

**HATJE
CANTZ**

Philip Taaffe

The Life of Forms Works 1980–2008

With contributions by

Brooks Adams

Holger Broeker

Markus Brüderlin

Kay Heymer

Kunstmuseum
Wolfsburg

March 8 to June 29, 2008



Contents

	Sponsor's Statement	4
	About the Exhibition	5
Kay Heymer	On the Development of the Pictorial Work of Philip Taaffe	11
	Plates	27
Philip Taaffe	A Project for Wolfsburg	177
Markus Brüderlin	Abstraction as the Continuance of Ornamental History	185
Holger Broeker	Forms in Time	193
Brooks Adams	Interview	205
	Checklist of Exhibited Works	231
	Authors' Biographies	233
	Biography	234
	Selected Bibliography	236

Sponsor's Statement

With the exhibition *Philip Taaffe: The Life of Forms*, the Volkswagen Bank is again pleased to be able to support the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg in showing art of international significance. The partnership with the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg has existed since 2001. Aside from the monographic exhibitions *Neo Rauch. Neue Rollen* and *Douglas Gordon. Between Darkness and Light*, the projects sponsored since then include the two large group exhibitions *ArchiSculpture. Dialogues Between Architecture and Sculpture from the 18th Century to the Present Day* and *Japan and the West: The Filled Void*, which testify to the museum's high standard of quality under the directorship of Markus Brüderlin.

In the exhibition *Philip Taaffe: The Life of Forms*, the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg shows the fascinating world of ornaments in the oeuvre of the artist who was born in New Jersey in 1955. This comprehensive survey of his work already promises to be one of the most exciting rediscoveries in the history of American painting. The works of the painter who attracted much attention in New York in the nineteen-eighties with his appropriation and reworking of existing images and styles are influenced by dealings with the history of ornaments from diverse epochs and cultures. For the first time in many years, the exhibition in the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg offers an overview of Taaffe's entire artistic career. His fascinating paintings of interpenetrating forms and colors will surely captivate and engage many viewers.

In our commitment to Philip Taaffe, we—as a globally operating company—are supporting the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg as well as its locally and internationally acclaimed exhibition activities. The Volkswagen Bank has long committed itself to a lively exchange between the generations. We are therefore again very pleased to provide a free shuttle bus in conjunction with this exhibition that will give regional school classes and senior-citizen groups the opportunity to become acquainted with the multifaceted work of this much-travelled painter.

We thank the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg and its staff for organizing this multi-layered exhibition. We are pleased to be able to continue our partnership this year and to contribute with our support to a new evaluation of Philip Taaffe's comprehensive work within the history of international art.

We wish the exhibition much success.

Burkhard Breiing
Chairman of the Board of Directors
Volkswagen Financial Services AG

About the Exhibition

The Life of Forms is the first comprehensive survey exhibition since the year 2000 dealing with the work of Philip Taaffe. The show encompasses approximately ninety predominantly large-format paintings dating from 1980 to the present. The most recent pictures were created by Taaffe in his New York studio especially for Wolfsburg. The artist, who was born in New Jersey in 1955, achieved international recognition as a part of the so-called Appropriation Art movement during the early nineteen-eighties and he developed his abstract art into an autonomous oeuvre that deals with the “re-creation of paradise” in the broadest sense. Taaffe, whose paintings are represented in many American collections and major European museums and whose works are regularly shown in important galleries, consistently developed his oeuvre in the seclusion of his large New York studio that partly resembles a factory and partly a venerable old library. The Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg has now taken on the task of presenting a representative selection of Taaffe’s technically subtle and visually captivating works to a wider audience.

Taaffe, whose first exhibitions went on view in New York and Hamburg in the early nineteen-eighties, undertook extensive journeys to the Middle East, to India and South America as well as Morocco. Taaffe lived in Naples, Italy, from 1988 to 1991, where he further developed his pictorial creations exploring the subtle relationship between abstraction and ornament. The artist works at a type of “ornament as a universal language” that brings together forms from the most diverse cultures and far corners of the earth. He varies and reworks these motifs and applies them onto the canvas in surprising new constellations and brilliant colors.

Because it was identified with simple adornment and superficial decorativeness, the ornament was long considered the Fall of modern painting. The pioneering forays into the realm of the nonrepresentational undertaken by Wassily Kandinsky, Kasimir Malevich, or Piet Mondrian were still compared to “painted carpets on which one should sit”—as Hugo Ball for example critically noted around 1920—instead of hanging them on the wall as free works of art. Since the nineteen-eighties however, it has been recognized that the ornamental represents the essence of modern painting alongside monochrome art and that the appropriation of the history of the ornament, which has gathered rich aesthetic knowledge over the millennia, contributed to the renewal of painting. In fact one must even ask today if the development of abstraction is nothing further than the continuance of ornamental history—in a different field and using other means.

Taaffe was one of the first to recognize this potential. The essay in the catalogue entitled “Philip Taaffe and Abstraction as the Continuance of Ornamental History” deals with the special role he plays in this context. His name appeared comet-like on the New York art scene in the early nineteen-eighties. In 1986 his paintings were shown in Europe at the legendary exhibition *Art and Its Double* curated

by Dan Cameron in the context of so-called Appropriation Art. His works were introduced to Europe on the occasion of a solo exhibition at the Ascan Crone Gallery in 1984. The reaction to the red monochrome painting *We Are Not Afraid* which he painted in 1985 remains unforgettable. It made Taaffe one of the most discussed painters of the then young art scene and it can now also be seen in our exhibition. At first glance it seems like a replica of one of the famous monochrome paintings by the great painter of the nineteen-fifties, Barnett Newman. Upon closer examination, however, one discovers garlands winding through the painting from the top to the bottom along the renowned stripes. The one side considered it a “betrayal of the heroic painting of the New York School,” while others considered it an “ingenious and timely interpretation of modernism.” But the young painter was not interested in pulling down the monuments erected to the forebears, but instead sought a serious and sustainable renewal of painting. In addition to Newman the recurrent appropriation of aesthetic positions developed by earlier artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Bridget Riley, and Ellsworth Kelly was a necessary starting point for Taaffe to develop his own concept of painting on the basis of that which had been attained. While many of his colleagues of that time sunned themselves in the limelight of the art scene, Taaffe strode his own path quite apart from trends. He engrossed himself in the “never-ending story” of the ornament and in the fascinating “life of forms.” The title of our exhibition is derived from Henri Focillon’s 1934 book *La vie des formes* (The Life of Forms in Art). In it, the French art historian showed that forms do not rigidly realize content, but evolve their own “moving” life according to their own principles. The predominant forms we know from art history evolved over the centuries through duplication, tension shifts, and equivalents as they transformed themselves from culture to culture.

Taaffe’s work has developed in remarkably unexpected ways since his early infamous works. In his contribution to this catalogue, Kay Heymer describes the journey. The artist has explored many corners of the world of art history and assimilated their forms: the tranquil power of forms from Mediterranean antiquity in Naples, the Islamic and Mozarabic ornaments from the North African coast, Spain, and the Middle East, the magic medieval light of Byzantium, the Asiatic aesthetics of illumination he encountered in India and Sri Lanka, and Japan’s highly codified *tsuba* that decorated the swords of the samurai. Taaffe’s mental journey led from Japan to the Pre-Columbian and Native American ethnic cultures in Northwestern America only then to return to his own Irish Celtic roots in Europe. Folkloristic and phylogenetic forms are no less important to him than the stylistic sophistication of distant advanced civilizations. But Taaffe is not interested in an eclectic collection of ornaments and their decorative dissemination on the canvas. He instead deliberately selects groups of motifs that influenced a collective, an ethnic group, or a society as a style over a long period of time. Gazing, he penetrates into their structures, assimilates them physically as it were, and reshapes them in order to apply them as individually experienced patterns and forms to the canvas; or might

we say: to capture them on canvas? Like a shaman he investigates the hidden knowledge and the healing effects of these forms in the process. The comparison of the functions of forms in various world religions is essential for an understanding of Taaffe's *Kunstwollen*: in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, as well as, should we interpret it metaphysically, in Modernism too. But the magical, animistic, and trance-like effect of forms always calls Taaffe back to the reality of modern aesthetics when he hybridizes the resonant patterns of so-called Op(tical) Art that have analytically dissected the workings of our perception since the nineteen-sixties.

Taaffe crossed the borders of cultural history after 1995 when he began to occupy himself with the forms and history of nature using fossils. He literally penetrates into the "history" of pre-historic evidence from the realm of flora and fauna. The geological fossil radicalizes the subtle, stratified composition of the pictures produced in protracted working procedures, and generate their own concept of time that Holger Broeker discusses in his essay for the catalogue.

The journey through the "history" of epochs and cultures is as startling as it is fascinating. The Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg has organized Taaffe's first comprehensive mid-career retrospective. The young museum has regularly staged survey exhibitions dealing with the works by important artists of today's art scene, most recently Neo Rauch and Douglas Gordon. As with the Leipzig painter, the museum not only provides Taaffe with a retrospective summarization of his oeuvre, but also makes a kind of project space available to the artist on the gallery above the main hall, for which he also conceived an architectural setting for his most recent pictures. When he first visited Wolfsburg in October, Taaffe was impressed with the spaciousness of the hall and its architecture encompassing two floors. The chronological route through the exhibition on the ground floor can be perceived from the raised platform. While the visitors below—in the past as it were—wander about as if in a labyrinth, the architecture as seen from above turns out to have the circuitous structure of a meander (fig. p. 26). It is akin to Umberto Eco's famous novel *The Name of the Rose*: In 1327, the Franciscan friar William of Baskerville and his novice Adson roam through an incomprehensible labyrinth in the monastery library of a Benedictine abbey. Seen from the outside however, the layout reveals itself to be a clearly structured geometrical formation. The exhibition architecture in the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg proves to be a metaphor for the two-fold manner of an artist who experiences the world formatively and simultaneously stands above it.

At the bend of the meander one enters a towering cube that contains something very special. The artist created an installation at the zenith of the exhibition which in some measure decrypts the genetic code of his aesthetic vocabulary: the pictures of the exhibition were "taken apart" and positioned in layers to form a towering installation comprising individual prints. The prints were

made directly from the printing blocks used by the artist to produce his paintings. Packed tightly together, they provide insights into the artist's material and intellectual workshop.

When Holger Broeker and I stood in Taaffe's studio in the middle of New York's Chelsea district in early June 2007, we were fascinated by the atmosphere of this workplace: The "atelier" was animated by two assistants who transferred the patterns from books to large sheets of paper. The timeless tranquility of an ancient library dominated two rooms further on where mountains of rare and precious books could be found. Several were open and showed illustrations of fossilized plants, primitive wood carvings, and architectural reliefs. The urge to comprehend the overabundant world of forms as a living cosmos was irresistible. John Ruskin must have felt this way when he discovered an evolutionary history of form in the mid-nineteenth century based on the profile cuts of cornices, capitals, and bases which he documented in his book *Stones of Venice*. In the next room we encountered an impenetrable accumulation of all kinds of paper clippings, printing blocks, stencils, and found materials. The glance through the dusty window onto the street was framed by a row of corals on the windowsill that made New York's colorful history appear like underwater sediments. Certain parts of Taaffe's studio in turn resembled an excavation site. Tea was served between softly waving palm leaves on the roof garden that abducted us to Paul Klee's and Henri Matisse's North African Tunis. Raymond Foye's photographs provide an impression of the delicate cosmos of Taaffe's studio, which is housed in the halls of a former Afghan school and in which the artist's paradisiacal works are produced. They give the catalogue its unmistakable character.

Acknowledgments

To Raymond Foye, Taaffe's vigilant associate, go our very special thanks for the dependable accompaniment of the project at all levels. Holger Broeker, curator of the collection at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, looked after the exhibition with immense commitment and I wish to extend my cordial thanks to him for this. The bibliography on Taaffe's works is very extensive. We are nevertheless convinced that this publication will provide a special contribution to the contextual reception of Taaffe's oeuvre. Many thanks must therefore go to the authors Kay Heymer and Brooks Adams, who have each contributed new and exciting insights into Taaffe's sources and methods. I am grateful to Chris Rehberger and Pia Zeisel at Double Standards for casting the abundance of material into an extremely beautiful publication. I also wish to extend my thanks to the staff at Hatje Cantz Verlag for their circumspect work on the catalogue. Thanks also go to all of those who assisted us in words and deeds, especially the former chief curator of the Gallery of Contemporary Art at the Hamburg Kunsthalle, Christoph Heinrich, who has been curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Denver

Art Museum since last fall. A very special word of thanks goes to Doris Ammann and Rafael Jablonka, who provided decisive information and consistently supported the extensive undertaking, as well as availing us of the exceptional staff of their respective galleries. Louise Neri and the Gagolian Gallery in New York likewise provided invaluable assistance, as did Studio Raffaelli d'Arte, Trento, Peter Blum, New York, and Galerie Ropac, Salzburg and Paris. Thanks also go to Claus-Peter Haase, the Director of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, and Ulrich Joger, the Director of the Staatliches Naturhistorisches Museum Braunschweig (State Museum of Natural History Brunswick), for valuable conversations and loans which, in an exemplary way, shed light on the relationship between Taaffe's world of forms and historical sources. This project could not have been realized without the generosity of many museums and private collectors in Europe and the United States who agreed to part with their works for the duration of the exhibition. I wish to express my most cordial thanks to all of them. The Volkswagen Bank has been an important partner for the Kunstmuseum for many years and I am grateful to Burkhard Breiing for the steadfast continuance of this support.

Philip Taaffe: The Life of Forms is not only intended to be an exhibition, but also an event. It was the artist himself who contributed the most to making this possible, not least by means of the new works he created for this presentation at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Philip Taaffe for this contribution and for the immense trust he placed in us. After the exhibition *Ornament und Abstraktion* in which two of his key works were shown in Basel in 2001, the long-felt longing for a monographic cooperation with him has now been fulfilled. Taaffe's aesthetic trip around the world and through epochs and cultures is also a part of the new transhistorical and transcultural program with which the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg wishes to contribute to the issue of a still to be defined "world art" in a globalized world. After the project *Japan and the West: The Filled Void* (2007/08), this exhibition is a further building block in the general program of the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg: "On the Search for Modernism in the Twenty First Century." Taaffe's "journey" is ultimately not one into the past. As Kay Heymer writes, Taaffe's painting is, in the era of the Internet, "a testament to the sovereign mastery of a flood of information that could drown us all." And in its obsessive dedication it is also profoundly existential.

Markus Brüderlin
Director



On the Development of the Pictorial Work of Philip Taaffe

The American painter Philip Taaffe is among the most important painters of his generation. His work, which now extends across some twenty-five years, continues the great tradition of American painting that became the dominant contemporary art form in the mid-twentieth century. Taaffe's claim on painting is as serious and as great as those of his predecessors, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman. Taaffe's work has nonetheless from the start confronted different difficulties than those that faced the heroic generation that preceded him. The significance of an artistic oeuvre can at first develop only within the artist's own period, under the conditions of that period. In this way the art of Newman and Rothko was still a form of painting that, through an extreme reduction of formal means, could claim to assert the fully free presence, without preconditions, of color as an existential experience. This was not possible for a painter thirty years later, when the idea of a painting as a direct experience imagined without preconditions was no longer possible. Taaffe became a painter at a time when painting had lost its innocence. His opportunity lay in gathering up the rubble left behind by the progress of avant garde art in the twentieth century, and in so doing to discover that painting could find new answers through the reconsideration of this rubble. His relationship to painting is thus just as existential as was that of the heroes of modernism. Naturally he differs in method. Taaffe is a painter-collector. His work took as its starting point the formally clear and limited tradition of twentieth-century nonrepresentational painting. It developed in very different directions, however, no later than his extended stay in Naples in the years between 1988 and 1991. In Naples, Taaffe began making use of the art traditions of the Mediterranean region from antiquity to the present, paying particular attention to ornamentation. Over time, he incorporated inspirations from a variety of cultures from across the world, which continue to serve him today as a resource for his work. In the mid-nineteen-nineties, he expanded his sources to include representations of nature largely taken from nineteenth-century natural history books in his impressive studio library. The art of Taaffe is life-affirming, decorative, hedonistic, enamored of the material world, yet characterized by a deep need for spirituality and transcendence.

Taaffe was born in Elizabeth, New Jersey in 1955. He began his artistic education in the mid-nineteen-seventies, a rather unfavorable time for painting. From 1974 until he received his degree in 1977, Taaffe studied at The Cooper Union in New York under Hans Haacke, an artist who made his mark with conceptual, pronouncedly political works. Haacke's planned exhibit for April 1971 at the Guggenheim Museum in New York was rejected by the organizers; with its aggressive critique of the investment positions of a number of museum trustees, it created an uproar that led to the dismissal of the curator in charge, Edward Fry.¹ It was hardly possible to study painting under Hans Haacke. "I couldn't show paintings in Hans's class. That was very passé," Taaffe said in an interview with the author Brad Gooch.² Yet Taaffe was highly interested in painting, cultivating a fondness for the work of Rothko in particular. He attended lectures by Dore Ashton, who told him much from

Kay Heymer

Green/White Stoppages, 1984, linoprint collage, enamel, acrylic on canvas, 215.9×215.9 cm, Jeffrey Deitch Collection (detail)



firsthand experience, and participated in her seminars. Despite this, Taaffe's first works at the academy were photographs, films, installations, and performances. In a lengthy conversation with the filmmaker Stan Brakhage in 1997, Taaffe described his situation at that time, and emphasized how important films had been for his work. He spent a great deal of time at the Anthology Film Archives, and studied film with Robert Breer.

Taaffe began his wide reading in young adulthood, and was particularly impressed by the works of William S. Burroughs, which he first experienced at the ages of sixteen and seventeen. They helped him to accept his own identity: "That was the importance of William Burroughs for me. At sixteen or seventeen years old, when I was reading those books for the first time, he instantly broke down all these barriers for me, shattered this sense of what was possible, and really made me believe in myself and my own sensibility and who I was."³ Dialogue with poets and writers is still an essential constant in the work of Taaffe today. While studying under Haacke, Taaffe also delved into the art of Joseph Kosuth and Joseph Beuys, who once paid a visit to the class. Robert Morris and Chris Burden, two Minimalist and Postminimalist sculptors and performance artists, played an important role for him as well. Only after leaving Cooper Union was Taaffe able to engage more intensively with painting, something he began to do while living for a brief period at the General Theological Seminary in New York's Chelsea district. A knowledge of Taaffe's daily routine from that time is a valuable aid in understanding his painting on the whole and the particular attitude to painting that he adopted from the start. In an interview, he described it as follows: "I was going to see movies in the afternoon and then I'd come home and I'd try to work at night. I had a small room, and on one wall I mounted drawing paper, and using paint-sticks and a little cassette tape recorder I'd start to work myself into a frenzy, describing a part of the film that I had seen. When I started to induce this activity I was making lines on the paper, and as the lines suggested certain pictorial memories, I began to speak into the microphone. Then I'd throw another piece of paper over the paint-stick and start another one. I did this for a couple of months—not every night, because it was a very intense activity. After a while I noticed that as I was murmuring into the microphone and making these lines and describing what I was trying to get at in the painting, the words would fall away and the gestures and images would take over . . ."⁴ In his response question, Raymond Foye aptly characterized this description as a "ritual process." Rituals imply definite, assembled traditions which live above all through repetition. Taaffe's ritual, or, as he also terms it, "liturgical" approach to painting, displays his interest in copies and reconsiderations of existing works, an interest not to be qualified as a detached postmodern strategy, but one which is fundamental, existential, at times very nearly religious in motivation.

Édouard Manet, *Le balcon*, 1868/69, oil on canvas, 169 × 125 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

René Magritte, *Perspective: Le balcon de Manet II*, 1950, oil on canvas, 80 × 60 cm, Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Gent

Barnett Newman, *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue II*, 1967, oil on canvas, 304.8 × 259.1 cm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart



In 1980, Taaffe rented a spacious apartment in Jersey City where he could collect things. It was there that he made his first group of works to attain prominence, the Picture Binding Series. In these collages, which Taaffe made from the material used to tape photographs into albums, he came upon an unmistakable pictorial language of his own for the first time. The production process for these works was reiterative and undeviating. The linear forms, closed in upon themselves, and the imaginary architectural spaces were created through a painstaking technique involving applying lengths of tape to Masonite panels, then partially removing the tape. The production of a single work took several weeks; the process was ritualized, as had been Taaffe's process of creation for his earlier paint-stick drawings. The formal language of these collages is very strict and abstract. Their material effect plays an important role, one described by the critic Jan Avgikos in a catalogue entry for the 1987 exhibit *Similia/Dissimilia* with the following words: "The tape presents a certain messiness and exerts a literal material presence—a ready-made that interprets the collage (the reference to painting) as a reductive set of formal issues."⁵ At the same time, Taaffe was collecting various papers from a wastepaper-disposal plant in Newark, where he found the material for one of his largest collages up to that time: "[*Martyr Group*] is from roughly 1984, and was inspired by Romanian frescos that are painted on the exteriors of churches in the Moldavian Valley from the sixteenth century. I found these police targets in a waste-paper dump in New Jersey. The idea was to bring a previous art-historical or architectural idea to a contemporary reality."⁶ Today, *Martyr Group* remains one of the few works in Taaffe's oeuvre to depict human figures at least in outline. Only in his most recent works, such as *Cape Sinope* (2006/07), do human faces appear. Although the oblong shapes in the large painting *Megapolis* (1996) have been interpreted—rather unconvincingly—as corresponding to African sculptures, most of Taaffe's works depict either abstract forms or plants and animals he has extracted from historical book illustrations.

Philip Taaffe and Appropriation

"The dogma of a slavish imitation of the ancients can serve the objectives of any romanticism."⁷
Henri Focillon

When he presented his first exhibit at the Roger Litz Gallery in 1982, Taaffe was friends with such artists as Donald Baechler and Ross Bleckner who worked in a substantially freer fashion than he did. Taaffe abruptly ended the Picture Binding Series after he presented it. Alongside his work on the large collage *Martyr Group*, he began incorporating points of reference from modern and contemporary art into his works. *Color Field Painting* (1983) takes on particular significance in this connection. The painting's tight, irregular, colorful strips so minutely subdivide the picture

Ogata Kōrin, *Bamboo and Plum Trees*, ink painting and gold leaf on screen, 62.5 x 181 cm, Tokyo National Museum



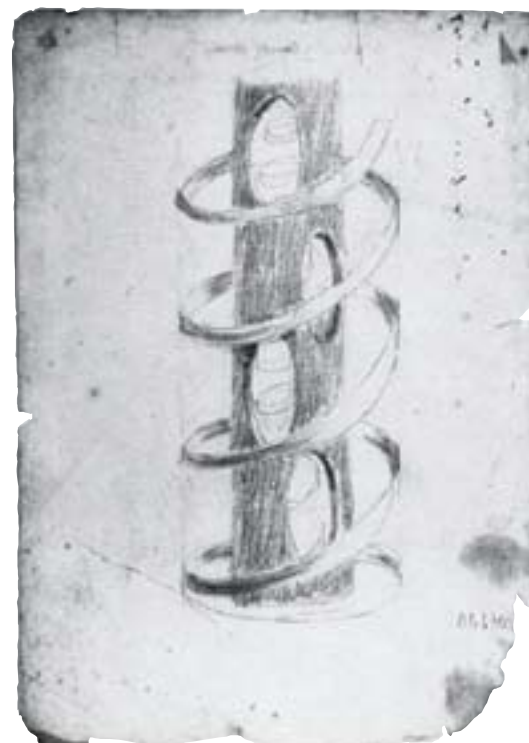
plane that the reference alluded to in the title *Color Field Painting* (Jules Olitski, Ellsworth Kelly, Kenneth Noland) is all but empty. The work seems closest to the canvases run through with narrow and glaringly colorful stripes of Gene Davis, an artist on the stylistic periphery of Color Field painting. In this work Taaffe was not yet making reference to specific other paintings. In 1983 and 1984 came the first works based directly on particular models. In those works, Taaffe developed great versatility in the technical realization of his creations, each of which relates to another artist's painting with precisely contemplated technique. The selection of inspirations is worthy of note. Taaffe first drew on works from the abstract tradition. The most direct copies, from 1984, are of small-format works by the American painter Myron Stout, all but forgotten by the early nineteen-eighties. In 1980, Sanford Schwartz organized an exhibit of this artist, who was remarkable for his highly distilled and austere abstractions, and Taaffe had the opportunity to study Stout's singular work in depth. His paintings after works by Stout are true homages. In them Taaffe respects the format and painting technique of his predecessor, for he had the feeling that this was the only way to transport himself into an archaic mental state comparable to that of Stout the loner. Taaffe described his relationship to Stout's work in a 1996 interview with Martin Prinzhorn: "When I started to make paintings, I thought about a kind of infinite scale, and looking at an American painter such as Myron Stout, there are certain forgotten stories, more obscure American artists that I felt very close to, and I felt so close to them, in a sense I understood that I shared my sensibility with other artists and other locations. So when I started to make this work, I felt as though I was reliving some kind of tribal [activity]—you might even call a contemporary tradition of painting a tribal activity . . . Feeling that my sensibility was shared by a lot of work that had been constructed already, everything had already been made in a sense, so I was as a priest or as a practitioner in a certain area of research and activity. It brought me back to a very early state, maybe an earlier life or an earlier condition. A very ancient condition. . . . There is a fiction involved and there is a reality involved, one's activity as an artist, this memory and this psychological transporting of one's own mental condition into other areas of knowledge and one's predecessors. Memory and fighting the memory at the same time."⁸

Portal of Ferrara cathedral, circa 1219, in Felix Kayser, *Werdezeit der abendländischen Kunst* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1948), plate 52

Hilma af Klint, *DUVAN, No. 1. Group IX, Series UW*, spring 1915, oil on canvas, 158 × 130 cm, Stiftelse Hilma af Klint

Where Taaffe's studies of the work of Myron Stout can be described as an act of loving devotion, his works that examine Bridget Riley's Op-Art paintings from the nineteen-sixties are not entirely without irony. Here he returned to the technique of collage in which he had already gained experience. Taaffe wished to "surgically dissect" the paintings of Riley. To that end, he made use again of paper he had found at the wastepaper-disposal plant in New Jersey. For the collages after Riley, he for the most part used paper rolls discarded as remnants in the production of lightbulb packaging. Taaffe made linocuts based on the waves in Riley's works, then printed these on the paper he had found. This resulted in the surfaces of his images being significantly more raw and plastic than the flawless surfaces of Riley's paintings. In 1985, he described his method in a conversation with Michael Kohn: "What most concerns me is that, in taking Riley's work as a formal pretext, I am able to construct another fictional space. This results in an entirely different area of experience that has the peculiarity of appearing to be what she did."⁹ Though Taaffe retained the format of the works in his paintings, he did not limit the freedoms he took in the use of a different technique. He also varied the titles—*Crest* turned into *Brest*, and *Fall* became *Adam, Eve*. In the latter case, Taaffe doubled Riley's painting. These titles come across like distanced echoes of the painting titles of Riley. With his painting *Overtone* (1983), Taaffe employed a phenomenon in music to describe the oscillating, dynamic relationship between his works and those of Riley.

Certainly the greatest provocation in Taaffe's early work came from his personal transformations of the works of Newman. Between 1985 and 1989 he created about twenty "versions" of Newman paintings. When, in 1986, I saw Taaffe's painting *Twisted Covenant* (1985) on display at the Frankfurter Kunstverein's exhibit *Prospect 86*, I was not yet familiar with the artist's methodology. Thus his painting seemed to me an ironic, blasphemous impertinence, one which did not open itself up to the potential for experience in the painting of Newman, but which instead simply used that potential as a motif for a superficial copy. Taaffe is not alone in this form of blasphemy. As an early example of this tradition in art history one might mention Marcel Duchamp's reproduction of the Mona Lisa with a mustache painted on (*L. H. O. O. Q.*, 1919, Paris), as well as René Magritte's 1950 revision of Édouard Manet's painting *Le balcon* (1868/69) under the title *Perspective: Le balcon de Manet II* (figs. p. 12), in which the Belgian painter replaced Manet's figures with coffins. Taaffe's paraphrases of the paintings of Newman are much better suited than the works of other artists as material for the discourse of postmodernity, because the titles of the paintings alone convey an ironic message that is also shown in the Newmanesque "zips," which are mutated into garlands. In the mid-nineteen-eighties, paintings like *Homo Fortissimus Excelsus* (1985), after Newman's central work *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* (1950/51), and *We Are Not Afraid* (1985), after Newman's painting *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue II* of 1967 (figs. p. 43 and p. 12), were hotly discussed at programmatic exhibits like *Endgame* at the ICA in Boston in 1986 and *NY Art Now* at the Saatchi



Fausto Melotti, *Untitled*, 1934, pencil on cardboard, 35 × 24.5 cm, Melotti Collection, Milan

Hans Arp's drawing *Planimetric Sculpture*, in *Arp*, exh. cat. The Museum of Modern Art (New York, 1958), p. 10 (detail)



Paul Feeley, *Untitled (April 15)*, 1964, oil on canvas, 152.4 × 152.4 cm, Museum Ludwig, Cologne

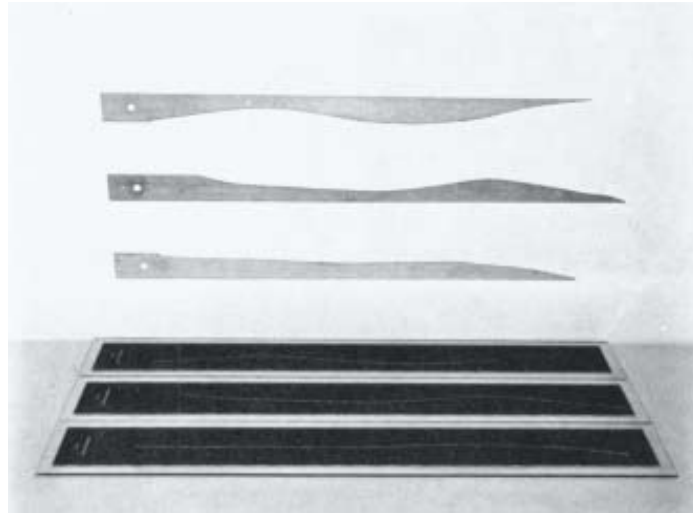
Yellow, Grey, 1986, mixed media on canvas, 213 × 141 cm, Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin (detail)

Ellsworth Kelly, *Green White No. 381*, 1967, oil on canvas, 216 × 216 cm, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven



Gallery in London in 1987. In the *Endgame* exhibition catalogue, Taaffe's contribution was commented on by three critics, each taking a different position. While Thomas Crow, in his text "The Return of Hank Herron," emphasized that the use of Newman's geometrically reduced pictorial language was to be explained as a differentiation from the neo-expressive painting techniques, popular in the nineteen-eighties, of such German and Italian artists as Anselm Kiefer, Georg Baselitz, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, and others, Yve-Alain Bois drew on French philosophy—in particular on the definition and theory of the simulacrum as formulated by Jean Baudrillard—to describe the ultimately despairing state of the artist: "It seems to me that although the young artists in question address the issue of the simulacral—of the abstract simulation produced by capital—they have similarly abandoned themselves to the seduction of what they claim to denounce: either perversely (as in the case of Philip Taaffe who refers to Newman's sublime while he empties it of its content); or unconsciously. . . . Like Baudrillard, I would call them manic mourners."¹⁰ Elisabeth Sussman, one of the organizers of the exhibition, more precisely grasped the complexity of Taaffe's praxis of reuse of prominent pretexts: "[Taaffe's] gesture of appropriation is meant as an expression of a subjectivity which does not necessarily need to be equated with originality, but instead with an endgame strategy that is not in reality an end, but a preamble to a new beginning. Though he places himself in the discourse of the copy, his recognition of this act signals a liberation from the emotional boundaries suggested by appropriation. Taaffe's gesture could be linked to that of a feminist who works within the conventions of pornography rather than against them."¹¹

The painting *Homo Fortissimus Excelsus* is—like its point of departure, Newman's central work *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*—a work that is particularly demanding in format alone. It measures 243.8 × 533.4 cm in size, and adopts the compositional structure of Newman's original. The vertical lines in the painting of Newman, his "zips," have been representationally reinterpreted by Taaffe as garland shapes. Taaffe's canvas, like Newman's, overwhelms the viewer with its size. There is a decisive difference, however, in the application of color in the two paintings. Newman's painting elaborates an exceptionally subtle color space, which has been created by the meticulous, repeated glazed application of color. Taaffe's red, by contrast, is more homogeneous, and seems to have been executed mechanically. This homogeneity of color supports the impression that Taaffe is representing the painting by Newman. Taaffe's painting does not ask of the viewer the same attitude that Newman's does. It is a representation, or, in the words of the artist, a "liturgical reenactment" of Newman's painting. Newman's claim was fundamental. With his painting, he asserted the creation of a new reality, one that was to make possible for the viewer an existential experience without preconditions. He disputed vehemently that his images might refer to something outside of themselves. His paintings aimed to liberate color as phenomenon, free of every limitation of



subject or composition. Newman's exceptional claim was idealistic and religious. In 1986, Taaffe published the following statement on his own paintings: "We will construct a mock-sublime to summon the sublime by indirection, because teasing or entertaining the sublime is just another way of aspiring toward sublimity. I am interested in a sublimity which encourages laughter and delight in the face of profound uncertainty."¹² Taaffe, therefore, desired that his gesture be understood not as denial, but as indirect confirmation. Yet all the same his depictions of Newman's abstract paintings harbor within themselves aspects of unmasking and disillusionment. Perhaps Newman's works do contain more echoes of things seen than the painter wished to admit. As early as 1987, the artist Jeff Perrone noted in an essay on Taaffe that Newman's painting *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* might be understood as a reply to *L'atelier rouge* (1911) of Henri Matisse (a central work of the French painter, and a work Newman was able to view regularly at the Museum of Modern Art). In his text, Perrone described a decisive detail: Matisse depicted certain shapes through white lines scratched off the monochrome red base. A startling correspondence to these white lines is to be found in Newman's painting—two of his "zips" are themselves white. Newman's "zips" have often been characterized as the means that make it possible to experience the color that surrounds them as an independent phenomenon separate from the base, without formulating a pictorial composition with unambiguous accents like middle distance, foreground, background, and the like. If one examines a folding screen by the Japanese painter Ogata Kōrin (1658–1716) depicting bamboo shoots on a gold background (fig. p. 13), one will find surprising parallels. The distribution of vertical lines on the folding screen resembles the hierarchy constructed in Newman's painting. The Japanese painting confronts us with the same spare and seemingly arbitrary distribution of perpendicular lines. Taaffe's representational reproduction of Newman's nonrepresentational painting might direct our vision to a possible interpretation of Newman's paintings that once seemed all but forbidden. The painting *We Are Not Afraid*, Taaffe's affirming answer to Newman's question *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue*, itself permits the posing of a new question. It is now accepted as fact that Newman took his inspiration from the stage play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, written by Edward Albee in 1962 and filmed by Mike Nichols in 1966. It was in 1966 that Newman created his first version on the theme of *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue*. Liz Taylor and Richard Burton played the leads in the film. A still from the garden scene with Burton and his young visitor shows the latter seated on a swing. The close-up in this scene is comparable to Newman's painting in the segmentation of space. What is surprising is that the swing is suspended from two ropes to the figure's left and right, and that these ropes are similar to the garlands that Taaffe made from Newman's lines.¹³ Has Taaffe closed a motival circle here, the existence of which Newman wanted no one to perceive in the first place? If Taaffe's spiral-shaped, plastic lines are linked to Newman's painting, another association thrusts itself upon us. The arrangement of the lines on the picture plane and the proportions of both the individual areas and of the lines call



Marcel Duchamp, *3 stoppages étalon (3 Standard Stoppages)*, 1913/14 (Paris), assemblage: three threads glued onto three canvas strips, 13.3 × 120 cm each and mounted on a glass pane, 18.4 × 125.4 cm; three wooden boards, approx. 6.2 × 113 cm each, formed on one side according to the shape of the threads; wooden box, 28.2 × 129.2 × 22.7 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Katherine S. Dreier Bequest, 1953

Bridget Riley, *Breathe*, 1966, emulsion paint on canvas, 297 × 208 cm, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam



to mind the structure of a Gothic portal, with the dividing line of the two wings of the door in the middle and the columns to the left and right (fig. p. 14). Newman himself did a painting in 1954 entitled *The Gate*, the distribution of space in which anticipates the linear arrangement in *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue II*. The association with a gate cannot be brushed aside. Taaffe's garlands are ornamental forms of nearly universal use. Similar forms may be found in the paintings of the Swedish mystic Hilma af Klint (fig. p. 14), as well as in the drawings of the Italian sculptor Fausto Melotti (fig. p. 15) from the nineteen-thirties. Numerous variants exist on Gothic portals and in African carvings. Taaffe's ornamental "zip" is a specimen of the life of forms that found its way into Taaffe's pictorial thinking through his reading of the theories of Henri Focillon and George Kubler.

The third important artist, along with Riley and Newman, whose works became frequent inspirations for Taaffe's personal transformations, is Ellsworth Kelly. Taaffe explained his interest in Kelly in a conversation with Stan Brakhage: "Not only was I deeply interested in the nature and texture of his paintings, I was interested in being that painter. I felt my abilities corresponded very closely to what he had done. . . . Rather than making a painting slightly different from his, I decided to try to get as close as possible to his works, to get right inside them if I could."¹⁴ Taaffe in fact comes very close to Kelly in paintings like *Yellow, Grey* (1987), although he changes a certain number of decisive elements. In the case of *Yellow, Grey*, the model is a Kelly painting depicting two yellow circular forms on a white field, Kelly's forms naturally being undisturbed and pure. Taaffe printed cambered and curving forms on very thin Japan paper, then affixed these to a canvas painted with the pattern taken from Kelly. Taaffe found the form in the catalogue for the 1958 Hans Arp exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art (figs. p. 15 and p. 16). That the shape is a quotation is not apparent at first glance. Here it is already clear that "appropriation" is not a postmodern strategy for Taaffe; rather, he transforms forms and obscures their origin. The effect is astounding. Kelly's forms appear to have been cut up. This makes them significantly more corporeal. Taaffe takes a similar approach in paintings such as *Nativity (Red, White)* from 1986. Like most of the personal transformations after Newman, the Kelly-inspired paintings are diaphanous—they supplement the unitary impression of the originals with a level of their own, on which Taaffe has deployed his alienating elements. Compared to Taaffe's personal transformations on the whole, however, one will nonetheless be struck by the greater diversity here in technical execution. Like the paintings after Stout, so too the paintings after the less well-known painter Paul Feeley—for example *Crucifixion* (1985), *Double Alnium* (1985), and *Signal* (1986)—are very direct borrowings, in which at most a few colors can have been changed. *Signal* (fig p. 69), for example, is a variant of Feeley's painting *Untitled (April 15)* from 1964 (fig. p. 16). Taaffe's only change other than the negative background is a subtle one, and it concerns the colors of the individual elements. Taaffe swapped the blue elements with

Staircase in the Jersey City Public Library, New Jersey

Frank Stella, *Ifafa I*, 1964, metal powder in synthetic-resin emulsion on canvas, 195.6 x 309.9 cm, Irving Blum Collection

Head of a deity, Ireland, County of Tipperary, Roscrea, Celtic, La Tène period, 4th–5th century BC, oak with traces of pigment, h: 38 cm, Menil Collection, Houston



the green ones, so that the complementary colors of red and green are no longer arranged horizontally and vertically in a cross shape but are instead placed alongside one another. Taaffe thus avoided the cruciform allusion, making his version of the painting more clear and less ambivalent in statement than Feeley's painting, which creates an ambiguous effect through its allusion to a cross within a circle. The painting's title *Signal* can be traced to Taaffe's reading of Kubler's book *The Shape of Time*. As Kubler understands it, a signal is a historical source, one which makes reference to the complex intertwining between the work of art and time: "The nature of a signal is that its message is neither here nor now, but there and then. . . . The perception of a signal happens 'now,' but its impulse and its transmission happened 'then.' In any event, the present instant is the plane upon which the signals of all being are projected."¹⁵ If the specific significance of a signal remains unknown or unimportant, a work of art can successfully overcome the limits of its own time. Under these circumstances, it owes its success to a living form in the sense of Focillon, whose theory takes as its starting point that forms emerge from forms and precede specific content, and that all of the meanings ascribed to these forms are secondary.

Taaffe's painting *Expire* (1989) marks the conclusion of his concept of the direct appropriation of model images (fig. p. 97). The basis here is Riley's painting *Breathe* from 1966 (fig. p. 17), Taaffe again having taken the negative of his model image. His title is programmatic. While *Breathe* describes an active process and thus presupposes a positivist view of modernism according to which nonrepresentational, formalist painting is still possible and can open up a valid horizon of experience, *Expire* only means to breathe out, and in particular means the last exhalation before death. In this sense, Taaffe's painting marks the death of modernism, it having come, after all the reductions and revelations of individual formal pictorial elements, to its end. Clement Greenberg's dogma of the flat color field image is the last thought-figuration of this modernist development. Naturally such an analysis cannot represent a conclusion for Taaffe, and it follows that his depiction of the death of modern painting is a quotation from another artist, turned into its negative. Figuratively speaking, Taaffe begins, through the process of appropriation, to do the opposite of what modernism did with its continuous reductions. The modernists only breathed out; Taaffe breathes in, which is to say that he takes elements from the art that went before him and professes his offensive position on it—that there is no other way.

Many of Taaffe's paintings from as early as the mid-nineteen-eighties are therefore far more complex than previously has been considered. *Green/White Stoppages* (1984; fig. p. 41), for example, combines a work by Kelly—*Green White No. 381* from 1967 (fig. p. 16)—with Marcel Duchamp's work *3 stoppages étalon (3 Standard Stoppages)* from 1913/14 (Paris; fig. p. 17). Here, Taaffe reproduces Duchamp's three individual accidentally formed curve shapes and lays them as a

Intersecting Balustrades, 1987, enamel screen print, collage, acrylic on canvas, 330 x 142 cm, Rafael Jablonka Collection, Cologne (detail)

Illustration in Moritz Meurer, *Vergleichende Formenlehre des Ornamentes und der Pflanze* (Dresden, 1909), p. 109, with notes by Philip Taaffe

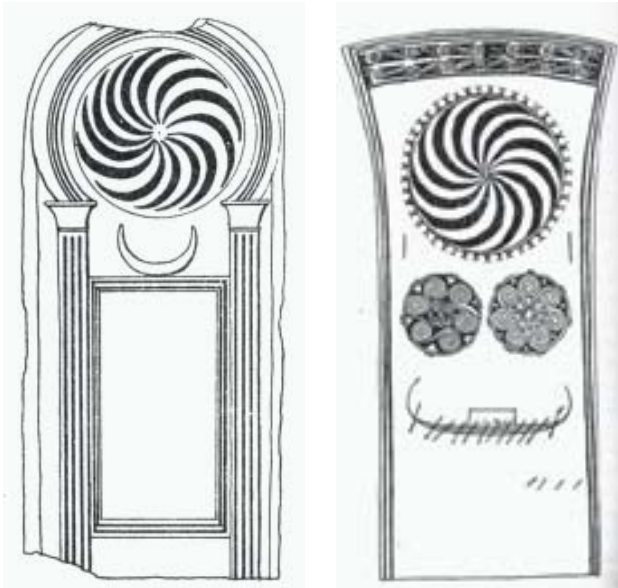


heavy curtain across the painting by Kelly. Likewise, the varying degrees of prominence of the predecessor paintings contributes to the appropriation being made either obvious or all but invisible. Taaffe's new versions of works by Stout, Feeley, and Charles G. Shaw were hardly recognized as such by many viewers, who were unfamiliar with the work of these artists. Out of the programmatic gesture of the appropriation of a single work, in the course of the nineteen-eighties Taaffe developed a formal method that used individual, found elements, like shapes, that were capable of being assembled in other ways in different works. The identifiable shapes thus enrich the works. In the different contexts, however, they also grow more neutral in their significance, and function like other formal components of painting, such as colors and geometric basic shapes.

The "shaped canvas" *Intersecting Balustrades*, made in 1987, is a particularly vivid illustration of how Taaffe handles various sources. The V-shaped basic forms of this painting refer to Frank Stella's V-shapes from the early nineteen-sixties (as in *Ifafa I*, fig. p. 18), while the ornamental surface design is based on a photograph taken by Taaffe's artist friend Mark Morrisroe at the Jersey City Public Library (fig. p. 18). The photograph depicts wrought-iron banisters from the early twentieth century. Taaffe alienates the ornamental design, however, by replacing the circular fields of rosettes with spiral forms reminiscent of Celtic forms (figs. p. 18 and p. 19). Printed, sometimes also painted, pieces of Japan paper have been affixed to the primed canvas. Taaffe's method of working is not painting in the conventional sense, in which a painter stands before the easel and paints directly onto the canvas (or, in the sense of Action Painting, works on a canvas on the floor). His process of work is split up into many individual steps that have been separated from one another. Taaffe spends a great deal of time on the making of printed papers, stencils, and stamps. At a later time, working on a new painting, he selects from among these tools and transfers them to the canvas. Each one of these work processes requires advance planning, and the actual execution brings with it many mechanical moments, ritual in Taaffe's sense, distinguished by frequent repetitions, sometimes meditative, sometimes accentuated by rhythmic music. Taaffe's paintings are pronouncedly rich in material effects. The distancing in his work method creates paintings that are free of any kind of expressive handwriting, and which at times have the effect of perfect artisanal products.

Illustration in *Decorative Art from Kirgizistan* (Leningrad, 1948), plate XLVI, with notes by Philip Taaffe

Illustration in Carlos Burckhardt, *Faunes jurassiques et cretaciues de San Pedro del Gallo* (Mexico, 1912), plate XXXVIII



Taaffe in Europe: The Expansion of Vocabulary

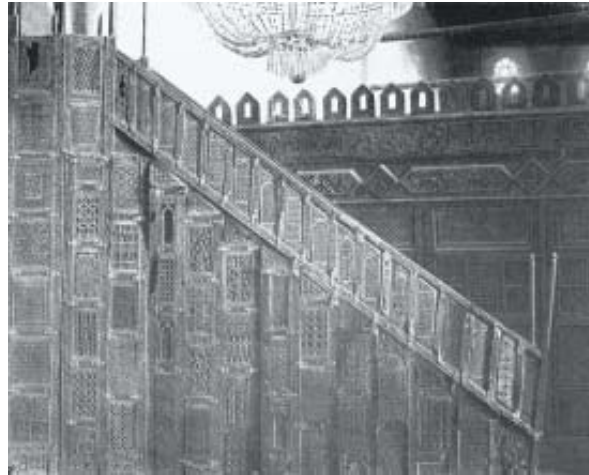
In 1988, Taaffe moved to Naples, to a city that was of particular interest for him as a location on the boundary between the cultures of the European Mediterranean region, Islam, and Africa. He left New York to quest after new stimuli for his painting. The last painting he did in New York was *Aurora Borealis* (1988; fig. pp. 92–93), an extreme landscape-format work with a strict sequence of lines based on his optical experiments with Riley’s paintings, very brittle and cold in effect. He would then display, in a solo show at the Galleria Lucio Amelio in December of the same year, how immense a step he had taken. Many of the paintings on view, such as *Ceremonial Abstraction* and *Radiant Study*, were filled with sensual, joyously hued series of ornaments. *Il Terrazzo*, a monumental collage of twenty monochrome paper works, echoed Mediterranean architecture, whereas other paintings called to mind works of the American artist Clyfford Still (*Quadro Vesuviano* and *Spaccanapoli*) and Barnett Newman (*Ulysses*, the Mediterranean hero par excellence, linked at once to classical antiquity and, with James Joyce, to the literature of the twentieth century). In Europe, Taaffe expanded his formal points of reference to incorporate the ancient and classical cultures of the Mediterranean, including Islamic art. The triumphant exhibition with Amelio made clear that Taaffe had succeeded in developing, out of the strategy of appropriation, a method of image making that could lead to convincing works independent of the popular issues of the day. From then on, the manifold sources for Taaffe’s paintings opened up a horizon against which his work proved itself to be a part of a rich cultural network, to be a world of forms for the painter to explore and the viewer to develop. The history of ornamentation became a central occupation for him, a genre, significantly, that had been discredited during the modernist era as a “lower art form.” Taaffe could find legitimation in Focillon for his interest in ornamentation: “. . . any speculation regarding ornament is a speculation on the great power of the abstract and on the infinite resources of the imaginary. It may seem altogether too obvious to say that the space occupied by the ornament, with its long shoreline and the monstrous inhabitants of its many archipelagoes, is not the space of life. No. On the contrary, ornamental space is clearly an elaboration on variable factors. . . . Here, then, is further confirmation of the idea that ornament is not a mere abstract graph evolving within any given space whatsoever. What ornamental form does is to create its own modes of space, or better, since our conceptions of form and space are so inseparably united, what they do is to create *one another* within the realm of ornament, with identical freedom respecting the object and according to identically reciprocal laws.”¹⁶ From this theory, Taaffe could derive a use of ornamental forms for himself, a use with validity timeless in tendency and which today continues to grant him a wealth of sources from cultural history without forcing him to consider set significations with rigid content or iconography. The artist’s extensive library, to which he often turns for source material, contains countless studies on the ornamentation of



Roman tombstone, circa 2nd century, in Hans-Jürgen Eggers, *Kelten und Germanen* (Baden-Baden, 1960), p. 82

Pictorial stone from Gotland, Sweden, 6th century, in Hans-Jürgen Eggers, *Kelten und Germanen* (Baden-Baden, 1960), p. 82

Capital, Al-Andalus (Cordoba), mid 10th century, marble, h 33 cm, Ø abacus 31 cm



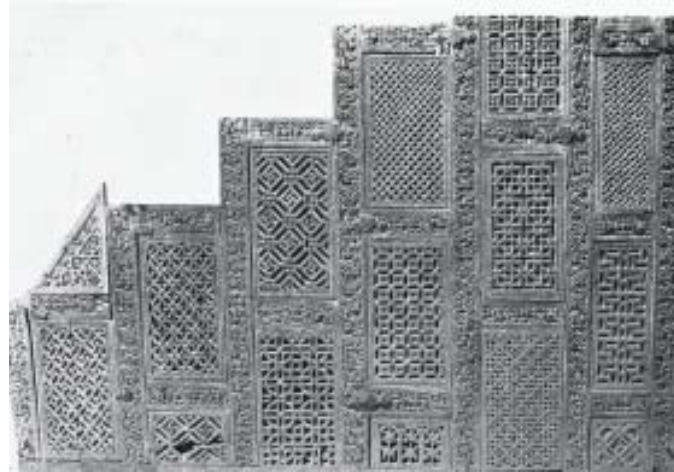
very different cultures (figs. pp. 19–20). The rediscovered significance of the ornament in contemporary art was the theme of a wide-ranging exhibition that Markus Bröderlin organized at the Fondation Beyeler in 2001, and at which Taaffe was present with the works *Queen of the Night* (1985) and *Old Cairo* (1989).

Taaffe's painting *Cappella* (1991; fig. p. 101) is an example of the tight intertwining of ornamental basic forms with the works of other cultures. The image is constructed like a chart of different models, presenting spiraling circles in two different sizes. The painting's background shows a golden yellow, aged in appearance, which is an allusion to the expansive gilded interior of the Cappella Palatina in Palermo from which the work takes its name. The spiral forms are printed stencils, and here again the irregular application of color, in conjunction with the printing process, achieves a patina-like effect: The image appears to bear the imprint of a long history. The spiral forms may be found at multiple sites within the cultural history of Europe, as for example on a Roman sarcophagus from Spain (circa second century A.D.) and on a sixth-century stone carving from the island of Gotland, a testament to the survival of the spiral form (figs. p. 21).

With paintings like *Ahmed Muhammed* (1989; fig. p. 117) and *Old Cairo*, Taaffe drew on the ornamentation of Islamic art, combining it with works in the Jewish-American tradition of nonrepresentational painting. *Ahmed Muhammed* is based on a late work by Adolph Gottlieb (*Lake*, 1967), and *Old Cairo* on paintings of Rothko (such as *Number 10*, 1950). The combination of these two great abstract traditions, so closely related to one another and yet today seemingly so irreconcilable in their opposition, is not without daring.

Other works, like *Reliquary* (1990/91; fig. pp. 82–83) and *Al Quasbah* (1991; fig. pp. 106–107), concentrate exclusively on Islamic ornamentation. The ornamented fields in *Reliquary* are reminiscent of the decoration of a pulpit (mimbar) from the ninth-century Sidi Oqba Mosque in Kairouan, Tunisia (figs. pp. 22–23). Taaffe's approach to Islamic culture is not colonialist or possessory. His specific personal transformation of these ornamental forms was ably characterized by the poet Edmund White in an essay on the painting *Al Quasbah*: "Taaffe . . . goes to the root and branch of Islamic decorative syntax. Basing his painting on abstract geometrical forms, stylized floral elements, and a highly controlled mise en page, he has recuperated for the West a tradition in which, because representation is forbidden, 'decoration' is essential. . . . By devising his own vision of the basic means of the Muslim craftsman, he has found a way of referring to an alien culture without exoticizing it."¹⁷ Works like *Black Volta* (1994/95) display the increasing complexity of references in Taaffe's images. While the curved black shapes in the picture's foreground present direct borrowings from the work of the American abstract artist Charles G. Shaw in the nineteen-thirties (fig.

Mimbar (pulpit) of the Sidi Oqba Mosque in Kairouan, Tunisia, 9th century, in Ernst Kühnel, "Die islamische Kunst," in Anton Springer, *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 6: *Die ausser-europäische Kunst* (Leipzig, 1929), p. 385



p. 24), the painting's title refers to the African art tradition of the Mossi. The Mossi are the major art-creating ethnic group on the Black Volta in modern-day Burkina Faso. Specimens of their work were published for the first time in Carl Kjersmeier's pathbreaking 1935 study *Centres de style de la sculpture nègre africaine* (fig. p. 24), although Taaffe's painting does not make express reference to these African works.

The Wunderkammer Effect

The work of Taaffe continues its organic growth, and it does not surprise that, in the mid-nineteen-nineties, he took on a new inexhaustible realm of motifs for his world of forms: nature. If one were to step into Taaffe's world, it would be into a forest, wrote the poet Vincent Katz in an essay on the artist.¹⁸ This metaphor is well-suited to the works created since the mid-nineteen-nineties. First, most of the paintings are densely populated with numerous motifs. Second, these motifs are taken with increasing frequency from the world of plants and animals. On occasion the forest must be sought underwater, for many works take their motifs from the flora and fauna of the sea. Taaffe has added motifs from nature first and foremost through his library. He collects lavishly illustrated rare books, and has made increasing use of this material in his paintings. A series of paintings with the coquilles of Japanese swords (*tsuba*) as central motifs derives from the book *Japanese Sword Mounts. A Descriptive Catalogue of the Collection of J. C. Hawkshaw* by Henri L. Joly. Printed privately in 1910 in an edition of only three hundred copies, it is illustrated with forty collotypes. Taaffe owns a copy of this rare book and followed its illustrations to construct the much magnified cardboard stencils he used to transfer the various *tsuba* to his large canvases. Paintings of plant and insect shapes are made in similar fashion. His interest in specialized nineteenth-century botanical publications led him to discover so-called "nature-printing," pioneered by Alois Auer and Baron Constantin von Ettingshausen in Austria and Harry Bradbury in England. Taaffe acquired a number of these difficult-to-obtain publications and employed them in his own paintings. He conducted research in natural history museums as well, where he found additional models. The botanist of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, for example, placed his own nature-printed ferns at Taaffe's disposal. Through these sources, Taaffe's repertoire of forms has grown immeasurably large, and from it he can create both thematically concentrated paintings as well as works in which forms from the most disparate sources are freely combined. The painting *Cape Sinope* (2006/07), for example, is assembled out of shapes taken from the coast of northwestern America and the prehistory of Serbia, placed over a background of colorful, freely and expressively applied ornamental shapes, the origin of which no longer plays a role (fig. p. 24).

Mimbar (pulpit) of the Sidi Oqba Mosque in Kairouan, Tunisia, 9th century, in Ernst Kühnel, "Die islamische Kunst," in Anton Springer, *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 6: *Die ausser-europäische Kunst* (Leipzig, 1929), p. 385

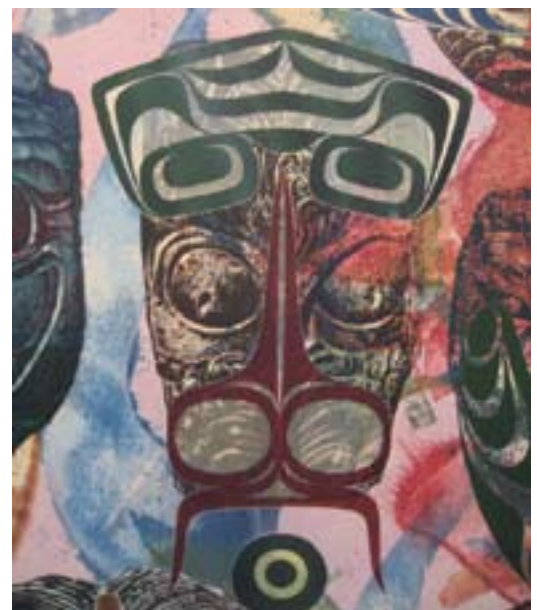


Taaffe transforms the shapes that he finds in his research and makes them usable, metamorphosed, in his own images. By way of this alienating process, he keeps the meaning of these forms in flux. He respects the foreign origin of his sources, yet makes the shapes his own. Because he, in opposition to the modernist tradition, does not reduce, but accumulates, his paintings grow increasingly rich. Today, he is most avidly concerned with the proper selection and measuring out of his source material. Taaffe's art is thus a mirror of the situation faced by all humanity in our era. At least since the propagation of the Internet on a broad scale, the difficulty of our time has shifted from the insufficient availability of information to its evaluation. Taaffe's painting is a testament to the sovereign mastery of a flood of information that could drown us all. It makes us aware of the necessity of looking carefully and viewing forms with an eye to their quality. Taaffe's painting is a plea for precision and the spiritual power of the forms that make up our world, or out of which our world is made. The close interconnections between Taaffe's art and numerous other artistic traditions—the Western avant garde having been only the first of his examinations—prove that both the sources and the works that result from them are necessary enrichments to our perception.

Charles G. Shaw, *Polygon*, 1938, dyed wood relief, 48.3×50.8 cm, Private Collection

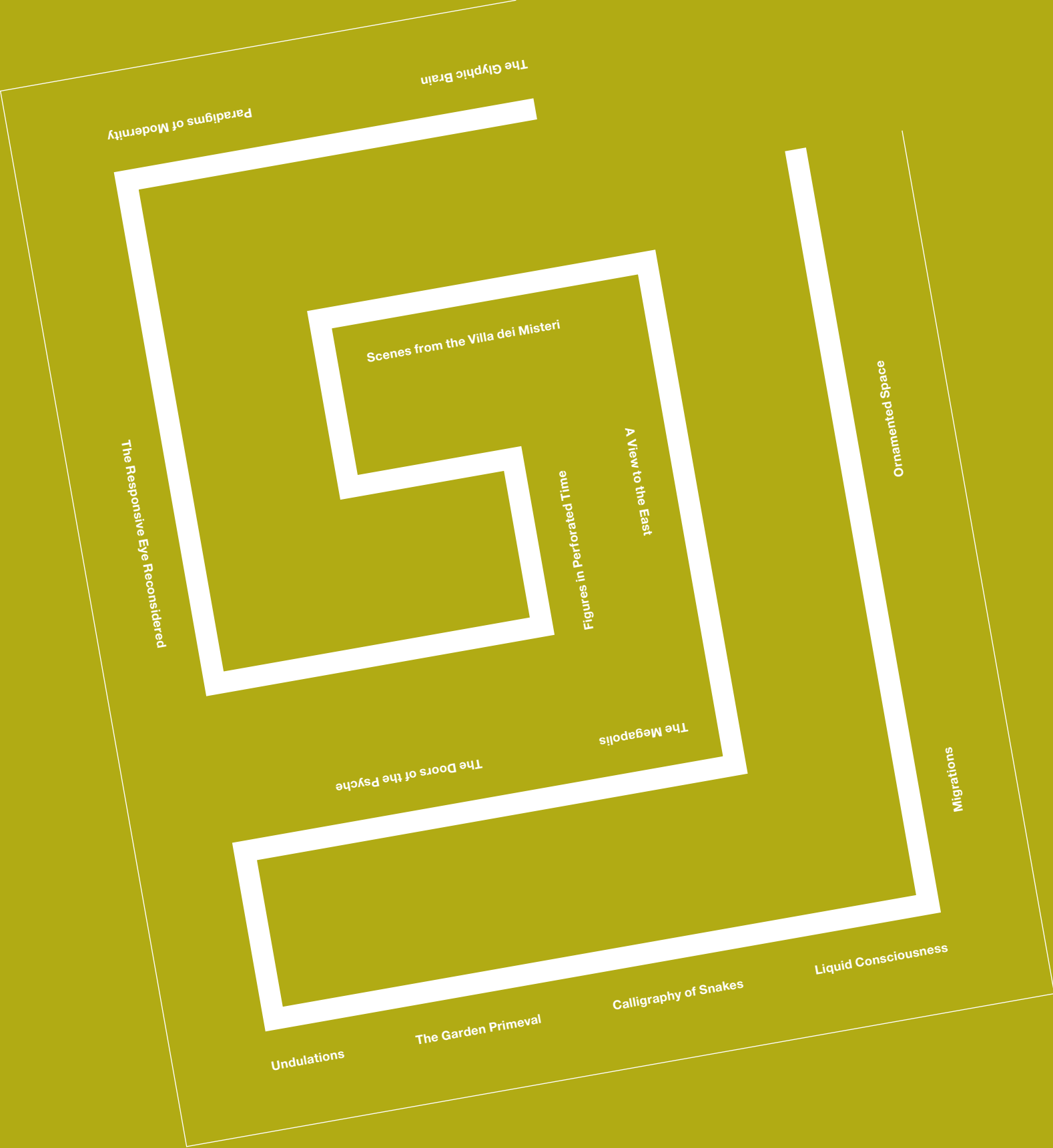
Mossi masks, in Carl Kjerfve: *Centres de style de la sculpture nègre africaine*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen/Paris, 1935), plate 36

- 1 Nancy Spector, "Against the Grain. A History of Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim," in Thomas Krens, ed., *Art of This Century. The Guggenheim Museum and Its Collection* (New York, 1997), pp. 229–258.
- 2 Brad Gooch, "First Break—Philip Taaffe," *Artforum International* 39, 9 (May 2001), p. 21.
- 3 Philip Taaffe, in *Philip Taaffe. Composite Nature. A Conversation with Stan Brakhage*, exh. cat. Peter Blum Gallery (New York, 1997), p. 74.
- 4 Philip Taaffe, "Interview" (by Raymond Foye and Rani Singh with Philip Taaffe and Fred Tomaselli), in *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward. Selected Works by Harry Smith, Philip Taaffe, Fred Tomaselli*, exh. cat. James Cohan Gallery (New York, 2002), pp. 51–67, here p. 58.
- 5 Jan Avgikos, untitled catalogue text, in *Similia/Dissimilia. Modes of Abstractions in Painting, Sculpture and Photography Today/Abstraktionen in Malerei, Skulptur und Photographie heute*, Rainer Crone, ed., exh. cat. Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Columbia University, New York; Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; Sonnabend Gallery, New York (Düsseldorf, 1987), p. 157.
- 6 "Philip Taaffe on Mark Rothko" (The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York 1998), http://www.philiptaaffe.info/Interviews_Statements/TaaffeOnRothko.php
- 7 Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, transl. Charles Beecher Hogan and George Kubler (New York, 1989), p. 57.
- 8 Martin Prinzhorn, "Conversation with Philip Taaffe" (1996), <http://www.mip.at/en/dokumente/1163-content.html>
- 9 Michael Kohn, "Philip Taaffe" (Interview), in: *Flash Art International*, 124 (October/November 1985), pp. 72–73.
- 10 Yve-Alain Bois, "Painting. The Task of Mourning," in *Endgame. Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*, David Joselit and Elisabeth Sussman, eds., exh. cat. The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, Massachusetts (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986), p. 47.
- 11 Elisabeth Sussman, "The Last Picture Show," in Boston 1986 (see note 10), p. 67.
- 12 Philip Taaffe, "Sublimity, Now and Forever, Amen," *Arts Magazine*, 60, 7 (March 1986), pp. 18–19.
- 13 I am grateful to Rafael Jablonka for this insight.
- 14 Taaffe 1997 (see note 3), p. 86.
- 15 George Kubler, *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, 1962), p. 17.
- 16 Focillon 1989 (see note 7), pp. 68–70, 83–84.
- 17 Edmund White, "Philip Taaffe. Al Quasbah, 1991," *Artforum International*, 32, 10 (Summer 1994), pp. 66/67.
- 18 Vincent Katz, "Philip Taaffe's Golden Days," in *Philip Taaffe. Recent Paintings & Drawings*, Raymond Foye and Georg Frei, eds., exh. cat. Thomas Ammann Fine Art (Zurich, 2003), n. p.



Cape Sinope, 2006/07, mixed media on canvas, 289.8×246.7 cm, Private Collection, Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin (detail)

Exhibition



Plates

Untitled I, 1980/81
Collage on paper
30.5×23 cm





Untitled IV, 1980/81
Collage on paper
38 × 29 cm



Untitled III, 1980/81
Collage on paper
30.5 × 23 cm

They were made in a very automatic state, late at night, with colored paper tape used for picture binding and book repair. I actually thought of these as walled medieval cities. The importance for me was the scale of the line and the points of infinitude within the network of straight lines; also the fact that they were enclosed. One image did look like the cerebellum, the woven structure of the cortex or brain matter, so I titled it *Glyphic Brain*.

Blackburst I, 1980/81
Paper collage and gouache on Masonite
129 x 119 cm

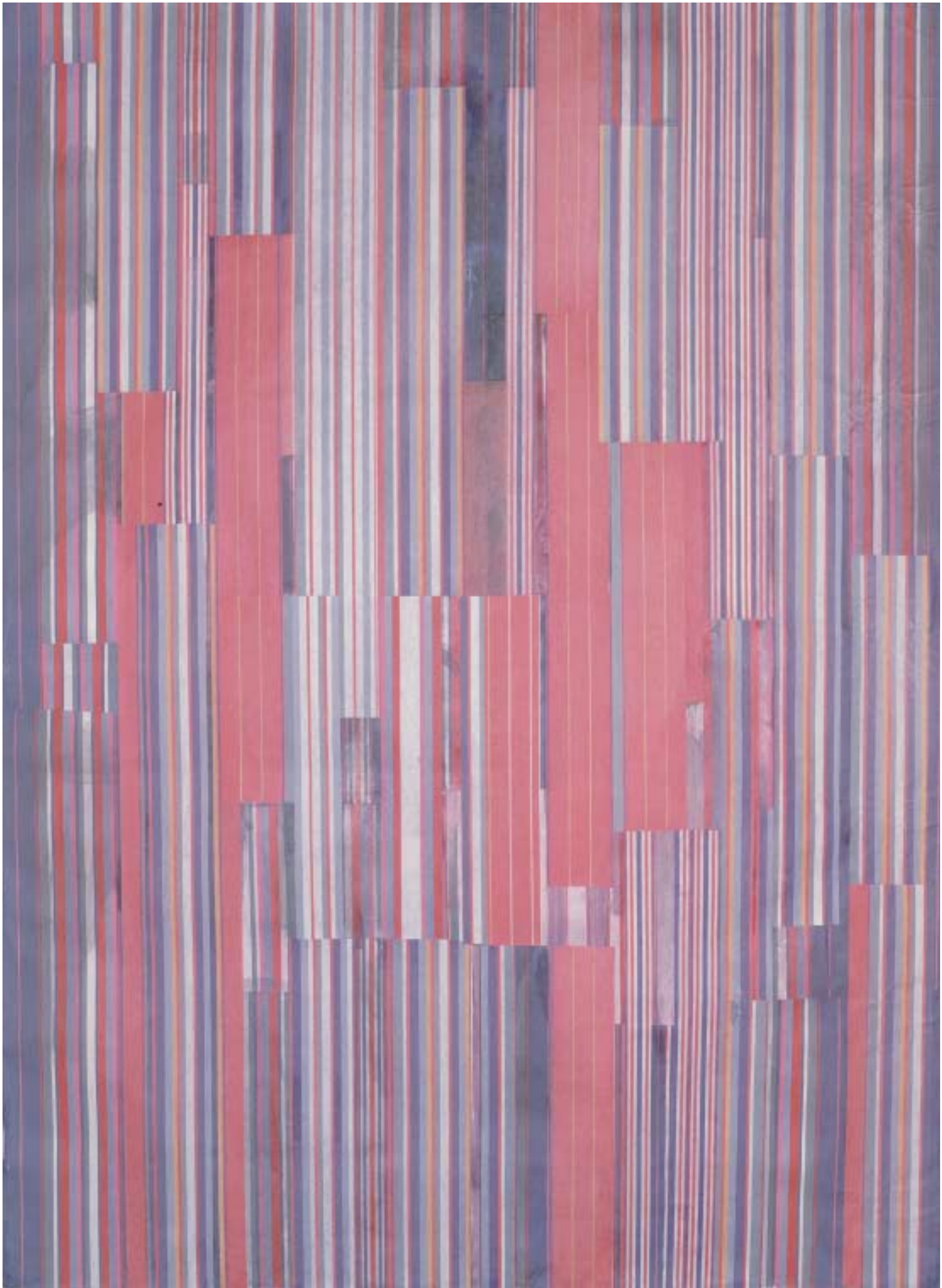


Untitled I, 1980
Collage on paper
48×41 cm



I break things. I undermine my own best intentions. And they're improvised They're unpredictable. I don't want to know how something is eventually going to turn out. They're more about process, and finding my way in this field of uncertainty.

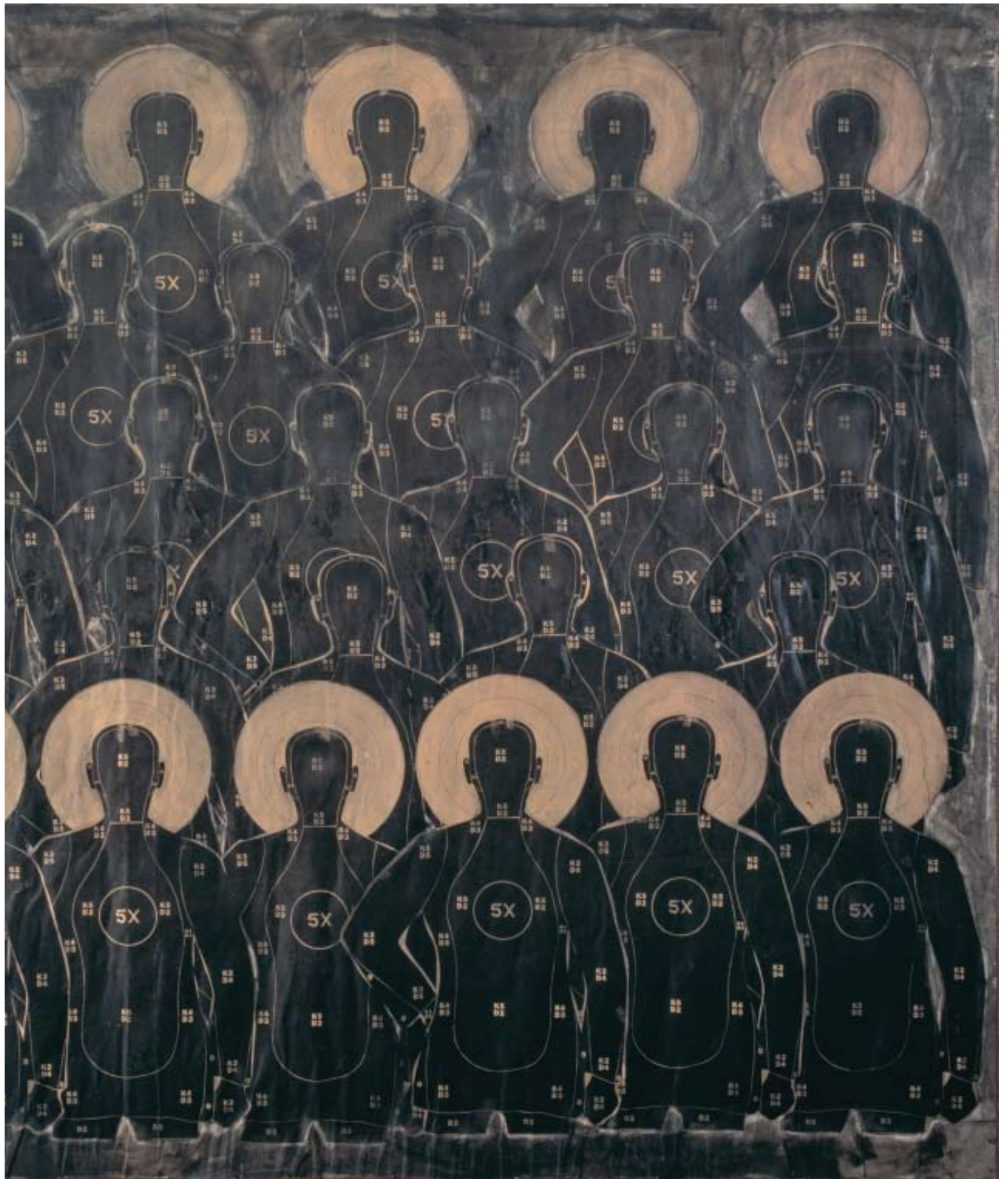
Color Field Painting, 1983
Mixed media on paper
254 x 186 cm



Martyr Group (1983) is the first of the big collages, and it was a radical break from previous concerns with straight lines and imaginary architectures. I wanted to get outside that self-referential field of inquiry. *Martyr Group* was inspired by sixteenth-century outdoor frescoes from the Moldavian Valley in Romania, paintings of saints in rows.



Martyr Group, 1983
Mixed media on canvas
264.2 × 264.2 cm

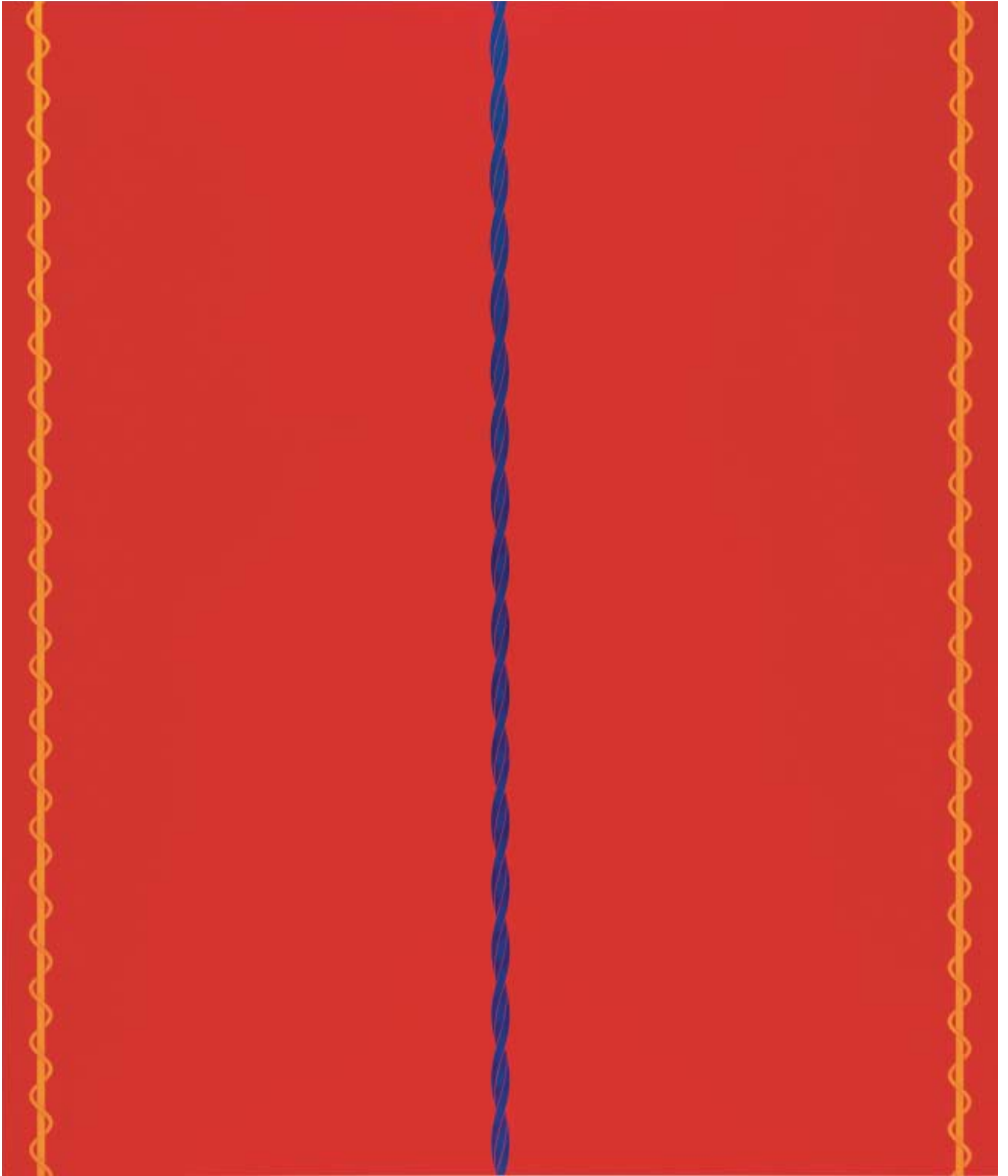


Green/White Stoppages, 1984
Linoprint collage, acrylic, enamel on canvas
215.9×215.9 cm



We Are Not Afraid (1985) is after Newman's painting *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue II* (1967). It's the same scale, but the vertical lines are printed from linoleum carvings—the same method I'd used to make the optical collages. To take the Newman zip and handle it almost physically, yet illusionistically too, was something I needed to see at that time.

We Are Not Afraid, 1985
Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas
304.8 × 259.1 cm

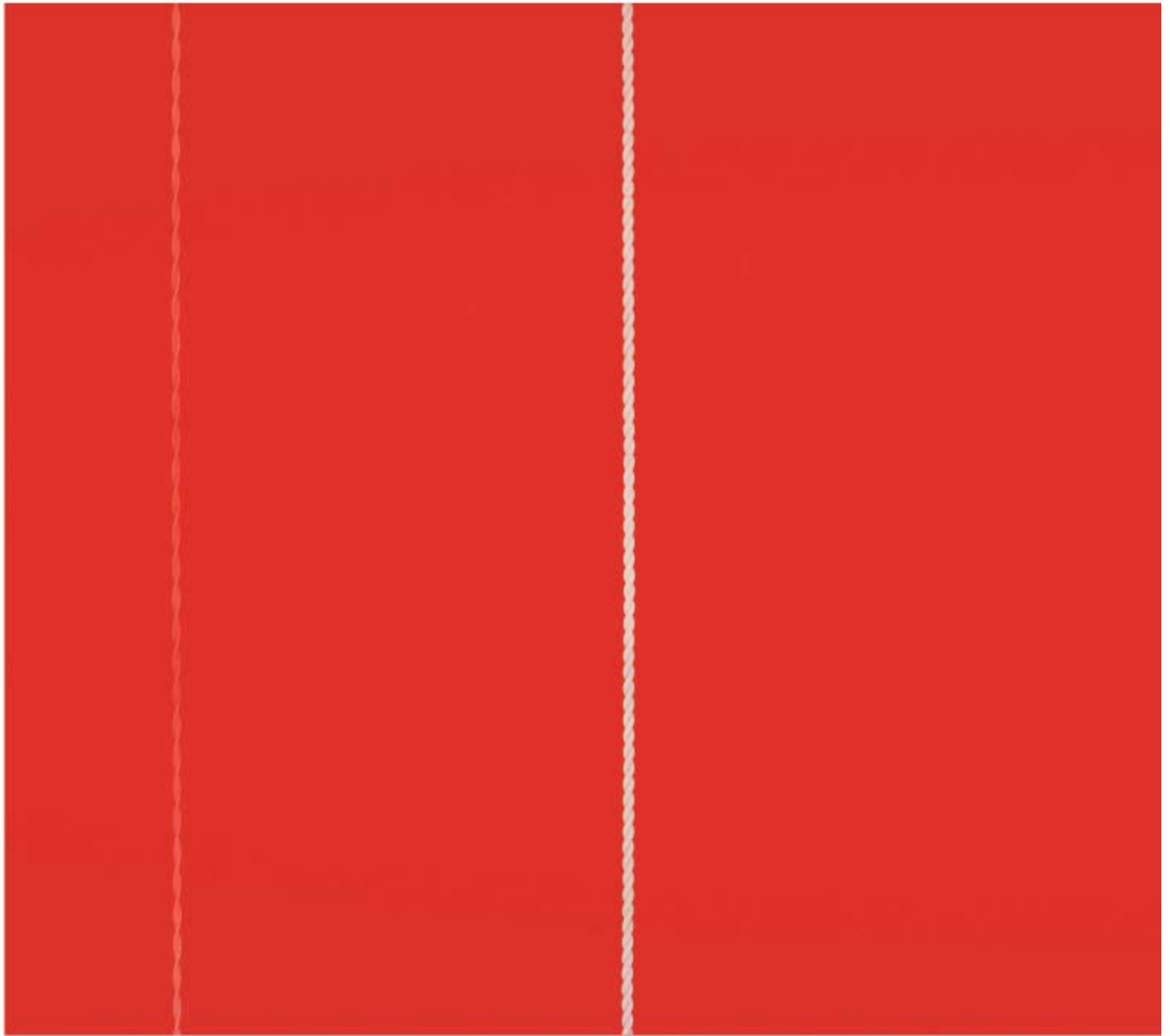


Queen of the Night, 1985
Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas
274 x 122 cm

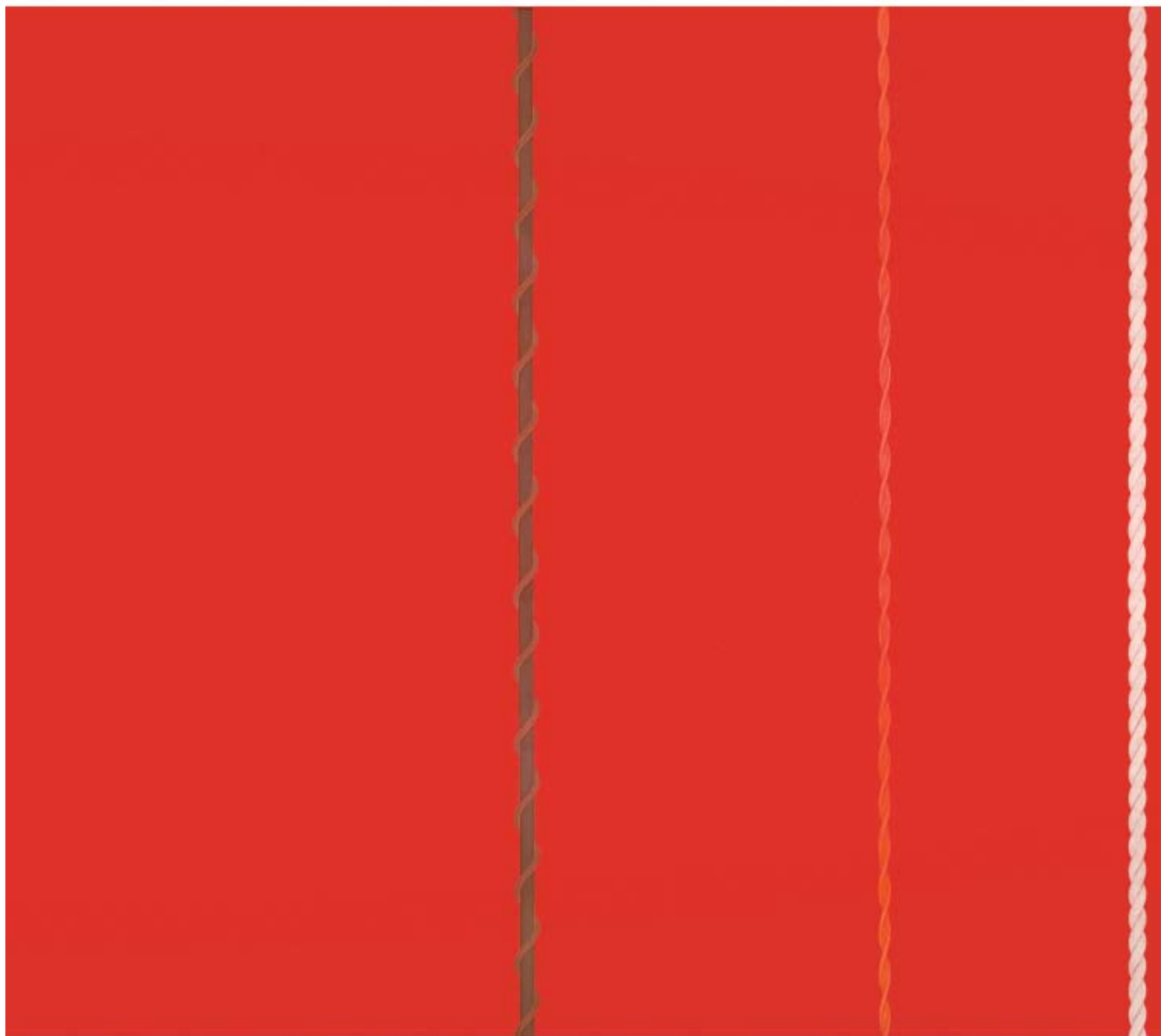


Chi-Chi Meets the Death of Painting, 1985
Acrylic paint over linoprint on paper
284 x 114.3 cm





Homo Fortissimus Excelsus, 1985
Mixed media on canvas
244 x 548.5 cm



By Twos, 1985
Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas
168.5 × 41.5 cm



Moonman, 1985

Linoprint collage, acrylic, enamel on paper

45.7 × 48.2 cm





Block Island, 1986
Mixed media on canvas
61 x 46 cm

Missa Caput, 1984/85
Linoprint collage, acrylic, oil on canvas
231 x 172.7 cm



Untitled Composition, 1984/85
Linoprint collage, acrylic and oil on canvas
223 x 173.5 cm



Around this same period I also began to make optical works, collages with an unwieldy, distended surface that had an almost sculptural quality. They were done after Bridget Riley, and I decided that I would also try to examine, or make homage to, or somehow recapitulate, certain works of Barnett Newman. I needed to see what I could do with this idea, because I was always very focused on New York School painting—Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Newman, and to a lesser degree Jackson Pollock.

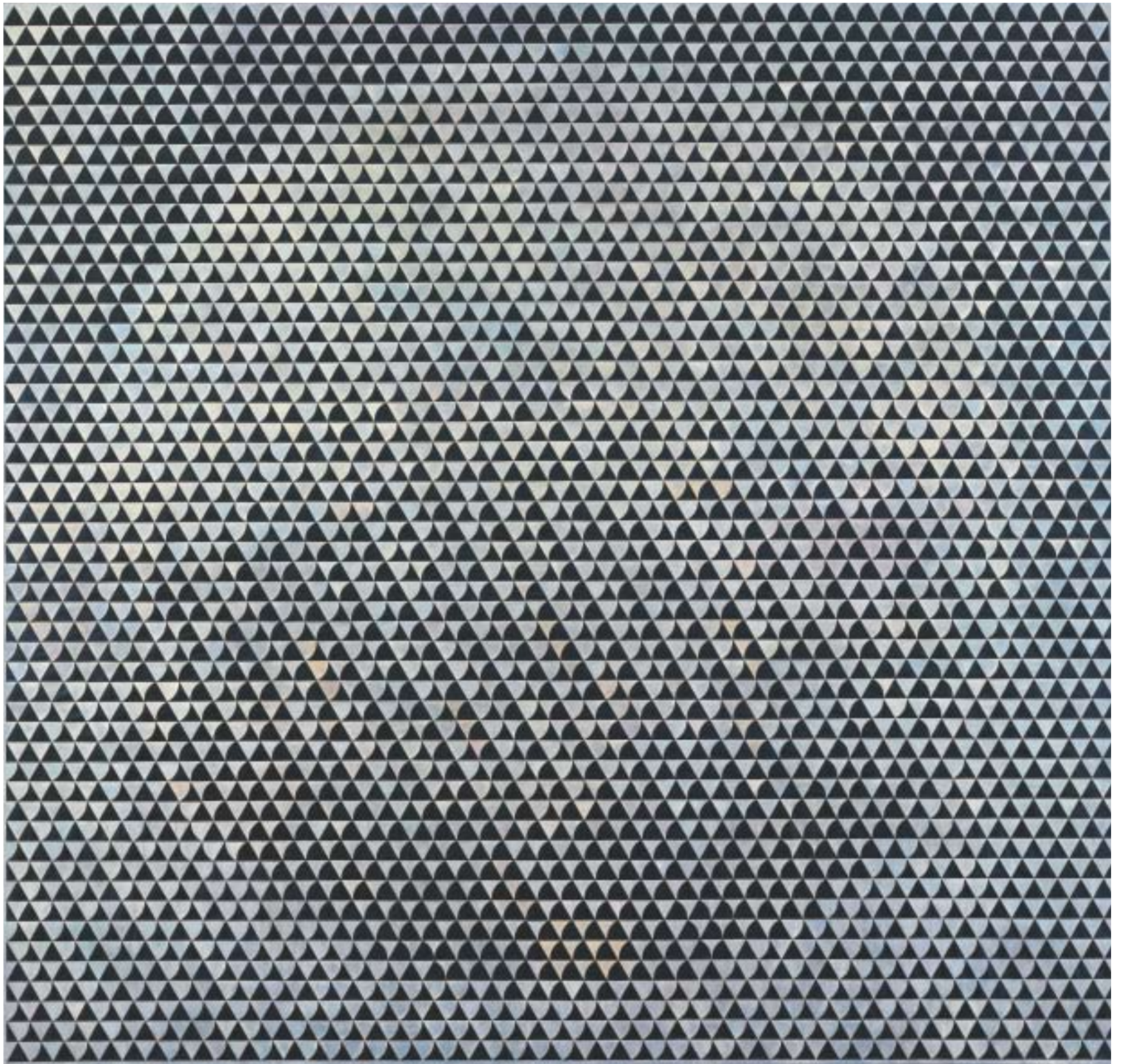
Yellow Painting, 1984
Linoprint collage, acrylic, enamel on canvas
192 x 192 cm



Shaded Sphere, 1984

Enamel silkscreen, collage, acrylic on paper with
linen edges

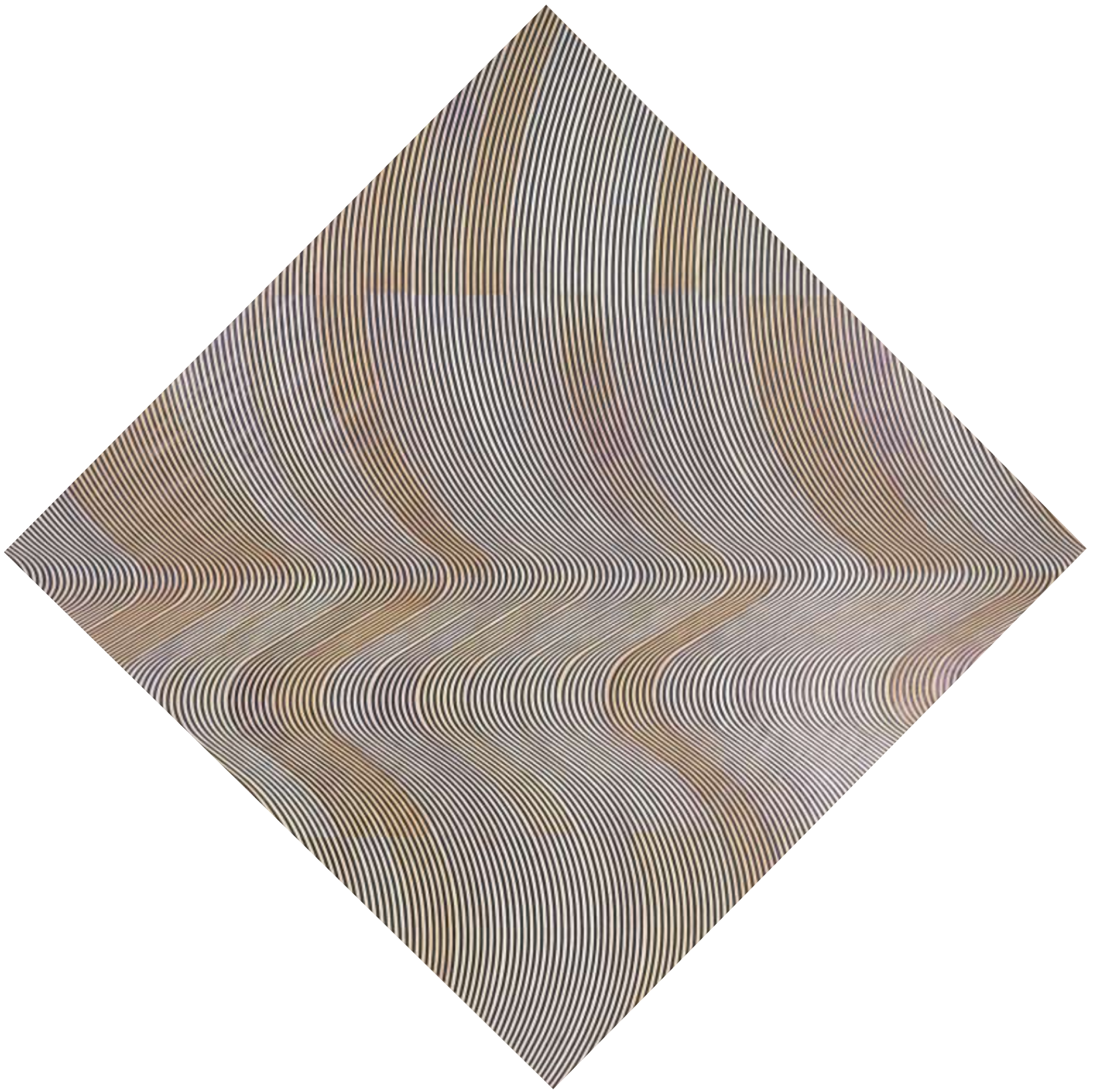
263 × 274 cm



Brest, 1983/84

Linoprint collage and acrylic on paper mounted
on canvas

196 x 196 cm



Black, White, 1985/86
Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas
107 x 88 cm



South Ferry, 1985/86
Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas
112 × 96.5 cm



Signal, 1986
Mixed media on canvas
152.4 × 152.4 cm



Quad Cinema, 1986
Linoprint collage, acrylic, enamel on canvas
214 x 208 cm





Blood Money, 1986
Linoprint collage, acrylic on paper on canvas
137 × 257 cm



Blue/Green, 1987
Silkscreen collage, acrylic on canvas
220 x 173 cm





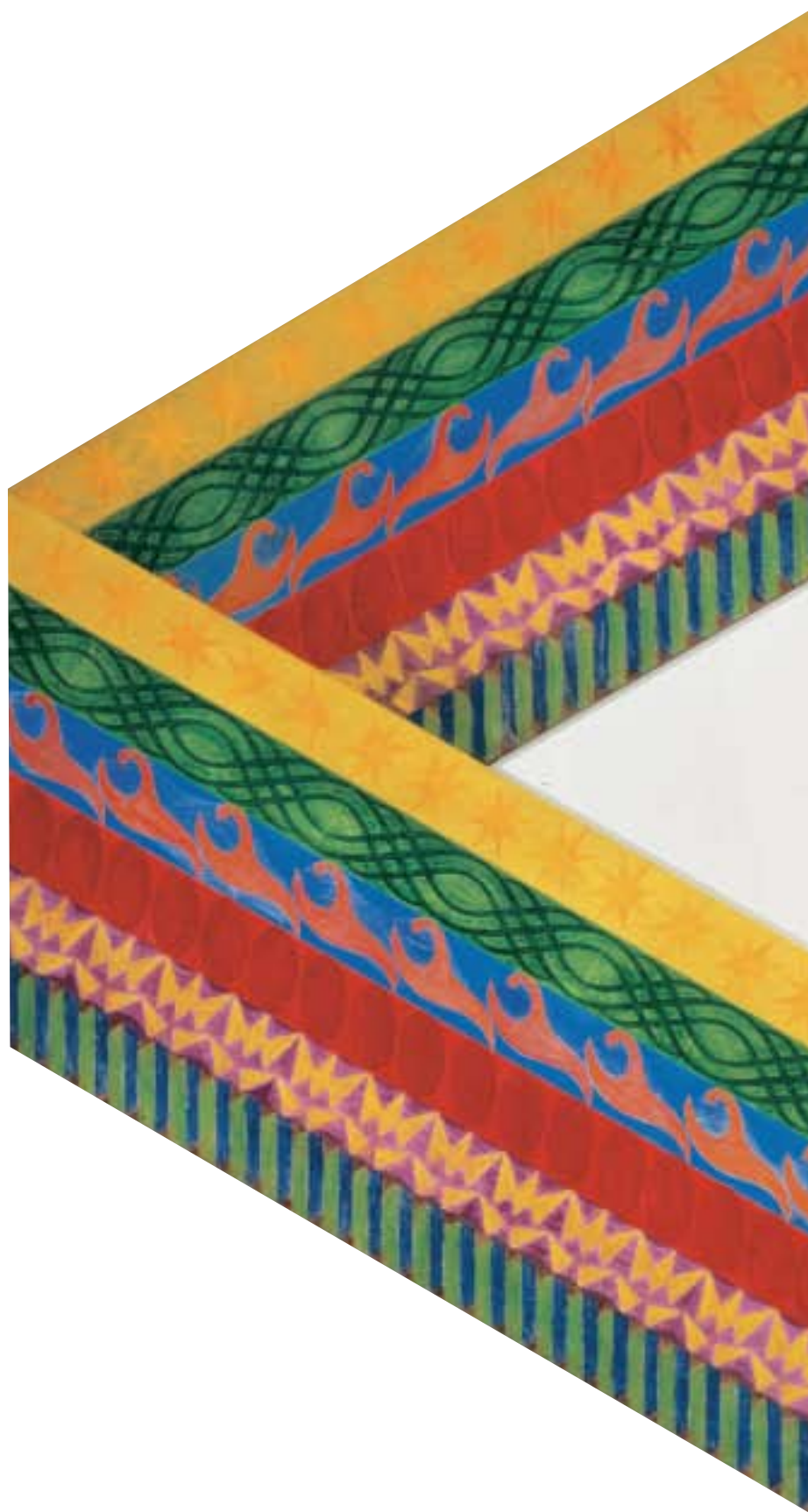
Intersecting Balustrades, 1987
Enamel silkscreen collage, acrylic on canvas
330 x 142 cm



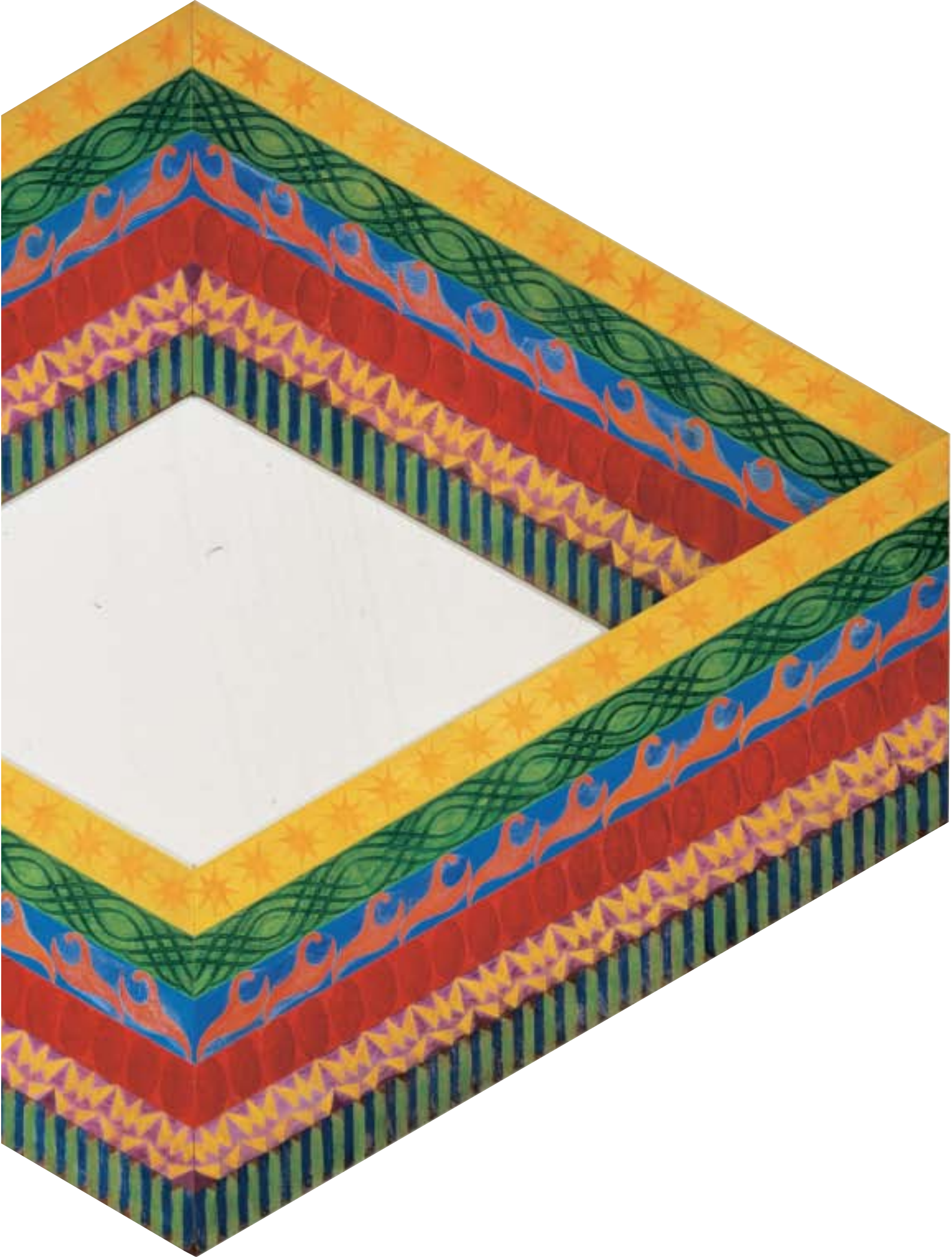


Frieze, 1986
Mixed media on canvas
59.5 × 528 cm





Banded Enclosure, 1988
Wax print, acrylic on canvas
diptych, 346 × 397 cm





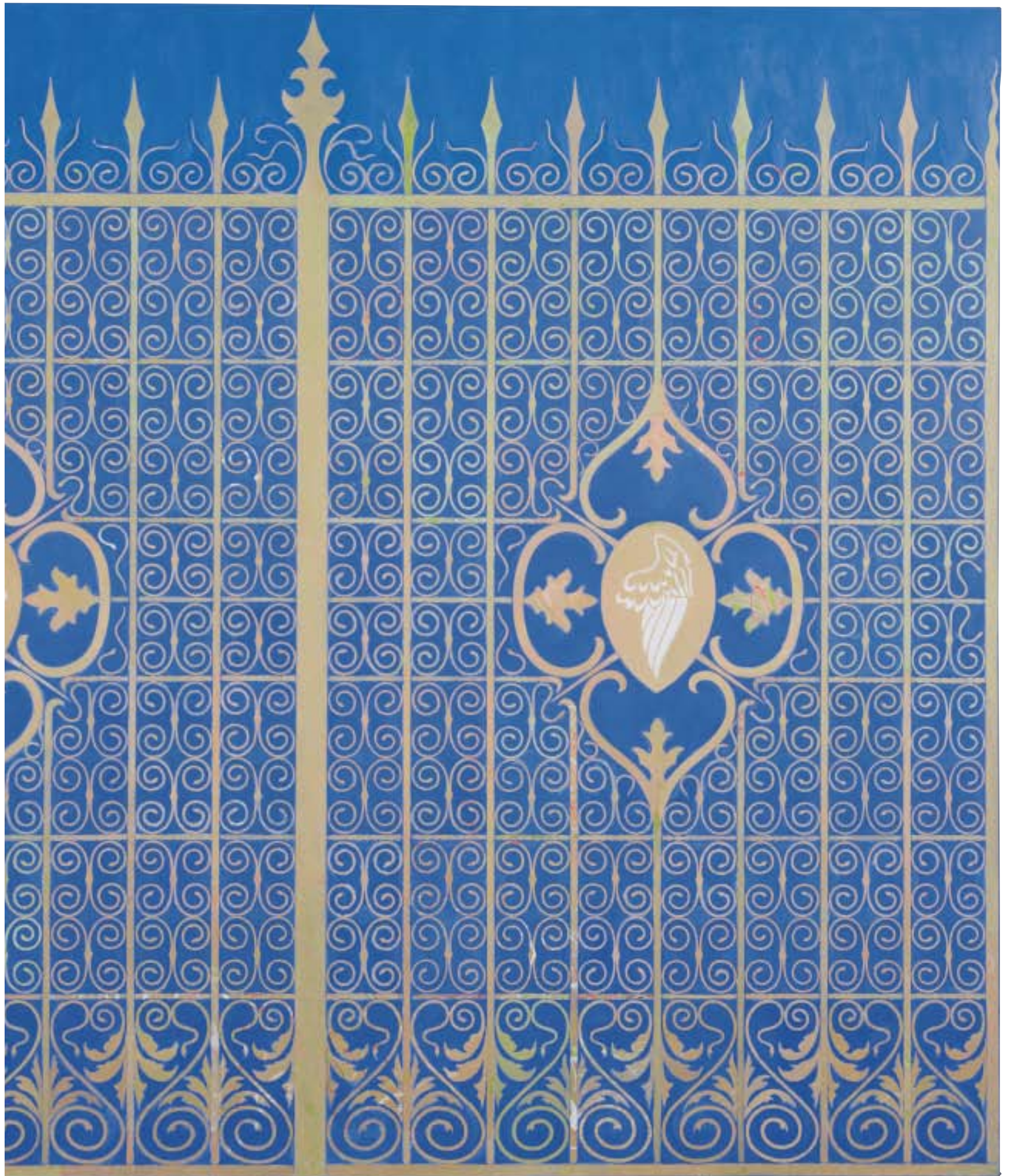
Reliquary, 1990/91
Mixed media on canvas
230 x 282 cm





Onement, 1987

Metallic silkscreen collage, casein acrylic,
enamel on canvas
259 x 305 cm



Timothy's Gate Transfigured, 1987
Mixed media on canvas
190.5 × 152.5 cm



Rebound, 1987

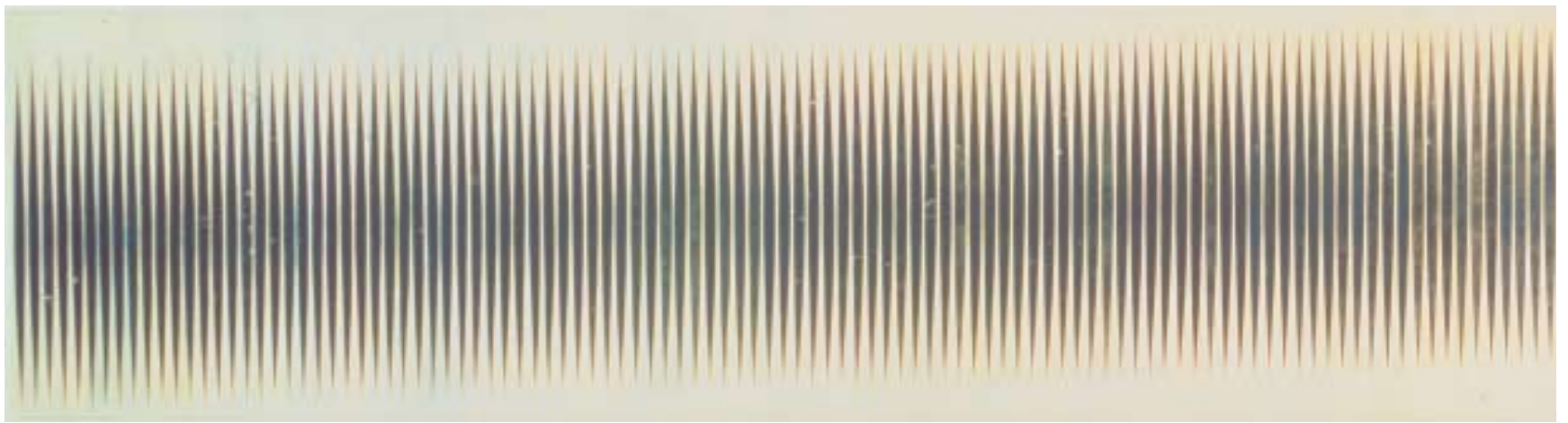
Enamel silkscreen collage, acrylic on canvas

165 x 165 cm

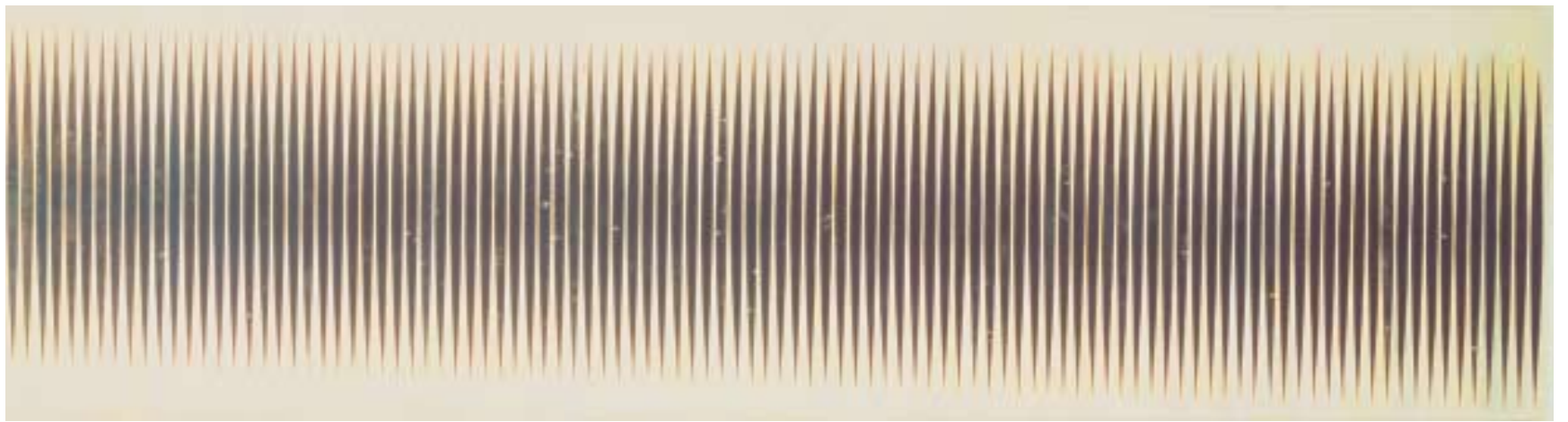


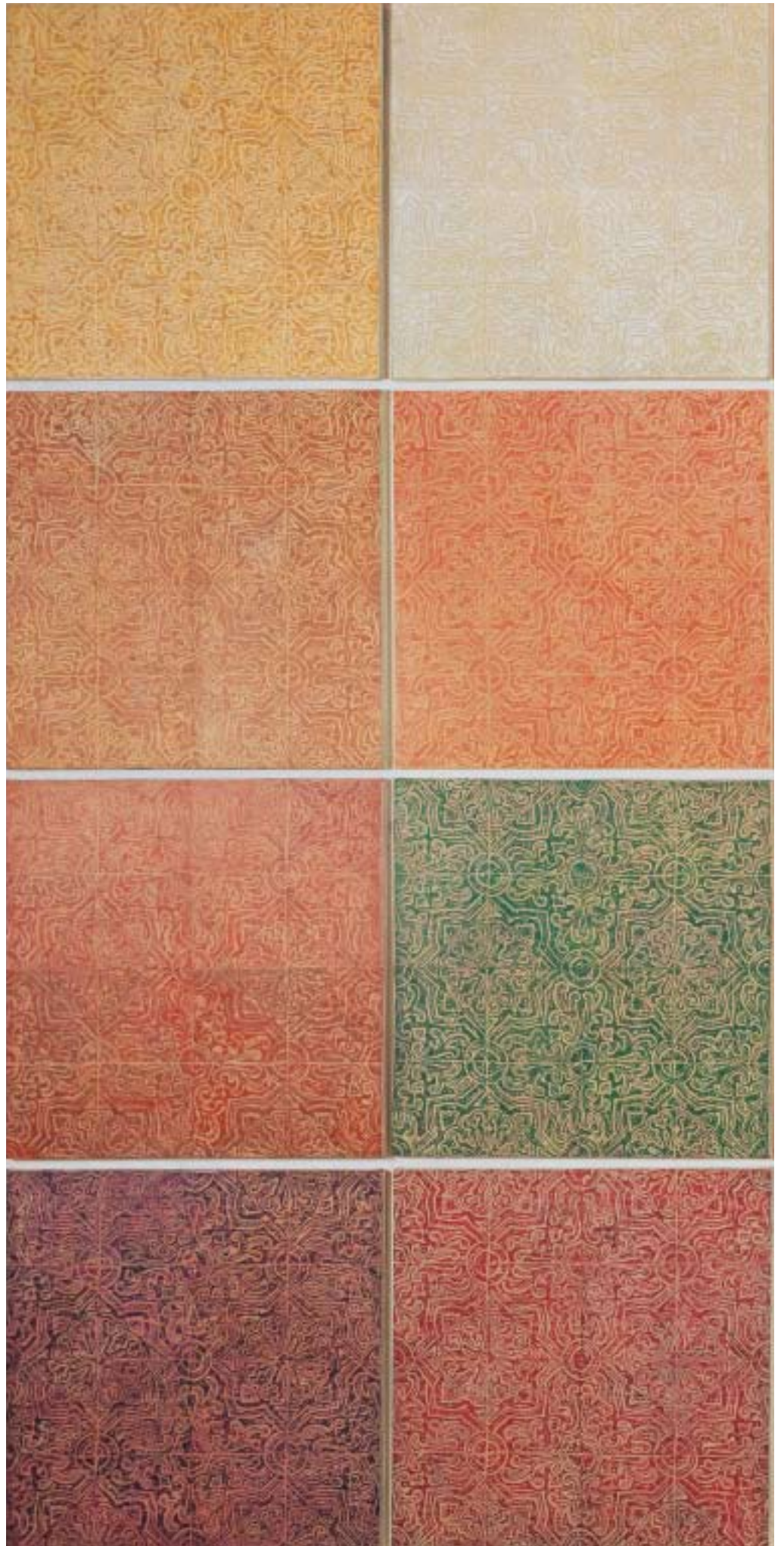
Yellow, Grey, 1987
Mixed media on canvas
213 × 141 cm



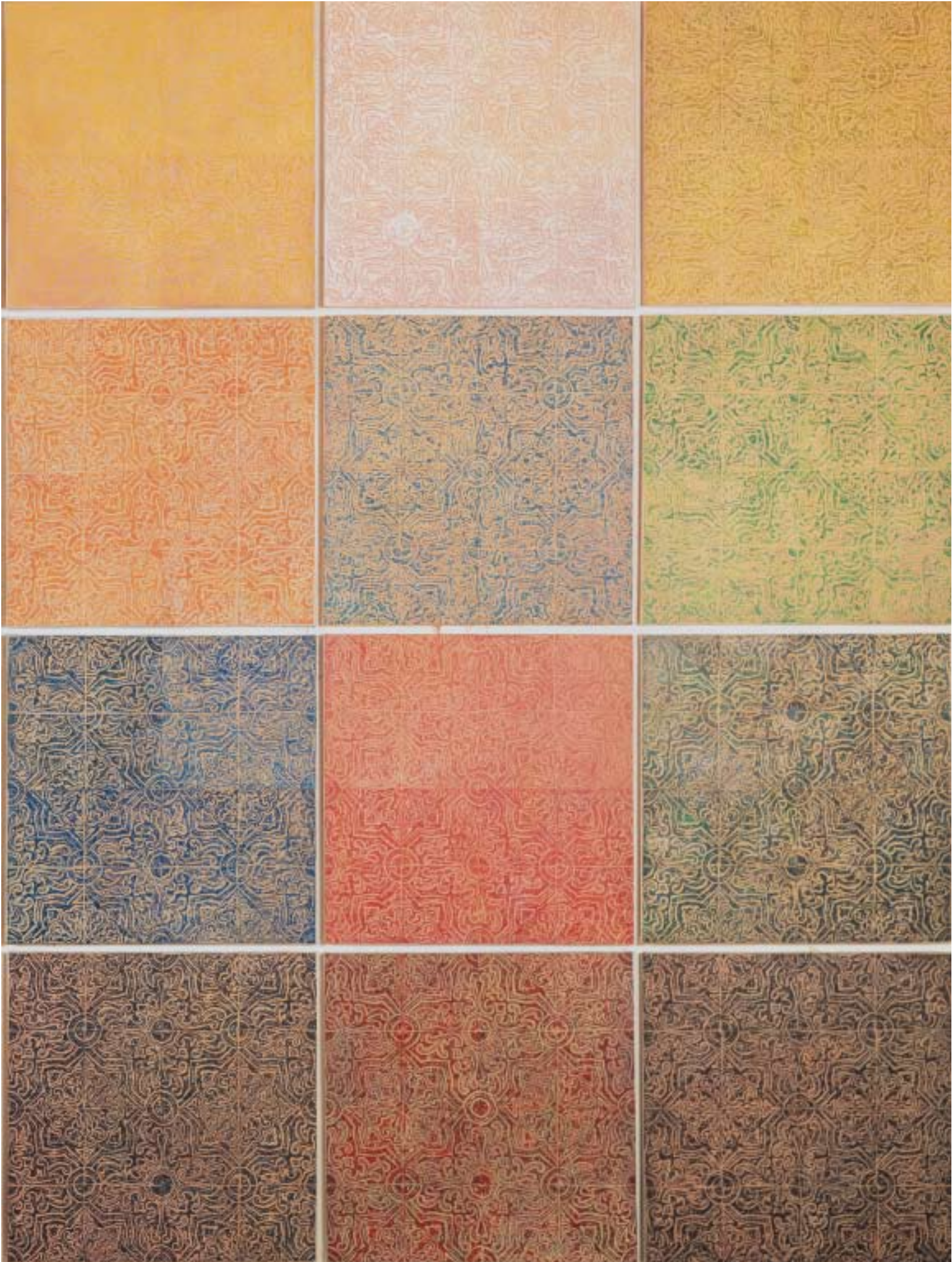


Aurora Borealis, 1988
Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas
81 x 617 cm





Il Terrazzo, 1988
Mixed media on tile
20 panels, 326 × 408 cm



Expire, 1989
Acrylic and enamel on linen
289.5 × 190 cm



Quadro Vesuviano, 1988
Monoprint collage, acrylic on canvas
226 x 174 cm



Cappella, 1991
Mixed media on canvas
279 × 279 cm



kommt NEU, muss
noch entzerrt werden

I made *Written on the Bay* (1988) after an Ellsworth Kelly painting called *Bay*. I was living in Naples, where there are old Roman anchorages, and I made my version of Roman anchors out of cut pieces of cardboard, creating a relief surface; then I used an encaustic material (similar to large round crayons) that I made myself to transfer their impression onto paper. I wanted to make a connection between Douglas Sirk, the Bay of Naples and the anchorages there, and Ellsworth Kelly.

Written on the Bay, 1988
Mixed media on canvas
179 × 146 cm





Pine Columns II, 1989
Woodblock print, acrylic on linen
291 x 255 cm



Desert Flowers, 1990
Mixed media on canvas
155.5 × 200 cm



Al Quasbah, 1991
Mixed media on canvas
228.5 × 459.5 cm

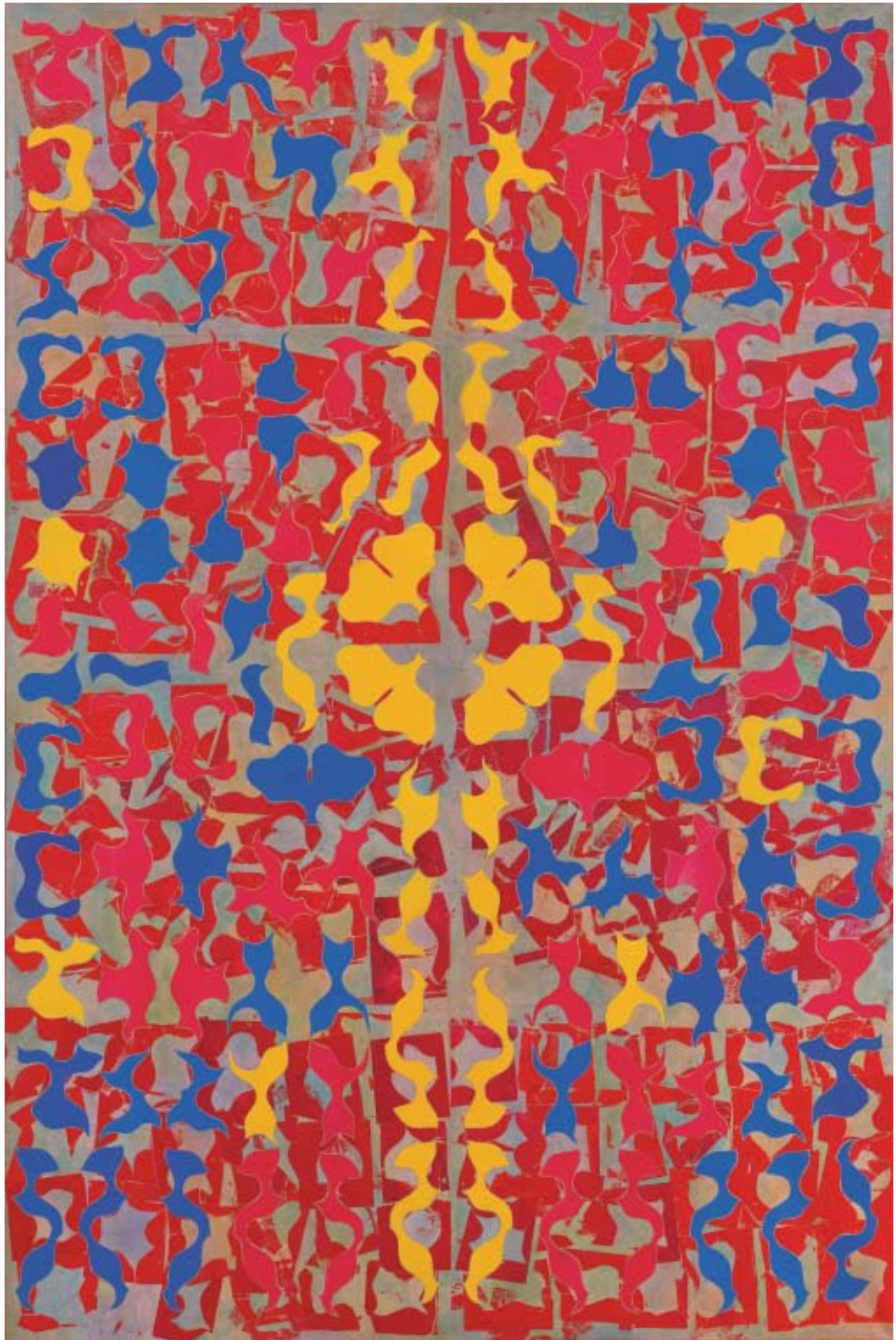




Black Volta, 1994/95
Mixed media on canvas
287 x 358.5 cm



Mosaic, 1991
Mixed media on canvas
248.8 × 231.5 cm



When I travel I'm discovering fragments that I'm bringing back to a certain mode of production. It's just a way of understanding what exists outside of one's own experience. I guess it's a critique of what I feel and see around me in the United States. I'm imagining a place that doesn't exist and so the place is the painting. That is the place I want to inhabit. When I'm working on the pictures I feel very strongly about them as an inhabitable place.

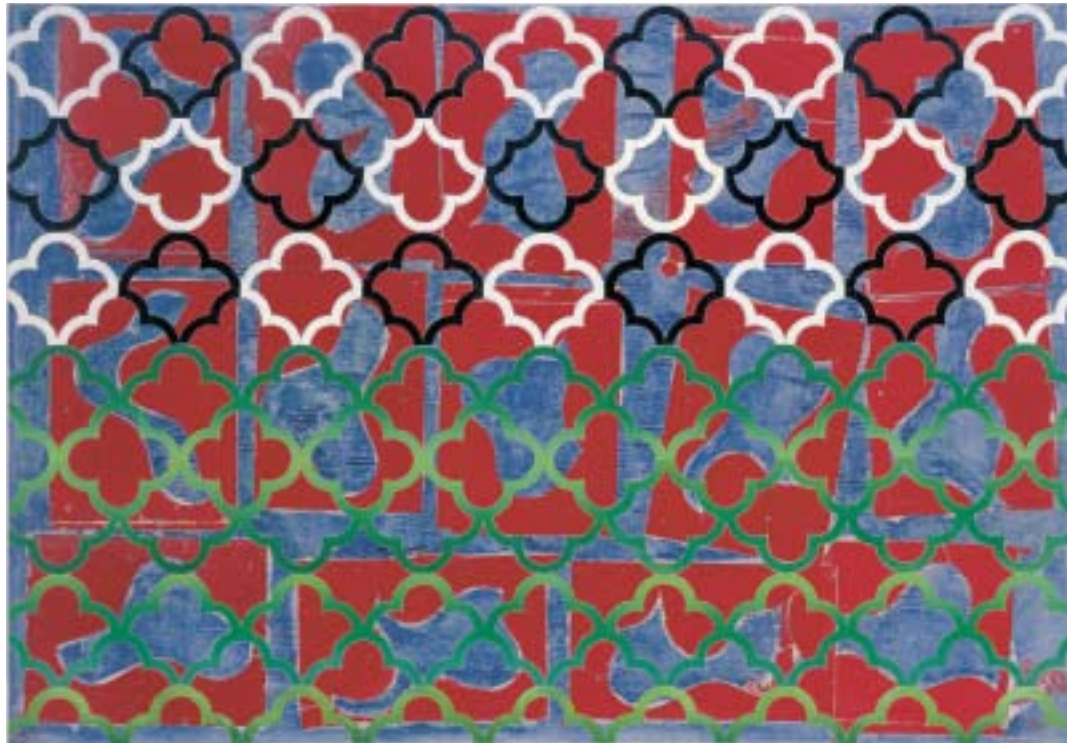
Old Cairo, 1989

Monoprint collage, acrylic and oil on canvas

231 × 172.5 cm



Bild ist neu, aber
hier fehlt rechts ein
ganzes Stück!



Semara, 2002
Mixed media on canvas
71 x 102 cm



Kharragan, 1998/99
Mixed media on canvas
293 × 126 cm

Actually, the origins of these anti-decorative arguments are to be found for the most part in modernist architectural theory. Mies van der Rohe's reaction to nineteenth-century architecture was to strip things down to their bare essentials, to a very focused structure. The use of proportion and planar space was considered embellishment enough—anything more had to be seen as anti-thetical to progress.

Ahmed Muhammed, 1989
Acrylic and enamel on linen
223.5 × 264 cm



Al Basrah, 2002
Oil pigment on linen
65 × 50 cm





Untitled (Study for Matinee), 1992

Oil on canvas

104 x 86 cm



Matinee, 1991
Mixed media on canvas
252 × 134.5 cm



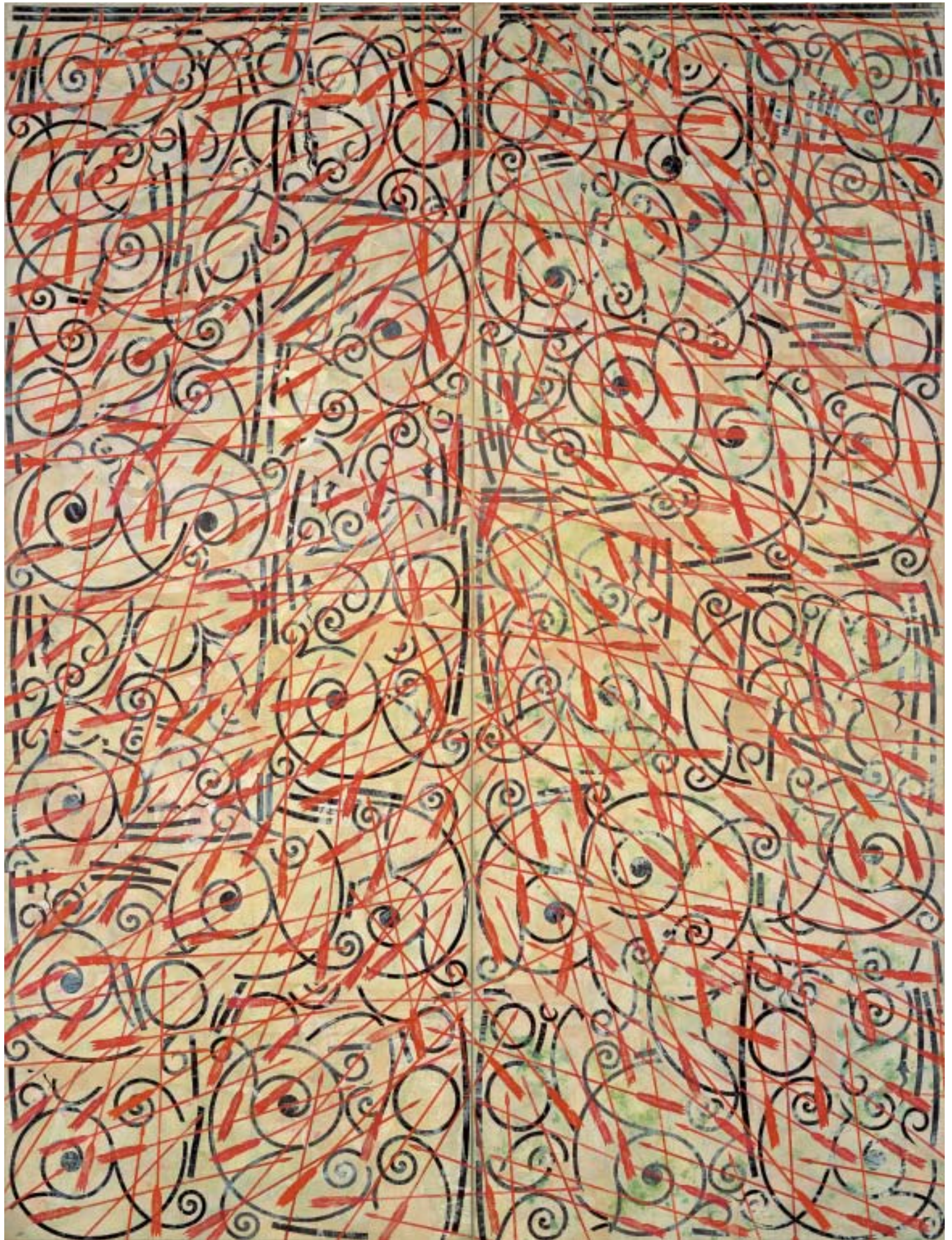
Figures in Perforated Time, 1993/94
Mixed media on canvas
215 x 300 cm



La Sciara, 1993
Mixed media on canvas
285 × 308 cm



Eros and Psyche, 1994
Mixed media on canvas
335 × 255 cm



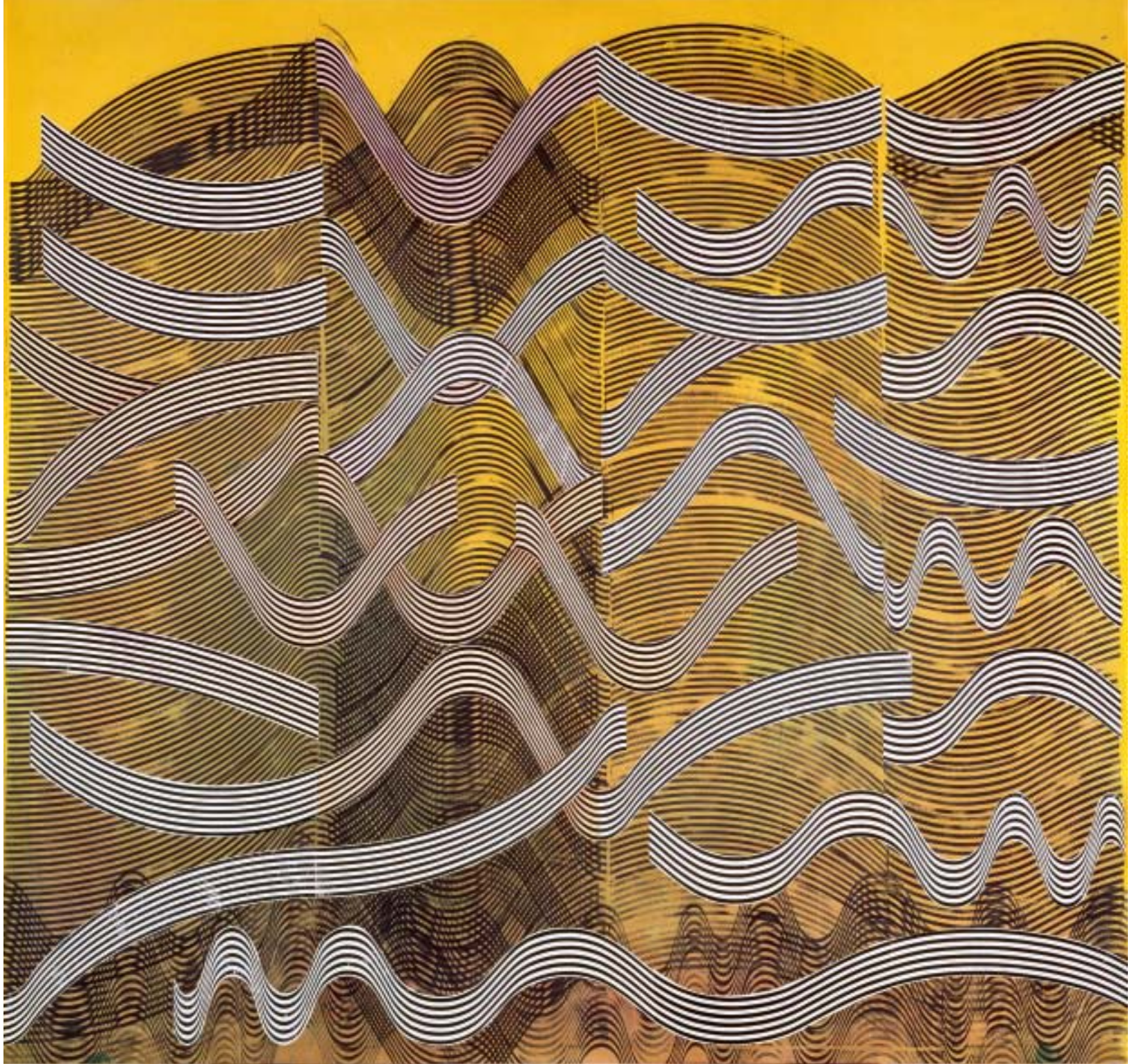
I suppose I have a natural inclination to do things in a deliberately Zen-like way. I like to define the parameters of a work indirectly, by gradually eliminating considerations that are not essential to what needs to be stated. Also, a lot of my work is ritualistic, and is developed in clearly distinct stages. Perhaps for some of these reasons that I myself don't completely understand, I feel comfortable involving myself with certain forms and images from Asian cultures.

Sirapatha, 1993/94
Mixed media on canvas
293.5 × 277 cm



Painting is rhythmic, yes. *Inner City* (1993), for example, has what I would call riffs—these energy points that come out of certain parts of the painting, and coalesce and collide and make an aggregate experience in time as we move from one part of the picture to the next. There are these interrelationships and connections and rhythmic bounces to the painting. The rhythm is very important; the painting has to move. It has to have a kinesthetic reason to exist.

Inner City, 1993
Mixed media on canvas
251.4 × 266.7 cm





Megapolis, 1996
Mixed media on canvas
420 x 954 cm



The snake motif . . . involves my identifying with something that has had the capacity for being culturally defined as divine and evil at the same time, and with how the snake impresses me as an evocative calligraphic line. I'm trying to see how this straightforward symbolism can be activated in the kind of work I do, which is usually more architectonic.

Calligraphic Study I, 1996
Mixed media on canvas
116.8 × 162.5 cm



Cobra Nocturne, 1997
Mixed media on canvas
139.7 × 167.6 cm



Pteris Viscosa, 1996
Mixed media on canvas
168.3 × 140.9 cm



Garden of Light, 1997
Mixed media on canvas
298 × 138 cm



What I'm attracted to in the natural sciences has to do with the fact that if you imagine nature and the natural world five centuries ago, ten centuries ago, it was unknown: primordial, mysterious, unfathomable in its complexity and density, and how gradually, year after year, century after century, we are slowly able to identify and learn and describe and draw pictures of this natural world.

Passage de Venus sur le soleil, 1998/99

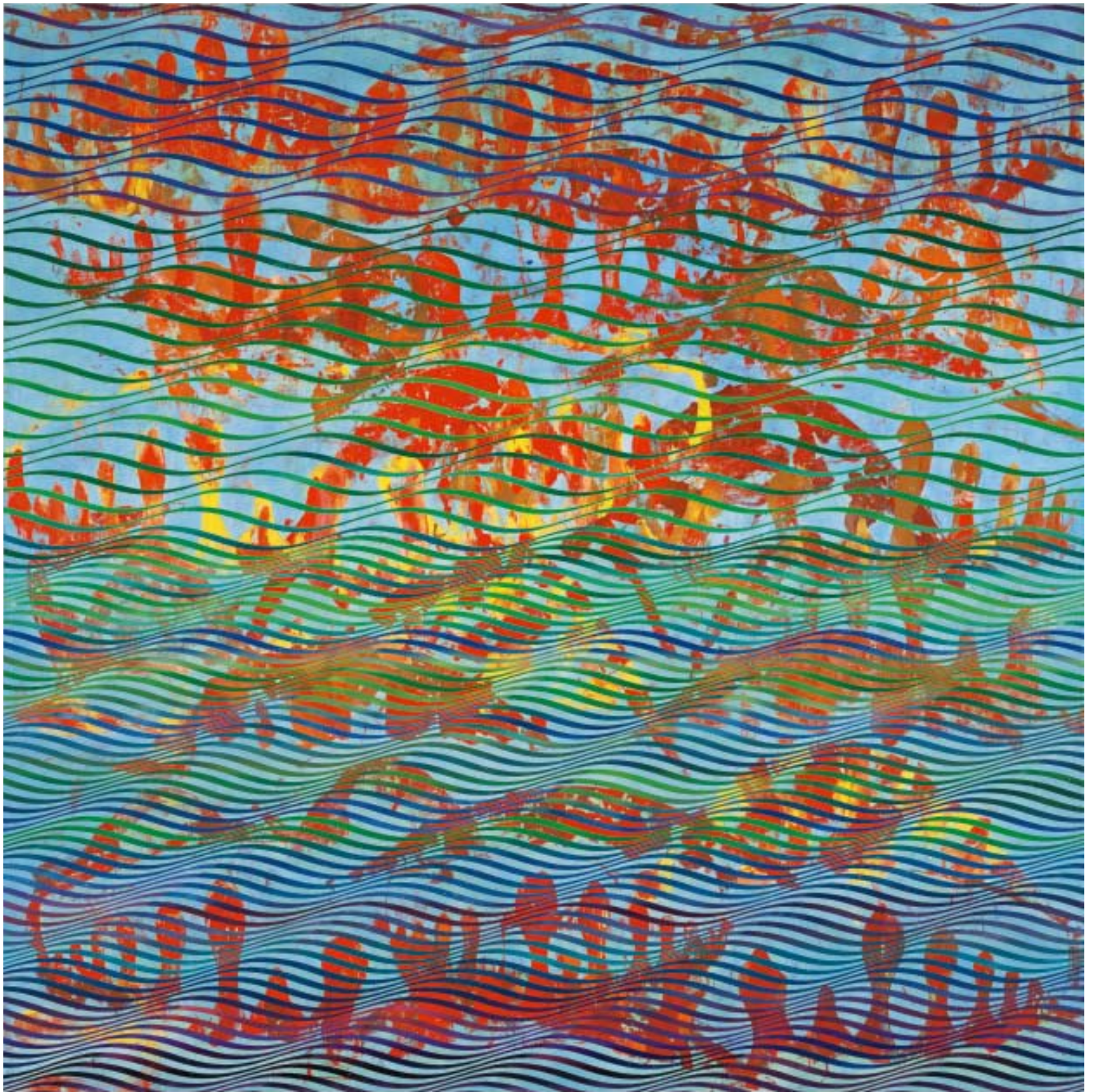
Mixed media on canvas

293.5 × 222.5 cm



Lately I've been delving into the sea world: researching imagery with the idea of eventually making an epic underwater painting. This will involve very basic emblematic creatures—deep-sea fish, shells, crustaceans, seaweed, and coral formations. For the most part I've been reworking images taken from nineteenth and twentieth century books on natural history. I'm always looking for something so representative of its type that it almost becomes an abstract element—a distillation or encapsulation of all its varieties. It is a characteristic which does not exist in nature, but only through our observation of nature—or more to the point, through my exposure to historical materials concerning nature.

Reef, 1999/2000
Mixed media on canvas
285.8 × 285.8 cm





Phasmidae, 2002
Mixed media on canvas
142 x 177 cm



Fern Totem, 2001
Mixed media on canvas
292 × 111 cm

Lunapark, 2001
Mixed media on canvas
424 x 292.5 cm



Mandala, 2001/02
Mixed media on canvas
293 × 295 cm



Sanctuary, 2002
Mixed media on canvas
221 × 302 cm



It's mystery and science combined. I think we've lost a lot of the mystery. I'm disappointed that a lot of scientists feel so negative about theology. That's not true for all scientists, but I don't see why theism and science can't coexist.

Theodora, 2003
Mixed media on canvas
166 x 199 cm

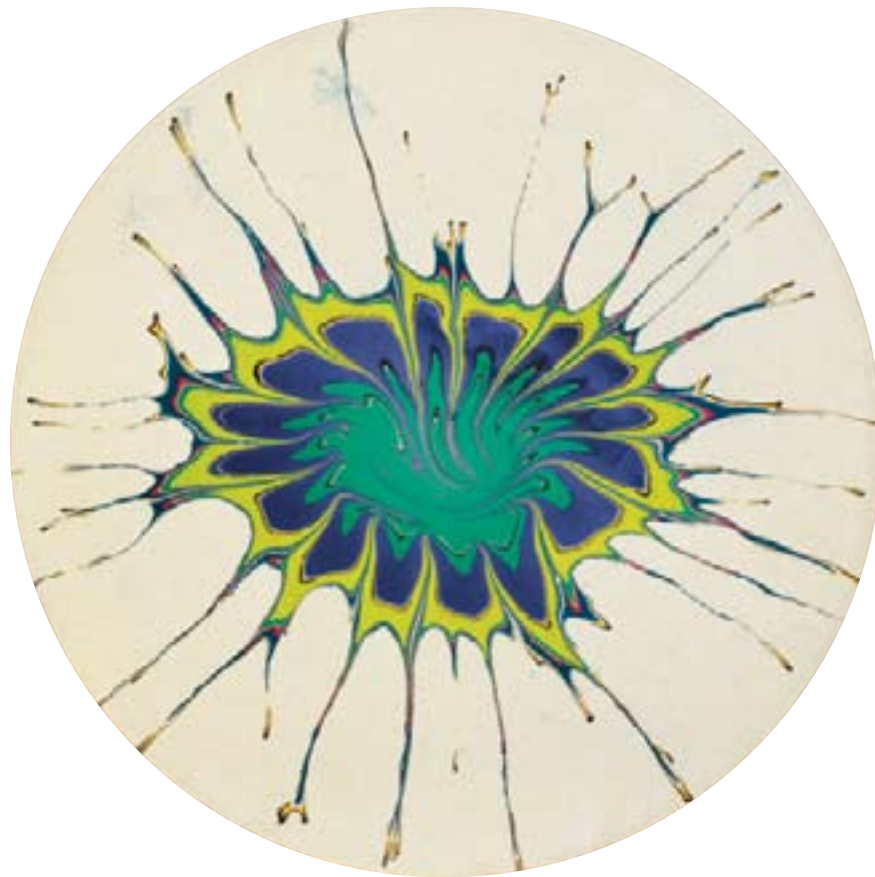




Untitled, 2002
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas
30 × 41 cm



Calligram (Vermilion), 2002
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas
23 × 29 cm



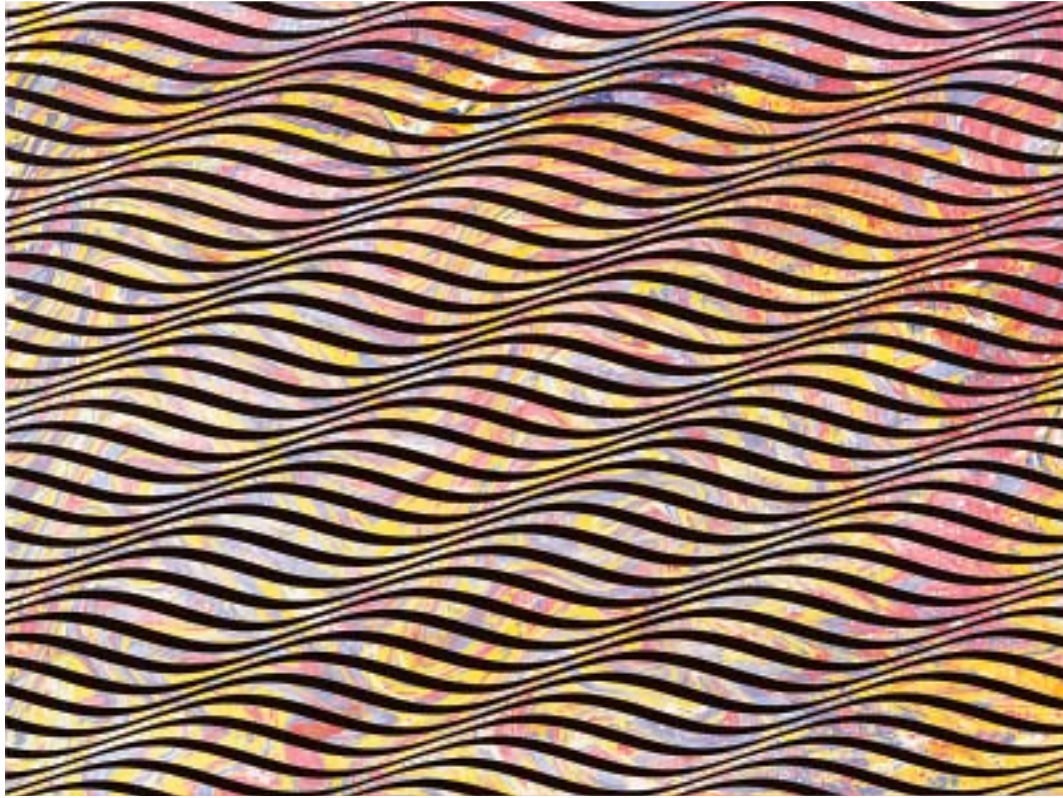
Imaginary Flower Triptych, 2002
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas
ø 37 cm



Imaginary Flower Triptych, 2002
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas
ø 37 cm



Paesaggio con elementi da ferro battuto, 2004
Mixed media on paper mounted on canvas
100 x 128 cm



Alluvium, 2002
Mixed media on paper mounted on canvas
76 × 102 cm



Lizard Music, 2002
Mixed media on canvas
69 × 95 cm



Bal Asterie, 2004
Mixed media on paper mounted on canvas
73 × 102 cm



Solaris, 2002

Mixed media on paper mounted on canvas

68 × 96 cm



Devonian Leaves II, 2004
Mixed media on canvas
127 × 98.5 cm

I like the idea that it [a cape] is a promontory, a terminus point, an extreme end of something. I used to go to Cape May, New Jersey, as a child. I've always loved coastal charts and guides, and I've always liked the idea of the cape as a point of navigation. As something jutting out into the ocean, a cape is very attractive, romantic. Usually the cape is where the lighthouse was, so it became a summoning point for seafarers, a nautical demarcation point, bringing them home to this point of land, finally going into port. The cape is about finding one's way.

Cape Sinope, 2006/07
Mixed media on canvas
289.8 × 246.7 cm

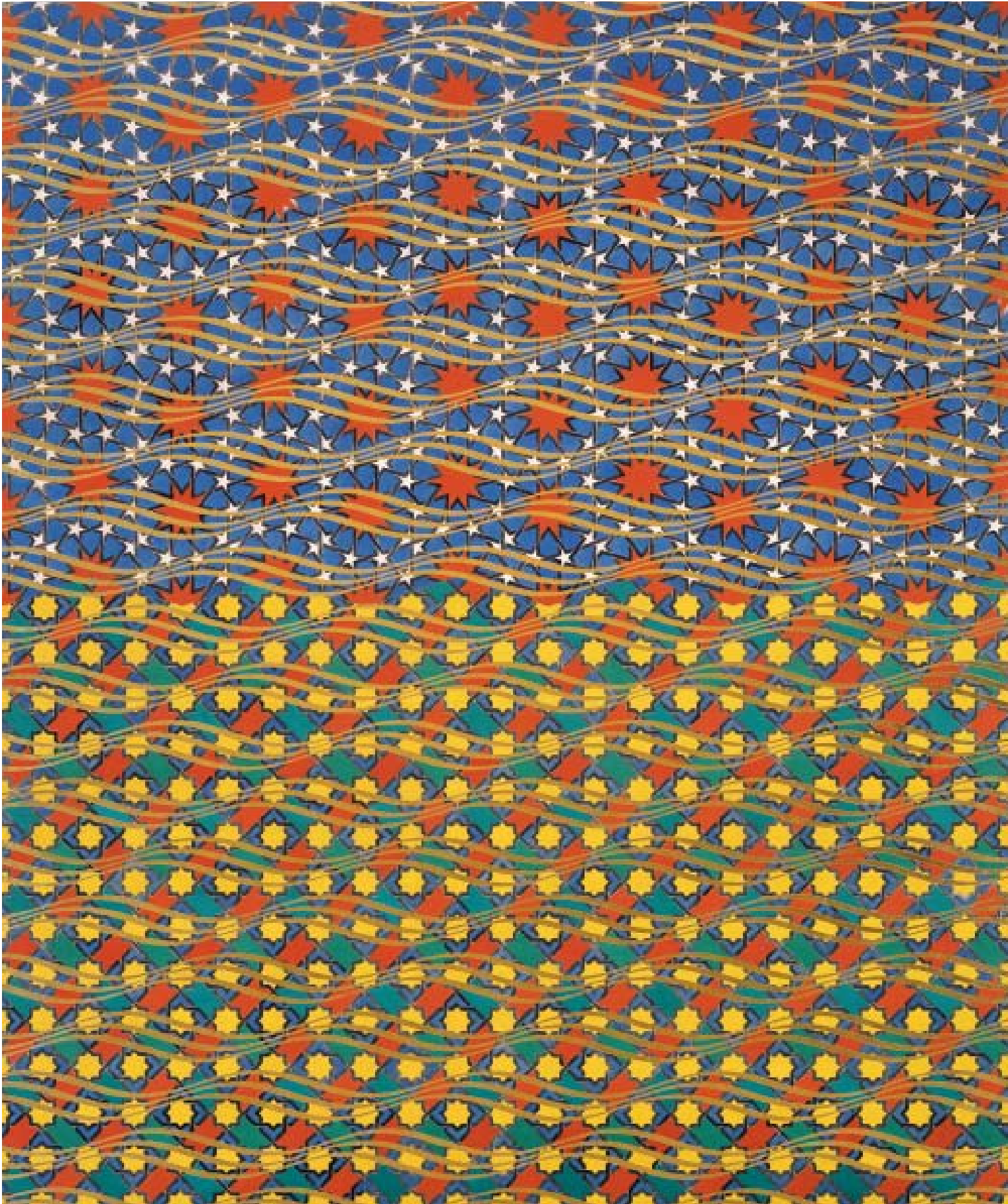


Dryadic Figures, 2006
Mixed media on canvas
214.6 × 257.8 cm





Port of Saints, 2007
Mixed media on canvas
306 × 257 cm

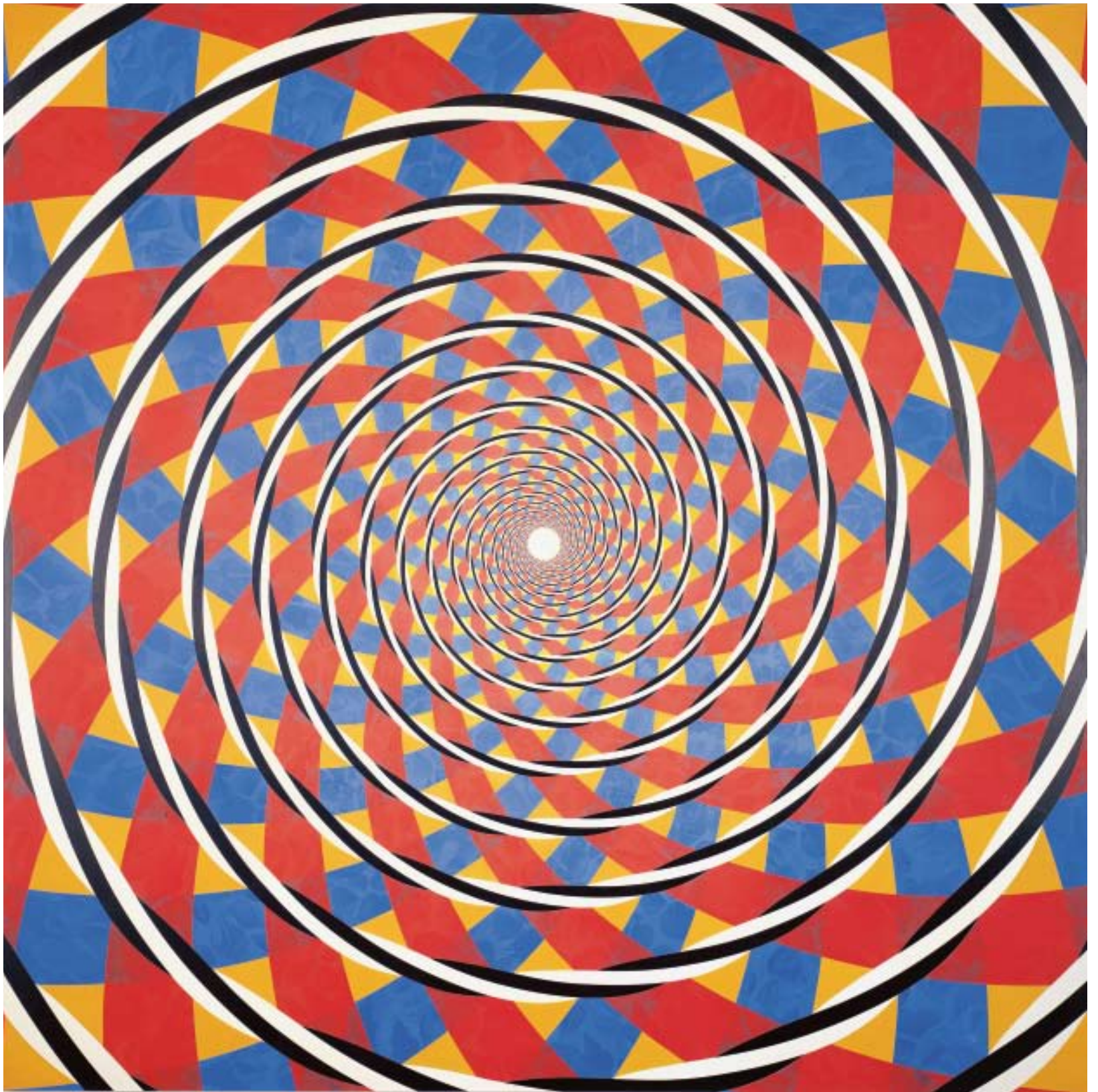




Migration, 2006
Mixed media on linen
Three panels, 241 × 648 cm



Unit of Direction, 2003
Mixed media on canvas
306×306 cm



Cairene Panel with Spirals, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
92.5 × 366 cm (detail), fig. p. 178

Painting with Byzantine Fragments, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
325 × 325 cm (detail), fig. p. 180

Perforated Stone Coptic Panel, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
80 × 350 cm (detail), fig. p. 182

Viking Filigree Totem, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
373 × 159.5 cm (n. fig.)

Cairene Panel with Twelve Pointed Star, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
59 × 336 cm (detail), fig. p. 179

Tirrgel Painting with Lion Encountering Reindeer, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
265 × 342 cm (detail), fig. p. 181

Large Viking Filigree Painting, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
327.5 × 277.5 cm (detail), fig. p. 183

Coptic Perforated Stone Screen, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
45 × 335.5 cm (n. fig.)

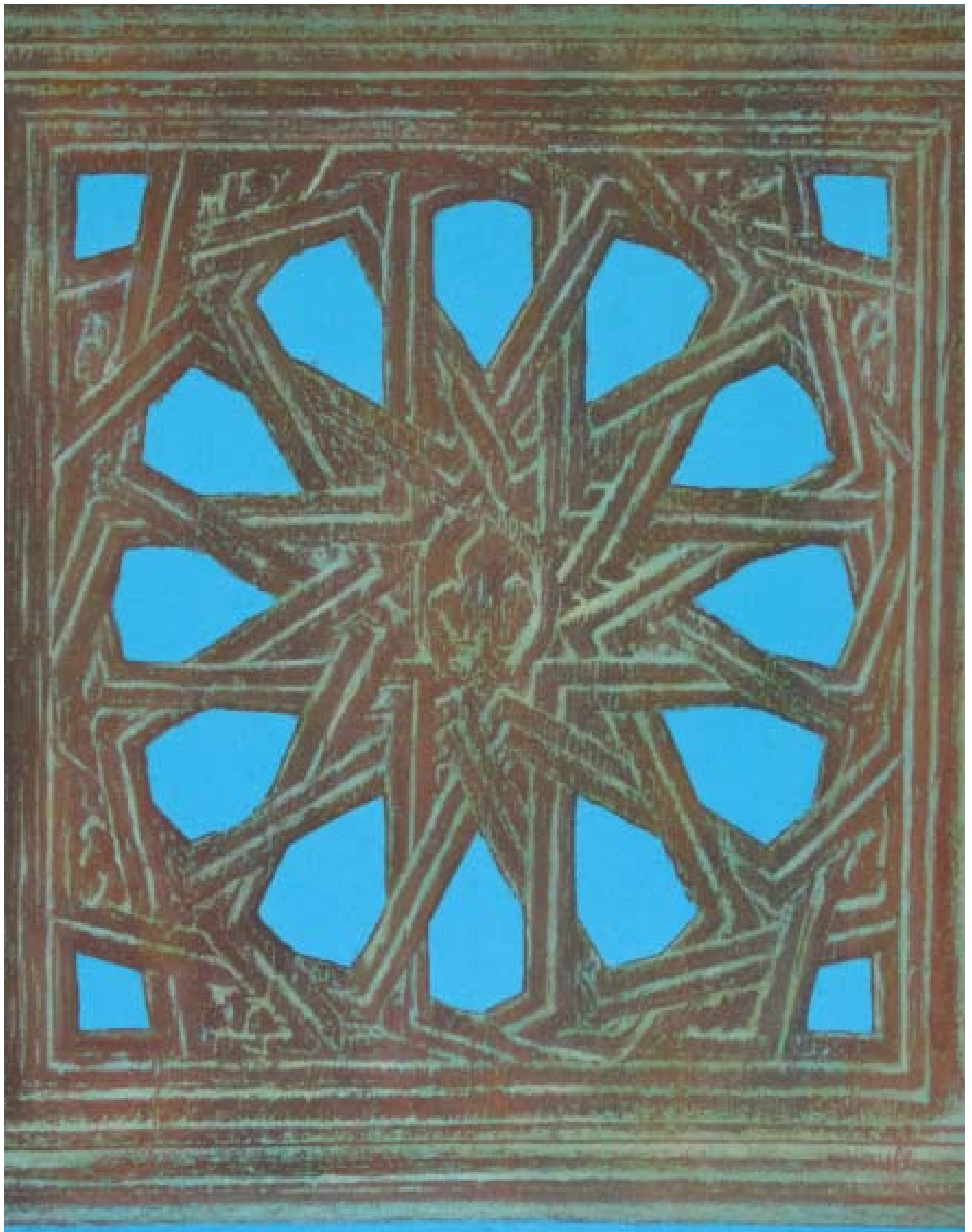
A Project for Wolfsburg

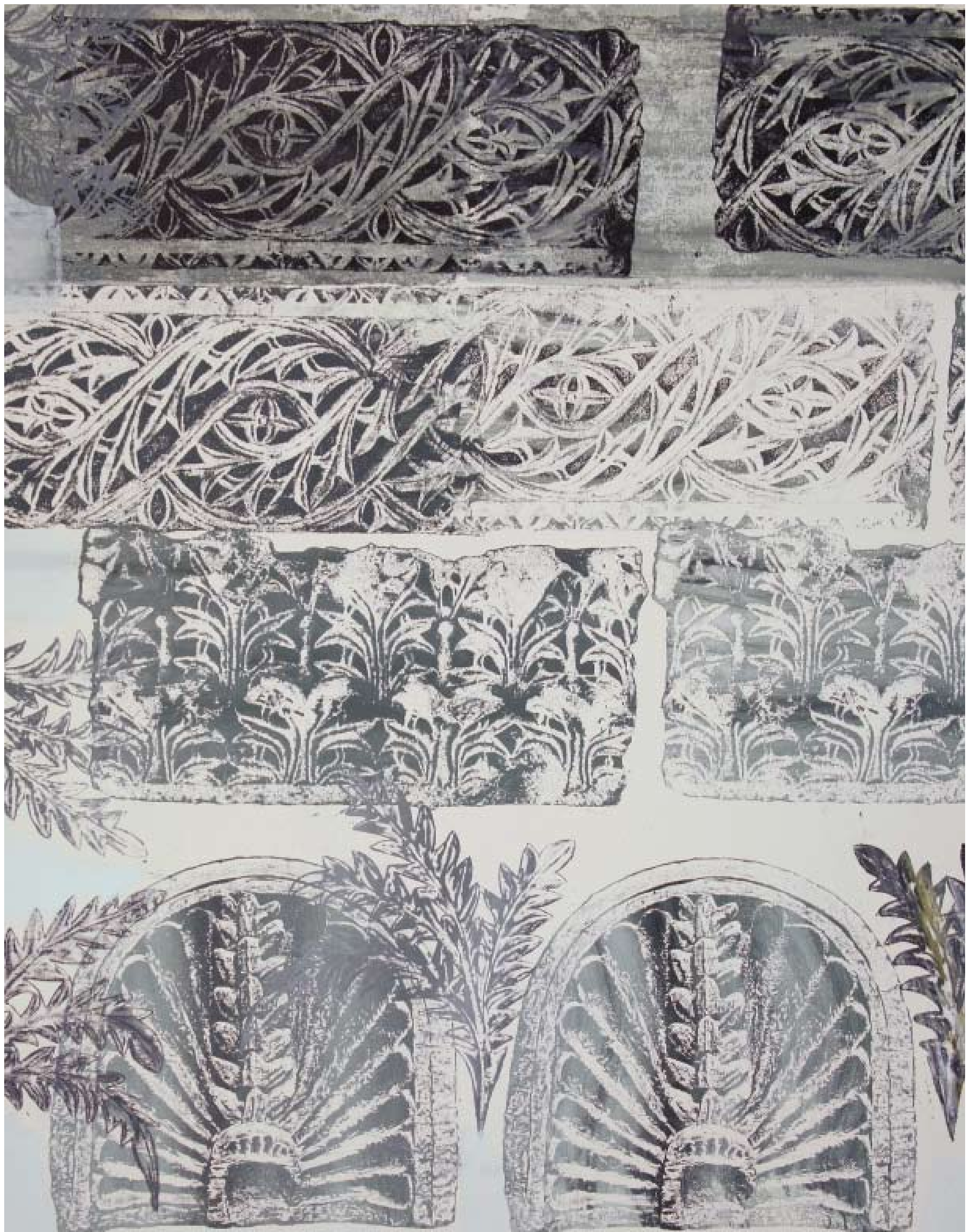
The Coptic stone carvings depicted in these new works were originally made in imitation of cane weaving. The sectional images illustrated herein derive from micro-photographs of Viking jewelry—a spectral analysis presented in an archeological treatise. I have in turn re-drawn these images using an old silkscreen process of direct tusche application, which I employ as a form of engraving. Gestural and linear variation, color staining, and rhythmic impressions are all a part of the expressive vocabulary used to provoke certain pictorial conditions. All of these elements are employed to create a meditation on the resonant possibilities of painting.

Philip Taaffe

The Byzantine friezes and carved Egyptian panels are presented as entablatures, the horizontal support that carries these decorative elements. In this way painted space engages architectural space: wall, column, pediment. As in architecture, proportion and structure are integral, but the painter may re-order parts, changing heavy to light, microscopic to monumental. These decisions allow latent aesthetic forces to be activated. The rhythmically composed overlays added to these supporting elements punctuate and weave the images together in a synaesthetic combination of movement, architectural time and color.

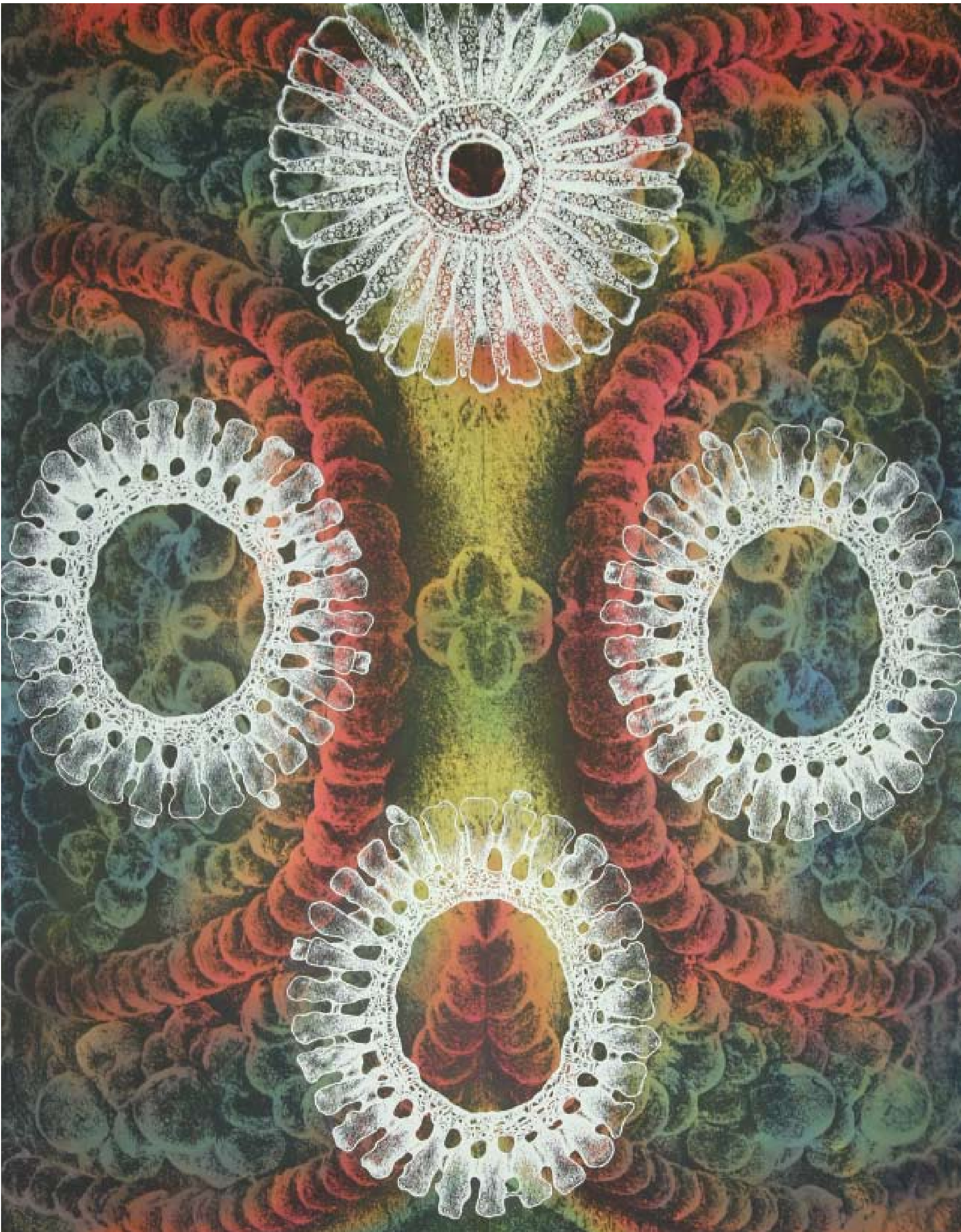














Philip Taaffe and Abstraction as the Continuance of Ornamental History

What the evolution of language meant for the development of society is what the evolution of the ornamental meant for the history of art. Niklas Luhmann¹

Markus Brüderlin

The formation of modern aesthetics can be narrated based on exciting stories. One of these momentous tales concerns the suppression and re-emergence of the ornament. The ornament has held a firm place in the world of design ever since mankind began to consciously shape its own environment. As the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl showed during the late nineteenth century, the ornament also cultivated its own continuous history down through the centuries from the first Egyptian lotus ornament via the Greek palmette and the Roman acanthus to the oriental arabesque. The *forme rocaille*, whose name derives from the shell form, was the last genuine ornament in the eighteenth century. Afterwards, during the incipient industrialization, ornaments had an increasingly difficult time in retaining their function in the fields of architecture and the applied arts and they were ultimately cast overboard completely in the early twentieth century. 1908, the year in which the Viennese architect Adolf Loos published his polemic essay *Ornament und Verbrechen* (Ornament and Crime), has frequently been named as the historical date of this expulsion from the realm of the applied.

Abstraction as the Continuance of Ornamental History

Curiously enough, so-called “abstract art” appeared at the same time as the banishment of ornament and “penetrated into the fields of painting and sculpture.”² Although the ornament was also condemned as a “sin” by such pioneers of nonrepresentational painting as Wassily Kandinsky, the new art form regularly “blossomed” ornamentally over the course of its history. That was the case during the early nineteen-thirties when artists of the Abstraction-Création movement around Hans Arp, Max Bill, Auguste Herbin, and Piet Mondrian arrived on the scene. The titans Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso also made the decorative socially acceptable in modernism again. Postwar painting of the nineteen-fifties also showed a strong revival of the ornamental if we take the triumphal procession of the all-over compositional principle of Jackson Pollock into consideration. Pattern Painting’s decorative designs filling entire canvases surprised New York in the mid-nineteen-seventies. It would be impossible to discuss the return of abstraction in the nineteen-eighties in the guise of the “Neo Geo” movement and its exponents such as Philip Taaffe, Helmut Federle, John M. Armleder, and Gerwald Rockenschaub without discussing the concept of the ornamental. If we examine the early and late works of Frank Stella or Sol LeWitt, then one could characterize the development of the art of these two Americans as an “ornamentation of Minimalism.”

Garden of Light, 1997, mixed media on canvas, 298 × 138 cm, Tracey and Phillip Riese Collection, New York (detail)



Artistic formulations that approached the “modernist project” in a historicizing manner such as those by Gerhard Merz turned out to be a kind of “ornamentalization of modernism” and of early nonrepresentational art.

The periodic emergence of the ornamental suggests that the ornament cast overboard by Loos in 1908 was not simply caught in the tow of modern art, but rather lodged itself instead as a “stowaway” as it were in its structural history. A look back over a century of abstract art provokes the question at the start of the twenty-first century, is nonrepresentational art in fact nothing more than the continuance of the millennium-old history of the ornament—a continuance by other means, namely in a different field, in the area of autonomous art?

The Migration and Mutation of Forms

It was the sociologist Niklas Luhmann who bemoaned in 1995 that the “history of the ornament and its relationship to the evolution of art”³ has not yet been examined. When one pursues it and concentrates on the history of forms, on the migration and the “life of forms,” one encounters amazing nexuses indeed. The development of the ornament from the Egyptian lotus to the oriental arabesque construed by Riegl based on examples from the collection of carpets in the K. u. K. Österreichisches Museum für Kunst und Industrie (Royal and Imperial Austrian Museum for Art and Industry), the present-day Museum für Angewandte Kunst (Museum of Applied Arts), can be further spun into the period of modern art. The key player is the arabesque, which, along with the *forme rocaille*, was the last independent ornament in history. It lodged itself during the early nineteenth century as a “stowaway” in the innovative concept of romantic painting (Philipp Otto Runge) and began to influence the structural history of an increasingly abstract art via Symbolism (Paul Gauguin) and Art Nouveau (Henry van de Velde). Like the Arabian ornament which divided itself up into the floral arabesque and the geometric interlaced star, linear abstraction branched off into a geometric (Alexander Rodchenko, Josef Albers, Mondrian) and an organic arm (Kandinsky, Matisse, Pollock). This history was comprehensively related in the exhibition *Ornament und Abstraktion* (Ornament and Abstraction) in 2001 and the surprising connections were demonstrated there based on decorative craftsmanship since the second millennium B.C.E., and artworks since the nineteenth century.⁴

Taaffe was represented at two prominent points in this comprehensive survey exhibition: first when his works chime in with the great story of “abstraction as the continuance of ornamental history” and later at the point when the American began to develop his own independent concept of painting. The first section united more recent artists such as Gerhard Merz, Elaine Sturtevant, Walter

View of the exhibition *Ornament und Abstraktion*, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 2001



Obholzer, Rosemarie Trockel, and John M Armleder. These works have the appropriation of classical modernism's dynamic compositional principles and their repetition based on ornamental form mentalities in common. Taaffe's monochrome large-scale vertical-format painting *Queen of the Night* (1986) was exhibited, which had caused a great sensation at the time as a paraphrase of his countryman Barnett Newman. The artist attracted international attention in the nineteen-eighties with such appropriations from Abstract Expressionism, as well as from Op Art and Hard-Edge painting.

War of the Cultures

The second painting by Taaffe was hung in the "Prologue" that dealt with the war or the dialogue between orient and occident respectively, based on aesthetic world pictures. A twelfth-century marble relief from Afghanistan was exhibited in this room next to Taaffe's *Old Cairo* from 1989 (fig. p. 112). Like the richly ornamented seventeenth-century Moroccan wooden door (fig. p. 187), it depicted an arabesque motif. *Old Cairo* represents a synthesis between the cloudy monochromy of Mark Rothko's 1968 painting *Untitled (Red, Orange)* that hung to the right next to it, and the grate-like ornament of the arabesque fork-blade motif. The connecting link between the richly decorated Islamic objects and the reduced abstract Western pictures (Mark Rothko) is the prohibition of images central to many cultures. In Judaism it is authenticated in the Old Testament. In the Islamic world it led to abstract ornamentation. And in the Byzantine Christian Church it resulted in the iconoclastic controversy of the eighth century that was accompanied by bloody persecutions. The prohibition of images forbids the portrayal of the divine in animal or human shapes. Iconophobia experienced a renaissance with modern abstraction, albeit on a secular level. Its expression is not ornamental abundance, but conversely monochromy and the objectification of the painting into an element of pictorial architecture (Barnett Newman). Although an otherworldly background is never entirely negated, the picture remains a kind of "threshold." László Glozer compared Rothko's pictures to a "blind mirror" in whose "blindness" an inconceivable pictorial spatiality is opened.⁵ In Taaffe's *Old Cairo*, Rothko's hazy color space crystallizes into an ornamental grate and becomes a unit of architecture—an open-work wall on whose faded surface traces of time appear. In fact this work refers to a district in Cairo with a Coptic and Jewish legacy, and forms a link between oriental ornamentation and Rothko's Byzantinism. Like the fifteenth-century Mediterranean Venetian painter Giovanni Bellini, it is possible that the Northern abstraction of the Russian emigrant Rothkowitz, who settled in the United States in 1913, received something from Byzantine monochromy that was now translated into the modern pictorial language. Since the late nineteen-eighties Taaffe has embraced the decorative forms of all cultures, among them



View of the exhibition *Ornament und Abstraktion*, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 2001

Door of an alcove, 217 × 102.5 cm, 1690, Meknès, Morocco, wood, carved and painted, 150 × 103 cm, Linden-Museum Stuttgart, State Museum of Ethnology



particularly the Islamic and the Byzantine. With him, modern iconoclasm returned to the “universal language of the ornament.” The ornament is not spread out purely over the two-dimensional surface in keeping with the transcendental contextuality of Taaffe’s aesthetic. His decorative pictorial conception does not make an assault on the edges in order to form a connection with the wall, but extends down into the depths of the painting itself—into the depths of cultural time that envisions the past as something active in the here and now.

The Ornamentation of Modernism and “Eternal Abstraction”



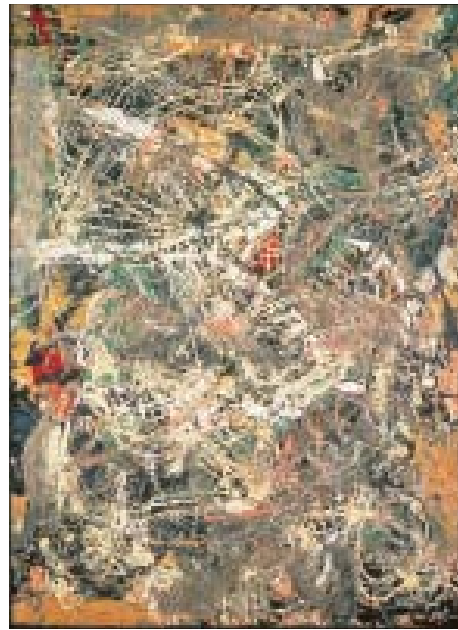
Queen of the Night, Taaffe’s second painting in the above-mentioned exhibition, is dominated by a deep-blue surface that fills the entire canvas. The narrow 274 cm-high vertical-format painting compels the viewer to take a position in front of it with one’s head held high (fig. p. 45). One notices the thin rod at the left that frees itself from the continuity of the dark blue only at a second glance; an even thinner line entwines itself daringly—like the snake on the rod of Asclepius. Or is it a steel spring that extends the pictorial boundary even further off into the vertical? Perhaps only a stylized creeping plant is depicted which dodges ornamentally around the unrelenting strictness of the perpendicular?⁶ A picture making a similar impression hung opposite Taaffe’s painting. Here a broad red expanse is bordered by two black stripes. The color fields are delimited from each other with sharp edges. No embellishments reconcile one’s eyes with the hard and sublime geometry. The painting is entitled *The Way II* (fig. p. 191). It was painted in 1969 by the forerunner of American Color Field Painting, Barnett Newman, shortly before his death. The empty monochrome surfaces are to be read as the highest expression of the absolute. Modern painting found its fulfillment in such works during the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties. For many contemporaries and critics, paraphrases such as Taaffe’s were seen as a kind of blasphemy against the heroic painting of the nineteen-fifties, and in fact even as a betrayal of the avant garde itself.⁷ Appropriation Art’s deliberate recourse to certain phases of modernism occurred at a time when the dynamics of the avant garde had slackened. Younger artists announced a radical skepticism of the modernist project through the use of ornamental refractions. John M Armleder’s pretty dotted pictures or his decorative adaptation of Barnett Newman’s sublime abstraction in *For the Love of Daisy* provoked the question, did the avant garde and its aspirations to a universal style of life not indeed find its fulfillment in ornamentalization—admittedly, however, not in the same way as the pioneers imagined it in their missionary zeal: pure nonrepresentationalism as an aesthetic method for the upbringing of the “new man of the future” (Piet Mondrian).

Martyr Group, 1983, mixed media on canvas, 264.3×264.2 cm, Rafael Jablonka Collection

Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Hall of Thirty-Three Bays*, 1995, gelatin silver print, 50.8×61 cm, Kunsthalle Bielefeld

Frescoes at the Voronet Monastery, Romania, 15th century

Jasper Johns, *Two Flags*, 1962, oil on canvas (bipartite), 248.9×182.8 cm, Norman and Irma Braman Collection



But more than just simply an exhausted modernism's oath of disclosure is behind the practice of recapitulation. It corresponds to the "archeology of knowledge" described by the philosopher Michel Foucault as the central formation of discursive analysis. It (the archaeological analysis) "is nothing more than a rewriting. It is not a return to the innocent secret of the origin; it is the systematic description of a discourse-object . . . those discursive practices following certain regularities."⁸ This "rewriting" practice often appears as a kind of historicization. Modernism began to contemplate itself, the dynamics of the avant garde, its purity directives, and its aesthetic utopianism in addition to its own historicity. But Taaffe's ornamentalizing appropriations from works by Barnett Newman, Ellsworth Kelly, or Bridget Riley went far beyond the reinvention of these individual stylistic concepts. He understood his recapitulating appropriations of selected geometric abstract positions as a kind of framework or plot in which he could ritually integrate the beginning of his own "history" in order to update the history of modern painting: "To tell a story and to use these pictures in the process as a texturing agent or to back up my own work with them and see in this way how a new phase of painting might result."⁹



Initiation and One's Own Individual Path

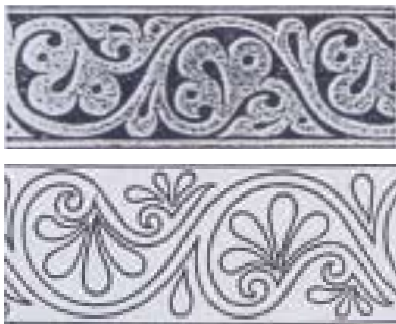
This decidedly narrative treatment of pictorial discourses recalls Jean-François Lyotard's remarks about "the pragmatics of narrative knowledge."¹⁰ Lyotard referred in this manner to a specific form of passing on knowledge which he demonstrated using the example of the demotic Cashinawa narrators belonging to the Indian tribe of the same name at the Peruvian-Brazilian border. The competence of each Cashinawa narrator is founded on the fact that he himself was once also a listener, and now includes himself into the story as a participating hero through the act of retelling. Narrative knowledge is superior to scientific knowledge insofar as it makes the past appropriative and usable through repetition and does not simply accumulate it. The French philosopher showed that the narrator himself is woven into a legitimizing discourse through the narrative process. In Taaffe's works, this corresponds with his yearnings to integrate himself into such a narrative chain through a measure of ritualized repetition with the purpose of being able to experience something like a degree of "certainty" in addition to sounding out modernism's inexhaustible potentials which were forgotten because of the avant garde's radical clean-up operation. Taaffe incidentally characterizes the group of artists in and around the New York School itself as a kind of "tribe." Taaffe's appropriation phase can therefore also be characterized as an "initiation ritual."¹¹

Tapestry, circa 2007, Afghanistan, wool, knotted, 76 x 62 cm, Private Collection, Berlin

Jackson Pollock, *Untitled*, circa 1949, textile collage, paper, cardboard, enamel and aluminum color on Pavatex, 78.5 x 57.5 cm, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel

Cape Sinope, 2006/07, mixed media on canvas, 289.8 x 246.7 cm, Private Collection, Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin

Shirin Neshat, *Rapture*, 1999, video and sound installation, black and white, 13 minutes, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York



The Reconciliation of Culture and Nature

As proven by his own independent path since the Appropriation Art of the nineteen-eighties, Taaffe's oeuvre is not only a critical reflection on the modernist project, but also stands for the intellectual and spiritual recharging of the concept of pure abstraction that had become exhausted through tautology and self-referentiality. In 1990, after Taaffe's rather analytic phase of ornamental appropriation, Francesco Pellizzi detected a turn towards a romantic, Arcadian use of the ornament that was also considered symbolic of paradise in earlier times.¹² Taaffe himself phrased it in this manner: "The picture should express that a different world is possible. . . . I represent a utopian position, but I also try to find the fundamentals for a paradisiacal situation on earth."¹³ Taaffe sees the ornament as a symbol of reconciliation. He tries to mobilize it against the supposed decompositional logic of reductionist avant-gardism as a universal "bonding agent" for a reputedly lost wholeness and inner harmony. Unlike his painter friend Peter Halley, who attached the principle of repetition to Jean Baudrillard's simulation theory and the reality of communications technology, Taaffe goes on an inner and outer voyage around the world as it were, occupying himself with various pattern systems inspired by transcendental experiences such as Islamic spirituality, which expresses eternity and infiniteness by means of abstract and complex serpentine ornaments. A cosmological interpretation of the world and a higher unity of nature and mankind are formulated in nonrepresentational patterns that are not, as in the occidental tradition, conveyed by naturalism, but by abstraction instead. A comparison of Taaffe's and Rune Miels's references to oriental ornamentation reveals a fundamental difference. While Miels conflates conceptual analytics in the Islamic pattern system of interlacing with occidental linearity, the American "delivers himself up" spiritually to the essence of the interlaced ornaments inspired by transcendental experiences.

The New York artist does not only empathize with Islamic mysticism. In his dealings with the paintings of Barnett Newman he also followed the traces of Jewish mysticism, whose pictorial language is closely connected to the Christian Byzantine prohibition of images through their—as we have seen above—common renouncement of representational visualizations of the divine. Taaffe later also assimilated Indian and Japanese ornaments. Floral patterns are often utilized in his paintings, for example the bright yellow arabesque blossom shapes in *Garden of Light* from 1997 (fig. p. 191) which he brought back with him from a trip to the predominantly Buddhist culture of Sri Lanka. Taaffe often overlaps cultural forms of the ornament with prehistoric plant discoveries taken from scientific publications. This synthetic cross-fading of motifs of various origins gives away his yearning to embed cultural history into the even more expansive history of nature.

Philipp Otto Runge, *Der Morgen*, 1803, design drawing, pen in gray on traces of lead on paper, 73 × 50.8 cm, Kunsthalle Hamburg

François de Cuvilliers the Elder, page from the series *Livre nouveau de morceaux de fantaisie*, circa 1740, copper engraving, 42.5 × 27.5 cm, MAK—Austrian Museum for Applied Arts/Contemporary Arts

The arabesque negative and positive, in Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen. Grundlegungen zu einer Geschichte der Ornamentik* (Berlin, 1893)

Wassily Kandinsky, *Improvisation 10*, 1910, oil on canvas, 120 × 140 cm, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel



Noch nicht
freigegeben!



The Ornament as a Universal Language

Taaffe's occupation with the mystic and aesthetic modes of action of existing ornamental systems is temporally as well as spatially universal. Recurrent reflections on his own Western way of seeing and on the Western form of mental cognition are instrumental in this process. The continuously reappearing reworkings of Op Art's graphic (wave) patterns such as those Taaffe assumed from Bridget Riley's paintings testify to his desire for an "analytical grounding" of his perception, of his consciousness of being rooted in Western culture. Taaffe's great artistic achievement is nevertheless his contribution to the definition of a coming universal world art. A new link between Western enlightenment as it was borne by modernism into the twentieth century not least by means of abstract art and Eastern spirituality is a key to the understanding of a global culture. The artist found a universal means of setting forth on this journey in the worldwide ornamental system. In 1958, when Europe was still divided and still far removed from a global culture not least because of the consequences of World War II, the art historian Werner Haftman wanted to proclaim "abstraction as the universal language." The documenta 2 that took place a year later in the Hessian industrial city of Kassel would become the birthplace of this artistic worldwide offensive in the spirit of *Westkunst*. As then, something arrogant still clings to such imperial gestures. But with the rediscovery of the ornament—the migration of its forms along a global path and the transformation of its patterns over the centuries—the question which now must be posed is if the ornament can function as a kind of aesthetic platform for the dialogue between the cultures—if not as a "universal language." No work provides a better model for the importance of this idea than the paintings of Philip Taaffe.

- 1 Translated after Niklas Luhmann, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main 1995), p. 349 (English edition *Art as a Social System* [Stanford, Calif., 2000).
- 2 Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order, A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (London and Oxford, 1979), p. 59.
- 3 Luhmann 1995 (note 1), p. 350, note 12.
- 4 See *Ornament and Abstraction. The Dialogue between Non-Western, Modern and Contemporary Art*. Ed. Markus Brüderlin. Exh. cat. Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel (Cologne, 2001).
- 5 László Glozer, "Mark Rothko," in idem, *Kunstkritiken* (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), pp. 234–236, here pp. 235–236.
- 6 Kay Heymer has traced an even earlier source: the thin twisted columns on the portals of Gothic cathedrals, which is certainly supported by the sacral architectonic character of Newman's large paintings.
- 7 A similar encounter between Newman and Taaffe also took place in the 1997 exhibition *Birth of the Cool. Amerikanische Malerei von Georgia O'Keeffe bis Christopher Wool* at the Kunsthaus Zurich. It too triggered vehement controversies.
- 8 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972), p. 140.
- 9 Translated after Philip Taaffe (Interview), in *The Binational. Amerikanische Kunst der späten 80er Jahre* (Cologne, 1988), p. 200.
- 10 See Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodernes Wissen* (Vienna, 1986), p. 71 (English edition: *The Postmodern Condition* [Manchester, 1984]).
- 11 "But I was also trying to declare myself a member of the tribe. . . . The New York School of painting, that's what was the most formative for me growing up." Philip Taaffe, quoted after "Philip Taaffe Talks to Bob Nickas," *Artforum* (April 2003), pp. 180–182, here p. 180.
- 12 Francesco Pellizzi, "Fragmente über das Ornament," *Parkett*, 26 (1990), p. 107.
- 13 Philip Taaffe, quoted after *Parkett*, 26 (1990), p. 68 (first published in Dan Cameron, *NY Art Now. The Saatchi Collection* [London, 1987], p. 55).

Henri Matisse, *Nature morte au camaïeu bleu*, 1908/09, oil on canvas, 88 × 118 cm, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg

Barnett Newman, *The Way II*, 1969, acrylic color on canvas, 198.5 × 152.5 cm, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel

Garden of Light, 1997, mixed media on canvas, 298 × 138 cm, Tracey and Phillip Riese Collection, New York



Forms in Time

In a conversation Philip Taaffe once characterized his pictures as journeys.¹ Standing in front of them, it is impossible to escape their effects: the ornaments and the repeating motifs bring recollections to mind that are often difficult to categorize. Before our inner eye, foreign and yet seemingly familiar times and places are implied. These surprising moments of mental time travel have their starting point in the superimposed fragmentary motifs and ornaments that cover the pictorial planes. Several of these motifs have been in existence since the dawn of mankind.

In Philip Taaffe's pictures, the dimension of time is experienced in a differentiated and intense manner. At the same time, however, Taaffe's pictures are not intended to point out historical matters or past events. It is rather the case that they produce a kind of update, a sense of the present brought forth from various sources that taken together form new meanings.

But how do these impressions come about? How can we call up these places and even entire epochs without ever having visited them? What does the sense of the present in Taaffe's pictorial cosmos and the impression of partaking in it consist of? And last but not least: what temporal dimensions open themselves up in and through these pictures?

The primary question that arises when asking whether the ornaments are images or only signs must also be reviewed because unlike the sign or the symbol, an image "does not find fulfillment in its referential function, but innately partakes in that which it illustrates."² The same is true of the ornament, which "aside from the classic allegorical and symbolic content forms possesses its own mode of referencing and establishes its own type of contextuality"³ where one can certainly differentiate between the ornament as a decoration and as a carrier of meaning.⁴ One must further take into consideration that ornaments can also originate from mystical and magical contexts.⁵ In principle, an answer to the question remains context-sensitive depending on the ornament's contents.

Each and every case must therefore be clarified as to the relative importance the individual ornament possesses, or how its meaning is transformed within the overall context. Even though the autonomous and cultural theoretical meanings of the ornament are by no means negligible in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,⁶ the associated meaning of the ornament as something decorative in accordance with the Latin stem *ornamentum* dominates Western consciousness. This above all is the basis of the skepticism and perhaps even the brusque rejection of the ornament by the abstractionists.⁷ Over and above the fine arts, one was still certain about how the function of the ornament was to be defined in the second half of the twentieth century. As Hans-Georg Gadamer still saw it in 1960, for example, the ornament must firstly "find its fulfill-

Holger Broecker

Calligram (Vermilion), 2002
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas, 23 × 29 cm,
Courtesy Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento (detail)



ment entirely in its accompanying decorative function But even the extreme case of the ornament still has something of the two-sidedness of decorative conveyance about it. It must not be inviting in and of itself nor be observed on its own as a decorative motif. It must solely perform its accompanying tasks.” Gadamer unambiguously added to this observation: “Everything that is decorative or that decorates something is determined by its connection to that which it decorates, onto that which it has been applied, and through which it is conveyed.”⁸ The ramifications of this are that the ornament also shares time with its carrier as a part of its decorative function. It is impossible for the ornament to shake off this “innate” function and with it the referential character to its historic dimension. It refers to its object in its function and is dependent on it.⁹ Only in this way does it receive its temporal location and specific place in a historic sense; this is the only way that memory becomes possible in this context.¹⁰

But Taaffe divests the ornament of its function by isolating it in his pictures and thereby releasing it from the body which it decorates. This has consequences. In its bare form, fragmented and frequently manipulated by Taaffe through the alteration of details, the ornament accrues a new quality in Taaffe’s pictures. Henri Focillon’s description formulated many years before Taaffe’s pictures were painted is applicable here: “In these imaginary worlds where the artist is geometrician and mechanic, physicist and chemist, psychologist and historian, form constantly meanders from bondage to freedom through the play of metamorphoses.”¹¹ That which Focillon formulated with respect to art history in general can be related specifically to Taaffe’s dealing with the ornament.

Taaffe frequently achieves an anchoring of his chosen design motifs with their historic or geographic roots by means of the works’ titles. In *Reliquary* from 1990/91 (fig. p. 194), for example, the title refers to the often precious and elaborate container for relics (from the Latin word *reliquiae* meaning “remains”). It is the ornaments themselves that are placed at the center of attention here. The picture’s “frame” is shaped by six different rows of ornaments; the picture plane is divided by sixteen rows of ornaments and almost all of them are also different. They frame numerous compartments which are therefore given special attention by means of this measure. The entire “shrine” is thus comprised of ornaments. It is “built” for them and not solely decorated by them. The ornamental bands as well as the compartmented ornaments stem from diverse cultures. By means of fragmentation, all the components are given equal importance and literally force the viewer to closely inspect their various forms and manners of construction. The applied aspect of the design, its subservient function, does not emerge here in any way, shape, or form. Rather the ornament itself is treated as a relic in its literal meaning, where the precious piece stands for the whole within a religious and therefore time-transcending context.

Reliquary, 1990/91
Mixed media on canvas, 230×282 cm, Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin

Untitled (Study for Matinee), 1992
Oil on canvas, 104×86 cm, Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin

Matinee, 1991
Mixed media on canvas, 252×134.5 cm, Private Collection, New York



This generation of attention in favor of form and color enables us to see the further temporal qualities in the ornaments associated with Taaffe's pictures. In particular it is the temporal quality of the forms that becomes evident through color contrasts as well as within the relationship between figure and the ground. The 1992 painting *Untitled (Study for Matinee)* (fig. p. 194) contains thirteen rows of ornaments of equal length arranged one above the other. Gazing at them one can experience how one's glance speeds up at different rates, how it is slowed down, made rhythmic, or quickly passes by depending on the height, the complexity of the pattern, and the contrast of the color to the picture ground. Several elements invite us to occupy ourselves with the individual motif; others are perceived as a continuous strip without allowing the separate motifs contained in it to become the focus of attention. Even the picture plane itself becomes divided up by the rows of ornaments that are differentiated by varying heights and colors.

Taaffe placed a metaform by means of a black masking over the staggered rows of ornaments in the 1991 picture *Matinee* (fig. p. 194), which describes a colorful field similar to *Untitled (Study for Matinee)*. But this form is singular as opposed to the multiple rows of ornaments behind it. The monumental appearance of the sign produced in this manner contains an opening and a closing form, recalling the fragment of an ornament on the one hand, as well as a stylized human shape on the other. The form left blank on the picture's black surface (whose shape alludes to the beginning and the end) provides a glimpse of the "world" of colored ornaments or is identical to this world respectively. In terms of a thought formulated by Gottfried Boehm regarding George Kubler's book *The Shape of Time*, this picture can be read as a metaphor for time: "The representation of time does not mean the representation of this and that *in* time even though that which transpires—in duration and transition—makes time visible in the first place, gives it form. Kubler does not conceptualize a structural understanding of time or the historical process in terms of temporal contents, but from the 'essence of actuality.' In the presence of time it becomes clear that it is—in his view—ultimately an *empty interval* that on the one hand divides the future from the past. But on the other hand, this empty moment is the only thing that we can ever experience directly. The empty interval therefore divides up time, creates relations, makes it measurable and bestows it with an historical dimension."¹² The "essence of actuality" could also serve as the starting point for an examination of Philip Taaffe's works. In *Matinee* one can even see a metaphor for Kubler's structural understanding of time: the omitted (and nevertheless the intrinsically filled) form as the ("empty") interval that divides the future from the past in the same way that every link in one of the above-mentioned rows of ornaments divides the previous row from the one that follows.

Vipera Russellii, 1996/97
Mixed media on canvas, 112 × 96.5 cm, Portalakis Collection, Athens

Calligraphic Study I, 1996
Mixed media on canvas, 116.8 × 162.5 cm, Private Collection, New York



The repetition and rhythmic flow of forms distinguishing the bands and rows of ornaments are characteristic structural features in those pictures by Taaffe for which he has chosen animal, vegetable, or mineral motifs. In *Vipera Russelli* from 1996/97 (fig. p. 195), for example, the identical viper motif appears many times arranged as an almost symmetrical pattern. Especially the snake motif but also others such as ferns or abstract patterns such as spirals can be found throughout Taaffe's entire oeuvre. This means that Taaffe undertakes varied recourses to the vocabulary of forms from older pictures just as they themselves referenced earlier forms from outside the work. In its repetition of forms and motifs, Taaffe's pictorial cosmos proves to be historic on the one hand, but also simultaneously cyclical, or time-transcending. Therefore it is certainly not coincidental that the snake, whose cyclical molting phases signify the existential, belongs to Taaffe's preferred motifs. With the patterns of its "temporary skin," it additionally references the ornament's characteristic feature of regularly adorning new and different carriers, coalescing with them periodically, perishing with them, and then being remembered again and applied to new vases, garments, or buildings: a migration of the ornament in time. On top of that, the meaning of the snake cannot be precisely defined because different cultures associate varying connotations with it: it is considered a symbol of evil, but also of knowledge and healing powers in addition to being a holy animal. Metamorphosis and transformation join in this ambiguity as is also the case with numerous ornaments in different cultures.

Because of the pointedly cyclical aspect of Taaffe's choice of motifs in his work, the familiar model of a linear development has been relativized; a time-transcending state is reached that seemingly circumvents further development in the sense of a progression. It seems perfectly obvious to see this specific quality of Taaffe's work in terms of Henri Focillon's reflections on the temporality of form: "A form can acquire the regenerating and revolutionary property without being a special occasion in and of itself simply by being transferred from a fast sphere into a slow sphere or vice versa. But it can just as well become a formal occasion without being a historical event at the same time. We can surmise something like this as a moveable structure in time into which various types of relationships intervene depending on the disparity of the movements."¹³

While the almost symmetrical arrangement of the snakes seems to confine *Vipera Russelli* into a formal corset, as it were, stiffening it into a solid form, the loosely arranged and superimposed snake motif in *Calligraphic Study I* from 1996 (fig. p. 195) seems as if evolved from a watery medium or diffuse ground. The snakes appear as elaborate characters representative of Oriental calligraphy's primary aim of achieving a perfect aesthetic balance as well as the visual embodiment of emotions.

Calligram (Vermilion), 2002
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas, 23×29 cm,
Courtesy Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento

A further group of Taaffe's works can also be linked with calligraphy: the so-called Floating Pigment pictures. Taaffe places the flow of forms at the center of his artistic endeavors here. Since 2002 he employed the marbled-paper technique which has been used since its development in China in the eighth century to generate patterns.¹⁴ Taaffe explicitly points to this technique with which his works are indelibly associated in such significant picture titles as *Water Drawing* (2004) and *Water Music* (2002), but also *Skin* (2001). The technique can be described as follows: "A sheet of marbled paper is produced by adding dyes to water in a shallow tray. This medium, the marbled ground, is a thickened liquid made from boiled seaweed on which the inks and dyes float through the addition of ox gall. The pigments can be expanded, directed and manipulated by using various tools and shaped into the desired pattern. When the colors have been applied and the pattern has been set, a sheet of prepared paper is laid onto the floating colors and the completed pattern is transferred to the paper. The surface of the thickened ground is then cleansed of any paint residues and the process of applying the colors for the next sheet can begin."¹⁵ The layer of color thus forms a "skin" that receives its identity while floating on the watery ground before it is conveyed to the surface of the paper. The genesis of the picture therefore does not take place in the water, but on it, through the manipulation of the color. And the "picture skin" remains liquid and shapeable until it has left the medium. Taaffe also alludes to the process of flaying in *Marsyas* (2004). Its title alludes to the river god of this name who was flayed alive as punishment for challenging Apollo to a flute-playing contest. The Floating Pigment pictures play an essential role in Taaffe's layering technique thanks to its capacity to serve as a "picture skin."

Calligram (Vermilion) from 2002 is one of Taaffe's most convincing works of this kind (fig. p. 196): surrounded by a bright maize hue, an intense vermilion area is located at the center of the picture and enclosed by a thin grayish black band that simultaneously frames it. Three highly calculated movements with a pointed tool going inwards and three going outwards from the color area seemingly bestow the formerly circular area with a bizarre but simultaneously balanced and harmonious form. The viewer's glance is directed along this "color boundary," the path of the contrast, into the interior of the color and then from there outwards again to the bright ground up to the tip where the line threatens to lose itself, before arching into the center of the vermilion field and then out again in an even steeper arch and so forth until the starting point is reached. One's view is thus directed in a circle, speeded up, slowed down again and then charged with the energy of the colors in the process, such that a contemplative, harmonious, and lively quality is gradually imparted while looking at the picture. The experience of such an energy-charged calm feeds primarily on the temporal quality of one's glance moving in a circular pattern around the picture.



Lizard Music, 2002
Oil pigment on canvas, 69 × 95 cm, Courtesy Studio d'Arte
Raffaelli, Trento

Water Music II, 2002
Mixed media on canvas, 77 × 103 cm, Courtesy Studio d'Arte
Raffaelli, Trento



Taaffe himself often associated the flowing character of these pictures, their quality of progress and proceedings, with music. Picture titles such as *Lizard Music* and *Water Music* (both from 2002, figs. p. 197) also point to the roots of such visual sensations. Perpendicular patterns accentuate the picture plane in *Lizard Music*. The surface of *Water Music* is divided up by the combination of a marbled ground over which a wave pattern has been applied. The marbled ground is formed by a reddish orange, yellow, and blue coating. The purity of the colors remains thanks to the technique Taaffe employs, but they are swirled around into eddies of color and similarly bizarre patterns. The waves printed over them at regular intervals, and which already appeared in earlier pictures from the Appropriation Art phase, heighten the effect: the surface is set into vibration by means of the visual meshing of these two layers; the picture seems to flow and fade away. This visual experience is comparable to the effect of looking through a reflecting and moving water surface. In the process, Taaffe succeeds in bringing together the amorphous area of water over the wave motif that structures the picture plane with the character of a piece of music to produce a moving picture. Both spheres are primarily articulated here via the flowing quality as a temporally continuous form and experienced as such visually.

A further culmination of temporal sensation can be found in *Migration* from 2006 (fig. p. 198). The first layer of the picture in the left part of the triptych is shaped by a dusky bluish and pink motif whose figure-ground relationship remains indefinable due to an unvarying “swinging back and forth.” Multi-colored elements can be found above it whose forms can be tied to waves as well as birds’ wings or snakes. The seemingly three-dimensional wave elements that resemble each other contrast the layer of the infinitely continual background ornament and form an irregularly accentuated pattern. The figure-ground relationship nevertheless remains irresolute between the two layers because, while the surface ornament is superimposed, a fruitful interaction with the wave motifs sets in, due to the size of the ornaments and the color contrast. Thus the “swinging back and forth” or interchangeability of forms and motifs occurs within as well as between these layers. The effect can also be observed—with other color combinations—on the middle and right section of the triptych.

We also encounter stratifications in *Cape Vitus* from 2007 (fig. p. 199), but concrete forms take the place of flowing forms here. The transparent motif elements which are either printed directly or applied in the shape of separate hand-colored prints form five perpendicular rows. The total impression recalls a palimpsest, although the individual forms appear mirrored at the central axis. Even more distinctive than the symmetry produced by the mirror imaging are the contorted stone faces from various cultures (Coptic, Asian, Gothic, etc.) taken from archaeology books, combined with native American glyphs from the Pacific Northwest coast, in addition to forms reminiscent of Marcel

Migration, 2006
Mixed media on canvas, 241 × 208 cm, Bruce Wasserstein
Collection, New York



Duchamp's Roto-reliefs. The picture's matrix is thus formed of motifs from diverse epochs and cultures from which a kind of "universal ornament" is generated.

The transparency and stratification of forms and their transformations make Taaffe's pictures comparable to palimpsests. The act of rewriting as it is found in old books or parchment manuscripts corresponds here to the choice of the motifs and their alteration or modification that are ultimately brought about by superimpositions and stratifications. Through the mutually influencing superimpositions, the history that is bound with each of the individual ornaments becomes "liquefied." Memory on the one hand is made complicated in front of Taaffe's pictures, but on the other hand a universal language emerges from the total impression that has become part of the collective memory in the course of globalization.

Memory, linked with these pictures' varied cyclical qualities, paradoxically seems to nurture a time-transcending Garden of Eden-like state. The pictorial grammar generated from forms and colors—as well as the cultural codes associated with them—develop into a wholeness that has the character of universal harmony.

The journey through Taaffe's pictures is a journey to as well as through Utopia. His pictures are the updating of an ideal state in today's increasingly fast-moving time in which the talk of globalization goes hand in hand with a growing lack of orientation. In this sense, Taaffe overcomes the present by visualizing Utopia in the shape of the paradisiacal. At the moment when an ornament, sign, or motif is given the same value as all others, the symmetry of time based on linearity dissolves. Before and after are no longer of any importance. The journey undertaken by the viewer by means of these pictures becomes a journey about which one can say only little, but on which all the more can be experienced—and which consequentially leads to an imaginary sphere of ideal harmony.

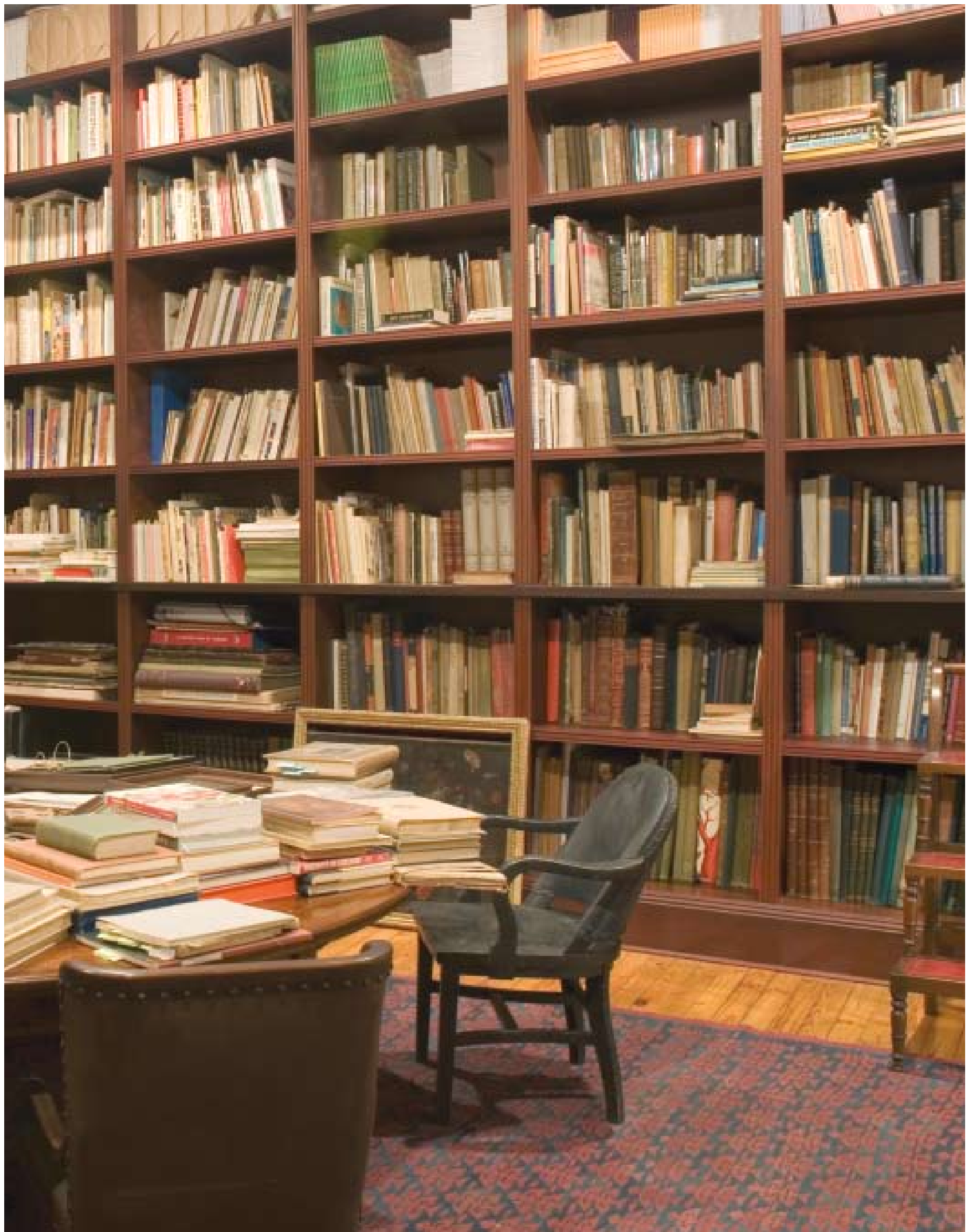
- 1 "Philip Taaffe and Fred Tomaselli in Conversation, with Raymond Foye and Rani Singh" (2002), http://www.philipptaaffe.info/Interviews_Statements/Tomaselli-Smith-Taaffe.php.
- 2 Translated after Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*, 4th edition, unaltered reprint of the 3rd enlarged edition (Tübingen, 1975), p. 146.
- 3 See Markus Brüderlin, "Einführung. Ornament und Abstraktion," in *Ornament und Abstraktion. Kunst der Kulturen, Moderne und Gegenwart im Dialog*, edited by Markus Brüderlin, exh. cat. Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel (Cologne, 2001), pp. 15–29, here p. 19.
- 4 Samuel Herzog, "Die schnelle Bedeutung—Ornament und nicht-westliche Kunst," in Riehen/Basel 2001 (see note 3), pp. 50–55, here p. 51.
- 5 Samuel Herzog and Hans Zitzko, "Rationalisierung im Dienst der Tradition—Ornament und Serie in der Kunst der Moderne," in Riehen/Basel 2001 (see note 3), pp. 56–63, here p. 59.
- 6 See Frank-Lothar Kroll, "Das Ornamentale in der Kunsttheorie des 19. Jahrhunderts" (Hildesheim et al., 1987), pp. 137 and 151.
- 7 See Brüderlin 2001 (see note 3), pp. 17–19, and Philippe Büttner, "Ornament und Erinnerung—Matisse, Kandinsky und Mondrian," in Riehen/Basel 2001 (see note 3), pp. 44–49.
- 8 Gadamer 1975 (see note 2), p. 151.
- 9 "It is especially true for the adornment that it belongs to the depictive; but depiction is a process of being, is representation. An adornment, an ornament, a sculpture placed at a preferred site are representative in the same sense that the church itself in which they are situated is also representative." (Translated after Gadamer 1975, see note 2, p. 152.)
- 10 See Büttner 2001 (see note 7), p. 47.
- 11 Henri Focillon, *Das Leben der Formen* (Munich, 1954), p. 115.
- 12 Gottfried Boehm, "Kunst versus Geschichte: ein unerledigtes Problem. Zur Einleitung in George Kublers 'Die Form der Zeit,'" in George Kubler, *Die Form der Zeit. Anmerkungen zur Geschichte der Dinge* (Frankfurt am Main, 1982), pp. 7–26, here p. 16.
- 13 Focillon 1954 (see note 11), p. 114.
- 14 See Peter Lamborn Wilson, "Cloud Papers for Philip Taaffe," in *Philip Taaffe. Carte annuolate*, exh. cat. Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea della Repubblica die San Marino (Milan, 2004), pp. 81–98.
- 15 Translated after: <http://www.hesse-buntpapier.de/marmor.htm>

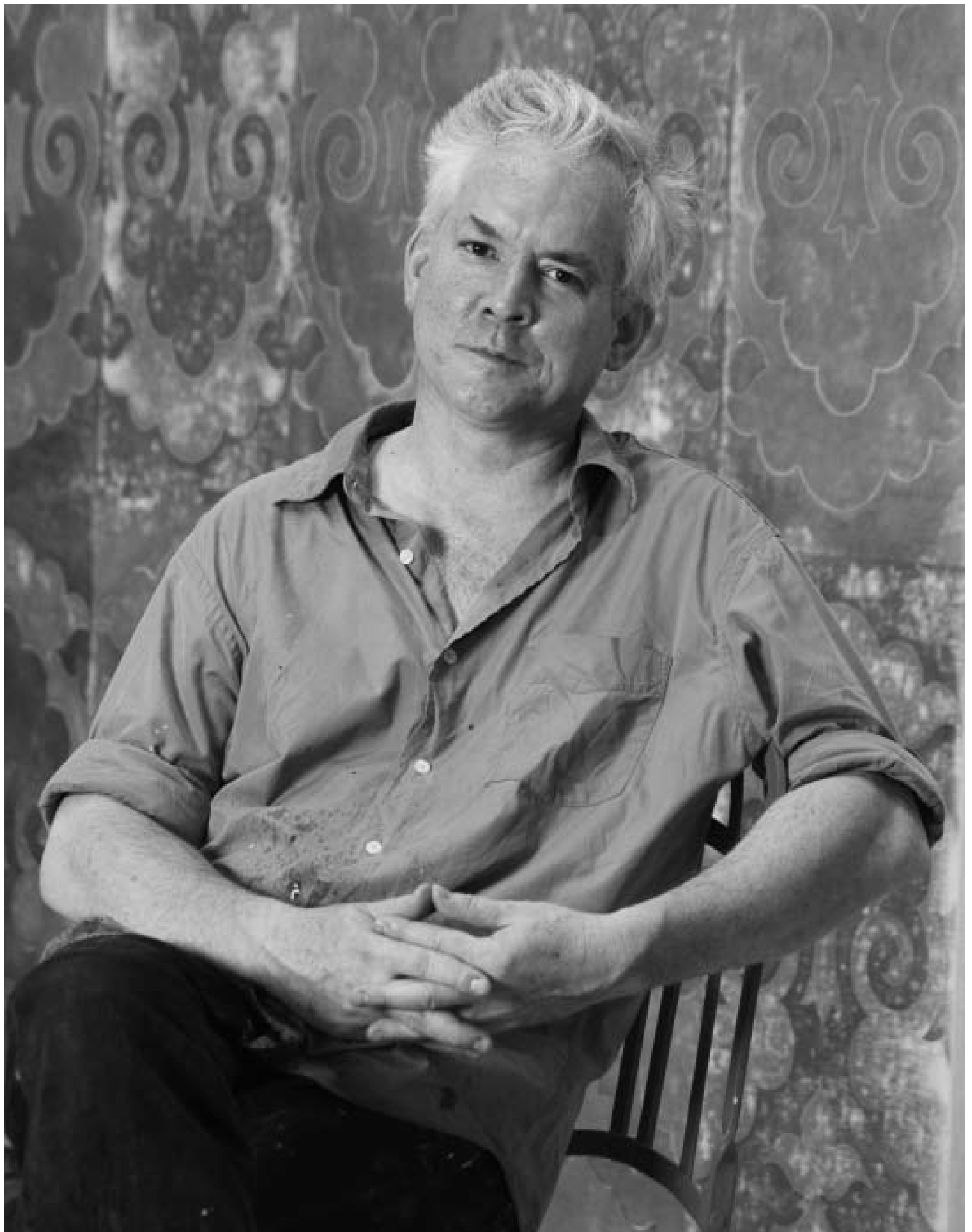
Cape Vitus, 2007
Mixed media on linen, 297.8 × 246.7 cm, Gian Enzo Sperone
Collection, New York











Interview

New York City, November 26–28, 2007

Brooks Adams: Do you remember the first art you saw as a child?

Philip Taaffe: One of my very earliest memories was going with my father into Manhattan to see a show of Winston Churchill's paintings, I think it was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

BA: And how did you like the paintings?

PT: I liked them all right, he was a Sunday painter. I saw a van Gogh exhibit as a child, and my mother said I was quite taken by it. That was probably at MoMA in the early nineteen-sixties.

BA: Did you know you wanted to be an artist at that time?

PT: I was always the class artist. The nuns in grammar school used to let me teach art class. I was so excited I always stood up when I worked. They tried to get me to sit down but I never could. I remember my first big hit—I drew a profile of Abraham Lincoln when I was four years old. I recall my mother having lots of Celtic souvenirs around the house, because she was Irish: tea towels with Celtic interlace designs, which impressed me very much. As an early teenager when I first started to gain some consciousness of modern art, I encountered Cy Twombly's *The Italians* at the MoMA. That was the first painting that really blew my mind—I guess I was twelve or thirteen years old.

BA: How did you end up going to Cooper Union?

PT: I went to Parsons School of Design first, after high school. I started out studying graphic design, drawing, and color theory. They didn't have a fine arts department until the year I entered. Larry Rivers was appointed head of the department. Much as I enjoyed him, the school was too much about commercial art, so I applied to Cooper Union as a fine arts transfer student and they accepted me.

BA: You studied with Hans Haacke. Do you remember the kind of projects you did with him?

PT: Quite vividly. It was an advanced sculpture class. I was doing installation work. I remember one performance-oriented project where I made a sculpture out of firecrackers I'd bought in Chinatown. I lit the long fuse and left the room. I guess I was trying to make an impression. Those were the days when one did that sort of thing.

Brooks Adams



BA: Did you get into trouble?

PT: Not in that case. There was another instance, though. I'd met Joseph Beuys. Hans was friendly with him and we went to see him. I was immediately influenced by his ideas. I found a crawl space in the sub-basement of the school, a tomblike space. I unscrewed the light bulbs and plugged in an ultraviolet lamp at the very end of this narrow passageway, which turned off into an alcove. The viewers had to follow the light. There was a hissing propane blowtorch, and framed pictures of fruits and vegetables leaning against bricks on a sandy surface. I hung latex gauze running behind the food groups with images of rats scampering behind. That was my sculpture. The trouble resulted when other students began exploring similar spaces that were off limits. I think it became an insurance liability issue.

BA: I'm interested to hear that you had vegetable imagery in your work that early.

PT: Yes, food groups. I was doing many things. I was making animated films, sending away to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers because they would send films to institutions. I had access to a lab where I would re-edit the army films and project them. I also filmed color images of Luther Burbank's fruit hybridization experiments, the hybrid fruits and vegetables he created. I animated these images so that one fruit would mutate into another, in a loop. I called them "Fruit Loops."

BA: The term appropriation first arose when you were at school. How did you feel about that concept?

PT: I was first exposed to these ideas through Hans Haacke's class; we were in communication with Sarah Charlesworth and Joseph Kosuth who taught at the School of Visual Arts. I attended one of their classes and people were sitting around in a circle reading aloud from Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, as if it were Holy Scripture. Sarah and Joseph were editing *The Fox*, which I read from cover to cover. Appropriation was coming out of conceptual theoretical cultural critique. It was a questioning of private property and control of the industrial media culture, a kind of hegemony that we were all struggling against. They thought that painting was a joke compared to what mass media were doing to our lives.

BA: Did you feel a part of that?

PT: For a moment, yes. I felt this was really gripping stuff that needed to be said. That was Hans Haacke's influence, again. But he really demonstrated a profound negativity towards painting.

Of course, I took that attitude to heart and then decided the most radical thing I could do after having been under his auspices was to paint. That's what you have to do—you somehow have to kill the father figure. In order to survive you have to kill the authority figure by inventing something new. Even though I still respect his teaching methods. I knew that painting was truly the thing for me. I felt within my bones that this would always be an inexhaustible activity that I really wanted to be involved with.

BA: In your early work it seems to me that you are often taking on modernism as a religion. You were serious, yet there was this wonderful light touch about it, that was essentially post-modernist. Now modernism has once again been redeemed as a positivist concept, but back in the early eighties it was brave to critique it from within.

PT: I think it had to do with discovering, in my case, my artistic identity, while at the same time questioning the modernist constraints we had inherited in the twentieth century—the succession of styles, always one thing supplanting the next. The moment one movement was consumed, the next thing would come along and take its place. In order to break that syndrome, appropriation was a good antidote. It was a way of standing up to these formal commands of constant rupture. It was a way of saying: Let's just stop and look at art history again. I don't like the word *appropriation*, but in the end appropriation was a way for me to have it both ways. I could paint *and* be critical.

BA: Do you remember seeing the Beuys show at the Guggenheim in 1979–80?

PT: Yes, I thought it was amazing. Although the difficulty I had with Joseph Beuys was that while I thought he was a great teacher, the personal mythology always bothered me. You had to take everything or nothing: you had to accept the self-mythologizing, the costume, and the teaching. I wasn't entirely enthralled by it, and I was surprised that Hans was, given his dislike of certain tendencies such as the cult of the artist's personality I think he was attracted to Beuys's interest in how society was a system and how art functioned within that system, and how it might affect or change the system. Art is not only about the art object.

BA: In that respect, do you feel that your art has a moral thrust?

PT: In a paradigmatic sense it could. I always thought that Mondrian's paintings had a lot to teach us about how to organize our lives in society. My point of view is that a painting is a one-on-one experience and that it can have a transformative role in how one person's life is affected by it, but



paintings don't have power to change society en masse. What's there is transmitted in a very personal way.

BA: David Moos wrote in an essay (published in the 2007 Gagorian Gallery catalogue) that Glyphic Brain (1980/81) is a depiction of an actual brain. An interesting observation.

PT: That work and others like it were ambivalent in that respect. They were made in a very automatic state, late at night, with colored paper tape used for picture binding and book repair. I actually thought of these as walled medieval cities. The importance for me was the scale of the line and the points of infinitude within the network of straight lines; also the fact that they were enclosed. One image did look like the cerebellum, the woven structure of the cortex or brain matter, so I titled it *Glyphic Brain*.

BA: I was reading a book by Gerald Hüther called *The Compassionate Brain*, and he was discussing the evolution of the brain in the simplest forms of life. And suddenly I said, Wait a minute, Philip's whole oeuvre is a depiction of the brain, of intelligences, loosely described; intelligences on all levels, intelligences in nature, in ornament . . . and here is the very first work of yours, this early image of the brain.

PT: That continues right up to the present. The most recent painting here in the studio is called *Exploded Ganglia* (2007).

BA: What is ganglia?

PT: *Ganglia* is an interesting word. For me it has to do with built-up forces of energy. Shall I get the dictionary?

BA: Sure.

PT: I think it's an important choice of word . . . Ganglion: a gray mass of nerve tissues, existing outside the brain and spinal cord. In pathology, it's a cyst or enlargement, usually at the wrist. But the third definition of ganglion is determining: *a center of intellectual or industrial force or activity*. The title came to me from one specific form in the painting, which reminded me of the first image of a brain you see on a sonogram of a fetus. Stan Brakhage always said vision began in the fetus.



BA: Following a strict chronology, the next work after *Glyphic Brain* and the *Picture Binding* series is *Color Field Painting* (1983).

PT: I was using found paper scavenged from the industrial waste-paper disposal bins at the local printing plants in Newark. I was roaming around in my broken-down '57 Chevy: an artist, a beatnik. I was exploring the industrial zones of the Passaic Valley, beloved of Robert Smithson, of Allen Ginsberg—the New Jersey Turnpike industrial zone, all the romance of that place. I was in the bowels of it, searching through mountains of disposed printed matter. Some crane operator would be sitting there smoking a cigarette, and I'd go up and say, "Mind if I look around?" And he'd say, "Go right ahead, kid." I'd discover things, put them in my car, and bring them back to my apartment. *Color Field Painting* was started at seven in the evening and finished at five-thirty the next morning. I used to stay up all night in those days. It was the first large-scale collage painting I made immediately following the *Picture Binding* series. It was a very automatic process. One day I just said: That's enough! No more picture binding! This was before the *Martyr Group* painting, before the optical works.

BA: What did you have in mind when you were making *Color Field Painting*?

PT: I was thinking of Hans Hofmann and his push/pull theories of composition. And I guess I was thinking of sabotaging Gene Davis, creating something that's completely fractured and then mended and put back together. It's also paper on paper, so it has that kind of distended surface. I stapled some of these large sheets of paper to the wall and began cutting strips of paper and pasting them onto the painting. Like the *Picture Binding* series, the composition was very automatic. I had all these little pieces of paper on the floor and some purple indigo paint that I was just throwing behind them, staining these little pieces along the way. After I completed *Color Field Painting* I took a walk downtown—Jersey City was very different back then than it is today—and I had such a feeling of liberation and accomplishment that morning. It was predawn and springtime and I walked down to the docks where they repaired ferry boats. I passed through the grasslands by the tugboat terminals as people were heading to work. I'll never forget that walk. The feeling of complete ecstatic exhaustion, and a sense of destiny ahead of me, almost an orgasmic release of energy, having made that work, and then going out into the morning.

BA: There's no imagery on this painting, is there?

PT: No, there's no imagery.



BA: Why do I have a feeling of shimmering skyline?

PT: That's what I used to look at: the New York skyline. I used to see the World Trade Center Towers from my window. It was right across the river, shimmering in the watery light. I could look out my window and see the Statue of Liberty at the end of my street. It was the top floor of a cold-water railroad flat, a water heater in the kitchen. The rent was eighty dollars a month, which gave me a lot of free time to paint. I worked in a small living room in front. Robert Mapplethorpe visited me here and bought one of the Picture Binding works. He was my first collector. My friend Curtis Anderson was working at a frame shop, making those pentagram-shaped frames for Robert. Curtis was also framing one of the Picture Binding pieces for me, and Robert saw that and asked who made it. Curtis said: "He's a friend of mine who lives in Jersey City, would you like to meet him?" Robert had just come back from a trip overseas and he had all of these traveler's checks with him. He paid me eight hundred dollars for a piece called *Forest Lantern*. He simply filled out his traveler's checks and I was extremely appreciative.

BA: I want to ask about some of the explicit Christian imagery in your work. Martyr Group is a crucial image. What were you looking at that inspired Martyr Group?

PT: I was looking at all kinds of things. In a book I discovered some Moldavian Valley frescoes painted on the outsides of Romanian Byzantine churches, and the organization of the saints impressed me. I also thought of it as a class or office photograph, with people standing on bleachers having their pictures taken. It was a combination of the idea of the Romanian exterior fresco and the contemporary corporate group portrait.

BA: Where did you buy those targets?

PT: I found them in the same waste paper disposal plants in Newark. They were clearly made for the police academy for target practice.

BA: Today they're always retrospectively read as early AIDS martyrs, people who were just beginning to die. Were you thinking about that kind of thing at the time, in 1983?

PT: I was starting to, yeah.



BA: Did you make other work like that?

PT: No, that was it. After *Color Field Painting*, the first Bridget Riley pieces that I started carving were also printed on found paper—some light-bulb packaging paper that I had found in the dump. I liked the fact that Riley’s ancestor had worked with Thomas Edison on the invention of the light bulb. So I knew about that connection and thought that was sweet.

BA: You were researching Bridget Riley at the time?

PT: Oh yes, researching and dissecting the paintings, surgically taking them apart. Just completely breaking them into sections and putting them back together again. The first optical work was actually a similar format as *Color Field Painting*, made with thin gray stripes. I have no idea what happened to that work, but these two paintings led to the linoleum carvings. In order to make the wavy lines, I decided to create a template and print the sections from linoleum carvings. I found discarded rolls of battleship linoleum, probably from a hardware store on Canal Street, or maybe some old flooring store in Jersey City. These early works had a lot to do with salvaging. I couldn’t afford expensive materials, so I was using what was at hand.

BA: So you made the first relief prints for the Bridget Riley appropriations. Did you make the plates yourself?

PT: Yes, I drew them on the linoleum and carved them myself.

BA: Did you have a day job at this time?

PT: The last job I had was at *Artnews* magazine in the layout department, gluing up the ads. Afterwards I’d have the money I needed to paint. My expenses were very low.

BA: What led you to choose a mechanical means of reproduction in these paintings, rather than just picking up a brush and painting them by hand? Why was this distancing factor introduced into the picture? It seems to be a very late-twentieth-century, Warholian phenomenon.

PT: I think it feels more real, or it gives one a greater sense of connectedness to the material circumstances in which we’re living. Perhaps it offers a look of greater authenticity, or seems more authentically mediated. But having a loaded brush and having a screen with oil paint on it is not so different, especially the way I use them. Often I work with solvents and melt the image for a watery

effect. By using printing techniques I could see things more immediately, more palpably. It's more exciting sooner. Also the fact that I wanted many of them—the idea of the pulsating field of imagery. One print would be slightly more deformed or degraded, then one would be perfect, then the next one would be terrible.

BA: The technical means seem to be tied into the zeitgeist of the moment, the age of mechanical reproduction.

PT: Actually, it feels very old-fashioned to me now. Silkscreen has become a very quaint medium. It's turned into an old-master technique.

BA: I was looking at Block Island (1986) in your library just now, and I suddenly realized the relationship between the wave shapes in the painting and the Bridget Riley undulation pattern. I'd never gotten the fact that the Bridget Riley undulations might be waves as well. I'd just never seen this before. That's a real constant in your oeuvre—that undulation.

PT: I suppose I've internalized that by now.

BA: It's not Bridget Riley's anymore?

PT: I suppose not. I can't say I've done it more than she has, but close to it. It's just been something that I've been very attracted to, something I felt was iconically significant, getting back to this idea of the liturgical reenactment: doing something again and again. It can be a very useful process. I've used this metaphor before as regards the progress of my work: as a wheel moves forward it also turns back on itself. I have a similar attitude toward the progression of my own work. I have a very retrospective approach to finding new material, or to examining the needs of a painting. I will often refer to earlier concerns, or just by accident they will come out at me. This has to do with what I call the concept of the *epiphanic* painting. I have all this material and I'm looking for a character to complete the story, to flesh out the narrative. Unexpectedly, something unanticipated comes out at me. It appears suddenly and I trace it to its origins and then bring it forward.

BA: This happens while you're working?

PT: Yes, I ask myself, "What do I need to complete the story?" Oh, I know. It was such and such a vehicle or an element and then I'll go searching after that and suddenly I realize that it wasn't that element but another that was close by, and that's the epiphany, that's what gets brought forward.

It's an important method for me and it's why I keep everything on hand. And if I can't find the printed material then I always have the means to reproduce it once again.

BA: In your early images of flora and fauna, such as the Pine Columns (1988), it didn't announce itself as nature imagery at the time, but there it is.

PT: Pine cones invoke the idea of Dionysian energy, they are a phallic Neapolitan symbol of regeneration.

BA: It was around 1996 when suddenly plant and animal forms started creeping into your work and it seemed very surprising at the time. But then in the late nineties the work just blossomed into paintings of snakes and ferns. And now you're exploring the archaeology of naturalism, with the Garden of Extinct Leaves (2005/06), for example.

PT: What I'm attracted to in the natural sciences has to do with the fact that if you imagine nature and the natural world five centuries ago, ten centuries ago, it was unknown: primordial, mysterious, unfathomable in its complexity and density, and how gradually, year after year, century after century, we are slowly able to identify and learn and describe and draw pictures of this natural world. I love early natural-history books for this reason. There is something so poignant about early depictions of animals. Then you get more detail in the nineteenth century with the behavioral studies, plant studies, the understanding of pollination, of ferns. Think of the people studying this day by day, and writing books full of detailed depictions of this infinitude of life on earth. It's breathtaking. If I can delve into one small aspect of this, and if I'm able to focus on something I've found and have a personal connection with, and I can make a work out of it, that's something important for me.

BA: The projects of these early scientists display a beautiful optimism.

PT: It's mystery and science combined. I think we've lost a lot of the mystery. I'm disappointed that a lot of scientists feel so negative about theology. That's not true for all scientists, but I don't see why theism and science can't coexist.

BA: Did you love nature as a child?

PT: I remember the weather. I loved snow and rain. I loved the sun and the trees and playing in the grass and digging in the earth.



BA: Did you have a backyard with flowers?

PT: There were flowers, worms, animals. I had a simple, normal relationship to whatever was around me. I spent a lot of time outdoors.

BA: Do you remember when you first saw an Islamic ornament?

PT: I knew about it from my childhood education. I used to go to the public library in Elizabeth, New Jersey and pore through the picture collection. I used to spend my entire Saturday in the picture collection of the public library. I would look at pictures of everything. As a child I would go to the Ritz Theater to see movies, that was a beautiful old Beaux-Arts Islamo-Orientalist opera house—and other movie houses as well. That sort of elaborate Islamic detail was not unusual in theaters from that period. My aunt Sheila once took me to see Muhammad Ali at the Audubon Ballroom in New York, I used to idolize him. There were a lot of Black Muslims there. She was fearless, the way she took me backstage so I could shake his hand. Later, when I was a teenager, my father was making business trips to Iran and Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, and would bring back souvenirs.

BA: What business was he in?

PT: He was the export sales manager of the General Mills Company. He would go over there and make these contracts for the flour, things like that.

BA: There's a painting from 1989 called Ahmed Mohammed. Is that Kufic script?

PT: Yes, it's a Kufic monogram, taken from an old calligraphy instruction booklet I found in Cairo. There was a whole section on Kufic monograms and it reminded me of wrought iron, because they were so rectilinear. They had arabesque in them but they were gridded, so I thought that it was an interesting structural device that could be brought to another kind of Western pictorial situation.

BA: Often your titles evoke places in the Arab world: Old Cairo, Samara, Kharragan Are they meant to evoke real places?

PT: I think what I do is I discover specific salient features that belong to a geographical or historical monument or place, some fragment of a place, and I use that as the central riff or the central anchor for how the work gets elaborated. That theme may eventually become submerged but it remains as the theme of the painting. Therefore, I apply the title, the designation, as the originating

impulse behind the generation of this image, although there are often other layers that ensue from the originating principle.

BA: For instance, where is Kharraqan?

PT: That's in Iran. There are sepulchral towers there constructed from incredibly elaborate relief brick formations. They're fairly straightforward but all-enveloping, and they keep shifting focus in a linear way, like a woven pattern. They'll go up as a diagonal, then they'll become vertical, then they'll shift again, and it's all done with brick. So this tower construction became the inspiration for the central part of that painting.

BA: Looking at your work, there's a complex, layered take on Islam. I see Islam filtered through the Gothic Revival.

PT: That's my favorite thing actually, where Islam meets the West. I encountered that early on in my travels, in Seville, and in Palermo at the Capella Palatina: that particular merging of Arab and Western concerns. Well, more specifically, Arab and Byzantine concerns.

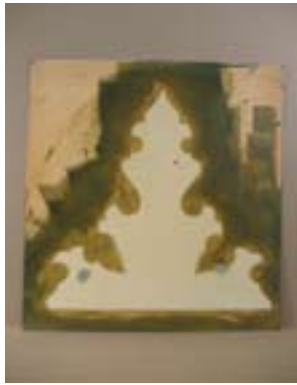
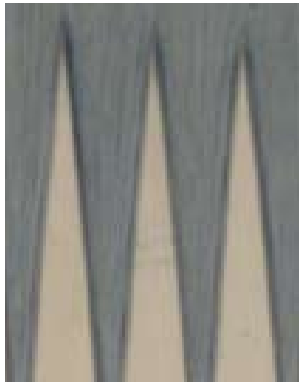
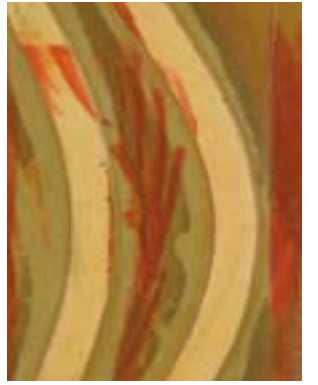
BA: How many times have you been to Morocco?

PT: Four or five times.

BA: Have you made art there?

PT: I've taken photographs there—when I worked on the book with Paul Bowles and Mohammed Mrabet, *Chocolate Creams and Dollars* (1992). I've tried to do drawings there, but I'm not good at working on things on the road. I'd much rather go to the bazaar and find some old pamphlet that's stuck under a batch of who knows what. I'm not one for holing up in a hotel room and drawing, unless I were staying for months at a time, then I would do that. I look for obscure things, visual artifacts of a place. I take pictures, I visit used bookshops, whatever seems interesting. The results often end up in my work. When I was in Damascus, just being in the Omayyad Mosque was enough inspiration for several works. There's an enormous mosaic depicting undulating waves, palms, architecture, with a strong Byzantine influence.







BA: The history of design is a constant subject for you. I don't know too many other contemporary artists who have implemented the history of design into their paintings. Was the history of contemporary design ever a field that fascinated you?

PT: No, I was always more interested in looking at paintings than at design, per se. And I always saw design as somehow subservient to painting, or how it might serve the needs of a painting. Design only comes alive for me when it becomes incorporated into a larger scheme of things, in a painting, in a pictorial fiction.

BA: How about your fascination for lesser-known artists, Paul Feeley or Charles Shaw? How did you discover Charles Shaw?

PT: Probably at Joan Washburn's gallery, or at the Museum of Modern Art, or at the Whitney Museum—he was an American post-constructivist thinker. A disciple of Jean Arp. I like discipleship. Carl Andre used to always say, "I'm a disciple of Brancusi. I'm merely an apprentice." I like the modesty of artists who become disciples of other artists: bringing the poetry of one's own personal life to the field of art history.

BA: Who are you a disciple of?

PT: (Long pause) That's a hard one to answer. Paul Klee, perhaps. Klee was a teacher, and I could be his student. He's exemplary in terms of his graphic experiments, his notations had an instrumental value for me when I was young. His analysis of nature, the influence of music, *The Thinking Eye*, *The Pedagogic Notebooks*, his travels in North Africa, the translucency of his colors, his imaginary cities . . . there are many similarities.

BA: I immediately thought of Klee when I saw the little insects in *Phasmidae*. Your work also operates on those disparities of scale—minute scales, too.

PT: I admire Klee's sense of pictorial fiction, the fantastic, and his wonderful sense of play. Also the constant change in his work: each thing is quite different from the next. He's good throughout. There are not a lot of artists who are good from start to finish, and I think he's one of them.

BA: By the year 2000, it seemed as if your aesthetic and your achievement were so pervasive, suddenly there were all kinds of things that looked like Philip Taaffes. It created a saturation that was disturbing.

PT: Well you know, Brooks, I do what I do as well as I possibly can, and I try to make paintings as powerful and complex and generous as possible, and I research them carefully. I make highly personal choices and I try to put everything I can into every painting that I make. But I recoil from the consequences of whatever they end up becoming in the world. My prospects for them and my sense of their potential in the world is always scaled back by my own sense of . . . I suppose pessimism is the word. I wouldn't call it nihilism, but I'm pessimistic. There's an anxiety that I feel about the subject. I've never been good with that whole side of things: what the world does to art. I guess that's why I'm trying for a more monastic posture. I want to be in an Alessandro Magnasco painting, in a refectory, listening to the pet crow . . .

BA: You are not responsible for it, but it has to do with the increase in popularity of contemporary art. The image culture will eat anything.

PT: The public side of art is important and I admit some artists are better at handling it than others. Some artists thrive on that kind of interface, it's part of their work. I've never felt comfortable with it. It's the frailty of whatever magic there is that I have tremendous enthusiasm for, but once I've finished and the painting leaves the studio there's a dissipation and then I move on to the next thing. What thrills me is being in the studio and conjuring up these things. Once they're out in the world one imagines they are somehow going to places where they would have an ideal life. But it's just silly to have those expectations.

BA: Were you attracted by the Dia Art Foundation idea in the nineteen-seventies, and what's become of it since? The one-man museum?

PT: I love the Cy Twombly Museum in Houston—that's wonderful. But it's hard to control these other outcomes.

BA: Brice Marden's recent paintings seem to be aspiring to a chapel installation.

PT: The work certainly deserves one. The *Cold Mountain* installation at Dia in New York in 1991 had a big effect on me. He's kept developing and doing extraordinary things subsequently. Another artist I deeply admire is Sigmar Polke. I first saw his work at Holly Solomon's gallery in New York.

It was much more interesting to me than American Pop Art. He was informed by their ideas, and yet he was able to cut inside of Pop Art in a way that was historically more broad, and more profound, perhaps because he was coming from a place that was further away. He exploded that everyday way of making a painting. The works were shorthand, like a code or cipher. They brought you to another place that was kind of Pop, but wasn't strictly about consumer culture. He's completely open—there is no sense of closure to his work. He can bring historical visual information to a painting and really make it his own. I love his use of found fabric, and found contemporary imagery. I like the labor-intensiveness of his work. He's able to synthesize a lot of disparate material and bring it together in one place. Polke is a painter who has incredible transformative abilities, and his graphic style is unique. He does it all well.

BA: Have you ever visited him?

PT: No, I've never met him. He also has a monastic temperament. He's reclusive, so he's able to get a lot of work done. His work never feels glib to me. You would think that someone who was as prolific as he is would sometimes be glib, but he isn't. And the work has a Baroque scale, which I admire. His use of resins and weird materials—he's a great alchemist. He's walking a tightrope, performing all these great antics—a pictorial acrobat. There's a gymnastic quality to the work, it's vigorous. The reason he can get away with all these things and the way he does them is because of the strong intelligence behind the work. I like the intellectual rigor of it. Also his whole attitude toward photography is very liberating, wonderfully nonchalant. He treats photography as just part of our daily discourse. There's a certain preciousness to what I do, and that's why I like what he does—his lack of preciousness. He's a great teacher for me.

BA: How does that preciousness function?

PT: A more acute fragility. It just happens to be how I go about doing things. Maybe it has to do with the use of collage, the thinness of paper and fusing it with the canvas—you know there are a lot of tricks that I do that merge collage with the surface. I don't like a lot of debris in my paintings—they're smooth. I don't like a lot of texture.



BA: I sometimes wonder if you ever feel like a salon painter? You have this amazing labor-intensive process. Very gradually things are built up, sometimes for years, there are assistants involved. It's a bit like the assembly of the salon paintings: you're very much the author of a work, the way Gustave Courbet is the author of *The Painter's Studio*, full of readings and subtexts.

PT: I've always thought of myself more as a *refusé*. I don't feel an affinity for the salon, no. What you seem to be saying could be true, although I think it gets short-circuited along the way.

BA: How?

PT: I break things. I undermine my own best intentions. And they're improvised, as I said. They're unpredictable. I don't want to know how something is eventually going to turn out. They're more about process, and finding my way in this field of uncertainty. I'm not trying to please any particular group of people.

BA: And they're not illustrations either.

PT: No, but it's an interesting question. I've always thought of myself as being an experimental artist. I guess there was some experimentation going on in the nineteenth century.

BA: Not as much.

PT: I have a certain distaste for a great deal of nineteenth-century art. It's one of my least favorite periods in fact—with the exception of the people who began to break with the nineteenth century, like Cézanne. Or earlier in the century, the turn towards Romanticism. I'm also fond of Corot. But I really don't like those nineteenth-century academic paintings, I don't like them at all.

BA: But you like nineteenth-century decorative art. And nineteenth-century science.

PT: Yes, by all means, and the museum is a nineteenth-century concept.

BA: I want to ask you about some specific paintings that are in the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg exhibition. What was the source for *Mosaic* (1991)?

PT: It's actually a fragment of a Paul Feeley work. The double dentate shape in yellow that is arranged like a quatrefoil at the center of the painting is something I freely sketched from a Paul

Gustave Courbet, *The Painter's Studio*, 1854/55, 359×598 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Feeley painting. I took that form as the starting point and extrapolated all of the permutations from there. I cut out several of these small toothlike forms in paper and placed them face down on glass that had been prepared with rolled printer's ink, so the paper forms would act as masks. Then I placed a piece of paper down on the glass to take the impression of the external shapes. I would do that many times over until I had quite an inventory of printed pages and shapes and densities of ink. As the ink got depleted, I would remove the masks and put them again on another sheet of paper on the floor, and they began curling up. I put another piece of paper over the paper that had the curling masks, and I would repeat the process. Then I stacked eight of these large sheets and collaged them onto the canvas, and the whole thing was tinted. All the negative shapes were very important to me. It's an encyclopedic application of the single dentate shape. Everything emanates from that one shape.

BA: Then it was tinted?

PT: The whole thing was tinted, and then a mosaic formation was composed over the pages. All of these negative abstract shapes were like passageways or little compartments, and these figures are composed with respect to the liveliness of the negative shapes that are coming through, until I had a nice figure-ground relationship taking place.

BA: It has the appearance of symmetry but it's not, or it's natural symmetry?

PT: It has the effect of symmetry, but it's completely broken down. The central part looks like a Roman staff, the device used to parade around the emperor's standard—that is how I thought of it.

BA: In the painting *Matinee* (1991), what is that big black silhouette?

PT: It's an aperture, or a keyhole, as though one were looking at a partial view of a flickering image on a silver screen in the darkness of a movie house.

BA: I read it as a figure on a black ground, and you seem to be reading it just the opposite.

PT: It flips back and forth.

BA: There are many cinema references in your work, there's a Cinema Posilipo, Quad Cinema. You spent some time at the movies. What about Quad Cinema (1986)?

PT: It was made in small sections, just partial radii that I collaged from the center out, then I painted out the center in black. See how the radii of one circle continue into the next when the circles touch? That was important to me so it was done first. In that way they would be continuous. It was a very measured work. The black dots are sort of like spores waiting to maneuver themselves into a vortex.

BA: I get a Roto-relief feeling of Duchamp from this. A non-New Yorker might not know that the Quad Cinema is actually four movie houses in one. It's a very literal place. Is this a place painting as well?

PT: Yes, it's another place painting. It has an everyday feeling. I like the fact that Duchamp first introduced his Roto-reliefs under the auspices of a trade show, sitting amongst other inventors who were demonstrating their new gizmos. If you spend time with the painting, it takes on an almost masklike quality. It turns into something else. It immediately strikes one as being about opticality and geometry, but then all of that seems to degrade and break down into something more primitive, having to do with eyes, perhaps a figure carved into the canvas in a very direct way.

BA: When did you begin with the marbling process?

PT: Frequently when I paint, I pour liquid color onto raw or gessoed canvases and use mops as paintbrushes to push the paint around. I've always been fascinated by the way the rivulets of paint look as they move and blend. I never know what's going to happen until the following day when it all settles and dries. So it occurred to me that I should learn about this marbling method, because it could be an extremely useful drawing medium. I wanted to explore liquid on liquid. I knew that marbling involved floating color on the surface of a liquid, but I didn't know the technique, so I began to research the subject from books. Before long I realized I needed to find someone to give me a tutorial. I located a lady named Iris Nevins who had written a book about Spanish marbling—it was self-published and it was beautiful and interesting. She was a very intelligent advocate for this particular art form. I telephoned information and found her number. I called her up and I said, "I read your book, I would like to visit you. Do you teach, can you help me?" She said, "Yes, certainly, come out to see me." I drove out to her farm in the far reaches of northwestern New Jersey where she lived with her husband, who was an early jazz vinyl collector and a very close friend of the artist R. Crumb, who is also a great record collector. The husband was a weird man, very

unfriendly to me, but she was as nice as could be. A gothic-looking lady, long black hair and slightly severe, but gentle and very nice. She took me into her workshop and we proceeded to marble. I spent the day with her and she turned me onto other books and other schools of paper marbling. She was friends with Nedim Sönmez, a famous paper marbler from Turkey, whose books I'd read.

BA: What type of work did he do?

PT: Marbleized miniatures, a little more precious than what I was seeking, but very good. There's a whole marbling community out there who earn their living by providing endpapers for fine-book publishers, and they produce every style imaginable. One thing Iris Nevins would not reveal was any of her formulas for making the paint. She showed me how to mix the carragen moss, a viscous liquid that you put in the tray and throw the color onto. She showed me how to manipulate the paint, she explained how the alum fixes the colors to the paper, she told me the right amounts of ox gall to make the color spread—every color has its own weight and chemistry which determine how it reacts to other substances and colors. But the one thing she would not do is give me any of her recipes for pigments. There's a lot of information out there now that one can research, but before the twentieth century there was absolutely nothing, a complete secret. There was a kind of Masonic stricture against passing on these recipes. But at least after my tutorial I knew where to begin.

BA: How long did it take you to master the process?

PT: I haven't mastered it. I worked on it every single day, for weeks and weeks. I had to stop everything else, I was lost to this technique. I understood how alchemists became engrossed. Suddenly things began to happen. It's fascinating because you really get to know the chemistry of color. I drew on the surface of the water with droppers of inks and styluses. It was a very trancelike, mesmerizing process. Eventually I made an enormous marbling pool here in the studio, about six by eight feet, with a plastic liner. I started using oils and enamels. By now I've used everything imaginable.

BA: Did you encounter any other contemporary artists who used this technique?

PT: After she saw some of this work, Bice Curiger told me about a wonderful Swiss artist named André Thomkins, a Fluxus-type artist, a colleague of Dieter Roth and Daniel Spoerri. I found out about his work and even managed to acquire one of his "astronaut" drawings done by marbling.

I made contact with his widow to find out what paint he was using, but that turned out to be a dead end. So I proceeded on my own.

BA: You were marbling on canvas also?

PT: Yes, but that's hard to do. Because of the weight of the canvas you tend to get blank areas that don't get inked, because of air bubbles—it doesn't work so well. Also, paper is a much more responsive surface.

BA: There are no second takes in this process?

PT: Yes, there are. Sometimes I go over a drawing again with two or three applications, one acrylic, one oil, it gets really wild. If a drawing doesn't work out the first time you can try to recycle it by reworking it again in a few days. Later still, I began mixing marbling with collage.

BA: Is there a lot of editing involved with these results?

PT: Yes. Just imagine the entire studio filled with blotter paper and wet sheets of marbled paper, thirty, forty, fifty sheets of paper, day after day. And this is going on for weeks. One builds up a certain momentum. It's like making a film, you're exposing footage, and at the end of the day you study the dailies—get rid of this, go in that direction . . .

BA: There's a kind of ombré psychedelic effect too.

PT: Yes indeed.

BA: Are you a psychedelic artist?

PT: I wouldn't deny it!

BA: One painting that mixes marbling and collage is *Lizard Music* (2001). What attracts you to reptiles like lizards and snakes? Do you see them as friendly?

PT: Oh yes, I think they are. They're very protective, you know. I like the fact that they participate in both worlds, the world of the sinister and diabolical, and then depending upon a certain cultural relativity they are divine, they are to be worshipped. Initially I was drawn principally to their calli-





graphic potential. I would look forward to seeing them and using them—just irresistible. I knew I wanted to make them part of my vocabulary.

BA: Somehow your whole approach became much simpler in paintings when you were working with snake imagery.

PT: I get to the point where there's so much density and buildup and so many layers that I feel as though I can't do anything else and then I just let go. These snakes occurred to me at such a moment when I had reached that point of oversaturation and I needed a simpler approach to line and shape and a means of getting there with greater immediacy. I'm starting to reach that phase again, I can feel it.

BA: You came full circle recently. In the mid-eighties you were appropriating Barnett Newman, who wrote on the Kwakiutl. Then in your 2004/05 work, you began appropriating Northwest Coast tribal forms. Did you read Newman's text on Pacific Northwest Coast art when you were younger?

PT: Yes, that was a very important text for me. It gets back to the concept of the sacramental. It's very important to understand how these tribes can inform our understanding of religious principles and the psychology of nirvana, or of the ecstatic, and how these belief systems operate and are manifested.

BA: I see you are working on a new Cape painting. The paper cut-out heads are visual aids?

PT: They're proofs, for locational purposes. Later I will silkscreen those heads directly onto the canvas. This is following a course of buildup. The heads are a combination of Coptic and Byzantine faces, and some are coming from Central Asia, eastern Persia, and into Afghanistan. A crossroads. They're a cast of characters, and they need to be a certain size in order to accomplish this drama. The painting at this stage consists of tangents, and proximities, and gestural overlays. I'm working out the specifics of how all the elements will relate spatially. I'm laying the groundwork for what is to occur. The painting has to be kept vigorous and complex—and it will be undermined and sabotaged in ways that are hard to see immediately.

BA: Do you have a sense of what the final form will be?

PT: No, it's completely improvised. I like the idea of having a working rhythm. It shouldn't be planned out, because all the little accidents which accrue along the way are what make the painting.

BA: In your 2007 Gagosian exhibition in New York you had three paintings named for capes: Cape Sinope, Cape Vitus, and Cape Zephyr. What fascinates you about a cape?

PT: I like the idea that it is a promontory, a terminus point, an extreme end of something. I used to go to Cape May, New Jersey as a child. I've always loved coastal charts and guides, and I've always liked the idea of the cape as a point of navigation. As something jutting out into the ocean, a cape is very attractive, romantic. Usually the cape is where the lighthouse was, so it became a summoning point for seafarers, a nautical demarcation point, bringing them home to this point of land, finally going into port. The cape is about finding one's way. Those paintings stemmed from my involvement with the Pacific Northwest Coast imagery and the fact that there are more capes in that part of the world than in any other. I started researching capes. I consulted nautical charts and made lists of capes from all over the world. Then I realized that it didn't have to be an actual cape. For instance, *Cape Sinope* is not a cape at all, it's a town on the Black Sea, the birthplace of Diogenes. *Cape Vitus* was named after Vitus Bering who discovered the Bering Strait.

BA: That's at the end of Alaska.

PT: Right. Bering had quite a lot to do with discovering these channels. So I called one *Cape Vitus* and then *Cape Sinope* and the third one is *Cape Zephyr*. Zephyr is the god of the west winds.

BA: How do you see yourself when you are working on a painting—as a navigator, an explorer?

PT: Maybe I'm the lighthouse keeper. I named a painting *Pharos* after the famed lighthouse in Alexandria. I love lighthouses. They're symbols of exploration.

BA: You told me yesterday that you've arrived at a new realization of yourself as an artist.

PT: It was absolute torment for me to go through this. At the end I realized: What is going to liberate me from this process of self-inquiry? What can I say that will make me feel I'm straightening things out for myself and getting to the heart of the matter? For the first time, I declared myself a

sacramental artist. I had never said that before. I believe painting is a sacramental act. I know there's more to be said on that subject, but I thought I'd make a declaration, because it's the kind of thing I've always been afraid of. Those are deeply personal values and I always felt they had to be stated in an apophatic way. Apophatic philosophy takes a negative approach, where you define something by declaring what it is not. I feel as though I'm moving away from this. I want to speak of what I feel most grounded by, what most interests me. What I look for in a work of art, in painting, is that it offers some healing power which can protect us and strengthen our sense of what we most love about being alive in this world. That's what a sacrament is. It's an affirmation of life.

BA: It's constant renewal.

PT: That's what painting should be.





Bottle with arabesque decor and Persian inscription, Iran,
13th century, painted quartz frit ceramic, h 25.5 cm, ø 15.5 cm

Checklist of Exhibited Works

<p><i>Ahmed Muhammed</i> 1989 Acrylic and enamel on linen 223.5 × 264 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 117</p> <p><i>Al Basrah</i> 2002 Oil pigment on linen 65 × 50 cm Private Collection, Bologna Fig. p. 119</p> <p><i>Al Quasbah</i> 1991 Mixed media on linen 228.5 × 459.5 cm Rafael Jablonka Collection Fig. pp. 106–107</p> <p><i>Alluvium</i> 2002 Mixed media on paper, mounted on canvas 76 × 102 cm Private Collection, Modena Fig. p. 161</p> <p><i>Aurora Borealis</i> 1988 Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas 81 × 617 cm Private Collection, Switzerland Fig. pp. 92–93</p> <p><i>Bal Asterie</i> 2004 Mixed media on paper, mounted on canvas 73 × 102 cm Private Collection, Milan Fig. p. 163</p> <p><i>Banded Enclosure</i> 1988 Wax print, acrylic on canvas Diptych, 346 × 397 cm Rafael Jablonka Collection Fig. pp. 80–81</p> <p><i>Black Volta</i> 1994/95 Mixed media on canvas 287 × 358.5 cm Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. pp. 108–109</p> <p><i>Black, White</i> 1985/86</p>	<p>Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas 107 × 88 cm Private Collection, Switzerland Fig. p. 65</p> <p><i>Blackburst I</i> 1980/81 Paper collage and gouache on Masonite 129 × 119 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 33</p> <p><i>Block Island</i> 1986 Mixed media on canvas 61 × 46 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 54</p> <p><i>Blood Money</i> 1986 Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas 137 × 257 cm Private Collection, Switzerland Fig. pp. 72–73</p> <p><i>Blue/Green</i> 1987 Silkscreen collage, acrylic on canvas 220 × 173 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 75</p> <p><i>Brest</i> 1983/84 Linoprint and acrylic on paper, mounted on canvas 196 × 196 cm Paul Maenz Collection, Berlin Fig. p. 63</p> <p><i>By Twos</i> 1985 Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas 168.5 × 41.5 cm Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 51</p> <p><i>Cairene Panel with Spirals</i> 2008 Mixed media on canvas 92,5 × 366 cm Courtesy the Artist Fig. p. 178</p> <p><i>Cairene Panel with Twelve Pointed Star</i> 2008</p>	<p>Mixed media on canvas 59 × 336 cm Courtesy the Artist Fig. p. 179</p> <p><i>Calligram (Vermilion)</i> 2002 Acrylic on paper, mounted on canvas 23 × 29 cm Courtesy Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento Fig. p. 157</p> <p><i>Calligraphic Study I</i> 1996 Mixed media on canvas 116.8 × 162.5 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 135</p> <p><i>Cape Sinope</i> 2006/07 Mixed media on canvas 289.8 × 246.7 cm Private Collection, courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 167</p> <p><i>Cappella</i> 1991 Mixed media on canvas 279 × 279 cm Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 101</p> <p><i>Chi-Chi Meets the Death of Painting</i> 1985 Acrylic paint over linoprint on paper 284 × 114.3 cm Rafael Jablonka Collection Fig. p. 47</p> <p><i>Cobra Nocturne</i> 1997 Mixed media on canvas 139.7 × 167.6 cm Courtesy Peter Blum Gallery, New York Fig. p. 137</p> <p><i>Color Field Painting</i> 1983 Mixed media on paper 254 × 186 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 37</p> <p><i>Coptic Perforated Stone Screen</i> 2008</p>	<p>Mixed media on canvas 45 × 335.5 cm Courtesy the Artist Without figure</p> <p><i>Desert Flowers</i> 1990 Mixed media on canvas 155.5 × 200 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 105</p> <p><i>Devonian Leaves II</i> 2004 Mixed media on paper, mounted on canvas 128 × 100 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 165</p> <p><i>Dryadic Figures</i> 2006 Mixed media on canvas 214.6 × 257.8 cm Private Collection, Courtesy Ammann Fine Art, Zurich Fig. pp. 168–169</p> <p><i>Eros and Psyche</i> 1994 Mixed media on canvas 335 × 255 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 127</p> <p><i>Expire</i> 1989 Acrylic and enamel on linen 289.5 × 190 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 97</p> <p><i>Fern Totem</i> 2001 Mixed media on canvas 292 × 111 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 147</p> <p><i>Figures in Perforated Time</i> 1993/94 Mixed media on canvas 215 × 300 cm Private Collection Fig. pp. 122–123</p> <p><i>Frieze</i> 1986 Mixed media 59.5 × 528 cm</p>	<p>Private Collection, Switzerland Fig. pp. 78–79</p> <p><i>Garden of Light</i> 1997 Mixed media on canvas 298 × 138 cm Tracey and Phillip Riese Collection, New York Fig. p. 141</p> <p><i>Green/White Stoppages</i> 1984 Linoprint collage, enamel, acrylic on canvas 215.9 × 215.9 cm Courtesy of Jeffrey Deitch Collection Fig. p. 41</p> <p><i>Homo Fortissimus Excelsus</i> 1985 Mixed media on canvas 244 × 548.5 cm Private Collection Fig. pp. 48–49</p> <p><i>Il Terrazzo</i> 1988 Mixed media on paper, mounted on canvas 20 panels, 326 × 408 cm Rafael Jablonka Collection Fig. pp. 94–95</p> <p><i>Imaginary Flower Triptych</i> 2002 Acrylic on paper, mounted on canvas Ø 37 cm Courtesy Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich Fig. p. 158</p> <p><i>Imaginary Flower Triptych</i> 2002 Acrylic on paper, mounted on canvas Ø 37 cm Courtesy Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich Fig. p. 159</p> <p><i>Inner City</i> 1993 Mixed media on canvas 251.4 × 266.7 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 131</p> <p><i>Intersecting Balustrades</i> 1987</p>
--	---	---	---	--

Enamel silkscreen collage, acrylic on canvas 330 × 142 cm Rafael Jablonka Collection Fig. pp. 76–77	<i>Moonman</i> 1985 Linoprint collage, acrylic, enamel on paper 45.7 × 48.2 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 53	Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 139	68 × 96 cm Private Collection, Modena Fig. p. 164	38 × 29 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 30
<i>Kharragan</i> 1998/99 Mixed media on canvas 293 × 126 cm Courtesy Peter Blum Gallery, New York Fig. p. 115	<i>Mosaic</i> 1991 Mixed media on canvas 248.8 × 231.5 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 111	<i>Quad Cinema</i> 1986 Linoprint collage, acrylic, enamel on canvas 214 × 208 cm Goetz Collection Fig. p. 71	<i>South Ferry</i> 1985/86 Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas 112 × 96.5 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 67	<i>Viking Filigree Totem</i> 2008 Mixed media on canvas 373 × 159.5 cm Courtesy the Artist Without figure
<i>La Sciarra</i> 1993 Mixed media on canvas 285 × 308 cm Private Collection On permanent loan to Hamburger Kunsthalle Fig. p. 125	<i>Old Cairo</i> 1989 Monoprint collage, acrylic and oil on canvas 231 × 172.5 cm Private Collection, Switzerland Fig. p. 113	<i>Quadro Vesuviano</i> 1988 Monoprint collage, acrylic on linen 226 × 174 cm Rafael Jablonka Collection Fig. p. 99	<i>Theodora</i> 2003 Mixed media on canvas 166 × 199 cm Private Collection Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 155	<i>We Are Not Afraid</i> 1985 Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas 304.8 × 259.1 cm Rafael Jablonka Collection Fig. p. 43
<i>Large Viking Filigree Painting</i> 2008 Mixed media on canvas 327.5 × 277.5 cm Courtesy the Artist Fig. p. 183	<i>Onement</i> 1987 Metallic silkscreen collage, casein acrylic, enamel on canvas 259 × 305 cm Private Collection Fig. pp. 84–85	<i>Queen of the Night</i> 1985 Linoprint collage, acrylic on canvas 274 × 122 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 45	<i>Timothy's Gate Transfigured</i> 1987 Mixed media on canvas 190.5 × 152.5 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 87	<i>Written on the Bay</i> 1988 Mixed media on canvas 179 × 146 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 103
<i>Lizard Music</i> 2002 Mixed media on canvas 69 × 95 cm Private Collection, Modena Fig. p. 162	<i>Paesaggio con elementi da ferro battuto</i> 2004 Mixed media on paper, mounted on canvas 100 × 128 cm Private Collection, Rome Fig. p. 160	<i>Rebound</i> 1987 Enamel silkscreen collage, acrylic on canvas 165 × 165 cm Private Collection, Switzerland Fig. p. 89	<i>Tirggel Painting with Lion Encountering Reindeer</i> 2008 Mixed media on canvas 265 × 342 cm Courtesy the Artist Fig. p. 181	<i>Yellow, Grey</i> 1987 Mixed media on canvas 213 × 141 cm Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 91
<i>Lunapark</i> 2001 Mixed media on canvas Two panels, 424 × 292.5 cm Essl Museum Klosterneuburg/Vienna Fig. p. 149	<i>Painting with Byzantine Fragments</i> 2008 Mixed media on canvas 325 × 325 cm Courtesy the Artist Fig. p. 180	<i>Reef</i> 1999/2000 Mixed media on canvas 285.8 × 285.8 cm Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 145	<i>Unit of Direction</i> 2003 Mixed media on canvas 306 × 306 cm Essl Museum Klosterneuburg/Vienna Fig. p. 175	<i>Yellow Painting</i> 1984 Linoprint collage, acrylic, enamel on canvas 192 × 192 cm Rafael Jablonka Collection Fig. p. 59
<i>Mandala</i> 2001/02 Mixed media on canvas 293 × 295 cm Private Collection Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 151	<i>Passage de Venus sur le soleil</i> 1998/99 Mixed media on canvas 293.5 × 222.5 cm Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 143	<i>Reliquary</i> 1990/91 Mixed media on canvas 230 × 282 cm Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. pp. 82–83	<i>Untitled</i> 2002 Acrylic on paper, mounted on canvas 30 × 41 cm Collection Raymond Foye, New York Fig. p. 156	Comparative Illustrations
<i>Martyr Group</i> 1983 Mixed media on canvas 264.2 × 264.2 cm Rafael Jablonka Collection Fig. pp. 38–39	<i>Perforated Stone Coptic Panel</i> 2008 Mixed media on canvas 80 × 350 cm Courtesy the Artist Fig. p. 182	<i>Sanctuary</i> 2002 Mixed media on canvas 221 × 302 cm Rafael Jablonka Collection Fig. p. 153	<i>Untitled (Study for Matinee)</i> 1992 Oil on canvas 104 × 86 cm Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 120	Bottle with arabesque decor and Persian inscription Iran, 13th century Painted quartz frit ceramic H 25.5 cm, Ø 15.5 cm Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz Museum of Islamic Art Fig. p. 230
<i>Matinee</i> 1991 Mixed media on canvas 252 × 134.5 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 121	<i>Phasmidae</i> 2002 Mixed media on canvas 142 × 177 cm Private Collection Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 146	<i>Semara</i> 2002 Mixed media on canvas 71 × 102 cm Collection Giordano Raffaelli, Trento Fig. p. 114	<i>Untitled Composition</i> 1984/85 Linoprint collage, acrylic and oil on canvas 223 × 173.5 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 57	Tile Iznik, 16th century Ceramic 27 × 26.5 cm Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz Museum of Islamic Art Fig. p. 208
<i>Megapolis</i> 1996 Mixed media on canvas 420 × 954 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. pp. 132–133	<i>Pine Columns II</i> 1989 Woodblock print, acrylic on linen 291 × 255 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 104	<i>Shaded Sphere</i> 1984 Enamel silkscreen, collage, acrylic on paper with linen edges 263 × 274 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 61	<i>Untitled I</i> 1980 Collage on paper 48 × 41 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 35	Fillings from the Minbar of Ladjin Egypt, 1296 Wood Without dimensions Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz Museum of Islamic Art Without illustration
<i>Migration</i> 2006 Mixed media on linen Three panels, overall 241 × 648 cm Bruce Wasserstein Collection, New York Fig. pp. 172–173	<i>Port of Saints</i> 2007 Mixed media on canvas 306 × 257 cm Essl Museum Klosterneuburg/Vienna Fig. p. 171	<i>Signal</i> 1986 Mixed media on canvas 152.4 × 152.4 cm Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin Fig. p. 69	<i>Untitled I</i> 1980/81 Collage on paper 30.5 × 23 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 29	Fossils and minerals from the Staatliches Naturhistorisches Museum Braunschweig Without figures
<i>Missa Caput</i> 1984/85 Linoprint collage, acrylic, oil on canvas 231 × 172.7 cm Private Collection, Switzerland Fig. p. 55	<i>Pteris Viscosa</i> 1996 Mixed media on canvas 168.3 × 140.9 cm	<i>Siraspatha</i> 1993/94 Mixed media on canvas 293.5 × 277 cm Private Collection Fig. p. 129	<i>Untitled III</i> 1980/81 Collage on paper 30.5 × 23 cm Private Collection, New York Fig. p. 31	Capital Al-Andalus (Cordoba), mid 10th century Marble H 33, Ø abacus 31 cm Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz Museum of Islamic Art Fig. p. 21
		<i>Solaris</i> 2002 Mixed media on paper, mounted on canvas	<i>Untitled IV</i> 1980/81 Collage on paper	

Authors' Biographies

Brooks Adams, born in 1954, is a writer and art critic based in Paris and New York. He is also a contributing editor of *Art in America* magazine. He received a master's degree in art history from New York University. His published books and contributions have included *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* (1997); *David Smith: The Last Nudes* (2000); *Clyfford Still Paintings 1944–1960* (2001); *Writings on Cy Twombly* (2003).

Holger Broeker, born 1959. Studied art history, modern history, literary studies, and philosophy in Gießen. Ph.D. thesis "Bildkonzeption der Stilleben Jean Siméon Chardins." From 1990 to 1992 assistant curator at the Kunsthalle Hamburg and teaching assignment at Lüneburg University. 1993 inventory of contemporary artworks in collections open to the public in northern Germany for the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg. Work on the collection catalogue of the Dutch paintings in the Kunsthalle Hamburg. Since 1994 curator of the collection and for temporary exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg. Exhibitions and publications, among others *Generation X* (2005), *Spurensuche* (2006); as well as on Olafur Eliasson (2004); Neo Rauch (2006); Gary Hill (2006); Douglas Gordon (2007).

Markus Brüderlin, born 1958, studied art history, art education, philosophy, and German in Vienna. Doctoral thesis on abstract art in the twentieth century. Exhibition curator and journalist on the art of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, design, and architecture. From 1994 to 1996 art curator of the Austrian Federal Ministry

of Science, Research, and Art. Founder of the Kunstraum Vienna and the journal *Springer*. For several years curator at the Fondation Beyeler in Riehen/Basel. Supervised the exhibitions *AURA. Wiener Secession* (1994); *Ornament und Abstraktion* (2001); *Anselm Kiefer. Die sieben HimmelsPaläste 1973–2001* (2001/02); *Expressiv!* (2003); *ArchiSkulptur* (2004/06); *Japan and the West. The Filled Void* (2007), among others. Director of the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg since 2006.

Kay Heymer, born 1960. From 1981 to 1988 studied art history, prehistory and ancient history as well as modern history at the Ruhr-Universität in Bochum; 1988 Master's degree with a thesis on primitivism as a subject of art theory. Since 1985 organization of numerous exhibitions of contemporary and African art, among others for the Museum Ludwig, Cologne; the Dresden Kunstverein; the National Gallery of Modern Art in Munich. From 1991 to 2006 head of projects and curator at the Art and Exhibition Hall of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bonn. Since 1988 publication of numerous texts on contemporary and African art. His book co-authored with Marco Livingstone *David Hockney: Portraits and People* (2003) received the Sir Banister Fletcher Award in 2004 for the best art book of the year in Great Britain. Kay Heymer lives in Essen as a freelance author.

Biography

1955 Born in Elizabeth, New Jersey
1974–1977 Studies at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art

Lives and works in New York

Solo Exhibitions

- 2007 *Recent Paintings*, Gagosian Gallery, New York
Works from the Portalakis Collection, The Portalakis Collection, Athens
- 2004 *Carte annuolate*, Galleria d'Arte Moderna Contemporanea della Repubblica di San Marino, San Marino
Jablonka Galerie, Cologne
- 2003 *Recent Paintings & Drawings*, Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich
- 2002 *Illuminations*, Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento
Ten Paintings, Jablonka Galerie, Cologne
- 2001 *Confluence. Selected Works from 1990 to Present*, University Art Gallery, University of California, La Jolla, California
Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea, Trento
Œuvres récentes, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris
- 2000 IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Centre del Carne, Valencia
New Paintings, Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1999 Baldwin Gallery, Aspen, Colorado
Recent Paintings, Gagosian Gallery, New York
- 1998 Rebecca M. Camhi Gallery, Athens
Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich
- 1997 *Composite Nature*, Peter Blum Gallery, New York
Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles
Mario Diacono Gallery, Boston
- 1996 Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin
Wiener Secession, Vienna
- 1994 *Recent Paintings*, Gagosian Gallery, New York
- 1993 Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin
Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas
New Work, Center for the Fine Arts, Miami

1991 Galerie Max Hetzler, Cologne
Recent Paintings, Gagosian Gallery, New York

1990 Galerie Samia Saouma, Paris

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

1988 Donald Young Gallery, Chicago
Galerie Lucio Amelio, Naples, Italy

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

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

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

1982 Roger Litz Gallery, New York

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2007 *Camouflage*, Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon
Contemporary Art at the Colby College Museum of Art. Gifts from the Alex Katz Foundation, Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine
Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York
Harry Smith Anthology Remixed, alt.gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne
Optic Nerve. Perceptual Art of the 1960s, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus
Painting as Fact—Fact as Fiction, De Pury & Luxembourg, Zurich
Pop Art 1960's–2000's. From the Misumi Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, Ibaraki; Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art; Hachioji Yume Art Museum
- 2005 8e Biennale d'Art Contemporain Lyon
Alchimie Saline, Palazzo Medico, San Leo, Città di 'San Leo
Le Printemps de Septembre. Vertiges, Les Abattoirs, Toulouse
Nach Rokytnik. Die Sammlung der EVN, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna
The Painted Word, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, New York

2004 *Drawings*, Gagosian Gallery, London
East Village USA, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
Parkett. Editionen, Kunsthau Zürich, Zurich
Vision einer Sammlung/A Collection's Vision, Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Mönchsberg
Visions of America. Zeitgenössische Kunst aus der Sammlung Essl und der Sonnabend Collection, New York, Sammlung Essl, Klosterneuburg/Vienna

2003 *Genetic Expressions. Art after DNA*, Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, New York
Greetings from New York. A Painting Show, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg
Montagna. Arte, scienza, mito da Dürer a Warhol, Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto
New Abstract Painting. Painting Abstract Now. Abstraktion in der neuen Malerei, Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen
Pictura magistra vitae. I nuovi simboli della pittura contemporanea, San Giorgio in Poggiale, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio, Bologna
The Invisible Thread: Buddhist Spirit in Contemporary Art, Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Staten Island, New York
The Spirit of White, Galerie Beyeler, Basel
Warped Space, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco

2002 *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward. Selected Works by Harry Smith, Philip Taaffe, Fred Tomaselli*, James Cohan Gallery, New York
We Love Painting. The Contemporary American Art from Misumi Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo

2001 *Give & Take*, Serpentine Gallery, London; Victoria & Albert Museum, London
Monstring. Mellem arabesk og objekt/Patterns. Between Object and Arabesque, Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik, Odense
Mythic Proportions. Painting in the 1980s, Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami
Ornament und Abstraktion. Kunst der Kulturen, Moderne und Gegenwart im Dialog, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel

2000 *Opulent*, Cheim & Read, New York

1999 *00: Drawings 2000*, Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
"Auffrischender Wind aus wechselnden Richtungen." *Internationale Avantgarde seit 1960. Die Sammlung Paul Maenz*, Neues Museum, Weimar
Botanica. Contemporary Art and the World of Plants, Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota, Duluth, Minnesota; Plains Art Museum, Fargo, North Dakota; University Galleries, Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois;

- Carleton College Art Gallery, Northfield, Minnesota; Alexandria Museum of Art, Alexandria, Louisiana; Tarble Arts Center, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois; Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago; University Gallery, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware
Itinere2, Palazzo delle Papesse, Siena
Post-hypnotic, University Galleries of Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois; McKinney Avenue Contemporary Arts Center, Dallas, Texas; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio; Atlanta College of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago; Tweed Museum of Art, Duluth, Minnesota
Real Stories II, Marianne Boesky Gallery/Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York
The American Century. Art & Culture 1900–2000, Part II: 1950–2000, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- 1998 *Ensemble moderne. Das moderne Stilleben/The Still Life in Modern Art*, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg, Paris
Now and Forever. Part I, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York; Matthew Marks Gallery, New York
Reflections of Monet, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
WallPaper, Nicholas Davies Gallery, New York
- 1997 *After the Fall. Aspects of Abstract Painting since 1970*, Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Staten Island, New York
Animal Tales, Whitney Museum of American Art at Champion, New York
Birth of the Cool. Amerikanische Malerei von Georgia O'Keeffe bis Christopher Wool, Deichtorhallen Hamburg; Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich
KünstlerInnen. 50 Positionen zeitgenössischer internationaler Kunst. Videoportraits und Werke, Kunsthaus Bregenz
Kunst, Energie in Ottenstein, 75 Jahre EVN, Schloss Ottenstein
Serial Imagery. Andy Warhol, Christopher Wool, Philip Taaffe, Kohn Turner Gallery, Los Angeles
Theories of the Decorative. Abstraction and Ornament in Contemporary Painting, Edinburgh International Festival 1997, Edinburgh; Edwin A. Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, Kansas
- 1996 Biennial of Sydney
Everything That's Interesting Is New. The Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens School of Fine Arts "The Factory," Athens; Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen; Guggenheim Museum Soho, New York
Nuevas abstracciones/Abstrakte Malerei heute, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Kunsthalle Bielefeld; Museu d'art contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona
On Paper, Marlborough Gallery, New York
Picasso. A Contemporary Dialogue, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris
- Reconditioned Abstraction*, Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis, Missouri
Screen, Friedrich Petzel Gallery, New York
- 1995 1995 Biennial Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Veletržní palác, Museum of Modern Art, Prague; Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen
25 Americans. Painting in the 90s, Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Works on Paper, Baumgartner Galleries, Washington, D.C.
A New York Time. Selected Drawings of the Eighties, The Bruce Museum, Greenwich, Ohio
ARS 95 Helsinki, Nykytaiteen Museo/Valtion Taidemuseo, Helsinki
New York Abstraction. Stephen Ellis, Jonathan Lasker, Fabian Marcaccio, David Reed and Philip Taaffe, Macdonald Stewart Art Center, Guelph
Pat Hearn Gallery. A Selected Survey, Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
Pittura/Immedia. Malerei in den 90er Jahren, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz
Silent & Violent, MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles
- 1994 *New York on Paper*, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris
The Magic Magic Book, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- 1993 *An American Homage to Matisse*, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York
Italia–America. L'astrazione ridefinita, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, San Marino
New York on Paper, Galerie Beyeler, Basel
New York Painters, Sammlung Goetz, Munich
Skowhegan '93, The Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine
The Brushstroke. Painting in the 90's, Ruth Bloom Gallery, Santa Monica, California
- 1992 *Ars pro domo. Zeitgenössische Kunst aus Kölner Privatbesitz*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne
Dark Decor, Independent Curators Incorporated, New York; DePree Art Center, Hope College, Holland, Michigan; San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, California; Florida Gulf Coast Art Center, Belleair, Florida
Doubletake. Collective Memory & Current Art/ Kollektives Gedächtnis und heutige Kunst, Hayward Gallery, London; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna
Ellen Berkenblit, Albert Oehlen, Alexis Rockman, Philip Taaffe, Christopher Wool, Luhring Augustine Gallery, New York
Group Show, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin
Quotations, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut; Dayton Museum of Contemporary Art, Dayton, Ohio
- Robert Gober, On Kawara, Mike Kelley, Martin Kippenberger, Jeff Koons, Albert Oehlen, Julian Schnabel, Cindy Sherman, Thomas Struth, Philip Taaffe, Christopher Wool*, Galerie Max Hetzler Thomas Borgmann, Cologne
There Is a Light That never Goes out, Amy Lipton Gallery, New York
Works on Paper, Schmidt Contemporary Art, St. Louis, Missouri
- 1991 1991 Biennial Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Carnegie International 1991, The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Conceptual Abstraction, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York
Glen Baxter, Philip Taaffe, James Welling, Galerie Samia Saouma, Paris
Parades, and Exhibition of Artist's Work for the Stage (Barceló, Bleckner, Garouste, Serra, Taaffe), ORCOFI, Paris
Strange Abstraction, Touko Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo
Stubborn Painting. Now and Then, Max Protetch Gallery, New York
Vertigo "The Remake," Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg
Who Framed Modern Art or the Quantitative Life of Roger Rabbit, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York
- 1990 *All Quiet on the Western Front? (75 Americans in Paris)*, Espace Dieu 17, Paris
Pharmakon '90, Nippon Convention Center, Tokyo
Ross Bleckner, Philip Taaffe, Richmond Burton, Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York
The Last Decade. American Artists of the 80s, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
- 1989 *Abstraction in Question*, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Arts, Sarasota, Florida
Fondation Daniel Templon, Musée Temporaire, Fréjus
Psychological Abstraction, Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art, Athens
- 1988 *American Art in the 80s. The Binational*, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf
Art at the End of the Social, The Rooseum, Malmö
Drawings, Luhring, Augustine & Hodes, New York
Hybrid Neutral. Modes of Abstraction and the Social, University Art Gallery, The University of North Texas, Denton, Texas; Galerie Monika Sprüth, Cologne
Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel
- 1987 1987 Biennial Exhibition, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

El arte y su doble. Una perspectiva de Nueva York/Art and Its Double. A New York Perspective, Fundación Caja de Pensiones, Madrid
Generations of Geometry, Whitney Museum at Equitable Center, New York
 Mary Boone Gallery, New York
New York Art Now, Saatchi Collection, London
Post Abstract Abstraction, Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut
 Galerie Paul Maenz, Cologne
Primary Structures, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago
Recent Tendencies in Black and White, Sidney Janis Gallery, New York
Similia/Dissimilia. Modes of Abstractions in Painting, Sculpture and Photography Today/Abstraktionen in Malerei, Skulptur und Photographie heute, Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Columbia University, New York; Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; Sonnabend Gallery, New York

1986 ARCO. *Arte Contemporaneo*, Madrid

Art 17 '86. Die internationale Kunstmesse, Basel
 Biennial of Sydney
Cologne Art Fair, Cologne
 Crescent Gallery, Dallas, Texas
 Donald Young Gallery, Chicago
Endgame, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
Geometry Now, Craig Cornelius Gallery, New York
 New City Editions, Venice, California
New York. New Strategies, Galerie Ursula Krinzinger, Vienna
Paravision II, Margo Leavin Gallery, Los Angeles
 Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
Prospect '86. Eine internationale Ausstellung aktueller Kunst, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt am Main; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main
Recent Abstract Painting, John Good Gallery, New York
Tableaux Abstraits, Villa Arson, Nice
Terrae Motus, Fondazione Amelio, Herculaneum
The Peter Brams Collection, Hamilton College, Emerson Gallery, Clinton, New York
The Red Show, Massimo Audiello Gallery, New York
The Science of Painting, Metro Pictures, New York
What It Is, Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York
When Attitudes Become Form, Bess Cutler Gallery, New York
Zurich Art Fair, Zurich

1985 *A Brave New World. A New Generation*, Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall, Copenhagen
Cult Decorum, Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York
 Galerie Rudolph Zwirner, Cologne
 Gallery 345, New York
Geometrie, Abstraktion, Ornament, Galerie nächst St. Stephan, Vienna

Paravision, Postmasters Gallery, New York
 Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
Post Style, Wolff Gallery, New York
Primer salón irrealista, Galería Leyendecker, Santa Cruz de Tenerife
The Chi-Chi Show, Massimo Audiello Gallery, New York
Vernacular Abstraction, Wacoal Art Centre, Tokyo
Visions, Eastman-Wahmendorff Gallery, New York

1984 *Art 15 '84. Die internationale Kunstmesse*, Basel
 Sex, Cable Gallery, New York
Terrae motus, Villa Campolieto, Herculaneum, Naples, Italy

1983 *Turn It Over*, Studio Sandro Chia, New York

Selected Bibliography

Monographs and Exhibition Catalogues

2007 *ArtWorks. The Progressive Collection*, New York.
Optic Nerve. Perceptual Art of the 1960's. Exhibition catalogue Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, Ohio. London.
Philip Taaffe. Edited by Louise Neri. Exhibition catalogue Gagosian Gallery. New York.
Pop Art 1960's–2000's. From the Misumi Collection. Exhibition catalogue The Museum of Modern Art, Ibaraki; Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art; Hachioji Yume Art Museum. Tokyo.

2005 *Alchimie Saline*. Exhibition catalogue Palazzo Medico, San Leo. Città di San Leo.
EVN-Sammlung 95–05. Exhibition catalogue Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna. Cologne.
Expérience de la durée. Biennale de Lyon 2005. Exhibition catalogue 8e Biennale d'Art Contemporain Lyon. Paris.
Vertiges. Printemps de Septembre à Toulouse. Exhibition catalogue Les Abattoirs, Toulouse. Dijon.

2004 Coetzee, Mark. *Not Afraid. Rubell Family Collection*. London.
Drawings. Edited by Mark Francis and Stefan Ratibor. Exhibition catalogue Gagosian Gallery. London.
East Village USA. Exhibition catalogue New Museum of Contemporary Art. New York.
Parkett—20 Years of Artists' Collaborations. Exhibition catalogue Kunsthaus Zürich. Zurich.
Philip Taaffe. Carte annuolate. Exhibition catalogue Galleria d'Arte Moderna Contemporanea della Repubblica di San Marino. Milan.
The Invisible Thread: Buddhist Spirit in Contemporary Art. Edited by Jennifer Poole. Exhibition catalogue Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Staten Island. New York.

Vision einer Sammlung/A Collection's Vision. Edited by Agnes Husslein-Arco. Exhibition catalogue Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Mönchsberg. Munich.
Visions of America. Zeitgenössische Kunst aus der Sammlung Essl und der Sonnabend Collection, New York. Exhibition catalogue Sammlung Essl, Klosterneuburg. Vienna.

2003 *Montagna. Arte, scienza, mito da Dürer a Warhol*. Exhibition catalogue Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto. Geneva.
New Abstract Painting. Painting Abstract Now. Abstraktion in der neuen Malerei. Edited by Gerhard Finckh. Exhibition catalogue Museum Morsbroich. Leverkusen.
Philip Taaffe. Recent Paintings & Drawings. Edited by Raymond Foye and Georg Frei. Exhibition catalogue Thomas Ammann Fine Art. Zurich.
Pictura magistra vitae. I nuovi simboli della pittura contemporanea. Exhibition catalogue San Giorgio in Poggiale, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio. Bologna.
Warped Space. Edited by Erica Olsen. Exhibition catalogue CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts. San Francisco.

2002 *Philip Taaffe. Illuminations*. Exhibition catalogue Studio d'Arte Raffaelli. Trento.
Philip Taaffe. Ten Paintings. Edited by Raymond Foye. Exhibition catalogue Jablonka Galerie. Cologne.
The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward. Selected Works by Harry Smith, Philip Taaffe, Fred Tomaselli. Exhibition catalogue James Cohan Gallery. New York.
We Love Painting. The Contemporary American Art from Misumi Collection. Edited by Nobuyuki Hiromoto, Yoshimi Chinzei, and Atsuko Takeuchi. Exhibition catalogue Museum of Contemporary Art. Tokyo.

2001 *Give & Take. 1 Exhibition, 2 Sites*. Edited by Leigh Markopoulos. Exhibition catalogue Serpentine Gallery, London; Victoria & Albert Museum. London.
Monstring. Mellem arabesk og objekt/Patterns. Between Object and Arabesque. Exhibition catalogue Kunsthallen Brandts Klædefabrik. Odense.
Mythic Proportions. Painting in the 1980s. Exhibition catalogue Museum of Contemporary Art. North Miami.
Ornament und Abstraktion. Kunst der Kulturen, Moderne und Gegenwart im Dialog. Edited by Markus Bröderlin. Exhibition catalogue Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel. Cologne.
Philip Taaffe. Exhibition catalogue Galleria Civica d'Arte Contemporanea, Trento. Milan.
Philip Taaffe. Confluence. Exhibition catalogue University Art Gallery, University of California. La Jolla, California.
Philip Taaffe. Œuvres récentes. Exhibition catalogue Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac. Paris.

2000 *00: Drawings 2000 at Barbara Gladstone Gallery*. Exhibition catalogue Barbara Gladstone Gallery. New York.

- Philip Taaffe*. Exhibition catalogue IVAM Institut València d'Art Modern, Centre del Carme. Valencia.
- Philip Taaffe. New Paintings*. Edited by Raymond Foye. Exhibition catalogue Gagosian Gallery. Los Angeles.
- Seidner, David. *Im Atelier der Künstler*. Munich.
- 1999 *Botanica. Contemporary Art and the World of Plants*. Edited by Peter F. Spooner. Exhibition catalogue Tweed Museum of Art, University of Minnesota. Duluth, Minnesota.
- Brock, Bazon. *Die Welt zu deinen Füßen. Den Boden im Blick. Naturwerk, Kunstwerk, Vorwerk*. Cologne.
- Philip Taaffe*. Edited by Gretchen Carlson. Exhibition catalogue Gagosian Gallery. New York.
- Phillips, Lisa. *The American Century. Art & Culture 1900–2000, Part II: 1950–2000*. Exhibition catalogue Whitney Museum of American Art. New York.
- Post-hypnotic*. Edited by Barry Blinderman. Exhibition catalogue University Galleries of Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois; McKinney Avenue Contemporary Arts Center, Dallas, Texas; Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, Ohio; Atlanta College of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago; Tweed Museum of Art, Duluth, Minnesota. Normal, Illinois.
- 1998 *Die Sammlung Paul Maenz. Band 1: Objekte, Bilder, Installationen*. Edited by Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar. Ostfildern Ruit.
- Ensemble moderne. Das moderne Stilleben/The Still Life in Modern Art*. Exhibition catalogue Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg and Paris. Salzburg.
- Philip Taaffe*. Edited by Raymond Foye and Georg Frei. Exhibition catalogue Thomas Ammann Fine Art. Zurich.
- Philip Taaffe*. Exhibition catalogue Rebecca M. Camhi Gallery. Athens.
- 1997 *After the Fall. Aspects of Abstract Painting since 1970*. Exhibition catalogue Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art, Staten Island. New York.
- Birth of the Cool. Amerikanische Malerei von Georgia O'Keeffe bis Christopher Wool*. Exhibition catalogue Deichtorhallen Hamburg; Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich. Ostfildern.
- EVN-Sammlung. Ankäufe 1995/96*. Exhibition catalogue Schloss Ottenstein. Maria Enzersdorf.
- KünstlerInnen. 50 Positionen zeitgenössischer internationaler Kunst. Videoportraits und Werke*. Edited by Edelbert Köb. Exhibition catalogue Kunsthaus Bregenz. Cologne.
- Philip Taaffe*. Exhibition catalogue Mario Diacono Gallery. Boston.
- Philip Taaffe. Composite Nature. A Conversation with Stan Brakhage*. Exhibition catalogue Peter Blum Gallery. New York.
- 1996 *Abstrakte Malerei heute/Nuevas abstracciones*. Edited by Hans-Michael Herzog. Exhibition catalogue Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Kunsthalle Bielefeld; Museu d'art contemporani de Barcelona.
- Everything That's Interesting Is New. The Dakis Joannou Collection*. Exhibition catalogue Athens School of Fine Arts "The Factory," Athens; Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen; Guggenheim Museum Soho, New York. Ostfildern.
- Family Values. Amerikanische Kunst der achtziger und neunziger Jahre. Die Sammlung Scharpff in der Hamburger Kunsthalle*. Edited by Uwe M. Schneede. Ostfildern-Ruit.
- Jurassic Technologies Revenant. 10th Biennale of Sydney*. Edited by Lynne Cooke. Exhibition catalogue 10. Biennale Sydney.
- Philip Taaffe*. Exhibition catalogue Wiener Secession. Vienna.
- Picasso. A Contemporary Dialogue*. Exhibition catalogue Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac. Paris.
- 1995 *1995 Biennial Exhibition*. Exhibition catalogue Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Veletržní palác, Museum of Modern Art, Prag; Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen. New York.
- 25 Americans. Painting in the 90s*. Exhibition catalogue Milwaukee Art Museum. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- ARS 95. Yksityinen/Julkinen—Private/Public*. Exhibition catalogue Nykytaiteen Museo/Valtion Taidemuseo. Helsinki.
- Pittura/Immedia. Malerei in den 90er Jahren*. Edited by Peter Weibel. Exhibition catalogue Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz. Klagenfurt.
- Silent & Violent. Ausgewählte Künstlereditionen*. Edited by Peter Noever. Exhibition catalogue MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles. Zurich.
- 1994 *Philip Taaffe. Recent Paintings*. Edited by Oliver Tompkins Ray. Exhibition catalogue Gagosian Gallery. New York.
- 1993 *Italia—America. L'astrazione ridefinita*. Exhibition catalogue Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna. San Marino.
- New York Painters*. Edited by Ingvild Goetz. Exhibition catalogue Sammlung Goetz, Munich. Ostfildern.
- Philip Taaffe. New Work*. Exhibition catalogue Center for the Fine Arts. Miami.
- 1992 *Ars pro domo. Zeitgenössische Kunst aus Kölner Privatbesitz*. Edited by Wilfried Dickhoff. Exhibition catalogue Museum Ludwig. Cologne.
- Doubletake. Collective Memory & Current Art*. Edited by Marianne Ryan. Exhibition catalogue Hayward Gallery, London. Zurich.
- Mrabet, Mohammed. *Chocolate Creams and Dollars*. With illustrations by Philip Taaffe. New York.
- Philip Taaffe*. Edited by Wilfried Dickhoff. Exhibition catalogue Galerie Max Hetzler. Berlin.
- Robert Gober, On Kawara, Mike Kelley, Martin Kippenberger, Jeff Koons, Albert Oehlen, Julian Schnabel,*
- Cindy Sherman, Thomas Struth, Philip Taaffe, Christopher Wool*. Exhibition catalogue Galerie Max Hetzler Thomas Borgmann. Cologne.
- 1991 *Philip Taaffe. Recent Paintings*. Exhibition catalogue Gagosian Gallery. New York.
- Strange Abstraction*. Edited by Jeffrey Deitch. Exhibition catalogue Touko Museum of Contemporary Art. Tokyo.
- 1990 *Ross Bleckner, Philip Taaffe, Richmond Burton*. Exhibition catalogue Perry Rubenstein Gallery. New York.
- 1989 *Fondation Daniel Templon, Musée Temporaire*. Exhibition catalogue Fondation Daniel Templon, Musée Temporaire. Fréjus.
- Philip Taaffe*. Exhibition catalogue Pat Hearn Gallery, New York; Mary Boone Gallery. New York.
- Psychological Abstraction*. Exhibition catalogue Deste Foundation for Contemporary Art. Athens.
- 1988 *Art at the End of the Social*. Exhibition catalogue The Rooseum. Malmö.
- 1987 *Cameron, Dan. NY Art Now. The Saatchi Collection*. London.
- Drawing Dialogue. William S. Burroughs, Philip Taaffe*. Edited by Diego Cortez and James Grauerholz. Exhibition catalogue Pat Hearn Gallery. New York.
- El arte y su doble. Una perspectiva de Nueva York/Art and Its Double. A New York Perspective*. Edited by Dan Cameron. Exhibition catalogue Fundación Caja de Pensiones. Madrid.
- Philip Taaffe*. Exhibition catalogue Mario Diacono Gallery. Boston.
- Recent Tendencies in Black and White*. Exhibition catalogue Sidney Janis Gallery. New York.
- 1987 Biennial Exhibition*. Exhibition catalogue Whitney Museum of American Art. New York.
- Similia/Dissimilia. Modes of Abstractions in Painting, Sculpture and Photography Today/Abstraktionen in Malerei, Skulptur und Photographie heute*. Edited by Rainer Crone. Exhibition catalogue Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Columbia University, New York; Leo Castelli Gallery, New York; Sonnabend Gallery, New York. Düsseldorf.
- 1986 *Beyond Boundaries. New York's New Art*. Edited by Jerry Saltz. New York.
- Endgame. Reference and Simulation in Recent Painting and Sculpture*. Edited by David Joselit and Elisabeth Sussman. Exhibition catalogue The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston. Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Philip Taaffe*. Exhibition catalogue Galerie Ascan Crone. Hamburg.
- Philip Taaffe*. Exhibition catalogue Pat Hearn Gallery. New York.

Prospect '86. Eine internationale Ausstellung aktueller Kunst. Edited by Peter Weiermair. Exhibition catalogue Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt am Main; Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main.
Tableaux Abstraites. Villa Arson, Nice.
What It Is. Edited by Wilfried Dickhoff, Exhibition catalogue Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York.

1985 *Primer salón irrealista.* Exhibition catalogue Galería Leyendecker, Santa Cruz de Tenerife.
Vernacular Abstraction. Exhibition catalogue Wacoal Art Centre, Tokyo.

1984 *Terrae motus.* Edited by Michele Bonuomo, Exhibition catalogue Villa Campolieto, Herculaneum, Naples, Italy.

Selected Articles

2007 Bowles, Hamish. "Memory Artist—Celebrated for Abstract Canvases that Mine the Past. Philip Taaffe Brings Layers of Meaning to a Landmark Chelsea Hotel Apartment." *Vogue* (February 2007), pp. 238–243, 273.
Mac Adam, Alfred. "Review. Philip Taaffe at the Gagosian Gallery (Madison Avenue)." *Artnews*, 106, 5 (May 2007), p. 156.
Princenthal, Nancy. "Philip Taaffe at Gagosian." *Art in America*, 5 (2007), pp. 195f.

2004 Yau, John. "Animistic Light." *Art on Paper*, 8, 6 (July/August 2004), pp. 32–35.

2003 Adams, Brooks. "Philip Taaffe." *Contemporary*, 58 (2003), pp. 110–113.
Strauss, David, Levi. "The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward. Harry Smith—Philip Taaffe—Fred Tomaselli." *Artforum International*, 41, 5 (2003), p. 134.

2002 Adams, Brooks. "Philip Taaffe. Found Abstraction—Repeated Motifs Drawn from Myriad Historical Sources Mark the Artist's Grand-Scale Painterly Canvases." *Art in America*, 90, 6 (2002), pp. 116–119.
Attias, Laurie. "Philip Taaffe." *Artnews*, 101, 2 (February 2002), pp. 134f.

2001 "Arte al caleidoscope: la prima volta in Italia di Philip Taaffe." *Arte*, 336 (August 2001), p. 19.
Gooch, Brad. "First Break—Philip Taaffe." *Artforum International*, 39, 9 (May 2001), pp. 21f.

2000 Moos, David. "Philip Taaffe. The Bees Know He Will Be Great." *Artext*, 71 (November 2000–January 2001), pp. 54–59.

1998 Cafopoulos, Catherine. "Philip Taaffe. Shifting in Time." *Arti*, 39 (May–July 1998), pp. 72–87.
Hilty, Greg. "Snakes and Daggers. Greg Hilty on Philip Taaffe." *Frieze*, 41 (June–August 1998), pp. 70–73.
Kuspit, Donald B. "Philip Taaffe." *Artforum International*, 36, 8 (April 1998), p. 114.
"Philip Taaffe." *Arti*, 39 (May–July 1998), pp. 42–71.

1996 Princenthal, Nancy. "Now You See It, Now You Don't: the Magic Magic Book." *Parkett*, 47 (1996), pp. 184–187.

1995 Morera, Daniela. "Philip Taaffe." *Vogue*, Milan, 536 (1995), pp. 146–151.

1994 Adams, Brooks. "The Tabernacle of Philip Taaffe." *Print Collector's Newsletter*, 24, 6 (January/February 1994), pp. 205–210.
Clarkson, David. "Philip Taaffe." *Flash Art International*, 177 (1994), p. 117.
White, Edmund. "Philip Taaffe. Al Quasbah, 1991." *Artforum International*, 32, 10 (summer 1994), pp. 66f.

1993 Madestrand, Bo and Hakan Nilsson. "Contemporary Ornaments." *Siksi*, 4 (1993), pp. 21–23.

1991 Saltz, Jerry. "Re-Animator: Philip Taaffe's Necromancer, 1991." *Arts Magazine*, 66, 6 (February 1992), pp. 17f.

1990 Denson, Roger. "Flight into Egypt. The Islamic Reveries of Philip Taaffe." *Flash Art International*, 154 (October 1990), pp. 129–133.
Denson, Roger. "Philip of Naples and the Evocative Geometry of History." *Parkett*, 26 (1990), pp. 108–111.
Dickhoff, Wilfried. "We Are Not Afraid. An Impossible Comparison." *Parkett*, 26 (1990), pp. 70–75.
Pellizzi, Francesco. "Fragment on Ornament." *Parkett*, 26 (1990), pp. 98–101.
Perrone, Jeff. "Philip Taaffe. History Is in the Making." *Parkett*, 26 (1990), pp. 80–81.
White, Edmund. "A propos Philip Taaffe." *Parkett*, 26 (1990), pp. 91–93.

1987 Liebmann, Lisa. "M. B. A. Abstractionism." *Flash Art International*, 132 (February/March 1987), pp. 86–89.
Perrone, Jeff. "Fashion Is the Real Thing in Abstraction." *Arts Magazine*, 61, 10 (June 1987), pp. 81–85.

1985 Cameron, Dan. "The Other Philip Taaffe." *Arts Magazine*, 60, 2 (October 1985), pp. 18–20.

Quotation Credits Photo Credits

p. 32	Brooks Adams, "Interview" (New York, November 26–28, 2007), in this publication, p. 208.	Courtesy Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich, fig. pp. 158–159	Mark Morrisroe, fig. p. 18 (left)
		Bayer, Bildpunkt AG, Basel, fig. pp. 48–49	Musée d'Orsay, Paris, figs. pp. 12, 221
p. 36	Ibid., p. 221.	Courtesy Peter Blum Gallery, New York, figs. pp. 115, 137	Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, fig. p. 17 (right)
pp. 38, 42, 58, 102	"Interview with Philip Taaffe" (conducted at Lalibela Studios, West 30th Street, New York City, April 29, 1996): http://philiptaaffe.info/Interviews_Statements/TaaffeCreeley.php	D. James Dee, figs. pp. 111, 197 (bottom)	Portalakis Collection, Athens, fig. p. 195 (left)
p. 112	"Robert Creeley and Philip Taaffe in Conversation" (August 17, 1999): http://philiptaaffe.info/Interviews_Statements/TaaffeCreeley.php	Courtesy Jeffrey Deitch Collection, New York, figs. pp. 10 (detail), 41	Tom Powell, figs. pp. 105, 117, 132–133
		Essl Museum Klosterneuburg/Vienna, figs. pp. 149, 171, 175, 188 (top left)	Giordano Raffaelli Collection, Trento, fig. p. 114
p. 116	"A Conversation with Stan Brakhage," in <i>Philip Taaffe. Composite Nature</i> , exh. cat. Peter Blum Gallery (New York, 1997), p. 29.	Raymond Foye, figs. pp. 209, 210, 211, 216, 217, 218, 225, 226	Tracey and Phillip Riese Collection, New York, figs. pp. 141, 184 (detail), 191 (right)
		Collection Raymond Foye, fig. p. 156	Gian Sperone Collection, New York, fig. p. 199
pp. 128, 130, 134	"Interview with Philip Taaffe" (conducted at Lalibela Studios, West 30th Street, New York City, April 29, 1966): http://www.philiptaaffe.info/Interviews_Statements/newInterview.php	Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York, fig. p. 189 (bottom right)	Steven Sloman, figs. pp. 29, 30, 31, 33, 35, 45, 121, 131, 135, 139, 147, 163, 194 (right), 195 (right)
		Goetz Collection, fig. p. 71	Staatliche Museen zu Berlin—Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Museum of Islamic Art, figs. pp. 21, 208, 230
P. 142	Brooks Adams, "Interview" (New York, November 26–28, 2007), in this publication, p. 213.	Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, fig. p. 190	Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, fig. p. 16
		Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin, figs. pp. 69, 91, 101, 108–109, 143, 145	Stiftelse Hilma af Klingt, fig. p. 14
p. 144	"A Conversation with Stan Brakhage," in <i>Philip Taaffe. Composite Nature</i> , exh. cat. Peter Blum Gallery (New York, 1997), p. 5.	Courtesy Jablonka Galerie, Cologne/Berlin, figs. pp. 2, 16 (detail; bottom left), 25 (detail), 51, 82–83, 120, 146, 151, 155, 167, 189 (top right), 194 (left and middle), and introduction on endpaper	Courtesy Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento, figs. pp. 157, 192 (detail), 196, 197 (top)
		Rafael Jablonka Collection, figs. pp. 19 (detail), 38–39, 43, 47, 59, 76–77, 80–81, 94–95, 99, 106–107, 153	Hiroshi Sugimoto, fig. p. 188 (bottom left)
p. 154	Brooks Adams, "Interview" (New York, November 26–28, 2007), in this publication, p. 214.	Alexandra Lerman, 2007, fig. p. 204	Tokyo National Museum, Tokyo, fig. p. 13
		Linden-Museum Stuttgart, State Museum of Ethnology, fig. p. 187 (right)	Jean Vong Studio, New York, figs. pp. 200–201, 202–203, 229
p.168	Ibid., p. 227.	Archive Paul Maenz, Berlin, fig. p. 63	© 2008 for the illustrated works by Jean Arp, Marcel Duchamp/Succession Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns, Wassily Kandinsky, René Magritte, Henri Matisse/Succession Henri Matisse, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock/Pollock-Krasner Foundation, and Frank Stella: VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2008
		MAK—Austrian Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna, fig. p. 190	
		Robert McKeever, figs. pp. 168–169, 172–173, 178–183, 198	
		Melotti Collection, Milan, fig. p. 15	
		Menil Collection, Houston, fig. p. 18 (right)	

Despite extensive research and best intentions, it was not possible in each and every case to establish the rights holders. Should the case arise, we would like to ask unacknowledged holders of such rights to contact the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg.

This catalogue is published in conjunction with the exhibition

Philip Taaffe: The Life of Forms

Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg
March 8–June 29, 2008

Powered by
VOLKSWAGEN BANK

Exhibition

Curated by Markus Brüderlin, Holger Broeker

Catalogue

Edited by Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg
Concept: Holger Broeker

Editing: Holger Broeker, Julia Wallner
Editing assistants: Anja Westermann, Esther Barbara Kirschner
Copyediting: Ingrid Nina Bell
Translations: Ben Letzler, Michael Wolfson
Graphic design and typesetting: Double Standards, Berlin
Typeface: Helvetica Neue LT
Reproductions and printing: Dr. Cantz'sche Druckerei, Ostfildern
Paper: LuxoSamtoffset, 150 g/m²
Binding: Kunst- und Verlagsbuchbinderei GmbH, Leipzig

© 2008 Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg; Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern, and authors

© 2008 for the reproduced works by Philip Taaffe: the artist; by Hans Arp, Marcel Duchamp/Succession Marcel Duchamp, Jasper Johns, Wassily Kandinsky, René Magritte, Henri Matisse/Succession Henri Matisse, Barnett Newman, Jackson Pollock/Pollock-Krasner Foundation, and Frank Stella: VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn; as well as the artists, and their legal successors

Published by
Hatje Cantz Verlag
Zeppelinstrasse 32
73760 Ostfildern
Germany
Tel. +49 711 4405-200
Fax +49 711 4405-220
www.hatjecantz.com

Hatje Cantz books are available internationally at selected bookstores. For more information about our distribution partners please visit our homepage at www.hatjecantz.com.

ISBN 978-3-7757-2121-9 (English)
ISBN 978-3-7757-2120-2 (German)

Printed in Germany

Cover illustration and Frontispiece: *Cape Sinope*, 2006/2007, Mixed media on canvas, 289.8 × 246.7 cm, Private Collection, Courtesy Jablonka Galerie Cologne/Berlin

Kunststiftung Volkswagen

President: Hans Dieter Pötsch
Board: Markus Brüderlin (speaker), Henning Schaper

Staff of the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg

Director: Markus Brüderlin
Managing director: Henning Schaper
Director of communication: Thomas Köhler
Project management: Manfred Müller

Curators: Holger Broeker, Annelie Lütgens
Assistant to the director: Julia Wallner
Curatorial trainees: Kathrin Engler, Esther Barbara Kirschner

Librarian: Anja Westermann
Head of art handling: Oliver Wenzel
Conservation: Christiane Altmann
Secretary for exhibitions and collection: Carmen Müller

Press and public relations: Ilona Schnellecke
Visual literacy: Ute Lefarth (director), Gerda Pohlmann
Press secretary/telephone: Nicole Schütze
Secretary visual literacy: Gudrun Kolleck

Accounting: Claus Anger (director), Eva Marsch
Secretary to the director: Eveline Welke
Assistant to the managing director: Tanja Rosenberg
Assistant to the director of communication: Andrea Bahl

Technical department: Armin Kohlrausch (head of technical staff), Diethard Behrens, Heinrich Dembowski, Oliver Jander, Andreas Lehmann, André Marschang, Oliver Mayenfels
Security: Detlev Bennecke (head), Achim Brach, Frank Heyder, Manfred Landgraf, Fred Lemme, Michael Pfotenhauer

Museum shop: Natascha Fieting (head), Pamela Cimino

Cleaning: Gina Pravata

Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg
Hollerplatz 1
38440 Wolfsburg
Tel. 05361 2669-0
Fax 05361 2669-66
Mail info@kunstmuseum-wolfsburg.de
www.kunstmuseum-wolfsburg.de

Sponsored by

VOLKSWAGEN BANK

GBH





