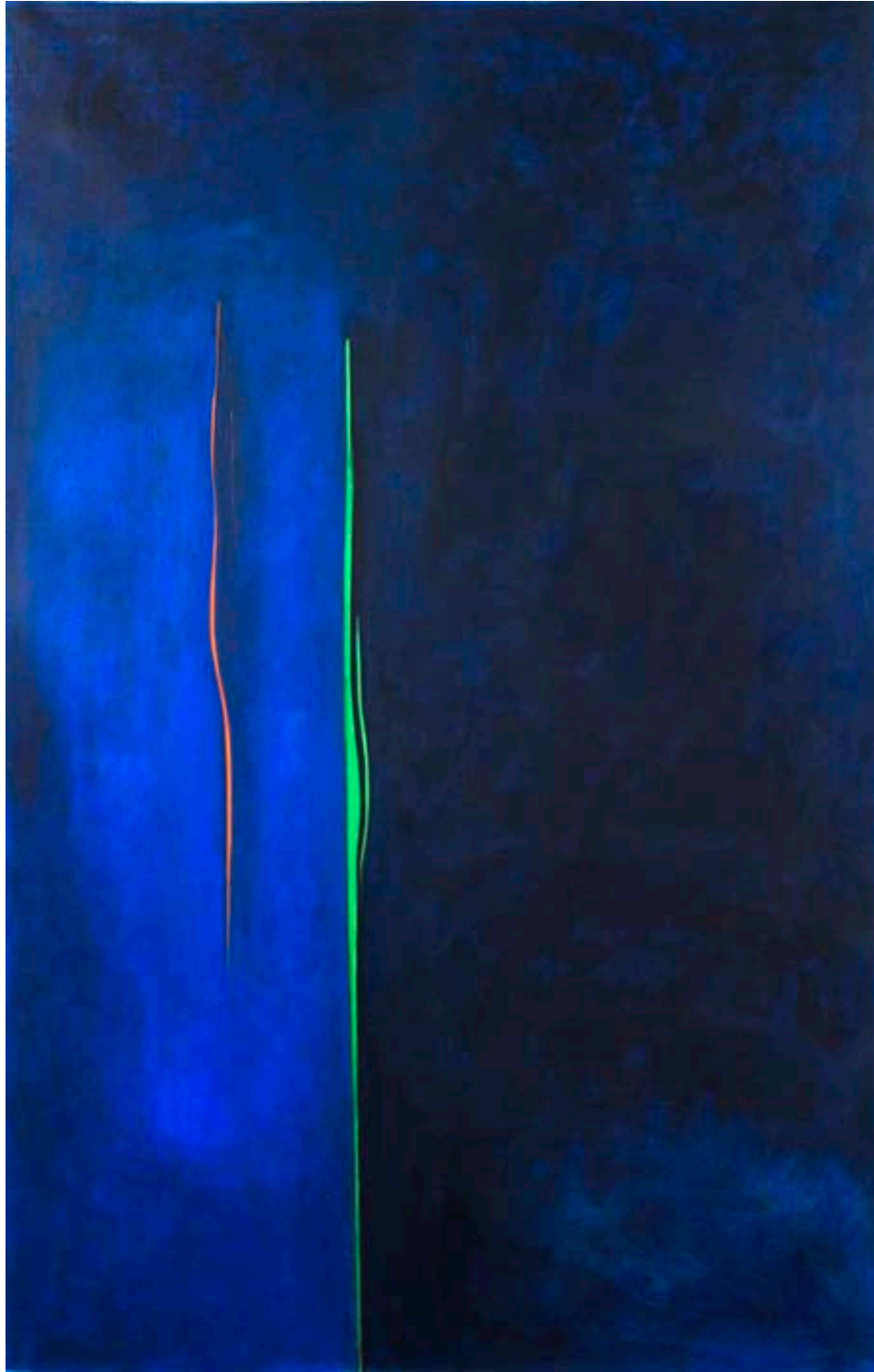


SONAM DOLMA

CONTEMPORARY TIBETAN ABSTRACTION AND INSTALLATION



C.X. SILVER GALLERY/BRATTLEBORO VT OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2010

LIST OF WORKS OF ART

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PAGE 24/25	RED CARPET, 2009/10, PLASTER (CA. 420 TSA TSA) AND WOOD, Ø: 244 CM, (NOT SHOWN IN BRATTLEBORO),
PAGE 26/27	RED CARPET (DETAIL)
PAGE 28/29	WISDOM, MARBLE AND PLASTER, 2010, (THE 2200 TEETH ARE CASTED FROM A WISDOM TOOTH), Ø 102 CM (NOT SHOWN IN BRATTLEBORO)
PAGE 30/31	TOWER OF BABEL, PLASTER AND WOOD, H: 95 CM, Ø 46 CM (NOT SHOWN IN BRATTLEBORO)
BACK COVER	SONAM DOLMA IN STUDIO, LONG ISLAND CITY, NY

Sonam Dolma

Sonam Dolma defies categorization and definition, both as a person and as an artist. She is one of few Tibetan-born contemporary female artists living and working in the West. Although topics and objects central to Buddhist and Tibetan life run through her art, she refuses to be labeled “Tibetan artist” just to fit into a niche that would be easy to exploit. Art has no nationality, religion, or gender, she says. In her paintings and installations, she puts personal experiences into new, universal contexts. If anything, her work is a continuous quest for her innermost self.

As an abstract painter, using mostly acrylic and sometimes oil on canvas, she is influenced more by Mark Rothko and Franz Marc than by traditional Tibetan art, which she never learned. And yet, especially her earlier paintings are strongly influenced by the colors of her native country and the Buddhist notion that all appearance is illusion. In these paintings, she often depicts abstract forms and shapes in earthy hues of orange, ochre, and green. The forms vaguely resemble large vases that seem fragile and ethereal, alluding to the human body as a precious and vulnerable vessel that one needs to be careful about what to fill it with.

Sonam Dolma’s move to New York in 2008 had a big impact on the direction that her work would take. She was struck by the blatantly overt power of the so-called “white collars” but also of dealers and collectors that she met in the art world. It’s as if her work became more concrete, forceful and direct as she embarked to reflect on issues of greed, selfishness, and abuse of power—which are all central themes in Buddhism that did guide Sonam Dolma throughout her life. However, with the act of being openly critical she deviates from the more typical Tibetan attitude of accepting existing conditions. Her “White Collars” series of paintings (2008/09) refers to such vivid encounters with men of power, and as a consequence, shapes of slightly menacing faces began to appear in her paintings. In some of these paintings, the faces look as if frozen in a snapshot, one eye coveting a distant object.

“Silent Ocean” is a series of 12 paintings in saturated dark blue, created during a residency at Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, in the summer of 2010. The idea for the series emerged from seeing images of the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico and after spending time on the Greek island of Paros, where all fish had practically disappeared. The paintings are unusually somber, with only a few, thin strokes of bright color—the life that is being destroyed in the oceans.

In New York, Sonam Dolma began to work with more tangible materials—clay, plaster, cloth, and wood; molds of teeth and empty gun shells, and material from traditional Tibetan and Buddhist life, such as monk’s clothes and religious objects. But rather than using them in their traditional context, she re-appropriates them, creating new meaning that urges us to think about war, poverty, religion, the environment, and what we are leaving behind for the next generation.

The New York encounters also conjured up feelings of powerlessness from her early life, when the Chinese invaded her native country and she had to escape with her family. Her installation, “Red Carpet” (2010), for example, consists of about 500 *tsa tsas*, traditional clay moldings of miniature Buddhist images, in the symbolic shape of a stupa or mound-like structures containing Buddhist relics.

The making of *tsha tsas* is a Tibetan Buddhist practice to accumulate merit. They can be found everywhere in Tibet, often piled up at a Khora, a circumambulation around a sanctum as part of a pilgrimage or meditation. Here, they stand on a wooden disc arranged in a circular field, lined up in narrow rows next to each other. The perfect geometrical form is intersected by a long red stripe representing a red carpet that interrupts the constellation. With the intrusion of the red carpet, the small rows of *tsha tsas* look like an anonymous mass watching a parade. The stupas also represent the uncountable victims of power abuse.

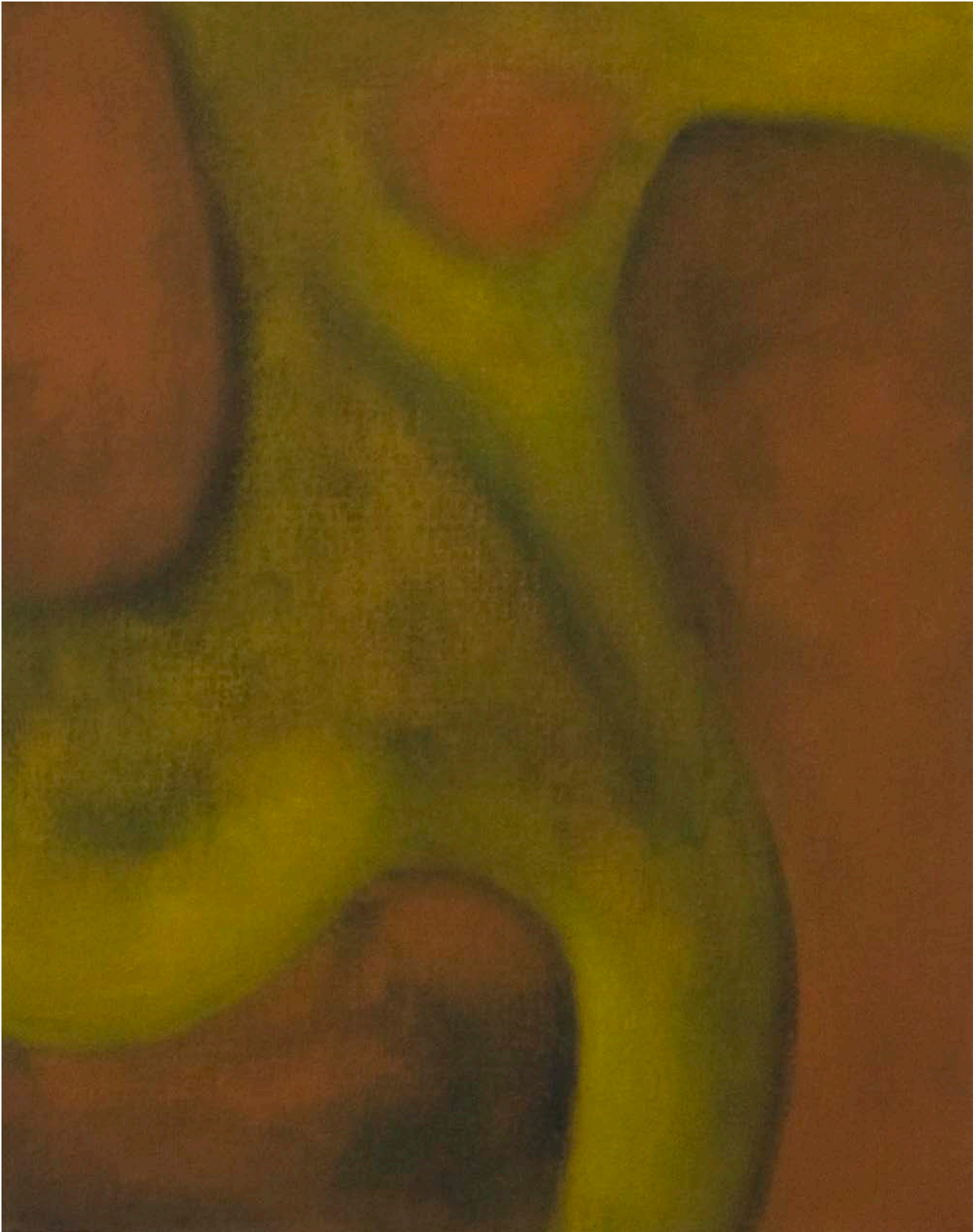
“Tower of Babel” (2010) is a cone-shaped installation consisting of five plates, carrying objects resembling candles, and piled on top of each other, each becoming smaller than the previous one. Every plate holds dozens of tightly stacked, vertical clay molds of empty gun shells alternating with plates holding clay forms resembling penises. The two molds are very similar in size, shape and form, and can easily be mistaken for one another. With this seemingly innocent-looking “wedding cake,” Sonam Dolma brings home the connection between machoism and destruction.

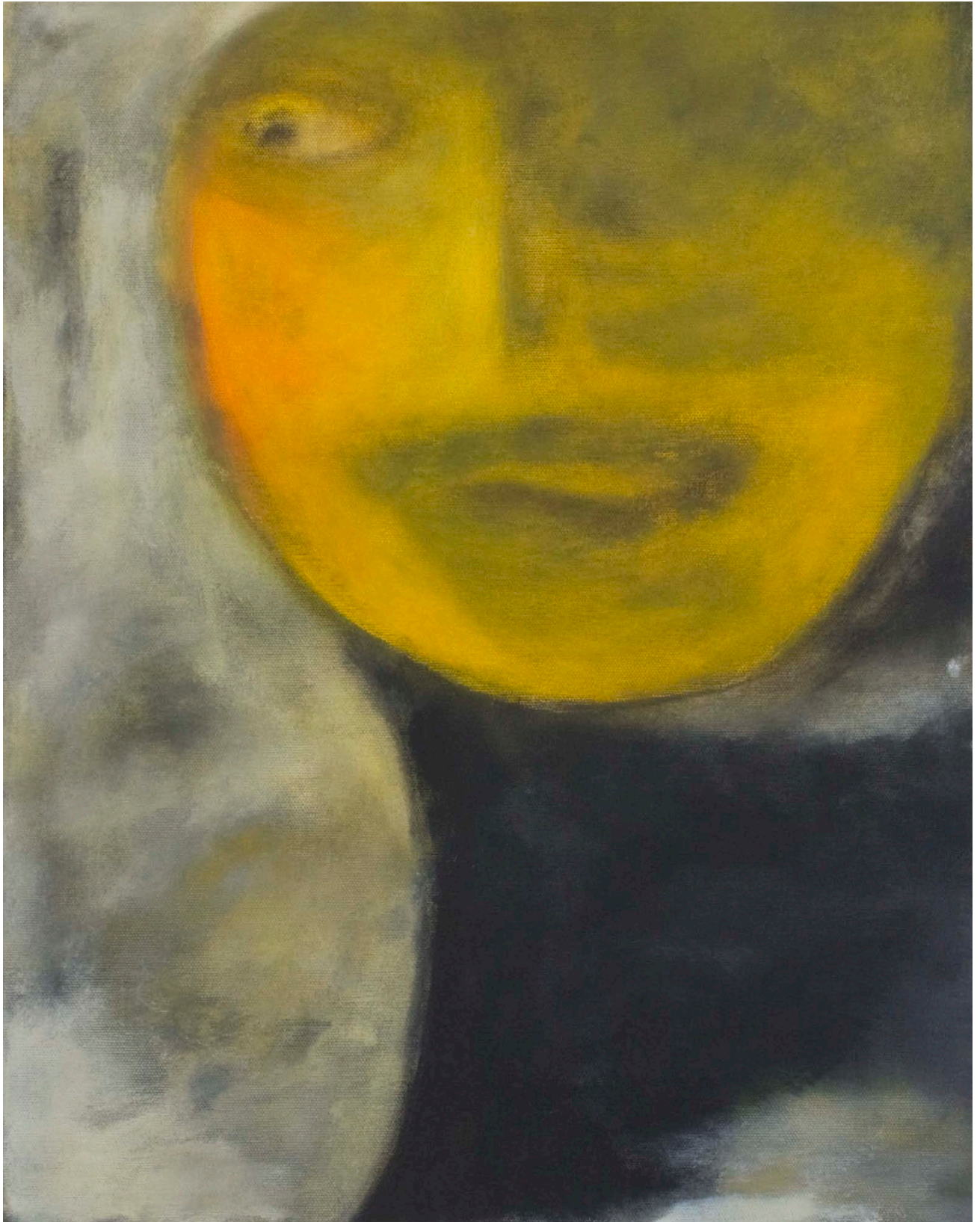
Made of 2200 replicas of a wisdom tooth that are neatly gathered in three white triangles on a black marble disk with a 40-inch diameter, “The Wisdom” (2010) takes on the shape of the universal nuclear sign. The installation is a reminder that the pinnacle of our “wisdom” has the potential to totally annihilate mankind.

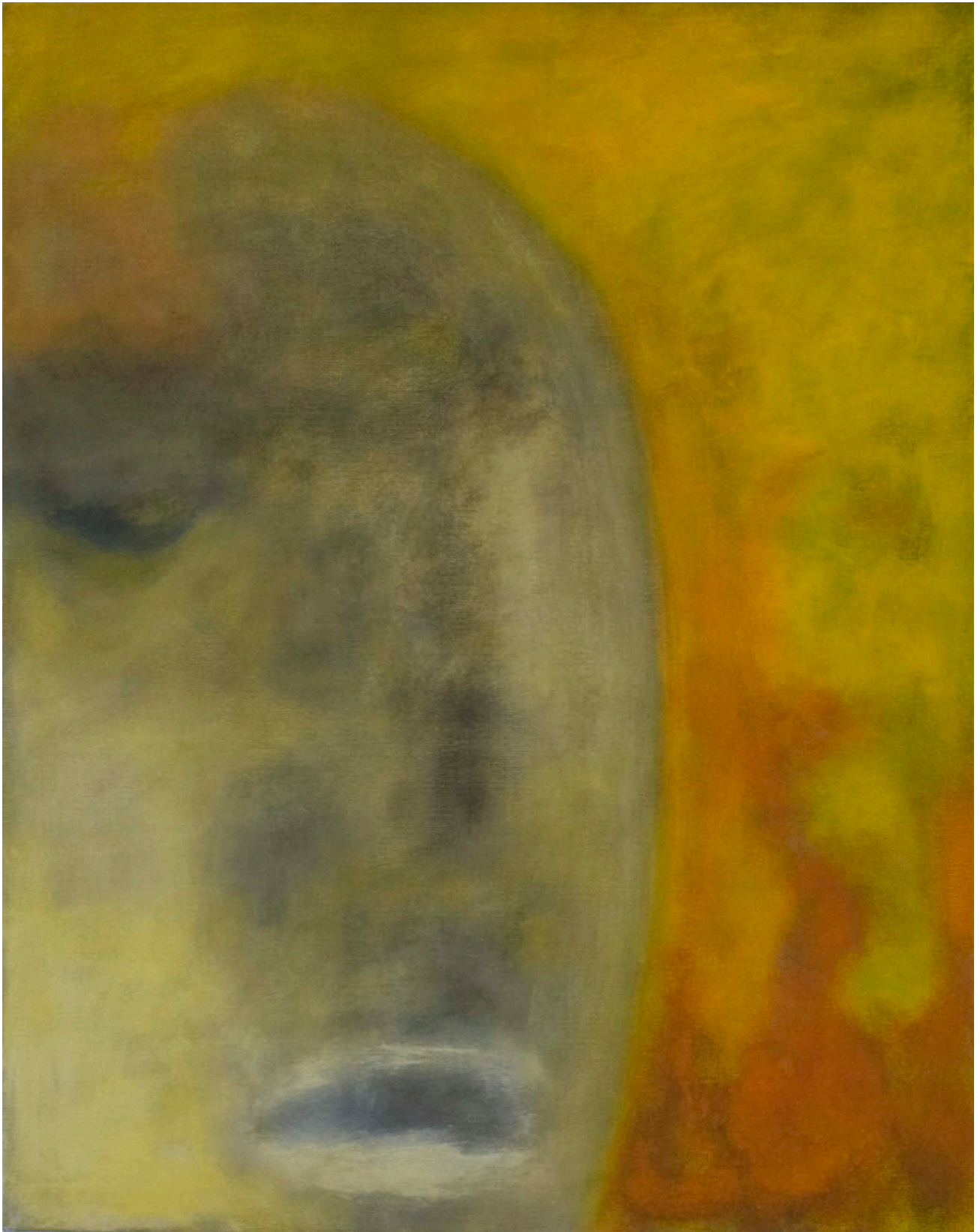
Perhaps Sonam Dolma’s most personal work is “My Father’s Death” (2009/10), a homage to her father, a Buddhist monk. It shows nine stupa-shaped *tsha tsas* protected by a square pile of folded Tibetan monk’s robes. Sonam Dolma was born in Tibet in 1953 and came to India when she was six years old, after a grueling journey over the Himalayas during which her younger sister died. In India her father worked, like many of the first generation of refugees, in road construction. Exhausted from the escape and hard labor, he died shortly after. He asked his wife to conceal their relationship, for they had no money to pay for his cremation. Sometimes the ashes of the deceased are put in *Tsha Tsas* and left at holy places; a *tsha tsha* mold was among the few things her family brought on their escape to India, which Sonam Dolma now uses as a mold for her artwork. She collected forty-nine monk robes for this installation, equal to the number of days that special prayers have to be read after death. It was important for Sonam Dolma to use worn robes, “to smell and feel the lives of these monks,” as she puts it. The clothes were hard to come by, but little by little relatives and friends in India and Tibet gathered them for her. “My Father’s Death” has thus also become a silent monument for all who have died in exile far away from their homeland.

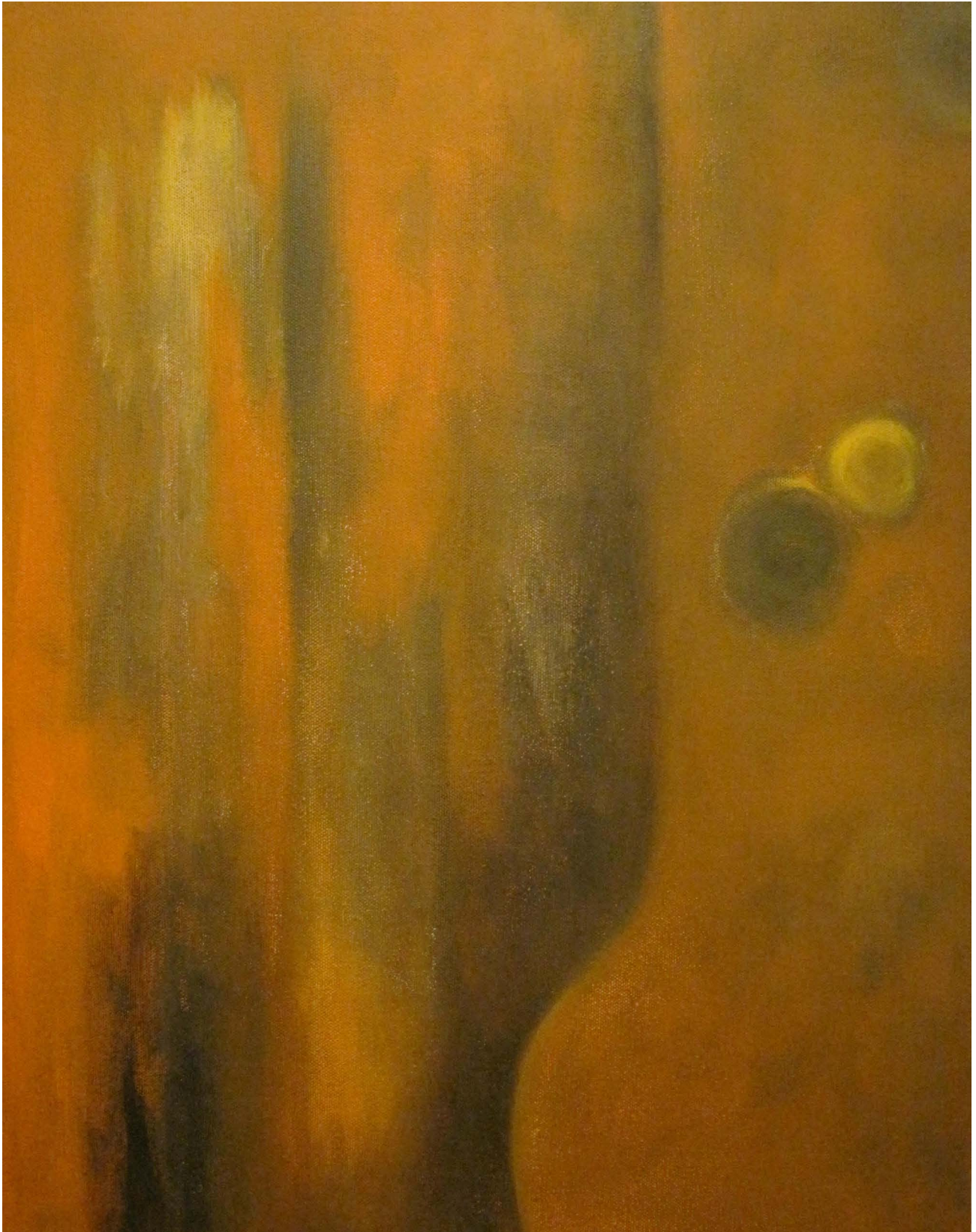
Sonam Dolma, too, was forced to work in road construction in India, until she was able to attend an English school. At the age of 19, she met her Swiss husband, Martin Brauen, and moved with him to his native country. She now spends her time between Switzerland and New York. She has exhibited widely in Europe and the United States, including at the C.X. Silver Gallery, Brattleboro, VT; Courtyard Gallery, Christopher Farr, Los Angeles; Neuhoff Gallery/Fuller Building, New York; Galerie Artraktion, Bern, and the Wereld Museum, Rotterdam.

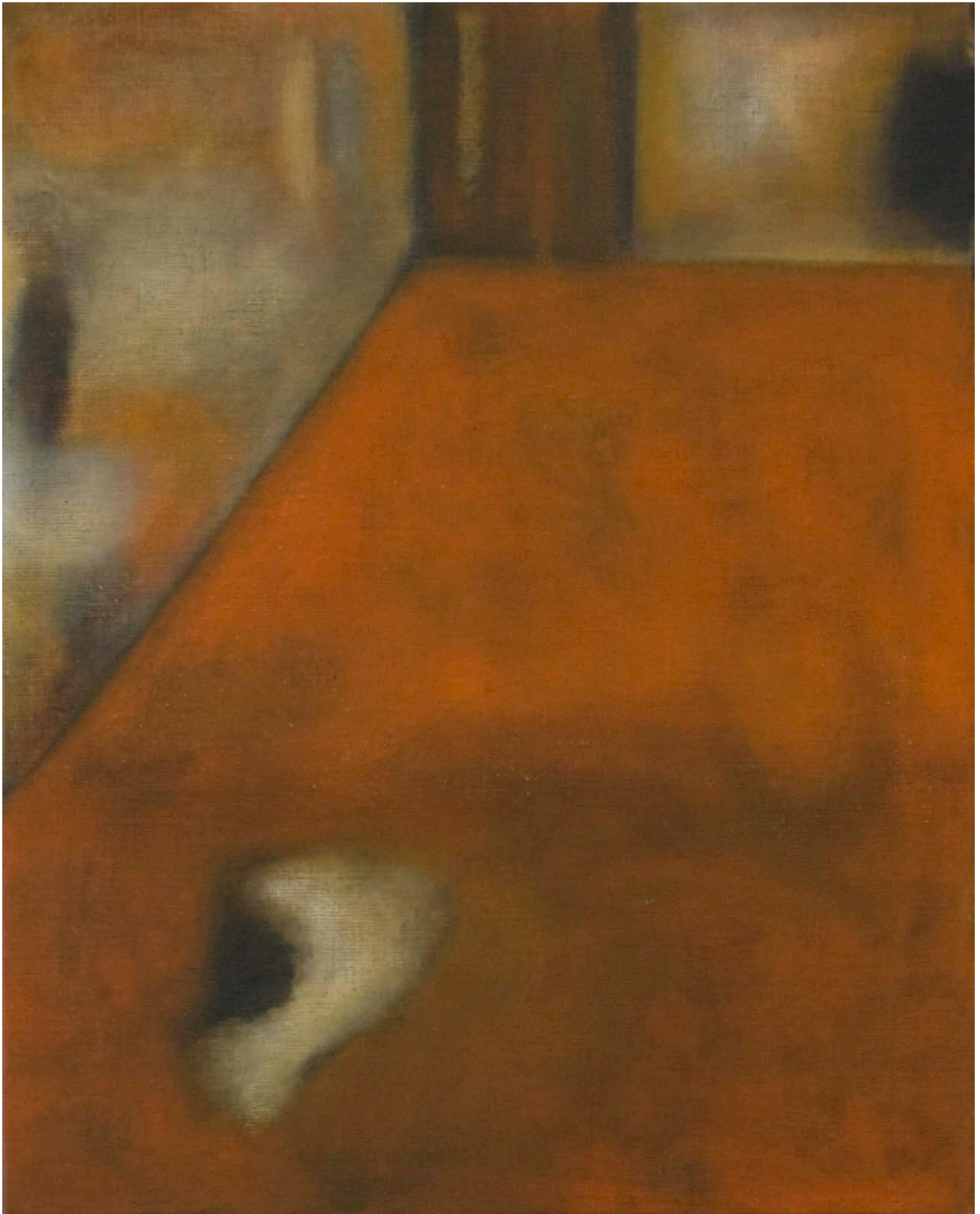
Corinne Erni, curator and cultural manager, 2010

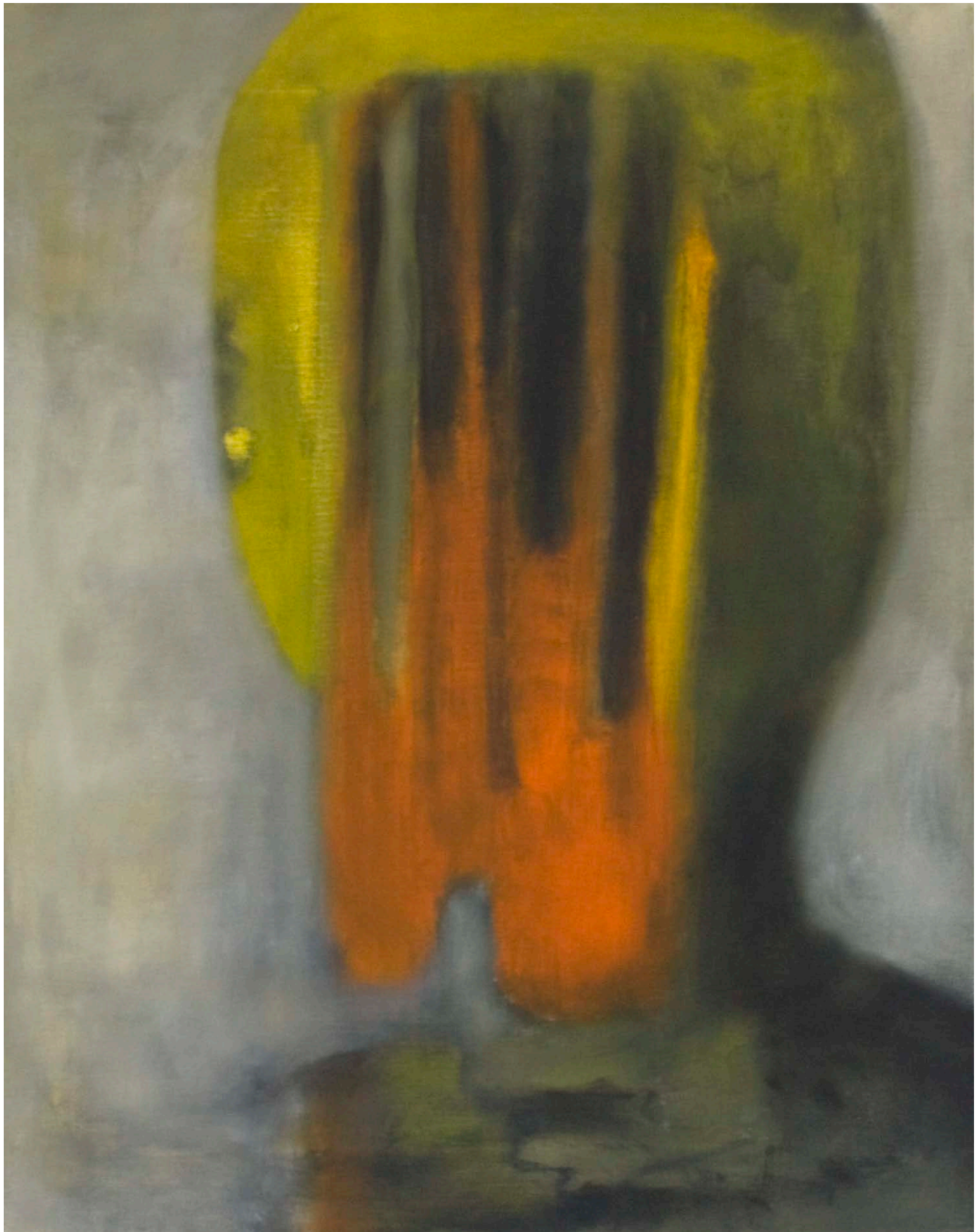


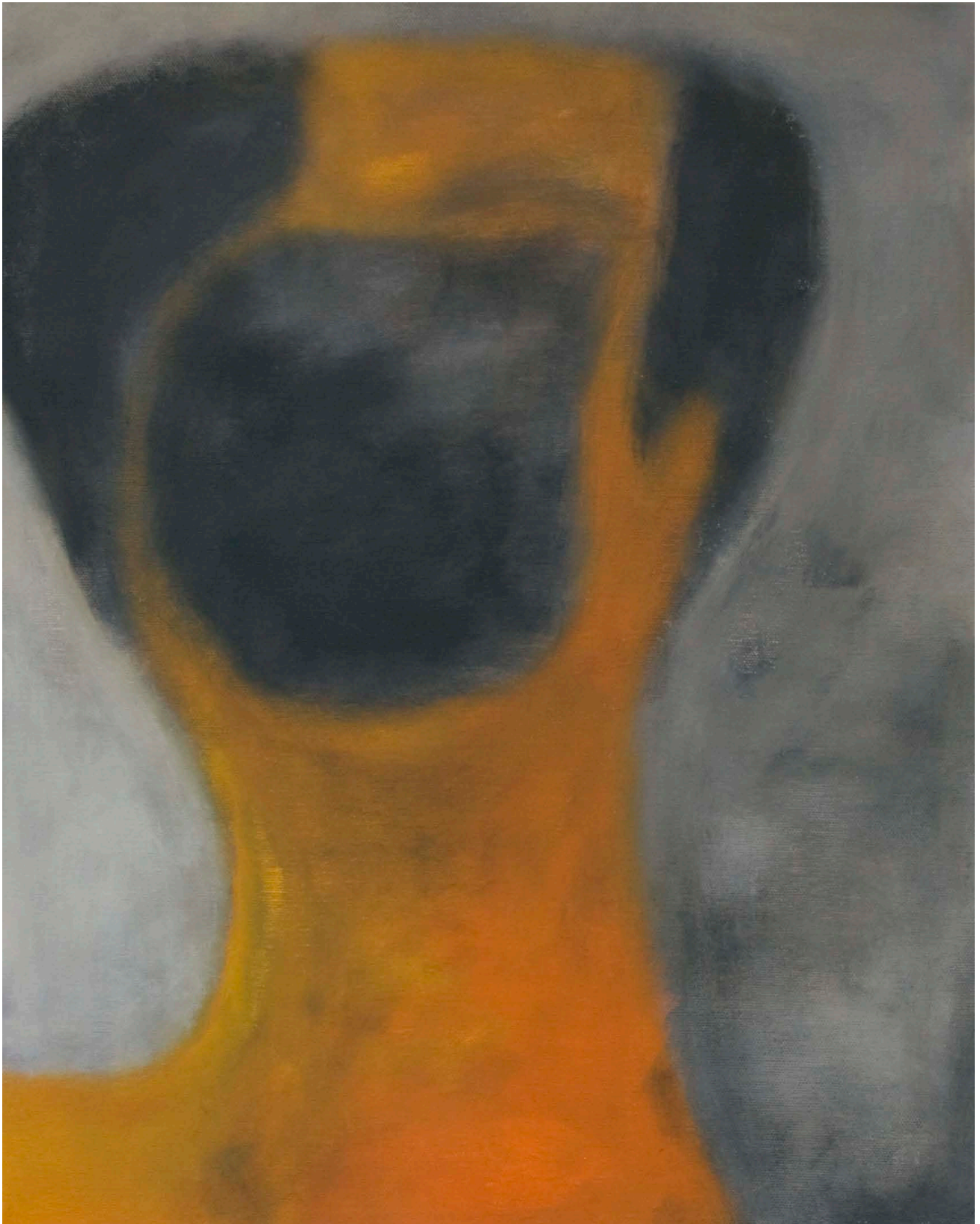


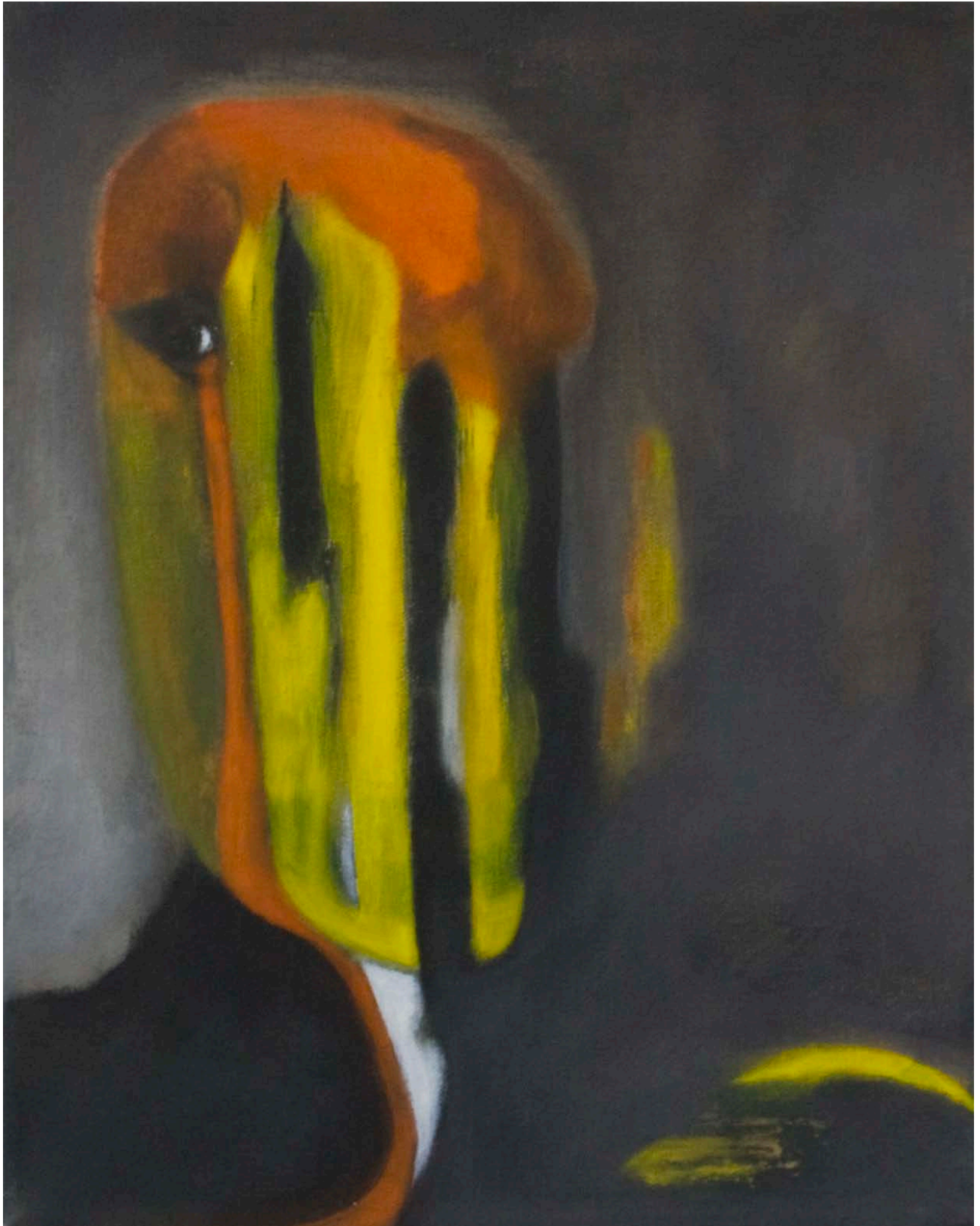


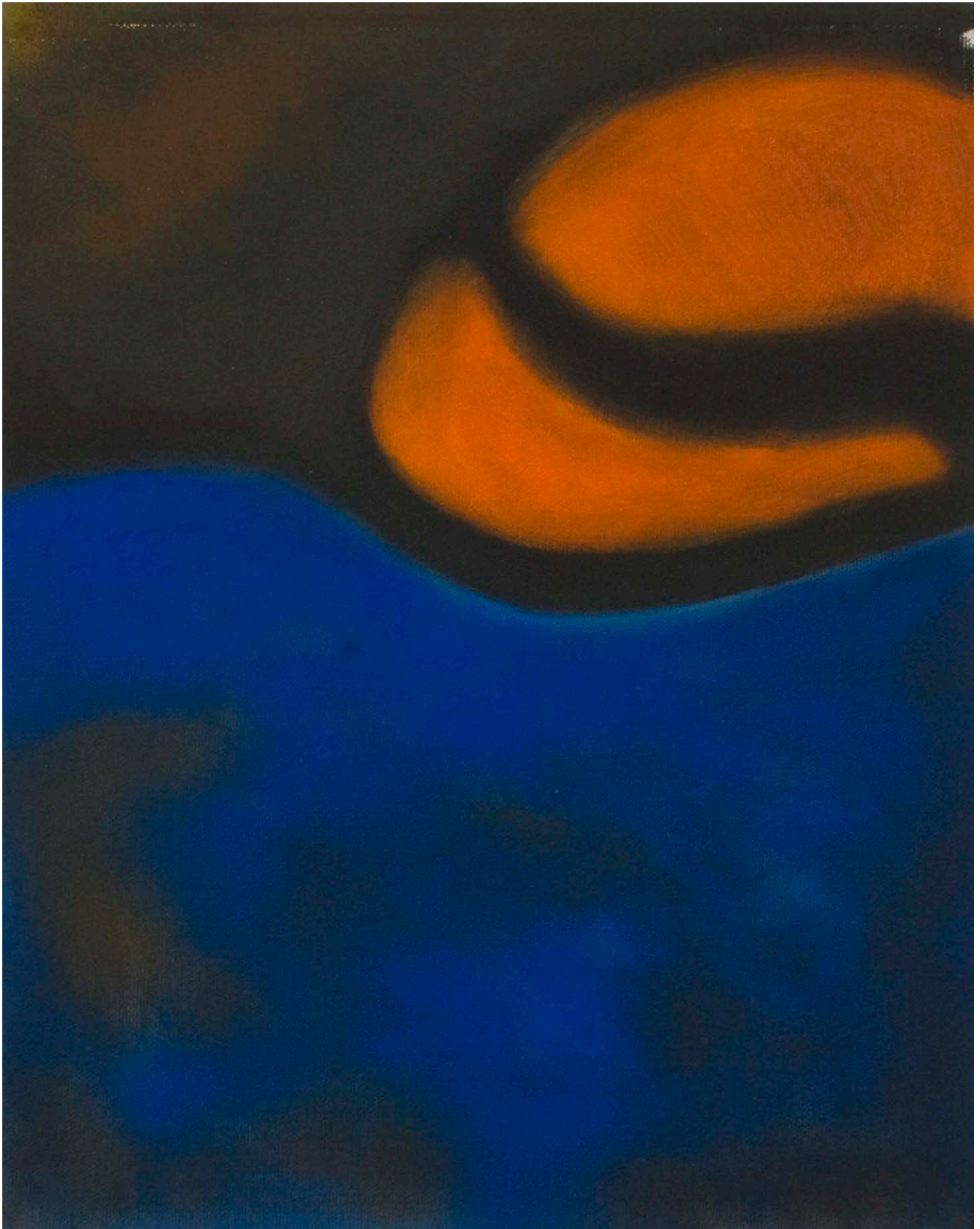


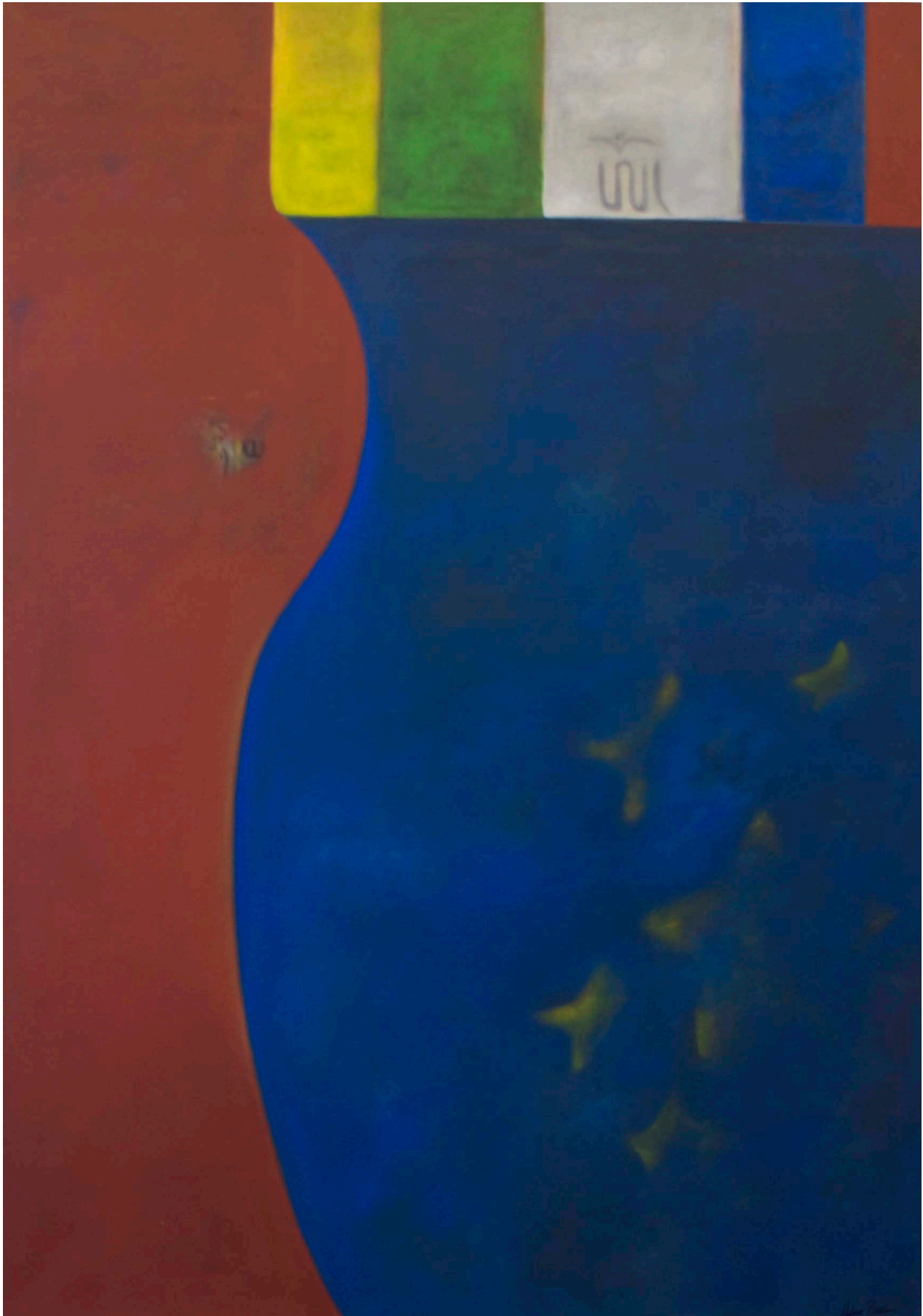




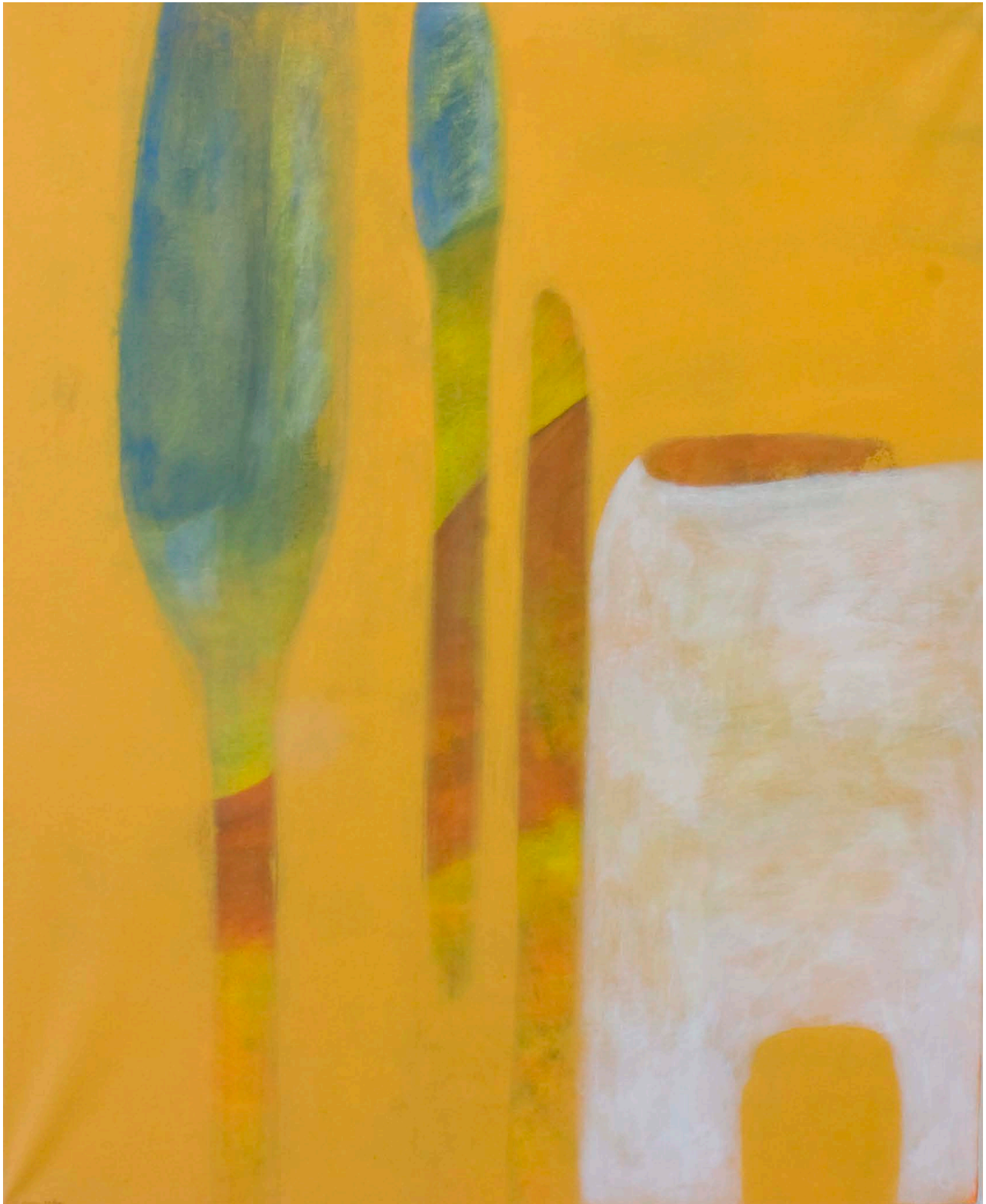






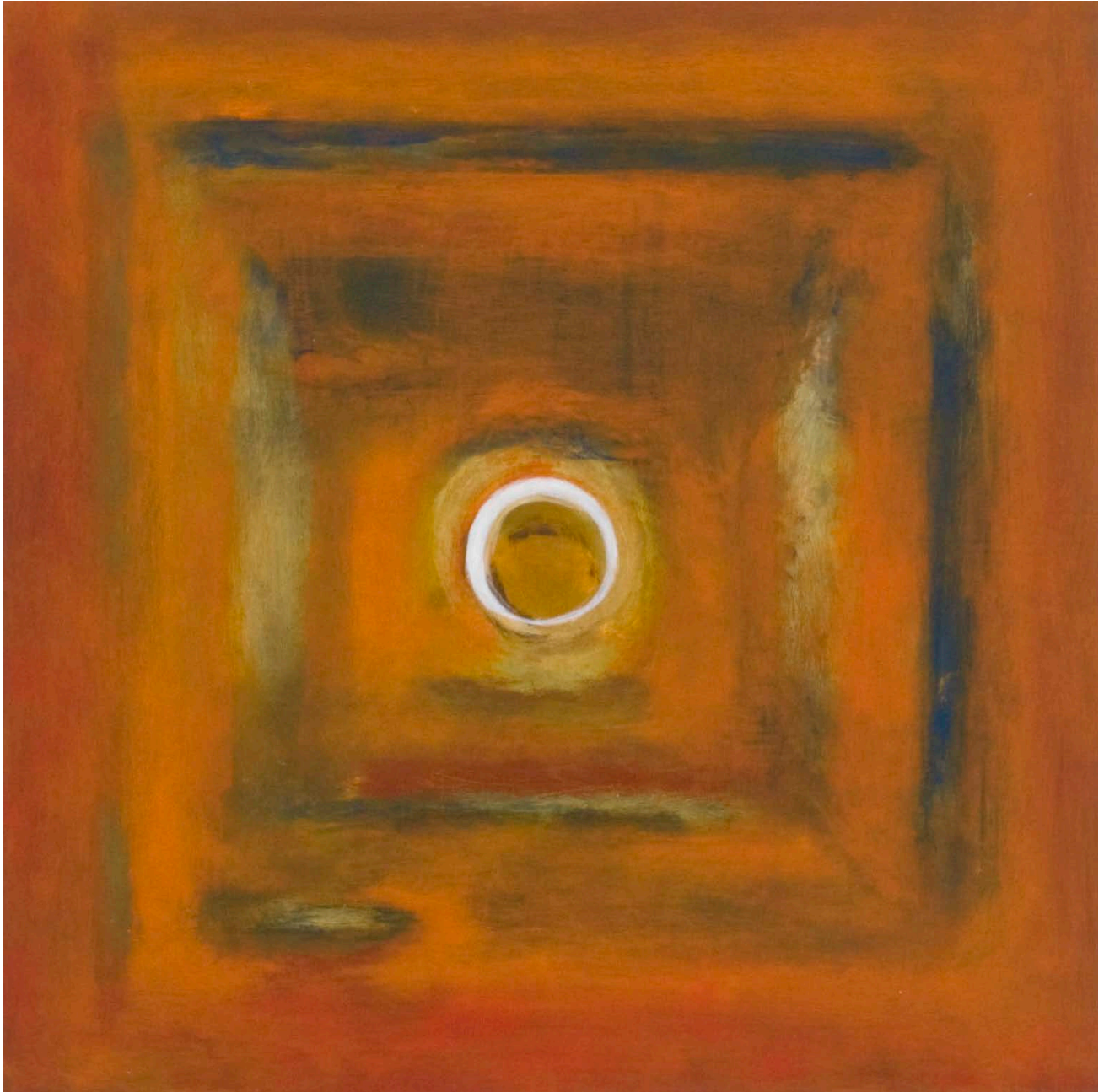








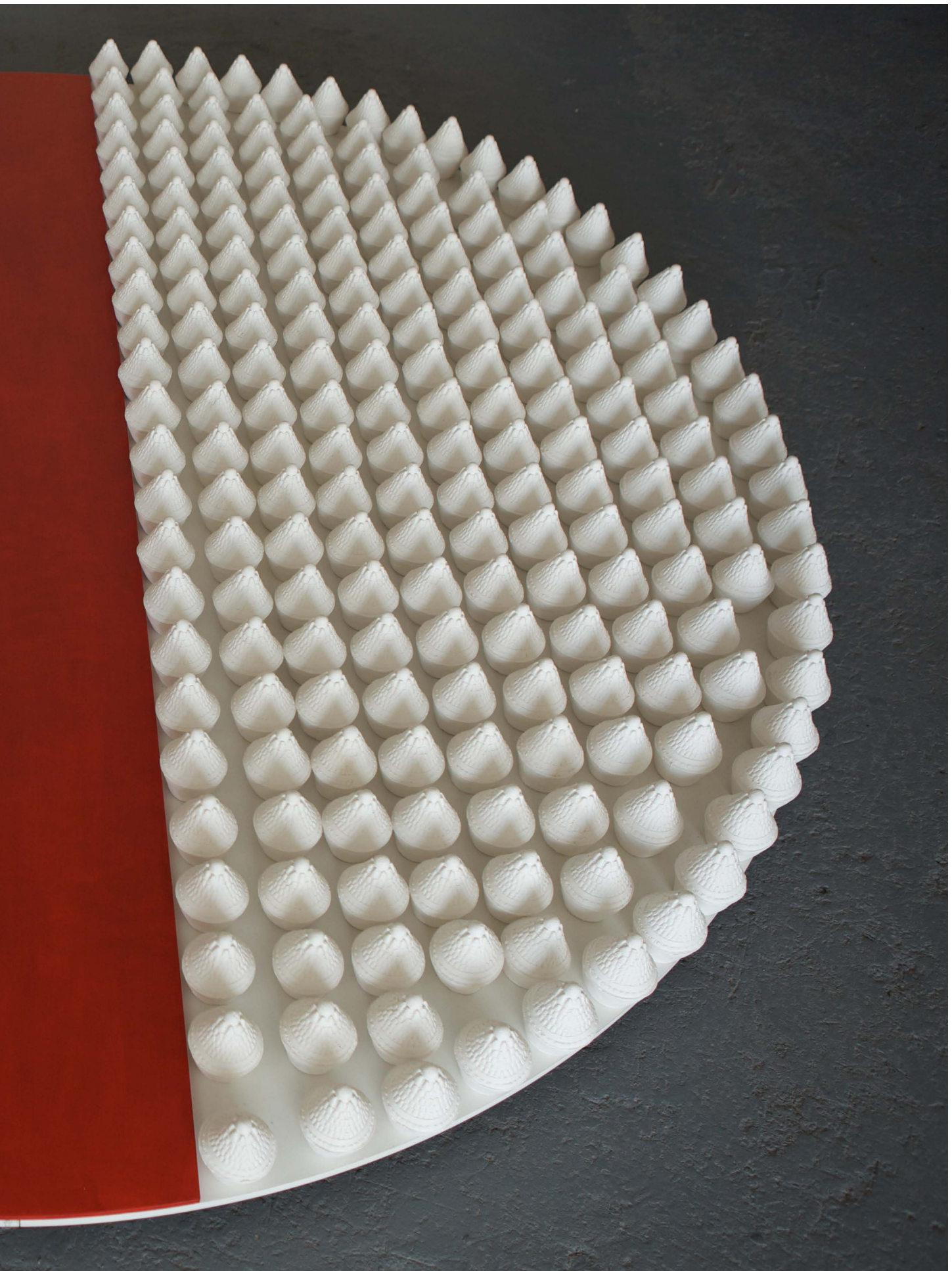






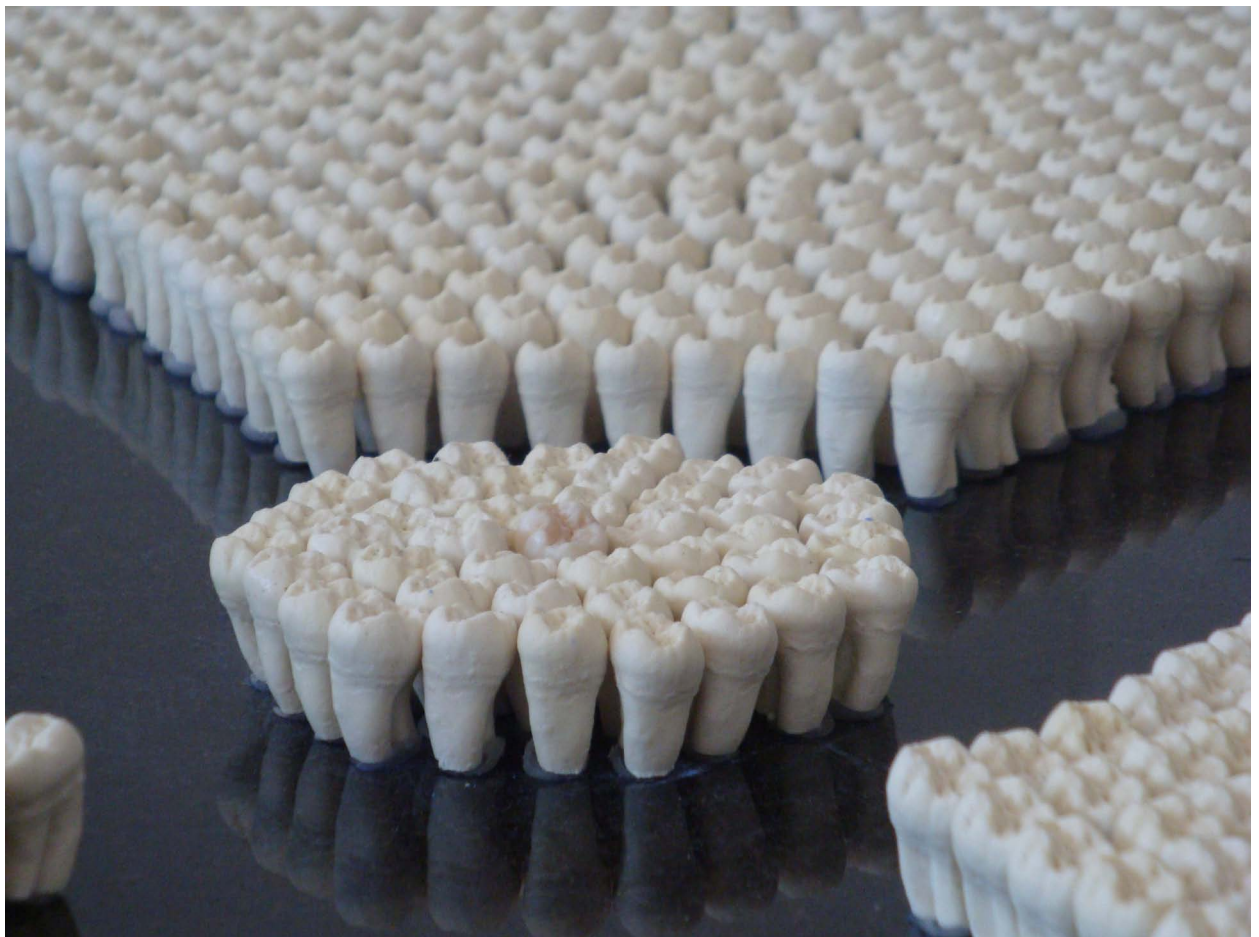


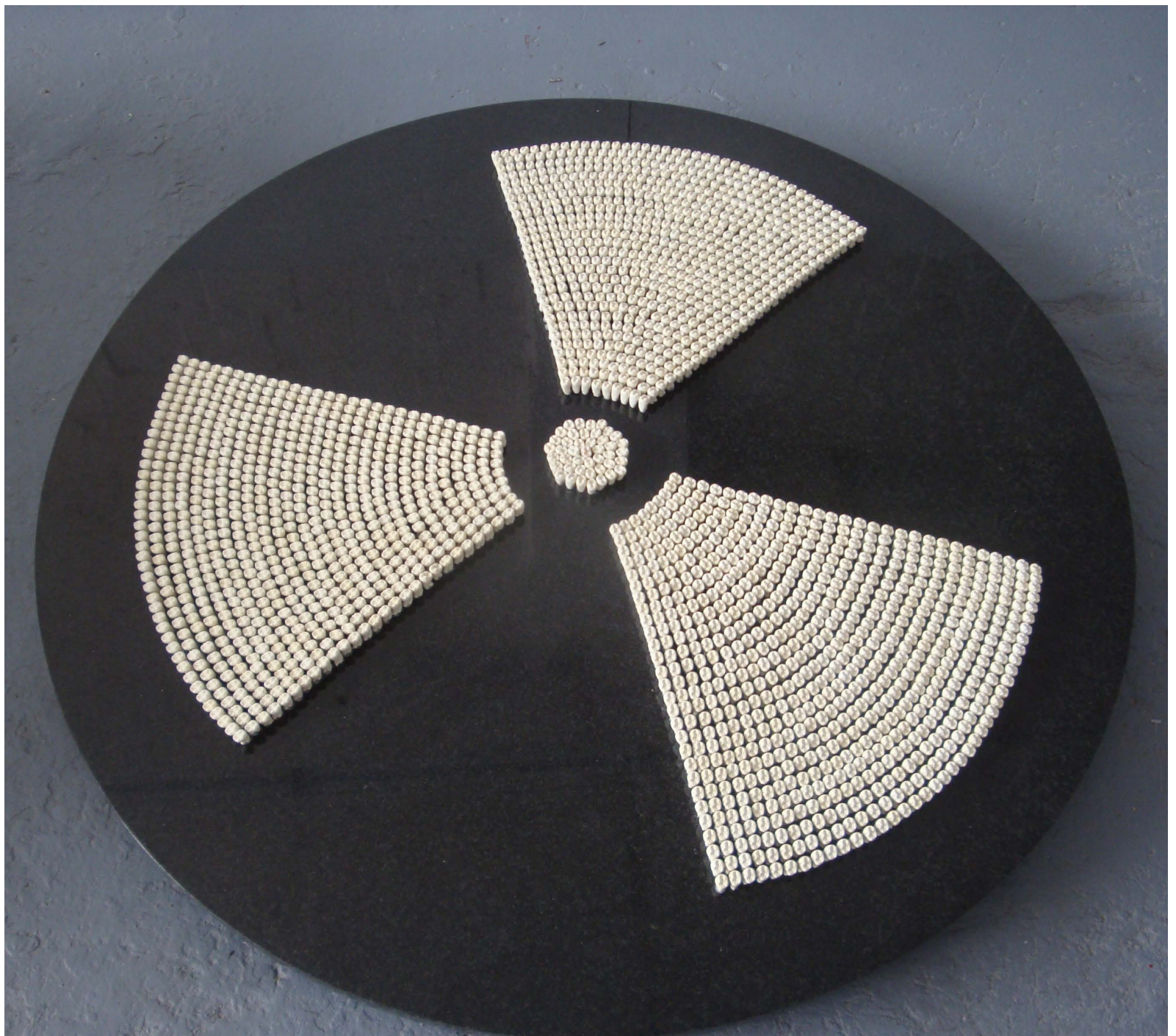


















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