

Yuan Wei

Portfolio

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I am a concept-driven artist whose practice centers on painting. I currently live in Cambridge, UK, and work across painting, installation, and mixed media. In today's environment of extreme image saturation, I have gradually come to understand painting as a device for thinking: through pictorial structure, spatial relationships, and material choices, I test how emotion, the body, and the environment are constructed and perceived.

Since my studies at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (National School of Fine Arts) in Paris (ENSBA), my artistic practice has consistently revolved around an exploration of marginal and invisible spaces within everyday environments. My early project *Presque Rien* (Almost Nothing) focused on overlooked details in the city and almost imperceptible changes. This experience gradually established my long-term interest in "things at the margins," "micro-structures," and the hidden tensions embedded in everyday spaces—spatial states that appear nearly empty yet contain latent meaning and emotion. I have always remained sensitive to "non-places" (non-lieux): transitional zones lacking a clear identity, such as corridors, parking lots, back rooms, and waiting areas. These spaces are often ignored, yet they profoundly reveal how we inhabit the world.

After moving from Paris to Cambridge, I entered an entirely different condition: an unfamiliar language, social isolation, and a rupture from my previous artistic ecosystem. At the same time, I began family life. Caregiving and creation unfolded simultaneously, fragmenting time and constantly interrupting sustained thought. Rather than translating this reality into narrative expression, I became more inclined to search for new formal structures within painting: how to reorganize space and perception amid instability, interruption, and compression. In the *Mind the Gap* series, fissures, corners, and unstable constructions gradually formed a visual grammar through which to address distance, boundaries, and emotional thresholds.

In the 2024 *Alchemy* series, my paintings introduced materials associated with domestic life and children—tape, stickers, toys, and everyday objects. Through division, layering, and friction between materials, the images generate spatial states in which directionality and hierarchy are constantly reorganized. This led me to think more directly about questions such as: who defines art, and how is the center of viewing established? "Decentering" has always remained an unfinished ideal in my practice—a persistent structural condition in which center and periphery are continually reconfigured yet never truly disappear. Over the years, I have continuously attempted to incorporate these fragments of reality into the state of making, turning them into objects that can be thought about and gazed upon, and exploring their relationships within the structure of the work—their function as "non-essential additions" and the symbolic meanings they carry. Like "non-places" (non-lieux), these "non-typical artworks" and objects/locations are often sites of loneliness, waiting, and "in-betweenness," permeated by a silent yet enduring tension.

In my most recent work, this visual language has further developed into an ongoing investigation of the semantics of "empty space." This question can be traced back to my postgraduate thesis, *The Semantic Content of Empty Space*, and has been reactivated and expanded through practice ten years later. In my work, "emptiness" gradually emerges as a liminal state, oscillating between the nameable and the unnameable, the identifiable and the unidentifiable. I transform "emptiness" from a background into the subject of the image, allowing it to become a state full of potential, as if "about to begin." Painting thus no longer merely represents space, but generates a field that can be seen and perceived—within which fragility becomes structure, interruption becomes rhythm, and painting becomes a way of reorganizing identity, attachment, and sensation.

In terms of titling, my practice has likewise undergone a shift from the "visual" to the "structural," and then to the "semantic." During the early *Presque Rien* (Almost Nothing) phase, titles were mostly geographic locations or coordinate-like references: I provided only a position for viewing, leaving meaning entirely within the image. *Mind the Gap* continued this approach, with titles functioning more as structural cues than as narrative or emotional expressions. In *Alchemy*, I adopted an almost documentary method of naming, using the juxtaposition of materials and forms as the titles themselves, bringing the works closer to experimental records or archival indices.

In the most recent stage, my titles have gradually shifted toward literary and philosophical contexts. My long-term, relatively closed life in Cambridge has made extensive literary reading an important way for me to dialogue with the outside world, allowing language and its literary contexts to enter my creative system. For me, language is not merely a label that points to things, but a structure that produces meaning—as Wittgenstein suggested, meaning does not preexist, but is generated through use and relationships. Titles such as *The Glass Bead Game*, *The Outsider*, and *Fragments No Longer* are not intended to explain the images; rather, they function as semantic triggers that create tension, rupture, or resonance with the visual field, transforming "emptiness," "connection," "liminality," and "existence" from visual structures into conceptual fields that can be thought through.

Through continuous experimentation with space, surface, and materials, I hope to expand the possibilities of painting in a contemporary context—not only as a visual form, but also as a spatial mode of thinking, allowing these "empty spaces" to become formal conditions through which meaning and emotion can emerge. Looking back at my practice, I have always sought to make the invisible visible, revealing the depth and complexity contained within spaces that we assume to be familiar, yet have long ceased to truly look at.

Yuan Wei

Born in 1984 in Zhuzhou, Hunan, China

Currently lives and works in Cambridge, UK

Education

2012 — Post-diplôme Research Programme (Postgraduate Research Diploma), École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (National School of Fine Arts), Paris, France

2012 — Master's degree, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (National School of Fine Arts), Paris, France

2010 — Bachelor's degree, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (National School of Fine Arts), Paris, France

Exhibitions

2026 — Empty Space (solo exhibition), ArtSpace5–7, Cambridge, UK

2025 — The Four Corners of the World (four-person exhibition), ArtSpace5–7, Cambridge, UK

2024 — Constructed Presence (two-person exhibition), M Space, Paris, France

2024 — Mind the Gap (solo exhibition), Galerie Zeto , Paris, France

2019 — An Uncertain Future (group exhibition), Museum Wugan, Shanghai, China

2019 — Cambridge Show (group exhibition), Kettle's Yard Gallery, Cambridge, UK

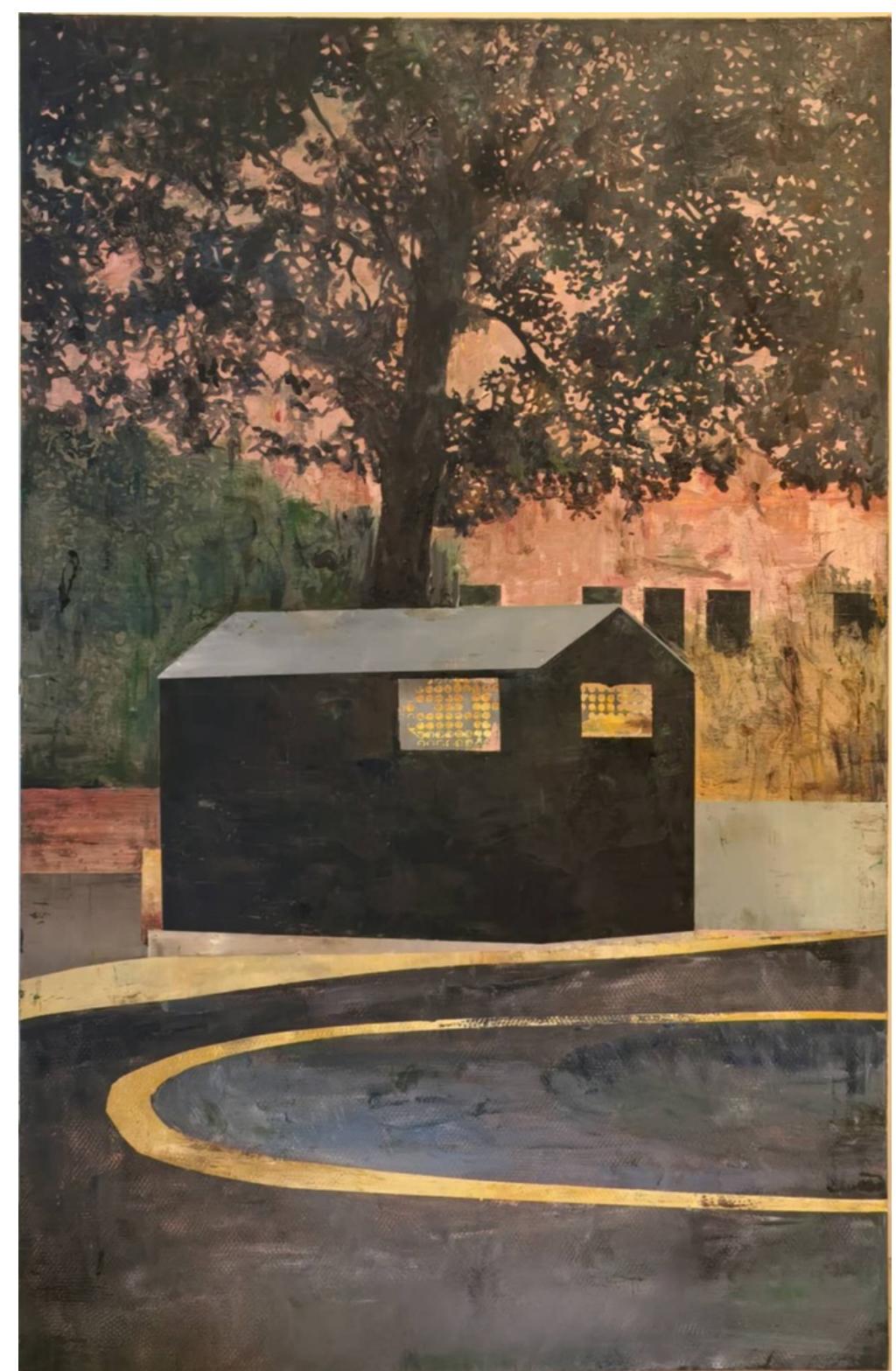
2015 — Nova 100 · Nanjing, Nanjing, China

2014 — Nova100 (shortlisted exhibition), National Agricultural Exhibition Center, Beijing, China

2013 — Contemporary British Watercolour (shortlisted exhibition), Royal Watercolour Society, London, UK

2012 — Art Without Borders (Asian ENSBA Students Exhibition), Asian Art Center, Paris, France

2012 — Presque Rien (Almost Nothing) (graduation exhibition), École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts (National School of Fine Arts, ENSBA), Paris, France



Peregrination, 2025.Oil on canvas, 100×150 cm.



Reflecting, 2025.Mixed media, 20×23 cm.



Anticipation, 2025. Oil on canvas, 100 × 120 cm.



The Glass Bead Game, 2025. Oil on canvas, 20 × 23 cm



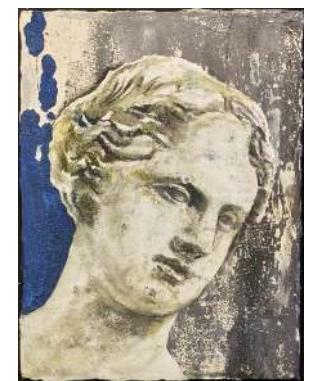
L'Étranger, 2025. Oil on canvas, 100 × 120 cm



The Castle, 2025. Oil on canvas, 45 × 65 cm



Reflected, 2025. Oil on canvas, 13 × 18.5 cm (左)



The Happy Prince/ess, 2025. Mixed media, 23 × 30.5 cm (右)



Diversion, 2025. Oil on canvas, 80 × 100 cm



Essence, 2025, Mixed media , 13.5x18cm



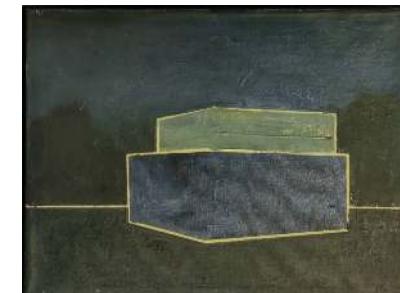
Instant success, 2025. Oil on canvas, 100 × 150 cm



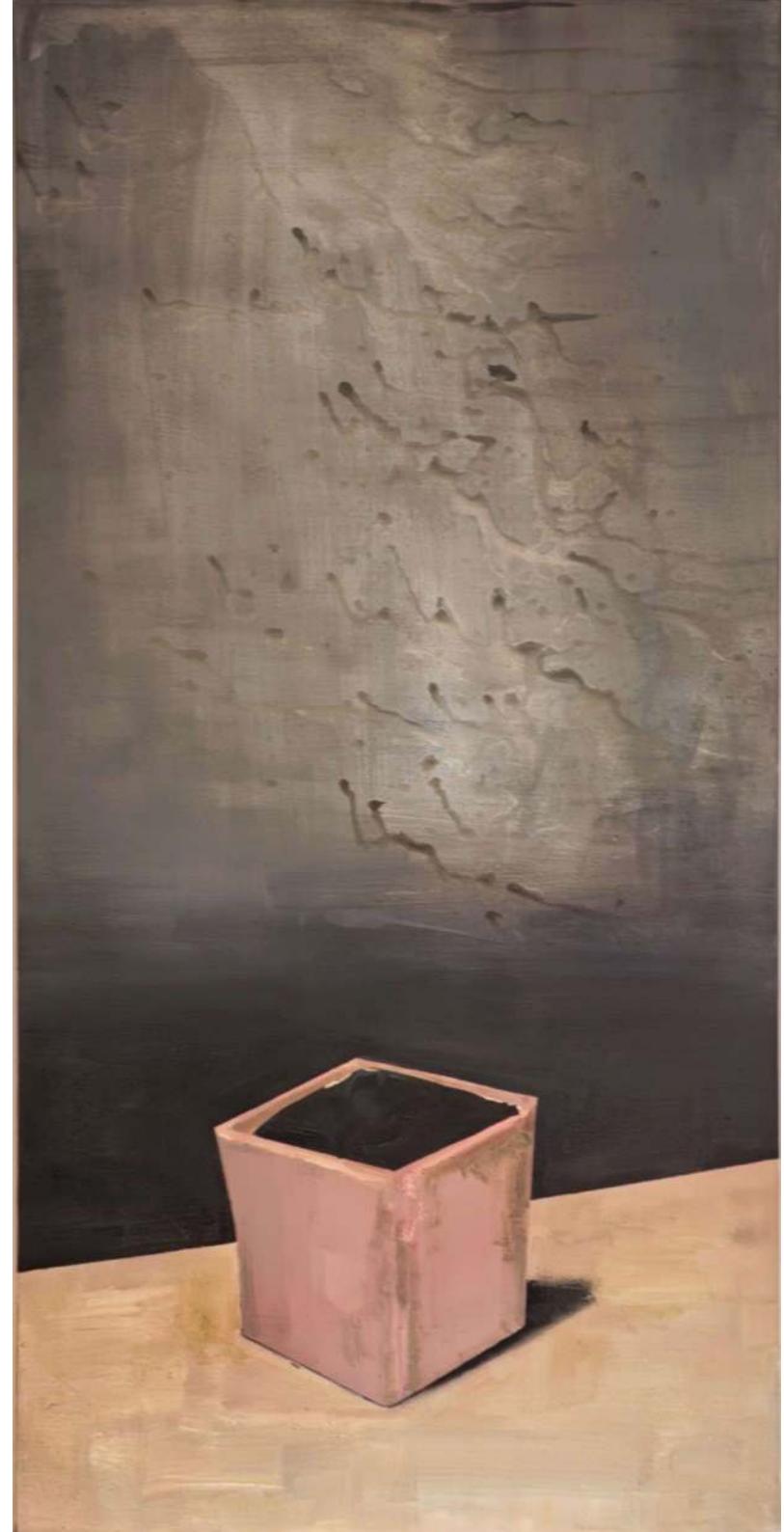
Fragments No Longer, 2025. Oil on canvas, 30.5 × 23 cm



Historical Reconstruction , 2025. Oil on canvas, 80×100 cm



Plinth, 2023. Acrylic on canvas, 23×30.5 cm



Seed Container, 2025. Oil on canvas, 50 × 100 cm.



Only Connect, 2024. Mixed media, 36 × 26 cm.



Rabbit , 2025. Oil on canvas, triptych, 13×18.5 cm (each).



Transmission , 2025. Oil on canvas, diptych, 13×18.5 cm (each)



JO02BF910B, 2018. Oil on canvas, 148 × 97 cm.



Empty Place, 2009. Oil on canvas, 15 × 25 cm



Ici, maintenant, 2017. Oil on canvas, 50×50 cm



JO02BE59PO-02, 2016. Oil on canvas, 25×20 cm



JO02BE96WP, 2017. Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 cm



Sink, mirror, half-covered, 2018. Oil on canvas, 20 × 20 cm



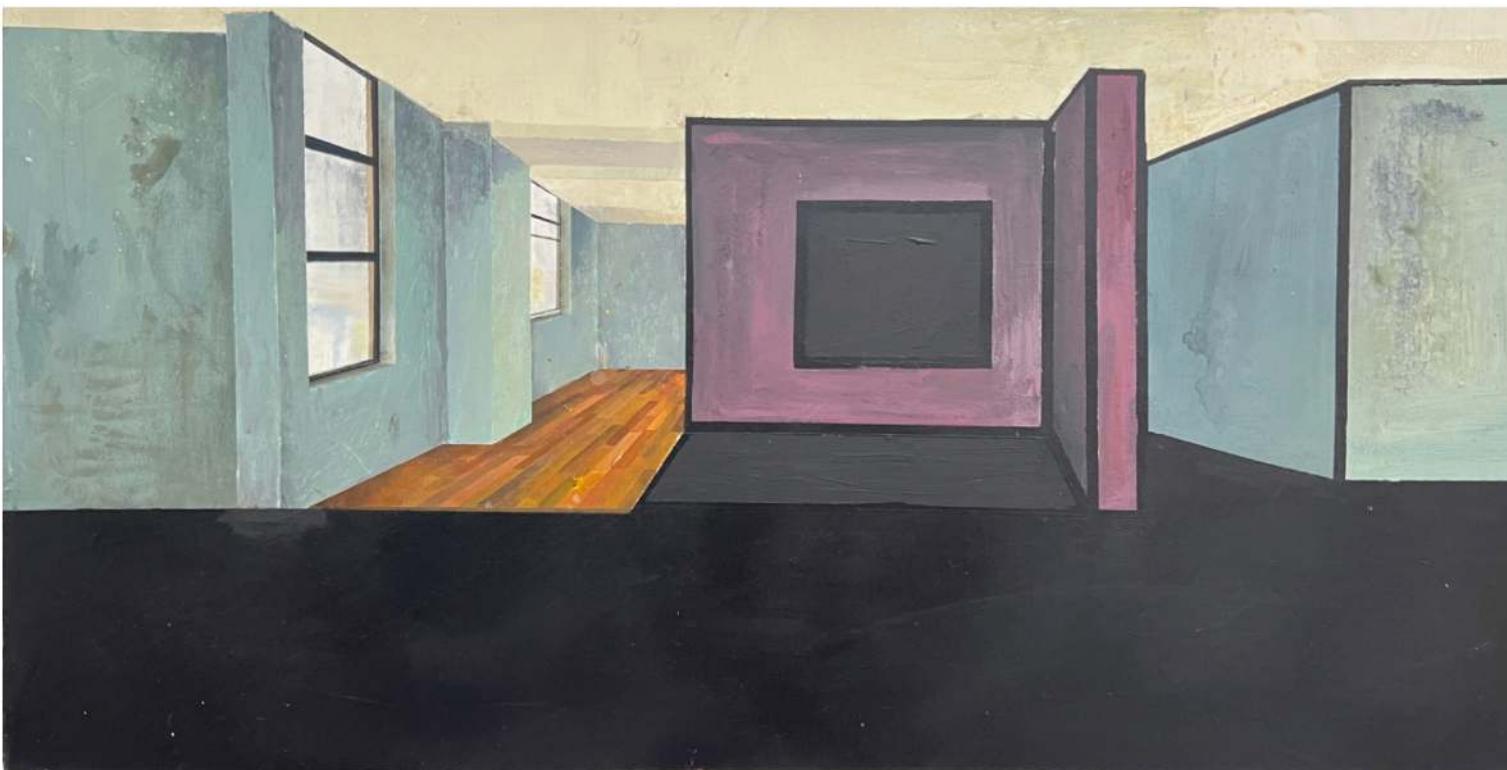
The Unmarked, 2023. Pencil on paper, 29.5 × 42 cm



JO02BF60WK, 2020. Oil on canvas, 20 × 25 cm



IO91VL89RH, 2018, Oil on canvas, 50x100cm



JO02BE59PO-01, 2018, Oil on canvas, 50x100cm

Alchemy

In Cambridge, many tourists pose for photographs holding apples in front of Trinity College, and the University Library frequently exhibits the manuscripts and relics of Isaac Newton. These everyday scenes continually remind us that his ideas were generated, fermented, and branched out within this city. Newton began with alchemical research, laying the foundations of physics concerning light and force; he later entered the minting system, and in his later years turned toward theological reflection. His lifelong adversary, Robert Hooke, by contrast, came from an artistic apprenticeship and went on to become an organizer of experiments and a constructor of visual knowledge. At the center of the Royal Society's power structure, he came into conflict with Newton and was ultimately marginalized. Despite being a scholar capable of producing precise drawings with the aid of a microscope, Hooke did not even leave behind a universally acknowledged portrait in this struggle. Individuals in history have never lived within a single system. Science, art, religion, politics, technology, and everyday experience have always been intertwined. It is precisely for this reason that I gradually lost interest in images operating on a single level—what concerns me is not interdisciplinary collage, but how a work can respond to a reality that is inherently multidimensional, fractured, yet mutually interlocking.

The Alchemy project unfolds from this understanding. It focuses on the relationship between layers of perception, gaps, and structural instability, exploring how emotion and meaning are generated through dynamic processes by reorganizing materials and forms.

This phase of work does not begin with color itself, but with the structures of human memory and perception: how we store experiences of color and emotion in the brain, and how we reawaken them through language. Often, the name of a color alone is enough to activate a particular sensation or psychological state—even before any specific color appears in the image. For me, color is not merely a visual phenomenon, but a perceptual code embedded in memory and experience.

Based on this understanding, the work begins with monochrome drawings. On black-and-white drafts, I annotate specific color names in text, using language to pre-construct a system of visual-emotional correspondences within the image, gradually forming a visual language system. This language is both a distillation of experience and a structural framework for the painting process: before color is “seen,” it has already been perceived at the semantic and imaginative level.

Some of these drawings are later developed into finished works, while others are deliberately kept in an unfinished state. Unfinishedness is not a flaw, but an intentional reserve of emptiness—providing necessary space for the sedimentation of emotion and thought, allowing meaning to gradually take shape in suspension.

Through the layering of color and the construction of gaps, these works respond to the flattening of visual experience in the technological age. Here, color exists not only as a formal language, but also as a medium that carries memory and emotion. Cracks and voids are placed at the core of the work: they are not static presences, but fields in which meaning is continually generated through unfinished states and material relationships.

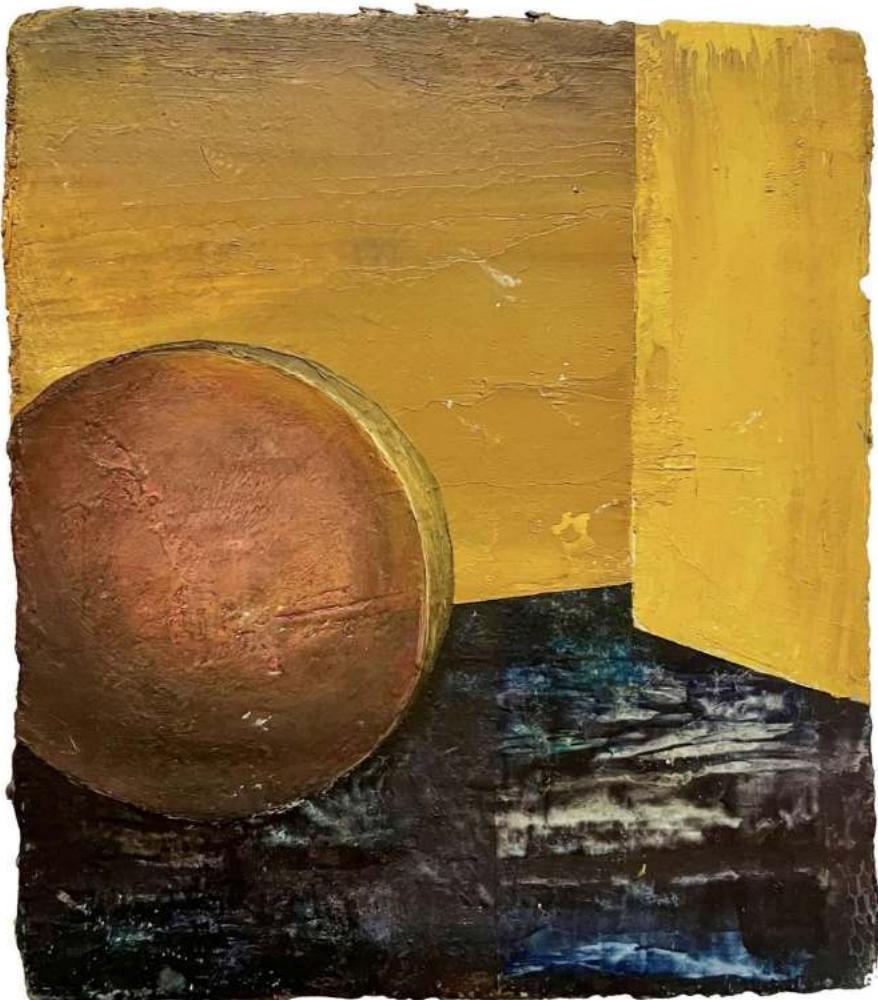
Within unstable anchor points, material experimentation further deepens the concerns of Alchemy. I use printed images and adhesive tape to construct planar layers, and design the lower edge of the entire canvas frame at an inclined angle, breaking the stability of traditional boundaries. Combined with spheres attached to the surface of the painting, this structure introduces a latent visual dynamic—as if they might slide or roll at any moment—evoking a psychological sense of uncertainty or a state of “passive following.” Through the interaction between inclined boundaries and objects, the work redefines the functions of space, boundaries, and the visual center.

It continues the core concept of differentiation from Mind the Gap, extending the interaction between materials and emotion from two-dimensional painting into spatial and psychological dimensions, completing an alchemy of emotion. The tilted boundaries and the placement of spheres symbolize a dynamic imbalance, mapping how perception and emotion generate new possibilities under pressure.

Through sustained exploration of gaps, fissures, and unstable structures, this Alchemy series seeks to establish new connections between materiality, the visual, and the psychological, allowing the works to move beyond physical form itself and become an ongoing inquiry into “balance” and the mechanisms through which emotional dynamics are generated.



Point Fixe Instable, 2024. Mixed media, 100 × 68 cm



JO02BF60WK20220420, 2020. Oil on board, 20 × 28 cm

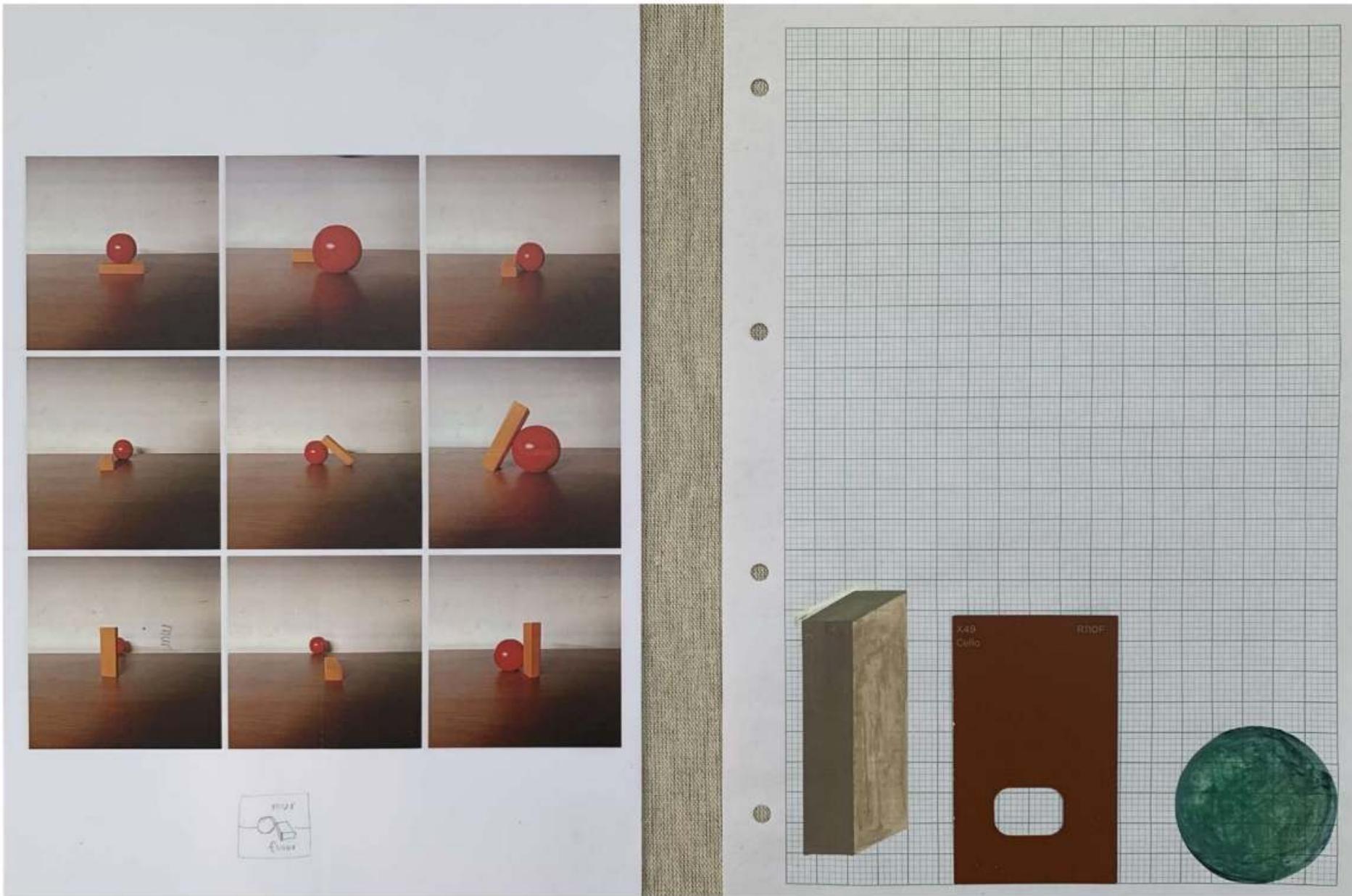


Alchemy sketches, 2024.

(Left) Digital print on paper

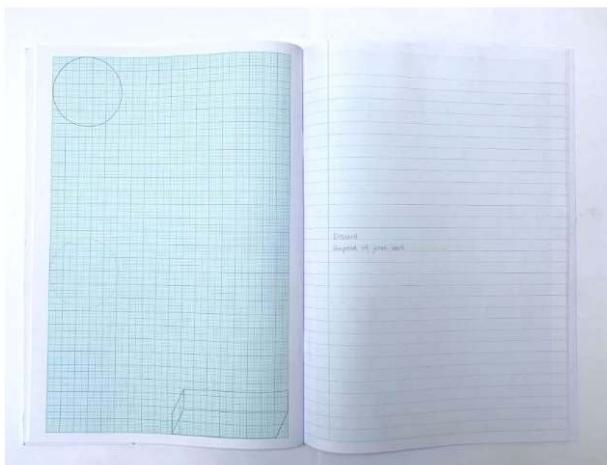
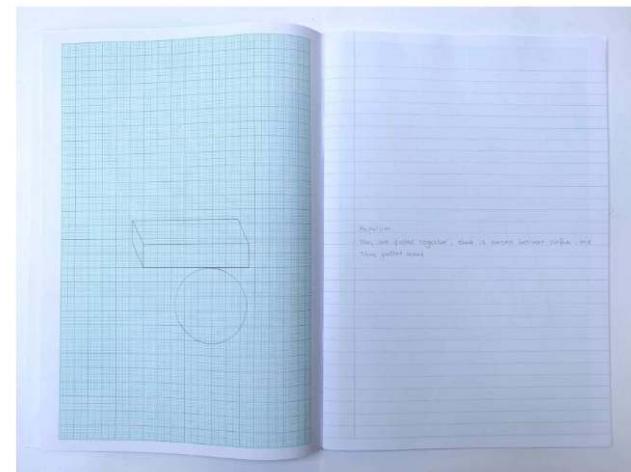
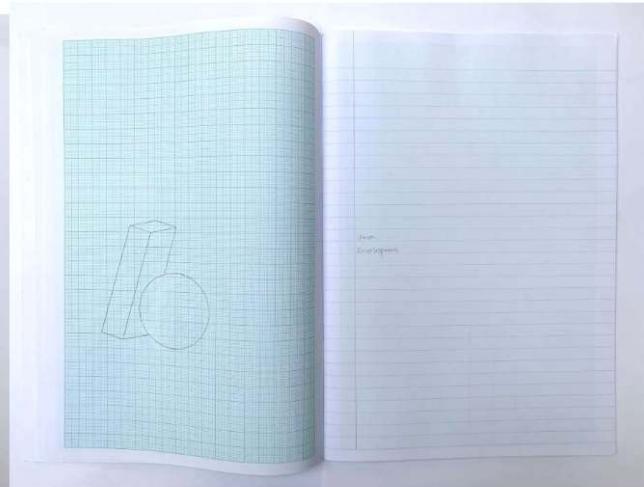
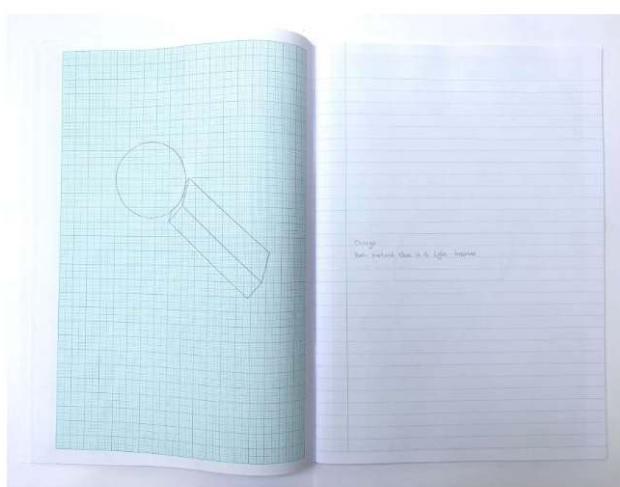
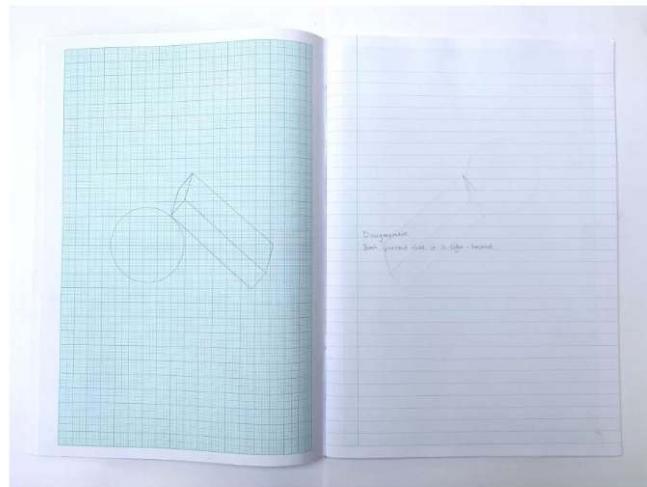
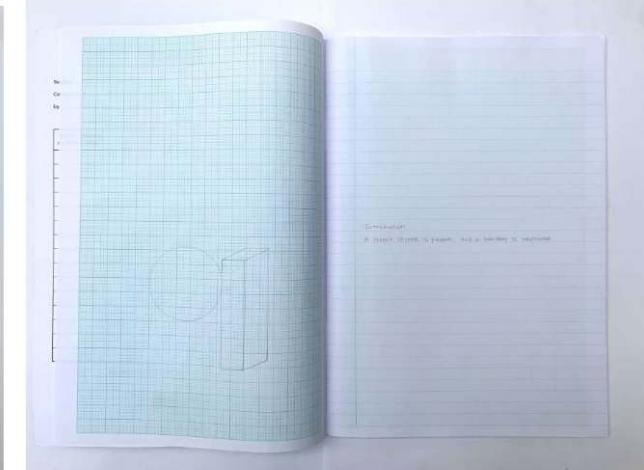
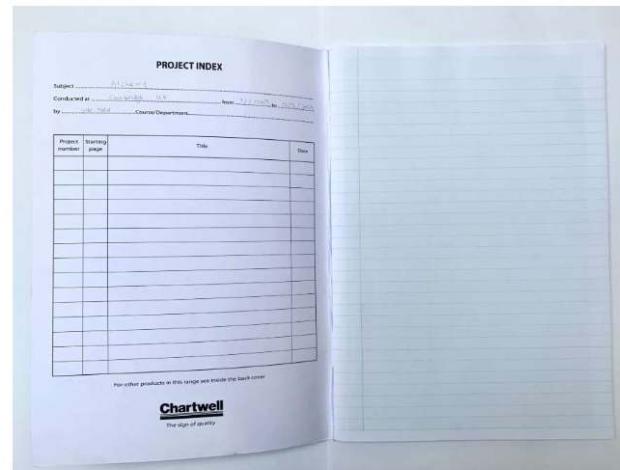
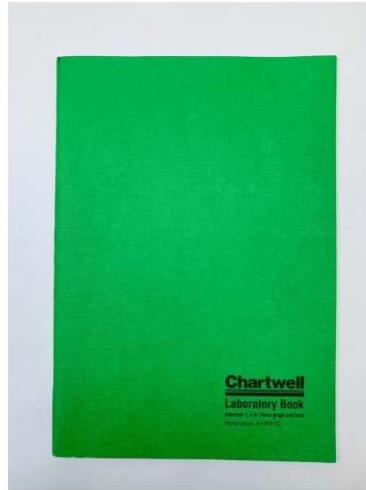
(Right) Acrylic on paper + color swatch

21 x 29.5 cm



Alchemy workbook, 2024.

Pencil on paper, A4, 40 pages.





Alchemy series installation, 2024.

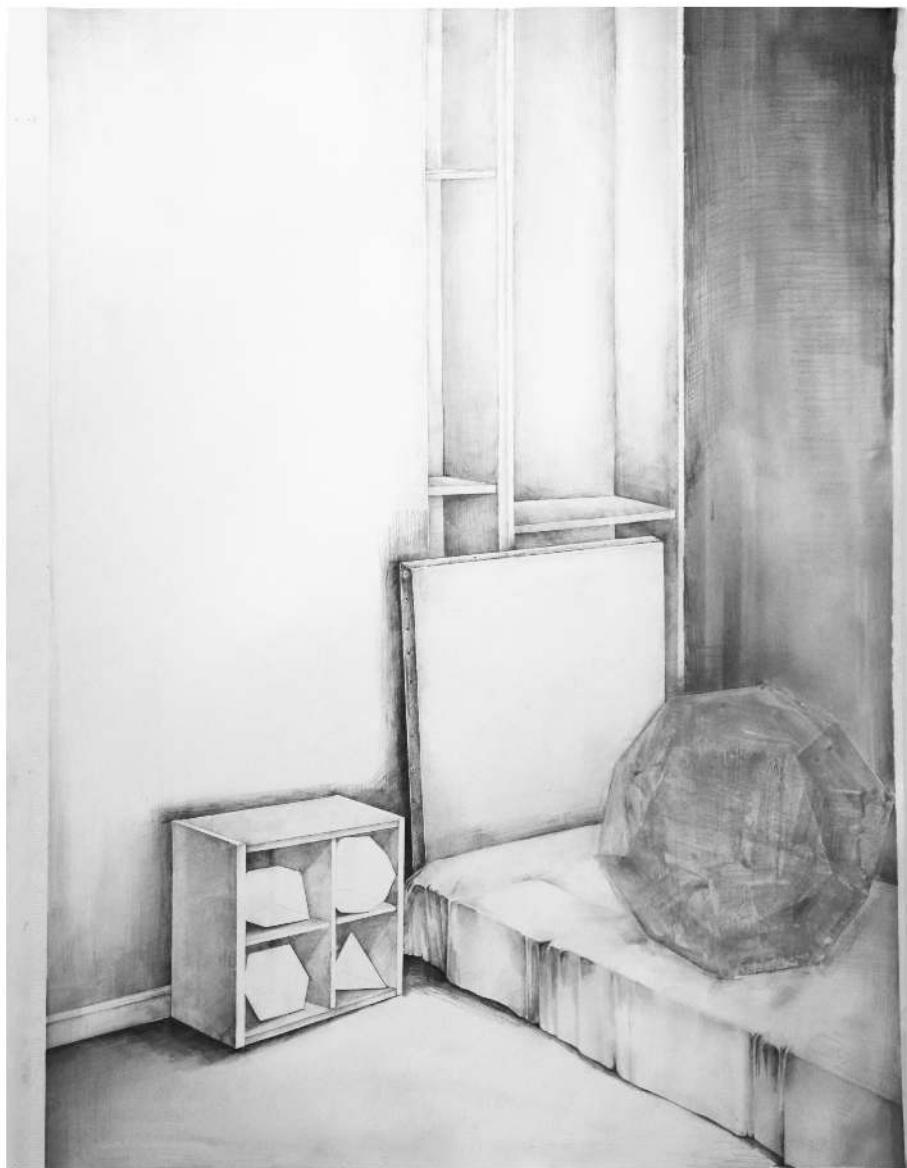
Exhibition view, Zeto Gallery, Paris, France.



Sylvanian Families Dollhouse , 2024. Mixed media, 50×100 cm



Oil on canvas, colored rhinestones, 35×27 cm



Solide Platonicien, Lit, 2023.Pencil and acrylic on paper, 65 × 47.5 cm



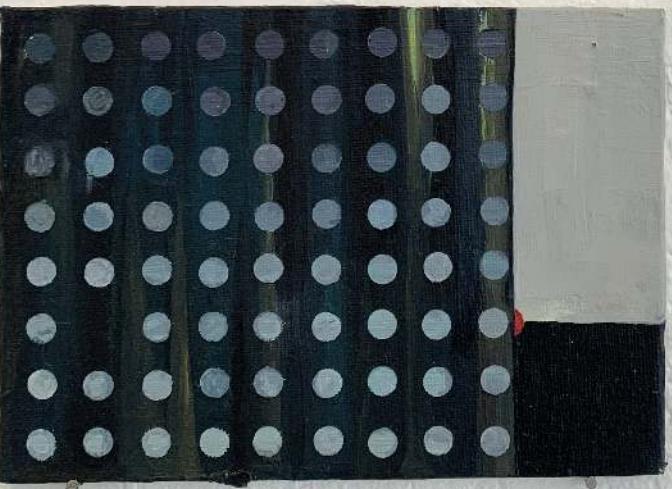
Bi-polar Directions, 2024.Oil on handmade paper, 22 × 35.5 cm



Building Blocks, Cylinder Removed, 2024. Oil on handmade paper, 27 × 14.5 cm (top)

Red Dot, 2020, Oil on board, 13 × 18.5 cm

(bottom)





Open and Closed Sets, 2024. Oil on handmade paper , 38 × 44 cm



Duxford War Museum and Cylinders, 2024. Oil on handmade paper, 22 × 19 cm



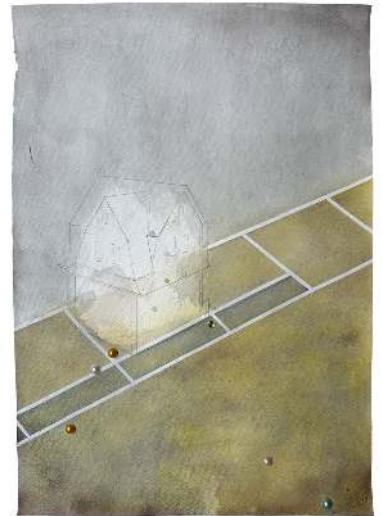
Propeller and Red Line , 2024. Oil on handmade paper, 37 × 44 cm



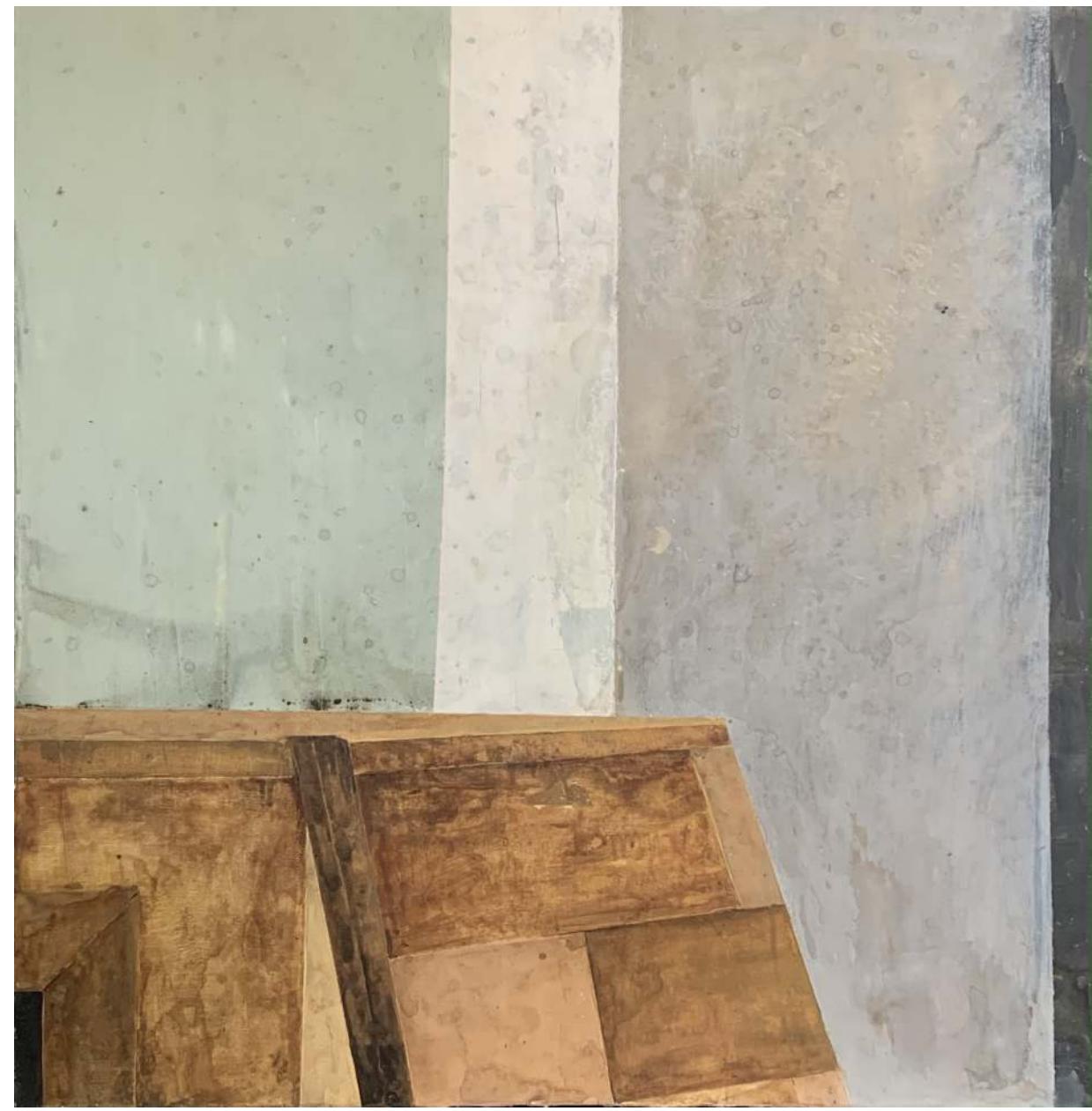
Corner, Toys, Overlap, 2022. Mixed media, 22 × 19 cm



Semi-open Interval, 2018. Oil on canvas, plastic rhinestones, 60×60 cm



Monopoly, 2024. Watercolor on paper, plastic rhinestones, 29.7×42 cm



@Shanghai, 2017. Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 cm.



@shanghai, 2017. Oil on canvas, 20 × 20 cm



Modular Openings, 2018. Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 cm



Boundary Conditions, 2020.

Acrylic on canvas, tape, 100 × 100 cm



Silent Structure, 2018. Oil on canvas, 148 × 97 cm

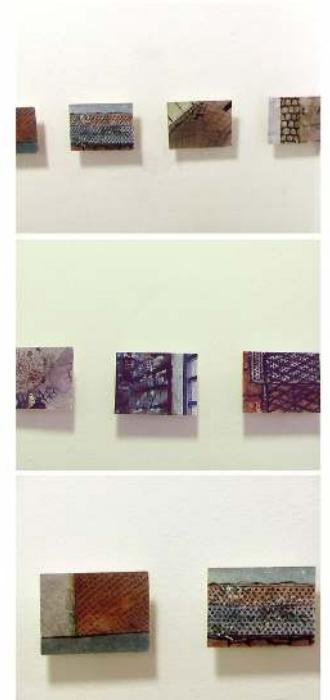


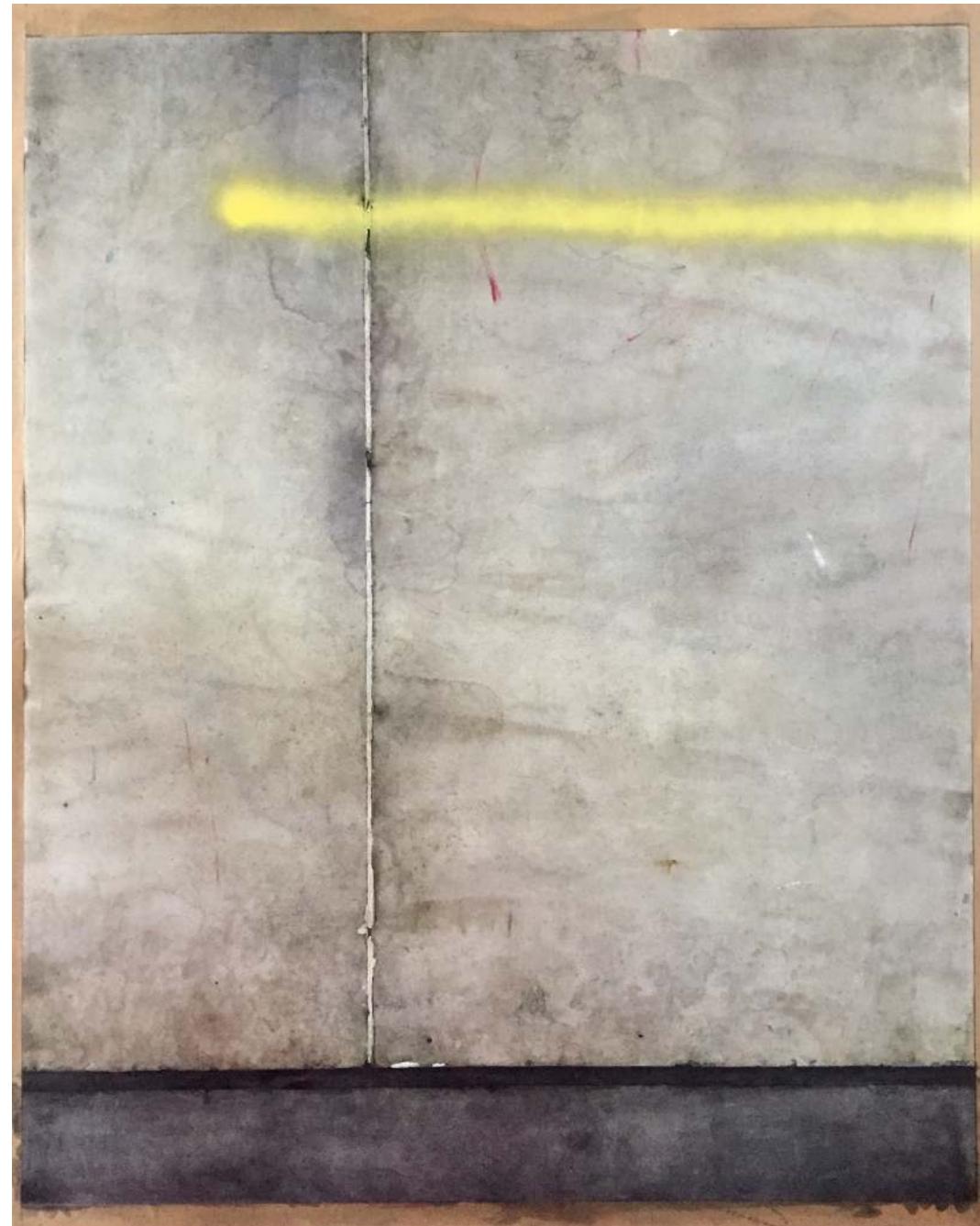
Modular Facade, 2020.

Oil on canvas, 60 × 60 cm

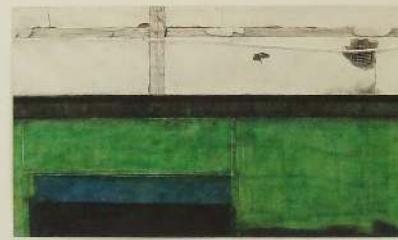


Presque Rien 3 Almost Nothing 3 , 2006. Watercolor on paper, 40 works, each 3.3×4.5 cm





JN18EU2017, 2017. Watercolor on paper, 87 × 110 cm



Undergraduate Graduation Solo Exhibition, 2010.
École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts , Paris.



JN18DT67DD66, 2009. Watercolor on paper , 170 × 230 cm

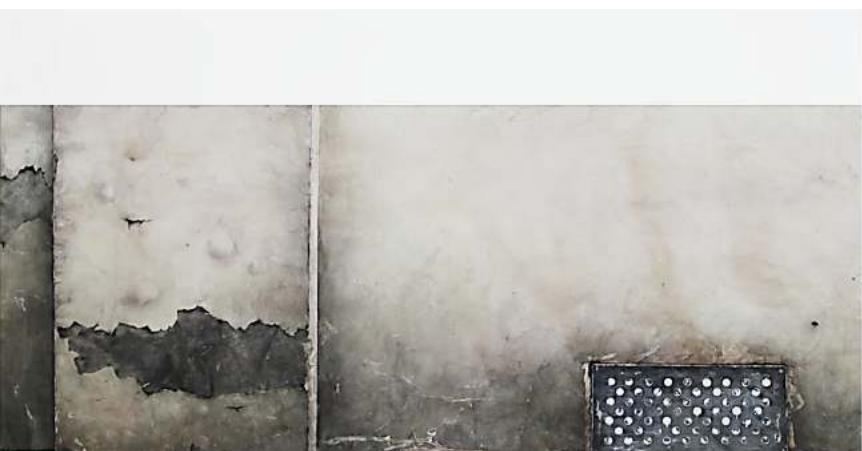


JO02BE61RS, 2019.

Oil on cardboard, 30 × 40 cm



JN18ET47ID71 (diptych), 2009. Watercolor on paper, 88×130 cm; 88×91 cm



JN18EU05DL13 (triptych), 2012. Watercolor on paper, 93 × 179 cm; 93 × 92 cm; 93 × 160 cm



2. JN18EU26EQ03, 2011. Watercolor on paper , 97 × 97 cm



3. JN18EU26EQ03, 2011. Watercolor on paper, 97 × 199 cm



4. JN18EU26EQ03, 2010. Watercolor on paper, 93 × 98 cm



Eighth Off, 2024. Mixed media on canvas, 20 × 20 cm



JN18EU26IN, 2009. Watercolor on paper, 85 × 58 cm

These large-scale watercolor works were created during my time as a student living and working at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris.. At that time, my practice focused on unnoticed corners of everyday life. In every moment, details are constantly changing and evolving, yet these walls and these floors seem to remain the same. Their changes are often difficult to perceive. These subtle, almost imperceptible changes—Presque Rien (Almost Nothing)—often slip out of our field of vision.

The subjects I choose to depict appear insignificant when compared to grand works of art, and are often overlooked. We pass by them every day without truly seeing them; to us, they almost do not exist.

Yet they are always there, coexisting with other things. Over time, these landscapes gradually leave traces and slowly reveal their own distinct personalities. In this process, time acts upon space, and people's incidental activities leave marks in these places. My work attempts to record these landscapes.

My creative process reflects the flow of time and the emergence of chance: painting, erasing, repainting... I explore at the intersection of art and life, and at the boundary between abstraction and figuration. I pay attention to things that are fragile and fleeting, seeking their unique presence within overlooked details.

“The poet does not create poetry.

Poetry is already there.

It has existed for a long time.

The poet merely discovers it.”

— Jean Skacel

This passage resonates with the core of my artistic philosophy: I am not creating these works, but simply discovering and presenting their existence. My art is both a form of recording and a form of discovery—of details in life that are often overlooked.

In this series of works, I use the Maidenhead Locator System as the method for titling the pieces. It is a system used by amateur radio operators, providing the minimum number of characters required to represent a specific point in geographic positioning.

This is the Wikipedia introduction:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maidenhead_Locator_System

For example:

14 Bonaparte Street, Paris, France = JN18EU05DL13

65 River Lane, Cambridge, UK = JO02BF60XP64



JN18EU25AF, 2018. Oil on cardboard, 20 × 28.5 cm