

LISA BRADLEY

THE FULLNESS OF BEING



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January 29 through February 28, 2015

Essay by Carter Ratcliff

HOLLIS TAGGART GALLERIES

958 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10021



Jumna, 1979. Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 inches.
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minn. (94.94)



Noesis, 1977. Oil on linen, 50 x 40 inches.
Private collection, New York



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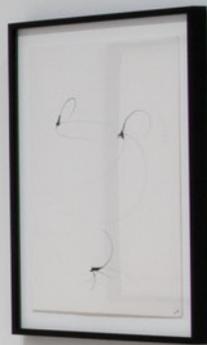


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Installation shot of a room featuring 15 of Bradley's drawings from the museum's permanent collection during the exhibition *To Have It About You: The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection*, Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 2009. Photo Courtesy of Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum



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Left: Movie poster of the documentary "Herb & Dorothy 50 x 50" (2013), directed by Megumi Sasaki

Below: Film stills from "Herb & Dorothy 50 x 50" of a panel discussion featuring Bradley with Dorothy and Herb Vogel, and artists Richard Tuttle and Charlie Clough, Delaware Museum of Art, 2010 (top); and Bradley discussing her painting *Akasa II*, 1995 (Collection Delaware Art Museum) with Herb and Dorothy Vogel and the then director of the Delaware Museum of Art, Danielle Rice, in 2010 (bottom)



Opposite: *Silence and Immutability*, 1997. Oil on linen, 47 x 38 inches. Academy Art Museum, Easton, Md. (inv. no. 2008.016.04), and featured in "Herb & Dorothy 50 x 50."





The Moon Cannot Be Stolen, 1987. Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 inches.
Brenau University Galleries, Gainesville, Ga. Purchase. This painting
was published in multiple editions of the seminal art history text
The Art of Seeing, edited by Paul Zelanski and Mary Pat Fisher.

Foreword

Lisa Bradley's profound and evocative compositions paradoxically capture the spirit of both stillness and motion. Her distilled formal vocabulary and signature shades of blue and gray belie a tremendous sense of velocity and a deep emotional resonance. Early in her career, Bradley's work caught the eye of renowned dealer Betty Parsons who was a pivotal advocate of such artists as Rothko, Pollock, Stamos, Still, Rauschenberg and others. The legendary Parsons' mentorship and friendship provided significant encouragement and public notice to the young Lisa Bradley. More recently, she was championed by the famously avid collectors Dorothy and Herbert Vogel, and many of her works are counted among those distributed in the Vogels' recent museum donations: *Fifty Works for Fifty States*. This sustained enthusiasm for Bradley's work is evidence of a profound emotional connection that her paintings find with the viewer. Dorothy Vogel described this effect in Bradley's work: "It's like when you fall in love. You can't tell why you fall in love, it's just something you feel."

Awareness is paramount in Bradley's work. Her paintings transcend the physical to become spiritual statements, drawing the viewer in with their distinct visual and emotional pull. Nothing is static. The elegant tracteries exist in her turbulent compositions in which expressionist brushstrokes create a sense of a continuum—of an elemental motion—like standing in the eye of a storm. Yet, despite this tempestuousness, Bradley's canvases exude a sense of peace, and therein lies the timelessness and ethereal power of her work.

Hollis Taggart Galleries is delighted to present *Lisa Bradley: The Fullness of Being* in which we explore the breadth of Bradley's career through an engaging selection of both recent and historical work. We would like to thankfully acknowledge the noted art critic and author, Carter Ratcliff for the contribution of his thoughtful essay which truly captures the poetry and strength of Bradley's oeuvre. Our exhibitions would be impossible without our professional gallery team and we extend our appreciation to Stacey Epstein, Martin Friedrichs, Dan Weiner, Samara Umschweis, and Ashley Park for their tireless individual involvement in the exhibition. Thanks also to Russell Hassell and Jessie Sentivan, whose design and editing expertise and behind-the-scene efforts have produced such an elegant catalogue. And lastly of course, we would like to thank Lisa Bradley for sharing her talent and sensibilities with our audience and for working so closely with us from the start of this project.

The measure of the "success" of an artwork is the degree to which the viewer falls in tune with, and shares the same emotional involvement of the artist. From the first encounter with Lisa's paintings one feels an immediate, deeply internal shift of awareness, like a transcendental experience. We are certain that her paintings will touch those who take a considered look. We invite you to see these marvelous creations first hand.

Hollis C. Taggart, President

Debra V. Pesci, Director

The Self and the Fullness of Being: On the Art of Lisa Bradley

Carter Ratcliff

To see is such a familiar experience that we hardly notice it. We look past our seeing to the thing seen, and so it is a subtle shock to encounter the art of Lisa Bradley. For her colors, her tonalities, the weave of her brushwork unite to render us conscious of seeing itself. We become aware of perceiving a painting in all its particularity, from its overall flow to the smallest nuance of its painterly texture. It is not possible to say why this happens. It is possible only to note that it does, that Bradley's imagery is in harmony with the very process of being perceived. It is as if her paintings come into being to gather us into this harmony. This is not to say that they turn in on ourselves, fostering a preoccupation with our own perceptions. Rather, they take us to a place where seeing and seen, self and other, meaning and intention are in such complete accord that we let go of all our self-centered concerns. We simply see, having arrived in a place—a contemplative state—where seeing merges with every other aspect of being.

With each of her canvases Bradley transports us to this place, yet each is distinct. For each manifests its own serenely moving energy, its own texture, its own play of brighter passages against darker backgrounds. We notice this distinctiveness because we are attuned to it. We expect an artist to achieve singularity and when we encounter an individual style we feel we know what to make of it. For we take it as axiomatic that the individuality of the work conveys the nature of the artist who created it. As Jackson Pollock said, "Painting is self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is."¹ These days, of course, we are just as likely to say that an artist succeeds by painting what *she* is. Our sense of who counts as an artist has become less exclusionary than it was over half a century ago, when Pollock defined art as self-expression.

First proposed early in the nineteenth century by Romantic painters and poets, this definition is still alive and intelligible. We know what William Wordsworth meant when he said, in 1816, that genuine poetry "proceeds as it ought to, from the soul of [the poet], communicating its creative energies to the images of the external world."² To generalize Wordsworth's point: art in whatever medium mirrors not only the world but also the artist. By dispensing with "images of the external world," abstract painters intensify the focus on themselves. Part of looking at a painting is reading a personality into the imagery it presents to us. This is certainly true in the case of Bradley's work, and we might well feel that looking has arrived at its goal once we have seen her paintings as reflections of her serenity, her sensitivity, and her imperative energy. But there is more to see. Rather, there is more to understand.

Because so many of Bradley's paintings are blue, her oeuvre brings to mind Yves Klein. Though he painted with various colors—red, green, gold—his blue paintings are all in one shade: International Klein Blue. Bradley, by contrast, uses a different blue in each painting. Sometimes it is so dark it verges on black or so light it could be seen as a luminous gray. There are paintings that veer toward aquamarine or a shadowy green. As Bradley's blue changes from one painting to the next so do the touches of white and streaks of black that inflect her predominant color. Klein took out a patent on his trademark blue, to suggest that he had not only discovered the best variety of blue but also taken possession of it. His canvases covered with International Klein Blue served as logos for himself. Bypassing the aesthetics of self-expression, he went directly to the artwork as self-assertion. With her blue pigments, Bradley draws our attention not to herself but to the color blue in all its inexhaustible variety. Yet, as I have suggested, she is powerfully present in her art. But where, exactly? And where do her paintings take us?

To speak of blue flecked with white is to suggest a sky with clouds. Or foam on waves. Yet Bradley's paintings never trigger these associations. The swirl of her brushwork may call to mind the agitation of a storm, yet her paintings are not agitated. What we see as motion also feels like stillness. Her paintings do not evoke the transience of weather. They evoke, instead, all that abides—a plenitude impossible to describe. And risky to name, for doing so implies that this plenitude is Bradley's subject. But she has no detachable subject, theme, or message to be conceptualized and explicated. The meaning of her work is in the experience of it. We understand it by looking, not by talking, and this is unusual.

Most visual art leads us from looking to talking and onward, one hopes, to a kind of looking illuminated by what has been said. Thus the early collages of Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, for example, don't make much sense until we have taken explicit note of the power of paper scraps to disrupt the flow of pigment. Piet Mondrian's geometric abstractions take on a full charge of meaning only if we are willing to discuss the affinities between the formal harmonies of his paintings and his ideas about a just and harmonious society. Bradley's art does not provoke that sort of explanatory talk. What, then, am I doing by talking about it? I am following a path that certain theologians have called the *via negativa*. Convinced that god is unknowable, they would say only what god is not.

Ad Reinhardt transposed this tactic to aesthetics, insisting that in authentic painting there is "no fooling-the-eye, no window-hole-in-the-wall, no illusions, no representations, no associations . . ."3 Reinhardt's list of things that painting is not contains over five dozen further items. Later lists include still more. The closest Reinhardt got to a definition of art was a pair of tautologies: "Art is Art. Everything else is everything else."4 I borrow his tactic of negation when I note that Bradley's paintings offer no self-expression, no self-image, no pictures of the sky or the sea or tempestuous weather. She never draws the traditional connection between the color blue and feelings of melancholy. There is nothing Picasso's Blue Period in her palette. There is, however, no point in going any further down the *via negativa*. No matter how

long I stay on it—no matter how far I extend my list of things not to be found in Bradley’s art—the path will lead beyond the negative to something positive: her art. Face-to-face with one of her paintings, we will be tempted to say something about it. Something that gets at what it is, not what it is not. But, as I’ve noted, it feels obvious that these works are to be seen, not talked about. What, then, is there to say?

We could acknowledge that we are in agreement with the artist herself, who says that her paintings offer us an experience for which there are no words.⁵ And then we could listen as she recounts an experience of her own, one that many others have undergone throughout the millennia. Bradley recalls that very early in her life there were times when she had an intense, utterly convincing sense that her essential identity was at one with the world, with the universe, with being itself.

As Bradley grew older she of course acknowledged that, for practical purposes, each of us has a distinct, everyday self that separates us from one another and our surroundings. We have personalities, social selves engaged by the world of ordinary, transient things. Yet there is what Bradley calls a “deeper self,” the self that experiences its oneness with the very ground of being. This is the self in ascendance when she paints. So she is present in her art not as an individual asserting her individuality but as a consciousness united with, indistinguishable from, a consciousness beyond the singular ego.

The Hindu Vedanta evokes this oneness by means of a starkly concise phrase: Atman is Brahman. The self *is* the universal Soul. We find echoes of this phrase in the writings of the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart, the American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson, and the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Parmenides. Zen Buddhism proposes the same unity, as do the Gnostic gospels. Yet there is a danger in mentioning these names, for each brings with it a tradition of teaching—a doctrine—and it would be all easy to suppose that Bradley intends her paintings to convey some doctrinal point. But she doesn’t.

As she says, “I am not following anybody.” For she feels no need to do so. Having known from an early age of the unity of self and world expounded by spiritual figures of all stripes, she had no need to find doctrinal corroboration in the works of others. For her, there is no argument to make, no point to nail down. There is only the experience of the oneness that underlies variety: the atemporal perfection of being that abides unchanged through all the transient events churned up by the flow of time. Bradley’s paintings, if we will let them, draw us into the state of knowing this perfect oneness. Or of remembering that we, too, have known it all along.

In 1966 Frank Stella said of his paintings, “What you see is what you see.”⁶ What you see is paint on canvas, canvas stretched on wooden frames, and that is all there is. No self-expression, no evocation of the artist, no symbolic image of nature—just objects of the kind we call paintings. Stella’s slogan fit not only his works but the cubes and grids of Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, and other Minimalists. Its literalism can still be detected in the art of much younger artists, for literalism solves the problem of meaning. If a work of art simply is what it is, the

problem is not merely solved. It goes away, and it is always pleasant to have one less thing to worry about.

The error in this line of thinking is to treat meaning as a problem. It is better to understand meaning as inevitable in every encounter with anyone or anything—even a Minimalist object. It turns out that what you ultimately see when you look at a work of art is what it means, and so Stella's slogan applies to Bradley's paintings as well as his own. What you see in her fields of blue include paint on canvas, gracefully shifting textures and tones, effortless transitions from surface to depth, from dark to light, from micro- to macrocosm. Eventually, you see beyond the objects of ordinary perception to a vision of vastness in which some might fear drowning. A question occurs: isn't the perfection of the infinite a perfect place to lose track of oneself? No, because a sense of infinity must be felt and when we are given that feeling by Bradley's art our sense of our essential selves is intensified, not diminished. For her art prompts the understanding we are not atoms isolated in a void but unimaginably complex instances of existence in all its unity and unbounded plenitude.

One last question: how can such immensity be contained within the confines of a painting? Since the time of the Renaissance the stretched canvas, with its straight edges and four corners, has symbolized among other things the autonomous, self-contained individual. And it is worth noting once more that Bradley is a highly evolved artist in possession of a style at once sophisticated and immediately recognizable as her own. Yet the distinctiveness of her imagery is forever leading us beyond itself, to a sense of the boundlessness in which we all share. Bradley never tries to picture this shared being and so the edges of the canvas pose no difficulty. They simply mark off the place where she invites us to join her in the experience of our oneness with the ground of all that is.

Notes

- 1 Jackson Pollock, interview, 1956, in Seldon Rodman, *Conversations with Artists*, New York: Capricorn Books, 1961, pp. 84–85.
- 2 William Wordsworth, letter to Archdeacon Wrangham, January 18, 1816, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years, two parts.*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1937.
- 3 Ad Reinhardt, "Abstract Art Refuses" (1952), *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt*, ed. Barbara Rose, Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1991, pp. 5051.
- 4 Ad Reinhardt, "25 Lines of Words on Art" (1958), *Art as Art: The Selected Writings of Ad Reinhardt* p. 51.
- 5 All statements attributed to the artist are from conversations with the author held in June and July 2014.
- 6 Frank Stella, in Bruce Glaser, "Questions to Stella and Judd," 1966, *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968, p. 162.

CARTER RATCLIFF is an art critic, poet, and writer. Since 1969, he has contributed to major art journals including *Art in America*, *Artforum*, *ARTnews*, and *Modern Painters*, among others. Ratcliff has taught at Hunter College, New York University, and the New York Studio School and is the author of *John Singer Sargent* (1982), *The Fate of a Gesture: Jackson Pollock and Postwar American Art* (1996), *Out of the Box: The Reinvention of Art, 1965–1975* (2001), *Georgia O'Keeffe* (2003), *Andy Warhol: Portraits* (2006), "The White Paintings of Richard Pousette-Dart" (2010), and *Conrad Marca-Relli: A Redemptive Order* (2011).









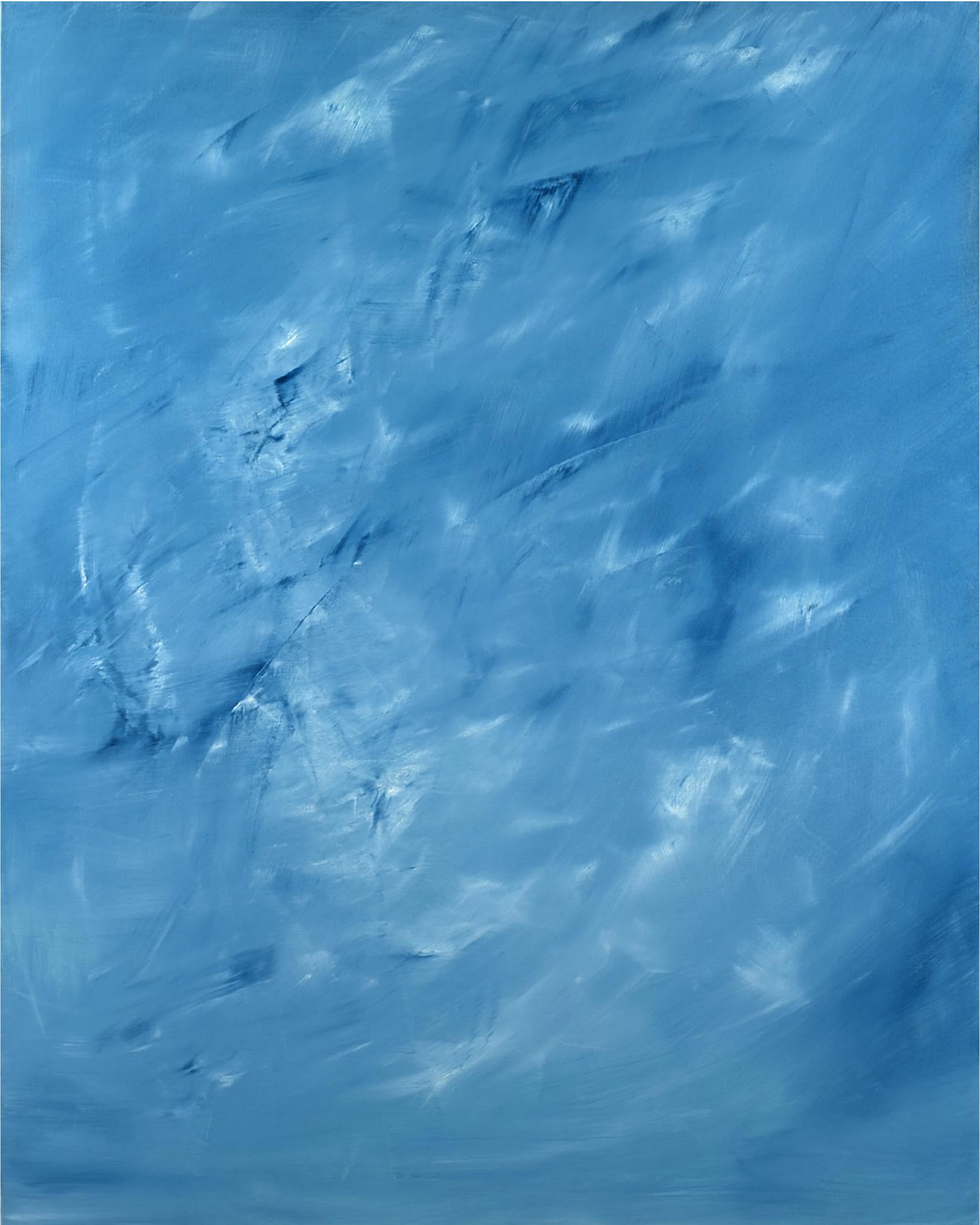




















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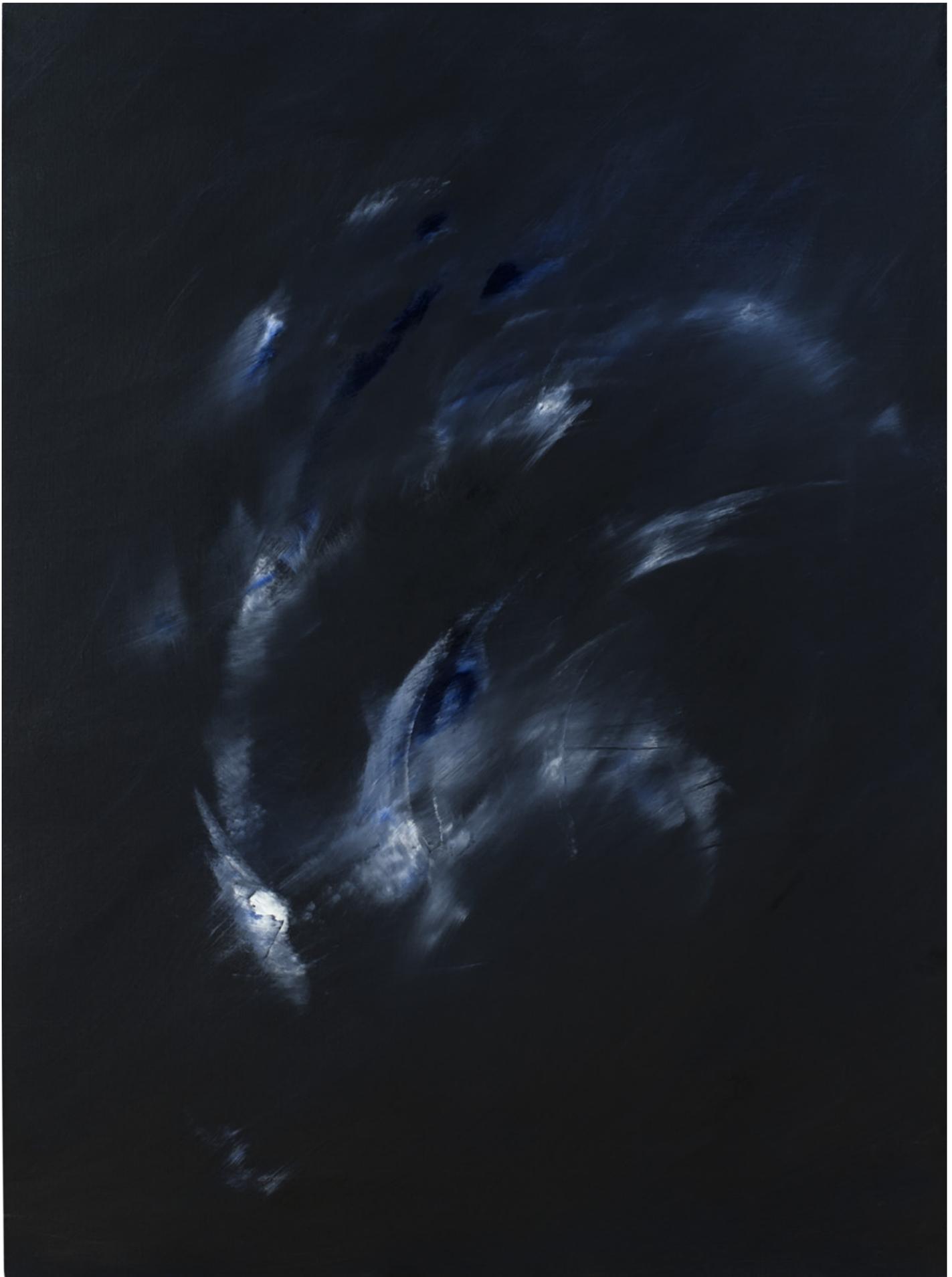
Untitled, 1987. Ink on paper, 30 x 22 inches











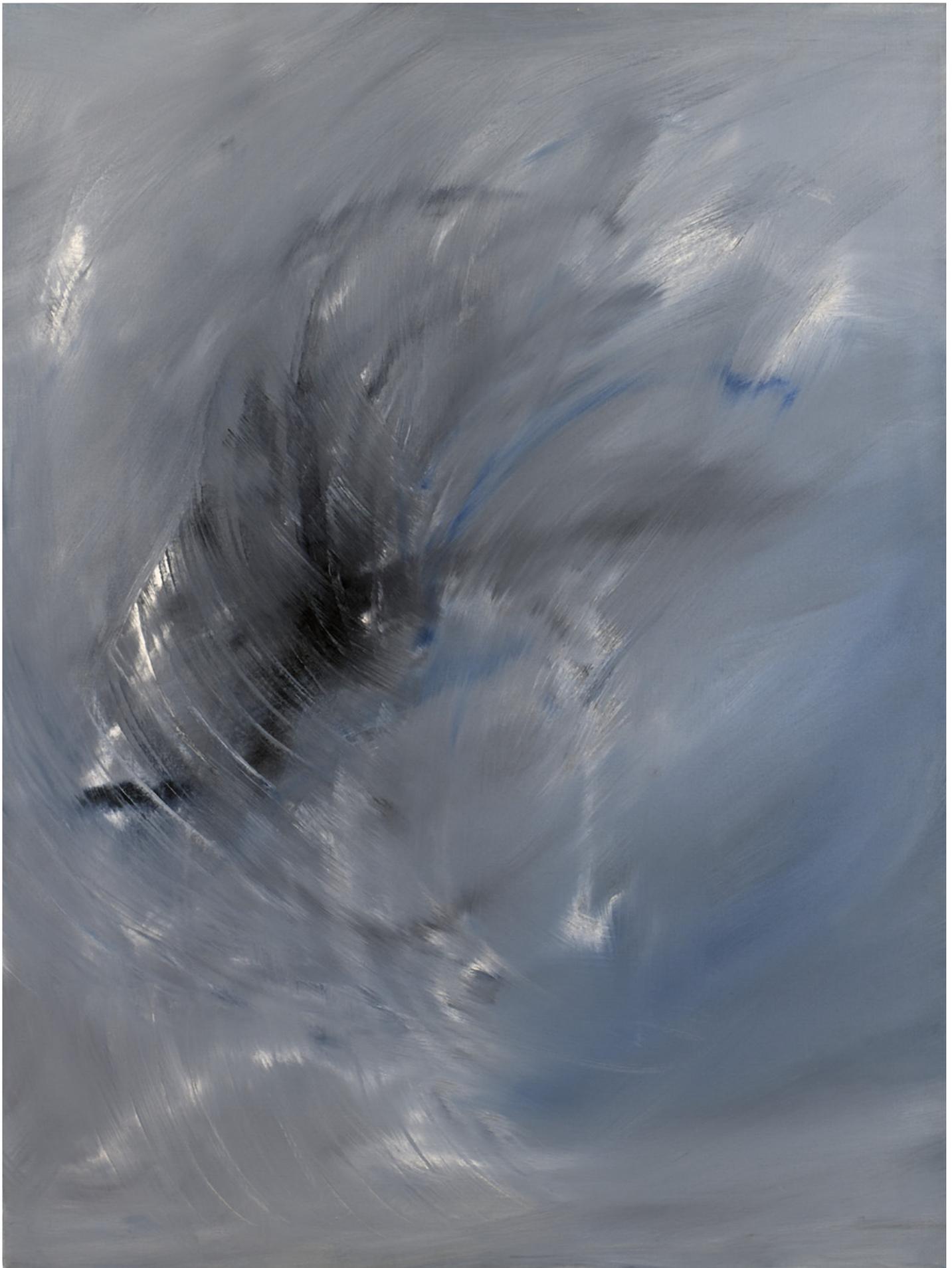
Moves, 2014. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches







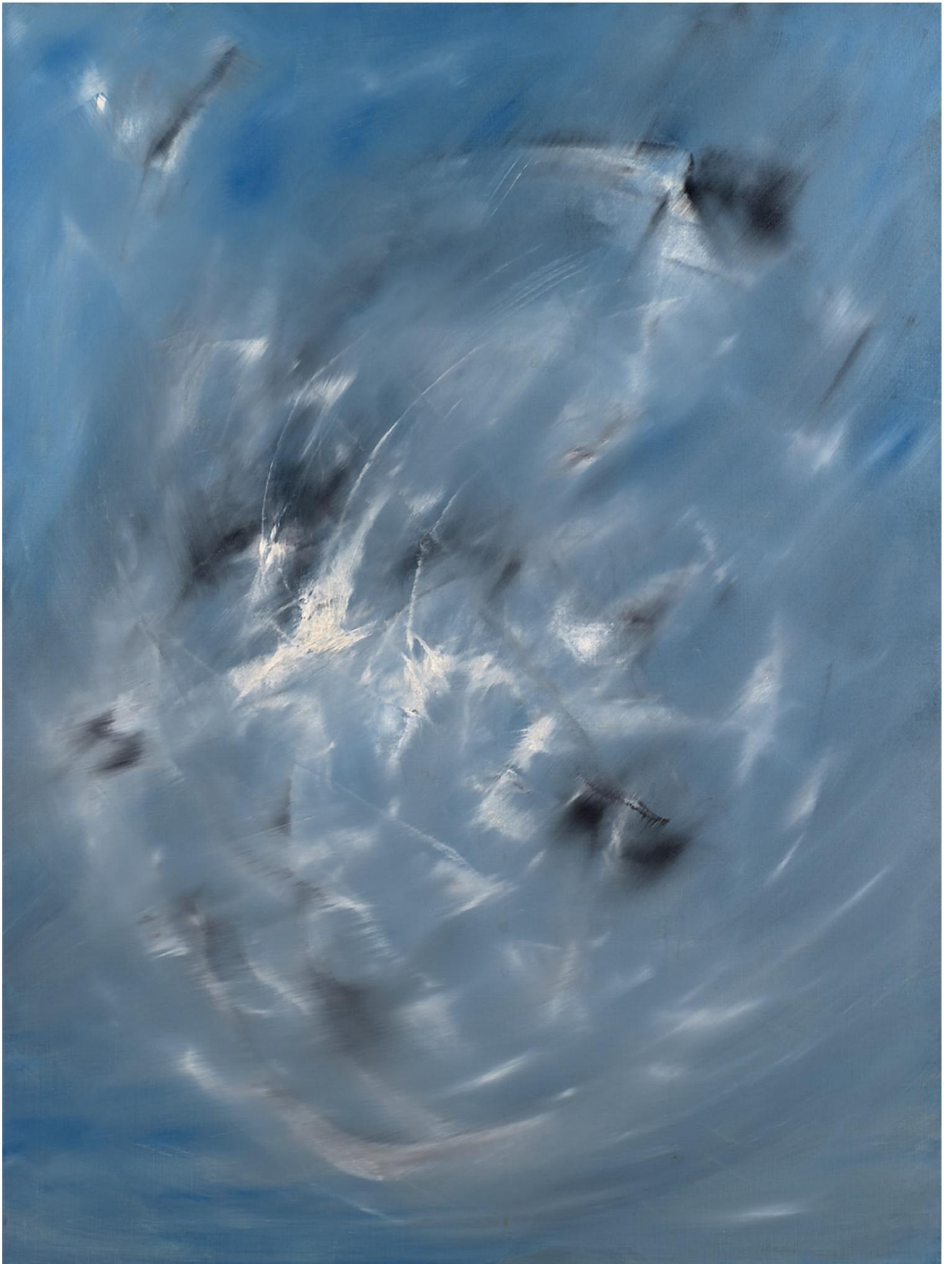






Departure, 1998. Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 inches





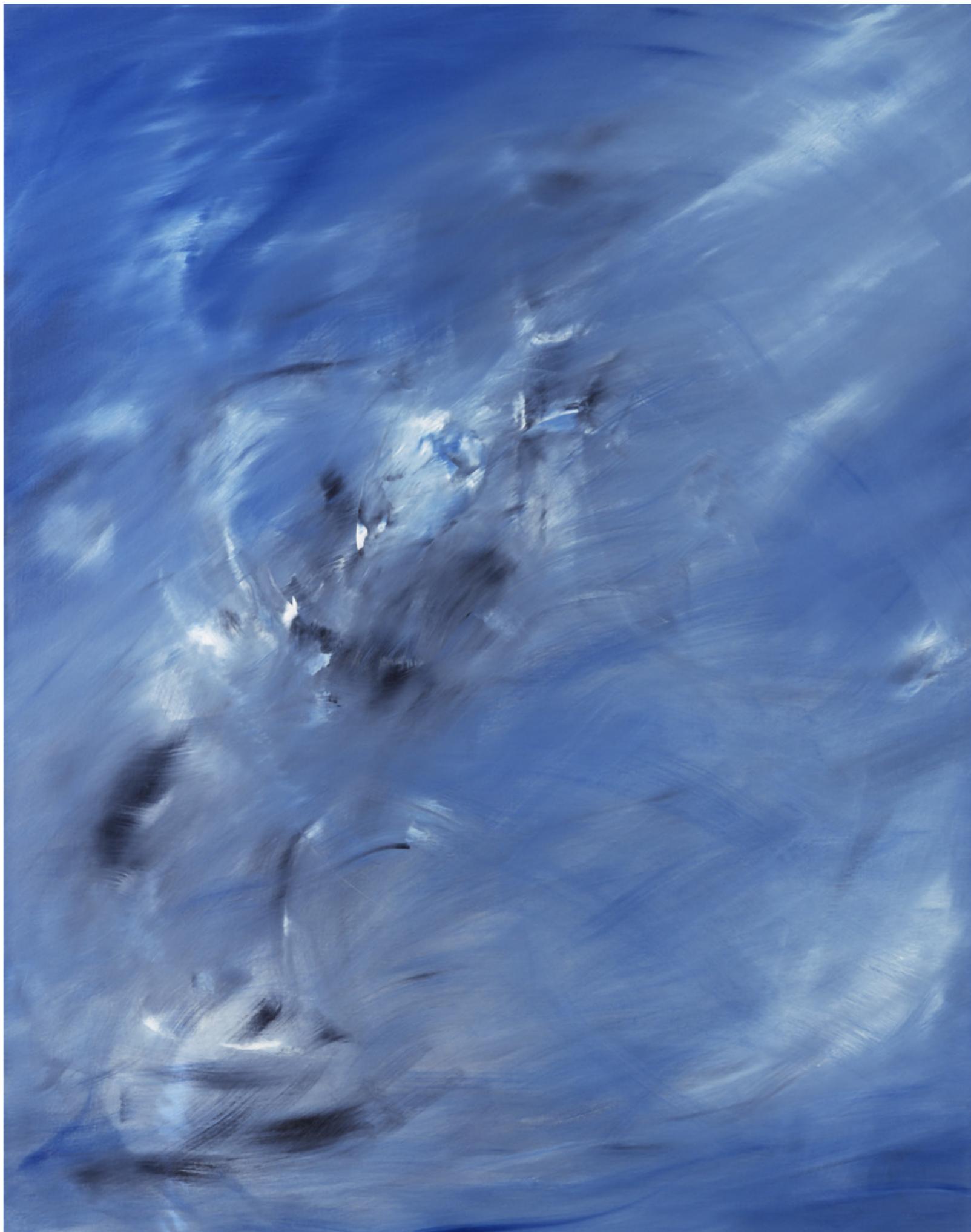






A Certain Perfection to This, 2014. Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 inches





SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, *Lisa Bradley*, January 29–February 28, 2015.
- Brenau University Galleries, Gainesville, Ga., *Lisa Bradley: Recent Paintings*, June 23–September 21, 2003.
- Donahue/Sosinski Art, New York, *Lisa Bradley: Paintings, 1996–1998*, October 15–November 17, 1998.
- E.M. Donahue Gallery, New York, *Lisa Bradley: Paintings*, February 14–March 12, 1996.
- Galerie Kaj Forsblom, Helsinki, Finland, *Lisa Bradley: Paintings*, April 20–May 14, 1995.
- E.M. Donahue Gallery, New York, *Lisa Bradley: Paintings*, February 3–27, 1993.
- Ratner Gallery, Chicago, *Lisa Bradley: Oil Paintings*, February 8–March 7, 1991.
- E.M. Donahue Gallery, New York, *Lisa Bradley: Paintings, 1987–1988*, May 3–27, 1989.
- Philip Dash Gallery, New York, *Lisa Bradley: Paintings & Drawings 1982–1986*, March 5–April 5, 1987.
- Major-Saxbe Gallery, Urbana, Ohio, *Lisa Bradley*, April 18–May 2, 1986.
- Bette Stoler Gallery, New York, *Lisa Bradley*, October 10–November 20, 1979.
- Ludlow Hyland Gallery, New York, *Lisa Bradley: Paintings & Drawings*, September 11–October 2, 1979.
- Ludlow Hyland Gallery, New York, *Lisa Bradley: Paintings & Drawings*, 1978.
- Boston Center for the Arts, *Lisa Bradley*, 1977.
- Loeb Drama Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., *Lisa Bradley: Paintings & Drawings*, July 27–August 10, 1976.
- Boston City Hall, *An Exhibition of Works by Lisa Bradley*, August 4–31, 1973.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, *Summer Contemporary*, July 17–August 30, 2014.
- Rochester Contemporary Art Center, N.Y., *Makers and Mentors*, February 6–March 16, 2014.
- Department of Art Gallery at McComas Hall, Mississippi State University, Starkville, *Herb & Dorothy: A Glimpse into Their Extraordinary Collection*, September 10–October 18, 2013.
- Daum Museum of Contemporary Art, *The Sum of Its Attributes: The Dorothy & Herbert Vogel Collection*, February 9–May 26, 2013.
- Brenau University Galleries, Gainesville, Ga., *Contemporary Perspectives*, November 2012–May 2013.
- Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, *The Collecting Impulse: Fifty Works from Dorothy and Herbert Vogel*, June 10–August 12, 2012.
- Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, *Pulling at Polarities*, May 10–June 16, 2012.
- New Orleans Museum of Art, La., *Making a Mark: The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection*, October 2011–April 8, 2012.
- Portland Museum of Art, Maine, *The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Maine*, August 13, 2011–January 29, 2012.
- Academy Art Museum, Easton, Md., *Fifty Works for Maryland: Collecting the Vogel Way*, August 7–November 6, 2010.
- Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, *The Vogel Collection*, June 26–September 12, 2010.
- Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, *Fifty Works for Fifty States: The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection*, June 19–August 29, 2010.
- Mississippi Museum of Art, Jackson, *Herb and Dorothy: A Glimpse into Their Extraordinary Collection*, April 10–September 12, 2010.

- Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, *The Dorothy and Herbert Vogel Collection: Fifty Works for Fifty States*, October 23, 2009–January 10, 2010.
- Kresge Art Museum, East Lansing, Mich., *The Kresge Art Museum Collection: Celebrating the 50th*, January 12–March 15, 2009.
- Open 10 International Exhibition of Sculptures and Installations, Venice Lido, *Birth of Venus*, August 30–October 14, 2007.
- Lesley Heller Gallery, New York, June 21–August 10, 2007.
- Lesley Heller/The Work Space, New York, *Celestial*, October 2–December 6, 2003.
- Wako Gallery, Tokyo, July 2002.
- Bank of American Plaza, Charlotte, N.C., *Material Perception*, Eighth Annual Art Exhibition, February 4–November 4, 1999.
- Brenau University Galleries, Gainesville, Ga., *Women Artists in the Vogel Collection*, 1998.
- Donahue/Sosinski Art, New York, *Pools of Light*, July 1997.
- 450 Broadway Galleries, New York, *Blue*, 1996.
- Swan Gallery, New York, *Face to Face*, September 1995.
- Carl Solway Gallery, Cincinnati, Ohio, *Eight Painters: Abstraction in the Nineties*, September 20–December 31, 1993.
- Musée Nationale de Dakar, Senegal, November 1991.
- Cie Moderne & Contemporaine, Paris, *Sensibilities Contemporaines*, July 1991.
- Lavrov Gallery, Paris, *Juin de L'Abstraction*, June–August 1987.
- Philip Dash Gallery, New York, *New Image Abstractions*, September 10–October 5, 1986.
- Chronocide Gallery, New York, *Summer in the City*, July 24–August 30, 1986.
- Jan Baum Gallery, Los Angeles, *Landscape/Elements*, An Invitational Exhibition, July 12–August 23, 1986.
- Mokotoff Gallery, New York, *Heads*, April 25–May 25, 1986.
- Chronocide Gallery, New York, *Strange Brew*, April 3–May 4, 1986.
- Mokotoff Gallery, New York, *Vital Space*, February 15–March 16, 1986.
- Leonarda Di Mauro Gallery, New York, *New Visions*, December 4–21, 1985.
- Kouros Gallery, New York, *Kouros and Kourai*, July 18–August 4, 1984.
- Phillipe Guimiot Gallery, Brussels, 1983.
- Soker-Kaseman Gallery, San Francisco, 1983.
- Elayne Marquis Gallery, San Francisco, 1982.
- Deicas Art, La Jolla, Calif., 1982.
- Fay Gold Gallery, Atlanta, Ga., 1982.
- Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1981.
- Bette Stoler Gallery, New York, *Five Artists*, December 16, 1980–January 6, 1981.
- First Women's Bank, New York, 1981.
- Bette Stoler Gallery, New York, *New Drawings*, February 3–March 22, 1980.
- Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, *Group Show*, December 9–24, 1980.
- Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, *Group Show*, December 18, 1979–January 12, 1980.
- Baak Gallery, Cambridge, Mass., 1978.
- Baak Gallery, Cambridge, Mass., 1977.
- Galeria Rosanna, Boston, 1976.
- Gallery 200, Columbus, Ohio, 1975.
- New Bertha Schaeffer Gallery, New York, 1975.
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- . *The Self and the Fullness of Being: On the Art of Lisa Bradley*. New York: Hollis Taggart Galleries, 2014.
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SELECTED MUSEUM AND PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Academy Art Museum, Easton, Md.
- Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin
- Brenau University Galleries, Gainesville, Ga.
- Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio
- Daum Museum of Contemporary Art, Sedalia, Mo.
- Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington
- Eli and Edyth Broad Museum, East Lansing, Mich.
- Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine
- Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis
- Indianapolis Museum of Art, Ind.
- Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minn.
- Mississippi Museum of Art, Jacksonville
- Musée Nationale de Dakar, Senegal
- National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.
- New Orleans Museum of Art, La.
- Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Logan, Utah
- Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia
- Portland Museum of Art, Maine
- Savannah College of Art and Design, Ga.
- University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor

This catalogue has been published on the occasion of the exhibition "Lisa Bradley: The Fullness of Being," organized by Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York, and presented from January 29 to February 28, 2015.

ISBN: 978-0-9889139-6-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014955836

Front cover: *Begins*, detail, 2012

Frontispiece: *Without End*, detail, 2013

Front flap: Lisa Bradley, Paris, 1990. Photographed by Anne-Laure Labadie

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Catalogue production: Jessie Sentivan

Design: Russell Hassell, New York

Printing: Spire, Boston

Photography: Roz Akin

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