



CHAE SUNG-PIL

HISTOIRE
DE
BLEU

OPERA GALLERY

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Exhibition 15 November - 5 December 2017

Opera Gallery New York is proud to present an exhibition of paintings by Korean artist Chae Sung-Pil. Chae is often called an 'organic artist' due to his use of soil, raw pigments and other natural materials. Rather than just using these as a simple medium, he aims to emphasize subjects such as the return to nature, the process of life, the ad hoc and the coincidental fate through the use of soil.

Chae Sung-Pil, who currently lives and works in Paris has come into the spotlight in France's art world by virtue of his philosophy of constant inquiry into the fundamentals, and his in-depth representation of the beauty of oriental spaces. Through the medium of pigment and soil he attempts to express eternal hope and purity, hence evoking Dubuffet's Art Brut on the one hand and Yves Klein's heritage on the other. This thread between nature, art history and his Korean roots really broadens the artistic arena in which he plays, and solidifies Chae's unique place in the contemporary art stage.

For this exhibition, the artist presents 'The History of Blue'. The color blue was used throughout the history of mankind - from antiquity to present - to represent certain cultural meanings. Through his reflection on the color and its historical and cultural contexts he has built a 'new world of blue' - an ideal that lives beyond borders or boundaries. Much like his previous project - 'Land of Anonymity' - Chae creates a world that is anchored in history but is simultaneously timeless and universal.

In these 15 new works exhibited in Opera Gallery New York, the artist provides each viewer with an opportunity to look back on their own connotations and memories of blue. Furthermore, the viewers will be given an experience of coming close to the world of origin pursued in 'Land of Anonymity' and revisited in this new world of blue.

AMOS FRAJND
Director
Opera Gallery New York

GILLES DYAN
Founder and Chairman
Opera Gallery Group



Detail of *Histoire de bleu* (170418), page 14

FERTILE SERENDIPITY

Behind some of the greatest discoveries or inventions in art lie some very ordinary domestic coincidences. Kandinsky and his famous upside-down portrait that led him to abstraction; Lee Miller accidentally opening the door to Man Ray's photography lab, thus creating an effect of 'solarisation' to the film being developed...

A similar thing happened to artist Chae Sung-Pil. While working on a tableau in their small Parisian apartment, his wife accidentally spilled a bowl of soup. The liquid spilled onto the canvas, leaving the mark of several delicate drops. "This is how I will paint", the artist thought. And the entire lifework of Chae Sung-Pil was thereafter built around this singular and subtle approach to the medium. Artistic skill rubbed shoulders with the accidental and unforeseen, like an event awaiting the association of a more thoughtful form of passivity.

The beauty of the serendipitous, the dance of myriads of elements, the evocative power of earth, the irrepressible feeling of nostalgia, vibrations of colour, a fascination for minutia, the love of poetry and calligraphy: all of this is at the root of Chae Sung-Pil's art.

The artist was born and raised on a small island in Korea, in a place where nature was preserved and children played carefree... A joyous and untroubled life that included a caring grandfather who initiated the boy in the art of poetry and calligraphy... A large family: the artist is the youngest of eight children. His mother made sure life at home was peaceful, her nightly prayers

invoking the moon: "May peace and harmony reign in our family"; a bowl of water left as an offering.

As a teenager, Sung-Pil went off to study Fine Arts in Seoul. Upon arrival, he discovered a sprawling metropolis. The young and sophisticated peers he mixed with constantly reminded him of his rural roots; this is where the artist started practicing a form of retreat and solitude and where he understood the importance of keeping in touch with earth, a deep relationship with nature that guides him to this day in his most important life decisions.

As for art, Chae Sung-Pil relies on a Taoist vision of nature and its five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal and water). These five changing (mutable) elements, perceived like various phases of transitional stages of a process of mutual conceiving.

Sung-Pil has written on this very subject: "*I give the eye the opportunity to perceive landscapes (matérialisme) based on a poetic, pictorial analogy of the way nature itself conceives*". But also: "*Earth and water create a space-source which, from a visual perspective, gives birth to land, landscapes; a field of essential riches*".

The space of the canvas: four sides, four cardinal points.

Two different time periods merge: the longstanding time of nature, geology and sedimentation; the swiftness of painting a tableau.



Detail of *Histoire de bleu* (170117), page 30

The easel is the wood; the ink or binder is the water; the colour is the fire and the finely crushed clay is the earth; the silver hue or pearly power symbolizes metal.

His art is both figurative and abstract, metaphorical and literal: Sung-Pil paints "the earth" with soil he has gathered himself, before finely crushing it and mixing with a binder and pigments. This is also what lends his paintings such an ethereal aspect: the matter is sublimated, obliterated. No impasto here, no muddy or opaque surfaces like with other *matérialisme* painters.

And don't forget the light, attracted to the canvas thanks to the many silver reflections of powdered pearl used as the foundation of the artist's compositions.

A series of blue tableaux. The colour of the sky or a water matrix.

Sung-Pil never paints swaths of colour, nor does he use a traditional easel, but rather several inclined canvases so that his paintings can unfold slowly, in an almost controlled manner.

The artist: he is the one who accompanies, who offers and guides but who never completes. Only nature completes things. As such, the verb "to paint", for Chae Sung-Pil, is not conjugated according to the traditional "I paint, you paint, he paints", etc... but rather as a reflexive verb "I paint myself". The tableau "paints itself". This is no artist's escapism but rather the very waiver of the

artist's privilege; more like a conscience than something that's accomplished through him and his materials.

Sometimes Chae Sung-Pil's paintings ripple like an agitated sea or like leaves floating in the wind; sometimes they flow in delicate streams of dusty soil during a sudden storm. We're reminded of fields, a lock of hair, an ocean bed, a forest or desert... All is wide open. The materials run free while powerful strokes, recurring themes and patters repeatedly suggest a specific intent, a conscience behind the art.

Contemplative.

In his heart, Sung-Pil roams the earth, the matrix, the material vestiges of his childhood. Through his work, the artist seeks the perfect stroke, fertile serendipity.

DAVID ROSENBERG

Beirut, March 2017

THE SYMPHONY OF BLUE

CHAE SUNG-PIL
THE HISTORY OF BLUE



1. THE PROJECT OF 'THE MIRROR' AND 'THE LAMP,' *THE HISTORY OF BLUE.*

Art is a mirror that reflects 'the world's reality as it is.' At the same time, it is a lamp that sheds light on 'the ideal reality that is supposed to exist.' Both of these roles attributed to art - the mirror and the lamp - are inextricably linked to each other: when art reveals the mere brutality and emptiness of the existing reality, the audience goes beyond the tough surface and somehow senses an underlying ideal within the artwork itself; and when art depicts an ideal world of flawless purity, the audience reads the artist's message behind his placid work, fiercely criticising reality as it is. Accordingly, the role of art sails back and forth over a line drawn between the mirror and the lamp. The audience stands on this borderline, contemplating and fathoming the essence of the human, the life, and the reality.

Chae Sung-Pil, the artist of the border, freely navigates both sides of the borderlines separating East and West, representation and abstraction, absoluteness and expression. This time, he conceived a new, ambitious project - *The History of Blue*. Chae reflects on the present world from the perspective of the cultural history of the colour "blue." He creates the future of blue in art by going beyond the boundary of conventional blue and presenting a new blue meant to integrate our reality.

2. THE LAND OF REALITY AND IDEALS, 'THE LAND OF ANONYMITY'

Chae's canvases materialise the ideal world that should legitimately exist in reality. He creates an original and primitive world based on the five basic elements of the human being and the world - fire (火), water (水), wood (木), metal (金), and earth (土). Earth and water naturally flow on the canvas, its background covered with silver powders, which represents metal and fire. In the midst of this flow, the strokes of the sorghum brush (wood, 木) that he makes himself create the firmament and the landscape. Earth (土), the very foundation of civilisation, is represented by soil collected from his ideal spaces - including his motherland - then filtered and refined. Mixed with pigments, soil turns into colours that are loaded with his spirit and passion. Water (水), which gives life to all creation, crystallises human civilisations while constructing a world that flows naturally on the canvas alongside a 'silver' light of purity.

Chae's world is not created by a one and only creator with absolute power. He waits for the material to 'spontaneously' spill down over the canvas and harden so that it can create an original world by itself. And then his sorghum brush, metonymy for wood and nature itself, completes the ideal and primitive world. Even though the pain coming out of his journey towards the origin and realistic restraints occasionally comes through in his works, all of his creations not only pursue the essence and ideal of nature itself, they also reveal it. They expand its territory beyond the will and thoughts of the artist.

The world created on Chae's canvas is hence exquisitely beautiful and peaceful, yet still in harmony with creative tension and motion.

The archaic nature and the world materialised in his work are 'The Land of Anonymity.' 'The Land of Anonymity' is home to all of us. Through his work, we experience the ideal world that 'is supposed to exist' in this 'existing' reality. We realise that the ideal world is our own and we peacefully decide to remain in it. Chae's art is just as visual as auditory. Most of his artworks have their voice and echo. We sense the resonance in each of them, both visually and physically. Then we can communicate with art. All of us then realise that we are the owners of a world newly created through listening and dialogue. We soar up to the 'supposed-to-exist' world that materialises on the canvas.

3. BEYOND THE POLITICS OF HUES

Politics of hues use colours to create the dichotomies between civilisation and barbarism, high (上) and low (下), sanctity (聖) and mundanity (俗), greatness (貴) and shallowness (賤). Historically, the colour has been used as a symbol of political, social and cultural ideology. Blue is the most representative, symbolic colour that was used for political dynamics. The ancient Celts, from the southeast area of Germany, are known for their belligerence. They invaded and subdued Britannia, Rome and even Anatolia. Celt warriors painted their face blue before fighting, as the colour was regarded as a source of power. But the Celts lost their dominance

after they surrendered to Caesar in the first century B.C. Nevertheless, the blue of Celt warriors, alongside with green, remained stigmatised in the Roman Empire as colours of barbarians, fear and threat. Blue went through continuous transformation in its interpretations -- from the colour of sanctity in Marianism, to the colour of asceticism during the Reformation, from the colour of freedom in industrial development and during the French Revolution to the colour of love in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, and finally a popular colour thanks to the blue jeans manufacturers.

In Chae's work, the world of conventional blue gives way to a new world of blue. The various blues embodying these dichotomous ideologies seem to be carrying the previous world away in a funeral bier. The vacancy is then filled by a new world of blue that may have existed since ancient times and is now revealing its true self -- much more intense and powerful than its predecessor. Chae's *The History of Blue* embodies division, exclusion, healing and coexistence, through new and various formative expressions. The history of imperialism has been about taking away others' territory, dividing and ruling over their land on their behalf. Natives underwent oppression and exile, threatened on their homeland, taken as slaves and prisoners. Blue not only represents the history of empires but also of the native people. For them, blue stands for as the bruises of torture as well as their hope for a better future. The new blue allows the victims of conventional blue to consider reinstatement. Each petal forms a wholeness, as they dream of 'the old future.' They do not merely dream about a beautiful, new land of hope

but to win back the pre-existing land of life. The future, the past and the present coexist within a single world.

Chae's new artworks fathom the flow of history through a single colour, "blue," which has been used in the art history since ancient times and up to the present days. In most cases, artworks have been tested and consumed by reality and society. As such, colour, one of the crucial components in painting, was chosen and used not by the artists' subjective taste, characteristics, or preference but by the authorities, who were both the producers and the consumers of art for a long time, in an implicit or explicit manner. Likewise, the history of blue also fluctuates when encountering turbulence in the world's historical flow -- such as the territorial expansion of ancient empires, the dominance of Christianity or religious Reformation, to name a few. In other words, it was not about the intrinsic nature or the meaning of the hue itself, but rather about the historical perspective under which blue was used: from the colour of barbarism and violence to the colour of sanctity and abstinence. Chae Sung-Pil tries to reproduce the 'supposed-to-exist' history in the 'existing' and 'objectively definite' history of blue through addition and subtraction. Accordingly, the gap between 'the existing mirror' and 'the supposed-to-exist lamp' closes and become extinct, letting reality and ideals coexist and cohabit.

4. BALANCE AND COEXISTENCE, 'THE LAND OF BLUE'

Chae's *History of Blue* is like a cultural history told through painting rather than by language. Historians

of Postmodernism have highlighted cultural history as a valuable methodology for historical research, instead of political history which focuses on kings and heroes. This approach rewrites and rediscovers the history of the whole as it tears apart the dichotomy between self and others; it reinstates otherness, neglected by traditional historians. Just like Postmodern history reads the whole history of humankind through a cultural perspective, Chae's work also paves a new way beyond the history of hue, with a profound insight.

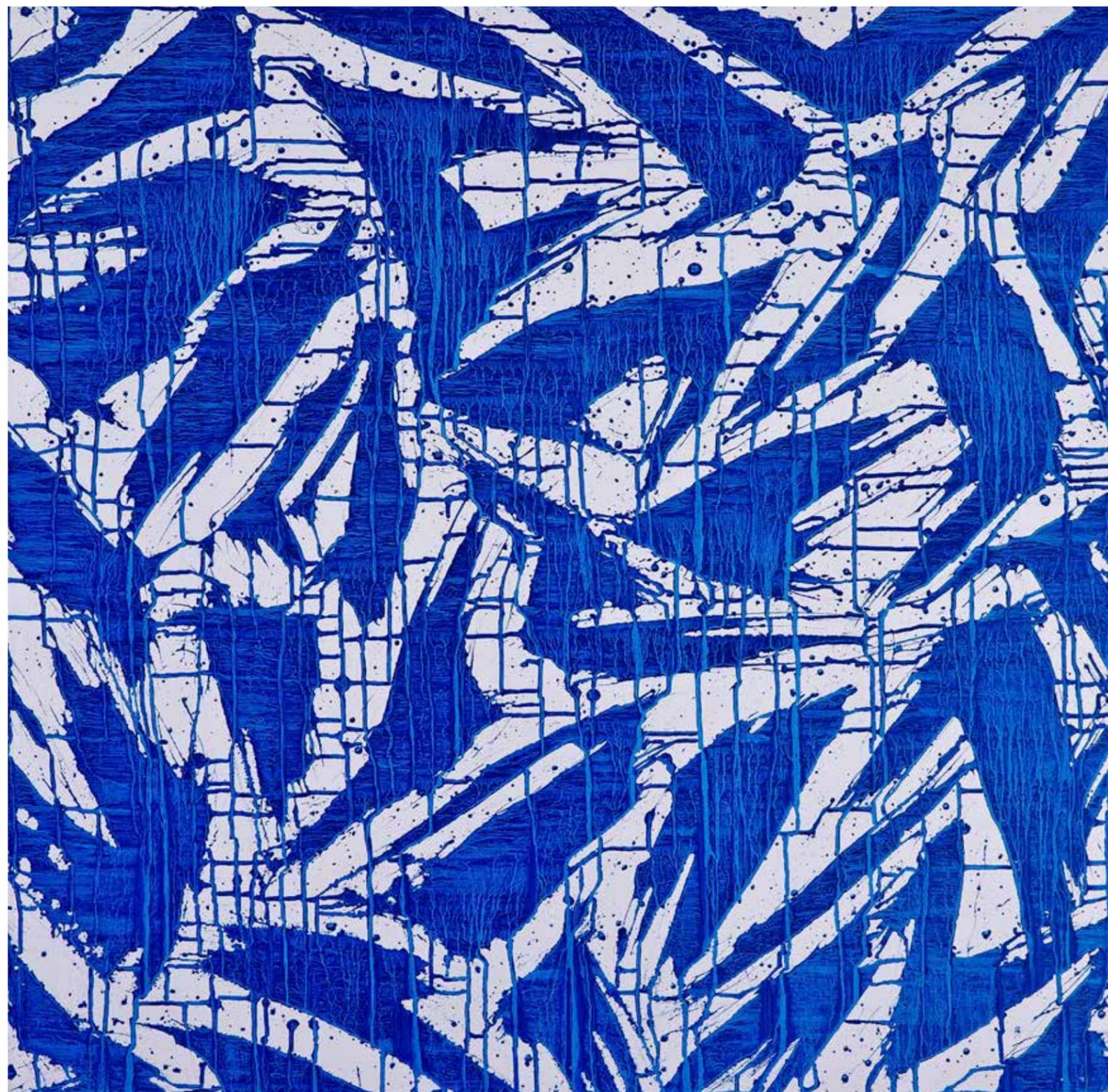
Chae's reflection on the 'pre-existing' history of blue rules out any regression to the gloomy history of the past. Rather, it pushes forward with an ideal and righteous history of blue. The fifty-five series of *The History of Blue* dismantles the dichotomies spanning cultural history as read by Postmodernists. Regardless of political or economic interests, the artist recreates a new world of blue, 'the Land of Anonymity,' in the place where the pre-existing primitive blue once was and went. Chae's *The History of Blue* is an anonymous land for blue only, which is historical and trans-historical at the same time. There, each of us may reside in harmony. Through his previous artworks, we could foresee the primitive and original world that 'the Land of Anonymity' pursues. In Chae's new series, the world is being stated under new and diverse forms of blue, a symbol of hope and freedom.

HAESUNG, CHUNG
Seoul, March 2017

ARTWORKS

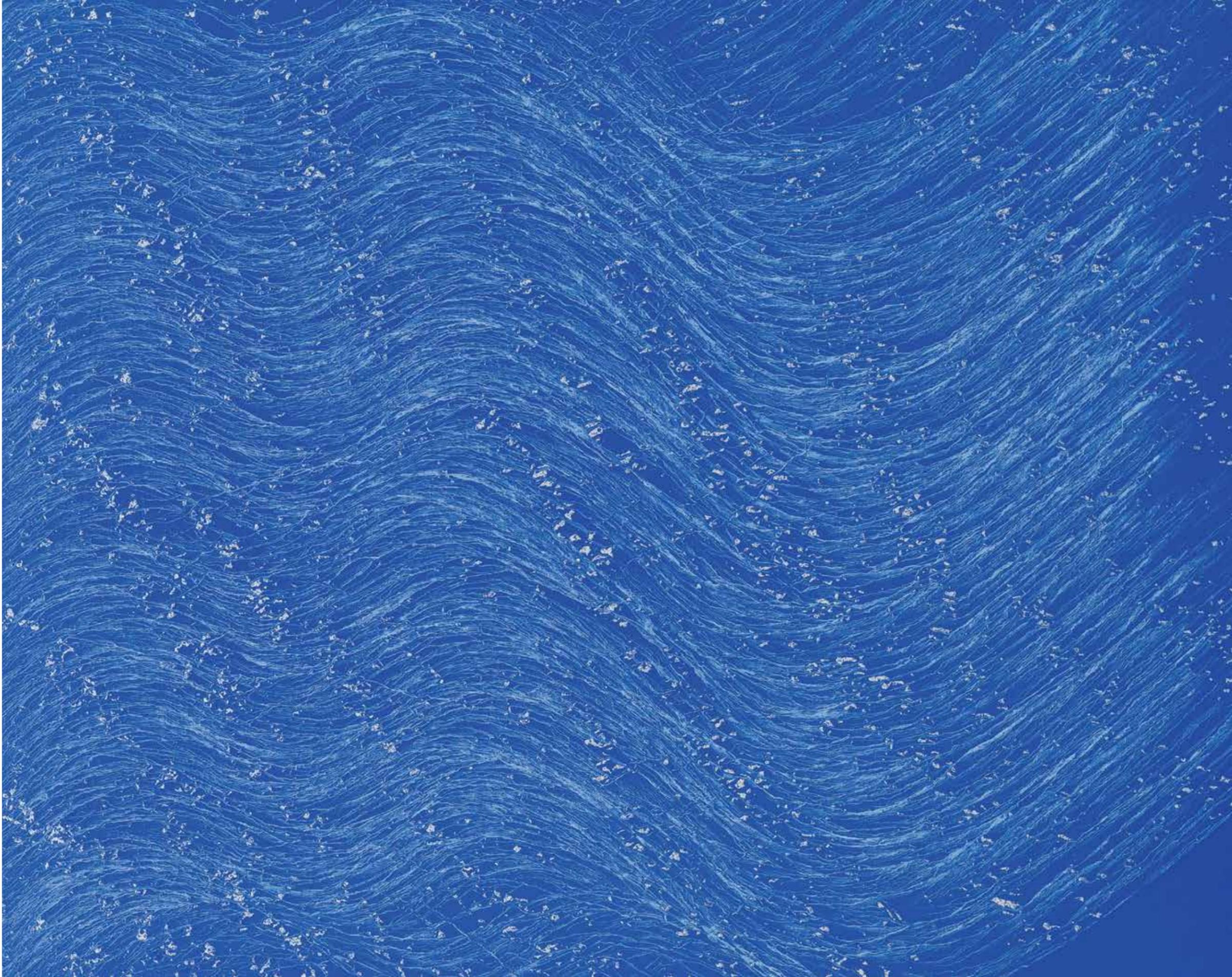
Histoire de bleu (170418)
2017

Natural pigments on canvas
39.4 x 39.4 in - 100 x 100 cm



Histoire de bleu (170109)
2017

Natural pigments on canvas
51.2 x 63.8 in - 130 x 162 cm



Histoire de bleu (170511)
2017

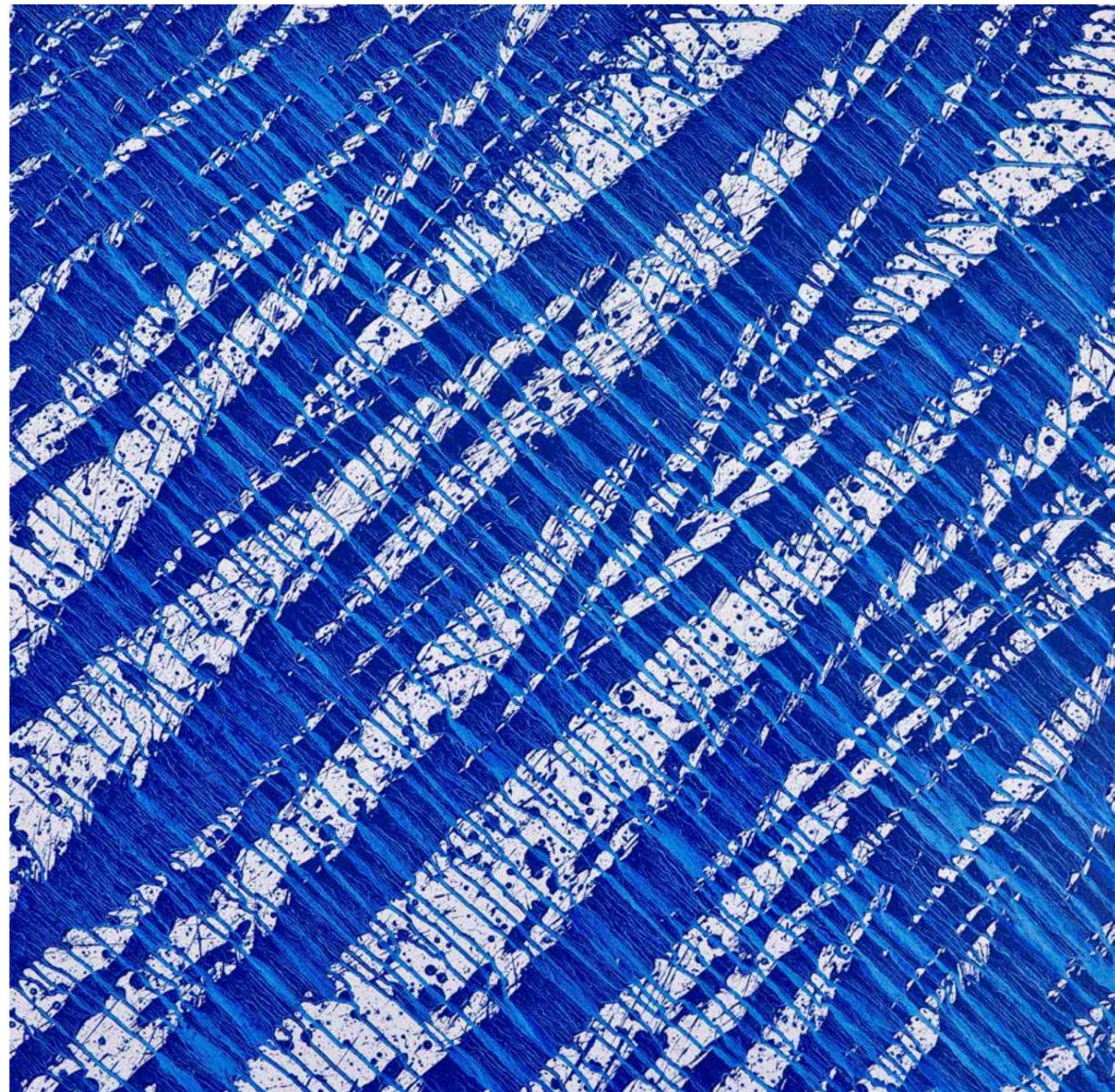
Natural pigments on canvas
78.7 x 63 in - 200 x 160 cm



Histoire de bleu (170409)

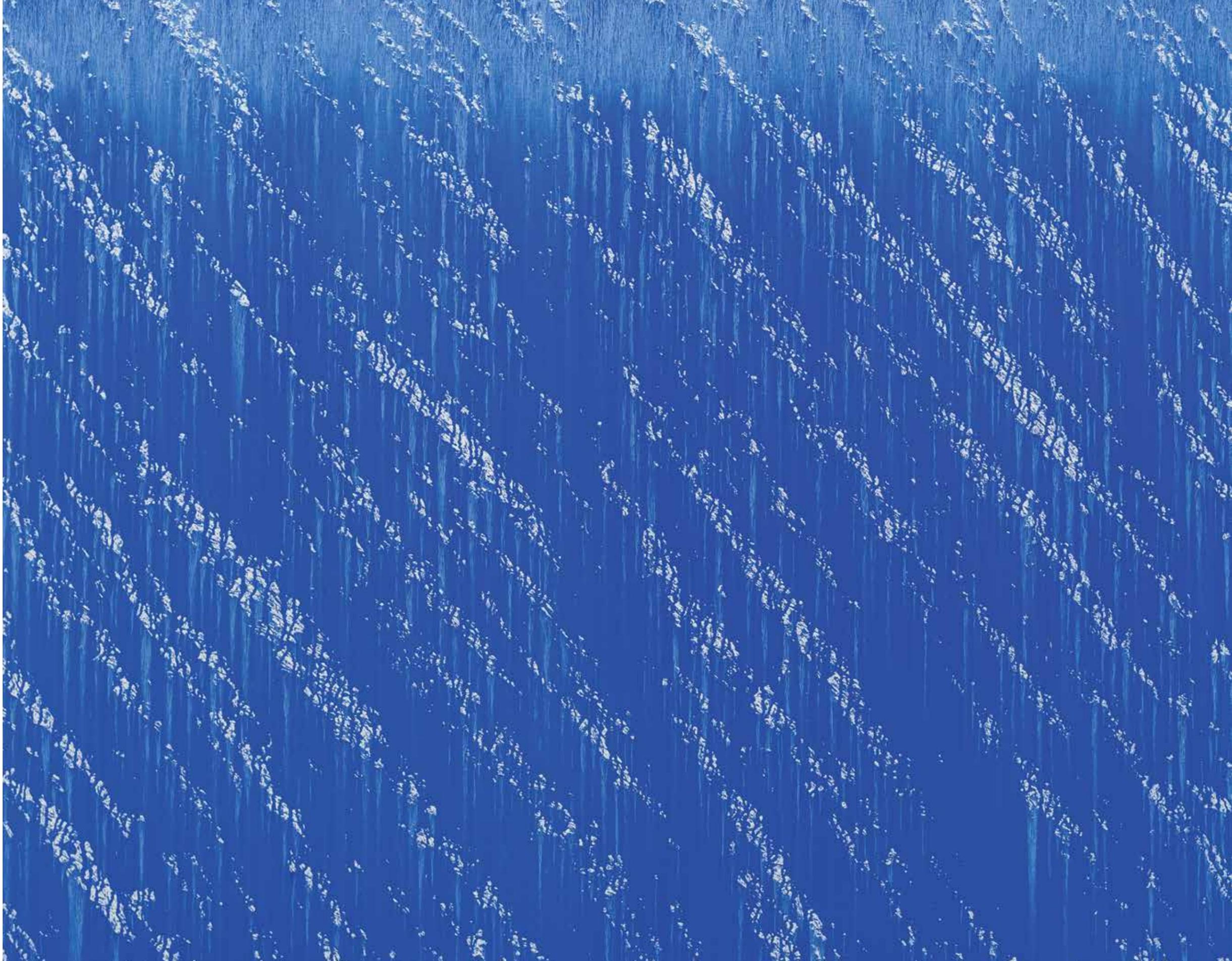
2017

Natural pigments on canvas
39.4 x 39.4 in - 100 x 100 cm



Histoire de bleu (170106)
2017

Natural pigments on canvas
51.2 x 63.8 in - 130 x 162 cm





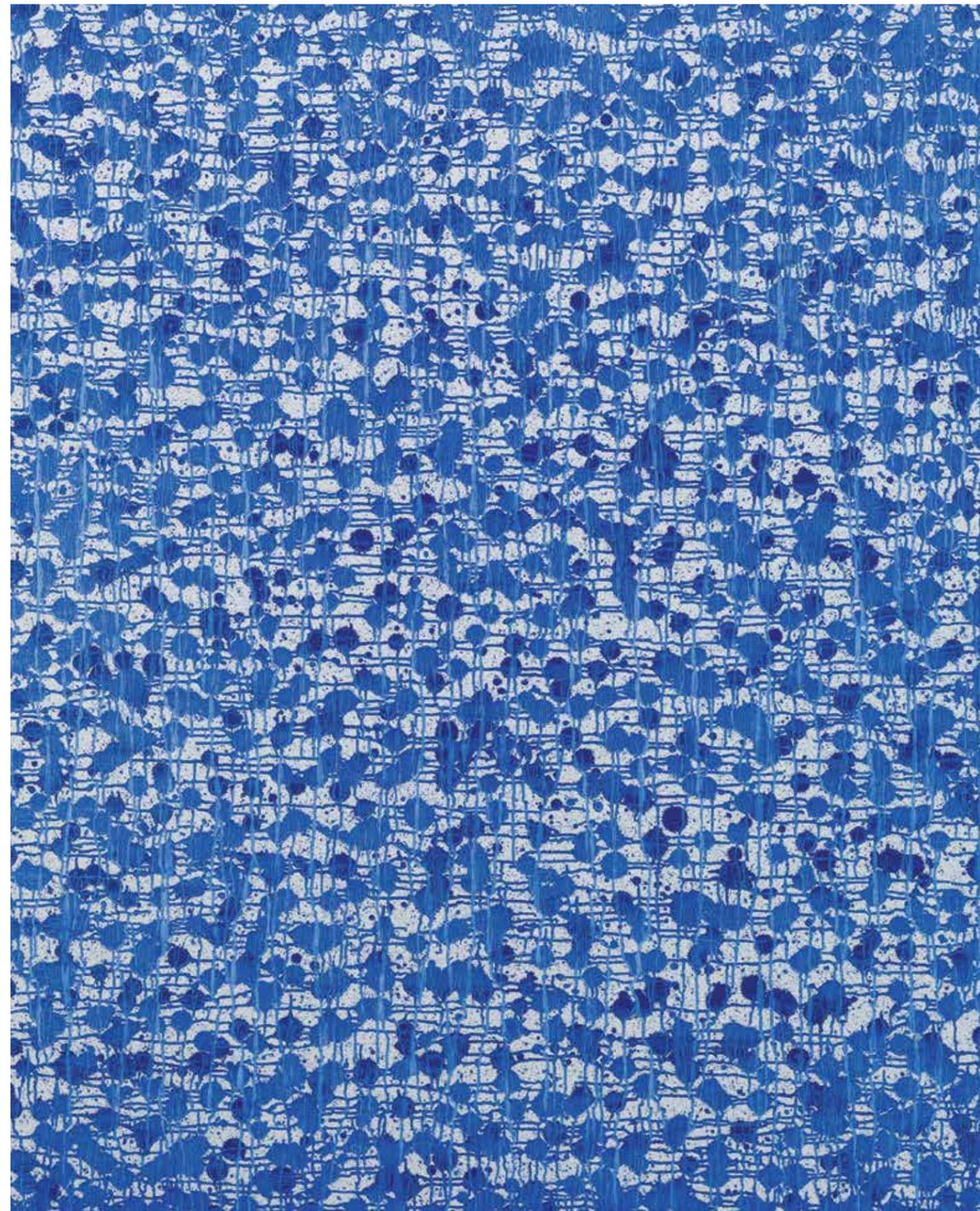
Histoire de bleu (161011)

2016

Natural pigments on canvas
51.2 x 51.2 in - 130 x 130 cm

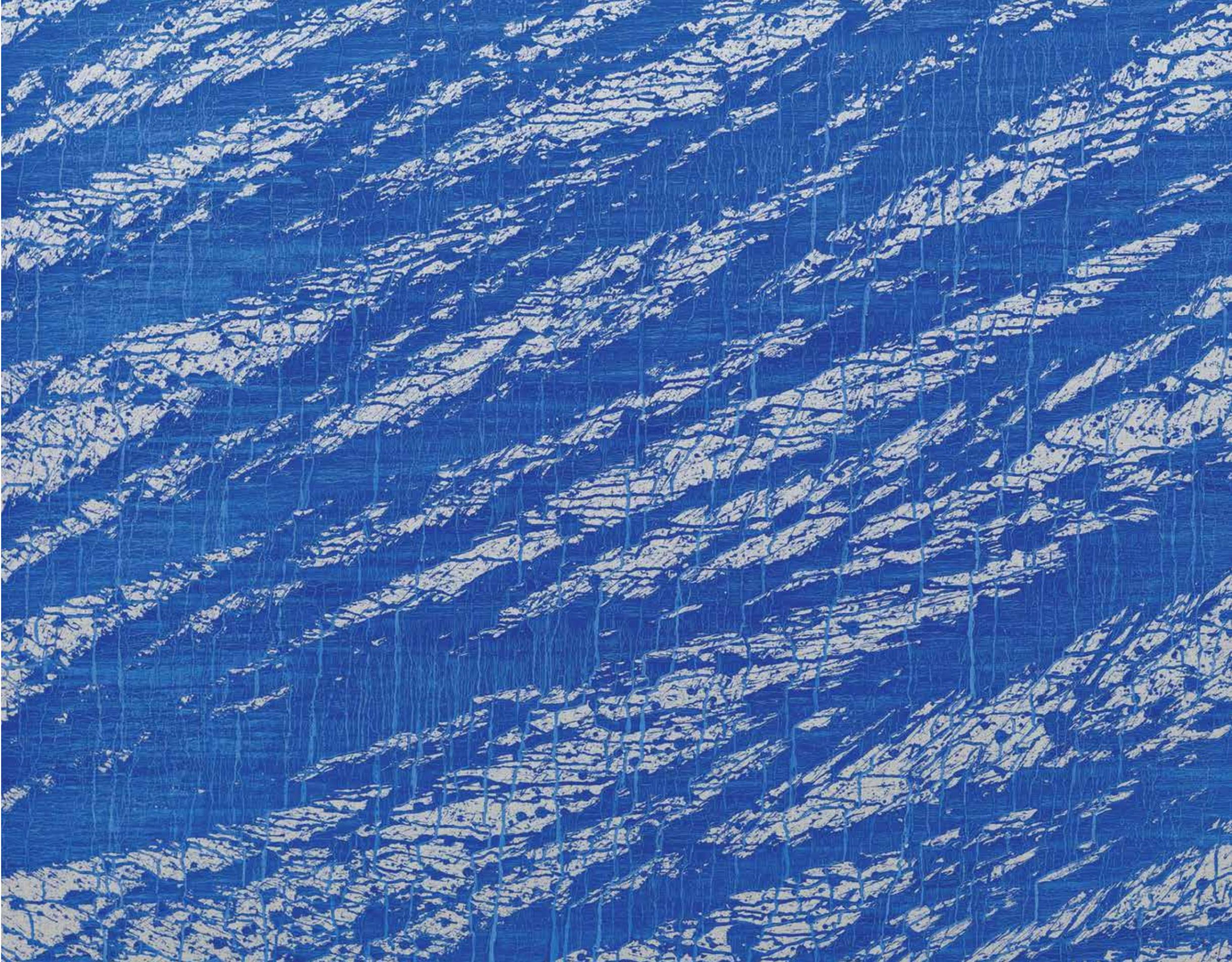
Histoire de bleu (170113)
2017

Natural pigments on canvas
63.8 x 51.2 in - 162 x 130 cm



Histoire de bleu (170103)
2017

Natural pigments on canvas
51.2 x 63.8 in - 130 x 162 cm



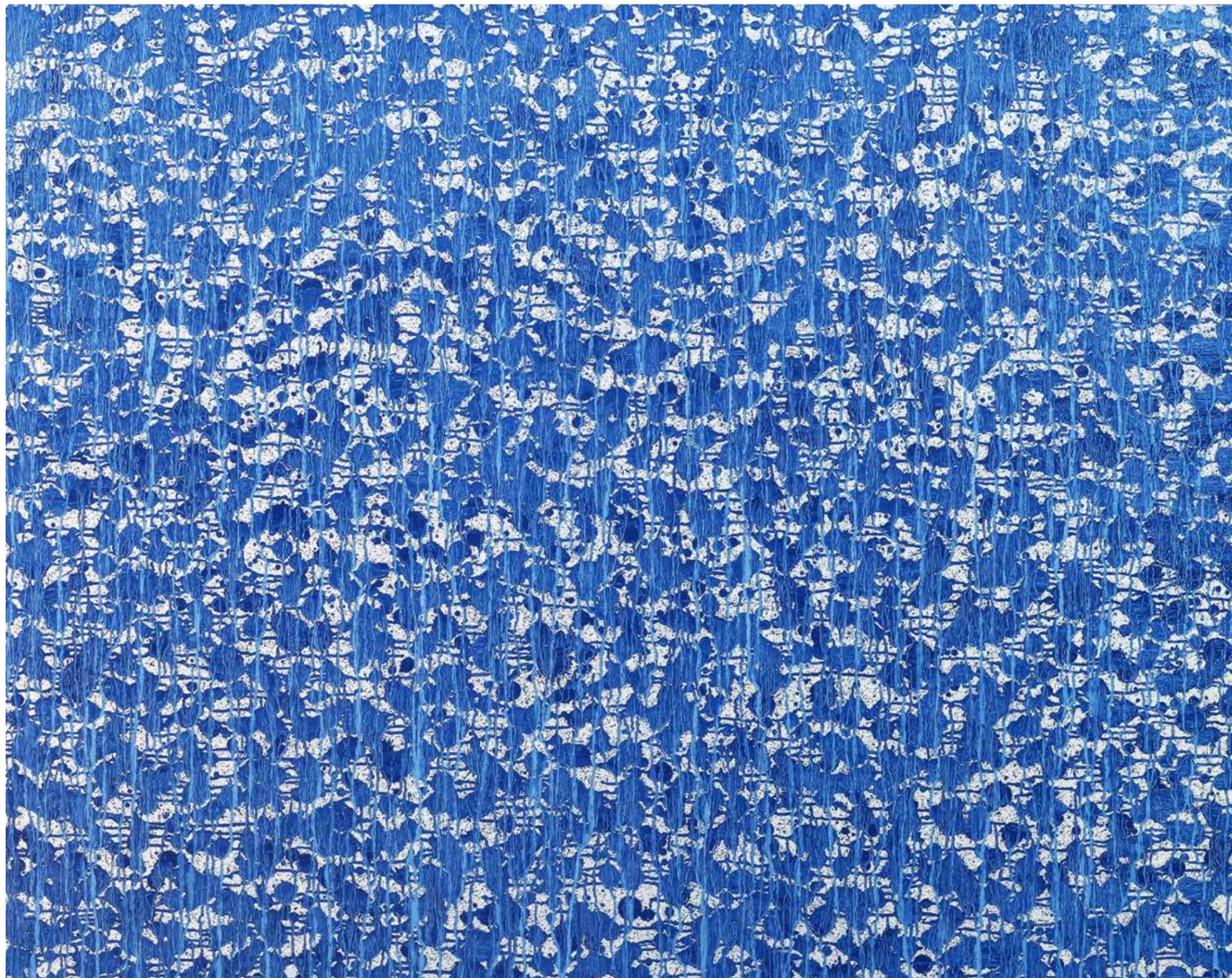
Histoire de bleu (170321)
2017

Natural pigments on canvas
78.7 x 63 in - 200x160 cm



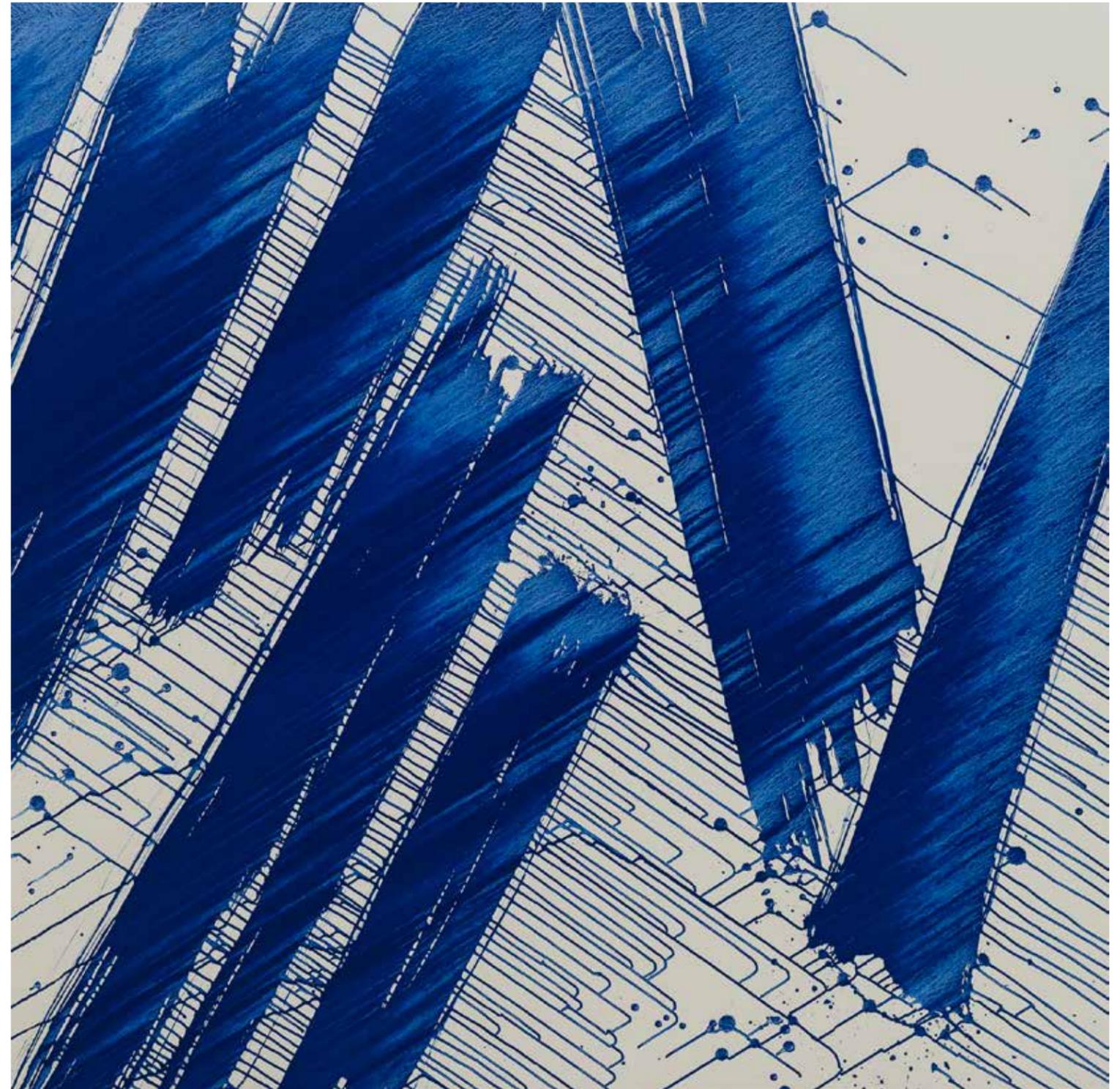
Histoire de bleu (170117)
2017

Natural pigments on canvas
51.2 x 63.8 in - 130 x 162 cm



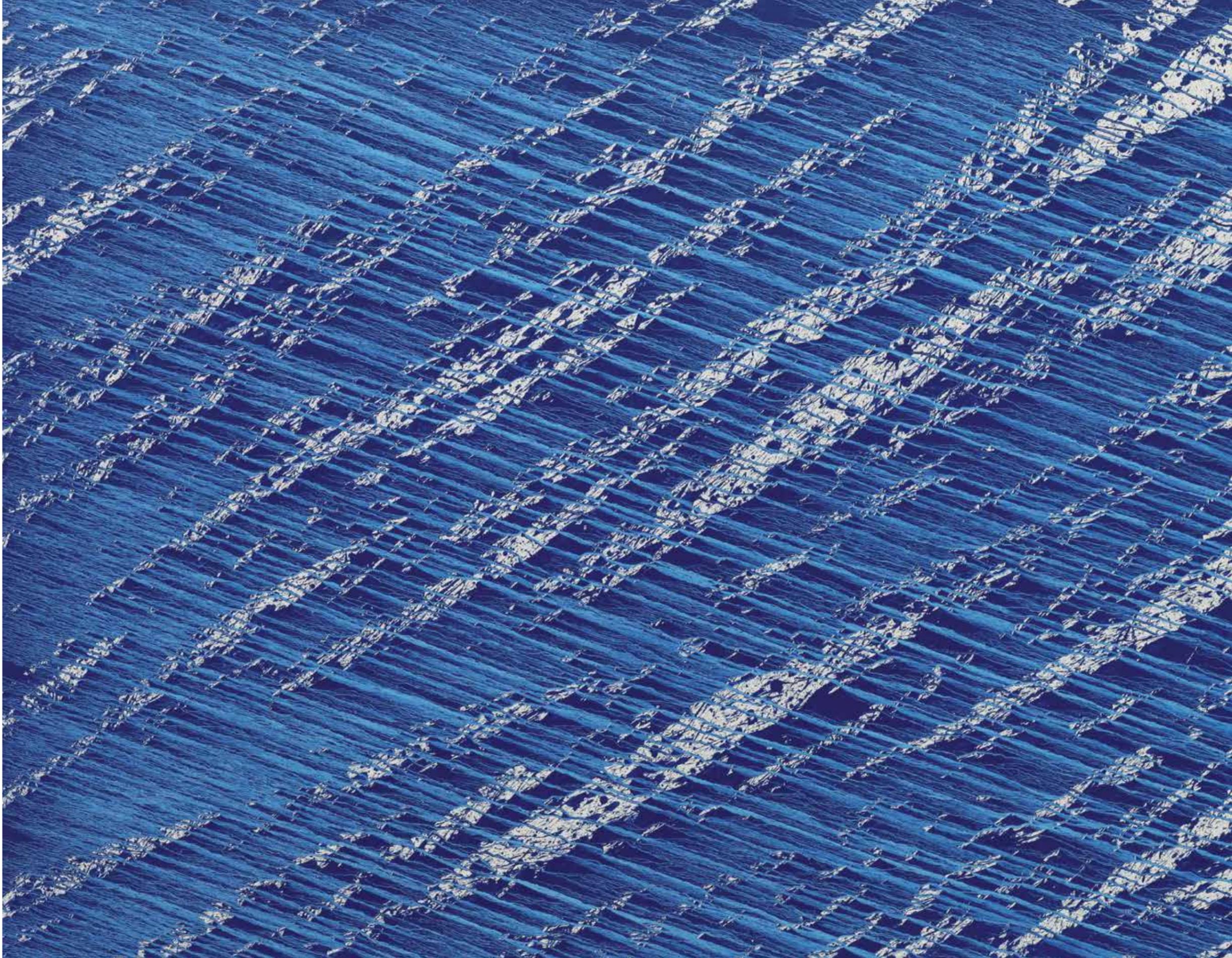
Histoire de bleu (161224)
2016

Natural pigments on canvas
63 x 63 in - 160 x 160 cm



Histoire de bleu (161105)
2016

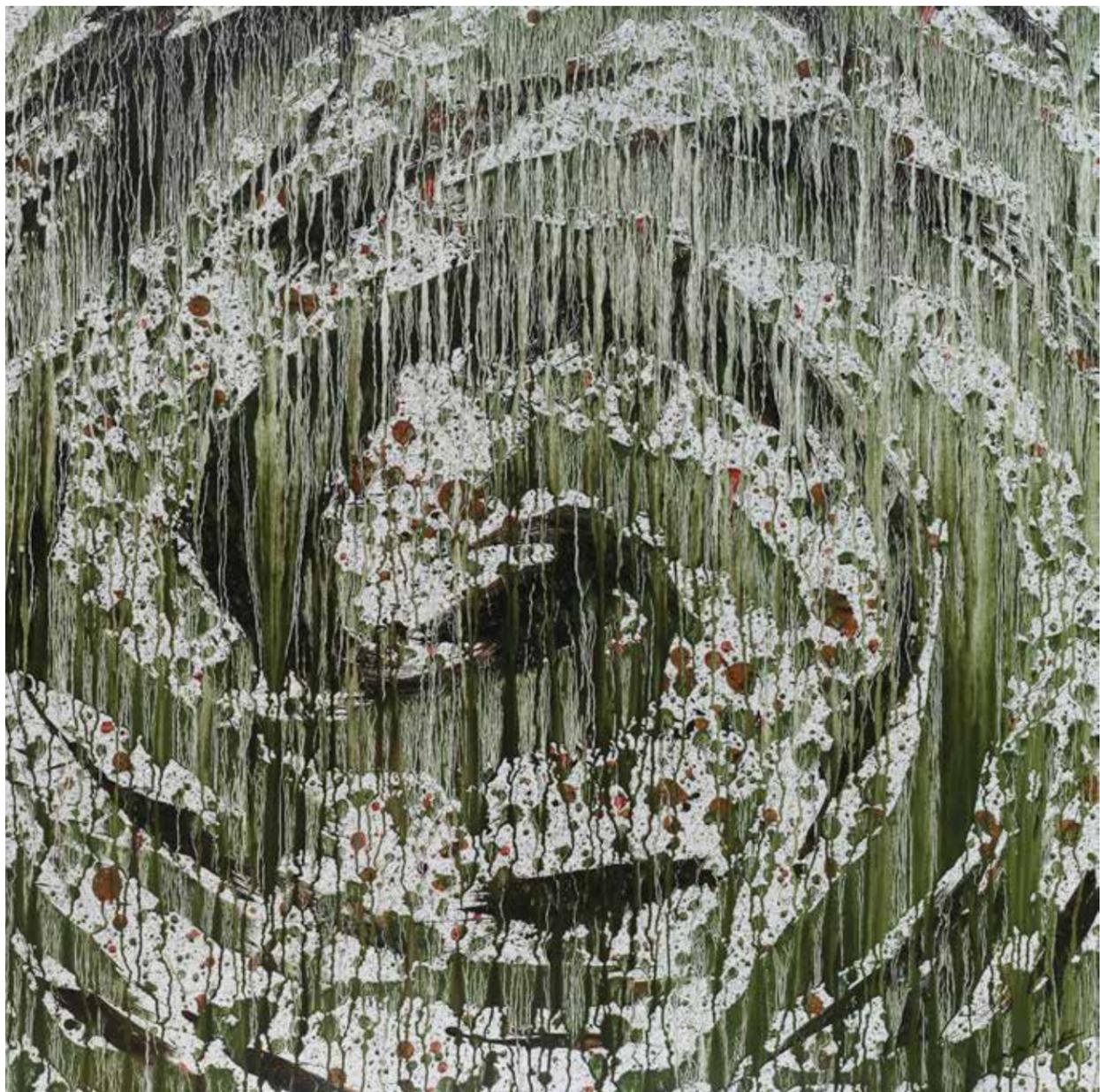
Natural pigments on canvas
63x78.7 in - 160x200 cm



Terre anonyme (150218)
2015

Natural pigments on canvas
51.2 x 63.8 in - 130 x 162 cm





Rêve de la terre (Circulation 1)
2010

Natural pigments on canvas
54.3 x 54.3 in - 138 x 138 cm



Origine (130323)
2013

Natural pigments on canvas
39.4 x 39.4 in - 100 x 100 cm

Histoire de bleu (140210)
2014

Natural pigments on canvas
62.2 x 62.2 in - 158 x 158 cm



Terre anonyme (150401)
2015

Natural pigments on canvas
51.2 x 63.8 in - 130 x 162 cm





CHAE Sung-Pil

Born in 1972, Jindo, Korea

- 2017 Doctoral program in Plastic Arts, Université Paris 1 - Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France
- 2005 Master of Advanced Studies in Plastic Arts, Université Rennes 2, Rennes, France
- 2003 M.A. in Oriental Paintings, Seoul National University, Seoul, Korea
- 1998 B.A. in Oriental Paintings, Seoul National University, Seoul Korea

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 Histoire de bleu, Opera Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 2015 Gallery Red Zone Art, Geneva, Switzerland
Opera Gallery, Dubai, UAE
Gallery CC, Seoul, Korea
Galerie Baudoin Lebon, Paris, France
- 2014 Galerie Shchukin, Paris, France
Galerie Caron Bedout, Villeneuve-sur-Yonne, France
- 2011 Young-Eun Museum, Kwang-Ju, Korea
- 2010 Galerie Christine Park, Paris, France
Gallery 89, Paris, France
- 2009 Gallery Sejul, Seoul, Korea
- 2008 Galerie Aroa, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France
- 2007 Galerie Brasilia, Paris, France
Galerie Saphir, Chevreuse, France

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 BRAFA, Brussels, Belgium
Plein et Vide, Kyobo Art space, Seoul, Korea
- 2016 Art Paris, Paris, France
Art Busan, Busan, Korea
'Reminiscing on past time' YoungEun Museum, Kwangju, Korea
KIAF, Seoul, Korea
CHAE Sung-Pil & Lee JaeSam, Gallery Grimson, Seoul, Korea
- 2015 Art Paris, Paris, France
Art15 London, London, UK
Art Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey
Art Busan, Busan, Korea
KIAF, Seoul, Korea
Art Elysées, Paris, France
'SEOUL PARIS SEOUL', Cernuschi Museum, Paris, France
SAUNAMU, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France
- 2014 London Art fair, London, UK
Art Karlsruhe, Karlsruhe, Germany
Art Paris, Paris, France
Busan Art Show, Busan, Korea
Gallery Superior, Seoul, Korea



GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2013 Opera Gallery, Singapore
Opera Gallery, Dubai, UAE
Opera Gallery, Hong Kong
Opera Gallery, Seoul, Korea
Opera Gallery, Paris, France
Opera Gallery, London, UK
Opera Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland
Opera Gallery, Monaco
Galerie 89, Paris, France
Art Paris, Paris, France
KIAF, Seoul, Korea
DeaGu Art Fair, DaeGu, Korea
- 2012 Korea tomorrow, Hangaram Museum (Seoul Arts Center), Seoul, Korea
Opera Gallery, Seoul, Korea
Sonamu, Ara gallery, Seoul, Korea
Sonamu, Galerie 89, Paris, Korea
DeaGu Art Fair, DaeGu, Korea
Doors Hotel Art Fair, Seoul, Korea
Monochrome in Korea, Gallery Dorothea van der Koelen, Mainz, Germany
The Rite of Spring, Galerie Maubert, Paris, France
- 2011 KIAF, Seoul, Korea
Galerie Maubert, Paris, France
Galerie Aroa, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France
- 2010 Miami Scope, Miami, USA
KIAF (Korea International Art Fair), Seoul, Korea
Korea Gallery Exhibition, Daegu, Korea
- 2009 China International Gallery Exhibition, Beijing, China
Chicago Art Fair, Chicago, USA
KIAF, Seoul, Korea
Art Kwangju, Kwangju, Korea
- 2008 Chicago Art Fair, Chicago, USA
KIAF, Seoul, Korea
ART Shanghai, Shanghai, China
Daegu Art Fair, Daegu, Korea
- 2005-2006 International Art Fair Mac2000, Paris, France

