

TOPOI, TROPI, APOTROPOS

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GALLERY AOP

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*It appears to me that pictures have been over-valued; held up by a blind admiration as ideal things, and almost as standards by which nature is to be judged rather than the reverse; and this false estimate has been sanctioned by the extravagant epithets that have been applied to painters, as 'the divine', 'the inspired', and so forth. Yet, in reality, what are the most sublime productions of the pencil but selections of some of the forms of nature, and copies of a few of her evanescent effects; and this is the result, not of inspiration, but of long and patient study, under the direction of much good sense.*

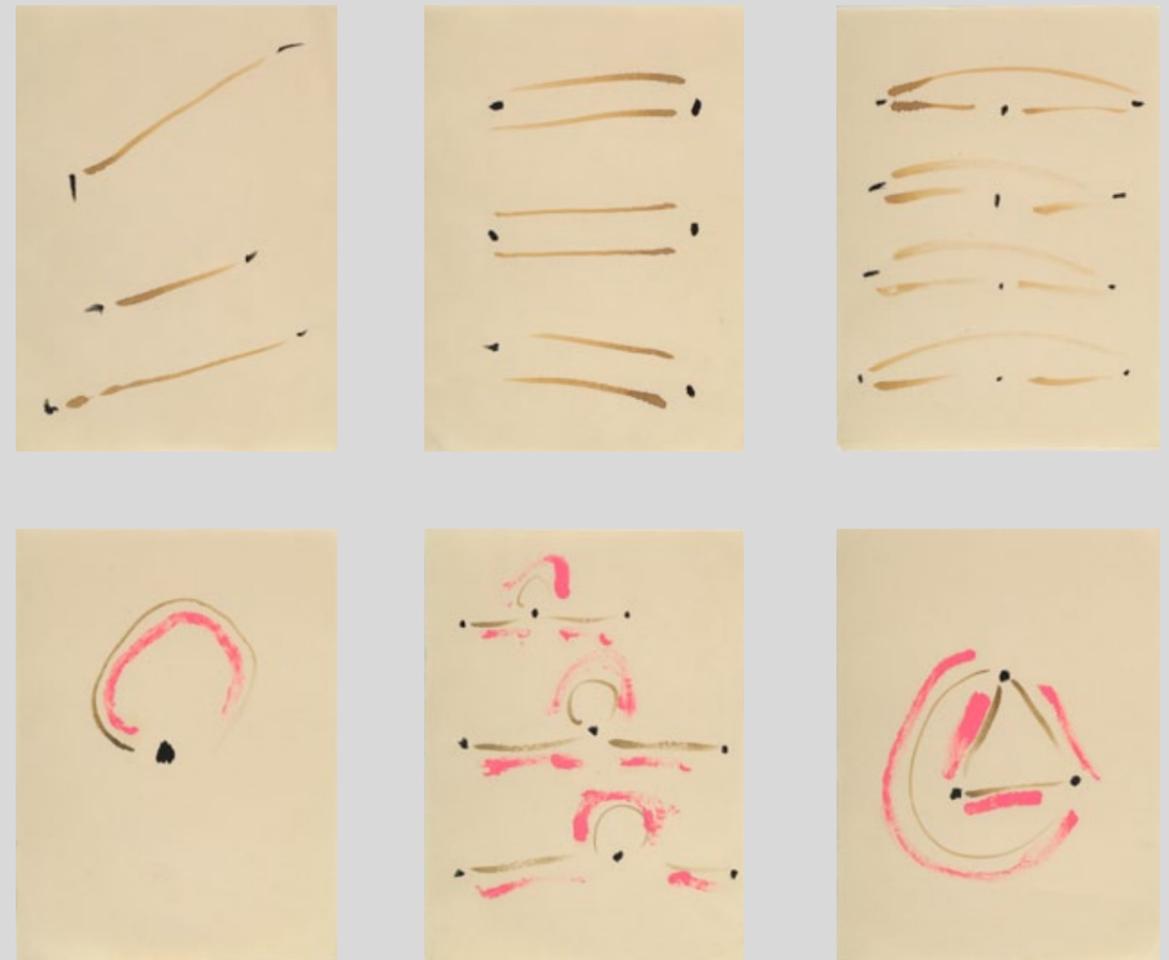
John Constable - Fourth Lecture at the Royal Institute,  
June 16th, 1836

# TOPOI

The work compiled in this exhibition continues my ongoing study of Topos theory. *Topoi, Tropi, Apotropos* expands on a series of drawings I completed in 2003 titled *Thinking About Category Theory*, wherein I gave priority to the relations or *morphisms* between objects within abstract compositions.

In order to further my understanding of morphisms, I engaged in a focused reading process. I found the material particularly challenging. I began making drawings, reproducing certain diagrams in order to gain a more fluid understanding of the material at hand. This way of drawing - to use drawing as utility - reminded me on the one hand of Michelangelo's approach to anatomy, where each drawing attempts to arrive at a specific understanding of a highly complex structure or system, that being the human body. In this regard, I completed a suite of six small drawings exploring the basic lexicon of topoi.

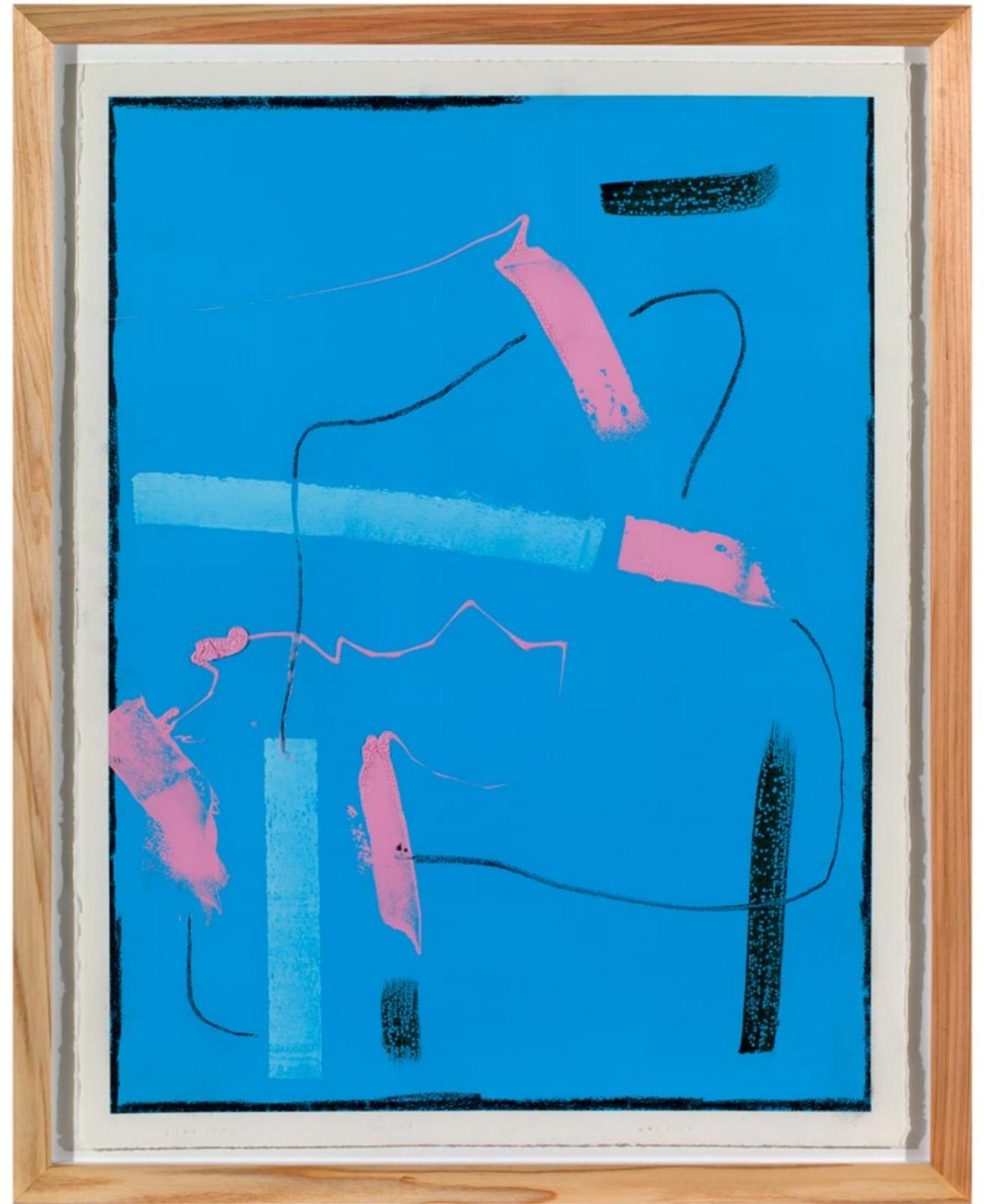
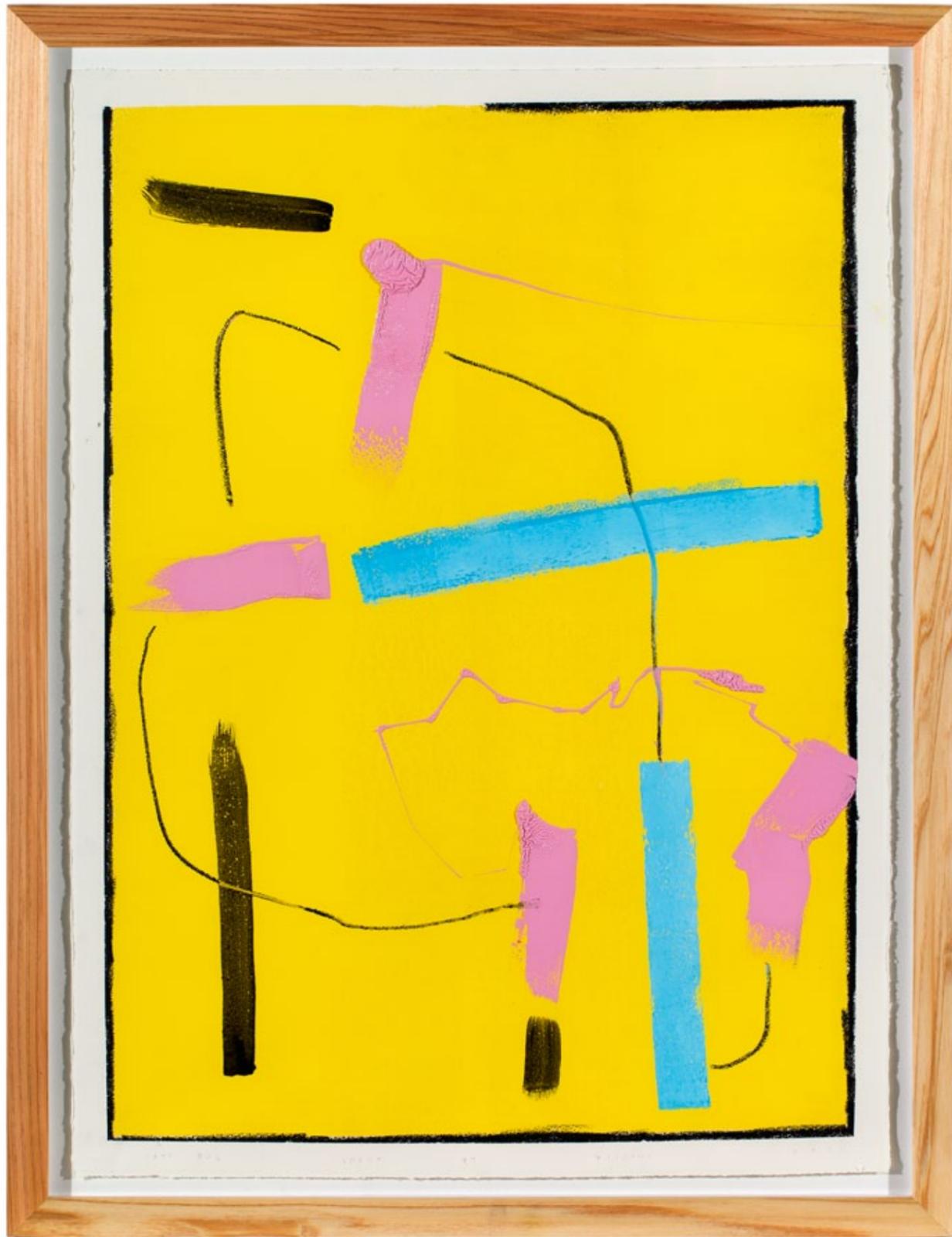
On the other hand, I was reminded of John Constable's approach to the study of nature. It occurred to me that the same rigour Constable applied to the art of painting nature - that being a "long and patient study" of not only the *appearance* of a landscape (through careful and specific chiaroscuro) but also of the *underlying onto-logical principles* inherent in landscape (eg. understanding the science behind cloud formation) - could be applied to abstraction. In this regard I completed a series of diptychs (*Dualities*) that I consider as formalist proofs of gestural abstraction, based on the proof of duality found within category theory, which is proof by reversed or mirrored morphisms of a closed Cartesian category.



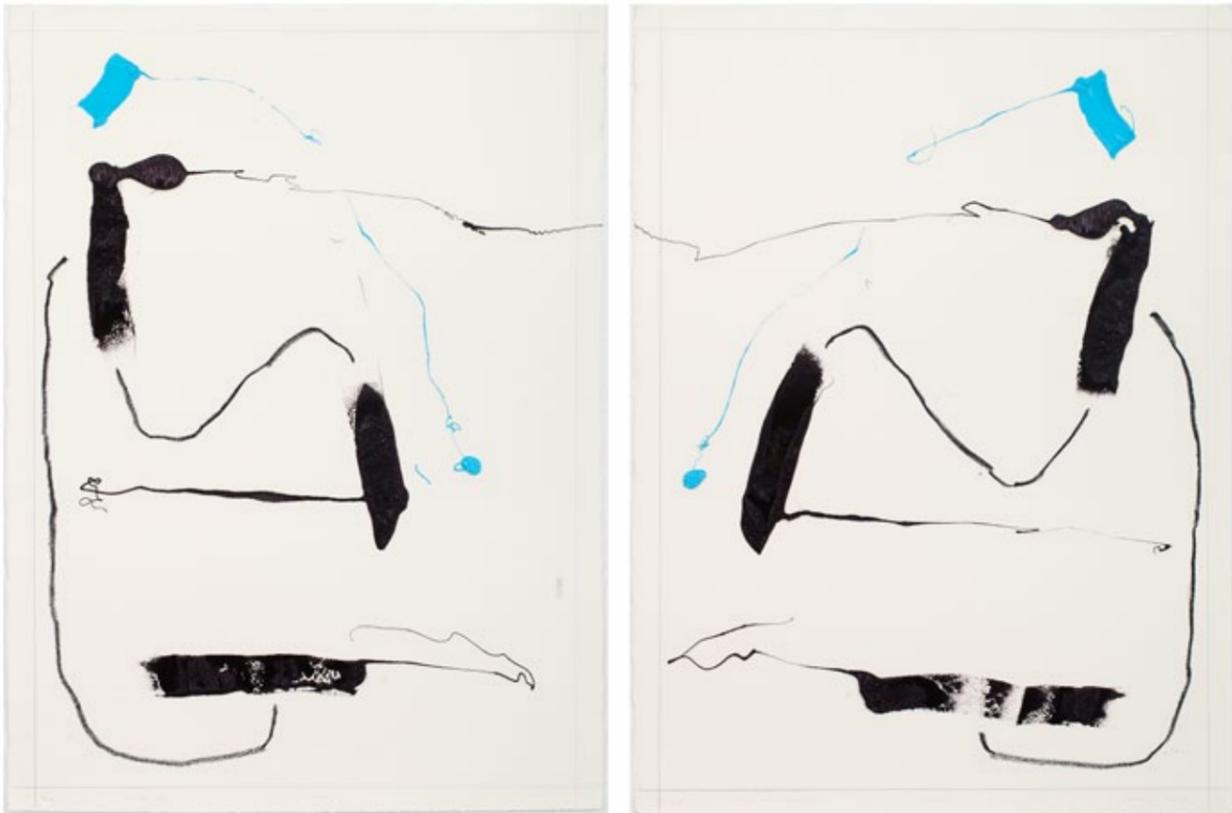
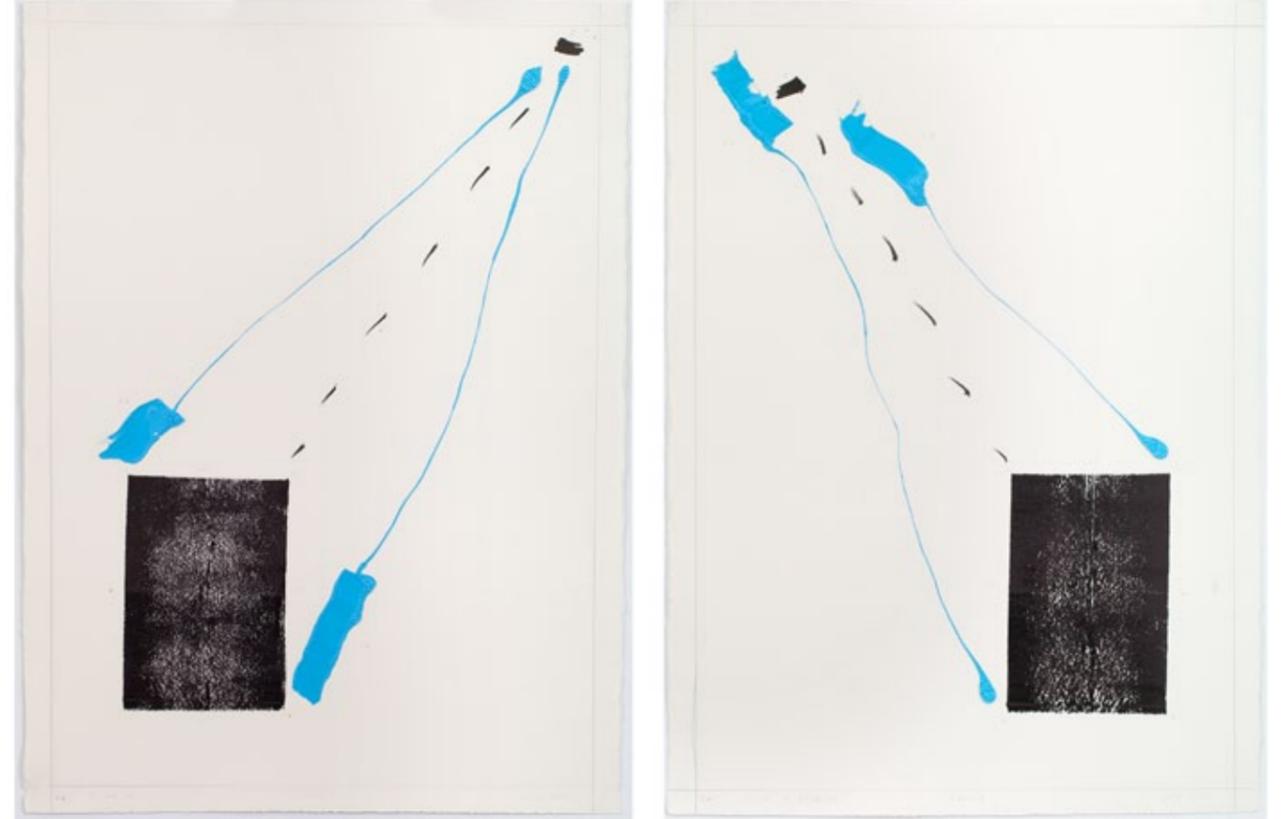
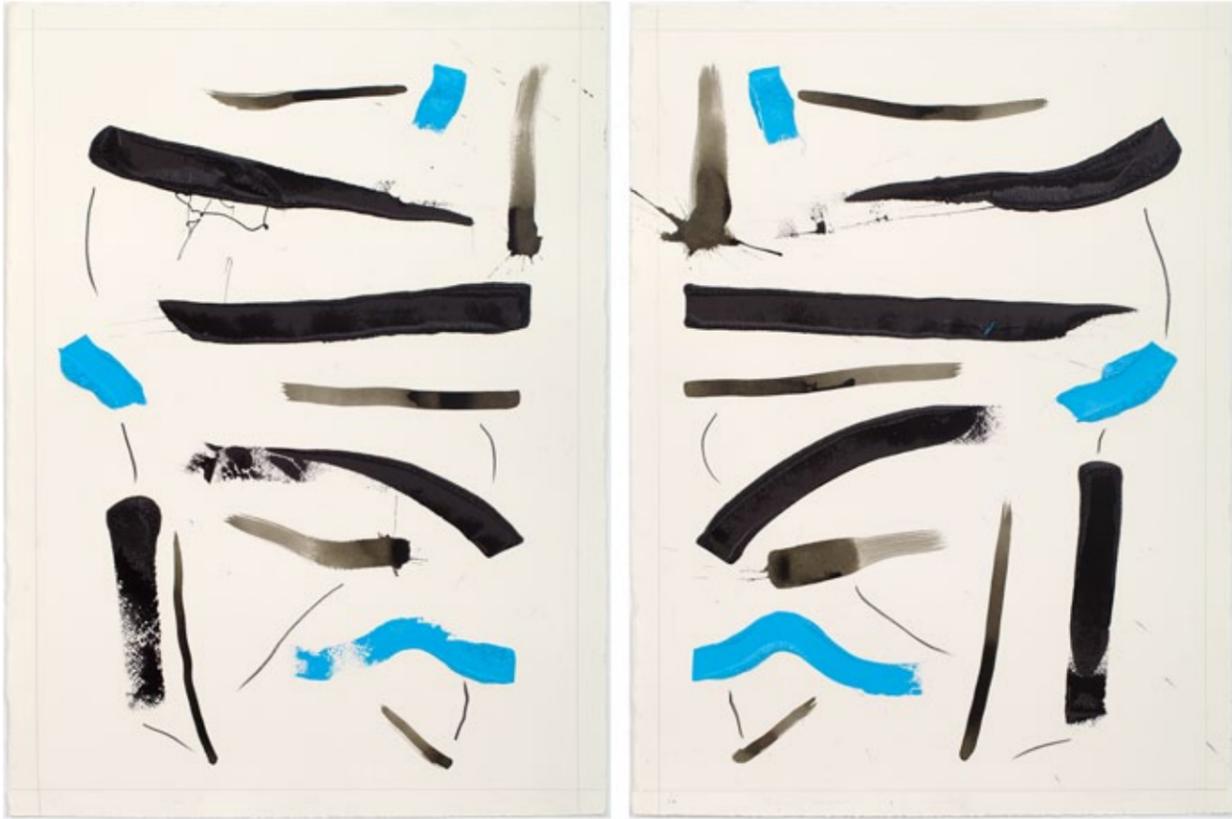
*A visual guide to the preliminary definitions of topos theory (Suite of 6 drawings).*  
Lithographic ink, litho crayon, liquid tusche on Bunkoshi Antique rice paper. 330 x 245 mm



*T2 Duality* (diptych). Lithographic ink, litho crayon, liquid tusche, graphite. 1320 x 560mm



*T5 Duality* (diptych). Lithographic ink, litho crayon, liquid tusche, graphite. 1320 x 560mm.



*T1 and T3 Duality* (diptychs). Lithographic ink, litho crayon, liquid tusche, graphite. 1320 x 560mm

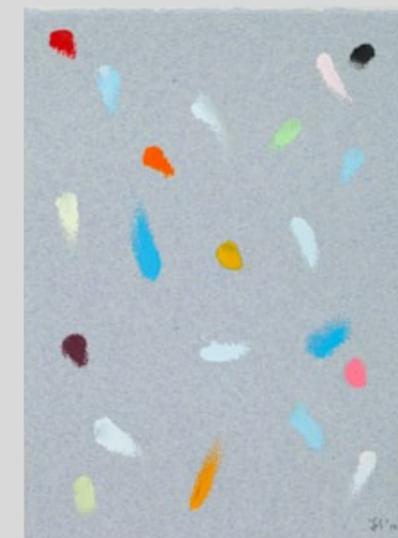
*T7 and T4 Duality* (diptychs). Lithographic ink, litho crayon, liquid tusche, graphite. 1320 x 560mm

# TROPI

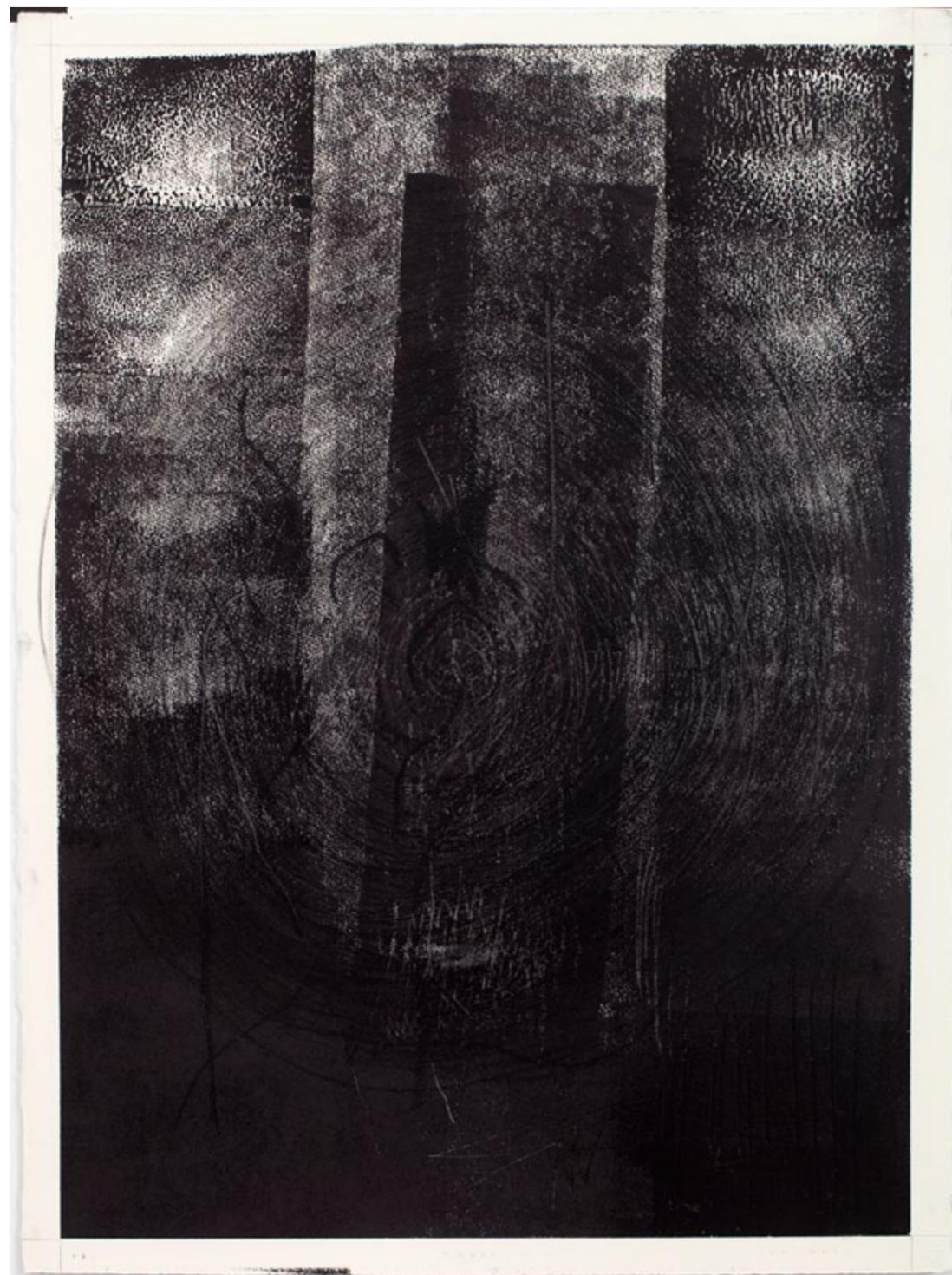
A better understanding of category theory furthered my grasp of the logic behind *being-there*, which presents a coherent system/philosophy defining the *degrees of appearing* of identities within (any) ontology, as encompassed in Alain Badiou's *Mathematics of the Transcendental*.<sup>1</sup> I made a few drawings (*Degrees of Appearing*) playing with ideas around appearing.

I thought of what Constable meant by "*evanescent effects*". I thought of Dan Rakgoathe's work on the transcendental, informed by Rosicrucian doctrine from an African Genesis perspective. I read a book<sup>2</sup> on the Rosicrucian Enlightenment, which seemed to approach the transcendental from a rather distinct perspective. I was surprised to learn that Descartes was very much present at the central event of the Rosicrucian Enlightenment - the Battle of White Mountain - around which time, through a series of profound meditations and dreams<sup>3</sup>, he became convinced that mathematics was the sole key to the understanding of nature.

I was struck by this historical link between the Hermetic tradition and contemporary mathematics. Perhaps these approaches to the transcendental were not entirely distinct. I was drawn to Rakgoathe's use of the spiral<sup>4</sup>, a shape I first became aware of in fever dreams as a child. I decided to, through the act of drawing, focus on coming into contact with transcendental events - moments of understanding that may not necessarily fit within a coherent system/philosophy in a purely analytical way. Each drawing would begin with concentric circles drawn with graphite, after which I would simply try something new to me.



**Top** *Degrees of Appearing B1 and B2*. Lithographic ink on Bunkoshi Antique rice paper. 240 x 165 mm  
**Bottom** *Degrees of Appearing T1 and T2*. Lithographic ink on JWM Turner's Blue paper. 180 x 135mm



*S1 Tropi*. Lithographic ink, litho crayon, graphite. 760 x 560mm



*S2 Tropi*. Lithographic ink, litho crayon, graphite. 760 x 560mm



*S3 Tropi*. Lithographic ink, litho crayon, graphite. 760 x 560mm



*S5 Tropi*. Lithographic ink, litho crayon, graphite. 760 x 560mm



*S6 Tropi*. Lithographic ink, litho crayon, graphite. 760 x 560mm



*S7 Tropi*. Lithographic ink, litho crayon, graphite. 760 x 560mm

## APOTROPOS

One day I read a news report about the recent conservation of Knole House in Kent<sup>5</sup> describing *apotropaic markings* - ritual protection marks that ward off evil spirits. Of course, I thought immediately of morphisms. These superstitious carvings made for some very interesting morphisms, the kind that could ostensibly direct the presence of evil.

I thought it would be funny to make a few drawings that could at the very least eliminate the presence of the closest thing I can imagine to true evil – *crapstraction*. I made some small ones (*Apotropaic Morphisms*) that could be hung easily by a door or window. I made some bigger ones that could prevent *crapstraction* from being hung there by an unsuspecting collector. In identifying what exactly constitutes as *crapstraction*, *Zombie Abstraction*, *Dumb Painting*... call it what you will... I once again found comfort in Constable<sup>6</sup>, specifically in his remarks on mannerism in art:

*Manner is always seductive. It is more or less an imitation of what has been done already, – therefore always plausible. It promises the short road, the near cut to present fame and emolument, by availing ourselves of the labours of others. It leads to almost immediate reputation, because it is the wonder of the ignorant world. It is always accompanied by certain blandishments, showy and plausible, and which catch the eye. As manner comes by degrees, and is fostered by success in the world, flattery, etc., all painters who would be really great should be perpetually on their guard against it. Nothing but a close and continual observance of nature can protect them from the danger of becoming mannerists.*

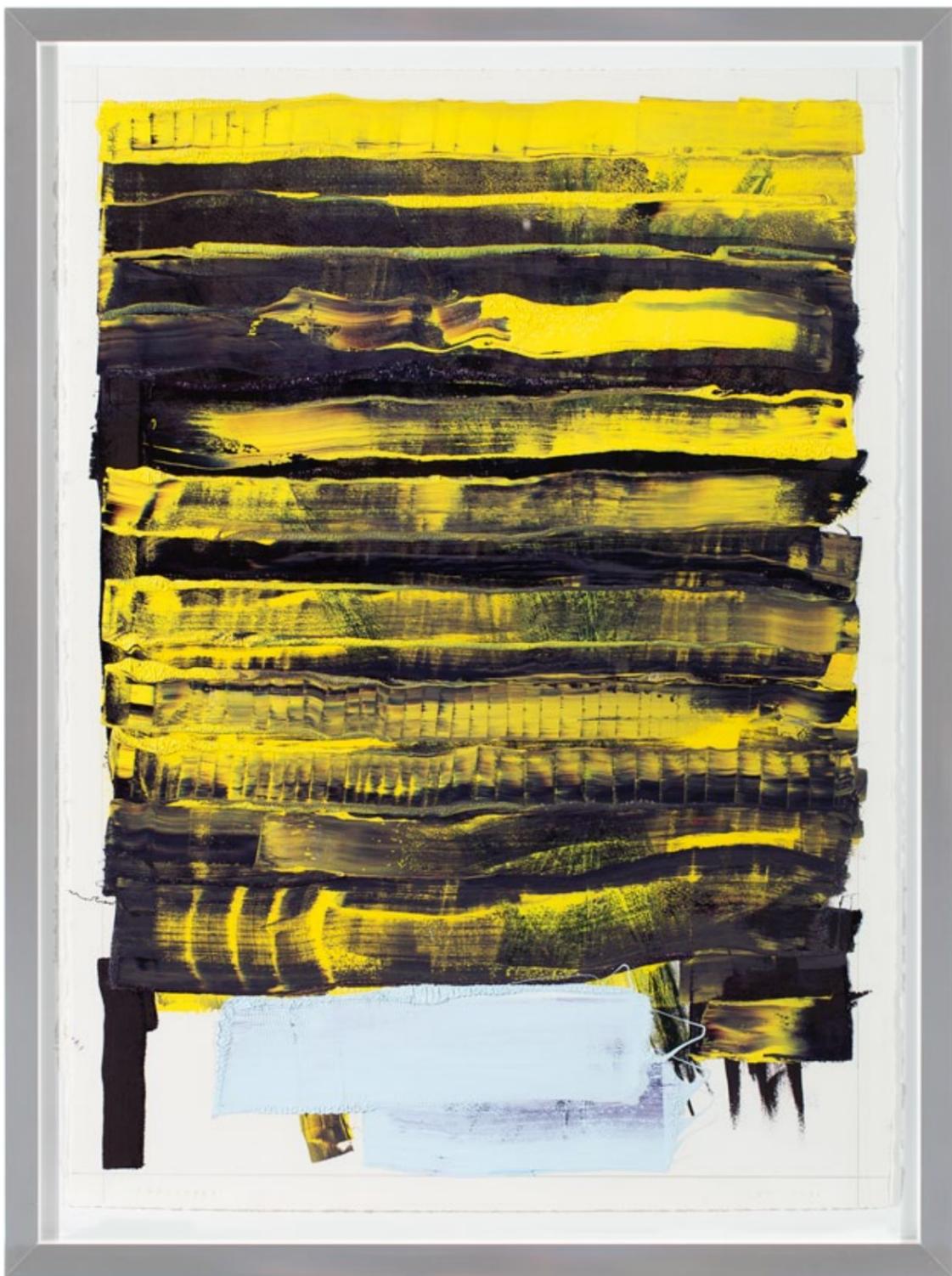




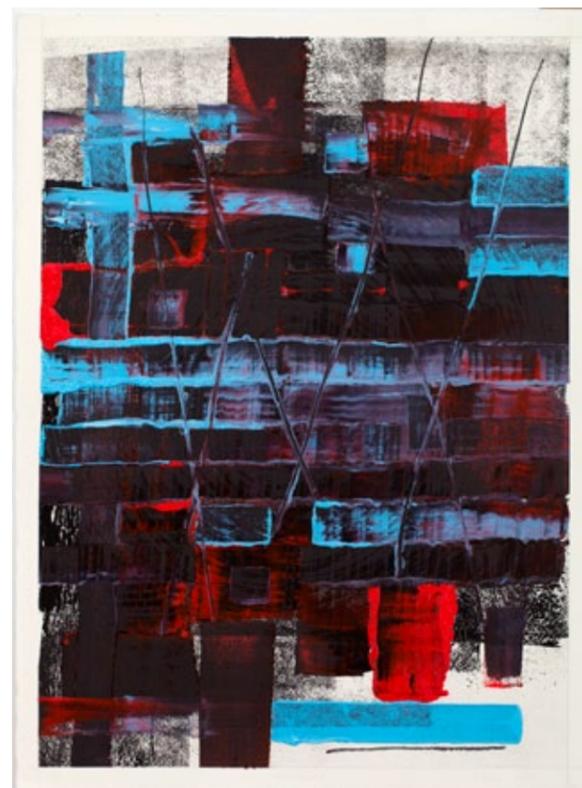
*Apotropos (Waiting for Day to End)*. Lithographic ink, litho crayon. 760 x 560mm



*Apotropos (Fish)*. Lithographic ink, litho crayon. 760 x 560mm



*Apotropos*. Lithographic ink, litho crayon. 760 x 560mm



*A5, A6 and A7 Apotropos*. Lithographic ink, litho crayon. 760 x 560mm



A4 Apotropos. Lithographic ink, litho crayon. 760 x 560mm



A8 Apotropos. Lithographic ink, litho crayon, graphite. 760 x 560mm

## NOTES

- 1 Badiou, Alain. (2014) *Mathematics of the Transcendental*. London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- 2 Yates, Frances A. (1972) *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- 3 *Ibid* pp 114 - 115. Descartes dreams occurred on 10 November 1619. The Battle of White Mountain took place on 8 November 1620.
- 4 Langan, Donvé. (2000) *The Unfolding Man: The Life and Art of Dan Rakgoathe*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers.
- 5 <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-kent-29906779>
- 6 Leslie, C.R. (1951) *Memoirs of the Life of John Constable, Composed Chiefly of his Letters*. Oxford: Phaidon. p 274, p 323.

## BIOGRAPHY

Jaco van Schalkwyk (b. 1979) received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Drawing from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn NY with Highest Honors. He was the recipient of the Pratt Circle Award for Academic Achievement in 2003 and editor of *The Prattler* student newspaper. He returned to South Africa in 2008. Van Schalkwyk's work has been included in private and corporate collections in South Africa, the USA and Europe. A survey of his work on paper, *Drawings 2011 - 2013* is available at GALLERY AOP. His debut novel, *The Alibi Club*, was published in 2014 by Umuzi. *Topoi, Tropi, Apotropos* is his fourth solo exhibition at GALLERY AOP.

