

**HYUNSUN JEON**

WHEN YOU UNDERSTAND MY SECRET,  
IT BECOMES A GHOST

Esther Schipper, Berlin

September 13 - October 19, 2024



*Esther Schipper*

## Hyunsun Jeon



Hyunsun Jeon was born in 1989 in Seoul. She received her BFA and MFA in painting from Ewha Womans University in 2014 and 2018. The artist lives and works in Seoul.

The artist has been awarded and selected for the 20th Song Eun Art Award, Song Eun Art and Cultural Foundation (2020), Chong Kun Dang Fine Arts Prize (2017), ARKO Artist Curator Workshop (2015), 37th JoongAng Fine Art Prize, JoongAng Ilbo (2015), 99°C Promising Art Support Program, Seoul Foundation for Arts and Culture (2014), Sangsangmadang Membership Card Artwork Proposal: Art in Your Pocket, KT&G (2013), and Seoul Digital University Art Prize (2013).

Hyunsun Jeon has invented a unique pictorial language that employs a chromatic palette predominated by greens, blacks, and blues. Her expansive vocabulary of proportion—some simplified passages for example relate to pixelation in early video games—is suspended between symbolic geometry and suggestive landscape conveying an impending sense of poetic absence and artificial presence.

Inspired by the scenery surrounding the religious figures in altarpieces or the deserted streets of a de Chirico painting, Jeon forges a world in which the main characters are omitted and instead shapes, strokes, and colors are the protagonists, caught in the constant maelstrom of becoming. She uses the medium of watercolor on canvas to build images slowly with small brushstrokes, allowing layers and objects to blend into each other yet yield a flat surface. The geometric forms in her paintings are often echoed in the three-dimensional structures in which she stages her works.

In summer 2023, Esther Schipper presented Hyunsun Jeon's works at **Dui Jip Ki**, a group exhibition of eight Korean artists that took place in the gallery locations in Seoul and Berlin. Other exhibitions of the artist include **The 12th Seoul Mediacity Biennale THIS TOO, IS A MAP**, Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul (2023); **The Moments We Encounter**, Suwon Ipark Museum of Art, Suwon (2022); **ARTSPECTRUM2022**, Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul (2022); **Meet Me in the Middle**, Gallery2, Seoul (2022); **Hay in a Needle Stack**, Korean Cultural Center in Hong Kong, Hong Kong (2021); **The 20th Song Eun Art Award Exhibition**, Song Eun Art Space, Seoul (2020); **Hotel Express**, Culture Station Seoul 284, Seoul (2020); **The adventures of Korean painting: I will go away all by myself**, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Cheongju (2019); **6th Chong Kun Dang Fine Arts Prize Exhibition**, Sejong Center, Seoul (2019); **Red Green Corners**, P21, Seoul (2019); **BOTANICA**, Busan Museum of Art, Busan (2018); **Parallel Paths**, Alternative Space LOOP, Seoul (2018); **Of Nature**, Suwon Ipark Museum of Art, Suwon (2018); **Forests and Swamps**, Weekend, Seoul (2017); **The Cone and Conversations**, Place MAK, Seoul (2015); and the **37th Joongang Fine art Prize Exhibition**, Hangaram Design Museum, Seoul (2015).

The artist's work is held in collections including: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul; Seoul Museum of Art, Seoul; Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Ansan; Suwon Ipark Museum of Art, Suwon.

Cover, detail: Hyunsun Jeon, **Where Apples are Drawn**, 2024, watercolor on canvas, 100 x 100 cm (39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in) (HJ 050)

## PRESS RELEASE

Esther Schipper is delighted to announce **When you understand my secret, it becomes a ghost**, Hyunsun Jeon's first solo presentation with the gallery. On view will be 10 new paintings by Jeon whose representation was announced in February of this year.

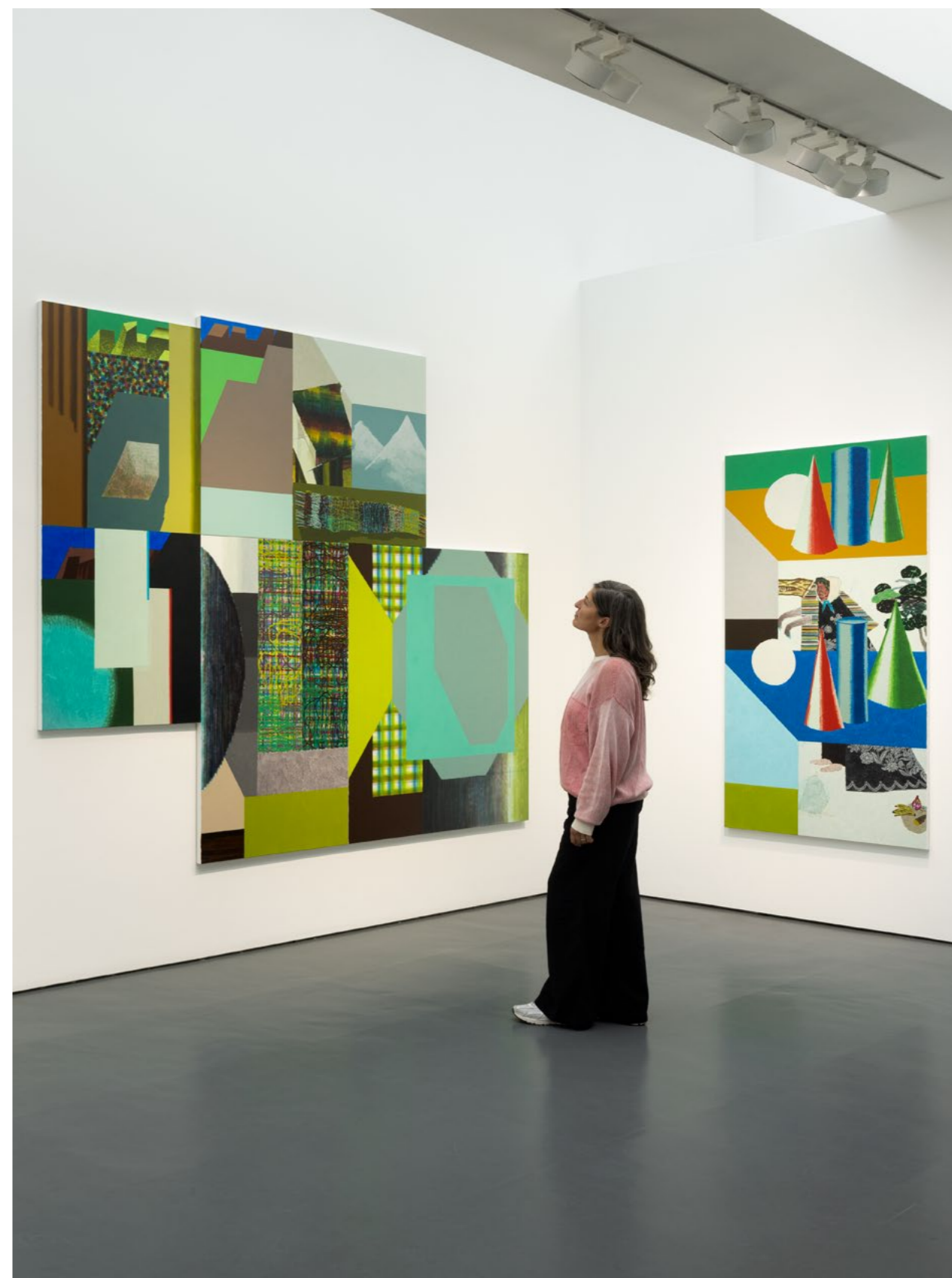
Hyunsun Jeon has developed a distinct iconography that combines figurative elements, such as trees, fruits, and objects from everyday life, with abstract forms, color planes and, increasingly since 2014, sets of classic geometric shapes. Jeon's forms are engaged in a constant shift between dimensions and associations—a cone, for example, may occur as a triangle, rendered with color gradients to suggest depth, or in the form of volcanoes, mountains or hats. Jeon's project has an all-encompassing, even world-building quality: quoting different styles as motifs, a work might simultaneously include painterly passages, pointillist sections or simulated brushstrokes, and motifs that have the linear quality of digital renderings or pixelation.

Installed in a loose grouping across three walls, Jeon's constellation makes the paintings appear to shift across the space. Echoing the overlapping and superimposition of motifs in the paintings themselves, the empty sections between the works is activated and becomes present as a kind of virtual space, an effect akin to windows on a computer screen or the layering of trompe l'oeil still lifes found on traditional folding screens found throughout East Asia.

Working in a medium that has traditionally thrived on creating the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, Jeon's work celebrates flatness. Her preferred medium, watercolor, achieves saturation and shallowness, maintaining a relatively thin layer of paint. Sometimes pierced by holes that open up views "into" the painting or superimposed fragments, Jeon finds ways to continuously remind the viewer of the planarity of the canvas, of looking at a flat surface, and of the actual thinness of the paint that supplies the illusion of depth.

Initially drawn to the mechanics of storytelling in folktales, mythology and religion, Jeon has sought a narration specific to the practice of painting. Inspired by the scenery surrounding the religious figures in altarpieces, Jeon forges a world in which the main character—the saints and sinners—are omitted. Instead shapes, strokes and colors, caught in the constant maelstrom of becoming, occupy it. Yet, while her art historical references to medieval altarpieces remain visible in the compositional structure, her aesthetic is grounded in the now. Jeon knowingly incorporates aspects of the digital world, in particular her generation's familiarity with and visual socialization through early video games. To Jeon, her work is a translation into analog form of characteristics she associates with the digital—among them being clear, sharp, smooth, sleek, or superficial.

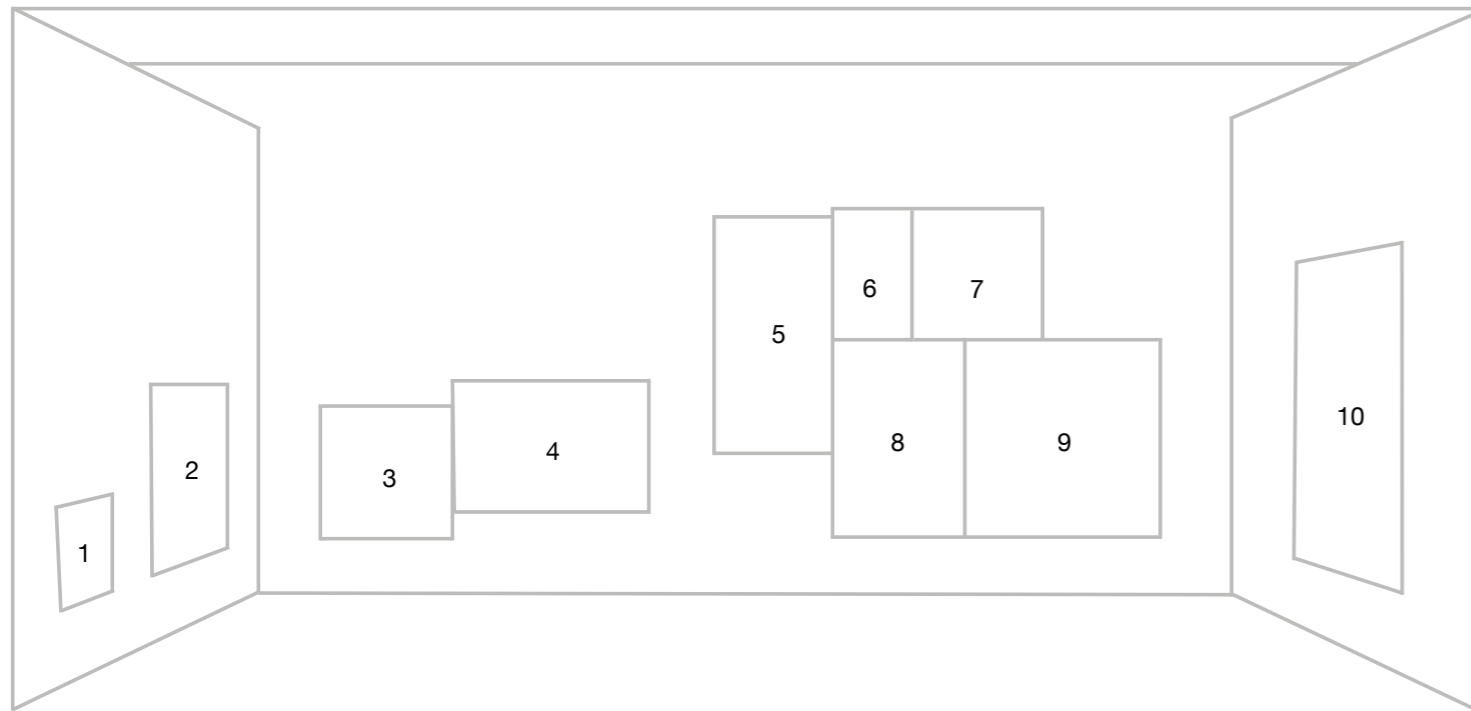
Her seriousness about what it means to be looking at something, explains Jeon's affinity for the work of Paul Cézanne. The French painter's comment to his younger friend Emile Bernard "to treat nature by means of the cylinder, the sphere, [and] the cone" resonated deeply with Jeon and to this day determines her artistic vision. Jeon's paintings don't tell stories or depict situations but in making us question every shape, plane, and motif, they communicate the uncertainty of our existence.



Exhibition view: Hyunsun Jeon, **When you understand my secret, it becomes a ghost**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2024)



Exhibition view: Hyunsun Jeon, **When you understand my secret, it becomes a ghost**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2024)



1. **A flower**, 2024  
Watercolor on canvas  
53 x 41 cm  
(HJ 048)
2. **Trees and Cherry**, 2024  
Watercolor on canvas  
117 x 80.5 cm  
(HJ 051)
3. **Where Apples are Drawn**, 2024  
Watercolor on canvas  
100 x 100 cm  
(HJ 050)
4. **Meet me in the Middle**, 2024  
Watercolor on canvas  
100 x 150 cm  
(HJ 053)
5. **Green Sky and Lake**, 2024  
Watercolor on canvas  
180 x 90 cm  
(HJ 052)
6. **Place**, 2024  
Watercolor on canvas  
100 x 60 cm  
(HJ 049)
7. **The Place Where It Was and Disappeared**, 2024  
Watercolor on canvas  
100 x 100 cm  
(HJ 047)
8. **Circle and Square**, 2024  
Watercolor on canvas  
150 x 100 cm  
(HJ 046)
9. **Cut and Sew-Checked**, 2024  
Watercolor on canvas  
150 x 150 cm  
(HJ 044)
10. **Two, Lying Down, Exposed Roots (14)**, 2024  
Watercolor on canvas  
200 x 100 cm  
(HJ 045)



Exhibition view: Hyunsun Jeon, **When you understand my secret, it becomes a ghost**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2024)



Exhibition view: Hyunsun Jeon, **When you understand my secret, it becomes a ghost**, Esther Schipper, Berlin (2024)

CUT AND SEW-CHECKED, 2024



Hyunsun Jeon, **Cut and Sew-Checked**, 2024, watercolor on canvas, 150 x 150 cm (59 x 59 in) (HJ 044)

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TWO, LYING DOWN, EXPOSED ROOTS (14), 2024



Hyunsun Jeon, *Two, Lying Down, Exposed Roots (14)*, 2024, watercolor on canvas, 200 x 100 cm (78 3/4 x 39 3/8 in) (HJ 045)

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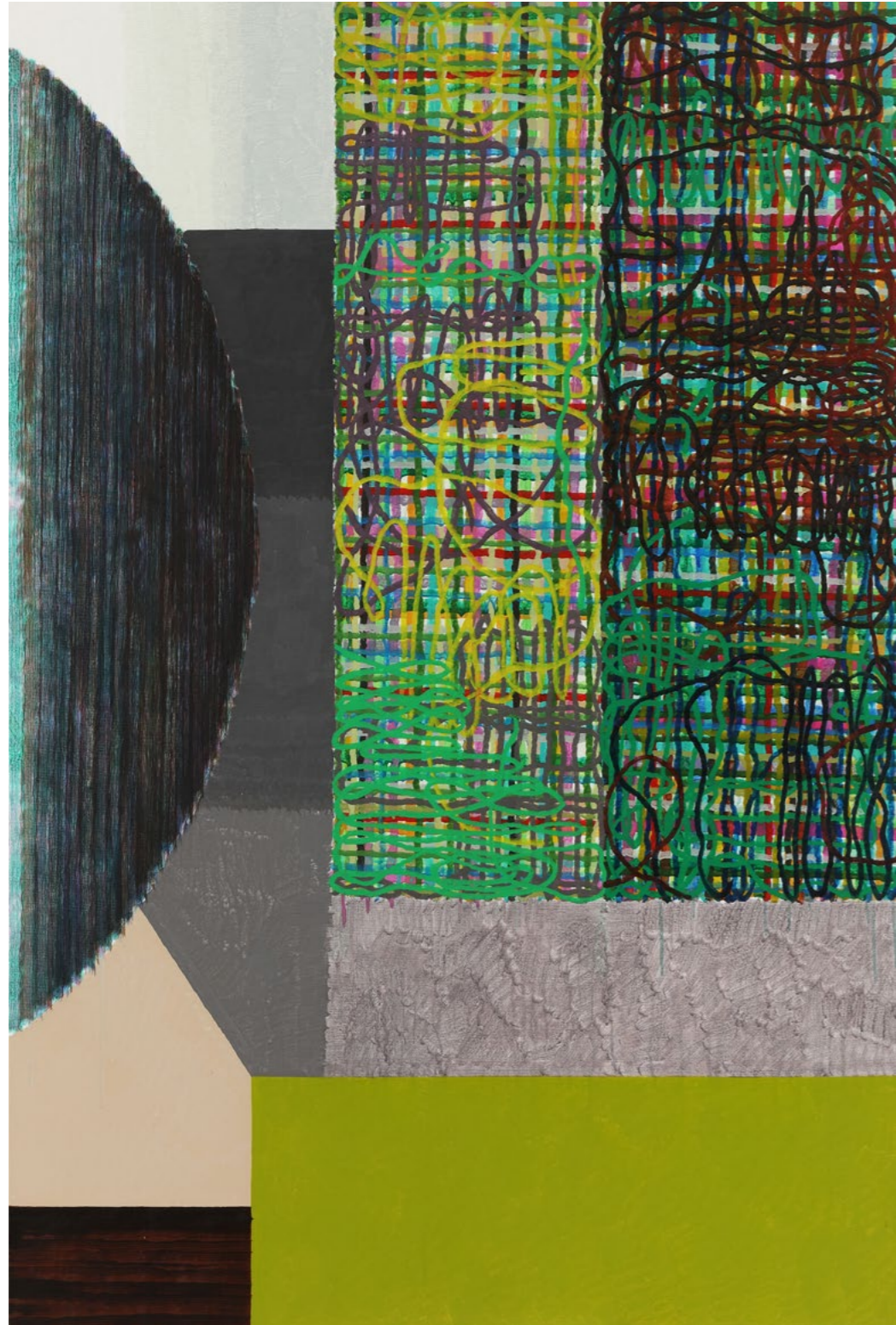
GREEN SKY AND LAKE, 2024



Hyunsun Jeon, **Green Sky and Lake**, 2024, watercolor on canvas, 180 x 90 cm (70 7/8 x 35 3/8 in) (HJ 052)

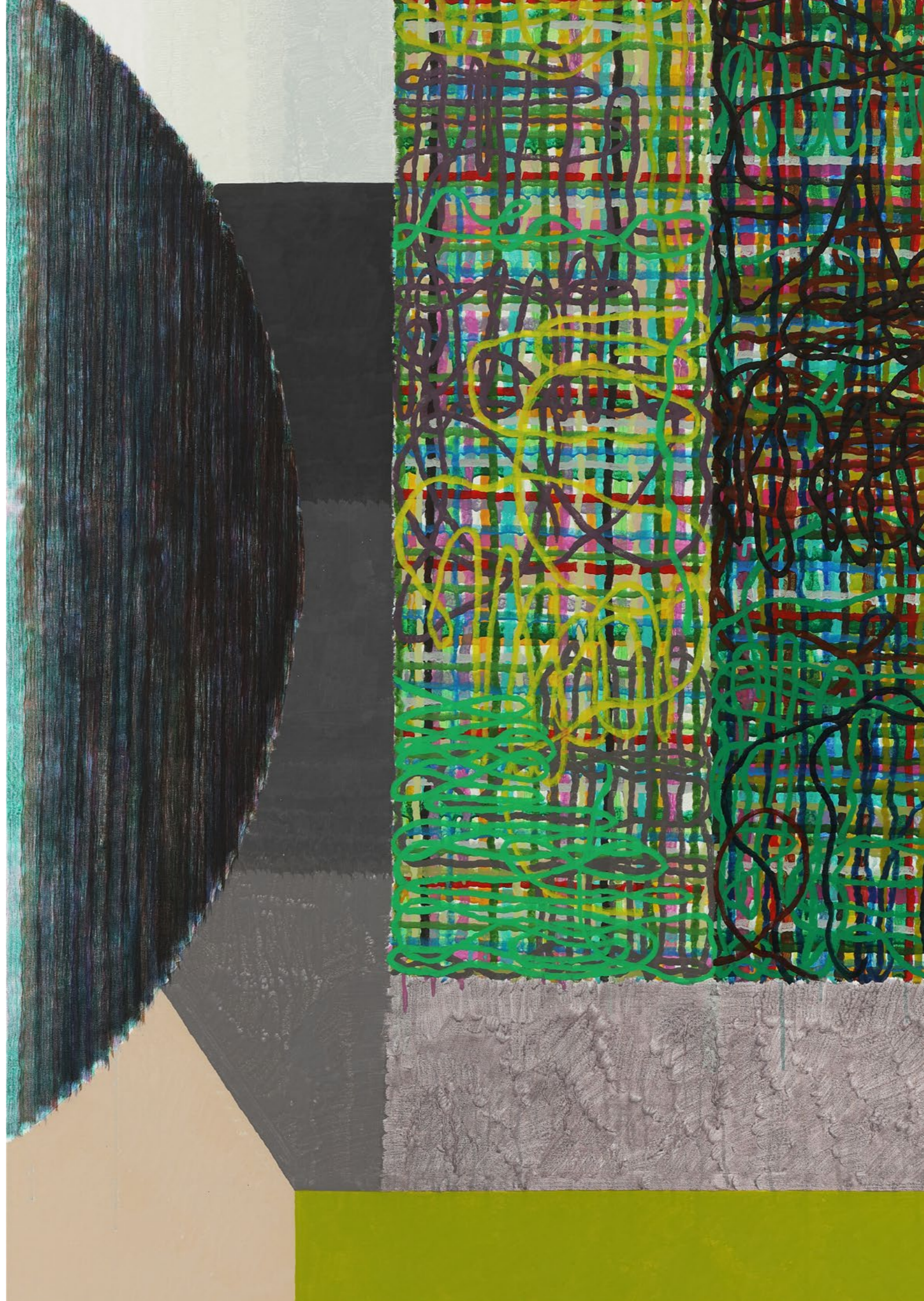
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Hyunsun Jeon, **Circle and Square**, 2024, watercolor on canvas, 150 x 100 cm (59 x 39 3/8 in) (HJ 046)

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MEET ME IN THE MIDDLE, 2024

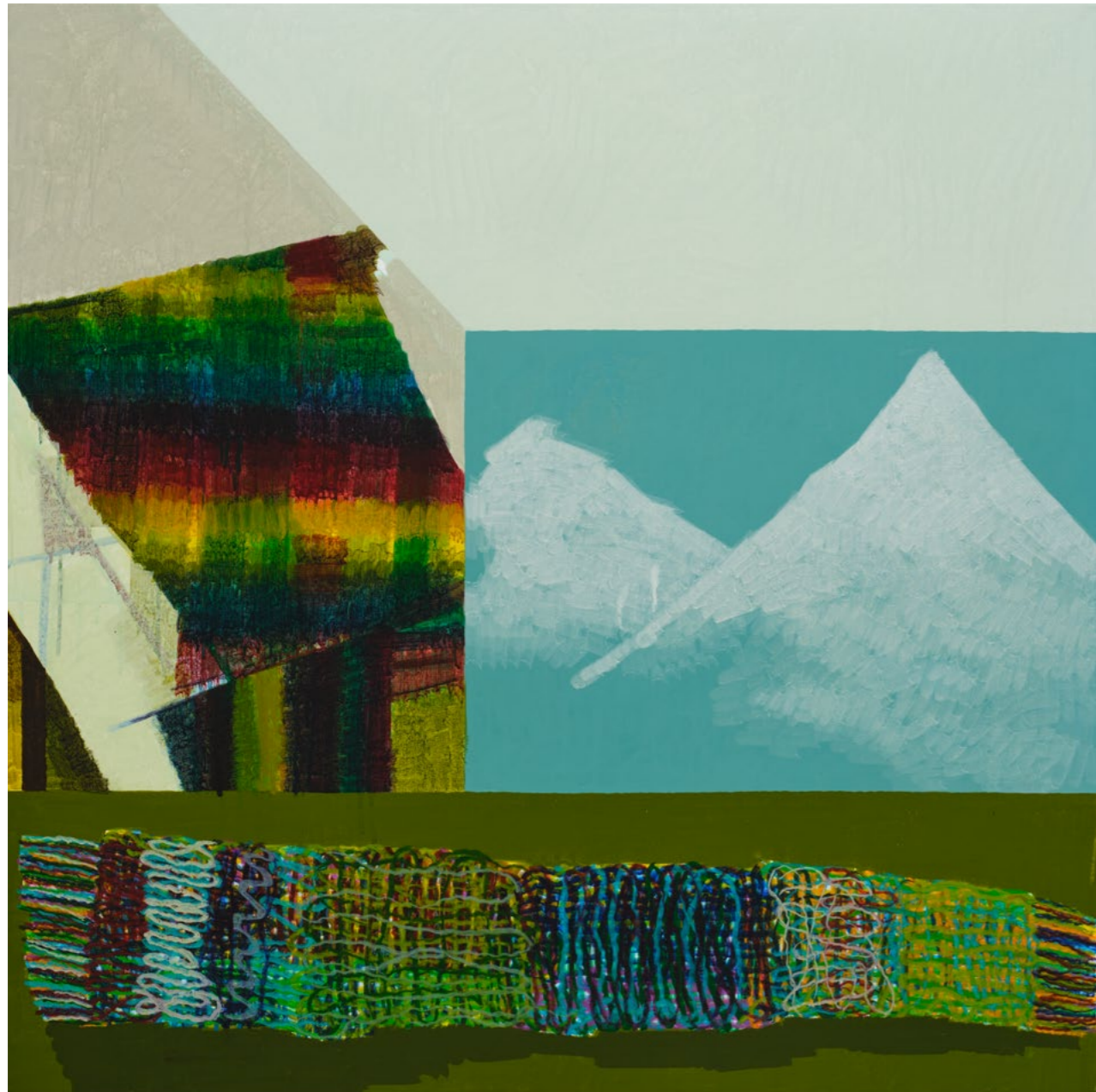


Hyunsun Jeon, **Meet me in the Middle**, 2024, watercolor on canvas, 100 x 150 cm (39 3/8 x 59 in) (HJ 053)

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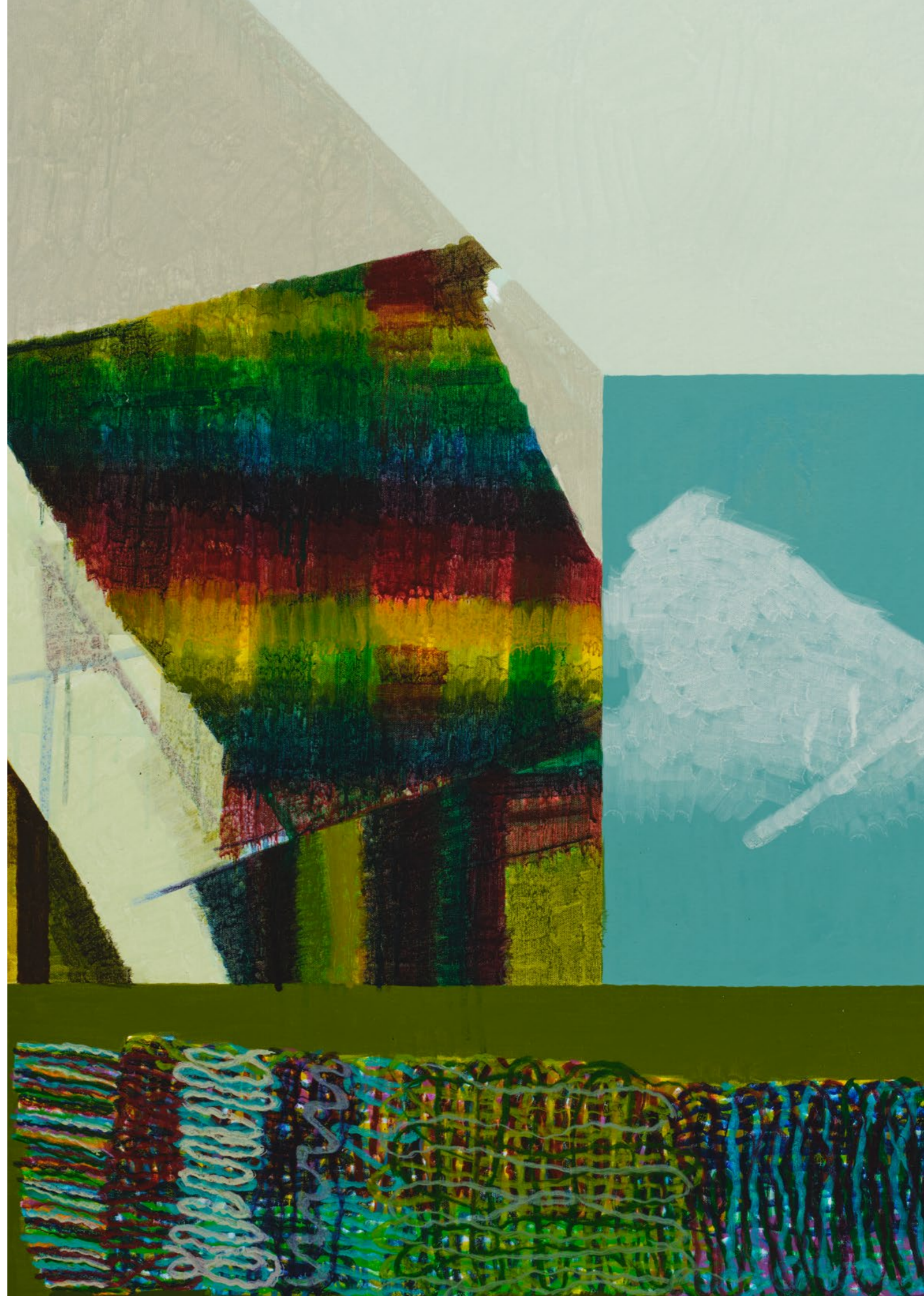


THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS AND DISAPPEARED, 2024



Hyunsun Jeon, **The Place Where It Was and Disappeared**, 2024, Watercolor on canvas, 100 x 100 cm (39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in) (HJ 047)

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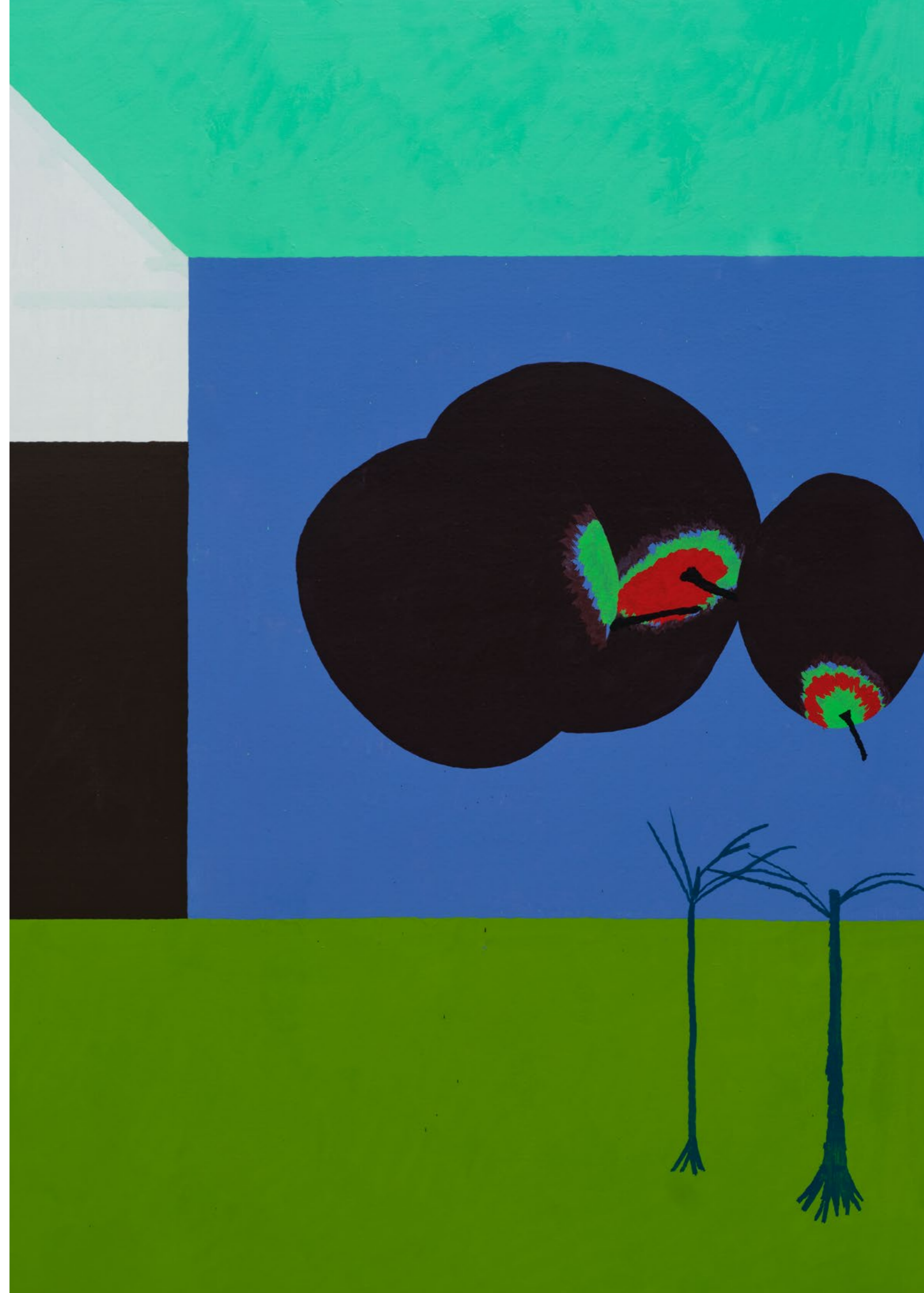


WHERE APPLES ARE DRAWN, 2024



Hyunsun Jeon, **Where Apples are Drawn**, 2024, watercolor on canvas, 100 x 100 cm (39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in) (HJ 050)

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TREES AND CHERRY, 2024



Hyunsun Jeon, **Trees and Cherry**, 2024, watercolor on canvas, 117 x 80,5 cm (46 x 31 3/4 in) (HJ 051)

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Hyunsun Jeon, **Place**, 2024, watercolor on canvas, 100 x 60 cm (39 3/8 x 23 5/8 in) (HJ 049)

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A FLOWER, 2024



Hyunsun Jeon, **A Flower**, 2024, watercolor on canvas, 53 x 41 cm (20 7/8 x 16 1/8 in) (HJ 048)

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