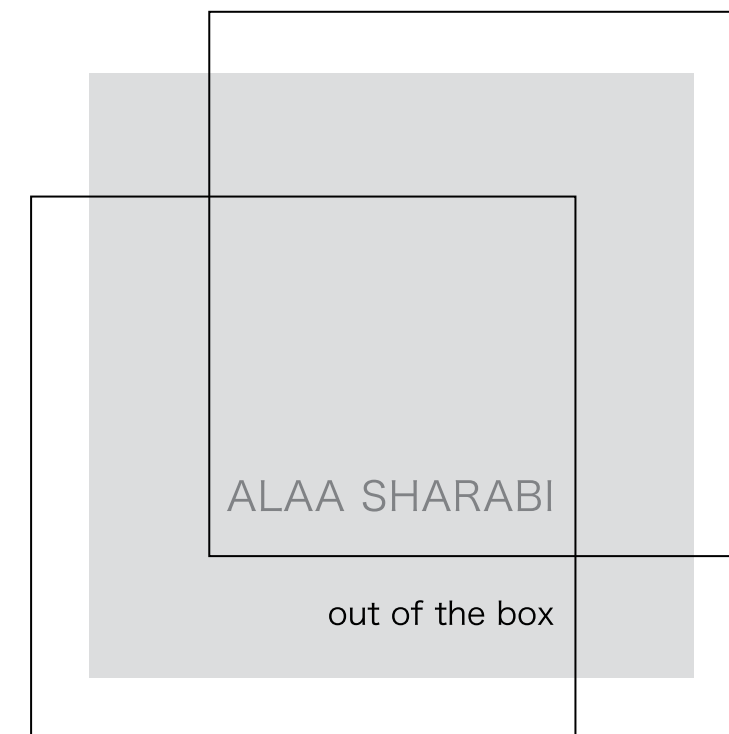




ALAA SHARABI

The image features a minimalist design on a white background. It consists of three overlapping squares. The central square is solid black. Two other squares, outlined in a thin grey line, are positioned around it: one to the left and slightly below, and another to the right and slightly above. The text 'ALAA SHARABI' is written in a white, sans-serif, all-caps font, centered within the black square.



Nothing is walking but everything is moving

قلبك دليلك

Your heart is your guide

Arabic proverb, advice given by a friend

Prologue:

The last thing I should be thinking of is water, but that is what comes as I look at the painting-prints of Alaa Sharabi. Then comes a scratch.

Water. Scratch.

Between the water and the scratch is a little distance as I think, look, feel. Water and scratch overcome their distance, become one, bundles of flowing, energetic feeling. I step back, taking some distance.

--

Alaa Sharabi's painting-prints are a multitude of cube-like forms, one layered and moving against another, poking in and out, pushing up *against* their own edges and those of the canvas walls around them: multitudes of walls, edges and lines, tools to describe a push against.

The way this artist creates is divergent, you could say unlawful; from his material choices of black ink and sugar on canvas, to the way he turns geometry on its head. But it is more than this, for Sharabi also seems determined to protect the impossibility of meaning. Catch me and I'm gone, his works seem to say, over and over. At times, looking at these images feels like swimming in and around his half-formed things, finding ways through. They are not streets, mazes or rock covered sea beds but we can treat them as if they are. They ask to be navigated, then they refuse.

--

When three dimensional forms are described, when simple lines create something that lines up with what we 'see', a particular form of reality is implied. These lines are not reality, but they mimic a certain way of seeing. The rules we are talking about are those of perspective and they are some of the foundational, if also most contested, to ideas of art in the western art historical canon.

Perspective drawing gives us distance.

Art historian of postcolonial historiography Wendy M. K. Shaw has recently argued that Islamic and European environments have both used the ‘realism enabled by geometry’, to different effects, noting that in the Islamic environment this realism was ‘associated with structure rather than appearance’ while in Europe the perspectival illusion became a powerful, narrative device.¹ In European thought then, the type of realism enabled by geometry has created the illusory spaces of the picture plane, painted places that can mimic the space around us and the distance between us. Standing in front of the picture, the viewer can imagine themselves as part of this familiar world and yet stand apart from it. In this deployment of perspective, there is a specific distance between world and its copy.

The possibility of separation between self and picture has helped to shape our passion for distance, for looking at, not being with. This type of depiction has shaped a way of seeing the world, its powers and balances, as much as our world has been shaped by it. In short, we might say that our ability to cross the space between inside and outside, self and other, has been eaten by the illusion of distance.

Alaa Sharabi’s current work gives the viewer a taste of this separation, but as we look, we see that we must somehow close this gap, move with him. He moves us around him, the work trembles, changes its mind. In this work, nothing is walking but everything is moving.

Sharabi’s strong and unstable geometries seem to say: the houses of our bodies, minds, countries, are also fleeting. Instead of a box, see this as an attempt to box. It’s not that I mean Sharabi is failing to make boxes – more that what he makes from his box-like beginning is something that will intentionally not maintain a distance, will collapse into closeness. The sides of his boxes are not walls, they are planes, geometric forms, but they seem to flatten what is beneath, seek to muffle. They are never completely opaque, always showing something underneath. Whole lives could play out under the next layer.

--

This is a work of minds, collective, hive.

The reflections of one form are cast in another, throw light, shade, layers and line on what is beside and inside. These works form groups, loose bunches of not-aloneness in not-quite landscapes. There is weight, thickness, community, touch.

I am thinking of a flock of boxes, but it’s not right – I am thinking of how to describe a gathering of boxes, in the way you might say a flock of sheep, for example. I check and somehow there is an expression for a gathering of boxes.

A bale of boxes

In every picture Sharabi presents us with a plural, a bale, a gathering. There are no lone forms here.

--

If you look once you will see something like nothing – a cacophony of lines

Extreme light, lines scratching. Scratch.

Lines like hair float and tangle. Lines of spirit, spirit lines. Follow these lines.

If there is language it is fleeting, like the images. Something on the tip of your tongue or at the back of your throat.

Disembodied parts sing insistently.

Lines that are becoming recognizable begin to flutter at the edge of my thoughts – but when I feel something emerge it slides away.

There are people inside the boxes – life animal

Spirit lines

Maybe it continues.

--

There is language here, languages. There are lines and shapes making not-quite words. Everything is full of not-quite energy.

What is above, inside and below. Things might be trapped under heavy layers, the walls of the boxes become fallen walls, trapping. But there are spirit lines among them that flow, break, continue, shape and not-quite shape, cannot be trapped, must be seen, seen again.

--

Don’t look here for logics within systems.

Look for scratch.

Music, a scratched 45, a record on the turntable. The scratch that might become part of the song.

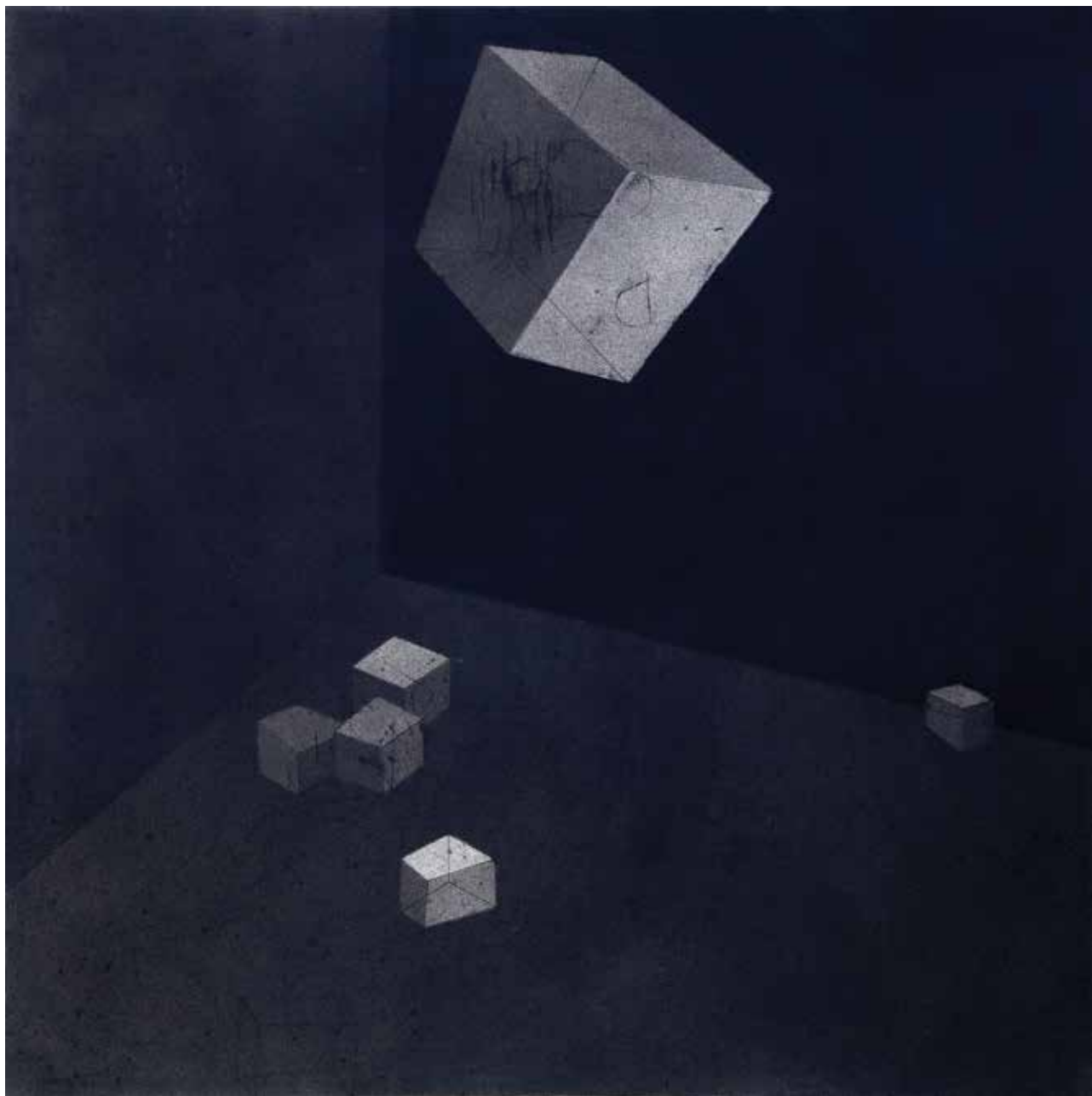
Sharabi’s not-quite boxes are energy, closeness. They are what is inside and around.

Epilogue:

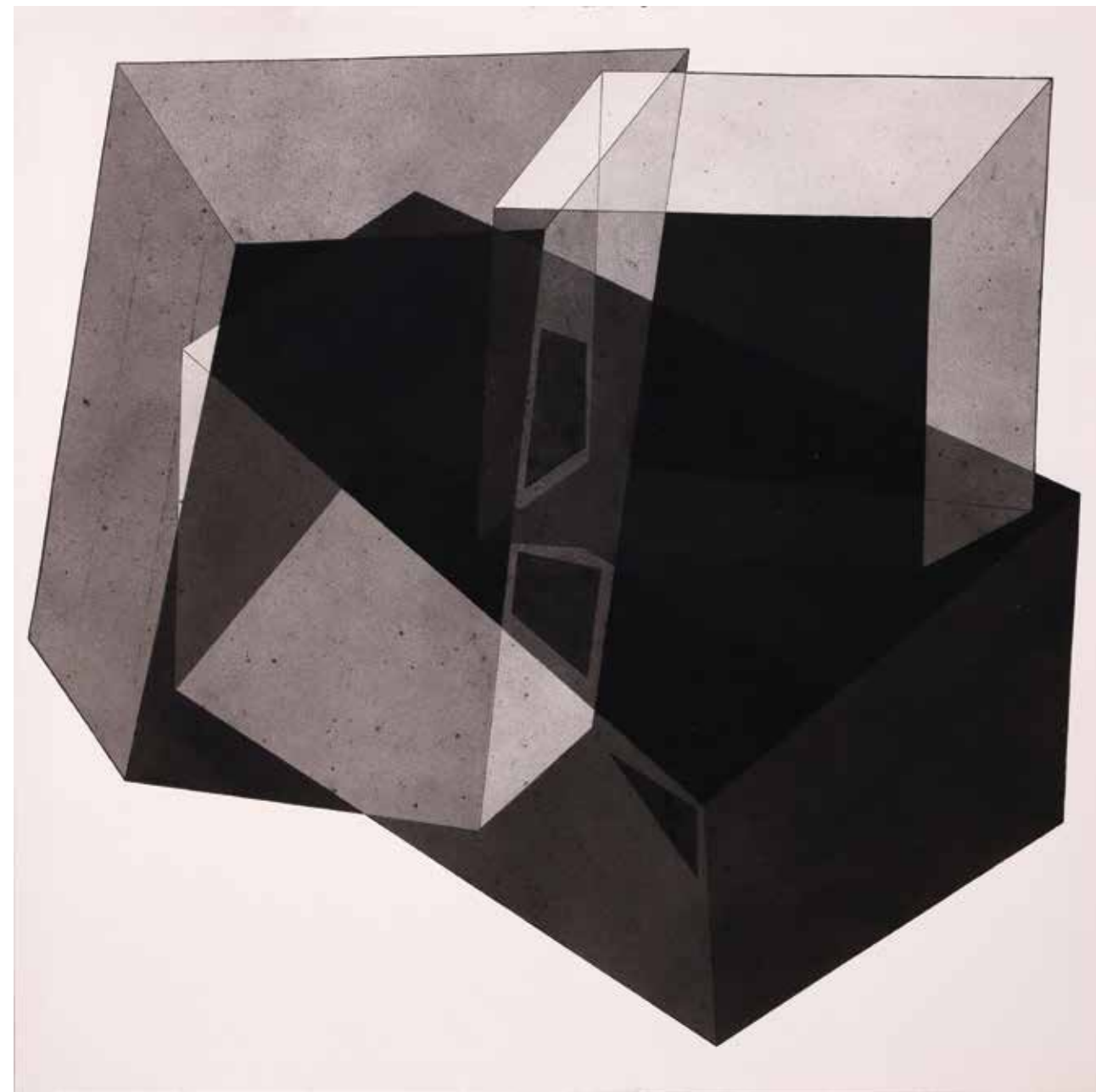
I keep coming back to water, flow, waves, energy.

Distance and perspective, background and foreground, exist in Sharabi’s work to show the closeness, nearness and interconnectedness, of things. Energy confounds distance, brings us in. The perspective might begin at a fixed distance, but everything moves.

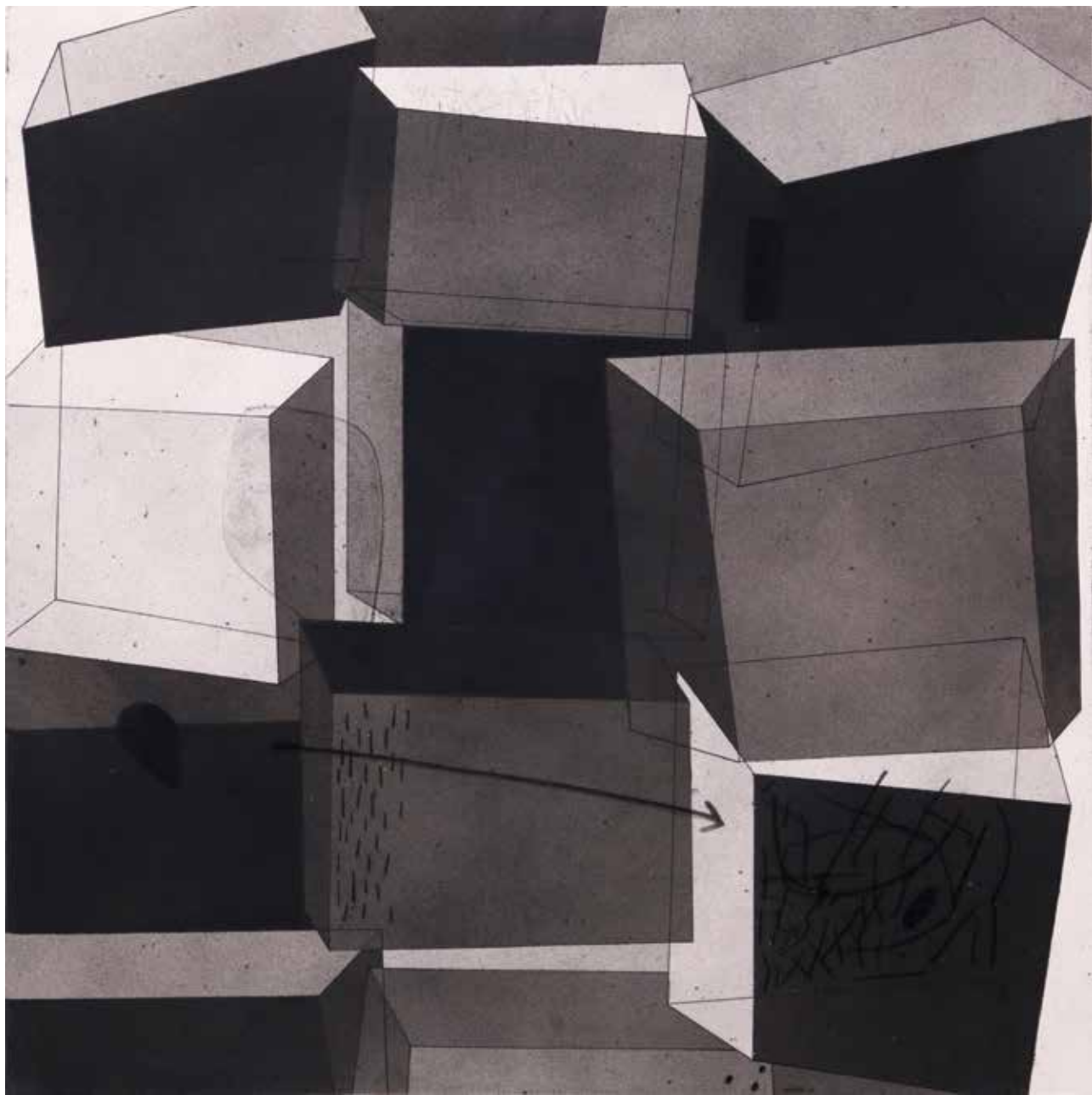
¹ Wendy M. K. Shaw (2019). What is Islamic Art, Between Religion and Perception. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.



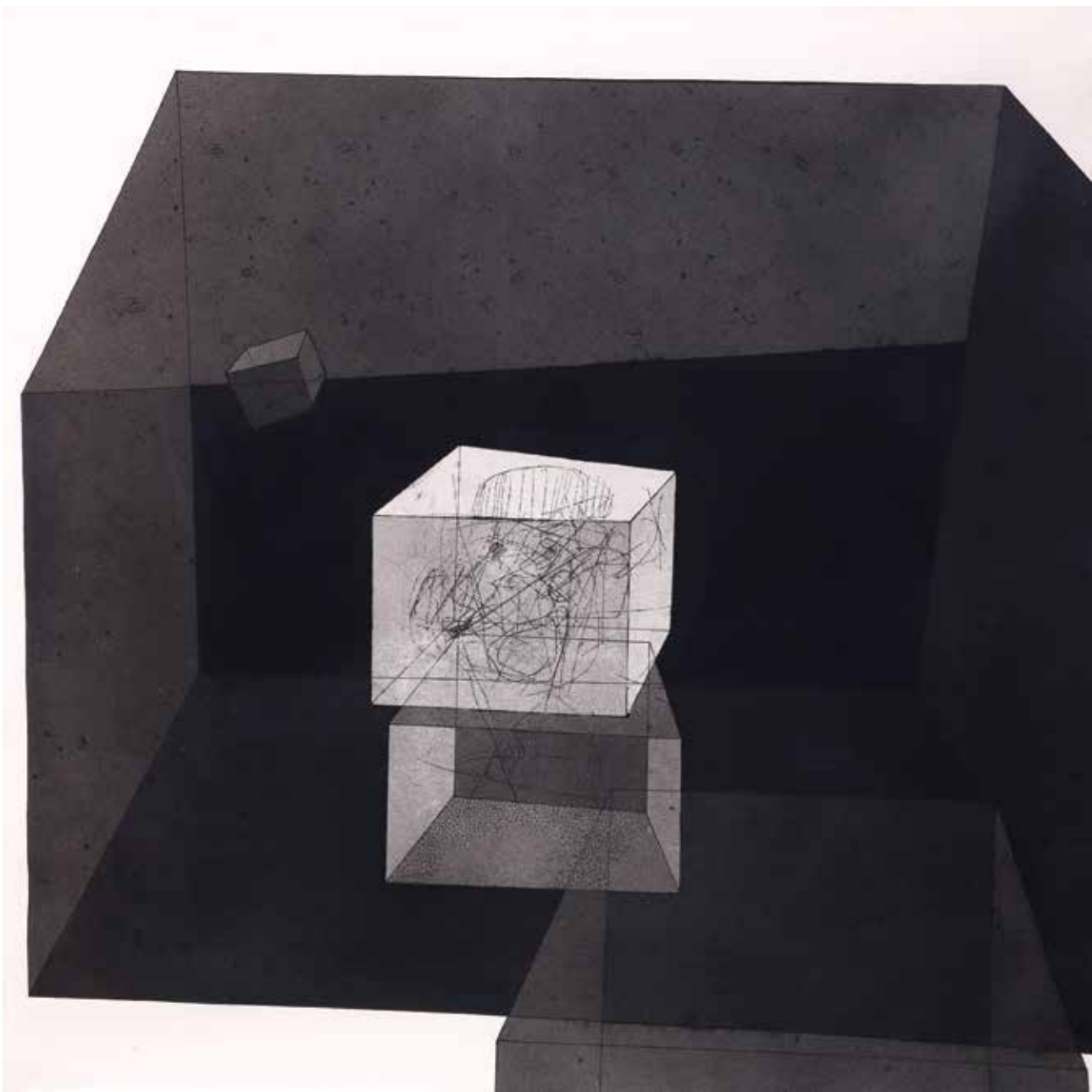
Mixed media on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2021



Mixed media on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2021



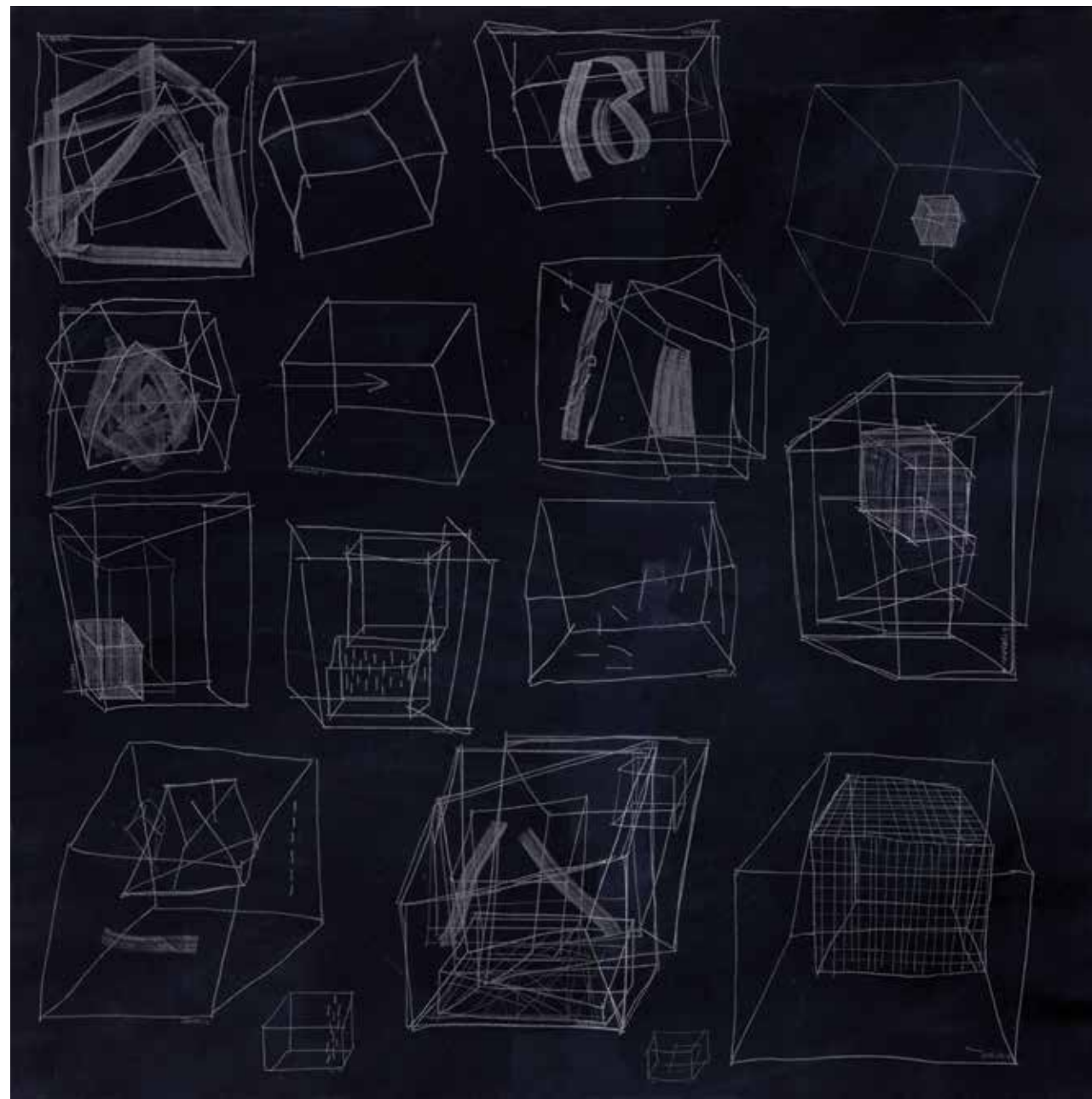
Mixed media on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2022



Mixed media on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2021



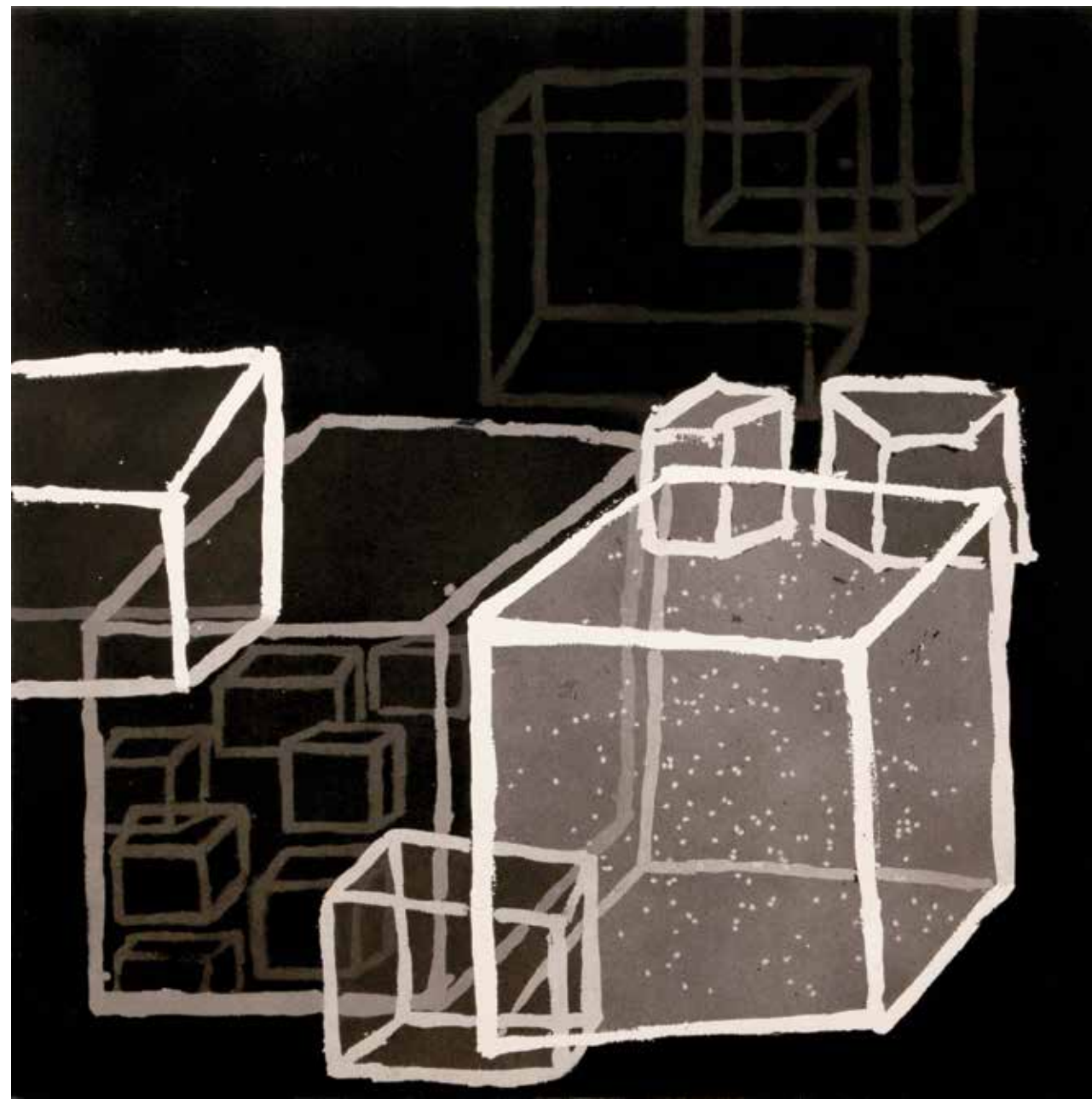
Mixed media on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2022



Mixed media on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2022



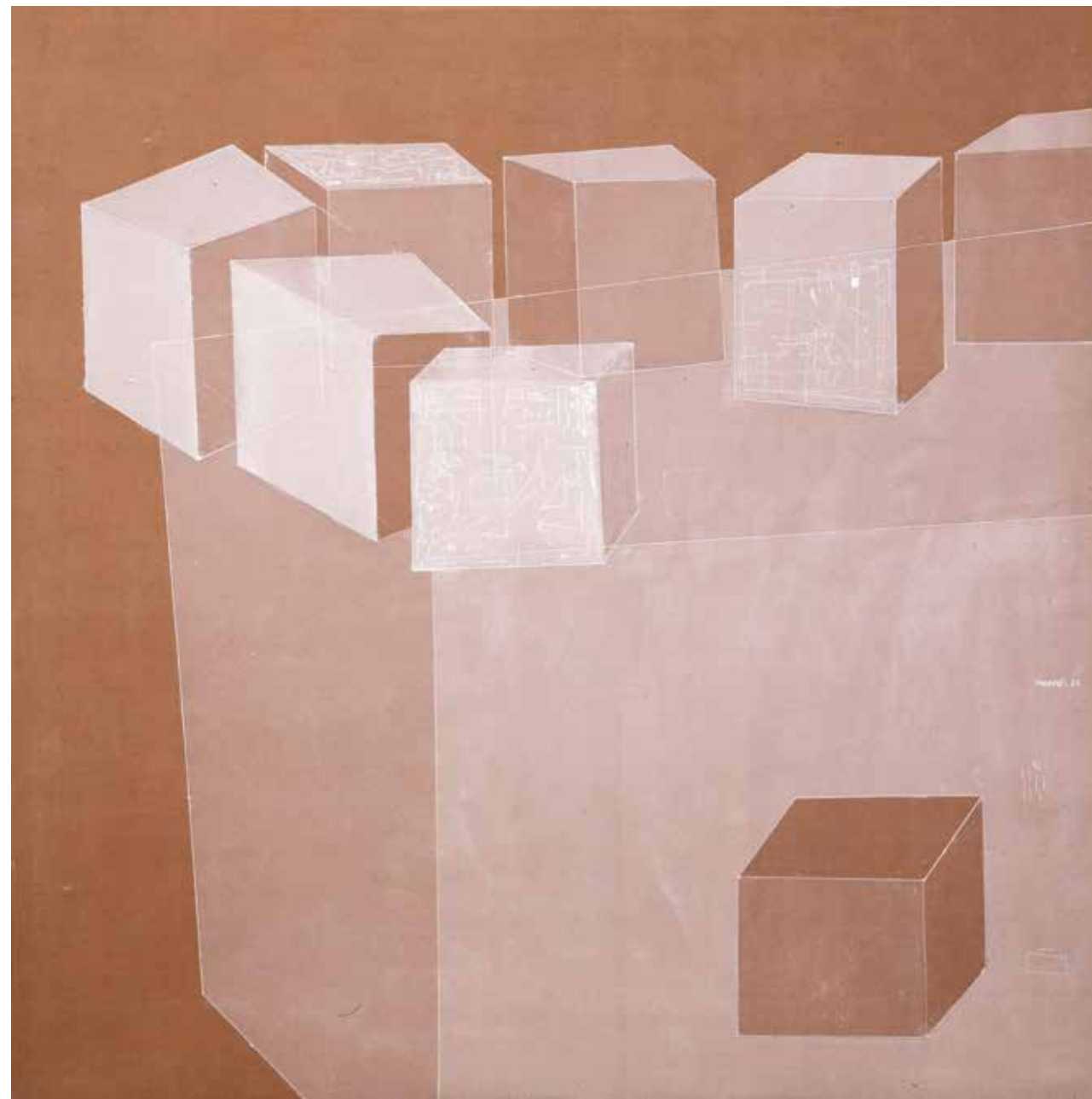
Mixed media on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2021



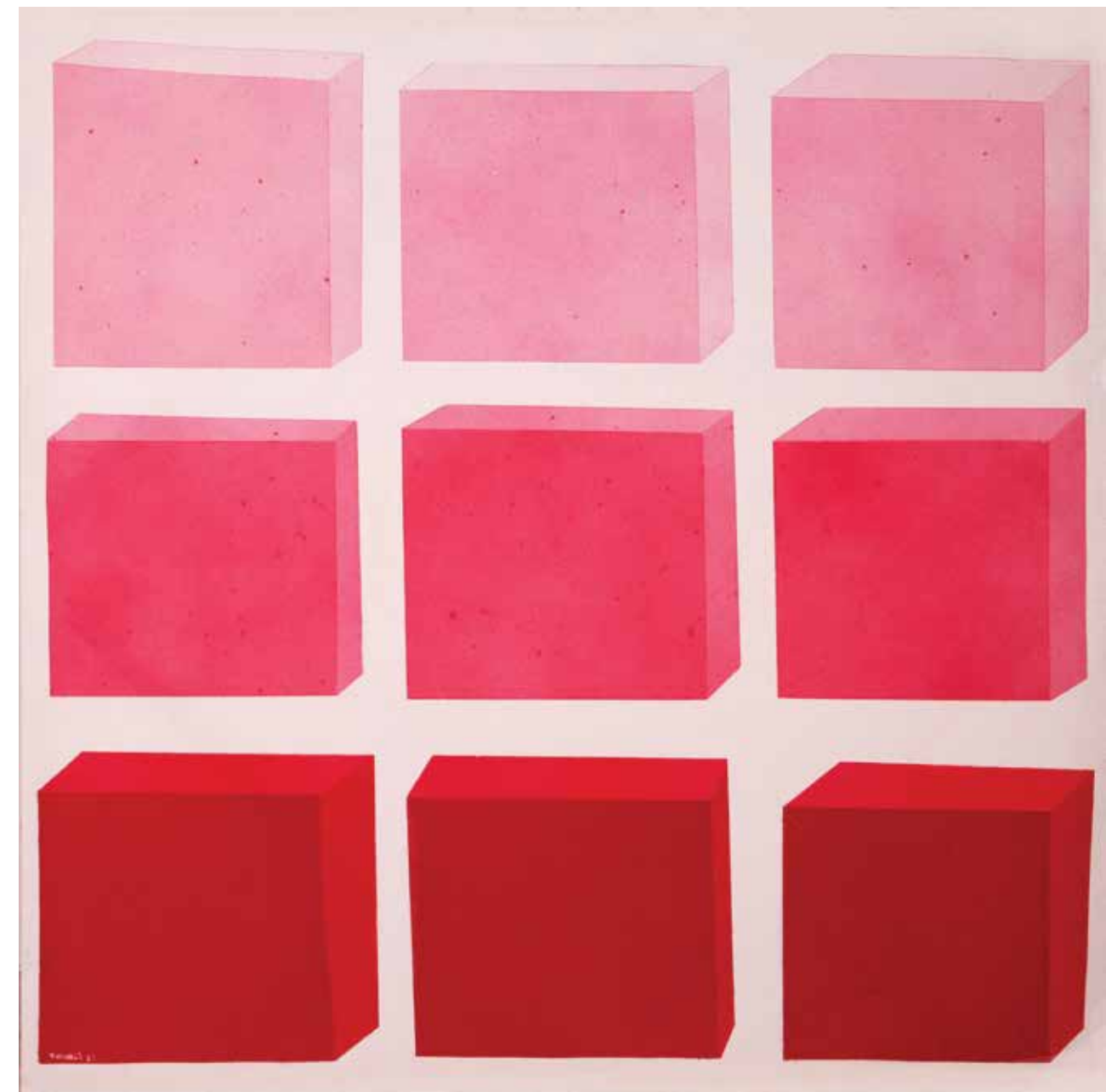
Mixed media on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2022



Mixed media on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2022



Mixed media on canvas | 150x150 cm | 2022



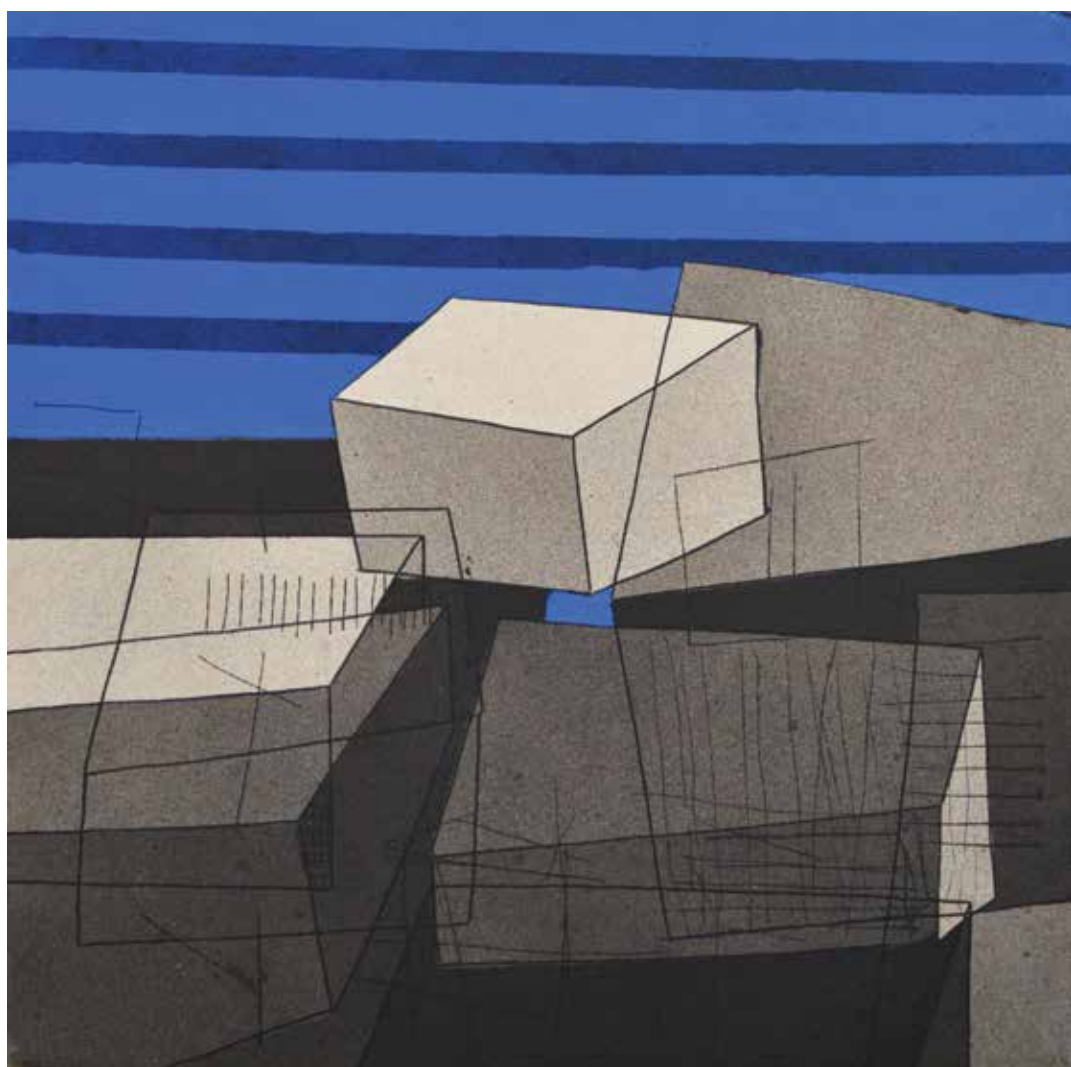




Mixed media on canvas | 175x147 cm | 2022



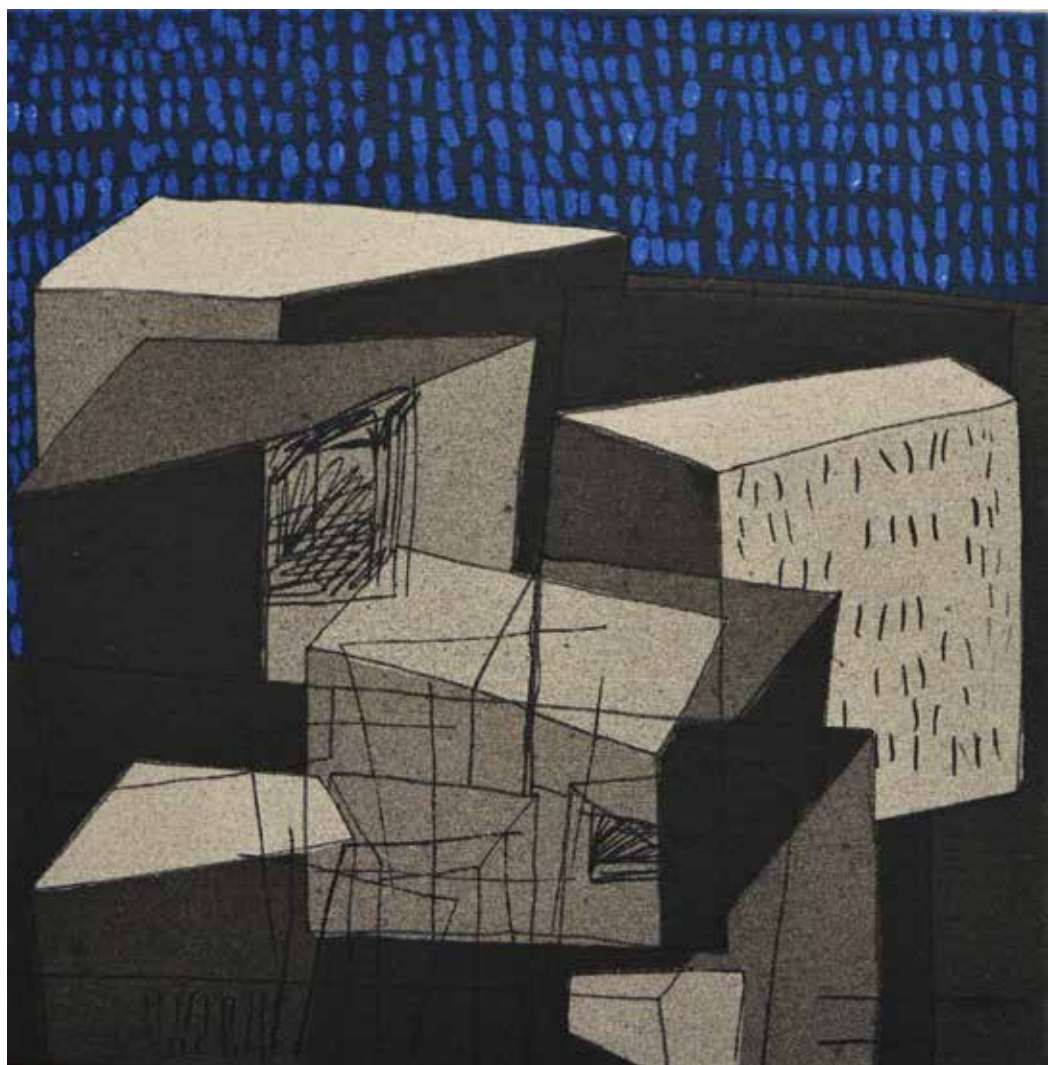
Mixed media on canvas | 100x200 cm | 2023



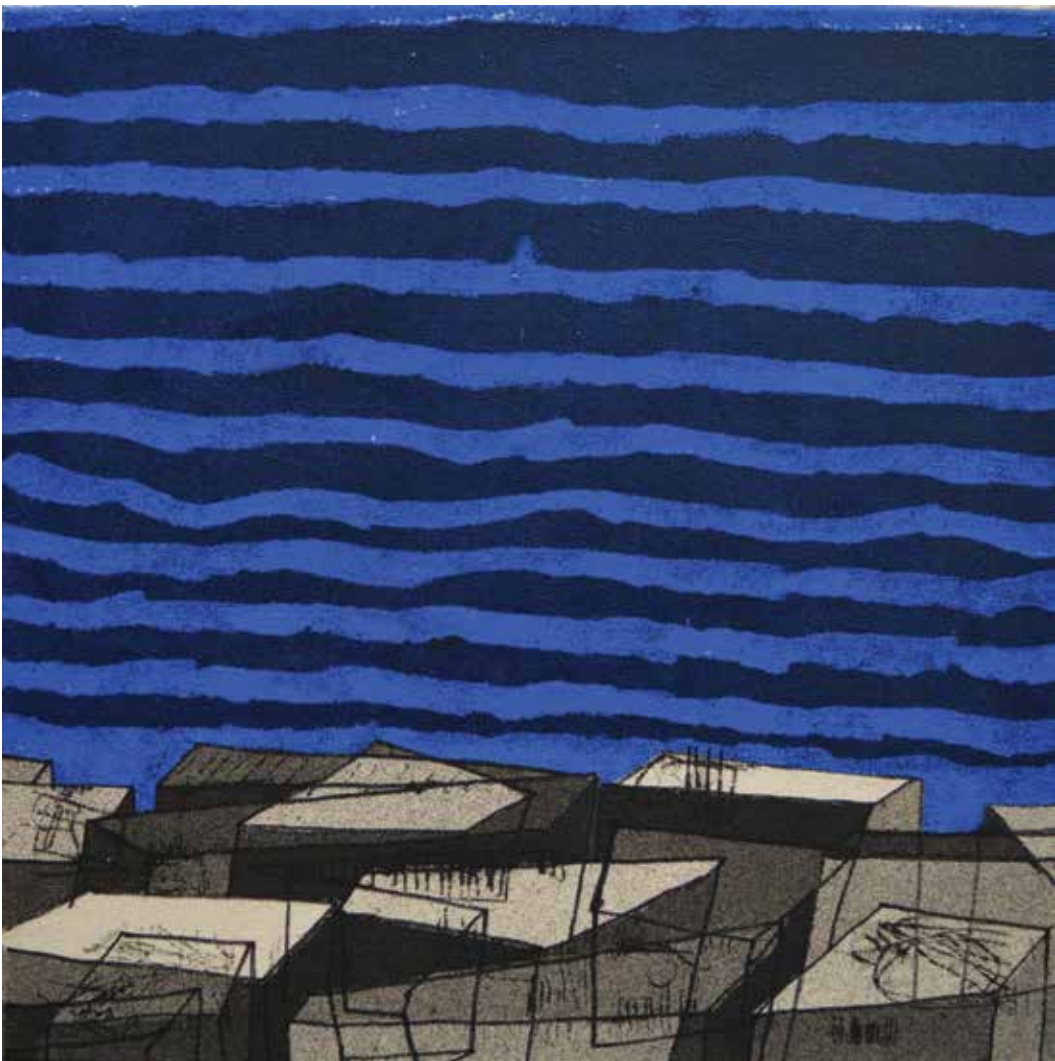
Mixed media on canvas | 70x70 cm | 2023



Mixed media on canvas | 70x70 cm | 2023



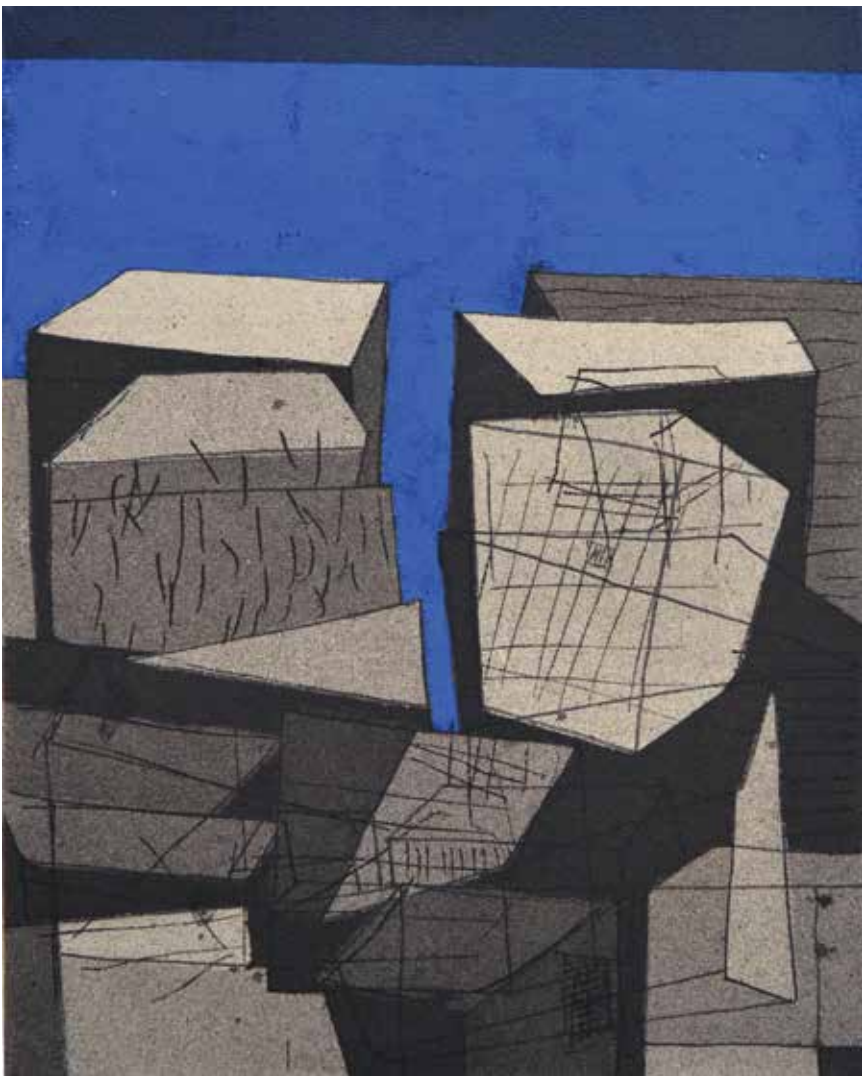
Mixed media on canvas | 45x45 cm | 2023



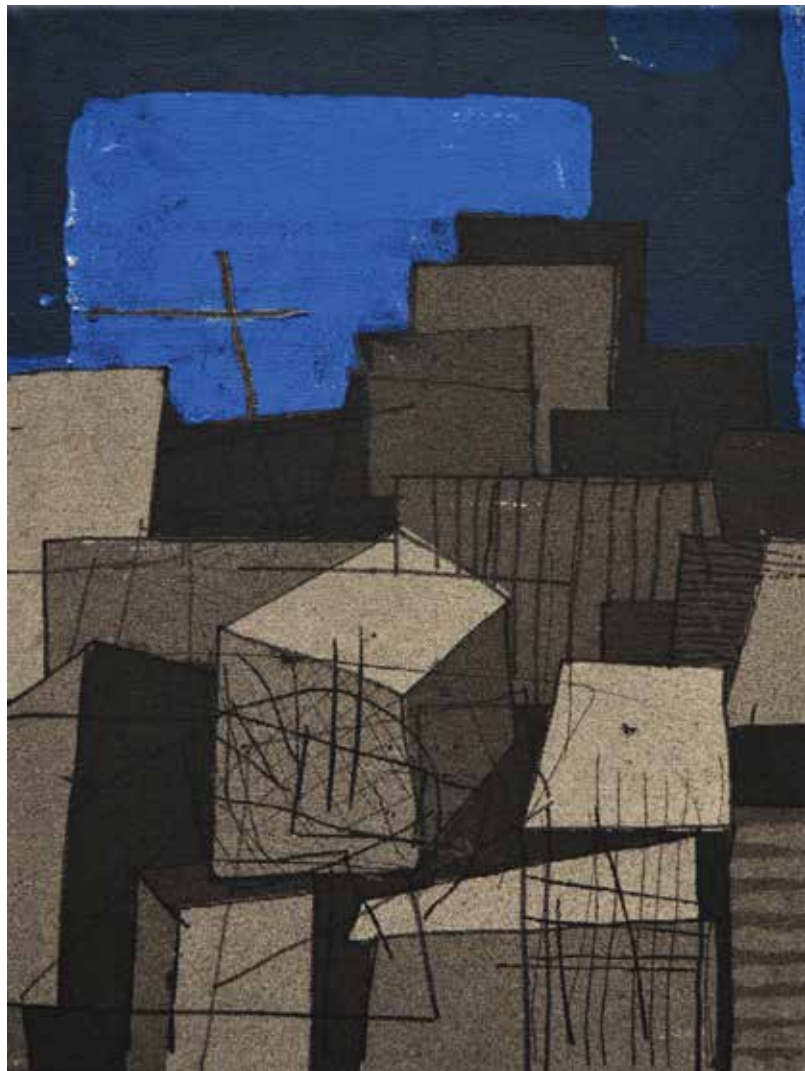
Mixed media on canvas | 40x40 cm | 2023



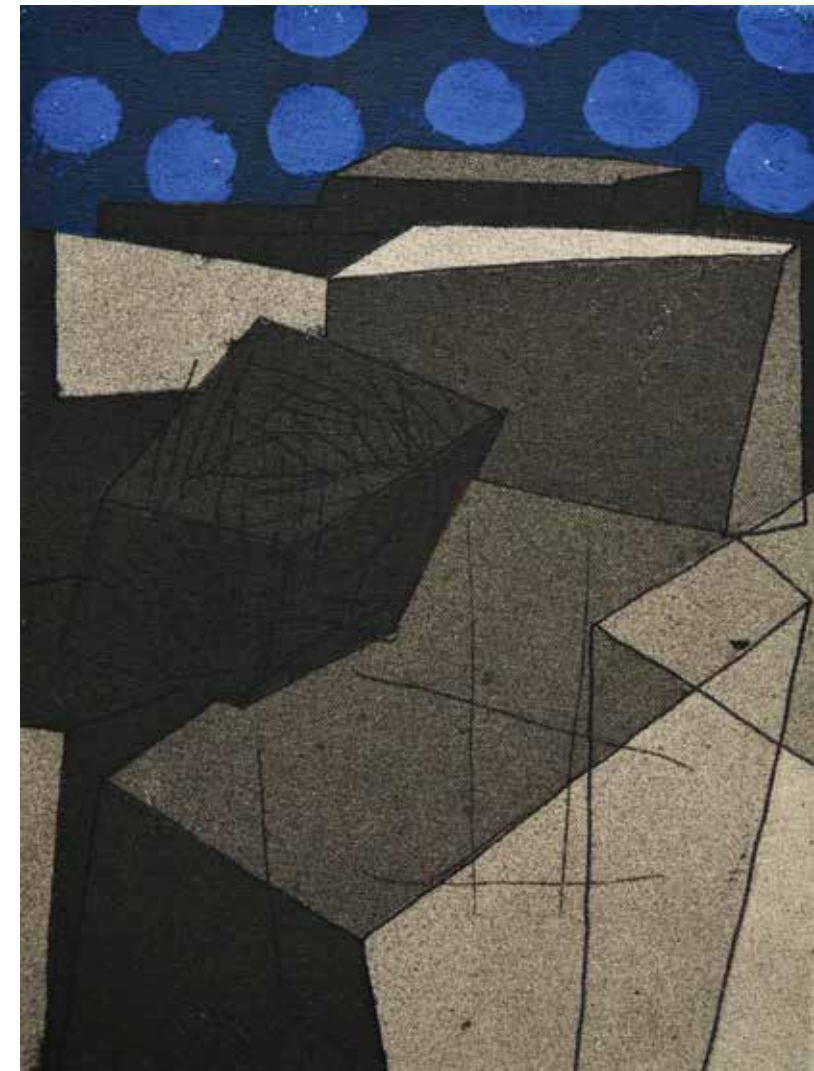
Mixed media on canvas | 50x40 cm | 2023



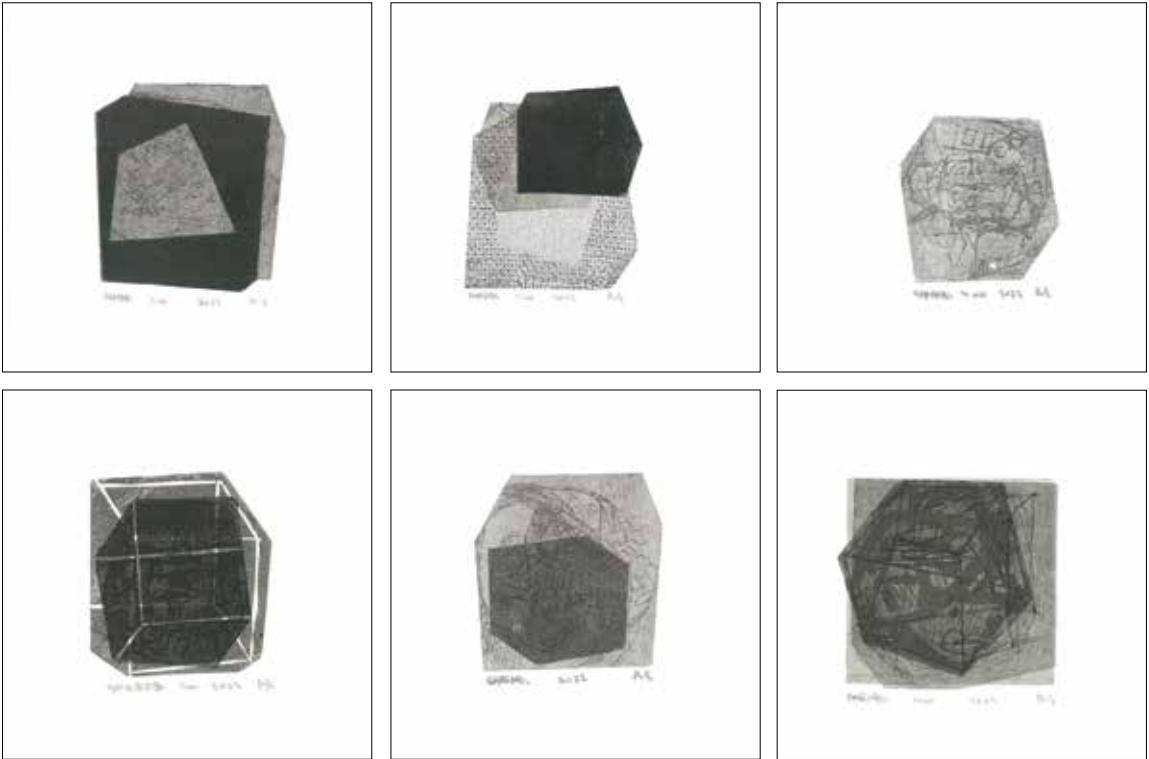
Mixed media on canvas | 50x40 cm | 2023



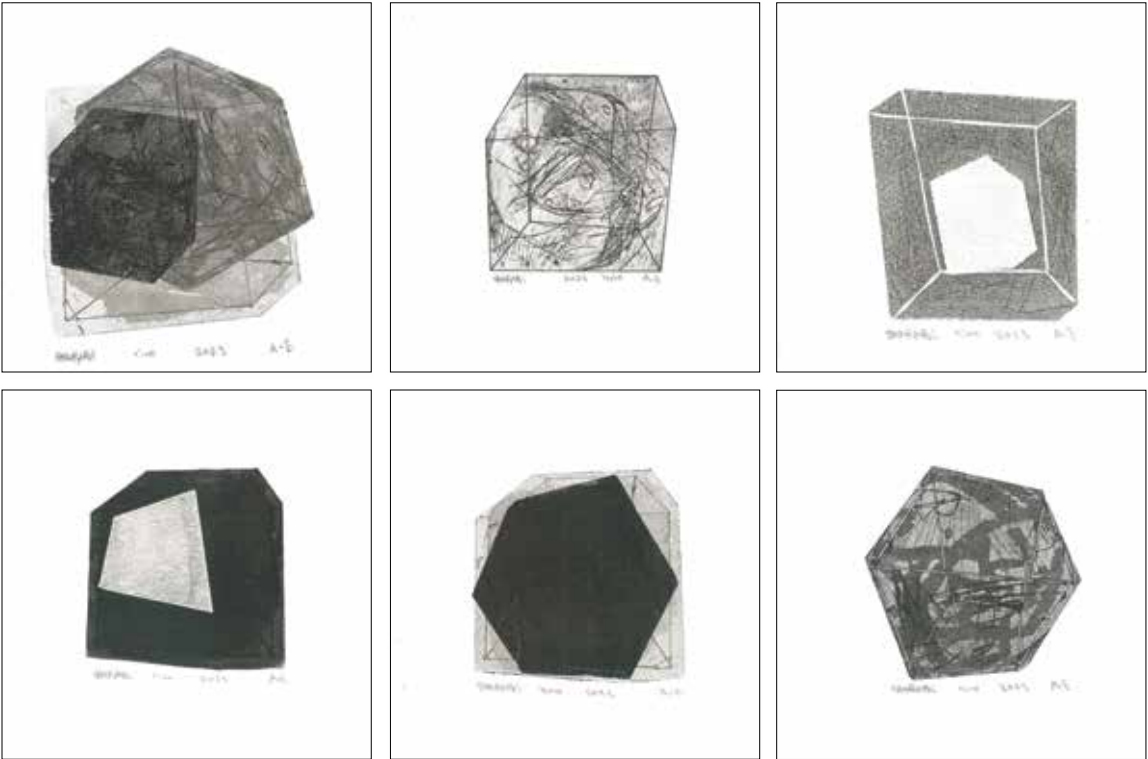
Mixed media on canvas | 40x30 cm | 2023



Mixed media on canvas | 40x30 cm | 2023



Etching on paper | 10x10 cm each - AP | 2021



Etching on paper | 10x10 cm each - AP | 2021

Alaa Sharabi

Born in 1988, Damascus, Syria.
Lives and works in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.

Education

- 2015 MA, Fine Arts, Damascus University, Damascus, Syria.
- 2010 BA, Fine Arts (Printmaking), Damascus University, Damascus, Syria.

Teaching

- 2018-Present Printmaking tutor, Sharjah Art Foundation, Sharjah, UAE.
- 2018-Present Printmaking tutor, Sharjah Art Institute, Sharjah, UAE.
- 2011-2018 Printmaking Assistant, Damascus University, Damascus, Syria.

Solo Exhibition

- 2015 Tajalliyat Art Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon.

Group Exhibitions

- 2020 National Taiwan Art Education Center, Taiwan.
- 2019 Duo Exhibition, Material Resilience, Qode Gallery, Jordan, Amman.
Kazan International Printmaking Biennale, Kazan, Russia.
Ward Gallery, Dubai.
Fann a Porter, Dubai.
- 2018 Penticon Art gallery, Penticon, Canada
- 2017 Penticon Art Gallery, Penticon, Canada.
Kalimat Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey.
- 2015 Part of Venice biennale, Venice, Italy.
Palace of Congresses, National Historical Museum, Tirana, Albania.
- 2014 Fabriano, Acquarello, Fabriano, Italy.
Samer Kozah Gallery, The Venue, Beirut, Lebanon.
- 2012 Kouzah Gallery for the Arts, Damascus, Syria.
Les Plumes Gallery, Lebanon.

Workshops

- 2018 Landscape Puglia, Lecce Museum, Italy.
- 2017 TA'AROF, SAFIR Artist Workshop, Sharjah Art Biennial.
Workshops at Visual Arts Centre conducted by Dr. Nizar Sabour, Damascus.
- 2007 Mediterranean Sea Workshop, Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus, Syria.



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