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EVA NIELSEN



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Index

Biography, p. 4

Curriculum Vitae, p. 5 - 6

Works and exhibitions, p. 7 - 45

Texts and Catalogues, p. 46 - 64

Eva Nielsen's paintings are at once cinematic, architectural and geological: fragments of built environment, desolate landscapes and utopian architecture are interwoven in her compositions through superimposed layers of opacity and transparency. Multiple scales and perspectives coexist, negate and displace one another in the dynamic indeterminacy of vanishing lines and fragmented projections, focusing the eye and the mind of the viewer simultaneously on the material density of the painting itself and on the affective matter of contemporary experience.

The artist has consistently focused her gaze on the interstitial zones of suburbia as liminal non-places, remnants of once utopian projections: landscapes in motion seen through obstructed windows and grids, empty playgrounds, fragments of infrastructure, abandoned wooden sheds and secondary homes. Combining screen-printing techniques with oil, acrylic and ink on canvas, Nielsen's process is one of consecutive fragmentations, concealments and revelations, positioning the final work as both reserve and residue in search for a pictorial fiction capable of holding multiple narratives and temporalities. Rendered through a superimposition of photographic capture, genre painting and techniques of assemblage, these subliminal landscapes offer a kaleidoscopic view over the modernist project in all of its contradictions and achieve a semblance of arrested motion. An alternative history of land use and built environment emerges, touches our most intimate memories and borders on the sublime.

Her carefully crafted fracturing and rearticulation of the silk-screened image in disjointed assemblages is set in tension with painted substrates, both revealing the screen within the image frame, and introducing a temporal dimension wherein the image reaches our eyes and minds like a time lapse video. In her most recent work, Nielsen completes the canvas by stretching a final layer of print on silk fabric, echoing the silk screen technique at the ground layer and augmenting the textility of painting. She introduces peripheral memories, human figures and bodily postures into her vision of the periphery. Creases and folds left by the crumpled fabric that run through the paint appear like an additional substrate of vanishing lines distancing and re-arranging the image. The passage of

time, through wear and tear, is at work here once again. Through all these substrates and microgestures, Eva Nielsen's work culminates in a form of painting that exceeds its own medium, remains receptive to the viewers' gaze and overflows into the imagination, as a metaphor for a topography of memory caught between fiction and materially inscribed traces.

Her work has been included in institutional group exhibitions such as Manifesto of Fragility - 16th Lyon Biennial (2022); Horizontes, 23rd Pernod Ricard Foundation Prize Exhibition (Paris, 2022); Spring, Fondation Thalie (Bruxelles, 2021); Fragments Ephémères, Fondation Schneider (Wattwiller, 2020); Persona Grata ?, MAC VAL (Lyon, 2019), Paroxysm of Sublime, LACE (Los Angeles, 2019), Recto-Verso #2, Fondation Louis Vuitton (Paris, 2018); Visions, Plymouth Contemporary (Plymouth, 2017); Painting, She said, Museum of Rochechouart (Rochechouart, 2015) and Spring Exhibition, Kunsthall Charlottenborg (Copenhagen, 2013).

Eva Nielsen's work has been recognized through multiple awards: LVMH Métiers d'Arts Prize and Residency Program (2021), Grand Prix de la Tapisserie d'Aubusson (2017), Art Collector Prize (2014) and Prix des Amis des Beaux-Arts/Thaddaeus Ropac (2009); and shortlisted for AWARE Prize (2017), Salomon Foundation Residency Award (2015) and Prix Science Po for Contemporary Art (2010). Her work is part of several public and private collections including MAC VAL, FMAC, Museum of Rochechouart, CNAP, Fiminco Foundation, FRAC Auvergne and François Schneider Foundation. Her recent solo exhibitions include SpectroGéographies (with curator Marianne Derrien), BMW Art Makers Prize Exhibition (Rencontres d'Arles & Paris Photo 2023); INTARSIA Residency Exhibition, LVMH Métiers d'Arts (Paris, 2022); Hypersurface, Le Point Commun, (Annecy, 2020); Evergreen Plaza, Maison Salvat (Labège, 2019); Hard Sun, The Cabin, (Los Angeles, 2017); The Inventory, LKV, (Trondheim, 2012). Eva Nielsen (1983, Les Lilas) lives and works in Paris, France.

EVA NIELSEN

1983, Les Lillas.

Lives and works in Paris.

Education

2009 DNSAP, Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Paris, FR

2008 Bourse Socrate, Central Saint Martins School of Art, Fine Art, London, UK

2005 Master of European Studies, Sorbonne, Paris, FR

2003 BA Literature, Sorbonne, Paris, FR

Solo Exhibitions

2023 INTARSIA III, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR

2022 INTARSIA II, Jousse Entreprise, Paris, FR

INTARSIA I, Exhibition Residency LVMH Métiers d'Arts, Paris, FR

2020 Hypersurface, Le Point Commun, Annecy, FR

2019 Dipolar, duo show with Jennifer Caubet, curatrice Sophie Vigourous, Jousse Entreprise, Paris, FR

Evergreen Plaza, Maison Salvan, Labège

2018 Cosmovisions, duo show with Marion Verboom, curated by Marianne Derrien, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR

Squam, with Marion Verboom, Material, Mexico, MX

2017 Hard Sun, avec Raphaël Barontini, The Cabin, LA, USA

Unfolding Landscapes, curated by Nanda Janssen, Selma Feriani Gallery, Sidi Bou Said, TN

Les Fonds de l'oeil, Jousse Entreprise, Paris, FR

2016 Horizon, THE PILL, Istanbul, FR

Eva Nielsen & Clément Laigle, Espace Art & Essai, Rennes, FR

Eva Nielsen, Espace art contemporain Camille Lambert, Juvisy-sur-Orge, FR

2015 Moving in Space, Tajan Art Studio, Paris, FR

2014 Zones du doute, Art [] Collector Prize, Paris, FR

Kodak grey, green screen, with Rebecca Digne, Dominique Fiat, Paris, FR

The Road, Selma Feriani Gallery, London, UK

2012 Jardin Clos, curated by Daria de Beauvais, Galerie Saint-Severin, Paris, FR

The Inventory, with Mireille Blanc, LKV, Trondheim, NO

2011 Walden, Dominique Fiat, Paris, FR

Elvedon, Eva Nielsen/Marion Verboom, Maison des Arts de Grand Quevilly, Rouen, FR

2010 Feedback, Dominique Fiat, Paris, FR

2009 Florine Leoni/Eva Nielsen, Point de Fuite, Permis de Construire, Toulouse, FR

Let's talk about painting I, with Jean-Baptiste Bernadet, cur. Clément Dirié, Le Stand, Lyon, FR

2008 Poltergeist//Vaudoumania, ENSBA, Paris, FR

Group Exhibitions

2022 Manifesto of Fragility, cur. Sam Bardaouil and Till Felrath, La 16e Biennale de Lyon, FR

Horizons, 23rd Pernod Ricard Foundation Prize, cur. Clément Dirié, Paris, FR

AS IF IT COULDN'T - 6th Year Anniversary Group Show, THE PILL, Istanbul, TR

2021 Accrochage(s), THE PILL, Istanbul, TR

Spring, Fondation Thalie, Bruxelles, BE

Tentatives de positionnement, Jousse Entreprise, Paris, TR

Varia/passage, cur. Mathieu Cherkit, galerie Jean Brolly, Paris, FR

Horizons, cur. Domitille d'Orgeval, Fond de dotations Franklin Azzi, Paris, FR

Etendue, corps, espace. Olivier Debré et les artistes architectes, cur. Isabelle Reiher and Marine Rochard, CCCOD, Tour, FR

2020 Untitled, Selma Feriani gallery, Tunis, TN

20 ans – 20 œuvres, les Abattoirs, Toulouse, FR

20 ans – 20 œuvres, Le Majorat, Villeneuve-Tolosane, FR

10 ans de créations contemporaines, Musée Départementale de la Tapisserie, Aubusson, FR

Fragments Éphémères, Fondation Schneider, Wattwiller, FR

Reality is Not What it Seems, Jousse Entreprise, Paris, FR

On n'y voit rien, Galerie Anne-Sarah Benichou, Paris, FR

2019 It's a wonderful life, Galerie de Multiples, Paris, FR

Persona Grata? cur. Alexia Fabre, Anne-Laure Flacelière, Ingrid Jurzak, MAC/AL, FR

16th International Triennial of Tapestry in Lodz, cur. Marta Kowalewska, Central Museum of Textiles Lodz, PO

Some of us, cur. Jérôme Cotinet-Alphaize AND Marianne Derrien, Kunstwerk Carlhütte, Hamburg, DE

2018 Paroxysm of sublime, cur. Anna Milone, LACE, LA, USA

Persona Grata, curated by Anne-Laure Flacelière and Isabelle Renard, Musée de l'Histoire de l'Immigration, Paris, FR

Affinités, cur. Sophie Vigourous, Jousse Entreprise, FR

Azur et Bermudes, cur. Joël Riff, Art-O-rama, Marseille, FR

Recto-Verso #2, Fondation Vuitton, Paris, FR

2017 Voici venu le temps des assassins, cur. Alain Berland, Galerie Journiac, Paris, FR

Art [] Collector_ 5 x 2 + 1, Galerie Valerie Bach, Brussels, BE

Collection n°7, Interior and the Collectors, Lyon, FR

D'un instant à l'éternité, La Graineterie, Houilles, FR

Surreal House, THE PILL, Istanbul, FR

Plymouth Contemporary Biennial, Peninsula University & Karst, UK

Aware Prize for women, Palais Royal, jury chaired by Alfred Pacquement, Paris, FR

Peindre Dit-elle. Chap 2, cur. Julie Crenn & Annabelle Ténèze, Musée des Beaux Arts de Dole, FR

Lucite, Musée de Rochechouart, FR

Les épis Girardon, cur. Joël Riff, Moly Sabata, Albert Gleizes Fondation, Sablons, FR

Architopie, Rosa Bonheur Museum, Chevilly-Larue, FR

Territoire, cur. Sophie Vigouroux, Jousse Gallery, Paris, FR

Oblique, Autour de Claude Parent, cur. David Liaudet, Ecole supérieure des Beaux-arts, Le Mans, FR

2015 Le pied dans le plat, cur. Stéphanie Airaud, Le Form, Le Havre, FR

Ligne aveugle, cur. Hugo Schüwer-Boss and Hugo Pernet, ISBA, Besançon, FR

Fantôme, cur. Sarah Mercadante and Benoît Blanchard, L'Île, Paris, FR

Painting, She said, cur. Annabelle Teneze and Julie Crenn, Museum of Rochechouart, FR

Outrage, cur. Mathieu Buard, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, FR

Outrage, cur. Mathieu Buard, galerie Jeune Création, Paris, FR

Présente, with Julien Meert, Charlotte Moth, Romain Vicari, Carsten Balle Nielsen, Eva

Nielsen, Shanta Rao, Valérie Snobeck, Maxime Thieffine, Anne-Charlotte Yver and Raphaël

	Zarka, La Traverse, Alfortville, FR	53e Salon d'art contemporain de Montrouge, Montrouge, FR
	Hospitalités 2015 - Hors d'Oeuvre, Camille Lambert space, in collaboration with Mac/Val, FR	Room 3, 51 avenue Montaigne, Paris, FR
	Avec et sans peinture, Mac Val - Musée d'art contemporain Val de Marne, FR	Exposition des finalistes du prix de Dessin David-Weill, Institut de France, Paris, FR
	Electives affinities, with Anne Neukamp and Mireille Blanc, cur. Marc Desgrandchamps, Tajan, FR	2007 Les peintres du mardi (récidivent), ENSBA, Paris, FR
2014	Saxifraga Umbrosa #2, cur. Marianne Derrien, La Générale, Sèvres, FR	Awards & Grants
	Art is Hope, Piasa, Paris, FR	2023 BMW Art Makers Prize
	Les esthétiques d'un monde désenchanté, CAC de Meymac, FR	2021 LVMH — Métiers d'Art
2013	Plus jamais seul, Standards expositions, Rennes, FR	2017 Short-listed Meurice Prize
	La Belle Peinture II, Phoenix des Halles, Port St Louis, Mauritius, FR	Short-listed AWARE Prize
	Foutre, cur. Mathieu Buard and Joël Riff, Dûo, Paris, FR	2015 Short-listed Salomon Award Prize
	La Belle Peinture II, Palais Pisztoy, Bratislava, SK	2014 Collector Prize
	Spring exhibition, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, DK	2010 Short-listed Prix Sciences Po pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris
	N'habite plus à l'adresse indiquée, Centre Albert Chanot, Clamart, FR	2009 Short-listed Audi Talents Awards
	Let's talk (again) about painting, Musée de Guyancourt, FR	Prix des Amis des Beaux-Arts, under the direction of Agnès B. & T. Ropac, Paris
2012	La peinture française contemporaine, combinaisons de l'histoire, Perm Museum, Perm Kraï, RU	Residencies
	Perceptions vives, cur. Marion Daniel, La Couleuvre, FR	2021 LVMH — Métiers d'Art, Paris, FR
	Christmas Jewels, Au 8 rue Saint-Bon, Paris, FR	2019 Flax Foundation, LA, USA
	Grands Formats, L'Atelier, Nantes, FR	2017 The Cabin, LA, USA
	Guasch Coranty, Centre d'Art Tecla Sala de l'Hospitalet, Barcelona, SP	2013 La Pratique, Vatan, FR
	Athématique, Espace Brochage Express, Paris, FR	2012 LKV, Trondheim, NO
	Oui à la peinture/Yes to painting, Tajan, Paris, FR	PLOT, School of Design & Art, Rouen, FR
	Man-Ma de, Dominique Fiat Gallery, Paris, FR	Workshop, School of Fine Art, Toulouse, FR
	Géométries variables, Plot HR, Rouen, FR	
	Babel, Palais des Beaux-arts de Lille, cur. Régis Cotentin, Lille, FR	
2011	Et si l'espace n'était qu'une dimension intérieure, Abbaye Saint-André, Meymac, FR	
	Outre-Forêt, cur. Mathieu Buard and Joël Riff, 6b, Saint-Denis, FR	
	Infiltration – le privilège des chemins, cur. Marianne Derrien, Plataforma Revolver, Lisbonne, PT	
	Tandem, 31 rue de La Concorde, Bruxelles, BE	
	Dessins Exquis, 40 rue de Richelieu, cur. Laurent Boudier, Paris, FR	
2010	Paravents, La Source, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR	
	La Photographie au scalpel, Espace Immix, Paris, FR	
	Nocturne(s), Nuit Blanche, 104, Paris, FR	
	Res Publica, Museum of Modern Art, Moscow, RU	
	Summer show, Dominique Fiat gallery, Paris, FR	
	Paysage 2 : Imminence de la catastrophe, Espace Croix-Baragnon, Toulouse, FR	
	Mouvements des atomes, mobilité des formes, cur. Marc Desgrandchamps, ENSBA, Paris, FR	
	Prix Sciences-Po pour l'art contemporain, Paris, FR	
	Exposition des Lauréats du Prix Agnès b., Espace Lhomond, Paris, FR	
2009	Let's talk about painting II, cur. Clément Dirié, Le Stand, Lyon, FR	
	SP Arte, Rhys Mendes Gallery, Belo Horizonte, BR	
	Les morts te saluent, ENSBA, Paris, FR	
	Prix 2009 des Amis des Beaux-Arts, ENSBA, Paris, FR	
	Still Painting, Rhys Mendes Gallery, Belo Horizonte, BR	

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WORKS AND EXHIBITIONS



Eva Nielsen
Hard Sun, 2022
Oil, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas (diptych)
200 x 180 cm (each)

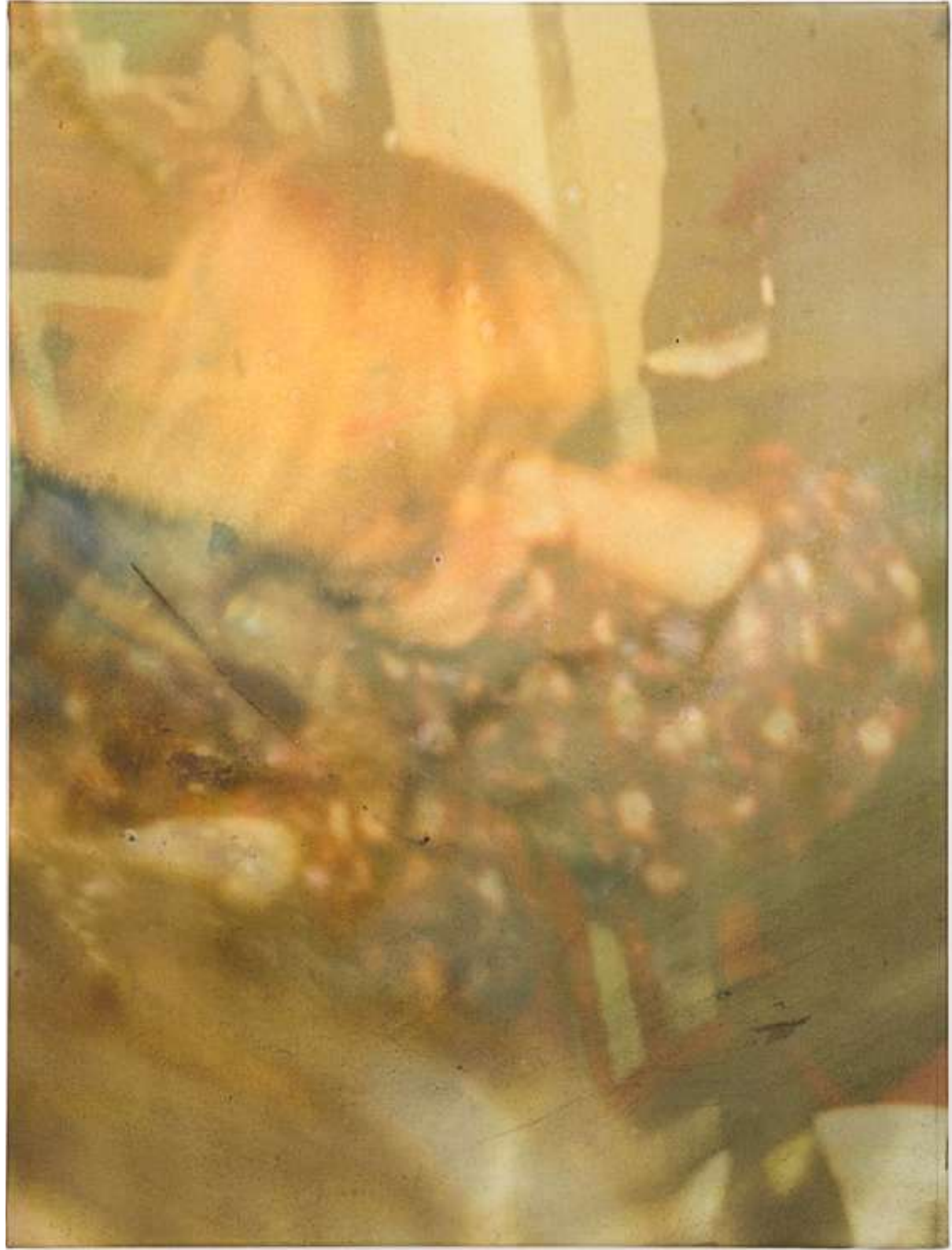






Eva Nielsen
Insula III, 2023
Oil, acrylic, ink and organza (silk) on leather
80 x 60 cm

Eva Nielsen
Insula IV, 2023
Oil, acrylic, ink and organza (silk) on leather
80 x 60 cm





Eva Nielsen
Insula V, 2023
Oil, acrylic, ink and organza (silk) on leather
80 x 60 cm

Eva Nielsen
Insolare IV, 2023
Oil and latex on canvas
180 x 130 cm



















Eva Nielsen
Polhodie, 2022
Acrylic, oil and silkscreen
ink on canvas
260 x 300 cm





Eva Nielsen
Chemical Milling (9), 2021
Acrylic, ink and silkscreen on leather and organza
71 x 65 cm

Eva Nielsen
Chemical Milling (10), 2021
Acrylic, ink and silkscreen on leather and organza
75 x 65 cm





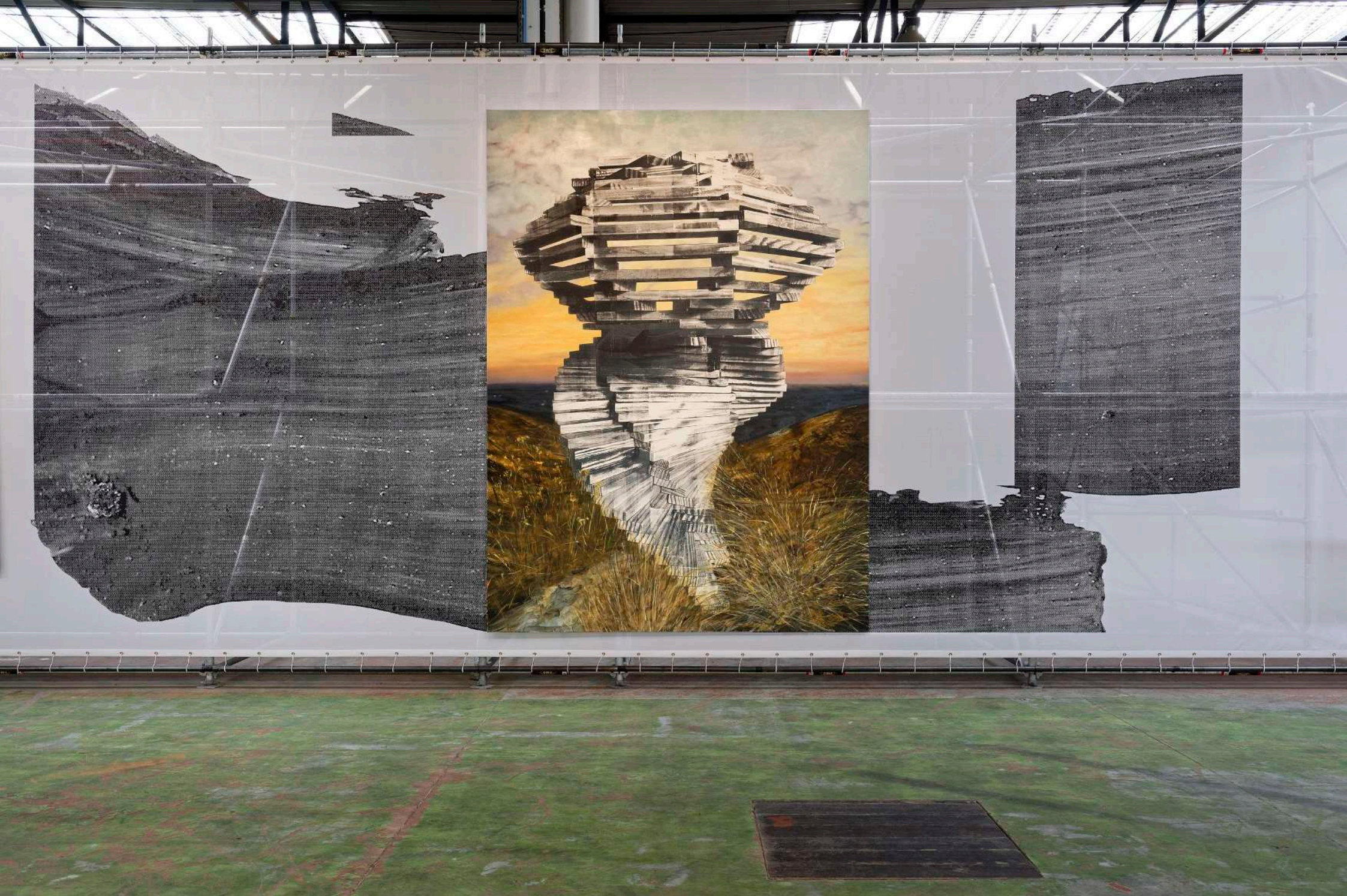


Eva Nielsen
Reversal (4), 2022
Oil, acrylic, ink and silkscreen on canvas
280 x 190 cm (each)







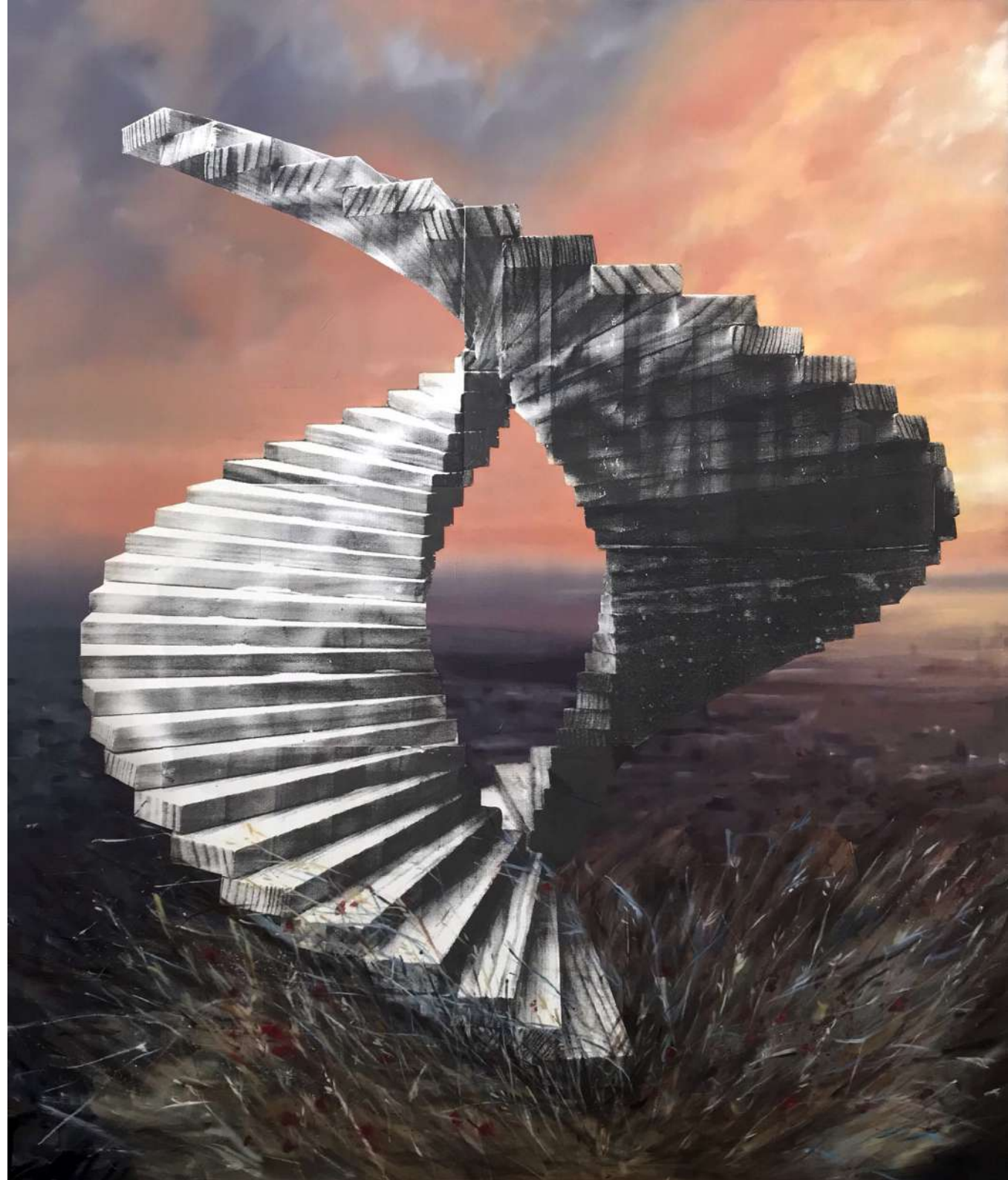






Eva Nielsen
Decaradian, 2019
Acrylic, oil and silkscreen print on canvas
200 x 170 cm

Eva Nielsen
Quasar II, 2021
Acrylic, oil and silkscreen print on canvas
200 x 170 cm





Eva Nielsen
Zamak III, 2021
Oil, acrylic and
silkscreen on canvas
190 x 230 cm



Eva Nielsen
Quasar, 2020
Oil, silkscreen, acrylic on canvas
155 x 200 cm







Eva Nielsen
The Cabin, 2017
Oil, silkscreen, acrylic on canvas
200 x 150 cm

Eva Nielsen
Scope (12), 2022
Acrylic, ink and silkscreen on canvas and organza
180 x 125 cm





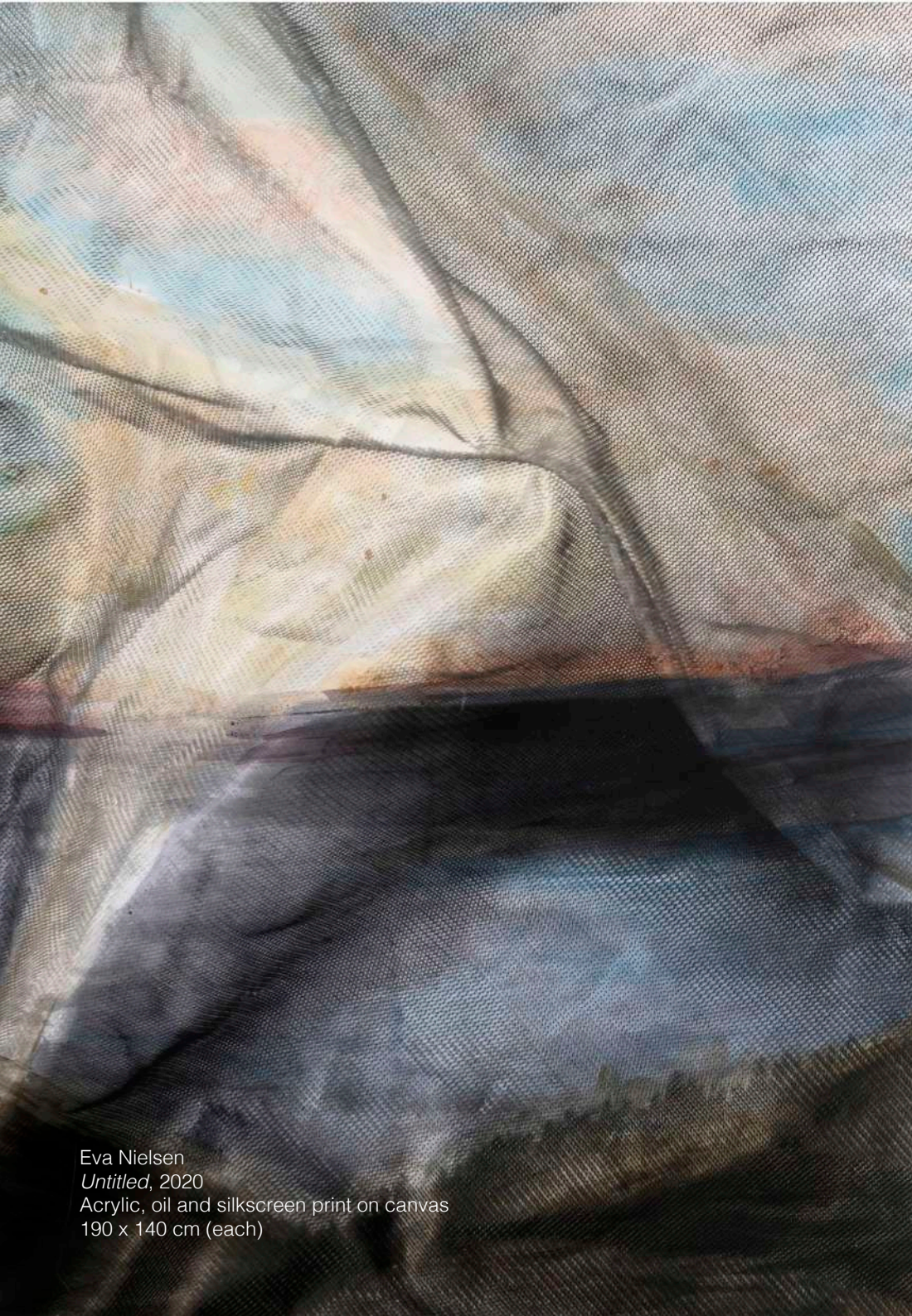


Eva Nielsen
Lucite XV, 2017
Acrylic, oil and silkscreen print on canvas
190 x 140 cm

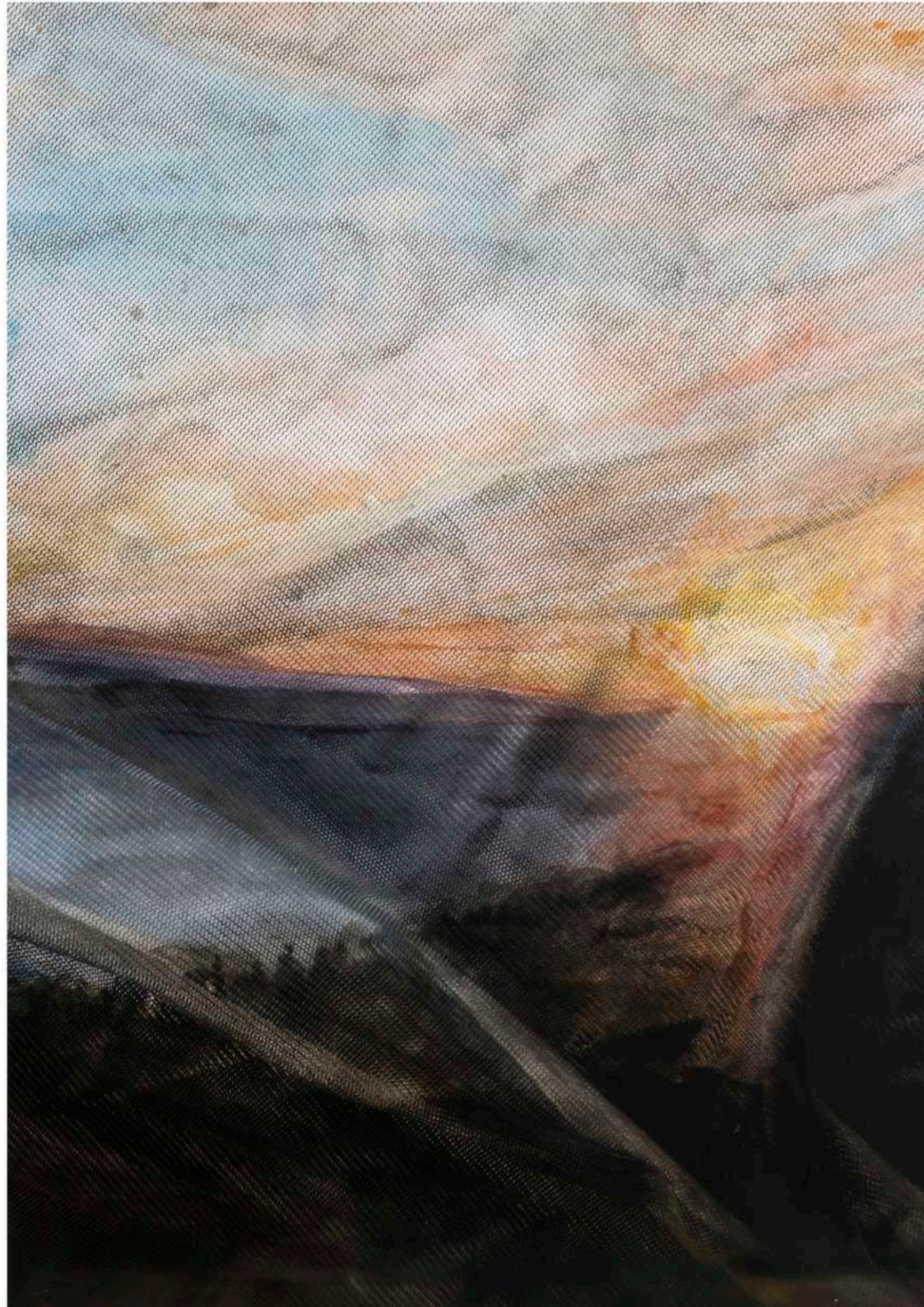


Eva Nielsen
Lucite, 2019
Acrylic, oil and silkscreen print on canvas
190 x 140 cm





Eva Nielsen
Untitled, 2020
Acrylic, oil and silkscreen print on canvas
190 x 140 cm (each)



THE PILL[®]

TEXTS AND CATALOGUES

Let's agree, just tentatively, just for the moment, to call Eva Nielsen a landscape painter. Yet her work is painting in a different sense than the one that has been handed down to us by tradition, and likewise the landscape as it appears there is something distinct from the inherited idea of it. Part of the pleasure imparted by her paintings comes from the way they put the viewer in a state of uncertainty, a sort of cognitive drift, and one of the causes of this uncertainty, though not the only one, is the both/and/neither/nor nature of the works' technical and material basis.

In the modernist tradition, Nielsen eschews any effort to minimize the noise-to-signal ratio in the transmission of an image, that is, to make communicative medium as transparent as possible to its pictorial content. In fact, she is just as interested in what, in the very means by which an image is constituted, interferes with the clear perception of it. One might even perceive the interference more readily than the image. But in any case, one is left with uncertainty: not only an uncertainty about what is being seen but also an uncertainty about what is causing that uncertainty. That's where the interchange between different techniques (photography, printing, painting) and materials (canvas as a support for oil, acrylic, and silkscreen ink, or paper as a support for ink, toner, and watercolor—not to mention those works in which leather substitutes for canvas or printed silk organza functions as a translucent layer of “paint” atop the surface) comes into play as an experiential factor in the work.

The artist herself has articulated the program: “Doubt, both mental and technical, is in my view the strongest way to allow the spectator to appreciate the work. A painting opens a space of projection, of fantasy.... Our vision of what surrounds us is by definition fragmentary and not to be trusted.” This realization—that not only representation, but what we think of as reality, are incomplete and inconsistent constructs—is certainly disquieting. But in painting, at least since Cubism and certainly once again in Nielsen's work, this disquiet can be made into a source of gratification. It can be savored, and in the process, we can learn, as it were, how to be

at home in our human situation. As Nielsen says, “the viewer cannot really situate these spaces and is in a form of dream-like turmoil when faced with the paintings. It can evoke familiar places but there remains a part of doubt. This doubt is constitutive of my work.” This familiar yet dubious place is what the Freudians used to call the *Unheimlich*, the uncanny. Some of us are drawn to it like moths to a lamp.

Modernist practice can be said to begin with Édouard Manet interfering with his contemporaries' perception of his paintings' subjects by making a point of oil paint and canvas as matter and of the brush mark as a trace of the painter's manual effort as well as his in-the-moment decision-making, and this has sometimes been seen as heralding the arrival of abstraction, an art in which the image has disappeared, or rather, been reduced to that of the artist's representational means—Manet's dissonance pointing, paradoxically, toward a new kind of unison: “Since resemblance to nature is at best superfluous and at worst distracting,” it was believed, “it might as well be eliminated.” Nielsen, by contrast, demands the persistence of the image. But her estrangement of the image—which precisely because it is the thing to be estranged remains fundamental to all her work—is achieved by mixing means and, as it were, impeding their distinct perception rather than (like Manet) isolating and highlighting them.

Even referring just to her use of screen printing alone, Nielsen emphasizes the multiplicity of its possibilities—one might even say, of its identities: “It is at once an imprint, a stencil, a photographic extract.” Her adoption of it is tied directly to an experience of nature as artifice, as form, for as she has said, “My discovery of this technique is also connected to a feeling that I had one day whilst walking: the road, the building, the sky seemed to me particularly flat, as if they'd been cut out. I had a sense of vertiginous flatness. I was suddenly able to explore that feeling through screen-printing, because I could cut around the architectural elements, flatten their volume in the landscape and confront them at the vanishing line.”

This evocation of flatness signifies, of course, a connection to the whole history of modernism, of formalism, and indeed of the abstraction from

which she has nonetheless turned away. Nielsen has even invoked Maurice Denis's famous dictum—this is noteworthy, among other reasons, because it seems so unfashionable at a moment when figurative painting with a blatant sociocultural message has become popular again—that a painting “is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.” At the same time, the idea of cutting evokes modernist practices of collage and photomontage. Screen-printing is thus, for Nielsen, a method for seeing the surrounding world in terms that are immediately those of art.

And yet, perhaps just because of their photographic origin, these printed images enter painting as strangers, as elements coming from some elsewhere. I think this displacement of the image accounts, in great part, for the feeling described by Marianne Derrien, and which I have strongly felt myself as well, that standing “before a Nielsen canvas, I often have the feeling of being both there—in front of the painting—and somewhere else—an elsewhere brought to life by the painting.” I am there and I am not there because what I see is there and not there.

The image in Nielsen's paintings, you might say, is not, in essence, painted. And the act of painting rarely displays itself emphatically: most often, color appears as a *mélange* of fluid seepages that remain intangible, almost as if it were the result of a process of chemical interaction. And the artist acknowledges this: “I also play with the different techniques so that you can't really understand or know how the painting came about. Sometimes I'll screen print first and then paint layer after layer over the screen print by a masking system. Sometimes I will take and then screen print successive fragments to alter the first image. What interests me the most is the question of alchemy and the porosity or otherwise of materials.” Nielsen's layerings change the space of collage from surface to depth.

In this process, the gesture of the hand has not been eliminated but neither is it highlighted—it is not put on display for its own sake. Paint does not support the image but accompanies it and, sometimes, threatens to overwhelm it. There's nothing new about images entering the field of painting not through the action of the brush but as a silkscreened

photograph, of course—the practice goes back to the early 1960s, to Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg. But to mention those names is already to evoke Nielsen's difference from them. A great distance separates her art from Pop. Warhol and Rauschenberg were fascinated by media images. The Rauschenberg Foundation website notes that for his 1962-64 silkscreen paintings, “Rauschenberg's image sources included National Geographic, Life, Esquire, Boxing and Wrestling, and newspapers, as well as his own photographs.” Warhol's early paintings of movie stars were made from publicity photos. Both artists liked to dwell on cultural icons: We immediately associate Warhol with his reiterated images of Marilyn Monroe or Elizabeth Taylor, but don't forget that while Rauschenberg usually puts the accent on the field rather than on the figure, the recurrent image in his silkscreen paintings is that of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

The photographs Nielsen uses as sources, on the other hand, are mainly her own. If you've seen one of them before, you've probably seen it in a different painting of hers. It doesn't come with a culturally designated significance. And yet often, as with media images, the realm from which Nielsen's imagery comes somehow seems related more to a collective memory, even though it is impossible to explain why or say where they came from, than to individual experience. Sometimes it feels as if they might be frames from a film. The stillness of the image is eerie; there is a sense of something about to happen. The isolated cabin or bungalow that appears in several of the works, notably from the “Chemical Milling” series—isn't this the kind of place that, in some thriller, might serve as the hideout for some criminal trying to evade the law or maybe the gang he's betrayed? Maybe the place is uninhabited, abandoned, but to open the door to find out could mean danger. Or on the contrary, these might be family snapshots—but whose family? Everyone's? No one's? Moreover, the vacancy of the landscape, as the artist herself has said, “opens up a temporal gap. There's no knowing if this is yesterday, today, or tomorrow. In my view, breaking the reference points is part of the power of painting. It's what allows the beholders to project themselves into it. People often tell me, ‘It feels like the place where I grew up.’ It's always an illusion but the void allows for this relationship with memory.”

But while the paintings allow such resonances, they don't pursue them. No narrative ensues. The eerie stillness will forever stay eerie and still. Even in those cases, until now rather rare in Nielsen's oeuvre, where the human image can be glimpsed, such as some from the 2022 "Scope" series—and despite the figure being caught in motion—the feeling is of freeze-frame, a sort of perpetual pause. More commonly, in Nielsen's art, the "figure" is not a human being but a sculptural or even almost architectural construction of some sort, which dominates the field and threatens to demote (but doesn't quite succeed in reducing) the landscape to a mere background role. So imposing are these imaged constructions that—though she might not like hearing this—I can't help thinking of Nielsen as a sculptor as much as a painter, despite the fact that she has never (yet) exhibited a free-standing, three-dimensional work. Consider paintings such as *Quasar*, 2021, or *Zoled*, 2022, for instance, each with a central image of a spiraling steplike structure built (in the artist's studio) out of wooden planks—an ascending form that, in the case of *Zoled*, has a kind of extreme contrapposto, unstable and dynamic, while *Quasar*'s protagonist looks more like a tornado made of boards. Neither one resemble any sort of living being and yet they appear, somehow, animate. Printed in gray-scale tones and white, these constructions have a ghostly aspect despite their volumetric robustness, while the terrain and sky that surround it are painted in a surprisingly lyrical manner—the flickering brushstrokes used to represent the foreground grasses in both works speaks of an underlying wilderness that is foreign to the dominating form that imposes itself, while the deep space of the sky, particularly in *Quasar*, suggests a baleful, perhaps even apocalyptic drama brewing.

The human image in Nielsen's paintings is little more than a fading silhouette, an intangible shadow, while the things that people build take on an uncanny vitality and presence, and both have a disjointed connection with the place where they occur. Nielsen has spoken of her admiration for artists who broach "the question of the fragments, the counterforms, the collagist aspect and the hybridity. Their works are both strong and fragile, full of decisions and doubts." She herself is one of those artists. In her work everything is strange, everything is familiar. We recognize our danger, but also our freedom. We glimpse the inhuman beauty of it all.



Nature After Nature: On Eva Nielsen's Un-Building Process

← **DECARADIAN**
OIL, ACRYLIC
AND SILKSCREEN INK
ON CANVAS
210 x 170 CM
2019

Nature should not be the object of poetic celebration. Or at least, not before the very concept of nature has been subjected to critical inquiry. Rooted in European Romanticism, nature, as it has traditionally been represented, directly impacts our everyday worldview. Since the turn of the 2010s, philosophers have started to warn us, like Graham Harman, that “*nature is not natural and can never be naturalized.*” Taking matters further, Timothy Morton even assesses that the main obstacle to environmental thinking is the image of nature itself. In their book *Ecology without Nature* (2007), the American philosopher points out that to embrace an ecological view, one must relinquish the idea of nature once and for all. While Eva Nielsen's work does not directly relate to the wave of philosophy loosely referred to as “Object Oriented Ontology,” it bears elective affinities with it while bringing forth a social conscience to one of our time's most pressing perceptive shifts. As a painter, the French-Danish artist roots her representations inside a personal experience: that of observing, from the window of a train during commutes between the outskirts and the center of Paris, the several entangled layers of time that make up a certain scenery. Time, here, is measured in millions of years, that of geological time, just as it surfaces through more visible, man-made constructions sprouting here and there over the span of a few years of months. To render both visible at once calls for a subjective prism, which Nielsen renders through the push-and-pull of intricate and sometimes conflicting layers of reality. Representing landscape as both mundane and fleeting, present and retro-futurist, Nielsen inserts screen-printed buildings within lush sceneries rendered through animated brushstrokes. Rather than imposing themselves as erected, the buildings open up a spatial-temporal gap, leaving space for the viewer's own speculative projections. As Modern subjectivity is increasingly put under inquiry, nature might very well be the last resistant fortress of Post-Enlightenment heritage. By laying bare decaying concrete as a stand-in for a similarly crumbling concept, Eva Nielsen reveals nature as the frail, ever-evolving construction that it ultimately is.

EVA NIELSEN

31

"When the traveller reaches the oasis, his retinas hallucinating, he starts looking for shade and water. He will find water here in quantity, covering almost everything in its passage. On the other hand, shade never ventures too far. It is always midday — a wet midday, to be sure — in these "peephole" works. Traps for the eye; receptacles to project yourself into; cognitive instruments. A mirage, even without sun or seduction, remains a peerless temptation. Rain, sullen trees, the impression of night arriving, these bachelor pavilions which irresistibly draw us towards them heighten the mysterious potential of the mirage, as if it were just a first stage before going any further, to the back of the canvas, and to the backs of our own eyes."

CLÉMENT DIRIÉ, ON THE OCCASION
OF THE EXHIBITION *NEW PAINTINGS*,
EVA NIELSEN, *THE PILL*, 2016





Qu'est-ce que je vois quand ce tableau d'Eva Nielsen me regarde? Qu'est-ce que j'éprouve quand cet autre me retient? Comment est-ce que j'en ressens la matière, la surface, la trame? De quelle manière mon œil y circule-t-il? Quels liens mon cerveau opère-t-il alors avec le réel et son double à la Nielsen? M'invitent-ils à les rejoindre dans leurs vagues paysages? Y comprendrais-je mieux les raisons de leur familière absurdité? Ou puis-je simplement rester en lisière, sans me projeter dans ces espaces au sein desquels je demeurerais à jamais le seul être humain?

Qu'est-ce que j'emporte quand je laisse un tableau d'Eva Nielsen derrière moi? Une sensation d'effacement, d'effraction? Comment ce souvenir visuel m'imprègne-t-il la rétine? Que ressentent les Bédouins en s'éloignant tranquillement de cette oasis où ils ont trouvé refuge? Est-ce que la vie de l'oasis est semblable une fois la caravane partie? Que ressentent-ils encore quand cette palmeraie vue au loin ne se révèle être qu'un mirage? Pensez-vous que la peinture tienne davantage de l'oasis ou du mirage? Aimez-vous voir, en chaque toile, un piège optique qu'il vous faut simultanément déjouer et élucider?

C'est sans doute de telles questions que se pose également Eva Nielsen, en tant que peintre et première spectatrice de son œuvre, depuis ses débuts au tournant des années 2000-2010. De telles questions qu'elle renégocie constamment à partir d'un dispositif simple, presque immuable, donc fertile: une forme – structure simple ou complexe – occupe le devant de l'espace pictural; un paysage, plus ou moins dense, arrête le regard tel un rideau en fond de scène. Le protocole, lui aussi, est élémentaire:

Essay

How to (Make One) See with Painting

Clément Dirié

EN

What do I see when this Eva Nielsen painting is looking at me? What do I feel when transfixed by another? How do I experience its material, its surface, its depth? In what way does my eye pass over it? What links are made by my brain when faced with Nielsen's portrayals of reality and its double? Do they invite me to join them in their remote landscapes? When there, will I better understand the reasons for their familiar absurdity? Or can I simply stay on the edge, without projecting myself into these spaces at the heart of which I will remain forever the only human being?

What do I take away with me when I leave a Nielsen painting behind? A sensation of dismay, of erasure, of intrusion? How does this visual memory permeate my retina? What do the Bedouins feel when calmly leaving the oasis in which they have found refuge? Is the life of the oasis the same once the caravan has departed? And what do they feel when the palm grove seen from afar reveals itself to be a mirage? Is painting similar to an oasis or a mirage? Do you like to see each canvas as an optical illusion that you must simultaneously elude and elucidate?

These are, without doubt, the questions that Eva Nielsen has also been asking herself, as a painter and as her work's first viewer, since her emergence in the late 2000s and early 2010s. She is constantly renegotiating these questions from the starting point of a simple, almost immutable (and therefore fertile) protocol: a form – a simple or complex structure – occupies the foreground of the pictorial space; a more or less dense landscape stops the gaze like a curtain in the background. The production procedure is equally elementary: a tight imbrication of the



une imbrication plus ou moins serrée de la peinture et de la sérigraphie qui se frottent, se superposent, se mélangent, parfois de manière inattendue, au cours même du processus de création. Mais cette « scène primitive » de l'œuvre de l'artiste lui offre, par sa simplicité même, une grande liberté d'exécution : les possibilités de rencontre d'une présence et d'un décor sont infinies, comme le sont les frictions entre effets de réel et effets de peinture. Comme le sont les jeux optiques que ces frictions génèrent⁰¹.

Le pouvoir de l'illusion – dont la peinture constitue sans doute une expression exacerbée, archétypale – réside dans la réunion des contraires : l'incertitude et la virtuosité, l'échappée et la précision, la présence et le hors-champ. C'est également ce qui fascine dans le mirage et l'oasis, au-delà de notre propre envie d'y croire : cette apparition soudaine – véridique ou non –, au milieu du désert et de la platitude, d'un bloc de réel, avec palmiers, bruit de l'eau qui coule et promesse du repos. Cette apparition, elle n'est pas tant optique que mentale. Elle se situe au point d'intersection de la pupille et des neurones : pulsion scopique et auto-persuasion cérébrale réunies. (Et si la cascade et l'origine du monde d'*Étant donné*s : 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage (1946-1966) de Marcel Duchamp n'étaient finalement qu'un mirage, dépaycé dans les montagnes suisses ?)

Dans ses ensembles successifs de peintures – qui appartiennent à des registres techniques et iconographiques différents, qu'elle étend méthodiquement –, Eva Nielsen poursuit cette recherche : donner corps à l'illusion, à des mirages visuels agissant autant sur la vue que sur l'intellect, à la surface de nos orbites comme au fond de nos yeux. Ces mirages prennent des apparences changeantes : parfois, architectures de béton, fières de

leurs formes monolithiques, qui emplissent l'espace, l'envahissent presque, et dont la certitude immanente construit les paysages alentour ; ailleurs, scènes de genre kaléidoscopiques, feuilletées de plis infinis ou traversées de cicatrices propices à la révélation, brisant la linéarité du réel. Ces dernières, peut-être marquées par les aventures humaines qui s'y déroulent, dévoilent leur potentiel narratif, cinématographique.

Dans son ouvrage *La Griffée du temps. Ce que l'histoire peut dire de la littérature*, Judith Lyon-Caen analyse, en historienne, l'une des nouvelles des *Diaboliques* de Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly titrée « La Vengeance d'une femme » (1874). Dans un chapitre intitulé « Interlude. Détaillisme », elle conclut ainsi l'un des axes de sa recherche – chercher dans la fiction les traces du réel : « le détail vrai est la condition de réussite du mensonge romanesque⁰² ». Il est aisé d'examiner la pratique d'Eva Nielsen à l'aune de cette réflexion : le détail vrai est la condition de réussite du mensonge pictural. Ce que l'artiste emprunte à l'ici et maintenant – jeux de terrains d'enfants, sculptures de ronds-points de banlieue, éléments d'ingénierie civile abandonnés, résidences secondaires endormies, vitrines oubliées, architectures en ruine –, elle le transfigure à sa manière, grâce à l'effet d'un glacié ou d'un trompe-l'œil, à la stratification d'une composition, à la répétition d'un motif, au recouvrement d'une sérigraphie, au flirt avec l'abstraction, à l'indécidabilité d'un flou ou d'un moiré. L'artiste ne cherche pas à mimer une réalité que l'œil pourrait découvrir seul, mais nous propose des précipités de ses visions, des collages de formes, d'atmosphères et de paysages perçus, photographiés, glanés, puis reconstitués. Les peintures d'Eva Nielsen offrent ainsi une certaine idée de

painting and of the silkscreen print that rub up against each other, overlapping and mixing with each other during the creative process, sometimes in unexpected ways. But the very simplicity of this “primitive scene” offers the artist huge freedom of execution: the possibilities to confront a presence and a setting are infinite, as are the frictions between the effects of reality and the effects of painting, as are the optical illusions generated by these frictions.⁰⁷

The power of illusion – of which painting constitutes without doubt a magnified, archetypal expression – resides in the meeting of opposites: uncertainty and virtuosity, blurring and precision, presence and what remains out of view. It's equally this that fascinates in the mirage and the oasis, beyond our own desire to believe in it: this sudden apparition – truthful or not – in the middle of the desert and pure flatness, of a true chunk of reality with palm trees, the sound of running water and the promise of repose. This apparition is not so much optical as mental. It exists at the meeting point of the eye's pupil and the neurones: scopical impulse and cerebral self-suggestion brought together. (What if the waterfall and the origin of the world of *Étant donné*s : 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage [Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas, 1946-1966] by Marcel Duchamp was ultimately a mirage, out of place in the Swiss mountains?)

In her successive bodies of paintings – belonging to different technical and iconographic registers, expanded methodically by the artist – Nielsen follows this quest: to give substance to illusion and visual mirages, which act as much on the retina as on the intellect, and which exist at the surface of our orbits as much as in the backs of our eyes. These mirages take on changing appearances: sometimes

the proud monolithic forms of concrete architecture that fill the space, almost invading it, and of which the immanent certainty constructs the landscapes around it; elsewhere, kaleidoscopic scenes of genres, pleated with infinite folds or covered in scars, which enable revelation, breaking the linearity of reality. These images, maybe marked by the human adventures that play out there, reveal their narrative and cinematographic potential.

In a recent study, Judith Lyon-Caen analyses, as a historian, one of the stories of *Diaboliques* (The She-Devils, 1874) by Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly, “La Vengeance d'une femme” (“A Woman's Revenge”). In a chapter entitled “Interlude. Détaillisme”, she concludes one of the axes of her research – looking in fiction for traces of reality – in this way: “the true detail is the condition of success of the novelistic lie.”⁰⁸ It is helpful to regard the practice of Eva Nielsen in light of this reflection: the true detail is the condition of success of the pictorial lie. With what the artist borrows from the here and now – children's playgrounds, suburban roundabout sculptures, abandoned elements of civil engineering, sleepy second homes, forgotten shop windows, architectural ruins – she transfigures reality in her own way, with a glaze or a trompe-l'œil, the layering of a composition, the repetition of a motif, the overlapping of silkscreen prints, flirting with abstraction, or the indiscernibility of a blur or a shimmering. The artist is not looking to imitate a reality that the eye might discover by itself, but instead offers us precipitates of her visions, collages of forms, atmospheres and landscapes perceived, photographed, gleaned, then reconstructed. Eva Nielsen's paintings thus offer a certain idea of vision: made of bedazzlements, of discrepancies, of cascading



031

032

la vision : faite d'éblouissements, de décalages, de mises au point en cascade. De zone réservée, le blanc se fait clignement violent⁰³. De motif architectural, la trille métallique devient structure *all-over*. Ses sujets, volontairement ingrats, voient le standard se disputer à l'anecdotique et au non-reconnaissable, dans un va-et-vient permanent entre les échelles : celle, technique, du nécessaire de plomberie comme celle, *bigger than life*, des artistes du land art. La vision de près, au microscope, où l'œil s'affole au contact des particules élémentaires, alterne avec le point de vue lointain, comme si nous dominions la « bataille picturale », constamment recommencée.

Chaque fois, la scène représentée, reconstruite à partir de morceaux de réel, est partielle, vue à travers un obstacle, une structure, presque un « outil visuel » influant sur la perspective et la répartition des éléments sur la toile. Des images, entre paysages et natures mortes, obtenues par des objets inertes, où le cul-de-sac de la vision ne signifie pas celui de la pensée. Ou bien des images ouvertes, voire béantes, où des vortex immobiles créent une dynamique de vision. « C'est encore une manière de voir le paysage, de l'encadrer. Cette vision rejoint l'essence même de la peinture. Un rectangle prompt au surgissement d'un « ailleurs », mais avec un point important : cet ailleurs est fait de peinture et ne vaut que pour cela. C'est une fable partagée, consentie⁰⁴. »

Grâce à son approche ouverte du médium pictural⁰⁵ et à sa vision de la peinture à la fois comme *cosa mentale* et comme fenêtre sensible ouverte sur le monde⁰⁶, Eva Nielsen propose des pièges pour le regard, des réceptacles où nous projeter, des instruments cognitifs auxquels se mesurer. Les espaces ainsi fixés sur la toile sont bien

adjustments. The white escapes from its "reserved" zones to produce violent flashing.⁰⁹ From an architectural motif, metal vines become an all-over structure. Her subjects, purposely unattractive, present the standard in dialogue with the anecdotal and the non-recognisable, in a permanent back and forth between scales: from the technical scale of the plumbing tools, to the larger-than-life scale of land art. The perspective of the microscopic close-up vision, the eye reacting to contact with elementary particles, alternates with the faraway point of view, as if we were controlling the "pictorial battle", constantly repeated.

Each time, the represented scene, reconstituted from elements of reality, is incomplete, seen across an obstacle, a structure, that acts as a kind of "visual tool", influencing the perspective and the partitioning of elements on the canvas. The images, somewhere between landscapes and still lifes, are blocked by inert objects, where the cul-de-sac of vision does not represent that of thought. Or else open, almost gaping images, where the immobile vortex create a dynamic of vision. "It's also a way of seeing the landscape, of framing it. This vision approaches the very essence of painting. A rectangular prompt to the emergence of an 'elsewhere', but with an important point: that elsewhere is made of paint and that is all it is. But it's a shared, consensual fable."¹⁰

Thanks to her open approach of the pictorial medium¹¹ and her vision of painting as at once *cosa mentale* and as a window of sensation, open onto the world¹², Nielsen offers traps for the eye, receptacles to project yourself into, cognitive instruments against which we measure ourselves. The spaces thus fixed onto the canvas are most often places of transition, in-between spaces, anonymous

souvent des lieux de transition, de l'entre-deux, des seuils anonymes où cela circule, où semblent flotter des émotions, des souvenirs. Des tableaux comme des paysages de mémoire, une mémoire visuelle riche d'autant d'images réelles que d'apparitions mentales.

- 01 Face à la toile, Eva Nielsen est intéressée par « le moment du choix, les expérimentations, le travail de composition, qui s'effectuent tout en travaillant à partir de règles et de principes qui ne deviennent jamais des obstacles, afin de prendre en charge les données de la peinture et de tester comment elles peuvent interagir ou se repousser », propos issus de la conférence « Surimpression » donnée par l'artiste le 30 octobre 2014 au Collège de France, à Paris, dans le cadre du colloque « La Fabrique de la peinture ».
- 02 Judith Lyon-Caen, *La Griffe du temps. Ce que l'histoire peut dire de la littérature*, Gallimard, « NRF Essais », Paris, 2019, p. 171. « La peinture n'est qu'un tissu de mensonges », me disait Eva Nielsen dans un entretien réalisé à l'occasion de *Feedback*, sa première exposition personnelle en galerie, Galerie Dominique Fiat, Paris, 2010.
- 03 Dans sa conférence donnée en 2014 au Collège de France (*op. cit.*), Eva Nielsen déclarait : « Dans les peintures de Francisco de Zurbarán, de Filippo Lippi ou des maîtres hollandais, l'impression que l'air circule me stupéfie. »
- 04 Propos de l'artiste à l'auteur, 2019.
- 05 Eva Nielsen n'envisage jamais la peinture comme une *terra isolata* mais toujours en lien avec la photographie, la littérature, le cinéma, l'installation et la pratique curatoriale.
- 06 L'image de la fenêtre est choisie à dessein : « J'habite en périphérie de Paris : le paysage est comme quadrillé, sa vision toujours parcellaire. Le paysage tend à devenir un horizon sublimé, hors d'atteinte. On ne peut le saisir qu'à travers la fenêtre, derrière le grillage, entre deux immeubles, depuis la voiture du RER... Regarder frontalement le paysage est une expérience rare. C'est à partir de ce constat très simple que j'ai organisé mon travail. Tout en le structurant, l'objet parasite vient bouleverser le paysage », propos d'Eva Nielsen à l'auteur, 2019.

thresholds where something circulates, where emotions and memories seem to float. Paintings as landscapes of memory, a visual memory as rich with real images as with mental apparitions.

- 07 Facing the canvas, Eva Nielsen is interested by "the moment of choice, experimentation, the work of composition, that is carried out whilst working from rules and principles that never become obstacles, so as to take charge of the facts of painting and to test how they can interact or repel each other", remarks made by the artist on 30 October 2014 during the "Surimpression" conference at the Collège de France, Paris, in the context of a panel titled "La Fabrique de la peinture".
- 08 Judith Lyon-Caen, *La Griffe du temps. Ce que l'histoire peut dire de la littérature*, Gallimard, NRF Essais, Paris, 2019, p.171. "Painting is just a tissue of lies," Eva Nielsen told me in an interview carried out during *Feedback*, her first personal gallery exhibition, Galerie Dominique Fiat, Paris, 2010.
- 09 In her 2014 conference at the Collège de France (*op. cit.*), Eva Nielsen declared: "In the paintings of Francisco de Zurbarán, Filippo Lippi or the Dutch masters, I am amazed by the sense of the air circulating."
- 10 Remarks made by artist to the author, 2019.
- 11 Eva Nielsen never envisages painting like a *terra isolata* but rather connected to photography, literature, cinema, installation and the practice of curation.
- 12 The image of the window is intentional: "I live on the periphery of Paris: the landscape is as if criss-crossed, its vision always fragmented. The landscape tends to become a sublimated horizon, out of reach. On cannot grasp it other than through the window, behind the grid, between two buildings, from the car or the RER train... Seeing this landscape upfront is a rare experience. It is from this very simple observation that I have organised my work. By structuring it, the parasitic object disrupts the landscape." Remarks by Eva Nielsen to the author, 2019.

Essai/Essay

Clément Dirie

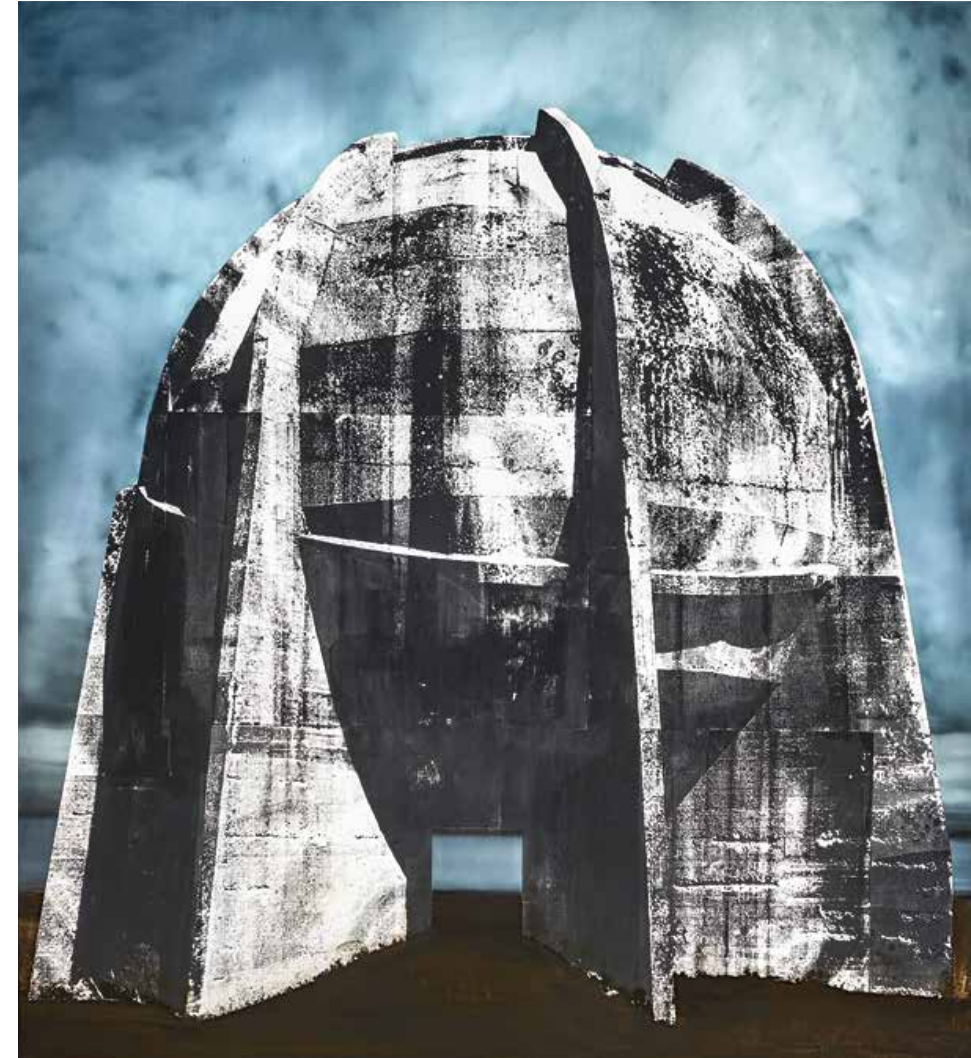
41

«Suburbia [la banlieue] signifie, littéralement, une ville "au-dessous" ; c'est un abîme circulaire entre la ville et la campagne – un endroit où les édifices semblent sombrer, hors de vue – les bâtiments basculent dans des limbes tentaculaires. Chaque site glisse vers l'absence. Une immense entité négative et sans forme déplace ce centre qu'est la ville et submerge la campagne. »¹³

L'œuvre d'Eva Nielsen est constamment à la lisière de quelque chose : au seuil du territoire, de son centre et de sa périphérie, de l'image imprimée et de la peinture, de l'abstraction et de la figuration. D'un horizon à l'autre, du format au sujet, le paysage prédomine dans ses peintures et ses dessins. Inspiré à la fois par les architectures et par leurs vestiges tant modernistes qu'utopistes, son regard se pose sur ce qui semble être « hors de vue » car les lieux qu'elle retranscrit n'apparaissent qu'entre les interstices d'une nature abandonnée et des sites industriels. Telle une topographe, une observatrice ou une nomade, l'artiste expérimente ces territoires en mutation, tant par leur étendue que par leur exploitation. Ces espaces dits intermédiaires, elle les connaît bien, ce sont ceux de la région parisienne. À la fois personnelle et fictive, cette cartographie s'est façonnée au fil du temps entre ses origines danoises et son ancrage en périphérie de la ville. Si bien qu'étrangement une atmosphère silencieuse propre au romantisme nordique semble advenir, entre sublime, « tragédie du paysage » et contemplation à travers des lumières bleutées ou rendues verdâtres par le déchaînement de forces naturelles. Sa peinture puise dans la puissance et

"Suburbia literally means a 'city below'; it is a circular gulf between city and country – a place where buildings seem to sink away from one's vision – buildings fall back into sprawling babels or limbos. Every site glides away toward absence. An immense negative entity of formlessness displaces the center which is the city and swamps the country."¹⁶

A work by Eva Nielsen is constantly at the border of something: on the edge of the territory, between centre and periphery, printed image and painting, abstraction and figurative art. From one horizon to another, from composition to subject, it is the landscape that predominates in Nielsen's paintings and drawings. Inspired both by architecture and by the vestiges of architecture (modernist as much as Utopian), her gaze rests on what seems to be "out of sight" because the places that she transcribes only appear between the interstices of abandoned nature and industrial sites. Acting as topographer, observer or nomad, the artist experiences these changing territories by their expanse as much as by their exploitation. She knows these so-called "intermediary" spaces well, they are those of the Parisian region. Simultaneously personal and fictitious, this cartography has over time been shaped by both her Danish origins and her foothold in the suburbs. So effective is this practice that, oddly, a silent atmosphere unique to Nordic romanticism seems to set in, somewhere between the sublime "tragedy of the landscape" and contemplation through bluish lights, or those made greenish by the unleashing of natural forces. Her work draws on the power and vigour of these landscapes in order to subtly articulate an organic,



la vigueur de ces paysages afin d'articuler subtilement un rapport organique, voire alchimique, entre art et nature. Face à ces espaces abandonnés, à un paysage enneigé, à une zone périurbaine désertée ou à des jeux d'enfants, Eva Nielsen scrute ces espaces-temps transitoires à la mémoire difficilement saisissable qui font désormais partie de nos vies quotidiennes.

Sa peinture est toujours dans la mobilité et interroge les modes de déplacement. En transit(ion), ses œuvres le sont aussi dans leur façonnage, entre le bruit numérique de l'image et l'hypothétique silence de la peinture. Nous devenons *passagers*, comme le titre d'une de ses premières peintures, car sa peinture nous embarque dans ses déambulations tant réelles qu'imaginaires. Passant par *Villeneuve-triage* (2010), non loin de son atelier, ou par *Rivesaltes* (2011), au paysage plus désertique et sec, avec ses aires bétonnées, ou vers des terres plus lointaines, comme *Ellis Island* (2011) et *Antananarivo* (2011). Peinture-image ou jeu mental ? Au travers de ces multiples visions du paysage, elle rassemble, reconfigure et récolte des fragments du réel, mais quelque chose s'y interpose toujours tel un écran ou un filtre. Avec la sérigraphie, Eva Nielsen « décalque le monde » et « abîme » la peinture en la sublimant. À l'image de l'altération des lieux qu'elle a parcourus ou infiltrés, ces espaces en reconstruction, réels ou factices, brouillent et perturbent nos repères. Loin de chercher à imiter la nature, surtout la manière dont crée la nature, l'artiste centre sa peinture au-delà du dualisme nature/culture hérité du XIX^e siècle en transformant le paysage en une « contre-histoire » de l'aménagement du territoire.

Ses paysages-mirages traquent les jeux anticipatoires de l'obsolescence technique, des processus de

dégradation et des ressacs d'une civilisation édifiatrice. En réinvestissant ces reliquats industriels, Eva Nielsen propose une relecture de la notion de paysage entropique énoncée par l'artiste Robert Smithson, représentant majeur du land art, qui écrivait, en 1967, dans son texte *Les Monuments de Passaic : Passaic a-t-elle remplacé Rome en tant que Ville éternelle ?* Dans son texte¹⁴, Smithson les nomme *panoramas zéro*, et les décrit comme n'ayant ni noyau, ni centre, et semblant contenir des *ruines à l'envers*, à l'opposé de la ruine romantique, car « ils s'élèvent en ruine avant d'être construits ».

Cette sédimentation d'un paysage dialectique tant naturel que culturel se précise dans les séries d'Eva Nielsen intitulées *Ascien* (2017) ou les plus récentes nommées *Archihead* (2018). Elles sont les témoignages d'une activité où chaque peinture devient l'objet d'un scénario hypothétique qui ne cesse de renégocier une présence-absence humaine. À l'ère de l'anthropocène et du capitocène, sa peinture se fait le réceptacle des mutations et des transformations du territoire. Tel un enregistrement des traces de la civilisation post-industrielle, son œuvre analyse la décomposition naturelle de toute édification humaine en s'intéressant aux dimensions politiques du paysage, dépassant ainsi la conception classique du paysage occidental comme « simple décor ». L'intervention de l'humain dans le paysage et son impact par ses modifications et ses bouleversements de l'équilibre de la biosphère infusent les multiples couches des peintures et dessins de l'artiste. Chaque paysage est imprégné de formes et de strates qui réinterrogent les ruptures, les persistances, les effondrements des systèmes socio-écologiques. C'est grâce à cette volonté profonde de « faire partie du



even alchemical, relationship between art and nature. Faced with these abandoned spaces, a snow-covered landscape, a deserted suburban zone or children playing, Eva Nielsen examines these transient spaces and times with the elusive memories that form part of our daily lives.

Her painting is always in a state of movement and explores methods of displacement. In their shaping, her works are also in transit(ion), between the numerical noise of the image and the hypothetical silence of painting. As referenced by the title of one of Nielsen's first paintings, we become passengers, because her paintings take us with her on her wanderings (the real as well as the imaginary ones). Passing by *Villeneuve-triage* (2010), not far from her studio, or by *Rivesaltes* (2011), a more deserted and dry landscape, with its concrete zones, or towards more far-off lands like *Ellis Island* (2011) and *Antananarivo* (2011). Painted image or mental game? In these multiple visions of the landscape, she assembles, reconfigures and harvests fragments of reality, but something always interposes itself like a screen or a filter. In her use of printing, Eva Nielsen "traces the world" and "spoils" the painting by sublimating it. Representing the alteration of the places that she has roamed or infiltrated, these spaces of reconstruction, real or fake, scramble and disrupt our perceptions. Far from looking to imitate nature (above all the way in which nature creates), the artist places her work beyond the nature/culture dualism inherited from the 19th century, transforming the landscape into an "alternative history" of the land's development.

Nielsen's landscape-mirages playfully anticipate technical obsolescence, processes of degradation and the setbacks of a civilisation that builds and constructs.

In looking at these relics of industry, Eva Nielsen offers a reinterpretation of artist Robert Smithson's concept of entropic landscape. Smithson was one of the major representatives of land art and wrote in "The Monuments of Passaic" in 1967: "Has Passaic replaced Rome as The Eternal City?" In his text¹⁷, Smithson calls these *zero panoramas*, without nucleus or centre, which seem to contain *ruins in reverse*, as opposed to romantic ruins, because they "don't fall into ruin after they are built, but rather rise into ruin before they are built".

This sedimentation of a dialectical landscape, natural as well as cultural, is specified in Eva Nielsen's set of series entitled *Ascien* (2017) or, more recently, *Archihead* (2018). They are testimonials of a practice in which each painting becomes the object of a hypothetical scenario that ceaselessly renegotiates a human presence-absence. In the Anthropocene and Capitalocene era, her work becomes a receptacle for the earth's mutations and transformations. A record of the remains of post-industrial civilisation, her work also analyses the natural decomposition of human constructions, whilst also addressing the political dimensions of the landscape, thus moving beyond the classical conception of the Western landscape as "simply scenery". Human intervention in the landscape, and its impact by way of modifications and upheavals to the equilibrium of the biosphere, infuse the multiple layers of the artist's paintings and drawings. Each landscape is permeated with forms and layers that explore the ruptures, continuations and collapses of socio-ecological systems. It is thanks to this profound desire to "be part of the landscape" that it is possible to call into question the notion of the urban environment that we already know. These preoccupations

paysage » qu'il est possible de remettre en question la notion d'environnement urbain telle que nous la connaissons. Ces préoccupations ont guidé Eva Nielsen vers la ville d'Arcosanti, expérience urbaine radicale conçue au cœur de l'Arizona, dans les années 1960, par Paolo Soleri et basée sur cette notion inventée d'arcologie, fusion entre l'archéologie et l'écologie. Pensée comme un écovillage ou un organisme biologique, les forces naturelles y coexistent avec les fragilités humaines.

Entre palimpseste pictural et stratifications géologiques, sa peinture prélève et creuse l'histoire de ces paysages, telle une « accumulation de couches superposées par les usages humains sur la face de la terre », selon les termes du géographe et historien du paysage américain John Brinckerhoff Jackson¹⁵. Entre « paysage politique » (produit par le pouvoir) et « paysage vernaculaire » (fabriqué localement par les habitants), Eva Nielsen opère un recadrage qui permet de focaliser le regard vers ces matérialités contemporaines. Incarnation, voire excavation, d'une histoire politique et sociale inhérente à la révolution industrielle par l'usage du béton, leurs formes ressurgissent tels les *Sun Tunnels* de Nancy Holt, gigantesques oculi en béton armé érigés dans un paysage désertique. Machines cosmiques et engins de chantier, ces agrégats de sable et de pierres permettent de voir vers et à travers un « futur préhistorique » qui réveille la substance amnésique d'une modernité en quête d'autres territoires. Un jeu entre le monumental et le banal, l'évanescent et l'atemporel, l'artificiel et le naturel s'installe en permanence dans l'œuvre picturale d'Eva Nielsen qui porte en elle le sédiment de ces formes qui dialoguent aussi avec les incisions de Gordon Matta-Clark, avec le principe de mélancolie chez

Aldo Rossi ou encore avec les utopies formalistes de la côte ouest américaine. En décelant les multiples facettes du projet moderniste tant par son hégémonie esthétique et dogmatique que par son histoire alternative et contre-culturelle, Eva Nielsen navigue entre ces récits et ces territoires déjà traversés par la déperdition, la dérive, jusqu'à en faire l'expérience du sublime.

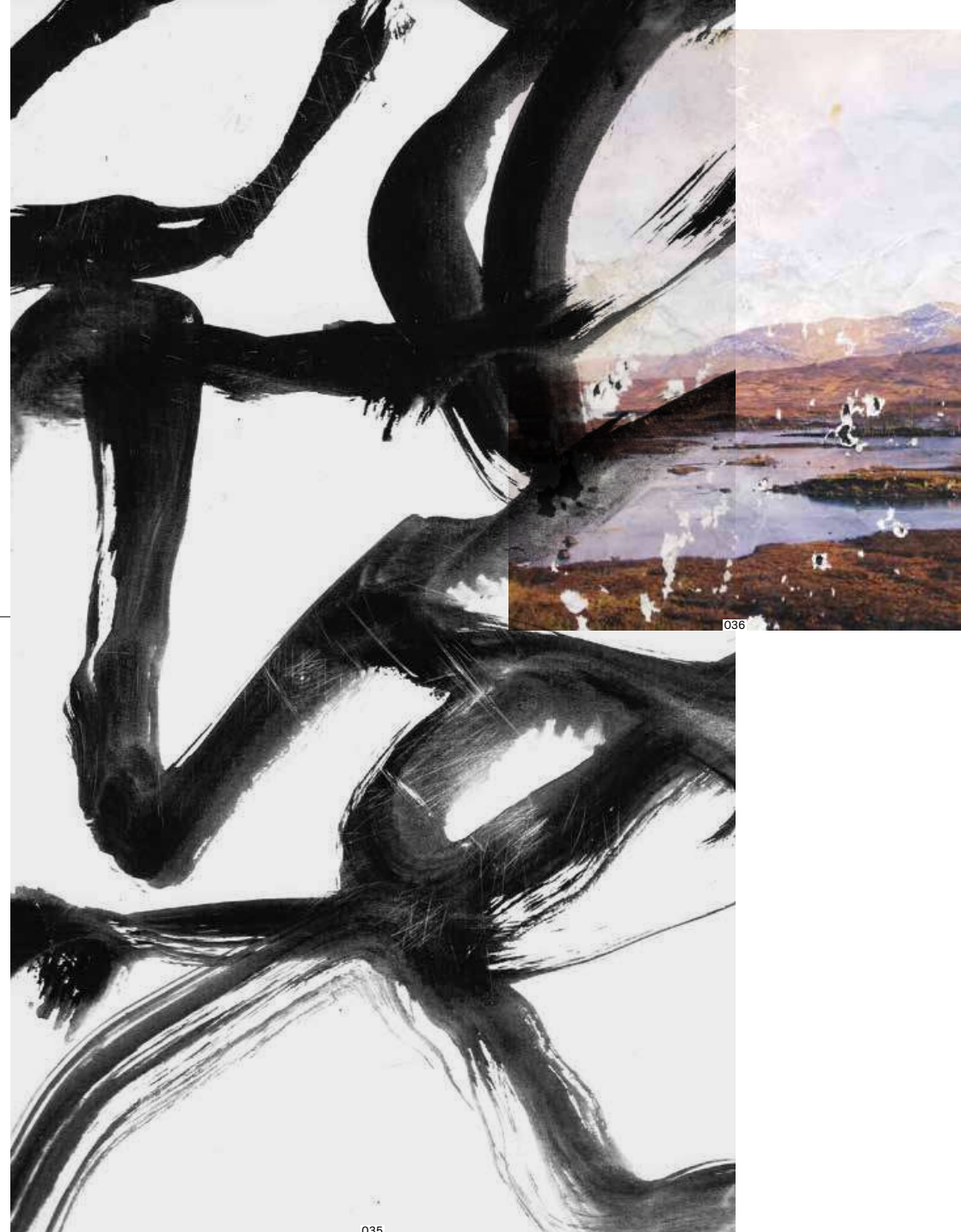
- 13 Robert Smithson, « *A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art* », 1968, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, p. 91, trad. de l'extrait par Suzanne Paquet, « Une nouvelle topographie, ou l'art de la périphérie », in *Nouvelle revue d'esthétique*, PUF, 2008, n° 1, p. 35-43.
- 14 « *The Monuments of Passaic: has Passaic replace Rome as the Eternal city?* », Artforum, New York, 1967, dans Robert Smithson, *une rétrospective: le paysage entropique, 1960-1973*, catalogue d'exposition du MAC Marseille, 1994.
- 15 « *The Word Itself* », *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997, p. 305.

have guided Eva Nielsen to the town of Arcosanti, a radical urban experiment conceived by Paolo Soleri in the heart of Arizona in the 1960s and based on his invented concept of "arcology", a fusion of architecture and ecology. Conceived as an ecovillage or biological organism, natural forces coexist here with human weakness.

Between pictorial palimpsest and geological stratifications, Nielsen's painting collects and excavates the history of these landscapes, as an "accumulation of layers superimposed on the face of the earth by human use" (using the terms of geographer and historian of the American landscape John Brinckerhoff Jackson¹⁶). Between "political landscape" (made by power), and "vernacular landscape" (made locally by those who live there), Eva Nielsen performs a reframing that enables us to focus our gaze on this contemporary materiality. Incarnation, perhaps excavation, of a political and social history, the concrete forms inherent to the Industrial Revolution resurface as in *Sun Tunnels* by Nancy Holt, gigantic oculi of reinforced concrete erected in a desert landscape. Cosmic machines and engines from building sites, these aggregates of sand and stone allow us to look *at* and *through* a "prehistoric future" that awakens the amnesiac quality of modernity in search in other territories. The monumental and banal, the evanescent and atemporal, the artificial and natural, are constantly at play in the work of Eva Nielsen, which carries within it the sediment of these forms, which are also in dialogue with Gordon Matta-Clark's incisions, Aldo Rossi's principle of melancholy or even with the formalist utopias of the American West Coast. By recognising the multiple facets of the modernist project, as much by its aesthetic and dogmatic hegemony as by its alternative and

counter-cultural history, Eva Nielsen navigates between these narratives and these territories already touched by loss, drifting towards what makes the experience touch the sublime.

- 16 Robert Smithson, "A Museum of Language in the Vicinity of Art", 1968, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996, p.91.
- 17 "The Monuments of Passaic", Artforum, New York, December 1967.
- 18 "The Word Itself", *Landscape in Sight: Looking at America*, ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1997, p.305.



EVA NIELSEN

CHROMA

TANNERIES ROUX / TWINPIX

RVB BOOKS

A Second Life

Since the beginnings of agriculture about 10,000 years ago, humans have looked for ways to use and improve the riches offered by nature. For example, they became tanners, motivated by necessity, but also resourcefulness, because they had animal hides on hand, then as they do today, as by-products of livestock farming, which they had developed to provide milk, wool and meat. They had to learn how to process these hides, to make them imperishable, supple, and even to give them new colors. The same would be true some 5,000 years later, when humans figured out how to breed and raise silkworms, thus adding an animal fiber with unique and exceptional fineness, brilliance and resistance to the plant-based ones they were using at the time. Today's tanners, like those at Les Tanneries Roux, and today's silk farmers, spinners and weavers, but also silk printers like those at Twinpix, are the modern interpreters of these centuries-old traditions and expertise that helped create humanity as we know it and our shared culture.

Art and painting have nurtured and given expression to our humanity for even longer. Eva Nielsen is therefore also heir to a practice that has been enriched and extended since the use of the first natural pigments on cave walls, along with advances in techniques and chemistry. When she met the artisans of Les Tanneries Roux and Twinpix, Eva had a wonderful mastery of the techniques of painting, but had little or no experience with leather or silk. And it was by seeking to encourage these two materials to reveal the other possibilities her artist's eye could see and of which the artisans might not be aware that she was able to use them, to rethink them, just like any other tool that might replace or round out those already in her palette. Sometimes as mediums, sometimes as objects. Through successive experimentation, taking a methodical and reasoned, but inspired, approach. And with the obliging assistance of the artisans.

Eva is like the sorcerer's apprentice in Fantasia, who gives life to inanimate objects with a wave of a magic wand. And this is, perhaps unconsciously, what unites the twenty-five pieces created during her residency: bringing things (back) to life. This is true for

objects, from an abandoned house to a simple chair or from a Vercors landscape to family photos, just as it is for materials (leather, canvas, silk organza), and even techniques (painting, superimposition, juxtaposition, collage). Each of the pieces, all variations on these main themes, transmits a feeling of life, rhythm and movement. They easily suggest the third dimension. The fourth, time, is also made manifest. Here we have twenty-five brilliant expressions of one of the most noble intentions and paradoxes in art: that of conveying life as fully as possible, while capturing it for eternity.

Jean Baptiste Voisin
President, LVMH Métiers d'Art

**Painterly Pastoral,
A Path Connecting Sources.**

*"I watched the lightning tear the sky apart,
Watched waterspouts, and streaming undertow,
And Dawn like Dove-People rising on wings—
I've seen what men have only dreamed they saw!
I saw the sun with mystic horrors darken,
And shimmer through a violent haze;
With a shiver of shutters the waves fell
Like actors in ancient, forgotten plays!"*
Arthur Rimbaud, *Le Bateau ivre* (1871),
stanzas 8 and 9¹

All destinies are anchored in the river. Rainwater runs over the earth, penetrating the soil, collecting to form the sources that combine here to become the Isère. Eva Nielsen had been invited to the confluence of these merging and eroding waterways so that she might take her painting to realms she had not explored until then: leather and silk. Every month of this year, she thus made her way to Romans-sur-Isère, where Les Tanneries Roux is located, during a period in which our relations with others, our movements and our bodies were upended in hitherto unimagined ways. She set up her temporary painter's studio in a space on the top floor of the tannery. From her very first visit, she instantly caught the warm and strong natural light of Romans. Captivated by the personal narratives and collective stories built up locally in layers, Nielsen became adept at navigating these unknown landscapes, departing from the usual paths to literally immerse herself in new avenues for exploration and production, always a treasured opportunity in the life of an artist.

When I stand before a Nielsen canvas, I often have the feeling of being both there—in front of the painting—and somewhere else—an elsewhere brought to life by the painting. The first sensation is that of a closeness or remoteness from the landscapes that you know, that are dear to your heart. Stranger still, you call to mind places you've never been before. To achieve this, Nielsen experiments, bringing together and superimposing work from her archives that rises to the surface of the canvas and of memory. She delves tirelessly into a personal collection of images, the fruit of her searches

over several years, consisting of reproductions of works by other artists, images she herself has captured during her travels, and numerous pictorial or literary references, both classic and contemporary. An uninterrupted flow of images that never leaves her, in order to move forward and "get the studio going," as she says. *Ellis Island*, the title of an earlier work by the artist, resurfaces within this iconographic repertoire like a vision, a ghost, a spectral image. More than a motif, it's a recollection, a vibrant emotion in confronting history and these places marked by the human tragedies of centuries past. A here and an elsewhere that hold the artist's attention, forever bearing the imprint of current tribulations, eventually leading to the disappearance of a number of urban, industrial and natural landscapes, a transformation in which the intensifying human impact is indisputable. At times disenchanted, her pastoral painting can be seen as a temporal loop, continually revisiting this age-old pictorial and literary theme to give shape to a multitude of visions, between profane illumination, fantasy and destruction.

Leather, silk and canvas as atmospheric surfaces

Hiding, showing, altering, coloring and dissolving are all painterly gestures. By revealing the suprasensible quality of the pictorial medium, Nielsen's works reinforce our relationship with the world by reconnecting us with it. She constantly feeds the nearly sentimental, or even melancholy, connection between painting and photography through a variety of techniques, styles and supports employed to rediscover and reiterate certain gestures learned by producing her own images in the darkroom. On a different scale and in a different production context, the tannery is also a place where materials are soaked in solutions, where the impact of time is decisive. During her residency, Nielsen planned out several series of new paintings, mainly in very large formats, beginning with residues of images printed on transparencies

mounted on the studio walls, then making use of scraps of leather or canvas, whose potential she explored, with increasing mastery, over the weeks and months, by working with the teams at the tannery and those at a silk printing workshop. Little by little, all of these images filtered through, saturated the leather and then the silk, more specifically organza, to achieve the granular and iridescent dimension favored by the artist. On leather, the *sfumato* effects painted in oils cause the printed or silk-screened images to rise to the surface like particles floating in water. Through chance encounters between overlays and sheer coverings, her painting becomes cinematic, kinetic, catches its breath, allows air to pass between the elements of the composition.

Through an approach both arbitrary and extremely precise, Nielsen was also keen to bring these materials together in unexpected, even novel, ways by joining tannery gestures with those of painting, but also sewing. The irregularity of surfaces as well as the dimensions of certain leather pieces steered the conception of each of her works in specific directions. As the painting and silk screening were done directly on the pieces, with the leather providing the scale, time was needed to select the scraps and dyes that would work well together, moving from earth tones to darker hues and eventually black. The silk reveals the painted background of the leather-canvas with the printed image, which thus enter into dialogue. The fabric becomes a new protagonist, in the manner of a more or less translucent membrane: it acts on and reacts to the refraction of light by absorbing the invisible to bring it to life. Given the varying consistency of these materials, the way they behave, their symbolic power and their latent force, Nielsen gradually affirms the magnetic, photochemical and alchemical dimensions of her painting as dyeing, and vice versa. Her painting takes on a mirrored aspect, becomes turbid, agitated. Although sight is the sense always thought to be the one that enables us to see and know everything, organizing the world from our perspective, in this case our eyes do not immediately grasp what they are observing because the

hybridization of these materials becomes solar, not to say cosmic.

River at work, or the sedimentation of painting

Like a waterway by turns appearing and disappearing, filtering techniques are a constant of both pictorial and silk-screening processes. Pieces literally bathe in liquids to create images, just as leather might spend long periods soaking in the riverbed. Silk brings yet something else, a vibration, a rhythm. In this dialogue with painting on leather, silk opens up a closed space and seems to tear back the veil laid over architectural forms by bringing in light and air. An entire social geography, shot through with geology, history and urban planning, is revealed by the artist, from the rocks of the Vercors mountains to the concrete of more or less recent buildings. The ties with landscapes and architecture are very strong and essential in Nielsen's work, which breaks into its constituent elements little by little, comes back together in other places, and is often built up from several fragments.

Building, then tearing down, breaking, cutting and smashing into pieces in order to rebuild. This back-and-forth motion between desertion and activity shapes our relationship with the city, its suburbs and its exurbs. Neglected areas are dotted with prefab structures like roadside shelters: parks, campgrounds and holiday villages in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, used as venues for sports and leisure by some and as a means of survival by others. The fragility of these spaces resonates with the ruggedness of landscapes contemplated through a car or train window, or while hiking in the mountains and woods. Several references, in particular American ones, are essential for Nielsen, who draws inspiration from the political writings of Henry David Thoreau. The landscapes he explored gave force to his words. Based on his experiences, Thoreau presents the desired life as one reduced to its essentials and reflects on the intellectual and spiritual alienation of his nineteenth-century contemporaries. Just like literature, painting can become an act of resistance,

¹ Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Schmidt (New York: HarperPerennial, 2008), p. 137.

rebellious against the dominant ideas and beliefs of one's age. Nielsen spent a great deal of time and care exploring the countryside between Grenoble and Valence, with its network of routes and roads leading to Romans-sur-Isère. Each of her paintings is a reservoir of observations and perceptions that lay bare the looming threat for the natural environment. Cyclical in its attention to light variations and seasonal changes, circular in its economy and iconography, her painting creates an archaeology of memory, that of natural resources and the preservation of spaces.

In spite of this need to satisfy our thirst for the unknown and the imaginary, it is this other vision of the world that Nielsen discovered in reading Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* during her residency. Revealing the fault lines within an American family, one of the central settings in this book is a tannery, a "magical spot" where parallels are drawn between the expertise at work there and the lives of its characters. Flirting at the boundaries between fiction and autobiography, Roth explores themes as powerful as the weight of history, cultural heritage and family, or the handing down to the next generation at the heart of the American dream, along with the latter's rise and fall. A dream given shape through work, successes, enticements and masks can collapse like a house of cards at the slightest crack. This multilayered construction lends itself to different readings and varying perspectives, all speaking to the dissolution of a myth. As in this novel, Nielsen's painting articulates present and past through a series of recollections and jolts between what was, what can no longer be, and what's next.

Scarred worlds at the boundaries

Powerful, inspired and poetic, painting as fabric becomes the support for several contexts. With silk screening, it's as if a vision machine has drawn the image, both a tracing and a photocopy, caught between transparency and opacity. These virtually magical processes allow the artist to intervene directly in the chemistry behind the development of the image. Not really

a collage, a photograph or a print, not really a painting either, but instead all of these things at once. Between hybridization and weaving, a palimpsest of superimposed images and materials overlap to create ecosystems with ambiguous compositions, between flatness and depth. Playful, liberating and transgressive, these alterations, enlargements, reframings and blurrings are a way of pushing the limits of our resistance to images and their widespread dissemination.



Far from a simple depiction of the places Nielsen roams through, crosses or observes, more than anything else her painting suggests a relationship with these places, which can be evocative, affective or instructive. Leading us toward an interlaced web of parallel, multiple and hybrid universes, the artist broadens her own capacity for imagination without setting any limits for herself, exploring the infinite possibilities offered by these combinations. The fusion of elements characterizes all levels of her process. Her plural approach is at the root of this search for constellated possibilities. Nielsen makes her painting the foundation of her perambulations and she shapes it

by walking, by driving to discover other places until she returns to its drop-off point, the studio. The experience of being on the move, journeying, traveling is crucial. With architecture, with the fitting together of places within places, new forms and modes of life emerge, resulting in a complete symbiosis between the living and the mineral, between the human and the non-human which, like the traveler of Italo Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities*, explores ways of being. Flouting boundaries between mediums, practices and motifs, Nielsen remodels their readability and offers an anatomy of a devastated urban landscape. Adopting the principle of construction and deconstruction, her painting speaks to us of economic decline and the exodus that has led to the abandonment of numerous buildings.

It is through her perspective on this modernist and postmodernist urban heritage, between preservation and dereliction, symptoms or phantoms of aging urban infrastructure, that she puts together a kaleidoscope of images and free associations that reappear between the folds of her works. Everything can be regenerated, recycled, brought back to life, diversified. Here or there, it is the frame of an urban planning project emphasizing the time periods of architecture, a lived and experienced time that shares with us the creative evolution of a city like a living thing recounting its life and not merely its history.

The entrails of architecture reveal social layers through building facades. Unknown forces and energies rise up to their surface: holes, hollows and filled areas, things in and out of focus, hollows strangely filled, and empty spaces. Light and air pass through these architectural feats, cities, landscapes. A feeling of incompleteness, like in a dream, becomes palpable through this direct take on the acceleration of urban transformation. As in a Cubist collage, multiple time dimensions run into each other and are juxtaposed in flat and hybrid shapes that impose their materiality.

With these territories that are constantly being rewritten, Nielsen paints the strata

of imaginary or invisible cities, from industrial wastelands to country-cities, source-cities or garden-cities, containing transposable pathways that converge and diverge as if they were shifting from one shape to another. Shapes that circulate and migrate like a city copying itself². This is certainly what gives her painting its living dimension. By carrying out an analysis, in a chemical sense, of the components of a city or territory caught between movement and motionlessness, plan and disorder, real and imaginary, past and future, emptiness and proliferation, weight and etherealness, invisible and elsewhere, Nielsen is constantly surveying her own cosmos to delve deeply into our multiple ways of being.

Marianne Derrien

² Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), p. 109–110.

An Interview with Eva Nielsen.

—Your practice encompasses painting, photography (which you incorporate in your canvases), and silk screening. How do you combine these mediums?

—Early in my studies at Beaux-Arts in Paris, I already knew that I wanted to bring different mediums together and that hybridity would be central to my work. I was in a painting studio but I also spent a lot of time in the photography darkroom. I was fascinated by the series of revelatory steps in the process, and by the alchemy of the various solutions used. I found working on developing times to adjust contrast and the gradual appearance of the image entirely captivating. As for painting, I've always been intrigued by the medium's possibilities, lending itself to all approaches. My interest in photography naturally led me to silk screening. Transferring images, choosing the colors to be used, printing—all of these steps were constant sources of inspiration for me. I realized that the language of silk screening could also apply to my painting: the interest in successive unveiling, the notion of interposed screens, the reconstruction of an image in layers. Comparing this technique with the practice of painting is fascinating.

You can do anything in painting: layers in acrylic, *sfumato* effects in oil, fields of color, reserve areas. I feel like I'm always learning, expanding my idea of what's possible. I also quickly accepted another key element: chance. Or more accurately, attempting to control random variables. This is what working in the studio is all about, because things escape you and despite your efforts to give coherence to the whole, it's precisely this alchemy, which may or may not happen, that I find exhilarating.

—How did you approach leather, a material you hadn't worked with before?

—I think I've always been intrigued by leather. And my visit to the tannery confirmed this feeling. There is the animal aspect, of course, and the work of the women and men who transform this material imbued with great power, because of its connections to a territory and a history. You can't approach leather without having all of this in mind, it's an integral part of the material. I was afraid of not daring to bend it to my will, but I changed my vision

of it thanks to the tanners and other artisans at the tannery. Whenever they spoke about it with me, I could sense their deep affection for the material. This helped me see leather through their eyes, and observing their hands as they worked with it led me to approach it differently. I remember Hamid explaining the differences that could be perceived in each hide or skin depending on the animal's lived experience, which was an enthralling moment for me. Traces of insect bites, whether the animal had lived well or not, the respect it had enjoyed during its life, all of which may or may not affect the quality of the leather. With this vision of leather, I was able to approach my work as an artist at the tannery with humility. In addition, observing the precise gestures of the tanners on a daily basis, their work with colors, and listening to all the artisans as the spoke about what working in the tannery meant to them only strengthened these feelings. Of course, and this is after all what makes a residency lasting several months so interesting, all of these steps take time.



—This new residency was special in that it was conducted jointly in a 200-year-old tannery and in a silk printing workshop

at the cutting edge of technology. Alongside trying out techniques with leather, you thus also worked with silk.

—Silk is like an old friend I'd been meaning to visit for some time. Its historical connection with what we still call silk screening, because it was the material originally used in the process, made it particularly attractive to me. Very quickly, the material's ethereal aspect drew my attention, its propensity to let light through while reflecting it back. Silk is very closely tied up with the question of luminosity, a key area of fascination in my work: how things can appear surreptitiously, reveal themselves, suggest more than one interpretation, etc. One of the highlights of the residency was the possibility to choose materials from among hundreds of options. Thanks to Moé Ito, senior project manager for silk at LVMH Métiers d'Art, I was able to spend time examining and comparing samples at the LVMH Métiers d'Art headquarters. I ended up choosing organza, a material I found completely fascinating. The way in which the cocoon is handled is unlike that used for other types of silk, giving a nearly metallic quality and a diaphanous rigidity to the material. I picked out two specific weights: a very fine weave due to my interest in sheer coverings and filtering and a heavier weave for pieces combining canvas, leather and silk. The assistance provided by Guillaume Bessault, a printing technician at Twinpix, was invaluable. He helped me prepare the files, taking delivery of the materials and calibrating the prints on silk. It was also his first time printing on organza, so both of us were eager to see how it would turn out!

In my view, silk acts like an "augmented reality," a layer able to reveal the work having gone into the painting underneath. It brings a fantasy to life because all of a sudden the silk-screen image I had prepared takes shape with the printing on the sheer silk material. In this process, what is particularly interesting is the doubling up of the colors used in the painting and those used for the printed silk. This creates a unique and fluctuating color scheme, a bit like what you can sense visually when you're in motion and your eyes capture hints of landscape. Another unexpected result came from the natural *moiré* pattern of the silk, which frizzles the *sfumato*.

An additional aspect jumped out at me: the sheer coverings included unprinted areas—reproducing those in my photographs—leaving the silk bare in some places, thereby emphasizing its materiality in opposition to the painting.

—How did you pursue these two areas of exploration at the same time, silk on the one hand, and leather on the other? Did you have a project in mind from the start that would bring the two together?

—Yes, I quickly realized that this would be the focus of the residency. Silk and leather are two diametrically opposed materials, with very different properties. Collage has been a part of my work since my first paintings, I use it for my preparatory sketches. Over the past year, I've taken a more radical approach to fragments in my compositions, and I've also looked more at joining disparate pieces. I thus went into the residency in this frame of mind, with the aim of creating compositions that would bring materials as dissimilar as silk, leather and canvas into dialogue. As a painter, I have an intense desire to "put everything I love in my paintings," as Picasso once said. Fitting into the same composition silk-screened images on leather, brushwork on canvas, and printing on silk is a very exciting adventure. I've looked a lot at the collages of Kurt Schwitters and Hans Arp, which I find striking for their power, their materiality and the possibilities they contain. The idea of making different materials occupy the same surface is very stimulating for me. I had in mind the famous aphorism by Maurice Denis that I often heard during my studies at Beaux-Arts: "It should be remembered that a picture [...] is essentially a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order." And this of course opens up the question of how you organize a composition. This principle relating to the organization of painted space was pushed even further by the Cubists, who reconceptualized the vision of a whole and the multiplication of perspectives in a radical way. I think pursuing this is something that appeals to me on a fundamental level, how to convey multiple viewpoints on a canvas by combining several perceptions to form a whole.

—You're a painter and, very early in our exchanges, you confided in me that you've been disturbed by the fact that painting works so well on leather. Has your relationship with traditional painting been altered by this experience? Has painting on leather led you to reconsider your connection with the canvas?

—Yes, it was a startling discovery for me. When I began working with leather, my thoughts initially turned to silk screening. One evening, I tried painting with acrylic and ink on a scrap of leather. It was an eye opener, because I took on board the behavior of the animal hide or skin, the principle of paint absorption, and leather's way of recalling where it comes from. Every gesture is recorded in the leather, and it's almost bewildering at first: a stark color can be completely absorbed, or else transformed. What I found especially moving was to emulate the gestures of the tanners as they bathe, dress, smooth and impregnate the hides or skins. My painter's gestures had many points in common with theirs: applying color, wiping it off, returning to certain spots to apply more. In this sense, my relationship with the canvas is necessarily different today: to me it now seems stiffer, rougher and, of course, it has neither the history nor the animal aspect of leather.

—Does this mean that you're disillusioned about canvas? Have you entered a new chapter in your experience of painting? How does it affect your desire to paint?

—I think that by working with new materials I've been able to rethink my relationship with the canvas by taking its materiality into account. I would say that this support, which had been a given for me, has now been put into question. But I still recognize that canvas has undeniable qualities: malleability, resistance, weave.

—You've been fascinated by black leather. Black is not an easy color in painting. Its relationship with light needs to be overcome or tamed. Has your perspective on this non-color changed?

—Matisse said that "black is also a color." This has been a formative idea for me in the management of my color schemes as a painter, because when you bear this in mind composi-

tions can be created more powerfully.

The black dyes produced in the tannery are stunning in their depth, and this helped me upend my conception of the management of layers. Starting with a dark surface leads you to conceive the subsequent layers differently. I looked a lot at Georgia O'Keeffe's landscapes, especially *Wave, Night* (1928) and James Whistler's "nocturnes," in particular their fluid green and blue glazes, and they served as guides for the series of pieces created on black leather. My colors were absorbed by the leather in a different way, and this was also the first time I had used silver ink in silk screening. The use of silver also ties up with analog photography (whose images were initially developed using silver salts) and with its use by Pictorialists, like Edward Steichen, who flirted with the porous boundaries between painting and photography, as in his work *Midnight Lake George* (1904).



—You decided to stretch the leather over a frame, as if you hadn't ever deviated from painterly traditions.

—This was a question I asked myself at the beginning of the residency: Did I want to go beyond the limits of the frame to paint

in a different way? But the fact is that, in my view, what I needed to do was instead to redefine the components within the frame, looking at how to organize internal movements, rethinking the composition for the space delimited by these four corners, and so forth. I found it more compelling to use silk and leather as elements in their own right in the pictorial composition, to incorporate them more intimately. I'm not interested in the performative use of leather or silk. I prefer using them as tools in the act of painting. In this sense, my work is strongly inspired by artists like Lee Bontecou and Jay DeFeo, who reconceptualized their tools while remaining aware that they couldn't escape working on the famous "flat surface" described by Maurice Denis. The continuing revolution of the flat surface is a subject I never tire of, enthralling for me as a painter, and to my mind it is where the most captivating tension plays out.

—During your residency, you enjoyed a great deal of support at the tannery. But early on, you also sought out connections elsewhere in Romans, in particular with the Lycée Technique du Dauphiné, a technical secondary school, and Mains d'Œuvre, a leather goods workshop. Did this help you in your creative process? What were you looking for by pursuing this approach, technical solutions or increased familiarity with the material?

—Les Tanneries Roux is located very close to the Dauphiné school and local geography is always key to the way I move forward in my work: it's very interesting to interact with students—especially students specializing in leather in this case—and to hear their thoughts. The tannery's location was not selected by chance: it was built here to be close to the Isère, because leather manufacturing facilities have a constant need for water. Incidentally, this was something that struck me during my first session at the tannery: the soaking of the raw hides or skins in various solutions instantly brought to mind the silver salt solutions used in photographic processes. Like photographic paper, leather is transformed by passing through these solutions and reveals different properties at each stage.

Leather manufacturing activities have been essential to the region's development and have shaped it historically. I was impressed by the school, its students and the engagement of their teachers. However, I quickly realized that in order to work on the pieces I would need to seek out the help of experts in the field, and Marie Rose was able to arrange for me to meet two of the school's graduates, Dorian Cayol and Quentin Barralon, who had studied at the École des Arts Décoratifs in Paris afterward before returning to Romans to establish Mains d'Œuvre. This was one of those encounters that turned out to be better than I could have ever imagined! From our very first exchanges, Quentin and Dorian immediately understood what I was trying to achieve and we worked together to resolve technical issues. They brought their expertise and their vision of the materials, and they allowed me to use their workshop located in the historic center of Romans, only about half a mile from the tannery!

—Which technical issues did they help you resolve?

—I knew very early in the residency that I wanted to combine leather, canvas and silk in a single composition. However, as I moved forward with my production, a major problem emerged: how to fit all my fragments (oil painting on canvas, silk screening on leather, printing on silk) into the same artistic space. Following my visit to the Dauphiné school, thermofusion was one avenue considered, and needle-punching was another. But the variety of materials prompted me to turn toward the technique traditionally associated with leather: sewing, quite simply. Dorian and Quentin have many sewing machines and sew leather pieces on a daily basis. They suggested several techniques to me. We selected invisible seams for the works bringing together fragments. In contrast, for the series of works involving only leather scraps, we opted for more dynamic and visible seams.

—Leather has a thickness, whereas silk is lightweight. For one of your series, you chose to make this antagonism very clear,

by presenting the silk fragment as a veil floating over the leather. In other words, silk as a filter that conceals and reveals. With the desire, perhaps, to not show the leather directly. So that it wouldn't be laid bare, so that it wouldn't be immediately apparent. All of this encourages the interpretation that nothing is offered to view easily. This work conceived in layers is typical of your practice. What does it tell us about your relationship with the tangible world? And more specifically about the status of a work of art?

—One of the greatest compliments that could be made about my work is that it can't be grasped immediately. Stages are often superimposed and sow doubt about how the paintings are put together. This doubt, both mental and technical, is in my view the strongest way to allow the spectator to appreciate the work. A painting opens a space of projection, of fantasy. It's never an answer in itself. Our vision of what surrounds us is by definition fragmentary and not to be trusted. It's this ambiguity between optical reception, personal projection and the reconstitution of a whole that drives my pictorial practice.

—In your works we see abandoned homes and landscapes but never human figures. What kind of world are you trying to capture?

—Revealing homes, architecture and landscapes necessarily suggests the human presence. Furthermore, humanity is always the subject, because we're so tied up with the ecosystem: we interpret, shape and destroy it, we fantasize about it. Our worlds are inhabited by our desires. Abodes and shelters of all kinds, like every act of construction, are connected with this projection. When I was heading to the tannery for the first sessions, I immediately noted the makeup of the towns and villages in the region as well as the more isolated built structures. The latter reminded me of the houses built into the side of the mountain that I had seen in Glencoe, in the Scottish Highlands. In Romans, the mountains are everywhere, a silent mass in the fog that fills the valley with its soundless presence. The Isère river was essential to the establishment of the tannery here, in the same way that

the Vercors range is intimately connected to the lives of local women and men.

I transcribe what I see while driving or walking: fragments of homes, bits of landscape, shards of sky. Painting human figures makes less sense to me because human beings are already omnipresent, in what has been built and in the person viewing the picture.



—Throughout your residency, the Vercors range came to be a conspicuous backdrop. What did you draw from it?

—The Vercors is an important character in the story of my residency. Its silent presence determines life in the valley. Sometimes while driving, I was amazed to see it reappear suddenly at a roundabout when I had forgotten about it a moment before. It's a very dramatic mountain range that calls out to you at every turn. Several times a week, I was struck by the constant feeling of purification it provoked. Soon I was setting off in the car to explore. I was greatly helped in these excursions by the tannery staff, who shared tips about the best vistas and places. For me, the most stunning part is the start of the ascension,

when you have left Pont-en-Royans behind and are heading toward Choranche: the colors of the rockface (ochre, rust, brown), the ethereal transparency of the Isère ... It's not a seductive landscape, it's much more than that. A brutally real force emanates from this part of the route. Quentin and Dorian of Mains d'Œuvre, who were both born in Romans, told me they also loved this particular vantage point. Of course, the history of the French Resistance in the Vercors is a powerful aspect in appreciating this landscape. I thought about it every time I explored the region. I'm happy that I got to discover the Vercors in January, because it had a very special intensity for me then.

—For my last question, I've gotten into the habit of asking each artist to what extent the residency gave rise to an alchemy between him or her and the artisans. It's a rhetorical question of course, because I know how much you were assisted and guided.

—What I found to be particularly wonderful about this residency was the idea of working in a studio within the tannery. It's a technical aspect that really shapes the experience. My comings and goings on the premises as an artist were a source of inspiration for me every day and made the residency completely immersive. It's stimulating to leave behind your usual working environment to be able to paint at a place like a tannery. I also appreciated the fact that, in my day-to-day work, relations were never forced. As time went by, I was able to exchange with members of the staff in the corridors or by asking questions at technical workshops, and this is the way things move forward. Our conversations could be technical or philosophical, merely friendly or about sharing family news, in short, snapshots of life within a company. They ranged from just a greeting or a few words in passing to in-depth discussions. I felt that I was part of the tannery for six months, that I didn't have the status of an "artist" and I really loved that. Everyone was extremely helpful and kind to me and gave of their time willingly. Every now and then I would hear steps on the stairs leading to my attic studio and Michèle, Olivier, Élodie, Salvatore, Chloé, Hamid, Franck, Katherine

or another of my new friends would breeze in, and for a few moments we would discuss my paintings and talk about silk and leather. It was always a spontaneous kind of thing in our daily activities, with an enthusiasm that was entirely natural. Part of my studio was in the oldest portion of the tannery, and the silk-screening workshop was amid the technical workshops. There again, I enjoyed being able to wend my way every day among the leather pieces, vats with various solutions, all the dyes, etc. and observe the precise gestures of the tanners, the colorists and the patternmakers. The metamorphosis and alchemy of materials create a spectacle that is endlessly fascinating.

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