



PHILIP TAAFFE

L'ENVOI

JMM GALLERY
Jablonka Maruani Mercier

Essentially, everything in my work is about a process of description. My attitude towards repetition has to do with the cumulative effect of continuous applications of line and color. If we focus on that, and see them as crystallized into patterns or marks, what do they add up to? They become some kind of actively structured field. I see that as being an entrance to a trance-like state. I'm interested in inviting the possibility for ecstatic experience, for getting outside of stasis.

My roots are from Ireland, and I suppose a subtext to my work must relate to these Celtic shamanistic traditions. The work is also about movement, or how we see in a constant series of glimpses. What do I want my art to accomplish? What do I expect it to be like as a physical encounter? I think the best thing one can hope for is to be able to enter into another world.

Midnight Blue, 1985
Mixed media on canvas
193 x 239 cm



INTERVIEW BY Charles Stein for the Brooklyn Rail

Charles Stein (Rail): When you eventually arrive at what you want to have in a painting, is the number of elements something that is decided beforehand, or is it arrived at through the process?

Philip Taaffe: It's arrived at along the way. Number is important to me, and variation is important to me, as are the interior analogies within a work—how elements correspond in different parts of the work. I discover connections in the course of making the work. I build that into the work, so these discoveries get constructed into the picture itself. The wonderful thing about collage is that a lot of the elements on paper can be put in different places and later removed. I can lay everything out on the floor and figure out what's going on, and decide what to permanently apply to the work. I work in an elliptical way in that respect, an indirect way, as far as mark-making. It can be a mark if I want it to be, but then that mark can be erased. In the course of working on a painting what I leave out is as important as what I put in. There are all kinds of levels of intentionality within a work, and collage allows me to keep my options open during the working process.

Rail: When you choose the elements, I presume it is for visual reasons, that is to say formal, as well as symbolical ones: what the images represent. But how much of this concern is worked out beforehand? Once chosen, how much are you allowing these images to come to significance on their own?

Taaffe: It has to make narrative sense in my mind. Often there are certain historical and geographical themes that can be brought together. For example, in "Onibaba II" (2011), I wanted to work with Japanese Noh masks. And I wanted to have these bronze lanterns and carved screens function as the enveloping network of lines behind the masks.



Onibaba II, 2010-11 - Mixed media on linen 196 x 217 cm

Then I saw Kaneto Shindo's film *Onibaba* (1964), a Japanese ghost story, and it made a tremendous impression on me. It was a great primal film experience, and I wanted to capture some aspect of that: echoes, reverberations. I used Shindo's title because it's always interesting to know what people are inspired or influenced by, but there is no direct correlation necessarily. Sometimes I choose to associate myself directly with a work of art like that—it's good back-up in a sense. I wanted to make this strong reference to an experience I had. It seemed something worthy to aspire to, in terms of an expressive goal.

Rail: There is a simultaneous revealing and concealing of the laborious intensity behind the work, even where the subject matter seems to be ornament as such. What people see as "decorative" often involves concrete reference to ornamental forms and contexts.

Taaffe: It's the specificity of it that really matters. For example, when I discovered this illustrated field report on the Mongolian canoe decorations of the Amur tribe, that was a real shock of recognition for me. I'm identifying a historical and geographical crystallization of culture—a certain visual trope that can transport me somehow in the making of a work. I always feel that I'm a medium. My ideal condition is to be outside of the work and to let these transmissions take place on the basis of my understanding and personal reflections and my urge to turn these tropes into something that is of palpable use, through my physical actions and gestures, through signs and traces—all of the things I can build upon and make connections from. I think that an artist has to set up imaginary fields of possibility for the participant, the viewer, to help them connect with their own personal history, their own humanity, where they come from. That's the dialogue that art provides. It's how we carry on.

Rail: There are many languages of ornament. What is often at stake is the fact that your work does allude to the ornamentation of not only art, but of architecture and functional things like grates and fences, lifted from specific historical and cultural contexts. And these contexts may include the old books from which you have adapted or derived the images. The images also often have an emblematic character. There is thus an emblematic itinerary—a journey of images, glyphs, symbols, across different stations in historical time, that terminates at your picture. At the same time there is also a kind of "decorativeness" in your practice in the sense that abstract shapes are arranged in ways that are in themselves simply beautiful. They give pleasure by how they look, not necessarily different from the way that ornamentations or decorations do. The surface is beautifully ornamented while at the same time alluding to specific ornamental realms. So there is a complexity to the meaning of the decorative in these works that goes well beyond the usual objections to the merely decorative. There is also a rhetoric of emblems and glyphs that is in another sense something quite different from an arrangement of "ornaments." They suggest a particular plane of registry, a register of the emblematical, parallel, say, to the plane of the pictorial. Floating on the frontmost surface of the work is a region where emblems float in their own realm.

Taaffe: Well, these paintings are in part historical meditations. When I place glyphs that have been used by people in a certain time and geographical place, it's a kind of time-traveling. I'm unraveling a kind of narrative, bringing in certain disputed narratives, and weaving them back together—that's something that I very much like to do. In that sense my work is about desire, ultimately.

Painting is about what I want to exist in the world. I feel there's a certain kind of tonality and poetry and sensuousness that is missing, perhaps, from our time. So I'm trying to bring into the world something I don't believe exists in this way. If people want to call that "decorative" then that's their problem. I don't mind, just as Matisse didn't care that his paintings were thought of as decorative. The difference between the decorative and other aspects of the composition to his mind wasn't a determinate distinction. The problem with what we're getting into here is the shifts of tendencies in Modernism, and how there are academic critics who want to blot out the possibilities of a given history—a given color, a kind of music.

Rail: Speaking of which: do you listen to music while you work?

Taaffe: Sometimes, it depends on the stage the work is in. When I get stuck on a painting and I don't know where to take it next or I'm working out some complex structure within a work, I listen to Mozart, the marches. Somehow, they just snap me to attention, enable me to get to the bottom of things, the heart of the matter. Often I find old records that no one wants and that I've never heard of, and I'll give them a listen to. Recently I discovered Peter Warlock this way, on the flip-side of a Benjamin Britten recording. I'd never heard of Peter Warlock. His real name was Philip Heseltine. He was a British musicologist, and had a deeply scandalous life. I started listening to this piece of his and I really loved it. The "Capriol Suite" is based on 18th-century French choreography. He's someone who studied antique musical forms and made something new out of them. When I heard this composition and researched his work, I realized why I liked it. I like studying older paintings or older music and then culling something that I feel is unspoken, something that I can build upon—rhythms and variations. Encountering a visionary work can be inspiring no matter what medium, because you connect to that vision, it helps you to focus. Inspiration isn't necessarily like, "I'm going to take this and put it in a work," rather it's a kind of attitude or approach. Music is conceptually not unlike collage in that there are a certain set number of elements that you can use to create something. I guess I like that structure. I like the discipline. I like going into a limited group of possibilities and making a world out of it. I like that sense of being resourceful. And I believe it has environmental and economic implications.

Rail: How does color function for you in all of this?

Taaffe: I think the color has to emerge from the emotional atmosphere of a work. At a certain stage in the making of a work the subtle tints that accumulate over the entire surface of the work bring about a unified experience. It has to do with the feeling-state of the painting. That's how I would put it. The colors have to do with the specifics of the painted experience. I like Matisse's claim that the best color is always dirty color, when there's something inside the color that's messy.

Rail: In Matisse, the cut-outs were about immediacy and grace; you are about grace but with mediation. The mediation of a historical itinerary which complexifies the pleasure.

Taaffe: I like to use the term "adequacy" to describe the goal in view as I develop a piece. At a certain point in working over the many stages of these paintings, I have to remind myself what it is I hope to achieve. The answer in general is that I hope to achieve a level of adequacy: sufficient for the specific requirements of the work, a sense that this is all that is necessary. I'm not fussing over it. It's adequately presented. That's an important methodological

principle for me. It doesn't mean I'm settling for less. It's what it needs to be, given the materials that I wish to bring together in a work. A painting is an enclosure for a circuit of energy. Lots of things are connected and held in place by the format of the work itself. The edge is clearly important to me in terms of how the energy is held in place. One thing I try to avoid is a fragmentary pictorial experience. I like the works to be fully contained and fully realized, which requires a certain amount of compositional adjustment in the making. I make a lot of material and use it towards one painting, and explore that theme in depth, as opposed to spreading it out over a number of works. I don't really work in series, so when I do an exhibition in a gallery, each painting will be thematically quite diverse. But there is a thread between them somehow.

Rail: It would be adequacy in terms of what you had already proposed to do. So the other side of that would be that you are proposing something that is not compromising.

Taaffe: It's always something that doesn't seem quite feasible at the outset. By now, painting for me seems like quite a long and epic involvement. Each picture is a long journey. Moving forward is like a wheel revolving, it goes forward but it comes back around—there's always a retrospective aspect to it. I don't discard any of my earlier imagery. There are a lot of earlier concerns continuing: iconography, glyphs, fantastic architecture. I don't close any doors behind me. I always try to expand upon what I have done, and add to it. It's all about the fullness of incident: trying to tell a complete story. What I'm really interested in is a larger synthesis—that's what I try to achieve. I always try to find a way of adding things that I think belong there thematically and symbolically, from the standpoint of gesture and incident—what ultimately manifests into a pictorial phenomenon. I think more is better, and I think it's very important to try to incorporate as much as possible. But then there's a lot of editing involved in making my work, a lot of process, a lot of research. I have to tell some sort of pictorial story on the basis of all of these concerns and gestures.

Rail: But the evidence of your hand in these pictures often seems distant from the images themselves. Does this have something to do with the mechanical techniques used to create them?

Taaffe: I wouldn't use as strong a word as "ideological," but there is something about the analysis of my own "voice" and my desire to be removed from the work, which these mechanical techniques somehow facilitate. There's certainly a psychological struggle going on there, in terms of those kinds of decisions. I want to be more of a mediator than an actor. There's the original creative impulse, and then later there's the self-consciousness or self-awareness of that impulse. Juggling these states is a game one plays with oneself in the work.

Rail: There's an intense paradox, vis-à-vis this hands-on-ness, because you've removed some of that directness by changing the scale of some of the images you've used, such as the enlargements from microphotography. One has no idea of what the actual size of these things are, so the similarity between them and the way you have treated them volumetrically and coloristically are not interfered with by differences of scale. In the painting, you've brought them all into the same scale. And the change in scale also is how they become more generalized and abstract. The treatment in the printed image is on the way to abstraction, and you carry them further in the process by disengaging from the specificity of the scale.

Taaffe: As to the distancing, I like the fact that my own process is

hidden or understated. I don't like gratuitousness: gesture for the sake of gesture. I don't like to do things I don't have to do within the painting, but there are many things I feel I must do outside the painting. In preparing imagery for example, I have produced tusche silkscreens which are hand drawn onto the silk with a grease crayon. They're incredibly labor intensive, but the labor is not evident. Other images are relief-printed from linoleum carvings, but made in such a way that they're gossamer-like they're phantasmic. The decision to reduce the opacity of the prints, knowing that one would be able to see through them, was entirely intentional. That was a measured treatment. There's also a lot of in-painting, a lot of going back and re-touching, but you don't see the evidence of it. But I don't need to show all of this. I'm showing the world something else.

Rail: You say you don't want to do any more work than you have to, but you follow by saying the silkscreens are hand drawn, which is highly labor intensive. There's a paradox here.

Taaffe: Yes, the paintings are very much made up of paradoxes. There's ambivalence and there's clarity, and each has its place. The fact that all of these different renderings and approaches are combined is what puts the painting into the realm of abstraction.

Rail: The superimposition of different content, different pictorial planes, different possible cultural and historical references, different rhetorical registers—is not only spatial, then, it's temporal—different phases of waiting or gestating, superimposed in their consequences.

Taaffe: In my work the labor is never really restrictive or eliminative. It allows for a deepening, a discovery of qualities. There is no universal demand. In fact, I develop different procedures for each work. I never generalize or formalize them. I'm not making a strict agenda, I'm suggesting openness, and a state of natural abiding.

Rail: The images in your work are applied in discrete series of operations, sometimes separated by extended intervals of time. These intervals are significant in that the accumulation of reflection between the applications of the various layers is the mysterious site, as it were, where the intuited relations between images and layers are allowed to accumulate and suggest the details of their final form. The picture becomes a receptacle not only of the images and their sources, but of the invisible spiritual activities performed during these periods of waiting.

Taaffe: It's about arriving at a point of objective realization, then you go on to the next stage, to another state of realization. But one cannot proceed without the certain degree of closure that has occurred at the end of the previous phase. That has to be brought to a point of resolution before the next phase can commence. Not only are there imagistic layers but there are deliberative layers. Painting for me is a considered process that is made up of observation and deliberation, and I'm inviting the viewer to participate in this process. Deliberation is important because it has cultural consequences. We need to have an awareness of the consequences of our actions, to be more deliberative in a cultural sense, and not be in this state of constant inattentive, distracted activity. That is what I mean when I say I try to avoid a fragmentary pictorial experience. Granted, this is all a very far-reaching notion, but I still think art should be paradigmatic—it should suggest a way of living. I still believe in the moral standards of artistic creation: that the painting can have implications beyond itself.

Rail: I've been thinking about the primordial in your work—something that started to form in my mind when I was reading through your interview with Stan Brakhage in the *Composite Nature* book. There is a poem of Charles Olson's in the second volume of the *Maximus Poems* that ends:

*The sea does
contain the beauty I had looked at
until the sweat
stood out in my eyes. The wonder is
limitless, of my own term, the compound
to compound until the beast rises from the sea.*

Taaffe: Astonishing. What is that "beast"?

Rail: Throughout the *Maximus Poems* there's a history of the migratory journey of Olson's heroic figure, Maximus—who takes on the identities of different personages from literary archaic personages to, say, John Smith, the British explorer, and finally Olson himself. But Maximus is always accompanied by a kind of dragon or sea-serpent, and it is this sea-monster that Olson is trying to see. To bring it up into view. It has to do with the relationship between the primordial and the dangerous—a struggle with the hidden depths—that is brought to bear in a way that manifests as beauty. It is not the post-Kantian sublime. It is not something that is constituted in contrast to or even in excess of the rational. Though of course, it isn't particularly "rational" beauty either in a classical sense. The beautiful is already outside that consideration because of the intensity of its experience. It is a difficult beauty, a beauty borne of the intensity of a struggle, an unflinching looking into the primordial, risking being turned to stone, choosing to do the impossible thing and being willing to remain with it until it yields to vision.



Phasmidae, 2014
Mixed media on canvas
203 x 173 cm
Courtesy Luhning Augustine

Taaffe: How long can we remain there is the question. Subliminal beauty is dangerous—Olson seems to be saying that one cannot inhabit that place indefinitely.

Rail: We are always pulling away from it.

Taaffe: We're pulling away from it, but there's also a kind of magnetism that the primordial represents and we're attracted to that. We're pulled by it, and then, in order to survive, we have to release ourselves from it somehow, to get away from it, but nevertheless to return to it once again, for our bearings, for our necessary spiritual sustenance.

Rail: What strikes me in that particular passage in relation to you, though, is that the "term"—Olson speaks of his own "term" meaning, I think, both the language original to him and the sense of termination—the boundedness of his own form and power to originate form—but that in the poem the term for what he sees is beauty—that it doesn't escape into that other thing called "the sublime." The insistence that the thing seen is beauty and that it is really there. Olson has, as you say, again and again this sense of a kind of positive confrontation with the objectivity of the world that far from finding that objectivity lifeless or neutral, finds it full of living beauty, but also numinosity and a kind of pagan raunchiness. "I smell your breath, sea," he says somewhere. Look right at it. Smell it. Stare it down.

Taaffe: Stare it down, that's right.

Rail: I'm thinking of the snakes in the *Composite Nature* book. In repeating the snake images with various intensities of impression that are beautifully organized, you give a sense of a proliferation that is not only the natural proliferation of serpentine progeny. It is the images that proliferate, and therefore something in relation to ourselves. And yet at every point it is still these scary snakes.

Taaffe: What is truly fearful is a situation where we find ourselves mortally threatened, as if we were confronting something that could put an end to our perceptive capacities—that we would no longer be able to perceive anything. We are tempted by these destructive forces. It's a kind of dance macabre. Art becomes a way of facing down death.

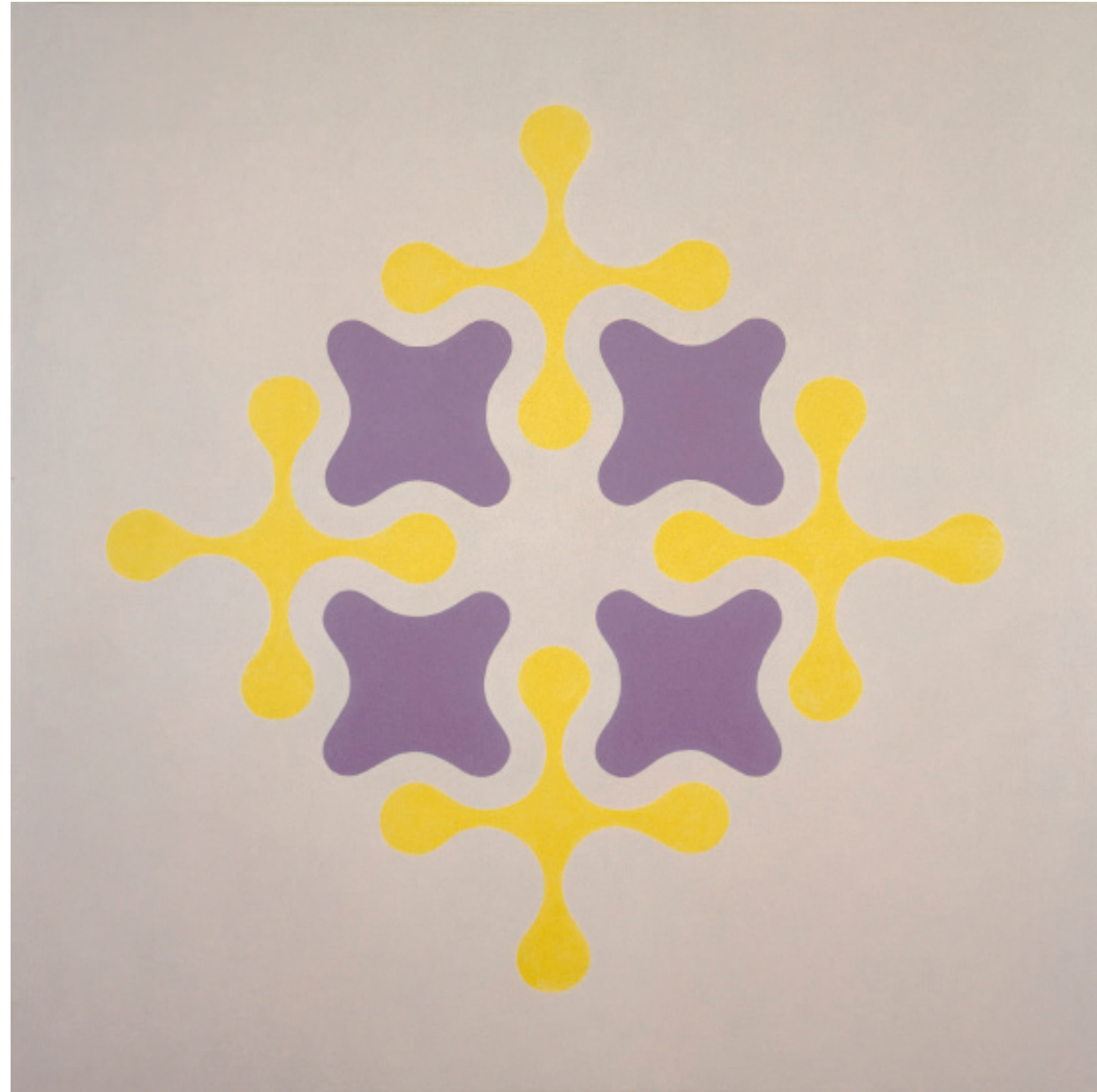
Rail: There's a famous phrase from the theologian Rudolph Otto in his book *The Idea of the Holy*: "mysterium tremendum et fascinans": the numinous mystery that is overwhelming and fascinating. It is as if beauty itself becomes the means by which it is possible to sustain the gaze upon the primordial in the Olson poem, and in your work.

Taaffe: Isn't it amazing how Olson is just constantly referencing the sublime? It's a constant. Everything is inflected by his pursuit of this otherworldly thing, but which is very much within this world.

Rail: I call it the hyper-concrete: an attendance upon the immediate, the concrete reality that is more deeply what something is than its categorizable identity—an attention that so stays with the immediate that it arrives at something uncanny, something numinous.

Taaffe: Yes, that is the pursuit. It's beyond any category of thought, and outside of language. The numinous cannot be arrived at through nominal means—it's something beyond description. Art is in that realm because it is not a linguistic exercise. It's a visual language, but it's not naming something.

I'm not seeking to describe a situation. The painting *is* the situation.



Crucifixion, 1985
Acrylic on canvas
152,5 x 152,5 cm



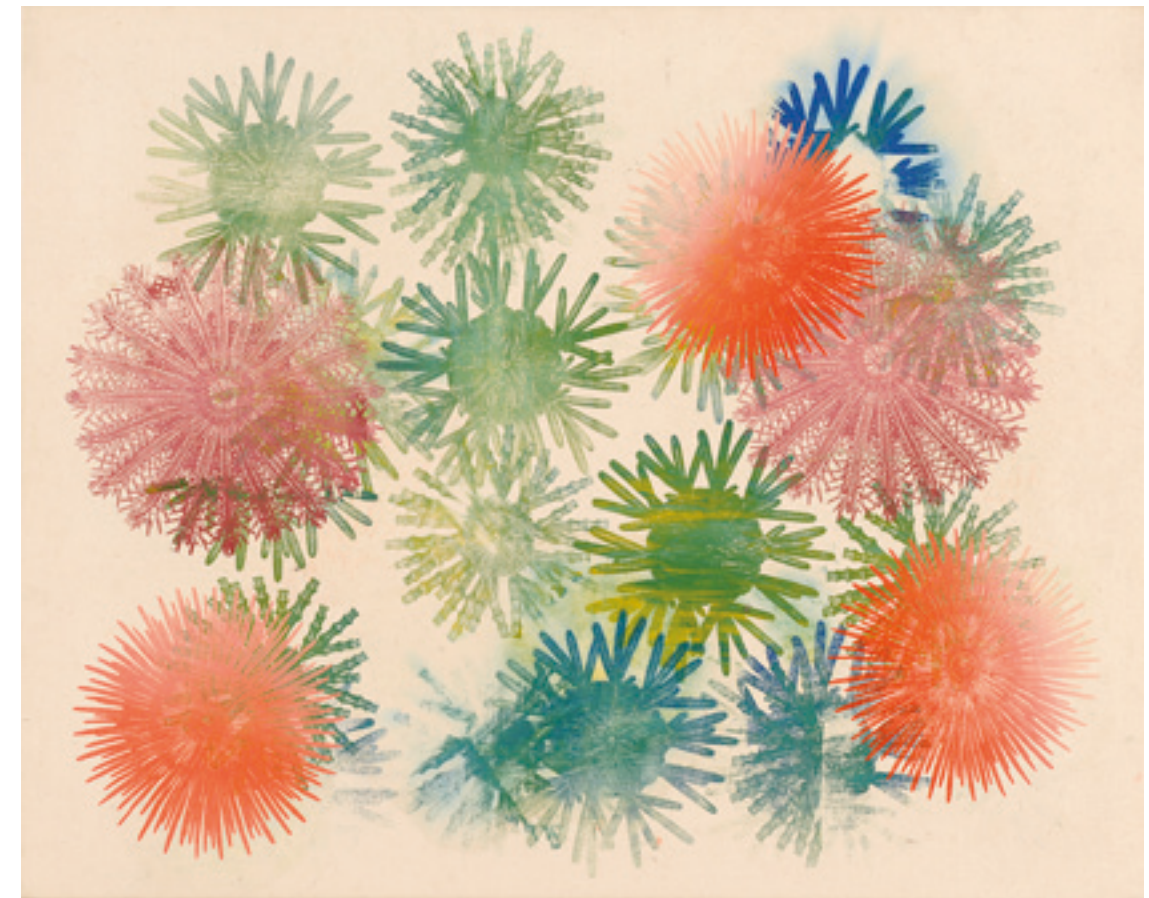
Signal, 1986
Oil on canvas
152,5 x 152,5 cm

I think the phrase "aesthetic ecology" can also apply to the fact that, in the awareness of making something, you have to energize every frame. Every cell has to have a life energy. There's a cumulative effect as a result of all of these energy sparks. It's a funny psychological problem, how to treat one's chosen material. I love calligraphic gesture and will very often scrape litho ink over glass deliberately to make an impression on paper from that.

But there's a fine line between appreciating a certain gesture or mark, giving it its due weight, and not feeling too precious about it. And I think the material has to be treated in a very ecological way, so that one makes good use of these resources, accepting them for their potential and for their capacity to be integrated within a larger scheme of things.

They have a practical use value — as well as having a particular beauty. There is the more inclusive, loving part of the story, and then there must be a ruthlessness, which has to do with knowing what belongs where.

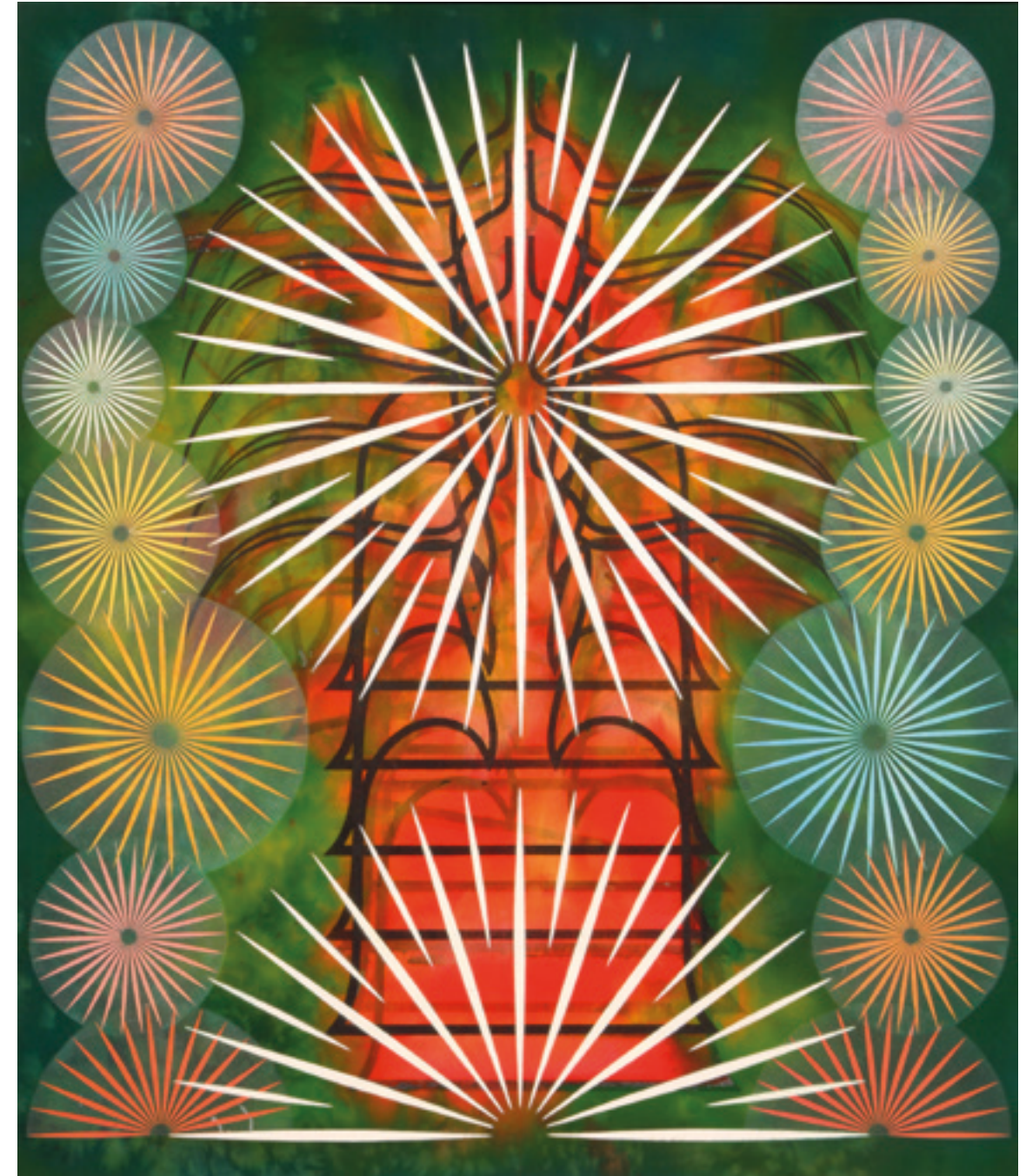
Untitled, 1998
Oil on canvas
70 x 88 cm



I don't believe that one must entirely accept the culture that one is in. If you are an artist, part of your job is to change that culture, to create alternative cultural possibilities. At a certain point in my development as a painter, I simply had to leave New York. I moved to Naples for almost four years. I didn't really know what I was becoming part of, but I knew I needed some fresh cultural sources for my work. It was a really tough period for me to make my work and to live, and I needed to be elsewhere.

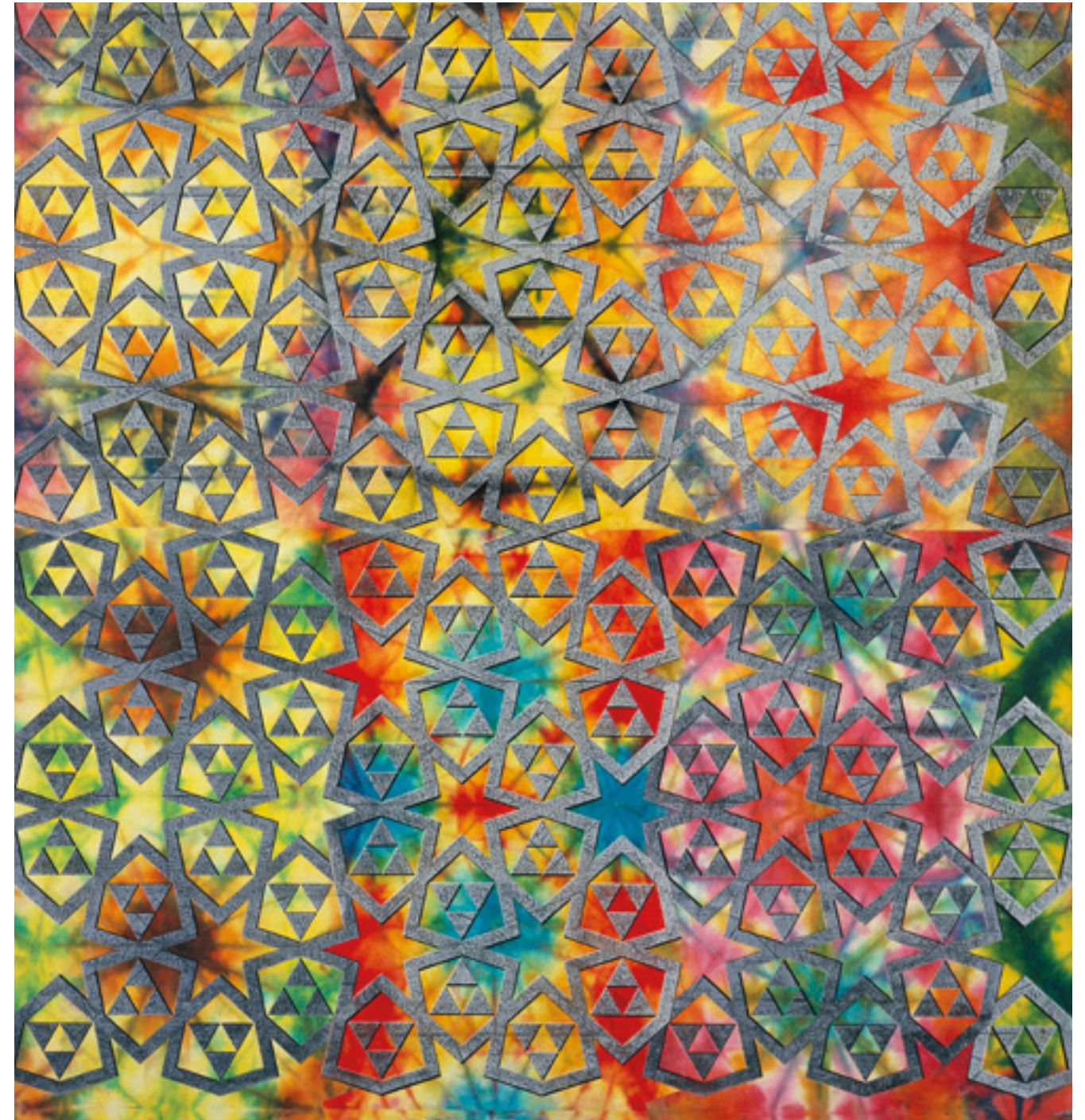
I needed to change my cultural surroundings because I was starting to become more interested in working with motifs and stories from other parts of the world, and I wanted to actually relocate myself to another geographical place. It was about desire. That move represented the beginnings of a desire for deeper cultural experiences, so that my work could begin to take more into consideration.

Biolumen, 2000
Mixed technique on canvas
167 x 143 cm



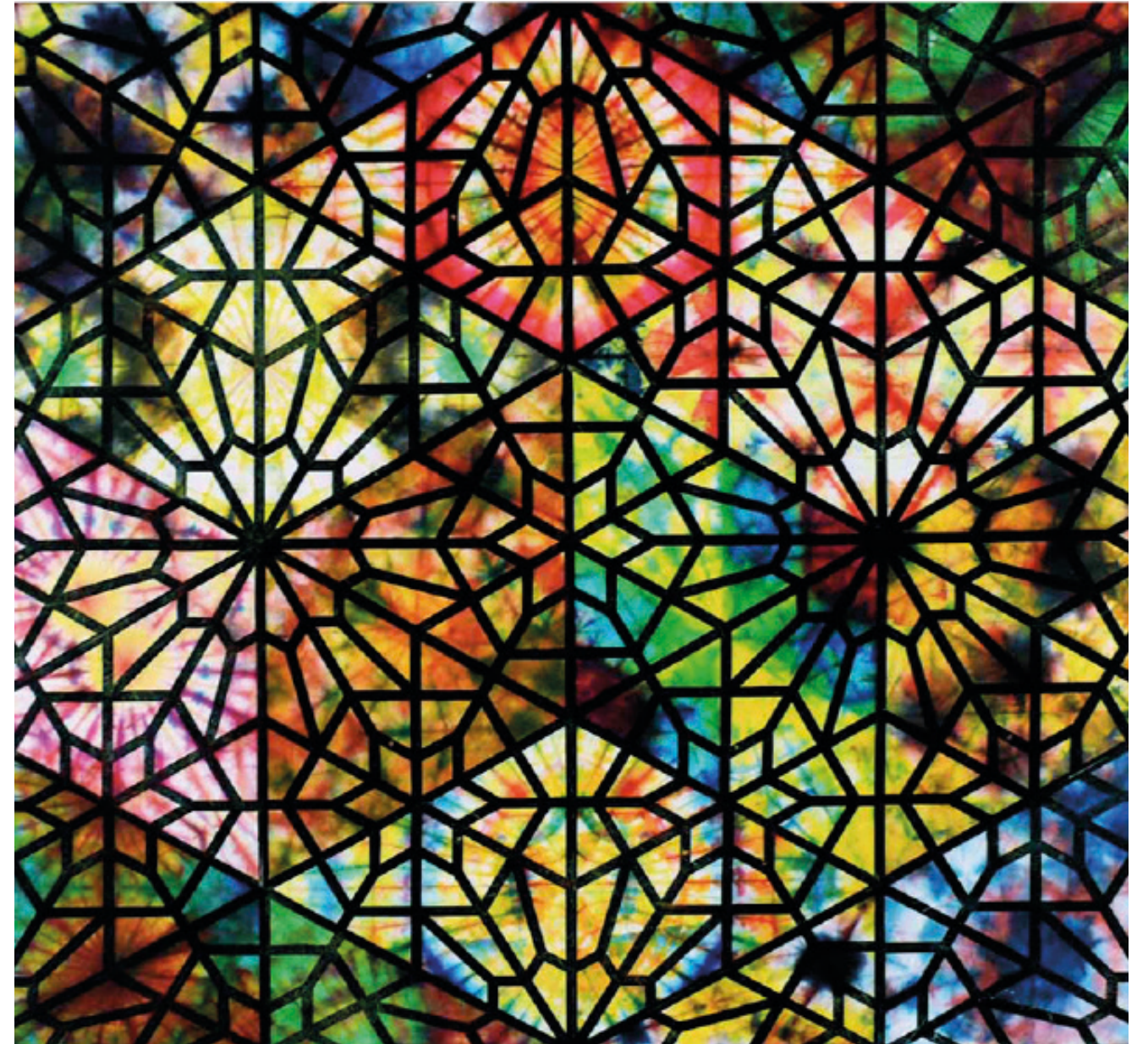
As a painter what you are always obliquely aiming towards somehow is to make visually manifest that sense of a unifying intelligence—the grand synthesis. In spite of the manifold nature of its material concerns, or the amount of detail and complexity involved, the ultimate experience of a work needs to come across as a singular expression.

Andalusian Panel, I, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
87 x 81,3 cm



I would say that to look at a painting means that one is taken up with another reality, a pictorial fictive reality, and as such that picture represents an imaginary location. So that if one is fed up with the mundane and pedestrian experiences of life, and instead stands in front of a painting, that is a place, an imaginary construction to inhabit with one's sensory being. To be lost inside of a painting is the crucial experience here, as an alternative to other places in the world.

Cairene panel, 2008
Mixed media on canvas
92 x 96,5 cm



Paintings for me represent imaginary geographic locations, and architecture helps me get an internal narrative going—it occasions a form of time travel that provides real clues to imaginary structures. I like to internalize those elements which are the “subjects” of my paintings, bring them together and make a kind of opera. In a way, I’m more like a composer or a storyteller. I like to invent characters and situations and put them together pictorially to make a believable visual fiction.

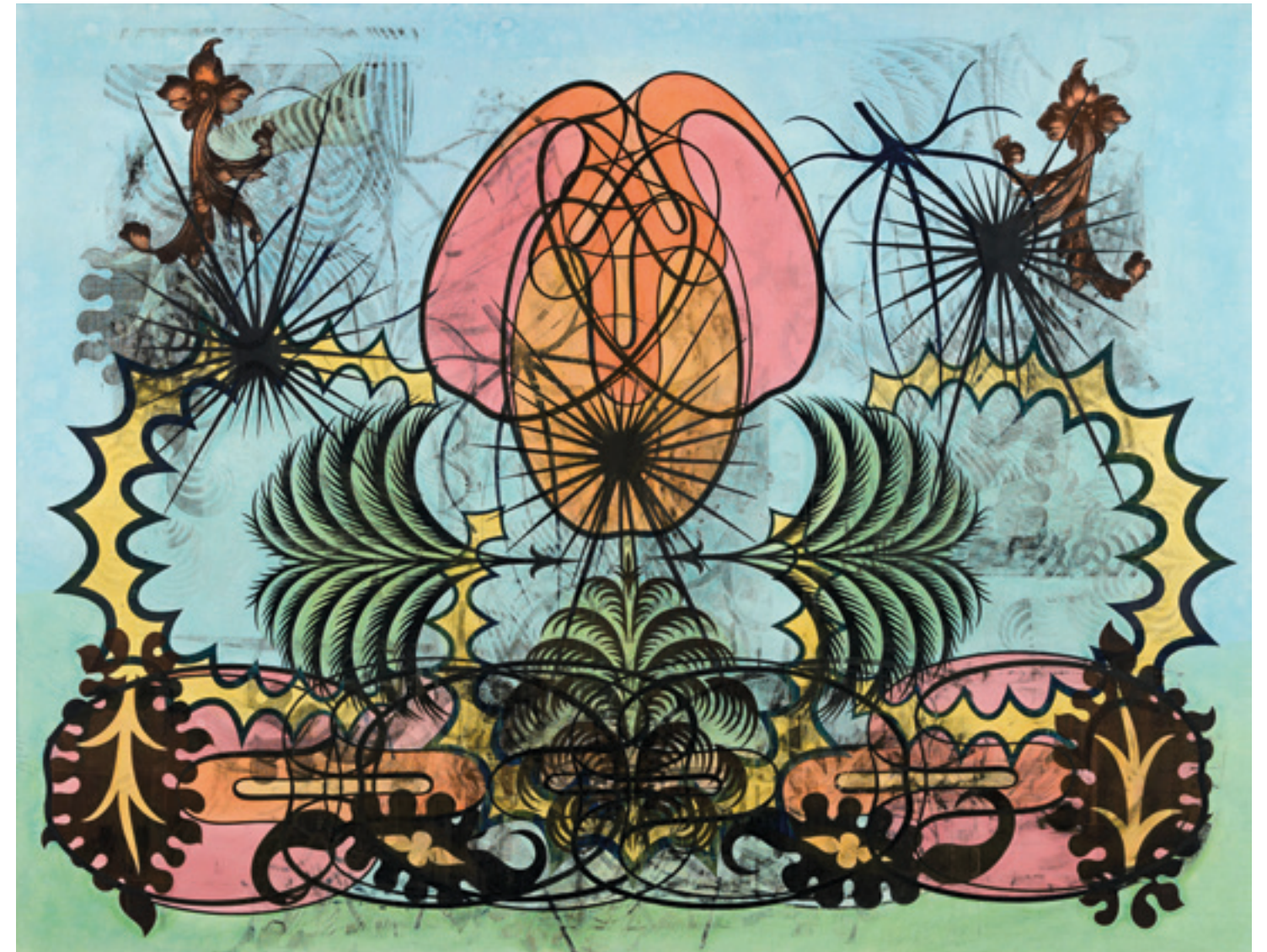
Tabriz, 2010
Mixed media on linen
189 x 219 cm



Essentially, I'm trying to make a primitive painting. I'm trying to summon the archaic. I want to enter into a primitive situation. This is my protest against the sensory deprivation that we experience, which is due to this tendency towards globalization, towards homogenization, towards the generic: a technological standard rather than an aesthetic standard.

I'm mining history, trying to regenerate a pictorial situation that is more humanistic. It's not about commodification, it's not about fitting into some sort of corporate structure. It's opposed to that direction. It's not a rejection of the new. It's a rejection of the expectations surrounding the new.

Glyph, 2011
Mixed media on canvas
83,5 x 121,5 cm



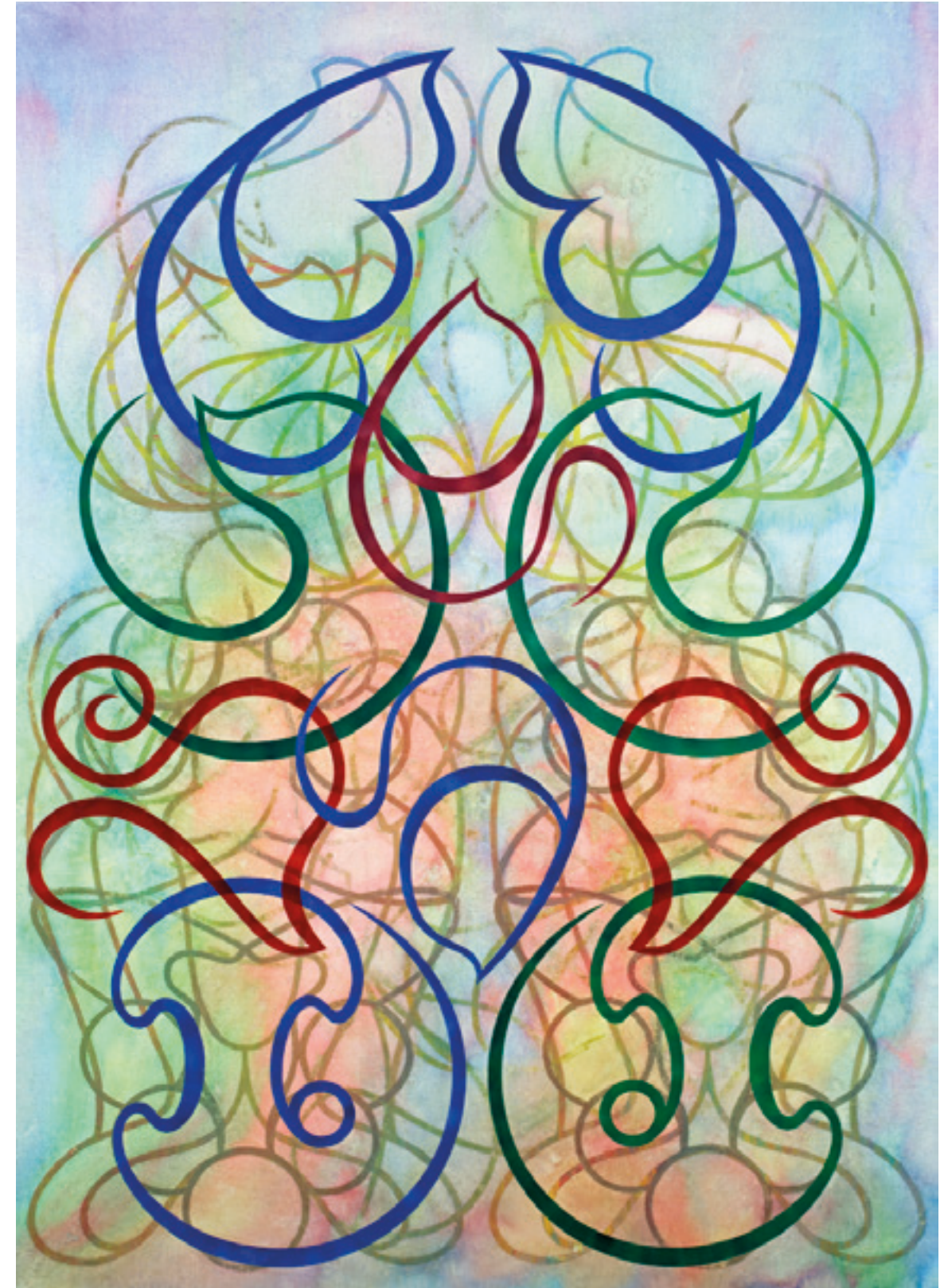
I want to see our way over this chasm of invisibility [between art history and the present work]. I look upon much historically appropriate work as isolating certain needs that we have with respect to painting, and examining those needs critically, hoping to divulge possibilities for freedom.

Study for Medallion Window, 2011
Mixed Media on linen
130 x 203 cm





Sigiri Totem I, 2011
Mixed media on canvas
229 x 160 cm



Sigiri Totem II, 2011
Mixed media on canvas
229 x 160 cm

For a long time in my work I'd been using various acculturated symbols or marks, crystalline references to art history and architecture. In the nature composites, I'm using depictions in place of acculturated symbols. The context of my work is still very much rooted in the language of abstraction, but this new vocabulary changes my approach somewhat.

I experience this nature imagery as opening up the work, letting other information in. I'm interested to see how it might fit into a cultural geology, how it tests the abstract tradition. Let's remember that abstract merely means "drawn from." It also applies to something that is taken from somewhere else.

Large panel with Row Ornament, 2012
Mixed media on wood
94 x 61 cm



I always liked to make paintings, and when I left school it became for me, existentially speaking, the most radical thing that I could do. At that time I felt I knew in my bones I was in the right place, to be engaged in this process of visual gesture building. I was convinced this was a deeply personal activity which could take into consideration everything I cared about, in terms of my readings in philosophy and criticism, in terms of my understanding of the history of cinema, and with regard to virtually any other subject I might learn about or expose myself to.

I realized that painting, as a discipline, might be able to reflect or contain all of these ideas. And it had nothing to do with the limited idea of the contextualization of the art object as a consumer fetish.

Large panel with Row Ornament, 2012
Mixed media on wood
61 x 94 cm



I think collage is the most important artistic invention of the twentieth century. Of course, it wasn't "invented" in the twentieth century—glueing images together as a method of pictorial application goes way back, but as a deliberate artistic tool, collage has been put to unprecedented uses by painters and filmmakers over the past hundred years now. My own approach is to blur the boundaries between what is painted and what is collaged. I build up my paintings in a constant back and forth play between these two methods.

For me, it's kind of extreme in that I will actually produce a vast array of printed collage material which is made specifically to be applied toward a single painting. Every painting has a distinct image vocabulary with a distinct scale, and this vocabulary is used architectonically as collage, that is, with the same structural intentions as a painted line. So for me, this idea of being able to freely substitute an already defined image on paper for a painted mark is a predominant factor in my work.

Study for Eros and Psyche I, 1994
Acrylic and oil pigment on paper
100 x 70 cm
Signed on the reverse



*I want darkness and I want fire. Beyond that, I don't know how I am going to paint it...
I want the viewer to feel the idea, to feel the fire and moisture at the same time, to be cool
and hot. I want these two elemental experiences to be jarring.*

Study for Eros and Psyche II, 1994
Acrylic and oil pigment on paper
78 x 58,4 cm
Signed on the reverse



Making a painting for me is not unlike shooting a film, in a schematic sense: one exposes a certain amount of footage and then one goes on to select the parts that belong to the final picture. I make many impressions on paper from these printing plates and then choose the examples that are most stimulating for me. When I'm ready, I can cut them out and tape them to the canvas to compose with them. I usually mark their exact location with pastel before they get collaged onto the canvas.

I want to give myself as much freedom as possible in the formation of the work, and using these methods enables me to generate a lot of imagery outside of the painting before it enters the work. I prefer having imagery that can be built around an improvised idea. It's a constant and ongoing process—a kind of radical empiricism.

Untitled, 1994
Oil and acrylic on paper
38,4 x 30,8 cm
Signed on the reverse



It's a question of understanding the nature of what one is engaged with, and reading the character of the thing as it moves along. The character of the work gets put there through gestures that are largely unconscious. I may have a general sense of what I want to do to a canvas, and I may have in mind a specific series of operations in order to arrive at that stage. But it's crucial to follow the clues that become visible along the way; and I study those clues very closely, deciphering them—like breaking a code.

Untitled, 1994
Oil and acrylic on paper
38,4 x 30,8 cm
Signed on the reverse



I suppose I like working towards certain boundaries of abstraction. This has to do with stretching a pictorial idea until it reaches the end of what it can do. Then I'll break this vocabulary wide open, intervening within it somehow. I see this as a way of making the work more abstract, which means that it contains the most of what can be held there.

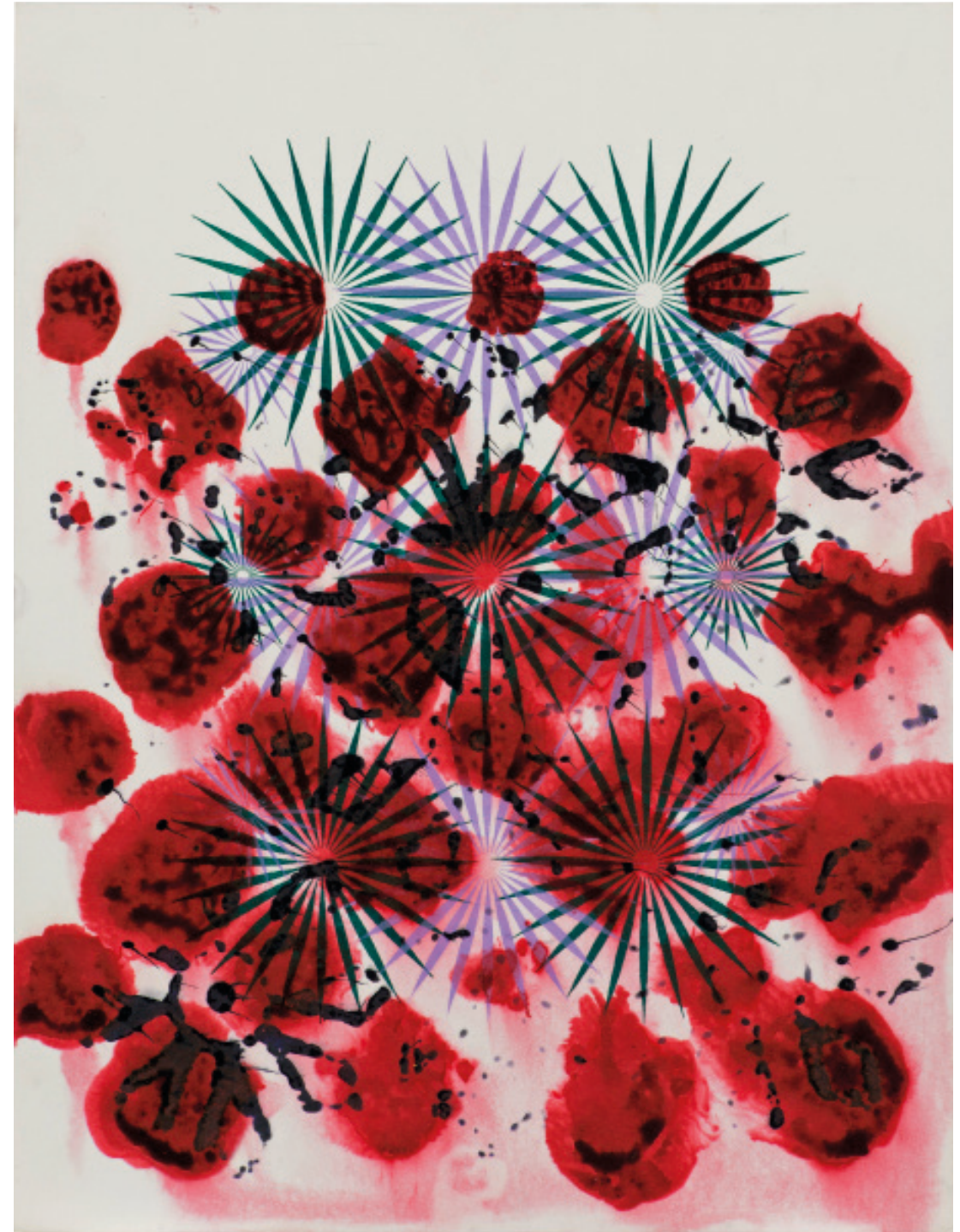
The work must be a highly energized field. The energy field has got to be unified—with every molecule active and contributing towards this. All of it is essential in measuring the impact or success of the thing. For me, when a painting feels complete in this way, it's tantamount to acknowledging a primal condition.

Untitled, 1994
Oil, pigment and linocut on paper
33 x 25,4 cm
Signed on the reverse



I feel I haven't painted abstract paintings so much as I've painted the abstract tradition into my paintings. I know they qualify as abstract from the standpoint of an audience, but I see them as having a strong personal connection to what I've lived through and to what I thought should be manifest in a work. I think of a painting as a physical place. All the paintings that I've ever loved in my life I felt as having a very specific geographical/cultural location.

Untitled, 1994
Oil, pigment and linocut on paper
33 x 25,4 cm
Signed on the reverse



I like syncretist situations, the kind of situation where incursions from many different geographical sources have a layering effect of cultural and historical density.

Some of my paintings contain elements from decorative sources, and yet the paintings themselves never assume a decorative character... Decoration is usually derived from a local natural situation; it can epitomize the lush quality of palms or lotus flowers or jungle overgrowth. Decoration in this folk sense is a kind of culturalized representation of nature.

I primarily want to feel the living reality of these elements, and to respond to them in a personal way by making a composition that allows these other voices to speak again in a way that I've understood and responded to. These voices are part of this lived experience represented by decoration.

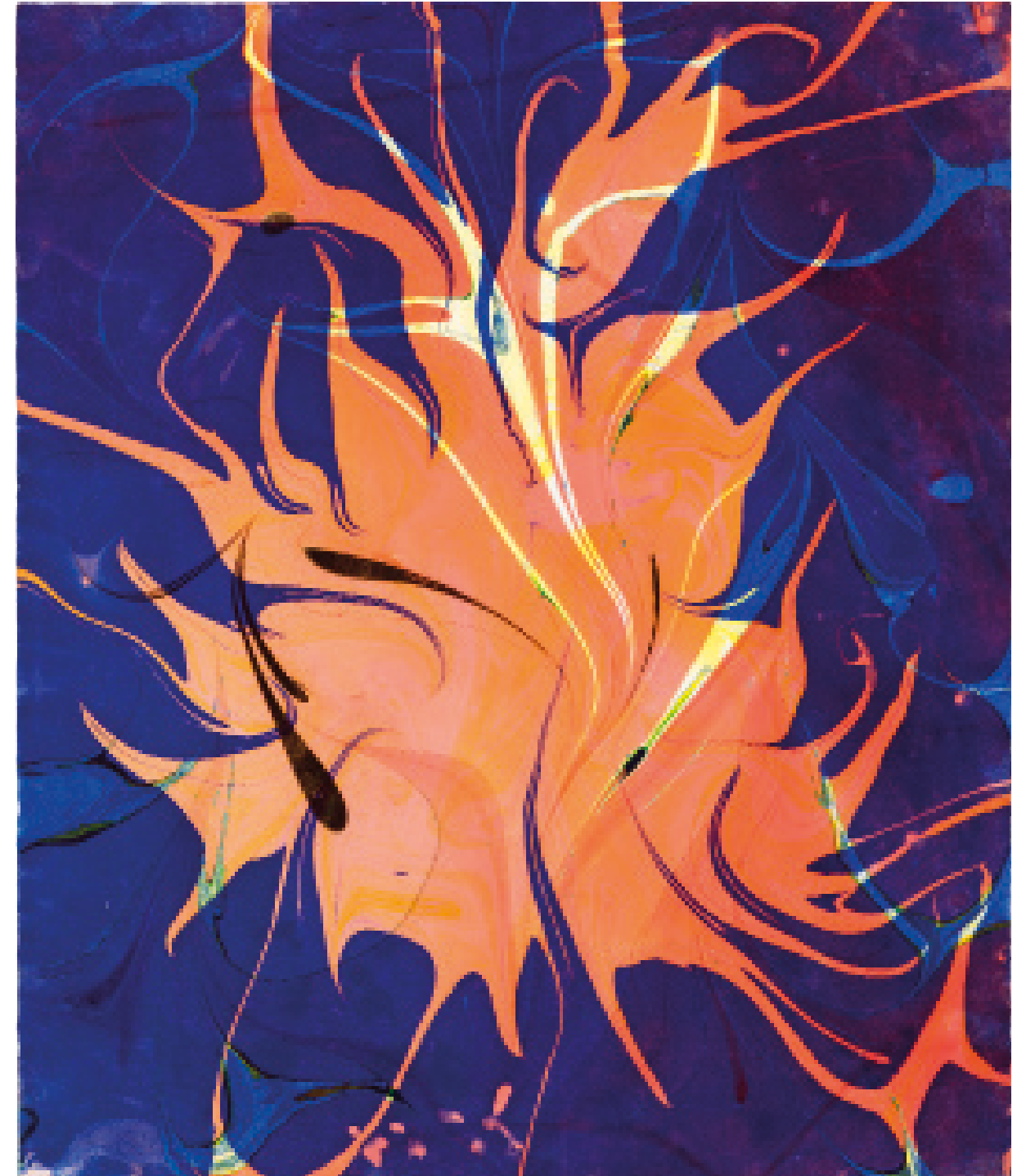
Untitled, 1996
Oil and pigment on paper
48,9 x 80 cm
Signed on the reverse



On one level, making a painting is always an extraordinary gamble, and it should be. I think the more an artist risks in terms of constantly moving forward into unknown territory, and the more one takes into consideration along the way, the better the art will be—theoretically at least. And this is a profound issue, because there is a big difference between what is potentially envisioned and that which is fully realized or becomes knowledge.

An artist cannot do everything, so the choices he or she makes and the parameters that are set up for the work will clearly effect the result. On the other hand, I see it as a basic given that an artist's primary responsibility is to experiment, to try things that don't always work out, and to do the practical research necessary to expand their point of view and to broaden their range of subject matter. So "gambling," from the standpoint of praxis, is all in a day's work, so to speak.

Untitled, 2003
Acrylic and ink on paper
46 x 39,4 cm
Signed on the reverse



Painted space is mental space. For me, the deepest part of the process of making a painting is when I get into an almost incantatory state. When I'm working in this way, I can sometimes recognize a previous archaic existence that I seem to have been a part of. I'm revisiting an archaic moment. Sometimes when I'm working on a painting, I'll put an element into place, and I'll see that in relation to something else; and I will have an experience of passing through the familiar terrain of a forest encampment, or sitting by a fire, part of some remote tribal archaic life that I have been a part of, I feel that very strongly.

It's a recognition of an earlier existence, in the act of having experienced just a particle of that existence in a work. That's what really exhilarates me.

PHILIP TAAFFE

BIOGRAPHY

PHILIP TAAFFE

1955 Born in Elizabeth - New Jersey, USA

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 *L'envoi* - Jablonka Maruani Mercier Gallery, Brussels, BE
Casamadre Arte Contemporaneo, Naples, IT
(with Christopher Wool)
Luhring Augustine Bushwick, Brooklyn, NY
- 2014 Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento
- 2013 Luhring Augustine, New York
- 2012 Baldwin Gallery, Aspen
- 2011 Gagosian Gallery, London
Irish Museum, Dublin
Galerie Jablonka, Böhm Chapel, Hürth/Köln
- 2010 MAGI' 900, Bologna
Gagosian Gallery, New York
Gagosian Gallery, Athens
- 2009 Galerie Jablonka, Berlin
Studio d'Arte Raffaelli, Trento
- 2008 Philip Taaffe: The Life of Forms, Philip Taaffe: The Life of
Forms, Paintings 1980-2007. Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg
Galerie Jablonka ArtParis, Abu Dhabi
- 2007 Gagosian Gallery, New York
The Portalakis Collection, Athens
- 2004 Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea della
Repubblica di San Marino
Jablonka Galerie, Cologne
- 2003 Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich
- 2002 Jablonka Galerie, Cologne
Studio Rafaelli Arte, Trento
- 2001 Galleria Civica Di Arte Contemporanea Trento
Art Gallery, University of California, San Diego
Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris
- 2000 IVAM, Centre del Carme, Valencia
Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1999 Gagosian Gallery, New York
Baldwin Gallery, Aspen
- 1998 Rebecca Camhi Gallery, Athens
Thomas Ammann Fine Art, Zurich
- 1997 Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles
Mario Diacono Gallery, Boston
Peter Blum, New York
- 1996 Max Hetzler, Berlin
Wiener Secession, Vienna
- 1994 Gagosian Gallery, New York
- 1993 Gerald Peters Gallery, Dallas
Center for the Fine Arts, Miami
- 1992 Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin
- 1991 Max Hetzler Galerie, Cologne
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
- 1987 Mario Diacono Gallery, Boston
Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
- 1986 Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
Galerie Ascan Crone, Hamburg
Galerie Paul Maenz, Cologne
- 1984 Galerie Ascan Crone, Hamburg
Pat Hearn Gallery, New York
- 1982 Roger Litz Gallery, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 The Optical Unconscious, Gebert Foundation for Culture, CH
The First International Biennial of Contemporary Art of
Cartagena de Indias, Columbia
The Floral Ghost, Planthouse, New York
New York in the 1980s: Urban Theater, The Modern Art
Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth
Post Op: Du perceptuel au pictural. 1958-2014,
Galerie Perrotin, Paris
House of Vetti, Koenig & Clinton, New York
- 2013 Expanding the Field of Painting, Institute of Contemporary
Art, Boston, MA
Some Radical Turns: Works by Carl Andre, Robert Barry,
Alighiero Boetti, Alberto Giacometti, Sherrie Levine,
Pablo Picasso and Philip Taaffe, Jablonka Galerie, Zürich
Künstler Der Galerie, Jablonka Galerie, Zürich
Bleckner Taaffe Winters, Jablonka Galerie, Zürich
- 2012 Conceptual Abstraction, Hunter College/Times Square
Gallery, New York; Cit Art Foundation/Neues Museum,
Staatliches Museum für Kunst und Design, Nürnberg, DE
Watercolors. Phillips de Pury & Company, New York
It's Always Summer on the Inside, Anton Kern Gallery, NY;
Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, NY
the name is BURROUGHS, ZKM: Museum of
Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2011 Contemporary Art from the Collection of Jason Rubell,
Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL
Political Patterns, (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen)
ifa-Galerie Berlin & Stuttgart, Germany
Ornamental Structures, Kunstverein Pforzheim, Germany
Rediscover, Beledere, Vienna
Artists Collect: Prints from the Collections of Sol Lewitt,
Kiki Smith, Philip Taaffe and Richard Tuttle, International
Print Center, New York
Alchemy and Inquiry: Philip Taaffe, Fred Tomaselli,
Terry Winters, Glyndor Gallery at Wave Hill, Bronx, NY.
Traveled to James Cohan Gallery, Shanghai
Now & Then, Harris Lindsay Works of Art, London

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York
The Broad Art Foundation, Santa Monica
Birmingham Museum of Art, Birmingham, AL
Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine
Des Moines Art Center
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art, New York
Philadelphia Museum of Art
Museum der Moderne Salzburg
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna
Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, MA
Sammlung Essl, Austria
Collection Scharpff, Hamburger Kunsthalle
Reina Sofia, Madrid
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Kunstmuseum, Wolfsburg

PHILIP TAAFFE

L'ENVOI

SEPTEMBER 2015
Exhibition & Catalogue

JABLONKA MARUANI MERCIER GALLERY

BRUSSELS - KNOKKE

CATALOGUE © 2015 JMMGALLERY

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Designed by
SANDRINE LALONDE

Printed by
GRAPHIUS, BELGIUM

SPECIAL THANKS TO

RAYMOND FOYE

JMM GALLERY
Jablonka Maruani Mercier

Rue de la Régence 17, B-1000 Brussels
BELGIUM

www.jmmgallery.com

ISBN 978-2-930487-18-2

