*Was it a vision, or a waking dream?*

Chen Zhe
Bianca Raffaella
Aida Tomescu

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17 July – 6 September 2025

In the interplay between dreaming and seeing, presence and absence, permanence and transience, the works of Chen Zhe, Bianca Raffaella, and Aida Tomescu trace the delicate thresholds where endings dissolve into beginnings. Drawing from poetry, memory, and personal visions, the artists play upon the evanescent nature of our existence, revealing how the fleeting and the eternal are inextricably entwined.

Returning to her primary language of photography, Chen Zhe's *Eternal Ephemera* series refutes the polarisation of such binaries as dreaming and awakening, birth and death, revealing in their place a hall of mirrors, projecting cycles of renewal towards eternity. For Chen, 'the photographs in this series are proof that we have always been living in each other's finite times, and in the recursive time of the cosmos'. Ends serve as beginnings; in *Ancestor* (2020), a jellyfish, in a slow dissolving process somewhere between life and death, is abstracted, appearing as an eye, an erupting volcano, a cosmic nebula. This dissembling image is not coincidental to the theme of ephemerality but in fact derives from our awareness of it, as Chen explains through the verse of Ming poet Wang Shizhen, 'don't blame the pupil for indulging in fantasies and illusions, since we all depart from ephemera.'

Bianca Raffaella's ethereal floral and figurative paintings are also imbued with illusions and elusiveness, appearing to 'fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget', in the words of the poet John Keats, an inspiration to her recent work. Through blurs of white, pastels, and iridescent metallic strokes, Raffaella, who is partially sighted, translates her experience of 'persistent vision' – where images remain in constant motion, appearing only briefly as faint shadows or flickers of light.She describes how 'often the viewer will detect the echo of a figure that was once there.' Her resulting otherworldly gestures are further brought to life through impasto and hand-painting techniques, which, for Raffaella, verge on the sculptural.

Aida Tomescu's dyptich *Into a carpet made of water I & II* (2018) is notable for its clarity and light – the mood is serene and contemplative, not that this precludes the rich incidents and notations, buried in the under layers, the repeated painting-over (and scraping back), or the subtle unsuspected passages of transitions that unfold as we look. The work offers clear contrasts between an open ever-changing surface and the concentrated passages of silver-white built through layers of pigment and erasure, creating localised densities, lending depth and substance. The work's body is inherent to the way the image is constructed. It is formed from building the painting with scrapers and mixing pigments directly on the surface. Previous drier layers of paint begin to mix with fresher ones giving the work its 'found colour'. The temperature of the whites changes as we look, altered by the blue and yellow active underneath. The image with its feeling of private intimacy is becalmed and stilled; it produces appearances and gives off a certain state, a certain condition, which is like a spirit of place or an intuition. The title is a verse from an early poem by Thomas Bernhard: 'Into a carpet made of water'.
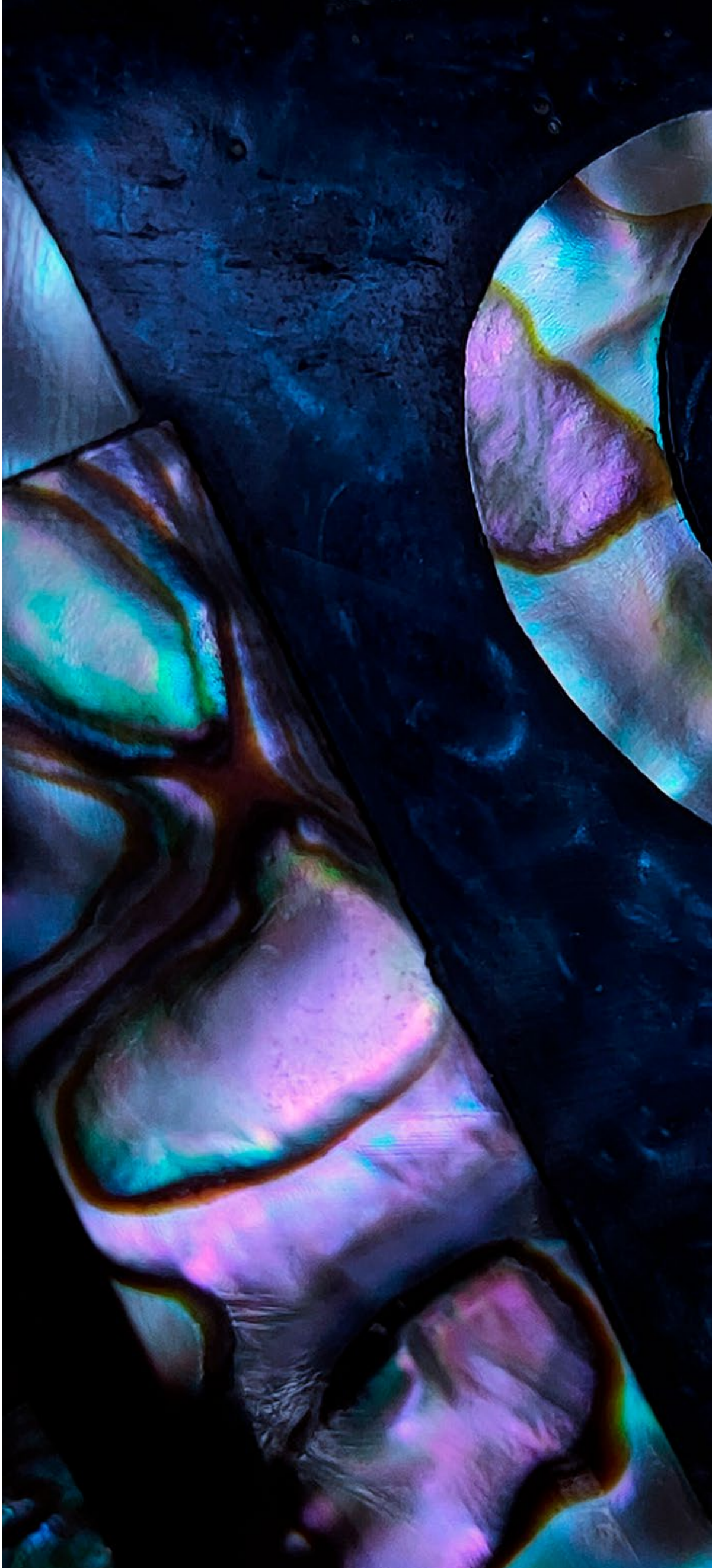
Chen Zhe (b. 1989)
*Eternal Ephemera: Sea Girl*, 2020
Archival Inkjet print
56 x 42 cm / 22 x 16 1/2 in
118 x 78 cm (Framed)
Edition of 5

'Don't blame the pupil

for indulging in fantasies and illusions,

since we all depart from ephemera.'
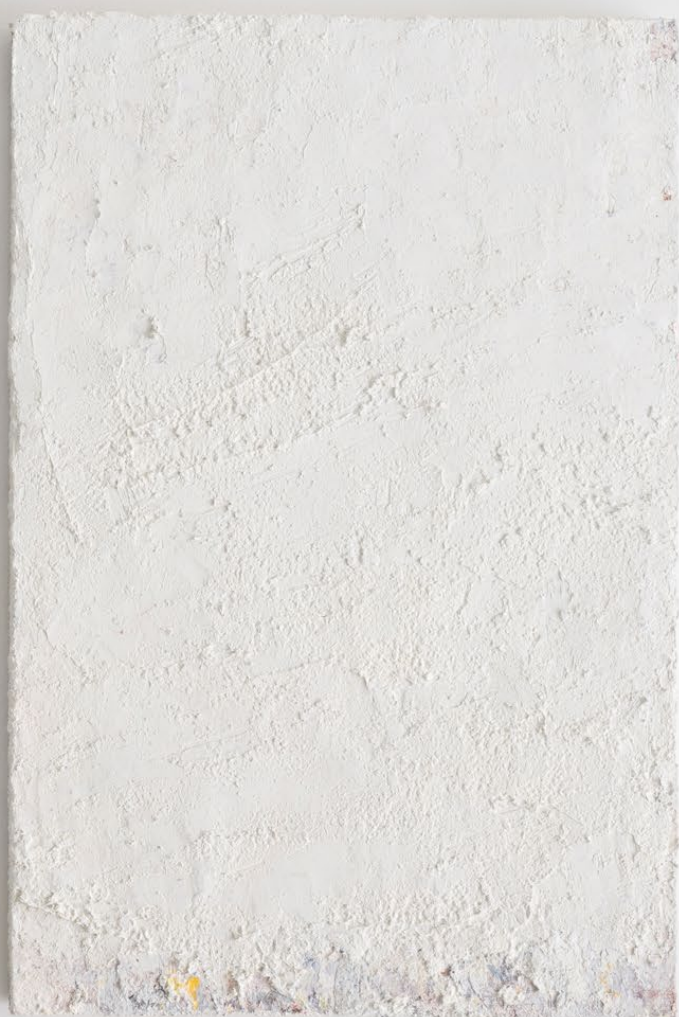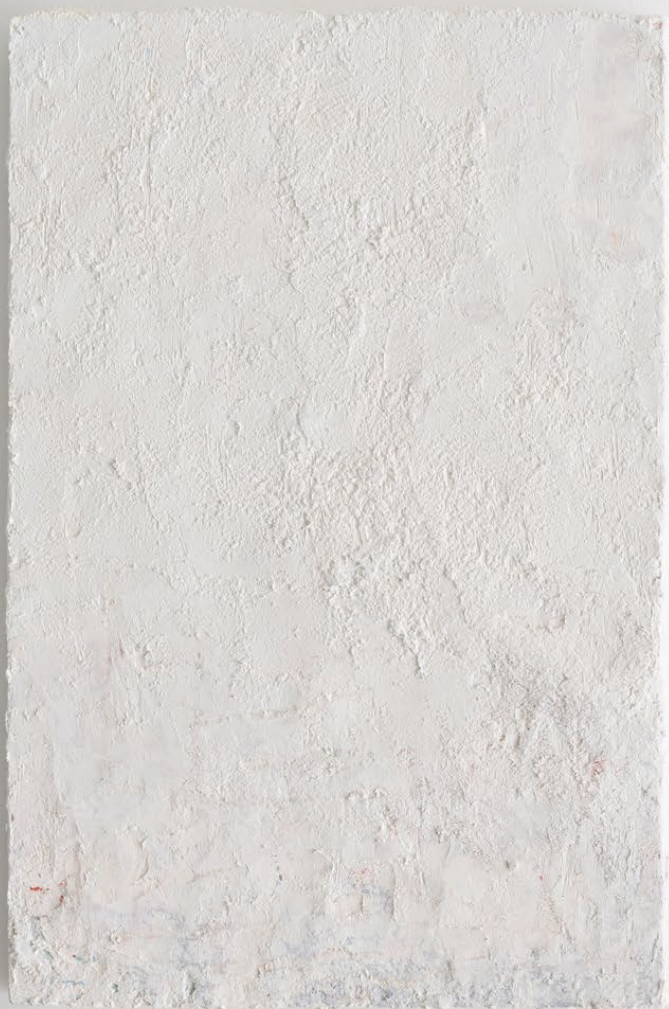

Wang Shizhen (Ming Dynasty)

Chen Zhe (b. 1989)
*Eternal Ephemera: Ancestor,* 2020
Archival Inkjet print
56 x 42 cm / 22 x 16 1/2 in
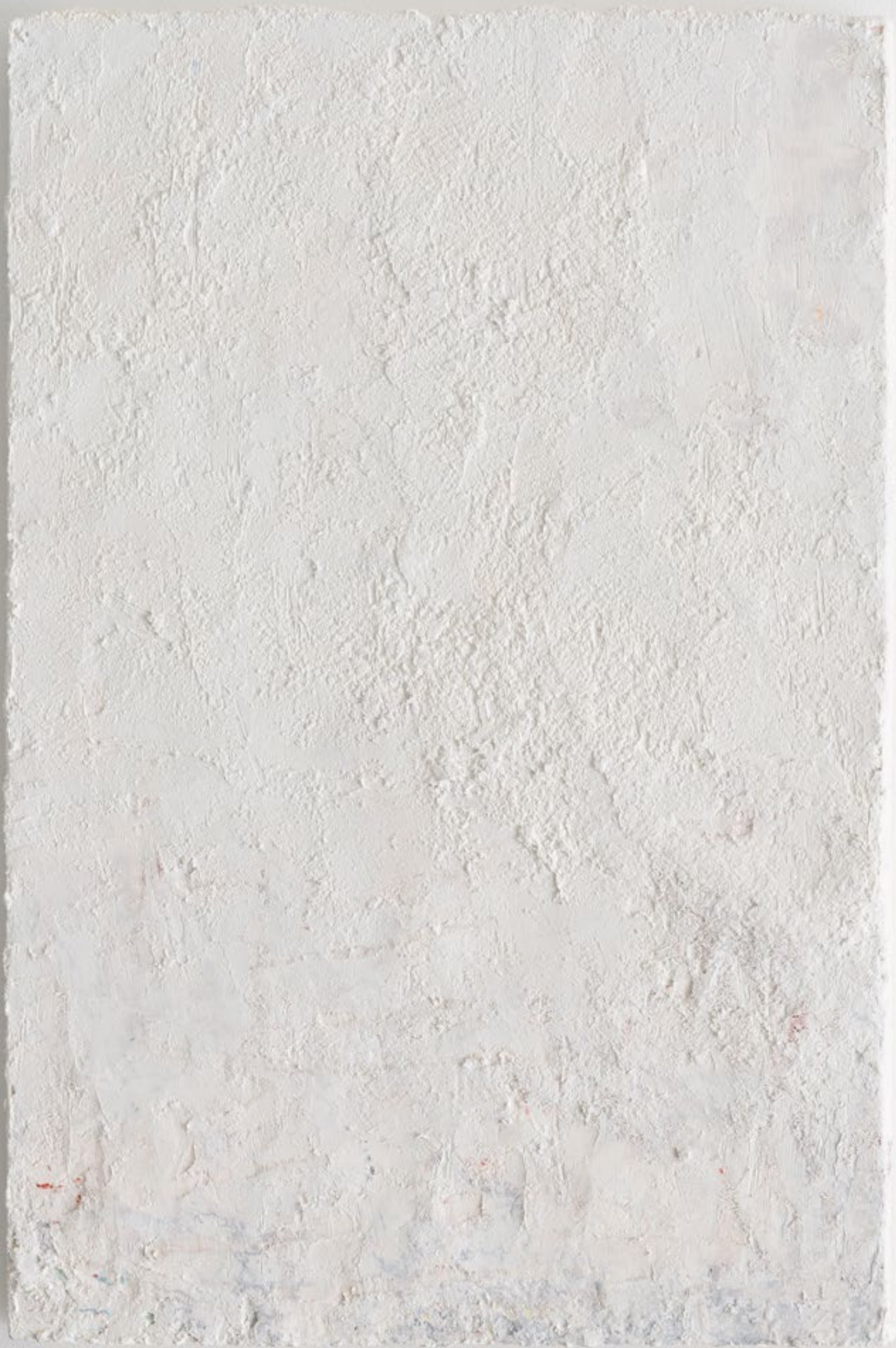118 x 78 cm (Framed)
Edition of 5

Aida Tomescu (b.1955)
*Into a carpet made of water I & II* (diptych), 2018
Oil on wood panel
60 x 40 cm (Each) / 23 5/8 x 15 3/4 in (Each)

'Into a carpet made of water

I embroider my days...'


Thomas Bernhard, 'Into a carpet made of water'

*Into a carpet made of water I*, 2018

*Into a carpet made of water II*, 2018

Bianca Raffaella (b. 1992)
*Beyond the Gaze (Stargazer Lily)*, 2025
Acrylic on linen
150 x 100 cm / 59 x 39 3/8 in

Bianca Raffaella (b. 1992)
*Sensation of Bloom,* 2025
Acrylic on linen
45 x 35 cm / 17 3/4 x 13 3/4 in

'Was it a vision, or a waking dream?

Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?'

John Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale'

Bianca Raffaella (b. 1992)
*Chasing Waterfalls*, 2025
Acrylic on linen
150 x 100 cm / 59 x 39 3/8 in

Bianca Raffaella (b. 1992)
*Surprise Unfurling,* 2025
Acrylic on linen
41 x 30.5 cm / 16 1/8 x 12 in

Bianca Raffaella (b. 1992)
*Drenched in Serenity,* 2025
Acrylic on linen
41 x 30.5 cm / 16 1/8 x 12 in

**Chen Zhe** (b.1989, Beijing)

Chen Zhe received her BFA in Photography and Imaging from Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles. Her works has been exhibited at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, Yokohama Triennale, Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Shanghai Biennial, Guangzhou Photo Triennial, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Three Shadows Photography Art Centre and more. Chen Zhe is the recipient of the Inge Morath Award from the Magnum Foundation, Three Shadows Award, Lianzhou Festival Photographer of the Year Award, Xitek New Talent Award and the Foam Talent. Her publication *Bees & The Bearable* was awarded the Best Photobook of the Year by Kassel Fotobookfestival in 2016.

**Bianca Raffaella** (b.1992, London)

Bianca Raffaella is a British artist and activist based between London and Margate, UK. In 2016, Raffaella was the first registered blind student to graduate from Kingston University in the Visual Arts, with a First Class Honours degree.

In 2021, Raffaella's work was selected for the Royal Academy of Arts's Summer Exhibition, coordinated by Yinka Shonibare, followed by her solo exhibition, *Hushed Impressions*, at Orleans House Gallery in 2023. She was also awarded the Nat West Entrepreneurship Funding Prize in 2019 for her bespoke sensory fashion label. An advocate for accessibility in the arts, Raffaella has shared her insights as a speaker at the Goethe-Institut's *Beyond Seeing* project and as a panellist at Tate Modern's *Please Touch* the Art talk. More recently, she was selected by Dame Tracey Emin for Flowers Gallery's 2024 *Artist of the Day* series, presenting a one-day solo exhibition as part of the programme's 25th edition, followed in 2025 by her first major London show, *Faint Memories*, at Flowers Gallery on Cork Street.

**Aida Tomescu** (b.1955, Bucharest)

Structure and content are critical components of Tomescu's paintings, which often have long gestation periods, taking months and occasionally years to complete. She says: 'My interest has always been to arrive at a unified image with fullness and clarity, to condense from a succession of moments and a continuous correspondence between layers, a truer more essential character of the image. In the midst of doing the work, when things are going well, you often feel that you are drawing on the sum of many experiences that are somehow essentially related. In other circumstances, all those experiences might seem very disparate, yet in the realm of the work they come together into complete accord.'

Aida Tomescu has been living and working in Sydney, Australia since 1980. Tomescu studied at the Institute of Arts, Bucharest, where she graduated with a Diploma of Visual Arts in 1977. Shortly after her arrival to Australia she completed a postgraduate Diploma at the City Art Institute graduating in 1983. Tomescu has exhibited regularly since 1978, with forty solo shows to date. Aida Tomescu is the winner of the Sulman Prize in 1996, the Wynne prize 2001 and the Dobell Prize for Drawing 2003, by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. She is also the winner of the inaugural LFSA Arts 21 Fellowship in 1996 at the Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne. Tomescu is represented in all major art museums in Australia and in international collections including the National Gallery of Australia; the National Gallery of Victoria; the Art Gallery of New South Wales; the Art Gallery of South Australia; Queensland Art Gallery; Heide Museum of Modern Art; Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand; and the British Museum, London, UK.