



nara roesler

**bruno dunley**  
**pequenas alegrias**  
nara roesler rio de janeiro

**opening**  
april 18, 2024

**exhibition**  
april 18 – june 1, 2024

about bruno dunley's  
*pequenas alegrias*  
pedro frança

Over the last year, Bruno Dunley has produced around 50 small paintings and dozens of works on paper. The same number of paintings remain unfinished. The absence of large-format works made 2023 an atypical year in his career. This restriction was not initially planned or carried out systematically. It began as a modest exercise in a moment of fatigue and ended up naturally turning into a project. But what was the purpose of this project?

There are times when, for internal and/or external reasons, artists set out to enter a kind of retrograde orbit, like Mercury's trajectory: they take a break, a ruminating attitude, sifting through the mud of the past, mixing up temporal layers. These are times to rescue problems that have been left behind, to put together movements and intuitions that have been set aside for many years, seemingly disconnected until their coexistence shows us that something mysterious can bring them together. These attitudes of revision are fundamental in work processes, which usually occur in response to moments of crisis. If you don't know what to do, you can do nothing... but you can also do everything, and even redo it. In Bruno's career, *Pequenas Alegrias* [Little Joys] originates from a series of drawings made during a period of impasse and immobility in 2014. At that time, doodles inspired by a visit to the cave paintings in Serra da Capivara were a way of putting desire back into motion. It wasn't just the immediacy of the drawing, but also the evocation of the primal gestures that make an image appear in stone, exalting our desire to mark and represent. In 2023, this new set of *Pequenas*

*Alegrias* looks like the result of an exercise in self-criticism, the stubborn attitude of a work asking itself: "What am I made of? What do I want?".

Among this body of small paintings, we find elements that have been running through Bruno's production for 15 years: the donkey drawn with childish strokes, raising questions as to the origin of this image; the silver frames suggesting a drawing appropriated from some photograph ("Janela"; "Noturna"); the evocation of cave painting and primordial graphic signs ("Formiga"; "Sol"; "Aquela"); the painting of fragments of other paintings ("Vaso"), a certain evocation of obsolete and faded colors and shapes ("Papelaria"; "Nuvem"); the digestion of soft geometry characteristic of a type of Brazilian modernism ("Luar"; "Campo Aberto"), a certain nervous brutality of short strokes ("Passagem"; "Desenho") and the exploration of monochrome ("Monocromo Paisagem", "Xerox"). This whole repertoire is not, in and of itself, coherent or incoherent; they are attitudes or strategies that coexist in Bruno's work, making up his particular constellation. But here, with the paintings unified by the regularity of their sizes, the tricks accumulated over the years coexist and are put to the test. *Pequenas Alegrias* is therefore an exercise in making, choosing and organizing. The juxtaposed little paintings invite us to ask ourselves to what extent they rhyme and to what extent they clash, in a practice that forces us to hold dissonant tastes in the tongue of our eye.

That's why, in recent months, with much of the work completed, Bruno's studio became an

editing island. Two walls were transformed daily. Each duo or trio highlighted specific aspects of their components, through contrast or similarity. Paintings with a brighter surface complimented their opaque and tenuous neighbors (as in the duo “Papel Amassado” e “Xerox”) and explicit figures highlighted the silence of abstractions. Sometimes the opposite happened, when similar paintings juxtaposed together shouted out their singularities. My favorite example, right on the gallery’s entrance wall: the luminous joy of the Sun contrasts with the sobriety of the Monochromes next to it, like day and night. However, after a while, coming closer, we see these poles reversed, giving way to the nervous euphoria of the monochrome and the distant opacity of the Sun with its cave-like evocation. The gaze, more easily than speech, allows for the simultaneous coexistence of what, expressed in words, would be frankly contradictory.

Politically, socially, psychically, it is increasingly important that we know how to make contradictions live together, to sustain uncertainties and paradoxes, to endure the discomfort of sharing unresolved problems. But can art be an exercise of this kind, helping us to sustain doubts before affirmations? That’s Bruno’s bet, and I think we should consider it. Because this is not a bet that the artist makes only in the studio. His practice in the world opens up to activities in different positions in the art world. I’ll mention three: pedagogical activities (which he has been doing in different contexts since he was very young), political activism involving workshops and dialogues between the field of art and public policy-making

bodies (such as the Ali:Leste project, which he helped to found) and the production and sale of paints (through the factory *Joules & Joules*, which he started in 2020 with his friend and artist Rafael Carneiro. Its products have helped sustain the practice of countless artists in the face of economic certainty in recent years ).

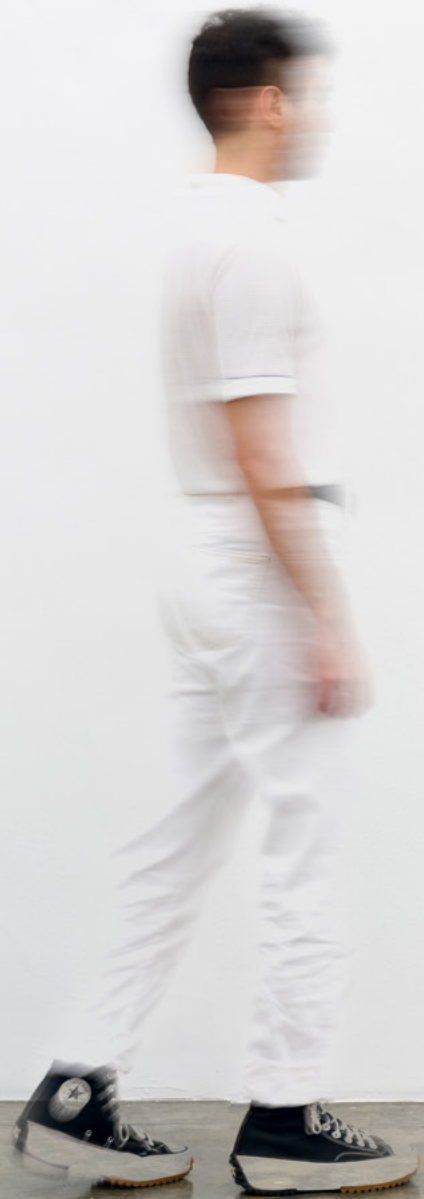
These activities don’t merge with the solitary practice of painting, but they do contaminate it: the research into paints was born out of a hangover after a solo show (*Virá*, Galeria Nara Roesler, São Paulo, 2020). Making the material itself slows down and intensifies the relationship with the exercise of painting, helping to disarm the cosmetic trap that brings making and consumption closer together. The knowledge acquired in recent years appears in “Little Joys” in the diversity of surfaces, in the variations of opacities and preparations; it creates complexity in the simplest compositions and enriches the memory game that Bruno now proposes. The series of works shows that knowledge is never a problem for those who don’t confuse practice and theory. The actions in the public sphere have to do with recognizing the limits of art in transforming reality, and therefore with the urgency of reconciling the knowledge of an artist with the militancy. Political and pedagogical activities help to reinforce the significance of an artistic practice that needs to rub up against the real world in order to understand that it can be a gesture in itself, capable of sustaining its mysterious and anti-discursive aspects. Referring to this life inside and outside painting, Bruno says he needs both, neither of which is enough on its own.

In 2008, Bruno’s work gained visibility, taking part in a generation that had the force of an industrialized, prefabricated, digital figuration. A work that has consolidated itself by collecting and recycling symbols from history and culture is now folding in on itself, on its choices and inclinations. What stands out from this, and visitors can see it for themselves, is its most constitutive dimension and also the most trivial: the affection for making things, the attention to each gesture, each mark, the expression of the months of waiting between one layer and the next, the slow digestion of an accumulated repertoire, found and cultivated in almost 20 years of dedication to the difficult and absurd activity of depositing, for pleasure and for pleasure, ore and fat on pieces of cloth.



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Sol, 2023  
oil paint, oil pastel and  
thickened gel on canvas  
40 x 35 cm  
15.7 x 13.8 in





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Vaso, 2023  
oil painting and  
aluminum on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in





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*Burro*, 2023  
oil paint on canvas  
20 x 30 cm  
7.9 x 11.8 in

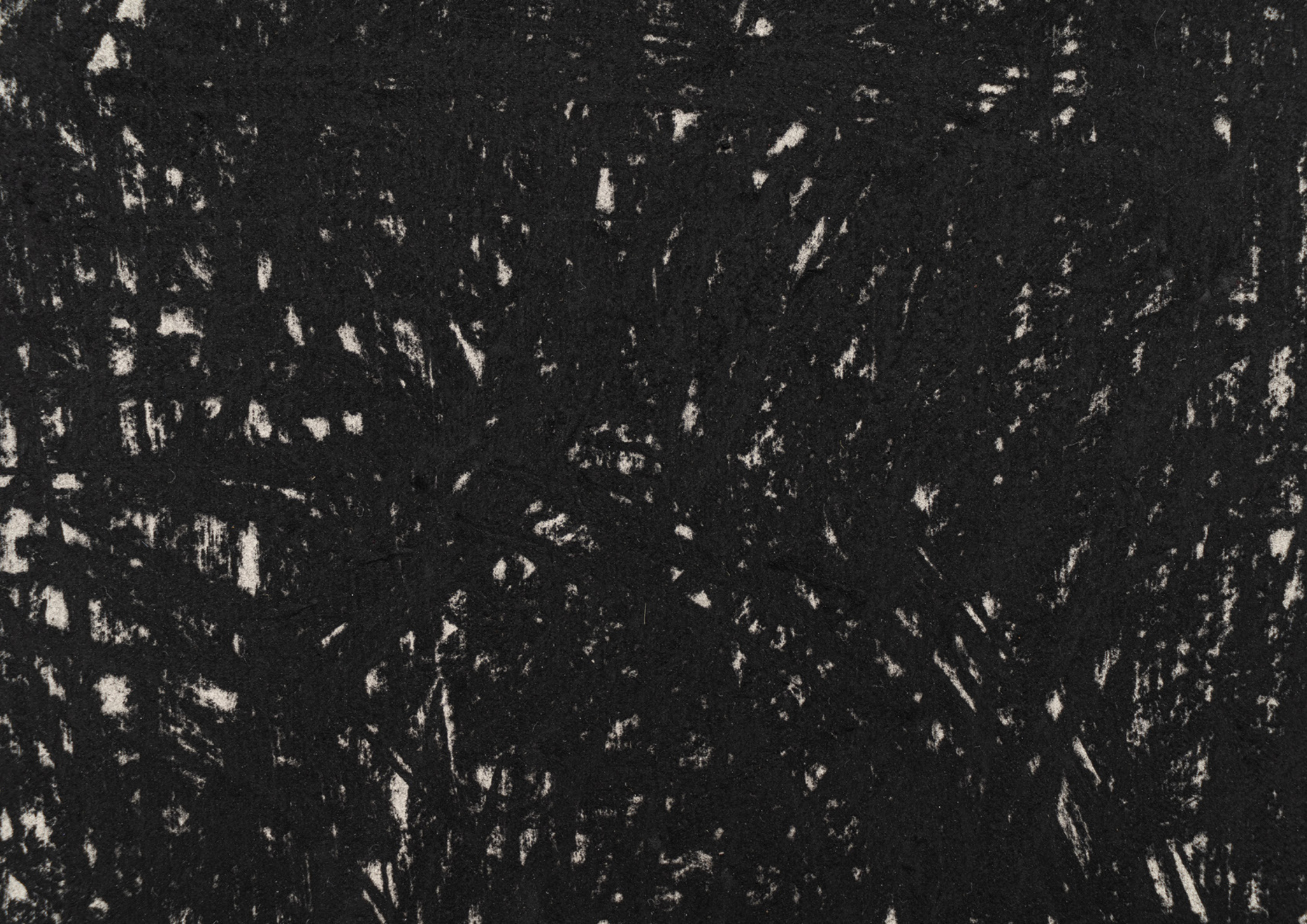






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*Desenho*, 2023  
charcoal on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in





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Cat, 2023  
oil paint on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in

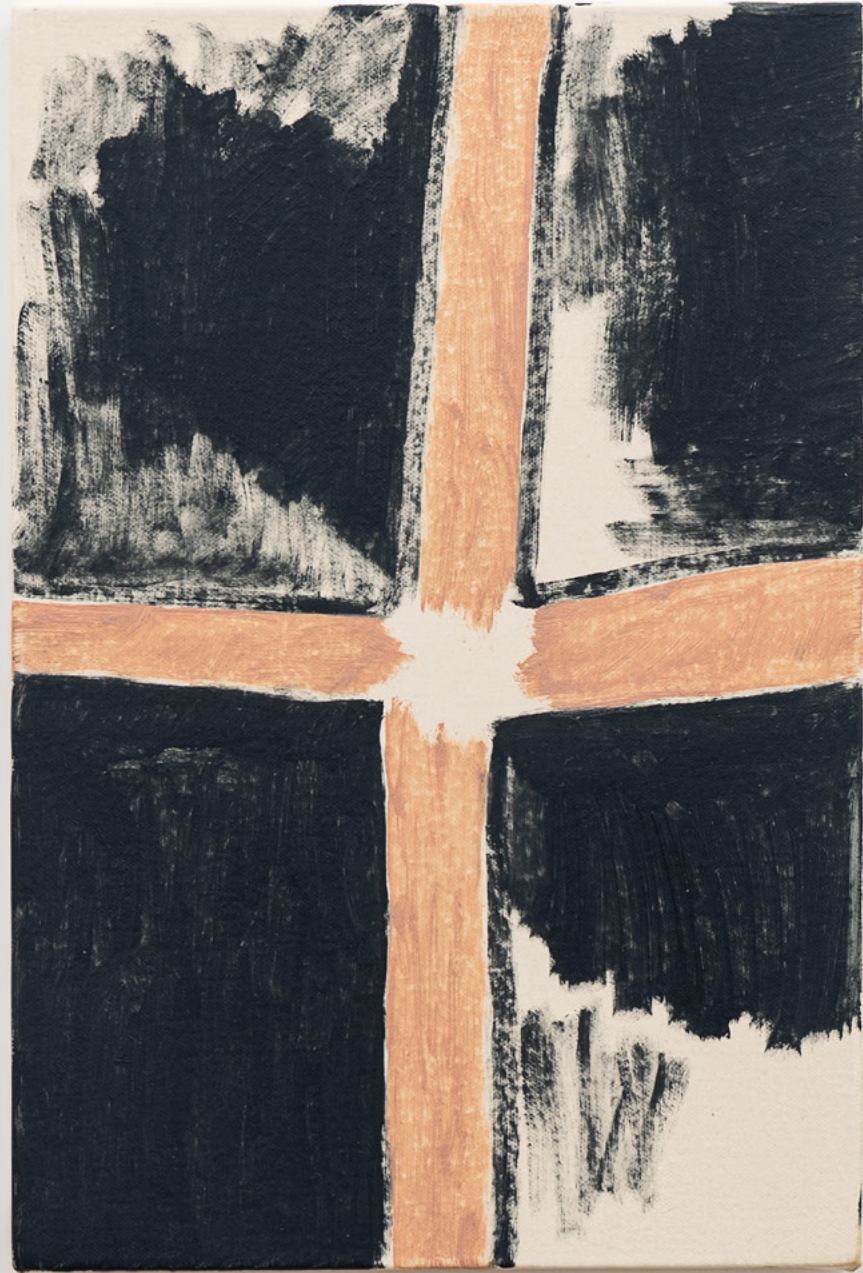




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Formigas, 2023  
oil paint, oil pastel and  
thickened gel on canvas  
35 x 40 cm  
13.8 x 15.7 in





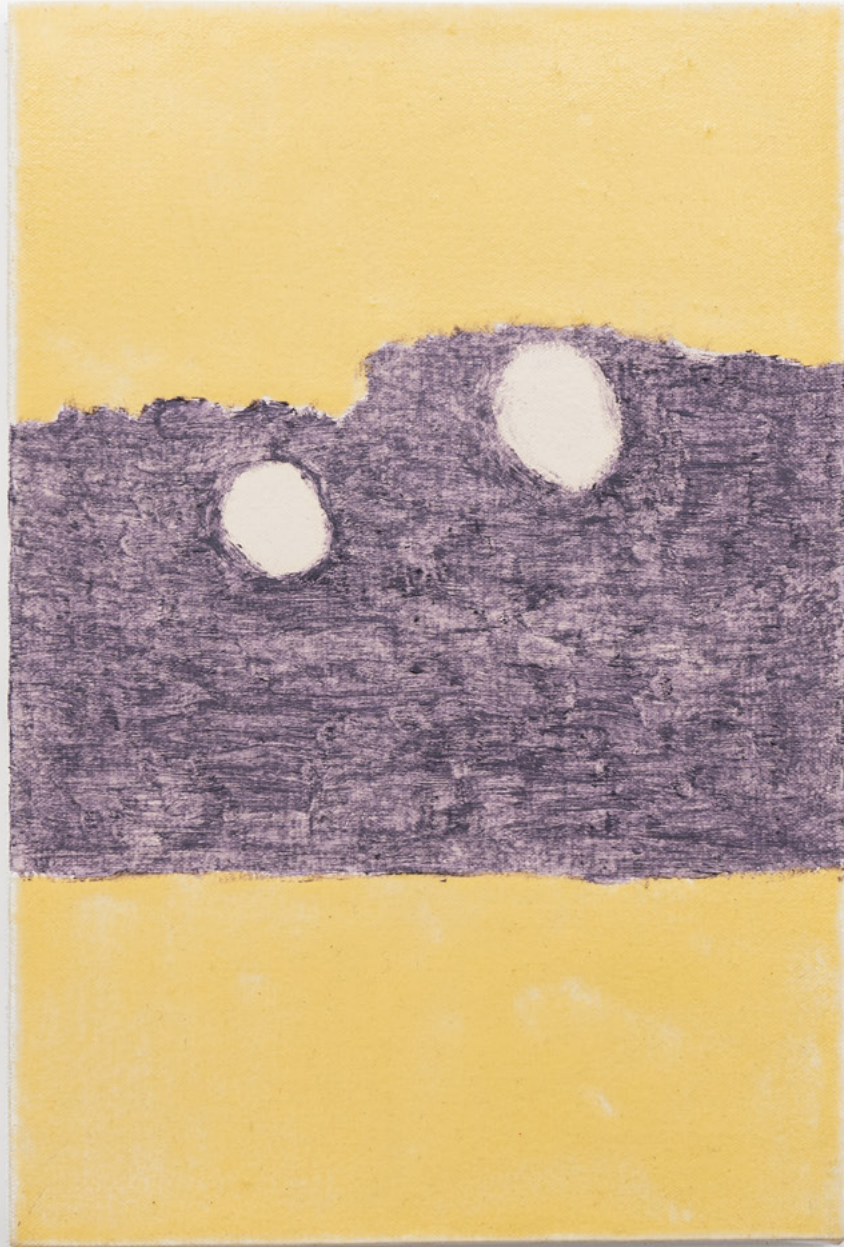
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*Pequenas alegrias*, 2023  
oil paint and thickened  
gel on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in



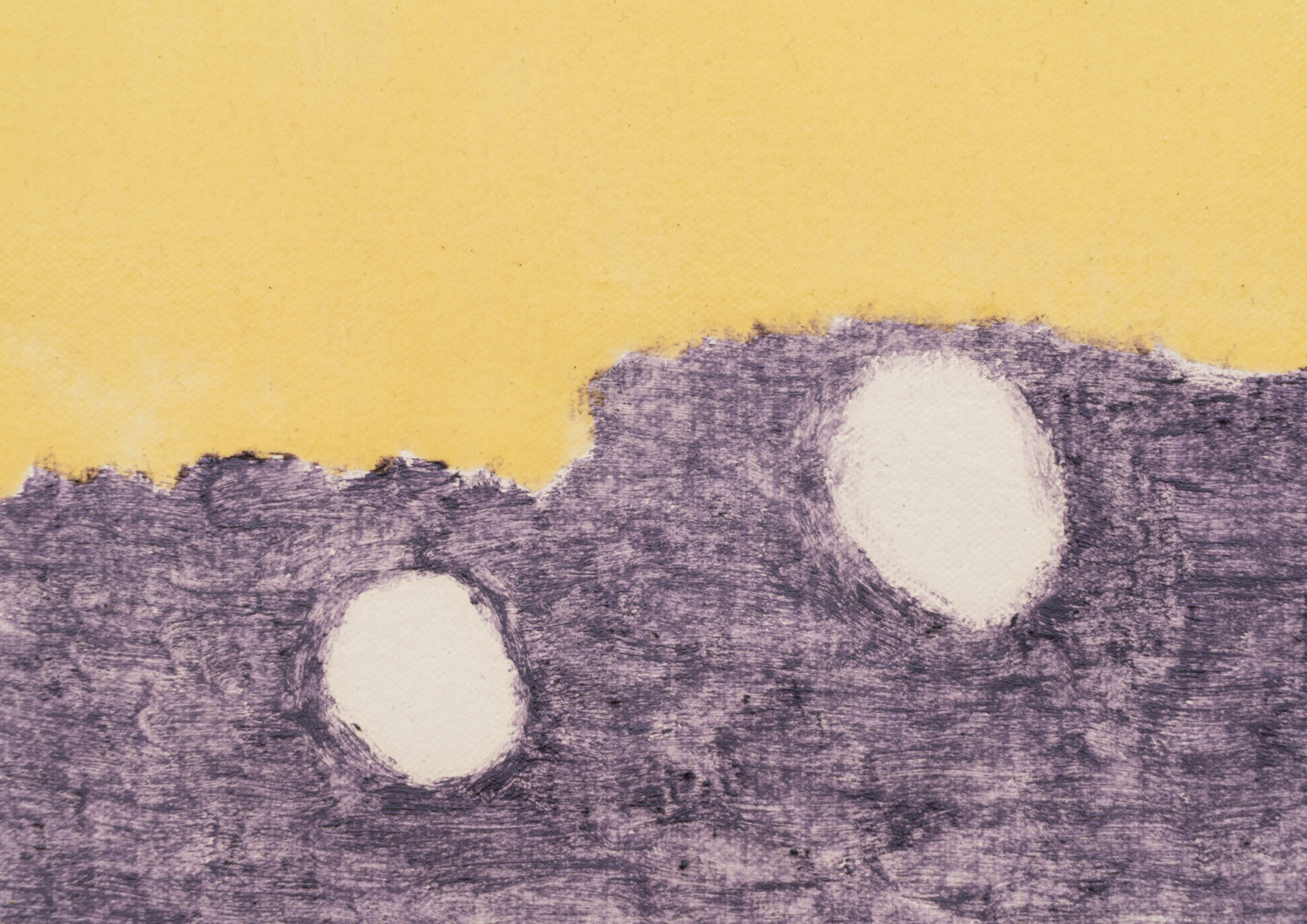






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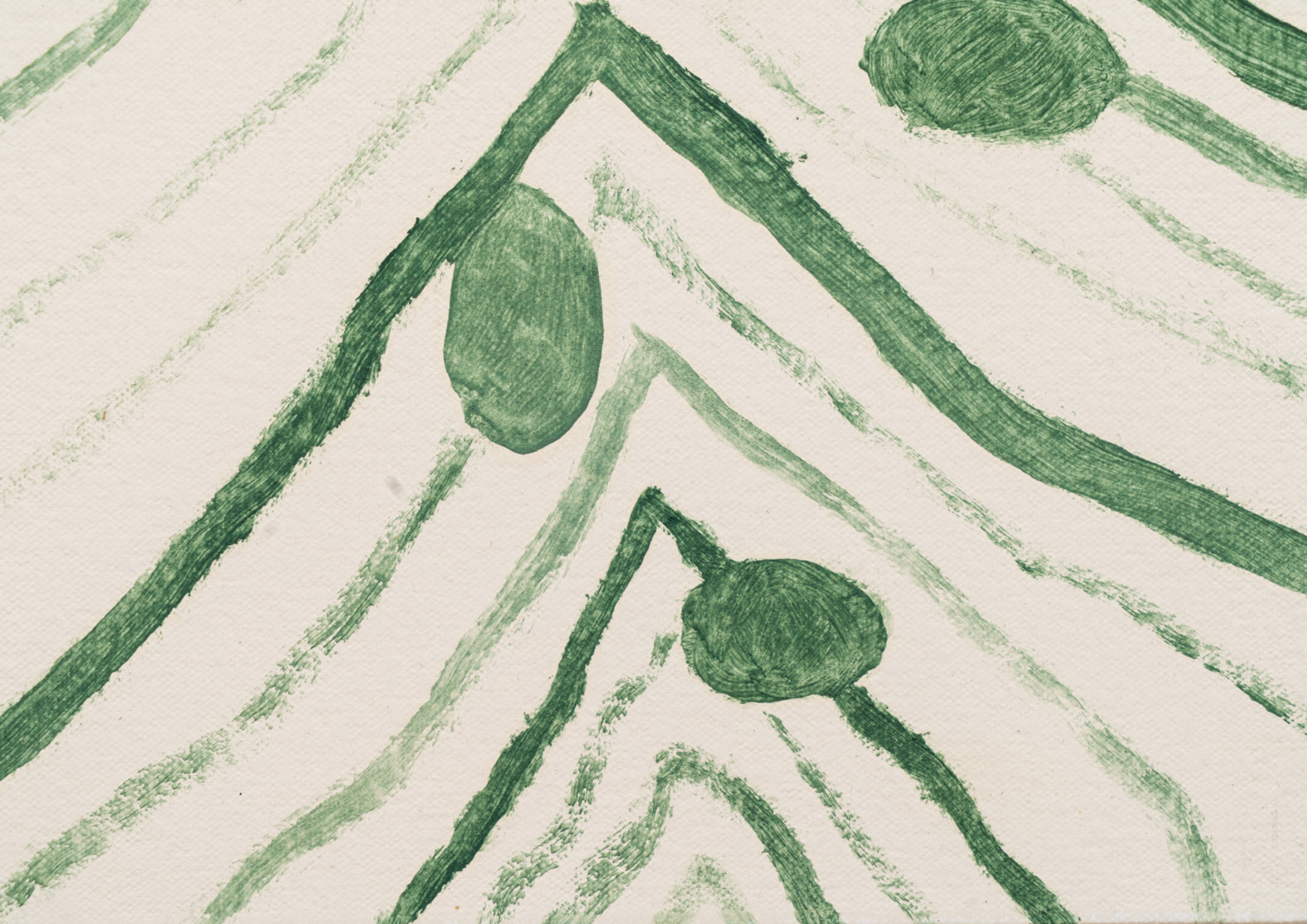
*Luar*, 2023  
oil paint and thickened  
gel on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in

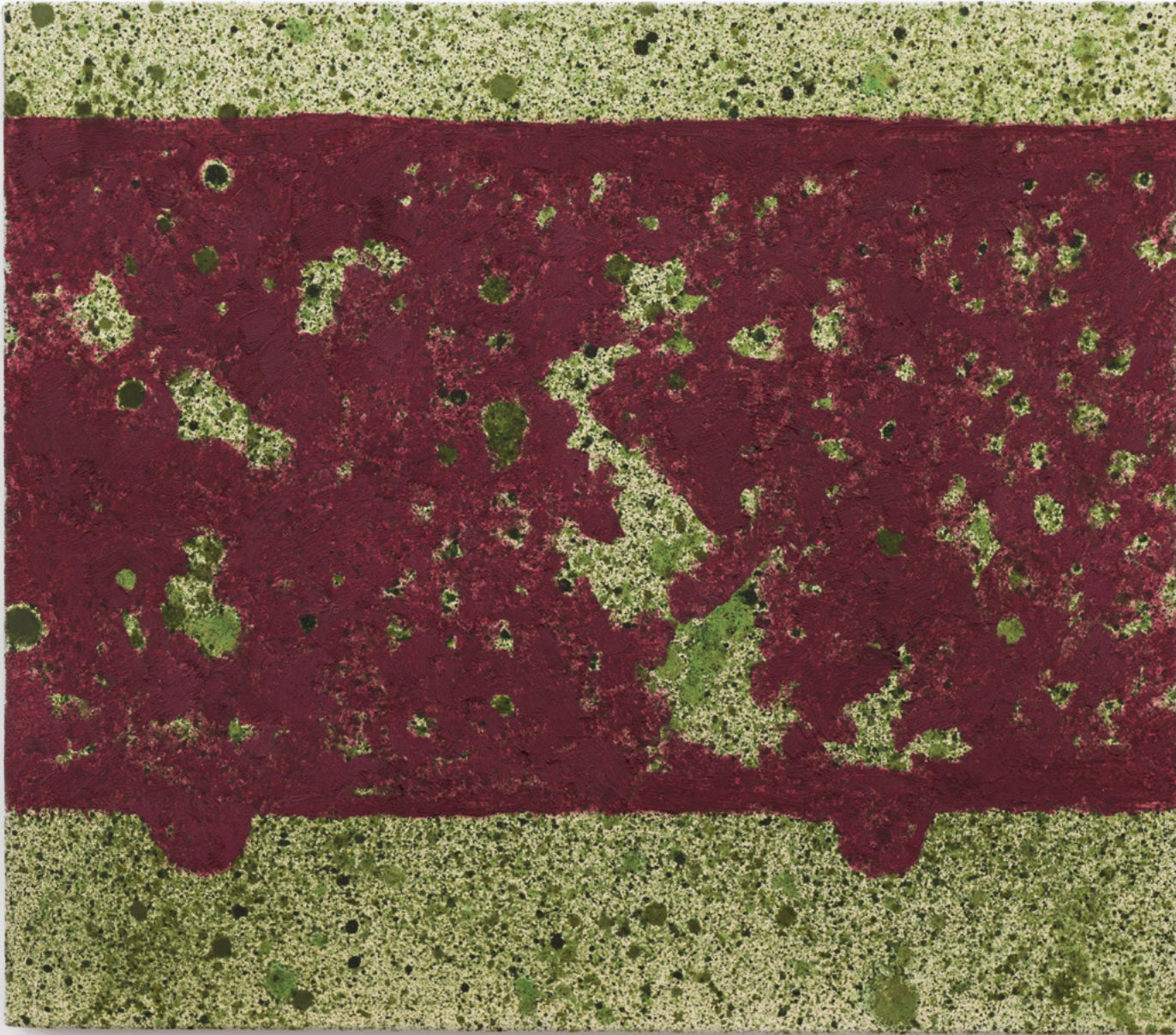




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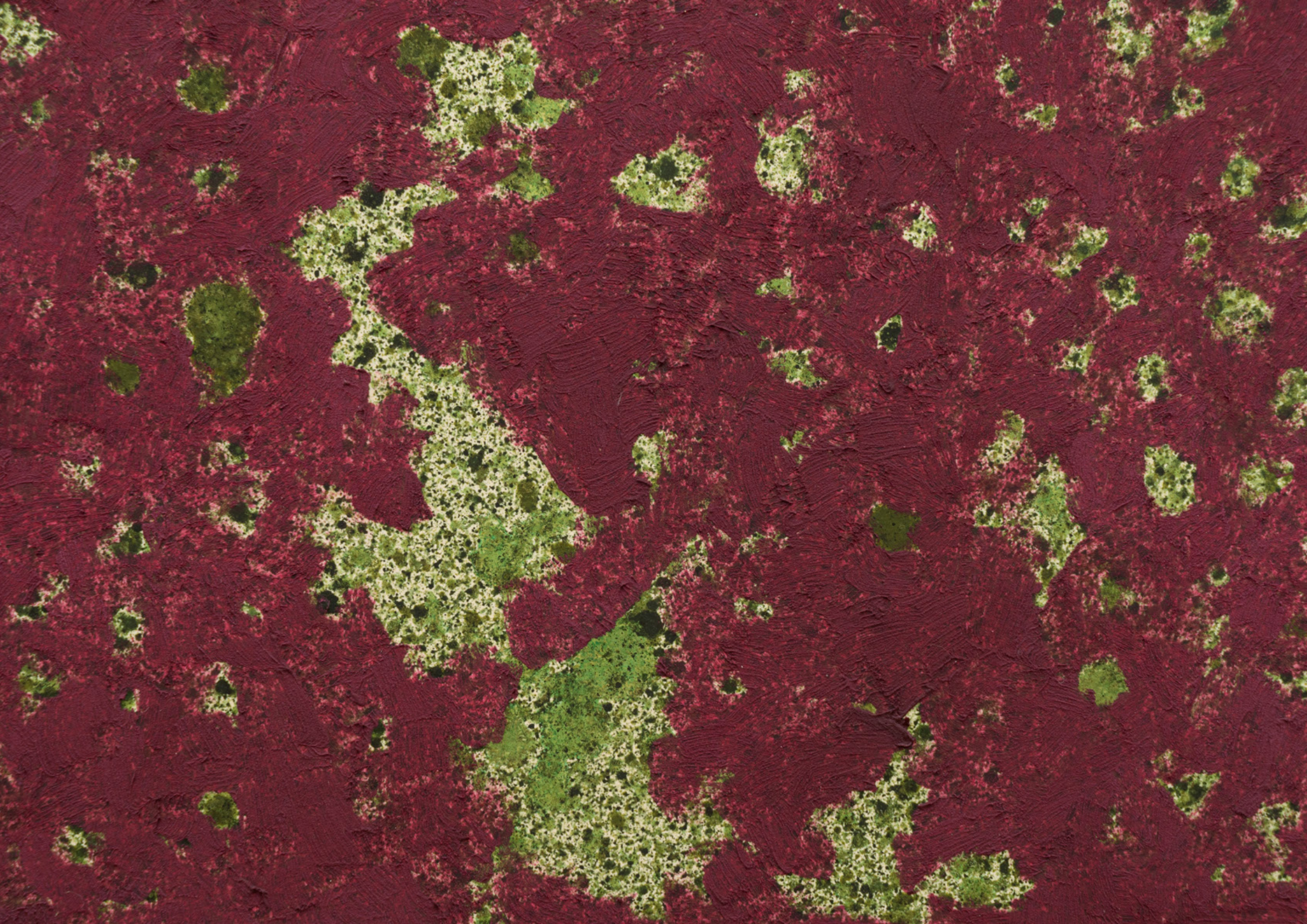
*Aquela verde*, 2023  
oil paint on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in





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*Campo abierto*, 2023  
oil paint on canvas  
35 x 40 cm  
13.8 x 15.7 in

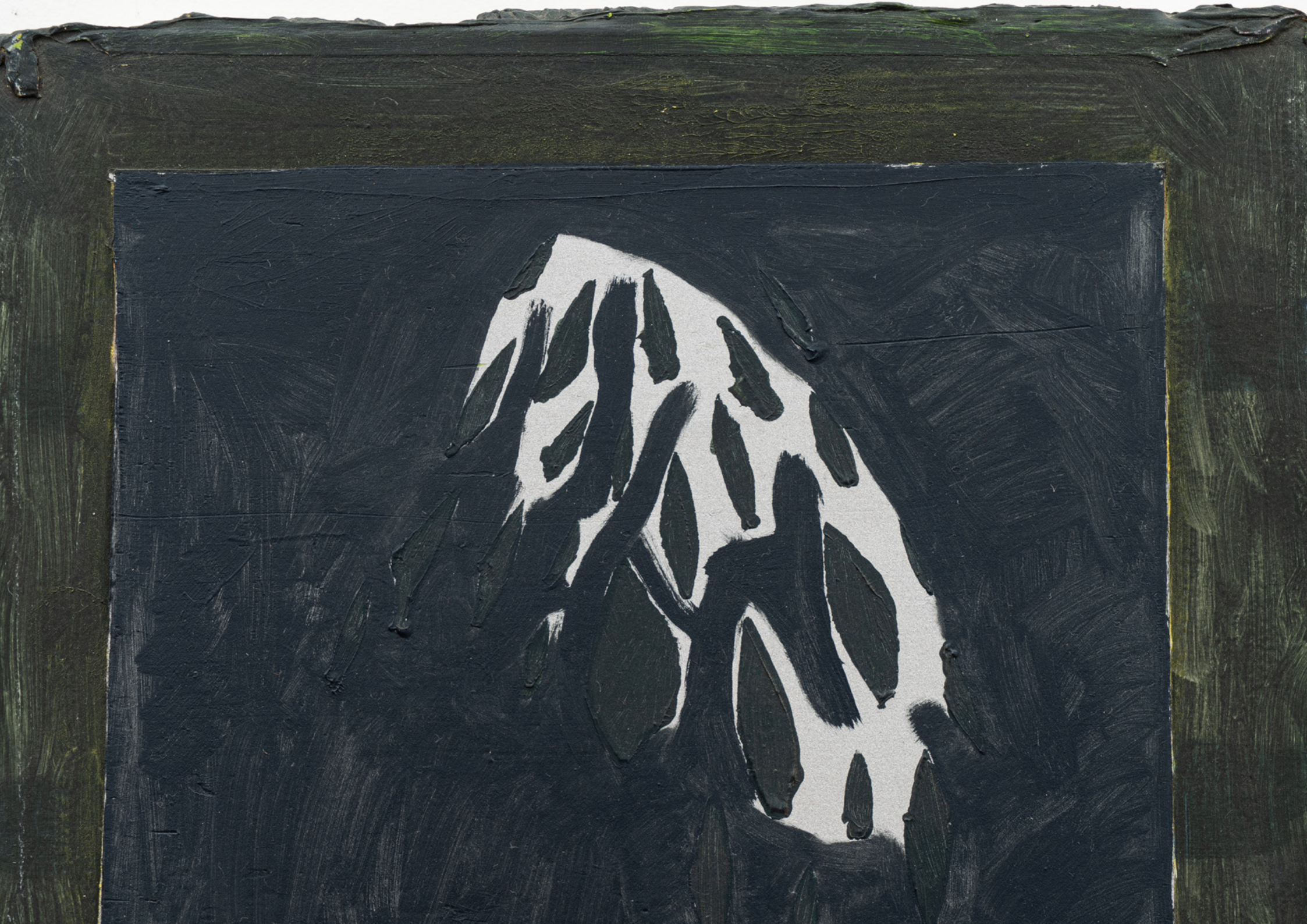






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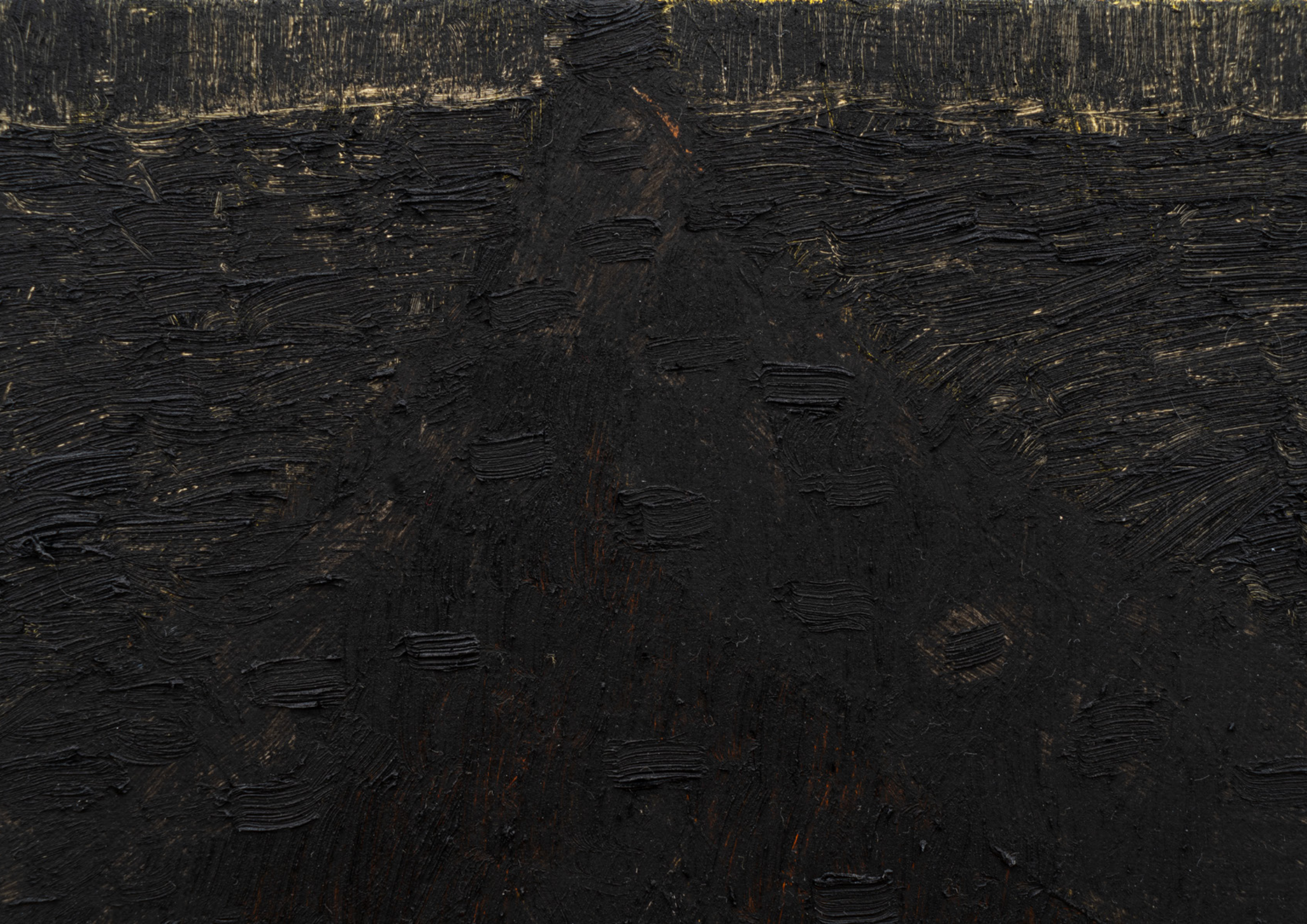
*Noturna*, 2023  
oil paint on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in





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*Monocromo paisagem, 2023*  
oil paint on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in





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*Janela*, 2023  
oil paint and  
thickened gel on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in





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*Nuvem*, 2023  
oil paint on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in



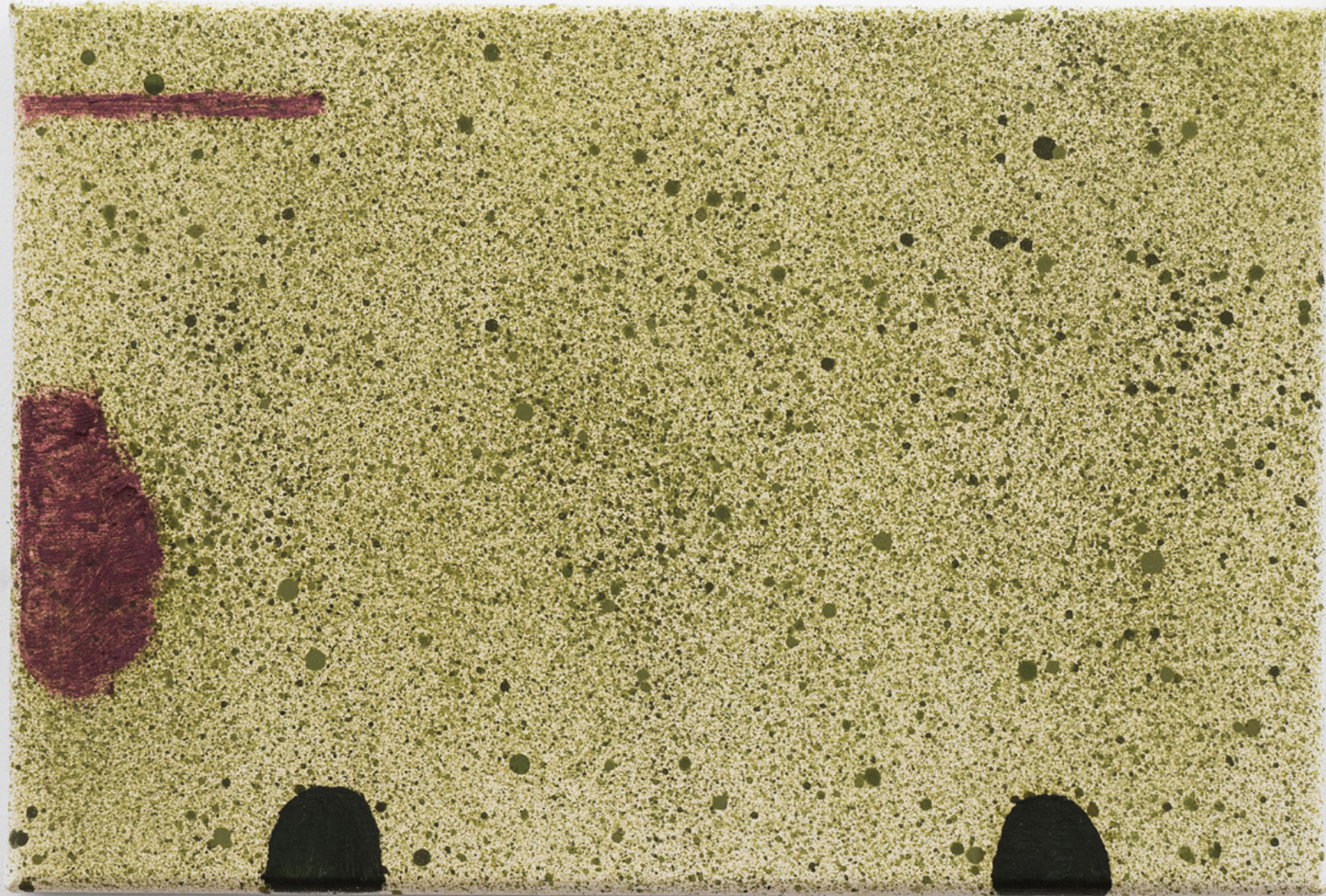




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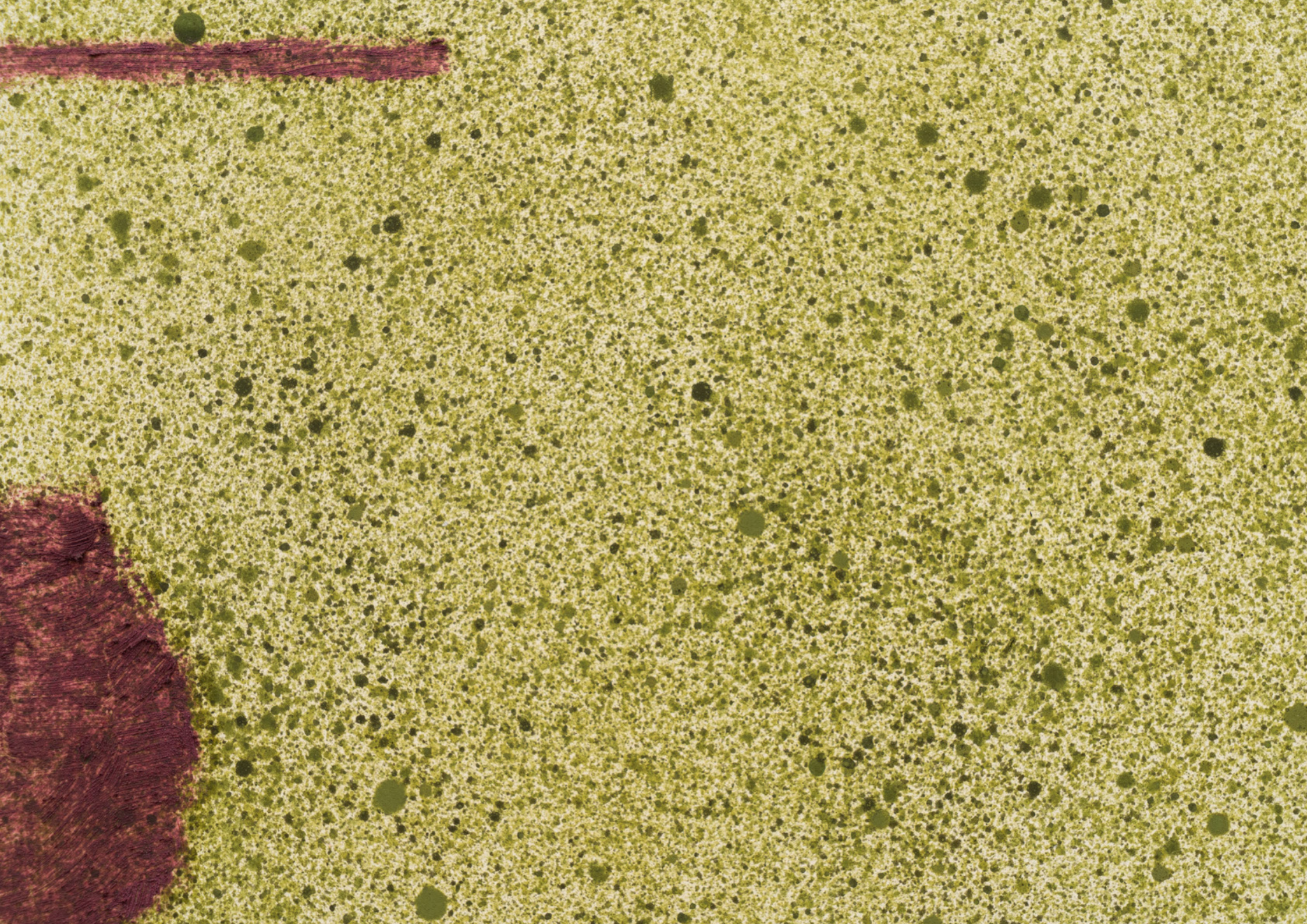
*Cafona*, 2023  
oil paint on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in





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*Pasto*, 2023  
oil paint and thickened  
gel on canvas  
20 x 30 cm  
7.9 x 11.8 in





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*Passagem*, 2023  
oil paint and  
thickened gel on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in





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*Papel amassado*, 2023  
oil paint and  
thickened gel on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
7.9 x 11.8 in







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Xerox, 2023  
oil paint and  
thickened gel on canvas  
30 x 20 cm  
11.8 x 7.9 in



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## **bruno dunley**

b. 1984, Petrópolis, Brazil,  
lives and works in São Paulo, Brazil

The work of Bruno Dunley questions the specificity of painting, particularly in relation to representation and materiality. His paintings depart from carefully constructed compositions, which he gradually begins to correct, alter, and cover up, frequently revealing the lacunae in the apparent continuity of perception. Bruno Dunley is part of a new generation of Brazilian painters called the 200e8 group. The collective, based in São Paulo, was founded with a common interest in painting, to enable its eight members to develop a critical approach to painting within the contemporary art scene. Dunley's work begins with found images and with an analysis of the nature of painting, where language codes such as gesture, plane, surface, and representation are understood as an alphabet. Recently, his practice has shifted towards gestural abstraction, all while maintaining his interest for representation.

As stated by the artist 'I see my work as a series of questions and affirmations about the possibilities of painting, about its essence and our expectations of it.' Often, a single color predominates the surface of his compositions, establishing a minimalist language and a meditative quality that is frequently addressed in critical texts about his work. More recently, the artist has shown an interest for more aggressive composition, expressed through vibrant and contrasting colors. The 200e8's practices stipulate that stable or preconceived ideas about artistic processes should be abandoned, and procedures continually reformulated. In the work of Dunley, promises are made and consequently broken, testing the limits of the viewer's tension.

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### **selected solo exhibitions**

- *Clouds*, Nara Roesler, New York, USA (2023)
- *Virá*, Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2020)
- *The Mirror*, Nara Roesler, New York, USA (2018)
- *Dilúvio*, SIM Galeria, Curitiba, Brazil (2018)
- *Ruído*, Nara Roesler, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (2015)
- *e*, Centro Universitário Maria Antonia (CeUMA), São Paulo, Brazil (2013)
- 11bis Project Space, Paris, France (2011)

### **selected group exhibitions**

- *The rains are changing fast*, The Hekscher Museum of Art, Huntington, USA (2024)
- *Aberto 02*, Casa Vilanova Artigas, São Paulo, Brazil
- *Mapa da estrada: novas obras no Acervo da Pinacoteca de São Paulo*, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil (2022)
- *Entre tanto*, Casa de Cultura do Parque (CCP), São Paulo, Brazil (2020)
- *Triangular: Arte deste século*, Casa Niemeyer, Brasília, Brazil (2019)
- *Al-5 50 ANOS – Ainda não terminou de acabar*, Instituto Tomie Ohtake (ITO), São Paulo, Brazil (2018)
- *139 X NOTHING BUT GOOD*, Park – platform for visual arts, Tilburg, The Netherlands (2018)
- *Visões da arte no acervo do MAC USP 1900–2000*, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC USP), São Paulo, Brazil (2016)
- *Deserto-modelo*, 713 Arte Contemporâneo, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2010)

### **selected collections**

- The Hekscher Museum of Art, Huntington, USA
- Instituto Itaú Cultural, São Paulo, Brazil
- Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC USP), São Paulo, Brazil
- Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), São Paulo, Brazil
- Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

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