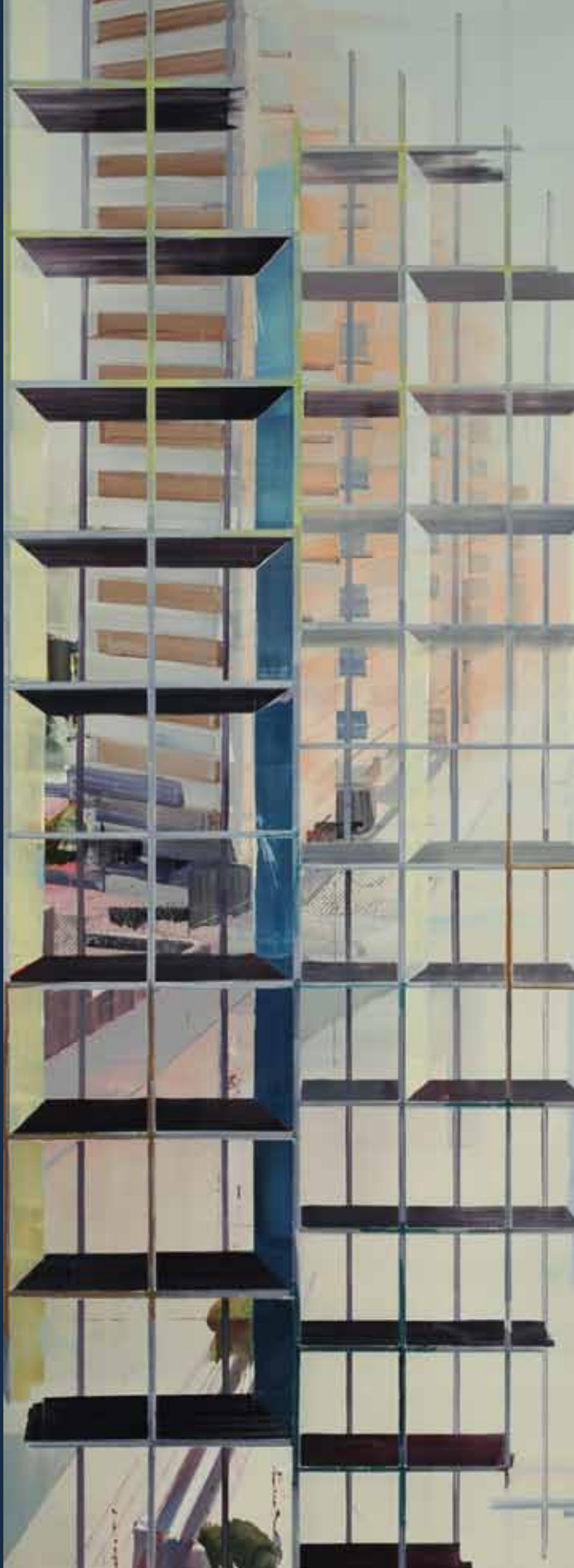


Driss Ouadahi

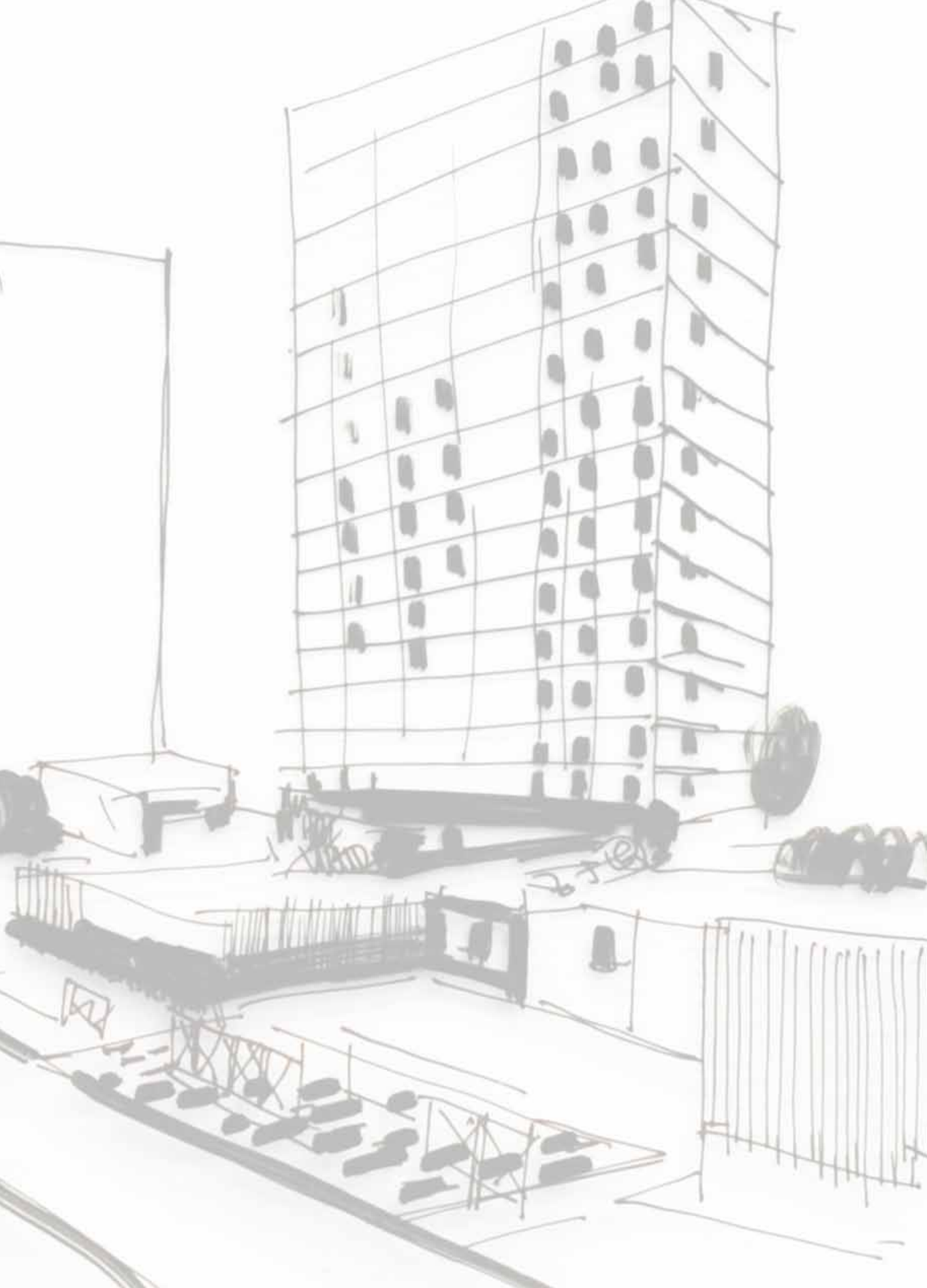
Breathing Space

6 February – 14 March 2012

shabireriqpays







Driss Ouadahi

Breathing Space

6 February - 14 March 2012

shabibouadahi





Breathing Space

In 'Breathing Space', Driss Ouadahi creates vast, semi-abstracted representations of urban sprawl and decay. His paintings can be seen as isolated summaries of implied social systems and mass-produced urban building stock, endless lines and angles that contain and constrain the messy, unpredictable and unknowable ebbs and tides of human activity.

Born in Casablanca, Morocco and having trained initially as an architect in his homeland Algeria, before studying and settling in Dusseldorf, Ouadahi's rigidly-structured works present a number of immediate positions.

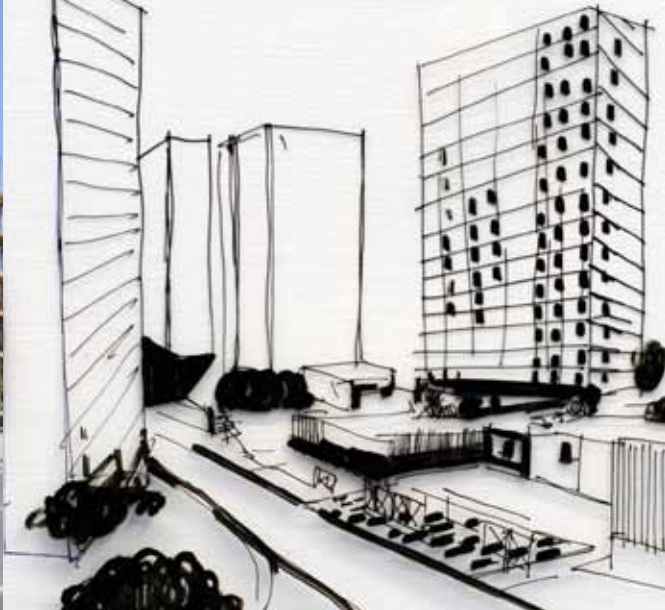
At the heart of his practice are the urban tenement blocks, relatives of the ground-breaking, utilitarian living spaces devised during the mid 20th century as a necessary solution to decades of urban migration following industrialisation. In their stark designs, echoing Modernist balances of function and form, they have evolved in the collective consciousness from futuristic utopian mass dwellings into signifiers of urban social poverty. The Modernist influence on his use of grids, based on the repeating patterns of tower blocks, also belies an obsession with the potential of perspective in a narrative construct.

It was, in fact, seeing half-completed tower blocks on the outskirts of Algiers during a visit in 2000 that inspired this long-running series. Unfinished, due to lack of building permits, these skeletal shells stood derelict across the outer limits of the city. Observing their exposed interiors, Ouadahi noted the peculiar 20th century phenomena of mass construction forcing people into living their lives, constrained and contained into clusters of tiny boxes.

Yet the grid, upon closer inspection, works as a two-way device, simultaneously inviting and distancing the viewer from the cityscape. This conflicted duality imbues Ouadahi's works with a rich, dynamic tension. For instance, peering into the heart of 'Luers Pour La Nuit', the grid structure impassively reflects back a panorama of a city in turmoil – burning cars, fires and disorder. (It was coincidence that this painting was executed in 2010 and featured in the 2011 Cairo Biennial - alongside 'Over The Fence' and 'Underground Path' - the closing of which happened amidst the revolution of last January).

Yet Ouadahi has taken these gigantic symbols of migration urbanization and alienation and worked them into a variety of responses to what Foucault termed the 'places without a sense of place', urban landscapes that simultaneously define and alienate the lives of their inhabitants. The cities in his paintings are anonymised composite collages of the sort of identical drab ghettos to be found across the world, aspects from European, Asian, Arab or African cities and suburbs. Shorn of their individual familiar aspects and landmarks, here, cities melded into Ouadahi's endless metropolises are inspired by locations discovered by the artist on his travels (or by browsing random urban streets on Google Earth).

Whilst creating an implicit critique of the effects of 20th century globalization – the fact that a suburban stretch of municipal housing is pretty similar whether it's in Ankara, Algiers or Alaska - his fascination is for the possibilities of human existence between endless repetitive structures and interconnecting joists. Walkways, fences, alleys and paths brings a manifold sense of movement amidst the relentless geometry, either into the dystopian jungle, or a way out



through the miasma of blocks and boundaries, into a metaphorical freedom and infinity. Reminiscent at times of the similarly-scaled epic visions of Gursky and Richter, Ouadahi's architecturally-trained eye seeks out spatial harmonies and rhythms that summon emotion and humanity amidst the twisting perspectives and dynamic structures. The result sees vibrant leaps from tightly-bound claustrophobia to areas representing luminescent space and freedom, within the buildings, the latter resounding with a deep personal nostalgia for the artist's childhood, spent intermittently in similar housing blocks in France, when he was not staying with his Berber grandmother in Algiers.

Ouadahi works on a macro and micro scale, offering us his startlingly rich visions of a cityscape before taking us deeper into his world and zooming in on small details, 'fragments' of the panorama. Nowhere is this clearer in this exhibition than in the 'Fences' paintings – hyperrealist full-scale close-ups of interlocking wire fences, the kind of which can be found anywhere across the world. From childhood memories of watching wealthy foreigners playing tennis behind such barriers, in 'Another Way', Ouadahi dramatically busts out an explosive escape, tearing out a hole in the links into an ethereally hazy beyond. There's a deeper meaning here too; Ouadahi was often challenged by contemporaries as to why his work wasn't more 'traditionally' Algerian, his chosen practice, he felt, being acknowledged as the 'privilege of Europeans'. His definitively ripped and torn-down fences go some way to commenting on his attitude towards such matters.

Balancing Ouadahi's strident forms and structures are his softly beguiling colour palettes. Eschewing the tendency towards bolder, harder tones more common amongst his contemporaries in Germany, Ouadahi's control of light and tone recalls influences as diverse as Flemish old masters from the 17th century to the dream-like tones of 1960s West Coast painters. The colours reflected in his cityscapes shimmer in the distance, echoing their almost dream-like appearance and forming a dialogue with the scaffold-like bulk of the framing grids. The harmony between colours throws up dramatic tensions against the rigid lines, adding layered meaning to his landscapes. Taken as a whole, they limn these pieces with an unknowable depth of emotion and magic that animates his vast, unique urban landscapes with a rich sense of poetry and humanity.

Arsalan Mohammad
Berlin, January 2012

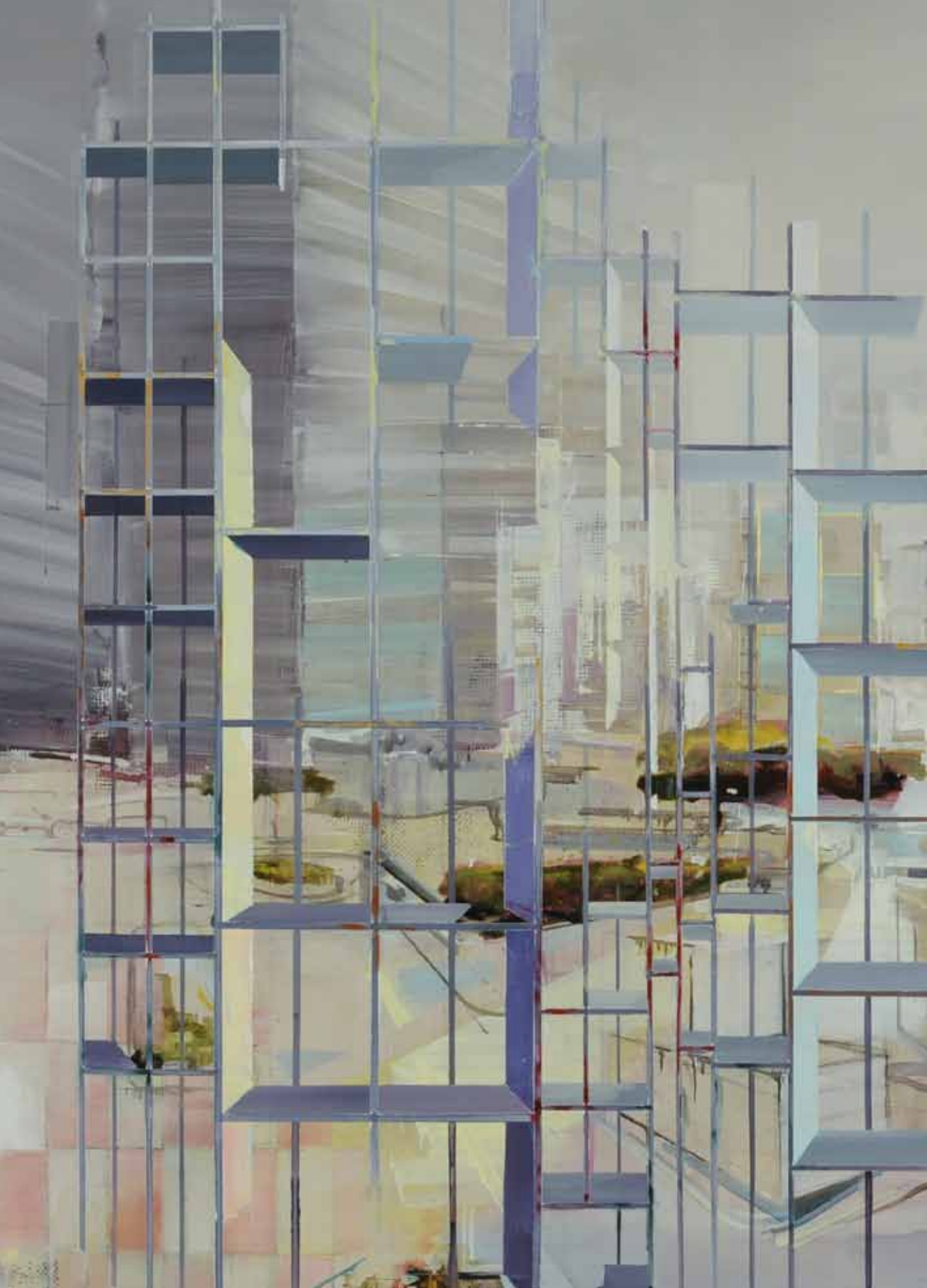






Nightfall
2011
Oil on canvas
180 x 200 cm





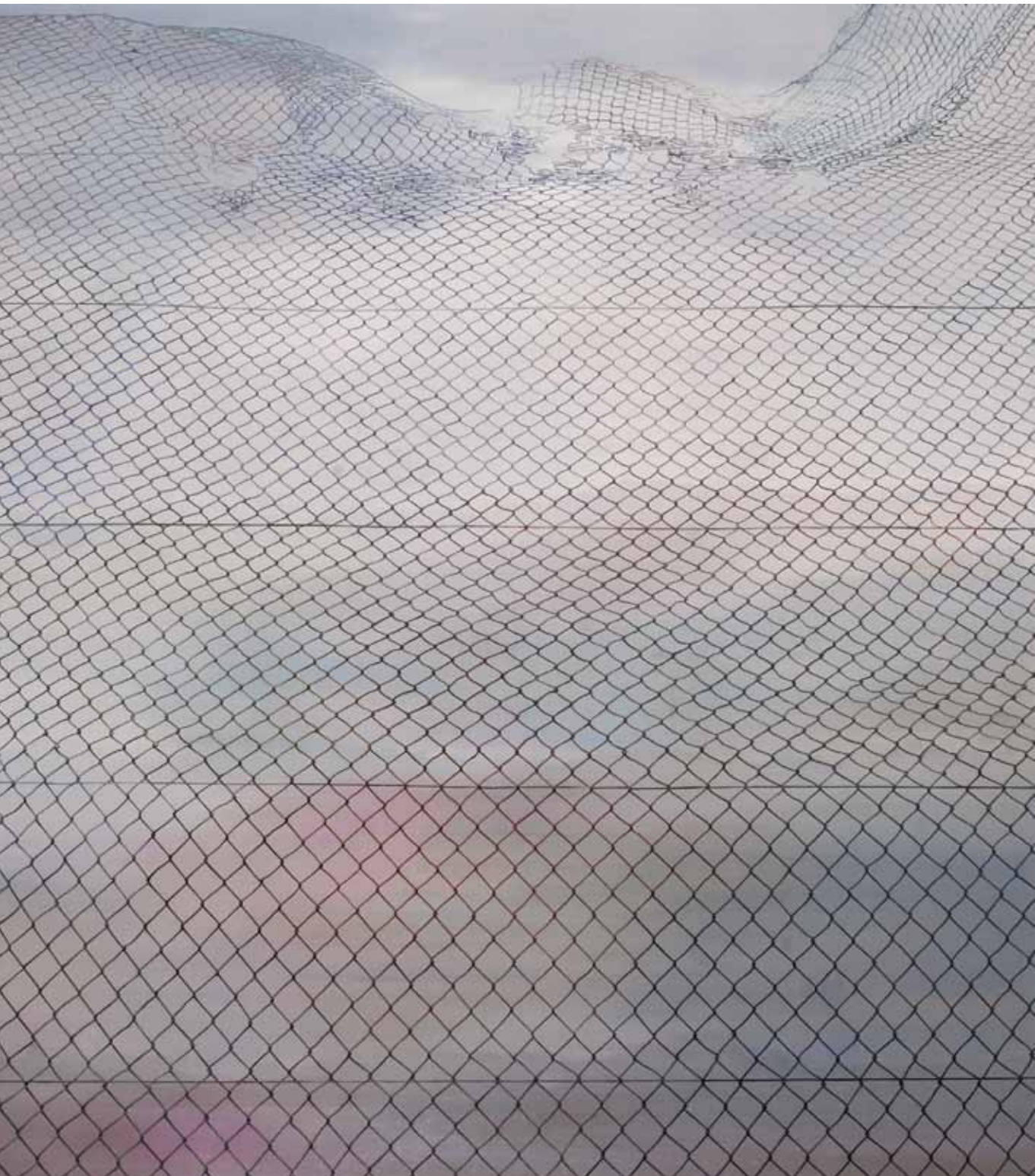


Ainsi Soit Elle
2011
Oil on canvas
180 x 200 cm



Bleu Nulle Part
2011
Oil on canvas
180 x 200 cm





Over The Fences
2010
Oil on canvas
200 x 180 cm







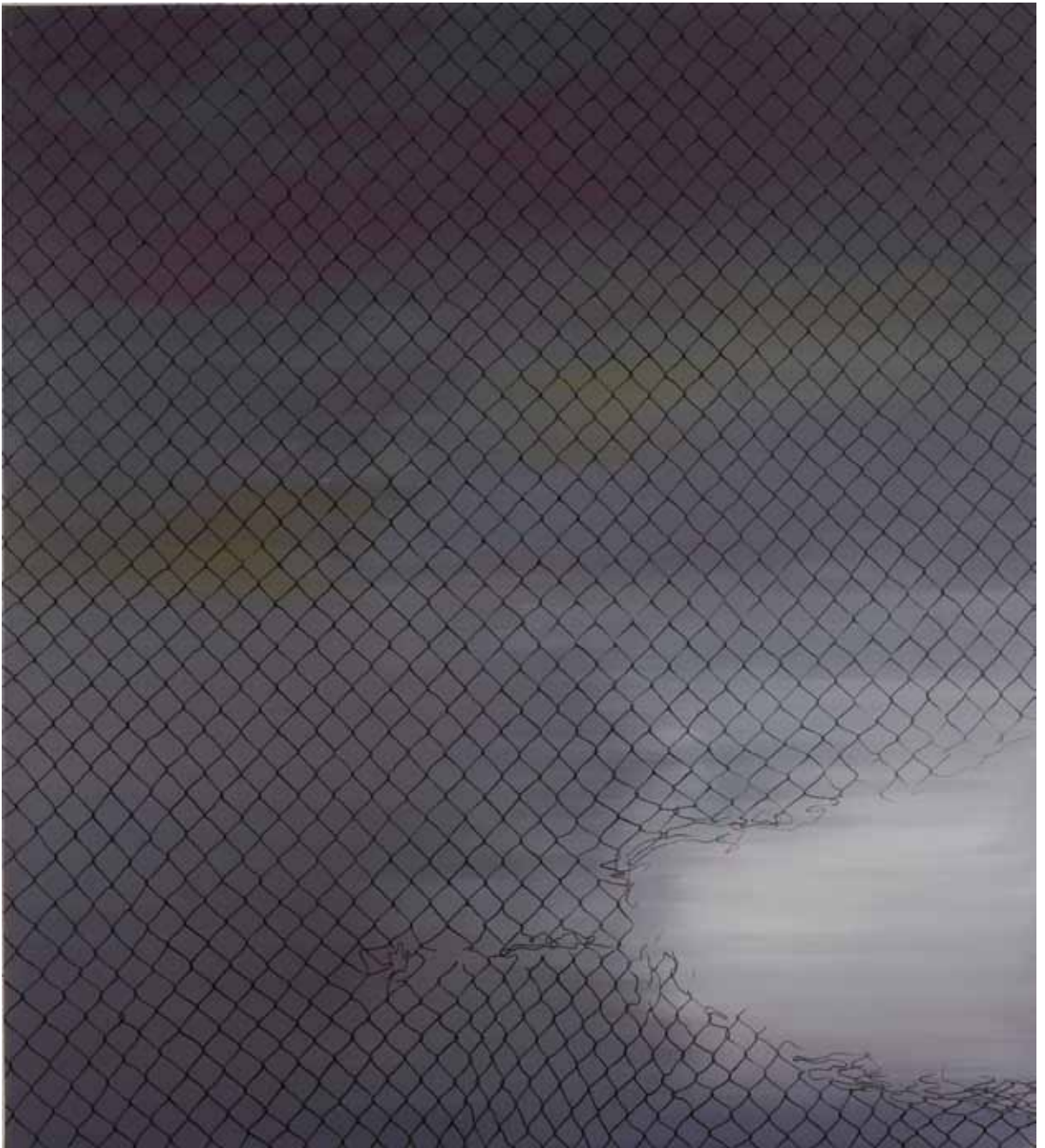
Toutes Direction
2011
Oil on canvas
190 x 240 cm



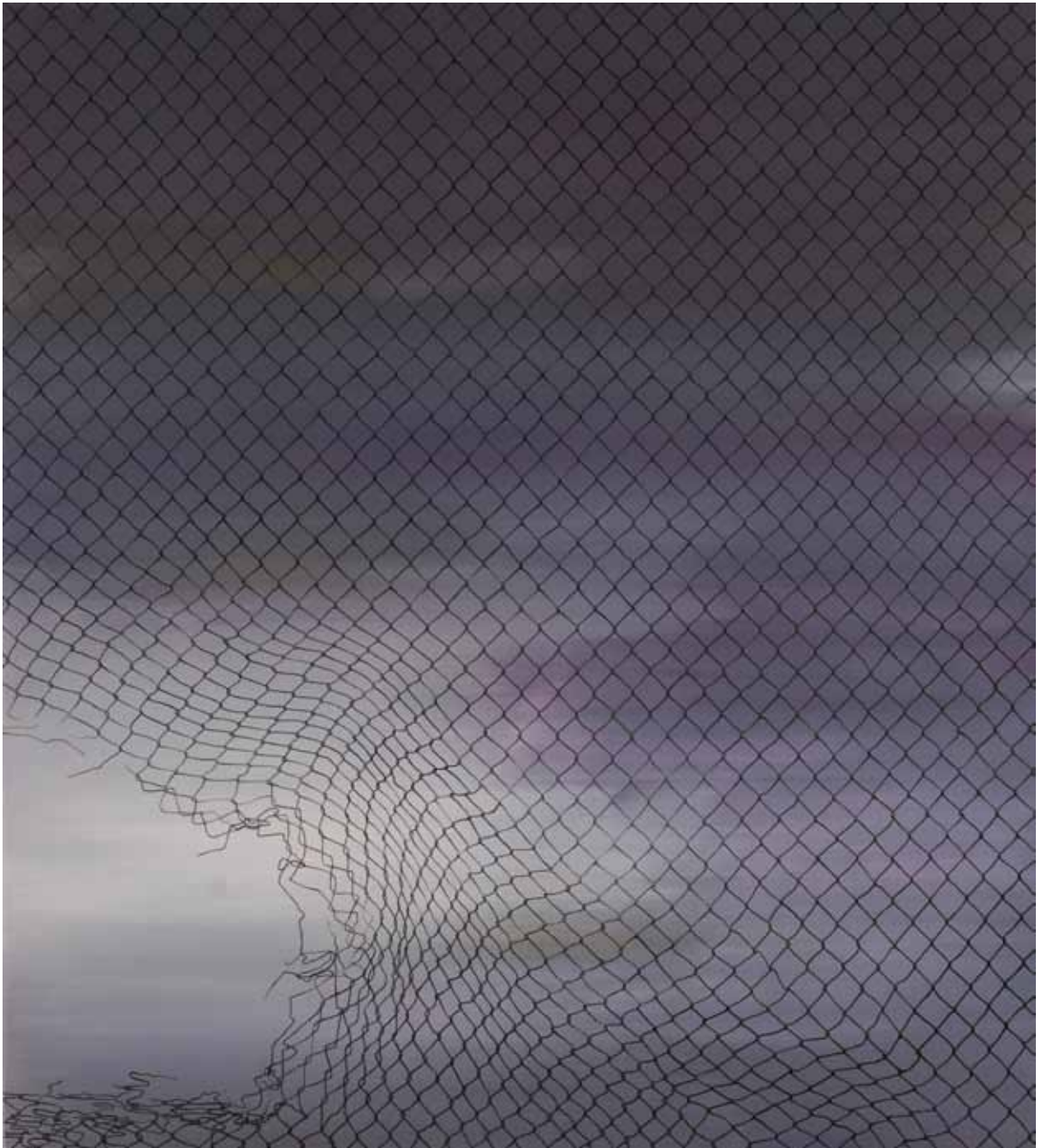
Breathing Space
2011
Oil on canvas
190 x 240 cm

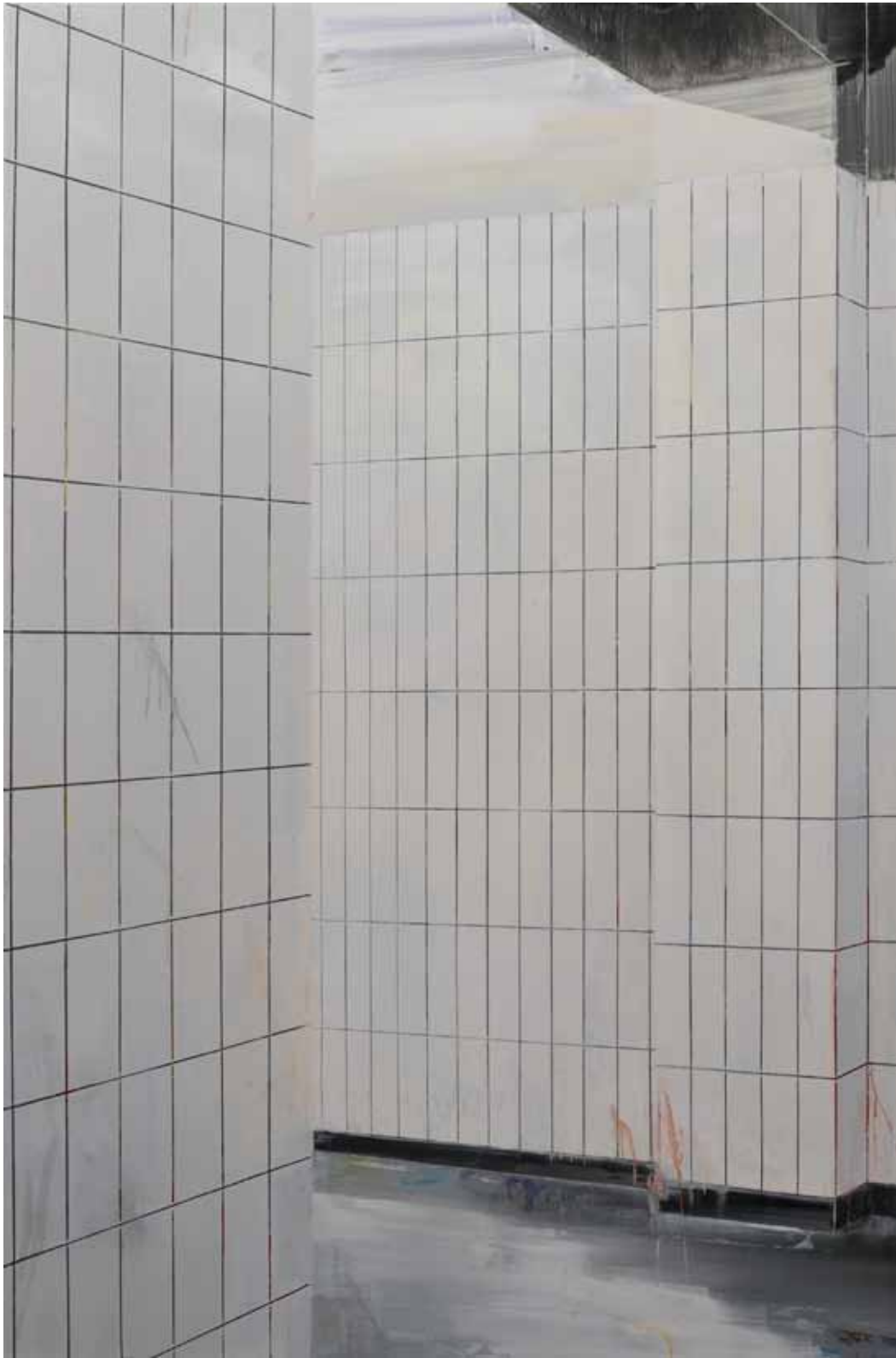
Lueres Pour La Nuit
2011
Oil on canvas
190 x 240 cm





Another Way
2012
Oil on canvas, diptych
200 x 360 cm over all





Underground Path
2010
Oil on canvas
190 x 240 cm



Algerian, born 1959 Casablanca, Morocco
Lives in Düsseldorf

EDUCATION

- 1994 Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf, Germany
- 1987 École supérieure des beaux-arts, Algiers
- 1982 Study of Architecture, Algiers

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 Breathing Space, Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai, U.A.E.
- 2010 Densité, Hosfelt Gallery, New York
- 2009 Herbert-Weisenburger-Stiftung, Rastatt, Germany
- 2008 dok25a, Düsseldorf (with Yun Lee)
- 2007 Unexpected Neighborhoods, Hosfelt Gallery, New York
- 2007 Another Place, Another Me, Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco
- 2005 Atelier am Eck, Düsseldorf, Germany (with Mourad Messoubeur)
- 2005 Künstlerverein Malkasten, Düsseldorf, Germany (with Mourad Messoubeur)
- 2003 Centre d'Art Contemporain, Istres, France
- 2001 Galerie Klinkhammer-Metzner, Düsseldorf, Germany
- 2001 Institut Français, Düsseldorf, Germany
- 2000 JASIM Gallery, Düsseldorf, Germany
- 1996 Raum X, Düsseldorf, Germany

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2011 Magreb: Dos Orillas, Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, Spain
- 2011 Le Retour, 3ème Festival International d'Art Contemporain d'Alger
- 2011 Future of a Promise at Venice Biennale 54, Venice, Italy
- 2011 Geometric Days, Exit Art, New York, NY, U.S.A.
- 2010 EINFLUSS: 8 from Düsseldorf – Introducing the Next Wave from Germany, Hosfelt Gallery, New York and San Francisco
- 2010 Cairo Biennial 12, Cairo, Egypt
- 2010 archiTECHtonica, CU Art Museum, University of Colorado, Boulder, U.S.A
- 2010 In Full Color, Hosfelt Gallery, New York, U.S.A.
- 2009 Looking Inside Out, Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, Norway
- 2009 Crossings/Traversées, Bab Rouah/Bab El Kebir, Rabat, Morocco
- 2009 Périfériks, Centre d'Art Neuchâtel, Switzerland
- 2008 Watching the Detectives, Meierhof Projekte, Düsseldorf, Germany
- 2008 Iconoclastes: Les Territoires de l'Esprit, Galerie Anne de Villepoix, Paris, France
- 2008 Art Entre Quatre Murs, Les Abattoirs, Toulouse, France
- 2007 Pattern vs. Decoration, Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco and New York, U.S.A.
- 2007 Alger: Capitale de la Culture Arabe, Musée national d'art moderne et contemporain d'Alger

- 2006 Sonntag: Painting from Düsseldorf, Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA, U.S.A.
- 2003 Centre d'Art Château de Servières, Marseille, France
- 2001 Unterwegs, Achim Franz Willems/Driss Ouadahi, Atelierhaus e.V., Aachen, Germany
- 2001 Traumzeit, Germany
- 2001 Landschaftspark Duisburg, Germany
- 1997 51. Bergische Kunstausstellung, Museum Baden, Solingen, Germany
- 1996 AL FANN II, DOCK 4, Kassel, Germany
- 1995 Les effets du voyage, Palais des congrès et de la culture, Le Mans, France
- 1991 Galerie Isma, Algiers
- 1989 Musée Picasso, Antibes, France

Lawrie Shabibi would like to thank the following:

Driss Ouadahi for his commitment and astonishing talent; Rüdiger Weng, for introducing us to the artist's work and making this exhibition possible; Amir Ouadahi for supplying additional images; Arsalan Mohammed for the introductory essay in this catalogue; and Joud Malhas, who designed this catalogue.



