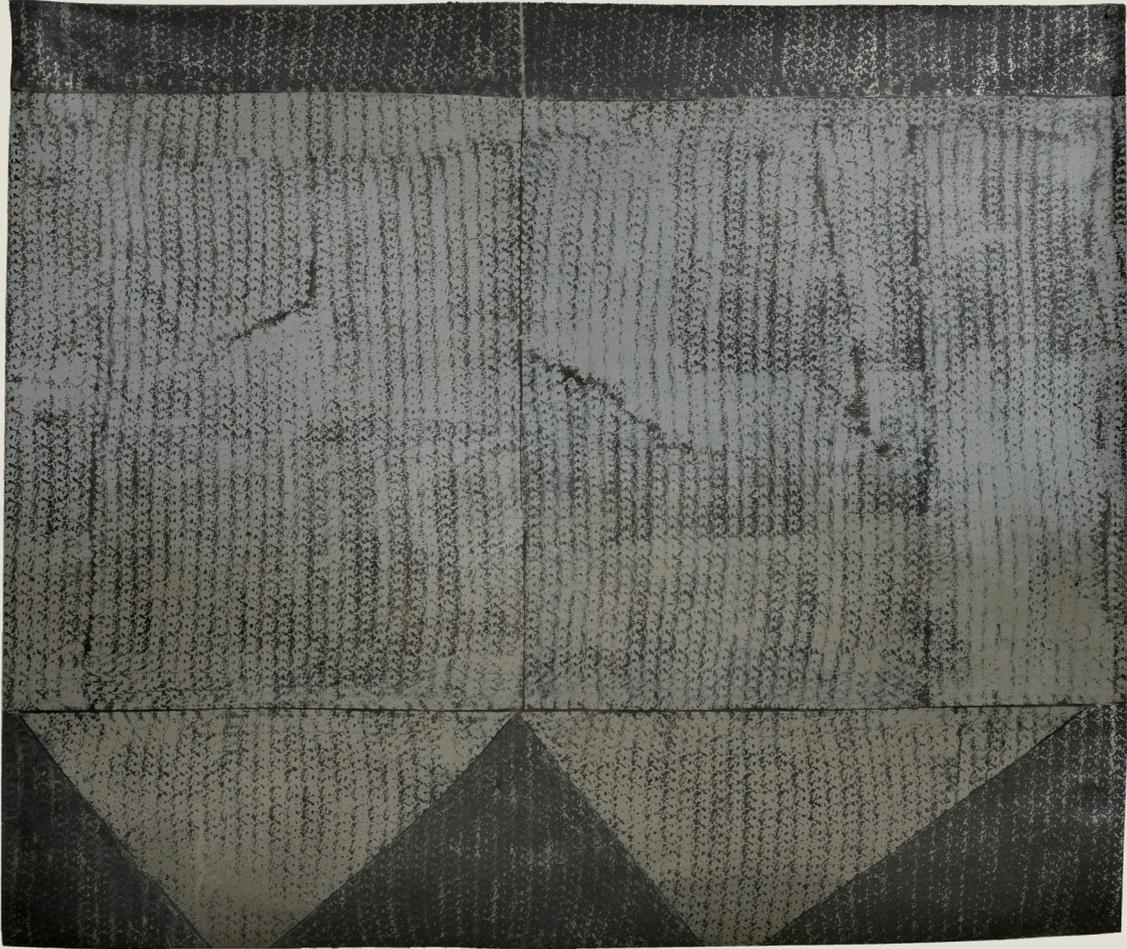


WAY FINDING



CAROLINE BURTON

This publication accompanies the New Jersey Artist Series exhibition:
WAY FINDING: CAROLINE BURTON
on view at the New Jersey State Museum, Trenton
from September 23, 2023 through March 31, 2024

The New Jersey Artist Series highlights the work of artists born, living,
or working in New Jersey.

Cover image: Caroline Burton, *State I (of Being, NJSM), 2022*.
Acrylic on canvas, 61 × 72.5 in.
Back cover image: Caroline Burton, *Peace, 2023*. Acrylic on canvas with
thread, 38.5 × 34 in.

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WAY FINDING

NEW JERSEY ARTIST SERIES

CAROLINE BURTON

September 23, 2023 to March 31, 2024

New Jersey State Museum, Trenton

Way Finding: A Blind Process

I first met Caroline Burton at her studio in Jersey City in the summer of 2022. There were finished canvases displayed on the walls of her studio, and piles of her work were stacked on a long table. Burton and I chatted about her practice as we carefully lifted each of the canvases and moved them to the other end of the table to reveal the painting underneath. Each unveiling of a new work was a delightful chance encounter, the marks and patterns shifting and transforming in surprising ways.

The markings in her paintings are familiar, but difficult to place. I asked how she made them, and Burton moved around the table to a plastic bag in a corner of her studio filled with crocheted and knitted afghan blankets. There were multiple bags like this filled to the brim with handwoven textiles she had found in thrift stores and yard sales. I quickly learned that within Burton's painting practice is a printmaking practice. She charges the afghans with paint, and presses them firmly against the surface of the canvas, often using the force of her entire body. Left behind is the impression of the crochet pattern, usually in some shade of gray acrylic paint. A two-dimensional ghost of the soft and brightly colored fiber matrix. A familiar pattern made uncanny.

It is with great reverence for the original maker that Burton collects and makes use of these discarded afghans in her work. She reflects on who they might have been, the hours of labor involved, and the original intended purpose of the object – Was it a gift? A bit of handmade charm to brighten the home? In fact, Burton sees these unknown makers as silent collaborators in the printmaking process that drives her work. The anonymity of her collaborator, and the inherently blind nature of printmaking is essential to Burton's process. A unique aspect of printmaking is that the form you seek to capture in ink is concealed until the final moments when printing matrix is lifted

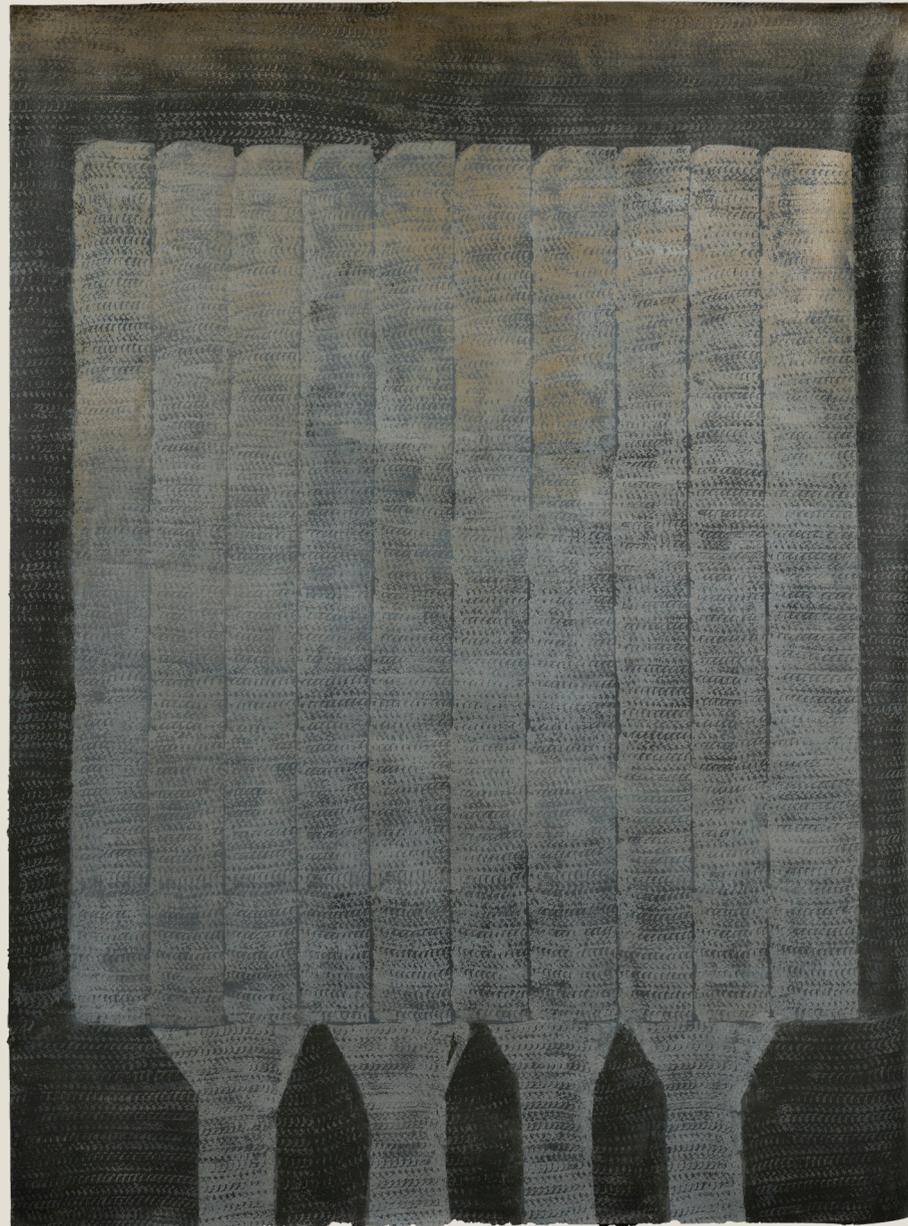
from the surface, forcing the maker to trust their intuition and the blindness essential to the creative process. Even when Burton reuses and re-inks an afghan, each imprint is individual, and the result a mystery until the blanket is peeled away from the canvas, and the artist sees what she has made for the first time. The developments that emerge are ultimately a product of chance, something Burton not only embraces, but deliberately seeks out.

It occurred to me that the process of looking through Caroline's paintings in the studio – pulling back canvases to reveal ones underneath, and the excitement and anticipation one feels with each unveiling – closely mirrors Burton's process of making the work. As a viewer, I was learning what the artist could accomplish using this method, and how to look at and approach her work. I was allowing shapes and patterns to unfold before me, and observed the connections and distinctions between forms that hover between the familiar and unfamiliar. There was something in the experience akin to walking through an unfamiliar space, like a new house. Just as one might be surprised when what you thought would be bathroom is actually a closet, so too, would I find myself expecting to see certain shades of gray or a horizontal rectangle, then be shocked by hot pink hues, or oblong circular shapes that float in a field of paint. I was just getting my bearings.

In public spaces, like a school, hospital, or museum, there are often informational systems and processes that help people navigate through these physical environments. These tools and systems are called "wayfinding," a term often attributed to the architect Kevin Lynch, who first used it in the early 1960s. Wayfinding tools might come in the form of maps or signage pointing visitors toward key locations, such as elevators, waiting rooms, galleries, exits, etc. The term has also been used to describe the ways in which humans and animals orient themselves and find their way from place to place in nature. Burton learned



State I (of Being, NJSM) (detail), 2022
Acrylic on canvas, 61 x 72.5 in.



State II (of Being, NJSM), 2023
Acrylic on canvas, 72.5 x 54 in.

of this term only after completing many of the works in this exhibition, and found it useful when describing the process of both making and looking at her oeuvre. Separated into two words, *way finding* conveys an active approach to navigation that Burton feels more accurately describes her practice.

The titles of *State I (of Being, NJSM), 2022* and *State II (of Being, NJSM), 2023* are perhaps hints to the viewer about the process that drives Burton's work. The term "State" contains within it multiple meanings, including one that refers to the printmaking process. A state is a stage through which a print progresses as an artist alters the original matrix, adding complexity with each new layer. Printmakers often create many states before achieving the final print. The titles, *State I* and *State II*, indicate that these paintings are related, and perhaps alternate versions of the same work, or part of the journey toward some other future painting. Indeed, with these grisaille abstract forms, Burton has created several paintings based on the architecture of the New Jersey State Museum building, adding another facet to the term "state." Each painting approaches the structure from a different perspective, capturing the paradoxical nature of the building's midcentury design. The gray concrete of the building's exterior, clad mostly in marble, is an imposing block of stone that appears to hover almost weightlessly above attenuating broad triangular forms that narrow into supportive pillars, and walls of glass and steel.

A visitor coming to see *Way Finding* would likely enter the Museum through the main entrance on the first floor, passing the Auditorium, Planetarium, State Library, and other buildings that make up the 1965 Cultural Complex. Once inside, one will need to get their bearings in order to find the Riverside Gallery on the second floor. Maps and signage within the building can help point them in the right direction. One visitor might choose to make a beeline for the exhibition, while others might choose to meander through other galleries along the way, exploring the Museum's permanent collections. Some might draw connections between Burton's abstract paintings and the strong geometric and minimalist style of artists like Tony Smith; or locate the influence of American quilt making in works that Burton has torn apart and re-stitched together. In the shapes and forms that

emerge from her work, one might find something similar in historical maps or satellite imagery of agricultural and natural areas. The interlocking and layered structure of Burton's paintings might also evoke the art of basket weaving, and the use of color and compacting of pigment is at times reminiscent of the sedimentation of rock and minerals. While not made with these specific objects and images in mind, Burton's work might inadvertently lead us down museum hallways that house these items, and perhaps ultimately guide us to the perfect side view of the Museum building, with the memory of Burton's *State I* and *State II* fresh in our minds.

Not only does Burton find her way through an intuitive blind printmaking process and collaborative work with unknown makers, but so too does the viewer as we embark upon a sort of expedition through close looking, taking in the strangely familiar details and markings in each work. The images that result from Burton's process then become wayfinding tools themselves at the moment when one's memory of her paintings comes into contact with the place, land, structure, or object that originally inspired it.

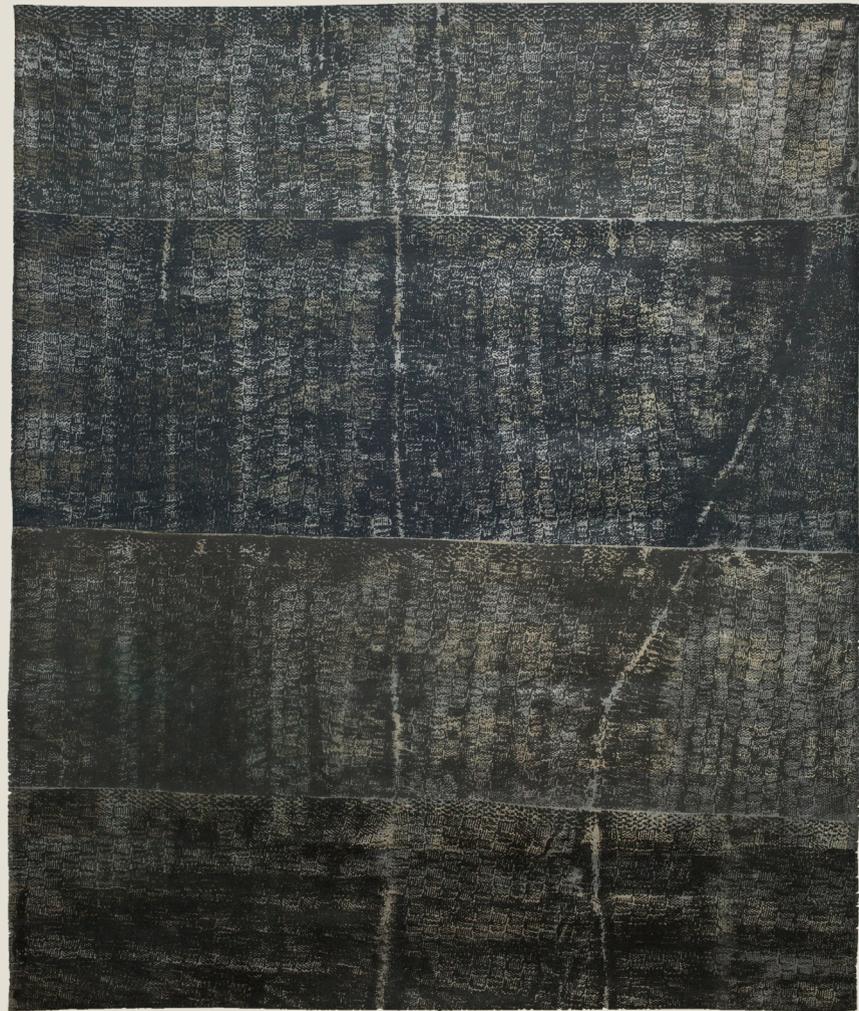
Sarah B. Vogelman
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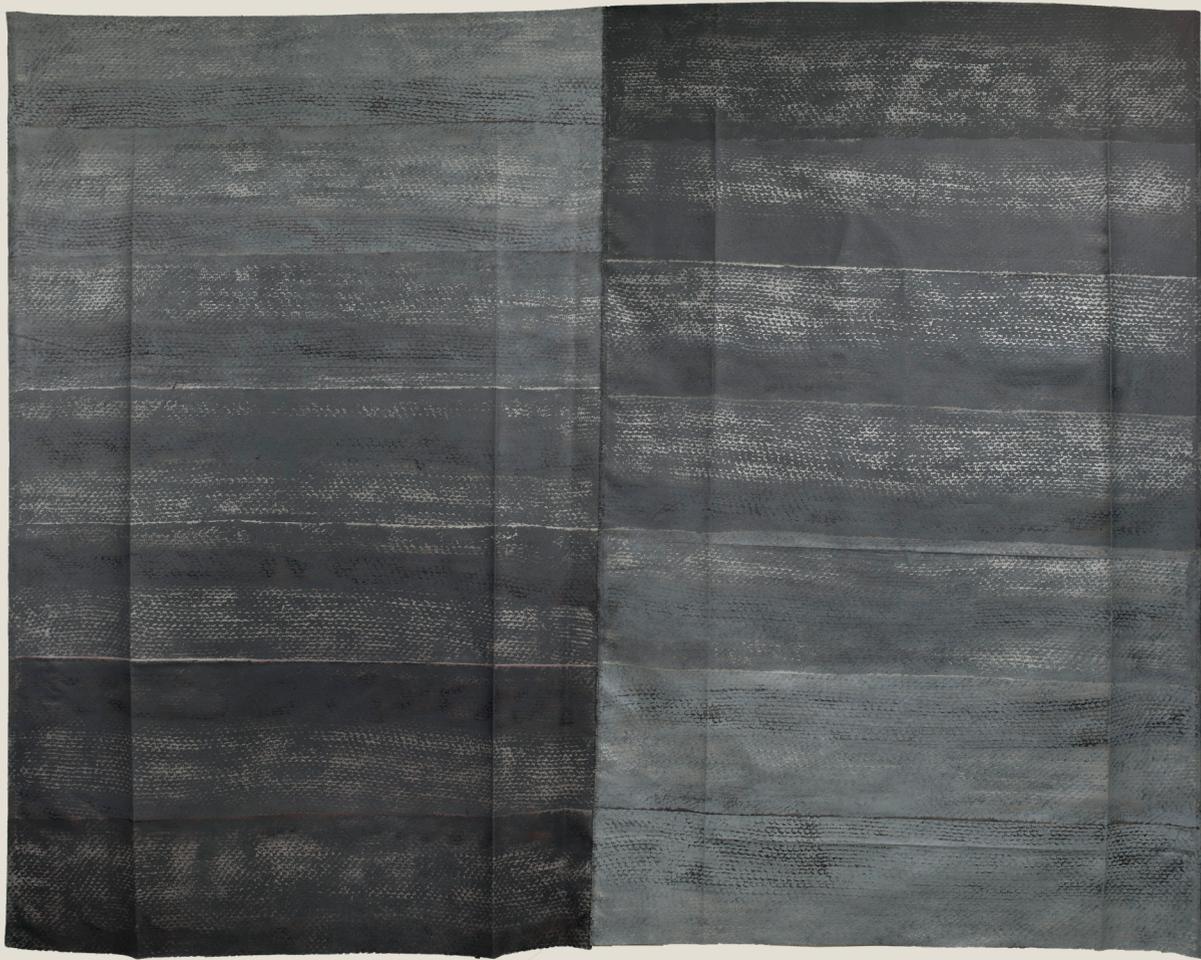
Four Corners (Incarnation), 2022
Acrylic on canvas, 74.5 x 72.5 in.



Incarnation x 4 (Seneca Lake), 2020
Acrylic on canvas with thread, 66.5 x 56 in.



Four Fields (Incarnation), 2022
Acrylic on canvas, 73 x 60 in.



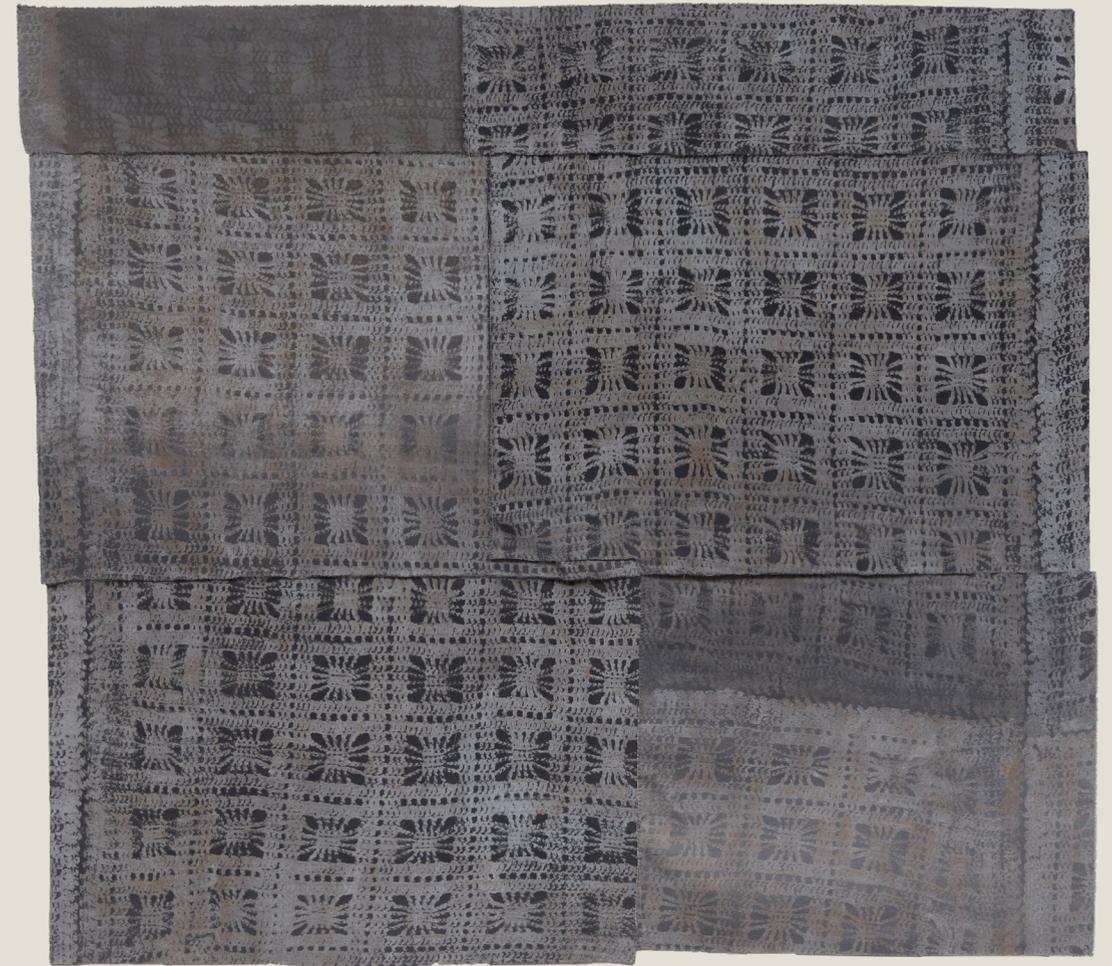
Incarnation 45 (with folds), 2022
Acrylic on canvas with thread, 96 x 120 in.



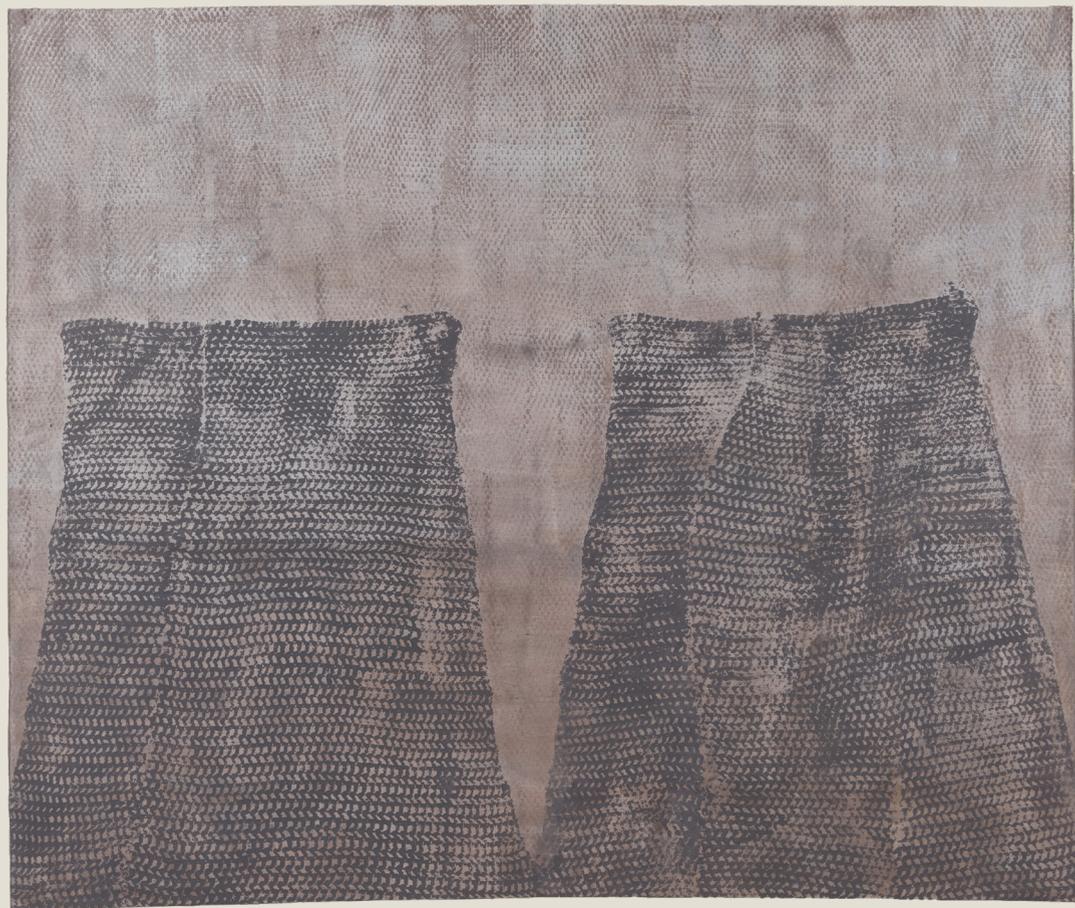
Intersect (Incarnation), 2022. Acrylic on canvas, 25.5 x 22.5 in.



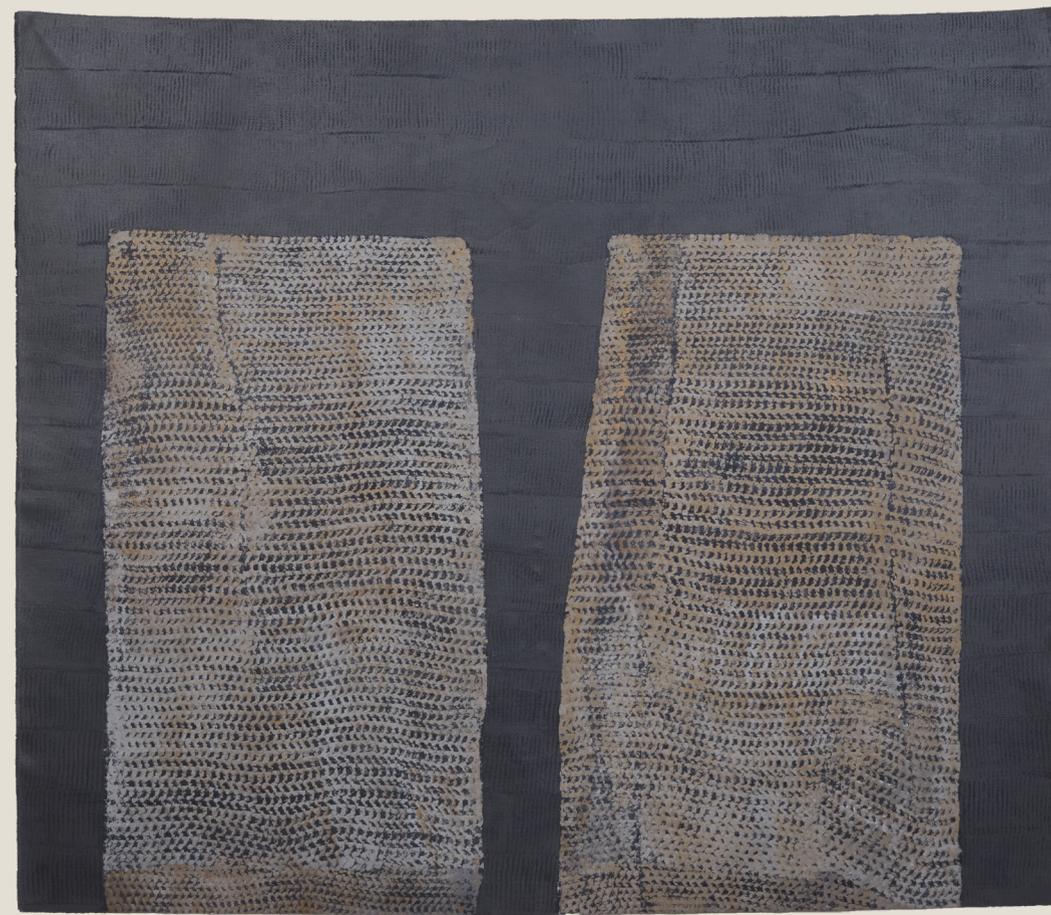
Concrete (Incarnation), 2022. Acrylic on canvas, 23 x 20.5 in.



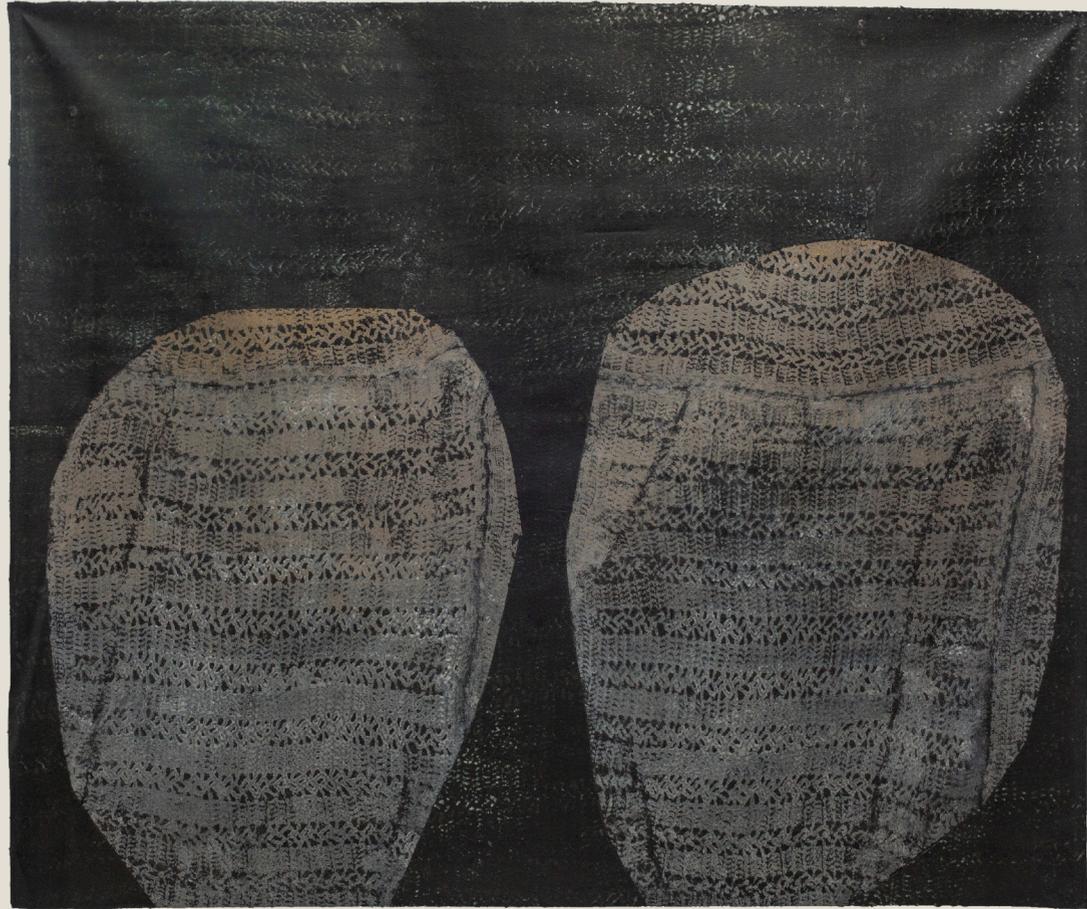
Concrete (U of C Incarnation), 2021
Acrylic on canvas with thread, 55 x 61 in.



Towers I (Incarnation), 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 61.5 x 72 in.



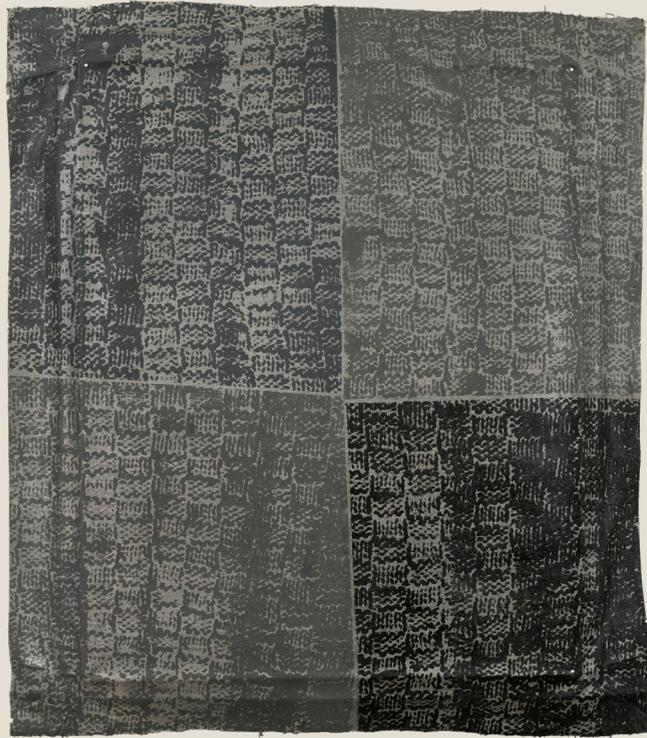
Towers II (Incarnation), 2021
Acrylic on canvas, 62 x 72.5 in.



Boulder (Incarnation), 2022
Acrylic on canvas, 61.5 x 72.5 in.



Framed (Incarnation), 2022
Acrylic on canvas, 35.5 x 26 in.



Four Corners (Grey Incarnation), 2022
Acrylic on canvas, 24 x 20.5 in.



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