

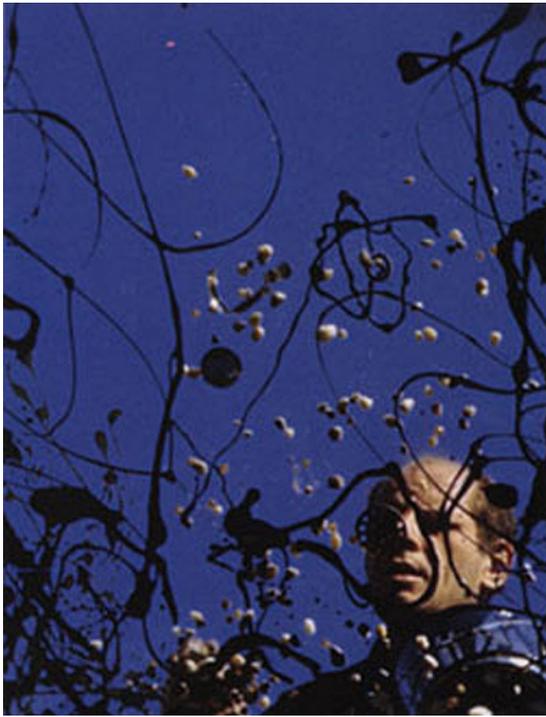
kace.



Jardin

de Nuit:

SPECTACLE INTO PAINT



Hans Namuth, film still of Jackson Pollock working on *Number 29*, 1950



KACE, *Jardin Bleu*, 2022

**...the spectacle is affirmation of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance—
Guy Debord [1]**

Art and fashion, both inherently predicated on aesthetics, share a fascination for the spectacular and sensorial interplay of rich colors, textures, and materials: These overlapping creative sparks are precisely what prompted KACE, a two-individual collective, to enter into an intersubjective exchange where each partner could bring his own aesthetic strength to the table. In their union, KACE bridge the gap between art and fashion, and ultimately transcend that gap. They thrust the viewer into a novel experience that defies simple definition.

The *Jardin de Nuit* paintings are a testament to this fated meeting of minds. They feature flowers of various sizes, composed entirely of sequins meticulously sewn to a silkscreen backing—a skill that requires hundreds of hours. In turn, these flowers appear to spring forth from thick swashes of vibrant hues that accrete into diverse bands of pigments—some matte, some glistening, as the pigments are poured through one side of the silkscreen canvas and slowly drip to the other.

Yes—a truly unheard of technique is the fruit of this fascinating duo and one almost has to see it to believe it.

In 1950, Hans Namuth famously filmed Jackson Pollock while painting. His iconic stills of Pollock have permeated the collective consciousness and immediately come to mind anytime one encounters this “drip technique” he pioneered. At one point, Namuth ingeniously positioned himself below a piece of glass that Pollock was painting on. Looking up, he captured a moment that phenomenologically speaks to the act of the painting itself, while it anticipates the process evolved by KACE: the paint, liquid, following the pull of its lyrical gravity, in drubs and drabs, forms droplets, filaments, lines, and blobs. Once gravity did its job, KACE (unlike Pollock who stopped there), intervene actively, and with squeegees, brushes and other tools, help the paint go through one more level to transpire down through the silkscreen membrane and form various accretions of paint on the *other* side—which will become the final work.

Simply imagine Jackson Pollock painting from the back of his canvases, to see what happens as the paint seeps through his porous canvas. Better yet: imagine a collaboration between Pollock and Andy Warhol, where Warhol provides vast silkscreens, and then the two,

[1]Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit, MI: Black & Red, 2016), 10..



Left
KACE,
Jardin Coloré, 2022

Right
Andy Warhol,
Flowers, 1964
The Museum of Modern Art

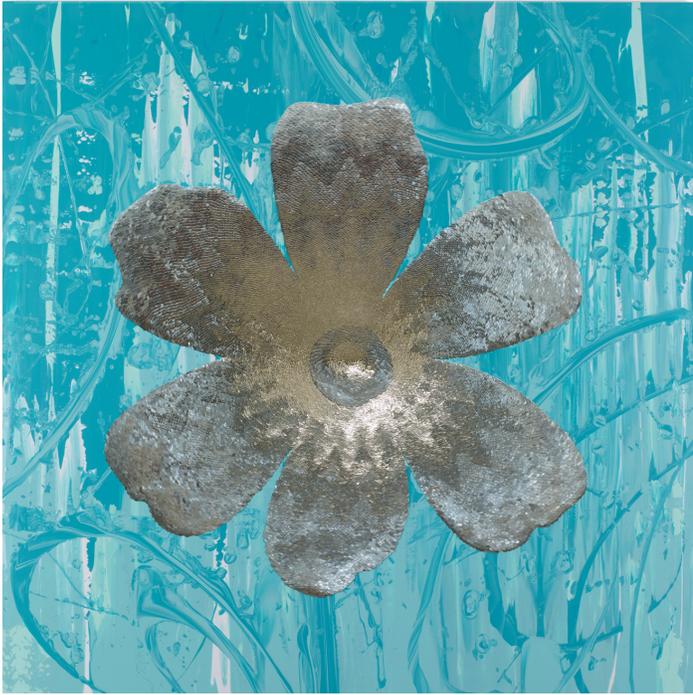
like seasoned chefs, go at it from each side of the surface, to see what happens. This unique pictorial accord, this remarkable dual technical prowess, developed by KACE, is nothing short of spectacular.

Here, the choice to turn a medium (silkscreen) into a support, was a mere stroke of genius: porous, though resilient, the very fine mesh of this beautiful fabric, enables KACE to give life to this toing-and-froing, this animated exchange, between one side of the canvas and the other. While the hand-sewn, blossoming, sequin-made flowers draw upon the ornate beauty of traditional Indian garments, the application of paint recalls Abstract Expressionist Action painting. The sum total, however, transcends the confines of art history and extends into the realm of post-Pop, post-historical imagery.

Indeed, taking our analogy of Pollock and Warhol further, we see how the cross-semination between Abstract Expressionism and Pop is visible, palpable even, in paintings such as *Jardin Coloré*.

In this work, a bouquet of vivid hues—from lavender to lush violet, salmon to crimson red, and blush to hot pink—stand against a moody forest of dark green, gestural swipes. While the flowers are situated some distance apart, they are pulled together by the sort of deep color saturation that is realistically found only in the fullness of the springtime in our dreams. With their playful vitality and graphic outlines standing against an expressive backdrop, they clearly nod to the *Flowers* series Warhol began in 1964, based on a photograph of hibiscus flowers by Patricia Caulfield.

Nevertheless, where Warhol employed the silkscreening process for its speed and ease in reproducing images—creating nearly 900 *Flowers* in total—KACE are drawn to the material for precisely the opposite reasons. KACE take silkscreen, a medium synonymous with reproducibility, and turn it on its head: in each painting they craft an utterly irreproducible composition. Where Warhol prints, KACE imprint. For Warhol, the silkscreen is a means to an end. With KACE, it becomes the end in itself.



KACE juxtapose slow, meticulous craftsmanship with intrepid, rapid painting, to create distinctive visual phenomena. In *Jardin Avec Tiffany*, for example, turquoise and sky-blue flow through one another with tranquil lyricism, interrupted only by streaks of white paint that give the impression of light peeking through the cracks of a door. These colors applied with bravado and confidence of hand, immediately call to mind the unforgettable, ever soothing, trademark color of Tiffany & Co. boxes. One might get lost, awash in this sea of blue, were it not for the confrontational cogency of the silver flower that dominates the center of the canvas. Commanding attention like a hypnotic talisman, the scintillating flower appears to hover in front of, or above the azure background. From a distance, the flower appears to soar above the realm of gravity; it seems to have taken off from us, leaving us within our physical earth-bound limits, while orbiting into some unnamable fourth dimensional zone.

The *Jardin de Nuit* paintings too, tease out a different kind of relationship—namely the one between recto and verso. The backs of paintings are traditionally given little concern. A beautiful and noteworthy exception is Jasper John's

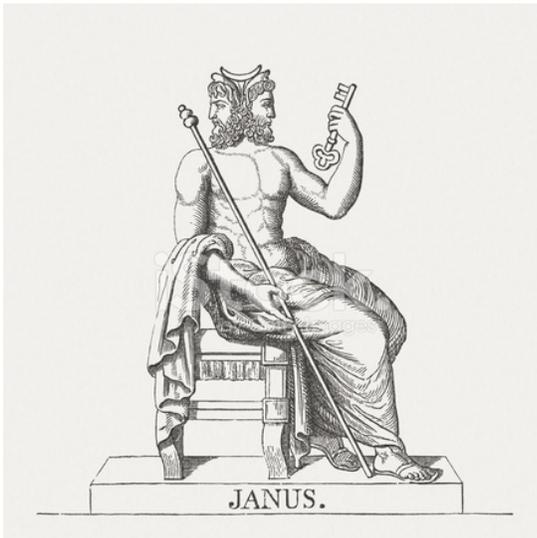
Canvas, in which the back became the front. Other artists, such as Sigmar Polke and Marcel Duchamp, have created artworks meant to be experienced from two sides. Polke's double-sided paintings of acrylic on resin explore the ephemeral, ghost-like nature of the gesture that can be traced from front to back. Likewise, Duchamp's masterpiece, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, more commonly

Left
KACE,
Jardin Avec Tiffany, 2022

Below
Jasper Johns,
Canvas, 1956
Philadelphia Museum of Art

referred to as *The Large Glass*, co-opts the translucency of glass to express its central narrative, apparent from whichever side you gaze. Yet, once again, KACE seem to engage in an art historical dialogue, only to distinguish themselves from their predecessors: In their technique of painting from both sides, KACE are not chiefly driven by transparency or ephemerality, but continuity and duality.





Engraving of the Roman god, Janus

They are interested in transpiercing—as the paint is applied from the recto and seeps through the silk membrane in an organic way to become visible and apprehensible from the other side.

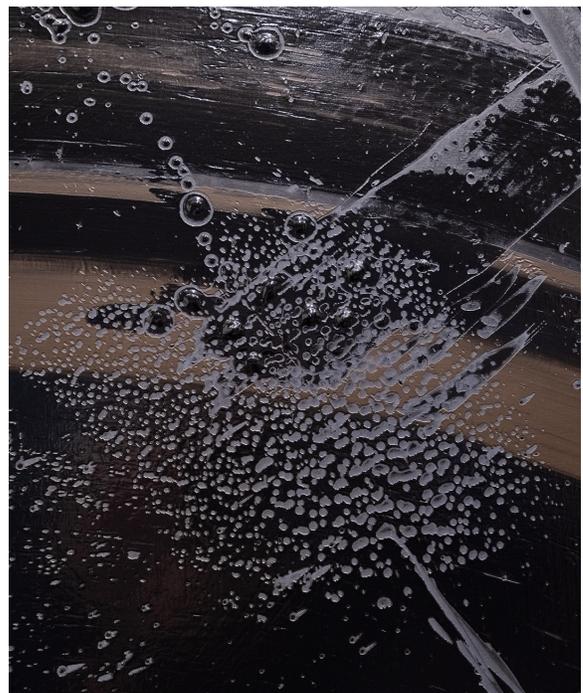
Their technique, where paint passes from one side of the silkscreen to the other, results in an artwork that is both singular and doubled. For, while their spirited exchange results in only one painting, and its two sides remain inextricable from one another, each side holds its own autonomous essence. Like the two-headed Roman god of transitions and passages, Janus, who represents the meeting point of life's symbolic dualities—life/death, light/dark, war/peace, past/future—the *Jardin de Nuit* paintings exist at the border of opposing forces, on and within the silkscreen surface that defines the border, and that is the border between to sides. Furthermore, we can look at Janus, a deity in whom two perspectives and opposites coalesce, as an appropriate symbol for KACE's intuitive, fluid approach to collaboration in both visualization and execution. As Khan poetically puts it, “it’s my hands, his eyes, his hands, and my eyes.”

In fact, it could be said that the *Jardin de Nuit* series chiefly seeks to welcome and cultivate a nexus of fascinating contradictions.

This is embedded in the very metaphor that gives the series its title—a robust collection of flora thriving in the night. Many areas of the paintings appear thin and glossy, other areas feature bold swaths of paint that seem to slowly trickle down the canvas and coalesce into viscous, alluring accretions of matter.

“It’s my hands, his eyes, his hands, and my eyes.”

Closely inspecting a work like *Jardin Noir*, one notices how certain zones even seem as if they have been subject to some kind of chemical reaction, bubbling up and freckling over to reveal a compounded multilayered film of underpaint. The light ricocheting off the canvas and the brilliance emanating from it, are what makes these surfaces a marvel to behold.



Detail from *Jardin Noir*, 2022

There is perhaps no painting that exemplifies the resplendent beauty of the *Jardin de Nuit* series better than *Jardin Chrome*. Glowing with some metallic iridescent sheen, this work packs a rush of visual information that quickly overwhelms our senses. The surface's kaleidoscopic ability to bend light fractally results in a complete dissolution of the boundaries between color, texture, and form. As the eye cannot confidently discern the nature of the work's surface, which continues to morph like a mirage in the desert, the viewer feels irresistibly drawn to the sense of touch. We feel a sudden and overwhelming desire to run our hands across the textured surface and physically, haptically absorb the painting, in a swift corporeal scoop. Indeed, KACE's chrome works challenge the traditional definitions of painting by confounding the gaze. Like Rudolf Stingel's aluminum foil paintings, their reflective sheen overrides the modernist separation between two and three dimensionality to emphasize the theatrical and experiential qualities of the artwork—indeed again, morphing into the spectacle.

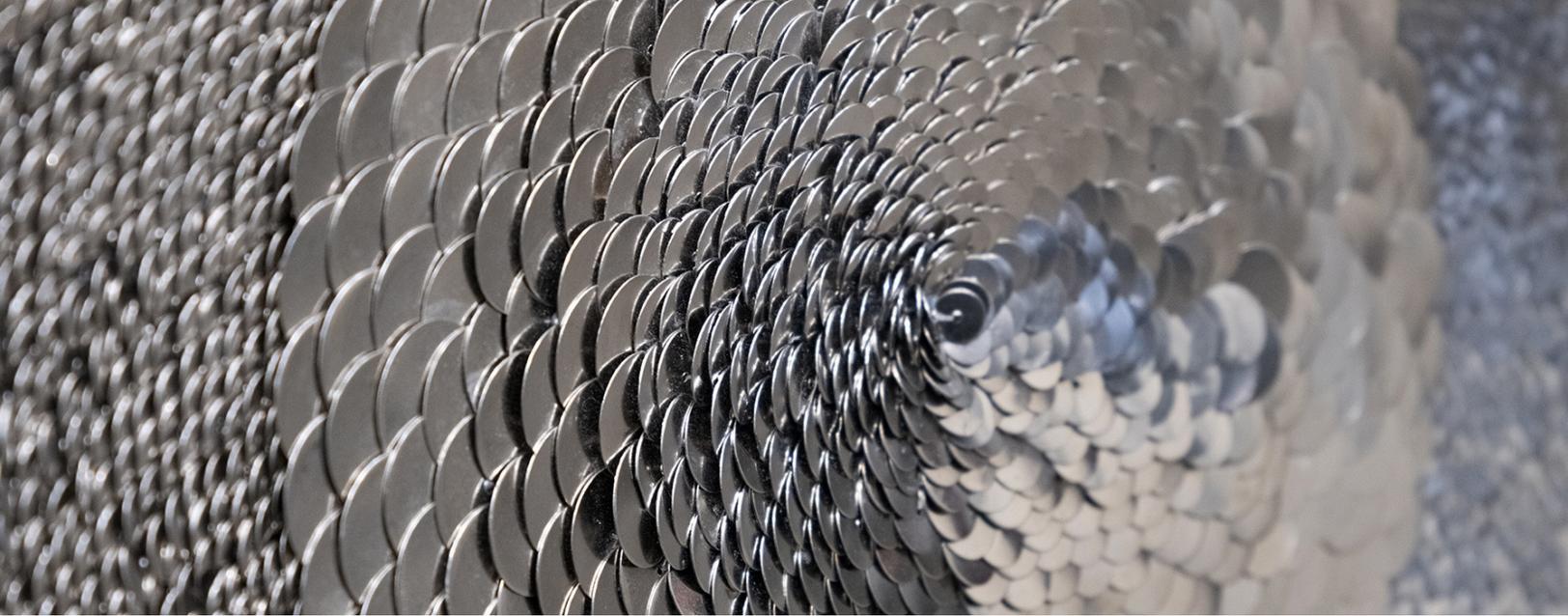
The intense sensations of movement found within *Jardin de Nuit* can be attributed to the paintings' core three-dimensional feature—its sequins. Light beams off the thousands of small, circular sequins affixed to the silkscreen to create a centrifugal force that pulls you towards the core of each flower. This is manufactured by the careful placement of the sequins in a circular pattern that grows ever-tighter as it approaches center, like a figure skater whose rotations grow faster in speed as they curl in with momentum. Without regarding these works at close range, it is hard to appreciate just how many singular sequins have to work in unison to achieve such a magical, visual simulacrum.



Above
KACE,
Jardin Chrome, 2022

Below
Rudolf Stingel, *Untitled*, 2002





Detail from *Jardin Avec Tiffany*, 2022

Breathtakingly uplifting adornments, sequins remain indispensable in the worlds of fashion and costume design. Their importance in these industries was showcased in *Manus x Machina*, The Costume Institute's landmark exhibition from 2016 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This event marked an infrequent instance in which artistic audiences were given the opportunity to appreciate and explore the intersections and interdisciplinary relationship of art and fashion. In fact, while shiny, fashionable materials like crystals and glitter are

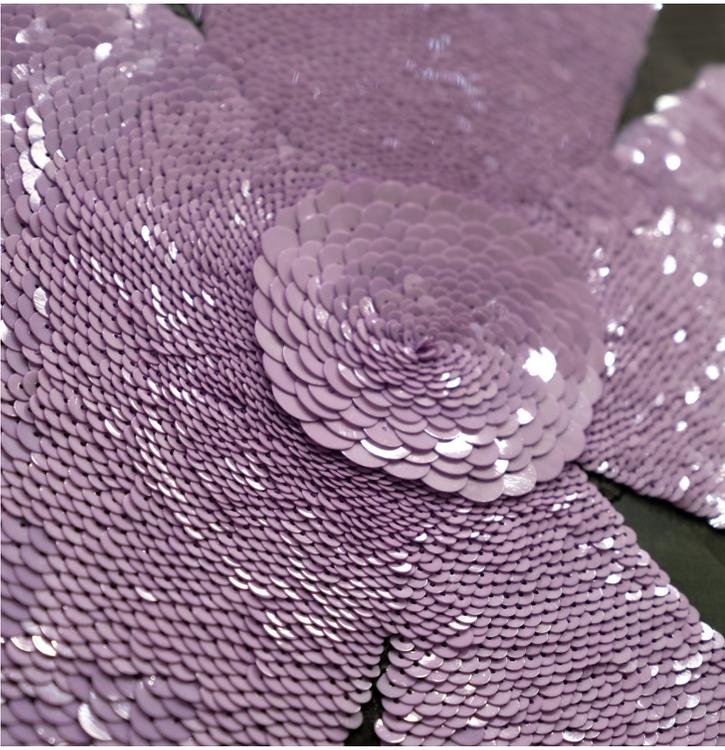
emotional and symbolical power as did the nude upon the sensitiveness of the old masters.”[2] His cohort, Gino Severini, thus began using sequins to demonstrate how dancers' dresses, quite literally, reflected their dynamic movements through space in paintings like *Dynamic Hieroglyphic of the Bal Tabarin* (1912) and *Blue Dancer* (1912). For KACE, sequins not only recall the luxury and importance of sequins in contemporary fashion, but also mirror the viewer's movements as the walk around the painting. KACE use these sequins as a

"It's a dance... it's a ballet."

commonly found in contemporary artworks by the likes of Damien Hirst or David Altmejd—sequins are still rarely encountered. To find a striking precedent for KACE's usage of these dazzlingly underutilized elements we must look back to a movement of the twentieth century avant-garde: Italian Futurism. Futurism was an artistic movement primarily concerned with action, speed, and functionality, many futurists also sought to extend their utopic reimagining of color and form in the realm of fashion. Half a century before Warhol, Umberto Boccioni, one of the leading members of Futurism, declared: "the harmony of the lines and folds of modern dress works upon our sensitiveness with the same

complement and contrast to the expression of painting. Together, the paint and sequins seem to be constantly negotiating a balance between movement and stasis. This is namely due to the fact that while the sequins are carefully arranged and placed, the broad strokes are dictated entirely by chance—their techniques landing somewhere between choreography and improvisation. Fittingly, in speaking to their methods the pair agree, "it's a dance... it's a ballet."

[2]Umberto Boccioni, "Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto (1910)" in *Futurist Manifestos*, (New York, Viking Press, 1973), 29 - 31.



Detail from *Jardin Coloré*



Gino Severini,
Dynamic Hieroglyphic of the Bal Tabarin, 1912
The Museum of Modern Art

KACE emphasize form and materiality to generate intense sensory experiences, masterfully elevated through paradoxes that lead their audience around in circles. Their works draw upon preconceived and coincidental connections alike, as they seek to revise art history or, perhaps, reinvent it. They reconcile the conscious process of craftsmanship with chance and the performative theatricality of abstraction—and by doing so, expose the profound interdependency between light and motion, sight and touch. In *Jardin de Nuit*, art and fashion, Pop and Abstract Expressionism, figure and ground, color and form, movement and stasis come together and explode in a beautiful and utterly unforeseen new reality. In this groundbreaking body of work, contradictions flourish into a unique species of flowers capable of blooming even in the dark.

Fittingly, it remains impossible to give a précis of KACE's efforts, without circling back to where we began—at the crossroads of aesthetics and spectacle. Our epigraph, and all of Guy Debord's aphorisms for that matter, were presented as a full critique of the spectacle's function in modern society. Debord decried the reality that images had come to replace human interaction—and yet, in KACE's work we see how beautifully poetic these visual exchanges can be: it is precisely the image of KACE's spectacular colors and dazzlingly detailed flowers, which allow us to move through history and commune with Pollock, Warhol, Stiegel, Severini, and so many others. In the spectacle of their work we give ourselves over to seductive beauty our senses relish in and our minds can only continue to theorize.

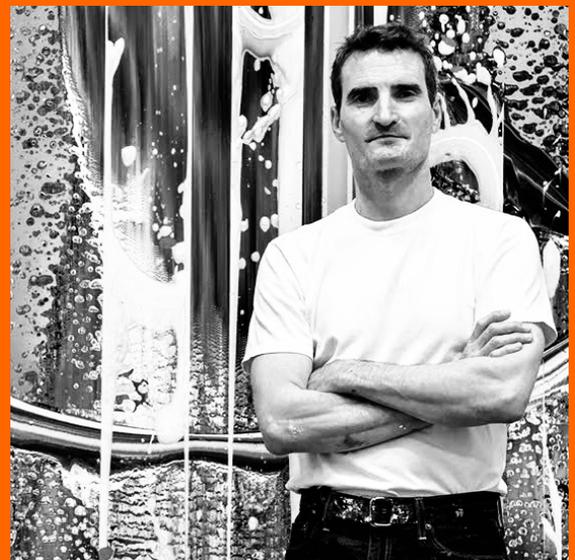
TEXT BY JOACHIM PISSARRO

ABOUT

Renowned designer Naeem Khan was born and raised in Mumbai. From an early age, Khan was immersed in the richness of his culture and cultivated an artistic eye: Third in a dynasty of designers, he inherited and preserved the generational knowledge of his father and grandfather, who crafted lavish garments for the Indian royal families. In his teens, however, Khan would move to New York City to forge his own path in fashion world. There, during his years as an apprentice to Halston, Khan nurtured his own artistic direction and gained an appreciation for minimalist design. Before long, Khan was intimately familiar with Andy Warhol and the other creatives who frequented The Factory. An elegant ode to his Eastern and Western influences — in 2003, Khan launched his eponymous line, with pieces worn by First Lady Michelle Obama, Queen Noor of Jordan, Duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton, Beyoncé, Jennifer Lopez, Taylor Swift, and others.



New York based artist Stanley Casselman famously caught Jerry Saltz's attention back in 2012, when he responded to Saltz's challenge for a "faux Richter." The critic, who posed the challenge with the expectation of failure, was stunned by Casselman's uncanny mastery of technique—plainly conceding, "he is a practiced artist who knows how to handle paint." Indeed, in his own mesmerizingly layered paintings, Casselman succeeds at navigating the polarities of control and chance, while expanding upon the spiritual essences of abstraction. His visually opulent compositions, made using a "flat bar spreader," muse upon the raw, undefinable qualities of the human condition.



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