



Published on the occasion of C. Michael Norton's solo show *Infinity's Sprawl* at UNIX Gallery
October 26 - December 9, 2017

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New York, NY 10011

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C. MICHAEL NORTON



Teaching the Eye to See: The Paintings of C. Michael Norton

Eleanor Heartney, 2017

Ever declared dead, abstract painting is ever re-emerging because it addresses some of the most profound questions about our relationship to reality. Precisely because it eschews literal representations and easily legible interpretations, abstraction has always offered artists a way to explore the deeper connections between matter and spirit, subjectivity and objectivity, stasis and movement, time and space. From its earliest emergence in the early 20th century, abstraction has been a philosophical tool. For Kandinsky, it was a way to manifest the ever-mutating energies of the universe, while for artists like Malevich and Mondrian it provided a link to the essential unchanging geometry that underlies the phantasms of visible change.

Under the influence of Clement Greenberg during the heyday of Modernism, critical theory attempted to rein in abstraction's more profligate tendencies. Greenberg's formalism described an art that kept to itself, mining only the most elemental tools of the medium. In the case of painting these comprised form, color, edge and surface. But even the most apparently formal of artists chafed at these creative restrictions. Ellsworth Kelly found the key to his severely reductive compositions in the eccentric shapes of the natural and human world. Frank Stella, whose early work seemed to present a classic exemplar of Greenbergian formalism, eventually broke free from the confines of material, form and support with wildly allusive, multidimensional painting/constructions. These embodied his notion of "working space", an ideal of art that owed much more to the excesses of baroque illusionism than to the austere reductivism of minimalism.

C. Michael Norton is equally untethered from narrow definitions of abstraction. Perhaps because he originally came to art as a sculptor, perhaps because he is an aficionado of music, perhaps because his childhood struggles with dyslexia have forced him to seek out connections that run underneath the more obvious systems of language and logic, his paintings embrace the illogic of flux, movement, change and becoming. Nothing about them is orthodox. Take, for instance, the process by which they progress from paint spattered drop cloths on the floor to complexly layered wall works. In the course of this transformation, sections of raw linen are carefully masked during the preliminary stages, and compositions are built from drips, spatters, rolled and partially erased patches of glossy paint. When the tape is carefully removed, areas of the canvas remain bare. Their hard edges cut with what feels like surgical precision across and into the colorful deposits of paint. In some works, layers of semi-translucent gel medium encase discreet areas of the canvas, preserving them like butterflies encased in resin. In others, Norton attaches and paints over digital prints made from sections of previous paintings. These dazzling works are created using equally unorthodox tools – paint is applied, impressed, extracted and splattered with knives, spatulas, rollers, tape, almost any thing, it would seem but a conventional brush.

For the viewer, the result is a challenge. These are not paintings to be taken in a glance. They reward and demand long close looking. In a sense they are training the eye to see. This is apparent, for instance, in the lattice forms that appear in paintings like *Kandy Red Sentinel* and *Emotional Foreplay*. Created by the masking and then removal of tape, these grid-like passages deliberately confuse the eye's expectations of positive and negative space. What reads as void is filled with viscous material, while a visual armature is created by the unpainted linen's lack of color. A similar disconnect occurs when riotously busy areas of layered paint are literally boxed in by unmasked sections of raw linen. An energy that seems resistant to any discipline is firmly held in place by a visual absence. Meanwhile,

gesture and geometry duke it out, the legacy of Kandinsky butting up against the more measured inheritance of Mondrian and Malevich.

In Norton's works, moments of order and structure are immediately undercut by their opposite, leaving the eye to shift constantly between different modes of pictorial space. The literal depth created by paint laid thickly on the painting's surface competes with the illusory reversal of figure and ground. In recent works, Norton explores these contradictions by increasing the proportion of "empty" space created by the unpainted linen. But again careful looking reveals that this apparent vacancy is full of subtle incident as slight irregularities of the emulsion rolled over the raw linen float like layers of mist in a foggy morning.

Though resolutely nonrepresentational, Norton's paintings nevertheless flirt with allusion. One can read in them the rhythms of jazz (and indeed, one of his pivotal paintings is titled simply *Ornette*), as well as the expansive space and dappled light of the Catskill landscape where Norton has his country studio. The bold, discordant colors might be a response to the urban environment where he spends the rest of his time. Some works have titles that refer to places, while others present philosophical musings (*I Am Not What I Am*) or witty comments on life (*I Am Celebrating The Vastness Of Our Ignorance*). Others suggest a more scientific frame of mind. But the ultimate focus of these paintings seems to be the nature and experience of time.

Time has always been a difficult issue for painters. Unlike music, dance or even sculpture, a medium that manifests itself only when one moves around it, painting has always seemed uniquely locked in space. Medieval painters tried to get around this restriction by creating multiple scenes of the same narrative within the same painting, while the Futurists tried to suggest movement by presenting what we might now refer to as a set of stop action representations of a body moving or an object falling. But abstraction did away with the need for such literal analogies. Instead as Harold Rosenberg suggested in his memorable notion of the painting as "an arena for action," abstract expressionism seemed to solve the problem of time by suggesting that what was captured on canvas was the artist's heroic struggle with his or her medium.

Norton's paintings take on the presentation of time in a different way. His approach brings to mind the notion of time explored by French philosopher Henri Bergson. Writing in the early 20th century, Bergson drew on the metaphors of music and dance to describe the lived experience of time. In our more authentic moments, Bergson suggested, we feel time, not as a succession of moments strung out like beads on a string, but as what he called "duration." By this he meant a folding in of past and present upon themselves. Bergson used the example of the gong of a bell to explain this idea, describing the way that the beginning and the end of the stroke are contained within and reverberate through each moment of our experience of it. Bergson's notion of duration resonated with then current discoveries in physics, most notably in relation to the inseparability of time and space posited by Einstein's theory of relativity. It resounds today as a way of describing the experience of creative immersion when we seem suspended in an eternal but richly unfolding present.

In Norton's paintings, durational time is captured within the space of the painting. It appears in the almost archeological layering of the stages of creation. One feels that if one studied the paintings long enough one could bore down

from the swaths of emulsion on the surface through the coats and smears and drips of color to the original passages of paint spattered on the canvas as it lay on the floor. But the paintings also capture time as an experience. One finds oneself moving through the paintings in and out of pictorial space, wending a path that is different each time one encounters the work. In this sense they are never the same. Then, there is the actual simultaneity of the works: one is always beginning underfoot, starting to take shape from the drips and splatters that fall from the work on the wall that is being completed. And finally, there is the time – often a year or more – in which these works slowly take form. Thus in Norton's paintings, time is less a subject than a medium, something through which and about which the works emerge.

In many ways, Norton's paintings are proof of the incommensurability of words and images. The writer can describe colors, shapes and forms, explain techniques, cite antecedents, grasp at metaphors and point to allusions. But in the end the verbal and the visual realms exist on different planes. One feels these works more than one consciously understands them. They express things we know without necessarily being able to put them into words. And they reveal why abstraction remains a necessary form of expression, essential for its capacity to help us grasp and share the lived experience of space and time.



TRYING TO GET AWAY FROM MYSELF, acrylic and pigment print on canvas, 28 x 42 in | 71 x 107 cm, 2017

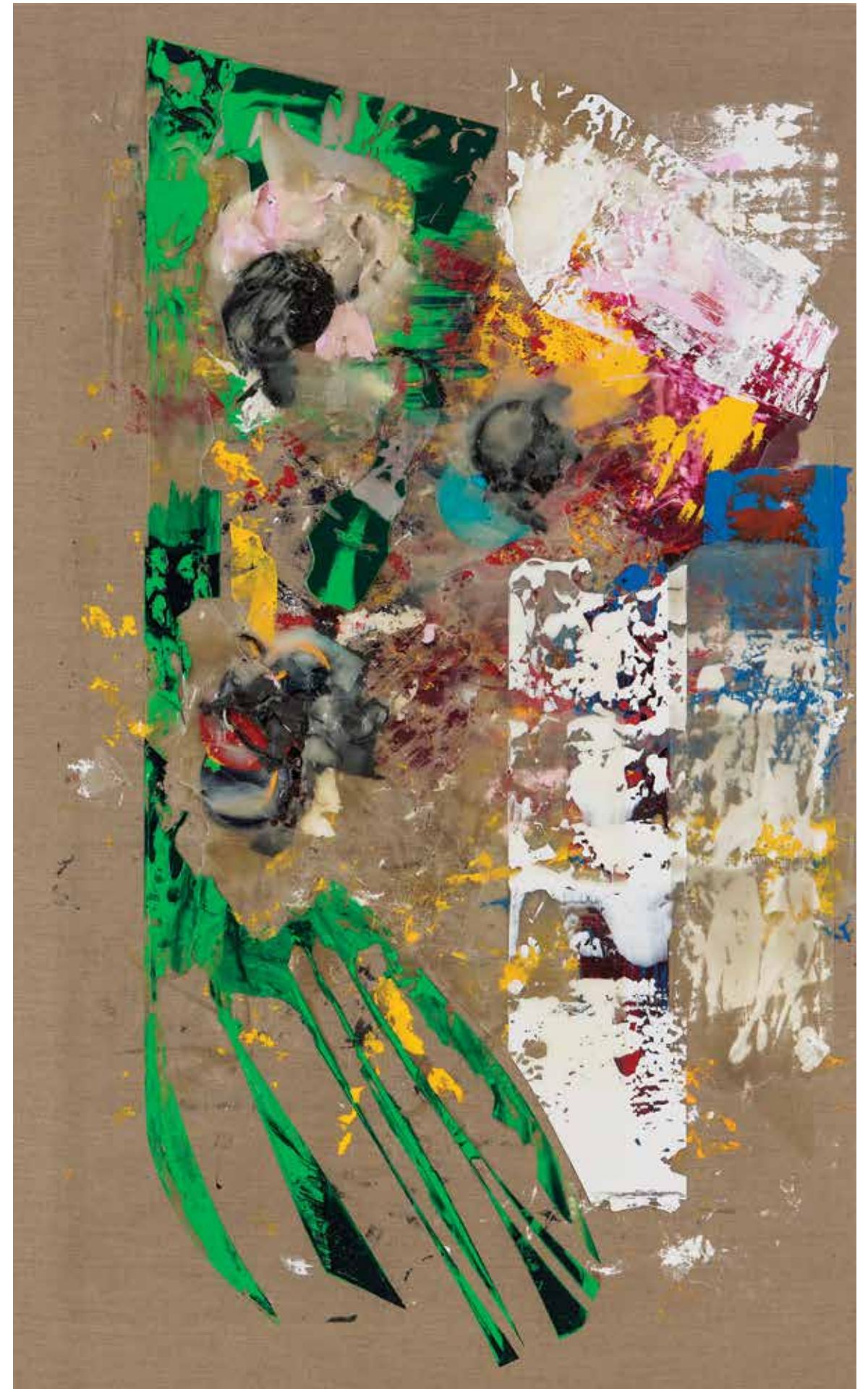


SAMPLING TIME, acrylic on linen, 72 x 90 in | 183 x 229 cm, 2016-17



INFINITY'S SPRAWL, acrylic on linen, 103 x 104.25 in | 262 x 265 cm, 2016-17

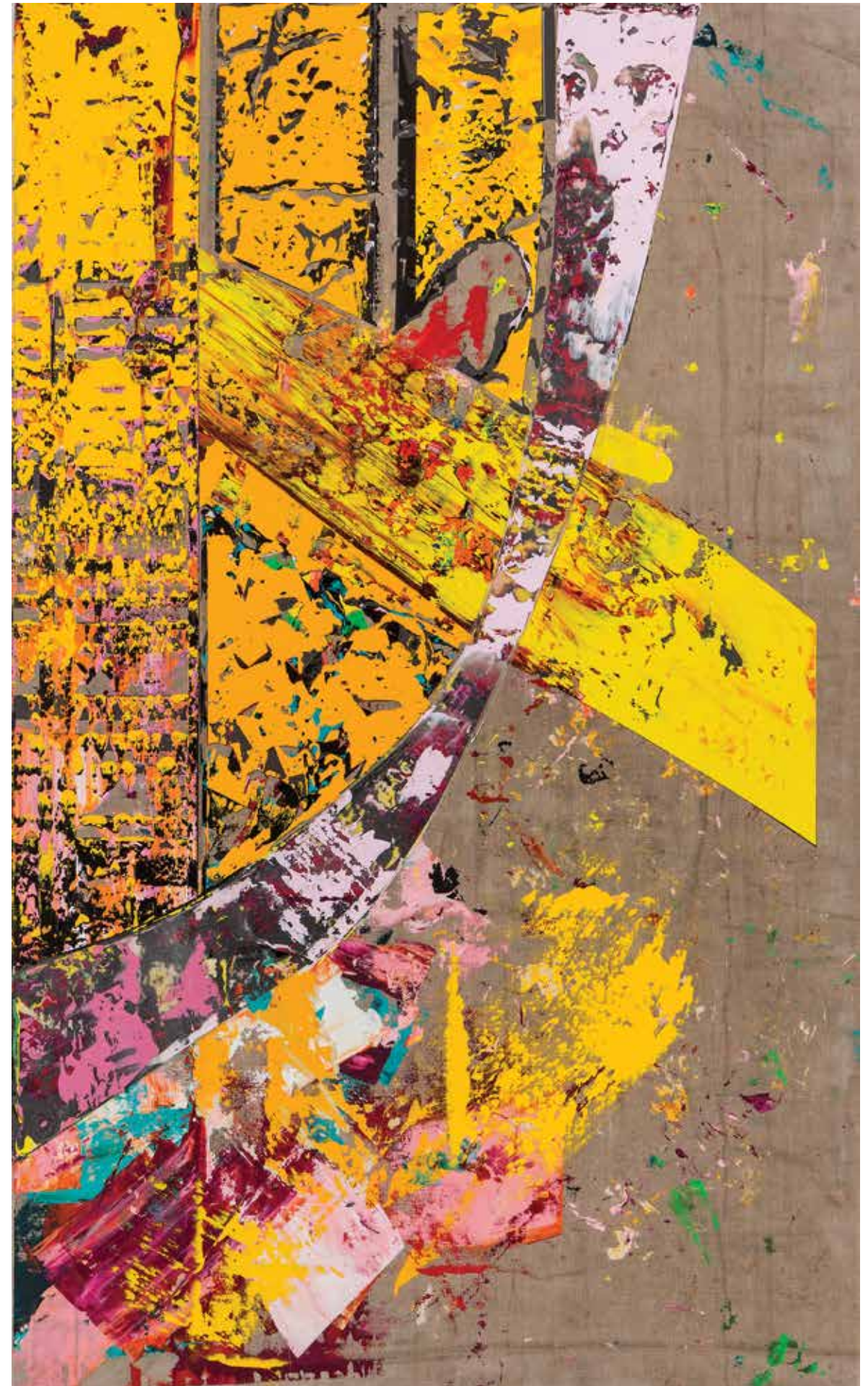
PLAYING IN NOSTALGIA, acrylic on linen, 90 x 55 in | 229 x 140 cm, 2016-17





KANDY RED SENTINEL, acrylic on linen, 103 x 94.5 in | 262 x 240 cm, 2016-17

SWEET DEPARTURE FOR ORNETTE, acrylic on linen, 90 x 55 in | 229 x 140 cm, 2015-17





STRIKER, acrylic on linen, 90 x 122.5 in | 229 x 311 cm, 2016-17



EMOTIONAL FOREPLAY, acrylic on linen, 80 x 90 in | 203 x 229 cm, 2016



I AM NOT WHAT I AM, acrylic on linen, 63 x 154.5 in | 160 x 392 cm, 2016



NEW CALAKOTA, acrylic on linen, 90 x 96 in | 229 x 245 cm, 2016



THINGS LOST THAT WE'RE NOT AWARE OF, acrylic on linen, 90 x 160 in | 229 x 406 cm, 2016



VORTEX OF DESIRE, acrylic on linen, 70 x 80 in | 178 x 203 cm, 2016

When Paintings Awake

Raphael Rubinstein, 2017

I didn't pay much attention to the floor during my first visit to Michael Norton's studio — and why should I have? Surrounded by large, complex abstractions, filled with full-throttle palettes and explosive varieties of mark-making, I was vaguely aware of the floor being covered with some kind of tape-and-fabric arrangement but really didn't give it much thought. It was only on a subsequent visit, when Norton began describing his typical painting-making process, that the significance of the floor, and the functions of its taped-down fabrics became clear to me. If I begin my discussion of Norton's work by focusing on the floor, it's for two reasons: first, that's where many of his paintings actually begin and, second, he has developed a unique and innovative way of incorporating the floor into his painting process.

The floor has, of course, been a vital space for painting since Pollock began working on unstretched canvases in his Long Island studio in the late 1940s. Creating a painting on the floor offered Pollock and the many artists who have subsequently chosen the horizontal over the vertical a more extensive, less encumbered space than the easel or wall: paintings could be larger, almost mural scale; artists gained the ability to step, crawl or lay on the painting (to be "in" it, as Pollock famously said) and to work from all four sides. They also found themselves on more intimate terms with gravity.

Arguably, it was only some 20 years after Pollock's first drip paintings that the floor really came into its own as a privileged creative zone in the work of post-minimalist sculptors such as Lynda Benglis, Richard Van Buren and Barry Le Va, and European artists (often painters) such as Claude Viallat and Sigmar Polke (I have in mind the latter's "Motorcycle Drawings" of 1969-1971); New York painter Jack Whitten is also a pioneer of floor painting. In his recent book *25 Women: Essays on Their Art*, Dave Hickey evokes this moment in a conversation he recalls from the late 1960s: "The critic Peter Plagens, myself, and a group of sculptors were wandering around the SoHo opening of a Barry Le Va scatter-piece. As we surveyed Le Va's receding plane of dispersed objects, Plagens said, 'The floor is the new wall.'" Since its apotheosis some half century ago, the floor has been a prime exhibition space for artists looking to spread out and escape hierarchies. In Norton's work, however, it serves a different function—as active resource rather than zone of display.

Here's how it works: In Norton's New York studio—a below-ground space in a Tribeca loft building where the artist lives—Norton will lay large rectangles of raw linen on the floor, sectioning them off and securing them with wide strips of duct tape. I have often seen artists cover the floors of their studios to protect them from becoming splattered with paint, but no such concern motivates Norton. He positions the raw linen as a receptive rather than protective device; it's there to accumulate paint incidents as Norton works on other paintings that, after having served their time on the floor, have been stretched and hung on the wall. As he is positioning these rectangles of raw linen, he may already be thinking about the painting it will eventually become, sometimes taping over areas of the linen that he wants to remain free of color, but once the textile is secured he doesn't pay attention to what is happening to it for quite a while. Norton remarked to me that he sees the paintings on the floor as being in a "dream state." This seems like a perfect way to describe this initial phase: at rest, recused from any conscious intentionality, the painting is at liberty to imagine itself in all possible configurations as it accumulates the detritus of studio activity. And what comes after this dream state? Once on the wall the painting slowly awakens and begins to recount its dreams to the artist.

Norton began incorporating the floor into his process about four years ago. Before that he would just put a drop cloth on the floor and get to work. Then one day he realized he was standing on something that was already on its way to being a painting. In the first of his floor-origin works, *Euclid* (2012-13), the extent and density of floor splatters is limited, but since then the artist has given more and more scope to these messy incidents, as in the recent paintings *Working Title* (2015) and *Emotional Foreplay* (2016) where these complex parts are, arguably, the dominant elements.

Initially, the accumulation of paint on the floor linens is accidental, unintentional, and largely unobserved, a matter of drips and splatters generated by the work being done on paintings hanging on nearby walls. Some of these flurries of paint are let loose when Norton peels strips of tape off of a still-wet painting and whips them back at the painting, producing a shower of paint droplets, or he may flick the tape directly at the floor coverings. Occasionally there are partial footprints where the artist has stepped on and tracked wet paint across the taped-down floor linen. More substantial are the collateral drips and splatters made when Norton uses one of the various knives, spatulas, straightedge tools and other implements (including lots of masking tape) to apply and guide paint. Interestingly, or perversely, the only tool that Norton never uses is the paintbrush. It's unusual for a painter, especially one who pursues such painterly effects, to forgo the trusty paintbrush, but maybe a little less unusual for someone whose formal artistic training was as a sculptor, not as a painter.

At a certain point when one of the pieces of linen underfoot looks ready, Norton frees it from the duct tape, stretches it and hangs it on the wall. Before applying any more paint to the newly stretched linen, he uses a roller to lay down irregular bands of clear acrylic emulsion. Not immediately noticeable — and probably missed by many casual viewers — amid the thickets of paint fragments and bold architectonic motifs that will follow, these swaths of transparent gesso nonetheless play a crucial, if subtle, compositional role. For one thing, their ghostly demarcations, slightly lighter in color than the raw linen, break up the ground, adding a visual rhythm to the backgrounds of the paintings. Its subtlety in color variation, as it lies over the linen ground, heightens our awareness of the material qualities of the finely woven linen, a support that is more delicate than standard canvas and even carries a touch of opulence. The large, soft, rolling swath of the application stroke creates a notable tension between the emulsion and the thin sharpness of the acrylic colors vectoring in to the painting. Additionally, the emulsion's slightly reflective qualities introduce a different type of retinal fact, while acting as the thinnest of barriers between support and paint. It's when you look very closely at Norton's paintings—and he is one of those artists whose work repays nose-to-painting looking—that you notice the difference between how a painterly mark behaves when it touches raw linen and when it comes to rest on a layer of emulsion. Very recently, Norton has taken his experiments with clear emulsion further in a large triptych (inspired by some religious paintings the artist saw many years ago at the Prado) in which the two side panels are only painted with rolled-on emulsion, while all the painterly action is confined to the middle panel. Is an emulsion-only painting the inevitable next step?

Previous writers have noted the exuberance of Norton's palette, and, indeed, the overall tone of his work. In an insightful essay, painter-critic Stephen Westfall observed that Norton's paintings "shock with color intensity and material plasticity," as indeed they do. Westfall also speculates that the "over the top" vivaciousness of Norton's work runs counter to a lingering Puritan strain in some sectors of American culture. Whether or not there any shreds left of the Puritan legacy in the U.S.—it seems pretty doubtful after the 2016 Presidential election—clearly Norton is no subdued

Minimalist. When I first encountered his paintings there was something about them, perhaps to do with that “color intensity and material plasticity,” that I couldn’t identify, some influence or attitude that set him apart from many of his peers. While I saw that he was clearly in close dialogue with canonical postwar abstraction painting—Westfall cites Richter, Johns and Stella as being among Norton’s influences; one could add other younger painters—his unabashed joie de peindre seemed to be drawing on other sources. It was only when Norton began to tell me about his frequent sojourns in France in the 1980s, and about his encounters there with some of the Figuration Libre artists such as Robert Combas and Hervé di Rosa, that I realize what one of those sources might be.

A movement that emerged in France in the early 1980s, Figuration Libre drew on graffiti, cartoons, comic strips and art brut, as well as on Dubuffet’s hyper-compressed compositions and love of lumpy, proliferating figures. It also gleefully rejected anything that could be considered good taste or intellectually pretentious, seeking instead street cred and populist scope. Although there were close contacts and obvious affinities between Figuration Libre artists and Americans such as Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf, the French artists never made a mark in New York. Norton only encountered them because in the 1980s he was exhibiting his work (figurative sculptures!) at Galerie Chanjour in Nice, which also showed Robert Combas and other Figuration Libre artists. In terms of style and imagery, Norton’s current paintings have nothing in common with Figuration Libre, but what they do share with the work of Combas, di Rosa and Cie is a willingness to operate at full volume, to crank that painterly amp up to 11. Norton is never afraid of overloading his viewers. As critic David Cohen has said of Norton’s paintings, “rife with the raw energy of heavy metal, perhaps, or complex free jazz, or even opera at its most, well, operatic, they are a euphoric fusion of virtuosity and excess.” Evidence of this can be seen in paintings such as the appropriately named diptych *What a Wallop* (2005-2008) or *Vortex of Desire* (2016). This is not to say that Norton only favors excess—there is an almost pastoral quality to some passages in his paintings, and he clearly understands the virtues of empty space.

The shift from floor to wall is not the only migration in the lives of Norton’s paintings. Frequently, he will take works in progress back and forth between his New York City studio and his second home upstate. At least one of the paintings in this show, *Working Title*, made the round trip, having been started in New York, worked on upstate, then returned to New York for yet more changes. His work can also take a long time to be completed, as some of the dates reveal. It is probably not the result of the city/country split of studios, but Norton’s paintings are full of dislocations and disjunctions, starting with the scraped and scumbled forms that he gradually builds up around the floor-splatters and marks, and, even more radically, with the carefully taped and often slender geometric forms that appear in most of his works. Look, for instance, at the backwards E motif in *Einstein’s Edge of Winter* (2009-2011) which, incidentally, is one of the wall-only paintings. The predominance of white paint in *Einstein’s Edge of Winter* evokes, intentionally or not, the white ground of primed canvas. It’s a reminder that because he uses raw linen, Norton never starts with a “blank canvas,” even when, as with this work, he skips the floor phase.

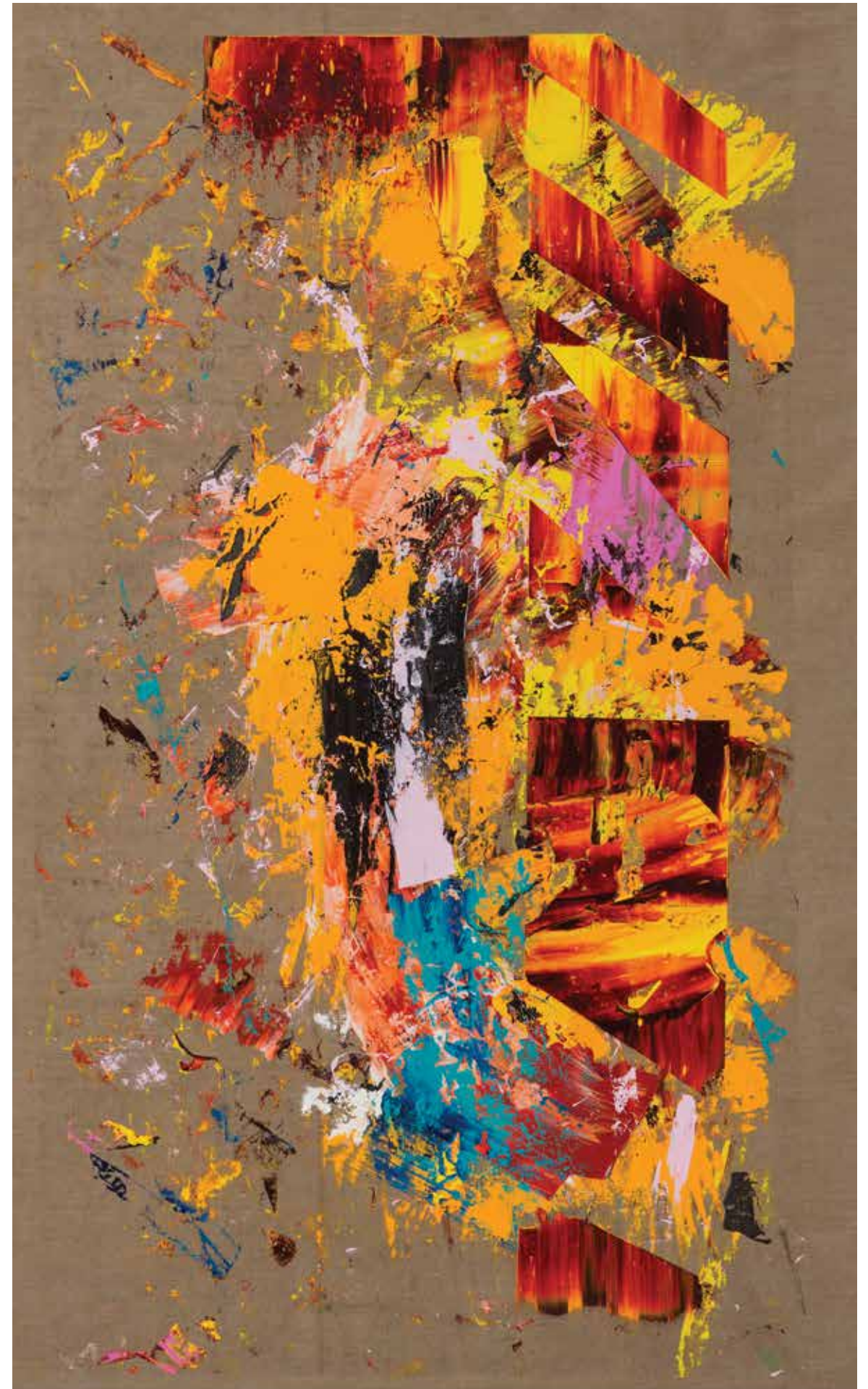
In a new series, Norton has found yet another way to paint on what we can think of as a “prepared surface” (analogous to John Cage’s use of a “prepared piano”). Working with master printmaker Katy Martin, Norton has made digital prints of details from his paintings and then overpainted them. Painting onto photographic reproductions is a fairly common technique, but it’s rare for an artist to overpaint a reproduction of one of his or her own paintings. (This may be an emerging trend: Amy Sillman has recently been painting onto reproductions of her digital drawings).

Printed slightly larger than the originals, these are hard-to-pin-down hybrids: at once reproductions and unique objects, they are full of fascinating spatial and conceptual conundrums.

Unlike that forceful reversed E in *Einstein’s Edge of Winter*, many of the taped-off forms in Norton’s recent paintings convey a sense of fragility and lightness, like things made from paper, feathers or balsa wood. This weightless quality makes them seem to be floating atop the linen support like apparitions. I’m thinking, for instance, of the pink and yellow vertical forms in *Working Title* and the trellis-like structures flanking the central tangle of *Emotional Foreplay*. So different from the layered, shard-like marks and patches of scumbling that lie between them, these tapering structures, which oscillate between the totemic, the decorative and the architectural, appear to have dropped into the painting from another dimension; their delicacy is dramatically at odds with the blocky, almost brutalist forms that appear in many of Norton’s paintings. Complicating matters still further, they feature internal color shifts that are the only visual residue of intermediate compositions that vanish when the surrounding tape is pulled off. Thus, at the same time we might take them as framing devices or figure/ground statements, they also function as ruin-images, inviting us to imagine lost topologies. For all his libertine embrace of paint in its most physical and retinal manifestations, for all his continuous—and deeply pleasurable—onslaughts of color, Norton also acknowledges the share of the invisible. Amid these crashing chords of color and glissandos of dragged gestures, there are virtual images that exist only as a whisper, fugitive as the circumstances of a dream that dissolve the moment we wake up.

* Text originally published in “When Paintings Awake,” exhibition catalogue, David & Schweitzer, New York, 2017.

SENTINEL FALLS, acrylic on linen, 90 x 55 in | 229 x 140 cm, 2015



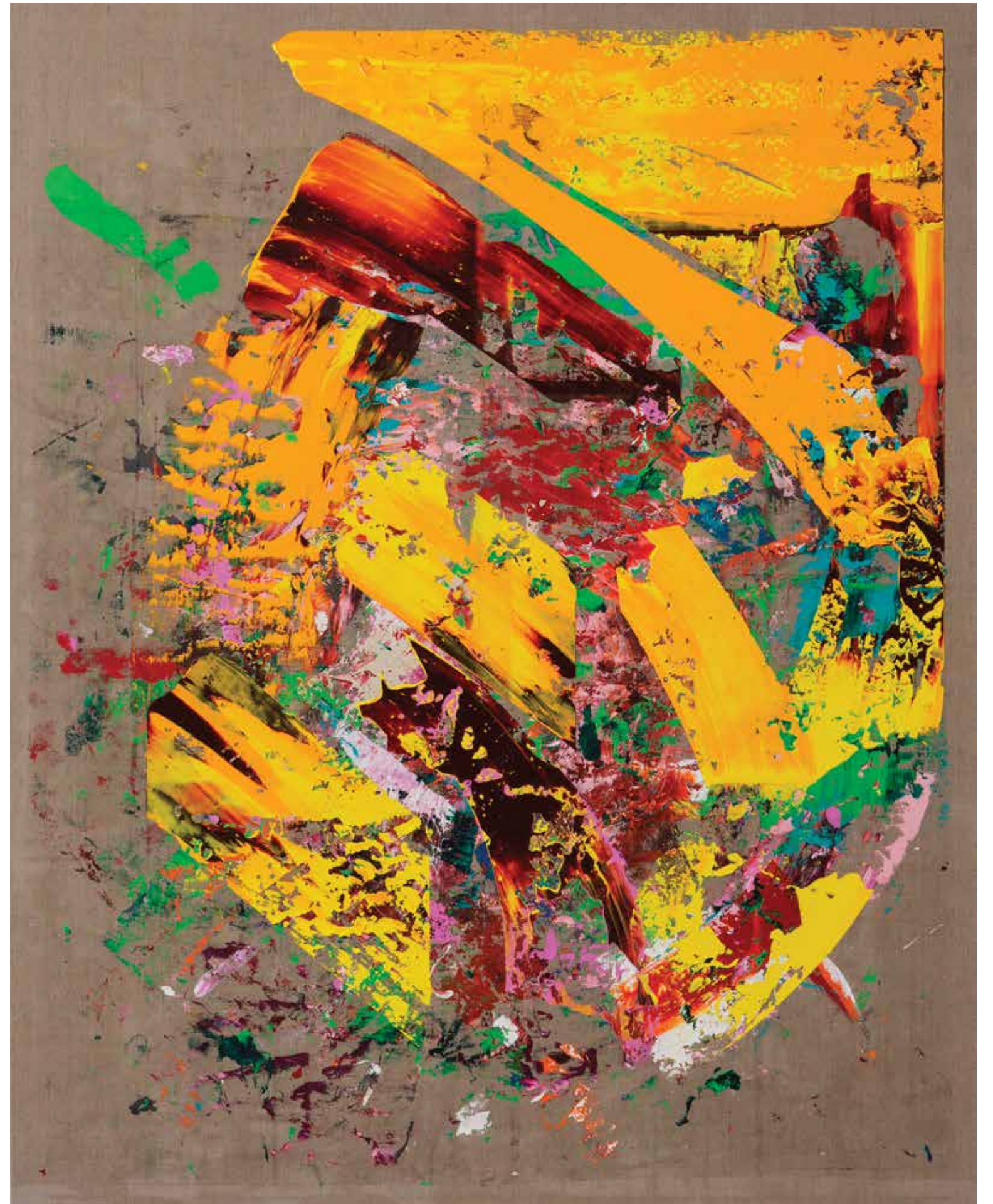


WORKING TITLE, acrylic on linen, 90.5 x 110.5 in | 230 x 281 cm, 2015



STEAMY, acrylic on linen, 51.5 x 63 in | 131 x 160 cm, 2015, Private Collection New York

LIFE ON FIRE, acrylic on canvas, 90 x 72 in | 229 x 183 cm, 2014-15





HUMBOLDT, acrylic on linen, 72 x 90 in | 183 x 229 cm, 2014-15

SANTA CRUZ, acrylic on linen, 80 x 70 in | 203 x 178 cm, 2014-15





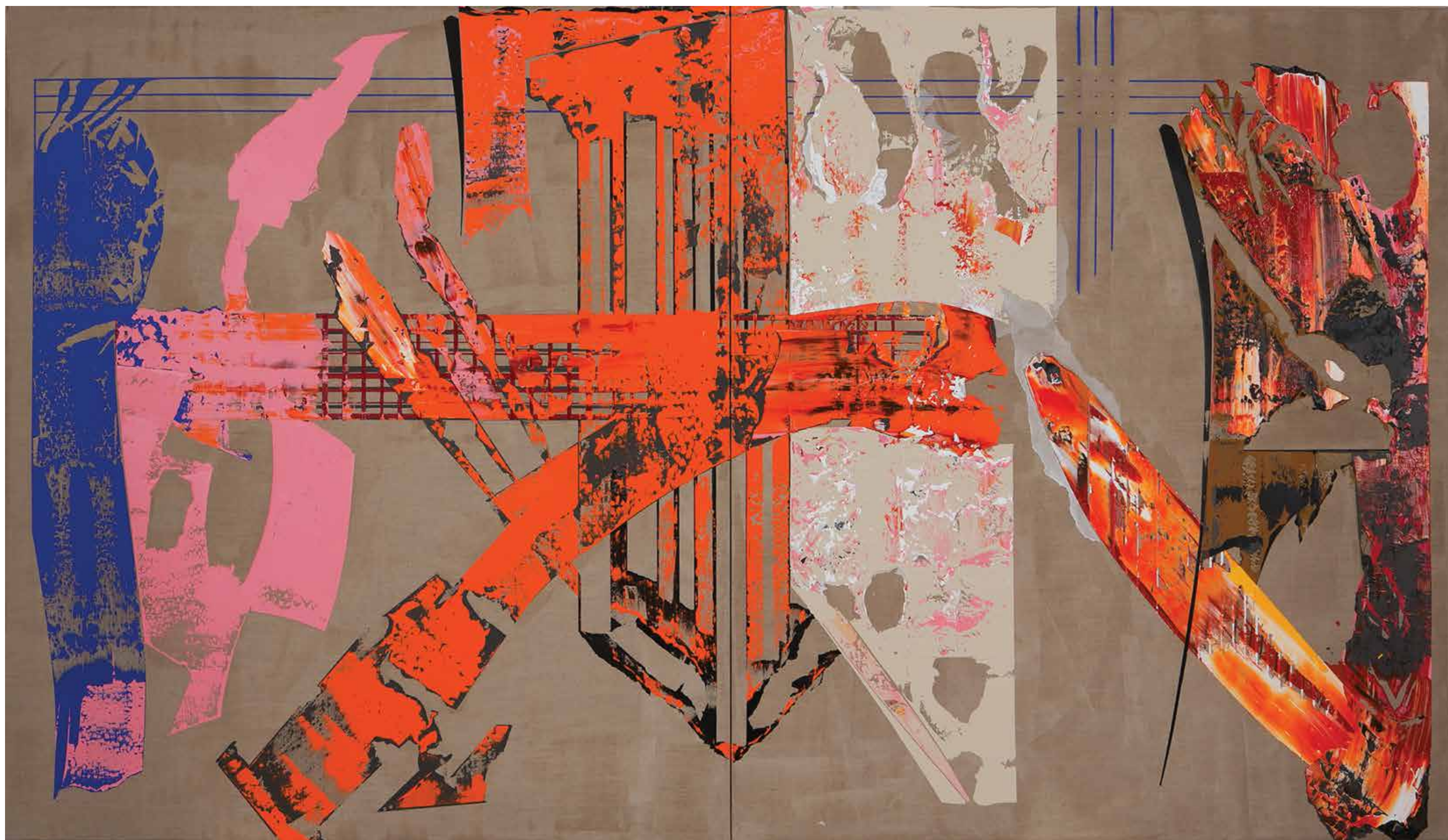
ODYSSEUS, acrylic on linen, 70 x 80 in | 178 x 203 cm, 2014-15, Private Collection Germany

EVIDENCE OF EXISTENCE, acrylic on linen, 90 x 72 in | 229 x 183 cm, 2014-15





TAKE IT TO THE OZONE, acrylic on linen, 36 x 48 in | 91 x 122 cm, 2014, Private Collection New York



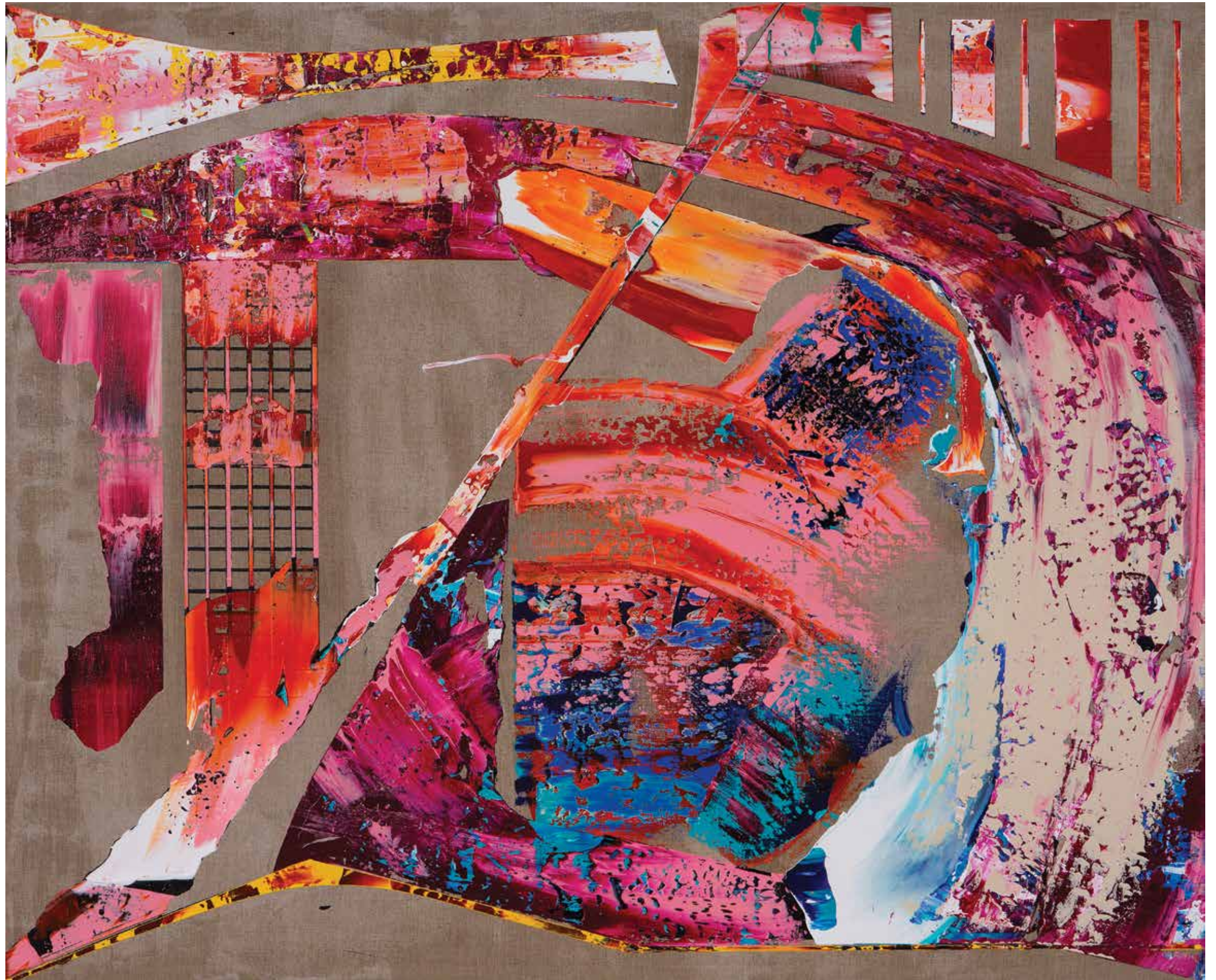
HOG MOUNTAIN SPUR, acrylic on linen, 80 x 140 in | 203 x 356 cm, 2013-14



LUCIFER'S PIANO PLAYER, acrylic on linen, 80 x 70 in | 203 x 178 cm, 2013-14, Private Collection New York



NEGATIVE AMBITION, acrylic on linen, 72 x 90 in | 183 x 229 cm, 2013 -14



HOT ENOUGH TO MELT, acrylic on linen, 52 x 63 in | 132 x 160 cm, 2013, Private Collection Iowa

Ground and Consequence: C. Michael Norton and The Colors of Noise

David Cohen, 2016

At 8.30 am on Friday, February 5 of this year, as C. Michael Norton was starting his day in his downtown New York home, a massive, 15-story crane toppled into nearby Worth Street, killing a man and injuring several others. The explosive thud and ensuing screech of sirens unnerved Tribeca residents like Norton for whom the events of September 11, 2001 are etched in memory. On that fateful day, Norton and his wife, the artist Ruth Hardinger, had also been at home and were able to watch the towers fall from their street. He describes the visceral impact of his witness to Christopher Joy and Zachary Keeting (of the videography project *Gorky's Granddaughter*) in their interview with Norton.* "When the first tower collapsed all my auditory shit just shut down," he recalls, his features betraying momentary wonderment and pain as the image of a cascading tower comes back to mind. "I watched that thing peel away, it was all visual." People started rushing past them, but it was like a movie without the sound. Then he began to hear Ruth talking to him, although everything else was still edited out.

Norton didn't bring this up to explain in any way his iconography or methods but instead to illustrate his instinctual understanding of the separateness and specificity of the senses in the complex ontology of his aesthetic process. "I'm not hearing..." and we see him struggle to define what he means by hearing. Backing up, he owns that he does, in fact, listen to music while he paints but that is not the level at which he means that he is not hearing. Intimating the paintings behind him he suggests that what he is trying to say is that he doesn't hear (a priori) his own forms. "I'm not hearing, I'm reacting." It is as if there are rules of discourse between the painter and what he paints, a mode of communication that reverses the logic of action and command, an eloquence that emerges amidst voices of silence.

Silence, however, is the last virtue that springs to mind when looking at his paintings. You almost need earplugs in front of them; color and gesture are so raucous, explosive, thunderous and shrill. Anything but decorous, these boisterous images heave with noisy effects. Rife with the raw energy of heavy metal, perhaps, or complex free jazz, or even opera at its most, well, operatic, they are a euphoric fusion of virtuosity and excess.

What I'm calling the visual noise is, nonetheless, a contained phenomenon within these paintings. There is almost an embarrassment of riches in the range and tone of colors, sensations, and moods. But if the sound is understood to be the liquid element in his paintings – that gooey interlacing of molten color (he is a supreme master blender) that imparts an unnerving sensation of being poured onto the retina as it is beheld – then this audible fluid is, as it were, isolated in septic tanks amidst the clean, neat environment that is the totality of the painting. He somehow manages to maintain, with almost disconcerting restraint, areas of pristine canvas on which the chromatic and painterly mess can bubble. The visible support is like a servant with a dry towel waiting at the edge of the pool. Stephen Westfall has noted an affinity with the paintings of Francis Bacon that makes perfect sense of this dramatic interplay of figure and ground, thinking of the way Bacon situates painterly ejaculations of flesh against virgin expanses of raw canvas or modulated brushwork. But the swimming pool simile shouldn't be allowed to give the impression of strict architecture: the relationship of wet to dry is more anarchic in Norton. Dynamics of figure and ground are complicated by his abstraction and his teasing intimations of depth and projection, of receding pockets of space and protruding surface incident.

Besides the wet-dry dichotomy in Norton, which can be characterized as an opposition of clean canvas and melding medium, there is an equally stark contrast within the painted portions of the canvases themselves, a polarity of

geometric fixity and organic flow. Neat, regulated, graphically achieved elements offset brushy, gestural, coagulating smears. The contrasting forms almost dramatize their mode of conception, as if the hardedge elements are a product of deliberation, the fluid gestures of chance—cautious planning and reckless abandon. As if to underscore implications of neatness, forms in the linear mode cling to areas of clean canvas. Associations these structures give rise to are varied: in *Celestial Carve*, for instance, slats in a boat come to mind, if viewed aerially, or treads of a bowed staircase if read as receding in space. The green grid in *Chewing Glass* is akin to a lattice—or perhaps the frets on a guitar. In *Maggie* an area to the right of the image of stopped-out planks of blank canvas against black and pink infill reads schematically like a city map, while in *Rutabaga* the arc of curved golden yellow slats at the top of the image are like the glass canopy of a railway shed or covered market. None of these associations are forceful enough to police the viewer into a literal reading of the image, but the variety is as phenomenological as it is associational, conditioning the sense of composition and pace in images of contrasting feeling.

As varied as the moods and connotations of these hard-edged forms might be, the proliferation of Norton's organic painterly marks seems greater. This plethora of handling and effect is united by an expressive sense of purpose that defies a seeming free-for-all in their deployment. There can be impasto in one passage and sheerness in another. Colors can blend while retaining their distinctness, like ingredients marbling in the first rotation of a cake mix. Or there can be a staccato repulsion of one smear of color over another in an effect many commentators have compared to the squeegee spreads in Gerhard Richter. Norton acknowledges Richter as a mentor to contend with, alongside Frank Stella and Jasper Johns. The artist who comes to my mind, however, when thinking about the way Norton's clusters of painterly activity occupy free boundaries and yet sit isolated on a pristine ground is Linda Benglis. In the 1970s this artist – now internationally celebrated as a sculptor – pioneered a hybrid of painting, sculpture, installation and performance in a series of poured-from-the bucket carpets of liquid latex. (Norton has an opposite trajectory, beginning his career in sculpture). In concert with post-minimalist artists like Richard Serra and Eva Hesse, Benglis connected preoccupations of her generation (such as process and reduction) with the "energy made visible" action painting of the New York School, in particular Jackson Pollock. There is a similar historical reconciliation, I would argue, in Norton: in respect to friendships, sensibility, and intellectual priorities, he belongs with the generation of artists now grouped under the rubric of Conceptual Abstraction, for example David Reed, Peter Halley, Jonathan Lasker and Norton's essayist Stephen Westfall. But in a way that is more empathetic and less deconstructive than any of these peers, Norton directly channels the painterliness of abstract expressionists such as Hans Hofmann, Philip Guston and Joan Mitchell. There is a synthesis in Norton of the criticality of his peers and the expressivity of his forebears.

I bring up Benglis, however, for another reason, and that is the radical play of chance and containment implicit in her pouring strategy. There is extraordinary dexterity in allowing the colors to flow into exuberant puddles without muddying. The shape thus generated holds autonomy upon the floor: wayward within, it presents unity without. Norton achieves comparable sectioned-off anarchy, a playpen for errant behavior within an otherwise orderly field. Except that in Norton, neat divisions between figure and ground are frustrated. The clean canvas doesn't so much indicate as symbolize where ground ends and consequence begins. The complex and noisy layering of effects and contrast of forms violates clear boundaries. And his is not chaos in quotes, like the stylized squiggles of Jonathan Lasker. The ability to retain silent ground amidst painterly noise would seem to imply calculation, which in turn precludes spon-

taneity. But that is not in tune with Norton's artistic personality. Because of his severe dyslexia, he tells us, he thinks visually—and backwards. "If I tried to be formulaic, I'd forget the formula," he jokes. It might be useful to think of Norton performing spontaneity the way cultural theorists now encourage us to believe we all perform gender.

His strategy entails means of generating isolated pockets of chance within a meticulously balanced, evolving order. Norton is able to draw on years of experience as a commercial house painter, as well of course as a fine artist. He starts a painting with a layer of transparent medium applied all over. The first intimation of a compositional structure is the chance pattern of brushstroke visible in the primed ground. He refers to what commercial painters call "holidays," the lesions or overlaps that prevent a brushless smooth surface. (In view of the noisy brood that a Norton composition will spawn it is worth recalling the words of Toru Takemitsu, that silence is the mother – or perhaps grandmother – of music.) As a non-volitional means of generating marks, canvases are often then laid on the floor where they accept studio droppings and stray flings of paint from other works in process. When he finds himself responding consciously to the emerging composition the canvas graduates to the wall. It is presumably at this stage that he becomes more acutely aware, and protective, of remaining clear ground. This ontology is significant as it reverses, or at least complicates, a causal notion of raw ground supporting cultivated or tolerated accumulations. The complexity brings to mind random pockets on an ethnographic or linguistic map where it looks like a stray group has settled whereas they are the remnant of the group that was already there.

A key stage in the preservation of ground and the proliferation of effects is his use of masking tape and stencils, a demarcation tool both of drawing and what could be called preemptive erasure. This allows him to give full rein to expressive and exploratory painting while relatively safe in the knowledge, or at least, expectation, of hard-edged, reveal: a safe space for wild actions. This is not to imply, however, a simple duality between hard edge and painterly, or between austerity and overload. "Until I pull the tape off I don't really know what I have." Similarly, it is a mistake to think of the geometric and organic aspects of his painterly lexicon as mapping such creative dualities as masculine and feminine, logical and intuitive, Apollonian and Dionysian. For sure, there can be expressive tensions between them, but rather than polar opposites, as stated earlier, they should be thought of as an antimony: equally valid though distinct and, where overlapping, mutually exclusive procedures. As Norton says in the closing moments of his interview with Gorky's Granddaughter: "To make the work and to accept that it's happening are two separate things."

* All quotes from the artist: Gorky's Granddaughter: C. Michael Norton, March 2015.

<http://www.gorkysgranddaughter.com/2015/03/c-michael-norton-march-2015.html>

** Text originally published in "The Temptation of Space," exhibition catalogue, Art Virus Ltd., Frankfurt, 2016.



CATSKILL 4 - EYES FALL OUT, acrylic on linen, 80 x 70 in | 203 x 178 cm, 2006-14

SENTINEL BLUES, acrylic on linen, 90 x 55 in | 229 x 140 cm, 2013





EUCLID, acrylic on linen, 79 x 133 in | 201 x 334 cm, 2012-13

A SENTINEL DESIRE, acrylic on linen, 90 x 72 in | 229 x 173 cm, 2012



A SENTINEL WOLF, acrylic on linen, 90 x 72 in | 229 x 183 cm, 2012





I AM CELEBRATING THE VASTNESS OF OUR IGNORANCE, acrylic on linen, 92 x 104 in | 234 x 264 cm, 2011



EINSTEIN'S EDGE OF WINTER, acrylic on linen, 90 x 144 in | 229 x 366 cm, 2009-11



SIDEWINDER, acrylic on linen, 63 x 102 in | 160 x 259 cm, 2010



WORTH THE WAIT, acrylic on linen, 103 x 126 in | 262 x 320 cm, 2009-10



SPLIT KICK, acrylic on linen, 103 x 126 in | 262 x 320 cm, 2009-10



WHAT A WALLOP, acrylic on linen, 90 x 144 in | 229 x 366 cm, 2005-08

The Temptation of Space

Richard Vine, 2014

Why would a sculptor abandon the third dimension? What might that act of renunciation mean to him and to his viewers? Any answer, in the case of C. Michael Norton, must acknowledge that the purge is never complete: some vestige of space always remains, endowing the artist's "flat" colorful paintings with both formal and psychological depth.

Norton's journey to the acrylic brightness of his mature work has been a long one, marked throughout by interaction between conceptual binaries—in short, a dialectical progress. Tellingly, the artist was born and raised in North Dakota, yet today lives in downtown Manhattan. That relocation alone—from provincial origins to dense urban life, from simplicity and clarity on the plains to cosmopolitan complexity and flux in Tribeca—is enough to alert us that his nature is divided. When Norton left the Middle American prairie for Humboldt State University in Arcata, California, he first studied bronze casting, a brute mineral-based procedure, alien to any sensibility formed by rapport with the land. Understandably, he soon grew dissatisfied with the semi-industrial process and its cult of swaggering machismo. After his BA (1977), Norton switched to San Jose State, where, earning both an MA (1978) and MFA (1981), he set about making open, sometimes latticework, assemblages of wood, wire, paper, and plaster.

And here the formal dichotomy in his work becomes as evident as the psychological. These sculptures, clearly in line with the modernist heritage, simultaneously evoke various Native American constructs: litters, teepee and hut skeletons, racks for drying or smoking (e.g., *Short Horn*, 1982). This is only natural, in a sense. As the controversial 1984 MOMA exhibition "'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art" demonstrated, borrowings from indigenous cultures (seen as purer, more authentic, closer to the sources of deep inspiration) have been part and parcel of artistic modernism at least since Gauguin went to Tahiti and Picasso was struck dumb by African masks at the Trocadéro.

But what is the difference between an object made for daily or ceremonial use by a Plains Indian and a formally similar object made solely for aesthetic purposes by a university-trained postwar artist? Perhaps we should ask more directly: what job does each creator want the work to do? For the primary difference between these cultural products must lie, surely, in intent and reception, in desires endemic to the maker's community. The traditional object-maker seeks to meet a utilitarian need (to harvest, to hunt, to transport, to fight) or else, or in addition, to beseech the spirits—two functions regarded as equally real, equally practical. The contemporary artist, on the other hand, has been schooled to value work that is, in the strictest sense, useless—serving no end other than an enrichment of the audience's experience and an increase in the artist's public esteem. In a world without gods, this is no small matter. It trumps pragmatism.

Equally complicated—and peculiar—is Norton's treatment of these rough-hewn sculptural forms. In principle, their parts could have vectored off in multiple directions, their shapes could have punctuated and manipulated space in infinite ways. Some of the loosely figurative ones—such as *Chat*, 1984—do exactly that. But, for the most part, Norton confined this work to grids and the relation of one rectangular element to another, as though the components were slightly jumbled windows—or canvases (*Yellow Wire*, 1983). Indeed, many of them are actually painted: sculptures in real space daubed with pigment, evoking paintings that, Alberti asserted, function as windows into virtual space (*American Goat*, 1983).

Around 1987, in the midst of an eight-year period (1984-92) when he was dividing his time between the U.S. and France, Norton made a definitive shift to painting per se, producing at first grotesque (though comically bright and squiggly) fantasy creatures tumbled together in quasi-patterned arrangements against placeless monochrome backgrounds. The forms, hues, and compositions bore a kinship to those of the CoBrA movement, Peter Saul, and the Chicago Imagists. This was, after all, the era of East Village recklessness. Yet a structural regularity, angular and geometric, persisted in Norton's two-dimensional works, implying that his sculptures were, in effect, still there under the more organic (and orgasmic) overlays of painterly figuration. It was as if the abstract structure of Indian Space Painting—an overtly American synthesis of Cubism and Surrealism practiced in the 1940s and '50s by artists such as Howard Daum, Gertrude Barrer, Steve Wheeler, Will Barnet, Peter Busa, and Robert Barrell—had been infused with the psychedelic impulses of the Vietnam War era.

That ability to embrace contraries, holding them simultaneously in dynamic equipoise, has remained a signature feature of Norton's art up to the present day. In the 1990s and early 2000s, when his palette was dominated by blue, white, and black, he tended to create visual zones—some populated by rectilinear shapes, some by circles and curves—asymmetrically balanced like equally important but largely segregated realms of cognition and feeling (*After the Fact*, 2001-02). In these works, anxiety is contemplated as a theme and, at the same time, actively experienced by both artist and viewer. The images convey an existential anxiety of choice, where every option selected entails the loss of its equally attractive (and equally troublesome) alternative. Vacillation or stasis seem to be the only responses possible within this locked, internally churning, visual universe.

Compartmentalization cannot last—so at least the voices of good mental health advise us. Thankfully, for reasons that are not entirely clear (least of all to the artist himself), the log jam finally broke. Previously, Norton had devoted much studio time to working and reworking old canvases, often winning a kind of forced liberation of the gestural curves. In the early 2000s, one saw those rounded shapes breaking out of their former constraints, invading larger and larger portions of the field (Milton and John, 2002-03). Yet the colors remain cool and limited, tending to somberness. Anyone who has had a dark night of the soul is likely to feel the intense anguish of these works, and to fear a bit for their author.

Then, suddenly, something quite splendid happened, affecting this viewer and others with force. Revisiting Norton's studio in 2008 after a longish absence, I was greeted by a new world color. "What a wallop!" I blurted in front of the first work I saw, a phrase that subsequently became its title. Some 12½ feet wide by 7½ feet high, featuring vertical strips of bright yellow stippled with green, white, red, and pink, the diptych pushes its picture plane forward like a caution sign that has tossed caution aside, proclaiming instead a new order of pleasure and happiness. The effect of the painting—bold as Pop Art but completely abstract—was shared by several other canvases in the room, and by many more soon to come. My exclamation echoed, I believe, the implicit battle cry of this newest, most accomplished, phase of the artist's career.

This is not to say that the paintings Norton has made over the past decade are simple in either construction or meaning. Far from it. *Ornette* (2006), named for the free jazz great Ornette Coleman, is a broken field of seemingly random forms and colors that somehow mysteriously cohere, in the manner of Coleman's startling music. Works like *Einstein's*

Edge of Winter (2009-11) and *Pink-E* (2011), with their firmly differentiated quarters, remind us that paradigms or “frames of reference” are as determinative in art as they are in physics. *Split Kick* (2009-10) is partially riddled, Swiss cheese fashion, with holes revealing the linen beneath—one of the lacunae grown large as a cartoon thought-bubble, but blank and disclosing nothing. Is this the Nothingness that seemed to impend in the earlier “blue” works? Apparently not, since similar holes appear in many cheerily hued pictures, such as *Mr. Sweetheart* (2009-10), *Slow Smolder* (2010) and, most pointedly, *Worth the Wait* (2009-10)—a work that is thoroughly upbeat in both title and coloration, although it duly notes the annoyance of delayed gratification.

In *Sidewinder* (2010-11), a ladder-like grid appears, suggesting a column of high-rise windows, perhaps, but also hinting at a subtle return of the repressed: the latticework of Norton's early sculpture. Its appearance is a tacit acknowledgement of the space that has otherwise been systematically withheld from Norton's paintings through a deliberate refusal of perspective and modeling. But, as Chinese painters have long known, there are other ways to evoke space—most deftly by counterposing form with a vast emptiness. A small boat drawn on a blank expanse will seem suspended in limitless depth and eternity. Such juxtapositions may not always be comforting—“the eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me,” Pascal said—but confronting the void, even obliquely, is necessary to both art and reason.

In short, an emotion-laden space persists in Norton's paintings—behind the gapped peek-a-boo surfaces, around their unmodulated forms. In several of his most recent works—*Euclid* (2012-13), *Hot Enough to Melt* (2013), and many more—the empty passages have gained almost equal parity with the forms. Moreover, since his breakthrough moment at the turn of the millennium, Norton has also been making sculpture again, somewhat on the sly: familiar grid forms in wood, hemp, and plaster; tangled skeins of limp cord oddly reminiscent of dripping paint.

For this artist, space itself—depth in both the pictorial and psychological sense—is tempting and ineradicable. It is the compositional factor commonly associated, in Western thought, with deathly oblivion but also with the passage of time and the kind of traumas that no adult living in the art world escapes: youthful indiscretions and wanderings, intoxicants, volatile relationships, professional frustrations, divorce. Thus this work's pictorial dialogue between emptiness and form, as constant as the inner duel of memory and presence, remorse and hope.

Today, however, the painter is in a very good place, enjoying financial security, a stable and loving third marriage, a well-earned facility in his work, and the quiet respect of his artistic peers. His more disturbing concerns center now on political-economic chicanery and environmental waste—the state of the world rather than the state of his soul. To judge from the painterly emblems that Norton currently presents us, these grim social issues remain, linen-like, in the background and margins—undisguised and undeniable, to be sure, but overridden by a brightly joyous artistic life under the sign of Matisse.



* Text originally published in “Black Renaissance Noire,” edited and published by the Institute of African-American Affairs at New York University, New York, Fall 2014.



ORNETTE, acrylic on linen, 72 x 90 in | 183 x 229 cm, 2006



CATSKILL 5, acrylic on linen, 80 x 70 in | 203 x 178 cm, 2005-06, Private Collection Germany



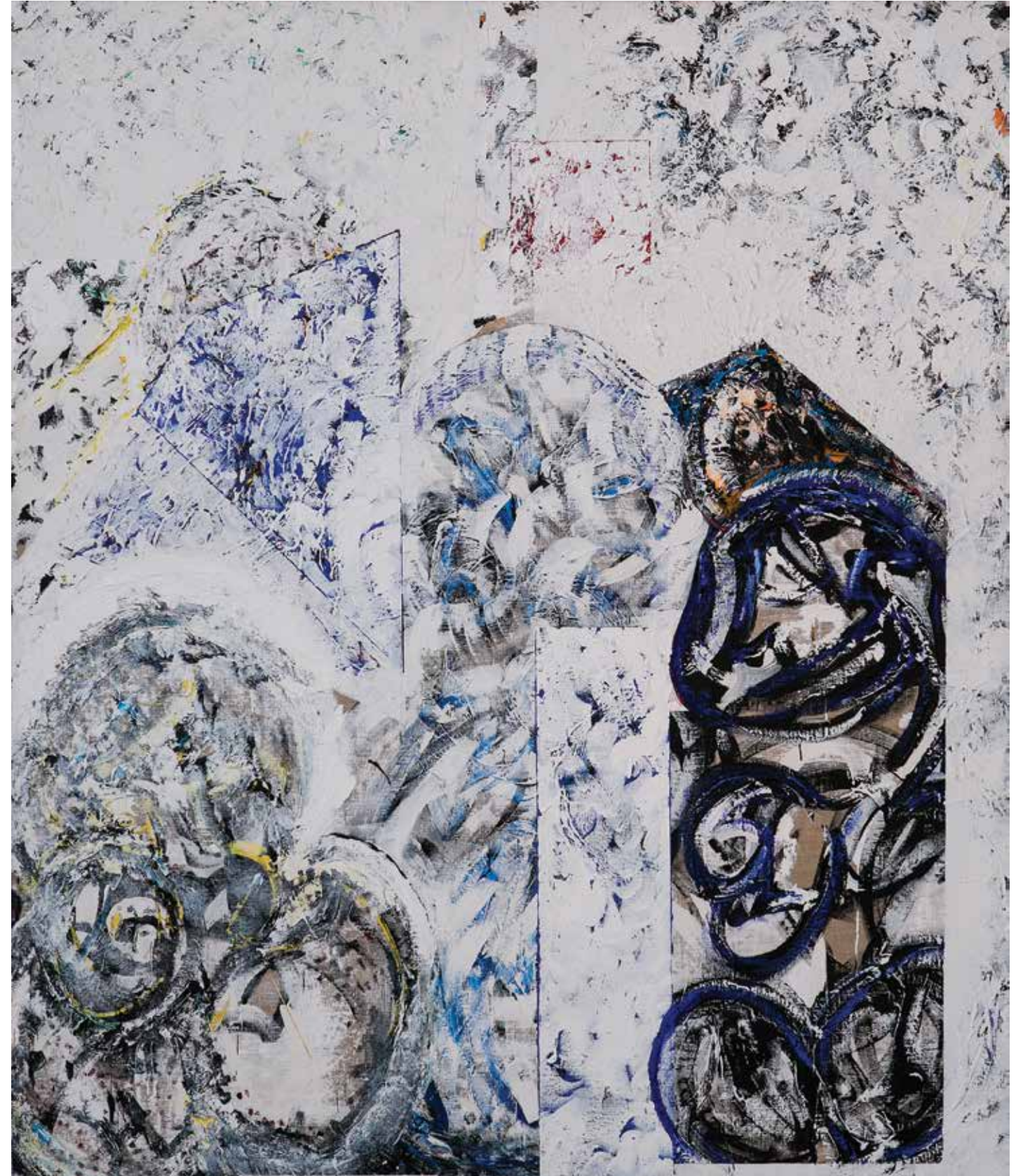
SAFETY, acrylic on linen, 72 x 90 in | 183 x 229 cm, 2003



XBLANQUE MAKES HIS PLACE, acrylic on heavy cotton drop-cloth, 110 x 100 in | 279 x 254 cm, 1996-2001



BLUE WINDOW WHITE PATH, acrylic on linen, 76 x 68 in | 193 x 172 cm, 1996-98, Private Collection Singapore



WHITE WINDOW, acrylic on linen, 80 x 68 in | 203 x 173 cm, 1996-97



BLUE MEMBRANE WHITE WINDOW, acrylic on canvas drop cloth, 112 x 132 in | 284 x 335 cm, 1995-97

Over The Top

Stephen Westfall, 2013

A quick and simple answer to the riddle of why C. Michael Norton's paintings are not better known is that in America, at least, there remains a suspicion of vivacity in the fine arts. Presumably, that's something best left to the popular arts: pop music, Hollywood movies, fashion, Las Vegas; all that is garish and frivolous. As Leo Steinberg pointed out in his great essay, "Other Criteria," this suspicion of any peacocking in the fine arts goes back to the Puritan heritage of American arts and letters, and while that aesthetic hegemony has been breaking down over the last century it still persists in the low incident surfaces and simultaneously hip and monastic blacks, reds, and whites of neo-conceptual painting. And there is indeed something comparatively over the top about Norton's painting: all that color, impasto overlay, and vaulting trajectory. However, it doesn't take too much time in looking at his work to appreciate how his "expressive" painterly energies are supported by structure and seek to elaborate further structural complications. These are paintings that shock with color intensity and material plasticity, with signs of impulse over deliberation, and then roll back to unveil deep structural considerations and an investment in historical conversation.

In the mid 1990s, Norton was painting largely in blue and white, with black as structural punctuation and other colors peaking through the writhing brushwork. The compositions proposed a segmented interior architecture, like the post-Cubist interiors of Picasso and Gorky. Norton fills each rectangular plane with curving impasto paint strokes, reminiscent of the build up of marks in Pollock's *Eyes in the Heat* (1946). And the Pollock associations are sustained by the compartmentalization within these compositions, which has always reminded me of the pre-abstract paintings of Pollock such as *The She Wolf* and *Guardians of the Secret*. This combination of rectangular planes functioning as panels or containers of more gestural, curvilinear marks is also strikingly reminiscent of the graphic effects of Pierre Alechinsky's COBRA paintings, a resonance which suggests that, while American Abstract Expressionism was the groundbreaking movement, any consideration of the full range of meanings put in play by the post-war style of gestural Abstract Expressionism will ultimately have to include a co-equal engagement with Art Informel, Tachisme, and the COBRA painters. Such a comparison resituates Norton's painting within a deeper and broader "mainstream" than we might have imagined.

By the latter part of the 1990's, Norton starts to let small sections of the sized linen ground appear through the gestural blizzard in paintings such as *White Window* (1996-97). Even at this early stage of development, his decision radically transformed the experience of "reading" paint pictorially from a turbid field, which was nonetheless the ground zero for traditional pictorial illusion, to a skin: like a peeling sheet of wallpaper revealing the wall underneath. One obvious precedent for this surface reading is Mimmo Rotella's Nouveau Realisme paintings, where the painting's image and surface is created from the peeling away of overlaid metro posters. But Norton is painting rather than practicing decollage. By 2003 he is scumbling paint on with a knife across areas of linen masked with tape, creating webs or netting patterns that reveal the linen, slightly glistening with its coating of polymer sizing. Some of the broad, cursive brush strokes are hanging on as a substrate over which the masked-out nets float, but they gradually disappear over the course of the ensuing decade. Going forward, Norton's drawing with paint is going to appear at first glance to be more detached from personalized gesture.

By 2005 and 2006, Norton finds a more irregular spacing for the holes in his "nets," so that the openings onto the linen ground more closely resemble charred negatives of Jasper Johns' flagstones than they do the holes in netting

(though these, too, reappear on occasion). In paintings such as *Catskill* (2006) and *Ornette* (2006) the linen ground is more completely exposed and on its own terms. The holes are there, but the other broad painterly passages begin as a scraping into linen ground and the linen itself has become the principal field color, warming the entire palette with its light greenish-umber tonality. Within his painted passages Norton is by this time building up layers of color through scraping or squeegeeing color on color, so where the paint declares itself as a distinct material layer on top of the linen it also opens up into a separate optical field that you can see into. It is this intensive doubling of field space for the eye that is utterly distinctive in Norton's painting, but I first want to address three giants with whom his work shares some commonalities.

From 2006 on, it is possible to isolate three major painters with whom Norton is having a deep and extended conversation: Gerhard Richter, Jasper Johns, and, increasingly, Frank Stella. This is an intimidating group for even the most ambitious painter, but Norton takes them on with aplomb. The outline and dispersal of the holes in relation to Johns' flagstone patterns has already been mentioned, but Norton is also drawing on the legacy of Johns' reiteration of the objecthood of the stretched canvas. The activation of the linen ground incorporates the whole object of the stretched linen strainer into the picture, a re-insistence of the thingness of the painting that Johns intensified like no prior painter.

The Richter reference is in Norton's paint application, wherein he pulls paint across paint, leaving blurry streaks of color on top of different colors pulled the same way. The visual texture of Norton's color-on-color scumblings is harder and faster than Richter's squeegee pulls of color into color, which I think is clearly the result of Norton's choice of acrylic over oil. Acrylic dries faster and so the top coat is tending to overlay substrata more than mingle with it, though in spots you can see the top color imbedding itself in the taffy-pull of the under colors. The effect is dazzling in paintings such as the very large *What a Wallop* (2005-2008), where successively lighter planes of yellow scan across streaks of green, black, red, and white in vertical compartments of varying width and regularity. The compositional compartments, themselves, move from an irregular or broken pattern on the left to a more geometric vertical alignment on the right. Norton can take years to arrive at the chromatic and material fullness that his major paintings display. *What a Wallop* took three years to complete and the aptly named *Worth the Wait* (2009-2010) took two. So much for acrylic being a necessarily "fast" medium.

Norton continued to organize his compositions largely by adjacent vertical banding up through early 2010, when he introduced a new element: a tensile grid created by masking with tape, as in *Sidewinder* (2010-2011). In *Sidewinder*, the linearity of the grid is still subsumed by the overall structuring of vertical compartments, but the gridding virtually takes over the composition of the subsequent *I'm Celebrating the Vastness of Our Ignorance* (2011). Or perhaps the narrower width of the picture seems to collapse into a grid of nearly the same structure, without the broader bands of paint-on-paint overlay that stretch the horizontal dimensions of *Sidewinder*. The warm ground of the areas of exposed linen allows Norton much more leeway to experiment with explosive, near dissonant chords of color, so that the chilly and acidic violet and white combinations, which seem to be popping off the surface of the painting on the left and coagulating like a bruise on the right aren't simply (almost) too sour expressions of a spectrum palette, but an essay on stretching away from a middle value, earth-toned base.

Norton never really abandoned the curvilinear gesturalism stored up in his earlier paintings and it reappears in his later paintings as a foil for the mentholated stylishness of his taped-off grids. The contraction and expansion of the grids themselves, particularly in the large scale of Norton's larger paintings suggests Stella's Deco Baroque (and Grotesquerie) from the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Stella was setting illusionistic geometry against an expressionist gesturalism in an almost virulent spectrum palette. The illusionism in Norton's paintings only seems to threaten to break out of the rectangle in Baroque fashion. The real sense of life-giving space in his paintings can be located in the surface breaks: where the edges of the irregular holes or the ruled, masked-out lines meet the linen ground; or where different directional velocities collide, as in the torqued gestural contrapposto in the constellation of fiery, painterly forms in *A Sentinel Wolf* (2012), or the rhythmic punch of the three mauve pink curvilinear gestural constructions that ride horizontally converging straight angles coming in from the left hand side of the picture in *Pink-E* (2011).

As noted, Norton's color both explodes against and is grounded by the exposed linen grounds of his paintings, but the linen is also, simultaneously, spatially ambiguous and a material ground zero where the constructed nature of his illusionism is laid open for inspection. And in spite of the materially radical nature of this exposure of constructed pictoriality, the fourth painter who might be added to conversation Norton is having with Johns, Richter and Stella is really a figurative artist. That would be Francis Bacon, whose flayed figures wrestle or sexually entangle in schematically painted rooms that often seem to float like stage-painted skeins on an "absolute" ground of unpainted linen (though there may be a priming coat on the back).

Paintings should be viewed both as if they are the first thing in the world that one sees and for the range of contexts that are awakened by our need to interpret them. Norton's paintings are incredibly dynamic: chromatically and spatially ambitious; and seductive in their exposed processes. They express joy in their making. But they are also deeply invested in the painting culture of the post WWII era. They are ecstatic rather than hermetic, but they also thoughtfully measure an almost impossibly wide range of the most ambitious Modernist painting, spanning an even longer history than the last seventy years or so. Try to get back far enough on paintings like *A Sentinel Wolf*, *Cutting Grass* (2013), or *Sentinel Blues* (2013) so that you can see only the essentials of their overall compositional structures. When I do this I think not only of Deco rhythms, but also of the palette, compositional twists and brittle, but powerful torques of the Viennese Secessionist school, particularly those of Klimt. And a painting like *Euclid* (2012-2013), while holding almost all the elements already mentioned in other recent paintings, is reaching some new level of integration where references to other artists, even Richter, aren't what come to mind before the broken topographies that Norton is casting into a grand symphonic space like no other. Norton isn't painting "at" any one of his avatars, or even attempting a synthesis. His painting now holds its own with any of them while setting its own agenda.



MONTREAL SHUFFLE, marker and acrylic on paper, 40 x 30 in | 102 x 76 cm, 1993, Private Collection New York

* Text originally published on www.artdaily.com, July 2013.



CHRISTINE TAKES A HIKE, acrylic on cotton duck canvas, 78 x 114 in | 198 x 290 cm, 1989, Private Collection France



GOD HAS THIS NEW GIRLFRIEND THAT SINGS, acrylic on cotton duck canvas, 78 x 60 in | 198 x 152 cm, 1989, Private Collection France



DO YOU WANT TO BE QUEEN, acrylic on cotton duck canvas, 85 x 86 in | 216 x 218 cm, 1989, Collection of the artist



HANGING AROUND, acrylic on cotton duck canvas, 78 x 60 in | 198 x 152 cm, 1989, Private Collection New York



WILEY, wood, plaster, and paint, 72 x 36 x 36 in | 183 x 91 x 91 cm, 1985, Private Collection San Jose



WILEY'S CHOICE, oil stick, marker, and acrylic on cotton duck canvas, 78 x 60 in | 198 x 152 cm, 1987, Collection of the artist



YELLOW HORSE, oil stick, marker, and acrylic on paper, 42.5 x 30 in | 108 x 76 cm, 1986, Collection of the artist



YELLOW HORSE, metal, plaster, and paint, 72 x 48 x 36 in | 183 x 122 x 91 cm, 1986, Private Collection New York



DO AS YOU PLEASE CHEVAL ROUGE, animal trap, metal, plaster and paint, 66 x 90 x 42 in | 168 x 229 x 107 cm, 1984, Private Collection Grenoble

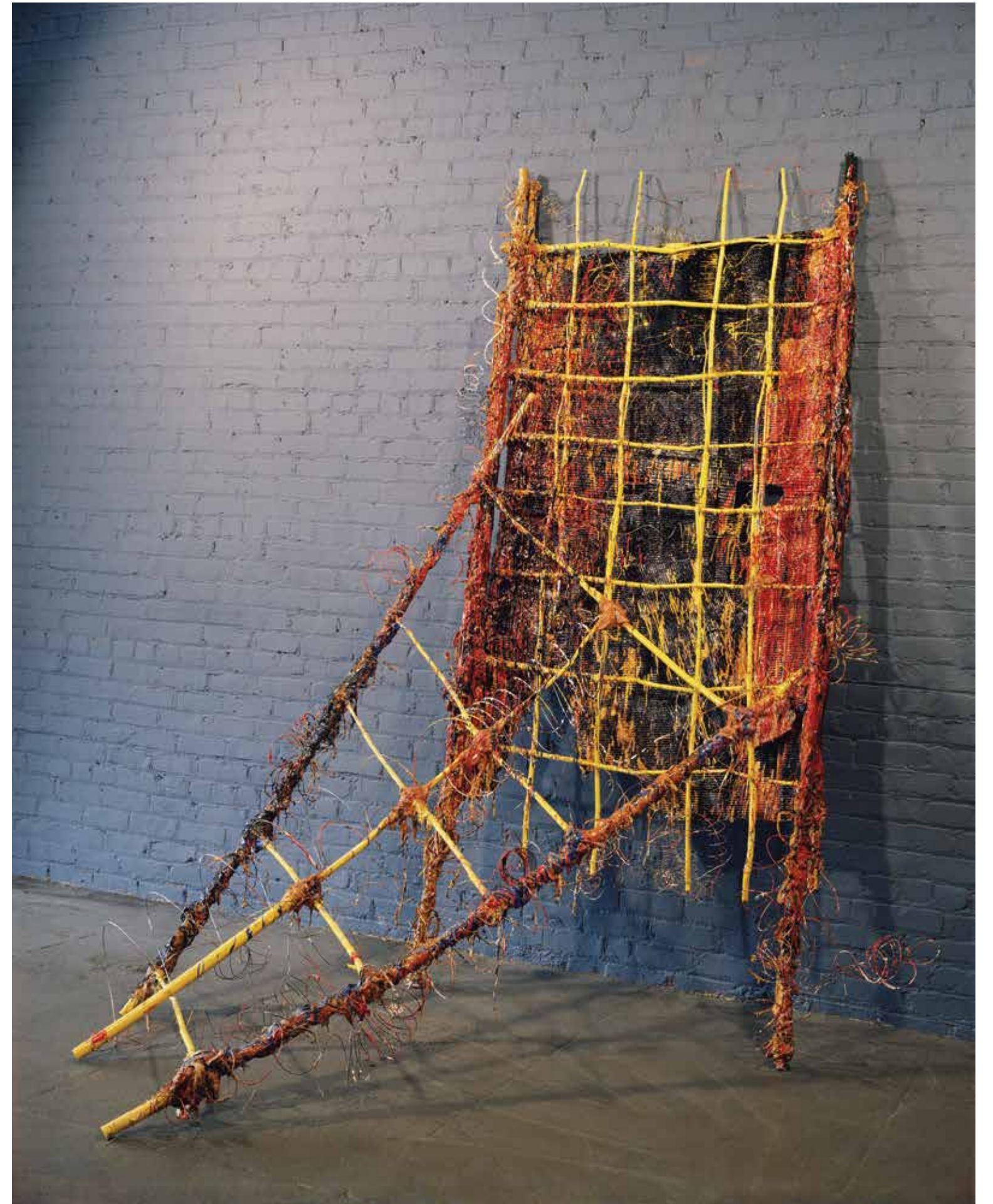


AMERICAN GOAT, bamboo, cardboard, raffia plaster and paint, 108 x 132 x 72 in | 274 x 335 x 183 cm, 1983

RED LEG, bamboo, cardboard, raffia plaster, and paint, 96 x 72 x 72 in | 244 x 183 x 183 cm, 1983



YELLOW WIRE, bamboo, cardboard, raffia plaster, and paint, 108 x 74 x 72 in | 274 x 188 x 183 cm, 1983



C. MICHAEL NORTON

EDUCATION

- 1981 Master of Fine Arts, San Jose State University, San Jose, California
1978 Master of Arts, San Jose State University, San Jose, California
1977 Bachelor of Arts, Humboldt State University, Arcata, California

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 Infinity's Sprawl, UNIX Gallery, New York, NY
When Paintings Awake, David&Schweitzer Contemporary, Brooklyn, NY
2016 The Temptation of Space, Art Virus Ltd., Frankfurt, Germany
2015 The Wolf I Feed, Brian Morris Gallery-Buddy Warren Inc., New York, NY
2014 PS 209 Gallery, Stone Ridge, NY
2013 Over The Top, Thomas Punzmann Fine Arts, Frankfurt, Germany
2011 Dancing In My Head, Thomas Punzmann Fine Arts, Frankfurt, Germany
Cacophony Part 1, FiveMyles, Brooklyn, NY
Cacophony Part 2, Woodstock Artist Association & Museum, Woodstock, NY
2007 Sudden Spring Suite, Tama, New York, NY
2004 Wangled Tabs, Maxwell Fine Arts, Peekskill, NY, Curated by Koan Jeff Baysa
2003 100 Broadway Exhibition Program, New York, NY, Curated by Suzanne Randolph Fine Arts
2001 Recent Paintings, Barbara Greene Fine Art, New York, NY
Razing Space, Galerie Terre d'Art, St. Paul de Vence, France
1992 Albissola/ America/Arte, Museo Civico d'Arte Contemporanea, Albissola, Italy
Galerie Capazza, Nancay, France
1990 Galerie Bercovy-Fugier, Paris, France
1985 Gallery 30, San Mateo, CA
1984 Galerie Christine Le Chanjour, Nice, France
Galerie Jean-Yves Noblet, Paris/Grenoble, France
1983 Markham Gallery/Museum Services, San Jose, CA
1981 San Jose State University, San Jose, California

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 David&Schweitzer Contemporary, Brooklyn, NY
Chimento Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA
Palm Beach Modern + Contemporary Fair, UNIX Gallery, Palm Beach, FL
2016 David&Schweitzer Contemporary, Brooklyn, NY
Sibling Rivalries, Torrance Art Museum, Los Angeles, CA
Nation IV Thru The Rabbit Hole, Sideshow Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

- 2015 Salon Zurcher Paris/New York, Brian Morris Gallery, Paris, France
spacematters, Brian Morris Gallery, New York, NY
2014 Pollux Tower, Frankfurt, Germany
Thomas Punzmann Fine Art, Frankfurt, Germany
2013 Sideshow Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
2012 5th Beijing International Biennale, National Art Museum of Beijing, Beijing, China
3 Person at Filser & Graf, Munich, Germany
Sideshow, Brooklyn, NY
2011 ArtFair 21 Cologne, Thomas Punzmann Fine Arts, Cologne, Germany
Thomas Punzmann Fine Arts, Frankfurt, Germany
Collaborative Concepts at Saunders Farm, Garrison, NY
Sideshow Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
Exit Art, New York, NY
2009 Collaborative Concepts at Saunders Farm, Garrison, NY
2008 Sunshine International Museum, Beijing, China
Collaborative Concepts at Saunders Farm, Garrison, NY
Union Square West Group Exhibition, Tama, New York, NY
Inside/Outside, Maxwell Fine Art, Peekskill, NY
2004 Pollinations, The Lab Gallery, Roger Smith Hotel, New York City, Curated by Koan Jeff Baysa
2001-02 Barbara Greene Fine Art, New York, NY
2000-02 Galerie Terre d'Art, St. Paul de Vence, France
1990-98 Galerie Capazza, Paris/Nancay, France
1989-91 Galerie Bercovy-Fugier, Paris, France
Salon International D'Arts Plastiques de Valognes, France
1986 Zeus-Trabia Gallery, New York, NY
1985 San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA
Arco, International Contemporary Art Fair, Madrid, Spain
1984 Salon de Montrouge, Paris, France

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2017 "Wide Awake in America," Bradley Rubenstein, CultureCatch, April 21, 2017
"When Paintings Awake," Raphael Rubinstein, Essay for exhibition catalog, David&Schweitzer Contemporary
Chimento Contemporary: "Straight Outta Bushwick," Genie Davis, February 14, 2017, Art & Cake, Los Angeles, CA
"Straight Outta Bushwick," Carolina A. Miranda, January 5, 2017, Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles, CA

- 2016 Otium Magazine for Contemporary Literature: Ein Sinn für Distanz (A Sense of Distance), Gespräch mit dem bildenden Künstler und Maler C. Michael Norton (Interview with Artist C. Michael Norton) by Sarah Schuster. (2016) »Otium« Magazin für Lyrik und Prosa der Gegenwart no. 12
 "Ground & Consequence: C. Michael Norton and The Color of Noise," by David Cohen, Catalog Essay for Art Virus Ltd, Frankfurt, Germany
- 2015 Le Quotidien De L'Art Mardi October 20, 2015, Salon Zurcher showing North American Galleries
 THE LOOKOUT, "The Wolf I Feed," Brian Morris Gallery and Buddy Warren Inc., Art in America, June 2015
 C. Michael Norton, Brian Morris Gallery and Buddy Warren Inc. by Alexa Lawrence, Art News, Summer 2015
 Artcritical, The Review Panel, April 28, panel took place May 29, 2015 with David Cohen, Peter Plagens, Roberta Smith, Christina Kee
 Gorky's Granddaughter Studio interview by Zachary Keeting & Christopher Joy, 26 minute video, March 15, 2015
- 2014 "The Temptation of Space" by Richard Vine, Black Renaissance Noire, edited & published by the Institute of African-American Affairs at New York University, Fall 2014
- 2013 "Over The Top" by Stephen Westfall, artdaily.com, July 2013
- 2007 "Sudden Springs Suite" by Koan Jeff Baysa
 "The Sudden Spring Series" by Koan Jeff Baysa, dArt International (volume 10, number 1), Miami, FL
 "Tactile Abpressionism" by Koan Jeff Baysa, NY Arts, March/April 2007
- 2004 "Wrangled Tebs" by Koan Jeff Baysa
- 2001 "Razing Spaces: The New Paintings by C. Michael Norton" by Dominique Nahas
- 1990 "C. Michael Norton: From the Comedy of America to the Ceremony of Life" by Isabelle Coera
- 1987 C. Michael Norton, featured artist, Peninsula Magazine, April 1987, San Francisco, California
- 1986 Exhibition 86, 11th Annual Great American Arts Festival, Santa Clara, CA (Alena Willcoxon/ Eileen Hill/Bee Wax)
- 1985 "C Michael Norton" by Jacqueline Blance, Galerie Le Chanjour, Nice, France, Kanal Magazine, January 1985
- 1984 Awarded exhibition and residency grants from Ministere de la Culture, Paris, France, Commission d'orientation des artes plastiques, Grenoble, France



