



GERARD MOSSÉ

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New Work

Jill Newhouse Gallery

4 East 81st Street New York, NY

Tel (212) 249-9216

This catalogue accompanies the exhibition

Gerard Mossé: New Work

from May 3 to June 3, 2016

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4 East 81st Street New York, NY 10028

Tel (212) 249-9216

www.jillnewhouse.com

COVER: *Paper Painting F17*, 2015-16

Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 24 x 18 inches

Gallery director: Christa Savino

Design by Lawrence Sunden, Inc.

Essay © David Ebony

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WHITE LIGHT/WHITE HEAT

by David Ebony

The value to be conquered here is light. Light is thus a valorization of fire, a hypervalorization in that it gives meaning and value to facts that we first take to be insignificant. Illumination is truly a conquest.¹

— Gaston Bachelard, *The Flame of a Candle*

IN HIS ETHEREAL and evocative recent paintings on vellum Gerard Mossé remains fixated on light. He explores a particular kind of value and intensity of light, and a seminal light source. The imagery that has fascinated him for some years is fundamentally abstract, featuring just a few seemingly simple shapes hovering in a neutral-toned, nondescript space. Typically, one or more dark, vaguely rectangular forms, each in an upright, vertical position, bulge slightly about three-quarters of the way toward the top of the form. Horizontally traversing this area of the rectangle is a white or sometimes golden-yellow band of glossy oil pigment; in this passage, the artist often activates the surface with a multilayered, rich impasto.

The geometric shapes appear totem-like, sometimes nearly anthropomorphic, but almost certainly architectonic, at times recalling the monoliths of Stonehenge. In the most recent works, such as

Paper Painting E7 and *Paper Painting F17*, the brooding rectangular forms are tinged with color, and seemingly backlit, pulsating with a warm, shining halo in gold or pink, which contributes to the painting's overall prismatic glow. The images often have a dreamlike quality, but it is important to note that on some level the elements remain tethered to reality, and to nature. While the dark geometric shapes could allude to boulders or earthen outcroppings, the brilliant white bands suggest the blazing sun, or moonbeams, a lighthouse beacon, or, perhaps, the primordial flame that so fascinated the influential French theorist Gaston Bachelard.

Paper Painting E5 and *E10* are resolutely vertical compositions. Each of the works features two prominent rectangular shapes; one or more similar shapes on either side are barely discernable—they seem to have dissolved into the hazy, grayish-blue otherworldly ether of the background. The bands of light these forms emanate glow in shades of orange-yellow, and deep pink in the hazier, background shapes. The emphasis of these compositions is on verticality. The works recall Bachelard's comments in his book *The Flame of a Candle*, "For someone dreaming of a flame, the entire room takes on an atmosphere of verticality. A gentle but unfailing dynamism draws dreams to their summit."²

French Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, especially works by Seurat, were among Mossé's earliest passions. His efforts today,

however, are not aimed toward an exploration of the play of light on objects, as, for instance, Monet studying the effects of sunlight on haystacks throughout the course of a day. Instead, Mossé explores the attributes of light itself, its intensity, for example. Full of allusions, but never descriptive, his work may be seen as a unique hybrid. A desire for intensity, as part of Mossé's North African heritage, contrasts with and complements the refinements of French culture that have also informed the work. His overall endeavor is more akin to Picasso's approach to art-making as a rather insular activity, part of a more or less ritual process.

Mossé's approach to a series of mostly black-and-white compositions is rather physical compared with the oil-on-paper pieces. The materials—graphite, charcoal, and pigment—are drier, and the emphasis is on line and gesture. Mossé often uses his fingers in applying the works' finishing touches. In *B & W 1*, he built up the cores of the two black foreground rectangles with thick white pigment. Countering this brilliant tactility, sinuous flourishes of black markings outline and soften the otherwise strident rectangles. In *B & W 4*, the two foreground rectangles appear to undulate. Each shape seems to break apart near the middle, where an emanating bright white light is modulated with touches of pastel in red and yellow.

Early on, as Mossé adopted a visual vocabulary of pure abstraction, light itself became a metaphorical vehicle he used to enliven

each composition. Although he avoids emphasis on the cosmic associations of his favored subject, and its attendant religious overtones, the transcendental possibilities of his art are apparent. His work, however, differs markedly from other forms of erudite and meditative post-war abstraction, including Abstract Expressionism, Color Field, and Minimalist painting. Although conceptually related, Mossé's quietly illusionistic works are quite distinct from the compositions of hazy, luminous rectangles that comprise Rothko's transcendent abstraction, for instance.

Mossé's art nevertheless rests on a firm art-historical foundation. Being surrounded by his paintings conjures a number of associations with art of the past, as well as pop culture. The glowing candles in paintings by Georges de la Tour and Gerhard Richter immediately come to mind. Also relevant are the cosmic light sources in Baroque painting, such as Apollo's radiant halo in the Diego Velázquez's 1630 masterpiece, *Apollo in the Forge of Vulcan*, in the Prado. I also cannot help thinking of the goddess Diana's moonbeams in Anne-Louis Girodet sumptuous *The Sleep of Endymion* (1791). In addition, Mossé's work demonstrates a kinship to Romantic painting, as, for instance, Caspar David Friedrich's 1818 *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, with its luminous mist.

A certain rhythm and musicality permeate Mossé's painting, and the artist has remarked on the importance of music in his work. On

a visit to his studio, I thought of the Velvet Underground's seminal rock album, *White Light/White Heat*, mainly because of its title, and Mossé's aim to make his paintings generate their own light. He is passionate about certain jazz musicians, especially Charlie Parker, whose virtuosity and soulfulness he strives for in his painting.

Mosse's art exists in a singular realm, somewhere between the empirical and the mythological. Rather than a depiction of reflected light, Mossé's spellbinding paintings do, indeed, appear to project light. They illuminate their surroundings, and bathe the viewer in a warm, sensuous radiance. The imagery is emphatic and the aftereffect never ends.

1. Gaston Bachelard, *The Flame of a Candle*, Dallas Institute Publications, Dallas, 1961/1988, p.19.
2. *Ibid*; p. 41.

David Ebony is a contributing editor of Art in America and the author of a monthly column for Yale University Press online. He lives and works in New York.

Paper Painting FI, 2015–16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 17 x 12³/₄ inches



Paper Painting F15, 2015–16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 17 x 12³/₄ inches



Paper Painting F17, 2015–16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 24 x 18 inches



Paper Painting E6, 2013–15
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 24 x 18 inches



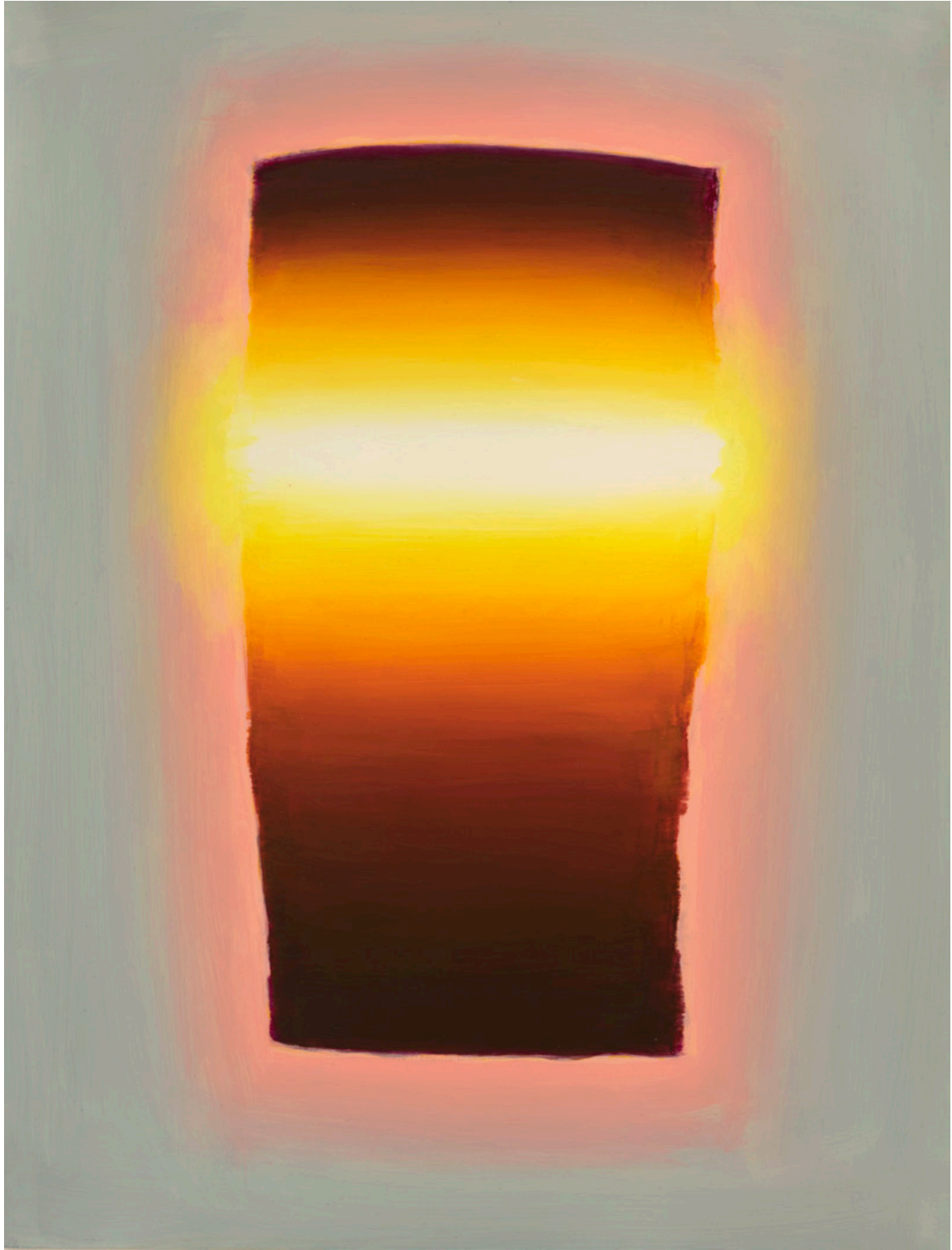
Paper Painting F13, 2015–16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 17 x 12¾ inches



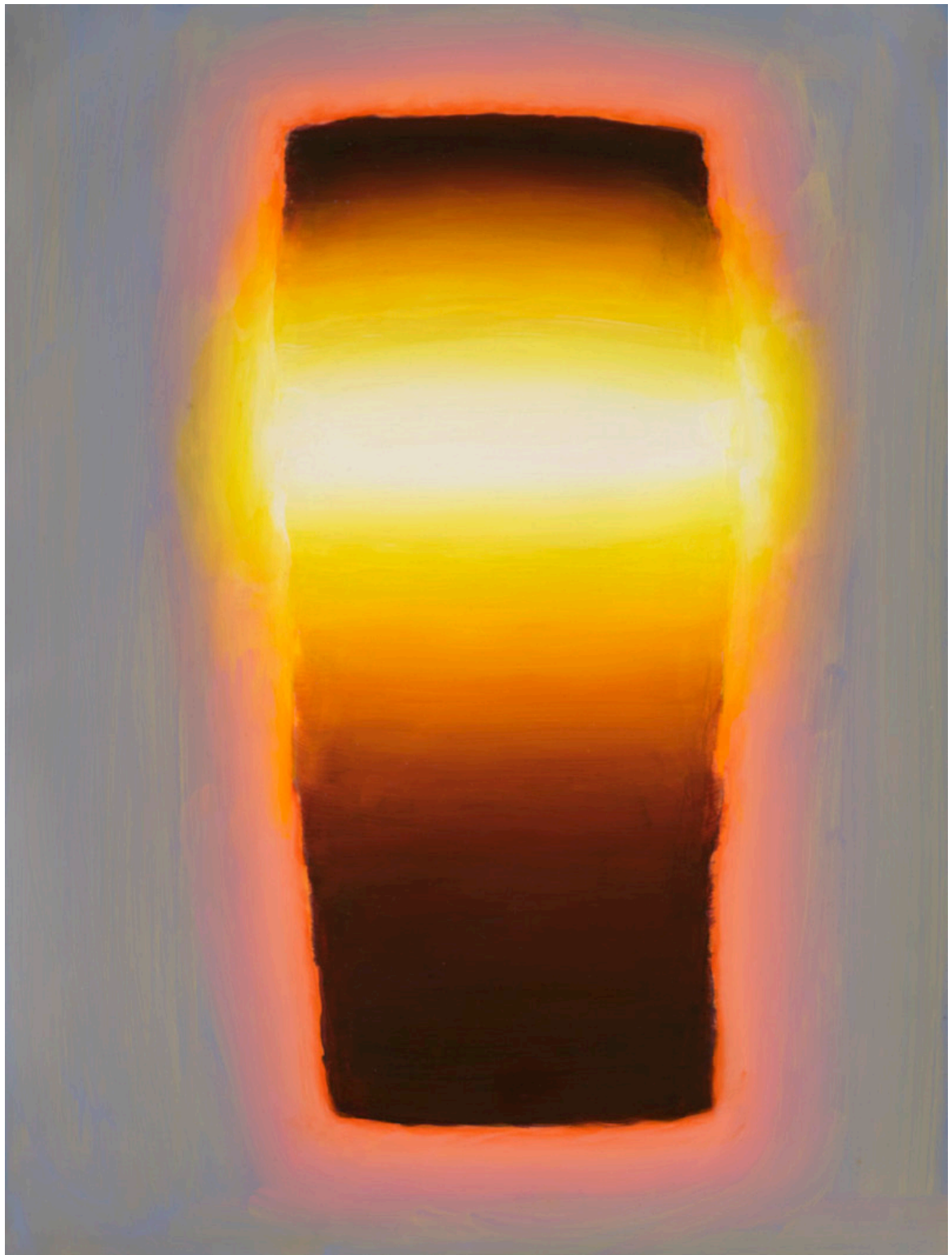
Paper Painting F18, 2015–16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 24 x 18 inches



Paper Painting F9, 2015–16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 17 x 12¾ inches



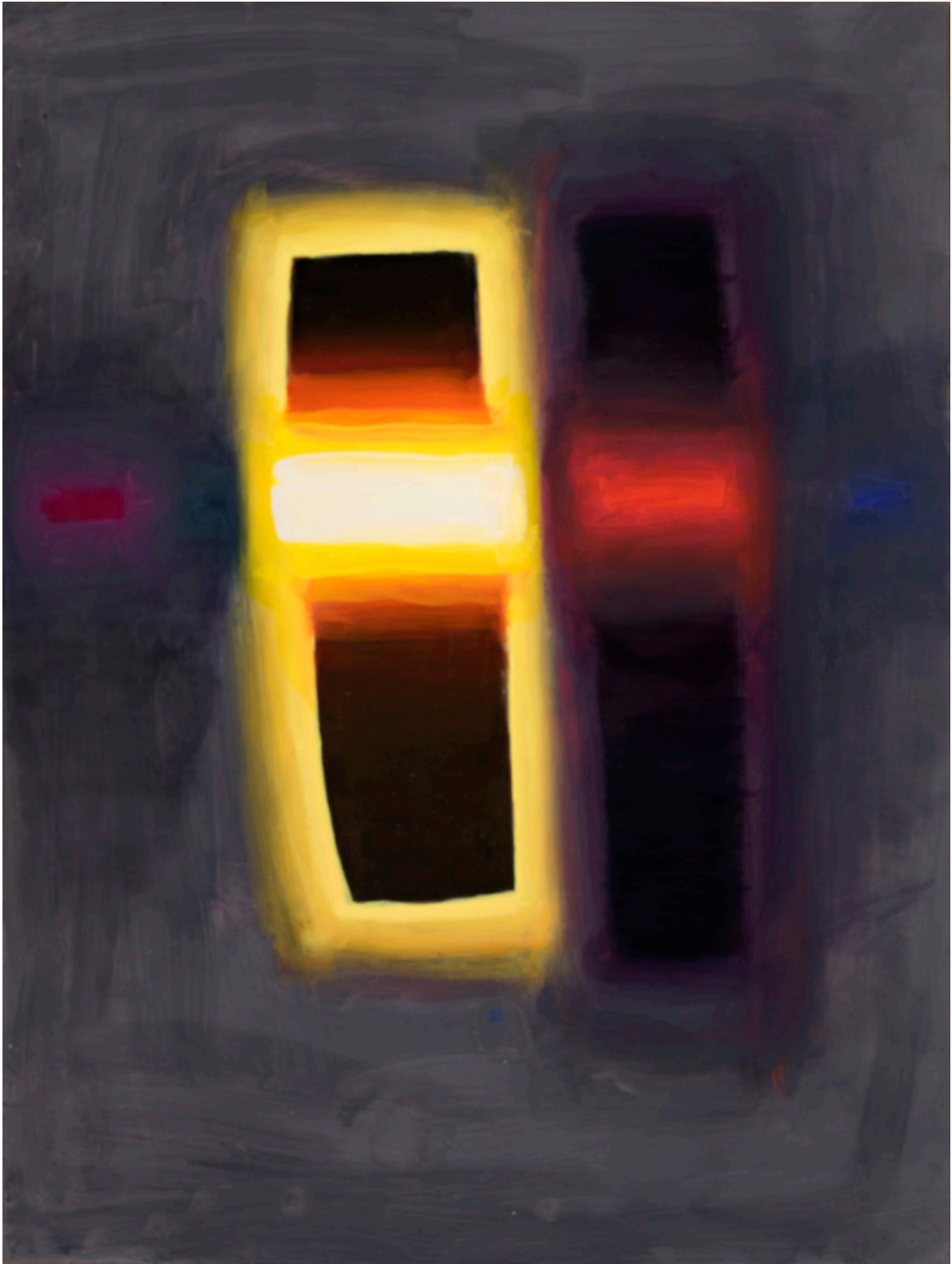
Paper Painting F8, 2015–16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 17 x 12¾ inches



Paper Painting E9, 2010–16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 24 x 18 inches



Paper Painting E5, 2013-15
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 24 x 18 inches



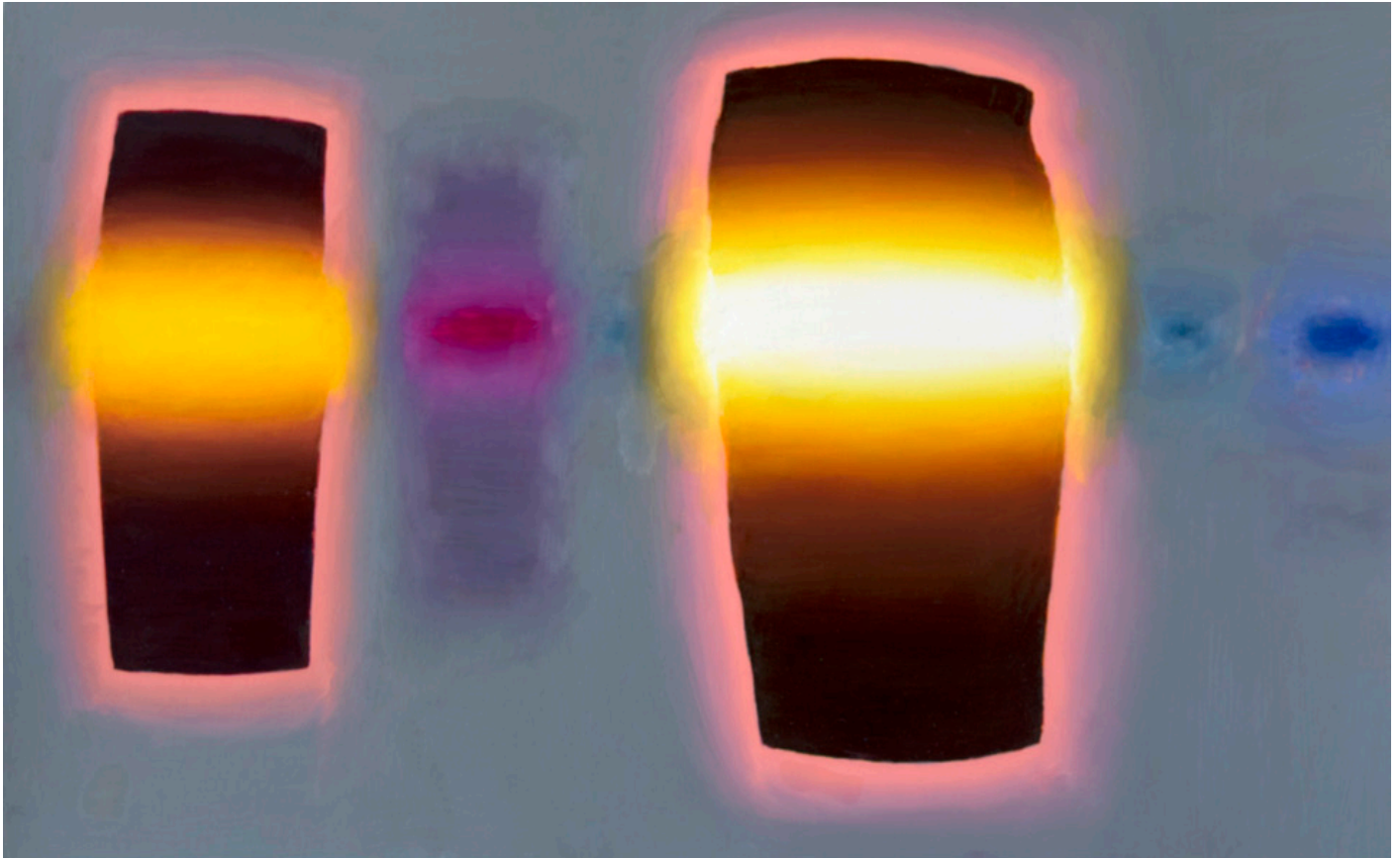
Paper Painting F2, 2015-16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 17 x 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches



Paper Painting F14, 2015–16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 17 x 12¾ inches



Paper Painting E7, 2015-16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 24 inches

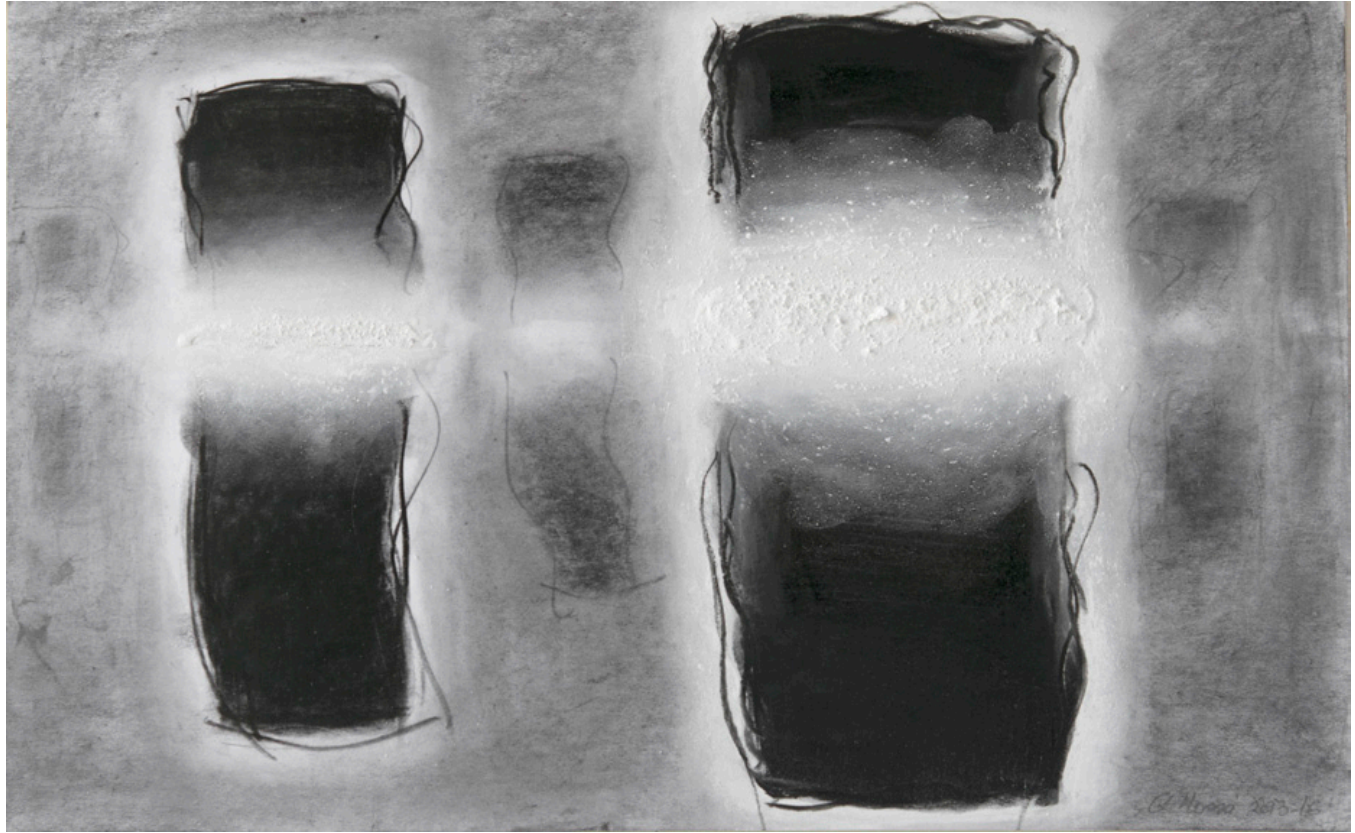


Paper Painting E10, 2012–16
Oil on vellum mounted on matte board, 17 x 12½ inches



B & W I, 2013-16

Graphite, conte crayon, charcoal, acrylic, and pigment on plate paper, 10³/₈ x 17 inches



B & W 2, 2013-16

Graphite, conte crayon, charcoal, and acrylic on plate paper, 11 x 7 inches



B & W 3, 2013-16

Graphite, conte crayon, charcoal, acrylic, pigment, and pastel on hand wove paper, 8¼ x 11½ inches



B & W 4, 2012-16
Graphite, conte crayon, charcoal, and pastel on plate paper, 10 x 7 inches



B & W 5, 2013-16

Graphite, conte crayon, charcoal, acrylic, and pastel on plate paper, 17 x 12³/₄ inches



Born in Casablanca, Gerard Mossé

spent his childhood in Morocco and Marseilles before moving to Los Angeles at 16. He began his artistic career as a painter, but soon began working in other media as well. He apprenticed with the well known ceramicist Michael Frimkess before studying sculpture, painting, and drawing at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles. Mossé earned an MFA in painting at the Claremont Graduate School of Art in California, where along with his own studies he taught classes on contemporary art.

Mossé moved to New York in 1987, where he still lives and works. His work shifted from figurative to abstract as he explored questions about the nature of painting and the freeness of line, form, and color. Mossé had his first solo exhibition in New York in 1991, and has been showing regularly since. In the 1990s, he also lectured at Hampshire College in Amherst on the relationship between art and philosophy. Today, Mossé focuses exclusively on his painting. His art has been shown nationally and internationally, in both solo shows and group exhibitions, from New York to Tokyo.

Education

1985

M.F.A. Painting, Claremont Graduate School of Art,
Claremont, CA

1975-78

Studied at Otis Art Institute, Los Angeles, CA

1973-74

Apprenticeship with Michael Frimkess, Venice, CA

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2016

“New Work,” Jill Newhouse Gallery, NY

2013

“Paintings on Paper,” Jill Newhouse Gallery, NY

2010

Elga Wimmer Gallery, Chelsea, NY

2006

Janet Kurnatowski Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2005

Katherine Markel Gallery, Chelsea, NY

1996

Andrea Pintsch, Munich, Germany

(3 featured artists)

1991

Berland Hall Gallery, New York NY

1985

Claremont Gallery, Claremont, CA

1980

Kaplan/ Bauman Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

Selected Group Exhibitions

2015

Eating Painting, 308 at 156 project Artspace NY

2013-14

“Transmissions,” Marin Community Foundation

2013

Winter Highlights, Jill Newhouse Gallery NY

XXL2, Elga Wimmer Gallery, Chelsea NY

XXL, Elga Wimmer Gallery, Chelsea NY

Schema Projects, “Drafted,” Brooklyn, NY

2012

Highlights, Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle, WA

Highlights, Elga Wimmer Gallery, Chelsea, NY

Denzil Hurley, Robert Storr, Gerard Mossé,

Francine Seders Gallery, Seattle

2011

“In the Presence of Light,” Danese Gallery,

“Works on Paper II,” Danese Gallery,

New York, NY

2010

“Abstraction Revisited,” Chelsea Museum of Art, NY

“Winter Salon,” Bjorn Ressle Gallery, New York, NY

“Works on Paper,” Danese Gallery, New York, NY

2009

“A Matter of Light” Elga Wimmer Gallery,
New York, NY

Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York, NY

Nina Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA

2008

“Winter Salon,” Bjorn Ressle Gallery, New York, NY

2006

Nina Nielsen Gallery, Boston, MA

2003

Art in General, Studio Tour, New York, NY

2000

“Abstraction/ Construction,” Soil Gallery, Seattle WA

1996

Group Exhibition, Galleries of Hampshire College

1995

Art in General, Annual Studio Tour, New York, NY

“Maximum Capacity,” Artists Initiative, New York, NY

1994

Group Exhibition, Apex Art, New York NY

“Night of One Thousand Drawings,” Artists’ Space,
New York, NY

1989

International Artists, Laforet Museum, Tokyo, Japan

1984

Three person exhibition, Downey Museum, Los Angeles,
CA

1983

Claremont Gallery, Claremont, CA

1981

Mandell Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

Teaching Experience

2006

Lecture, “On my work,” The New York Studio School,
New York, NY

2000

Visiting lecturer, University of Washington, Seattle, WA

1996

Adjunct Assistant professor of Art, Hampshire College,
Amherst, MA

1995

Visiting lecturer, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA

1992

Visiting lecturer, Hampshire College, Amherst, MA

1984–85

Ideas in Contemporary Art, Claremont Graduate School
of Art, Claremont, CA

Bibliography

2016

Catalog essay by David Ebony

2013

Catalog Essay by David Cohen

2010

Art Critical, review by Jonathan Goodman

2010

Catalog essay by Carter Ratcliff

2010

Art News. March 2010 Review, Works on Paper,
Danese Gallery

2005

Art in America, Review (December 2005)

1992

Tema Celeste, January / March issue

1981

Artweek, Fall issue

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