

BIRTH OF ANOTHER GOD

Sajal Sarkar

On View July 30 – September 5, 2026
Opening Reception July 30, 6:00pm – 8:00pm

aicon CONTEMPORARY

35 Great Jones Street, New York, NY

Cover: Sajal Sarkar, *Field of Departure*, 2026, Oil on canvas
Inner Cover: Sajal Sarkar, *Imaginary Couple*, 2026, Oil on canvas

Back: Sajal Sarkar with *Field of Departure*, 2026

Sajal Sarkar | THE BIRTH OF ANOTHER GOD

Aicon Contemporary 35 Great Jones St, New York, NY, 10012
+1 (212) 666-7552 info@aiconcontemporary.com aiconcontemporary.com



ABOUT US

Aicon Contemporary was founded in 2019, building on the two-decade legacy of Aicon Gallery. Based in New York, the gallery is dedicated to presenting ambitious contemporary practices that expand the geography of local art.

Working with artists from historically under-represented and diasporic contexts, Aicon Contemporary foregrounds perspectives shaped by migration, distance, and layered cultural histories. The program emphasizes material experimentation and conceptually rigorous practices that challenge dominant narratives within contemporary art.

Through exhibitions in New York, participation in leading international art fairs, and placements in major institutional collections, the gallery fosters meaningful connections between artists and a local audience. In doing so, Aicon Contemporary operates as a critical conduit between local and transnational art discourses.

At its core, the gallery's mission is to reconsider the frameworks through which modernity and contemporaneity are understood, advocating for a more expansive, plural, and locally rooted perspective that resists a singular, western-centered canon.

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A desolate landscape, with traces of life in the distance. A strategically placed horizon sharply splits the land and the sky. This familiar trope of Romantic landscape painting, which Sajal Sarkar has mastered over the last decade, prominently appears in his newest series *Birth of Another God*, albeit with a twist. A massive, bizarre structure in the foreground, built of seemingly tiny fragments, interrupts the horizon. A closer scrutiny finds that many of the fragments are specific objects of various scales, from urban detritus to skeletal remains, while others remain unidentifiable. The cluster seems tentative, threatening to fall apart. Ambiguity, which is central to Sarkar's formal and conceptual process, characterizes the series; it is therefore necessary to examine the role of ambiguity in his creative enterprise by touching on broader issues around abstraction.

In retrospect, it is clear that the Western modernist discourse on abstract art was about cherished ideals that were mostly unachievable in practice. In both pre-war Europe and postwar America, images of discarded material reality described by such phrases as 'non-figurative', 'non-objective', or 'non-representational' concealed a fallacy that all intelligent abstract painters knew all along: if 'figuration' implies not just human or animal figures but references to anything corporeal, then any notion of 'pure' abstraction becomes a myth, since even the most non-figurative gesture on a surface is always capable of invoking a material reference, even if remotely. Malevich's iconic *White on White* (1918), the uniquely simplified self-referential image that can also be read as a tilted blank canvas mounted on a white wall, brings the point home; it unequivocally demonstrates that far from

being mutually exclusive, pictorial realism and abstraction are always in a symbiosis, the potential of each embedded in the other. Much of the abstraction by the American Minimalists (Frank Stella's early pin stripes, among others) were informed by the awareness of this underlying paradox in the discourse of abstraction, where iconoclasm is rhetorical, at best.

Another concealed issue is the question of power. The movements in abstract art in both Europe and America were launched by white – mostly heterosexual-- males. The ideals of abstraction, in other words, belonged to a specific demographic, which denied its own subject-position and professed those ideals as universal and themselves simply as 'artists'. Such endorsement of an iconoclastic, self-referential, 'non-figurative' art –often identified by the generic label 'formalism'-- empowered the universalist identity of those artists.

The utopian claims of modernist abstract art were critically dissected between the 1970s and the 1990s. The critique convincingly established that projection of the artist's subjectivity with any claim of universal validity is no longer tenable in a heterogeneous world; and that despite its apparent divorce from corporeality or perceivable subject and content, the specific historical location of the image and its maker plays a central role in the process. This revisionist tide opened the doors to a fresh surge of an immense variety of experimental abstraction –often labeled New Abstraction-- around the turn of the century by freeing it from the previous mandates. Spearheaded by artists of color and various sexualities and genders, a largely self-conscious abstract art has emerged over the last couple of decades where incisive political and social subjects playfully mingle with energetic explorations of material and process, demonstrating the artists' sharp awareness of history. Mark Bradford, Julie Mehretu, Chris Ofili, and Nari Ward

are among those who stand out on this front, all of whom exploit abstraction's apparent detachment from corporeality to encode it with signs from that same reality. Sajal Sarkar's training and practice, however, happened far away from this milieu of playful iconoclasm, as he was born, raised, and trained in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), India. The primary goal of art training at the Kolkata institutions has long been enhancement of technical skill, which breeds a cultish allegiance to figurative representations among its students. And in light of the city's robust history of left-leaning thinking, figurative art fits neatly into its elite visual culture. While Sarkar, after his graduation, relocated to Baroda in the province of Gujarat, where the art milieu is very different from that in Kolkata, he carried with him hubris for his expertise in figure drawing. Because his creative thinking has always been deeply affected by crises of humanity, his anthropocentric work from his Baroda phase typically features competently depicted human bodies writhing in agony. Then in 2016, Sarkar immigrated to the United States with his family. He has since been struggling not only to negotiate his relationship with his adopted home (where he witnessed the ugly, xenophobic side of American society that had remained leashed for decades), but also to locate his niche in an unfamiliar art world, having uprooted a reasonably active career in India. It was through these initial years of self-reflection that he found an opportunity to rigorously revisit his entire creative process: his subjects, imagery, materials, and techniques. His work subsequently underwent a radical transformation; while still steadfastly grounded in his humanistic ideals, he began shifting away from his previous fascination for the human body. Logistical constraints on multiple fronts —the absence of adequate studio space, for one— pushed Sarkar toward watercolor and drawing. Unlike the very large canvases of the four artists mentioned above,

canvases of the four artists mentioned above, the scale and treatment of his work from this period make them an intimate experience, with radical simplification of the realistic imagery from a few years prior. The series called *Perilous Home*, exhibited in 2019, I believe, has immediate kinship with the current one. The work from that series falls into two distinct groups: while one offers discernable referential subjects, the other underscores design and pictorial surface over illusion of space. Mostly horizontally composed, the first group has a bisected picture plane, forming two segments often linked by a motif that controls the entire composition with remarkable precision. That these are abstractions of panoramic landscapes is obvious; the bisection serves as the horizon, subtly curved to suggest the shape of the planet. Yet the tranquility that such a horizon usually brings to a landscape is either harshly invaded by powerful forces, or an impending doom lurks in the background: dark clouds, fiery glows, thick smoke. The surface shows clear mastery of material and process; tonality is radically economized, yet it produces impressively nuanced effects and controlled accidents. Dried puddles, blotches, blots and stains that are lifeless, even ugly up close show dynamic interactions when perceived in their pictorial entirety. Distanced farther from references to corporeality, the pictures of the second group demonstrate that the confrontational notions about life, death and suffering in Sarkar's Baroda phase are reforged into a more introspective existential vision—a spiritually-inclined position, if you will—through a strategic use of abstraction. Geometric shapes and layered tones engage in a complex formal play, colliding, overlapping, bleeding into one another. The circles and webs expand and multiply with lives of their own and with little obligation to anything beyond pictorial demands. In contrast to the apocalyptic mood of the panoramic landscapes, some of these images feel curiously lively and welcoming; their formal treatment has an “allover”-ness (to

borrow a Greenbergian term) that makes them stand apart from the others. It is fair to observe that they testify to Sarkar's undaunted optimism about life amid all the agonies and perils that torment him. I have no doubt that *Birth of Another God* confidently builds on the achievements of *Perilous Home*. Once some of Sarkar's logistical issues were resolved in the last few years, like access to a studio space, his work became more ambitious in scale, imagery, and execution. Fairly large canvases in oil in the current series offer the same landscape format as in the first group of *Perilous Home*, but dexterous use of the medium introduces a sense of gravity that replaces the playfulness of the previous work. Instead of controlled accidents, meticulously executed skies in this series show dense layers of clouds, with signs of instability that heighten the somber—even ominous—mood of the scenes. The ambiguity of drips, stains and blotches that draw attention to the land in the watercolors have changed character as well, making way for a hybrid cluster of unknown identity made up of myriad components looming in the foreground. Sarkar's intense attention to detail underscores a different kind of ambiguity: one is drawn to the unstable fragments of the clustered entity in the foreground, only to discover that while some of them can be recognized as urban debris and skeletal remains, many other pieces do not refer to any specific objects; they exist only as abstract shapes. I prefer to call them 'things', as opposed to 'objects'. These illusionistically rendered shapes of unknown origin, I argue, play a vital role as pictorial agents of ambiguity and abstraction in these images. They might recall some of the dreamscapes by the French Surrealist Yves Tanguy, an empty land with ambiguous, amorphous shapes. But

the abundant presence of 'things' in Sarkar's work and their instability make the scenes feel stranger and more precarious than Tanguy's paintings. In *Imaginary Couple*, a massive upright structure -- the low horizon contributing to its enormity--invades the foreground of the vertically composed picture. The behemoth defies description -- perhaps it is a tall dead tree or a figure with a raised arm. Yet while the upper portion of the shaft is convincingly painted as a skeletal form with a visible vertebral column within it, strange, malleable, coil-like 'things' instead of a head frustrates any attempt to read the entity either as a tree or a body. What is more, the darker, lower section is composed of 'things' that are abstract in their own right. But then again, at the foot of it sits a clearly recognizable skeleton of a seemingly docile animal (a dog?). The same ambiguity, produced through judicious use of realism and abstraction, is evident in *Birth of Another God*, where an equally baffling, intensely red tornado-like shape ominously rise from a dark, hilly landscape. Instead of a regular whirlpool of wind, however, this dynamic form is composed of countless 'things' of various shapes, some of them splintering outward. It is tempting to read them as pieces of architecture and furniture (as objects), but such references turn out to be tentative, at best. A similar encounter awaits in *Floating Heart on Alakananda*: a heart-shaped structure built with a dense crowd of mostly 'things' aggressively dominates the space. With the palpable air of uncertainty, these almost primeval landscapes are evidence of Sarkar's meditations on the precarity of civilization and his earnest search for order within chaos. Bones and skeletons are a striking inclusion in this series, such as in *Imaginary Bridge* and *De-Civilization in Process*. Let me observe here that on one level, Sarkar's fascination for skeletons may well be a vestige of his nostalgia for a mode of art training where knowledge of anatomy is paramount. That said, what I find

captivating is his maturity in harnessing that nostalgia in the service of his current needs. A skeleton is the ultimate trace of life's corporeality; it causes both awe and fear because rejecting all nuances of identity, it harshly exposes the frailty of life. It is, paradoxically, both an abstraction of a body and a disturbingly objective reminder of it, which means regardless of the style of representation, there is always a strong potential for abstraction in the *idea* of the image of a skeleton, especially in fragmented views. And this, I believe, precisely illustrates Sarkar's coinage of the term "contextual abstraction" to describe his current work, evident in his small paintings where close-ups of skeletal fragments almost become 'things', at times metamorphosing into vibrant brushwork. Sarkar's contemplations of existential questions culminate in a couple of paintings – *Five Elements* and *Anatomy of a Midnight*—that borrow as much from the second group of Perilous Home, where form and design prevail over extraneous references as from the first group of landscapes. A dark ellipse dominates both scenes. In one, it hovers above like an extra-terrestrial object, connected to a body of water below by a tower of illuminated dots forming a luminous column. In the other, it sits on the land in mid-ground, with an illuminated human habitat encircling it, as if it offers a glimpse of the inception of civilization. The ellipse is the most simplified, elemental shape Sarkar has used thus far in a dominant role between the two series; it is where the 'things' of the landscapes turn into irreducible dots of light. There is indeed a strong sense of ambiguity and mystery, but the threat of calamity or the drama of impending doom of the landscapes is replaced by a calmer, pensive atmosphere which might provoke fundamental existential questions about humanity. Here precarity, furthermore, is counterbalanced by a possibility of redemption. What if the ellipse is

not meant to be understood as a solid space but as a dark conduit? Perhaps there is light at the other end of that primeval darkness? The very large canvases by Mehretu, Bradford, Ofili or Ward promise something more than simply form and design. What especially draws me to Sarkar's recent and current work is that it makes the same promise, but fulfills it in a different way. Initially enticed by his formal adventures, one is later confronted by the precarity of human existence that the images invoke beneath the familiar trope of beauty. Yet Sarkar touts no utopia. As with the four artists, design and object, form and content are always in a symbiosis in his work, in a dialogic relationship, as in Malevich's *White on White*. In other words, the potent ideas buttressing his images take advantage of the myth of abstraction to engage in vibrant conversations with the elements of pictorial construction, material, and process. It is this dialogue between abstraction and realism, between his birth culture and the adopted one, and between his deep introspection about life and actual lived experience that enables him to efficiently deliver on his promise. Despite all the differences in life history and work, therefore, I find this a compelling reason to include Sarkar in the company of these artists. Once the prerogative of white male artists, the discourse of contemporary abstract art is now a space for offering a diverse range of visions and agendas. And as an immigrant artist of color in America navigating a hybrid existence, Sajal Sarkar confidently enters that space.

--Sunanda K Sanyal

SAJAL SARKAR

Born 1963, Kolkata, India



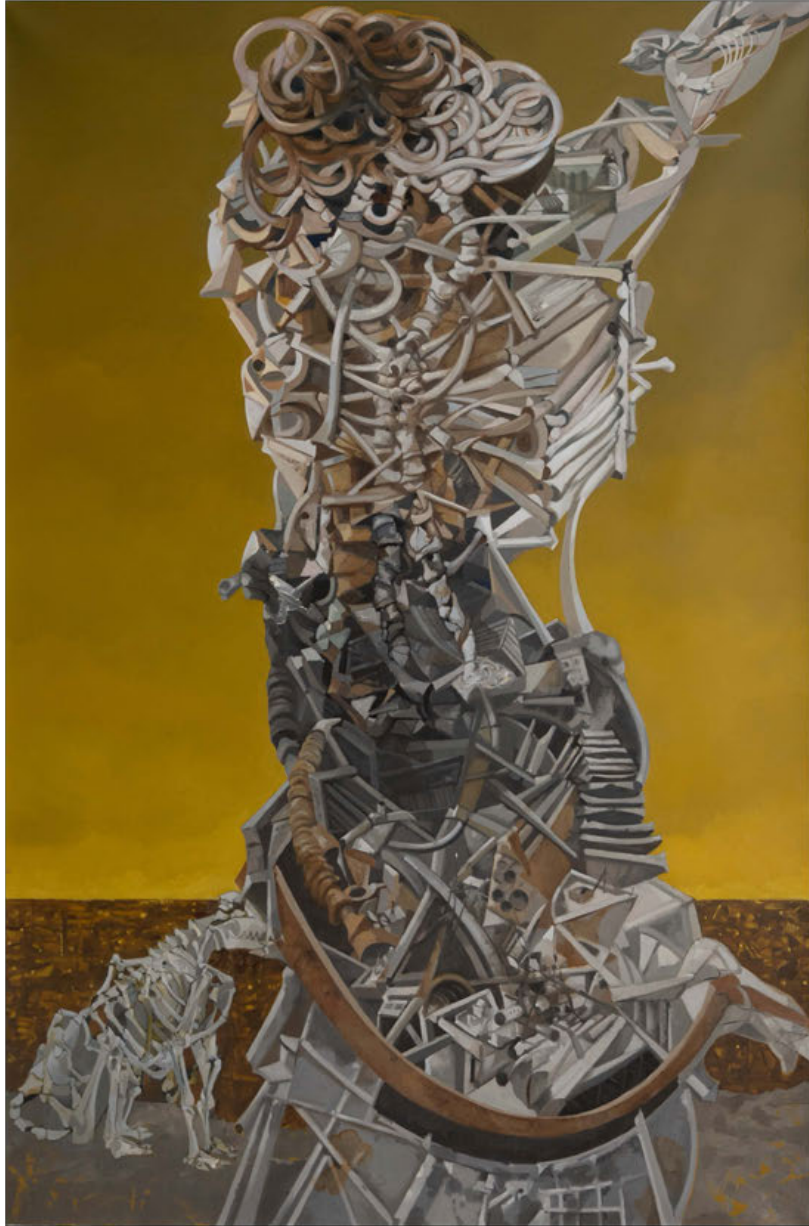
Sajal Sarkar is an artist of the Indian diaspora who explored most of the conventional mediums like drawing and painting, printmaking, and sculpture. Completed his BFA in Drawing and Painting in Govt. College of Art and Craft, The University of Calcutta in 1989, and then studied Printmaking at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India. In 1993-95.

He has won several grants and awards including the New Jersey State Council on the Arts Individual Artist Fellowship in 2024, The Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation grant in 2021, Senior Research Fellowship from the Cultural Ministry of India in 2011-12. The Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation, Canada in 1996 and 2005.

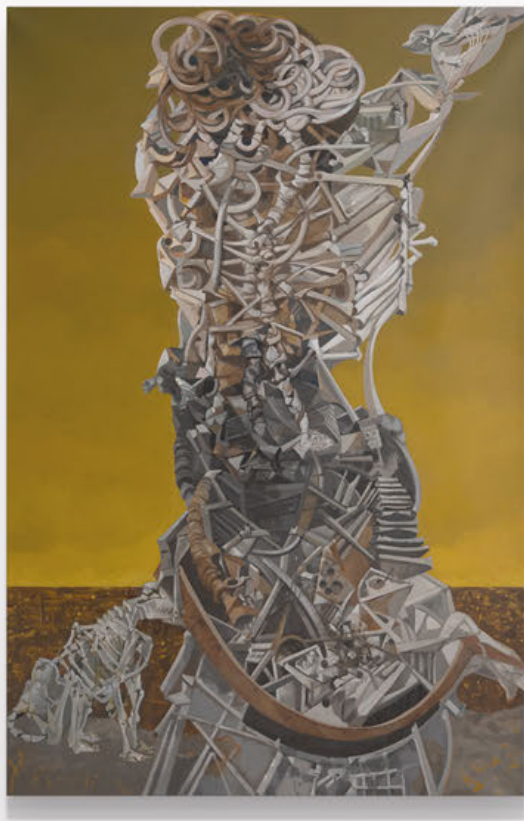
Sajal has shown his work in numerous solo shows and group shows in various parts of the world. In 2016 he migrated to the USA and continued his art practice exploring various natural mediums in his work. Sajal presented several artist talks, including at the University of Connecticut(UConn), CT, the World University of Design, Haryana, India, Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India, and East Connecticut State University.

His interview was published in Art Review City, New York, and Art Soul Life magazine in India, an article was published in Art India Magazine His works are in collection with the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi, Library of Congress, DC, National Gallery of Modern Art, and Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi along with several private collections internationally.

Sajal presently lives and works in NJ.



Sajal Sarkar
Imaginary Couple, 2026
Oil on canvas
77.5h x 52w in





Sajal Sarkar
Five Elements of Life, 2024
Oil on canvas
68h x 50w in





Sajal Sarkar
Infinite Silence,
2026 Oil on canvas
46h x 46w in





Sajal Sarkar
*Anatomy of a
Midnight, 2024*
Oil on canvas
59h x 78.75w in





Sajal Sarkar
De-Civilization in Process, 2026
Oil on canvas
30h x 92w in





Sajal Sarkar
*The Field of
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65.5h x 63w in





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Birth of Another God, 2026
Oil on canvas
78.5h x 78.75w in





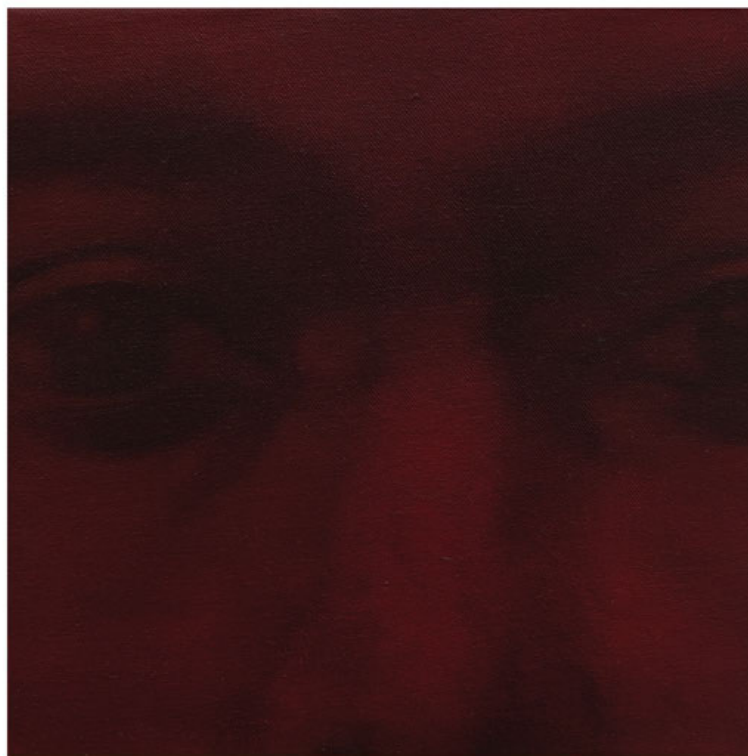
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*Floating Heart on
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Sajal Sarkar
The Imaginary Bridge, 2026
Oil on canvas
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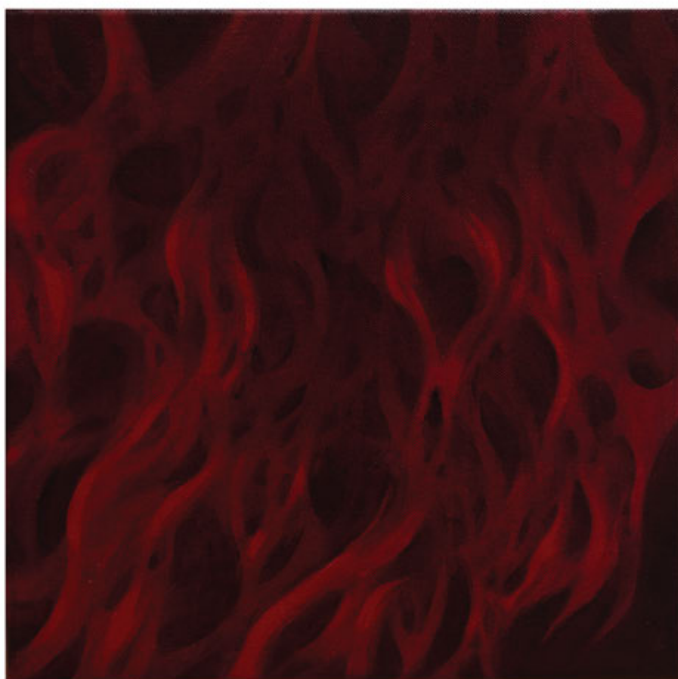




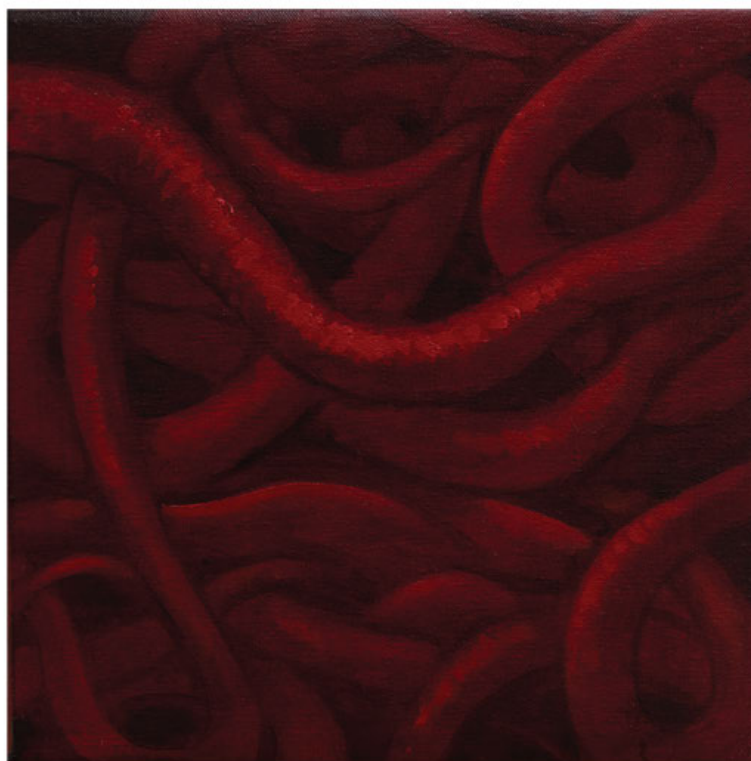
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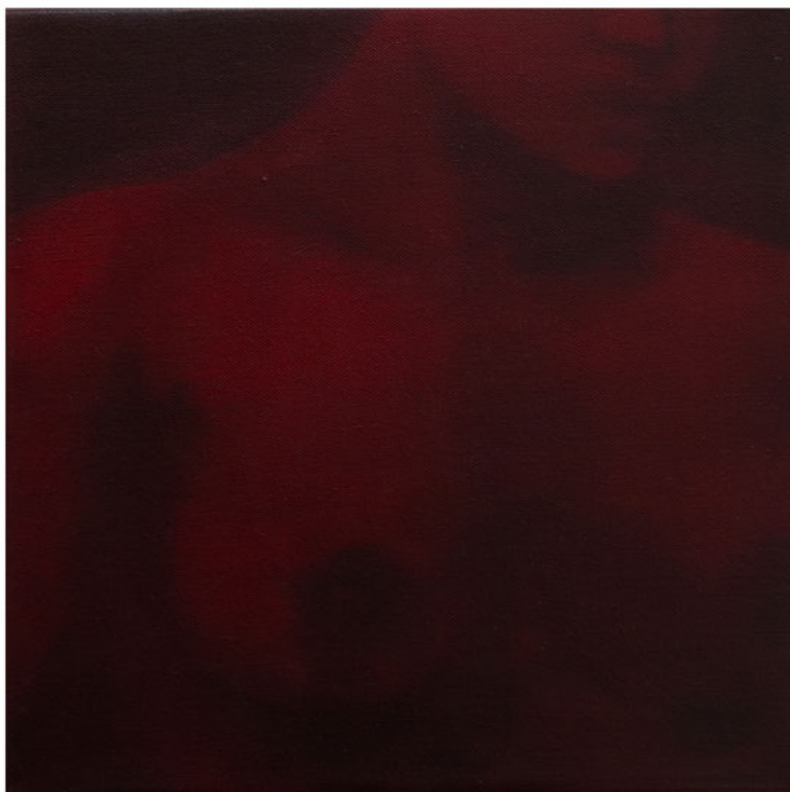
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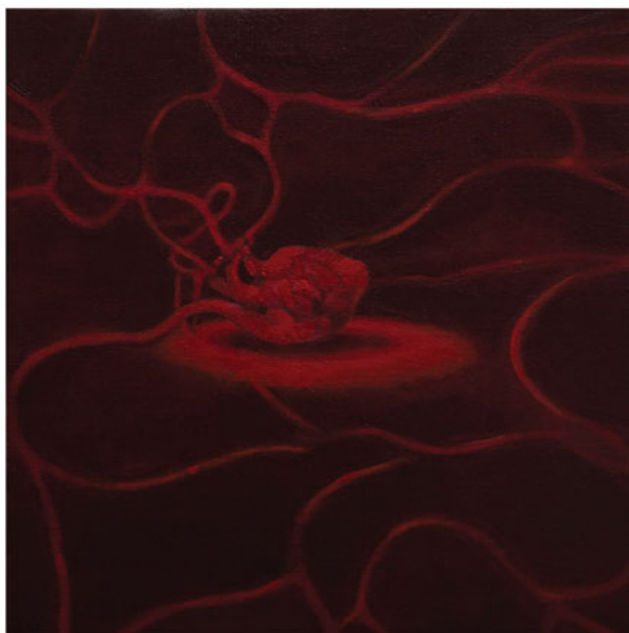
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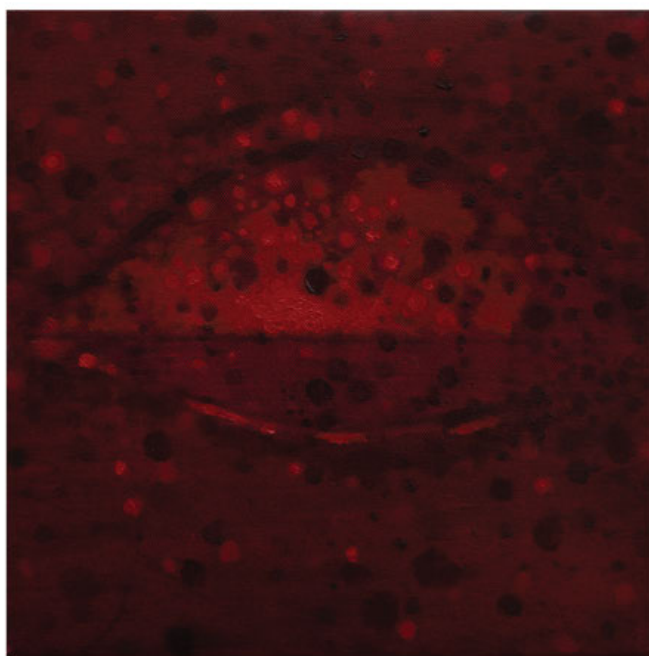
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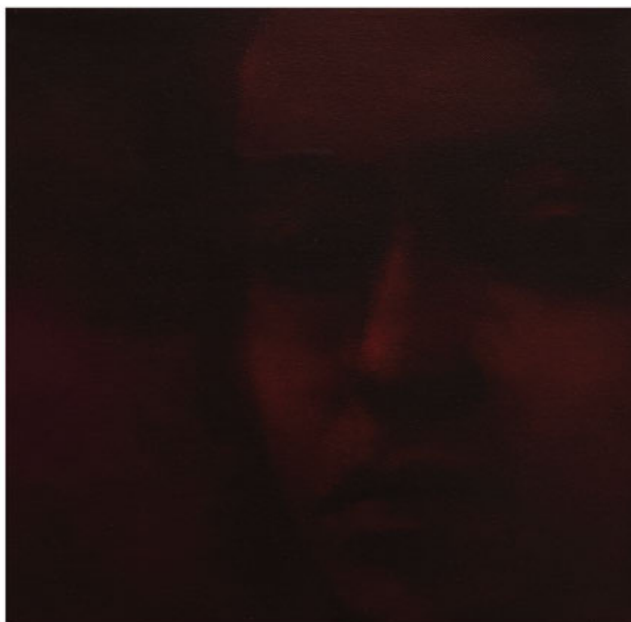
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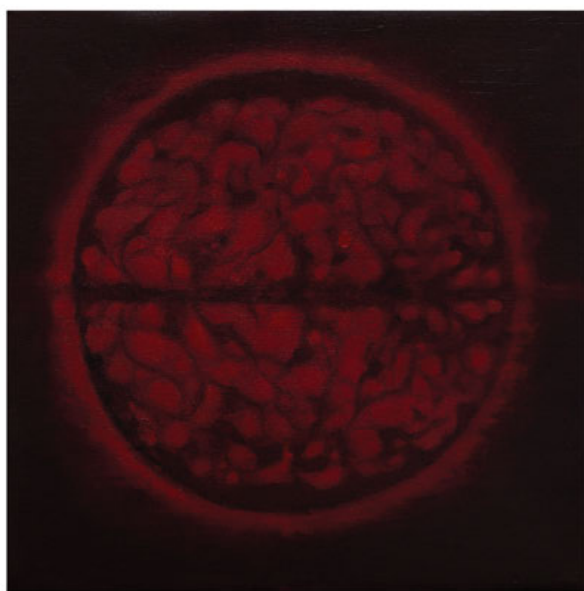
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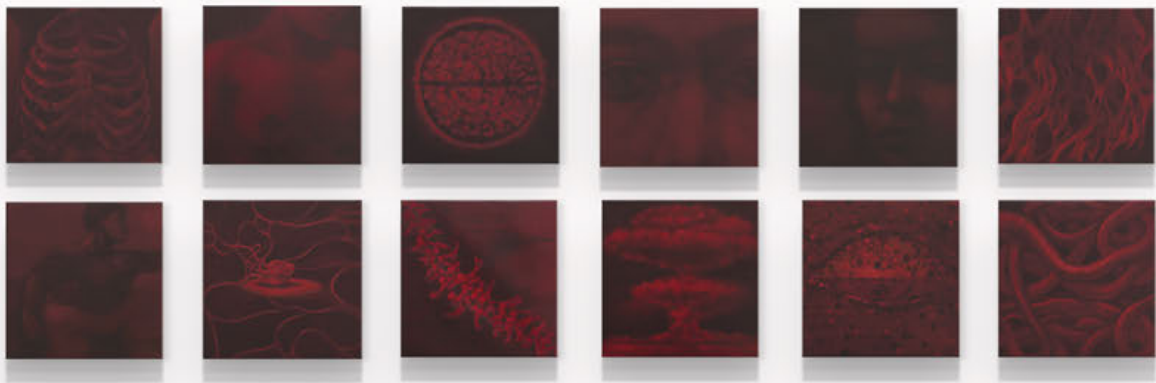
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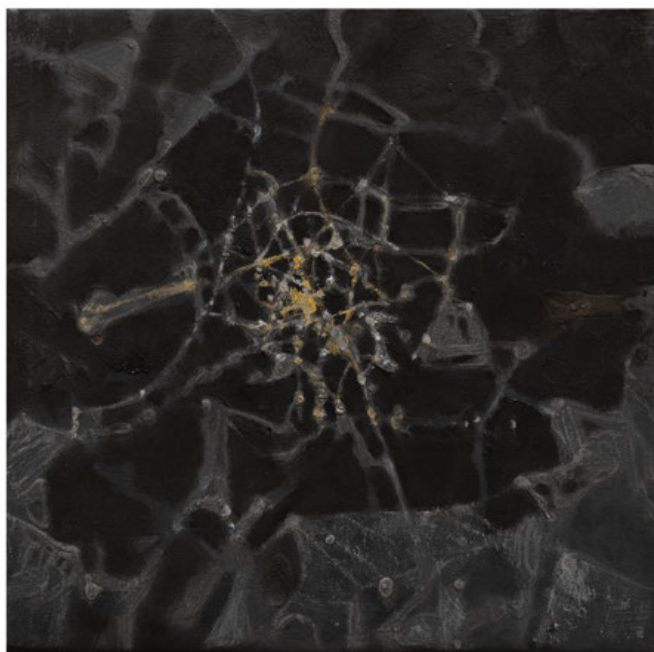


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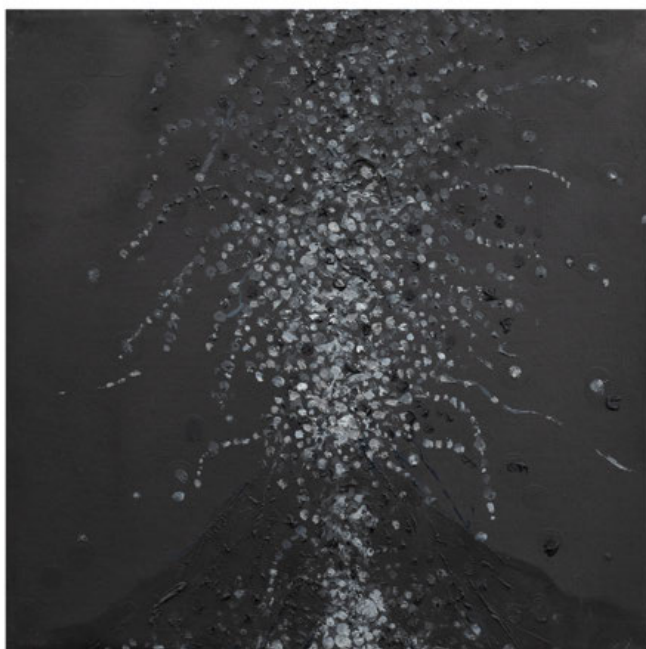
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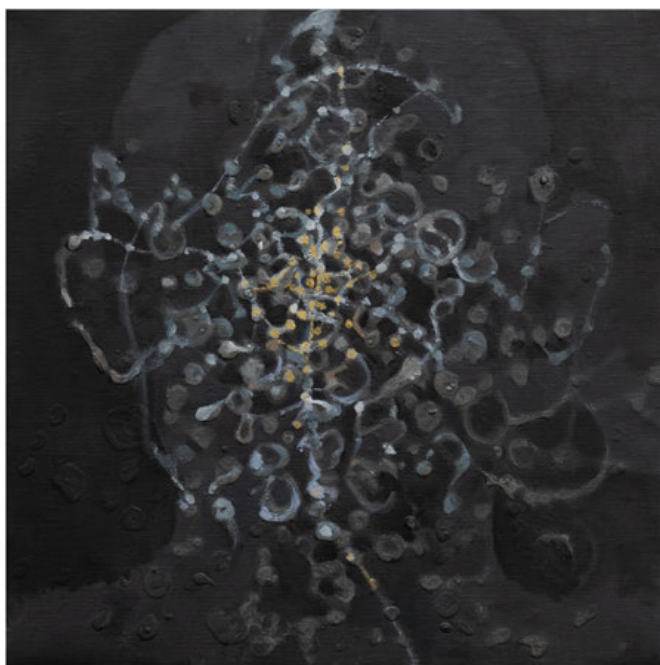
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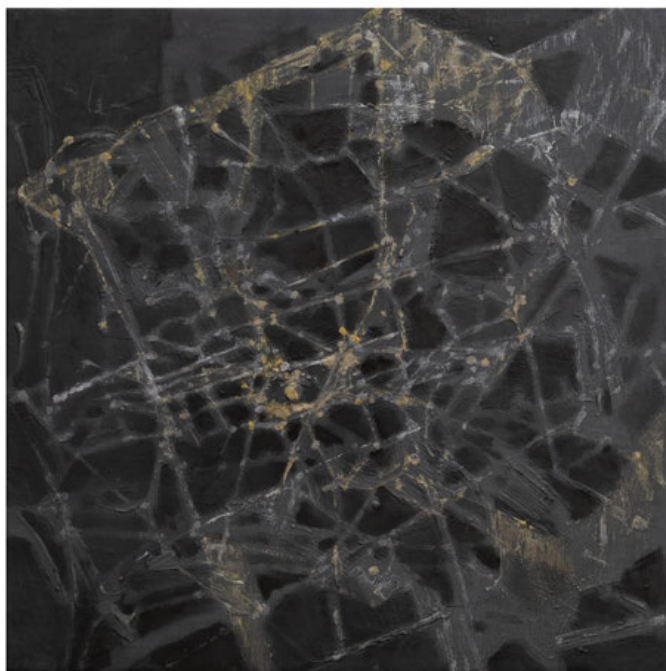
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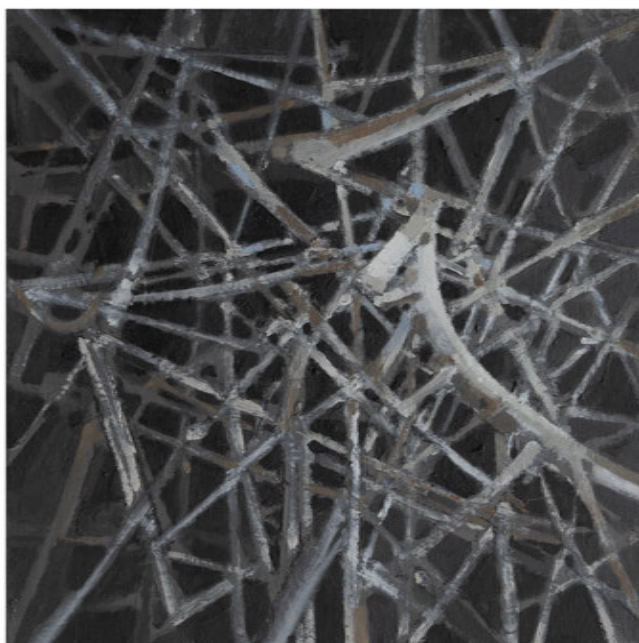
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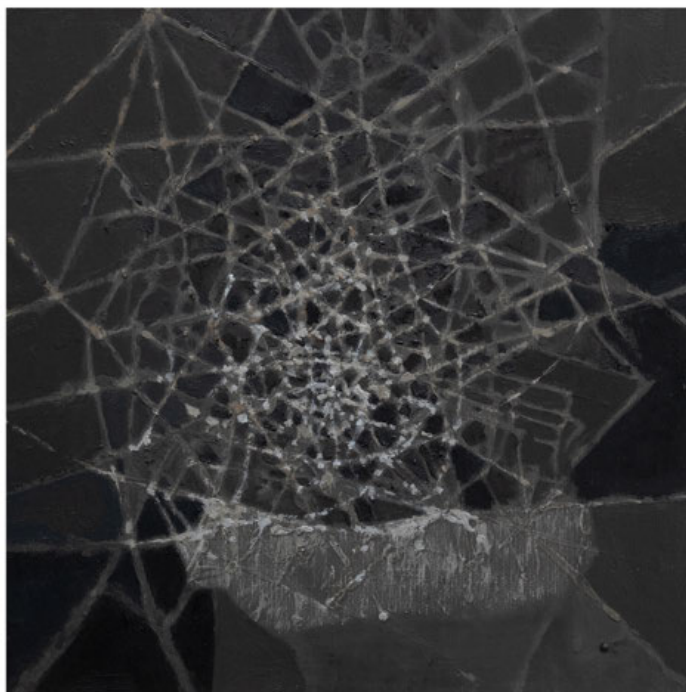
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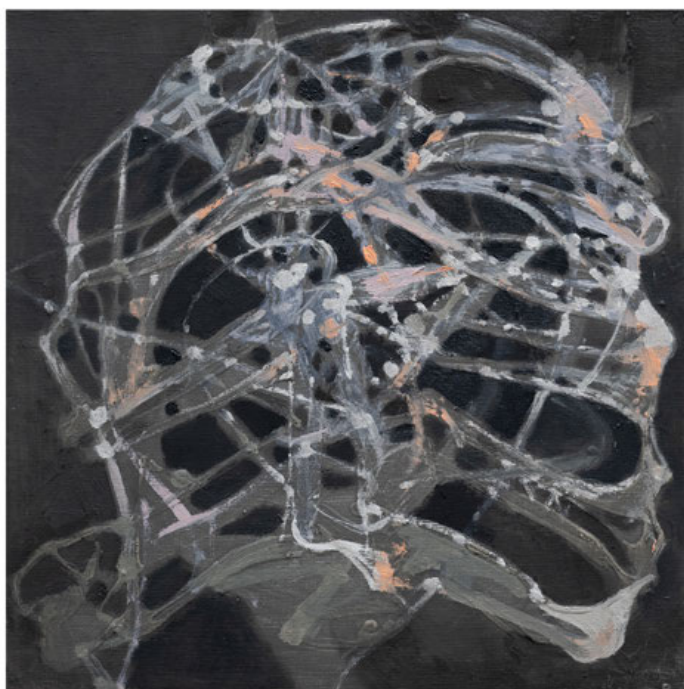
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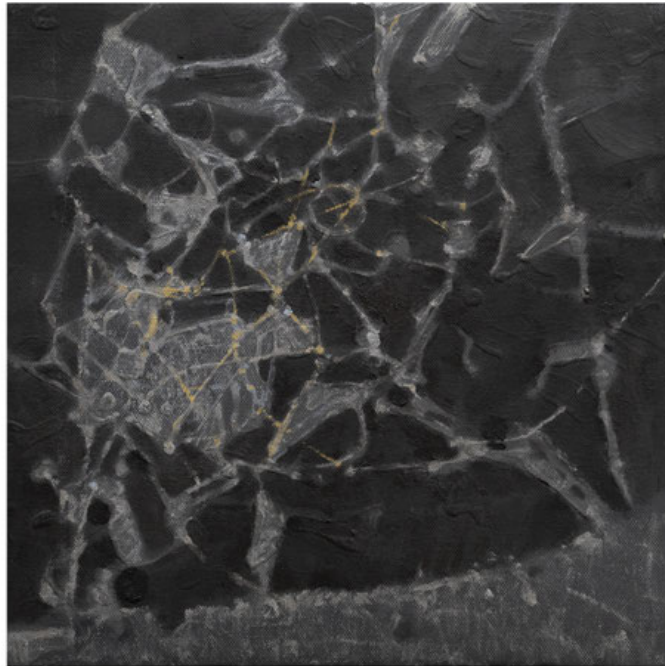
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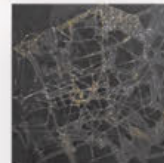
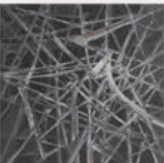
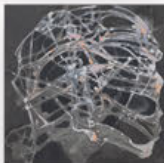
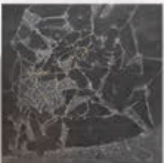
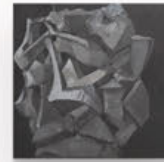
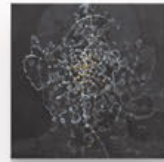
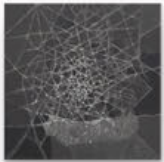
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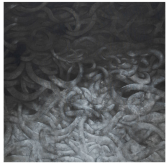




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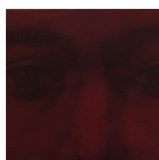
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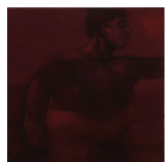
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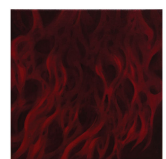
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Oil on canvas
48h x 55.75w in



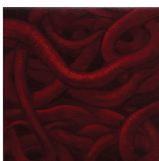
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



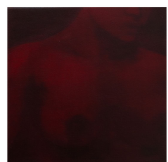
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



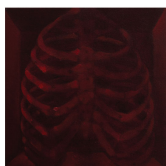
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



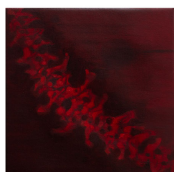
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



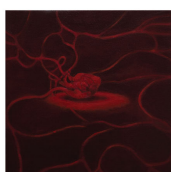
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



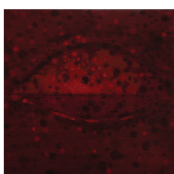
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



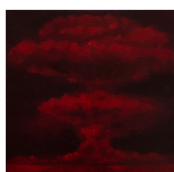
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



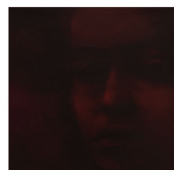
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



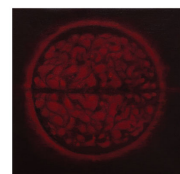
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



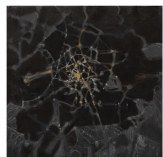
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2024
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



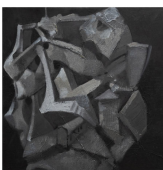
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



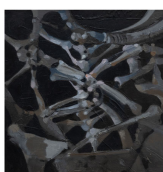
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



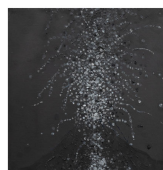
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



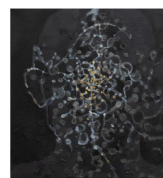
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



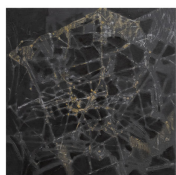
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



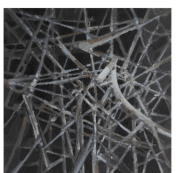
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
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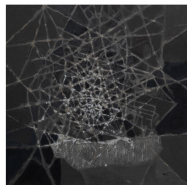
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



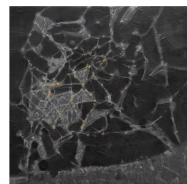
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



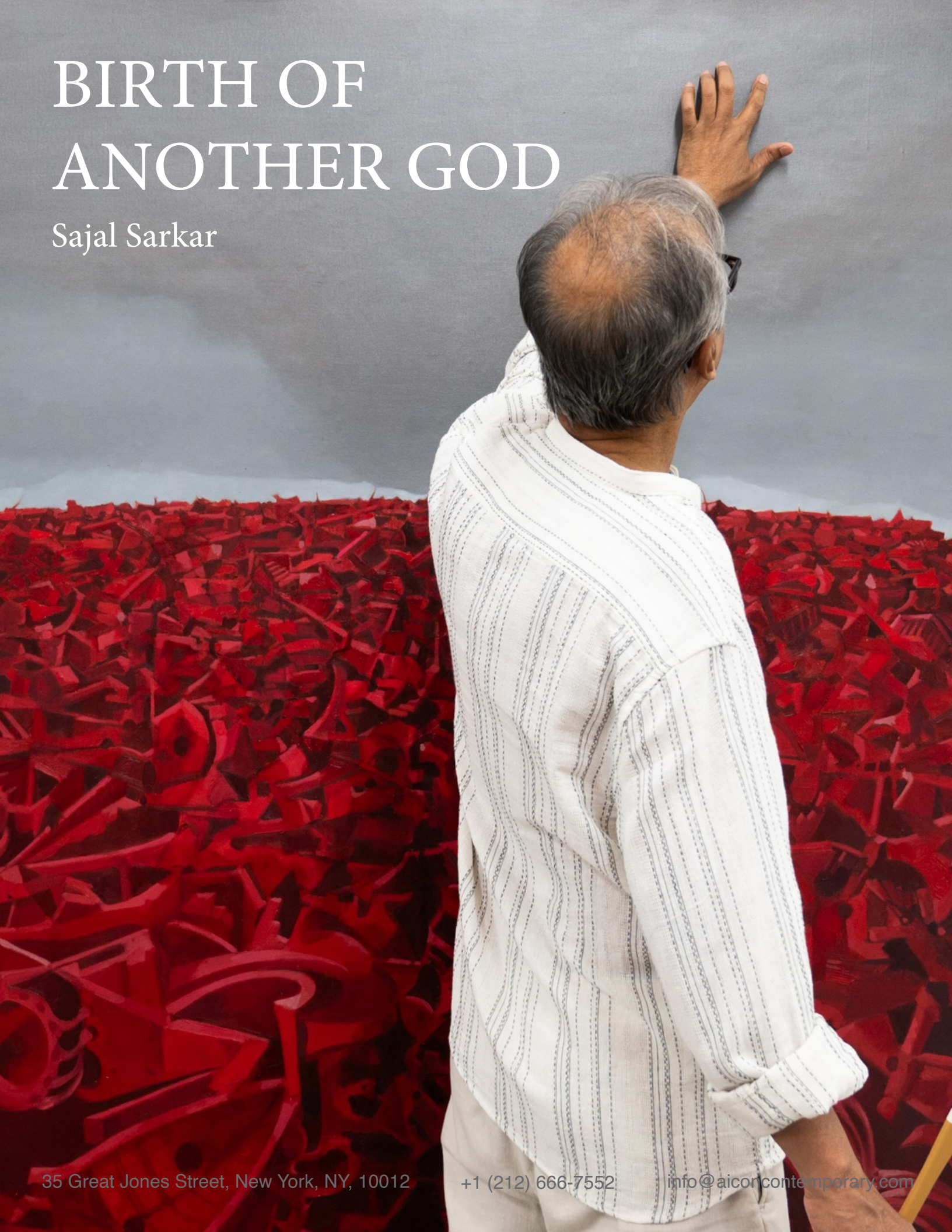
Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in



Sajal Sarkar
Untitled, 2025-2026
Oil on canvas
12h x 12w in

BIRTH OF ANOTHER GOD

Sajal Sarkar



35 Great Jones Street, New York, NY, 10012

+1 (212) 666-7552

info@aiconcontemporary.com