

DONNA SCARPA

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Horizons & Environs

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Essay by Paul D'Agostino

THE PAINTING CENTER

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Earth, Wind, Fire, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 inches, 2024

Donna Scarpa: Intimacy and Light in *Horizons & Environs*

Donna Scarpa's recent paintings showcased in *Horizons & Environs* constitute a chromatically vibrant, compositionally enlivened suite of works that buzz, brim, and burst with aesthetic freshness. Wholly palpable in these zestful compositions is the artist's unfettered enthusiasm for varied approaches to abstract formalities and nature-inspired subjects alike – and for charting new territory in her ongoing investigations of the revelatory potential of pictorial light.

Scarpa's compositional treatments are matters of layerings, imbrications, diffusions, interlacings, and subtle, nimbly rendered interventions. Consistent in her practice are calmly meandering, patently gestural marks, ostensibly laid down by way of prolonged yet unlabored passages with loaded brushes, and variable modes of material translucency that allow the bright hues of nether layers to peer through overpaintings, and that create an overall sense of lightly handled luminosity. Relatively heavier uses of texture occasionally factor into the artist's surfaces as well. These serve to variegate and enrich the compositions in select areas, and to accentuate the limpidity of the more liquid registers with which the textured patches converge and commingle. Also generally consistent in Scarpa's practice are uses of wide ranges of expressive, carefully determined palette combinations, a tendency to work on multiple paintings at various scales all at once, and an enduring predilection for seeking cues for abstraction in the natural environment.

Scarpa's references to landscapes, plants, and the shifting atmospherics of our shared habitats most broadly understood are evocative as opposed to illustrative, whispered or implied as opposed to stated or described. Such are the utterances of spirited 'environs' in the artist's new body of work. As for the 'horizons', these too collapse notes of the literal into hints of the metaphorical. Scarpa's preferred mark-making gestures in the thrust of her recent works manifest as markedly horizontal, even while many of her surfaces are proportionally square or vertical.

As such, her horizontal interventions, with the motion of the artist's hand ever present, scan as strata, bands, and layered stacks of color, occasionally interlaced with or accented by variably conspicuous arcing, vertical, dashed, or dotted marks to suggest lattices, loops, links, lobes, sieves, spots, and textile-like weavings. In some works, Scarpa's horizontals imply actual horizons, such as in the effulgently sizzling duo *Earth, Wind, Fire* and *Horizon*, where choice horizontal stretches scan as indirect indications of horizon lines tucked into ambiguously perceptible, thermally radiant landscapes. Also ranking highly in Scarpa's thermal index is *Solar*, where fiery vertical striations of saffron and apricot orange hues overlay, intersect, and line up with an undergirding of scant horizontal vestiges of green and purple, and where boldly drawn, gently arcing delineations tumbling down the left register recall the curved and rounded forms of *Walking on the Moon*, while also echoing the energetically brushy, blazing cycles of marigold loop-de-loops dancing about in *Chakras*. Meanwhile, in works such as the synergetic *Glow*, the mesh-like *Glimmer*, and the formally elusive *Mirage*, horizontal intimations embedded into surfaces or surging to the fore arouse poetically enigmatic notions of 'horizons' – intuitable, perhaps, as limits to awareness or knowledge, or as uncertain transmissions of nebulous beyonds.

Loosely gestural, chromatically striated, and variably textured horizontalities in Scarpa's paintings sometimes also point to quite specific features in or visions of the natural environment. The robustly rendered bands of warm oranges, ruddy greens, varied ambers, and deep umbers in *Earthen*, for example, might be seen as hills and valleys beneath a dusky sky, or as demarcations of field after field of fertile farmland, or even as immemorial strata in a prodigious extrusion of minerally rich sedimentary deposits. In *Midnight Rain* – which might be viewed as the setting of *Earthen* glimpsed during a nocturnal storm – thinned hues of ultramarine blue and somewhat pale cerulean obscure a vaguely discernible background of organics being drenched in a downpour. Whereas those works evince a sense of zooming out, as it were, or regarding from a certain remove, other compositions seem to probe their subjects more closely by zooming in. The vacillating horizontals of

striking greens and intermittent yellows in *Moss* and *Bamboo*, for instance, suggest the vital chromatics of not only their eponymous subjects, but also of all manner of other kindred fungi, thalli, shoots, and lichens – all as if subjected to close-up, undeviated observation. In works where somewhat thicker textures lend distinct visual grip to their surfaces, the tangibility of painterly facture translates to tangibility of painted objects as well. In the sweetened golds of *Honeybee*, it seems as though an oozing honeycomb from a beehive or apiary is what's most immediately present before our eyes. And in *Dune*, soft undulations of herbaceous and seafoam greens create aspects of wispy grasses in their titular perch, swaying about shiftily in their sandy hillock substrate. Above this shoreside mound, then, we glimpse a soft jade sky suffused with hints of azure – a sure sign of an auspiciously placid, remote horizon.

Vigorous and vivid, intensely lucid and rife with life, Donna Scarpa's paintings in *Horizons & Environs* mediate the sensations of mirthful solace the artist attains from the world around her. They invite viewers to join her in hiking through the woods, strolling along the beach, walking around the neighborhood, or standing still whilst gazing up at the sky, all the while registering the vicissitudes of light and natural curiosities of their surroundings. Although horizons are often matters of metaphorical and geographical distances, Scarpa abstracts them from her quotidian environs to reveal them with joyful, luminous nearness, rendering them pictorially proximal, stirringly intimate.

- Paul D'Agostino, 2024

Paul D'Agostino, Ph.D. is an artist, writer, educator, curator, and translator. He is Writing and Thesis Advisor for the MFA program at The New York Studio School, and a regular visiting critic and instructor for several other institutions and residency programs. D'Agostino teaches writing workshops, is a translator and editor working in various languages, and writes about art, books, and film on a freelance basis.

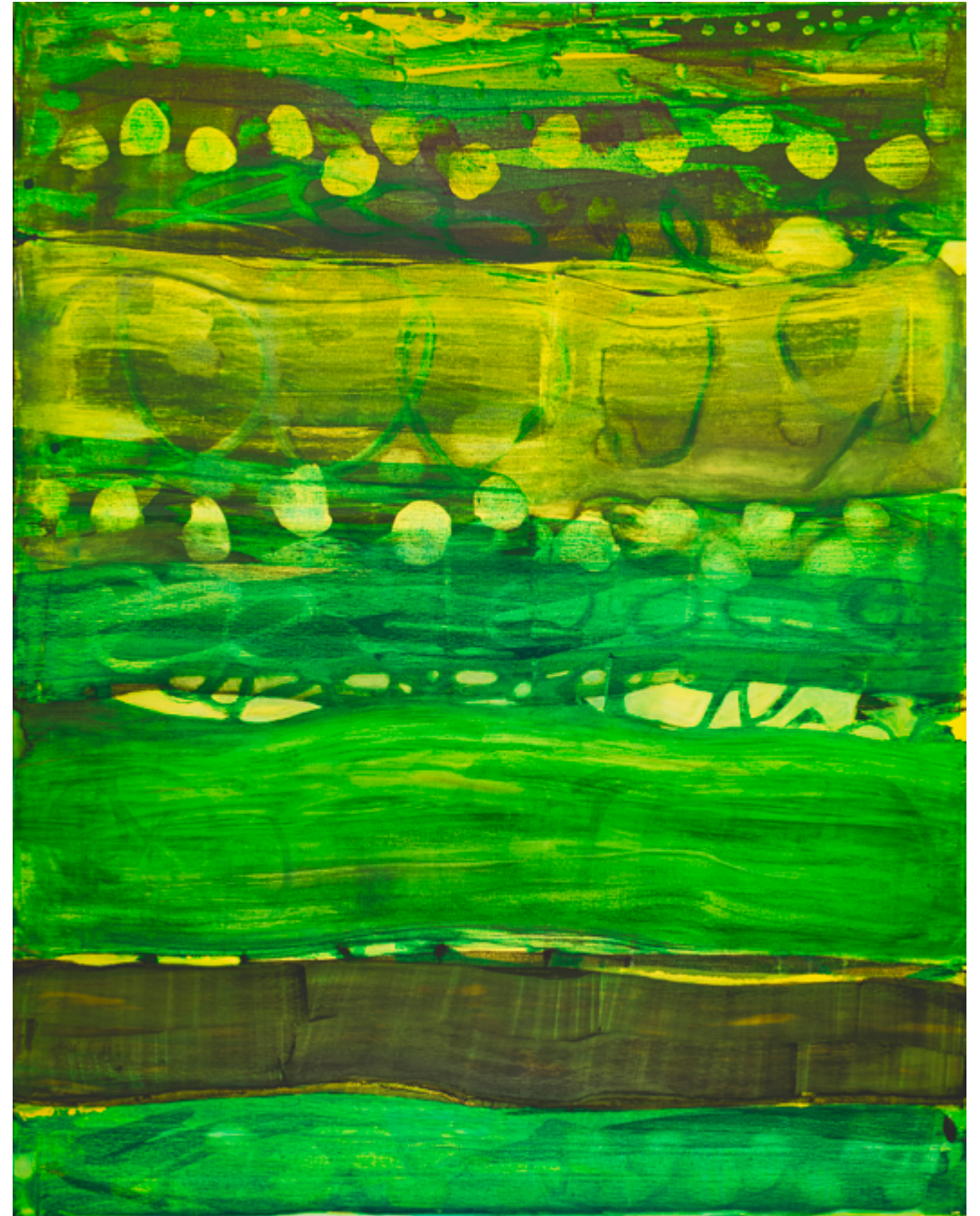


Horizon, oil on canvas, 20 x 16 inches, 2024



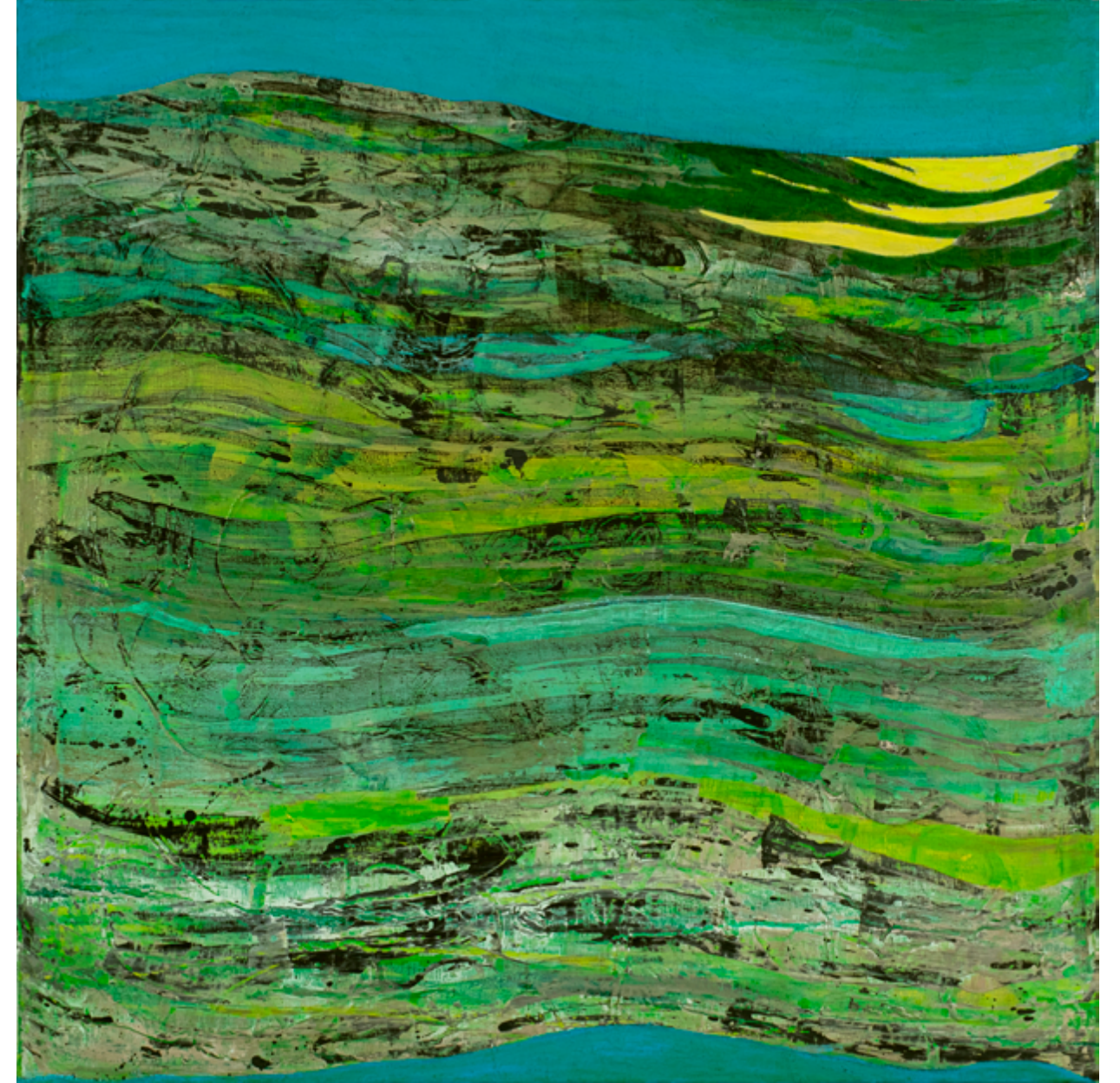
Shelter, oil on canvas, 14 x 11 inches, 2024

Moss, oil on canvas, 50 x 40 inches, 2024





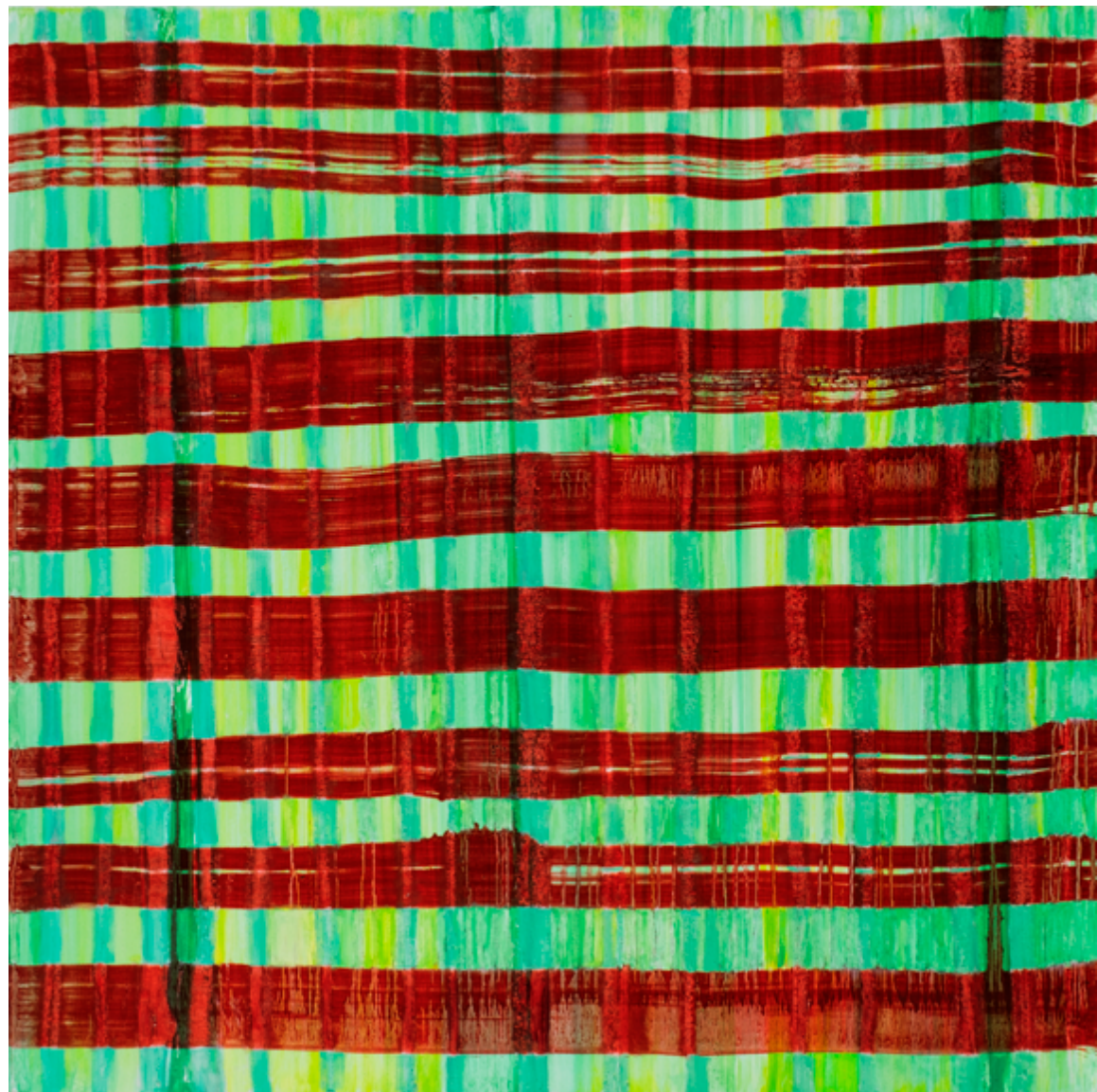
Bamboo, oil on panel, 10 x 8 inches, 2024



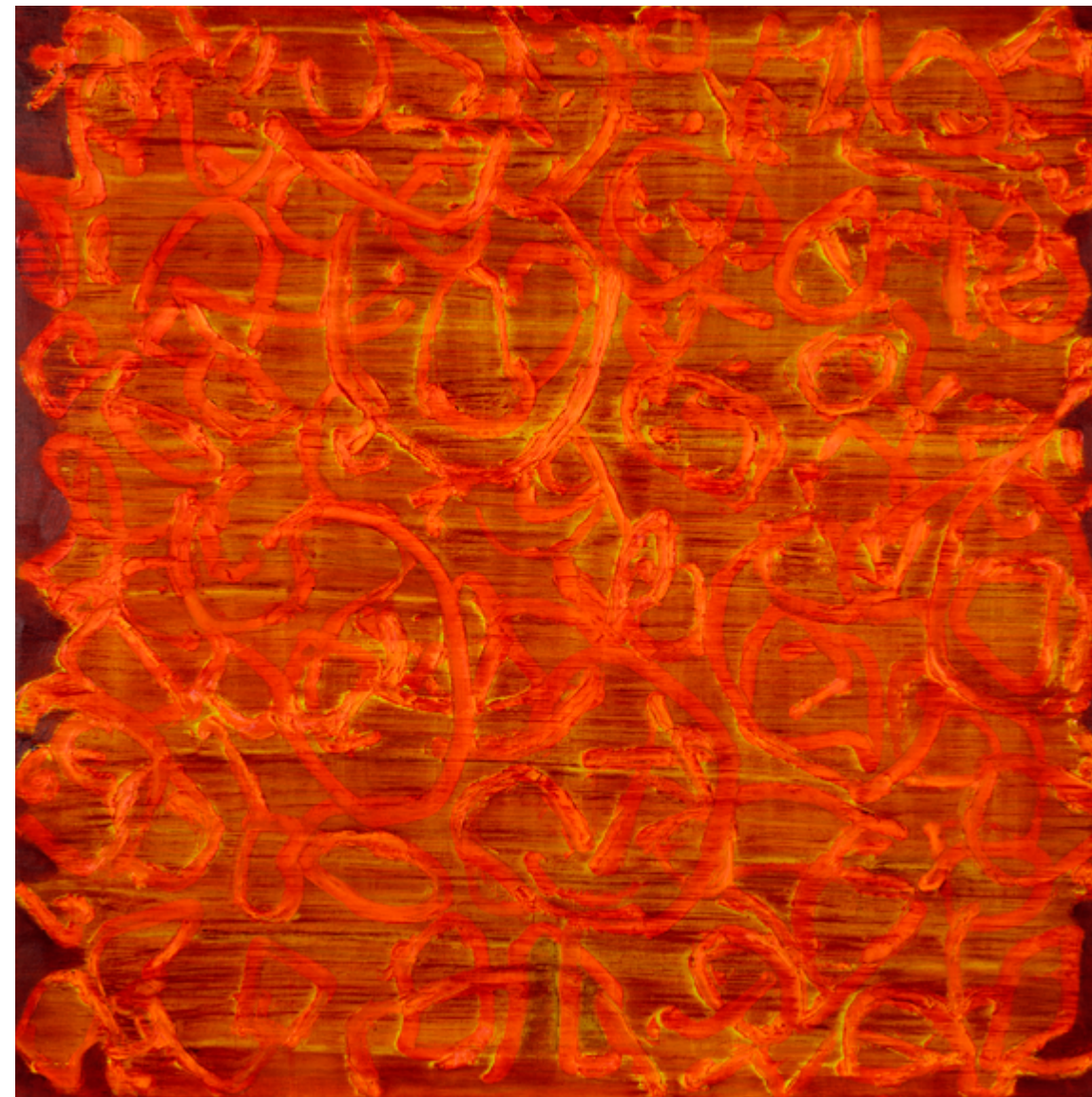
Dune, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 inches, 2024

Honeybee, oil on canvas, 30 x 30 inches, 2023



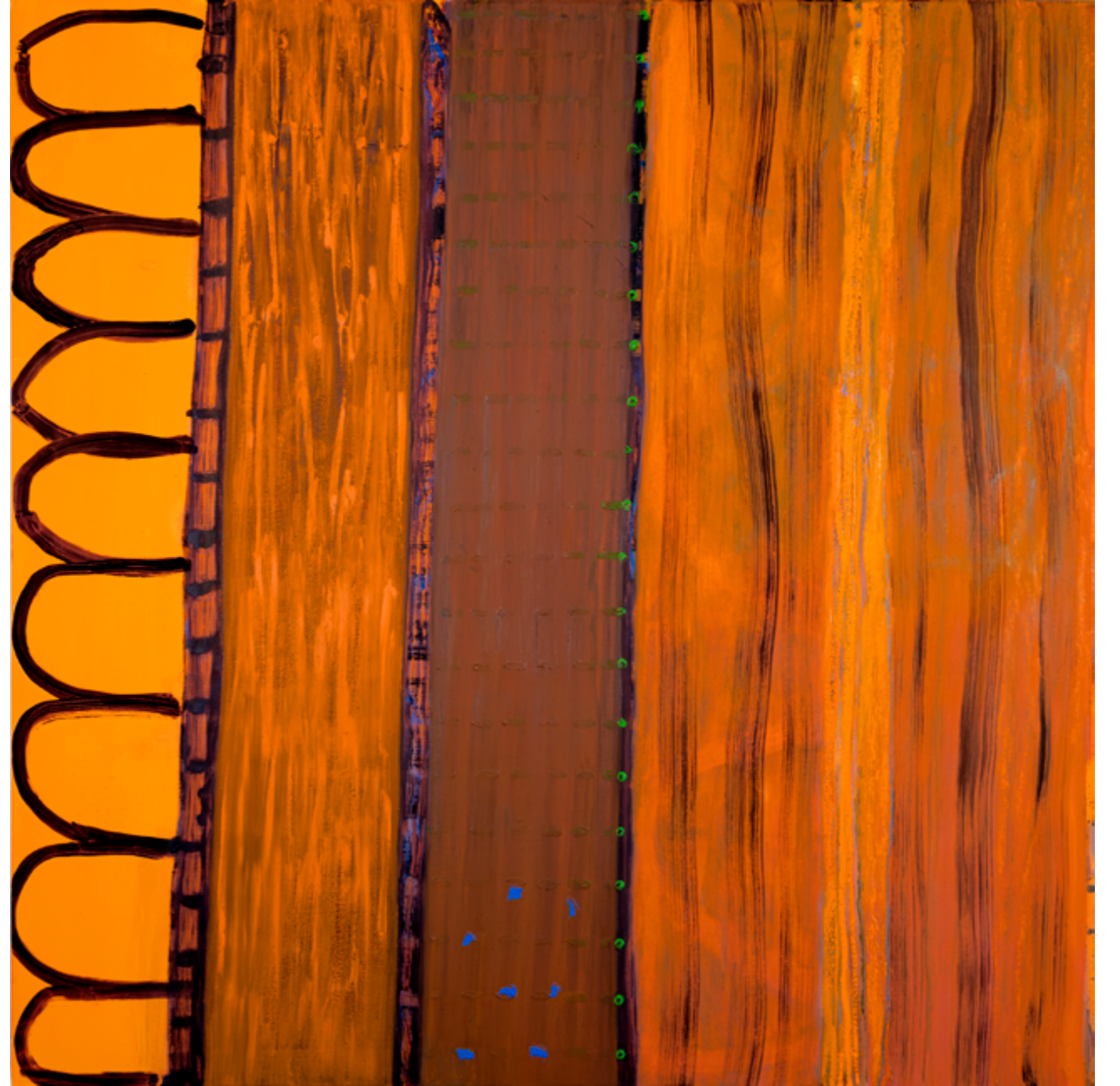


Glimmer, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches, 2023



Glow, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches, 2023

Solar, oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches, 2024





Chakras, oil on linen, 18 x 18 inches, 2024



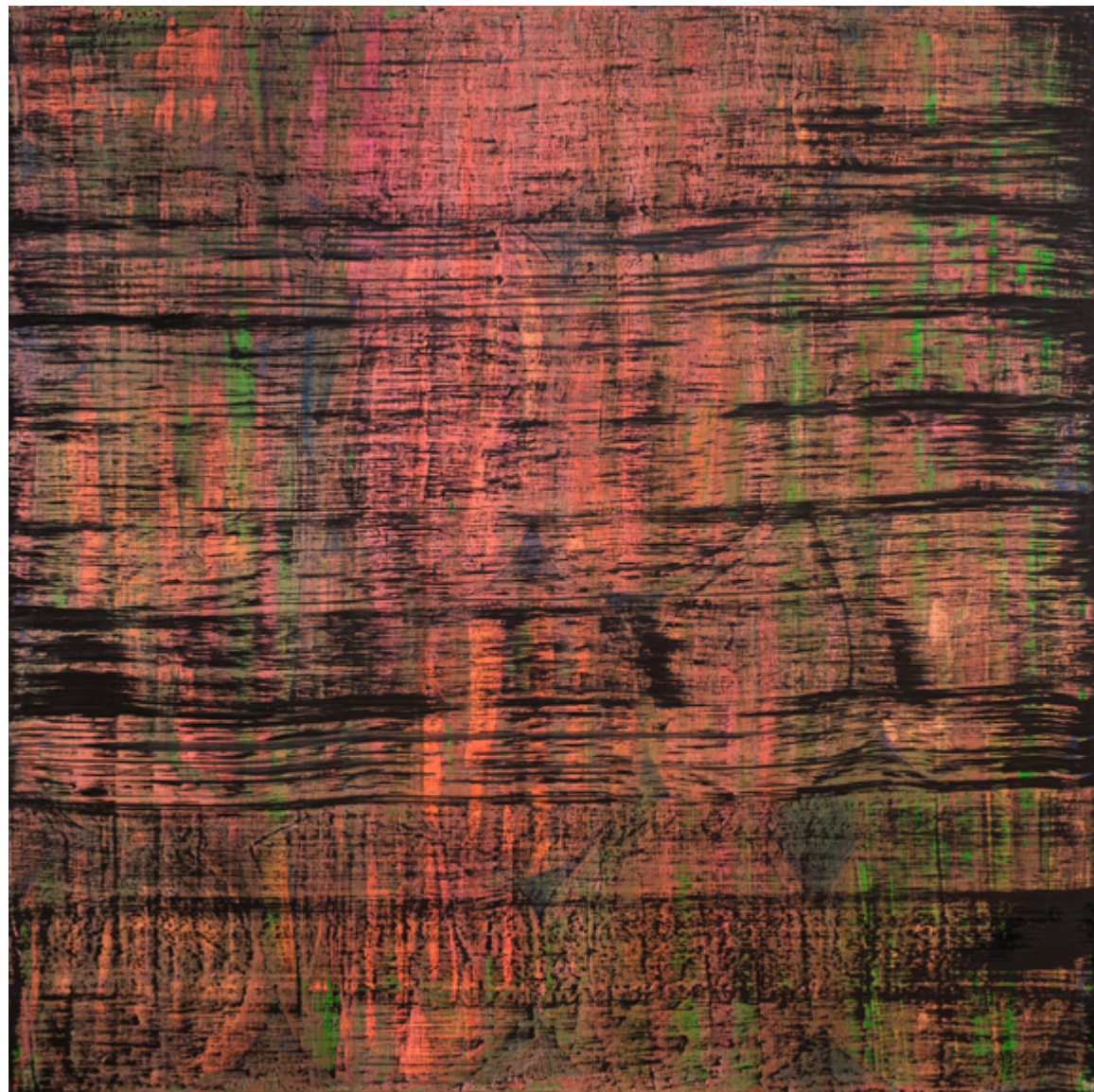
Walking on the Moon, oil on linen, 14 x 11 inches, 2023

Midnight Rain, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches, 2023

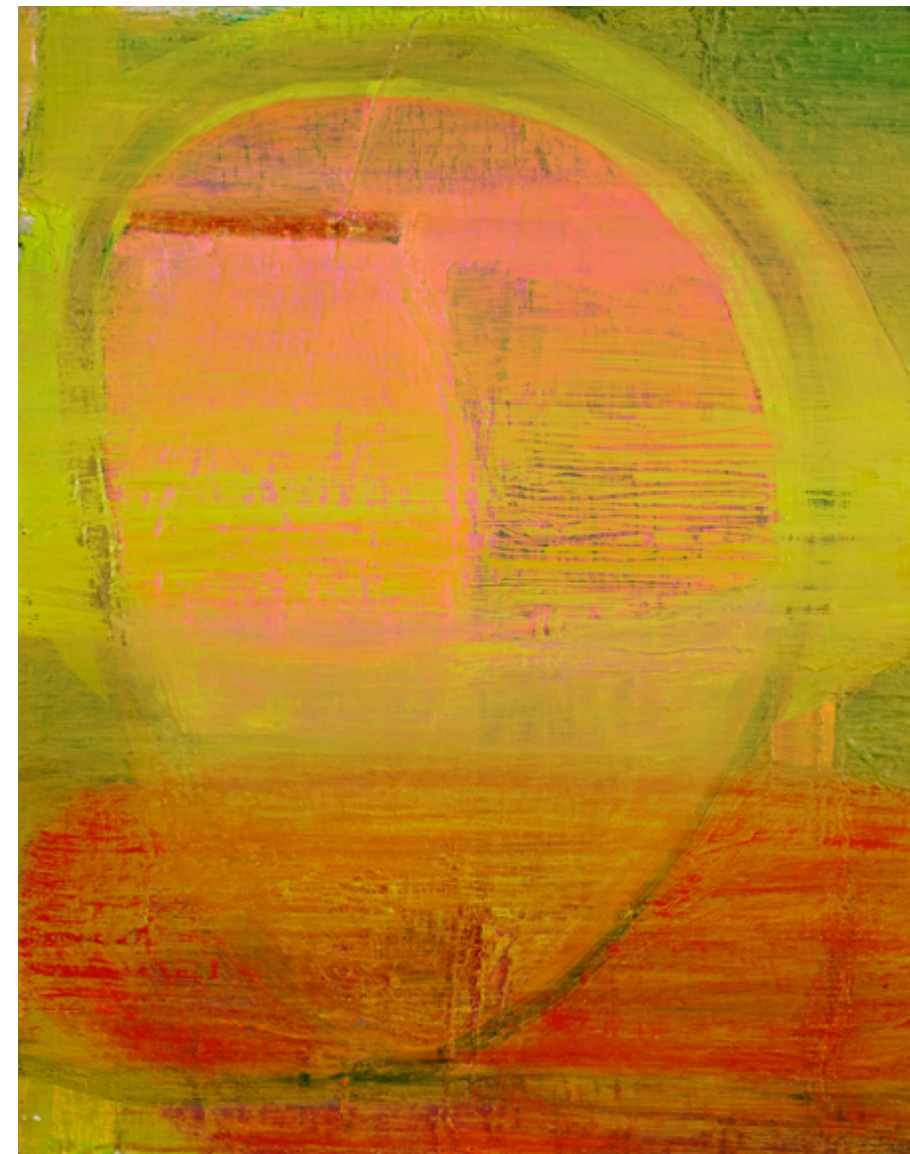


Earthen, oil on linen, 40 x 30 inches, 2023



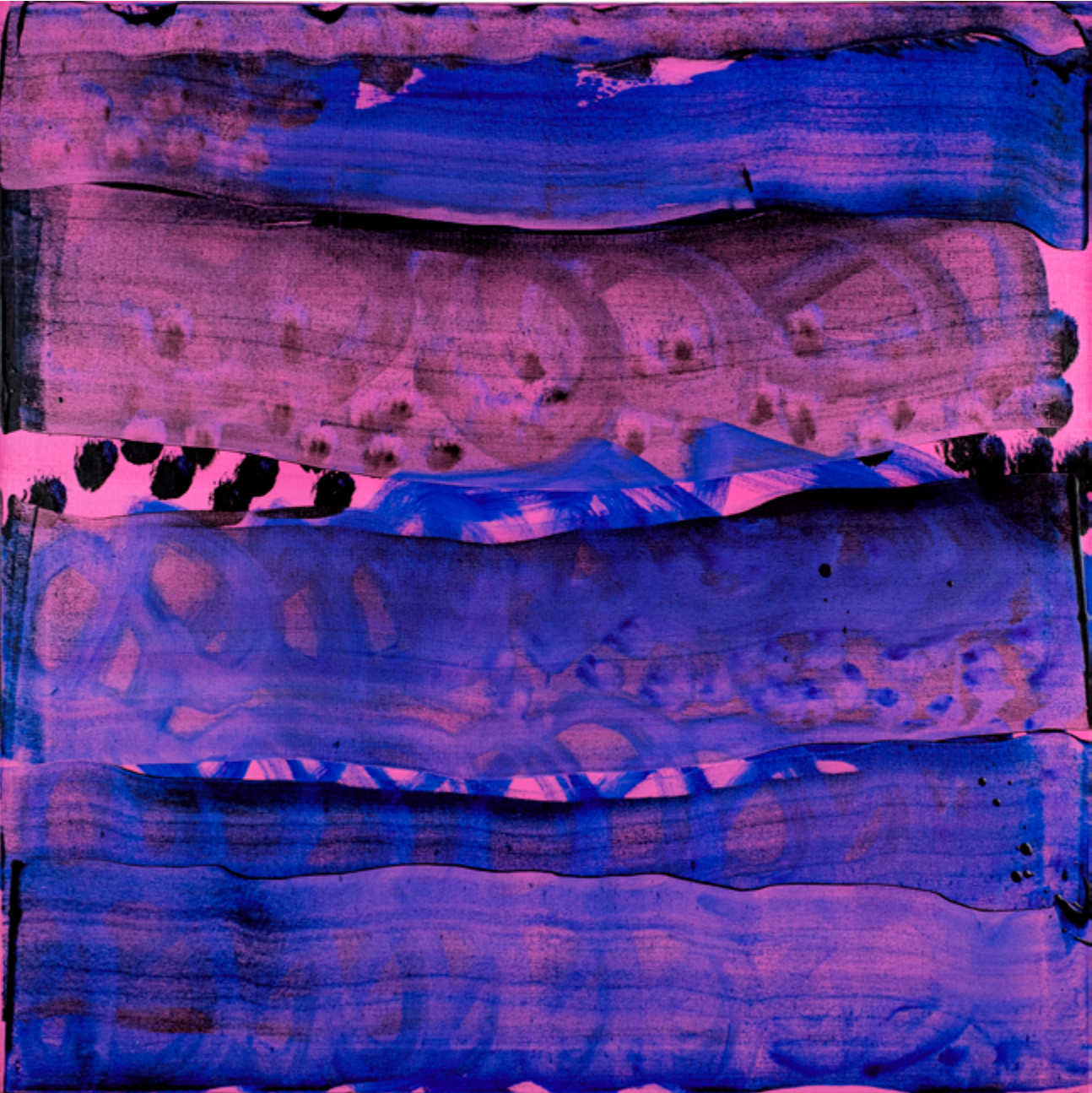


Harvest, oil on canvas, 24 x 24 inches, 2024



Mirage, oil on canvas, 14 x 11 inches, 2024

Grape Seed, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches, 2024



Donna Scarpa

Donna Scarpa lives and works in Ridgefield, Connecticut. She holds a BFA in Fine Arts and Textile Design from The Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. She has also furthered her studies in painting and drawing through workshops and certificate programs at The School of Visual Arts, The National Academy of Design, The Art Students League of New York, The Green Studio School, and The Yellow Chair Salon. Scarpa has exhibited her abstract paintings extensively in New York and Connecticut. Her solo exhibitions include *Horizons & Environs*, The Painting Center, NYC; and *Reconstructing*, The Painting Center, NYC.

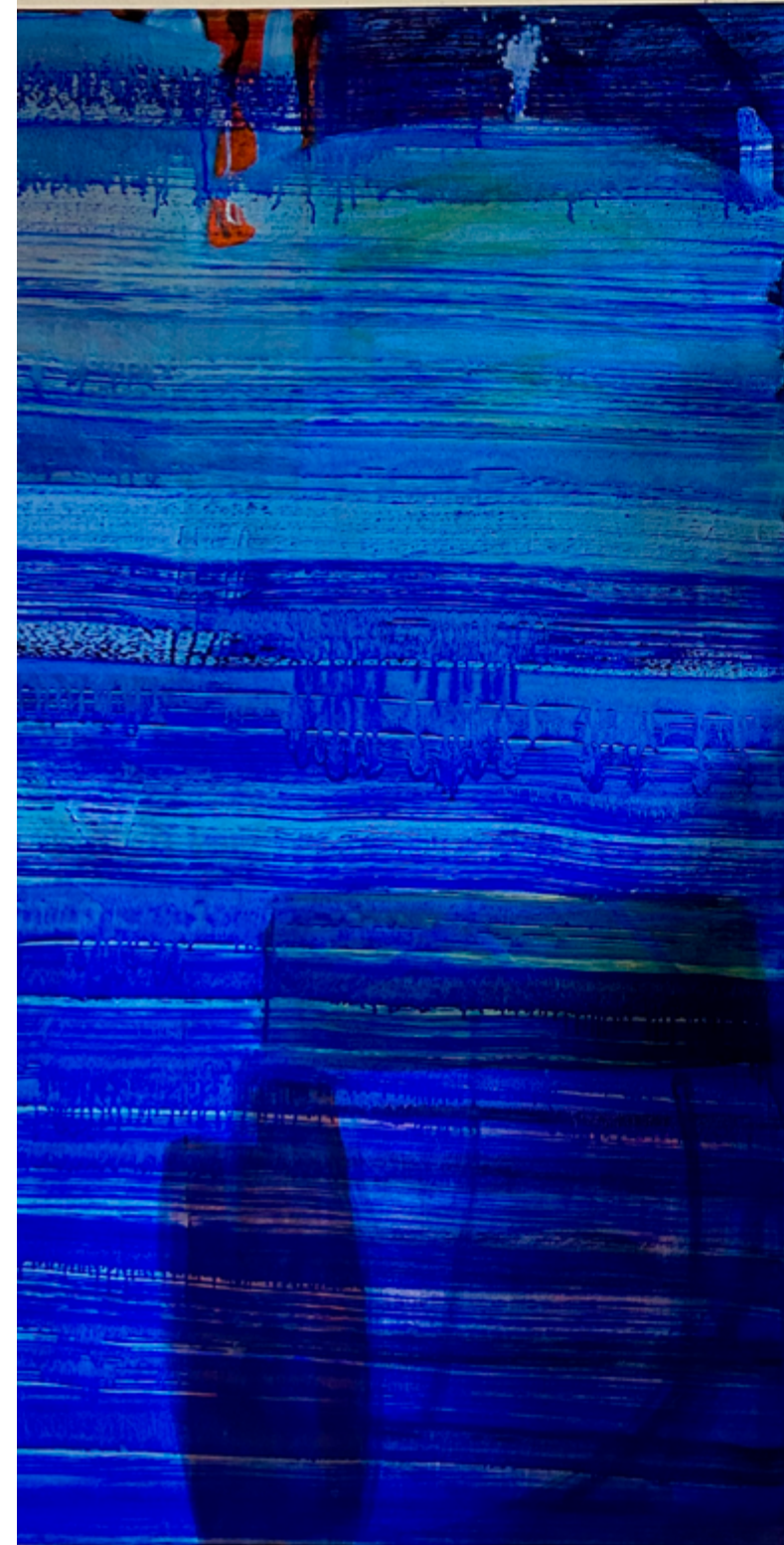
Her work has also been featured in group exhibitions in numerous venues, including the Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury CT; Katonah Museum Artists Association, Katonah, NY; Woodstock Artist Association & Museum, Woodstock NY; Ridgefield Artists Guild, Ridgefield, CT; Upstream Gallery, Hastings On Hudson, NY; The Painting Center, NYC; New York School of the Arts, NYC; The Mamaroneck Artists Guild, NY; Center for Contemporary Printmaking, New Canaan, CT; Garrison Art Center, NY; The BIZ Gallery, Larchmont, NY; The Sephardic Community Center, Brooklyn, NY; and Art Society of Kingston, NY. Scarpa has also curated exhibitions at The Biz Gallery in Larchmont, NY. Her work is held in a number of private collections and been featured in *Balanced Rock: The North Salem Review of Art, Photography, and Literature*, and in the *Art in America* Annual Guide, 2021-2022.

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Catalogue Design: Shazzi Thomas

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Artist Statement

My enduring interests as a painter include the transmission of light through color, the materiality of paint, and intuitive, intentional processes. I create tactile and spatial relationships through gestural marks, layered surfaces, and generally bright palettes in my ongoing exploration of abstract forms.

In my most recent paintings, I employ color, texture, shape, and line to create compositions suggestive of the natural world. Gestural, horizontal marks sometimes look like horizon lines, while at other times they appear as strata of earth. In some works, bright colors and textured surfaces give abstract form to plants or features of landscapes. In others, expressive marks and translucent treatments suggest skies and celestial bodies.

While creating the paintings in *Horizons & Environs*, my local environment of woods, hills, and lakes have been a source of solace and inspiration, and a reliable catalyst in the studio. The horizons in question are both literal and metaphorical as features of the natural world, and as creative expressions of things to come.

Thank you to my husband Aldo Scarpa for your love and encouragement, and to my family and friends for their love and support. Special thanks to Paul D'Agostino for your brilliant writing and professional guidance. Applause and appreciation to Shazzi Thomas for her amazing eye and all that she has done to make this show happen! This catalogue is dedicated in memory to my lovely, talented friend Carolyn Brown Okay, 1958-2023.

