

An aerial photograph of a blue body of water with white foam from waves. The text is overlaid on the image.

Kathleen Jacobs

SOARS

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MAY 8–JUNE 19, 2021

HEATHERGAUDIOFINEART

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Kathleen Jacobs Natural Collaboration

Reflecting on the recent headlines surrounding digitized art, NFTs and other crossovers between fine arts and technology, it is refreshing to highlight an artist who embraces a curiosity with the hand-made and has a deep engagement with the medium of painting. Kathleen Jacobs is one such artist, who, through a process of rigorous experimentation has arrived at a distinctive practice that is decidedly her own.

Pivotal milestones in Jacobs' artistic trajectory have defined her approach to mark-making. She grew up in a ranch in Aspen, Colorado where she was acutely in tune with nature, its materials and characteristics. Following college in Boston, she went to Milan, Italy and studied graphic design at the Scuola Politecnica di Design, one of two post graduate art schools in Europe that revived the teachings of the utopian Bauhaus. That experience not only exposed her to the psychology of form, elements of design and how to alter optical adjustments, it also trained her to take systemic approaches to problem solving.

Marriage relocated Jacobs to China, where she immersed herself fully in the culture and learned the language, customs and, more importantly, the art of calligraphy. This new form of expression, taught to her by her father-in-law, the renowned autodidact artist Huang Yongyu, was to have a lasting effect in her approach to artmaking. Calligraphy requires great practice and skill, and Jacobs found the constancy of repeated efforts and methodologies rewarding. Through trial and error, the artist was able to experiment with the different materials and brushes and, in addition, she learned techniques behind traditional Chinese painting. These methodologies were to inform her own canvas preparation in years to come.

Four years later, Jacobs returned to her home ranch in Aspen and focused on using the materials at her disposal: wood, wax, hay, wire and the like. The ever-inquisitive experimenter created sculptural forms and worked in ceramics and printmaking. Motivated to find new ways of mark-making, she explored

matrices beyond the conventional woodblocks or etching plates by making direct impressions of tree barks with paper and any fabric she could find. This exercise led to her first large-scale project, a minimal land intervention that was ten-years in the making (1989-1999). Jacobs wrapped eighteen aspen trees with canvas in a grove in Colorado's White River National Forest. Little did she know then that this installation, intended to heighten awareness of the sudden decline of the species, was to become the genesis of her signature marks and painting processes.

Using canvas or linen, Jacobs wraps thinly painted and gessoed materials around tree trunks and rubs them with oil stick. This form of application, known as *frottage*, was a technique developed by Max Ernst in 1925 and a method adopted by his fellow Surrealists. Rubbing a textured surface with the use of a pencil or other drawing material, *frottage* relinquishes control by permitting the unexpected to emerge. Jacobs' appropriation of this technique has a different purpose however, for her work is not about evoking unsettling or uncanny imagery. Her approach to tracing tree barks is instead a collaboration with nature.

Jacobs staples canvases to tree trunks for months at a time, in some instances several years. She returns to them ritualistically, rubbing them with pigments to trace the natural wood grains. Working on different species of trees, she registers the varying inherent patterns and grooves of the barks. Some tactile markings may be thicker with fluffier or feathery edges, (as seen in *SOARS*) while other lines have a finer presence (*PINON.*) Jacobs is creating an authentic and permanent record of the tree's surface at a certain point in its lifespan. The rubbings materialize like ghost markings of the giant organism. Today, she is more cognizant of impressions to be expected based on the tree species, but she can never fully predict what is going to happen. There is always the element of surprise. Mother Nature also lends a hand. The permeable canvases absorb the surrounding light and humidity they are exposed to, and these paintings thus take the concept of *plein air* to a different level. They soak in the atmosphere of nature and react to the environment with their changing patina.

The harmonious partnership with nature concludes when Jacobs removes the weathered canvases and brings them indoors to her studio. She continues to apply washed-out oil and acrylic

paints, either on the front of the canvas, or from the reverse, pushing the pigments through the weave of the material. These thinly veiled layers of paint are prevalent in Chinese traditional painting, their nuanced grounds offering soft depths to the surface. Jacobs' paintings are typically monochromatic, and she restricts her palettes to various tonalities of whites, cool shades of blues, yellows or reds. With minimal means and a sparing use of color, the paintings feel unhurried and offer the viewer a contemplative serenity. They are physical records of time, space, light, place and environment, and formally, they possess their inherent spatial and light perceptions.

Once stretched, the canvases are turned, orienting the *frottaged* impressions to run horizontally across the surface. The break from their visual source is a way for Jacobs to bridge another important aspect of her life: being outdoors while flying, kayaking or surfing. In the paintings, the repetitive linear motifs take on the semblance of thin clouds across the sky or foamy waves on water or ripples on a sandy beach. So delicately refined in their modest and subtle palettes, their abstract vocabulary so finely nuanced, the paintings seem to belie having endured their harsh exposure. Another characteristic that is particular to Jacobs' works are their scale and how they relate to the human body. The canvases can vary in size depending on the age of the trees they interacted with, with smaller paintings marked on younger saplings to larger ones traced on bigger trunks. The sheer scale of *SUMIT* is a reminder that arboreal lifespans out-last ours by decades, even centuries.

Jacobs lives and works in Western Massachusetts, unencumbered by urban distractions. She incorporates her personal passion of piloting acrobatic planes into her artwork by titling her paintings after navigational fixes. It is no coincidence the shady whites, creams and blues evoke the temporal experience of vertiginous altitudes. These paintings feel timeless and meditative in their beauty, giving us pause and make us reconsider our relationship with the natural world.





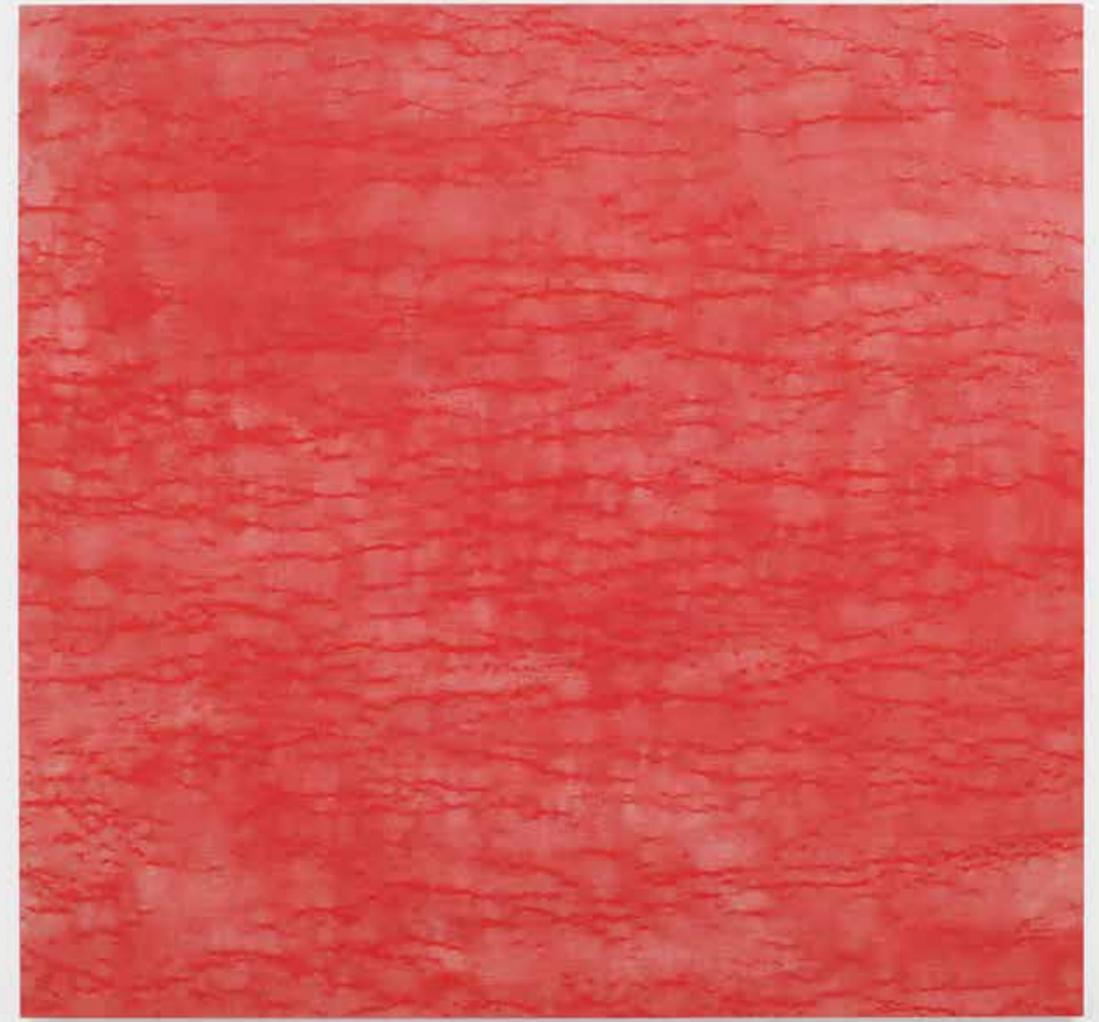
FERNS 2019 OIL ON LINEN 40 x 41 IN.



WOODS 2017 OIL ON LINEN 72 x 76 IN.



MINOE 2020 OIL ON LINEN 30 x 30 IN.



STAXS 2020 OIL ON LINEN 60 x 63 IN.



PEBLE 2020 OIL ON LINEN 30 x 30 IN.

TOZEK 2020 OIL ON LINEN 30 x 30 IN.





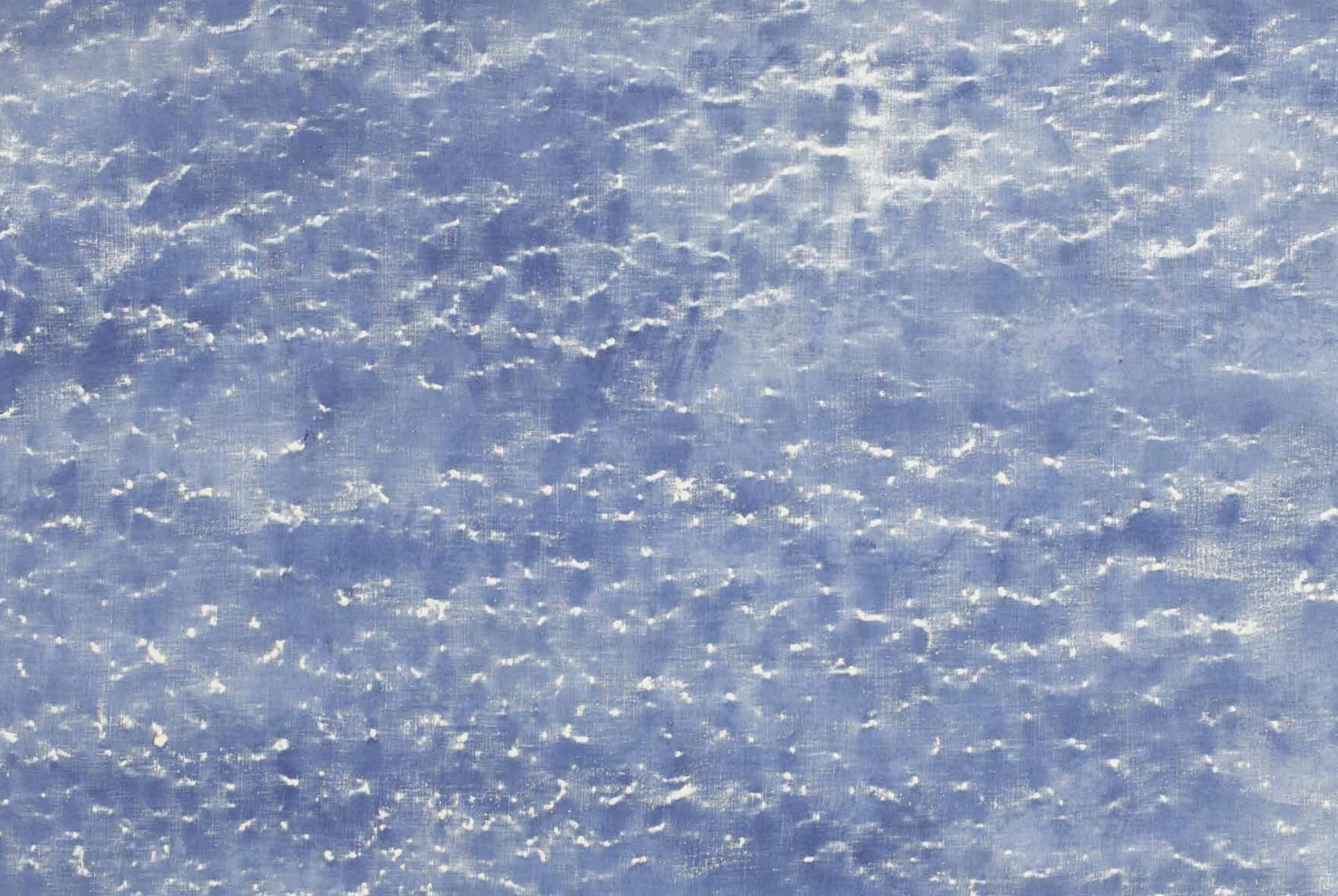
SOARS 2018 OIL ON LINEN 72 x 76 IN.



PITAS 2016 OIL ON LINEN 72 x 76 IN.



PENNI 2020 OIL ON LINEN 67 x 48 IN.



ZOOLU 2020 OIL ON LINEN 30 x 30 IN.

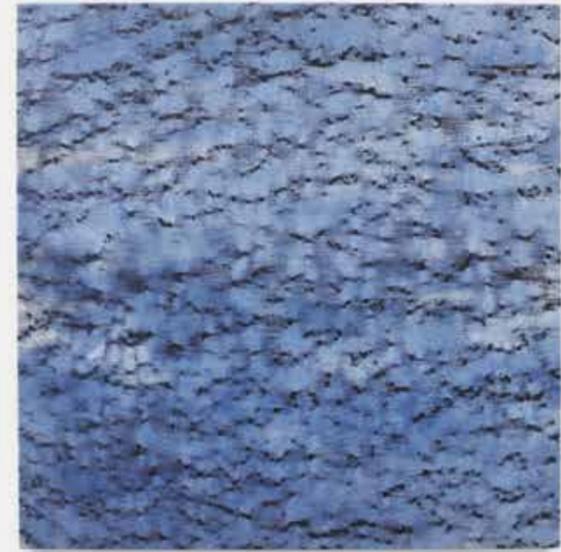




SUMIT 2018 OIL ON LINEN 100 x 67 IN.

WILMA 2020 OIL ON LINEN 30 x 30 IN.





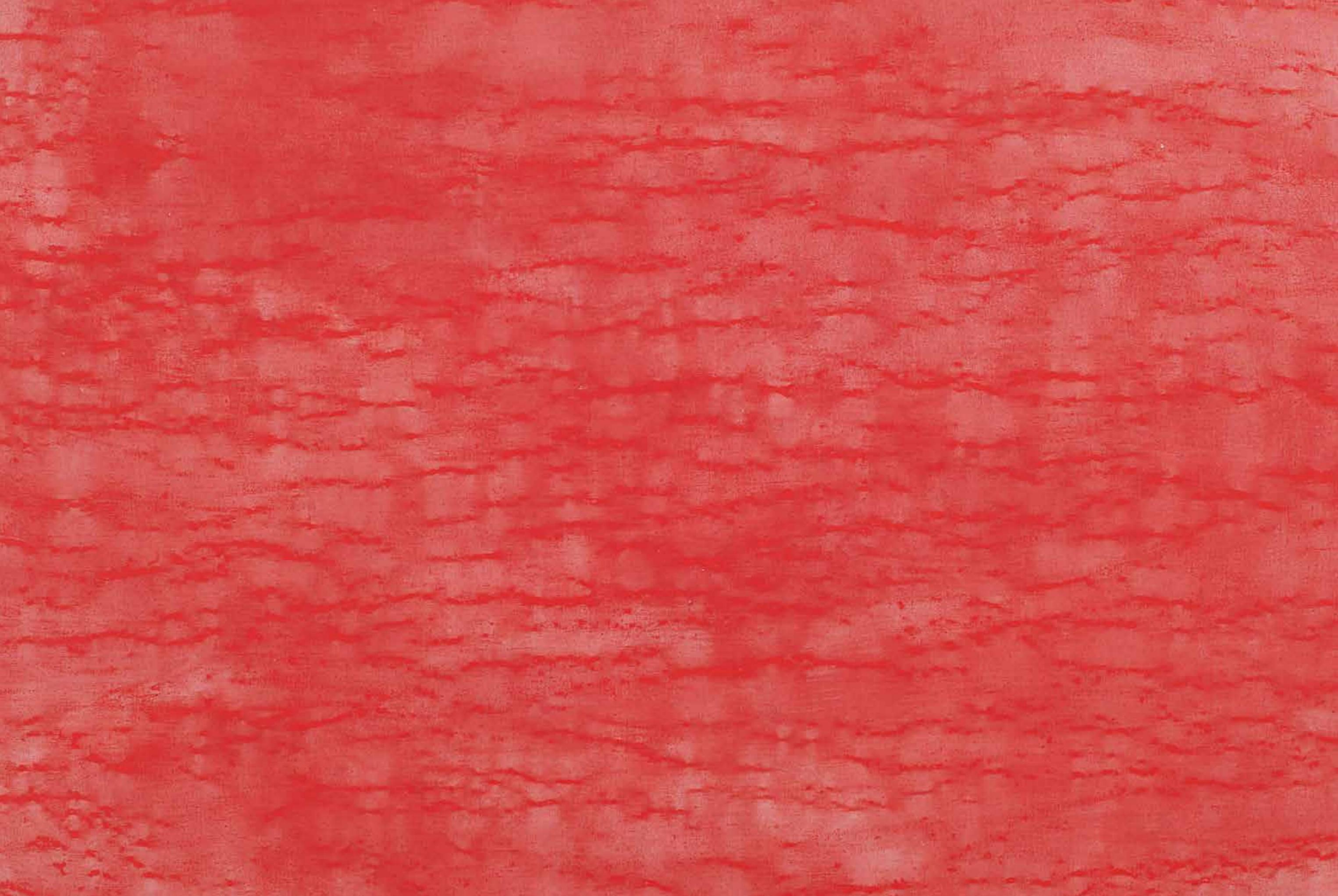
URSIX 2020 OIL ON LINEN 30 x 30 IN.



PINON 2014 OIL ON LINEN 87 x 80 IN.



ORDER 2020 OIL ON LINEN 60 x 63 IN.





Kathleen Jacobs

Born in Aspen, Colorado
Lives in Great Barrington, Massachusetts

EDUCATION

Scuola Politecnica di Design, Milan, Italy
Pine Manor College, Boston, MA
Yale Language Centre, Chinese University, Hong Kong

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2021
SOARS, Heather Gaudio Fine Art, New Canaan, CT

2019
ECHOS, paintings and site-specific outdoor installation,
Turn Park Art Space, West Stockbridge, MA
Kathleen Jacobs, ARS Gallery, Honolulu, HI
In Light of Shade, Fergus McCaffrey, New York, NY
Inauguration: Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Richard Höglund,
Kathleen Jacobs, Yayoi Kusama, Sol LeWitt, Joel Shapiro,
and Frank Stella, The Bonnier Gallery, Miami, FL
AVION, The Bonnier Gallery, Miami, FL

2018
Opening Reception: Carl Andre, Richard Höglund,
Kathleen Jacobs, Sol LeWitt and Christo,
The Bonnier Gallery, Miami, FL
Under The Night Sky, Organized by Michael Black,
Friedman Benda, New York, NY
An Eccentric View: Tauba Auerbach, Jo Baer, Marsha
Cottrell, Tara Donovan, Eva Hesse, Kathleen Jacobs,
Yayoi Kusama, Agnes Martin, Mira Schendel,
Fernando Mignoni, New York, NY
DRÉMS, Fergus McCaffrey, New York, NY
Kathleen Jacobs, ARS Gallery, Honolulu, HI

2017
Kathleen Jacobs, The Lab, Bellevue, WA

2016
Kathleen Jacobs: Clearing, Hillman-Jackson Gallery,
Great Barrington, MA

2015
Gatherings, Fergus McCaffrey Fine Art, New York, NY
Crunchy (organized by Clayton Press and Gregory Linn),
Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, NY

2014
Love Story: Anne & Wolfgang Titze Collection,
Belvedere Museum, Vienna, Austria, (catalogue).
Isha Nelson Gallery, Great Barrington, MA

2013
Isha Nelson Gallery, Great Barrington, MA

2012–14
Architecture For Art, Hillsdale, NY

2007
Peder Bonnier Inc., New York, NY

2004
Peder Bonnier Inc., New York, NY

2000
Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO

1998
Peder Bonnier Inc., New York, NY

1996
Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO

1994
Peder Bonnier Inc., New York, NY

1993
Patricia Moore Gallery, Aspen, CO

1992
Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, CO

1992
Jamison Thomas Gallery, New York, NY

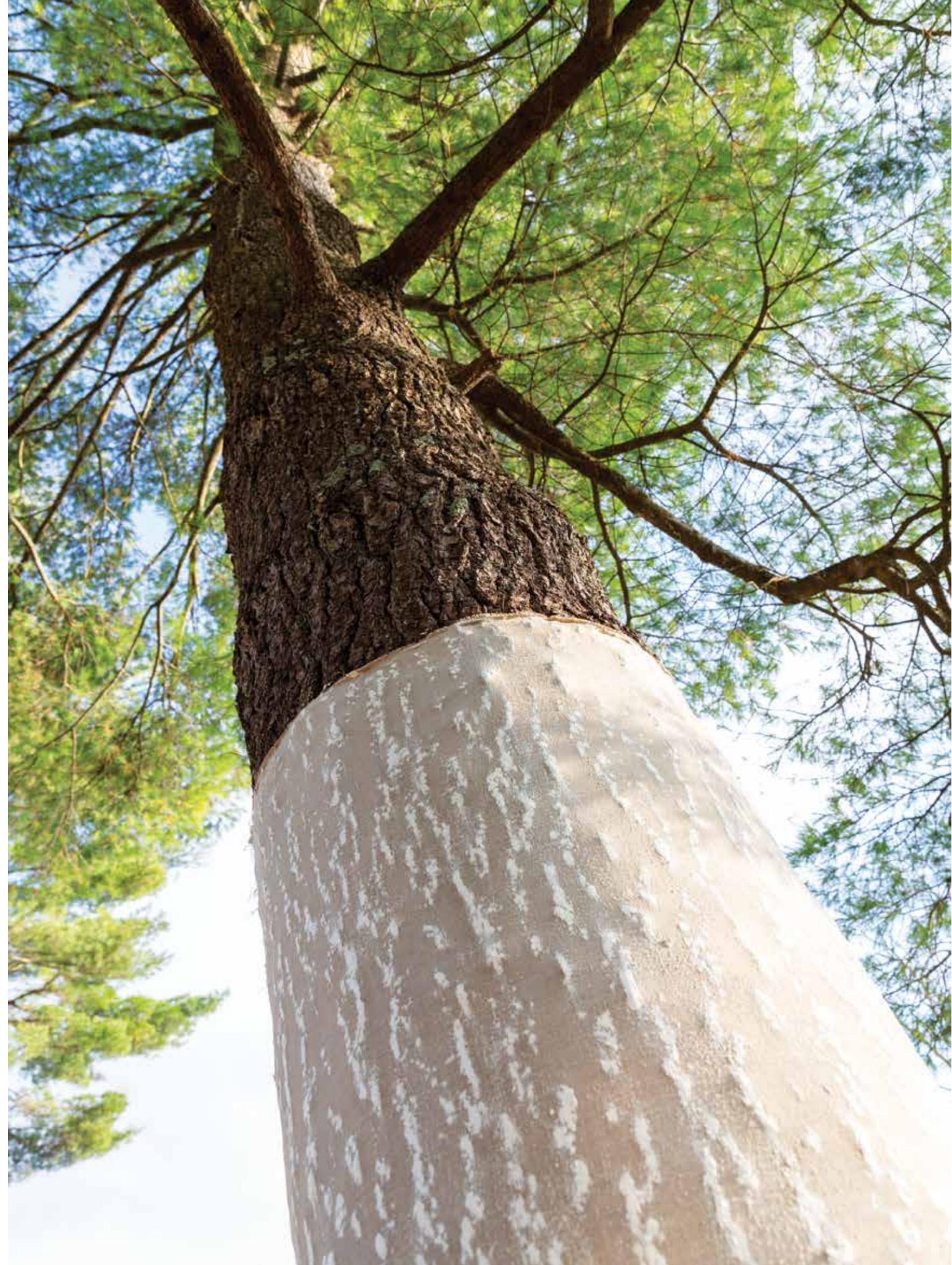
1991
Tavelli Gallery, Aspen, CO

1990
Tim Brown Gallery, Aspen, CO

1989
Tavelli Gallery, Aspen, CO

1989
Patricia Moore Gallery, Aspen, CO

1988
Gallery of The Bank of Aspen, Aspen, CO



This catalogue was published on the occasion of the exhibition:

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