

**CARLOS SAGRERA**

PATTERNS

CORE II

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Rutger Brandt Gallery  
VanSpijk Publishers

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## FOREWORD

CARLOS SAGRERA

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*“any regularly repeated arrangement, especially a design made from repeated lines, shapes, or colors on a surface”*

*“a particular way in which something is done, is organized, or happens”*

*Patterns*, an exhibition with more than 20 new paintings, is the second solo exhibition in the Netherlands by Spanish artist Carlos Sagrera, who lives and works in Leipzig, Germany. Sagrera is a young talent and belongs to a new generation of contemporary painters who is inspired by the New Leipzig School, many of whom also live in the former cotton factory in Leipzig; Die Spinnerei. This is also the place where, in 2015, we came into contact with, and became enchanted by, the painted interiors of Carlos Sagrera. This encounter laid the foundation for an exceptionally successful cooperation, and we now represent him both at home and abroad. Sagrera works on the basis of an old family photo archive, yet in his current interiors he also incorporates images from a more recent past; images combined with memories of places he lived or where friends once lived. The hyperrealistic details in Sagrera’s work are on an exceptionally high artistic level, but true excitement unfolds when common and recognizable motifs are translated into abstract streaks of color. And this is exactly the direction Sagrera has taken in the past three years. This transition can clearly be observed; he now allows himself even more freedom on canvas and does not shy away from the complexity of the subject. Razor-sharp realism is still perceivable in his work, and at the same time, abstraction plays an ever more important role. Despite his young age, he seems to have found himself as a painter; Sagrera is more aware of his own signature, his own style. During the exhibition and in this publication bearing same name, we focus on his new direction and recent developments in painting. We continue to follow the painter in his quest for fading memories and capturing human mannerisms.

We would like to thank everyone who made this exhibition and its publication possible. In particular, we would like to thank Anka Ziefer and Emily Ansenk. Anka Ziefer, director of the G2 Kunsthalle in Leipzig, wrote an essay in which she delves deeper into the creation of *Patterns*. In addition, she describes several paintings by Sagrera and puts his work in an art-historical perspective. Emily Ansenk, director of Kunsthal Rotterdam and also a great admirer of Sagrera's work, provides a very intimate description of her experience of a specific work by the artist. We would also like to express our gratitude to Carlos Sagrera for the wonderful cooperation of the past years and our many interesting encounters.

Through the growing oeuvre of Sagrera's work we see a passionate, hard-working artist who continues to build on his chosen path but does not shy away from experimentation. We hope that this book is the next step in contributing to the widely supported recognition of Carlos Sagrera as a major artist of our time.

Rutger Brandt  
Amsterdam, August 2018











## CARLOS SAGRERA

### *Remembrance of things past<sup>1</sup>*

It's my first visit to Carlos Sagrera's new studio at the Leipziger Baumwollspinnerei (Leipzig Cotton Mill), which he moved into in 2016. What attracted him to Leipzig back in 2014 was his admiration for the New Leipzig School generation of painters. The two months he was initially going to spend here as a participant of the Leipzig International Programme (LIA) have already turned into four years, and, as I learn during my visit, he has no immediate plans to leave. Although he does like the idea of living closer to his Spanish hometown in the foreseeable future. After all, the presence of memories of his own, as well as his family's past have become the main focus of his art.

In 2011, at his grandparents' home in Madrid, one of the places he felt most attached to as a child, Sagrera came across photographs of it from the 1970s. Carlos was born in 1987. What he primarily sees in those photographs taken before his birth is the time that has passed but is still visible through the presence of objects and spaces. Foreign and familiar things blend together to form newly configured memories. In 2013, this inspires him to photograph the same rooms again, in their current state and with their present-day furniture and décor, intentionally copying the original camera angles, trying to find traces of the past. He tells me he would have liked to take these current-state pictures using the same camera lens the originals were taken with but found it impossible to determine what camera had been used. That same year, his grandmother dies and the family sells the flat. The third and final series of photographs of his grandparents' flat thus shows it in its empty, uninhabited state of abandonment.

1. The first English translation of Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* by C. K. Scott Moncrieff was published under the title *Remembrance of Things Past*.

Since 2012, Sagrera has been incorporating all these private photographs into his work and using them as the foundation of his painterly practice. In 2014, he takes the photographs to Leipzig with him and, from a distance, continues his study of the topography and emotional condition of this 'site of memory'. While previously he has chiefly painted landscapes, he now begins to focus entirely on interiors, thus shifting his gaze from outside to inside. His focus, however, is not on the faithful rendition of the rooms but on the processes of appropriation and transformation in painting. He is interested in the specific arrangement of objects which he will occasionally combine with other objects from an entirely different context. One recurring element, for instance, is a partition screen that never actually existed in his grandparents' flat (*Postcolonial I & Postcolonial II*, pp. 72, 73). Objects and spaces are thus defamiliarised, cast in shadow, shifted, even abstracted, are consequently reactivated both in memory and present and live on. Places for safekeeping and storage, as depicted in *Tunnel* (p. 51), are converted into repositories of memories. Many of the interior situations exist in several versions, sometimes up to five. In *Semi-Furnished* (p. 34), the artist's focus lies on a tiled wall and the abandoned kitchen unit in front of it. Everyday life has disappeared from this once lived-in space. On the painting's surface, the room is beginning to dissolve. In an earlier version of the same theme from 2016 (*The Red Chair*, 55 x 46 cm, private collection), we can still detect cooking utensils, food packaging, kitchen equipment, fixtures and furnishings.

One thing Sagrera pays special attention to is the atmosphere of a room created by artificial, man-made light (*Routine*, p. 56). This kind of light can be switched on and off. It is a controlled light that serves a special purpose, reflecting both habits and preferences and inscribing itself into one's individual memory of a place. Through finely nuanced hues and shading effects, Sagrera is able to evoke his most intimate perceptions, taken from both his conscious and involuntary memories: the temperature, sound, taste and even smell of objects. He thus creates an effect – as, for instance, in *Triptych* (p. 12) – that viewers, who come equipped with their own personal experience, are inevitably drawn into.

The paintings created in this fashion cannot, however, simply be labelled as products of a purely retrospective view, as they actually form the substrate for memory processes. In this context, we could also speak of the contemplation of time through the medium of painting: Sagrera does not even attempt to bring together the complex interrelationships of awareness and memory, exterior appearance and outwardness, inwardness and feeling, in one formula; he does not shed light on any of this. Nevertheless, his approach is somehow liberating, as it dares to engage with the quiet and ordinary side of life. Internalised and remembered places condense into paintings by dint of the imagination. Paintings like *Last Room* (p. 18) give us back something we had given up for lost – an unperceived loss, for when it is there, we cannot even put a name to it. It is the less than spectacular, not even quaint, rather ordinary, yet fragile elements inherent in human existence, which, as they pass by, leave not only traces but gaps as well. It is the awareness of loss and the destructive force of time. This might bring to mind Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* and the time that seems irrevocably lost. Though Sagrera does not halt the passing of time, he makes it visible through the medium of painting.

The artist's most recent paintings display greater openness in terms of figurative execution and the texture of the painted surface. The blurred forms and destructive elements already apparent in his earlier works have developed to a point where the painterly process of image production is disclosed entirely. This is especially evident in *Stacking II* (p. 6): The starting point for each of Sagrera's paintings is an abstract underpainting applied with a squeegee. The resulting random chromatic gradation forms an initial colour field from which the artist then proceeds to develop his interior still lifes. The primary material his spaces are created from is colour. This is contrasted by geometric line constructions similar to underdrawings which are then placed on top of the colour structures and partly remain visible on the paintings' surfaces. *The Pink Panther* (p. 48) even seems unfinished in parts, although to call it that would be misleading; 'imperfect' is a more suitable term to describe its state, as the imperfect is a verb tense which makes reference to an ongoing, unfinished event that began in the past. Sagrera's





images are open to what cannot be seen but might be. In this sense, they are symptomatic of the everlasting process of recollection in its ongoing state of transformation.

Effectively, Sagrera has expanded his series of 'inner spaces' to his current personal surroundings. In *Kitchen Shrine* (p. 16) he combines the kitchen at his flat in Leipzig with an element from traditional Japanese architecture: A *tokonoma* is a type of alcove inside a room probably derived from the concept of the Chinese domestic altar niche. In Japan, a room with a tokonoma is said to be a sign of sophistication and fulfils a representative function. Every tokonoma generally contains a calligraphic scroll (or, less commonly, a figurative image) mounted on a wall, paired with a complementary flower arrangement; its decoration and use of materials will determine the level of formality the host wants to convey to guests. Special emphasis is placed on how well the single elements harmonise with each other, how the light falls upon it, and how the layers of shadows are cast into the depth of the suggestive space. A tokonoma thus serves as a type of stage, illustrating the taste, dignity and wealth of the host in the form of a spatial image. So what does a tokonoma have in common with the kitchen in the artist's period flat in Leipzig? Sagrera opens up the dimensions of a room and inscribes it with new possibilities of meaning. He combines different elements – an alcove, built-in shelves, Chinese characters, blue curtains, a flower basket, or a TV – to form a kind of tabernacle in honour of the concept of the intimate homestead and private retreat. He makes use of the identity-forging tokonoma theme to further explore questions on human and individual existence inside the domestic sphere. In doing so, he focuses on characteristic behavioural and organisational structures that, when recurrent, turn into patterns – the title of this exhibition. These patterns condense into the essence of expressive form and are thus able to survive the passing of time.

Anka Ziefer, Director G2 Kunsthalle Leipzig  
August 2018









## CARLOS SAGRERA

### *The kitchen*

There is nothing sexy about a deteriorated, aging kitchen, except at most the touch of the nostalgia it bears.

A longing, perhaps, for times gone by, when people still dined together at the kitchen table. I often find the kitchen the most enjoyable place in a home, because of its intimacy and its activity: this is the place we cook, drink, discuss...there's always something that has to be done, cleaned up, stored away. It stands for security and hospitality. Many of my life's decisions have been made at the kitchen table.

Perhaps this is the reason I immediately fell in love with *Keep the rug* (p. 20) a small painting about as big as a kitchen window, by the Spanish painter Carlos Sagrera. I look at it every day with great pleasure. My eyes follow the colors first, then the lines. The colors tell a different story than the lines. The interplay of lines conjures up the corner of a kitchen, with a tall kitchen cupboard, a piece of the countertop – or is it the oven? – a notch in the wall and a shiny granite floor with a mat. The tiles against the wall and on the floor are depicted with subtle lines. The lines provide the proper perspective and give the kitchen its form and volume.

The colors confuse me. I can still follow the light blue paneling, the pieces of rusty brown on the wall indicate decay, the light streaks on the floor suggest a sense of age, but the beautiful dark blue accents at the top right and in the middle are purely there for the satisfaction of the artist. He is playing with my eyes. A pink dot here in the cupboard, a lilac-colored surface over the tall cupboard looks like what seems to be a transparent layer, applied to literally produce several layers of perspective. The black in the upper corner might imply a deep space behind the wall of the kitchen; however, that image is disrupted again by the overlapping white. The colors reveal the joy of the artist, and the hand of the master.

The loose, playful touch that does not wish to confine itself within the lines, the different layers that Sagrera visibly applies and lets shine through at different places truly reveal his love for painting and his ability to be a painter of his time: an innovative form of painting, with a special

perspective that creates an intimate space, a layeredness reminiscent of the passage of time and with it the memories, in combination with the abstraction he deliberately introduces into each of his works.

Sagrera's work can be placed in the long tradition of realistic painting, with the interior as a recurring genre. Trained at the art academy in Madrid, he has been able to develop further since 2015 thanks to a scholarship in Leipzig, Germany. Indebted to the famous artists of the Neue Leipziger Schule such as Neo Rauch, David Schnell and above all Matthias Weischer, he found his own style a number of years ago. An entirely new world opened up to him upon seeing Weischer's work in 2011. He himself says about this relationship: "For me, this was the perfect combination of things I was looking for in painting: historical references, the materiality and reflection of the artist's materials, traces of the work process and a way to imitate reality. The interiors, the empty spaces, memories of the past, the iconography and the references to the history of painting; all these elements are present in his work and are also important to me."<sup>1</sup> A true inherent element of Sagrera is that he incorporates his own memories into his work. The places he knows, such as the house of his now deceased grandparents, and the rooms he always depicts only partially, form the starting point of his paintings. In this depiction, the corner of the kitchen is only a part of the overall concept – the observer does not get to see everything. Sagrera chooses which traces of the ravages of time he makes visible or not, and the interaction of the colors becomes more and more relevant. These often abstract supplements contribute to the essence of his painting: conveying a feeling or mood by depicting more than the eye can perceive. I'm going to quietly reflect on that in my kitchen....

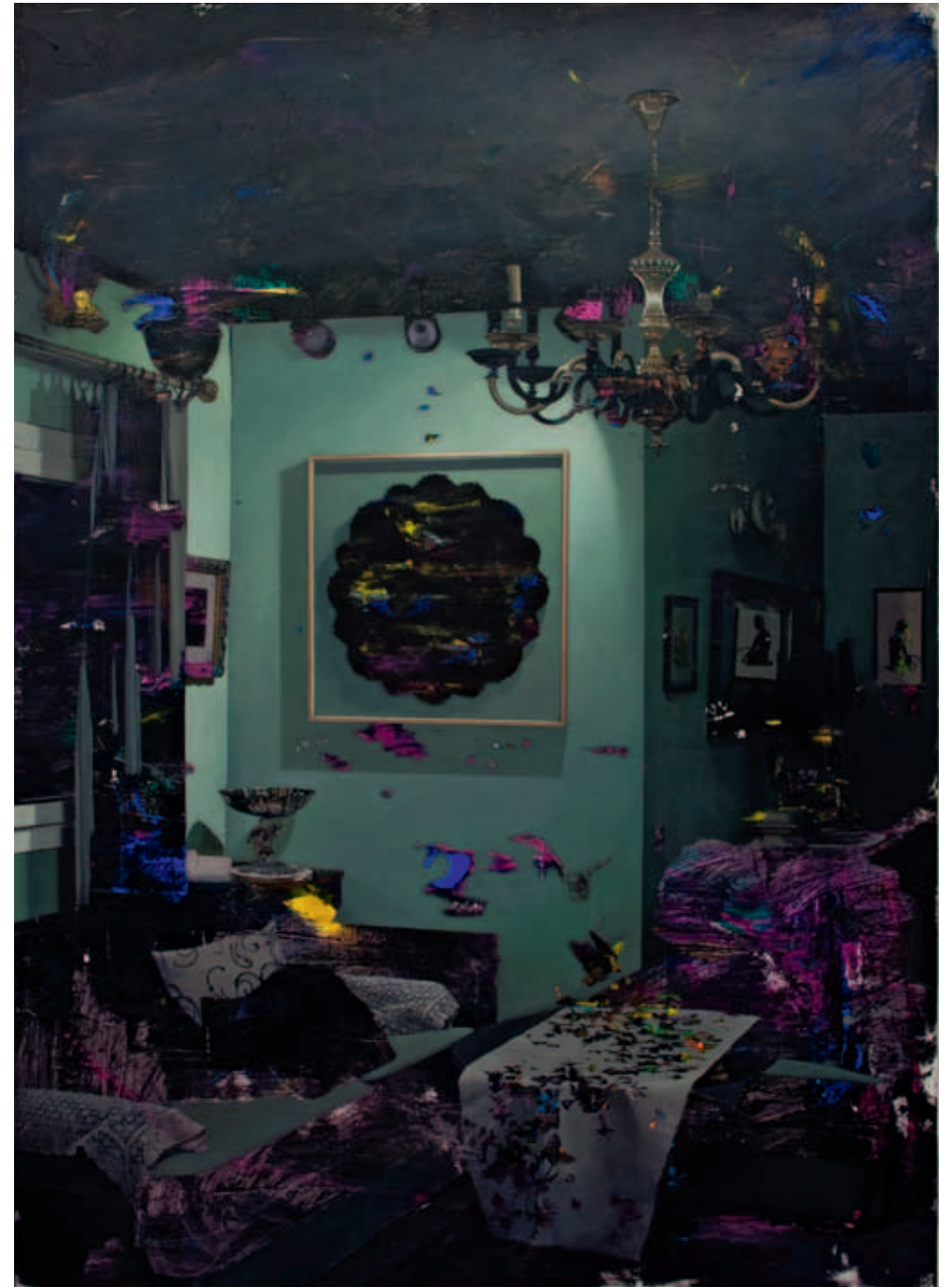
Emily Ansenk, Director of Kunsthall Rotterdam  
August 2018

1. Carlos Sagrera, *Inside the shadow*, 2016.





- 24/25 • *Emptying*, acrylic on canvas, 42,5 x 33 cm, 2017  
> *Shrine cloth*, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 100 cm, 2018  
>> *Shrine cloth*, detail









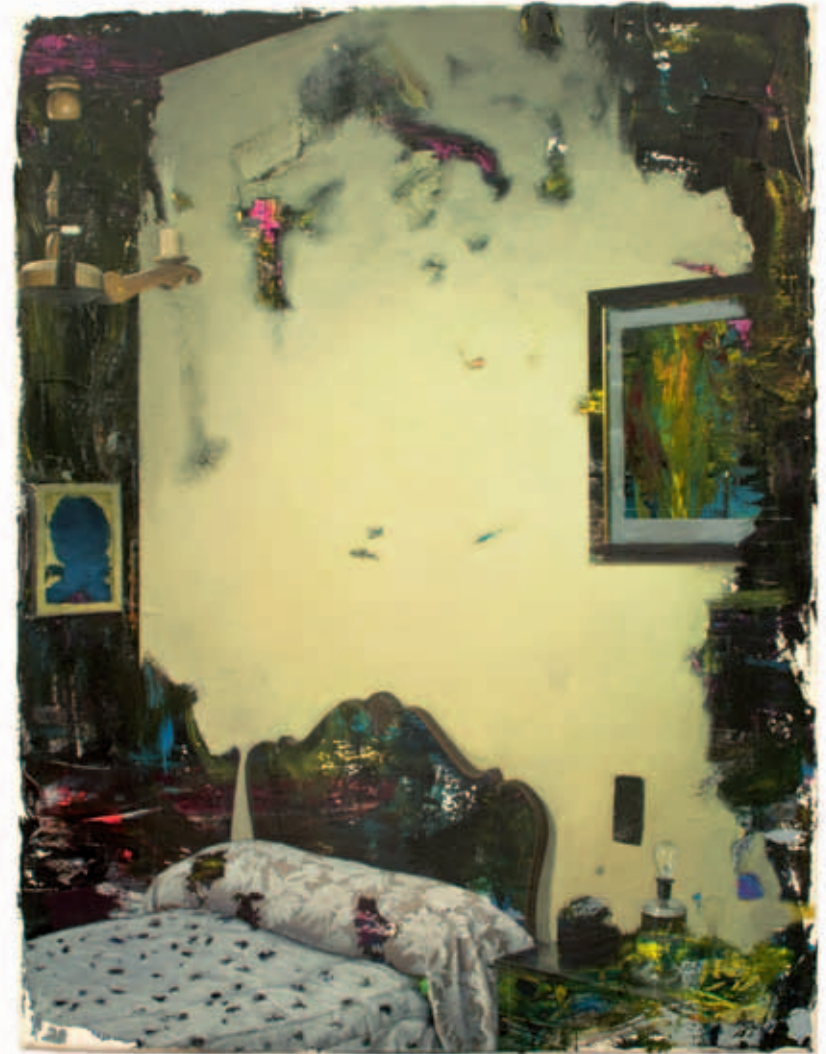
- 28/29 • *Sitting room*, acrylic on canvas, 44 x 37 cm, 2017  
> *The same old play*, acrylic on canvas, 41 x 36 cm, 2018

















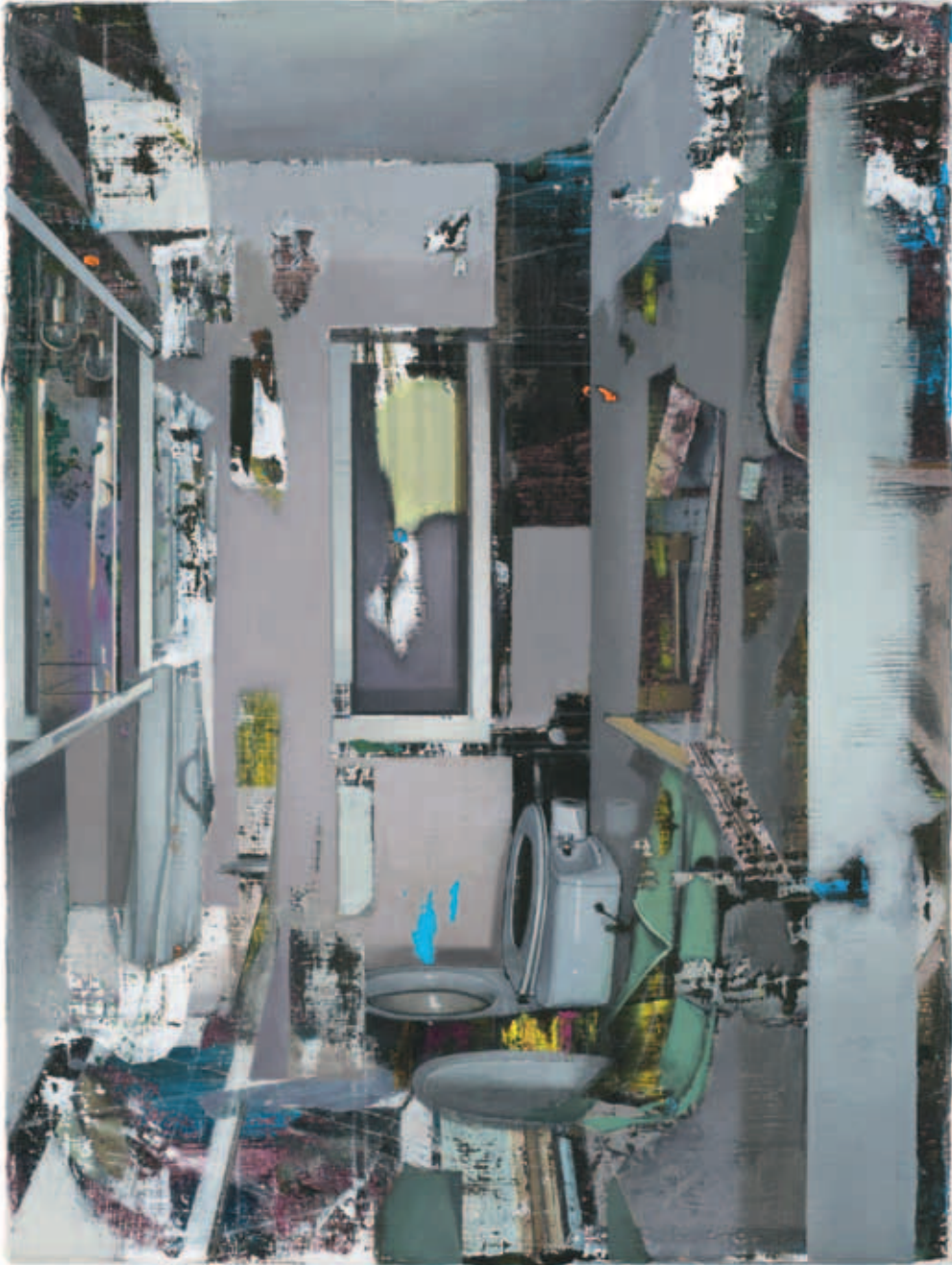
- 38/39 • 3, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 24 cm, 2017  
> *Disassembling*, acrylic on canvas, 70 x 70 cm, 2018  
>> *Disassembling*, detail













- 44/45 • *Unhang*, acrylic on canvas, 44 x 37 cm, 2017  
> *Way to the shower*, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 24 cm, 2018









50/51 • *Vanishing*, acrylic on canvas, 130 x 130 cm, 2017

> *Tunnel*, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 60 cm, 2018

>> *Tunnel*, detail









- 54/55 • *Training*, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 24 cm, 2018  
> *Sitting room II*, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 18 cm, 2018





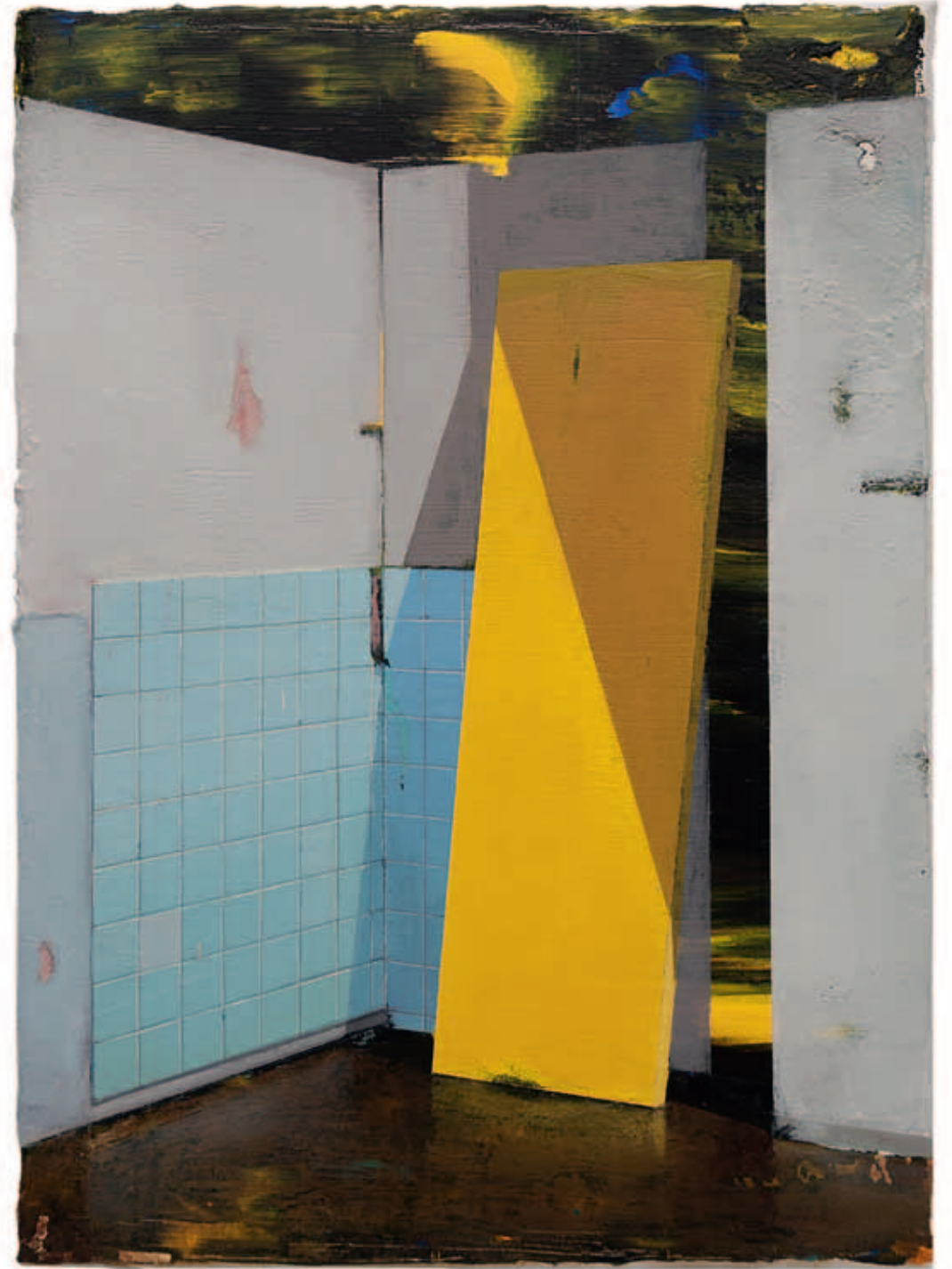


- 58/59 • *Warm*, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 24 cm, 2017  
> *Cuatro esquinitas*, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 18 cm, 2017











- 64/65 • *Unwind*, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 24 cm, 2018  
> *Crooked cupboard*, acrylic on canvas, 40 x 30 cm, 2018





66/67 • *Crooked cupboard*,  
detail on real size,  
acrylic on canvas,  
40 x 30 cm, 2018





68/69 • *Old oven*, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 24 cm, 2016  
> *Stacking*, acrylic on canvas, 53 x 38 cm, 2018









- 72/73 • *Postcolonial I*, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 24 cm, 2018  
< *Postcolonial I*, Detail on real size  
> *Postcolonial II*, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 24 cm, 2018



74/75 • *After the yellow door*, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 24 cm, 2018  
> *Fitting*, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 24 cm, 2018







**CARLOS SAGRERA**

1987

MADRID

SPAIN

## EDUCATION

2007 – 2011 BFA. Faculty of Arts and Communication.  
European University of Madrid (UEM). Spain.

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2018 “Patterns” Rutger Brandt Gallery.  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands.\*  
2017 “Interior life” Brennecke Fine Art.  
Berlin, Germany.  
2017 “Selections of Mind” VoltaNY.  
New York, USA.  
2016 “Inside the shadow” Mokum Gallery.  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands.\*

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2018 Salon der Gegenwart, Hamburg, Germany.\*  
2018 Untitled, Miami Beach. Florida, USA.  
2018 “Rundgang der Spinnerei Galerien”.  
Leipzig, Germany.  
2018 Art Paris. Grand Palais. Paris, France.  
2018 Art Karlsruhe, Art Fair. Messe Karlsruhe,  
Germany.  
2017 KunstZürich artfair. Zürich, Switzerland.  
2017 Positions Berlin art fair. Berlin Art Week  
2017, Germany.  
2017 VOLTA 13 art fair. Basel Markthalle.  
Basel, Switzerland.

2017 “Small format-great painting!” Galerie  
Brennecke. Berlin, Germany.  
2017 Art Karlsruhe, art fair. Messe Karlsruhe,  
Germany.  
2016 “Ich dachte, Sie wären nur ein armer  
Schlucker!” Kommunalka. Leipzig, Germany.  
2016 “Interiors” Dukan Galerie.  
Baumwollspinnerei. Leipzig, Germany.  
2016 “Art Fair”. Cologne, Germany.  
2016 #5 Sammlung Hildebrand G2 Kunsthalle.  
Leipzig, Germany.  
2016 “Probed Light” KTR Gallery. Leipzig,  
Germany.  
2016 “KunstRai” art fair. Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands.  
2016 “Caminos que se cruzan al sur” Young  
Spanish Realism. Museo de Almería.  
Andalucía, Spain.\*  
2016 “Realisme” Art fair. Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands.  
2016 “Licht in Mokum” Mokum Gallery.  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands.  
2015 “PAN Amsterdam” Art fair. RAI Amsterdam,  
The Netherlands.  
2015 “Spektral” Vektor Schule, Leipzig. Germany.  
2015 “Visitando la realidad” Galería Besada.  
Pontevedra, Galicia, Spain.  
2015 “...and a thousand miles behind” ArtWalk,  
Leipzig, Germany.

2015 “Ausencia” Kir Royal Gallery.  
Valencia, Spain.  
2015 “Respirar”, Nave 73. Madrid. Spain.  
2015 “m2m3”, Centro Cultural Villa de Móstoles,  
Madrid, Spain.  
2015 “Gestures” Halle 18, Winter-Rundgang,  
Spinnerei. Leipzig, Germany.  
2014 “Espacios que importan” Nave 73.  
Madrid, Spain.  
2014 “A Topology of Memory” Halle 18,  
Spinnerei. Leipzig, Germany.  
2014 “75th International Exhibition of Visual  
Arts” Valdepeñas, Ciudad Real, Spain.\*  
2014 “Multi/Tutti/Fest. Cienfuegos.  
Málaga, Andalucía, Spain.  
2014 “11th Young Artist Circuit” Madrid, Spain.  
2014 “Cromática, III Biennial of Young painters  
“CumLaude Foundation, Ourense,  
Galicia, Spain.

## GRANTS

2017 Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation,  
Quebec, Canada.  
2014 “IV Encontros Artistas Novos”. Cidade da  
Cultura de Galicia. Spain.  
2013 Scholarship for Young Creators, Fundación  
Antonio Gala. Córdoba, Andalucía. Spain.

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- “Carlos Sagrera” Art walk Leipzig  
ISBN 978-3-00-053299-0
- “La felicidad nos dejó cicatrices”,  
Ulises Juárez Polanco. Valparaiso editions.  
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- “Student competition awards” 2010-2014  
Ue School of Architecture. ISBN 8472072169

## WORKS IN COLLECTIONS

- Caldic collection, The Netherlands.
- Hildebrand collection, Leipzig, Germany.
- Antonio Gala Foundation, Cordoba,  
Andalucía. Spain.
- UEM Collection. (European University  
of Madrid). Madrid, Spain.
- ING Collection

\* Catalog



**COLOPHON**

**CARLOS SAGRERA**

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