

FUTURA 2000 TARPESTRIES

FUTURA 2000: TARPESTRIES

ERIC FIRESTONE GALLERY





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FUTURA2000: TARPESTRIES

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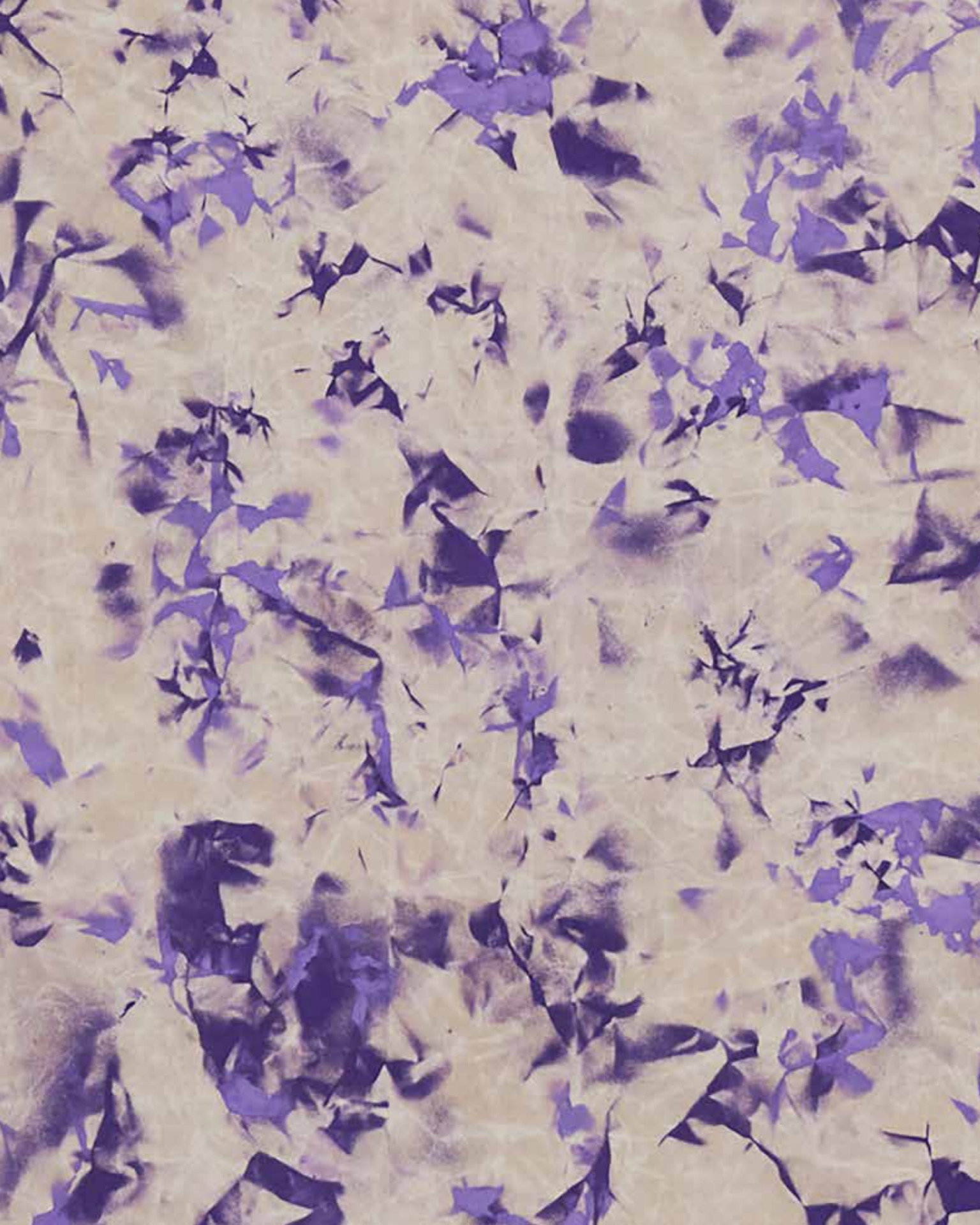
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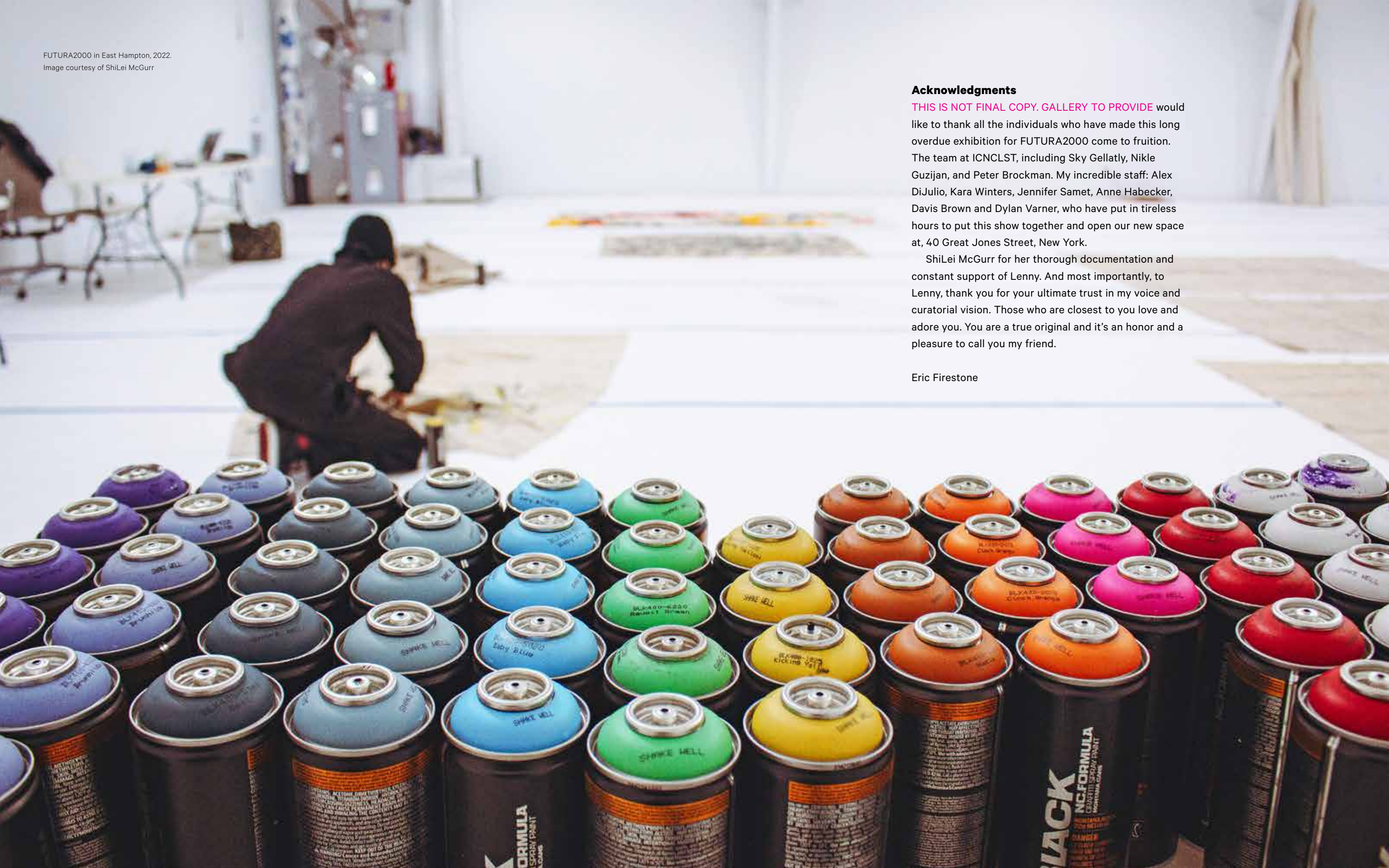
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Essay by ZEPHYR

Eric Firestone Press
2022



Acknowledgments

THIS IS NOT FINAL COPY. GALLERY TO PROVIDE would like to thank all the individuals who have made this long overdue exhibition for FUTURA2000 come to fruition. The team at ICNCLST, including Sky Gellatly, Nikle Guzijan, and Peter Brockman. My incredible staff: Alex DiJulio, Kara Winters, Jennifer Samet, Anne Habecker, Davis Brown and Dylan Varner, who have put in tireless hours to put this show together and open our new space at, 40 Great Jones Street, New York.

ShiLei McGurr for her thorough documentation and constant support of Lenny. And most importantly, to Lenny, thank you for your ultimate trust in my voice and curatorial vision. Those who are closest to you love and adore you. You are a true original and it's an honor and a pleasure to call you my friend.

Eric Firestone

GENIUS BOY AT PLAY

by ZEPHYR



Dateline: 1973, Manhattan (Upper West Side)

In the earliest years of the 1970s a Manhattan youth designs a graffiti tag that is entirely unlike anything that has come before. As a young sprout, I saw this tag and created—as I did for many tags when I knew nothing about the artist—an imaginary persona for the responsible party.

This boy, I decided, was an odd genius. A misfit. He fancied making graffiti in his own self-created fringe outside the boundaries of the new homogenous youth writing culture that had taken hold of the city. I assumed he was a nerdy kid, sporting horn-rimmed glasses as he tagged subway stations with an El Marko pen and a ruler. Why a ruler? Because, I assumed, executing these little masterpieces certainly must require one.

Graffiti demands swift execution, so names with minimal letters and stylistic complexity seem a wise approach. Nonetheless, it was not uncommon for some early writers of legend to buck this trend. “Super Kool 223” could not be fast to put up, to say nothing of “Stay High 149” and his joint-smoking stick figure.

So what of the boy whose tag had lines so long and straight and parallel that a ruler was required? Can’t be fast to do. Next level exactitude. Genius boy at play.

As a kid spotting the tag, I sensed a paradox—an act of defiance within an already defiant subculture. Civilians and cops held no sway over “FUTURA2000.”

He was going to take all the time it took to make one of these things.

When I finally got the shocking newsflash (“He does NOT use a ruler!”) I was confused. My amazement shifted direction, but remained. “He draws those lines freehand?!” Genius boy at work.

Dateline: 1979, Manhattan (UWS again)

I first met Leonard Hilton McGurr in 1979, one year after the completion of his service in the United States Navy. We became fast friends. The day he walked into the Soul Artists headquarters—an abandoned laundromat we had commandeered—his loose, athletic style immediately erased all of my preconceptions. Gregarious and charismatic to an infinite degree, everyone in our clique vied for his company. He possessed laser-quick organizational skills that bordered on the supernatural—we all felt like we were moving in slow motion around him. Working with Leonard Hilton in those early Soul Artists “art workshop” days and at Esses Studio was tantamount to taking on a rigorous athletic challenge. He had the energy of fifty of my stoner friends combined. Just keeping up with him was tough. I wondered if he had acquired some of these traits in the Navy. Was he always like this? Turns out he was. The Navy just sharpened the blade.

At home and abroad FUTURA would tear break-neck through streets he had never seen, in cities he had never visited, as if on a scavenger hunt for

FUTURA2000 in his Brooklyn Studio, 1983. Image courtesy of Eric Kroll

platinum. He always knew exactly where he was—even when he didn't—utilizing to full effect an internal compass so accurate it would make Magellan envious.

One of the few things that could bring the FUTURA tornado to a screeching halt was the sight of a Pac Man machine. It was not his Kryptonite but his elixir. These were the earliest days of video games and the broader digital revolution—a seismic evolution wholly parallel with FUTURA's life and career. There he would stand, like the pinball wizard of rock 'n' roll lore, locked into the machine until Dondi and I would tug him away by force. With a single quarter he would often top the leader board with the same ease one might sip a can of Coca Cola—another trademark FUTURA habit. Boy genius at play.

Dateline: 1980, New York City

As the graffiti gang of 1980 embarked on their canvas revolution in converted storefront galleries, just how to deliver subway art to white cubes became the group challenge. It was then that FUTURA decides if everyone is going to zig, he's going to zag. Zag himself right into hyperspace.

While the rest of us were immersed in the incestuous traditions of blending aerosol color as interiors and exteriors around hard, cartoonish letter lines, FUTURA pursued a inventive alternative. He wants to use the mist. He decides that the mist is where the fun is. All the best secrets are in the mist, not the limited alphabet.

Exiting the Esses Studio workshop he immediately adopts a painting process of aerosol abstraction. In group exhibitions at Fashion Moda, the Mudd Club and PS1 he announces himself with aplomb. To seal the deal he paints an entire subway car—top to bottom and end to end. It is a brightly colored abstract masterpiece completely devoid of lettering. FUTURA dubs his mobile public mural "Break." Overnight he has revolutionized our world.

Dateline: 1984, Western Europe and the World at Large

The Fun Gallery, while well intentioned, cannot contain the boy genius. The things he is doing are just too powerful and it is forcing the seams outward and

stressng them. He attracts the interest of three heavy hitters in the art world, Yvon Lambert in Paris, Tony Shafrazi in New York, and Yaki Kornblit in Amsterdam. By this time "Futch" has already achieved rock star status, particularly after his close association with The Clash and his extensive world travel. His work with The Clash Las suggests he has developed a mastery of design and illustration. It appears to be the result of years of formal training, but alas, this is not the backstory. In fact, there is no backstory. Boy genius at play.

He has, by now, more than made his presence felt in the world. FUTURA is a famous artist. He has spawned numerous imitators. He enjoys a symbiotic relationship with the media and much has been written about him. He has recorded a rap record. He makes extraordinary paintings. When it comes time for the traditionalist hacks to try and make sense of his work, things get hilarious, or tragic—depending on one's perspective.

Attempts by "art experts" to place FUTURA's output into a linear art historical genealogy is confounded by the artist and the art form. What they will never understand is that FUTURA, like New York's graffiti itself, came from nowhere. As a Dutch art collector explained to me thirty-five years ago, it was the lack of identifiable precursors that made our graffiti art so fascinating. When a critic opined that perhaps FUTURA was the next Kandinsky, our response was unambiguous: No. Wrong. He is the first FUTURA.

Dateline: 2000, Williamsburg, Brooklyn

I am in the lair of the digital knight. FUTURA is surrounded by walls of TV screens and monitors and multiple computers and I'm wondering if I have wandered into a Nam June Paik retrospective. I ask him what he is doing but his explanation is meaningless to my analog mind. The boy genius is in his element. From this bunker I gather he is writing code and designing his own computer programs while editing his favorite one- or two-second blips from old movies into algorithmic collages, primarily, I assume, for his

FUTURA2000 in East Hampton, 2022. Image courtesy of ShiLei McGurr



own amusement, since the world has not caught up with this yet. From this little room he seems to be hacking the entire universe.

We are in an industrial building in Williamsburg that he shares with Stash. They are business partners but also have separate ventures. Bless his heart; FUTURA tries to offer me an explanation of their multiple overlapping domestic and international businesses (streetwear, collectibles, and all things cool) but it is far too dense for my limited processing chip to make sense of. All I know is there was something called GFS at one point but now they own Recon stores, and other entities are FUTURA Laboratories and Project Dragon, and Stash has “Subware.” At least a dozen other enterprises are ongoing, but I can’t follow along. Japan is a big part of it and so are a lot of small but expensive cryptic figurines—the collectibles—and something called “Bathing Ape.” Suddenly I’m in the back streets of Hong Kong again, circa 1981, trying desperately to keep up with FUTURA as he outpaces me by twenty meters.

By this time FUTURA’s work with mega-companies has reached a fever pitch. Nike is his good buddy—it’s a marriage made in heaven—and they have recently flown him out to their headquarters to give the VIP treatment to him and his son, Timothy. FUTURA has already eclipsed art stars like Warhol with branding brinkmanship well beyond standard practice. His ability to navigate the corporate waters is natural and stress free—just the opposite of what one might expect from negotiations that can be complex and fragile. FUTURA’s innate ability in this area continues to generate exciting collaborations of the highest order.

Of particular note at the end of 2000—“FUTURA’s year”—is the publication of a FUTURA monograph brought to life by the folks at Booth Clibborn in the UK. A collage of multi-media fun and die-cut surprises with quotes randomly scattered throughout this masterpiece, the seemingly impossible task of presenting FUTURA’s constantly kinetic strobe-light mind onto a printed page has been achieved to near perfection.

Dateline: 2022, East Hampton, New York

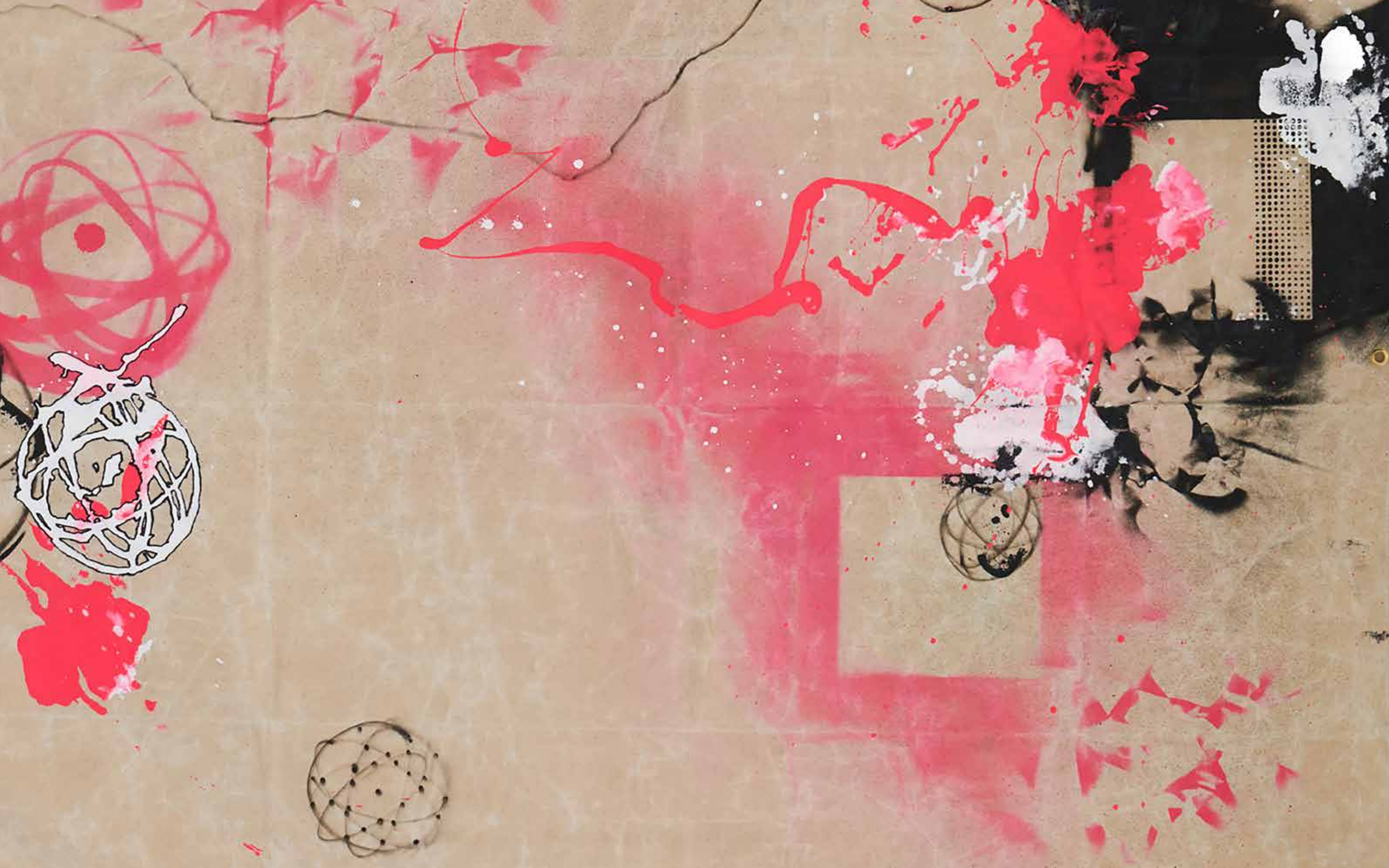
On view right now is some ultra fresh FUTURA. The exhibition is called TARPESTRIES—not bad, but I’m coming up with my own name for it. I’m calling the show With Experience Comes Wisdom—a new visual dialect for public consumption. Colossal pieces that represent the latest chapter in the ongoing FUTURA saga, written lovingly for you and me in that perfectly articulated FUTURA language. You may notice some wonderful, familiar FUTURA-isms, but the lexicon has, once again, exploded geometrically.

The work was created on site at the two fab Firestone spaces, which leads us here. Praise should not be reserved solely for the veteran virtuoso. A story this deep can only be told properly when a gallery possesses the ability to appreciate the artist’s vibe. This seems easy but it actually isn’t. Experience required, respect given.

Ok. I’ll say goodbye now. Thanks for listening. One last thing. How wrong would it be if I didn’t at least acknowledge the spectral presence of an “action painter” who hailed from these parts? Legend has it he preferred to stand over his canvases and paint them outstretched on the floor. I don’t know about you but that sounds really cool to me . . .

FUTURA2000 in East Hampton, 2022. Image courtesy of ShiLei McGurr









BLUE PICKET FENCE 2022
SPRAY PAINT, ACRYLIC, AND MARKER
ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
96 X 120 INCHES



ANDESINE 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
96 X 72 INCHES

FOLLOWING SPREAD
EMERALD 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
96 X 72 INCHES

SCORPIOIDES 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
84 X 60 INCHES







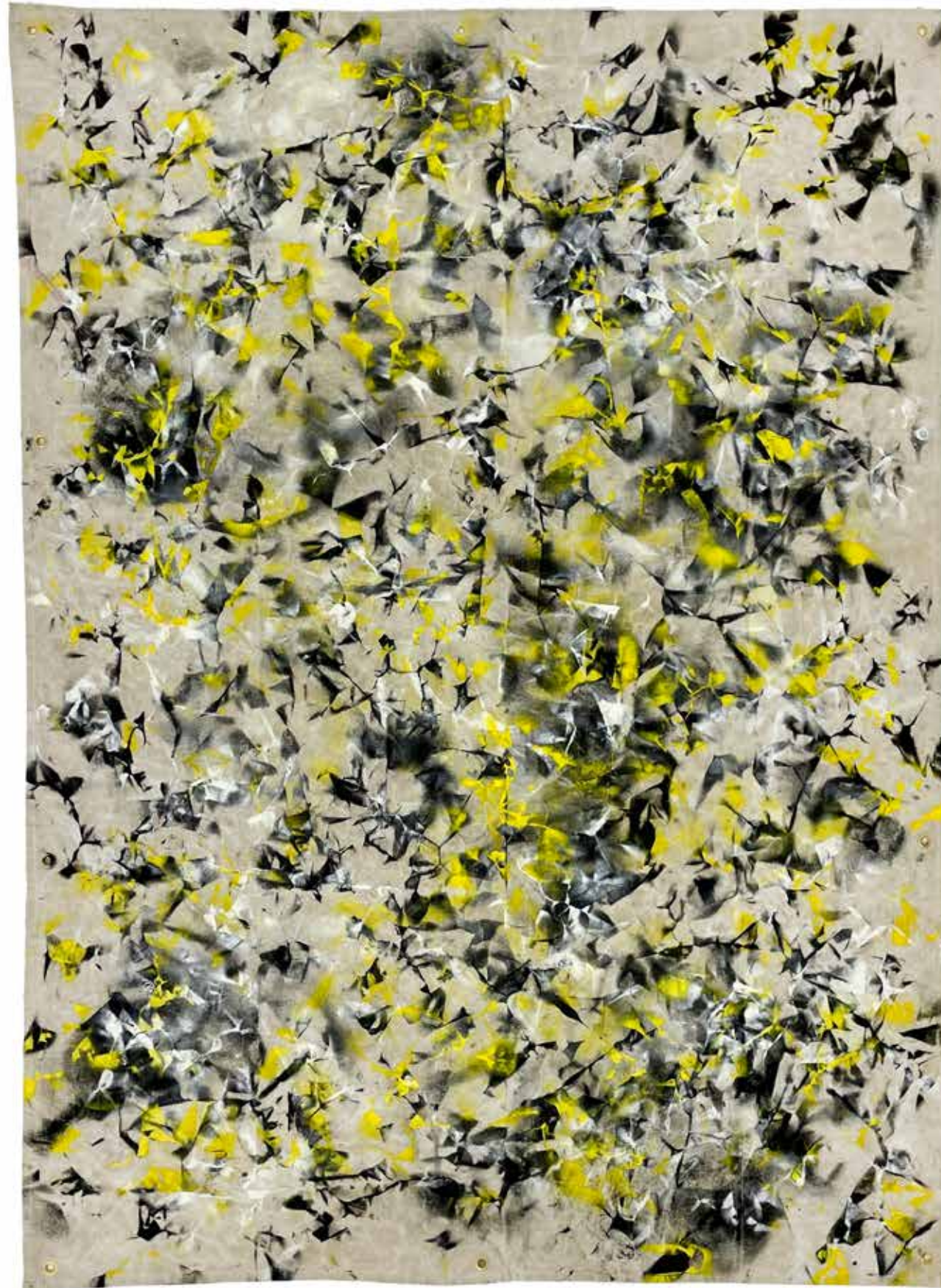


RIGHT
39 MEG 2022
BRONZE
47½ X 30½ X 24¼ INCHES

OPPOSITE
FROLICK 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON CANVAS TARP
84 X 60 INCHES

FOLLOWING SPREAD
SPECTROLITE 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
69 X 92 INCHES

BELLS OF IRELAND 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
84 X 60 INCHES





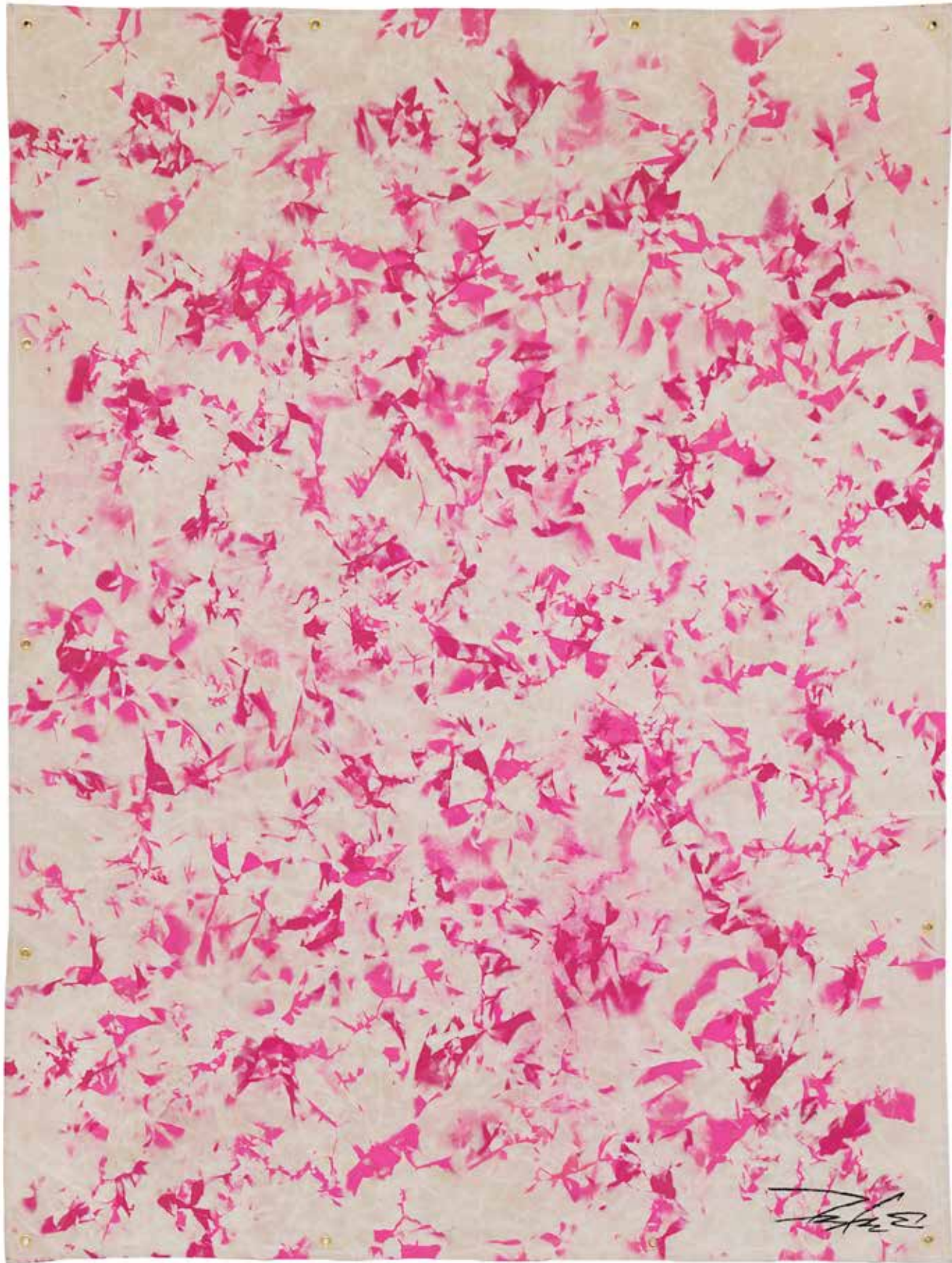


WISTERIA 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
84 X 60 INCHES

FOLLOWING SPREAD
TOURMALINE 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
96 X 72 INCHES

PETUNIA 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
84 X 60 INCHES







GREEN BERET 2022
SPRAY PAINT, ACRYLIC, AND MARKER
ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
84 X 60 INCHES

FOLLOWING SPREAD
PINK FLOYD 2022
SPRAY PAINT, ACRYLIC, AND MARKER
ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
84 X 60 INCHES

PURPLE HAZE 2022
SPRAY PAINT, ACRYLIC, AND MARKER
ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
84 X 60 INCHES









BENTO BOX 2022
SPRAY PAINT, OIL, ACRYLIC, MARKER ON CANVAS
62 X 127 INCHES



SYSTEM SEVEN 2021
SPRAY PAINT ON CANVAS
48 X 48 INCHES

CELL TOWER 2022
SPRAY PAINT AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS TARP
94 X 69 INCHES



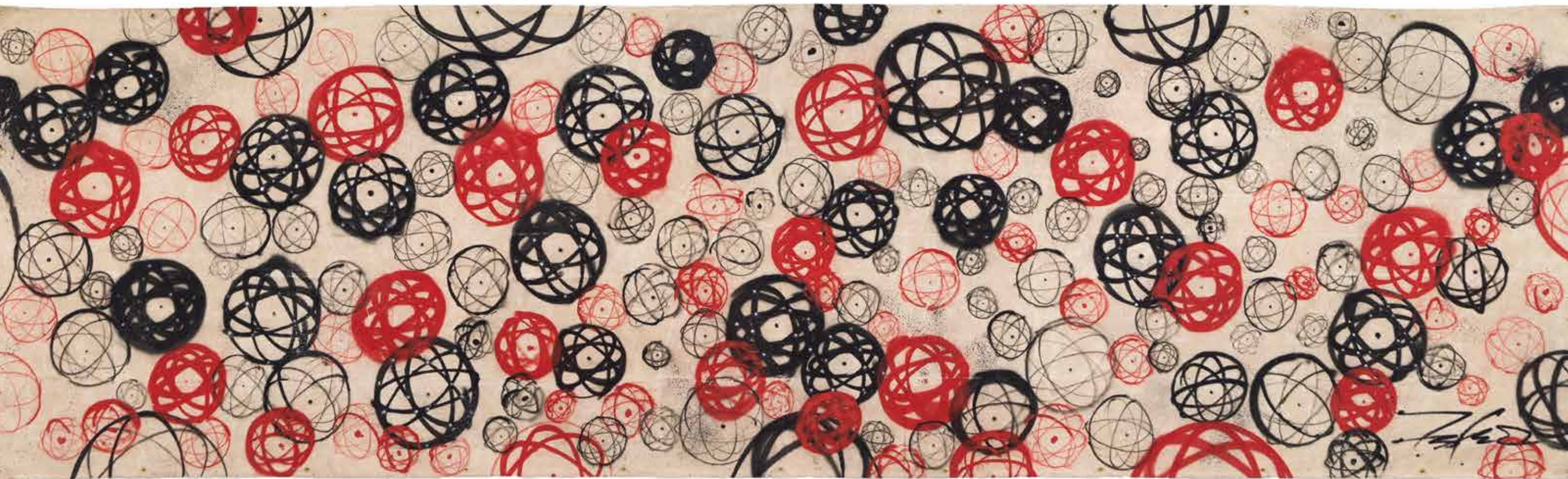


BAKER'S DOZEN 2022
SPRAY PAINT, ACRYLIC AND
MARKER ON CANVAS TARP
96 X 120 INCHES





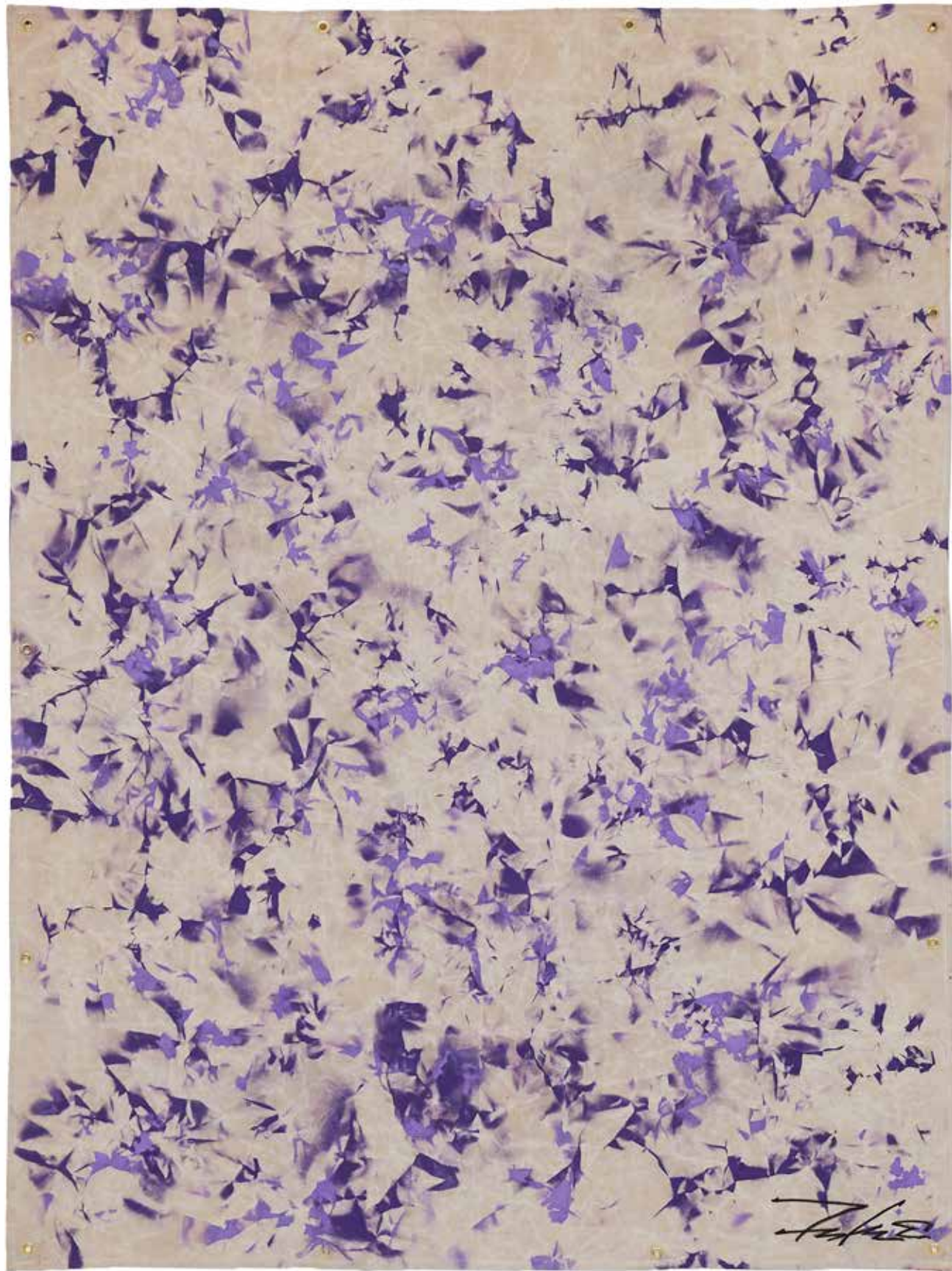
THE METALLIC AGE 2022
SPRAY PAINT AND ACRYLIC ON CANVAS TARP
133 X 138 INCHES



ANTIGEN 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
69 X 234 INCHES

FOLLOWING SPREAD
LAVENDER QUARTZ 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
92 X 69 INCHES

FIRE OPAL 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
96 X 72 INCHES

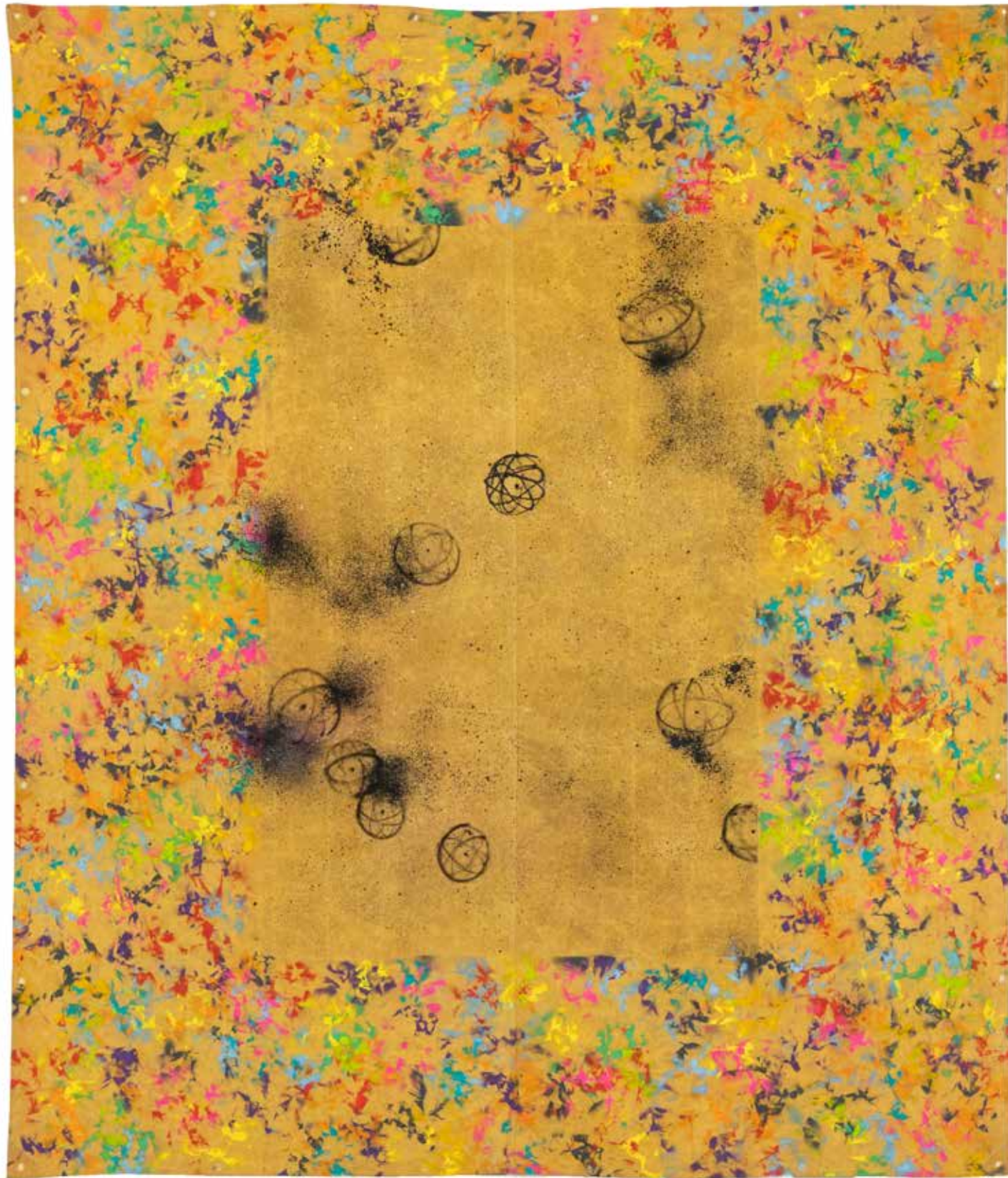




FUTURA2000 in East Hampton, 2022.
Image courtesy of ShiLei McGurr



TURMERIC 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON WAXED CANVAS TARP
117 X 138½ INCHES



MAGIC CARPET 2022
SPRAY PAINT ON CANVAS TARP
118 X 188 1/2 INCHES

