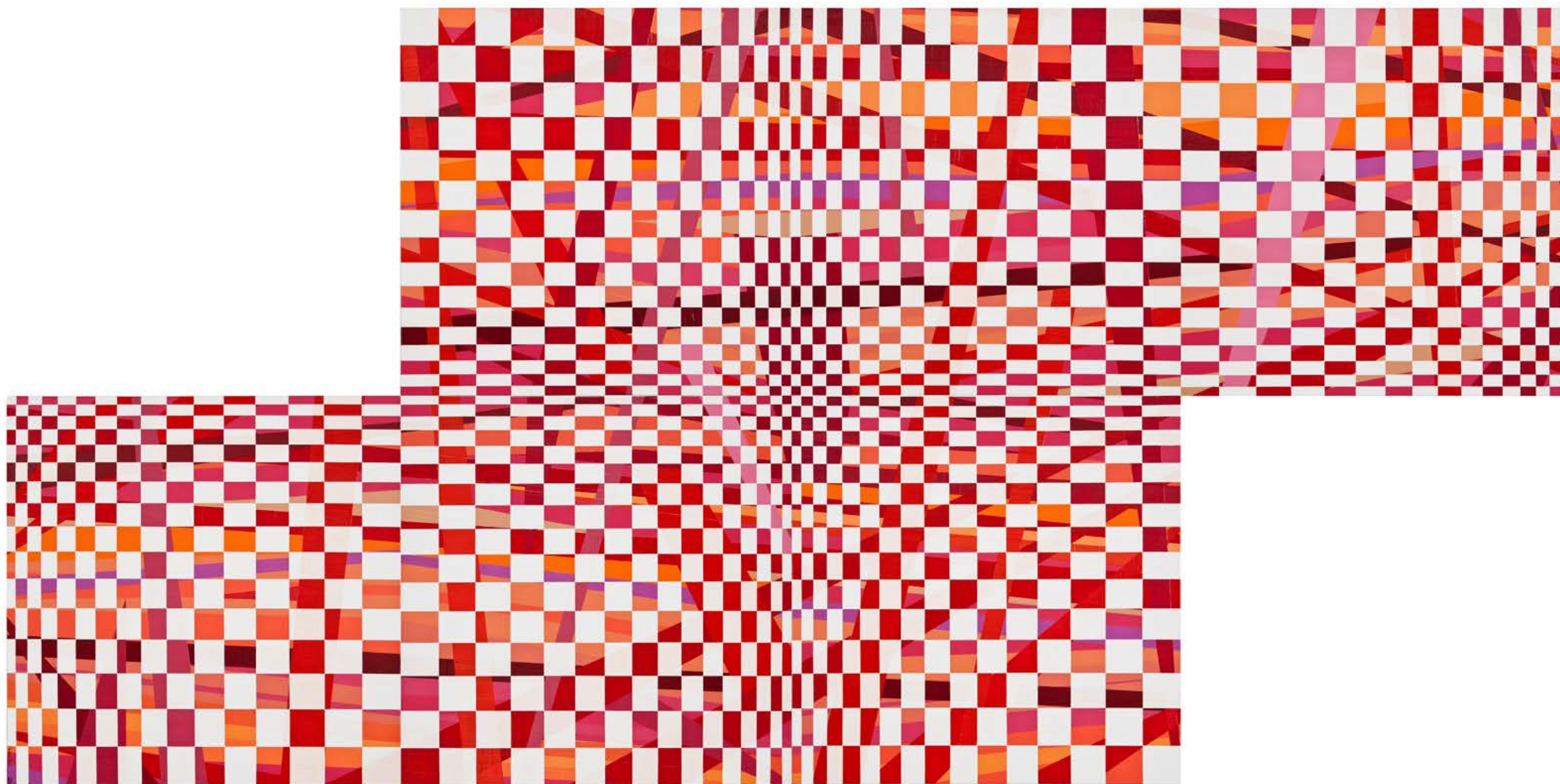


An abstract geometric artwork featuring a background of dense, horizontal stripes in various shades of red, pink, and blue. Overlaid on this background are several large, solid black triangular shapes that point towards the center, creating a sense of depth and perspective. The composition is dynamic and modern.

MOUTEEA MURAD

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and Murtaza Vali
Design by Dima Bittard
Photography by Nairy Shahinian
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MOUTEEA MURAD



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 123, Manifestations
at the Warm Sands*
2016
Acrylic on canvas
200 x 400 cm

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Mouteea Murad
Kite (detail)
2007
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 180 cm

ABSTRACT PAINTER MOUTEEA MURAD

By Samia Halaby

The rarity of genuine abstract painting today places Mouteea Murad among the very few young artists with the courage to make their own path. And he does so with work that is full of youthful energy and exuberance. Painting that is truly abstract is distinct from what is often labelled abstract but is actually a hybrid between illusion and abstraction. Countless numbers of supposed abstractions hint at faces or fantastic personages or landscapes; they are essentially illusions with blurred features.

The development of painting over the past two centuries has been a sea-saw between advanced revolutionary thinking and retrograde conservatism. In our time, painting, yet again is declared dead, while conceptual art, built upon verbal configurations, takes precedence and is the height of fashion. Murad's work is purely visual and purely abstract; it is an aesthetic where words have no place and where genuine visual thought rules. His work lives miles away from retrograde fashion.

Murad's love of Arab/Islamic art is a supportive infrastructure to his thinking. Although mainstream art of medieval Arab history—what western historians label as Islamic decoration and which is actually an abstract art of inlaid panels—is purely visual and yet not separate from nature and reality. Islamic art relies on geometry and symmetry as western painting relies on perspective. But neither symmetry nor perspective define the formal aesthetic of the art while in fact they do define how they imitate nature and reality in their respective ways.

Arabic geometric abstraction based on symmetry reflects the world differently than illusionist pictures based on perspective. Early Arabic abstraction makes images of experienced patterns in nature and thus is a realistic rendition of things we see. This kind of image is based on the general principles of motion, such as rhythm, distribution, and change: the effect of time. It is based on the viewer's understanding while in motion rather than when stationary.

The aesthetic of Arabic art at its purest, most masterful is little understood by western historians. The formal attributes of this art have yet to be properly described. The interaction of parts and how parts are selected from symmetrical patterns is rarely in scholarly focus. Exhibited in museums, Islamic art objects lose important attributes because their

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relationship to the whole of an architectural setting is rendered invisible. It is like exhibiting the parts of installation art separate from their ambiance—separated from the whole, the parts do not make sense. This attribute is what lends the masterful among mosques their amazing power to impart a sense of beauty, the kind that silences the frivolities of daily concerns and encourages quiet contemplation. This is the aesthetic attitude where Murad's paintings belong and which defines their relationship to nature and reality.

Yet his paintings, while they rely on Arab/Islamic aesthetics, live in the modern world with an awareness of recent international art and an equally important awareness of modern life and technology. It is not surprising to see the influence of revolutionary Cubism in his work, especially the late stages of Cubism known as Synthetic Cubism as practiced by Juan Gris and Pablo Picasso. This influence is more obvious in the first few years of his work.

There are masterful pieces among the paintings of his brief oeuvre of nine years of work. My favourites are ones that have surprises, ones that lay down a process and then defy the full expectation of that selfsame process. His unwavering colour of high saturation is at times overwhelming but he always manages to find a way to make it work. Among my favourites are ones that use colour in a variety of saturations. For me, the geometry weakens when the perspective of two walls and a floor is used or when a strident checkerboard with an illusion of graduated compression to expansion in little squares covers the entire surface. In these I miss what makes his work so much an image of reality with its wealth and surprises.

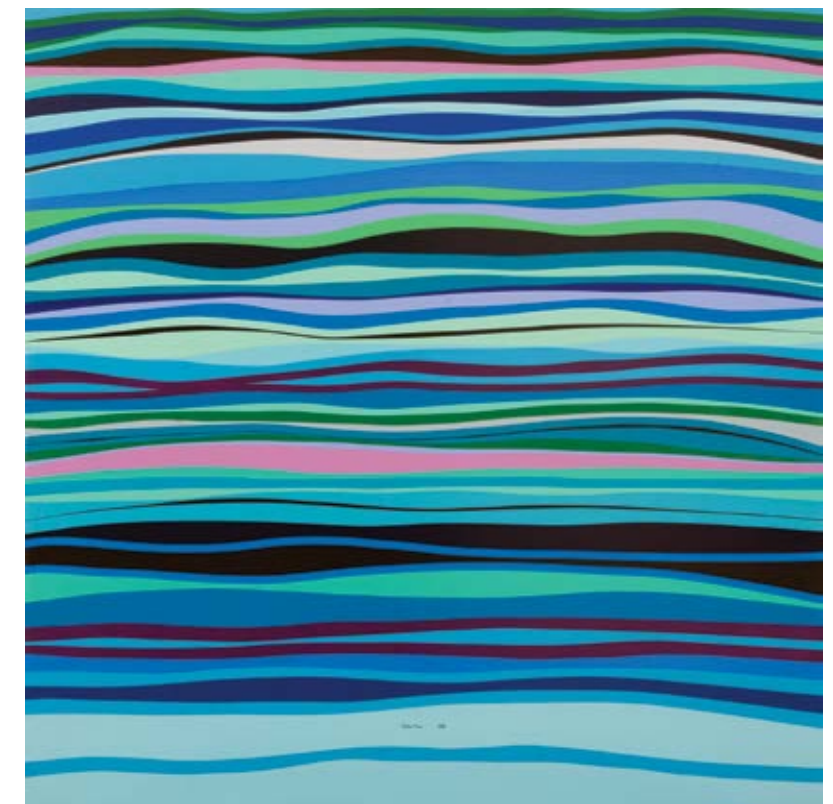
Beside high colour and geometry, Murad utilises free hand gestures. I can almost imagine him getting tired of the demands of precision and taking a brush and freely scribbling over the entire surface. It is irresistible to see the motions of Arabic calligraphy in the scribble. It is as though childhood education in calligraphy has taught the hand to move in ways that make sudden twists and unexpected turns. When he does utilise them, his free gestures always enhance the painting.

It is difficult for a young painter to be constantly in the limelight as an artist belonging to an important gallery. While it presents opportunities to learn about the international art world, it reduces the quality of aesthetic privacy—moments of unfettered thought to explore and discover. Still, the painter cannot live only in the studio. Contemporary artists have to be contemporary and know their surroundings. How to combine the need for privacy and love for Arabic art with knowledge of both contemporary life and international culture while processing the reaction of the art world is a large total of challenges this young painter has to meet. Mouteea Murad is doing really good work •

Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 46, Where
 the Wish Lies*
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 120 cm

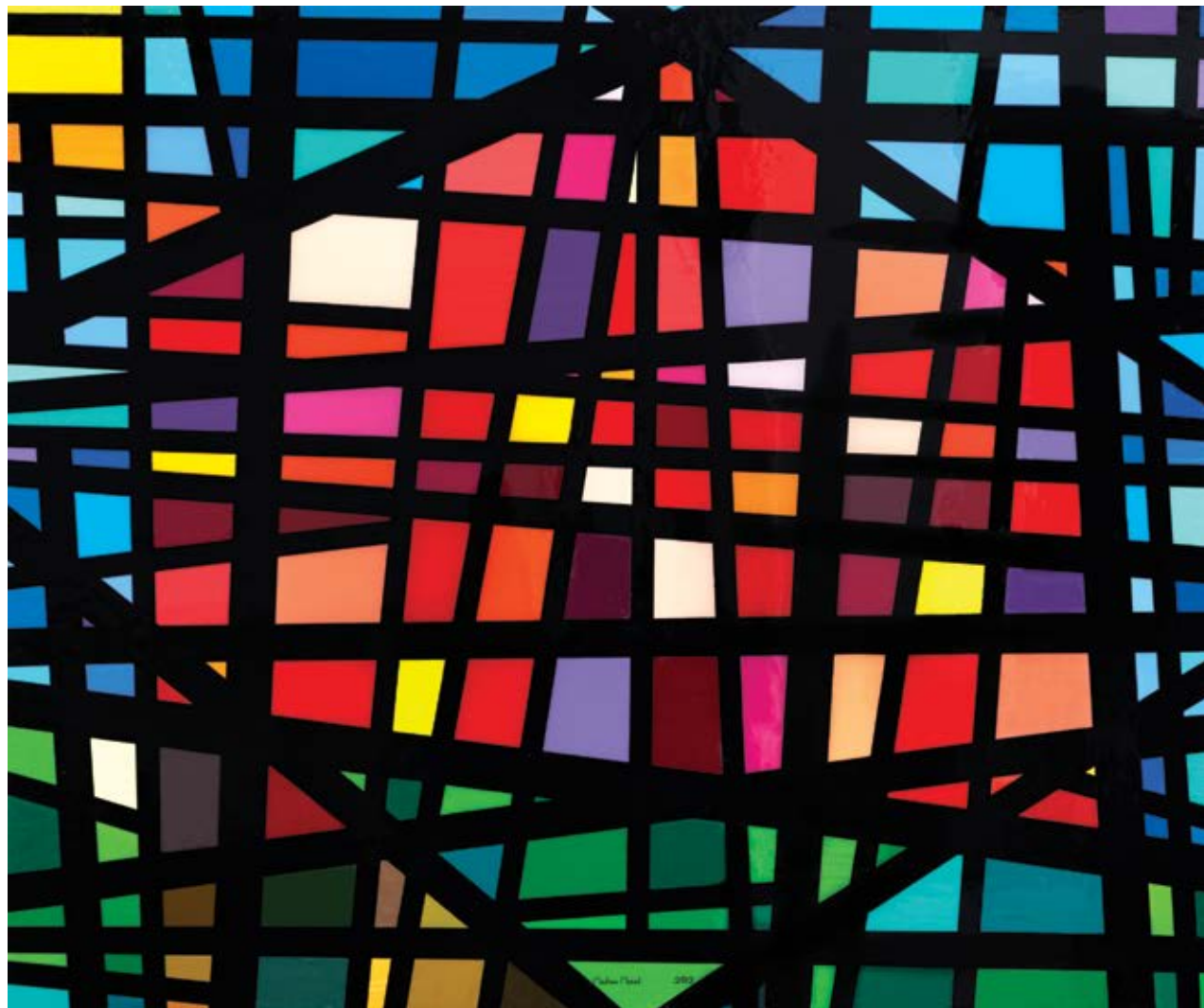


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 43, Marine Waves
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm

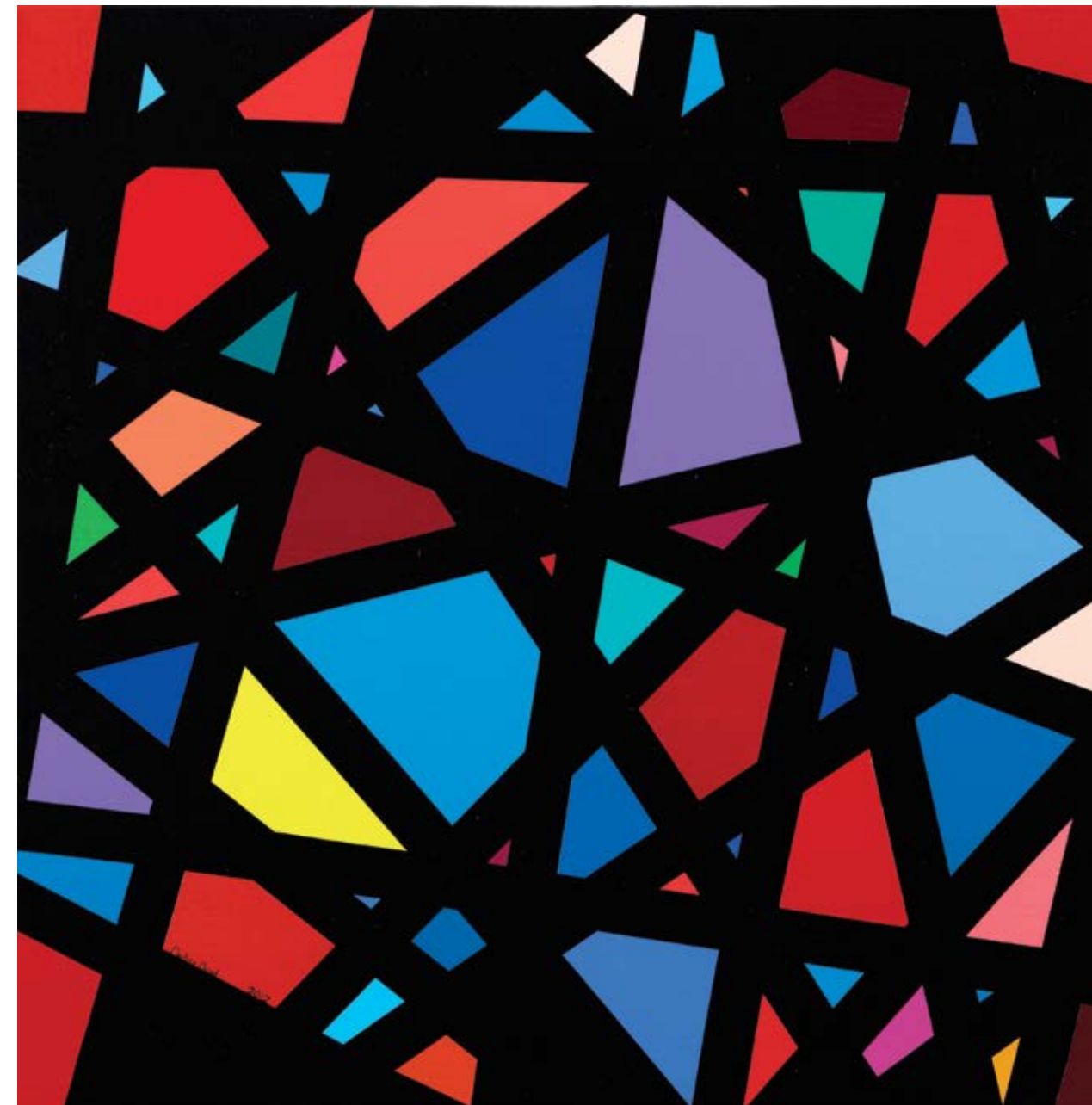




Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 42, Damascene
Lines
2011
Acrylic on canvas
155 x 465 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 62, Another House
 in the Countryside*
 2012
 Acrylic with epoxy on canvas
 100 x 120 cm

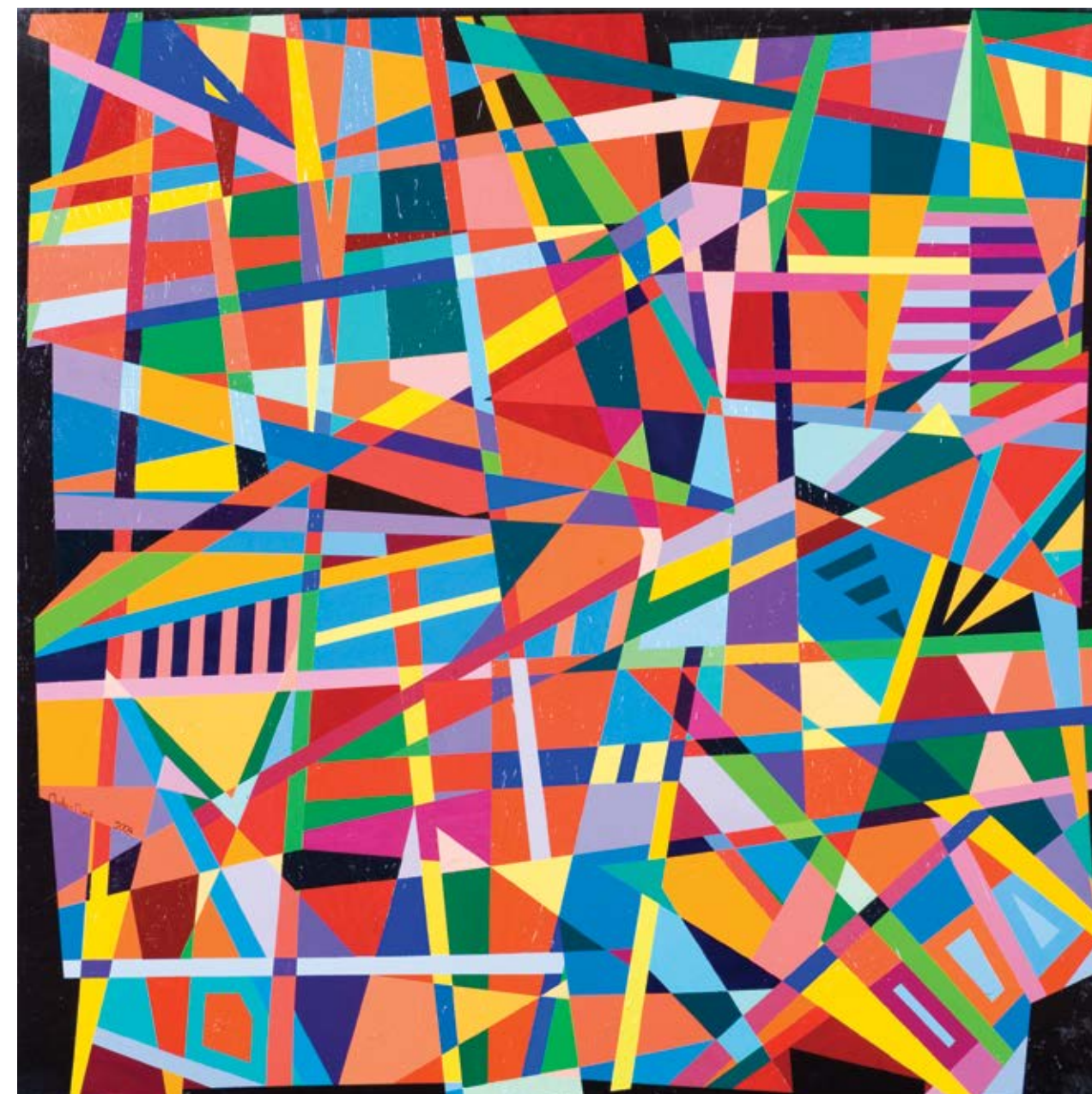
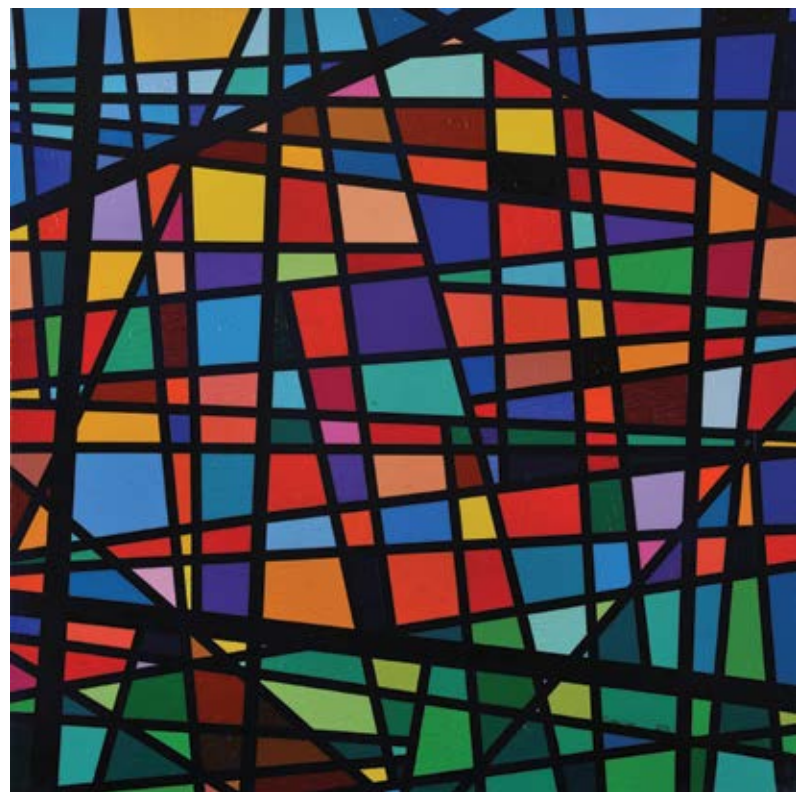


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 72
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 100 cm

Mouteea Murad
Trial No.3, Greeting to Fateh
Al-Mudarres
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 120 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 6, A House in the
Countryside, Greeting to
Paul Klee
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 120 cm



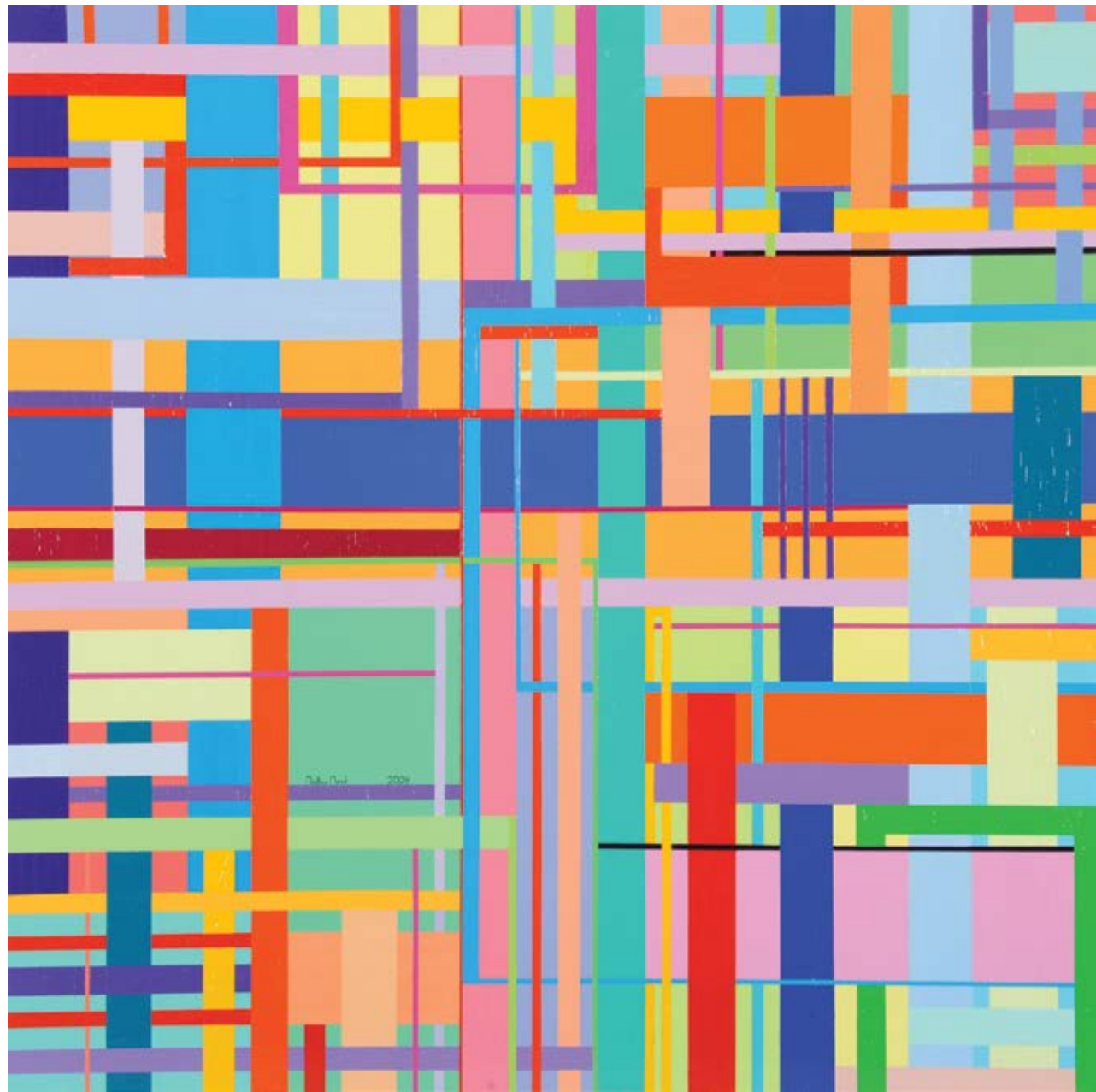
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 7, Greeting to
Moustafa Fathi
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 120 cm



Mouteea Murad
Paper Airplane
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 240 cm



Mouteea Murad
 Untitled
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 150 x 50 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 20
 2009
 Mixed media on canvas
 120 x 120 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 1
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 100 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 4
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 150 x 50 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 5
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 150 x 50 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 8
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 150 x 50 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 12
 2009
 Mixed media on canvas
 150 x 50 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 21
 2009
 Mixed media on canvas
 150 x 180 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 22
 2009
 Mixed media on canvas
 185 x 185 cm

MOUTEEA MURAD AND THE VOCABULARY OF GEOMETRIC ABSTRACTION

By Maymanah Farhat

In a 1926 manifesto, Kazimir Malevich identified the use of geometry in modern abstract painting as achieving ‘the zero of form.’ This phrase not only describes the absence of recognisable subject matter but also suggests the process of minimising a composition based on essential pictorial elements. Malevich believed that pure abstraction could provide a departure from the objective world and ‘concrete visual phenomena,’ arriving at art’s intrinsic abstraction and its reliance on ‘feeling’ as a determining factor.¹

The Russian artist’s theories directed the development of geometric abstraction throughout the twentieth century, and continue to be relevant today. Whereas geometric principles have been explored throughout the history of art, modern painters utilised abstraction in new ways, limiting their compositions to interactions of colour, shapes, and lines while rejecting illusionistic space. Once this representational device was set aside, abstraction became a means to investigate how the properties of painting are perceived, establishing the work of art as an autonomous object and subject.² Over the course of several decades, and in response to the dominance of Abstract Expressionism, nonobjective art grew to comprise various styles of painting.

Perhaps the most important development to result from what Clement Greenberg referred to as ‘post-painterly abstraction’ is its emphasis on form, which supersedes the identity of the artist. In Europe, individual painting styles were central to art since the Renaissance. Mid-century movements of geometric abstraction, such as hardedge painting and Op art, called for flat, carefully constructed compositions where sharp lines and saturated colour are distinguishing features.

Artists living and working outside of Europe and the United States were engaged with the evolution of geometric abstraction as it occurred, although many had previously absorbed its fundamental



1. Malevich, Kazimir. *The Non-Objective World: The Manifesto of Suprematism*. Trans. Howard Dearstyne (Chicago: Paul Theobald and Company, 1959).

2. Seitz, William C., *The Responsive Eye*. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1965).

properties by way of local visual cultures, including the anonymity of the artist's mark that often results from nonobjective designs. In South America, for example, pioneering artists in the first half of the twentieth century looked to trends in Europe—where many worked during the early part of their careers—while also delving into the 'symbolic imagery and nonobjective language' of indigenous cultures.³ Their aesthetic experiments were based on 'non-objective sensation,' as Malevich first proposed. A number of Latin American painters and sculptors such as Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres-García worked with the social potential and universal characteristics of geometric abstraction in mind, reevaluating traditional forms alongside the lineage of movements such as Suprematism, Constructivism, and De Stijl.

In the Arab world, painter Saloua Raouda Choucair held the first exhibition of modern abstract art with a 1947 solo show at Beirut's Arab Cultural Centre. During a stay in Paris between 1948 and 1952, the Lebanese modernist appropriated the mathematical structure of Islamic art as the basis for nonobjective compositions, and contributed to an influential school of French post-war painting. Choucair's theoretical treatment of geometric abstraction included explorations of space in consideration of social organisation; and in the tradition of Islamic art, she argued that abstraction is a method of distillation, one that allows for the essence of matter to be revealed.⁴

Other artists of the time similarly approached geometric abstraction with a critical eye. Like their Latin American counterparts, a major source of inspiration among twentieth-century Arab painters and sculptors was local visual culture. Islamic art and architecture, Arabic calligraphy, and the geometric designs of ancient art were widely used as prompts by regional artists, many of whom recognised the influence of such imagery in the works of modernist pioneers like Paul Klee and Henri Matisse. By the late 1960s, diverse image-makers were working with abstraction across the Middle East and North Africa. Although the first attempt at incorporating Arabic letters is found in a 1944 work by Iraqi painter Madiha Omar, subsequent artists belonging to the modern Hurufiyya movement reinterpreted calligraphy with the aim of collapsing its forms. Mahmoud Hammad led a group of Syrian painters that used Arabic text as the starting point for abstract compositions in which overlapping shapes and colour create multiple planes and freestanding letters seem to float due to immeasurable spatial depth.

The breakthroughs of the Hurufiyya movement quickly led artists to take up the international experiments that were redefining nonobjective art. Iraq's Hashim al Samarchi adopted an approach to abstraction that extends the conceptual aims of Op art by drawing inspiration from illuminated manuscripts of the Quran. Elsewhere, Moroccan artist Mohammed Melehi fashioned a hardedge painting style that reflects the advances in colour theory that first circulated in

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Mahmoud Hammad
La Ellaha Ella Allah
 1982
 Oil on canvas
 100 x 120 cm



Mohammed Melehi
 Untitled
 1975
 Cellulose paint on panel
 100 x 120 cm
 Courtesy of Barjeel Art Foundation

3. Enriquez Schneider, Mary. 'Mapping Change: Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection.' (Cambridge: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001).

4. Choucair, Saloua Raouda. 'How the Arab Understood Visual Art,' Translated by Kirsten Scheid. *ARTMargins* Volume 4, Issue 1, 2015.



Mouteea Murad
Childhood Persists Again
 2006
 Oil on canvas
 170 x 170 cm



Mouteea Murad
 Untitled
 2006
 Oil on canvas
 100 x 100 cm

the United States, where he studied, after the release of Josef Albers' *Interaction of Colour* (1963). Melehi's colour field compositions contain wave-like formations that describe springs of energy and movement. Composed of broad lines, his recurring motif is identified with modern takes on Arabic calligraphy, among other sources of regional culture.

Today, a number of the Arab world's foremost painters continue to work with geometric abstraction, while a new generation has embraced the transnational progression of the movement, casting an even wider net. As a leading member of this emergent group, Sharjah-based painter Mouteea Murad has exemplified its forward-thinking spirit. In the last ten years, Murad has worked through the history of geometric abstraction as he renews its main facets, particularly the plasticity, relativity, and psychological effects of colour.

At first, colour served as a distinguishing characteristic, a way to break with the expressionist school of painting that has dominated the artist's native Syria for six decades. Before turning to geometric abstraction in 2007, Murad worked in an expressionist style that he honed at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Damascus, where he trained with figurative artists Abdulrazzak Al-Samman and Abdul Manan Shamma, and allegorical painter Khouzaima Alwani. Some of Murad's colleagues at the university were Reem Youssef, Tammam Azzam, and Mohannad Orabi, who are now recognised for initiating new approaches to representational art. After graduating, Murad regularly exhibited with regional galleries and became known for dark works that depict sullen figures in a black, white, and grey palette. This was followed by a period of formalist compositions in which he experimented with the expressive qualities of calligraphy while also reexamining the basics of figuration. As colour disappeared from his paintings, he became engrossed in sociopolitical themes, depicting a world of greed, violence, and exploitation. Murad refers to this period of his work as expressive and critical of 'tyrannical injustices.'⁵ The dispiriting subject matter of these works eventually took a toll on the artist, posing an existential crisis.

Shortly before entering the Shabab Ayyam competition for young painters, Murad suddenly abandoned his expressionist aesthetic and its outward social commentary, opting instead for vivid colour schemes and nonobjective compositions. Part of his motivation for beginning anew stemmed from the experience of working with children at a private school in Damascus, where the creative process of art was heightened by a sense of wonder.⁶ In one particular exercise focusing on colour and geometry, Murad was reminded of an important aspect of painting: how formal elements must relate in order to create a balanced image. Later in his studio, he made abstract pictures in which different hues were introduced according to the imagery that resulted from collaging the works of his students. Over the bottom layer, he painted loose forms, including expressive

5. Murad, Mouteea. *A Date with Spring*. (Dubai: Ayyam Gallery, 2013).

6. Interview with the artist conducted by the author, July 2016.



Mouteea Murad
Portrait
 2006
 Mixed media on canvas
 100 x 100 cm



Mouteea Murad
Portrait
 2006
 Oil on canvas
 100 x 100 cm



Mouteea Murad
Portrait
 2006
 Mixed media on canvas
 150 x 50 cm



Mouteea Murad
War of the Crown and Donkeys
 2006
 Oil on canvas
 150 x 50 cm



Mouteea Murad
Festival
 2008
 Mixed media on canvas
 120 X 120 cm



Mouteea Murad
Coloured Maze
 2008
 Mixed media on canvas
 120 x 120 cm



Mouteea Murad
Arabian
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 100 cm

lines of various widths and lengths and interlocking shapes that are fluid or defined. *The Shared Toys* (2007) is the first signed painting from this yearlong project, which he submitted to the competition. The mixed-media work comprises a grid of appropriated drawings that is visible beneath a richly painted surface, resembling a stained glass window or a mid-century mosaic.

In a subsequent untitled painting, Murad's ornate use of geometry is more pronounced, as the dripped, calligraphic lines seen in earlier paintings have become secondary details that accent the implied movement of dense areas of colour. The work contains three strata: an undercoat of splattered paint that forms an abstract expressionist base; a carefully composed arrangement of triangles, quadrilaterals, and half circles that brings to mind Mahmoud Hammad's suggestion of infinite space; and a superficial field of sporadic marks. Together, these surfaces create sensuous chaos. Other compositions from this period lean towards the New York school of abstraction with gestural brushwork.

Murad's investigation of interlocking shapes and contrasting hues continued with paintings that limit the viewer's perception of depth to a single surface, and emphasise colour in order to 'transmit' energy and emotion to the viewer. In *The Magical Carpet* (2008), tightly assembled forms make it difficult to discern between positive and negative space, an elimination of the boundary between foreground and background that results from the artist's use of evenly distributed solid colour and hardedge lines. The work is mostly composed of rotated polygons. This uniform image recreates the sensation of watching an object in motion, as the shapes appear to turn clockwise. Here, Murad is 'feeling through colour—and not with structure' as Michael Fried observed in the colour field paintings of Kenneth Noland. According to Fried, this led the Washington Colour School artist to 'discover structures in which the shape of the support [or the stretcher] is acknowledged lucidly and explicitly enough to compel conviction.'⁷ Murad's investigation of colour relativity—what Josef Albers defined as 'the mutual influencing of colours,'—quickly progressed to a consideration of the physical nature of the painting, as an independent object.

Paintings such as *Festival* (2008), *Coloured Maze* (2008), and *Arabian* (2008) explore how negative space and the treatment of the canvas as a separate environment can create the illusion of floating compositions. In *Arabian*, for example, an irregular polygon containing a geometric motif is painted against a black background. The intersecting lines and shapes that cut across this image remain confined to its borders, limiting the 'action' of the painting to a space within a space. Although minimalist artists such as Carmen Herrera, Kenneth Noland, and Sol LeWitt used similar formal devices, building on the lessons of Suprematism and the cutouts of Henri Matisse, Murad's rendering is reminiscent of Islamic manuscripts in which magnificent arabesques are placed in the centre or to the

7. Fried, Michael. 'Shape as Form: Frank Stella's New Paintings,' *Artforum* (1966).



(Left)
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 33
2010
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 50 cm

(Right)
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 34
2010
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 50 cm



(Left)
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 35
2010
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 50 cm

(Right)
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 36
2010
Acrylic on canvas
150 x 50 cm



side of the page and surrounded by empty paper or modest patterns that seem to recede into the background. Bringing the historical development of this type of geometric abstraction full circle is the fact that in 1947 Matisse described his fascination with Islamic art by stating: 'This form of art, with all its aesthetic components, suggests a greater space, a truly plastic space.' As demonstrated in his cutouts, Matisse was particularly drawn to the negative spaces of arabesques, which he studied from Persian and Arab textiles, Arabic manuscripts, and examples of Islamic architecture in Morocco and southern Spain.

While Murad's *The Magical Carpet* and *Arabian* are examples of geometric abstraction, it was not until 2009 that he fully embraced the angular forms and flat surfaces of the movement. Around the same time, he began labelling and numbering his paintings as 'trials,' with each devoted to specific experiments, a practice that allows him to determine the efficiency of various techniques and compositional elements. As he researched the formalism of painting, he gravitated towards pictorial strategies that treat nonobjective art as a science. Combining different methodologies, he arrived closer to Islamic aesthetics.

Murad was born in Homs, Syria but spent most of his life in Damascus. There, reminders of its celebrated past as a centre for Islamic art and architecture were ever-present. During fourteen centuries of Muslim rule across North Africa and West Asia, the city served as the capital of the Umayyad Caliphate, and was an important outpost of the Mamluk Dynasty in addition to an economic and cultural hub under the Ottoman Empire. As Damascus changed political hands, the city acquired new types of architecture, and local motifs were transformed. The history of the Syrian capital can be traced through its various monuments, particularly mosques, churches, and synagogues, and lesser buildings like former religious schools, hospitals, mausoleums, inns, and homes.

Growing up in Damascus, Murad was intrigued by the geometry of its surfaces, whether belonging to edifices, manuscripts, or ordinary objects. His appreciation of the city's visual culture was initially from a spiritual point of view. In Islamic art complex mathematical patterns and definitions of space adhere to notions of piety, as repetition, symmetry, unity, and order allude to certain beliefs, such as the infinite nature of divine creation. Colour also plays a crucial role in communicating this concept and encouraging contemplation. According to Murad, the mystical nature of the aesthetic shaped his visual memory, and has directed his work since he first switched to abstraction.⁸ His experience of internalising the principles of Islamic art and architecture as he developed an awareness of things is familiar to other painters who were born in ancient Arab cities. In their individual writings, Palestinian artists Samia Halaby and Kamal Boullata have described similar

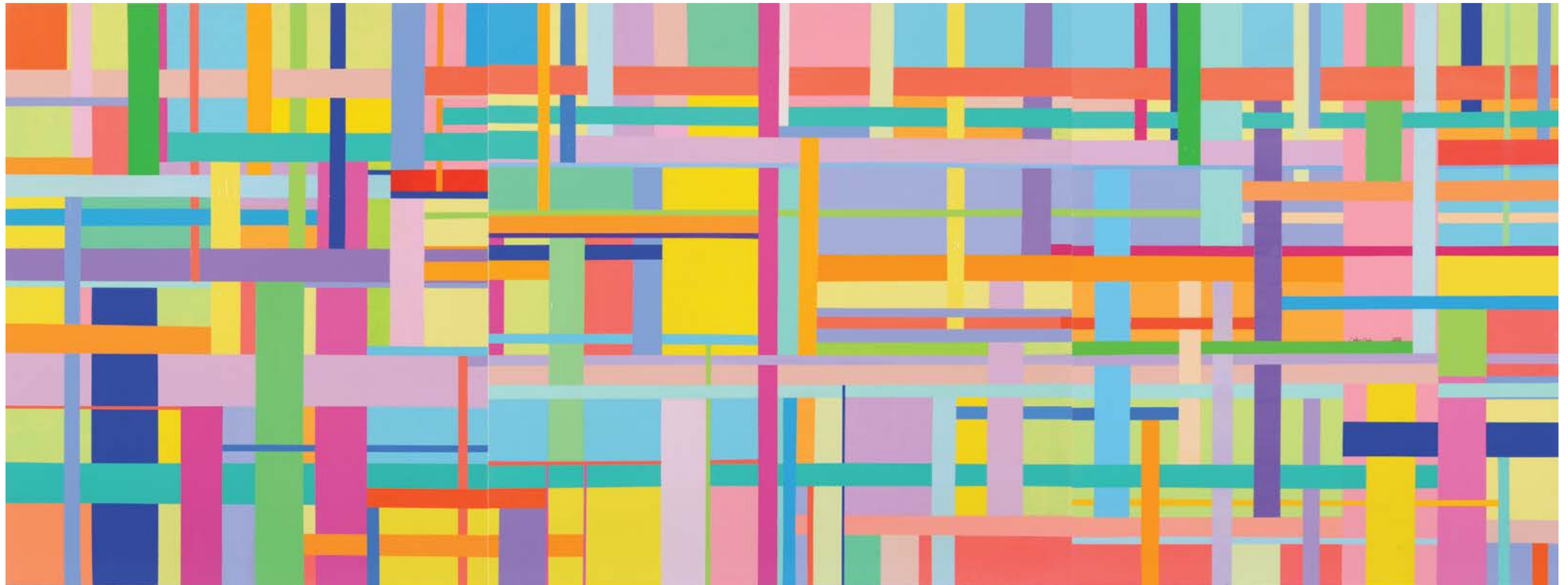
8. Interview with the artist conducted by the author, July 2016.



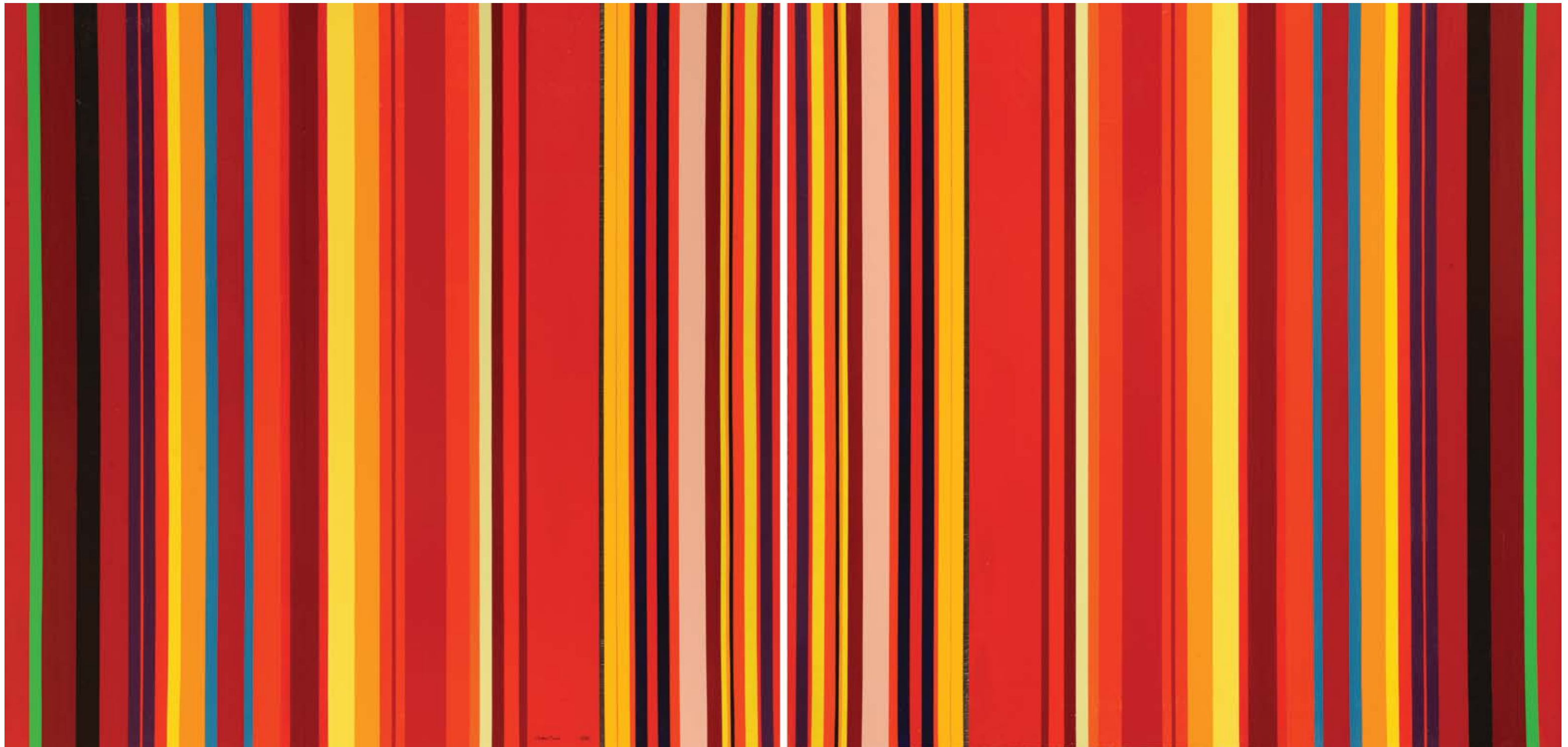
Samia Halaby
Yellow Spiral
1970
Oil on canvas
168 x 168 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 11, The Centre
2009
Mixed media on canvas
180 x 180 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 17, Oriental Colours
2009
Mixed media on canvas
120 x 320 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 26, Oriental
Extension
2010
Acrylic on canvas
155 x 310 cm

Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 94, Eastern Lines
2013
Acrylic on canvas
200 x 100 cm



9. Boullata, Kamal. *Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present*. (London: Saqi Books, 2009).

10. Interview with the artist conducted by the author, July 2016.

11. Mondrian, Piet. 'Neo-Plasticism: the General Principle of Plastic Equivalence.' *The New Art - The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, eds. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James. Boston: De Capo Press, 1993).

connections to the historic architecture of Jerusalem, where they were both born. Boullata details the ubiquitous presence of 'the basic form of the square' in the city's buildings and decorative arts as 'a fundamental geometric unit preserving the matrix of abstraction that constituted a decisive part of [his] cultural memory.'⁹

The impact of Islamic art on Murad also materialised as an ongoing exploration of geometric abstraction and visual sensation. The painter intentionally avoids establishing a focal point within the borders of his motifs in order to urge the viewer's eyes to wander. Consequently, he begins a painting much like an arabesque, and moves towards four equidistant points, developing his composition with the same degree of interest in every direction. Generating a multifaceted motif that seems to blossom outwards, Murad strives for 'a continuous kinetic interaction' and considers this aspect of his work to be analogous to 'the ornamental units' of Islamic art.'¹⁰ At times a shape or line is repeated as the image expands, for example in *Trial No. 11, The Centre* (2009), where a square in the middle of the painting grows exponentially. Rendered in white, this sequence creates an optical illusion over a colourful composition of triangles that originates from the midpoint but appears to shatter as though made from glass. The grid proposes a centrifugal force that undermines the viewer's perception of space.

Other works show how divergent patterns can be balanced with a method that is similar to the rejection of symmetry in De Stijl painting, where elements are independent yet relative. Piet Mondrian, a leading figure of the De Stijl movement, advocated for pictorial uniformity in philosophical terms by arguing that art is the 'plastic expression of the unconscious and of the conscious.' For the Dutch artist, this idea of balance applied to 'the totality of our being' in which 'the individual or the universal may dominate, or equilibrium between the two may be approached.' In other words, art is subjective and objective, revealing the reciprocal action of the unconscious and conscious mind. ¹¹ Murad sees geometric abstraction as a vocabulary, with formal details functioning as letters that compose words. Together, these details also provide 'a mirror of emotions and a reflection of them,' which complete the image for the viewer—a theory that parallels Mondrian's concepts of equilibrium and 'pure plastic expression.'

Works such as *Oriental Colours* (2009) verify Murad's reliance on form to retrieve mental images. With an intricate lattice that travels across the composition, the triptych offers a resplendent expanse that reproduces the sensation of traversing different terrains. Sea blue squares, coral and lavender rectangles, and emerald and mustard stripes intersect throughout the painting in a labyrinth of hues. The title of the work describes things that reside in memory but are unnamed, points of reference drawn from Murad's experiential knowledge reimagined with colour. The crisscrossing shapes and lines of his sectioned canvases offer endless passageways for the viewer.

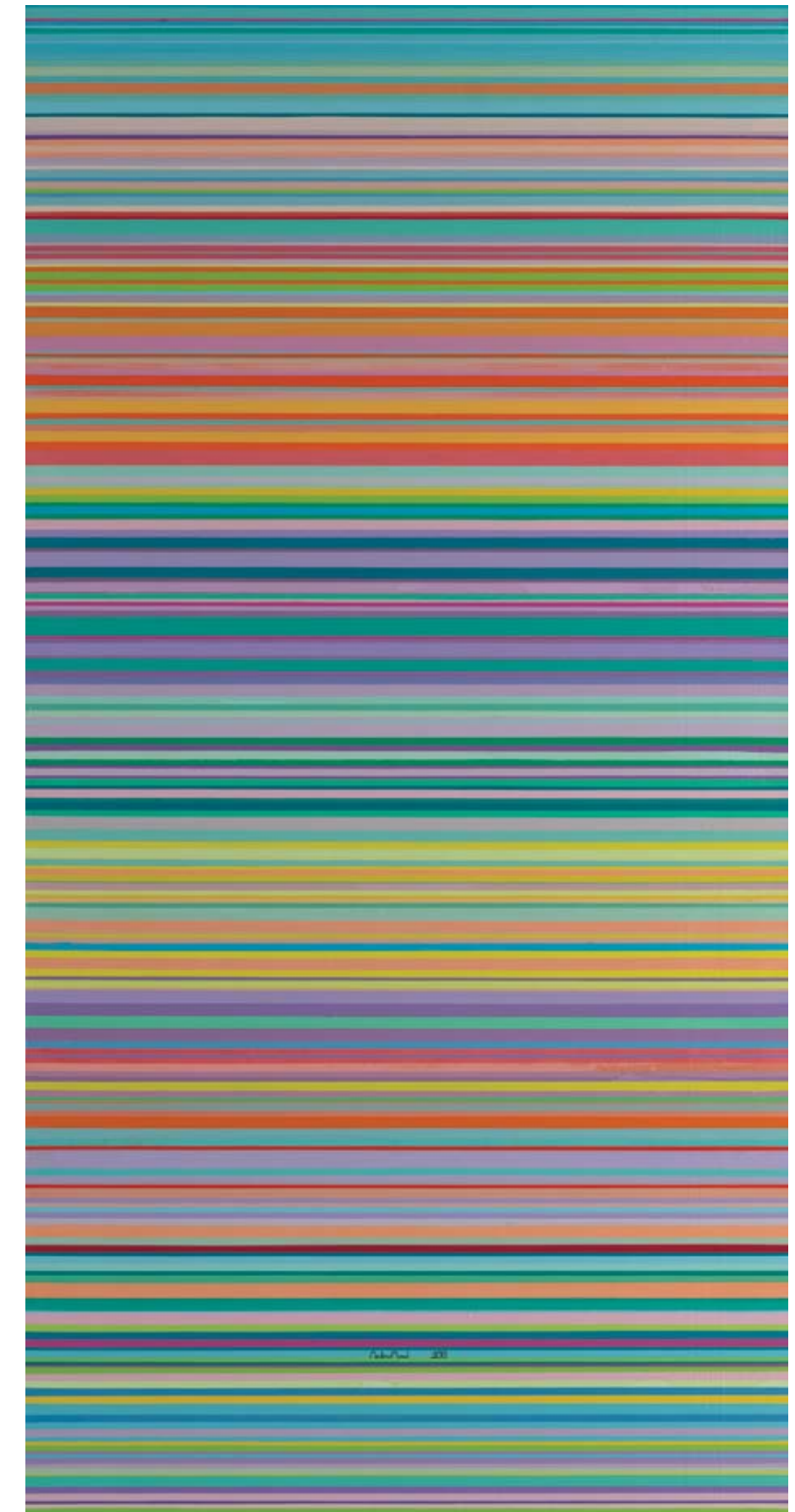
In *Oriental Extension* (2010), Murad reduces geometric shapes to bands and lines that vary in saturation and density. Although painted according to mathematical calculations, Murad's stripes achieve what Op artist Bridget Riley refers to as 'colour-form,' meaning that the structural elements of geometric abstraction are made secondary, as colour becomes the primary subject. *Oriental Extension* contains symmetrical halves that begin at a white vertical axis and continue outwards as a mirrored sequence of lines. Mostly rendered in red hues that alternate in value, the illusion of shifting space is produced through the plasticity of colour, which artist and educator Hans Hofmann defined as the 'push and pull' of contrasting hues.

The relativity of colour became increasingly important to Murad as he developed a body of work that concentrates on the visual effects of lines, a subject that has preoccupied artists since the modern period. One of the earliest exponents of colour theory in abstraction was Paul Klee, who referred to his stripes as 'strata.' Like a number of artists of the period, abstraction for the Swiss-born German painter correlated to music, particularly the rhythmic qualities of colour. Writing on the relativity of colour, Klee's former colleague at the Bauhaus, Josef Albers, later observed that: 'As harmony and harmonising is also a concern of music, so a parallelism of effect between tone combinations and colour combinations seems unavoidable and appropriate.'¹² Revisiting these essential ideas, Murad's striped paintings confirm the ability of colour to serve as an affecting detail when hues are placed side-by-side.

In *Trial No. 94, Eastern Lines* (2013), sections of colour appear to move as thin dark bands are dispersed between bright or dull bars. Murad's motif is made of simple forms, yet the complexity of the composition resides in its changing colour combinations, the order of which is carefully structured. The sequences of the painting can be read as a record of time, given that the intensity and thickness of hues change with each stripe, and not one colour arrangement is repeated. In a physical sense, the painting's vivid colour scheme, horizontal composition, and long, rectangular shape bring to mind the striped Kilim rugs that originated in the Adana province of eastern Turkey, and are popular across West Asia.

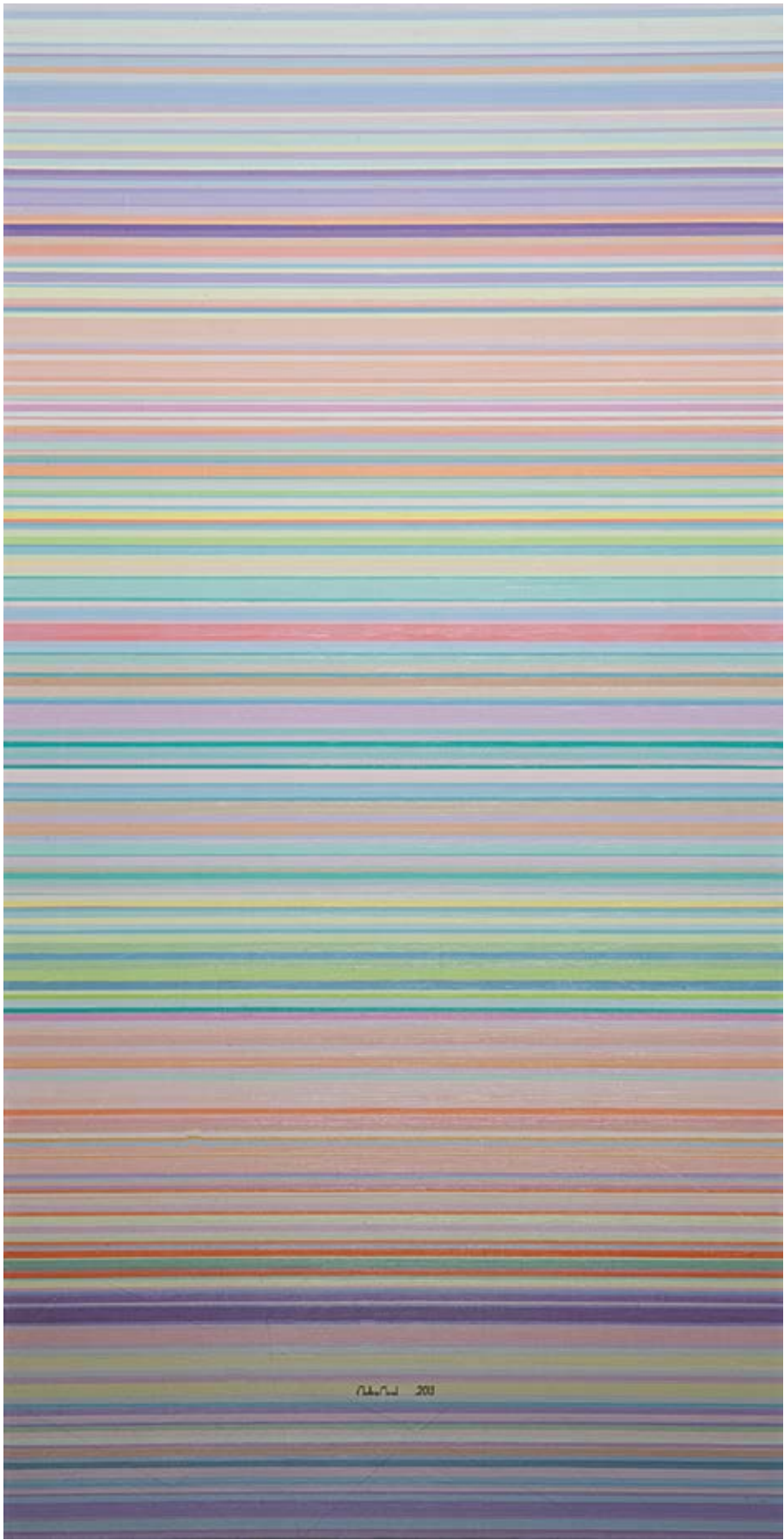
Trial No. 94, Eastern Lines belongs to a series of works inspired by the Arab uprisings. Other stripe compositions, however, forgo the geometric precision and colour range of the painting. Instead, Murad focuses on variations of a single hue and interposes slightly curved lines and long, thin triangles between bands. This creates the appearance of oscillating forms that descend towards the lower part of the painting, evoking the path of a procession, or the thrust of a society in flux. Murad created the series in Egypt after he was displaced from Damascus by the Syrian conflict. The high intensity of his palette recalls the 'strata' paintings of

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Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 95, Eastern Lines
 2013
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 100 cm

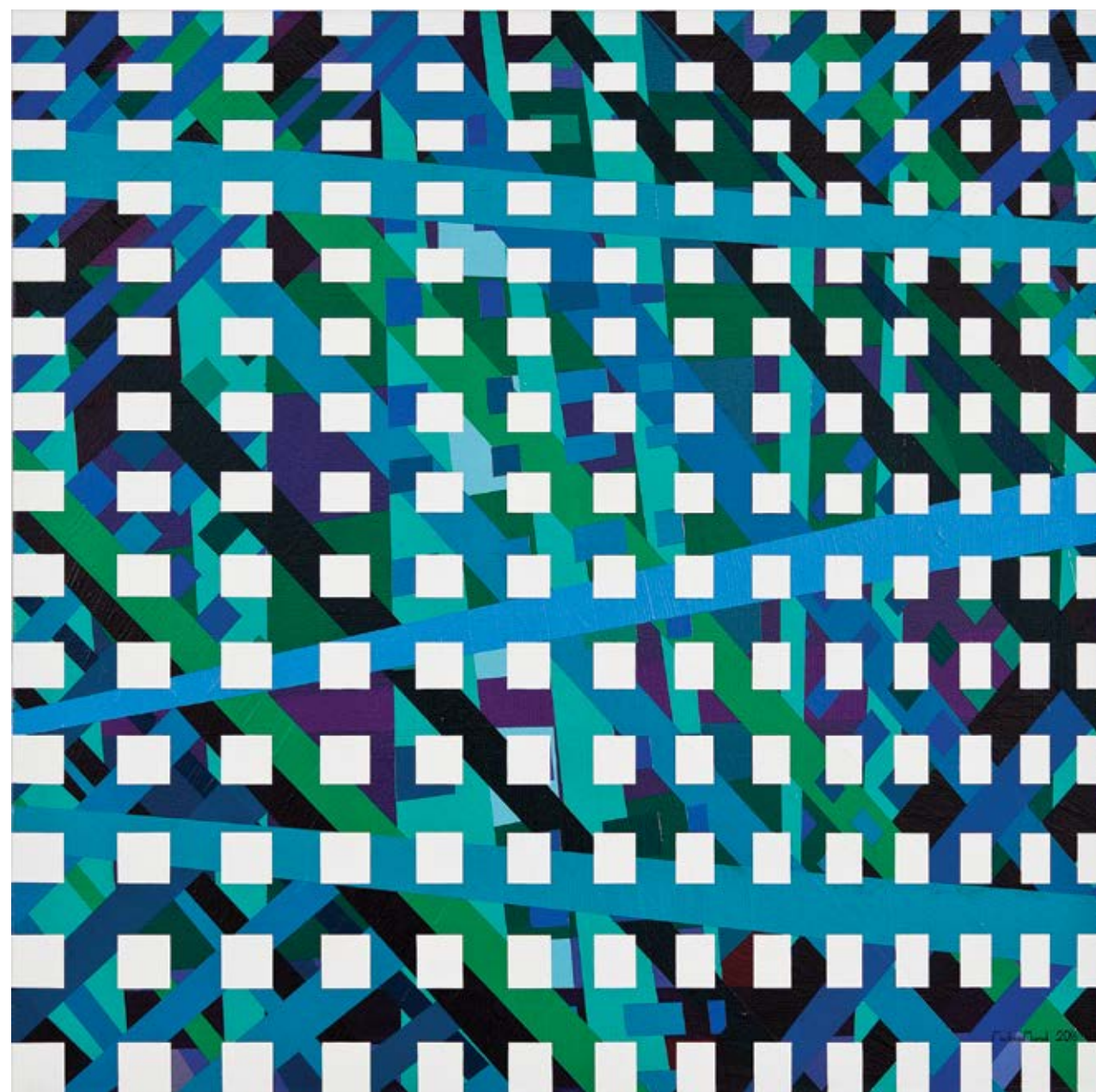
12. Albers, Josef. *Interaction of Colour*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).



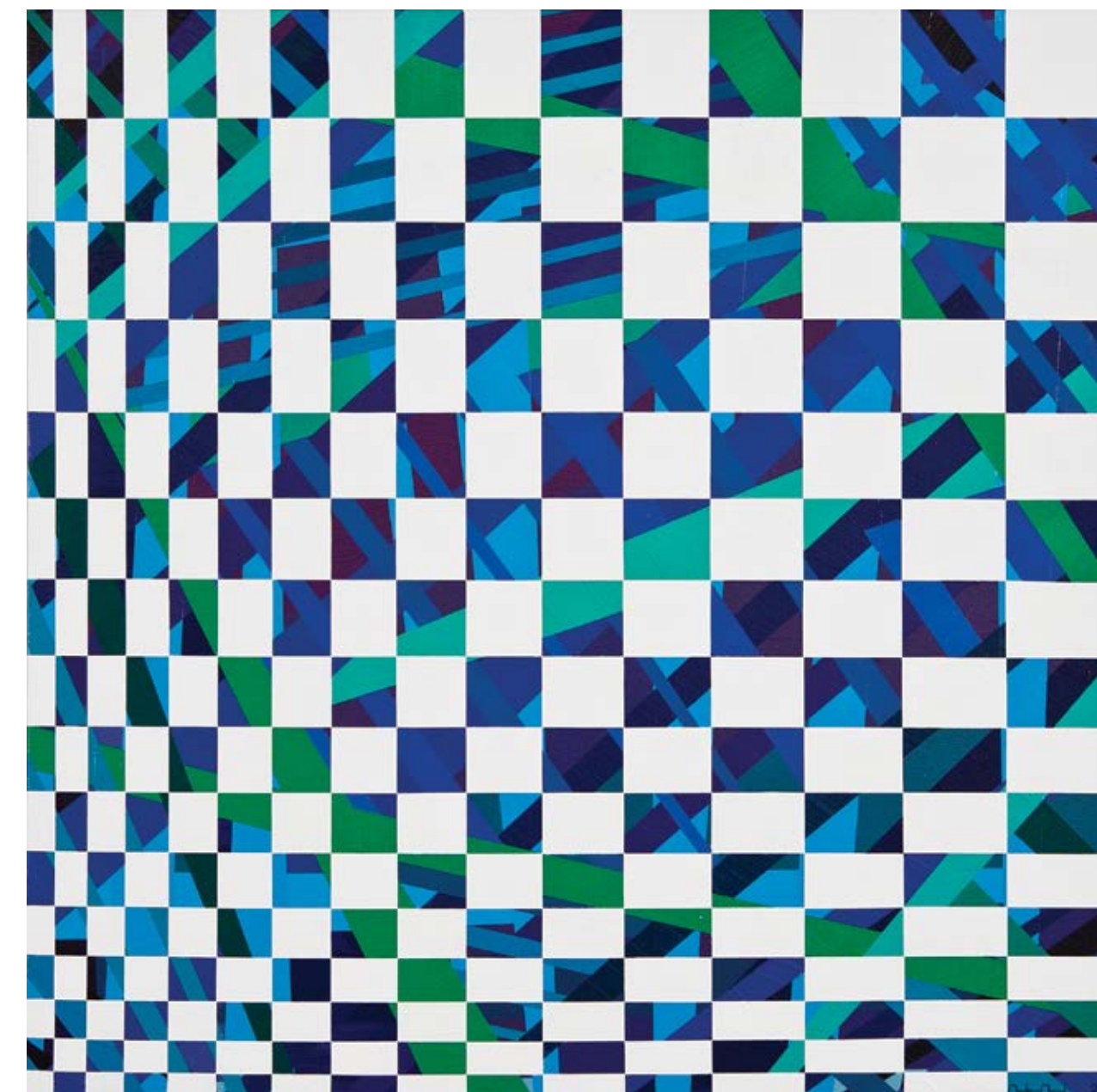
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 96, Eastern Lines
2013
Acrylic on canvas
200 x 100 cm

Paul Klee, who based several works on the Egyptian scenery he encountered in the late 1920s. Also present in this dialogue are Bridget Riley's stripe canvases that were the result of her own trip to the North African country in 1979. During this time, Riley was drawn to the limited palette of Pharaonic tomb paintings. Murad's images, despite using 'colour-form,' are closer to the compositions of the German modernist in that they first describe nature when addressing the reality of man.

Recent works by the Syrian artist indicate a return to earlier investigations of geometric abstraction with new insights. In his latest paintings, Murad incorporates the Fibonacci number series as small squares that gradually increase in size over images of crisscrossing bands. In mathematics the sequence is made when a number is the sum of the two numbers before it. The Fibonacci series has been used to illustrate growth patterns in nature, science, and art for centuries. Murad uses the numbers to produce outer motifs that obscure striking compositions, and resemble the latticework of *mashrabiya* windows. These architectural features provide a view of the street with the guarantee of privacy for the occupants of homes in densely populated cities like Cairo and Damascus. For passers-by, the screen protects an unknown inner domain. In Murad's paintings, similar geometric grids reveal a world of colour and interacting forms through openings that expand depending on where the viewer stands •

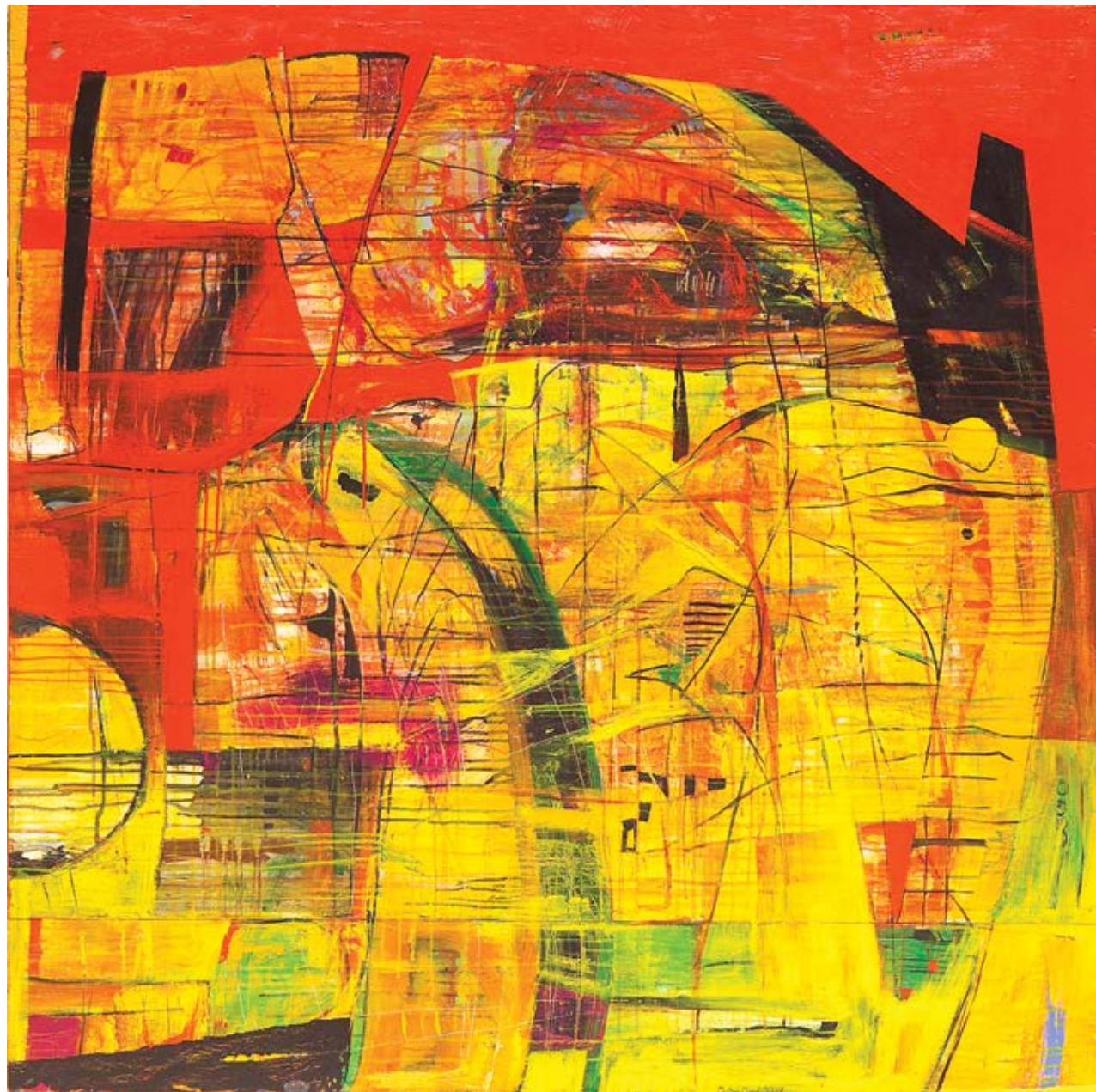


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 122
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 100 cm

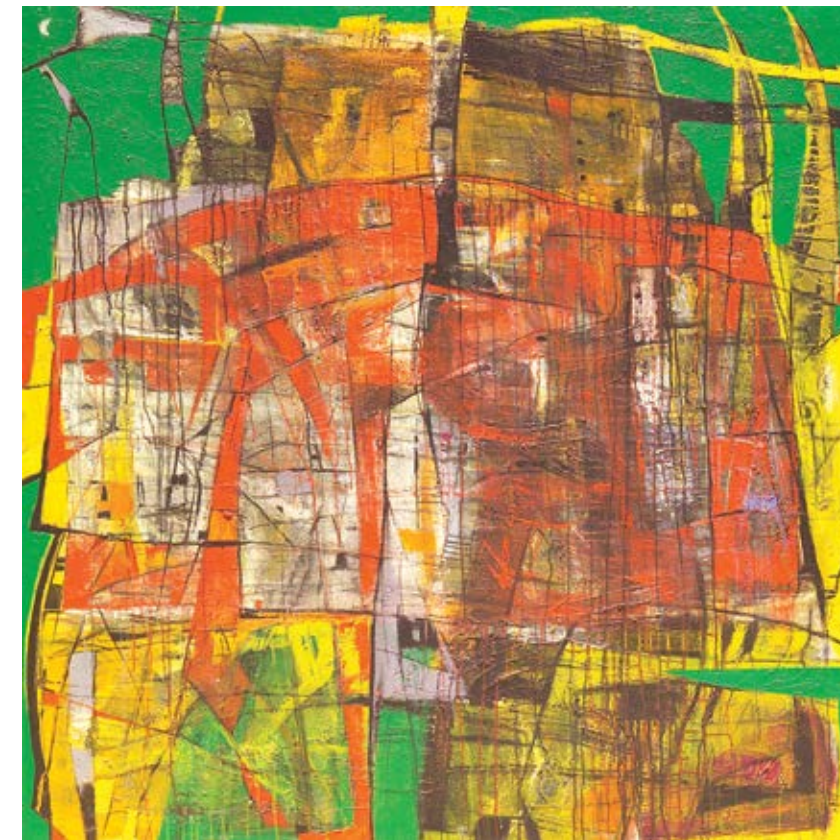


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 121
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 100 cm

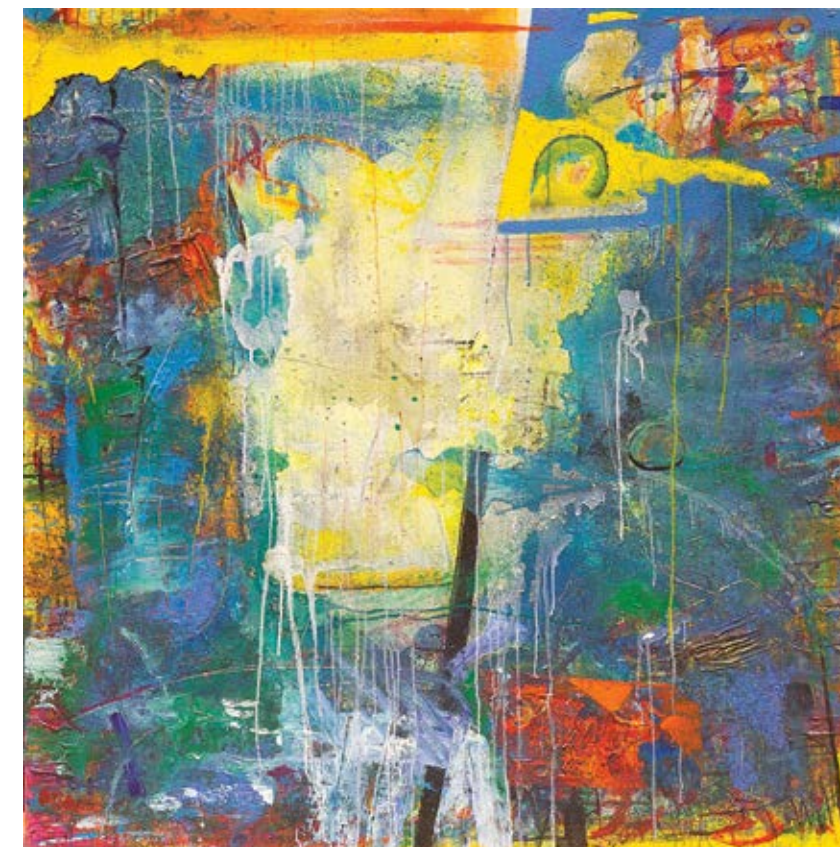




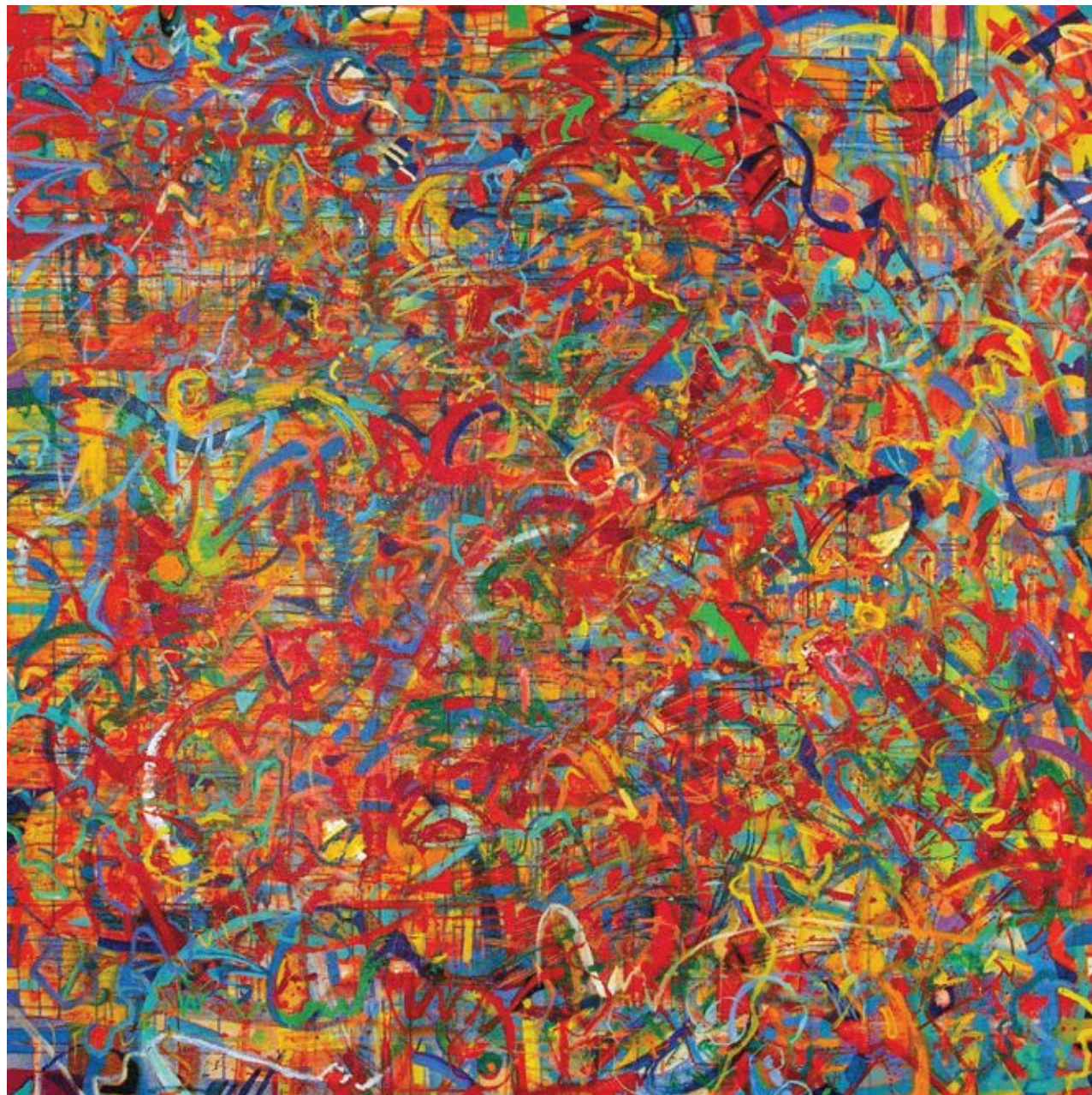
Mouteea Murad
 Untitled
 2007
 Mixed media on canvas
 145 x 145 cm



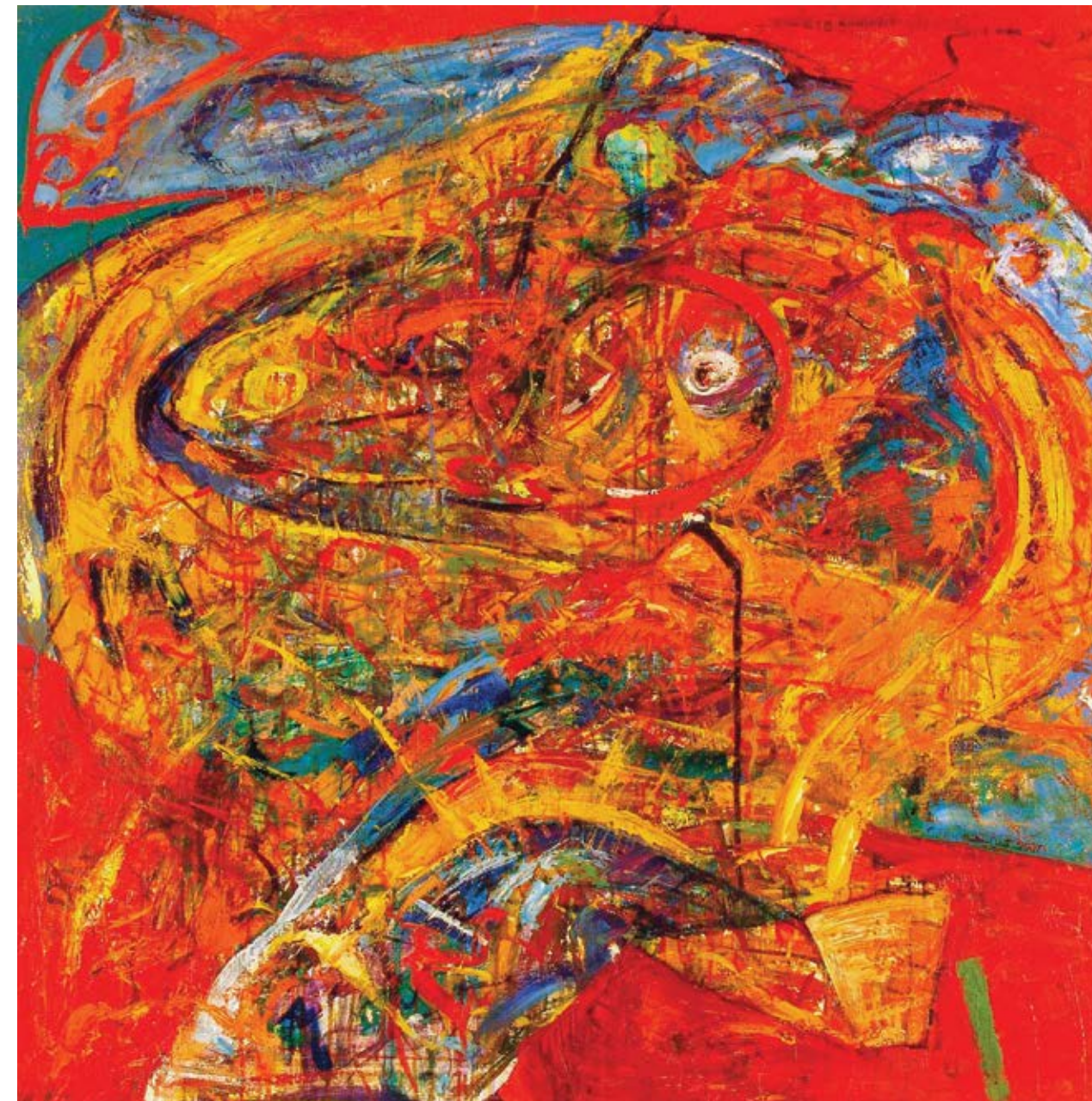
Mouteea Murad
 Untitled
 2007
 Mixed media on canvas
 145 x 145 cm



Mouteea Murad
 Untitled
 2007
 Mixed media on canvas
 120 x 120 cm



Mouteea Murad
Fire Crackers
 2007
 Mixed media on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



Mouteea Murad
Box of Pleasure and Surprises
 2007
 Mixed media on canvas
 120 x 120 cm



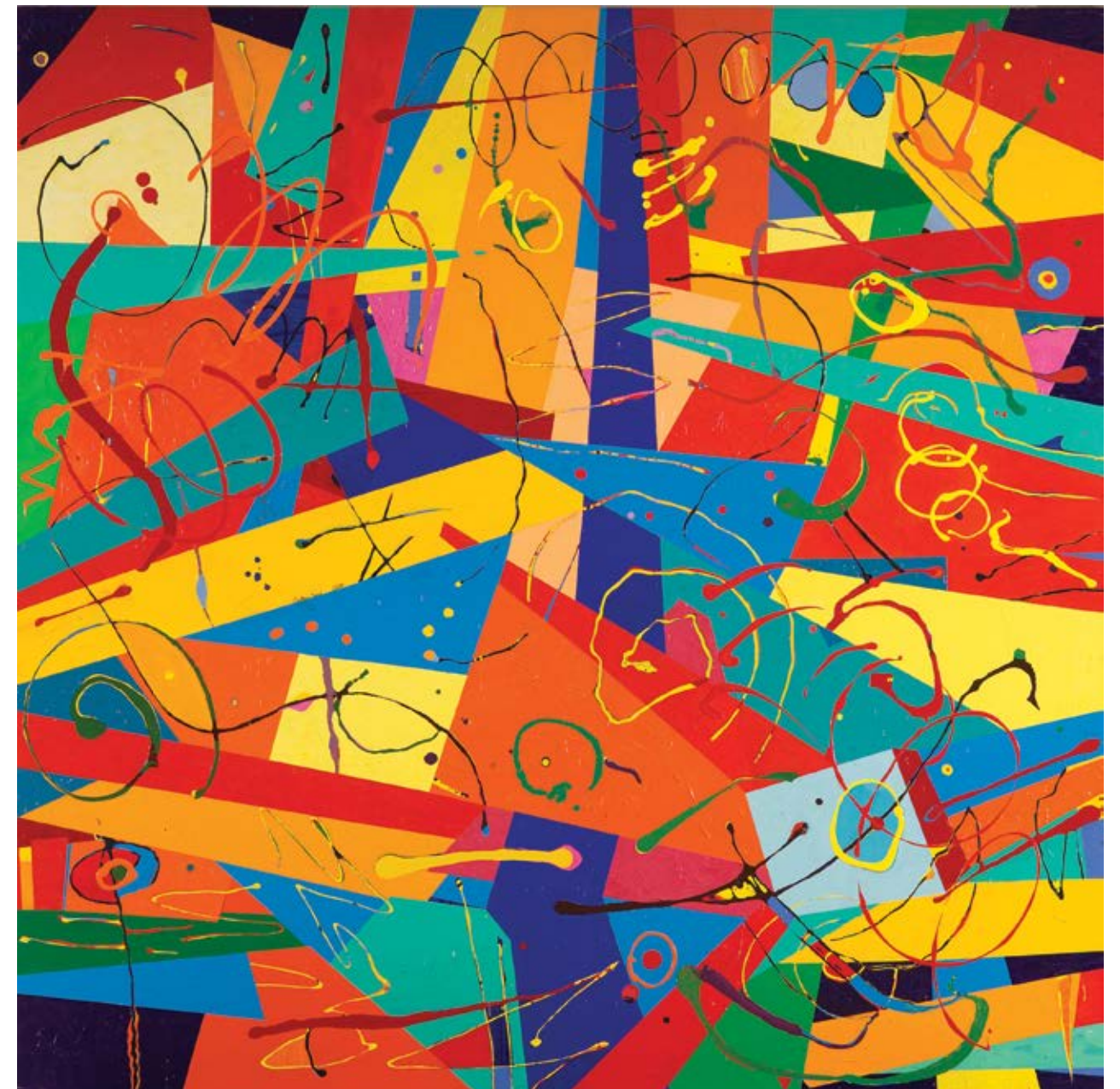
Mouteea Murad
Mood
 2007
 Mixed media on canvas
 120 x 240 cm



Mouteea Murad
The Hot Night
 2007
 Acrylic on canvas
 150 x 100 cm



Mouteea Murad
Binomial Equation
 2007
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



Mouteea Murad
Untitled
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm

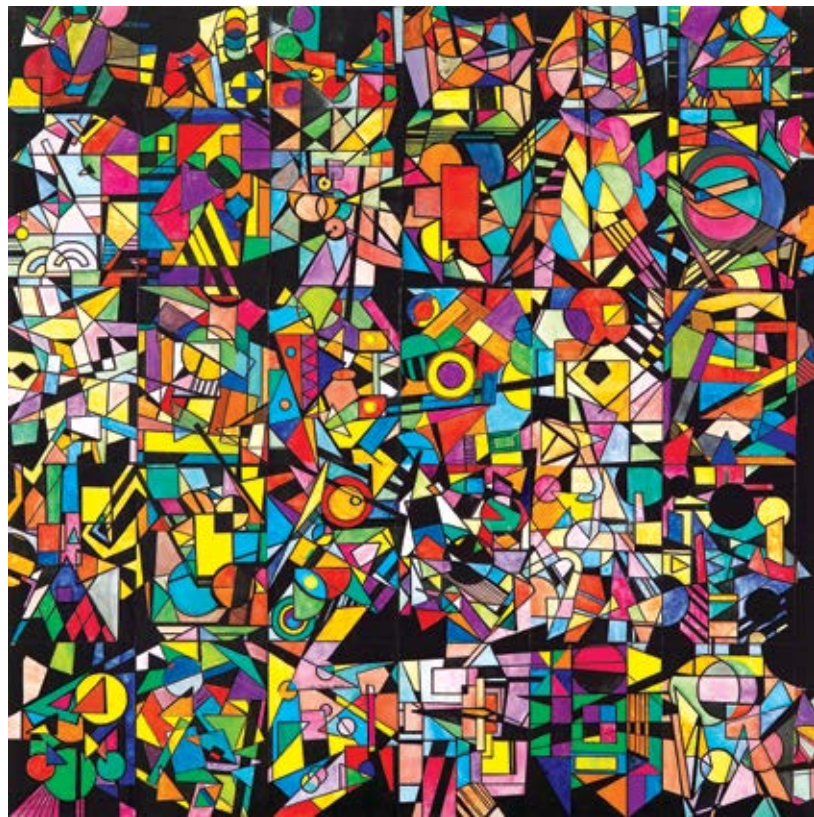


Mouteea Murad
Untitled
2008
Acrylic on canvas
180 x 180 cm

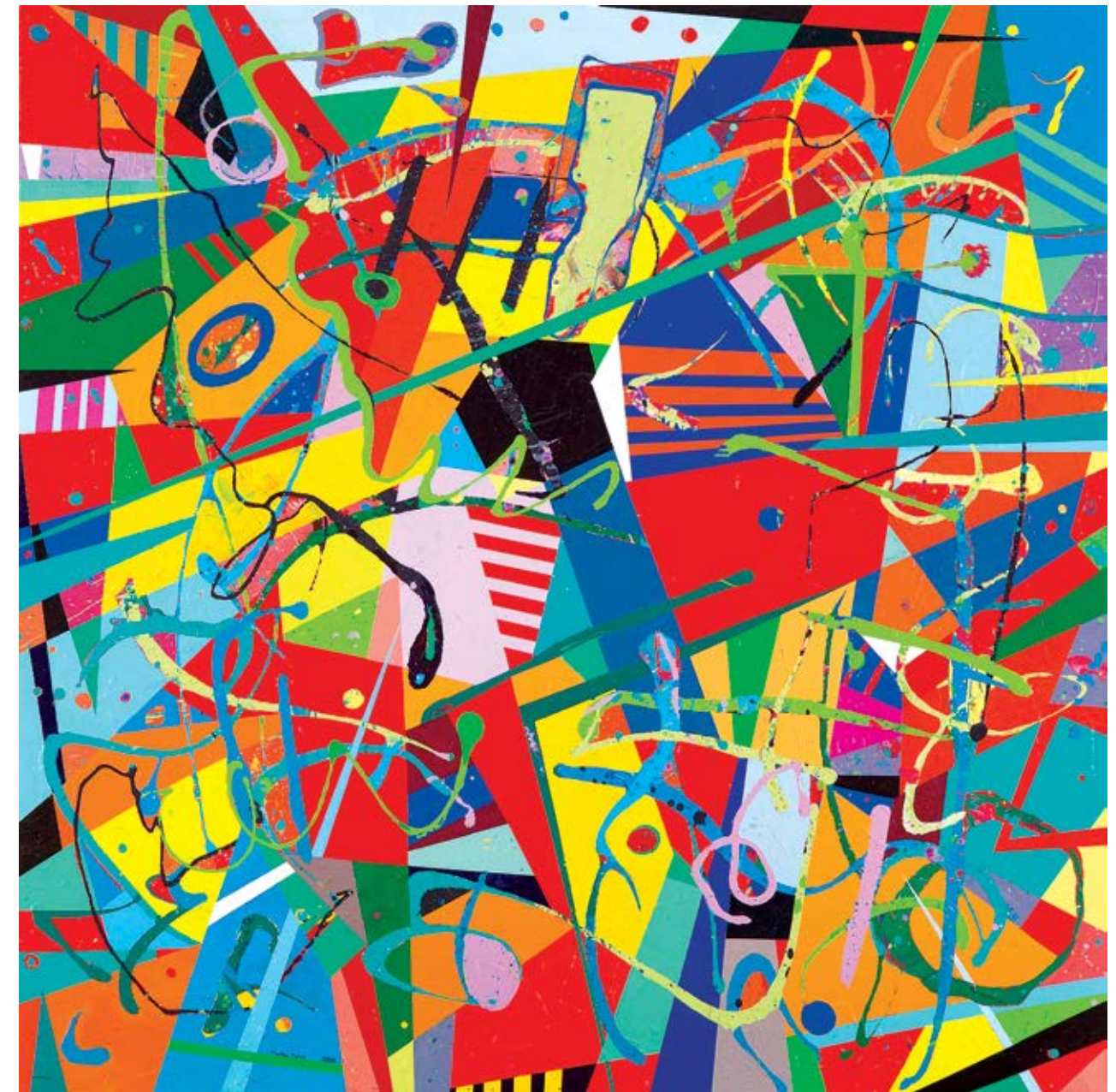


Mouteea Murad
Untitled
2008
Acrylic on canvas
180 x 180 cm

Mouteea Murad
The Airplane of the Shared Games
 2008
 Mixed media on canvas
 155 x 155 cm



Mouteea Murad
The City of the Shared Games
 2008
 Mixed media on canvas
 155 x 155 cm



Mouteea Murad
Festival II
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 155 x 155 cm



Mouteea Murad
High Mood
 2008
 Mixed media on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



Mouteea Murad
Kingdom of Happiness
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



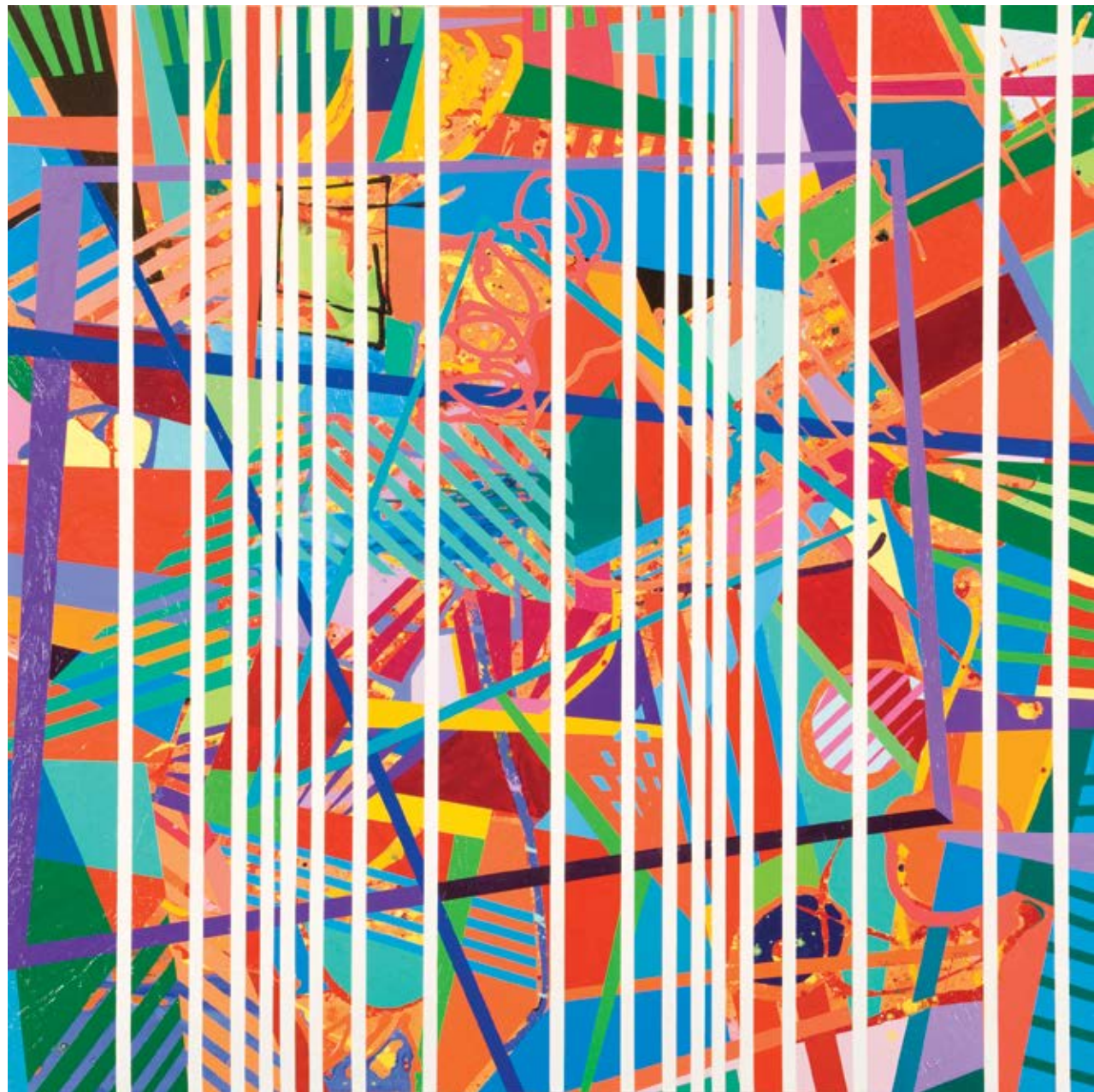
Mouteea Murad
Oriental Circus
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 240 cm



Mouteea Murad
The Magical Carpet
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



Mouteea Murad
My City In The Sky
2008
Acrylic on canvas
155 x 310 cm



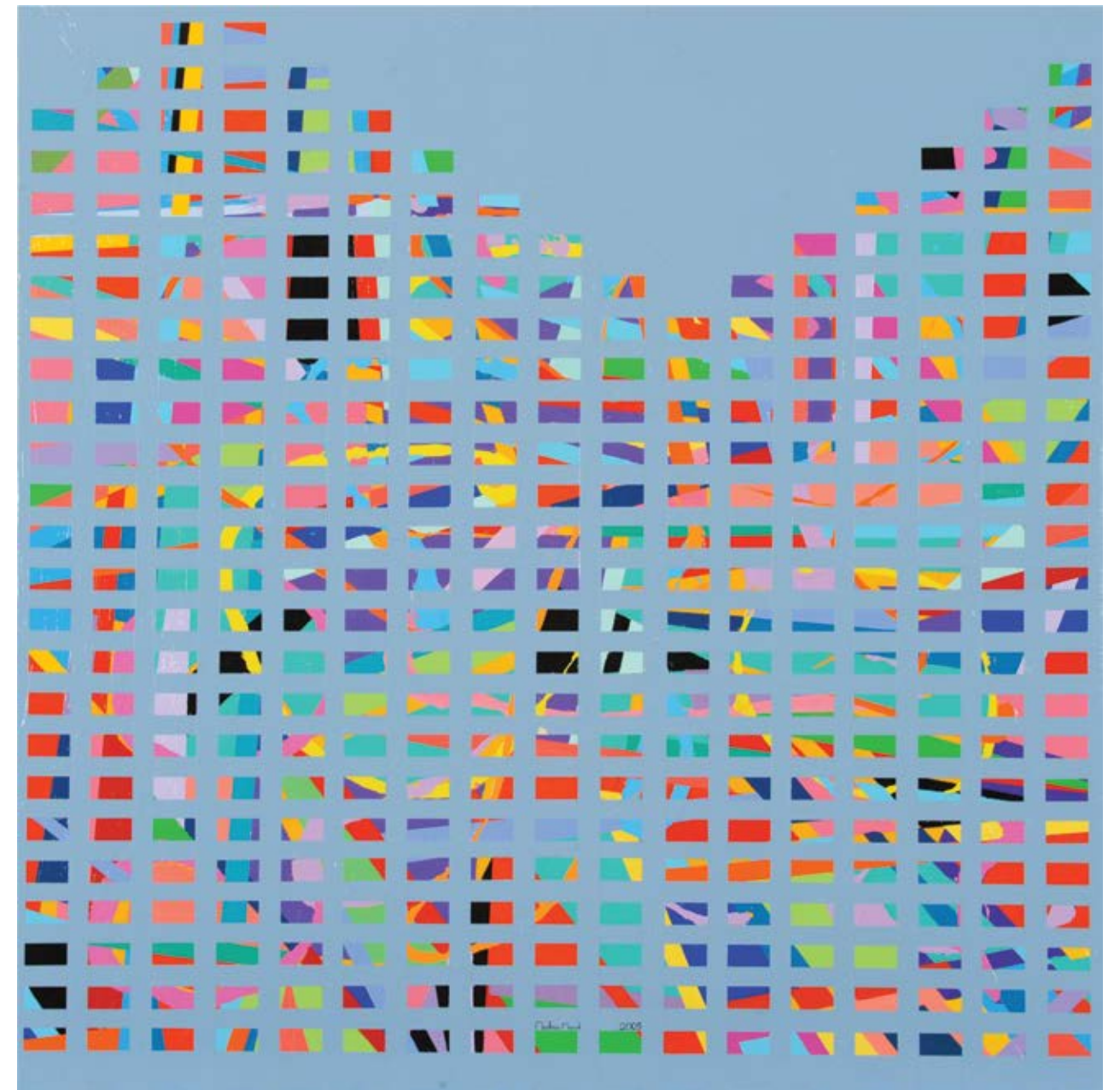
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 10
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



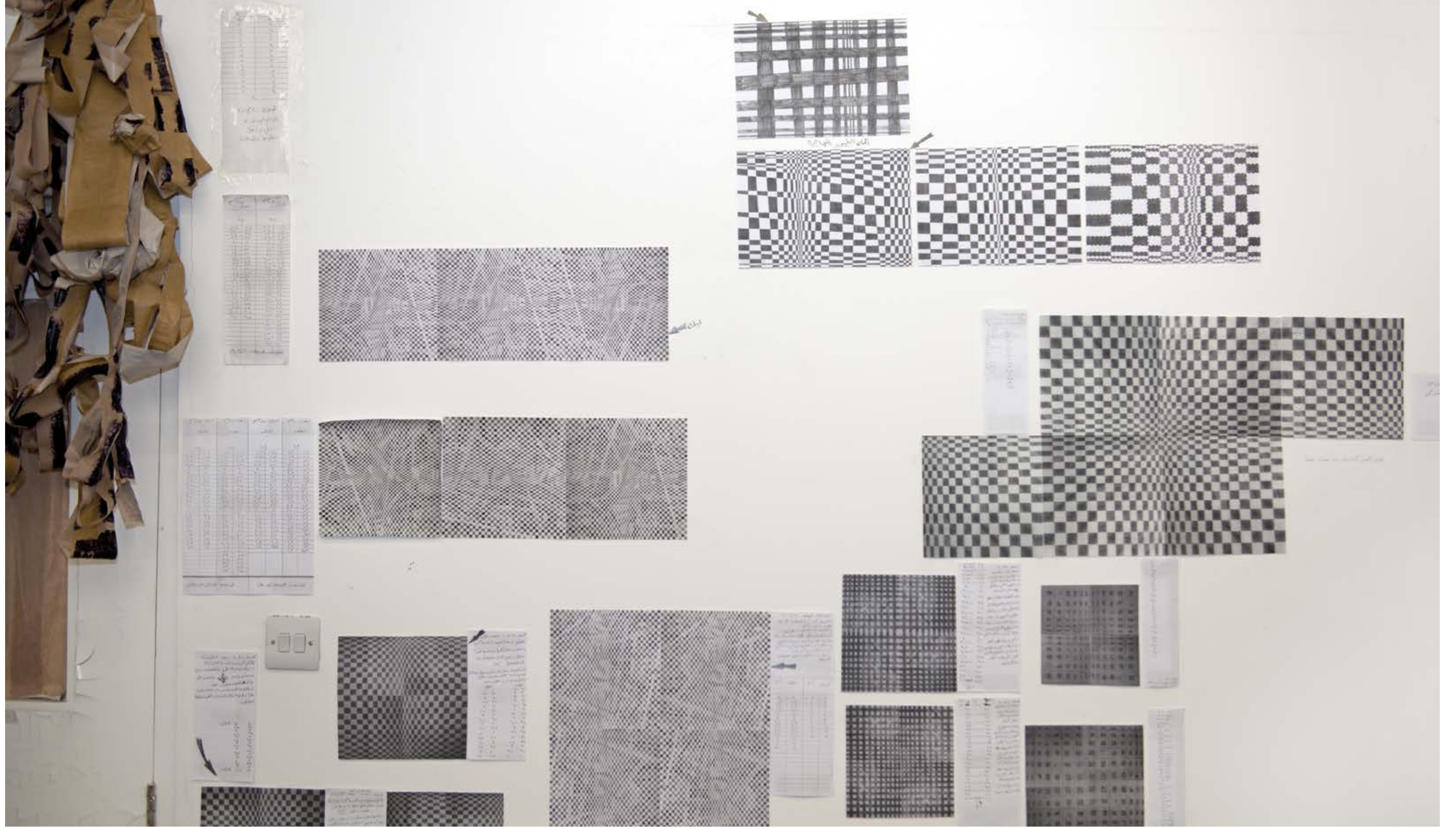
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 15, The Digital Castle
 2009
 Mixed media on canvas
 180 x 150 cm

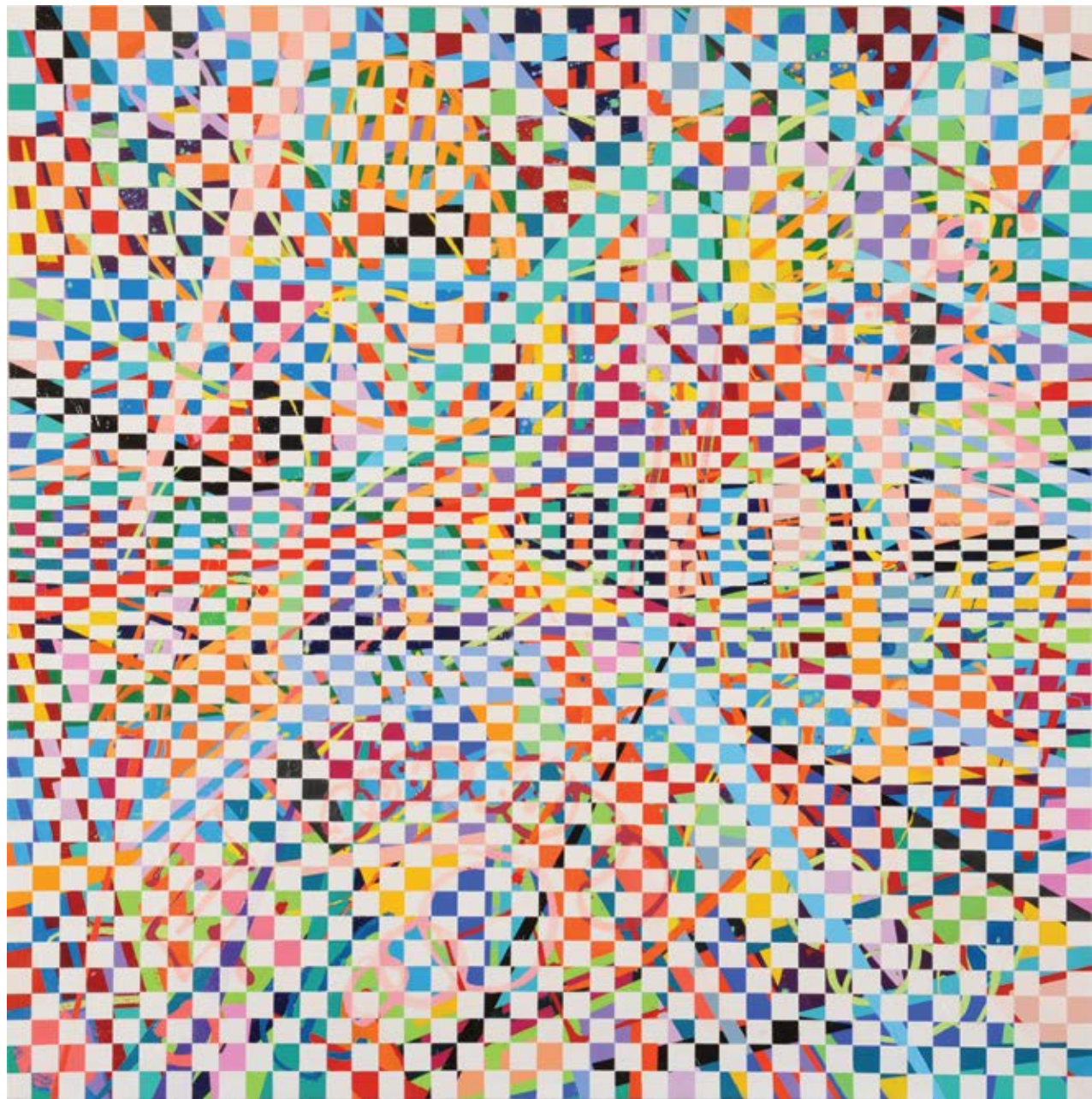


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 18
 2009
 Mixed media on canvas
 120 x 120 cm

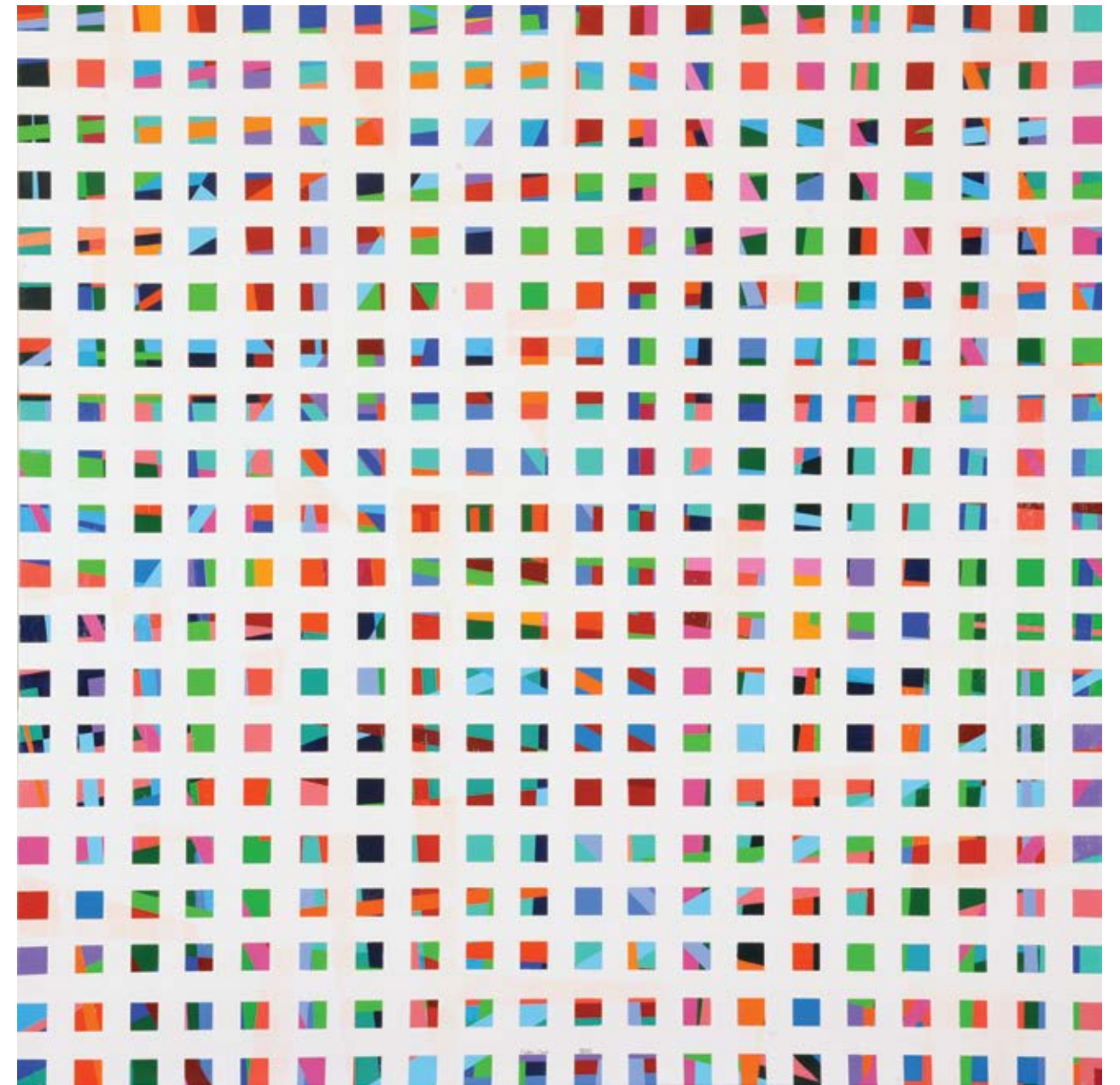


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 19
 2009
 Mixed media on canvas
 120 x 120 cm

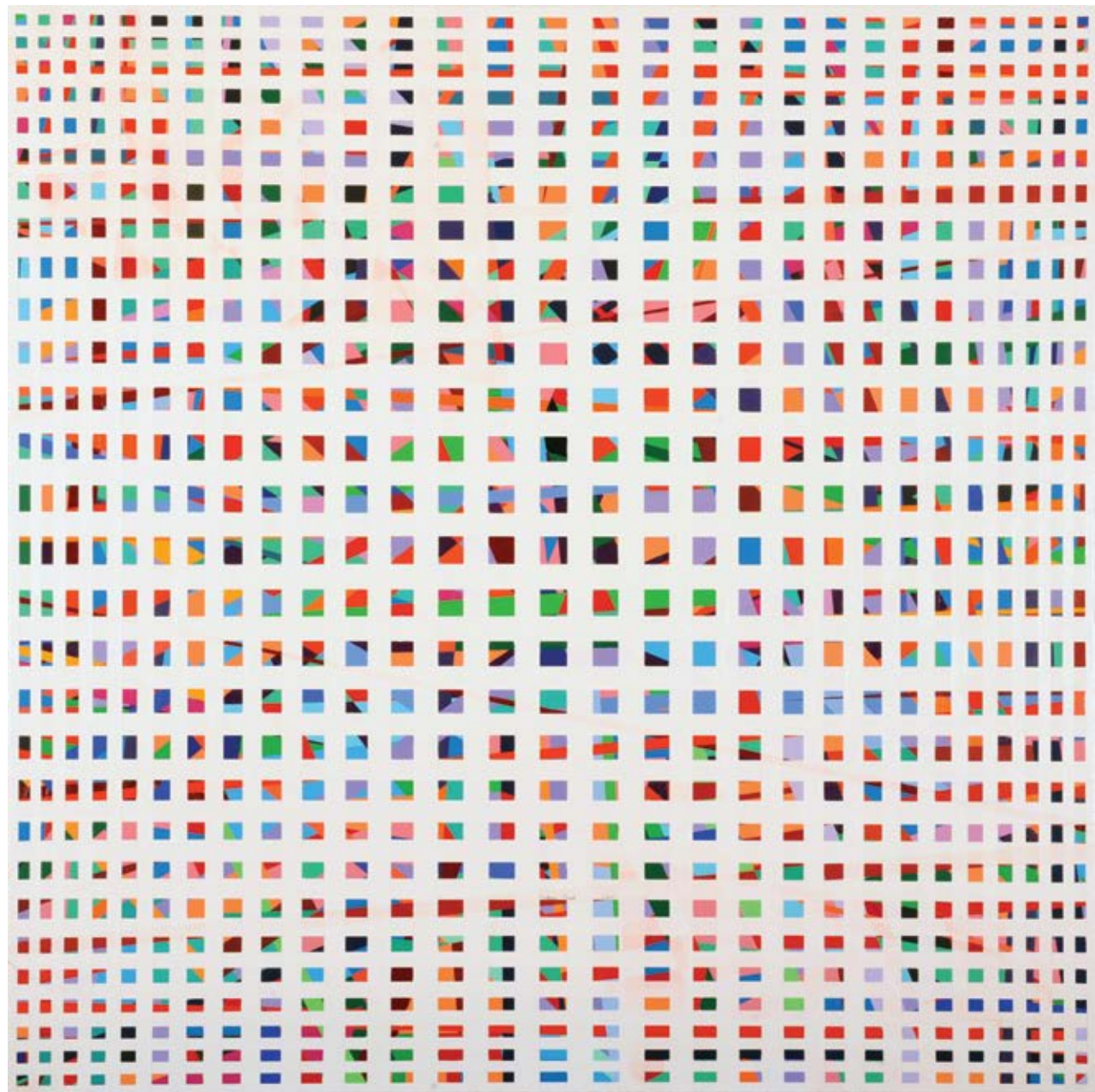




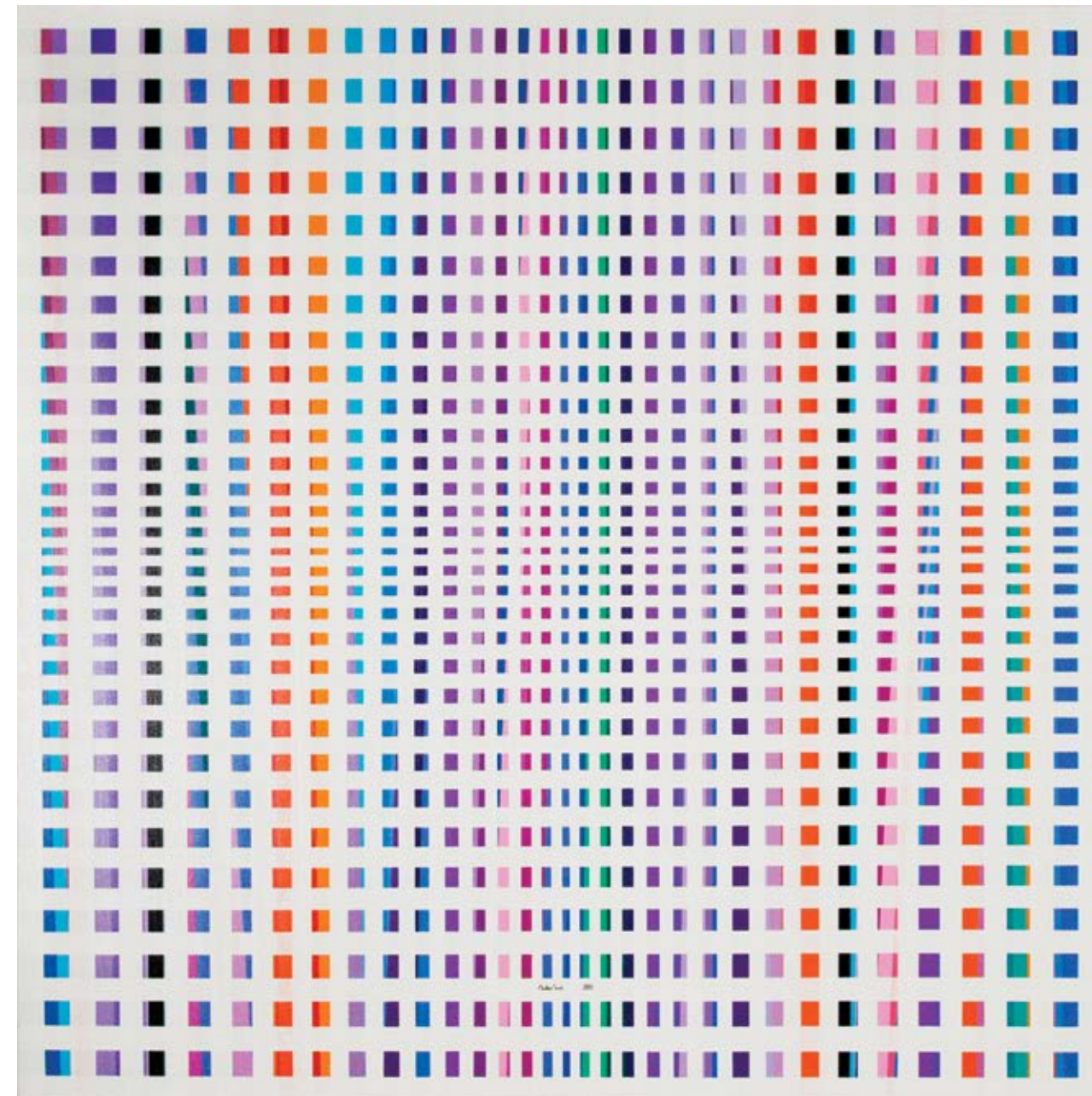
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 23
 2009
 Mixed media on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



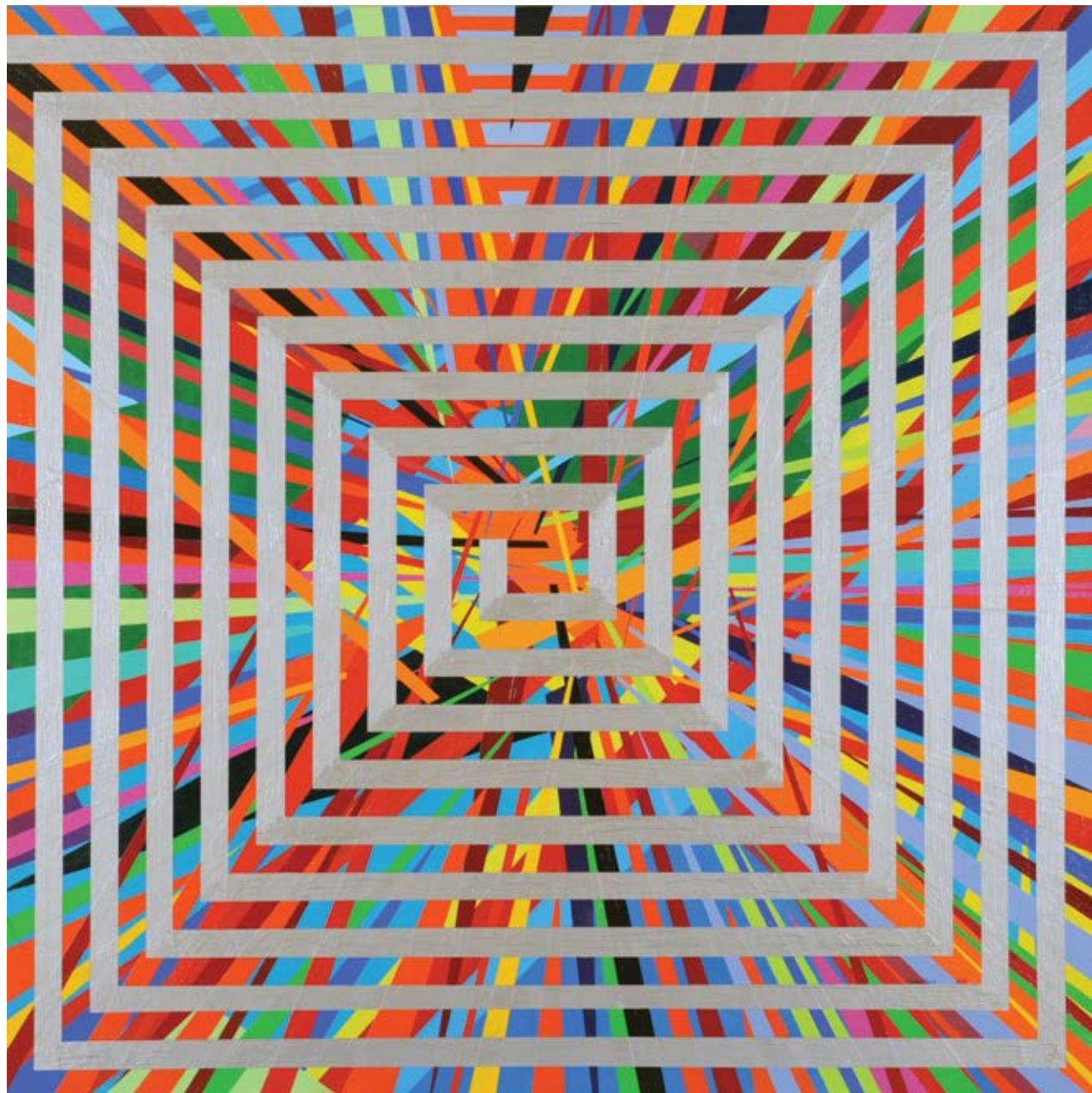
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 25
 2010
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



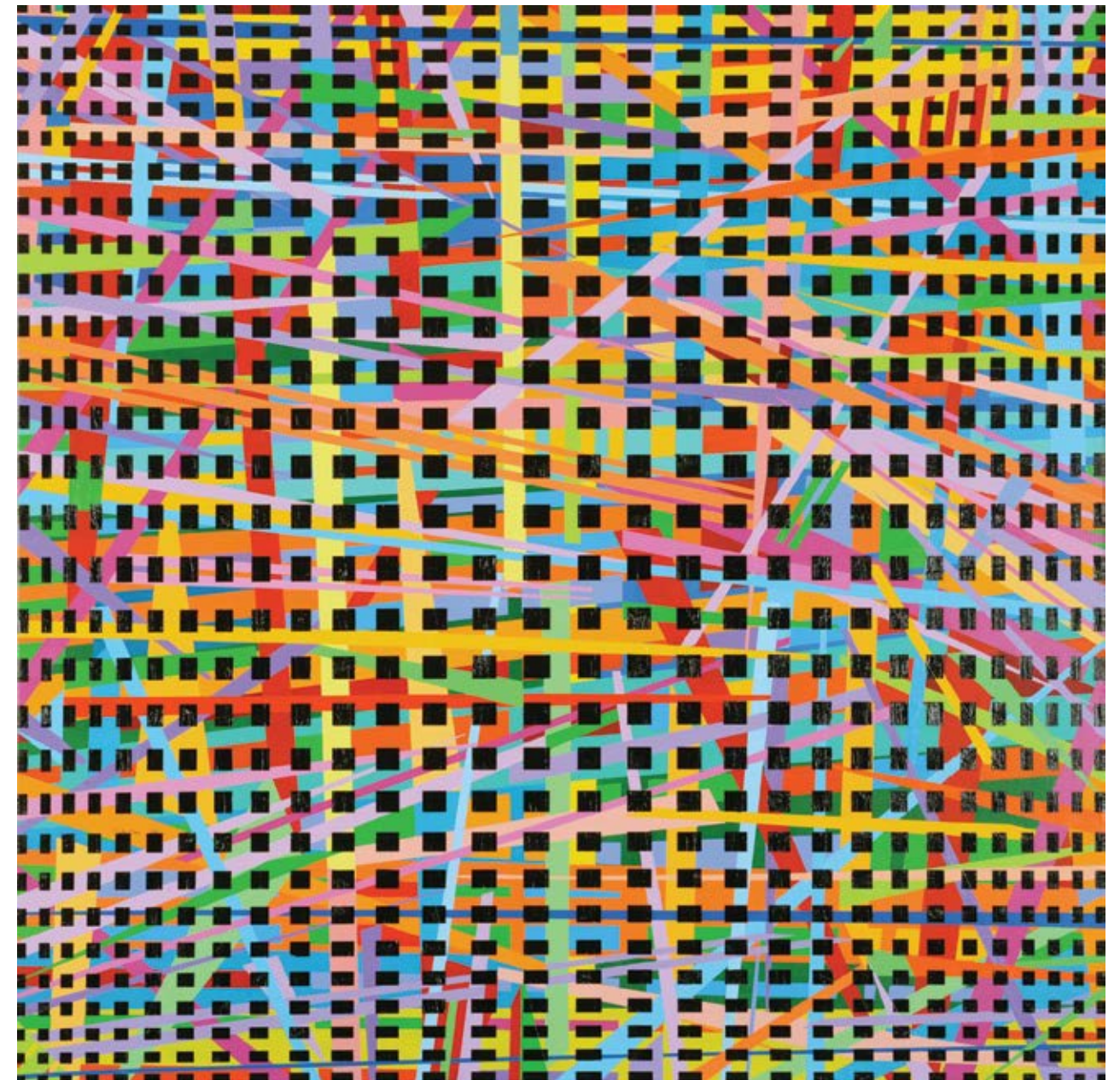
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 30, The Freedom in
 the Bird's Eye*
 2010
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



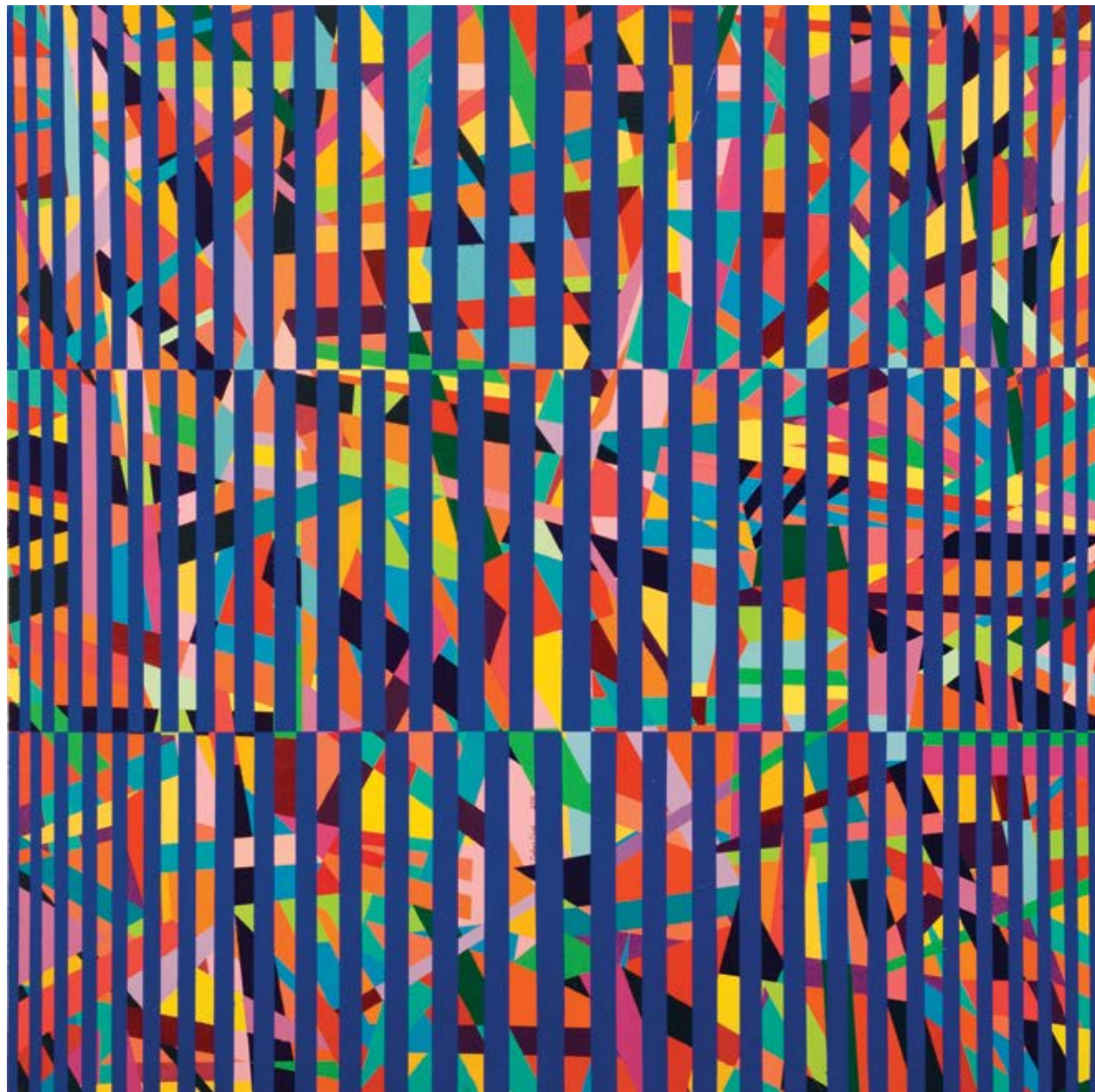
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 97, Brightening the
 Spirit and the Flesh*
 2013
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm



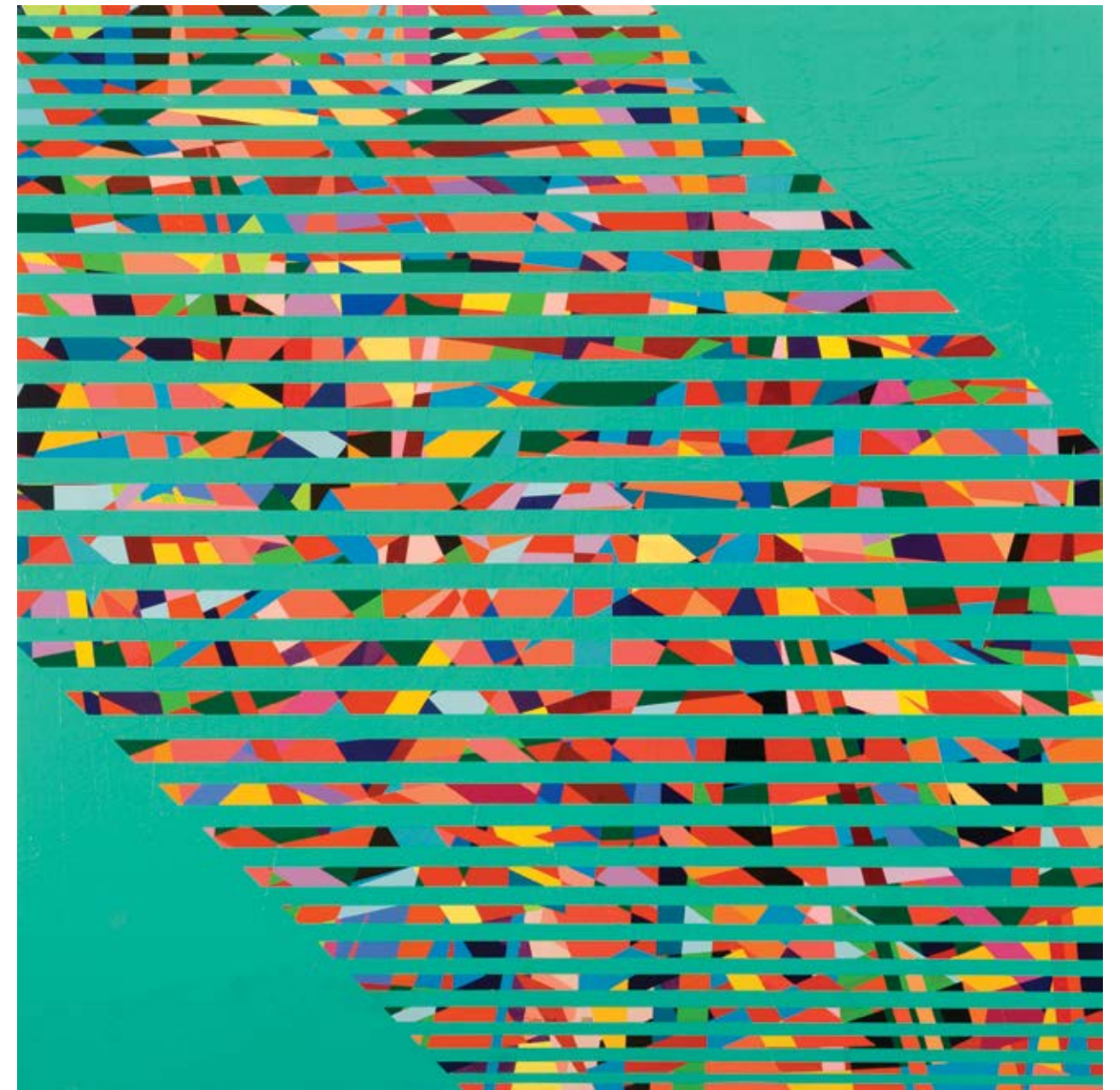
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 27, The Endless
 2010
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



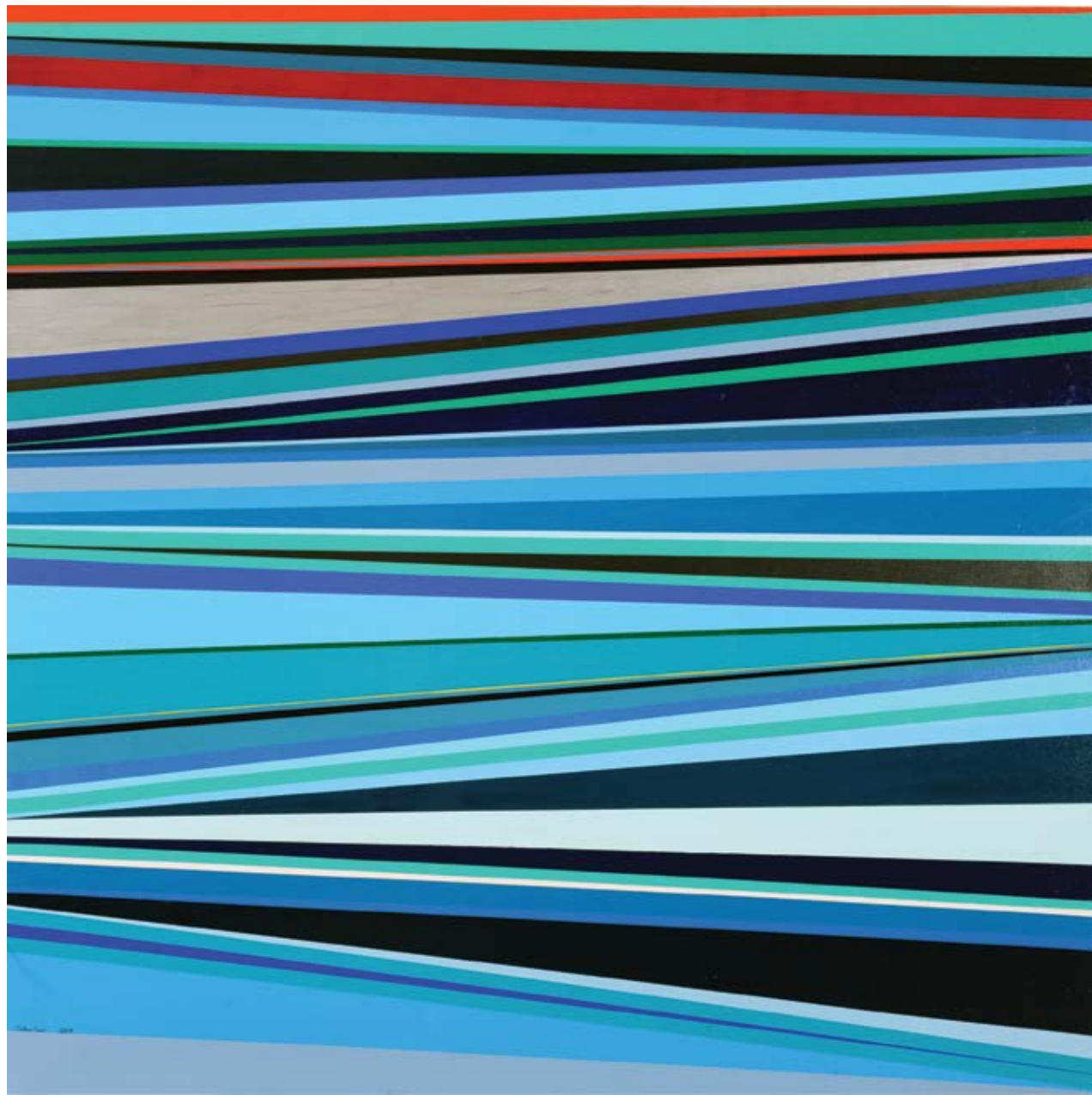
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 29, A Vision in the
 Colours of Gauguin*
 2010
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



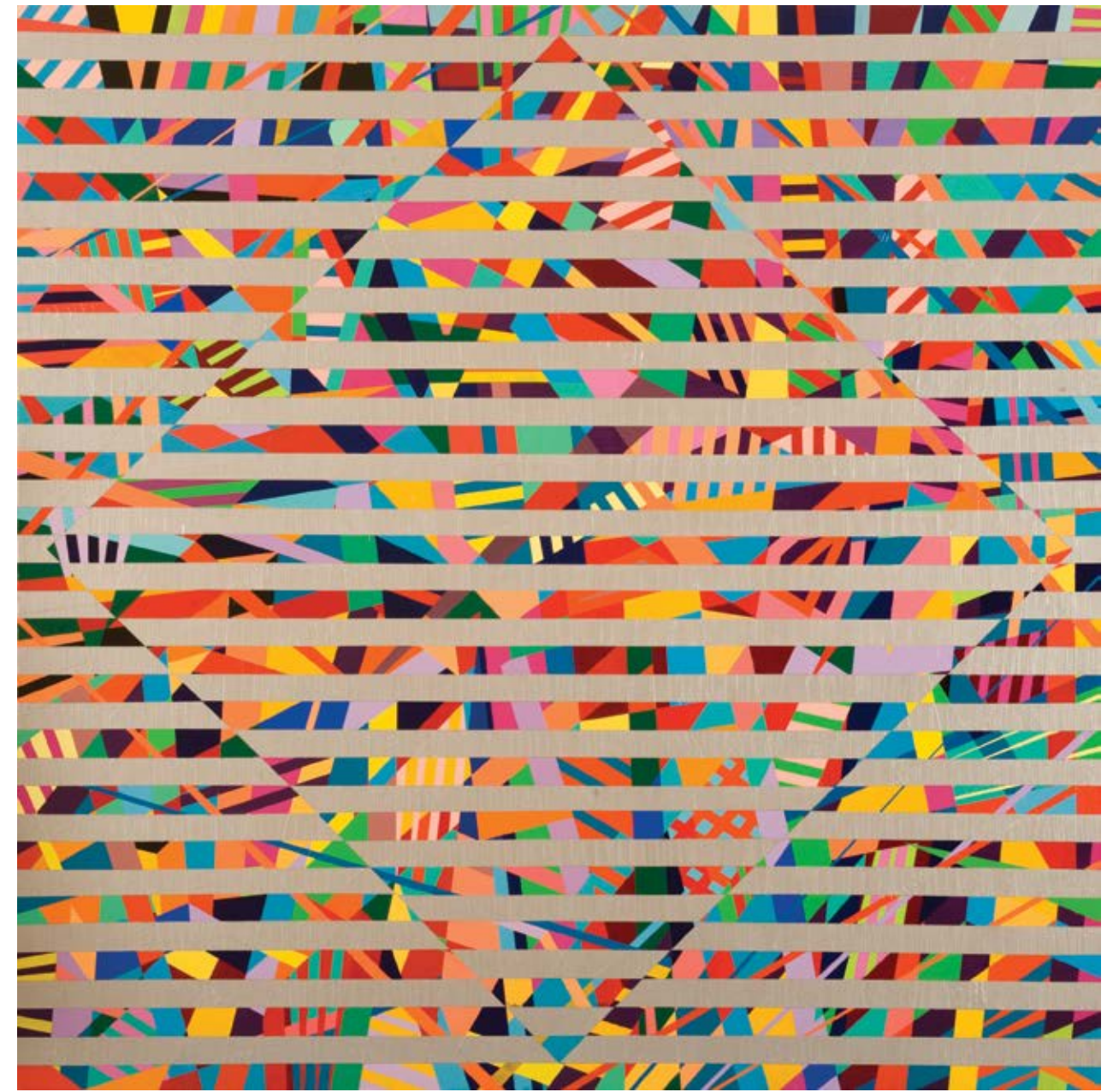
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 38
 2010
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



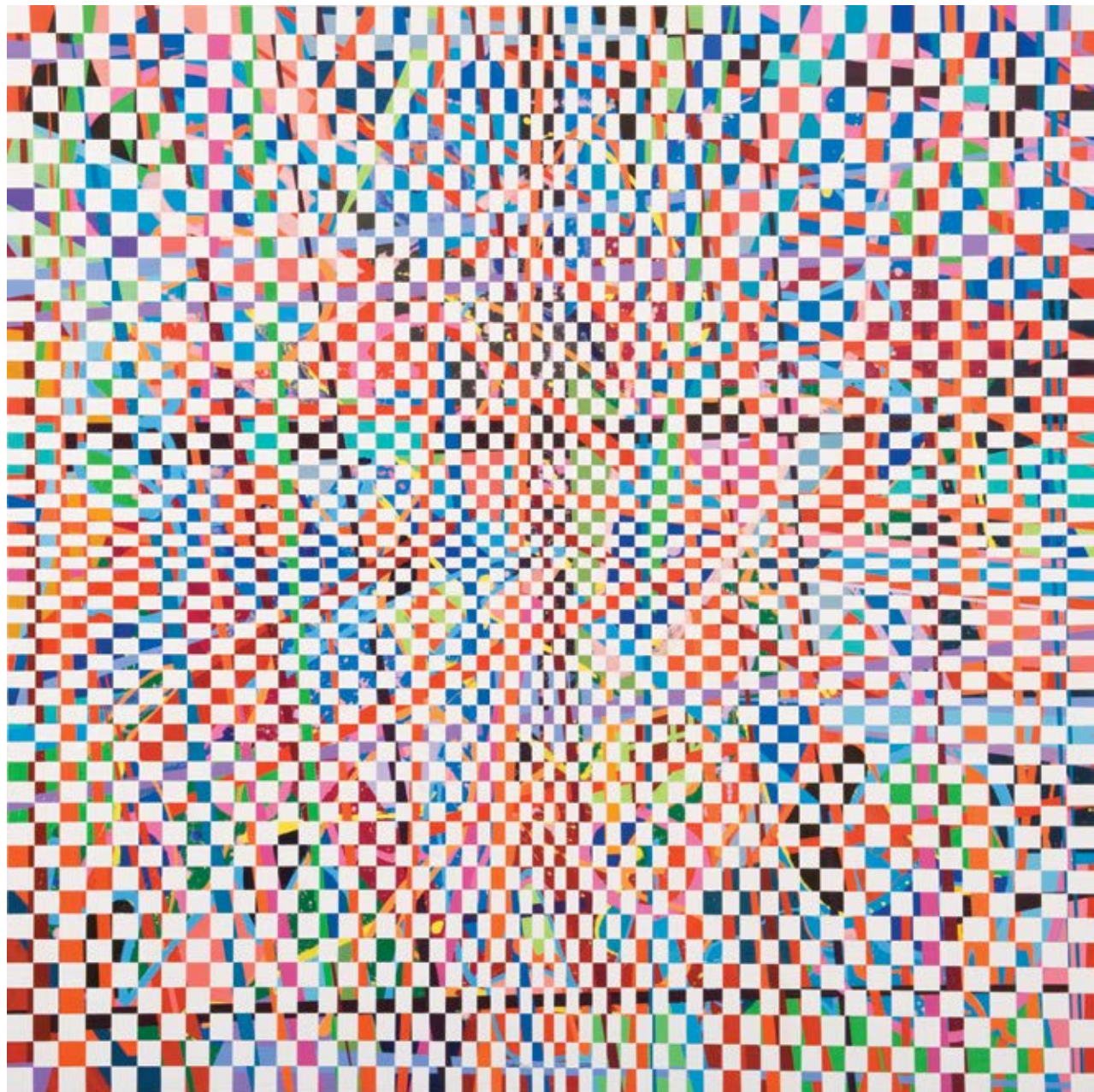
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 39, Cool Green
 2010
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



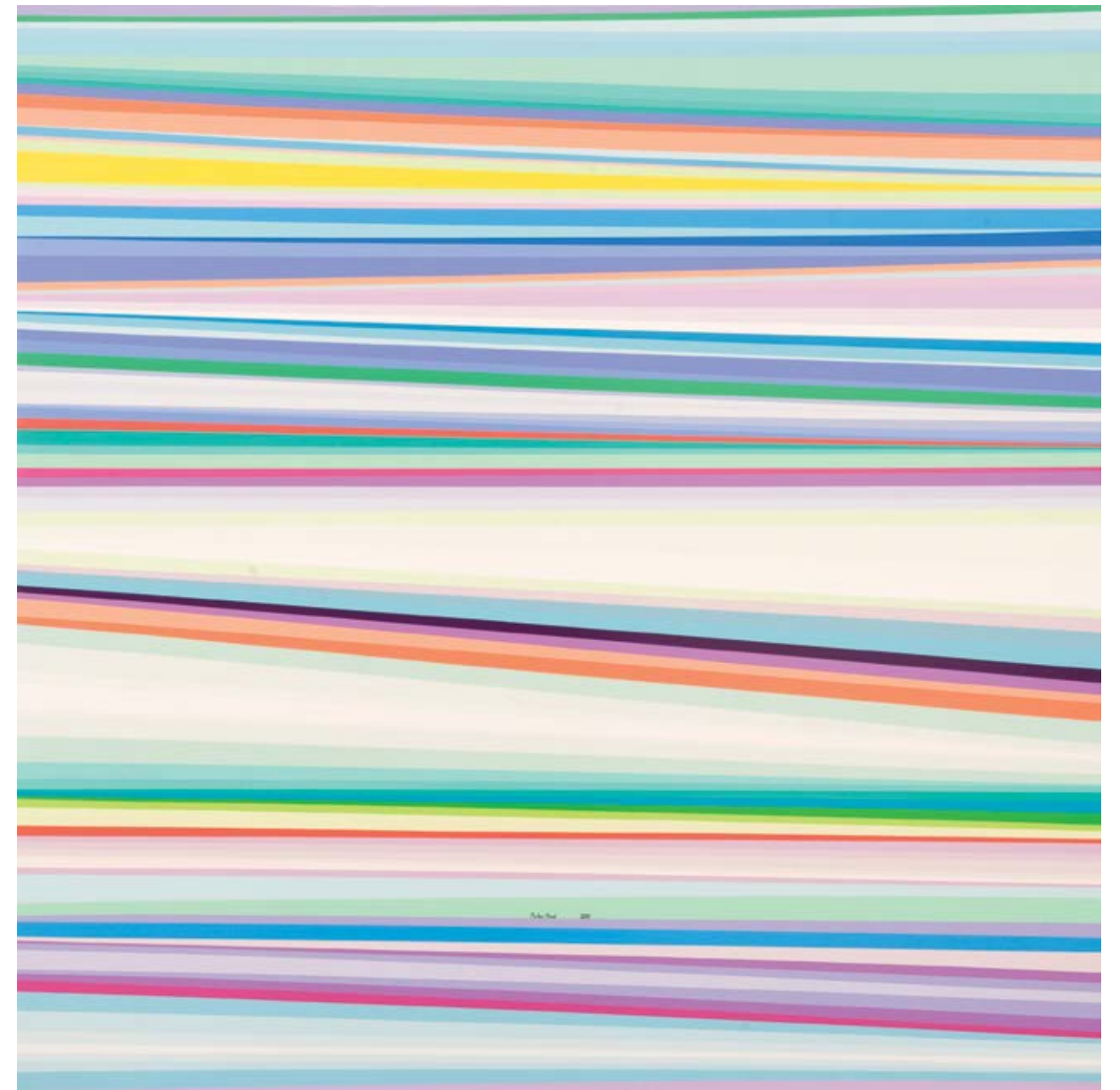
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 24, A Reflection in
 the Water*
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



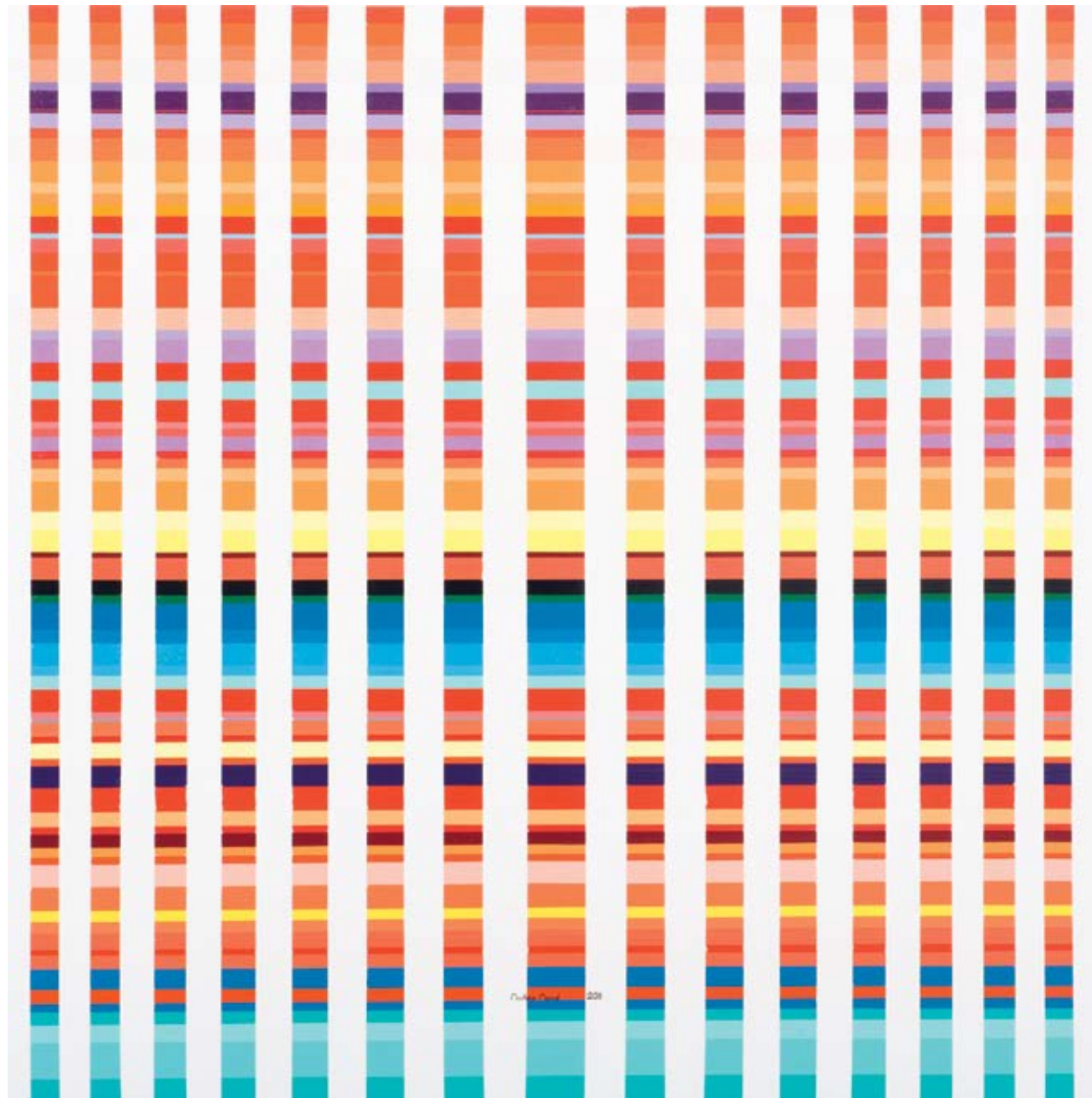
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 40, Two Squares
 from Damascus*
 2010
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 37, Supplication to
 God*
 2010
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 44, Spring Sunrise
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



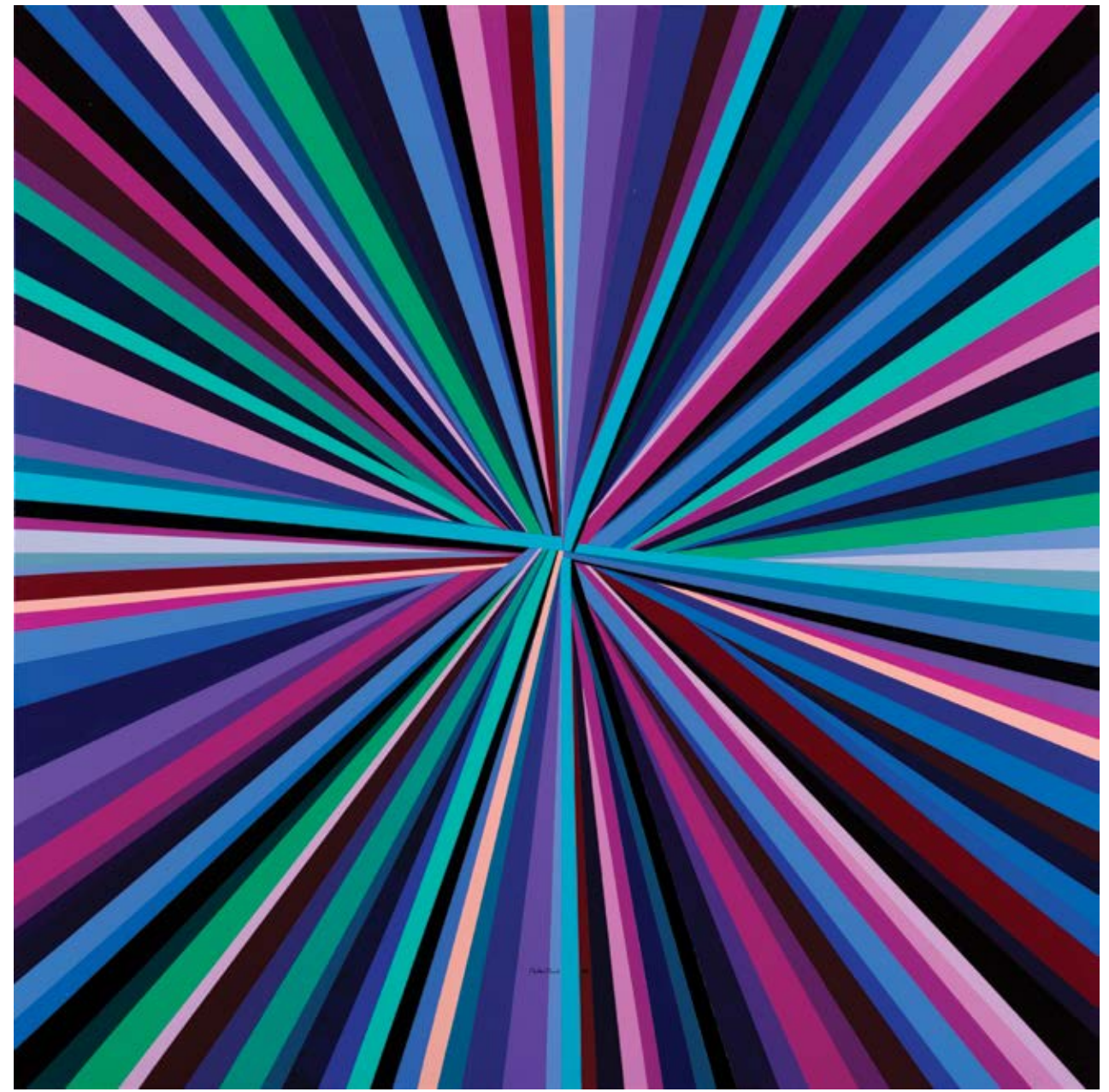
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 47
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 120 cm



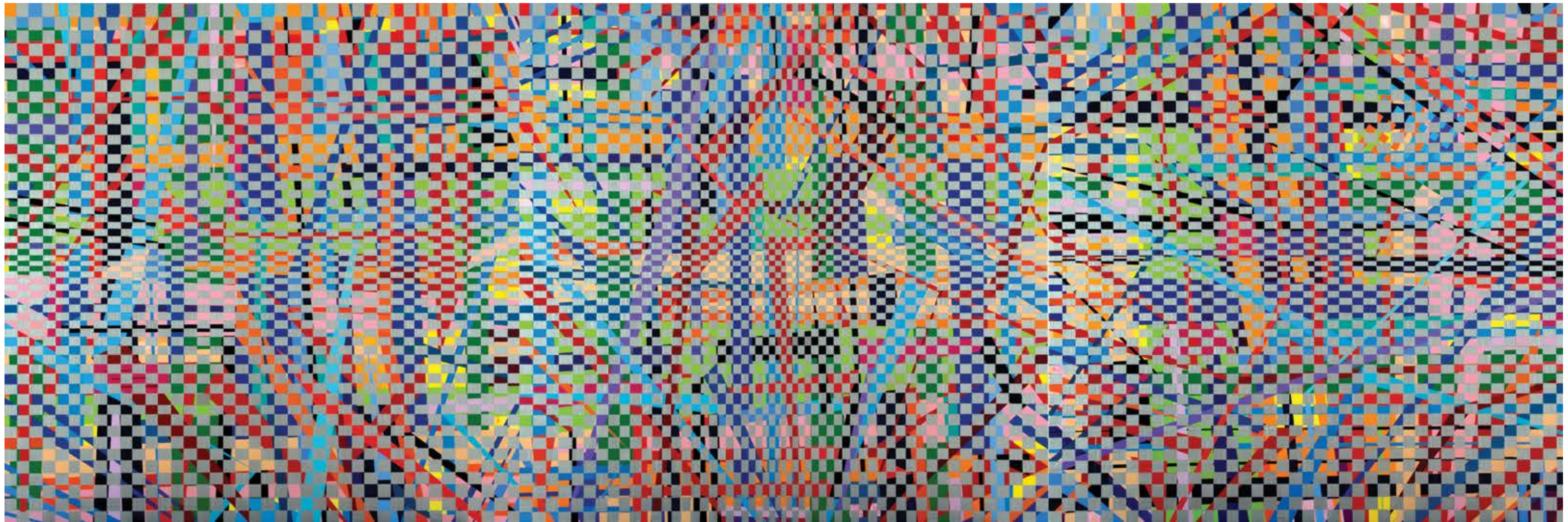
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 48, The Spirit is Anx-
 ious to Heaven*
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



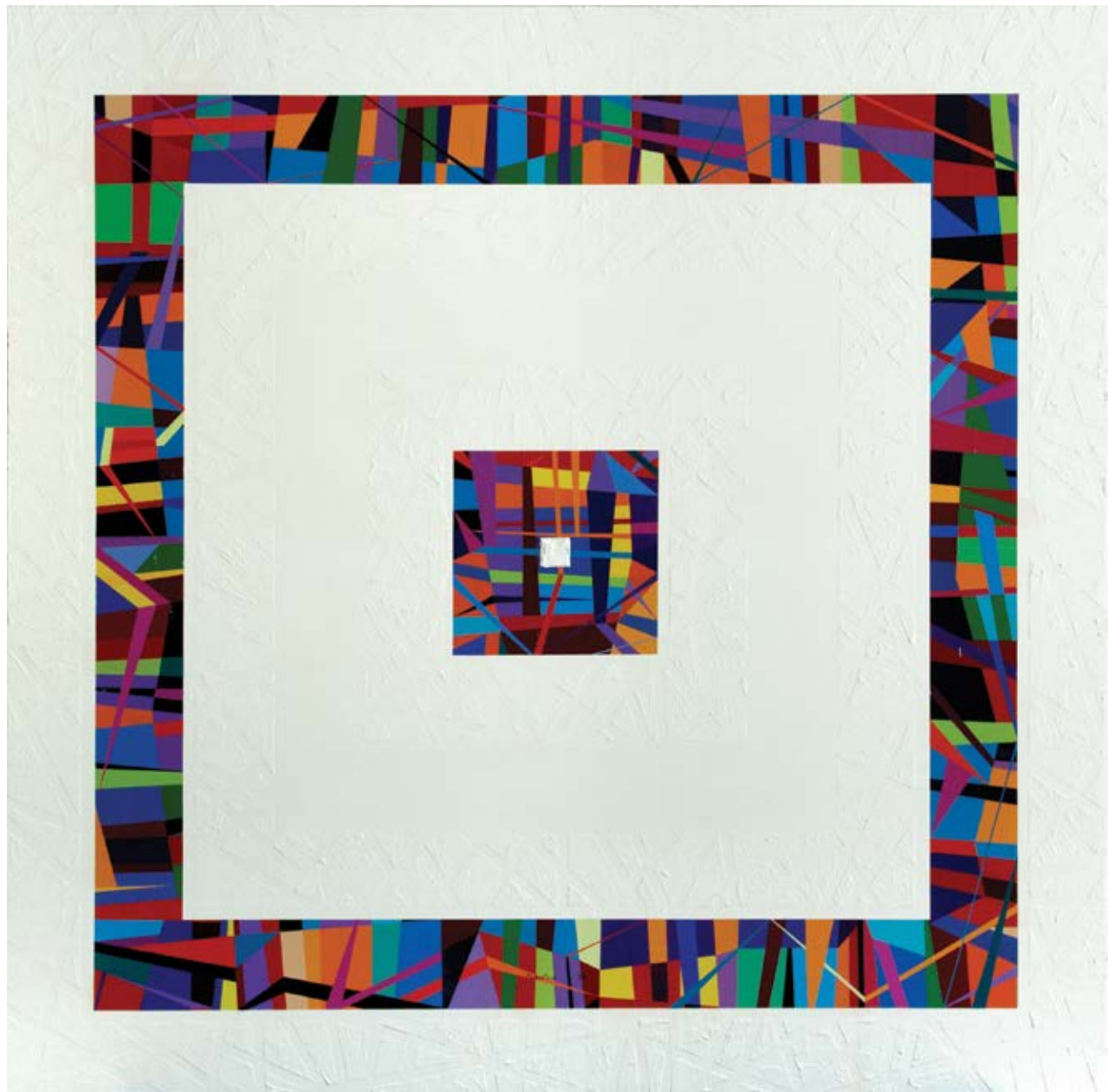
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 49
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 51
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



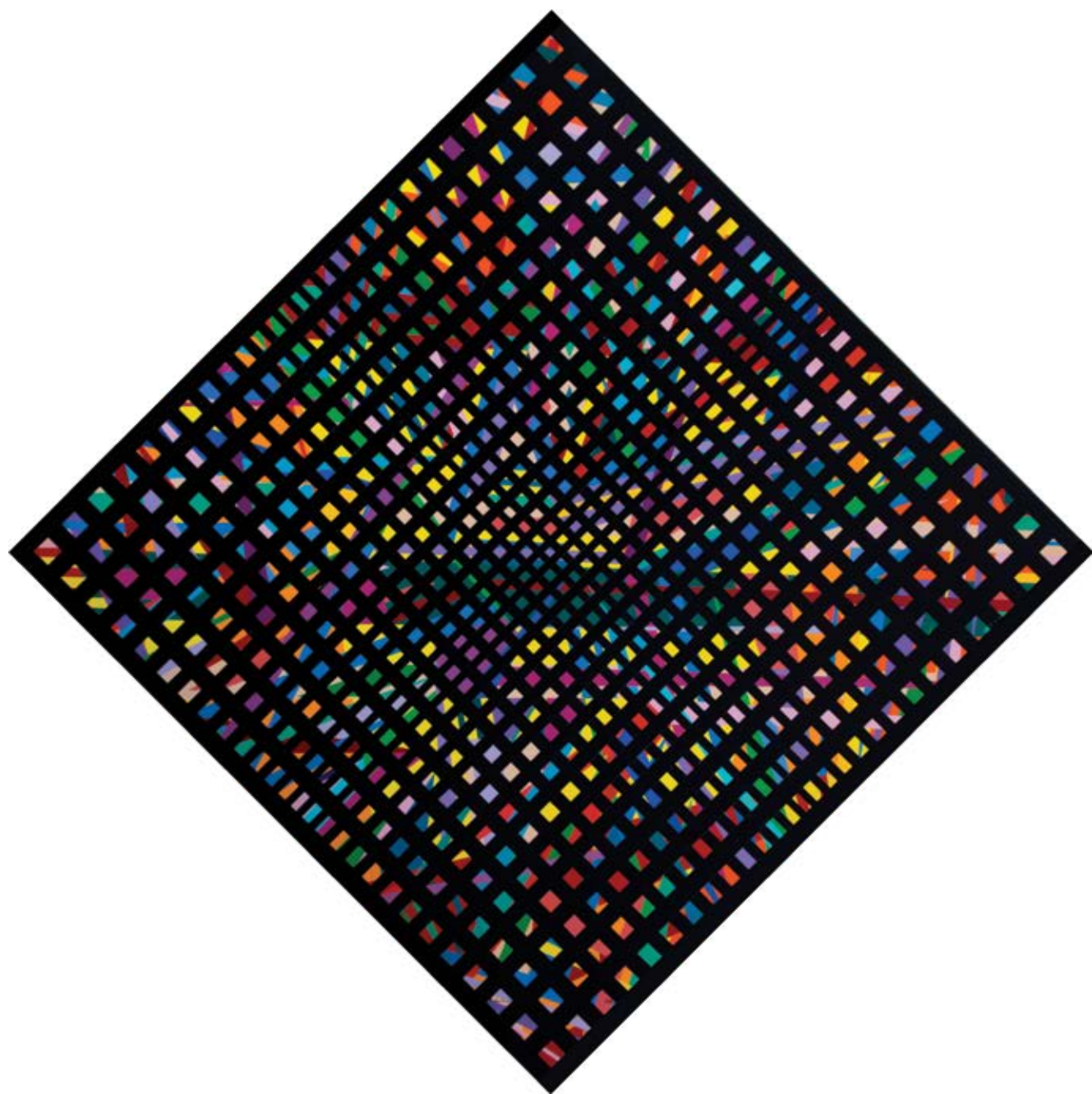
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 50
2011
Acrylic on canvas
185 x 555 cm



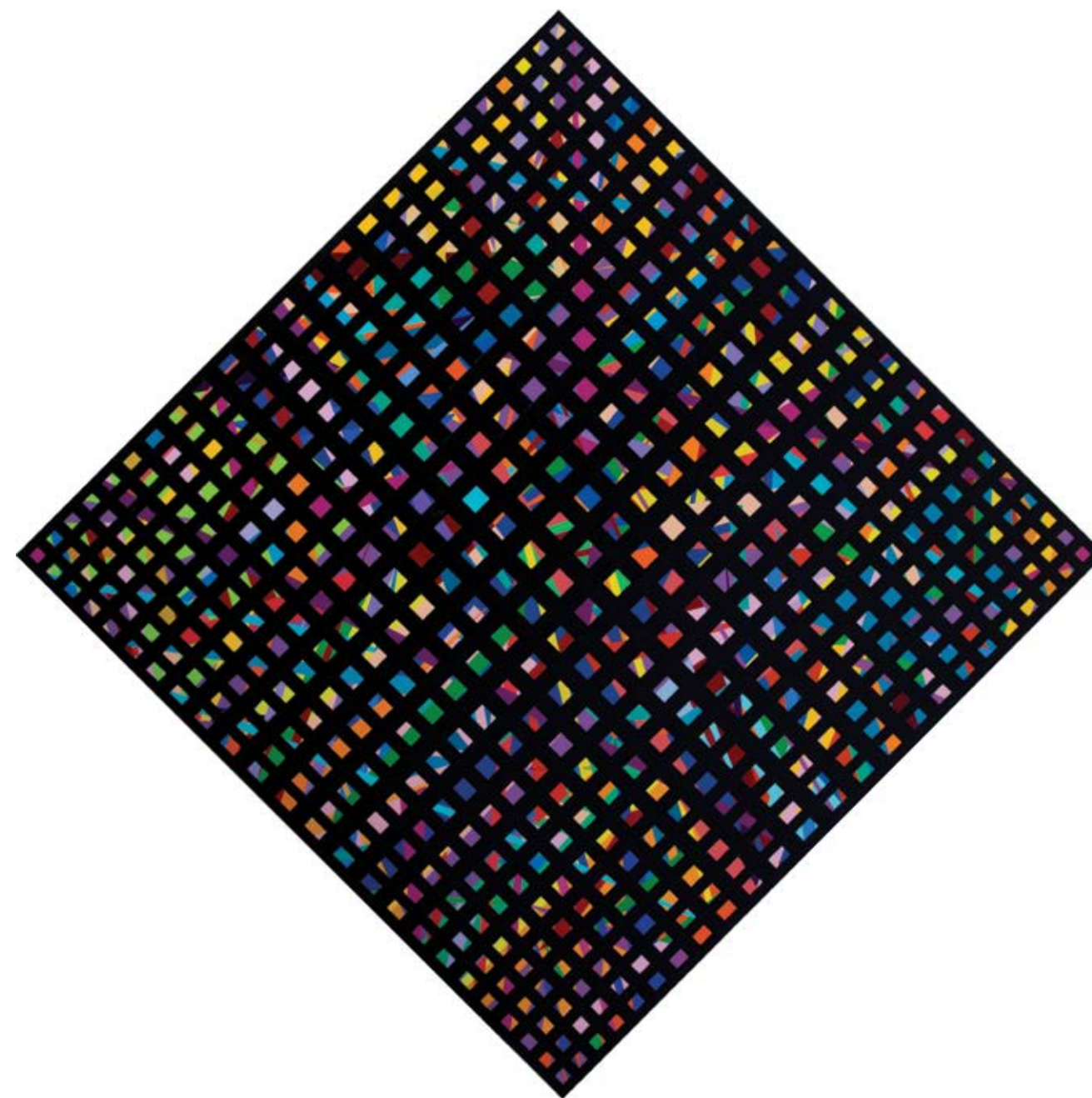
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 52
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



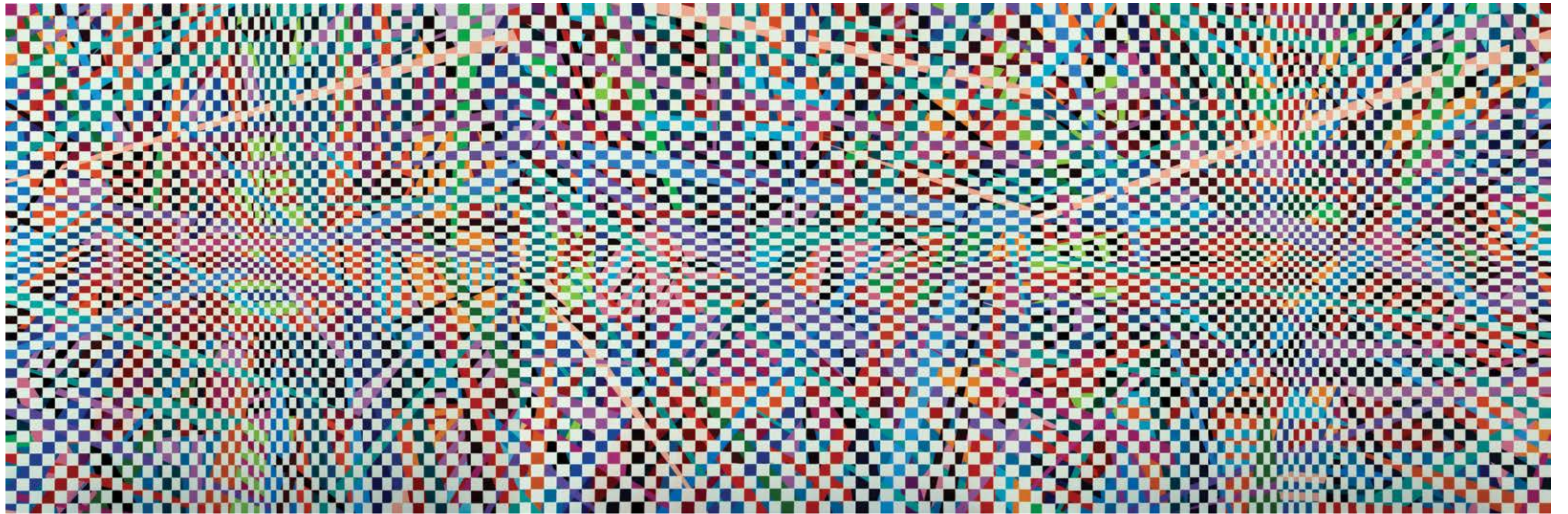
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 53
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 54
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 55
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 57
2011
Acrylic on canvas
185 x 555 cm



THE LIMINAL EYE¹

By Murtaza Vali

Mouteea Murad’s decade long dedication to pure abstraction is rare and singular, both in the specific context of his native Syria and across the broader region. Over the course of this decade, his ever evolving practice has drawn from various key moments in the history of twentieth-century abstraction in the west: Cubism’s shattering of the picture plane; Wassily Kandinsky’s use of abstraction as a path to the spiritual; Piet Mondrian’s investigation of rhythm and balance; Paul Klee’s irreverence with colour; Jackson Pollock’s gestural and angst-ridden drips; the hard-edged precision of Geometric Abstraction; and the dizzying perceptual effects of Op art. However, a conversation with Murad is peppered with frequent references to the profound influence that his careful study and in depth research of Islamic art, science, and thought has had on his practice of abstraction. By acknowledging this debt, Murad collapses the gulf between Islamic art and architecture and twentieth-century abstraction that conventional art historical narratives and canons, which privilege the latter over the former, maintain, taking an important step towards decolonising the discipline.

A spirit of experimentation drives Murad’s prolific practice. To wit, he has, since 2009, simply titled each of his abstract canvases *Trial*, followed by a sequential number. Some are subsequently given a descriptive and suggestive subtitle; references are often made to mystical and magical journeys, sublime natural phenomena, birds and butterflies, mathematics, and memory and nostalgia. The numbered sequence allows us to retroactively track the subtle shifts in Murad’s prodigious output. Like other abstract painters, Murad is also influenced by music, and rhythms and intervals structure much of his work. In that light, each *Trial* may be thought of as a riff or variation on a structure or composition. For Murad, this iterative way of working, one which privileges process over end result, is a path to the spiritual, a state one may continually strive for but may never achieve. His paintings do not picture the

1. The title of this essay is a play on *The Responsive Eye*, the groundbreaking exhibition of Op art, organised by William C. Seitz at New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 1965, which brought together artists whose work primarily generated ‘perceptual responses in the eye and mind of the viewer.’ See William C. Seitz, *The Responsive Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1965).

spiritual as much as encompass it in and through the ritualistic process of their making, a quality he hopes is transmitted to the viewer when they encounter them.

Since 2008, Murad has experimented with compositions that overlay a flat graphic pattern (most frequently in a neutral white or black, though he has experimented with colours) onto a multicoloured background. These patterns are predominantly made up of straight lines, simple geometries and nested shapes, of partial or complete planes of parallel lines or grids or regular and irregular fields of tiny squares and rectangles.² In some, the visual effect mimics basic perspectival logic, using strong diagonals and diminishing scale to plunge our eyes deep into the dizzying frame. In others, the pattern bears a strong resemblance to Op art, producing an optical or perceptual illusion (a protrusion or bulge, a crease or vortex) that appears separate from the painted surface, that seems to float in the space between viewer and painting, even when the volumetric effect produced projects away from the viewer. In some of the earliest works of this type the background layer consists of a mix of abstract motifs: fields of interlocking and overlapping hard-edged geometric shapes, Pollock-style gestural drips and splatters of paint. In more recent works, this layer is made up of either a stack of horizontal bands, sometimes straight and sometimes curvy, or a chaotic crisscross of lines and wedges, whose edges are always kept neat and precise using painter's tape.³ While Bridget Riley and other practitioners of Op art strategically limited their palettes as a way of maximising the perceptual response the patterns they painted elicited, Murad does not shy away from vivid colour.

The discrete visual logics of these two component layers are often oppositional: white or black versus a rich spectrum of colour; pattern and order versus chaos; a perspectival or optical illusion that suggests depth or volume, often worked out beforehand using careful calculations, versus a shallower pictorial field created through the intuitive layering of diagonals. In these puzzling compositions, these opposing logics are forced to overlap, creating a palpable tension between the two layers. In the simplest of these works, the surface pattern functions like a veil or a screen, obscuring vision by limiting visual access to what lies behind it. When small and regular, the grid of rectangles in black and/or white makes the frame disintegrate into a field of pixels, resembling an image of static or white noise on a television. But the surface pattern can also be understood as an intermediary that modulates what parts of the layer underneath are accessible, shaping our interpretation and meaning of it. This bipartite structure is analogous to the mystical Sufi doctrine of *zahir* and *batin* which divides sacred knowledge into the exoteric and the esoteric, that which is revealed or evident for all to see and that which is hidden and is only legible to the initiated.

One of the simplest patterns Murad has used is a grid of intersecting white lines, as seen in *Trial No. 111* and *Trial No. 112* (both 2015). In

2. Notably, Murad has only used a calligraphic pattern twice (in *Trial No. 2, There Can be No Vindication of Perfidy-Greeting to Al-Shaarani* (2009) and *Trial No. 28, I Declare Thee Safe and Secure Your Souls, Your Properties...Greeting to Al-Shaarani* (2010)) citing the work of the master Syrian calligrapher Mouneer Al-Shaarani both times.

3. Hundreds of loops of this paint-covered tape hang on a wall in Murad's current studio.



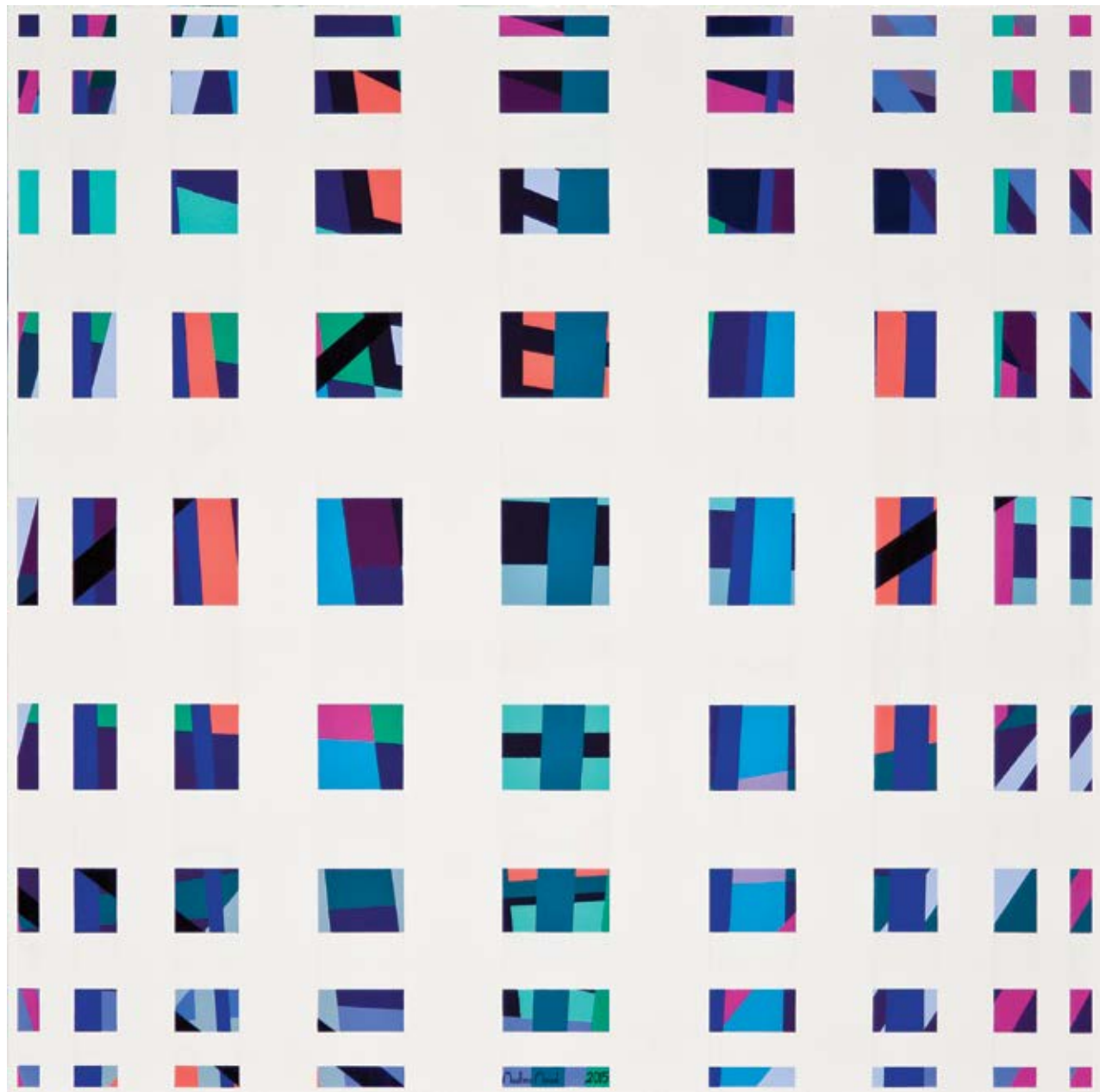
Muteea Murad
Trial No. 2, There Can be No Vindication of Perfidy-Greeting to Al-Shaarani
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 100 cm



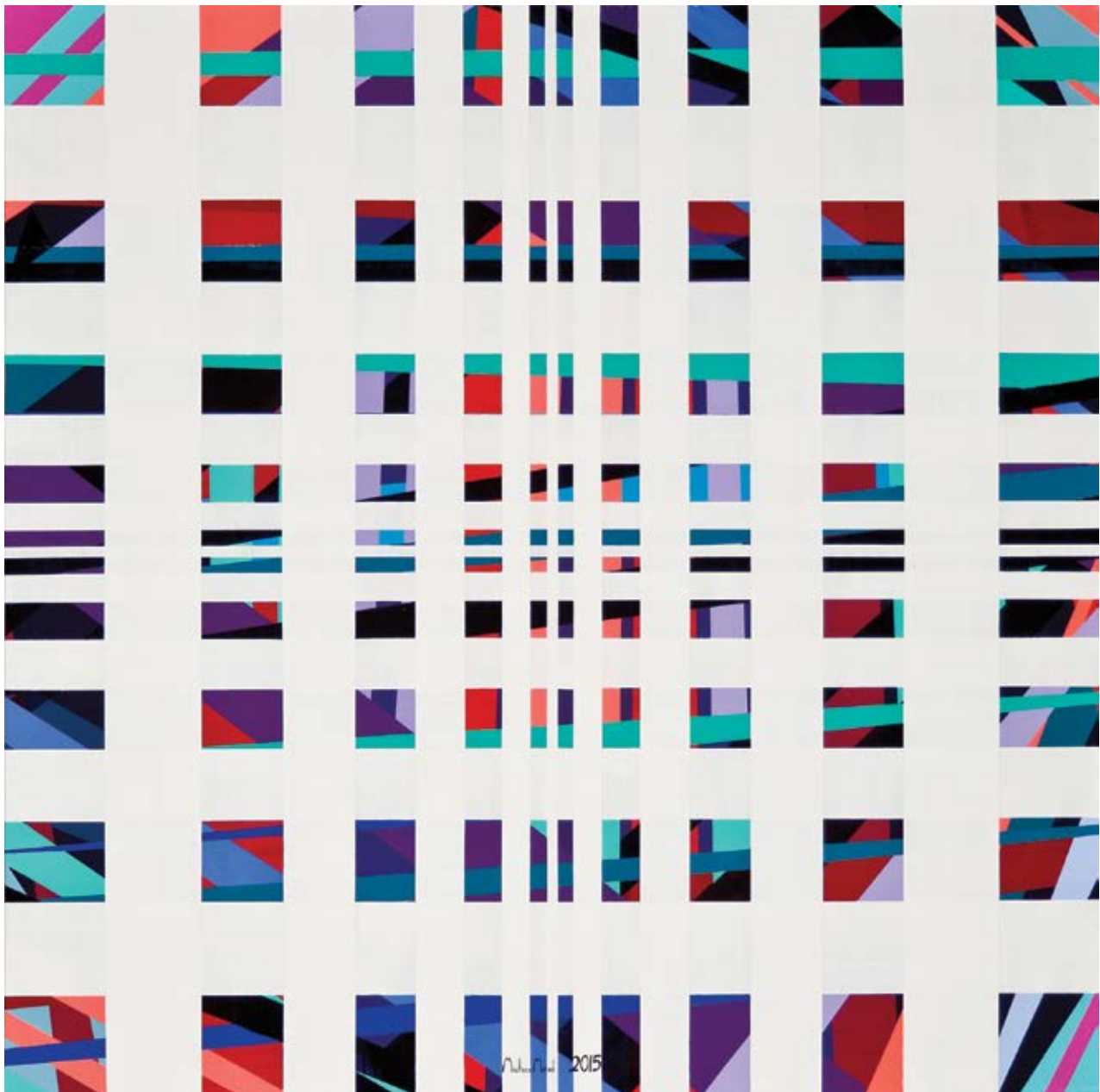
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 28, I Declare Thee
 Safe and Secure Your Souls,
 Your Properties... Greeting to
 Al-Shaarani*
 2010
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



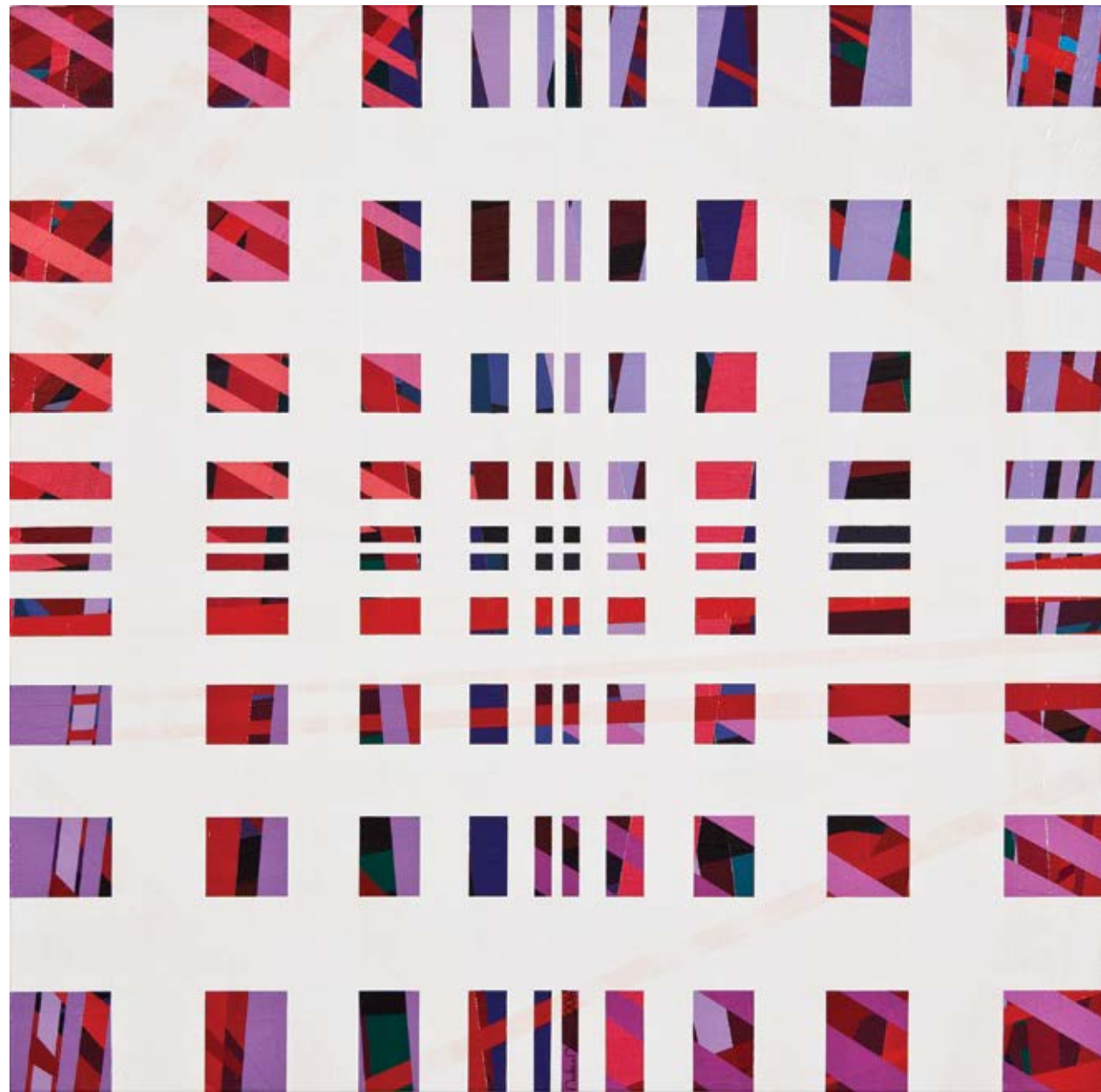
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 45, The Damascene
 Case*
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 111
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 100 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 112
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 100 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 120
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 100 cm

the former, they expand in width from the edges to the middle of the canvas, making the centre protrude; in the latter they shrink, sucking us into the centre. The pattern seems to expand and compress the space behind it. *Trial No. 120* (2016) repeats the latter composition on top of a predominantly warmer hued background, questioning how colour might affect our perception of the illusion, and vice versa. In *Trial No. 121* (2016), another simple work, the width and height of the units of a checkerboard of white quadrilaterals increase in regular increments from the lower left to the upper right, creating the illusion of a bulge at the top right corner.

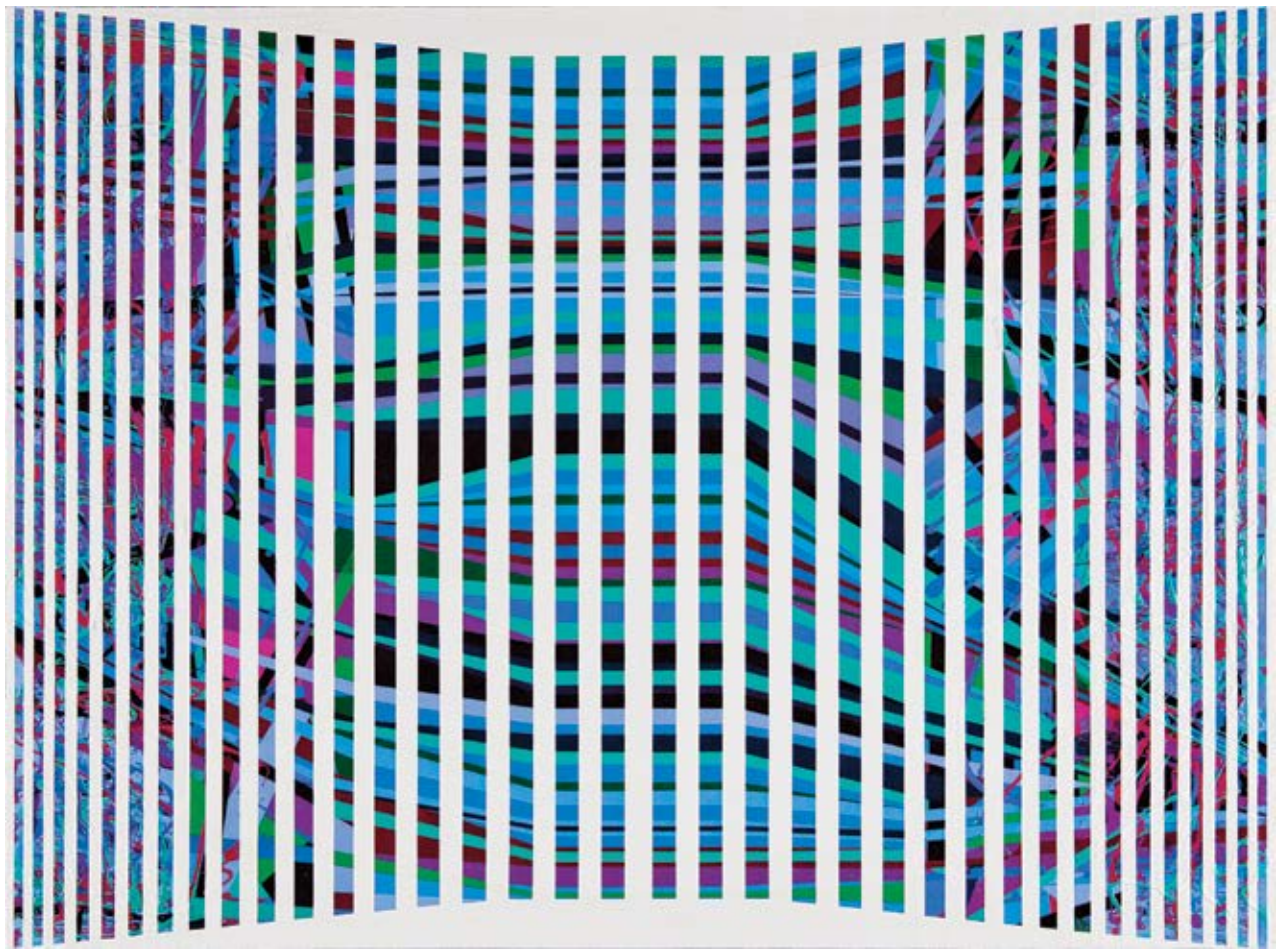
Murad's iterative and experimental process allows him to achieve varying effects with the same surface patterns. In *Trial No. 110* (2016), a progression of white verticals run across the frame, their width decreasing from one edge towards the middle and then returning to the original width at the opposite edge, creating the illusion of a central crease. *Trial No. 118* (2016) repeats this effect sequentially, doubling the alternating rhythms in the piece. In *Trial No. 103, Other Places from the Memory* (2015), a larger, more complex work, the white verticals gradually increase in width but decrease in height towards the middle of the frame, creating a bowing out effect. Similarly, the background layer is denser and busier at the edges, with a flurry of gestural drips and loops sitting on top of the tangle of hard-edged lines and wedges. The middle is more orderly, with lines that begin as diagonals lining up into a parallel stack across the centre of the canvas. In this case, the effect of the verticals is not rhythmic but cinematic; the gaps between the lines function like slits in a zoetrope. The visual stutter they produce forces afterimages, creating a sense of continuity and movement across the background despite the interruptions of the overlying pattern.

This same pattern creates a distinct effect in the scroll-like *Trial No. 108, Moments from the Happy Bow* (2015). Tall white verticals sit atop a stack of horizontal bands of irregular width and different colours that together approximate the spectrum of a rainbow. While there is a gradual shift across the spectrum from red at the bottom to violet at the top, it is not smooth, with random variations in intensity and hue creating an irregular push and pull. Here, our eye prefers to glide up (or down) along rather than across the smooth verticals, forcing us to average out the discrete bands of colour underneath into the continuous spectrum we are more familiar with and stressing the role of the eye and the body in how we perceive colour. *Trial No. 107, Moments from Childhood* (2015), a related work, elicits a very different response. The horizontals, here thinner and in a more subdued pastel palette, are overlaid with a grid of equally sized white squares. The result is more buzz than blur, suggesting a texture, a soft fuzziness one might associate with a baby's blanket, reinforcing the title's affect through haptic and chromatic effects. Two monumental multi-panel works—*Trial No. 125, Rainbow - Rain and Light and Love* and *Trial No. 126, Rain and Light and Nostalgia* (both 2016)—continue this line of investigation through

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Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 110
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 100 cm

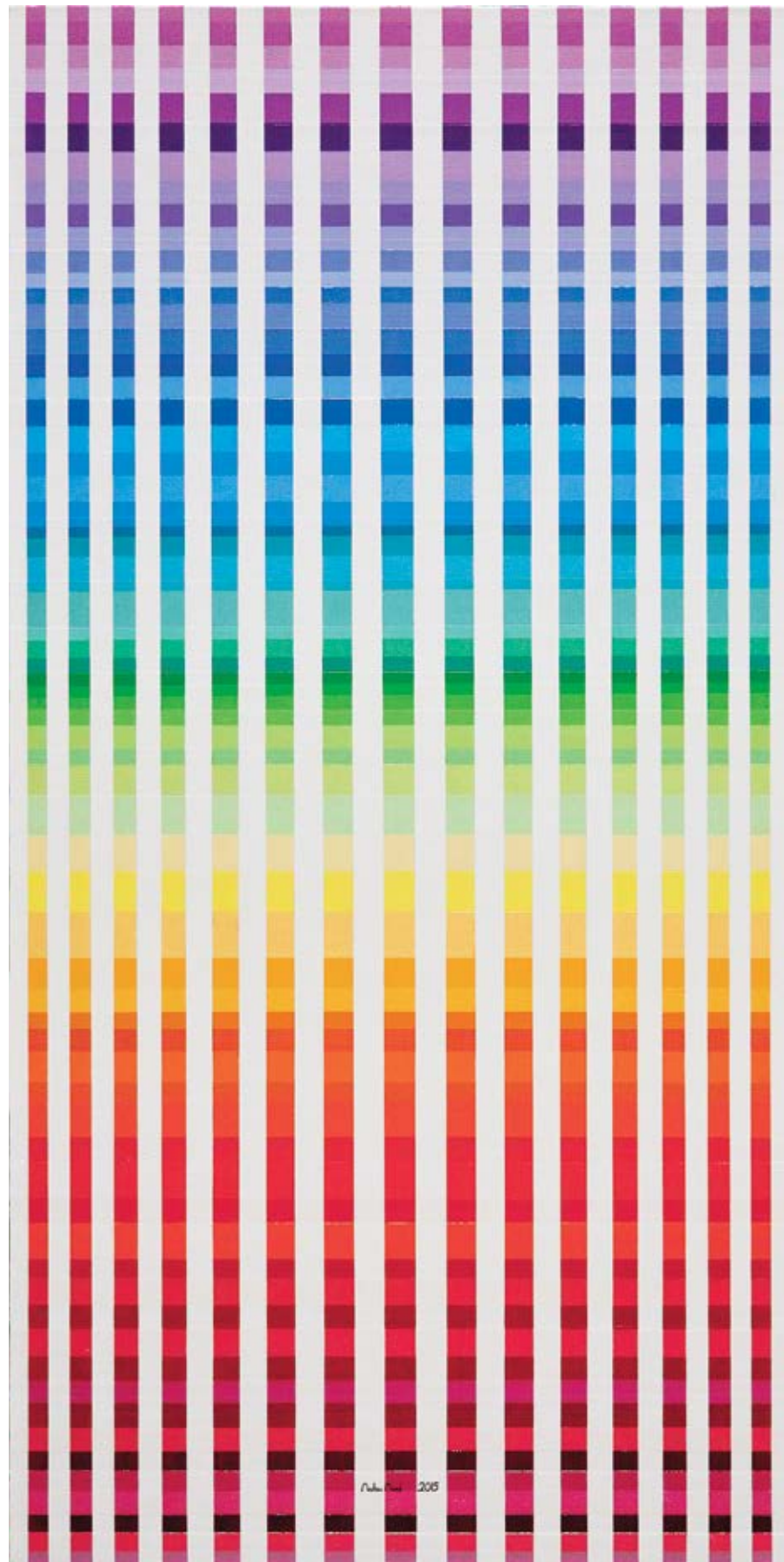


Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 103, Other Places
 from the Memory*
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 250 cm

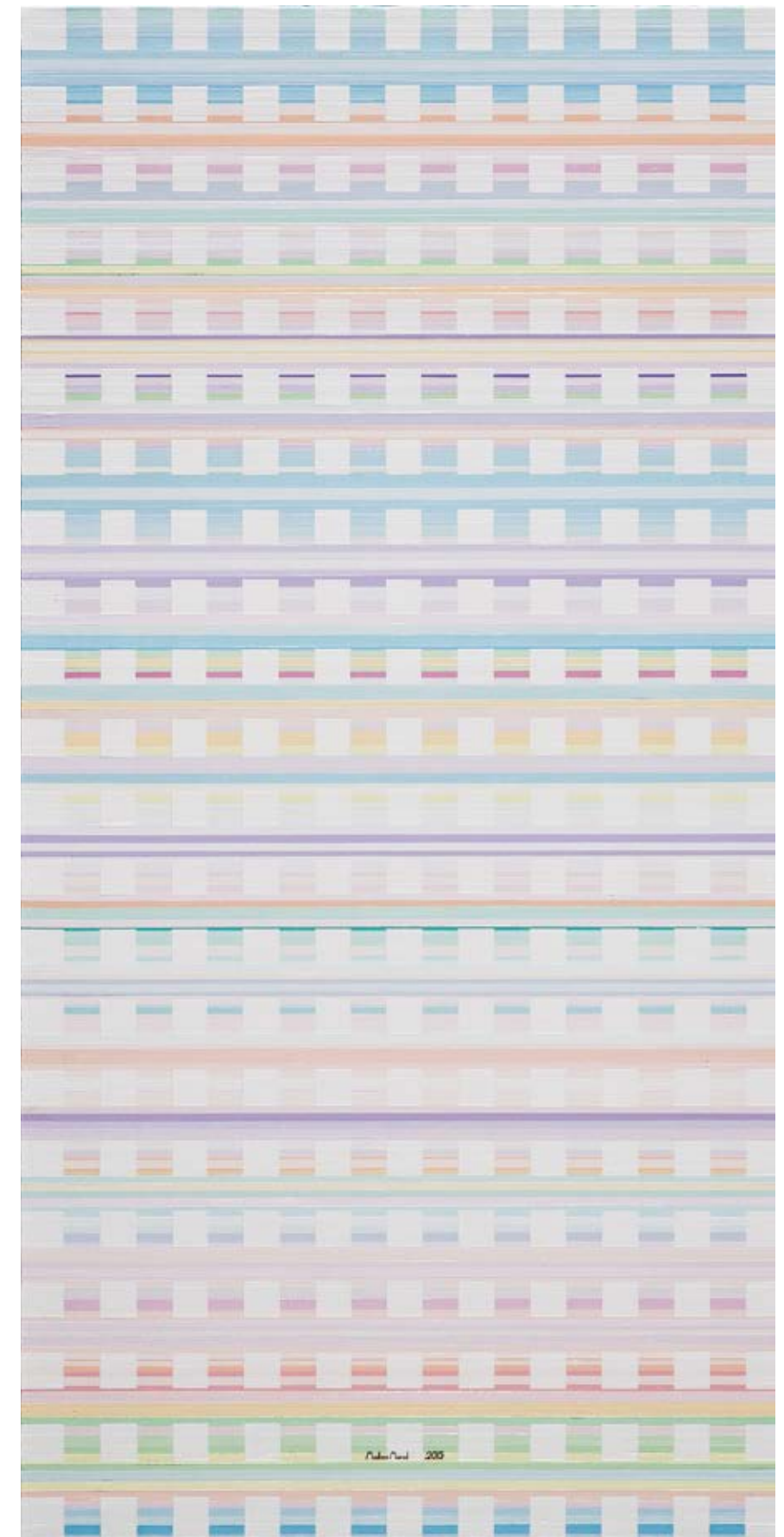


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 118
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 200 cm

Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 108, Moments from
the Happy Bow*
2015
Acrylic on canvas
200 x 100 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 107, Moments from
Childhood*
2015
Acrylic on canvas
200 x 100 cm

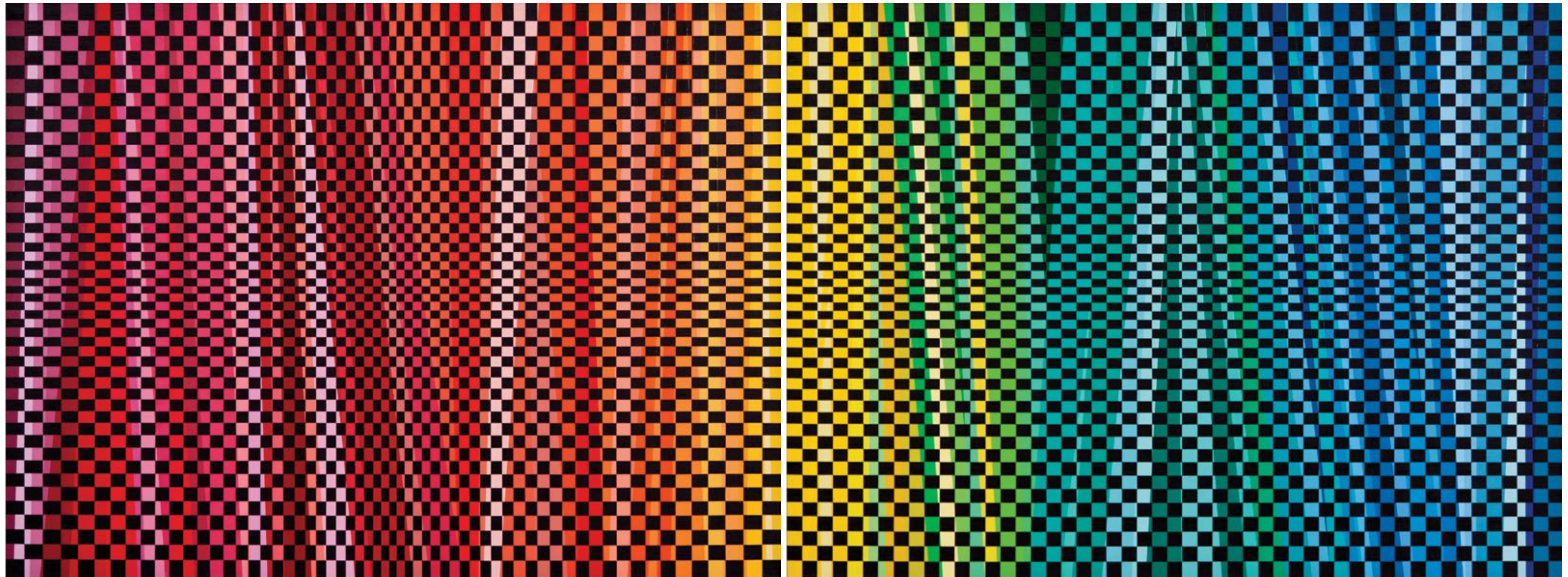




Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 125, Rainbow - Rain
 and Light and Love*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 700 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 125, Rainbow - Rain
 and Light and Love (detail)*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 700 cm



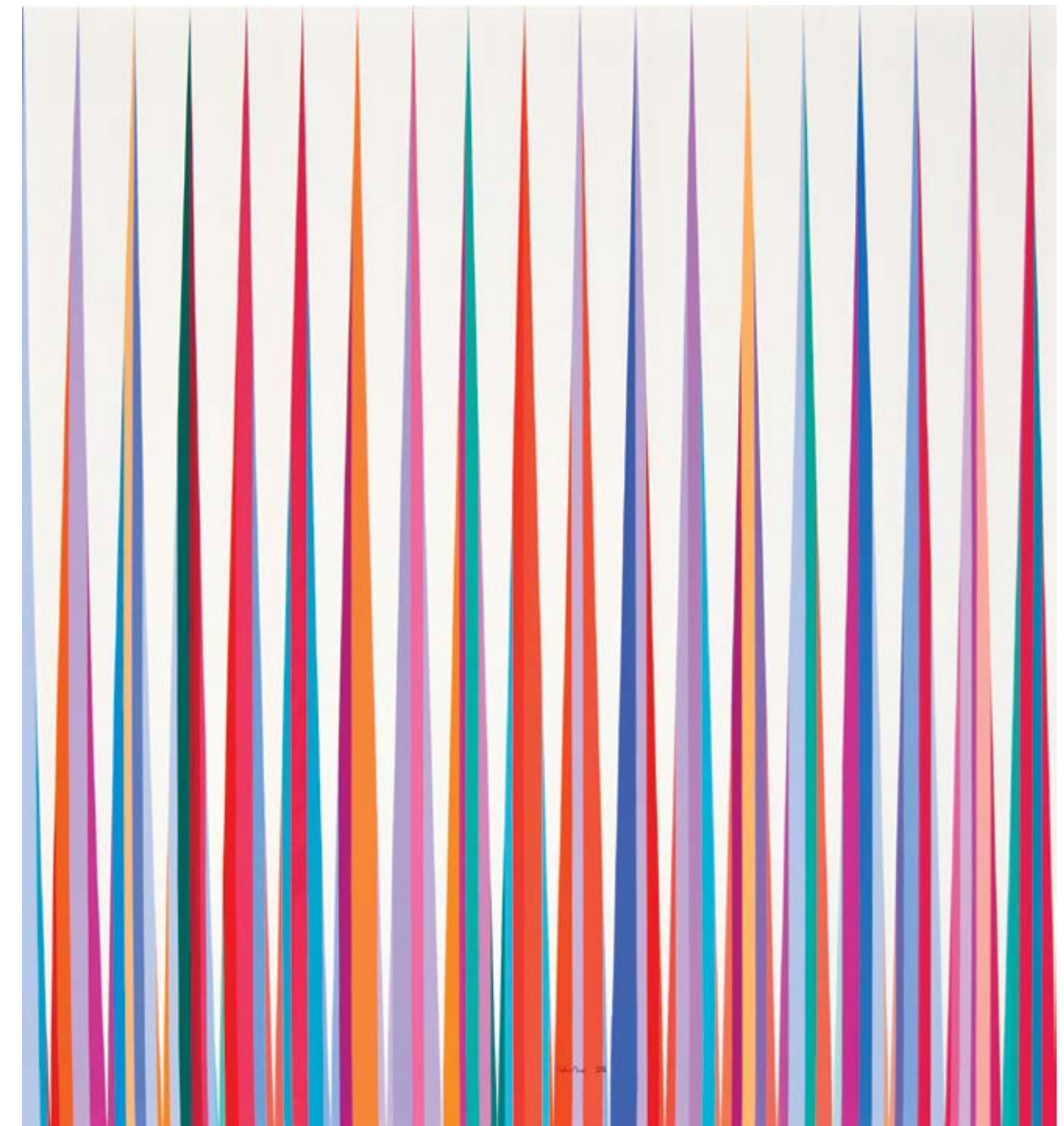
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 126, Rain and Light
 and Nostalgia*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 184.5 x 748.5 cm

more complex formats and background and surface patterns. In the former a horizontal progression of white verticals shorten and then expand in height across seven panels while in the latter a black checkerboard pattern is subtly manipulated to create a field of arcs and curves. In these works, and possibly all of Murad's canvases, colour, much like form, is understood and presented as a whole made up of parts, a complex phenomena not an absolute fact, that is always contingent on the capacities of the responsive eye.

Mathematics is an important influence on Murad's practice, and sheets filled with tables, numbers and calculations, pinned next to tiny studies for paintings, fill a bulletin board in his current studio. In *Trial No. 131, The Fibonacci Numerical Sequence* (2016) the irregular progression of white verticals, the spaces between them determined by the titular sequence, is almost lost against a dense multicoloured weave of horizontals and verticals. Juxtaposing a predictable but complex pattern against a chaotic field of noise, this composition questions whether we are able to distinguish one from the other, and where exactly the threshold between the two lies. While much of Murad's recent inquiry sits at this threshold between pattern and chaos, *Trial No. 115* and *Trial No. 116* (both 2015) poignantly reveal the unexpected perceptual effects produced when a regular and irregular pattern are superimposed. In the former, a frieze of inverted narrow white isosceles triangles sits on top of a field of verticals of varying thickness and colour, bisecting parallel lines with slight diagonals and creating a progression of thin spikes and wedges. The triangles, now black, alternate in orientation in the latter, creating striated diagonal bands that zigzag across the frame. In these works, a regular mediating layer does not introduce a sense of order but, instead, results in further complexity.

Many of these discrete paths of inquiry converge in Murad's most recent canvases, *Trials No. 130-135* (all 2016). In these works the surface patterns have become increasingly complex, often through the introduction of irregularities or the careful synthesis of two or more schema, which makes the logic of the pattern and its perceptual effect harder to resolve. The width across a vertical and/or horizontal band varies unpredictably in *Trial No. 130, The First Magical Numbers Game*, introducing subtle diagonals into what was previously a precise if irregular grid of intersecting orthogonals. This creates a sense of movement and vibration within the pattern itself and the perceptual effect it enables. In *Trial No. 133, When Your Soul Got Mixed with Mine* curved lines and varying band width together introduce torque into the pattern, resulting in the illusion of a protrusion that is also subtly twisting parallel to the picture plane, visually echoing the mixing referenced in the title. And in *Trial No. 132, Trance at Sunset* the vertical bands of the surface pattern alternately expand and contract from top to bottom, producing an undulating bubble effect, which, together with the warm palette of crisscrossing diagonals underneath, capture both the hallucinatory and chromatic qualities of the titular phenomena.

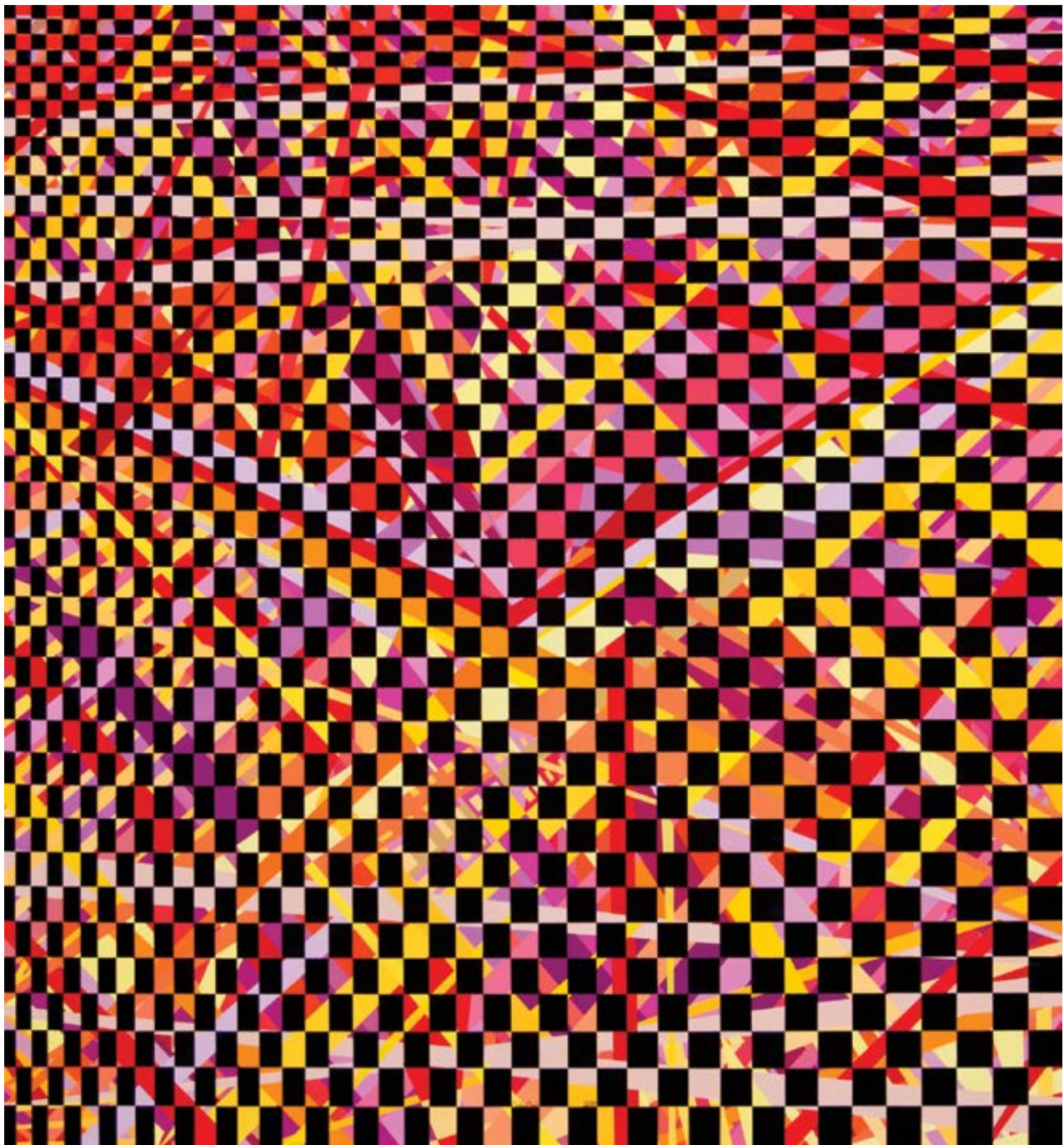
>>



Muteea Murad
Trial No. 115
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 185 cm



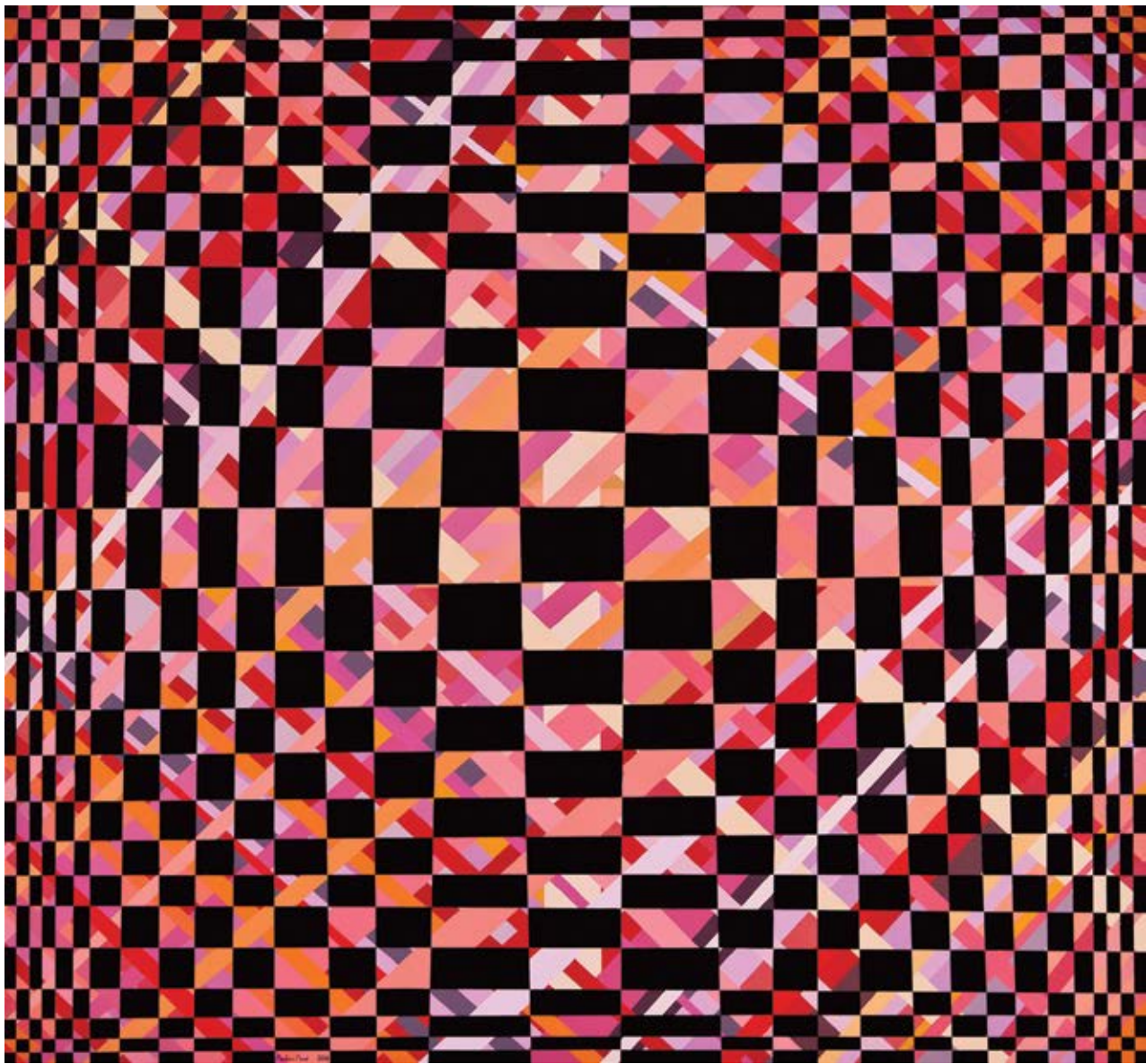
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 116
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 185 cm



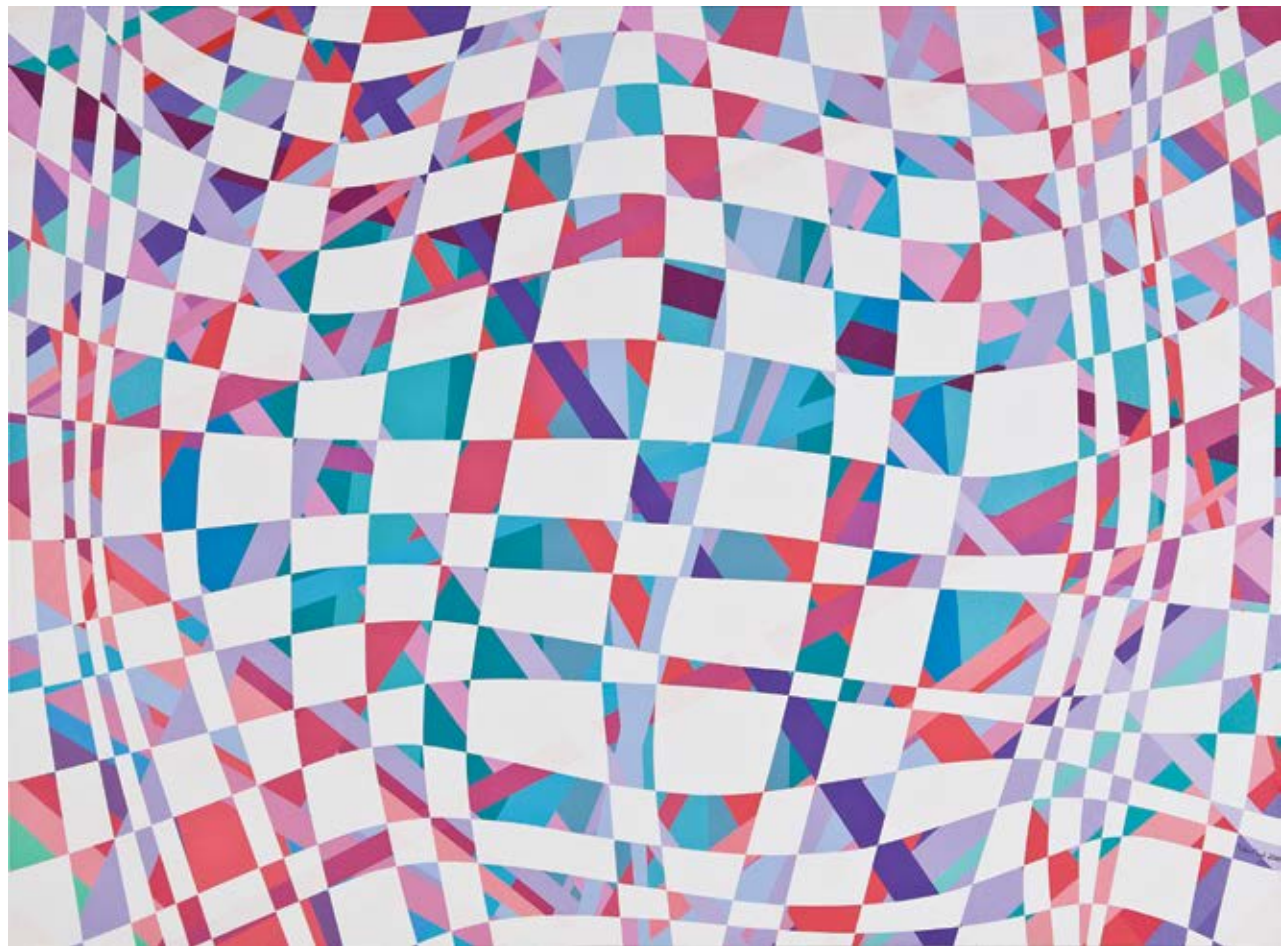
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 117
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 185 cm



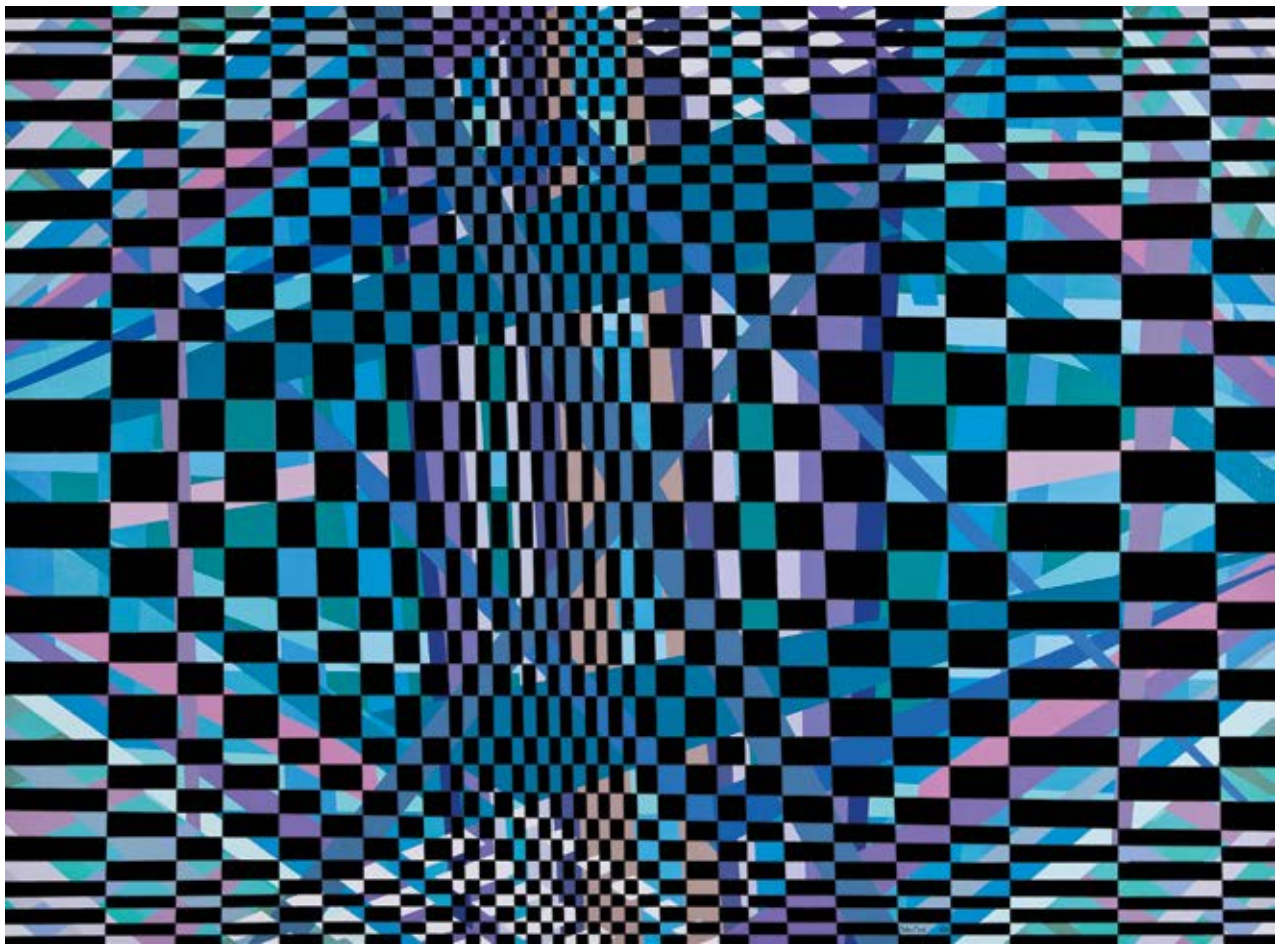
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 131, The Fibonacci
 Numerical Sequence*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 188 cm



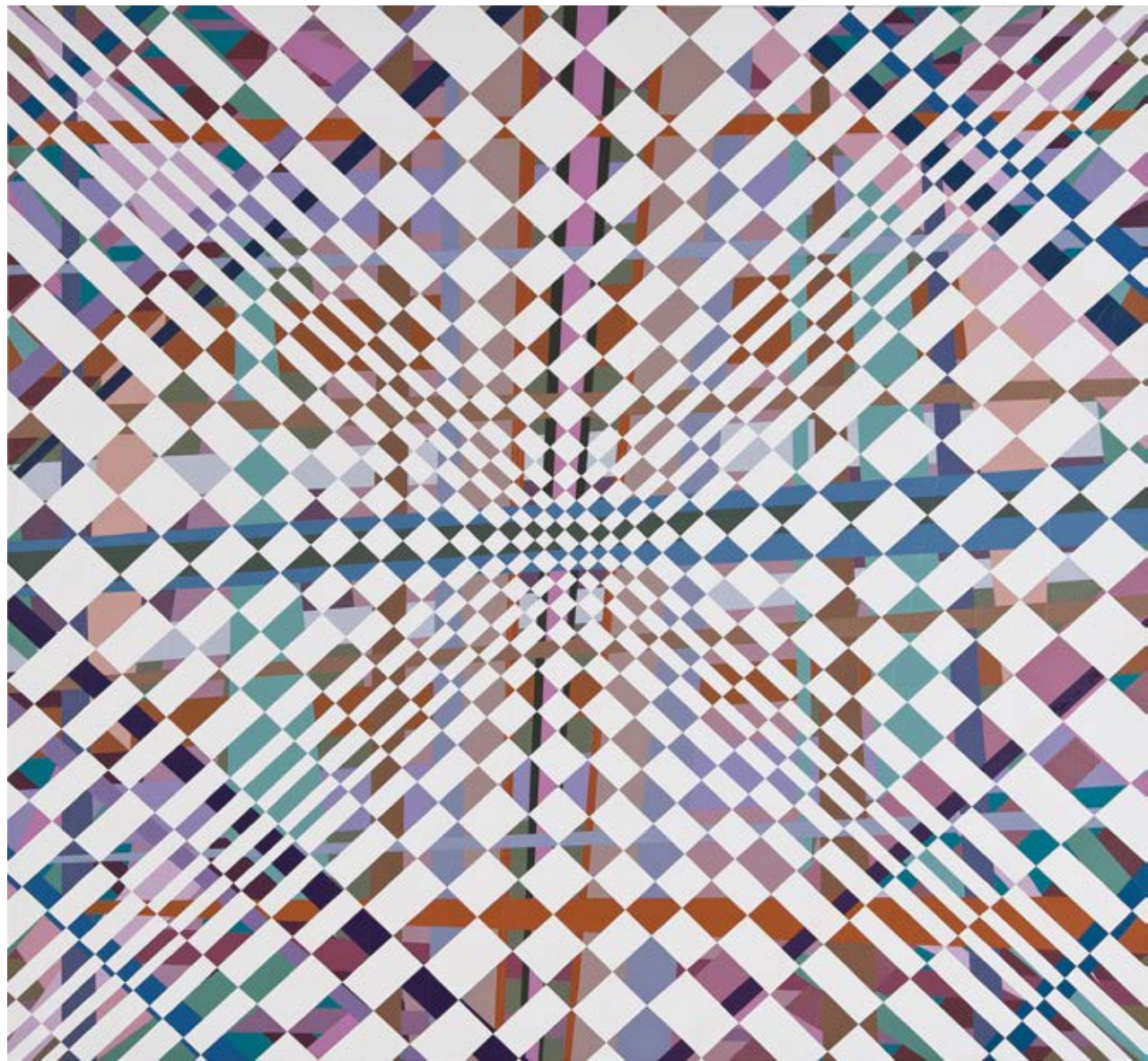
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 132, Trance at Sunset
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 200 cm



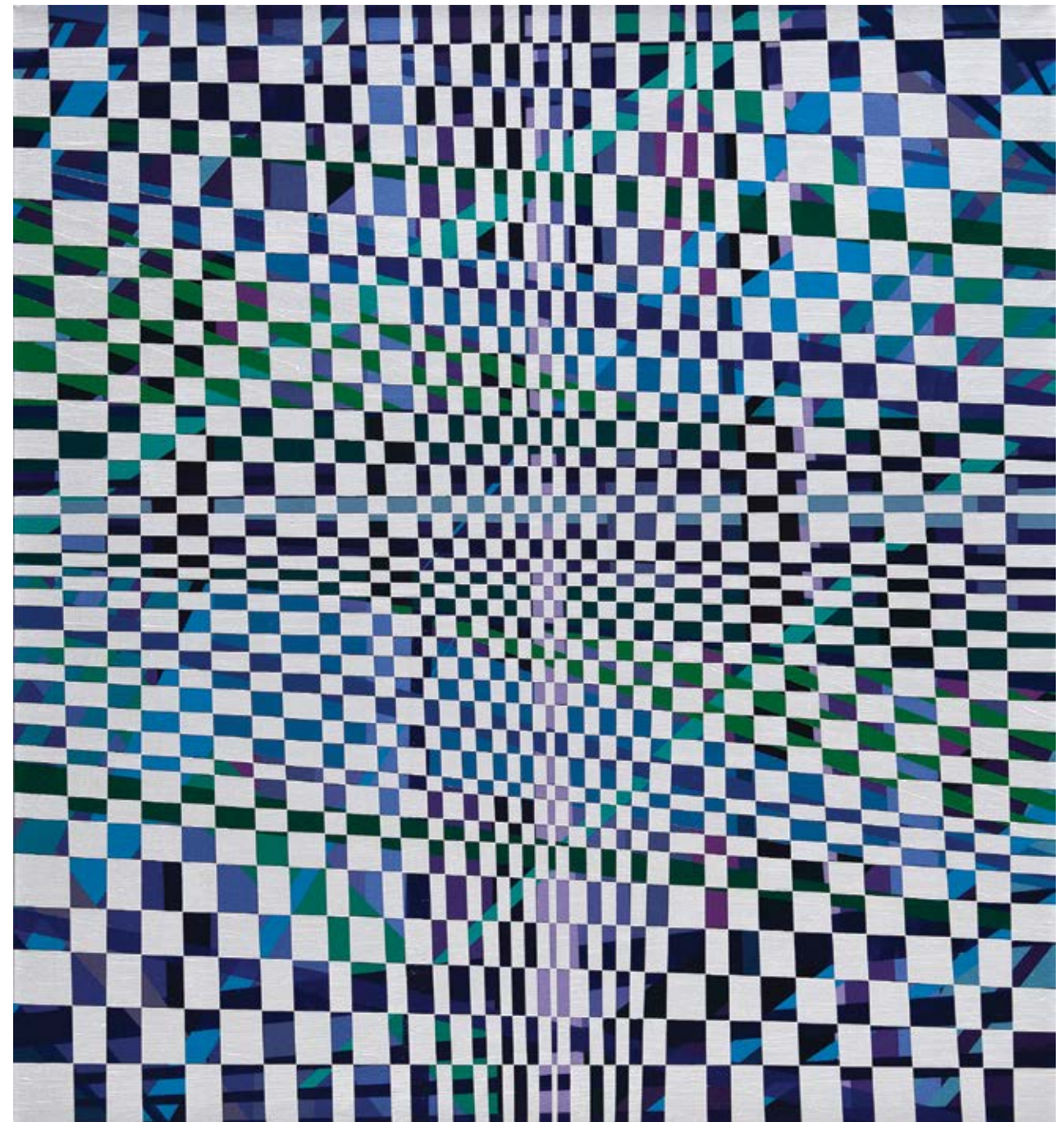
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 133, When Your Soul
 Got Mixed with Mine*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 250 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 134, Tunes of the
 Migrant Birds*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 250 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 135, The Butterfly of
 the Dream Dances Alone*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 200 cm



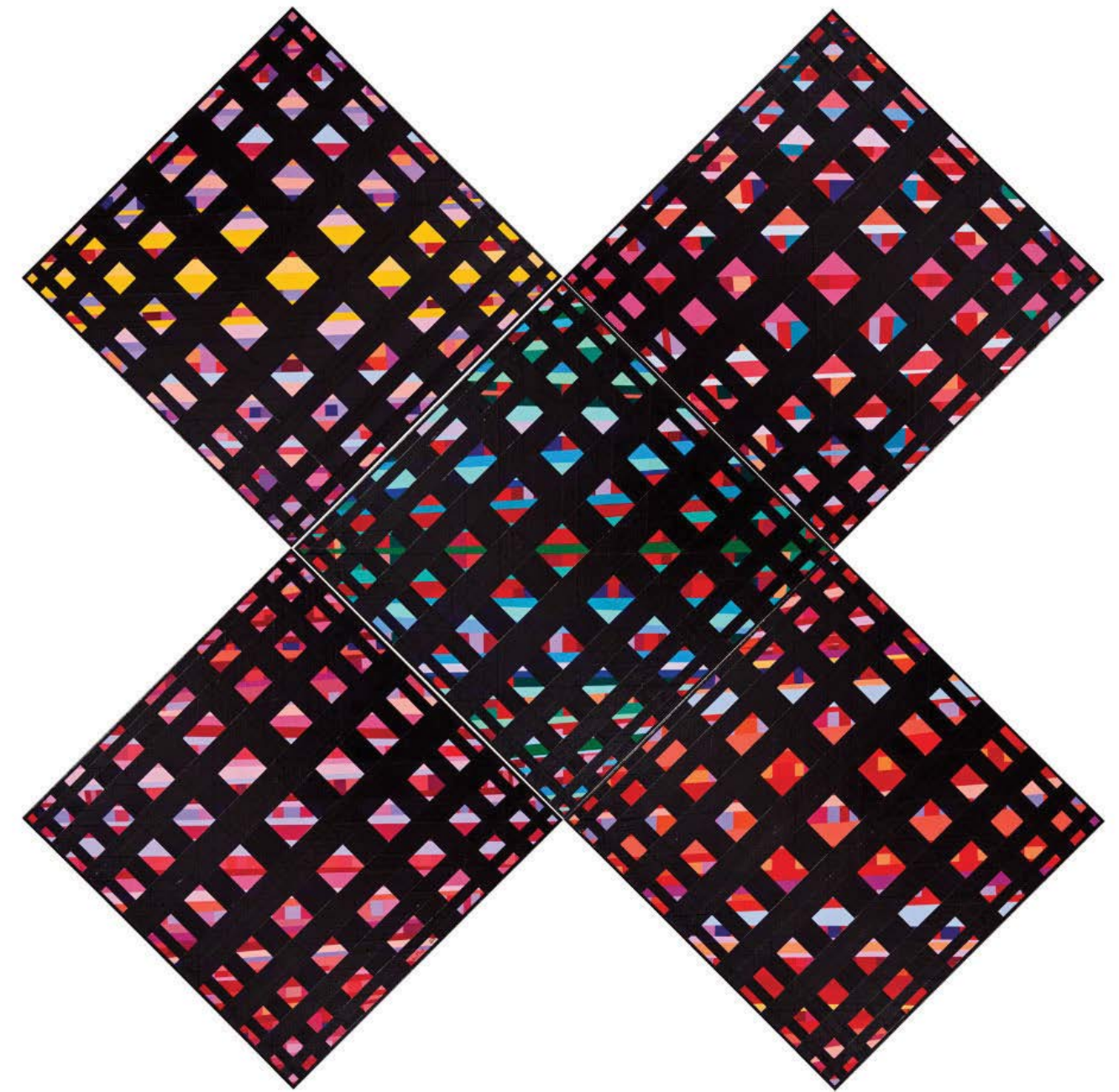
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 130, The First
 Magical Numbers Game*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 185 cm

What is common through all of these experiments is Murad's repeated use of compositions that consist of two discrete but overlapping layers, each with varying degrees of complexity. In these works, opposites seem to coincide and coexist in the same pictorial field without cancelling each other out or resolving into some sort of easy compromise. In her book *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf*, Miriam Cooke introduces the idea of *barzakh*, which she posits as a threshold between two states, where both coexist but remain distinct, a zone of undiluted convergence.⁴ In the Quran, it is used to refer to both metaphysical and physical states: to purgatory, on one hand, as the state in between life and the hereafter, and to a natural phenomenon observed in Gulf waters, on the other, where bodies of salt and sweet water meet but do not mix.⁵ Cooke uses this term as a provocative, if problematically reductive, epistemological framework for understanding the seemingly paradoxical simultaneity of tribal and modern cultural logics in twenty-first century Gulf societies. But the term seems particularly apt for understanding Murad's paintings as well.⁶ One could argue that Murad's abstractions place the viewer in an optical and perceptual *barzakh*. Juxtaposing two discrete layers, varied in form and effect, these paintings push vision well beyond its comfort zone, beyond predictable perceptual responses. Thresholds themselves, these canvases compel vision to hover or oscillate between the two layers and their respective effects. Forced to inhabit an in between space, where it is repeatedly and constantly unsettled, where it must always remain flexible and adaptable, the responsive eye itself becomes liminal •

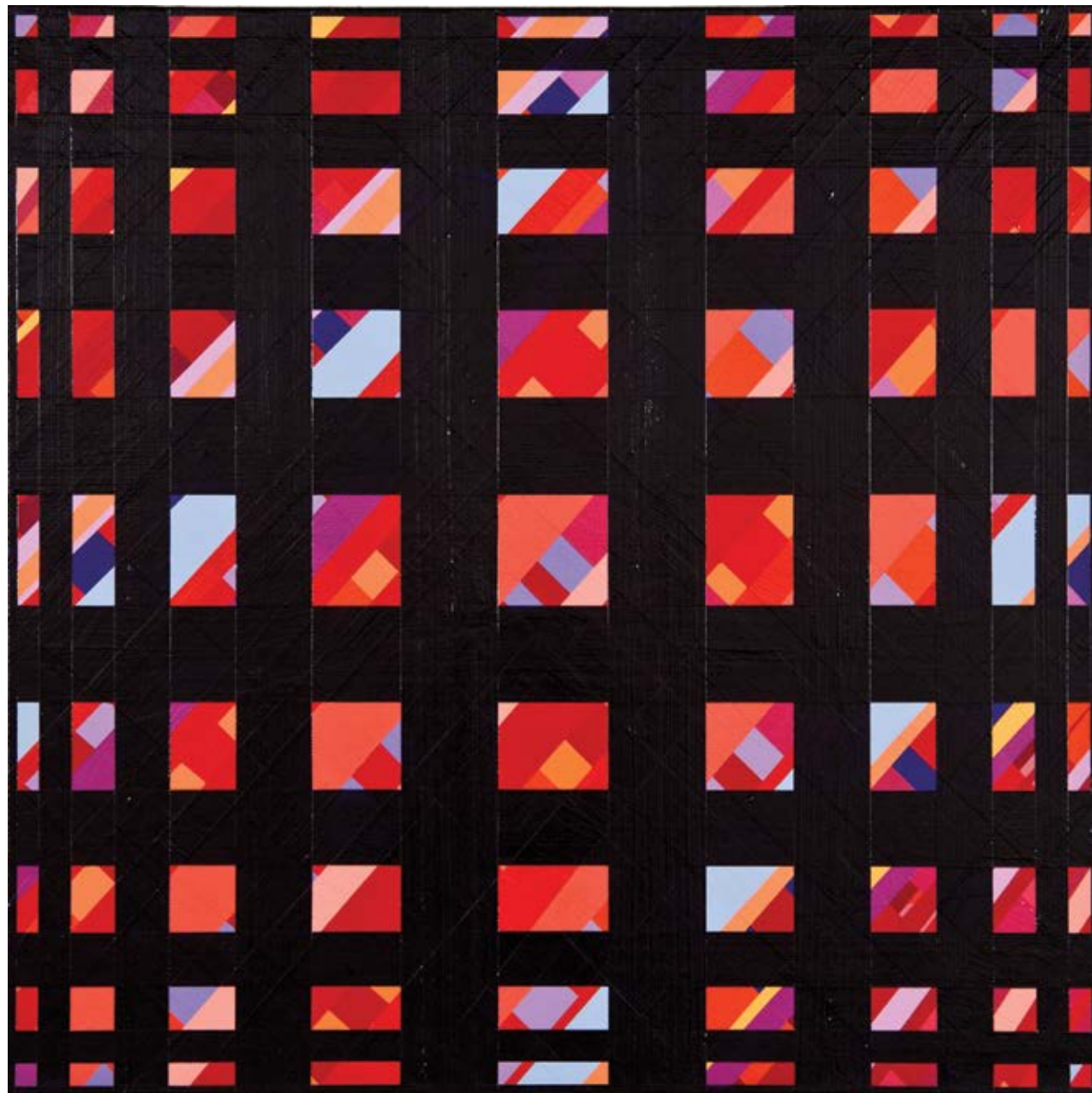
4. Miriam Cooke, *Tribal Modern: Branding New Nations in the Arab Gulf* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

5. Cooke, 76-70.

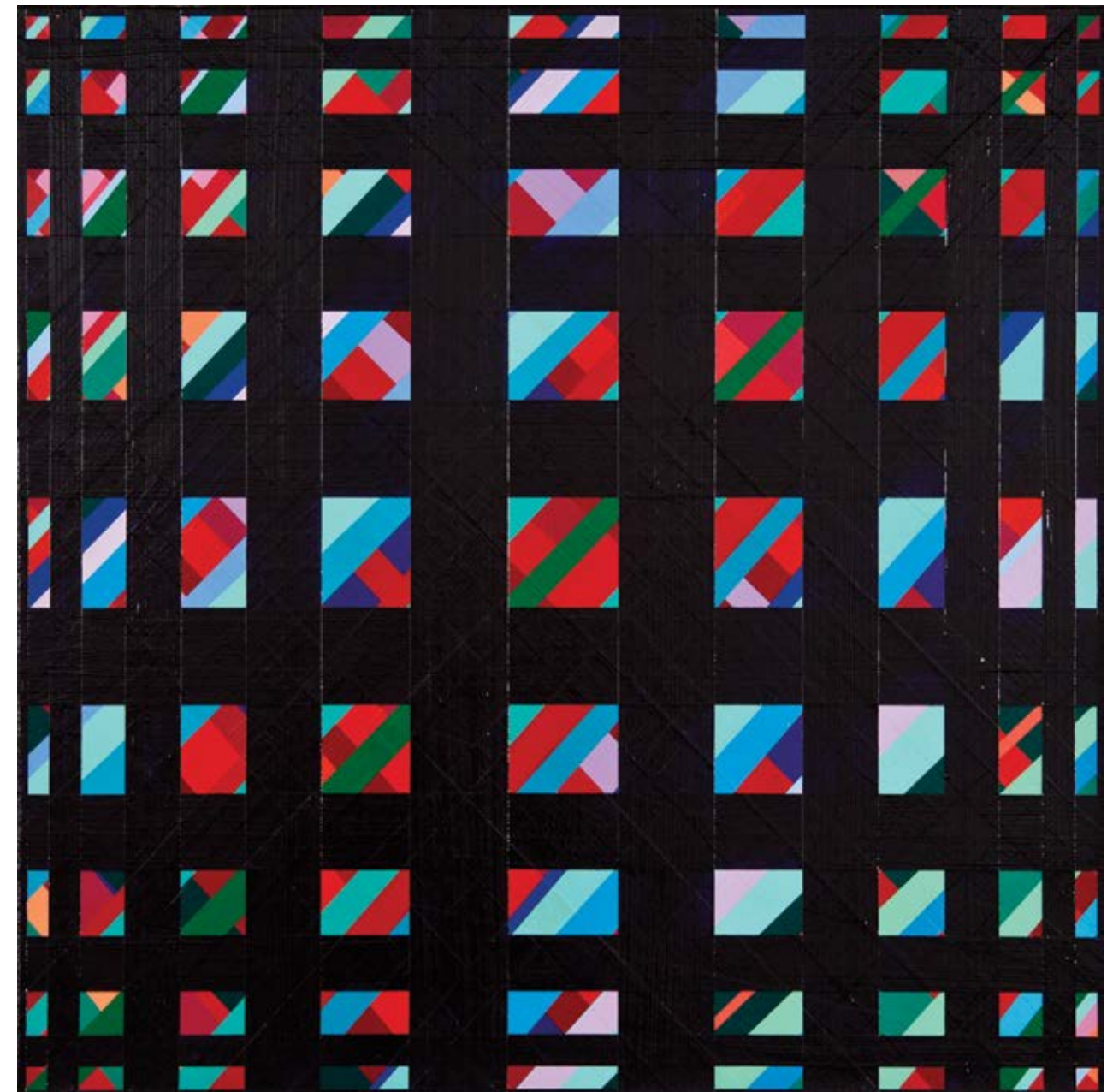
6. In an uncanny coincidence, *barzakh* as purgatory was the subject of Murad's infamous thesis project at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus. His practice at the time was entirely figurative and largely consisted of dark expressive grotesque bodies that symbolised existential angst and societal injustice. Though his teachers initially discouraged the subject, Murad persisted and the project was very well received.



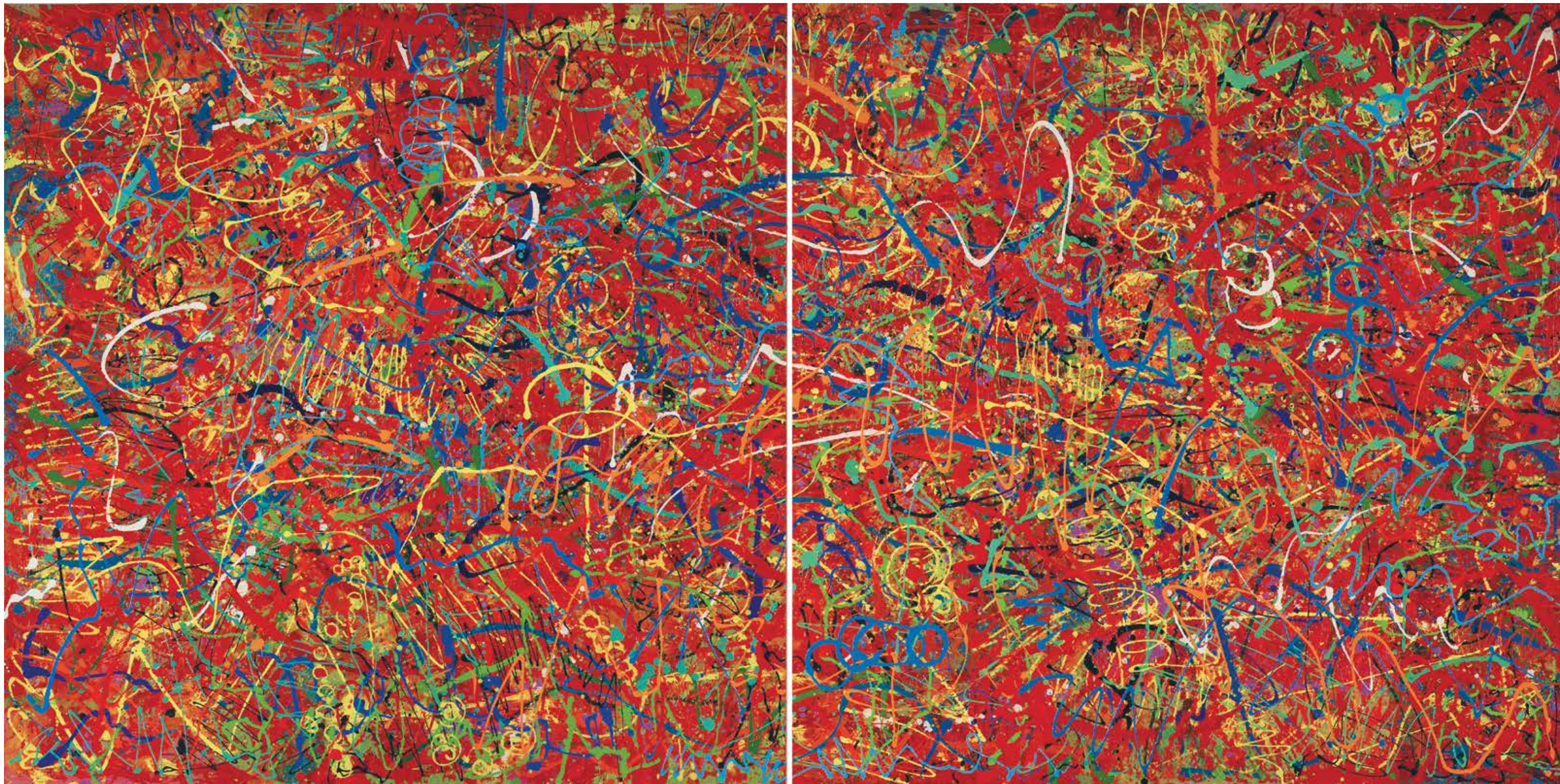
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 124, When We Go
 On in Time and Space*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 282.5 x 282.5 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 124, When We Go
On in Time and Space
 (detail)
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 282.5 x 282.5 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 124, When We Go
On in Time and Space
 (detail)
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 282.5 x 282.5 cm



Mouteea Murad
Abou Ali Mood
2007
Acrylic on canvas
145 x 290 cm



Mouteea Murad
Wasp's Tricker
 2007
 Mixed media on canvas
 145 x 145 cm



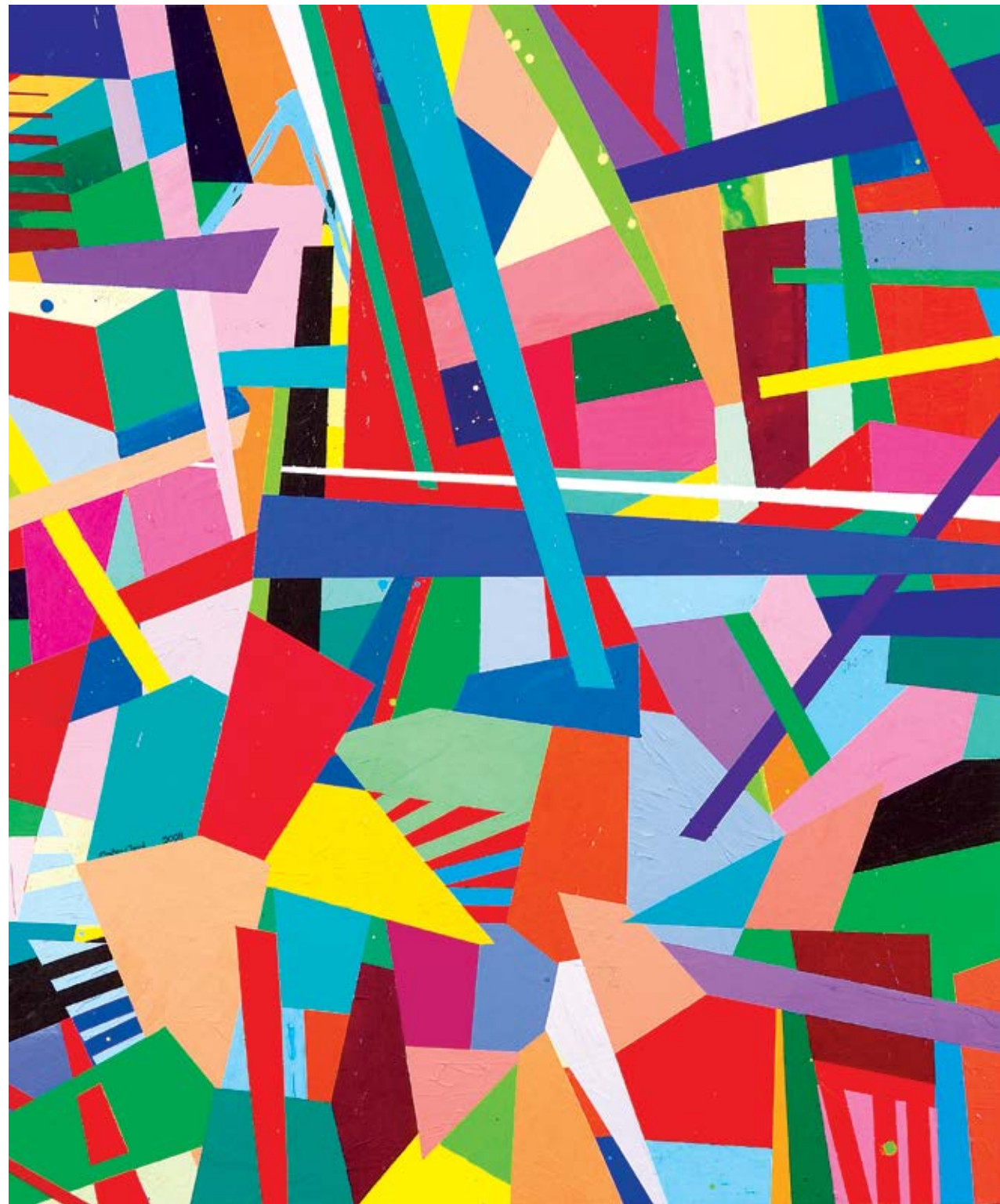
Mouteea Murad
Musical Uproar
 2007
 Mixed media on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



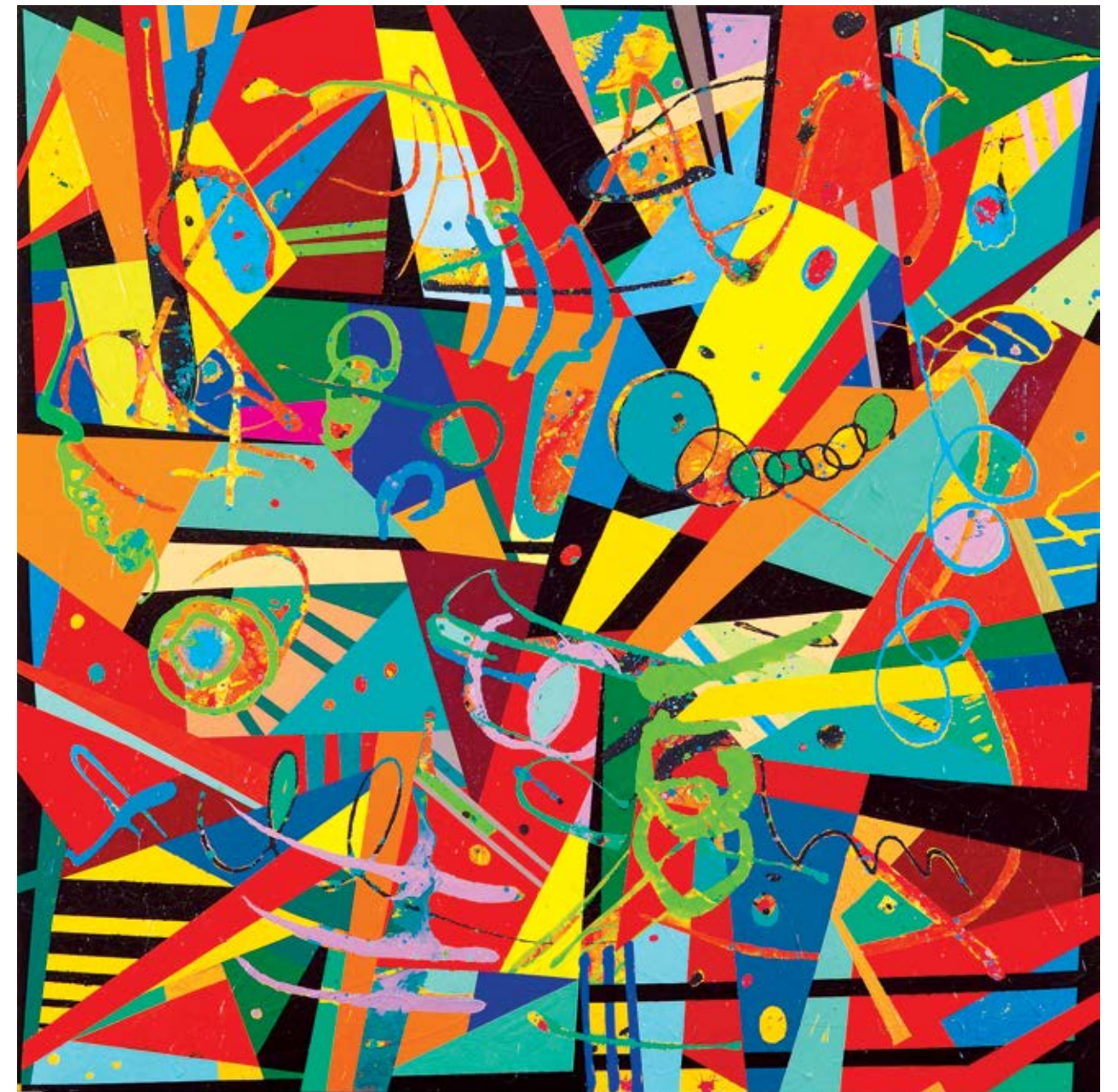
Mouteea Murad
 Untitled
 2007
 Acrylic on canvas
 155 x 155 cm



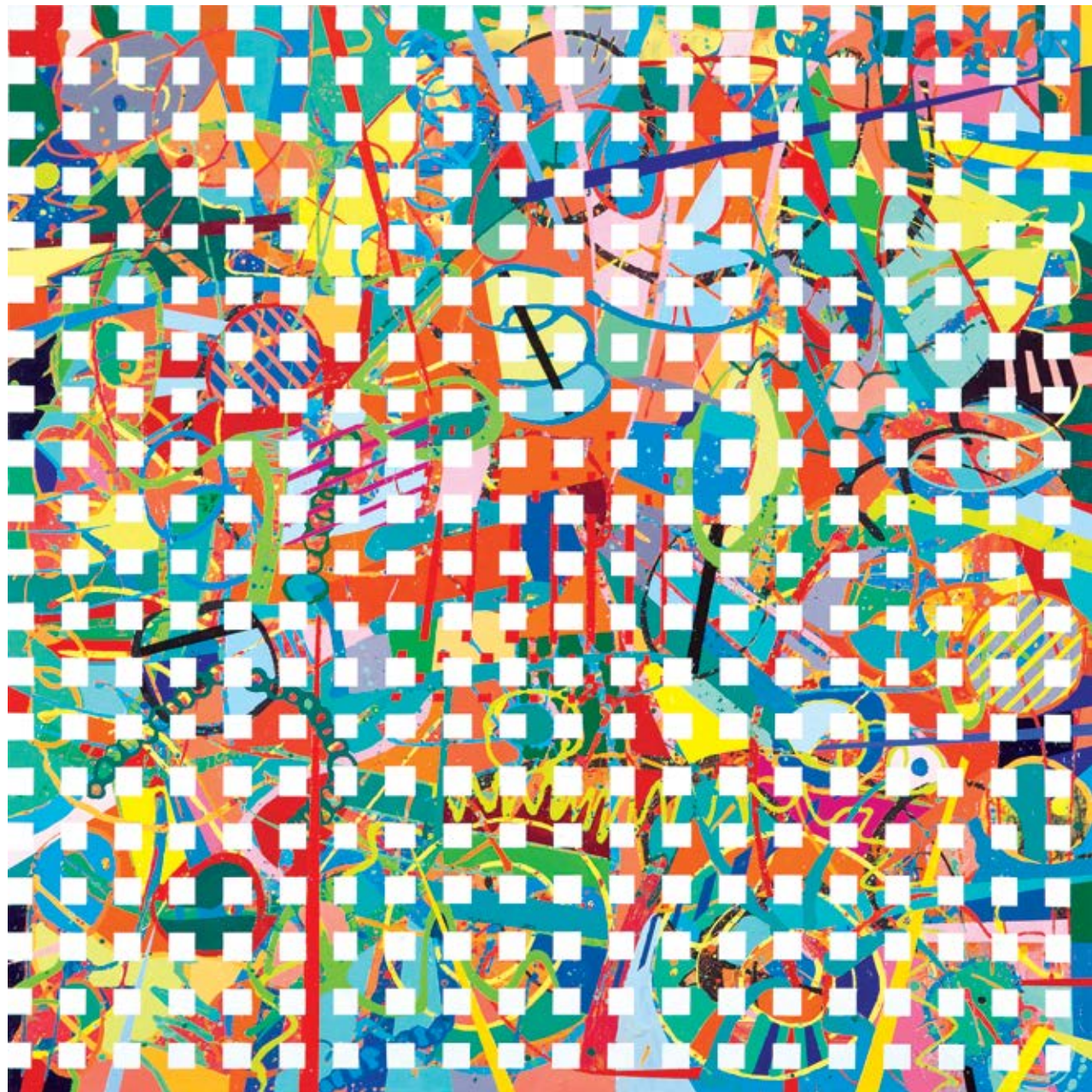
Mouteea Murad
 Untitled
 2007
 Acrylic on canvas
 155 x 155 cm



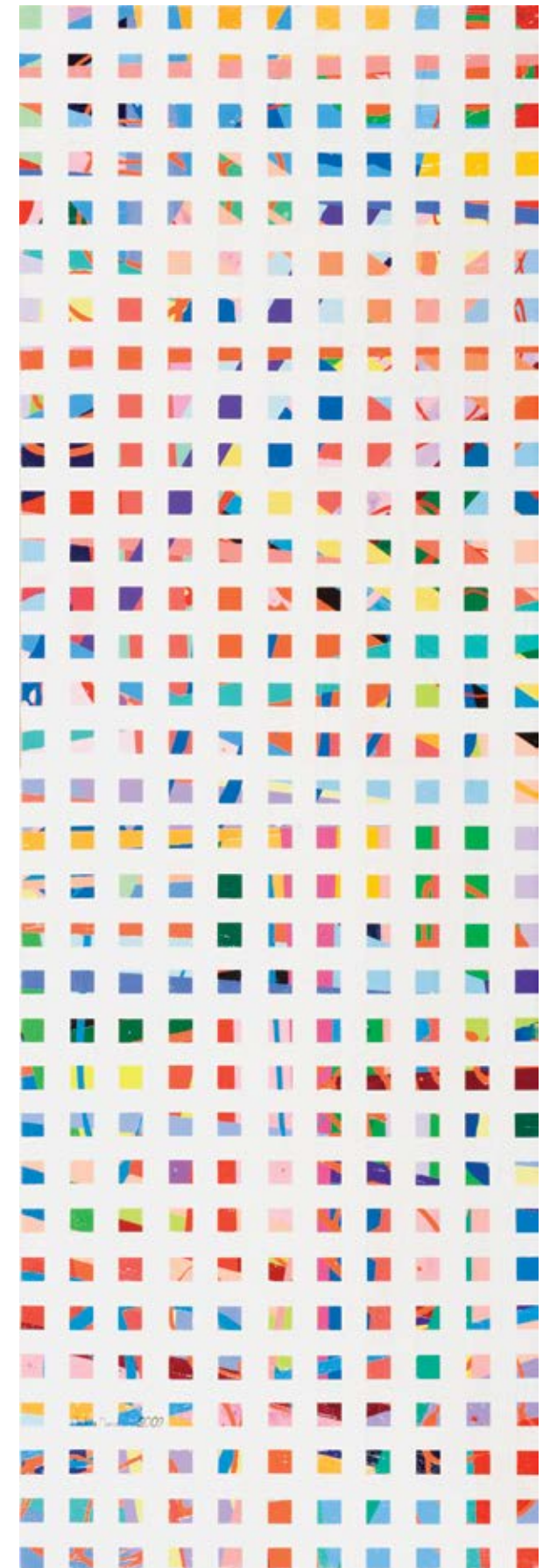
Mouteea Murad
City of Butterflies I
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 100 cm



Mouteea Murad
Festival I
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 155 x 155 cm



Mouteea Murad
Sunset Hallucinations
 2008
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 13
 2009
 Mixed media on canvas
 150 x 50 cm

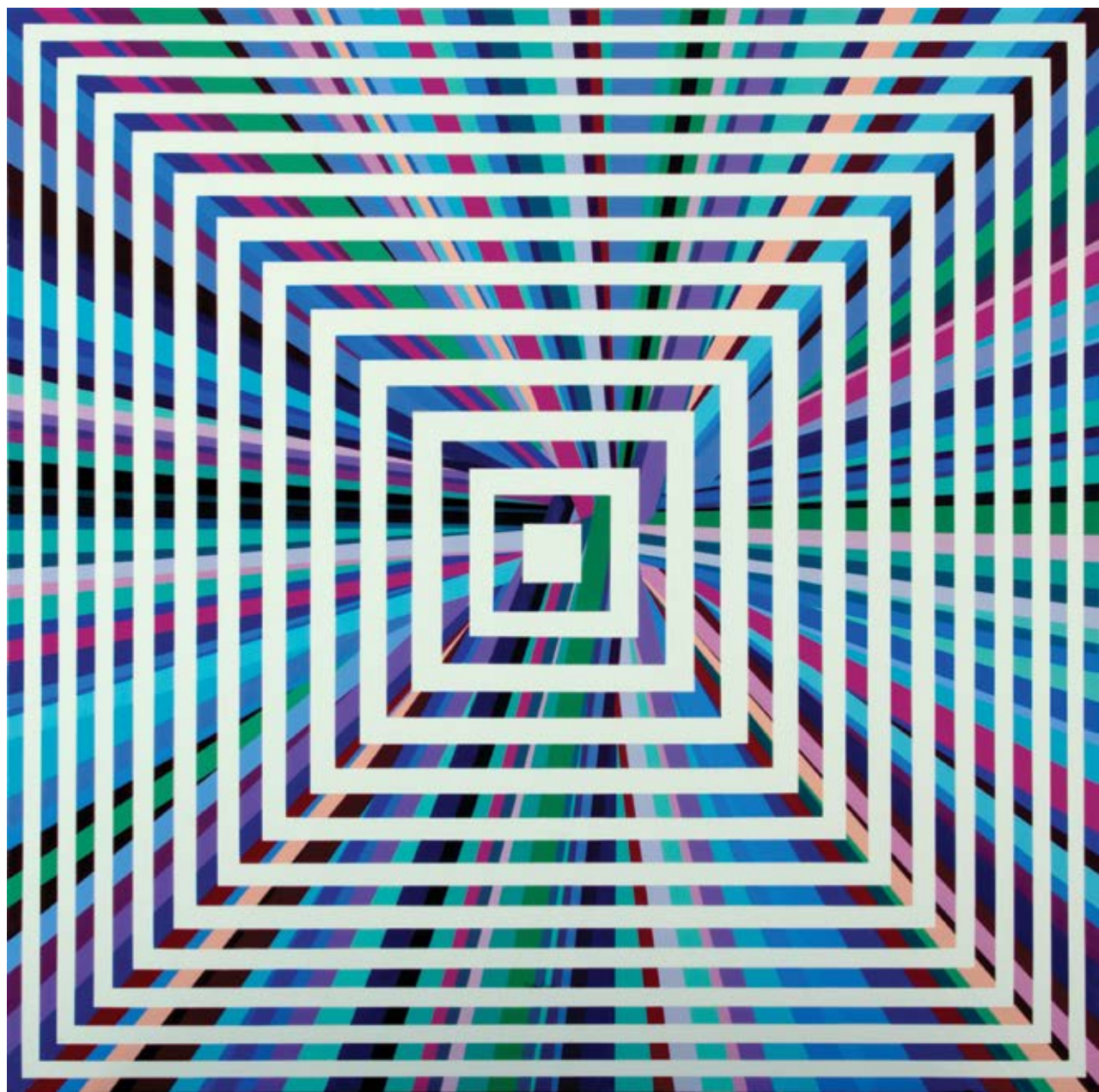


Mouteea Murad
50 Geometrical Formations
 2009
 Acrylic on canvas
 180 x 180 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 14, The Castle
 2009
 Mixed media on canvas
 180 x 150 cm





Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 56
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 185 cm



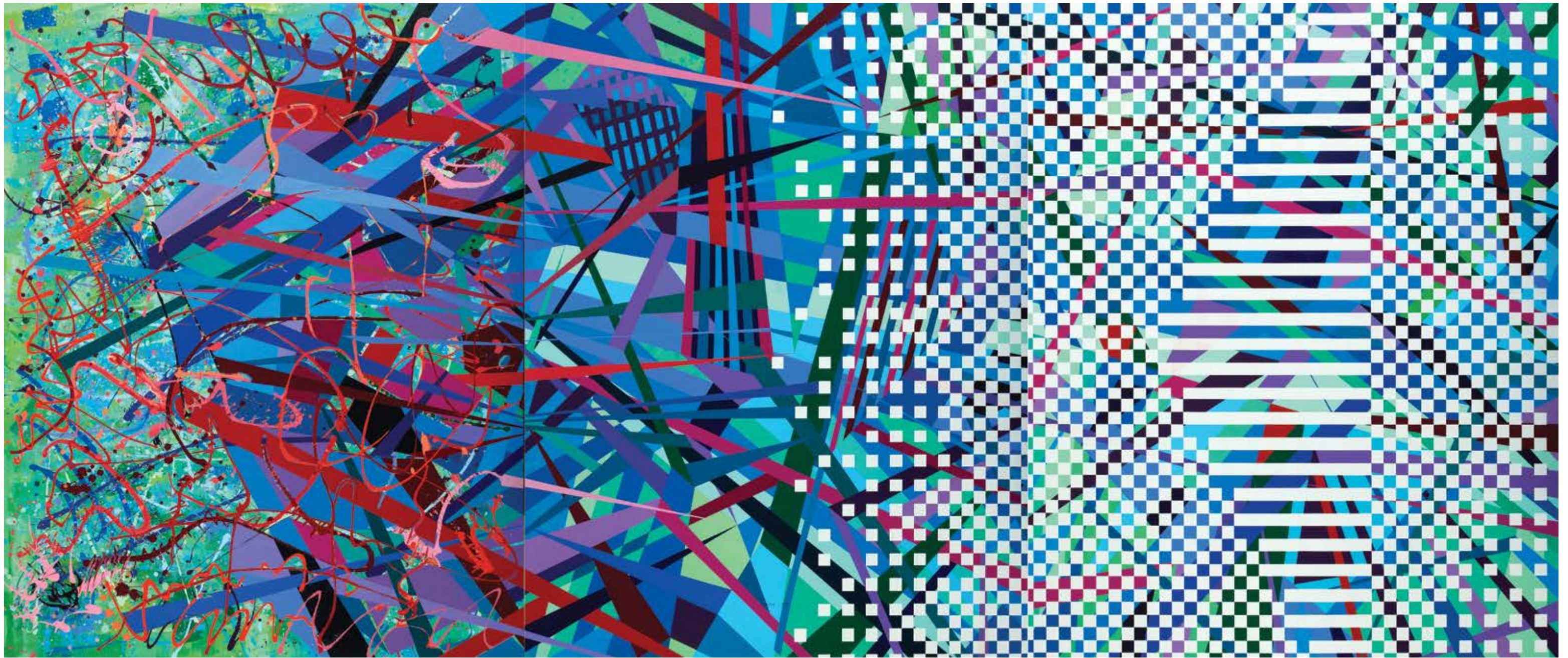
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 58
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 250 cm



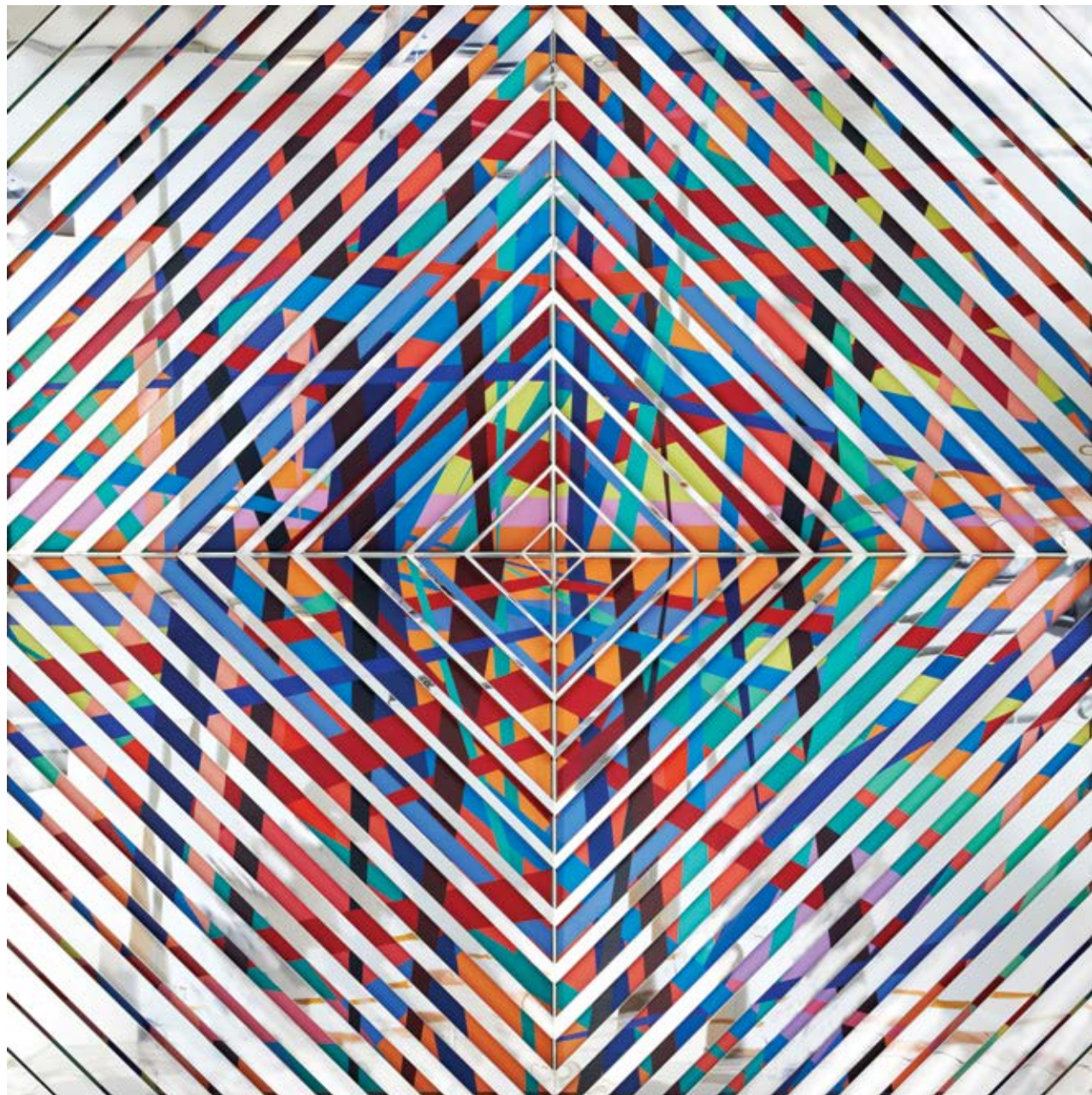
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 59
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 250 cm



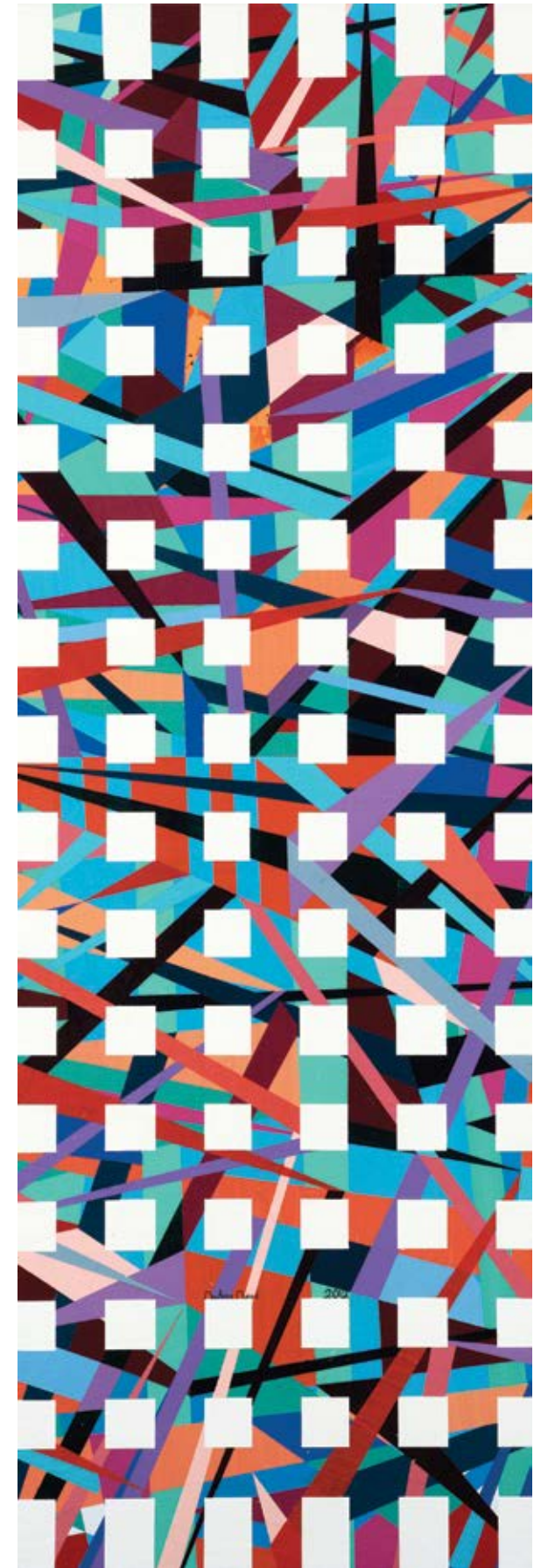
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 60
 2011
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 250 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 63, Days and Years
2012
Acrylic on canvas
250 x 600 cm



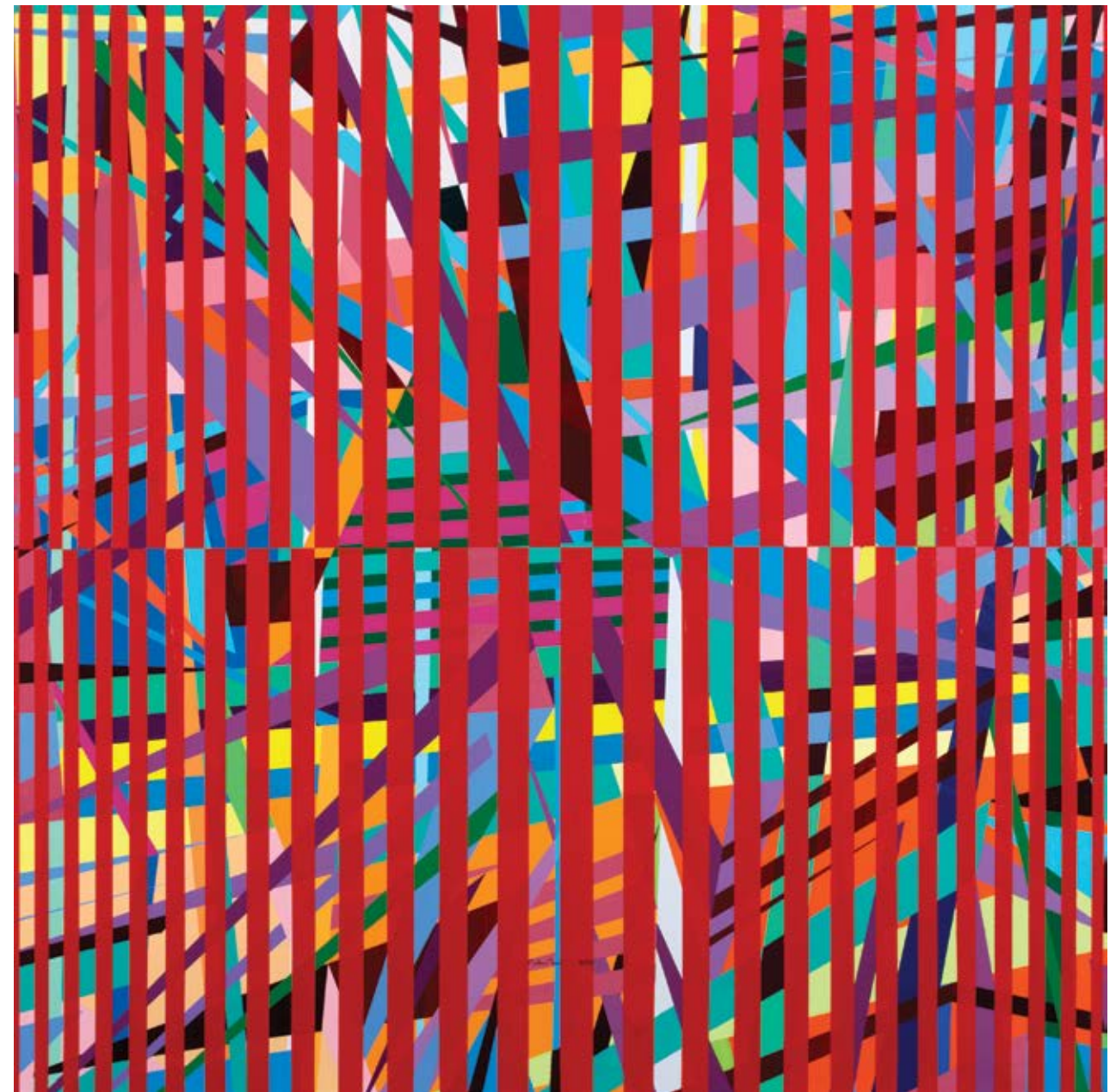
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 65
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas with
 chrome
 400 x 400 cm



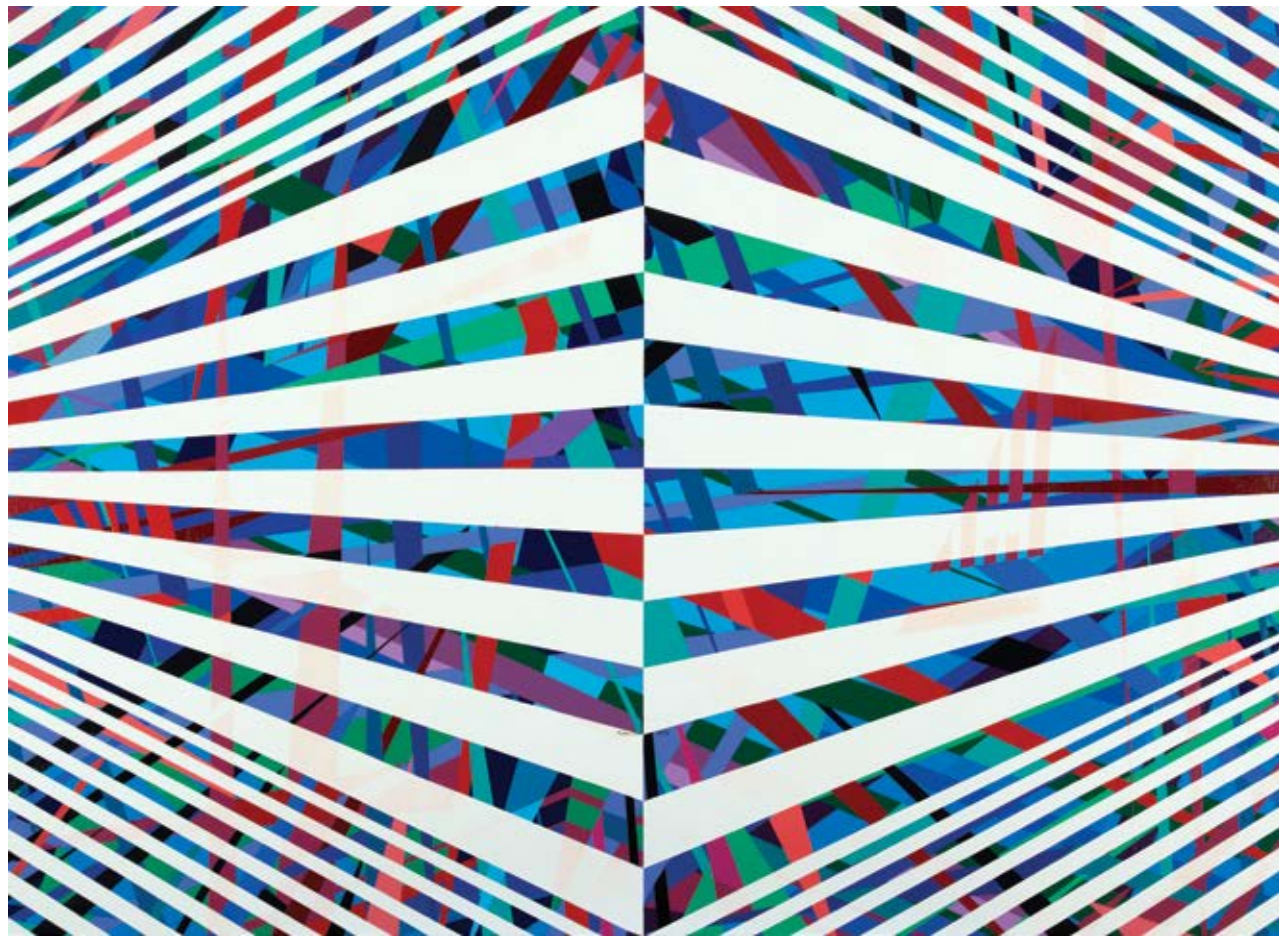
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 66
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 150 x 50 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 67
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 170 x 170 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 68
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 170 x 170 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 75
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 250 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 69
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 185 x 250 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 85
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 230 x 80 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 76
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 230 x 80 cm

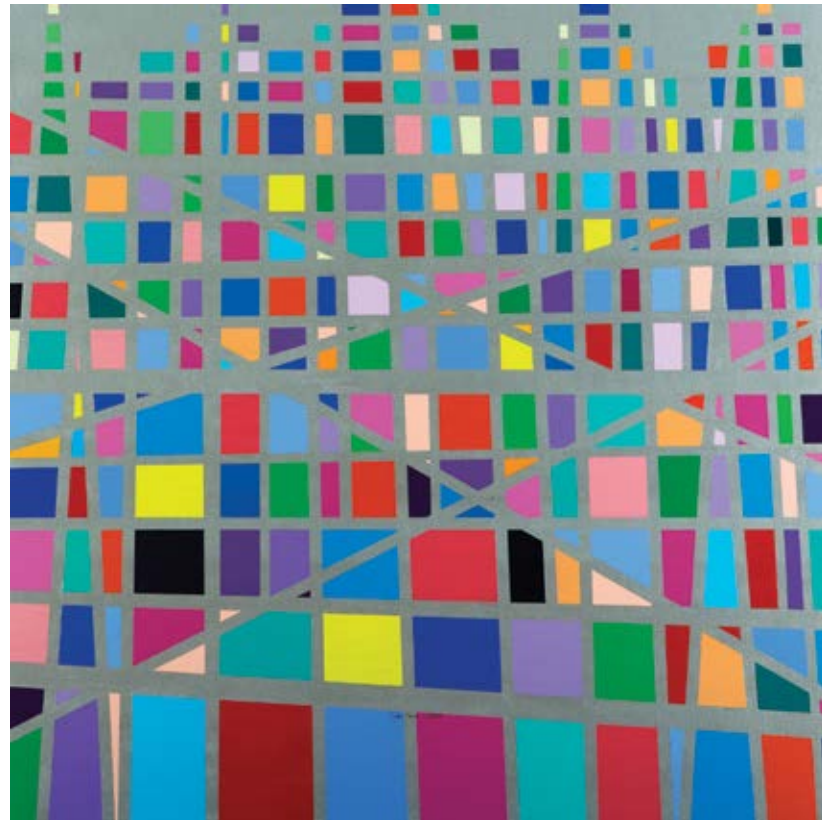


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 77
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 230 x 80 cm

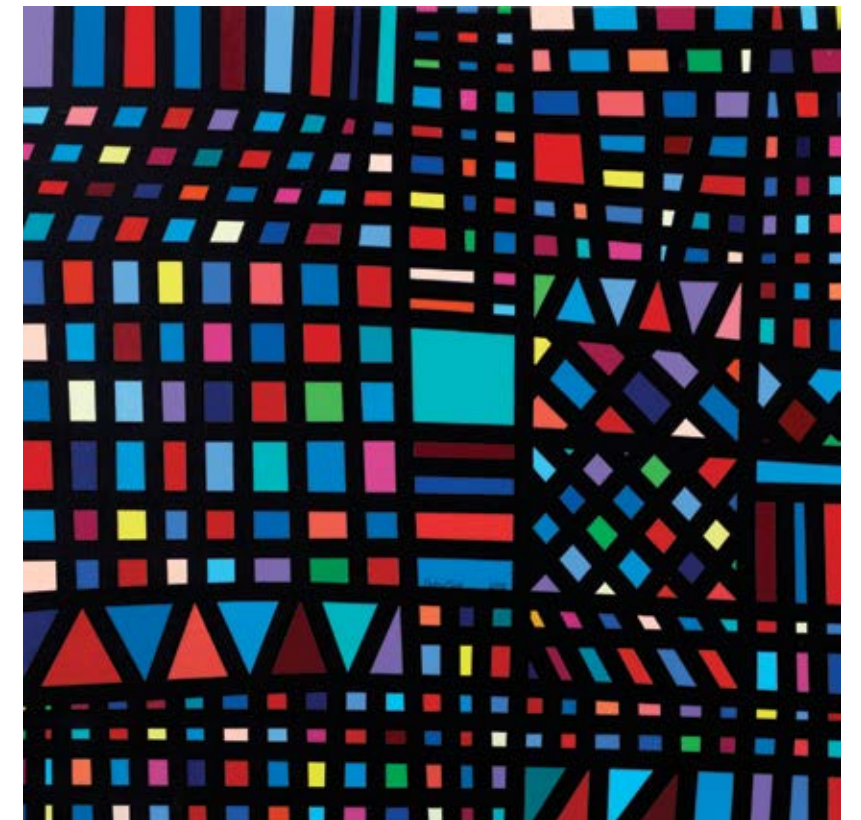


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 78
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 230 x 80 cm

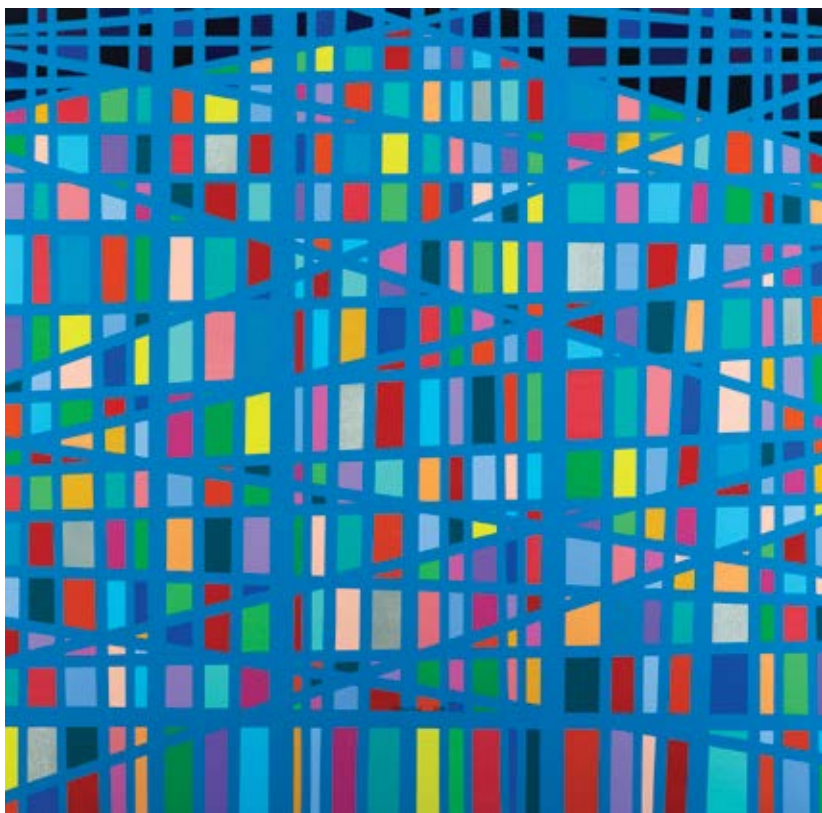
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 80
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 155 x 155 cm



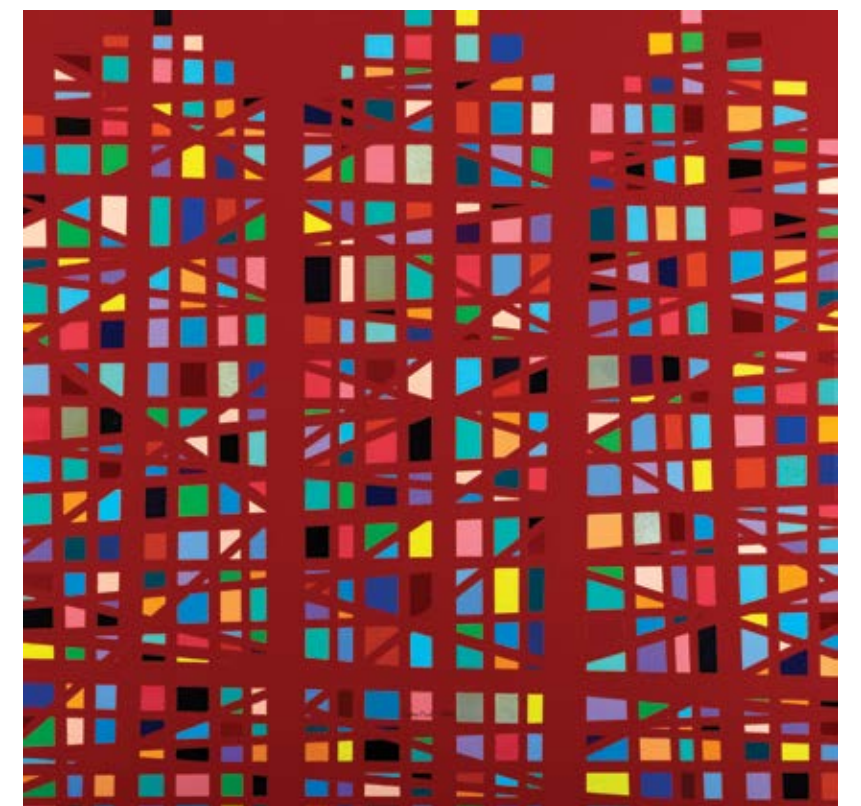
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 73
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 100 cm

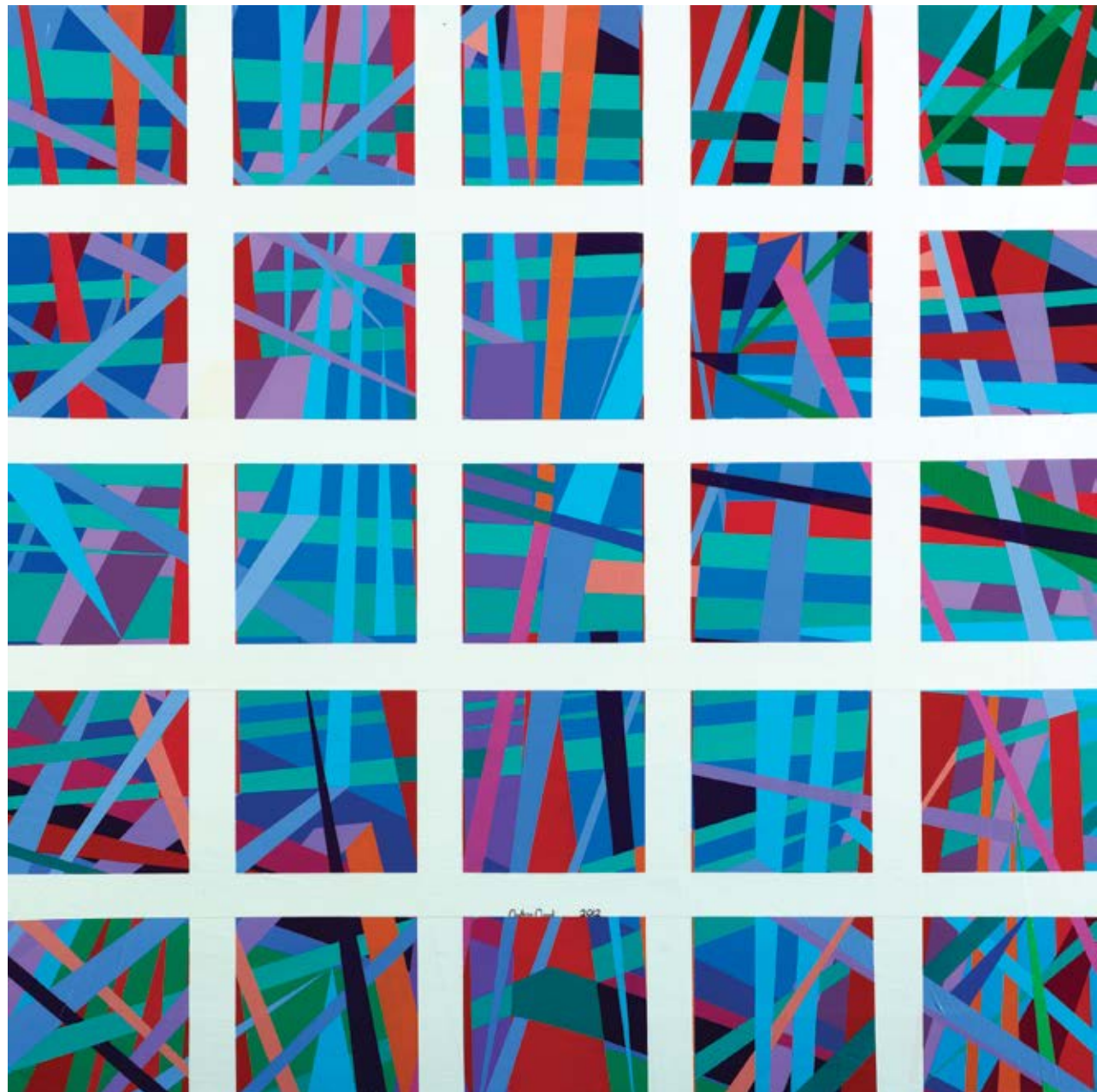


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 79
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 155 x 155 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 82
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 155 x 155 cm



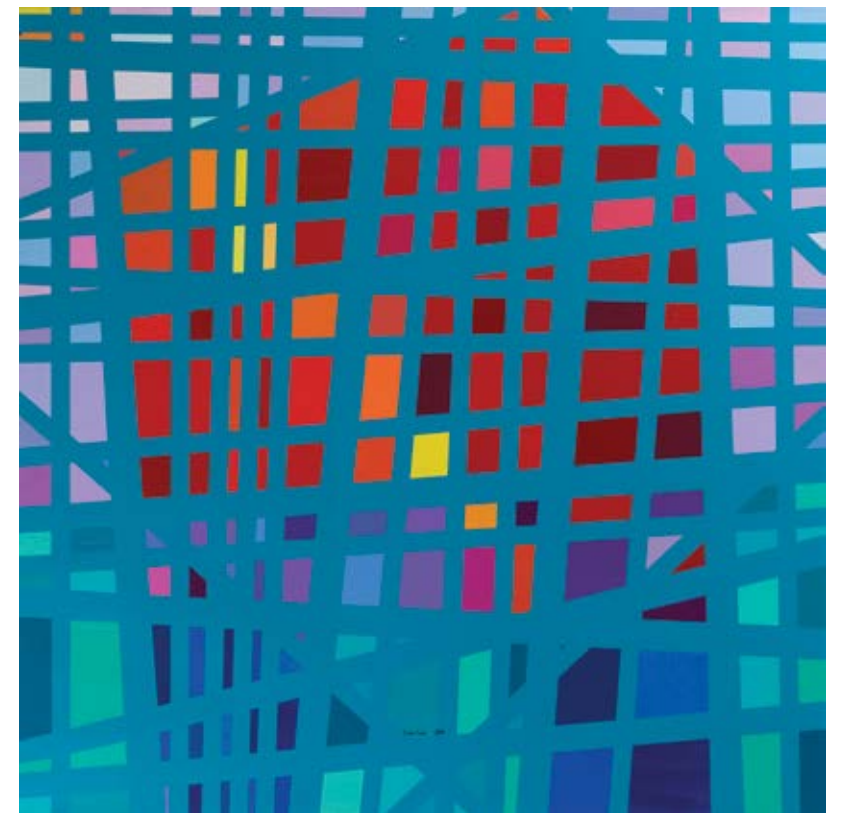


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 83
 2012
 Acrylic on canvas
 120 x 120 cm

Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 98, A House in the
 Quiet Countryside IV*
 2014
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 99, A House in the
 Clear Countryside*
 2014
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm





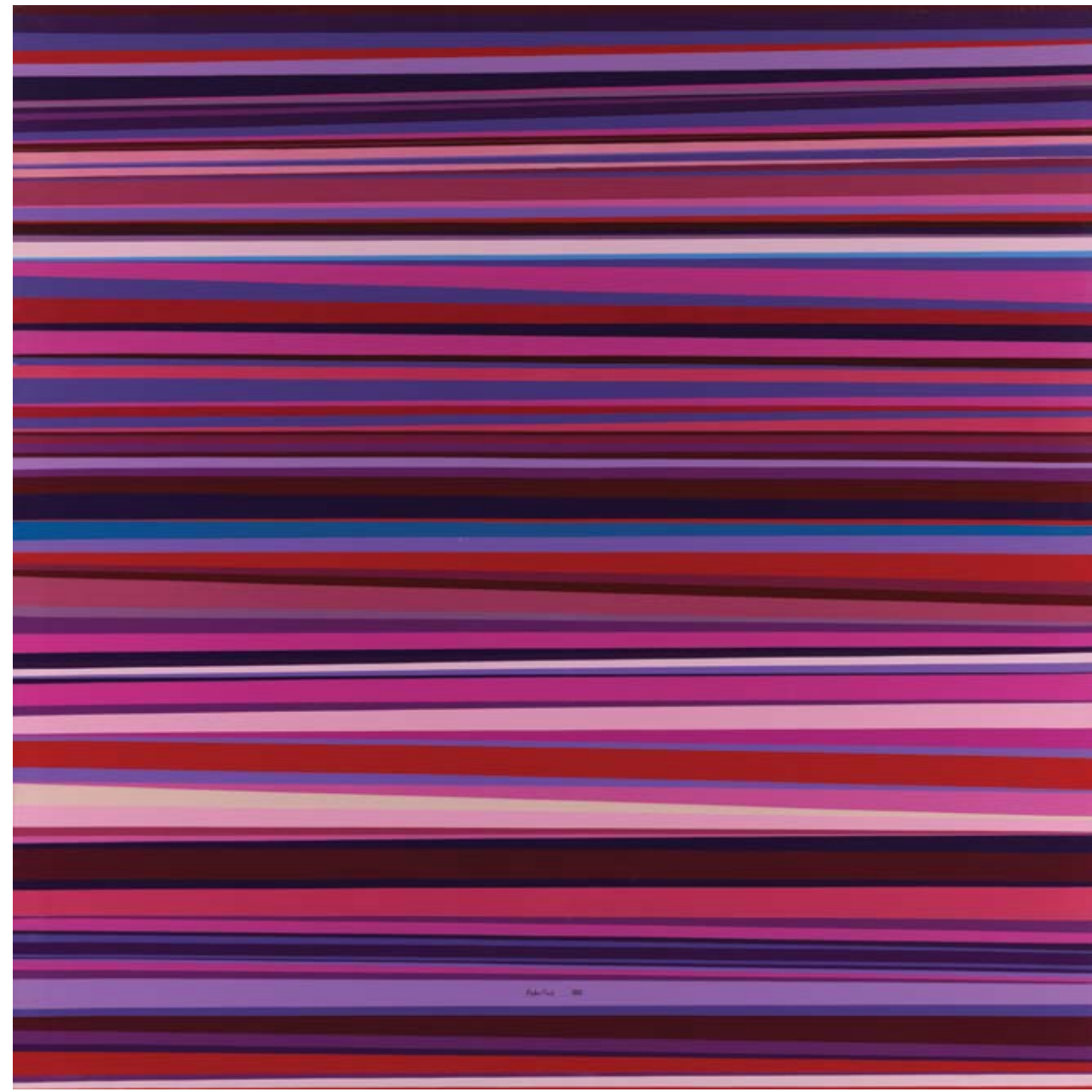
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 86, Vision in the Blue
 Dream*
 2013
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 88, Love in the Light
 of the Desert*
 2013
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm



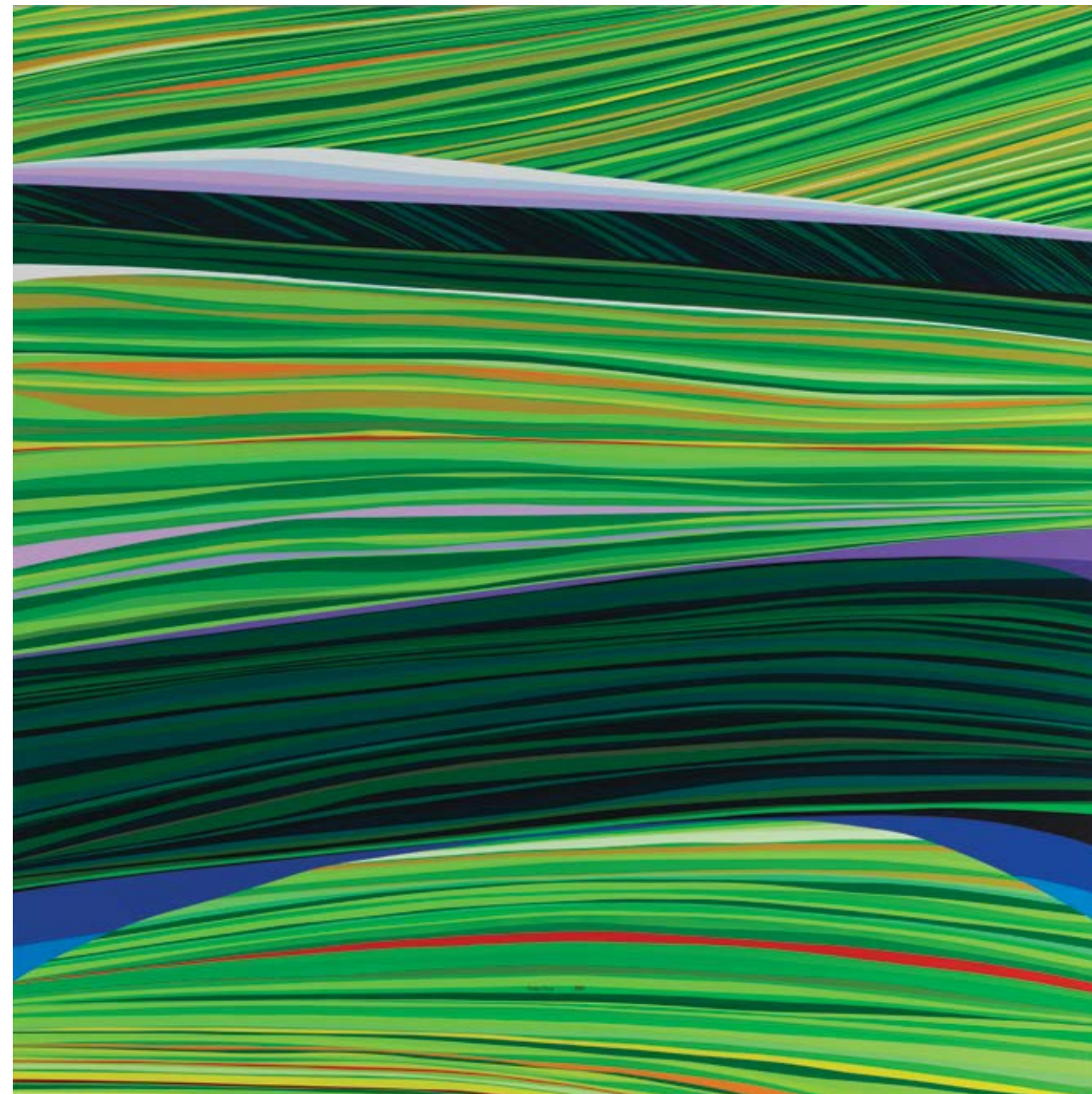
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 87, Colours from
 Paradise*
 2013
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 89, The Flowers in
 the Sky*
 2013
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm



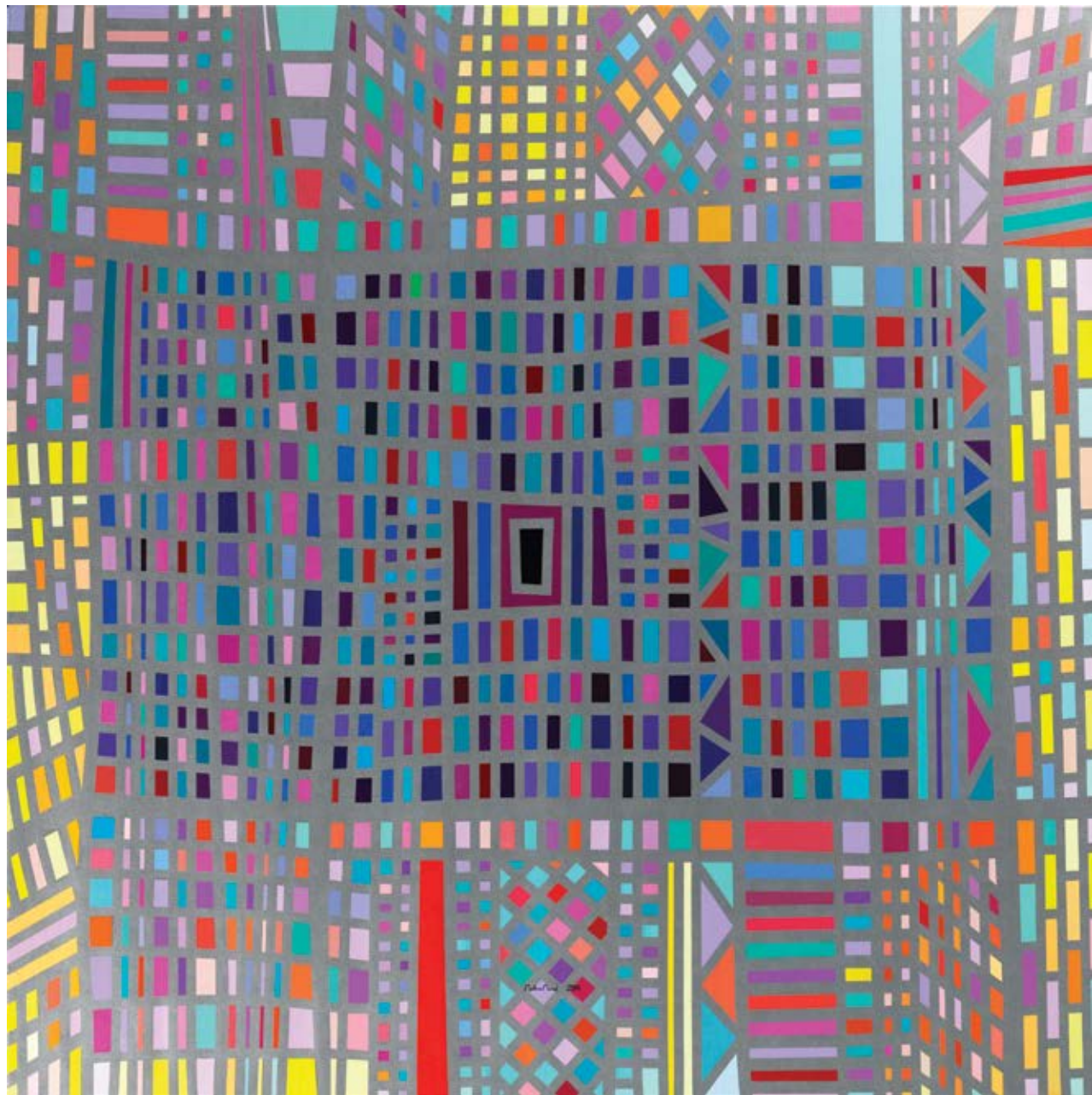
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 91, When Spring
 Blooms*
 2013
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm



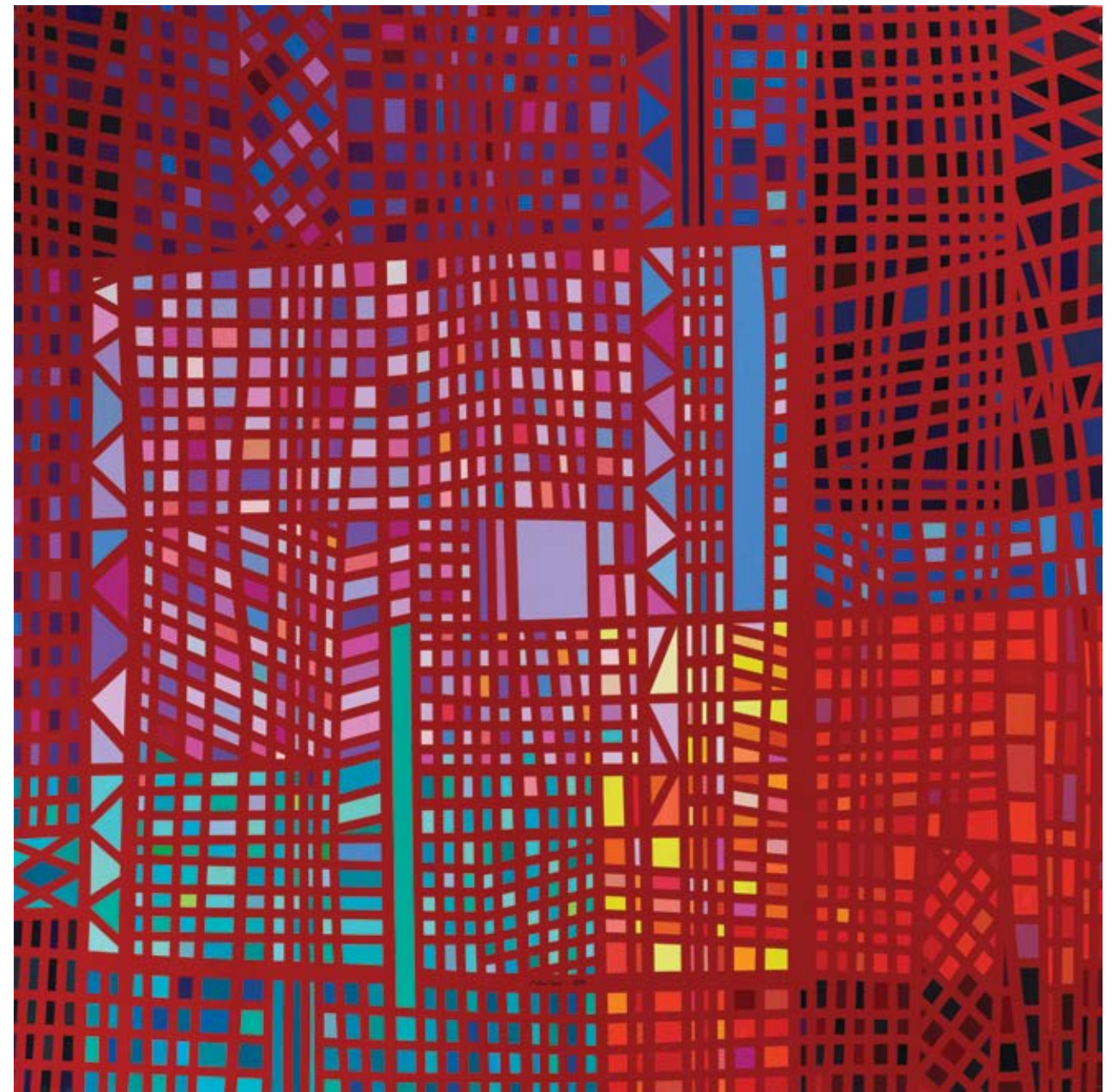
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 92, A Date with
 Spring*
 2013
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm



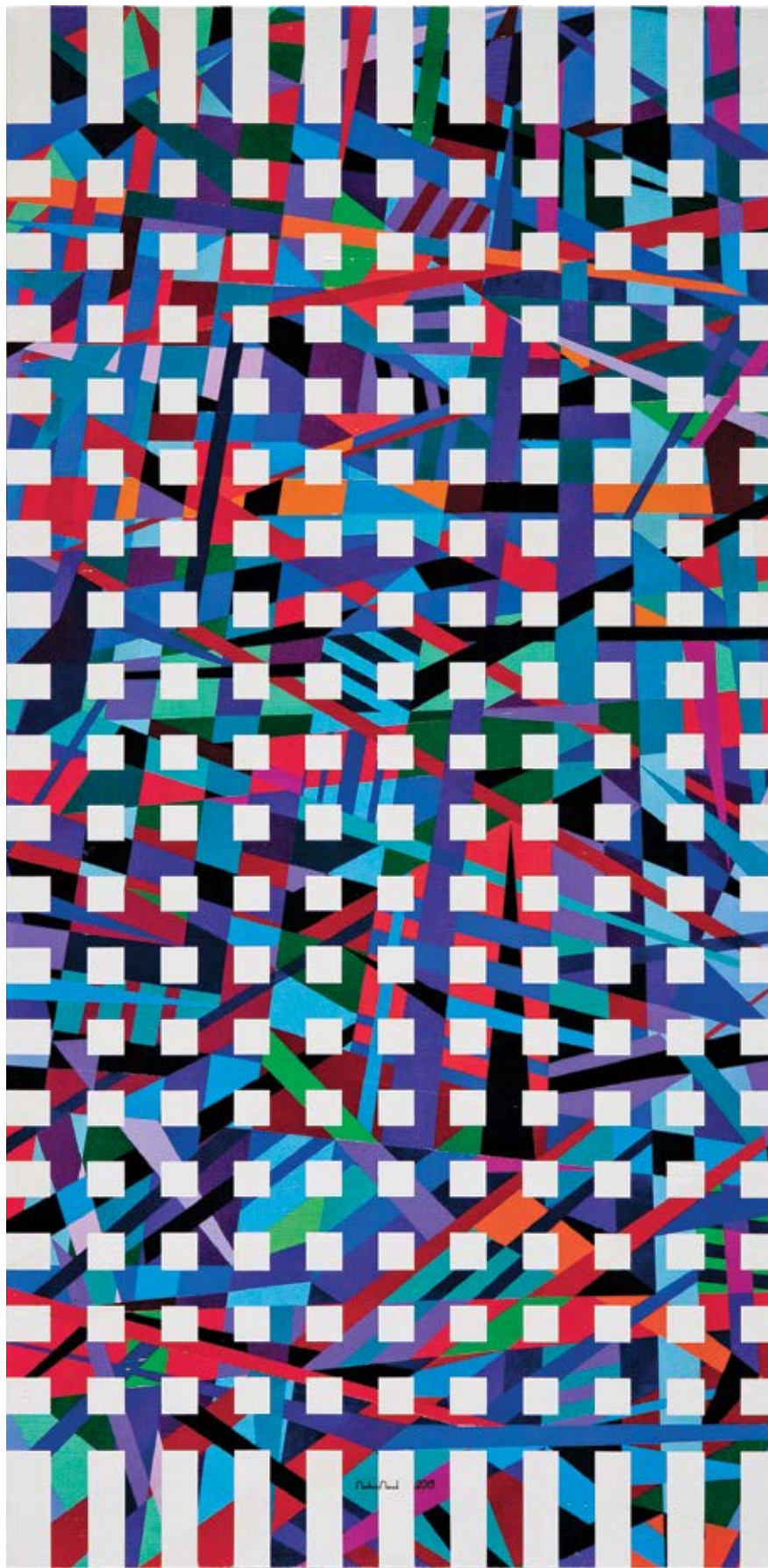
Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 93, Moments from
Childhood
 2013
 Acrylic on canvas
 100 x 200 cm



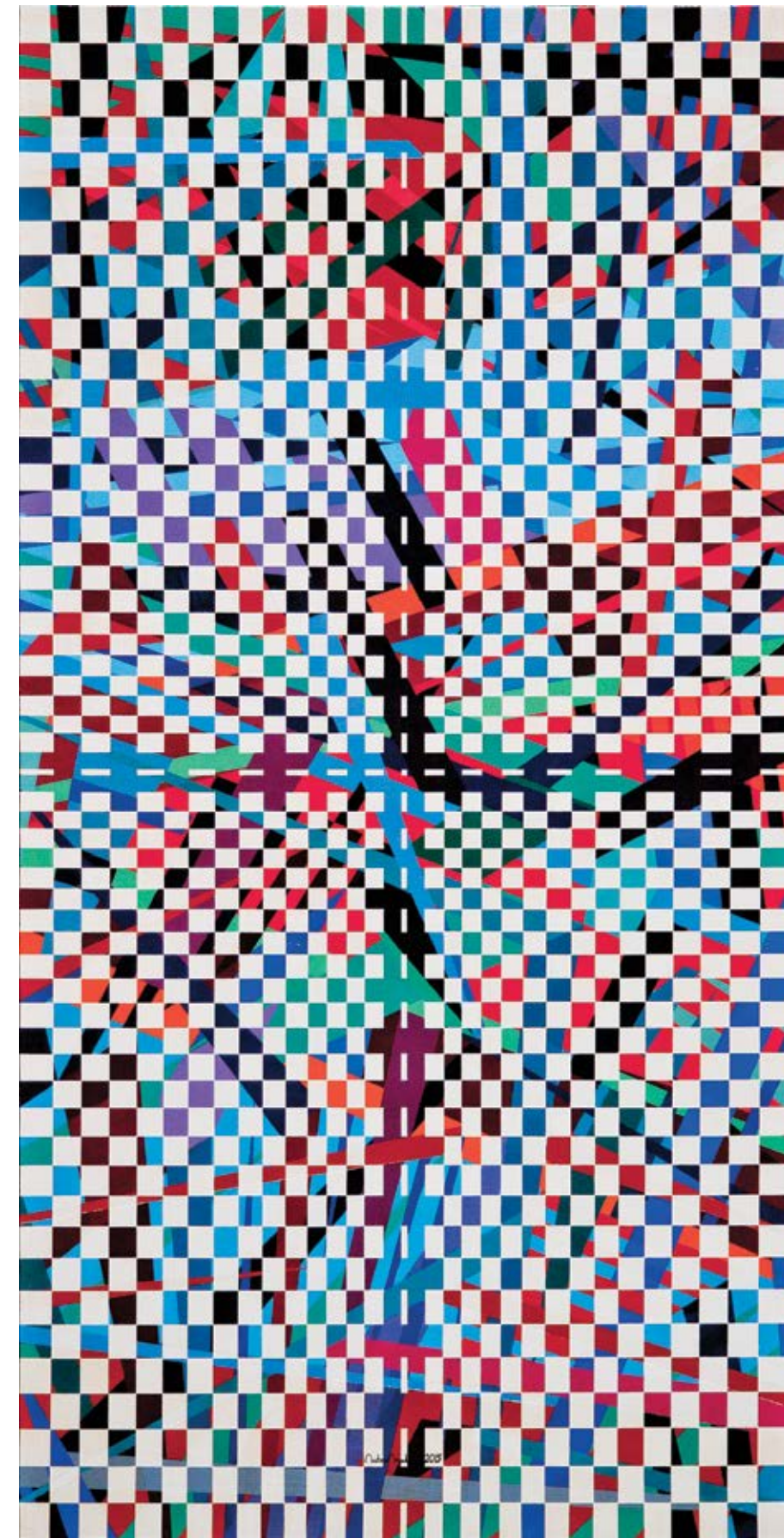
Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 100, A Difficult Inspi-
 rational Star*
 2014
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 101, Passion and
 Harmony with Red*
 2014
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 200 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 104
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 100 cm



Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 105
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 100 cm

Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 113
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 100 cm

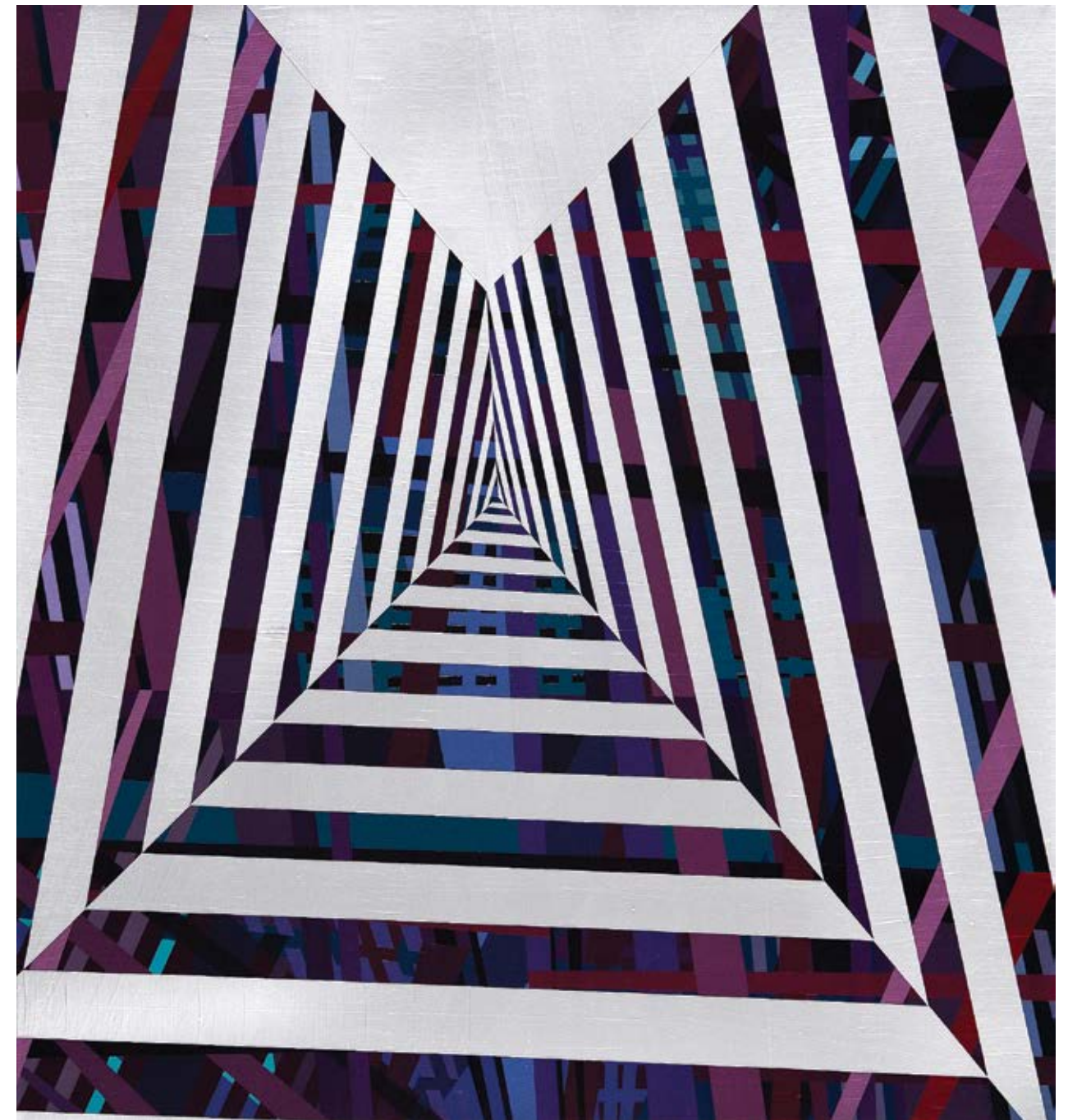


Mouteea Murad
Trial No. 114
 2015
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 100 cm





Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 127, The Magical
 Night Journey*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 185 cm



Mouteea Murad
*Trial No. 129, The Journey of
 the Bird in Damascus*
 2016
 Acrylic on canvas
 200 x 184.5 cm

Mouteea Murad's work sees a unification of spirituality and formalism, continuously drawing influence from the geometric forms and motifs of Islamic art. Murad began his career as a painter working on monochromatic, expressionist compositions that depict the anguish of modern man. In 2007, he adopted a renewed outlook that redirected his painting style, exploring relativity, spatiality, and the visual dynamic of geometric forms.

The evolution of Murad's work is reflected through the gradual stages of abstraction in his compositions as he builds on the breakthroughs of previous movements, experimenting with automatic brushwork, the illusionistic perspective of Op art, the symmetry of geometric abstraction, and the collapsing planes of Suprematism. In his most recent series, his interest in mathematics plays an integral role, with the Fibonacci numbers and sequence at its centre. His forms and lines are largely defined by algebraic functions and their geometric application within the work.

Murad lives and works in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. He received a Bachelor of Art from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Damascus in 2001. Selected solo exhibitions for the artist include Ayyam Gallery Beirut (2011); Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2011); and Ayyam Gallery Damascus (2010). His work can be found in private and public collections internationally, including the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts.



BIOGRAPHIES

Samia Halaby is a leading abstract painter and an influential scholar of Palestinian art. Although based in the United States since 1951, Halaby is recognised as a pioneer of contemporary abstraction in the Arab world. Her paintings have been collected by international institutions since the 1970s, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art (New York and Abu Dhabi); Yale University Art Gallery; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Art Institute of Chicago; Cleveland Museum of Art; Institut du monde arabe; and the British Museum.

Halaby's writings on art have appeared in *Leonardo: Journal of Arts, Sciences and Technology*, *Jerusalem Quarterly*, and *Arab Studies Quarterly*, in addition to edited volumes, while her independently published survey *Liberation Art of Palestine: Palestinian Paintings and Sculpture in the Second Half of the 20th Century* (2002) is considered a seminal text of Palestinian art history. Halaby's latest book is *Drawing the Kafr Qasem Massacre* (Amsterdam: Schilt Publishing, 2016).

Maymanah Farhat is an art historian and curator. Farhat is the artistic director and editor of publications of Ayyam Gallery, co-editor of *Jadaliyya Culture*, and a curatorial advisor to the Arab American National Museum. She has organised exhibitions at international art spaces and institutions including the Virginia Commonwealth University Gallery, Qatar; the Arab American National Museum, United States; and the Beirut Exhibition Center, Lebanon. Her writings have appeared in *Callaloo Journal*, *Art Journal*, *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, *Apollo* magazine, and *Art + Auction* magazine, among other periodicals, in addition to artist monographs, exhibition catalogues, and edited volumes. In 2014, she was listed among *Foreign Policy's* '100 Leading Global Thinkers'.

Murtaza Vali is a critic and curator based in Sharjah, UAE and Brooklyn, USA. A recipient of a 2011 Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant for Short-Form Writing, he regularly publishes in various international art periodicals and has contributed to publications for both commercial galleries and non-profit institutions around the world. His past curatorial projects include: *Between Structure and Matter: Other Minimal Futures* (Aicon Gallery, New York, 2016), *Formal Relations* (Taymour Grahne Gallery, New York, 2015), *Accented* (Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah, 2015), *Geometries of Difference: New Approaches to Abstraction and Ornament* (Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, New Paltz, 2015), *PTSD: Shahpour Pouyan* (Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai, 2014), *extra|ordinary: The Abraaj Group Art Prize 2013* (Art Dubai, 2013), *Brute Ornament* (Green Art Gallery, Dubai, 2012) and *Accented* (BRIC Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn, 2010). He is a Visiting Instructor at Pratt Institute and a Lead Tutor of Campus Art Dubai 5.0.



Founded in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is a leading arts organisation that manages the careers of diverse established and emerging artists. Blue-chip art spaces in Beirut and Dubai, a series of collaborative projects in the United States, Europe, and Asia, and a multinational non-profit arts programme have furthered the gallery's mandate of expanding the parameters of international art. With its widely respected multilingual publishing division and a custodianship programme that manages the estates of pioneering artists, Ayyam Gallery has also contributed to recent efforts that document underrepresented facets of global art history.

