

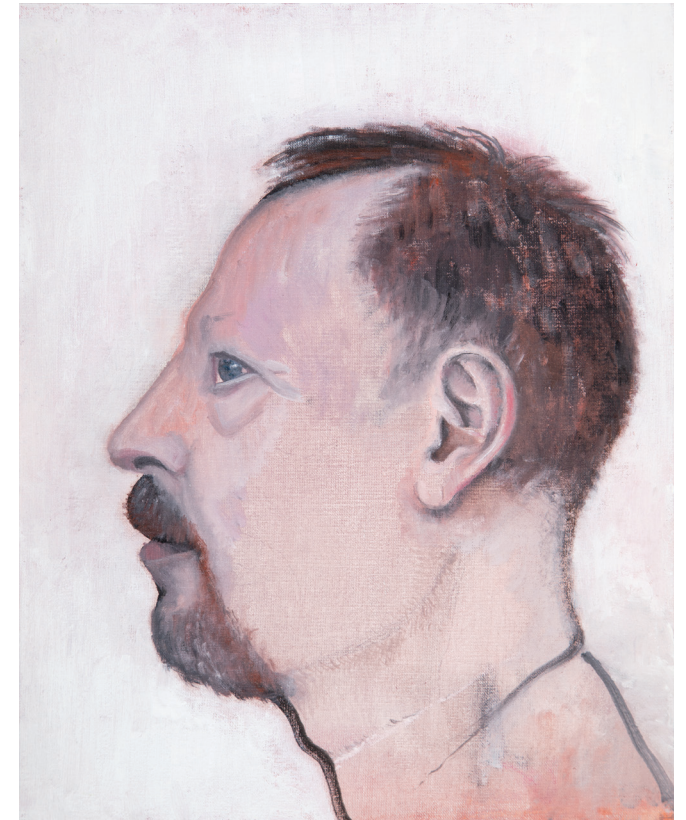
HAUSER & WIRTH

# GUILLERMO KUITCA

PINTURA SIN MUROS

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Self portrait, 2022, Oil on canvas, 30 × 24 cm / 11 ¾ × 9 ½ in

Born in 1961 in Buenos Aires, where he continues to live and work, Argentine artist Guillermo Kuitca draws on a range of iconography, including architectural plans, maps, theaters, musical scores and domestic spaces to produce an oeuvre that explores themes of history, memory, structured absence, sound and silence and the tension between the empirical and abstract. Shifting from gestural mark-making to linear precision, Kuitca's work mines varied aesthetic styles and histories, and in the latter half of his career, he has achieved significant acclaim for his deployment of a unique cubistoid style that masterfully reconciles abstraction with an illusionist form of figuration.

Exhibiting his first paintings at the age of thirteen at Lirloy Gallery in Buenos Aires, Kuitca quickly expanded his artistic practice by also studying drawing and theater direction. Early paintings from the 1980s incorporated theater imagery informed by his experience in theater production and often explored themes of history, memory, migration and domestic and communal spaces. Kuitca later began to integrate architectural and cartographic subjects into his oeuvre. Having established himself as a leading figure in the Buenos Aires art scene, in 1991—the same year that he founded Beca Kuitca, a studio art residency program for young and emerging artists—he staged his first solo museum exhibition in the United States, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. A year later—the first Argentine artist ever invited to exhibit at documenta in Kassel, Germany—he achieved further renown with his haunting installation of 20 mattresses.

The cubistoid style that Kuitca developed, and that would emerge as the artist's distinct visual language, first appeared in his 'Desenlace' series, which he presented at the Argentine Pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale. Recalling a cubist aesthetic and eschewing figurative references, the segmented forms and angular patterns of the compositions that he developed in this series have continued to act as organizing principles in his work, and have recurred throughout his oeuvre ever since.

Recent major solo exhibitions include the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Atchugarry, Uruguay (2023); Kunsthaus Pasquart, Switzerland (2017); Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, Brazil (2014); The Drawing Center, New York (2012); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C. (2010); and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2010).

Heterogeneity stimulates engagement with Guillermo Kuitca's new work. The paintings are executed in a range of sizes that shift dramatically from large vertical formats to more intimate horizontal works. The multiplicity of scales coincides with an equally varied display of subject matter, which is particularly unexpected when one learns that all of the works were completed over the course of one year and subsequently represent a singular period of intense production.

Kuitca is known for working serially and revealing one visual or symbolic theme at a time. The decision to pursue multiple subjects concurrently is unusual, as is his inclusion of imagery developed during previous periods. One senses the artist embracing an historicizing, or 'bird's eye,' view of this practice, as he deliberately chooses to engage simultaneously with architectural house plans, cubistoid patterning, maps and depictions of enclosed interiors. Looking further, to the artist's treatment of these subjects, one can recognize how these paintings are quite distinct from their predecessors, specifically in terms of how the artist is engaging his medium. Their chromatic pitch is higher than in previous bodies of work, revealing a greater saturation of color, and their application of paint looser in several paintings and overtly drier in others. These treatments feel fresh within his oeuvre. New themes additionally come to the fore upon closer observation. Overall, instead of confusing the eye, the artist's jumps in scale and known subject matter become tools for differentiation and they encourage attuned looking.

In reviewing the history of the artist's diverse production, which is now in its fifth decade, one also learns that he has, in fact, repeatedly circled back and engaged with previously developed imagery. New subjects and forms have been introduced at specific junctures, which are then folded into a practice in which they often later reappear. One comes to identify the artist's subject matter as a repertoire that can be continually reactivated in new contexts—similar to a sequence of musical notes or a series of gestures within dance. Cyclical returns to established themes become understood as a distinct characteristic of Kuitca's trajectory.

Landscapes appears in a number of works for the first time, in the form of snow-covered mountains, lush green fields, and waves crashing against a rocky coast. While these landscapes could reference many different geographical locations, they distinctly recall areas of the artist's native Argentina—specifically the Andes Mountains, the fertile fields of the Pampas, and the coast of nearby Uruguay. Such direct references to his local context are unprecedented within the artist's work and are a surprising development.

Superimpositions also occur in provocative ways throughout these paintings, as Kuitca's landscapes each include a house plan layered onto it or disintegrating into it. The plan in the painting with mountains (p. 30) unexpectedly includes a wrecking ball, which is shown breaking apart the linear interpretations of walls and furniture. Within one of the gray-blue seascapes (p. 27), the architectural drawing is missing an entrance, disconcertingly delineating a completely inaccessible home. Symbolically, these



Fig. 1. House Plan with Tear Drops, 1989, Acrylic on canvas, 201 × 160 cm / 79 × 63 in. Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Gift of Mary and John Pappajohn, 2010. Courtesy of Walker Art Center

works come to represent interior and exterior spaces merging, becoming unified and, existentially, the same.

House plans have appeared in Kuitca's oeuvre since the mid-1980s and act as signifiers of family units and domestic spheres. In works such as 'House Plan with Tear Drops' (1989, fig. 1), it takes on a figurative role, rendered with gigantic, exaggerated tears hanging downward from its vertically positioned form. In some earlier paintings, the house plans are made of thorns or bones. The delicate lines of the house plans in the new works make them feel, with their apparent fragility and precariousness, quite different from the previous iterations.



Two large works embed house plans within cubistoid spatial articulations—one in which pinks and reds dominate (p. 33), and the other painted in deep grays (p. 34). Each includes angular, linear patterning and shading, nodding to the modernist forms developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, which Kuitca has further developed into viral-like expanses of color and form. His cubistoid investigations first appeared in 2007, in works such as ‘Desenlace III’ (fig. 3), which formed part of a suite of paintings exhibited at that year’s Venice Biennale, where the artist represented Argentina. A completely unexpected quotation from art history at the time, this expansive formal subject has since become a recurring thematic within the artist’s work.

In one of the large paintings (p. 33), the incisive diagonal lines of these faceted forms become mounts for black crows. The lines overlap or become equivalent to those of the work’s house plan, confusing the viewer’s reading of these concurrently abstract and representational elements. The similarly structured large gray painting (p. 34) is more softly rendered, with veiled layers added to build up volumetric folds. These folds appear primarily contained within the boundary of the house plan, which includes more fully enunciated household furniture.

Cubistoid angles become equivalent to mountain ranges in two recent map paintings (pp. 26, 42), taking Kuitca further into a subject that he has engaged with for several decades. Like house plans, maps represent codified visual languages—a standardized form of visual communication that the artist chooses to manipulate.



Fig. 2. Odessa, 1987, Acrylic on canvas, 137 × 96.5 cm / 53 7/8 × 38 in. Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. Courtesy of Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam





Fig. 3. Desenlace III, 2007, Oil on canvas, diptych 195 × 119 and 195 × 214 cm / 76 ¾ × 46 ⅞ and 76 ¾ × 84 ¼ in.  
Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zurich

'Odessa' (1987, fig. 2) is an early example of his work in this genre, which quickly grew to involve maps referencing diverse national contexts. Two distinct treatments emerged: one in which Kuitca would fully reproduce a chosen map, the other where the information included would be confused through repetition of town names or their reinvention within a given context. The artist famously began to place maps on custom-made mattresses, as in the 'Untitled' installation he produced for documenta IX in 1992. Around 2008, town names began to disappear, becoming blurred, replaced by stand-in graphic elements or removed altogether. The current exhibition includes a particularly lyrical map painting (p. 26) devoid of any implied textual information, with only red and black lines, which would traditionally identify roads, floating and dancing across a yellow and gray ground of angled mountains.

At the center of a large black painting (p. 24), a mountain-like cubistoid structure appears. The painting also includes a series of scattered beds and divans painted in red, orange and white. Within the group of new works, this black painting evidences the greatest amount of spatial depth, as if the objects have been illuminated within a dark void. This type of domestic disorder appears in three additional paintings that also present furniture in disarray, but within enclosed spaces. One is a medium-sized work executed on a ground of bright yellow (p. 29). Black lines structure a three-dimensional space, with three perspectival walls facing the viewer and surrounding a floor scattered with beds, tables, chairs and a small fire. Two doorways can be identified at the back of this vast space, half



Fig. 4. Seven Last Songs, 1986, Acrylic on canvas, 141.5 × 226 cm / 55 ¾ × 89 in.  
Collection of MALBA, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires

of which appears enshrouded in smoke. A similar composition is presented in a painting with a gray floor and white walls (p. 45). A house plan droops across the entire space and rudimentary sketches of beds, chairs and tables float within the scene or appear drawn on its light walls. These spaces recall paintings of theater interiors that dominated the artist's early career, of which 'Seven Last Songs' (1986, fig. 4) is one enigmatic example. Kuitca specifically identifies the interiors represented in these new paintings as depicting bedrooms, not theaters, which charges their disorder with psychological implications and evocations of the unconscious, as spaces encountered during sleep. In the work 'In this house that is everywhere, the heart is the most important room' (2023, p. 37), heaps of bedroom furniture appear and disappear under a deluge of black lines and opaque smudges, amplifying the work's chaotic visual complexity.

One of these cavernous bedrooms is the context for the sole work in the exhibition that contains a human form (p. 28). Medium in scale and painted in gentle grays, pinks and purples, it presents a low bed or mattress occupied by a sleeping figure. Only a head of black hair is visible, snugly poking out from



under a striped blanket. The subject is depicted from afar and appears tiny within the room, which is devoid of any additional furniture. Instead, the space is engulfed by gigantic shadows that emanate from the head and sides of this slumbering protagonist, recalling Francisco Goya's etching 'The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters' (1797 – 1799). One cannot help but read this fantastical scene as representing an externalization of the figure's subconscious as his or her dreams are projected outward into the domestic interior.

Beds, as sites of sleep, sex, death and dreaming, have played a significant role within the artist's oeuvre, consistently reappearing since his very first exhibited works in 1982. Kuitca engaged beds three-dimensionally in wall and floor installations during the 1990s—a period in which this object became highly identified with his practice (figs. 5, 6). Most often single beds, these forms take on prominent, figurative roles within several smaller paintings included in this exhibition. In the largest of these (p. 39), a spare single bed with a tan blanket sharply folded down along its top edge hangs from a central point in the ceiling of a large room, serving as a strange chandelier. Its iconic, static character is accentuated by the disorder of the furniture outlined in black on the gray floor below. In the smallest painting included in the exhibition (p. 38), a single, green-blanketed bed is treated in an equally significant manner. It is seen from above, as if the viewer is peering downward, within a floor plan composition that is filled with expressive, brown and gray brushwork. A pale gray desk can be identified at the bottom right and, intriguingly, the walls of the floor plan coincide with the wooden frame of the physical painting.



Fig. 5. Untitled, 1992, 20 wooden beds, 20 cotton mattresses, buttons, acrylic paint and marker pen, each bed: 37.5 × 58.5 × 118 cm. Tate, Purchased with assistance from the Latin American Acquisitions Committee and the Estate of Tom Bendhem 2004. Photo: © Tate 2020 (Oliver Cowling)

Fig. 6. Detail of Untitled, 1992



A small orange and white painting (p. 23) establishes a similar relationship between the walls identified in a floor plan and the physical edges of the painting. Here, a slight gap is created between black lines representing walls and the exposed edges of the canvas. Geometries—in the forms of the vertical rectangles of beds and desks, the squares and circles of stovetop burners and the curves of toilet covers and a bathtub—each play off the dominant horizontal rectangle of the painting's stretched canvas. These forms-as-furniture move in and out of visual definition, with the painting offering a diverse range of material applications, from opaque areas with thick brushwork to scratch-like marks or translucent drips. What this potent painting cleverly illuminates is how the artist sets up a comparison between the space depicted and the possibilities of painting itself. This enclosed and perhaps uncomfortable 'room of one's own' presents itself as a space of boundless aesthetic opportunity. While such an austere room, outfitted with only the most basic elements, might initially appear to provide limited inspiration, here it is articulated as a provocative context for the imagination. Even within such a spare space, one's imagination can be taken anywhere and, in fact, everywhere. Similarly, Kuitca reminds us, the space of painting, which after centuries still involves the same basic elements of canvas, stretcher, brush and paint, continues to offer limitless imaginative possibilities. Painting has no walls.



Untitled  
2022  
Oil on canvas  
60 × 80 cm / 23 5/8 × 31 1/2 in





Untitled  
2022  
Oil on canvas  
196 x 204 cm / 77 1/8 x 80 3/8 in







Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
120 x 100 cm / 47 ¼ x 39 ¾ in



Pintura sin muros  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
80 x 90 cm / 31 ½ x 35 ¾ in





Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
90 × 80 cm / 35 3/8 × 31 1/2 in



Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
80 × 90 cm / 31 1/2 × 35 3/8 in





Pintura sin muros  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
195 x 171 cm / 76 3/4 x 67 3/8 in





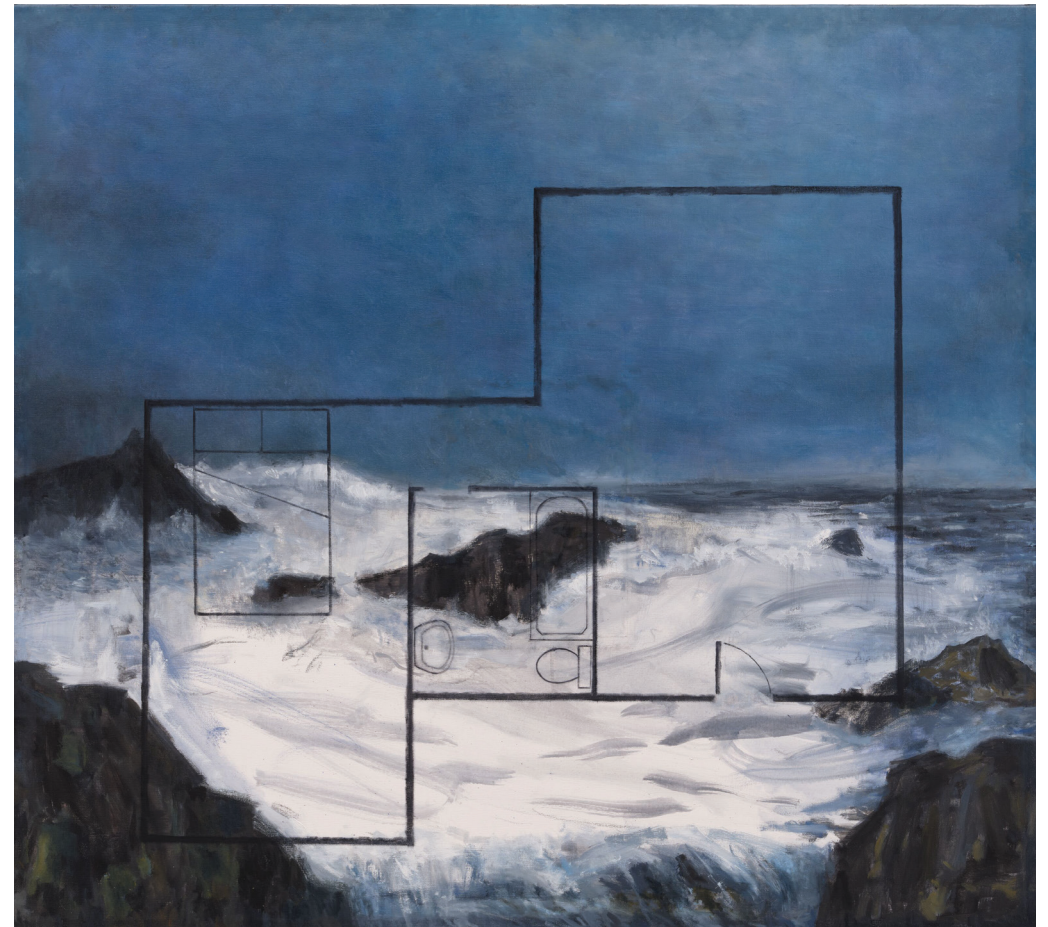


Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
243 × 195 cm / 95 5/8 × 76 3/4 in





Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
195 × 152 cm / 76 ¾ × 59 ⅞ in



Untitled  
2022  
Oil on canvas  
90 × 100 cm / 35 ⅞ × 39 ⅜ in





In this house that is everywhere, the heart is the most important room

2023

Oil on canvas

227 × 198 cm / 89 3/8 × 78 in



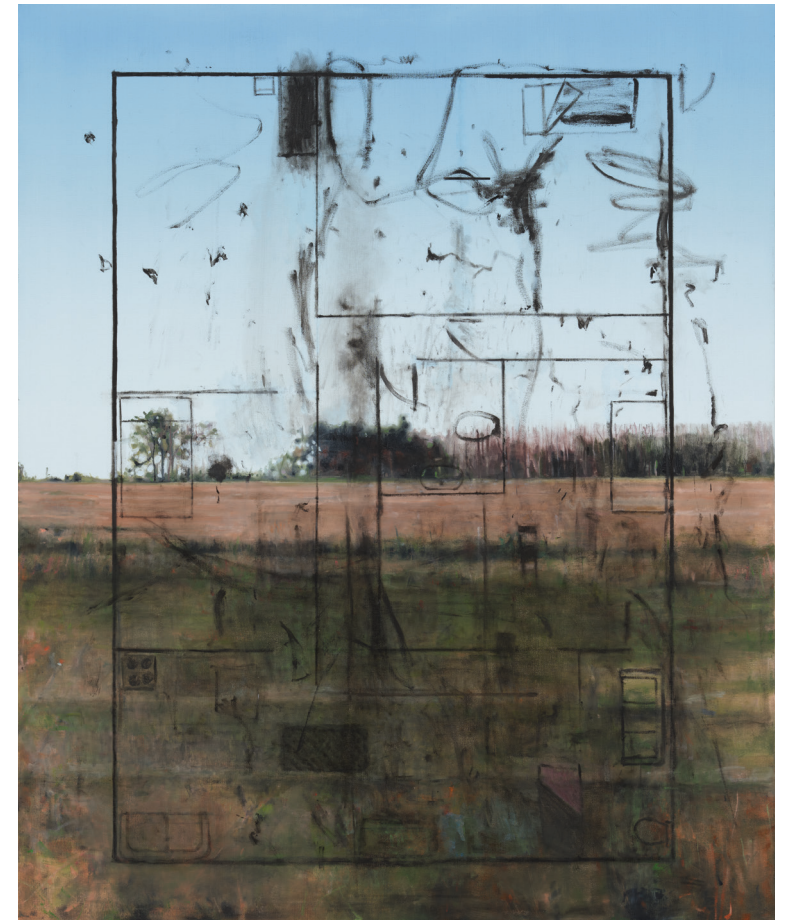


Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
45 × 55 cm / 17 ¾ × 21 ⅝ in



Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
120 × 90 cm / 47 ¼ × 35 ⅝ in





Pintura sin muros

2023

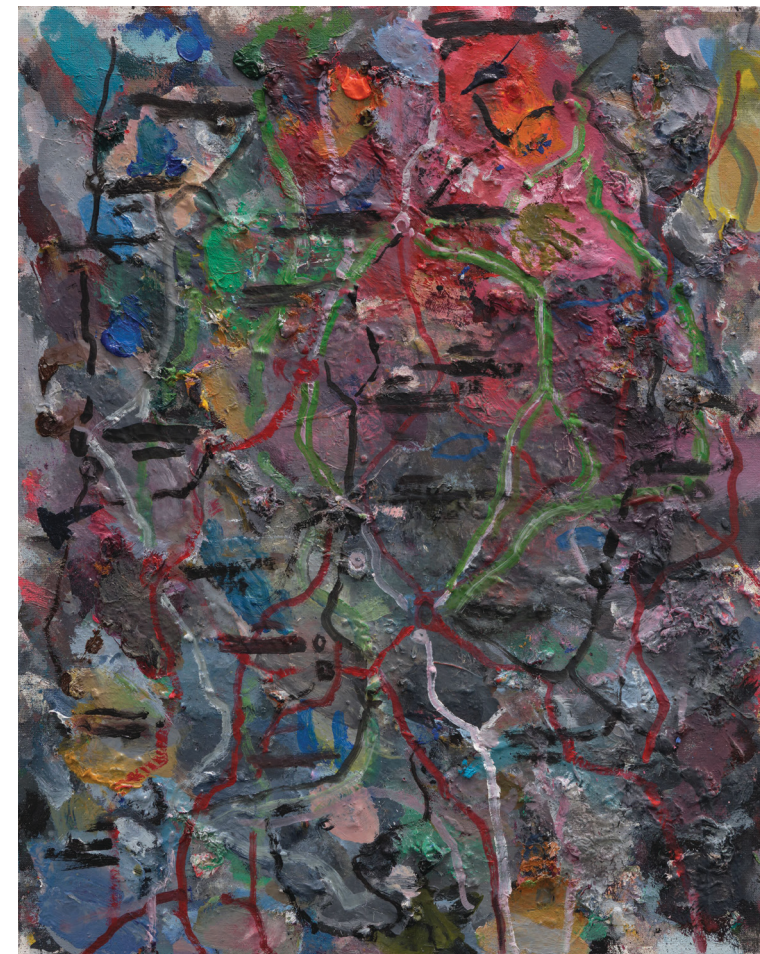
Oil on canvas

110 × 90 cm / 43 ¼ × 35 ¾ in





Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
110 × 90 cm / 43 ¼ × 35 ¾ in



Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
50 × 40 cm / 19 ⅝ × 15 ¾ in



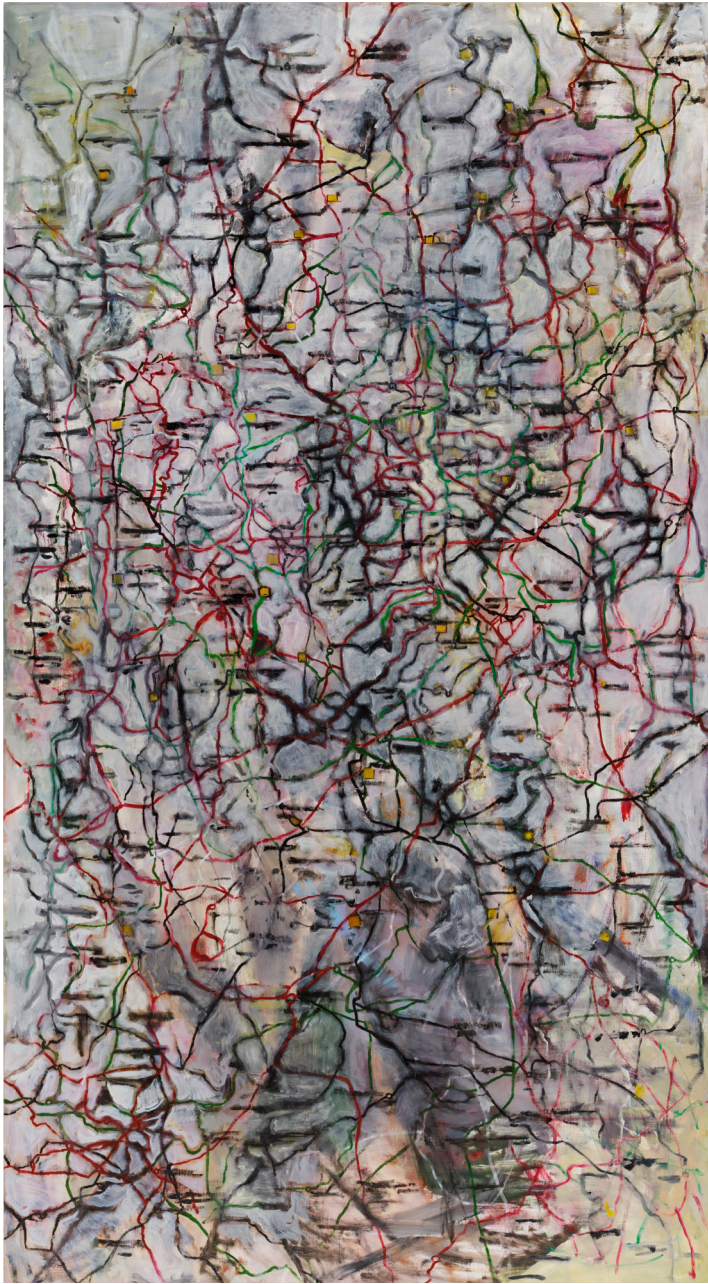


Untitled  
2022  
Oil on canvas  
109.9 × 100 × 2.5 cm / 43 ¼ × 39 ⅜ × 1 in



Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
100 × 110 cm / 39 ⅜ × 43 ¼ in





Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
198 × 109 cm / 78 × 42 7/8 in



Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
110 × 90 cm / 43 1/4 × 35 3/8 in





Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
220 × 255 cm / 86 5/8 × 100 3/8 in







Untitled  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
109.9 × 100 × 2.5 cm / 43 1/4 × 39 3/8 × 1 in



## Works in Public Collections

Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto/CA  
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth/AU  
Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo/US  
Centro Galego de Arte Compemporánea, Santiago de Compostela/ESP  
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland/US  
Colección Jumex, Mexico City/MX  
Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas/VE  
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas/US  
Daros Latinamerica Collection, Zürich/CH  
Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Wellesley/US  
Essex Collection of Art from Latin America, Colchester/UK  
Fonds national d'art contemporain, Paris/FR  
Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris/FR  
Fundación 'la Caixa,' Barcelona/ESP  
Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi/UAE  
Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson/NY  
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC/US  
Istanbul Modern, Istanbul/TR  
IVAM, Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, Valencia/ESP  
Kunsthaus Pasquart, Biel/CH  
Lille Métropole Musée d'art moderne, Villeneuve-d'Ascq/FR  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles/US  
MACBA, Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Barcelona/ESP  
MALBA, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires/ARG  
MAM Rio, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro/BR  
MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, Monterrey/MX  
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee/US  
Mudam, Musée d'art moderne Grand-Duc Jean, Luxembourg/LU  
Musée d'art contemporain de Montreal, Montreal, CA  
Museo de arte contemporáneo de Rosario, Rosario/ARG  
Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires/ARG  
Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, Badajoz/ESP  
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid/ESP  
Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires/ARG  
Museu de Arte Contemporânea de Serralves, Porto/PT  
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam/NL  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston/US  
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston/US  
Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar/NL  
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The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York/US  
The Morgan Library & Museum, New York/US  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York/US  
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