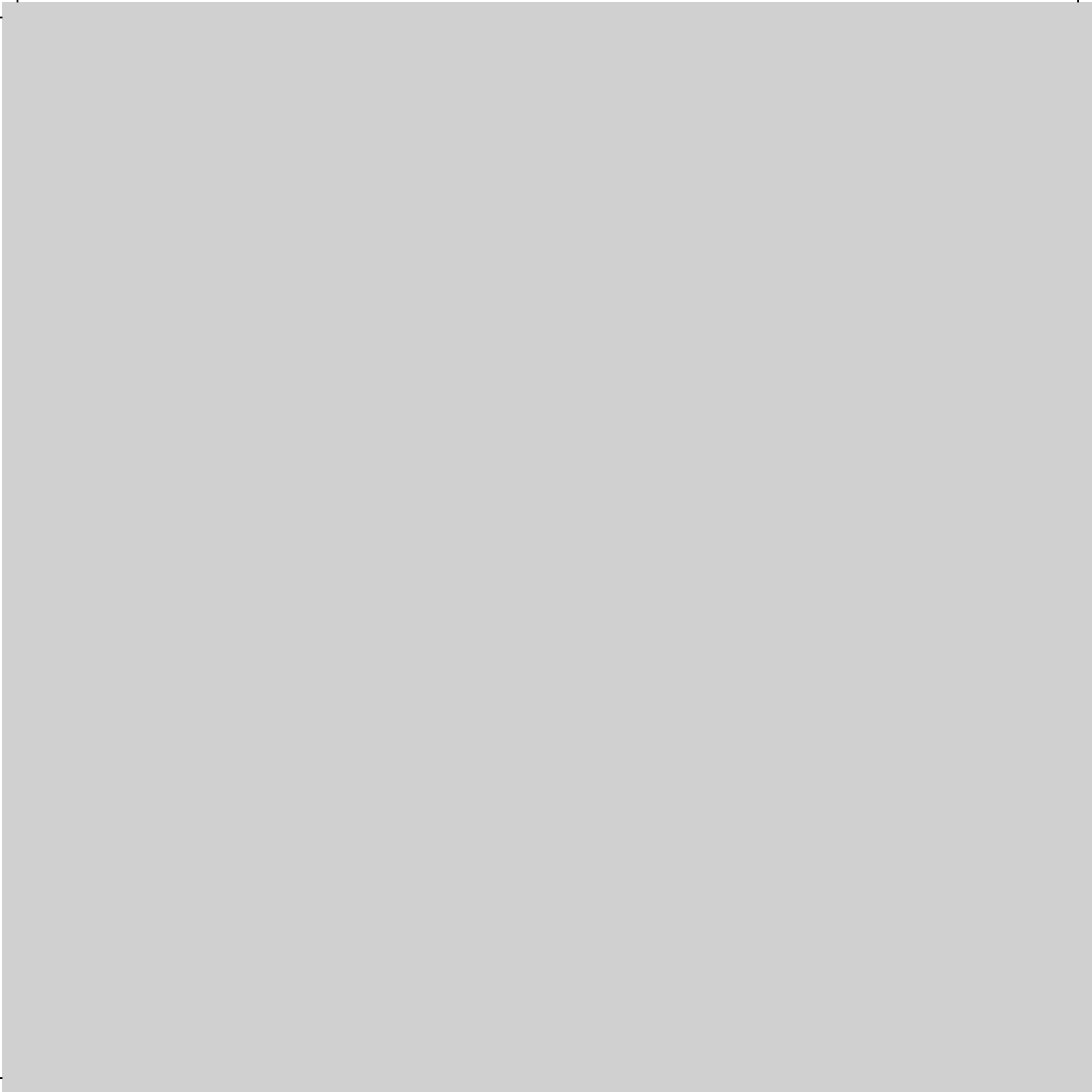




**Screen Memories**

**Mike Hollis**



# Mike Hollis

## Screen Memories



MSK Artspace  
April 29 - May 29, 2023

This catalog was published to accompany the exhibition  
"Mike Hollis Screen Memories" at MSK Artspace, Houston, Texas  
April 29 - May 29, 2023

Curated collaboratively at MSK Artspace.  
With special thanks to Mike Hollis, Mike Kirby, Lauri and Robert Wray,  
Ibsen Espada, Tex Kerschen, Donna Tennant, Henry Hunt, and Lynn Goode

Photo Credits:

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Last page photo by Zoya Tommy: Jim Harithas and Mike Hollis, Artwork by Ibsen Espada

Catalog designed and published by Lauri and Robert Wray  
Artwork photographed by Robert Wray  
Printed in the United States of America by Masterpiece Litho Inc.

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## **Forward**

Mike Hollis has always struck me as a unique person in the Houston art scene. I believe he is one of the first to add geometric elements into his work in a consistent way. He is a very good colorist, too. I feel like Mike is a kid playing with colored pencils and is not afraid to use the whole box.

I have been a fan of Hollis's work for a long time and acquired one of his paintings before the pandemic. In this piece the yellow and pink values have a harmonizing effect. They have the same tonal value and contrast as the darker values. The simple geometric shapes contrast, balance and parade on the canvas. It has a portal-like effect to me.

There is definitely a spiritual side, too. It feels multidimensional; the paintings are light and clean and come at you from different angles. There is a playfulness and still an orderly restraint. The best works draw you in and evoke a reassuring feeling – a higher order kind of thing. a pleasant and wise space to be in.

Michael Sean Kirby  
MSK Artspace



## Mike Hollis, Psychedelic Punk

by Tex Kerschen

Americans lust after pictures of horses, landscapes, and people's faces, offset by supersaturated fields of rich, spiritual blue, but most of them would rather die than admit it. Abstract painting may leave many of them dry, twisted, and unsatisfied, but that's what they trade online; that's what they sell and buy in galleries. Abstract painting looks good with furniture. It suggests a cosmopolitan, knowing perspective.

However, the suggestion of a cosmopolitan worldview and the appearance of discernment are not the same as those things themselves. You have to know things. You can't go around not knowing things.

Hollis is a painter's painter. But, really, he's a painter for anyone with an eye and a mind for beauty. His paintings ooze pleasure and intelligence. They are not sentimental. They don't beg for your attention; they reward it.

"When the legend becomes fact," John Ford famously said, "print the legend." So here it is.

Hollis was one of the first psychedelic punks. He dropped out of high school, spent time with the Red Krayola and its entourage, the Familiar Ugly, and taught himself and Julian Schnabel how to paint and how to surf. He quit his studies at the University of St. Thomas to work at the CAMH.

Not enough could ever be said about the acuity of his eye for color and form, but he's got an ear for what is lively in music too. He saw the Sex Pistols in London, saw Prince's first concerts in Houston. Hollis was on hand for most of Houston's legendary moments. And then love stepped in, spiring him away to New York to meet his destiny.

But something happened.

SCREEN MEMORIES mean the false memories the brain makes to shield trauma victims from reliving pain. To Hollis, SCREEN MEMORIES mean those good times on playback in the minds of those who have been abducted by aliens, probed, and thrown back into this catch-and-release stock pond Earth.



At various times in his career as an artist, one whose works can stop you in your tracks, Hollis has stood at the brink of the abyss of success, looking deep into it before saying, No, thank you in his gracious southern twang.

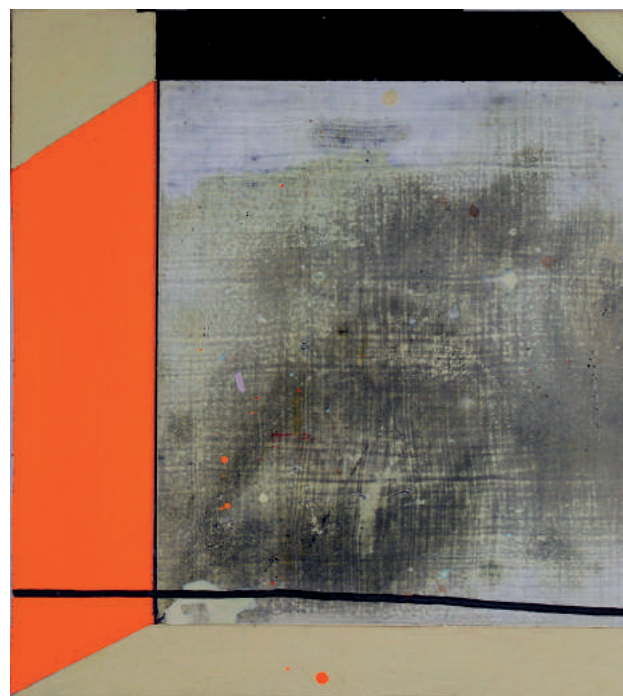
He is a true believer when it comes to painting. Like a monk, but with wit. Whatever he does, whatever he has done, he has always been in league with an unnerving beauty. But this agonizing nearness to beauty in its forms does not dilute easily. He once crawled across the pine floorboards of the Menil Collection to prostrate himself at Agnes Martin's feet, calling her "Master" until museum security asked him to leave.

Hollis makes paintings like big harsh tabs of color that come on like LSD. And what colors! LSD is not a friendly trip. LSD is a death ride, not a consolation. The panes of color in these paintings aren't weak medicine. Taken through the eye, they intensify space and time.

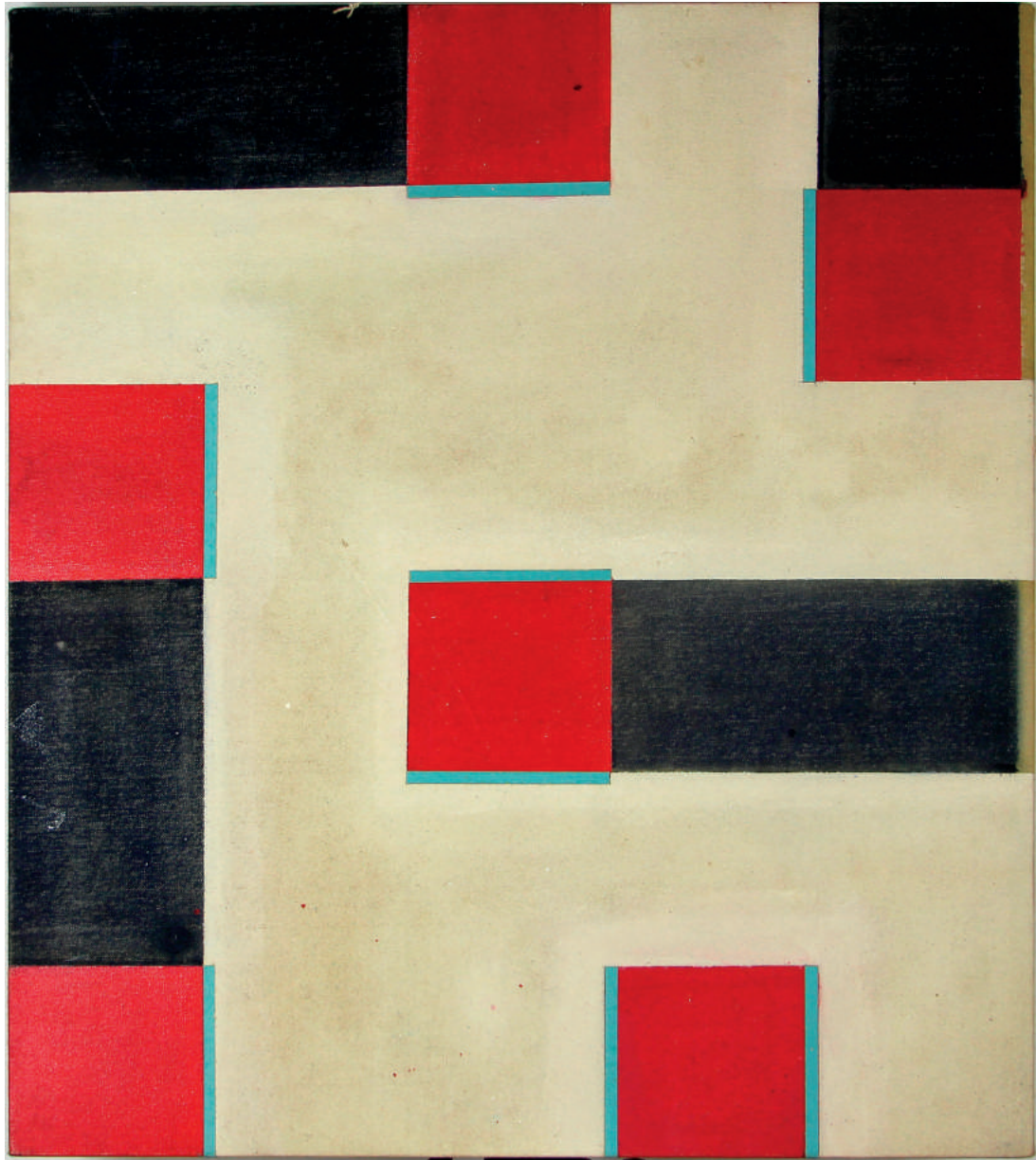
Or maybe I'm mistaken and Hollis is easy listening, and his paintings are furniture-adjacent, Muzak for the eyes.

No, no, I'm not. They're not.

This is joy wrapped around trauma. These are violent visitations, recollected in tranquility.



*Ruff Boys*, 2023, Mixed Media, 14 by 13 inches



*Trafficante*, 2016, acrylic on canvas panel, 27 by 24 inches

## Mike Hollis: Screen Memories

By Donna Tennant + Henry Hunt

Mike Hollis is a classic modernist. Hollis believes in the sensibilities of modernism, and his work is a testament to it. His paintings reveal, without exception, fidelity to an aesthetic that rejects representation in favor of pure abstraction. The result is reductive and non-objective. He utilizes a familiar nomenclature of shapes and colors in the tradition of geometric abstraction, arranging squares, rectangles, parallelograms, and other polygons to achieve seemingly endless variations.

Hollis has been part of the Houston art scene since the mid-1970s. After studying at the University of St. Thomas, he went on to work at the Contemporary Arts Museum of Houston, where he remained for eight years. The exposure to a broad range of contemporary art in the museum's galleries had a fundamental influence on the course of his work. From the beginning, he had little interest in representational or figurative art. His allegiance to formal abstraction began at this time, and he has continued on this path for nearly half a century. Hollis embraces a pictorial language of

nonrepresentational forms, avoiding the narrative in favor of spatial and color relationships.

After experiencing early success in the 1980s with one-person exhibitions at Texas Gallery and 55 Grand Street in Manhattan, among others, his solo and group shows have become less frequent. He has been included in significant exhibitions, notably "Degrees of Separation" (2015) curated by James Harithas at The Station Museum of Contemporary Art with Mel Chin and other artists. Throughout his practice, Hollis has experimented with complex patterns and collage, as seen in the significant *Argyle* series, several examples of which were shown at The Station. It remains a continuing interest. In the series of small paintings titled *Sanduku*, he establishes a pattern of geometric shapes in which the basic structure is repeated with nine variations, each with different color relationships. His color combinations are critical, with several of the cruciform shapes sinking into a black background, while others emerge from pale gray to blue to a dark mottled ground.

Typically, he works in series of three, six, or nine paintings, but he is not slavish to this formula. There are exceptions to this system as seen in the current exhibition.

Color is an essential element in Hollis's paintings. Color brings motion and energy to the pieces, as seen in *Pillow Filler (a)*. The black square on the flat red ground implies an urge to spin, but two pointed shapes seem to restrain it by simply touching opposite corners, thereby creating palpable tension. A companion piece *Pillow Filler (b)* offers a color variation with the black square hovering over a turquoise ground executed with visible brushstrokes. A magnetic attraction seems to exist among these three elements. The *Bindle* series suggests a three-dimensional static space, alluding to corners of rooms with colored walls, while *Congo Drops* evokes windows and doors. In contrast, the *congo b* series presents shapes that appear to float within the picture plane.

*Congo b (c)* is a departure within the series, with a right angle of white paint outlining the orange square.

The edge of a dark-green shape dry-brushed with black suggests a layering of forms, as does the white stripe above it.

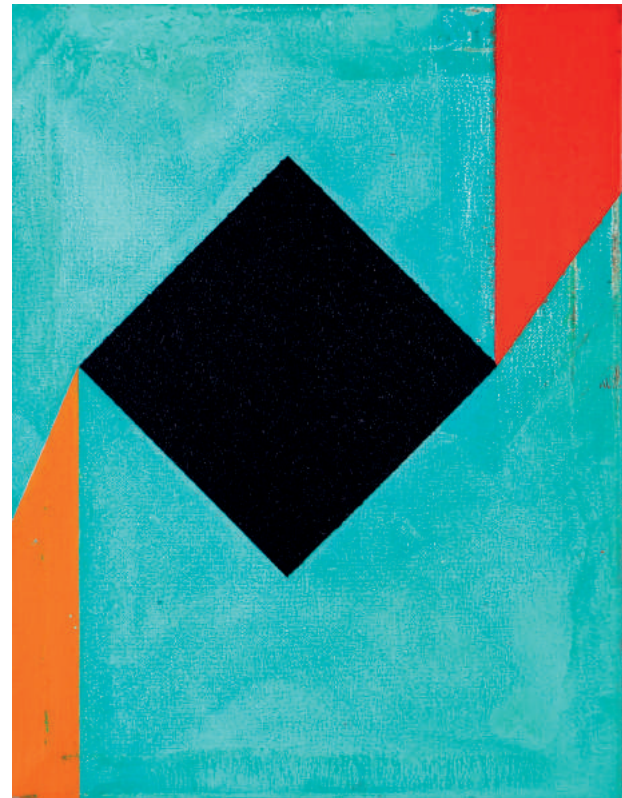
Although Hollis uses tape when painting, the edges of his forms are often imprecise, as one color encroaches into another. These minor imperfections are not of great concern to him, as he prefers to concentrate on more crucial issues and move on to the next permutation. Then there are the anomalies. In *Trafficante* red squares bordered by blue stripes are attached to black rectangles and become totem-like forms that push into the picture plan from all sides. *Flyer* uses a similar palette but introduces acute and obtuse angles to his geometric forms. The red square has become the side of a three-dimensional benchlike shape, while two skewed turquoise rectangles intersect to suggest a river or the sky. Hollis's palette is never somber, and these relationships between form and color create energy. In contrast to some non-representational art, his paintings exude a tempered vitality. To a sensibility that often renders itself "cool," he brings an expressive vigor.

Hollis reduces his imagery to the essentials, and the greater the simplicity, the more clarity and purity there is in his paintings. If modernism is the reduction of external connotation in the service of universal forms, Hollis is an authentic modernist. He adheres to the canon of geometric abstraction, exploring the relationships among shape, color, and line.

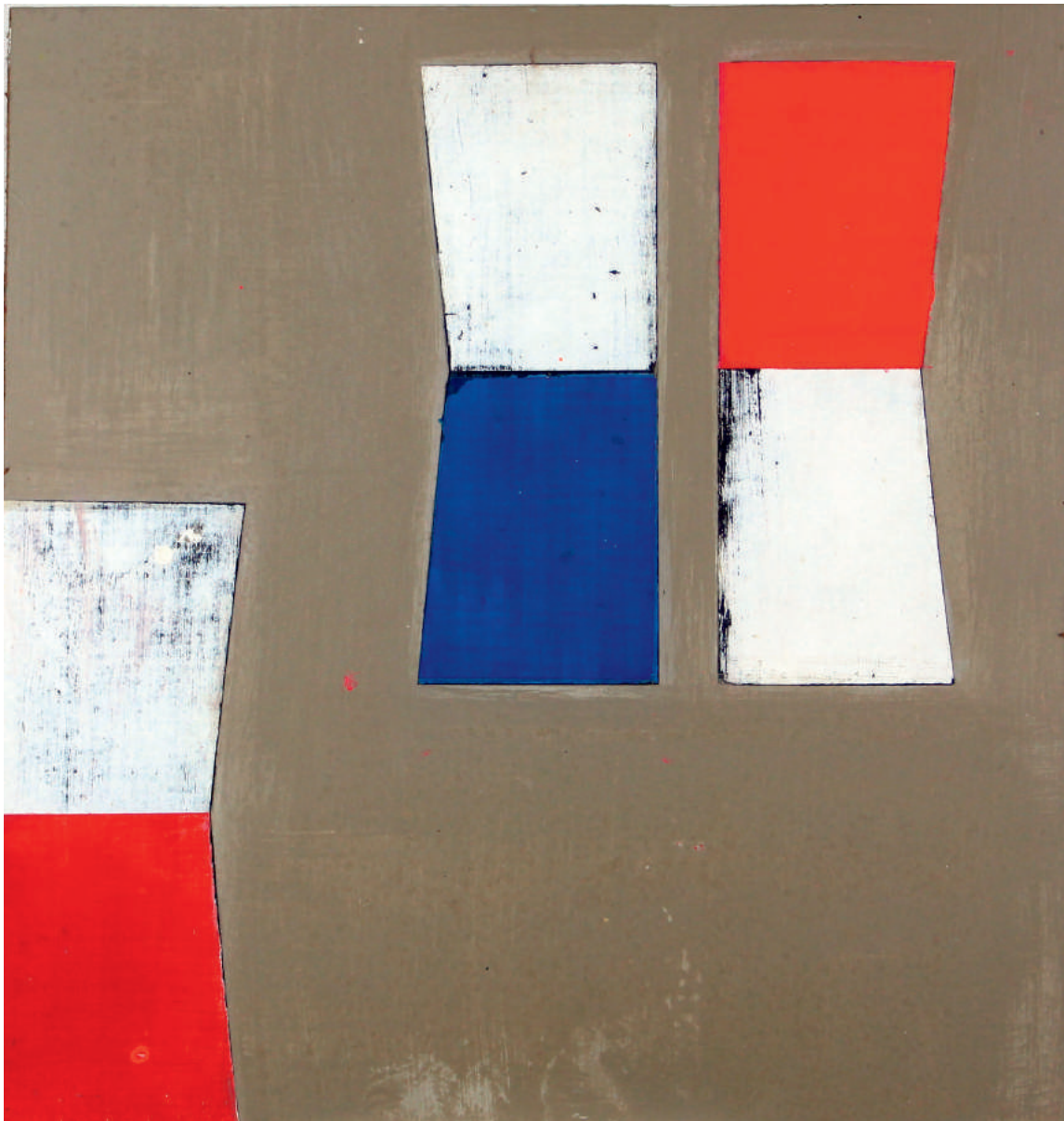
He understands composition and spatial organization, as well as equilibrium and opposition. Using a combination of playfulness and restraint, Hollis demonstrates control over his forms, colors, and surface textures. The recent work presented in this exhibition illustrates Hollis's evolution as a masterful and compelling painter.



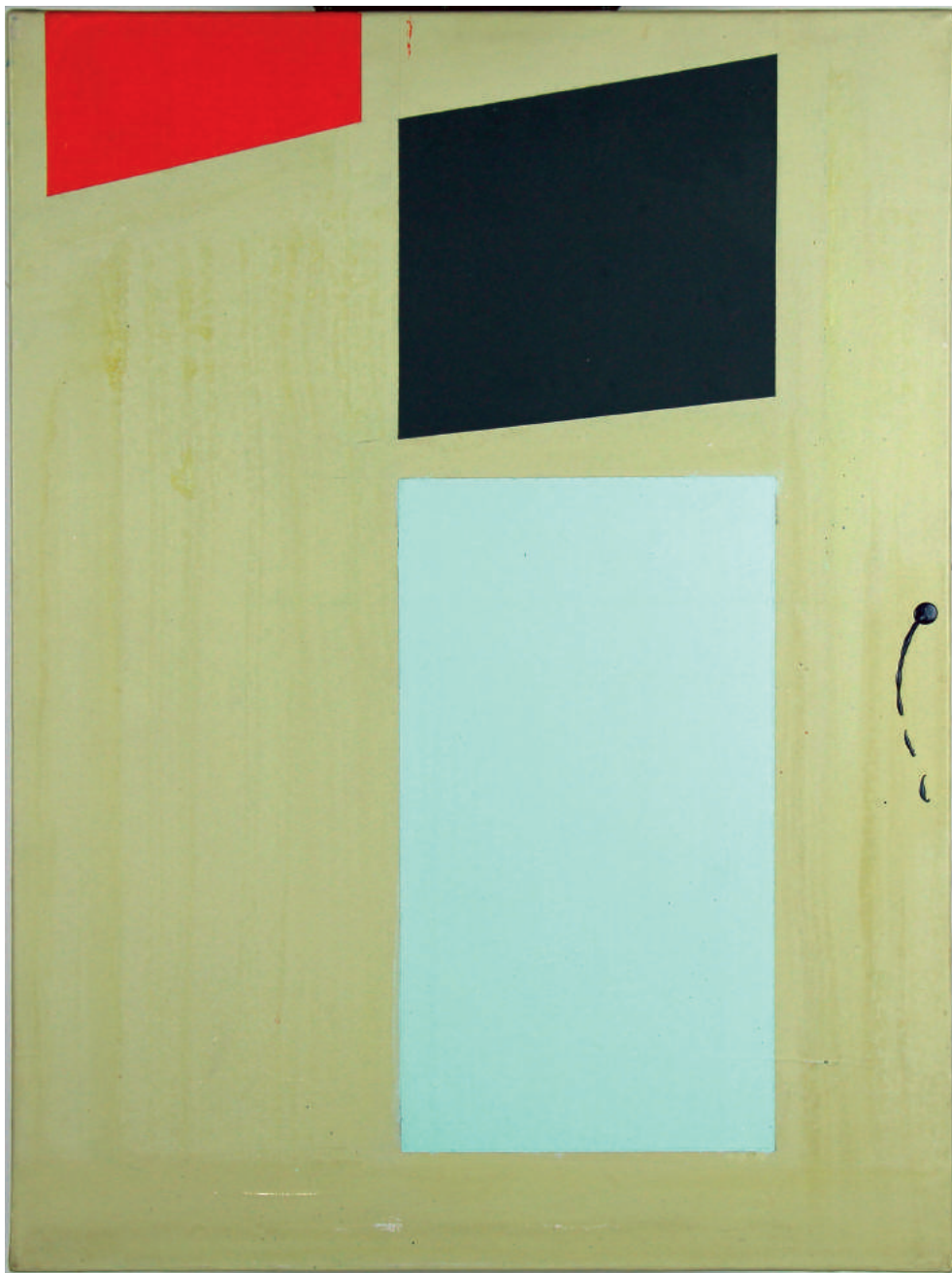
*Pillow Filler (a)*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 14 by 11 inches



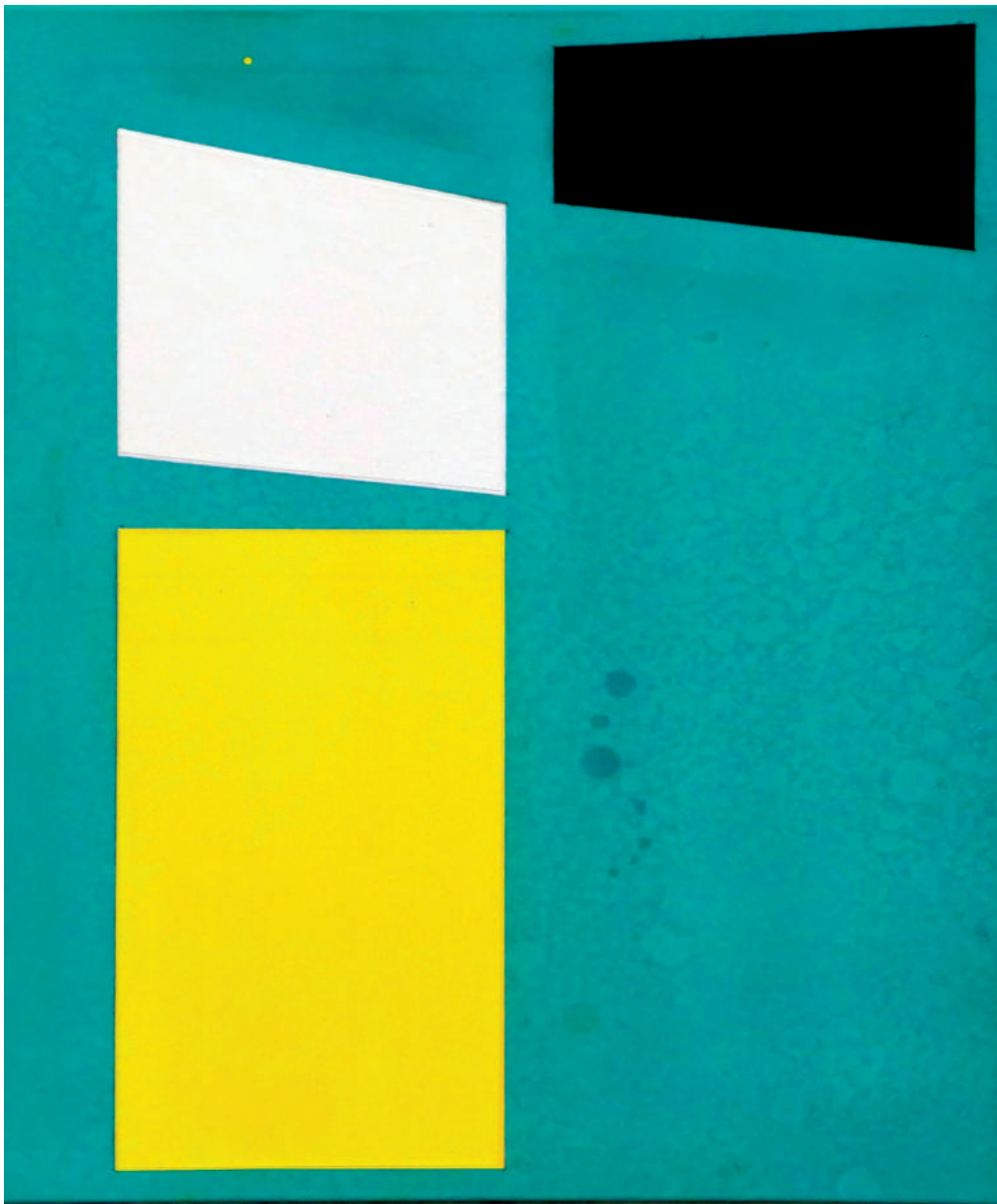
*Pillow Filler (b)*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 14 by 11 inches



*Kings court bottle club*, 2020, acrylic on panel, 12 by 13.5 inches

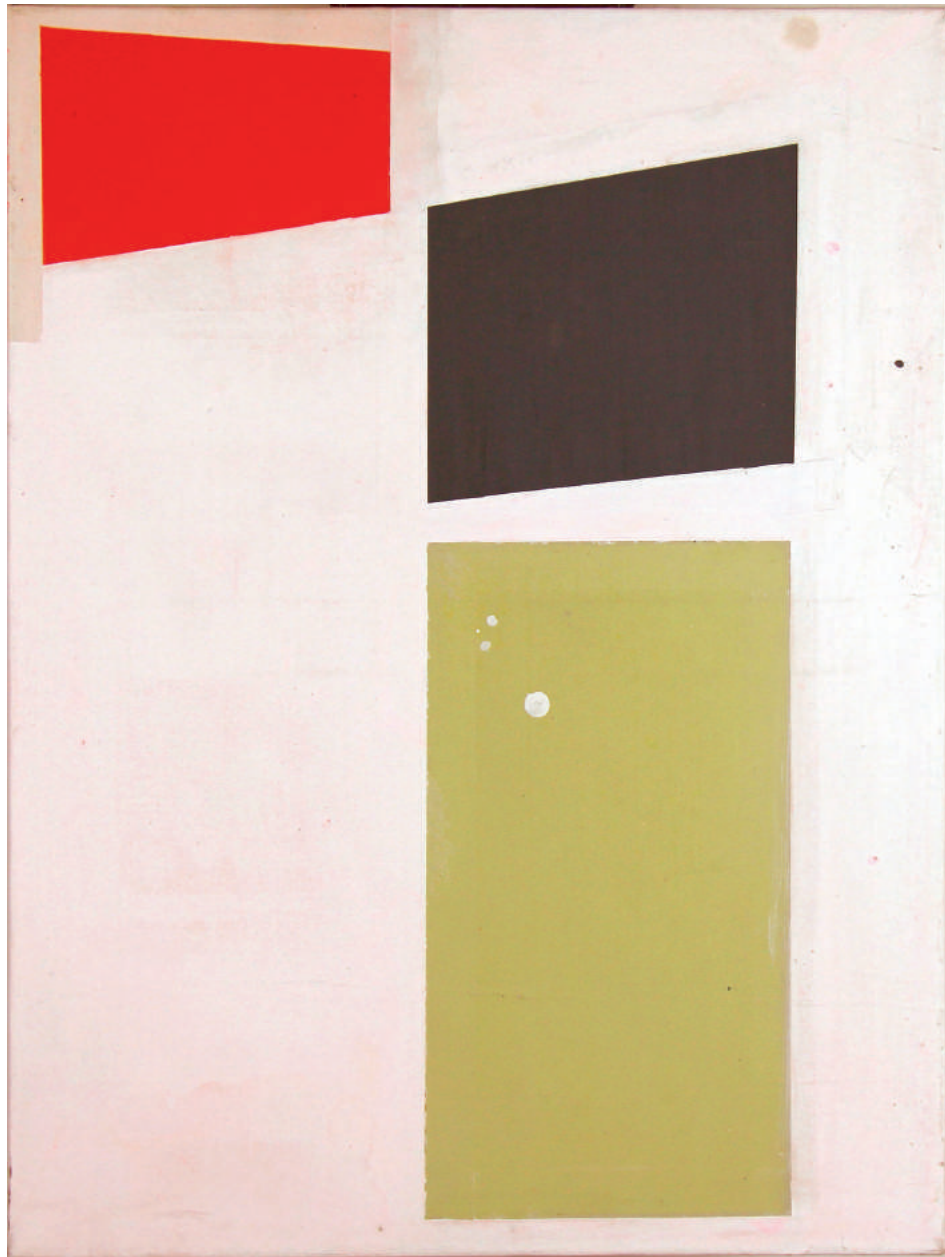


*Congo Drops (a)*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 24 by 18 inches



*Congo Drops (b)*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 24 by 18 inches

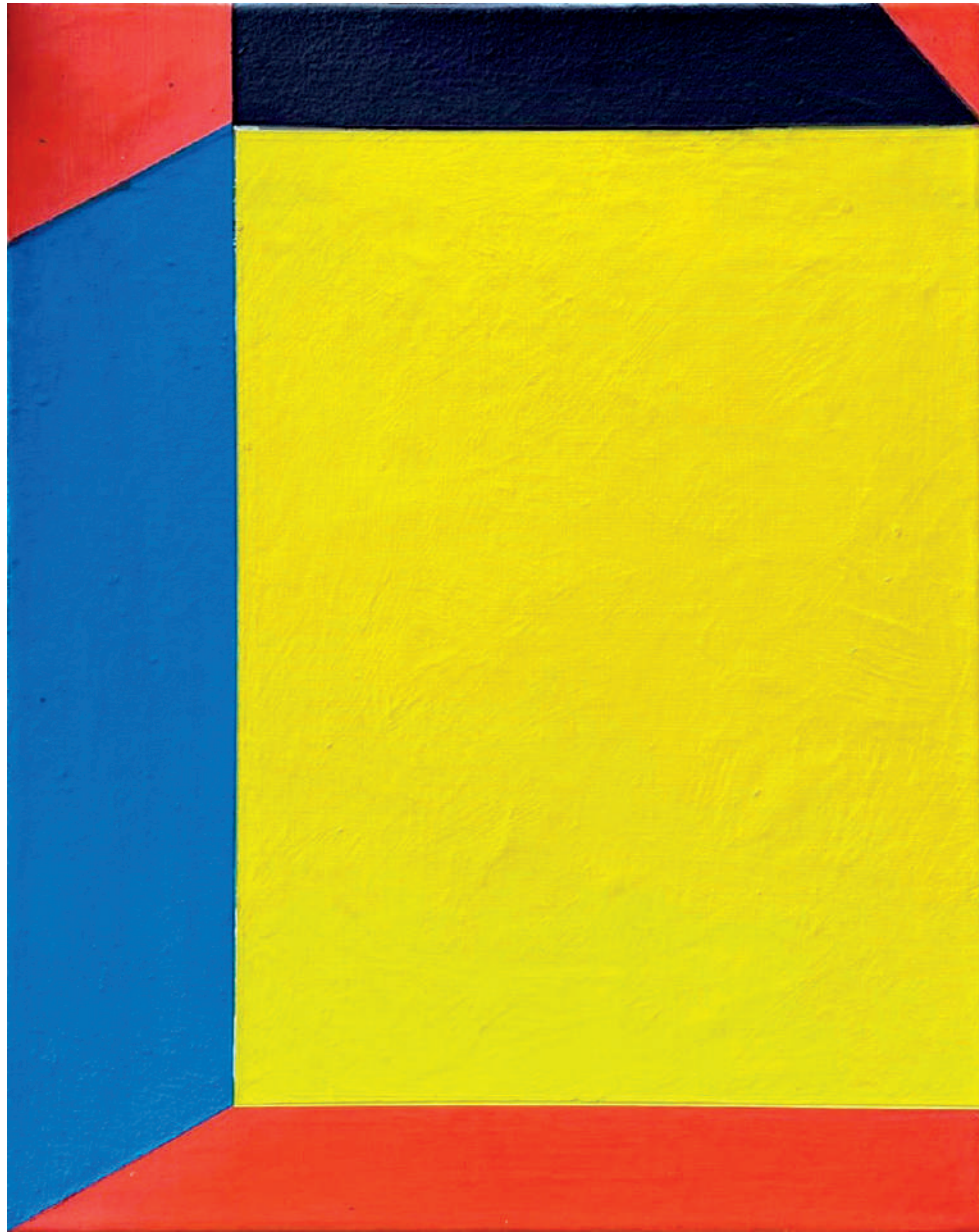




*Congo Drops (c)*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 24 by 18 inches



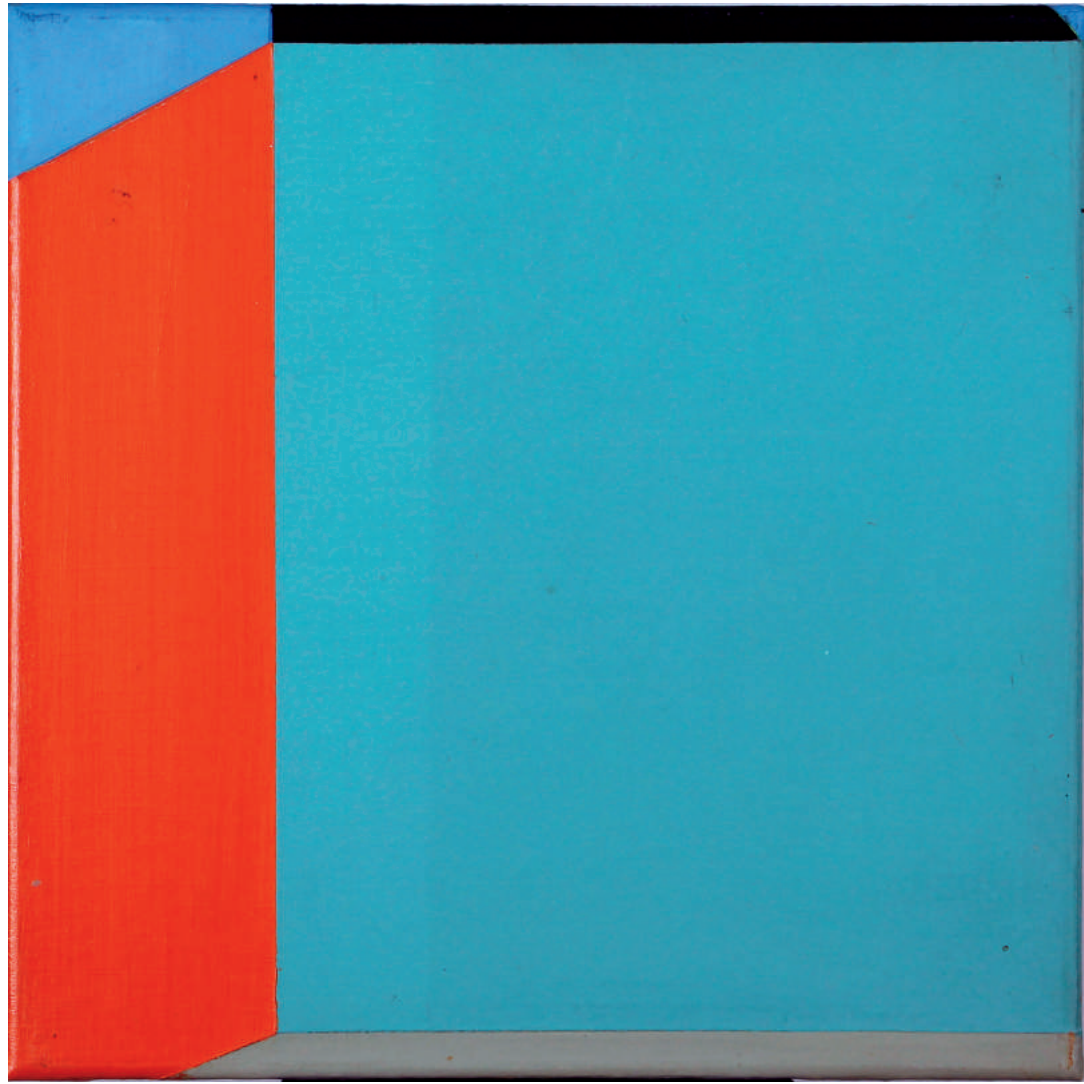
*Bindle (a)*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 20 by 16 inches



*Bindle (b)*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 20 by 16 inches



*Bindle (c)*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 20 by 16 inches



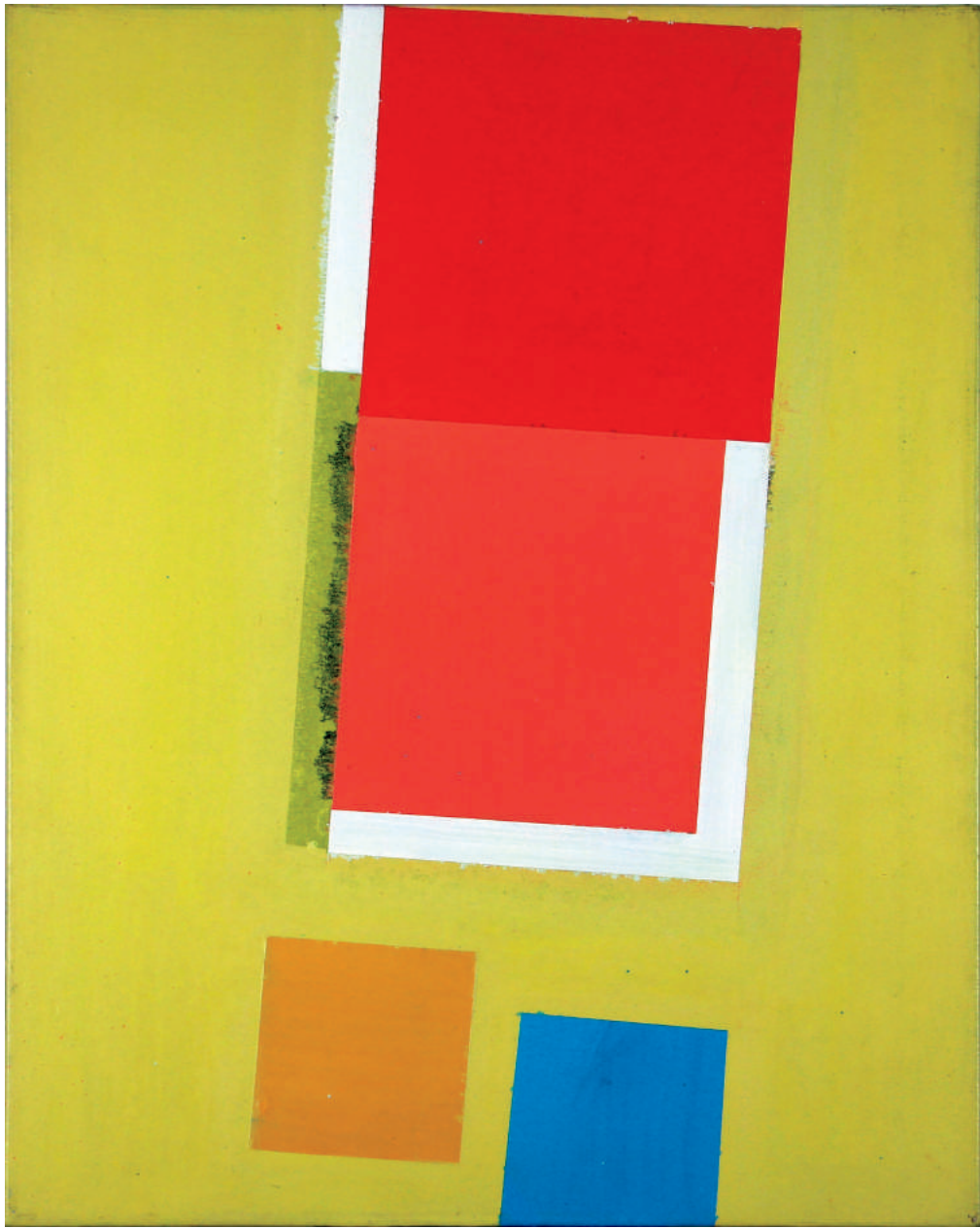
*Bindle Lite (a)*, 2022, acrylic on panel, 12 by 12 inches



*Bindle Lite (b)*, 2022, acrylic on panel, 14 by 14 inches

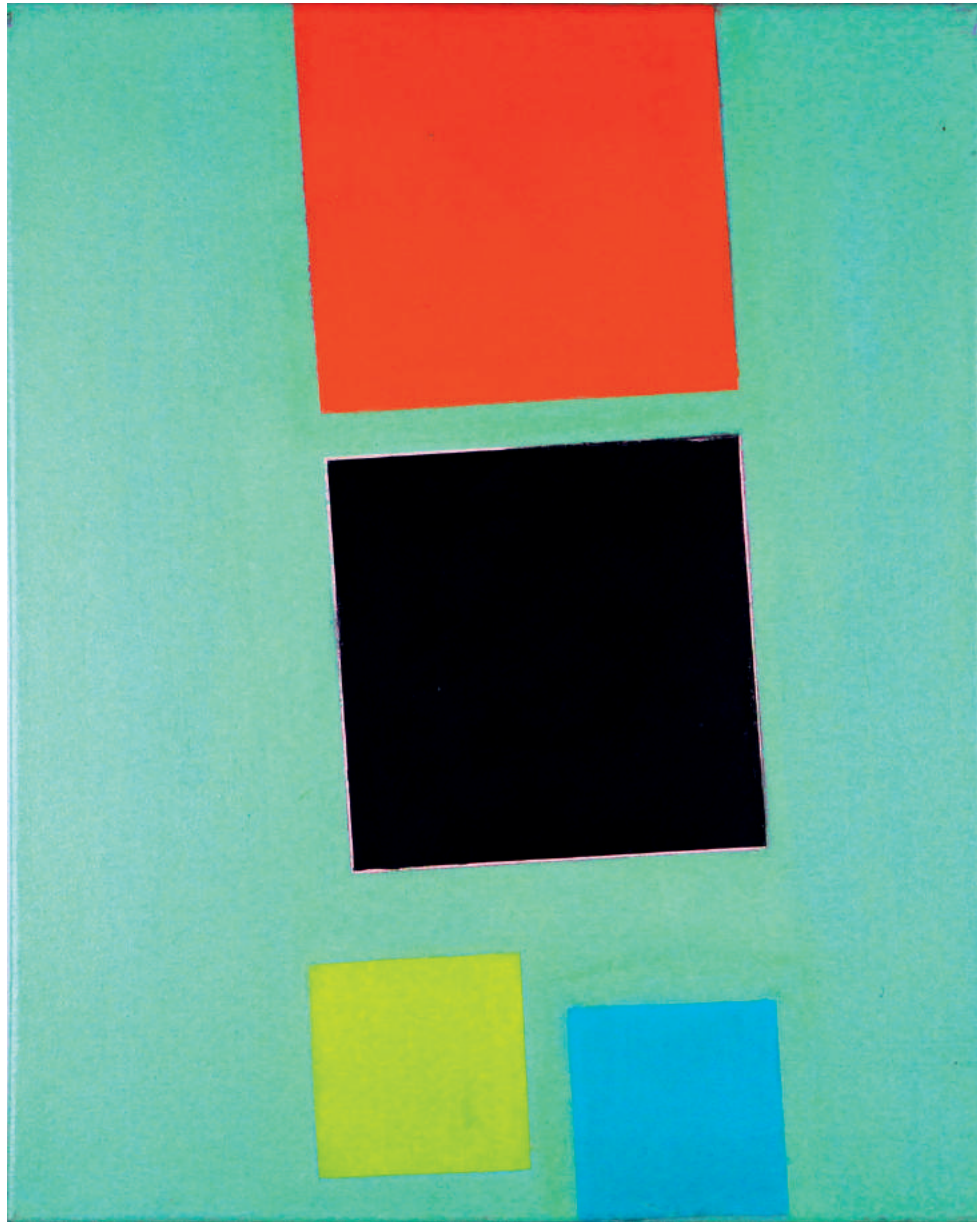


*Bindle Lite (c)*, 2022, acrylic on panel, 12 by 12 inches

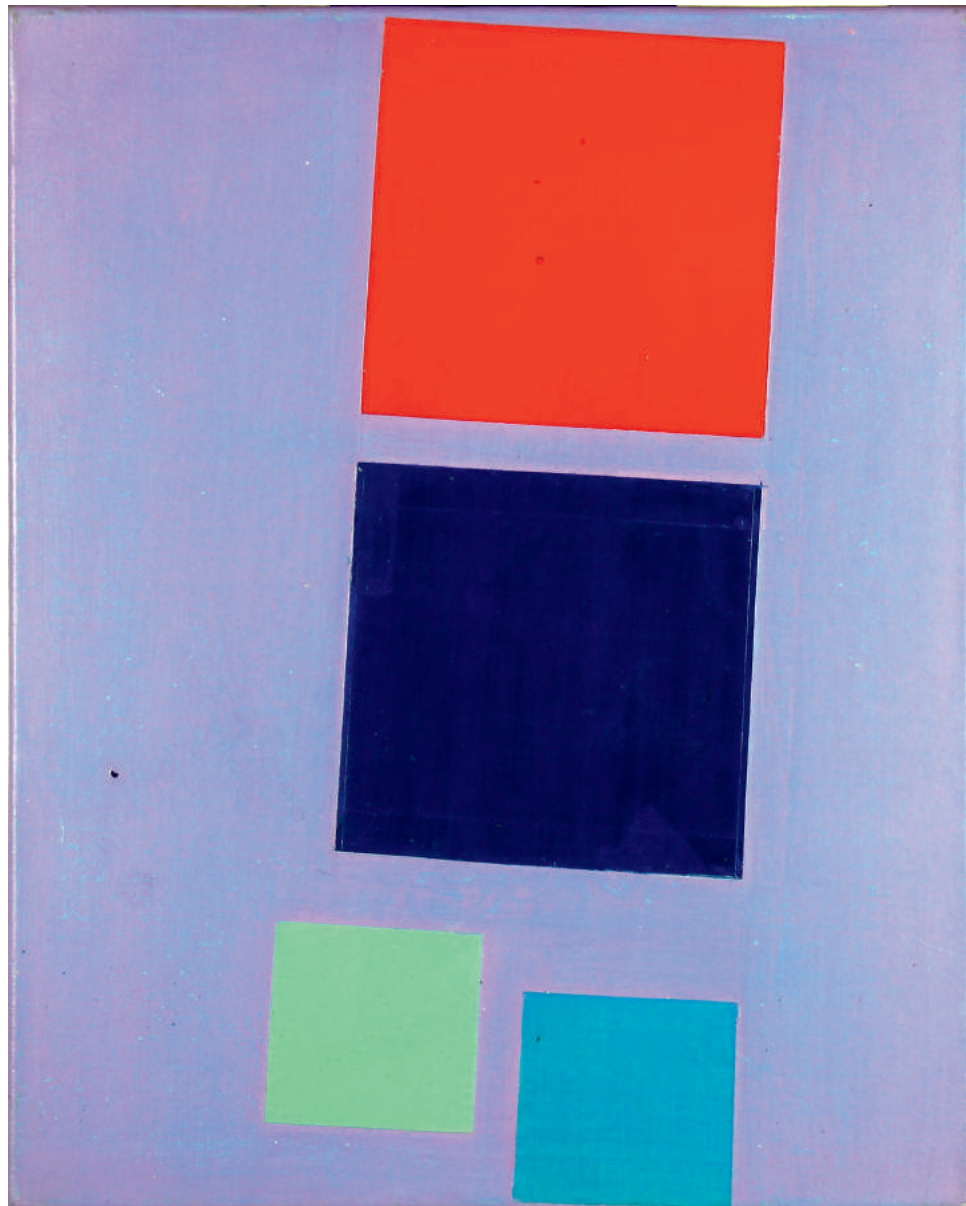


*congo b (c)*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 20 by 16 inches

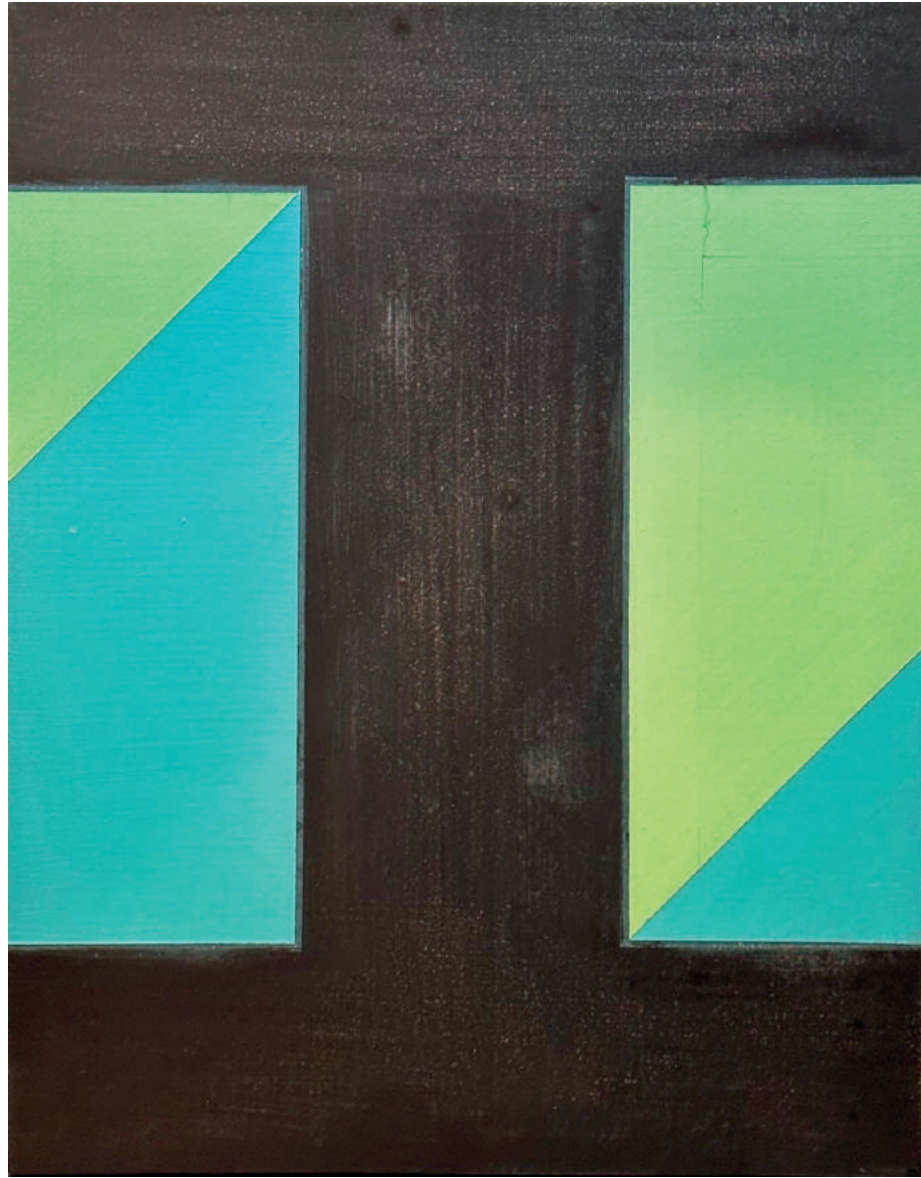




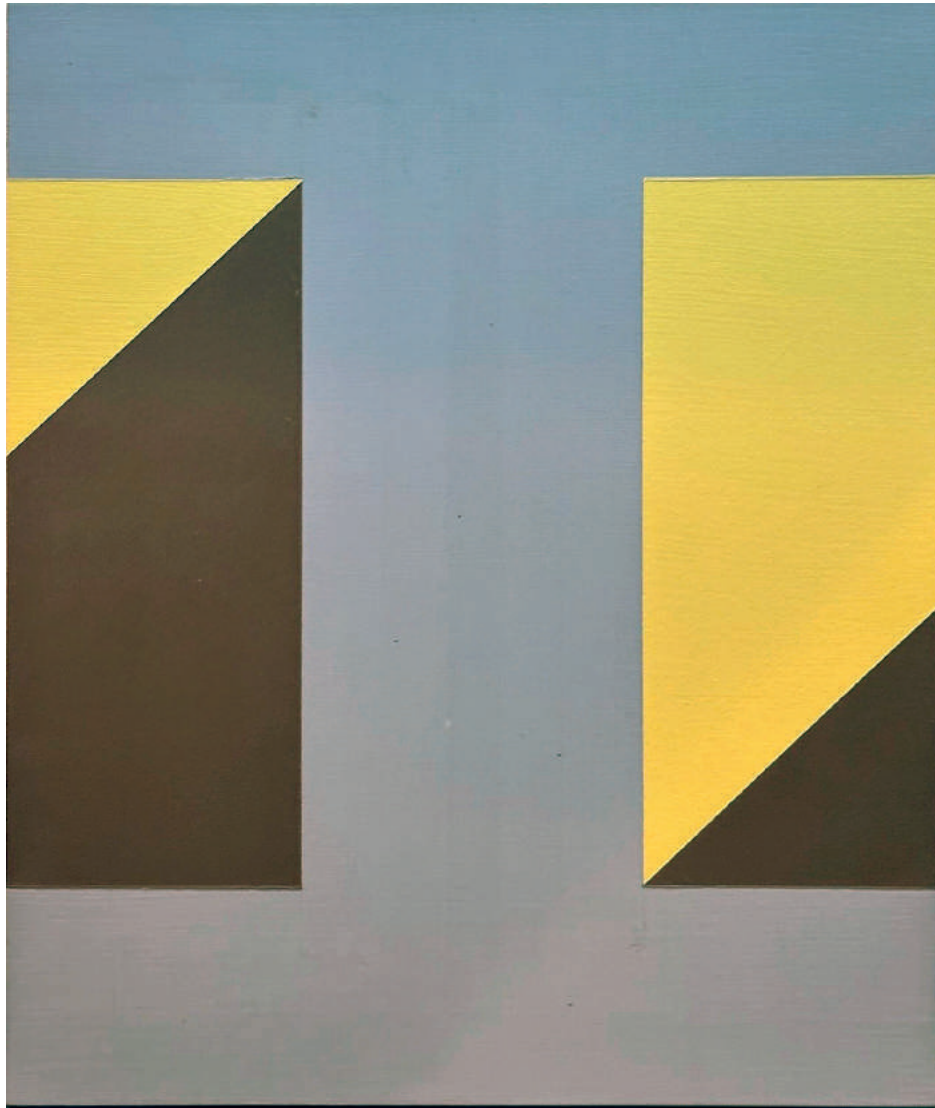
*congo b (b)*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 20 by 16 inches



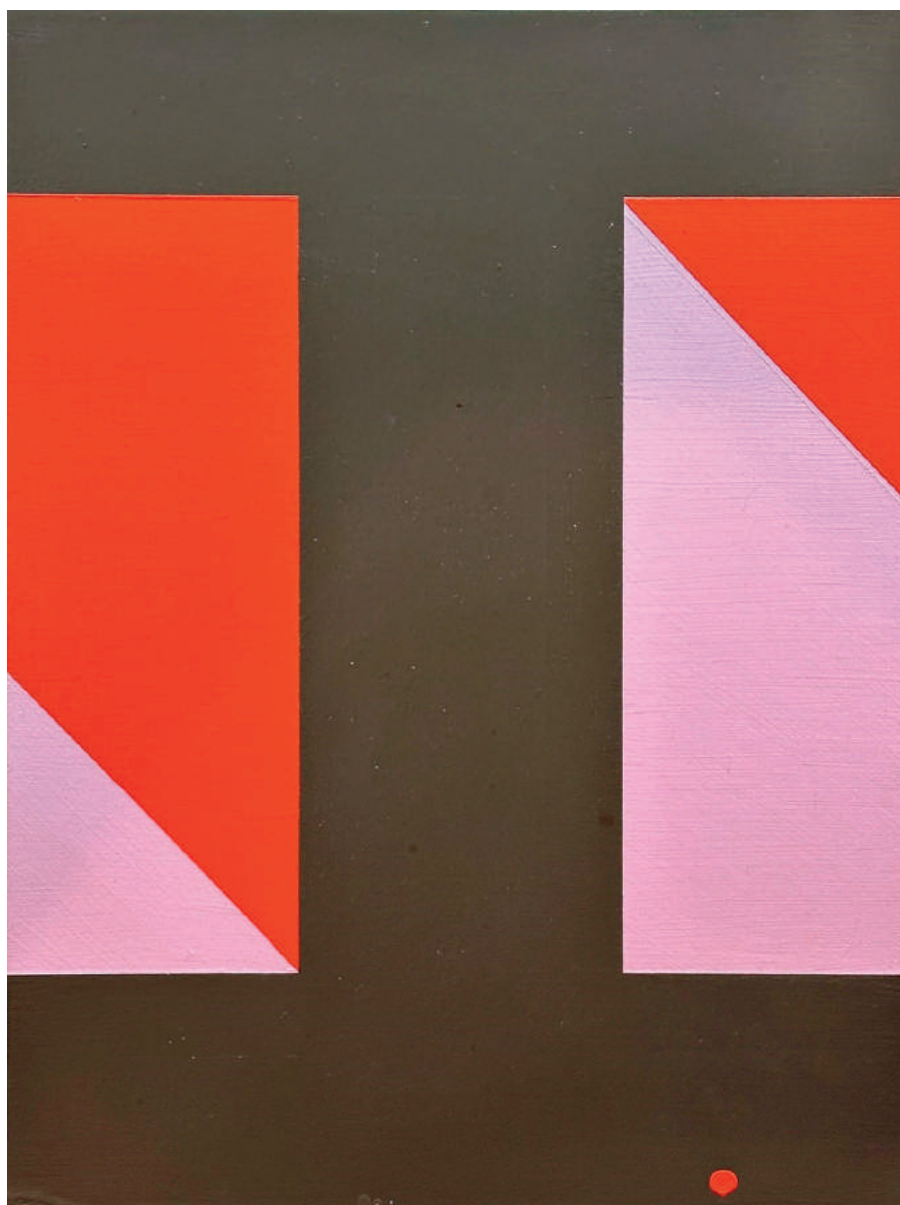
*congo b (a)*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 20 by 16 inches



*Twin Sets (a)*, acrylic on panel, 14 by 11 inches



*Twin Sets (b)*, acrylic on panel, 14 by 11 inches



*Twin Sets (c)*, acrylic on panel, 14 by 11 inches



*Hvisache (c)*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 24 by 18 inches

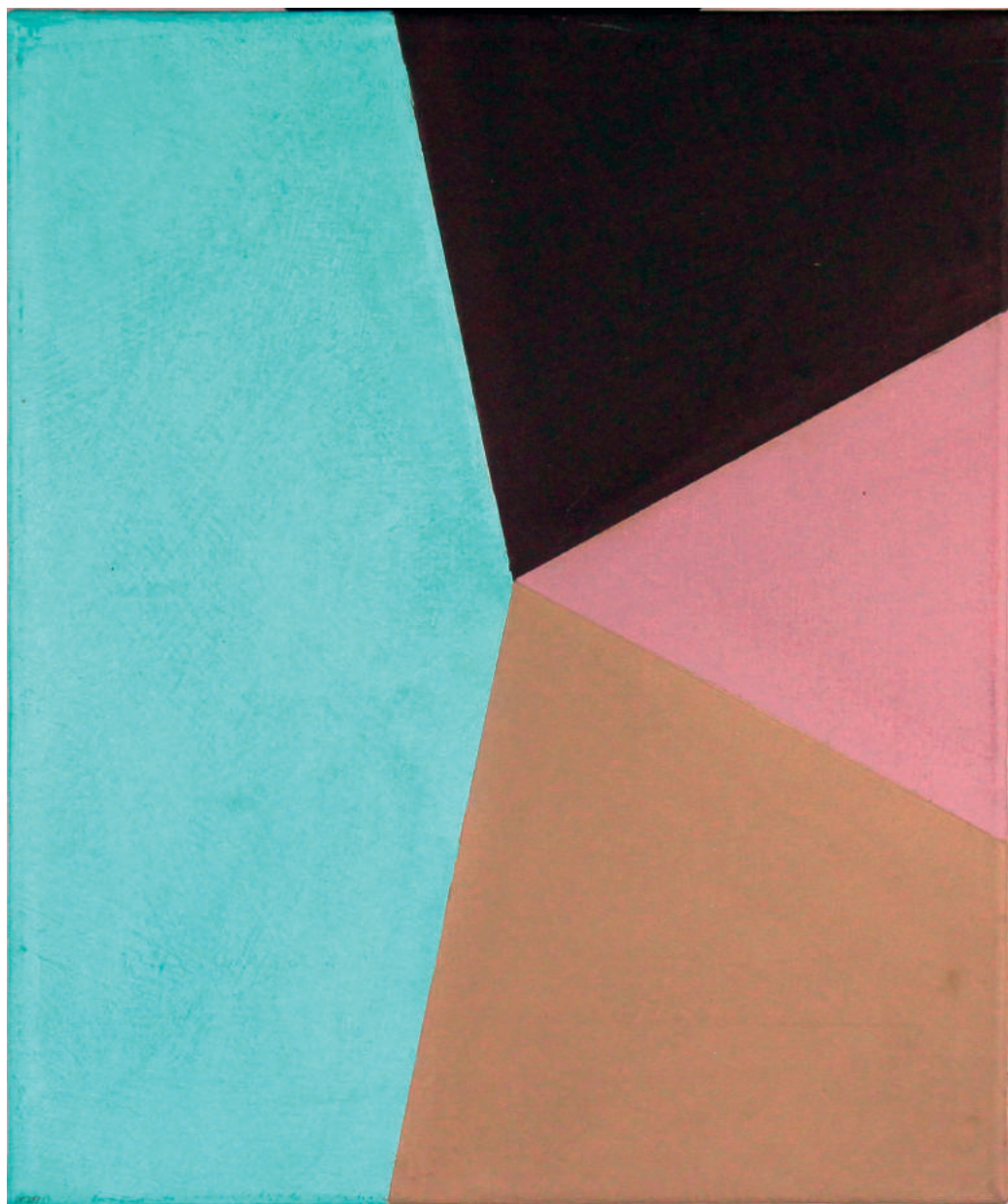


*Hvisache (a)*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 14 by 11 inches

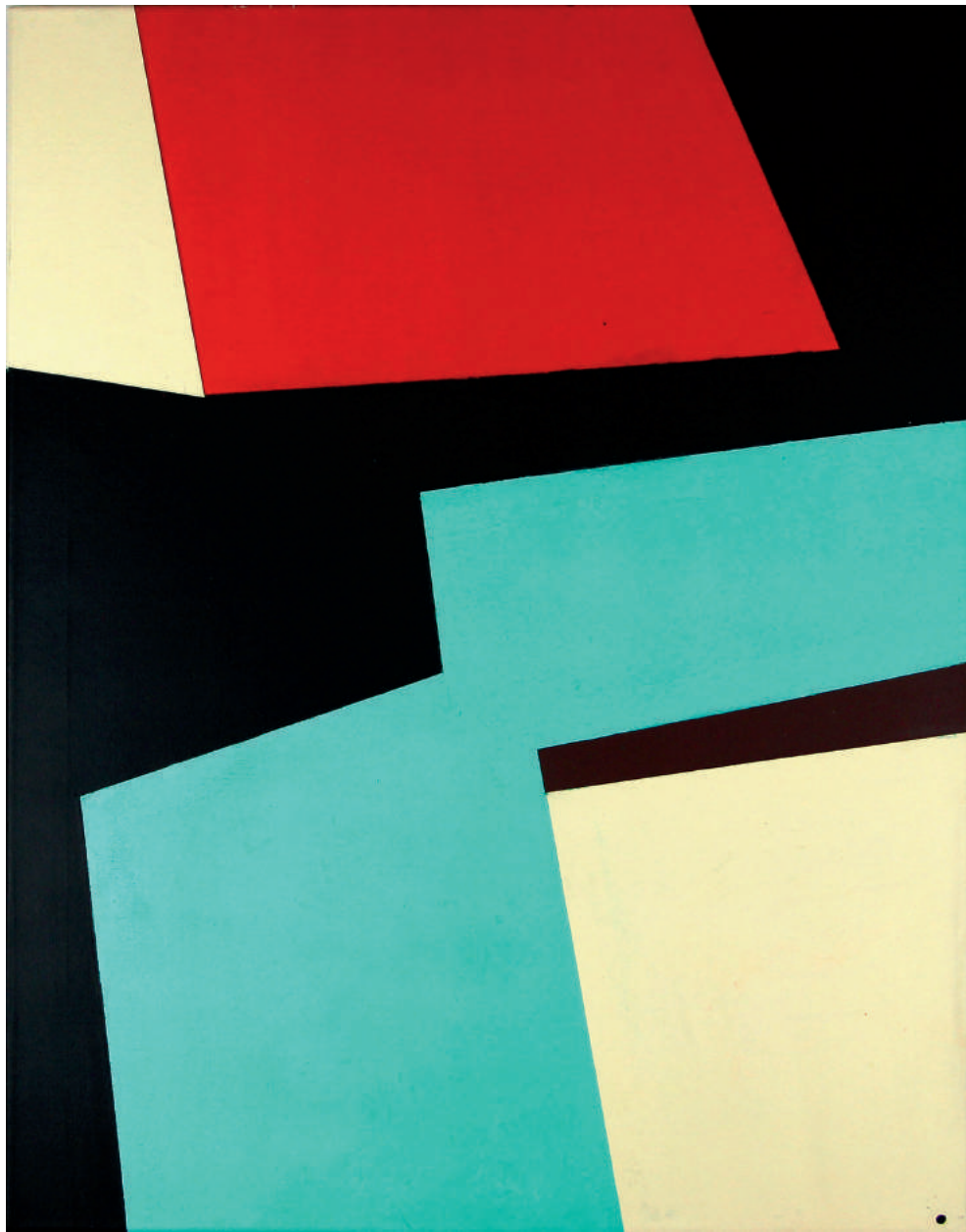


*Hvisache (d)*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 14 by 11 inches

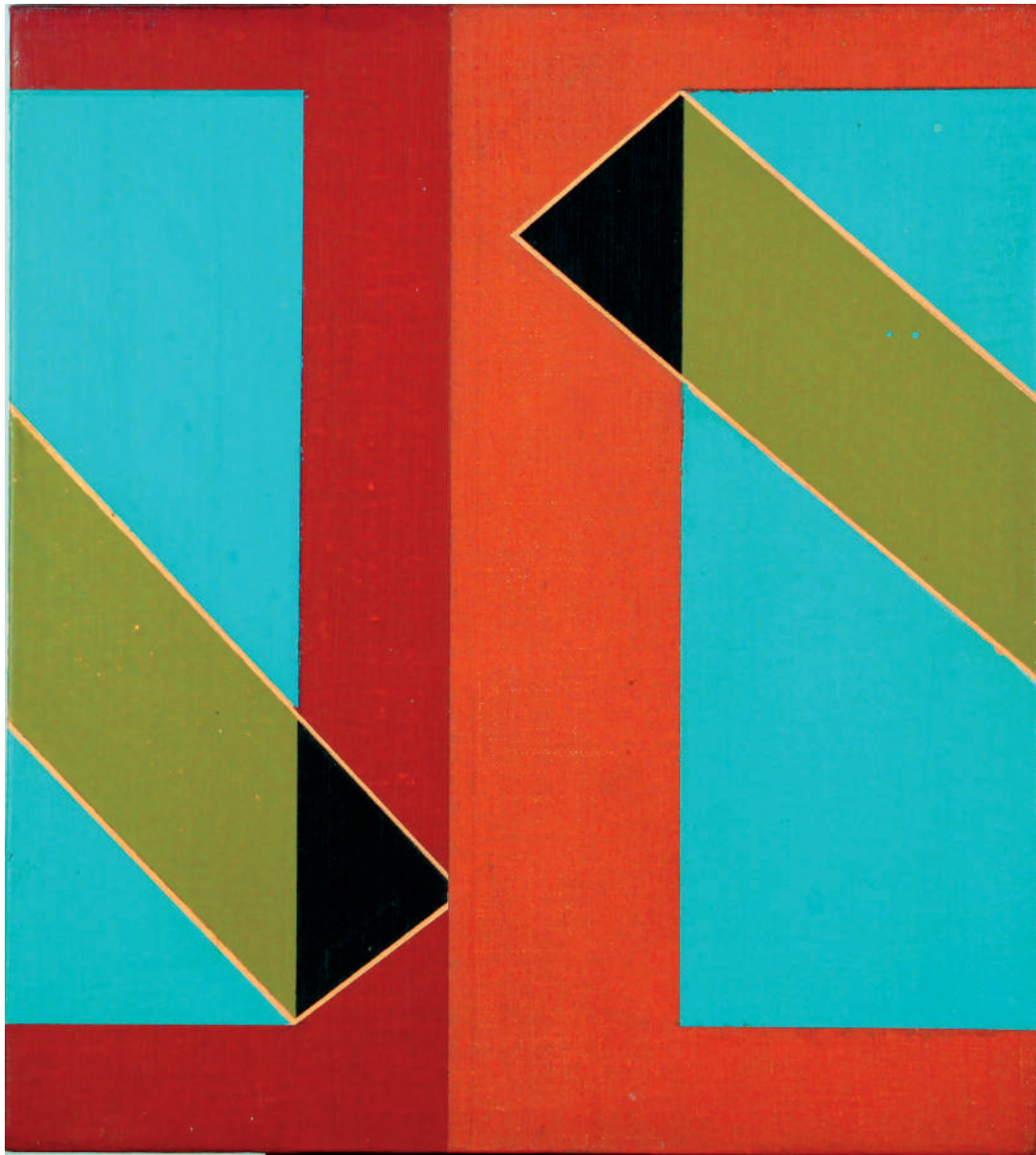




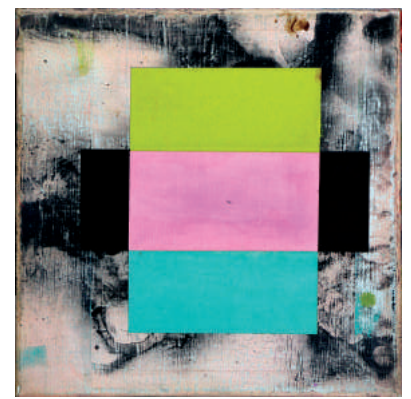
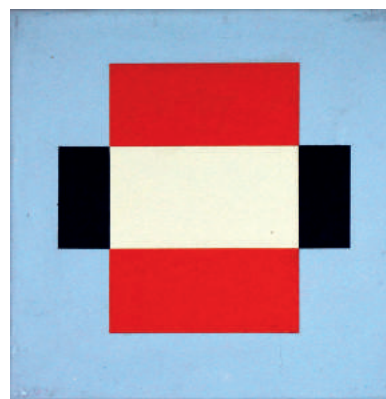
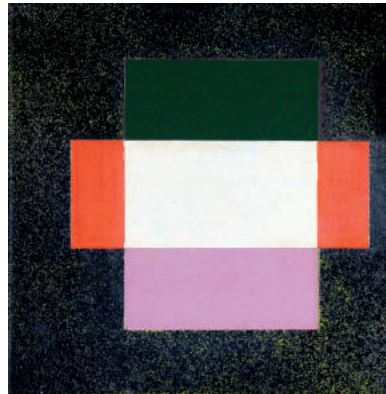
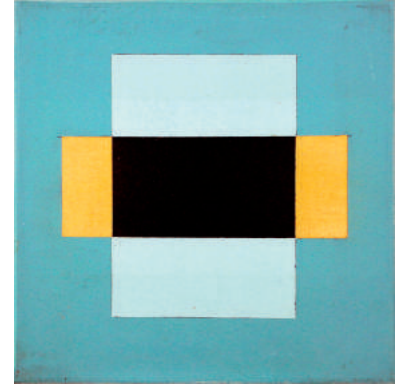
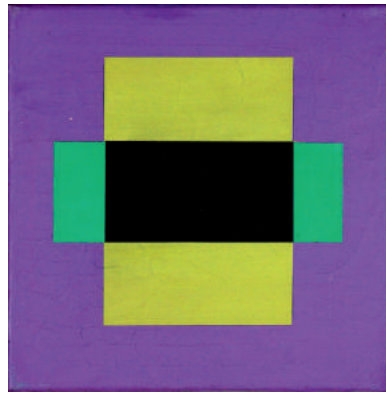
*Hvisache (b)*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 18 by 14 inches



*Flyer*, 2023, acrylic on canvas, 28 by 22 inches



*Lower Case Study Painting*, 2019, acrylic on canvas panel, 13 by 12 inches



*Sanduku Series, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 10 by 10 inches*

## **E.M. “Mike” Hollis**

Born 1953, Houston TX

### **Collections**

Chase Manhattan Bank, New York, NY  
Greenwich Management, Houston, TX  
Texas Hughes and Luce, Dallas, TX  
Texas Rotan-Mosle Company, Houston, TX  
Texas, Southwestern Bell Corporation, St. Louis, MO  
The CapStreet Group, Houston, TX  
Wilson Industries, Houston, TX

### **Museum Collections**

Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX  
The Menil Collection, Houston, TX

### **Individual Exhibitions (One-Man Shows)**

- 1979**    *Quail Suprêmes*, Texas Gallery Annex, Houston, TX
- 1981**    *Escape From Pine Valley*, 3221 Gallery, Houston, TX
- 1983**    *Escape From Pine Valley*, 55 Grand Street, New York City, NY 1999
- 1984**    *Bodacious Wall Hangings*, Square One, Houston, TX
- 1985**    Texas Gallery, Houston, TX
- 1999**    West End Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2007**    *Eyedazzlers*, Canon Texas Gallery, Santa Fe, NM

### **Selected Group Exhibitions**

- 1974**    University of St. Thomas, Houston, TX  
          *Art of the Lower Crust*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX  
          Houston Area Exhibition, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery, University  
          of Houston, TX  
          **Two Man Show**, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, TX  
          (Mike Hollis & Al Cheney)

- 1975** *Houston Area Exhibition*, Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston, TX
- 1976** *Daucus Carota – Archives of Our Lives*, Little Darlin’s Gallery, Denton, TX
- 1978** Delta Gallery, Houston, TX  
Galveston Art Center, Galveston, TX
- 1979** *Fire*, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX
- 1982** *Summer Group Exhibition*, Texas Gallery, Houston, TX
- 1984** *New Talent in Texas*, Texas Christian University Art Gallery, Fort Worth, TX  
*Michael Doga, Michael Hollis, Mary Ann Papanek-Miller*, Art League Houston, TX  
*Outstanding Emerging Artist Series*, Galveston Arts Center, Galveston, TX  
*Dimension Houston*, Republic Bank, Houston, TX  
*Synergy*, Alfred C. Glassell School of Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX
- 1985** *Texas Group Show*, Texas Gallery, Houston, TX
- 1987** *Collaborations*, Glassell School of Art, Houston, TX
- 1991** *Michael Hollis & James Martin*, Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX
- 1999** *Group Show*, ArtScan Gallery, Houston, TX  
*Mania*, Art Car Museum, Houston, TX  
*Andy Feehan & Michael Hollis*, Nancy Littlejohn Fine Art, Houston, TX
- 2001** *The Boom*, Art Car Museum, Houston, TX
- 2002** *Ajita*, The Station, Houston, TX
- 2003** *White Hot*, Devon Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX  
*Pink*, Devon Borden Hiram Butler Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2006** Bernabe Somoza Gallery, Houston, TX  
*Fluid Geometry*, ArtScan Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2007** Donna Rogers Fine Art, Houston, TX
- 2008** Holly Johnson Gallery, Dallas, TX
- 2008** Zoya Tommy Gallery, Houston, TX (2008 through 2017)
- 2015** *Degrees of Separation*, The Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston, TX
- 2017** *Houston Foundations Series*, Deborah Colton Gallery, Houston, TX
- 2023** *Screen Memories*, MSK Art Space, Houston, TX

## **Acknowledgments**

The MSK ArtSpace is founded by Michael Sean Kirby for the promotion of artist exhibitions and art education. As an artist and a teacher for over 20 years, Michael's artwork has been shown around Texas and in Mexico, including the University Pinacoteca Alfonso Michel, Contemporary Art Museum, Sculpture Month Houston, and the Big Show Lawndale. In 2021, the City of Houston acquired Kirby's work Ouroboros for its permanent Civic Art Collection. Michael earned an arts degree from the University of Texas and a Master's Degree in Visual Arts – with honors – from the San Carlos Academy in Mexico City.

Tex Kerschen is a writer, gardener, former curator, and high school English teacher. He makes music in the group Studded Left.

Donna Tennant is a writer and editor. Over the past 40 years, she has written about art for local and national publications, including Arts & Culture Texas, Glasstire, Visual Art Source, the Houston Chronicle, and Southwest Art. She has a BA in art history from the University of Rochester and an MA in art history from the University of New Mexico.

Henry Hunt is a writer, editor, and recovering art historian. He has broad interests but typically specializes in the visual arts, performing arts, and anything else that attracts his attention.



Photo by Zoya Tommy: Jim Harithas and Mike Hollis, Artwork by Ibsen Espada

In memory of Jim Harithas



