

Judith Braun

My Pleasure

Edited by Judie Gilmore

With essays by Aniko Erdosi and Jessica Holmes



INTRODUCTION

With great pleasure, I am excited to present the solo exhibition, *My Pleasure*, from artist Judith Braun. Pleasure is indeed at the heart of her work here. Her pleasure in creating it, her pleasure in sharing it, and her pleasure at presenting it in such an experimental format. Mobile metal frames displaying double-hung, raw-edge cavasses, painted cubical stools designed for mingling, and large, graphic wall installations create an immersive experience. Perhaps it's gauche to call an artist's work fun, but this exhibition *IS* fun, and I venture that most people will find pleasure in its viewing. There's an alluring mischief in Braun's work, like being in on a secret code or inside joke. As she declares loudly on the gallery wall, "Without pleasure, all we'd have is a bunch of stuff."

This focus on pleasure is not to make light of the fact that Braun's work is also emotional, even painful. Exaggerated tears feature prominently throughout, and her figures confront viewers unapologetically. Her paintings' bold, graphic pattern, iconographic quality, and suggestive text are not subtle. They communicate strong emotion, quickly, like emojis, the literal meaning of which is "picture" + "letter." Braun explores a related form of efficient, visual communication and the playful interpretations it invites. Similarly, she is open to the reinterpretation of her visual "language," putting paintings on rolling racks and welcoming the Ellen Sinopoli Dance Company to choreograph a live performance responding to and interacting with them.

Braun has been creating new work for this exhibition since our invitation to her eighteen months ago. From the very beginning she conceptualized a full gallery installation, not satisfied with the idea of a traditional hanging. I am thrilled she was willing to take risks and create new work and an unconventional format for display. I'm equally excited about the site-specific murals and wall installation from 1993, which create an ideal backdrop for her dynamic paintings. Insightful essays by art critic Jessica

Holmes and gallerist Aniko Erdosi contextualize Braun's new work within her larger practice and biography.

When I first was introduced to Braun's work, I was most intrigued by the juxtaposition of her graceful, abstract charcoal drawings and her playful and confrontational feminist works, with titles like *Crazy Bitch, Not Sorry*, and *My Pussy*. Where and how do these two bodies of work meet? I now realize, they don't meet per se, they coexist, both separate and together at once like good and bad, light and dark, pleasure and pain. Viewers will see both sides of Braun's practice in this exhibition. Tellingly, its title, *My Pleasure*, references a double entendre—two words that are simultaneously bawdy, self-serving, and generous. What fun indeed! (winky face)

Judie Gilmore
Director, Opalka Gallery

***My Pleasure: two words
that are simultaneously
bawdy, self-serving,
and generous.***

BIO & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

After growing up in Albany, I was drawn to live in New York City, maybe because my parents were always excited to take us there to absorb something that seemed important. I attended college there, settling in downtown Manhattan to live and work as an artist for many years. Indeed, those were important years for me, a valuable initiation of sorts. Now, to my surprise, I'm back in my hometown, turning my whole house into studio space, growing flowers, and enjoying how easy it is to grocery shop by car. I'm also discovering the Hudson Valley art scene, crisscrossing the scenic roads and getting in some good thinking time along the way. I left behind a wonderful art community, but with social media we're all connected these days. I love my new upstate community too! My work has traveled many paths as well, leading to the new paintings I made this past year. I do hope you enjoy the show. It's certainly been my pleasure.

I'd like to express my gratitude to Judie Gilmore, Amy Griffin, and Opalka Gallery for the opportunity and freedom to create a full-scale installation in this beautiful space and making me feel welcome back upstate. Over the past two years they provided the support and valuable dialogue I needed as ideas evolved from before and through COVID. With the exception of one early piece, all the work in the show is new. I also want to thank master cabinet maker, Jim Lewis of Springwood Studios in Troy, for fabricating the wood cubes for me to paint. Jim also helped me realize the mobile painting racks, alongside the expertise of West End Iron Works of Albany. I'm also grateful to Leah Rico for designing this lovely catalogue, and Aniko Erdosi and Jessica Holmes for contributing their thoughtful insights. A special thanks to my dear friend, architect Sebastien van den Berg, who lent me his ear and wisdom at crucial moments, as well as other friends' valuable feedback... you know who you are. Acknowledgments would not be complete without mentioning my grad school professor and forever mentor, artist Mark Greenwold, who first told me to take myself seriously. Last but not least, I'm honored and excited to be collaborating with the Ellen Sinopoli Dance Company, resident company at The Egg in Albany. This is a first for me!

Judith Braun
January 2022



Good Ol' Bad Girl

Anchored by universal principles such as duality, symmetry, and orbital motions, Judith Braun's work consists of words and images across various media and in multiple phases in her career. She started her artistic career as a realist painter but in 1987 turned to a then new technology, using photocopy machines to create large-scale, provocative images with a feminist iconography. The millennium brought yet another radical turn in her work. Intrigued by self-organizing systems found in nature, in the early 2000s Braun decided to create a framework of rules within which to continue her zestful explorations. *Symmetrical Procedures* became the overarching title for an ongoing body of work continued over the next two decades that consists of images strictly created by using only symmetry, abstraction, and carbon-based media. The smaller pencil drawings and her popular large-scale fingerprint wall installations from this period all share these principles. Their compositions arrange themselves around an invisible center just as her work arranges itself around her person. Their material, carbon, is not only one of the essential elements of life on earth, but also one that under heat and pressure becomes a diamond so, at heart, Braun chose yet another omnipresent component, diamond dust, to create art. Looking at these drawings and wall installations it is hard not to think of nature's hidden geometries.

Holistically speaking, Braun's artistic practice is an excavation through the strata of her own personality, aiming to find what is political about them to connect with others. Exploring her own inner psychic, mental, and emotional labyrinths she peels off layers of her being and exposes them to the world in the form of artworks.

Despite their organic compositions, her work is executed with a sharp conceptual rigor, Braun challenging herself to play and reinvent within the strict constraints she sets for herself. At the same time, she shows a sense of wit, exuberance, even irreverence in her work. Granting herself permission to go over the top. The intention is not so much provocation but rather an unapologetic expression of her desire to walk on the edge (even peek over), to let her work get in the viewer's face. In short, allowing herself to be a 'bad girl' and not to take things too seriously, but rather to take real pleasure in her work and in the freedom she permits herself. May that freedom be contagious.

Aniko Erdosi
January 2022

**Exploring her own inner
psychic, mental, and
emotional labyrinths
she peels off layers of
her being and exposes
them to the world in
the form of artworks.**

Aniko Erdosi is a gallerist, curator, and art writer based in New York. Originally from Hungary, she has curated numerous gallery and museum exhibitions and conducted lectures and presentations on contemporary art. She works extensively with women artists who emerged in the post-war era in Europe and the Americas. Since 2001 she has published reviews and critical essays on contemporary art.



Circles of Time, Circles of Life

In a year that has challenged the physical and mental well-being of the American population, to say nothing of the very social structures upon which the nation is built, it's perhaps inevitable that tears would feature so prominently in Judith Braun's recent work. Skeins of delicate, pink tears run down cheeks in one painting, while fat, salacious tears in that same distinctive hue gush elsewhere. One optically illusional face seeps teardrops from each eye like iridescent pearls; another seems to drown in a river of them. But though melancholia is one strain running through the fifteen new paintings featured in *My Pleasure*, it is not the only strain. All made during the pandemic year 2021, the works sometimes express sadness, of course, but by turns they also equally express the rage and confusion, the fear, and the unexpected joy that this most bewildering era has wrought.

Symmetry is a root of much of Braun's work, a rendering of which has been an aesthetic choice for many years. "Symmetry, as it gets simpler and simpler [becomes] circles," says Braun, "and very quickly, circles become faces." Nearly all these works embrace this circular symmetry morphing

into characterization, abstracted portraiture though it may be. A number of the paintings depict Braun herself, with *Rose Colored Glasses* perhaps being the closest likeness, complete with her checked shirt and trademark hot pink eyeglasses. But also present is the ethereal, unnamed figure of *Flower Head*, inspired by the garden Braun has cultivated since returning to her hometown of Albany four years ago, and which has become one of her flourishing hobbies during the pandemic. *Happy Bitch* composes a spectral smiley face from the words of the title, a feminist mantra to which Braun has long adhered and which draws out the connection between this new body of large paintings and her older work, evidenced by a photocopy installation that occupies the opening wall of the exhibition. Made nearly 30 years ago, *Happy Bitch* (1993) is the lone vintage work on view, fabricated at a point in her career when she was first challenging the strictures of more traditional oil painting, the medium in which she'd begun her practice in the early 1980s.

As Braun rightly points out, circles allude to the human face, but they also confer an even more venerable significance—the ancient and sacred

symbol of cyclical time and of eternity. Coming home to Albany, after a quarter century of living in New York City, has allowed Braun the physical space and the mental freedom to work larger and to spend more meaningful time with each of these canvases. Together, the series of paintings marks time's passage in a most unprecedented year. But even with their more mournful notes, the sense of buoyancy and resilience with which she has imbued them ultimately prevails. Like flowers that bloom in her garden in the spring, then succumb to the fall, only to sprout once again, Braun's sphere signifies life.

Jessica Holmes
January 2022

Jessica Holmes is a New York-area based writer and editor. Her work is featured regularly in *BOMB*, *Hyperallergic*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*, where she also edits the *ArTonic* column. Other print publications include bylines in *Vanity Fair Spain*, *The Magazine Antiques*, and *The Woman's Art Journal*, as well as numerous exhibition catalogues.



Rose Colored Glasses
2021
Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets
79 x 72 inches

The works sometimes express sadness, of course, but by turns they also equally express the rage and confusion, the fear, and the unexpected joy that this most bewildering era has wrought.

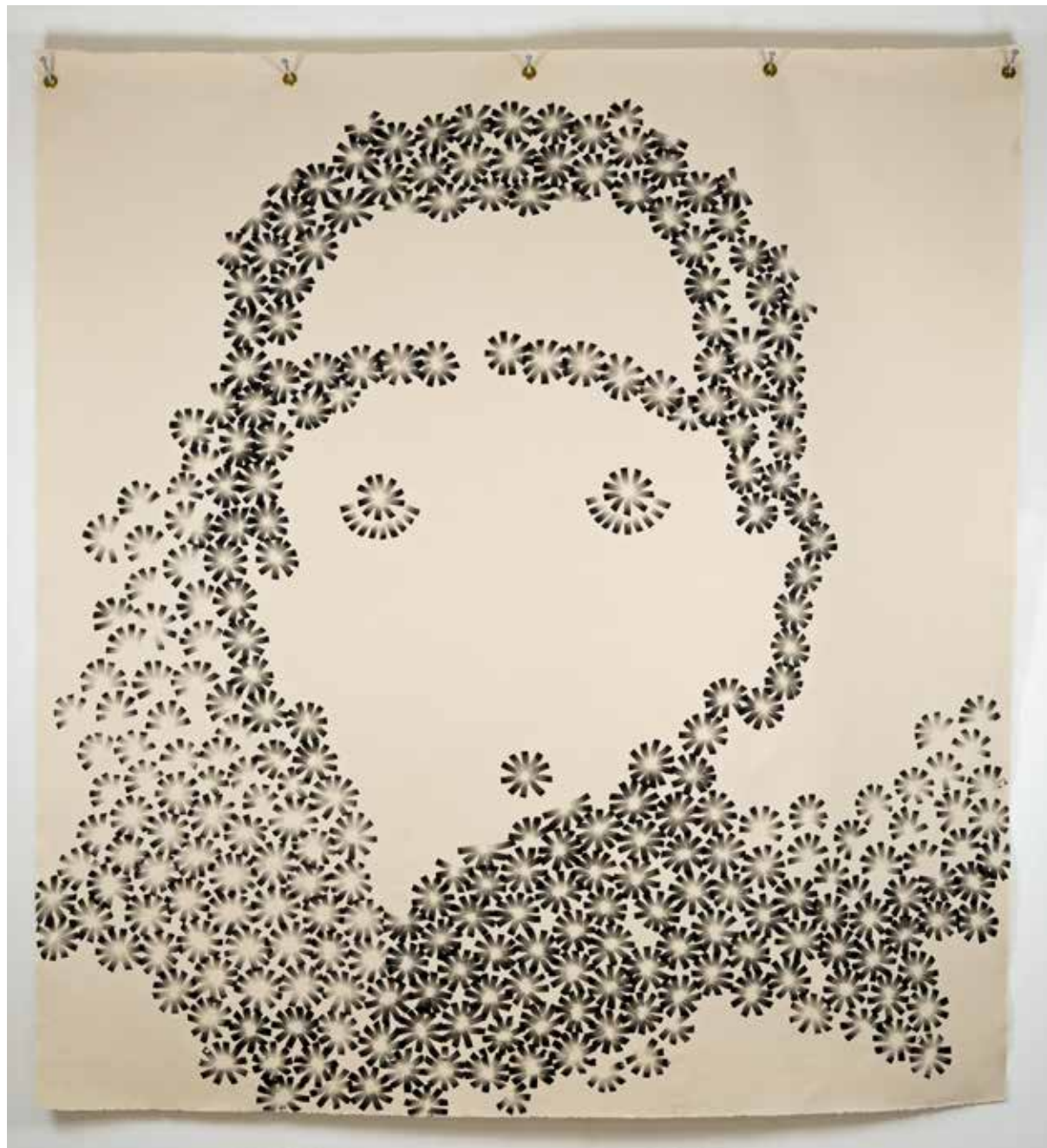
Drip Mask
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



White Tears
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



Flower Head
2021
Acrylic
on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



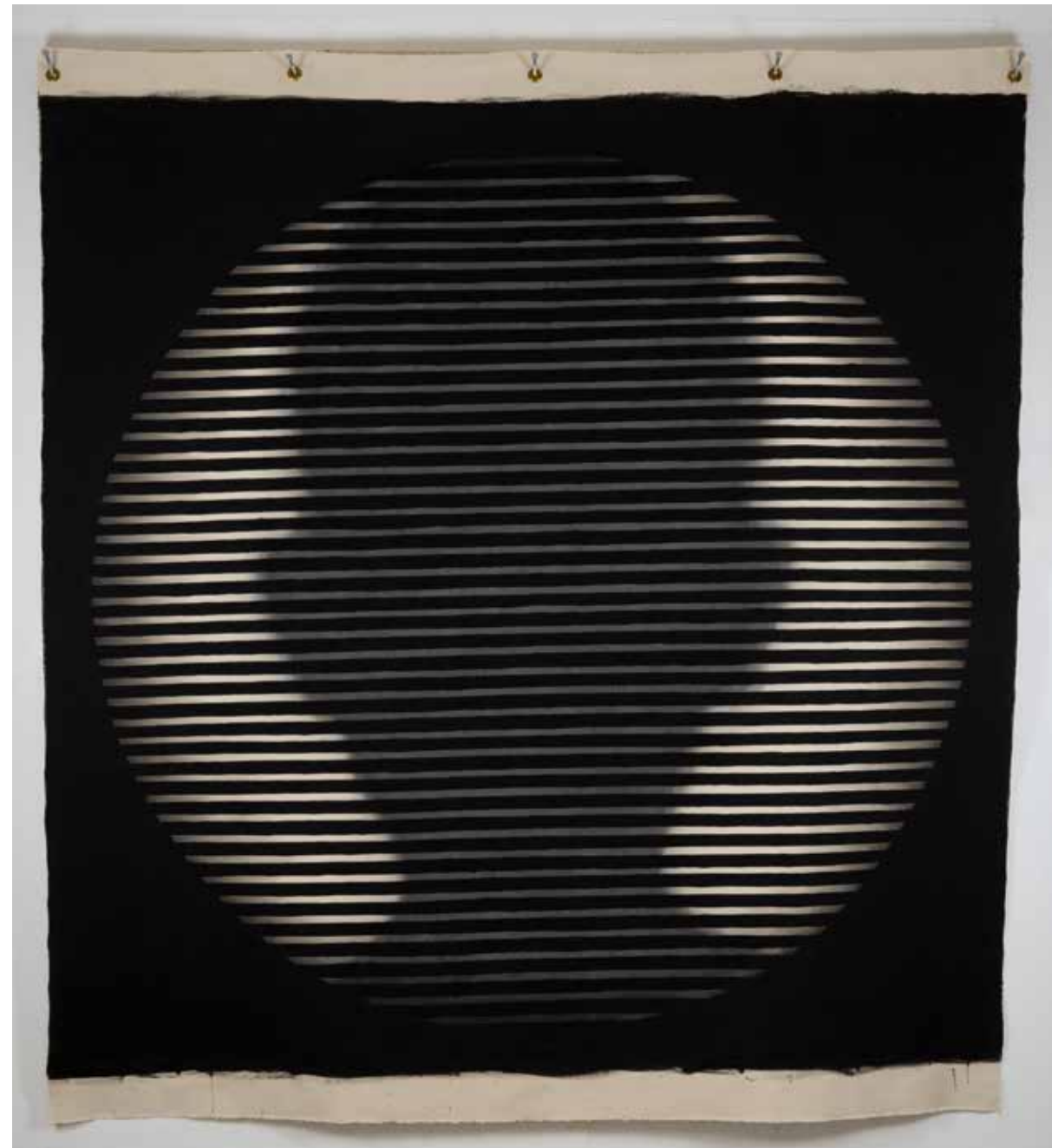
The Song
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



Orange Orb
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



Shadow Head
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



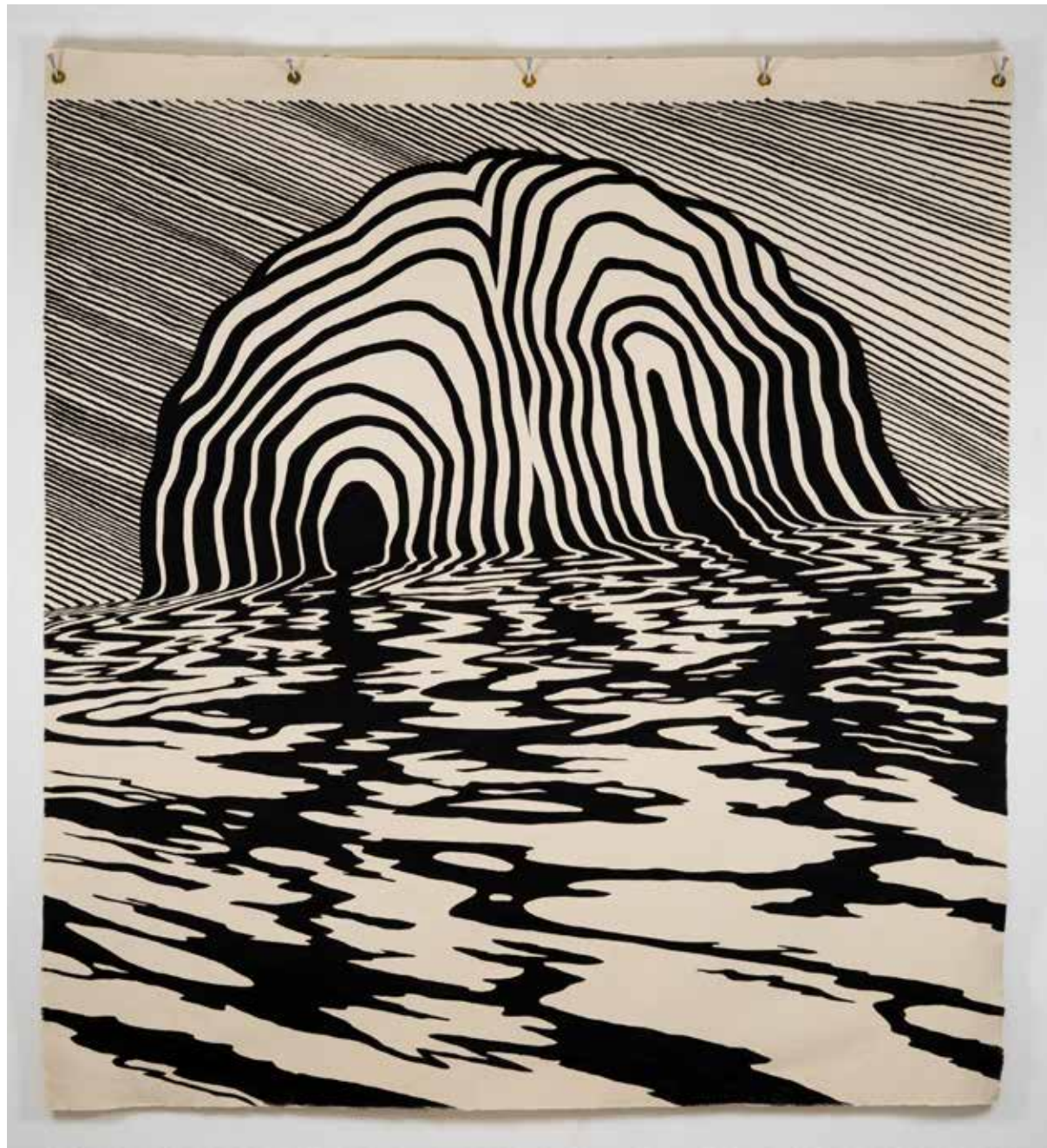
Pink Tears
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



Angela
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



*Drowning
Head*
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



Psycho Tears
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches

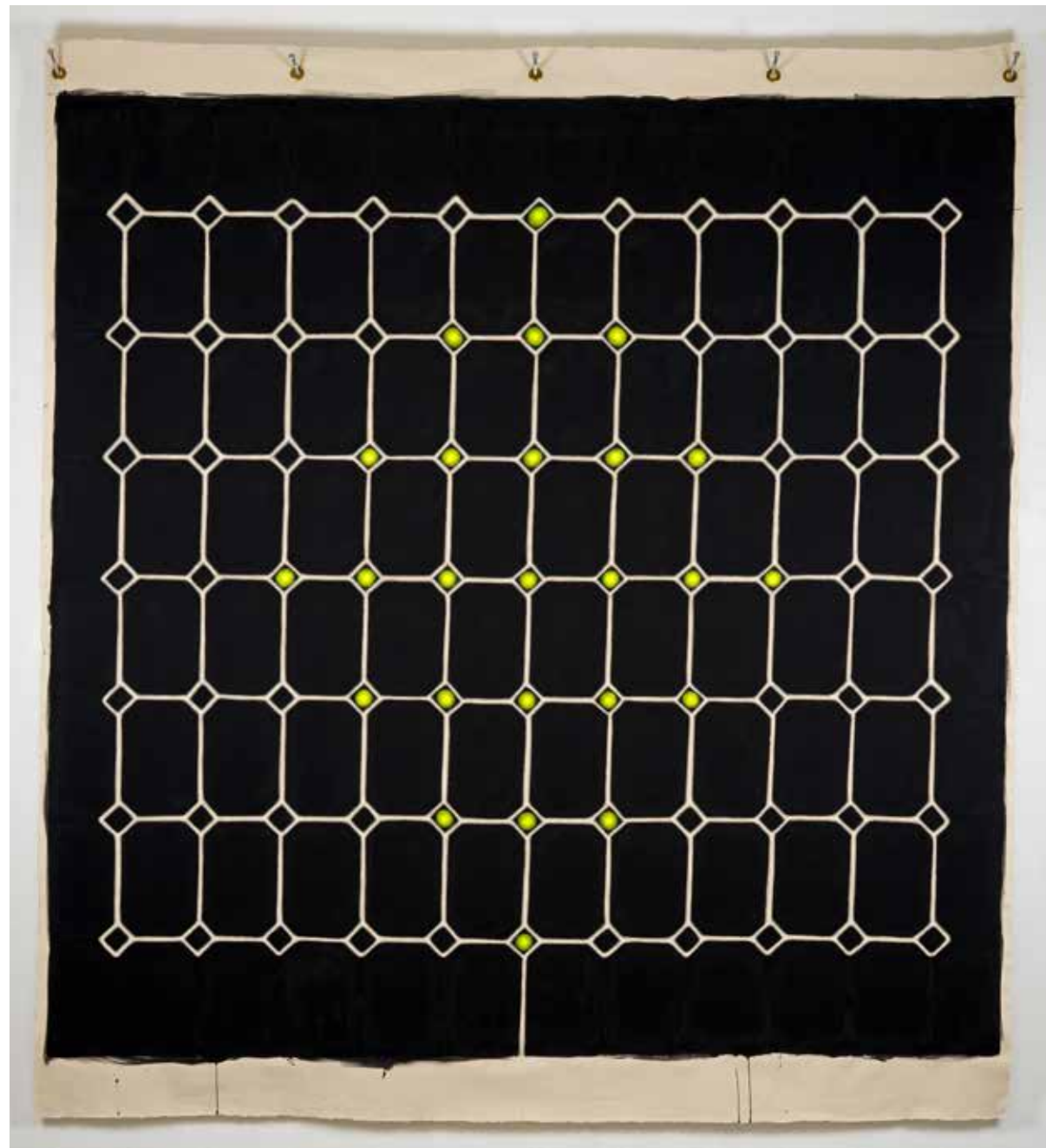


*My Phantom
Nipples*
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches

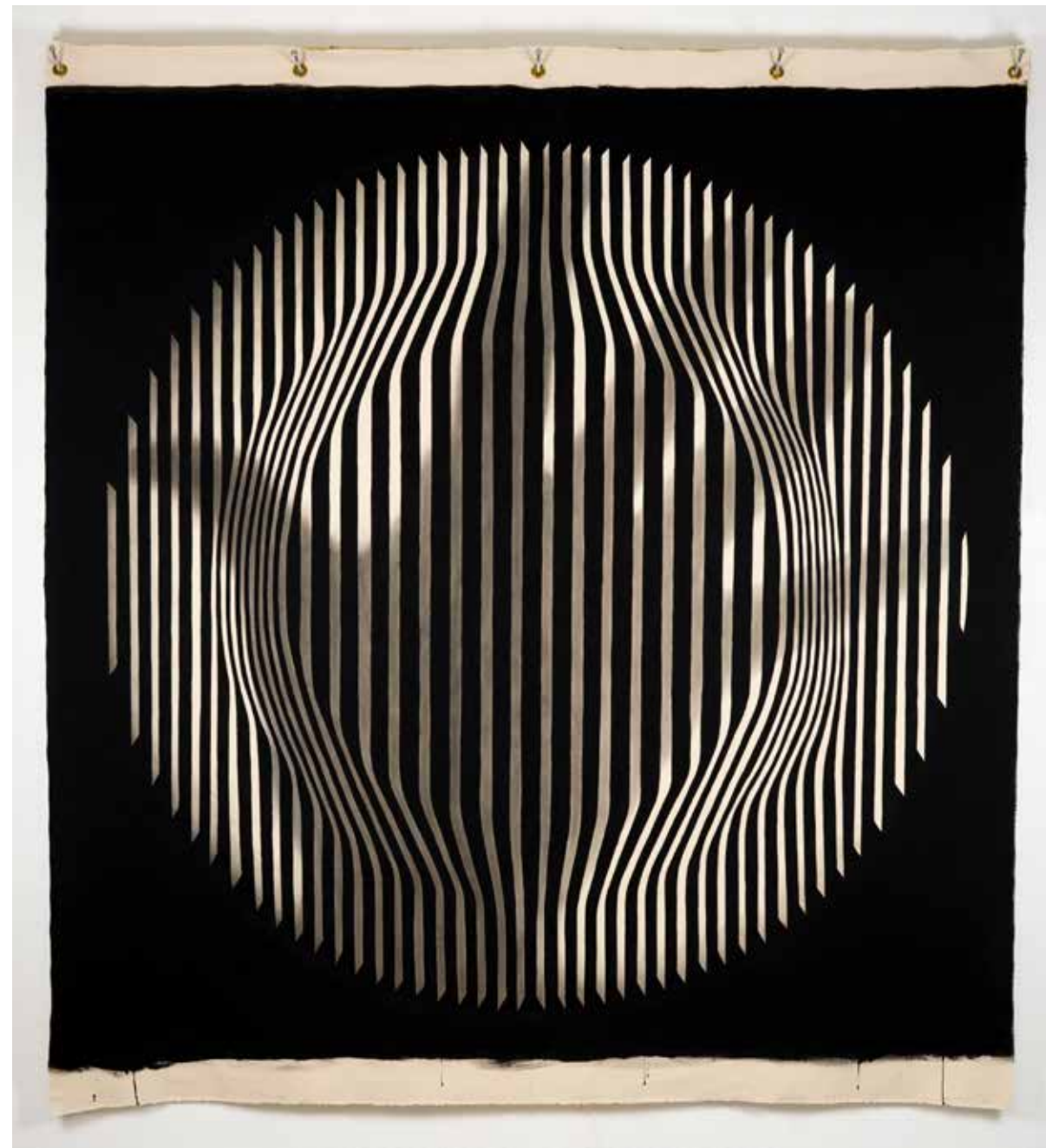


Happy Bitch
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches

Seed Head
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



Shalom
2021
Acrylic on raw
unstretched
canvas,
grommets
79 x 72 inches



WITHOUT PLEASURE
ALL WE'D HAVE IS
A BUNCH OF STUFF.

*Hand-painted text
on rear gallery wall,
144 x 408 inches*



*Clockwise from
top left*

*Finger Cube
Hot Cube
Pleasure Cube
Orb Cube
2021
Acrylic and
latex paint on
wood
16 x 16 x 16
inches*



*Sword Cube
2021
Acrylic and
latex paint on
wood
16 x 16 x 16
inches*



*Clockwise from
top left*

Sad Cube
Cosmic Cube
Seed Maze Cube
Rose Cube
2021
Acrylic and
latex paint on
wood
16 x 16 x 16
inches

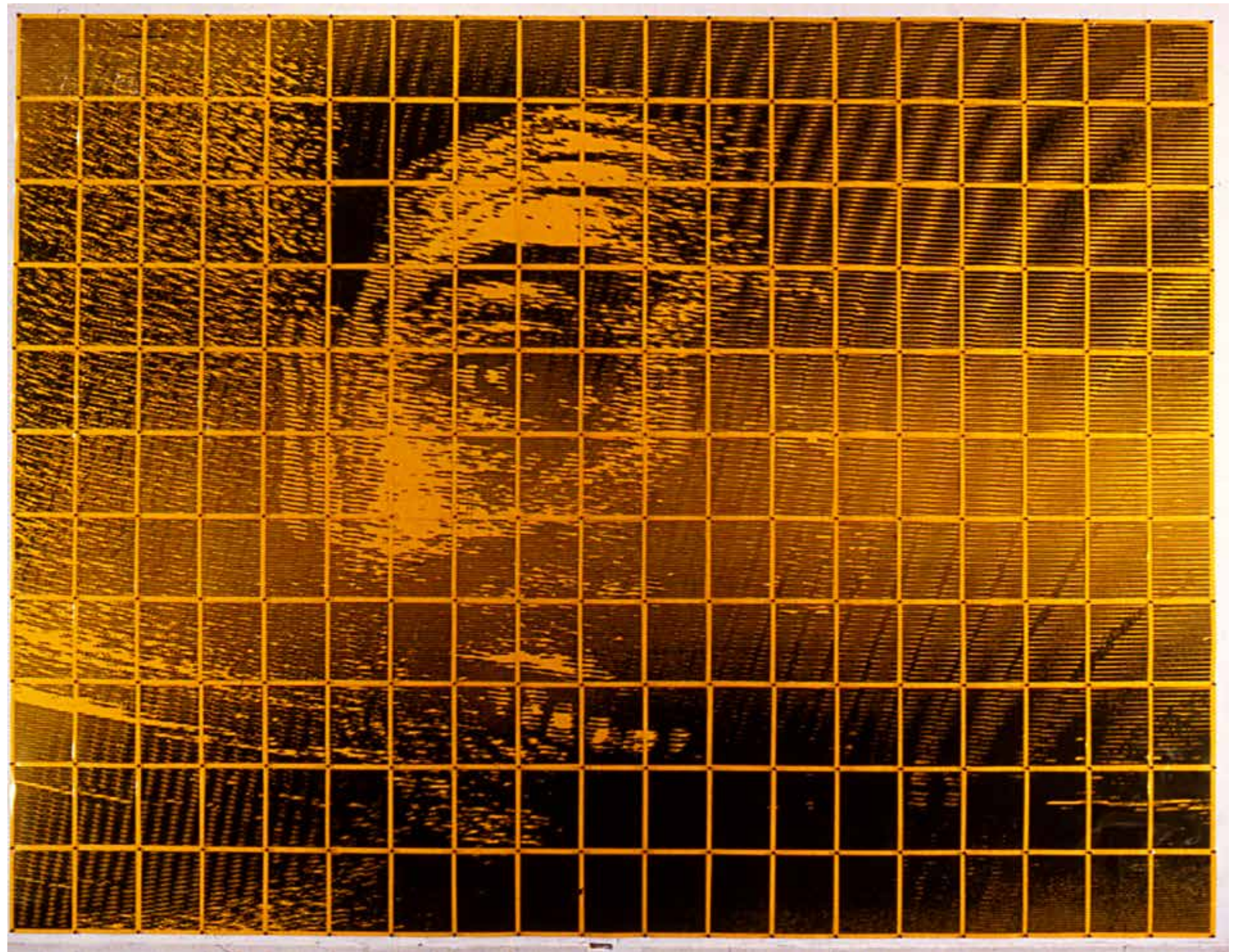


Psycho Cube
2021
Acrylic and
latex paint on
wood
16 x 16 x 16
inches

"Happy Bitch", a feminist mantra to which Braun has long adhered draws out the connection between this new body of large paintings and her older work.

—Aniko Erdosi

Happy Bitch
1993
Black carbon toner on neon
paper, pushpins
105 x 152 inches



Exhibition Checklist

INSTALLATIONS

<i>Happy Bitch</i> 1993 Black carbon toner on neon paper, pushpins 105 x 152 inches	<i>Orange Orb</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches
<i>Fingering #37</i> 2022 Charcoal fingerprints on wall 12 x 12 feet	<i>Pink Tears</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches
<i>Without Pleasure All We'd Have Is a Bunch of Stuff</i> 2022 Acrylic paint on wall	<i>Rose Colored Glasses</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches

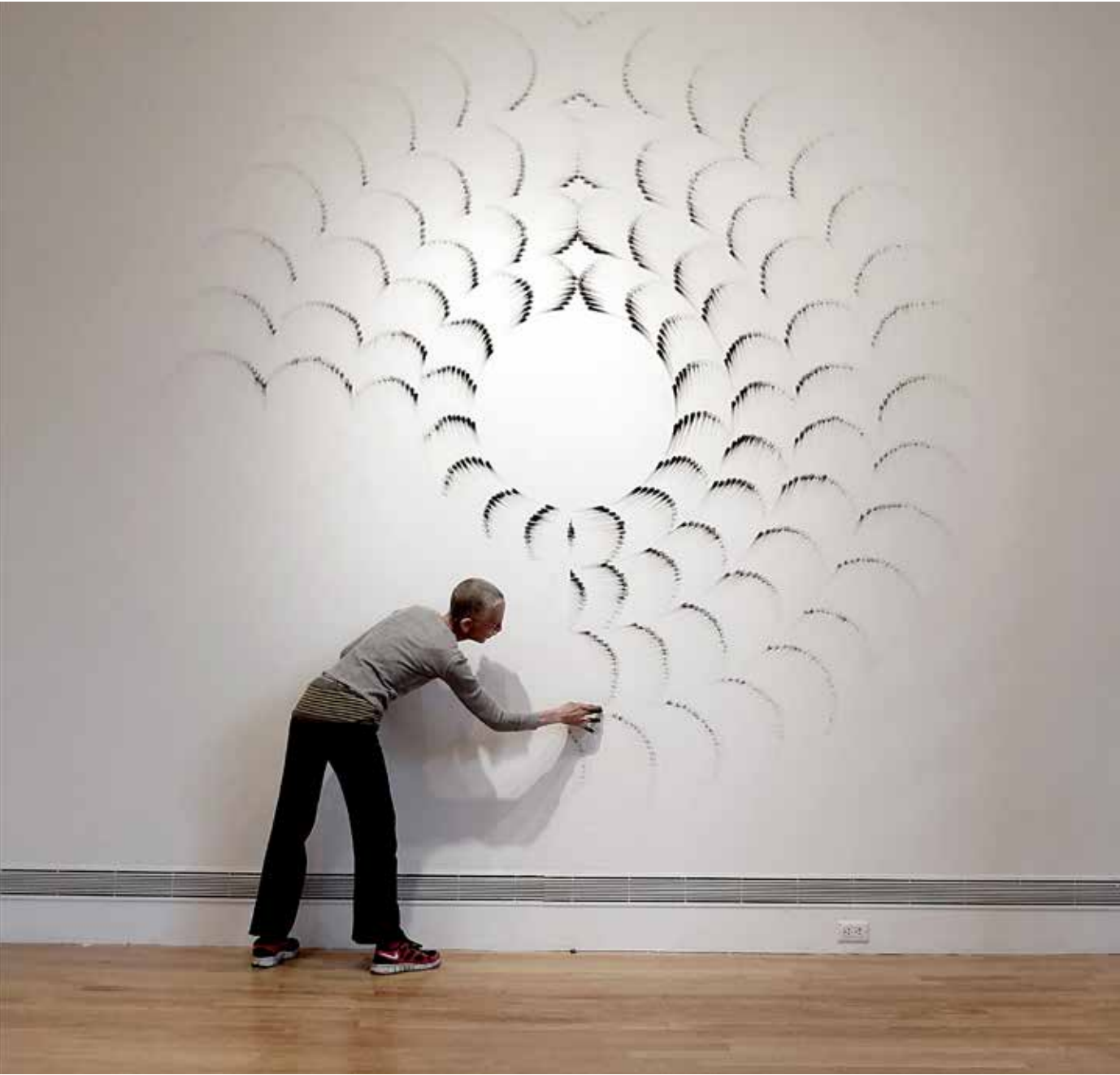
PAINTINGS

<i>Shadow Head</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches	<i>Drip Mask</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches
<i>Shalom</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches	<i>My Phantom Nipples</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches
<i>Psycho Tears</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches	<i>Happy Bitch</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches
<i>White Tears</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches	<i>Flower Head</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches

<i>Drowning Head</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches
<i>Seed Head</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches
<i>Angela</i> 2021 Acrylic on raw unstretched canvas, grommets 79 x 72 inches

CUBES

<i>Hot Cube</i> 2021 Acrylic and latex paint on wood 16 x 16 x 16 inches	<i>Seed Maze Cube</i> 2021 Acrylic and latex paint on wood 16 x 16 x 16 inches
<i>Psycho Cube</i> 2021 Acrylic and latex paint on wood 16 x 16 x 16 inches	<i>Finger Cube</i> 2021 Acrylic and latex paint on wood 16 x 16 x 16 inches
<i>Orb Cube</i> 2021 Acrylic and latex paint on wood 16 x 16 x 16 inches	<i>Rose Cube</i> 2021 Acrylic and latex paint on wood 16 x 16 x 16 inches
	<i>Sword Cube</i> 2021 Acrylic and latex paint on wood 16 x 16 x 16 inches
	<i>Pleasure Cube</i> 2021 Acrylic and latex paint on wood 16 x 16 x 16 inches
	<i>Cosmic Cube</i> 2021 Acrylic and latex paint on wood 16 x 16 x 16 inches
	<i>Sad Cube</i> 2021 Acrylic and latex paint on wood 16 x 16 x 16 inches



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