

angeli sowani
Seraphim

Grosvenor
Gallery

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22 November — 4 December 2012

Angeli Sowani's latest exhibition, *Seraphim*, shows once more that this artist is not afraid of taking risks or, one would be tempted to say, is not afraid of playing with fire literally and metaphorically. In her previous exhibition *Vaahan* Sowani had used the blowtorch as a brush to show us a world pitched between the liveliness of fire and the sombre fragility of its charcoaled traces. In *Seraphim* she continues her existential reflections on impermanence and change, fragility and transformation while bringing her formal explorations to further extremes. The series *Within*, *Sunscapes* and *Earthscapes* present to us her recent works with fire while *Waterscapes* introduces us to Sowani's experimentations with black enamel paint. Estranged yet organic, the paintings mark a crucial new moment in the journey between figuration and abstraction, which has characterised most of Sowani's work.

Unlike previously in *Within*, *Sunscapes*, and *Earthscapes* the flame is not used only to mark and draw on the canvas. Sowani lets the flame scar the paintings deeply, leaving them gaping with holes. Wishing to engage with a surface half consumed by fire has led her to adopt a smaller scale and work layering charred canvas upon canvas as if they were sheets of paper. The results were three series of an intimate and introspective nature characterised by a most delicate and precious materiality. *Within* is perhaps the uncanniest of the three. In these paintings the canvas is almost entirely burned, a leaf of deep browns and blacks with gnawed dark edges and gashed by holes. Layered beneath, one notices the unprimed front of another charred canvas. From its gashes slivers of orange, silver and gold glow forth turning the gaps into fuming cinders and adding spatial depth to the works. Embers, the paintings seem to remind us, always contain the glow of fire.

In the *Sunscapes* series the artist seems to have turned from within to celestial heights, to the sky or to paradise. If gold could only be glimpsed in the series *Within*, here it explodes in the concentrated form of the sun or the halo, an image the artist had already engaged with in the *Man or God* paintings. In *Sunscapes* golden suns or halos speak of heavens as much as of earth and as their golden disks crack and leak birthing the ghost of a flame, it is impossible not to recognise sensuous female forms. This exchange, contiguity or promiscuity between heavens and earth, inner depths and outer world is encountered also in the series *Earthscapes*. Here blue seraphs inspired by the mosaics of the Hagia Sofia

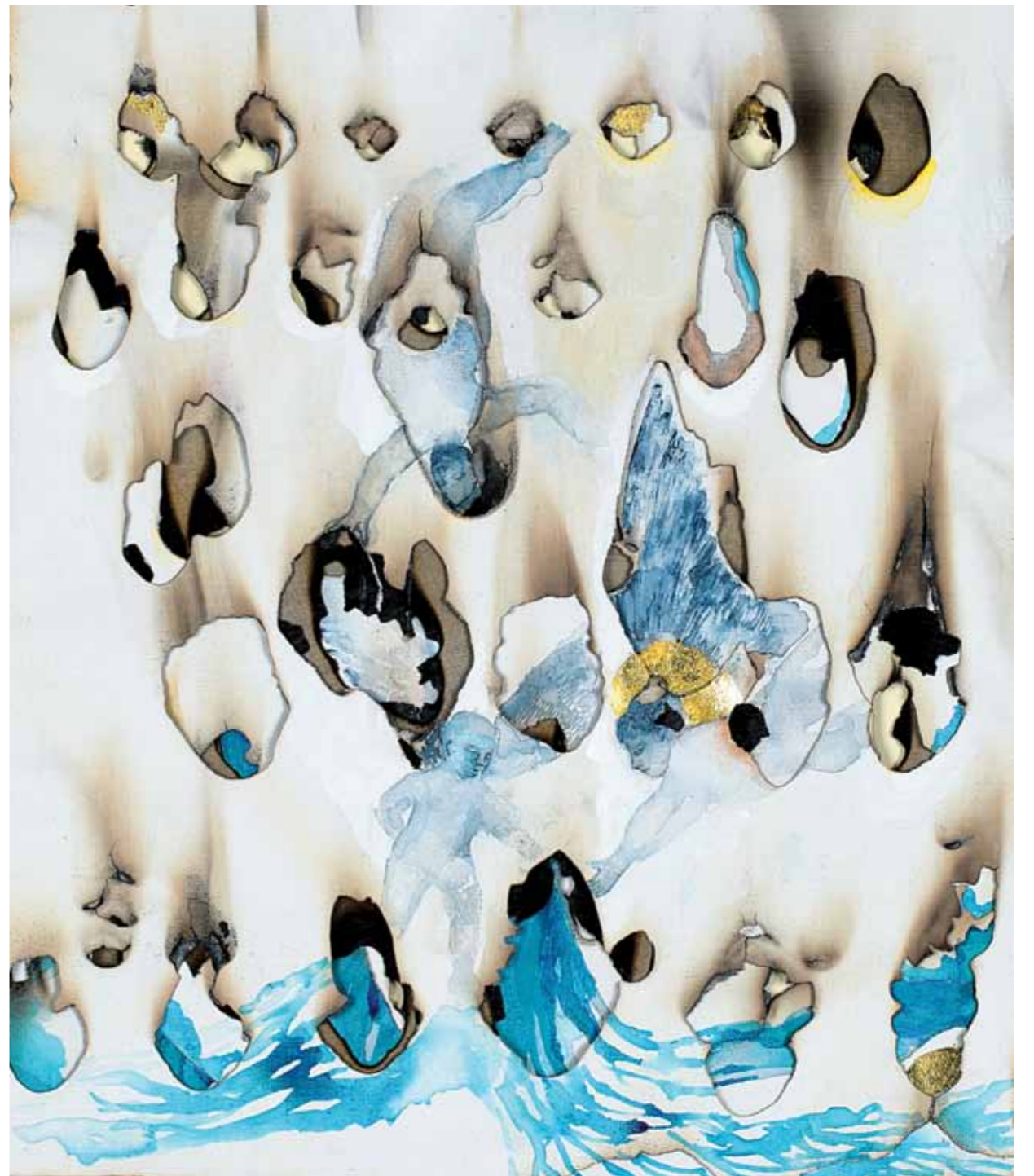
in Istanbul flutter in a sky that weeps burning cinders. As the artist herself has suggested, the seraphs do not serve as a specific religious reference. Rather they are another image born by the snaking shapes of the flames. Perhaps, they are a more compassionate incarnation of the flames themselves as the seraphs in the paintings attend a troubled humanity caressing the earth with their blue wings.

The last series *Waterscapes* plunges us instead into a world of congealed shadows, cool waters and darkness. Inks and paint are the medium here not fire, and black impenetrable winged shapes are the protagonists. Crowding the canvas like bats in a cave, these shadowy elements seem to mark the counterpart of angels, halos, and flames leading us deep below the embers into the secrecy of the earth.

Sowani is an artist who has travelled and she surely has learnt that images always travel a little further. Born out of differences and specificities which remain so important in many aspects of our lives, images can also run loose suggesting new links and connections. Sowani has taken us onto some of these unexpected journeys. Inner worlds, sunscapes, earthscapes, waterscapes: her works are flesh of the world, yet transform it anew.

Dr. Elena Bernardini

Plates



[1] *Earthscape I*

2012
Blowtorch, ink and gold leaf on canvas
53 x 46 cm (20¾ x 18 in)



[2] *Earthscape II*

2012
Blowtorch, ink and gold leaf on canvas
62 x 58 cm (24½ x 22¾ in)



[3] *Earthscape III*

2012
Blowtorch, ink and gold leaf on canvas
64 x 69 cm (25 x 27 in)



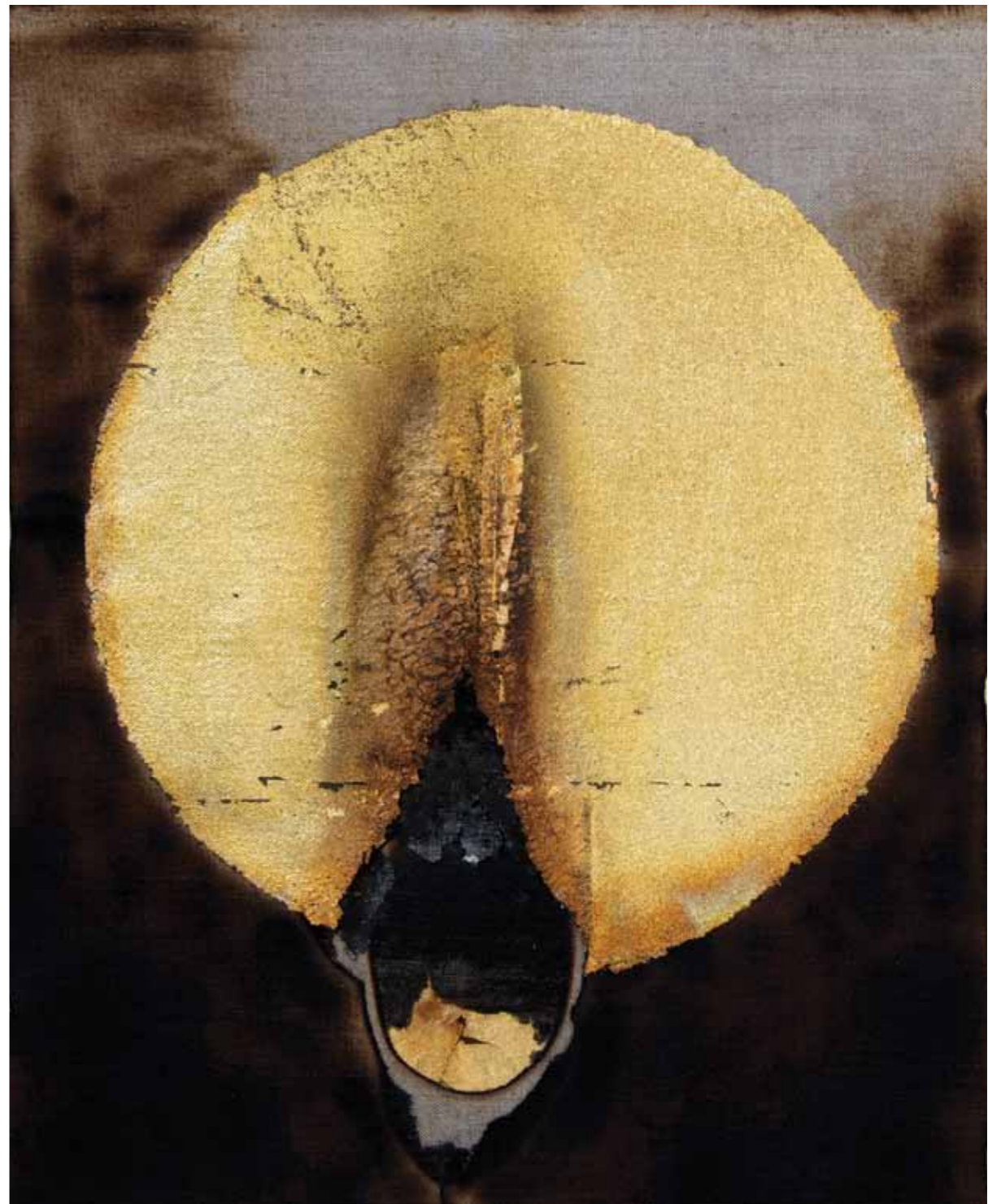
[4] *Earthscape IV*

2012
Blowtorch, ink and gold leaf on canvas
54 x 48 cm (21 x 18¾ in)



[5] *Sunscape I*

2012
Blowtorch, ink and gold leaf on canvas
38 x 31 cm (15 x 12¼ in)



[6] *Sunscape II*

2012
Blowtorch and gold leaf on canvas
37 x 31 cm (14½ x 12¼ in)



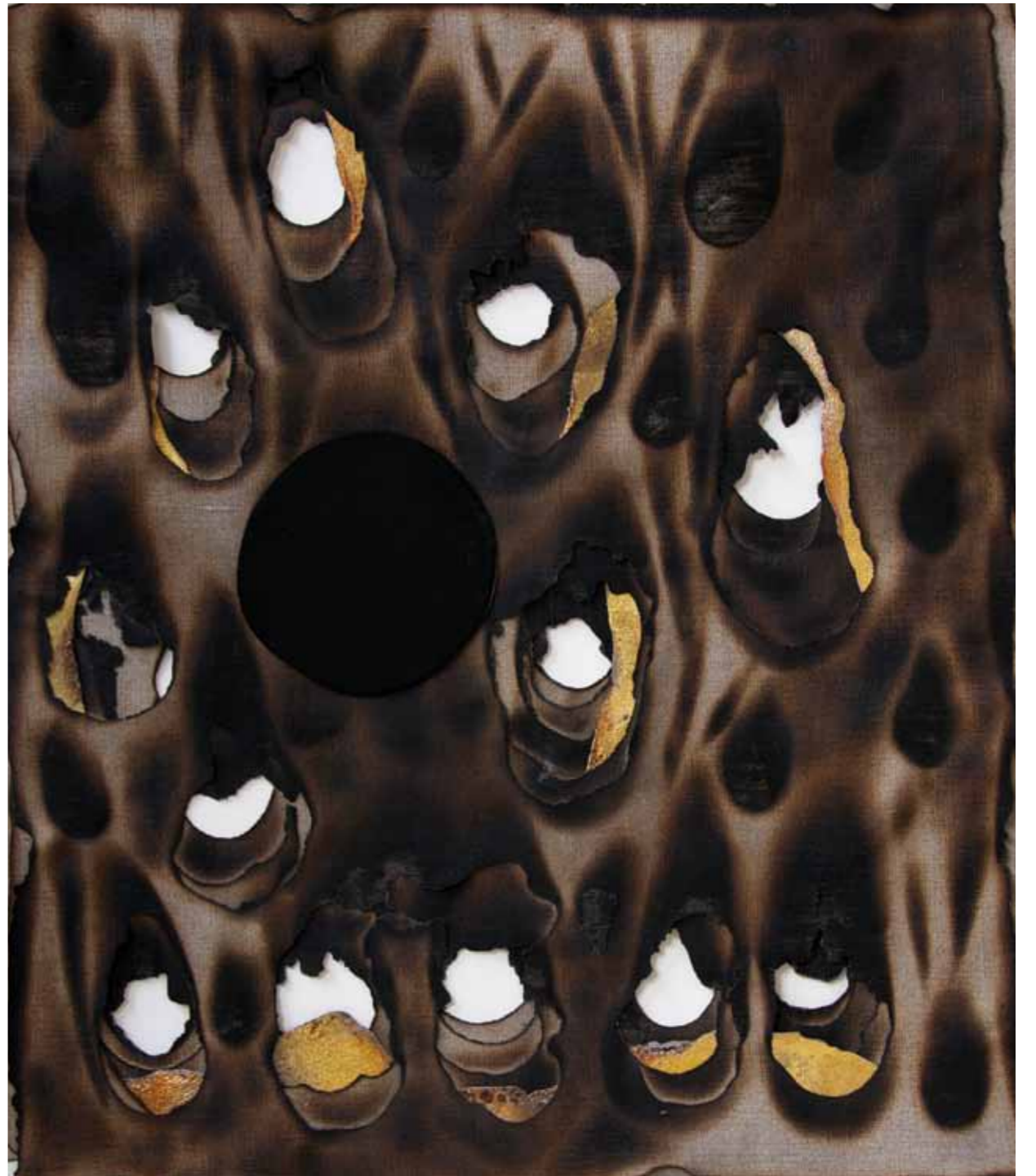
[7] *Sunscape III*

2012
Blowtorch, ink and gold leaf on canvas
37 x 30 cm (14½ x 11¾ in)



[8] *Sunscape IV*

2012
Blowtorch and gold leaf on canvas
37 x 30 cm (14½ x 11¾ in)



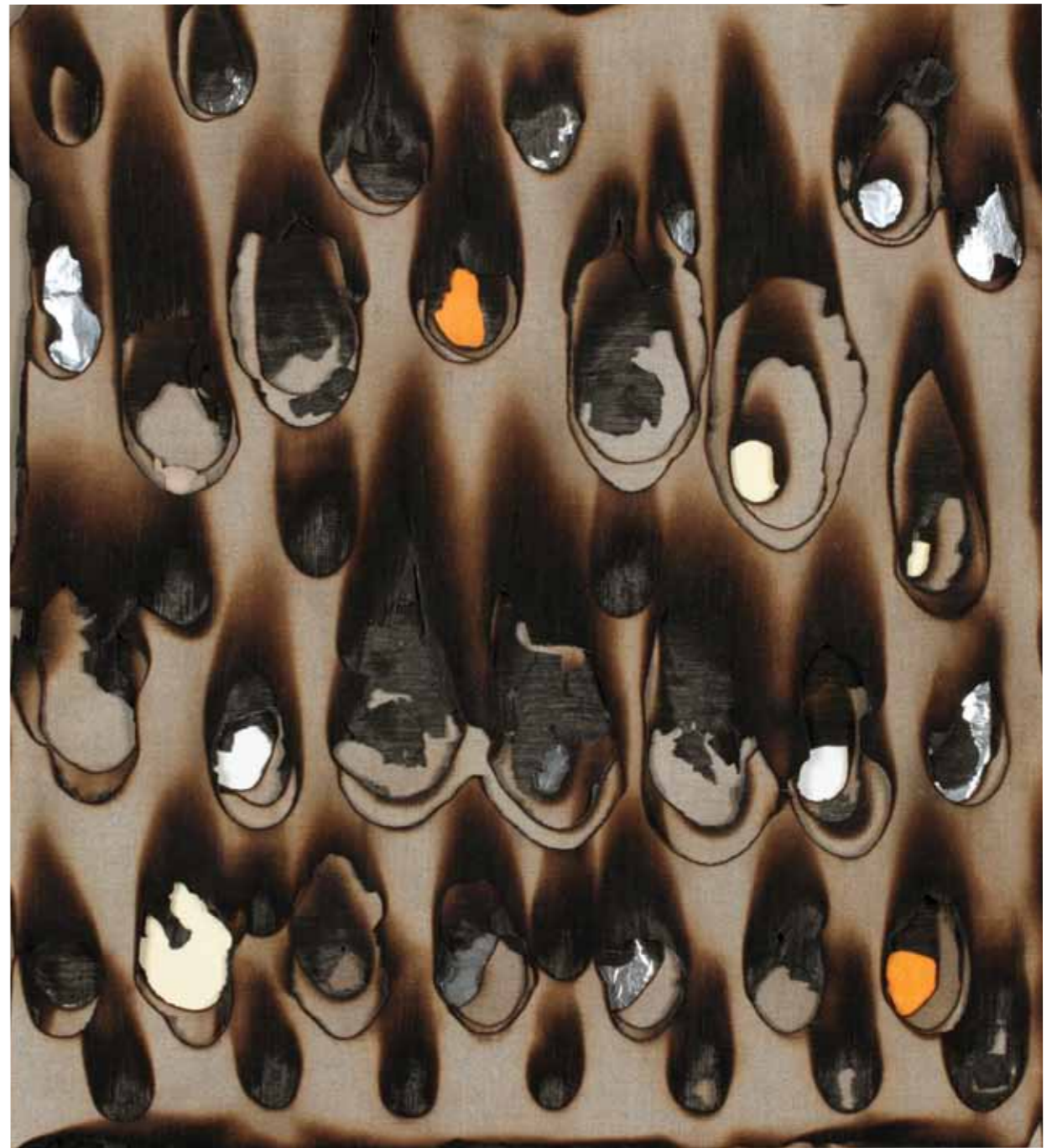
[9] *Within I*

2012
Blowtorch, paint and gold leaf on canvas
50 x 43 cm (19½ x 17 in)



[10] *Within II*

2012
Blowtorch, foil, paper collage
and paint on canvas
56 x 49 cm (22 x 19¼ in)



[11] *Within III*

2012
Blowtorch, foil, paper collage
and paint on canvas
54 x 49 cm (21¼ x 19¼ in)



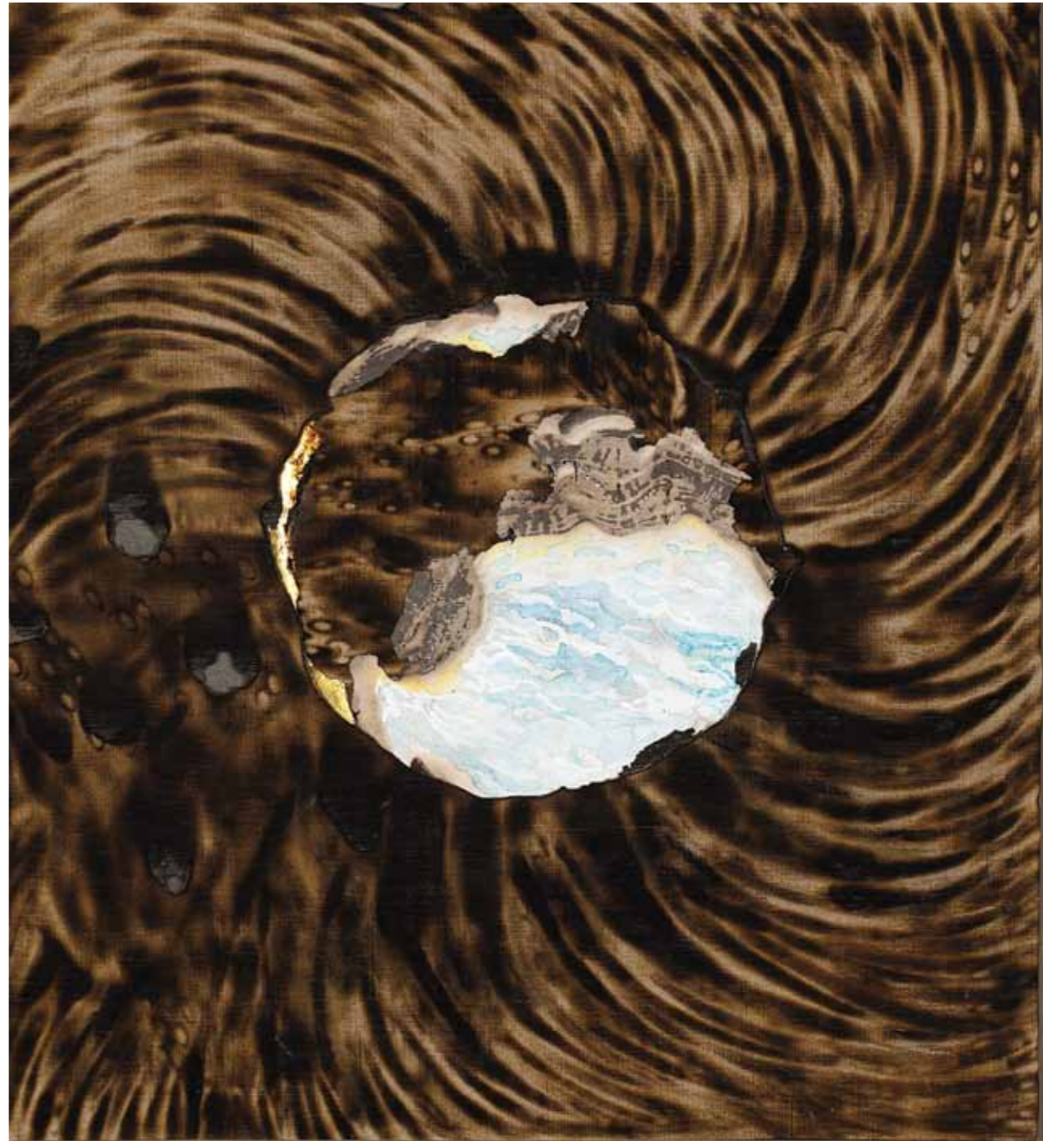
[12] *Within IV*

2012
Blowtorch, silver leaf,
foil and paper on canvas
56 x 52 cm (22 x 20 in)



[13] *Within V*

2012
Blowtorch, paint and
gold leaf on canvas
37 x 32 cm (14½ x 12½ in)



[14] *Embankment*

2012
Blowtorch, ink and gold leaf on canvas
68 x 63 cm (26 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ in)

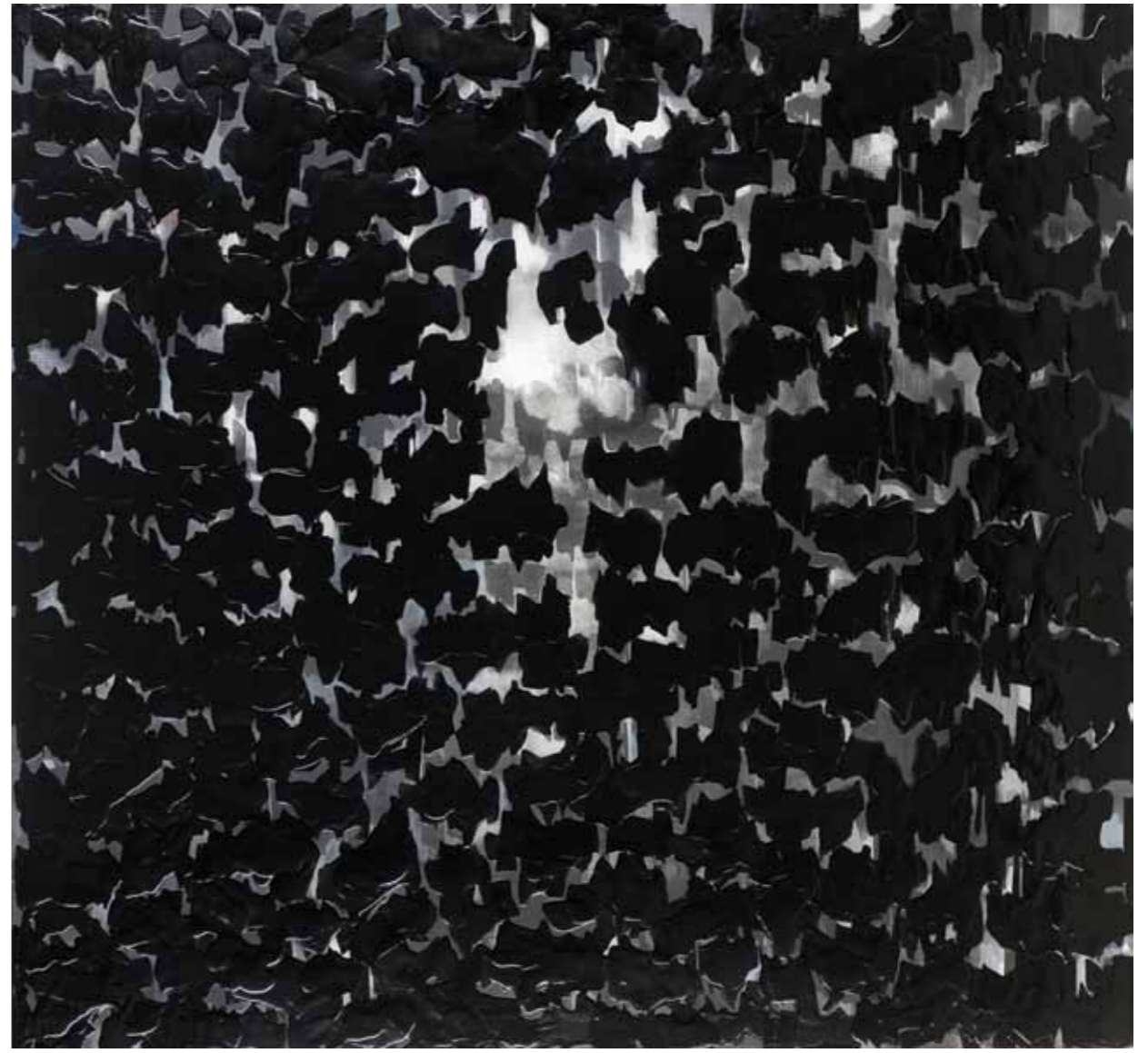
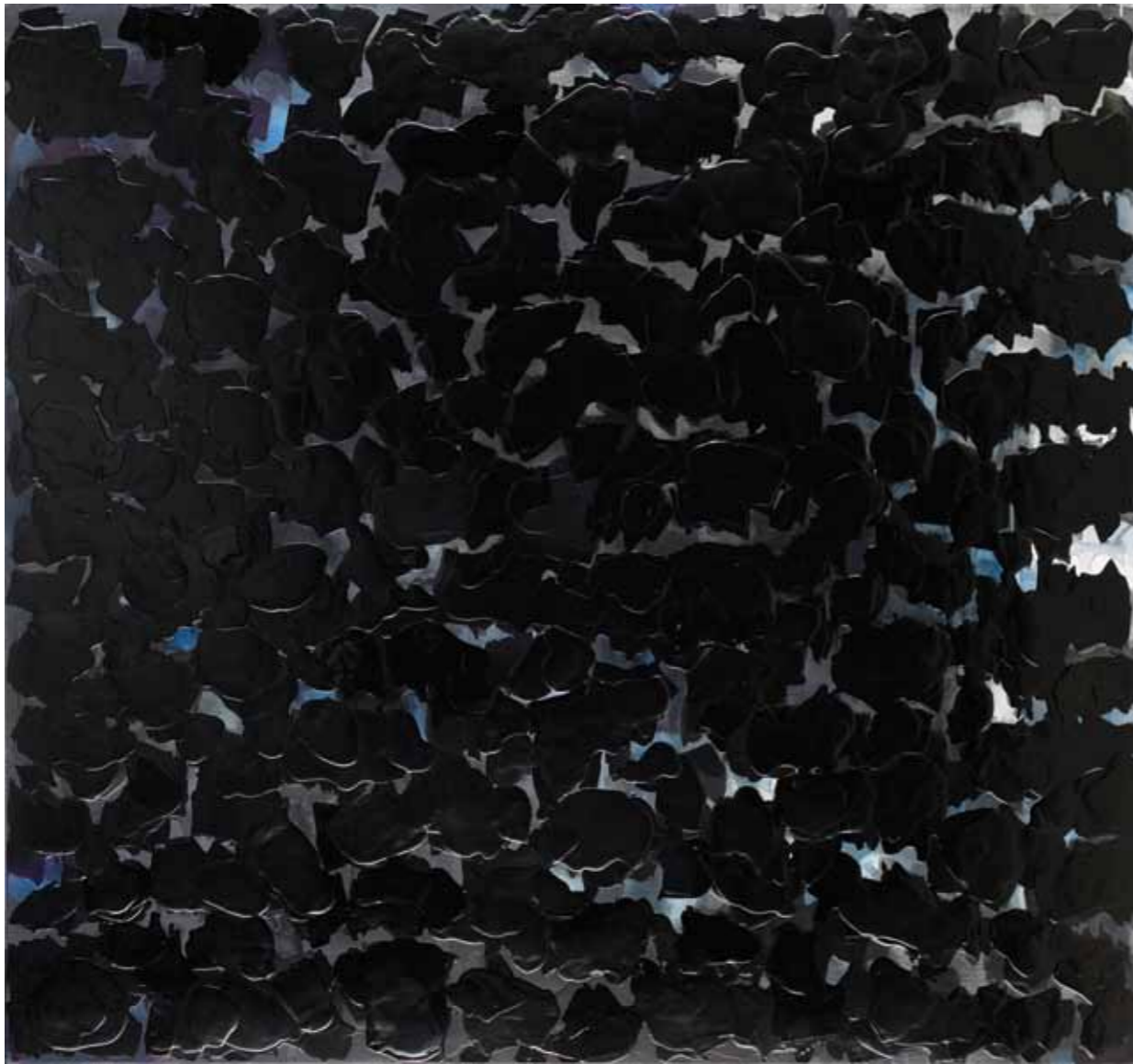


[15] *Waterscape I*

2012
Oil, ink and paint on canvas
160 x 180 cm (63 x 70¾ in)

Next spread
Waterscape I (detail)





[16] *Waterscape II (Diptych)*

2012
Oil, ink and paint on canvas
140.5 x 150 cm each (55 x 60 in each)
140.5 x 300 cm overall size
(55 x 120 in overall size)

Next spread
Waterscape II (Diptych) (detail)





[17] *Waterscape III*

2012
Oil and paint on canvas
60 x 60 cm (23½ x 23½ in)



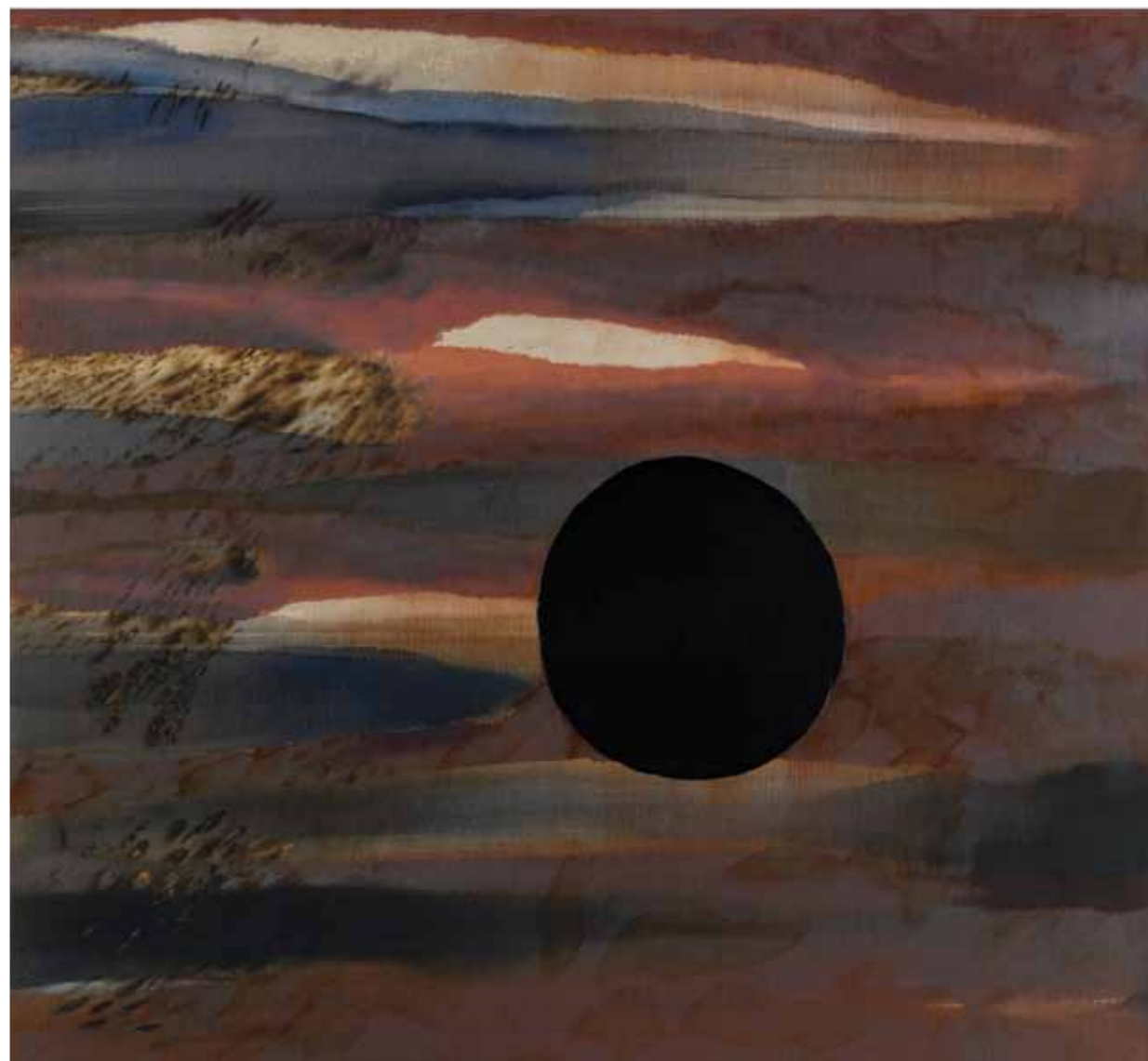
[18] *Waterscape IV*

2012
Oil and paint on canvas
60 x 60 cm (23½ x 23½ in)

[19] *Shadows*

2012
Oil on canvas
100 x 50 cm (39¼ x 19½ in)





[20] *Burnt Sky I (Diptych)*

2012
Blowtorch, oil and paint on linen
141 x 150 cm each (39½ x 59 in each)
141 x 300 cm overall size (39½ x 118 in overall size)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2012 *Seraphim*, Grosvenor Vadehra Gallery, London
 2010 *Vaahan*, Grosvenor Vadehra Gallery, London
 2008 *Inner Weaves*, Grosvenor Vadehra Gallery, London
 2007 *Limits of Their Existence*, Saffronart.com, Mumbai
 2006 *Out of the Blue*, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
 2004 *Identity in Abstraction II*, King's Road Gallery, London
 2002 *Identity in Abstraction*, The Rotunda Gallery, Hong Kong
 2001 *Figures in Abstraction*, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
 2000 *Paintings by Angeli Sowani*, Taj Art Gallery, Mumbai
 2000 *Faces and Figures*, The Rotunda Gallery, Hong Kong
 1998 *The Artist and the Sculptor*, The Rotunda Gallery, Hong Kong
 1997 *Paintings by Angeli Sowani*, Taj Art Gallery, Mumbai
 1995 *Beginnings*, Alliance Francaise, Bangkok

SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

2007 Harmony Show, Mumbai
 2006 Harmony Show, Mumbai
 London Art Show, London
 2005 Harmony (Artist in Focus), Mumbai
 India Habitat Centre, New Delhi
 London Art Show, London
 2004 London Art Show, London
 Sacred Space, Jehangir Gallery, Mumbai
 2003 Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai
 Harmony Show, Mumbai
 2002 London Art Show, London
 Visual Arts Centre, Hong Kong
 2001 Visual Arts Centre (The Watchdog Exhibition), Hong Kong
 2000 Art Today Gallery, New Delhi
 Visual Arts Centre, Hong Kong

1999 Art Today Gallery , New Delhi
 Gallerie Martini, Hong Kong
 1998 Contemporary Indian Ar, Chicago
 Gallerie Martini, Hong Kong
 Le Gallery, Singapore
 1997 Visual Arts Centre, Hong Kong
 Gallerie Martini, Hong Kong
 Rotunda (50 years of Independence), Hong Kong
 1996 Visual Arts Centre, Hong Kong
 1995 Chang Gallery, Bangkok

Works by Angeli Sowani are held in numerous private collections in the UK, Hong Kong, Thailand, Italy, USA, Singapore, and India.

Credits

We would like to thank Dr. Elena Bernardini for her contribution to the catalogue.

Elena Bernardini has done her PhD at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London focusing on Installation Art in India. She has been Tutor for the Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Art, SOAS and has given lectures on Indian contemporary and modern art at SOAS and Goldsmith College. She has published essays and interviews on Indian contemporary art.

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