

Philip Taaffe



Philip Taaffe, 2011. Photo: Aubrey Mayer

Philip Taaffe

Recent Paintings

Introduction by
Kiki Jai Raj

BALDWIN GALLERY

ASPEN 2012

SYNCRETISM



Aspidium, Asplenium, Pteris III, 2011. Oil pigment on canvas, 39 x 63½ inches

The friction of ideas which occurs when cultures collide is a human constant. For all of history, thoughts have spread throughout the globe, as virulent as microbes, unchecked by geographical or ideological barriers. Every new contact instigates the exchange of knowledge: formulae, technology, arcana, and symbols that, once given expression, move swiftly through the intellectual aether. With each subsequent historical encounter, the world is interconnected ever more intricately, as disparate beliefs merge and amalgamate, and spark the complex bio-chemical reactions combining human absolutes in an accumulation of broad strokes. Borderless desire serves to underscore the sameness of all peoples, and creates a distinct space, both physical and psychological, wherein the limitations of time and country are dissolved within art and concepts.

Visual languages have always possessed an unfathomable freedom to migrate. As Alexander's armies moved east in 4th century BCE, the classically trained sculptors followed to adorn the conquered lands. The Macedonian Hellenistic culture flooded central Asia, through modern Afghanistan's Bactrian kingdom and onward, ultimately as far as Sri Lanka and Japan. Early Greco-Buddhist sculptures from the Gandhara (in what is now Pakistan) give us extraordinary evidence of western classicism in confluence with the iconography of the east.

In Japan's Meiji era 1868-1912, a freer, more open state experienced a vogue among elites for portraits in western dress, influencing the iconography of the contemporary ruling image. In reciprocal exchange, the aesthetic of traditional Japanese painting exercised profound influence over European popular visual culture: the flat perspectives and spare forms of traditional Japanese painting even informed Impressionism, the most popular and enduring of all painting movements.

The known world was expanded in the west as well, when mountain ranges, kingdoms and phyla came to fill great expanses of cartography heretofore labeled with 'here there be dragons'. Though in fact seeking to limit and demarcate the extent of potential religious dissent, the medieval holy crusades had the practical result of expanding the scope of available knowledge in the west. In addition to higher mathematics and the great scientific advances made possible by the adoption of Arabic numerals, the armies' contact with the peoples and cultures of the Holy Land reintroduced

Europe to classical erudition long vanished from what had been the western Roman Empire. In deepening our understanding of the lands beyond, introducing new historical perspectives, and even through fostering a spiritual ambiguity that ennobled the individual, Europe was left open for the eventual cultural and intellectual advancements of the renaissance. The borrowings of 'orientalism' continued also to infiltrate design, architecture, and the graphic arts throughout Europe for the full second half of the last millennium, including painting from Bellini to Delacroix and Turner. In literature, Edward FitzGerald's translation of Omar Khayyam, and Sir Richard Francis Burton made the soul of the exotic accessible and thrillingly tangible to the masses.

Concurrently, science also expanded its jurisdiction, edging towards shaky understandings in ethnographic study, human behavior, taxonomy, and Darwin's intricate theory-craft. Exotic birds continued to be hunted for the settler's table and for the feathers on fashionable hats, but now also to provide curious specimens of zoological taxidermy in the Natural History Museums, as the educated population leveled its gaze at an increasingly distant horizon. Categorization and 'scientification' of all that was surveyed served to both clarify and quantify the complexity of life. Curiosity cabinets recreated that essentially 19th century museum experience, and medical and botanical illustration became arts unto themselves.

In his painting, Philip Taaffe references the complex interchange of meanings and symbols, borrowing in composite assemblage the iconography of civilization, and all the visual richness and infinite variety of nature. Elements are distilled to essences, the fractional components creating a new mythology and unearthing archaic meanings. Taaffe's paintings are populated with characters from both natural and art history. Above an intricate surface, sometimes referencing medieval tile-work, glowing translucent Color Field stains, or the Turkish Islamic non-representational 'design as high art' of ebrû (marbleized surfaces overlaid with calligraphic flourishes), are layered rhythmically patterned elements. Ammonites and snakes, masks of Greek tragedy, disembodied serifs and other artifacts of cultural and fossil record undergo distinct thematic investigation. The negative spaces buttressing Gothic roseate windows and crumbling Moghul stone lattice work, Taaffe credits with equal largesse.

Taaffe's references challenge the viewer, but also remind us that art is a civilization-constant, as integral to the existence of humanity as proteins, and as infinite in variety. Though the far-flung elements may at a glance appear disparate, the component images are periodic symbols, shaped by the forces of world civilization, or crafted by those of natural selection. The work does not solely encompass art, world history and the origin of species, but also illuminates and speaks to our present, the meanings of worldwide culture and the macrocosm, and ultimately of humanity: a mathematics that the eye can prove. Taaffe's paintings reveal the Artist as scientist, historian, and also collector.

Philip Taaffe's work is a visual quest. His paintings move forward and back through the timelines of mankind and of geological periods, and return to each and instruct the viewer with excavated scientific and cultural riches. What is drawn from is both artful and natural: stringing together the rare, the base, and the exquisite. The serendipitous placements are revealed as communion: Taaffe's work is experiential as much as it is visual. The participatory depictions jolt and arrest with startling revelation, functioning almost as a collective theosophical experience for the viewer—a mystery play with an art historical plot. In the visual catechism, meanings are revealed without the obfuscating references of their usual context; his symbols are thereby expanded in influence, beyond the worlds of their origin.

These visceral messages transcend the limits of language, and Taaffe connects us to humanity's role in the formative magic of the world. Through his work we advance as a civilization, in the continuing evolution of possibility. With increased understanding our intellectual autonomy is expanded, as the world is understood through enumeration, visual intuition and generous explication. Painting consecrates a new country: a separate and distinct location that the viewer's imagination may inhabit—a place of infinite freedom, a materialization of all human consciousness.

Kiki Jai Raj





Alcyonaria, 2010-11. Mixed media on linen, 64 x 78 inches



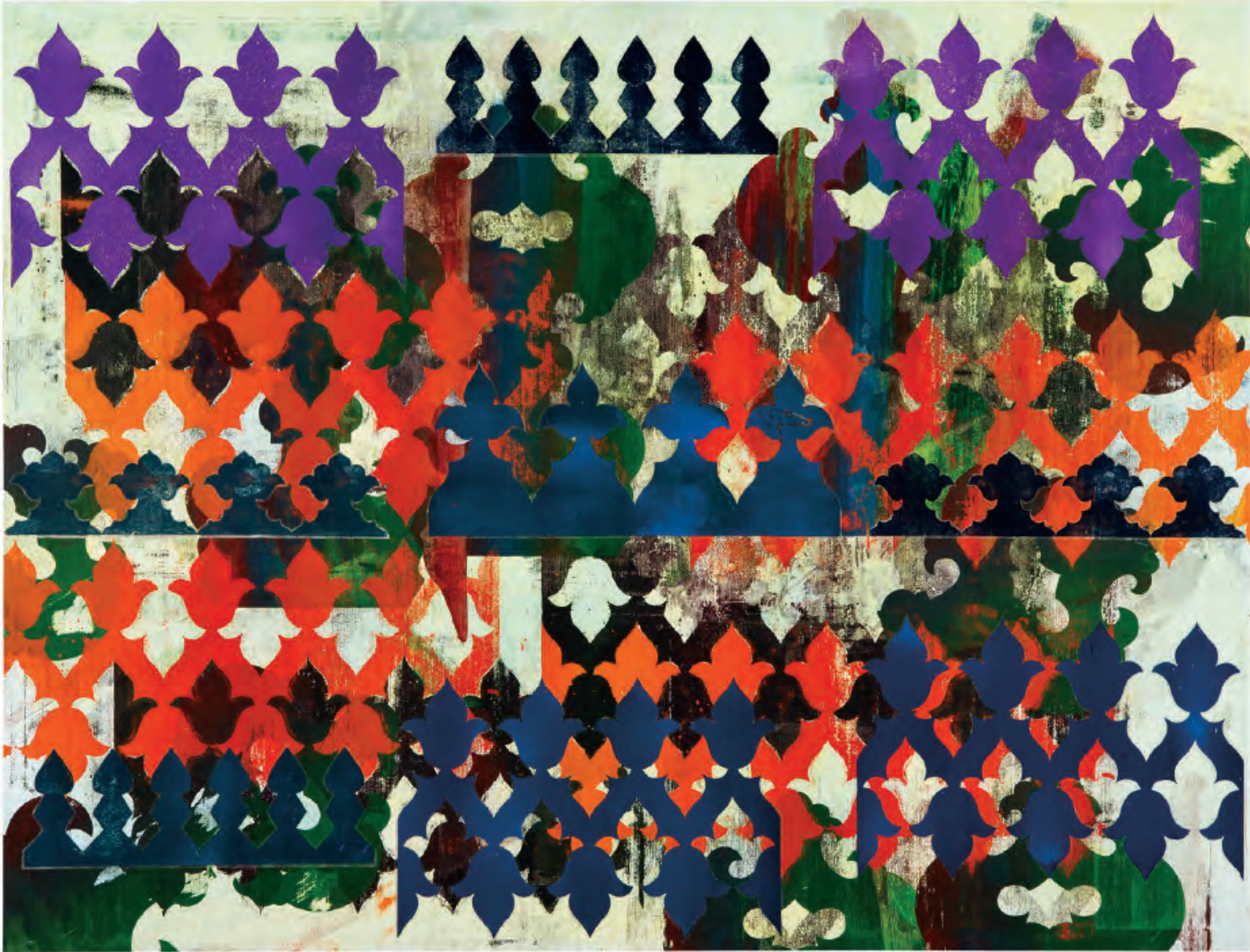
After Alcyonaiia III, 2011. Mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 30 x 40 inches



After Alcyonaia IV, 2011. Mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 30 x 40 inches



Facade, 2011. Mixed media on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Alcazar, 2011. Mixed media on canvas, 30 x 40 inches



Study for Medallion Window, 2011. Mixed media on canvas, 51 x 80 inches



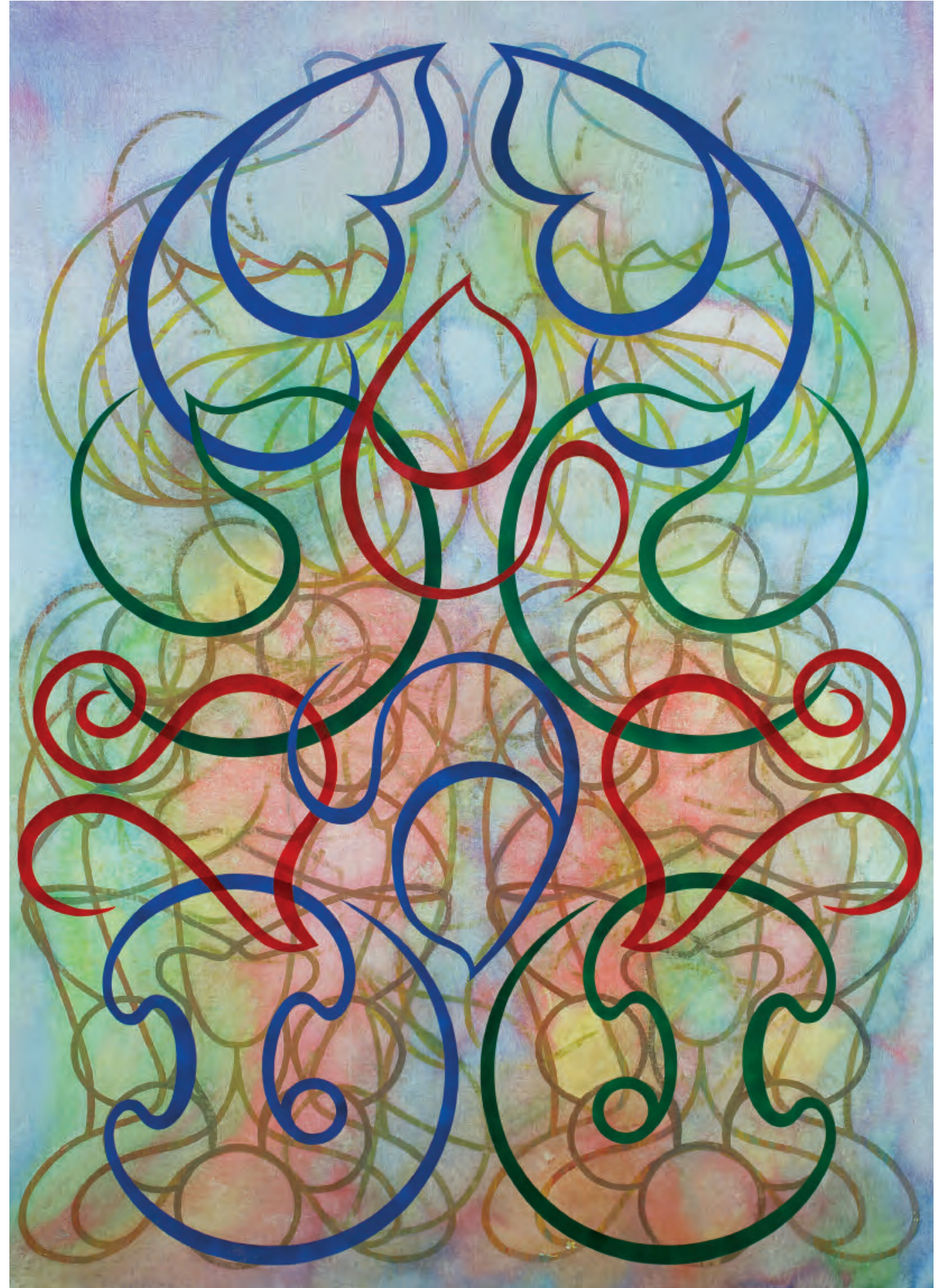
Larger Ornamental Composition with Fragments I, 2011. Mixed media on panel mounted on wood, 40 x 30 inches



Larger Composition with Ornamental Fragments II, 2011. Mixed media on panel mounted on wood, 40¼ x 30⅞ inches

Sigiri Totem I, 2011. Mixed media on canvas, 90 x 63½ inches

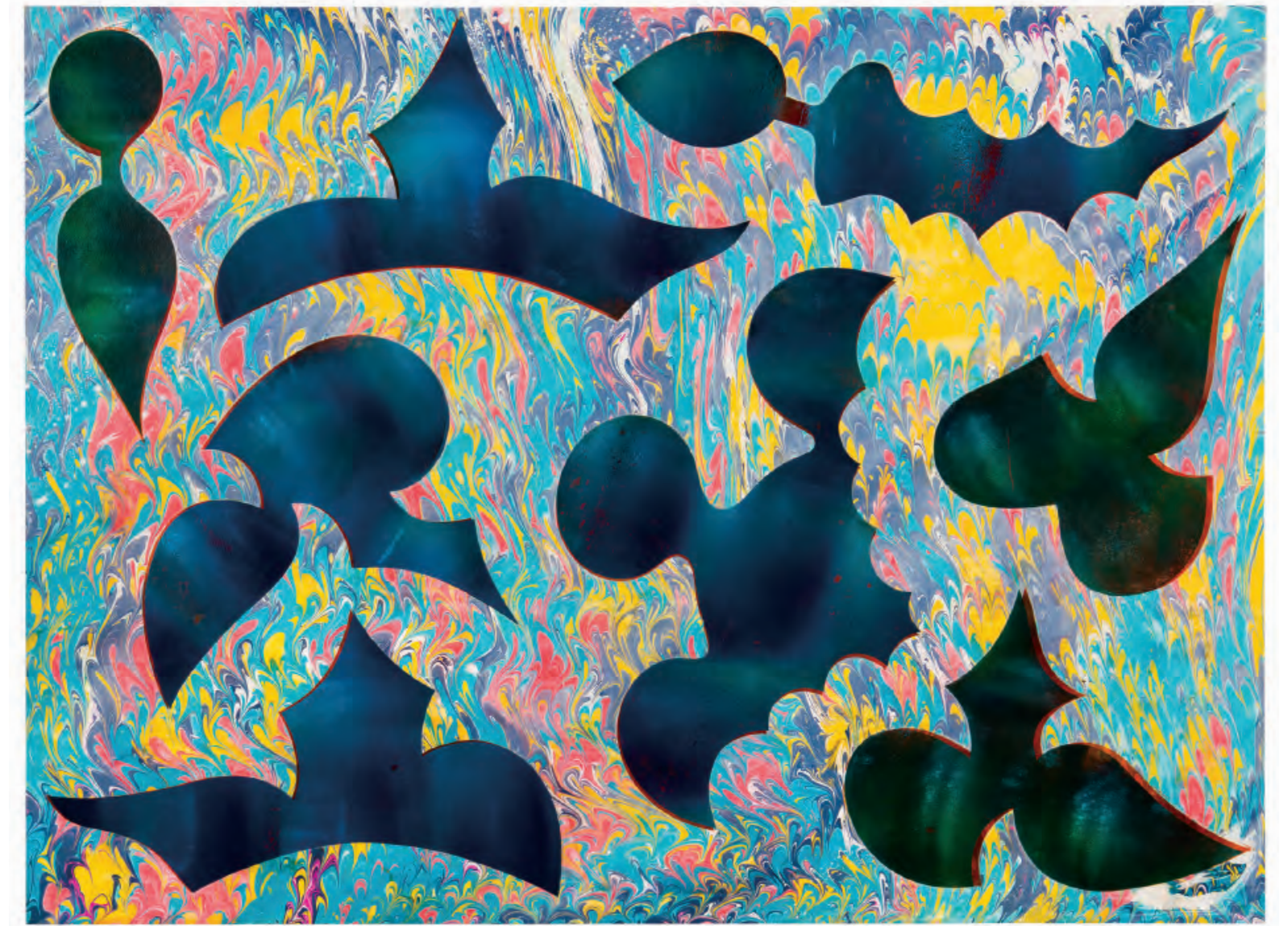




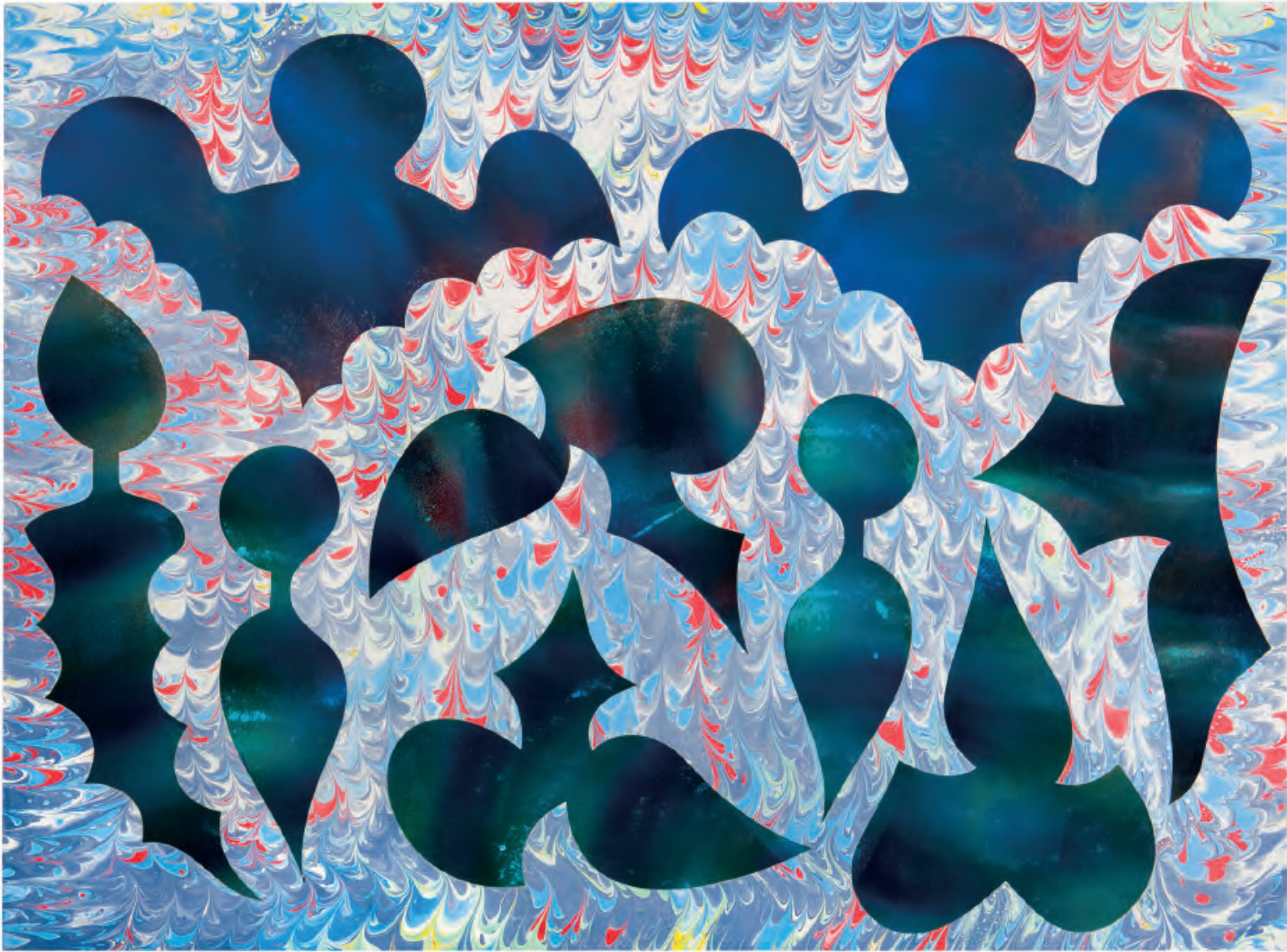
Sigiri Totem II, 2011. Mixed media on canvas, 89¹/₈ x 63⁷/₈ inches



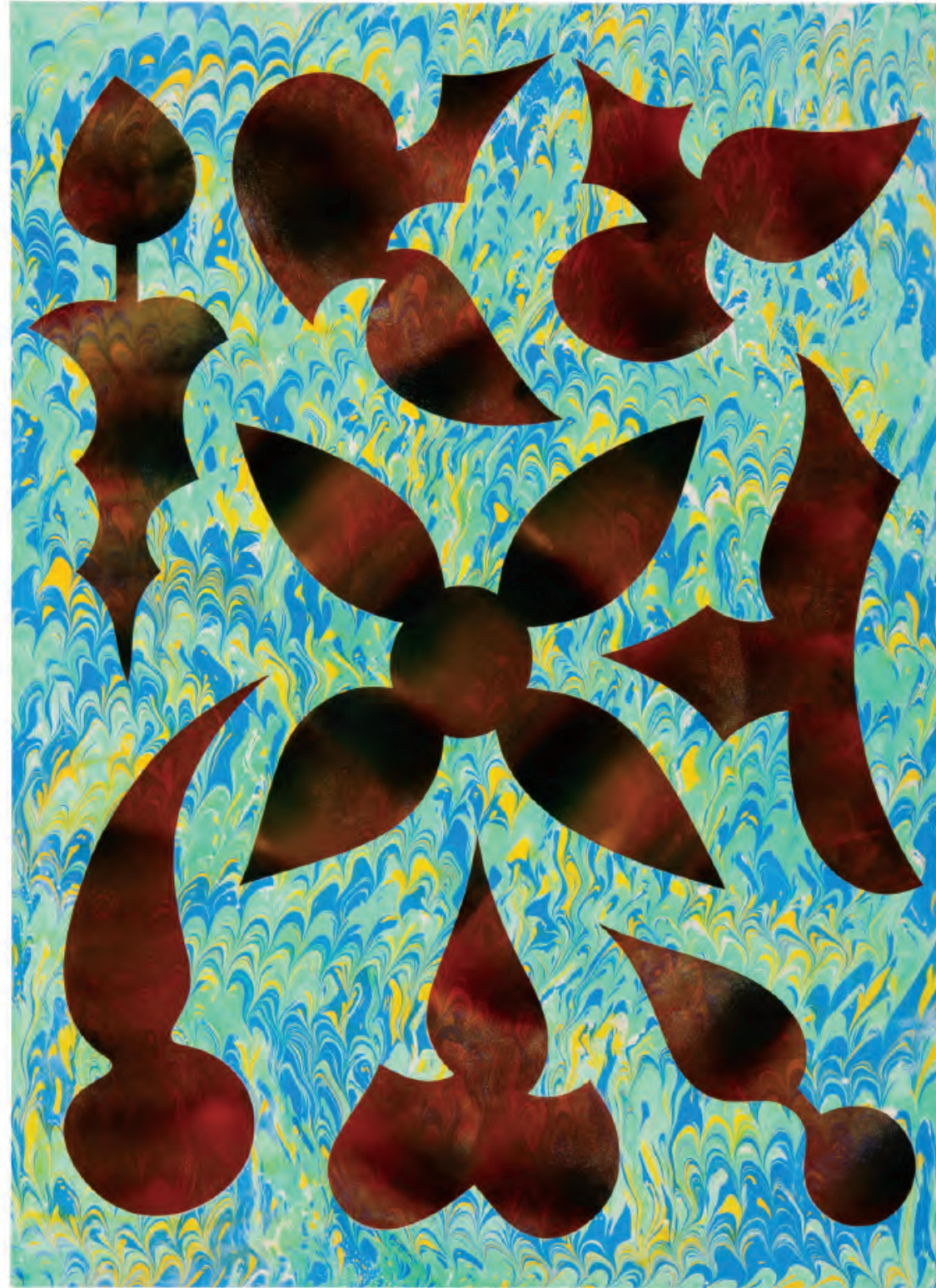
Thermopylae, 2011-2012. Mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 30 x 40 inches



Deltos I, 2011-2012. Mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 30 x 40 inches



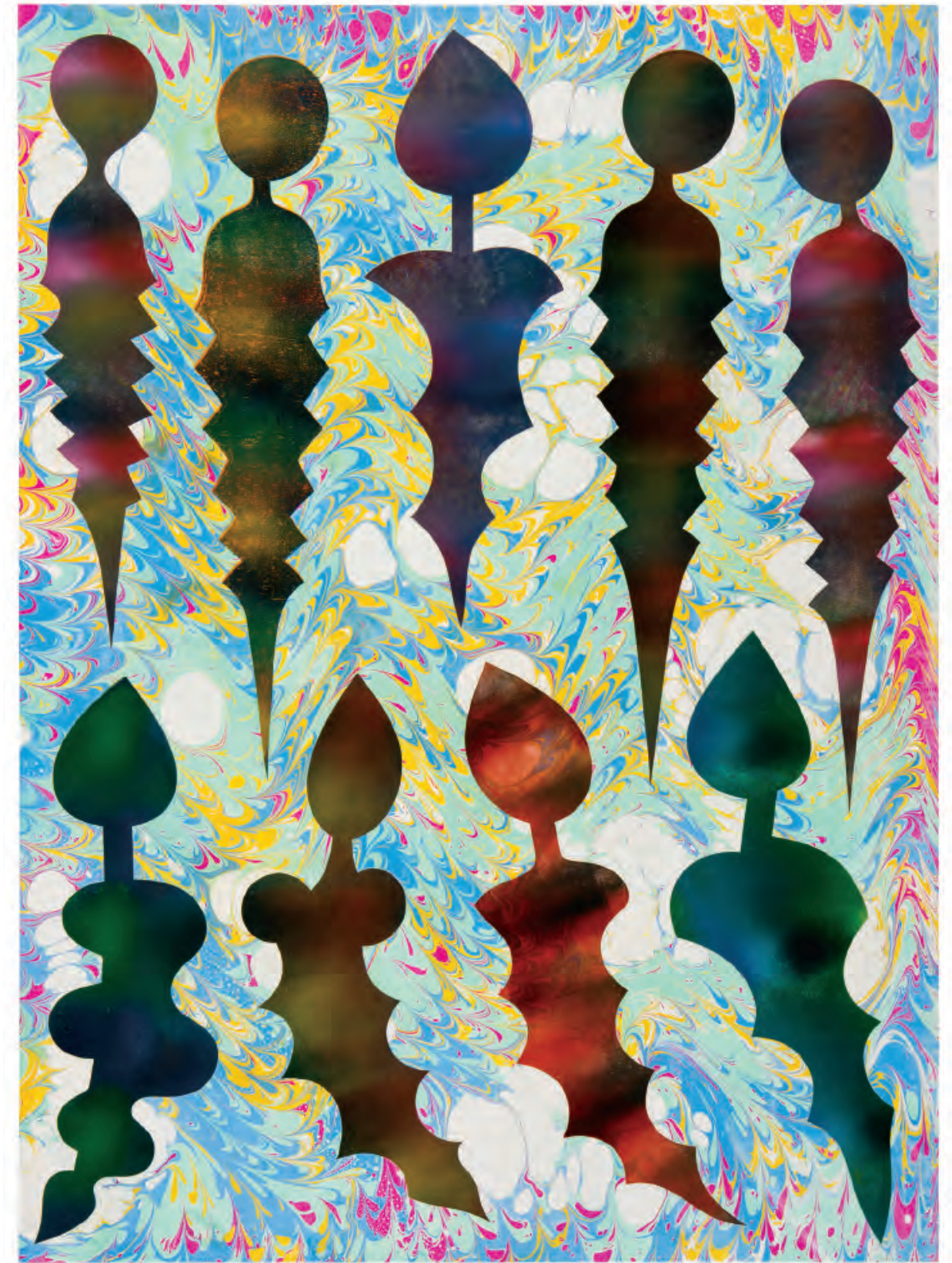
Deltos II, 2011-2012. Mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 30 x 40 inches



Penetralia, 2011-2012. Mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 40 x 30 inches



Agave, 2011-2012. Mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 40 x 30 inches



Sentinel, 2011-2012. Mixed media on canvas mounted on panel, 40 x 30 inches



Echinus Diadema, 2011. Mixed media on canvas, 46½ x 78¼ inches



Painting with Ornamental Fragments I, 2011-2012. Mixed media on panel mounted on wood, 40 x 30 inches



Painting with Ornamental Fragments II, 2011-2012. Mixed media on panel mounted on wood, 40 x 30 inches



Painting with Ornamental Fragments III, 2011-2012. Mixed media on panel mounted on wood, 40 x 30 inches



Juvenilia, 2011-2012. Mixed media on panel mounted on wood, 32 x 24 inches



Psycai, 2011-2012. Mixed media on panel mounted on wood, 24 x 32 inches



Composition with Ornamental Fragments IV, 2011. Mixed media on panel mounted on wood, 32 x 24 inches



Emblem Painting, 2011. Mixed media on canvas, 46 1/8 x 37 inches

PHILIP TAAFFE was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1955, and studied at the Cooper Union in New York. His first solo exhibition was in New York in 1982. He has traveled widely in the Middle East, India, South America, and Morocco, where he collaborated with Mohammed Mrabet on the book *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*, translated by Paul Bowles (Inanout Press, New York: 1993). Taaffe lived and worked in Naples from 1988-91. He has been included in numerous museum exhibitions, including the Carnegie International, two Sydney Biennials, and three Whitney Biennials. In 1990 his work was the subject of an extensive critical study in *Parkett* no. 26 (Zurich & New York). His work is in numerous public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Whitney Museum of American Art; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; and the Reina Sofia, Madrid. In the year 2000, the IVAM museum in Valencia organized a retrospective survey of his work, with contributions by Enrique Juncosa, Robert Rosenblum, and Robert Creeley. In 2001 an extensive survey of his work was presented by the Galleria Civica of Trento, Italy (with texts by Vittoria Coen and Francesco Pellizzi). In 2004 the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in San Marino (Italy) presented a survey of paintings and drawings based on the artist's explorations with floating pigments and the paper marbling process, accompanied by the Skira publication, *Carte annuvolate* (Cloud Papers) with essays by Peter Lamborn Wilson and John Yau. In 2008 the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg organized a retrospective survey, *The Life of Forms in Art: Paintings 1980-2008*, with a publication by Hatje Cantz, featuring contributions by Markus Bröderlin, Holger Broecker, Kay Heymer, and Brooks Adams. In 2011 the Irish Museum of Modern Art presented a ten-year survey of work, *Anima Mundi*, organized by Enrique Juncosa, with additional catalogue contributions by David Brody and Colm Toibín (IMMA/D.A.P.). Philip Taaffe presently works and lives in New York City, and West Cornwall, Connecticut.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1982
Roger Litz Gallery, New York

1984
Galerie Ascan Crone, Hamburg
Pat Hearn Gallery, New York

1986
Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
Galerie Ascan Crone, Hamburg
Galerie Paul Maenz, Cologne

1987
Mario Diacono Gallery, Boston
Pat Hearn Gallery, New York

1988
Donald Young Gallery, Chicago
Galerie Lucio Amelio, Naples

1989
Mary Boone Gallery, New York
Pat Hearn Gallery, New York

1990
Galerie Samia Saouma, Paris

1991
Max Hetzler Galerie, Cologne
Gagosian Gallery, New York

1993
Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas
Center for the Fine Arts, Miami
Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin

1994
Gagosian Gallery, New York

1996
Max Hetzler, Berlin
Vienna Secession, Vienna

1997
Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles
Mario Diacono Gallery, Boston
Peter Blum, New York

1998
Rebecca Camhi Gallery, Athens
Thomas Ammann Fine Art AG, Zurich

1999
Gagosian Gallery, New York
Baldwin Gallery, Aspen

2000
IVAM, Centre del Carme, Valencia
Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles

2001
Galleria Civica Di Arte Contemporanea Trento
University Art Gallery, University of California, San Diego

2002
Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris

2003
Jablonka Galerie, Cologne
Studio Rafaelli Arte, Trento
Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich
Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea della Repubblica di San Marino

2007
Gagosian Gallery, New York
The Portalakis Collection, Athens

2008
Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg
Galerie Jablonka Artparis, Abu Dhabi

2009
Galerie Jablonka, Berlin
Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento

2010
MAGI/Museo della artistiche e storia, Bologna
Gagosian Gallery, New York

2011
Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin
Gagosian Gallery, London

2012
Jablonka Galerie, Cologne
Bohm Chapel, Huerth
Baldwin Gallery, Aspen

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Philip Taaffe

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Baldwin Gallery

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