

In The Flesh



Here Comes the Bride
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas

Yeoh Choo Kuan

December
1 - 14 2014

"When we became addicted to a subject, we forget the knowledge which allows you to reach into its deepest secret, and it's at this point of our forgetfulness that the subject regenerates itself for us, he becomes then naive and poetic."

- G. Ungaretti

With "body aesthetics" being fundamental to my creations, the discovery of this series of abstract paintings is a profound development for me. It is a process of moving away from the pictorial narrative to the incomprehensible, a transfiguration of the body as painted images on the canvas and venturing further by portraying the canvas as the body itself. In this psyche, I am replicating the bodies through a queer process of construction and deconstruction. Bodies are now abstractly shown in object form or the "flesh object"; to capture the basic existence of human being.

In The Flesh

The Anthropomorphized Canvas

— Haffendi Anuar, 2014

The body and paint serve as symbolic materials for Yeoh Choo Kuan. In an intuitive manner, the young Malaysian artist explores the material qualities of paint allegorically interpreted as skin and flesh.

Growing-up proved to be an unsettling experience for the artist. Personal and familial lives have contributed to a series of incidents that have influenced his artistic practice. Witnessing performances of infidelity by close relations and viewing intimate acts in the open as a child have left a strong impression on the artist resulting him to question as well as explore intimate relationships, the naked human body and exploits of voyeurism as subject matters.

Fascinated by the depiction of intimacy, sexual and romantic relationships and violence in films as well as their aesthetic qualities, movies have provided a form of escape for the artist as a young adult. Film elements such as lighting, sound, colors, settings, moods, costumes and props create alluring images usually gripped with an emotional intensity though the artist states that inspirations are found in the delicate nuances in a director's work. Film directors influential to him are Gaspar Noé (b. 1963, Argentina), Roman Polanski (b. 1933, Poland, France), Woody Allen (b. 1935, America), Giuseppe Tornatore (b. 1956, Italy), and Pedro Almodóvar (b. 1949, Spain). Examples of themes conveyed in the varying films that attracted the artist such the mysterious sexual tension illustrated in Roman Polanski's *Bitter Moon* (1992), humorous dysfunctional relationships such as in many of Woody Allen's films and unarticulated intimate desire beautifully displayed in Giuseppe Tornatore's *Malena* (2000). Films have also served as an important element for the identity of his paintings as film scripts are recycled into titles, in which specific crucial narratives are obscured as cryptic statements to accompany his pieces. Other influences credited by Choo Kuan are the photographs by Nobuyoshi Araki, the attitude and vision of Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto and the emotionally captivating choreography of Pina Bausch.

Formally, his tactile paintings are sculptural in nature. Influenced by many art history sources such as Color Field paintings, Abstract Expressionism and the writings of Philip Guston, his works highlight the physical gestures and processes

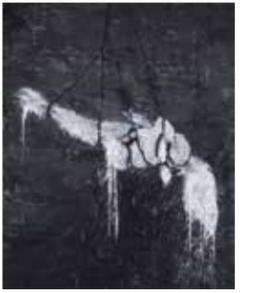
involved in which quick scrapings of the paintings' surfaces result in the fragile skins of paint to flake or peel, thus revealing the colors of the previous layers. His early works are evidently figurative in which he directed the "artist gaze" to himself, portraying his unclothed self or onto anonymous characters, constructing visually minimal though emotionally "explosive" portraits. They illustrate discernible figures such as in the piece *Fleshing White I* (2014) in which a ghostly white figure is seen bound and elevated in a pitch-black setting while *Raw I* (2013) is a large oil on canvas that depicts loosely in expressive brushworks a female figure lying on her back with what appears to have her legs opened.

Through time and countless abstractions, Choo Kuan has stated that "in a process of moving away from pictorial narrative to the incomprehensible", his exploration of "body politics" has resulted into the canvas to accrue human qualities. Devoid of illustrated figures and obvious narrative, his works still retain a sort of story as hinted by their titles. His painting process is physical and procedural in which he likens it to a reflexive process called "body impact". Working carefully in layers, he would construct the initial coat or the "flesh" by building-up a thick surface out of oil paint usually with vivid colors. The thin next layer of lacquer is then applied using a spraying device, usually in a single color and then allowed to dry before he peels and strips using a cutter or a hard pointed object. The skins of paint are permitted to drape and curl on the painting's surface while the marks and lines left by the pointed objects are allowed to intermingle with the sagging skin. The layers solidify thoroughly in a couple of days.

In a subtle way, Choo Kuan anthropomorphized the canvas; moving away from mere depictions of the figure to a sort of theatrical play by treating the paintings as props to acts of mortification. He considers the painted canvas as a simplified human form and it becomes a "surrogate person" that is nothing more than a piece of "flesh", emotionless and still. As an imagined "living thing", it suffers, and through acts of degradation, the naked skin is tormented by slicing lines, scrapings and peelings, thus instigating the "meat" below to flower forth as beautiful and luscious accumulations of colors. He constructs as well as de-constructs his pictures in a strange play of power in the studio with the imagined characters. More than being naked, the canvases have become purified. According to the artist, he likens himself to the main character of Mary Harron's psychologically charged black comedy *American Psycho* (2000), Patrick Bateman played by Christian Bale, and his current works cheekily echo a statement by the deeply troubled "protagonist" –

—
"There is an idea of a Patrick Bateman; some kind of abstraction. But there is no real me: only an entity, something illusionary. And though I can hide my cold gaze, and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable... I simply am not there."

(Harron, Mary, dir. *American Psycho*, Lions Gate Films, 2000. Film)



Fleshing White I
2014
Oil on canvas
213 x 170 cm



Raw I
2013
Oil on canvas
160 x 213 cm

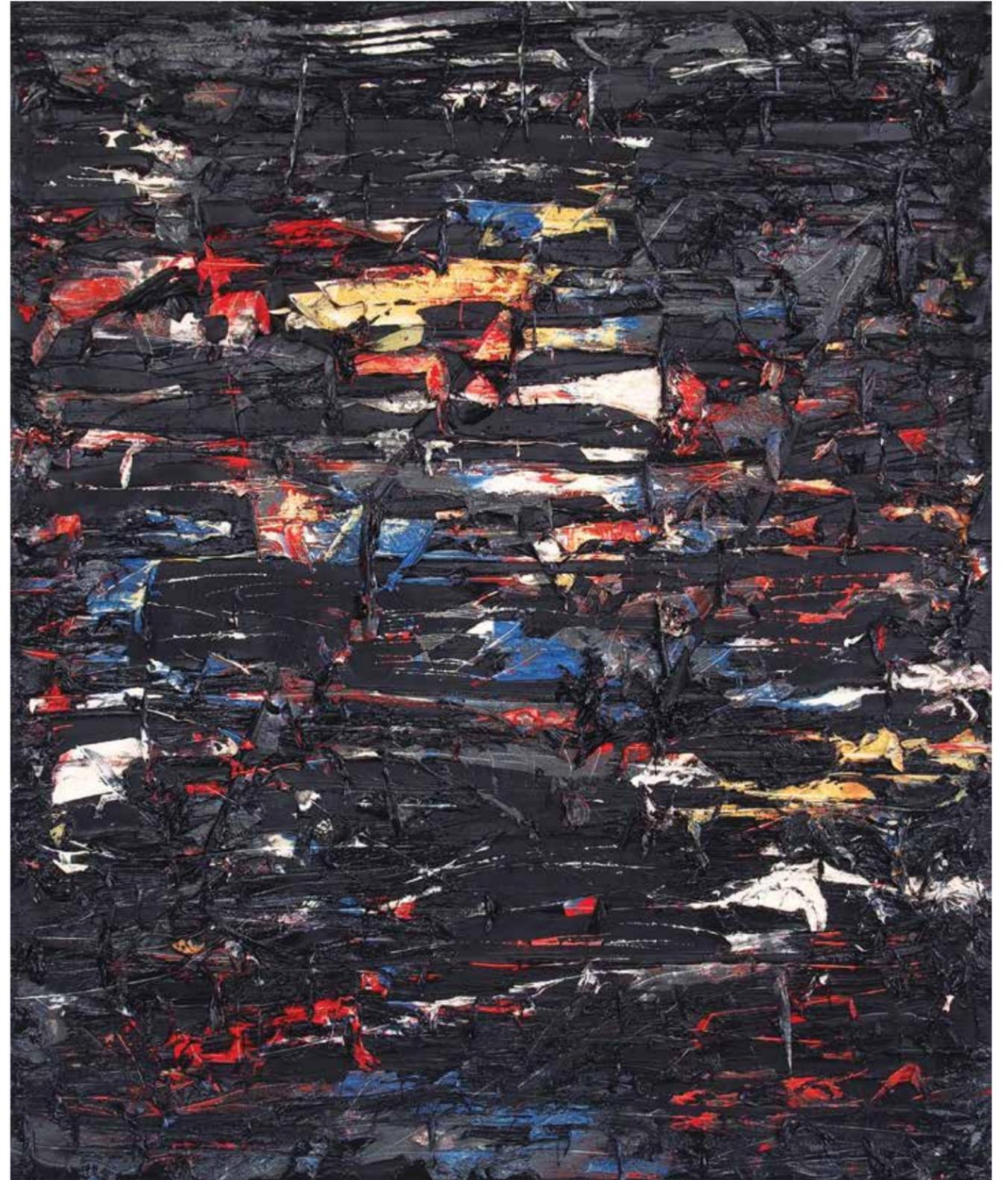


Works

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Screen capture from
— *American Psycho*
(Harron, Mary, dir. *American Psycho*, Lions Gate Films, 2000. Film)



You're Not Terribly Important to Me
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm



A Flesh of Split
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm



Love in Motion
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm



We Came so Close to Perfection
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm



Together We Stand Alone
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm





One Moment of Pain Perhaps...
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm



They Were inside Us
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm

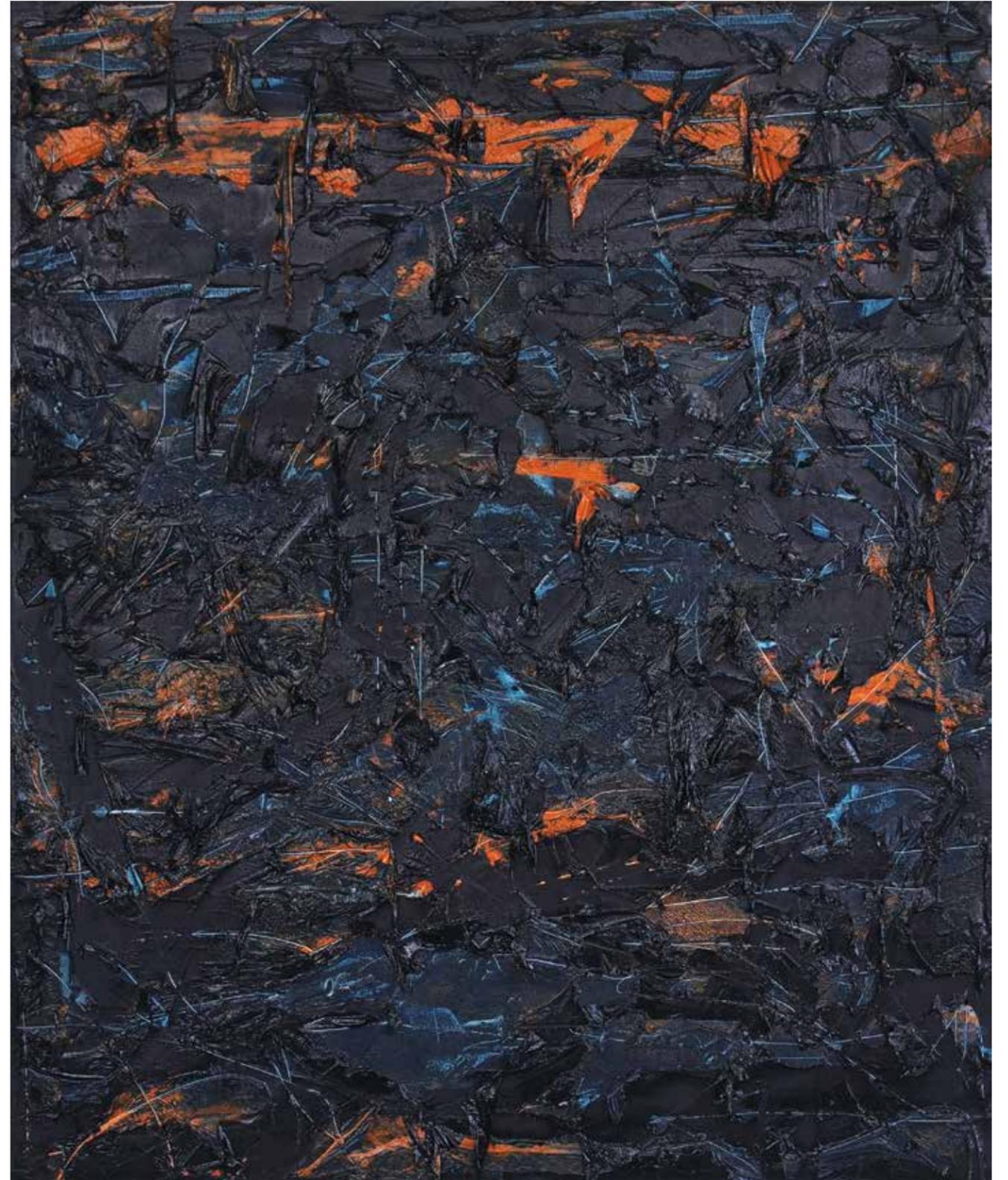


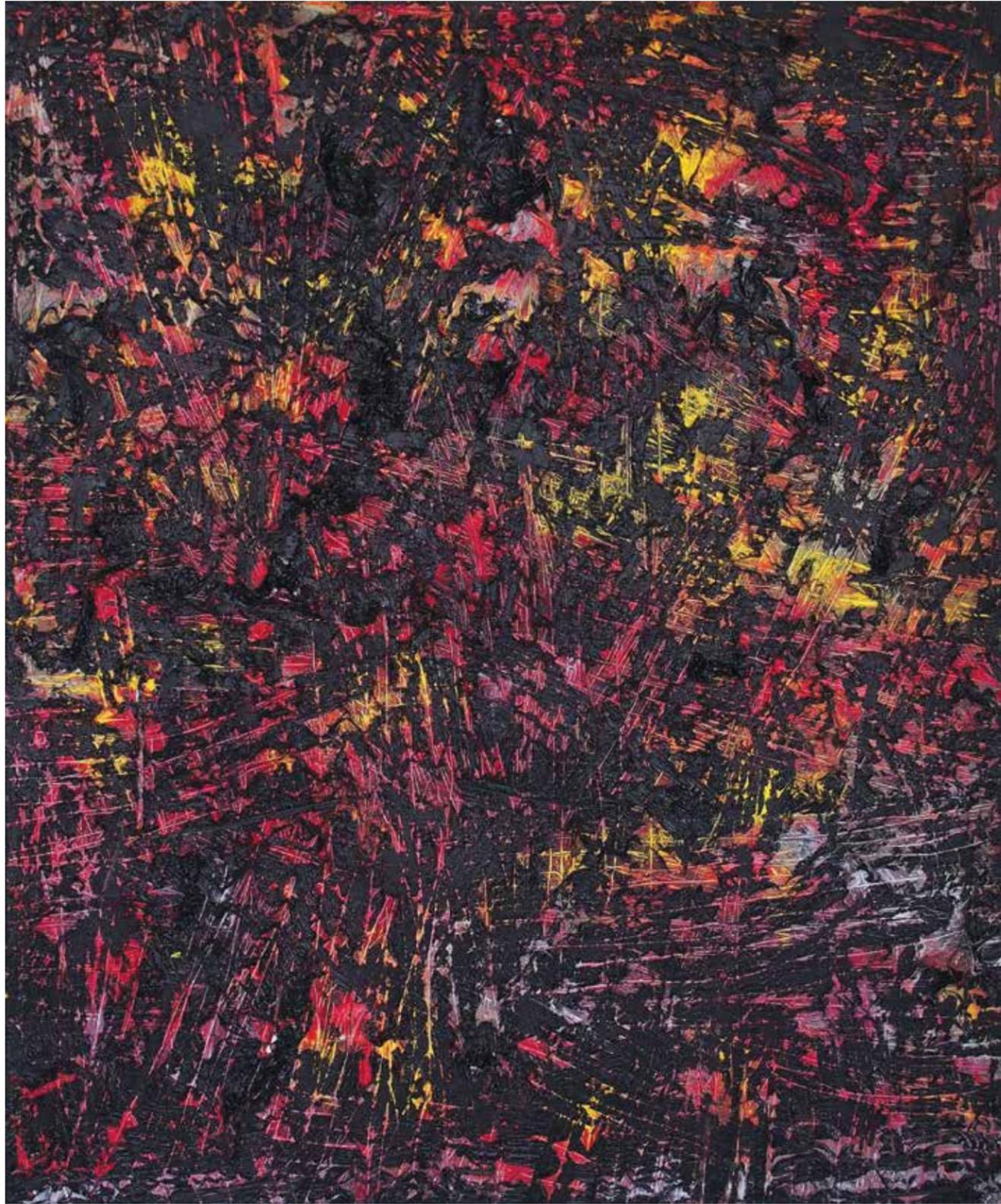
Screen capture from
— *American Psycho*
(Harron, Mary, dir. *American Psycho*, Lions Gate Films, 2000. Film)



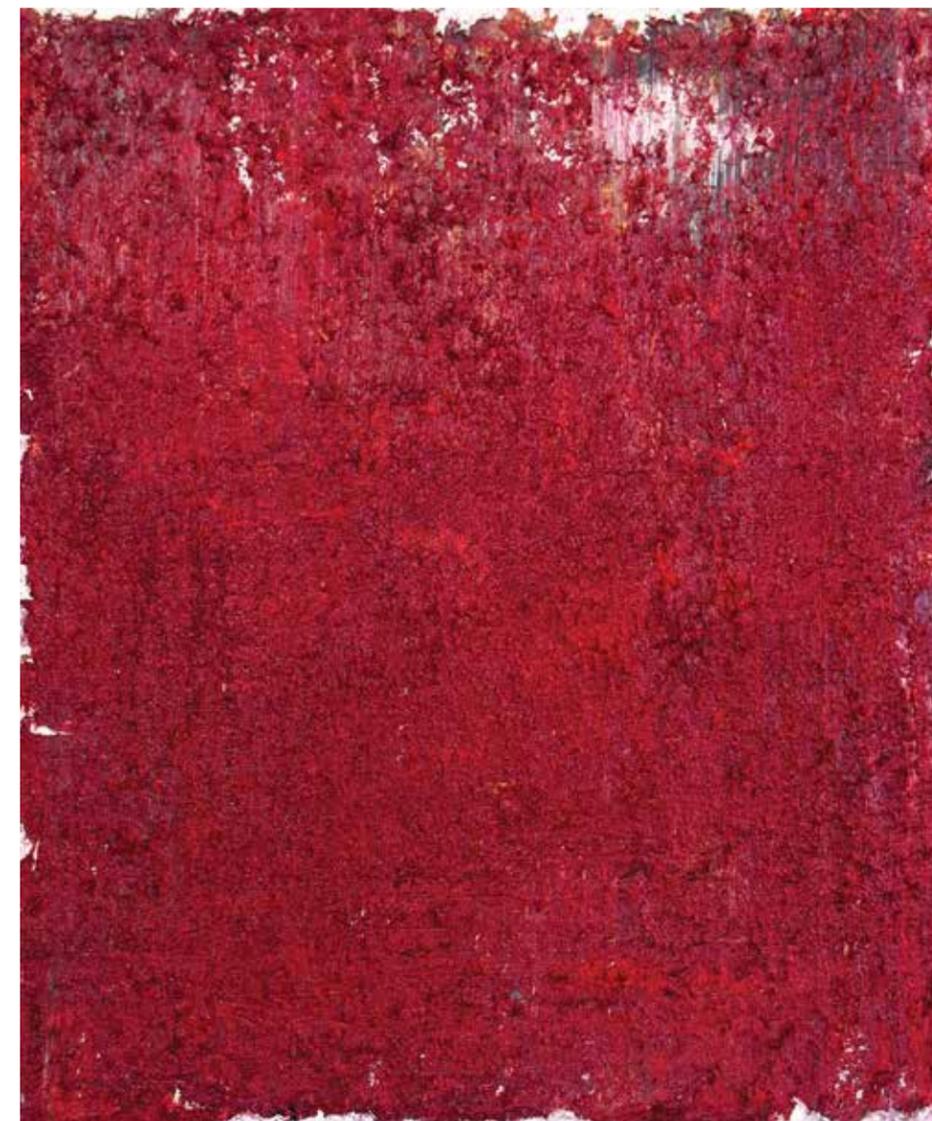
I Simply Am Not There
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm

I Just Want to Fit In
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm





And My Flesh Begins Crawling with Suspense
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm



I Was Cured Alright
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm

Let the Right One In
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm

I've Left It with You
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm

Here Comes the Bride
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm

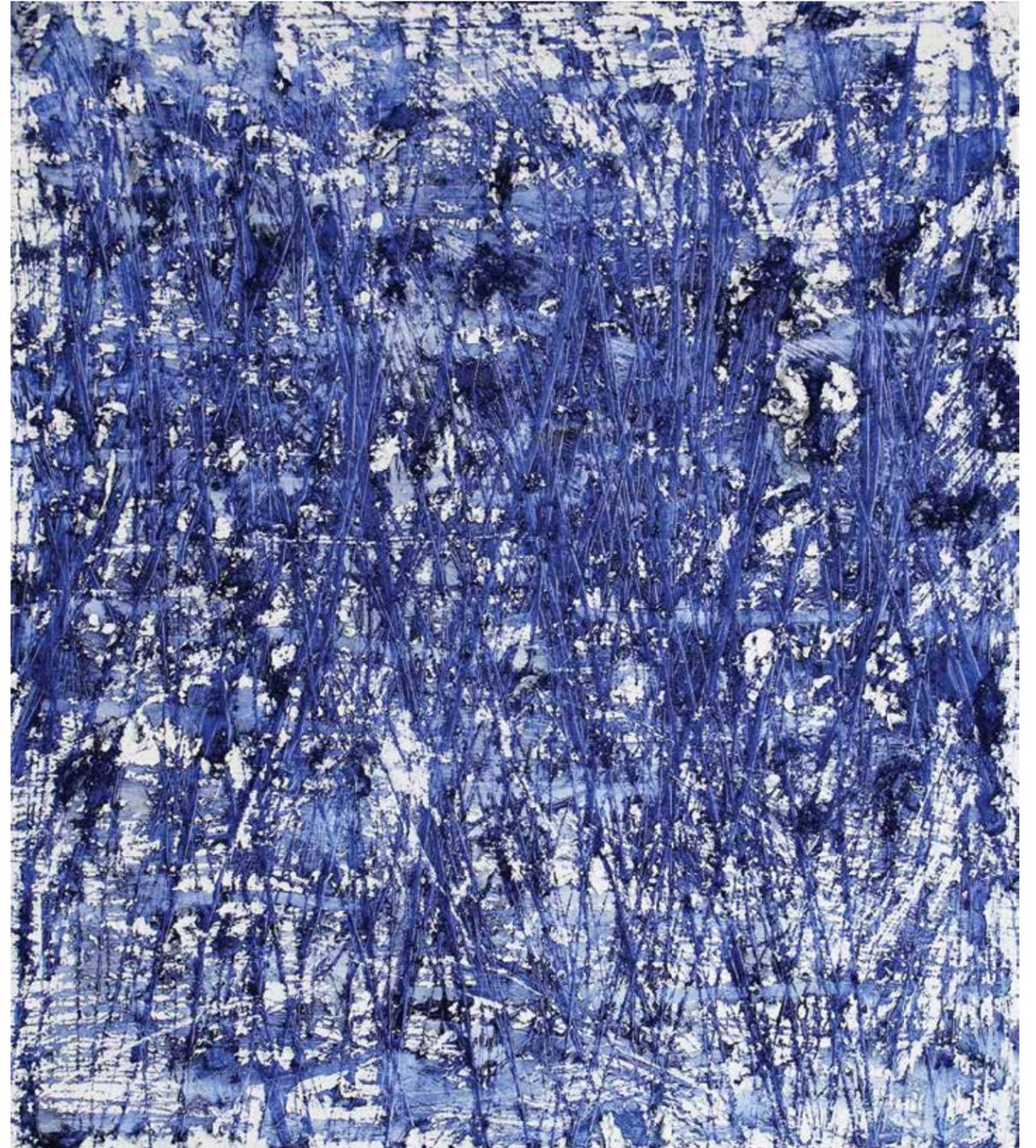




Almost Blue
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm



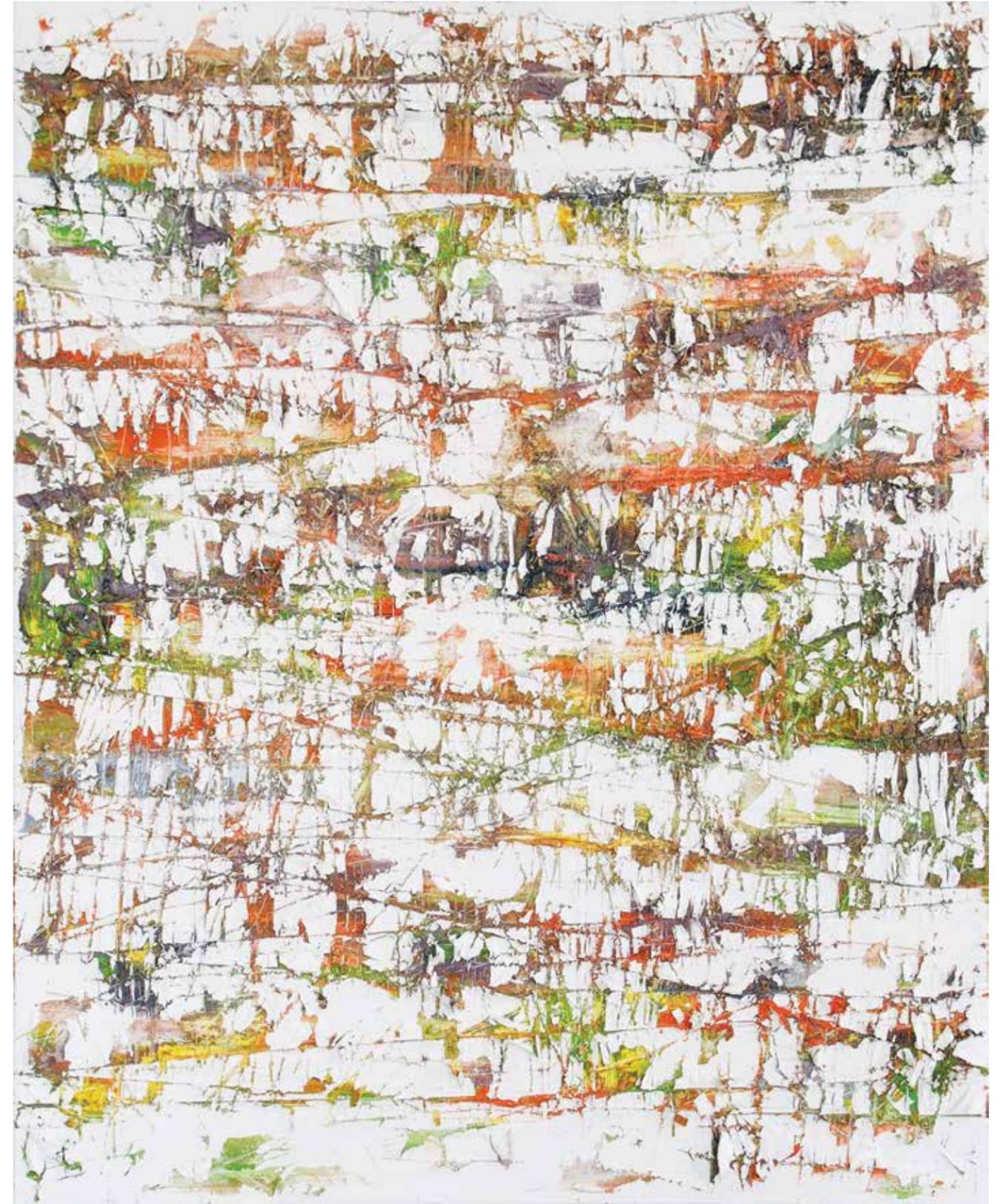
Screen capture from
— Kill Bill Vol.2
(Tarantino, Quentin, dir. Kill Bill Volume 2, Miramax Films, 2004. Film)



Actually, I Hate Violence
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm

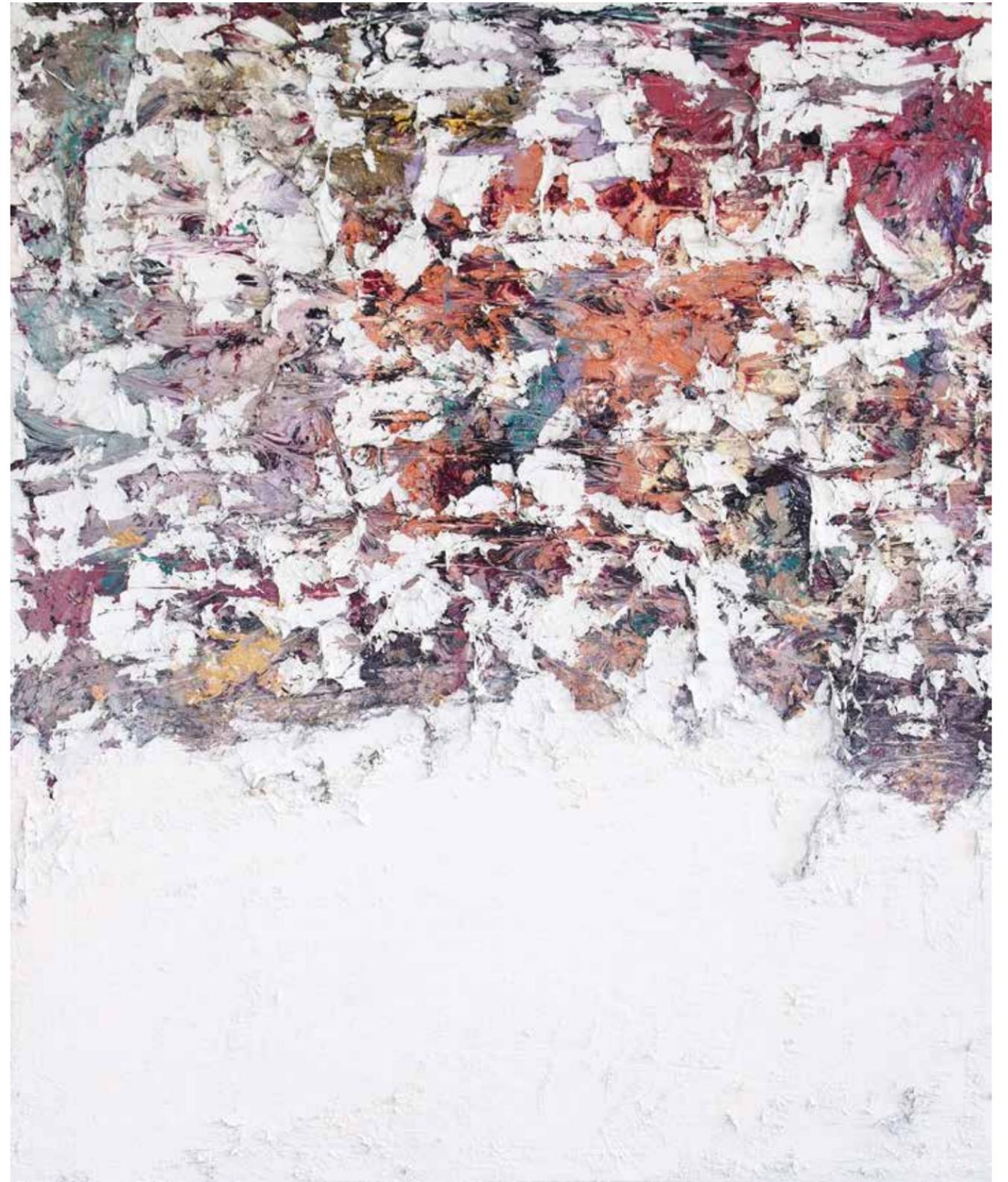


My Pain Is Constant and Sharp
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm



I Don't Know How Much Longer I Can Keep This Smile Frozen on My Face
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm

It's Just One of Those Days
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm

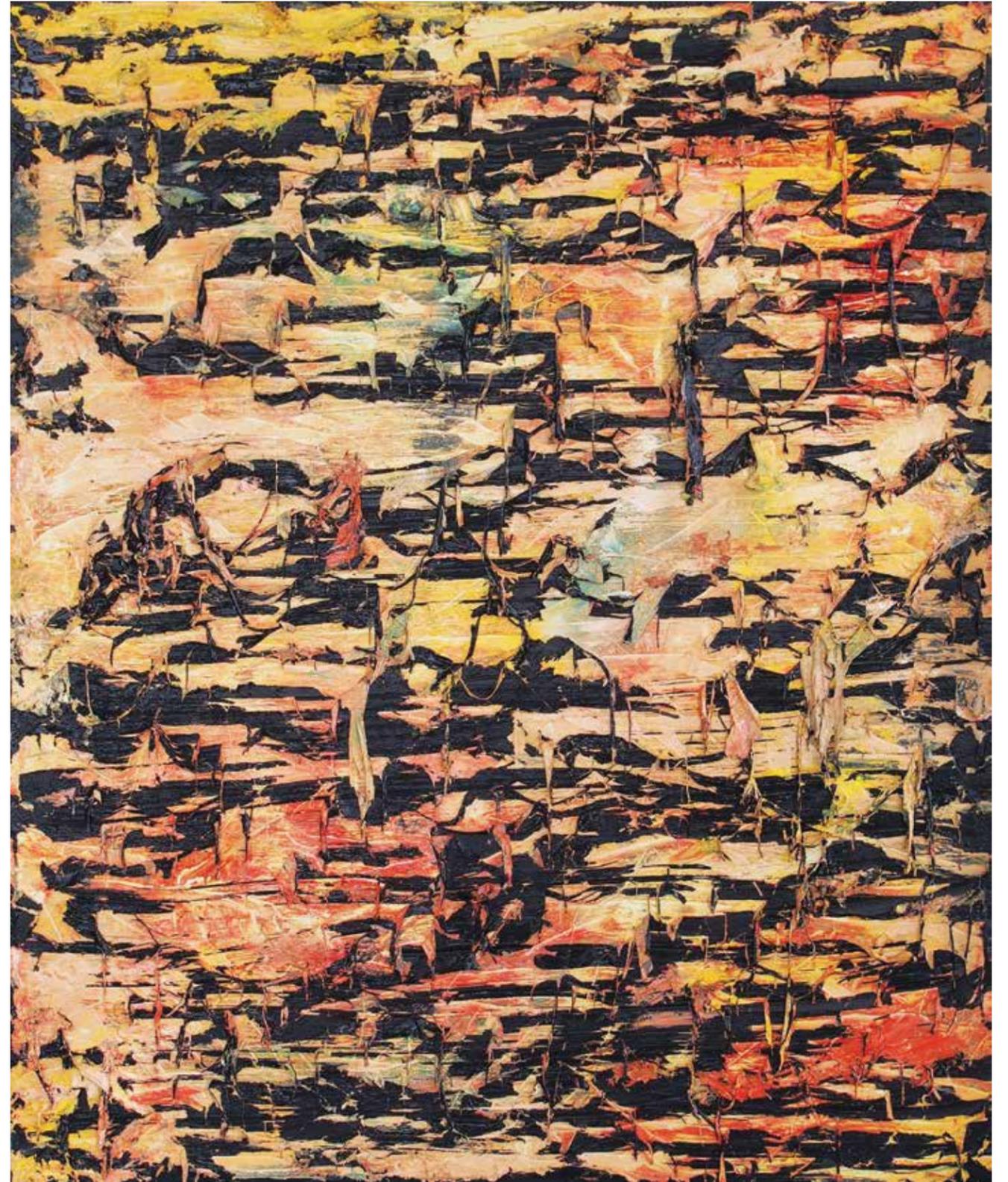




Screen capture from

— *Let the Right One In*

(Alfredson, Tomas, dir. *Let the Right One In*, Carl Molinder and John Nordling, 2008. Film)



Be Me for a Little While
2014
Oil & lacquer on canvas
90 x 75 cm



Yeoh Choo Kuan

Yeoh Choo Kuan (b. 1988, Malaysia) is a young artist working in the veins of Abstract Expressionism though he installs narratives and hints of figuration to the formal language of his paintings. He graduated from Dasein Academy of Art, Kuala Lumpur with a Diploma in Fine Arts in 2010. He lives and works in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Education

2012 Diploma in Fine Arts, Dasein Academy of Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Solo Exhibitions

2014 *In The Flesh*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2012 *Private Sentiment*, House of Matahati, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Group Exhibitions

2014 *Art Taipei*, Taipei, Taiwan
KIAF/14, Seoul, Korea

Arts Kuala Lumpur – Melbourne, Space@Collins Street Melbourne, Australia

Configuration, G13 Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

MEAA, White Box, Publika, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2013 *50/50* (two man show with artist Zelin Seah), TAKSU, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SAGER III (touring exhibition in 3 countries), HOM Gallery (Malaysia), Perahu Art Connection (Indonesia), Orange Gallery (Philippines)

Frame of Mind II, Orange Gallery, Bacolod City, Philippines

No Random Nonsense, Boston Gallery, Quezon City, Philippines

X Individuals- The Explorations, Art Accent Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Figuration Trajectory, G13 Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Up, Group Exhibition, TAKSU, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Locals Only, TAKSU, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2012 *Young & New Part IV*, House of Matahati, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

A Meter Diameter, House of Matahati, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2011 MEAA, Soka Gakkai Cultural Building, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The Malaysian Rice Plate Project, KL Convention Center, Suria KLCC, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

INSPIRATION OF TOMORROW, Starhill Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2010 *NOW!*, Starhill Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Breakthrough, Starhill Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



Acknowledgement

Deepest gratitude to my family, mentors, friends, Richard Koh, Michael Low and the Kuala Lumpur gallery team.

Richard Koh Fine Art has been in operation since 2005 and is regarded as a pioneer for introducing Southeast Asian contemporary art to Malaysia and the region. Promoting an adventurous roster of emerging and established Southeast Asian artists, the gallery regularly mounts exhibitions locally and abroad with a commitment to emerging practices and challenging media.

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