

Cecilia Vázquez. Pintura

Essay From her Monograph; Mexico City, 2013, Print.

Images from exhibition at Museo de la Ciudad de Querétaro, Mexico, 2012

**Essay: “Ground, Figure, and Ground Again in the Art of Cecilia Vazquez”
Dana Saulnier 2013**

Ground, Figure, and Ground Again in the Art of Cecilia Vazquez

The longer an artist works building a creative practice the more difficult it is to generalize about their work. This is because they are not simply 'making statements' that can be interpreted as an inventory. An artist responds to life and generates new dimensions within experience. It is better to think of their art practice as a way of dwelling.

In Cecilia Vazquez's art we see a vocabulary of figural forms that pulse with her thinking: flowers alive to memory, cords that bind and connect, mandalas with no beginning or end, jewelry revealing a kind of hard beauty, and flesh. This flesh is visceral, vulnerable, ephemeral, but also poignant and intimate. These forms are presented in layers of multiplying styles. Vazquez presents variations of her touch, including abrupt passages of painterly marks, stains, silhouettes, and refined description. Her work is ripe with historical connections to other painters, the problems of painting form and light, as well as traditions of still life and 'vanitas' imagery. Cecilia Vazquez balances a richly layered and fluid diversity of potential meanings in her work. We are always present to contingent meanings, to both continuity and discontinuity of sense. Indeed, tensions between insight and blindness are always intense in Cecilia Vazquez's art.

Fundamental tensions between continuity and discontinuity are most forceful in the dialogue of figure and ground. Vazquez's forms open upon their situated-ness. She loosens her figural forms from their ground, they float, wander, and gesture towards connections, yet always doing so within a highly tuned situation of discontinuity and distance. This distancing, as the situation for her forms being present together is very much Cecilia Vazquez's own mode of making. These tensions have been important throughout her career. Cecilia Vazquez's paintings and installations emphatically present pressure between figure and ground. I want to focus on this issue, trying to think it in several ways and speculate on some implications for our current moment.

One can think of the relation of figure and ground as a fundamental syntax of the language of painting. Thinking relationships between visual art and language is always fraught with dilemmas. It has been a recurrent theoretical concern. Post-Structuralist conceptions of language in particular, inscribe a 'linguistic turn' in theory since the 1970s. Many visual artists have been indirectly exposed to this thinking. In my view this has too often resulted in a tendency towards reduction, where the specificity of the art form is collapsed as it is assigned a function as a sign within a cultural system of conventional meanings. The specific form is unavailable as a concrete singular thing differing within experience. When language remains un-experienced, without thought and feeling, it remains static and conventional. Such language efficiently repeats what we already know and does little to ground our knowing in contingency.

Rather than think of language as wholly ensnared within socially structured systems I find it profitable to think of language as it occurs in speech and conversation. The specific act of speaking in a dialogue is a better analog to specific practices of an artist. When we have a conversation that truly matters to us, when we talk about our living values and relationships with those we care about, our conversation expresses both our knowing and our uncertainty. The interplay of loss and discovery layered with poetic grace, restraint and emotion in

Vazquez's art is palpable. In conversations that touch our living values we constitute our knowing within our uncertainty. In a concrete and lived manner such conversations, like the experience of art, lay out the limits of our knowing as the ground of our knowing.

Think of this less as a resignation to limitations and more as creative becoming. Language grows and differentiates meanings, becoming an 'outward turning' enlargement of our experience. The production of difference, as opposed to the repetition of identity, is a better way to think about art practices as language. In great art language expands, presenting both our knowing and our not knowing, both our continuity and our discontinuity, both our experience of figure and of ground. In Vazquez's work this is enacted in large measure as a tense dialogue of figure and ground. Her figures present fragments of narrative potential suspended yet given motion by their manner of being distant together.

The key question is how to think this 'ground'.

What is present in this artist's structuring of ground? Thinking in terms of language we can conceive ground as the disclosure of limitations that situates our knowing. Thinking in terms of time we can think ground as structuring our dispersed relation to the experience of time. Considering how powerfully Cecilia Vazquez pressurizes ground to her forms -- multiple interpretive frameworks are fruitful.

If we are careful not to limit our thinking to landscape alone, Vazquez's descriptions of sky-like spaces in some of her earlier paintings offer a way to orient the question. The space of the sky can be thought and re-thought as a space of potential. Cecilia Vazquez explained that the sky-like spaces in her work were open territories, spaces ahead of and for events. She described a kind of maternal, nurturing sky, full of light and warmth, a clear blue stability. Yet this same space will suddenly build into storms and become transformed. Vazquez structured her sky-like grounds as spaces open and alive to experience. They were spaces where our fleeting and often vulnerable being within time could become eventful.

One can think of her sky-like spaces as spaces that are always already 'open' ahead of events and in this sense conditional for events. These skies, the grounds of her paintings, make present the 'open potential' of the ground, comprising a kind of 'background situation' or 'past to future wholeness' for any specific event. One may think of them as an existential plenum and understand them as situating presence. One can also think of them as spaces of becoming and understand them as generatively projecting futures. The simultaneity of past, present, and future, reveal a densely multiple, yet whole immanence, a ground that we can sense even as we can only experience it as dispersed across specific events.

In this exhibition Cecilia Vazquez continues to creatively inhabit tensions of figure and ground. The exhibit, divided into two rooms, sets up proliferating comparisons for how she relates whole to part. Everywhere time and her 'painting languages' are divided and combined,

discontinuous while begging continuity, constant in revealing limitations. We find precariousness and uncertainty along with our interpretive forward motion. We are fluid, moving between memorials and unfolding potentials. The installation in particular embodies the sense of future momentum. This art challenges the surrounding space of the gallery to transform, it suggests distant futures growing out from this specific state. The syntax of the installation forcefully structures projection. And though the stained or ashen, ghost like grounds in the series of works titled *Soft Geometry* may be more readily perceived as analogs to memory, things are not so simple. These works are less enactments of remembering and forgetting, less sequential than that, they are simultaneous mappings of near and distant poetic durations, as if past, present, and future, must disclose potentials of relation.

Cecilia Vazquez dwells in her projects as one dwelling in technique. Her habitation of shifting moments and spaces between figure and ground comprise a membrane of technique that she makes visible to us. We see her forms and spaces as the practical and technical ground of her thinking and thus: we see her technique. In some sense this is to see the ritual, practical mind of an artist who has long dwelled in her working methods. This dwelling is a deeply intellectual and practical matter, and one must grasp the practical grounding conditions of technique, of medium, as yet another way to think ground.

From a Marxist inflected perspective one could argue that the practical, material conditions of production are the most important basis for analysis. In such an analysis little territory remains for the specific dwelling of an individual artist. Concepts addressing ideas like ritual, individual agency, and perhaps even 'technical agency' are filtered out of analysis. Yet we now live in an age where thinking about 'technical agency' as well as technical transformations are pressing questions.

Why now raise the issue of technique and the technological? Because the discontinuities and tensions present in Cecilia Vazquez's art as she works through figure and ground compel a parallel with a contemporary sense of our transforming grounding relations with technologies that are everywhere and nowhere. With such technology, shifts, expansions, and compressions of our sensate experience extend and differ our everyday language and categories of space and time. Given our immersion in technologies that strive to seamlessly colonize our being our capacity to see and understand the being of technique becomes more pressing. We live in a moment that needs to see technique.

Technique can be more or less visible. When we see the gaps, distances, and discontinuities in Vazquez's art we see her contingent experience become visible as technique. The continuum of potentials and limitations of technique and technology become perceptible in her art practice. It is not that Vazquez is presenting technology as subject matter, rather she, like many other contemporary artists, is responding to the changing grounding conditions of our era. She does so as a visual artist grounded in her technique, making tensions visible in a manner that resonates compellingly with our contemporary moment.

This suggests that the syntaxes of 'abstract' art are particularly important in an era that gains by seeing new mappings of technique. The sense of projection in Vazquez's work resonates with the long history of abstraction, including the non-objectivity of Kandinsky and Mondrian, understood as extended ways of sensing. The momentum of this history is relevant today with renewed force as we situate ourselves to technological agency and simultaneously with our need to situate our being to technological limitations.

Tensions between figure and ground in Cecilia Vazquez's art are anything but seamless-- rather they are resolutely provisional. Cecilia Vazquez's art, dense with fulsome, deep, poignant, gaps and mysteries becomes prophetic towards our contemporary conditions precisely because it makes its technique so insistently visible. Indeed, the capacity to make such tensions visible is perhaps more present to a painting practice because it proffers a differential to the faster rhythms of mass media less capable of engendering contemplation.

Cecilia Vazquez's art opens up, suspends, and projects our senses of time and language. This is another way of saying that her art visually realizes difference. While it is true that a horizon of technique is a ritual matter for an artist, for one practically alert to the differing of a life lived, it is just as vital that her being within technique is not exclusive to the studio. Along with us, Vazquez dwells in our changing grounding conditions. Cecilia Vazquez gives us her gifts as a witness to this life. She produces dimensions within this moment that are both poetic and prophetic.

Dana Saulnier is an artist who sometimes writes about art.

“Cecilia Vázquez. Recent Work”

Museo de la Ciudad de Querétaro

Mexico

2012



“Cecilia Vázquez, Recent Work”
Room 1
City Museum of Querétaro, Mexico
2012



“Cecilia Vázquez, Recent Work”
Room 1
City Museum of Querétaro, Mexico
2012

“Cecilia Vázquez, Recent Work”
Room 2
City Museum of Querétaro, Mexico
2012





“Cecilia Vázquez, Recent Work”
Room 2
City Museum of Querétaro, Mexico
2012

Individual pieces from
“Cecilia Vázquez. Recent Work”



“Soft Geometry O”
Mixed media (acrylic and color pencils on canvas)
47 x 51 in.
2011



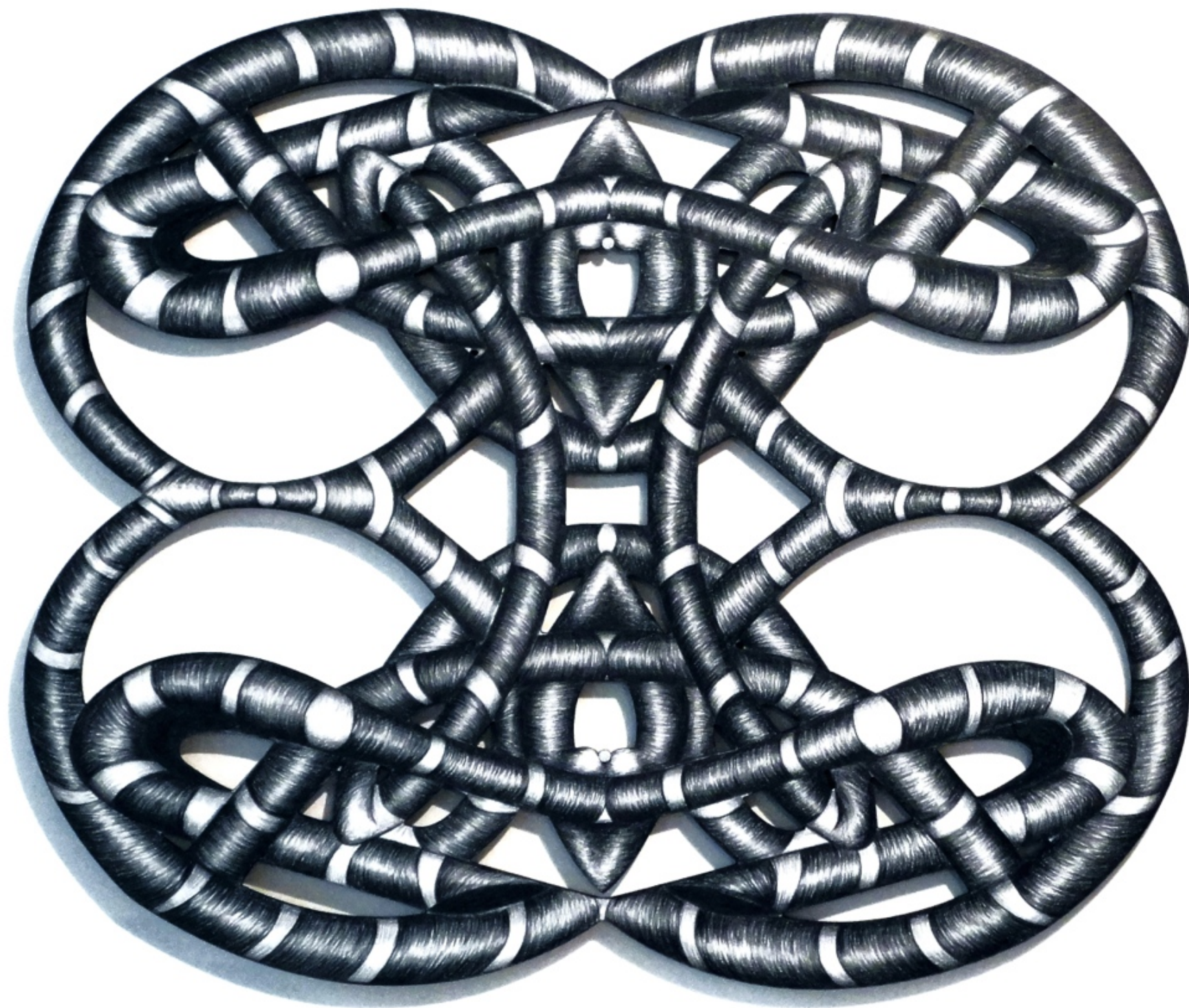
"Soft Geometry A"
Mixed media (acrylic and color pencils on canvas)
47 x 51 in.
2011



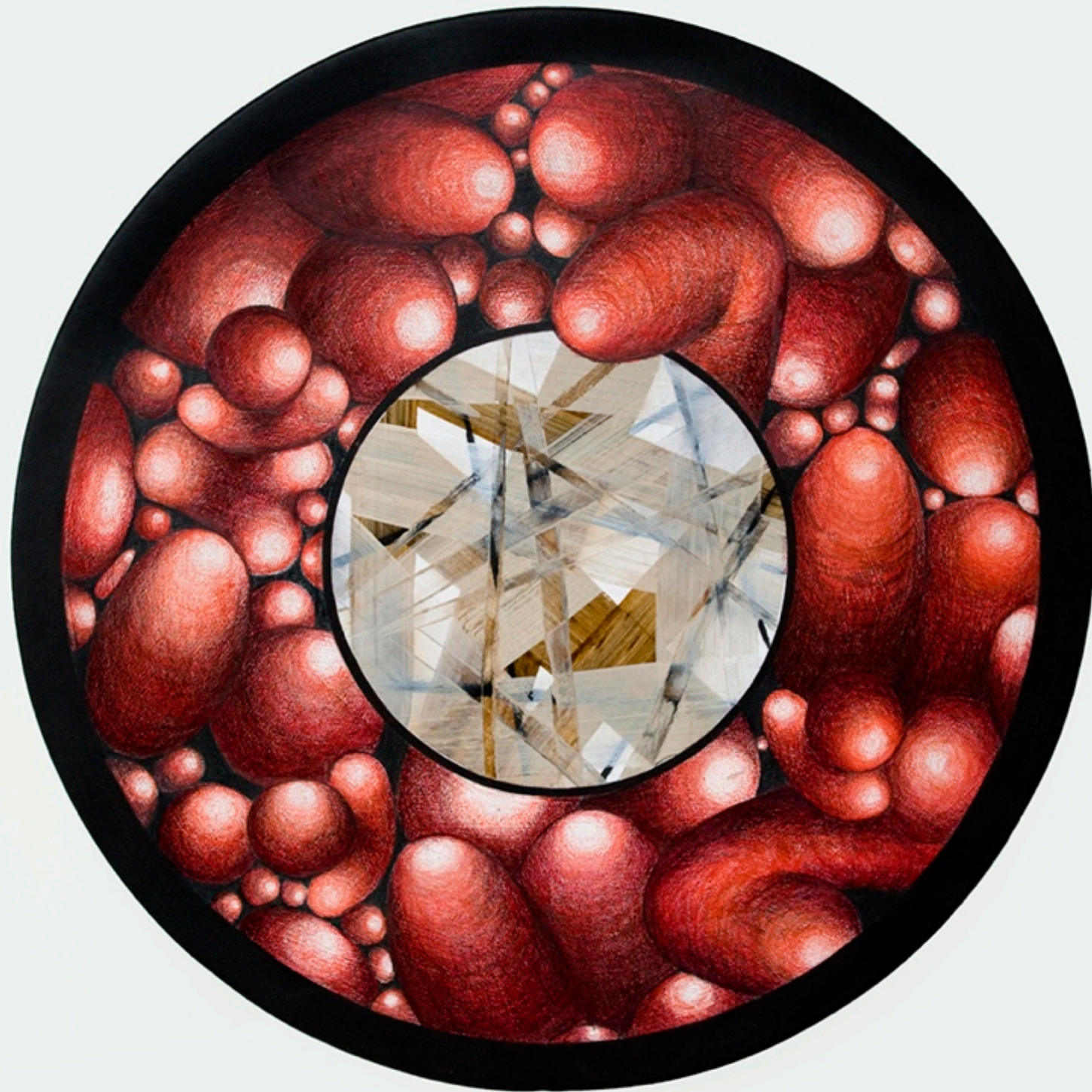
"Soft Geometry 8"
Mixed media (acrylic and color pencils on canvas)
47 x 51 in.
2011



"Soft Geometry 4"
Mixed media (acrylic and color pencils on canvas)
47 x 51 in.
2011



"Mandala"
Color pencils on wood
24 x 28 in.
2012



Untitled
Mixed media (acrylic and color pencils on canvas)
11 in. diameter
2012



"Pearls 2"
Mixed media (acrylic and color pencils on canvas)
11 in. diameter
2012



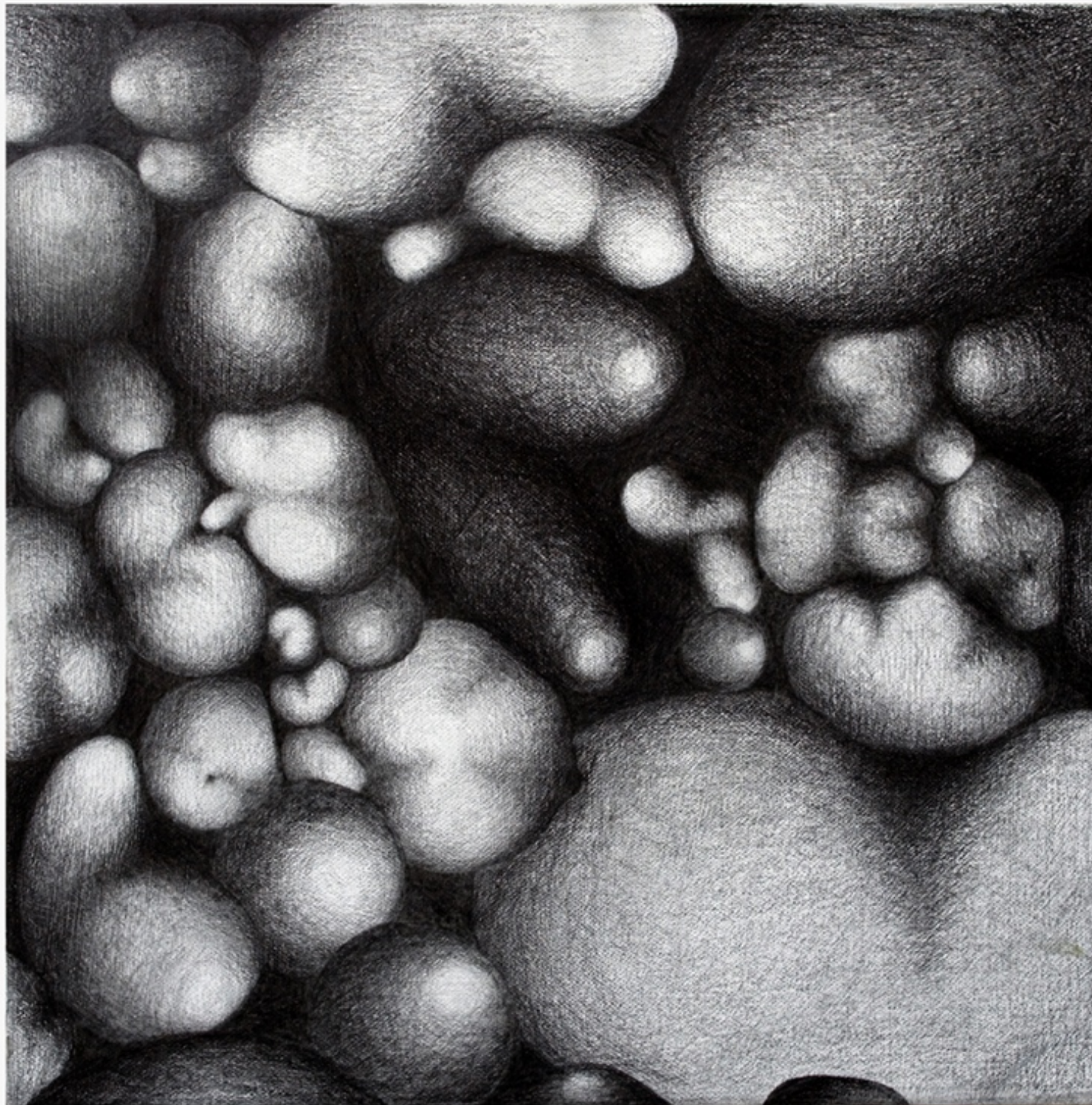
Untitled
Mixed media (acrylic and color pencils on canvas)
11 in. diameter
2012



"Black Pearls"
Acrylic and color pencils on canvas
11 x 11 in.
2012



"Protuberance"
Color pencils on canvas
11 x 11 in.
2012



“Inside 2”
Color pencils on canvas
11 x 11 in.
2012



“Free-standing Double Rose Yellow”
Acrylic on wood
19 x 11 in.
2012



Study: various independant shapes (for expanded painting -- wall piece)
Mixed media on canvas or wood
Dimensions variable
2012