

signposts
that
gather

Signals that Gather

February 2 - February 27, 2016

Jack McWhorter

Bridget O'Donnell

George Schroeder

Nancy Seibert

THE PAINTING CENTER

547 West 27th Street, Suite 500, New York, NY 10001

Tuesday - Saturday, 11- 6 pm, www.thepaintingcenter.org

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According to the Roman author Pliny the Elder, the ancient Greek painter Zeuxis once competed against fellow artist Parrhasius to see who could make the most realistic image. Zeuxis painted a bunch of grapes so convincingly that birds attempted to eat them. But when he tried to remove the disheveled curtain he thought was covering his rival's work, he discovered that the curtain was in fact a painting, thus assuring Parrhasius the victory.

In many ways this legend from the 5th century BCE encapsulates the *raison d'être* behind Western painting that would hold court for roughly the next two millennia: the idealized imitation of the visible world. Painters were expected to be prestidigitators – master illusionists who fabricated beautiful windows on physical reality. Call it an intellectual slavery to the apparent.

Fast forward to Modernism's insistence on the flatness of the picture plane as a discrete object in itself, and then further into the pluralistic explorations of concepts and materiality commonly referred to as "Postmodernism." It is a pesky term at best. Suffice to say that when we strip away the often arcane, sometimes silly philosophical rhetoric that surrounds it, we're still left with the realization that the essential focus of Postmodernism is, arguably...Modernism. More precisely, it's an ongoing commentary on, and re-assessment of, Modernist ideologies.

That said, the four artists exhibited here – George Schroeder, Nancy Seibert, Bridget O'Donnell, and Jack McWhorter – represent three generations of combined experience in examining the legacy of Modern/Postmodern abstraction. Each has developed a distinctive visual language - a codified system of interrelated markings, shapes, colors and planes that can simultaneously appear to congeal and disperse along the image surface. The painters' manipulations of these

signs, or signals, along with their respective palettes, may refer to "real world" sources, but only in a peripheral or idiosyncratic way. And even as these painters have developed effective means by which to imply elements such as motion, rhythm, or tension, they do so without delineating specific narratives or subjects.

While the apparent structural rigidity and high contrasts of dark and light hues in George Schroeder's paintings might suggest a kinship to Minimalist aesthetics, it is their quietly regulated surfaces that imbue them with a palpable sense of intuitive expressivity. Schroeder's paint application allows for delightfully integrated passages wherein the top skin of color has been uniformly scraped away to reveal the grainy tactility of the canvas, tinted earlier in the painting process with shadows of underlying color.

Amid the precision of flat, hard-edged geometric design there is also a playful spatial dynamic – a gentle fluctuation between positive and negative planes that in turn balances rhythmic movement with stillness. What finally emerges from these works is a lyrical architecture of sorts, heraldic in its simplicity, and exquisitely engineered to generate moments of sublime equilibrium.

Nancy Seibert has drawn her pictorial inspiration from nature in what she calls "...a synergy of paint and energy produced in brushstrokes..." Her recent mixed media works are highly tactile, atmospheric visions that can suggest the volatile movement of wind, water, or perhaps foggy mists across earthen tracts. Indeed, her recent canvases look as if pigments and particulate matter, once deposited on the surface, are in the process of being swept away, leaving in their wake vast white voids. Or perhaps the reverse is true – materials are in the process of arriving to fill empty space.

In any case, the figure-ground shifts are intriguing. Seibert's technique is spontaneous enough to allow her to frame essences, imbuing her surfaces with a sense of transient physicality. These are translations of, or meditations on, changeability. And you can almost hear the energetic motion of mark-making. Loud silence, or silent noise?

A related spirit of flux and ambiguity is clearly at work in the mixed media works on paper by Bridget O'Donnell. Her pieces, however, are more autobiographical than ostensibly "natural." Sourced in maps of places where she has lived, you might consider her visions collectively as an abstract journal of sorts, describing not just the rhythmic patterns of street layouts, but moving or "writing" through them in variable states of mind and heart.

There is a tangible sense of urgency, mystery, and maybe even madness in her passages of scribbles, doodles, and amorphous clouds of pigment interspersed and synthesized with the grid configurations. It's as if she wanted to quickly record memories or sensations before they disappear into the ghostly backgrounds and disintegrate completely. Fragments float, are retrieved, or slip away, in a frenetic and dramatically engaging simultaneity of construction and disruption.

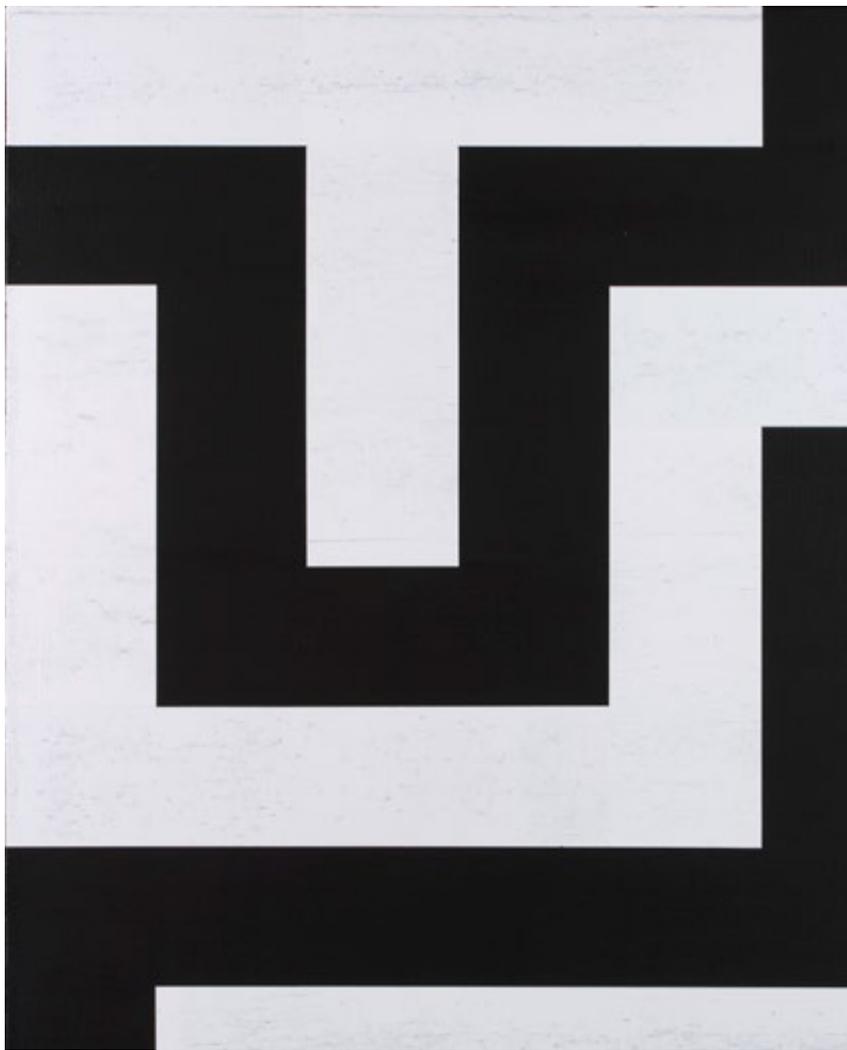
Jack McWhorter is a painter's painter. He's a masterful colorist who revels in the materiality of oil paint, the physicality of the brushed mark or shape, the gestural fluidity of line. "I am drawn to organisms found in nature," he recently stated, "and respond to their power as factual beginnings in making paintings, in the same way that a landscape painter might use the landscape as a factual beginning."

But only the beginning. In exploring the confluence of art and nature, or science, McWhorter formalizes his intuition in these current works via a continued focus on hybridization and what he calls morphology - "...shapes and forms indicating states of growth or becoming..." His compelling visual syntax is rigorously grounded in the push-pull dynamic between organic/geometric shapes, spectacular chromatic relationships, and spatial anomalies that might incidentally evoke natural objects or phenomena, yet effectively transcend literal illustration. In their interactions of rhythm, pattern and motion, these paintings pulse and crackle with a jubilant energy, describing structures or processes at once matured and nascent, static and changing.

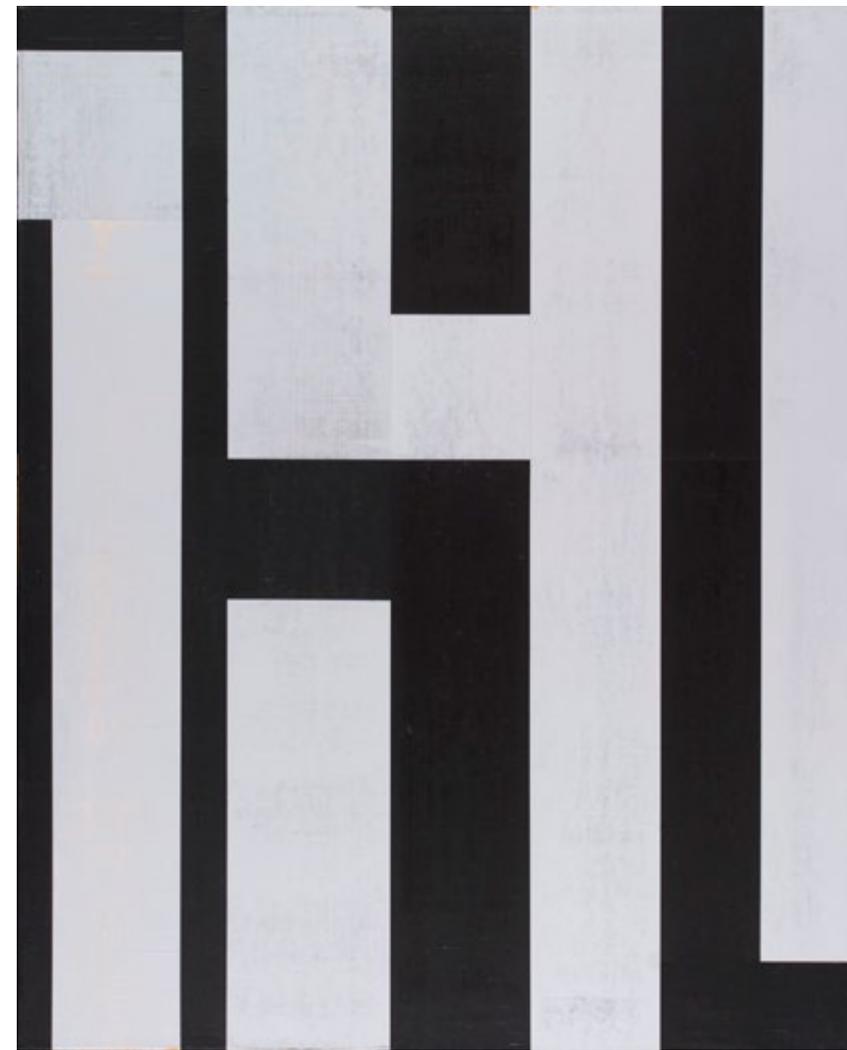
McWhorter's invigorating offerings, and for that matter those of the other artists he has gathered here, take me back, oddly enough, to Zeuxis and Parrhasius. They embodied a painting tradition that never outgrew meticulous narrating of the visible world. I'm reminded that one difference between representational and abstract painting is the difference between prose and poetry.

The stylistic variances among the works in this exhibit notwithstanding, each artist demonstrates a unique fluency in some dialect of abstraction. It is a poetic language to be sure, and one that can be admittedly complex, even confounding. But it remains ever true to its purpose of embracing that which is most ephemeral and ineffable about not just making art, but I dare say being alive.

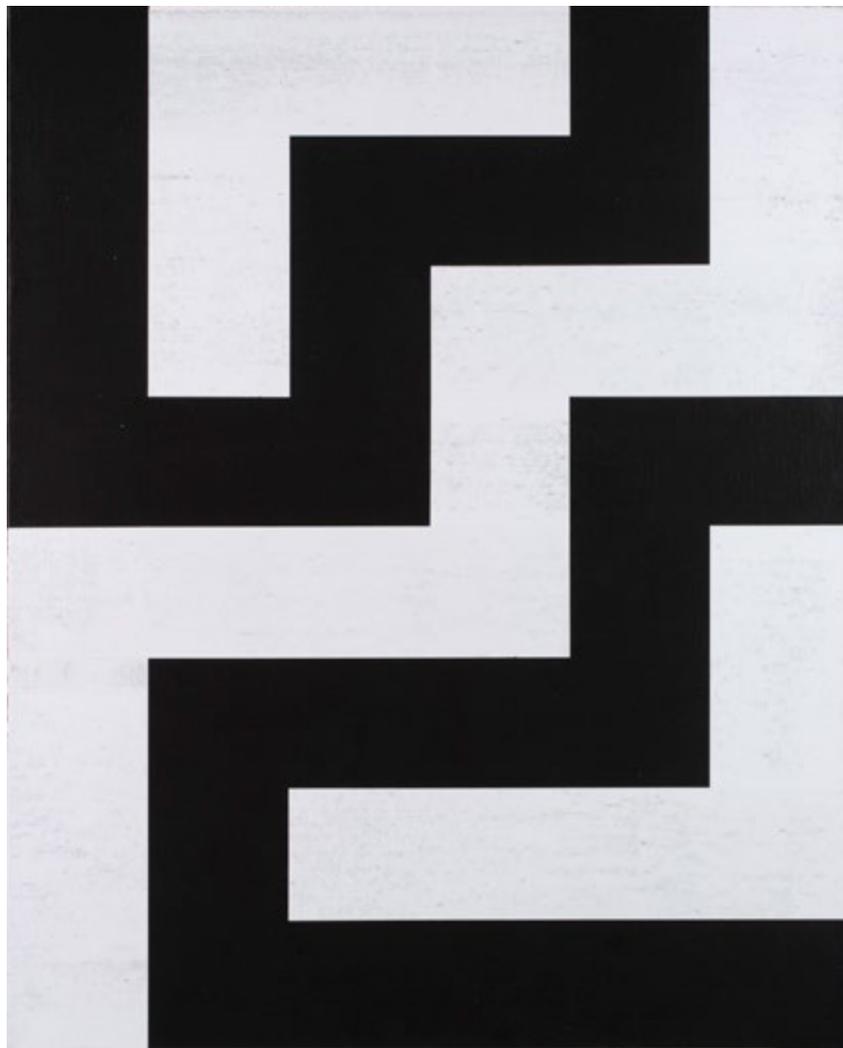
Tom Wachunas



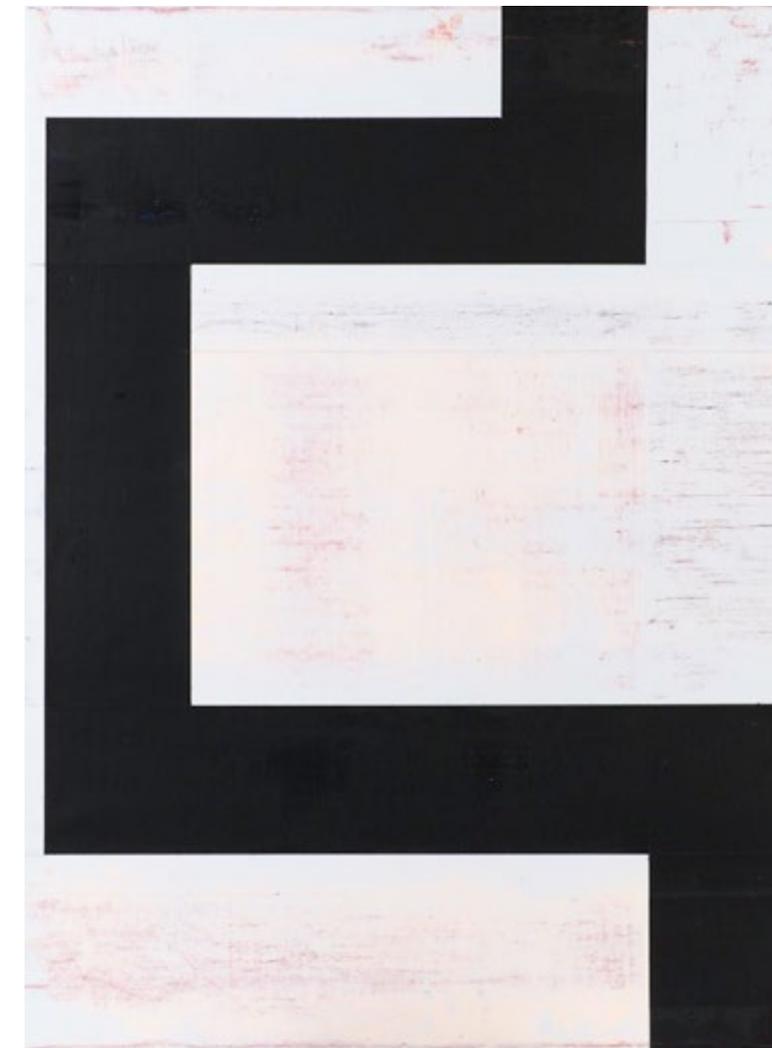
George Schroeder, *Aztec*, 2014, 44" x 36", Acrylic on Linen



George Schroeder, *Untitled*, 2013, 44" x 36", Acrylic on linen



George Schroeder, *Labna*, 2014, 44" x 36", Acrylic on linen



George Schroeder, *Sketch*, 2015, 24" x 18", Acrylic on linen



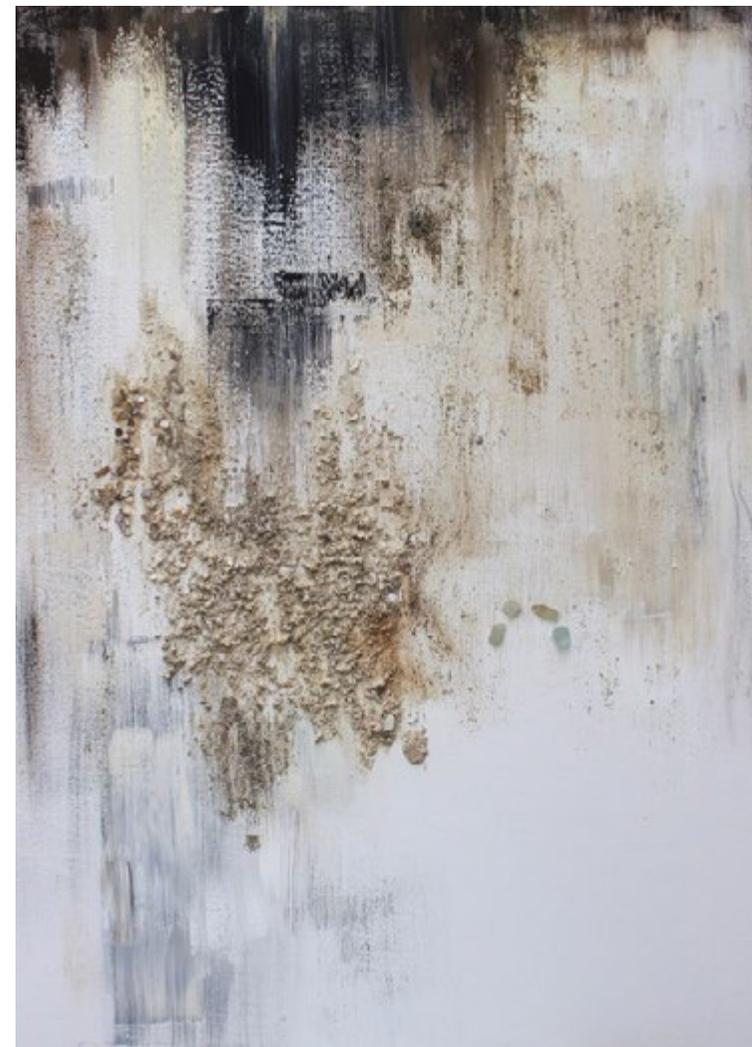
Nancy Seibert, *Sands of Time I*, 2015, 48" x 48", Mixed media on canvas



Nancy Seibert, *Sands of Time II*, 2015, 48" x 48", Mixed media on canvas



Nancy Seibert, *Shore Dreams I*, 2015, 36" x 48", Mixed media on canvas



Nancy Seibert, *Shore Dreams II*, 2015, 36" x 48", Mixed media on canvas



Jack McWhorter, *Like Courbet*, 2014, 20" x 26", Oil on paper



Jack McWhorter, *Holding Its Own Message*, 2015, 22" x 30", Oil on paper



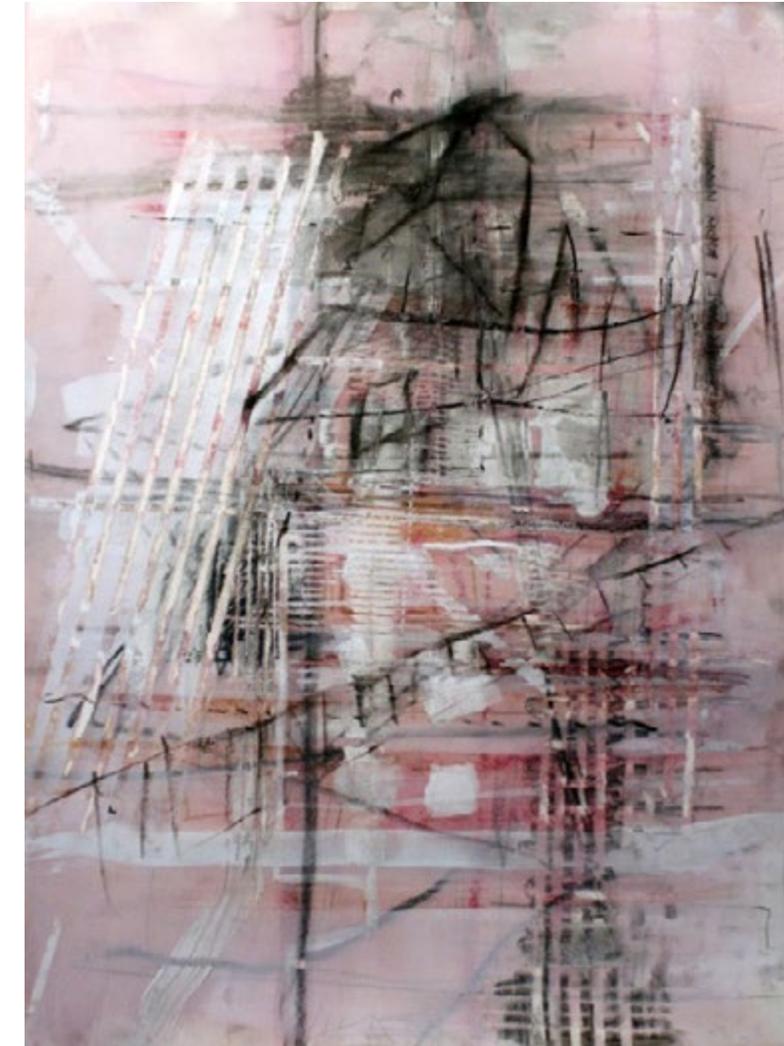
Jack McWhorter, *Slow Formation*, 2015, 22" x 30", Oil on paper



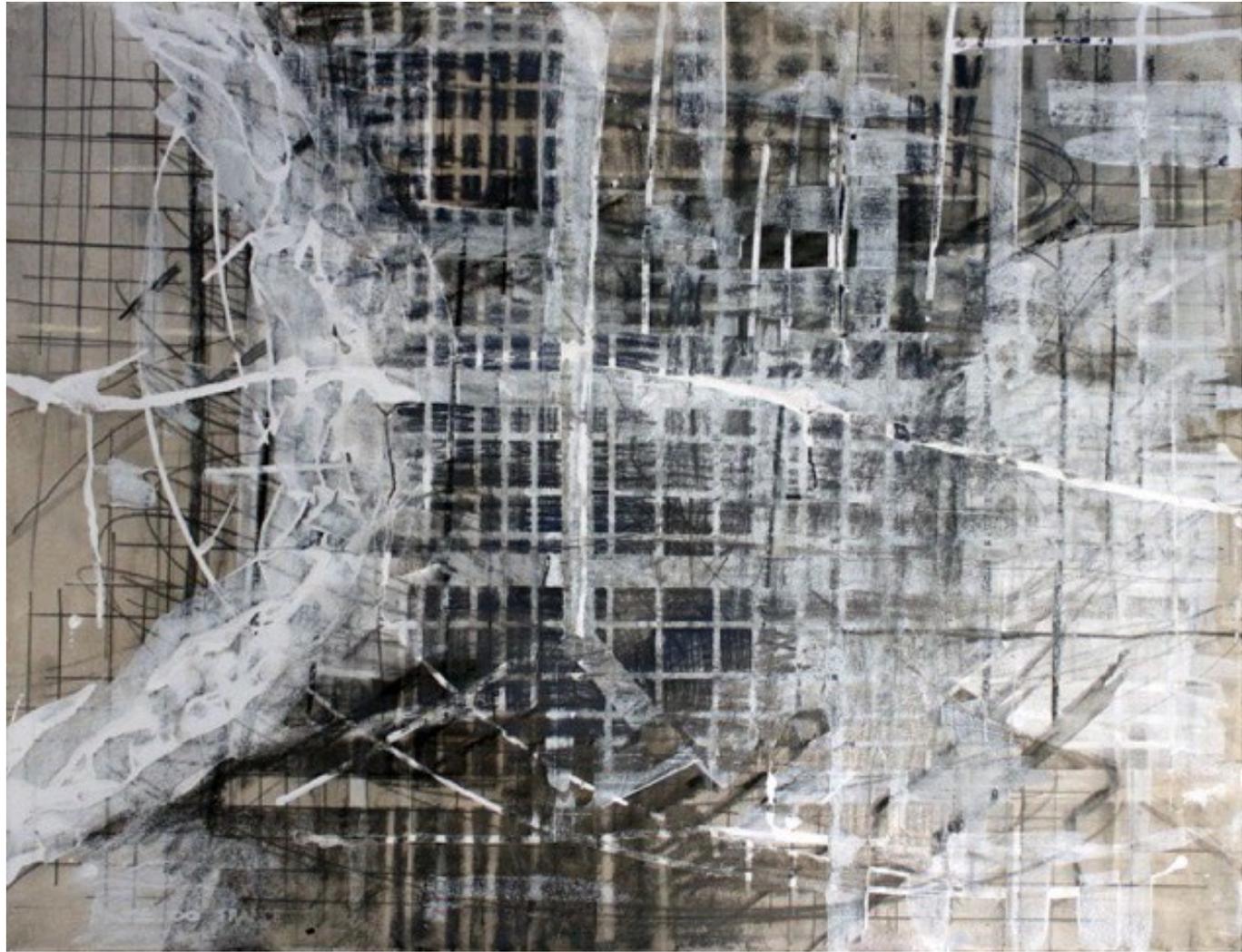
Jack McWhorter, *Signal Tree*, 2015, 22" x 30", Oil on paper



Bridget O'Donnell, *Buxton*, 2015, 22" x 30", Acrylic, charcoal, graphite on paper



Bridget O'Donnell, *Omaha II*, 2015, 22" x 30", Acrylic, charcoal, graphite on paper



Bridget O'Donnell, *Omaha I*, 2015, 22" x 30", Acrylic, charcoal, graphite on paper



Bridget O'Donnell, *Akron I*, 2015, 22" x 30", Acrylic, charcoal, graphite on paper

