

Georgii Uvs

On Khaos and Beauty

Retrospective 2005 – 2018

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Curated and produced by
Eva McGaw and Tatiana Palinkasev / Metamorphosis Art Projects, London

Gallery Eight

8 Duke Street St James', London SW1Y 6BN

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On Khaos and Beauty

A rshile Gorky, the artist who had a fundamental influence on the development of abstract art expression in the 20th century, said that “the Abstraction allows man to see with his mind what he cannot see physically with his eyes. Abstract art enables the artist to perceive beyond the tangible, to extract the infinite out of the finite. It is the emancipation of the mind. It is an exploration into unknown areas.”

In the energetic atmosphere of Moscow in the 2000s, Georgii Uvs began searching for a different artistic expression. For a long time he felt unsatisfied with figurative painting which he found limiting, denying him space for originality. He therefore took some years of contemplative pause from painting to re-emerge as a completely transformed individual. He began experimenting with different techniques, colours and pigments: he began to explore ‘the unknown’. Uvs, like his fellow artist Gorky, knew that he was at a point of no return. Abstraction was enabling him to bring his art to a completely different level.

Abstraction was the way to abandon the conformism of realism and be individual, unique, recognizable at first glance. Uvs claims that “Every artist seeks to be different. Realism implies levelling among artists. You can’t remember each of them, often they are very similar. Abstraction is a completely different thing; it is immediately clear that this is a completely different person.”

This retrospective follows Uvs in the development of his abstract style, in his constant quest for originality and inventiveness in the language and in his experimentation with new techniques, colours and pigments. He begins his pursuit for abstraction in *Khaos*, the archetypal state of emptiness, journeying through to the ultimate

goal of *Beauty*, a value that Uvs always strives for. The stages of the journey are punctuated by different locations in the life of Uvs. Firstly in Moscow, then in Malta, and later in the UK, embodied in a distinct but contrasting series of paintings, called *Mesozoic*, *Genesis*, *Codes* and *Wings*. He has taken on the challenge set for the artist by Kandinsky, to lead fellow human beings towards the tip of a pyramid representing the spiritual life of mankind. Only a great artist can reach the tip of that pyramid, Kandinsky concludes.

After the turbulent 90s of the post-perestroika era, the artistic scene in Moscow was opening up to international exchange. More Russian artists were travelling and exhibiting outside Russia and more Western art was being shown in Moscow. Nevertheless, there was a sense of impending doom provoked by a volatile political situation and the scars of a violent past. At the same time, religion continued to play an important part in the lives of many in Russian society.

It was in this context that Georgii Uvs was working on his abstract language. The feeling of foreboding and the spiritual is present in the Moscow period paintings, especially in those of a more religious nature such as *Fallen Angel* and *His Feet*. He never attempts to represent any one of these stories as a narrative. Indeed, he stays clear of the narrative and moves in the direction of abstraction. “Abstraction gives space and the subject is never chosen per se, but comes out of the creative process”, states Uvs.

Parallel and intertwined with the process of focusing on abstraction, was the experimentation with techniques and materials. In the early 2000s, Uvs systematically examined the effects of varying degrees of viscosity in paints and began to use UV

reactive pigments in order to give a new dimension and luminosity to his works of art. A painting like *Woman* (2005-2009) is emblematic of this. It is simultaneously realized through a combination of oil paint and UV reactive pigments, manifesting a duality of views – a feature and trademark that originated from that period in the career of the artist.

In 2014, Georgii Uvs moved to Malta. Different light, intense colours, the air filled with perfume, and a renewed zest in his work drove him away from formal abstraction to a state where his mind roamed free. His art became more intuitive, with brighter colours and a feeling of new optimism. In Malta, he also felt the presence of an audience interested in abstract art and his work, whilst in Moscow, he sensed that his art was before time and was not fully grasped. This set of circumstances fuelled more energy into his “purification” of abstraction and away from formal abstraction.

The birth of four new series of paintings, *Mesozoic*, *Genesis*, *Codes* and *Wings* is the consequence of a continuation of experimenting with pigments and the development of a new technique. By manipulating the paint from underneath the canvas, Uvs manages to create polymorphic forms defined by the interaction of his mental processes, his manual intervention, and fate. Whilst being a physical and laborious working mode, it nevertheless allows him to transmit his energy directly onto the canvas. He achieves the right balance of viscosity by mixing the pigments into the paint and that permits him a freedom to express his moods and feelings. In the words of one of the fathers of abstract art, Wassily Kandinsky, “The observer must learn to look at the picture as a graphic representation of a mood and not as a representation of objects”.

Genesis is the series in which Uvs uses the manipulation of paint from underneath the canvas, as in *Genesis #5* and *#8*. The type of paint is very thick, and it takes up to 3 years to dry. Conversely, the *Mesozoic* and *Codes* series are painted in thinner layers and with a completely different technique such as *Mesozoic #4*, the details of which Uvs prefers to keep to himself.

Experimentation and new pigments were fundamental in this liberation of the self, because they represent tools empowering the artist to travel and to find his place. “In the framework of optimism, everything is much wider, the world is wider, new themes appear. Wings are freedom. *Wings* could not be created in Russia”, says Uvs.

With an entirely different environment to Moscow, Malta and the UK reinforced in Uvs the conviction that he co-creates his works of art with nature. He argues that if nature is perfect, then we must let it manifest itself, rather than try to imitate it. Hence, his choice of colours is determined according to the mood the artist wants to depict. These colours are then poured on to the canvas, manipulated into a shape, and create a composition that has never been touched by the artist. Uvs’ working process is an artistic performance in its own right, and not just a phase of painting. Even the drying is a performance and an interaction where nature takes the lead. Because the drying is slow, nature can intervene and create an astonishing moonscape with folds and craters, something that the human hand could not do or, moreover, repeat. Uvs controls the process, which is very precise and yet profoundly influenced by chance, in a dynamic and ever changing balance between nature and the intervention of man. Chance seems to be, in the words of the artist, “the incident for which,

consciously or not, I get to paint the essence of nature". At the same time, chance saddles the artist with a great responsibility, to stop at the right moment, not a touch more and not a touch less, to let that ultimate beauty appear, the vision that he unconsciously had in mind and that took form through days and weeks of work. "Sometimes

miracles happen. This is the most joyful but rare moment where you have to work a lot. Miracle is when the randomness has merged with your intention".

Tatiana Palinkasev and Eva McGaw
September 2019

On Khaos and Beauty

On 7 May 1959, the British physicist and novelist, C.P. Snow, mounted a podium at the Senate House in Cambridge to deliver a landmark lecture called *The Two Cultures*. He lamented that a vast gap had opened up in western society between science and the humanities; that practitioners in the one field knew little, if anything, about the other; and that communication between them was all but non-existent.

Snow contended the majority of scientists could barely bring themselves to read a chapter of Dickens, and the majority of humanities professors were wholly ignorant of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Sixty years on, Snow's lecture is still the subject of great debate. Has the gap he posited between the two titular cultures narrowed, widened or remained the same?

The contemporary painter of Russian origin, Georgii Uvs, makes for an interesting case-study in this regard. Subject of the new exhibition, *On Khaos and Beauty*, at London's Gallery 8 – featuring work from the past 14 years – he is an artist who introduces many elements of science into his practice.

Uvs graduated from Moscow State University in the mid-1970s with a degree in Geology – before taking a second degree in Fine Arts. The paintings from the early part of his career were in a figurative mode, but nowadays he's an avowed convert to abstraction.

He eschews brushes, manipulating his paints instead from beneath the canvas – through an ingenious combination of tools, battens and the odd electrical device, the details of which he keeps secret.

'Realism implies similarity and a levelling among artists', Uvs says. 'It traps them in a practice of depicting landscape, faces, still-lives or whatever. Abstraction, by contrast, offers complete freedom.

It's the manner in which an artist can truly find his individuality'. (Here he echoes the Abstract Expressionist master Jackson Pollock's claim that 'every good artist paints what he is'.)

Alongside his method of applying paint to canvas, another way Uvs exerts his individuality is through the composition of that paint. He finds conventional oils restrictive – too viscous, above all. Drawing on his geological training and an understanding of the chemical analysis of minerals, Uvs purchases special, UV-light- reactive pigments and creates his own paint.

In a mix of art and science of which C.P. Snow would doubtless have approved, Uvs determines both the colour and consistency himself. Not that this comes instinctively.

He admits that, as with any scientist, there's a certain amount of experimentation and investigation involved, a certain amount of trial and error. He tends to try out different variations of pigment and solvent on small canvases first – Uvs refers to these as his 'sketches' – before adopting the ones he likes for bigger canvases.

The luminescence of his pigments is striking: whether in ordinary light or (as was the case in Uvs's show, *Full Circle: The Beauty of Inevitability*, at the Saatchi Gallery earlier this year) in a dark room under ultraviolet light.

There end up being, in fact, two different paintings in each canvas, depending on the illumination. The switch from UV to non-UV lighting radically affects the viewers' perception of what's in front of them.

Take a painting such as *Wings #9*, from 2017, for example. In normal viewing conditions, with its eddies of yellow within a blanket of fiery red, it rather recalls the thick of an active volcano. Under UV light, however, the colours become a trippy mix of cyan, magenta and green, and the hint of two

seahorses can perhaps even be made out.

Uvs stresses ‘viewers are free to see what they want to see’ in his paintings. Even though he is the creator and has long since renounced figuration, he accepts he’s ‘not an absolute authority’. In other words, science can play a fundamental role in a work such as *Wings #9*’s creation, but has negligible impact on its reception. Those who think they see a seahorse have every right to see a seahorse.

On Khaos and Beauty will include works from 2005 onwards, which covers precisely the period Uvs has been working in abstraction. His palette has grown markedly brighter in that time, with a noticeable shift happening when he left Moscow for Malta in 2014. One wonders why that might be. A change in the weather seems the most obvious explanation, the blue skies and fierce sunshine of the Mediterranean prompting brighter imagery. Just as it did for van Gogh, on his move to Arles in the south of France in the 1880s.

However, Uvs himself cites the move to Malta as one of ‘psychological release and liberation’. Apparently, few people in Russia were interested in abstraction – by him or by any artist – as if an after-effect of the highly figurative Socialist Realist style demanded by the Communist leadership for much of the 20th Century (which depicted idealised farmers and workers in the midst of heroic toil).

With the move away from Russia, Uvs felt new optimism – in a society more accepting of his art – and the brightness he introduced to his paintings thereafter was a product of that.

One of the series he made in Malta, *Mesozoic*, has a name that seems apt for a non-figurative art such as Uvs’s: the Mesozoic era, after all, occurred several million years ago, before mankind walked the earth. The era was one of great transition – when the continents began to emerge into their present-

day configurations – and Uvs’s thin films of colour convincingly capture the sense of fluidity.

Another series created on Malta – *Genesis* – boasts paint considerably thicker. So much thicker, in fact, it took up to three years to dry. To encounter many of the works from *Genesis* is a physical experience. These are sculptures as much as they’re paintings. The crusting, cracking and cratering on the surface (results of the long process of drying) call to mind lunar landscapes. Or perhaps, given the artist’s background, geological formations.

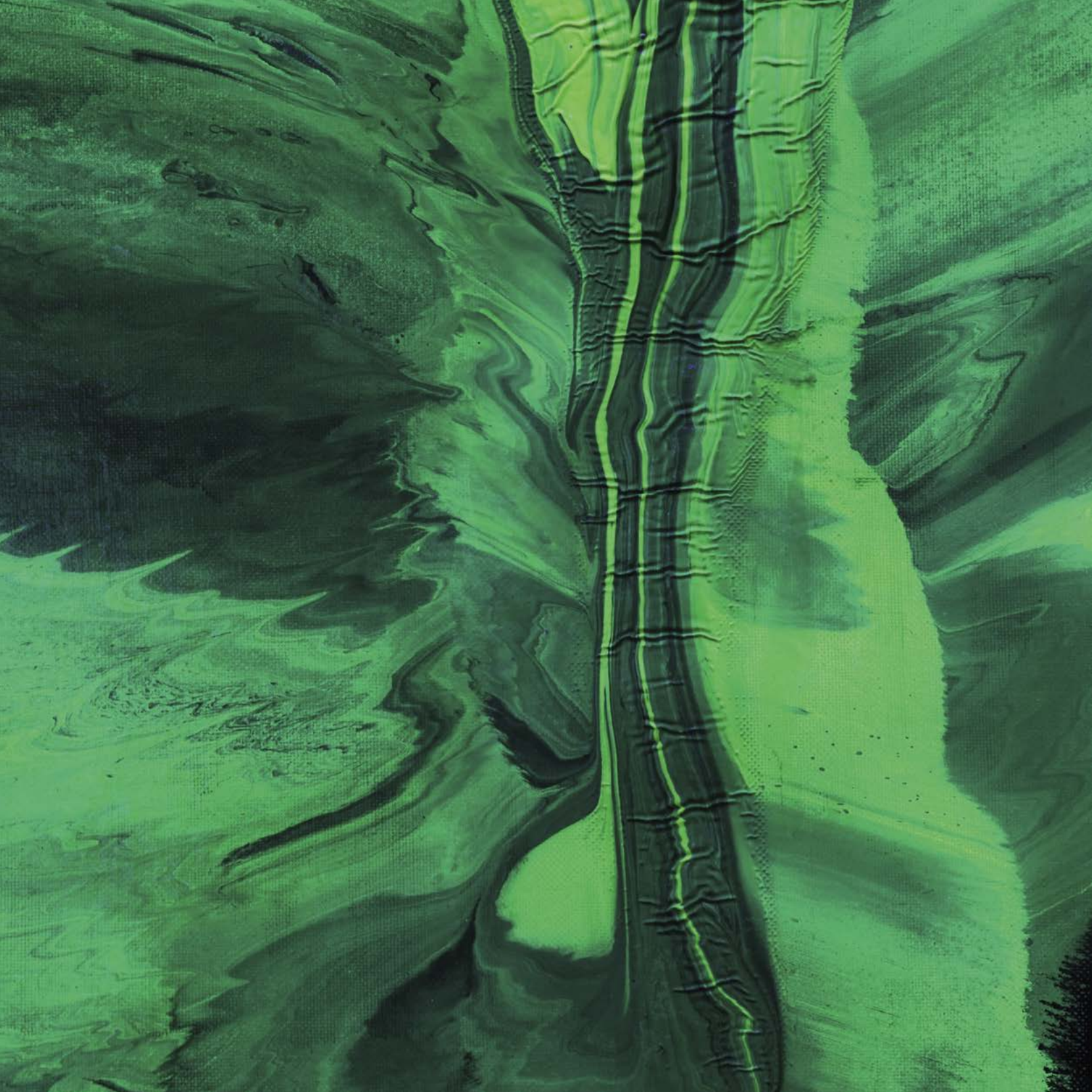
Uvs’s illustrious compatriot, Kazimir Malevich, was one of the pioneers of abstraction more than a century ago. With 1915’s *Black Square*, he reduced painting to a simple geometric shape and a single colour, removing all hints of what western art had hitherto been about: representation.

Malevich, though, would by the early 1930s return to a figurative style: in some part, no doubt, because of the political climate (Stalin now having come to power and insisting all art be Socialist Realist art) but more crucially because he felt he’d reached the end of a road with abstraction. After the black square, he decided there was nowhere left for him to go artistically than back to figuration.

Judging simply by the wealth of difference between the *Genesis* and *Mesozoic* series, it’s clear Uvs is far from making the same decision himself. ‘Abstraction is my most authentic form of expression,’ he says. ‘And every day it brings me the opportunity to go somewhere new’.

For Uvs, then, abstract painting is quite the opposite of the end of a road; it’s an entry point to whole new worlds.

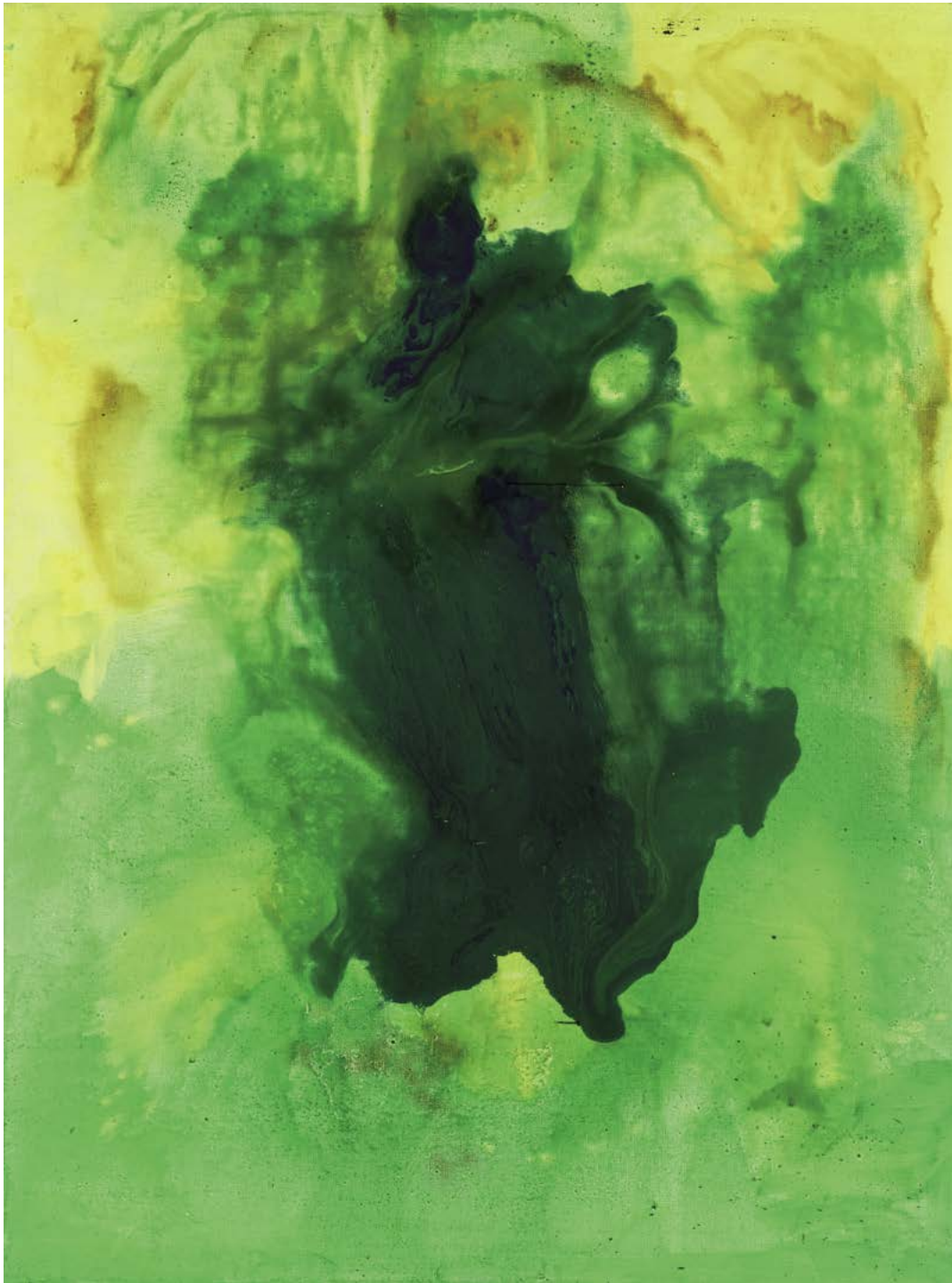
Alastair Smart
September 2019



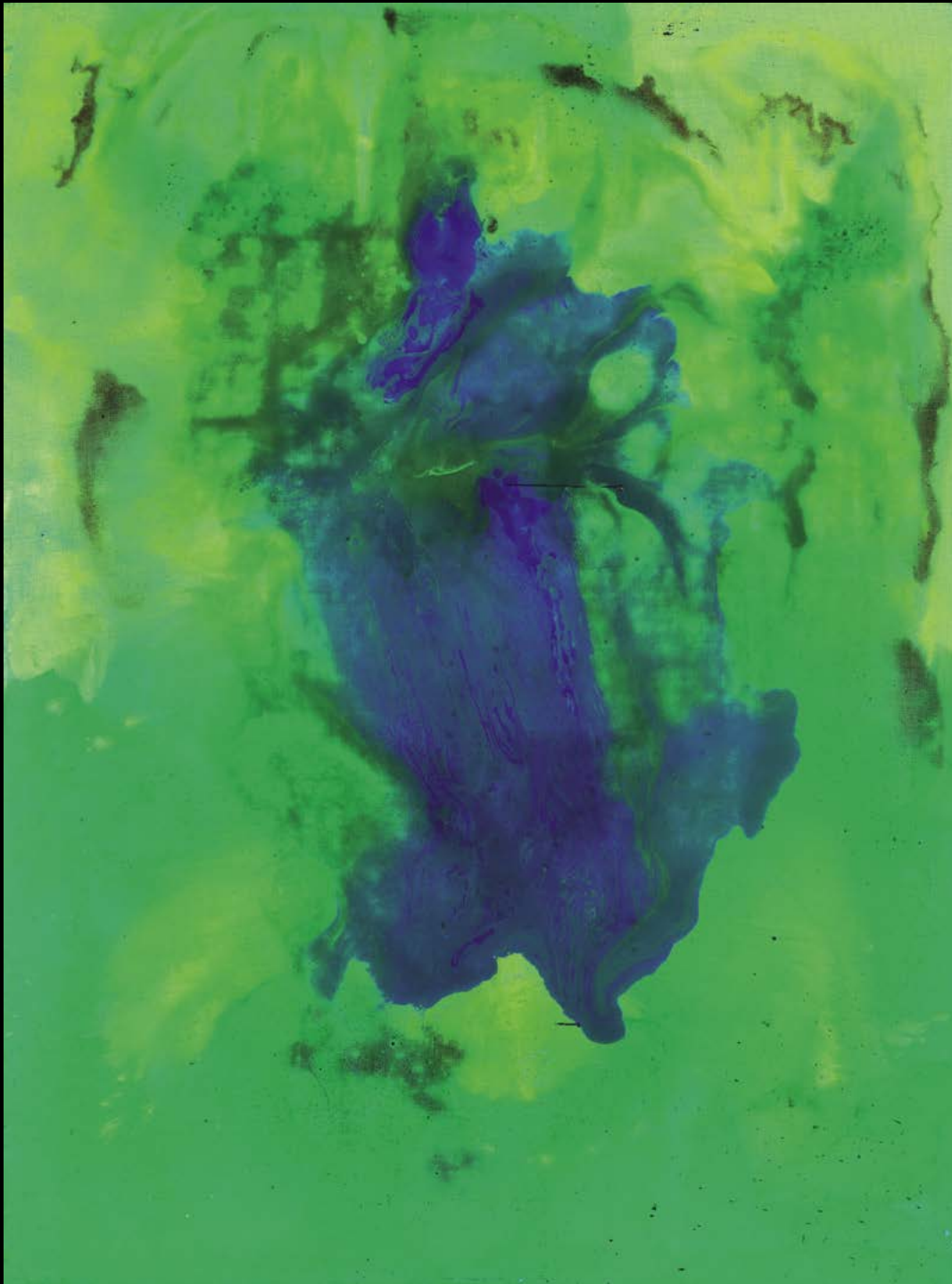
The background is an abstract composition of green and black. The green areas are textured and layered, resembling marbled paper or a fine grid pattern. The black areas are solid and dark, creating a high-contrast effect. The overall appearance is that of a textured, possibly woven or printed, surface.

MOSCOW

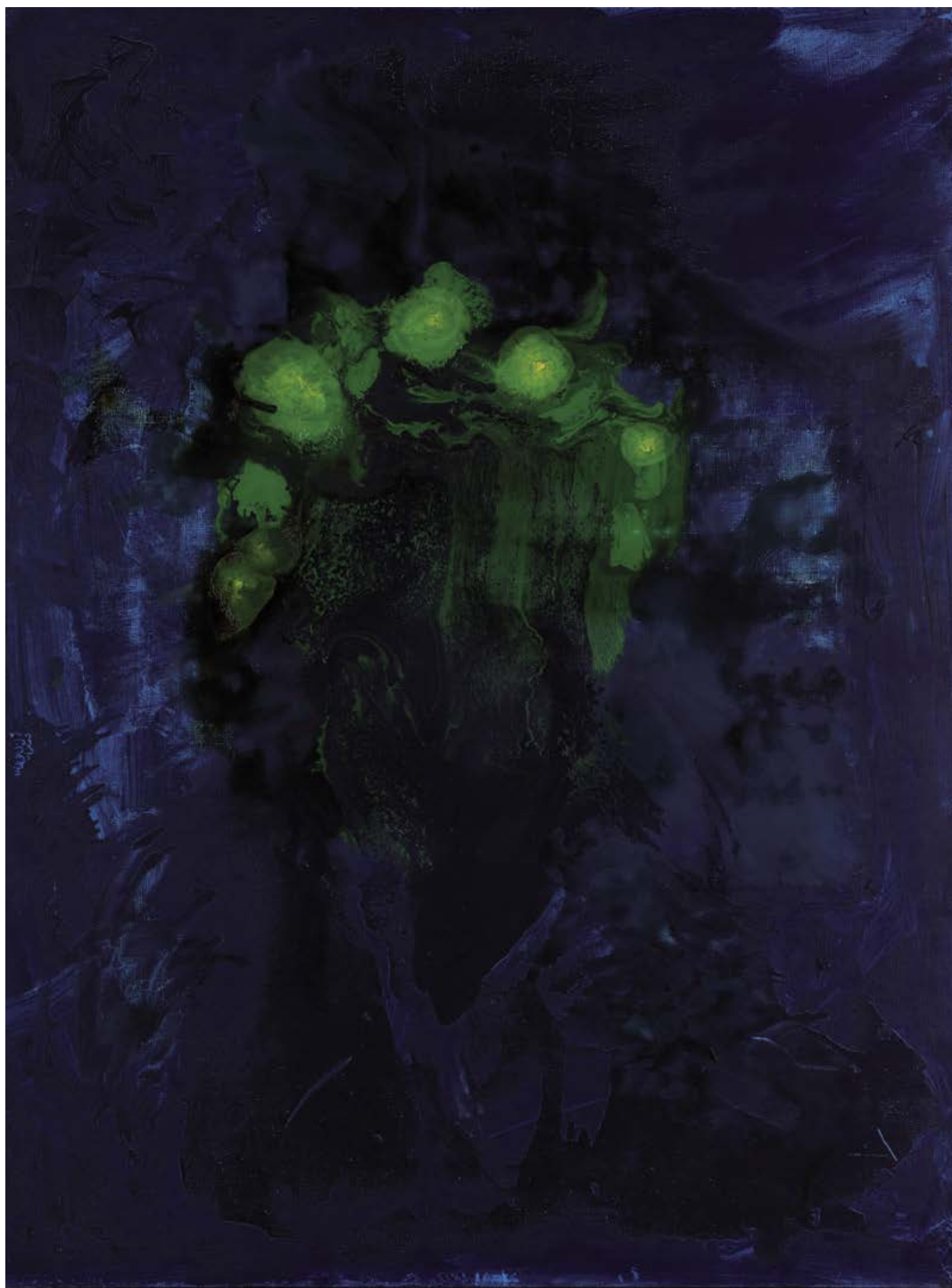
2005-2014



Archangel
200x150cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



Archangel
(under UV light)
200x150cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



His heel
200 x 150cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



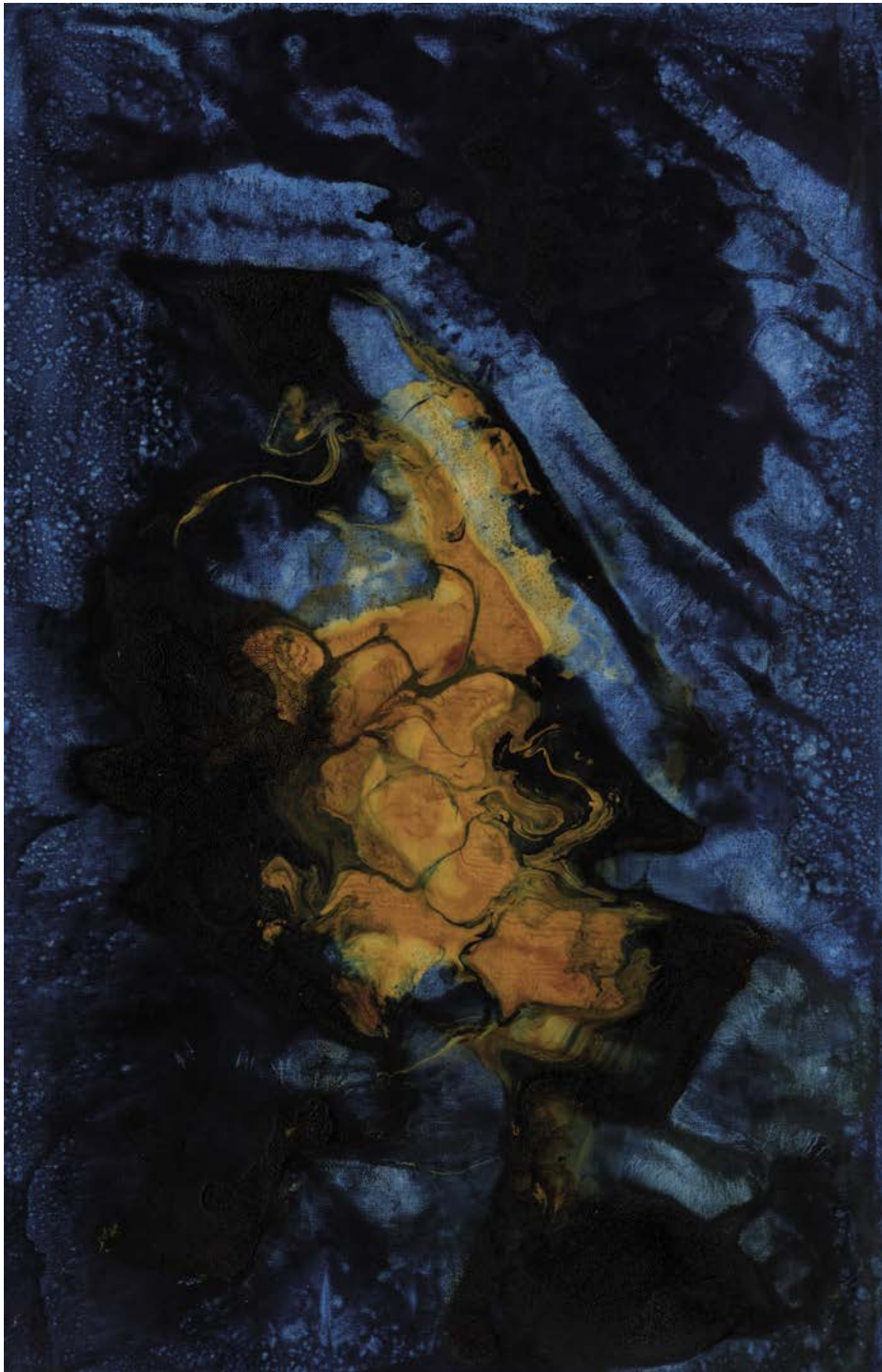
His heel
(under UV light)
200 x 150cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



Woman
200 x 130cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



Woman (under UV light)
200 x 130cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



Fallen angel
195 x 126cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



Fallen angel (under UV light)
195 x 126cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



Hermit
195 x 126cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



Hermit (under UV light)
195 x 126cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



His servant
200 x 150cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas



His servant
(under UV light)
200 x 150cm
2005-2009
Oil on canvas

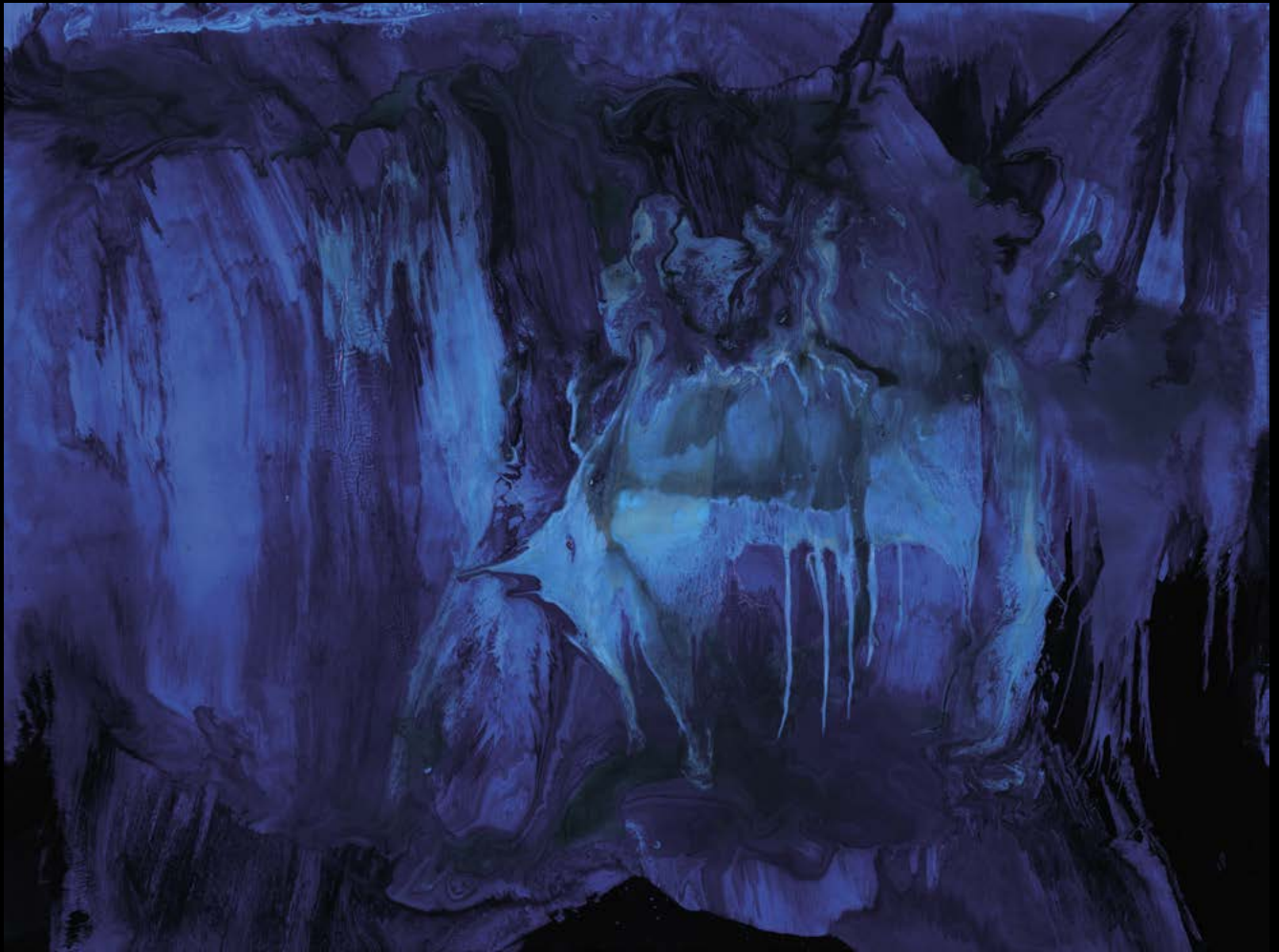


She thinks she is still alive

150 x 200cm

2005-2009

Oil on canvas

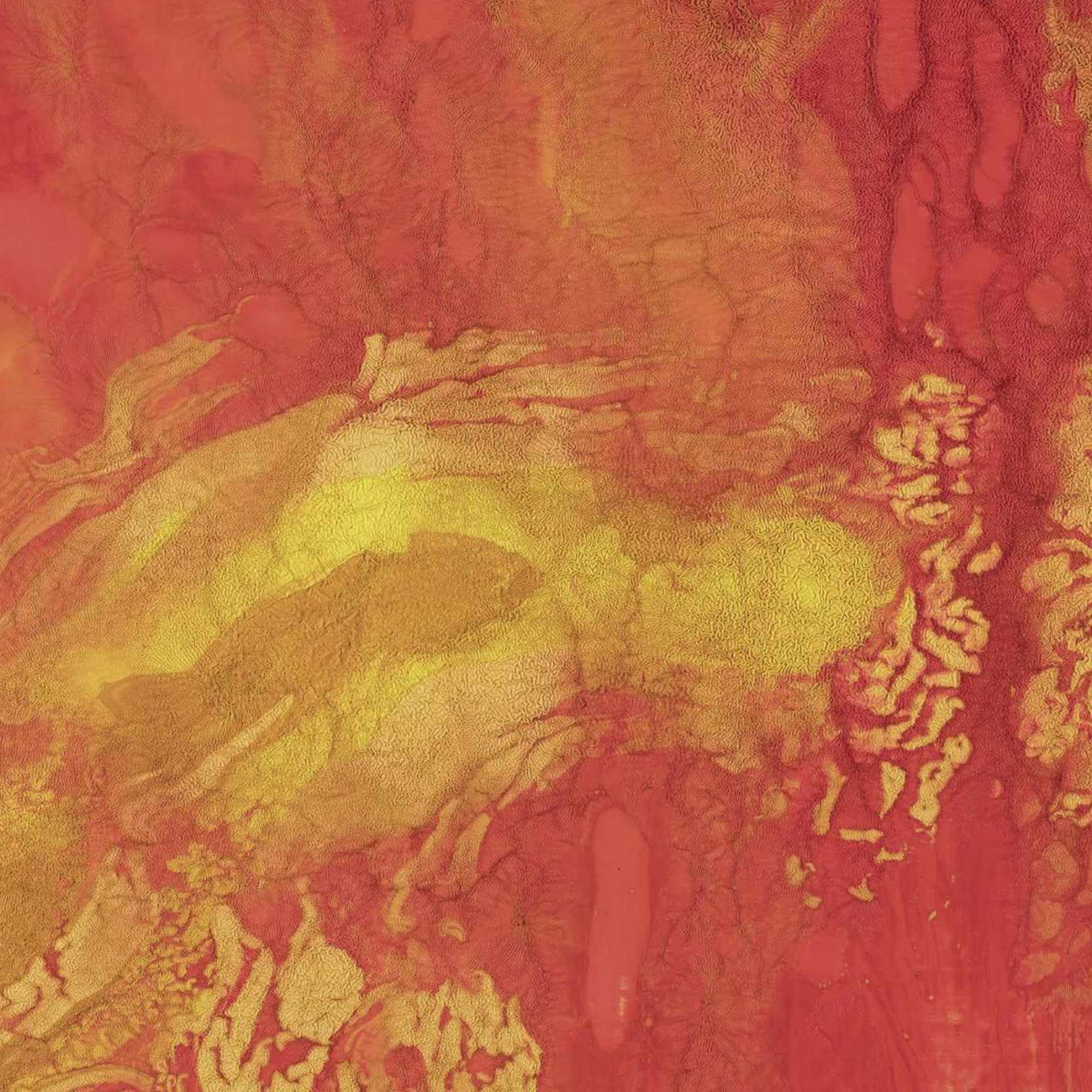


She thinks she is still alive (under UV light)

150 x 200cm

2005-2009

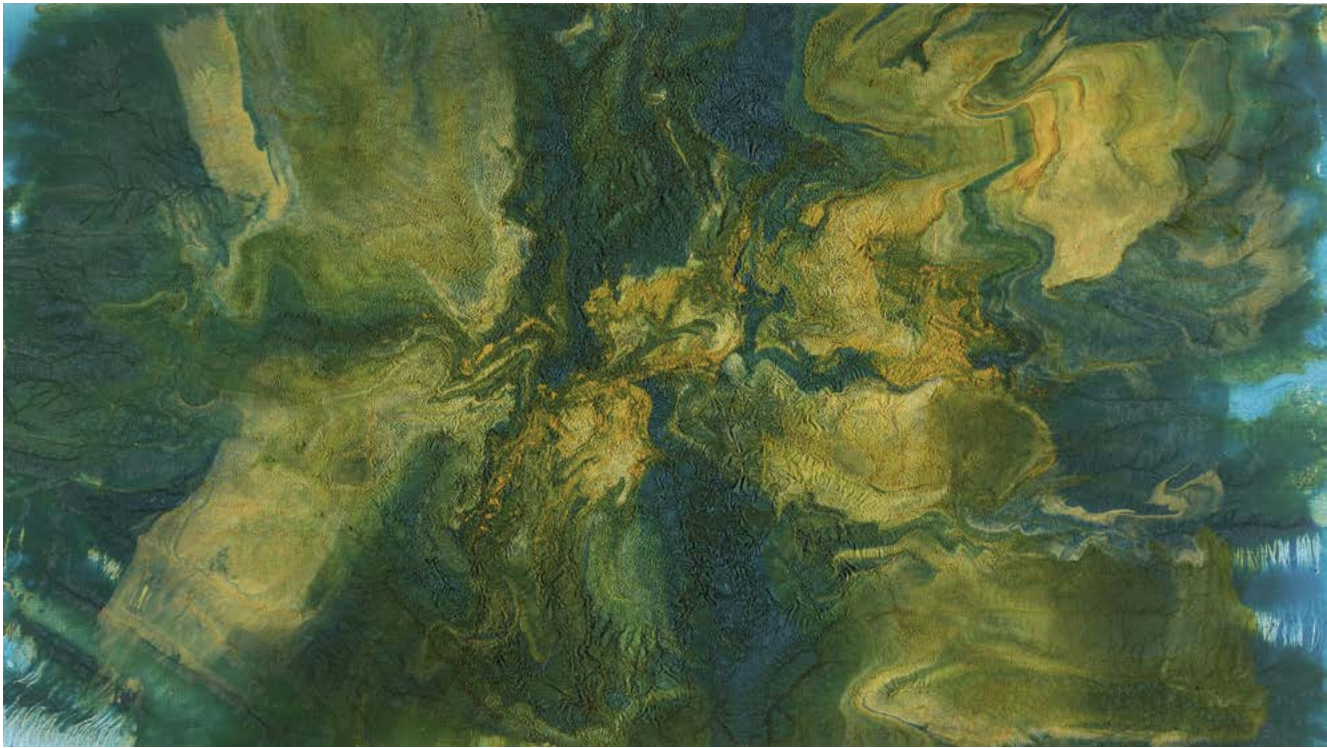
Oil on canvas





Malta

2015-2017

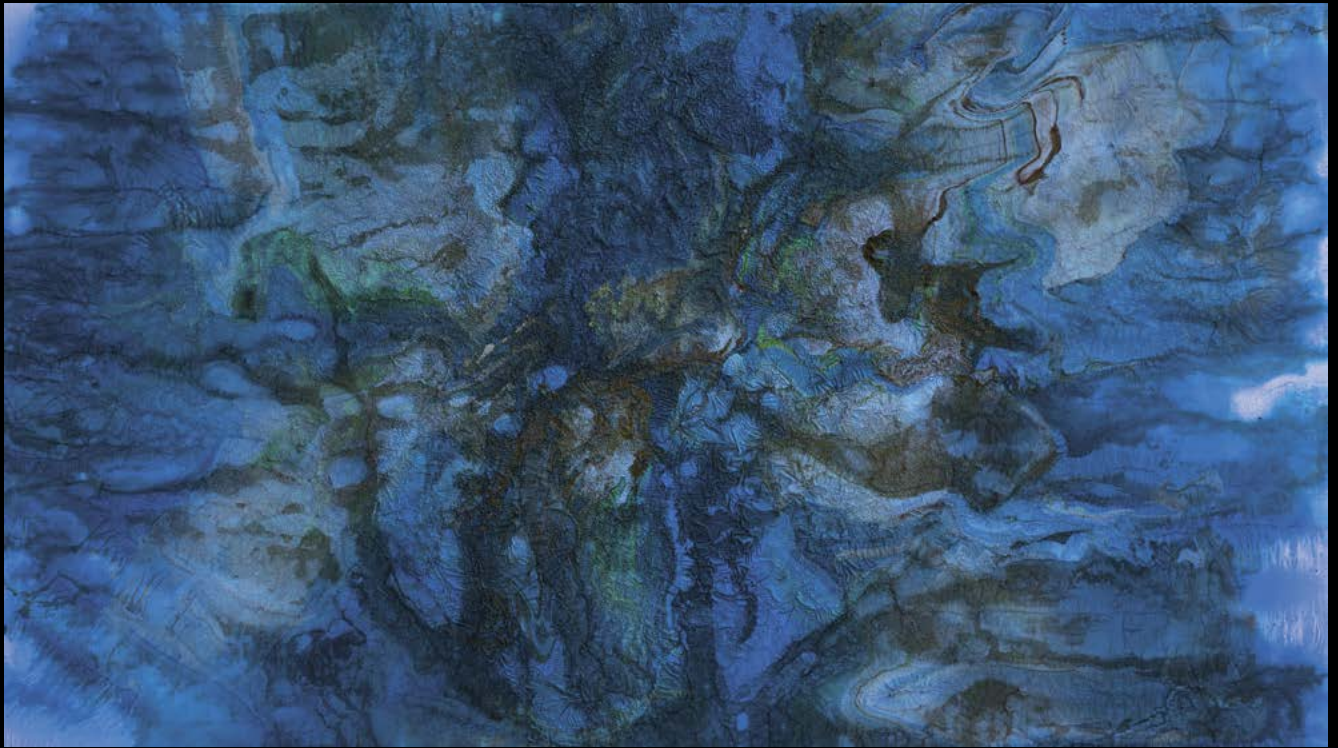


Wings #3

115x x 205cm

2016

Oil on canvas



Wings #3 (under UV light)

115x x 205cm

2016

Oil on canvas

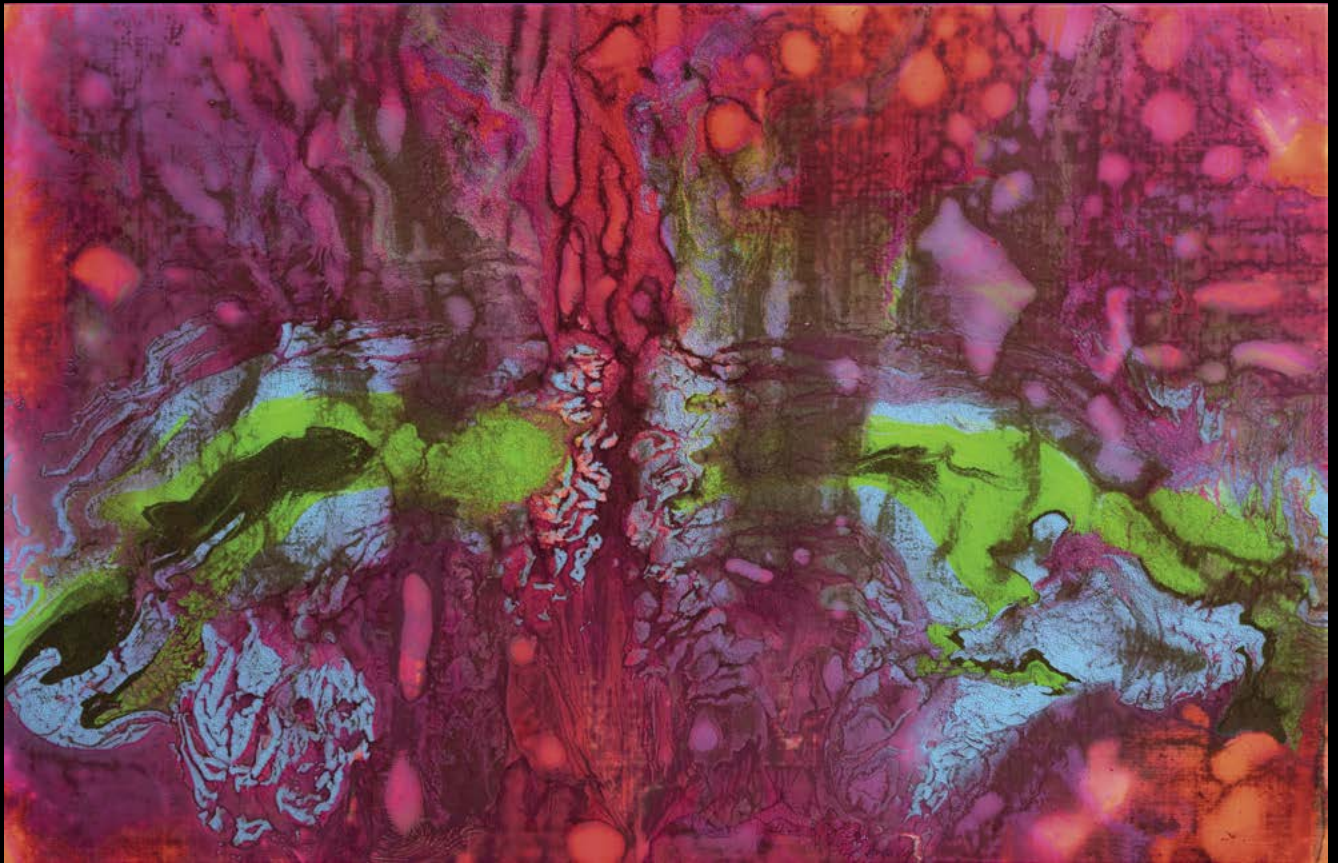


Wings #9

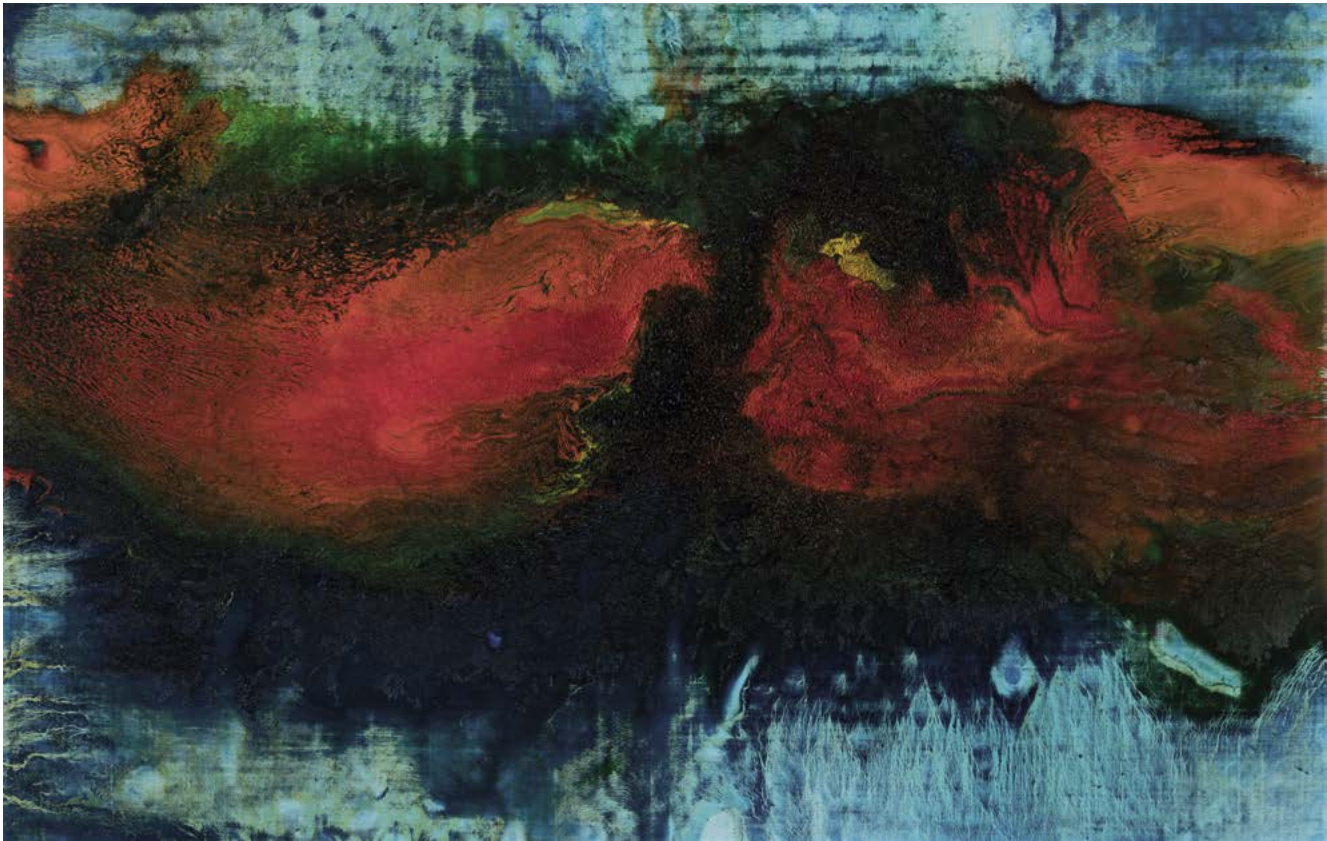
130 x 200cm

2017

Oil on canvas



Wings #9 (under UV light)
130 x 200cm
2017
Oil on canvas

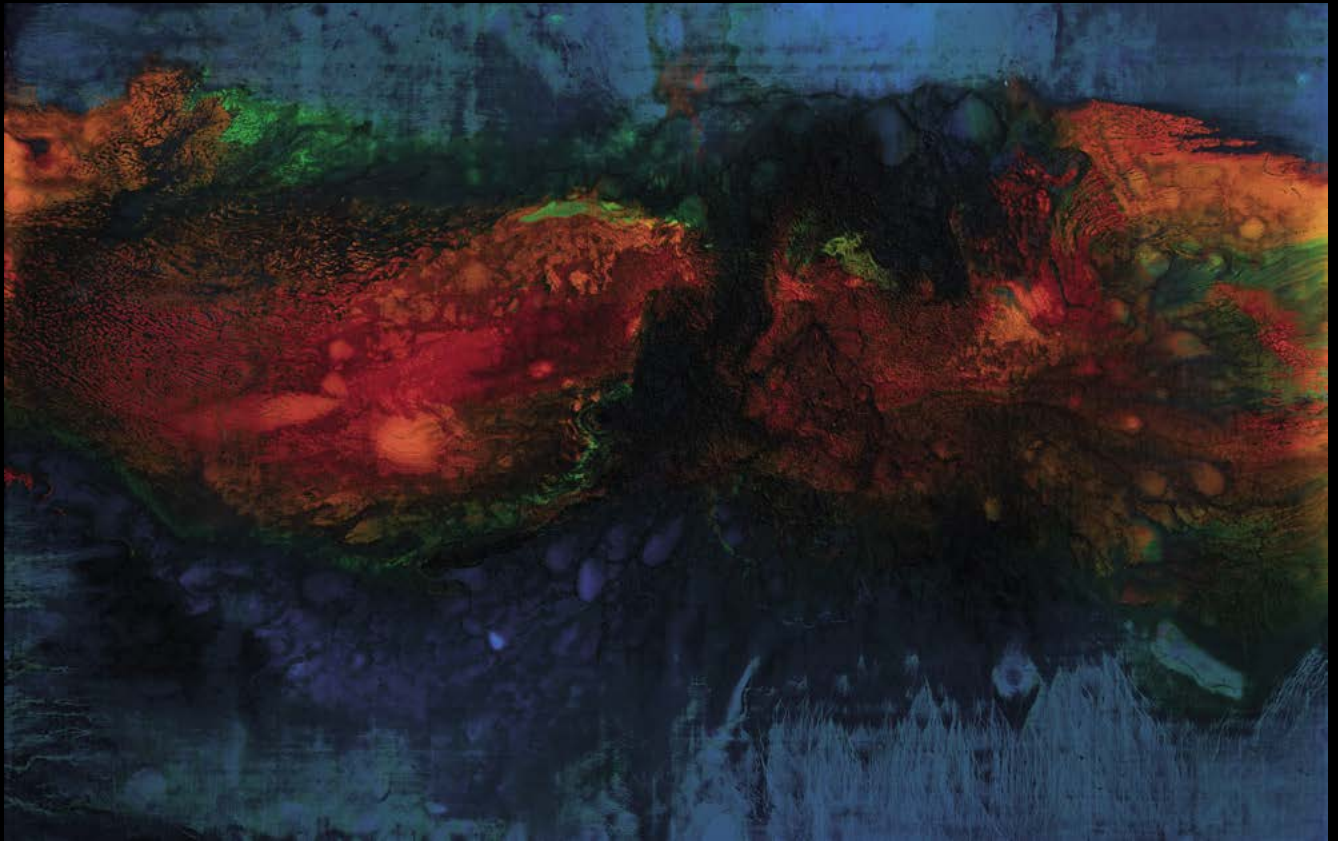


Wings #5

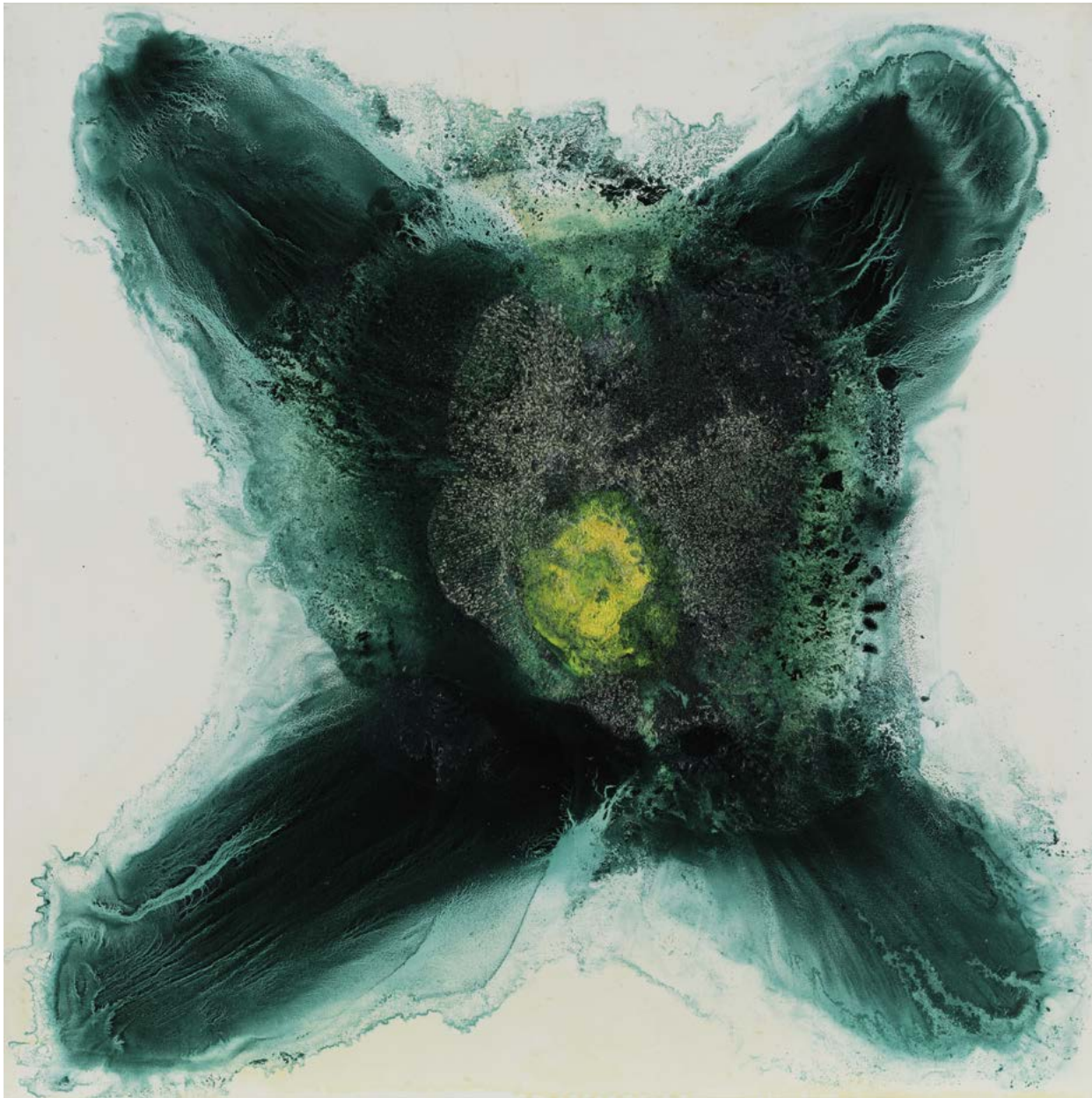
130 x 205cm

2017

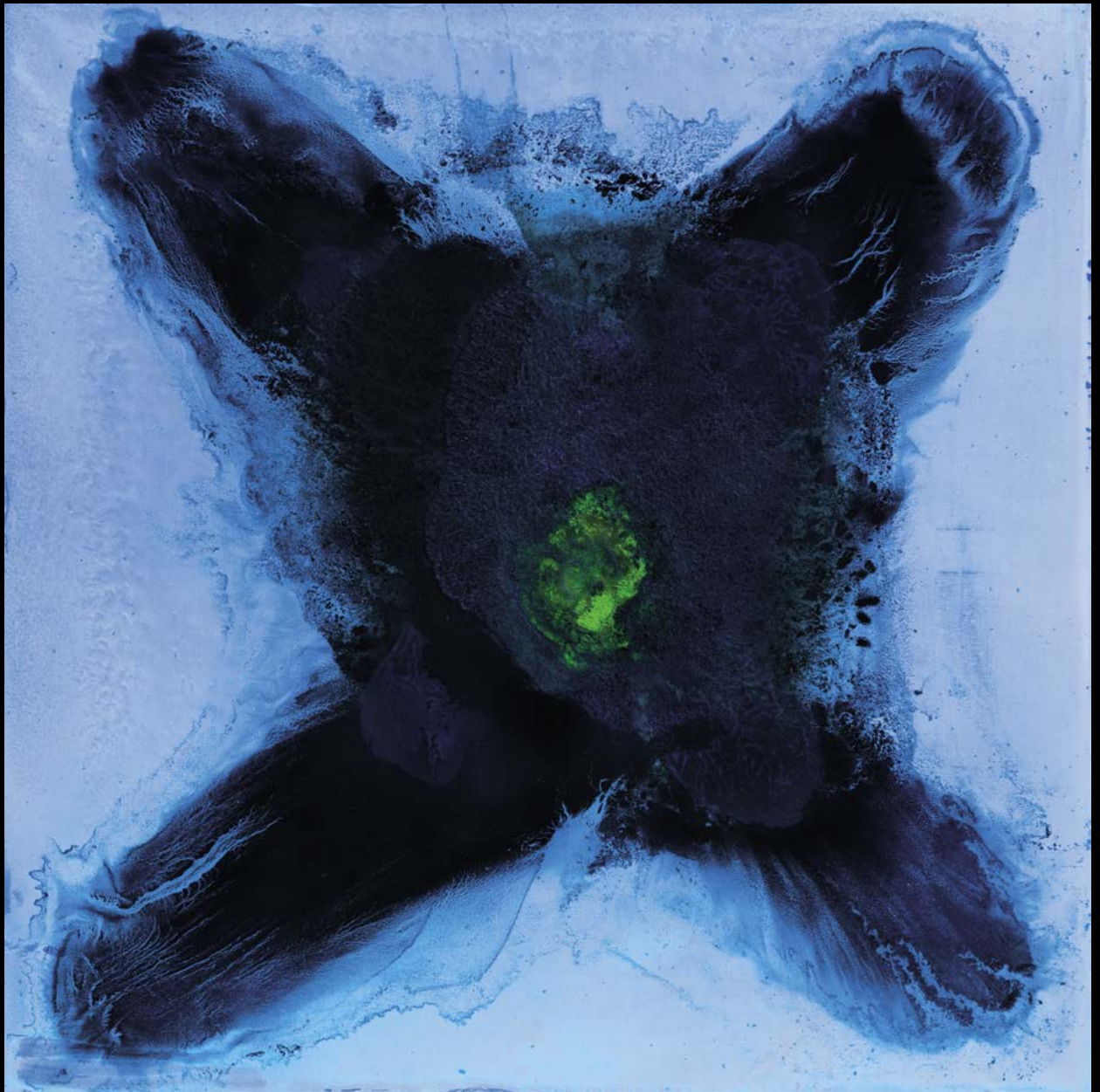
Oil on canvas



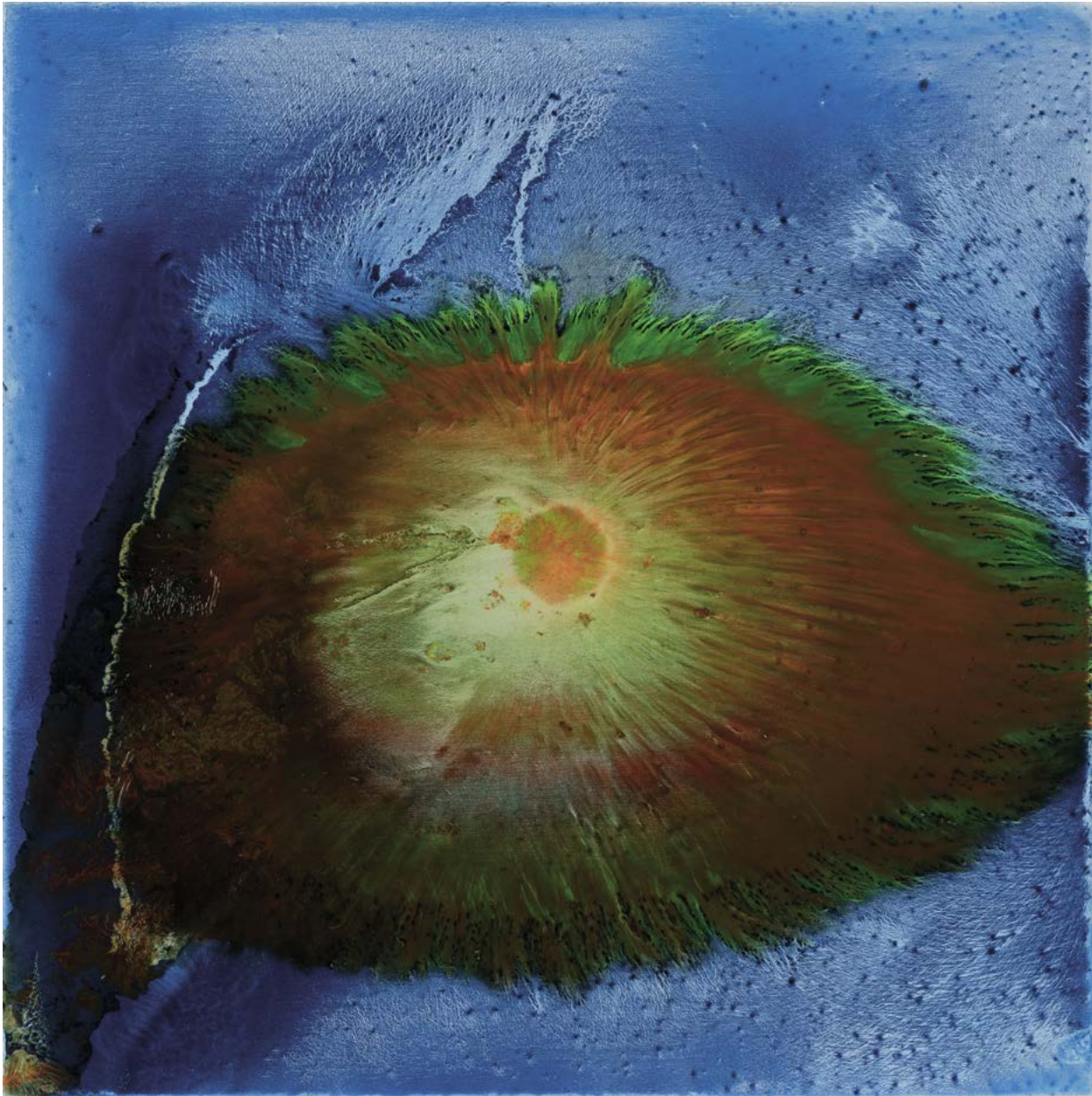
Wings #5 (under UV light)
130 x 205cm
2017
Oil on canvas



Genesis #3
90 x 90cm
2017
Oil on canvas



Genesis #3 (under UV light)
90 x 90cm
2017
Oil on canvas

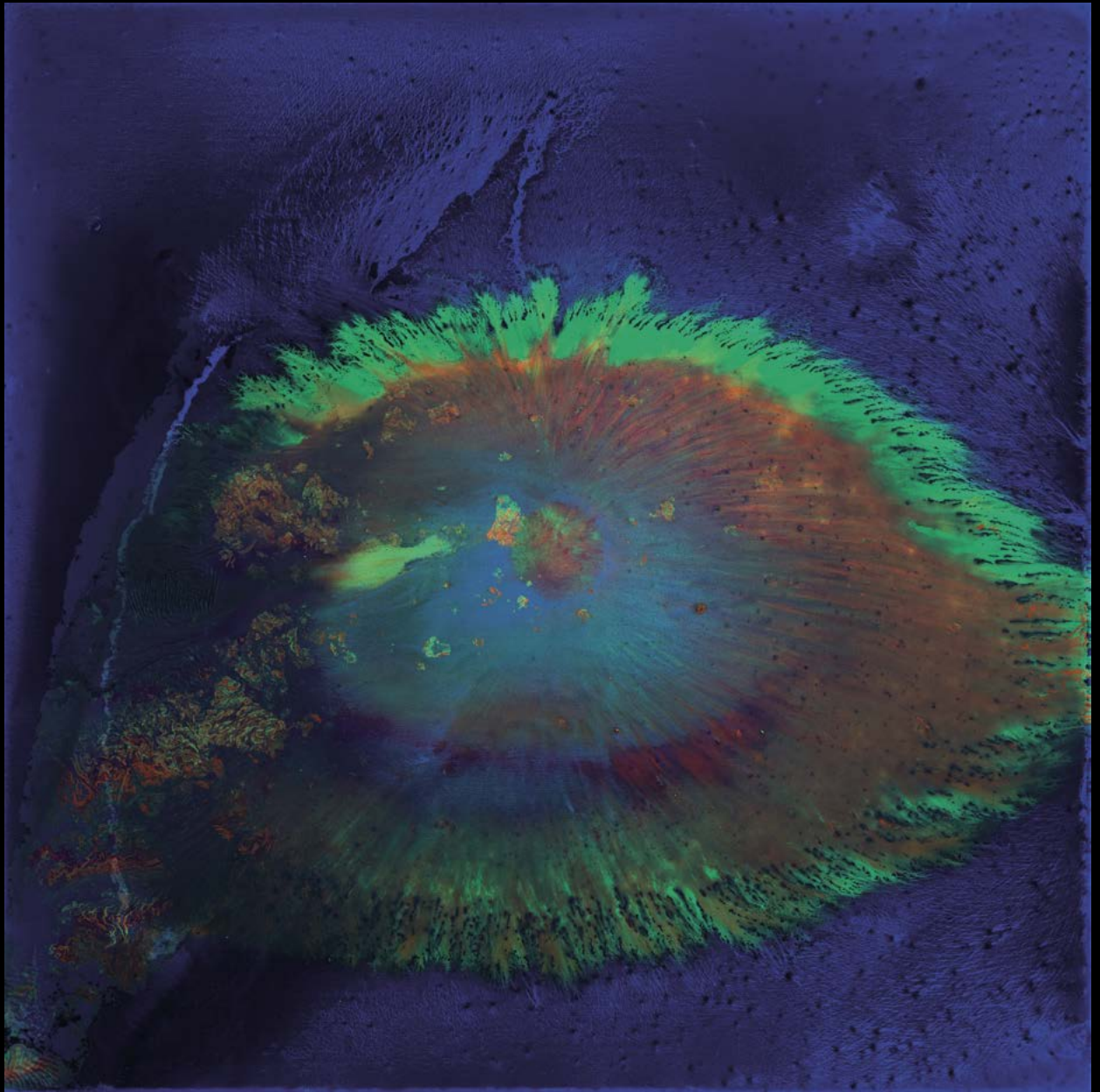


Genesis #1

90 x 90cm

2016

Oil on canvas

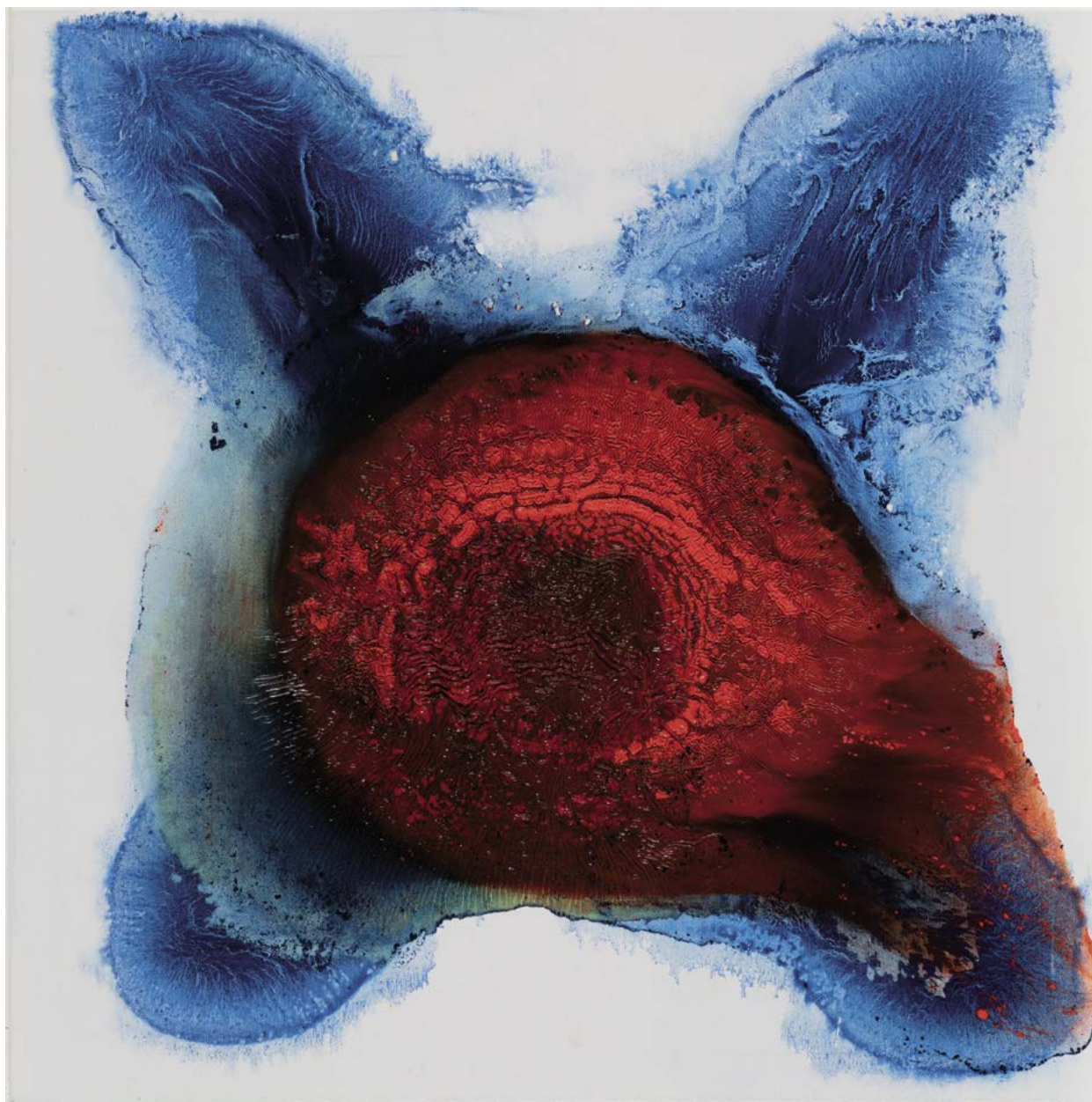


Genesis #1 (under UV light)

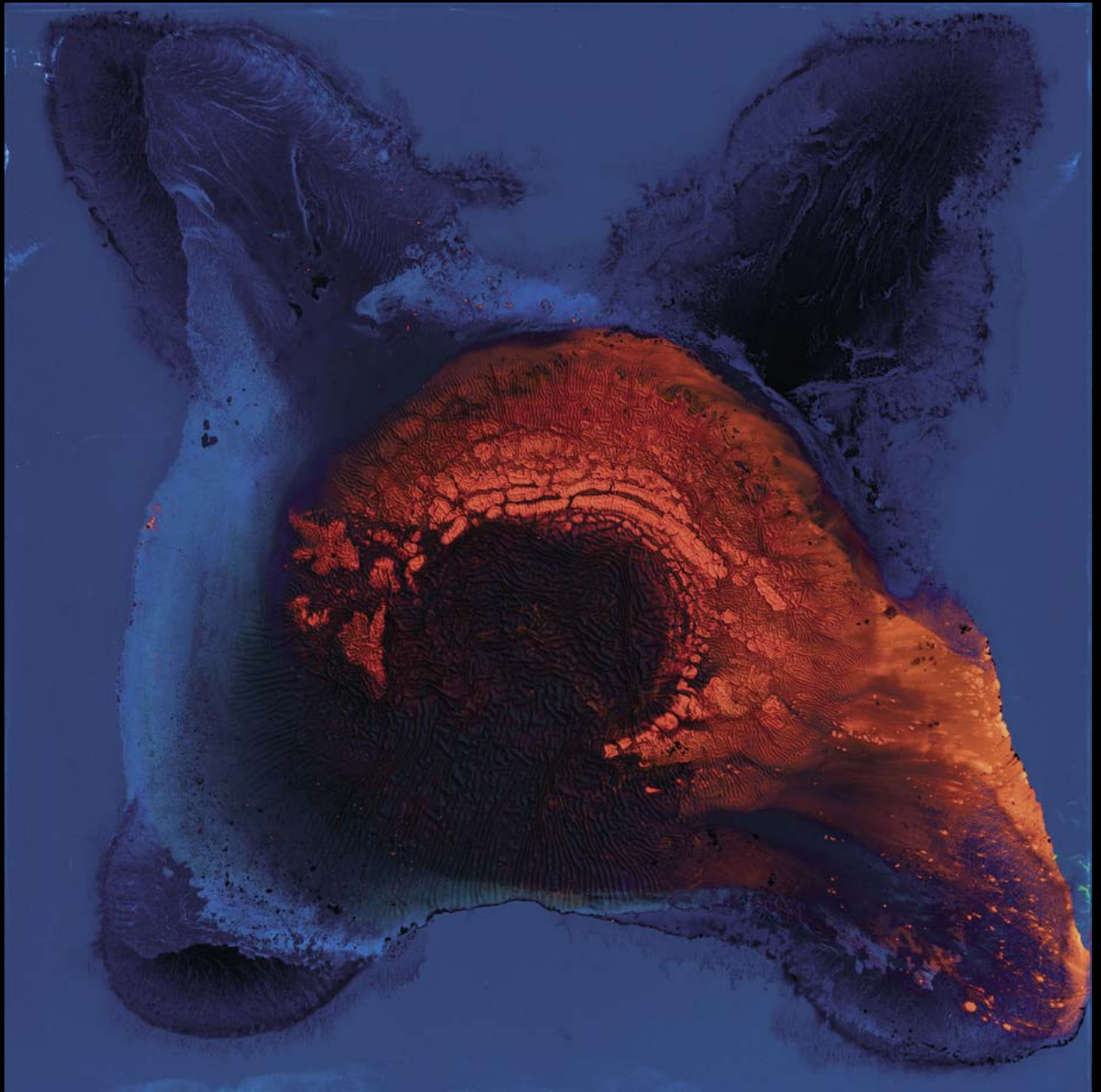
90 x 90cm

2016

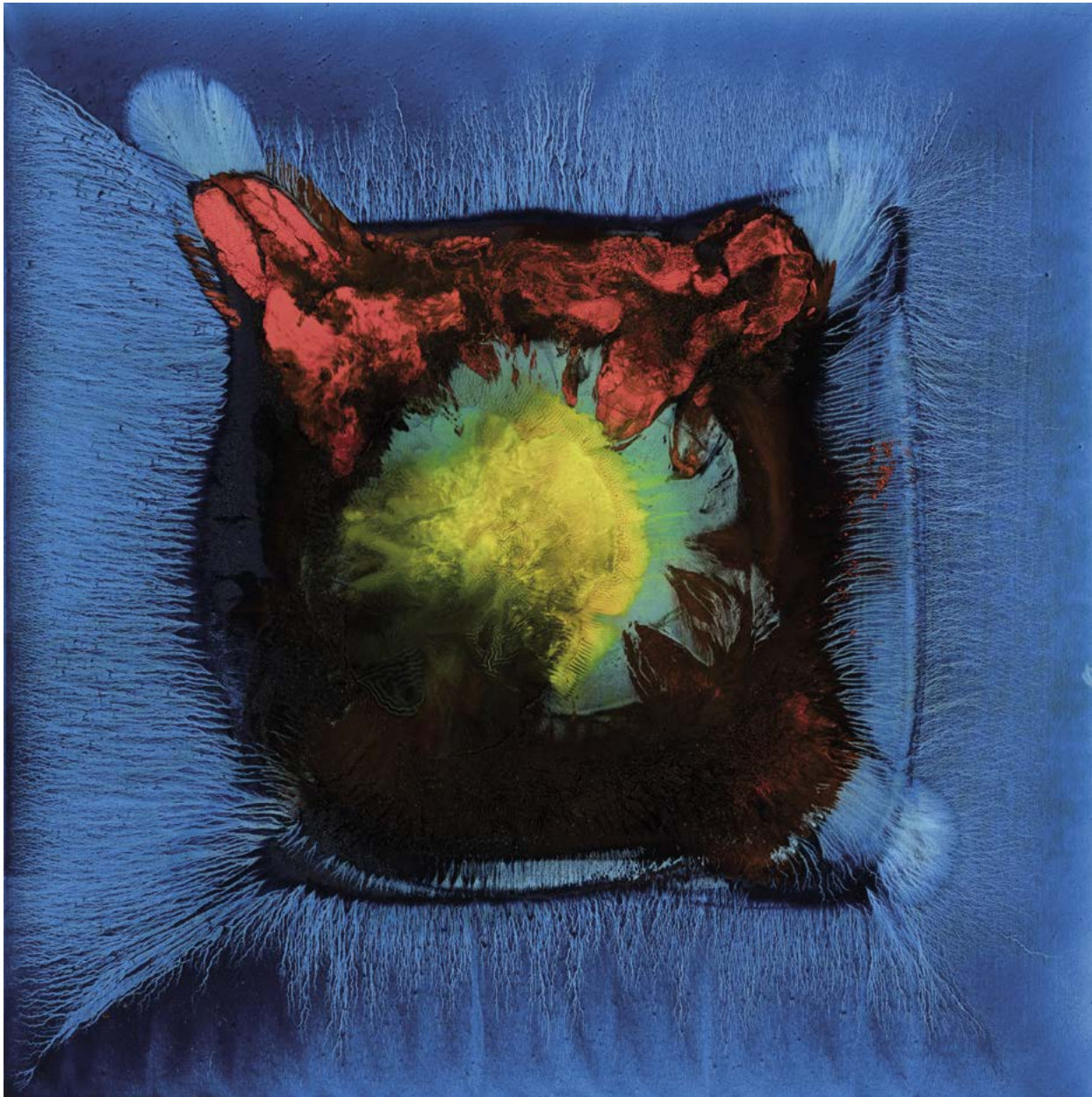
Oil on canvas



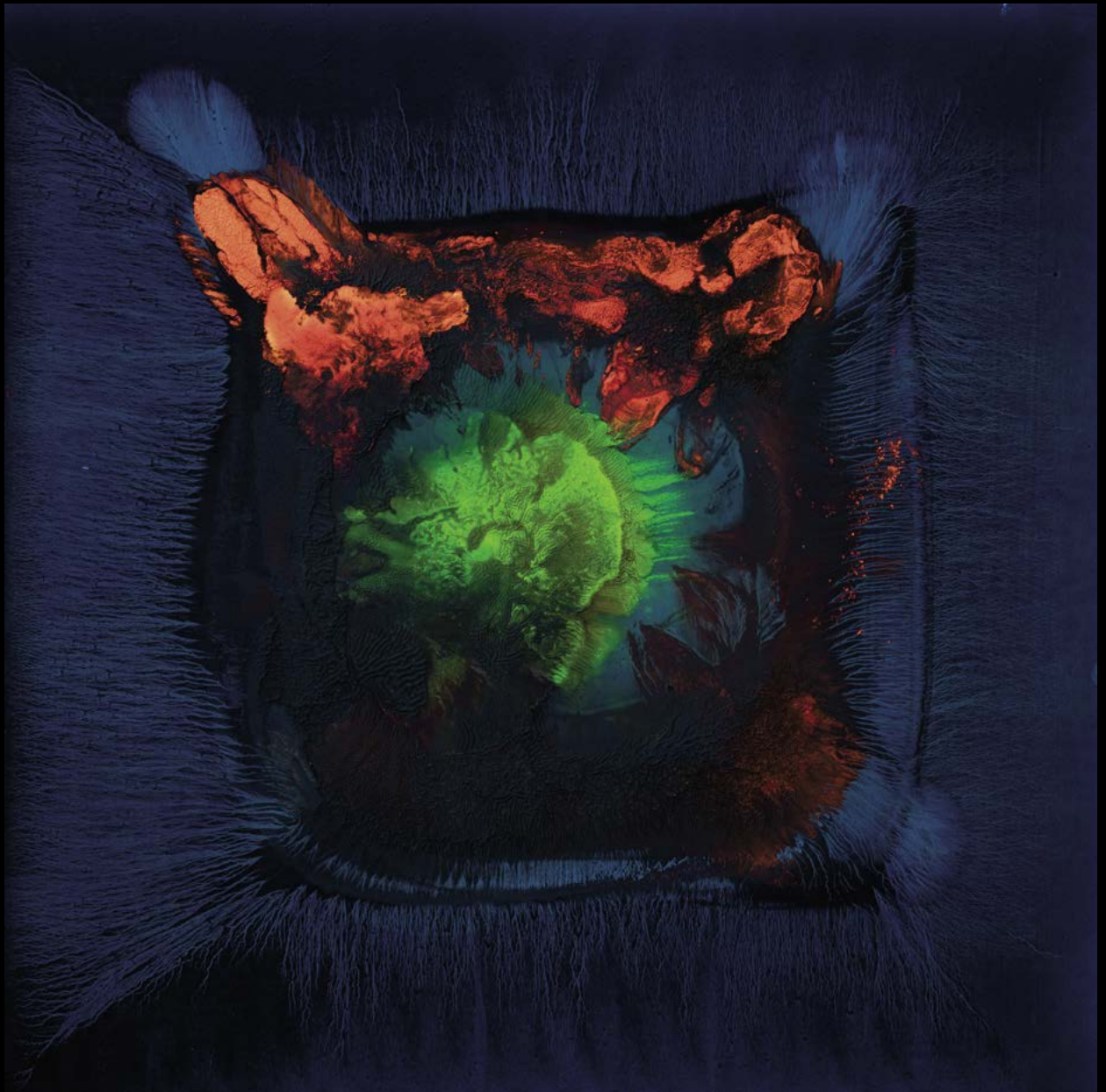
Genesis #2
90 x 90 cm
2017
Oil on canvas



Genesis #2 (under UV light)
90 x 90 cm
2017
Oil on canvas



Genesis #5
150 x 150 cm
2017
Oil on canvas



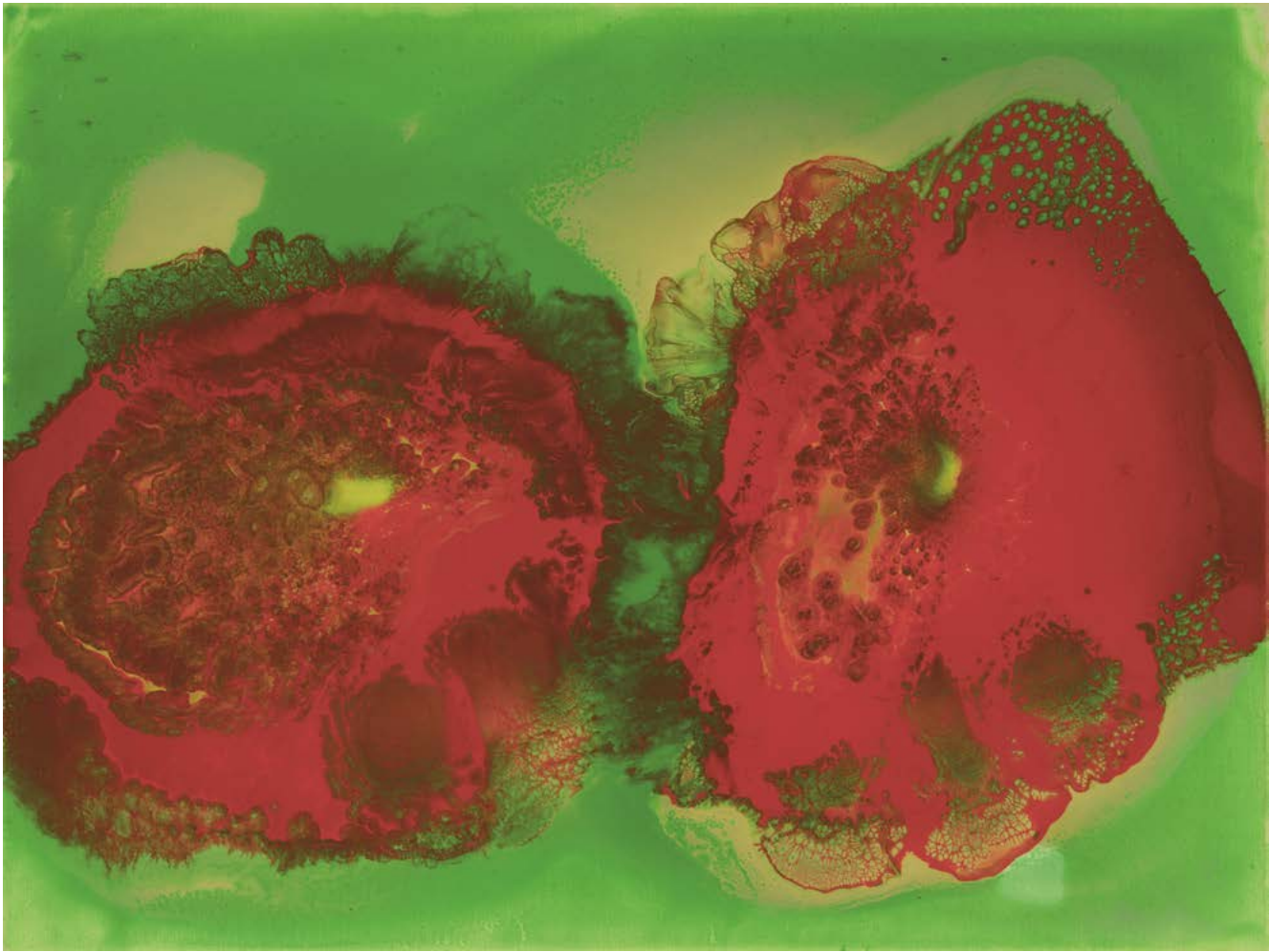
Genesis #5 (under UV light)
150 x 150 cm
2017
Oil on canvas



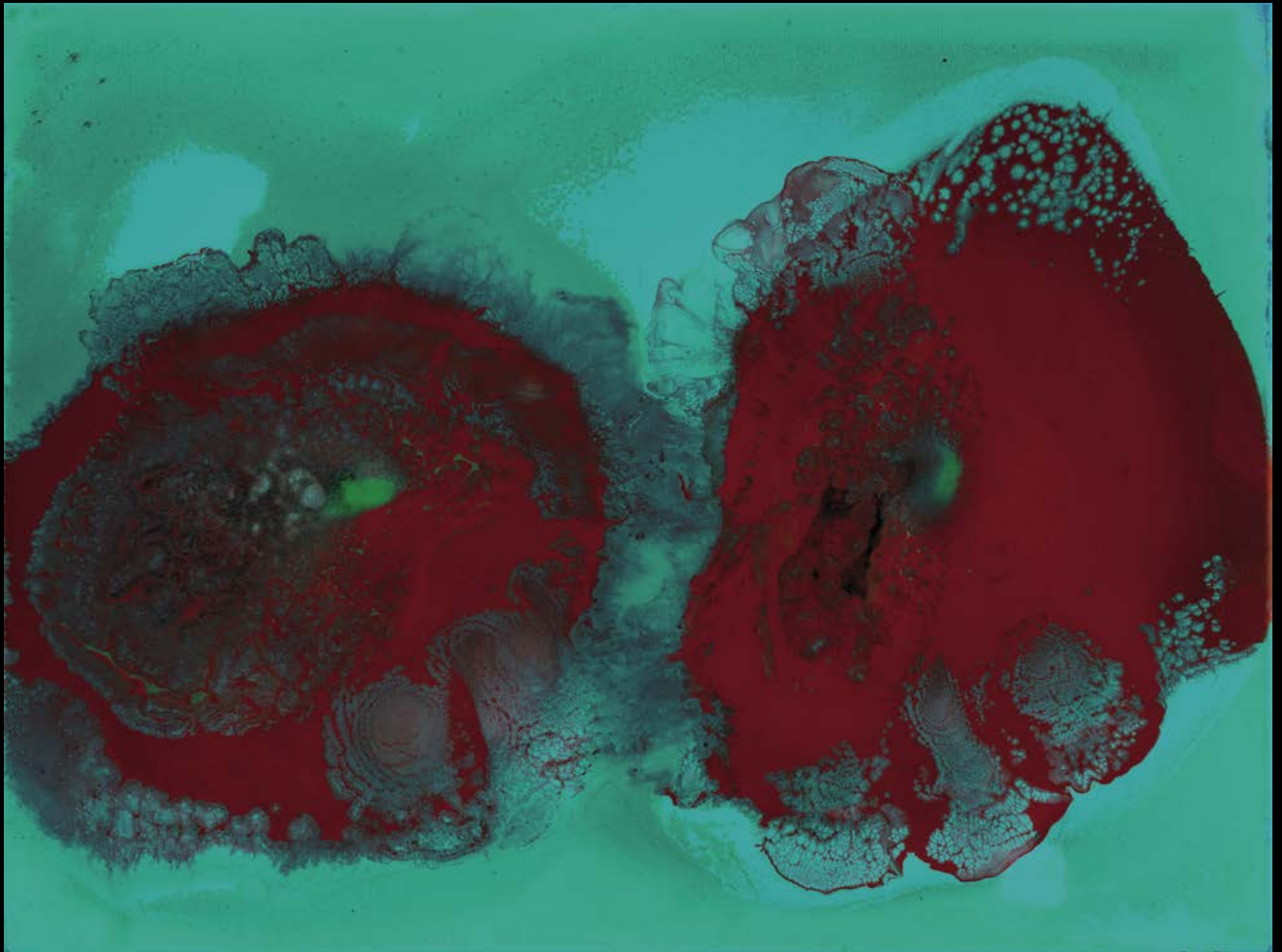
Genesis #7
150 x 150 cm
2017
Oil on canvas



Genesis #8
150 x 150 cm
2017
Oil on canvas



Poppy #1
60 x 80cm
2017
Oil on canvas

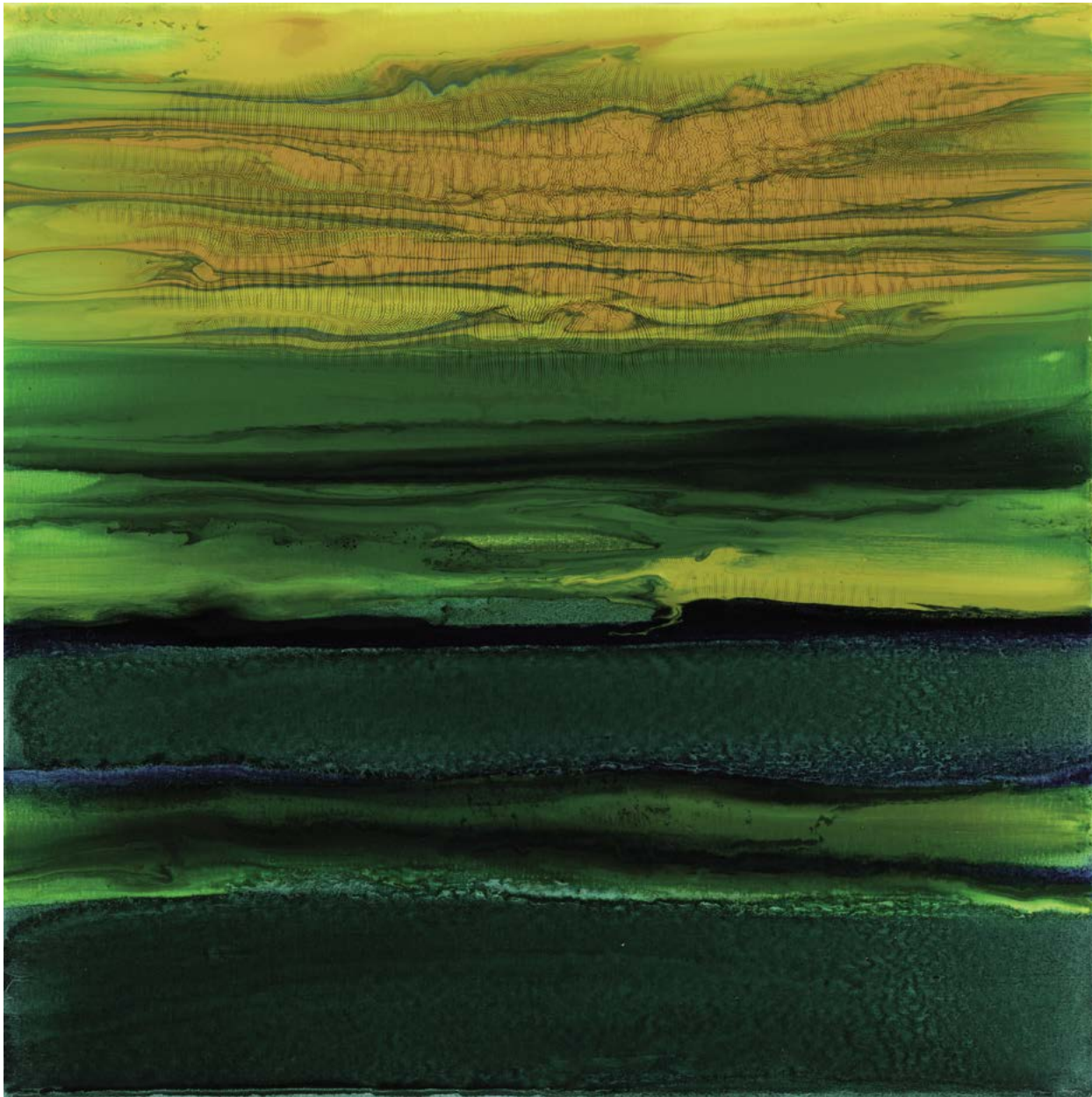


Poppy #1 (under UV light)

60 x 80cm

2017

Oil on canvas

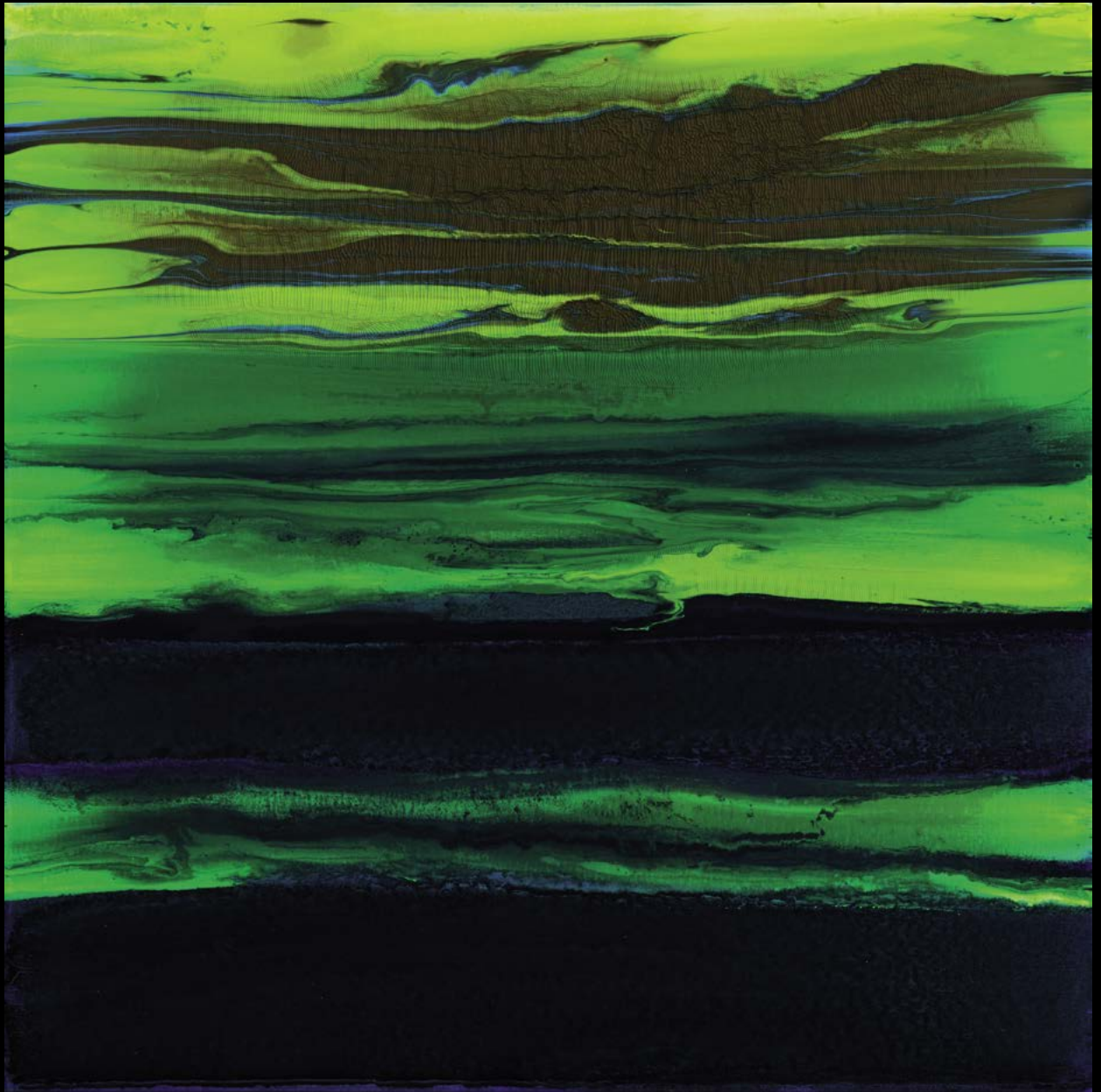


Mesozoic #2

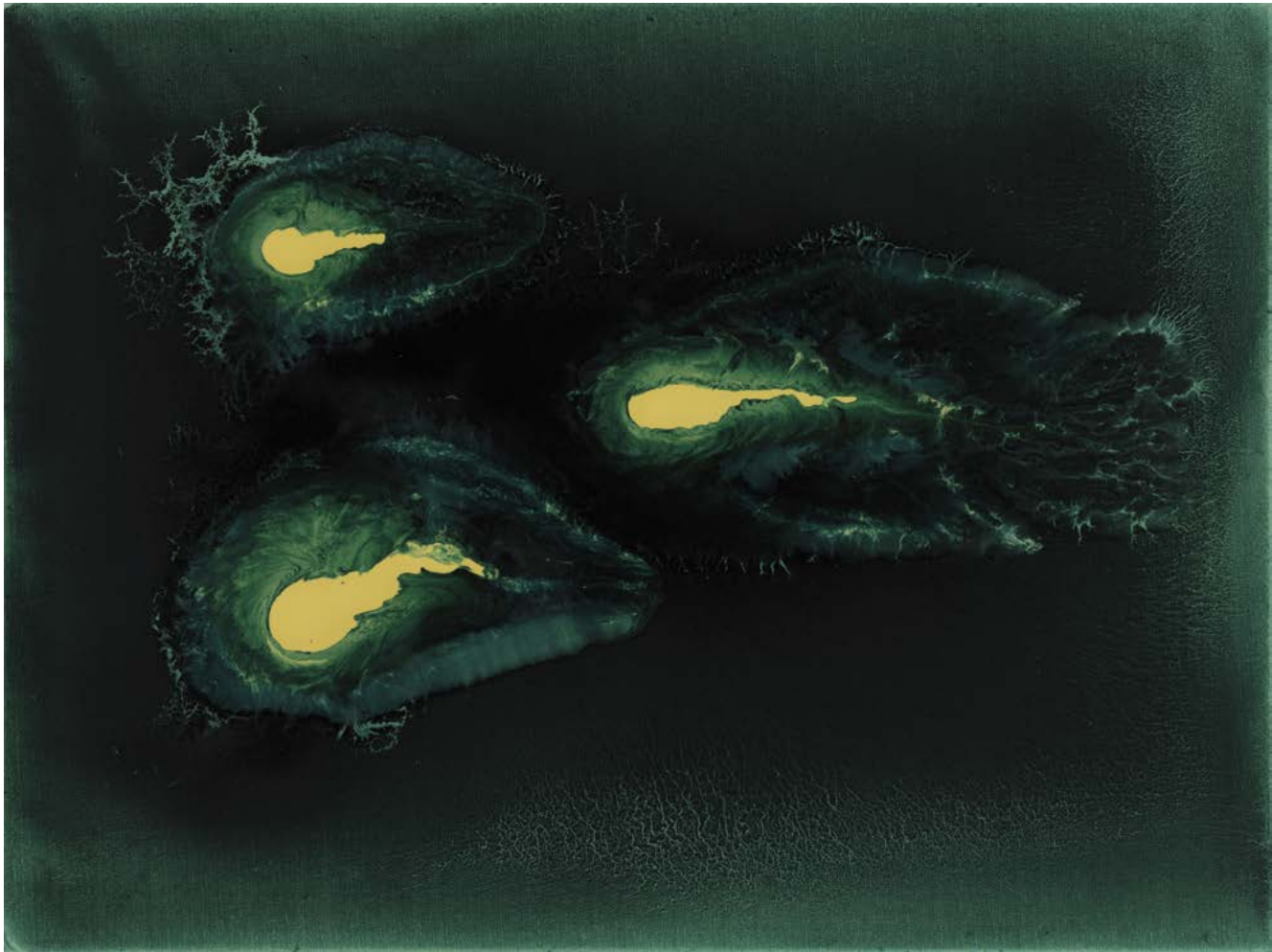
60 x 60cm

2016

Oil on canvas



Mesozoic #2 (under UV light)
60 x 60cm
2016
Oil on canvas

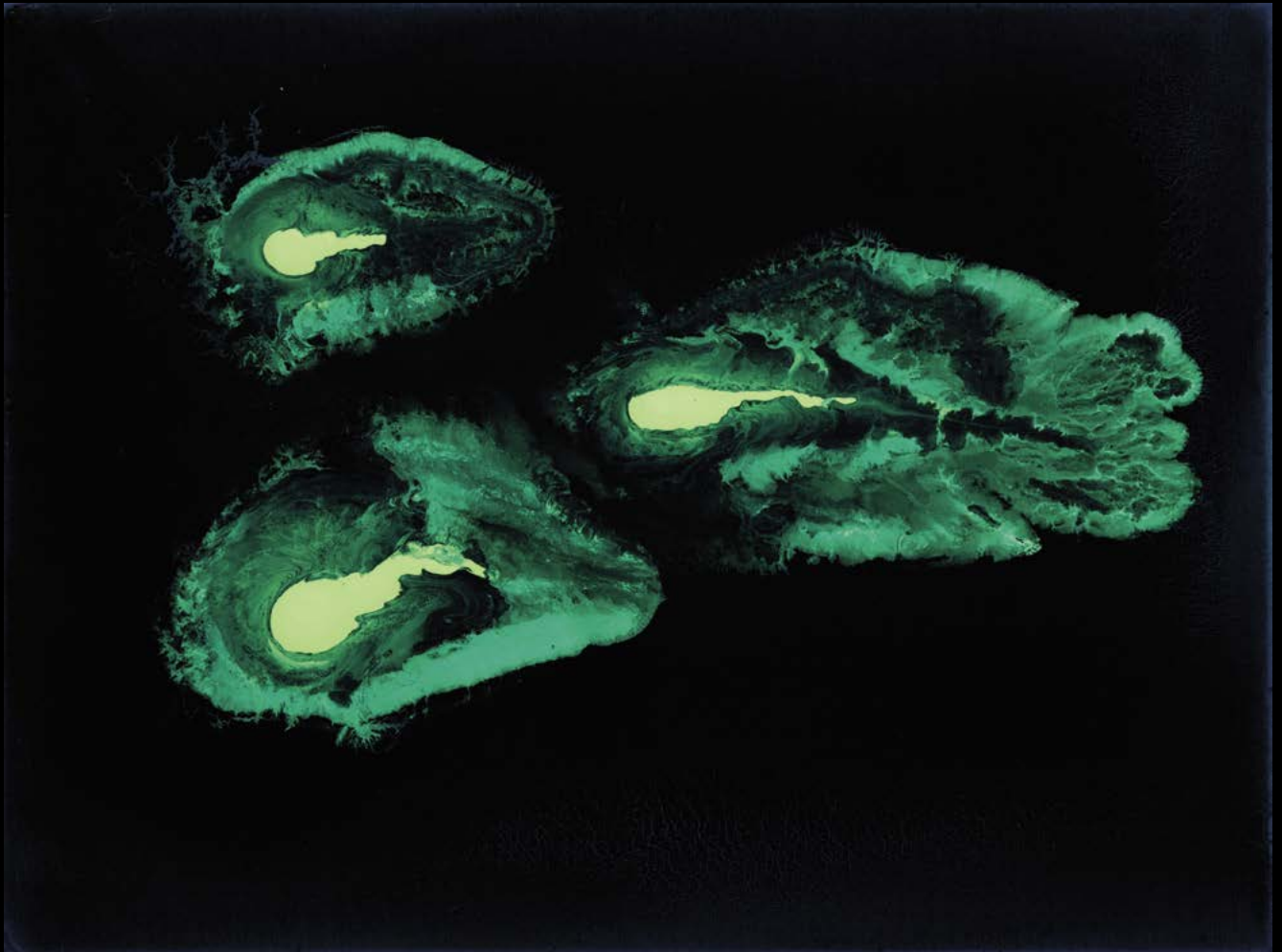


Beginnings #1

60 x 80cm

2016

Oil on canvas

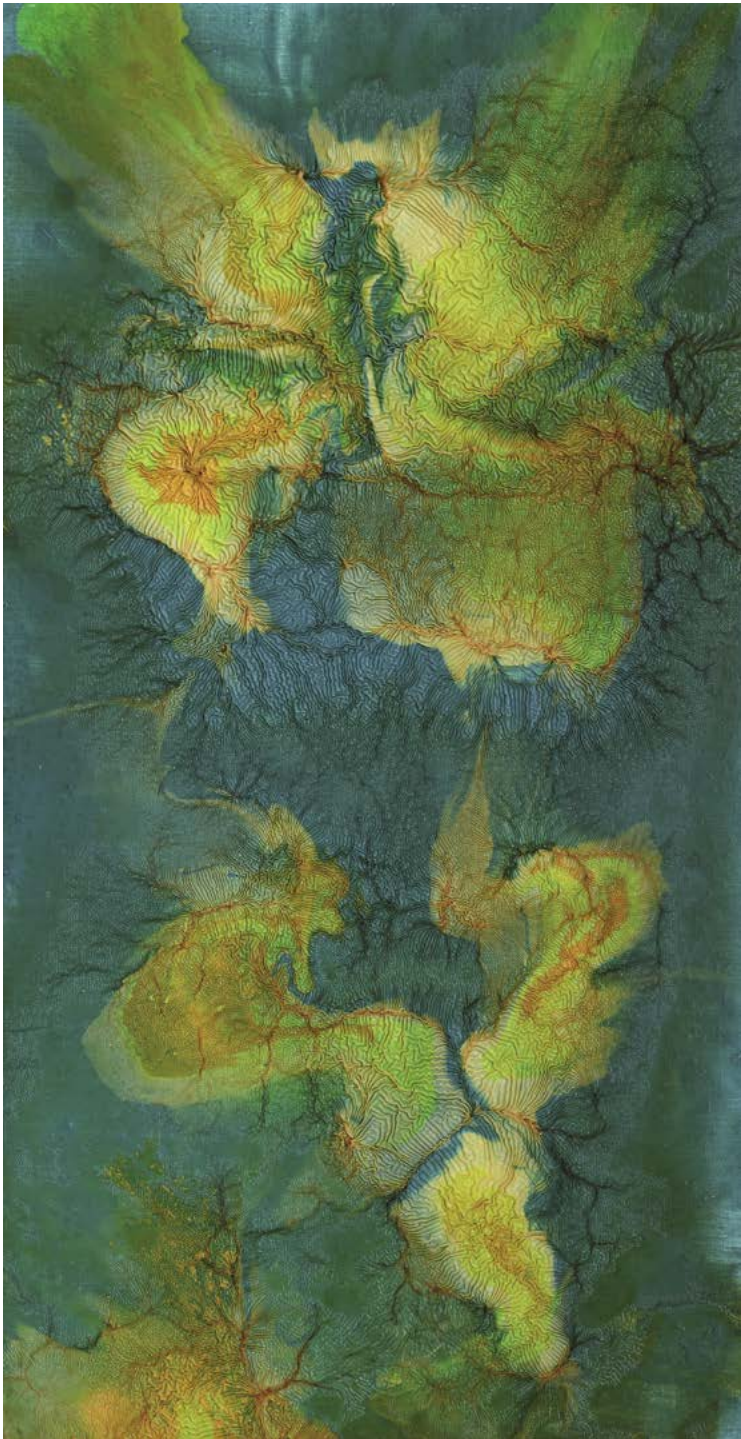


Beginnings #1 (under UV light)

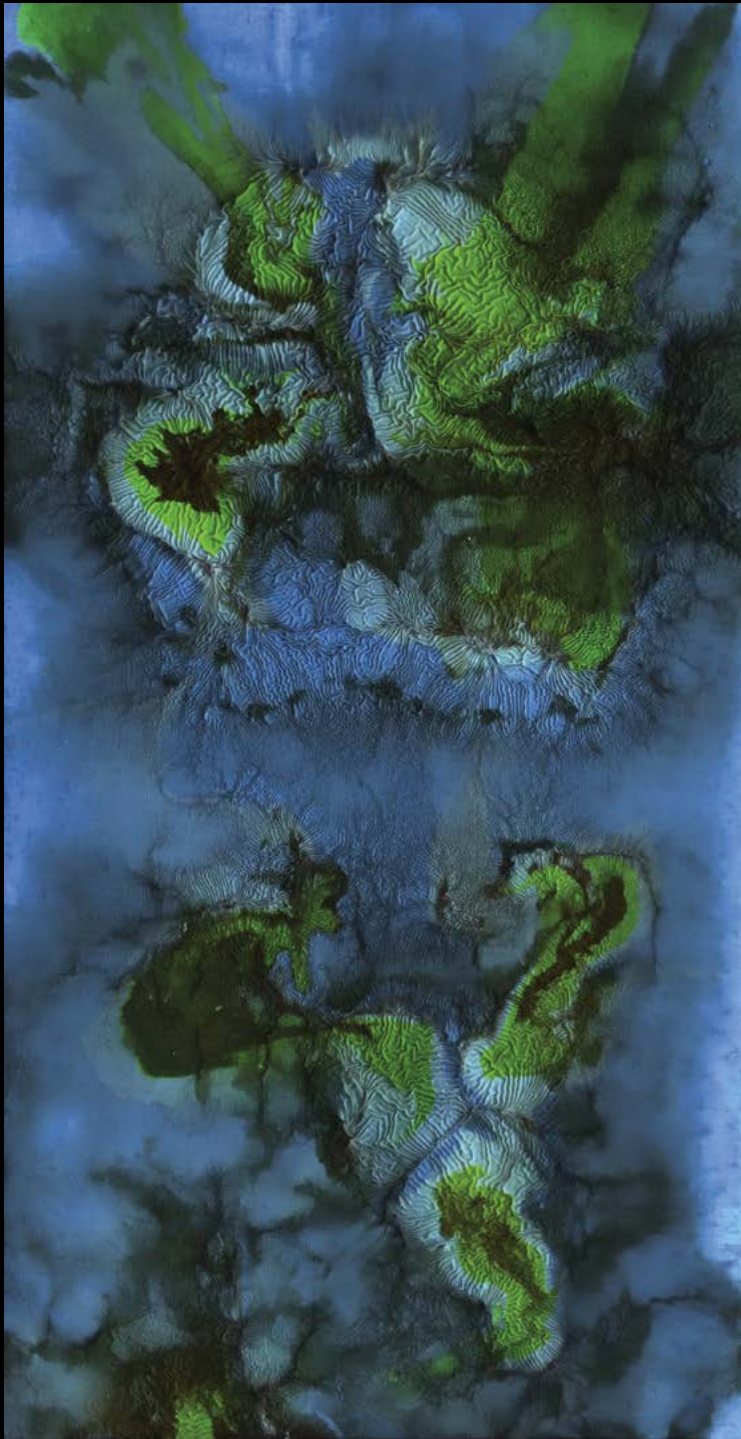
60 x 80cm

2016

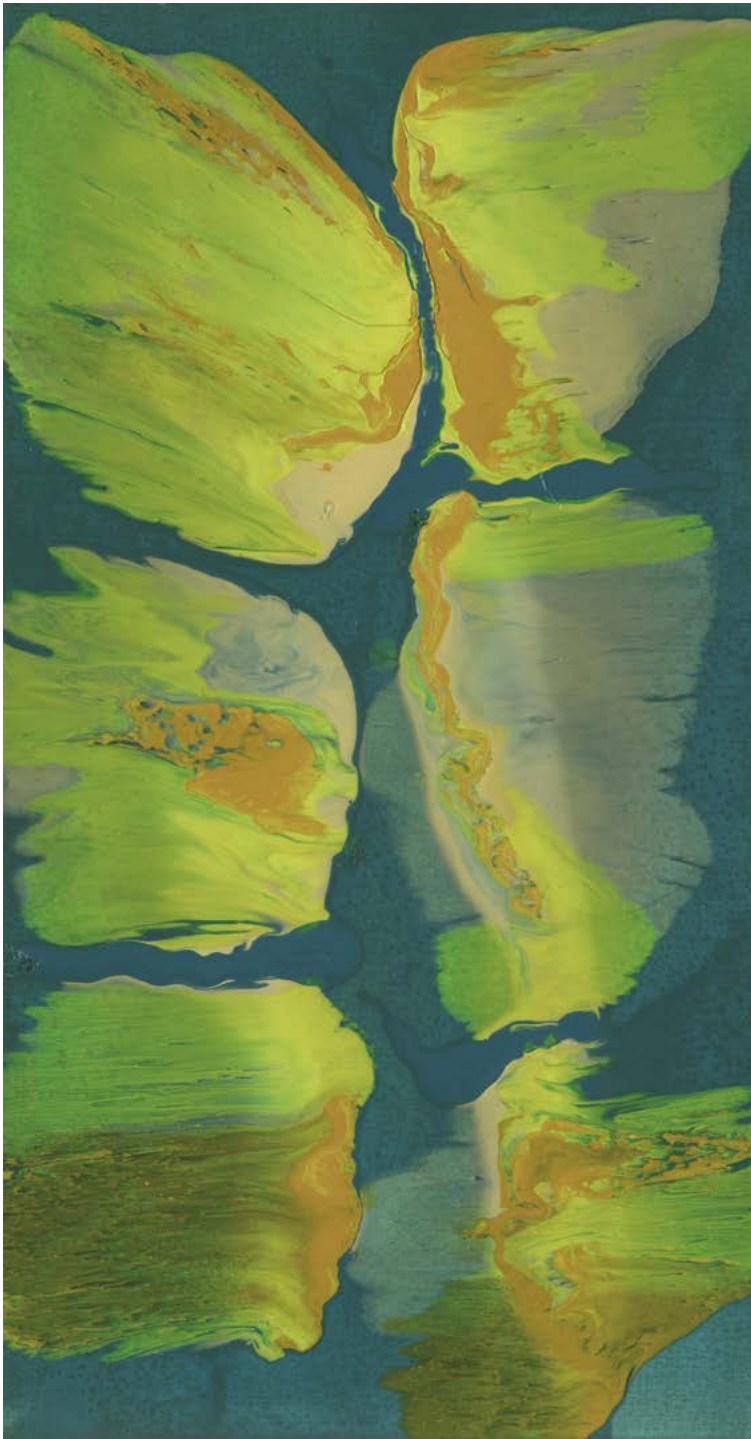
Oil on canvas



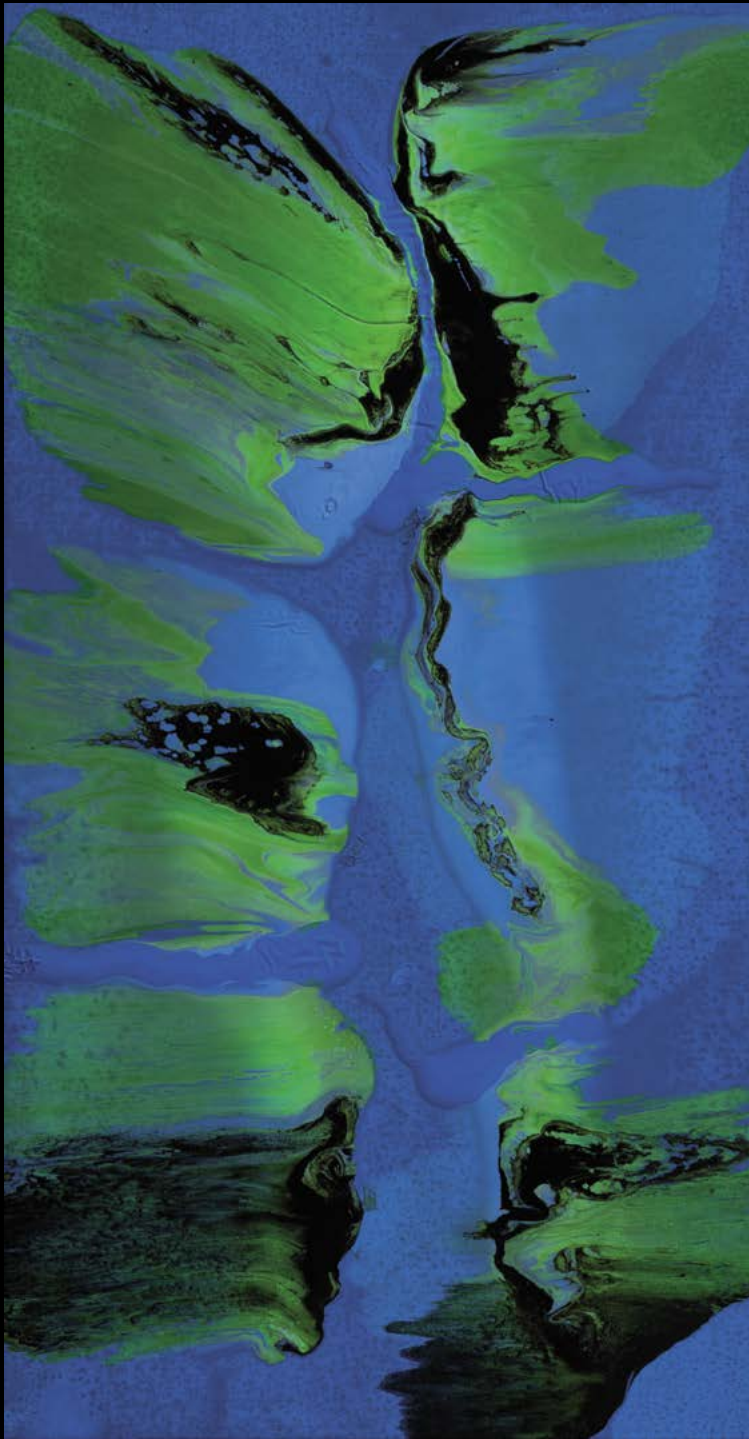
Wings #13
95 x 50cm
2015
Oil on canvas



Wings #13
(under UV light)
95 x 50cm
2015
Oil on canvas



Wings #14
95 x 50cm
2015
Oil on canvas



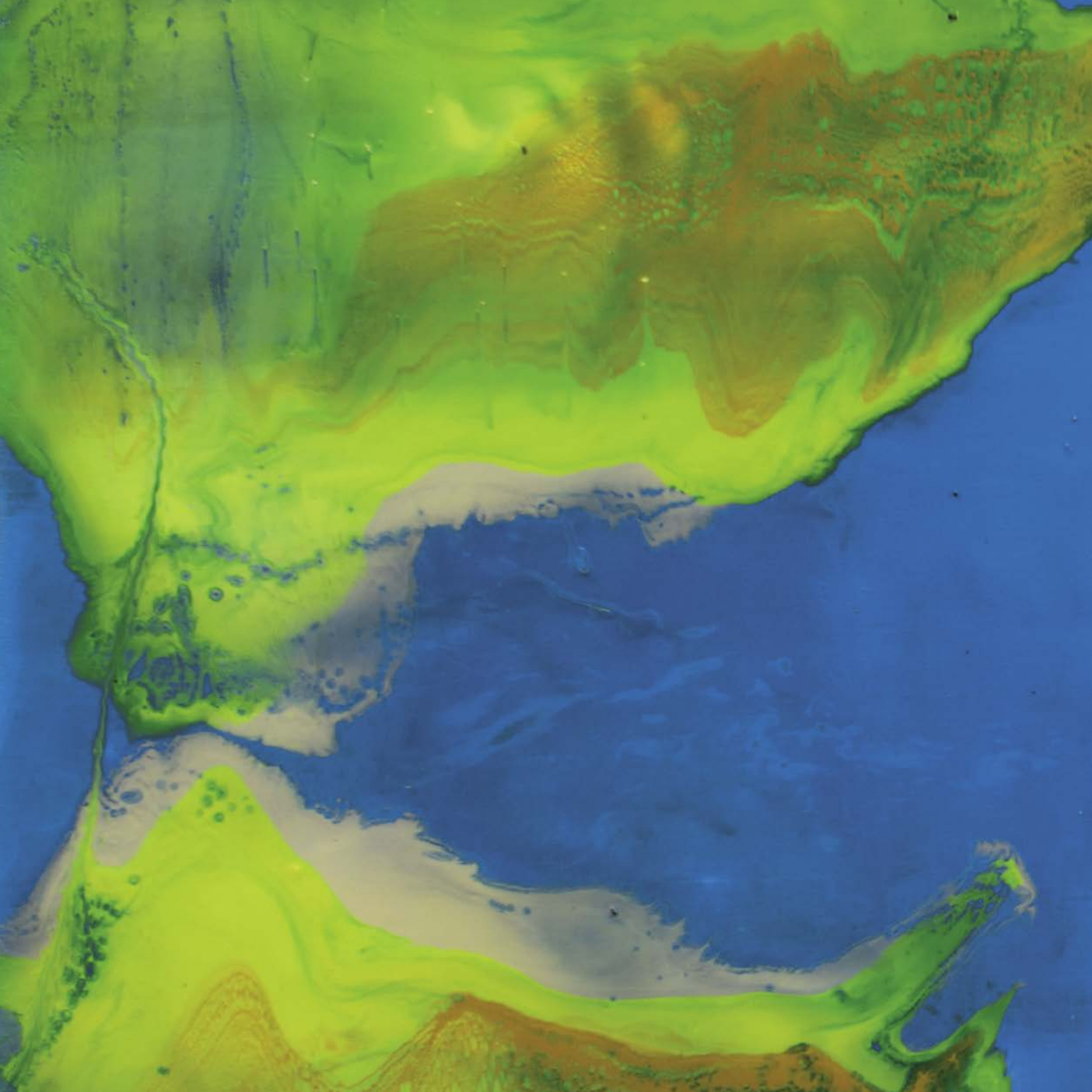
Wings #14
(under UV light)
95 x 50cm
2015
Oil on canvas



Mesozoic #4
140 x 210cm
2016
Oil on canvas



Mesozoic #4 (under UV light)
140 x 210cm
2016
Oil on canvas



A topographic map of the United Kingdom, showing the landmasses of Great Britain and Ireland. The map uses a color gradient to represent elevation, with green for lower elevations and brown for higher elevations. The surrounding sea is shown in blue. The text "United Kingdom" and "2018-2019" is overlaid on the map.

United Kingdom

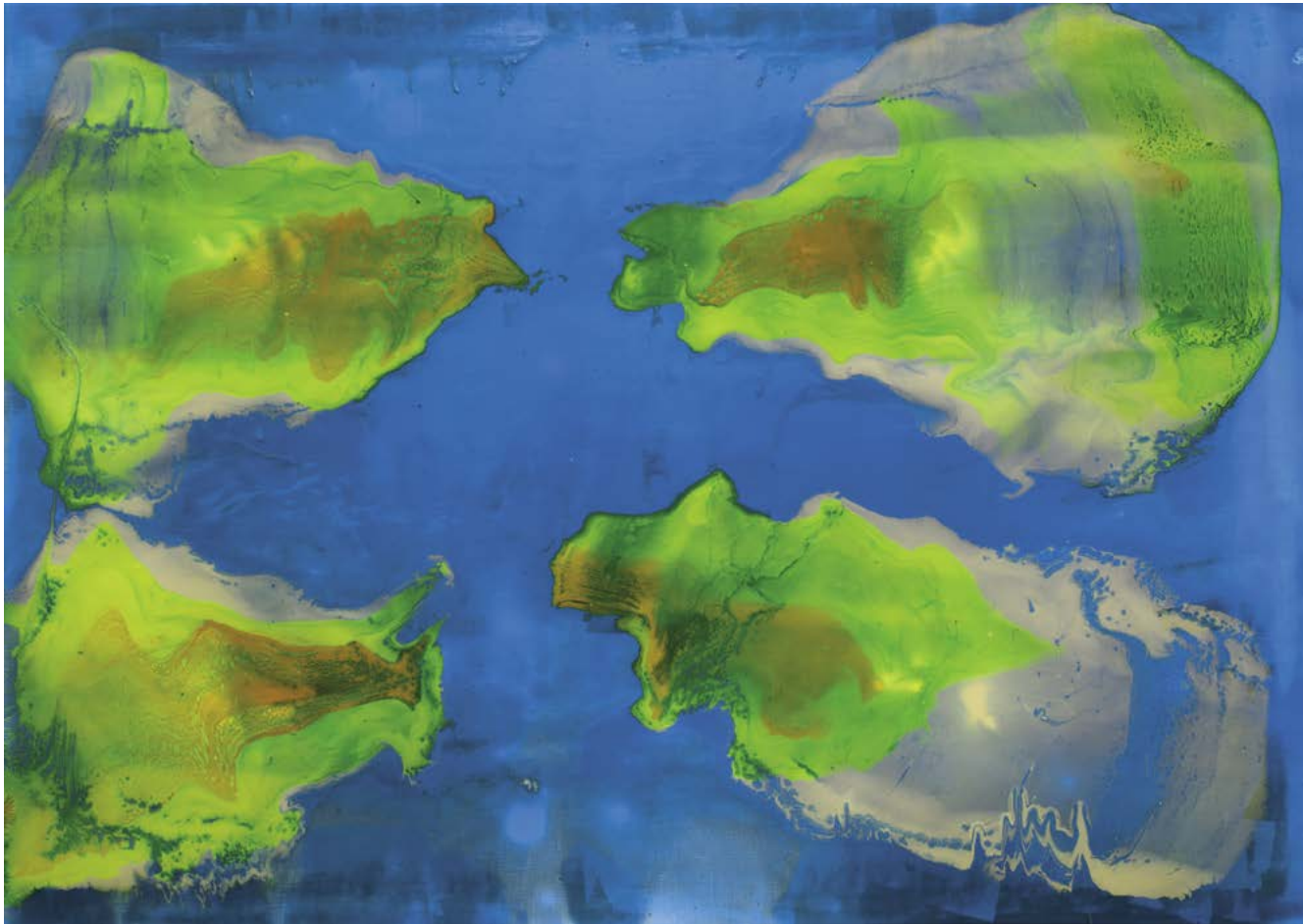
2018-2019



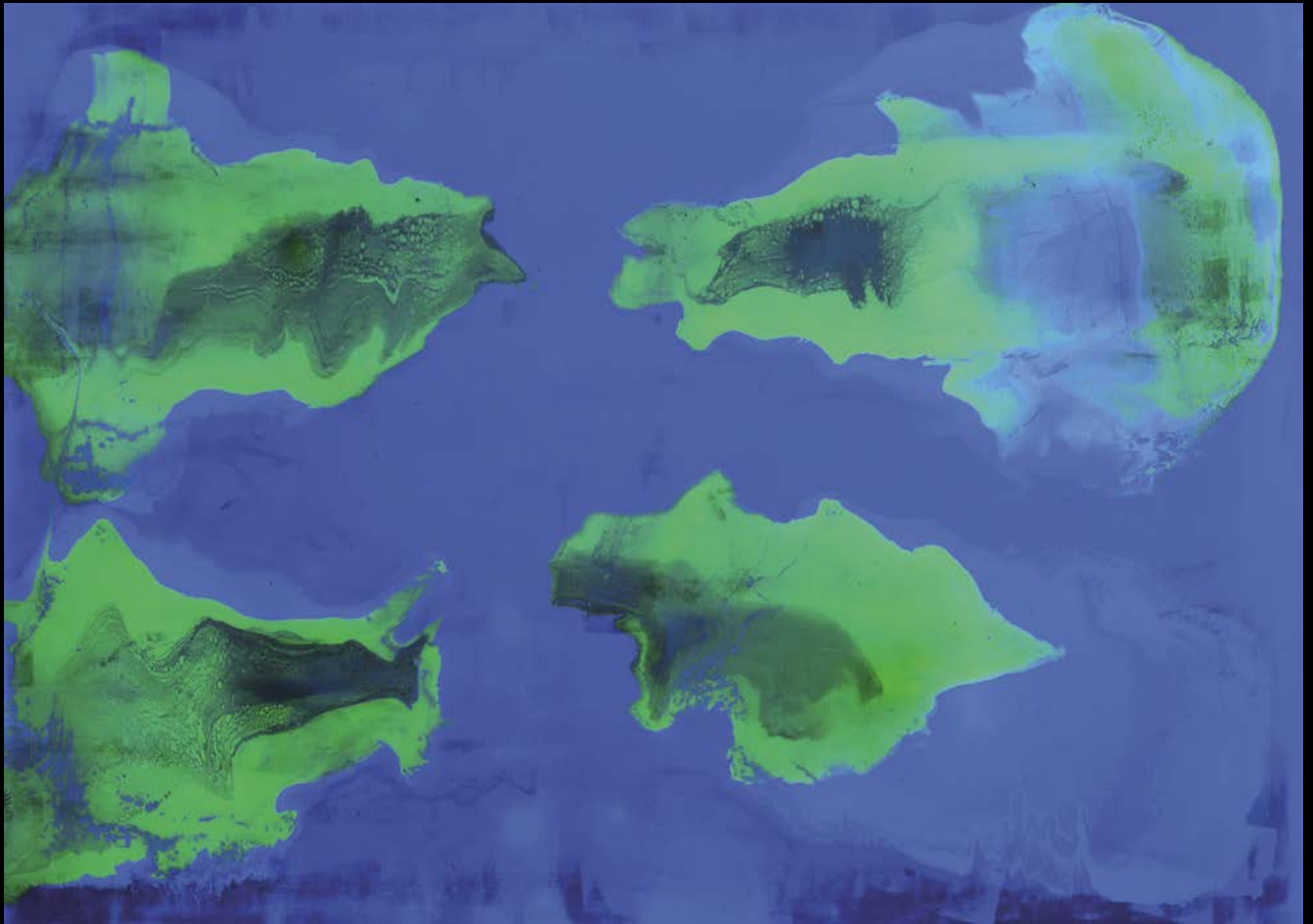
Wings #16
130 x 206cm
2018
Oil on canvas



Wings #16 (detail)
130 x 206cm
2018
Oil on canvas



Wings #15
144 x 202cm
2018
Oil on canvas



Wings #15 (under UV light)

144 x 202cm

2018

Oil on canvas





At a glance

Moscow 2005-2014



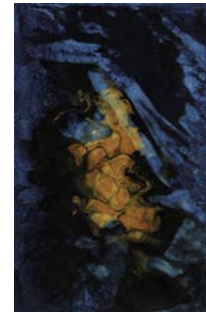
Archangel
200 x 150cm, 2005-2009
Oil on canvas



His heel
200 x 150cm, 2005-2009
Oil on canvas



Woman
200 x 130cm, 2005-2009
Oil on canvas



Fallen angel
195 x 126cm, 2005-2009
Oil on canvas

Malta 2015-2017



Hermit
195 x 126cm, 2005-2009
Oil on canvas



His servant
200 x 150cm, 2005-2009
Oil on canvas



She thinks she is still alive
150 x 200cm, 2005-2009
Oil on canvas



Wings #3
115 x 205cm, 2016
Oil on canvas

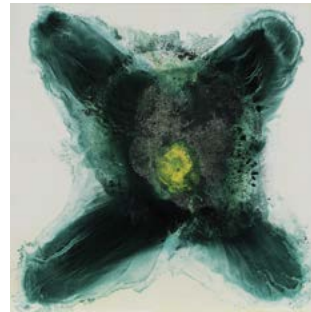
Malta 2015-2017 (continued)



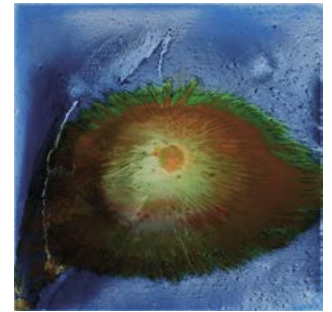
Wings #9
130 x 200cm, 2017
Oil on canvas



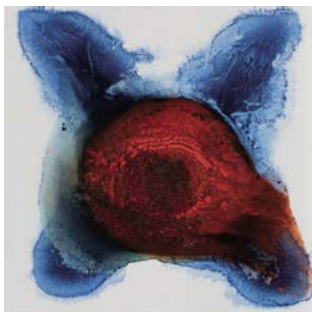
Wings #5
130 x 205cm, 2017
Oil on canvas



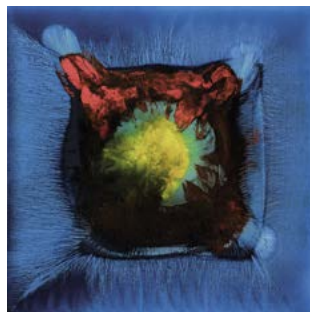
Genesis #3
90 x 90cm, 2017
Oil on canvas



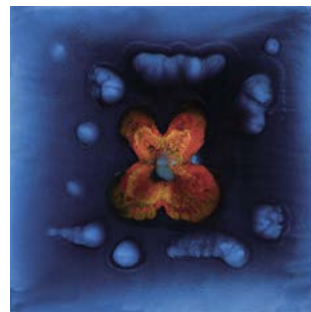
Genesis #1
90 x 90cm, 2016
Oil on canvas



Genesis #2
90 x 90cm, 2017
Oil on canvas



Genesis #5
150 x 150cm, 2017
Oil on canvas

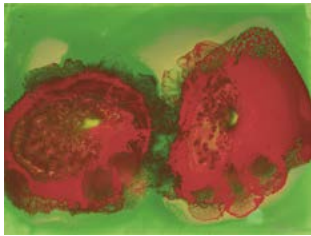


Genesis #7
150 x 150cm, 2017
Oil on canvas



Genesis #8
150 x 150cm, 2017
Oil on canvas

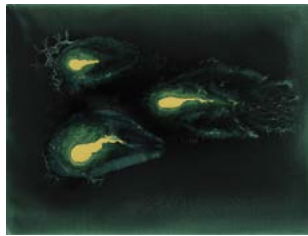
Malta 2015-2017 (continued)



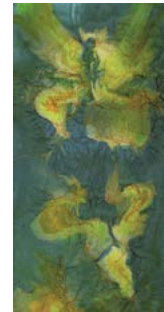
Poppy #1
60 x 80cm, 2017
Oil on canvas



Mesozoic #2
60 x 60cm, 2016
Oil on canvas

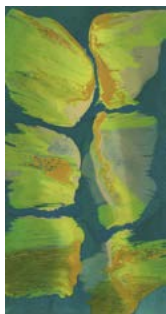


Beginnings #1
60 x 80cm, 2016
Oil on canvas



Wings #13
95 x 50cm, 2015
Oil on canvas

United Kingdom 2018-2018



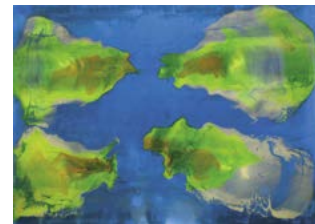
Wings #14
95 x 50cm, 2015
Oil on canvas



Mesozoic #4
140 x 210cm, 2016
Oil on canvas



Wings #16
130 x 206cm, 2018
Oil on canvas



Wings #15
144 x 202cm, 2018
Oil on canvas

About the artist



Georgii Uvs (b. 1954) is an acclaimed Russian visual artist. He began painting at the age of 17 and after graduating with a degree in Geology, he pursued his second degree in Fine Arts from Moscow State University of Graphic Arts (MSUPA). Following his studies, Uvs has been working at Russian State Television as a production designer and art director. His attitude to art is an integral part of his being, a channel to express his emotions and transmit his energy. For Uvs, art is an interaction between artist, environment, and people. His style developed and his focus changed when he moved to Malta, where he felt free, his subjects became more abstract, and he crystallised his artistic energies into the four series of paintings, Mesozoic, Genesis, Wings and Codes that were recently shown at Saatchi Gallery.

www.georgiiuvs.com

About the curators



SVETLANA PRODANOVA

Eva McGaw has been actively involved in the art world since the early 1990s. She has pursued her passion by supporting Eastern European artists through commissioning and producing exhibitions. She lived in the Middle East for over 17 years, where she worked as a special representative for Sotheby's.

Tatiana Palinkasev began her career at Christie's auction house in London and further worked in their Madrid and Rome offices. After valuable experience gained at the auction house internationally, Tatiana co-founded Callisto Fine Arts, where she focuses on curatorship and exhibitions.

Together, Eva and Tatiana established Metamorphosis Art Projects, where they produce and curate art exhibitions with a special edge. They create extraordinary experiences to motivate artists in developing new forms of expression, helping them to communicate their innermost convictions to inspire their audiences. Interaction and inspiration are the key elements of their exhibitions. They look for special, out of ordinary elements to achieve extraordinary exhibitions.

www.metamorphosis-artprojects.com

The artist's studio



Contact

Email: info@georgiiuvs.com
Phone: **+44 7949 153 342**
Web: www.georgiiuvs.com

Metamorphosis Art Projects

Eva McGaw: **+44 7850 398 961**
Tatiana Palinkasev: **+44 7721 652 226**
Email: info@metamorphosisartprojects.com
Web: www.metamorphosis-artprojects.com

Credits

Edited by John McGaw and Carlo Milano
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