



A PHOENIX OF HOPE  
SHILPA NIKAM

# A PHOENIX OF HOPE

Recent Works  
by

**SHILPA NIKAM**

Curated by  
**Sushma Sabnis**

Tuesday 22nd - Monday 28th November 2022  
at  
Jehangir Art Gallery  
M G Road  
Mumbai 400023



Untitled | Mix media on paper board | 8" x 8" | 2020

## A Phoenix of Hope

In a career which spans nearly thirty years, artist Shilpa Nikam has diversified her art practice into various categories of art making ranging from drawings and paintings to printmaking and installation works; at times blending all art processes in a single series. Essentially her works have always adhered to the abstract lexicon and over decades of experimentation arrived at a signature style which is transitory and contemporary at the same time. Rejecting the compulsion of 'Bombay style' abstract painting which is often lampooned as merely juxtaposed colour-fields devoid of meaning, Shilpa's oeuvre over time has created a niche for itself in the world of Abstraction which stands for the apparent and the allegorical simultaneously.

Essentially all art is supposed to open up an image with deftly positioned entry points, urging it to go beyond the retinal scrutiny of an image to an ideological/conceptual one. Shilpa's works oscillate between near-abstract and absolute abstraction, giving the possibility of engaging with the work differently. She has done numerous value additions to her style and one can see the evolution of a distinctive approach, encouraging dialogue with the viewer. Sometimes specific colours or motifs act as an entry points into the work, without reining in cordoned compositions leading the eye across the work.

Artist Helen Frankenthaler changed the process of creating abstract art by opening up colour on unprimed canvases, accepting the autonomy of the colour to flow or pool on the surface or be soaked or blotted into the fabric. Similarly such acts of smearing, laying or removing paint/pigments on/off the surface of the canvas, and then allowing the breakage of colour into gradients is what Shilpa has been honing as a technique over years. In some works on display one would find mark makings using threads, laces and objects found around a studio, simply to disrupt the monotony of a surface and intend a textural element. The surface being painted also plays a huge part in this as its behaviour can never be strictly predicted or controlled, example, canvas and paper behave very differently to the viscosity of the paint, and hence the marks made are very different.

In some of her works in this show, Shilpa has chosen to use acrylic paints, which have a love-hate relationship with most artists owing to its versatility or rigidity depending on the artist's skill. When the artist masters a medium of such infamy, it becomes easy to manipulate it on the surface intended as Shilpa does, where the acrylic medium behaves like a powdered pigment and this in itself is a rare feat to pull off especially for a water soluble medium which tends to literally dampen the surface. The amorphous chalky look of the paint creates a contrast of definition and obscurity. This play of polar opposites is what gives her works new dimensions in visuality.

Shilpa's works also involve a style of spatial balances without demarcating areas, creating the twilights of 'mood-painting'. Mood painting is often attributed to an experiential essence of landscapes or portraiture, especially in the times of the Impressionists who chose to capture not just the protagonists under the effect of light, but also the mood of the scene depicted. In Shilpa's works one notices a strong presence of distinct moods of certain moment, like artist JMW Turner who created vibrant, turbulent works to express the artist's absolute oneness with the seascape or shipwreck. In this way Shilpa connects her art practice to her inner world in search for answers to her questions and pacifying the turbulent storms within her mind.

In this unstable 21st century world, Shilpa's works bear witness to the complete fragmentation of social, political, environmental and cultural fabric, evoking different psychological responses varying from crippling fear and desolation to valiant bravery in face of unpredictable catastrophes. She replicates this dystopian world which, we, the survivors of the lethal pandemic, the wars, the economic meltdowns; we the custodians of the ticking ecological time bombs, the load bearers of political upheavals, live in.

There is an unspoken sensitivity in the works which never overwhelm or nag the viewer, yet, is made visible in the broken lines, the foggy zones in the canvases, the confusion and helplessness of people who are still battling unseen demons. The sharp, dark colours strive to suture this ruptured, fragmented universe on the canvas just like hope binds the broken, disjointed human race today. While reflecting the world around her, Shilpa defiantly embosses her works with a positive streak in them, as she learns from her own life experiences to live through the pain rather than remedy it with escapism. The air is laden with endurance and underplays the strength of character which emanates from the works to reassure the viewer of better times, without bursting into the cliched pinks and yellows of false hope. The hues are kept grounded and the elements in the works mimic tiny bits of fine embroidery on a fabric, elevating the whole image from its tedium to diaphanous finery .

Taking a detour from painting, Shilpa has presented one large installation work in the show. The work titled 'Suspense-Suspension' is a 6ft x 2ft metal grid fitted atop an 8ft tall stand. Transparent wires hang from the grid squares holding metal pieces of unfamiliar shape and colour, at different heights. Each of these metal pieces have been cut, filed, chemically treated and then texturised with marks, scrapings, drilled holes and numerous forms of distress. Some of the pieces hang higher or lower than the rest which are at eye level. The work is vaguely reminiscent of 'Cold Dark Matter' by artist Cornelia Parker, however it differs in its object experience and visuality. Shilpa contextualises the vacillation of the world from pre-pandemic through to post-human times especially its socio-political, economic, religio-spiritual, environmental and psychological levels. The work succinctly portrays a personal, public and global state of mind of today's human. It illustrates the attempted recovery of ones' survival strategies, dealing with irreparable losses/deaths and the conflicting

futuristic zeal of an inevitable technological dependency, making (post)humans more virtual than real. A world where portions of the comfortable past have been wiped out as opposed to parts of a present and a future being mapped around doubtful notions of stability.

The continued class/caste/race/gender/economy battles of society, the 1% versus 99% resource imbalance, the apathy of every governance with weak political wills, the medical calamities and world markets in disarray, become vociferous in the sharp, irregular, serrated edges of the suspended forms. None of the pieces fit into each other as intuitive puzzle bits aspiring to become whole, instead the work is an astute observation of the hostility of our times at every level of physical and mental human experience. Human beings at war with each other and within themselves, yet each one yearning for an elusive peace. Rejecting hierarchical homogeneity within the rungs, she hopes that every one who stands before the work could find themselves reflected in some way in each of the fragile rotating pieces. Some pieces are perforated implying huge losses, some porous sieve like portraying missed opportunities, some rigid as outmoded attitudes or principles, others mutating identities as circumstance demands. Add to this chaos, natural calamities of an environmental abuse triggering the next tornado, the freak storm, the forest fires, the sudden earthquakes waiting to disrupt the next stable ground and suddenly, one realises that these metal pieces are Shilpa's vision of people around her. Her view of the inner realms of people smiling through their internal struggles, braving every storm, human made or otherwise. Shilpa Nikam's works in this show simmer subliminally with an urgency to stabilise the world around her, to anchor and sublimate the positives of a post-humanist existence, to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of destruction with fresh wings of gold; perhaps it could enlighten the way to actually 'be human' in the days to come.

Sushma Sabnis  
Art Critic/ Curator  
Mumbai 2022



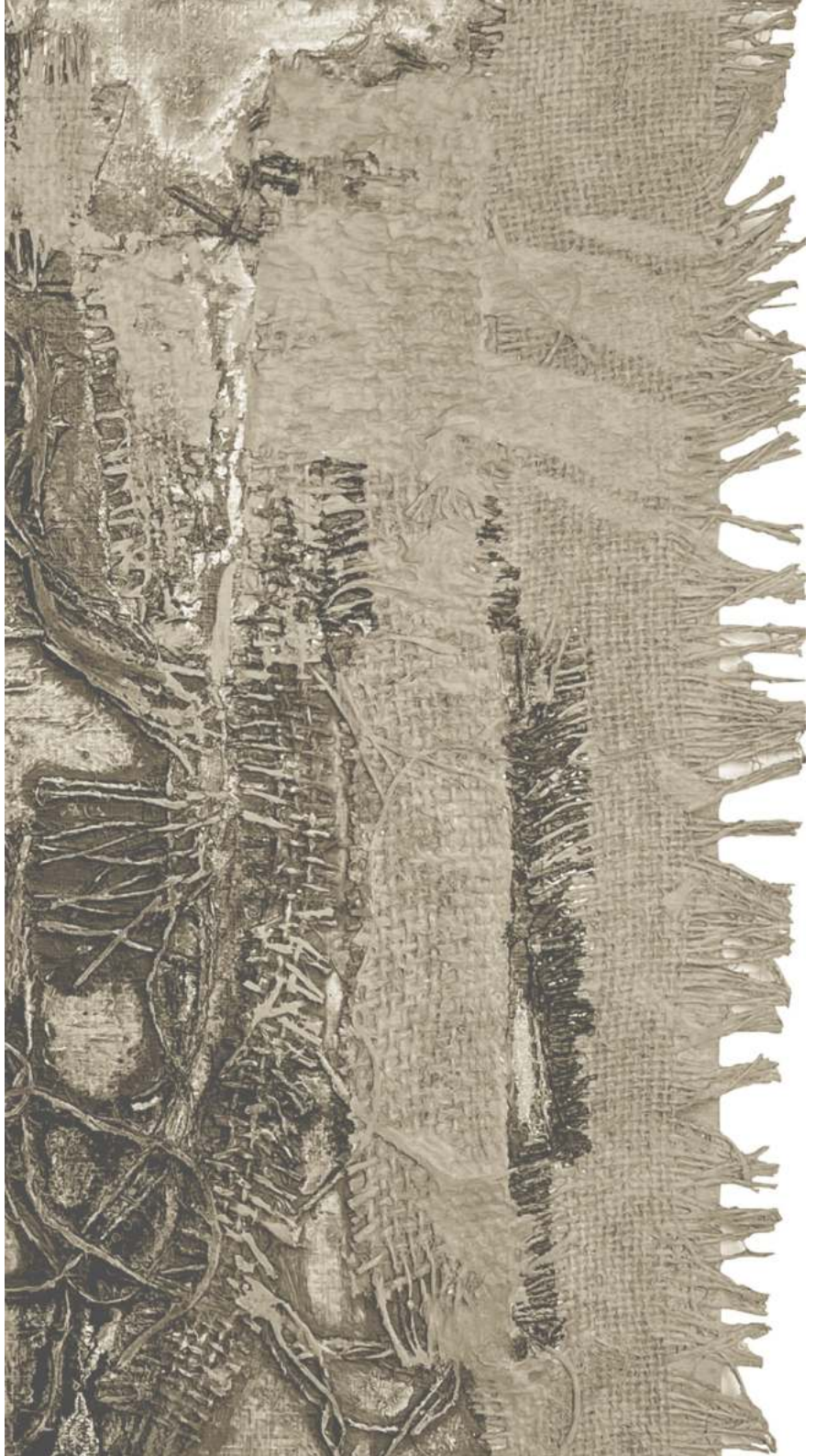
Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 24" x 24" | 2022



Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 24" x 24" | 2022



Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 30" x 48" | 2022

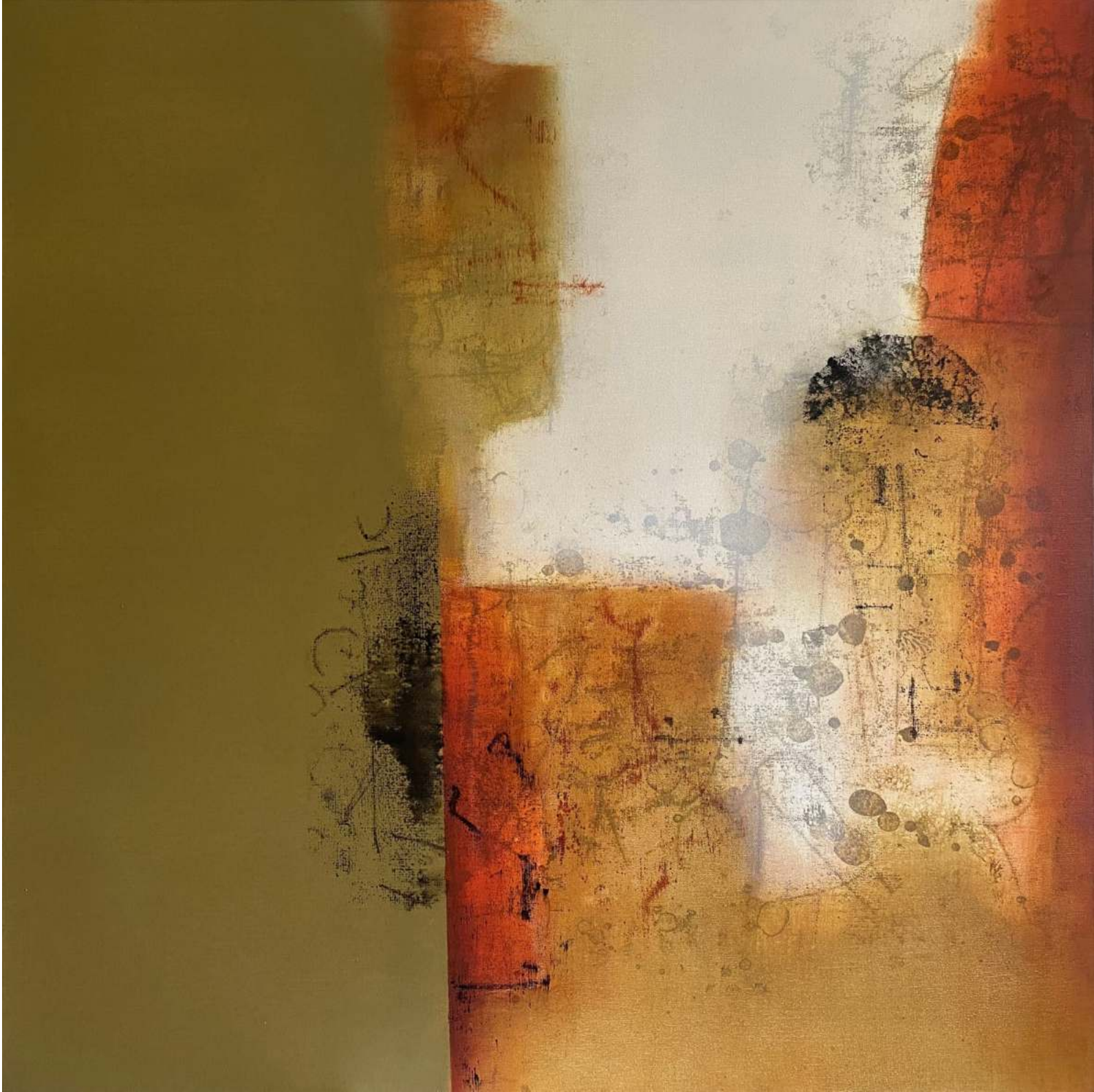




Untitled | Mix media on Paper board | 12" x 12" | 2022



Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 12" x 12" | 2022



Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 30" x 60" | 2022



Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 12" x 12" | 2022



Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 36" x 36" | 2022

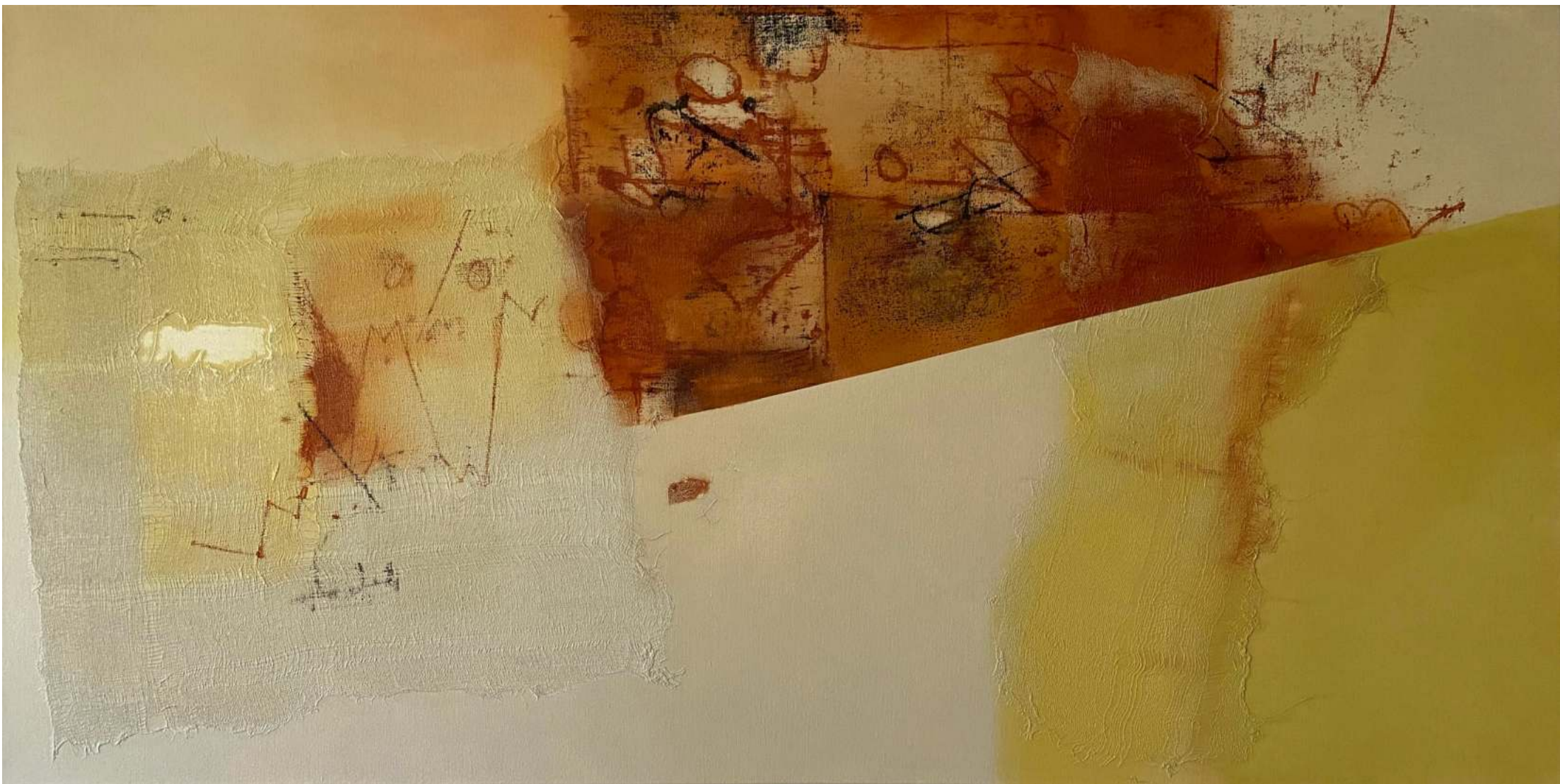


Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 30" x 48" | 2022

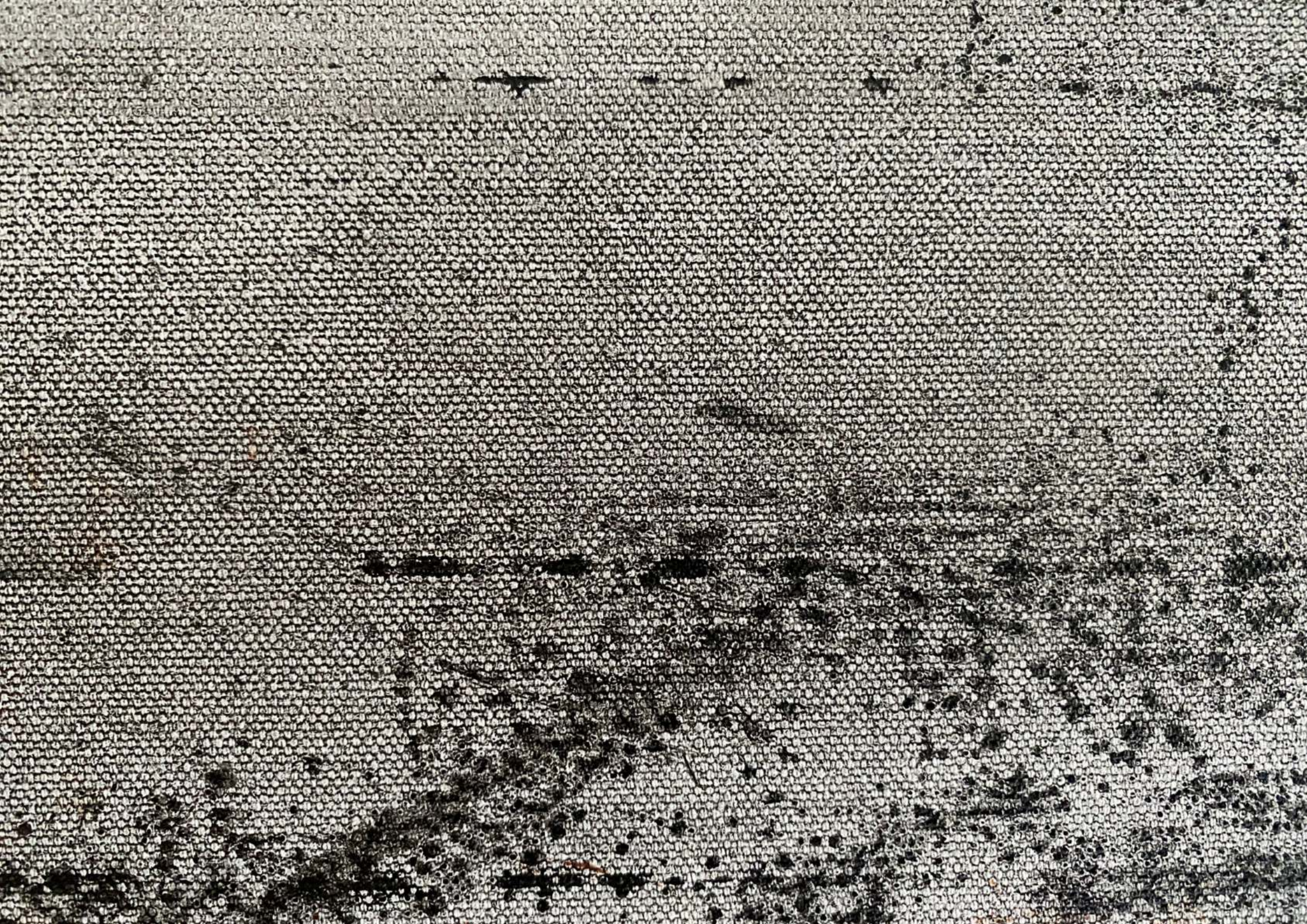


Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 12" x 12" | 2022



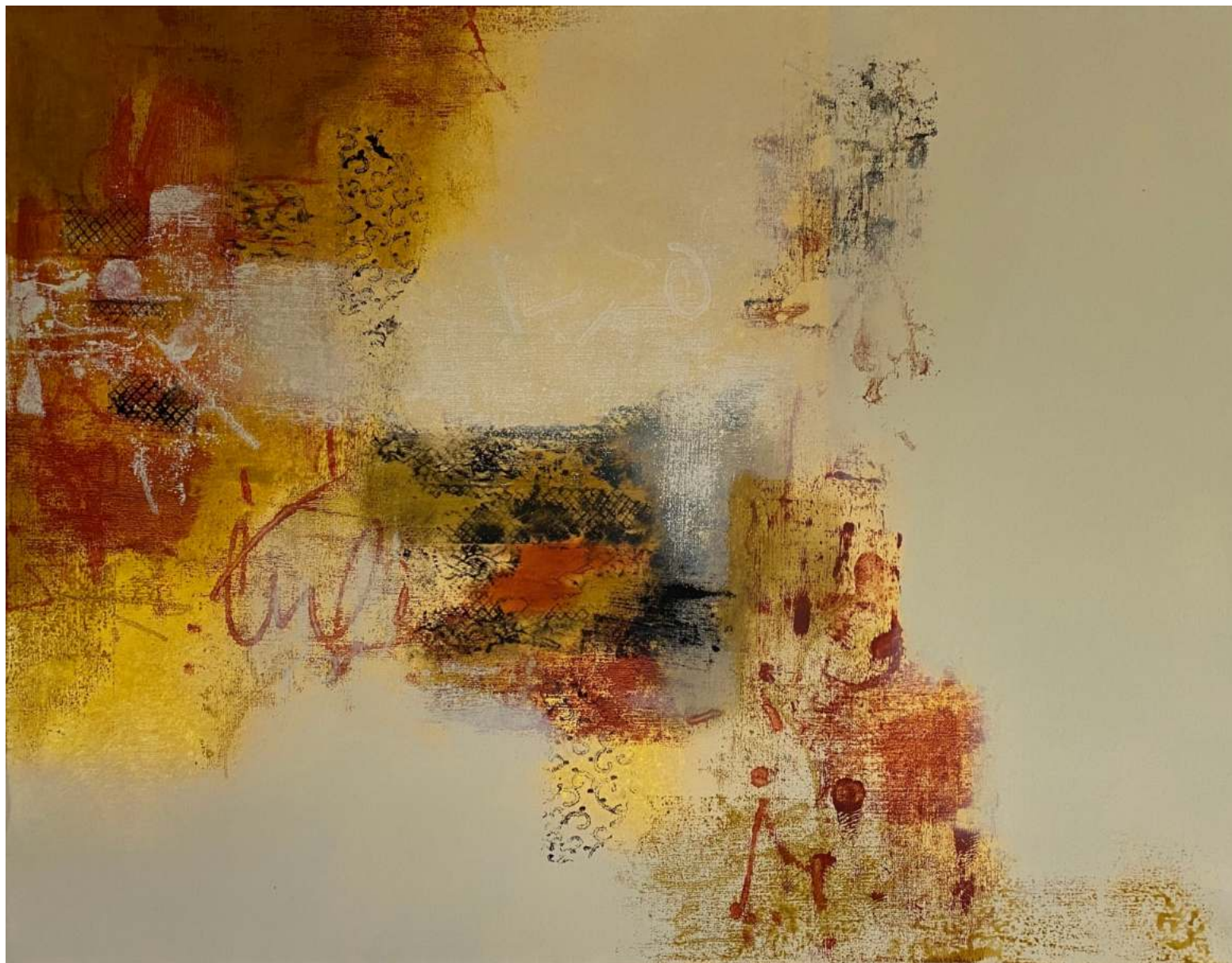


Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 30" x 60" | 2022





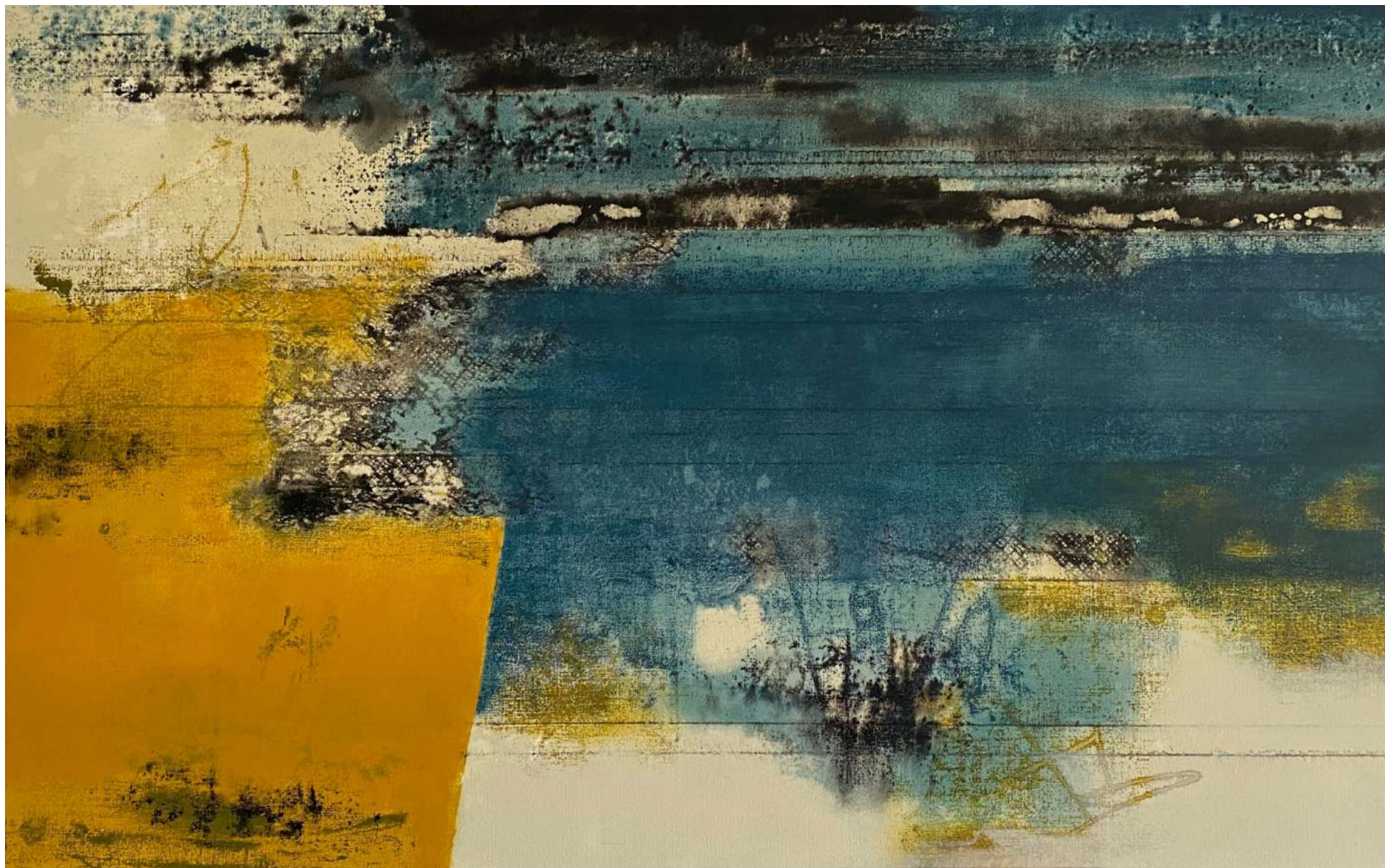
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Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 36" x 48" | 2022

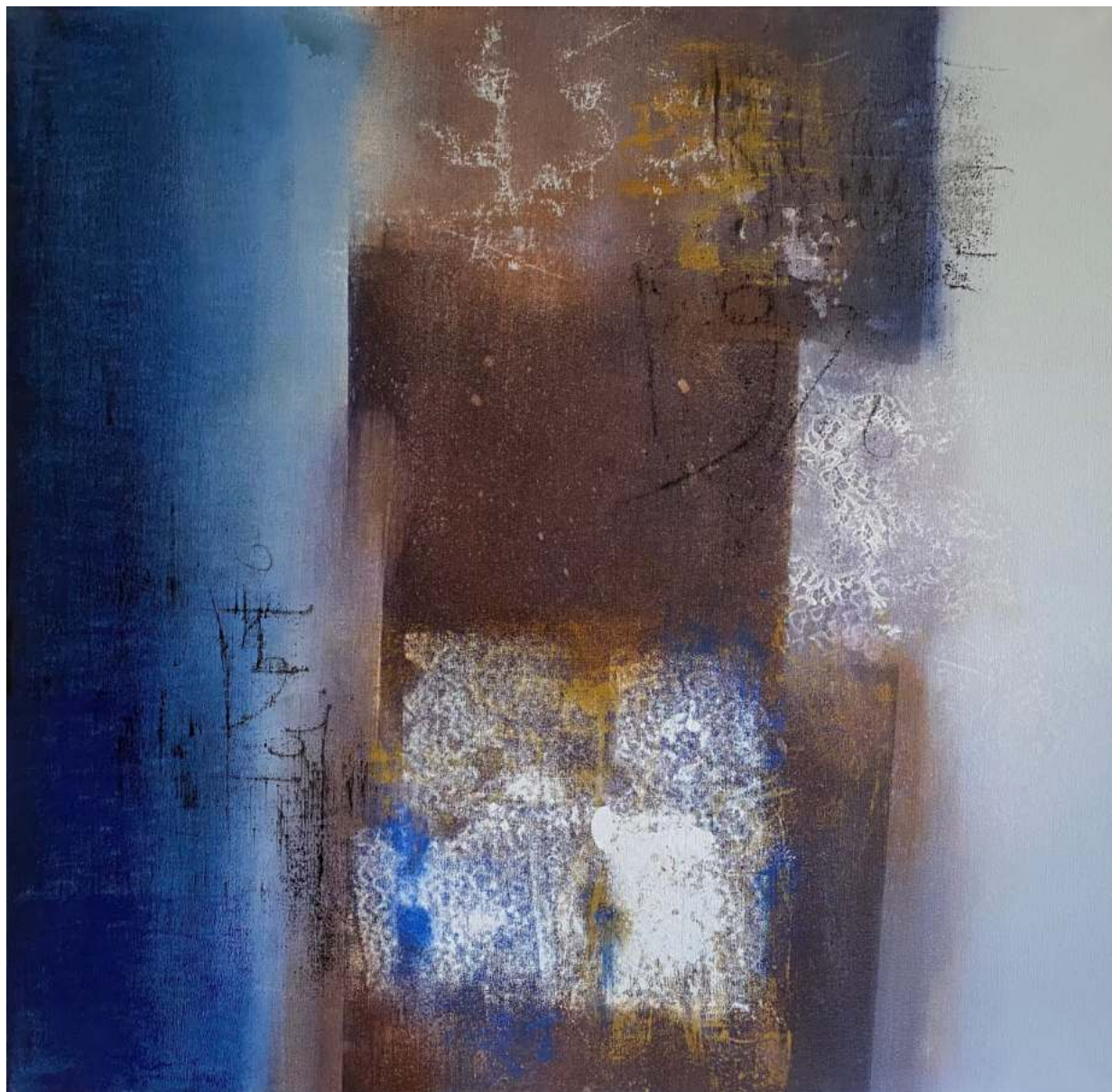


Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 36" x 36" | 2022



Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 30" x 48" | 2021





Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 36" x 36" | 2022



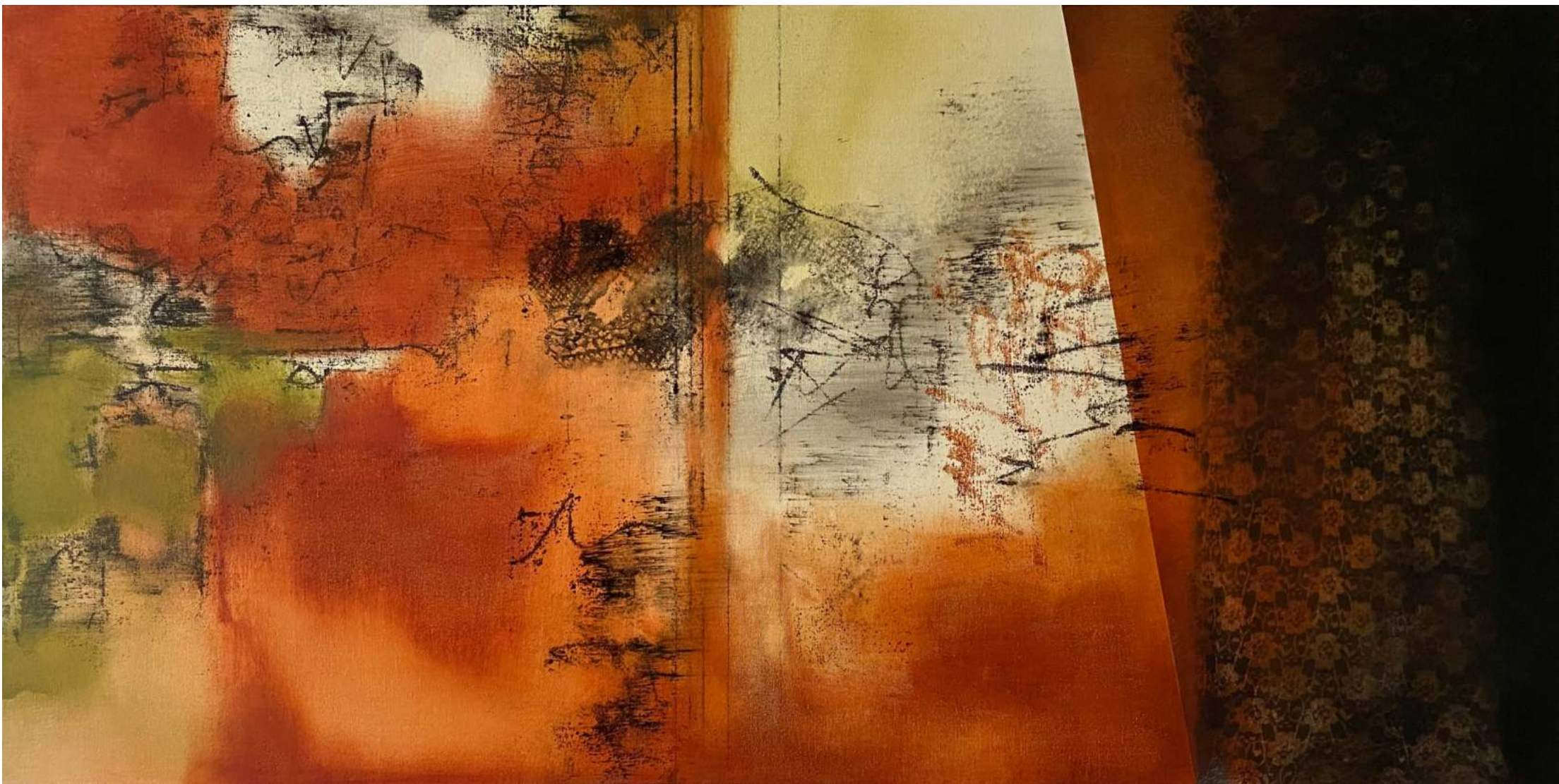
Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 36" x 48" | 2022



Untitled | Mix media on paper board | 8" x 8" |2020



Untitled | Mix media on paper board | 8" x 8" |2020



Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 30" x 60" | 2022



Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 36" x 48" | 2022



Untitled | Acrylic on canvas | 30" x 60" | 2022



Untitled | Mix media on paper board | 10" x 10" | 2020



Untitled | Mix media on paper board | 10" x 10" | 2020



Installation  
'Suspense - suspension' | H 96 x W 24 | Metal | 2022



**SHILPA NIKAM**

1970: Born at Jafrabad, Dist. Amreli, Gujarat.  
 1996: M.F.A.-Painting First class with Distinction first from Sir J.J. School of Art, Mumbai.  
 1993: B.F.A.-Painting first class from Sir J.J. School of Art, Mumbai.

### **AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS**

2021: 'Intriguing Journeys' of Abstracts Art event by Hina BhattArt ventures, Pune.  
 2021: 7<sup>th</sup> National Women Artist painting camp Mind Tree School, Ambala Cantt.  
 2020: Participate 'Art by the sea' 4<sup>th</sup> edition curated by Shradda Purnaye Mumbai  
 2019: International Non-Toxic Printmaking Workshop cum Seminar 2019Indira Kala Sangit University, Khairagarh, Chattisgarh.  
 2019: Participate in National Sculpture/Painting/Printmaking Camp L.K.A. Delhi, in Joint collaboration with Sir J.J. School of Art Mumbai.  
 2019: /2016,Participate 'Art Heart' camp at Chinmaya Vibhooti, Kolvan.  
 2018: Krishi Kala Utsav at ICAR-NAARM at Hyderabad.  
 2018: Participate Art camp Swami Bhaktiyog Memorial Artists 'Retreat at Rishikesh.  
 2018: Senior Fellowship – Cultural Department Government of India, New Delhi.  
 2017: Participated in LKA Chennai organized by “Ethnic Mindscape” – IV National Painting workshop at University College of visual Art Davangere, Karnataka.  
 2016: Cartist Automobile Art festival curated by Jonhy ML at Jaipur.  
 2016: National art camp organized by 'Dot Line Space 'at Wada.

2001 : Delhi, Maharashtra Artist, Camp Sponsored by AIFACS at Mumbai.  
 2000 : Fellowship – Cultural Department Government of India, New Delhi.  
 1999 : B.D.Somani institute of art & fashion technology org, Artists camp Mumbai  
 1997 : “State Award” in painting Maharashtra State Art Exhibition, Mumbai.  
 1996 : Merit Certificate in Annual Exhibition Sir J.J. School of Art. Mumbai.  
 1996 : Shri Vijay Pokarna's Prize Awarded in Bombay Art Society, Mumbai.  
 1996 : Third prize in Painting Maharashtra State Art Exhibition, Mumbai  
 1995 : Certificate Award from S.Z.C.C. Nagpur.  
 1993 : Participate camp at Govt.Museum,Chennai Org ,by S.Z.C.C. Thahhnjavar.  
 1993 : Participated Litho Camp Organized by W.Z.C.C. Udaipur.  
 1993 : First Prize in Annual Exhibition at Sir J.J. School of Art, Mumbai.  
 1992 : Scholarship from Ministry of HRD, Dept. of culture, New Delhi.  
 1991 : Travel Scholarship Award from Art Society of India, Mumbai.  
 1991 : Participated in contemporary painter's camp organized by W.Z.C.C. Udaipur held at Sir J.J. School of Art, Mumbai.  
 1991 : Merit Certificate in Annual Exhibition, Sir J.J. School of Art, Mumbai.  
 1991 : “Cash Prize” from Art Society if India, Mumbai.  
 1991 : Award in AIFAC Society, 9th Water colour exhibition New Delhi.  
 1990: “Karnik Award”in Annual Exhibition at Sir J.J. School of Art, Mumbai.

### **SOLO SHOW**

2022 : Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 2018 : Auditorium Hall, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 2014 : Jehangir art Gallery Mumbai.  
 2009 : Hirji Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 2008 : Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 2008 : Museum art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 2004 : Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 2001 : Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 1998 : Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai.

### **GROUP SHOW**

2022: Minimal stroke art gallery Pune  
 2022 : Ananta-Trithiya an online Art exhibition curated by Vasanth Rao Car Street Studios, Sydney  
 2021 : 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Awadh Art Festival at AIFACS, New Delhi.  
 2021 : UNDER HIS 'I' An All – Women Virtual show curated by Sushma Sabnis.  
 2020 : Collector's Art Fair 2020 Virtual art show organized by Awadh Art Festival  
 2020 : MORPHOUS AURA Abstract show curated by Amit Gupta at Krimauarts Art Gallery New Delhi.  
 2020 : Hands for Harmony an online art show by Aura Art.

2019: National Exhibition of Contemporary Art "BODY" 'curated by Johny ML at Shanghumugham Art Museum, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.  
 2018: Hub - 10-"TALE OF TWO CITIES" Exhibition at MSU Baroda.  
 2018: 1<sup>st</sup> Mumbai Korea Biennale at Sir J.J. School of Art Mumbai.  
 2018: 'Contemporary Trajectories' organized by 'Dot line space' in association With Nine Fish Art Gallery curated by Gourmani Das at Mumbai.  
 2017: Post-Age at Bussan International Art Fair South Korea.  
 2017: Terrorizing the mind on postcards' Post-Age exhibition Artist Centre,Mumbai  
 2017: 'Bombay Black' curated by Sumesh Sharma at Jahangir art Gallery Mumbai  
 2017: History and Voyage, show by The Bombay Art Society at NGMA Mumbai.  
 2017: Hub - 9 Exhibition at MSU Baroda.  
 2016: 9<sup>th</sup> Annual exhibition & LOC Line of Control curated by Jonhy ML a Birla Academy of art and culture Kolkata.  
 2015: 28<sup>th</sup> National Exhibition of Contemporary- South Centre Zone Nagpur  
 2015: Mini Prints show at Panaji, Goa.  
 2015: Women show at Studio Siana, Pune.  
 2015: Pune Biennale at Pune, curated by Jonhy ML  
 2015: CIMA Award 2014 show at Kolkata.  
 2010: Gallery Le Sutra, Mumbai.  
 2008: Art auction-'Sotheby' contemporary art exhibition, New York.  
 2006: "Impression of India" Singapore.  
 2006: Art auction, Femina power of Pink and Tao Art Gallery Mumbai.  
 2005: Present – Future Show curated by Saryu Doshi, N.G.M.A, Mumbai  
 2005: Pursing Abstraction India art Gallery, Pune.  
 2005: Charity for Tsunami, N.G.M.A, Mumbai.  
 2005: Pune Festival Tao art Gallery & Geetanjali Kirloskar at Pune.  
 2001/02/03 -Art access week Birla Academy of art and culture, Mumbai.  
 2001: Delhi, Maharashtra Artists Camp by AIFACS show Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 2000: 'Juxtapose' exhibition by artist couples Son-et-Lumiere Art Gallery,Mumbai.  
 1998/99 Bombay Artist's show by Vinayasa Art Gallery, Chennai.  
 1998: Miniature Show (Vista Group) at L.K.A. New Delhi.  
 1997: Black and White Exhibition (Vista Group) Y.B. Chavan Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 1997: 50 years of independence at the N.G.M.A., Mumbai.  
 1996/99 Miniature show at Sans Tache Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 1996: "Art Front" women Group show at Jehangir art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 1996: Save the Children – Nehru Centre, Mumbai.  
 1995: Crimson Art Gallery, Bangalore.  
 1995: Jehangir art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 1995/99 Art Today- Gallery, New Delhi.  
 1993: Gallery Leela Kempenski Hotel, Mumbai.  
 1993: Monsoon Show at Y.B. Chavan Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 1993: Monsoon show at Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai.  
 1991/04,2016:Indian Oil, Mumbai.

Collection India & Abroad

### Artist lives & Works in Mumbai

**Shilpa Nikam,**

Emp- 56/502, Evershine, Thakur village, Kandivali- east, Mumbai- 400101

Email -[shilpanikamart@yahoo.com](mailto:shilpanikamart@yahoo.com) / [shilpanikamart@gmail.com](mailto:shilpanikamart@gmail.com)

+91 9820512353

[www.shilpanikam.com](http://www.shilpanikam.com)



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