

HAWALA



CHARLES MUNKA

“What we see before us is just one tiny part of the world. We get in the habit of thinking, this is the world, but that’s not true at all. The real world is a much darker and deeper place than this, and much of it is occupied by jellyfish and things.”

- Haruki Murakami, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*

ABSTRACT WAYPOINTS

I was born and raised in France, and like many others of my generation grew up with video games, comic books, and animation. I was deeply fascinated by popular culture and media and by the time I entered high school had become drawn to the East.

In France, especially since the late 80s, a great appreciation for, and availability of, Eastern culture exists - translations of Manga comics can be found in alternative bookstores; the films of Takeshi Kitano’s, Takashi Miike, and John Woo were often shown in cinemas or released on VHS. As an aspiring comic artist these materials played an important role in the direction my work would take.

On later visits to Paris, my uncle, who works as a painter, would show me around the city’s great historical landscapes, its galleries and museums, emanating and sharing his own passion for Eastern culture and art. As a young boy growing up in a small town north of Lyon it’s hard to find words to describe the way these moments inspired me. His studio was on the ground floor of an old apartment building, and the times I spent there opened up the possibility of me becoming an artist in my own right.

It was then that two things became clear: I began to admire the tradition and relevance of the medium of cartoons, and I also sensed that I wanted something more. I was searching for something deeper.

These were the events that were shaping my personal language as I entered my first year at Ecole Emile Cohl, a school specialising in animation and illustration. After learning the basics of drawing, painting, and sculpture I soon realised that what I was looking for was more personal than the teachings of a certain type of aesthetic that the school adhered to. As my fascination for Eastern culture grew I began making plans to leave.

EASTERN STANDARD TIME, LATITUDE, LONGITUDE

I moved to Tokyo in February of 2002. I was only 21, with a one-year visa from an exchange program and the address of a friend I only knew at the time through an obscure forum for Japanese people conversing in English deep within the bowels of yahoo.jp. I was busy exploring a virtual world of Japan through the Internet.

At this time there was no such thing as Google maps, or street view, so it was only with a vague idea made out of Yakuza movies and animation series that I entered Tokyo and become immediately entranced by its aesthetics and atmosphere. I went there with hopes of becoming a Manga artist, and after a day walking round the city I entered a random video games agency that ended up calling me back for a tryout as a background designer.

You could say that exploring the obscure corners of Tokyo became my first professional job. I had to find locations to match the descriptions in the synopsis of the game, shoot it at the right angle, and then recreate an illustrated version on the computer. My mission was to create an experience, capture it, and bring it to life.

It was also around this time that my interest in the landscapes and atmospheres really developed, and as Tokyo is filled with myriad logos, symbols and colours, I started noticing the more overlooked corners of the city and experiment with graphic design in a more abstract way. As I took on different jobs in design agencies, or freelancing to keep the rent paid, I worked on developing my personal language from my adventures in Tokyo, Shanghai, and finally Hong Kong, where I am now based.

When I began work on my Manga collage series I was influenced by the likes of Mimmo Rotella who physical tore his canvases from the subway stations of my youth. Using newsprints, posters, and the inherent shapes of graphic arts, I restructured images to rearrange them in my own way - creating a new, more instinctive way of telling a story. These experiments on paper later influenced a series of paintings that were inspired by the process of my work as a background designer in Tokyo.

I relocated to Shanghai from Japan, got married, and moved again to Hong Kong. But something was nagging at me. Perhaps I was unsatisfied with the commercial work, I don’t know, but I knew I had to create more personal forms of art, with graffiti being the main focus. Graffiti often contains a political statement, but as I walked through the streets of Hong Kong in random directions around my studio at the time I became more interested in the physicality of where I was. I took photographs of any textures, colours, patterns or certain typographical elements that caught my attention and then recreated compositions on canvas from these materials. Similar to the collages, I was able to recreate a symbolic feeling of the moment I was in. The works became the virtual evidence of where I had been, a physical manifestation of my experiences and thoughts.

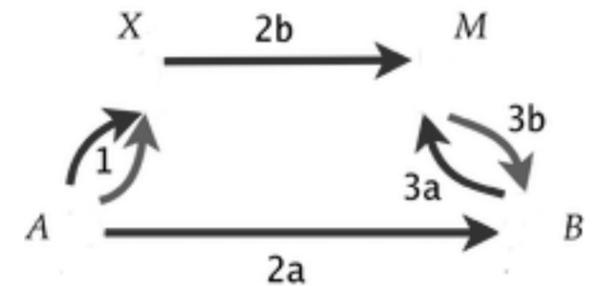
FORMA URBIS ROMAE

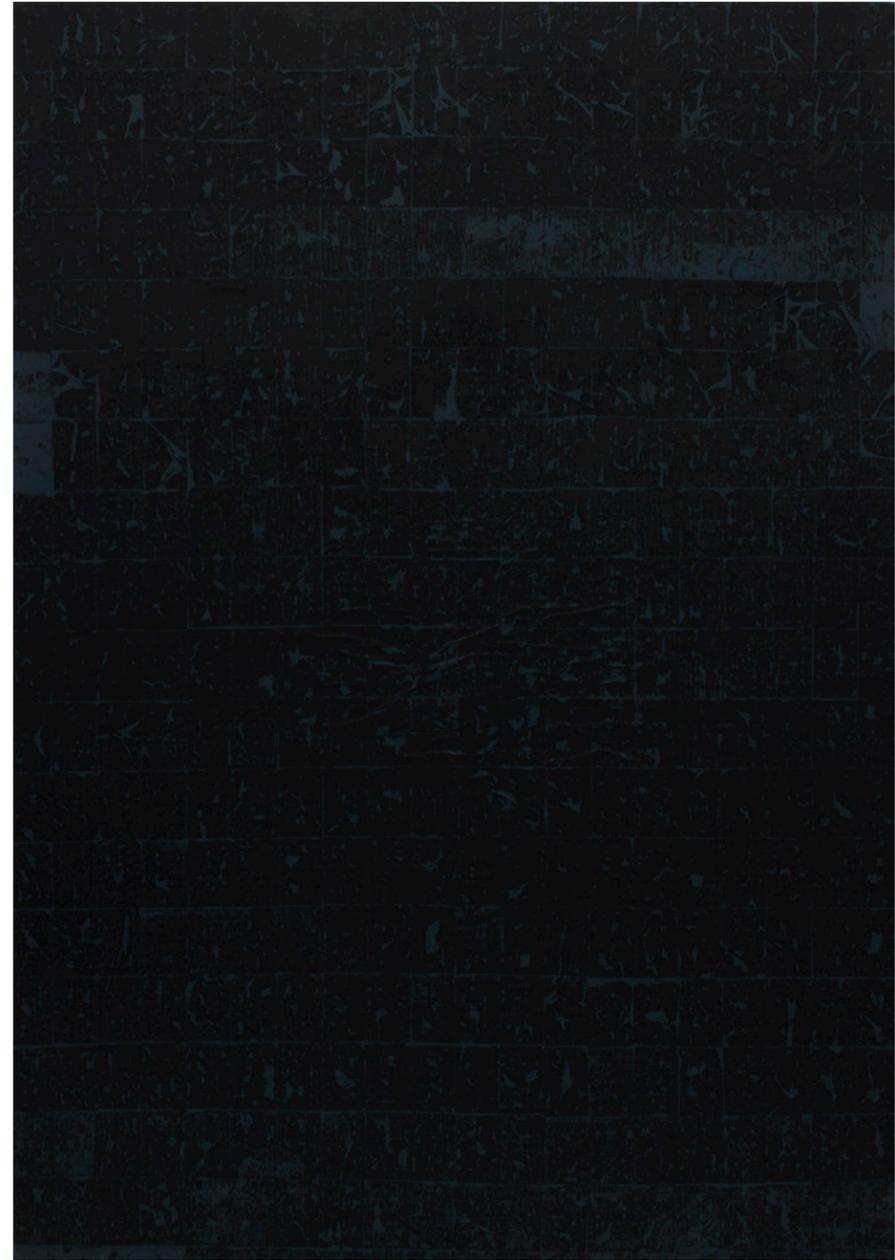
As I began to work more and more with my direct surroundings I studied those painters who had done the same before me – Antoni Tapies in Barcelona, Cy Twombly in the Mediterranean, these artists inspired me from the start. And by looking at the benzene transfers of Robert Rauschenberg’s work I became interested in an imagistic avatar. Unlike Rauschenberg though, who was more journalistic and chemical in his process, taking sources from pre-printed newspapers, my idea of experimenting with images transfer came from me wanting to provide a context of where I was – just like Tapies finding his Catalan identity and history within the scarred walls of Barcelona. Arriving in Hong Kong inspired me to start searching for a technique by which I could successfully transfer my personal database onto the canvas.

I should explain here that I have always been looking at images, making them, drawing them, trying to understand them, and analyse them. I never wanted to follow the traditional path of painting, but rather create series of works that employed all manner of transfer and image sampling techniques. I started experimenting with acrylic polymer and carbon transfer paper. Here was this material that allowed me to transfer an image faithfully. I painted the canvasses with flat, matte latex house paint, then went through a process of rubbing off the carbon paper to reveal the surface below, as well as the heavy process of rubbing off the paper to reveal the acrylic transfer images. Through this chaotic process the paintings revealed their true character, almost instinctively, and began to become integrated from, and within, the compositions.

Through this daily ritual the transfers became increasingly predictable and clean. The earlier attempts had given the paintings a loose, natural, and instinctive feel that seemed to slowly fade as the technique emerged. The materials were no longer free but forced to serve the purpose of the image. This is when I started to understand that it was the image that was holding me down, and that in order to recapture the intuitive nature of my work I needed to finally completely let go.

The new series of paintings took on a much darker tone than they previously had, with a certain mystery created by the unusual texture of dried ink that is not supposed to be detached from its binding in this way. The compositions, determined by the original proportions of the carbon paper sheet, were created instinctively and from one side of the canvas to the other. Each rip of the carbon paper that had been placed face down on a fresh layer of paint transfers its ink onto the acrylic in a unique way, depending on its size, mode of application, drying time, and paint consistency. The final result is an infinite matrix of shapes and textures determined by the interaction of two very basic materials.

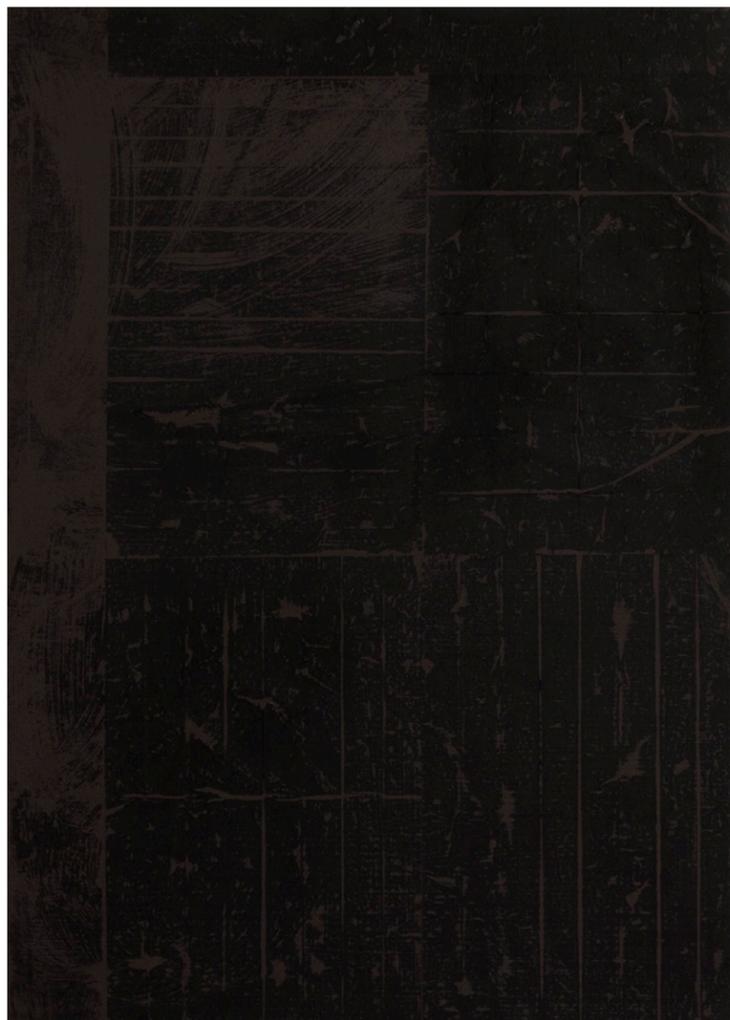




Preparation for a dive | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 106 cm



Indian Giver | 2015 | ink and acrylic on canvas | 137 x 87,5 cm



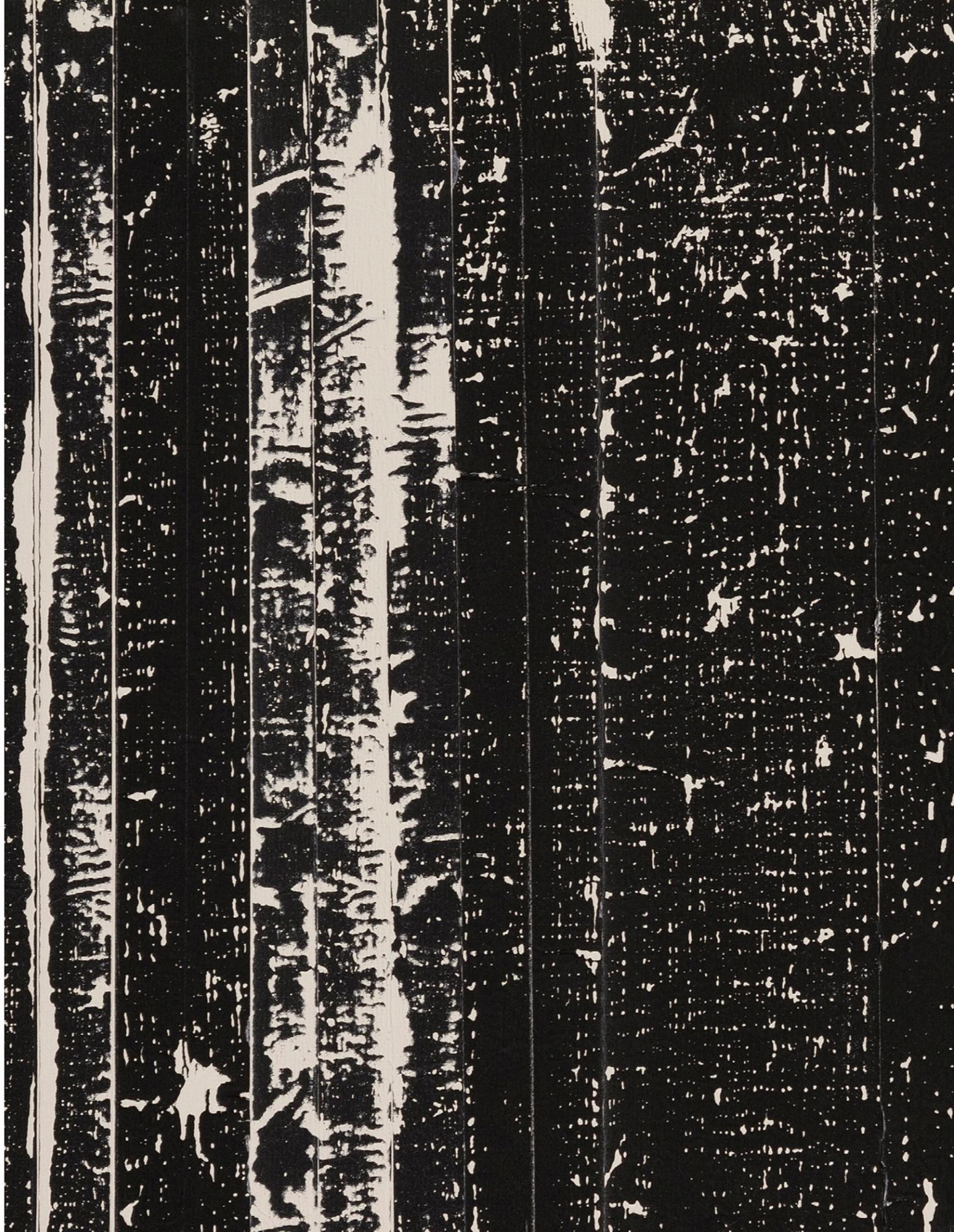
Untitled | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 137 x 87,5 cm



Untitled | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 106 cm



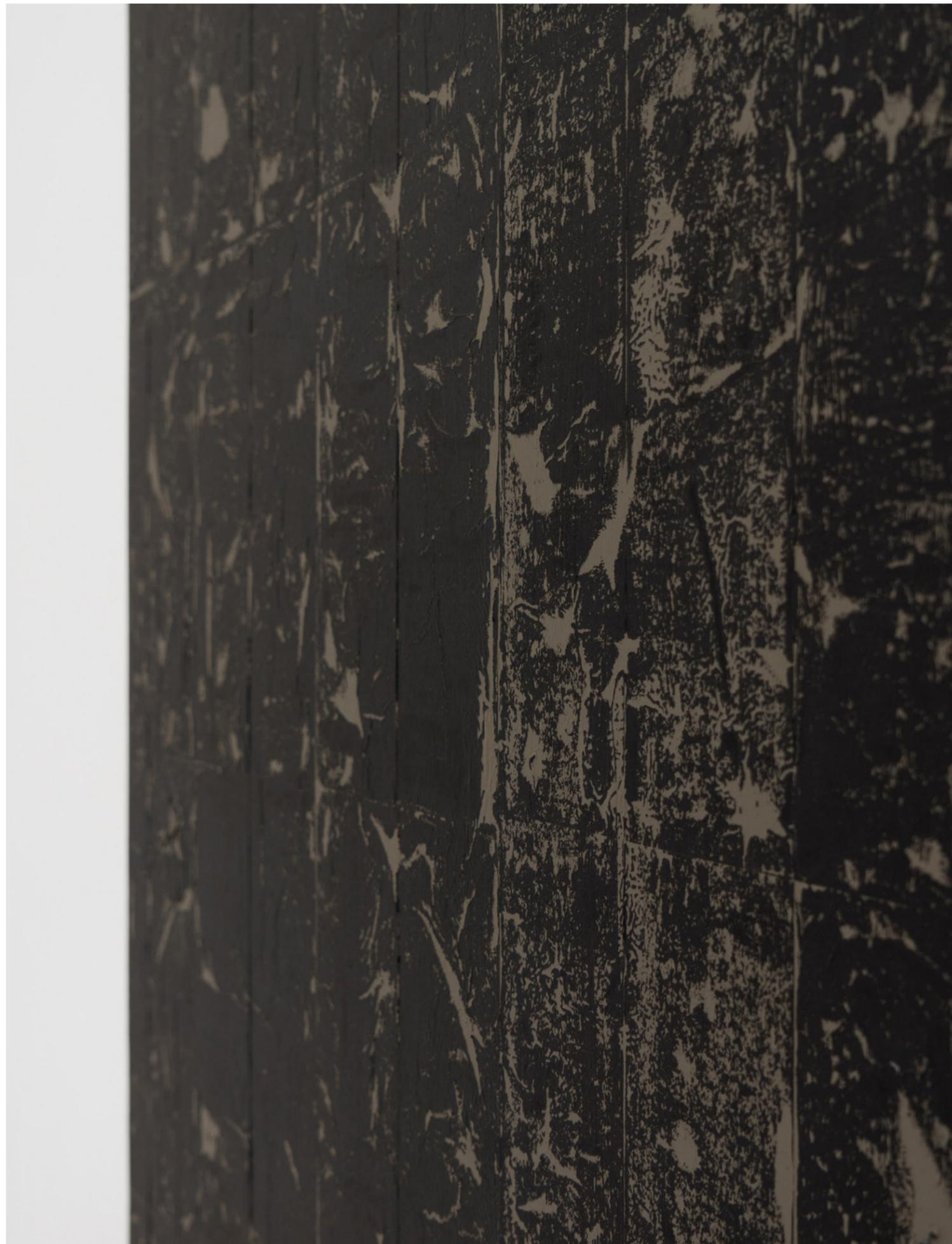
Untitled | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 106 cm



Untitled | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 106 cm



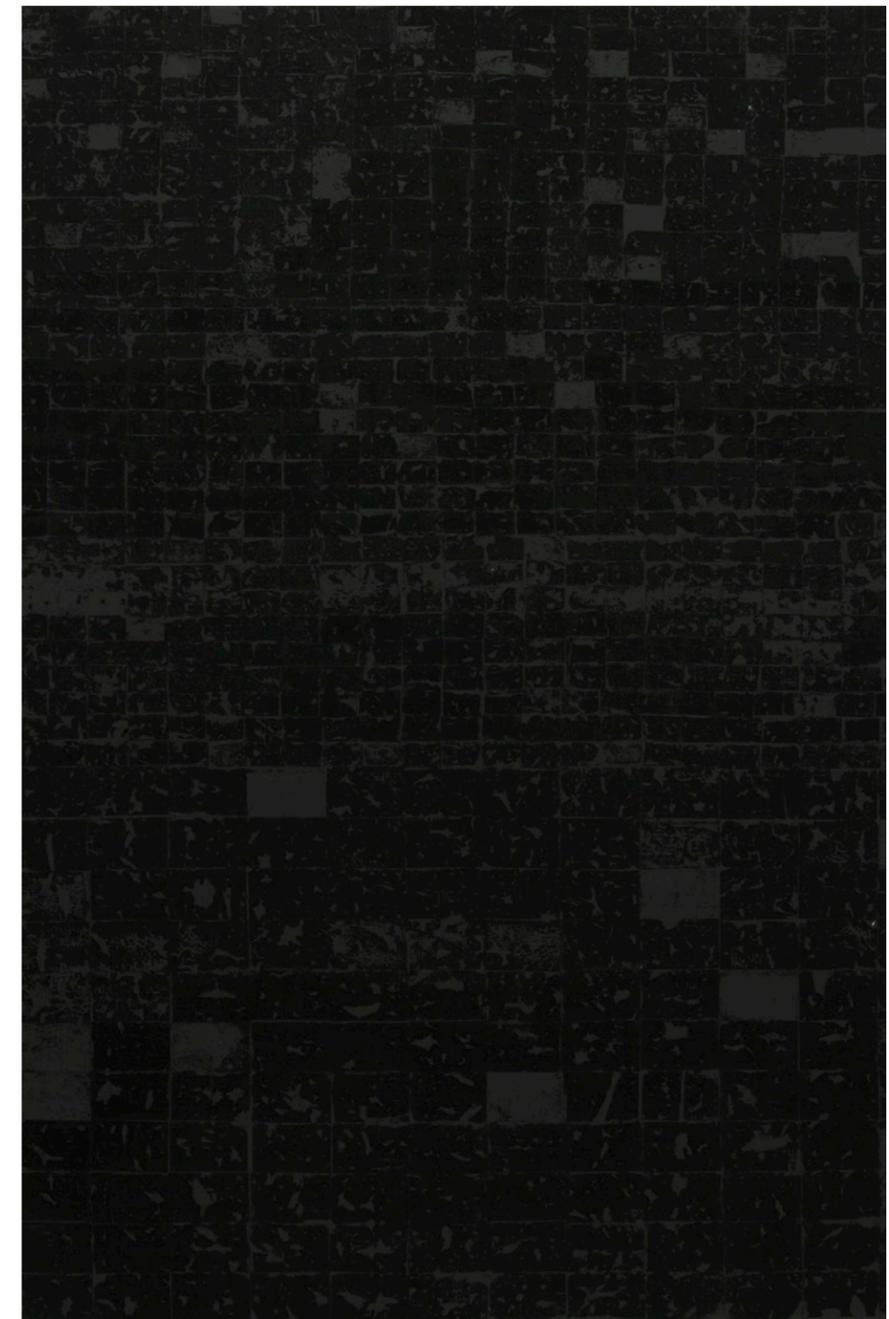
Neither all alike, nor all different | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 204 x 94 cm







Untitled | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 27 x 22 cm



Untitled (grid) | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 137 x 91 cm



How to hypnotize the blind | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 146 x 202 cm



Untitled (grid) | 2015 | ink and acrylic on canvas | 150 x 125 cm



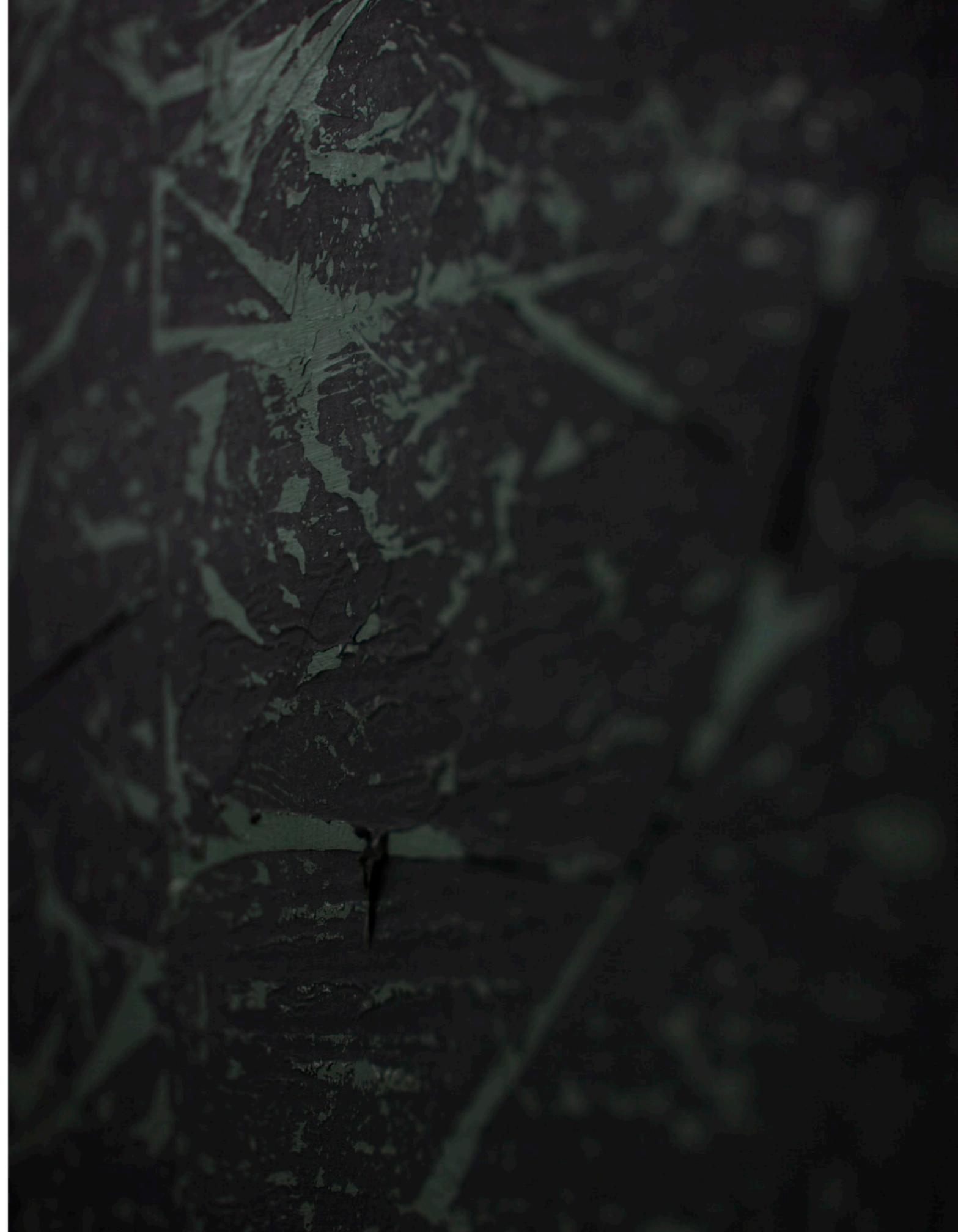
14



15



Some kind of conspiracy theory | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 110 x 224 cm



Dagobah System | 2015 | ink and acrylic on canvas | 162 x 140 cm





Descendants I | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 31 x 23 cm



Descendants II | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 31 x 23 cm



Descendants III | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 31 x 23 cm



Pelican I | 2015 | carbon paper and acrylic on canvas | 121 x 100 cm



CONTACT
charles.munka@gmail.com