

Alex Amini
Earthworks

Preface

Having studied architecture at Pratt Institute and Cooper Union in New York between 1982-1992, Alex Amini's practice strongly hinges on his point of departure from architecture, or a rejection of its distanced professionalism. Even within his education, Amini had little interest in the disciplined process of architectural design, instead gravitating towards the more hands-on and dynamic aspects of architecture, including model-making and drawing. For Amini, drawing was an autonomous practice—one which expressed architectural concepts in space, without a necessary application of the codified language of construction. As such, Amini was drawn to the immediacy of painting, as an act which is not inherently practical, yet which imprints a physical mark. In the late 90s, Amini began to make paintings on corrugated cardboard, and has since continued to embrace a non-traditional approach to painting. This attitude is particularly reflected in his series of double-sided paintings on unstretched canvas, which are often neatly folded up and pressed into stacks.

Though the work bears an initial semblance to the tradition of formalism in art, a closer understanding actually reveals distinct references to architectural styles and approaches. His drawings maintain important spatial properties that are reminiscent of architectural drawings—for instance, by engaging curved forms which seem to push against and between two displaced endpoints. The forms in Amini's work respond to spatial limits and constraints, as do those in architecture, including understanding how to express movement within set boundaries. In the case of painting, the question becomes how to express movement within the delimited field of the canvas specifically, as a kind of enabling constraint. Working from this idea, constriction provides a framework to actively react against; a grid, moreover, provides reference for how to curve and deform lines within it. And whereas formalism often connotes a fetishistic relationship to form in general, Amini's approach is more systematic and research-based. Moving towards the expression of material potential through a balance of precision and tension, Amini's practice can be better understood within the practice of topology, or the continuous, qualitative transformation of form.

Similarly, despite compositional qualities which seem to reference abstraction or expressive painting techniques, in reality the work points to very concrete material processes. Amini's paintings are much more controlled and process-based than they are expressive. In fact, their composition emerges out of material relations themselves, not pre-defined or intended. In this sense, Amini opens up an expanded definition of

process painting, as a 'spontaneous process' referring to the atmospheric forces at play, with little intervention by the artist's hand. As in Buddhism there is great emphasis on the practice of observation with little intervention, this technique of painting attends to the mystery of nonhuman forces always acting upon and around painting. These forces include condensation and air quality, relations and intensities of pigment, as well as air pressure and gravity. And following the practice of observation, the task of the artist becomes one of creating presence, or of attuning directly to forces.

As this renewed understanding of painting entails a re-directing of already existent, potentialized forces, there must be an emphasis placed on the action of directing (or mediating), rather than dominating. Painting, in this sense, refers to a non-conscious, and often spontaneous, locating of forces to produce quality. This is perhaps most evident in the Recordings series, in which ink and pigment are captured on photo paper, as a material that records and stores events. Like the process of photography which records and translates light into image on film, or the process of fossilization in which an instance is recorded in organic material, these works also reflect the enigma of overcoming immense time and distances—the possibility for an instance to be concretized and recorded, a mark made and stored in material.

Painting is not simply an exclusive relationship between the artist and the medium, but also includes the material forces it encounters and which surround it. Alex Amini's work does not strive to create an image intentionally, but rather spontaneously, through an attunement to natural forces, as well as through the practice of observation. Thus, the experience of painting involves regaining awareness of simple or elemental things, such as marks and traces, which become significant again through their expression of recorded event. This return to the elemental challenges pre-existing models of meaning and signification, while also cultivating and affirming the active practice of presence.

Earthworks

In Geology, striations refer to the emergence and evolution of layers in rock formations, in which history and past events are necessarily embedded. Looking at various examples of organic growth patterns, there exist discrete events which accumulate and disperse over time, giving form to increasingly complex structures. The Earthworks series reproduces this process of qualitative transformation to create a visual map of passages—or the extension of isolated points into linear progressions.

Within the field of the canvas, the four corners act as physical limits of potential action. Solutions consisting of paint, dye, water and detergent are mixed together in a cup, which is swiftly overturned onto the canvas, capturing the liquid inside. Trapped in this contained space, the liquid suspends and slowly penetrates through canvas. The cup marks an initial point of contact, one that is dense in pigment and coloration.

Once the liquid begins to seep through, the cup is dragged across the canvas. The traces of liquid express density without a pre-given form, only determined through its own passages. It is through this motion that the intensity of the paint diminishes. Departing from its original circular shape, the cup's passage records a capsule-like shape, or an elongated sphere. What results are two fixed points, or hinging nodes, connected by a history of motion.

The accumulation of these paths generate spatial conditions to which subsequent interventions react. Each time a new cup is overturned, a new path emerges and interacts with previous paths, which dictate future material forces and outcomes. The paintings consist of a final intensification produced through repeated, overlapping and entangled passages. Often this network of traces gives rise to larger spontaneous forms, almost as if attuning to a ghost image.

The porous surface of canvas, like the surface of the earth, accumulates events and interventions. Simultaneously absorbing traces of pigment, as well as recording the movement of liquid, canvas serves as an archive of material impressions. In the Earthworks series, cups of paint are moved repeatedly across canvas, creating multi-layered sequences of gestures, which are imprinted onto the surface of fabric.

Alex Amini



Cupping 01, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 72" x 108"



Cupping 02, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 72"x96"



Cupping 03, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 72"x88"



Cupping 04, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 66"x72"



Cupping 05, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 60"x72"



Cupping 06, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 56" x 72"



Cupping 07, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 54" x 72"



Cupping 08, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 54" x 72"



Cupping 09, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 48"x72"



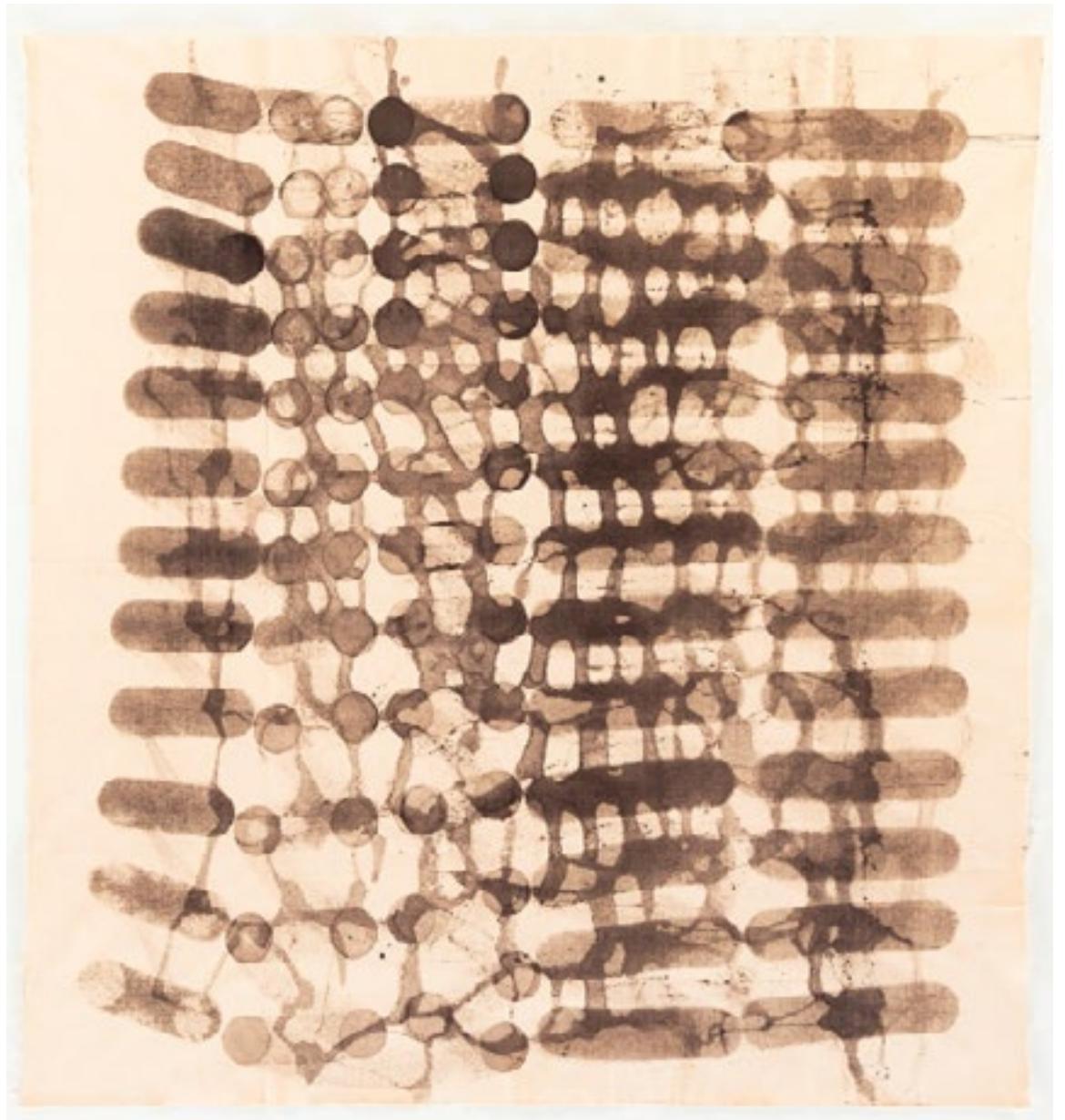
Cupping 10, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 48"x72"



Cupping 11, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 48"x72"



Cupping 12, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 34" x 54"



Cupping 13, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 71"x76"



Cupping 21, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 30"x40"



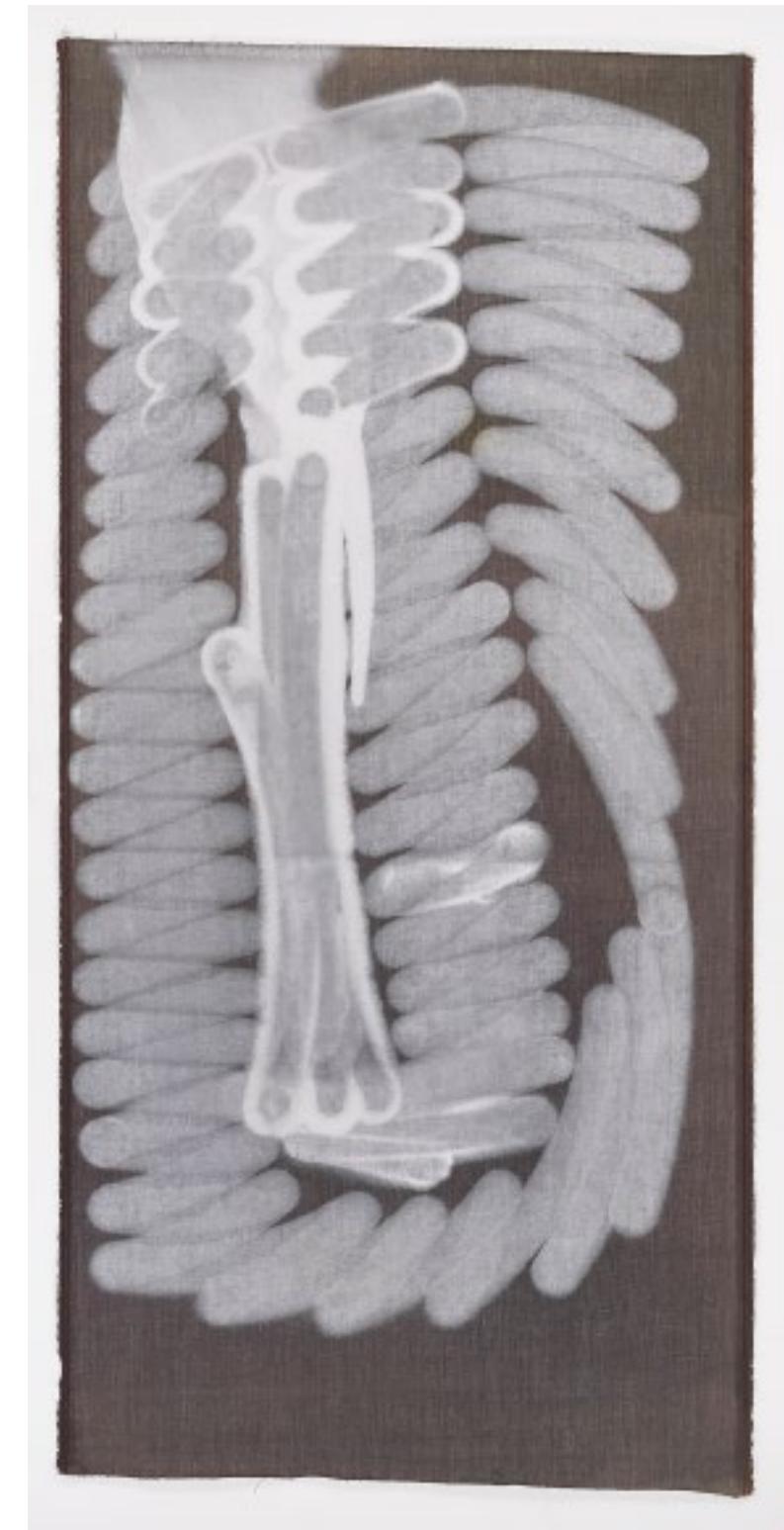
Cupping 18, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 26" x 75"



Cupping 40, 2011, mixed media on canvas, 60x120"



Cupping 19, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 52" x 108" (verso)



Cupping 19, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 52" x 108" (recto)



Cupping 14, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 30"x40"



Cupping 15, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 30"x40"



Cupping 17, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 33"x92" (verso)



Cupping 17, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 33"x92" (recto)



Cupping 16, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 59" x 67"



Cupping 20, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 60"x74" (verso)



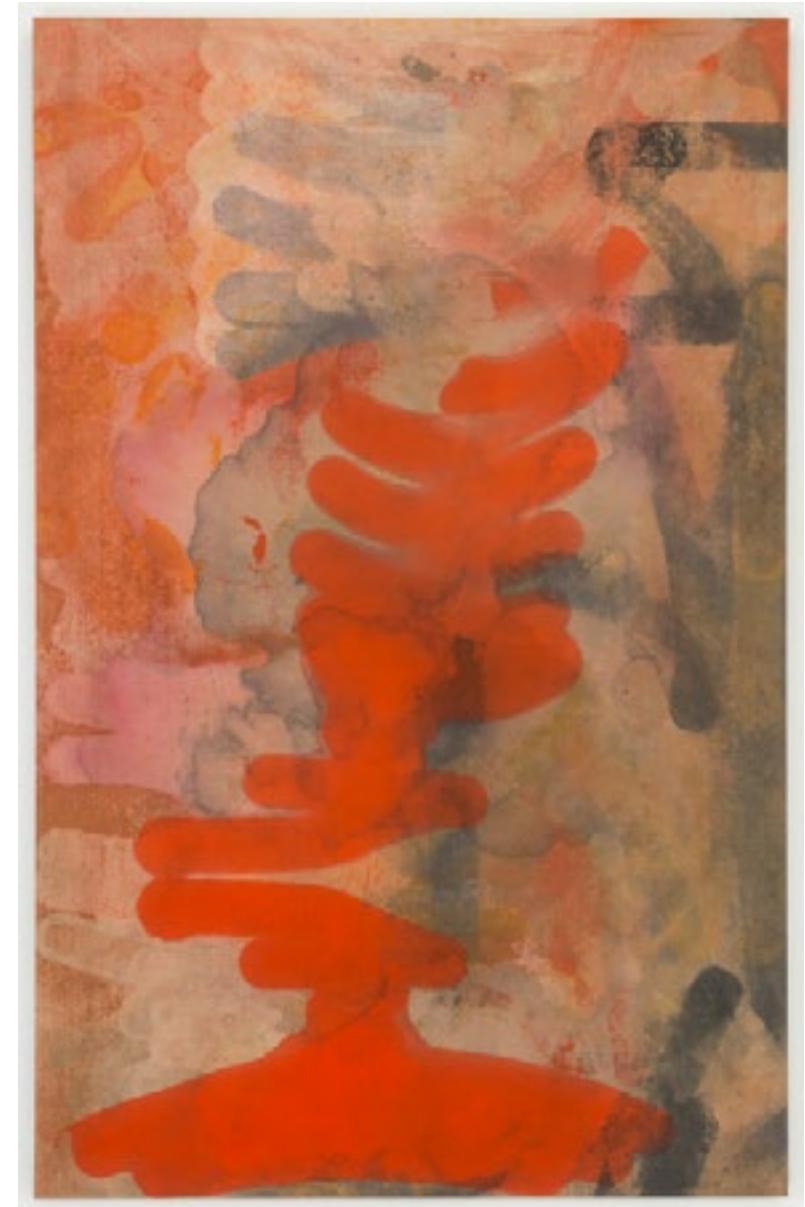
Cupping 20, 2013, mixed media on canvas, 60"x74" (recto)



Cupping 25, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 66"x94" (verso)



Cupping 25, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 66"x94" (recto)



Cupping 32, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 54x84" (recto)



Cupping 26, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 74"x75" (verso)



Cupping 26, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 74"x75" (recto)



Cupping 27, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 72"x95" (verso)



Cupping 27, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 72"x95" (recto)



Cupping 31, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 48x66" (verso)



Cupping 31, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 48x66" (recto)



Cupping 35, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 54x72" (verso)



Cupping 35, 2014, mixed media on canvas, 54x72" (recto)



Cupping 22, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 68" x 72" (verso)



Cupping 22, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 68" x 72" (recto)



Cupping 23, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 40"x70" (verso)



Cupping 23, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 40"x70" (recto)



Cupping 29, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 81x92" (verso)



Cupping 29, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 81x92" (recto)



Cupping 28, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 47" x 92" (verso)



Cupping 28, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 47" x 92" (recto)



Cupping 33, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 62x94" (verso)



Cupping 33, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 62x94" (recto)



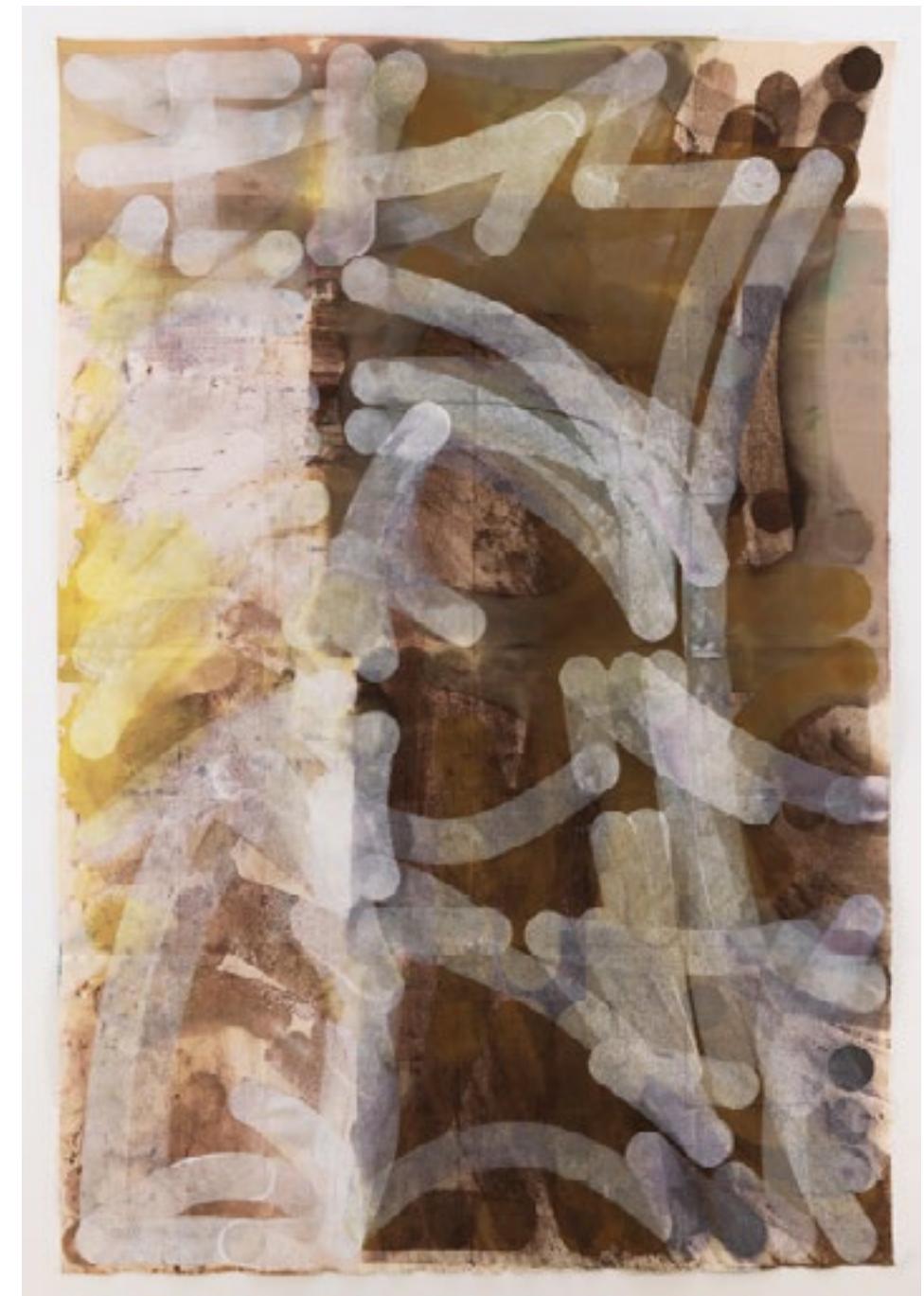
Cupping 24, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 47" x 74" (verso)



Cupping 24, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 47" x 74" (recto)



Cupping 34, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 64x94" (verso)



Cupping 34, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 64x94" (recto)



Cupping 30, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 28x70" (verso)



Cupping 30, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 28x70" (recto)



Cupping 37, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 81x88" (verso)



Cupping 37, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 81x88" (recto)



Cupping 36, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 65x94" (verso)



Cupping 36, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 65x94" (recto)



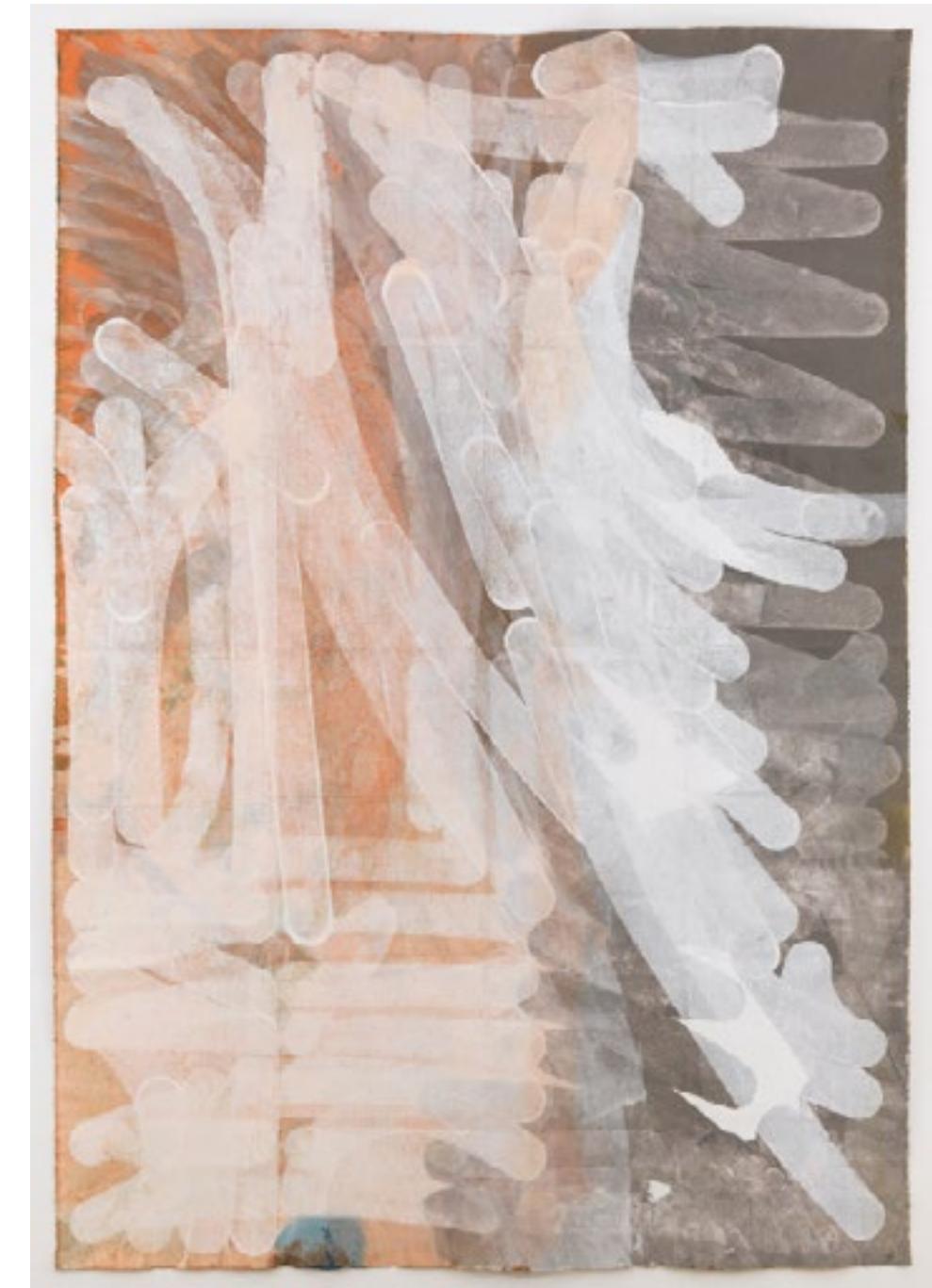
Cupping 39, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 62x93" (verso)



Cupping 39, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 62x93" (recto)



Cupping 38, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 65x93" (verso)



Cupping 38, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 65x93" (recto)



Cupping 41, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 62x67" (verso)



Cupping 41, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 62x67" (recto)



Cupping 42, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 59x64" (verso)



Cupping 42, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 59x64" (recto)



Cupping 43, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 58"x62" (verso)



Cupping 43, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 58"x62"(recto)



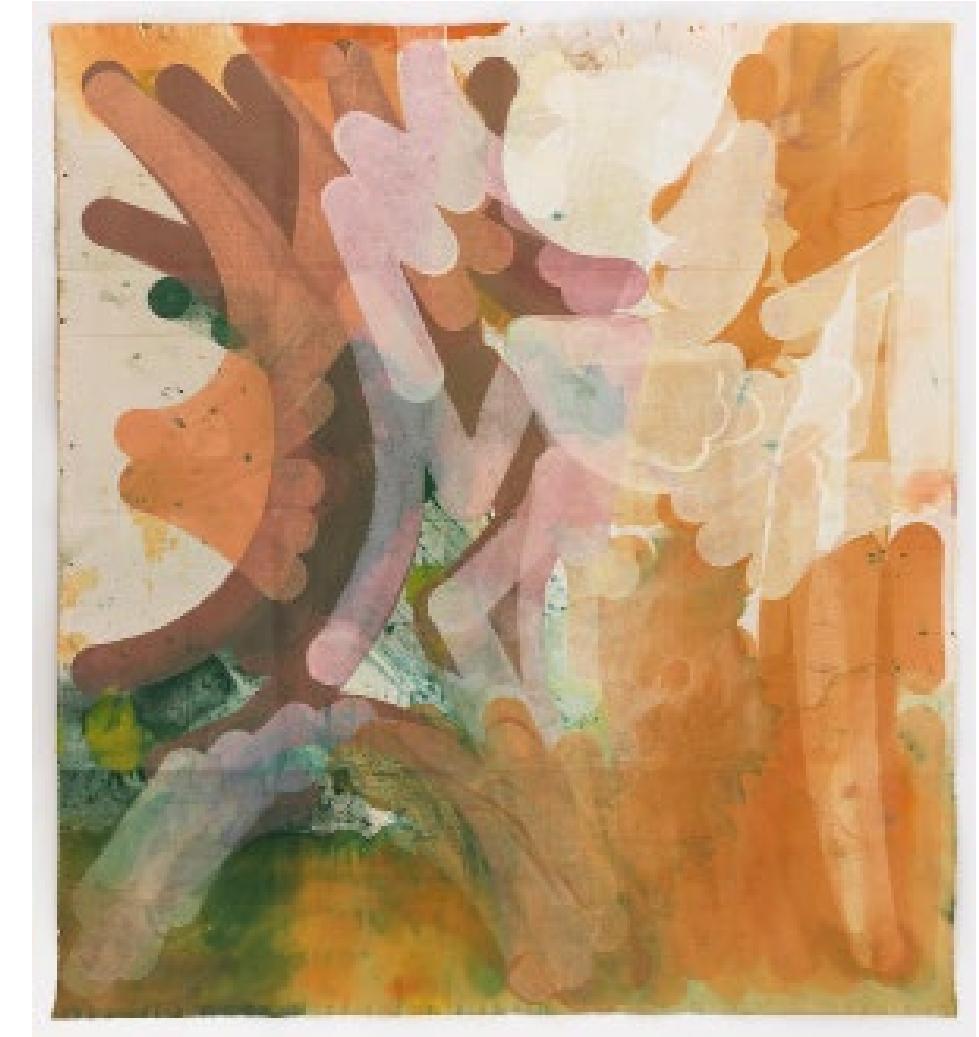
Cupping 44, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 63x70" (verso)



Cupping 44, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 63x70" (recto)



Cupping 45, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 61x70" (verso)



Cupping 45, 2015, mixed media on canvas, 61x70" (recto)



Alex Amini
Photography courtesy of Nina Subin
2011

