

Dianna



Molzan

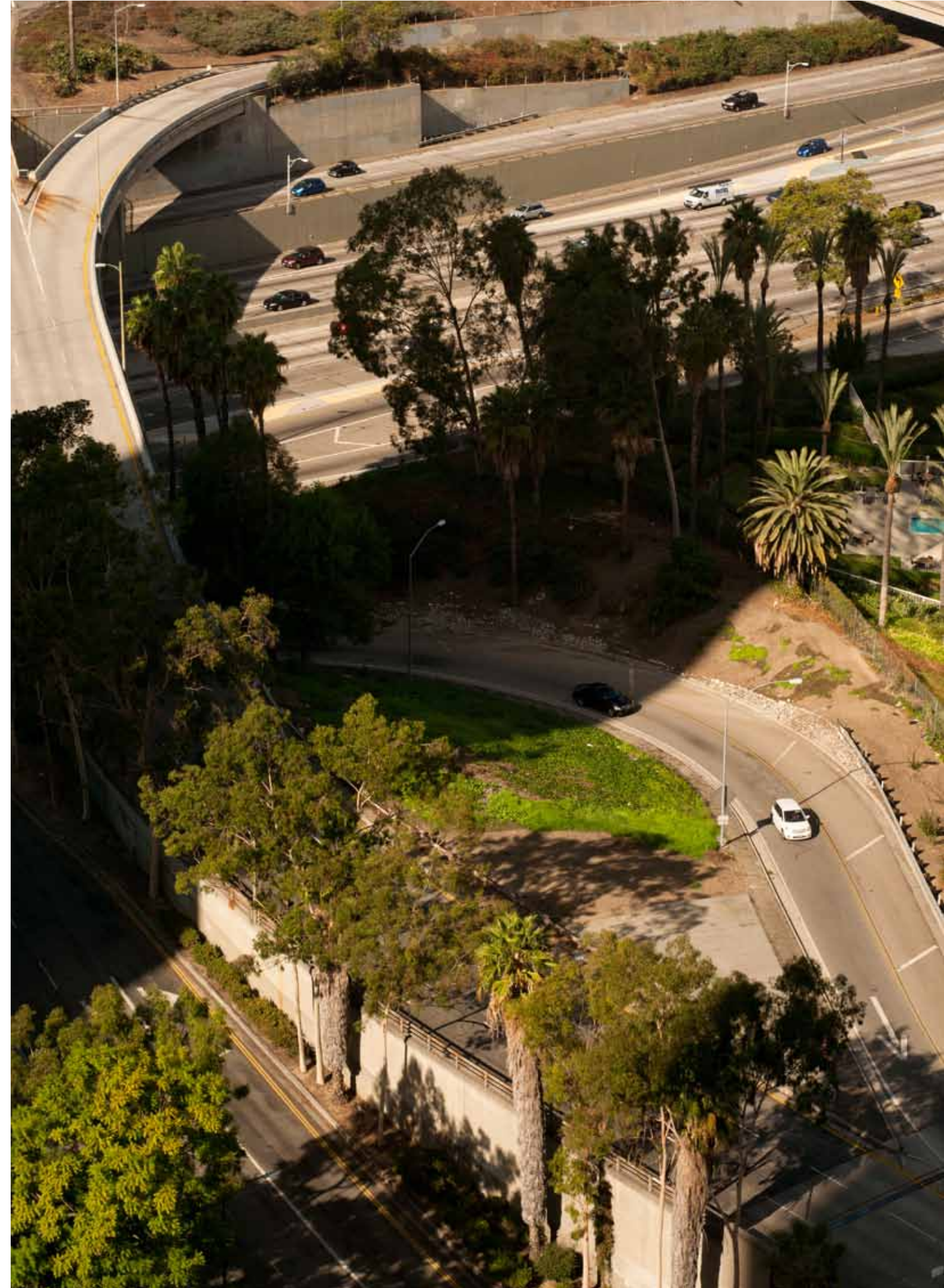


Toiling in the wake of postwar artists who attempted to “destroy the picture,” Los Angeles–based artist Dianna Molzan makes an enthusiastic kind of painting that is concerned with adornment and decoration as much as it is with deconstruction. Inspired less by nature than by human-design choices and attitudes about color, she ignores the classical hierarchies between utilitarian crafts and fine



art, making paintings in which the language of fashion and design is freighted with art-historical narrative. Whether her “bathroom-mirror-sized” paintings provide commentary on the contemporary impotence of aesthetic dissent, or just the pleasure of bringing brilliant hues into existence, Molzan’s practice is one of precision, refinement, taste and connoisseurship.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
NATHANAEL TURNER





Every painting — every good painting, at least — is a problem. This problem can come in all shapes and sizes: a problem with the world, a problem with painting, a problem with one's self. Whether it's the curious vibrational effect of two colors in proximity to one another or the crisis of consumer capitalism, a painting embodies or responds to the impetus for its own creation. Not all paintings solve their problems; most don't even come close. Many create more problems. That's okay.

For Dianna Molzan, the primary problem that her paintings address is largely self-imposed. In simple terms, it could be boiled down to the following question: Why does a painting, an object made of wood and textile and metal fixtures, conventionally ignore the materials of its own construction? This is a good problem because it engenders a slew of further problems. Such as: Why do we habitually disregard frames and mounts and borders when considering a painted picture? Does a painting contain, within its constituent parts, a hierarchy of value? Where does the painting end? Where does its value end?

The originary problem of Molzan's paintings is, arguably, only a conceit. In the present day, painters are no longer confined to the traditional media of oil paint and canvas. Perhaps they never were. Some of the most important paintings in the historical Western canon are frescoes on plaster, or painted directly on wood. In the twentieth century, artists used all manner of industrial and domestic materials to make paintings, and in contemporary discourse there is virtually nothing that could not make a case for calling itself a painting. (A 2011–12 series by Urs Fischer, coincidentally titled "Problem Paintings," were predominantly silkscreen on aluminium.) Furthermore, it could be argued that most of Molzan's works are not really paintings at all, but simply sculptures made of wood and canvas and paint.

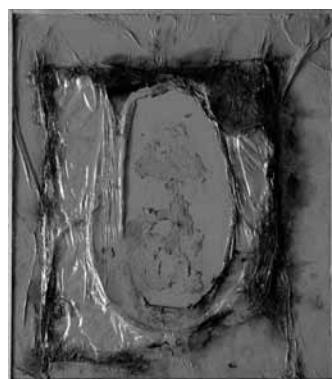
As a fledgling Los Angeles-based artist, Molzan continued to engage the multiplicity of options available to her. Yet even as she made videos and sculptures and explored performance, painting remained her touchstone. Not a natural multitasker, she quickly realized that she lacked focus, so she placed restrictions on herself. From then on, her work would only be made from the

elemental components of traditional painting: paint (almost always oil), textile (mostly canvas but also linen and, more recently, silk) and wood (fir and poplar). Paint would be applied by brush. She restricted her paint purchases to primary colors, plus white, from which she mixed all other colors (although the hard-to-mix shades of magenta and turquoise have sometimes required her to bend her own rules).

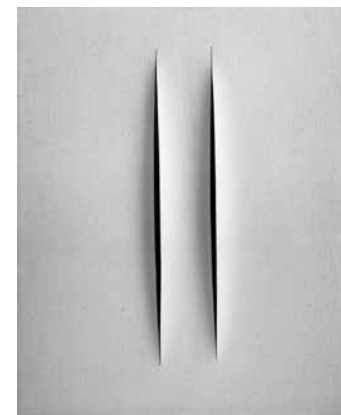
By confining her activities to these limitations, Molzan has, paradoxically, accessed a deep and wide territory of potential in the very center of the painting tradition. She has not approached her problem from its margins, nor attempted to broaden its scope with novelty or esoterica. Simultaneously, her critique is mainstream and of the mainstream. Molzan has, in her words, "gone in through the front door." Take, for example, the works she has made by unravelling and removing the threads of the canvas itself. Having fixed a canvas over a wooden stretcher, Molzan cut into the fabric and teased out all the vertical strands, leaving only the horizontal threads still fixed to the sides, causing them to hang slackly in downward arcs.

The first time she did this, in 2009, Molzan said it was "like finding something hiding in plain sight." The most obvious and yet overlooked property of the painting was suddenly exposed and shown to be a uniquely unstable ground for further painterly activity. Likewise, in an untitled painting from 2010 (Molzan declines to title any of her works), the artist spattered a light drizzle of red, yellow and blue paint onto the white primed threads. As such, color itself, like the surface it rests on, is separated into its primary forms. The effect, however, is far from reductive. *Untitled* (2010) is a humble miracle, a plainspoken revelation that transforms simple pictorial ingredients into an unexpectedly sensuous sculptural experience.

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, recently mounted the exhibition "Destroy the Picture: Painting the Void, 1949–62," the last curatorial effort by Paul Schimmel before he departed the institution. The exhibition took as its focus the first twentieth-



Alberto Burri,
Red Plastic, 1961



Lucio Fontana,
Concetto Spaziale (Attese), 1968

century paintings to have their canvases punctured by their makers in order to reveal the emptiness beneath. For artists such as Alberto Burri, Lucio Fontana and Shozo Shimamoto, all haunted by the terrible memory of World War II, such pictorial injuries were representative of the nihilism that they felt had come to haunt illusionistic representation. The painted canvas was, too, an analogue for the human

body: paint became exposed flesh, canvas a skin and the stretcher a skeleton.

Though she toils in the wake of these artists, Molzan shares little of their postwar angst. She has described herself as an enthusiast, with an additive practice that is concerned with adornment and decoration as much as it is with deconstruction. In contradistinction with the art of "Destroy the Picture," the

canvases in Molzan's paintings are in dialogue not with human skin (a rather melodramatic and now clichéd analogy, one might argue) but with textiles and design, from mass-produced patterns to popular color schemes. Accordingly, the work loses its potential terror; the stakes are lower, but also closer to home and more believable. The hanging threads of *Untitled* (2010) evoke the bagginess of a loose sleeve or a complex necklace. A work from 2011 is almost all void and no painting: an empty rectangular stretcher that is sleeved in ruched, off-white canvas. The effect is to temper the structure's unapologetic starkness with soft folds that bring to mind the kind of "scrunchie" hairbands popular with girls in the 1980s.

And as soon as fashion enters the conversation, so must history. Nothing remains contemporary for long; stylistic tropes, in clothes just as in paintings, have their day and are discarded or resurrected. Molzan is especially skilled in summoning a hard-to-define datedness in certain color palettes, patterns and paint applications. The flamingo pink, mauve, peach and sage that she deploys on five vertical bars of stretched canvas in a work from 2011, for example, evoke a

lady's blouse from the 1920s, or kitchen curtains from the 1940s, or even plastic laminate from 1980s-era furniture. The work is disarmingly familiar but also out of reach. We recognize it but cannot quite place it.

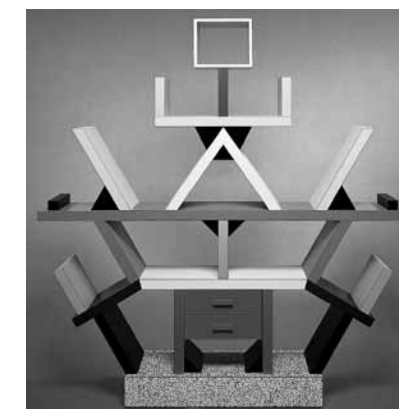
The same is true of what might be the gaudiest work in Molzan's *oeuvre*, from 2012. As with a number of her paintings, this work stands slightly proud of the wall thanks to square feet fixed to each of its corners. Its all-over pattern boasts involved polygons of red, blue, purple, brown and jade green, and only on sustained inspection turns out not to be a pattern at all. If we were to try and locate the bizarre, irregular composition within an aesthetic context, it would probably be to cheap curtain design or bus upholstery — rather than modernist painting — that we would turn.

It goes without saying that "fine" art and quotidian design have long had a symbiotic relationship. Styles and patterns have been passed, especially in the postindustrial West, back and forth between the different

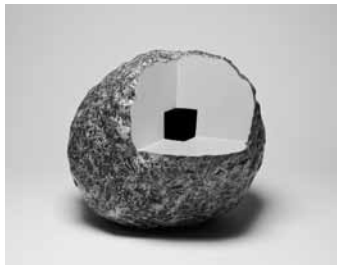
applications of form and function, between common and refined systems of value. The most self-consciously frenzied moment for this traffic was in the 1980s, when designers such as the Memphis Group, Frank Gehry and Vivienne Westwood incorporated cheap or industrial materials into their costly and highly desirable products. It should perhaps be no surprise that this is a period to which Molzan returns often in her work — and employs it, Tardis-like, to access other moments in 19th- and 20th-century visual culture. The flecked surfaces of Ettore Sottsass's laminate furniture for Memphis are revisited in paintings such as Molzan's 2010 work in which three folds of can-



Shozo Shimamoto,
Holes, 1954



Ettore Sottsass,
Carlton, 1981*



vas lap around a bare wooden stretcher, forming a *tricolore* ice-cream-like relief. Her dazzling paint effects are also reminiscent of the experimental ceramic glazes of fellow Californian Ken Price, an artist whose early work must surely have been an influence on Sottsass, and who wilfully ignored the classical hierarchies between utilitarian crafts and fine art.

A paint spatter, notes Molzan, can never be just a paint spatter. Depending on its density and size, it can be a Jackson Pollock spatter or a kitchen countertop from the 1960s. It can be a spatter emblazoned across a sweatshirt sold by Westwood and Malcolm McLaren at their late-1970s-era London store Seditonaries, or it could be the popular, aestheticized version seen on mass-produced denim and t-shirts in the 1980s. Or, just maybe, it could be the dripped paint effect applied to \$525 Maison Martin Margiela sneakers in the designer's Pre-Fall 2012 collection.

Despite the apparent casualness with which Molzan often applies paint — as if her objective is to simply fill up a surface with color or pattern — there is no possibility of such effects remaining neutral. Her concerns may seem predominantly formal but the language of fashion and design is freighted with narrative. The artist remembers owning a pair of paint-spattered trousers while growing up in the rural Pacific Northwest in the 1980s, and feeling unbelievably urban and sophisticated in them. Recently, I myself have seen jeans sold in Gap that have daubs of white paint ready-applied, as if the owner had just finished painting a newly acquired home (signified as being wealthy enough to buy a house but not wealthy enough to hire a professional decorator). The demographic associations of such design tropes are staggeringly precise.

To that end, this is how class identification and personal aspiration find their way into Molzan's work. Hers is a practice of precision,

refinement, taste and connoisseurship. Despite her work's orientation around both high and low cultural coordinates, it always makes an argument for its own value. It does this partly through the delicacy of Molzan's constructions: carefully sewn ropes encase hundreds of separated canvas threads, or evenly knotted nets pull tight across wooden stretchers. Even when Molzan makes marks that are intended to look careless, such as her "palette cleaner" paintings, in which crusts of colored paint accrue as she (supposedly) cleans excess paint from her brush, she aims to make the very best version of that careless-looking painting that she can. Bruce Hainley has called it "italicized brushwork." Molzan herself has described the process as "painting in drag." Her version of drag is never, however, ironic or camp. Instead it hews close to the hopeful notes of transformation and self-identification that that word also implies.

Molzan's paintings also make their claim to value simply through their likeability. They are, for want of a better word, pretty. That is not meant in a dismissive or derisive way; prettiness is but one weapon in their expansive armory. Molzan's paintings have the ability to hook the attention of a viewer from across the room. Her palette is equally unthreatening — she typically prefers pastel shades that might, unthinkingly, be termed "feminine" — and the modest scale of her paintings rewards intimate engagement. Thus dense areas of painterly activity demand close inspection, as with a work from 2012 in which two narrow vertical canvases (inflected with a motley color scheme) are bound together by a sagging white net. And nets of thread appear in other works too, along with ribbons of canvas that connect discrete paintings — normally vertical bands of canvas stretched over wood. These devices are actual and metaphorical traps for our attention: it is as if our roving gaze was a wild animal that Molzan was aiming, sweetly, to ensnare. A work from 2012, in which the net is pinned to all



Paint Splatter Replica Sneakers,
Maison Martin Margiela, Pre-Fall 2012

Joan Mitchell,
Untitled, 1977



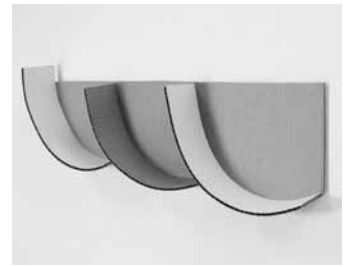
four sides of the stretcher, seems to have caught not only our eye but also clotted masses of vivid color. Molzan is directing our attention not so much to this gorgeous central portion of the painting, but to the clean white wall immediately behind it. The same is true of all these net pieces. It remains the wall, not the painting, that is the real subject of the work.

If I have characterised Molzan's work as revelatory and exposing, such a reading can seem contradicted by the artist's predilection for illusion and visual trickery. For instance, a number of paintings appear to hover about an inch away from the wall, pushed forward by the corners of a thickly painted rectangle that is slipping off the canvas. In a work from her 2012, a lime-green rectangle sticks to a ground not of canvas but silk organza. The heaviness of the paint is at discomfiting odds with the ethereality of the silk — and explains, perhaps, its apparent slide towards the ground. Such an illusion does, in fact, point to an ordinarily disguised quality of the paint: its viscosity when wet and toughness once dried. As it happens, the painted corners are structurally reinforced. "Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand," Picasso famously said. But he went on: "The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies."

These are not the only tricks that Molzan likes to play on her viewers. Strange physical effects also transpire when paint appears to drip downwards from the canvas onto exposed struts of wooden stretcher, or onto the hanging fabric ropes that drape across the front of some paintings. A work from 2011 seems to show a hanging rope — a mess of clashing hues — that has masked not one but

two areas of the same canvas from different color schemes. The work is indexical of a kinetic flip-flopping, an analogy for Molzan's either / or approach to painterly decisions. To that end, there is very little historical painting that Molzan is opposed to. She has expressed, in the past, her inability to choose between the positions of different painters — Joan Mitchell, Richard Tuttle and Matisse were the examples she gave — all of whom influence her practice in diverse ways. If she stakes a position of critique, it is an attack on the possibility, in the 21st century, of a singular critical position. She reserves the right to contradict herself. For some viewers, one work from her exhibition "Grand Tourist" at the ICA Boston, in 2012, might not be recognizable as a Dianna Molzan painting at all. In it, an explosion of blue, white and red pom-poms decorate a brown linen ground. The work derives from her reflection on how American patriotism in Boston is so wildly divergent from patriotism in, say, Texas. It is intended as an unstable proposition. It is also in especially discordant dialogue with another recent picture by Molzan of Twomblyesque flower blooms. Can one think of blue flowers on a red background without thinking of nationalism? If not, why not? Are all interpretations only options?

We have recently witnessed an American presidential election in which the signifying aesthetics — a red tie here, a blue tie there — are as interchangeable as many of the candidates' political positions. It is tempting to read Molzan's project as a commentary on the contemporary impotence of aesthetic dissent. There was a time in recent US history, the artist reminds us, when choices of color or design were high-stakes decisions. Lives have been lost over less. But that time is over. In her own art, Molzan does not cast judgment on the current situation one way or the other; it is not entirely good, she implies, but it is not entirely bad.

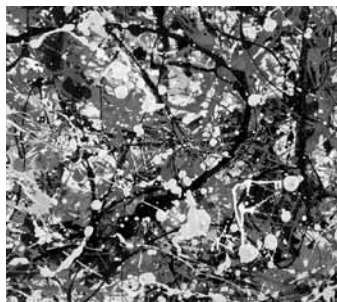


Richard Tuttle,
Boys Let's Be Bad Boys, 1998



Henri Matisse,
L'Escargot, 1953

Ken Price,
Big Load, 1988



Jackson Pollock,
Convergence, 1952

NINE WORKS BY DIANNA MOLZAN



I



II



III



IV



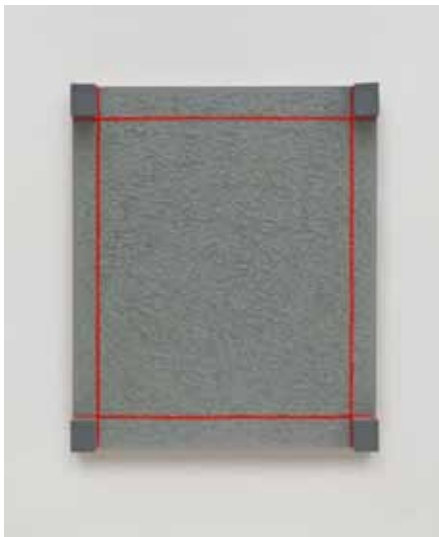
V



VI



VII

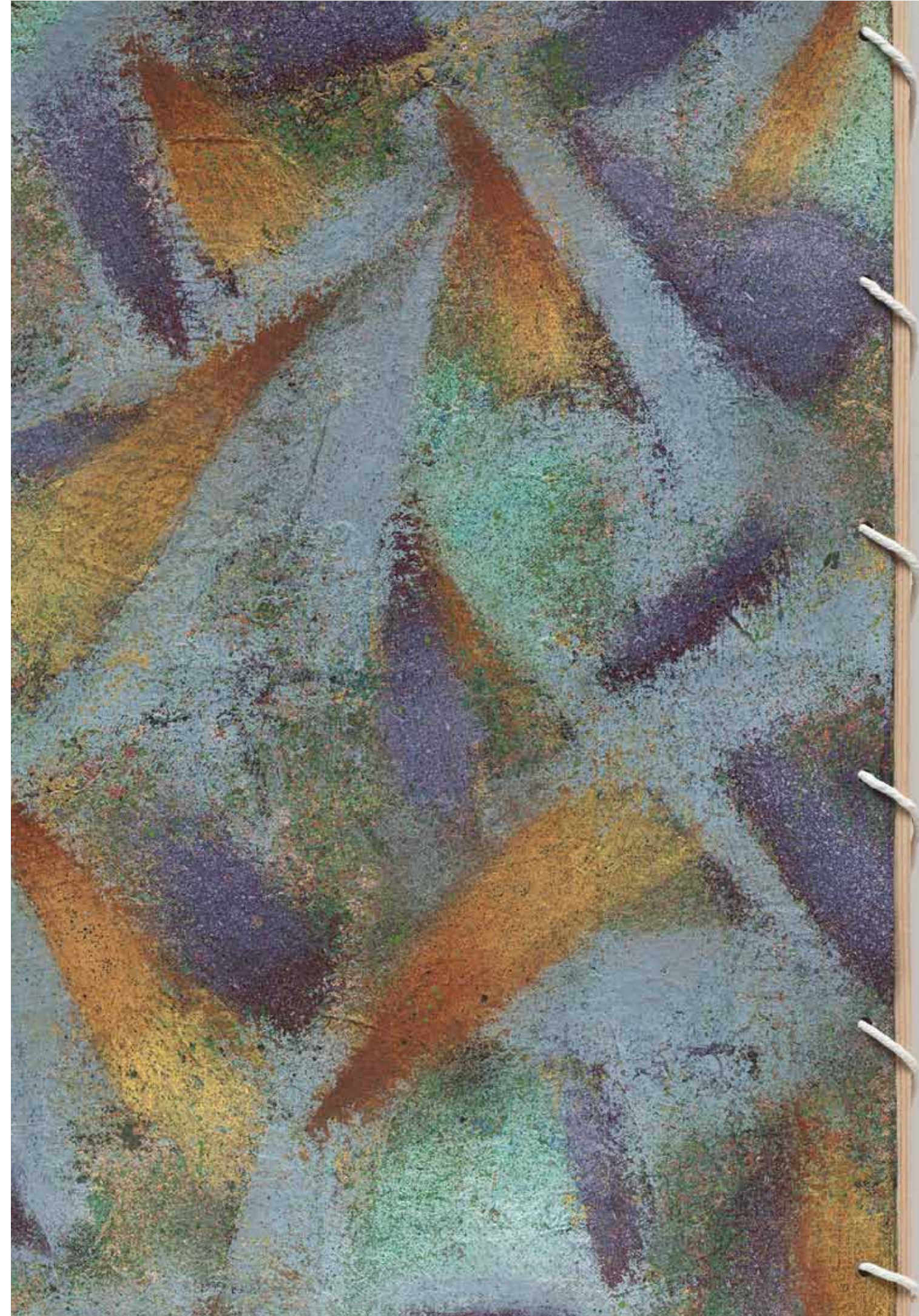


VII

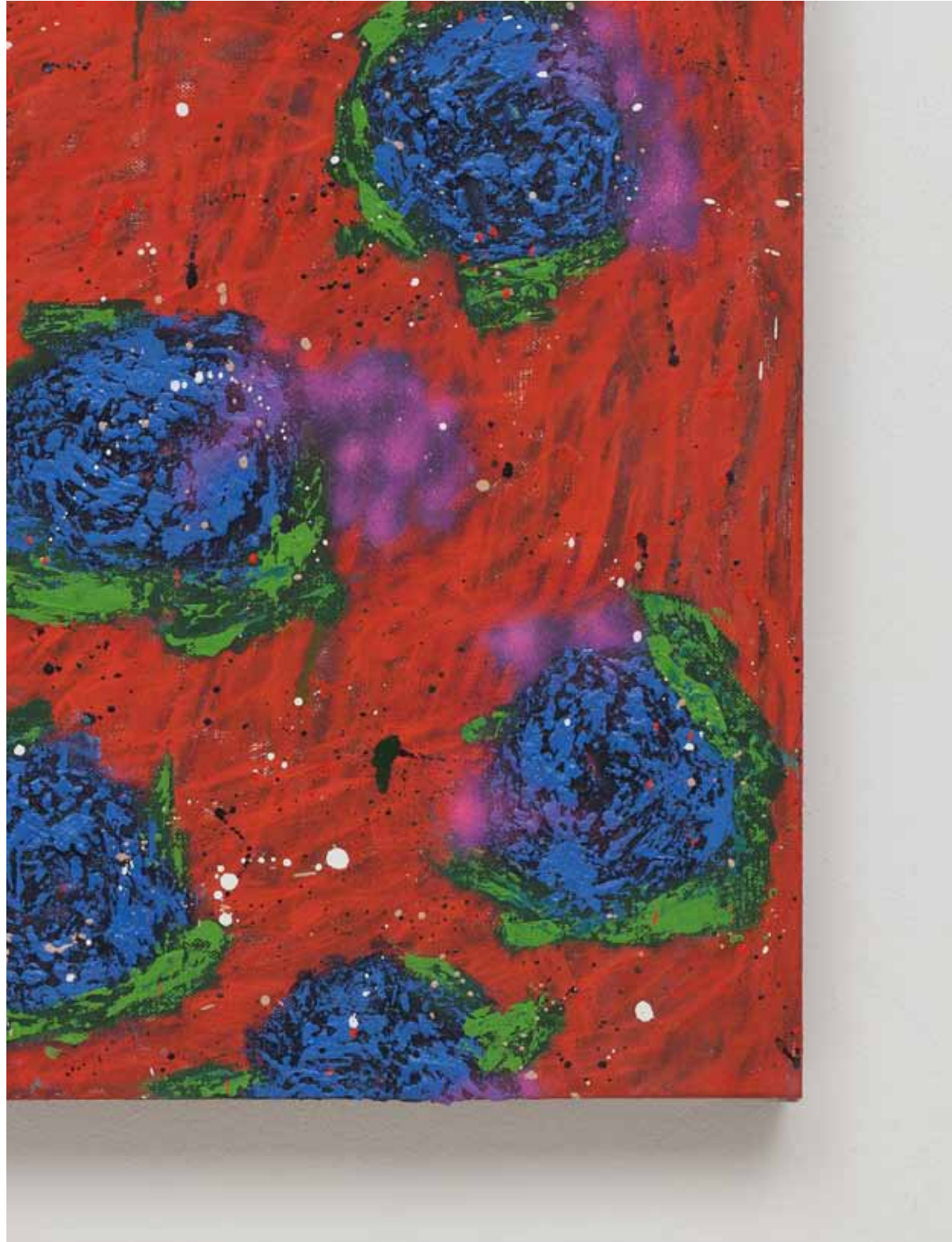


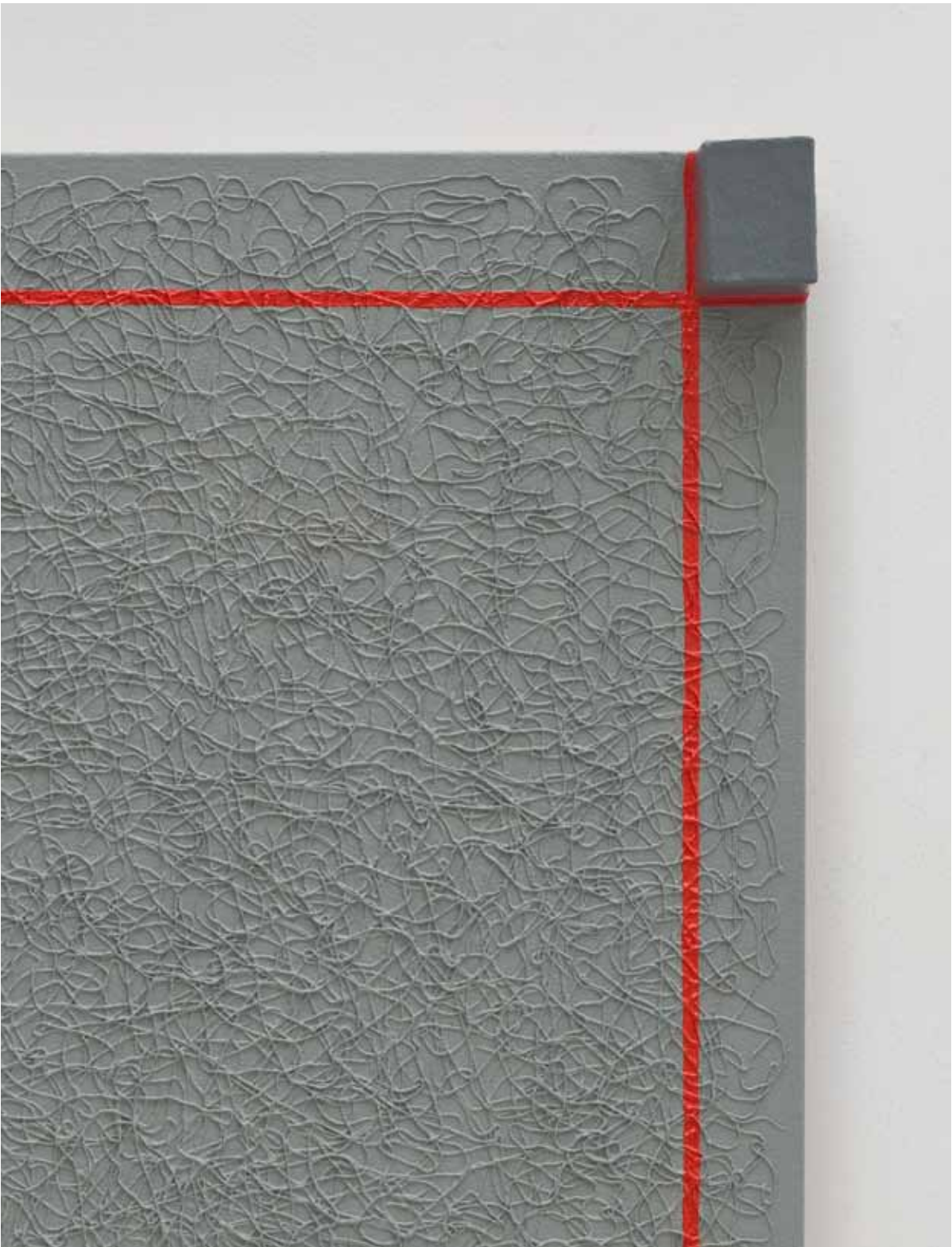
IX

I	UNTITLED	2009	OIL ON CANVAS ON FIR	24 × 20 IN	60.96 × 50.8 CM
II	UNTITLED	2010	OIL ON LINEN ON FIR	24 × 16 IN	60.9 × 40.6 CM
III	UNTITLED	2012	OIL ON CANVAS	37 × 21.5 × 1.5 IN	94 × 54.6 × 3.8 CM
IV	UNTITLED	2010	OIL ON CANVAS ON FIR	24 × 18 IN	60.9 × 45.7 CM
V	UNTITLED	2011	OIL ON LINEN	24 × 20 IN	60.9 × 50.8 CM
VI	UNTITLED	2011	OIL ON CANVAS	24 × 20 IN	60.9 × 50.8 CM
VII					
VIII	UNTITLED	2012	OIL ON CANVAS	70.5 × 57 × 4.5 IN	179.1 × 144.8 × 11.4 CM
IX	UNTITLED	2012	OIL ON CANVAS	72 × 55 × 3.5 IN	182.9 × 139.7 × 8.9 CM











INTERVIEW BY BRUCE HAINLEY I was talking to someone about Willem de Kooning and learned that throughout his life he was obsessed with certain colors of oil paint, in particular alizarin crimson and a certain green — maybe phthalo green? Do you have particular colors that you gravitate toward or that you actively try not to use?

DIANNA MOLZAN That makes sense. Those are two especially accosting colors, very strong. And yes, I do seriously obsess about color and often return to in-between, paradoxical types: colors that can be called warm/cool, sharp/mild, appealing/repellent or high/low. You could say a single color that can be read as discordant in itself. Maybe it has less to do with a few persistent colors for me, and more to do with always seeking a complicated one that isn't easily assimilated or expected in a certain context.

BH In terms of seeking those discordant and even self-discordant types of color, do you find solutions or inspiration just as frequently in nature as in culture? Or, to be more specific, in qualities of weather, ocean and desert light; variegations of sages, heathers and other flowers, and/or fashion — for some reason Jean Muir comes to mind — movies and design, like Memphis? Do you keep a sketchbook to track the discordant, among other things?

DM I like the bougainvillea that grows all over LA because the same plant will explode with different clashing clusters of hot fuchsia, cool red and bleached-out orange, and it always looks “wrong” to me. But when it comes to my paintings, human-design choices and attitudes about color are what inspire me most, and not color for the sake of color and not the givens of nature. Having said that, Henri Fantin-Latour's floral paintings are some of my favorites. The quality of the diffused somber light he captures is much like the overcast light of the Pacific Northwest where I grew up. So it's not that I am indifferent to qualities of nature or how other artists have been inspired by it, it's just that I'm more interested in exploring the unspoken rules of what governs a floral still-life painting. Why do we assign special significance to certain flowers and compositions and colors while viewing others as more or less desirable, both in and outside of art? I have a lot of iPhone pictures of flowers as visual notes, and most of them lack a clear central point and have a full-frame claustrophobic composition — much like my floral paintings. But the floral paintings are always a vague amalgam of “flower” that never corresponds to an actual type or existing image.

BH When you were in graduate school, I hope it's not too weird to revisit that moment, you spent a lot of time thinking and doing some writing about Eva Hesse's *Hang Up* [1966] and George Seurat's *La Grande Jatte — 1884* [1884–86], both of which are in the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago. How has your thinking about those two works evolved? Certain aspects of both paintings — for example: frames, framing — seem to remain central to your current work, but in ways that I never would have predicted. In part, I ask this question quite selfishly, since, after seeing all the Seurats — especially *The Models* [1887–88], which, as you know well, shows *La Grande Jatte* with its special white frame — at the Barnes Foundation this summer, I really can't hear or read enough about him.

DM Ah, the Barnes Foundation, that moveable feast! Now that is a weird revisiting. Part of my initial fascination with *La Grand Jatte* and *Hang Up* had to do with the works being

presented and altered in a particular context, so how fitting to bring in the Barnes. Also, Matisse’s *Dance* murals for the Merion Building are a big inspiration, literally, for the next group of paintings I’m making. Something I haven’t talked much about in connection to the frame and Hesse and Seurat is the spirit and style in which they approached the contained wall-mounted rectangle, both exuberantly and defiantly. Maybe more than past works, my recent frame-centric paintings are more absurd and playful, with a canvas “scrunchy” (cheap-fancy) snug around a frame with many layers of monochromatic paint. It’s not just about raising questions of what is intrinsic to a work of art and who decides, but how to express rebellion or find catharsis within a given system. This may sound ridiculous, but I’ve often thought of Seurat’s frames as not just unorthodox extensions of the picture plane, but also as a sort of aesthetic defacement or seepage — a distant precursor to Rauschenberg’s *Bed* piece and the painted taxidermy goat face in the *Monogram* combine. Those two works are well over 50 years old, and I’m still flabbergasted by their brilliant audacity.

BH Technical questions, since I so rarely hear them asked in contemporary interviews: What kinds or brands of paint do you use? Do you use synthetic or actually “haired” brushes, and what size? For some of your paintings’ effects — say, flecking — are there special tools or implements you keep nearby? Do you set up a palette when you work? Do you go to fabric and notions stores, in addition to art-supply places?

DM It’s nice to be asked technical questions — it is rare indeed! In general, I use really basic brushes and paint materials found at any art-supply store; nothing fancy or too expensive. Pretty much everything you see is made from some mixture of mineral spirits and linseed oil with Gamblin brand and, occasionally, Old-Holland primary oil colors: cadmiums red and yellow, both light and deep, and four blues (cobalt, cobalt teal, Prussian and cerulean), plus quinacridone violet (magenta) and titanium white. One thing I’m really fanatical about is mixing all of my own colors from the primaries — it allows for greater control but it is also a total agony and ecstasy. Bringing color into existence is awesome. My brushes are mostly bristle filbert, then flat, and then some rounds. I typically use one palette knife to mix paint and to paint with, and color is mixed just prior to using it. Any varying effects like flecking derive from the same stock brushes. I use carpenter tacks instead of staples for stretching canvas: they are easier to remove if needed, and you can use them again. Why do I suddenly feel like Martha Stewart...

BH Oh, it’s never not a good thing, a little Martha vibe. How many button and ribbon shops, not to mention nonce cooking techniques, has she alone pulled from oblivion? But the last time I visited your studio you had just finished some paintings which, to a certain degree, allowed you to think about Matisse’s Chapelle du Rosaire de Vence. Sadly, I’ve not yet been to the French Riviera or to the Matisse Chapel, a situation that pulverizes me some days. I bring it up, oddly, because I’ve been thinking a lot about a powerful moment in an essay by Molly Nesbit in which she’s renegotiating the work of Sherrie Levine, David Salle and Cindy Sherman, and their early — and ongoing? — friendship. At one point she writes: “But Levine employed the most impersonal, least theatrical techniques of thrift to bring divinity back. The trace of her own labor was confined to the zone of internegativity, as if there she could exist, a person only of shift, not swallowed by the darkness but not visible either, something like a person without walls.” Some of Nesbit’s rallying to Walker Evans and James Agee’s endeavor in *Let Us Now Praise Famous*

Men, which, obviously, became a part of Levine’s study, was “to recognize the stature of a portion of unimagined existence, and to contrive techniques proper to its recording, communication, analysis, and defense.” The combination of the project “to bring divinity back” with a pursuit to “recognize the stature of a portion of unimagined existence” seems alien to most discourses and strategies of contemporary art, and yet, after you told me about your dwelling on the Vence Chapel, I wanted to ask you more about what led you to consider it and to make work as a way to understand or confront what it is.

DM To talk about technique, divinity and thrift in connection with the Vence Chapel seems absolutely right. Matisse’s understated and sketchy renderings of what are typically designed to awe and overwhelm the senses — in scale, repetition and form — are so powerful because of their simple visual economy. But it’s difficult to answer your question fully because I’m still figuring out Matisse’s Chapel and his murals for the Barnes building and why they are so important to me. Definitely his incorporation of painted works with space is one reason; the sum of parts to make one overall work another, but that is a very incomplete and unsatisfying response. It does not account for the great feeling I have for those works, which is murkier to explain. But there has to be a degree of the unknown for me to proceed with a painting or body of work, or else it is just execution without discovery.

BH For your solo debut, “The Case of the Strand” [*at Overduin and Kite, Los Angeles, in 2009*], all of the paintings were of a uniform size, although their surfaces and depths changed greatly. Soon after that auspicious event, you brought various sizes of paintings into the mix. Could you discuss the differences between and/or challenges of making a “small” painting — do you think of them as portrait-size? — as compared to making a “large” painting? It’s not merely a shift in scale, although I think many assume it might be.

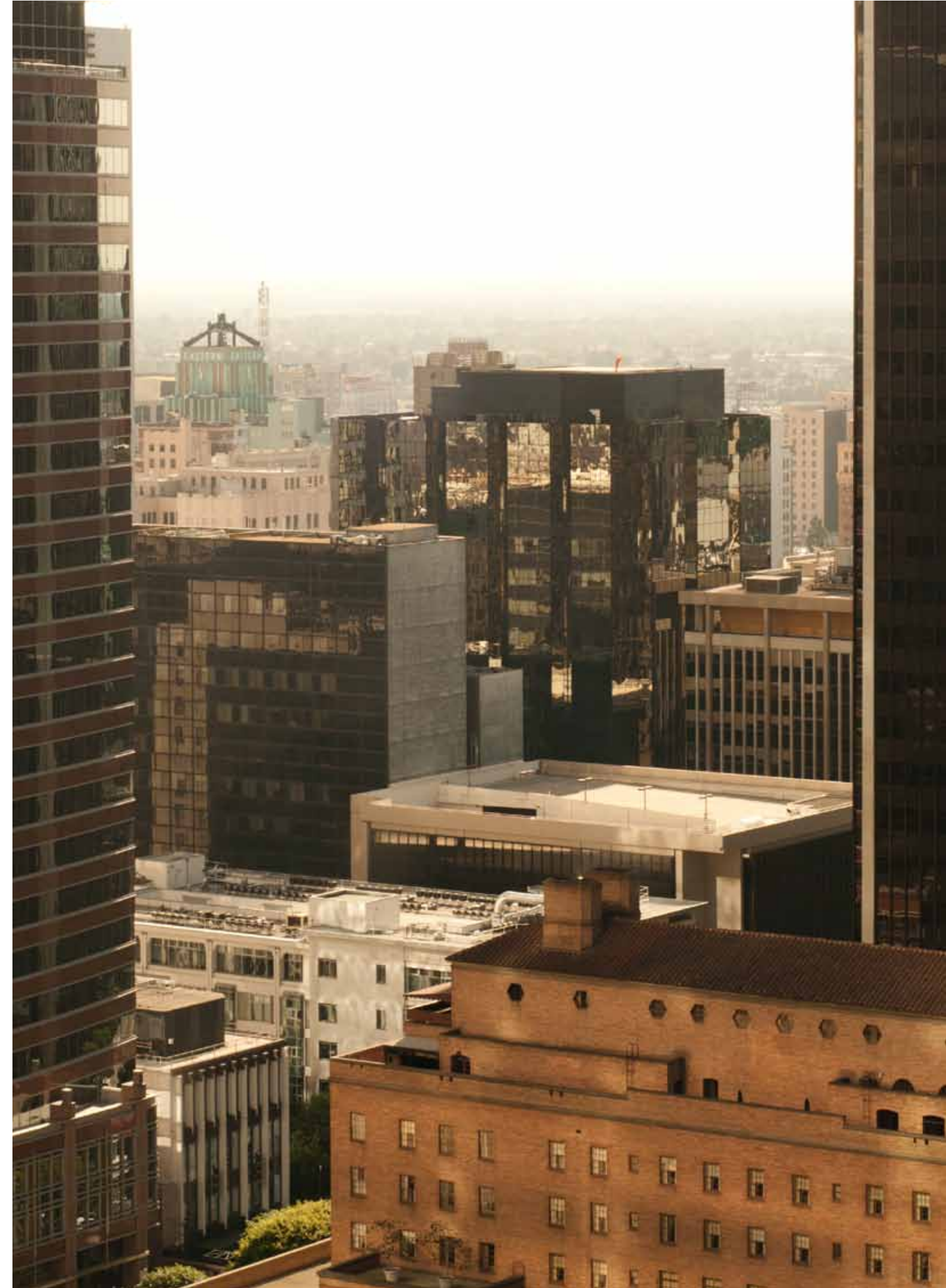
DM The small works are less portrait-size than viewer-head-and-shoulder-size. Maybe bathroom-mirror-size would be a more accurate description. And you are absolutely right that decisions of scale and orientation are rarely casual — they can convey as much meaning and intention as all the other elements that go into the painting. I spend a lot of time deliberating about precise measurements, to the point where I’m routinely using blue masking tape on the wall to nudge outlines — true to scale — around until they feel just so for a certain idea, before being made into a stretcher frame. Over the past year I’ve been doing a lot of diptychs and polyptychs using very tall and narrow canvases: three inches by six feet. The allotted space between the multiple canvases and how low to the ground they hang are as considered as the actual paintings. Applying paint to those slim surfaces makes me feel like I’ve never painted before; it’s very difficult because the width dictates the marks and significantly limits gesture. That is an extreme example of how shifts in scale require a whole new approach and sensitivity to making a painting.

BH Although you don’t give your individual paintings titles, you’ve provided some very evocative and snazzy handles to some of your solo shows, both in galleries and museums. “The Case of the Strand,” for example, and “Bologna Meissen.” And, most recently, “Grand Tourist.” What does a title do and what do you hope it does? What can’t it do or, rather, what do you hope it doesn’t do?

DM Thank you for that description, “snazzy handles”; I love it! That would make a great title, and a great pick-up line too. “Hey, snazzy handles, care to dance?” Who could refuse? I must say getting to talk with you about language is a thrill, as I have serious writer/poet envy, and titling a show is one of the few instances where I can play out my writer fantasy in a manageable five words or less. My notebooks are full of variations, cast-offs and would-be titles. Some of the discards I like better than the ones used, but it’s important that the title embody the intention and tone of the show, so I try not to get too enamored with syllables and word choices for their own sake. It is helpful to develop the title from the beginning while making the paintings. It’s almost like my subconscious thoughts about the work surface through trying to wrangle it into satisfying and concrete language — the emerging title and paintings start to inform each other and lead to a deeper understanding in the process. The title is always closely bound to a particular body of work and I think of it as an essential working piece of the show, so I’m always happy when people take to them and are curious and engaged beyond just namesake. But it goes the other way, too. Several years back I got some very heated responses for titling a show “Romancing the Strange.” Some people thought I was abusing the word “strange” with what they thought were boring paintings, and they were really pissed. It was hilarious since my title was about being enraptured with a thing you can’t figure out, and is beyond your knowledge or experience, but going for it anyway, which was basically my feeling about art and life at the time. It had very little to do with what they were upset about.

BH Considering the context or “site” where our conversation will appear, mulling over things Italian, I couldn’t believe a certain topic that was hiding in broad daylight of our mutual devotion hadn’t hit me earlier: the unlikely, heartbreaking ferocities of Giorgio Morandi. I’m pretty sure that the first time I was ever in your studio we talked about his paintings, and you were just preparing to see the Morandi survey at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In the Big Apple for the occasion, I went twice in a period of a few days, and I know you immersed yourself, point blank, in the Bolognesian’s persistent wonders for as long as you were able. I’m tempted to say that there’s a secret guild of Morandi admirers, a community that includes some comprehensible members like Maureen Gallace, as well as others, perhaps, more surprising — Trisha Donnelly, for example. Could you say something about what Morandi unlocks for you?

DM That is some pretty exceptional fandom company! But not surprising either; Morandi is so special. Yes, seeing the Met show was one of the most wonderful art experiences, just to be able to have so much quiet time with that much of his work, and to go round and round that rotunda for hours without breaking the spell. I think that immersing myself in Morandi made it possible for me to truly commit to a studio existence that is based primarily on looking and reflecting and experimenting with materials. For so long I struggled with the validity of doing that, even though it’s what I always wanted. Morandi’s patient and peculiar paintings made a great case for holing up in the studio, slowing down and getting introspective, which ultimately freed up my imagination and led to the work I’m making now.







DIANNA MOLZAN (b. 1972, Tacoma) lives and works in Los Angeles. She has had solo exhibitions at ICA, Boston; Whitney Museum, New York; and Overduin and Kite, Los Angeles. She has taken part in group shows at Vilma Gold, London; Fundación Santander, Madrid; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; and the Rubell Family Collection, Miami. Her work is also included among the collections of LACMA, Los Angeles; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, SFMoMA, San Francisco; Whitney Museum, New York; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Current & Forthcoming

DIANNA MOLZAN will be included in "Painter Painter," an upcoming group show featuring works by 15 artists investigating the contemporary language of abstraction at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Author

JONATHAN GRIFFIN is a writer living in Los Angeles. He is a contributing editor for *Frieze* and also writes for *Art Review*, *Mousse*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Tate Etc*, *Flash Art* and other publications.

Interview by

BRUCE HAINLEY lives in Los Angeles. The fifth issue of *Pep Talk* is dedicated to his writing. His book on Sturtevant, *Under the Sign of [sic]*, will be published in late 2013 by Semiotext(e).

All artwork images courtesy of
Overduin and Kite, Los Angeles
Photography by Brian Forrest