

DAVID AUSTEN

the stars above the ocean the ocean beneath the stars

T O T A H

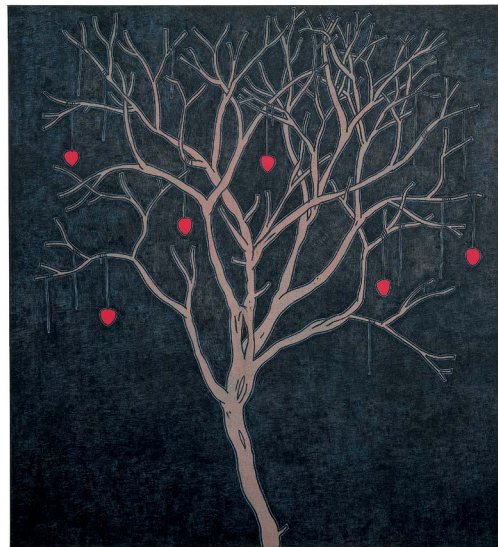
At the Threshold

by JOHN YAU

David Austen works in many different mediums: oil painting, watercolor, gouache, drawing, etching, collage, sculpture, photography, and film. He writes his own film scripts, as well as prose pieces inspired by his dreams. His engagements with oil paint, watercolor and gouache forge an unmistakable bond between the material and the process, which in turn has given rise to a discrete, medium-based constellation of subjects. The figures we see in the watercolors never appear in the oil paintings because the process by which they are made is integral to one medium and not the other. Additionally, in the oil paintings, Austen has made representational and abstract works without signaling a preference. He is the only artist I can think of whose works on canvas and paper are traditional in terms of medium but are atomized in terms of subject.

When making his oil paintings, Austen uses small brushes to apply the paint dryly and evenly on the rough surface of his flax canvas support, which ranges in scale from intimate to quite large. Since Austen does not try to fill all the crevices exposed by the thick weave, flecks of canvas peek through the paint. The flax canvas's permeable surface suffuses the painting with vulnerability, while the evenness of the paint application adds a matter-of-fact coolness to the work. Nothing is rushed or forced. The process is methodical and open-ended. The same patient application of a narrow, dry brush is evident in both the small and large paintings. I have the sense that Austen's works do not happen quickly, and that he often lays out what he is going to paint before he begins. We never lose sight that we are looking at a thing and not an image.

A number of paintings feel both complete and inexplicable, like something remembered from a dream. I am thinking of *Tree and Hearts* (2006), a large canvas depicting a leafless tree under a starless night, with six simple red hearts attached by strings to its bare branches. The color is flatly applied and the space is impenetrable, while the skin of the painting is porous. What happened, we might ask, to the other hearts, which must have been attached to the ten empty strings still dangling from the branches? Austen has done other paintings of leafless trees at night, such as *Tree and Stars* (2015), but they do not form a series.



In the intimately scaled *Untitled (Janus object)* (2017), the artist has painted the continuous, unhurried contour of a bottle capped by an eponymous Janus-headed stopper, two profiles facing in opposite directions. The image is arresting and mysterious. The work is a drawing in paint, a line slowly winding its way around the canvas. In another intimately scaled painting, the abstract *Untitled (after Paul Nash)* (2017), Austen has stacked, from top to bottom, two different groups of narrowing and widening bands of color edged by black lines.

While the artist used the same technique to make the three paintings I have briefly described, the subject matter of each is very different from the others. This small sample of his work becomes more complicated when we add the paintings that are made up solely of words and phrases, for they constitute a particular territory within Austen's explorations.

There is nothing in the oil paintings that broadcasts how long it took for the artist to make them: he does not call attention to the labor. Rather, we see a porous surface made of dry, matte color. It is almost as if he were using a crayon of some kind on a tough, scruffy skin, akin in that regard to the grained paper that Georges Seurat used in his Conté crayon drawings, or the rough-toothed paper that Richard Artschwager used in the pastels he made during the last years of his life. The amount of pressure applied while rubbing one thing against another becomes part of the meaning.

In the watercolors, Austen completes a work in one shot while standing at a table holding a loaded brush. He does not revise or go over the figure. The image is either what he is after or it is eventually discarded, a failure. Often the figure or figures are situated in the middle of the sheet. They are likely to be naked but not always. When Austen depicts two figures, their bodies are almost always touching each other, forming a single unit or stain of colored water.

If there is a break between the two figures, as in a watercolor of a naked woman holding a naked child's hand, the break comes at the gap between the child's shoulder and arm, which invites all kinds of readings. If you are reminded of mannequins and detachable limbs, as I was, you also realize that there are many contradictory ways to interpret the work. Clearly, Austen is as attentive to the space between the figures as to the figures themselves. Done on square sheets of paper (an abstract domain rather than one we might associate with the landscape or the portrait), the figures do not dominate the space so much as exist in it. Like silhouettes, they name themselves.

The mother and child both come from the initial puddle of watercolor that the artist sets down on the paper and begins spreading around with his brush. This way of working seems true of all the watercolors. We see bellies sag; male genitals droop; and breasts stick out, like bumpers on a big American sedan from the 1950s.

We see a nude male figure with a dangling penis and horns. According to the work's title, *Little red devil* (2011), he is the devil, but one who seems less powerful than we might have expected. Am I wrong in thinking that Austen's red devil is only as strong as the material from which he is made?

The figures are frozen in place, like a film still – a moment from a narrative whose beginning and ending elude us. They are in the midst of a drama unfolding on a bare stage (the otherwise empty sheet of paper). Their bodies perform a voiceless monologue or, if there are two figures, a silent dialogue.

Everything must be gleaned from how Austen positions the body (or bodies) in space. They can be perplexed, upset, angry, fretful, unhappy, embarrassed, frightened, bereft, dispirited, or resigned. Using what amounts to less than teaspoon of colored water, Austen can articulate a figure that is simultaneously comical and – when this is his goal – excruciatingly deflated. From animalistic sexual encounters to states of isolated despair to tender embraces, the variety of emotional states and interactions he has depicted over the years is astonishing.

What looks easy is really an understated tour de force. Applying a few drops of the medium to the paper demands that Austen choreograph the relationship between organization and dissipation until it arrives at the state he wants. Every move and application of pressure is crucial. Once you recognize the degree of subtlety that he is able to achieve with a small amount of watercolor, you become aware of Austen’s concentrated receptivity to the different ways the individual’s body inhabits space as well as relays his or her inner state of being. No matter what they are doing, the figures embody vulnerability, which is conveyed by the medium itself. They are stains and smudges, after all.

I think it is hard not to see a connection between the spreading watercolor and the slumping flesh, that all of us are nothing more than a vulnerable blot. Our awareness of time passing as it pulls us toward chaos — the body’s continuous state of aging — inflects our experience of Austen’s watercolors. He can unerringly home in on private moments of embarrassment. He seems to understand a lot about feeling humiliated, inaccessible, and lonely. The notes of humor sprinkled into the mix help convey a tenderness and sympathy on the artist’s part.

If Austen’s figurative oil paintings and watercolors seem to be the work of two different artists, this impression will become even more complicated once you have taken into account his word paintings; watched his films *Smoking Moon* (2006) and *End of Love* (2010); pondered his gouaches; seen his collages; and read his writing. I am not sure how many distinct artists inhabit the one known as David Austen, but I am convinced it is far more than two, and that a whole host of others may emerge as time passes. He is simultaneously polymorphic and singular, a rare combination even in our postmodern world.

Like the poet Walt Whitman, Austen seems to have embraced multitudes, for what comes through all of his work is a feeling of empathy for his nameless figures and dramatic characters, no matter how reprehensible or repulsive we might find them.

Despite the different mediums and kinds of work that Austen makes, the world they evoke is one that I associate with the stripped down realities found in hardboiled and noir fiction, experimental theater and the plays of Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, and Sam Shepard, as well as vaudeville and stand-up comedy. It is a nighttime world that is close to dreams. Dominated by isolated acts, private interactions, and monologues, it is a netherworld where the loss of control is inescapable.

There is something both particular and elusive about Austen’s nighttime world. What do I mean by this? Let’s begin with a small oil painting, which measures twelve by ten inches and is dated 2017. Its title is *Moon (a forgotten lamp in the room of the dead)*. The image is palpable, stark, and direct. A large, pallid circle

floats about a third of the way down the central axis of the canvas, which has been painted black. Neither an abstraction nor a representation, the wan disk is a sign of the moon, which is surrounded by a rough-grained black ground. Austen’s tactile night sky is not solidly black; bits of canvas are visible, an insistent field of tiny interruptions, a visual buzz that reminds us of the painting’s physical status.

Doesn’t my description of the placement of the circle sound like a lot of other paintings of the full moon, both famous and unknown? And yet, despite the familiar location of a familiar image, the painting is not like any I have seen before, which is uncanny. The realm that Austen has established for himself and his work is stripped down to the barest element: a full moon in a starless night sky.

While this subject would likely become a cliché in another artist’s hands, it doesn’t become one with Austen. He has applied dry paint to the rough weave with small brushes. The surface is never smooth, and the sky’s skin is rough and dry, which, among other things, might indicate the character of the denizens occupying this sunless domain.

The sensation of encountering a stripped-down world is true of all of Austen’s work, no matter what the medium. And yet, for all the bleakness his paring away might signal, the work is infused with a range of nuances of all kinds. There are the awkward gestures of the naked figures populating his watercolors, the discomfort they feel inhabiting their bodies, as evidenced by the way they look at themselves without the aid of a mirror. There are the moments of tenderness embodied by the bonding of two bodies into a single form, and there is the implied remoteness expressed by two figures having sex without looking at each other. It is a world where everyone is at least partially exposed, both literally and figuratively.

On the other end of the spectrum, the twelve characters — including a cyclops, a dandy, an imprisoned woman, and a trapeze artist — in his film *End of Love*, which takes place on the stage of a London theater, deliver monologues full of extreme pronouncements, often repeated to build to a fugue-like intensity. Words pour out, like crashing waves. The stage is a physically dark space and the language is both mundane and outrageous, registering the speaker’s feelings of exclusion, of being cut off from other humans. In their extreme isolation, they inhabit a death-like state in which they cannot escape their torment.

It is a place where an elderly Jack the Giant Killer lives full of bitterness and regret, having long ago killed the Giant, who was the first person to show him kindness. Bare-chested, we see the tattoo on his arm depicting a humanoid rabbit standing on its hind legs. In Austen’s domain, it feels natural to accept incongruities of this sort. His attention to the dramatic monologue is rare among contemporary artists. Only someone who has internalized a lot of theater, film, and other spoken arts could have written these speeches.

A Dark Angel stares straight head, beginning nearly every statement with “I doubt...” Another character known as the Fat Man – a possible reference to the smooth-talking Kasper “The Fatman” Gutman played by Sydney Greenstreet in the classic *noir* film, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), starring Humphrey Bogart – stands on the stage, repeating the phrase, “but love never found me,” prefacing each iteration with a contempt-filled reproach about a dubious accomplishment. Self-loathing, bitterness, pathos, smarminess, and fear are rolled into a braggadocio’s rhythmic solo. His monologue turns self-disgust into lyric flights, at once magnetic and disconcerting.

Before I read its title (and parenthetical subtitle), I stood before Austen’s *Moon (a forgotten lamp in the room of the dead)* and I found myself drawn closer and closer to its rough-grained surface, enthralled and wondering: how can this be possible?

It was when I learned the name of the painting, that something clicked: it became clear that in work after work, Austen’s purgatorial urban underworld is presided over by something omnipresent and forbidding – a full moon that has become “a forgotten lamp in the room of the dead”. It is a place where emotions are either extreme and overheated, or cold and in need of an autopsy.

Curious about the moon painting’s title, I wrote to Austen, who told me that the line comes from Milan Kundera’s novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984). Soon, we began exchanging emails about various authors we had read, TV shows we had watched, and movies we had seen, discovering in the back and forth a lot of shared interests and enthusiasms.

One poet we have both read is Frank Stanford, dubbed by fellow poet Lorenzo Thomas as “a swamprat Rimbaud”. Stanford, who, in 1978, committed suicide at the age of twenty-nine in Fayetteville, Arkansas, was incredibly prolific during his short life. *What About This: The Collected Poems of Frank Stanford* (2015) is nearly 800 pages long.

In a gouache made up of rows of awkward red circles woozily pressed together, Austen has included a phrase from Stanford. Austen types the text out on a sheet of paper using an old Remington Rand typewriter. Typed in capital letters and visible between two rows of circles near the paper’s bottom edge, the phrase reads: BLOOD CAME OUT LIKE HOT SODA.

It seems to me that what caught Austen’s attention is the incongruity of Stanford’s line. On one hand, it announces that someone is bleeding, which is cause for alarm. On the other hand, it describes the flow of blood almost comically, as spurting out like “hot soda,” which prompts the reader to ask: what does that mean? Stanford’s line makes emotional sense, even if we cannot explain it. More importantly, it evokes a complex collision of feelings, including pain, humor, and surprise. It describes images that seem impossible to reconcile. How do you collapse together blood and hot soda or, for that matter, the moon and a mortuary lamp?

Austen seems provoked by language that embodies a perceptual impossibility: something that is both concrete and invisible. Are the rows of red circles supposed to be read as large red drops of blood, or of hot soda? Their orderliness contradicts Stanford’s poetry. We cannot overcome the gap between the words and the picture, reminding us of the distance between verbal and visual images. By pairing inscrutable imagery with ambiguous language, Austen exacerbates the separation between them and stirs up complex, contradictory feelings.

The phrases that Austen incorporates into his work are as pared down as his images. In one gouache, whose title reflects the date it was made, *23.8.17* (2017), we find another line derived from Stanford: WHERE THE MOON SAYS I LOVE YOU, typed onto the paper, which the artist has carefully painted from top

to bottom in black gouache, leaving the white of the paper as a space around the words, arriving at a light-sucking matte ground. The line seems to refer to an emotionally loaded state of mind, rather than an actual place. What is this nighttime domain, where the moon declares its love for you?

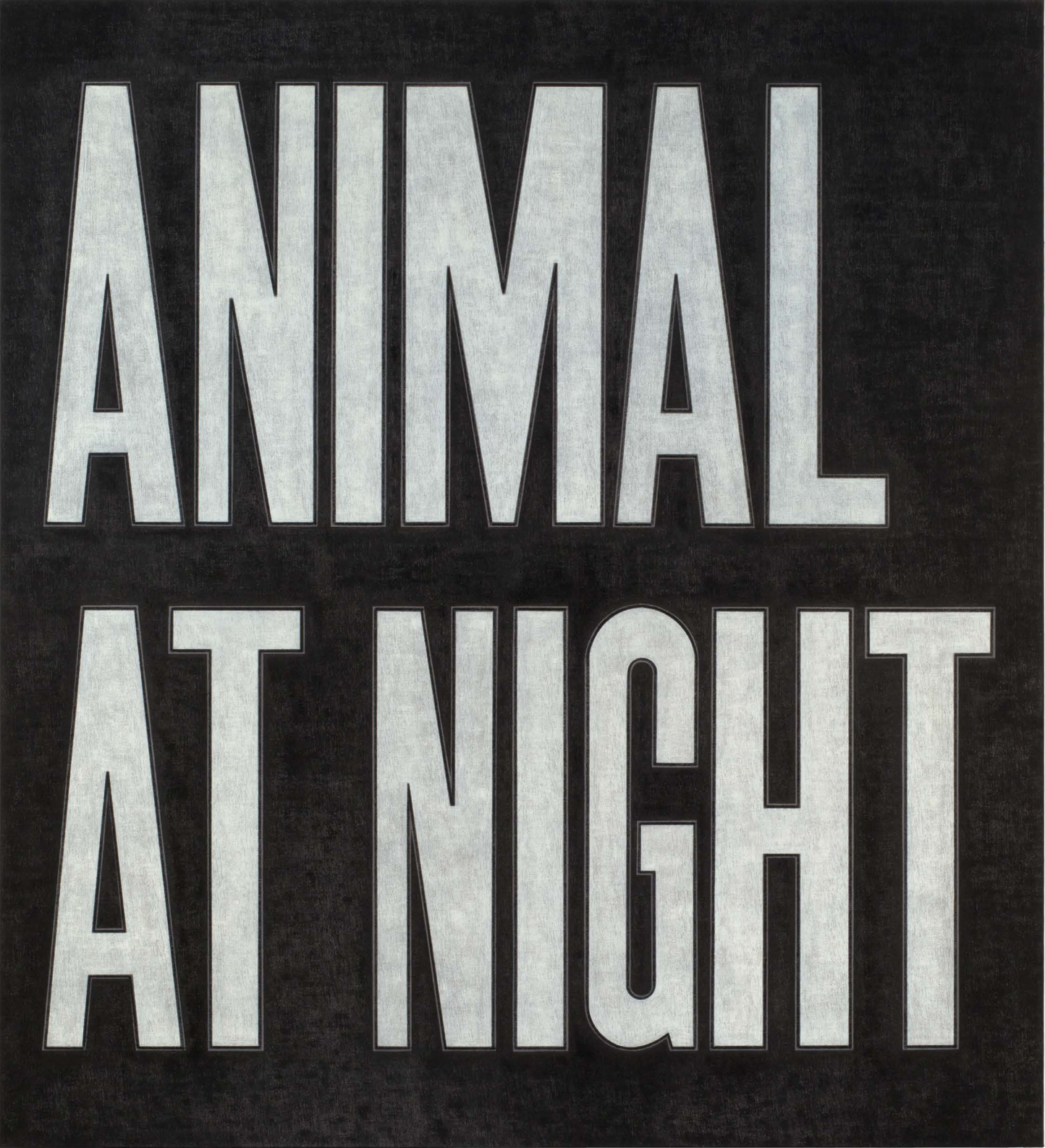
In the large word painting *Animal at Night* (2010), the title fills the canvas in pale gray letters against a black ground. The rough surface in tandem with the black and gray bring to mind grainy black-and-white movies from the 1940s and ’50s, the age of *film noir*. At the same time, the canvas’s visible weave evokes a porous skin, sensitive and open to the world.

What is the context in which these words exist? Is it an evocation of the change a lover undergoes at night? Is it of the terror lurking in an urban environment or prowling a rural one? Austen’s haunting phrase is singular rather than plural. The act of reading it lures us into a consideration of all the ways it can be read, all the meanings that can be applied, and in that sense, we become the author.

What about the word painting, *City of Love and Fear* (2009)? In contrast to *Animal at Night*, the letters of the painting’s title are done in different shades of blue, yellow, red, green, violet, and orange (the spectrum). The jauntiness of Austen’s palette invites a number of different readings, with none dominating. Using language that is seemingly reportorial, Austen hints at the chaos roiling just beneath whatever face we present to the world.

This is the paradox running through his art. The realm his works summon is self-contained and open, complete and cellular. There is the porous and smudged stain made by the watercolor, or the weave of the canvas faintly showing through the oil paint. There are the lines made by leaving the space unpainted by the gouache, and these unpainted slit-like spaces undulating across the surface are like the fine lines of a web. There are the aggrieved expressions of the characters in his films as they talk to us and to themselves, unable to control what spills out of their mouths. The paintings of stars seem to be about shaping our passage through time, even as we recognize the pitfalls of aestheticizing experience: to view the star-filled *Ocean* (2018) as a commentary on abstraction and representation is to miss the deeper beauty it possesses.

No matter how disturbing the vein of human behavior he addresses, Austen’s work is full of longing, wonder, compassion, and a stubborn faith in art’s redemptive power. His art is about the most difficult of subjects: being human and all the fear, terror and desire we find ourselves being haunted by, succumbing to, accommodating ourselves to, or trying to ignore.

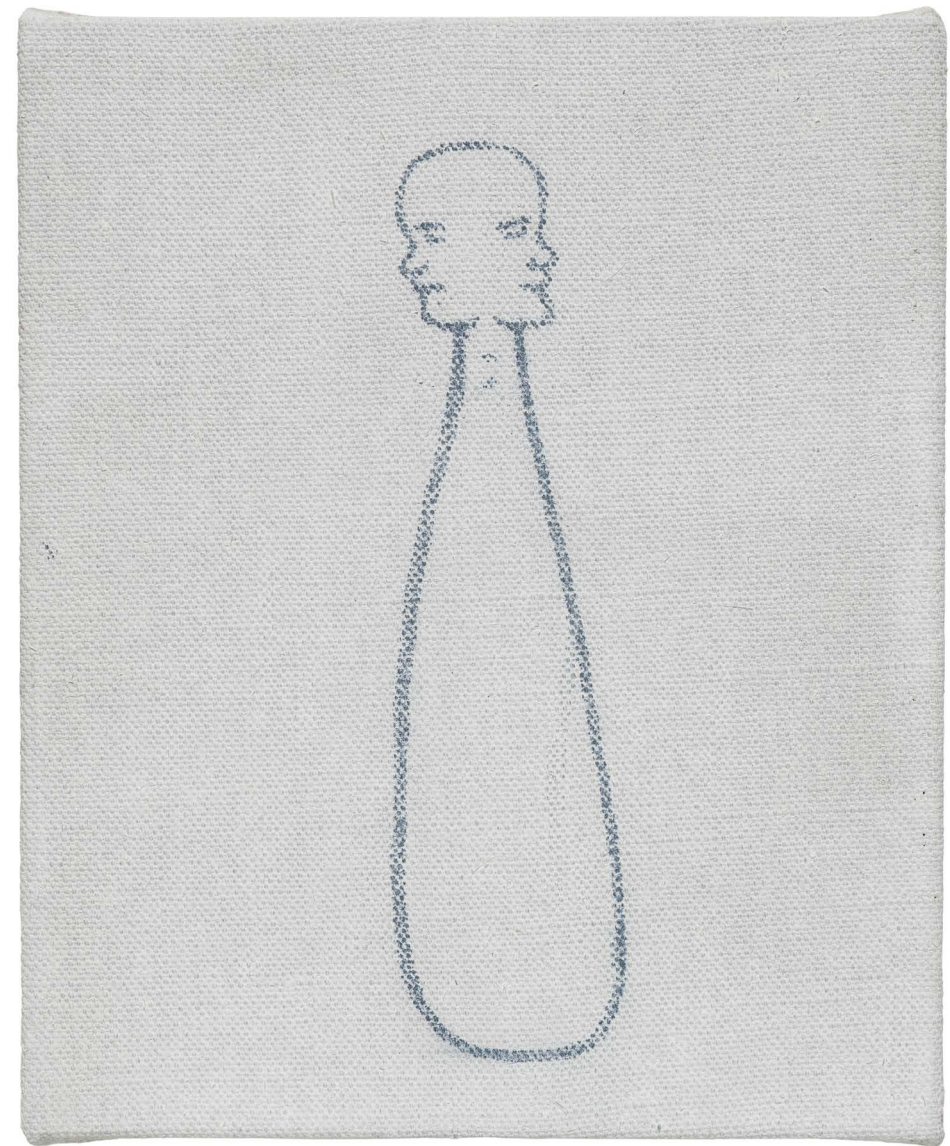


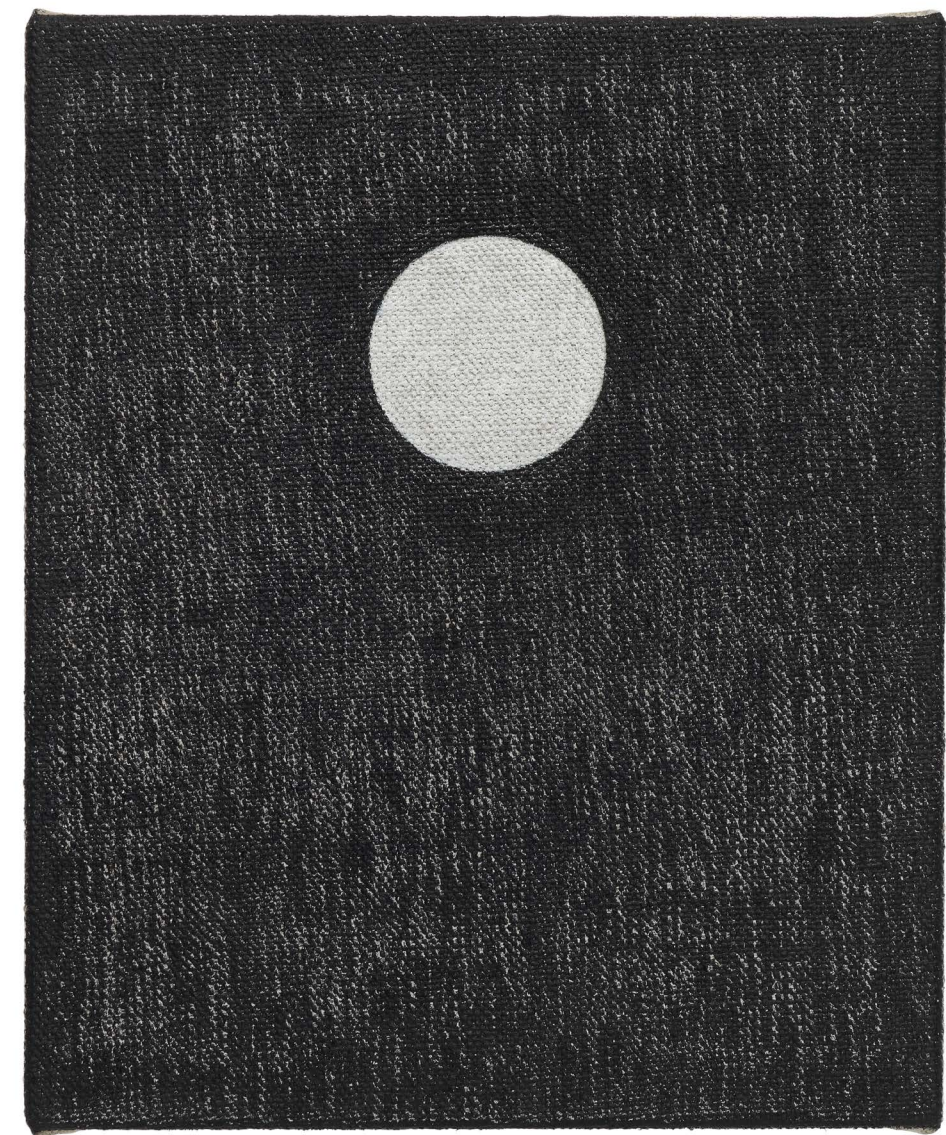
Animal at Night, 2010
oil on flax canvas
66 x 60 inches (168 x 152.5 cm)



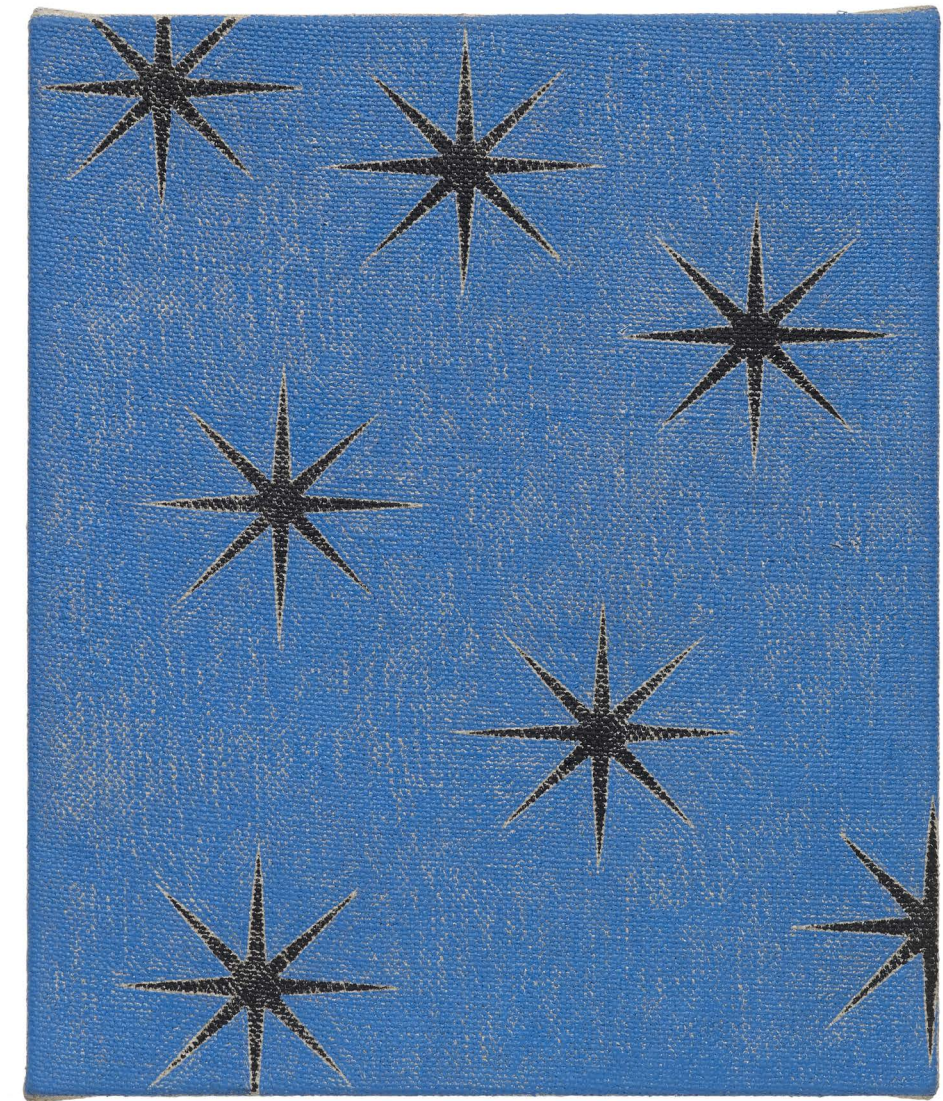
Tree and Stars, 2015
oil on flax canvas
12 x 10 inches (30.5 x 25.5 cm)

Untitled (Janus object), 2017
oil on flax canvas
12 x 10 inches (30.5 x 25.5 cm)





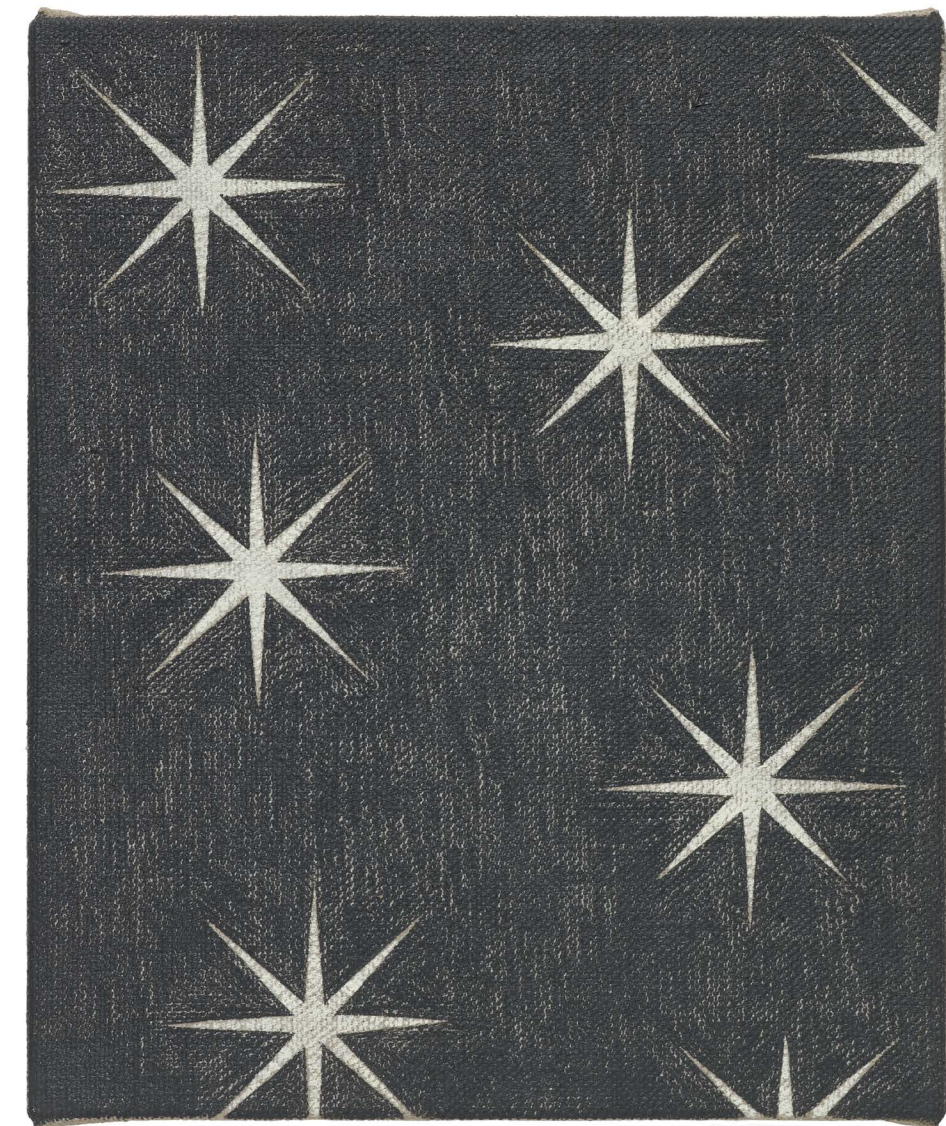
Moon (a forgotten lamp in the room of the dead), 2017
oil on flax canvas
12 x 10 inches (30.5 x 25.5 cm)



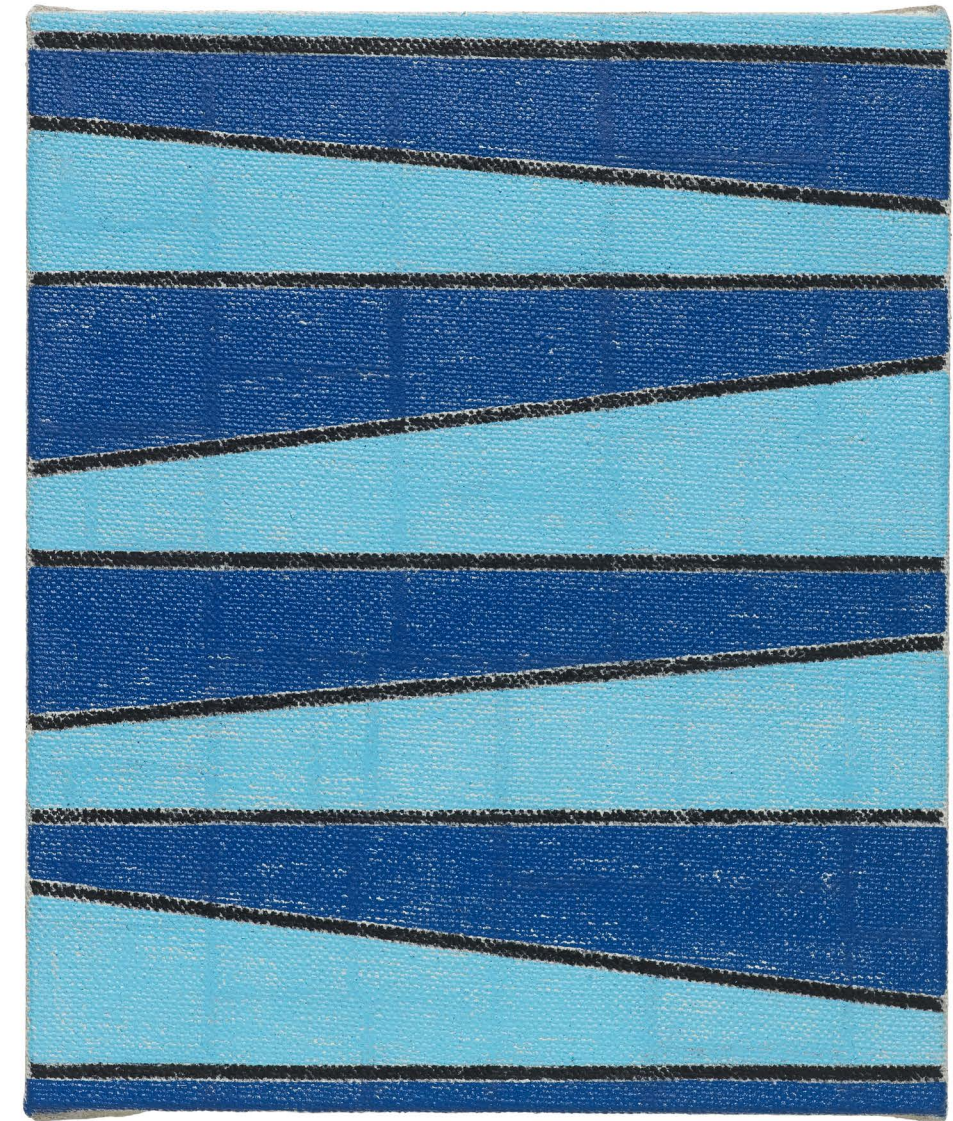
Untitled (dark stars), 2017
oil on flax canvas
12 x 10 inches (30.5 x 25.5 cm)



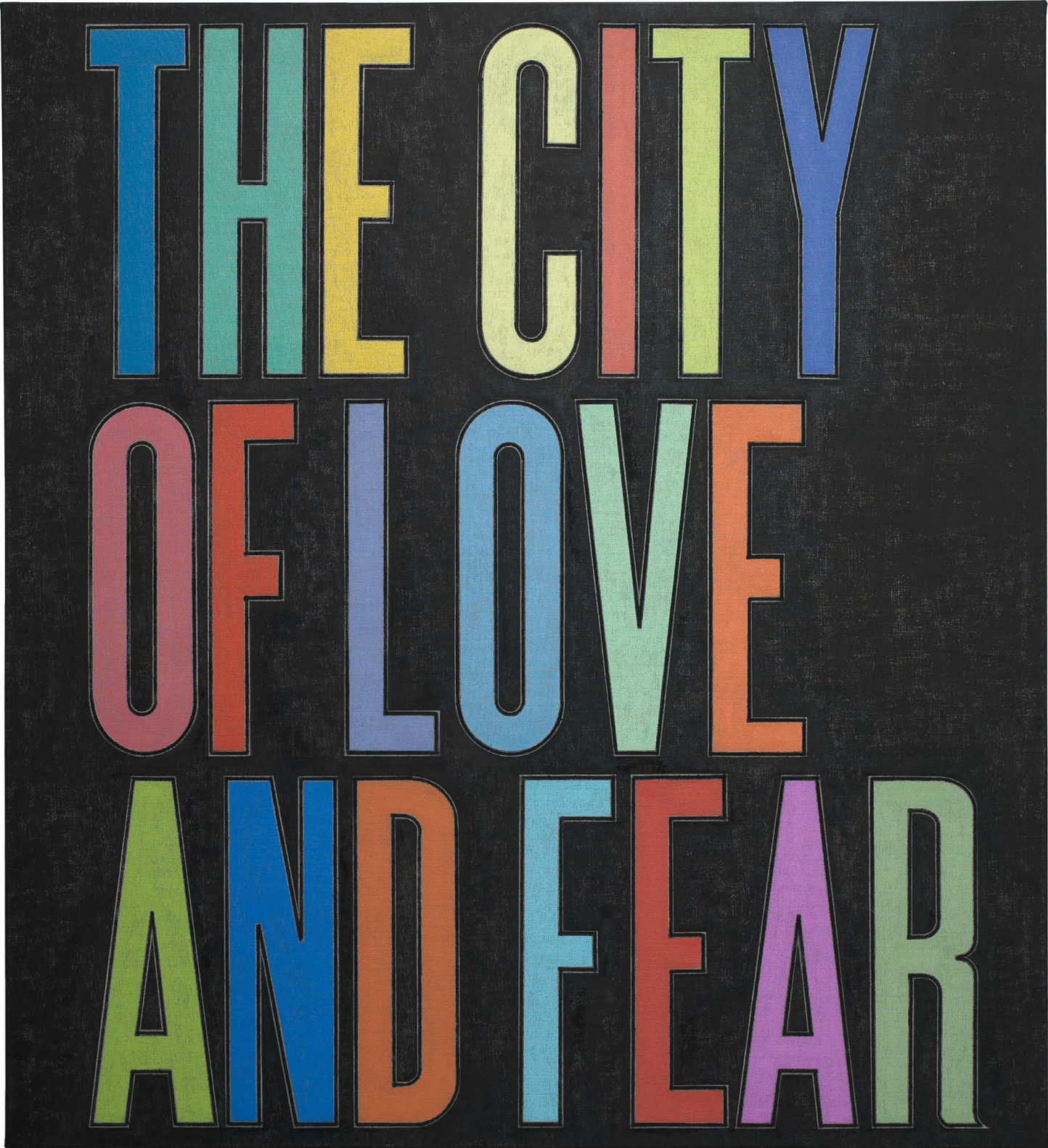
Medusa Tree, 2017
oil on flax canvas
12 x 10 inches (30.5 x 25.5 cm)



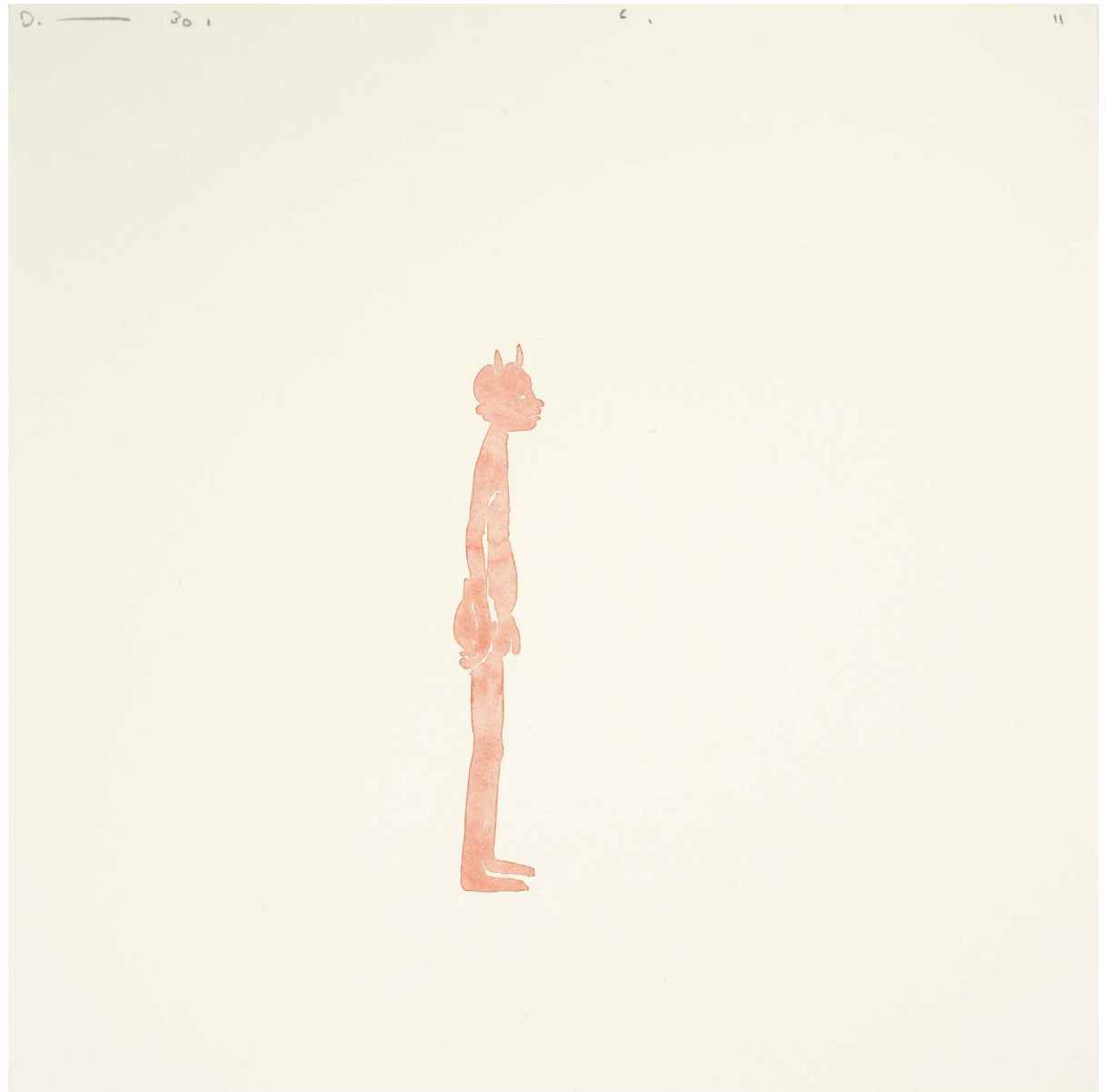
Untitled (small ocean), 2017
oil on flax canvas
12 x 10 inches (30.5 x 25.5 cm)



Untitled (after Paul Nash), 2017
oil on flax canvas
12 x 10 inches (30.5 x 25.5 cm)



City of Love and Fear, 2009
oil on flax canvas
66 x 60 inches (168 x 152.5 cm)



Little red devil 30.6.11, 2011
watercolor on paper
10 x 10 inches (25.5 x 25.5 cm)



Standing woman with brown hair 24.10.17, 2017
watercolor on paper
10 x 10 inches (25.5 x 25.5 cm)



Standing man arm outstretched 17.10.17, 2017
watercolor on paper
10 x 10 inches (25.5 x 25.5 cm)



Couple (shame) 26.4.11, 2011
watercolor on paper
10 x 10 inches (25.5 x 25.5 cm)



Woman arms outstretched (star) 18.10.17, 2017
watercolor on paper
10 x 10 inches (25.5 x 25.5 cm)



Man standing astride another 20.6.11, 2011
watercolor on paper
10 x 10 inches (25.5 x 25.5 cm)



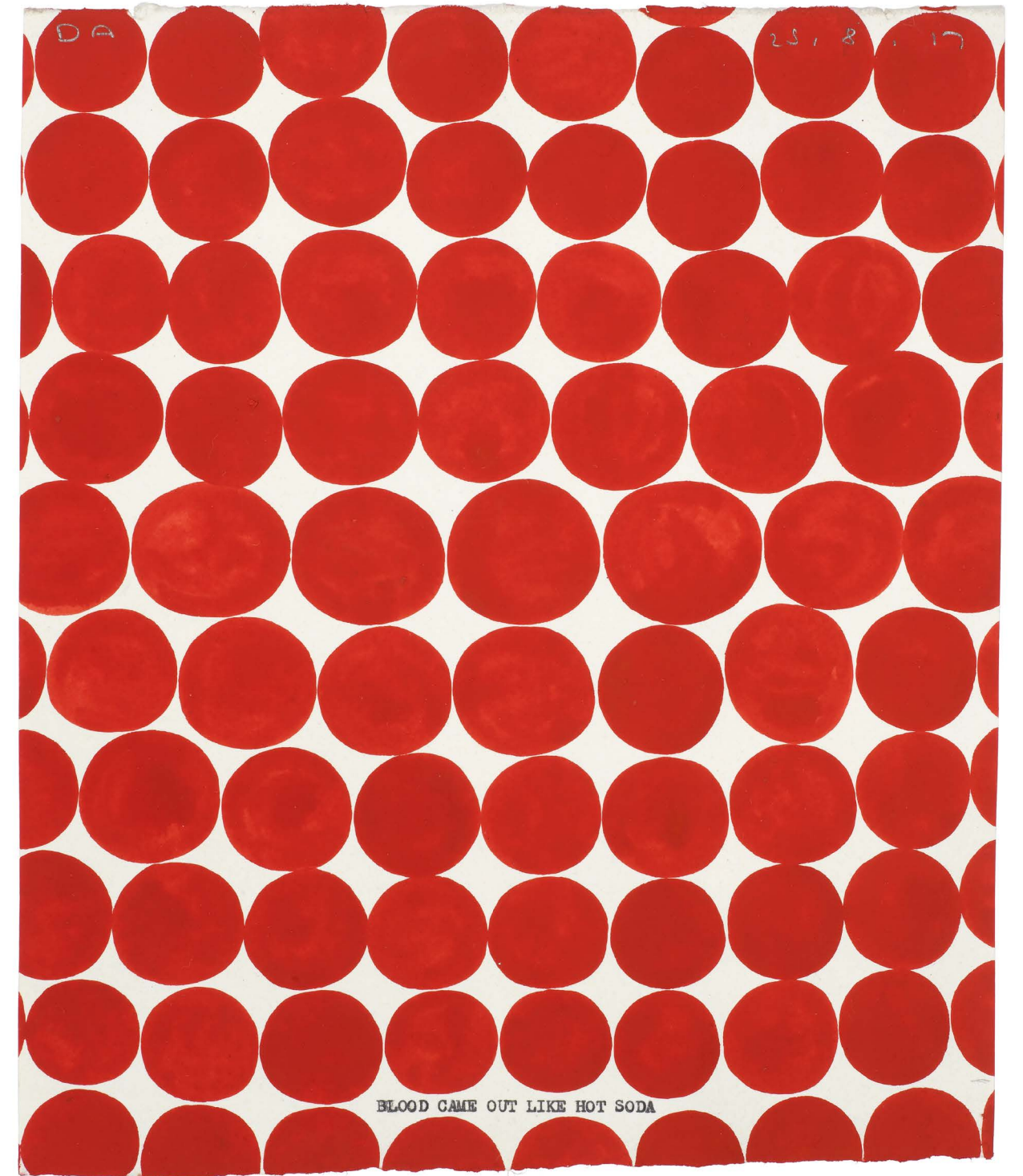
Ocean, 2018
oil on flax canvas
60 x 54 inches (152.5 x 137 cm)



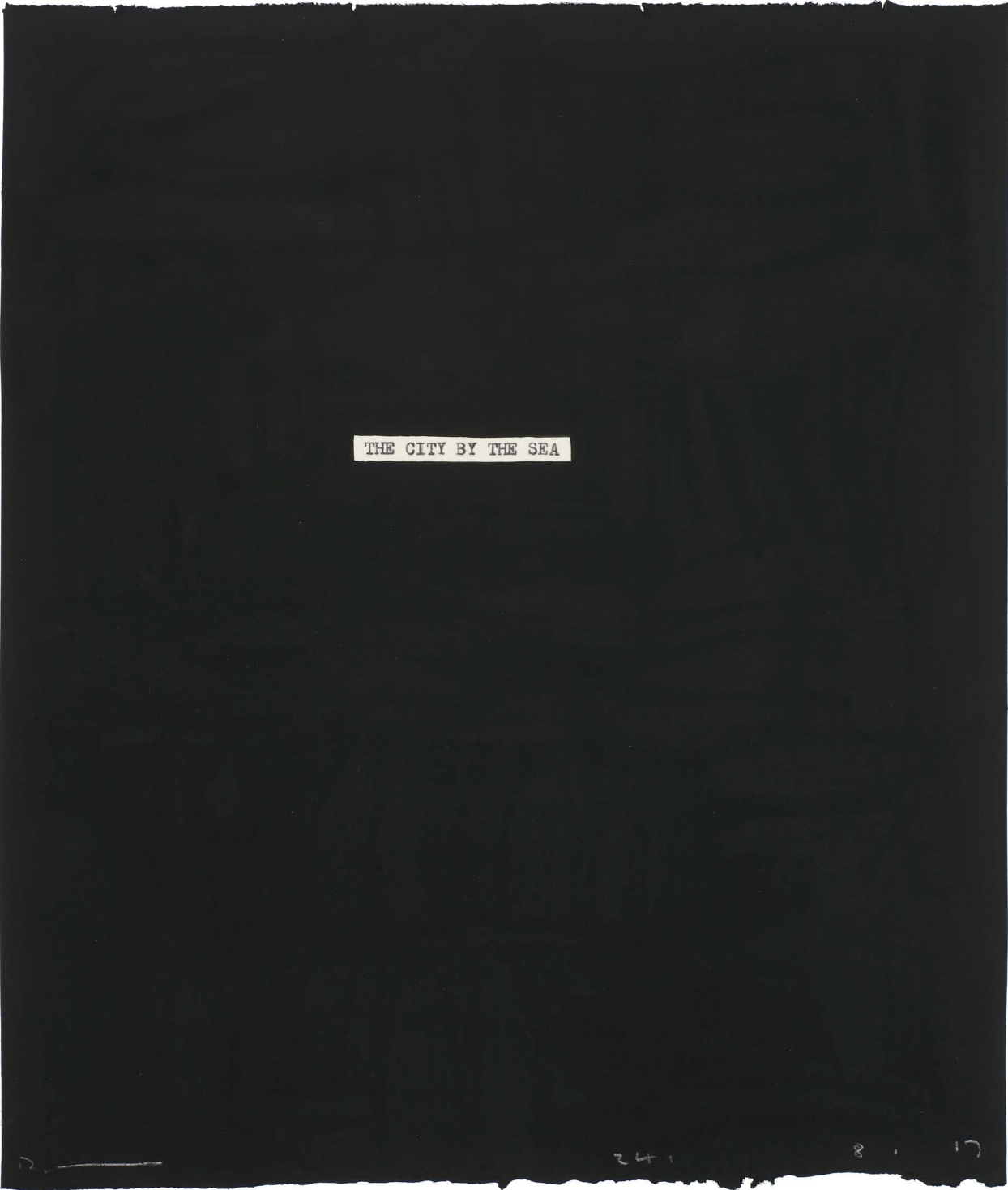
Untitled (red waves) 15.8.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



Stars Above the Ocean 7.9.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



Blood (Frank Stanford) 25.8.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



The City by the Sea 24.8.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



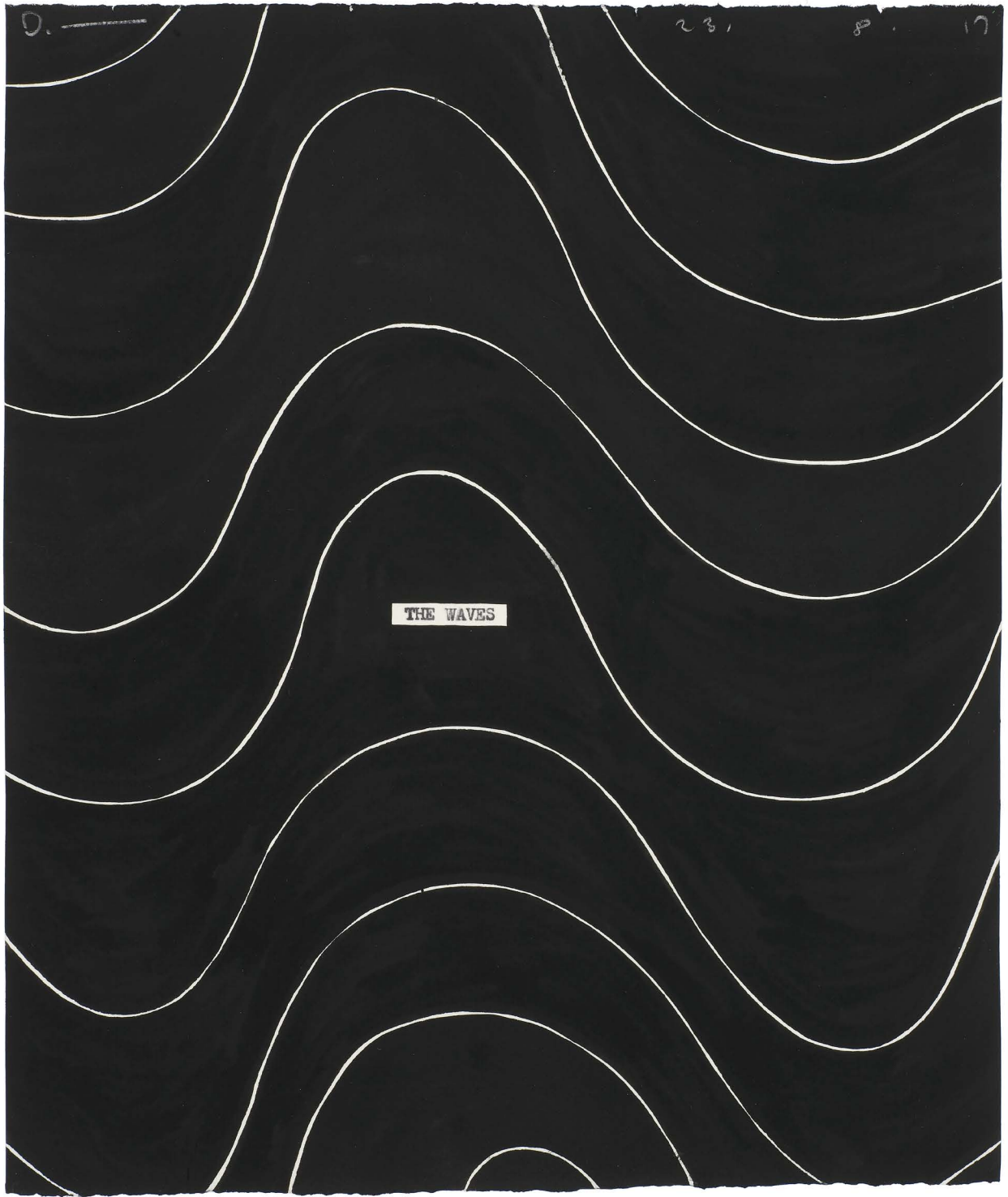
Where the Moon Says I Love You (Frank Stanford) 23.8.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



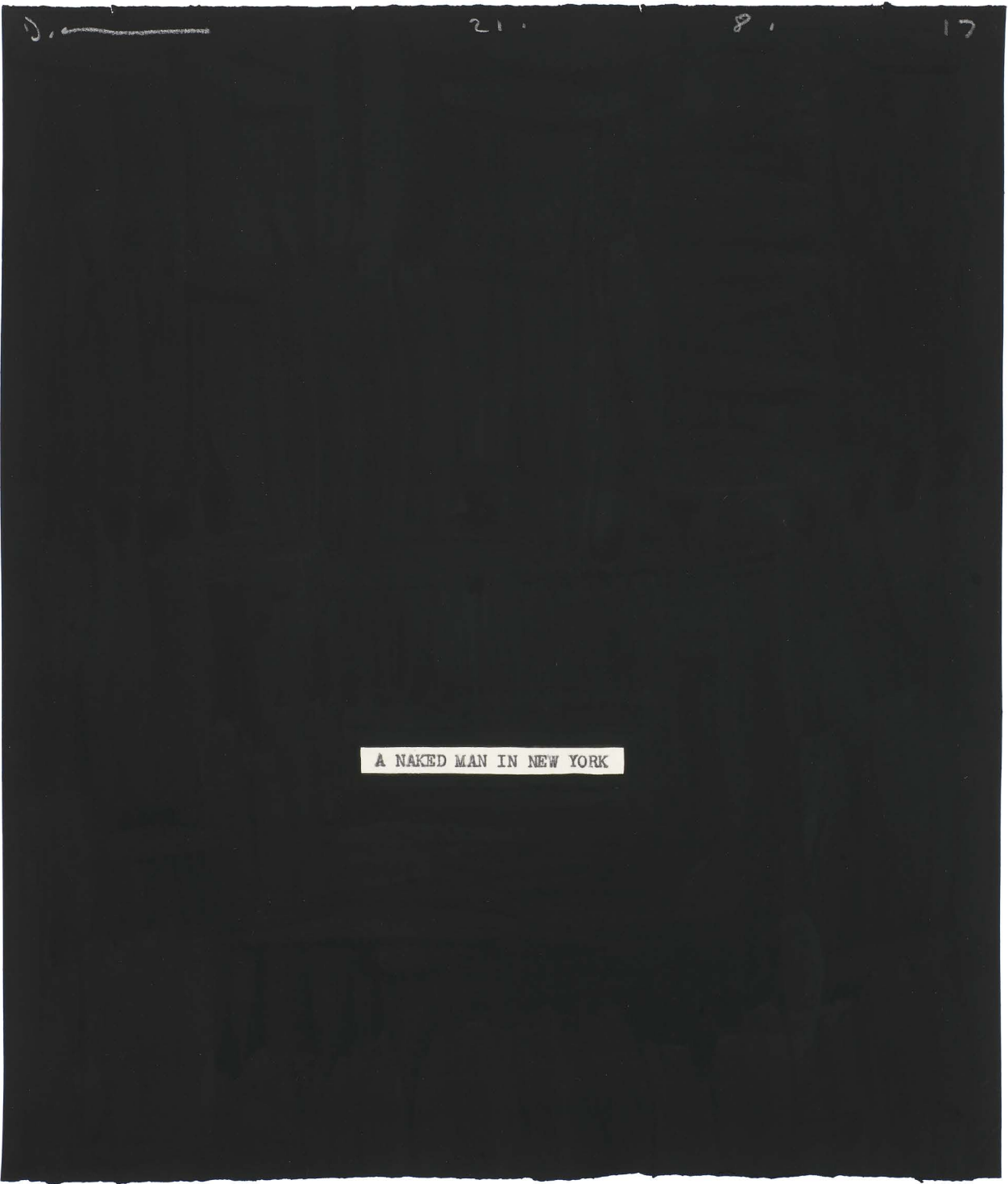
Untitled (black waves) 16.8.17, 2017
gouache
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



Eros 16.8.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



The Waves 23.8.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



A Naked Man in New York 21.8.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



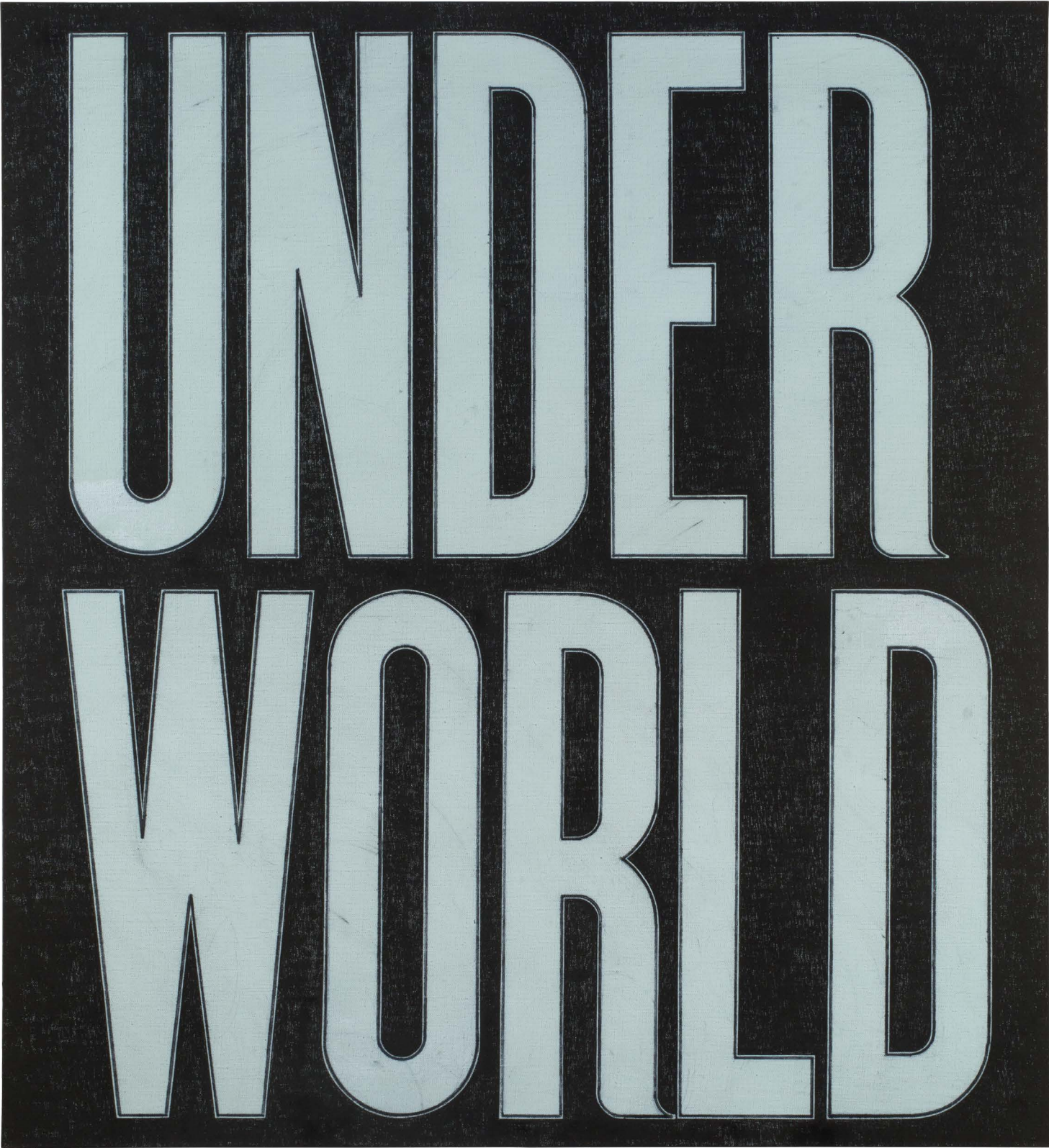
Black Disco 28.9.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



Untitled (orange ripple) 21.9.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



A Year in Orbit 5.9.17, 2017
gouache, type on paper
10 x 8 inches (25 x 21 cm)



Underworld, 2012
oil on flax canvas
66 x 60 inches (168 x 152.5 cm)

DAVID TOTAH in
discussion with

DAVID AUSTEN

- DT

I think what draws me to your work, is this constant quest for the intangible. Do you feel that after you’ve done a painting or a drawing, that quest is satisfied, for that moment, until the next yearning? Where does that idea come from, which gets you to the next one?
- DA

The ideas for most of the works, they drop into my head rather like a slide dropping into a slide machine. Or a magic lantern. And you know, my job is to make them as well as I can. I usually don’t really know or understand what they are about. I see the images quite clearly, and then I make them, but I don’t ever really understand them or know what they are about until they are made. It’s the process of making them that enables me to understand them. Sometimes that takes years. Sometimes years and years can go by before I really understand. So when I understand it, it’s very similar to the original glimpse of the idea. Intangible or untangible? What did you say? There’s a slight difference. The tangibility of what things are, making things – making things that weren’t there before.
- DT

No, the abstract and the idea of tangibility. The idea of yearning for lands that did not exist before, this yearning, is reflected in your word paintings, in the sky, in a love that is pure. And there is always that quest. But what you just said really hits a chord because to me you share the mystery that we all feel when we look at your work, and it is sometimes mysterious to you as well, where you are acting as a conduit – a vessel for certain things that come to you from somewhere else, otherworldly in a way.
- DA

Yes. I think the works, and the ideas behind the works, are often intangible. So my job is to make them as clearly as possible. And that’s why, I think when you look at my work, it’s all there. It’s all there in the surfaces and the way they’re made. There’s nothing hidden. It’s all very clear.
- DT

And the mystery is there.
- DA

And the mystery of what the thing is, is there, because it’s all there. When you look at it, you can see the brush marks.

- DT

You express mystery with a lot of clarity.
- DA

I like things that are matter of fact. That have that kind of clarity to them. That is really important to me. In the films, in the acting in the films, and the way they are made. In the watercolors. I suppose it’s to make them as accurate as possible. To make things as honestly as possible. Because the ideas could be dishonest. They may be dishonest, there may be secrets, they may be made up.
- DT

Well you said before that you are just channeling something.
- DA

Well I mean dishonest in the sense of fiction. You know? Like if you write a book of fiction, it’s dishonest in one way, but also absolutely more true than something that is really true. But I’m just the worker, really. My job is just to make the things.
- DT

So you only work when you have those moments. Or you are in the context of making work all the time, and when it comes, it comes.
- DA

I have lots of ideas. I just work all the time. And because I work in different mediums, there is always an ongoing idea...for instance the watercolors I do quite rarely. But when I do them, I make lots of them. So somehow my memory bank gets filled up, if you like, with figures and poses and violent acts and sexual acts and terrible things that these people are going to do to each other. And they kind of get filled up like a drip in a bucket of water. And then I’ll spend a couple of days just sort of making notes. Then months can go by before I make another set. And that’s why they are dated so clearly. I tend, when I’m making paintings, to always leave something to do the next morning, because then I don’t have to think about it. I often have lots of ongoing works in the studio that I leave in such a way, that when I come in the next morning I can just start work. But also I am aware that life is fleeting. And so you can’t lie around waiting for ideas. Art is a very hungry animal. You have to feed it. I read immense amounts of stuff. I see lots of stuff. I visit lots of places. Because you have to shovel so much stuff in. So much stuff in, to get such a little amount back.
- DT

And therefore you are in a way a storyteller. But do you think of the story before you start making a series of works or a painting, or does the story change along the way and take different turns?
- DA

I think what you mean by story I would probably call moments. You know I think my work is all about moments. Whether that’s a long moment or a short moment. I think of my own work very much like a time machine. That it has elements of memory in it. So it has the past, it has the now – because when you look at one of my works, you can see the time in them. You can see the time it takes to make them. You can see the moments. And then I think they go on into the future. And so they are time machines. They go back and forth, back and forth. That’s how they work for me, and I almost hope that they work for the viewer. Though of course I have no idea what anyone would think.
- DT

Well I think in all the work that you do, the concept of time is very different to what we see around us. It’s as if they are stuck in a time...we are nostalgic for something that hasn’t happened yet. There is a kind of nostalgia for future worlds, for future situations.

DA Yes.

DT There is a substance.

DA It’s strange isn’t it, because nostalgia is almost like a dirty word. It’s considered a little bit suspect. But then you look at the work of Tarkovsky, which is so much about nostalgia. And it can be very powerful. Orson Welles talks about nostalgia, there’s a great interview with him talking about what nostalgia means to him and how it feeds into his films.

DT Well you analyze it very well, and I think that nostalgic feeling as a way to connect with the work really resonates. Then you are also able to be very matter of fact.

DA Nostalgia is suspect because it somehow suggests a memory of something that didn’t actually exist in that way. You know when people say, “oh you’re being nostalgic”, because you’re being nostalgic for when days were better and time was better, and you know, green and pleasant lands. But of course that’s why it’s so powerful. It’s a bigger truth. It’s a collective truth which is maybe about a dream world. And it’s powerful for that reason.

DT Well that’s going back to the yearning for the intangible and unattainable.

DA Yes. Because I am very aware that life is fleeting, and in this very short period of time, you don’t really know anyone else. You’re in a self-contained spacecraft, a vessel. And it’s very odd to be doing this. The oddness of it is what I make the work out of really.

DT Have you always expressed your fascination with the other world, mystery, romance and fear through art, or have you also experienced some of these situations in your life? Situations that were darker than you would have allowed yourself to go into. Or the art was really the outlet, always, all along?

DA If you ask me if I had experiences, yes. You never forget things as a child, do you? And I believe in the underworld. My feeling about the underworld is that the ancients believed in the underworld, but the underworld was already here before this. It’s the underworld that exists first. Which is fascinating. Before the big bang. Or it’s always there. I don’t really believe in past lives, but I do believe in ghosts.

DT Have you ever had encounters?

DA No.

DT So you’re ok with the intangibility of that dimension?

DA Well as far as I know we might all be ghosts anyway. I don’t know how we got onto that subject [laughs]. It’s also that thing, that you never really know another person. Love is the great intangible thing. Is it possible? Is it really possible?

DT Do you feel like your watercolor characters, which are quite erotic, are the matter of fact aspect of that love that you are talking about? The more tangible aspect of that love.

DA I see these creatures who are living in the moment. And I see them as creatures who suffer from gravity.

DT So your work is a constant balance between gravity and grace, and that’s expressed through those watercolors. But then grace comes when you talk about stars and sky.

DA My figures are tragic figures who are homeless. They are homeless wanderers. And something terrible has happened to them. They’ve been evicted from somewhere. They have no home, they are naked. They are innocent. And they live in a world that is illuminated by stars. They often drown in the oceans. They are tragic figures.

DT Well that’s humanity. With a constant reminder that you’re not just that.

DA Well it’s very important, this idea that they are moments. I think watercolor is more akin to photography. I mean old fashioned, analog photography. They capture light, they are liquid. They are liquid formed. They are formed into a shape, and they work for me when they feel that they have substance, and they have gravity. But they stand or lie or fall in that space.

DT Photography is a source of inspiration for you that never translated into making photos?

DA Oh I make lots and lots of photographs. I’ve just never been brave enough to show them. But there are hundreds. I have lots of cameras. All film, as opposed to digital. And I collect photographs. I collect photographs of trapeze artists. Through auction and different places. Just early 1930s, 1920s photographs of often figures flying through the air. A sequence. And I particularly like the ones where the background is completely dark. Where you just see the figures untethered from gravity. You know, I love those. I’m probably going to show them actually. I’m interested to show photography by others in combination with my works on paper or paintings.

DT The otherworldly aspect of the words in your paintings - did you have moments that are unexpected, and you decided that you wanted to paint those words? How does it really happen?

DA I keep notebooks with lots and lots of lines. And some of it is things I’ve overheard, some of it is just making something up – a story or a paragraph or a piece of poetry. Some of it is out of newspapers. So I just have notebooks full of words and sentences, full of lines. And some just have weight. They have a gravity. And it usually takes me quite a long time, because it’s quite a responsibility, choosing the words that make it into text paintings. They have to have a certain weight. And also a certain intangibility, again. They have to be really certain, but also make you question what it means. So “*Animal at Night*” – it feels very matter of fact, very strong, and you think to yourself “yes, an animal at night.” And then you think, “what animal at night?” “What’s it doing?” And is that about a person, who acts like an animal at night? Or has animal desires? Is this someone locked in somewhere? Is there something happening? Is it about violence? Is it about

some terrible violent act? Is it a jungle book that is completely turned the other way around and it's full of dark desire? So it has to do all those things to you, for me to use it. I am unsure of what they mean, but I have to be unsure of them to want to make them. A word can sometimes be quite glib, and it doesn't have the weight or the context that I would like it to have.

DT So your work, your paintings, always keep us wondering. They are never boring. They always keep us from the obvious.

DA I like the obvious. I like it when you can find the obvious. It's really good. In fact I think I am on a quest to find the obvious.

DT [laughs]

DA But it's to do the obvious in a strange way. Strangely obvious.

DT Rather than obviously strange.

DA Yes. You wouldn't want to do something just because it's strange. But you would like to make something of strange beauty. If you said that something had strange beauty it would mean that yes it was beautiful, but there was also something a little bit suspect about it. A little bit dangerous maybe, a bit poisonous. A little bit turned. Like a flower turning. You know. Like a moldy fruit. It's those things.

DT What gets you on that frequency, of being able to create without a need to control everything?

DA It's just being observant. You just keep on looking. And trying not to miss anything. Being empathic. And to have empathy for things, whether it's a stone or a tree or a star or a person. Or a child. It's to have that empathy.

DT Well I feel that your work is very serious, and very meaningful, but that it always retains a child's heart. And a purity. And I guess that's what you mean by having that empathy. That's your heart, that's your compass.

DA I was a very old child. I think I've always been an old soul really.

DT Well that's different. An old soul with a young spirit.

DA I think I was born old.

DT Well you said you're an old soul, but that you don't believe in reincarnation. That's a contradiction there.

DA No.

DT Yes.

DA No. Because there's just one.

DT How do you explain certain things that you do, and you don't know why you're doing it? But yet it feels so right and familiar. Where are these things coming from?

DA Well one thing is that you're not alone, because there's lots of other people's work to look at from the past and from the ancients. Ancient writing and artefacts right up until today. I can learn by looking at a medieval painting, and part of my work is a response to that. That way it's been painted. Basically, you're sharing stuff. You're sharing stuff with others. From the past and from now. And so that gives you, if you're open to it, a certain understanding of things and materials and ideas.

DT That connects to the subconscious memory, where things are absorbed from a long time ago.

DA Well yes because when you enjoy something, when you've read a book or a film or anything like that, the thing you enjoy is recognition. When you say, "oh I know how that feels. That's captured it." Or "I'm scared," or "I'm in love". So that's what enjoyment is, isn't it? It's recognition of something. It's certainly not to make you feel cheap. Or nothing. Or dirty, or squalid. Or bored.

DT Well certainly your art has to be interacted with in person. Because of the vibration that emanates from the texture. Let's talk about the use of flax canvas for example.

DA Yeah I use a canvas with a heavy tooth on it so it grips and hold the paint. And I like it because it reminds me of sail cloth. That's just romantic for me. And I just like when I touch it, it grips. It holds the strokes. And I use very small brushes to build up the colors in the paintings. They actually have a lot of time compressed into them. When you see them you are also looking at months' worth of time compressed into a surface. Pushed into the surface.

DT You are able to express your inner world with extreme clarity through the type of paint, the type of canvas you use, how deep the black is in your gouaches. So it's a kind of art that has to be felt, almost touched.

DA Well you touch things with your eyes.

DT And so we're in an age where things are done through the computer, through Instagram. Certainly your art cannot fall under this instant gratification category, you have to spend time with it.

DA No it can't.

DT It's an art that communicates with you, and keeps telling you things.

DA Yes you have to be in the same room with it. And all of them are very clear about how they are

being made. The watercolors – this is what watercolor does. Watercolor is just colored water. This is what happens. This is what it does. This is its translucence. Oil paint is dense pigment held in oil. This is what it does. This is how it behaves. Gouache is dense, opaque. This is what it does, this is how it goes on, this is how it behaves. And so on.

DT What is the feeling that you like to trigger in your audience? Or what do you want to share the most?

DA I suppose I just want them to say, “yes, that’s what it is to feel that. That’s true, isn’t it?”

DT Well, they are moments, so you felt that in that moment and you captured it.

DA Yes.

DT So you have captured that moment.

DA I saw that, you know, the show of Peter Hujar’s photography at the Morgan. He has huge empathy. There are pictures of animals, pictures of babies, pictures of lovers, pictures of people with AIDS. You know, that whole world at that time. And he brings the same generosity of spirit to all those things. So when I saw that, you know, it’s shared. And he’s also doing it in such an unselfconscious manner. It’s very much about who he is photographing. There are pictures just of the Hudson, just of water. Very beautiful. So you see other artists and you go, yes, that’s very similar to what I want to do, it’s what I like to do. Now whether you succeed or not is another thing, isn’t it? That’s something else.

DT Well I feel your work is done with an impulse that doesn’t look for that success. It’s really an impulse that wants to express what you feel then. And it gives it a very strong identity, a very palpable identity, no matter what body of work it is, one can feel it’s coming from the same hand, from the same mind, from the same heart. Whether it’s through films, through paintings, through watercolors...and that is what I feel makes someone feel home.

DA Well I hope so. Because to me, I do feel that they all inhabit the same world. I hope that’s true.

DT What’s your next project, idea?

DA It’s a number of things. I’m trying to put them into order. I’m continuing with my series *The Drowned*, which is a set of very tiny watercolors of figures, that I consider to be dead, even though they are obviously alive, I think of them as the drowned. So they are a tribe of wandering souls. I’m making a small 16mm film, and it’s called *The Story of My Death as told to me by Another*. It’s a film of my own death, based upon a letter written to me by the novelist Rupert Thomson. He called me one day to say that he’d had a dream of my death. He was quite gleeful about it really. And so I asked him to put it in writing [laughs]. And so he wrote me a letter. It is the story of my death, and so I gave it that title. I am making that at the moment. Oh gosh, lots of things.

DT Going back to your choice of flax canvas, can you talk a little bit about the challenge. For example, the star painting – *Ocean* – and the fact that that surface is purely an obstacle.

DA Yes, it is being a bit bloody minded really, because I use a surface that is actually quite hard to do something accurately on. So I’ll paint these stars, and the stars took me about a month to paint them on a very bumpy road surface. So it’s silly. It’s kind of silly really. But it is part of what moves me a bit, to be able to do that. And in that painting, *Ocean*, again, I could have just written the word “ocean”, because ocean has a wonderful sense of everything. And so I wanted it to have that feeling, that it could encompass everything. This is why those stars go off the edge, so that it can go on and on and on and on and on. But the stars are stylized because they’re not real, and to make things that aren’t real, about something that is real – there’s something important and interesting in that, and again, that reflects my love of ancient artefacts and medieval works. The high degree of stylization in work from those periods, before naturalization. It’s a kind of objectivity that’s different, as opposed to realism. And in that particular painting, *Ocean*, the stars are painted with a wonderful yellow pigment called medieval yellow that reminds me of stained glass windows. It also reminds me of the color of the plague. Yellow being the color of death. There’s that great French film *The Hairdresser’s Husband*, and the hairdresser says something about someone who has died, and I remember it as her saying “vanilla is the color of death”. And then the background, which isn’t really the background because I painted it after I painted the stars – so the paint is painted the wrong way round as well – the background is painted in a dark, earth gray color where the pigment is entirely made out of charred animal bones. And that’s quite poetic in a nice way. So it’s a sky made from bone. So when you think about it, charred animal bone is the most physical you can get, isn’t it? I’ve unearthed the substance. To paint something as ethereal as a night sky with animal bone. So even within a very simple painting, there are different things going on. And also those stars tremble. They’re painted so they tremble. It’s because they are hand-made and hand-crafted, you feel the vibration in them and you see the brush marks. I think when you’re in a room, like you say, with the physical object itself, you see that the stars are trembling. It’s very important to me that all the work trembles. That is has that sort of...

DT Movement?

DA It’s not a movement. Trembling suggests more like a leaf on a tree, or your heartbeat, or the vibrations of trains going through tunnels.

DT It’s more a shimmering.

DA Something at the edge of your sensitivity. You know? Like when you feel a train coming through the floor. That kind of thing. Something just at the limit.

DT I think in the same vein of looking for a more difficult path, your watercolor characters are particularly small, a medium that doesn’t forgive, and your level of accuracy for facial features and expression is remarkable. By design you chose that size that will make your life more difficult?

DA The watercolor figures are the size that they are because that’s the size they are in my head. When I make them I tend to visualize the figure, and I can turn it in my head, and then I stand up doing them. I don’t sit down doing them. And then I paint them as accurately as I can.

DT Can you talk a little bit about the challenge of that scale, with that medium? And being able to make expressions on the face in the way you do?

DA No because that's top secret.

DT [laughs] Ok. I like that. And that's the answer actually I've provoked several times. A lot of works that are shown here have that mystery. And I want to keep that mystery as well, and the way to get there. For example, Aleksandar Duravcevic, he makes those drawings with graphite, and one day we had a curator here who was really mesmerized by those graphite on black paper, and she asked how he does it. He started explaining and I stopped him. I said, "we'll stop here, it's a mystery, and it's top secret". And the same way with Helen Pashgian, very different body of work, who works with epoxy and these almost alive objects. Somebody asked how does she do that, and I said would it make a difference if I said that she uses 5% resin, 15% dye? No. The result is what counts.

DA I don't really mind telling people how something is made, it's just that—

DT I'm not interested in how you make them, I'm interested to gage how difficult it is to use watercolor on such small scale.

DA Well do you know what the real answer is? With great difficulty. Because it's not easy. It is actually really difficult to make them.

DT Does that result in a lot of them being destroyed?

DA Yes. An awful lot.

FILMS

END OF LOVE

End of Love is a vaudeville performed at the end of the world. The location is on the stage of a London theatre. There is no audience. There are twelve characters: a dark angel, a betrayed cyclops, a love-torn dandy, a man who has everything, an ancient moon, a pair of petty criminals on the run, a trapeze artist, a homeless man, a lonely astronaut, an imprisoned woman and an aged Jack the Giant Killer.

The characters' monologues reveal glimpses of a lonely world of fear and desire, where they wait amidst crushed hopes and the impossibility of romantic truth. Referencing theatre, literature, expanded cinema and performance, as well as the artist's personal practice, *End of Love* is a poetic expression of love's elusiveness, the non-linearity of time, and fleeting facets of memory.

CAST *Dark Angel* Vicky McClure / *Moon* Liam Smith / *Dandy* Joseph Mawle / *Petty Criminal Her* Mia Austen / *Petty Criminal Him* David Leon / *Homeless Man* Paul Anderson / *Fat Man* Elliot Cowan / *Nobody* Obi Abili / *Trapeze Artist* Jenn Murray / *Astronaut* David Austen / *Prisoner of Love* Mia Austen / *Jack* Richard Bremmer

End of Love was originally commissioned by the Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University, and supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

End of Love, 2010
Super 16mm film transferred to high definition video
Colour, sound
65 minutes



SMOKING MOON

Smoking Moon is an uncanny representation of the moon; comical yet unsettling, it demonstrates David Austen's exploration of the darker side of the human psyche and the displacement of the moon from reality to myth. This work is Austen's first moving image piece, an example of the artist's distinct use of fragmented narrative as well as a tribute to early cinema and its representation of the moon.

Smoking Moon, 2006
Video
Black and white, no sound
13 minutes



David Austen

BIOGRAPHY

1960	Born in Harlow, Essex, UK
1978-81	Maidstone College of Art, Kent, UK
1982-85	Royal College of Art, London, UK
2004-5	Drawing Fellow, Wimbledon School of Art
2009	Stanley Picker Fellow, Kingston University, Kingston upon Thames, UK
2011	Bryan Robertson Award

SOLO EXHIBITIONS / SELECTED PROJECTS

2019	<i>David Austen</i> , Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee Scotland, UK (forthcoming)
2018	<i>David Austen – The Drowned</i> , Matt's Gallery, London, UK <i>the stars above the ocean the ocean beneath the stars</i> , TOTAH, New York, USA
2016	<i>The light that fell upon us burned</i> , Ingleby Gallery at Art Basel Miami Beach, USA
2015	<i>Black Heart</i> , Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Cogliandrino (MACC), Italy
2013	<i>Smoking Moon</i> , film screening as part of Art Basel Miami Beach film programme, Miami, USA <i>Billboard for Edinburgh</i> , public art project, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK
2012	<i>The Gorgon's Dream</i> , The Burns Monument, with Ingleby Gallery and the Edinburgh International Film Festival, Edinburgh, UK and at Rob Tufnell, London, UK
2011	<i>Papillon</i> , Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK
2010	<i>Smoke Town and End of Love</i> , Modern Art Oxford, Oxford, UK
2009	<i>My love, I have been digging up my own bones in the garden again</i> , Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK <i>Man Smoking</i> , Schiavo Mazzonis Gallery, Rome, Italy <i>The End of Love</i> , Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University, Kingston upon Thames, UK
2008	<i>David Austen & Man Ray</i> , Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK
2007	<i>David Austen</i> , Milton Keynes Gallery, Milton Keynes, UK (cat. illus) <i>Glitter</i> , Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK <i>Crackers</i> , film screening, Locarno Film Festival, Italy
2006	<i>Smoking Moon</i> , Camden Arts Centre, London, UK <i>GREEN ELECTRIC MORNING</i> , Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK (cat. illus)
2005	<i>Froth on the Daydream</i> , Wimbledon School of Art, London, UK
2004	<i>Darkland</i> , PEER, London, UK (cat. illus) Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK
2003	<i>Hard Times</i> , Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK
2001	Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK

	Annandale Gallery, Sydney, Australia
	<i>Edge of the World</i> , Christ Church Mansion, Ipswich, UK
	Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK
2000	<i>Happy City</i> , Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK
1999	Galerie Marianne Hollenbach, Stuttgart, Germany
1998	Inverleith House, Edinburgh, UK Slewe Gallery, Amsterdam, NL
1997	Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, London, UK Mead Gallery, Warwick, UK (Catalogue) Galerie Marianne Hollenbach, Stuttgart, Germany
1994	Anthony Reynolds, London, UK
1993	Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
1992	Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK
1991	Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, USA Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK
1990	Frith Street Gallery, London, UK (cat. illus)
1989	Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, USA Castle Museum & Art Gallery, Nottingham, UK (cat. illus)
1988	Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK (cat. illus) Arnolfini, Bristol, UK
1987	Serpentine Gallery, London, UK
1986	Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK (cat. illus)

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2018	<i>Jacob's Ladder</i> , Ingleby, Edinburgh, UK <i>TWENTY</i> , Ingleby, Edinburgh, UK
2017	<i>These Rotten Words</i> , Chapter, Cardiff, UK
2016	<i>Cosmic Connections</i> , TOTAH, New York, USA
2015	<i>Songs For Someone Who Isn't There</i> , Sarah Hardie EAF Performance, Edinburgh, UK
2014	<i>The Nakeds</i> , Drawing Room, London, UK (co-curator) touring to De La Warr Pavilion, East Sussex, UK <i>Slow Learner</i> , Timothy Taylor Gallery, London, UK <i>Abstract Drawing</i> , Drawing Room, London, UK
2013	<i>Once upon a time and a very good time it was...</i> , Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK <i>On Paper</i> , Centro de Artes Visuales Fundación Helga de Alvear, Cáceres, Spain <i>Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?</i> , New Art Centre, Salisbury, UK <i>Drawing Biennial 2013</i> , Drawing Room, London, UK
2012	<i>Language Games. An Introduction to The Art of Our Times</i> , Centro de Artes Visuales Fundación Helga de Alvear, Cáceres, Spain <i>With An Apple I Will Astonish</i> , Large Glass, London, UK

Working on the Inside, Tannery Arts @ the Drawing Room, London, UK

Summer Exhibition, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK

The Artist's Imprint, Emma Hill Fine Art / Eagle Gallery, London, UK

2011 *Ill Fares The Land*, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK

Artists for Kettle's Yard, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK

Watercolour, Tate Britain, London, UK

One Another, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK

2009 *Only The Lonely*, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK

No Shoes on the Carpet, Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

2008 *Better Than Grey: a Serious Consideration of Colour*, Bury St Edmunds Art Gallery, Suffolk, UK

The Archer and The Goat, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK

Conversations, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK

At Home, Voewood Projects, High Kelling, Norfolk, UK

Order Desire Light, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland

100 Years, 100 Artists, 100 Works of Art, A Foundation, London, UK

2007 *ArtProjx at Greenland Street*, A Foundation, Liverpool, UK

La vida privada – Coleccion Josep Civit, Centro de Arte y Naturalexa – Fundación Bèulas, Huesca, Spain

The Secret Theory of Drawing, Model Arts & Niland Gallery, Sligo, Ireland & Tannery Arts, London, UK

2006 *A Handful of Dust*, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK

Flip: A Drawing Exhibition, Chung King Project, Los Angeles, USA: in association with Drawing Room, London, UK

2005 *Edition*, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK

The Hardest Thing to Draw is a Kiss, The Gallery, Wimbledon School of Art, London, UK (curated by David Austen)

Miradas y Conceptos, MELAC, Badajoz, Spain

Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK

In Focus, Emma Hill Fine Art / Eagle Gallery, London, UK

Remarkable, Andrew Mummery Gallery, London, UK

2004 *10 Years*, Slewe Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

John Moore's Exhibition 23, The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK

Painting, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK

See it...Read it, Art with Words, from the Arts Council Collection, Draiocht, Dublin, Ireland

Chromophiles, Galleri Bouhlou, Bergen, Norway

2003 *Exodus (curated by David Austen)*, Kettle's Yard, Cambridge, UK

The Collection of an Invisible Man, Laing Art Gallery, London, UK

Independence, South London Gallery, London, UK

2002 *Abstraction*, Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh, UK

3 x 2, The Nunnery, London, UK

Artaid, Bloomberg Space, London, UK

2001 *Yellow*, Galerie Kempfer, Munich, Germany

2000 *Y2K*, Archimede Staffolini Gallery, Cyprus

Blue, The New Museum at Walsall, Walsall, UK

1999 Commission for the British Embassy, Cairo, Egypt

John Moores Exhibition 21, Liverpool, UK

1998 *Book*, Djanogly Art Gallery, Nottingham, UK

Source / Chanzo, National Museum, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

1997 *Marks and Traces*, Sandra Gering Gallery, New York, USA

Antechamber, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK

A Cloudburst of Material Possessions, Purdy Hicks Gallery, London, UK

Slewe Gallery, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

1996 Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK

Take it From Here, Sunderland Museum and Art Gallery, Sunderland, UK

In Passing, The Tannery, London, UK

Absolute Vision: New British Painting in the 1990s, Museum of Modern Art Oxford, UK

1995 *The Contemporary Art Society Collection*, Buttler Gallery, Kilkenny, Ireland

Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

Made in L.A., Los Angeles County Museum, Los Angeles, USA

1994 *Recent Publications - Editions and Monoprints*, Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

1993 *Painters' Prints*, Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

WaterCOLOUR, Curwen Gallery, London, UK

Strictly Painting, Cubitt Street Gallery, London, UK

Moving into View, Recent British Painting, Royal Festival Hall, London, UK

Spit in the Ocean, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK

1992 *Whitechapel Open*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK

Poiesis, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, UK

New Voices: Recent Painting For The British Council Collection, Centre de Conference Albert Borshette, Brussels, Belgium (cat. illus)

Twelve Stars, Arts Council Gallery, Belfast, UK; City Arts Centre, Edinburgh, UK; Barbican Centre, London, UK (cat. illus)

1991 *New Editions*, Cirrus Gallery, Los Angeles, USA

Whitechapel Open co-selector, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, UK

1990 *Mind the Gap*, Espace Culturel Graslin, Nantes, France (cat. illus)

Ciento, Barcelona, Spain

Poiesis, Graeme Murray Gallery, Edinburgh, UK

David Beitzel, New York, USA

The Theory and Practice of the Small Painting, curated by Tony Godfrey, Anderson O'Day Gallery, London, UK

British Art, Zellweger, Basel, Swizerland

Broadgate Art Project, London, UK

1988 *Object and Image: Aspects of British Art in the 1980s*, City Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, UK

Vanitas, Norwich School of Art, Norwich, UK (cat. illus)

Atlas 3, Nigel Greenwood Gallery, London, UK

1987 *Riverside Open*, Riverside Studios, London, UK

On a Plate, Franham College of Art and Serpentine Gallery, London, UK (cat. illus)

1986 *Between Identity and Politics: A New Art*, Gimpel Fils, London, UK and touring to:

Gimpel and Weitzenhoffer, New York, USA (cat. illus)

Works on Paper, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, UK

John Yau is the author of thirteen books of poetry, including *Radiant Silhouette: New & Selected Work 1974-1988* (1989), *Borrowed Love Poems* (2002), *Ing Grish* (2005) and, most recently, *Bijoux in the Dark* (2018). A freelance curator, publisher of *Black Square Editions*, fiction writer and art critic, he has also published numerous monographs and books of criticism, including *In the Realm of Appearances: The Art of Andy Warhol* (1993), *A Thing Among Things: The Art of Jasper Johns* (2008), *Catherine Murphy* (2016), *Thomas Nozkowski* (2017), *Philip Taaffe* (2018), and *The Wild Children of William Blake* (2017). In 2012, he was one of the co-founders of the online magazine, *Hyperallergic Weekend*, where his reviews of art and literature appear every Sunday. In 2018, he received the Jackson Poetry Prize, which “honors an American poet of exceptional talent who deserves wider recognition.” Yau is Professor of Critical Studies at Mason Gross School of the Arts (Rutgers University) and lives in New York.

Acknowledgments

Fionn Meade

Ingleby Gallery

Richard and Florence Ingleby

Samuel Jablon

Sophia McKinnon

Nicola Tranquillino

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

the stars above the ocean the ocean beaneath the stars at TOTAH, New York, February 15—April 22, 2018

Editor: TOTAH

Copyeditor: Liane Jones

Artwork Photography: Andy Keate; Peter White, FXP Photography, London

Following page:

David Austen

Stairs, 2012

black & white photograph

We are committed to respecting the intellectual property rights of others. All intellectual property which appears in this book belongs to the respective copyright holders.

© TOTAH LLC 2018

First edition published in 2018

Edition of 750

TOTAH

183 Stanton St

New York NY 10002

Design by

Ninze Chen-Benchev

New York, NY

ISBN 978-0-9975891-5-3



