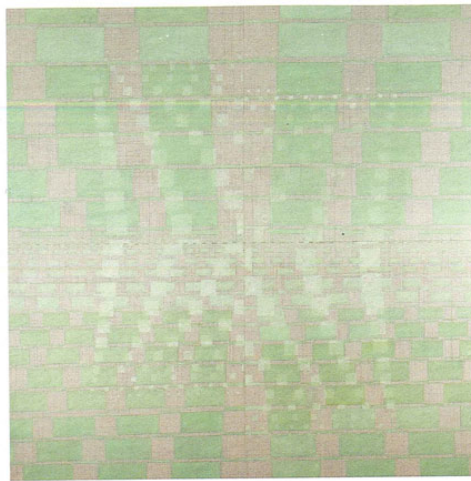




Elise Adibi, *Charcoal Drawing*, 2011, rabbit-skin glue, graphite, and charcoal on canvas, 72 x 72".



Elise Adibi, *Abiogenesis*, 2009, rabbit-skin glue, graphite, and oil on canvas, 72 x 72".



Elise Adibi, *Graphite 2*, 2010, rabbit-skin glue, oil primer, and graphite paint on canvas, 20 x 20".

OPENINGS

Elise Adibi

SUZANNE HUDSON

AMONG ITS CONNOTATIONS, the grid suggests pure geometry, with none of the anomalies endemic to nature. Agnes Martin, one of the grid's most distinguished adepts, famously sought to manifest this perfection in her art, and her paintings record her Sisyphean quest to iterate an ideal system. Martin remade the same compositions over and again, laying waste to trials that did not approach faultlessness. Morphology aside, Martin's paintings thus afford a telling contrast with the square-format grids of New York-based artist Elise Adibi. If Martin pursued a grid unadulterated by somatic reality—by fingers that twitch or pencils that grow dull—Adibi proceeds from



Elise Adibi, *Graphite Monochrome*, 2012, rabbit-skin glue, oil, and graphite powder on canvas, 30 x 30".

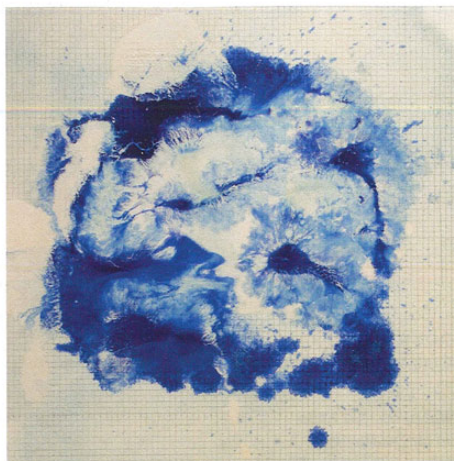


Elise Adibi, *Oxidation Painting*, 2011, rabbit-skin glue, oil, copper, and urine on canvas, 72 x 72".

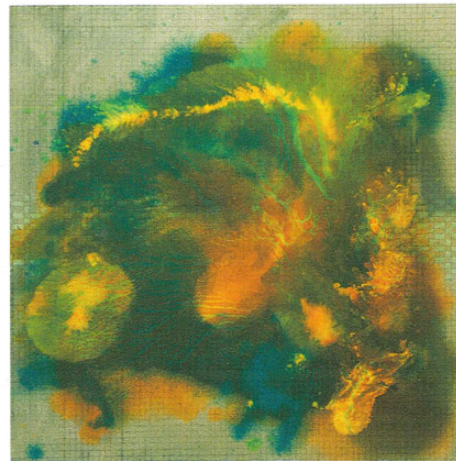


Elise Adibi, *Aromatherapy Painting*, 2013, rabbit-skin glue, oil paint, and neroli, lemon, and jasmine oils on canvas, 20 x 20".

Rather than promulgating an anti-industrial fantasy, Adibi's paintings remind us of premodern—even elemental—substances as a set of potentially live possibilities for generating form.



Elise Adibi, *Aromatherapy Painting*, 2013, rabbit-skin glue, graphite, oil paint, and blue tansy oil on canvas, 20 x 20".



Elise Adibi, *Aromatherapy Painting*, 2013, rabbit-skin glue, graphite, oil paint, and lemon, mint, clary sage, bay laurel, and black spruce oils on canvas, 20 x 20".

the assumption of embodiment and exploits compositional miscalculations and procedural imperfections. These might be smears and blurs resulting from her hand effacing the thing it was generating, as in the oversize *Charcoal Drawing*, 2011, where the passage of Adibi's palm left long, eddying smudges between rows of carefully drawn black squares. Breaks in rows, lines intended to form right angles but never arriving at a ninety-degree nexus, horizons wobbling midcourse, or whole scirms sloping down to one side likewise abound. Taken together, these incidents articulate Adibi's willingness to engage in the affirmation of subjectivity and the expression of life that Martin eschewed. For Adibi, there is no predetermined end point, only a place from which to start and then recognition of the meanings of each choice.

The artist underscored this tenet of her practice in titling her 2012 show at New York's Churner and Churner "Da Capo," literally "from the head" but more aptly "from the beginning." In the context of performance, "da capo" indicates that the musician should repeat a certain section of the score; in the exhibition, where *Charcoal Drawing* hung alongside related grids and fracture-laden monochromes, Adibi argued for a similar game of repetition within delimited parameters. There is a parallel here to biological processes—the repetition with variation that is the principle mechanism of evolution—and such resonances are all the stronger when one considers Adibi's interest in the notion of the spontaneous generation of life from inanimate matter (see, for example, *Abiogenesis*, 2009, or, less specifically, any of a number of works made with a precise shade of pistachio green that brings forth the otherwise imperceptible red in the unprimed

beige fabric, animating chroma). So, too, Adibi has recourse to organic supplies: cotton canvas and carbon (particularly mineral graphite powder, a medium that may be employed for wormy, near-sculptural strokes when pulled across paint) but also animal protein (rabbit-skin glue to size her supports and imbue them with a subtly glittery, diamond-like sheen).

Rather than promulgating an anti-industrial fantasy, though, Adibi's paintings remind us of premodern—even elemental—substances as a set of potentially live possibilities for generating form. Following an invitation to participate in Eric Shiner's 2011 group exhibition "Gertrude's/LOT" at the Andy Warhol Museum in her native Pittsburgh, Adibi began to make a version of oxidation paintings, in which her urine seeps into the thick, welcoming ground, streams down its surface in rivulets, or radiates outward in stains that suggest cosmic nebulae. Like Warhol's, Adibi's oxidation paintings, far from alluding to some primal site of painterly authenticity, are in fact cryptophotographic: The imagery "develops" as the urine interacts with a copper-based paint that coats the support like an emulsion.

Adibi has designated a more recent group of canvases "metabolic paintings," the language figuring the physical instability of the constituents—a mixture of plant oils, clinical-grade aromatherapy fragrances, and oil paints. Although this body of work was made this past fall in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where Adibi is currently a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, it germinated during a stretch in Los Angeles the previous winter, where the artist became intoxicated with the intense smells of jasmine and eucalyptus. In producing the metabolic

paintings, Adibi first keyed the colors to the oils (e.g., orange for bergamot, green for vetiver). She quickly abandoned correlatives, however, and began pouring neroli and lemon into wet paint, so that the oils pooled and oozed in coruscating flares over her omnipresent crisscrossing lines. Each scent has a specific density and propensity to spread or stay put: Mint is thin and colorless, whereas blue tansy stains whatever it touches and myrrh is syrupy to the point of gelatinousness. Adibi has little control over these effects, nor can she predict how the oils will interact with one another or who will perceive them.

A strong reek of, say, neroli renders the smooth reproduction of an artwork impossible. But more fundamentally, scent itself is a vital phenomenon, adamantly material—it is transmitted via clouds of molecules that require direct contact with sensory receptors—and remarkably impervious to representation. Scent evokes but doesn't denote; it acts as a mnemonic but does not signify. In Adibi's recent works, the olfactory is a kind of concrete surplus that redounds back on the grid (which, however self-referential, is neither formally nor historically inert; its horizontal and vertical axes may be torqued by other vectors). The scented oils she uses are volatile, and volatility is always entropic, tending toward depletion and stasis. Nevertheless, dynamic deliquescence might be preferable to the frozen-in-amber historicism of much contemporary abstraction and the interpretations and theorizations that justify it. In any case, the smell eventually dissipates, even as the oils remain. The residue is the aesthetic. □

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