

An abstract painting with a textured, layered appearance. The background is a mix of muted greens, browns, and greys. There are several distinct shapes: a large, dark, irregular shape in the upper right; a cluster of orange and red shapes in the middle left; and a small, bright blue circle near the bottom center. The overall style is expressive and painterly.

Kamrooz Aram
Cheryl Donegan
Lauren Luloff
Henri Matisse
Julia Rommel
Bob Thompson
John Zurier

Angel of History

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THE SCHNEIDER MUSEUM OF ART

SEPTEMBER 25 THROUGH DECEMBER 13, 2025

COVER

Kamrooz Aram

Angelus Novus (Renegotiated), 2011

60 x 54 inches

Courtesy of the artist

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555 Indiana Street, Ashland, OR 97520

541-552-6245

sma@sou.edu

sma.sou.edu

[@schneidermoa](#)

Foreword

We are pleased to present “Angel of History,” a group exhibition curated by Jason Stopa which includes the work of Kamrooz Aram, Cheryl Donegan, Lauren Luloff, Henri Matisse, Julia Rommel, Bob Thompson, and John Zurier. Stopa is no stranger to the Schneider Museum of Art. We shared his work in our fall 2023 curated show, “Intuitive Nature, Geometric Roots and Organic Foundations”, an exhibition about personalized set of tools that artists use to reflect their intuitional play on geometric roots and organic reflections. Here, Stopa carries that forward but roots the work within two historical artists starting with Henri Matisse (born 1869 – died 1954), an artist known by most households around the world along with Bob Thompson (born 1937 – died 1966), a lesser-known artist amongst the populous but very well known within the artworld. We have shown Bob Thompson’s work in the past recent years, and it was a delight for our audiences to discover his work. Stopa builds off the formal traditions set by Matisse and caried over by Thompson within his own painting practice. Stopa has selected the above artists as additional examples of this thinking within a broad spectrum.

I would like to thank the artists in this exhibition for making their artworks available, Jason Stopa for curating and contributing an insightful essay for the exhibition. In addition, I’d like to acknowledge the Schneider Museum of Art’s staff and support team, Maureen Williams, our Museum Preparator and Gallery Manager, Emily McPeck, our Associate Director of Administration and Communication, our student staff and our Museum Council; Cindy Barnard, Roberta Bhasin, Sandy Friend, Michele Fulkerson, Mary Gardiner, Vivian Stubblefield, School of Art & Communication Dean, Andrew Gay, catalog design by David Ruppe and printing by Brown Printing in Portland, OR.

Scott Malbaurn
Executive Director
Schneider Museum of Art







Cheryl Donegan
Lozenges (after Sonia Delaunay), 2024
Acrylic on silk
42 x 54 inches
Courtesy of the artist

The Angel of History Looks Back

“A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”¹

— Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*

From whence the future? I am tempted to answer this question with another. How might we view painting in the aftermath of a shared discourse? There are several horizons if we let history be our guide. Today, there is no shortage of painters seeking narrative, neo-sublime abstractions, responses to the digital, and the politics of representation. Yet, painting still has equally as much to say about its materialist possibilities. There are painters concerned with the staging of the domestic, examining support and surface, others preoccupied with ornamentation and structure, and still more demonstrating that painterly touch, incident and intention can reveal much about our subjectivity in the face of mass culture. In the wreckage of history, of politics, of ideology; painting’s materiality remains a necessary good.

This exhibition brings together seven artists stretched across two centuries. The contemporary artists I’ve chosen for this show address the formal and conceptual strains found in Henri Matisse and Bob Thompson. Each artist is concerned with the materiality of paint, its

1. Benjamin, Walter: “On the Concept of History.” *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Hannah Arendt, ed. Schocken, 1969.

saturation and density as it relates to facture and form. John Zurier invites us into a world of atmospheric light and radiance, with works that achieve a palimpsest quality. Julia Rommel approaches painting as an act of construction and deconstruction; many of her works feature window-like apertures akin to Post-Impressionistic painting. Lauren Luloff and Cheryl Donegan make paintings and installations, some featuring draped fabric, referencing the elaborate, decorative studio props found in Matisse paintings from the early 1900s. Kamrooz Aram makes distinct use of the arabesque to reimagine Western and Eastern aesthetic strategies, his methodology provides a link to Thompson, whose paintings often restage Old Master paintings within a Modernist framework. The last two artists, Henri Matisse and Bob Thompson, are the historical antecedents upon which this show rests. Though the artists overlap for only 17 years, they share a formal vocabulary of color and a desire for mythology, while straddling representation and abstraction.

Iranian artist Kamrooz Aram makes paintings on a fault line. The artist studied in the US. Islamic art, with its ornamentation and geometric patterns, has generally been regarded in the West as decorative and, therefore unserious. The Western sensibility designated the applied arts—tapestries, rugs, ceramics, miniature paintings—as beautiful, but far too functional. The fine arts, having no inherent use value, were free to pursue loftier aims.

In his *Arabesque* series, Aram makes use of overlapping arches, stars, and arabesque form on a planar grid. The artist has a lexicon of muted underpaintings, black drawn silhouettes, bright saturated color, transparent washes, and a distinct use of rectangular borders. The framing and staging of his compositions is offset by paint drips, pencil markings and grid lines, his process revealed to be part of the total work.

Aram's painting "Angelus Novus (Renegotiated)," (2011) is the exhibition title and also refers to Paul Klee's painting of 1920. Here, faint floral patterns in cadmium red and cobalt blue are set against a phthalo green and ochre ground contrasted by black gestural passages that circle the perimeter of the painting. A small red circle lies at the bottom left of the canvas contrasted by a large black triangle in the upper right. In the center, where the angel's face meets ours, lie three white triangles and one white diamond. The work's luminosity and central composition create a decidedly sublime effect, as if to say that the face of the angel, and their gaze into the past and future, cannot be seen at all.

Cheryl Donegan is an artist who came of age in the 80s, exhibiting irreverent, challenging video and performance work with irony and eros. A distinct painterly identity emerged from her initial performance works, one that acknowledges the artist as both creator and audience in an expanded painting tradition. This tendency eventually led her to combine several processes including digital printing, hand dyeing, upcycling, installation, and painting. Her natural antecedent is the French avant-garde of the early 20th century, which found an intersection between painting, costume, fashion and everyday life. Artists like Sonia Delaunay opened Maison Delaunay in 1920, a radical fashion space that served as a DIY counterpoint to the great couture fashion houses of Paris. During WWII, Matisse famously



Kamrooz Aram
Angelus Novus (Renegotiated), 2011
60 x 54 inches
Courtesy of the artist

designed highly decorative chasubles and liturgical vestments for the Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence, France.

Donegan began making her *Doomscroll* series in the pandemic, each one made of acrylic on plastic-backed paper, some stretching over twelve feet in a given direction. The pandemic required communities around the world to isolate, with severe social and psychological impacts. As the death tolls rose, many took to excessively consuming the news and social media, often to the point of feeling overwhelmed and anxious. Donegan's scrolls are highly physical, yet light, and made up of overlapping patterns of chain links, lozenges, and criss-crossing diagonal lines. "Doomscroll # 3," (2022) is composed of five crimson red, diagonal diamond patterned lines overlaid on bright blue, light green and vivid orange patterns. Here, the artist finds a contemporary nexus that reveals how abstraction can respond to social issues with brevity and pathos.

Beginning in the 1930s, Matisse began to take photographic records of several major paintings in progress. In a 1945 interview he stated, "I work from feeling. I have my conception in my head, and I want to realise it... The photos taken in the course of the execution of the work permit me to know if the last conception conforms more to what I am after than the





Cheryl Donegan
Doomscroll #3, 2022
Acrylic on plastic backed paper
49.2 x 137 inches
Courtesy of the artist

preceding ones, whether I have advanced or regressed.”² This relationship to decision-making and progress is a formal thread found in the work of Julia Rommel. The New York-based artist makes abstract paintings in a series of stages, with some paintings protruding from their edges, stretcher bars exposed, and other paintings becoming unstapled and married to other paintings altogether. Her surfaces are coarse, with grainy linen exposing past decisions left visible; she folds her surfaces several times over, creating a distressed materiality. We get the sense that these works, quite literally, unfold over time. Her titles are evocative. Works like “Stonehenge,” (2025) are made of five, warm gray vertical bands painted in a loose gestural manner with faint lines between each passage exposing bright greens, deep blacks, cadmium yellows and pale pink in the underpainting. The artist paints two thin straight lines, one in cool gray at the top and one in bright yellow at the bottom.

These paintings are sophisticated, revealing the possible avenues left for reductive abstract painting, something she shares in common with John Zurier. No singular style emerges in her practice as she makes good use of spare geometric compositions, gestural passages and airy monochromes—each one bearing varying thickness of paint, unique formal divisions and definitions of completeness.

For John Zurier, paint is material, paint is atmosphere, and atmospheres are about light. His near-monochromatic paintings contain delicate, gestural passages, an emphasis on the pressure of the brush as it is applied to the surface, along with considerations of pigment density and transparency. These qualities are offset by his occasional inclusion of linear forms and traces of incidental mark-making. His distinct use of light allows for visual suspension, where audiences hover just on the edge of the known and unknown. All of this is in service of silence. It is his north star. In a 2018 interview I conducted with Zurier for *Art in America*, he stated, “I have a photograph of Fra Angelico’s lunette fresco of St. Peter Martyr in San Marco’s courtyard, with his finger to his lips asking for silence. It reminds me that silence is both a spiritual principle and the condition of painting.”³ That his works conjure up an atmospheric color world full of evanescent light and radiance is complemented by the artist’s understanding of painting’s limitations and structural vocabularies. Restraint is a virtue.

Lauren Luloff treats the landscape as a site of expansiveness, play and human drama. Nature, as it is used here, is not a faithful representation of geography, nor is it a poetic sensibility about specific places. These are landscapes we experience as a formal world of color, light, pattern and space. Her paintings are engaged with the question of taste, while working in an additive and subtractive process that allows chance and determinacy to intermingle. The artist applies richly colored dyes on silk and then begins to deconstruct, cutting and sewing other pieces of silk together, to construct larger works. She then steams the silk allowing the dye to set before stretching it onto a frame, where the composition arrives in its final

2. Flam, Jack, ed.: *Matisse on Art*. University of California Press, 1995.

3. Stopa, Jason. “Ambiguity as Strength: A Conversation with John Zurier.” *Art in America*, 5 Apr. 2018, <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/interviews/ambiguity-strength-conversation-john-zurier-56480/>



Julia Rommel
Stonehenge, 2024
Oil on linen
66.5 x 49.75 inches
Courtesy of Bureau



Lauren Luloff
Beech Hill, 2025
 Dyed Silk
 25 x 30.75 inches
 Courtesy of SOCO Gallery

form. What we experience in this suite of four smaller works is the passage of time, close-up observation, and staged domesticity that points toward sensuality and exuberance.

Chance operations, ornamentation, and light are present in a number of the works on view, owing a debt to Matisse. A struggle with cancer in the 1940s left Matisse confined to a wheelchair, after which he famously embarked on his Cut-Outs. The artist would paint on paper in a variety of shapes and sizes, vegetal and abstract, and then began the task of arrangement into exuberant compositions, exploring decorative strategies, negative space and collapsing line and color, at times with striking provisionality. The Snail, his large scale decoupage assemblage of 1953 housed at the Tate Modern in London, is a collage made with gouache paper cut and pasted onto a base layer of white paper. The artist's subsequent series of lithographs based on his Cut-Outs, helped make his paper Cut-Outs more widely known.

In 1799, Francisco de Goya created a phantasmagorical intaglio print of a figure sleeping at his desk, his stylus resting on the table, surrounded on all sides by wide-eyed winged creatures of the night. Titled “El sueño de la razón produce monstruos” (The sleep of reason





Henri Matisse, *L'Escargot (The Snail)*, Lithograph. 1958. Unknown edition. 14 x 10 inches. Private collection.

produces monsters), this work serves as the inspiration for African American painter Bob Thompson's "The Circus," (1963). Originally raised in the American South, Thompson understood the fear and cultural anxiety of the Civil Rights era. His engagement with Modernity and historical painting finds a disquieting marriage in this easel-sized work that depicts large-scale birds in green and blue silhouette descending into the foreground. Their bodies are abstracted, their wings spread wide projecting both liberation and possible danger as they coalesce around two hunched figures painted in bright red and pale yellow. The entire scene is set against a deep umber-black foreground and patterned sky with red flourishes. Thompson's formal elegance and sophistication creates an angular negative space that reads razor sharp. Yet, contradictory readings abound as conflict and harmony appear to toggle back and forth with no resolution in sight.



Bob Thompson (1937–1966), *The Circus*, 1963, oil on canvas, 36 3/8 x 36 3/8 inches / 92.4 x 92.4 cm, signed; © Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY, Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY

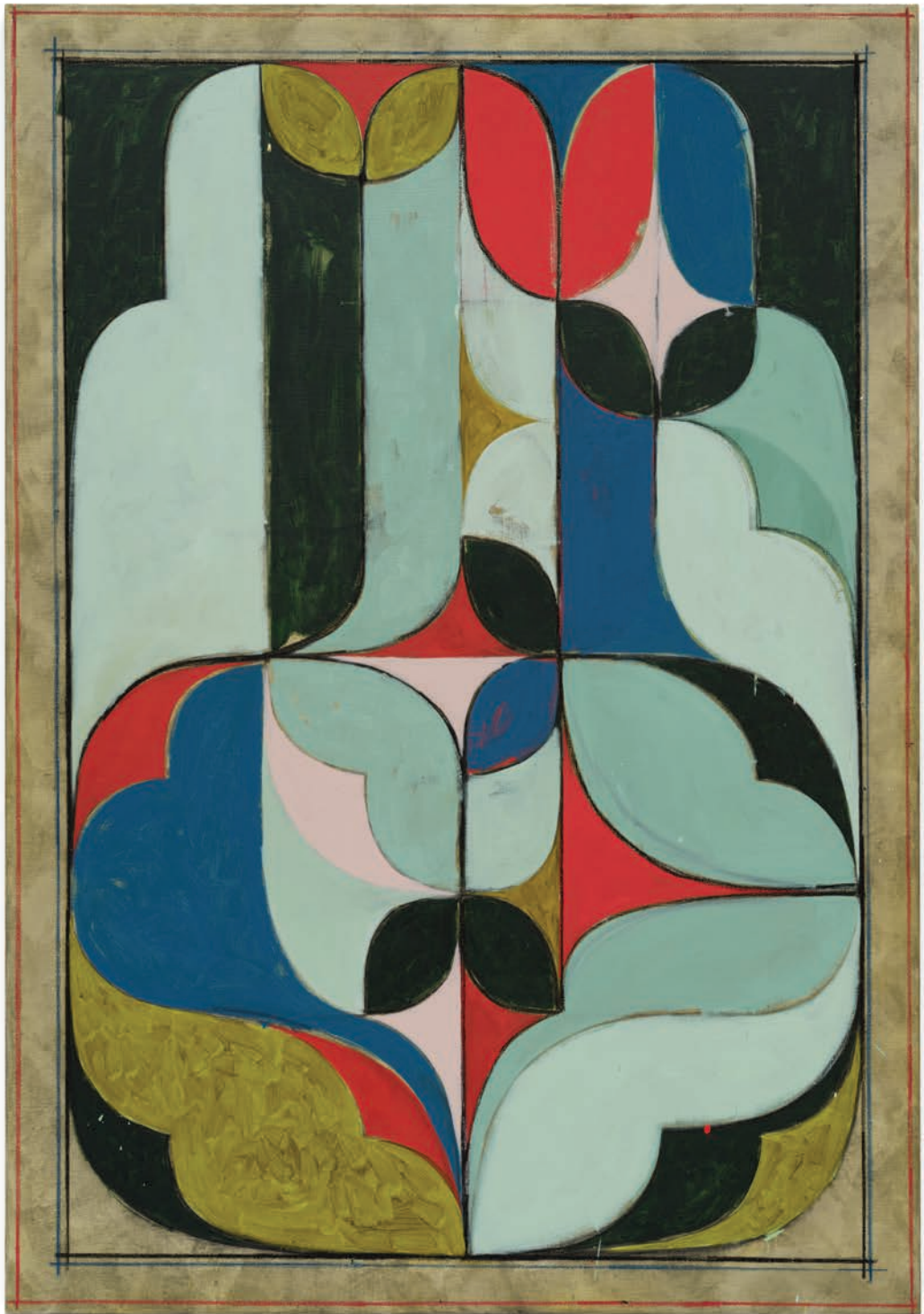
There are two references to winged creatures in this exhibition. Two paintings looking back in time at other paintings. Aram's angel is faceless, abstract, yet luminous. Thompson's winged creatures intertwine and wrestle with humanity painted in primary colors. It is a reminder that painting's desire for light, materiality, structure and history is caught up in the very web of what we will preserve for the future. In short, a reckoning.

Jason Stopa, 2025

Jason Stopa is a painter and writer living in Brooklyn. He is known for his large-scale abstract paintings that reference architecture, decorative objects, and heraldry. The artist has had numerous solo exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Seoul and Istanbul. He received his BFA from Indiana University Bloomington and his MFA from Pratt Institute in NYC. Stopa is Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at FIT. He is a contributing writer to *The Brooklyn Rail*, *BOMB*, *Hyperallergic*, *Momus*, *Artforum* and *artcritical*, among other art journals. He is currently working on a monograph on artist Linda Francis.



Kamrooz Aram
Untitled (Arabesque Composition), 2023
Oil, oil crayon and pencil on linen
66 x 46 inches
Photo: Sebastian Bach
Courtesy of the artist and Peter Blum Gallery



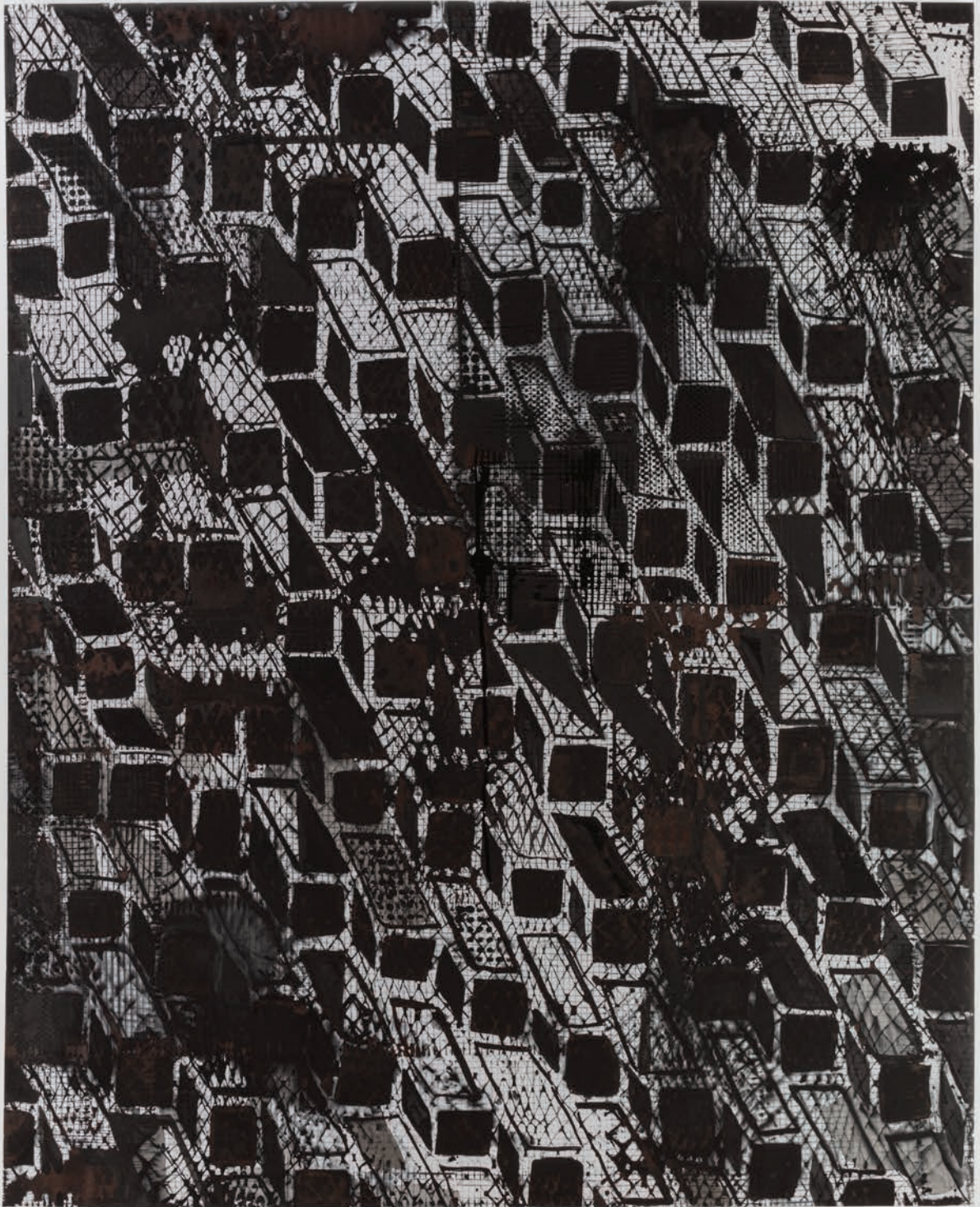
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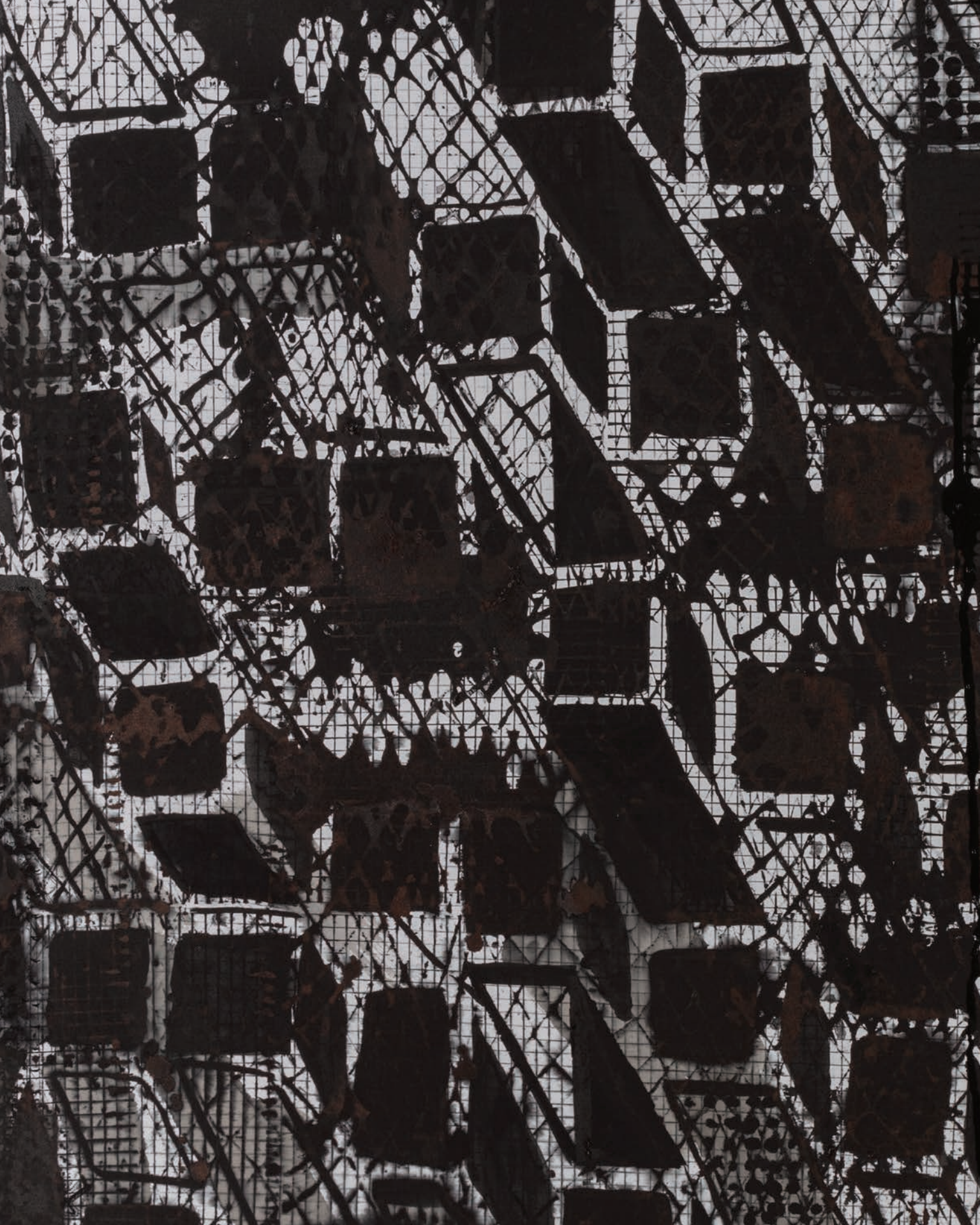


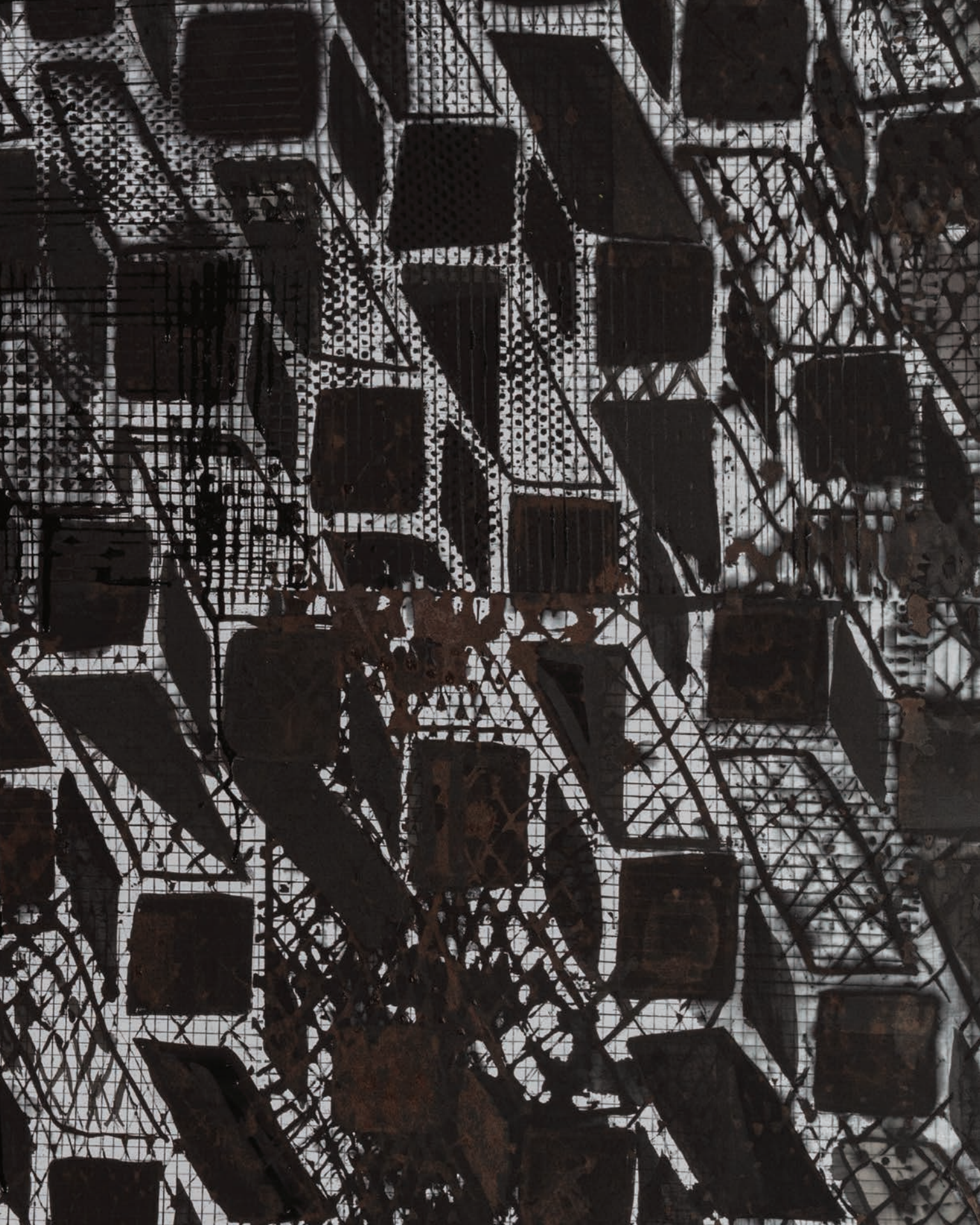


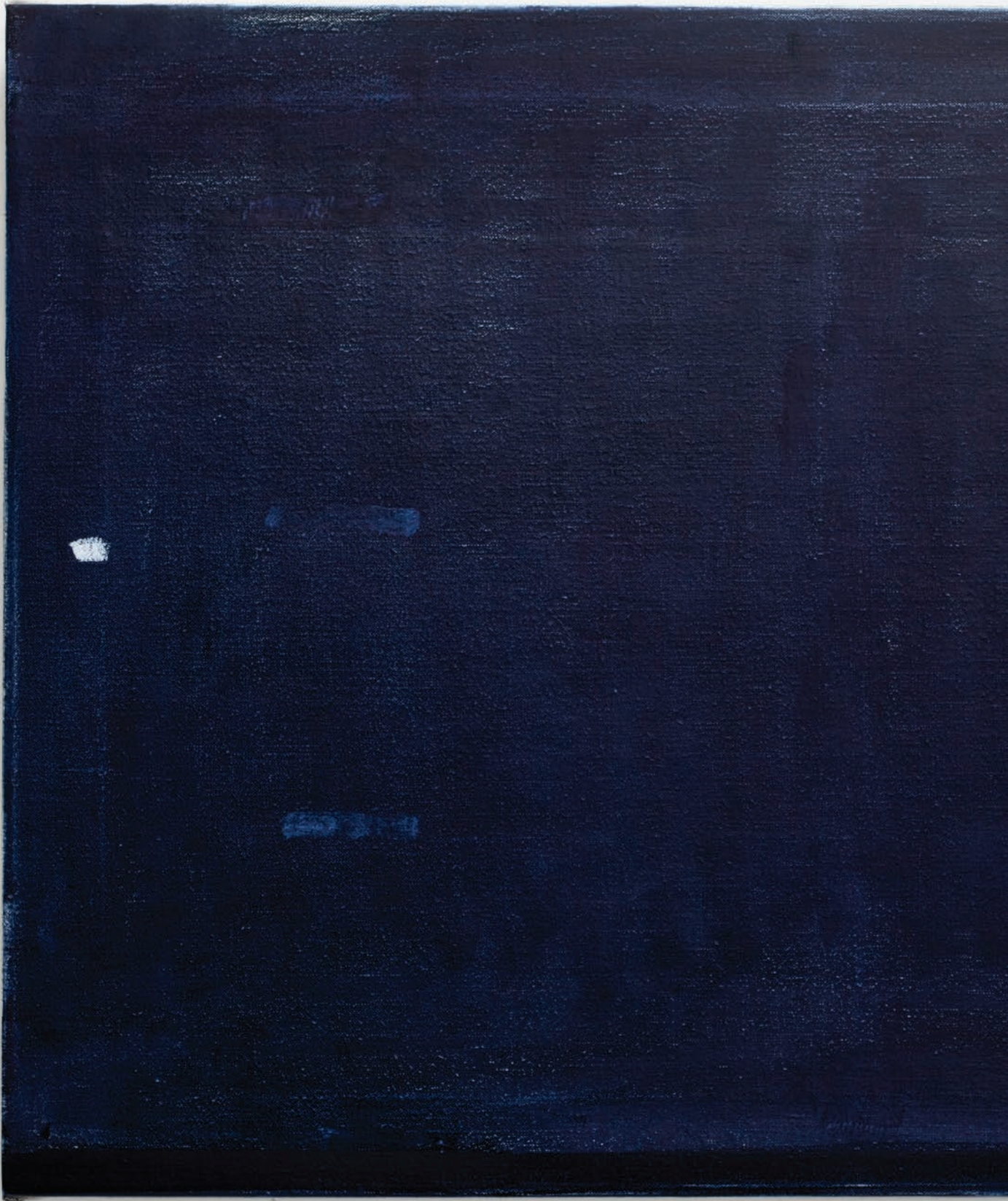
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Cheryl Donegan
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Acrylic on cotton cloth
42 x 54 inches
Courtesy of the artist









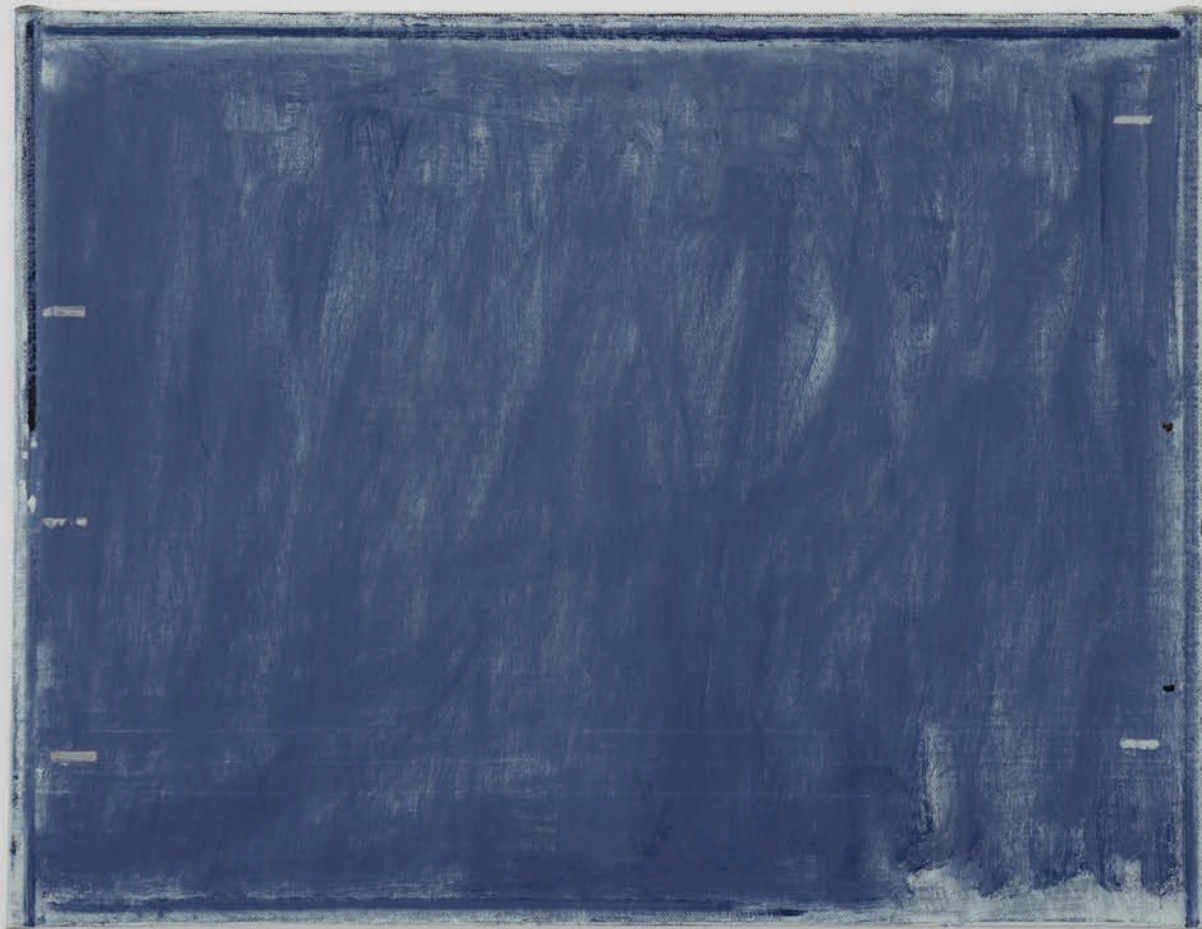
John Zurier
Far from Home, 2012
Oil on linen
26 x 36 inches
Courtesy of the artist and
Peter Blum Gallery







John Zurier
Level Distance II, 2023
Oil on linen
33 x 38 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Peter Blum Gallery



John Zurier
Untitled (Saraband), 2020–2021
Oil on linen
26 x 34 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Peter Blum Gallery



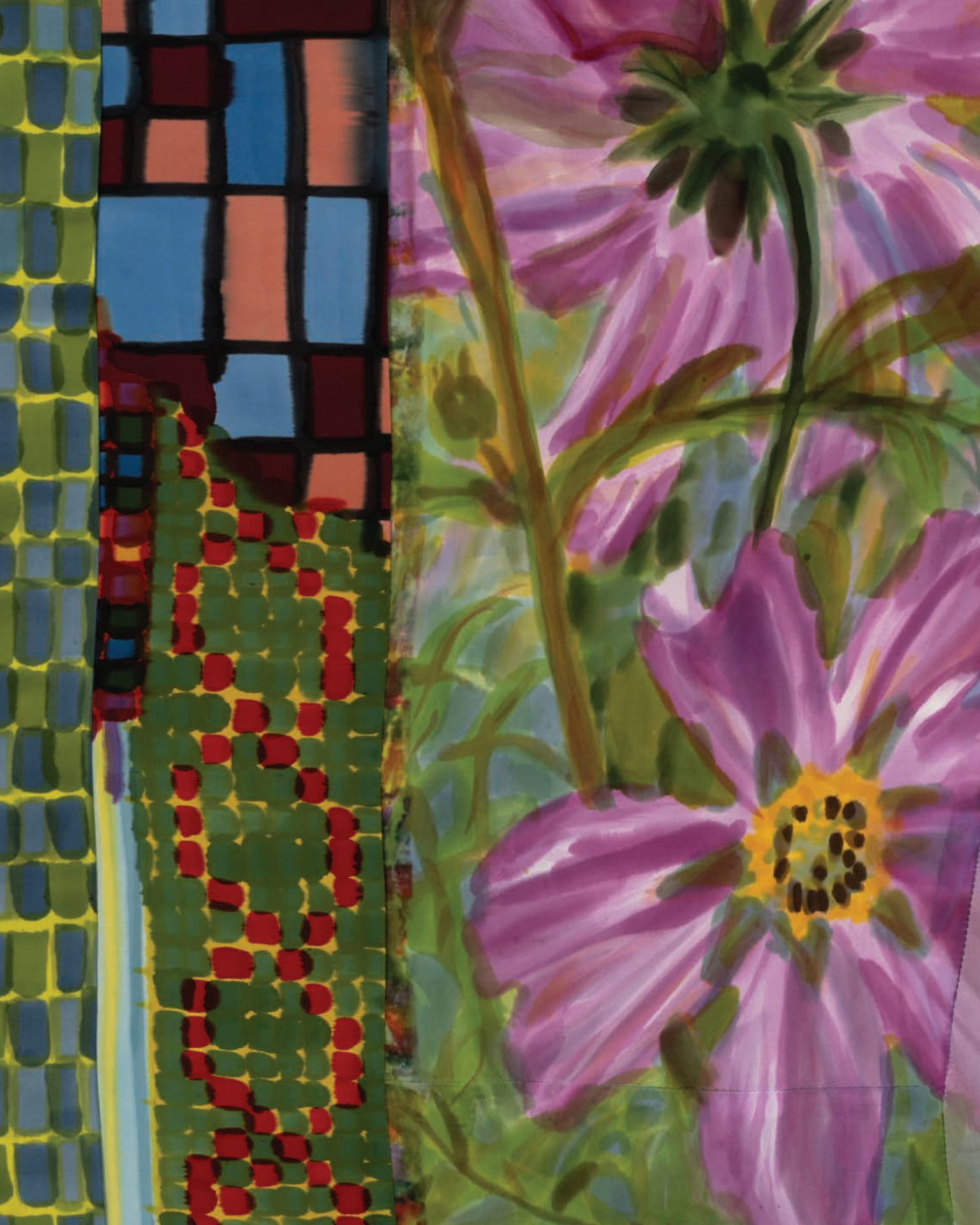




Lauren Luloff
Cosmos, 2025
Dyed Silk
26 x 29.5 inches
Courtesy of SOCO Gallery



Lauren Luloff
Our Faces, 2025
Dyed Silk
30 x 31 inches
Courtesy of SOCO Gallery







Lauren Luloff
Dahlia and Asters, 2025
Dyed Silk
34 x 37.5 inches
Courtesy of SOCO Gallery





Julia Rommel
Apologies, 2025
Oil on linen
28.5 x 25 inches
Courtesy of Alex Tabatabai







Julia Rommel
Iceberg, 2025
Oil on linen
83.5 x 123 inches
(in two panels, 83.5 x 89.5 and 83.5 x 33.5)
Courtesy of Bureau

Checklist of the Exhibition

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60 x 54 inches.
Courtesy of the artist



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L'Escargot (The Snail), 1958
Lithograph
Unknown edition
14 x 10 inches
Private collection

Bob Thompson



The Circus, 1963
Oil on canvas
36.375 x 36.375 inches
Signed
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New York, NY, Courtesy of Michael
Rosenfeld Gallery LLC,
New York, NY

