

PAINTERS PAINT PAINTINGS: LA VERSION

Curated by Alexander Warhus
Text by Larissa Kikol

Kerstin Brätsch
Andreas Breunig
André Butzer
Joanne Greenbaum
Secundino Hernández
David Huffman
Raúl Illarramendi
Eugène Leroy
Victoria Morton
Stefan Müller
Matthias Schaufler
Jana Schröder
Liliane Tomasko
Anke Weyer
Sue Williams

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NINO MIER GALLERY
GALLERY ONE
7277 SANTA MONICA BLVD
LOS ANGELES, CA 90065
INFO@MIERGALLERY.COM

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All of these paintings, with the exception of those by the late Eugène Leroy (1910–2000), were produced within the last five years. Which raises the question: What about their approaches can be described as contemporary? The group exhibition *Painters Paint Paintings: LA Version*, its works and curatorial orchestration, offer a clue.

Twentieth-century abstract painting was rarely for its own sake. It was a painting of projections and tools: a revolt against academic norms, a field of research for aesthetic-psychological modes of action, a way to process death and fascism, a cultural-political weapon in the Cold War era, a medium of introspection, object of sublimity and icon of freedom. Whatever the decade, whatever the context: the question “Abstract or figurative?” remained among the most important, complex topics across twentieth-century discourse. Then, at the start of the twenty-first century, we witnessed a paradigm shift. Abstract painting shrugged off the pressure to justify. Stripped of politics, it was freed of major crises, but also from the deep-seated psychological muses of its creators. A wave of new abstract painting burst onto the scene. Multiple painterly positions flowed side by side in a wider tendency. *Painters Paint Paintings: LA Version* offers a closer look at some of these, with an eye to the contours between them. The exhibition features loosely associated positions in (abstract) painting that stand apart from the polyphonic pack. In doing so, it lays the foundation for a new discourse on (abstract) painting.

So how does abstract painting deal with this new freedom? After all, it has never been as free as it is today. These days it is all about painting, painting as painting, without miring itself in fundamental discourses. Not even paintbrushes are a must. The current attitude enables an independent aesthetic, but also more individual, subjective associations. Artists move playfully within it; they are where they want to be and take what they need for their paintings. It is in this great independence that resilient positions take shape. The painters distinguish themselves—pursue serious, personal, and intricate processes that culminate in concentrated works, because new times call for new answers.

Eugène Leroy, the “oldest” artist in the show, created relief paintings with considerable amounts of accumulated paint. A smaller scale work finds them heaped on the surface like a mountain landscape. A closer look reveals a face, dark eyes, an elongated nose and the semblance of a white, contorted mouth. The figure dissolves almost entirely into abstraction. Such a seamless fusion of subject and background is rare and, consequently, you ultimately don’t need the figurative reference to enjoy its powerful color dynamic. Younger artists have transformed the haptic, voluminous mass into a lighter, more fluid type of painting.

One striking point of contrast can be found in the work of Kerstin Brätsch. Ink is drawn and dripped onto water, after which the liquid is moved to produce shapes and patterns. Then dry paper, which absorbs the pigment, is placed on top of the composition. Brätsch’s paintings emerge from hybrid, flowing states. The image is painted from above, as it were, in a situation combining chance, control, and personal experience with the process. The drifting paint settles into a streaked marbling, a psychedelic pattern that evokes figurative associations.

The canvas painting by Secundino Hernández has an equally airy effect. Whether the islands of color drift apart or towards each other is up to the viewer. The artist works by washing and scratching, removing layers of paint. The underlying surface is exposed, almost like an excavation of painted traces; destruction brings beauty in its wake. Predominant hues of blue, pink, and green mingle harmoniously, they also bring a sense of horizontal and vertical motion to the composition. Minimal painting born of marks and gestures.

Sue Williams infuses a buoyant composition with forceful movement. A first glance suggests spots of color floating in empty space—an abstract composition similar to that of Hernández. A second reveals half a horse, a severed head, or hybrid creature, half-woman, half-toad or rat. Other figures recall Pilgrims; elsewhere, a lady's shoe looms. Large patches of color appear watercolor-like; the figures are drawing-esque. The painting resembles a collage, though it is not fixed to a support. Williams's world spins as if in a whirlpool. It may well be about to flush down the mouth of the tunnel at the center of the painting.

Andreas Breunig's approach points to a structural deconstruction of abstract painting. Many of his paintings are composed on a white background, across which lines, strokes, squiggles, and spots are dispersed. Yet the individual elements are related; they always form an overall composition, show condensation, indicate directions of movement, fights and skirmishes, energy flows. *Sort Cuts No 35*, the work on view here, finds elements held together by a painterly veil. Red, orange and pink hues catch in dribbles of paint and a light mist that sets them aglow.

Contrasting this is the work of Jana Schröder, who places abstract constructions in the image itself. Round non-shapes pile onto one another, swell like a growing organic entity in the midst of growth. They entwine, tuck into one another before extending their way back through other holes. Bulges are painted out; lines morph into surfaces. The reduced color palette keeps the focus on the volume, a form spread in all dimensions. The loose brushwork and light fill harmonize with the overall image, allowing the work to remain abstract without tipping into figuration.

Joanne Greenbaum works in multiple, colorful layers of patterns and shapes. Her work finds space emerging in the superimposition of large brushstrokes and more detailed stripe patterns, spots, and dots. The worlds are dizzying apparitions, psychedelic in nature. A blend of color-field painting and print elements, albeit heavily mixed and dynamized. Color contrast play as crucial a role in *Untitled* as its opposing, abruptly alternating lines of motion. Painting and drawing, line and surface merge. This inner symbiosis balances out the chaos, making room for oases of tranquility within the composition.

A meditative atmosphere of contemplation unfurls in *Powerful Growl*, a work by Victoria Morton. Gleaming yellow and isolated orange shades luminesce, placated by a soothing pink overtone that suspends areas of color, lessening the likelihood that they will break apart. An impressionistic-seeming, detail-rich texture lends emphasis to the painting's upper section; larger angles and round shapes do not contradict each other so much as naturally dock onto one another. It is not surprising that the painter is also a musician. Her work is permeated by harmonies and a careful crafting of mood.

Anke Weyer's abstract painting is more playful, expressive. Her paintings, which are often created outdoors, show clear traces of bodily, physical exertion. These are images dominated by broad gestures—hand gestures certainly, but also those incorporating her arms and the rest of her body. They point to the commitment, dynamism, and action involved in the painting process—aspects chaotically, explosively reflected in the worlds of the paintings themselves. *Vaquera* shows the addition of dark colors: larger, roundish blotches connected by lines. Dark-light contrasts infuse the composition with a sense of vibration, a dynamic heightened by the artist's coarse, rapid brushwork.

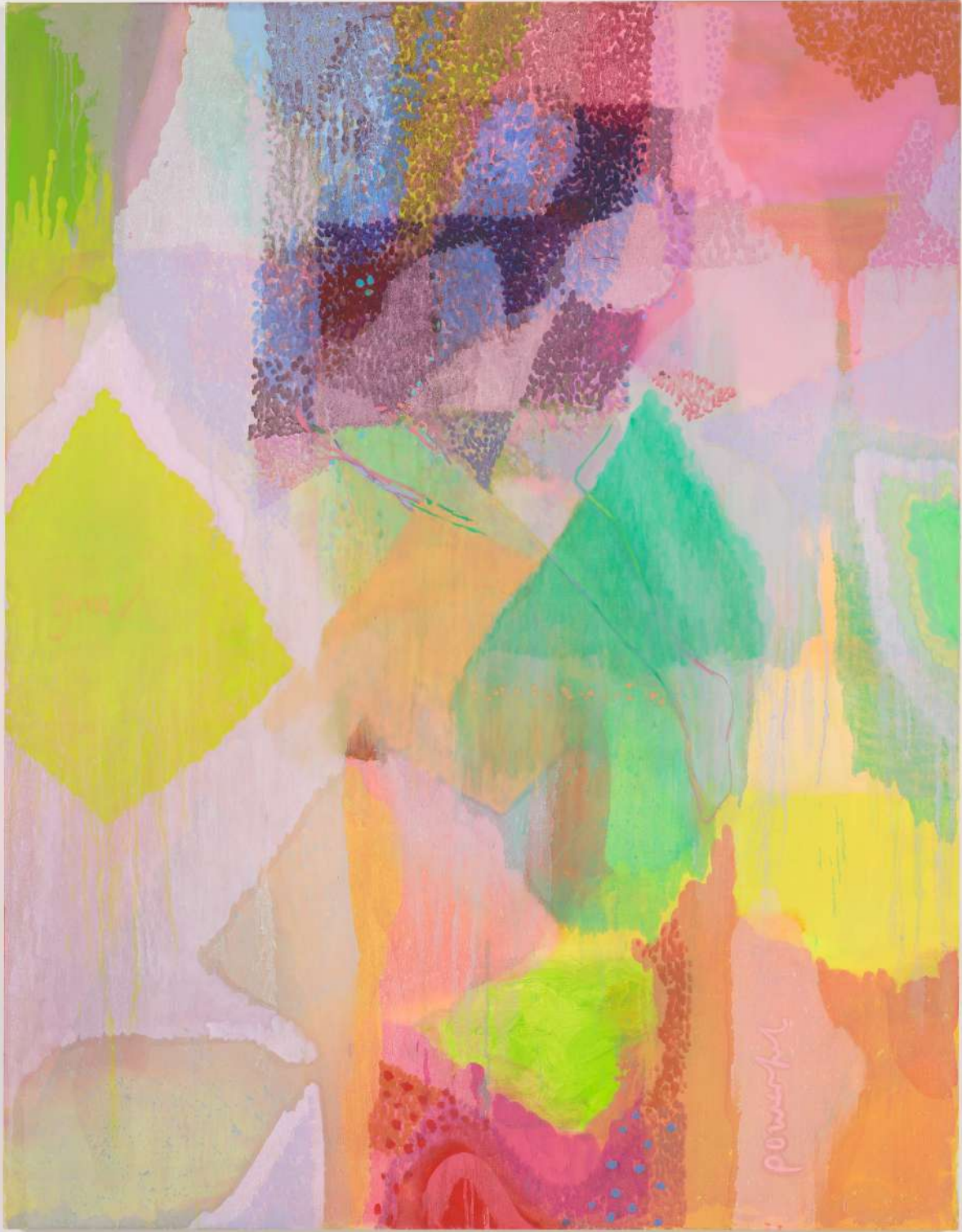
A counterpoint appears in the work of André Butzer—the black painting which is not a black painting at all. The work belongs a larger cycle of works known as the *N-Bilder* (N-Paintings). After a long creative period with Butzer's typical family of figures including, for example, the *Friedens-Siemens* (Peace-Siemens), or chaotically colorful skies with cat heads, the artist embarked on a series of paintings seemingly in black and white. At first, two bright interstices were to be found in these pieces, narrowing over the years into a single slender band of light. Everything is there in the darkness: Butzer's previous worlds, death, life, color.



As different as these artists' works may appear, they do have things in common. Space and composition, for one thing. They seem to exist in a state of suspension; it is unclear if one is looking at them straight-on or from above, maybe, from a bird's-eye view. Then the painting would be a kind of (playing) field—as in the case of David Huffman, Victoria Morton or Stefan Müller—where painting happens. For a long time, painting was seen as a window, as a glimpse of another world, but one whose spatial dimensions matched what humans could themselves picture. Consequently, abstract painting was often associated with landscape. Yet most of the paintings shown here remain playfully open in terms of perspective; there's no need to know where the ground is. Larger gestural formations seem to float in mid-air, piling up, growing organically but weightlessly, as in the work of Jana Schröder, Matthias Schaufler, Liliane Tomasko, Anke Weyer, or Joanne Greenbaum. Other works, including those by Sue Williams, Andreas Breunig, or Raúl Illarramendi, are more island-composition-based, consisting in scattered placements of color, traces, or figures, distributed across pictorial space. The elements can be viewed in isolation, but they are not alone. They condition each other, exist among one another, in silent symbiosis.

Previous exhibitions by curator Alexander Warhus include 17 Abstract Paintings. Co-curated with Luisa Rittershaus, the 2014 show was realized in the space formerly occupied by Galerie Rudolf Zwirner in Cologne. Featured artists included, among others, Andreas Breunig, Stefan Müller, Matthias Schaufler, and Jana Schröder. Warhus shares a passion for (abstract) contemporary painting with Nino Mier, and both have independently worked with a number of artists exhibited in this show. It is from these interfaces that Painters Paint Paintings: LA Version emerged—a show that brings together relevant positions in contemporary painting, younger and more established artists alike.

-Larissa Kikol, June 2022



Victoria Morton | *Powerful Growth*, 2017 | Oil on canvas | 70 7/8 x 55 1/8 in, 180 x 140 cm
(VMO22.002)







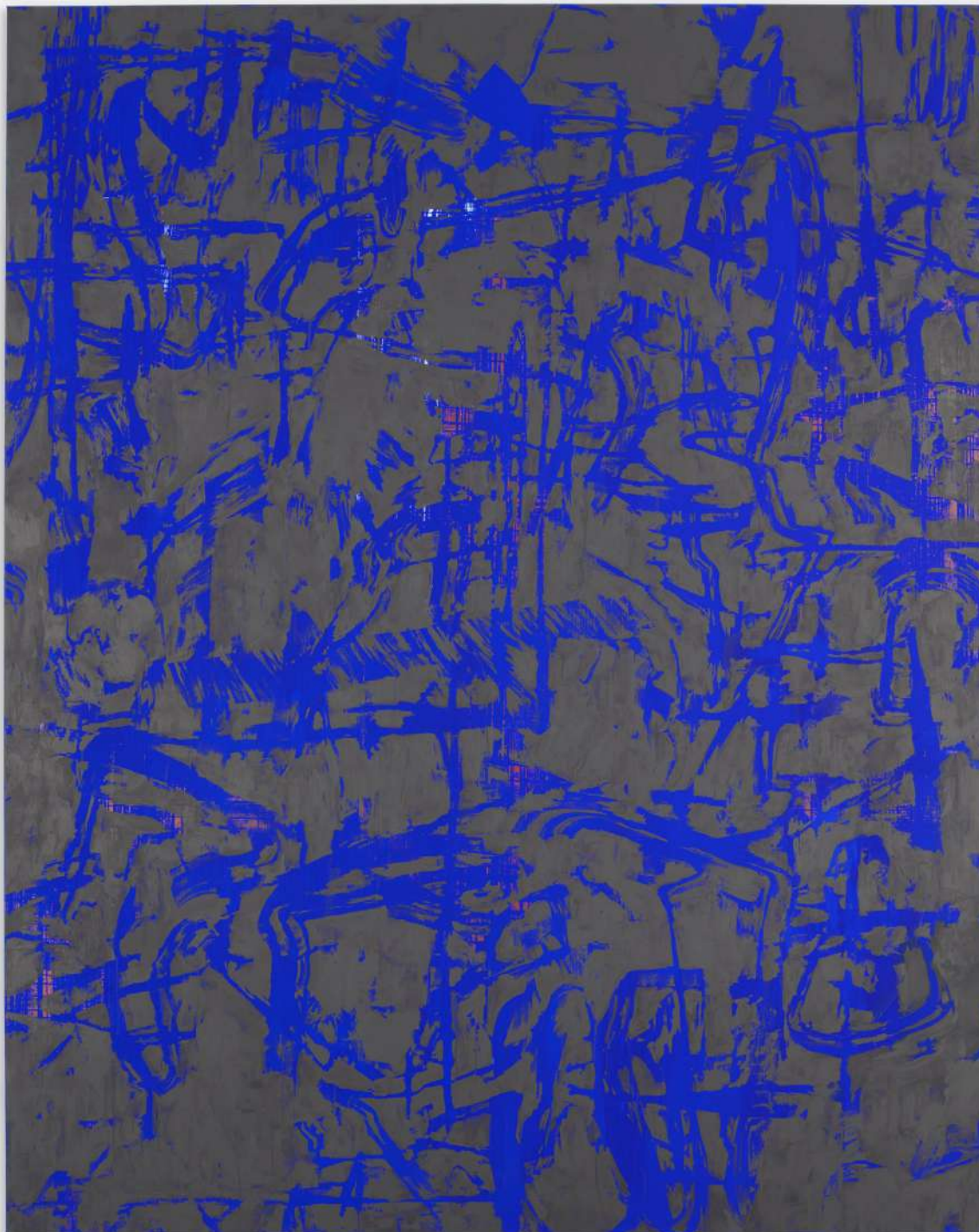
Sue Williams | *Betsy Ross Composite*, 2020 | Oil on canvas | 40 x 50 in, 101.6 x 127 cm | (SWI22.003)



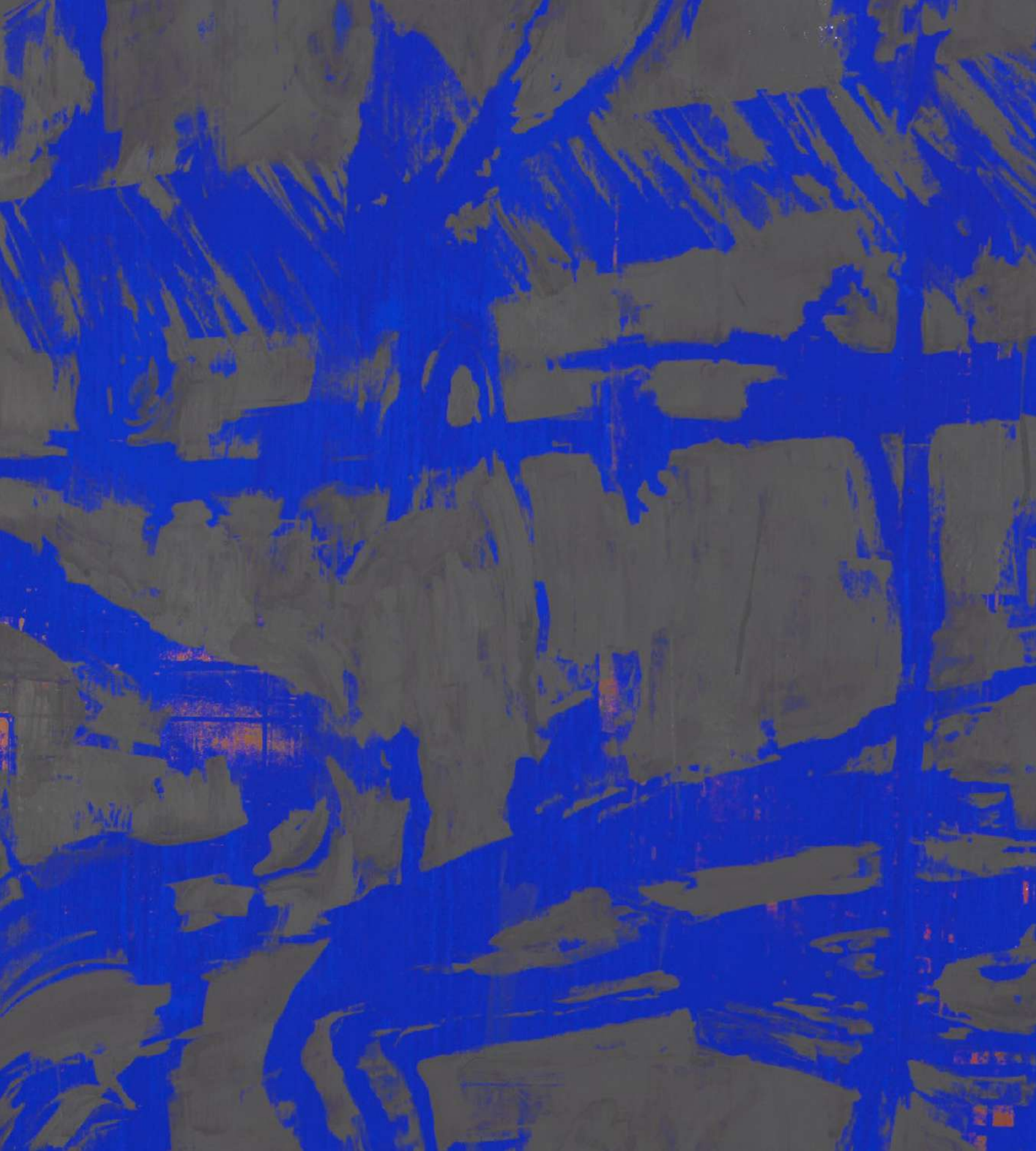


Stefan Müller | *When you're out of your mind, you can stay inside*, 2022 |
Oil, ink, and lacquer on Panama canvas | 84 5/8 x 74 3/4 in, 215 x 190 cm | (SMÜ22.001)





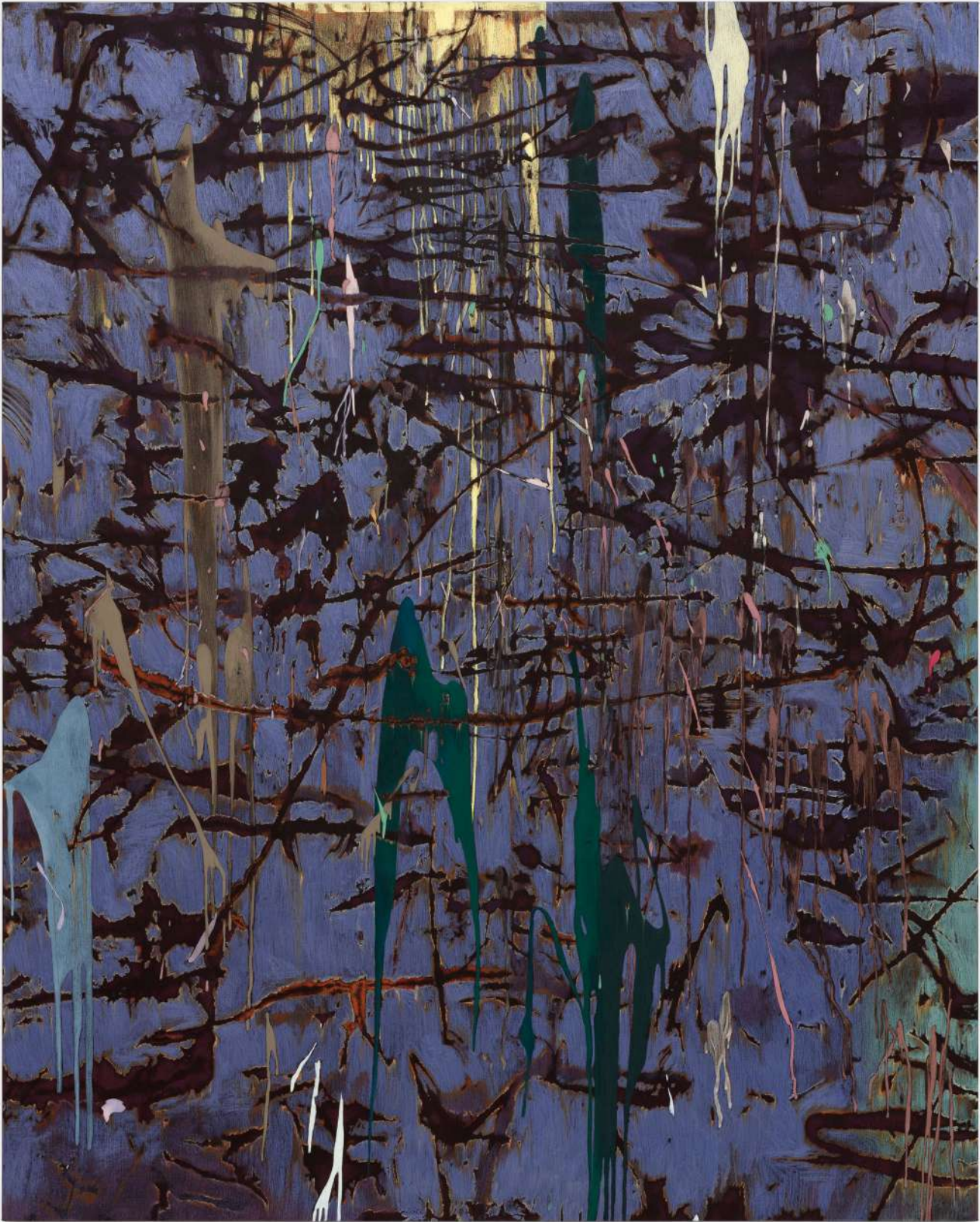
Raul Illarramendi | *EA n°270, 2022* | Oil, watercolour stick and gouache on canvas
78 3/4 x 63 in, 200 x 160 cm | (RIL22.001)





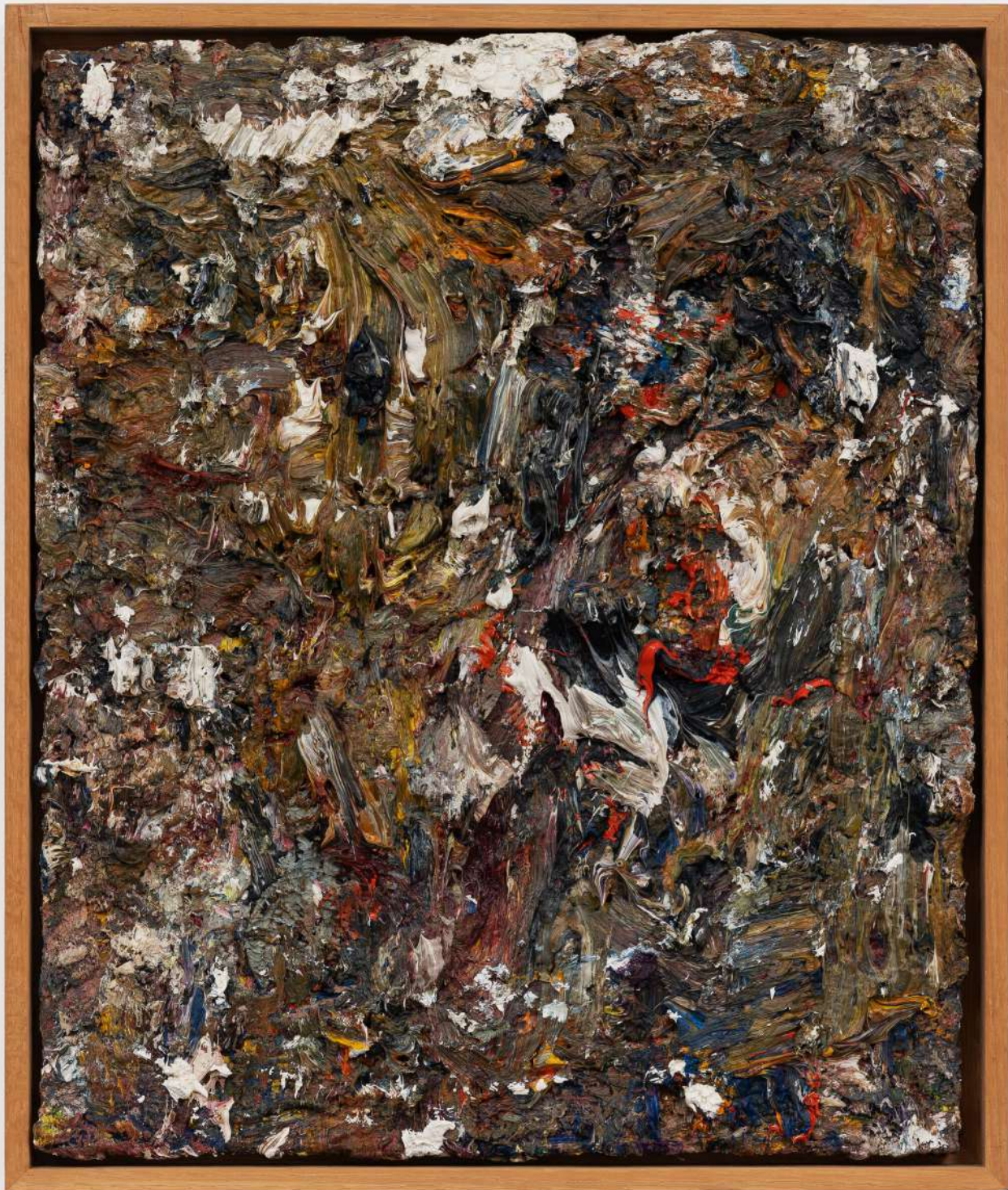
Liliane Tomasko | *all that we lose*, 2022 | Acrylic and acrylic spray on linen
76 x 76 in | 193 x 193 cm | (LTO22.005)





Raul Illarramendi | *EA n°261, 2022* | Wax pastel, color pencil and gouache on canvas
78 3/4 x 63 in, 200 x 160 cm | (RIL22.002)





Eugène Leroy | *Tête dans un paysage (Head in Landscape)*, 1996
Oil on canvas | 18 1/2 x 15 1/2 in, 47 x 38 cm | (ELE22.001)





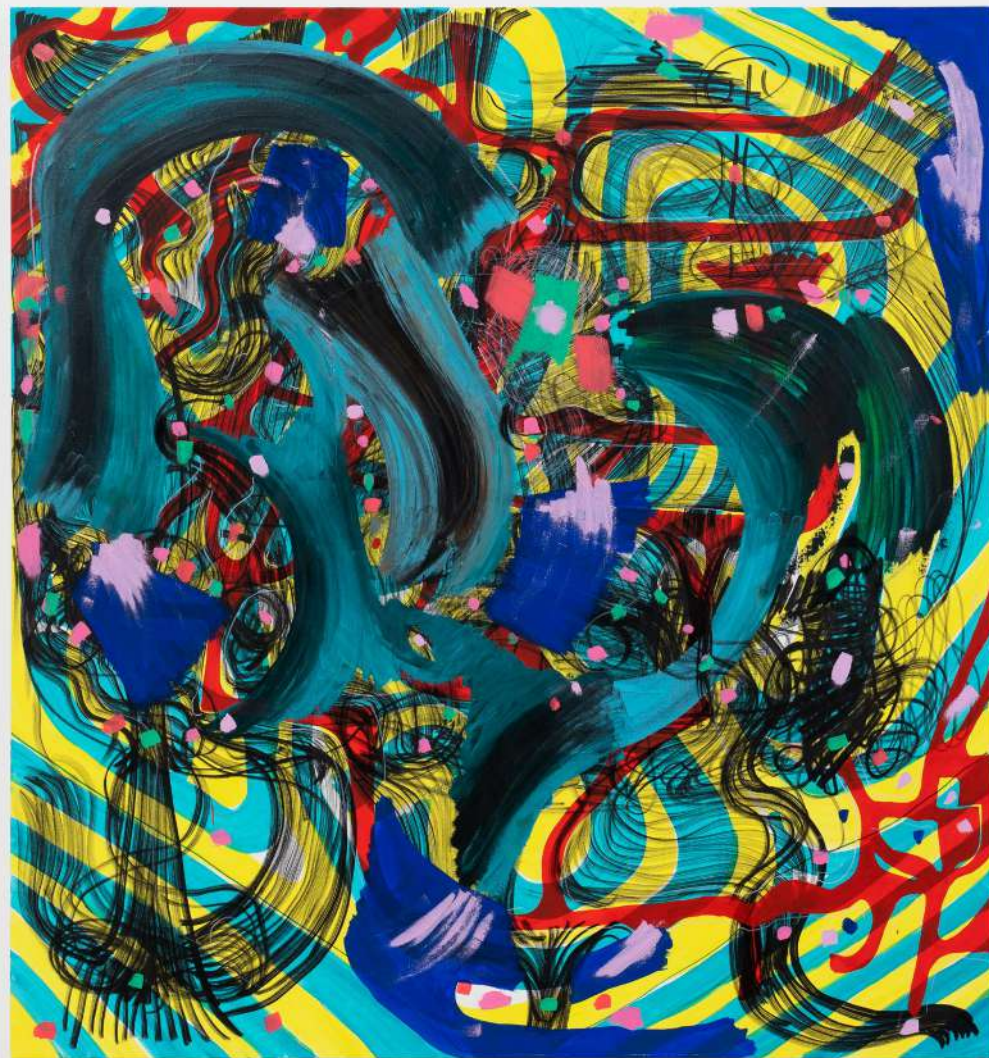
André Butzer | Untitled, 2017 | Acrylic on canvas | 76 3/4 x 59 1/8 in, 194.9 x 150.2 cm | (AB17.072)





Joanne Greenbaum | Untitled, 2022 Oil, flashe, acrylic, and acrylic marker on canvas | 75 x 65 in, 190.5 x 165.1 cm (JGR22.016)

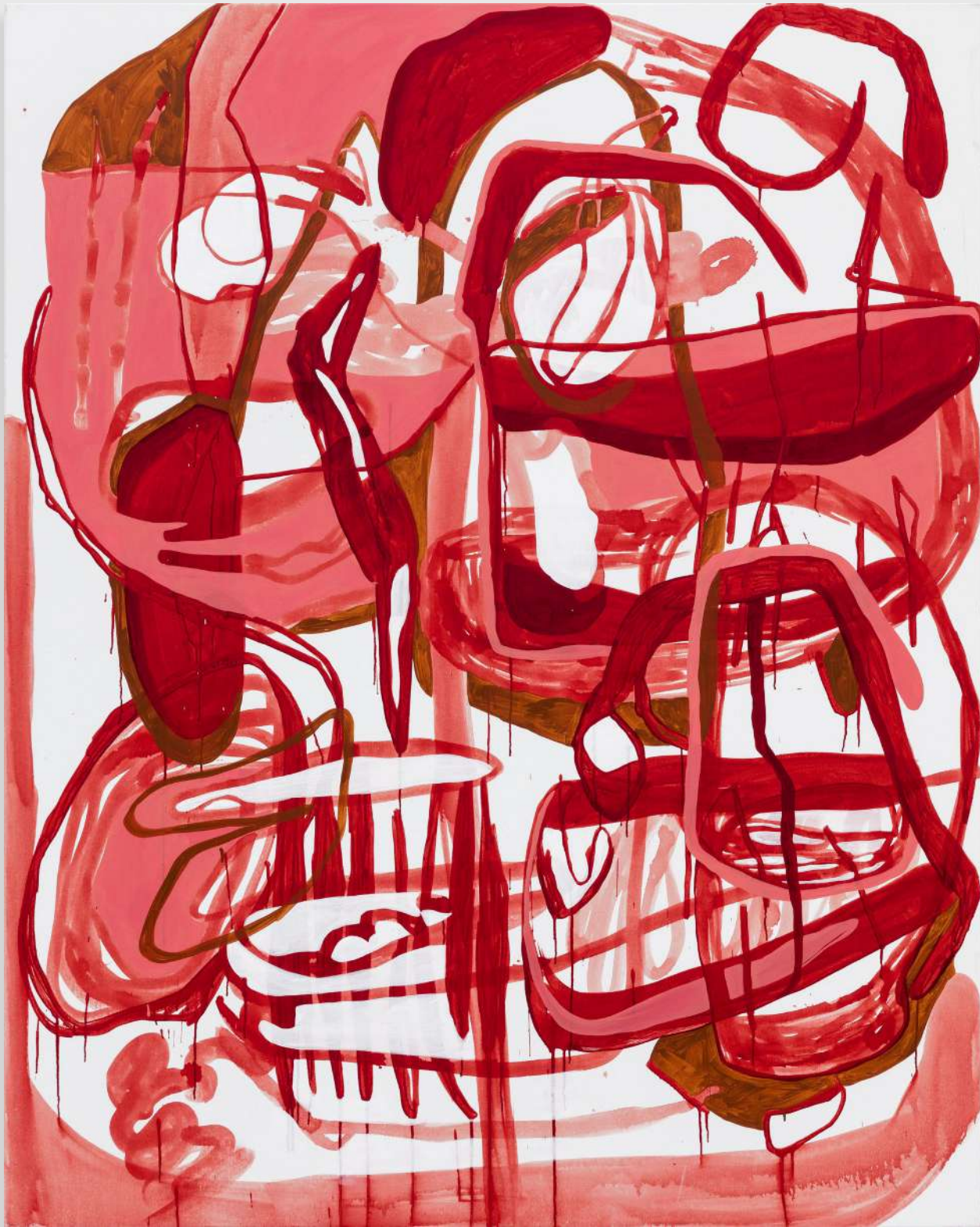






Matthias Schaufler | *The Yoga of society*, 2021-2022 | Oil on canvas
63 x 51 1/8 in 160 x 130 cm | (MSC22.001)





Jana Schröder | Untitled, 2022 | Acrylic and oil on canvas | 78 3/4 x 63 in, 200 x 160 cm
(JSR22.043)







Secundino Hernandez | *Untitled*, 2021-2022 | Acrylic on linen +
78 3/4 x 84 5/8 in, 200 x 215 cm | (SHE22.001)

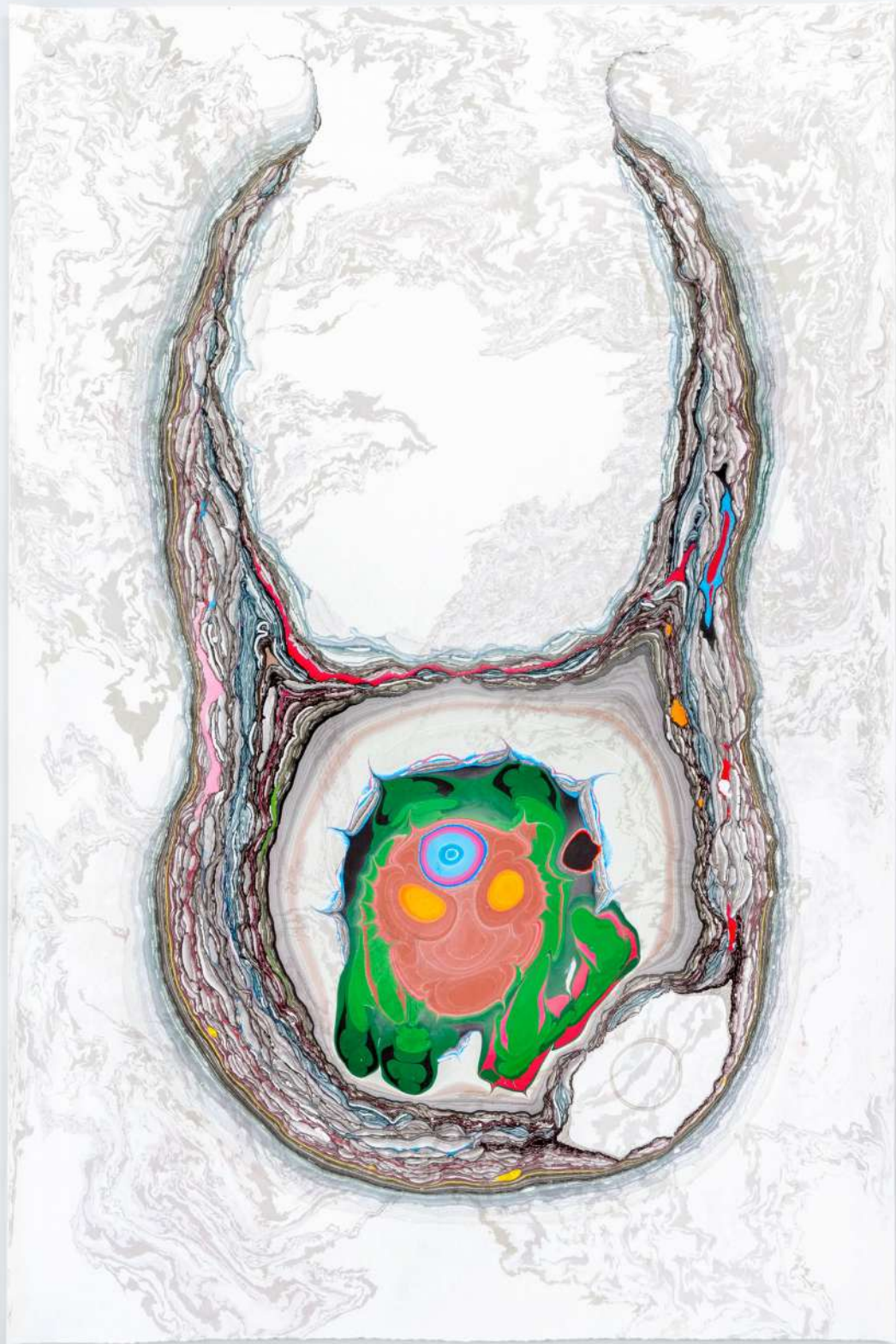




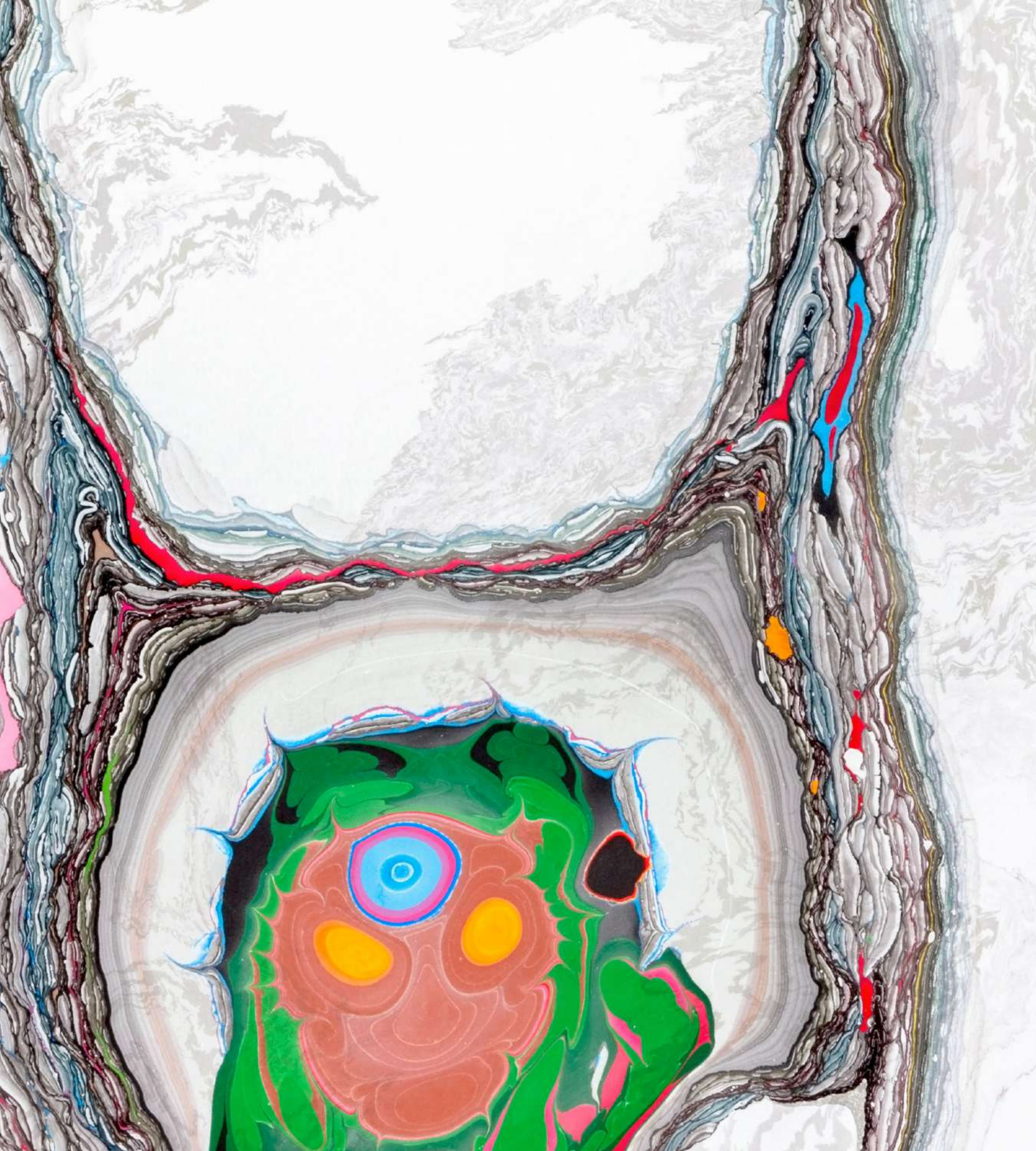
David Huffman | *Sun Ra's Dream Part 2*, 2022 |

Acrylic, oil, African cloth, spray paint, glitter, photo collage, and color pencil on birch wood panels A suite of 2 panels
96 x 96 in (overall) 243.8 x 243.8 cm (overall) 46 x 96 in (each) 116.8 x 243.8 cm (each) (DHU22.001)





Kerstin Brätsch | *Unstable Talismanic Rendering_Psychopompo* (with gratitude to master marbler Dirk Lange), 2017
Pigment, water color, ink, and solvents on paper | 108 x 72 in, 274.3 x 182.9 cm | (KEB22.001)





Anke Weyer | *Vaquera*, 2021 | Oil and acrylic on canvas | 64 x 78 in, 162.6 x 198.1 cm | (AWE21.013)







Andreas Breunig | *Sort Cuts No. 35*, 2021 | Oil, acrylic, graphite, and charcoal on canvas
90 1/2 x 74 3/4 in, 230 x 190 cm | (ABR22.022)





