

Rajinder Singh

'...the ceiling floats away with a sigh..'

Wei-LingGallery

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Rajinder Singh



If paintings could talk: examining Rajinder Singh's *The ceiling floats away with a sigh*

I think the history of art is simply a history of getting rid of the ugly by entering into it, and using it. After all, the notion of something outside of us being ugly is not outside of us but inside of us. And that's why I keep reiterating that we're working with our minds. What we're trying to do is to get them open so that we don't see things as being ugly, or beautiful, but as we see them just as they are .

—John Cage

I read this article about sound artist John Cage recently – about the essence of his work, its heart. “The core of what Cage has come to be known for, that expansive negative space, isn't nihilistic, isn't an absence, but, rather, it's life-affirming, a presence,” wrote Maria Popova, lead essayist behind the website Brain Pickings. I pick this quote as a preamble even though there's no immediately discernable link between sound and painting; with the first, the experience is often deemed transitory and fleeting, whereas paintings – tangible objects that they are – offer us plausible experiences, afforded to us as long as we are in its vicinity. Still, and very loosely I might add, the quote on Cage reminded me of Rajinder's latest works. Their ominous darkness and their expansive parameters draw you in, yet they have enough room— via the voids caused by the layers of paint – for stirrings of the synapses and limitless possibilities that go beyond the confines of the works themselves.

The ceiling floats away with a sigh is part of a series that Rajinder has been working on since 2010/11 in London, and today, we are treated to 11 new works that represent the pinnacle of the artist's cumulative studio practice in the last few years. “After four years of working on various permutations of what I am doing now, I have pared the process down to its simplest form,” says the artist, likening today's body of work as the extraction of an essence.

Rajinder also spoke of the process guiding this series, expanding on the complexity behind the technique and the continuous use of specific materials and themes from earlier in his career: “I have built myself a large spray

booth. I use it with my massive compressor to carefully prep my acetate and to build up my paint layers of days weeks to get the surface I need to work with. Once I have prepared it, I start adding paint and taking off paint”. He dubs this process “sculpting the plastic”, an apt term considering the dominant presence of acetate in his works.

Indeed, manmade materials have always had a place in Rajinder's practice. Early on, the traditional canvas was already eschewed for vinyl, and in the last decade, polyester fabric has played a starring role. Yet, above the choice of materials, the one persistent element in Rajinder's oeuvre has been his love of mathematics. This harks back to two things: one, a childhood passion that was spurred by his father, and two, academic training on the subject. Naturally, Rajinder used numbers extensively in his earliest works, proffering them in a more literal form. These early numbers functioned as artistic symbols that stretched across the canvas like unruly binary codes, but that symbolism of yore has been replaced by a different mathematical language, one that is very much hidden from our eyes, but which occupies the artist's mind.

“I am still defined by my background and interest in mathematics,” Rajinder argues. “This is manifested today in the questions that I respond to through my art. I am interested in that which is the opposite of the study and the mores of mathematics which defines the field. I am interested in the gap we presume to exist between the study of numbers and the making of art... Mathematics, though, scares people. It gives them a headache. It makes them turn away. But it is also a fertile field for investigating that which is without. And this is what interests me just now.”

These concerns have been married with more recent investigations, particularly in the fields of philosophy and critical thinking. Born from stints at Singapore's ICA (with the latest being FOLD of 2012), Rajinder began working on the subject of the ‘traumatized body’, and the artist informed his works and research with the cerebral examinations of Giles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. The ‘traumatized body’, notes the artist, is a “site for new, highly volatile and very personal epistemologies”. You may not make an instant intellectual index of this, but the trajectory is there. And, the artist's life events of late also make for a compelling link to his works today; it has been a matter of life and death in recent times for Rajinder, vis-à-vis the birth of the artist's second child, as well

as the passing of a close friend at the age of 48. With the knowledge of these facts, the title of today's body of work, *The ceiling floats away with a sigh*, does suddenly carry a more personal and weighted type of significance.

And yet, it also illustrates the more visual aspects of Rajinder's latest works. Parallels have been drawn to the notion of spaces beyond aperture openings or architectural voids; a shrine, a prayer mat, or a temple located in the real world that holds the metaphysical promise of an otherworldly life. This quasi-transcendental view is brought to life with images of Chinese-inspired landscapes, waterfalls, and depths of infinity, all meant to stroke the sublime and lull you into considering "what we know and how we know". Indeed, it's this polarity that interests the artist. Knowledge lies at the forefront of Rajinder's mind and his works, and the gallery's preamble to *The ceiling floats away with a sigh* perhaps describes this pursuit and ambition best: "Rajinder sets out to traumatize the body through disrupted, dislocated architectural spaces forcing the viewer to pause and question certitudes, abandoning for a short moment the subjectivity and significance of built space."

The artist reinforces this point in our communication, saying that the works function as "interrupted see-through canvases with seductive imagery painted and carved to violate you while cajoling you into a peaceful reverie", and that it's a sense of tranquility that he hopes to evoke via this exhibition. "Peace. An acceptance that what our world view and thus our entire conception of things is based on a highly volatile systems of knowing that are already absent and always under erasure. And there is peace to be found there."

It seems apt, at this juncture, to revisit John Cage:

My composition arises out of asking questions. I am reminded of a story early on about a class with Schoenberg. He had us go to the blackboard to solve a particular problem in counterpoint (though it was a class in harmony). He said, 'When you have a solution, turn around and let me see it.' I did that. He then said: 'Now another solution, please.' I gave another and another until finally, having made seven or eight, I reflected a moment and then said with some certainty: 'There aren't any more solutions.' He said: 'OK. What is the principle underlying all of these solutions?' I couldn't answer his question; but I had always worshipped the man, and at that point I did even more. He ascended, so to speak. I spent the rest of my life, until recently, hearing him ask that question

over and over. And then it occurred to me through the direction that my work has taken, which is renunciation of choices and the substitution of asking questions, that the principle underlying all of the solutions that I had given him was the question that he had asked, because they certainly didn't come from any other point. He would have accepted the answer, I think. The answers have the questions in common. Therefore the question underlies the answers.

A similar form of inquisition and questioning appears to have been Rajinder's modus operandi in his production of *The cloud floats away with a sigh*, and the monochromatic paintings are all testament to the workings of his mind along with an adept painterly process. If paintings could speak, his would tell tales of mathematics, the questioning of built spaces and of a physical painting process, and the transience of life itself. And without a doubt, these are conversations worth having.

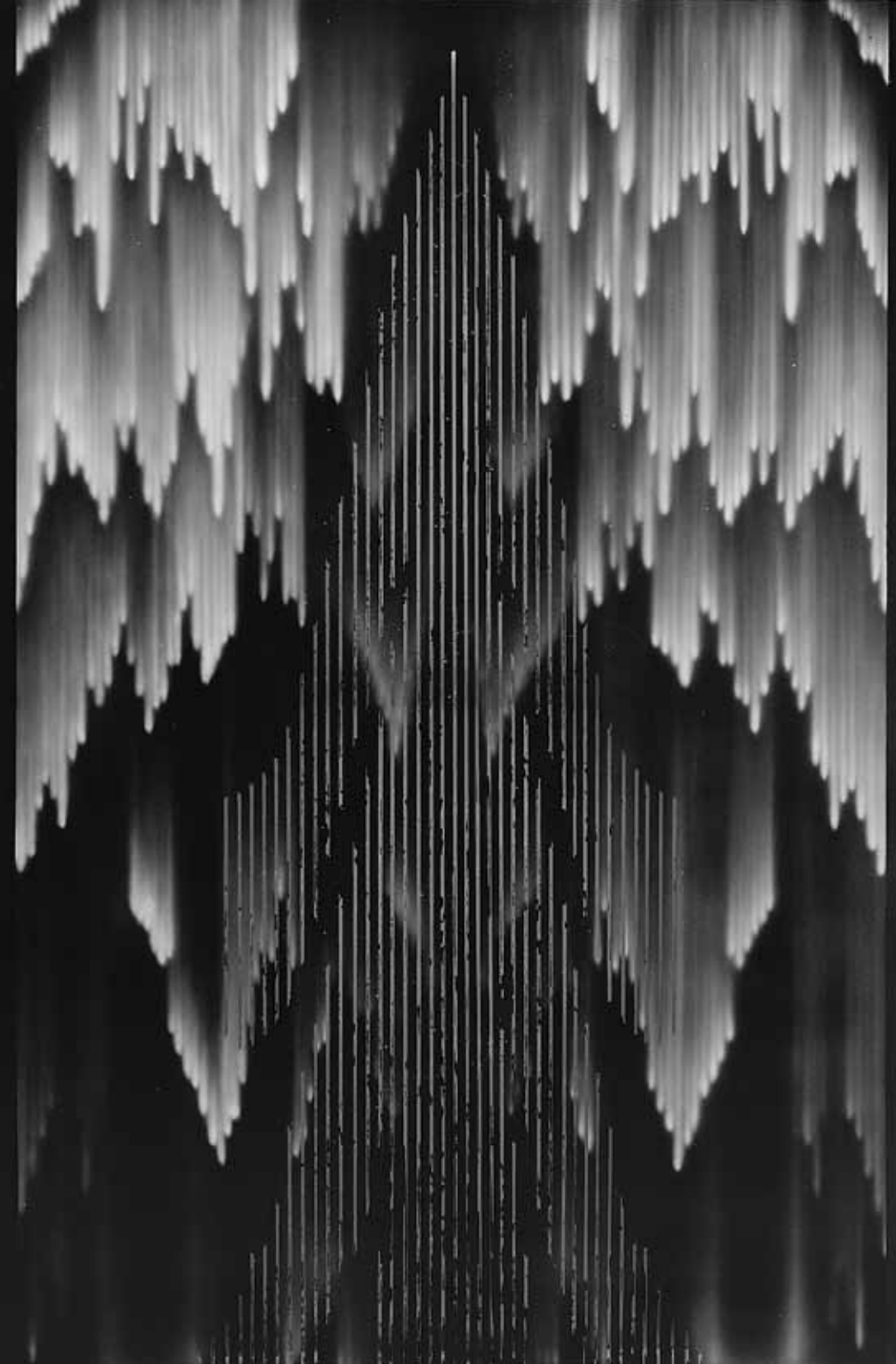
Rachel Jenagaratnam

July 2014

Kuala Lumpur

*All quotes from the artist are excerpts from e-mail conversations to the writer dated June 16-24, 2014.

**All references to John Cage and Maria Popova's writing found here <http://www.brainpickings.org/index.php/2012/07/05/where-the-heart-beats-john-cage-kay-larson/>



*Above the ground
or under it.*

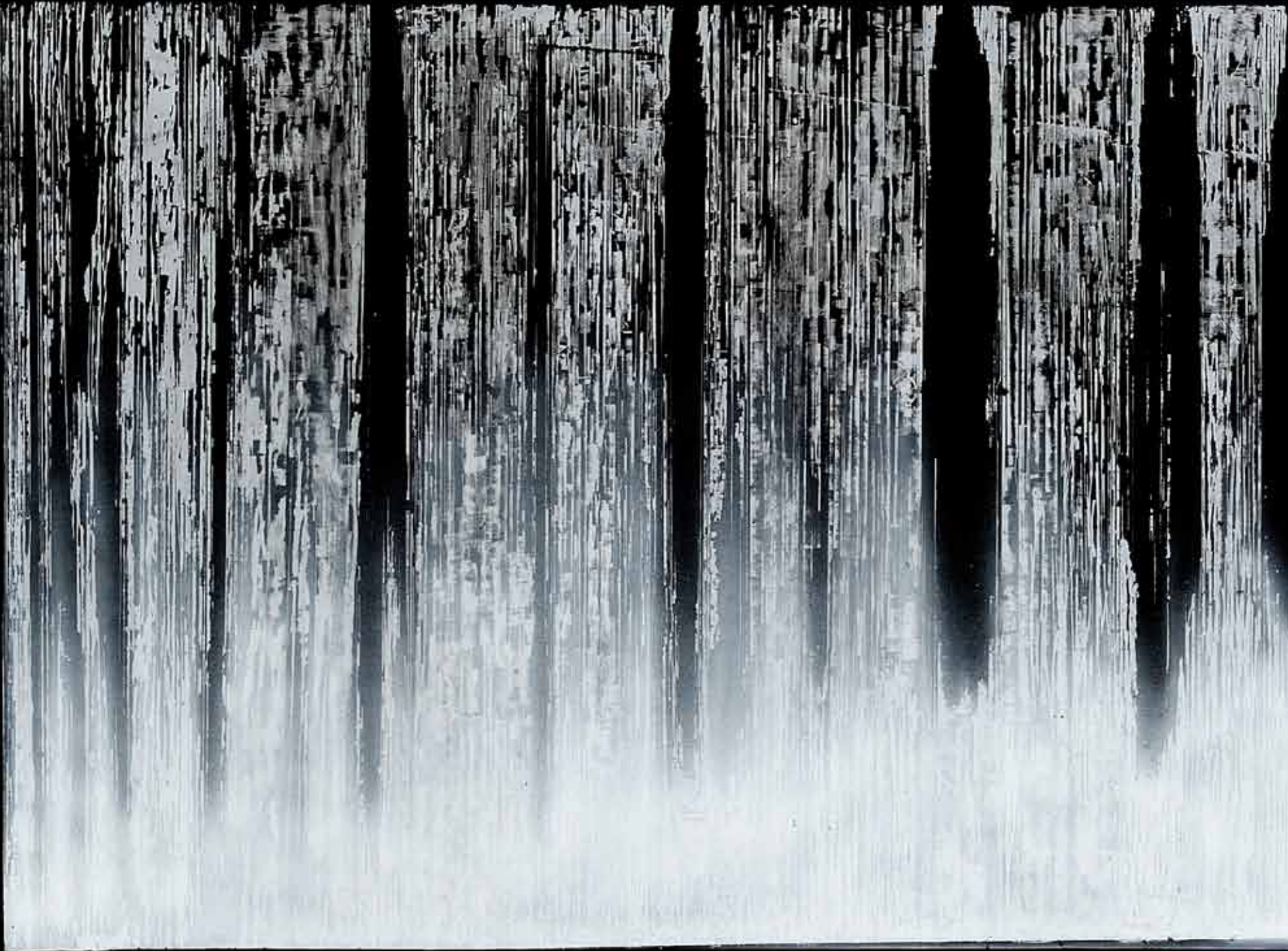
Acrylic on acetate
102cm x 152cm
2014



*Draw a line,
write a line,
drop a line, there!*

Acrylic on acetate
105cm x 155cm
2014





*All must descend,
not to an end.*

Acrylic on acetate
243cm x 122cm
2014



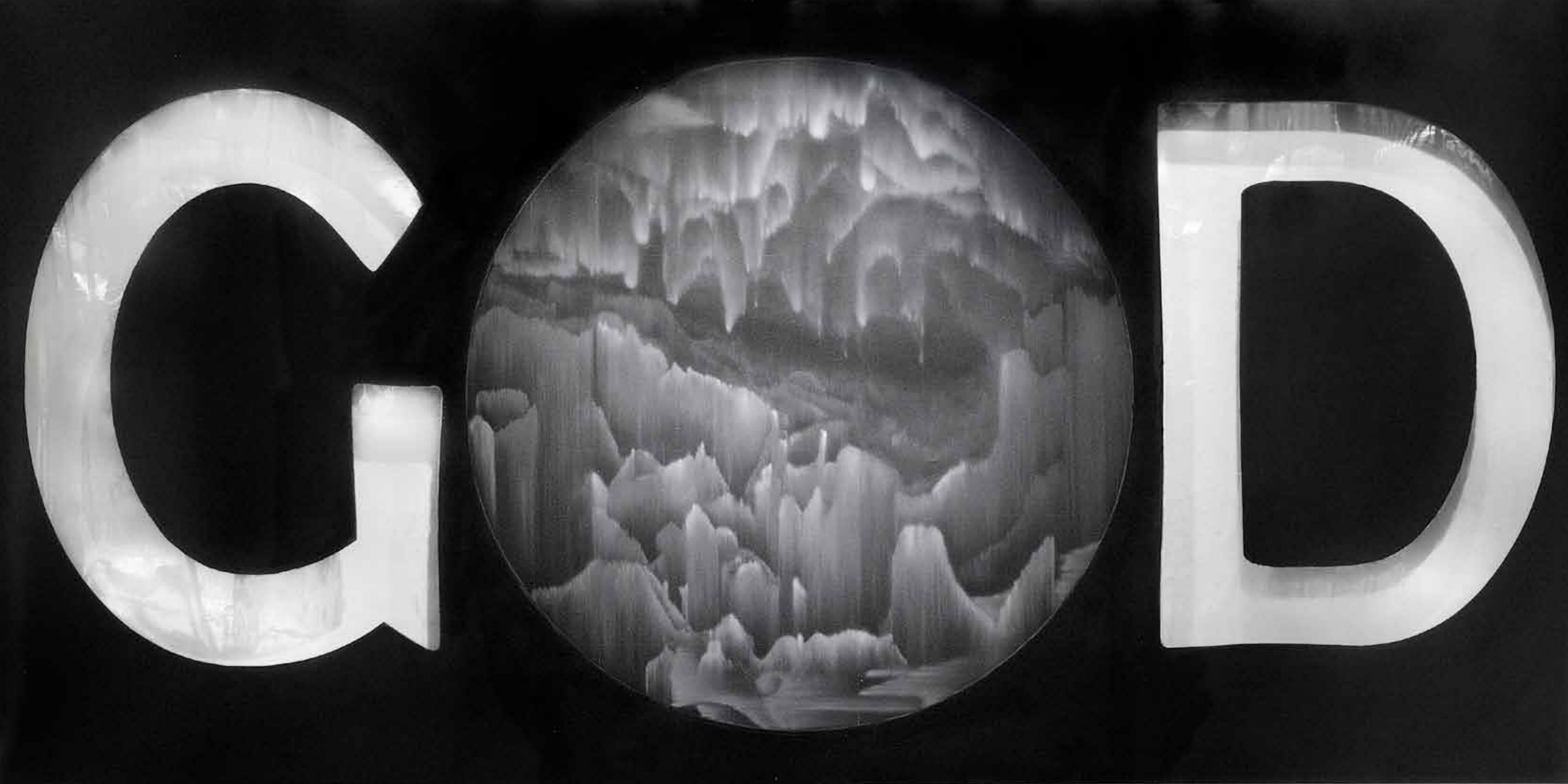
Architecting the regulating diminishing line
Acrylic on acetate
248cm x 122cm
2014



*Between iron columns
I walk towards the pier.*
Acrylic on acetate
105cm x 155cm
2014

*Line by line,
to an empty windswept place.*
Acrylic on acetate
102cm x 152cm
2014





*Here at last I fix a line,
severing the world's design.*

Acrylic on acetate
244cm x 122cm
2014

*I am a black ocean,
leaping and wide.*

Acrylic on acetate
248cm x 122cm
2014





*Lattice work
of a nomad's comb.*
Acrylic on acetate
100cm x 150cm
2014



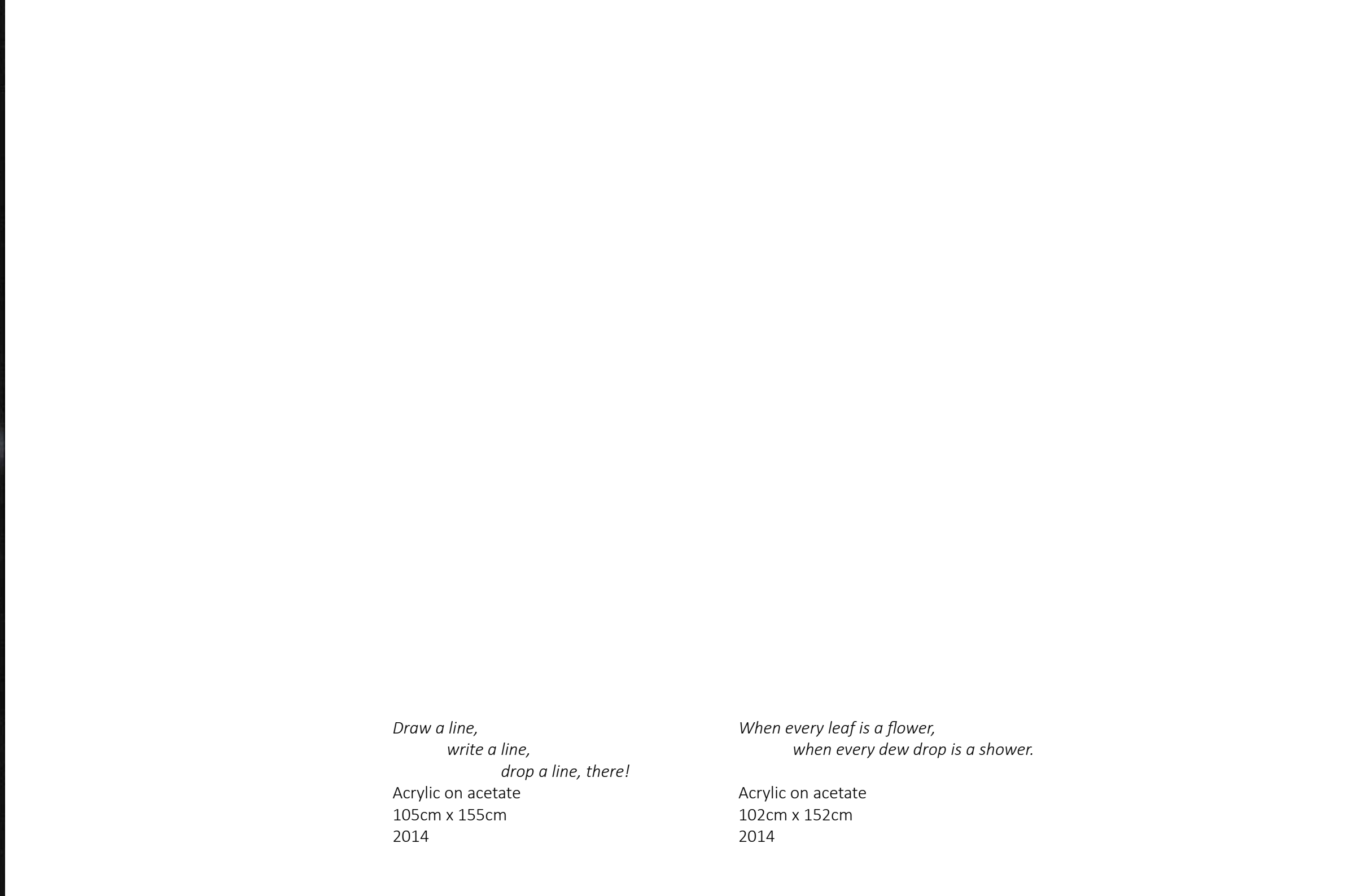
*Matched
but not repeated.*
Acrylic on acetate
102cm x 152cm
2014





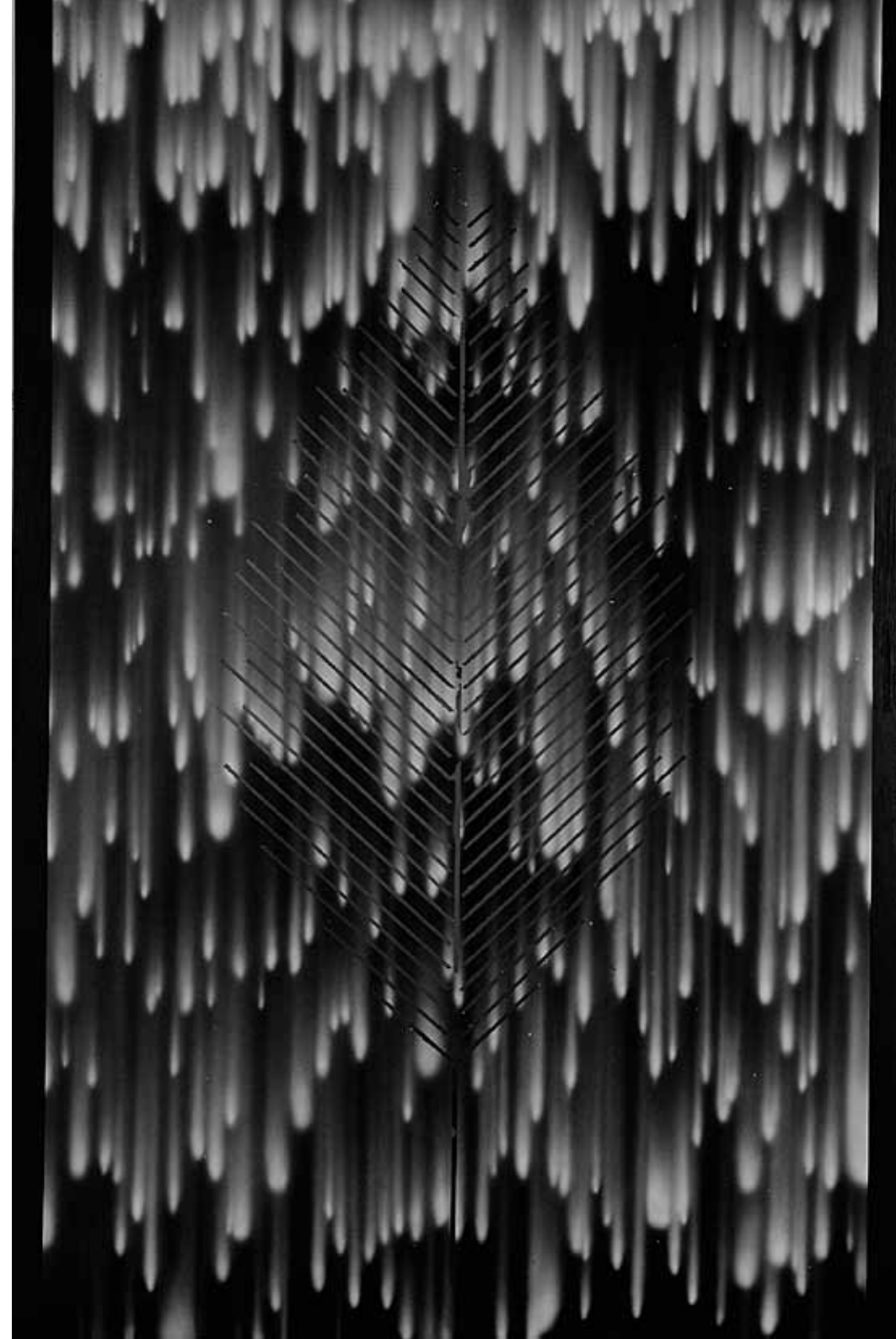
*Draw a line,
write a line,
drop a line, there!*

Acrylic on acetate
105cm x 155cm
2014



*When every leaf is a flower,
when every dew drop is a shower.*

Acrylic on acetate
102cm x 152cm
2014



RAJINDER SINGH b.1964

Born: Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia

Based in: London, United Kingdom

Education

2010- Master's Fine Arts (supervisor- Dr Ian Woo)- LASALLE, Singapore

1993- PhD (Engineering & Mathematics)- QUB, UK

Solo Exhibitions

2014 *‘...the ceiling floats away with a sigh..’*; Essay by Rachel Jenagaratnam; Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2013 *Number-Trance-Face*; Curated by Isabel Anchorena(paintings); Isabel Anchorena Gallery, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

2012 *FOLD*; Curated by Dr Charles Merewether (installation); Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore.

M.O.L.C.; Curated by Ben Hampe (paintings); Chan HampeGallery@Raffles, Singapore

2011 *Ya-ad*; Curated by Jody Neal (installation); Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore.

Ellaline; Curated by Charlotte G. (paintings); Stephanie Hoppen Gallery, London.

Number-Trance-Face; Curated by Michele B. (paintings); Essay by Dr Kenneth Fernstein; Boscia Art Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.

Assemblage- A mid career retrospective for artist Rajinder Singh; Curated by Nicolas Olivry (paintings); Nomu on Monu galleries, Singapore.

2010 *Cause & Defect*; Curated by Jasdeep Sandhu (paintings); Essay by Lawrence Chin; Gajah Gallery, Singapore.

Curio; Curated by Paul Manem (paintings); Essay by Rachael Jenagaratnam; Chinese House Gallery, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Curio; Curated by N. Olivry (paintings); Hong Kong Expo Centre, Hong Kong.

Curio; Curated by Yusof Majid (paintings); Essay by Rachael Jenagaratnam; PACE Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Curio; Curated by N. Olivry (paintings); Fulleton Hotel for ParkerAsia event, Singapore.

The Traumatized Body; Curated by Ian Woo (installation); Tri-Space, LASALLE School of Arts, Singapore.

2008 *Number-Trance-Face*; Curated by SavaadFelich paintings); Essay by Dr Kenneth Fernstein; Yering Art Gallery, Melbourne, Australia.

Number-Trance-Face; Curated by Yusof Majid (paintings);Essay by Dr Ian Woo; PACE Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Number-Trance-Face; Curated by N. Olivry (paintings); Hong Kong Expo Centre, Hong Kong.

Number-Trance-Face; Curated by J. Manuel (paintings); Essay by MilenkoPrvacki; O.Fournier Galleries, Argentina.

2007 *Faces*; Curated by N. Olivry (paintings) ;Tower Club Galleries, Singapore.

Faces; Curated by N. Olivry (paintings); The Universal gallery, Singapore.

Faces; Curated by N. Olivry (paintings); De Taillan Galleries, Bordeaux, France.

source_code; Curated by Yusof Majid (paintings); Essay by Dr Carmen Nge; DarlingMuse Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2006 *In the becoming*; Curated by Joseph Benjamin (Sketches and Drawings); Tavolo@BoonTat Street, Singapore.

2005 *I coME from over tHERE*; Curated by S. Swank (paintings); Essay by Rene Daniels; PPH Public Art Space, Singapore.

I can SMELL your BAD breath; Curated by David Clarke (illustrations); Merbau Gallery, Singapore.

Anthro (paintings); Anthropology Gallery, Singapore.

Gridlocked; Curated by James Holdsworth (paintings); Block43 Art Gallery, Singapore.

Selected Group Exhibitions

2014 MuestraColectiva de Verano 2014; Curated by Isabel A. (paintings); With artists D’Arienzo, Hoffmann, Cuttica, Cetner, Bianchedi, Ronsino, Vega, Vattuone, Durmuller, Monferran, Aitala, Sanchez Fantino, Genovesi; Isabel Anchorena Gallery, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

2013 Spice; Curated by Yusof Majid (paintings); Pace Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2012 Timeless; Curated by Lim Wei Ling (paintings); Wei Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Pace Gallery Anniversery 2012; Curated by Yusof Majid (paintings); Pace Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

London Art Fair 2012 with Stephanie Hoppen Gallery, London.

2011 18@8 Save The Planet; Curated by Lim Wei Ling (vinyl toy and paintings); Wei Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Interchange: The Tribute Edition; Curated by Gillian Nelson (installation and paintings);With Patrick Storey, Lynn Lu, Andy Yang and Rajinder Singh; Chan Hampe Galleries, Singapore.

The Lasalle Show’11 Exhibition; Curated by Dr Charles Merewether (installation); ICA Galleries, Singapore.

Spice(paintings); With Jailani Abu Hassan, IlhamFadzli, Yusof Majid, Regina Noakes, Stephen Menon, Ali Nurazmal; Curated by Yusof Majid; Pace Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2010 4/12 ; Curated by Ian woo(installation); With Natacha Arena, Matthew Bax, Cui Liang, Igor Delic, Isabelle Desjeux, Lucinda Law, Steven Lim, Edith

Podesta, Rubin Hashim, Tim Xie Ying and ZakiRazak; ICAS Galleries, Singapore

Trapolle; Curated by Daniella Beltrani(installation); With Ken Feinstein, Ezzam Rahman, Matt Bax and ZakiRazak; Curated by D.Beltrani; Art Trove gallery, Singapore.

Object ; Curated by Ian Woo (installation); Praxis Space, LASALLE School of Arts, Singapore.

2009 pace gallery: anniversary 2009 (paintings);With Ahmad Zaki Anwar, Jaliani Abu Hassan, YusofMajid,Ivan Lam, Rajinder Singh, NurazmalYusoff, Husin Hourmain, SamsuddinLappo, SamsudinWahab, FaizSukor, Fauzin Mustafa, Daud Rahim; Curated by Yusof Majid; PACE Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Aliya and Farouk Khan CollectionShow, Iskandar Malaysia; Contemporary Art Show 2009 (paintings); Curated by ShushiShamsuddin; Danga City Mall, Johor Bahru, Malaysia.

2008 Force of Nature (paintings); With Ahmad Shukri Mohamed, Ahmad Zakii Anwar, Annuar Rashid, BayuUtomoRadiikin, Choy Chun Wei, FaizSukor, FauzinMustaffa, HamidiHadi, IlhamFadhir, Ivan Lam, KhairinaKhairuddin, NurazmalMdYusoff, SamsuddinLappo, Yusof Majid and ZulkifleeZainolAbidin;

Curated by Yusof Majid; PACE Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

pace gallery: anniversary2008(paintings); With Jaliani Abu Hassan, Yusof Majid, Annuar Rashid, Ahmad Shukri Mohamed, UmibaizurahMahir Ismail, Daud Rahim, Ernesto Pujazon, HamirShoaib, AwangDamit Ahmad, FaizShukor, Fauzulyusri, HamidiHadi, HusinHourmain, IlhamFadzli, MasnoorRamly,

Mohd Hafiz, Yau Bee Ling, ZuraimiDaud; Curated by Yusof Majid ; PACE Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

2007 pace gallery: the opening 2007 (paintings); With Ahmad Zaki Anwar, Jaliani Abu Hassan, Yusof Majid, BayuUtomoRadjikin, Ivan Lam, AswadAmeir, Ahmad Shukri Mohamed, UmibaizurahMahir Ismail, Daud Rahim, Ernesto Pujazon, HamirShoaib, Nelson Dominquez,joelcouloigner; Curated by Yusof Majid (paintings); PACE Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

What else is there? (paintings); With animator Chris Shaw; Curated by Christopher Shaw; Royal Plaza on Scott, Art Space, Singapore.

2006 Symbiosis(paintings); With artists Donna Ong and ChngNai Wee; Curated by ChngNai Wee (paintings); Marina galleries, Singapore.

2005 Racial Harmony ; Curated by James Holdsworth (paintings); Bradell Heights CC Art Room, Singapore.

Chip Bee Artist Boheme ; Curated by Ketna Patel (paintings); Michi Gallery, Singapore.

2004 Batch No 3; Curated by James Holdsworth (paintings); Block 43 Art Gallery, Singapore.

- 2004 Vision and Illusion- Reconstruction of a city ; Curated by Michelle Lim (installations); Singapore Art Festival 2004 St James Power Station, Singapore. Malcolm` s Chicken ; Curated by James Holdsworth (paintings); Block 43 Art Gallery, Singapore.
- 2003 Nascent: Beginning to be; Curated by James Holdsworth (paintings); Block 43 Art Gallery, Singapore.

Residencies, Fairs and Awards

- May 2013- Art Basel, Hong Kong
 April 2013 – 2nd round selection finalist, BP Portrait Award, National Portrait Gallery, London
 Jan 2012 – London Art Fair
 Sept 2011 – finalist in Summer Open Call, 3rd Ward, New York.
 2010- One of thousand world wide artists listed on the Amsterdam based biannual compendium of artist Thousand Living Painters
 July 2008 three lithographs on plate and stone Residency at IDEM (formerMourlot Studios), Paris, France.
 Nov 2007 Energy 20 artists of Asia, TT Awards, Hong Kong.
 2006/2009- Artist Ambassador for Capannelle Wine, Italy.



Wei-Ling Gallery

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Wei-Ling Contemporary

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Cover image: Rajinder Singh, *I am a big black ocean, leaping and wide*, Acrylic on acetate 248cm x 122cm, 2014 31

