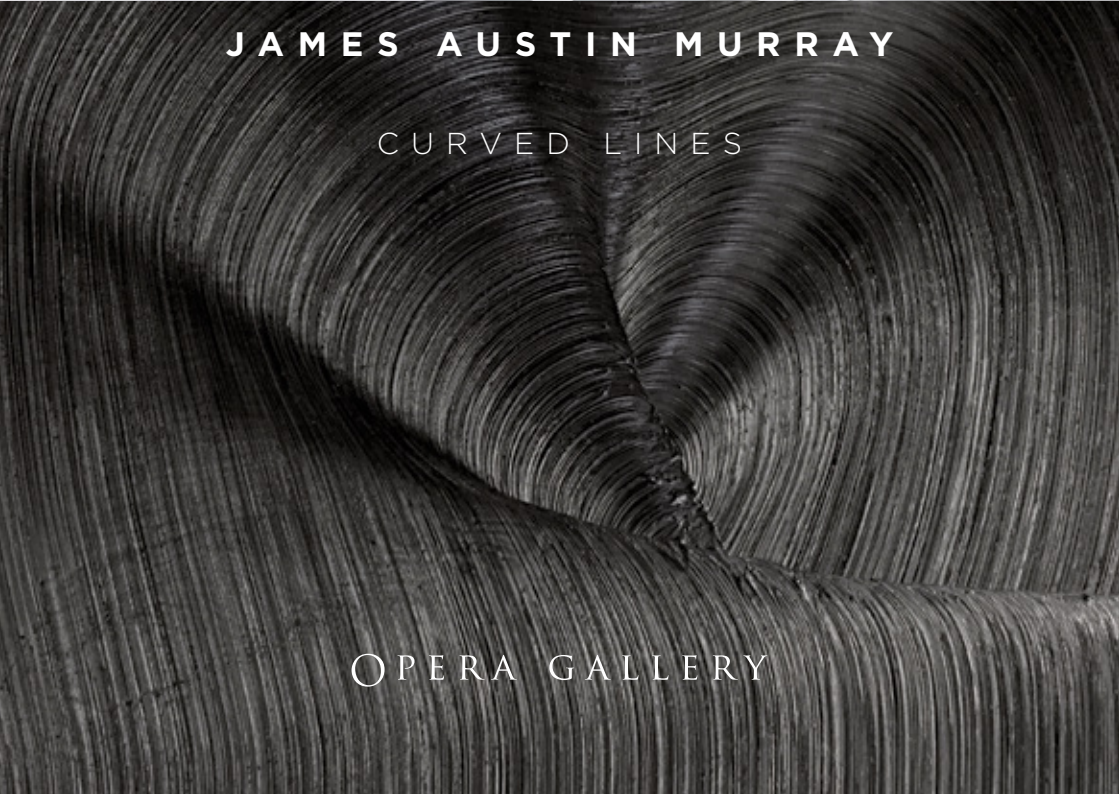




BENOIT LEMERCIER

JAMES AUSTIN MURRAY

CURVED LINES



OPERA GALLERY

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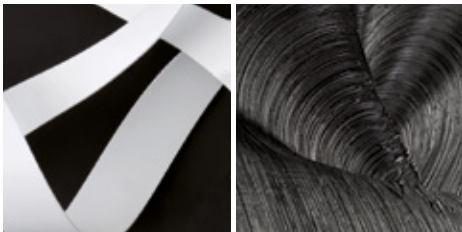
P R E F A C E

In the beginning, there was matter. Its endless evolution and permutations make up the universe and all life as we know it. With *Curved Lines*, we present to you two artists, French sculptor Benoit Lemerrier and American painter James Austin Murray, who are both interested in the concepts of change and visual perception.

Each artists create artworks that are tactile, sensitive and seductive in their simple elegance. Lemerrier presents, in this exhibition, two series of sculptures: the angular and dense *Hypercubes* and the light and fluid *Superstrings*, both inspired by perspective and dimensionality. He renders unimaginable scale visible in front of our eyes. Murray, is a magician of infinite variation contained in the surface of a single black canvas. He uses primordial ivory black paint, made from charred bones or ivory, that mankind has favoured from prehistory.

Each of them brings their concept into focus through the artwork they create. Suddenly, when viewing, background noise disappears, replaced by intricately rendered detail, demanding both our attention and ambient reflection which animates the work. We stand before these works as if we are children once more, in awe, witnessing the vibration of particles, offering a glimpse of the unknown and mysterious universe. We want to ask the most basic questions. What is it? What will it become?

We hope that this intense dialogue between two artists, brings to you a moment of wonder and tranquility, mesmerised by the curved lines that lead deeper into our hearts and outwards towards the infinite.



Gilles Dyan
Chairman and Founder
Opera Gallery Group

Damien Simonelli
Director
Opera Gallery Monaco





BENOIT LEMERCIER

French sculptor Benoit Lemerrier is born in 1965. Lemerrier has always been fascinated by manual work, including drawing and painting. This leads to his experimenting and learning how to handle various materials since a young age. At the age of 16, he created his first drawing *The Periodic Classification of Elements* inspired by chemistry. Since then, Lemerrier began to associate art and science in his artworks trying to illustrate in a visible form the mysteries of the universe. He now lives and works in Paris and in Eauze in the Gers region.

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Benoit Lemerrier brings to us an artistic vision of the world's mysteries that surround us. Based on different scientific theories, he takes us on a journey into the heart of matter and presents a poetic vision of the infinitely grandiose and the infinitely small through series *Hypercubes* and *Superstrings*, which started in 2000.

The *Hypercubes* series brings us towards the infinitely grandiose by playing with the anamorphic to venture into the fourth spatial dimension. Angular and black geometric sculptures open these perspectives to us and lead towards the infinite with radiating lines.

The *Superstrings* series is a demonstration of the infinitely small made visible by the intermingling white bands showing the vibrations of the smallest particles of matter. The quantum string theory suggests that matter is made of vibrating microscopic strings that in turn create subatomic particles.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 *Collect*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
Petits formats, Galerie Delaunay, Paris, France
- 2018 Fifth Avenue, Moscow, Russia
Sculptures récentes, Galerie Dutko, Paris, France
- 2017 *D'un infini à l'autre*, Galerie Sofronis, Luxembourg
D'un infini à l'autre, Espace d'art Courcelles, Montigny-lès-Metz, France
- 2016 *Sculptures extérieures*, Château Sainte-Roseline, les Arcs-sur-Argens, France
- 2015 *Sculptures*, Galerie Dutko, Paris, France
- 2014 *D'un infini à l'autre*, Galerie RX, Paris, France
- 2013 *D'un infini à l'autre*, Centre d'art contemporain Bouvet-Ladubay, Saumur, France
- 2010 *Abstraction du nécessaire*, Espace culturel Bellegarde, Toulouse, France
Galerie Nathalie Clouard, Rennes, France
Au cœur de la matière, Galerie RX, Paris, France
- 2009 Centre culturel, Chantilly, France
- 2008 *Voyage au cœur de la matière*, Schoolgallery, Paris, France
- 2007 Les Cordeliers, Condom, France
- 2005 Espace de l'art concret, Mouans-Sartoux, France

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Collection Fonds national d'art contemporain, French Ministry of Culture
Fondation Société Générale, Paris, France
Collection Bouvet-Ladubay, Saumur, France
Collection Ar Milin, Rennes, France
Collection Frey, Reims, France

INTERVIEW

The *Hypercubes* and *Superstrings* series were both originated in 2000. What was the inspiration to start experimenting with two very different sets of artworks?

I am personally convinced that the world around us is more complex than what we perceive. Our sensorial receptors are not capable enough to visualise and comprehend the entirety of reality.

The goal of my research is to give shape to this nature that is invisible to us. My work as an artist is inspired by different scientific theories. I chose to demonstrate each of them by what I call a series. Each series is therefore about a specific issue.

In order to embrace the universe in its entirety, I imagined two series that symbolise the "limits" of space – the infinite grand with *Hypercubes* and the infinitely small with *Superstrings*.

Hypercubes is the representation of the fourth spatial dimension. The so-called series is composed of angular sculptures made of radiating lines or anamorphic shapes. I decided to paint them black to recall the darkness of intergalactic space.

Superstrings is the name of a very relevant scientific theory that says a great deal about matter that is not made of atomic fragments but rather microscopic vibrating strings. I have therefore imagined intermingled bands in order to illustrate this primal energy. These sculptures are always white, white evoking the purity of origins.

The viewer can thus visualise a kind of Yin and Yang between my vision of the infinitely grandiose, represented by dark and angular sculptures, and that of the infinitely small, evoked by curved white sculptures.

How did you become interested in quantum physics and relate its principles to your artworks?

Many domains of human activity allow to comprehend about the mysteries of the world. There is philosophy, religion, the arts (sculpture, painting, poetry, etc.) and science. Science covers many disciplines including quantum physics. The latter suggests today a totally counterintuitive way to perceive the world. For instance, it explains to us that the passing of time is not rigid, as we would have thought, but fluid.

Other quantum approaches are equally surprising. It is the case of String Theory. I became interested since the late 1990s. This theory seemed marvellous to me. It became a backdrop against the shapes I had in mind.

For me, the *Superstrings* series is like the energy of origins. I have the impression of creating more or less big fragments of a single monumental sculpture. It is a love chain of kinds, travelling from one continent to the other across cultures.

I like this idea of an endless sculpture.

How did you come to choose and work with steel as a material for the two series?

Steel is a difficult material to work with, but it allows making things that other materials don't. We could give it a tremendous amount of shapes as long as we have mastered adequate technics.

Furthermore, when using steel, there is the unique experience of welding. Welding is an almost alchemical act. Imagine that! You have in front of you two pieces of steel that are autonomous and independent. By welding, you combine them and connect them definitively. There were two objects and now there is but one. It is incredible!

This fusion technic allows obtaining complex forms, defined and solid despite time.

What is the process when you create a sculpture? Do you start with an idea, a sketch, etc.?

It's always difficult to analyse the process of creation. Certain sculptures were prepared with drawing beforehand whereas others are imagined and made directly in the workshop. I make all the sculptures myself, and each one of them is unique. Sometimes, a work can be left unfinished for a long time in the workshop. I'm not in a hurry. Magic and success only appear when I feel in phase with the material.

For bigger projects and commissions, I would prepare a photomontage or a sketch, which allows for a good visualisation of scales and agreement with the collector.

Since 2000, how did these works evolve?

Naturally, the forms evolved. They are more or less bent, energetic, void or in relief. It is difficult to describe this evolution. But when I see an older sculpture I can retrace immediately in what state of mind I was when I created it.

Are there any other concepts or materials that you are exploring concurrently or would like to in the future?

As you have understood, my goal is to demonstrate a vision about the mysteries of the world. Each series is a fragment of reality. For now, I have shown but with four series: *Hypercubes*, *Matière noire* (dark matter), *Lumière* (light) and *Superstrings*. But I have imagined more than a dozen others!

I hope I could exhibit next a fifth series created in 2001 that I have never shown before, it is called *Particules* (particles). To be continued!



PREVIOUS PAGES

SUPERSTRINGS, 2018

Painted steel

Unique piece

163 x 121 x 30 cm - 64.2 x 47.6 x 11.8 in

SUPERSTRINGS, 2016

Painted steel

Unique piece

45 x 39 x 35 cm - 17.7 x 15.4 x 13.8 in





SUPERSTRINGS, 2017

Painted steel

Unique piece

127 x 108 x 26 cm - 50 x 42.5 x 10.2 in

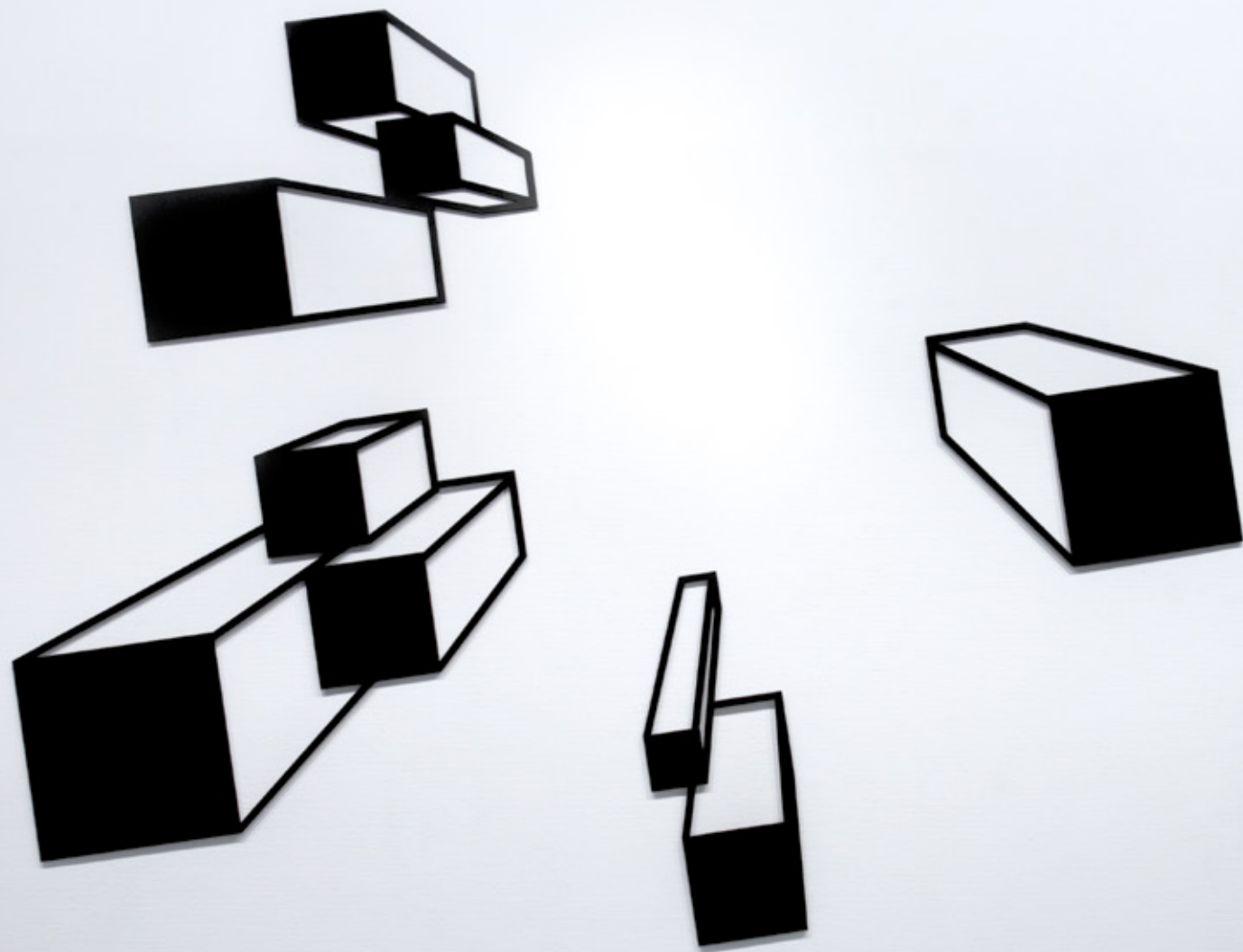
NEXT PAGES

HYPERCUBES, 2013

Painted steel

Unique piece

210 x 270 x 2 cm - 82.7 x 106.3 x 0.8 in





SUPERSTRINGS, 2018

Painted steel

Unique piece

137 x 137 x 24 cm - 53.9 x 53.9 x 9.4 in



HYPERCUBES, 2017

Painted steel

Unique piece

115 x 115 x 7 cm - 45.3 x 45.3 x 2.8 in

SUPERSTRINGS, 2016

Painted steel

Unique piece

45 x 32 x 30 cm - 17.7 x 12.6 x 11.8 in

NEXT PAGES

SUPERSTRINGS, 2013

Painted steel

Unique piece

45 x 52 x 40 cm - 17.7 x 20.5 x 15.7 in







HYPERCUBES, 2015

Painted steel and acrylic on canvas

Unique piece

120 x 110 x 7 cm - 47.2 x 43.3 x 2.8 in



SUPERSTRINGS, 2018

Painted steel

Unique piece

140 x 105 x 27 cm - 55.1 x 41.3 x 10.6 in



HYPERCUBES, 2017

Painted steel

Unique piece

130 x 107 x 4 cm - 51.2 x 42.1 x 1.6 in



HYPERCUBES, 2019

Painted steel

Unique piece

41 x 35 x 37 cm - 16.1 x 13.8 x 14.6 in

SUPERSTRINGS, 2016

Painted steel

Unique piece

120 x 80 x 24 cm - 47.2 x 31.5 x 9.4 in



SUPERSTRINGS, 2006

Painted steel

Unique piece

250 x 204 x 178 cm - 98.4 x 80.3 x 70.1 in







JAMES AUSTIN MURRAY

James Austin Murray is an American painter born in 1969. After graduating from Parsons School of design, he spent some time in Paris, Slovakia and Hungary. Murray's still has evolved from more figurative drawings to his current signature black paintings. He has pursued, for the last decade, a gestural based approach to monochrome abstract painting using ivory black oil paint. Murray's work, immediate as it is organic, draws its strength from the reflective qualities inherent within the paint he uses and the physicality of the visceral brushstroke left behind. He currently lives and works in his native New York City.

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Light, paint, form, these are the things all my works have in common. I could talk about each of these subjects at length but it is their blending that makes up my ecosystem.

I take pleasure in seeing light change from hour to hour, day to day, and month to month. The combination of paint and form is like a puzzle that I could solve over and over again and never be right, and also never be wrong. I could play with paint all day without ever completing a painting or even intending to, and feel as if it were a day well spent.

There is a mystery in paint. Making paintings is a deep dive search for an unknown answer. That not knowing entirely what will happen is what drives me. Sometimes I feel like an animal without the use of language but with something I need to say. I deeply believe that we are affected by what we see. Horrors on the news, a beautiful sunrise, a terrible accident, an act of kindness, a beautiful tree, and a painting to meditate on: they all affect us. I think that a painting can change us in small and sometimes larger increments. There are specific paintings that have changed my life. If I can do that for one person with one painting, my life will have been a success.

James Austin Murray, March 2019

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2019 *Curved Lines*, with Benoit Lemercier, Opera Gallery, Monaco
In Tandem, with Mark Zimmermann, Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, USA
Black Desert, with Mareo Rodrigues, Madison Gallery, Solana Beach, USA
- 2018 *Future Proof*, Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, USA
Distant Stars, Bruno David Gallery, St. Louis, USA
Convergent Evolution, REDSEA Gallery, Singapore
Light on Black, Madison Gallery, San Diego, USA
- 2016 *Super Massive Black Hole*, Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, USA
- 2015 Asia Contemporary Art Show, Hong Kong
- 2014 Art Market Hamptons with Lyons Wier Gallery, East Hampton, USA
Mystery of Light, Lyons Wier Gallery, New York, USA
Asia Contemporary Art Show, Hong Kong
- 2013 *Ides of March*, Narthex Gallery at St. Peters, New York, USA
- 2007 *Tree's Whisper*, Dam-Stuhltrager Gallery, Brooklyn, USA
- 2005 *Over-On*, Dam-Stuhltrager Gallery, Brooklyn, USA
- 2004 Visiting Artist, International Gallery of Contemporary Art, Anchorage, USA
- 2001 *On and Off White*, L.I.C.K. Ltd, Fine Art, Long Island City, USA

AWARDS AND RESIDENCES

- 2012 Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, Omaha, USA
- 2011 Dedalus Foundation Fellowship Award for residency at the Vermont Studio Center,
Johnson Artist in Residence at the Woodstock Byrdcliffe Guild, Woodstock, USA

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Sofitel, Philadelphia, USA
Hotel Palomar, Philadelphia, USA
Four Seasons Hotel, Washington D.C., USA
Omni Hotel, Nashville, USA
Tom Ford, New York, Miami and Macau, USA

For anyone reasonably well-versed in recent art history, James Austin Murray's paintings call to mind a number of venerable precedents from the last 75 years: the all-over pictorial strategies of artists like Jackson Pollock or Mark Tobey; Ad Reinhardt's signature black paintings from the early 1960s; and even the eye-bending surfaces of Op Art virtuosos like Bridget Riley and Richard Anuszkiewicz.

But Murray came into his own not through prolonged study of Modernist masters, or even much fine art training beyond majoring in illustration at Parsons School of Design in New York. His mesmerising and hugely accomplished paintings of the last few years were preceded by a few adventures in abstracted landscapes, followed by some frankly clunky experiments with shaped canvases. A tendency toward reducing his palette to basic black was evident as early as 2008, but like many before him - Pollock unfurling the canvas on the floor, say, or Helen Frankenthaler's discovery of "staining" - Murray had an "aha!" moment that led to his current practice. His epiphany occurred not in the studio, however, but in a hardware store in Hell's Kitchen, where he hit on the notion of affixing several wallpaper brushes to a long handle and dragging the whole apparatus across paint spread over the surface of the support.

At first he found himself most comfortable with a square format, because it's "neither a landscape nor a portrait, it's simply a square," he says. And at their largest, six feet, the works approximate the height of a tall viewer, offering an experience that is neither overwhelming nor too comfortably familiar, like the traditional size of easel paintings since the Renaissance.

It's an approach using the most basic of means - paint, brushes, and canvas - that's served him well for about three years now. But the surface effects are far from simple, and indeed offer an almost otherworldly experience, as the striations from the brush take the eye on a roller-coaster journey into pleats and folds, over light-struck hillocks and into shadowy crooks and bends. Depending on where you stand, the paintings can look like a forbidding landscape you could walk right into. It's a visual encounter that is both unsettling and profoundly seductive.

To keep the challenge fresh for himself and his audience, Murray has introduced variations in shape in the last three years. One is a round support, called a tondo by art historians, and the other, a square with smoothly curving sides. These small incremental changes suggest that Murray has nowhere near exhausted the possibilities of a limited palette and basic contours. This is not through lack of inventiveness; it's simply that many artists want - or even need - to explore countless variations on a simple formula.

At the moment, Murray is at the top of his game and beginning to get the kind of national and international exposure the work richly deserves. His is a universal language in the grand tradition of reductive abstract art, from Kazimir Malevich to Robert Ryman.

Ann Landi, March 2019

Ann Landi is a contributing editor of ARTnews and the founder and editor of Vasari21.com.

INTERVIEW

Since when did you start creating your signature ivory black paintings and why?

Just over ten years ago, I was doing hyperrealist work, using graphite on canvas. It was work I had loved doing, but the work was starting to lose my interest. At the same time, I had started to move some paint around on a small canvas, just to clear my head and this became a meditative practice. I would breathe in and make a stroke down and breathe out and cut across. I used the same little canvas for a few weeks wiping it down at the end of each day. At one point I was looking at it and thought, I'll stop on this one and keep it. That was the genesis of this body of work. They remained small for the first couple of years. Little by little that changed and as I started working on larger canvases, I had to come up with ways to get the marks I was looking for. That's when I began building my brushes.

Are your current paintings different from your earlier works? If so, how?

My paintings are constantly changing and evolving. As I mentioned, I had been making very tight drawings on canvas, before that I had been doing thicker oil paintings that relate more to the current work. I continue to explore different avenues in the work and sometimes I find something special and sometimes there are failures. Those failures are not really failures, they're proofs of a sort. They're confirmations that help me move the work forward.

What is a typical day for you like at the studio?

I get in and spend the first hour with a coffee and the previous day's progress. That's one of the most important times in the studio. It's then that I make the final decision on if the work from the previous day is done. There is something to be said about sleeping on that decision and coming into the studio with morning eyes, and a fresh perspective that has a little distance.

Depending on the day, I'll work on preparing panels for painting or I'll actually be painting. The day to day running of the studio has all the elements of running a business but the important thing is to be doing the work and I keep regular office hours with occasional late nights.

Your works have very interesting titles. How do you choose them?

I feel as if it's more like a collaboration between myself and the painting. Rarely, but it happens, I get it wrong. When that happens, I can never remember the painting's name and it doesn't feel right. If it is still in the studio, I'll change it to something that feels more correct. I usually name them around a week after they have been completed. This way I have spent time in the studio with each of these paintings and know them better.

Last but not least, what are some of the artists that you find inspirational?

There are so many that have inspired me, it's hard to quantify. There are specific artists whose works have had dramatic affect on me as an artist. One of the first paintings that really hit me in the gut was Joan of Arc by Jules Bastien-Lepage. There is such gravity to the figure, and the canvas has so many abstract elements that describe realism as well as to confuse the eye in abstraction.

Similarly, and for some of the same reasons, paintings by Rothko, de Kooning and Pollock have all had a major influence on me as an artist.

Contemporarily, Richard Serra has a large influence as well as other less well-known artists working today such as Tamar Zinn, James Little, Celia Johnson, Joanne Mattera, Donald Martiny, Margaret Neill and Alex Couwenberg and many others.

I still do some curating and I'm always looking for new artists to look at.



IN HER PRESENCE, 2019
Oil on board
ø 91.4 cm - 36 in



NOT THE FUTURE ANYMORE, 2019
Oil on board
ø 91.4 cm - 36 in

WHAT TREES THINK, 2019

Oil on canvas
ø 91.4 cm - 36 in





STARDUST TINKER, 2017
Oil on canvas over panel
91.4 x 91.4 cm - 36 x 36 in



JOHNNY TOLD ME, 2017
Oil on canvas over panel
121.9 x 121.9 cm - 48 x 48 in



EXCUSE ME, DO I KNOW YOU?, 2019
Oil on canvas over panel
152.4 x 152.4 cm - 60 x 60 in



UPPER EXPLOSIVE LIMIT, 2019
Oil on canvas over panel
152.4 x 152.4 cm - 60 x 60 in



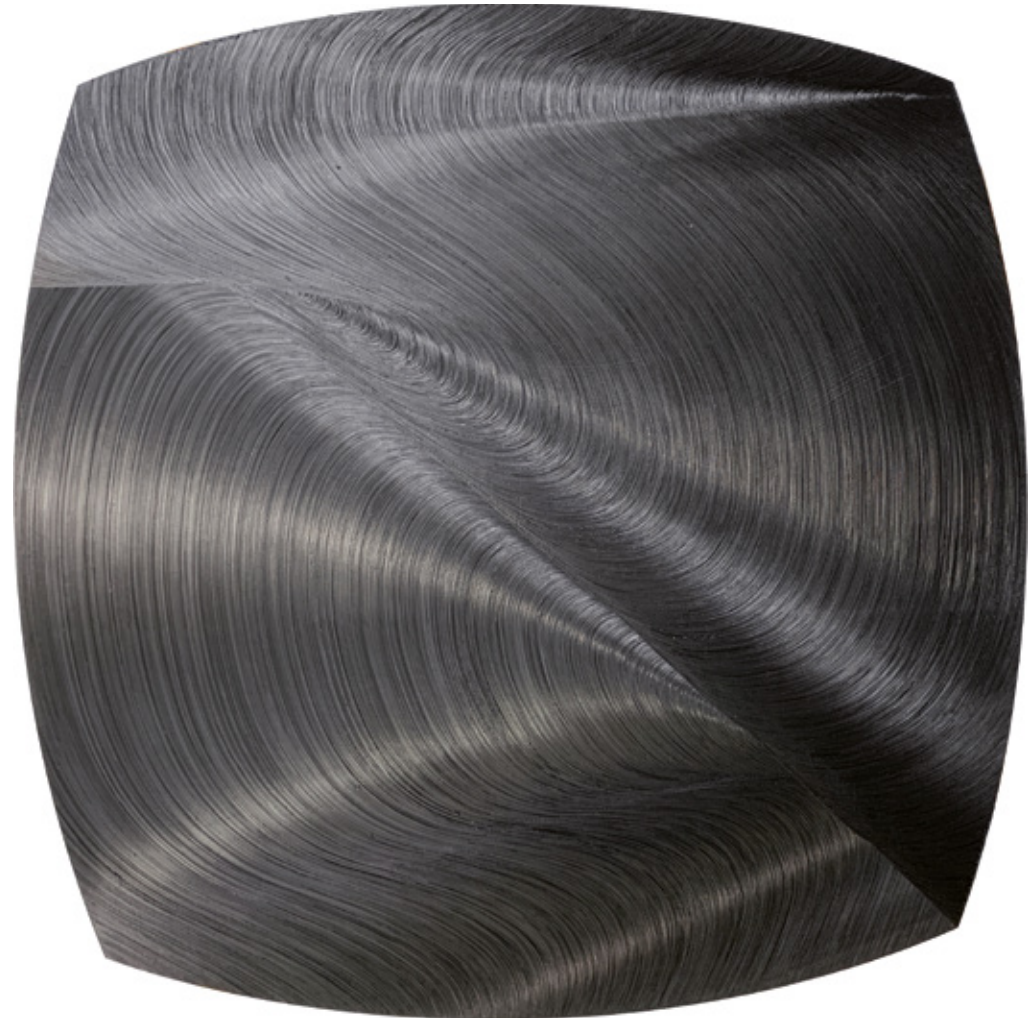
DARK POND, 2019
Oil on canvas over panel
ø 121.9 cm - 48 in



SHIVER, 2018
Oil on canvas over panel
ø 121.9 cm - 48 in



I'VE GOT A SILVER MACHINE, 2017
Oil on canvas over panel
182.9 x 182.9 cm - 72 x 72 in



CHORUS OF STARS FALLING, 2019
Oil on canvas over panel
182.9 x 182.9 cm - 72 x 72 in

CALCULATING AZIMUTH, 2018

Oil on canvas over panel
182.9 x 182.9 cm - 72 x 72 in



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Coordinator: Lou Mo

Authors: Ann Landi, Lou Mo

Translation: Lou Mo

Photography: Antoine Baralhe, Josiah Apehouse Esowe

Designer: Willie Kaminski

Printer: Stipa

OPERA GALLERY

1 avenue Henri Dunant, Palais de la Scala, 98000 Monaco

+377 9797 5424 | monaco@operagallery.com

operagallery.com

