

# *Illume*

Annie Hsiao-Wen Wang

# Illume,

## The painting of Annie Hsiao-Wen Wang

by David Bromfield

Like the New York painter Mark Rothko, Annie Hsiao-Wen Wang aims to evoke states of mind and being through the physical presence of paint. The traces and tracks made by the artist assume a life or lives of their own in the eye of the beholder, even to the point of suggesting an ocean, a galaxy or an universe; that is to say a consistent, sublime space filled with light and dark, in which, for better or worse, we have our being.

Unlike Rothko, however, she deliberately sets out *'to offer an opportunity for the viewer to stop and meditate upon the numinous and the emotional. I like the idea of it being an illumination of the subconscious, and of what (in this current rational world) we sometimes choose to ignore.'*\*

Rothko hoped to discover such an opportunity for himself through his painting. His slow staining and soaking technique was akin to polishing time into a mirror, a mirror that might reflect the universe as we sense it to be, though often Rothko revealed a negation, an abyss, a grand abyss to be sure, but one that, as Nietzsche guessed, would stare straight back into you.

Our artist is more optimistic. She sees the possibility of openness, of *'illumination and enlightenment'* in her painting, and is fascinated by the use of light and dark in the work of Rembrandt; the baroque light which is ultimately the light of creation, present in all things, at all times, that the Dutch master could just as easily reveal in a vibrant etching as in a radiant portrait.

She works slowly to build up the depth of her glowing surfaces through careful glazing, that allows precisely more or less colour in her medium, to suit that specific spot on the canvas and no other. She follows procedures perfected by the Baroque masters, through which a smooth unbroken surface can be tuned to reflect a glow from any one of the many layers of light and shade, each slowly annealed into the canvas. This perfectly sensual, almost erotic, process becomes, for the artist, a means to project joy, a consummate happiness, into the material world. If Rothko polished the world to an icy emptiness, Annie Hsiao-Wen Wang tunes it to melodic perfection.

Consider *Opus*, a large painting in which colour and light rises to the eye unbidden, driven only by cunning

*If Rothko polished the world to an icy emptiness,  
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modulation. The two lower corners are both blue but to the left is blue just stirring itself into a firm existence through a purple haze and grey green boundaries; while on the right, a ripened, day-bright cobalt peaks above the deep tints of a marine gulf or an infinitely slow midnight on the barely blue fringe of intergalactic space. Above, a wedge of vibrant orange red drifts across the canvas. Cadmium orange and ochre lie half behind the darker rose crimson, clearly separate in space and time. The boundaries of this translucent crimson cloud at least hint that this is a painting, made from what was once coloured mud. These hints are needed if the viewer is to enjoy the work, to enter it completely. The surface too has a delicate texture, like the glowing skin of a luscious fruit. This is, in part, the consequence of slow glazing, which mutes, but retains, the tooth of the canvas to produce a slight sparkle, an optical friction. This whisper for the eyes, sensual susurrus, the sound of waves in a starry night, keeps the painting alive. It lives as our dreams live.

Artists have painted to achieve a mirror smooth surface, Ingres, for example, but they made nothing but glacial images, nudes frozen in a block of ice or

Olympus in a tank of tropical fish. To sense that something is profoundly human our eyes must touch it. Annie Hsiao-Wen Wang is fully aware of this.

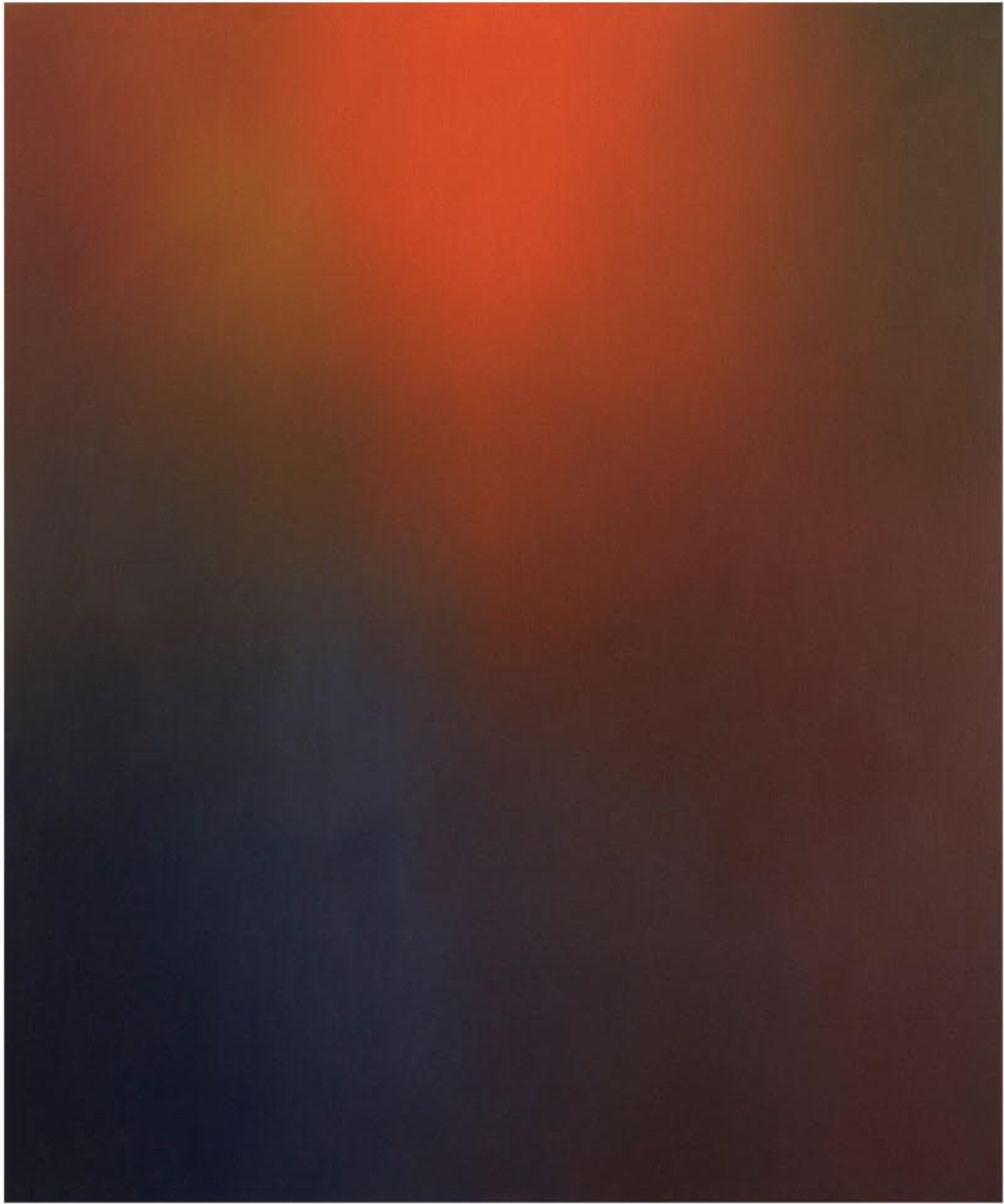
At the same time her work raises the great, unresolved question for painting, at least European painting, the mystery of how paint becomes poetry. Plainly this is partly because paint can be understood, apprehended, as light. *'Let there be Light'* said the creator and all else followed. Many artists have seen light as a metaphor for that which binds us harmoniously to the universe, but paint is not light and an image or indeed a painting is not itself a metaphor. Yet almost every work in this show carries an absolute conviction that it is somewhere we might one day be - at home.

\* Comment to the author

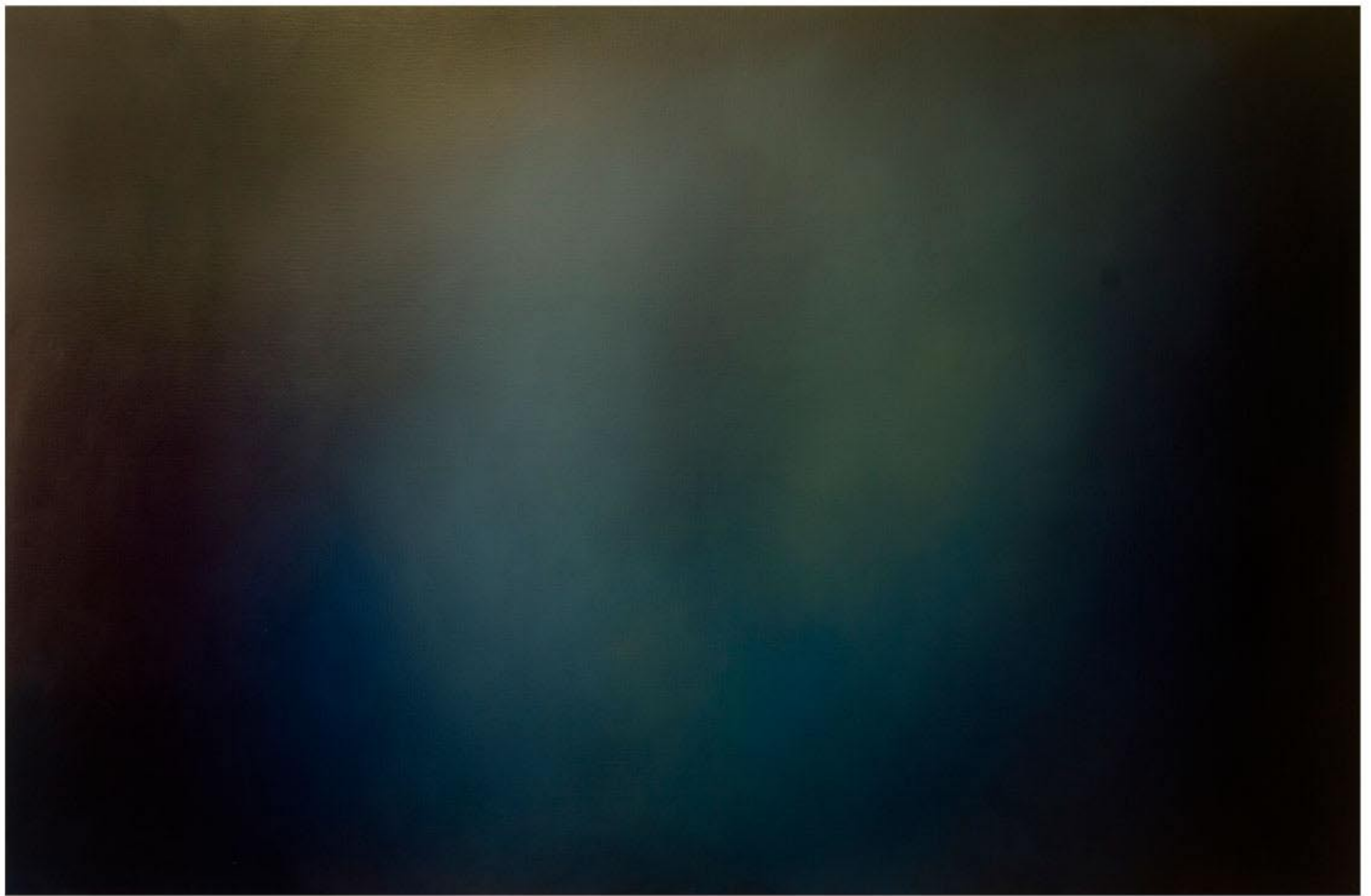
David Bromfield is a critic, writer and curator based in East Perth. He has written several books on Western Australian artists including *CODES on Janis Nedela* (2008) his most recent book *Now The Hard Part* on the work of Martin Heine will be published in December. He is also director of the KURB gallery, a cooperative space in William Street Northbridge.

***Id***  
Oil on canvas  
2010  
1.37m x 1.37m





*Inhale*  
Oil on canvas  
2010  
1.02m x 1.22m



*Cinder*  
Oil on canvas  
2010  
1.83m x 1.22m

*Nightingale*  
Oil on canvas  
2009  
1.37m x 1.37m





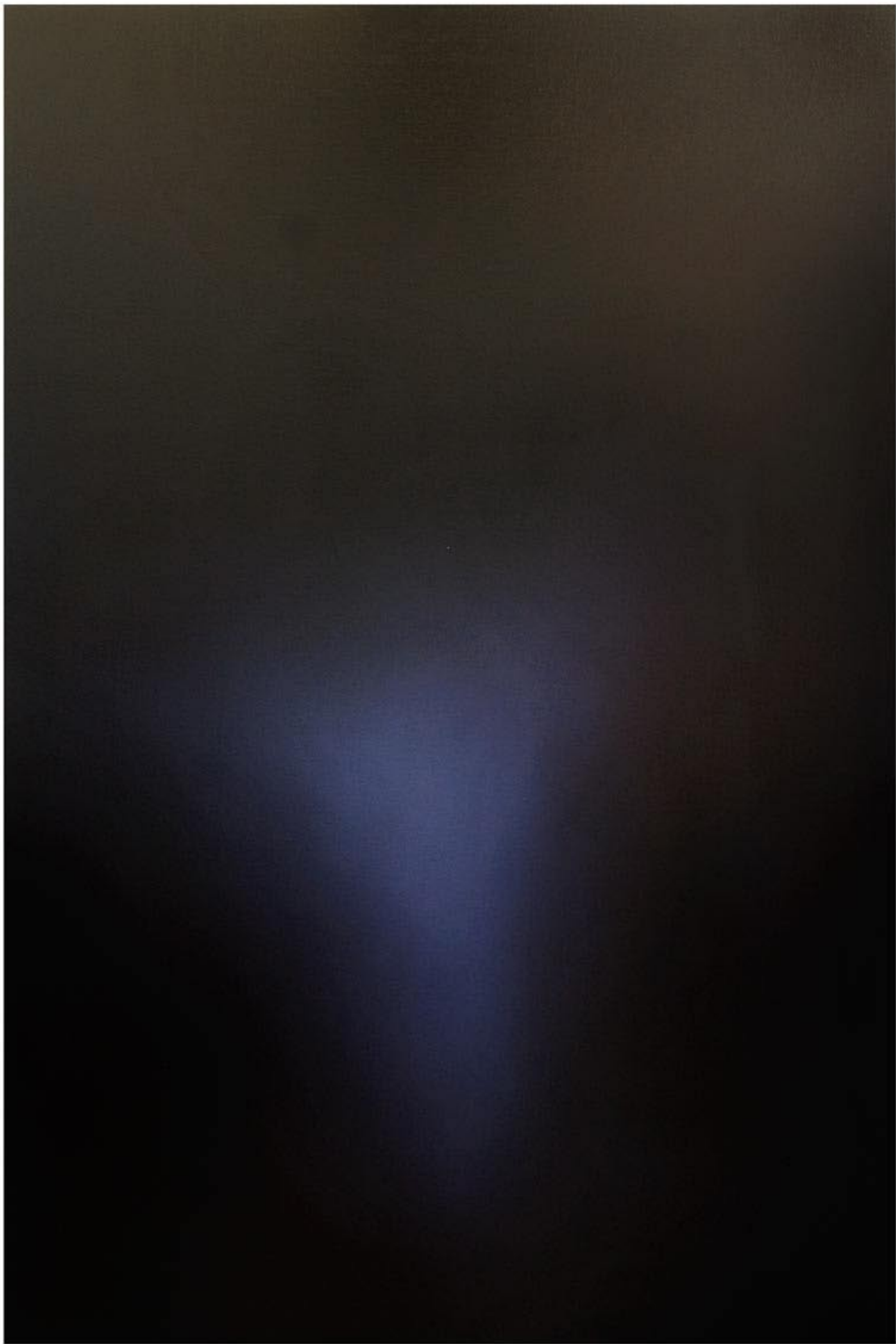


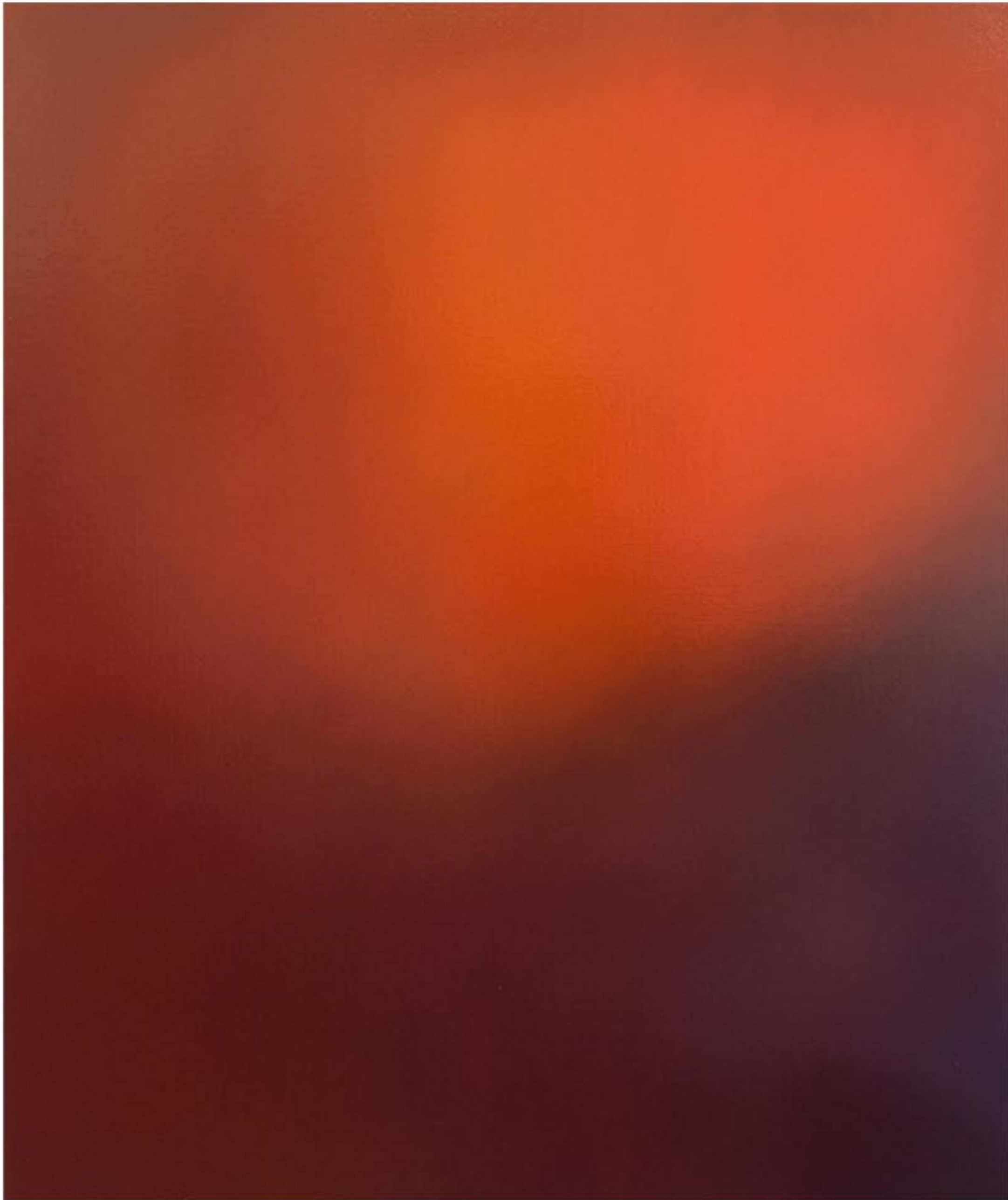
*Return I, II, III*  
Oil on canvas  
2010  
0.92m x 1.22m each



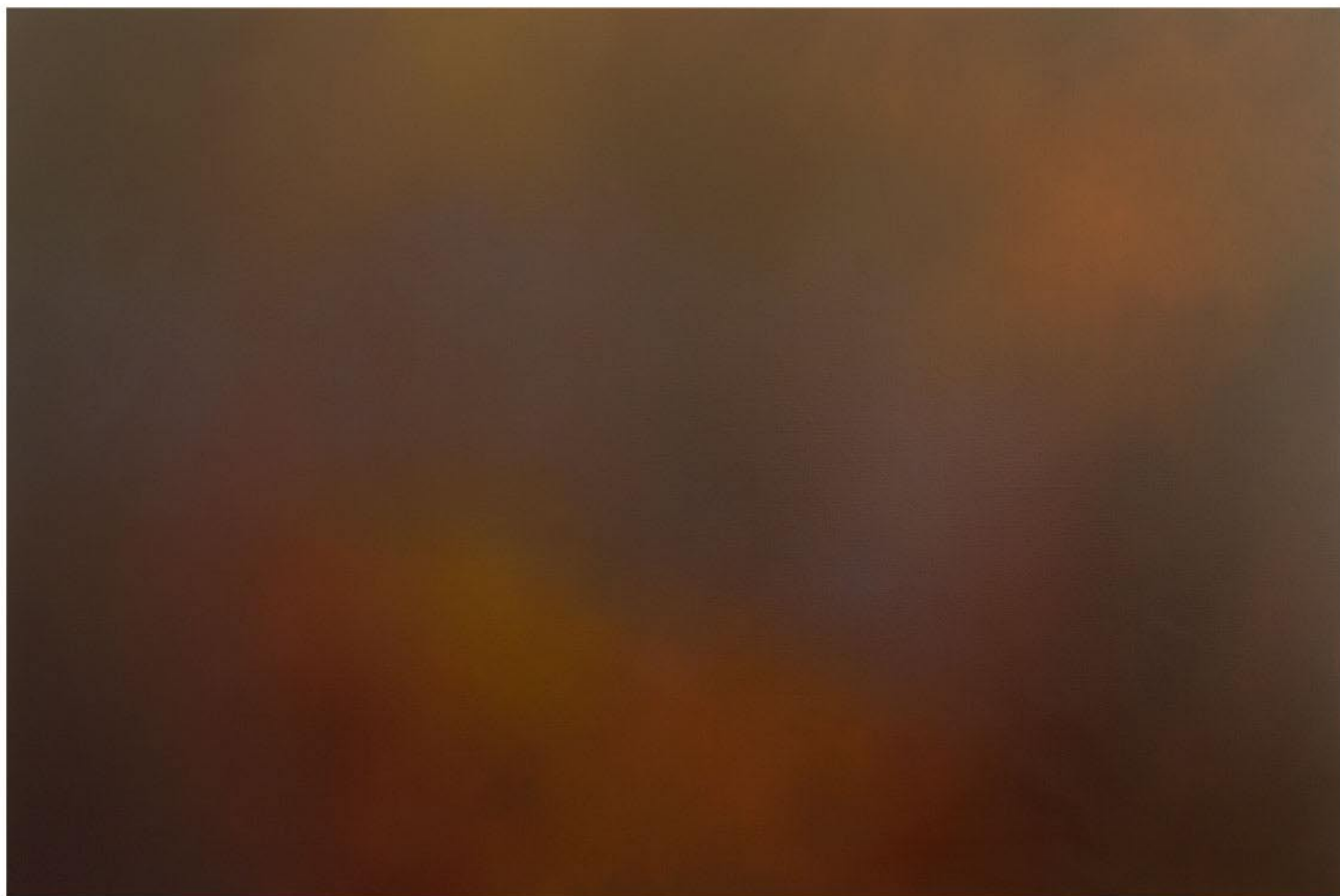
*Nocturne*  
Oil on canvas  
2010  
2.14m x 1.53m

***Yearn***  
Oil on canvas  
2010  
1.22m x 1.83m





*Bloom*  
Oil on canvas  
2010  
1.02m x 1.22m



*Breath*  
Oil on canvas  
2010  
1.83m x 1.22m

*Opus*  
Oil on canvas  
2010  
1.53m x 1.53m







## SELECTED CV

### EDUCATION

2008 Bachelor of Contemporary Arts (Visual Arts & Photomedia), Edith Cowan University, WA.

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2010 Illume, Perth Galleries, North Fremantle, WA.  
2005 Empathy, Little Creatures Brewery, Fremantle, WA.

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2010 Cossack Art Award, Cossack, WA  
2010 Vasse Art Award, Vasse, WA  
2009 City of Joondalup Invitation Art Award, Joondalup  
2009 Discordant Natures, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge  
2009-10 Young Artists with Artitude, InterContinental Perth Burswood  
2008 Waving Not Drowning, Perth Centre for Photography, Northbridge  
2008 8.08, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge  
2008 Bangladesh 2008, Spectrum Project Space, Northbridge  
2007 The Blue Exhibition, Kurb Gallery, Northbridge  
2007-10 Fair Trade Exhibition, Kurb Gallery, Northbridge  
2006 The Red Exhibition, Kurb Gallery, Northbridge  
2006 Gomboc Sculpture Survey, Gomboc Gallery Sculpture Park, Middle Swan  
2005 Northbridge Windows Exhibition, ArtRage Festival, Northbridge  
2005 Give, The Projection Lounge, Northbridge

### BIBLIOGRAPHY/PUBLICATIONS

2009 Art Monthly Australia, Dr. N. Schwarz, September 2009  
2009 The West Australian - 'Prayer on a g-string' by R. Spencer, 18th September 2009  
2009 The Wire Mag - 'Uneasy bodies of work' by J. Bahr, 10th September 2009  
2009 The West Australian - 18th July 2009, pg 8  
2008 Southern Gazette - 24th June 2008

### AWARDS

2010 Cossack Art Award - Highly Commendation Award  
2009 City of Joondalup Invitation Art Award - Judges Commendation Award  
2009 Young Artists with Artitude Award  
2008 National Association of Visual Arts Ignition Prize  
2007 Student Art 2007 Annual Design Competition

### RESIDENCIES

2009 Artist in Residence, Spectrum Project Space

### COLLECTIONS/COMMISSIONS

2010 Short listed for Fiona Stanley Hospital public art project  
Edith Cowan University Art Collection, Burswood Collection, Private collections throughout WA, Sydney, Melbourne, Taiwan.

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