
PATRICK WILSON

PATRICK WILSON

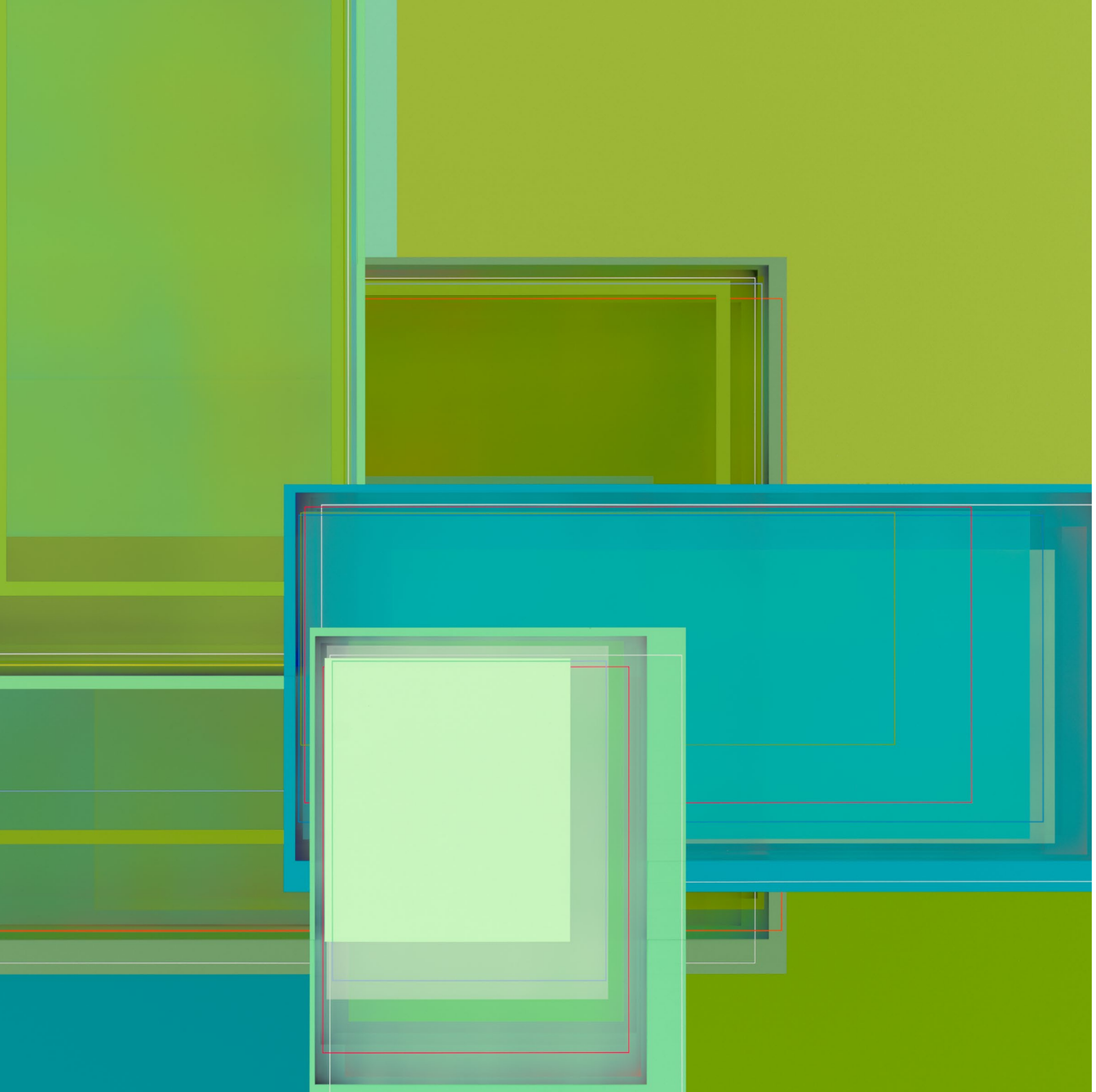
MILES
McENERY
GALLERY

511 West 22nd Street
New York NY 10011

515 West 22nd Street
New York NY 10011

525 West 22nd Street
New York NY 10011

520 West 21st Street
New York NY 10011



How many things can you look at at once?

How many thoughts can you think at the same time?

How long can you remember those things and those thoughts, before they vanish?

And when they vanish, are they replaced by new thoughts and things, or are they just gone?

These four questions—or at least one or two of them—come to mind every time I look at one of Patrick Wilson's paintings for five minutes or more. They do not pop into my head every time I cross paths with a canvas Wilson has painted over the last fifteen, maybe twenty-five, years. But they percolate to the surface when I'm in the right frame of mind and have been pulled in by the gravitational tug or magnetic force that Wilson's paintings exert, strongly but never silently—gregariously, generously, and inclusively. He lets it rip rather than making a holier-than-thou virtue of restraint or buying into the idea that art functions best when it withholds its supposedly secret powers from anyone interested in it. That sort of art keeps us under its thumb: unsatisfied and needy and never worthy of being acknowledged or recognized, which is, when you think of it, manipulative and, when it comes right down to it, pathetic.

That's what minimalism and much of modernism were all about: works of art casting themselves as withholding parents. Their presumptuous autonomy was the major measure of their strength, which, truth be told, had more to do with dominating and subjugating viewers than with empowering them. In contrast, a painting by Wilson is outgoing. Its colors are pools of deliciousness you want to jump into, its size is suitable to one-on-one interaction, and its composition is so familiar that dogs and cats can understand it: shapes and spaces no more complicated than doors and windows, or road signs, or the illuminated screens people have their faces stuck in, not quite 24/7, but more than most would like to admit. With all that is going on in a single canvas, a roomful of Wilson's paintings is not to be missed. Or visited quickly. Or only once.

His riveting rectangles of unnaturally satisfying colors are pretty punchy, they are more than a little freewheeling, and they hold nothing back. Most are outgoing. All are welcoming. Their energy is infectious, enlivening. They elicit excitement. Your pulse speeds up in their presence. No painting of Wilson's is reticent, retiring, or restrained. He makes get-up-and-go paintings, juiced to the gills, jam-packed with so much visual energy and so eager to deliver it that you can't help but feel the energy.

In some paintings, there are more than 150 points of entry—readily accessible—that draw you into an interwoven, overlapping labyrinth of more spaces and passageways, not one of which is a trap to catch or confuse you or to force you to double back. Instead, the planes and spaces in Wilson's paintings induce

free, unencumbered, frictionless movement from one space to another. They are not constrained by the laws of gravity or the requirements of architecture (or even sculpture); instead, they occupy the space and time of dreams, in which we move from one scene or time frame to another—freely, fluidly, and as if making sense of it all doesn't really matter. The space in Wilson's paintings is more digital than analog: In the same way that the tap of a key or the touch of a screen opens a whole new world (and more), a quick look at one of Wilson's works opens worlds within worlds, each with ample space to explore, both imaginatively and intellectually. We drift off in unbounded, unguarded reveries or study the logic of each composition, trying to determine the sequence in which the many layers were applied, as well as where each rectangle ends, whether it is overlapped by another rectangle or what it is bordered by. Think of Wilson's paintings as shape-shifters. They certainly generate space-shifting moves on the part of their viewers. Defined by an exceptionally high-keyed palette (eat your heart out, Pantone color chart!), their amazing rainbow of kinky tertiaries, juicy secondaries, and vibrant primaries, along with a wide range of blacks and whites (and grays of all stripes) invite you to hop, skip, and jump from one color to another, sometimes sliding smoothly and fluidly from one reality to another, sometimes swooshing from close-up, reach-out-and-touch-it nearness to the infinity of deep space. At other times, Wilson's paintings invite you to feel as if you're peeking around corners, glimpsing beyond horizons, peering into the mysteriousness of it all, and enjoying every minute of it.

The sensuality of the surfaces of Wilson's paintings is spectacular: so sumptuous and aglow with so much to savor that it's clear that each painting is occupying the here-and-now as if it were the only moment that mattered, and that you, the viewer, are the center of the universe. There is not a smidgen of withholding. There's discipline, to be sure, but with Wilson's paintings it's pretty clear that rigors and regimens have far more to do with his relationship to his art than with what his works expect from us. It's obvious that Wilson goes to great lengths to get every detail so close to perfect that you'd need a magnifying glass and a laser level to detect any variations in his razor-sharp edges, crisp contours, and perfectly smooth planes.

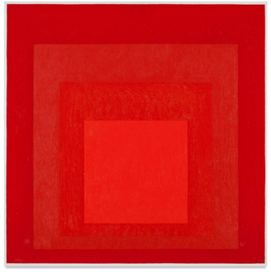
In any case, his paintings strut their stuff like peacocks on speed: There are wildly unlikely combinations and collisions, in precisely and peculiarly engineered compositions, stacked and overlapped and juxtaposed on meticulously manicured surfaces and spaces that are both translucent and opaque. Some rectangles have a slab-like solidity, while others are atmospheric. They are rolled or squeegeed, some jumping forward, others opening onto something like infinity. All are thrilling and sensuous. An installation of his paintings is a joyride for the eyeballs. It's a freewheeling adventure that goes every which way. It's an unexpected escapade that the brain races to keep up with—becoming more and more energized and engaged as the process blossoms. The installation lights up, like a lightbulb in the mind's eye. But it's as if that lightbulb were a three-dimensional rainbow, its supersaturated palette so unbelievably beautiful that it makes nature pale in comparison—and makes viewers feel supernatural.

All we're asked to bring to the party is the right frame of mind. That means being sufficiently relaxed and sufficiently alert to give Wilson's paintings the opportunity to do their thing. That's it.

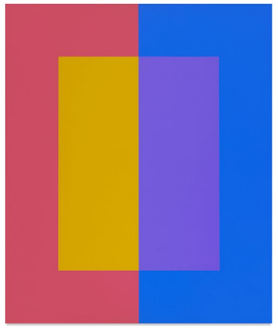
Of course, being relaxed and alert means bringing attentiveness, curiosity, and openness to the situation. It also means, and this is essential, entering a situation where there is liberty. Looking at Wilson's work, like looking at all types of art, is a voluntary endeavor. No authority—or annoying friend—can compel you to see what they think you should see, to experience the world as they want you to, according to whatever passions and commitments suit and move them. Liberty forms the foundation of Wilson's paintings; it's what they're built on. Their ethos of laissez-faire self-determination is about giving all of us the opportunity to see for ourselves, to figure things out on our own (both solo and in conversation with others), and to discover whatever we can, howsoever we are able to do so. His paintings do not have plans for us. There are no messages to be interpreted or argued with, no codes to be deciphered, no verbiage to be translated, no expectations about what we need to do, much less how and when we need to do it. There is no backstory. There are no club memberships, special privileges, or presumptions about how art needs to be meaningful, which usually means reflecting back what people already see in themselves—as if art were little more than a mirror. There's nothing special or precious or, most important, personal, in what Wilson's works ask of anyone. They have great respect for anonymity. There is a come-one, come-all inclusivity to their understanding of anonymity. Every person is treated as someone with something important to discover when they start looking at the paintings for themselves.

Every one of Wilson's paintings starts simply: a handful of variously colored rectangles punctuate—and pile up on—a vertical or horizontal canvas. Things get complex very quickly: Many of the rectangles turn out to be a dozen, sometimes a couple dozen, rectangles, seemingly stacked atop one another, set one inside another, set alongside another, or overlapping another rectangle. Within various sets or clusters or stacks of layered rectangles, various rectangles are defined by a shift in tint or hue, often by hair-splitting differences within very thin slices of the spectrum. Between and among the various sets, clusters, or stacks of layered rectangles, Wilson often sets up dramatic clashes between complementary colors—or among colors that do not seem to belong on the same planet, much less in the same painting.

Wilson's wickedly original tertiaries orchestrate subtle—and not so subtle—shifts in temperature and intensity, creating an impressive array of related but distinct rectangles, many of which bear familial resemblances to others but all of which do their own thing. Aside from mixing slight but significant gradations in his palette, Wilson makes the same color look different by juxtaposing it with different colors. He concocts a mind-bending cornucopia of colors by making you see differences you've never imagined, much less previously seen. We are left wondering if we're looking at the same color in two different places or at two different colors.



Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square R-III α-4*, 1968,
Oil on pressed cardboard, 32 x 32 inches (81.5 x 81.5 cm)



Karl Benjamin, *#12*, 1975, Oil on canvas,
48 x 40 inches (121.0 x 101.6 cm)

More important, we're also left scrambling to determine where the facts of what we are trying to decide reside: Is it on the surface of the painting? In our eyes? In our minds? In some combo of the three? The confusion is exquisite and generative, heightening perceptions and sharpening our analytical capacities while blurring the boundaries between object and subject, between seer and seen.

Each of Wilson's rectangles is also distinguished by its texture—dappled, because it is rolled on, as a house-painter would paint a wall; or glassy, because it is slathered on smoothly, with a palette knife, as a laborer would create a perfectly level cement driveway; or barely there, like fog or smog or smoke or steam, because it is swiped across the increasingly multilayered surface with a squeegee, as window-washers would do their work. The various textures Wilson deploys are variously opaque and translucent, ranging from rectangles that have the presence of homogenous planes, to rectangles that feel like rock-solid slabs of three-dimensional color, to still others that come off as atmospheric, inviting the eye and the mind into misty distances and beyond—to the unfathomable vastness of deep space.

Additionally, some of the rectangles in Wilson's paintings form fully fleshed-out shapes, while others are simply the outlines of rectangles—razor-sharp demarcations that appear too perfect to have been made by a human. Imagine Josef Albers (1888-1976) collaborating with Kenny Howard, aka Von Dutch (1929-92), and James Turrell (b. 1943), with the trio looking out of the corner of its collective eye at works by Karl Benjamin (1925-2012), David Reed (b. 1946), and Patrick's dad, Richard Wilson (b. 1944). This will give you an idea of the profoundly idiosyncratic nature of Wilson's paintings: colors and shapes consorting and colluding to do things neither colors nor shapes could do on their own, for purposes more impactful and exciting than conventional ways of thinking about abstraction allow, much less invite or engender.

David Reed, *#515*, 2001-2004, Oil and alkyd on linen,
Support: 120 x 54 inches (304.8 x 137.2 cm)

The beauty of Wilson's accumulated—and accumulating—rectangles is that every single one could stand on its own as a painting—some of them, paradoxically and poetically, as minimalist paintings. *Door Number Two* (2023) encapsulates this dynamic, which is also at work in *Lakefront Property* (2023), *The Cabin* (2023), *Sling Blade* (2024), and *Cajun Music* (2024). Here's how I see it:

From across the room, I see six, no eight, separate rectangles. My initial count includes a flat black rectangle (in the upper right quadrant), a flat blue rectangle (filling out the remainder of the background), and four far more elaborately rendered rectangles, each in a range of tints, tones, and shades: one red, one pink, one blue, and one white. All of their edges are set, perfectly parallel and perpendicular, to the canvas's edges. The magic happens even before I can put my initial accounting into words: What I had first seen as a single blue rectangle is actually three blue rectangles: dark blue (lower right), light blue (lower left), and medium blue (upper left). So I see eight, not six, rectangles. Then the fun really begins. Each of the four complex rectangles, which appear to float in front of the four monochrome rectangles, multiplies into more rectangles than I can count. Wilson has layered so many rectangles atop one another that most of their surfaces are covered by the rectangles atop them, leaving only a thin band, on one or two—sometimes three or four—of the sides visible.

That's because very few of the rectangles form concentric stacks. Imagine looking down, with a bird's-eye view, at a stack of books, all of different sizes, set very neatly atop one another, generally from largest to smallest, but not always. We're left to figure out which bands of Wilson's rectangles align with other bands, forming whole yet partially hidden rectangles. Sometimes it's easy. Sometimes it isn't. But the overlapping rectangles always test your memory, not to mention your capacity to distinguish differences and identify similarities.

The small red rectangle, which I first saw as a singular entity, seems, on a longer look, to be comprised of ten separate rectangles. But it's hard to say that with any real certainty, because one of the bands of a partially covered-up rectangle is so atmospheric and multihued that it's difficult to determine exactly where it begins and ends. The pink pileup of rectangles is stacked more concentrically. I count nineteen, ranging from pale to rosy to hot pink, and including a range of fleshy tans, as well as some crackling zips of fiery orange and deep blue. It's especially difficult to determine the exact number of pink rectangles because of the translucency of some and because a handful barely peek out from behind their neighbors, forming lines that would make any pin-striper jealous, not to mention Wayne Thiebaud, who also knew how to give a great, electrifying kick to the edge of a shape. The blue cluster looks as if it's comprised of twenty separate rectangles, but they are so eccentrically arranged that it's difficult to keep track of which edges join up with which edges, or if some only peek out from one side of the rectangle above it.

Plus, many of the edges of the rectangles are surrounded by a halo-like glow, a penumbra of light that makes it hard to know where it ends, and where its surroundings begin. Moreover, just about every color in the painting appears in the stack of blue rectangles, along with dazzling yellow and a range of grays that is anything but neutral. Finally, the white pileup is made up of at least fifteen different rectangles, but it's impossible to give an exact number because Wilson has made so many hairsplitting distinctions in his sexy grays and translucent whites that this rectangle is among the most mysterious, both for its ghostliness and because it seems so suffused with shadows, which makes it easy to get lost.

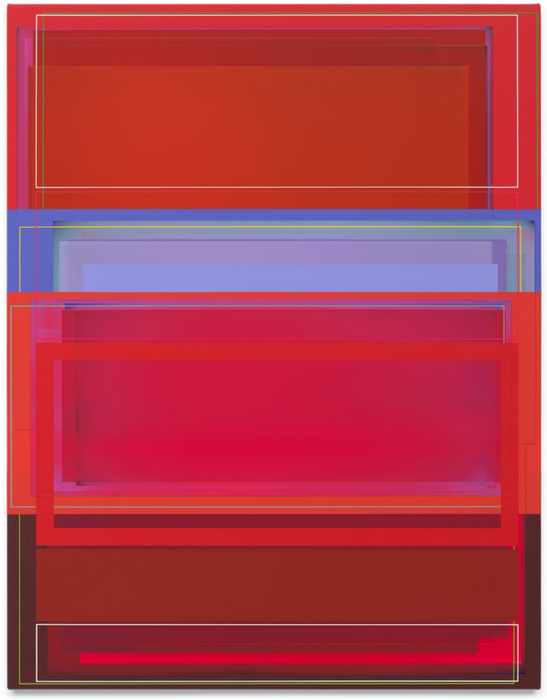
To step back and consider the mechanics of *Door Number Two* is to discover that you have been looking at paintings within paintings within paintings within paintings. It's a challenge to try to determine if two parts add up to one. It's a pleasure to witness how Wilson has managed, kind of miraculously, to hold everything together. The balance, harmony, and resolution of the composition is humming and buzzing like a well-oiled machine, even if you were completely unaware of that rhythm while you had your nose in the painting and were lost in the weeds of its infinitely fascinating details. Keeping more than one idea in mind is simply part of the process. It's not a requirement when you first look at the painting; it's something you do once you get going. And seeing more than one painting at once is an even greater pleasure. It's also a whole lot easier to take in a number of paintings than to account for the visual dynamics of any single painting.

To go from *Door Number Two* to the other large canvases, including *Lakefront Property, The Cabin, Sling Blade,* and *Cajun Music*, is to see Wilson amplify the complexity of his compositions in order to intensify the impact of his artistry. Although these four paintings and *Door Number Two* are structured similarly—basically four monochrome rectangles in the background and four more complex rectangles stacked atop them—the way Wilson breaks up space and reconfigures it gets more sophisticated, more layered, and more interwoven. The increase in confidence and virtuosity is palpable. The same goes for us viewers. It becomes easier to keep more in mind and see more things at once. It's also easier to understand and enjoy what's going on. Looking at a painting by Wilson is its own reward. But it's more than that. There's a sharpening of perception, a focusing of thinking, an extension of attention span, and an expansion of consciousness. So the next one you look at is even more satisfying to see, even more fun to consider.

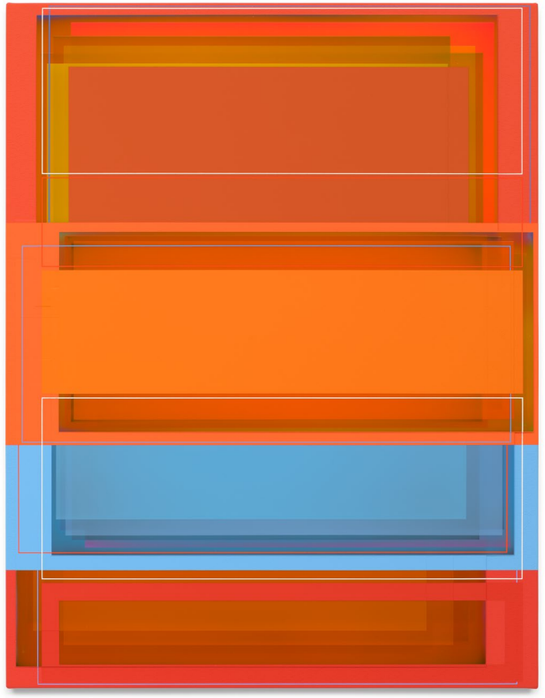
Wilson's group of six small paintings, *About Time (Red), About Time (Orange), About Time (Yellow), About Time (Green), About Time (Blue),* and *About Time (Violet) (2024),* does something similar but different. Each canvas invites us to zoom in, as if for a close-up, then to step back and survey the whole set. This disperses our attention across a panoramic expanse, a nearly fifteen-foot section of our architectural surroundings. Taking us in two directions simultaneously, Wilson's singular series intensifies and widens (or deepens and broadens) our engagement, drawing us down endlessly fascinating rabbit holes while catapulting us toward a horizon-spanning scan, a big-picture overview of everything, all at once. It's trippy. It's dizzying. And it's well worth the trouble.

Back to Oakland (2024) and *West Coast Sound* (2024) are even more extreme. Rather than laying four complex rectangles atop four monochrome rectangles—and riffing off that format—Wilson stacks his rectangles in two directions simultaneously: atop one another, in superimposed layers (as he has done in every work so far), and side by side, forming two columns, or towers, of rectangles. It is as if we are now, in addition to looking at rectangles layered over one another and blocking out the ones beneath them, looking at the spines of stacked books, from the side, so we see the thickness of each volume. It's as if Wilson is getting us to see the painting—and the world—from two perspectives at once: a bird's-eye view (as he has before), and as a cross-section (which is new). The picture plane is more radically fractured. This lets Wilson pack more information—and more punch—into every square inch of his paintings. These paintings are more challenging to sort out and more time-consuming to take in. They're also more satisfying to see and fascinating to think about—either one rectangle at a time or all together. Or, best yet, both at once. ■

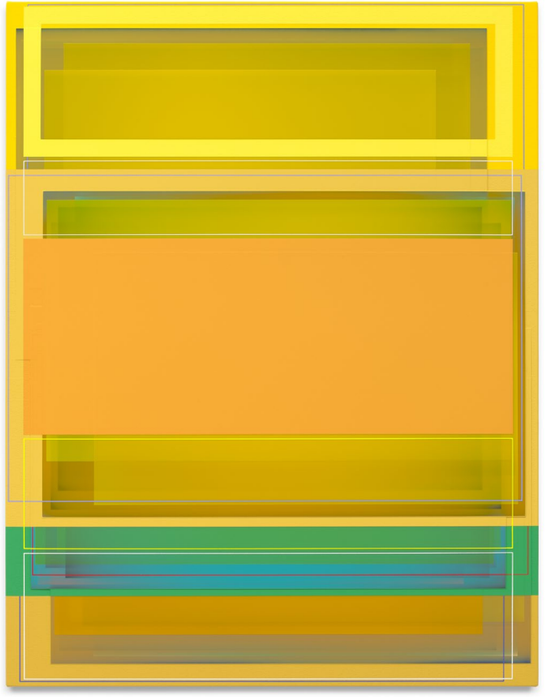
David Pagel is an art critic, curator, and professor of art theory and history at Claremont Graduate University. His reviews and essays have appeared in the *Los Angeles Times, Brooklyn Rail, Artforum, Art issues., Flash Art,* and *Art in America*. Recent publications include *Jim Shaw, Lund Humphries*, London, 2019 and *Talking Beauty: A Conversation Between Joseph Raffael and David Pagel about Art, Love, Death, and Creativity,* Zero+, Claremont, 2018, as well as monographs on Ted Larsen and Augustine Kofie. Pagel's book on John Sonsini will be published this year by Radius. Pagel is a self-taught diorama builder, an avid cyclist, and a seven-time winner of the California Triple Crown.



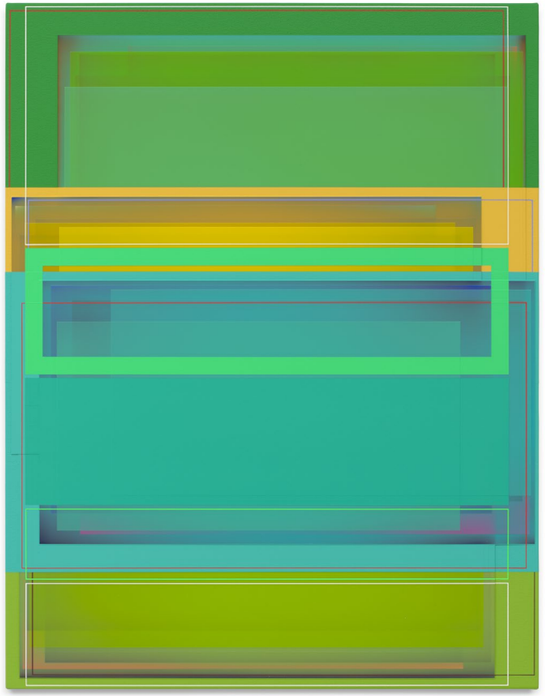
About Time (Red), 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
27 x 21 inches
69 x 53 cm



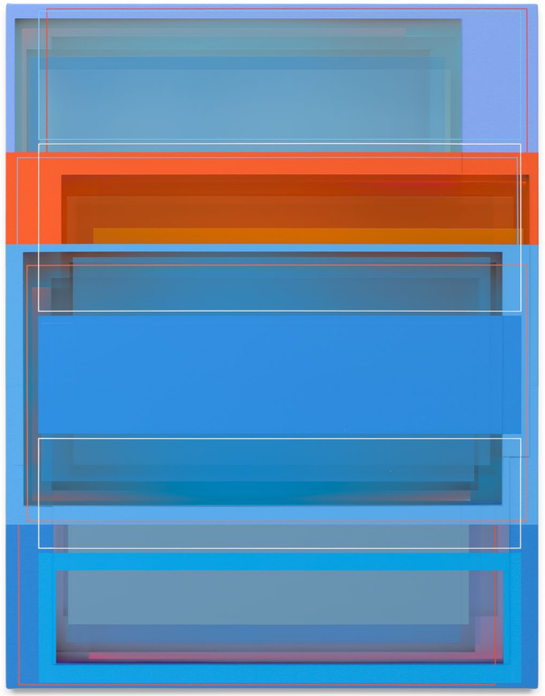
About Time (Orange), 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
27 x 21 inches
69 x 53 cm



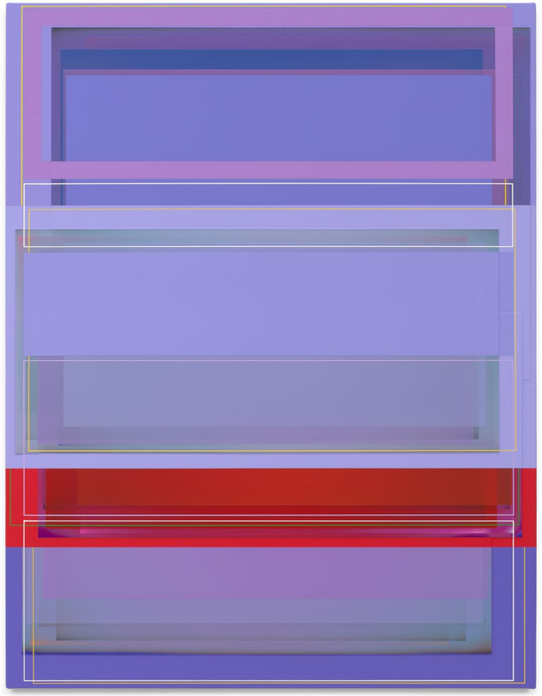
About Time (Yellow), 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
27 x 21 inches
69 x 53 cm



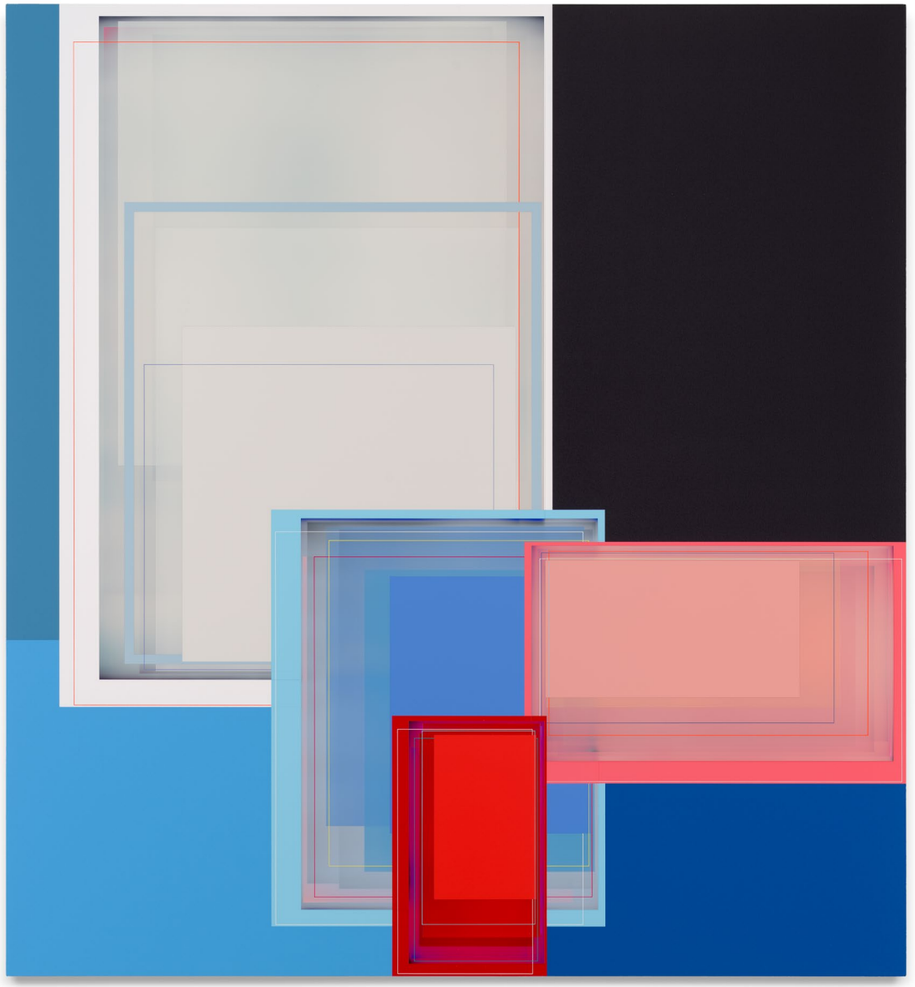
About Time (Green), 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
27 x 21 inches
69 x 53 cm



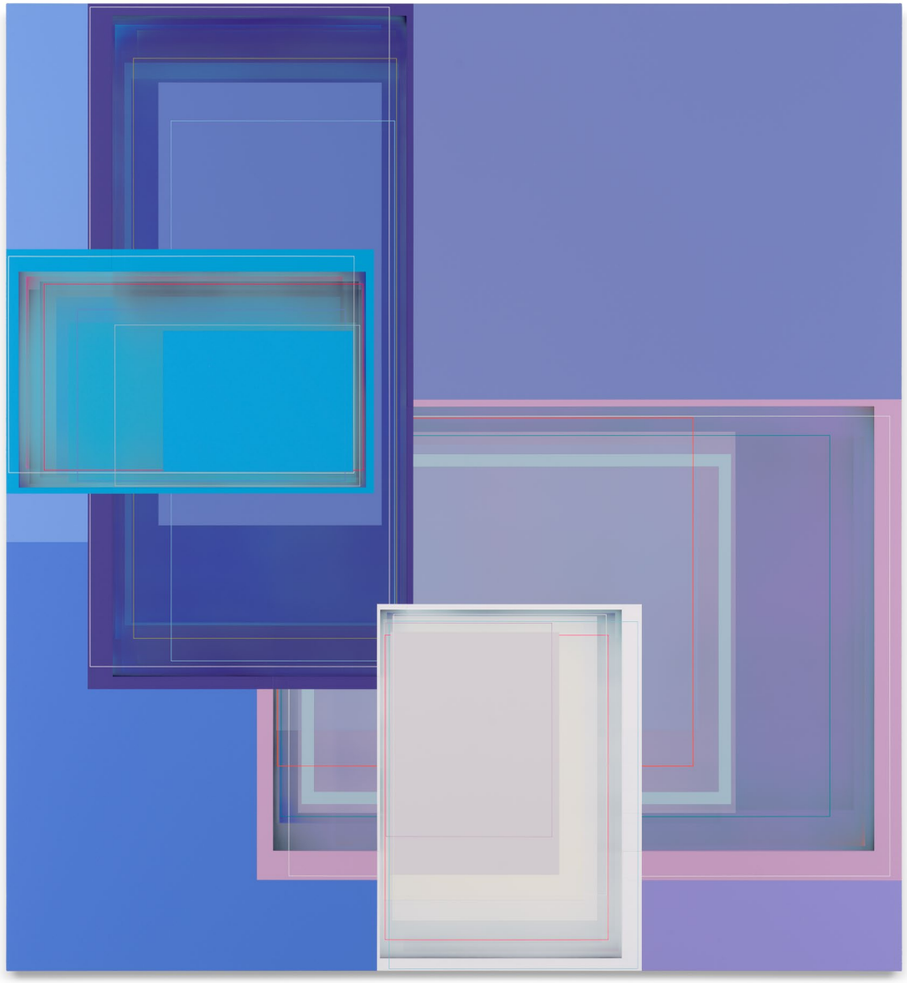
About Time (Blue), 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
27 x 21 inches
69 x 53 cm



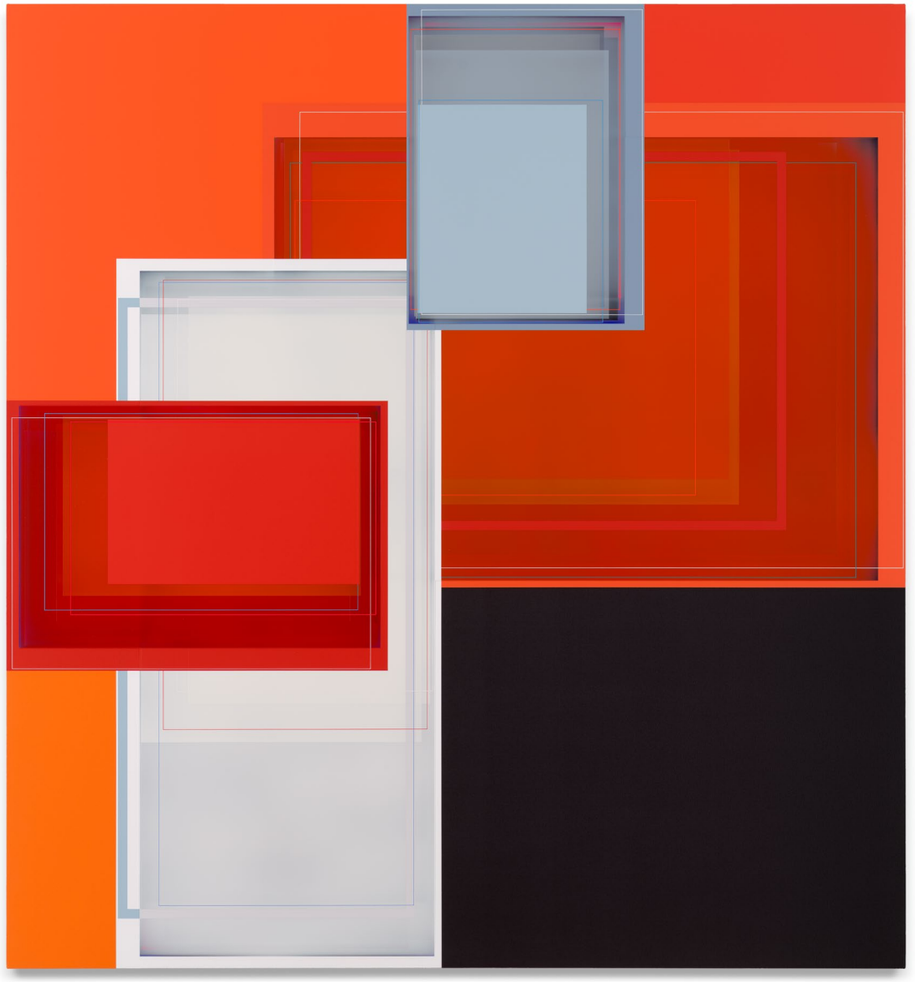
About Time (Violet), 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
27 x 21 inches
69 x 53 cm



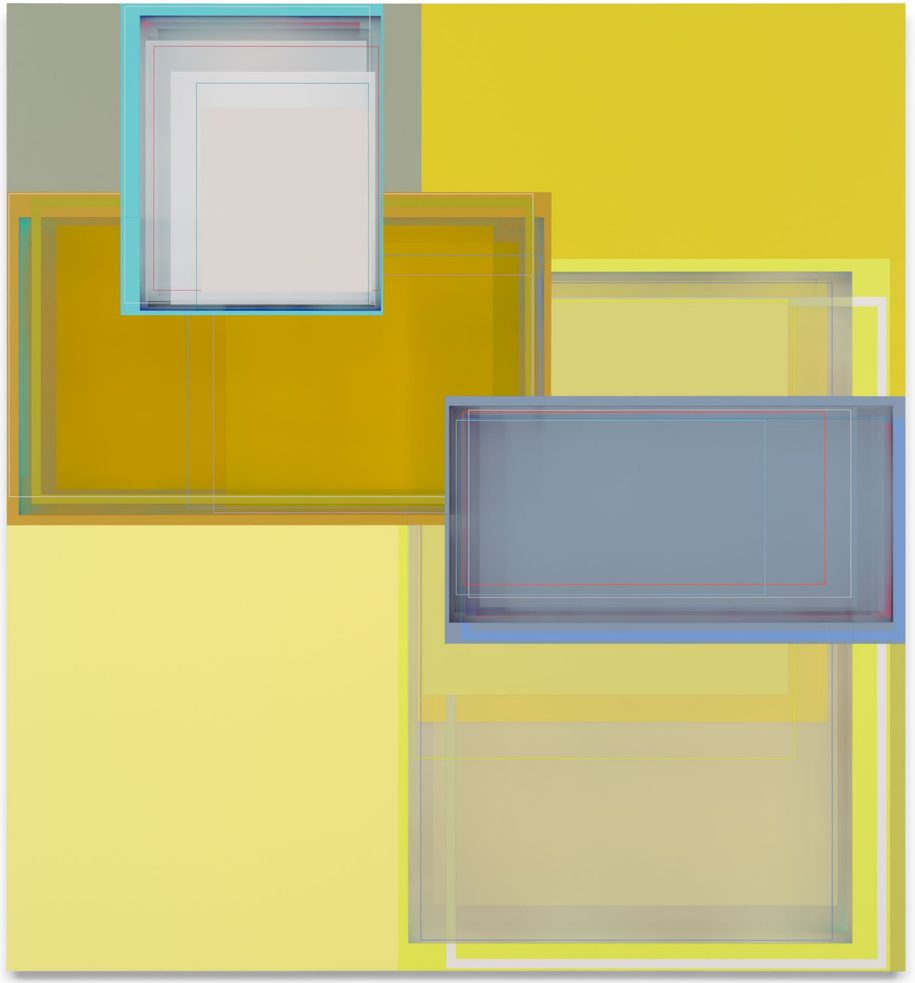
Door Number Two, 2023
Acrylic on canvas over panel
72 x 67 inches
183 x 170 cm



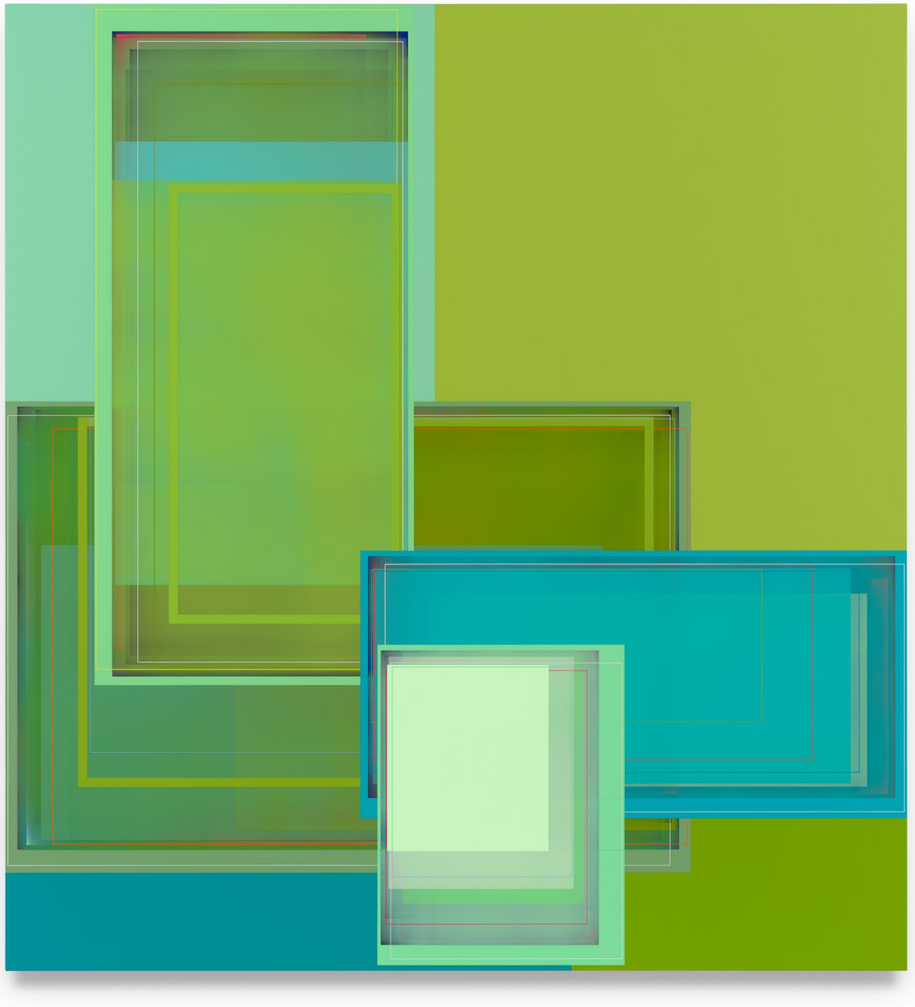
Lakefront Property, 2023
Acrylic on canvas over panel
72 x 67 inches
183 x 170 cm



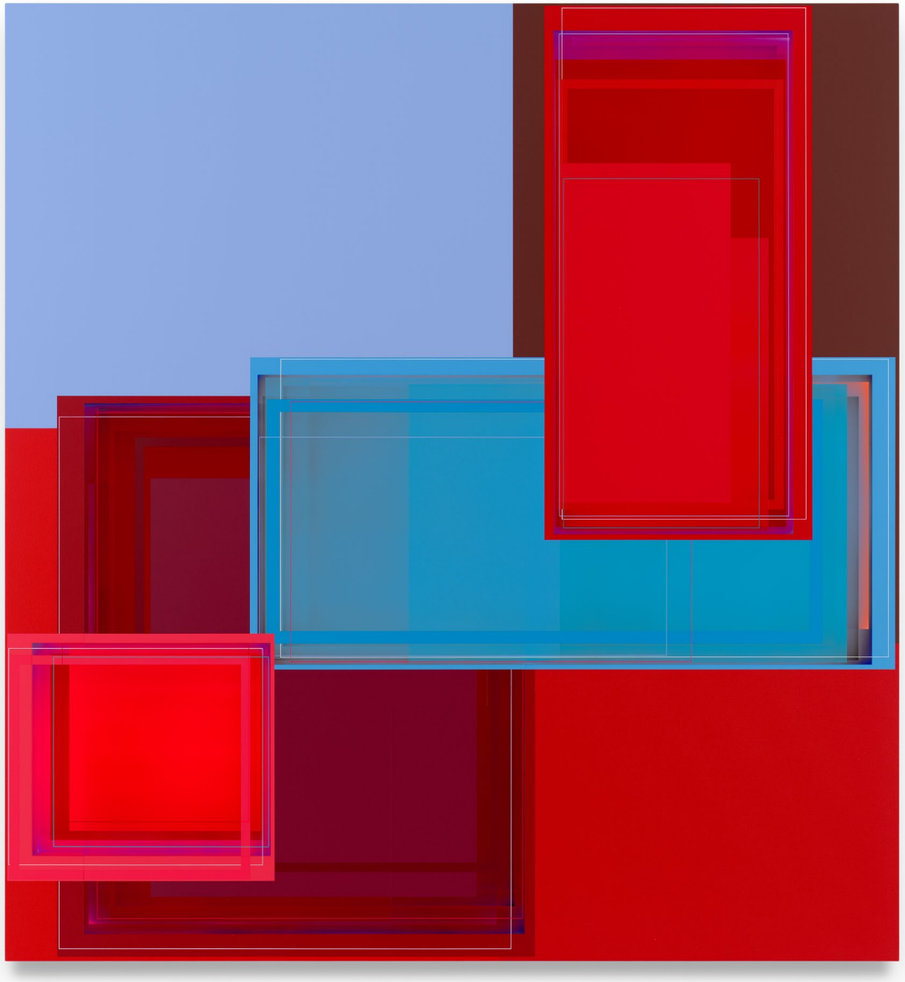
The 415, 2023
Acrylic on canvas over panel
72 x 67 inches
183 x 170 cm



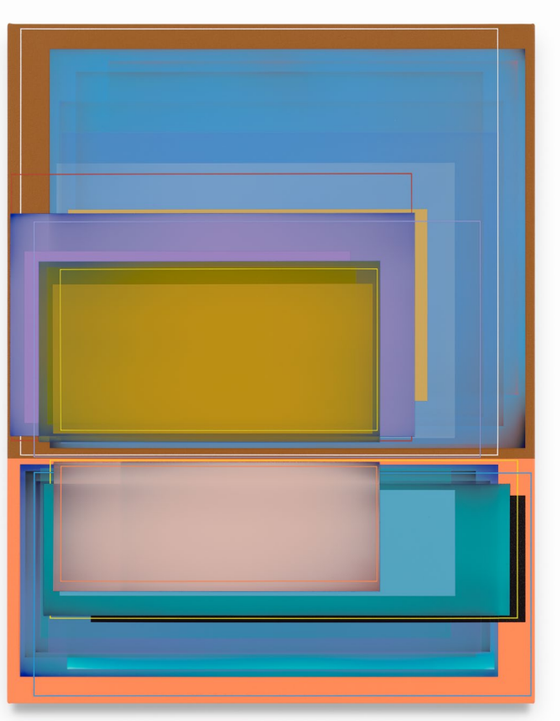
The Cabin, 2023
Acrylic on canvas over panel
72 x 67 inches
183 x 170 cm



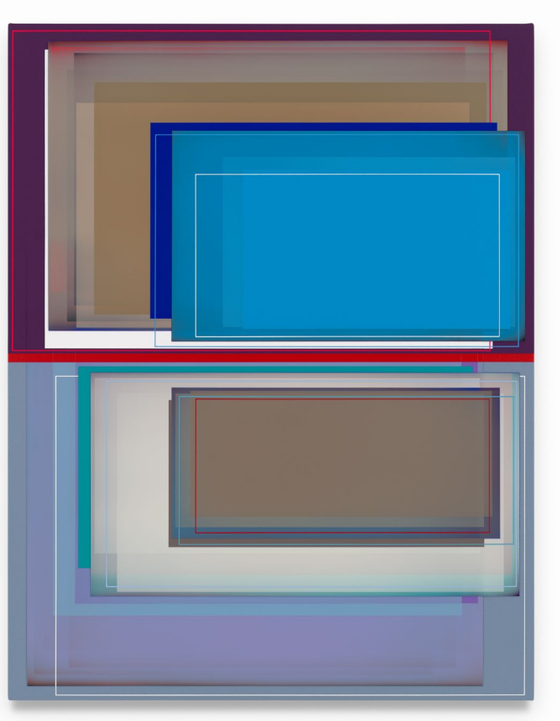
Cajun Music, 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
72 x 67 inches
183 x 170 cm



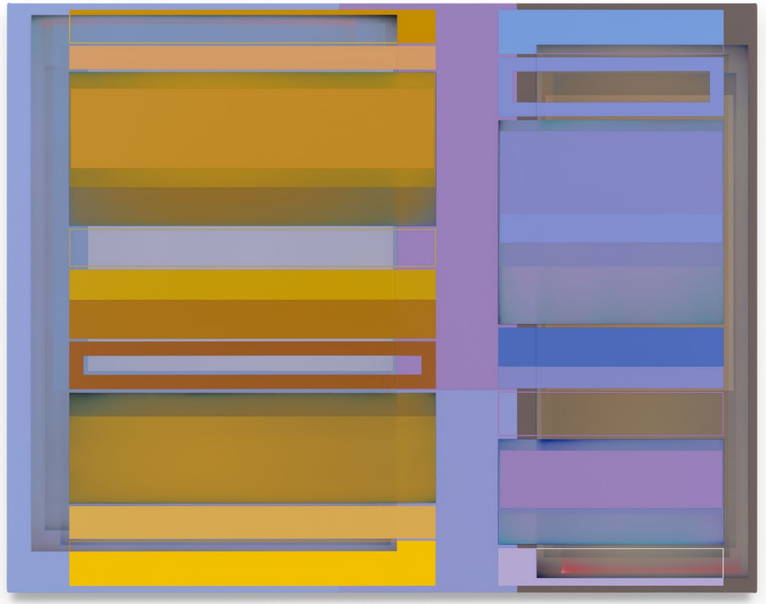
Sling Blade, 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
72 x 67 inches
183 x 170 cm



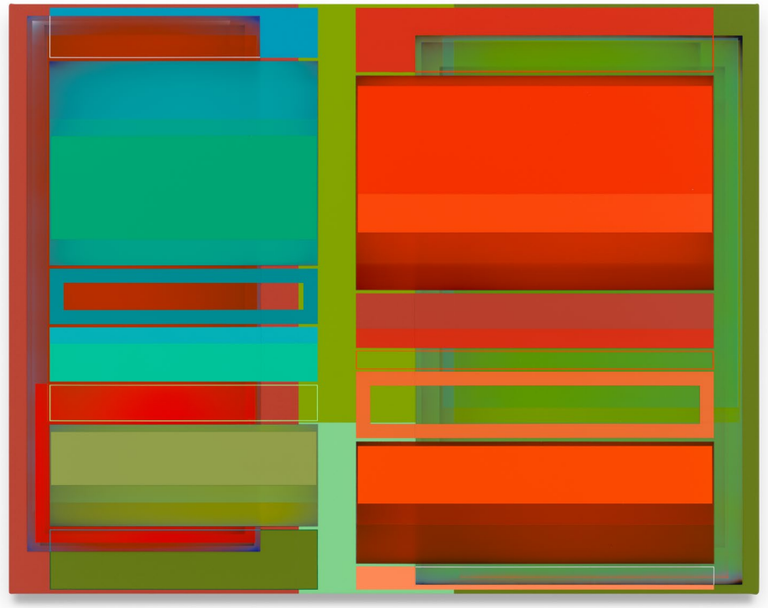
Cowboy Song, 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
27 x 21 inches
69 x 53 cm



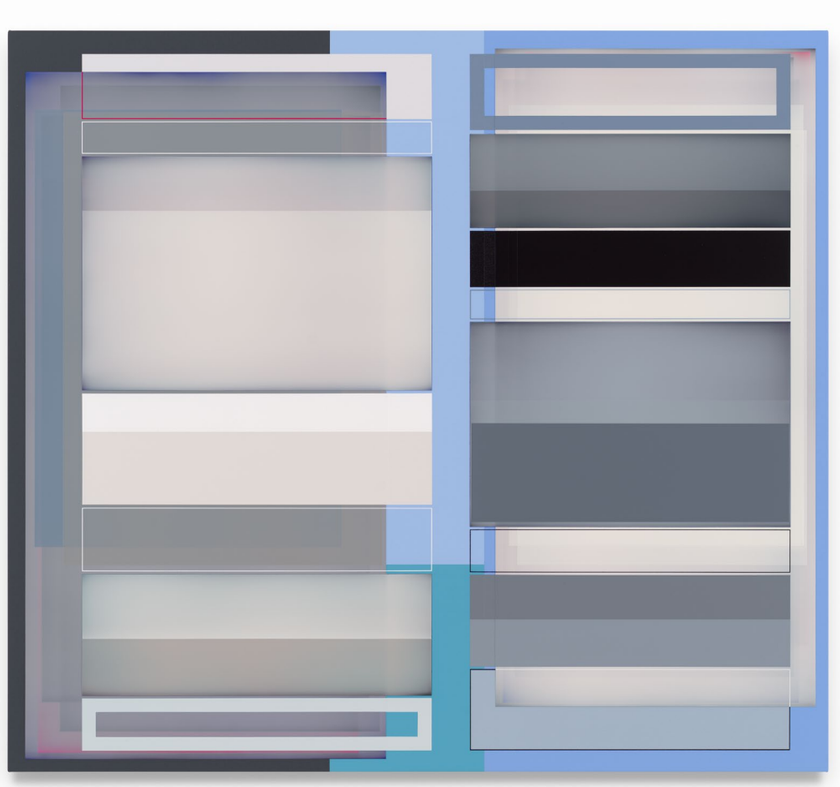
Trail Scout, 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
27 x 21 inches
69 x 53 cm



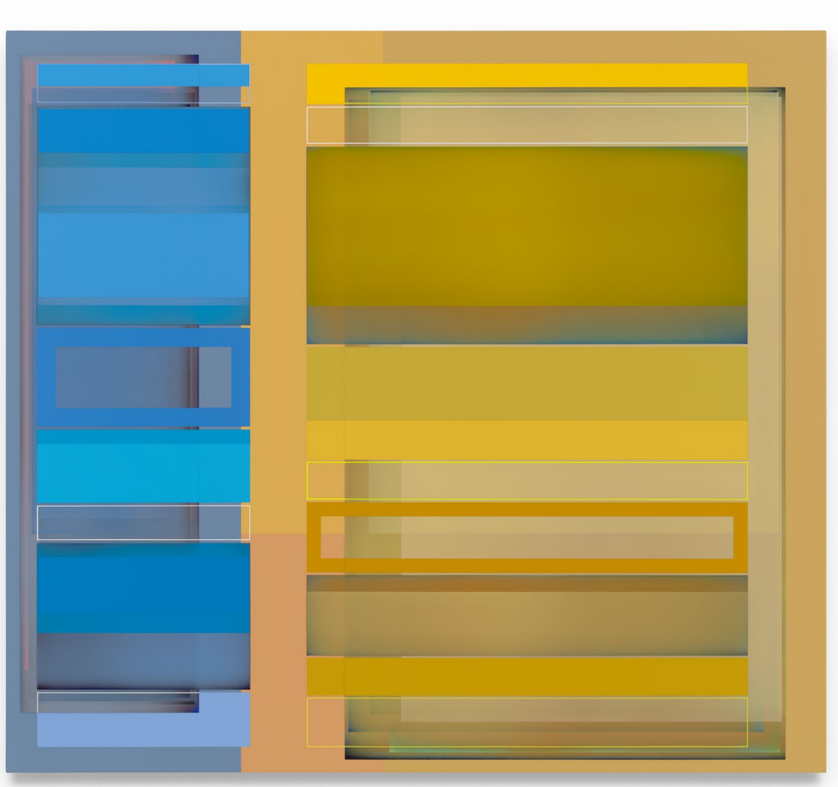
Lavender Honey, 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
29 x 37 inches
74 x 94 cm



Thai Food, 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
29 x 37 inches
74 x 94 cm



Back to Oakland, 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
37 x 41 inches
94 x 104 cm



West Coast Sound, 2024
Acrylic on canvas over panel
37 x 41 inches
94 x 104 cm

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

PATRICK WILSON

5 SEPTEMBER – 26 OCTOBER 2024

Miles McEnery Gallery
525 West 22nd Street
New York NY 10011

tel +1 212 445 0051
www.milesmcenery.com

Photo Credits
p. 6: © bpk Bildagentur / (LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur/Münster, Westphalia/Germany) / Photo: Hanna Neander / Art Resource, NY
p. 6: © The Estate of Karl Benjamin/ Photo: Gerard Vuilleumier
p. 7: © Buffalo AKG Art Museum / Art Resource, NY

Publications and Archival Associate
Julia Schlank, New York, NY

Photography by
Dan Bradica, New York, NY

Catalogue layout by Allison Leung

ISBN: 979-8-3507-3457-7

Cover: *The 415*,(detail), 2023

MILES
McENERY
GALLERY