

ADAM HENRY

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BY ACCEPTANCE AND DEFERRAL:
THE WORK OF ADAM HENRY

To make sense of any work of art, one must transform the work's interlinked networks of signs, symbols, traces, and structures into a linear text. The paradox that arises from doing this, is that the narratives that are central to understanding the work are actually the product of the viewer's comprehension. In the case of Adam Henry's paintings, the fracturing of its integrated whole results in an array of subjects such as difference, reiteration, authenticity, deferral, acceptance, and the relation of form and content to identity.

The inventory of Modernist practices that Henry's paintings exploit have with differing emphasis been in place since the Romantic Revolution of the 1820s when subjectivity triumphs over objectivity. This is the period of industrialization, during which bourgeois values displaced the older standards and criteria of the culture of the aristocracy. In the process the moral, literary, mimesis, craft, and aesthetic norms rooted in the Christian world view were transformed into a secular perspective. Art became a media to display the centrality of its own history indexed to the individual producer's intentions, psychology, and ability to innovate. The renaissance became the birthplace of bourgeois culture. In that moment, Enlightenment reason divided the world between Art (imagination), and Science and Industry (facts). From this ensued the modernist debate concerning art's criteria and values — art became an emergent subject, its identity having become unfixed.

A hundred and fifty years later (circa 1970s), the modernist platform reified and entropied. Those acts of negation arrived at in reaction to convention, which had been a significant part of Modernism's operating system, no longer resulted in dynamic new propositions or innovations, but instead a stultifying historicity. The Kantian logic and aesthetic that had come to dominate western culture gave way to a Hegelian critique. Art had come to an end, it had come to reside in its form, and as such was known and therefore no longer dynamic. For painters of Henry's generation, the collapse of the modernist paradigm, marked the end of art (as we had come to know it) — some celebrated their new found freedom with an unprecedented eclecticism, or sought to promote newer media, while others by means of denial sought wistfully to keep the dead and dying alive. Under these conditions, for those artists who understood this to be a period of transition, rather than an end — the question they faced was, how best to proceed.

Of all the possible options, Henry seems to have chosen to accept the existent terms and conditions of late-modernist painting's as his foundation. What this means is that his paintings begin with a canvas filled with all that possibly has gone before. Under such conditions, the task of the artist is to remove everything that does not serve their purpose, and reform what is left. Based on this, the question facing Henry was: how can he exploit modernist painting without merely replicating, quoting, or critiquing it? Apparently, he must have either intuited, or discovered Ockham's razor, which proposes that in trying to understand something complex, getting the unnecessary information out of the way is the fastest way to the best explanation. In applying this axiom to modernist painting ostensibly, he began by abandoning the tried and true modernist scheme of challenging, or negating conventions and dominant practices.

Unfettered from modernism's dualist premise, he turned to those contradictory effects and principles that modernism had sought to resolve. Henry instead sought to produce a synthesis — some new third term. An example of this is *Untitled (dbhfhd)*, 2015, (see page 91) which consists of twin images that at first appear to be a pair to mirror one another. On closer inspection, we discover that they actually are the inversion of one another. Each canvas consists of a series of horizontal bands, which grow progressively broader as they descend from the top edge of the canvas. Each band is twice the width of its predecessor and is transversed by a left to right diagonal, which consist of gradations of blue, to red, to yellow. On the left canvas these fade to white at the lower right corner of each band, on the right they fade to the upper left corner. By superimposing optical shifts that interlock, overlap, and hard and soft-edged effects that merge into one another, Henry, emphasizes the pictorial and optical conflicts between what we know to be there and what we see.

In another aspect of *Untitled (dbhfhd)*, Henry combines the contrivances of the literalism of minimalist presentation associated with Brice Marden's early multi-canvas monochromes and Jo Baer's frame paintings, with the contemplative qualities associated with the romanticism and illusionism found in the shaped canvases of Neil Williams, and Ralph Humphrey. This amalgam permits Henry to discard the classical idea of painting's unity of form and content, which Frank Stella and Robert Mangold in the 1960s had literally reduced to a question of the painting's object-hood and self-referentially. These observations, led me to conclude that another of Henry's objectives is to make visible those aspects of painting's internal conflicts, which had come to be concealed — that are unseen

— not because the eye can be fooled by a slight of hand, but more importantly due to our expectations. Rather than resolve or point to these things, Henry intensify their conflicts. With this in mind we can view Henry's paintings as an attempt to uncover, or expose those contradictory facets of abstract painting that due to habit, critical neglect, residual modernist biases, and misunderstanding have come to be hidden in plain view.

This idea of hiding things in full view, led me to think about Edgar Allan Poe's story: *The Purloined Letter*, which revolves around a stolen letter — the letter in question is proof of the Queen's infidelity and is being used to blackmail her to assert her influence on the King. But all of this is incidental — what is significant is that when the Queen's agents carry out a thorough search of the thief's home in which even the floor boards are pulled up, and the wallpaper peeled back, the searchers ultimately find nothing. Out of desperation, the aid of the private investigator Dupin is enlisted. After a single visit with the culprit, he finds the stolen letter — not by searching for it, but by means of observation and deduction. Dupin discovers the letter has been hidden in plain view — quite simply, it had been turned inside out, re-addressed, resealed, and placed in a letter rack with other letters. The stolen letter had previously gone unnoticed because those who had searched for it were looking for its hiding place, where as the investigator was looking for a letter and therefore, had been able to recognize that it had simply been disguised.

The modifications the letter had undergone and its location which permitted it to go unseen, should be considered in the context of the deferral of message and the privileging of its form. Within the context of this reading: *The Purloined Letter* is not about what has been stolen, or even the logic of guilt and coercion, but is concerned with the construction of identity re: appearances — deception, deferral, misrepresentation, and cognition — which are all the things I have come to associate with Henry's paintings. So despite their appearances and all that I have written about them thus far, we may now also see Henry using painting as a means to display the interaction between form and structure as they generate analogies, rather than a mode of representation — the signification of some non-present thing, or metaphor.

Employing the types of abstract painting associated with formalism and the experiential as tropes, rather than end in them selves, Henry's works subscribe to an index of traditional qualities, inclusive of opticality, figure ground relationships, composition, and the

production of shallow illusionistic space. He seemingly has set aside painterly process, materiality, and color — yet, each of these elements are also present, though always in an understated manner. Occupying a place between the neo-classical and the industrial process, the materials do not become signs in themselves. Meanwhile, Henry's approach to color is idiosyncratic — he uses Goethe's spectrum of four colors (yellow, red, blue, violet). The permutations of these colors dictate and limit his use of color. Even when black is used, it is chromatically arrived at by combining his four colors. Even at this micro level he signals his desire to produce differing harmonies and contrasts within the context of similarity.

Despite their familiarity in all ways, given genre, appearances, and their varied presentations, Henry's paintings seem to be ever-so-slightly off register — they do not sit comfortably within the terms they appear to subscribe to. This is because there is always a subtle conceptual, or aesthetic inversion of what is expected. Similar to the slight of hand artists Penn and Teller, Henry also shows us how he tricks us. Most succinctly, Henry demonstrates in the painting *Untitled (SHplsHS)*, 2016 (see page 101) his rudimentary pictorial vocabulary. In this painting a hard-edged rectangle composed of four bands, one for each of his primary colors, occupies the center of the upper half of the canvas. In the lower half he has painted a similar figure, the only difference being that the boundaries between the four bands have been blended and the rectangle's edges have been blurred. Normally, we would speak of the hard-edge form as being in focus and the lower one as having a soft focus; yet again calling to mind the conflict between what we know and what we see. The familiarity of his paintings misdirect his audience in such a way they may not immediately realize the implications of what they are seeing.

The subversion and inversion of expectations takes place within each and every aspect of Henry's work. For instance, immaculate and meticulously made — his painting's surfaces are flawless — nothing is given over to chance, his process is controlled and nearly invisible. Yet, the erasure of touch, rather than referencing the impersonal and the mechanical, comes to suggest the artisanal — the craft roots of painting. As in Ad Reinhardt's *Black Paintings*, the flawlessness of Henry's works may move the viewer to peruse the surface with the intent of discovering if they might have been printed, instead of having been hand-painted. The inability to immediately determine how they are made serves as an impetus for self-reflection — a poke meant to set the viewer into motion gathering clues as to what potential sense may be made of the anomalies, inconsistencies, or inflections they discover.

In this process, the viewer may also become aware of the level of skill that was necessary to initially produce and then reproduce each painting. These deliberations return us to the hand of the painter (who may, or may not be a studio assistant) and the fact that these works are held to a standard of technical skill, rather than those of authorship e.g. the hand of the painter versus that of the artist.

Likewise, given his perverse logic, Henry does not use repetition to question the idea of originality, nor make an issue out of reproducibility, or reference the modularity of minimalism. Instead Henry seems intent on compelling us to reflect upon the degree of difference that occurs within sameness. Though all of these sources must be acknowledged, Henry's repetition of an image, inclusive of whatever variations in composition/configuration that his process permits, are akin to Claude Monet, Josef Albers, and Frank Stella who used repetition as a way to investigate and exploit a given set of optical elements or effects. Therefore, the work *Untitled (s31a13s)*, 2015 (see page 15) which consists of twin paintings where at midpoint, each has been diagonally divided upward from left to right. The lower halves have been painted with a dark brown (left edge) to pale yellow gradation, the upper sections from light to dark (right edge). The resulting image is optically unstable. Their images not only create an illusionary form, but the interaction between the two panels forms the impression that one is looking at a combined image consisting of four quadrants.

Repetition, replication, and variation do not only supply Henry with a conceptual and phenomenal framework, but also an opportunity for a subtle inversion of expectations. The exhibition *Repetition (Repetition)* includes a set of 5 paintings; on their white grounds Henry has painted a grid of matte black dots surrounded by soft focus halos of his four primary colors. These paintings initially appear to be identical. Yet, one painting (the fourth from the left) is literally set aside within a set of parenthesis that have been painted onto the wall. Only this one painting is a true duplicate of one of the other paintings. All the others, though identical in composition and effect, differ in the sequencing of the color halos. By means of scrutiny and comparison, we discover how changes may or may not significantly affect a painting's reception, and how perhaps though things appear to be different, in actuality they are very much the same and vis a versa. This calls to mind the anecdote concerning how Yves Klein, at the initial exhibition of his monochromes, walked viewers around the gallery, stopping at each painting to describe its uniqueness, despite the fact they were all the same blue and the same size.

Many aspects of Henry's works noted here are only apparent when multiple members of a given family of paintings are presented, for instance as in the 2014 exhibition *Alien Beatnik Siren*, which consisted of an installation of fourteen similar paintings. In the installation photo of *Alien Beatnik Siren*, we are given a sampling of three paintings that again, initially appear to be identical (see pages 70-71). Yet as we compare them, we come to notice that the four corners of each painting consist of dark triangles that transition to gradations of red, yellow, blue. The secondary effect of this is each corner reads as a disintegrating square. A tertiary effect of how the corners are painted is that we see simultaneously a glowing central oval transversed horizontally and vertically by a radiant white cross. What initially goes un-noticed is that the color combinations within each corner are slightly different. In other words, none of these paintings are identical. Another aspect of this latter type of production is that each grouping of works exists as an always already incomplete set — because X number of iterations, or non-systemic variations implies infinity. In this case it reveals that the group is the product of the act of reproducing a prime object. The images therefor function as members of a closed set.

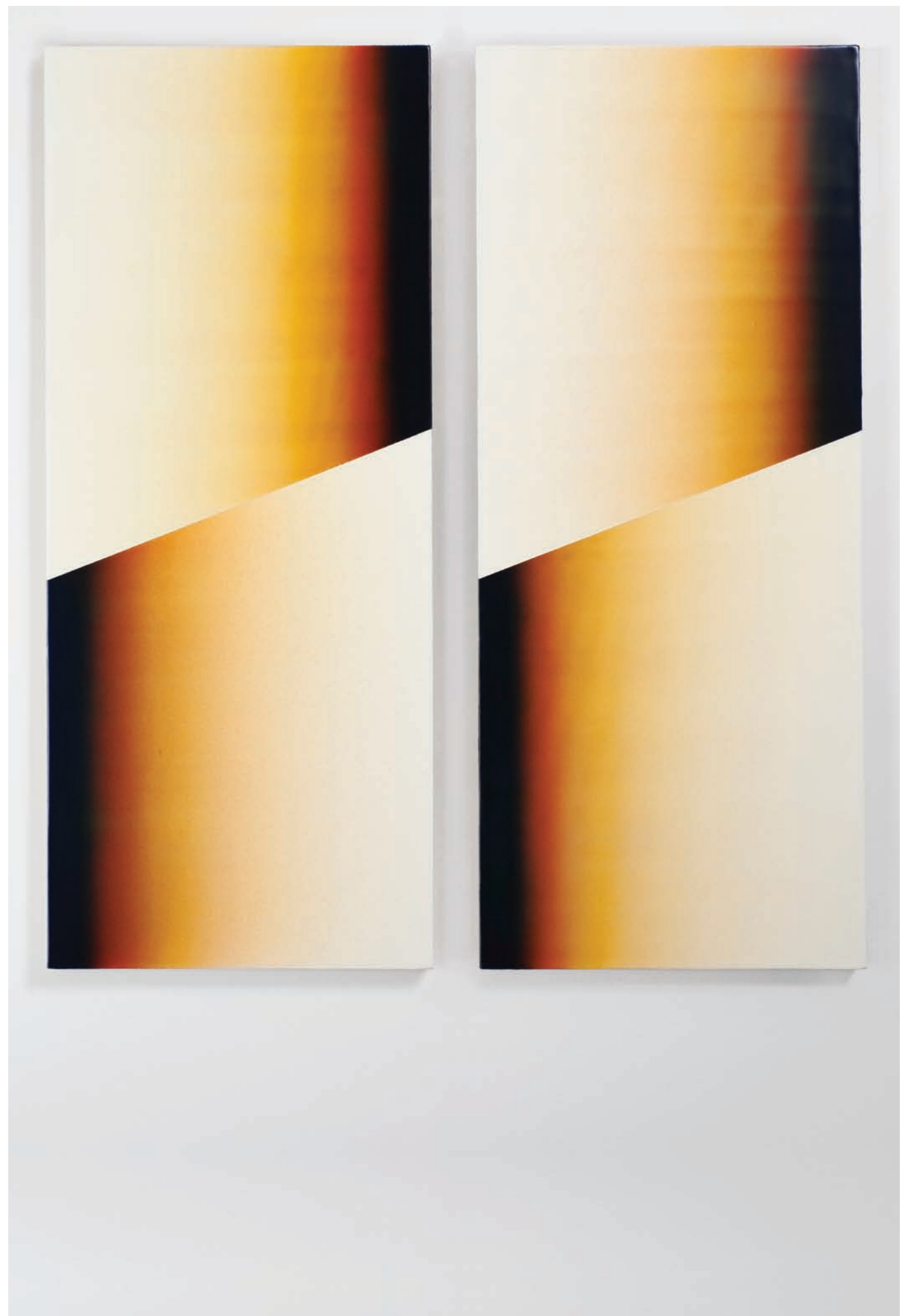
When the group of paintings from *Alien Beatnik Siren* is dispersed, the paintings become something else. What is this other thing? It is a trickier matter, in the sense that as in the story of *The Purloined Letter* — these painting exist as an 'effect' of what might be considered the delusional deferral of content for form — the literal for the literary. Isolated from one another, each painting comes to be identifiable as subscribing to the standard models of abstract painting as a source of some indeterminate optical, or compositional and aesthetic experience. The fourteen paintings that make-up *Alien Beatnik Siren* each function as a discrete unit in which the differences between them are not as important as the fact that the way the four corners are painted produces primary, secondary, and tertiary images. What is telling about this is Henry does not seek to resist this situation, undermine it, nor necessarily even exploit it. Without rhetoric or irony, he accepts this as the dual nature of his venture. Based on this, we can understand Henry's paintings as function in yet another index that is inclusive of reception, structural analysis, data and information retrieval, and speculation. Within this framework, the individuated paintings, similar to the serialized ones, are performative in their assertion of the constraints that form and media have on concept and content. In this, Henry uses aesthetic experience as a means to transmit information concerning the conflict between structure, materiality, and appearances.

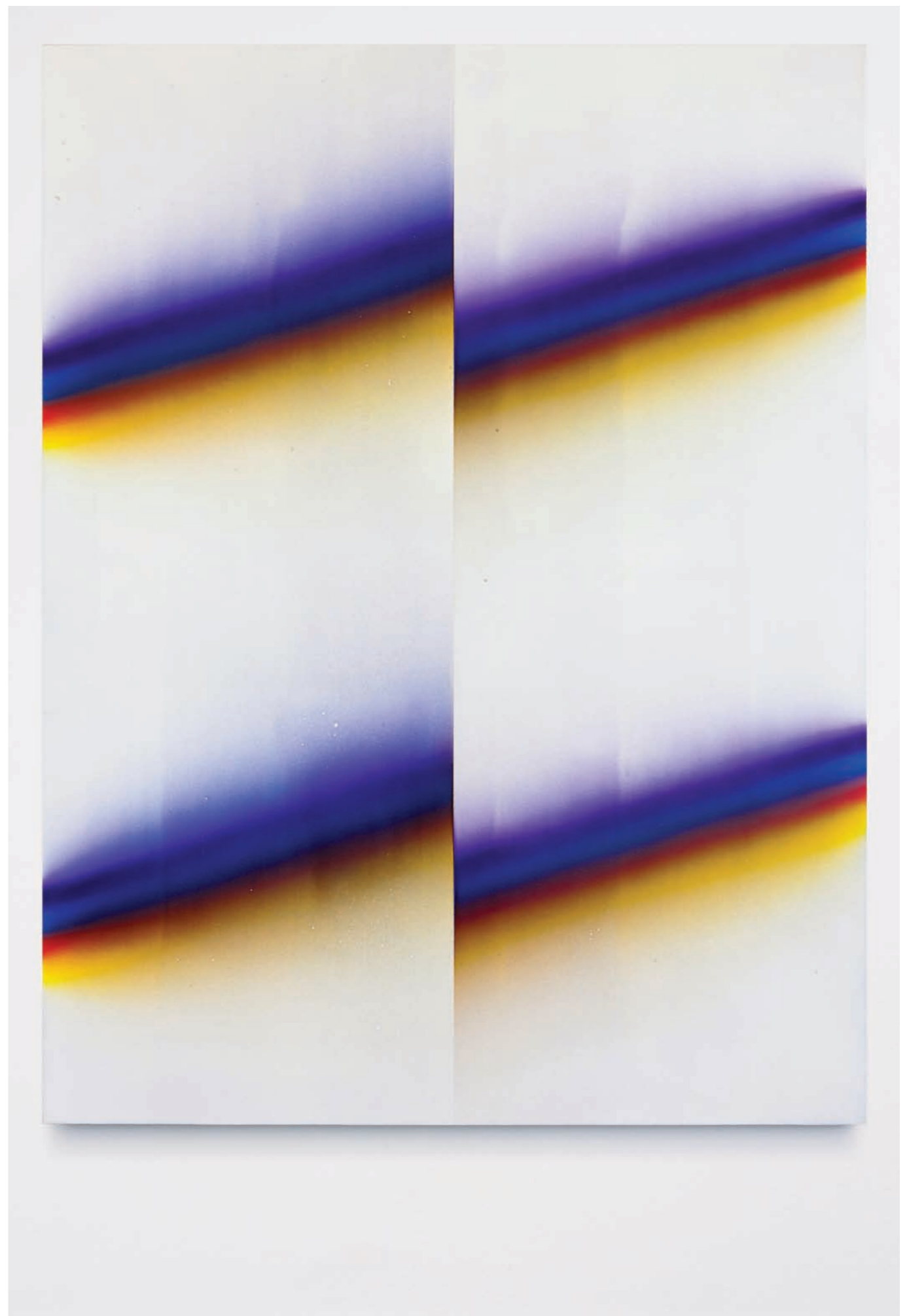
What is of interest is that within each of the indexes Henry's paintings generate, his work never arrives at being about one thing, or another — no one aspect seems to dominate — instead each shifts our attention. It is safe to assert that Henry's works reflect a willingness on his part to have things misunderstood and that likewise he embraces the idea that each painting may miscommunicate the terms of its existence. From this I infer that his works rather than being about articulating the issues that motivate him are the product of what he may realize via them. Henry does this without calling attention to the fact that he is doing so because he does not want his resistance or acceptance to become his subject. Instead, the most significant narratives relative to making sense of his work are those that are the product of the viewer's perceptual and cognitive powers. Henry therefore must strive to supply us with everything he understands as necessary to make sense of his work. This intra-subjective economy in turn challenges how in our minds we go about constructing a depiction and an interpretation of each painting.

In the tradition of Yves Klein, Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, Andy Warhol, and Gerhard Richter — Henry's paintings reveal themselves to be a composite of deceit, formalism, and an attempt to perhaps spiritually transcend their own materiality. Comparably, Henry's composites of contradictory positions invariably transmit, re-transmit, and relay signals about the traditional and novel concerns of its maker, and aspects of their cultural context and history, as well as the technical, material, and intellectual conditions of their making. Henry leaves it to his audience to extract and make sense of what they can from the assemblage of older (traditional) signals and those newer ones (propositions) that emerge from the combined information his paintings store and distribute. It is through this economy, we become aware that Henry has turned painting inside out, and how its unexposed interiority now supplies the surface upon which those texts that had been subordinated and marginalized may now be inscribed. For appearance sake as in *The Purloined Letter*, Henry's paintings seem to leave things just as they have always been, yet just a little bit different. This is what one might expect from a man whose surname and given name when switched, function as the other.

Saul Ostrow







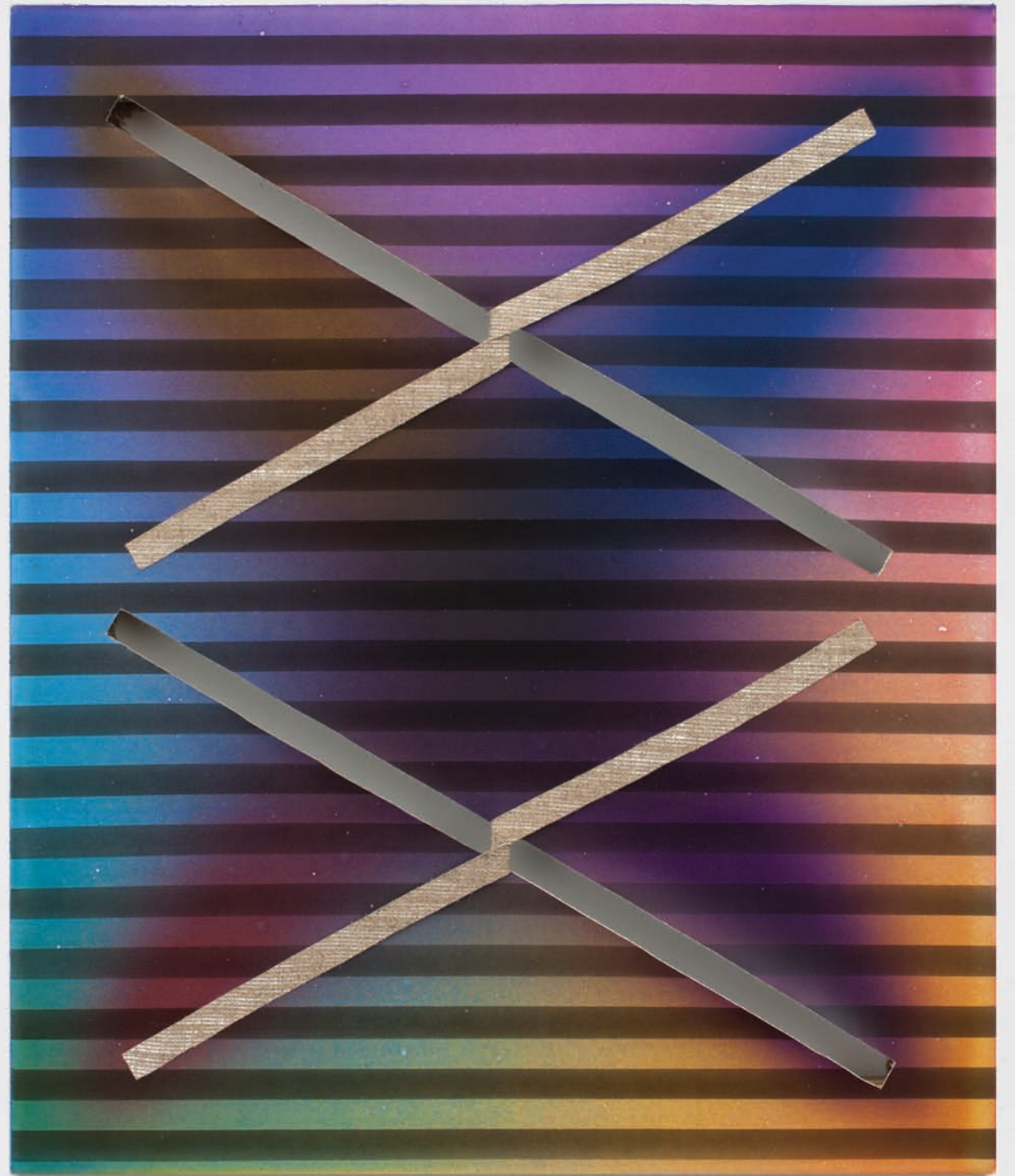


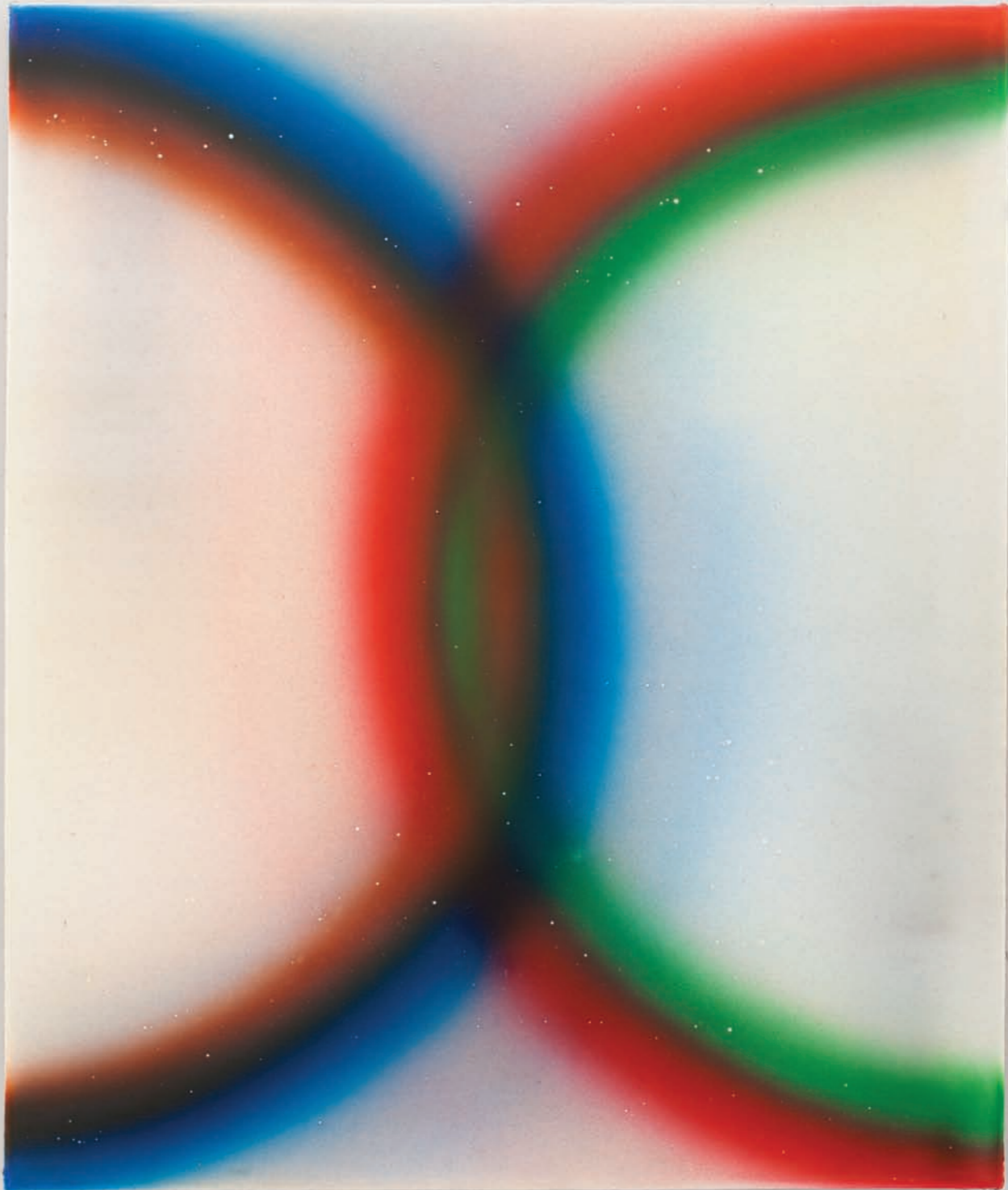




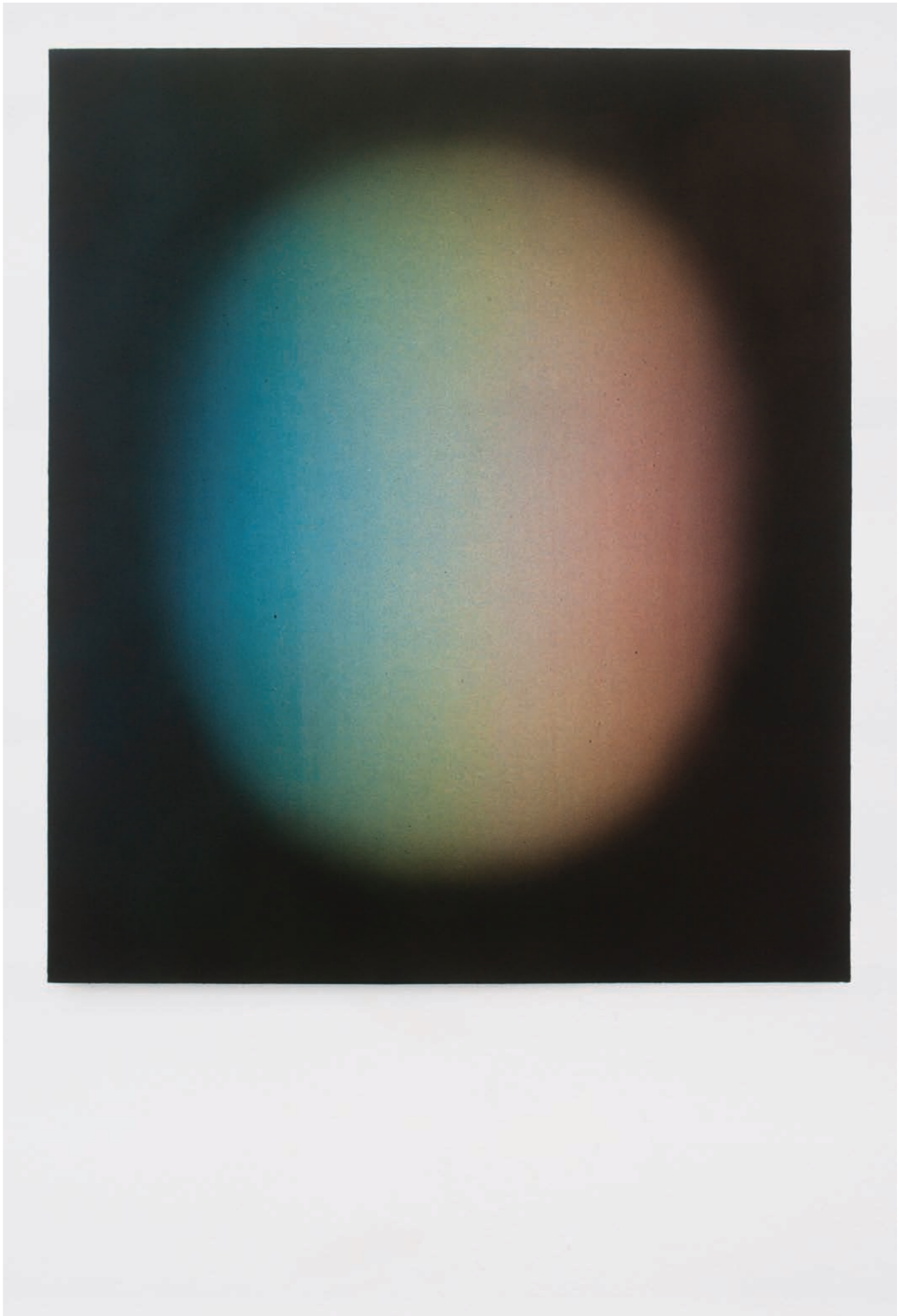


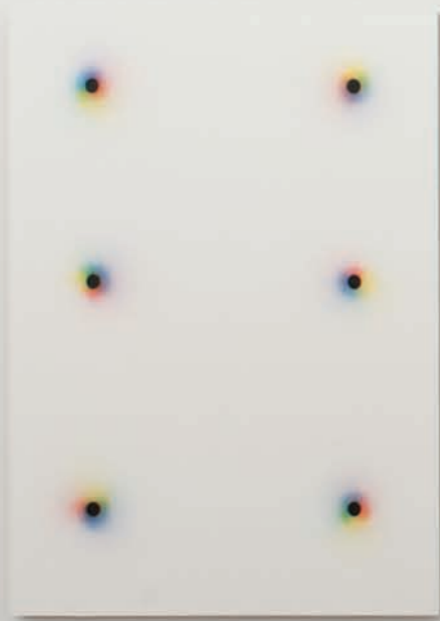






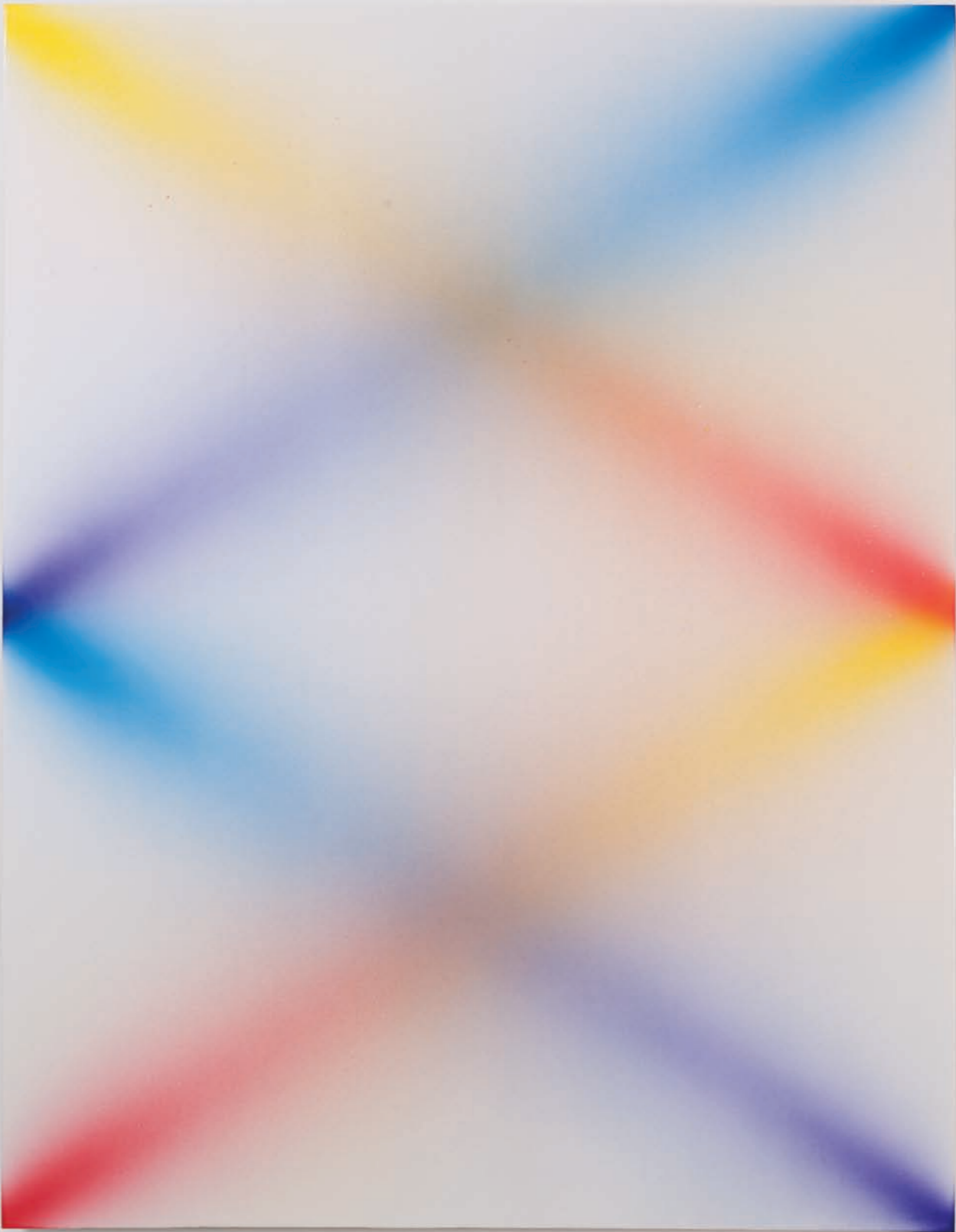


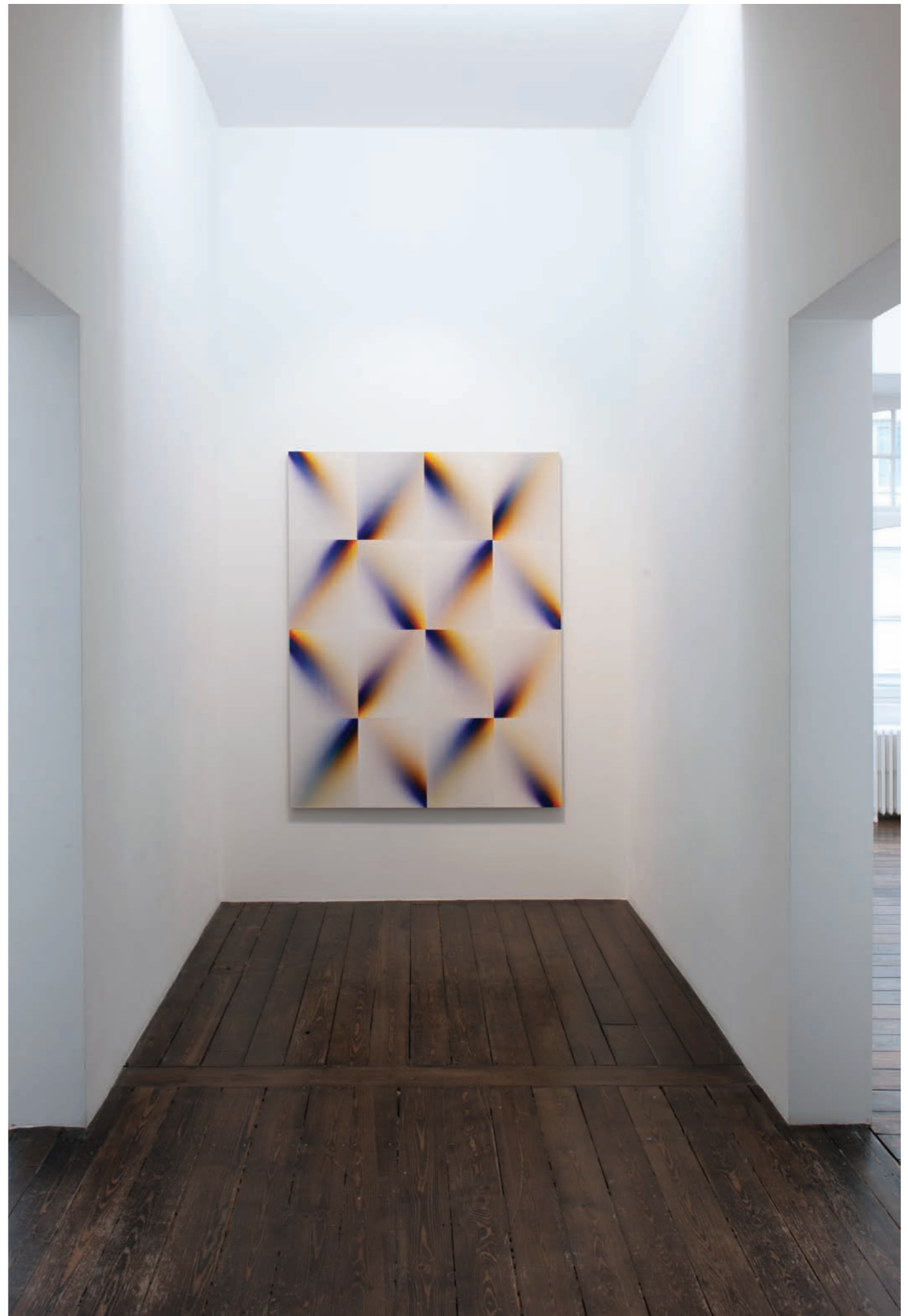
















A CONVERSATION BETWEEN JUSTIN BEAL AND ADAM HENRY

J.B. — You know a lot of painters, so I am guessing part of the reason you asked me to do this interview is because you wanted to move this conversation in a different direction. From where I stand, your recent work has more to do with the representational structures of grammar and algebra — than the conventional problems of painting.

A.H. — I have enjoyed our conversations in my studio particularly because they have revolved around these themes. Conventional painting problems are omnipresent and although the new work does address language and mathematics, I'm more specifically interested in the logic behind them. I like that the rational and irrational can have equal weight in painting, especially when things like language or mathematics get involved.

J.B. — You and I have spent a lot of time discussing concrete poets like Eugen Gomringer and Augusto de Campos. There are two phrases you use in the description of your work — the “compression of seeing and reading” and “the idea of the rational and the irrational having equal weight” — both strike me as also being apt descriptions of successful concrete poems.

A.H. — Actually, you were the first person to point out the connection to concrete poetry. I believe it was in 2005 when we were at the Skowhegan summer residency together. You recommended an anthology by Mary Ellen Solt, which was very influential on me. I really like the idea of a concrete poem being a model for multiplicity. Simultaneity is something that concrete poetry shares with painting. The poem perfectly embodies the coming together of two somewhat opposing parts of vision and the way visual information is processed. The symbol and the picture are fused. It creates a conundrum that is similar to the way we experience a painting, which is simultaneously flat and dimensional.

J.B. — As a sculptor, I feel compelled to push back against the idea of a painting as “dimensional,” can you explain what that means to you?

A.H. — I've never really thought of a painting as just flat. I guess that's why I have cut into them, exposed the backs, put them in corners, on pedestals, or focused on them as objects as much as images. But, painting has another dimension — its psychology — meaning its idea space whether that is illusionistic or not.



I've spent a lot of time in my studio thinking about how to reconstruct my ideas about painting's physicality. Most of that time was spent just staring at the materials. The stretcher bars did not seem that interesting, but the linen was. I held it up to a window and noticed the light coming through. I considered that a painting could exist in between the threads of the weave and not on the surface. That's how the "Path" paintings started. I found loosely woven jute fabric and would add paint drop by drop to the space between the threads. Because of surface tension, the paint naturally wanted to fill in this gap. I changed the color as I went along, creating pathways within the jute. It's a very slow process, but I like the idea of exploring the matrix of the cloth and not just using it as a support.

J.B. — What about the concrete painters? I think of Max Bill in particular. His relationship to painting seems to be less an end unto itself than one of several tools, like poetry, typography, architecture, and teaching that he used to explain his philosophy of design.

A.H. — That's interesting because I was led to Max Bill and Theo Van Doesberg through Joseph Albers when I was the teaching assistant for the Albers color theory class at Yale. It was around this time that I expanded my practice to include text, fonts, and other non-painting forms. As I discovered artists like Bill (who blurred the lines of art and design) it allowed me to consider the objects as a form of presentation and helped rid the work of the cliché of authenticity. The concrete painters' "form" is one where abstract thought is made visible by economical means. There is a wonderful quote by him in the book *Concrete Art in Europe after 1945*: "The goal of concrete art is to develop psychological objects for mental use, similar to the way in which the human being creates objects for material use."

J.B. — You describe a lifelong visual relationship to language that compels you to consider how symbols (letters, shapes, etc.) might appear rotated, inverted, or reflected. As an artist of course, this is not a disability as much as a kind of cognitive advantage, to use your term. Your pre-Adobe brain performs these Photoshop functions automatically, free-transforms. I imagine your brain starting with a b. Flip horizontal and it is a d. Flip vertical and it is a p. Flip horizontal and it is a q. This transformation is perfectly captured in the font you designed where each letter is copied and reflected over a slightly off-center vertical axis, rendering paragraphs both obfuscated and legible to the patient eye. This is concrete poetry, right?

A.H. — There's a trick that painters do in their studios when a painting looks unbalanced. If you turn your back to the painting and hold up a mirror, you will see the painting reversed. This reversal shows not just an alternate view, but makes clear the balance or imbalance of composition. I have a tendency to play these perceptual games and I am interested in how perception is evolving. I like to imagine shapes, and symbols rotating in space. Our evolution of vision radically changed when we developed written language. From birth we think in images naturally, but we have to learn to read and write. It seems that humans developed written language because we are social and we needed to better communicate and pass on knowledge. Suddenly we went from hunters to coders, pattern recognition to symbol recognition. This is one of the reasons that abstraction was appealing to me. A concrete painting, for example, is what it "is" and that helps to get to the ideas quickly.

As a child I had an experience that was a physical manifestation of this reversal or flipping you describe and it had a heavy impact on my perception. I spent a lot of time alone exploring the desert prairies of Colorado and New Mexico. I was very much affected by the landscape and the vastness of space. I spent many days hiking to the top of mesas and through arroyos. One late sunny summer afternoon I became distracted by a red racer snake I had been following for most of the day. I lost track of time and found myself a bit too far from home, and I tried to make my way up a large mesa before it became dark. I reached the top of the mesa just as the sun went down. The summer heat and the light beige dirt created a kind of mirage effect as the sun was setting. For a few seconds the light being reflected off the prairie ground was brighter than the setting sun. This caused me to be massively disoriented. I couldn't tell what was up or down. I stood frozen until the sun receded from the horizon and I was left in darkness. It was the first time a natural phenomenon had left me so spatially confused. This horizon flipping was a type of perceptual dislocation that forced me to reorient both my body and mind in relation to an environmental illusion. As I returned home everything looked and felt different. I think having to reorient myself actually "reset" my senses. In many ways I strive to recreate this "reset" experience in my work. My font was definitely intended to do this.

J.B. — All of this also goes a long way to explain your interest in theories of perception, Gestalt psychology and how that logic comes to bear in unexpected ways. I am thinking specifically of the video *Post Prelude*, both in the negative image of the painted hands and the inversion of the video footage.

A.H. — I made the video very quickly after I read about the Sulawesi cave painting that was recently found in Indonesia. The cave predates the Lascaux cave in France and the La Cueva de El Castillo cave in Spain. It is considered not only the first instance of art, but also the first painting. I found it interesting that the application of the paint on the cave wall was blown (sprayed) and this is very similar to the way that I have been applying paint (through an air gun). Although atomized paint has been considered a new (post industrial) technology, it is in fact is the oldest painting technique. I really like this collapsing of time. For the video I sprayed paint over the hands of a friend and when the paint completely covered the surface of her skin, I asked her to raise her hands above the sprayed impression and attempt to hold them completely still.

Of course this is impossible and it resulted in the very subtle shaking of her hands that was only made visible through time. I inverted the footage so it looked somewhat like an x-ray. This made it feel a bit more mechanical and this artificiality slowed down the initial understanding of the footage. It was my version of a cave painting.

J.B. — Your practice, despite my analogy in the earlier question, is largely non-digital. You work by hand, not on a computer, but I am interested in how your use of four-color map theory (yellow, red, blue, violet) relates to the process color model (cyan, magenta, yellow and key (black)) used in almost all contemporary print media. Can you talk more specifically about your interest in map theory and how you see that system relating to CMYK?

A.H. — I first started using a four color system when I was in graduate school and making paintings using a mathematical problem called the four-color mapping theorem. I believe the problem was first proposed by August Möbius, and later made



popular by Frances Guthrie when he was working on a map of England. Guthrie wanted to know what was the least amount of colors needed to fill in the map without any one color coming in contact with itself. It's basically a way to separate space with minimal variables. It was the first mathematical theorem that was proved using a computer which is why it resurfaced in the late 1990's. For me, it was a way to democratize the space in the paintings. I overlaid this color system on representational images and it created a pattern that actually worked with and against the image. I liked this paring down of color and as I made new work I carried over the idea that all you need are four colors to not only create all other colors but also to delineate and distinguish space. I also felt it was important to limit my palette so I didn't spend too much time with the aesthetics of the color space. Perhaps the connection to CMYK is merely a coincidence; but my four color system is based on Goethe's observed spectrum and not the printing process.

J.B. — Can you explain how you translated Goethe's four-color system into the color spectrum you use in your current work?

A.H. — Goethe's observed spectrum shows that when light is refracted, it splits into four elemental colors: the warm side, which is yellow and red and the cool, which is blue and violet. Yellow transitions to white and violet transitions to black. His illustrations show where color begins and ends in our vision. For me it clearly bracketed our visual spectrum and I chose these four colors as my primaries. The inclusion of violet allows for a system that shows a very clear transition from light to dark and from warm to cool. The transition of one thing to another (whether it was a gradation or a spectrum) carries symbolism of time. Much of my work involves micro changes and this spectrum was a great tool and symbol for this incremental change.

J.B. — Apparently, during a party in Weimar in the winter of 1785, Goethe had a late-night conversation on his theory of primary colors with the South American revolutionary Francisco de Miranda. This conversation inspired Miranda in his design for the yellow, blue, and red flag of Gran Colombia (three horizontal bands of yellow, blue, and red either in the proportion of 1:1:1 or 2:1:1 depending on the version) from which the present national flags of Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador are derived.

A.H. — That is a really nice connection. I didn't know about his meeting with Miranda. Goethe's influence is incredible.

His book *Theory of Colour* exemplifies a moment in history when a mode of scientific inquiry split, creating the new field that would later become Gestalt psychology. Newton discovered and published his wave theory of light and color just before Goethe was able to publish *Theory of Colour*. Newton's papers proved Goethe scientifically wrong. But this allowed Goethe's book to be interpreted as the psychology of observed color rather than the physics of it. His book *Theory of Colour* had much more to do with how we cognitively understand color than the physics of light. With the hindsight of history, we can see that what may have originally been considered a failure was actually an incredibly important discovery. Goethe had a massive influence on a great number of psychologists and philosophers including Wittgenstein who at the end of his life began writing his own book on color that was inspired by Goethe. I find it problematic that color in contemporary art can be dismissed as a superficial subject but in philosophy, psychology, astronomy, physics, and mathematics it's fundamental to understanding communication. Color is as much an integer, a metaphor, and a symbol as it is a sensory or aesthetic experience.

J.B. — This made me think, tangentially, of repeated references in your work to Latin American Modernism, Alfred Jensen, Borges, Concrete Poetry. The historical narrative around Brazilian Concrete Poetry for example, is generally a story of an "alternate" modernism- either an independent movement that evolved in parallel to a dominant European style or a reaction to a European idea that sought to improve upon the original. I see this idea of the copy or the translation as a central idea in your work. Or perhaps more specifically, the idea that the inevitable degradation that happens in the translation from master to copy to copy to copy can be a source of content.

A.H. — We have talked quite a bit about alternative modernisms and how they propose alternate possibilities. Perhaps painting itself is a model for possibility. I'm sure my connection has something to do with the fact that I am Latino and I grew up in the Southwest where there is a strong Latin American influence. As someone who embraces abstraction as a working mode of thought, I have to admit my understanding of abstraction through modernism was secondary. My first interest in abstraction was not through modernist painting but rather through the Mexican and Native American textiles in the Southwest. Latin American modernism has much less to do with the purity of things and I, being Mexican-American, find this

attractive. But I am also interested in how ideas translate or are translated by different cultures. I like the idea of reinterpretation in general because it points to the purpose of the question rather than the answer. There is a simple honesty to that.

J.B. — You hung your painting *Untitled (1/1)* in the exact same space in your last two shows in Brussels. The most recent of those shows, *Repetition (Repetition)* deals with the location of “identical” works (planes) in relationship to a Cartesian coordinate system (x, y and z axes). The architecture of the space is complicated, not a white cube, and you engage it by hanging works vertically, rotating others 45 degrees to occupy adjacent corners, laying another horizontally on a pedestal. I had been thinking about those planes in relationship to conventions of architectural representation — axonometric drawings, isometric drawings—but it occurs to me now that perhaps their strength is how they set up *Untitled (1/1)* as a work in a fourth dimension. The same piece occupies the same place (with a nail hung in the same hole) two years later. This forces the viewer not only to consider how the exhibition exists in space, but also how it exists in time.

A.H. — It was important that many different types of repetition be included in the exhibition. This was the contrast that was needed to show difference. The space was large enough so that in each room a viewer was confronted with a different idea and this kept the repetition from becoming redundant. I very much like your observation that the (1/1) painting introduced the element of time and it’s true that unconventional hang was a way to set up the paintings as a spatial experience. In fact, the three thin grey paintings hung in the alcove of *Repetition (Repetition)* had the titles *A Plane in Three-Dimensional Space X*, *A Plane in Three-Dimensional Space Y*, and *A Plane in Three-Dimensional Space Z*. The idea was that the paintings are not just flat planes but also coordinates.

J.B. — In your show *Alien Beatnik Siren*, you set up a different model of repetition. This time you used a system of rules to make fourteen nearly identical paintings hung in two rows of seven facing each other on the walls of the long narrow gallery. The dimensions of the canvas, paint type and color, technique and sequence of application are the same for each painting, so the tension in the show exists between the small differences that distinguish each canvas. It is a formulaic system. It appears to be devoid of hand or gesture, but the formulaic process actually places all the emphasis on the single independent variable in the formula which is you.

A.H. — There are many variables at play here, but perhaps the

most important variable is the viewer, not me the artist. When confronted with fourteen (virtually) identical paintings nobody thinks about the artist’s person. The questioning seems to be more along the lines of why would somebody do this. It seems to go against the grain of originality. It again sets up a logic problem and at that time it was important for me to challenge the conservative notion of authenticity in contemporary painting.

J.B. — What a viewer ends up seeing in these is not the system, but the small anomalies within the system. You talk about “trying” to make the same painting over and over again, but you were also “failing” to make the same painting over and over again. How did your emotional and physical condition change between applications? It is not quite aleatoricism, because the chance is not in the roll of the dice, but rather in your mood or temperament. That makes them very intimate despite the fact that they look so structured. I wonder if that is how one ought to read this work... as something not only about modes of perception or systems of representation, but also about your own physical and emotional condition as you work through your system of self-imposed parameters?

A.H. — When you use a system it takes away the problem of success. If one follows through with the program, the painting just is. I think this makes the process much closer to an experiment and I find the work much more interesting when I start with the attitude of “let’s just see what happens”. Because the subtle anomalies were the subject of the exhibition, I needed a way to present them. The gallery was only eleven feet wide so the unusual architecture was a good opportunity to create an experience that was intimate enough that the anomalies would be visible. These anomalies happened through the process of making and there were many factors in this: I painted them flat on sawhorses and made tape markers on the studio floor that diagrammed out where I should stand and in what order I would paint the corners. I also used tape tabs on the sides of the paintings to indicate stopping and starting points of the gradations. Climate in the studio was also controlled using heaters, humidifiers, and an air purifier that sucked the dust out of the air. I tried to calm myself before painting. Sometimes this worked, others times it didn’t. As much as I choreographed and tried to make the same painting it was impossible. Failing to make the same painting was built into the idea of making the paintings. Although I approached the process like a machine, I ended up with fourteen unique colorful glowing voids that felt very human.

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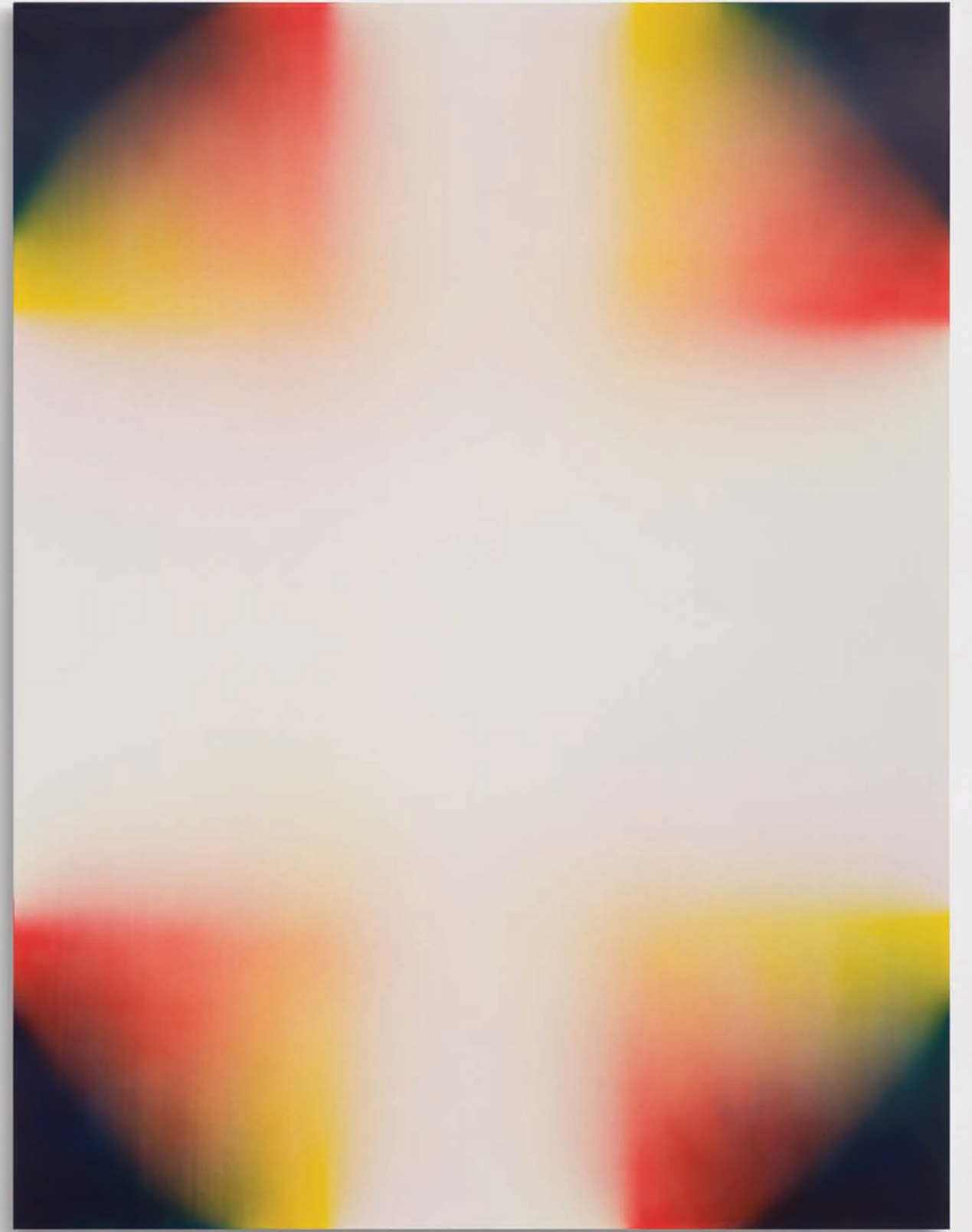










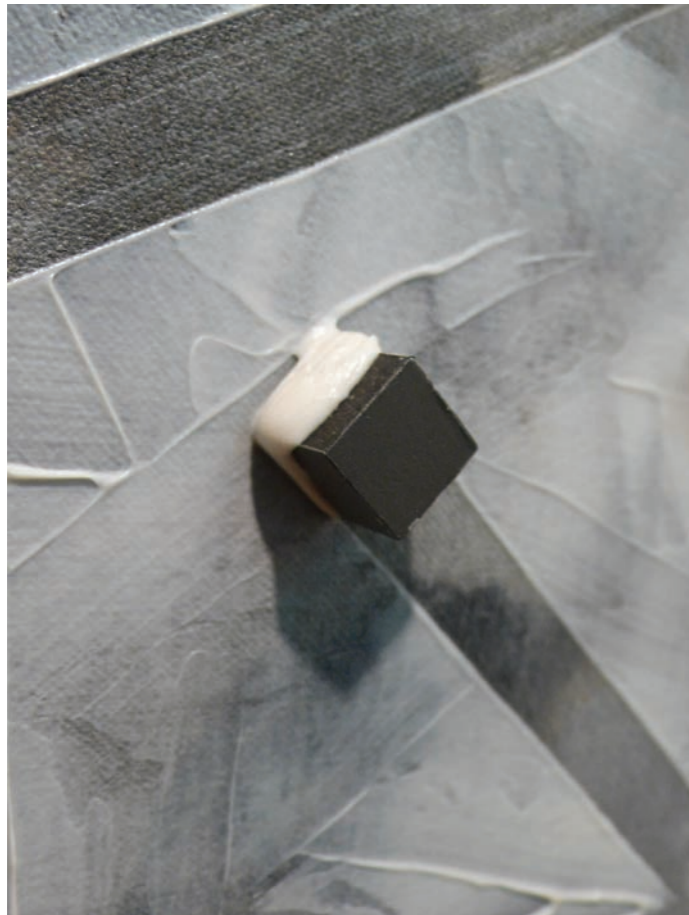






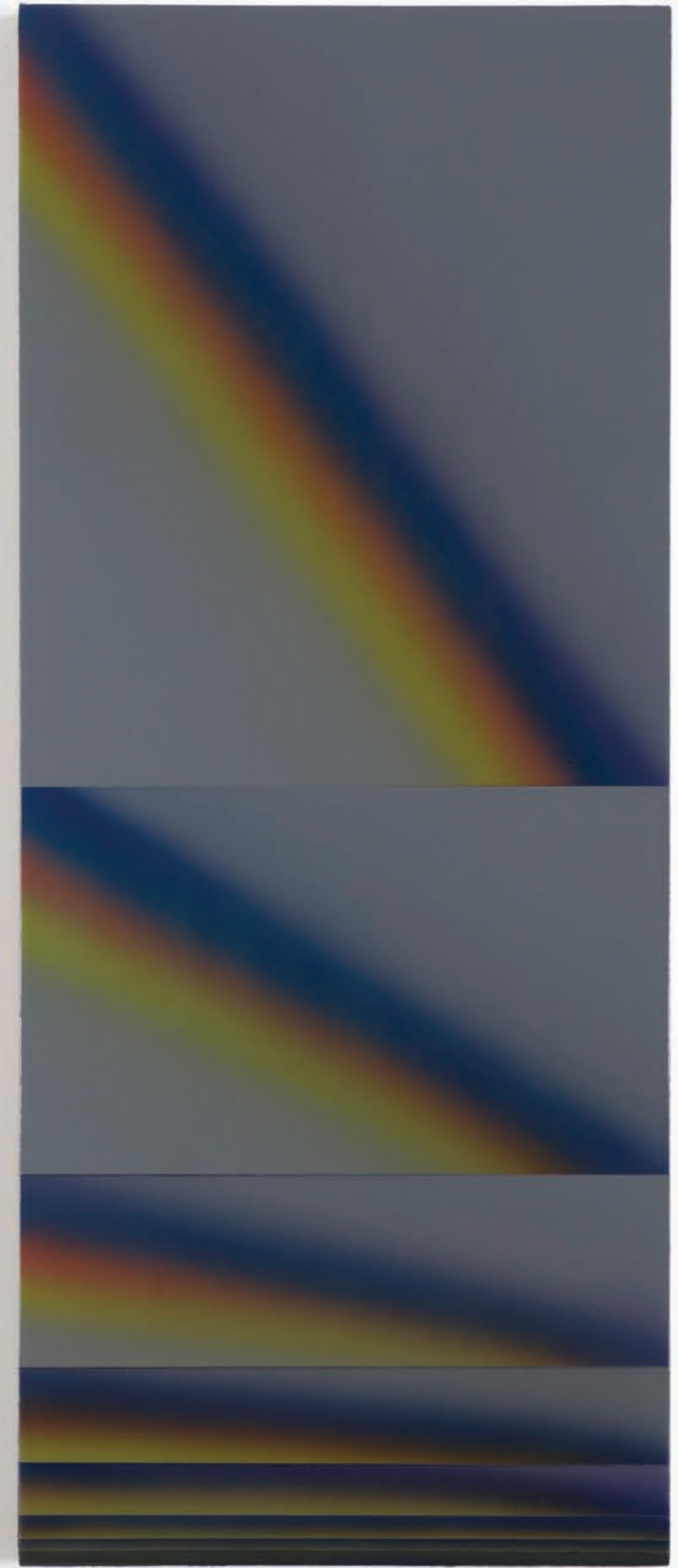


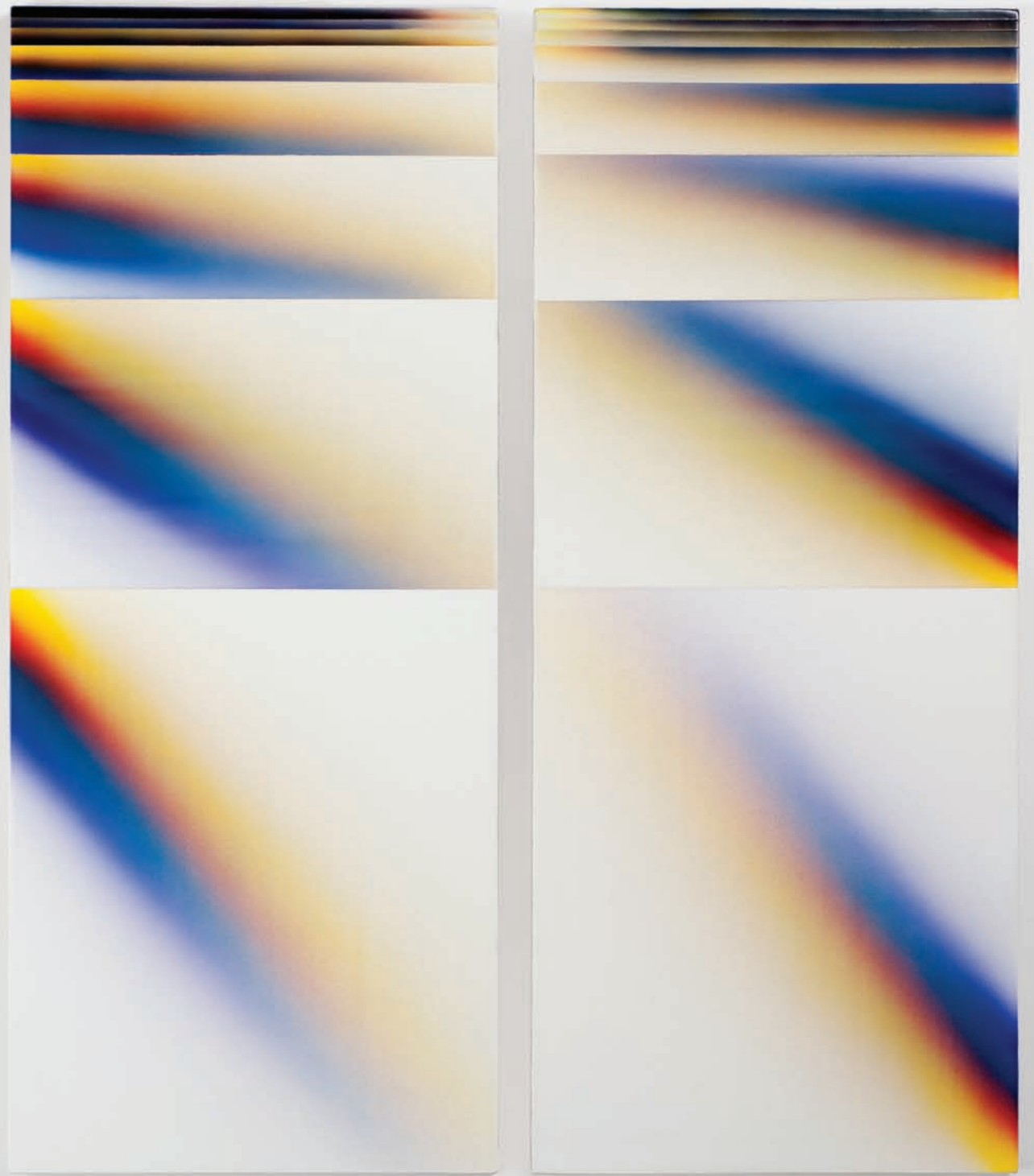




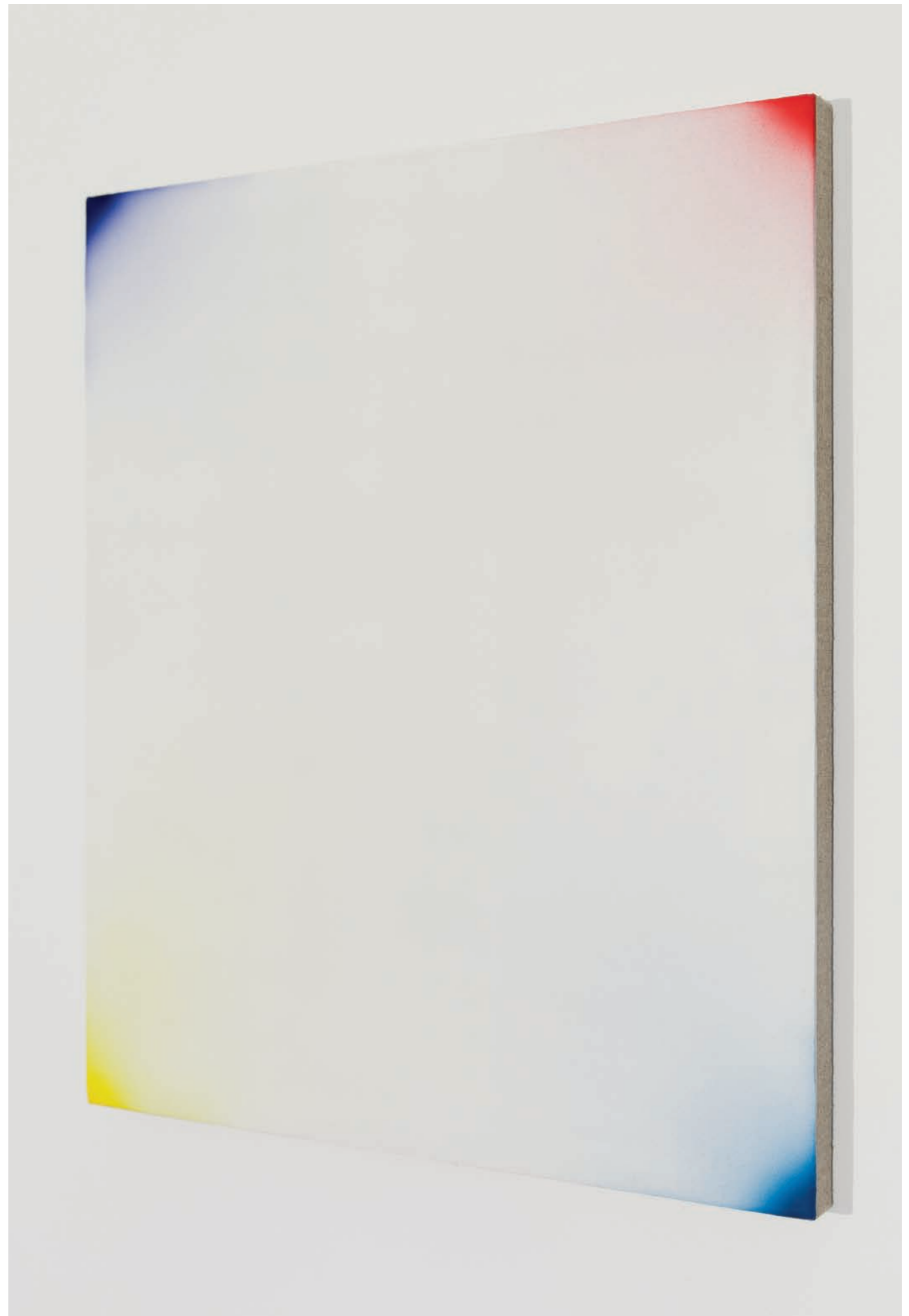




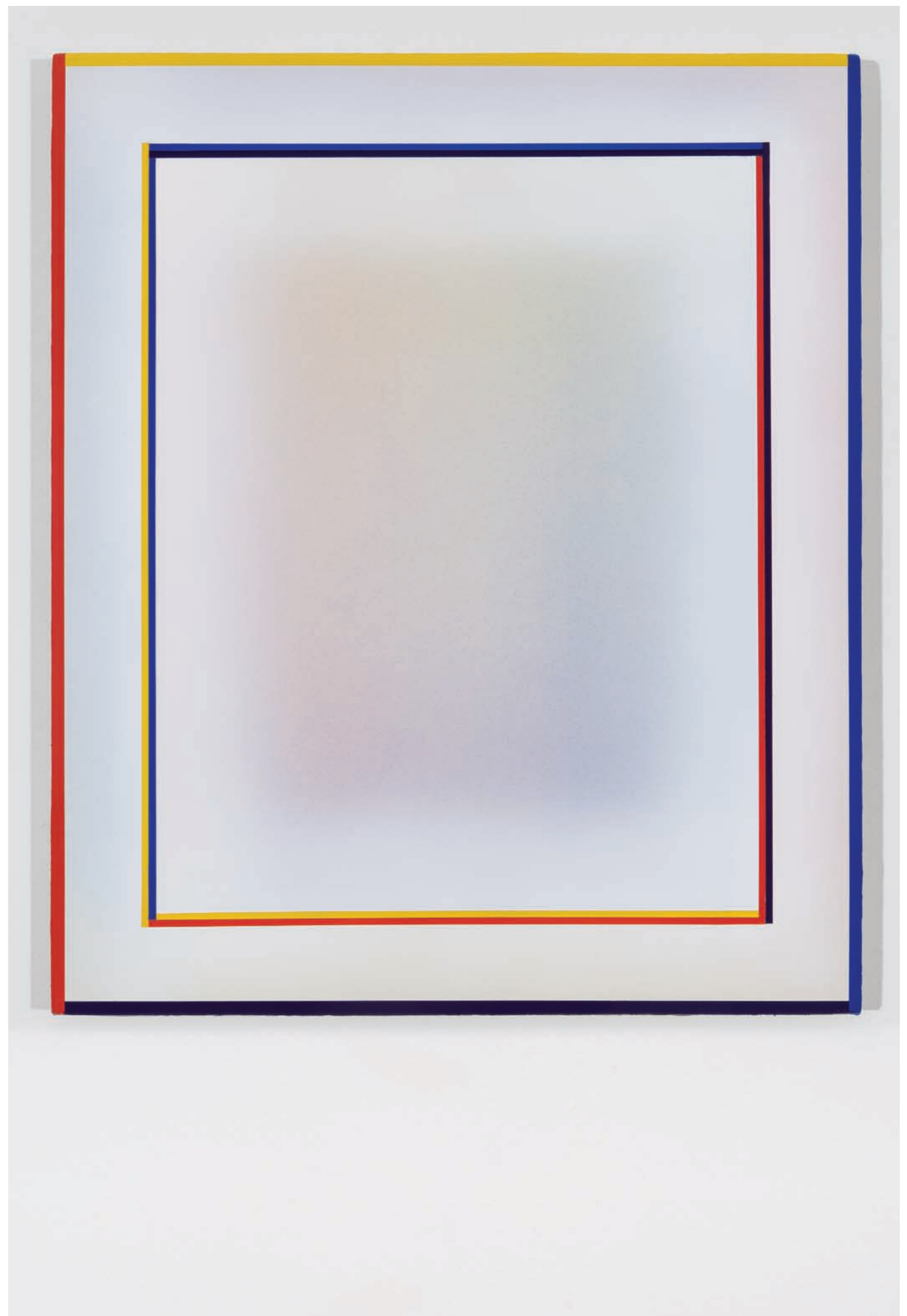






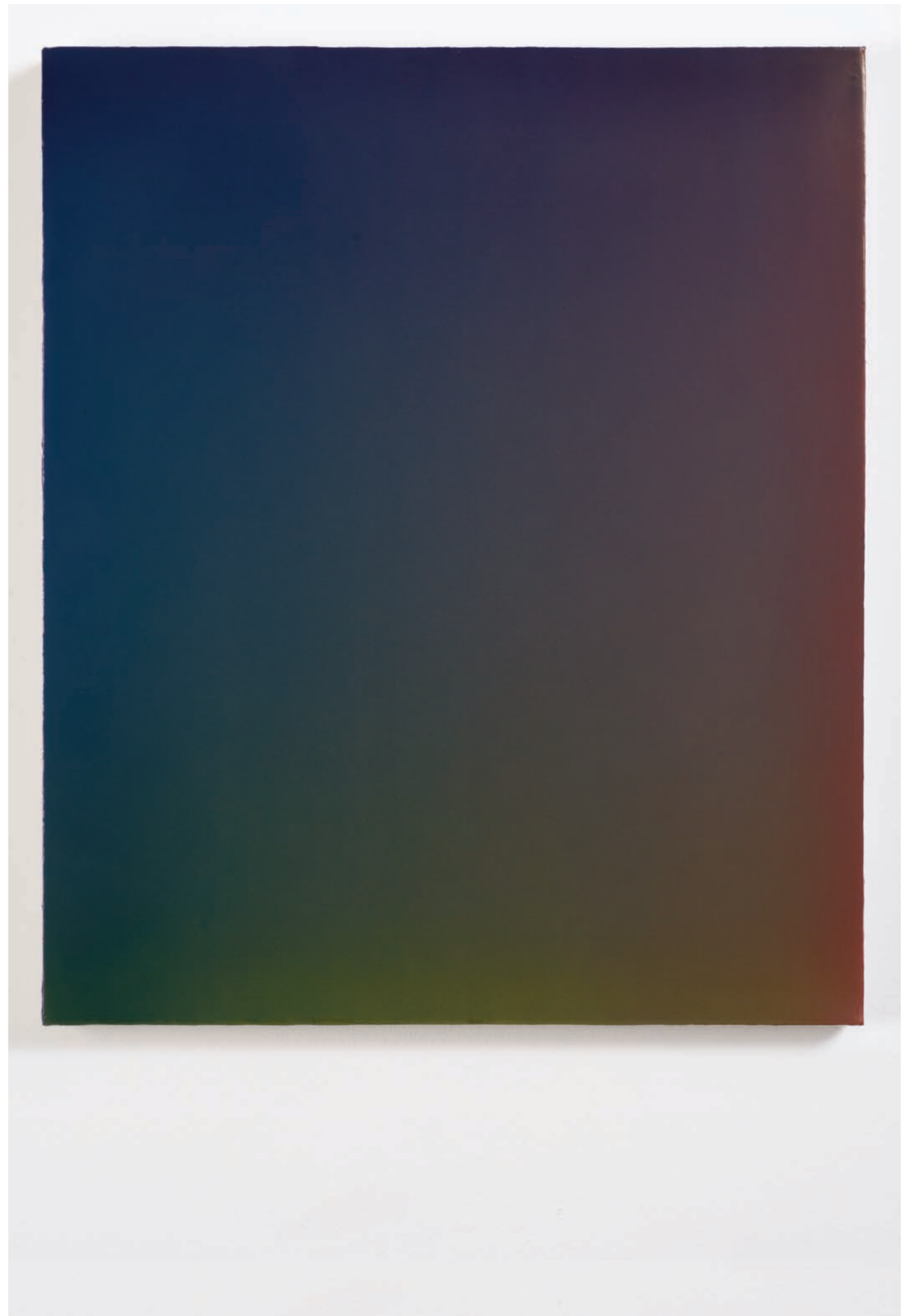


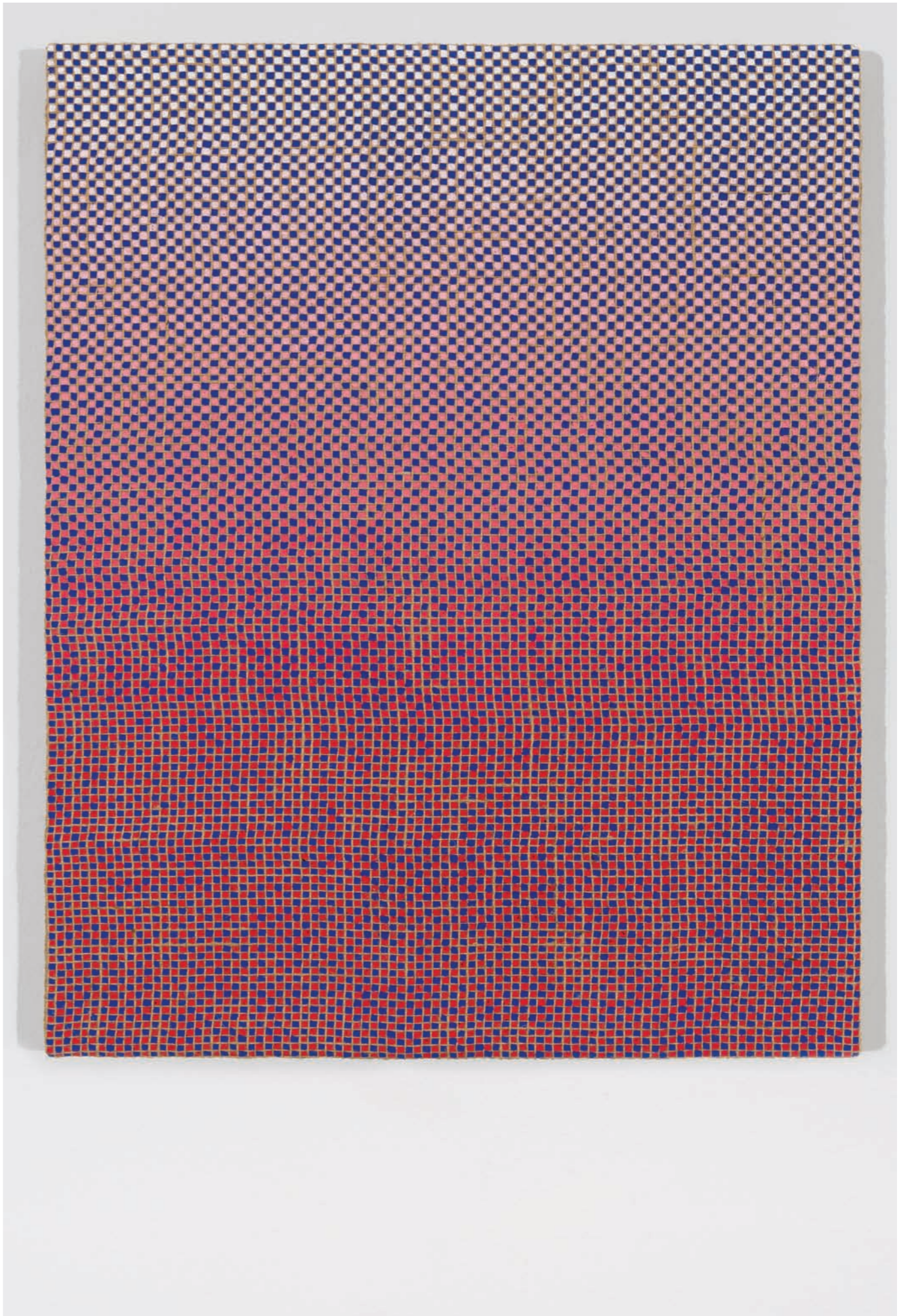
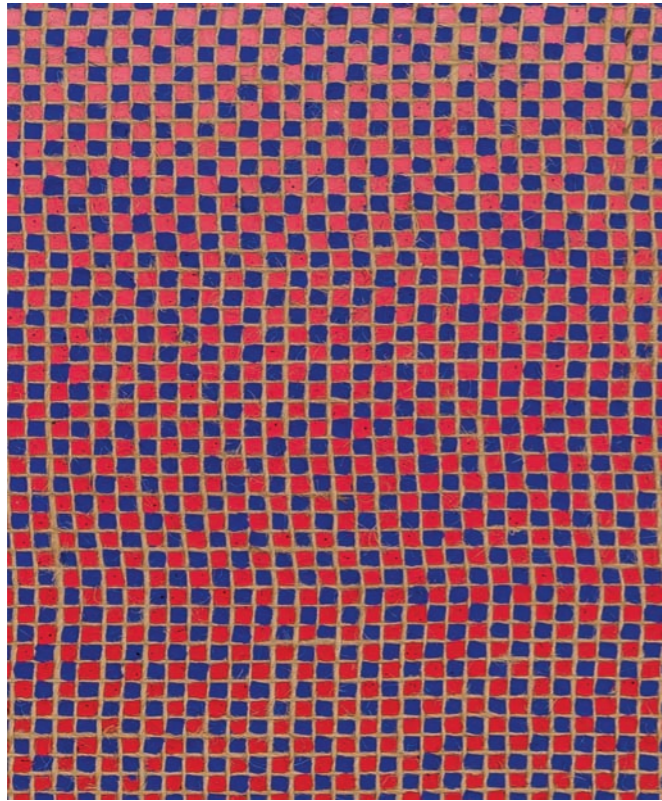


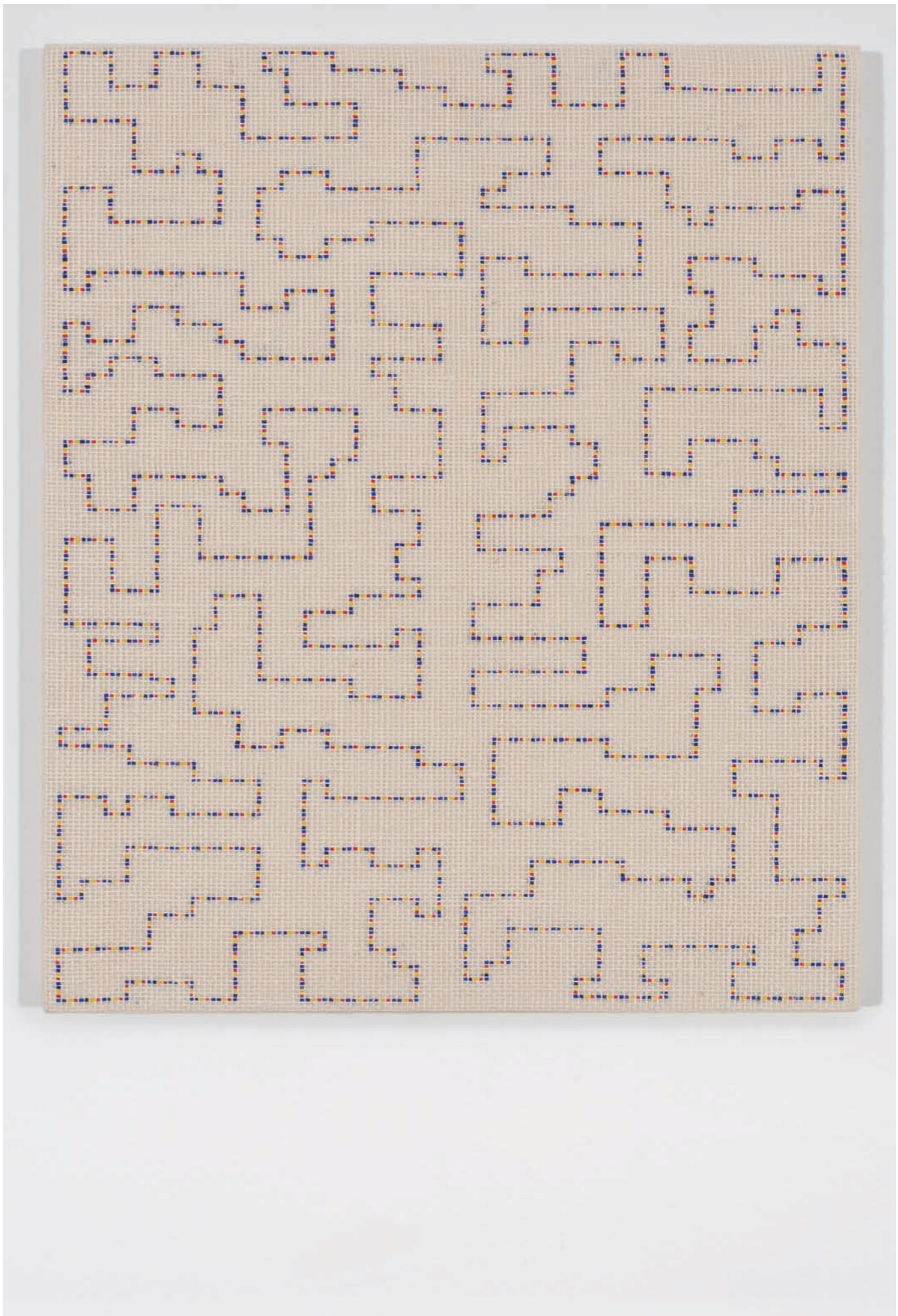
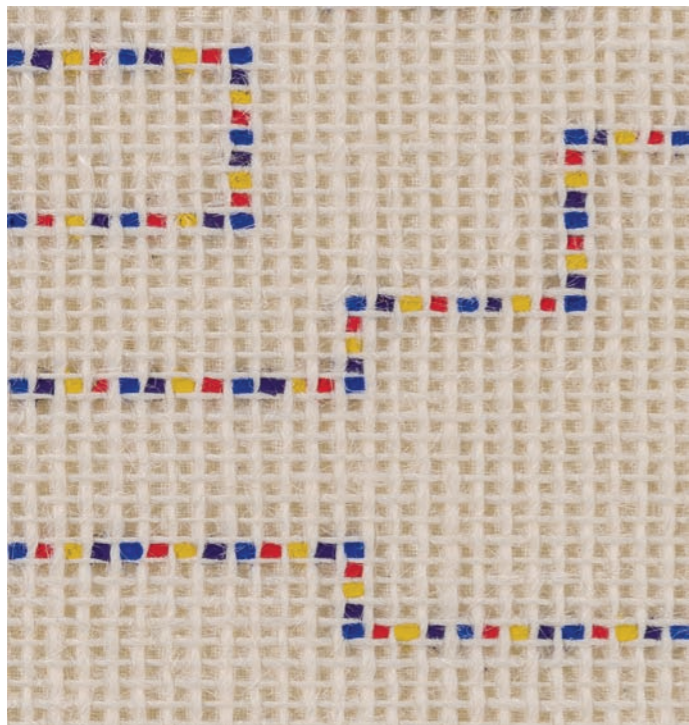












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Untitled (*proxy*), 2016, synthetic polymers on linen,
31 x 24 inches

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1974, Pueblo, Colorado.
Lives and works in Brooklyn, New-York City

EDUCATION

2000
MFA Painting, Yale University School of Art

1997
BFA Double Major Art and Art History,
University of New Mexico

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2015
Repetition (Repetition), Meessen De Clercq,
Brussels, Belgium

2014
Alien Beatnik Siren, Joe Sheftel Gallery, NY

2013
An aspen's inability to be a pine,
Meessen De Clercq, Brussels, Belgium

2012
In Spectral Form, Joe Sheftel Gallery, NY

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2015
A.N.T.H.R.O.P.O.C.E.N.E., Meessen De Clercq,
Brussels, Belgium
I.O.O.M., Lucien Terras, New York, NY
Painting the Sky Blue, Stefan Lundgren Gallery,
Palma de Mallorca, Spain
Crunchy, organized by Gregory Linn and Clayton
Press, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, NY
Post Analog Painting, The Hole, New York, NY
Deep Play Fun House, curated by Brent Stewart,
Seed Space, Nashville, TN
The Two States of W.W., curated by Andrew Prayzner,
TSA New York, Brooklyn, NY

2014
Homo Ludens, Meessen De Clercq, Brussels, Belgium
This One's Optimistic: Pincushion, New Britain
Museum of American Art, New Britain, CT
Parallax Futured: Transtemporal Subjectivities,
Skirball Museum, Cincinnati, OH
Post-Psychedelic Dreams, Grey Area/Glenn Horowitz
Bookseller, East Hampton, NY
Go With the Flow, The Hole, New York, NY

2013
Xtraction, The Hole, New York, NY
The Medium's Session, Zeitgeist, Nashville, TN

2012
Workspace Exhibition, Dieu Donné, New York, NY
Specifically Yours, Joe Sheftel Gallery, New York, NY
Retrospect, Charles Bank Gallery, NY

2011

The Third Order, Charles Bank Gallery, New York, NY
Anonymous Presence, Y Gallery, New York, NY
Painted Pictures, curated by Arthur Ou, Blackston
Gallery, New York, NY
Neon Sigh, collaboration with Emily Mae Smith,
The Arcade, Nashville, TN
In the Heavens of our Imagination,
Lost Coast Culture Machine, Ft. Bragg, CA

2010

Gradation, Portugal Arte 10- Portuguese Biennial,
Lisbon, Portugal

2009

On From Here, Guild and Greyskul, New York, NY
Room Tones, St Cecilia's Convent, Brooklyn, NY

2008

Blank, curated by Yi Zhou, Median Museum,
Beijing, China
Plastic Topography, South Street Seaport Museum,
New York, NY
The Map, curated by Vandana Jian, ROCA,
Nyack, NY

2007

Blank, Ke Center for Contemporary Art,
Shanghai, China

2006

Passport -International Globus Dislocater, Roebling Hall,
Brooklyn, NY
Invitational, Roski Gallery, University of Southern
California, Los Angeles, CA

2005

Working Space, Cuchifritos Project Space,
New York, NY
All of a Piece, Geoffrey Young Gallery,
Great Barrington, MA

2004

A Slow Read, Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
Irrational Exuberance, Stephan Stux Gallery,
New York, NY

2003

Fresh Meat, Center for Experimental and
Perceptual Art, Buffalo, NY
Toward a Low End Theory, Minnesota Center
for Photography, Minneapolis, MN

2002

The Accelerated Grimace, Silverstein Gallery,
New York, NY
Aim 22, Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, NY
Love and Ardor, Geoffrey Young Gallery,
Great Barrington, MA

2000

Location, Midway Contemporary Art,
Minneapolis, MN
Waiting List, Geoffrey Young Gallery,
Great Barrington, MA

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2015

Steeverlynck Sam, "Expo Adam Henry: zoek de verschillen" (review), brusselnieuws.be, May
Lorent Claude, "Le langage pictural et son image répétée" (review), Arts Libre, April

2013

Johnson Ken, Art in Review "Xtraction"(review),
New York Times, June 6

2012

Akel Joseph, "Critics' Picks" (review),
Artforum.com, May 29
Relyea Lane, "D.I.Y. Abstraction"
WOW HUH, October 8
"The Lookout: Adam Henry at Joe Sheftel" (review),
Art in America, June 7
"Art and Soul, Five Art Shows",
New York Magazine, January 26
"The Lookout: Specifically Yours at Joe Sheftel",
Art in America, February 17

2011

Press Clayton, "Meso-American Remix"
Alterative Latin Investor, December
Nathan Emily, "New Art" Artnet, July 28
Christy Matt, "Neon Sigh"(review),
Art Papers Magazine, June 1

2009

Pem William, "On from Here"(review), Bones Beat,
Village Voice, February 12
Zhou Yi, "Adam Henry Interview" BQ Magazine,
April 10

2008

Genocchio Benjamin, "Charting Mind and Space"
(review), New York Times, March 16
Xiaohui Lui, "Begin with the Beginning"
Catalog, Beijing, China

2007

Zhou Yi, "Blank" Exhibition catalog,
Shanghai, China

2005

Kocache Mouktar, "Site Matters" D.A.P. press,
New York

2004

Cotter Holland, "A Slow Read" (review),
New York Times, February 23
Cotter Holland, "Sampling Brooklyn, Keeper of Eclectic
Flames" New York Times, January 23

2003

Cantor Karen, "Universal Objects."
Petite Mort Magazine, October

2002

Cotter Holland, "Artist in the Marketplace" (review),
New York Times, September 6
Johnson Ken, "The Accelerated Grimace" (review),
New York Times, July 12
Kerr Merrily, "The Accelerated Grimace" (review),
New York Arts, September
Pulkka Wesley, "Artists Play With Perception in
'Reconfigure'" The Albuquerque Journal, April 7

2001

Fallon Michael, "Prefablanscapelite" (review),
City Pages, February 2

LECTURES

2012

Visiting Artist, University of Cincinnati, OH

CURATORIAL PROJECTS

2009

System: System, The Convent at St. Cecilia's,
Brooklyn, NY

2002

Reconfigure, Richard Levy Gallery, Albuquerque, NM

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B 1000 Brussels (Belgium)
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Published in February 2016

ISBN 978-2-930528-14-4