



material occupation

university art museum · university at albany 2012

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Caetano de Almeida

Sarah Crowner

Josh Faught

Elana Herzog

Marietta Hoferer

Sam Moyer

Anja Schwörer

Melissa Thorne

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February 7 through April 7, 2012  
Corinna Ripps Schaming, curator

**University Art Museum**  
University at Albany  
State University of New York

## foreword

The artists in *Material Occupation* shred, tear, sew, tape, and bleach; they pull apart and bind together in ways that are both unfettered and unexpected. They find poetry in the elemental visual language of abstraction, and like every abstract painter or sculptor they create meaning from line, form, and color. With a toolbox of fabric, fiber, and other non-traditional materials, they work in techniques that are more often associated with craft than fine art and that bear the weight of wide-ranging historic and metaphoric associations. In the process, they move seamlessly across the boundaries that divide the categories of art, craft, and design.

I am indebted to curator Corinna Ripps Schaming for the concept of the exhibition and for all that it has taken to give it form, grace, and purpose. Artist, critic, and curator Michelle Grabner brings a unique perspective to the subject in her catalogue essay. Organizing an exhibition is a highly collaborative venture, and its success depends on the willing efforts of a skilled and tireless museum staff. The Museum is fortunate to bring to bear on all its projects the talents of Zheng Hu, exhibition and catalogue designer; the installation and problem-solving abilities of Jeffrey Wright-Sedam, Darcie Abbatiello, and Ryan Parr; the organizational skills and outreach efforts of Naomi Lewis; and the administrative support provided by Joanne Lue.

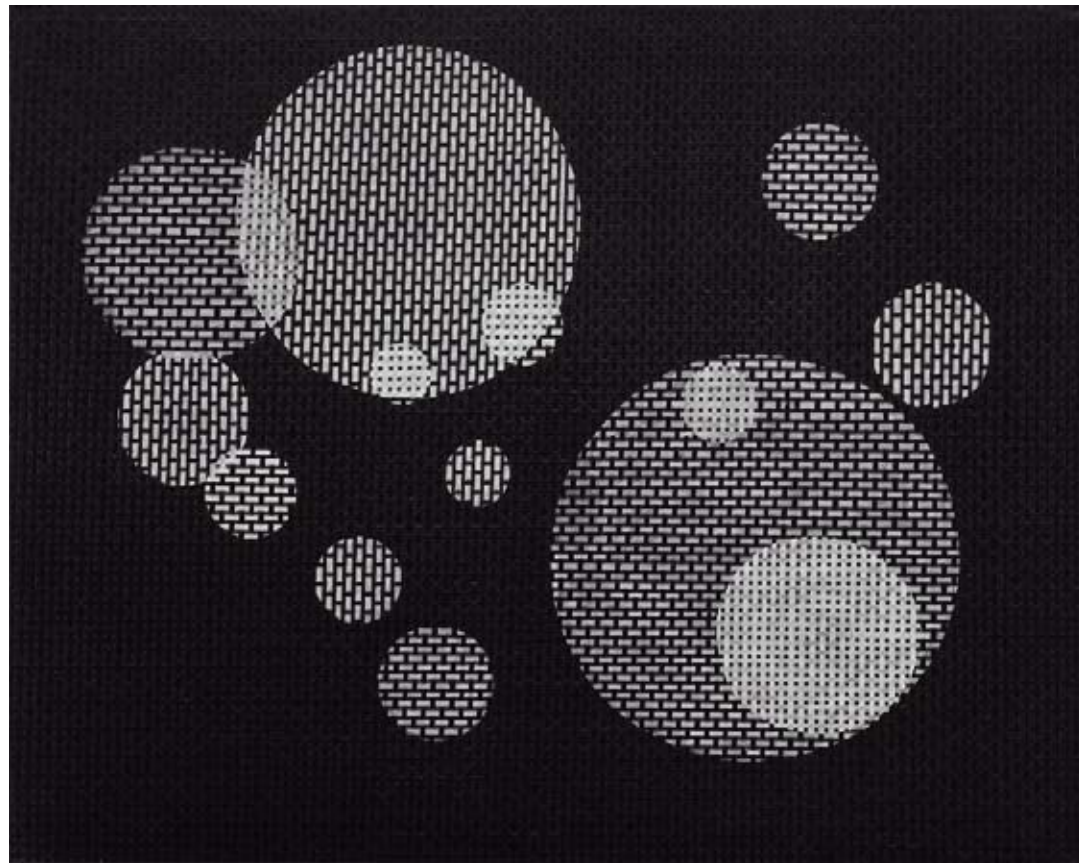
I am grateful to University at Albany President George M. Philip and to Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Susan D. Phillips for their ongoing support of the Museum and its programs. Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs William B. Hedberg has provided a thoughtful and generous guiding hand.

A grant from the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation has made this exhibition catalogue possible; I am deeply appreciative of the foundation's recognition of the significance of the Museum's publication program. Additional support for the exhibition and related programming was provided by The University at Albany Foundation, University Auxiliary Services, and the Center for Jewish Studies.

Sincere thanks go to lenders Dr. Dana Ardi, Charlotte and Bill Ford, and two private collectors, as well as to Augusto Arbizo at Eleven Rivington; Nicelle Beauchene at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery; Rachel Uffner and Amber Vilas at Rachel Uffner Gallery; Lisa Cooley, Thomas Ahlgren, and Kelly Woods at Lisa Cooley Fine Art; and to Fernanda Arruda, Jeanne Finley, Gary David Gold, Stephen Gribbin, Janae McHugh, and Chloe Pfendler.

My deepest thanks go to the artists in *Material Occupation*, whose talent has graced our walls with work that is both beautiful and thought-provoking.

Janet Riker  
Director



Caetano de Almeida  
*Sete Planetas*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 47¼ x 59 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Eleven Rivington, New York



Caetano de Almeida

*Hippeastrum Hybridum*, 2010, pollution on paper, 24 x 18 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Eleven Rivington, New York

*Tulbaghia Violacea*, 2010, pollution on paper, 24 x 18 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Eleven Rivington, New York



Caetano de Almeida  
*Eliseos*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 86½ x 67 inches  
Charlotte and Bill Ford Collection



Sarah Crowner  
*Untitled*, 2011, gouache on sewn canvas, diptych: each panel 58 x 36 inches  
Private collection



Sarah Crowner  
*Untitled*, 2011, gouache on sewn canvas, 58 x 36 inches  
Collection of Dr. Dana Ardi



Sarah Crowner  
*Curtains (Vidas Perfectas)*, 2011, fabric paint on linen, sewn linen, 8½ feet x 20–24 feet wide  
Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York



Josh Faught  
*How to Beat the High Cost of Living*, 2009, hand-woven cotton, nail polish,  
toilet paper, silk flowers, indigo, sequins, ink, 92 x 72 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Lisa Cooley Fine Art, New York

RIGHT  
*How to Beat the High Cost of Living* (detail)







Josh Faught  
*Triage*, 2009  
 Hemp, nail polish, spray paint, indigo, logwood, toilet paper, pins, books, plaster, yarn, handmade wooden sign, denim, gloves, 80 x 120 inches  
 Courtesy of the artist and Lisa Cooley Fine Art, New York

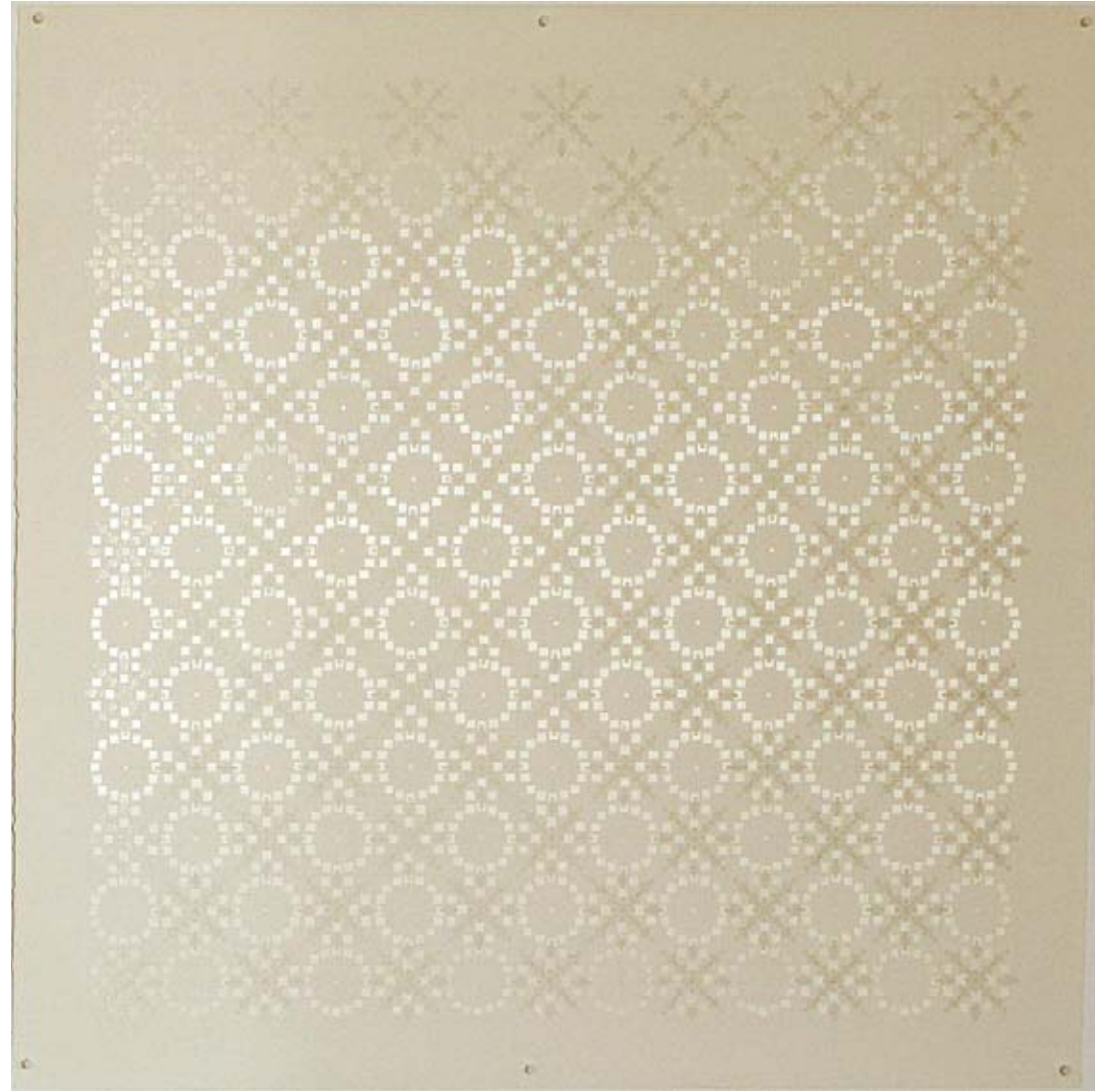
LEFT  
*Triage* (detail)



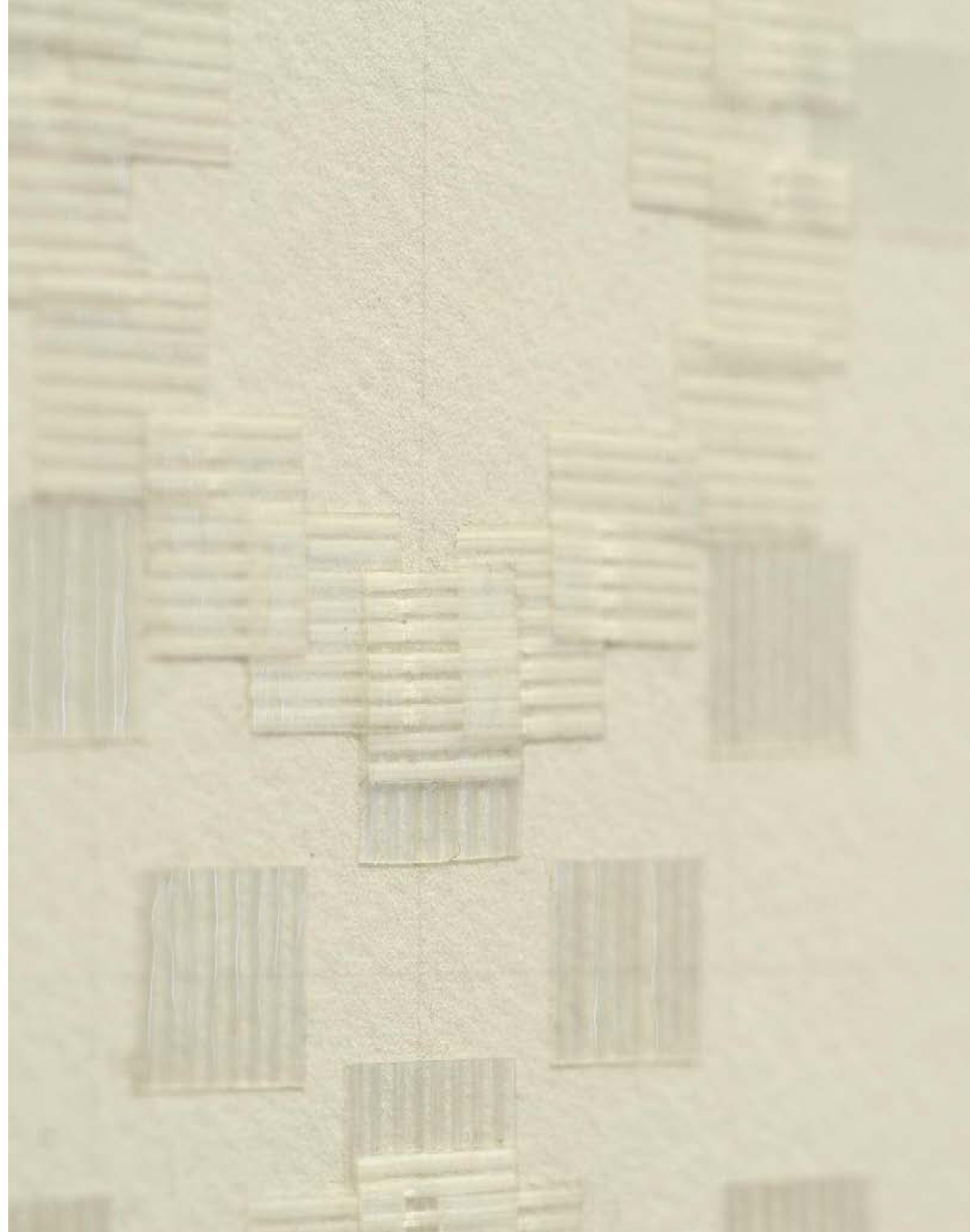
Elana Herzog  
*Untitled (detail)*, 2012  
Site-specific installation on two floors, wood, hardware,  
fabric, metal staples, painting, 34 x 7 x 6 feet  
Courtesy of the artist



Elana Herzog  
*Untitled* (detail), 2012  
Site-specific installation on two floors, wood, hardware,  
fabric, metal staples, painting, 34 x 7 x 6 feet  
Courtesy of the artist



Marietta Hoferer  
*Big C\_8*, 2010, tape and pencil on paper, 60 x 60 inches  
Courtesy of the artist



RIGHT  
*Tapis* (detail), 2012, tape and pencil on paper, 124 x 240 inches (four panels).  
Courtesy of the artist



Marietta Hoferer  
*Tapis*, 2012, tape and pencil on paper, 124 x 240 inches (four panels). Courtesy of the artist



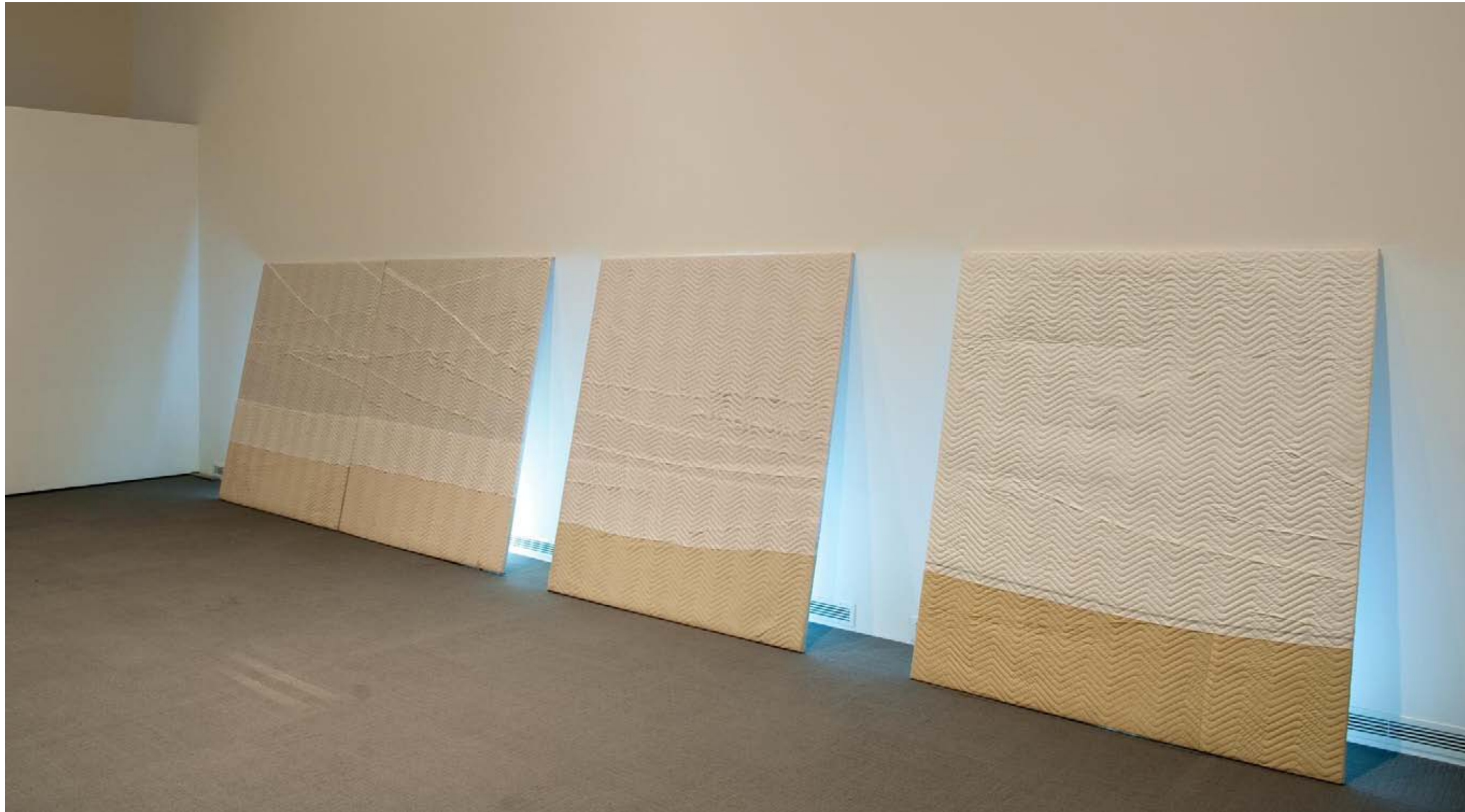
*Tapis* (details)



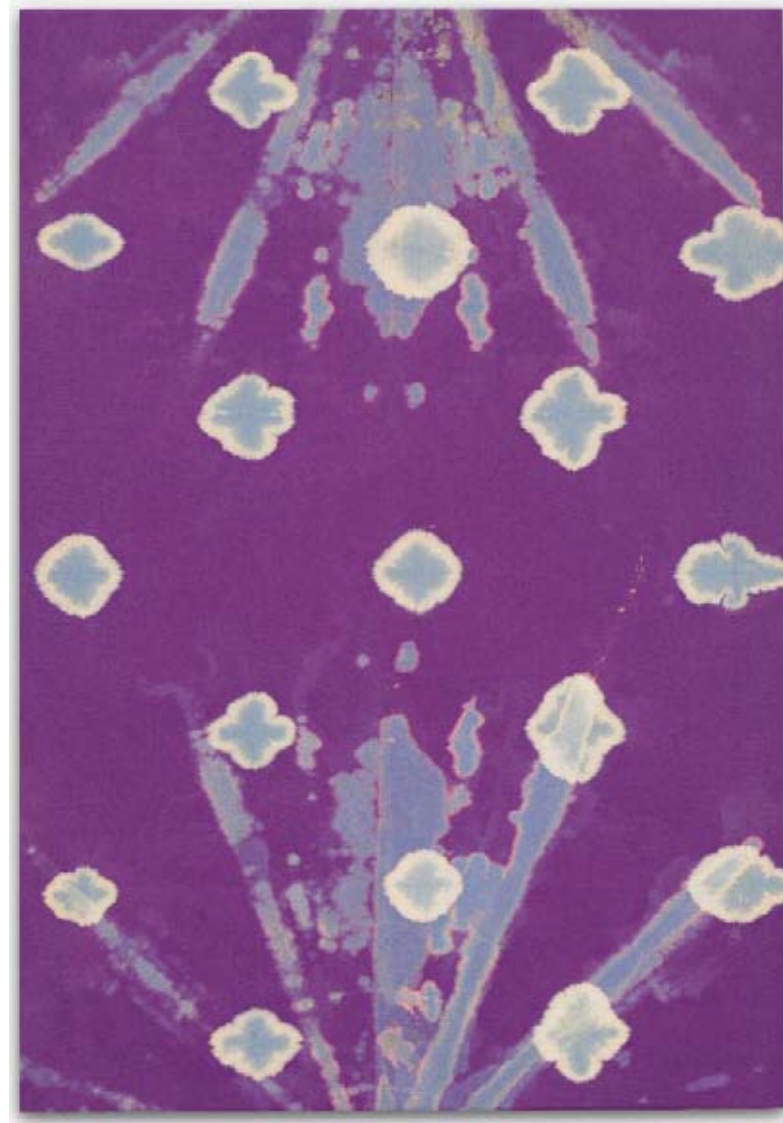
Sam Moyer  
*Untitled*, 2011, ink and bleach on canvas mounted to wood panel, 60 x 48 inches.  
Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York



Sam Moyer  
*Worry Rug 4*, 2009, IKEA rug, encaustic, 53 x 32½ inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York



Sam Moyer  
*Night Moves* (detail), 2009, moving blanket mounted to wood frame, six panels, each 66 x 60 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York



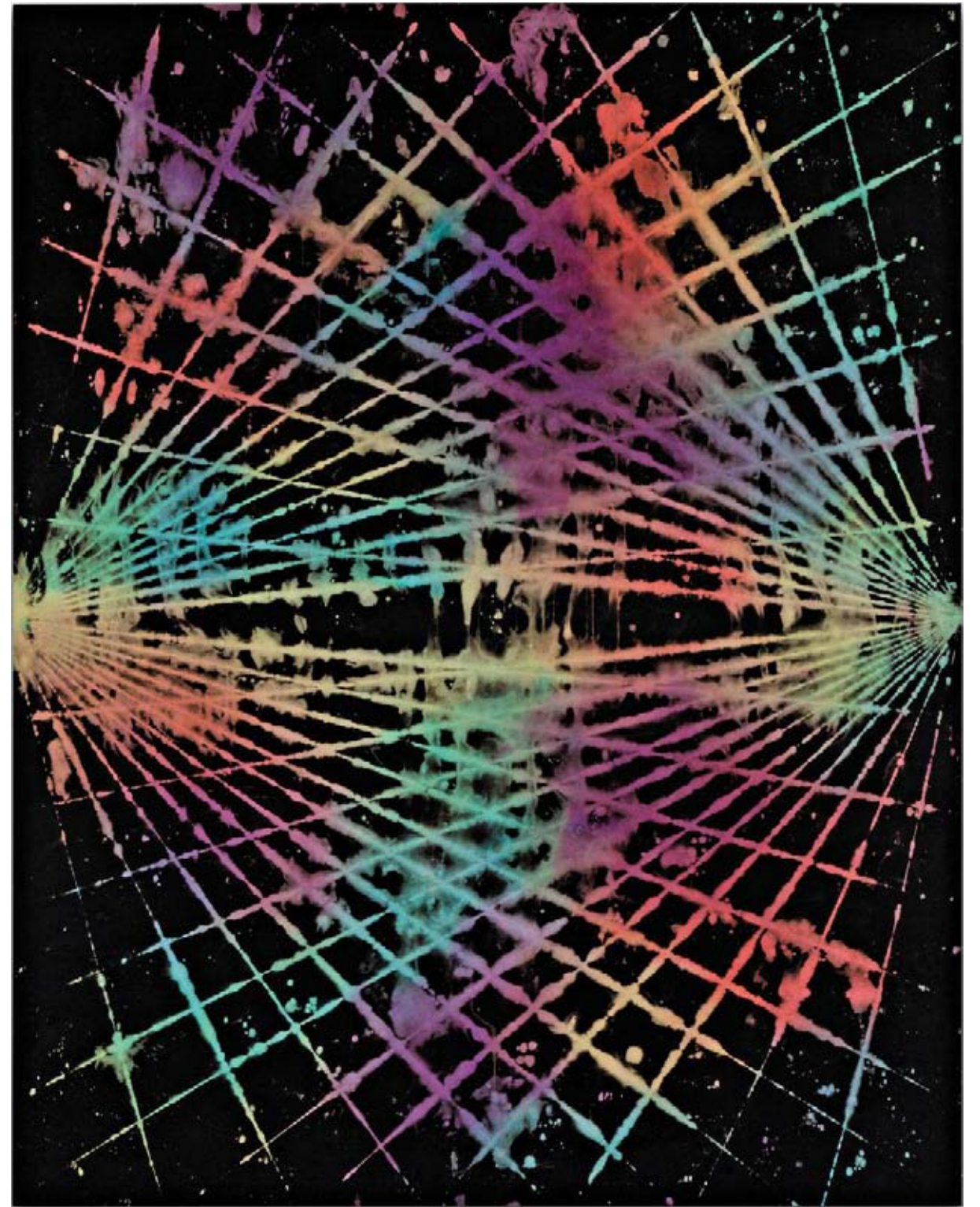
Anja Schwörer  
*Untitled*, 2010, bleach on cotton, 45¼ x 31½ inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

LEFT  
*Untitled*, 2010, bleach on canvas, 76 x 49 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York





Anja Schwörer  
*Untitled*, 2010, bleach on cotton, 47 x 39½ inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York



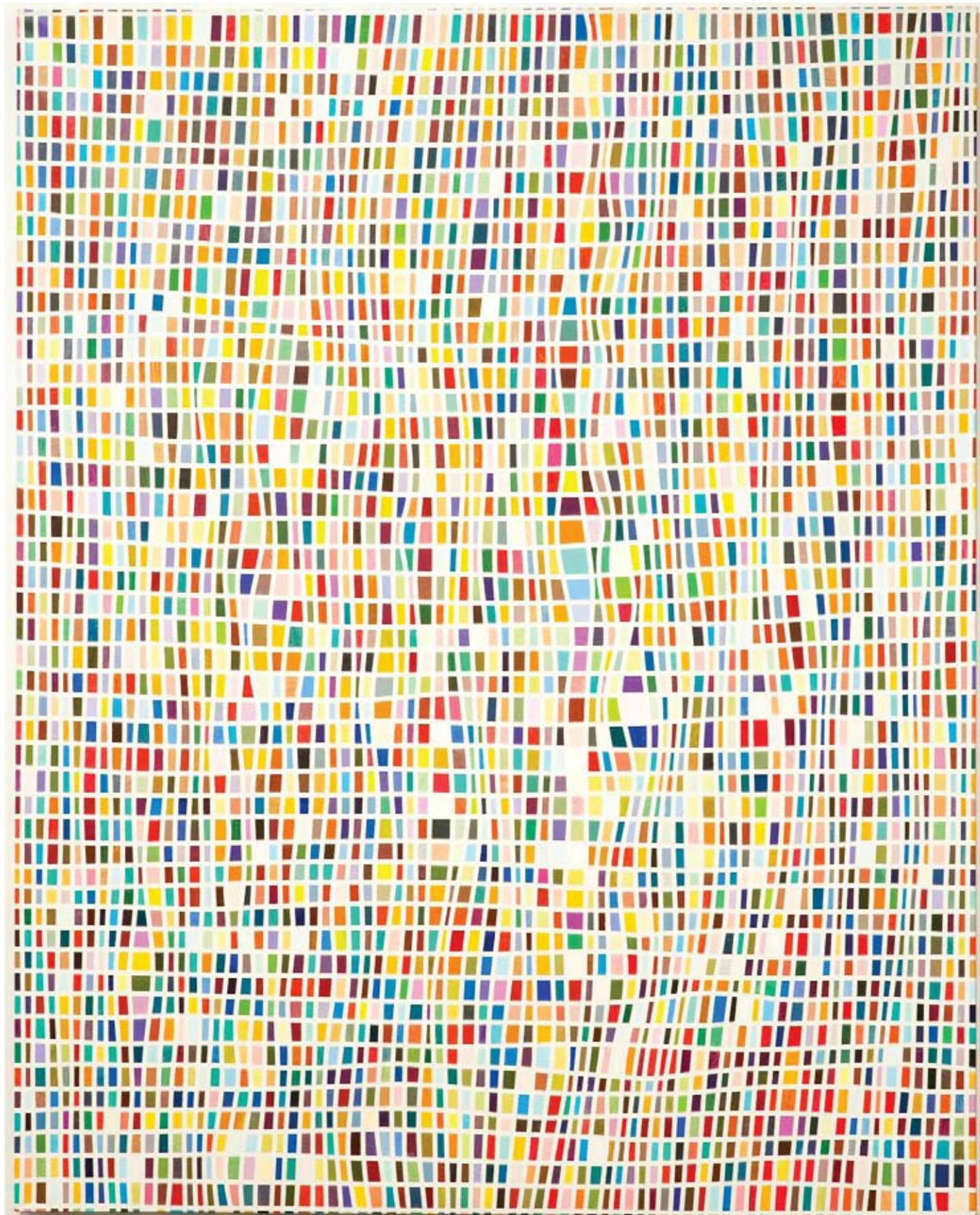
Anja Schwörer  
*Untitled*, 2010, bleached and dyed canvas, 74¼ x 59 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York





Melissa Thorne  
*Ranchstone Repeat* (detail), 2012, ink, graphite  
384 x 16 x 16 inches  
Courtesy of the artist





## material occupation

The artists represented in *Material Occupation* challenge the idea that abstraction is a rarified concept that bears little relation to everyday experience. Using a materials-based approach and tapping into the more decorative strains of Modernism, these artists explore the cultural associations inherent in prosaic materials and familiar patterns. They replace traditional art-making gestures with actions that are equated with craftwork or domestic labor, such as stitching, bleaching, mending, taping, folding, and tearing, to transform paper, thread, old and newly woven fabric, industrial tape, and other ordinary materials into poetic abstract forms. The decorative, the contemplative, the idiosyncratic, and the marginalized thus take precedence in work that proposes an alternative relationship to classic modernist abstraction. As they proceed, these artists apply the lessons of past innovation to the demands of the present with patience and care, their methods serving as the perfect antidote to unstable times.

Operating in the long shadows of canonical heavyweight movements from the early twentieth century, from Bauhaus and Constructivism to latter-century Minimalism and post-Minimalism, these artists are perhaps too astute (or too weary, or too wary) to go head-to-head with their antecedents. Instead they take a “use it or lose it” approach and make the legacy their own. To occupy oneself with hand labor—focused, simple, and often repetitive, but also concentrated, sustained, and idiosyncratic—reaffirms the position of the artist as a steady and prevailing force for positive action in the eye of the storm.

**Sam Moyer** uses accessible, quotidian materials such as bleach, plywood, and packing blankets in paintings and sculptures that both defy and embrace the legacy of minimalist abstraction. In a series of monochromatic wall-hung fabric sculptures titled *Worry Rugs*, Moyer begins with mechanically produced materials (found rags and fabric scraps, or inexpensive store-bought rugs) and transforms them through a process of ritualized undoing. She laboriously picks threads from their weave and unravels them to create subtle abstract patterns. This subtractive process undercuts the functional tradition of rug weaving and matches it with the frustration that often accompanies the daily routine of studio practice. Her encasement of the de-woven rugs in a black tar-like encaustic extends the metaphor into the realm of mourning.

To persist as a studio artist despite the hours in relative seclusion and circuitous, often self-reflexive research seems increasingly antithetical to contemporary life and prevailing trends in contemporary art practice. Yet Moyer picks away at her rugs and transforms them into something she can call her own. This approach conjures up a host of associations, including the textile industry, factory work, and mechanical vs. handmade production, and serves as a funnel for both anxiety and contemplation. By undoing what is already wrought, the work becomes a manifestation of the domestic and artistic loneliness inherent in hours of studio practice, an anxious object that speaks to the attempts to manage these feelings, as well

Caetano de Almeida  
*3825 Cores (3825 Colors)*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 59 x 47¼ inches  
Private collection

as a form of resistance to the speed of contemporary life. Mixed with a Penelope-like determination and hopefulness that the constancy of effort will yield return in the end, Moyer finds meaning in this narrative of unmaking.

Moyer applies a similar reductive approach to her bleach paintings. Their muted grayscale palette is achieved through a batik-like process of removal that merges bleach and ink with folded cloth, reinforcing its underlying structure. While these works are tied to the history of abstraction, they also stem from craft practices and domestic labor. As with her *Worry Rugs*, Moyer exploits simple techniques and the inherent properties of her chosen materials by merging both with the fabric's own materiality.

The installation *Night Moves* is comprised of fluorescent light fixtures and packing blankets stretched on wood frames. These variable components are arranged in response to the space they occupy. The stretched blankets, sewn together in variegated bands of color, lean against walls; the fluorescent lights emit a blue ambient light from behind—imagine a studio at night, long after the artist has left. Looming like ghosts of art history past, Moyer brings together these non-art materials to create a psychological space poised in anticipation of the artist's next move.

**Elana Herzog's** recent site-specific installations transform discarded household elements and fabric scraps into wholly new abstract forms that articulate the volume of the space they occupy. While welcoming the flash of recognition that her humble materials evoke, Herzog is most interested in how the process of abstraction sharpens awareness of the architectural and material properties inherent in everyday surroundings. In response to the University Art Museum's open multi-level space, Herzog presents a bifurcated structure that begins on the first floor and reemerges onto the second. Playing fast and loose with what she refers to as the "future/pastness" of the Museum's late-modernist architecture, she references stairs, chandeliers, and mobiles while never losing sight of sculpture's formal properties or of her tenuous relationship with Modernism and technological progress.

Embedded in Herzog's practice is the conflation of manual and manufactured labor. The discarded scraps that she works with have experienced something of the world; they have already migrated through culture and participated in a cycle of production, use, and exhaustion. She writes of them, "What once represented acquisition now comes to represent loss." Under her hand, these materials are transformed; the physical invades the abstract as she pulls apart, twists, sutures, and stretches her found materials to disrupt and alter their surfaces and original designs. As the materials become abstracted forms that only obliquely reference their original function, Herzog engages in the ongoing modernist dance from high to low and back again—an idea that is given visual form in the simultaneous upward and downward site lines of her *Material Occupation* installation.

As with other artists in the exhibition, Herzog conjures a host of associations through the making of her work. The Rube Goldberg-like installation embodies the inextricable relationship between labor and art production and calls into question how one occupies time and chooses materials. She acknowledges her ties to the commercial market; she turns to it for inspiration while resisting its implications as a commodifying, homogenizing force. She also examines artistic labor; a "why bother?" fatalism is coupled with a willful determination to make one's mark, stake one's claim. All becomes fair game under her directorship. Herzog's willful, freestanding structures fly in the face of modernist utopian ideals, yet a tenuous

relationship to Modernism remains as she offers up a challenging irreverence for its once-sacrosanct ideals.

German-born, New York-based artist **Marietta Hoferer's** wall drawings are anchored in the framework of the grid. Laid out in pencil, the grid serves as the armature for a range of systems and patterns she creates with transparent tape of varying size, texture, and translucency. Hoferer's white-on-white compositions fit squarely within a process-oriented minimalist continuum, but she makes no secret that her intricate patterns and surfaces ultimately share the same lineage as the design charts associated with such traditional handiwork as petit point, knitting, and carpet weaving.

*Tapis* (2011), an expansive four-paneled wall hanging, is a testament to Hoferer's exhaustive process and dogged determination. The repetitive, humble action of sticking down thousands of tiny tape squares and calibrating how light plays upon this newly created shimmering surface transforms dress into something with seemingly magical properties—perhaps a magic carpet, perhaps a force field. Hoferer's careful attention to pattern, texture, and stillness translates into a radical act that disrupts the formality and pictorial legacy of the grid by her unorthodox choice of material. Her relationship to the grid is both a measure of her tenacity to adhere to a given system and a vehicle by which she expands beyond its hegemonic hold on artists who work in the long shadows of modernist abstraction. Her patterns and allusions to weaving, tapestry, and needlework defy the modernist ideology: no longer does it surround the grid as a fixed, impenetrable, silencing, self-referential field. Instead, her monumental *Tapis* becomes a site for reverie, with poetic power embedded in its subtle ground.

San Francisco-based artist **Josh Faught** creates multi-media abstract works that combine a variety of traditional craft techniques such as weaving, crochet, knitting, macramé, and Indonesian ikat. His assemblages feature overlapping, loose-ended stripes of loom-woven fabric in tandem with domestic materials that include French manicure press-on nails, political pins, potpourri pies, spray paint, scrapbooking stickers, and sequins, all of which are casually mounted on makeshift stretchers. The fragile and open-ended nature of these constructions speaks to Faught's interest in an equally fluid dialogue surrounding theories of Modernism, the queer and feminist deployment of traditionally domestic crafts during the 1970s, and current gay politics.

An acutely wrought anxiety permeates the fibers of his cast-off tableaux. Invested in exploring personal sites of domestic dysfunction, Faught violates both high art and craft traditions by weaving together incompatible materials and techniques, all of which are united by their "low" status. Embedded in his work are skills that were honed early in childhood, at summer camp and at his grandmother's side. He claims to have learned to weave before he learned to draw or paint—a biographical aspect that locates his knowledge of craft in a time loaded with issues of identity construction. For Faught, replacing drawing and painting with weaving or knitting (in direct opposition to the skills he learned in art school) is a means to explore how queerness or queer desire can be visualized in material form. He borrows an expressive vernacular from the art fabric movement of the 1970s, when materials took on historical, emotional, and political resonance, and turns to this moment by appropriating its dated strategies as a way of coming to terms with ongoing inequities in the present. In a pointed violation, the high seriousness of modernist

abstraction is replaced by the unpretentious, humble tradition of craft.

Faught’s work speaks to the social values inherent in craft-based traditions. While the work feels as if it were made by a tentative, inexpert hand, its mastery lies in the cultivated fragility of its every weave and fiber.

German artist **Anja Schwörer**’s psychedelic canvases radiate abstract patterns that draw upon her strong interest in alchemy and heavy metal music. Using substrates of denim, velvet, and black canvas, she employs a reductive process of waxing, folding, and bleaching to create strong light and dark contrasts that are both expressive and raw, optically intense and formally elegant in their invocation of a beautiful cosmos gone awry. Forgoing traditional painting materials, she introduces a handmade element into her work that makes her cosmic fields seem earthbound.

Schwörer’s symmetrical, formalist, geometric compositions are made by batiking, bleaching, and tie-dyeing, processes that merge chance with highly considered compositional restraint. Her use of bleach serves as part of an ongoing experiment with the alchemical properties of an everyday solvent. Bleach can puddle and pull color from cloth in unexpected patterns and residual drips, but in the end it always conforms to the woven materiality of the fabric as resonant forms emerge from what has been deleted or pulled away. Morphed and manipulated, Schwörer’s “paintings” (because in the end, that is what they are) take on a quality of hallucinated space that stems from her affinity for “hippie-thinking.” Her use of black resonates with associations to absence, a void, darkness, the occult, the total absorption of all light rays.

Like other artists in *Material Occupation*, Schwörer’s interest in applying alternative techniques and unconventional materials is a means by which to distance the hand from traditional painting methods, all the while acknowledging the potency of abstract painting and its ongoing hold on the contemporary imagination.

São Paulo–based artist **Caetano de Almeida** creates optically charged, patterned abstract paintings inspired by the vibrant and mismatched weave of Bahian textiles commonly found in local markets. Following the traditions of Brazilian Modernism, he culls freely from American and European abstraction and renders remnants of tape, controlled drips of fluid acrylic, and networked lines of colored pencil into something distinctly Brazilian.

De Almeida draws on the language of twentieth-century abstraction while seeking inspiration in decidedly un-modernist places. He blurs the distinction between high and low in references that extend beyond the paintings’ gridded constructs to the hustle, haggling, and lively exchanges of the marketplace, to the cross-pollination of cultures, and to the intersections of Latin American and European Modernism. While these paintings represent a clearly defined link to the legacy of modernist painting, his geometric “pollution” paintings stem from a less hierarchical tradition. For these, de Almeida deftly arranges nineteenth-century shipbuilding stencils on paper so that their filigreed edges mimic floral patterns found in Victorian botanical prints. He then exposes the piece to the polluted air around his São Paulo studio. Over an extended period of time, contours and shadows emerge, tonal variations of pale, barely perceptible grayish-brown—a tangible visual form of the careful cultivation of dirty air. These layered abstractions link his work to the utopian experimentation of the avant-gardes of the 1920s and 30s, particularly

Moholy-Nagy’s photograms, which were created by placing flowers or ordinary objects directly on a special photographic paper and exposing the whole thing to natural or artificial light. After a time, the contours and shadows of the flowers left light surfaces on the dark background.

De Almeida’s deft combinations of pattern and materiality, present and past, nature and industry, commerce and art, speak to his broader concerns about colonization, the history of Western exploration, and how art and design migrate throughout culture.

**Melissa Thorne**’s recent works employ modest materials to interface with existing architectural structures. Based on her long-term fascination with interior textiles and wallpaper, these works address the patterned materials used as exterior skin for buildings. Using patterns found in her built environment—rock walls, concrete facades, modular siding—she makes site-specific wall paintings that amplify the tension between surface and structure. Painting directly on the wall with watercolor and ink, she creates delicate, meticulous patterns that simultaneously reference their everyday source and the complicated history of geometric abstraction.

For *Material Occupation*, Thorne time-travels through architectural design motifs in her dissection of a stonework pattern with very classical antecedents. She has painted a thirty-foot column in the Museum with a faux brick stonework pattern based on asphalt siding—itself an imitation. In researching regional building materials, she found that this siding was used extensively from the 1940s well into the early 60s. Popular because it resisted weathering and shattering, its brick and stone appearance also offered the “look” of timeless solidity. The siding came in a variety of subdued gray- and brown-toned palettes that were peppered with pastel accents and varied surface textures. Thorne chose the most colorful iteration for her painting—taupe, ochre, red, forest green, sky blue (an off-kilter de Stijl color scheme matched by a Baroque-like fusion of seemingly incompatible texture)—and, using a stencil, has combined mechanical and handmade systems in her careful deconstruction of the brick pattern. Thus her process fuses sleight-of-hand and conceptual conceit as she both exposes the underlying structure of the fake painted stonework and riffs off its similarities to the fixed pattern and structure of the modernist grid. The low-brow design solution plays off the Museum’s high modernist architecture, and the use of water-based paint contradicts the original function of the ersatz asphalt siding, replacing it with something ephemeral and easily removable—nothing timeless here, since the painted column will be repainted at the exhibition’s close.

Thorne’s unabashed enthusiasm for inexpensive design solutions and painterly surfaces probes deeper cultural phenomena as she renders the repetitive cycle of high/low migration into a singular statement. Her own material occupations loom large while calling into question the motivation and lineage that define the larger material world.

Brooklyn-based artist **Sarah Crowner**’s hard-edged geometric paintings are stitched together from pieces of canvas and linen. Using modernist abstract paintings as a template, Crowner reconfigures them into new forms with scissors, fabric, and an industrial sewing machine. Alluding to domestic labor, her carefully constructed compositions propose a wry challenge to the seriousness of familiar modernist tropes. From a distance, her paintings appear to be seamlessly distilled, hard-edged abstractions, but upon

closer inspection one sees roughly textured linen, painted canvas, and solid-colored cloth whose sewn seams are clearly visible. Piecing together through sewing also speaks to the purpose of that craft: sewing is an attempt to make things whole. Thus her choreographed manipulations of form and geometric transitions propose an expanded framework for her paintings, for as she draws on the language of twentieth-century abstraction, she violates it at the same time. Craft strategies replace the authorship of mark-making with a brush, challenging painting's historical preeminence over other forms of expression as well as the gendered concepts surrounding craft vs. high art.

Crowner's interest in early twentieth-century interdisciplinary avant-garde movements, in which artists moved freely between different practices, coupled with an interest in activating her paintings, has led her to explore theater, performance, and its surrounding environment. In her most recent sewn paintings, abstracted elements of the stage appear: opened curtains, footlights, stage flats that declare an anticipatory presence waiting for an undefined performance to occur. Recently Crowner fabricated an actual curtain that functions both as painting and theatrical backdrop for Robert Ashley's boldly unorthodox production of *Vidas Perfectas*, a re-imagining of his 1983 opera for television, *Perfect Lives*, in which a bank robbery, cocktail lounges, and love intersect in the American Midwest. Crowner's curtain sports an equally unorthodox constructivist palette of reds, blacks, and yellows—with shots of shocking pink.

What appear to be played-out art forms remain ripe and exciting sources of engagement for all the artists in *Material Occupation*. As these artists restore, reclaim, upend, and rebuild forgotten practices, they are forging a place for themselves in a continuum they are determined to make their own. In their embrace of abstraction and their conflation of canonical Modernism, the decorative, and hard work, they undertake the full-time occupation of constructing meaning out of materials.

Corinna Ripps Schaming  
Curator

## the political ecology of matter and thingly things

*But an orderliness that is too obvious cannot become meaningful in this superior sense that is art.*

— Anni Albers, *On Weaving*, 1965

*I always say that craft is exactly what you think it is—that is, if you have a definition that's not pretty close to the proverbial person on the street's, you are probably barking up the wrong tree. So, something like "knowing how to make something, through a detailed engagement with materials and process." Notice that doesn't include "by hand," nor does it presume that craft involves making something functional.*

— From an interview with Glenn Adamson in *Portlandart*, 2009

With basic articulation, Anni Albers concisely defines the muddled frontier that prevails between art and design. Yet extending Albers's conviction to differentiate painting and textiles, drawing and decoration, or assemblage and decoupage is not so neatly done in a contemporary art world that is fraught with ever-shifting value structures and material economies. Albers's plainness of language is further admirable when she makes the claim that "the organization of forms, their relatedness, their proportions, must have that quality of mystery that we know in nature."<sup>1</sup> Neither a metaphoric statement nor a theoretical one, it is a plain statement of belief.

Terry Eagleton tells us: "Nature is not a term one can easily nip behind. Once we have informed the Alpha Centaurian anthropologist that making music and feeling sad are just in our natures, there isn't much more we can tell her. But if she asks, 'But why?' she simply hasn't grasped the concept of nature."<sup>2</sup> Albers understands human nature. She is comfortable in her understanding of art and enthusiastically embraces an essentialist position of design. This implies that she accepts the fact that some things do not change, a position that most contemporary artists and thinkers profoundly distrust. The artists included in *Material Occupation*, however, are also largely essentialist, relying, for example, on the abstract structure of the grid or the literal framework of a warp and weft system. But within this foundation, both modern and postmodern modes of working are vigorously recognized: material fragments attach and dissolve platonic supports, the separation between high and low comes in and out of focus, moments of originality and authenticity are celebrated and then undone, all while an extraordinary weight on material manipulation and "thingliness" rises to the fore.

Giving "voice to a vitality intrinsic to materiality"<sup>3</sup> while acknowledging the laboring, social, and linguistic nature of human culture is the ontological core of Josh Faught's fabric and textile assemblages,

Elana Herzog's discarded scrap constructions, Sam Moyer's altered rugs, Anja Schwörer's bleached and dyed paintings, Melissa Thorne and Marietta Hoferer's wall installations, Caetano de Almeida's complex abstractions celebrating Bahian cloth, and Sarah Crouner's stitched geometric canvases. "I will try to give voice to a vitality intrinsic to materiality, in the process absolving matter from its long history of attachment to automatism or mechanism," avows Jane Bennett, her thesis firmly rooted in the introduction to her 2010 book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.<sup>4</sup> And it is in this proposition that *Material Occupation* coalesces a diversity of visual syntax and attitudes.

Eight years ago, Jerry Saltz floated "Termite Theory" as a way to discuss the "decorative obsessiveness... labor-intensive and manic" art production that incorporated "a crafty, psychedelic surrealism."<sup>5</sup> Much of the work he heralded was small-scale, colorful, flimsy, and cheap. The explanation for this collective attitude shift that materialized after 9/11, according to Saltz, was that "a generation of emerging artists appears to find the puffed-up professionalism and market-driven hustle of the late 1990s bogus, while the over-intellectualization of some of the art of the same period strikes them as institutional or simply over."<sup>6</sup> What is best with respect to Saltz's criticism is that he thinks on his feet and is not afraid of putting into print loosely formed observations. The fact that he didn't see this aesthetic strategy as a "market-driven hustle" underscores his romantic predilection for an authentic and genuine imagination.

What is noteworthy about the positions staked out by the artists in *Material Occupation* is that they have embedded critical contextual positions regarding shifting value structures in the contemporary art apparatus, while at the same time embraced historical debates between the visual arts and crafts. If Saltz's claim that his "hive" of termites worked to "ingest and destroy simultaneously" as a strategy for survival, I would suggest that the artists comprising *Material Occupation*, working in that ill-defined space between art, craft, and design, practice because there is still work to be done on critical, formal, and material fronts. They are not driven by entrepreneurial concerns, but instead seek industrious and evaluative objectives. And specifically in the work of Sam Moyer, Josh Faught, Anja Schwörer, and Elana Herzog, they ingest modernist positions while simultaneously disrupting end goals, boundaries, and issues of originality and authorship.

Dr. Glenn Adamson, historian and theorist of craft and design, has made a notable career of mapping craft's power structures primarily located in the economic and political manifestations of language. In an interview, he says: "Skilled practitioners make innovation possible in all fields of making, from the traditional crafts to industry, science, film, and fine art. Though we may not subscribe to the individualistic model that animated studio craft, we must hold onto the movement's basic insight: that craft humanizes this wide world of production. Treating it lightly will result in a diminishment of its cultural contributions."<sup>7</sup> Locating craft's cultural authorities, as well as articulating its limitations, is important work. However, it is not the driving force behind the work comprising *Material Occupation* simply because it seamlessly synthesizes the tropes of craft with painting, drawing, and sculpture. Well aware of Adamson's work and the critical theories that undergird craft and material studies graduate programs throughout the academic world, the artists here keep this discourse at the periphery of their practice.

Art world trends, such as Saltz's Termite Theory, or current movements in painting—for example, provisional abstraction and performative painting practices—don't accurately summarize a position for this group of material-oriented artists. And if academic research and craft theory are relegated to critical subtexts, then what is primary about these artists' attraction to labor, material, and formal invention? Again, regardless of the varied conceptual facets contouring their individual practices, it is the acknowledgement of materials and the "thingly" effect that profoundly announces itself as primary. "It is never we who affirm or deny something of a thing; it is the thing itself that affirms or denies something of itself in us."<sup>8</sup> It is the choreographing of things into other things that is at stake in *Material Occupation*.

Continual motion is also a principled element in the work. Somewhat paradoxically, the heavy reference to and employment of fabric suggests an inclination toward movement, flexibility, folding, and wrapping instead of an emphasis on the labor rooted in the actual making of these textiles. And although much of the work in the exhibition occupies the wall in the same way traditional artwork does, the material vocabulary of these works implies movement, time, and adaptability: a networked system of found materials, craft techniques, and artist gestures. These economies and networks parallel the characteristics of the everyday. As manual labor becomes more abstract, materials and their affecting conditions become the focal point of materiality in cultural production. In the past, material-based and craft-oriented work was defined by concepts of work, degrees of originality, and formal invention. The artists in this exhibition keep these concepts in play, but it is their understanding of material effect, and their essential belief in the transcending nature of human endeavor, that give uncanny power to their works.

"A work of art, we know, can be made of sand or sound, of feathers or flowers, as much as of marble or gold. Any material, any working procedure, and any method of production, manual or industrial, can serve an end that may be art,"<sup>9</sup> claims Albers. The eight artists comprising *Material Occupation* have a deeper and more complex understanding of what this claim means than most contemporary artists. After all, crochet fragments, IKEA rugs, toilet paper, yarn, and bleach rarely enter the artist's studio as medium.

Michelle Grabner

*Michelle Grabner is an artist and writer who lives and works in Oak Park, Illinois and Waupaca County, Wisconsin. She is a professor and the chair of Painting and Drawing at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Grabner and her husband, Brad Killam, run The Suburban (thesuburban.org) in Oak Park and The Poor Farm (poorfarmexperiment.org) in Little Wolf, Wisconsin. She is represented by Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago; MINUS SPACE, Brooklyn; and Rocket, London.*

<sup>1</sup> Albers, Anni. *On Weaving*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1965, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*. New York: Basic Books, 2003, p. 192.

<sup>3</sup> Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Saltz, Jerry. "Termite Theory," *Artnet*, June 23, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Rauch, Alex. "An Interview with Glenn Adamson," *Portlandart*, February 17, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Spinoza, Baruch. *Short Treatise: On God, Man, and His Well-Being*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1958.

<sup>9</sup> Albers. *On Weaving*, p. 72.





## artist biographies

### **Caetano de Almeida**

Born in 1964 in Campinas, Brazil. Lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil.

Selected solo exhibitions include *Caetano de Almeida* at Eleven Rivington in New York City (2011 and 2009); *Caetano de Almeida* at Galeria Luisa Strina in São Paulo, Brazil (2009); *Borda* at Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2007); and *Cafofô* at Galeria Distrito Cuatro in Madrid, Spain (2007). Selected group exhibitions include *Law of the Jungle* at Lehmann Maupin in New York City (2010); *One Loses One's Classics* at White Flag Projects in St. Louis, Missouri (2009); and *25 Artistas Pintura Escultura Desenho* at Galeria Anna Maria Niemeyer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2006).

De Almeida received an M.F.A. from the School of Communication and Arts, University of São Paulo in São Paulo, Brazil.

### **Sarah Crowner**

Born in 1974 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Lives and works in New York City.

Selected solo exhibitions include Galerie Nordenhake in Stockholm, Sweden (2012); *Ballet Plastique* at Catherine Bastide in Brussels, Belgium (2011); *Zig Zags and Curves* at Helena Papodopolous in Athens, Greece (2011); *Acrobat* at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York City (2011); and *Handbuilt Vessels* at Nice + Fit Gallery in Berlin, Germany (2008). Selected group exhibitions include *WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THERE IS CURRENTLY NO SPACE OR PLACE FOR ABSTRACT PAINTING* at Martos Gallery in New York City (2011); *New Shadow Old Legs* at Eleven Rivington in New York City (2011); *Creeds, Colors and Combinations* at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York City (2011); *Owl Stretching Time* at Galerie Nordenhake in Berlin, Germany (2010); and *2010 Whitney Biennial* at The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City (2010).

Crowner received an M.F.A. from Hunter College, City University of New York in New York City.

Sarah Crowner  
*Curtains (Vidas Perfectas)* (detail), 2011, fabric paint on linen,  
sewn linen, 8½ feet x 20–24 feet wide  
Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

**Josh Faught**

Born in 1979 in St. Louis, Missouri. Lives and works in San Francisco, California.

Selected solo and two-person exhibitions include *Josh Faught and William J. O'Brien* at Lisa Cooley Fine Art in New York City (2011); *While the Light Lasts* at Lisa Cooley Fine Art in New York City (2010); and *Josh Faught: 2009 Betty Bowen Award Winner* at Seattle Art Museum in Seattle, Washington (2009). Selected group exhibitions include *Painting Expanded* at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York City (2011); *The Craft* at Lehmann College Art Gallery in New York City (2010); *Call and Response* at Portland Museum of Contemporary Craft in Portland, Oregon (2009); and *The Horror Show* at Chicago Arts Gallery in Chicago, Illinois (2008).

Faught received an M.F.A. from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in Chicago, Illinois.

**Elana Herzog**

Born in 1954. Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Selected solo exhibitions include *Into the Fray* at LMAKprojects in New York City (2011); *The Elephant in the Room* at New/Now Gallery, New Britain Museum of American Art in New Britain, Connecticut (2010); *Dewarped and Unweft* at Daum Museum in Dedalia, Missouri (2009); and *Plaid* at Smack Mellon in Brooklyn, New York (2007). Selected group exhibitions include *B19* at Humanities Building, Long Island University in Brooklyn, New York (2012); *Extended Drawing* at Tegnerforbundet in Oslo, Norway (2011); *The Jewel Thief* at the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery in Saratoga Springs, New York (2010); *Apparently Invisible* at The Drawing Center in New York City (2009); and *Motion Blur* at Gustavsbergs Konsthalle in Gustavsbergs, Sweden (2009).

Herzog received an M.F.A. from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University in Alfred, New York.

**Marietta Hoferer**

Born in 1962 in Hausach, Germany. Currently lives and works in New York City and Vermont.

Selected solo and two-person exhibitions include *Divergent Affinities* at Wexler Gallery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2011); *Drawings* at Hosfelt Gallery in San Francisco, California (2010); *Coptic Light* at Smack Mellon in Brooklyn, New York (2010); and *ART Karlsruhe* at KunstBüroBerlin in Karlsruhe, Germany (2009). Selected group exhibitions include *Annual Extravaganza* at Sideshow Gallery in Brooklyn, New York (2012); *Textility* at Visual Arts Center of New Jersey in Summit, New Jersey (2012); *The White Show Part Two* at Pittsburgh Center for the Arts in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2012); *Extended Drawing* at Tegnerforbundet in Oslo, Norway (2011); *The White Show* at Clarion University Art Gallery in Clarion, Pennsylvania (2011); and *Black and White* at Metaphor Contemporary Art in Brooklyn, New York (2010).

Hoferer received an M.F.A. from the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin, Germany.

**Sam Moyer**

Born in 1983 in Chicago, Illinois. Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Selected solo exhibitions include *Shape Shifters* at Rachel Uffner Gallery in New York City (2010); *In the Offing* at Max Hans Daniel in Berlin, Germany (2009); and *Night Moves* at Cleopatra's in Brooklyn, New York (2008). Selected group exhibitions include *Textility* at Visual Arts Center of New Jersey in Summit, New Jersey (2012); *Washed Up and Bleached Out* at Galerie Tom Christoffersen in Copenhagen, Denmark (2012); *New Perspectives* at Brand New Gallery in Milan, Italy (2012); "... " at The Hole in New York City (2011); *Painting Extended* at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York City (2011); *Greater New York* at P.S.1 in Queens, New York (2010); *Transfer Function* at ZeiherSmith Gallery in New York City (2010); *Gruppenausstellung* at Auto Center in Berlin, Germany (2009); and *If the Dogs Are Barking* at Artists Space in New York City (2009).

Moyer received an M.F.A. from Yale School of Art in New Haven, Connecticut.

## **Anja Schwörer**

Born in 1971 in Kandel, Germany. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

Selected solo and two-person exhibitions include *Anja Schwörer* at Fourteen30 Contemporary in Portland, Oregon (2011); *Le Pli* at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York City (2010); *Anja Schwörer and Wolfgang Fladl* at Galerie Reinhard Hauff in Stuttgart, Germany (2007); and *Anja Schwörer* at Anderson's Contemporary in Copenhagen, Denmark. Selected group exhibitions include *WE REGRET TO INFORM YOU THERE IS CURRENTLY NO SPACE OR PLACE FOR ABSTRACT PAINTING* at Martos Gallery in New York City (2011); *All That Is Unseen* at Allan Nederpelt in Brooklyn, New York (2011); *Cave Painting* at PSM Gallery in Berlin, Germany (2009); and *Which Way Berlin-LA* at Pharmaka in Los Angeles, California (2008).

Schwörer studied at the National Academy of the Forming Arts in Karlsruhe, Germany.

## **Melissa Thorne**

Born in 1970 in Tallahassee, Florida. Lives and works in Troy, New York.

Selected solo exhibitions include *ROCKSLIDE ROCKSOLID* at Devin Borden/Hiram Butler Gallery and at Optical Project, both in Houston, Texas (2010), and *A Partial Index of Improvements* at Devin Borden/Hiram Butler Gallery in Houston, Texas (2008). Selected group exhibitions include *Synthetic Supports: Plastic Is the New Paper* at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, Texas (2011); *Site as Symbol* curated by Survey West Collaborative at FOCA in Los Angeles, California (2011); *A Machine Field Guide to LACMA* at Los Angeles County Museum of Art in Los Angeles, California (2008); and *Art Brussels* with Galerie Schmidt Maczollek in Brussels, Belgium (2008). In addition to her studio practice, Thorne performs and records with the band Fol Chen.

Thorne received an M.F.A. at California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California.

## exhibition checklist

### **Caetano de Almeida**

*Eliseos*, 2010

Acrylic on canvas

86½ x 67 inches

Charlotte and Bill Ford Collection

*Hippeastrum Hybridum*, 2010

Pollution on paper

24 x 18 inches

Courtesy of the artist and

Eleven Rivington, New York

*Tulbaghia Violacea*, 2010

Pollution on paper

24 x 18 inches

Courtesy of the artist and

Eleven Rivington, New York

*Sete Planetas*, 2009

Acrylic on canvas

47¼ x 59 inches

Courtesy of the artist and

Eleven Rivington, New York

*3825 Cores (3825 Colors)*, 2008

Acrylic on canvas

59 x 47¼ inches

Private collection

### **Sarah Crowner**

*Curtains (Vidas Perfectas)*, 2011

Fabric paint on linen, sewn linen

8½ feet x 20–24 feet wide

Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle

Beauchene Gallery, New York

*Untitled*, 2011

Gouache on sewn canvas

Diptych: each panel 58 x 36 inches

Private collection

*Untitled*, 2011

Gouache on sewn canvas

58 x 36 inches

Collection of Dr. Dana Ardi

### **Josh Faught**

*Rules to Party Play (#7)*, 2010

Hand-bleached crocheted and

woven hemp, wool, spray paint,

scrapbooking letters on linen

70 x 50 inches

Courtesy of the artist and

Lisa Cooley Fine Art, New York

*How to Beat the High Cost of Living*, 2009

Hand-woven cotton, nail polish, toilet paper, silk flowers, indigo, sequins, ink

92 x 72 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Lisa Cooley Fine Art, New York

*Triage*, 2009

Hemp, nail polish, spray paint, indigo, logwood, toilet paper, pins, books, plaster, yarn, handmade wooden sign, denim, gloves

80 x 120 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Lisa Cooley Fine Art, New York

### **Elana Herzog**

*Untitled*, 2012

Site-specific installation on two floors, wood, hardware, fabric, metal staples, painting

34 x 7 x 6 feet

Courtesy of the artist

### **Marietta Hoferer**

*Tapis*, 2012

Tape and pencil on paper

124 x 240 inches (four panels)

Courtesy of the artist

*Big C\_4*, 2010

Tape and pencil on paper

60 x 60 inches

Courtesy of the artist

*Big C\_5*, 2010

Tape and pencil on paper

60 x 60 inches

Courtesy of the artist

*Big C\_8*, 2010

Tape and pencil on paper

60 x 60 inches

Courtesy of the artist

*Big C\_9*, 2011

Tape and pencil on paper

60 x 60 inches

Courtesy of the artist

### **Sam Moyer**

*Untitled*, 2011

Ink and bleach on canvas mounted to wood panel

60 x 48 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York

*Untitled*, 2011

Ink and bleach on canvas mounted to wood panel

60 x 48 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York

*Night Moves*, 2009

Moving blanket mounted to wood frame

Six panels, each 66 x 60 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York

*Worry Rug 1*, 2009

IKEA rug, encaustic

53 x 32½ inches

Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York

*Worry Rug 3*, 2009

IKEA rug, encaustic

53 x 32½ inches

Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York

*Worry Rug 4*, 2009

IKEA rug, encaustic

53 x 32½ inches

Courtesy of the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York

### **Anja Schwörer**

*Untitled*, 2011

Bleach on cotton

39½ x 32 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

*Untitled*, 2010

Bleach on cotton

45¼ x 31½ inches

Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

*Untitled*, 2010

Bleach on canvas

47 x 39½ inches

Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

*Untitled*, 2010

Bleach on canvas

76 x 49 inches

Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

*Untitled*, 2005

Bleached and dyed canvas

74¾ x 59 inches (unstretched)

Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

### **Melissa Thorne**

*Ranchstone Repeat*, 2012

Ink, graphite

384 x 16 x 16 inches

Courtesy of the artist

*Material Occupation*

February 7 – April 7, 2012

University Art Museum

University at Albany

State University of New York

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2012931010

ISBN: 9780910763424

Catalogue Designer: Zheng Hu

Editor: Jeanne Finley

Photography: Gary David Gold Photography; Ryan Parr; Darcie Abbatiello

Printer: New York Press & Graphics, Albany, New York

Text set in Monotype Gill San Book® on Endurance Silk 100lb text and 130lb cover

Museum Staff:

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The exhibition, catalogue, and related programming are supported by the Office of the President, Office of the Provost, The University at Albany Foundation, the Center for Jewish Studies, University Auxiliary Services (UAS), Holiday Inn Express (Western Avenue, Albany), and the Ellsworth Kelly Foundation.



Lenders to the exhibition:

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Eleven Rivington, New York

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Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York

