

# SUSAN PARKER

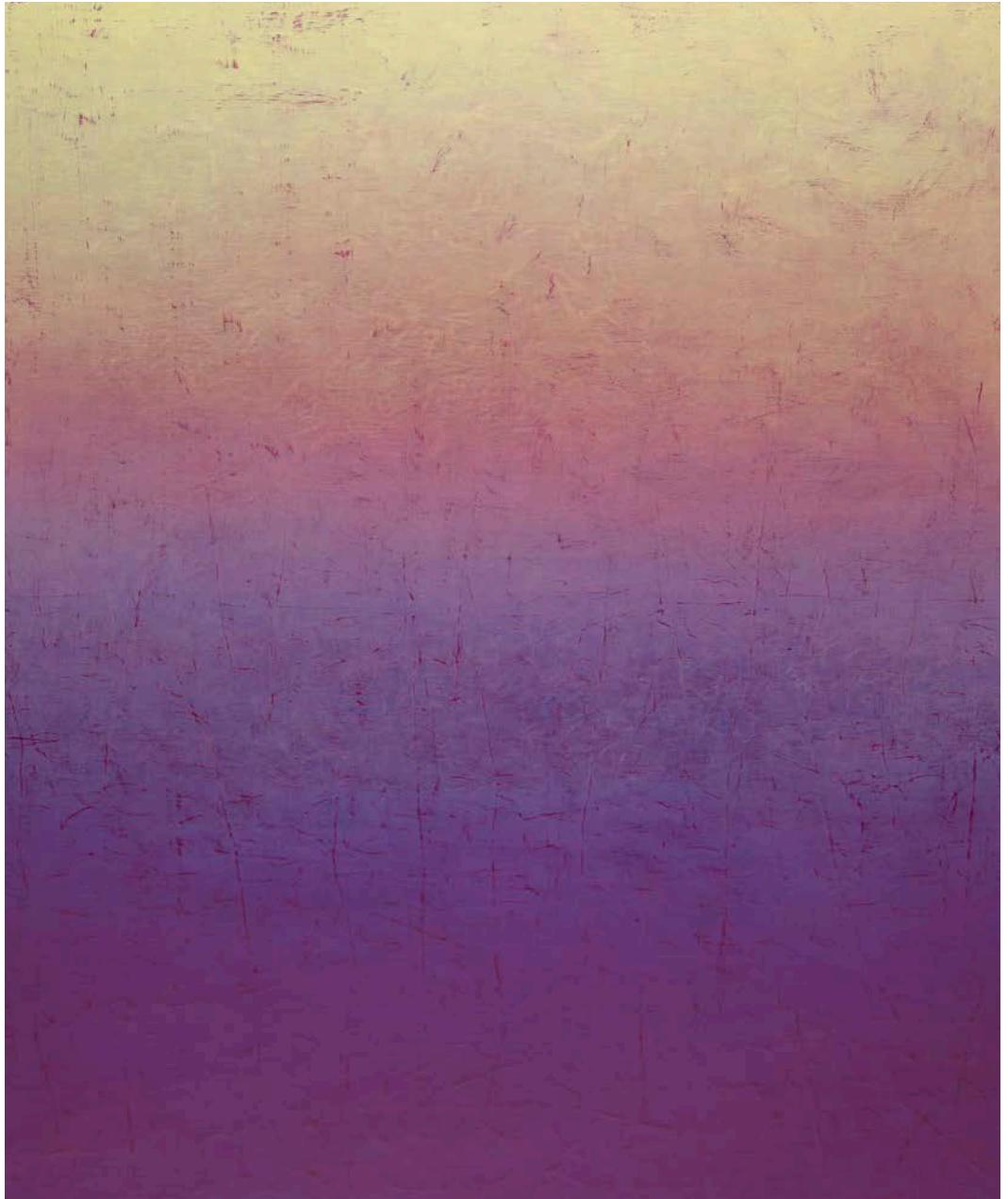
color, form and memory

# SUSAN PARKER

color, form and memory

"When I begin working, there is no fixed, predetermined plan.  
As a piece develops, my involvement becomes more urgent.  
I do what feels instinctive and decisive.  
The finished piece is a record of these activities."

*Susan Parker*



**1. Enigma One**, 2012, 72 x 60 in [183 x 152 cm]

## ARTIST STATEMENT

I work on canvas and panel and enjoy building and cultivating visual fields inhabited by low-relief shapes and patterns that are to varying degrees submerged within layers of translucent color. I want to make paintings that have a strong, physical presence and also convey a sense of discovery and intimacy upon closer viewing. Inspiration comes from diverse sources including features of the natural landscape, aerial views, observations of ever-changing light and atmospheric conditions, and marine phenomena. Compositionally, I have tendencies toward specific placement, inscription, organic and glyphic form, boundary-making, and personal notation. A preliminary sketch on the blank canvas with chalk and then with undiluted, heavy body acrylic paint becomes a foundation for further development. My process is physically direct, and I try to stay attuned to what the painting wants to be. Sudden, intuitive decisions to augment certain areas and pare down others are often pivotal. The finished painting gives me a sense of having arrived at a place of reconciliation between the world of ideas and memories, and the world of physical matter. In speaking of the unfolding of the soul, poet David Whyte has remarked: *"It's always a beckoning uncertainty. In some ways it's more like a gravitational pull: you never arrive there. You simply feel yourself come alive in that magnetism."* This is why I make art.

*Susan Parker [July 5, 2016]*





**2. Compass Two**, 2011, 36 x 36 in [91 x 91 cm]



**3. Azimuth Three**, 2011, 48 x 48 in [122 x 122 cm]

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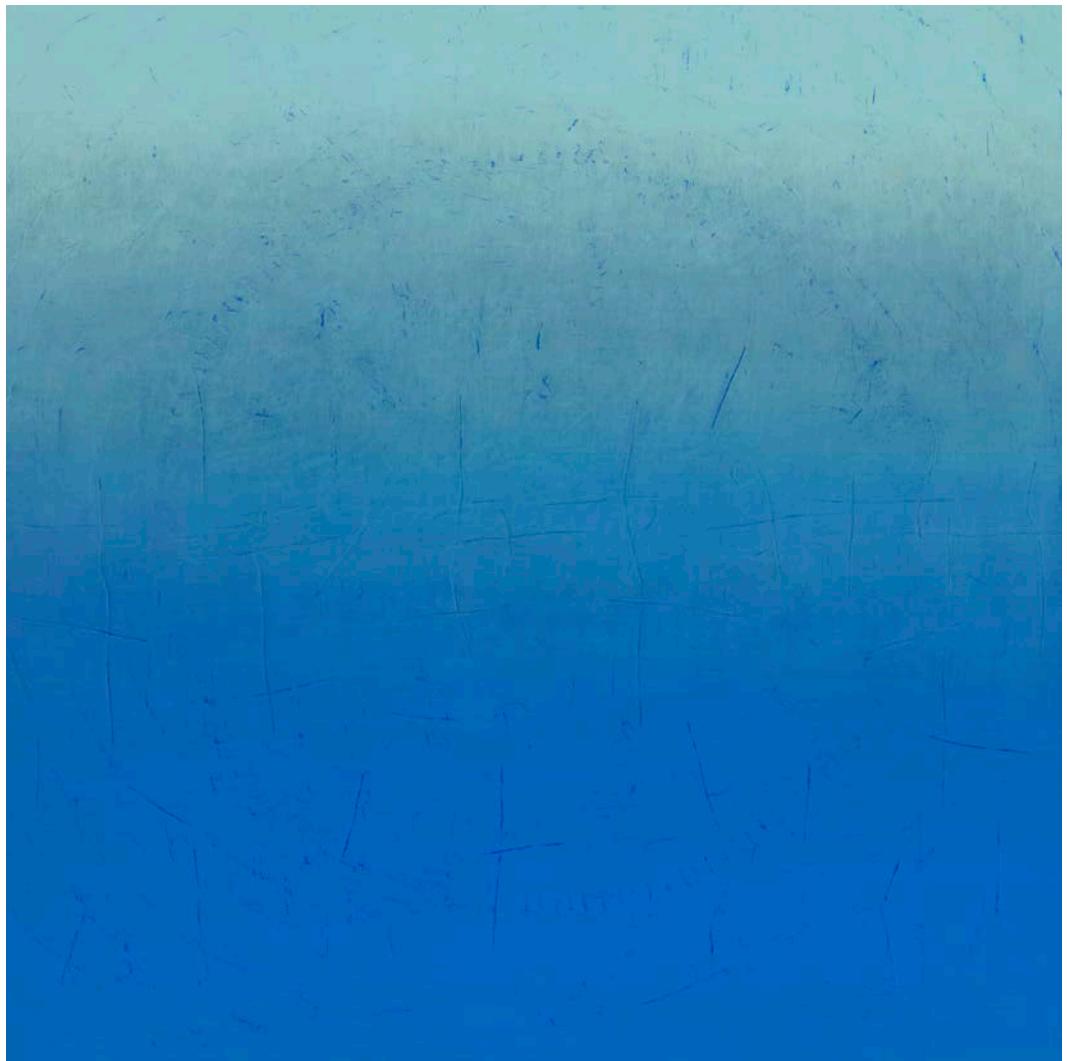
### Color, Form and Memory

Susan Parker's luminous and color-saturated canvases lure us in, and then capture us in their enigmatic depths. With the intuitive eye of a colorist, Parker skillfully develops environments permeated by subtle marks and apparitions. Each painting, she says, "is a record of its own creation... growing from the energy and pleasure of building." Her work exudes the solidity of an object constructed over time, layered and multidimensional, yet it also transmits an all-encompassing, almost ethereal tonal atmosphere.

After many years of making representational drawings, paintings, and sculpting clay, Parker grew enamored of abstraction in art school, where she discovered collage and assemblage and experimented with combining mediums in various ways. She found that adding texture added interest, and began to incorporate shavings of wood directly into her paint. She also carved recesses into her panels in order to create a shadow, or to make a cave or window in the surface, further ways to confound the traditional flat illusionism of painting.

Parker notes two California artists whose work has impacted her own, the sculptors Nathan Oliveira and Stephen De Staebler. Creating a layered, dimensional surface was already a part of Parker's process when she encountered Oliveira's sculptural series: the *Yucatan Sequence*, table-sized horizontal bronze sculptures reminiscent of partially revealed maps or archaeological excavations. Their subliminal textures, like obscured evidence – discernable but not quite decipherable – resonated deeply, and still evoke a response for her today. Like Oliveira, De Staebler's columnar ceramic sculptures make reference to archaeology and its investigation of the long buried or forgotten. Evocative of dynastic Egyptian sculpture, his totemic steles are embedded with fragmentary sections of the human body. These encased figures both belong to and emerge from their surrounding material, like captives trying to break free.

Today, rather than inserting materials into her paint Parker creates her textural components from the paint itself, using tools she invented for the purpose. Generally working on canvas



**4. Blue Radius**, 2013, 36 x 36 in [91 x 91 cm]



**5. Chart One**, 2012  
60 x 60 in [152 x 152 cm]

rather than wood panel, she remains dedicated to developing her surfaces and never works completely flat. She has evolved a personal glossary of motifs, including glyphs, charts, terrestrial maps, and fossil-like forms which populate the layers of her paintings. These act as internal suggestions rather than true subjects, and appear much like figures emerging from the fog.

Intriguingly, many of Parker's motifs are a reflection of her "other" life – she is an avid sailor who competes in a racing fleet on the San Francisco Bay. Comparisons between the disciplines of sailing and art are interesting to contemplate. A single-minded absorption and a creative objective are crucial to both. But sailboat racing assumes a clear destination, specific rules, and visible competitors, whereas painting is a solitary activity, its destination discovered only internally, and its rules self-created and potentially changeable from moment to moment. The crosscurrents generated from these dual dedications have led Parker into innovative territory.



**6. Chart Two**, 2012  
36 x 36 in [91 x 91 cm]

Transitioning from the externally focused and competitive world of sailing, Parker transmutes her environmental experience into artwork. On the boat she is immersed in subtle shifts of light, and its reflective, ever-changing effects on the surrounding water. Highly attuned to these variations, she works out her sensory memories on canvas, blending nearly indiscernible gradations of paint with a delicacy of hand reminiscent of that seminal color-field artist, Mark Rothko. Parker revels in these minute transitions, often following a line of color experimentation through many iterations. Her series of sky blue paintings are a clear expression of this impulse. In each she explores a different approach to tonality and color saturation and a different graphic dimension by embedding versions of the compass rose, latitude and longitude lines, or meandering pathways into the surface.

Parker's three vibrant paintings in the *Chart/Compass* series, illustrate comparable investigations into her handling of texture and color. In *Compass Two*, 2011, small parallel ticks of paint coalesce into a central circle out of a field of other marks, to recall the

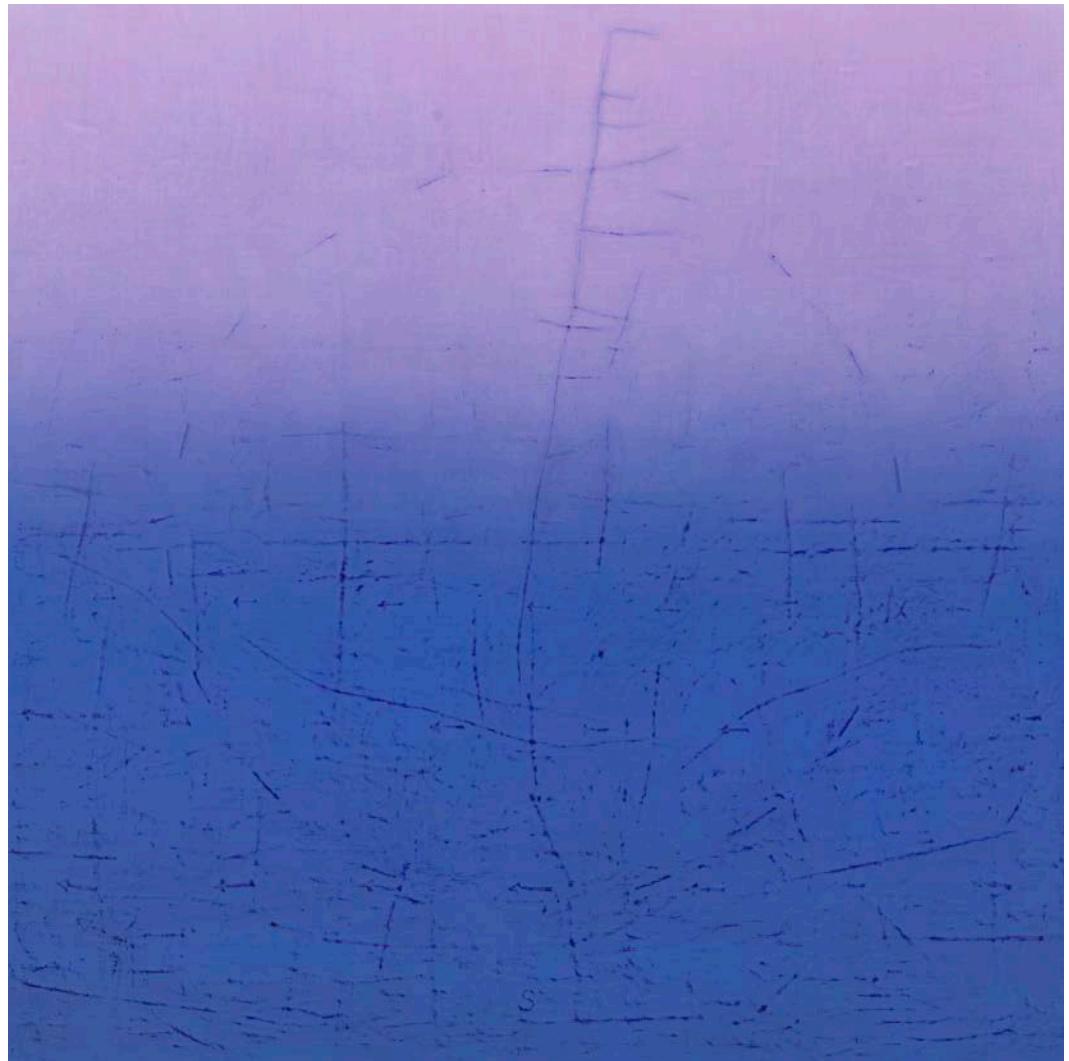


7. **Chart Five/Cityfront**, 2013, 72 x 60 in [183 x 152 cm]

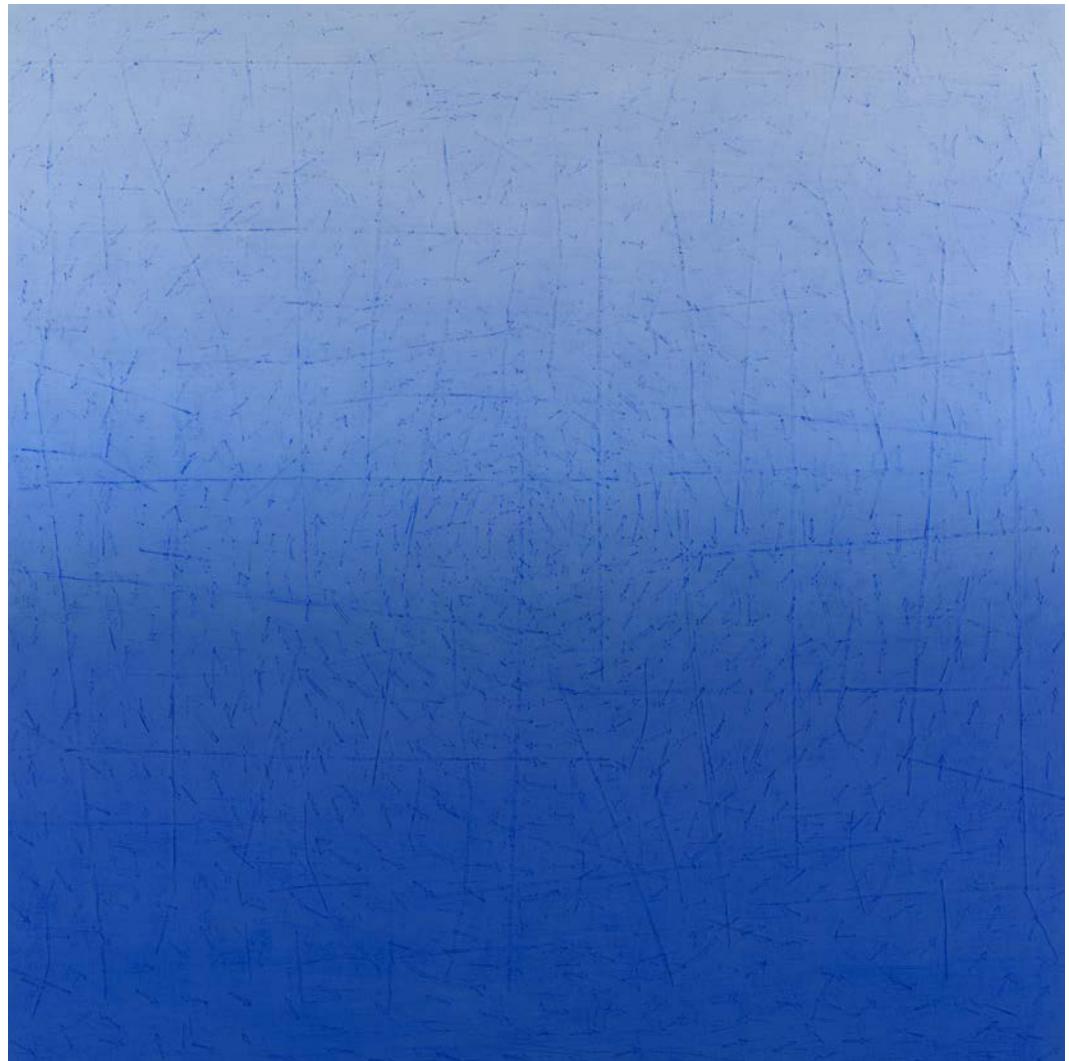
compass rose, a directional device familiar to sailors from their nautical charts. The painting evokes a horizon line with the overlaid circle uniting the yellow and blue worlds of air and water above and below. In the similar *Chart One*, 2012, her compass rose is barely discernable, and although yellow and blue again define the spaces, the subtle alteration of tonality results in a more ethereal work with very different qualities of light and emotional temperature. Then, in *Chart Two*, 2012, Parker explores a different approach. Like a nautical chart or a view from above, a clearly delineated coastline takes shape. Yellow and blue again dominate, but rather than the airy immersion of *Chart One*, *Chart Two* describes an encounter between land and sea. Glyph-like currents of water confront their terrestrial boundary and Parker manipulates her paint to mark it, each color meeting then subtly infiltrating the other with elegant precision.

Addressing the warmer end of the spectrum in her recent *Fossil* series, Parker enters new compositional ground. In *Fossil One*, 2015, a sinuous, vertebrae-like element bisects the canvas, its features suggestively vague. Might it be a chasm opening to expose hidden depths, or skeletal remains rising up and emerging from these depths? The painting's deep mahogany color edging into gold also evokes the patinated surface of burnished leather, and with its patterning of lines and abrasions, these attributes are further accentuated. With a few subtle shifts, Parker again generates three closely related works, each imbued with a distinctive ambience. *Fossil Two*, 2015, replaces an engraved surface with a more tempered one but powers up the tonality towards the fiery realm. In *Fossil Three*, 2015, the linear structure gives way to a tumble of shadowy, bone-like shapes that seem to lie just below the surface. These ambiguous entities arise solely through Parker's deft manipulation of paint. Moving away from the horizontally stratified arrangement of color in much of her recent work, the organizing principal travels outward from the center, its complex mix of tone softening to paleness at the edges. Parker never resorts to illusionism, but this compelling work transmits an alluring sense of mystery.

In her newest series, *Tracery*, Parker has purposefully redirected her palette away from saturated hues to experiment with works less driven by color. In *Tracery Four*, 2015, hints of lavender, rose and yellow add to a mix of creamier, vanilla-like tones play over a web of intersecting lines, like a misty aerial map. In the starker *Tracery Three*, 2015, nearly all



**8. Amethyst**, 2013, 36 x 36 in [91 x 91 cm]

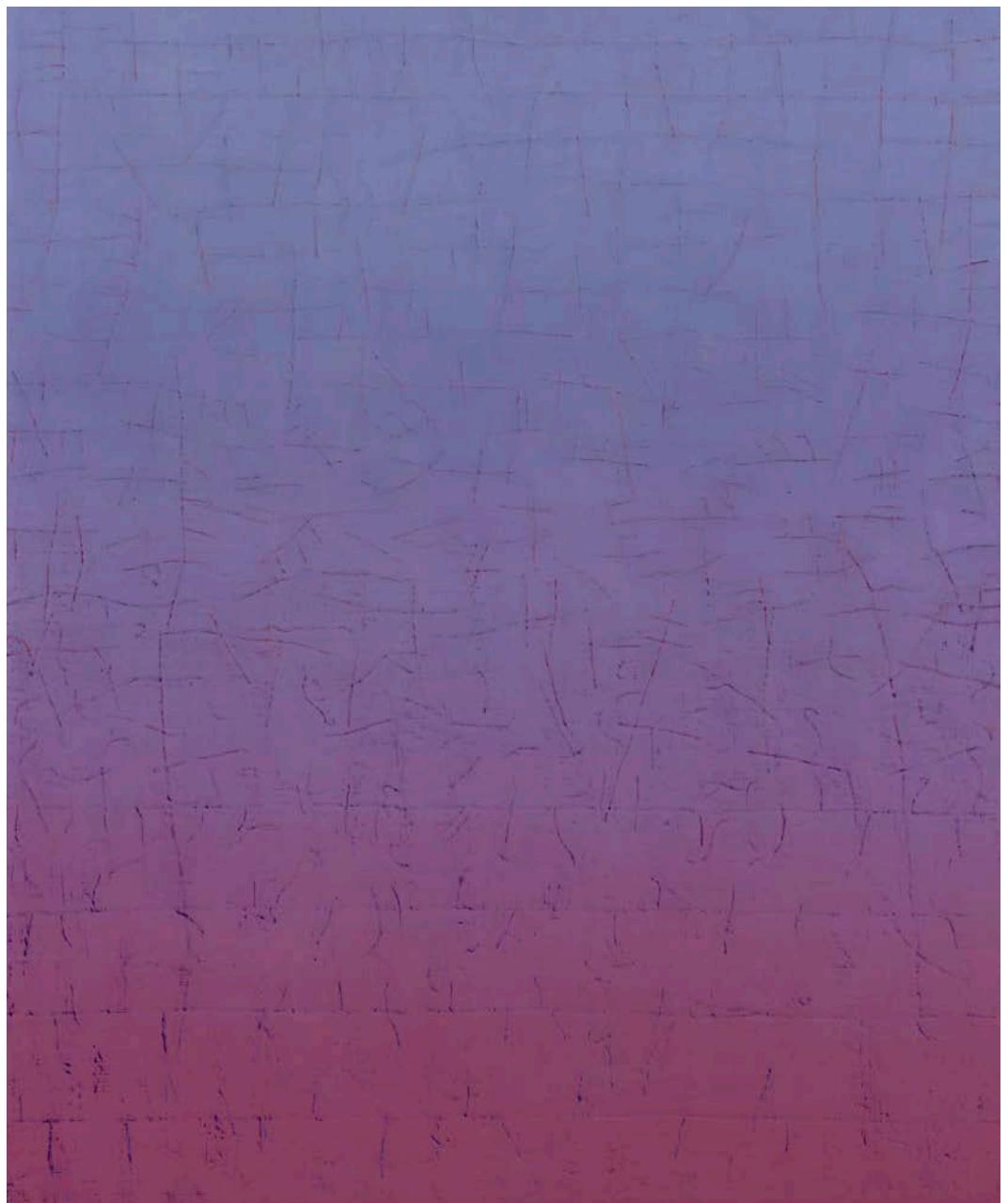


**9. Chart Three**, 2013, 60 x 60 in [152 x 152 cm]

color seems eroded away, leaving a surface reminiscent of bleached vellum or dried bone. The map-like diagram at its heart evokes remnants of an abandoned desert civilization. In an intriguing switch, the graphic elements in these paintings become the dominant feature, now standing out in their pale ground.

Susan Parker spends many hours surrounded by not much more than air and water. As a sailor and as an artist, looking into the distance or scanning the horizon gives her a highly refined awareness of the elusive and transitory effects of light. Although she does not attempt to reproduce her life on the water in a conscious way and avoids illusion, she is able to impart an essence of this experience in her paintings. Parker is also a creature of the depths, drawn to reaches of the past. Her enigmatic runes and charts, her elegantly applied layers into which artifacts are both submerged and revealed, act as a personal site of mystery and discovery. She has created a deeply soulful body of work that, while absorbed in the ephemeral, remains fully grounded in time.

Helaine Glick  
Independent Curator



**10. Blue Veil**, 2015, 72 x 60 in [183 x 152 cm]



**11. Tanbark**, 2013, 36 x 36 in [91 x 91 cm]



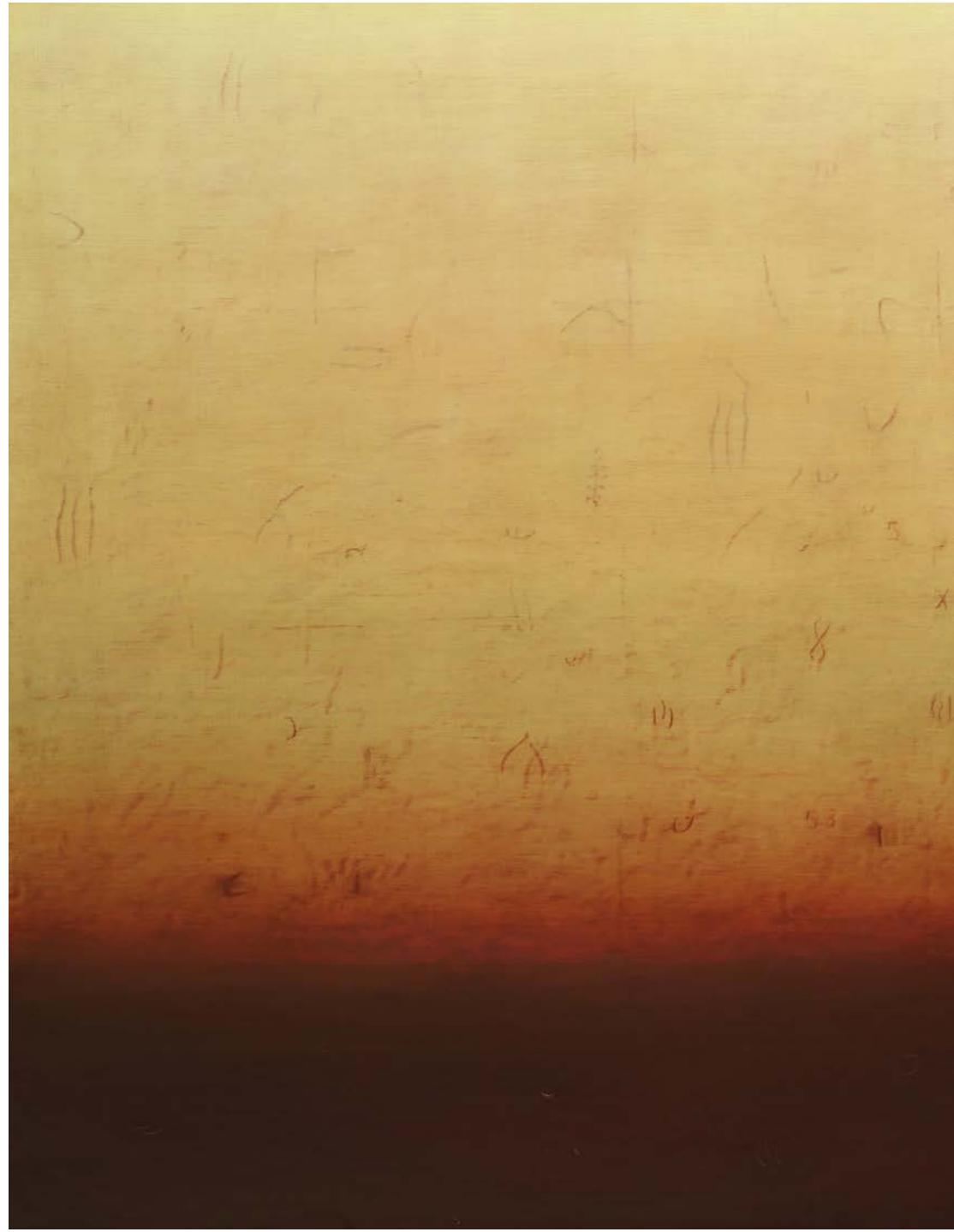
**12. Amethyst Two**, 2014, 60 x 60 in [152 x 152 cm]

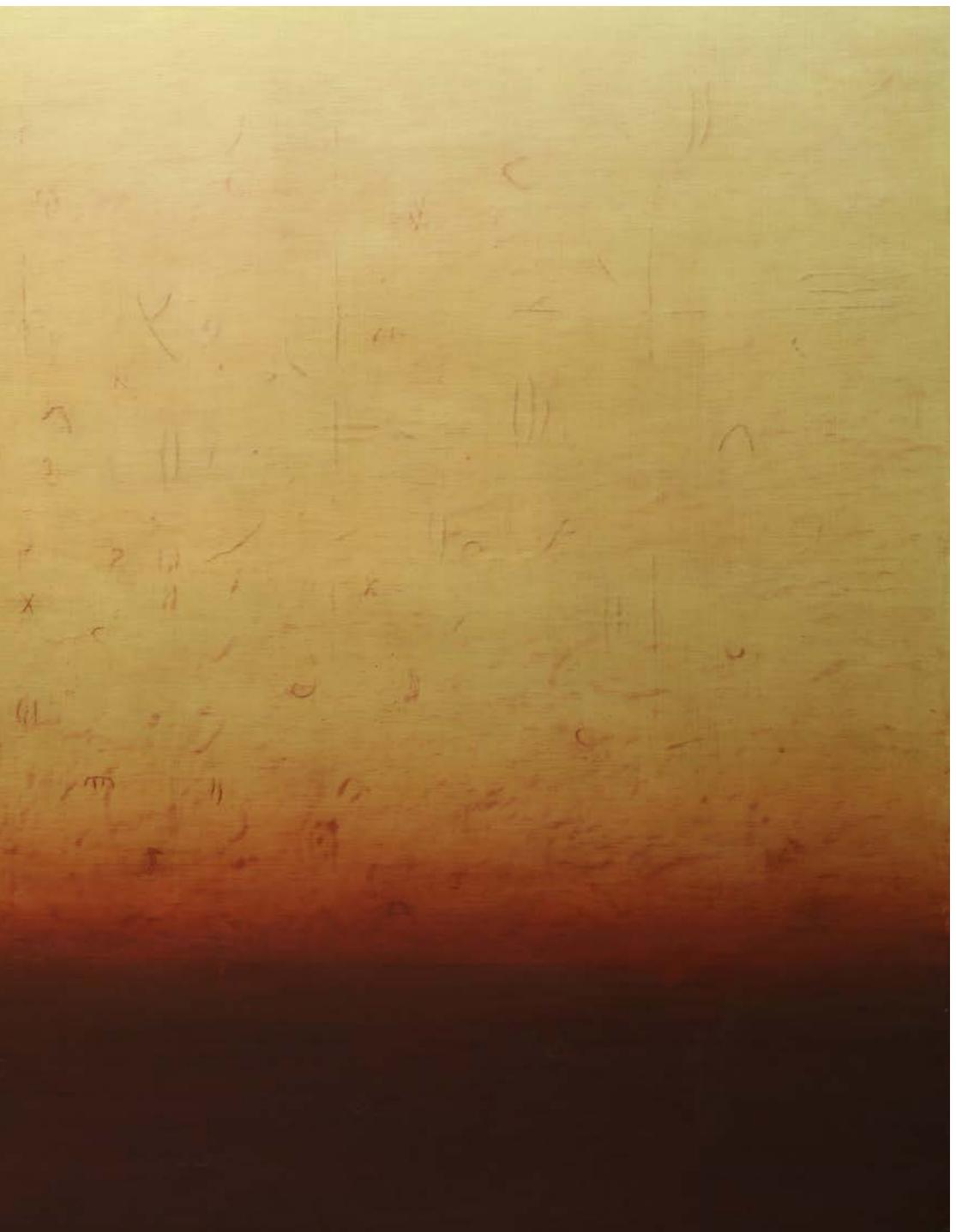


**13. Strata One**, 2011, 72 x 60 in [183 x 152 cm]



**14. Glyph One**, 2011, 48 x 48 in [122 x 122 cm]  
(next page) **15. Glyph Two**, 2011, 48 x 72 in [122 x 183 cm]







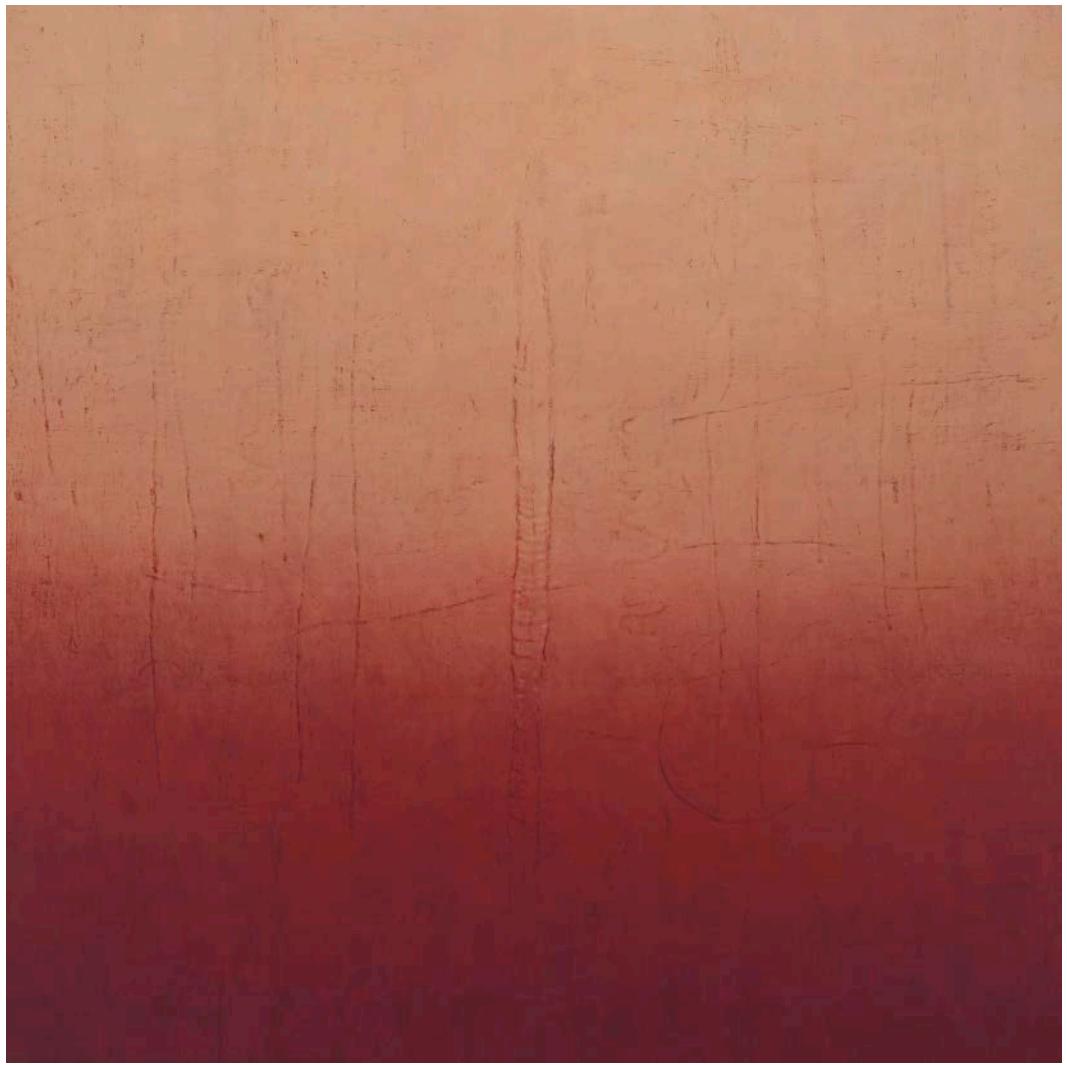
16. **Chart with Three Bridges**, 2015, 24 x 24 in [61 x 61 cm]



17. **Enigma Three**, 2015, 24 x 24 in [61 x 61 cm]

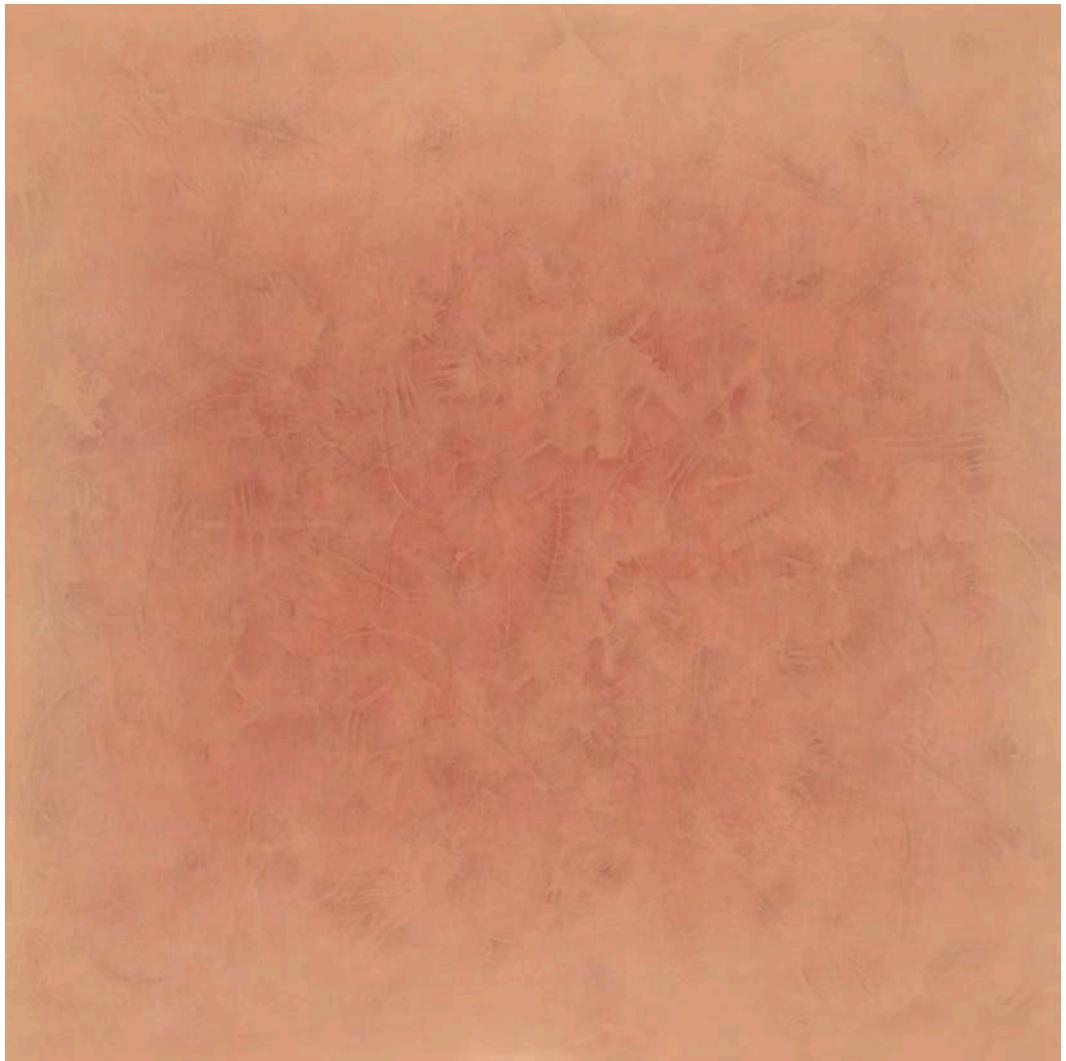


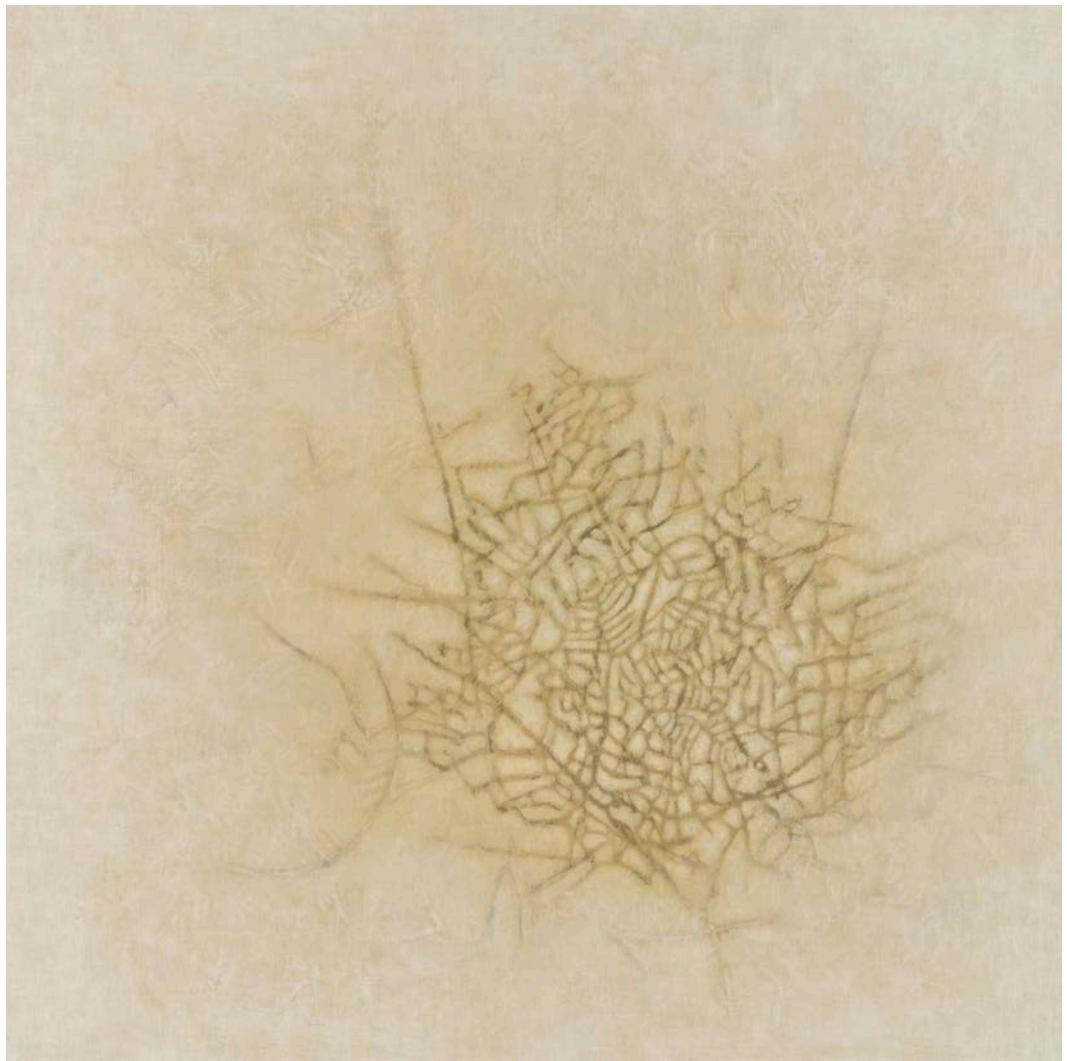
**18. Fossil One**, 2015, 48 x 48 in [122 x 122 cm]



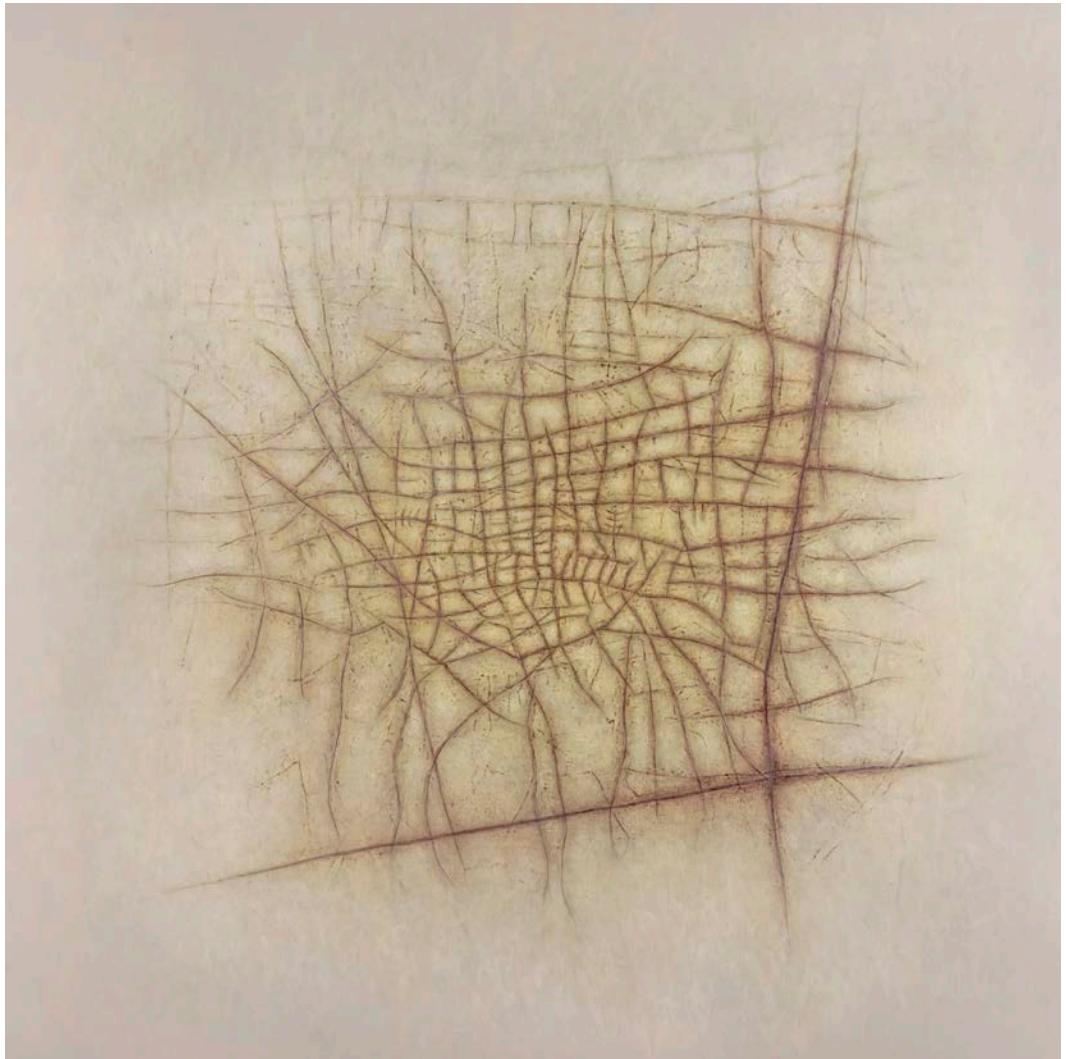
**19. Fossil Two**, 2015, 60 x 60 in [152 x 152 cm]

**20. Fossil Three**, 2015, 60 x 60 in [152 x 152 cm]





**21. Tracery Three**, 2015, 36 x 36 in [91 x 91 cm]



**22. Tracery Four**, 2015, 84 x 84 in [213 x 213 cm]

# SUSAN PARKER

Born in Attleboro, Massachusetts

## Solo Exhibitions

- 2016 "Susan Parker: Color, Form and Memory," Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, CA
- 2013 Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA
- 2006 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Artists Gallery, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA
- 2002 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Artists Gallery, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA
- 2000 Durka/Chang Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1999 J.J. Brookings Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1998 Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA  
J.J. Brookings Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1996 Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1994 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Artist's Gallery, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA
- 1990 Jeremy Stone Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
City Center, Oakland, CA
- 1989 Jeremy Stone Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1988 Colorbox Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1986 Southern Exposure Gallery, San Francisco, CA

## Group Exhibitions

- 2014 "SHIFT – Five Decades of Contemporary Painting," Monterey Museum of Art at La Mirada, Monterey, CA  
"Contemporary Heritage: Selections from the Permanent Collection," Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, CA
- 2013 "Lure: Bay Area Artists Explore the Sea," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Artists Gallery, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA  
Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA

- 2012 "Golden Gate Bridge; 75th Anniversary Exhibition," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Artists Gallery, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA  
"In Full View," Olive Hyde Gallery, Fremont, CA
- 2008 "30th Anniversary Exhibition," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Artists Gallery, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA
- 2003 "25th Anniversary Exhibition," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Artists Gallery, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA
- 2002 Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA
- 2000 Durka/Chang Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1998 J.J. Brookings Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
"Bay Area Art II," Napa Valley Fine Arts Gallery, Napa, CA  
"Toward the Millennium: Contemporary Paintings from Northern California," Monterey Museum of Art at La Mirada, Monterey, CA  
"Inaugural Exhibition," Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA  
"Twentieth Anniversary Exhibition," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Artist's Gallery, Fort Mason, CA  
Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1997 Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1996 Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1995 "Artist's Books," Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, San Jose, Costa Rica  
Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1994 "Miniatures," San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Artists Gallery, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA  
Don Soker Contemporary Art, San Francisco, CA
- 1992 "Textures of Nature," Berkeley Art Center, Berkeley, CA  
"In Support of Bay Area Artists," One Market Plaza, San Francisco, CA  
"Art from Nature: Six Installations," Sesnon Gallery, Porter College, University of California, Santa Cruz.
- 1990 "Inaugural Exhibition: Looking On / Bay Area Works," Yerba Buena Gardens Cultural Center, San Francisco, CA  
"Selected Acquisitions / Recent Work," Jeremy Stone Gallery, San Francisco, CA

- 1989     Jeremy Stone Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
          "Seven Select Bay Area Artists," College of Marin Fine Arts Gallery, Kentfield, CA
- 1985     "KQED Art Awards Exhibition," F.J. Michaels Gallery, San Francisco, CA
- 1983     "The Impolite Figure," Bannam Place Exhibition Space, San Francisco, CA
- 1982     "Spring Show," Academy of Art College, San Francisco, CA

## Publications

- Kenneth Baker – San Francisco Chronicle, June 16, 2013  
John Held Jr. – San Francisco Arts Quarterly, online, June 2013  
Open Studios Press – Studio Visit, Volume Twenty-One, May 2013  
Harry Roche – San Francisco Bay Guardian, December 1992  
Frank Cebulski – Artweek, December 1990  
"Profile" – City Life, City Center, Oakland, CA, March 1990  
Mark Van Proyen – Artweek, March 1988  
Suzanne Boettger – Artforum, October 1983

## Public Collections

- Crocker Museum, Sacramento, CA  
Monterey Museum of Art, Monterey, CA  
Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, CA  
California State University, Monterey Bay, CA  
Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, Monterey, CA  
Cypress Financial Corporation, SF, CA  
Fertility Physicians of Northern California, San Jose, CA  
Northwestern Mutual, San Francisco, CA  
Presidio Social Club, San Francisco, CA  
RPM Mortgage, Alamo, CA  
Saintsbury Winery, Napa, CA  
Shorenstein, Oakland, CA  
Triple Point Capital, Menlo Park, CA

## Awards

Eureka Fellowship Nominee, 1992

## Education

1979-82 Academy of College, San Francisco, CA

1972-75 Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts



23. **Tracery One**, 2015, 12 x 12 in [30 x 30 cm]

## PLATES

1. *Enigma One*  
Crocker Art Museum  
Gift of Barbara and William  
Hyland, Monterey CA 2013.38  
  
Plates 2, 8, 10, 18, 19 20, 21 22, 23  
are courtesy of the artist.
3. *Azimuth Three*  
Montage Health, formerly  
Community Hospital  
of the Monterey Peninsula  
Monterey CA  
  
Plates 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17  
are courtesy of private collectors.
4. *Blue Radius*  
Triton Museum of Art  
Museum Purchase  
  
**All paintings are acrylic on canvas.**
5. *Chart One*  
Montage Health, formerly  
Community Hospital  
of the Monterey Peninsula  
Monterey CA
6. *Chart Two*  
Montage Health, formerly  
Community Hospital  
of the Monterey Peninsula  
Monterey CA
7. *Chart Five/Cityfront*  
Montage Health, formerly  
Community Hospital  
of the Monterey Peninsula  
Monterey CA
9. *Chart Three*  
Montage Health, formerly  
Community Hospital  
of the Monterey Peninsula  
Monterey CA
11. *Tanbark*  
Collection of Monterey  
Museum of Art  
Gift of Barbara and William  
Hyland, Monterey CA  
2013.021



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## SUSAN PARKER

color, form and memory

All artwork by Susan Parker © Susan Parker 2016

Essay © Helaine Glick 2016

Published in conjunction with the exhibition Susan Parker: Color, Form and Memory, Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, CA, August 20 - October 23, 2016.

Helaine Glick is an independent curator and writer. She worked in the Curatorial Department of the Monterey Museum of Art, Monterey, California for fifteen years, and was its Assistant Curator for eight years. At the museum she curated multiple solo, photography, and collection-based exhibitions. She continues to focus on independent curatorial projects, and is an advisor and writer for the Winfield Gallery in Carmel, California, and a member of the Board at the Center for Photographic Arts, also in Carmel.

Photography: Scale Up Art, San Francisco CA

Graphic Design: Keli Pharaoh

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