



RON JANOWICH



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HS-HOWARD SCOTT GALLERY

RECENT PAINTINGS
AND DRAWINGS

ESSAY BY LILLY WEI

The Light Comes Shining

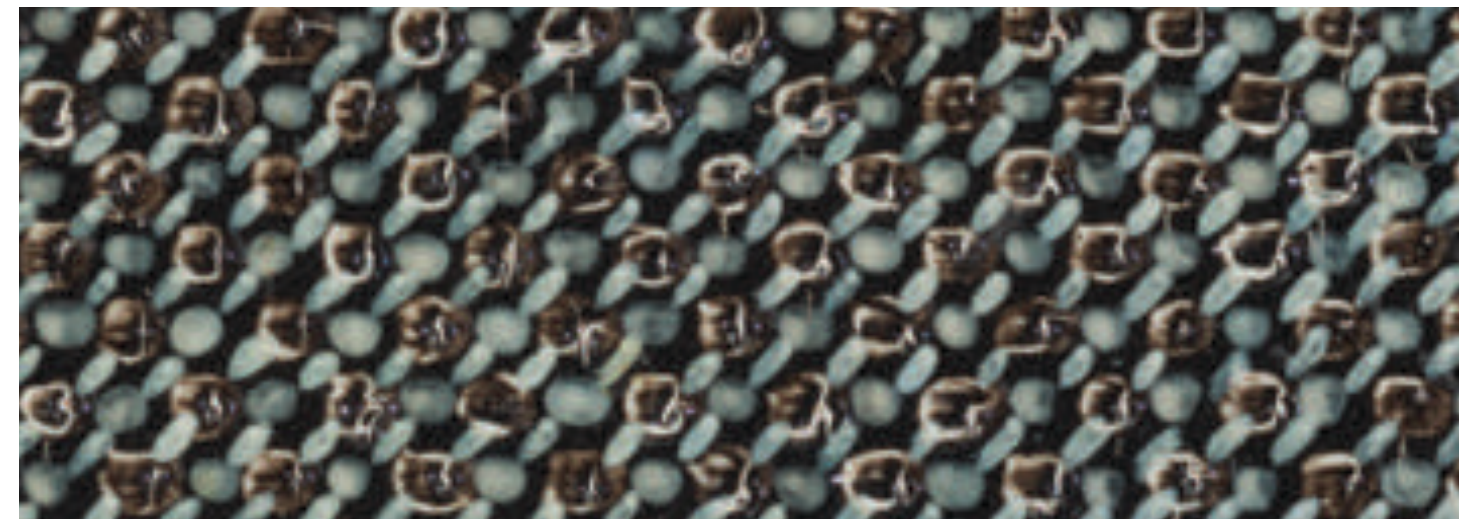
by Lilly Wei

Abstract artist Ron Janowich has long worked on drawings and paintings simultaneously, excited by the complex, revelatory relationship that exists between them, each catalyzing further possibilities in the other. Starting about five years ago, he began to make drawings exclusively in silverpoint, a demanding technique that is rarely seen in contemporary art although more and more artists have been experimenting with it of late. Janowich was attracted to silverpoint because it was an ancient method of depiction, later widely used by medieval scribes and then artists such as Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden and Albrecht Dürer. Highly regarded during the Northern and Italian Renaissance, Rembrandt maintained the tradition in the Netherlands into the 17th century as it declined in esteem elsewhere. Janowich's aesthetic development has been much influenced by historical European art, so it seems inevitable that silverpoint would tempt him. He has long studied old master techniques and materials for both the beauty of the results and their proven efficacy, adapting them to his own purposes. Janowich also deeply believes in art's continuum and synchronicity. But, it should be noted, he is not at all resistant to newer media and produces videos, sound work, photographs and digital images, embracing them as instances of present visual syntax and unequivocally part of that same continuity.

Beyond its historical value, it was, of course, the characteristics of silverpoint itself that he fixated on, drawn to its particular manifestation of physicality, to its plasticity. Janowich was intrigued by its utter responsiveness to the touch of his hand bearing down on the support, onto the clay-coat ground, biting into it. However delicate the gesture, the impress was registered and retained, no longer ephemeral. Silverpoint is unforgiving, the line once drawn is not eradicable but

Janowich revels in the finality of it, in its challenge. The incised fine lines—the fineness of which is another of its seductions—penetrate the surface and essentially becomes integrated with it. Built up layer after layer, the elegant crosshatchings parallel the slow construction of his painted panels as they assume substantiality. The application of graphite “glazes” over the silverpoint is comparable to the glazing of his oil on linen on panel paintings, a meticulous process that Janowich calls “weaving” from “the ground up.” It is not just a surface phenomenon, he explained. Thus, a tangible, dimensional structure is created, illusionism minimized, dependent upon materiality. Pigmented, fluid encaustic is at times then flung onto the surface, the heated beeswax mixture drying on contact. While the opposite of the deliberateness of the silverpoint markings, the improvised gesture is nonetheless similar in that it, too, is fixed, once it meets the surface. But it is the dialectic established that is of critical import, providing pictorial completeness by contrasting the repetitious and the singular, the slow and the instant, the analytic and the mercurial, color and tonalities of black and white.

Janowich also experiments through drawing, as artists often do, searching for new forms, different morphologies, new visual knowledge, expanding his parameters. When he eventually finds a shape that satisfies him, he seizes it, replicating it in a series of drawings and then transferring that shape to a series of paintings, sometimes producing as many as twenty or thirty works in sequence. His shaped formats—here most often circular and sections of circles, contours charged—suggest emblems of infinity or Buddhist mandalas, the enclosed space fluctuating between positive and negative. Janowich wanted to rid himself of the rectangle, and its limitations, replacing it with a less conventional kind of space, one that was articulated physically as well as optically. “On a quantum



and micro level, the world is an open field. Solidity is really illusionary. I am working with the idea that abstraction can get closer to modeling the world as an open field.”

Janowich's impulse to serialize might be traced to Minimalist and Postminimalist precepts although for the most part, he rebelled against the ideologies of the 1970s as a young artist. He preferred to merge Modernism with the past and the unfolding present in his rigorous, intensive, almost four-decade-long investigation of painting, his primary medium, and other media. It was the Greenbergian insistence on flatness—by then a restrictive, formulaic trope—that most disturbed him, since the history of painting and the paintings he revered was largely predicated on a concept of space.

He wanted to make paintings that were not posited on the artificiality of a flat plane. In order to expand the space, Janowich laid down, as noted above, layers of pigments and glazes to create a mesh, a weave. The viewer could then look not so much at the surface of the work as into it, as if into water, he said. “When we look at clear water we see surface, depth, and the reflection and refraction of light that creates a transient perceptual field.” These interlocked, composite structures evolve into an indeterminate spaciousness—even if slight in terms of actual measurement.

To increase the luminosity of the finished painting, he begins with a black ground. When he puts a white or tinted white on the black ground, the brightness of the white mark increases. Conversely, when he puts a black or dark mark on it, it becomes richer, deeper in color while the middle tones seem more nuanced. Janowich uses numerous

colors but they are not always easy to see. The blacks, for example, are very complex, never really black but composed of different hues.

Densely painted and impasto marks comprise the first layer of his paintings, placed within a penciled grid sketched lightly onto the ground, a matrix that eventually disappears. He then adds the flat geometric shape or shapes that are the organizing underpainting. When completed, Janowich begins to weave “a perceptual field” by brushing a toned glaze over the impasto and the flat, colored geometric areas. He repeats the process numerous times. Eventually the surface builds up to “an actual three-dimensional field,” a process that usually requires several months, an unpredictable mix of the instantaneous and the extremely slow. One reason for the length of his ventures is his careful balancing of pictorial elements: form, color, light, shadow, and texture. For instance, he doesn't want the painting to be too graphic, its geometry simply a kind of scaffold that permits great variation within it. He also doesn't want to add too many expressive gestures, since that would destroy the serenity of the work.

The scale of these recent paintings and drawings is modest, about 20” x 10.” It makes them more intimate, and draws the viewer close. The work is no longer driven by internal anxiety, by doubt, although it has taken him years to achieve a certain peace. In that regard, his art is autobiographical, an emotional barometer. Janowich said that with maturity, there is also a diminishment of ego so his work no longer needs to be heroically sized to be successful. They can also be a series of quiet, concentrated experiential moments that are equally, if not more riveting, with their own sustaining, meditative beauty, like this selection of radiantly dark and brilliant matter.

Lilly Wei is a New York based art critic and independent curator.



P A I N T I N G S

Untitled 1 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



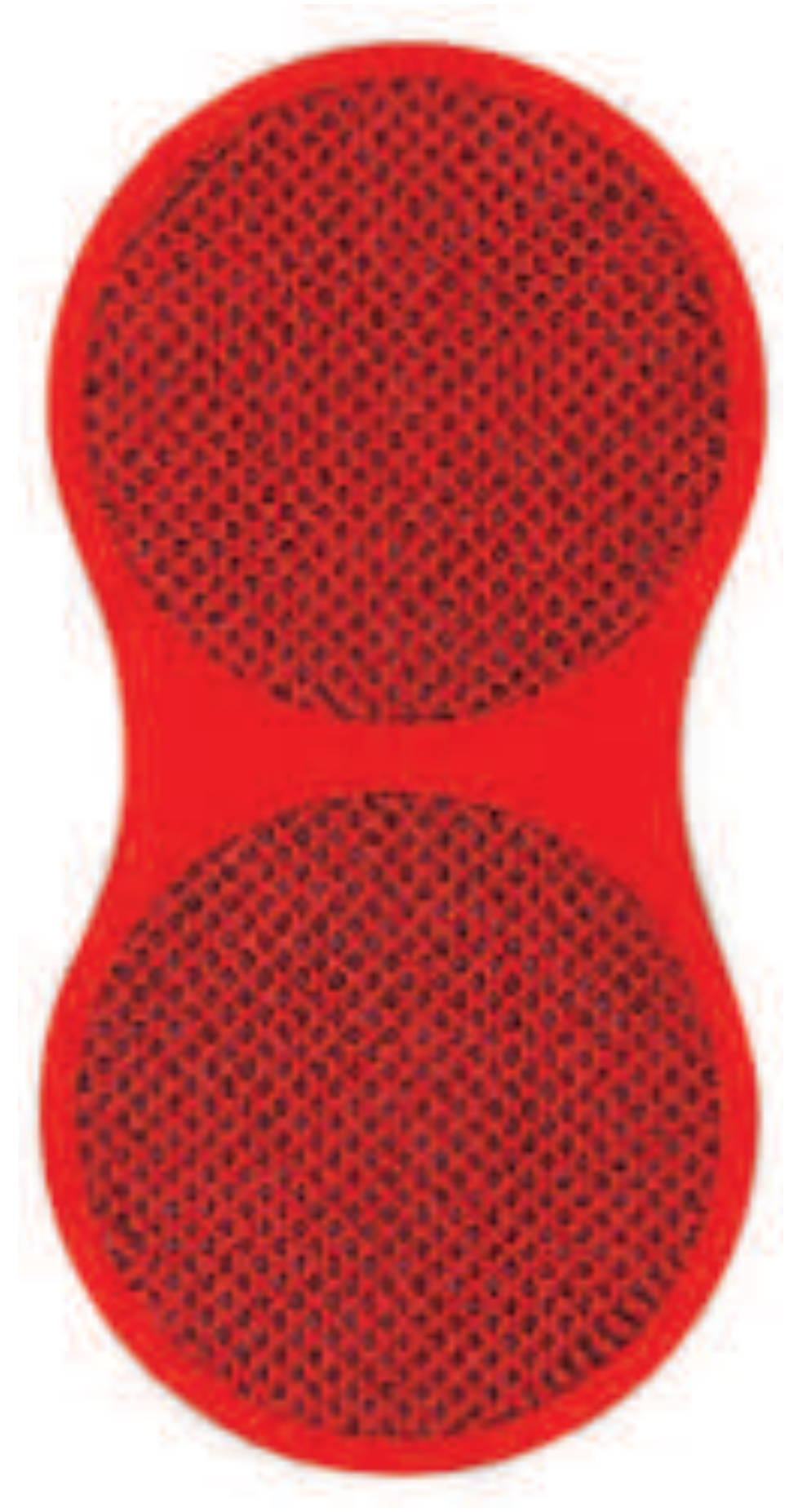
Untitled 8 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



Untitled 10 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"

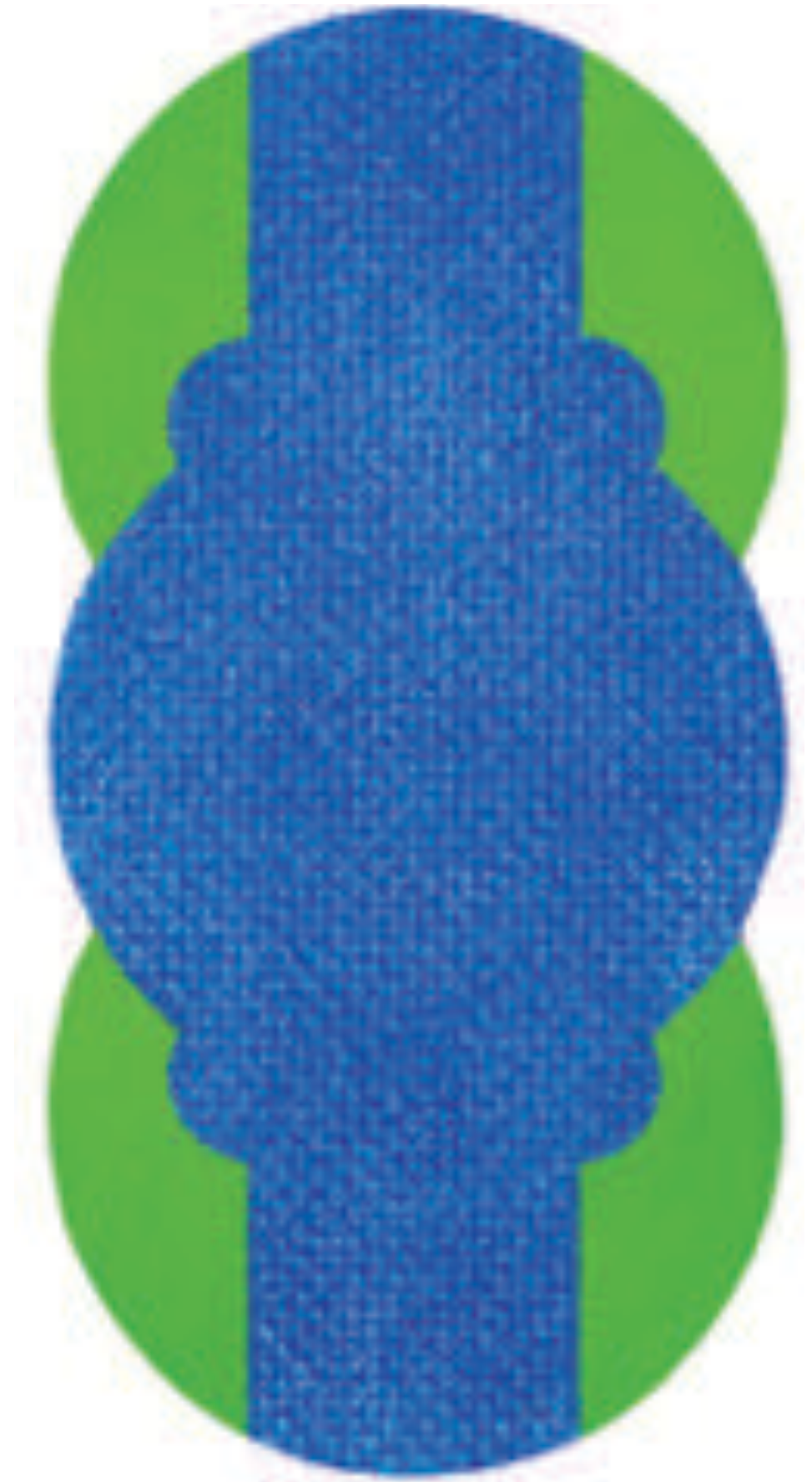


Untitled 4 • 2012
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



Untitled 15 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



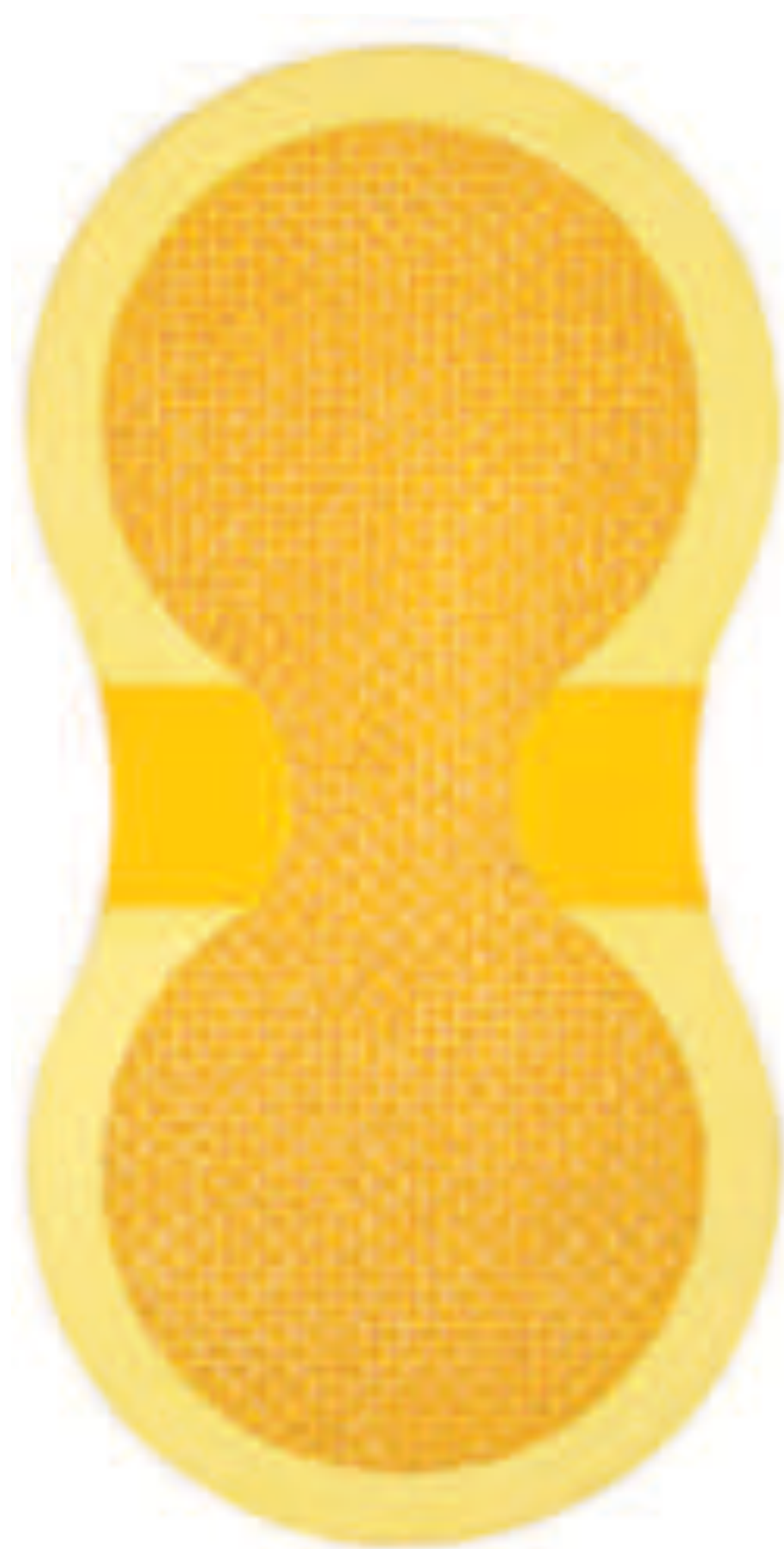


Untitled 3 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



Untitled 1 • 2012
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"

Untitled 7 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



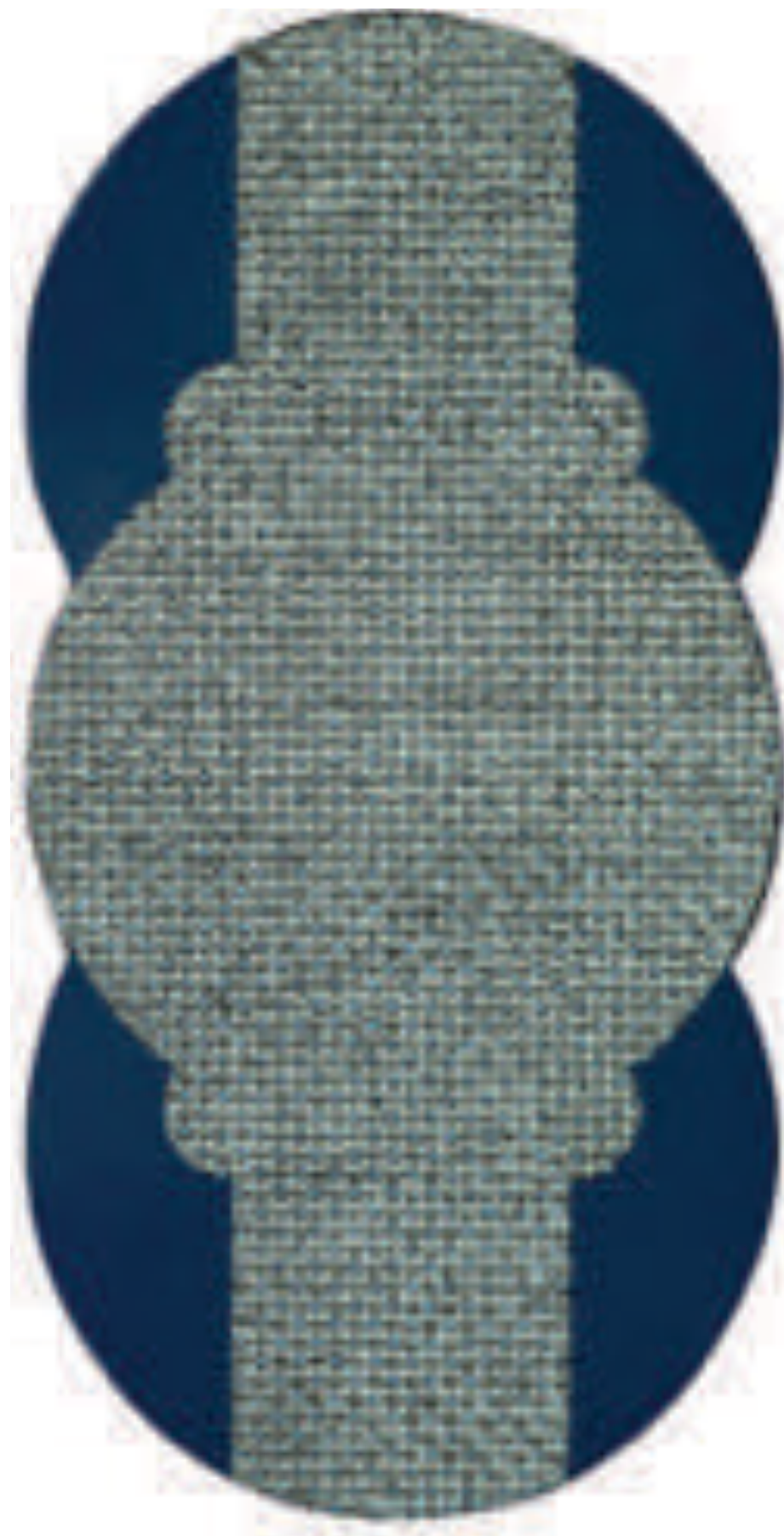
Untitled 2 • 2012
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



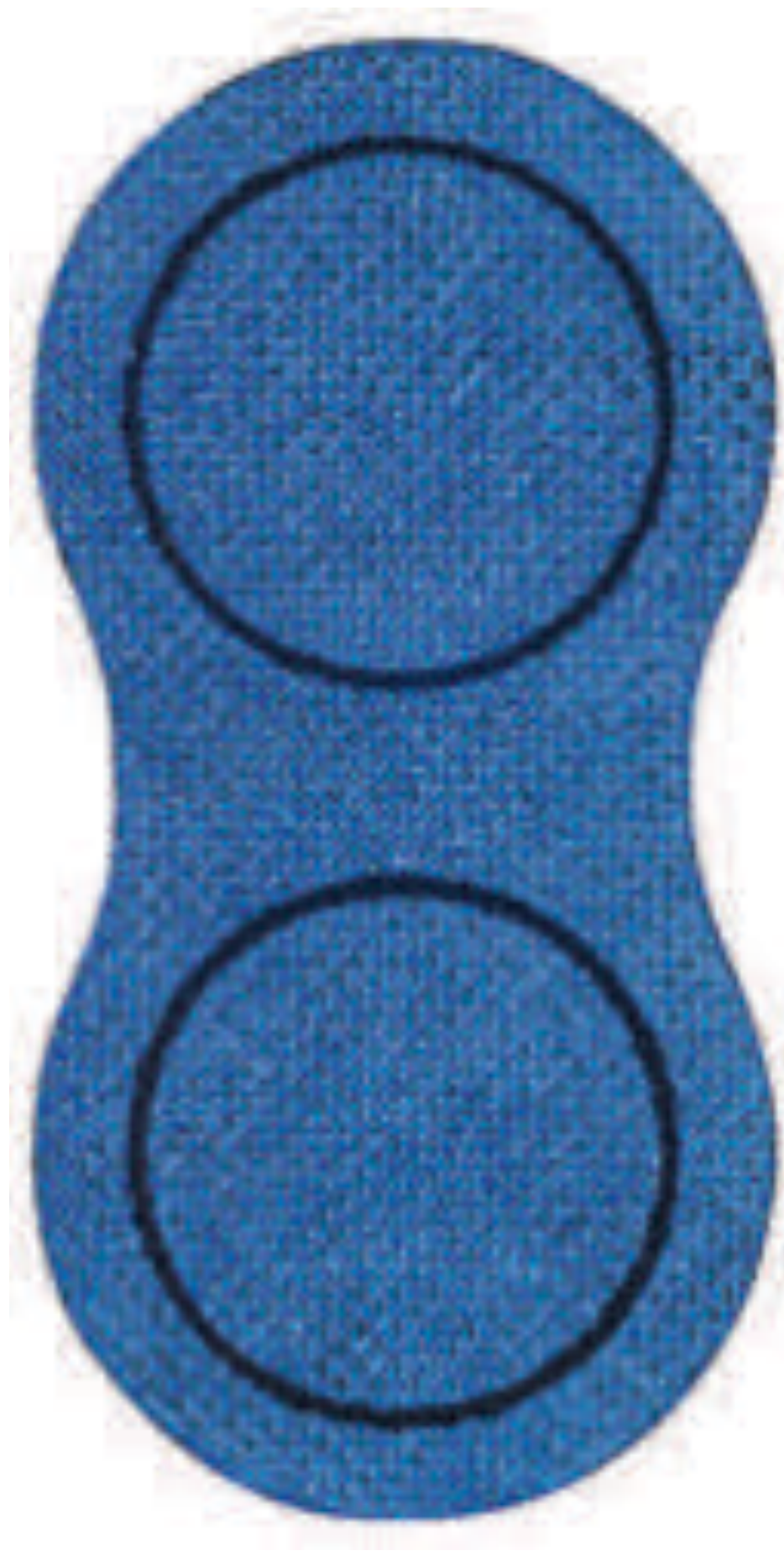
Untitled 13 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



Untitled 11 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



Untitled 9 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



Untitled 14 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



Untitled 12 • 2013
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



Untitled 3 • 2012
Oil on linen on panel • 10"x20"



DRAWINGS



Untitled 3 • 2010
Silverpoint and encaustic on claycoat paper • 18"x14"



Untitled 1 • 2011
Silverpoint and encaustic on claycoat paper • 18"x14"



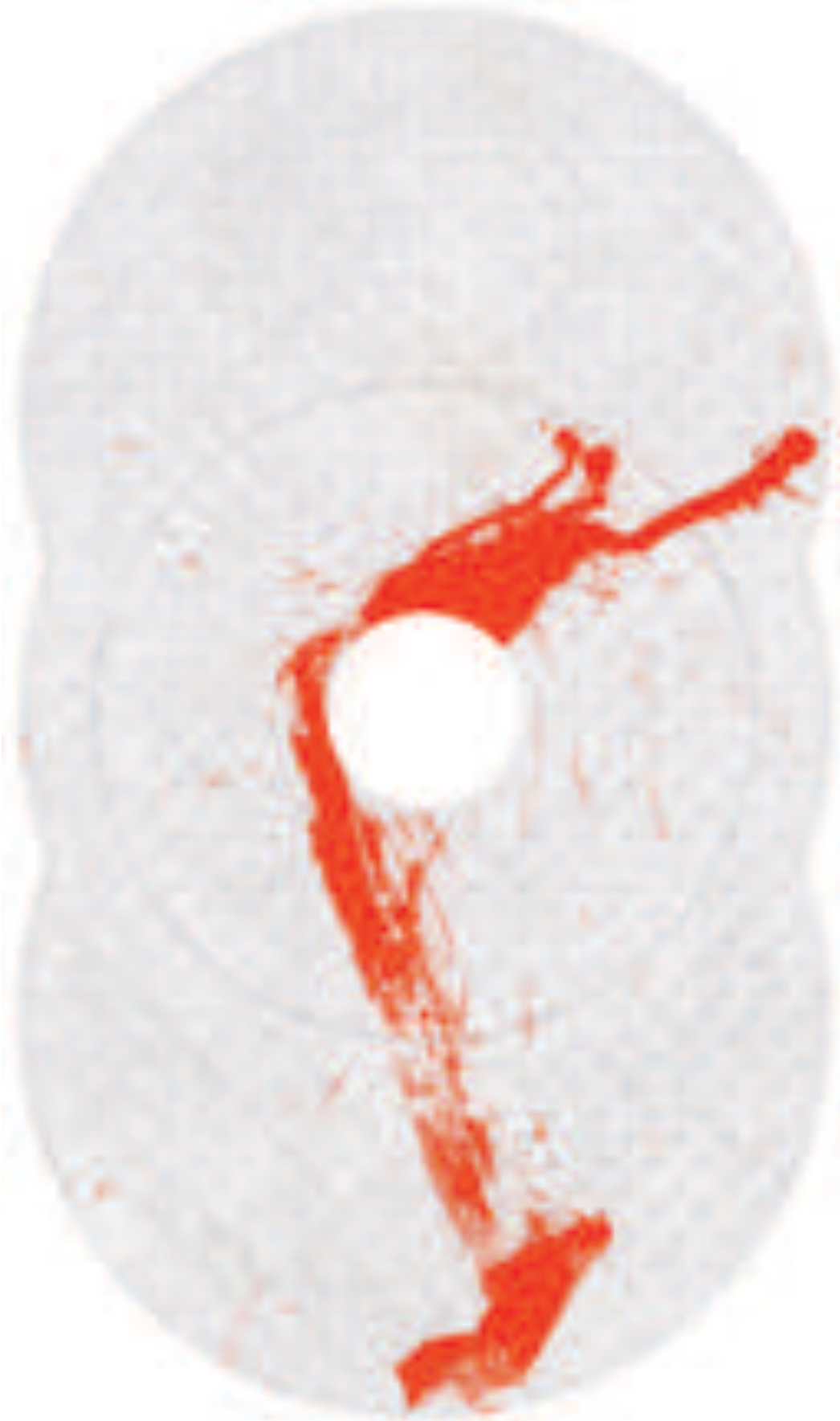
Untitled 6 • 2010
Silverpoint and encaustic on claycoat paper • 18"x14"



Untitled 6 • 2011
Silverpoint on claycoat paper • 18"x14"




Untitled 1 • 2010
Silverpoint on claycoat paper • 18"x14"



Untitled 7 • 2011
Silverpoint on claycoat paper • 18"x14"



Untitled 3 • 2011
Silverpoint on claycoat paper • 18"x14"



Ron Janowich is an artist with studios in New York, New York; Gainesville, Florida; and Preston Park, Pennsylvania. Janowich works as a painter, photographer, digital artist, curator, and associate professor of arts. Having earned a BFA and MFA at the Maryland Institute College of Arts, he teaches for the University of Florida and is the recipient of two individual artist fellowships in painting from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Janowich's work appears in collections in America and abroad: Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY), Tate Gallery (London, UK), Cleveland Museum of Art (Cleveland, OH), Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art (Gainesville, FL), and numerous private collections. Publications featuring his work include H.H. Arnason's *History of Modern Art*, David Carrier's *The Aesthete in the City*, Jeremy Gilbert Rolfe's *Beyond Piety*, and Robert Atkins' *Art Speak*.

Recent cocurated exhibits include "Emergence & Structure" with Daniel Hill at Miami-Dade College Museum of Art + Design, University Gallery, University of Florida and at Grossman Gallery, Lafayette College, Easton, PA (2012); "Synthesis: Experiments in Collaboration" with Merijn van der Heijden at Axel Raben Gallery, New York, Grossman Gallery, Lafayette College, Easton, PA and University Gallery, Pace University, New York (2004); and "Thinking in Line" with John Moore at University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL (2003).

Janowich's Artist Interview Series explores modern themes and modes of expression through interviews with contemporary artists. These interviews have appeared in *Other Voices* ("In Conversation: Robin Hill & Ron Janowich: Handmade, Repetition, Narrative"; Penn State University, 2007) and the *Brooklyn Rail* ("In Conversation: Mary Hambleton & Ron Janowich"; 2004 and "In Conversation: Jake Berthot and Ron Janowich"; 2009).

Recent solo exhibitions include "Recent Silverpoints, Graphite and Encaustic Drawings" (2012) and "Meditations" (2008), Howard Scott Gallery, New York, NY. Recent group exhibitions include "10 Artist to Watch" curated by Peter Frank, Los Angeles Center for the Digital Arts (2011); "Ephemera" The Deluce Gallery, Northwest Missouri State University (2011); "21st National Drawing & Print Exhibition" College of Notre Dame, Baltimore, MD (2010); "Concatenation" Los Angeles Center for the Digital Arts (2010); "Echo, Imprint, Reverb" curated by Stephen Maine at the Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York, NY (2008); "New and Improved" Los Angeles Center for the Digital Arts (2008); "Process and the Contemporary Print" curated by Leslie Wayne, University of Minnesota and Central Florida University (2008); "Positive/Negative" Slocumb Galleries, East Tennessee State University (2008).

Ron Janowich is represented by the Howard Scott Gallery, NYC www.howardscottgallery.com

More information on the work of Ron Janowich can be found at www.RonJanowich.com and www.Rjanowich.com

