

JOE BEDDALL

SCREENWORKS AND WATERWORKS



*THINGS FOR VIEWERS TO CONSIDER WHEN LOOKING THROUGH JOE BEDDALL'S SCREENS, DARKLY.

BY SARAH K. RICH

A screen is the site of quiet conflicts.

A screen is distance-sensitive. If you stand within a foot of a screen, its thick wires can block details of the world, making it hard for you to observe the spread of flower petals in your garden. You may find that you have to shift left and right just a tad in order to get your eye around those little linear obstacles. But if you stand back several more feet, the screen hardly seems to interfere at all. Joe Beddall's screen paintings redouble this effect, for if you look at their painted com-

positions close-up, the metal grid support steals attention from the color, but if you back up, the painted composition resolves, consolidates. Proximity does not necessarily produce clarity, or even intimacy.

A screen is tough. It is like canvas in its weave, but packs a metal oomf. In Beddall's practice at least, it doesn't need to be primed. It doesn't need rabbit glue or gesso. For stretching, it needs a mere four grommets at the corners, and those grommets will look chunky, sturdy, and badass.

A screen is permissible, and perhaps even kind. Its job is to let some gentle things through—the sound of crickets or traffic, an evening breeze, a view onto the street. Canvas is woven so tight that nothing behind the picture plane can contaminate the frontal composition. A screen is not so uptight. It is hospitable to the world. It stretches out its warp and weft in confidence, inviting Beddall's compositions to converse with what's behind.

A screen protects. For all its porous hos-

pitality, a screen is first understood by most people as that which intervenes between you and the winged things that want to bite you in your sleep. Screens are tinged, ever so slightly, with fear and danger. The toughness of Beddall's screens often recall this security feature.

A screen is industrial. It is factory made. It is a commodity one buys at Home Depot. It doesn't benefit from traditions of the organic or handmade like ochre pigments or animal parchment. In its regular patterning of verticals and horizontals, the screen also bears similarity to the grids of ledger books and other structures of quantification on which capitalism feeds.

The screen is Modernist. In the early 20th century, at a moment when capitalism was gaining ever more powerful traction, the grid (one of capitalism's favorite visual idioms) actually emerged in modern painting as an emblem of spiritual transcendence. From Piet Mondrian and Paul Klee to Agnes Martin, gridded abstractions defied bourgeois appetites for representation narrative. Pure verticals, pure horizontals, the grid aimed to be anti-materialistic, it aspired to universality, spirituality. When Beddall makes grids out of legibly industrial material, then, he reconsiders the cultural contradictions (materialist materialism / spiritual transcendence) that the grid has historically grid embodied.

A screen is paradigmatically American. This is learned the hard way by anyone who travels outside of North America during the summer. In Europe, where windows are either open or closed, the allure of the screen is lost. The dusty opacity of a screen in raking sunlight, the subtle darkening of a house's apertures by mesh, these are incidental pleasures for which the expatriate American might long. Beddall's painted allusions to indigenous sign systems enhance the screens' legibility according to place.

A screen is the relic of the past. A late 19th century invention, the screen was a necessity before the advent of central air conditioning. Today, those with central air waste electricity if they open their windows at all (both Joe and I, lacking such modern

amenities, tough it out the old fashioned way). Modern workplaces have no need for screens on plate glass windows that do not open.

Beddall's screens thus inherit sensibilities from a rich vein of American Modernism that descends to us through figures like Charles Sheeler and Georgia O'Keeffe—artists who in the 1920s developed smooth, matte planes and bold edges that captured with equal facility both the majestic urbanism of the sky scraper and lonely nostalgia of the barn door. It is a vein that also flows to Beddall through the work of Jasper Johns, who in the mid-1950s made the landmark flag and target paintings that appealed to both formalists (like MoMA curator Alfred Barr) and collectors of folk art (like Abbey Rockefeller).

If we view a gallery or landscape through one of Beddall's concentric circles-on-screens, what we see is the way in which the present filtered by multiple zones and phases of history. Indeed, when we look at Joe Beddall's screens, our senses are given a rare and exquisitely pleasurable opportunity to appreciate some of the most conflicted features of modernity—its forms and its social contexts, its pungent mix of utopia and nostalgia, and most especially, its ambivalence regarding historicity itself. ~ *DCM*

THE CONDENSATION ARTIST By D.K. Higgins

On the eve of his 2013 show at the NAP Exhibition Space in Kutztown, I did a brief interview with Joe Beddall in his studio, which is usually crammed with pieces from both categories of his art—screenworks and waterworks. But the studio was barren except for a single waterworks panel that was leaning against a wall. Coincidentally, his waterworks were what I was most curious about.

I first observed some those amazing panels a few months earlier at an event at the ION Gallery in State College, where Beddall was also present. When I praised him as "a great condensation artist," he seemed surprised. "You're the first person to call me that,"

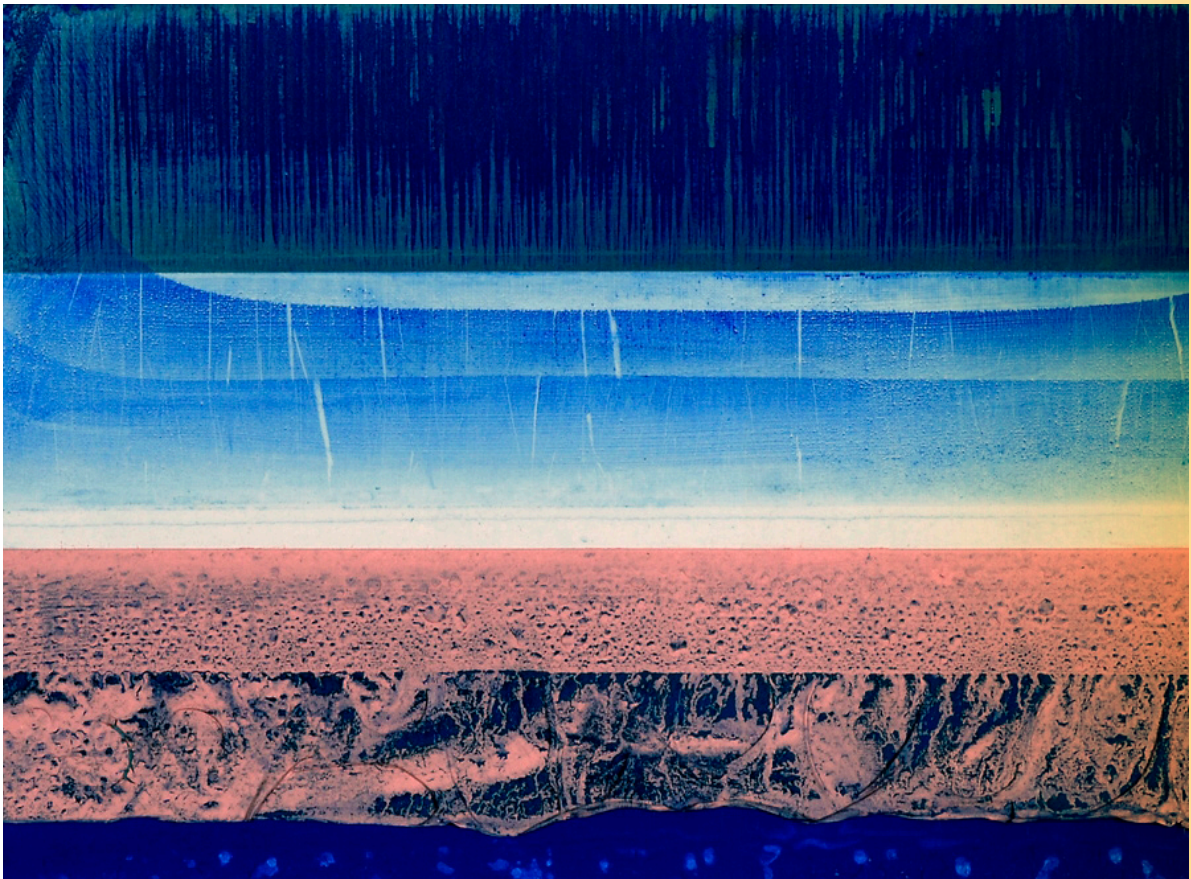
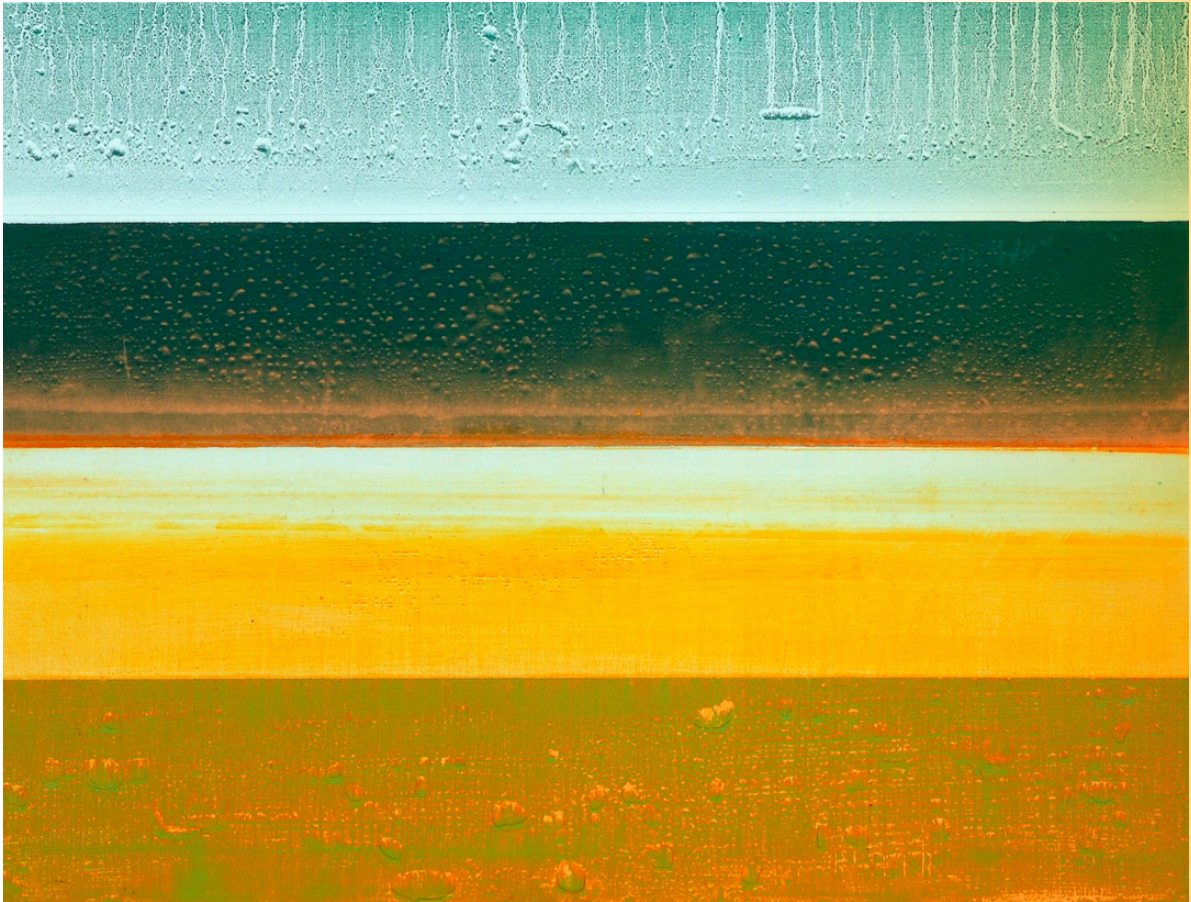
he said, grinning.

The waterworks process involves the submergence of painted aluminum panels that are then left to the whims of the weather and the process of evaporation to create sedimentary patterns. "The waterworks are kind of an exploration of the sedimentary process and the way water impacts paint underwater," Beddall explained. "I used aluminum because I didn't want oxidation to come into it. I wanted to see what I could get purely from the sediment—the acrylic on the panel and the panel in the water. So I used aluminum and painted on it and I would either scuff the surface or not. As I learned what would happen, I could control it. And control is a key word that I really don't do, but I try to create a situation where there's a give-and-take between these natural processes, then I move on from there. I don't do a lot in terms of composition because this process tends to take over that duty. For me it's a matter of seeing what it gives me and then working with it."

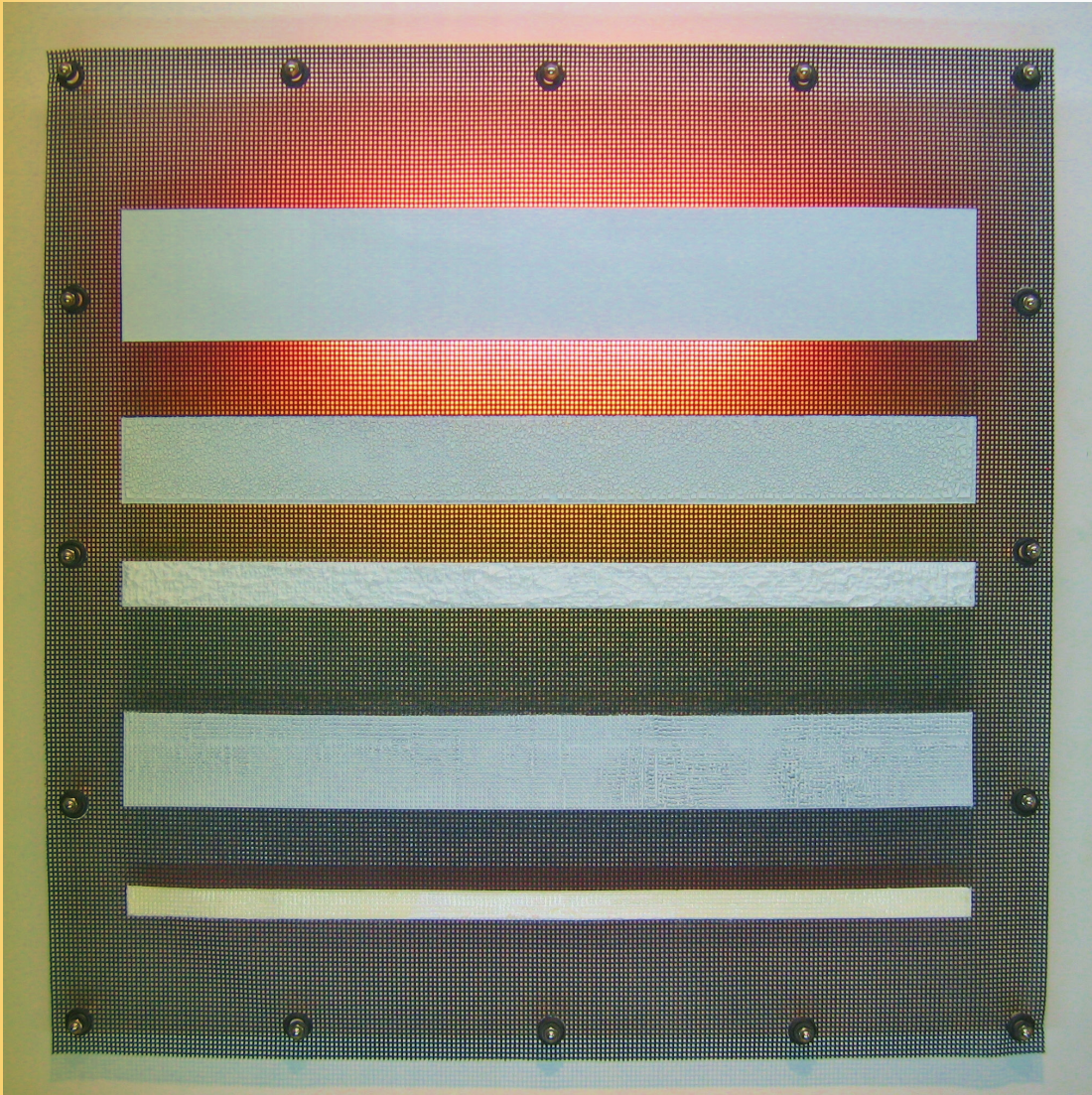
I noticed that Beddall only puts his signature on the back of his waterworks pictures. "I don't feel like I'm the sole author," he said as he picked up the remaining panel. "So to stick my signature on one of these beautiful effects is just not something that, for me, would be appropriate." He studied the panel for a moment. "I originate the idea, but on a piece like this...where would I put the signature? I just wouldn't do it."

The Kutztown show was a homecoming of sorts for Beddall, who graduated from Kutztown University in 1978. "My emphasis was in sculpture. I do a lot of painting, but I still have a connection to 3D. I think in terms of constructing things—adding, subtracting and editing, in a sense, as opposed to painting something that looks representational. I've always had an interest in giving visual form to intangible things—ideas and expressions, emotions and concepts like spirituality, energy...things that you can't touch or feel but they have a real impact on our lives. That's why I work mostly in the realm of abstract art." ~ *DCM*

SUMMER

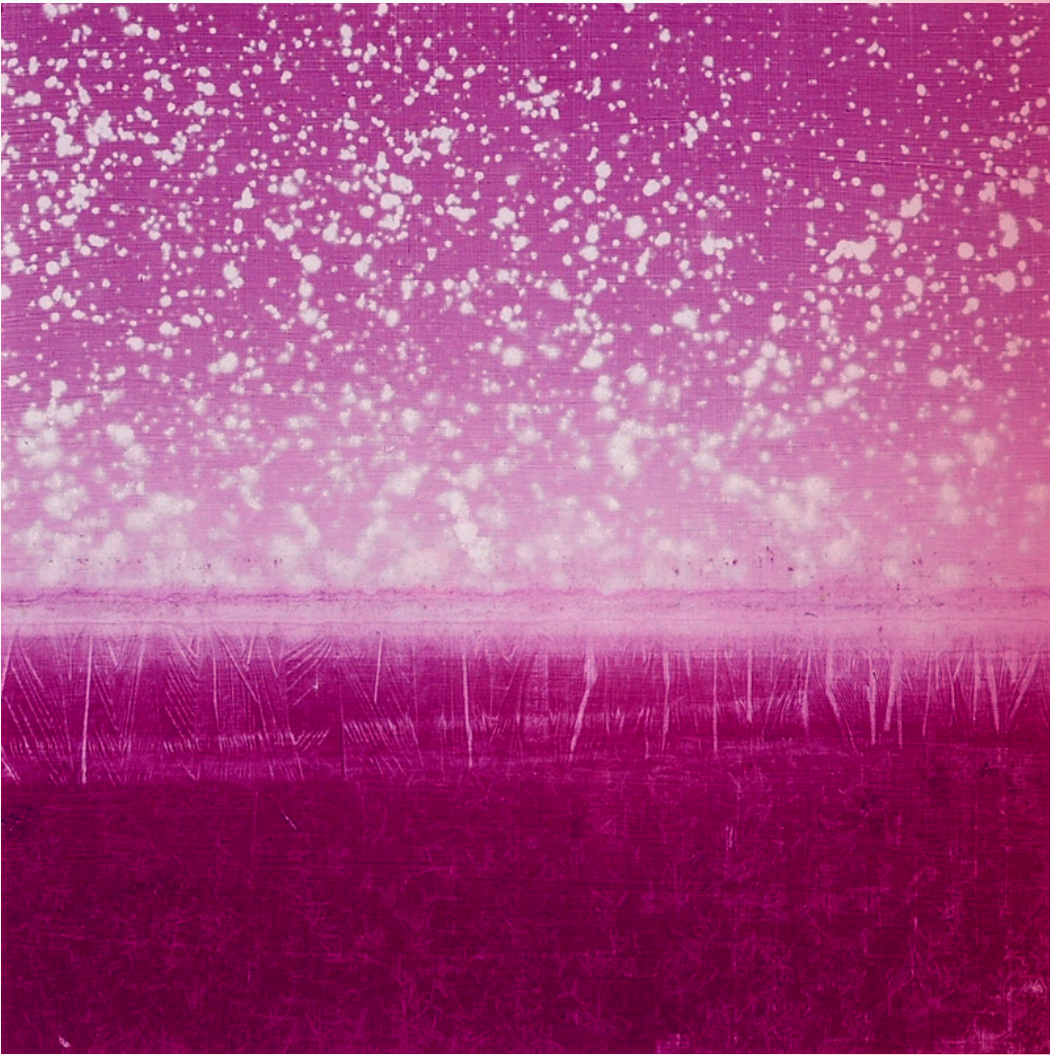
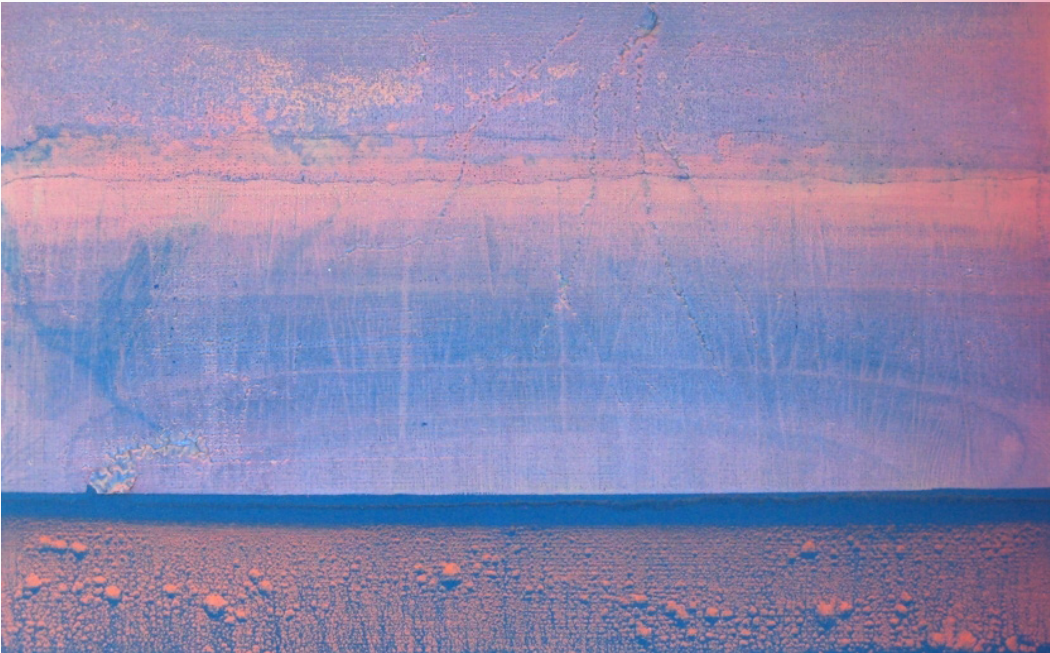


WINTRY MIX



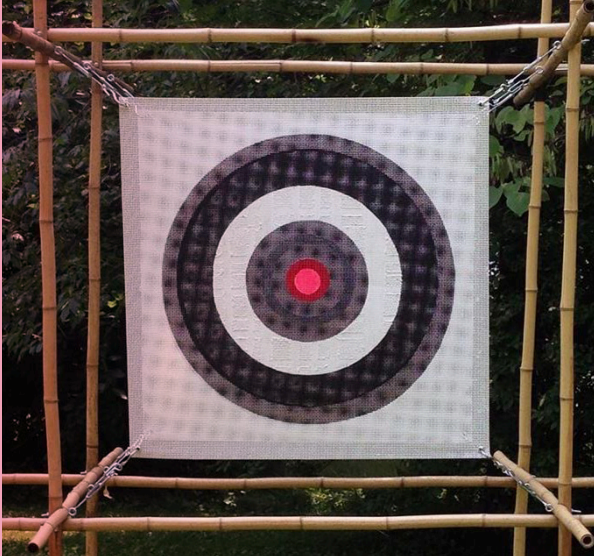
WHITE STRIPES SPECTRUM

NORTHERN LIGHTS

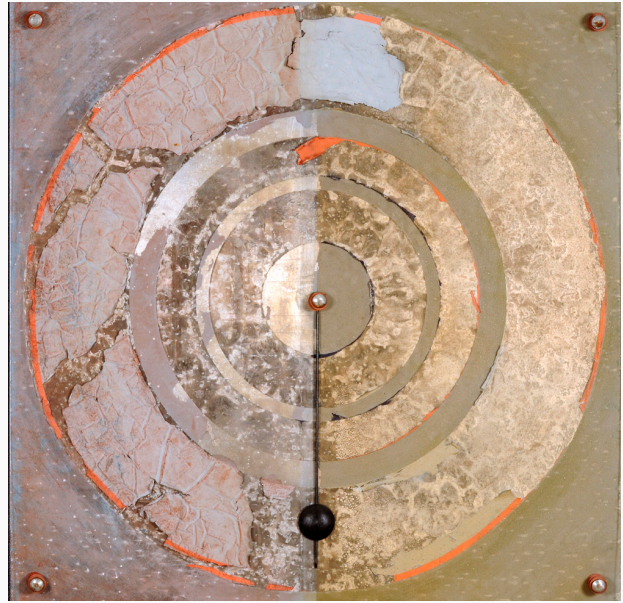


NOVEMBER SNOW

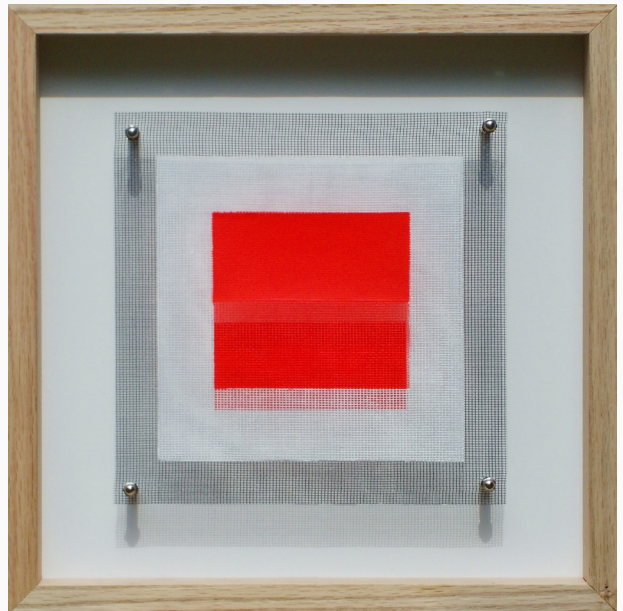
3 CIRCLES / 3 SQUARES



TURNING POINT



PASTEL TARGET



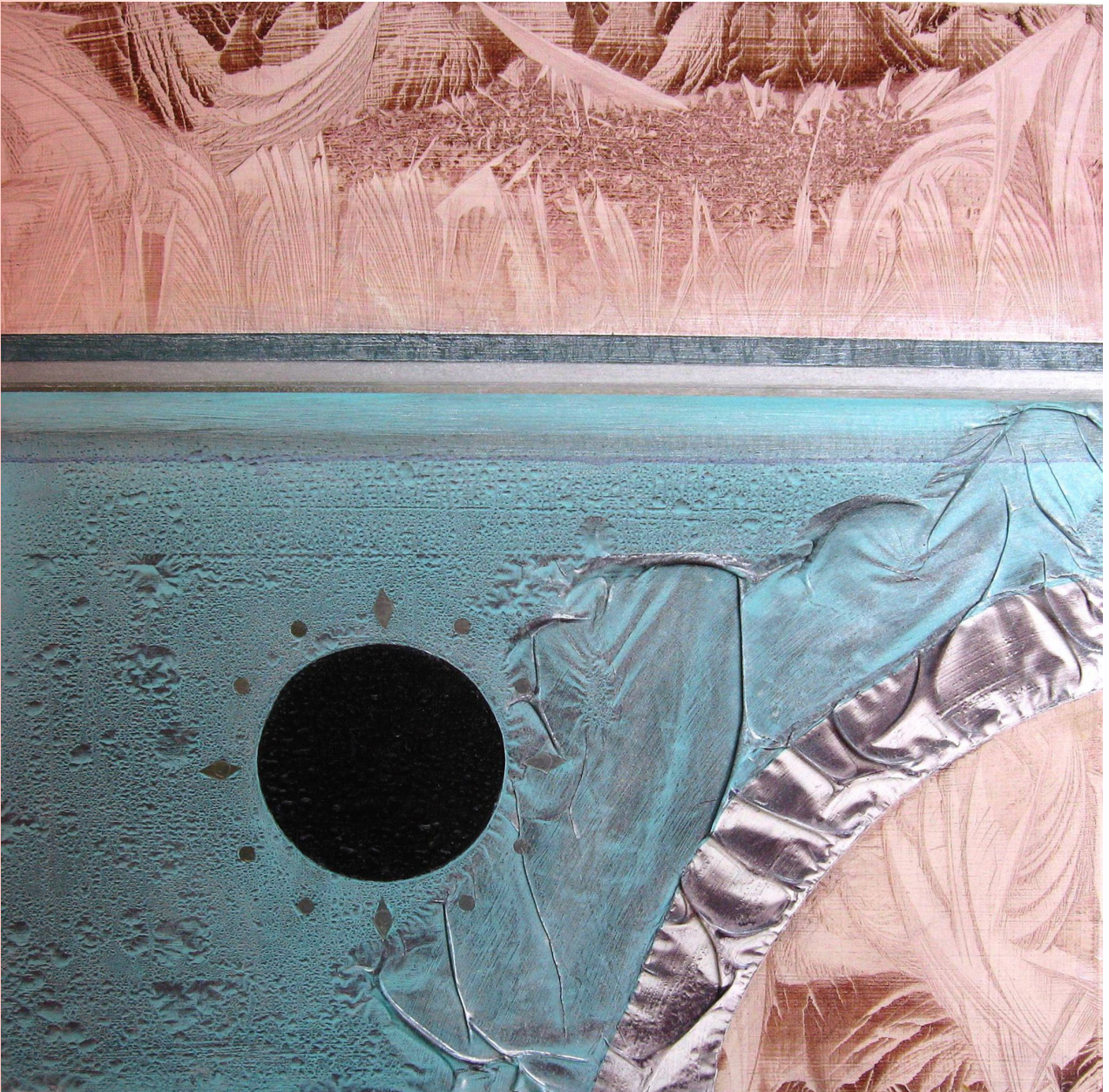
RED SQUARE



CHROMIUM GREEN AND SKY

COLOR KARMA





SPACE AND TIME