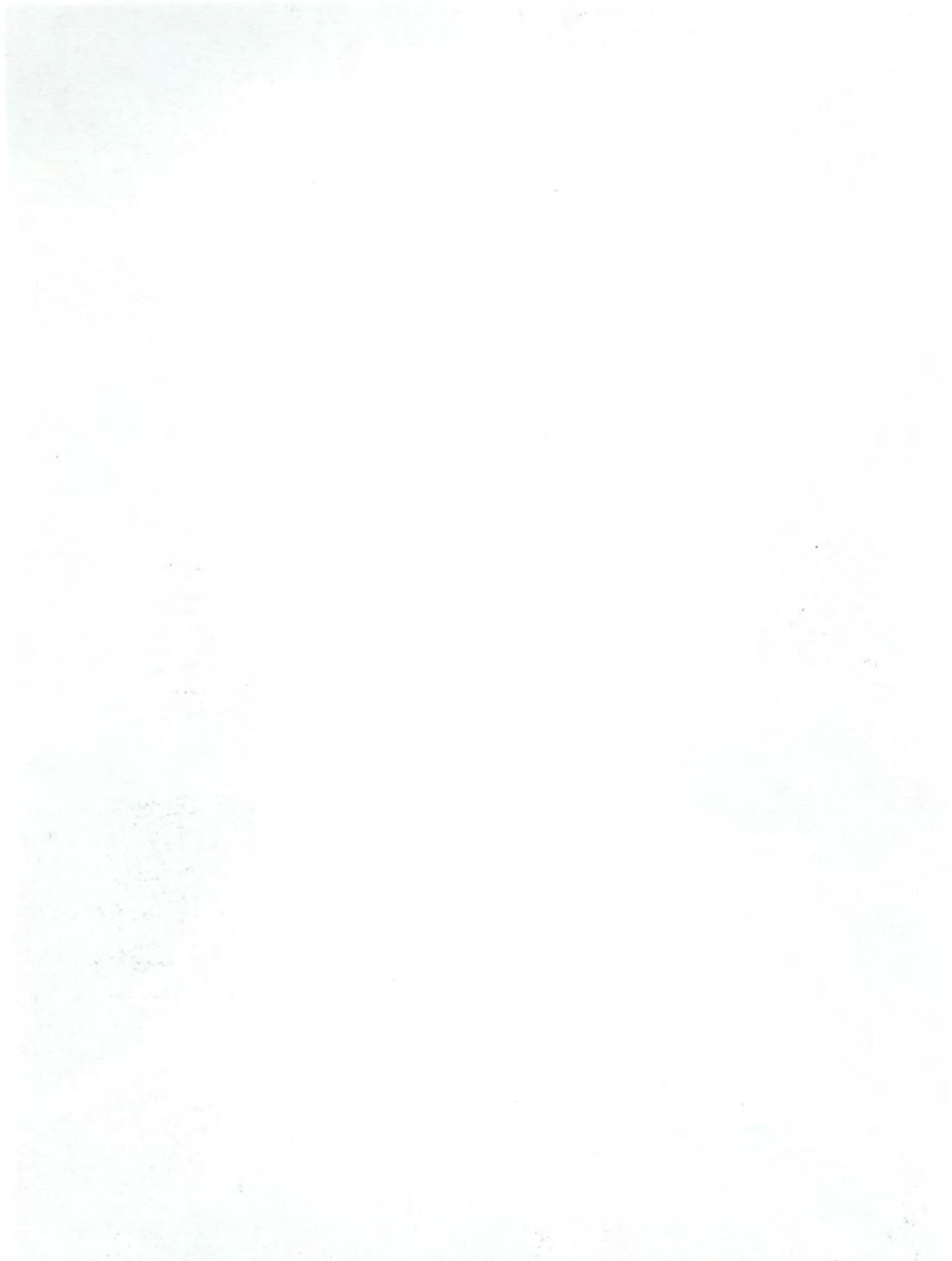


NO FUTURE





Mask, acrylic and polymer car paint on panel, 35x25in, 2015

KARA JOSLYN

NO FUTURE

2016

BEAUTIFUL TREASON: Adventures in the Art of Transmutation

Alizarin Miller

Kara Joslyn's series of works for her UC San Diego Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition, *No Future*, amounts to a spellbinding transmutation of images. To transmute comes from the Latin *transmutare*, "to change across," which denotes a metamorphosis of sorts from one form or state to another. A second and more fitting definition (for both the luminous surfaces of Joslyn's works and her extraordinary, yet enigmatic process) is derived from the 12th century French *transmutation*, used to indicate an alchemical transformation—the pseudoscientific process through which base compounds were converted to precious metals like gold and silver. Given her interest in illusion, optics, and elements of design, this series reveals continuities in Joslyn's practice but also significant departures from some of her earlier works grounded in decorative and graphic elements, architectural mimesis, and archaic imagery. Ultimately, the work is about a relationship to the (new) images she teases into being on the painting surface.

The works of Joslyn's series occupy various productive tensions that merit consideration apart from her source material. Pauline Johnson's 1958 instructional book, *Creating with Paper: Basic Forms and Variations*. Yet brief consideration of the book brings about some interesting contrasts and ideas. For example, in terms of scale, Joslyn's subjects are 1:1 with their frame. That is, the size of the painting surface is meant to emulate the size of the paper from which these forms may have been crafted in their extant iteration. However, "size" in Joslyn's series is an irrevocably relative term. There is no suggested dimension in Johnson's instructions for her paper crafts; the only dimensional referent in Joslyn's paintings is an interiorized, *mise-en-abyme* type relationship between original objects of unknown size, commercial photography blown up or shrunk accordingly for book presentation, and the artist's transmutation of these objects-qua-photographs into paintings. Their imageness blooms from this particular quality.

Johnson's book also conveys the ethos of domestic mid-century America, an interesting counterpoint to both Joslyn's process and the wholly distinct world of images in her series. The 1950s was a time that heralded the reinvigoration of the nineteenth century cult of domesticity—a setting where we can easily imagine suburban housewives creating Christmas decorations from *Creating with Paper*. What emerges here rather ironically is the fact that Joslyn herself is characterized by none of the supposed "virtues" of womanhood espoused by this set of provincial gender attitudes, nor does she reproduce any of the conventionalizing discourses of American vernacular cultural production. Instead, she's a Bowie-loving feminist punk powerhouse whose demeanor comes through in her work—a taste for rebellion, a borderline obsessive attention to detail, an investment in unorthodox and somewhat anonymous subject matter, and a dedication to the craft of image making juxtaposed with an interest in industrial materials and methods. Joslyn wears neon socks, leopard print, bangles, and the hot orange pigment of "Lady Danger" with the same ease that the geometries of each panel wear their car paints and Interference Blues.

Inseparable from the enigmatic character of the images in each painting is Joslyn's technique. She teases out the delicate, seemingly ephemeral quality of her forms using hand-mixed polymers applied with a painstaking, laborious process of masking and airbrushing. Joslyn's works also play tricks on us in terms of thematic content and image-material relationships. The work calls up several interesting tensions, most notably between the hand-made and industrial and their respective links to the feminine intimations of domestic handicraft versus the typically masculine associations of car paint with the auto body shop. In traversing supposedly "natural" gender distinctions as well as the outwardly dichotomous relationship between the intimate, private space of the home suggested by her subjects and the space of industry and commerce suggested by her medium, Joslyn exposes these categorical distinctions as constructs.

Switching gears. An early version of Michel Foucault's essay, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe," an exploratory text about René Magritte's celebrated painting, *The Treachery* [translated also as "treason"] of *Images* (1928-29), was published in the French journal, *Les Cahiers du Chemin* (incidentally) ten years after the first printing of *Creating*

with *Paper*. Magritte's somewhat wayward accounts of the concept of "similitude" in painting met with a reckoning of sorts in Foucault's iconic essay. Yet Foucault was hung up on the precedence of text and its semiological significance in painting. In lieu of a typically overwrought attention to the hierarchical register of signs in the old hat of canonized art history and theory, Joslyn describes painting as a "somatizing" experience, a means of experiencing objects rather than representing them. Joslyn's works themselves emit somewhat somatic and immaterial qualities simultaneously. Strikingly "real" in a bodily sense, we can almost feel our fingernails sliding along the impeccably rendered creases of *Fold* or scoring the curves of *Moon*, yet the objects do not exist. They are no longer extant.

Illusionism has a long history in painting, but for our purposes we'll keep with Surrealism—a movement often characterized by a psychological subterranean of out-of-time images and dreamlike non sequiturs rather than, for example, the deeply historicized allegorical and religious symbolism of painterly trompe l'oeil in the still life genre. Joslyn's series evokes association with some of the qualities rendering in Magritte's *The Lovers*, *Le Perreux-sur-Marne* (1928). The delicate folds and play of shadows in *Crumple* and *Mask 2* are wrought with the same admirable attention to material illusion as was given to the sateen white fabric individually draping the figures of Magritte's embracing couple. In contrast to the disrupted voyeurism one experiences when looking at *The Lovers*, any human subject—the one wearing the mask or whose neatly manicured fingers perhaps sliced and folded the paper in *Duck*—is absent from the ethereal scape of Joslyn's levitating forms. The subjects of Joslyn's work are divorced entirely from their source material and original context [the intermediary "space" of photography] and given a new life, though perhaps a solitary one—a floating world of something ghostly and arrested. *Through the Looking-Glass* style, in hallucinatory, albeit vernacular images. Yet the works, miraculous as they seem, still convey the terrestrial realities of process, skill, and materiality. The slippage between object, photograph, and painterly depiction is reconstituted in images for which the representational potentiality of the paintings in fact slips away—while one can sense a deeply somatic relationship to process or between ourselves and the subjects, it is difficult to imagine these floating figures in a room or

resting on a surface of some kind in the same way we cannot quite fathom their iridescence. Joslyn's luminously depicted models indeed "invade" her supports much in the way Foucault observes of Magritte's subjects. The empty masks and lustrous images of folded or crumpled sheets are both enigmatic and insistent. There is no human subject. These are images that ask to be themselves, thoughtfully.

Later republished as a book, Foucault's essay was accompanied by two letters from Magritte to Foucault. Foucault's prose in the essay is undeniably lovely, but it is Magritte more so than Foucault that seems to convey something of Joslyn's approach to her series of works. In a letter from May 23, 1966, Magritte writes:

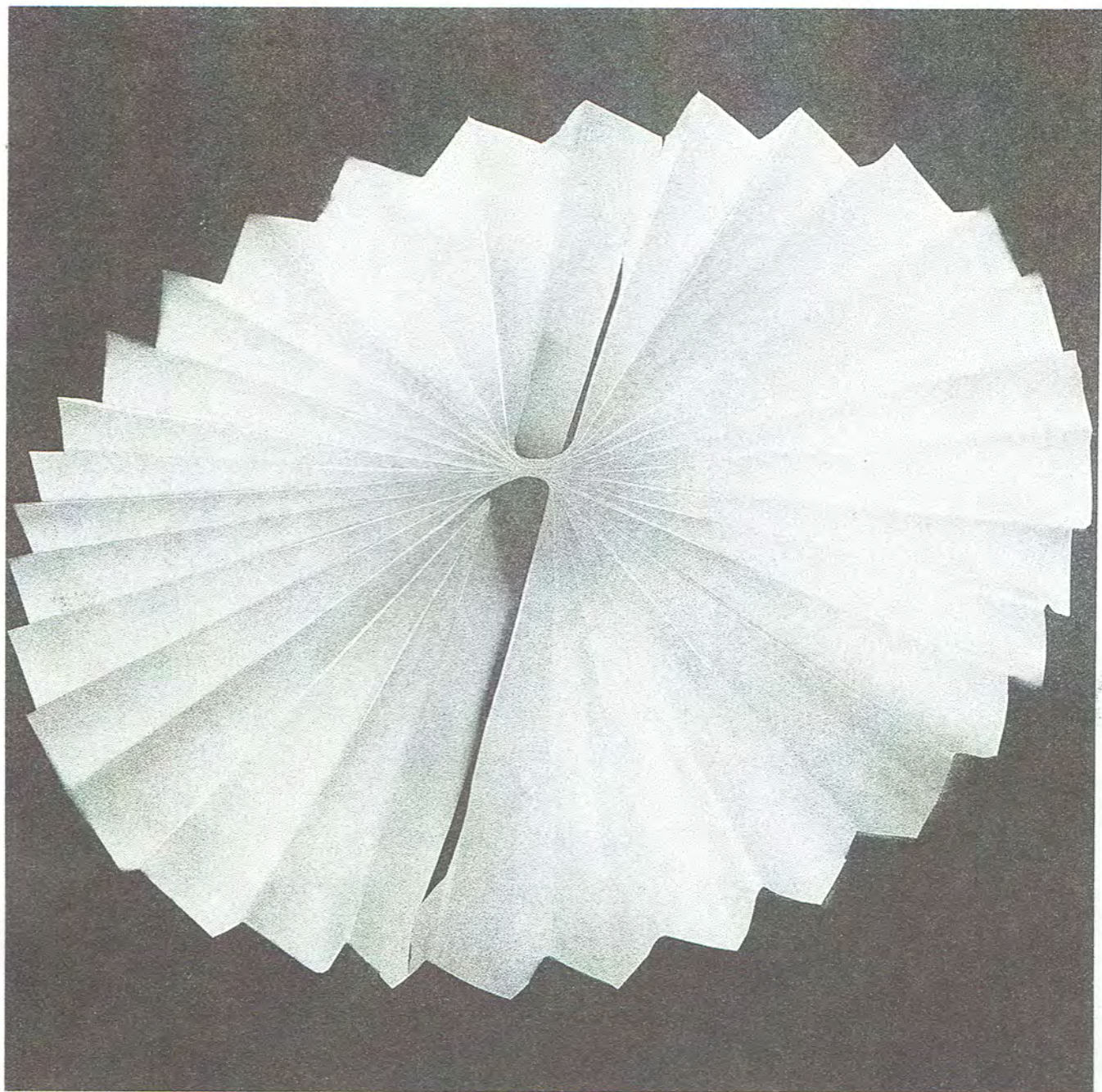
On this topic [similitude versus resemblance], it is evident that a painted image—intangible by its very nature—hides nothing, while the tangibly visible object hides another visible thing—if we trust our experience.

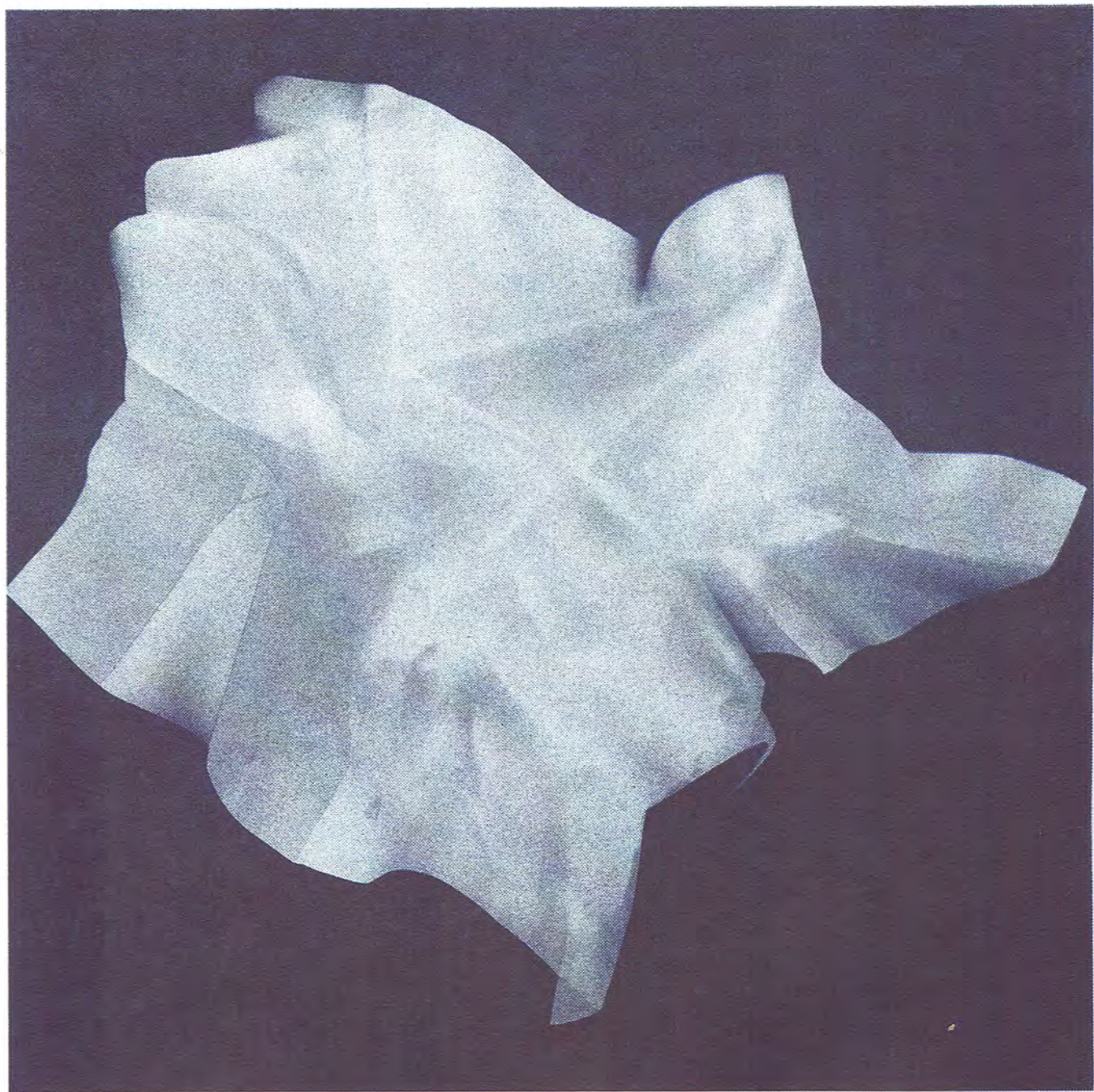
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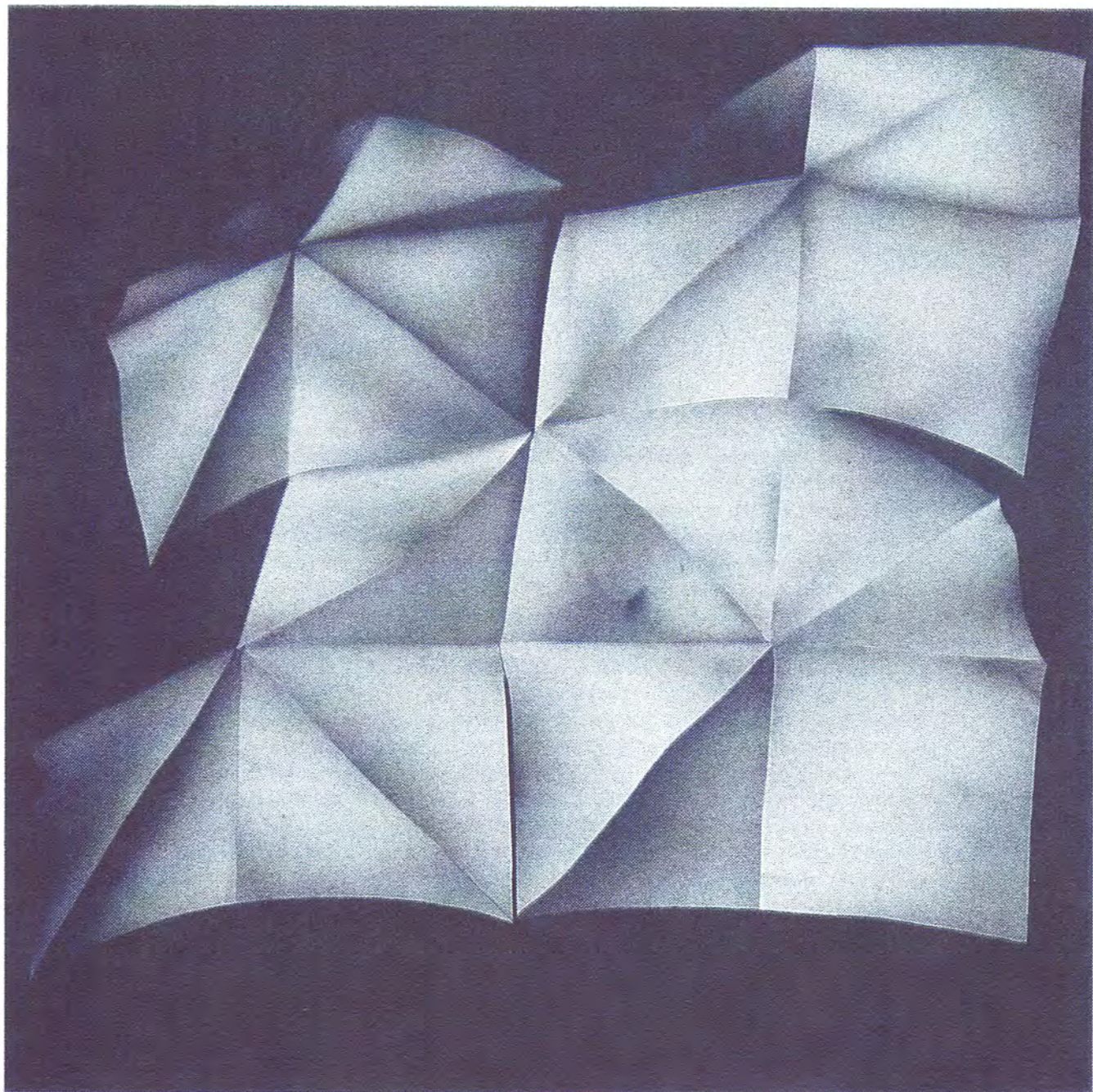
What does not "lack" importance is the mystery evoked in fact by the visible and the invisible, and which can be evoked in principle by the thought that unites "things" in an order that evokes mystery.¹

As Joslyn sees it, the mystifying and ambiguous attributes of her paintings are what make them interesting. The transmutation of her subjects is such that we as viewers also form relationships to each as a unique and storied image. Though a series sourced from a single origin and crafted with similar techniques, each panel conveys its individuality—*Mask* is flamboyant and slightly silly, but you could depend on him in a pinch. *Heart* is effeminate and has an antisocial side. *Fold* can be cutting and perhaps a bit cold sometimes. *Eye* really has her shit together. These unfaithful forms, these oxymorons, these enthralling shapeshifters—a beautiful treason of images.

¹ See Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe: With Illustrations and Letters by Rene Magritte*, trans. and ed. James Harkness (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 57.







Fan Fan, acrylic and polymer car paint on panel, 14x14in, 2016
Crumple, acrylic and polymer car paint on panel, 14x14in, 2015
Fold, acrylic and polymer car paint on panel, 14x14in, 2015

SELF-TITLED: The work of Kara Joslyn

Melinda Guillen

*OH BONDAGE! UP YOURS!*¹

Chain-store chain-smoke

I consume you all

Chain-gang chain-mail

I don't think at all

Oh bondage up yours!

Oh bondage no more!

No Future is a series of paintings featuring simplified craft paper forms: masks, moon, heart, duck, pinwheel and others by the artist Kara Joslyn. The exhibition is a painted index of displaced familiar forms that are sourced from a 1950s instructional craft book of folded paper formal techniques—themselves, forms already transposed onto the book's pages—and then, by the artist, materially transposed again on individual two-dimensional pictorial planes. The index of Joslyn's paintings could be read as mimetic pages from a book. Psychoanalytic feminist and cultural theorist Luce Irigaray describes mimesis as a deliberate strategy. "To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself simply to be reduced to it... inasmuch as she is on the side of 'perceptible,' of 'matter' —to 'ideas,' in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by masculine logic, but so as to make 'visible,' by an effect of playful repetition... to 'unveil' the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply reabsorbed into this function."²

I consider the transposition of forms in Joslyn's work less as appropriation (which implies traceable originality or ownership) and more as a mimetic process of recovery. She is interested in both memory and fantasy and possesses a deep nostalgic attachment to objects from before her time: previous generations (especially the 1970s) accessed and maintained through collections of records, science fiction novels or rocks and minerals as geological souvenirs—just to name a few. Like

many feminist artists: she is well versed in the game of codification. The act of repeating or recreating a form that is central to Joslyn's mimetic process is akin to listening to a record or watching a film again and again. We do it to produce, confirm, and manifest our identity; a way of staking claim on the fleeting present moment, reflecting a process that is inherently object-based and ongoing.

THE EMPTY³

*A real party not just people who're faking fun
But everything gets erased before it's even said
And all that glitters isn't gold when inside it's dead
All that glitters is not gold*

The etymology of "iridescent" is nice and simple. "Iris" from the Greek word meaning "rainbow" and the Latin suffix of "escent" for "having a tendency toward." Interestingly, iridescence is also occasionally referred to as "goniochromism" and that is derived from "gonia" meaning "angle" and "chroma" for "colour."⁴ For anyone that has drawn pleasure from holding an iridescent crystal or mineral—labradorite or bornite, commonly referred to as "peacock ore," are just two examples; or the pearlescence of abalone shells; or looking up at a post-storm rainbow across a clearing sky or down at motor oil dispersed on the street, a subtle band of color upon the road's surface—you know such pleasure is timeless in the sense that it occurs frequently throughout our lives. Since the advent of modernity, the fascination with iridescence, prismatic color fields, light, and advancements in optic technologies led to countless produced variations of this iridescent effect, most notably in paint including the polymer car paint Joslyn uses—a nice nod, as a SoCal native, to lowrider car culture.

Goniochromism. I like it as an intersection of color and angle. I see a goniochromatic operation in Joslyn's practice: there's reciprocity in the understated iridescence—you find it along the forms when you stay with the work a little bit longer, when it triangulates with your line of vision and scattered light in the space. In a recent studio visit, Joslyn and I discussed the three key visual elements in her painting system: the black surface, represented forms, and use of iridescent paints.

The paint pigments are actually cut with a laser, the same technology used in holography (another interest of the artist), which enables her to control the intensity and flake of the color. Interestingly, Joslyn does not paint with white and employs a technique much closer to drawing where she sands the surface down. In her process, the only actual void is white. The black paint on the panel is not a "background" to the form, rather, they co-exist precisely on the same temporal and spatial plane, reinforced by the maximized flattened surface.

*DO THEY OWE US A LIVING?*⁵

Fuck the politically minded / here's something I want to say,

About the state of nation / the way it treats us today.

At school they give you shit / drop you in the pit.

You try, you try, you try to get out / but you can't because they've fucked you about.

Then you're a prime example of how they must not be.

This is just a sample of what they've done to you and me.

For some, there may be an immediate discomfort in reconciling the three-dimensional optical effect of the formal representations on the surface of Joslyn's paintings. For example, in *Fold (Geometric Solids and Variations)*, 2015, a crumbled piece of paper is not so, but rather, upon sustained engagement, the flat form is materially simple: paint applied meticulously to the panel so that the form seems to appear as such. However, unlike the patriarchal myth of post-war Abstract Expressionist painting and its critical mystification (or convolution) in the United States, Joslyn isn't trying to withhold a deeper meaning from her viewers. You need not have a trained eye to enjoy the work, you simply need an open one. Joslyn isn't trying to withhold a deeper meaning from her viewers. You need not have a trained eye to enjoy the work, you simply need an open one.

The logic of expanded viewership undoubtedly harkens back to some of the central ideas in 1960s Conceptual Art, what we understand now as a critical response to the boring old boys' club of formalism. It isn't surprising to me that Joslyn cites among her influences German visual artist Gerard Richter's work, particularly for

his exploration of memory and the notion of form as a record of imprinted energy; as well as pioneering conceptual artist Sol LeWitt. Although LeWitt emphasized the process of art making over the then-privileged status of the object, what is useful here is that process itself, according to LeWitt, does not follow a sequential order that requires intuition, creativity, or any type of rational thought. Rather, LeWitt felt as though the audience for art was already limitless and multifarious. Joslyn's critical (and punk) approach is quite similar. The work is for everyone (in its iridescence), forever and familiar (in its formal representation), while simultaneously for no one (in the white void negation) and exists right now, in your face (in the flattened surface). As LeWitt stated in his canonical text, *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, "It doesn't really matter if the viewer understands the concepts of the artist by seeing the art. Once it is out of his/her hand the artist has no control over the way a viewer will perceive the work. Different people will understand the same thing in a different way."²

MOONAGE DAYDREAM?

*I'm an alligator / I'm a mama-papa coming for you
I'm the space invader / I'll be a rock 'n' rollin' bitch for you
Keep your mouth shut / you're squawking like a pink monkey bird
And I'm busting up my brains for the words
Keep your 'lectric eye on me babe
Put your ray gun to my head
Press your space face close to mine, love
Freak out in a moonage daydream oh yeah*

When I think of my friend, the artist Kara Joslyn, I *HEAR* her. She's a force of nature—sweet and intuitive; cunning and deliberate; methodical and curious. Her voice registers on its own level like a compact burst of sonic energy. I didn't think much about it until now but there is an obvious visual relationship between blackened space, light, and iridescence in her work that is not oppositional but rather cosmological. Joslyn's practice is something like its own galaxy system with all the necessary seemingly disparate elements—cataclysmic explosions, dark matter, the

presence of light from long expired stars, spectral lines, electromagnetisms, space-time, subatomic particles, dissolution, rebirth, radio waves, and most importantly, the unknown. The unknown in modern life often signals anxiety about the future, but in the limitless expanse of the universe, the unknown is the beginning and end.

In Mesoamerican art historian George Kubler's excellent 1962 book, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*, he describes the temporal experience of forms writing, "Actuality is when the lighthouse is dark between flashes: it is the instant between the ticks of the watch: the rupture between past and future: the gap at the poles of the revolving magnetic field, infinitesimally small but ultimately real. It is the interchronic pause when nothing is happening. It is the void between events."⁸ Kara Joslyn's paintings are sweet individual moments of cosmological actuality.

¹ X-Ray Spex. *Germfree Adolescents*. 1978. EMI.

² Luce Irigaray. *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 76.

³ Le Tigre. *S/T*. 1999. Mr. Lady Records.

⁴ This sweet bit of information is readily available on any search engine on the Internet upon entering the word "iridescent"—try it.

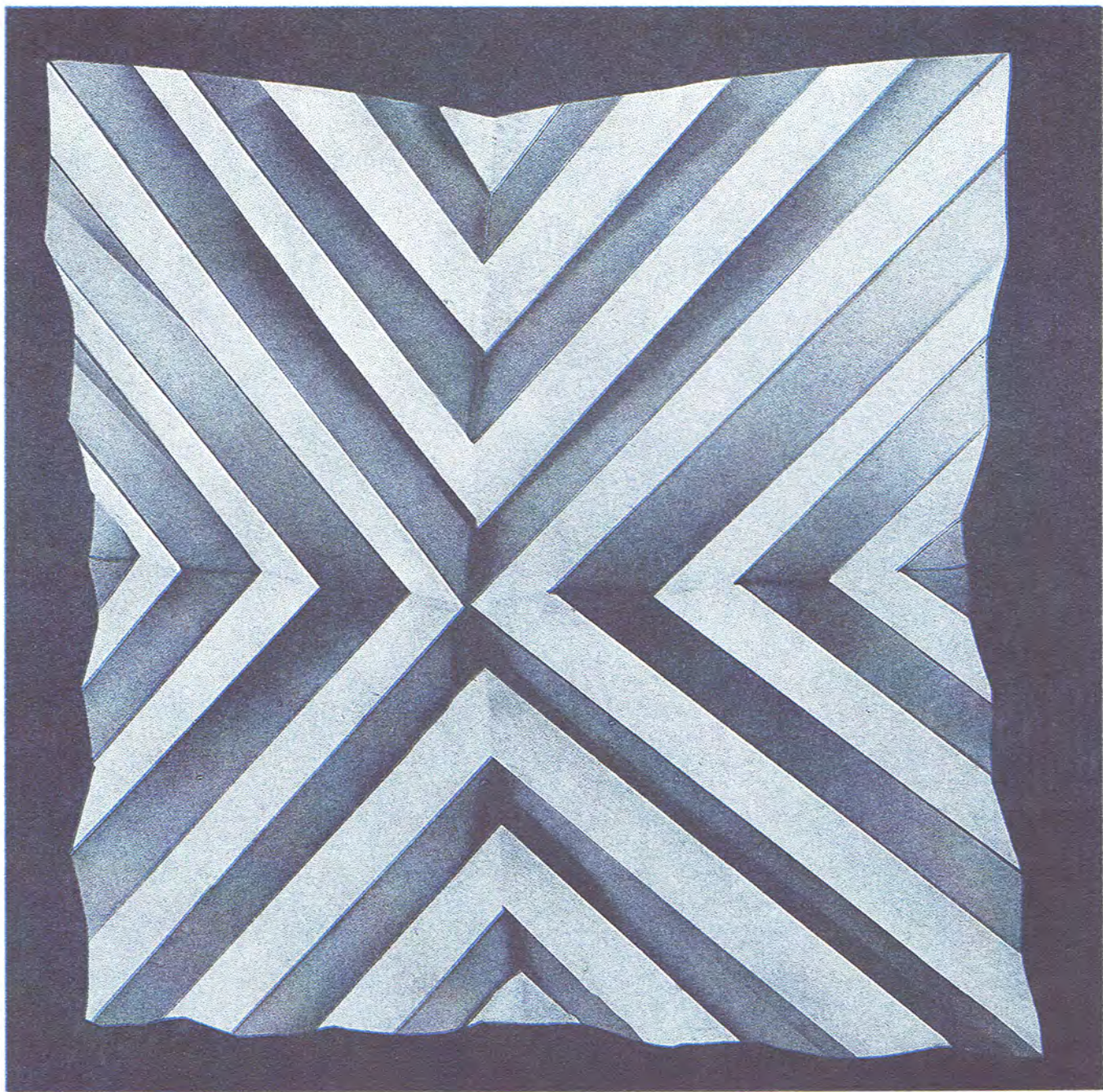
⁵ CRASS. *The Feeding of the 5000*. 1979. Small Wonder/Crass Records.

⁶ Sol LeWitt. "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" (1967), in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 14.

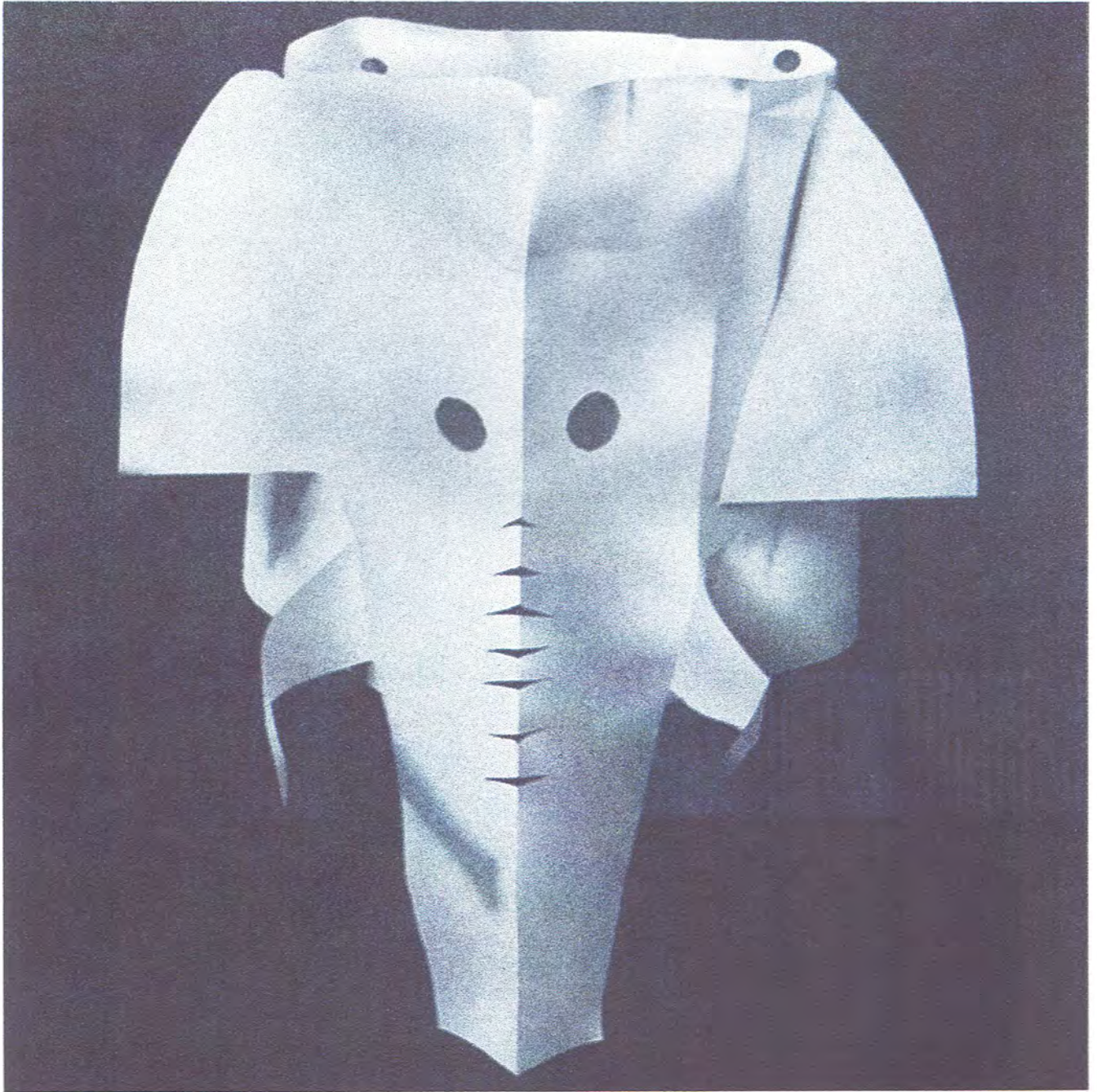
⁷ David Bowie. *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. 1972. RCA Records.

⁸ George Kubler. "The Nature of Actuality," in *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 17.

X. acrylic and polymer car paint on panel. 14x14in. 2015



Elephantasmagoria, acrylic and polymer car paint on panel, 36x36in, 2016



xo
kara joslyn
2016



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