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I USED TO BE A RAINBOW

Earl McBride

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**I USED TO BE
A RAINBOW**

EARL MCBRIDE

This book is dedicated to Kim Perrier. Your love is my greatest treasure. Thank you for your unwavering support through all these years and all my shape-shifting. I love you the most..


I wish to thank my wonderful, giant committee:
Committee Chair, Bart Exposito and members
Scott Anderson, Susanne Anderson-Riedel, Ray Hernández-Durán,
Patrick Manning and Raychael Lynn Stine.
Your honesty and directness illuminated the path to a deeper understanding of painting and my practice. Thank you all for your flexibility, inspiration, energy, and vision.

Thank you, Nancy Zastudil, for your essay and editing this book. You're a vital and talented member of the art community here in Albuquerque. I'm honored that you're a part of this publication.

Thank you, Richard Levy and Viviette Hunt of Richard Levy Gallery, for your enthusiasm, generosity, and belief in my work. Thank you, Richard, for your sweet gift of vintage *Mad Magazines* for our first studio visit. I feel fortunate to be represented by your gallery and I look forward to what comes next!

**I USED TO BE
A RAINBOW**

EARL MCBRIDE



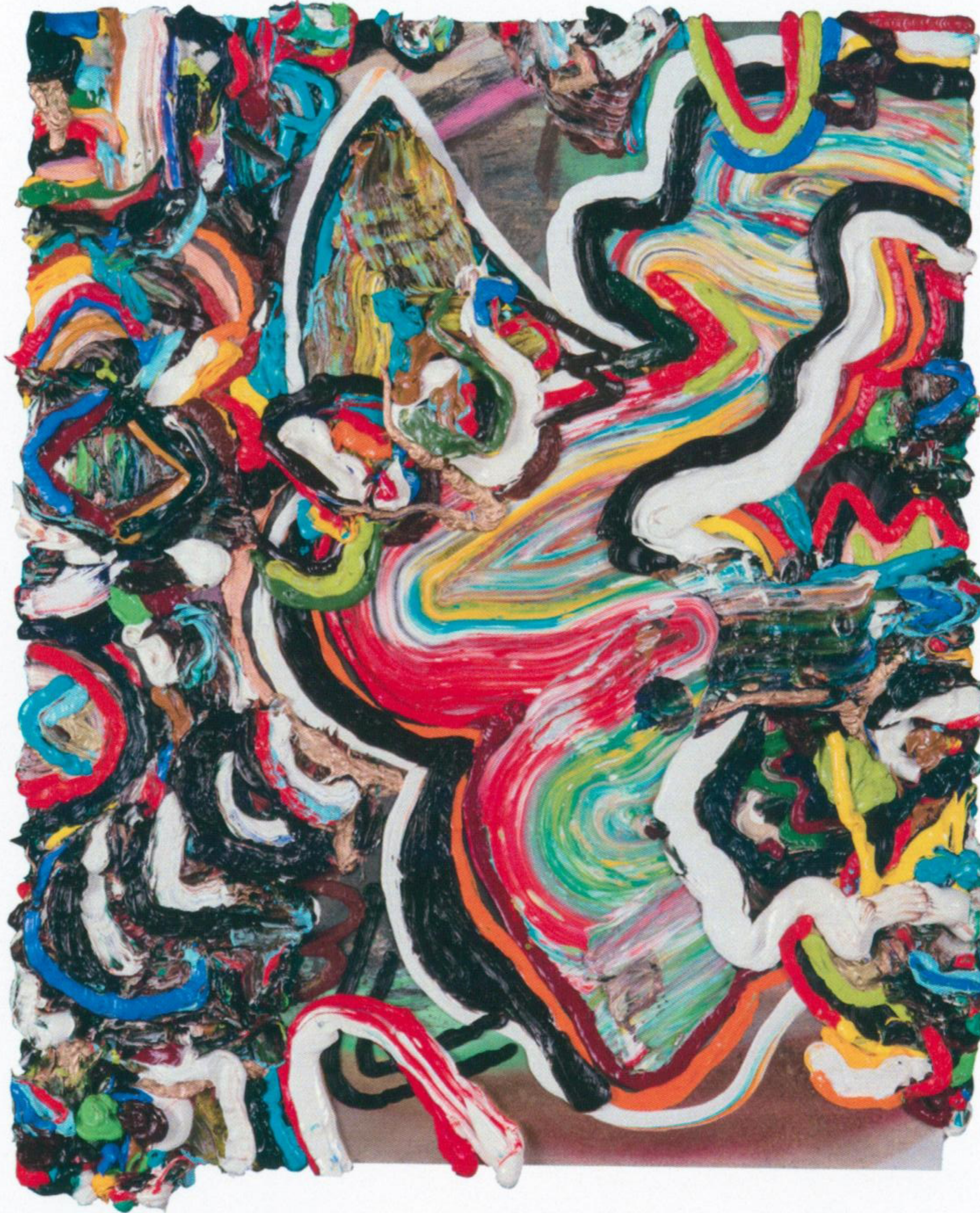
FYI



EARL'S

IN

HERE



Pink Rhino, 2016
oil and spray paint, 20x16"

Earl

By Nancy Zastudil

Painting is applying one bit of color next to another. Music is a string of notes played in succession. Walking is putting one foot in front of the other. While true in theory, anyone who has ever put one of these activities into practice knows it demands far more.

In his artworks, Earl McBride embraces similarly simplified expectations, though not without first coaxing—sometimes wrestling—them into submission. His use of materials, expressionist mark-making, and choice of colors are all strong compositional elements that make direct reference to a personal narrative without resorting to overt, didactic representation.

McBride's paintings are bold and enticing—a literal, physical mash-up of forms. He creates most of his imagery through the repetition of a specific shape—a point or peak, sketched in pencil and crayon, or formed with paint—which signifies his coming out and gender reassignment. Sometimes he gathers these marks together to form a star, or mountain-like form, and other times he connects, stretches, and softens them to create a double arch, typically recognized as the universal symbol of a bird in flight.

Heavy, thick layers of high chroma paint, which he applies gluttonously, straight from the tube, result in colorful, bulbous surfaces that are alive and obese with pigment, then thinning out or disappearing altogether in places to reveal a flat yet layered, sometimes spray-painted, underpainting on panel. Pink Rhino, a 20"x16" painting with its compacted, swollen materials could be read as a detail of the larger 48"x36" work Too Much?, which seems to spin like a dust cloud of emotion and energy, giving a hat tip to the use of "POW!" and "WHAM!" and other visual exclamation explosions found in cartoons and comic books.

The large painting SMILE, which McBride identifies as a self-portrait, depicts what the title implies: an image of a smiley face. But when considered amidst the artist's other works, the "face" can be seen as spray-painted shapes—two yellow circles or spots, overlaid with white, and a yellow half-loop—floating atop a vibrating background of stacked peak-like, double rainbow arches that create a sharp central groove or division and reach outward (or inward, depending on perspective). The combination elicits an agitated emotional response to the ubiquitous "Smile!" command of family and strangers alike. Other works such as Tube Sock Snoopy, You Made Me Hate the Circus, and Chicken and Waffles, with their references to childhood experiences, the power and influence of memory, and Southern food combinations, persuade viewers to more deeply consider the relationships between McBride's abstract imagery, personal experiences, and cultural norms.

To create *Tiny's*, a powerhouse miniature painting, McBride piled paint en masse onto the lower half of a 6"x4" panel, with little regard for the imposed limits of its edges. Paint sits like thick globs of black, blue, red, white, and yellow icing which flatten and spread near the middle, leading the viewer's eye up toward a sharp peak, surrounded by a halo of black spray paint splatter. In the lower left quadrant, he creates multiple peaks by squeezing paint from the tube and applying it directly to the surface, then presumably pulling like taffy until it gives way. He finished the piece by sprinkling the surface with silver dust.

With his exaggeration of the "fat over lean" painting principle, along with a lack of strict delineation amongst drawing, painting, and illustration, McBride firmly grounds his works in conversation with contemporary art practice. He uses contradictions as the physical and visual building blocks of his paintings to remind us that we live in a culture dominated by binary representations of existence—ugly as compared to beautiful, no good without evil, nothing is sacred without the profane, right is only so if there is wrong, and yes is meaningless apart from no. Simultaneously, he asks us to challenge these relationships. What about the generative power of pluralism and multiplicity: and, maybe, also, sometimes?

Thick and thin paint, shiny and matte surfaces, bright and dull colors, left and right, top and bottom, and side-by-side arrangements all draw attention to the myriad nuanced, dynamic positions that exist in between supposed static absolutes. These separations refer to the dualities embedded in American culture, including religion, gender, and aesthetics, separations and expectations that McBride seeks to unite. In works such as *Earl*, or another simply titled *^*, he arranges the composition into distinct areas of heavy activity, punctuated by opaque white-beige backgrounds visually connected through his symbology. The associative power of naming invites viewers to follow along as the artist finds his way through the frenzy.

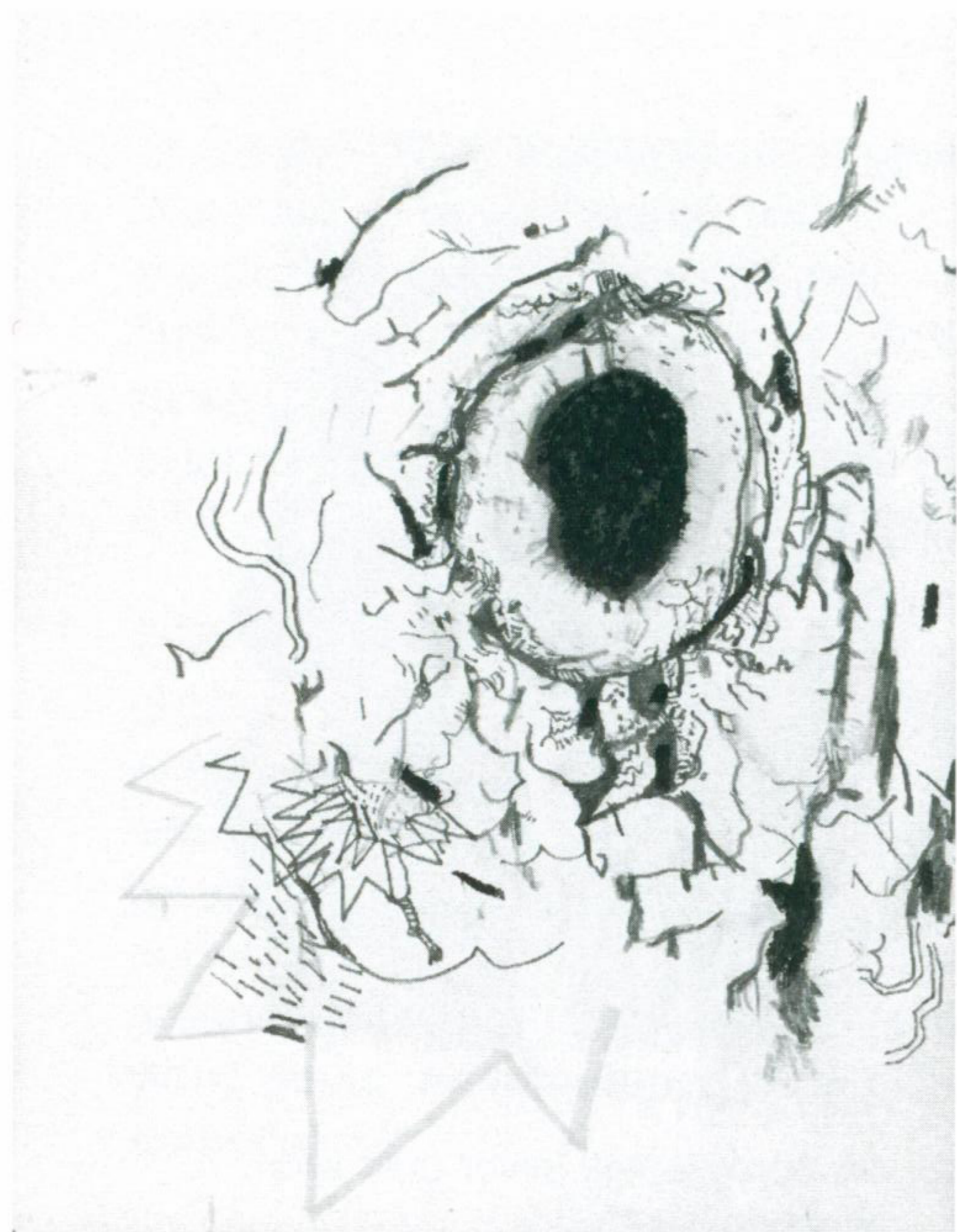
McBride is generous with his creativity, using engaging abstract imagery to propose a slew of potentially messy questions about his (and our) psychological and physical states of being. And there is joy here, there is life. And there is love. Can an "empty" space of a painting long to be fulfilled? Can a crowded image gasp for breath? Does one decision, one action, simply lead to the next? These metaphors may seem simple, but the lessons are profound.

—NANCY ZASTUDIL

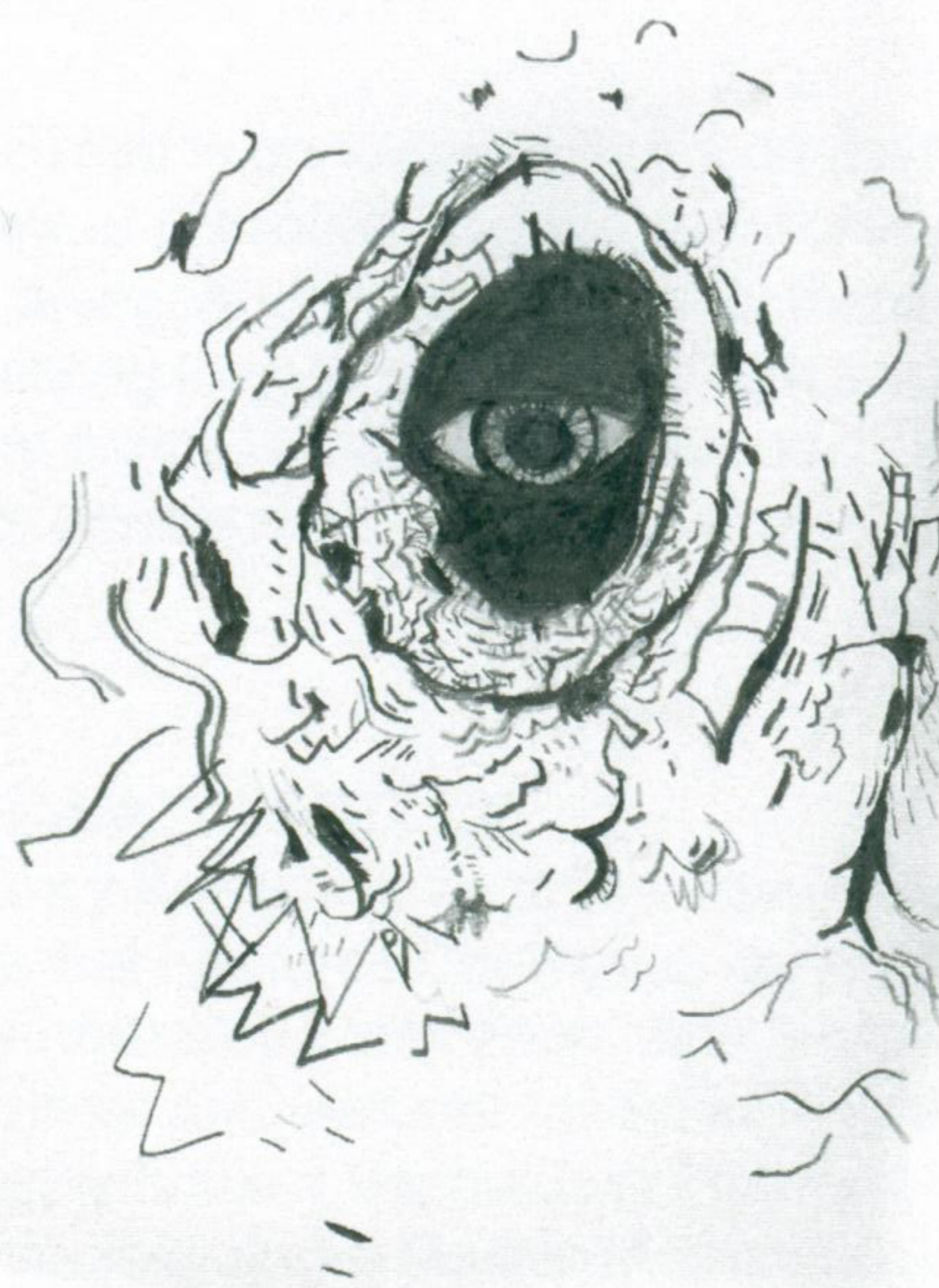
Nancy Zastudil is an art curator, writer, and editor. Currently she is owner/director of Central Features Contemporary Art and Administrative Director of the Frederick Hammersley Foundation. She is also Visual Arts Editor for Arts and Culture Texas, and her reviews and features have been published in various other magazines and publications. Nancy holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting and Drawing from The Ohio State University and a Master of Arts in Curatorial Practice from California College of the Arts.



Tiny's, 2017
oil, spray paint, silver dust and
graphite, 6x4"



This is my first memory: I am not old enough to talk. It's past my bedtime. I am sitting on my mother's lap. The TV is on but the sound is down. The movie is black and white. The shot is a city street at night. It's raining and dark. The camera focuses on a park. The camera pans closer to a tree on the edge of the park. Then closer to a knot in the tree. Then a closer shot and I see ...



... AN EYE! There was an eye in the knot of the tree and it looked out and then moved its gaze to one side. The presence of this eye was unexpected and horrifying. What does this mean? My tiny baby brain was scrambled by this shocking and disturbing sight.

I wondered, "Is there a human in the tree? Is the tree part human? Does the tree have an eye? Is this a monster? What is a monster? Do we exist where we should not?"



“An angel is nothing but a shark well governed.” - Herman Melville

This is my first memory connected to drawing: I was about three years old. My parents had invited friends over and they were in the den. I was in my bedroom with a piece of paper and a pencil. I had an illustrated book of angels. I found a cherubic angel, with blond curly hair and a chubby winged body. I placed the paper over the angel and traced its golden locks, rose bud lips, and little toes. I was proud of my drawing and took it into the den to show the grown-ups. They were *amazed* and marveled at their talented toddler. I realized they didn't know I traced the angel. I didn't let on. I kept my secret but now I had to learn to draw. I practiced drawing by looking at an illustrated Bible and *Casper the Friendly Ghost* comics before moving on to *Mad Magazine*, *Cracked* and *ZAP Magazine*.



There are shapes that repeat again and again throughout my life and I repeat them in my paintings. One of those is the shape of a bat's wings. When I was a kid I lived in the country and we did "country" things. For example, we would toss pine cones up in the air at night and bats would dive down at them. The shape of their wings against the black Georgia night is printed on my memory. Vampire movies were especially frightening because I felt the scenario so plausible.



One night, when I was about six or seven years old, my sister and I were spending the night with my Aunt Leona. We were sleeping in a bedroom with a fireplace. A flying squirrel sailed down the chimney and glided across the bedroom. We called my granddad who lived across the street. He came over with a broom and a shot gun. I was relieved when he used the broom to usher the winged squirrel from the house.

There was something about these particular animals that interested me. A bat looks like a puppy with wings made of antique furniture. Squirrels aren't supposed to have wings or fly. These were an aberration and so am I.

PAINTING



Pray for Surf, 2015
oil, colored pencil, graphite, crayon and marker on panel, 48x48"

This is one of four 4'x4' paintings I started in the spring of 2015 and finished that summer. I began releasing an energy that I had previously kept reigned in. These paintings were a turning point. This time, I left the marks and built the painting on them instead of wiping them out or covering them up.



Losing My Religion, 2015
oil, colored pencil, spray paint, enamel marker, Flashe and graphite, 48x48"

Losing My Religion is about letting go of ideas about the self and painting. I was trying to visually interpret ideas about gender, individuality, and identity. I use letters as form or structure in many of my paintings. The word MUSEUM is embedded in this one. It's a voodoo spell to actualize its exhibition in a museum.



I Heart Don Martin, 2015

oil, colored pencil, spray paint, wax crayon, enamel marker and graphite, 48x48"

I Heart Don Martin is a painting in honor of one of my childhood heroes, Don Martin, cartoonist for *Mad Magazine*. It's also a self-portrait. This is what it looks when I think of Don Martin and little Earl and the woods around my house. A water fall of thoughts spills and tumbles as I use marks to make forms out of rambling associations.



I Used To Be A Rainbow, 2015
oil, colored pencil, litho crayon, Flashe, spray paint, enamel marker and graphite, 48x48"



Dr. J, 2016
oil and graphite, 40x34"

Dr. J is a poem about a middle-aged basketball player who is also a combination of me, my dad, and Dr. J (a basketball player my dad and I both loved). It's about sports and wanting to have sideburns. The "E" is for Earl, Edgar (my granddad), and Everett (my dad). If I tell you these things, does it close down your experience? A friend had this painting for a while and hung it upside down. Does that mean she didn't understand the painting? No. She didn't understand as I do. I suppose formally she preferred it the other way round. I'd like to say I'm O.K. with that. But, right away, I turned it around.



^, 2015
oil, graphite, spray paint and wax crayon on panel, 48x36"

Where am I? Who do I think I am? This mark is next to that one.
How large am I? I feel desire because of this negative space. How
do I fit in space? What am I?



Earl, 2016
oil, colored pencil, spray paint, enamel marker and graphite, 48x36"

My work is a result of collisions. Most recently, I collided with a particular manhood and puberty. I am absorbing the testosterone and it's changing me physically and mentally. My studio practice has collided with this greasy vile and that collision creates another shift. I work now with a kind of directness that eluded me pre-testosterone. I am less hesitant. I'm in the process of becoming and un-becoming, and so are my paintings.



You Made Me Hate the Circus, 2016
oil, colored pencil, spray paint, enamel marker and graphite, 60X49"



Dirty King, 2016
oil, graphite, spray paint and wax crayon on panel, 48x36"



Big F.U., 2017
oil, graphite, spray paint, wax crayon and oil stick, 60X49"



Ace, 2017
oil, graphite, spray paint, oil stick, wax crayon and gold dust, 60X49"

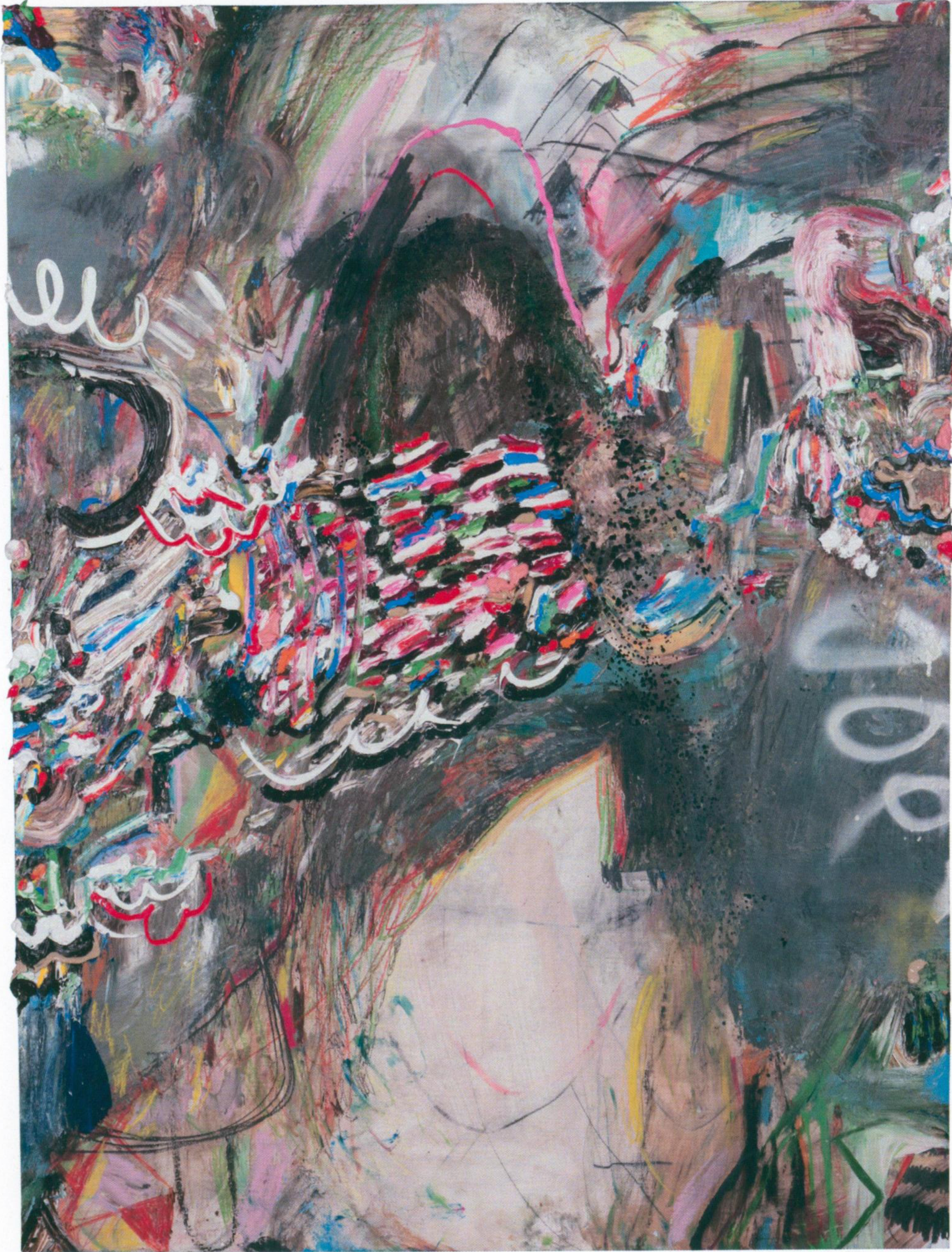


Dragon Dreams, 2017
oil, graphite, spray paint, wax crayon and Flashe, 60X48"

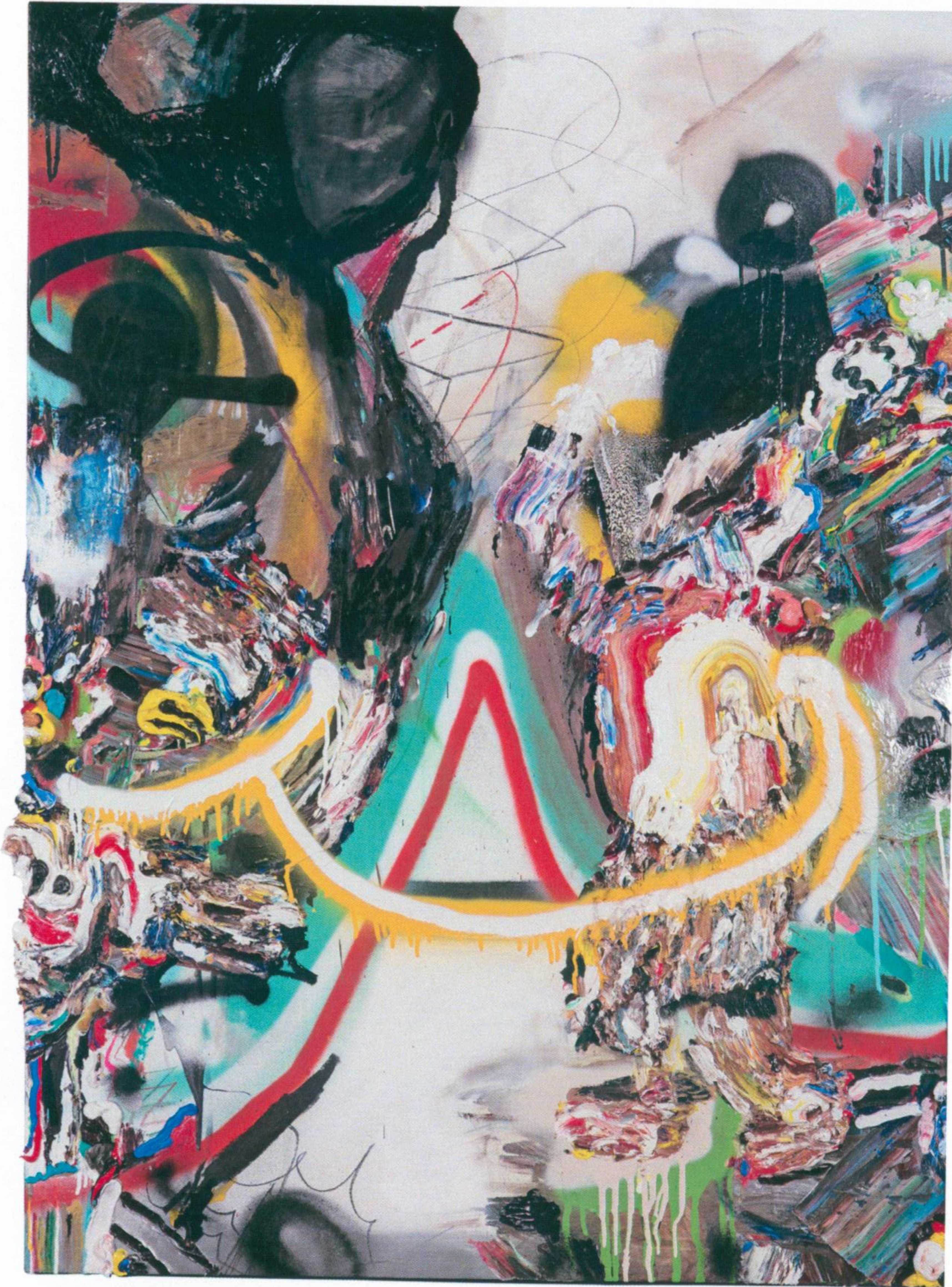


Too Much?, 2017
oil, graphite, spray paint, wax crayon and Flashe, 48x36"

It should look alive, searching, undone and unresolved. I want these paintings to be sexy-ugly. I don't want my work to be easy to love. I want it to seduce you in spite of its volume or excess.



American Landscape, 2017
oil, graphite, spray paint, wax crayon and Flashe, 53x30"



Polar Sasquatch Circus Revival, 2017
oil, graphite, wax crayon and spray paint on panel, 49x36"

Polar Sasquatch Circus Revival is a self-portrait and an abstract painting that celebrates ugliness. It's about myth and the collision of culture and ritual. At its heart, it's about feeling like a freak and letting the freak flag fly.



Black Rainbow, 2017
oil, graphite, spray paint and grease marker, 20x16"



fzzeMDER, 2015
oil on canvas, 14x15"

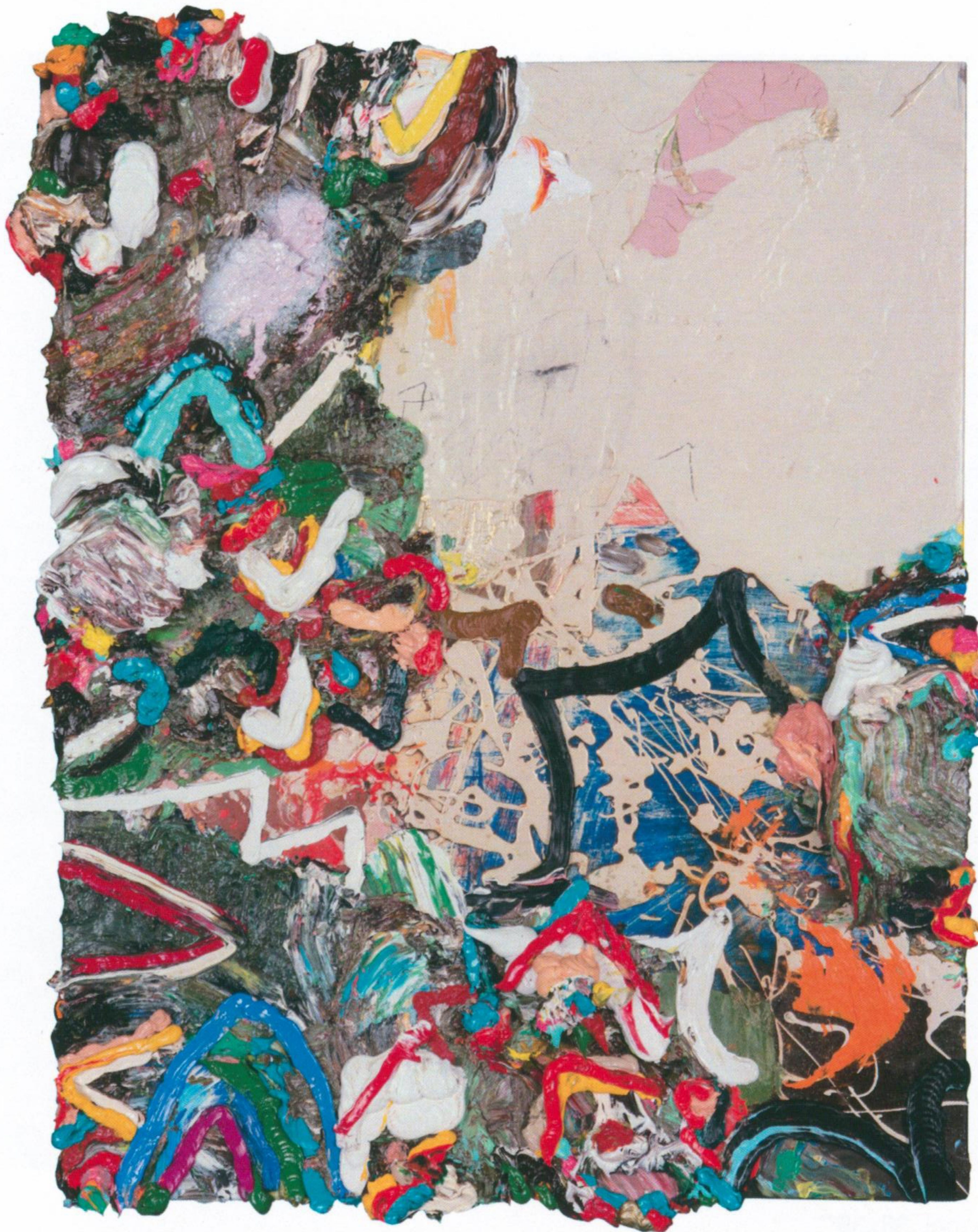
Human beings are messy. There is confusion and overflow. The texture and oiliness in my paintings are evidence of an attempt to describe this condition.



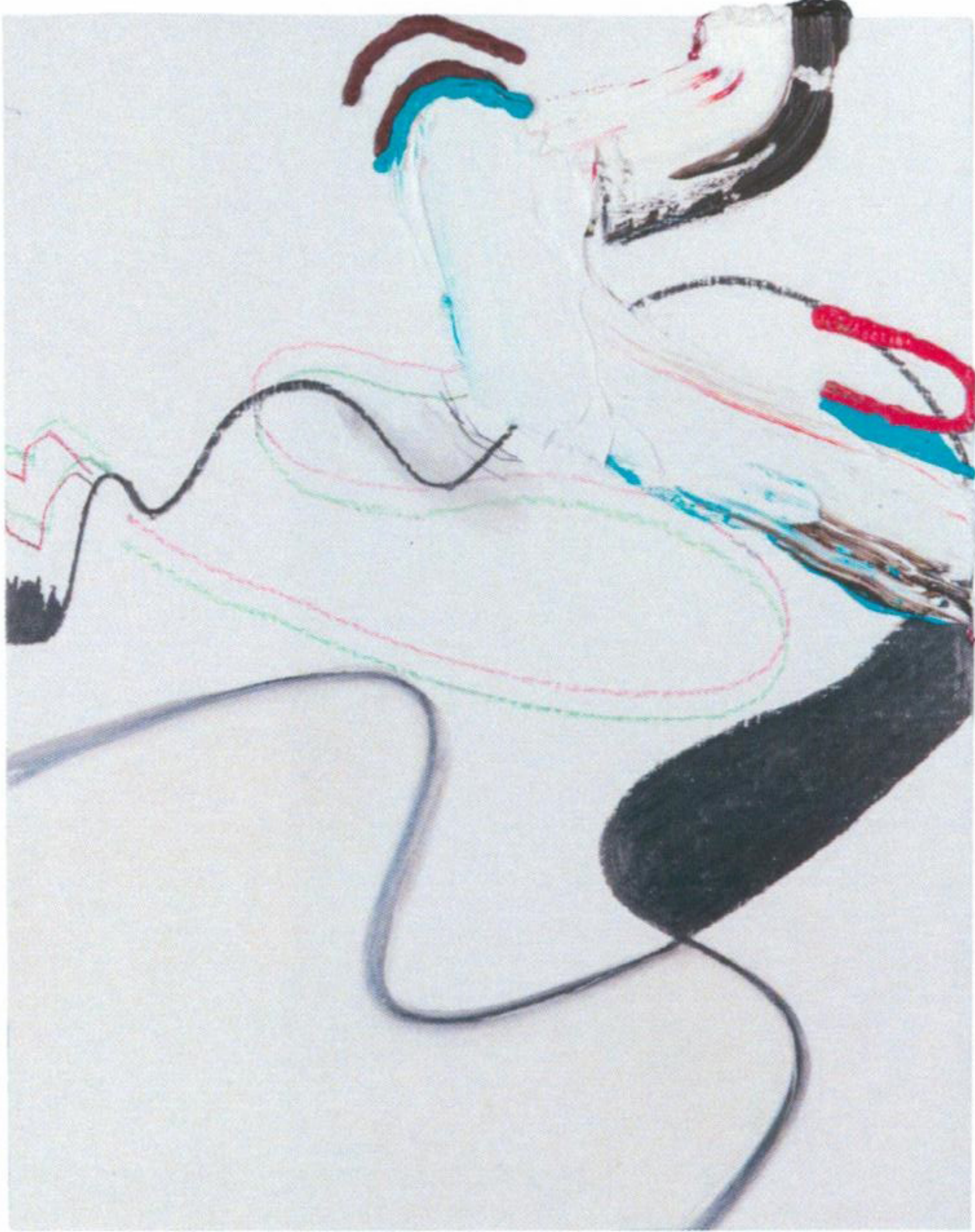
Heimlich, 2014
oil on canvas, 16x15"



Stomp, 2014
oil on panel, 36x36"



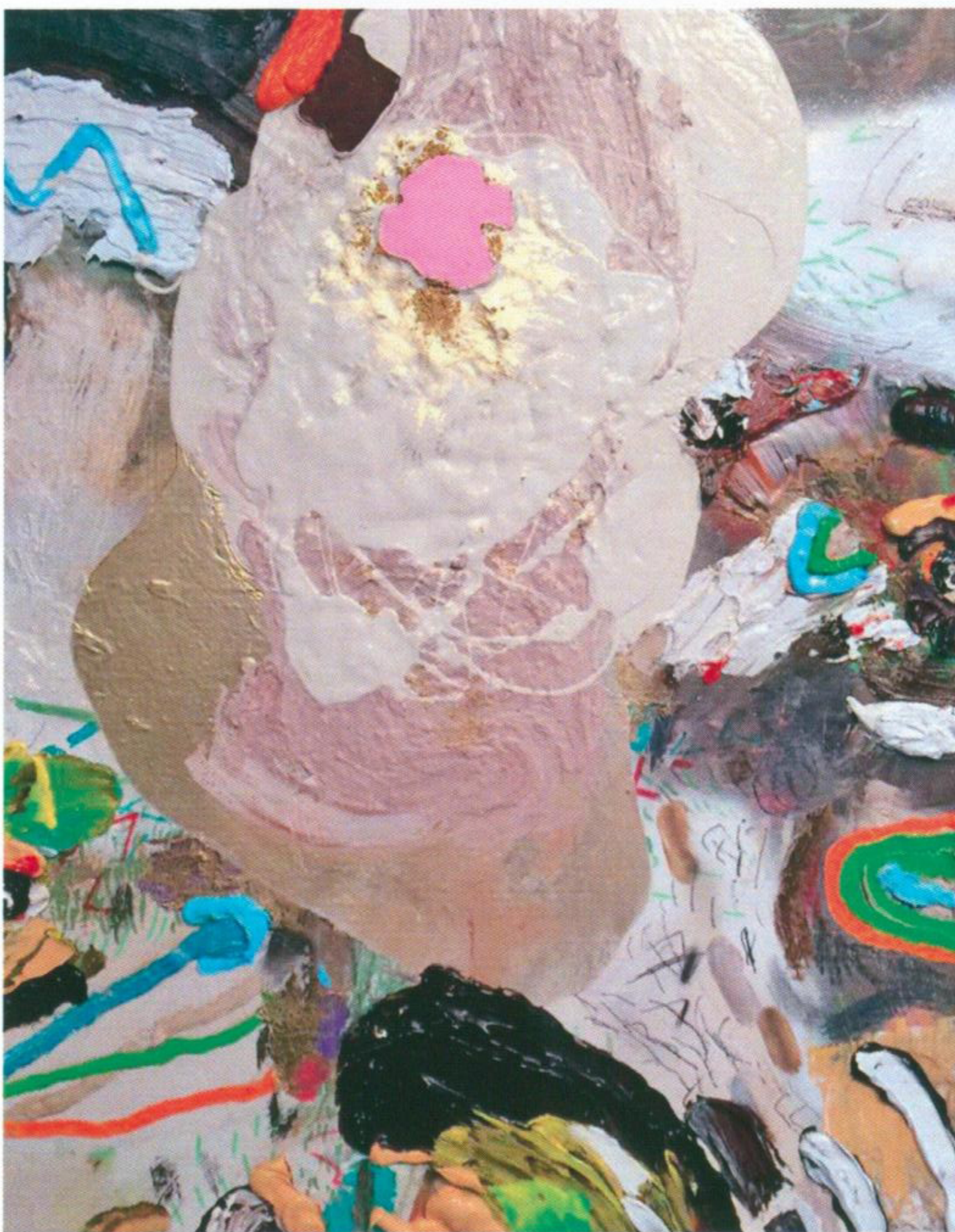
Last Gasp, 2016
oil, flash, house paint, graphite and spray paint on panel, 20x16"



Tube Sock Snoopy, 2017
oil, graphite and wax crayon on
panel, 20x16"



Joker, 2016
oil, graphite and wax crayon on panel, 20x16"



Chicken & Waffles, 2016
oil, graphite, wax crayon, flash, gold dust,
house paint on panel, 20x16"

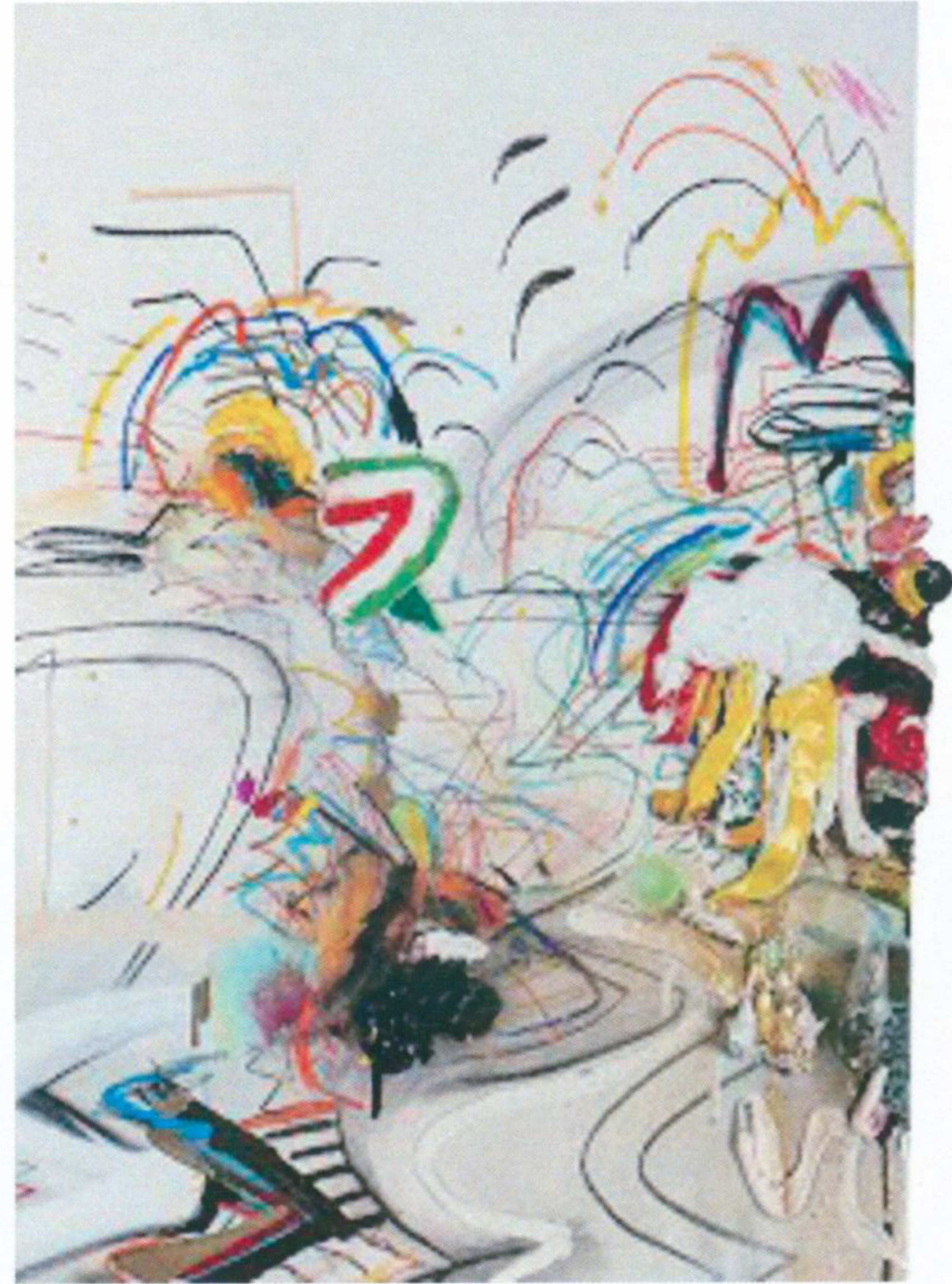


Little King, 2016
oil, graphite, spray paint and wax crayon on
panel, 20x16"



SMILE, 2017
spray paint, oil and graphite on panel, 49x36"

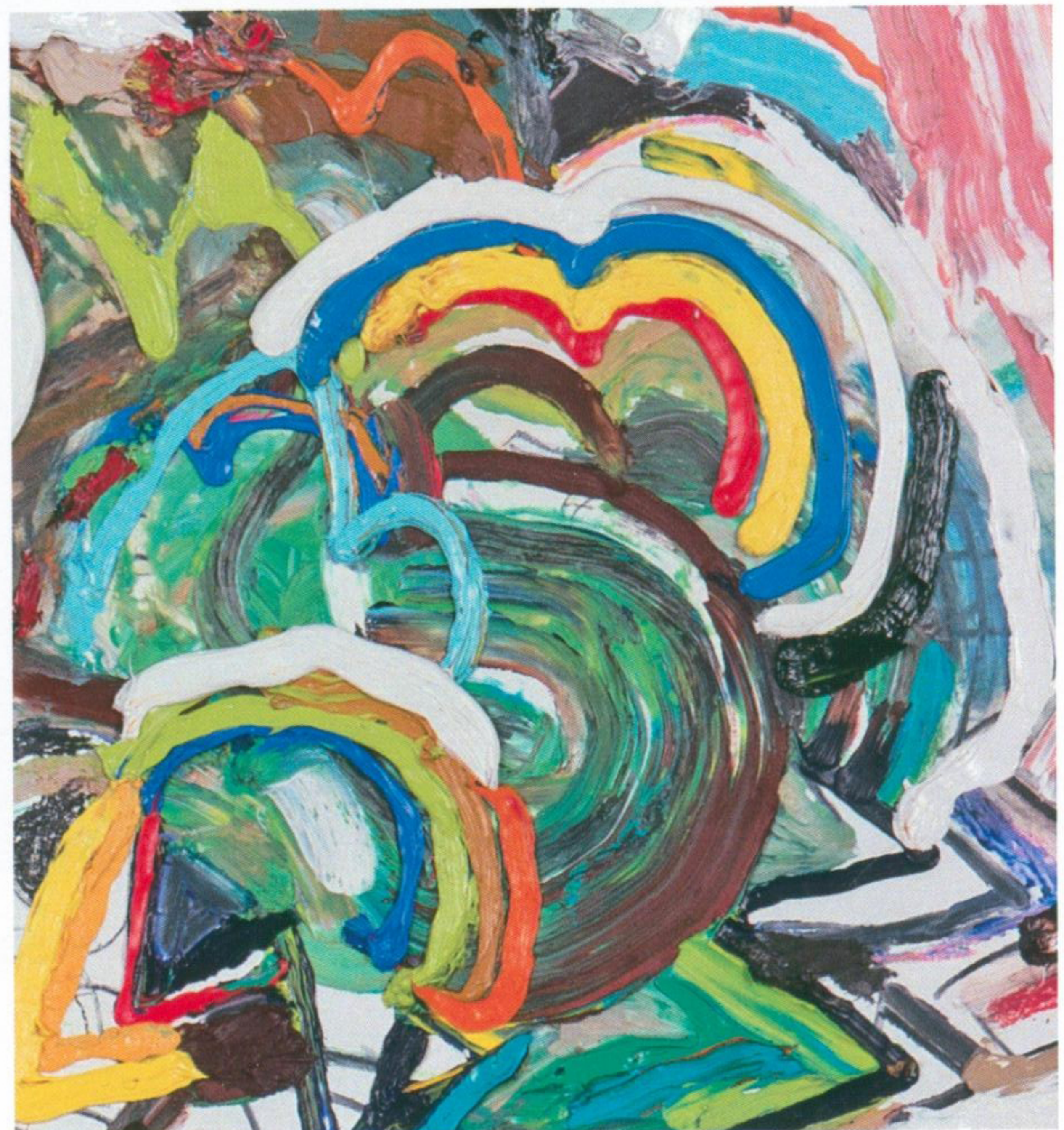
DETAILS

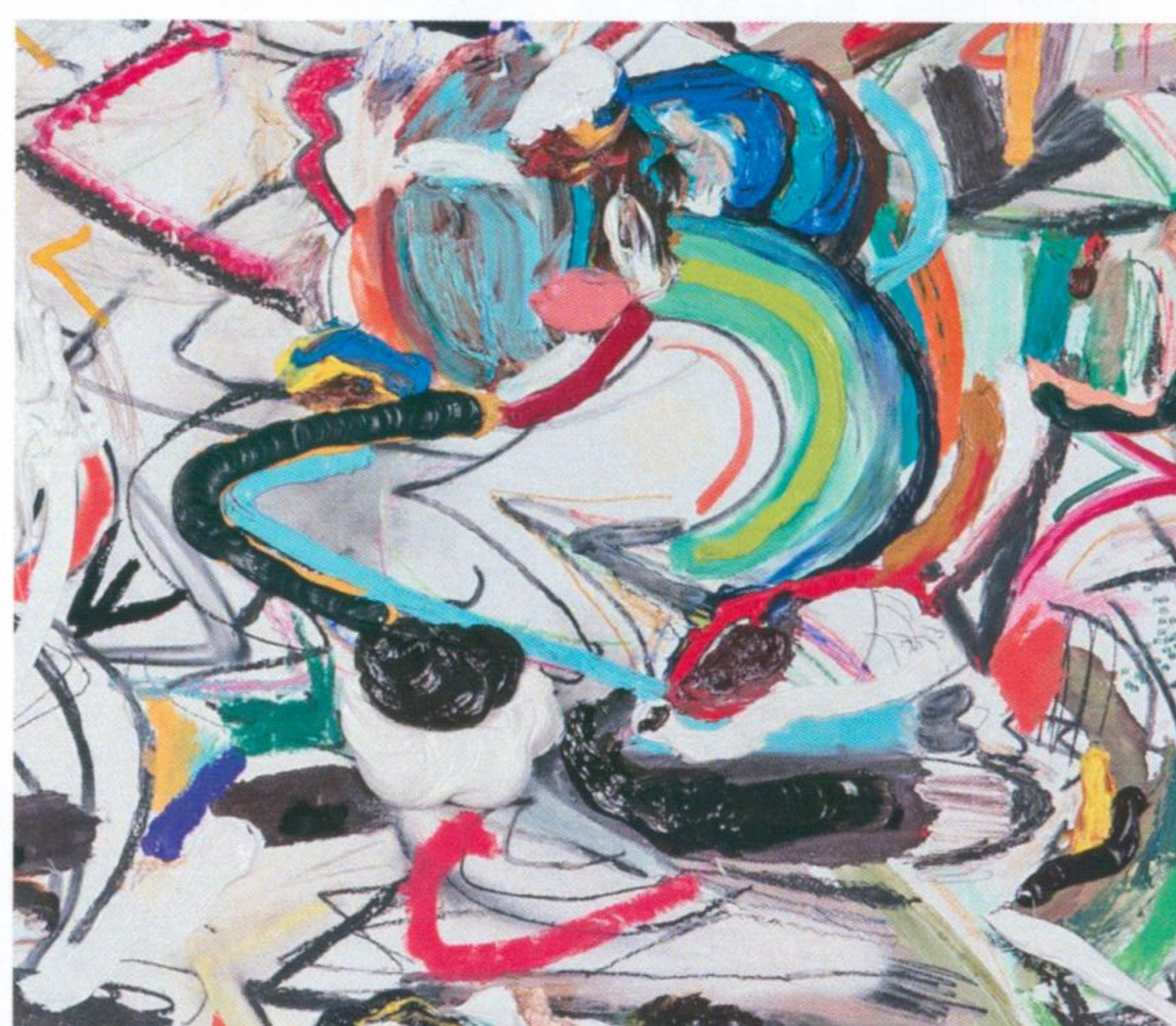
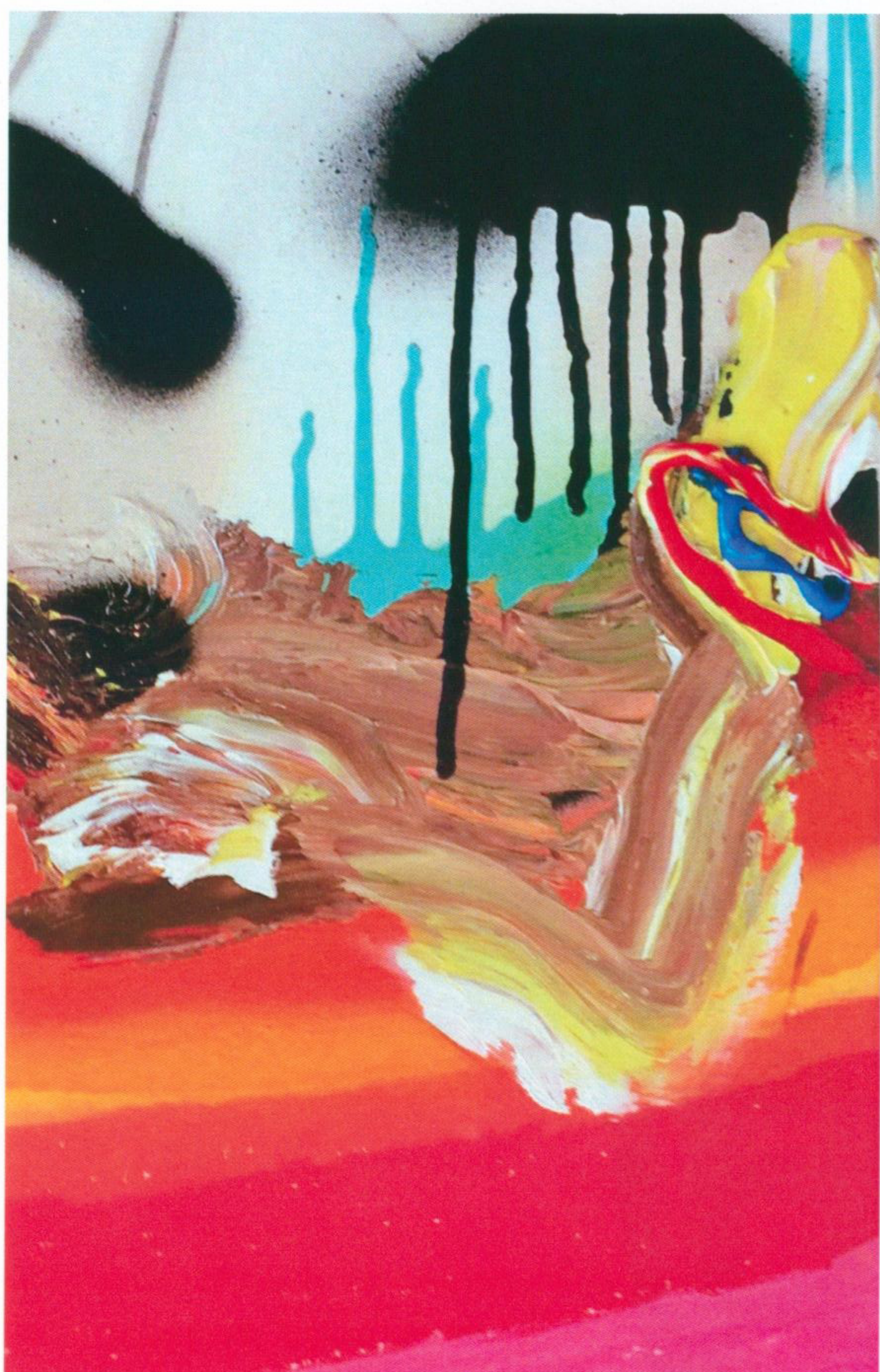




I am a particular sort of feller. My work shows me and you what that looks like. I paint and draw these things so that we are connected.

I think when someone responds to a painting they are responding to those things we have in common, written in a language that, somehow, we both know. The viewer understands me a little more because of something familiar they see in my painting. It's some part of them, too and those parts can be ugly and beautiful, viscous and dry, oily and flat, thick and smooth, observer and participant, comedy and pathos, negative and positive space, discordant colors, brash decisions and restraint. We are connected in these ways.





My paintings are about transformation, ugliness, beauty, salvation, damnation, shape-shifting. Most importantly, they are about the mechanics of paint and the language of drawing and painting, which is giving form to an idea. Sometimes they are a futile plea to be understood while willfully obscuring the view. They are formal manifestations of feelings, ideas, and my reactions to the world. Each painting is its own thing. I have an experience with the painting that allows it to become what it needs to be, what it was supposed to be all along.

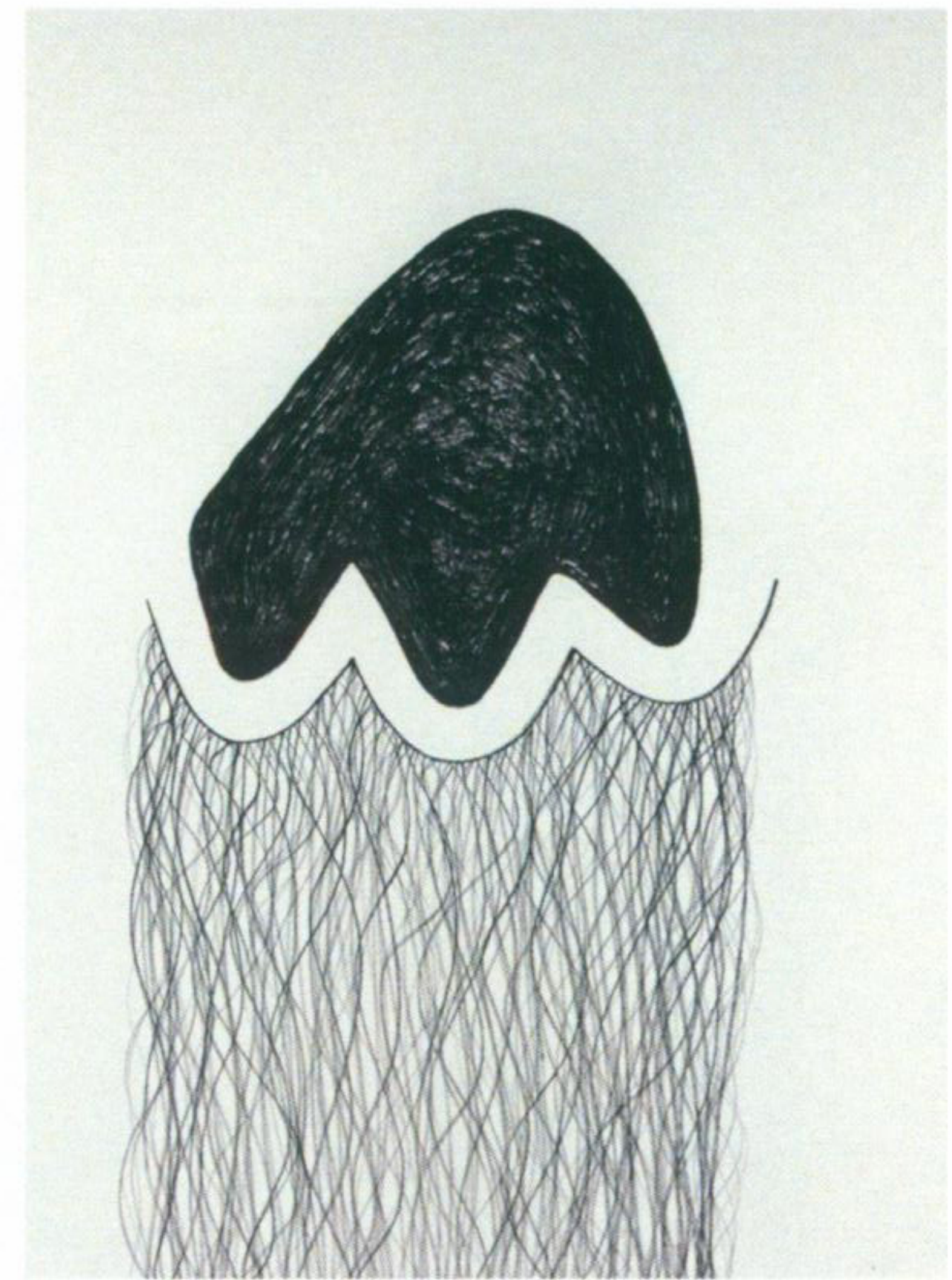


PRINTS

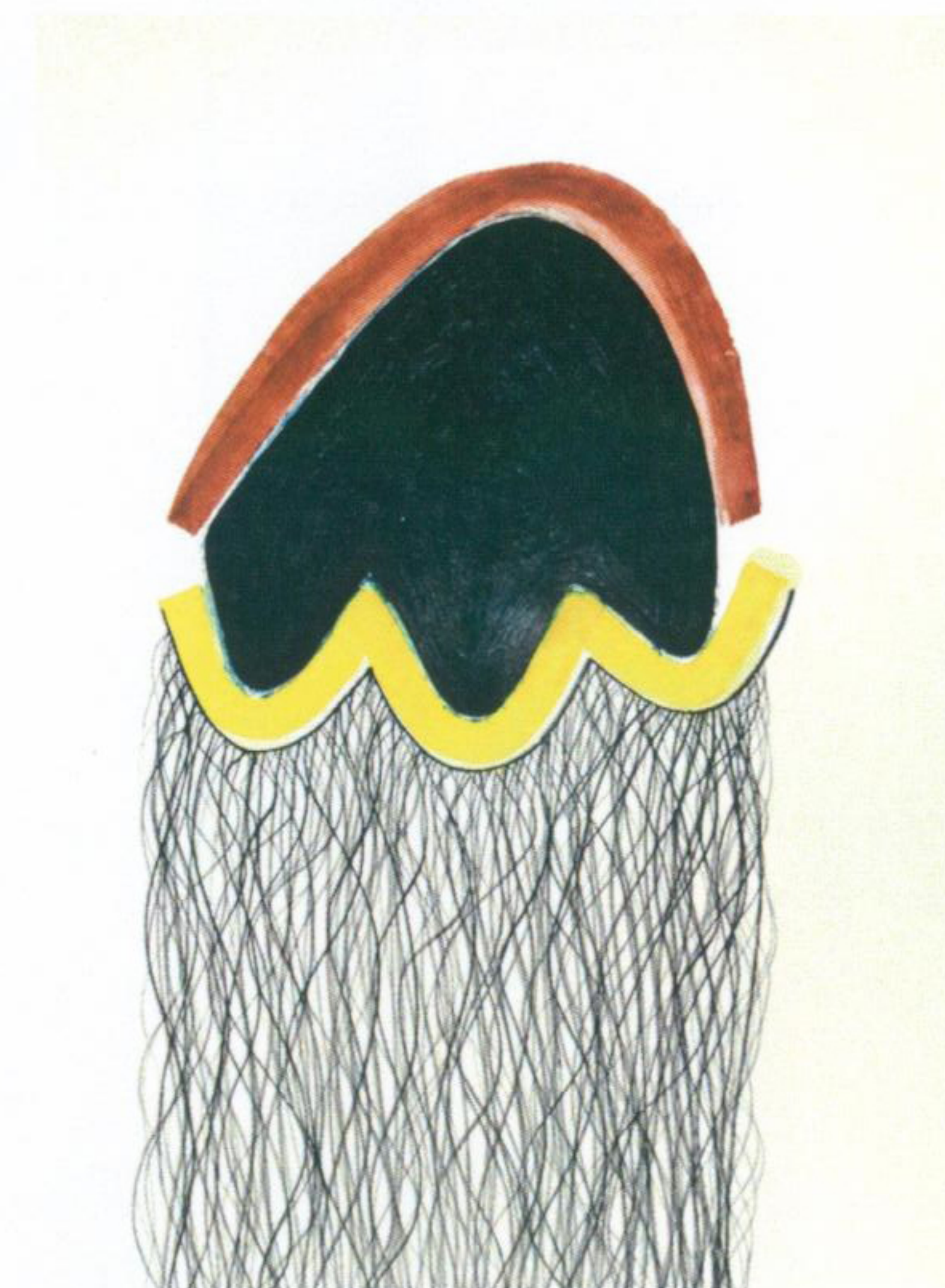


Top of the Key, 2015, monotype with glitter on paper, 30x22"

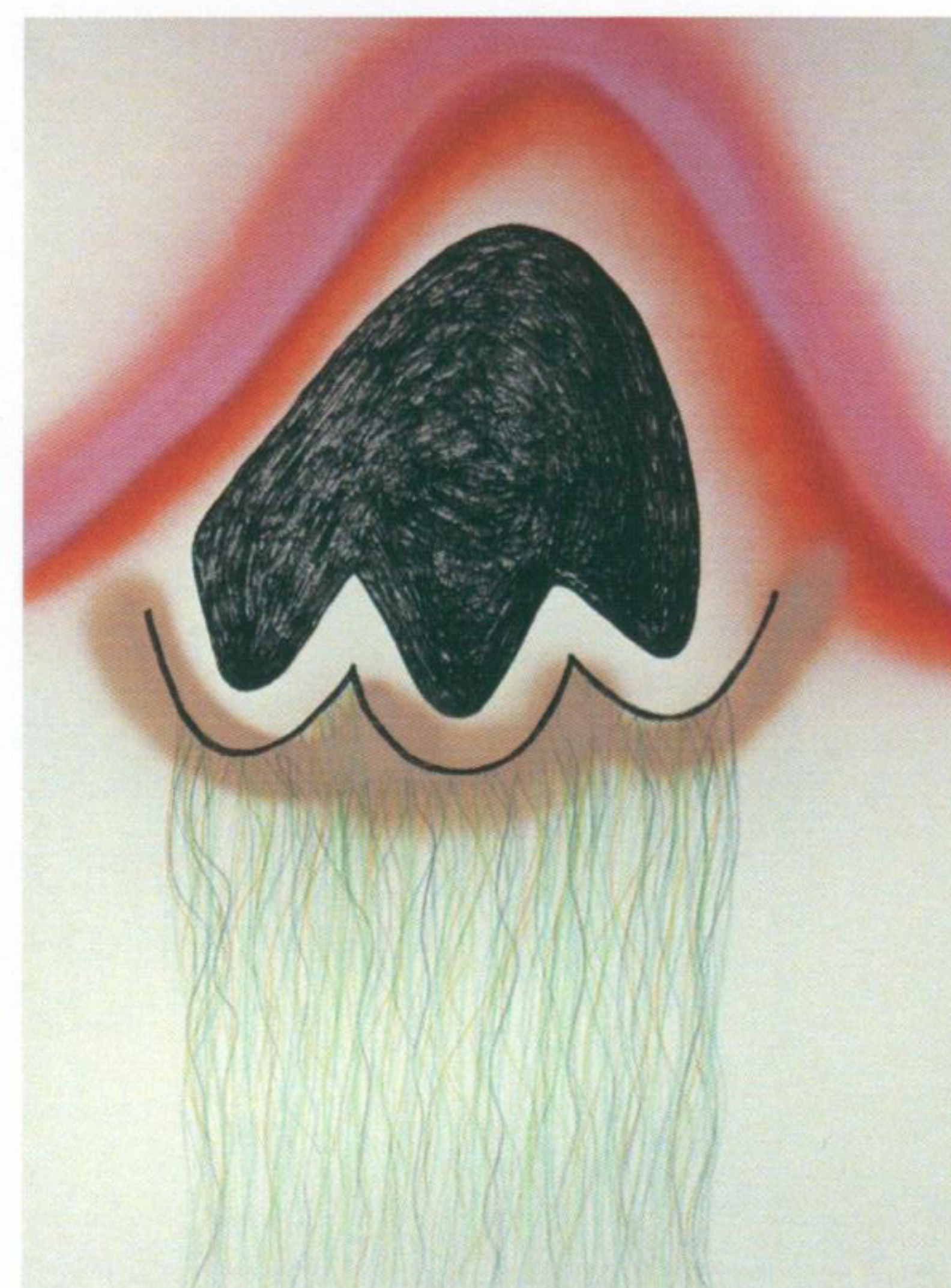
Smack Attack, 2015
lithograph on paper, 30x22"



Smack Attack No. 1, 2015
lithograph and monoprint on paper, 30x22"



Smack Attack No. 2, 2015
lithograph, colored pencil and spray paint on paper, 30x22"





Busted, 2015, lithograph on paper, 30x22"



Busted ed. 1/5, 2015
lithograph with colored pencil and crayon
on paper, 18x15.5"



Busted ed. 2/5, 2015
lithograph with colored pencil and crayon
on paper, 18x15.5"



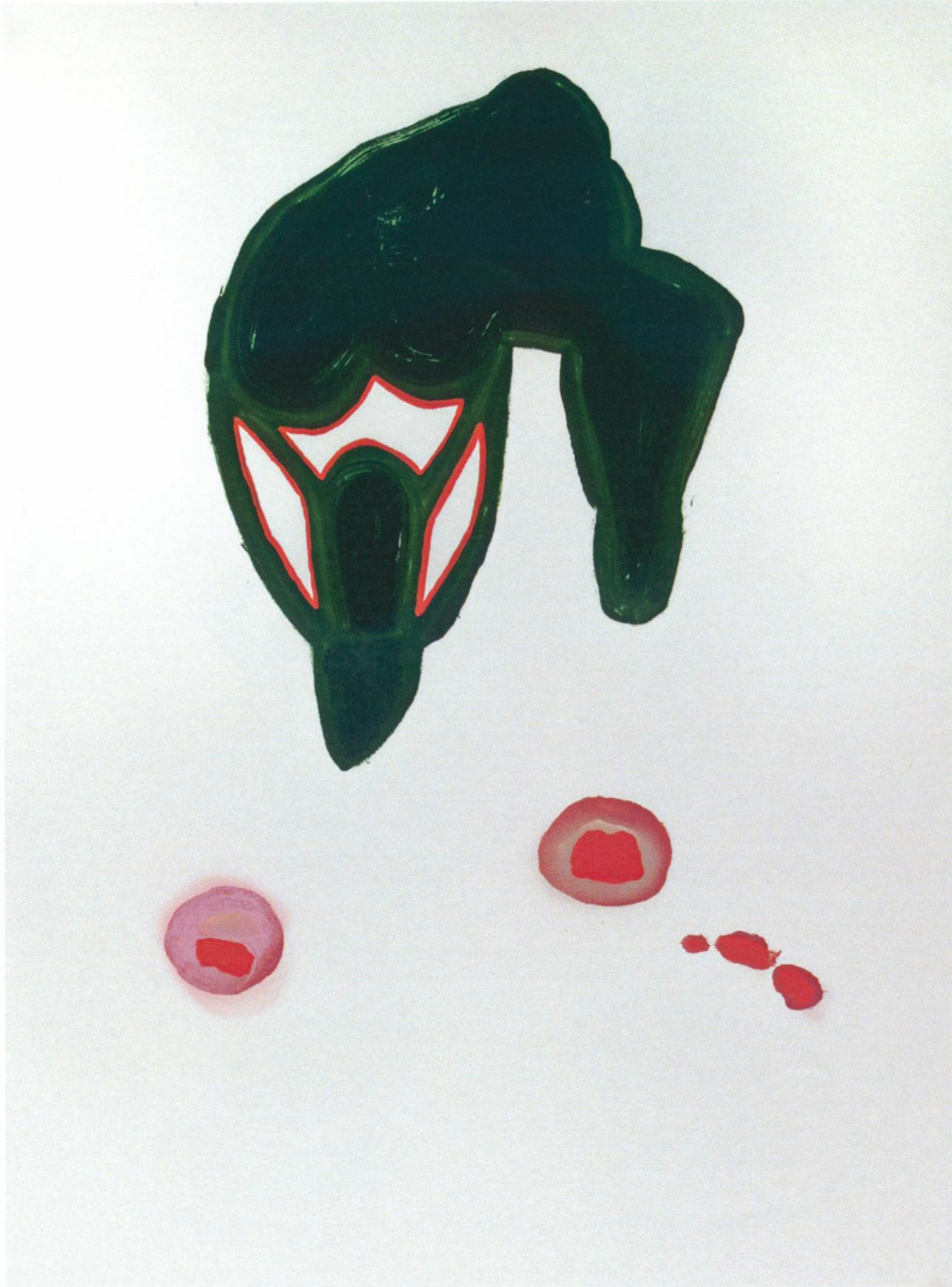
Busted ed. 3/5, 2015
lithograph with colored pencil and crayon
on paper, 18x15.5"



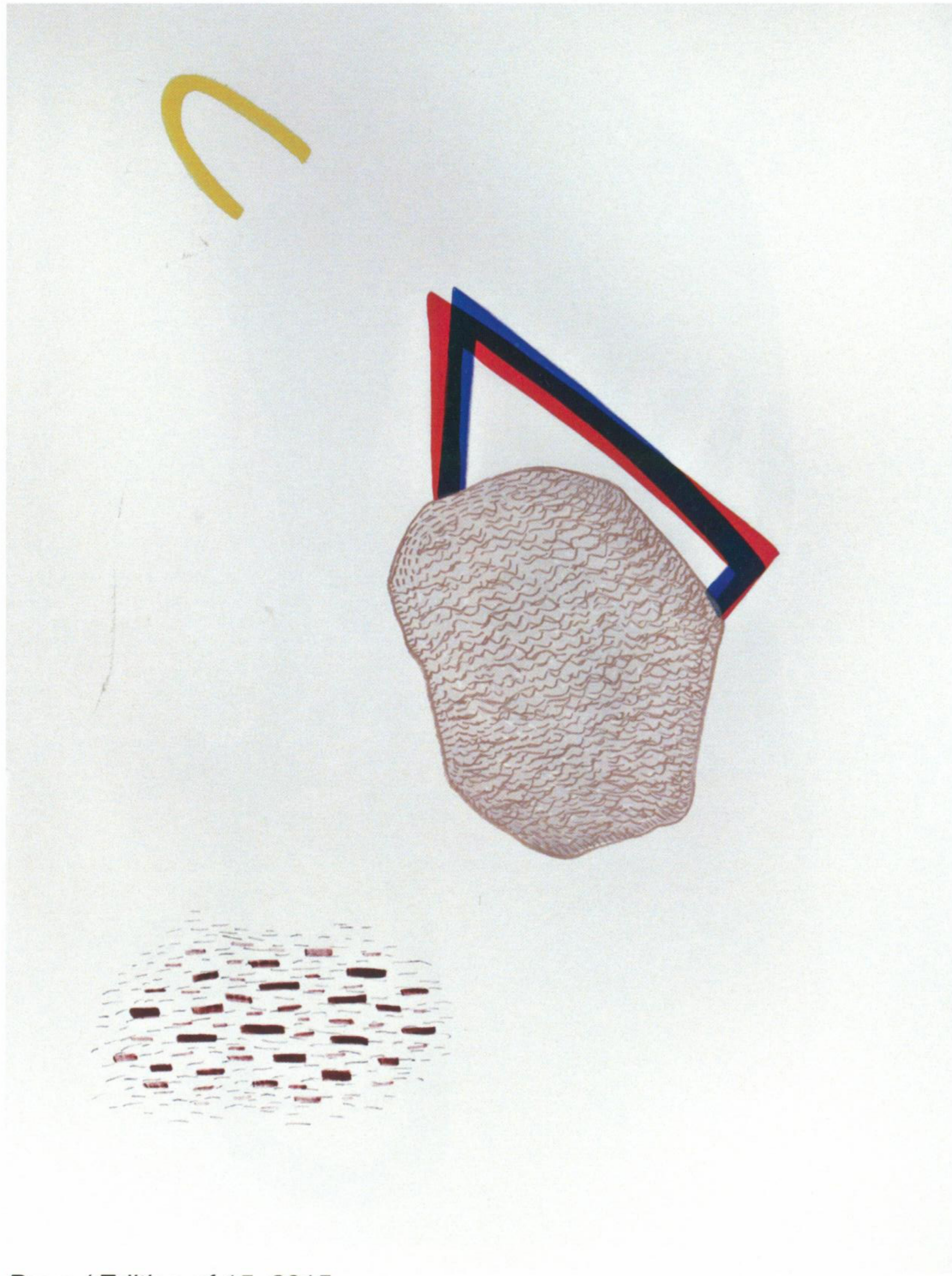
Busted ed. 4/5, 2015
lithograph with colored pencil and crayon
on paper, 18x15.5"



Almost Amelia, 2015, lithograph with acrylic on paper, 30x22"



Freckles of Nikumaroro (Almost Amelia Earhart), 2015
monotype on lithopress with acrylic and spray paint, 30x22"



*Draw / Edition of 15, 2015
lithograph, 30x22"*



Diagram 2, 2015
lithograph with colored pencil and graphite, 40x33"

Someone Like Me

In 1971, I was 8 years old. After church one Sunday, my family drove out to a restaurant in the woods. This place was in the bona fide boondocks and owned by a family member I'd never met. That was odd. It's a small community. When I was born, I bumped the population up to 100. I had lived for 8 long years on Earth and I thought I knew everyone.

As we drove up to the restaurant, I was struck by how remote a place it was. There were maybe 4 or 5 cars parked in front of a white two-story house. The property was well maintained and the house was typical of homes built in that area in the early 1900s. Empty rockers lined the wrap-around porch and a coon dog slept on a braided rug by the front door. He raised his head as we walked past him into the atrium.

We were greeted by a stocky fellow in a dark grey suit who led us to the dining room where we sat around a large oval mahogany table. I could not keep my eyes off the man who greeted us. He stood now in front of a buffet cabinet, his thick hands folded in front of him. His hair was black, short, parted on the side and slicked back. He looked serious with his eyes focused almost straight ahead, so he could be aware of what we needed and yet not look directly at us. I looked directly at him. He was not *only* a man, I thought. He seemed like something else, too. He looked like maybe he was also a woman? But, he was a man. He is like me. Somehow, I'm like him.

I rode back with my grandparents. When we got to their house, I waited until I was alone in the den with my grandmother.

“Grandma, was that a man ... or a woman?”

Grandma Ruby said, “He’s your cousin. He was born female but lives as a man. Not everyone is the same and we love him.”

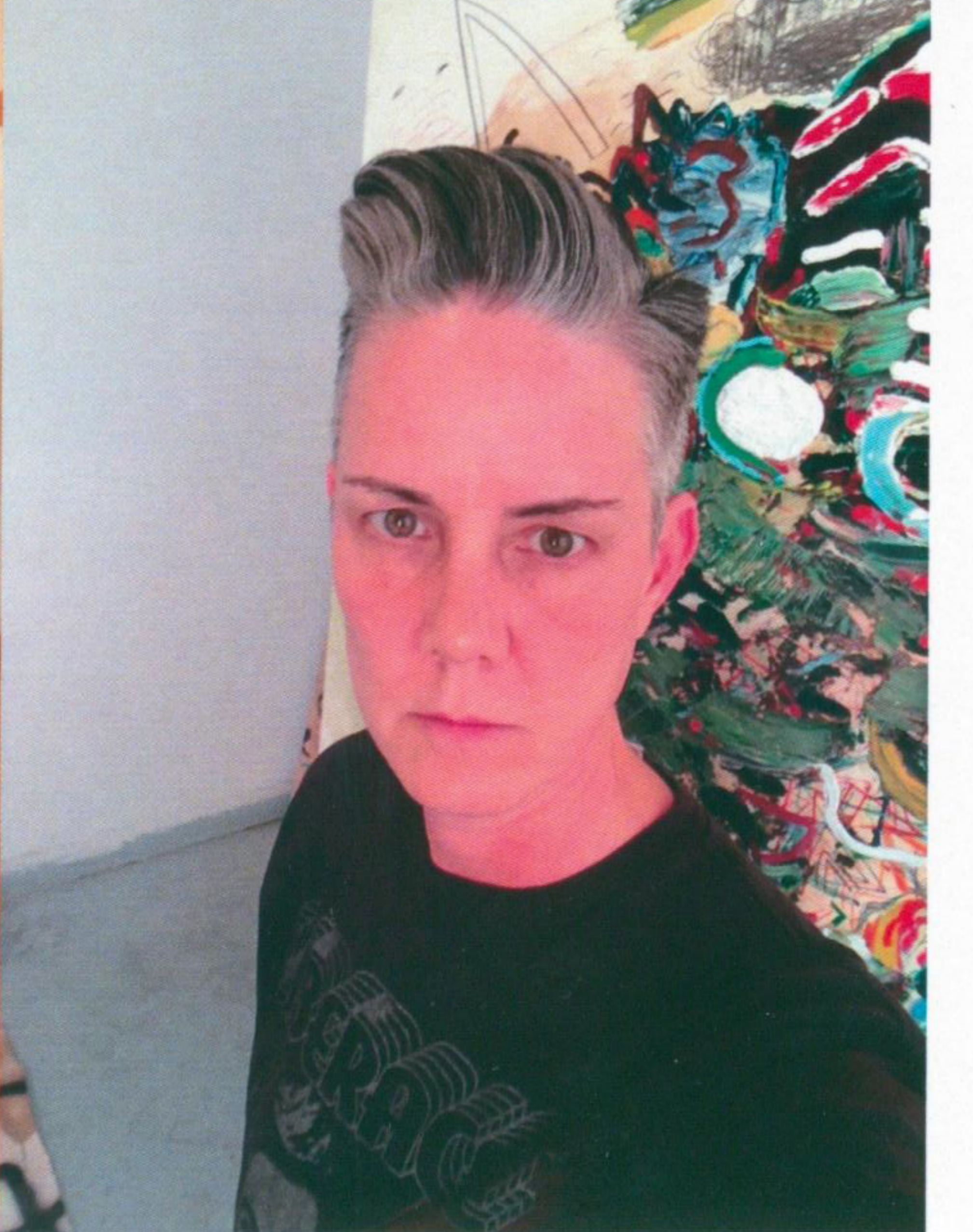
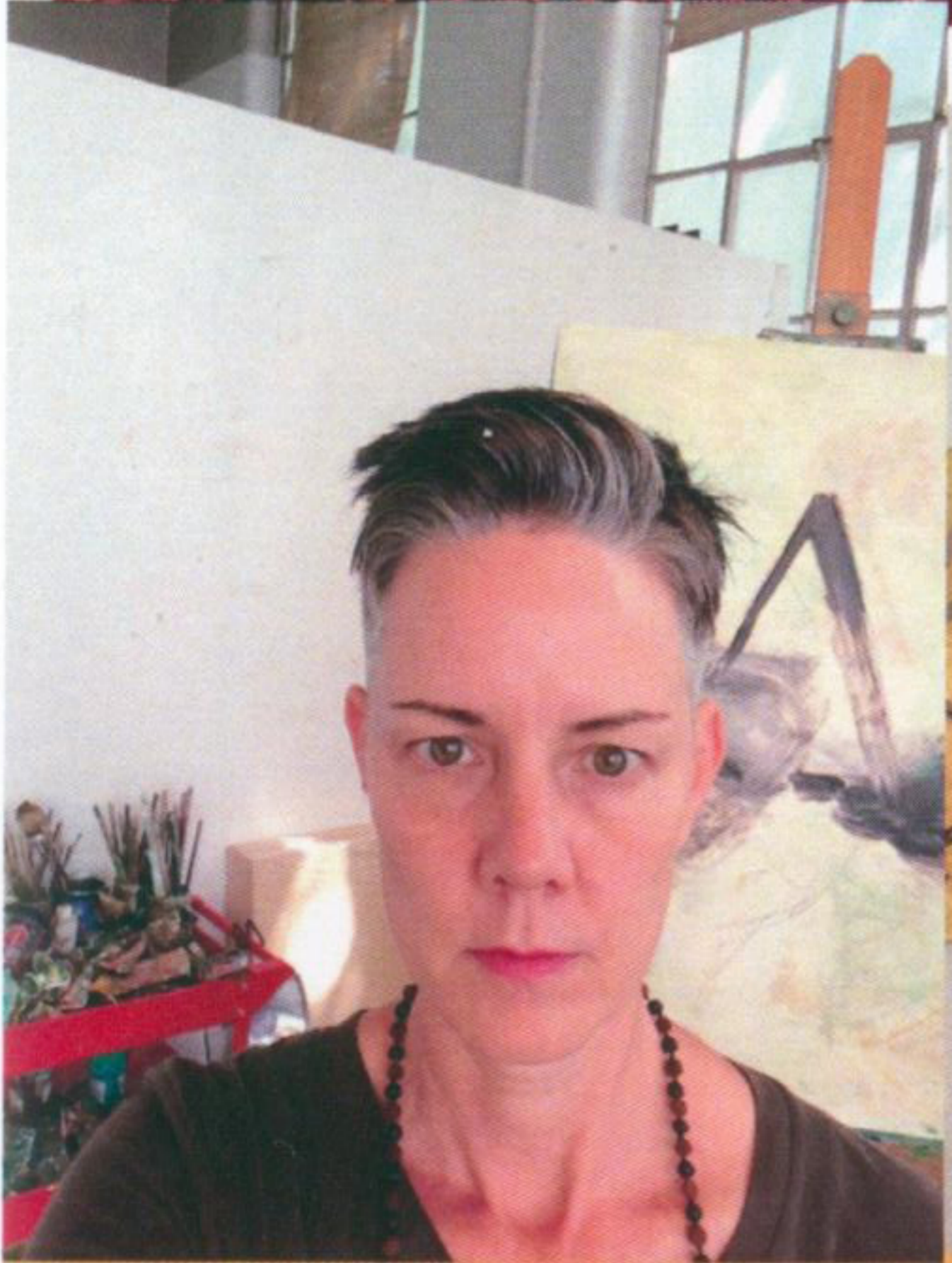
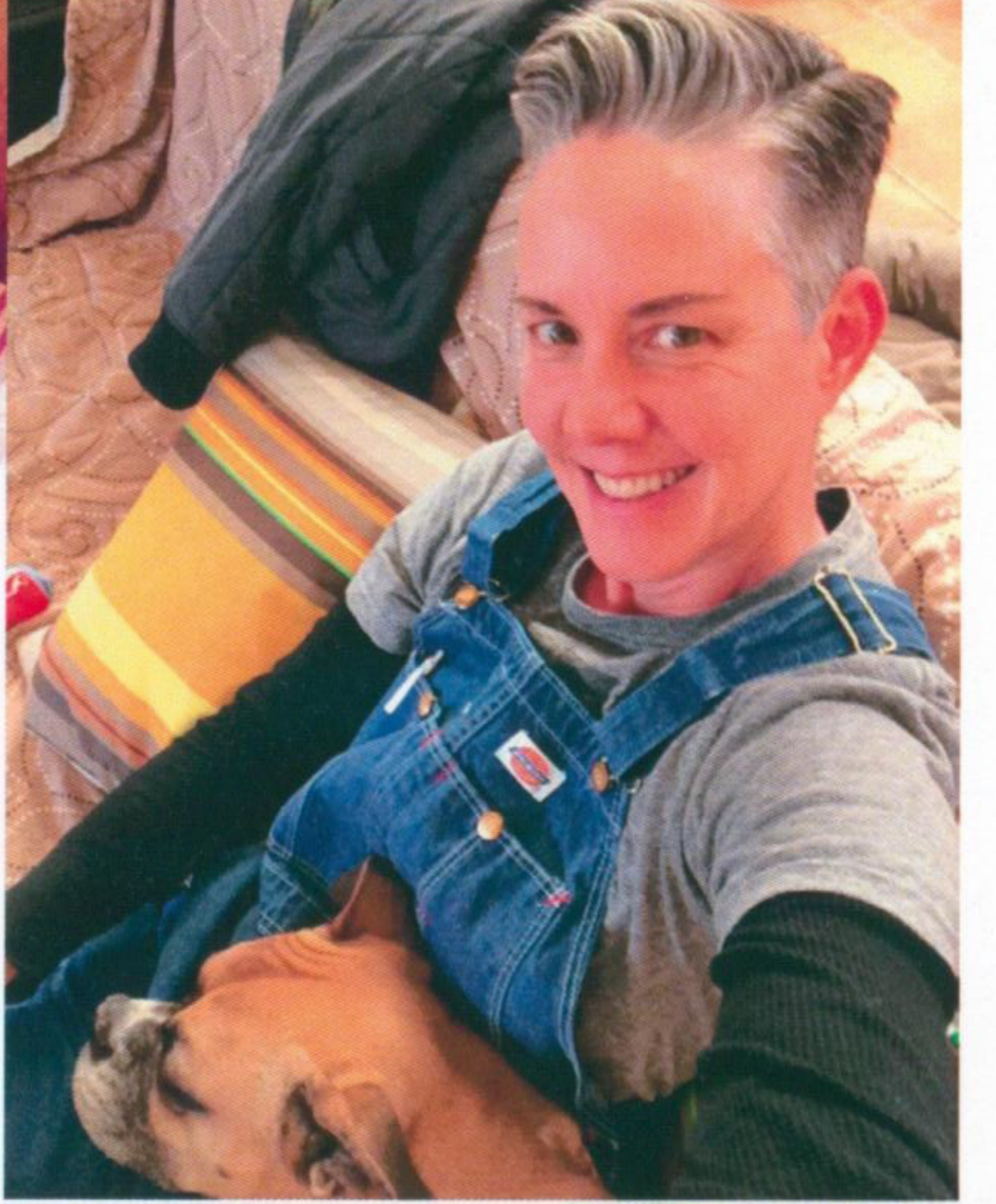
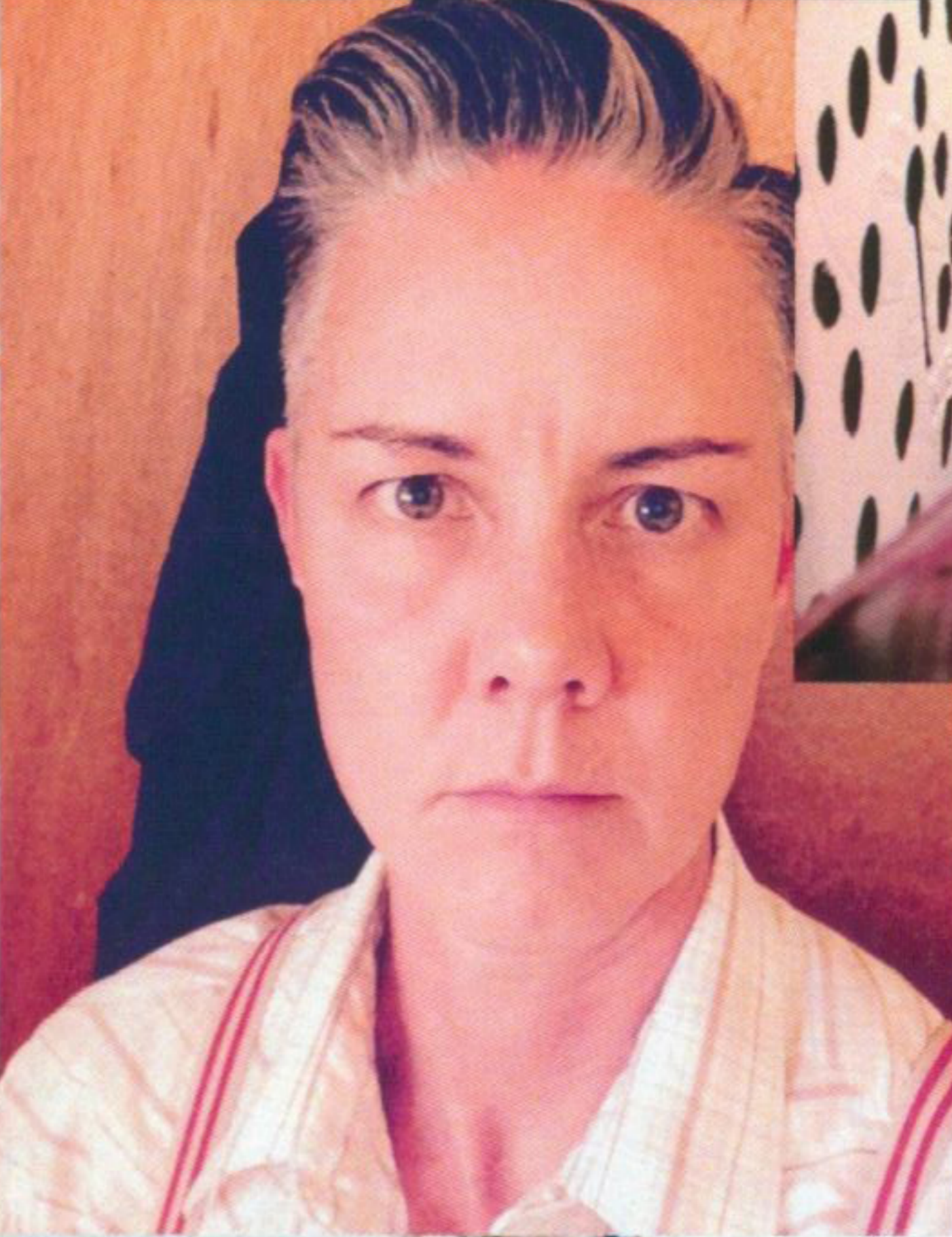
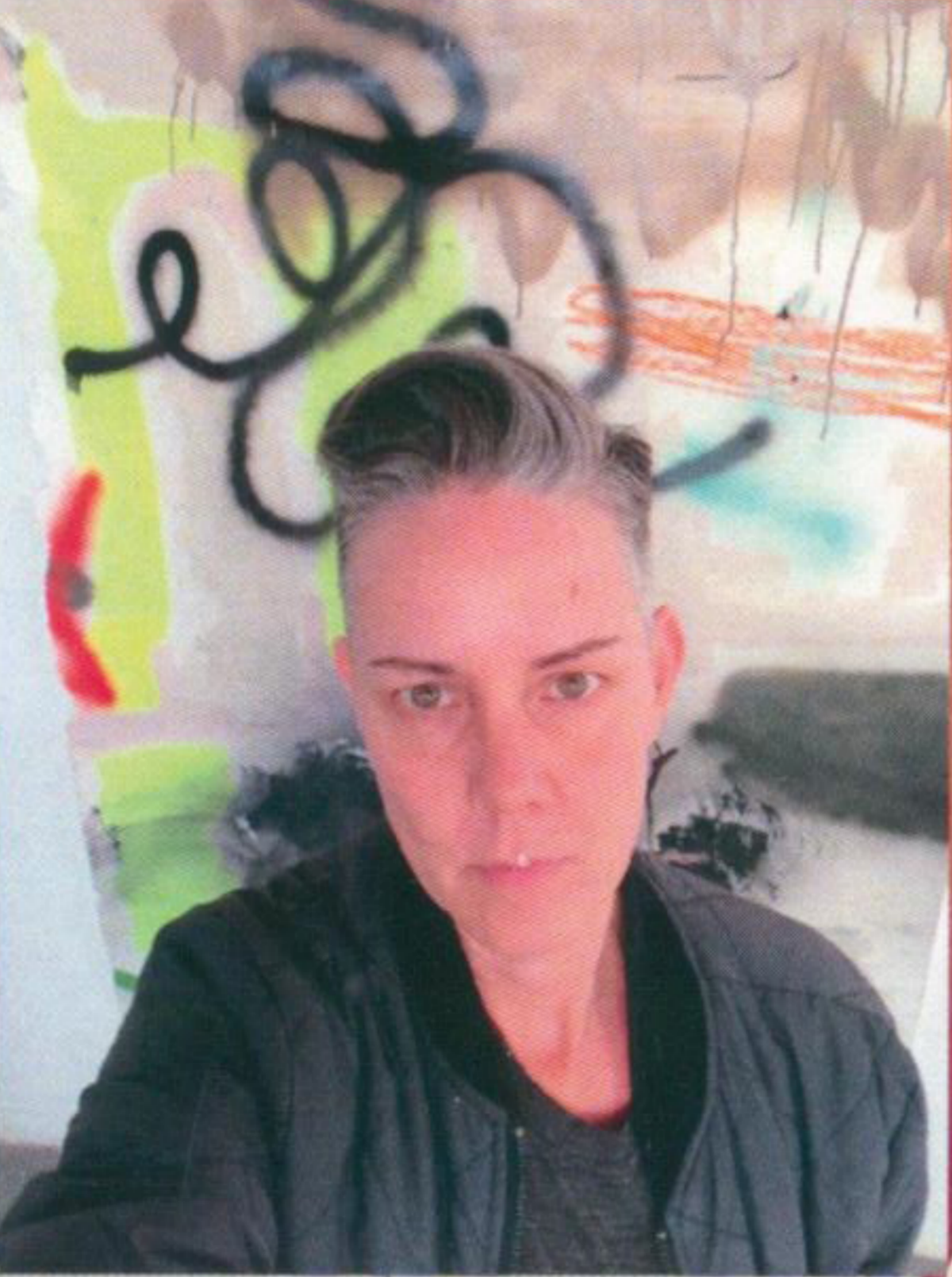
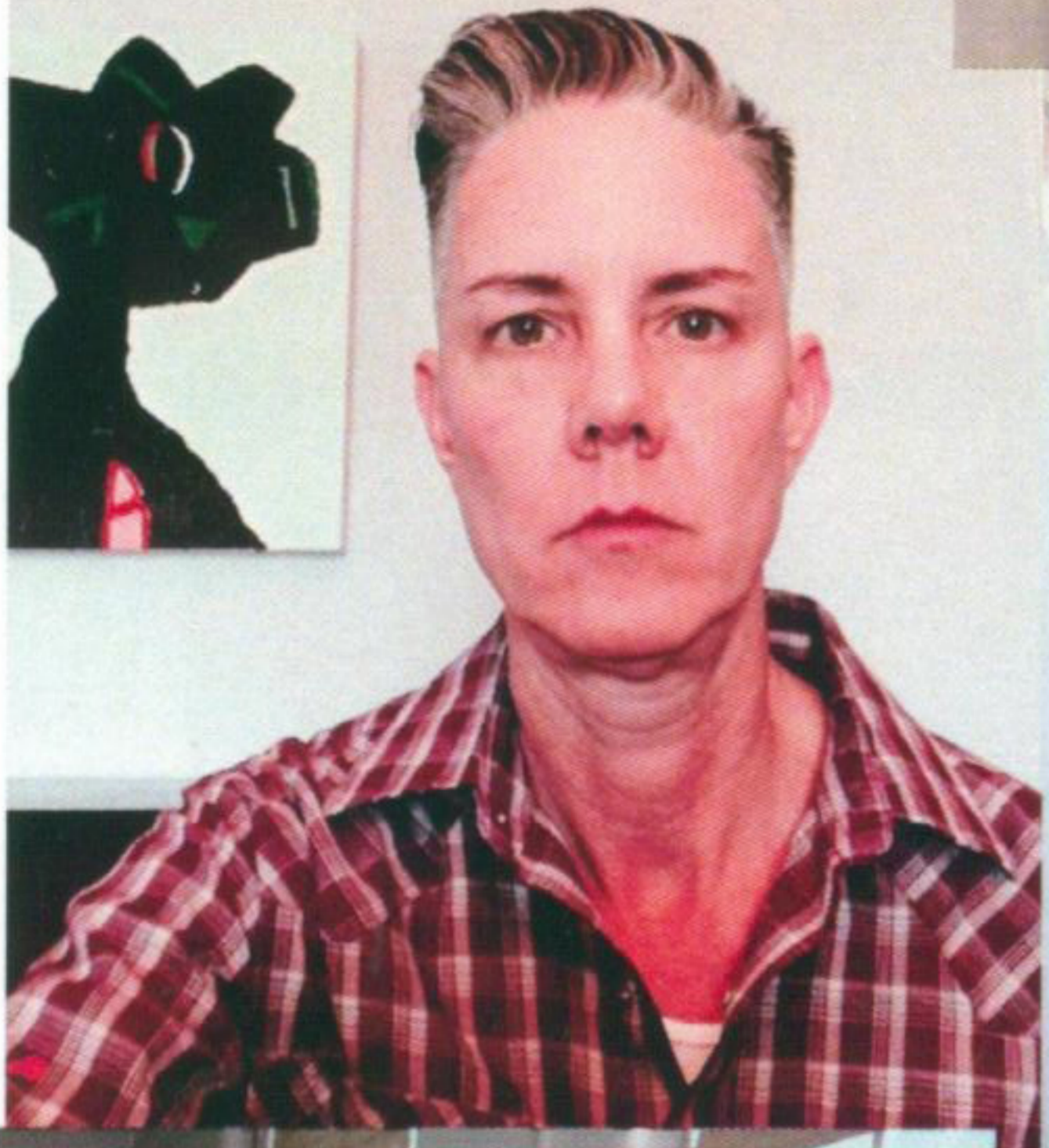
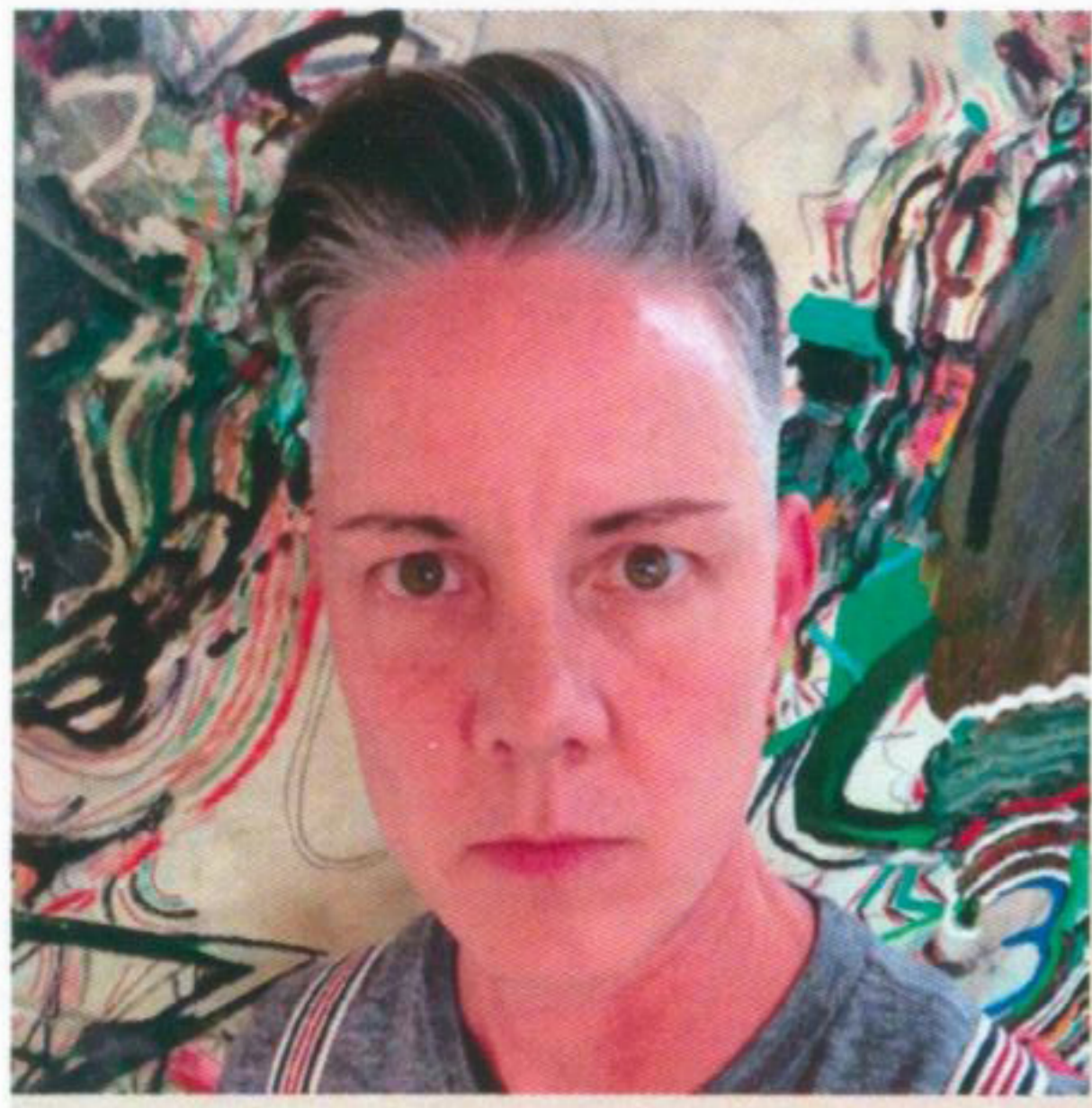
That’s all she said. It was a lot.

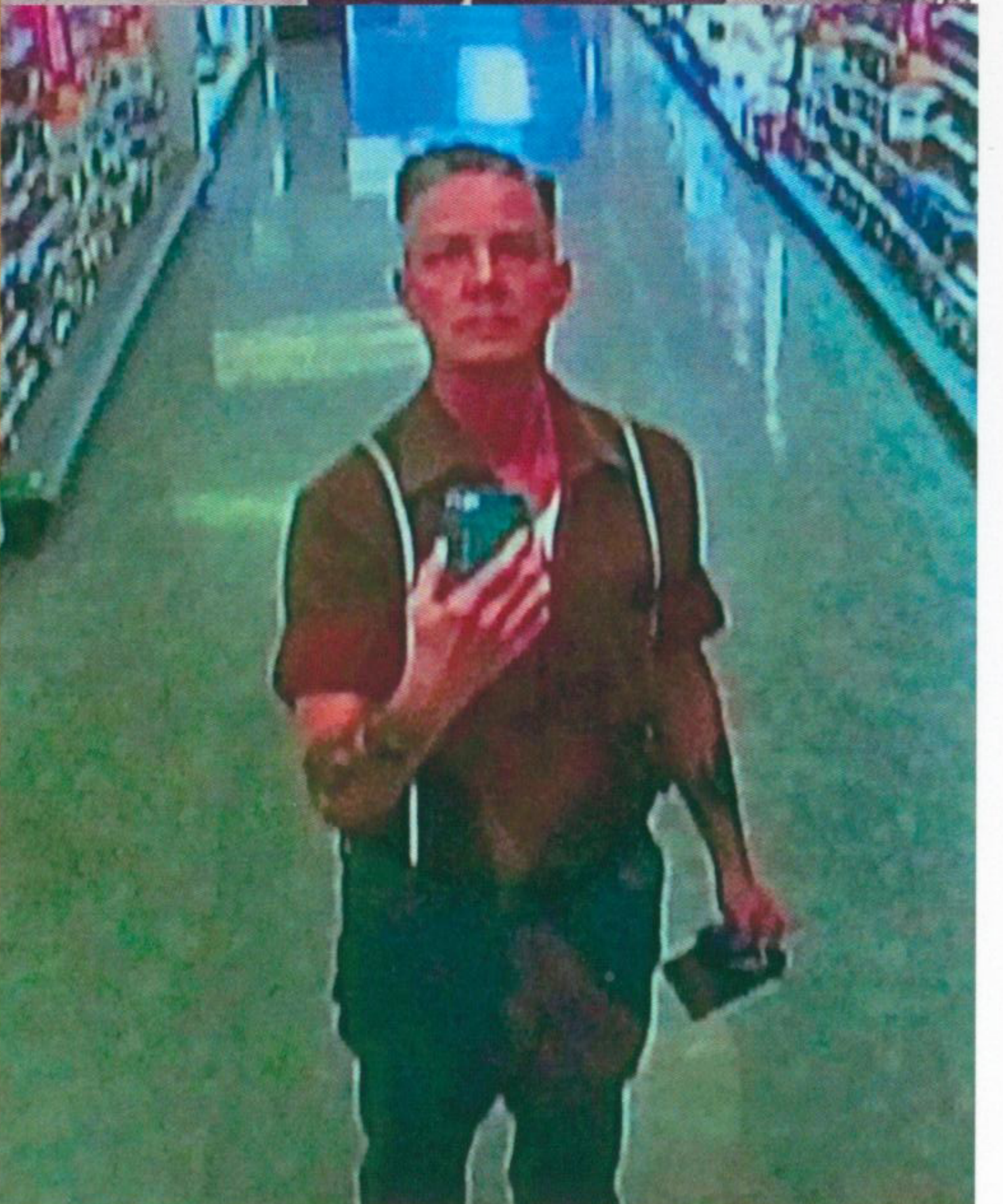
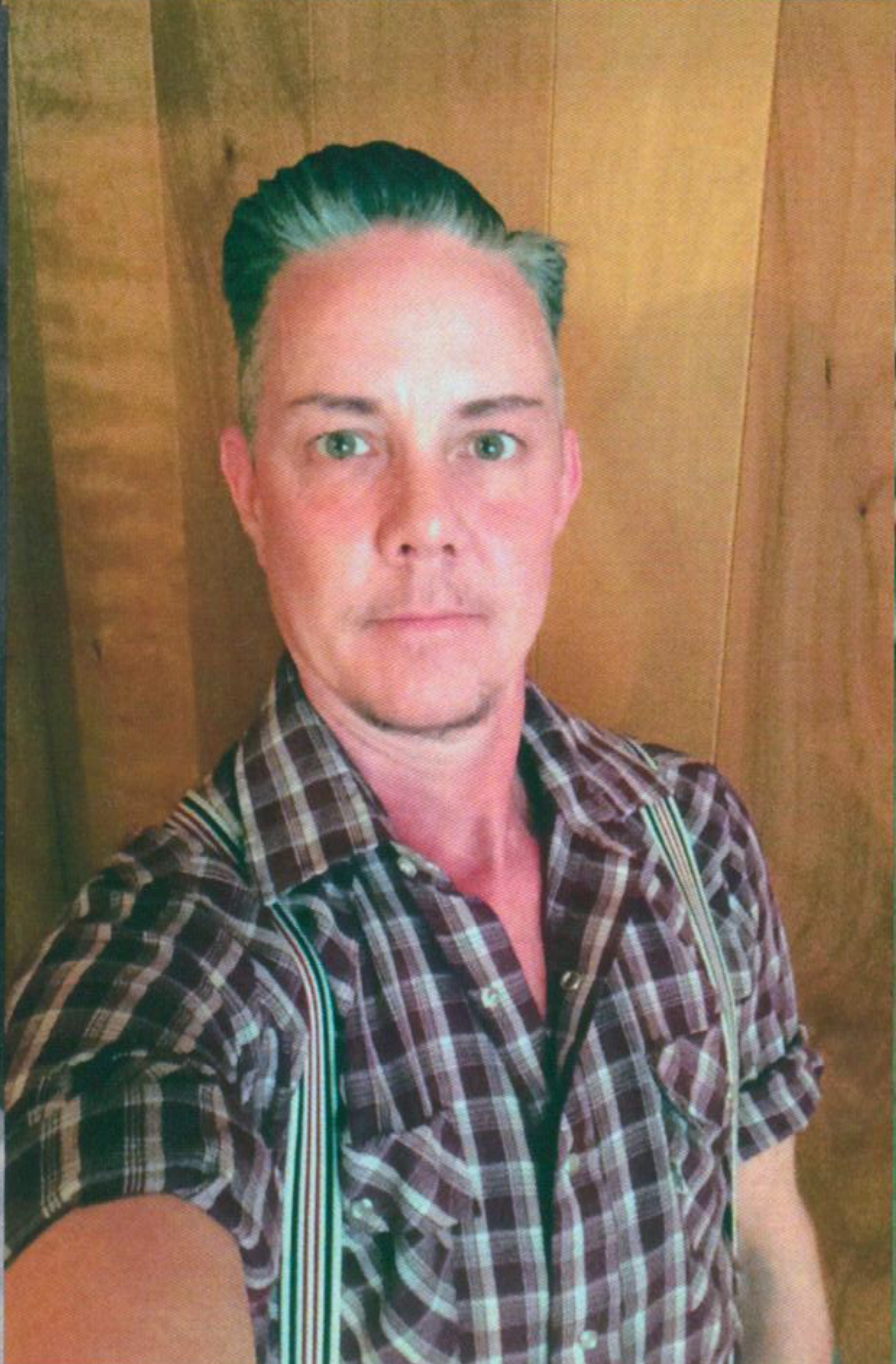
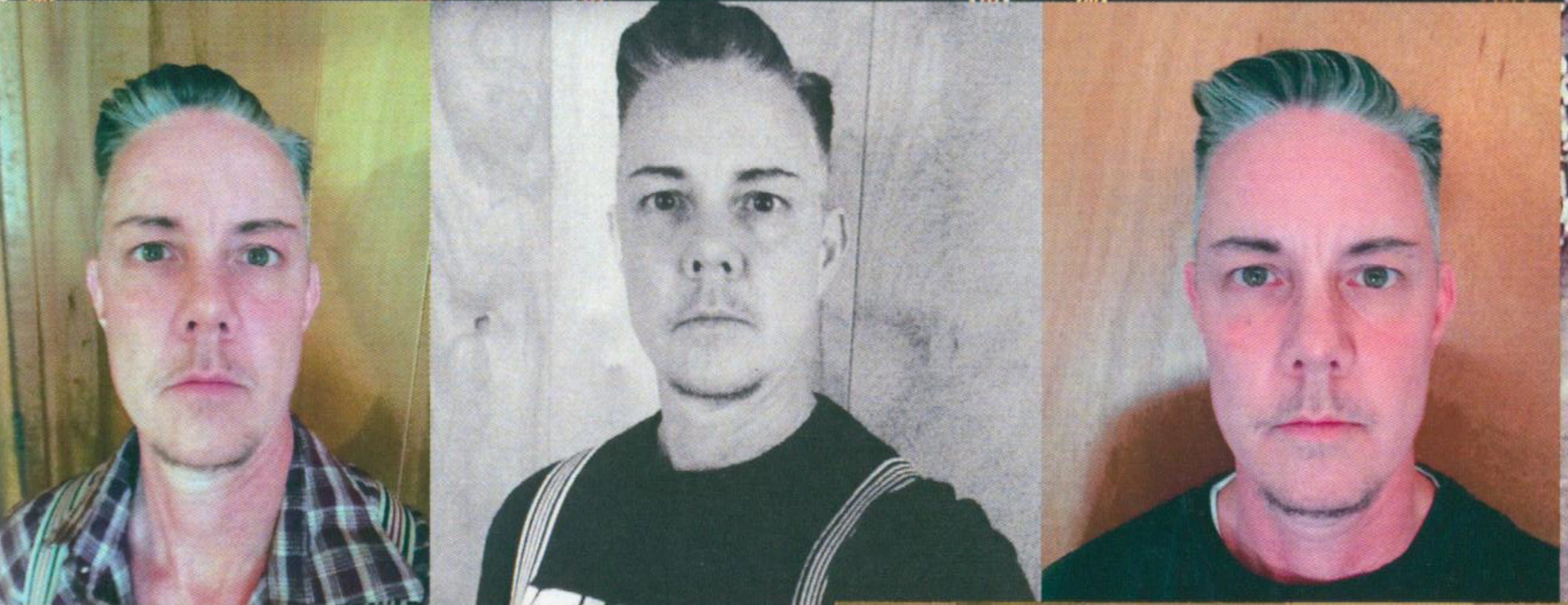
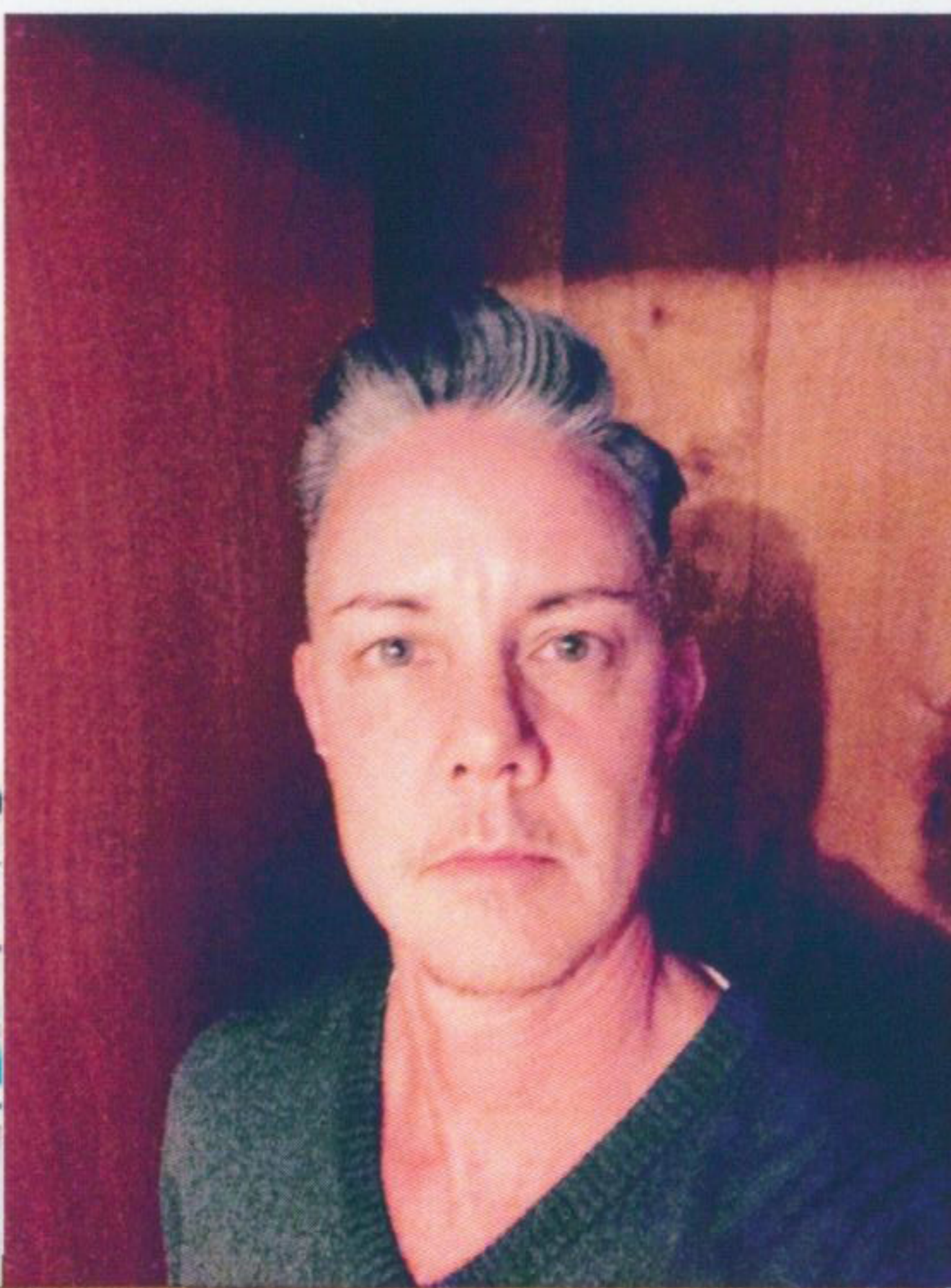
What strikes me now is how courageous and strong he was to make a business for himself in the middle of nowhere, in a part of the country where people are killed for being different or, at the very least banished and shunned. He was there on that Sunday, standing in his restaurant and serving dinner. He made the life he needed to live. It seemed then and seems now to be a bold, wonderful, satisfying - and lonely - way to live.













Published by Richard Levy Gallery