

# CANAN TOLON

*SOMEWHERE NOW*

VON LINTEL GALLERY · NEW YORK

# CANAN TOLON: SOMEWHERE NOW

By Cathy Lang Ho

*Limbo. Fugue. Glitch. Reflex.* Compact and suggestive, these terms imply a range of different but similar states of uncertainty, transition, or disturbance. These words—the titles of just some of Canan Tolon’s solo exhibitions held over the past two decades—speak to the artist’s persistent concern with precarious states and in-between spaces. Lapses, gaps, voids—what otherwise might be regarded as characterless buffers, Tolon reveals to be essential to propping up fuller experiences and bigger pictures.

The primacy of the void, both spatial and temporal, in Tolon’s work is not surprising, given her technique: Her images start to emerge when she begins the process of removal, scraping with a sharp razor blade at thick layers of black oil pigment to unveil scenes that seem extant, as if they have been waiting to be excavated. Though pure geometric abstractions, her paintings evoke landscapes, urban scenes, sprawling constructions, horizons distorted by a kaleidoscope.

Perplexity is a common first reaction to her work. Since Tolon started experimenting with black oil stick on Mylar—a milky waterproof architectural tracing paper—in 1991, she has created a sizable archive of ravishing, imaginary places, Piranesi-esque in their endless, warped perspectives. Disorientation notwithstanding, they contain traces of the familiar. Black and white images seem inevitably to connote evidence of reality: As visually

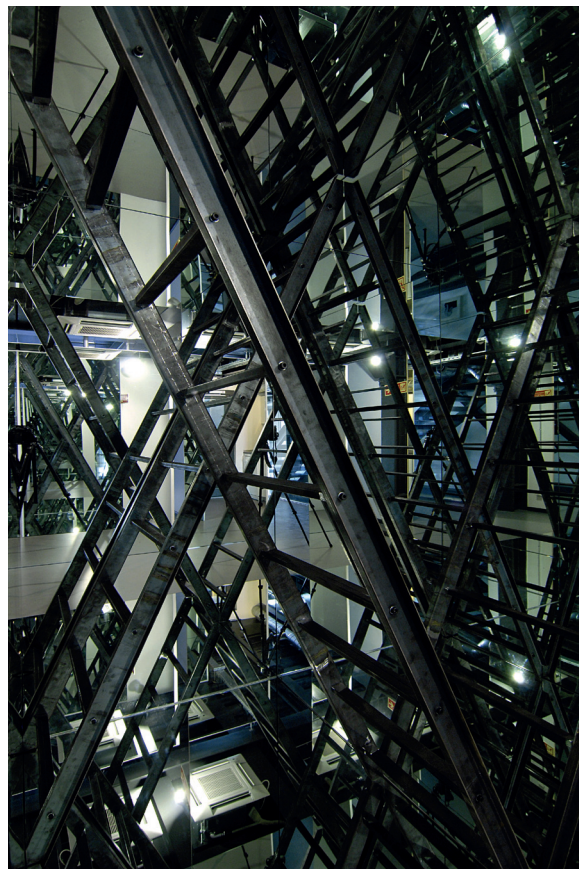
kindred to documentary photography and film, they seem to freeze moments or events into historic record. But more interesting is how and why Tolon’s elusive images incite a need for viewers to identify comforting reference points. “False memories”—that’s Tolon description of the perhaps natural human compulsion to anchor personal experiences in imagery, no matter how abstract. The recurrent sense of *déjà vu*, or perhaps more aptly, *déjà là*, is intentional, traceable to Tolon’s sympathy for “the hope for a possibility of a narrative.”

Across Tolon’s repertoire—collages, paintings, sculptures, installations—she has demonstrated a preoccupation with space, the way it’s visualized, imagined, remembered, and navigated. Her training as an architect has had a profound influence, no doubt, as has her multicultural background—she’s Turkish-born, French-raised, English-educated, and Bay Area-based—which has instilled in her a marked mindfulness of cultural gaps and appreciation for a multiplicity of perspectives. One of Tolon’s most endearing personality traits is her constant word-punning, her plays on “lost in translation” concepts that only a polyglot could concoct. *Double-entendres*—and all the ironies and perversions they embody—pervade the way she filters the world. It’s this linguistic dexterity that helped her navigate the cultural and personal divides she confronted as a young person forced to move through the world with limited mobility.





Untitled, 1997, black oil on mylar, 14 x 11 inches



Emergency Exit, 2007, site specific installation, 6 mirrors and 2 ladders, 90 x 48 x 48 inches

Tolon's reduced mobility, caused by an early-childhood bout with polio, obviously factors significantly in her fixation on space. Though this hardly defines who she is—and in true Tolon form, she banters easily about it—on a practical level, her awareness of space is more magnified than that of most people. As a result of her reduced mobility, she developed an extraordinary spatial dexterity, reliant on mental skills that empower her to create, turn, and warp volumes in her mind, and like a time traveler, disregard “real” space altogether.

Such relativities—cultural, perceptual, physical, temporal—are recurrent themes for Tolon. Though she trained as an architect, she never intended to be one. She wanted to be a philosopher. For her, studying architecture was just one avenue towards understanding phenomenology, or the study of the structure of consciousness and the way we experience things. As a student of London's well-known Architectural Association and later as a Ph.D. candidate in architectural history at U.C. Berkeley, she took a particular interest in French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, curious about the role perception plays in how we engage our surroundings. In common parlance: To get from point A to point B, for some people, it might take 5 minutes; for others, 3 hours, and the journey is never the same for different individuals. Another French philosopher, Henri Bergson, was equally inspiring for Tolon: His theory of time and consciousness resonated with her personal preoccupations with time as it is inexorably linked to mobility.

Throughout her career, Tolon has challenged herself to imbue two-dimensional works or static materials with the third dimension, time. (It's for the same reason that she's employed non-static materials in other works, like oxidizing metals and growing grass.) She describes her ink paintings as “origami of spaces,” with folded planes and interrupted fields of visions that create their own sense of place and time elapsing. In her memoir *Futur Imparfait* (written in French and wittily named for a tense that does not exist), she elaborates on these ideas and the unavoidable tendency we have to filter what we know, what we've seen, and what has happened through the wavering lens of the present, proving the inconstancy of perception.

Tolon's obsession with space and time is especially pronounced in her latest works. She has escalated the repetitiveness of forms with rhythmic sequences that seem to spill beyond the plane's edge, resembling stills in a film strip. The work is more linear, more rhythmic, or “more musical,” in Tolon's words, and less representational. The perfected repetitiveness is attributable in part by Tolon's mastery of her own technique of careful flicks of a sharp razor blade, which requires great simultaneous control of hand and eye muscles. Her works involve a tremendous amount of physicality; this is even more true for her sculptures and installations. She might even be seen as a tad masochistic, subjecting herself to harsh, labor-intensive exercises in order to imprint her works with her own arduous movements. The dynamism in the paintings is palpable: They move, and you move with them, and with her.



**Time After Time**, 2010, two part site specific installation with paintings on multiple panels, mirrors, steel balustrades and guardrails, and lightbulbs. Installed at the Institute for the Humanities at the University of Michigan.

It's been more than 20 years since Tolon first started experimenting with this form of painting, which originated as an act of frugality: Working part time as an architectural renderer, she always had leftover Mylar, which she recycled for her artworks. Today, she still goes back to the materials that were central to the architects of her generation—the T-square, Mylar, sharp blades, sponges—surprising herself that there are still new shapes and movements to discover, new possibilities in the technique. The results are stunning, simultaneously rigid and random, premeditated and accidental.

A new dimension she has introduced to her scraped-ink paintings is color. It's not novel for Tolon to work with color—it appears in her rich rust paintings, in which she places metal objects on

canvases and allows them to weather outdoors naturally before intervening, and her growing sculptures with seeded canvases. In her most recent body of work, the colors appear more as highlights than as structural components of an image. She admits, "A painting with colors seems artificial to me." She describes her use of color in this context as "a modifier," akin to the way old black-and-white photos or movies have been retroactively sepia-toned or colorized. Indeed, the colors, which are more fades and stains than anything, seem to heighten Tolon's manual process as they disrupt the photographic facade. In the world she has constructed, stories are not told in pictures but in slowly unfolding sequences, details embedded in durations that transport us from one impression to the next.

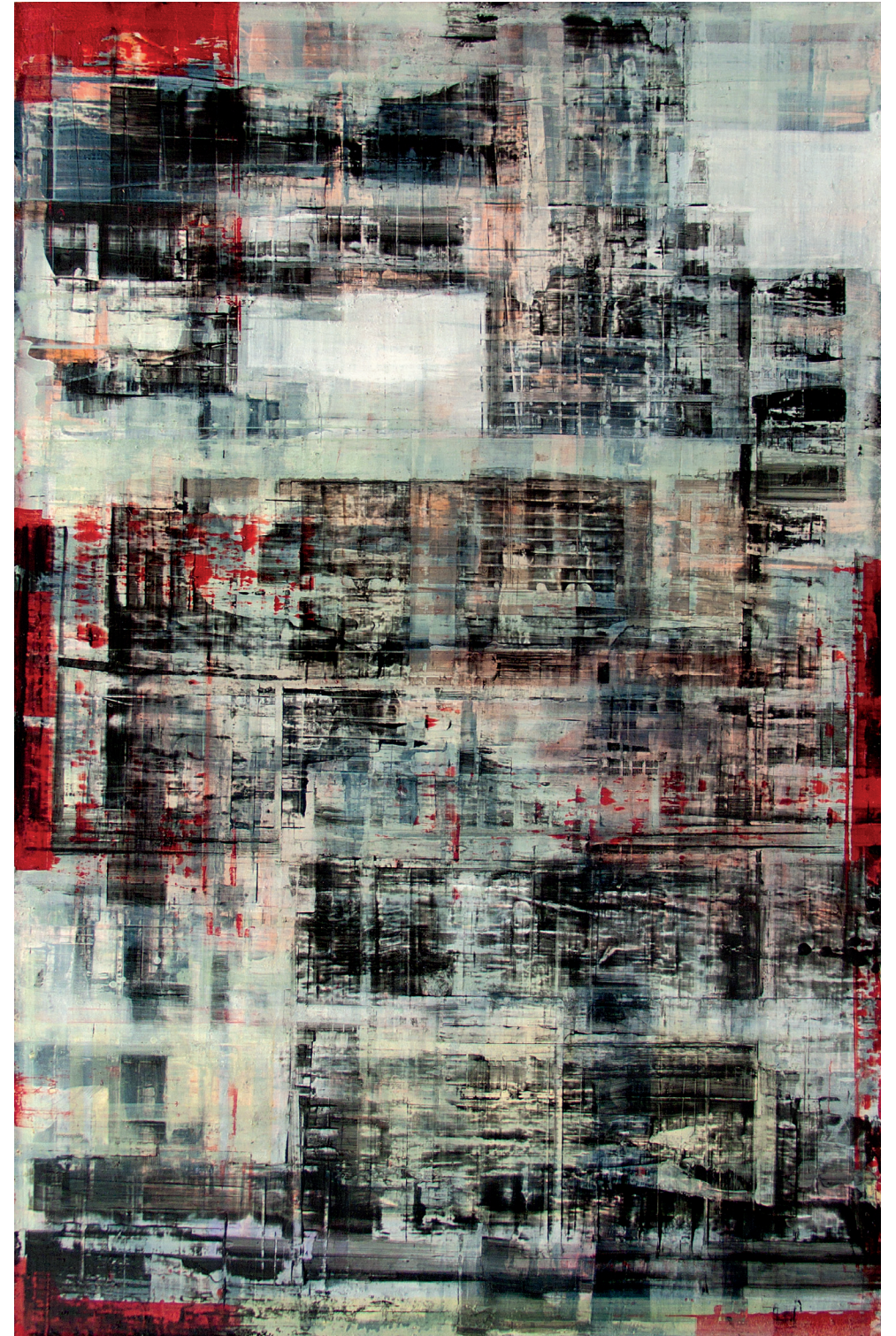


Untitled 1-11, 2012  
oil on four panels  
24 x 24 inches each (48 x 48 inches overall)





Untitled 1.3, 2013  
oil on canvas  
40 1/2 x 26 inches



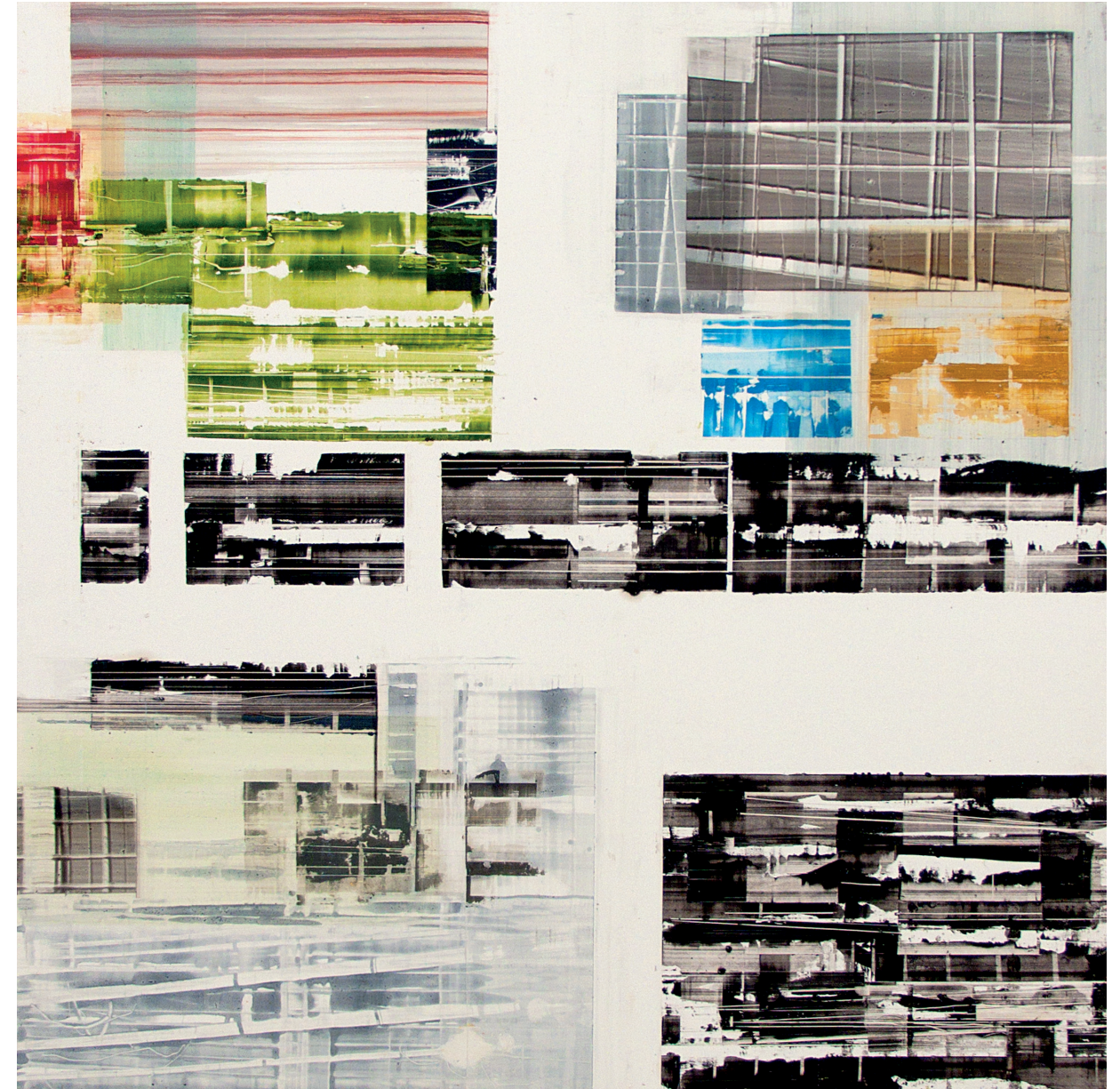


Untitled 10.2, 2013  
oil on panel  
16 x 16 inches



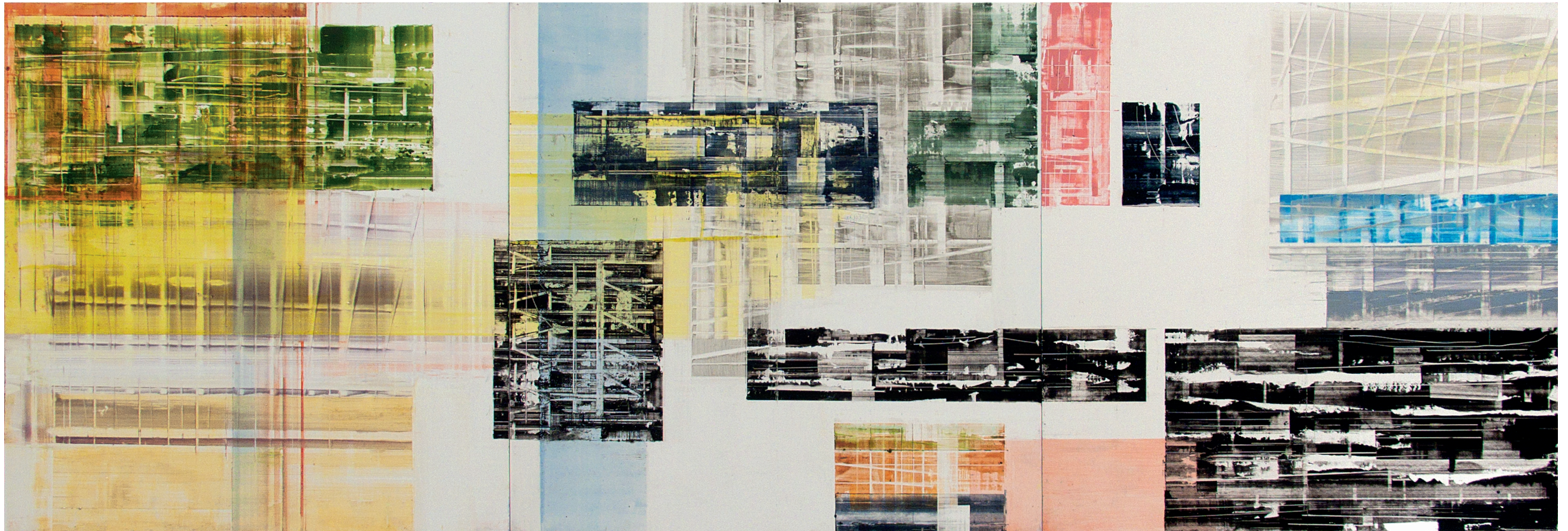


Untitled 11.2, 2013  
oil on panel  
24 x 24 inches



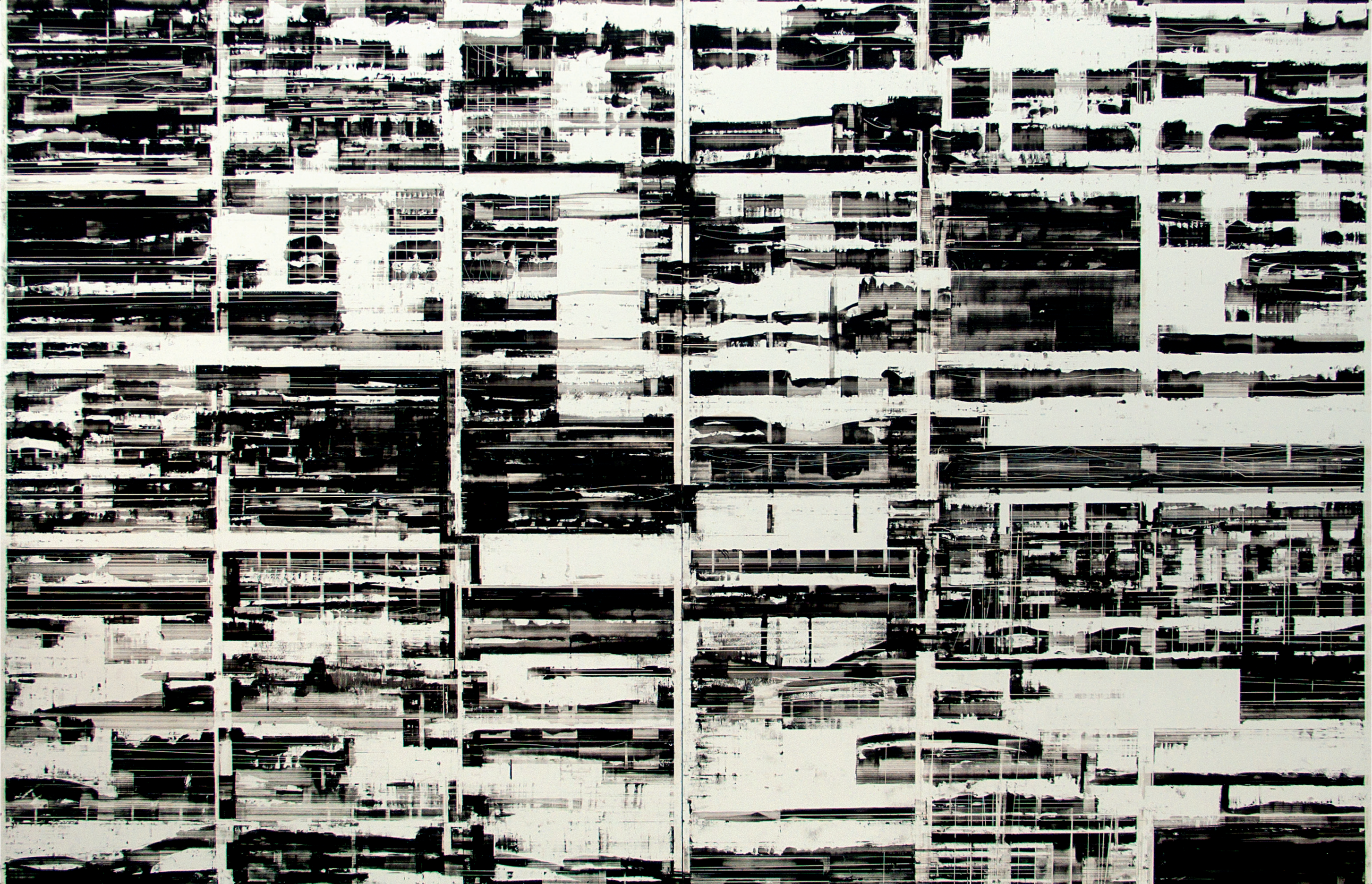


Untitled 12.2, 2013  
oil on three panels  
16 x 16 inches each (16 x 48 inches overall)



next pages:  
Untitled 13.2, 2013  
oil on two panels  
48 x 36 inches each (48 x 72 inches overall)







Untitled 16.3, 2013  
oil on canvas  
24 x 24 inches

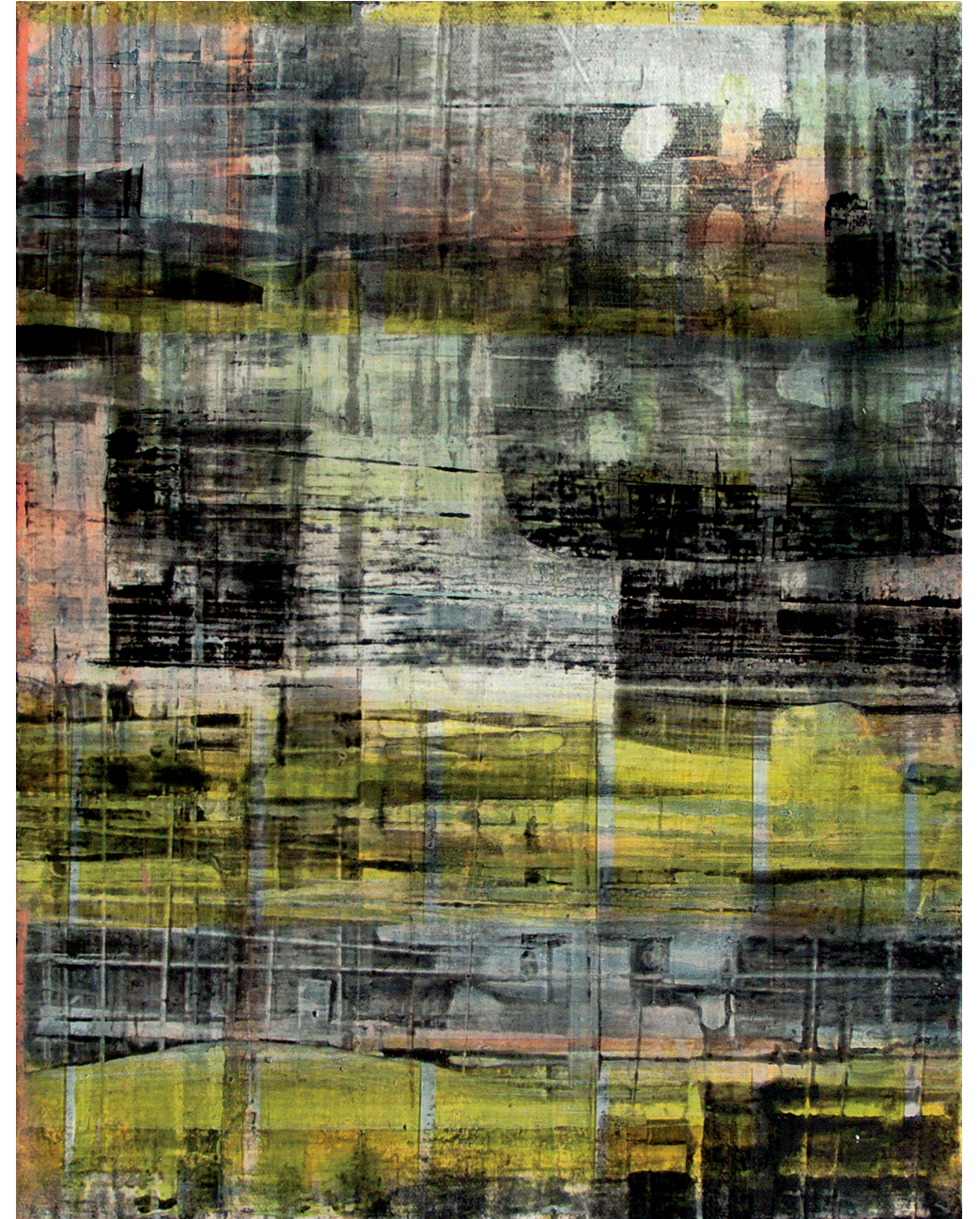




Untitled 2.3, 2013  
oil on canvas  
12 x 12 inches

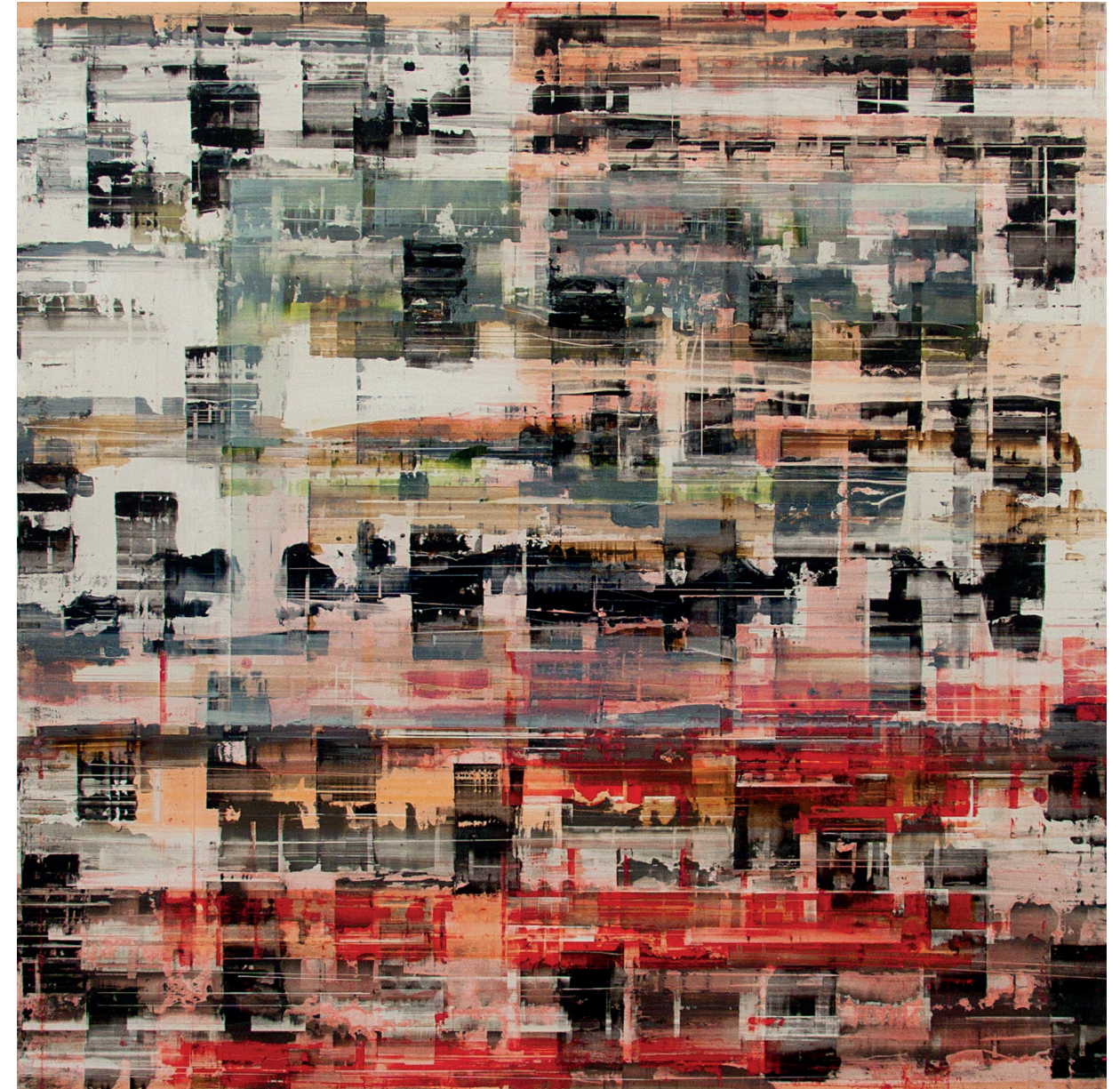


Untitled 3.3, 2013  
oil on canvas  
14 x 12 inches





Untitled 4.2, 2013  
oil on panel  
24 x 24 inches





Untitled 4.3, 2013  
oil on canvas  
24 x 24 inches



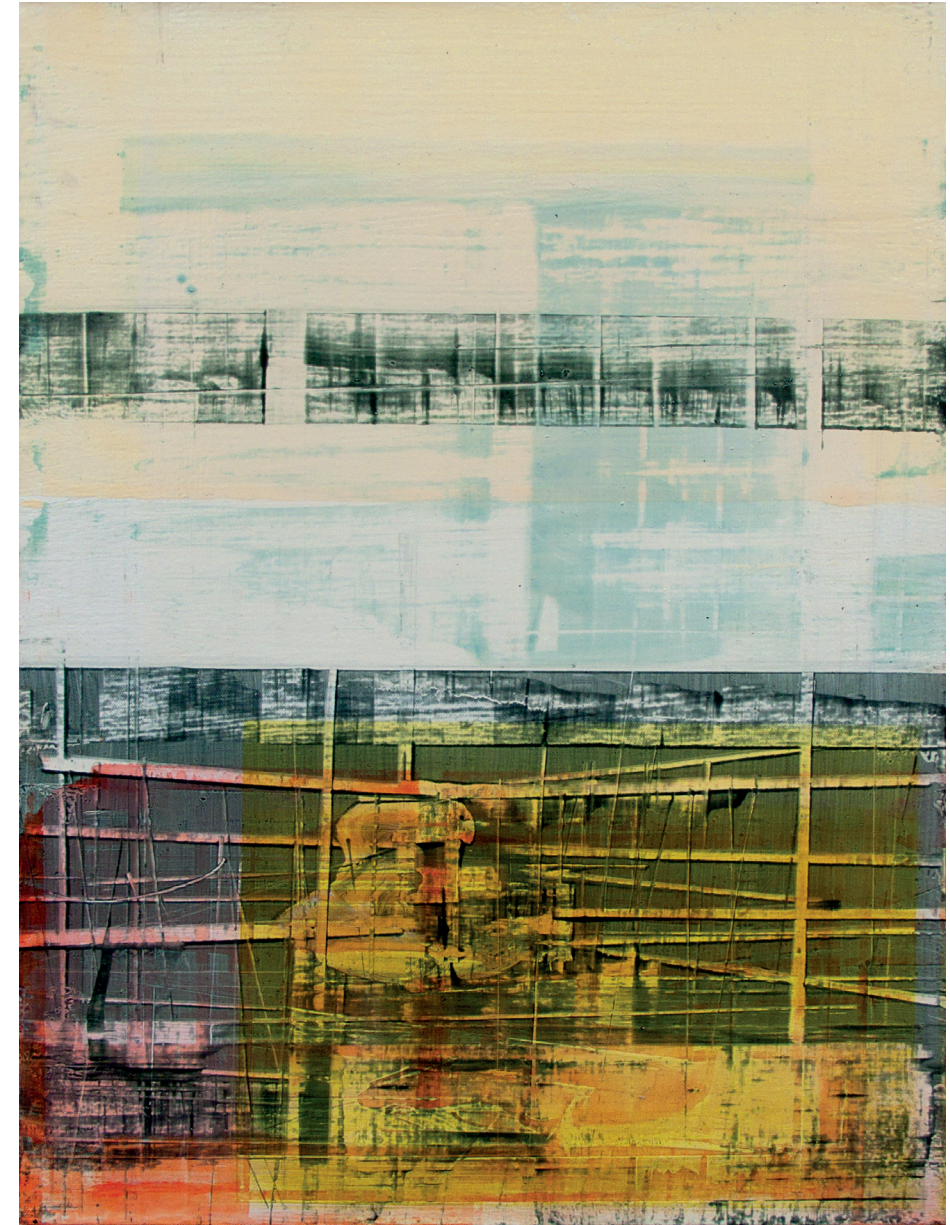


Untitled 5.2, 2013  
oil on panel  
24 x 24 inches





Untitled 5.3, 2013  
oil on canvas  
24 x 18 inches



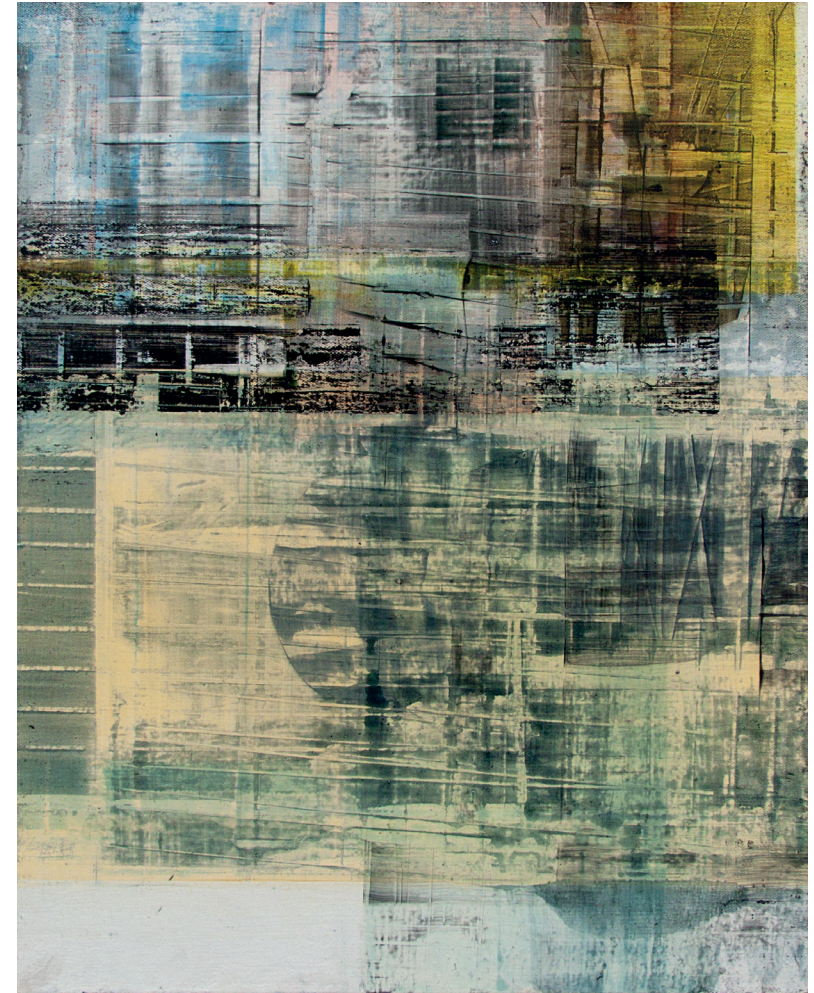


Untitled 6.2, 2013  
oil on panel  
24 x 24 inches

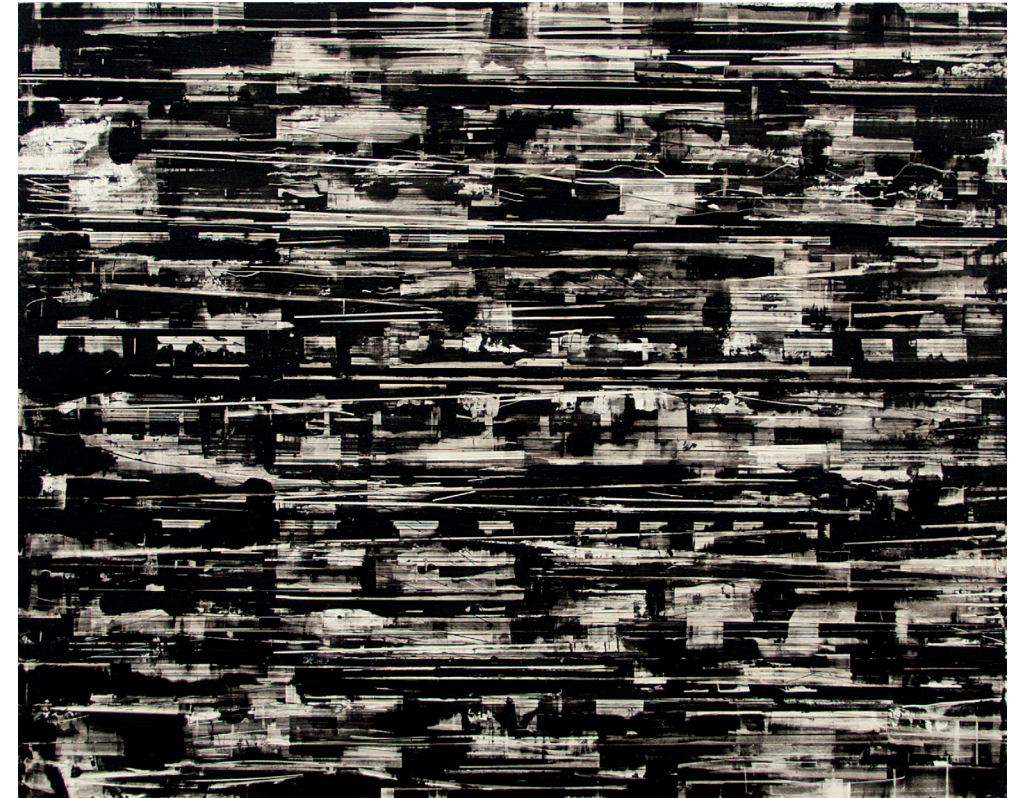




Untitled 6.3, 2013  
oil on canvas  
20 x 16 inches



Untitled 7.2, 2013  
oil on panel  
16 x 20 inches





Untitled 7.3, 2013  
oil on canvas  
33 x 30 inches





Untitled 8.2, 2013  
oil on panel  
36 x 36 inches





Untitled 8.3, 2013  
oil on canvas  
36 x 24 inches





Untitled 9.2, 2013  
oil on panel  
24 x 24 inches





Untitled 9.3, 2013  
oil on canvas  
55 x 55 inches





CATHY LANG HO

Cathy Lang Ho is an independent writer, editor, and curator based in New York. She was the commissioner and lead curator of the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale (2012). Her writing has appeared in numerous publications, including *Architect* (where she is a contributing editor), *Blueprint*, *Domus*, *Arquitectura Viva*, *New York Times*, *Artinfo*, and *The Architect’s Newspaper* (where she was the founding editor).

CANAN TOLON

trained as an architect and holds a Masters from the University of California at Berkeley. In addition to her paintings, she is also well known for her large-scale installation work. She has exhibited internationally since 1984, including shows at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Rotterdam’s Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, the Istanbul Modern Museum, and London’s Saachi Gallery. In 2012, she was named one of Art+Auction’s 50 Next Most Collectible Artists. Tolon lives and works in the California Bay Area.

Born in Istanbul, Turkey  
Lives and works in Emeryville, California

EDUCATION

- 1983 MA Architecture, University of California at Berkeley, CA
- 1980 BA, Middlesex University/Architectural Association, London, England
- 1979 Fachhochschule, Trier, Germany
- 1976 Napier University, Department of Design, Edinburgh, Scotland
- 1975 Baccalauréat, Philosophie-Lettres, Ecole Française d’Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2013 *Somewhere Now*, Von Lintel Gallery, New York, NY
- 2012 *Time After Time*, Institute for the Humanities, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI  
*Then, and then*, Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco, CA
- 2011 *Reflex*, Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2010 *Fugue*, Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey
- 2009 *Break-in*, Artists Gallery, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, CA
- 2008 *Glitch*, Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Glitch*, Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco, CA
- 2005 *Everything is Honky Dory*, Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey  
*Everything is Honky Dory*, Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2004 *Blind Trust*, Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey     *Blind Trust*, Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey
- 2003 Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco, CA  
Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey  
Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Angle of Repose*, Mills Museum of Art, Oakland, CA
- 2001 Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey  
Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey
- 2000 Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France  
*Nothing to Declare*, Borusan Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey
- 1999 Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey
- 1998 Kaza Eseri, Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey
- 1997 Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco, CA  
Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey



1996 Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey

1993 Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey  
*Still Lives*, Center for Contemporary Art, Santa Fe, NM  
Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey

1992 Garden of the Zodiac Gallery, Omaha, NE  
Introduction Harcourts Modern and Contemporary Art Gallery, San Francisco, CA

1991 Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey  
Pro-Arts Gallery, Oakland, CA  
Bemis Gallery, Bemis Foundation, Omaha, NE  
Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Still Lives*, Maçka Art Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey

1990 University of California at Berkeley, CA

1984 University of California at Berkeley, CA

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2012 The 1<sup>st</sup> Kiev Biennale, Curator David Elliott, Kiev, Ukraine  
Istanbul Modern-Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

2011 *Zwölf im Zwölften*, Tanas, Berlin, Germany  
*Suretin Sireti / Beyond the Apparent*, Pera Museum, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Hayal ve Hakikat / Dream and Reality*, Istanbul Modern Museum, Turkey  
*Driven to Abstraction*, Von Lintel Gallery, New York, NY  
*Confessions of Dangerous Minds*, The Saachi Gallery, London, England

2010 *İkinci Sergi / Second Exhibition*, Arter, Istanbul, Turkey  
*+infinity*, Curator Deniz Artun, Cer Modern, Ankara, Turkey  
*A Dream... But Not Yours*, Curator Esra Sarigedik, National Museum of Woman in the Arts, Washington, DC

2009 *Istanbul Next Wave*, Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin, Germany  
*New Works, New Horizons*, Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Turkey

2008 *In and Out of Istanbul*, Slought Foundation, Philadelphia, PA  
*Bay Area Now 5*, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA  
*Modern Experiences*, Istanbul Modern, Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Turkey

2007 *J.P. Morgan Chase Collection*, Pera Museum, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Istanbul Now*, Lukas Feichtner Gallery, Vienna, Austria  
*21<sup>st</sup> Annual Exhibition*, Emeryville, CA  
*Modern and Beyond*, Curator Fulya Erdemci, Santrallistanbul, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Nev/Tepebaşı*, Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey

2005 *Çini İçin*, İznik Tiles Foundation, Hagia Sofia, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Contaging Natur*, Aksanat, Istanbul, Turkey  
*2<sup>nd</sup> Pedestrian Exhibition*, Curators Fulya Erdemci and Emre Baykal, Karaköy, Istanbul, Turkey  
Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey

2004 *Observation, Interpretation, Multiplicity*, Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Turkey

2003 *Turkey-Plastic Dialogues: Verheugen Selection*, City Hall, Brussels, Belgium  
The Blue Room, San Francisco, CA  
Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Organized Conflict*, Proje4L Museum of Contemporary Art, Istanbul, Turkey  
U.N. Art Center, Brussels, Belgium

2002 Rundetårn Art Center, Copenhagen, Denmark  
Permanent Collection, Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Turkey  
*1<sup>st</sup> Pedestrian Exhibition*, Curator Fulya Erdemci, Nişantaşı, Istanbul, Turkey

2001 Topkapı Museum, Istanbul, Turkey

2000 *Space Time*, Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey  
*Space Time*, Galeri Nev Istanbul, Turkey

1999 *Cover Contour*, Galeri Nev, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Cover Contour*, Galeri Nev, Ankara, Turkey  
*Re- Generation*, University of California Art Gallery, San Diego, CA  
*Crossing Zones*, De Paul University Art Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Lack Excess*, Galerie Nev, Ankara, Turkey  
*Lack Excess*, Galerie Nev, Istanbul, Turkey

1998 San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA  
Bolas Museum of Art, Bolas, CA1997  
*Drawing First*, Southern Exposure, San Francisco, CA

1995 *Long Horizons*, Falkirk Cultural Center, San Rafael, CA  
Nexus Gallery, Berkeley, CA  
*I am Another*, Charlottenborg Center for Arts, Copenhagen, Denmark

1994 *Forms of Address*, Walter/McBean Gallery, San Francisco Art Institute, CA  
Nexus Institute Gallery, Berkeley, CA  
*Zyzyva*, Victoria Room, San Francisco, CA  
*Coming Across*, Euphrat Museum-DeAnza College, Cupertino, CA

1993 Topkapı Museum, Istanbul, Turkey  
Southern Exposure, San Francisco, CA

1992 3<sup>rd</sup> International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul, Turkey  
*Sanart '92*, Ankara, Turkey  
Montgomery Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
Bemis Gallery, Bemis Foundation, Omaha, NE  
Garden of the Zodiac Gallery, Omaha, NE  
San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, CA  
Alsace Plurielle, Mulhouse

1991 *Of the Wall*, Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, Lincoln, NE

1990 Richmond Art Center, Richmond, CA  
Bemis Foundation, Omaha, NE

1989 Gallery Vienna, Chicago, IL  
Nerlino Gallery, New York, NY  
American Institute of Architects, San Francisco, CA

1988 Viridian Gallery, New York, NY

1987 California College of Arts and Crafts, San Francisco, CA

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