



‘Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.’

Walter Benjamin
The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1936)

As the pandemic unfolded, our world view inadvertently shifted from the physical to the virtual. Our loved ones and colleagues were rendered to the maximum degree of pixel density our devices could handle; we became our front-cameras. The tradition of illusion in art shifted into our palms and we were now the illusion; every online image a masterpiece of *trompe l’oeil* (deceives the eye).

Of course, well before the pandemic, we willingly became devoted subjects of surveillance capitalism, embracing a marked escalation in technological addiction framed by a backdrop of environmental and economic catastrophe. The subsequent governmentally and socially enforced separation only served to underscore our late-capitalist mentalities: we are alone, but technology can save us. Accepting the pandemic as our final, complete baptismal immersion into hyperreality (in case there were any specks of reality still lingering), one recalls the French philosopher Guy Debord’s pithy 1967 ‘Society of the Spectacle’ portending, “the spectacle reunites the separate, but reunites it as separate.”

Surveillance capitalism, to underscore, is an economic system focused on the commodification of personal data with the express purpose of generating profit. Baudrillard defines hyperreality as “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreality”. Reality is no longer discernible as we live in our blessed, optimised, panopticon lives. We’ve exchanged our natural personhood to become branded commodities emancipated from the shackles of history, free to curate our personal newsfeeds with maximum algorithmic effect. At the same time, we are ironically shackled indelibly to our own personal histories as every moment is recorded with or without our consent. Time and space, the two constants, are no longer that constant.

‘Virtual gaze’ has been created with these ideas in mind. The screen is the muse: both its contents and its surface. Each work ruminates on the virtual world through the mediums of painting and sculpture. The works are formal studies into material properties of what comprises a painting or sculpture (for example paint, canvas or stretcher bars) underscoring them as physical objects and therefore exploring their verisimilitude,

their *reality versus virtuality*. They are not images to scroll past, they are paintings. The sparseness of the works disrupt a traditional reading of art - and digital images - where subtly of texture and materiality become vehicles for meaning. Narrative can be interpreted through material, through perception and light, through the sharing of a unique space and time between human and work.

The French painter Charles Lapicque said that the creative act should offer as much surprise as life itself. Silk obscures and enhances, offering a tech-esque shimmer and obfuscation. Heavily worked metal sits alongside natural linen beside raw rock, an orgy of cavelike primitivism and sophisticated mechanically-produced synthetic material. The imperfect stitch and the few visible marks become focal points and exist almost as accidents: their existence linger as human question marks, as ontological smudges.


Artworks are sometimes arranged as a screen may be, constructed from arranged pixels. The composition for the work, ‘Situating our dreams’, was taken from a composition algorithm generator commissioned for and made by a coder in Ukraine. ‘#FFF3D3’ is a combination of studies translating a digital colour (the hex value of the title) into panels using a variety of media and surfaces, interpreting the colour at different times of the day and in different lights. ‘A primal condition’ was created through seeping colour through the reverse of the canvas, using the texture of the paint and material to dictate appearance. Metal works evoke the industrial nature of the screen, but at the same time contradict this perfection through their organic, vulnerable makeup.

Ironically the JPGs of ‘Virtual gaze’ will become the end product in the lifecycle of the works and will be the way the works will be largely viewed and remembered, reproduced any number of times. The philosopher Walter Benjamin said that technology drove a shift from art as something of contemplation to that of distraction because of its reproducibility. Technology directly impacts sense and perception, two factors which ultimately affect “humanity’s entire mode of existence”. In a world where we are the product, where we are endlessly reproduced in the hyperreal, you might wonder what Benjamin would say about humanity’s current mode of existence.

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Morgan Stokes is an emerging artist based in Sydney. ‘Virtual gaze’ is his second solo show with Curatorial+Co. In 2019 he completed a four-month residency in Berlin followed by a year long practice in Germany. He holds a Master of Design from UNSW. His works can be found in private collections across Australia, the USA, Germany and around the world.





PAINTINGS



Situating our dreams (2022)
Oil and acrylic on stitched linen, canvas and fabric, Tasmanian Oak frame
203cm H x 153cm W x 5.5cm D
\$7200 Framed



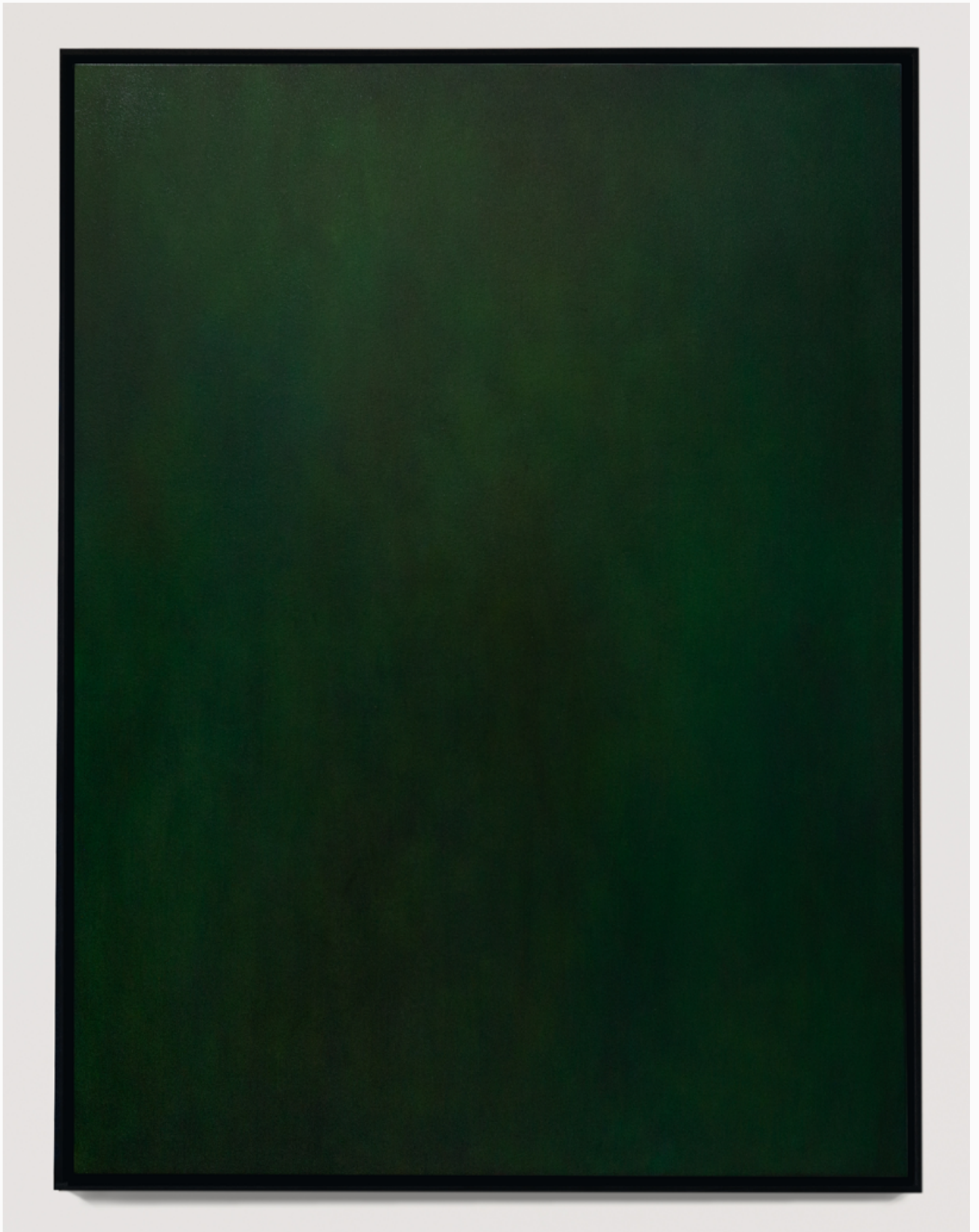
A primal condition (2021)
Acrylic on stitched canvas, Tasmanian Oak frame
163cm H x 123cm W x 5.5cm D
\$4900 Framed



Pride and reason (2021)
Acrylic and bleach on stitched hessian, Tasmanian Oak frame
163cm H x 123cm W x 5.5cm D
\$4900 Framed



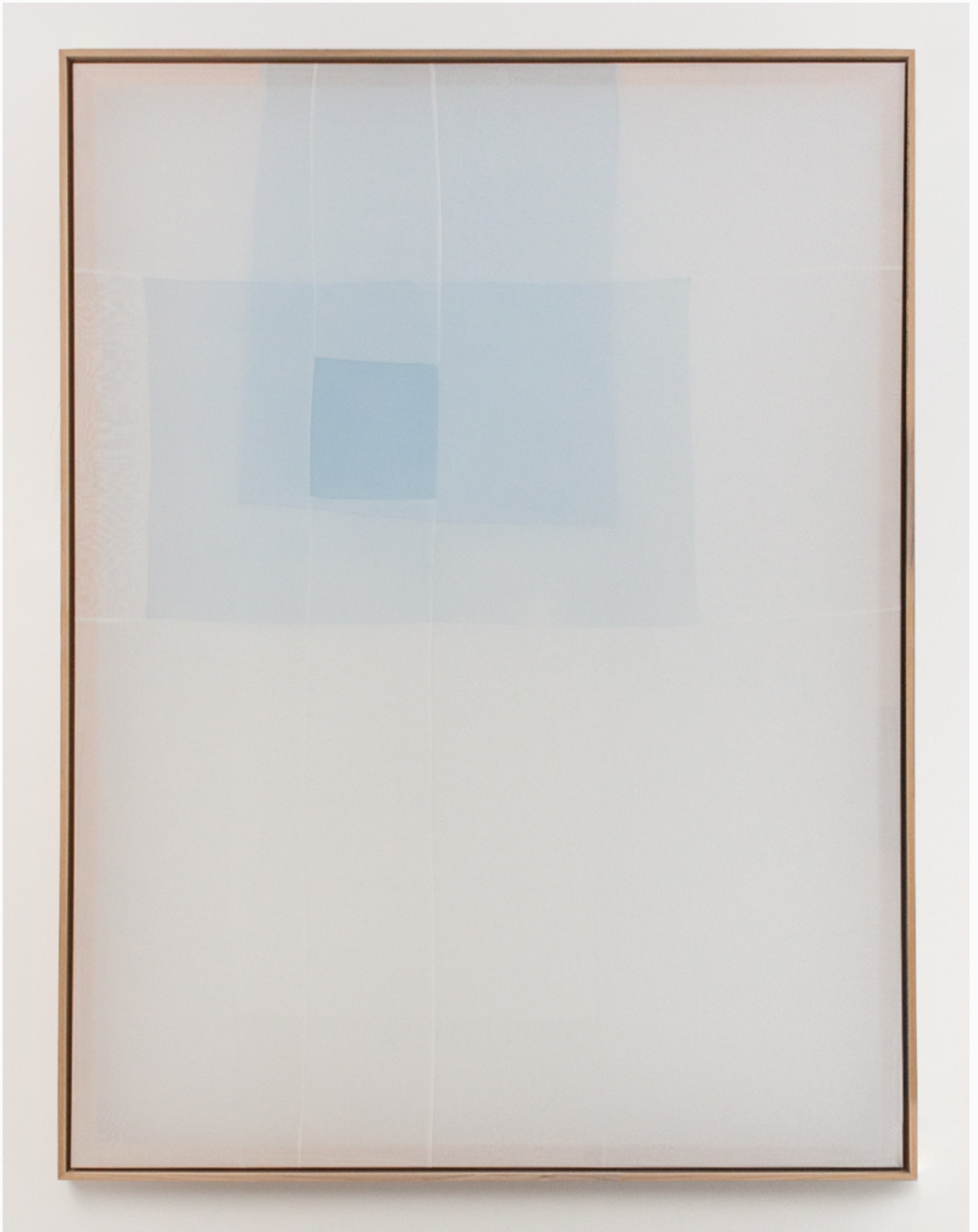
RGB (2022)
Oil on canvas, Tasmanian Oak frame with shou sugi ban finish
163cm H x 123cm W x 5.5cm D
\$4900 Framed



RGB 2 (2022)
Oil on canvas, Tasmanian Oak frame with shou sugi ban finish
163cm H x 123cm W x 5.5cm D
\$4900 Framed



Tenuousness of memory 1 (2021)
Stitched silk organza and polyester organza, Tasmanian Oak frame
153cm H x 116cm W x 5.5cm D
\$4400 Framed



Tenuousness of memory 2 (2022)

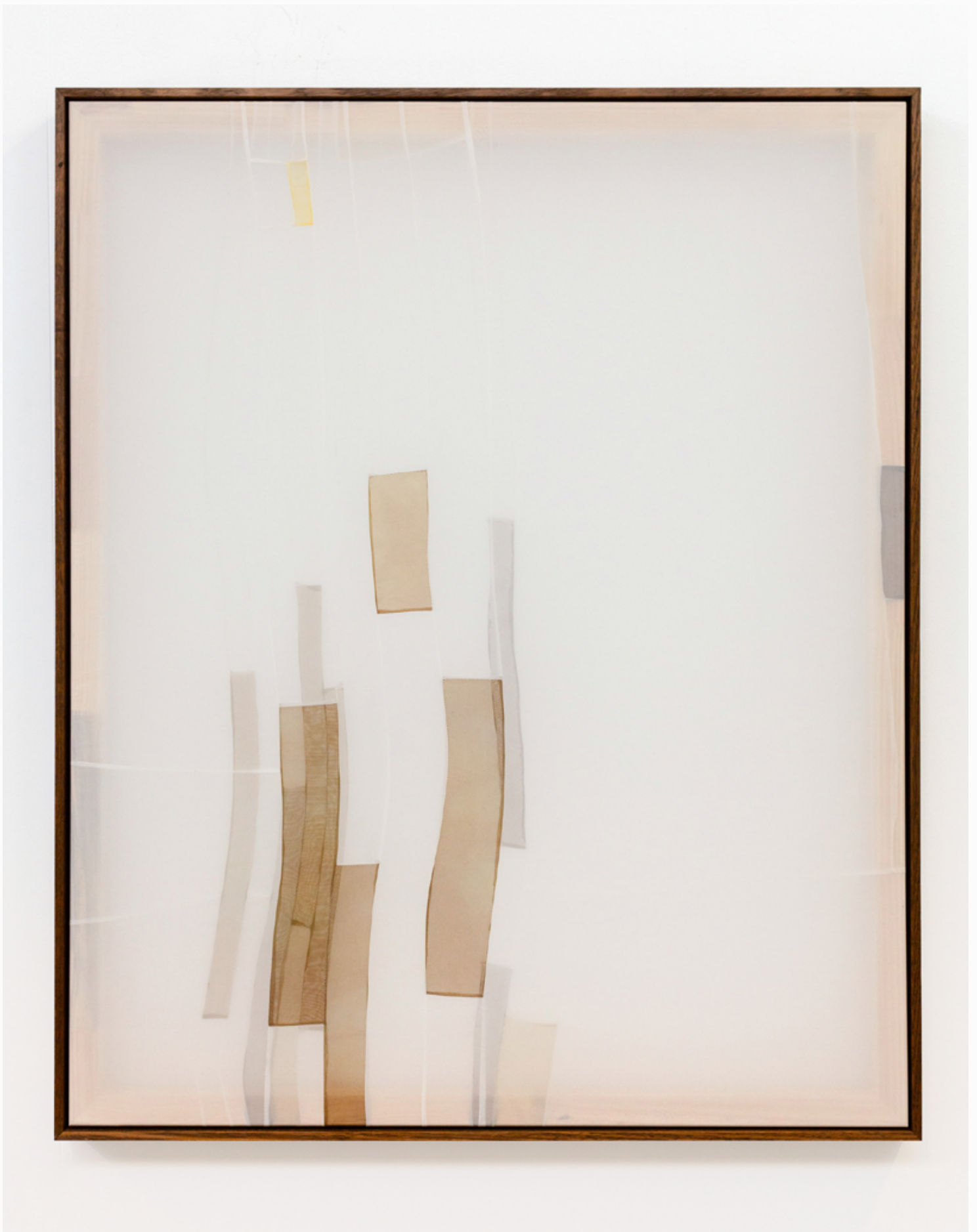
Dye and acrylic on stitched silk organza and polyester organza, Tasmanian Oak frame

153cm H x 116cm W x 5.5cm D

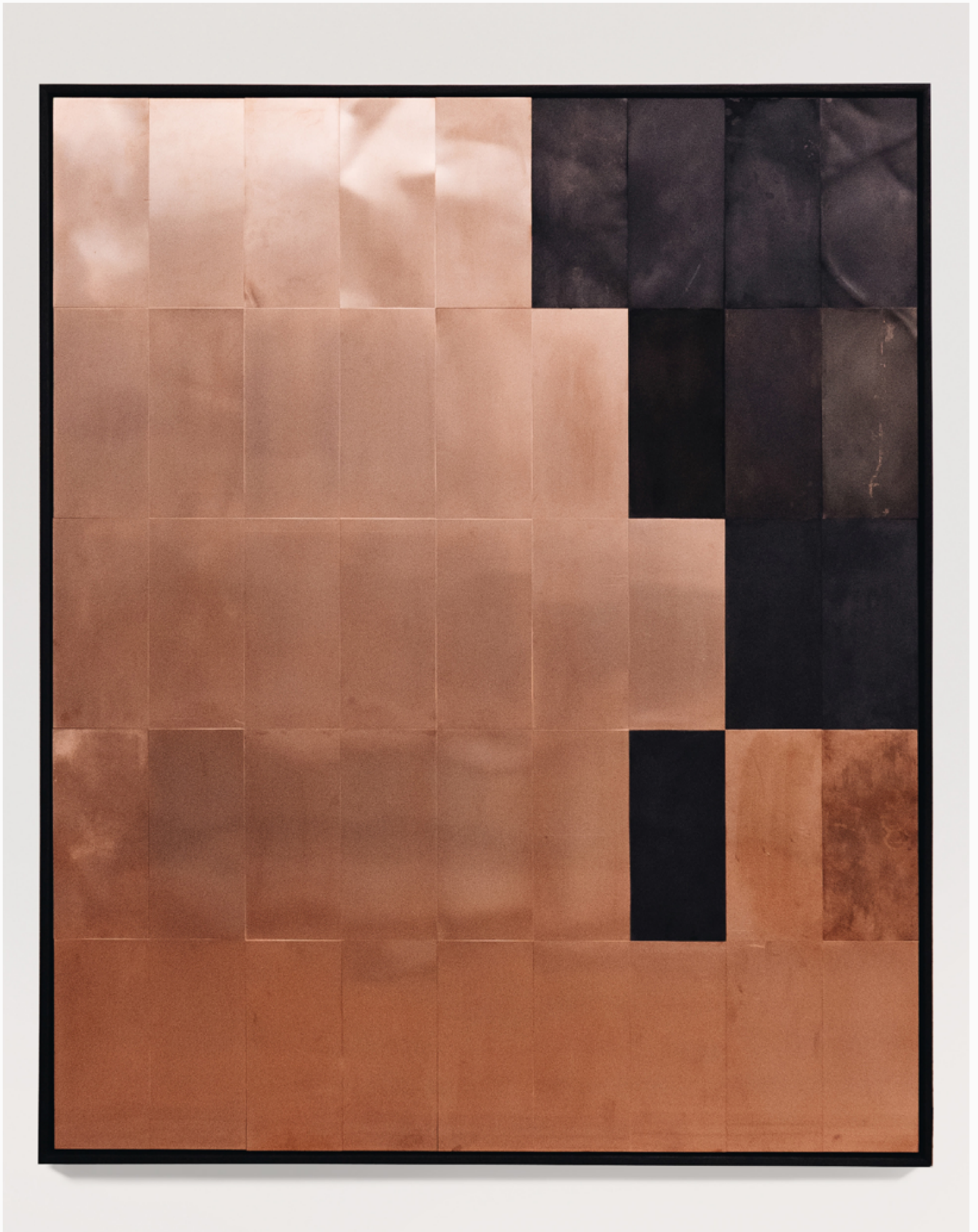
\$4400 Framed



#FFF3D3 (*Off-hex painting 2*) (2021)
Oil, acrylic and watercolour on stitched canvas, Tasmanian Oak frame
153cm H x 116cm W x 5.5cm D
\$4400 Framed



Threshold of being (2022)
Dye and acrylic on stitched silk organza and polyester organza, Tasmanian Oak frame
113cm H x 93cm W x 5.5cm D
\$3200 Framed



True and false (2021)

Patina on copper (includes copper maintenance tools), Tasmanian Oak frame with shou sugi ban finish
113cm H x 93cm W x 5.5cm D
\$4800 Framed



The primitivity of the imagination (2021)
Anodised aluminium panel, Tasmanian Oak frame with shou sugi ban finish
58.5cm H x 44.5cm W x 5.5cm D
\$800 Framed



Lonely painting (2021)
Dye on stitched silk organza and polyester organza, Tasmanian Oak frame
58cm H x 53.5cm W x 5.5cm D
\$900 Framed

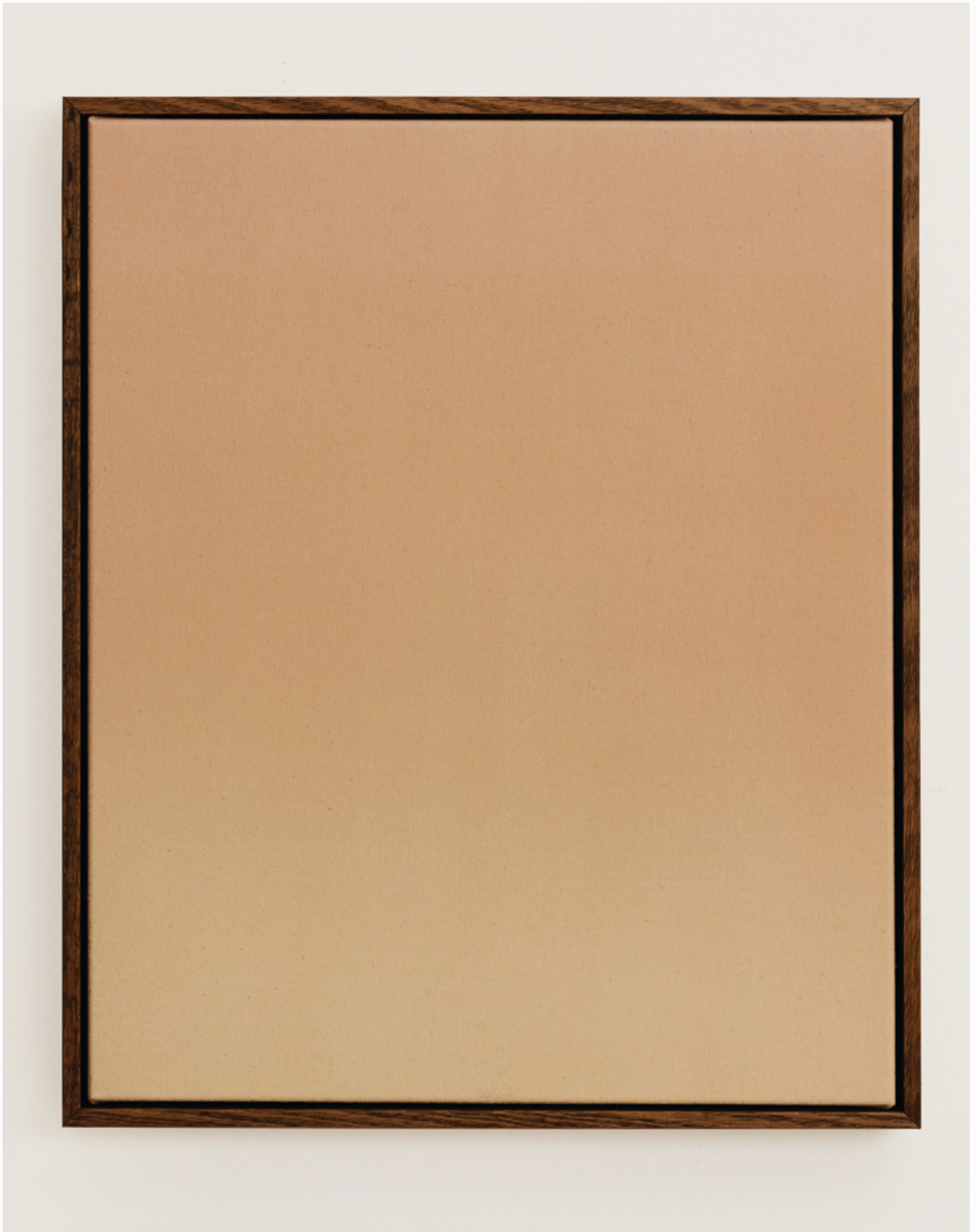


Long suffering painting (2021)

Dye and acrylic on stitched silk organza, Tasmanian Oak frame with shou sugi ban finish

58cm H x 48cm W x 5.5cm D

\$800 Framed



Proud painting (2022)
Watercolour on canvas, Tasmanian Oak frame
58cm H x 48cm W x 5.5cm D
\$800 Framed



Phenomenon of freedom (2022)
Charcoal on polyester organza, vinyl, Tasmanian Oak frame
43.5cm H x 43.5cm W x 5.5cm D
\$950 Framed



Vulnerable painting (2022)

Acrylic on canvas, dye on silk organza, polyester organza, Tasmanian Oak frame

39.7cm H x 32.2cm W x 5.5cm D

\$660 Framed



Poetic significance (2022)
Acrylic on stitched linen and hessian, Tasmanian Oak frame
37.3cm H x 34cm W x 5.5cm D
\$660 Framed



Poetic reverie painting 1 (2022)
Patina on copper, Tasmanian Oak frame with shou sugi ban finish
24.5cm H x 24cm W x 3.5cm D
\$620 Framed



Poetic revery painting 2 (2022)
Patina on copper, Tasmanian Oak frame with shou sugi ban finish
22.5cm H x 23cm W x 3.5cm D
\$620 Framed



SCULPTURES



Simulation sculpture 1 (2022)
Cast aluminium with black nickel plated finish, Wigdon sandstone
47cm H x 36cm W x 30cm D
\$7500



Simulation sculpture 2 (2021)
Cast gunmetal, Wiagdon sandstone
19cm H x 11 cm W x 9.5cm D
\$2300



Simulation sculpture 3 (2021)
Cast resin with ceramic coating, aluminium
33cm H x 18cm W x 9cm D
\$2300 (Edition of 3)



Photograph by Arvin Prem Kumar



CURATORIAL+CO.

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Curatorial+Co. acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the country on which the gallery sits, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and cultures. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.