

RHYTHM OF SERENITY

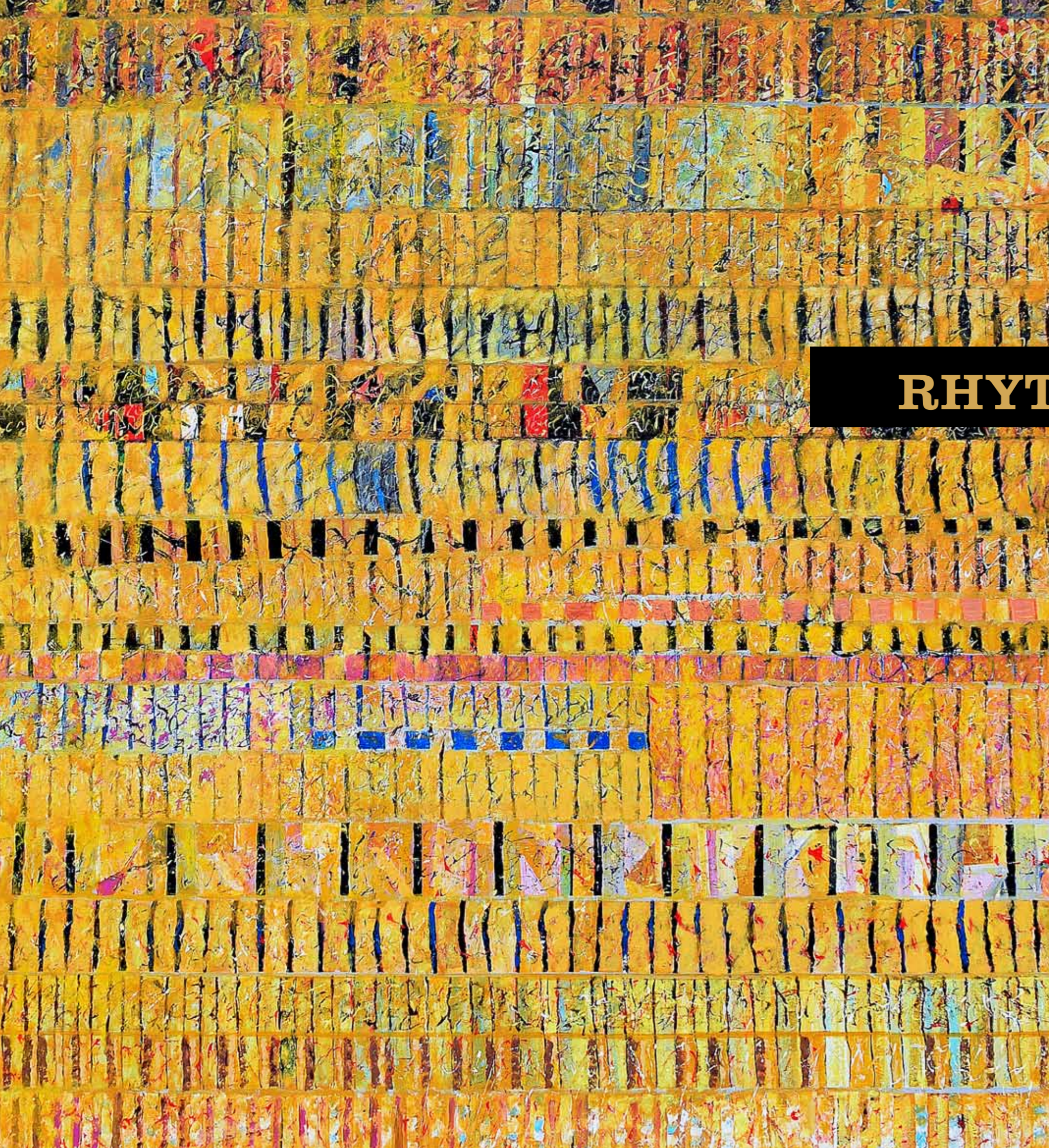
A Solo Exhibition by Internationally Renowned Artist

KALICHARAN GUPTA



CONCEPTUALISED BY
UMA PRAKASH

CURATED BY
JYOTI A. KATHPALIA




ART KONSULT
ART GALLERY FOR CONTEMPORARY INDIAN ART

Presents

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KALICHARAN GUPTA

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21 - 25 April, 2024

Visual Arts Gallery
India Habitat Centre, New Delhi

www.artkonsult.com



CURATOR'S NOTE

Kalicharan Gupta is an internationally renowned abstract artist of India with a career spanning over five decades. In his journey in abstractions, he has explored his own unique rendering of artistic techniques, lines, colours and monochromes to stunning effect. He has eighteen solo shows to his credit and numerous group exhibitions. His work is in various prestigious national and international collections and institutions.

In this solo show *Rhythm of Serenity*, his recent abstractions are exhibited. They traverse through the complex mazes of the subconscious, the evocative lanes of memory, under the overarching aura of meditative, intuitive and spiritual, the resonance of which encompasses all earlier moods and impressions.

Kalicharan Gupta's distinguished and extensive career is characterised by artistic progression and distinct phases. The earlier phase is dominated by figural work. Here the artist took up the concerns of migrant workers and their struggles for livelihood and survival. After his series on the tribals, the Kalicharan Gupta evolved into a more abstract mode where the relinquishment of representational art led to the artist's intense engagement with drip painting or dropping paint techniques. This signature abstract style is a feature of his artworks as they delve into an exploration of the deeper more inscrutable rhythm and the intuitive apprehension of the world. Simultaneously, Kalicharan Gupta's artworks display a careful assimilation and ingenious illumination of the events around him, the philosophies he has been exposed to and the socio-cultural realities which he transforms into an inspired spontaneity and expresses in meticulous creativity.

There have been various Indian artistic influences, a prominent one being of Ramchandran in Kalicharan Gupta's earlier art. But later the artist's closeness with Dhiraj Choudhury, Prof Pran Nath Mago, Jagadish Dey and others took the form of fostering a sense of community and discussions around art rather than overt influences. Kalicharan Gupta is also inspired by Picasso and Rothko, but his work progresses in its own unique trajectory. Perhaps the edginess of Picasso and the spiritual aura of Rothko are what Kalicharan's artworks creatively put forward, but in an artistic language that has hardly any precedents.

It is true that unorthodox painting techniques led to a vital innovation in modern art in the west. One of such was the drip painting technique which soon became 'action painting.' Whereas the association of drip painting vis a vis the American artist Jackson Pollock has been seen as gestural, action and revolutionary painting, Kalicharan's style sees a turn towards incredible control accentuated by the colour palette of muted shades and a calm acquired through the subtle mastery of the human mind and emotions. It is fascinating to observe how in Kalicharan's dropping paint technique, there is an element of persistent patterning, a geometricity and an infinitude of repetition bound in the structural, graph like web of intricate parallelism and geometry. The carefully wrought rectangles and the selective use of

colours bestow an aura of carefully arranged serenity unlike the apparent and dynamically contrived disorder in many drip paintings. Perhaps that could be the reason that the artist calls his technique "dropping paint" rather than dripping as it is marked by tremendous discipline and dexterity. The effect of this technique is a construction of an intricate repetition and patterning web of dulcet serenity, a visually pleasing and soul satisfying harmony of peace and tranquillity.

Kalicharan Gupta starts by dropping paint from the top of the canvas. First using a drop of water to test the path that the paint will take, Kalicharan then moves on to paint. The paint falls in a straight line which can be gauged from a scale. Often times the canvas is then turned by ninety degrees, made horizontal. The effect is a graph like intermeshed effect. The graph like grid that Kalicharan creates is not achieved through the geometric scale, rather the artist uses wooden strips, to achieve the linearity and geometric restraint. The preferred colours are mostly black, white, greyscale or muted shades rather than the bolder colour palette. Kalicharan Gupta prefers to mix and dilute primary colours to manifest the serenity that his creativity urges him to express. In the words of the artist, "In the newer works I have shown the necessity of peace and quietude, the deep need for silence and peace I have used grey tones and diluted the colours to achieve this effect."

In this patterned structure, the artist renders brushwork with the minute, free flowing and diverse brush strokes that create a hypnotic, mesmerising effect - from the extremely intricate and fine to vibrant, dynamic abstract forms - ribbon like swirls or wave like patterns. These forms and repetitive patterns work in tandem and accentuate the brilliance of the assiduous and intensely creative abstract geometry, and at other times the free-flowing shapes obfuscate the underlying grid but never fully. These lines and the grid are made visible almost magically and inexorably and this tantalising glimpse forms the musical score of the latent and the manifest, of the free flowing intuitive and the deeper patterns, and the underlying grid, a hidden order of things in both the human mind and the cosmos itself. The artwork series *Tapestries of The Boulevard* exemplify such a dialectic. His other works like *Mirage* take the patterned design to an optical perspectival play.

Western and the Eastern world views

David Clarke in his article, "The All-Over Image: Meaning in Abstract Art," makes a differentiation between Clement Greenberg's situating the artist firmly within the art movements and evolution in

Western art history, hence somewhere deprivileging or side-lining concerns such as the artist intentions and the proposition that artists could use the formal elements to put forth the philosophical, cosmological notions and ideas. He further goes on in his discussion to compare the Eastern philosophical world view and the Western view through the idea of phenomenal reality and the emphasis on process rather than on things and subjects. "Manifest reality, arising out from the unmanifest void and eventually being reabsorbed by it, is viewed as having no substantiality, no permanent form or structure. This is in contrast to Western physics which sees matter as real and indestructible, composed of distinct and irreducible elements..." (359) Interestingly, Kalicharan's artworks elucidate how the process as much as the abstraction become leitmotifs of the paradox of inexorable ephemerality in the midst of a Zen like serenity. This solo exhibition indeed is an amalgamation of the Eastern philosophies, his own contemplation and his singular technique that has been honed to perfection. The series *Man of Great Enlightenment* is the artist's abstract expressionist exploration into these tranquil states. His frequent visits to Korea influenced this movement towards this Zen like control and silence and a deep underlying rhythm akin to the cosmic rhythm that is not heard but surrounds us. And that is what the paintings try to capture. As a contemporary artist, Kalicharan uses the abstract in newer modes of expression that merge the contemporary Indian reality with Eastern philosophic systems and spirituality.

However, the artist also puts across some strangely brilliant hues and startling juxtapositions as in his artwork *Bliss* giving the effect of joyful tranquillity and heart-warming expressivity that brims over the canvas. Even here there is no overflow of intense colour but rather a skilfully wrought expression. As a complement to the above, his free-flowing shapes and forms never signify an excess but rather the artistic venturing into the realm of unexplored cadences.

The Principle of Line

The strong element of line is what has been a constant feature in the artists artworks since his student days in Delhi College of Art and continues to be a definitive characteristic of Kalicharan's works, adding magnificently to the aura of spiritual calm and serenity.

The strong and consistent presence of linearity and lines in his works is not just a creative predisposition but rather the deep artistic commitment that Kalicharan demonstrates towards it exemplifies a deeper more profound philosophic commitment

almost classical in nature to the idea of control, restraint and discipline. In the words of the artist, "If you are in the line then the environment around remains okay and there is no disturbance. It is in this line of discipline that excellence can be glimpsed, and one doesn't trouble others." This line as the artist himself clarifies is not the line of conformity but rather the line of mental strength and discipline which is imperative to coexist and create. The artist's statement is evocative of the strong need of a moral, ethical and social coexistence which can only be a function of an order and mutual respect, where one's actions and lives do not disturb the existence of others. The thought has its antecedents in classical restraint rather than postmodern chaos. To channelize the power of the abstract towards such rigor and control while also painting the free flowing and non-representational, all in the simultaneity of the same canvas is the extraordinary achievement of Kalicharan Gupta. Indeed, it is a rare phenomenon to have a reminder of these principles through the work of abstraction. Abstract art theory as it is being widely disseminated today, is more about the untrammelled impulses, the uncontrollable energies, but Kalicharan's abstract vision is more towards the lines of abstraction that is a search for the meditative, the tranquil and the principled line. Unlike the free spontaneous and intuitive works that bring the Dionysiac energies as well as chaos on the surface, the paintings of Kalicharan Gupta are carefully wrought intuitions into the realm of meditation and deeper rhythms. Their very subtle mysteries and the muted shades and lighter colours become a semi-permeable, translucent screen through which the deeper rhythms, the heavier tides and larger cosmic movements can be glimpsed.

Kalicharan in his *Seascape* and *Seachange* series brings forth a whole range of paintings that are rendered in shades of blue. They tease the viewer into the deeper currents of the sea and contemplation and on the infinitude of the mind to encompass all human nature in its monumental sweep. It is also interesting that this predilection for the colour blue in the psychoanalytical colour theory is the colour of infinitude as well as of intellection and thinking. These are the very attributes that are a distinct part of Kalicharan's oeuvre.

Grid of love, loss and longing

The exhibition also covers the series of artworks that Kalicharan Gupta created during the pandemic period titled *Passages*. The angst and uncertainty that was an integral part of this period has been used towards artistic creation and catharsis. The grid format of the smaller works which were created by the cutting into 5"x5" canvases and creatively rendered the grid of life and hope in the dark times of

Covid. The paintings visually recreate the emotional and experiential journey through the pandemic and to the recent years. They explore the currents of loss and longing and hope as well as the passage of time and crises.

Unlike the focus on the composition and the subject in representational art, Kalicharan Gupta's work looks at the intuitive but nonetheless architectural buildup of the ideas that he seeks to explore. The series *Metropolis* is a visual evocation of the metropolitan cities. In several of his works he explores the loss of open lands and fields as they are taken over by the urbanism, the contemplation of which lends a spiritual nostalgic quality to his works. In his own words, "In my newer compositions I have explored new compositions in abstraction. My soul is the guide my eyes which gives shape to quintessential forms, volumes of straight lines making a conversation with my inner rhythms. Indeed, it is the rich shapes discovered by memory and labour that is the essence of my imaginative vision." It is this rhythm that is combined with sharp visual observation of the world around that forms the noumena of Kalicharan Gupta's art. As he notes, "What is important is peace, a musical serenity and the tune and waves of music... till they are not present in the artist the artist is not complete."

The abstract works of Kalicharan Gupta look simultaneously at the world around him as well as the profounder movements. The works are not about the daily chaos or vibrant spontaneous and explosive creativity but rather the slow and infinite contemplative motion, which is barely perceptible, but which adds the stillness of cosmic rhythm and underlying harmony and movement. Kalicharan's abstract art indeed gently lulls the viewer from the world around towards the deeper, rhythms, the silent motion that lulls the mind into a meditative trance and the aligning of the planets, the celestial spheres which is barely felt but which undergirds all, and which is the reason we exist.

Jyoti A. Kathpalia

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“ Kalicharan Gupta is a painter with distinct sensibility that evolved out of his long living in cosmopolitan New Delhi amidst multi-ethnic and multi-cultural presence of the people here .

He began his journey as a figurative artist and established his identity on contemporary Indian art scene with his highly expressive ink drawings of men and women in single or huddled struggling to find their identity in the changing pace of life .

Later his figures got lost somewhere in high rise structures raised to accommodate a multitude of dwellers in search of shelters .

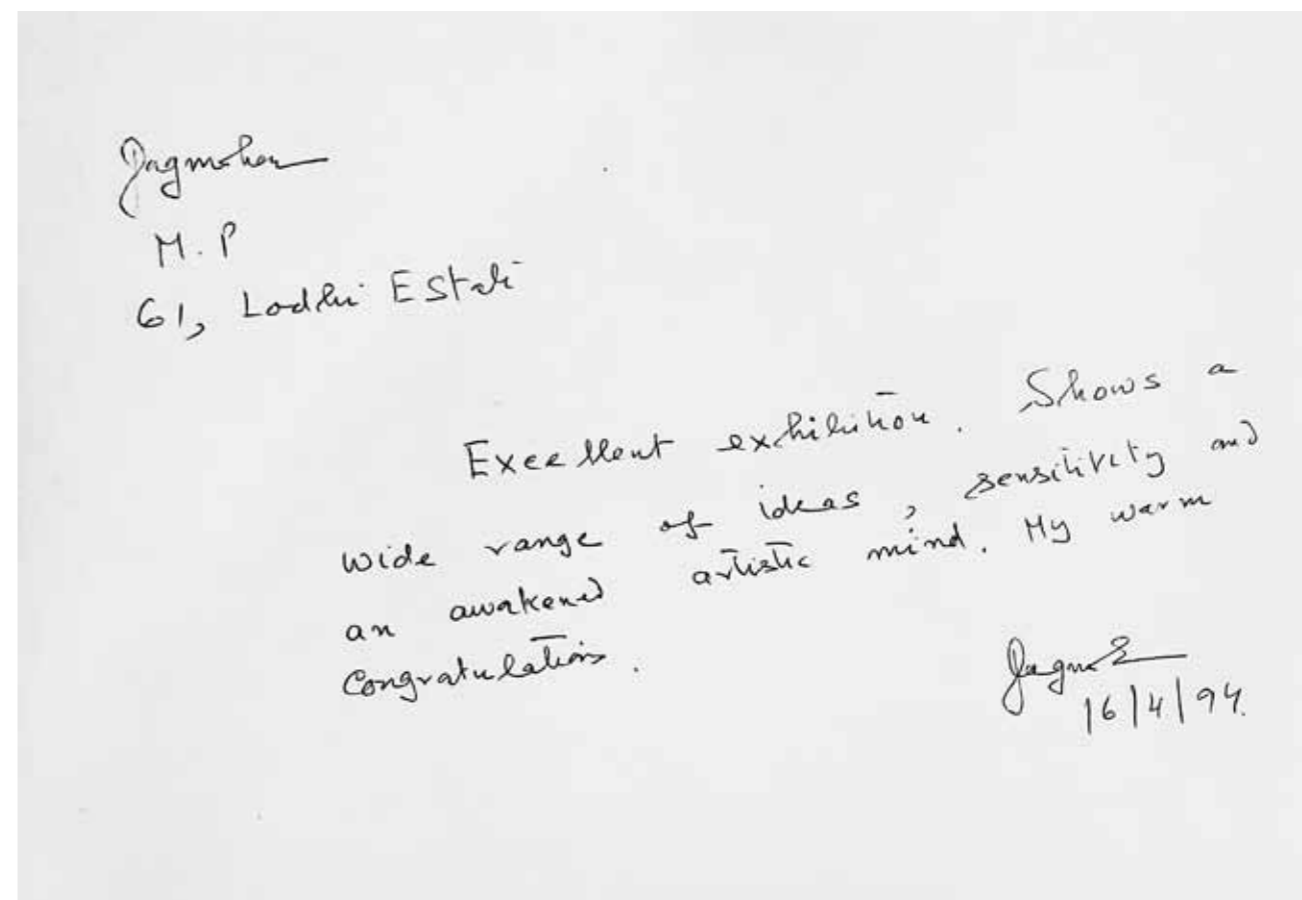
The vertical surge altogether changed the life and landscape of the city under the blue sky .

Kalicharan whom I affectionately call Kali has contemplated over this shift in urban planning and painted its verticality with the colours of the rainbow

While looking at his work , the viewer feels as he is in a cosmopolitan city , and imagine the life breathing in between the coloured stripes in an upward movement

Apparently the artist is showing his artistic concerns for the life getting isolated in this man-made magic-web created by colonizers to house people of different hues and shade .

Prem Singh ”



Exhibition review by Sri Jagmohan ji, 1994



UMA PRAKASH in conversation with KALICHARAN GUPTA

Kalicharan's *Rhythm of Serenity* in Abstract art allows the viewer the freedom to explore his artwork and assign their own meaning to the piece. Feelings such as joy, anger, sadness and love surface as the viewer seeks deeper meaning. Unlike realistic imitations of an object this art form explores elements of shape, form colour and line. The artist discovers ideas beyond the canvas and the mere physical reality. Kalicharan's trajectory has been very exciting and his work emanates sincerity enabling viewers to connect with the artist and feel an emotional resonance. This visual art form encapsulates a language of feeling leaving it to the viewer to capture and appreciate it.

Interview

Uma Prakash (UP): *When did you realize you were interested in the arts?*

Kalicharan Gupta (KG): When I was in 9th or 10th grade in Punjab in 1963/64, it was my headmaster who proposed to my father that I could be a drawing teacher because I was one of the best students of the year. My eldest brother's drawing was also very good and one of my uncle's still life in pencil shading was amazing, so my father sent me to Jamia for a two-year course diploma in Teaching of Art and Craft in 1965-67. He sent me to DAV College Jalandhar for further studies in Engineering but could not succeed. From that period, I studied under Sh Jaghu Bhai Shah, Vanleela Shah and N K Dixit. In 2nd year, Mr. A Ramachandran and Paramjeet Singh taught us in Jamia. I always had good relations with all my teachers and guides.

UP: *What was your experience studying at the Delhi College of Art?*

KG: I knew that after passing from Jamia one can study further in the College of Art etc. But my father did not allow me to do it and asked me to do a job. I took evening classes at Delhi College of Art for seven years in 1967. My elder brother helped me to get a job as an art teacher in a school of international repute in 1969. I finished my BFA from the College of Art in 1974 and did my post-graduation in 1979.

In college, my teachers were Prof P. N. Mago, Prof S. K. Bhattacharjee, Prof Jagmohan, and others. We had a very good campus and library to learn more about Indian art and western art. In 1967-74, approximately 47 years back, it was very peaceful, and studied a lot about art and aesthetics.

UP: *What made you start dropping paint and for how long have you been practicing it?*

KG: Dropping came later, about 16-17 years after passing from college. I was very busy with drawings (pen and ink, brush, mixed media) because there was so much space to work. Following my marriage, my family and I resided in a single room, and as there was no space hence, I continued with drawings. I started painting in the years 1985-90 and am continuing to this day. If you look at my pen and ink drawings, they involve dropping lines with pencil or charcoal, which can also be seen on canvas in different orientations such as vertical, horizontal, or rhombus.

My drawings are in the collections of NGMA, Chandigarh Museum and Lalit Kala Akademi, Sahitya Kala Parishad, etc. I am also attached to the Dhoomimal Art Gallery, Dhoomimal Art Center, etc.

UP: *Who are the artists in India and abroad that impacted your work?*

KG: In India, my mentor Prof P. N. Mago, Mr A. Ramachandran, Prof Jai Zharotia, Mr Keshav Malik, Dr Dinanath Pathy, Prof Niren Sen Gupta, Dr L. P. Sihare (NGMA), Mr Ashok Vajpeyi, Mr Shanti Dave, Mr Krishen Khanna, Mr Himmat Shah, Ms Shobha Broota, Mr Ebrahim Alkazi, Mr Rameshwar Broota etc.

Abroad, Mr Kwang Soo Oh, Director of National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul; Prof Man Young Hwang, Korea; Mr Loutfi Zermani, Paris, etc.

But my works are going through art galleries, not through artist.

UP: *After painting migrant workers in your figurative art phase, what made you move to abstract art?*

KG: My old figurative works are about workers because I belong to a small village in Haryana (earlier Punjab). The workers' bodily forms are different from ours as they work very hard from morning till evening and live in groups having no facilities. Drawing inspiration from their way of life, I tried to paint them in my own unique style.

I have worked on the subjects such as

1. Down Trodden
2. How tribal forms are penetrating the contemporary world
3. Metropolitan

Once in the year 2000, I visited Sora Tribals and stayed with the tribals in Tapta Pani (hot springs) in the Berhampur district of Orissa. There were little haats as we have in weekly markets in cities. Tribal people participated in activities like Hikiroma Haats with their children and pets like camels, buffalo, goats, dogs, etc. Their children are doing aerobic-like exercises on their way, so I incorporated these aerobic forms in my earlier paintings.

When I visited Russia through the ICCR program in Vladivostok on the golden jubilee of Indian independence in 1997 and Moscow through a workshop, I saw the buildings under construction totally covered with construction wrap, etc. so I used that in my works. Still, sometimes I use these methods.

UP: *Does nature prevail in your art?*

KG: I think without nature we are incomplete. Our body is made up of its 5 elements, so it is impossible to separate ourselves from it. Whether we are thinking, creating, or simply doing our daily activities, nature plays a vital role. My lot of work is the answer to this as parallelism. For example, some works create sounds/peace although they are in abstract forms. Forms creating space and are full of meaningful voices.

UP: *There is a Zen-like quality in your works. Does exposure to Korea contribute to this?*

KG: In 1995, I visited Korea for the first time. I participated in the first Kwangju/Gwangju International Biennale and I found both India and Korea have the same regional and family setup. And since 2002, I have been visiting Korea to join art exchange programs biennale. South-East Asian countries like China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand etc. follow Buddhism which originated in India.

Visiting Museums is a great opening eye into the art and artists. One can learn a lot from such great Museums etc.

UP: *What do you think is the future of Indian art in the global market?*

KG: I think the future of Indian art in the global market appears promising. But a lot of young artists are producing works that seem baseless and highly subjective. Nevertheless, we are fortunate to have access to exceptional art schools, colleges, faculties, and universities, which gives us confidence to nurture outstanding students.

UP: *What are your major strengths and weaknesses?*

KG: When I was appointed as the Director of Lalit

Kala Akademi's Garhi Studios in 1994-97, a lot of exchange programs were arranged with the help of the British Council, American Center and other institutions. On the national level, workshops, Kala Melas and studios of LKA were very famous among foreign Universities.

Devraj Dakoji, studio in-charge of printmaking looking after the studios in his eighties. When you have power and working capacity you can work more.

And about weaknesses, some wrong decisions were also applied.

UP: *What are your preferred mediums? Have you experimented with sculpture?*

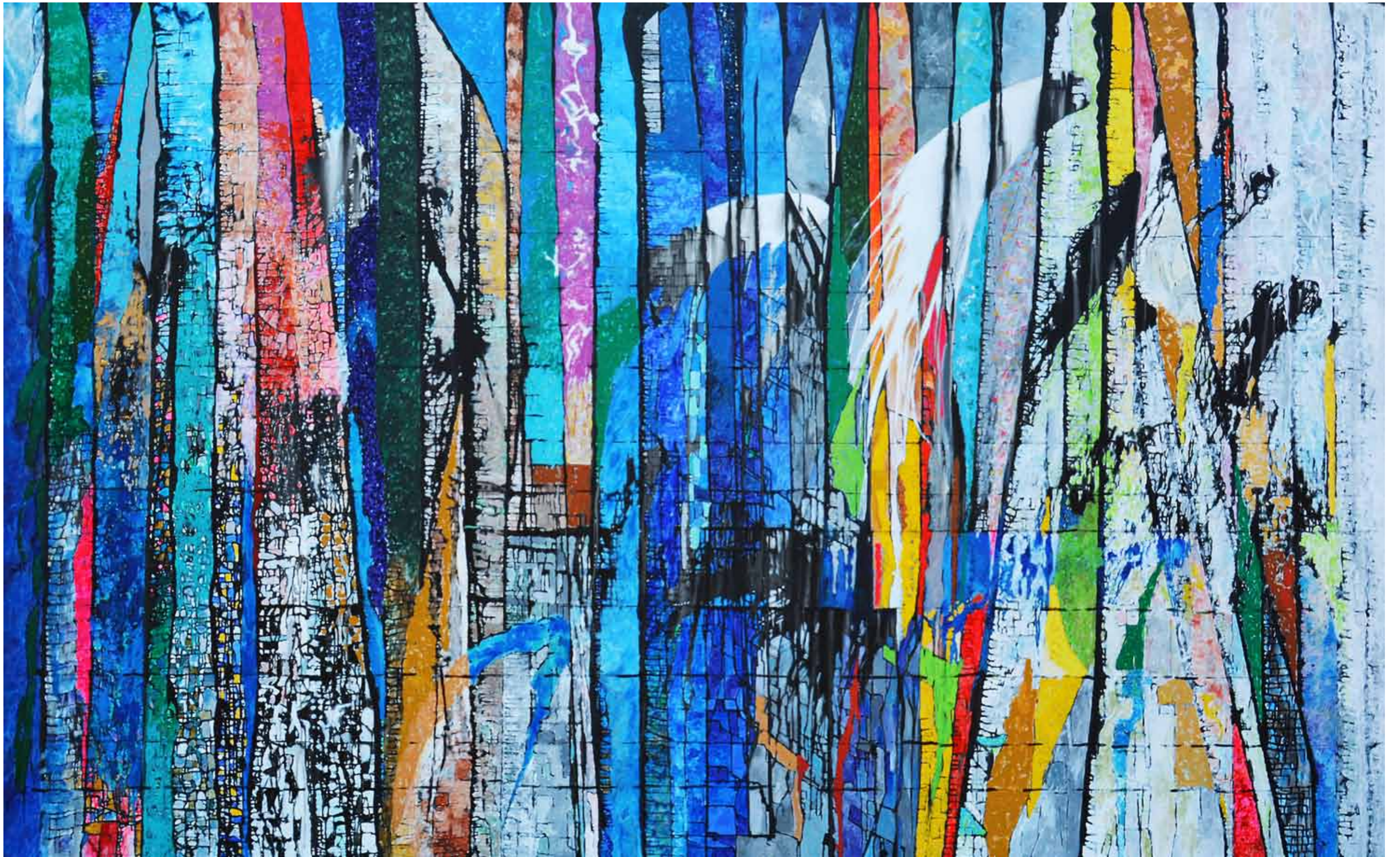
KG: Yes, I did. Some gallery owners supplied heads, masks (3D work) which I then painted using my own style. However, for many years, I have been considering creating sculptures in my own style. I have done numerous drawings of it, but I have not yet attempted to work on a sculpture. I hope to do so one day.

UP: *There appears to be a spiritual feeling in some of your paintings. Comment.*

KG: During my visit to Korea for India Korea exchange programs, I had an experience when I was sitting outside a Buddhist temple. A person came requesting me to come inside the temple, but there was no place to sit. I continued to sit outside. Soon after, a senior monk emerged coughing. I got up and did an Indian remedy on him as we do in our country. After a while, he felt better and asked me if I was from India, to which I replied yes. He told me that only Indians knew that remedy. I felt a sense of pride knowing that my country was remembered.

This experience made me think that every country has something to teach us about humanity through spirituality. Little I tried to be spiritual towards my work such as some particular works with the help of linear lines on canvases 'Man of Great Enlightenment' which reflects Buddhist philosophy and "South Wall Of Pungnap Seung Fortress" This work was shown in a solo show in 2017 India Art Fair New Delhi.

Uma Prakash is an Art Critic and Curator and is the India correspondent for the Hong Kong based magazine, Asian Art News, and World Sculpture News. She has been associated with the visual and performing arts in India and abroad. She has also curated several art exhibitions like Utsav in South Africa which featured combined "Gandhi through my Eyes" by Haku Shah "From Empire to Emporium" from Eicher Gallery New, and a local exhibition called "Gandhi Revisited" by South African artists. The bi-annual Gurgaon Utsav festival that presents theatre, music and dance has been co - founded and nurtured by her.



Azure Symphony
Acrylic On Canvas
72 x 120 inches
2018



Seascape Series
Acrylic on Canvas
68 x 36 Inches
2023



Seascape Series
Acrylic on Canvas
70 x 36 Inches
2022



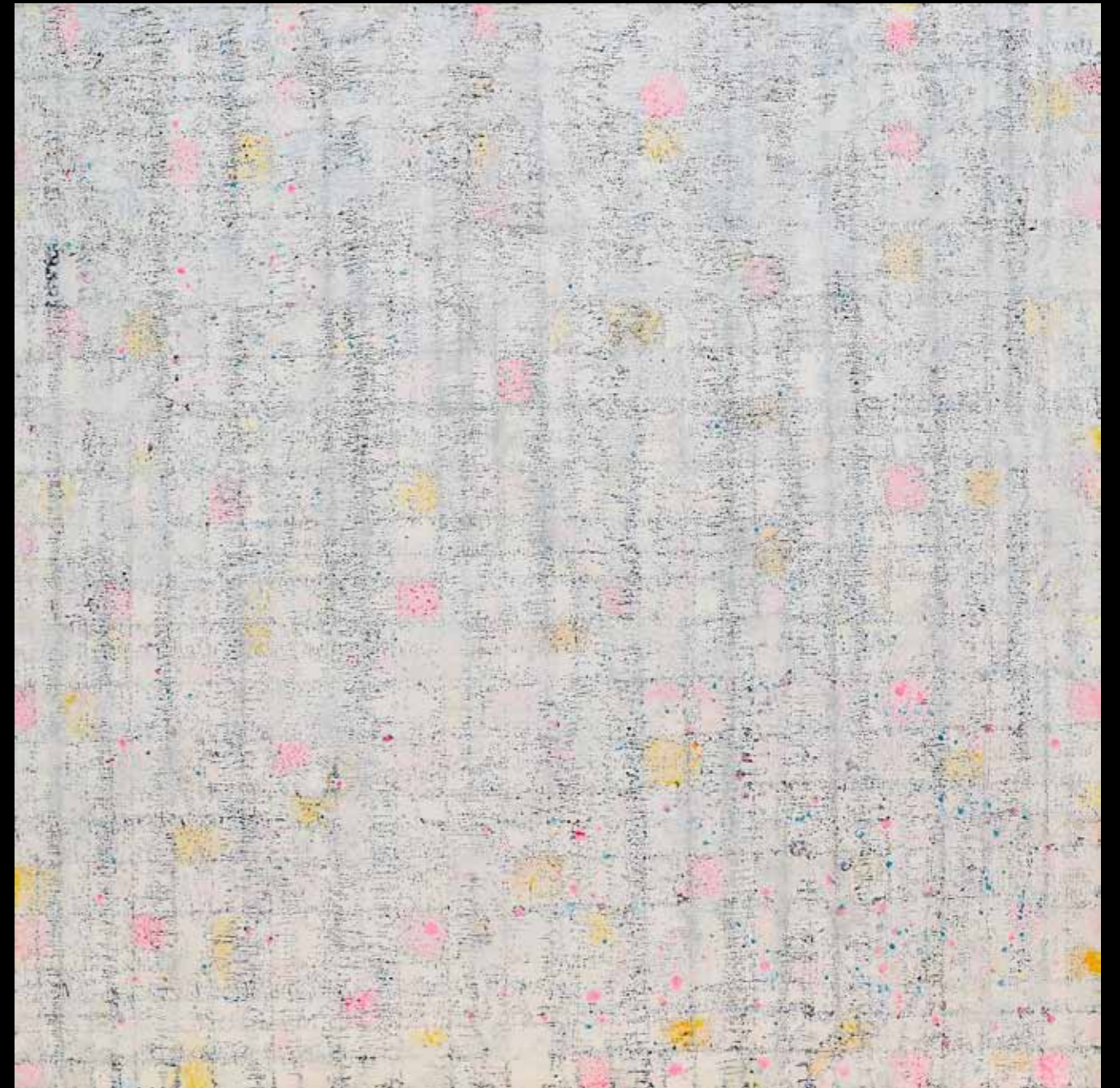
Radiance I
Acrylic on Canvas
36 x 33 Inches.
2019



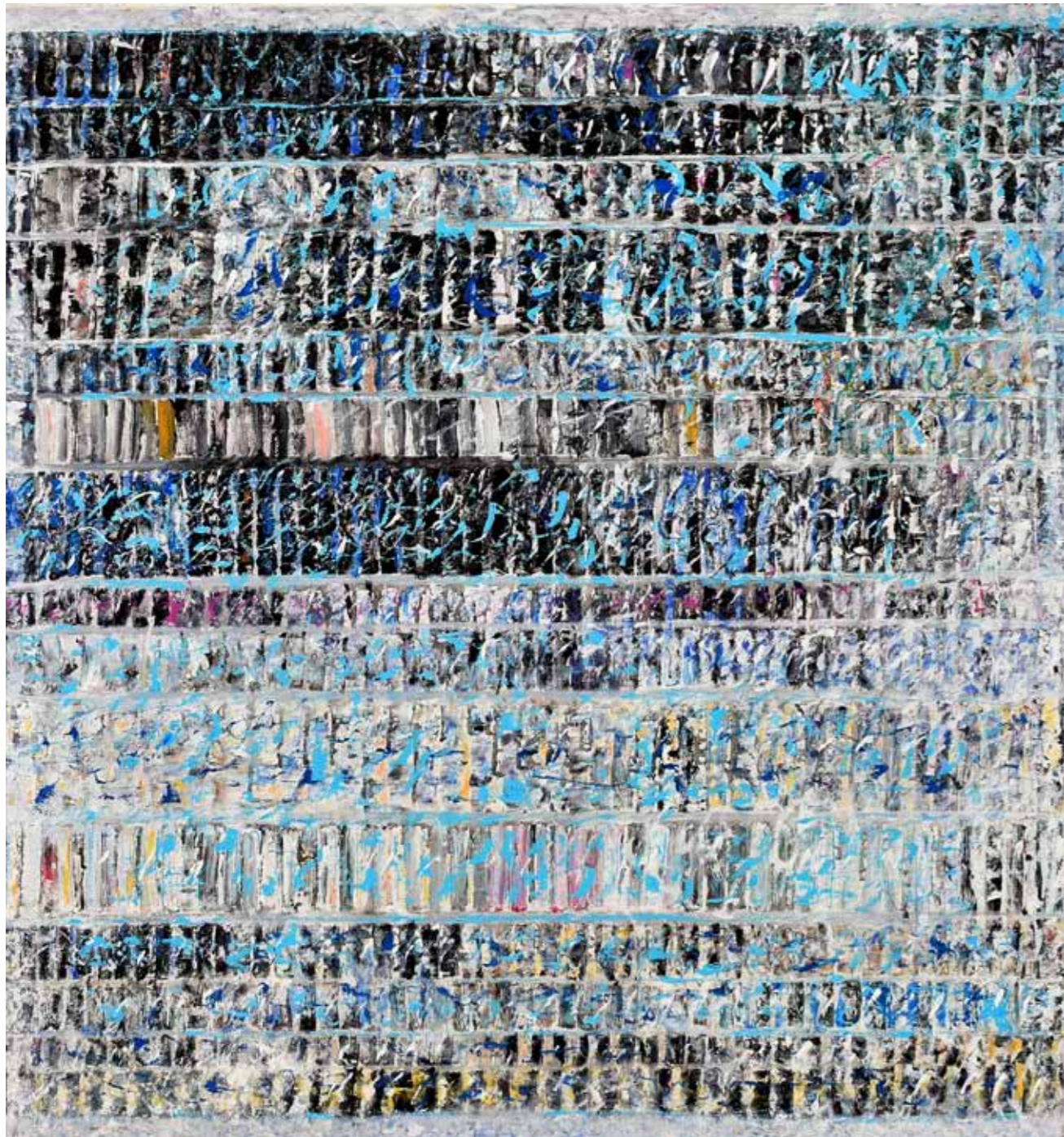
Bliss
Acrylic on Canvas
33 x 36 Inches
2022



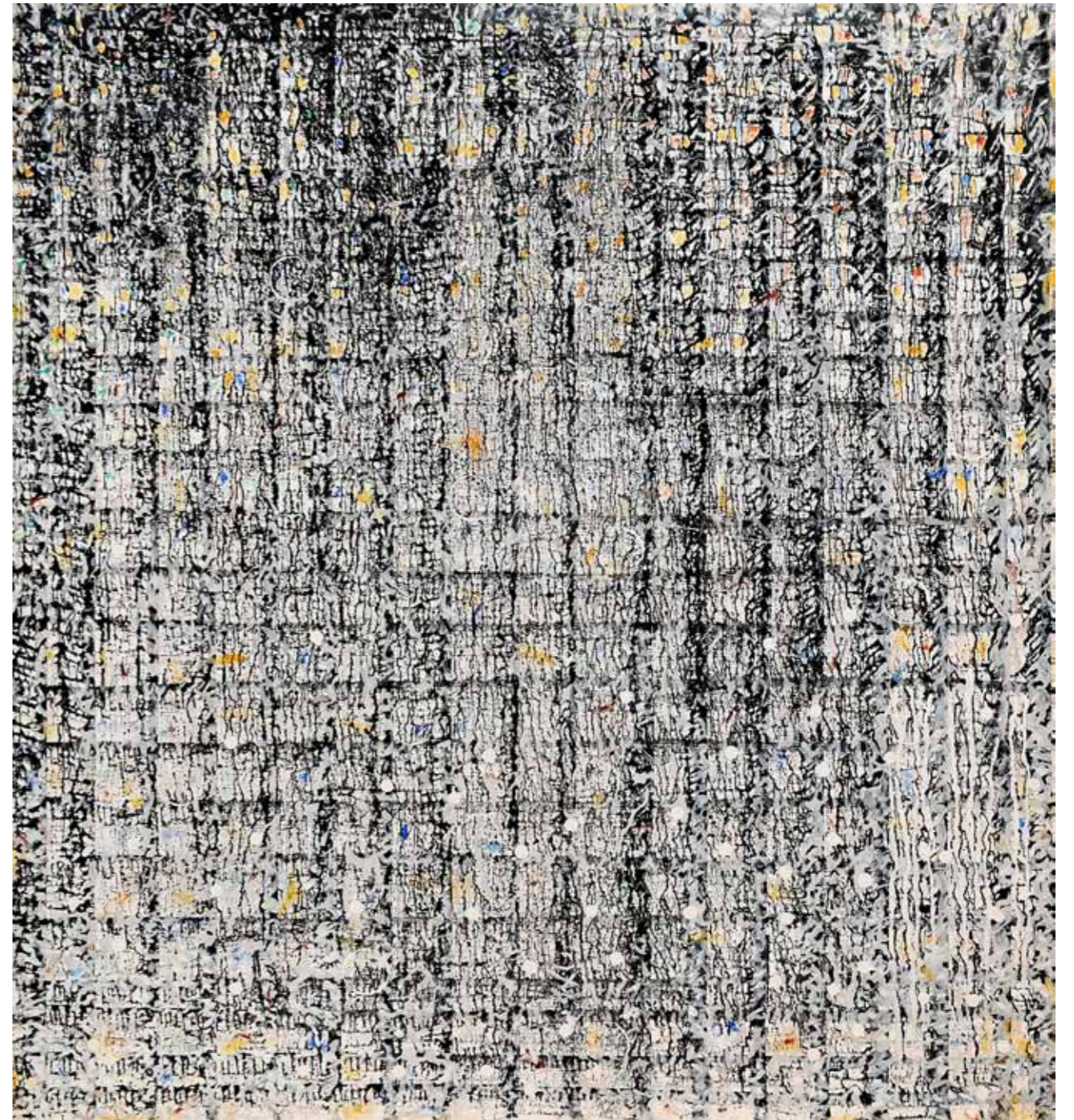
Seachange I
Acrylic on Canvas
48 x 48 Inches
2021



Meditations on Serenity
Acrylic on Canvas
48 x 48 Inches
2018



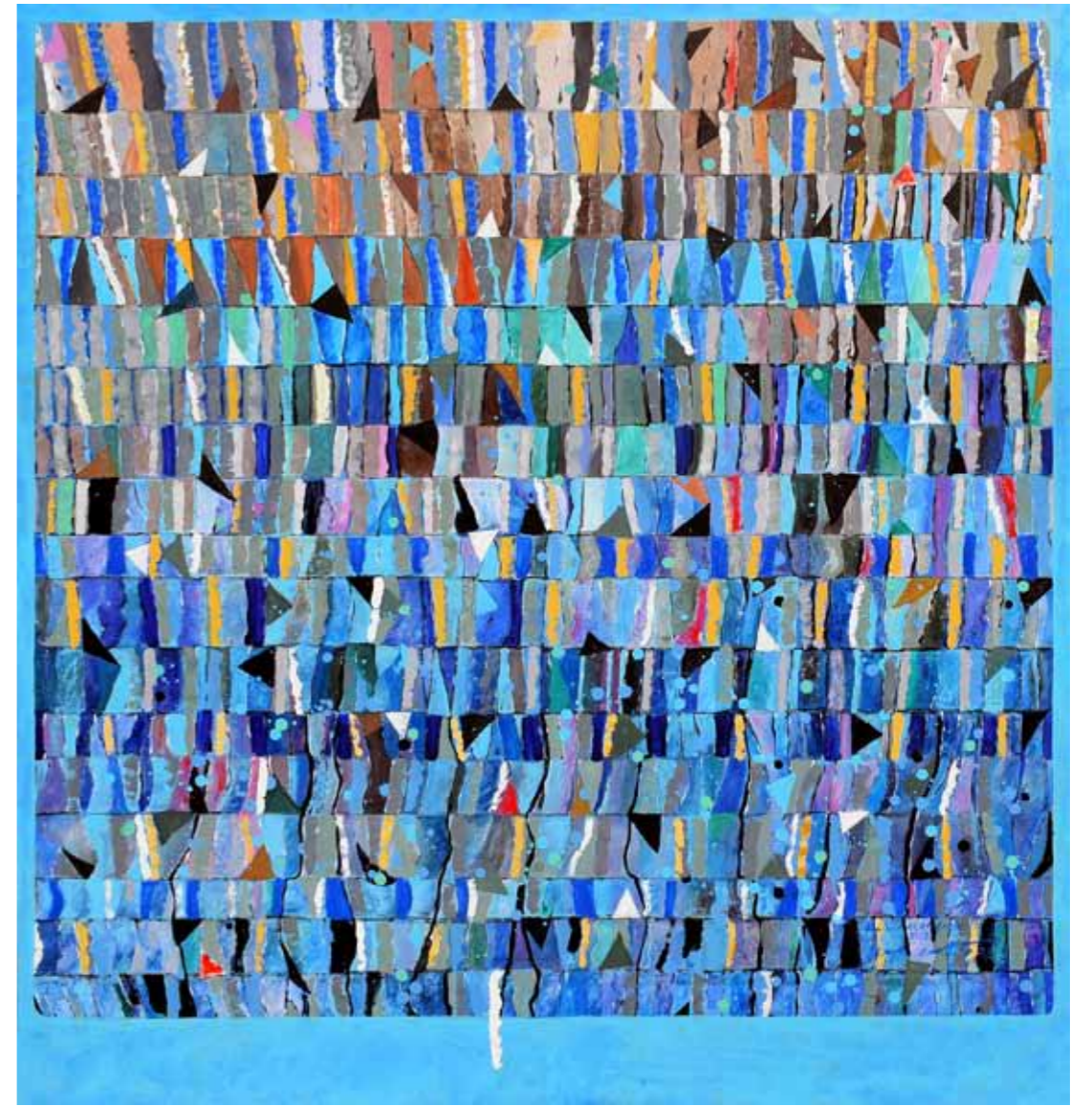
Seascape Series
Acrylic on Canvas
33 x 36 Inches
2023



Metropolitan Series
Acrylic on Canvas
50 x 55 Inches
2015



Cascade
Acrylic on Canvas
55 x 60 Inches
2022



Aqua Rhythm
Acrylic on Canvas
55 x 60 Inches
2023



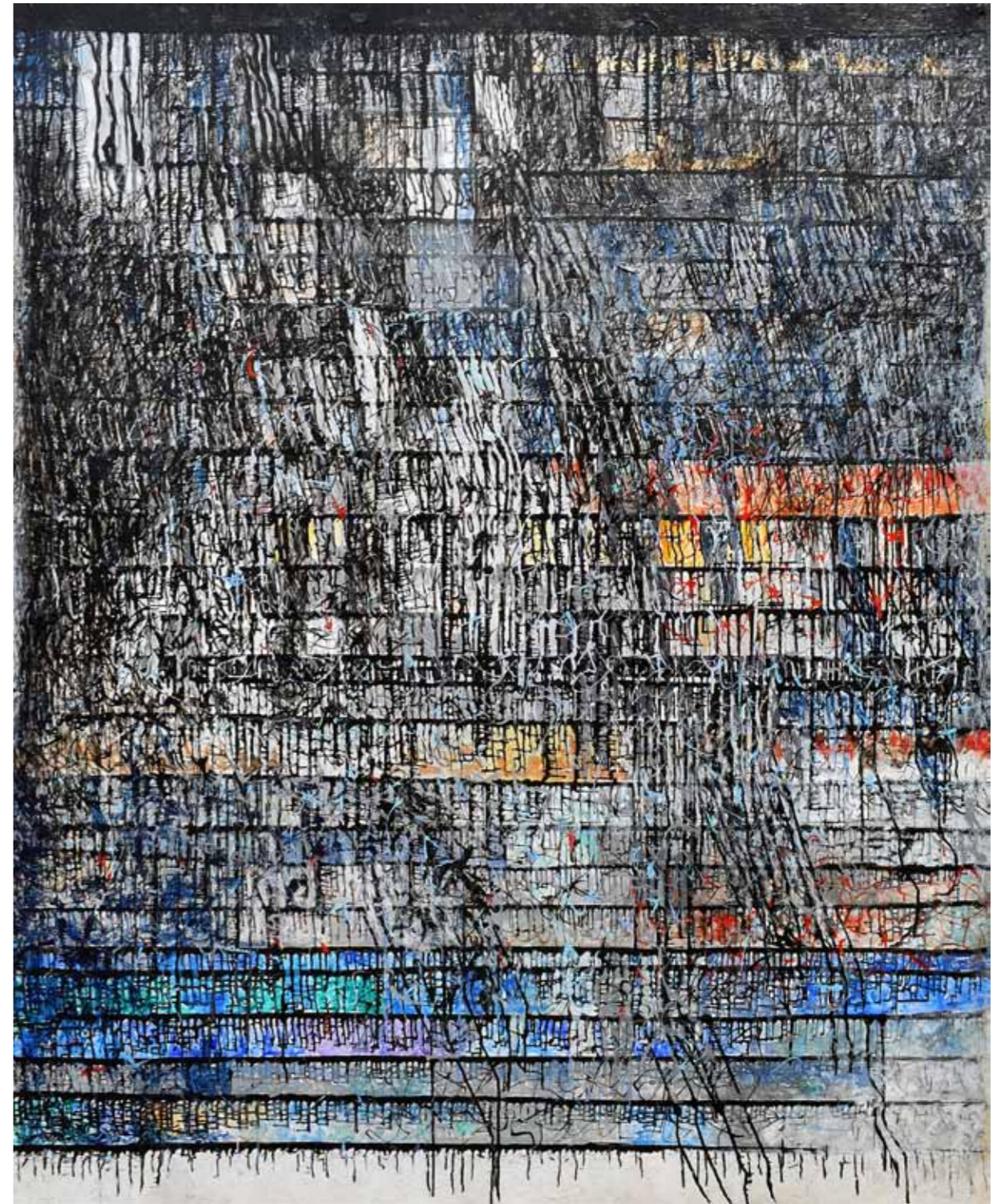
Man of Great Enlightenment-7
Acrylic on Canvas
70 x 36 Inches
2020



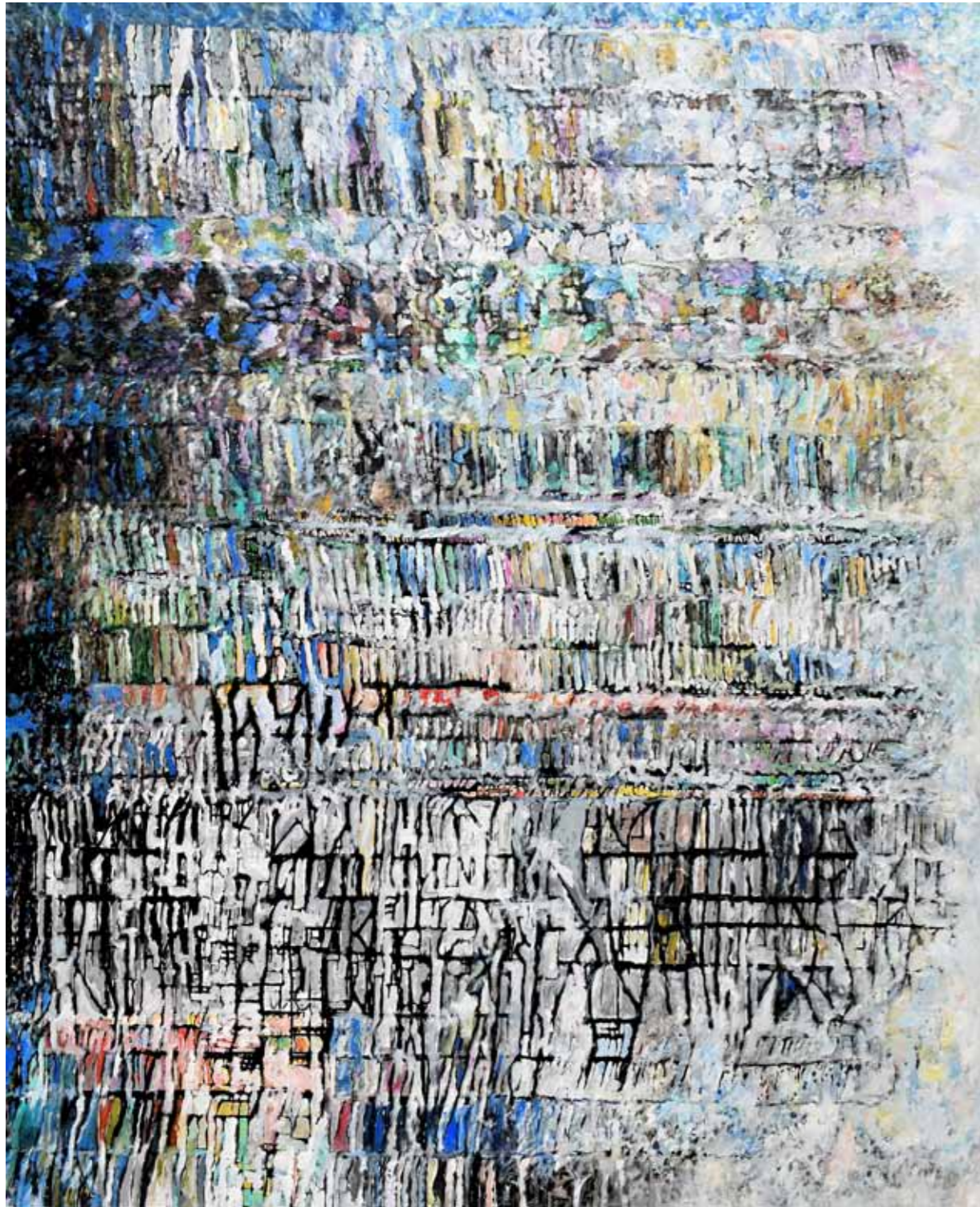
Man of Great Enlightenment-8
Acrylic on Canvas
70 x 36 Inches
2020



Man of Great Enlightenment-1
Acrylic on Canvas
70 x 60 Inches
2019



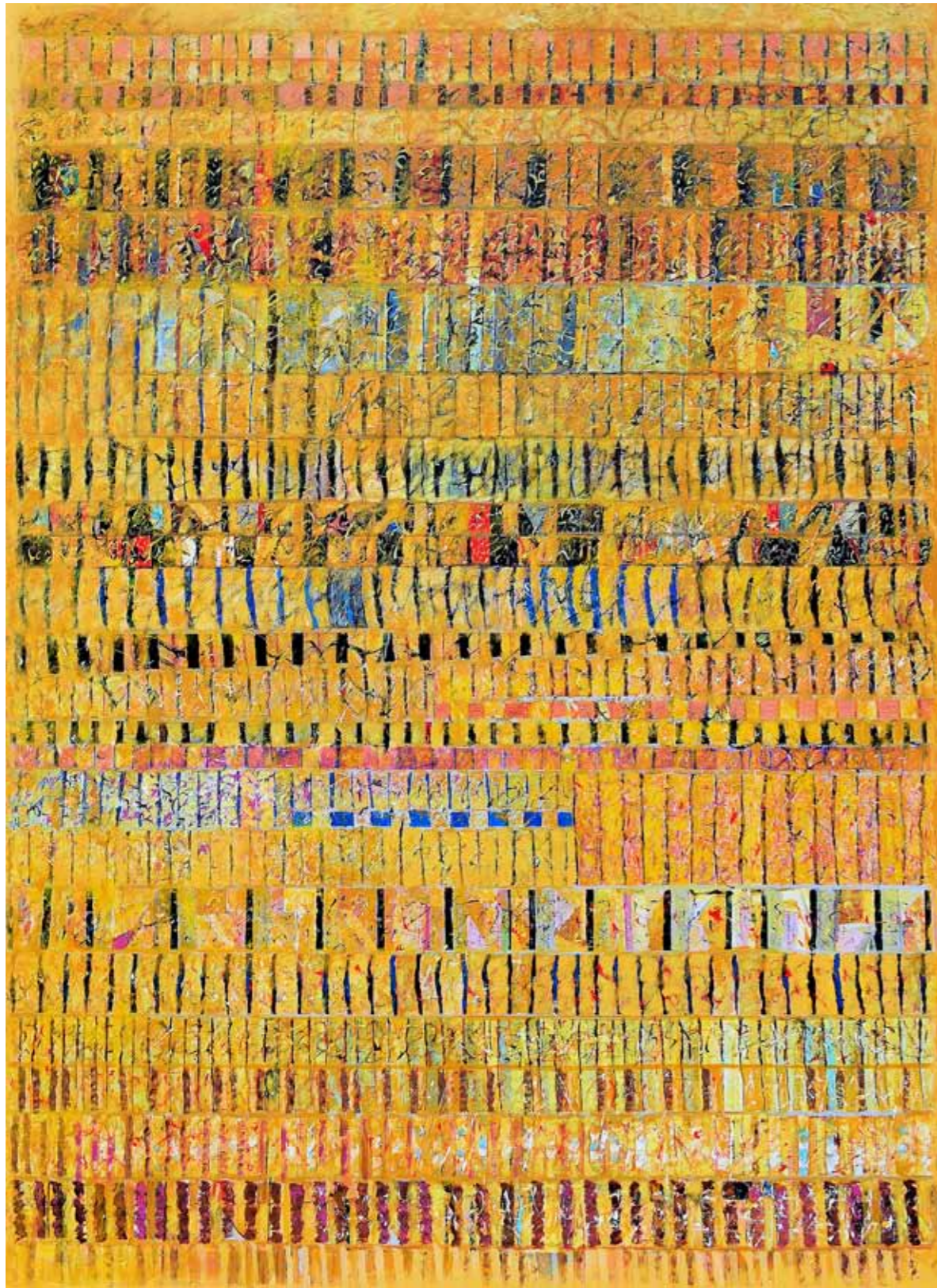
Parallelism
Acrylic on Canvas
74 x 60 Inches
2015



Whispers of Shades
Acrylic on Canvas
74 x 60 Inches
2017



Seascape Series
Acrylic on Canvas
80 x 60 Inches
2023



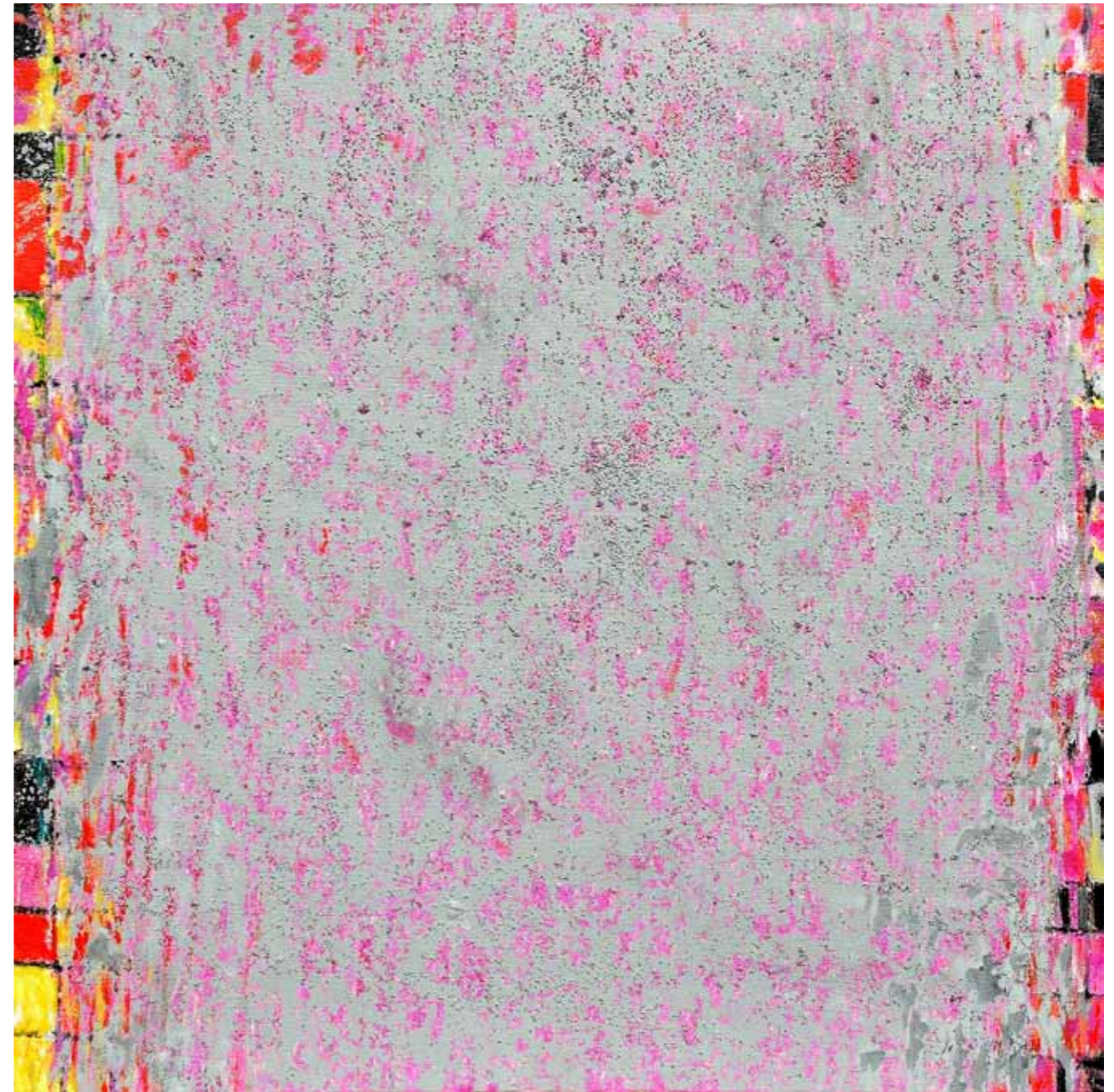
Radiance II
Acrylic on Canvas
80 x 60 Inches
2023



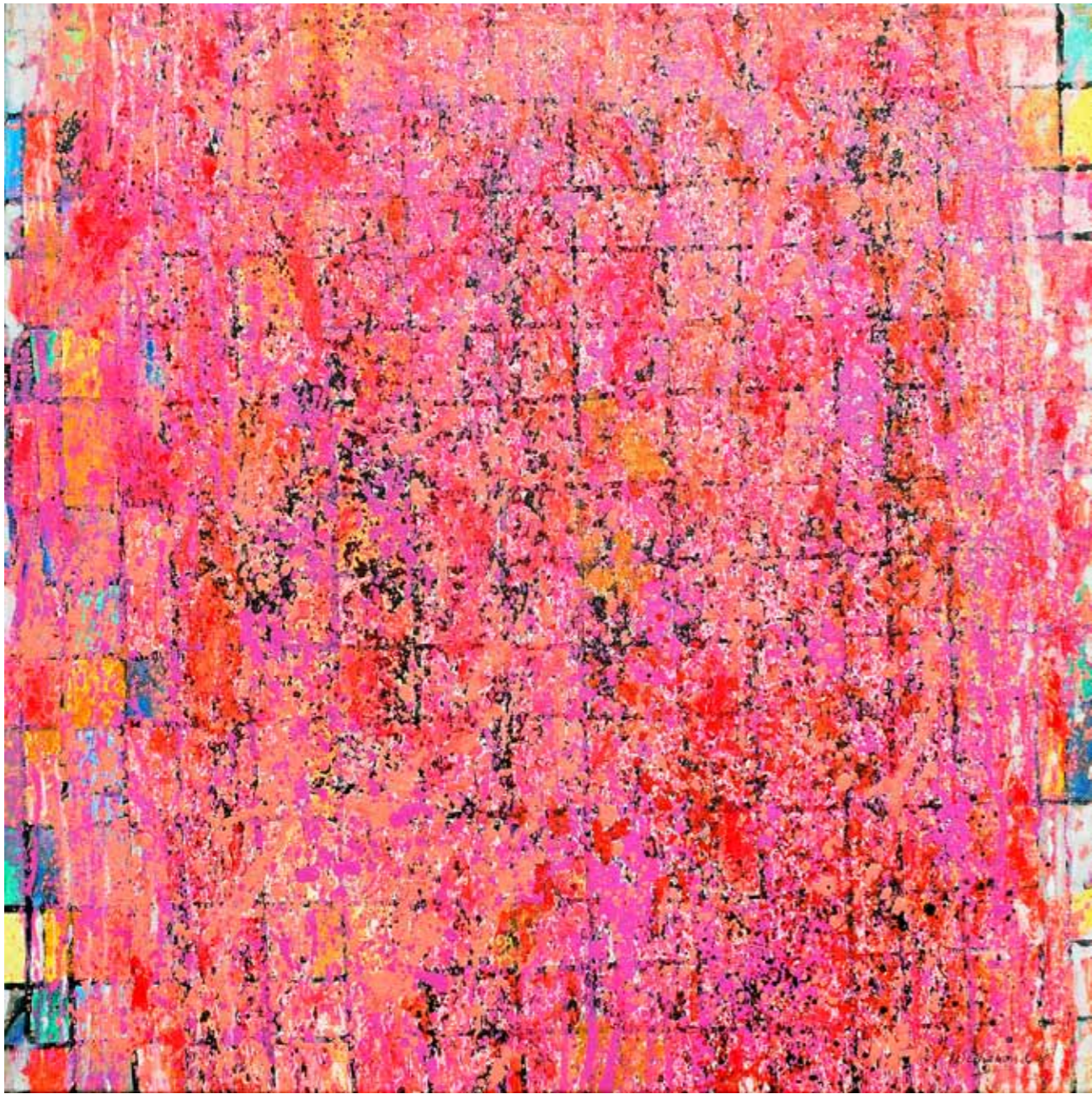
Floating Petals
Acrylic and Glass Beeds on Canvas
70 x 60 Inches
2015



Seachange II (Typtich)
Acrylic on Canvas
68 x 36 Inches (each)
2023



Tapestries of The Boulevard I
Acrylic and Glass Beads on Canvas
24 x 24 Inches
2021



Tapestries of The Boulevard II
Acrylic & Oil on Canvas
24 x 24 Inches
2021



Tapestries of The Boulevard III
Acrylic and Glass Beads on Canvas
24 x 24 Inches
2021



Tapestries of The Boulevard IV
Acrylic on Canvas
24 x 24 Inches
2021



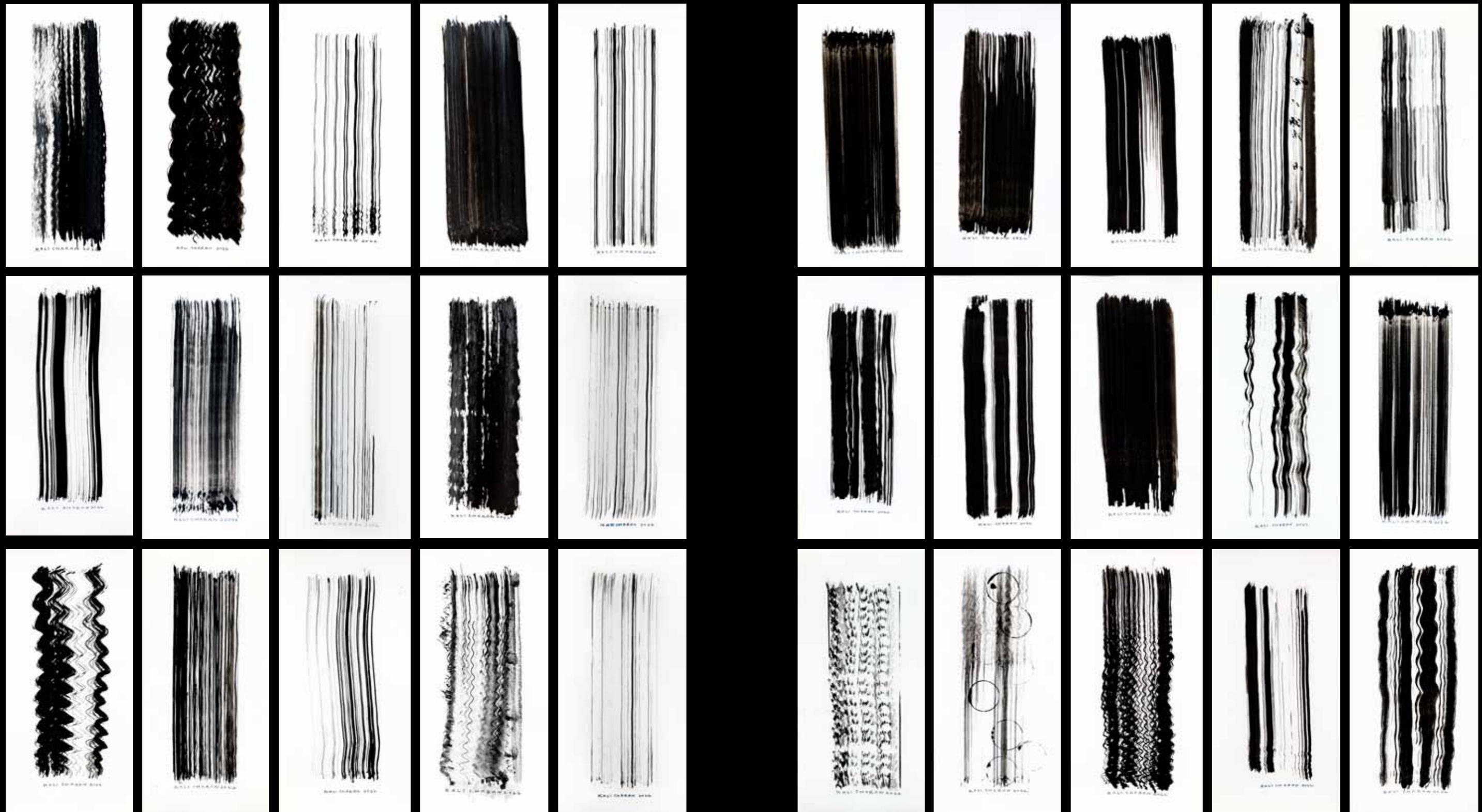
Tapestries of The Boulevard V
Acrylic and Glass Beads on Canvas
24 x 24 Inches
2021



Mirage I
Acrylic on Canvas
31.5 x 34.5 Inches
2022

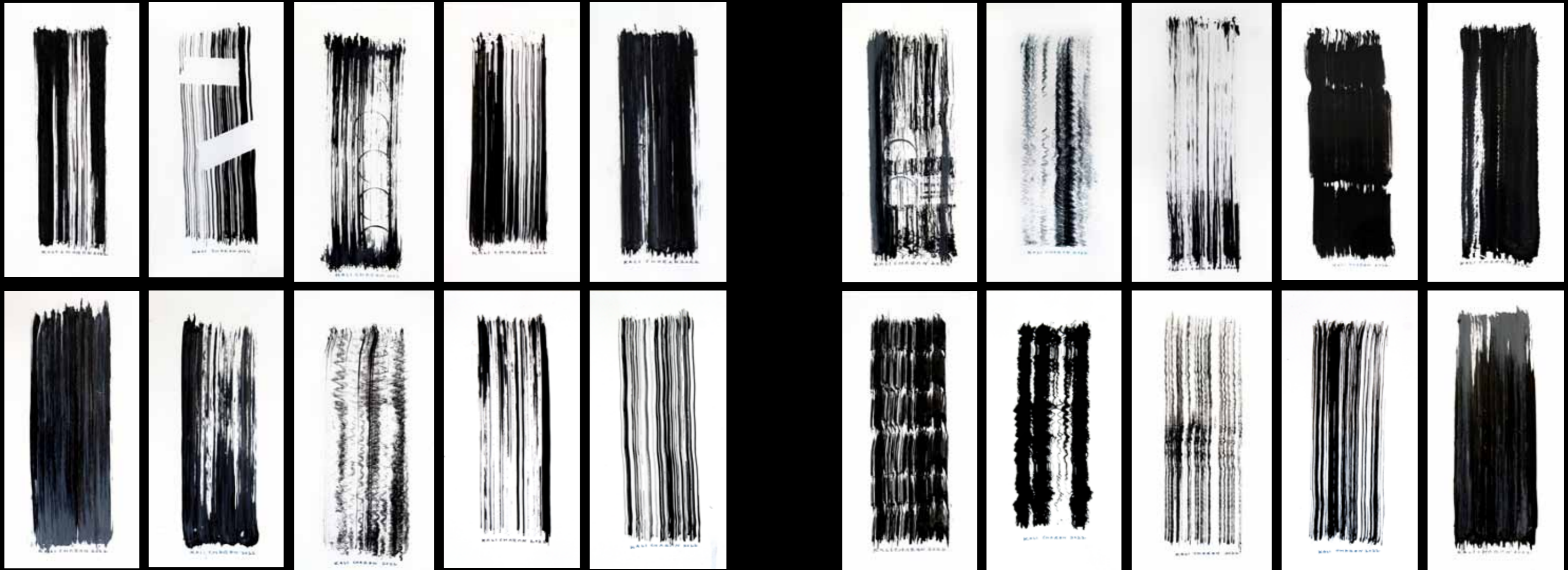


Mirage II
Acrylic on Canvas
31.5 x 34.5 Inches
2022



Ink Reflections
Ink on Paper
9.5 x 5 Inches (each)
2022

Ink Reflections
Ink on Paper
9.5 x 5 Inches (each)
2022



Ink Reflections
Ink on Paper
9.5 x 5 Inches (each)
2022

Ink Reflections
Ink on Paper
9.5 x 5 Inches (each)
2022



Kalicharan Gupta

I was born 1947 in Punjab now in Haryana. Studied at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, College of Art, Delhi University.

Had eighteen one-man shows in India, Korea as well as solo show in India Art Fair 2017. Had participated in thirty-five group shows, and also curated India - Korea and Korea - India 2002, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2018, 2019 Exhibitions, workshops and seminars in New Delhi and Seoul, Korea.

I had participated in The Inner Path festival of Buddhist Film, Art, and Philosophy in NGMA New Delhi. And has participated Fourteen Artist's Camp/Workshops National and International and also nominated as Commissioner of South Asian Countries in 1991 and worked under National Museum of Contemporary art, Seoul, Korea 2006. I had been the Honorary Director, Lalit Kala Akademi Garhi Studios New Delhi, 1994-97, Commissioner of Biennale of Visual Arts, Seychelles, 1992, and was Nominated on 50th Anniversary of India's Independence and curated an exhibition of three artists at Vladivostok, Russia through ICCR 1997. I had visited and participated in '95 Kwangju First International Biennale, Korea 1995, also participated in Singapore Art Fair. In 2021, 2022 I had participated in Gwanghwamun International Art Festival Art and Travel in Seoul. Has the recipient of Junior and Senior Fellowship from Department of Culture, Govt. of India. 1991-92 and won the National Award from Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.

Published articles in leading Indian, Korean, Russian newspapers and magazines. Films on me have been telecast four times on Delhi Doordarshan. Works are in the collections of Lalit Kala Academy, NGMA New Delhi, Govt. Museum Chandigarh, and private collection in top industries like Apollo Tyres, Dabur Industries, Scindia's, Tata Steel, Birla's, Taj Hotels, Kiran Nader Museum, Indian Art Museum Seoul, Paris France, USA and various national and international private collectors and Museums.

Secretary: Academy of Visual Media (a Regd. trust for the promotion of art and photography) since 1999.

REHYTHEM OF SERBENTY



ART KONSULT

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