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DAN RAMIREZ

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**DAN RAMIREZ**

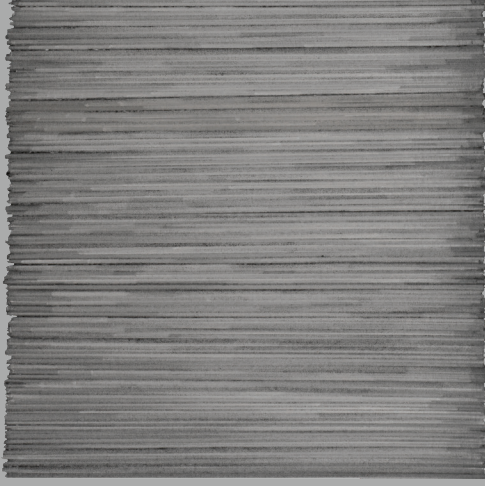
SEPTEMBER 8 -  
OCTOBER 14,  
2023



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THOUGHTS  
CHATLS

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# DAN RAMIREZ: PORTALS BY LYNNE WARREN

How fascinating it is to find an artist whose work at first meeting may seem to be tethered in philosophical musings, buoyed by obscure modern music references and references that unfortunately for many are only marginally less obscure—classical music, poetry, historical artworks—that while supported by those things, doesn't require intimate knowledge of them. And how delightful it is that what the work actually does is graciously invite viewers to employ their visual literacy where they are richly rewarded with the pleasure of subtle states of observation and ratiocination.<sup>1</sup> Such is the work of Dan Ramirez.

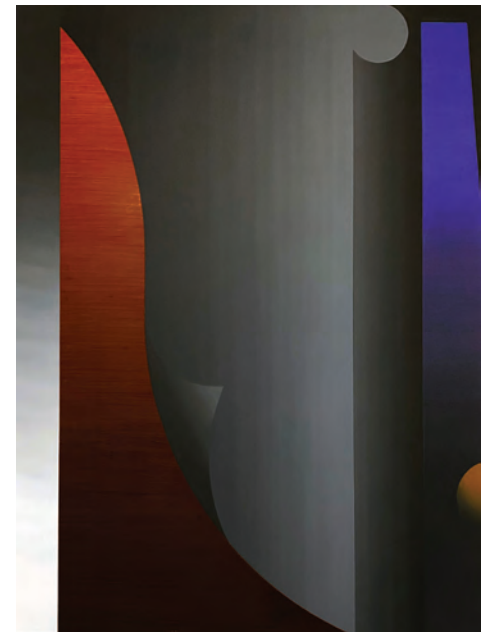
Let's agree a viewer should not have to know a panoply of things—whether obscure or clear—about a work of art before it is initially viewed. Yet today that seems to be the overarching ethos. In museums and galleries, labels and statements explain the backstory, the artist's intentions (often unquestioningly derived from the artist himself), what exactly to look at in a piece, and what a proper take-away should be: "This work warns us of the dangers of climate change" or "This work references the artist's identity as [fill in the blank]." The insidious effect of this is many viewers don't really look at artworks; sadly,

often, they merely glance at things that are pointed out by others, most of these things being non-visual, and then they look away to discuss what they have "learned." In Ramirez's case, discussion would probably include "I didn't know he was a truck driver for many years!" or "I didn't know he didn't make art until he was in his thirties." Both interesting items but neither provides any real keys to his art.

Behold the seven smallish works that make up *Vertical Thoughts: Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross*, (2022–23) (pp. 27–30).<sup>2</sup> They spark. They glow. Even flicker if you pull your eyes around quickly. But all so subtly. Close observation required.



Dan Ramirez | *The All-Powerful Word*  
Graphite/Acrylic/Latex/Canvas/Panel  
96" x 122" | 1978 | Collection of the National  
Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago



Dan Ramirez | *Q.E.T.: Duet for PK*  
Oil/Acrylic/Clear Varnish on Panel  
48" x 36" | 2022–23

Some patience is required as the eyes and brain coordinate. As in his larger paintings, there are actual layers and illusions of layers. Forms and illusions of forms. And always lines.

Yet the concept "line" doesn't do justice to what is there before you. It's more carvings, precise and beautiful, both in the lines of graphite that Ramirez has used in his works almost from the beginning (he has featured parallel lines of graphite in his work since at least 1977), and the lines in his most recent paintings, such as *Q.E.T.: Duet for PK* (2022–23) (shown above), that are demarcations between dazzling expanses of color and subtle gradations of gray.

Ramirez describes his approach to *Vertical Thoughts* as "scribing"—a reference to writing with the added connotation of recording or copying. He stacks strokes of graphite atop a ground of computer-generated imagery and traditional drawing. The digital

imagery includes a sheet of papyrus and strips of bark that he acquired and photographed. As Ramirez explains, “I explore the historical rendering of words and language from an abstract frame of expression: Vertically stacked graphite sheets of light.”<sup>3</sup> It is fascinating that the artist sees the stacked graphite lines as *sheets* and further, as *sheets of light* because the lines transformed are indeed that. Ramirez adapted this language from a description of the music of jazz great John Coltrane as “sheets of sound,” which to the artist suggested a type of layering characteristic of his thinking and his [artmaking].<sup>4</sup>

*Vertical Thoughts* needs to be viewed very close up, mid-range, and at a bit of a distance which allows taking in all seven works. The individual compositions complement yet question one another. Viewing them as reproductions is sorely inadequate. Linger at mid-range reveals portals: in some works a central “doorway” atop a horizontal slab that the artist sees as akin to the pediment upon which Christ on the cross is sometimes depicted in historical painting, such as Velázquez’s *The Crucified Christ*, ca. 1632, in the collection of the Prado. Some works reveal several portals, including peeled back openings. It seems significant that the first work in the progression has a small, narrow portal, centered over three stacks of graphite lines, the central stack higher than the two that flank it—a reference to the Trinity? That Jesus was crucified along with two others? The stacks and seeming portals change from



*The Crucified Christ*  
Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez  
Oil on Canvas | Ca. 1632  
Copyright © Museo Nacional del Prado

piece to piece, with the last displaying a solitary stack of graphite lines that ascends into a white rectangle in a sort of stairway to heaven. Consistent in all the works is the horizontal slab—the metaphorical support for the crucified Christ—here thinner there thicker, supporting a single stack of lines or multiple stacks. These variations seem quirky and personal as opposed to the playing out of a system, and surely they are. Ramirez has long maintained that his works are personal, not formulaic, created out of his need to process his interests and experiences.

Unlike many abstract painters, Dan Ramirez can’t be said to have created a repertoire of signs and symbols to which he has assigned unvarying meanings. Familiarity with his work doesn’t especially yield a trove of knowledge useful in interpreting a previously unseen work. In fact, a visually sensitive and literate first-time viewer potentially

can gain as much reward as someone highly conversant with the entirety of his career. Some might think this is to devalue his achievements over a long career, but it is the opposite. Simply the richness of the experience with an individual work is not predicated on knowing the progression of his career.

Let’s jump into a little history—my history with Dan Ramirez. I’ve known his work since at least the late 1970s. I wrote about it in a brief essay in a catalog of the legendary Imagist collector Dennis Adrian, published by the Museum of Contemporary Art in 1982. For some it will make little sense that Adrian collected the abstract Ramirez, but at base he loved serious and proficient artists, not just those in the figurative Imagist style. He wrote one of the most perceptive things I’d encountered about Dan Ramirez’s work: “[his] intensely black forms illogically seem to emit light.”<sup>5</sup>

My own little essay said something that surprised me, forty-one years later, in that it holds up: “His work has evolved from paintings that grapple quite directly with formal problems to ... works that simply utilize formal elements to create completely non-referential entities that, for Ramirez, express ineffable emotions...”<sup>6</sup>

One of the early exhibitions I mounted during my long career as a curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art was *Images for Human Conduct* (1987), which featured four Chicago artists

who dealt with moral issues. I had been reminded of what I had written in the catalog for this show when reviewing essays and articles from the 1980s to today on Dan Ramirez's work.<sup>7</sup> Young artists in the 1980s generally were not much interested in such subject matter as issues of morality, as I explained in the show's catalog essay:<sup>8</sup> "[Art] no longer is, as it once was, a spiritual endeavor, a metaphysical investigation, an ineffable activity fed by intuition and the desire to be deeply connected to the human community." About this traditional perception of art I had also confidently stated, "Like religion, its closest analogue, art knew where it wanted to go, but could never be sure about what it might find when it got there." The writings I'd reviewed about Dan Ramirez's work emphasized how it stood apart from that of many other of his contemporaries, the authors using language much like mine to describe his working process, evoking its religiosity, its spiritual qualities, its desire to be a portal to each individual viewer and exist for that purpose alone.

Although Dan Ramirez had not been included in the *Human Conduct* show, my position on the topic clearly applies to his work, as I was describing a different approach to artistic practice than that which has dominated since Duchamp's influence, beginning in the 1950s, spread wide and far to define what was proper contemporary art. Ramirez as an artist knows where he wants to go, and while hopeful of finding what he "wants" in making an artwork, he would never quantify "success" as achieving exactly what

he set out to do, and certainly would never dictate to a viewer what it is that the viewer should find. Indeed an old-fashioned way of being an artist, yet his visual presentation initially belies that traditional approach. Two thoughts emerge about my history with Dan Ramirez: Thank goodness I experienced his work all those decades ago, and thank goodness I've survived to be able to revisit them and see new works over the years, as Ramirez has been blessed with a long and productive life.

Dan Ramirez in the flesh might startle someone who only knows the work and imagines a forehead-furrowed intellectual dry and distanced from the world. He is in fact exuberant about life, extraordinarily warm, engaged and engaging. Always curious and open to new experience. In the past two decades he came to know Catalan ceramicist Joan Gardy Artigas through a number of residencies at the Fundació Josep Llorens Artigas and workshops in Gallifa, Spain. These residencies have been soul-quenching for Ramirez, and have led him into working with ceramics. A medium not nearly as available for precise control. This taking up of such a material may seem antithetical to what a follower may have surmised about an artist who displays such precise control over his materials. But Ramirez explains that his identity is that of artist-as-painter who deals with extending his idea of a painting and "other aspects

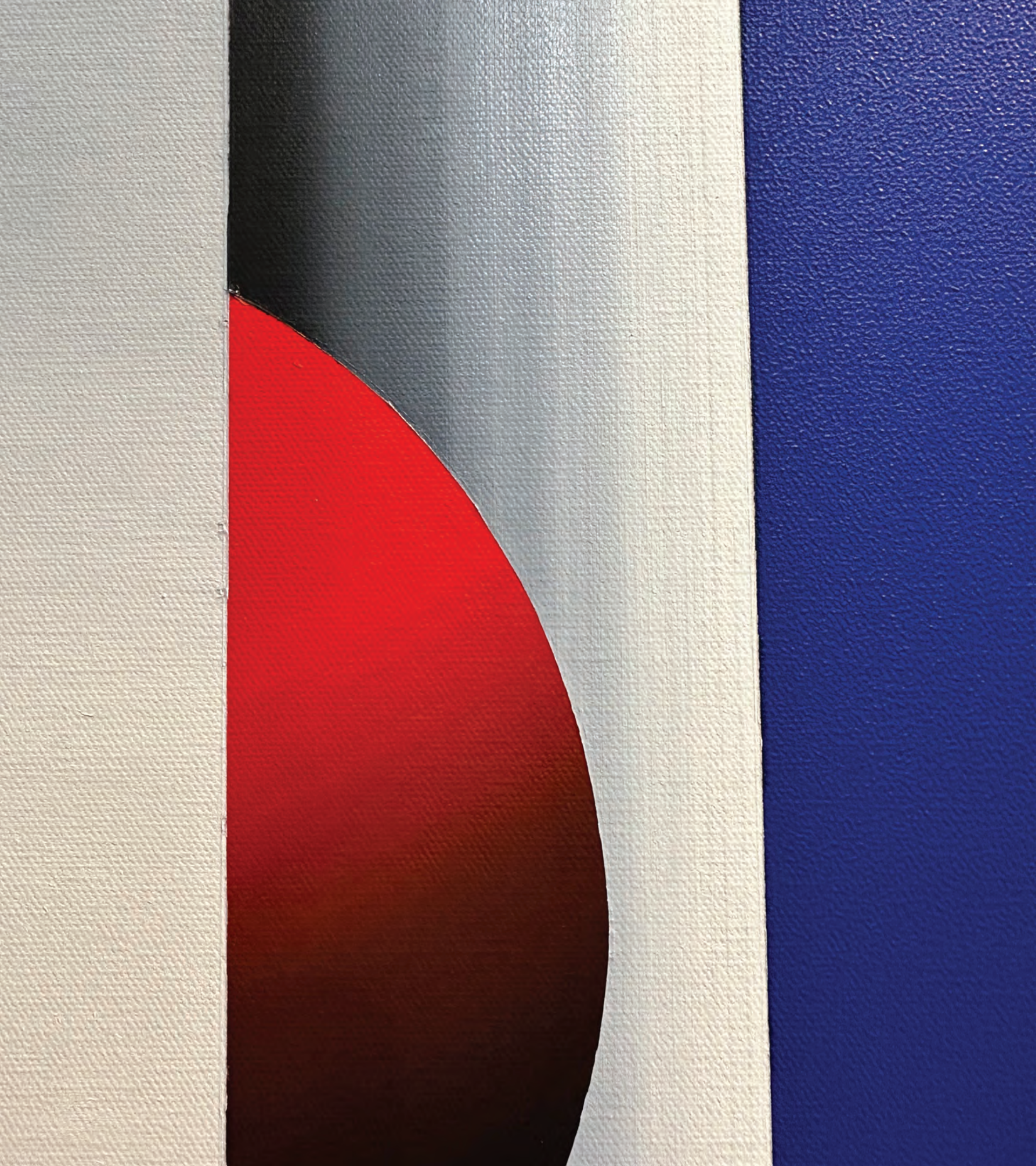
filter in later."<sup>9</sup> Openness is a rare and challenging virtue and Ramirez demonstrates it in ceramic works such as the brilliantly red *Fuego Desnudo* (2017) (p. 76). The beauty, the tactile qualities, the reflective shine are all present as they are in the paintings and drawings. Portals to the increasingly rare pleasures of deeply satisfying aesthetic experience.

■ **Lynne Warren was a long-time curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, where she focused on that city's artists and unique art history.**

## ■ ENDNOTES

- 1 A slippery term but for the purposes of this essay a viewer's ability to perceive, identify, interpret, and finally confidently relate to—in appreciation or disregard—a work of art without having read someone else's (including the artist's) instructions on how to think about or approach it.
- 2 Franz Joseph Haydn, Austrian composer of the Classical period, 1732–1809; Charles Gounod, French opera composer, 1818–1893; Morton Feldman, American composer associated with experimental 20th-century music, 1926–1987. The "seven words" are not actually words but phrases (utterances) and the work relies more on Hayden's 1786 Good Friday commission for the Cádiz Cathedral, Spain, and Gounod's choral "The Seven Last Words" of 1855 than on the canonical utterances (which can be found in a helpful Wikipedia article: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayings\\_of\\_Jesus\\_on\\_the\\_cross#](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sayings_of_Jesus_on_the_cross#)).
- 3 Dan Ramirez, statement, "Vertical Thoughts (On De-Scribing the Seven Last Words of Christ)" 2023, in *Vertical Thoughts*, p. 31.
- 4 Richard Shiff, "A Minimalist Romance" in *Certainty and Doubt, Paintings by Dan Ramirez*. Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison (Madison, WI), 2017, p. 9.
- 5 Dennis Adrian, "Dan Ramirez: A Critical Survey of Form and Content," in *Dan Ramirez: Works 1972-1979*, The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, 1979.
- 6 Mary Jane Jacob, et al, *Selections from the Dennis Adrian Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 1982, pp. 33-34.
- 7 Including articles and catalog essays by Dennis Adrian, Robert Glauber, and more recent pieces by Buzz Spector, and Richard Shiff.
- 8 "Notes from the Bridge," *Images for Human Conduct*, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 1987, p. 3.
- 9 Interview with the artist, April 26, 2023.







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# SCRIBING AND ASCRIBING BY BUZZ SPECTOR

Over the 40-plus years of my personal friendship, and artistic affiliation, with Dan Ramirez, there are a few constants in his studio practice I can share here. Dan brings patience and control to whatever materials he handles in the production of his art. Whether applying washes of paint to fields of raw canvas (or, more recently, unvarnished wood) mixing iron oxide or other particulates into his oil and acrylic pigments, or drawing line-upon-line of graphite on paper or museum board, Dan attends to process with unwavering focus. This marshalling of attentiveness, physical effort, and distinctive proportions are what we see when scanning the surfaces of the finished work.

The shift in Dan's choice of printmaking techniques, from traditional intaglio to digital production methods, also shows his care in manifesting tonalities, depths, and *trompe l'oeil* effects. For a very long time, Dan eschewed overt gesturing as an aspect of his compositions. The effects he wants his art to convey don't include demonstrations of adeptness or virtuosity as ends in themselves, although the stamina it would take to duplicate his artistic methods isn't commonplace.

Unseen, but no less important, is a constant argument my friend has with himself over the relation his heritage of Catholicism has to the visual aesthetic of Minimalism with which he is widely associated. My writing here is instigated, in part, by my having read a social media post<sup>1</sup> Dan shared in March 2020. He begins with "‘Truth and Reality,’ along with my upbringing as a Catholic, is a theme that has filtered throughout most of my life as a painter..." Dan goes on to describe Minimalism's "unyielding perspective" on art's function as one of manifesting, through material fashioning, a visual order paralleling a form of thought. Dan offers a cogent summary of an internal conflict with the concept of Faith that drives his art:

"Phenomenology and its relationship to Epistemology often conflates the challenge that language exerts on... how one articulates with words what is. What we say and how we say it often... falls short, from the standpoint of some truth or perception of truth (absolute or otherwise), ironically rendering what underscores that which works of art, especially abstract art, lend to experience per se; the relationship between certainty and doubt; especially as to how that challenges one's sense of the function of Faith..."<sup>2</sup>



Morton Feldman | *Rothko Chapel*  
Album Cover | Ca. 1971  
Copyright ©Columbia Odyssey

Dan gives the title, *Vertical Thoughts: Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross* (pp. 27-30) to the modest—in numbers although not in aspiration—selection of paintings, digital prints, and one work in oil, papyrus collage, and graphite on panel. The titular reference is to Morton Feldman, a major figure in 20th century music and art, whose oeuvre includes the suite of five *Vertical Thoughts* compositions he wrote in 1963. Feldman was friends with a number of key abstract artists, including Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, and Mark Rothko. Feldman's 1971 composition, *Rothko Chapel*, for soprano, alto, choir, percussion, celesta, and viola, was commissioned by the Menil Foundation, which asked for a musical equivalent for the 14 Rothko paintings installed in the ecumenical chapel designed by Philip Johnson.

*Rothko Chapel* is discussed in Ryan Dohoney's 2019 book, *Saving Abstraction: Morton Feldman, the de Menils, and the Rothko Chapel*. Dan is responsive to Dohoney's reflections on the place of religion in late modernism



and on the equivalence between compositional practices in music and painterly techniques in abstract painting. Indeed, he made a gift of this book to me as I began researching this essay. Dohoney cites contemporaneous praise offered to Feldman, from composer Joan LaBarbara, for his having created “a sonic equivalent to the feeling of that place.”<sup>3</sup> A comparable belief in the dialectical relationship of music and abstract art has occupied Dan for many years. His first major print cycle, in 1981, *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus*, the subject of a solo exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago, takes its title from Olivier Messiaen’s 1944 piano suite, and since then references to Messiaen’s music can be seen in many of Dan’s paintings, drawings, and prints.



Dan Ramirez | *Contemplation of the Father*, from *Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus: An Homage to Olivier Messiaen* | 22.5" x 29.9375" | 1980  
Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago

The ideas of musical/artistic equivalencies that charged Dan’s thinking about Messiaen are raised anew in his consideration of Feldman’s music and writings. Dohoney quotes Jonathan Bernard’s assessment that Feldman “creatively reworked concepts from modernist painting—including surface and all-over technique—by means of his compositional practice.”<sup>4</sup> Just as we can hear the grain of a voice or a sonic texture in music, we can see granularity or viscosity in paint or pencil surfaces.

In the 2022-23 suite, *Vertical Thoughts: Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross*, the artist has applied graphite scoring, which he characterizes as “scribing,” to the seven digital images on paper. Each begins with highlighted images, both of materials—papyrus and wood—that have long association to writing or art making, and computer-generated bands of light—tonal shifts between dark and light—that float within and against fields of matte inkjet blackness. The Biblical titular reference in Dan’s suite is both theological and musical, referring to the Gospels but also to western musical compositions bearing the same title, such as Joseph Haydn’s 1786 oratorio, *The Seven Last Words of Our Saviour on the Cross*. The suite has been dedicated as an homage to Franz Joseph Haydn, Charles Gounod and Morton Feldman.

In earlier ages, the recording of statements and actions was the duty of scribes. We know the roster of prophets, royalty, alchemists, and

judges through their words as much as their built monuments and fashioned things. Every document from the millennia preceding typesetting, to which we have access today, is a transcript from the (largely) anonymous hands of scribes. In contemporary times, the role of the scribe continues, although the means of so doing have drastically changed. In this era of recording devices, transcription is less the means to preserving lines of text than of clearing away the static of the spoken—or encoded—that threatens the efficacy of subsequent reading.

Transcription carries with it the responsibility for exactitude, but it is not, in itself, an interpretive act. The medieval monk, copying pages from the Bible, was not supposed to change the text previously imagined, and subsequently written, by another. However, the act of scribing still had its effects on the psyche of the copyist. Whatever the Psalm being copied, the scribe was best prepared to perform flawlessly only after absorbing the sacred words, the spiritual lessons, imparted through that text, so the orientation of thought was thoroughly incorporated into the communal purposes being served by the copying.

#### **What of scribing not obligated to the reiteration of a text?**

In July 2018 I visited Dan’s Chicago studio. On this occasion, he was excited to show me a sheet of papyrus



Dan Ramirez study:  
Graphite layered onto papyrus

he'd recently obtained. On it he'd been making layer upon layer of graphite strokes until the center of the sheet of plant stalks was filled with a black ovoid "cloud." Papyrus, first made in pharaonic Egypt, is essentially the oldest form of paper, dating back at least 5,000 years. In virtually all of Dan's previous work using graphite, the lines he drew were bound by the edges of museum board panels to which the pencil strokes had been applied. On the papyrus, however, there was no structural boundary. Instead, the ends of individual strokes remained visible, each one then constituting a line with more affiliation to textuality than pure texture.

On that day in 2018 Dan had not yet characterized his process as "scribing," but the cloud of graphite on the papyrus sheet was the epitome of *avant la lettre*. Unbounded, Dan's drawn lines gained properties of mood

and tone that were occluded in prior works whose graphite incising was stopped at the edge of the panel. The collaged and drawn-upon papyrus in Dan's oil on panel, *El Sufrimiento (The Suffering)*, 2022-23 (p. 35), is a vestige of that graphite cloud.

Dan's scribing is unreadable, but that is not a failure of copying letterforms. Rather, his stacks of graphite scoring are more closely related to asemic writing. "Asemic" means text without syntax, words without definitions, or letters from impossible, or at least unfamiliar, alphabets. Asemic writing employs the conventional armatures of textuality, such as the line and the column, but at a very unconventional distance from the conventions of alphabets and words. Unreadable writing—not merely bad prose—offers readers unknown letterforms, or letters we recognize but in unknown order such that what's present remains apart from our semantic and syntactical toolkits.

What's left of writing, then, in Dan's scribing? He describes the visual effect he has in mind as "vertically stacked graphite sheets of light."<sup>5</sup>

This is certainly a material and phenomenological attribute of the painstaking process by which they are made, but viewers who are always also readers will see that process as both durational and illuminatory. Like the scribes of the past, re-embodying texts letter by letter, Dan executes his stacks line by line. The calling of the scribe is one of preparation before, and execution during, this re-embodying. We read the labor of the letter within the habitations of its words. If no readable words are deciphered in what's been scribed, we still have the memory of reading as a guide to the artist's manifest illumination.

■  
Buzz Spector is an artist, writer, and art editor of *december* magazine. He attended graduate school with Dan Ramirez at the University of Chicago, and they've been friends ever since.

## ■ ENDNOTES

- 1 Ramirez, Dan. "While waiting for a completed commission to dry..." Facebook. March 14, 2020.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Dohoney, Ryan. *Saving Abstraction: Morton Feldman, the de Menils and the Rothko Chapel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 1.
- 4 Ibid., p. 13.
- 5 Ramirez, Dan. Artist statement, "Vertical Thoughts (On De-Scribing the Seven Last Words of Christ)" 2023, in *Vertical Thoughts*, p. 31.

**How the title for the series Q.E.T. –  
Aletheia: El pájaro (The bird)  
came about.**

A painting simply *is*, and what that *is* resides in the work in ways that the polysemic nature of language, that which we use to get some sense of our perceptions, cannot stabilize. Instead, language facilitates our intuition, that unique mediating process between interpretation and doubt, between feeling and emotions, driving the infinite manifestations of perception that challenge certainty.

The *Aletheia: El pájaro* series of five paintings began with my ongoing interest in exploring how time, space, and light function in my work. I explored how these elements could reveal themselves both as the formal qualities that they possess, and as something more, whatever that might be.

The paintings began with my interest in a piece of chamber music entitled *Quartet for the End of Time (Q.E.T.)*, by the French classical composer of religious music Olivier Messiaen: a stunning and beautifully sublime piece that explores the capability of music to convey the composer's deepest feelings about the relationship of time to the eternal and the divine.

My focus was to entertain freely subjective notions of what each might mean to *me* at a given moment. It was this combination and conflation of thought, feeling, and intuition that suggested a beginning. In effect, the recognition of *Aletheia*, a process of *disclosure*, comes after the fact. And because there is no stable characterization or understanding through language of what is taking place simultaneous to the act of painting, the *disclosure* is ongoing.

Eventually, the work began to suggest clear varnishes and tapered edges that could decipher layers of light and space unfolding in ways that challenged the substrate—the basswood panel—and its relationship as a *physical* object in space versus the *illusion* of pictorial space. I began to see a correlation as to how this could mimic or metaphorize the experience of a time-based medium, like the quartet.

As the work progressed, the folding segments within the picture plane brought me back to the quartet's first movement, *Liturge de Cristal*, a musical moment that is centered around the figure of a blackbird. Birds

and birdsong are a major component in much of Messiaen's music, and especially so in this movement.

The resulting image and subject evoked in my mind one of my favorite poems, *El pájaro* (The bird), written by the Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz, with its resonance regarding time, space, and the relationship of death to the eternal:

***The bird***

*A silence of air, light, and sky.*

*In this transparent silence*

*day was resting:*

*the transparency of space*

*was silence's transparency.*

*Motionless light of the sky*

*was soothing*

*the growth of the grass.*

*Small things of earth, among*

*the stones,*

*under identical light, were stones.*

*Time sated itself in the minute.*

*And in an absorbed stillness*

*Noonday consumed itself.*

*And a bird sang, slender arrow.*

*The sky shivered a wounded*

*silver breast,*

*the leaves moved,*

*and grass awoke.*

*And I knew that death was an arrow*

*Let fly from an unknown hand*

*And in the flicker of an eye we die.*

Dan Ramirez | 2023

**ALETHEIA: EL PÁJARO (THE BIRD)**

Oil | Clear Acrylic Varnish | Birchwood Panel  
72" x 48" | 2018

Octavio Paz Early Poems 1935-1955, Translated  
by Muriel Rukeyser and others, p. 6.



## Q.E.T.: EL PÁJARO I

Oil | Acrylic | Basswood Panel  
24" x 18" | 2018





## Q.E.T.: EL PÁJARO II

Oil | Acrylic | Basswood Panel  
24" x 18" | 2018





## Q.E.T.: EL PÁJARO III

Oil | Basswood Panel  
24" x 18" | 2018

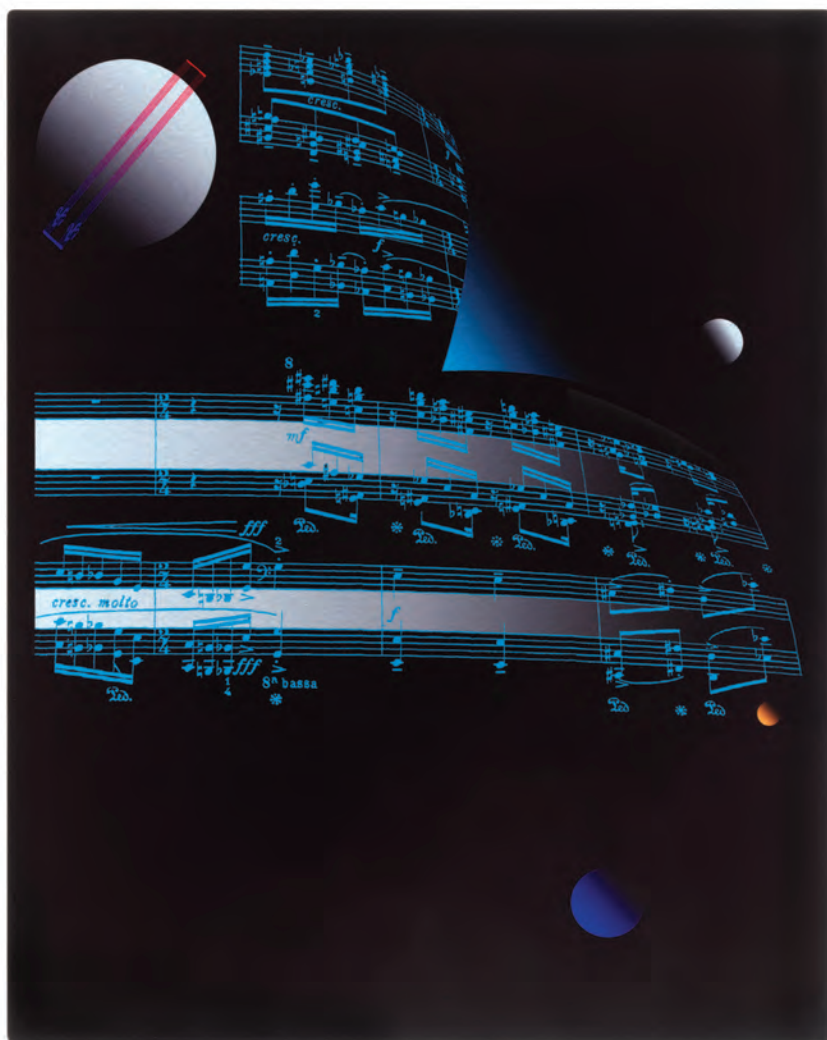


## Q.E.T.: EL PÁJARO IV

Oil | Clear Acrylic Varnish | Basswood Panel  
24" x 18" | 2018  
Collection of Anne Finkelman







**ALETHEIA AND THE COSMOS: AN HOMAGE TO  
OLIVIER MESSIAEN AND HIS "VISIONS OF THE AMEN."**

Digital Print on Aluminum

59" x 59" overall | 14" x 11" each | 2016-17

Detail above



II. Amen des étoiles,  
de la planète à l'anneau

A musical score for a piece titled "II. Amen des étoiles, de la planète à l'anneau". The score is presented on several staves. A prominent vertical red bar is positioned on the left side of the score. A blue planet with a ring system is visible in the lower right quadrant of the page.

A musical score featuring a blue planet with a ring system and a red star. The score is arranged in multiple staves, with the planet and star serving as visual elements.

A musical score with a blue planet and a red star. The score is presented in a grid-like format with multiple staves. The planet and star are positioned in the lower right area.

A musical score featuring a red star and a blue planet. The score is arranged in multiple staves, with the star and planet serving as visual elements.

A musical score with a blue planet and a red star. The score is presented in a grid-like format with multiple staves. The planet and star are positioned in the lower right area.

A musical score featuring a blue planet and a red star. The score is arranged in multiple staves, with the planet and star serving as visual elements.

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## *Proem*

*As I score each page, cutting into the flow of each fiber,  
I lay these lines to the surface of meaning.*

## *Scribing the Seven Last Words*

*As I arpeggiate this stacking of lead,  
Pizzicato and arco conjoined,  
Retinal vibrations yield a motion held fast.*

*Now a soundboard of fusion,  
Layers and breadth,  
Darkness reflects these lines that will last.*

*An Homage to Franz Joseph Haydn and Charles Gounod*

*&  
Morton Feldman*



**VERTICAL THOUGHTS**  
**(On De-Scribing the Seven Last**  
**Words of Christ)**

In 1979, I was introduced to the religious music of French composer Olivier Messiaen, and in particular his suite of 20 piano compositions, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant Jesus*, and more recently *The Quartet for the End of Time* and *Visions de L'Amen*. Today, I continue a journey that has come to symbolize numerous phases of my creative output.

This latest exploration, my "scribing" of the Seven Last Words of Christ, one of many mysteries that underscores the essence of Christian religious faith and Roman Catholicism in particular, takes a path like many of my attempts that precede it. But this venture carries the added expression of scored graphite strokes, combined with computer-generated imagery and traditional drawing. Here I explore the historical rendering of words and language from an abstract frame of expression: vertically stacked graphite sheets of light.

I relinquish any literal deciphering of a word, thought, or recording of any historical or religious event ordinarily assigned to a scribe. Mine is a progression by way of metaphor that functions simultaneously as an abstraction of the writing/scribing process, and a visual experience that offers a way of thinking and feeling beyond words to touch on universal human suffering and the ineffable spiritual dimension of suffering that personifies the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Dan Ramirez | 2023





**VERTICAL THOUGHTS:  
MEDITATIONS ON THE SEVEN LAST WORDS  
OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS**

Digital Image | Graphite | Paper  
Seven individually framed images  
Image 16" x 12" | Frame 23" x 19" | 2021-23  
Collection of Mark and Judy Bednar





II



III



IV



V



VI



VII

## PLANK

Oil | Acrylic | Collage | Oak  
18" x 7.25" | 2020







## EL SUFRIMIENTO (THE SUFFERING)

Oil | Papyrus Paper Collage | Graphite | Panel  
40" x 30" | 2022-23

Above: Study for *El Sufrimiento* | 2018-20









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# INTERVIEW: RICHARD SHIFF AND DAN RAMIREZ

**RICHARD SHIFF** - Dan, I'll have some questions to ask about how you construct the new works, including your thoughts about surfaces and spaces, and about images created digitally and images created by hand.

But let me start by observing the irony of your very skillful use of language to express the ultimate failing of language. Ordinary prose language, with its regulated syntax, fails to reach the emotional nuances that we associate with both musical composition and visual art. You adjust the familiar term "describing" to read as "de-scribing." It's a bit of poetry in itself—distorting or stretching the play of language to introduce novel considerations, if not feelings. I take your sense of scribing to allude to the work of scribes, whose task was to record an existing text or an oral pronouncement, as if to generate, within the protocols of transcription, the perfect description of the original. A change in appearance of a text on a page produced by a copyist would not necessarily introduce a flaw in the transcription.

You, however, refer not to describing but to de-scribing. Here the prefix "de-" negates what scribing accomplishes, undoing its function, deactivating it. Your own "scribing" with horizontal bars of graphite de-scribes the allusion to a textual order that a stack of drawn horizontals generates because of its resemblance to lines of type. Your graphite lines reflect light—they illuminate—without need of language to translate a material order (graphite) into an order with spiritual potential (illuminating light).

Yet Christianity is often regarded as a religion of the Word, a faith that privileges verbal communication in sacred texts over other forms of presentation. Music and visual art often "illustrate" the Word, as in *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, to which you refer. It all makes me think of Barnett Newman—an artist always of great interest to you—and his *Stations of the Cross*, to which he gave the alternative title of the last words: *Lema Sabachtani*—why? Why did you forsake me? The words express the passion, the suffering. Or do they? Newman liked to say that he enjoyed talking about painting because it was something about which you could never say anything definitive or even meaningful.

Well, this has been a long-winded way to ask you whether you think you succeed in your art to go beyond what a writer achieves in a philosophical or theological text. You've been inspired by Wittgenstein and many others. Is this because the writers whom you prefer actually do what you do—somehow use language to go beyond language, just as you may use light and color to go beyond language? Perhaps your use of de-scribing goes beyond language, too.

**DAN RAMIREZ** - I first approached trying to state something in writing about how I was **not** trying to literally decipher or interpret what Christ may have said on the cross. My first impulse upon attempting the subject of *Word*, in the context of what may or may not have been said on the cross, was that I didn't trust interpretations that were made by so many over such long periods of time, something that has always troubled me about the Bible and the sacredness of the "Word." So, when I chose to "de-Scribe" I was trying to play on the idea of on the one hand describing what my thinking and process was attempting to accomplish, and at the same time take away scribing as thought of traditionally. Instead, I wanted to find a visual element—since I am a visual artist—that could work abstractly, as a material and process that visually mimics writing but presents a presence that could function metaphorically with the light that graphite is capable of reflecting,

and to “de” scribe the scribing, that is, take it away, erase its connotations in ways that a traditional scribe’s responsibility is expected to be.

Perhaps what a visual artist experiences beyond writers of a philosophical text or theological text is that the visual artist, especially one who works in the abstract, is in a position of exploration, whereby there isn’t a specific or precise goal toward an explanation. There is no end point to be reached within a given context. Newman liked to say that he enjoyed talking about painting because you could never **say** anything meaningful, as he fully recognized the limitations of language to convey areas of the ineffable, not unlike Wittgenstein, who professed his limitations in much the same way. In that manner, I do feel I succeed because of the nature of an ambiguity in abstract visual elements that refuse to be tied down to only one interpretation. And so, honor the process and materials that are the essence of their being.

**RS** - No wonder, then, that you like Wittgenstein. The early Wittgenstein points to what lies beyond the reach of the tautological system of language and the later Wittgenstein dwells on the ambiguities and byways that any exercise of language introduces. It’s as if Wittgenstein wants to derive from the

exercise of language what you want to derive from the exercise of abstraction in visual art. Abstraction is, as you say, an inherently exploratory mode because its practice has no definitive rules to guide it. It discovers its rules as it moves along, and if it keeps moving, it probably abandons the rules it just acknowledged.

I think of the theoretical argument fashionable during the late 20th century, that no text can be truly original because all linguistic expression is prefigured in the language itself. If anyone tried to make an analogous argument for visual art—well, some postmodernists did during the 1980s—it never really caught on, never gained much credibility. Painters like yourself continued to introduce visual imagery that didn’t seem to have been prefigured in the long history of pictorial imagery.

You seem to be creating your own foundation of faith by exploring spirituality by way of its material manifestations. You develop a visual art that relates base materiality to abstract geometry and onward to the dematerializing qualities of light. Do you see yourself as someone reaching for a higher truth or principle as you invent new ways of manipulating the elements of visual art? If both certainty and doubt factor into your attitude toward the function of the artist, will doubt always dominate? Certainty seems to mark the end of an exploration—not something you would want, I would think. Yet a sense of certainty might be needed to proceed from one stage of a work to the next (like being certain about the visual effect that a certain process will produce—a matter of

trusting your own experience). When do you feel certainty while working on a composition? When do you feel doubt?

**DR** - Oh, I have never felt certainty! And the doubt is a manifestation of that experience. I came to appreciate that when I first attempted to try and achieve some understanding of my Catholic upbringing and faith when I first posed the idea of the relationship to body and soul in the very first paintings I did as an undergraduate. I needed a subject and that was what I chose to explore. It was much later, in my graduate years at The University of Chicago where I stumbled upon Wittgenstein, that I found my imagination and thinking process widen. During that phase of my life and over the many years since then, I came to appreciate one of Wittgenstein’s most memorable ideas when he stated that it’s “not *how* the world is, but that it *is*, is the mystery.” And that “it is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but that it *exists*.” (Italics mine.) I have come to appreciate that neither certainty nor doubt is the driving force for me. The driving factor is **wonder!** It’s the wonder that has driven my imagination and my need to explore. And abstraction, especially Geometric Abstraction, seems to be what I am

best suited for. Whatever painting skills I happen to have seem best suited for creating lines, light, and space.

But it isn't only painting or the visual arts that my "tools" are limited to. My background in music, especially jazz, has been a tremendous asset. The use of the imagination, along with having a strong knowledge of the instrument (in my case the double bass), sets up the environment for "play." Not only the execution of jazz music through the physical facility and knowledge of music itself, but the freedom to simply **play**, to respond instantaneously, like a child in the sandbox! There is a great feeling, a spiritual feeling in that for me. Music has allowed me to explore the process of thinking and feeling simultaneously. And that seems so natural to me. Intuition, the willingness to trust one's choices at the very moment of "play" and let the results speak for itself, that is freedom, that is play. À la John Coltrane in jazz and Feldman in music that has yet to really be defined.

But you have also touched on something that has begun to come into play that began over 20 years ago and is crucial to where I am today. You said that I seem to be creating my own foundation of faith by exploring spirituality by way of its material manifestations. This is true. And much of that began with my working at the Fundació Josep Llorens Artigas and I found myself surrounded by clay and a spirit of artmaking that felt very comfortable. And it has begun to manifest itself in curious ways, especially in the exposed wood that has become such an important move for me in my work.

You ask if I am reaching for a higher truth or principle as I invent new ways of manipulating the elements of art. Ultimately, it's the elements of art, its **language**, that must be nurtured, explored. Without that there can only be the same old answers to what are likely the same old questions. But art as well as life must be dragged along and manipulated in some way to grow. As uncomfortable as that might seem to anyone who finds comfort in being able to anticipate what the outcome of their efforts might be, it is nevertheless crucial to understand that just as we hopefully grow as artists and human beings, that the language accommodates that process. Growth to me means **new** questions! So yes, there is a principle to be nourished. *Art itself*. I don't know if that's a higher truth, but I don't see how one can function as an artist without tending to what allows it, the art, to grow with it. For me that is a principled approach. And hopefully that's understood as my having the same responsibility as anyone who wishes to express and or communicate with any chosen language.

**RS** - You've always emphasized the connections between playing double bass in a jazz group and painting and drawing in the studio. What you take from the sounds of your instrument are the vibrations that you feel so immediately, which may be just as important as the more extended

lines of rhythm that develop through a period of playing the instrument. Thinking of sound as vibration seems to connect the musical performance to the generation of a composition in the studio, where you're so attentive to the feel of making marks on a resistant surface. The mark-making is itself exploratory, no matter how many times you do it, because the "vibratory" contact of, say, graphite against wood panel generates an immediacy of feeling. The feeling is always fresh. You don't allow your scribing process to become a tedious routine. I imagine that if it were to become routine, you would cease doing it.

So I can see the attraction of working in clay, which is such a malleable, touch-oriented material that seems to transform itself continually while in the artist's hands. The creative gesture belongs as much to the material itself as to the artist. The experience of clay would only cause you to become that much more attentive to the resistance of fibers in wood, or in the papyrus that now has both material and historical interest for you, or even in relatively smooth standard types of paper. Each material has its vibratory character, which contributes to the experience of creating a composition of elements.

You refer to working in the mode of geometric abstraction. It seems suited to your expressive needs. This fact causes me to realize that the insertion of a representational or mimetic element into your creative process



would only introduce a needless layer of mediation between your experience of the feel of materials and the look of a completed composition. Rather than enriching your art, a representational factor would make it less direct than it now is. I think also of how your color is just color. It doesn't create a naturalistic atmosphere. It can allude to something—just as your red, black, and white can allude to Goya—but a sensory appreciation of the work has nothing to do with the historical connection. Your use of color is more like Newman, less like Rothko. Newman gave his works suggestive titles, often with biblical references, and he was not averse to discussing spirituality. But he believed that whatever transcendent quality his art might generate would be independent of any verbal discourse that he or anyone else might apply to the work as commentary.

I suppose that Newman might have taken your reading of Wittgenstein to heart, stressing that the issue was not how works of art came to be but that they existed in the first place. When you use materials to create art, each instance must come as something of a surprise, because the power of creation seems to be beyond the artist who does the creating. It's as if a work of art talks back to its own maker or guides the process of its own making, knowing where it wants to go.

DR - Yes, yes, and yes!

Scribing on different surfaces certainly produces a variety of tactile resonance. When bowing on the double bass, or arco as it is referred to, the feeling is

quite different in transference of energy and feel to the body as I embrace the instrument. Arpeggiating pizzicato with my fingers offers quite another sensory experience. And so yes, when I am scribing, I can easily relate, given the speed, pressure, and the material/substrate, parallel experiences to each of the methods I mentioned about the double bass. The difference of course is the result. One is sound in real time. The other is light in real time.

Working in clay at the Fundació Josep Llorens Artigas in Gallifa, Spain, I had a similar resonance, but in so many different ways. First, since it was—and in many ways still is—a new medium, I was disenchanted that I could not control the formal elements, especially edges, that I tried to transfer over from painting. This, as it turned out, was a good thing. The loss of control and being at the mercy of the fire often resulted in ways that were much more interesting than I had planned. Joan Gardy Artigas and his son Isao would always tease me with a pixie-eyed look, knowing full well that surprises were endemic to the medium. Joanet (how he is informally addressed at the Fundació) eventually convinced me to “trust the fire!!!” But it was more than just the image-oriented side of the process. It was the physical weight, the presence of holding this sometimes cumbersome

object in my hands, that affected me. It made me want to invest more time in trying to understand the material itself and what it had to offer beyond ceramics. It was a moment when I decided to think of my interest over the years about paintings as objects in a new way. And as more experiences down the road with the medium came about, such as my experience with applying illusionistic folds to the image, like the circular ceramic piece *Fuego Desnudo* (p. 76), and to some earlier ceramics I tried where I left the clay exposed in certain areas, without any color, it was during that time that my excitement about new possibilities arose. This is a medium that indeed decides where it wants to go after it's put into the kiln. But it speaks back numerous possibilities at the same time.

One of the primary effects of the material, its clayness and its objectness, has led me to many of the new interests and discoveries I'm dealing with, underscored by the spirit with which Joanet, Isao and everyone at the Fundació nurture me along.

Returning to the area of music which you example in your question, let me try and see if I can connect/conflate the experience with clay and materiality.

You and I had a conversation some years back regarding how I was attempting to work with space and light. I mentioned John Coltrane and what has come to be known as his “sheets of sound,” brought about by way of a method of arpeggiating rapidly and intuitively, varied sequences of notes within a given chord arrangement that for Coltrane

signaled a whole new adventure into his spiritual endeavors. I've been thinking more about that.

The point, at that time, was not how Coltrane's "sheets" can be illustrated but how the notion of an unfolding spatial layer on a frontal plane that has the potential to move not only from front to back, can also suggest a left to right parameter of the substrate, its edges. How can it take on an integrative role with the painterly elements that are positioned to leave the frontal plane and suggest a space outside of its origin as a painted object. I've begun to move on that possibility with how I treat the red "circle/planet" in both *Trane's Planes* (p. 51) and *Kosmik Trane* (p. 53). In *Trane's Planes*, it sneaks out of a background space "within" an unfolding frontal plane but still retains its position within the substrate, the canvas. But in *Kosmik Trane*, I shove the red circle/planet to the right edge of the basswood panel trying to establish that in fact there is no "edge". Instead, that the substrate/object resides in a real physical space, my studio wall, and I am attempting to conflate visually and conceptually the real space and the implied space. To get beyond the "theater" of my physical engagement with space and light on the painted plane in my studio and onto an imaginative, yet real space outside of the thing itself. This is what allows me

to entertain the notion of my interest in the wonder of the cosmos, the universe, its spatial wonder, and the wonder of all the materiality that exists within it! *Moonplay for Felix: Elixer* (p. 57), *Aletheia: El Pájaro* (p. 15), and the series *Q.E.T. El Pájaro* (pp. 17, 19, 21, 23) would be other examples of that.

Mondrian had a similar experience when at a point-in-time when he hung one of his square abstract paintings on its tip and experienced how the linear elements shot out and off the image! I've read that it was a moment that over time pushed him toward understanding that experience as a "plastic expression of expansion." It is my understanding that it was that experience of expansion that allowed him to allude to "expansion" as "cosmic rhythm" that was the origin of all spatial experience."

This "cosmic rhythm" parallels, as I see it, Coltrane's "sheets of sound" as an arpeggiating sequence of notes intuited and hurled into real time, and musical time and space, beyond the chordal boundary, the formal parameters as written music, and expands sound to a place that was previously unknown through the knowledge of his medium, and his substrate, the saxophone. Just as Feldman with his vertical ascending of sound using the element of diminished auditory tones expands his music. These go beyond only being metaphorical and instead relate directly to real time, like the cosmos and the universe which is continually expanding. I'm trying to move beyond the traditional way of understanding "plastic" as a determinate into a world of artmaking. I've come to a point in these recent paintings, especially those

exposing the substrates material, its woodenness, to real light with varnishes that reflect actual light.

There are times when I felt that I was painting a theater scene that I was occupying simultaneous with the space I was "performing" in but trying to extend beyond the physical and intellectual moment I was experiencing, I was transfixed by a kind of Necker-cube conundrum that wasn't a conundrum at all, not a plastic space but an intuited "elastic" space. I was in touch with stretching out there!

As I began to think about what I said regarding the new experience of space and the physical object in it, the substrate, I remembered something that you and I talked about a few years back. It has to do with my take at that time on Newman's assertion regarding space and place. I can see where I've moved closer to his side of things. Here is an excerpt from the longer statement I made then:

Of the myriad of ideas as to expressing myself and exploring the content of my work over the years, one of the interests I have held onto, because I have always felt it significant in a way that I didn't understand years ago, is the issue of how the formal element of "space," illusionistic and physical, played into my thinking. And how I understood Newman's characterization of the difference for him between

“space” and “place” back then. It seemed to me then that “place” was a more substantial idea as to how one functions not only physically before a painting but psychically, that is, emotionally. I think have a clearer understanding of how my art over the years has helped clarify for me why and what it is that is different between Newman’s idea of “place” and my idea of “place.” I have surmised above, by way of his essay “The Sublime is Now,” that there is a sense of the “absolute” in Newman’s feeling toward place. And I have tried to argue that I see his “place” in terms of a transcendent need to be felt as a moment when the viewer experiences one of his paintings as an “I am Here,” moment, and that there is a connection there to how he thinks similarly about the sublime. Newman’s “presence” as it relates to “place” is not a series of historical events that unfold over time. It seems instead to be a here and now condition of being and not the being-in-the-world being that Heidegger refers to because there is no unfolding as an interaction with the being-in-the-world at large world. Instead, it is an instantaneous moment of realization of self as the viewer views the painting.

**RS** - Dan, given these ruminations over space and what I might call dimensionality—especially your sense of space that moves, that expands, that encompasses—I think of the fact

that you often paint the sides of panels that you’ve constructed to project to a significant degree from the wall. So the painting has at least three colored surfaces and becomes a volume rather than a plane. When you photograph these works, you present three views—from the left, straight on, and from the right. To complicate matters further, you often use “slicing” along the edges—the imposition of a black border that doesn’t adhere to the plane of the given rectangular format. Your frontal planes become two planes, fundamentally ambiguous with respect to their orientation within the space of the viewer.

As you say, the introduction of reflective elements, whether varnished areas of wood panel or thickened deposits of graphite, allows light to become an active feature within an arrangement of visual effects, as if someone analyzing one of your works would need to include luminosity as a constituent quality along with color, line, and shape. Matte white is very different from pearlescent white. I may be influenced by the unavoidable presence of sci-fi imagery in our culture as I observe this, but your paintings—with their skews, warps, curls, twists, and folds of implied space—connote a cosmic order. All dimensions come into play. And, of course, some of your titles connote this aspect: *Kosmik Trane* (p. 53); *Kosmik Thoth I* (p. 59).

So let me ask you to comment on where there is illusion and where there is reality. I’ll cite just one detail within one example. In *Lux Vixtoria* (p. 55), what do you expect a viewer to experience,

given all the spatial ambiguities? There are two potentially curled edges (if I accept the illusion of a paper-thin surface placed atop another paper-thin surface). One of these curls or roll-overs or wrap-arounds interferes with the appearance of a circular disk, colored to present the illusion of light reflected from a spherical surface. We both like to think of these disks that appear in your paintings as “planets.” They seem to float within implied spaces that cause them to appear diminutive—specks within a cosmos. But, given the coloring, black-and-white on one side of the curl and black-and-blue on the other side, are we dealing with two planets or one? Or one in transformation? Or one with sides of day and night? Is “planet” just shorthand for the orbs that appear in your paintings, which have no representational reference? Or does representation become unavoidable, even in an art as geometrically abstract as yours?

Sometimes it seems that all space must be a perceptual abstraction and the only reality is what you can touch close-at-hand. Making a painting is taking the abstraction that constitutes the space that we know (which is the space we imagine) and making it real by converting it to tactile experience.

**DR** - In the context of my work and my world I think of illusion as a visual experience and intellectual experience simultaneously. I’ll paraphrase Donald Judd whom you quote in *Sensuous Thoughts* about knowing or



understanding his work in that there is no division between thought and feeling. It happens all at once. For example, when you ask what I expect a viewer to experience, my first thought is that my interest is not in how a viewer is going to “understand” what is unfolding on the picture plane or object that I am engaged in. I am caught up solely in what I am experiencing as I chase an initial thought and feeling I have at whatever moment I am applying color, line or whatever. It is true that I’m aware, at some point, though mostly after the work is complete, that a viewer outside of myself will see the work and have some thought or feeling of their own, and that is one of the reasons I enjoy painting. I leave the viewer an opportunity to become engaged with their own feelings and thoughts. To become one with the experience. To enter a place where presence is shared and felt as an experience all their own. To grow along with me in ways that offer the freedom to be.

*Lux Vixtoria* is an interesting example as regards both feeling—psychological and/or tactile—and thinking. It offers an experience of painterly illusion and actual reflected light. Both conflate in such a way—I now have come to consider reflected light as a formal element among all the traditional elements—as to complete a real experience in real space. Not only illusionistic painterly space, because actual light partakes in real time. I say real time because light that is present will fluctuate over time. And

this becomes, for me, a formal element that exudes real time, not the static time normally associated with a two-dimensional painting.

You also imply in your question an importance to tactility. I have found myself oftentimes wanting to touch the different surface areas of *Lux Vixtoria*. Not unlike times when I want to touch a sculpture. Like maybe a Brancusi. And this reminds me of some of the experiences I have had with viewers and my work using graphite. There have been times when a viewer feels the need to touch the graphite area. I have had to rescribe those areas on a few occasions. I find that interesting as regards reflective light. It is almost the opposite in that the darkness of the graphite invites touching because of the tactile quality provided by the light it seems to emit. Coming out of the darkness, so to speak. I also like the metaphorical possibility of “seeing”—thought and feeling—as a play on knowledge, or “knowing” as Judd might say.

As to the “orbs” or “planets,” I think interpretation becomes unavoidable in the context provided. When I think of the “order of the cosmos” where I often find myself in wonder as to how “order” can be established, I find that unanswerable, unless one wants to think of Genesis and the Fire, air, earth, water, etc., ad infinitum. Sounds more like chaos to me... which can be a good thing when it comes to “knowing” art. Best to wonder. It keeps the juices flowing!

A final thought on reality:

My comment as to wanting to touch areas of *Lux Vixtoria* has much to do with realizing the **woodiness** of what has become a substrate as well. The material itself, as wood, allows for a realization of it being a **thing** in the world and the universe as well as a painterly depiction of the cosmos/ universe. It is like what I felt holding a piece of clay and the potential it had because of its malleable properties. Whereas the wood isn’t malleable in the same way as clay, and the clay was very matte and dull, the ceramic medium and process of glazing offered similar possibilities. I am only beginning to touch on that. The *Saturnarius* pieces (p. 75, 77), *Fuego Desnudo* (p. 76), and *For Carol* (p. 74) would be an example of that potential. Hopefully more of that will develop when I visit Artigas again.

**RS** - I think that your incorporation of reflectivity as an active element of the work does something of what your use of painted edges does—it brings the artificiality of the work of art back into the world of real objects in navigable, tactile space (not just visual, illusory space). You stress the variable, mobile quality of reflected light, which adds to the three spatial dimensions the dimension of time (change and duration). So if the painted edges

make your two-dimensional works three-dimensional, then your use of reflectivity adds a fourth dimension. Your exploration expands accordingly. If your ceramic works also operate in four dimensions, they do so in an unusually immersive way, given the intimate relation of the hand to the clay.

I think of how it's common for painters to step back from their work and view it from a distance even as they're in the midst of the process of making. They need a global view since the optical component of the work remains dominant. But with clay, it may be that, from beginning to end, the tactile component is dominant. Just a thought.

**DR** - That's an interesting thought, Richard. As much as I find great pleasure in tying my experience of painting and the thing itself to a reality such as space and the universe, especially the cosmic which entails all the elements that compose the material things on earth, I never thought about the fourth dimension. And I think your observation that how I treat the sides as well as the edges, and then factor in reflected light, is on to something. I find it especially interesting because a direction like that follows a wonder of mine that I've been chasing for a long time: How does a painting function to its fullest potential? I've always confronted the question of what **is** a painting? And why do we call it a painting? Is it only because the material of paint is applied to it? That would be like saying a car is only a car because it has wheels. But where does it take you? How does it get you there? Perhaps reaching a fourth dimension can finally eliminate having

to use words to try and answer those kinds of questions. Bringing this thing we call a painting into a context like the cosmos, and the universe, using both painterly illusion and reality, would be like extracting clay from the earth, glazing it, holding it in one's hands and realizing that ultimately, it's all about the material nature of reality. We walk in it. We hold it. We look at it. We feel it. We just alter it a bit. The basswood in *Lux Victoria* and any of the works that leave the wood exposed function in similar ways. I would include paintings I've done where the canvas is exposed as an additional step in that direction. But so far, those surfaces don't interact with light like the wood pieces. They offer up something else. And I think what they offer up is how to keep penetrating deeper into what a painting is.

**RS** - I agree that your earlier works with exposed canvas are analogous to the recent works with exposed wood. The comparison makes me realize that, of course, the exposed canvas also contributes to the play of light, though not as definitively as a varnished or glazed panel does. The exposed canvas calls attention to its materiality and it reflects light, but in a very diffuse and muted form. Sometimes an artist's later works reveal what his early works were about, although they were less assertive in how they performed. In retrospect, the early works seem to hint at what the later works accomplish.

**DR** - I agree. It prompted me to look at a statement I made a long time ago and put on my website:

...Not unlike the piecing together and reflecting on a family album, whereby one can go back and view a particular person, place, and time from the perspective of a contemporary situation, my work functions in a similar way. Many images I create in response to my present experience often loop back in time to earlier works that might correspond to the questions raised in the present. That "loop" can either reach back to a recent image or jump over many years to a painting that has revealed itself to me in new ways. There is no straight line.

And yes... the canvas does produce its own dialogue with light. It's very muted in tone. When I mentioned wanting to touch certain areas of *Lux Victoria*, I should have mentioned that I did not have the same response to its center section which is gradated but very matte in comparison to the exposed reflected wood. It's a nice contrast that throws the light into play dramatically because it absorbs rather than reflects light. It also brings the visual experience in the center into and through the picture plane. This emphasizes the outer areas and its objecthood.

**RS** - Given the direction that our conversation has taken, let me ask you to comment on a work that seems to me extra-complicated, or extra-inclusive, with respect to the way it relates several dimensions to each other and

several “grades” of materiality to each other. I’m thinking of *El Sufrimiento (The Suffering)* (p. 35). You have papyrus, graphite, and oil interacting with each other (and with the panel ground, tacitly). These interactions are not easy for perception to grasp. Your title probably alludes to the suffering of a martyr, but there is also suffering in the sense that one entity suffers the presence of another entity, which entails mutual response. If I put you into the position of analytical critic of your own work, how would you describe (or de-scribe, if you prefer) *The Suffering*?

**DR** - Oh, Oh! A critic I’m not! Especially of my own work. But I do see what you’re getting at. In fact, you’re choosing this work, and the reasons for doing so are legitimate as well as very perceptive. But this will take a twofold approach. I think this will also take us to one of those questions I raised earlier about my interest in how paintings function and why they may look as they do. Or in the very least, how I approach that when I work. Let me start by citing another of the statements I have on the artist statement page of my website. You may be familiar with it:

I have no objection to describing a painting—it’s blue, it’s eighteen feet long, it’s ten feet high, it has rabbit-skin glue, and so on. But it seems to me to insist on this alone can only lead to a doctrinaire position... What

I am saying is that my painting is physical and what I am saying also is that my painting is metaphysical. What I’m also saying is that my life is physical and that my life is also metaphysical.” ~ Barnett Newman

*El Sufrimiento* is indeed compiled, or composed, quite different from the other paintings. This was entirely intuitive, in materials and layout combined. I do bring in many of the components of light, lined edge-slicing, and painterly illusionistic light, as well as the light that graphite emits. But all in service to the papyrus material. It was the material that prompted the approach. The paper has its own torn edges. I see that as a visual (perhaps unsettling) dynamic as it relates to the edges of the panel, which are clean and sharp. And those papyrus edges can be altered to be made sharp should I find that an interesting interplay at a given moment. The illusionistic light and the light emitted by the graphite, both on the papyrus itself and the central area in the open space where the papyrus is cut out with sharp edges, also creates a spatial and visual dynamic that seems to compete with where things may be located in space. One seems to be on a frontal plane of the panel and the other on a separate element, the papyrus, floating in the space that the graphite in the central area is located. And the graphite scribing on the panel surface, which is quite rough in that area, lends a feeling of tactile scratching. Along with the rest, that gives me those additional layers of real and illusionistic “sheets of space” along with the painted light on the sides, and a tactile experience that I find to be a crucial element in exploring spatial congruities that allow

for a certain kind of conundrum—think Necker-cube! So yes, perception is more difficult because of these differences in application when compared to some of the other work, but this conundrum also lines up intellectually for me on a personal level. This is a subject about suffering and death, and “possible” resurrection that, given my struggles with truth and reality and my faith (and therein lies one of the metaphysical components that intuit my decisions as I compose, paint, and move things around), that necessitates the discomfort that resides in **looking** at it. These are decisions not unlike those that produced earlier works like *La Duquesa de Gallifa* or *La Duquesa: Vestido con Faja Roja (Dress with Red Sash)*. The literal comparison between those and *El Sufrimiento* would be that I saw the papyrus—as opposed to the white cloth and red sash and black hair as regards the Duchess of Alba—and its genesis as wood, in an analogous situation as the cross that Christ was crucified upon. My mind even intuited beyond that to pure language where I thought of the potential **materiality** of papyrus as a wood similar to the weight of the cross that Christ carried to Calvary. Not too far removed from how I thought about the weight of clay. I don’t know sometimes how I make these leaps, but I trust my intuition and leave it at that.

There is much more to the “story” of suffering that this painting was driven by. Should that interest you, I would be alright in conveying that to you.



**RS** - Dan, your responses are wonderfully self-reflective—they extend your studio experience into a writing experience, which is beyond mere description and the usual kind of analysis. Newman had a similar attitude toward writing. You allow *El Sufrimiento* to continue to live in your thoughts about it. So, yes, if you have more to say about this work, I think it's worth saying. The link between papyrus and wood is entirely logical and yet not obvious in the pictorial context. For me, the connection comes through the experience of fibrous surfaces, which have a very distinctive tactile quality. Oddly, when you create a stack of graphite bars, you give to the totality of the graphite area a fibrous character. You play the verticality of papyrus and wood panel against the horizontality of the graphite. The Cross, of course, is both vertical and horizontal.

**DR** - I will try. But what I can add will likely have less to do with the physical process than what initiated me to get to where I arrived at with that painting. And likely to take me the long way around to get to *El Sufrimiento*.

When I was asked to put together an exhibition for this year, I assumed I would use the main gallery as usual. But it turned out that a marvelous representational painter, Maria Tomasula, would occupy the main gallery. So, I had the option to try and

put together work only for the smaller gallery in the back—which is a nice sized space—or use the office gallery—which is smaller but brings in light from the street. I bring this up because by fiat it allowed me to look at my work in a way I had not been paying attention to. And what I realized was that I needed to use both spaces. I came to that realization on reflection that the earlier work, the series *Quartet for the End of Time*, *The Visions de L'Amen*, and *Vertical Thoughts: Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross* (pp. 27-30), including *El Sufrimiento*, were approaching darker subjects that internally I have been dealing with for a very long time. They reflect my concern with not only my faith but also my mortality, my dying. This has become more of an interest as I continue to age.

I realized that the newer work, my reflections on Coltrane especially, given his spiritual concerns, has been exploring what happens **after** I die? To my body, my consciousness, and the challenges to my faith as I continue to probe through my art today. It has become a very real experience. Not one that I dwell on, but certainly one that is real. And so, I have been trying to deal with that. Upon reflection it appears that the earlier work, but also including *El Sufrimiento* and the *Vertical Thoughts: Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross*, even though more recent, is in stark contrast to the newer work in terms of imagery and a more settled sense of myself. There is less anxiety in the newer work. As I see it, I've been engaged in romancing the cosmos as that final resting place. I find that thought to be very real and very fun. It is one of the manifestations of getting so close to

materials. The universe and the cosmos and all the scientific research that has been done in that area is something that has dominated my thinking and my feelings. À la Coltrane and his quest for the spiritual by finding new ways in his music to break out into the cosmos.

But let me jump to *El Sufrimiento*.

After I started, but had not yet completed the *Vertical Thoughts: Meditations on the Seven Last Words of Christ on the Cross*, there were moments, such as when I first introduced my wonderful friend Buzz Spector to the papyrus I was working on with graphite (he mentions this in his essay) that the actual material—the papyrus—started to suggest more than what I was getting from the digital images of the papyrus at that time. And so began the sense that at some point that papyrus was going to offer me something new. And so, it did: *El Sufrimiento*.

But it's how *El Sufrimiento* as a subject became important to me that you might find interesting. During the period when I was trying to get a feeling for just what it was I was feeling about that particular piece of papyrus, I read a book by the Irish author Colm Tóibín, *The Testament of Mary*. It's a wonderful read that treats Mary as a person, just like you and me. I won't

go into the details. Suffice to say it deals with reality. But at the end of the book, in the “Authors Note,” he mentioned something that went deep into me. And in my reading of it I felt he made an important separation between much of the mystical kind of reading about the Crucifixion—that’s the context in which Mary is treated in the book—and reality as we humans can conceive of it. He closes with an observation that I took as a perception about power, mystery and redemption that shook me. It is an observation about a painting he recalled while trying to make that point. Regarding Mary, he made a reference to a painting by Titian, *The Assumption*, 1516–18. Then went on to mention how 40 years later, Tintoretto made a painting of the Crucifixion, which hangs in a **secular** building, the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, in Venice. I’ll quote only the section that impacted me in such a way as to eventually paint *El Sufrimiento*. Speaking of the Tintoretto, he said, “...it is a long painting, and while the Crucifixion at the center is beautifully painted, it is the vast surround which began to interest me. I looked at the sense of *ordinary and chaotic life* going on, feeling what that day on Calvary might actually have been like before anyone knew what it would come to mean” (italics mine). Well, I looked at that painting too. And all I could think of was all the suffering that all those people in the painting had been experiencing during **their** lifetimes! What about them? There is so much suffering. Much of it brought on by us. Much of it brought on by belief systems, religious, political, and otherwise. I couldn’t stop thinking about how often I have heard, “How could

God let that happen?” My only rejoinder to that is that it has nothing to do with God. We often bring it on ourselves, or others do it for us. So, it’s a reality, in my thinking, that inspired me to want to somehow confront that. Not in some political way (I try never to bring politics into my work) or moral way (I abhor flagrant morality in art). But I was struck by the suffering depicted. I just wanted to be absorbed by my own belief as to what it means to be human and to make art. To make a painting. To be inspired. To care. And so... *El Sufrimiento*.

If this comes across as moralizing, I apologize. Please blame it on my lack of being able to articulate with words what I feel I express better visually.

**RS** - As humans, I think our responsibility to ourselves as well as to our communities is to remain as alive as possible while living. For an artist, whatever other form this responsibility takes, the course of action is to continue to explore the possibilities of art, as you are doing. Artists, writers, musicians never really retire. Academics sometimes retire from academic writing, but if they do, they usually turn to writing poetry or a novel. Although the term “suffer” usually connotes some kind of painful experience, in its essence it just refers to undergoing a condition or situation or state of being. I suppose that we suffer our own lives. Your positive attitude toward Being allows you to struggle to extract the deepest meaning or expression from your physical/sensory materials—the

deepest in relation to your experience of existence. So what amounts to a struggle and often a lot of frustration can also be a joy. Some viewers may sense tragedy in your art (the cosmos beyond our comprehension), and others may sense elation (a glimpse of a space and time beyond). I think that so much depends on attitude. Let’s just say that you have a healthy attitude toward life, death, and the art that you continue to create.

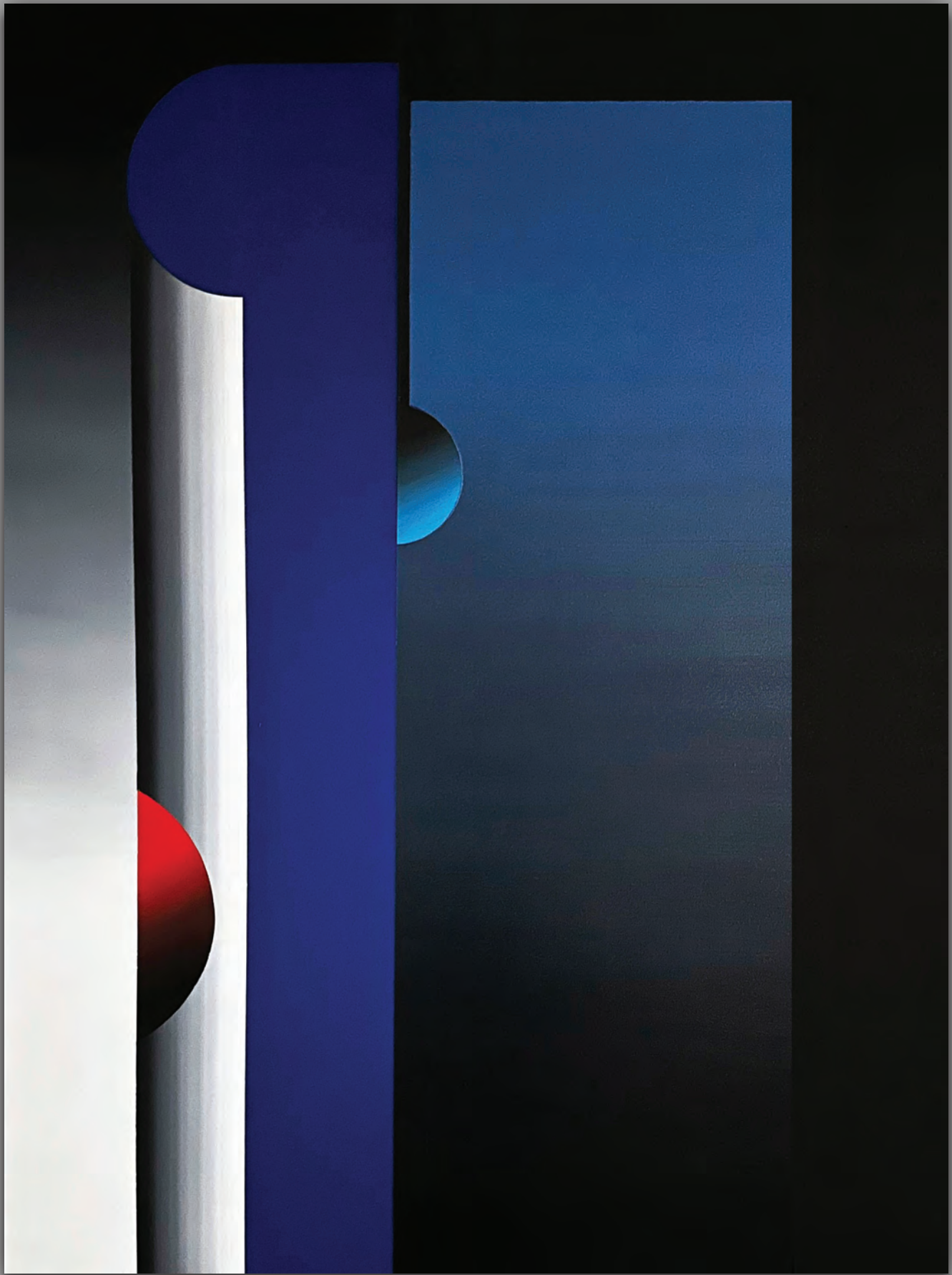
**DR** – It’s true that some will see the cosmos as an either-or-experience in the way you say. For me, I appreciate the reality that I cannot know one way or the other how things exist out there. And like making art, that is its joy. The **wonder**. The spiritual side of life and death. I find it especially joyful to know that in death one enters that very moment of creation all over again. I suppose under certain circumstances dying can indeed be an art experience.

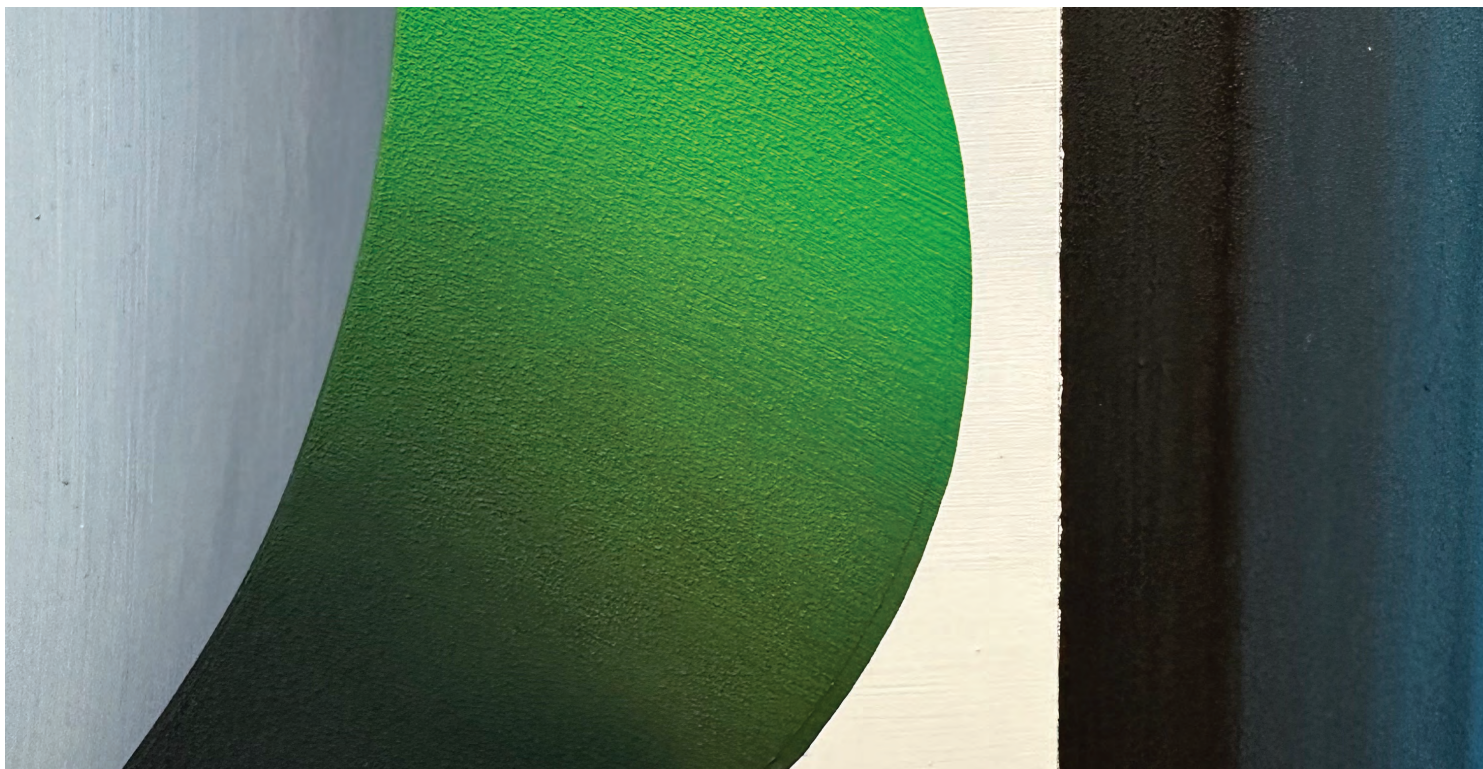
■  
Dr. Richard Shiff, Effie Marie Cain Regents Chair in Art, and Director, Center for the Study of Modernism at The University of Texas at Austin. Dr. Shiff has authored numerous books and critical essays. His most recent books include: *Sensuous Thoughts: Essays on the Work of Donald Judd*, 2020; *Jack Whitten: Cosmic Soul*, 2022, and *Writing After Art: Essays on Modern and Contemporary Artists*, 2023.

## TRANE'S PLANES

Oil | Acrylic | Canvas  
48" x 36" | 2023



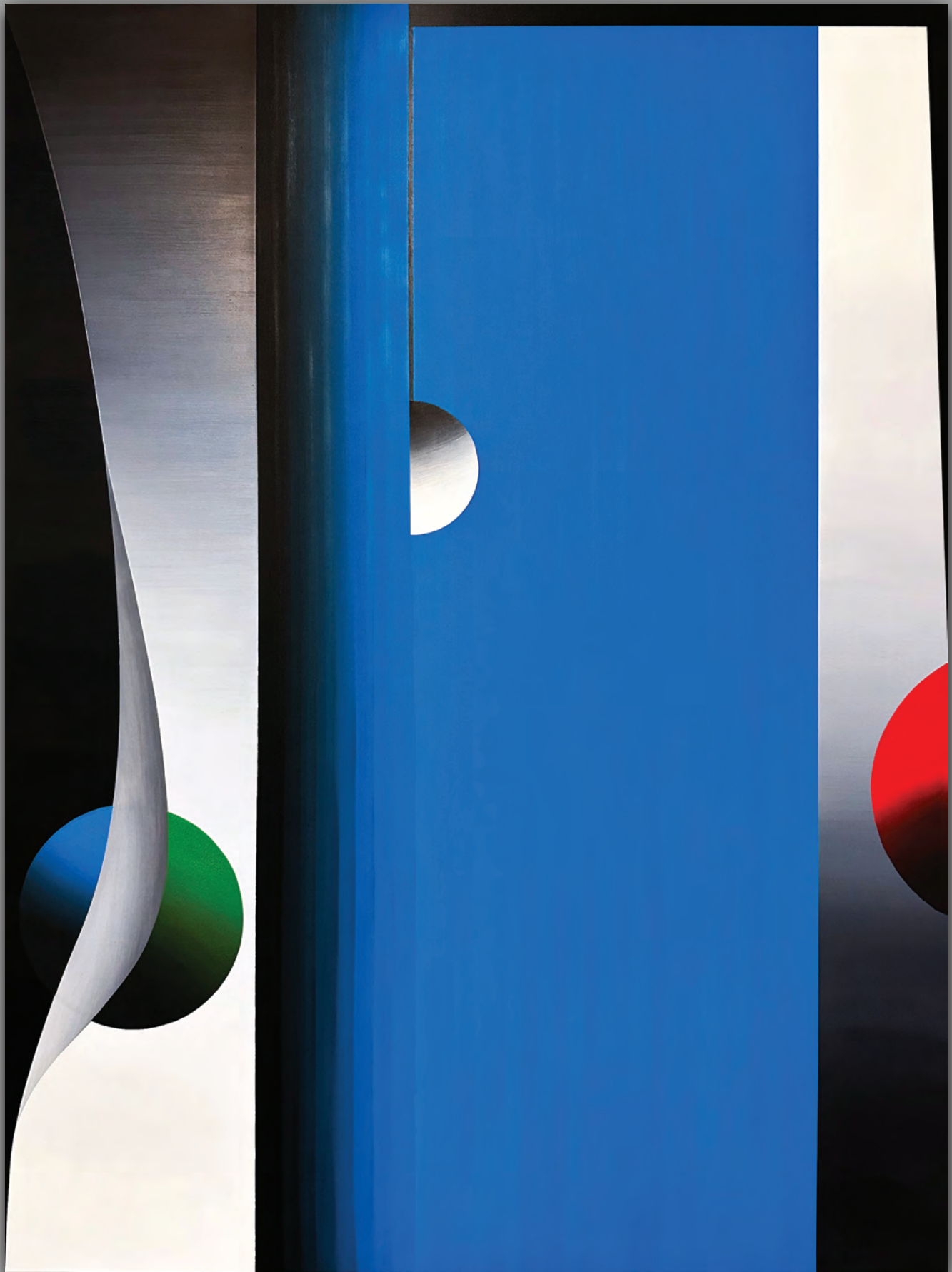




## KOSMIK TRANE

Oil | Acrylic | Panel  
48" x 36" | 2023 | Detail above







## LUX VIXTORIA

Oil | Varnishes | Birchwood Panel  
48" x 36" | 2023



## MOONPLAY FOR FELIX: ELIXER

Oil | Acrylic | Birchwood Panel

48" x 36" | 2020

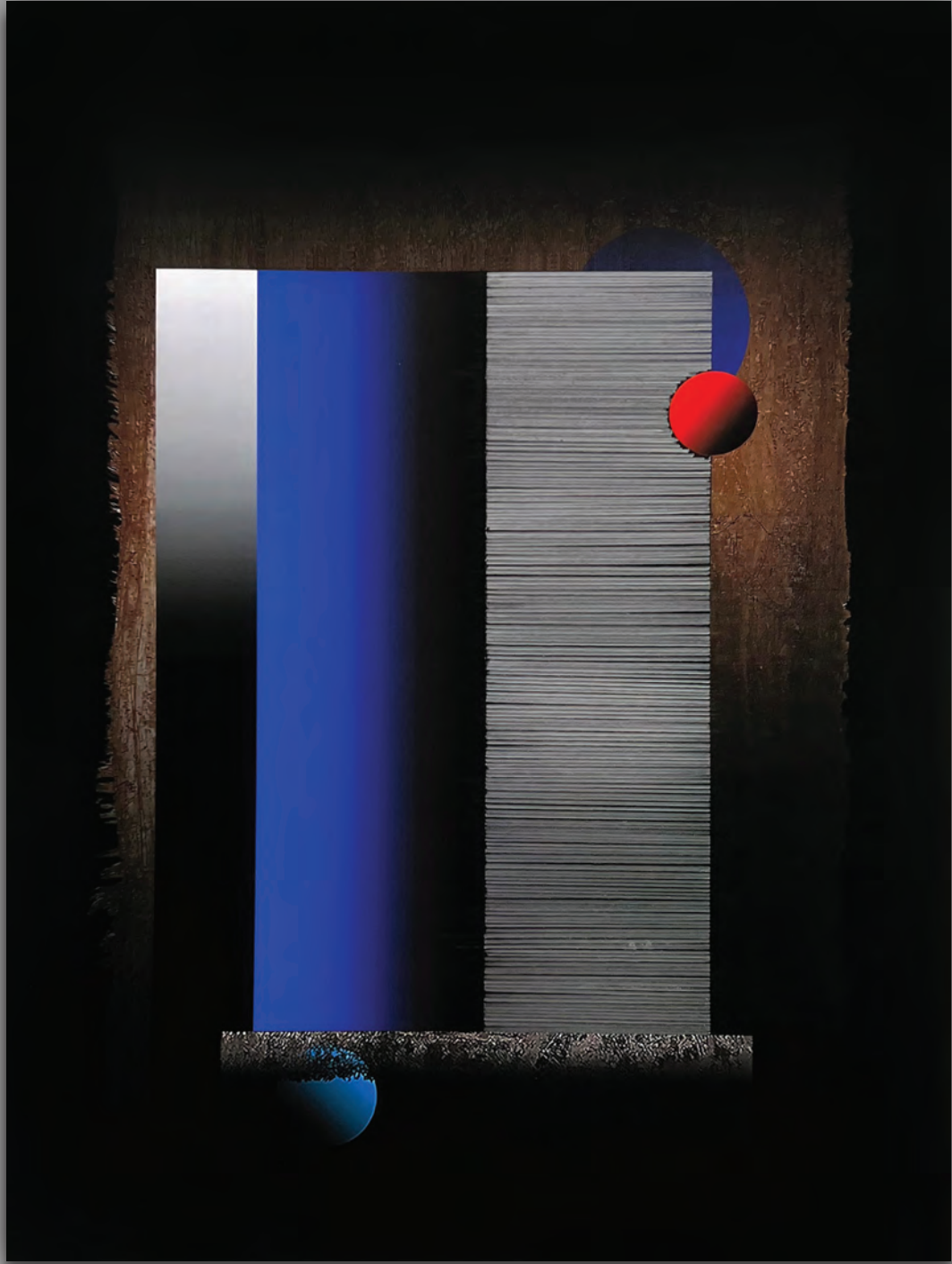
Collection of Felix Paul Bach-Ramirez





## KOSMIK THOTH I

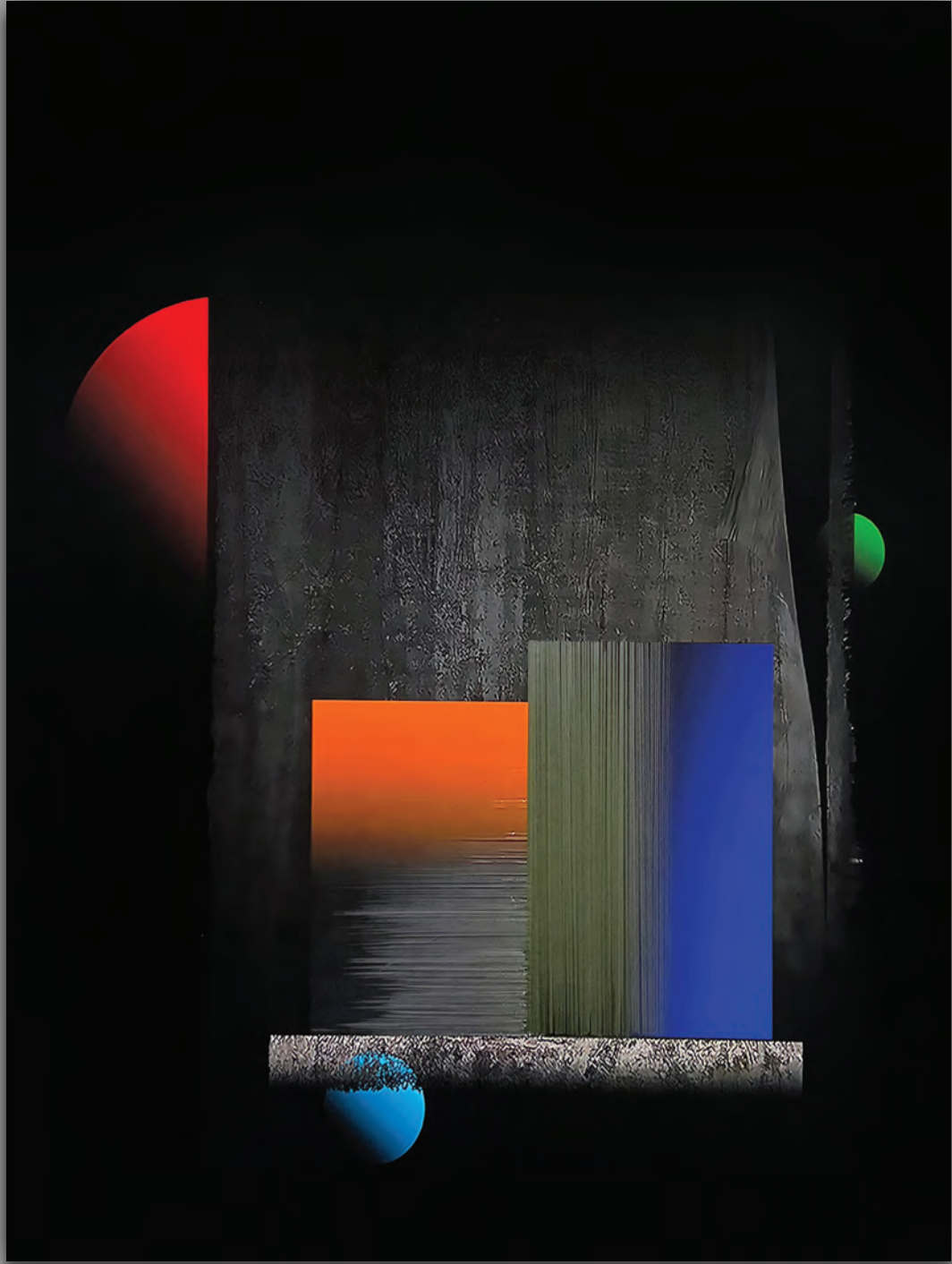
Papyrus Digital Image | Graphite | Paper  
16" x 12" | 2022





## KOSMIK THOTH II

Papyrus Digital Image | Graphite | Paper  
16" x 12" | 2022

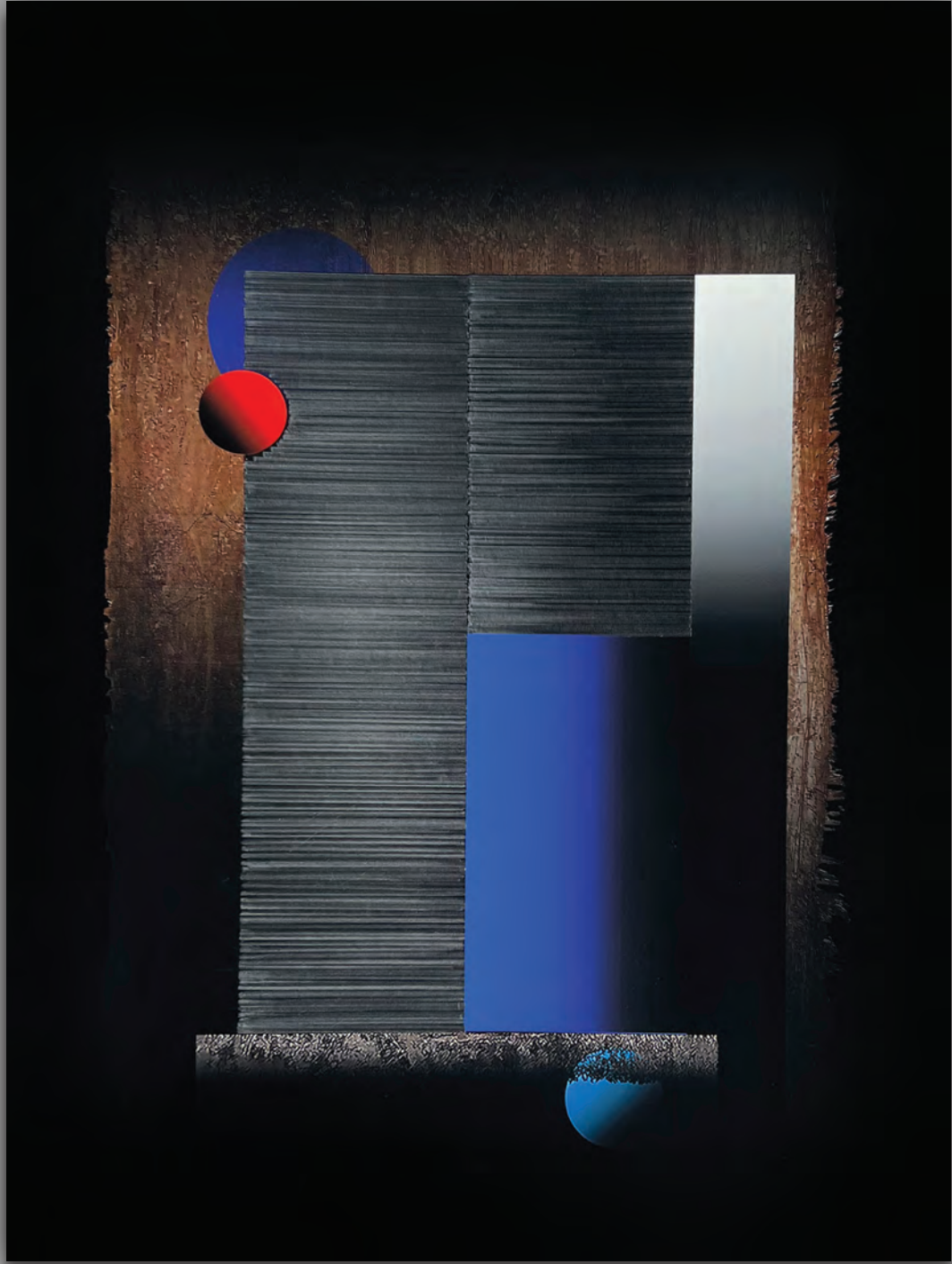




## KOSMIK THOTH III

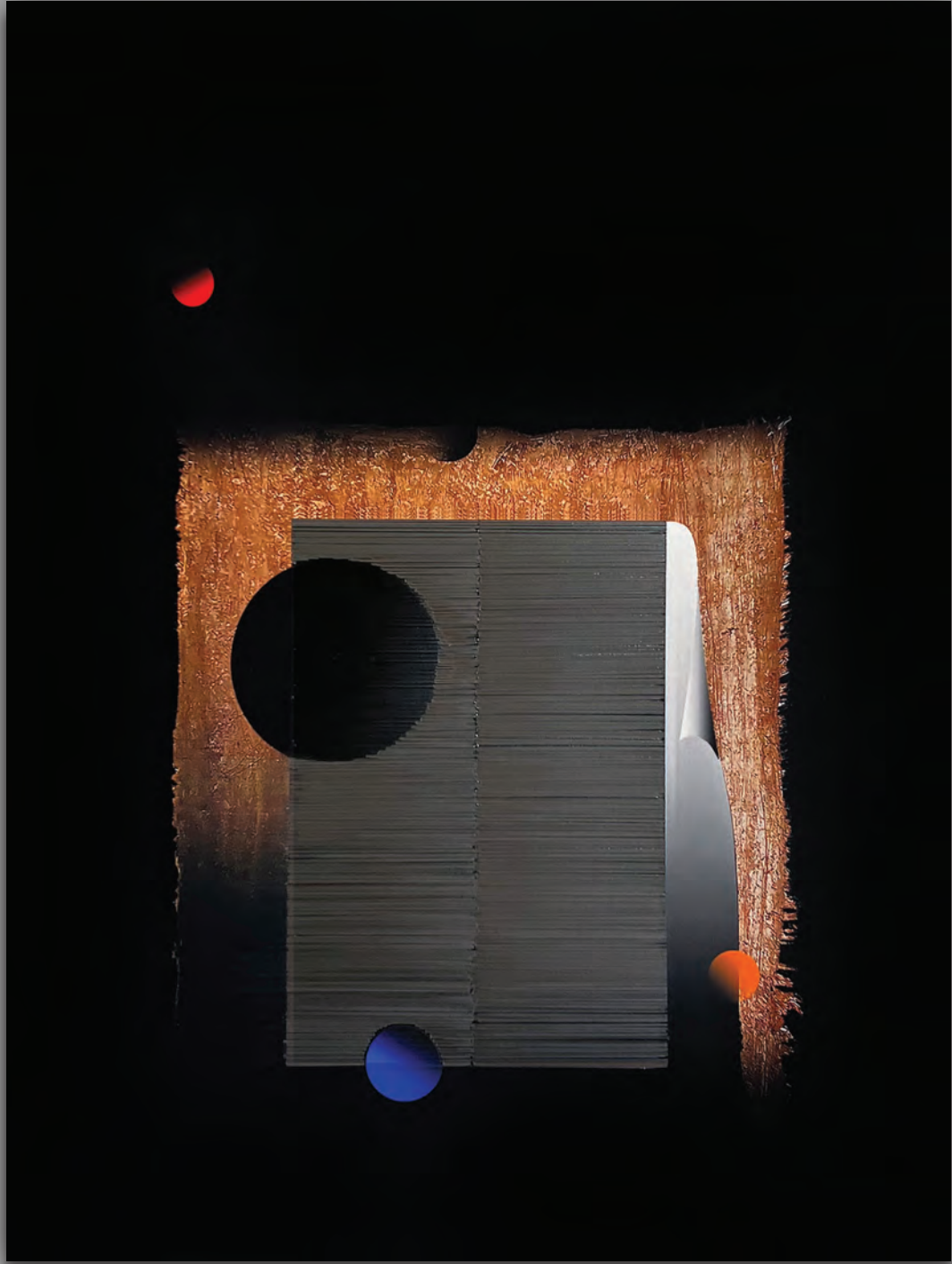
Papyrus Digital Image | Graphite | Paper  
16" x 12" | 2022 | Detail above





## KOSMIK THOTH IV

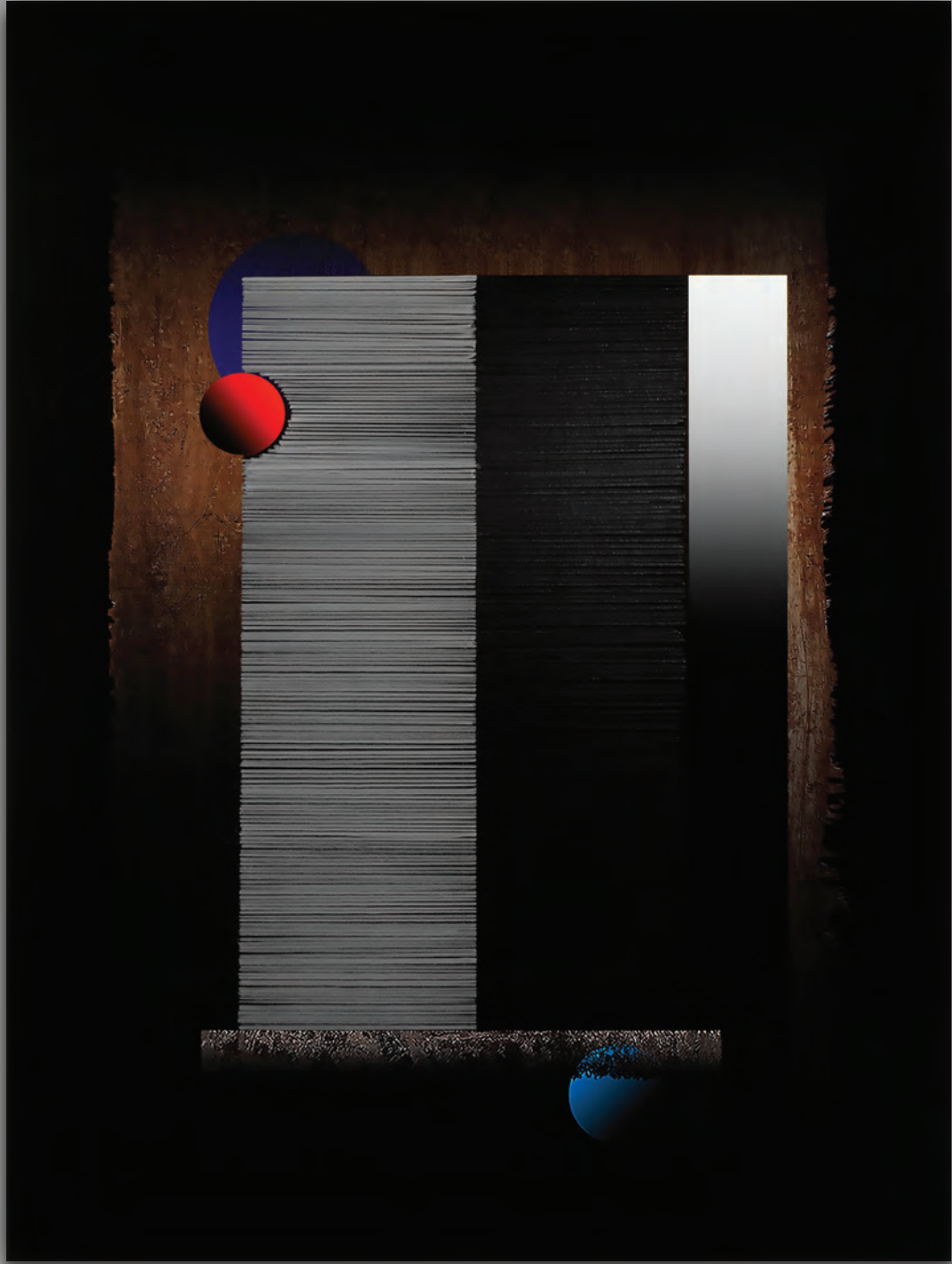
Papyrus Digital Image | Graphite | Paper  
16" x 12" | 2022





## KOSMIK THOTH V

Papyrus Digital Image | Graphite | Paper  
16" x 12" | 2022  
Collection of David and Heidi Ramirez



## BARIOLAGE I

Digital Collage | Ink | Gouche | Graphite | Paper  
12" x 19" | 2022







## BARIOLAGE II

Digital Collage | Ink | Gouche | Lumanence Pencil | Paper  
12" x 19" | 2022 | Detail above





# FUNDACIÓ PRIVADA-TALLERS JOSEP LLORENS ARTIGAS GALLIFA, SPAIN RESIDENCY



ISAO ▲



MAKO ARTIGAS ▲



▶  
JOAN GARDY ARTIGAS







## IN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

There are times in an artist's life and development when, if fortunate, circumstances present themselves in unexpectedly rich and rewarding ways. Such has been the case with my experience at the *Fundació Privada-Tallers Josep Llorens Artigas* over the last 20-plus years. In 2002, I began the first of numerous residencies where I met ceramicist, painter, and sculptor Joan Gardy Artigas, founder of the *Fundació* dedicated to his father, the renown Catalan ceramicist Josep Llorens Artigas. Along with his wife, artist Mako Artigas, ceramicist and textile designer, and their son, artist Isao, ceramicist, sculptor and painter, I was introduced to a world of artmaking, and creativity, coupled with a *Joie de vivre* sensibility that inspires much of the work in this exhibition. With its history stemming back to their affiliation with such luminaries as Picasso, Giacometti, Dufy, Miro, and others, the *Fundació Josep Llorens Artigas* continues to propel forward into contemporary times. And for me, it continues to nurture all the expectations I had as a young artist with an unquenchable imagination and fascination with the unknown, something that I still possess today! And for that they have my heartfelt gratitude.



Dan Ramirez | 2023



## FOR CAROL

Ceramic Glaze

4.375" x 4.375" | 2008

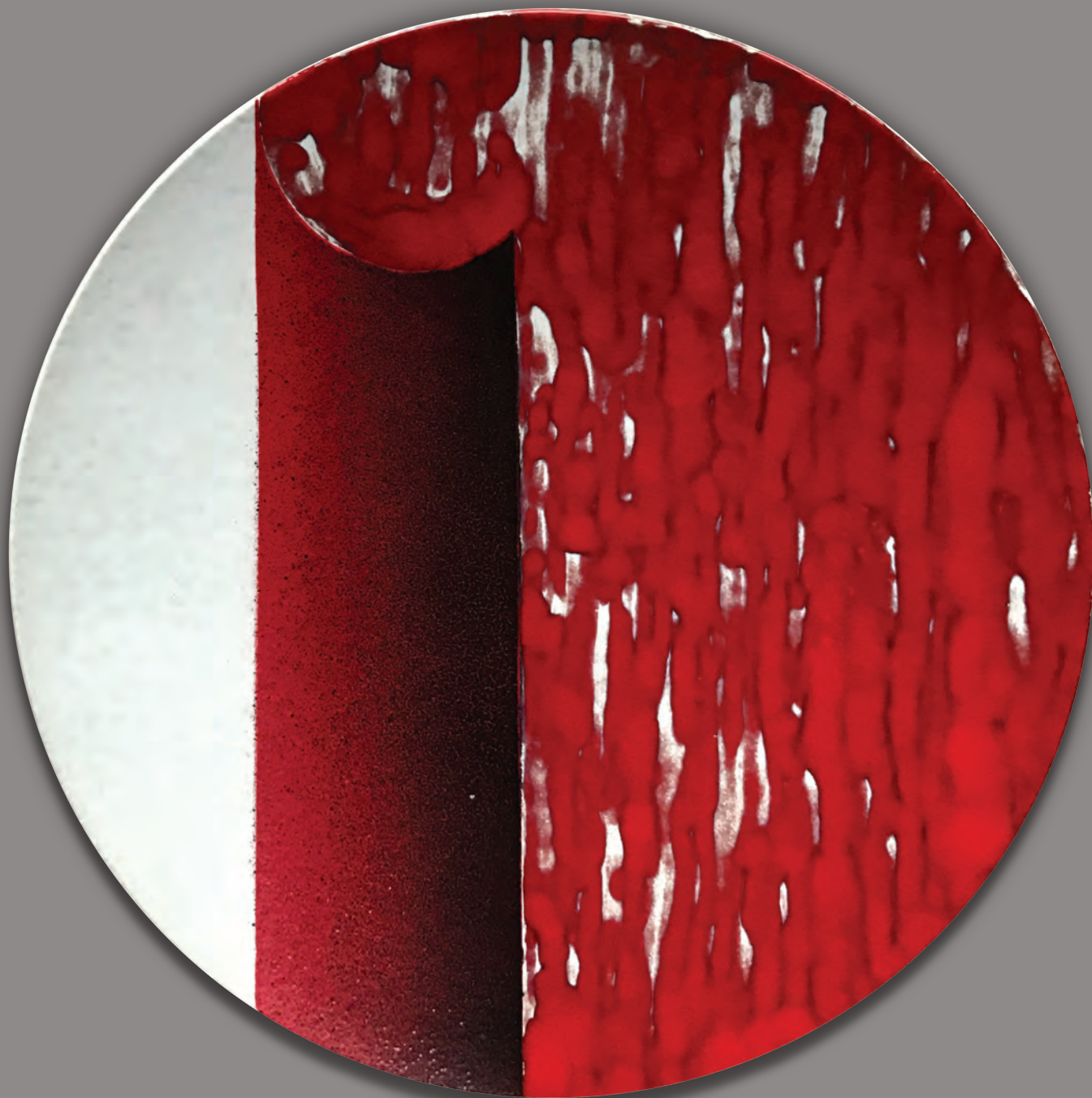
Collection of Carol Pylant





**SATUNARIUS I**

Ceramic Glaze  
12" x 9" | 2010



**FUEGO DESNUDO**

Ceramic Glaze  
12" diameter | 2017

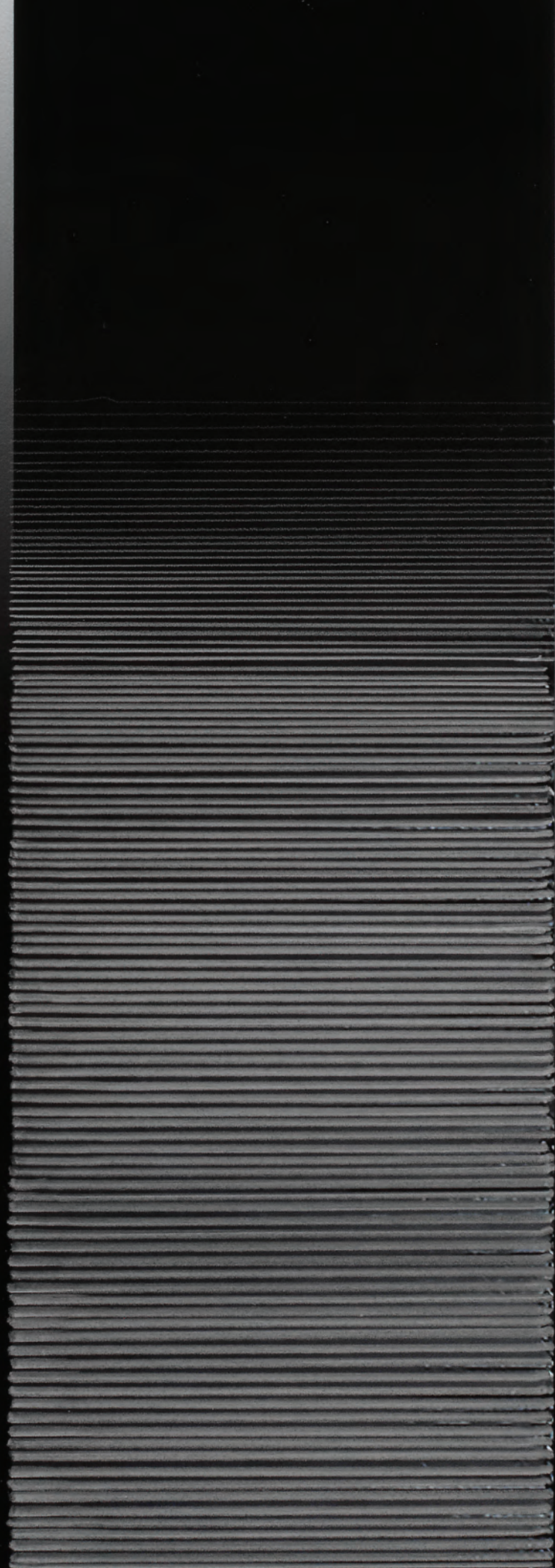




## SATUNARIUS II

Raw Ceramic with Glaze  
12" diameter | 2023







# CV: DAN RAMIREZ 1975-2023

## SELECT SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2023** Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Vertical Thoughts* | Catalog
- 2021-22** Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Sheets of Space/Finding Place*
- 2017-18** Chazen Museum, Madison, WI  
*Certainty and Doubt, Retrospective, 1975-2017* | Catalog
- 2016** National Museum of Mexican Art  
Chicago, IL
- 2014** Union League Club of Chicago  
Chicago, IL
- 2008** Alfedena Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2005** Museum of Contemporary Religious  
Art, St. Louis, MO
- 2003** Klein Art Works, Chicago, IL  
Printworks, Chicago, IL
- 1997** Roy Boyd Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 1992** Illinois Benedictine Monastery, IL  
*Twenty Contemplations on the Infant  
Jesus: An Homage to Olivier Messiaen*
- 1990** Dart Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 1984-85** Illinois State Museum, Springfield, IL  
Catalog
- 1981** The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Chicago, IL | *Twenty Contemplations  
on the Infant Jesus: An Homage to  
Olivier Messiaen* | Catalog  
Ball State University, Muncie, IN  
*Twenty Contemplations on the  
Infant Jesus: An Homage to Olivier  
Messiaen* | Catalog
- 1980** Marianne Deson Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 1979** The Renaissance Society at The  
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
*Dan Ramirez Works: 1972-1979*  
Catalog
- 1977** Krannert Center for the Performing  
Arts University of Illinois, Champaign/  
Urbana, IL

## SELECT GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2021** Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Art Miami*, Miami, FL
- 2019** Museum of Contemporary Religious  
Art | St. Louis, MO | *GRATITUDE*
- 2018** Museum of Contemporary Religious  
Art | St. Louis, MO | *MOCRA 25*
- 2017** Illinois State University, Springfield, IL  
*Bricks and Mortar: Architecture as  
Poetic Space*  
Governors State University,  
University Park, IL | *Vera Klement and  
Dan Ramirez: Body and Spirit*  
Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Art Miami*, Miami, FL  
DePaul Art Museum, Chicago, IL  
*Four Saints in Three Acts*
- 2016** The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Chicago, IL | *Homegrown: From the  
Permanent Collection*
- 2015** Evanston Art Center, Evanston, IL  
*Hybrid's Paradise*  
Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Art Expo*, Navy Pier  
Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Art Miami*, Miami, FL
- 2014** National Museum of Mexican Art,  
Chicago, IL | *Abstract Art from the  
Permanent Collection*  
The Museum of Contemporary  
Religious Art, St. Louis, MO | *Thresholds*  
Thomas Masters Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*New Art Examiner Launch Event*  
Art Industry, Madison, WI | *Non-Stop*  
Zolla/Lieberman Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*re: animate*
- 2012** Jean Paul Perrier Gallery  
Barcelona, Spain | *Collectiva*  
Madison Museum of Contemporary  
Art, Madison, WI | *Seen/Unseen*
- 2010** Museum of Contemporary Religious  
Art, St. Louis, MO | *Good Friday: The  
Suffering Christ in Contemporary Art*
- 2009** Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, IL  
*The Francis & June Spiezer Collection*
- 2008** Daum Museum of Contemporary Art  
Sadalía, MO | *Acquisitions Exhibition*,  
Monterey Bay Aquarium Museum  
Monterey Bay, CA | *Jellies*  
Museum of Contemporary Religious  
Art, St. Louis, MO | *Pursuit of the Spirit*  
Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, WI
- 2006** Museum of Contemporary Religious  
Art, St. Louis, MO | *Highlights:  
Selected works from the MOCRA  
collection and works on loan*
- 2005** The National Museum of Mexican Art  
Chicago, IL | *Colecciones: Mexican  
Art from 50 Private Chicago Collections*
- 2003** The Museum of Contemporary  
Religious Art, St. Louis, MO | *Richard  
Meier, Steven Holl, Dan Ramirez*  
Northern Indiana Art Association  
Gallery, Munster, IN | *That 70's Show:  
Pluralism in Chicago Art*  
Monterey Bay Aquarium Museum  
Monterey Bay, CA | *Jellies*  
Klein Art Works, Chicago, IL  
*Full Frontal*
- 2002** Suburban Fine Arts Center  
Highland Park, IL | *Real Abstraction:  
No Metaphor, No Apologies*  
Klein Art Works, Chicago, IL  
*Pondering*  
Mary and Leigh Block Gallery,  
Northwestern University, Evanston, IL  
Klein Art Works, Chicago, IL  
*Contemporary Abstraction*  
Klein Art Works, Chicago, IL  
*Chicago School II*
- 1998** Roy Boyd Gallery, Chicago, IL  
Art Expo, Navy Pier, Chicago, IL  
Derriere Guard Festival, Graham  
Foundation, Chicago, IL
- 1996** Museum of Contemporary Art  
Chicago | Chicago, IL | *ART IN  
CHICAGO, 1945-1995* | Catalog  
Madison Museum of Contemporary  
Art, Madison, WI | *Three Artists:  
Daniel-Smajo Ramirez/Julia Fish/  
Louisa Chase*  
Mary and Leigh Block Gallery,  
Northwestern University, Evanston, IL  
*Second Sight: Printmaking in Chicago  
1935-1995*  
Madison Art Center, Madison, WI  
*Art in Bloom*  
Roy Boyd Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Update: Dan Smajo-Ramirez,  
Frank Pietek, Buzz Spector,  
Bill Conger, Ann Wilson*,  
Madison Art Center, Madison, WI  
*Wisconsin Triennial* | Catalog  
Ukrainian Institute of Modern  
Art, Chicago, IL | *25 years of  
Contemporary Art* | Catalog
- 1994** Transmission Gallery, Glasgow,  
Scotland | *Exquisite Drawing: Lines  
of Correspondence*,  
The Museum of Contemporary  
Religious Art, St. Louis, MO  
*Post-Minimalism and the Spiritual:  
Four Chicago Artists*  
Rockford Art Museum, Rockford, IL
- 1993** Madison Art Center, Madison, WI  
*Wisconsin Triennial*  
The Renaissance Society, The  
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL
- 1992** Artemesia Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 1991** Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL  
*En El Corazon Del Pais, (In The Heart  
Of The Country)*  
The Renaissance Society, The  
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL
- 1989** Dart Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Selected Works*  
State of Illinois Art Gallery  
Chicago, IL | *Partners in Purchase:  
Selected Works, 1976-87*
- 1988** The National Museum of Mexican Art,  
The Museum of Contemporary Art,  
Chapultepec, Mexico City, Mexico  
*Adivina: Latino Chicago Expressions*  
Illinois Dedication Exhibition of  
Commissioned Works, Technology  
Park, Chicago, IL

- 1987** Roy Boyd Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
*Works on Paper*  
Grae Gallery, St. Louis, MO  
*Chicago Abstractionists: Works  
on Paper*  
David and Alfred Smart Gallery  
The University of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
*Prints of Illinois: 1950-1987*
- 1986** Community Gallery of Art  
College of Lake County, Greyslake, IL  
*Nuestras Imagenes: Our Images*
- 1985** Nexus Museum, Philadelphia, PA  
*Earworks*  
Southern Allegheny Museum,  
Johnstown, PA | *Earworks*  
Museum of Contemporary Art  
Chicago | Chicago, IL | *Selections  
from the Permanent Collection*  
Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, IL  
*Then and Now*
- 1984** The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Blake-Palmer Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*20th Century Prints & Drawings: Part II*  
Trisolini Gallery, University of Ohio  
Athens, GA | Catalog  
Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, IL  
*1984-86 Abstract/Symbol/Image:  
A Revision* | travelling exhibition  
Catalog  
Franklin Square Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Future Tense*  
Roy Boyd Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Abstract Painting*
- 1983** Madison Art Center, Madison, WI;  
Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery,  
University of Nebraska, Lincoln,  
Norman, NE; MacKenzie Art Gallery,  
University of Regina, Saskatchewan;  
Sarah C. Blaffer Art Gallery,  
University of Houston, TX; Loch Haven  
Art Center, Orlando, FL; Anchorage  
Historical and Fine Arts Museum,  
Anchorage, AK; Arkansas Art Center,  
Little Rock, AK | *Chicago: Some Other  
Traditions* | Catalog  
Mandeville Gallery, University of  
California, San Diego, LA Jolla, CA  
*1983-84 Chicago Scene*  
Museum of Contemporary Art  
Chicago and Name Gallery,  
Chicago, IL | *Eleven Chicago Artists*  
Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, IL  
*Fans*
- 1982** University Art Gallery, Sonoma State  
University, Rohnert Park, CA; Cheney  
Cowles Memorial Museum, Eastern  
Washington; State Historical Society,  
Spokane, WA | *Chicago Abstract  
Painting*  
Terra Museum of American Art,  
Evanston, IL | *Solitude: Inner Visions  
in American Art* | Catalog  
College of Fine Arts, University of  
Nebraska at Omaha, *Drawing from  
Chicago*, Omaha, NE.  
Museum of Contemporary Art  
Chicago, Chicago, IL | *Selections from  
the Permanent Collection*  
Museum of Contemporary Art  
Chicago, Chicago, IL | *Dennis Adrian  
Collection*

- 1980** The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH | *Chicago/Chicago*  
Western Association of Museums *Chicago Abstract Art* | touring exhibition  
NEUE KUNST AUS CHICAGO  
Bonn, Germany  
Sloan Galleries, Valparaiso, IN  
*The Drawn Image Exhibition*  
Museum of Contemporary Art  
Chicago, Chicago, IL | *Selections from the Permanent Collection*
- 1979** Museum of Contemporary Art  
Chicago, Chicago, IL | *Raices Antiguas/Visiones Nuevas-Ancient Roots-New Visions*  
Karlsruhe, Stuttgart, and Munich, Germany | *Aesthetik/Graphik/Bilden* traveling exhibition  
Indiana University, N.W., Gary, IN  
*Critics Choice*  
Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art  
Chicago, IL | *Abstractions from Chicago*  
The Art Institute of Chicago  
Chicago, IL | *100 Years-100 Artists*  
The Art Institute of Chicago  
Chicago, IL | *Prize Winners Revisited*  
Columbia College, Chicago, IL  
*Chicago Drawing*
- 1978** The Art Institute of Chicago  
Chicago, IL | *Works on Paper, 77th Chicago and Vicinity*  
Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI  
*Chicago: Art of the 70's*  
Oklahoma Arts Center  
Oklahoma City, OK.  
Michigan Museum of Art  
Ann Arbor, MI | *Chicago: The City and Its Artists, 1945-1978*  
Mulvane Art Center, Washburne  
University, Topeka, KS  
Bologna Arte Fiera, Bologna, Italy  
University of Missouri, Kansas City,  
MO | *1978 Abstract Art in Chicago*  
University of Missouri, Columbia, MO  
Western Illinois University, Macomb, IL  
Northern Illinois University, De Kalb, IL  
*Chicago Collects Chicago*  
N.A.M.E. Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Seven by Nine Invitational*
- 1977** Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago, IL  
*Recent Masterpieces of Chicago Art*  
travelling exhibition  
N.A.M.E. Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 1976** The Art Institute of Chicago  
Chicago, IL | *Visions; Painting and Sculpture, Distinguished Alumni, 1945-present*  
Memorial Union Gallery, Purdue  
University, Lafayette, IN  
*Chicago Abstract Art*  
Indianapolis Museum, Indianapolis,  
IN | *Painting and Sculpture Today*  
The Renaissance Society of The  
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
*Young Collectors*

- 1976** Bergman Gallery, The University  
of Chicago, Chicago, IL | *Midwest  
MFA Drawing Show, IIT, Chicago  
Wednesday Evening Group*  
Deson-Zaks Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Group Drawing Show*  
1134 Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Critic's Choice*
- 1975** ARC Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*Women Choose Men*

## SELECT HONORS AND AWARDS

- 2022** Artist Residency | *Fundacio Privada Tallers Josep Llorens Artigas*  
Gallifa, Spain
- 2019** Artist Residency | *Fundacio Privada Tallers Josep Llorens Artigas*  
Gallifa, Spain
- 2015** Helen Coburn Meier and Tim Meier  
Foundation for the Arts  
Art Achievement Award  
Artist Residency | *Fundacio Privada Tallers Josep Llorens Artigas*  
Gallifa, Spain
- 2010** Artist Residency | *Fundacio Privada Tallers Josep Llorens Artigas*  
Gallifa, Spain
- 2007** Commission | McCormick Place  
Convention Center, Chicago, IL  
Permanent Installation, 8 Large-Scale  
Paintings | *Chicago; City on the Make:  
An Homage to Nelson Algren*
- 2005** Artist Residency | *Fundacio Privada Tallers Josep Llorens Artigas*,  
Gallifa, Spain  
Pollock-Krasner Foundation Award  
New York, NY
- 2002** Artist Residency | *Fundacio Privada Tallers Josep Llorens Artigas*,  
Gallifa, Spain
- 1996** Commission | Madison Art Center  
(a.k.a. MMOCA-Madison Museum  
of Contemporary Art), Mixed-Media  
Print, Madison, WI  
Commission | Madison Art Center  
(a.k.a. MMOCA-Madison Museum  
of Contemporary Art), *Survoyeur*,  
Video-Mixed Media Installation  
Madison, WI
- 1992** Fellowship Award | Wisconsin  
Arts Board
- 1988** Commission | State of Illinois  
Technology Park
- 1985** Commission | Dirk Lohan, Dallas, TX  
Metropolitan Structures, Frito-Lay,  
*Glassworks* (Stained-Glass Structure)
- 1984** Commission | New Art Examiner,  
Chicago, IL Benefit, *Celestial City*,  
Lithograph
- 1983** Commission | State of Illinois Building,  
Chicago, IL
- 1982** Commission | Illinois Governors Award  
Nominated for Awards in the Visual  
Arts | Southeastern Center for  
Contemporary Art, Winston-Salem, NC
- 1978** Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Logan Medal  
The Art Institute of Chicago,  
Chicago, IL  
CIC Fellowship Award | The University  
of Chicago, Chicago, IL

## SELECT PUBLICATIONS/BOOKS

- 2023** *Vertical Thoughts* | Zolla/Lieberman  
Gallery, Chicago, IL  
*A Philosophy of Visual Metaphor in  
Contemporary Art* | Mark Staff Brandt  
Bloomsbury Press | pp. 26, 51-53
- 2017** *Certainty and Doubt: The Paintings of  
Dan Ramirez* | Chazen Museum of Art,  
Madison, WI
- 2004** *On the Strange Place of Religion in  
Contemporary Art* | James Elkins,  
Routledge/Taylor & Francis Books,  
270 Madison Ave., New York, NY  
1006, p. 75 (Illustration/Text)
- 1993** *The Painter Speaks: Artists Discuss  
Their Experiences and Careers*  
Edited by Joan Jeffries, in conjunction  
with Columbia University Greenwood  
Press, Connecticut & London  
Chapter 10, pp. 143-160
- 1996** *Art In Chicago: 1945-1995* | Thames  
and Hudson Ltd., London | pp. 207, 301
- 1985** *Sight Out of Mind: Essays and  
Criticism on Art* | Dennis Adrian,  
Contemporary American Art Critics  
Series, UMI Research Press, Ann  
Arbor, MI | Preface XIII and Chapter 5

## SELECT SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

- 2018** *History of Art and Design Chicago*  
PBS-WTTW, Episode Four: Off The Grid
- 2010** *Corsi Salviati* | School of International  
Art, Sesto Fiorentino, Italy | Lecture
- 2006** *Santa Reparata School of International  
Art* | Florence, Italy | Lecture
- 1996** *Landscape, Perception, Self*, Madison  
Art Center, Madison, WI | Lecture  
*Interface: New Media and the  
Creative Process* | New Media Center,  
Helen C. White Library, University of  
Wisconsin-Madison, WI
- 1994** *Computer Generated Imagery and  
Quotational Theory* | Madison Art  
Center, Madison, WI | Lecture
- 1993** *National Endowment for the Arts*,  
Washington, DC | Painting, Panelist/  
Juror  
*National Art Education Association  
Conference*, Chicago, IL | Lecture  
*Recovering the Holy in Contemporary  
Art* | The Museum of Contemporary  
Religious Art at St. Louis University  
St. Louis, MO | Panelist  
*Social Histories/Personal Realities*,  
Madison Art Center, Madison, WI  
Panelist
- 1991** *Postmodernism and the Visual Arts:  
Identifying the Issues* | Madison Art  
Center, Madison, WI | Lecture  
*The Construction and the  
Deconstruction of the Self: the  
Chronology of an Art Experience*  
55th Annual Conference of the Mid-  
America College Art Association,  
University of Wisconsin-Madison.  
Paper presented at panel entitled  
"Artists and Identity"
- 1989** *German Romanticism/American  
Minimalism: A Chicano's Legacy-Or  
Whose Culture Am I Anyway?* | The  
University of Wisconsin-Madison, WI

- 1988** *The Changing Role of the Individual  
in Modern and Post-Modern Art* | The  
University of Wisconsin-Madison, WI  
Lecture  
*Changing Aspects of Language  
Regarding the Sublime* | The University  
of Wisconsin-Madison, WI | Lecture  
*The Education of Artists* | Elvehjem  
Museum, The University of Wisconsin-  
Madison, WI | Panel
- 1987** *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting  
1890-1985* | Museum of Contemporary  
Art, Chicago, IL | Lecture on the works  
of Piet Mondrian, Barnett Newman,  
and Dorothea Rockbourne  
*A Chronology of the Work of Dan  
Ramirez* | Museum of Contemporary  
Art Chicago, Chicago, IL | Lecture
- 1985** *Content in Abstract Painting*  
Boyd Gallery, Chicago | Panel
- 1983** *Everyman-Contemporary Religious  
Art* | NBC-TV, Michel Segard,  
interviewer. Aired, September, 1983
- 1982** *Theology and the Object in my Work*  
Ox-Bow School of Art | Saugatuck, MI  
Lecturer and Artist-in-residence
- 1981** *A Chronology* | University of Chicago  
Lecturer and Artist-in-Residence  
*Twenty Contemplations on the Infant  
Jesus: A Homage to Olivier Messiaen*  
Prints & Drawing Dept. | The Art Institute  
of Chicago, Chicago, IL | Lecture
- 1979** *A Chronology of the Works of Dan  
Ramirez* | The Art Institute of Chicago  
Chicago, IL | Lecture  
*Cultural Influences in My Work*  
Northwestern University Lecture  
Series | Northwestern University  
Evanston, IL
- 1978** *Raices Antiguas/Visiones Nuevas-  
Ancient Roots/New Visions* | Museum  
of Contemporary Art Chicago,  
Chicago, IL | Panel  
*Influences* | University of Missouri, KA  
Lecture and Panel  
*The Northern German Romantics and  
My Work* | University of Michigan, Ann  
Arbor, MI | Lecture

## SELECT MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

- The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
The Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock, AR  
Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, WI  
Daum Museum of Contemporary Art  
Sadalia, MO  
DePaul Museum of Art, Chicago, IL  
Llorens Artigas Foundation, Gallifa, Spain  
Madison Museum of Contemporary Art,  
Madison, WI  
Museum of Contemporary Religious Art,  
St. Louis, MO  
Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL  
National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago, IL  
San Antonio Museum of Art, TX  
Sheldon Memorial Art Museum, Lincoln, NE  
Smart Museum, The University of Chicago  
Chicago, IL



