



Yasmina
ALAOUÏ

OPERA GALLERY

Yasmina
ALAOUÏ

—
Sediments

OPERA GALLERY



Preface

“Man is a creature that makes shapes and rhythms; he is practiced at nothing better and it seems that he takes pleasure in nothing more than in inventing figures. Only observe how our eye occupies itself as soon as it receives nothing more to see: it creates itself something to see.”

Friedrich Nietzsche

It is with great pleasure and excitement that we open this new solo exhibition for the wonderful Yasmina Alaoui.

Since its inception as New Amsterdam, New York has been one of the most diverse and multicultural conurbations on the planet. NYC established itself as a pioneer for co-existence, tolerance and plurality separating it from much of the continent in which it resides. New Yorkers as a result are a different flavor of American - sediments, perhaps, of this great metropolitan river.

An epicenter for modern and contemporary art since the 1940s, New York remains a magnet for museums, galleries and artists of all stripe and medium. For Opera Gallery, with 12 locations around the world, representing artists from all over the planet, the draw to this major city and its premier art scene was an obvious one - our gallery artists truly represent international diversity, highlighted through a multitude of idiosyncratic methods and nuances.

This exhibition is especially exciting as it is not often that we have had the opportunity to feature an artist native to New York. Yasmina Alaoui is the embodiment of the modern New Yorker, with strong connections to her bi-cultural background and a pursuit for creative innovation, pushing the boundaries of technique and convention. She is a true citizen of the global village.

Through her work, Yasmina aims to bridge between the secular and religious, the classical and contemporary, order and chaos, and figuration and abstraction. Her extensive language of material and application is apparent in any one of her complex pieces. It is the rooted embodiment of inclusiveness and self-expression.

In this wonderful new collection Yasmina opens a window for us to view her unique universe. Originating from French and Moroccan descent, she brings a piece of her background and culture to her oeuvre quite literally; collecting elements and found objects from her home town of Marrakesh in Morocco and incorporating them into her rich surfaces to striking, authentic effect. These colossal mementos of Morocco become a mirror of her own personal story and cultural sediments.

We are proud and honored to have the artist present at the exhibition opening in the gallery.

Gilles Dyan
Founder and President
Opera Gallery Group

Amos Frajnd
Director
Opera Gallery New York

Yasmina Alaoui

Artist Unearths Moroccan Geologies, Bones, and Historic Practices for Exhibition of Mixed Media Installations.

Yasmina Alaoui Explores the Limits of Rock, Plaster and Pigment in Sediments.

In *Sediments*, Yasmina Alaoui unveils twenty new mixed media installations. Each formed on wood board, there are eighteen wall hangings and two sculptural totems. Alaoui begins with the Islamic geometries that are a trademark of her oeuvre. Working in plaster, pigment, and found objects, she then builds up each work creating mounds of material that project from the surface. The result is a series of colossal abstract installations.

Walking around her hometown of Marrakech, Morocco, Alaoui sourced geodes and other forms of natural debris which have been incorporated into the works. Glossed in gold patinas, dense Kohl dust or indigo pigments, each work generates a vision of Alaoui's Morocco. Bones are tethered to the canvas, rocks and crystals shimmer, and her geometric patterns attempt to surface. In some works, Alaoui traces stories of appropriation, returning cultural heritage to her homeland. The indigo pigments she uses, for example, are derived from an ancient practice by the Saharan Tuareg people which was appropriated by distinguished artists like Jacques Majorelle and Yves Klein, who rebranded the pigment with their own monikers.

Amidst political shifts locally and globally, this exhibition offers a glimpse at Islamic motifs, Moroccan landscapes, and abstraction through the lens of someone poised between East and West.

Matthew McCardwell
Art Historian, August 2017





Sediments

Time and memory according to Yasmina Alaoui

Yasmina Alaoui earned her reputation from a series of remarkable works displaying body parts or women's faces, overlaid with abstract and sparkling patterns. Mixing drawing, painting, photography and diverse techniques of her own, these works, created in collaboration with her companion Marco Guerra, reasonably established her among the most prominent artists internationally.

With rich cultural inheritance of Moroccan descent from her father, and French heritage from her mother, she embarked upon her own artistic journey; Alaoui was determined to constantly challenge and defy all stereotypes, whether related to women in general or to cultural archetypes from the Arab-Muslim world.

An evangelist of the quest for mystery and beauty, the artist carefully avoids specific political allusions in her works, yet never losing sight of the potential social impact of her work. Recently, the artist has begun to broaden her new artistic horizons, producing large-framed works (panel paintings, triptychs and square formats) as opposed to her previous work.

Such abstract compositions evoke vast mineralogical landscapes, which can be visible from the sky. Texturologies and Matériologies by Dubuffet, burnt or smashed materials by Tâpies and Millares, American bird's eye views paintings, "futuro-archaeological" installations by artist Chen Zhen or the radiant range of colors range in Zao Wou-Ki's compositions... One can reflect on a plethora of images and artistic influences when meditating on these riveting works, where the gaze probes the raw material, ceaselessly losing and finding its way.

Opera Gallery is honoured to present to the public, for the first time, twenty of her new works.

During the creative process, every composition is the result of delicate elaboration; the artist begins by creating geometrical patterns in the style of Zellige tile designs. Found in traditional craftsmanship

and mosaic works, these usually static forms seem to disintegrate here, sometimes even blowing up into pieces and vanishing into space.

Once this meticulously skilled stage completed, an eminently physical work begins, in which the artist's entire body is involved and where the unpredictable plays a crucial part. Yasmina Alaoui embellishes her geometrical compositions with a mix of materials both organic and mineral: a combination of salt, sand, gravel and acrylic painting is first applied and then dusted with pure pigments (Tuareg blue, turquoise, pink, green, gold...); kohl, ashes and hand-crafted stars made of plaster are then added, alongside materials such as pieces of styrofoam or broken ceramics collected in the Palm Grove - not far from the Marrakech Riad, where she works a part of the year. Sometimes panels are laid flat on the floor, sometimes slightly inclined, while Yasmina gently drops the materials directly onto the surface. These drops, like a sedimentary layer, cover some of the work, partly veiling the first outlined patterns that emerged.

Ruins of an ancient village, a civilisation that has disappeared, images of destruction or of looming human catastrophe, or perhaps the vision of a vegetal world or cellular division... her works seem to contain something cosmic and extra-terrestrial. Some will see a devastated battleground, while others, an image of birth or regeneration. Indeed, many feelings can be triggered when observing these works. But beyond any specific aspect of reality, what prevails is the extreme sensitivity of the artist's gaze and hands. Does she not say that each work from this new series is a reflection of her soul? Two layers are superimposed, one fragile and delicate, the other stronger, almost violent.

A portrait of the artist and the world she lives in.

David Rosenberg
Paris, July 2017

Artist's Statement

I have been making art since I was seven, it is what I know best and feel most comfortable with.

Art is a great tool for exploring the world. There are no limits to where you can take it and where it will lead you.

It is a creative vessel indeed: wonderfully complex at times, therapeutic at others.

The language of art is timeless and international, and it was a great way for me to communicate, firstly with myself, and subsequently with the world.

Art lets me investigate any subject matter. Any concept that I grow fond of can be incorporated into my art, research and development.

Although the title of *artist* is still strange to me, there is no such thing as becoming an *artist*; it became a full time professional career for me. I was an artist before I really understood what being an artist meant.

Both of my parents greatly influenced my career in art. My mother is a genuine art admirer, always exposed to artistic stimuli; she loves photography and taught us about numerous great artists.

My father, though he would never call himself an artist, has a very creative and unusual way to tackle his diverse business ventures. He taught me a great lesson: a large part of making art is about strategy and problem solving.

My mother enrolled me in various after-school activities, piano, dance, etc., but the one that really resonated was sculpture. I took classes at the Carousel du Louvre in Paris, where I was taught both how to be a great technician and how to think abstractly and conceptually. The impact of this class on me was profound: today, in every project I create, technique is equally as important as the concept.

We moved to Morocco when I was ten. So immediately inspired was I by the various patterns I

encountered in homes, artefacts, henna body art, that I began to draw obsessively.

I would draw all day long, including at school, which often got me into trouble... but I couldn't stop! I would cover all of my books and then move on to my friend's notebooks or those of whoever was sitting next to me. At the time, having no formal training in drawing or painting, the patterns (those found now in my "1001 Dreams" series), although extremely delicate and complex, had a very naive and tribal quality to them. How I cherish those today: knowing as much as I do about drawing, these were truly my first investigation into art...

During my teenage years I was very lucky to be surrounded by extremely talented people: Yves Saint Laurent and Serge Lutens were close friends of my parents.

I remember when Yves Saint Laurent gave my mother, Serge, and I a private tour of his house. I remember seeing a painting by William Turner for the first time, a very abstract and minimalist scene of a caravan caught in a sand storm. That painting changed my life. It was so strikingly simple, so beautifully unpredictable and violent at the same time, I couldn't wrap my head around how one painting could evoke such extreme feelings all at once.

I also spent a lot of my vacation time in Mahjoubi Aherdane's house: his two daughters, Kenza and Fanou, caught my eagerness for art and became great mentors to me. We would spend days drawing, painting, sculpting, creating photo shoots. What a wonderfully experience it was to find kinship souls who were as obsessed as I was!

I've always had a passion for science and wanted to continue studying neuroscience and genetics, so I moved to the US in 1995 to study medicine at the College of William and Mary. I was informed that the school had a foundry, therefore decided to take sculpture classes. This ended up being my major! During those years I worked mostly on extremely large-scale sculptures in bronze, plaster,

wood and metal. One of my teachers jokingly remarked that one day one of my creations would end up collapsing on me and that they would find me dead under it! Working with large-scale works is a very physically demanding task; it was also a huge leap from having worked for years with extremely fine ink pens on small-scale drawings.

I also studied filmmaking at NYU in the summer of 1998. So when I moved back there in 1999, I quickly found work in the film industry, notably for Spike Lee, Eriq La Salle and Rachid Bouchareb. I was very curious about the film-making process and worked in several departments: casting, production, film and sound editing and assistant director.

I met Marco Guerra in 2002 and we immediately spoke of working together. It was this collaboration that turned my passion for art into an actual career.

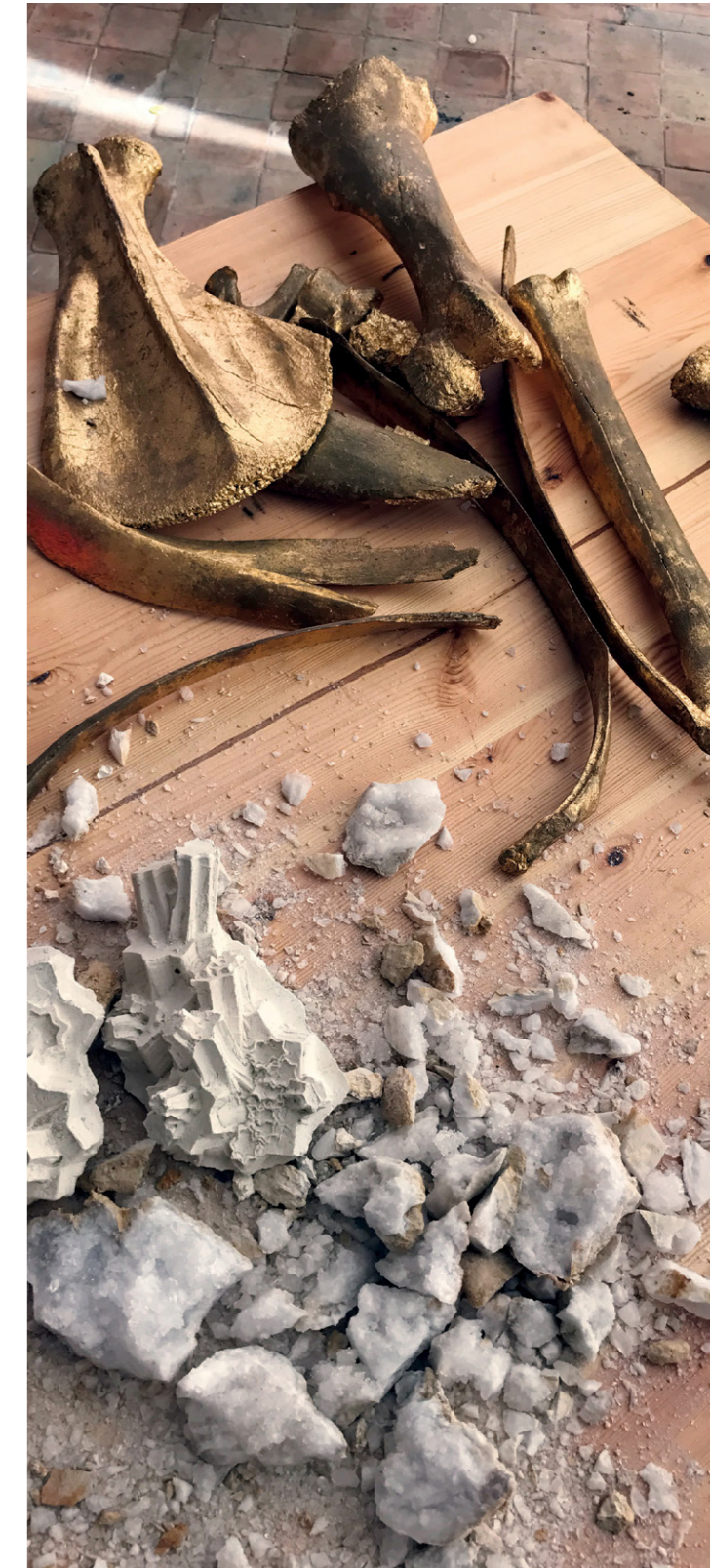
I worked on incorporating my drawings into his photos, developing a complex process of mixing photo, drawing, painting, collage, digital, for two years. Our first "1001 Dreams" series was born. It was an immediate hit. The very first gallery I sent it to offered us a show and the pieces started selling before the exhibition even opened.

My real artistic career had truly just begun. I have since worked on many different projects, as I am not a fan of doing the same thing repetitively. My love for diverse media calls for a playful combination of materials, constantly drawing, fashion and jewellery design, filmmaking and music composition.

My choices of subject matter have also changed over the years: my earlier work focused on the figurative, my later works are much more abstract.

My focus is on media, the history of art making, art making traditions, the cultural uses of media. What also captivates me is understanding and studying the defining line between science, nature, multicultural traditions and contemporary art making.

"I have been making art since I was seven, it is what I know best and feel most comfortable with."





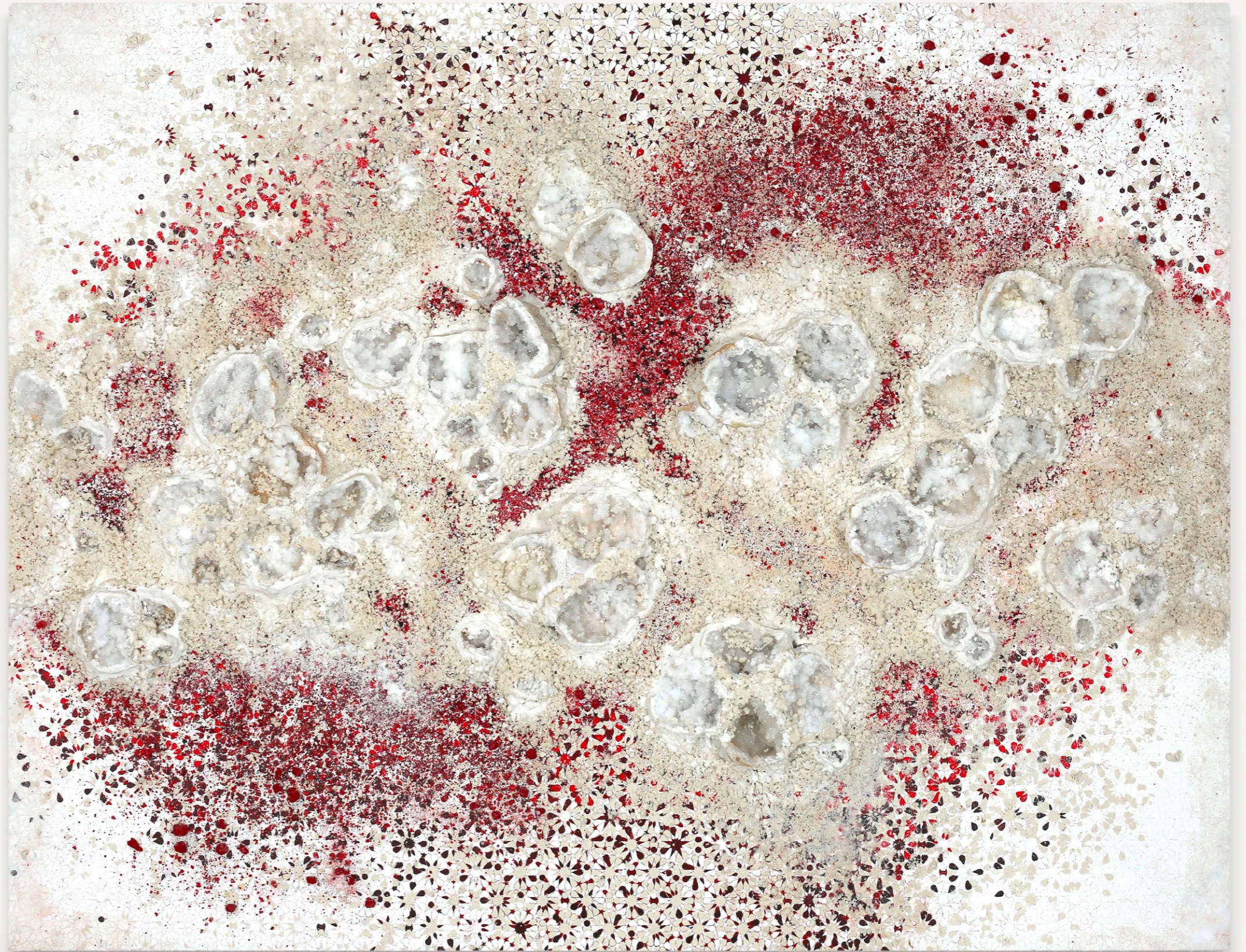
White and Gold Trio #1, 2017

acrylic paint, gold leaf, minerals, camel remains, salt and gravel on wood panel
Triptych: 71.6 x 98 in | 182 x 249 cm



Gold White Duo #1, 2017

acrylic paint, salt, pigments and minerals on wood panel
Diptych: 69.3 x 90.6 in | 176 x 230 cm



Red White Rectangle #1, 2017

acrylic paint, salt, gravel, pigments and minerals on wood panel
69.3 x 90.6 in | 176 x 230 cm



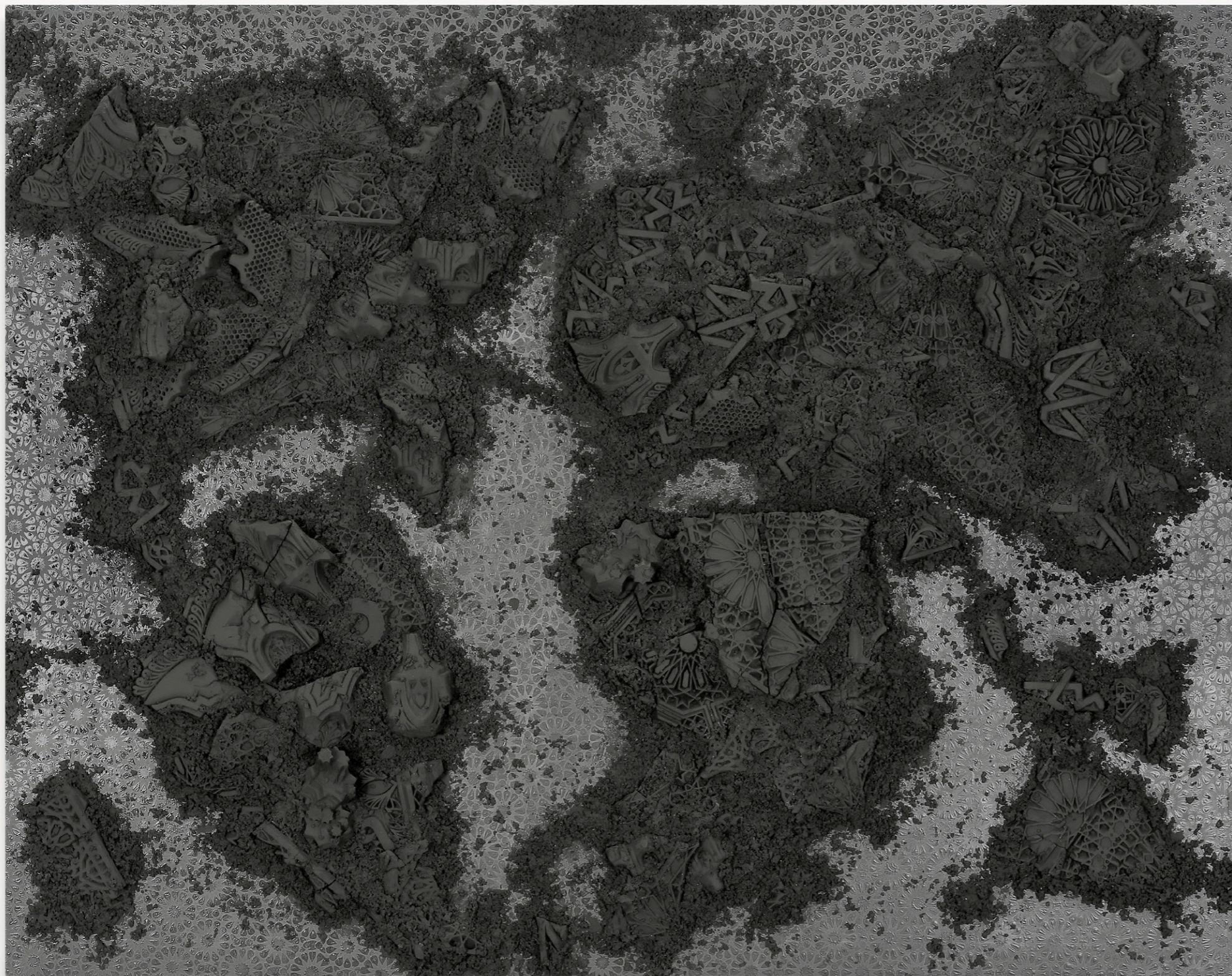
Silver Trio Khol #1, 2017

khol, pigments and camel remains on wood panel
Triptych: 71.6 x 98 in | 182 x 249 cm



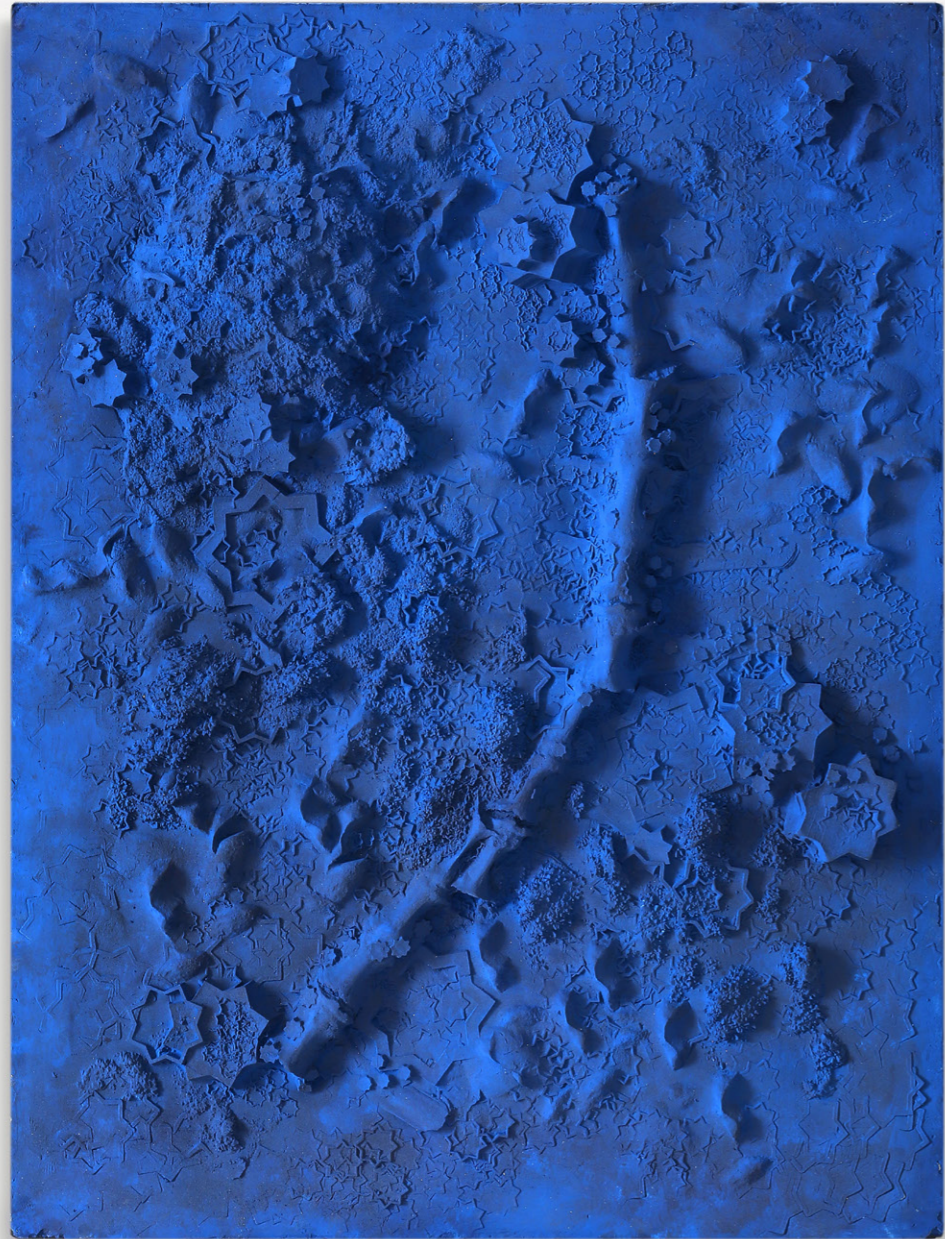
Grey White Rectangle #1, 2017

acrylic paint, ashes, khol, found objects and salt on wood panel
59.1 x 74.8 in | 150 x 190 cm



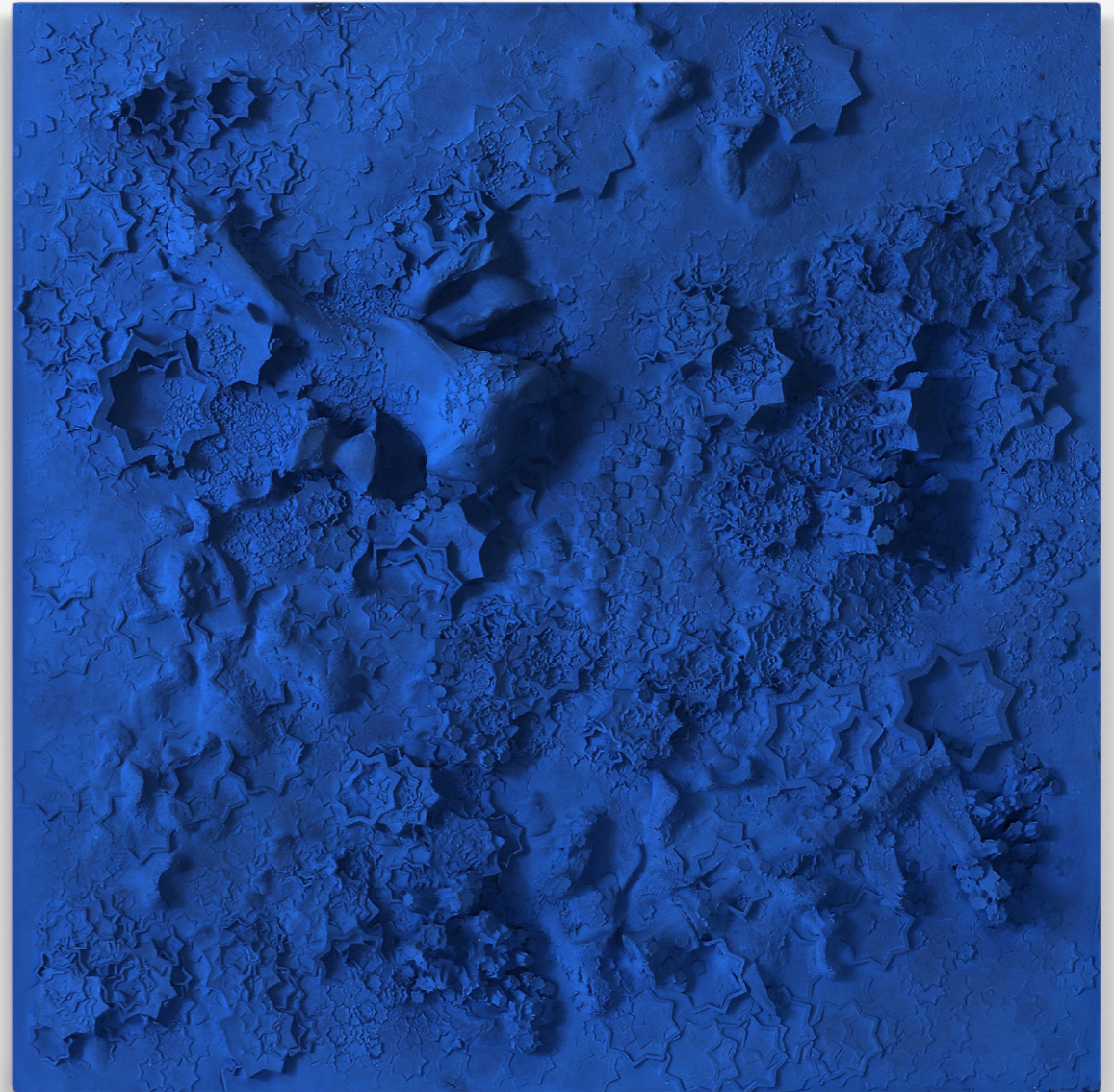
Black Rectangle #2, 2017

acrylic paint, plaster and gravel on wood panel
59.1 x 74.8 in | 150 x 190 cm



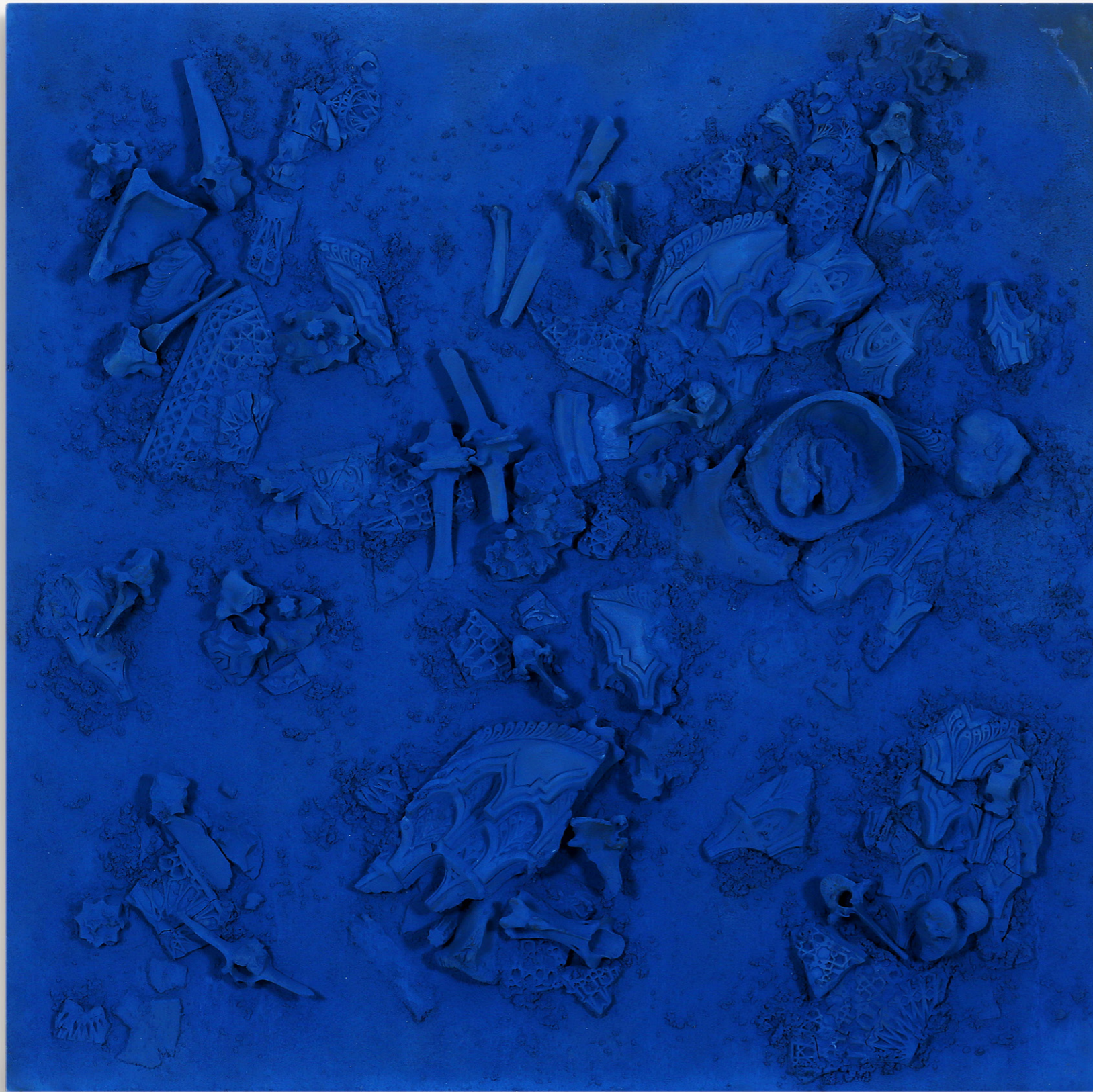
Blue Plaster Rectangle #1, 2017

Tuareg indigo and plaster on wood panel
40.1 x 30.3 in | 102 x 77 cm



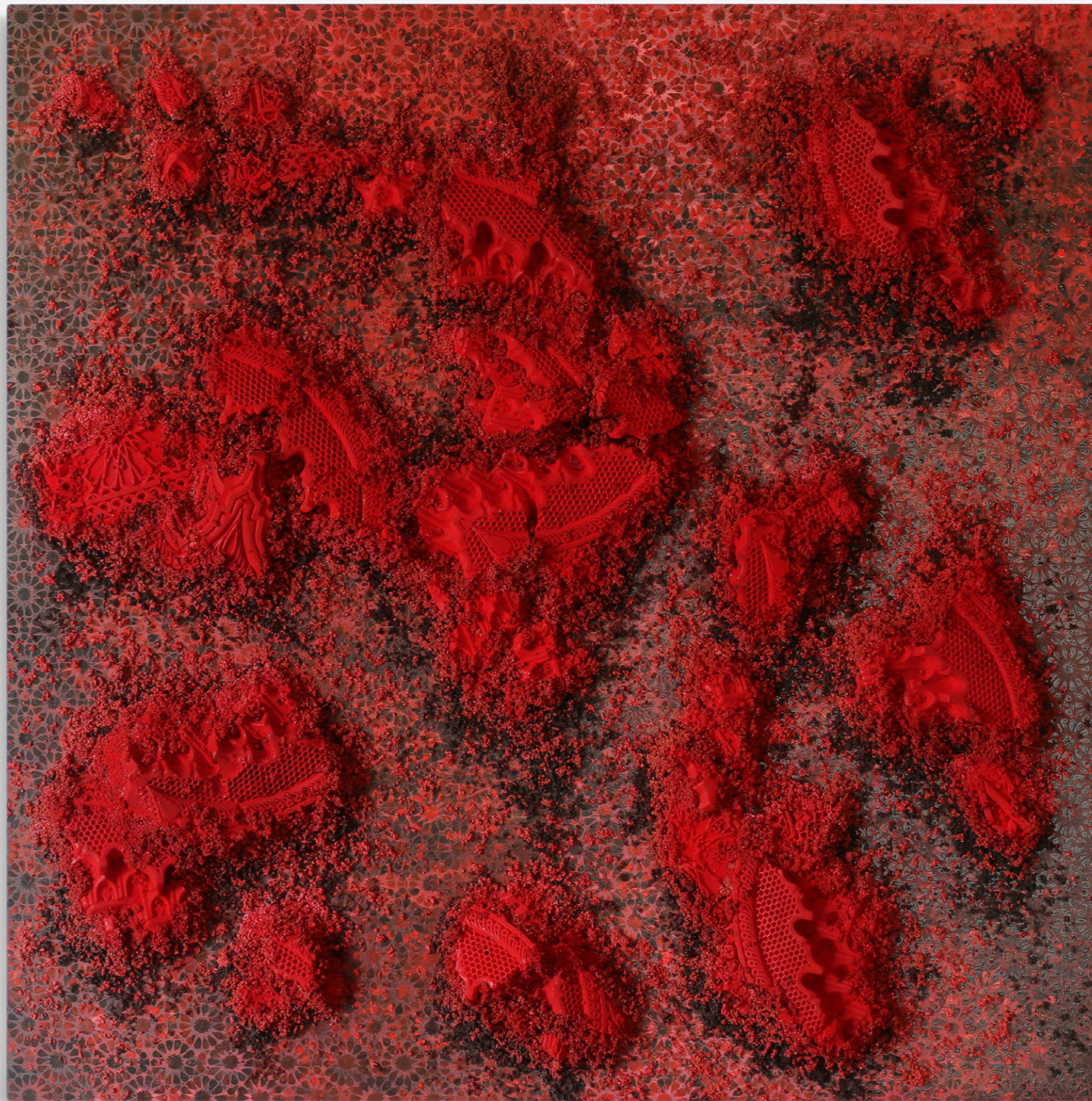
Blue Plaster Square #1, 2017

Tuareg indigo and plaster on wood panel
36.2 x 36.2 in | 92 x 92 cm



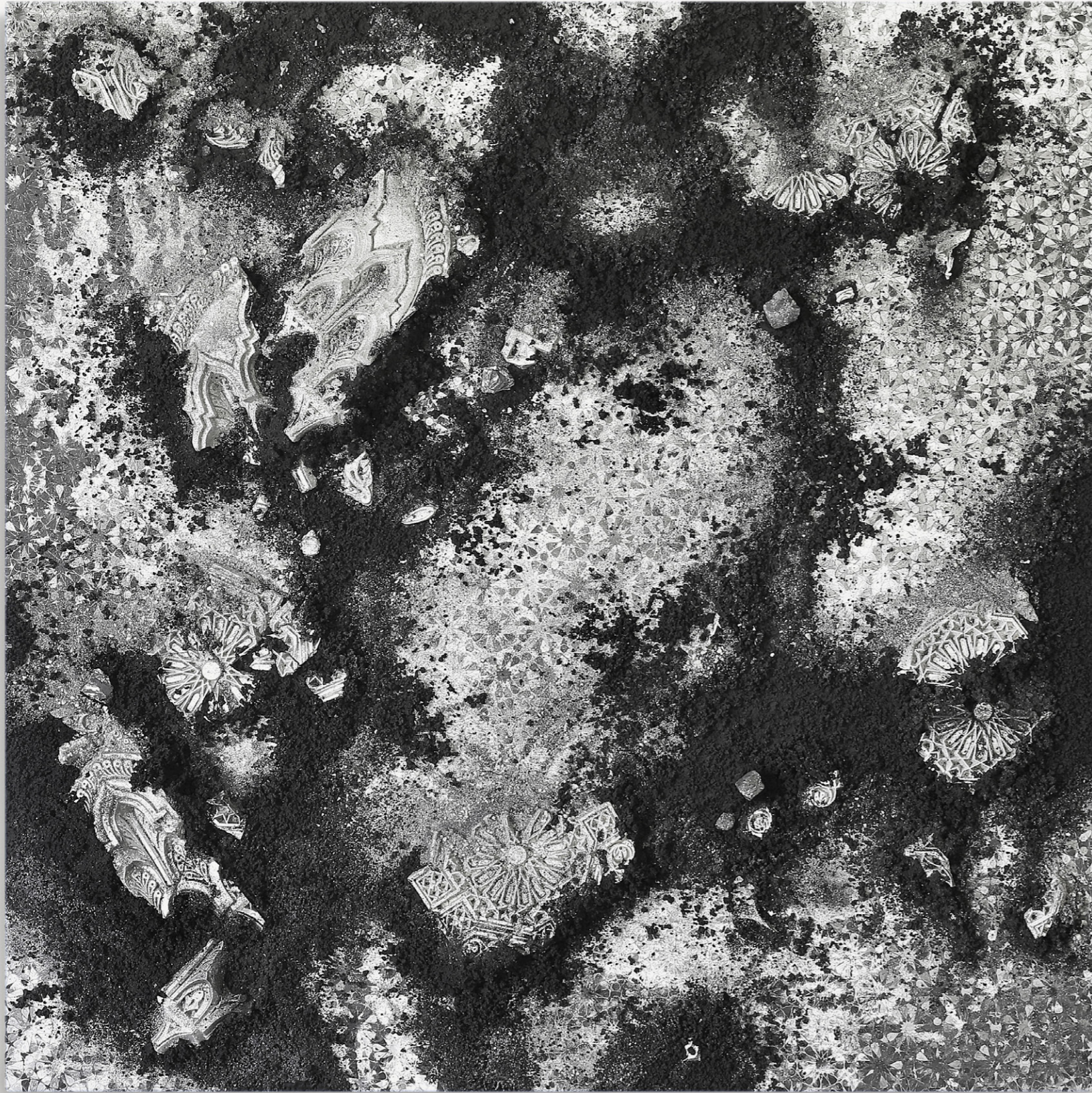
Blue Square #1, 2017

Tuareg indigo, gravel, found objects on wood panel
62.2 x 62.2 in | 158 x 158 cm



Red and Black Square #1, 2017

acrylic paint, pigments, plaster and gravel on wood panel
62.2 x 62.2 in | 158 x 158 cm



Black and Grey Square #1, 2017

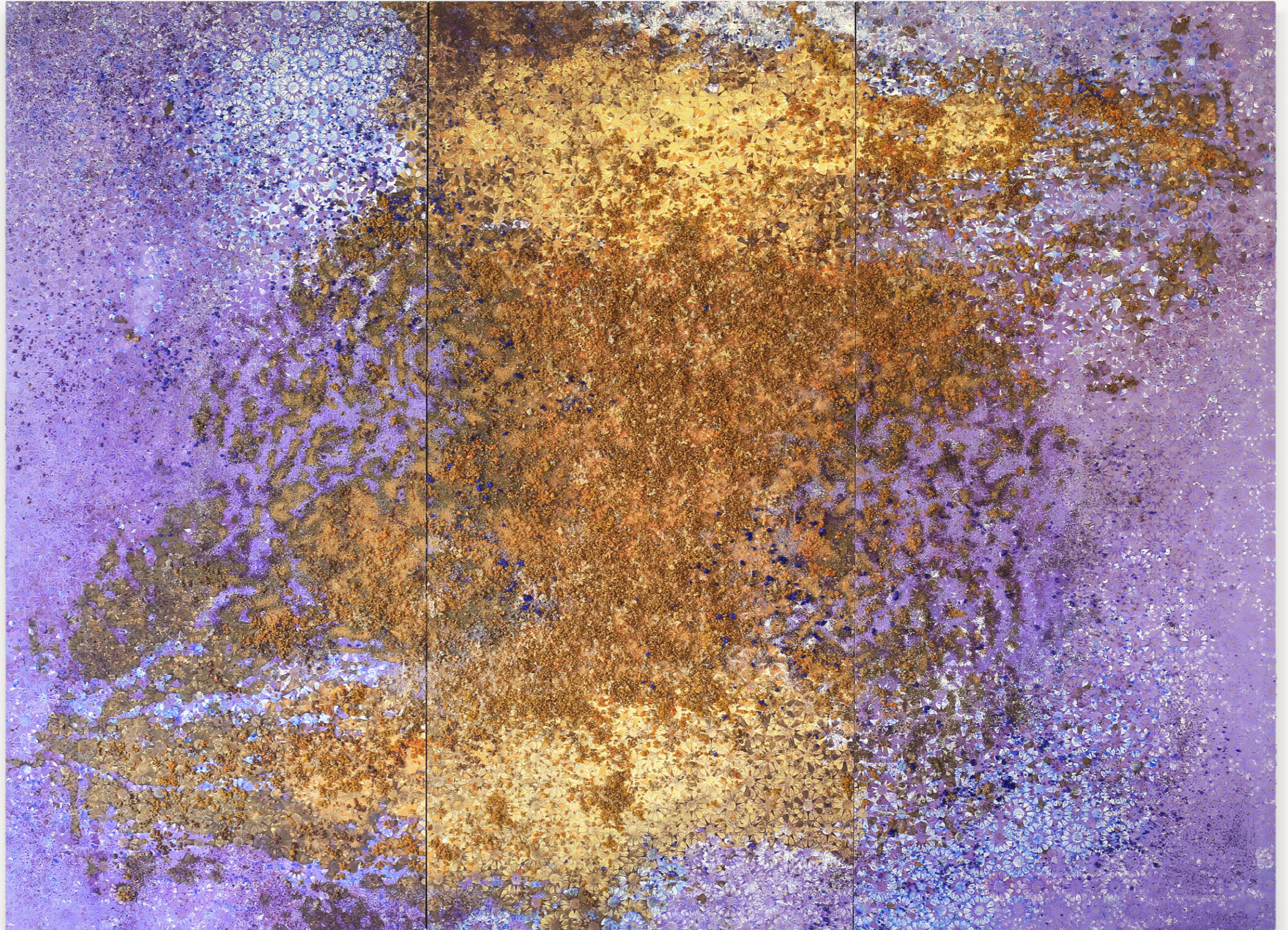
acrylic paint, pigments, plaster, salt and gravel on wood panel
62.2 x 62.2 in | 158 x 158 cm



White Silver Square #1, 2017

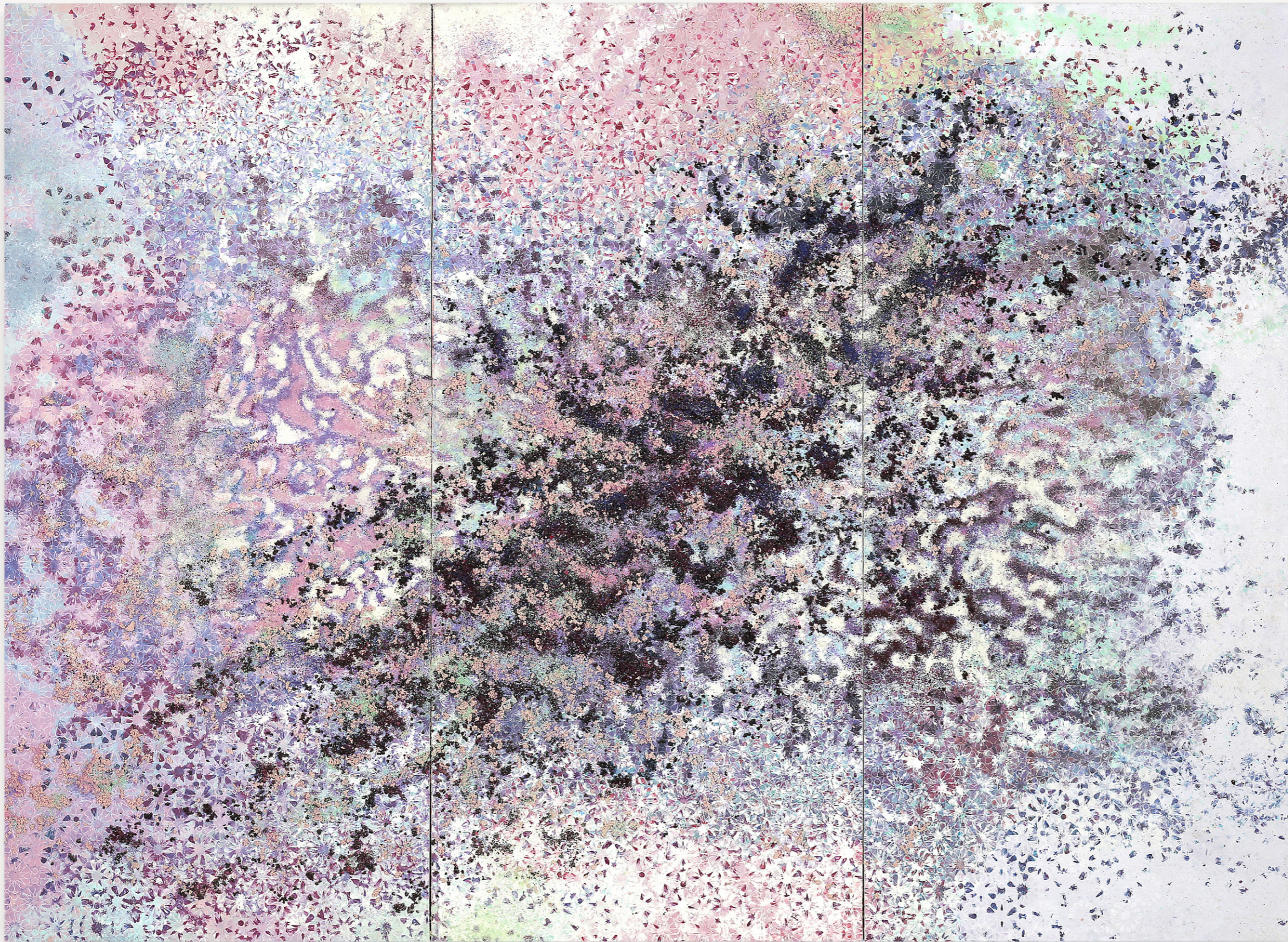
acrylic paint, khol, salt and plaster on wood panel
62.2 x 62.2 in | 158 x 158 cm





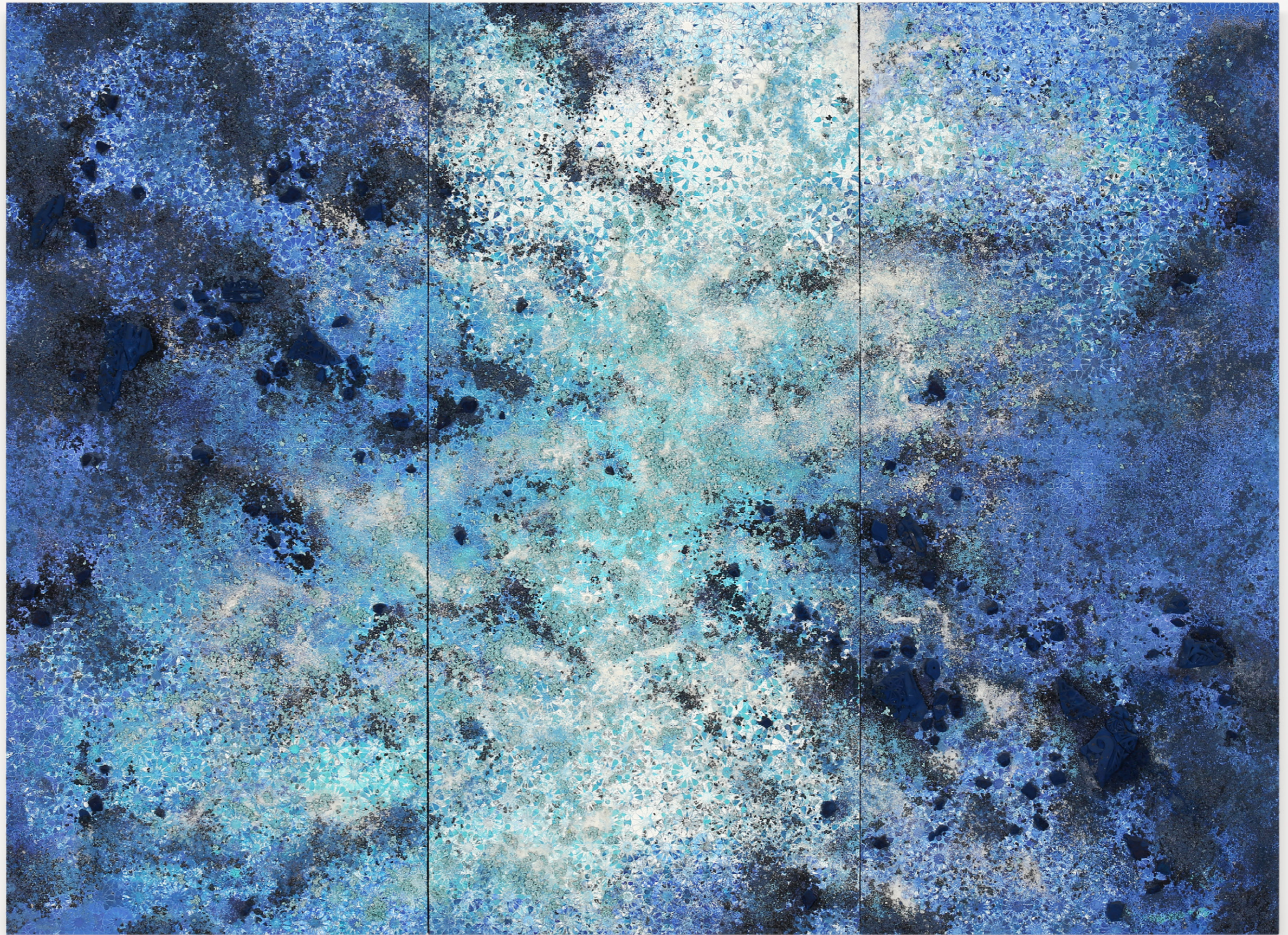
Purple Gold Trio #1, 2017

acrylic paint, pigments, salt and gravel on wood panel
Triptych: 75.2 x 102.8 in | 191 x 261 cm



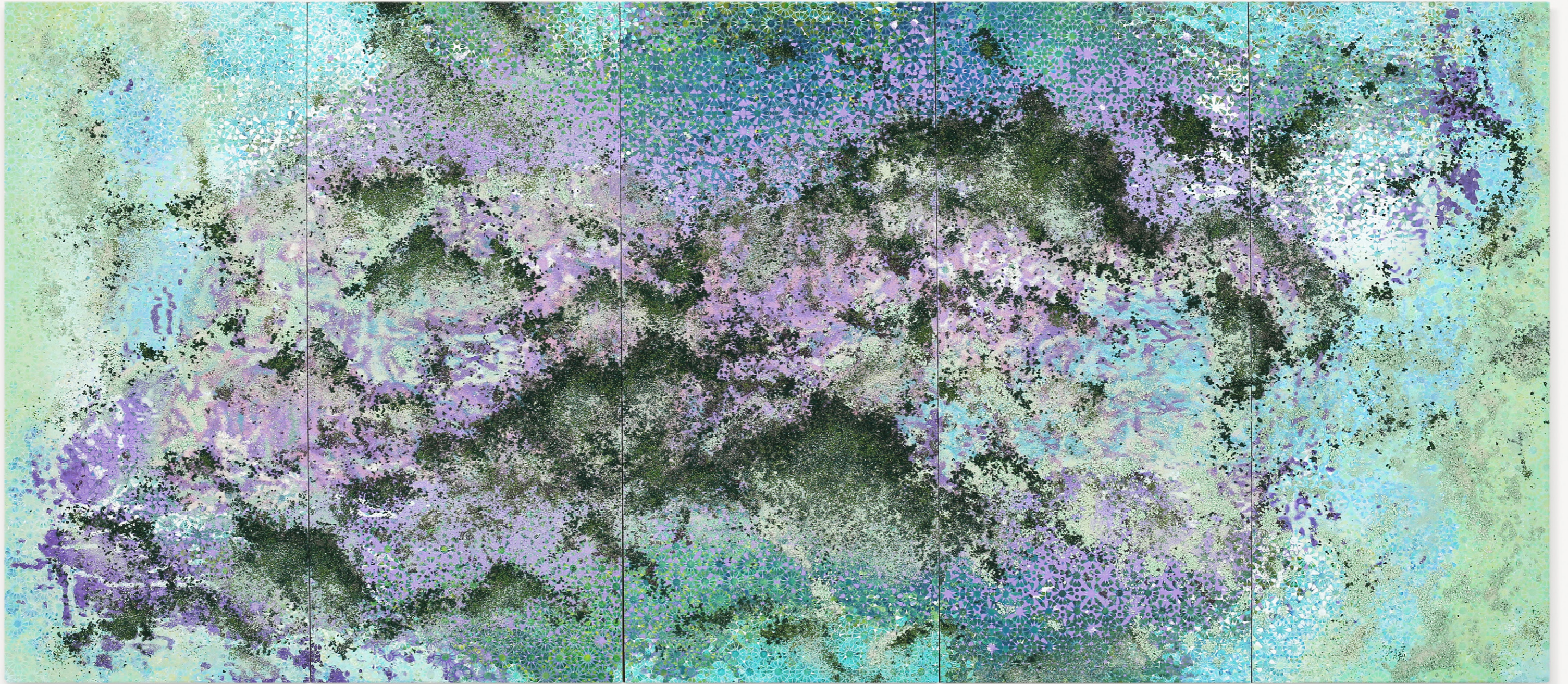
Pink, Purple Trio #1, 2017

acrylic paint, pigments, salt and gravel on wood panel
Triptych: 75.1 x 102 in | 191 x 261 cm



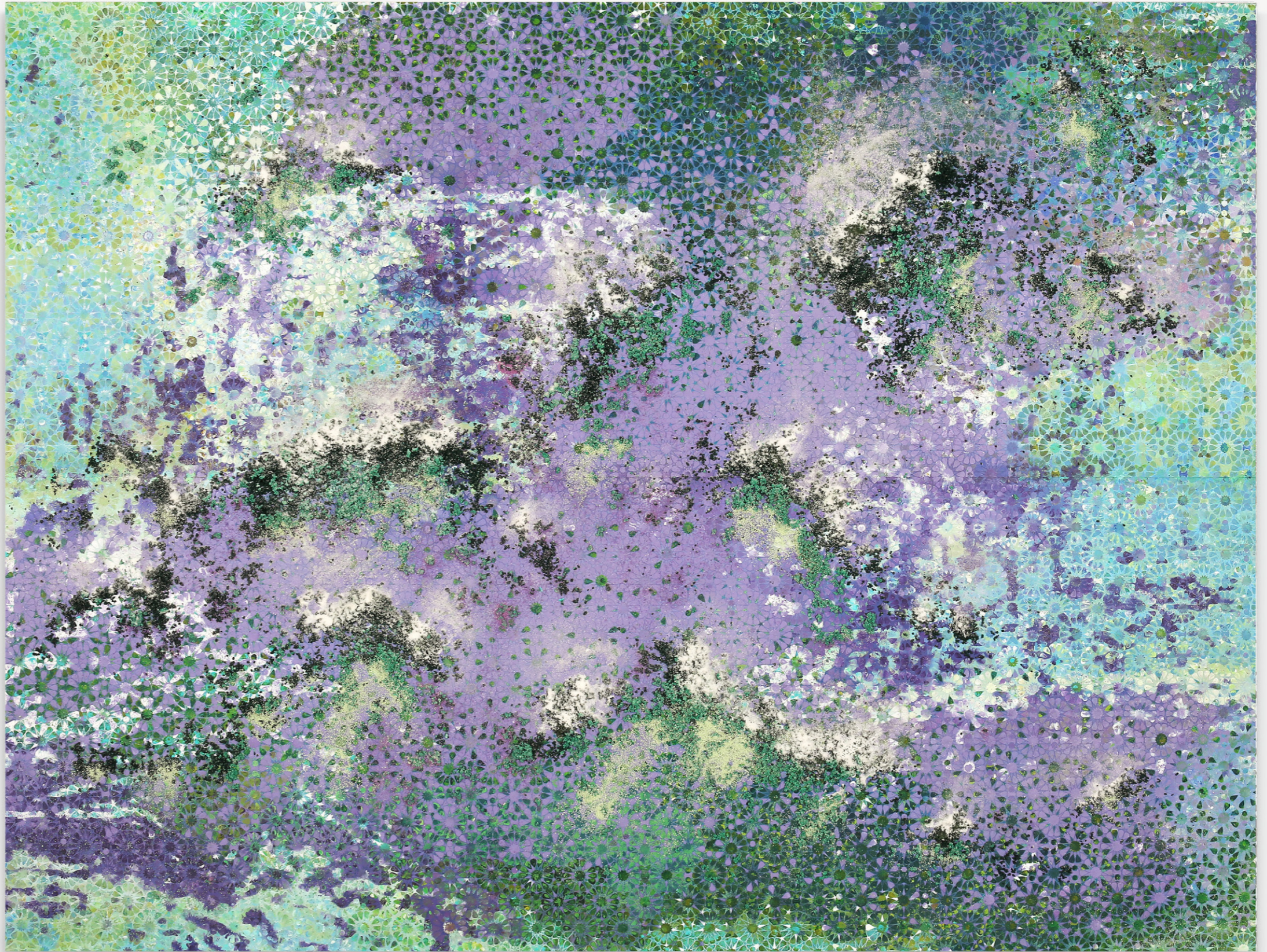
Blue and White Trio #2, 2017

acrylic paint, Tuareg indigo, salt and gravel on wood panel
Triptych: 74.4 x 100.1 in | 189 x 256 cm



Green and Purple 5 panel #1, 2017

acrylic paint, pigments, salt and gravel on wood panel
Pentptych: 74.8 x 171.3 in. - 190 x 435 cm



Green Purple Rectangle #1, 2017

acrylic paint, pigments, salt and gravel on wood panel
69.3 x 90.6 in | 176 x 230 cm



"It is necessary to feel the painting rather than look at it, since the painting should be from an almost organic material."

Serge Poliakoff



Golden Totem #1, 2017

acrylic paint, gold leaf, camel remains and gravel on wood panel
86.6 x 47.2 x 27.6 in | 220 x 120 x 70 cm



White Totem #1, 2017
acrylic paint, salt and minerals on wood panel
86.6 x 47.2 x 27.6 in | 220 x 120 x 70 cm

Biography & Exhibitions

Yasmina Alaoui is of French and Moroccan descent, born in New York in 1977. She studied Fine Arts at the Carrousel du Louvre in Paris and acquired a BA in Sculpture from the College of William and Mary. She currently lives in New York city and exhibits internationally.

The underlying themes behind all her works directly deal with her experiences of multicultural upbringing and aim to bridge extremes by embracing opposites: secular and holy, classical and contemporary, order and chaos, repulsion and attraction. She is known to create complex and intricate visual works using a wide variety of techniques, which she combines in an authentic manner.

Yasmina has collaborated with photographer Marco Guerra on the "Tales of beauty" and "1001 Dreams" series, which have been collected and exhibited internationally since 2003.

- 2017 Solo Show, Opera Gallery Dubai, Dubai, UAE
- 2016 Solo Show, Opera Gallery Paris, Paris, France
- Moumental Sculpture Untitled 2016, COP22 Project, curated by Mahi Binebine, Jardin des Arts, Marrakech, Morocco commissioned
- Not New Now, curated by Reem Fadda, Marrakech Biennale, Marrakech, Morocco:
- Empreinte, group show, curated by Mahi Binebine, Musée de la Palmeraie, Marrakech, Morocco; Sans-Titres, L'Blassa, Marrakech, Morocco
- 2015 Americana Art Festival; Soho: Collection, group show, Allouche Gallery, New York, USA
- 2014 Group Show, Leila Heller Gallery, New York, USA
- Inaugural Group Show, Musée Mohammed VI d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Rabat, Morocco
- 2013 Jamm Arts, group show, curated by Lulu Al Sabah, Dubai, UAE
- Calligrafitti, group show, curated by Jeffrey Deitch, Leilla Heller Gallery, New York, USA
- Syriart, group show, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, France
- 2012 Biennale OFF, group show, Marrakech Biennale, Marrakech, Morocco
- Solo show, Opera Gallery New York, New York, USA





*“Art must be born from the material
and spirituality must borrow the
language of the material.”*

Jean Dubuffet

Credits

I would like to thank Marco Guerra for helping in the making of this project and Gilles Dyan for his continuous support and belief in my art and the entire Opera Gallery team for all their hard work.

Yasmina Alaoui, 2017



OPERA GALLERY

791 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10065 | T +1 646 707 3299 | nyc@operagallery.com | operagallery.com