

# TERRI BROOKS

PHE LUXFORD explores the balance of the tactile, the fugitive and the evocative in the surfaces of an artist who finds poetry in the suburbs.



**T**he neglected zones of urban existence — alleyways, awnings, walls, gutters and shutters — occupy a unique place within the history of painting. Perhaps inadvertently, artists have been depicting such insignificant elements as cracked window ledges and the dark recesses of architraves since the time of Giotto. Ubiquitous and utilitarian, the marginal nature of such sites and the phenomenological questions they raise have dominated Terri Brooks's practice for the past two decades and continue to inform her work today.

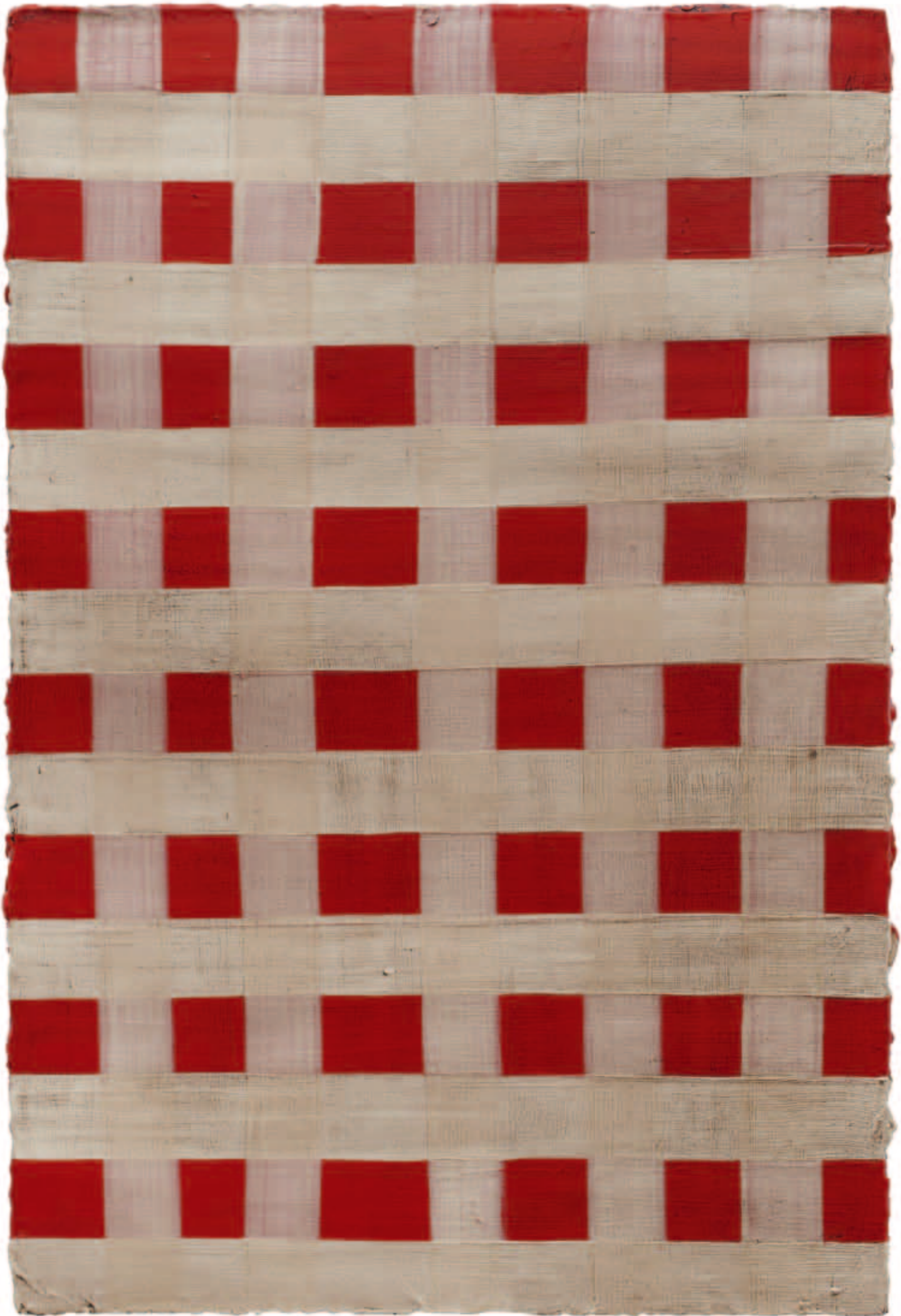
Navigating a territory between material awareness and perceptual sensitivity, Brooks's practice hinges on the ability to perceive beauty within the decayed. Informed by her observations of the streets around her Northcote studio, Brooks refers to herself as an 'urban archaeologist', searching the built world for traces of action and deterioration.

Brooks has a personal interest in Northcote, this once working-class suburb of her childhood. She recalls the delight of solitary play, exploring the run-down yards and front

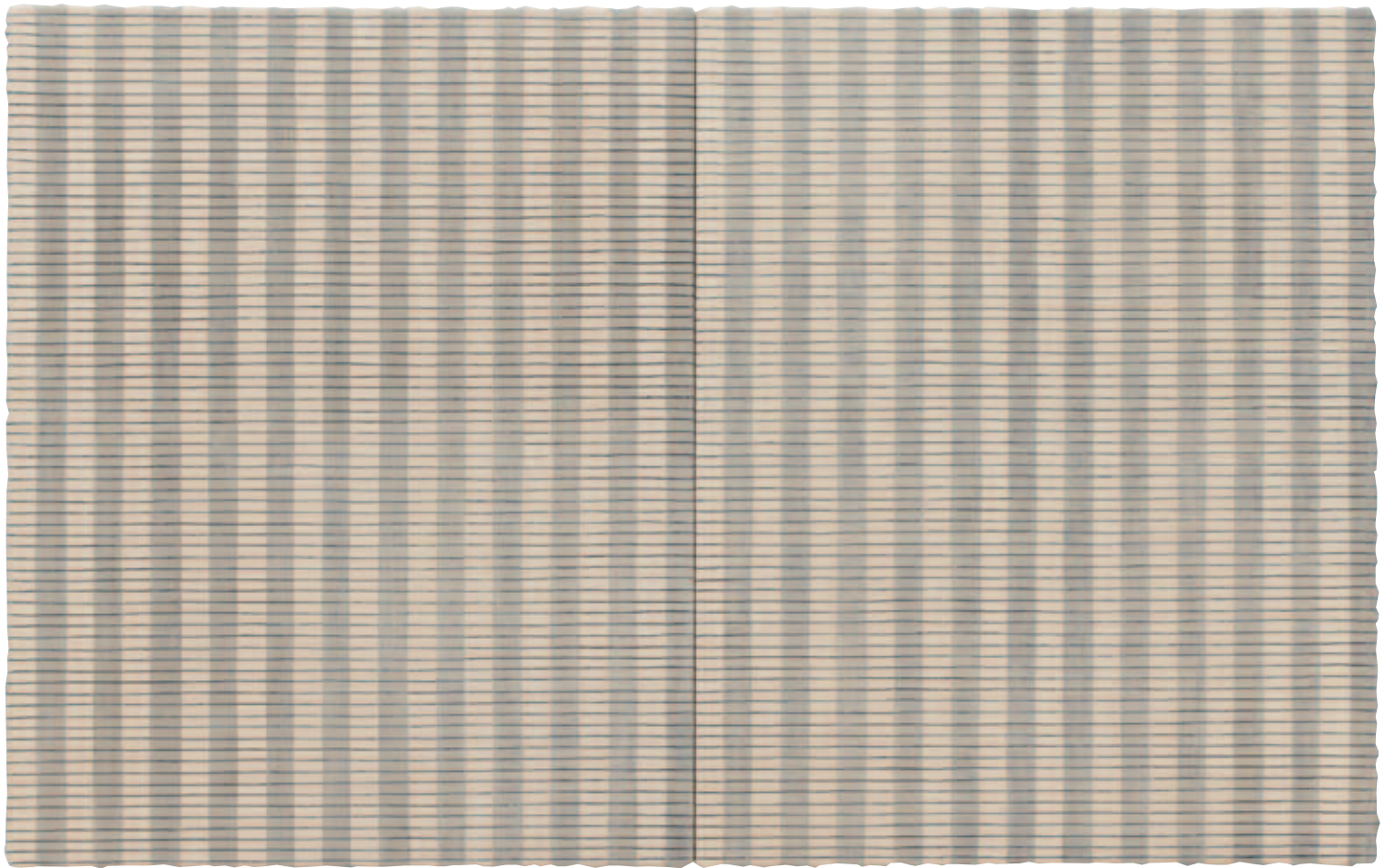
fences of her neighbourhood, the old wallpaper of her grandparents' home, the flaking facades of weatherboard houses. It was through her grandfather, a builder in retirement and sometimes housepainter, that Brooks received her first exposure to the physical pleasures of painting. Helping him clean his brushes at the end of the day, she was given free rein to slap diluted, running paint across the wall of their tin shed — this memory is now embedded within her impulse to create.

Her paintings oscillate between interests in linear gesture and structural form and openly nod to the work of Tony Tuckson, Cy Twombly and Antoni Tàpies. While more recent works possess a physical tactility, at other times she has created works of extreme delicacy — fine grey lead marks knit in repeated action across a canvas plane. Within works such as *Double Linear* (2008) the build-up of thin, pale paint washes creates a complex base over which her responsive mark-making is laid. Merging fine pencil with the bold and immediate quality of spray paint, Brooks literally re-enacts the wear and trace of the urban environment.

Having recently completed her PhD, her interest in the worn and degraded became an







important part of her research. As she examined the resourceful character of Australians during her childhood, the hardship of prior generations also resonated. Colonial, Depression and wartime attitudes of making do by fixing what was once broken intrigued Brooks and seeped into her practice. Within the folds, stitches and welding spots of the makeshift, Brooks finds traces of humanity.

Her fascination with the everyday shares something of the intention of the Italian Arte Povera movement, which sought to subvert the distance between art and life by incorporating discarded or everyday materials into their practice. A recent series of paper works shown as part of the two-person exhibition *Zerbrechliche Weite* (Fragile Space), at Germany's Art Museum Neubrandenburg, elegantly demonstrated the physical, almost alchemical potential of basic materials. The *Anyhow Series* (2009), built from blocks of newsprint, formed a new kind of tableau. Rippled and warped by the moisture of glue, these undulations allow paint to coalesce and flow.

Crusted and heavily coated, her more recent works continue to recall the physical quality of industrial debris — slabs of concrete, window frames, sections of crumbled wall — and operate in a discrete zone somewhere between the sculptural and the painterly. The impasto applications of her paint hint at an artist delighting in the act of replication. *Hazardous Painting Series* (2011) echoes the thick, chalky

quality of road boundaries, inspired by watching a solitary workman lay down road lines outside the local paper mill. Dense white layers are built up and ooze at the seams. Uneven in their application but sure in direction, they expose the act of a brush steadily moving across canvas. Paint spills over the edges to pool and settle like the crust of icing over a cake. A final glaze of pale brown is encrusted within the white, transforming it to an old creamy hue, solid against the tarry gloss of colour beneath.

The refinement of her technique intentionally disrupts any standard readings of the everyday. These works operate within the margins of discrete easel painting and architectural reality. Suspended within each canvas is an intentional exercise in reduction, true to the principles of minimalist practice. The recurring motif of line, laid down in slow and clear sequence, indicates a subtle meditation on labour and the humble truth of the wearing effects of time.

Brooks's abstraction rejoices in the tactile experience and emphasises the procedural nature of painting. A guide to how they have been constructed is embedded in the strata of layers. Akin to the histories of the built environments Brooks references, her paint slowly slips over the edges of the canvas, congealing, shrinking and drying at different rates, gesturing the fragile and residual nature of decay itself.

Terri Brooks is represented by Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne; Gadfly Gallery, Perth; and Aptos Cruz, South Australia. □

Previous pages:

Top left: Terri Brooks, *Anyhow Sequence*, 2008, oil, enamel and pencil on paper blocks, each 122 x 61cm. In situ, *Zerbrechliche Weite* (fragile space), 2009, Kunstsammlung Neubrandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany.

Bottom left: Terri Brooks, *Beige and Cream*, 2010, oil and enamel on canvas, 35.5 x 28cm.

Right: Terri Brooks, *Digger*, 2011, oil, enamel, pigment and PVA on canvas, 93 x 63cm. Photograph Jeremy Dillon.

Opposite page: Terri Brooks, *Hazardous Painting*, 2011, oil, enamel, pigment and PVA on canvas, 41 x 33cm. Photograph Jeremy Dillon.

This page: Terri Brooks, *Ribbons*, 2011, oil, enamel, pigment and PVA on canvas, 153 x 244cm. Photograph Jeremy Dillon.