



**new
water
colors**

DECEMBER 5 2015- JANUARY 23 2016
AREHART-CABELL INVITATIONAL GALLERY
SNENANDOAH VALLEY ART CENTER



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PIPER GROVES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SVACART.COM

CATALOGUE DESIGN BY

KATE HANCOCK

New Watercolor
(with a brief history of watercolor)

Most of us have tried, maybe back when we were very young, to make a picture with the half used pans of dry watercolor and a scruffy, prickly haired brush. We remember how much fun we had and how great the struggle was as well. Maybe this contributes to the fact that watercolor is often the most easily recognized painting medium among the general American public. In the New Watercolor exhibition at the Shenandoah Valley Art Center, we are getting a chance to see how sixteen artists are exploring—even stretching—the very nature of the historic watercolor medium.

Water-based painting goes far back to the very first artists; those mixing hand crushed colored earth with water to paint on cave walls. A wondrous tradition began in China two thousand plus years ago; watercolor painting on paper or silk. In Central Asian, Indian, and Persian artists have used watercolor and gouache (a semi-opaque watercolor) to create magnificent illustrated manuscripts for many centuries. During the Middle Ages watercolor and tempera for illustrating manuscripts but watercolor painting in the West was first practiced by the 16th century German artist, Albrecht Durer. In the 1700's, watercolor was taught in the royal academies of Europe as an aid for artists or naturalists to make color sketches out in the field. By the early 1800's, Romantic landscape paintings and the published illustrations by naturalists were all the rage in England. With them, the popularity of watercolor soared.

North American painting in watercolor grew out of this English tradition but soon became uniquely indigenous; just think of the John White's early watercolors of the native Virginia coastal cultures and James Audubon's wonderful (water)colored drawings of our native fauna and flora. During the mid 1800's Winslow Homer, whose watercolors were boldly designed and richly colored, elevated watercolor to the height of professional painting. His works, and the brash, fluid brushwork of his expatriate colleague, John Singer Sargent, set the new American standard in watercolor painting for several decades.

Early in the 20th century, watercolor gained new followers with the coming of age of a group of committed modernists. Charles Predergast, Georgia O'Keefe, John Marin, and Charles Demuth all learned the traditional methods of the medium but, eschewing the conservative influences of their day, attempted to use watercolor as an innovative modern painting technique. Marin's boldly broken brushwork and Demuth's elegantly refined compositions sought to reinterpret American themes through the lens of Cubist and Futurist modernism. Charles Burchfield in his earliest and late works, along with work of the highly idiosyncratic Walter Anderson, approached watercolor landscape painting with an ecstatic and poetic intensity that rivaled European Expressionism. Some American artists rejected European derived Modernism and sought to create new Modern and American forms of realism. Edward Hopper, Burchfield (again) and Ben Shahn created magnificent watercolors in this period.

Sam Francis painted significant aqueous paintings, but he was alone among the 50's and 60's New York School/Abstract Expressionist artists to do so. This might be attributable to the massive, even heroic, scale of much American work of the period, a size for which we tend to think traditional watercolor is not particularly well-suited. Among artists, an interest in watercolor may also have been supplanted by experimentation with the new aqueous medium, acrylic. However, after the mid-century lull in artists' interest in watercolor, a resurgence of naturalistic

imagery and the rise of "works-on-paper" during the 70's and 80's increased the visibility of all types of aqueous-media painting. Traditional transparent watercolor, gouache (the opaque watercolor), their close relatives casein and tempera, as well as acrylic and mixed aqueous media have been prominent in the works of Romare Bearden, Phillip Pearlstein, Andrew Wyeth, Carolyn Brady, Joseph Raphael.

The sixteen artists in this exhibition at the Shenandoah Valley Art Center pursue watercolor very independently, but each have precedents in this long line of America watercolor painters. Jane Forth and Junko Yamamoto have both adopted the application of applying paper over panels in their work, but to different ends. Yamamoto's almost architectonic approach to design is solid and bold; Ms. Forth's image is much more akin to the Marin's work but in a softer, more romantic, and ethereal vein.

Beth Sharur's Imperiled, takes up the ancient practice of manuscript painting and marries it to the quintessential 20th century concept of mixed-media. Colleen Harrigan's Cape Pogue seems simpler at first glance when compared to the ornately worked composition of Four Sisters by Jane Skafte, but both move the viewer through the layers of watercolor/collage imagery in subtle, sophisticated ways. Looking at Amy Smith's Solid As A Rock, a wonderful paradox emerges as her "rock" is created with boldly sophisticated visual passages; making fine use of the still new Yupo surface's potential. Similarly sensuous, the surprises of color applied to a non-traditional surface (film), is evident in Chhiv Taing's delicate work.

Carl Gombert and Susan Rosen are so different in terms in style, intent, and approach but they have intriguingly incorporated a surprising use of hand stamping with aqueous media ... a technique not usually associated with watercolor at all. Seeming opposites in their use of hues, Scott Hillman and Ananda Balangit-LeFils' works are densely packed with solidly designed color passages.

Frankly, it is the energy of expression, the very intensity of spirit running through them, which draws my attention to these sixteen artists' works. The sumptuous coloration of Steven Wolf's Row of Burnished Trees and the seeming simplicity Phoenix by Rachel Gaudry, speak in very different visual languages. But both, and the work of each of the other artists in SVAC's New Watercolor, resonate with sincerity and honesty. The works feel new; that is rare, in any medium.

John A. Hancock
November, 2015

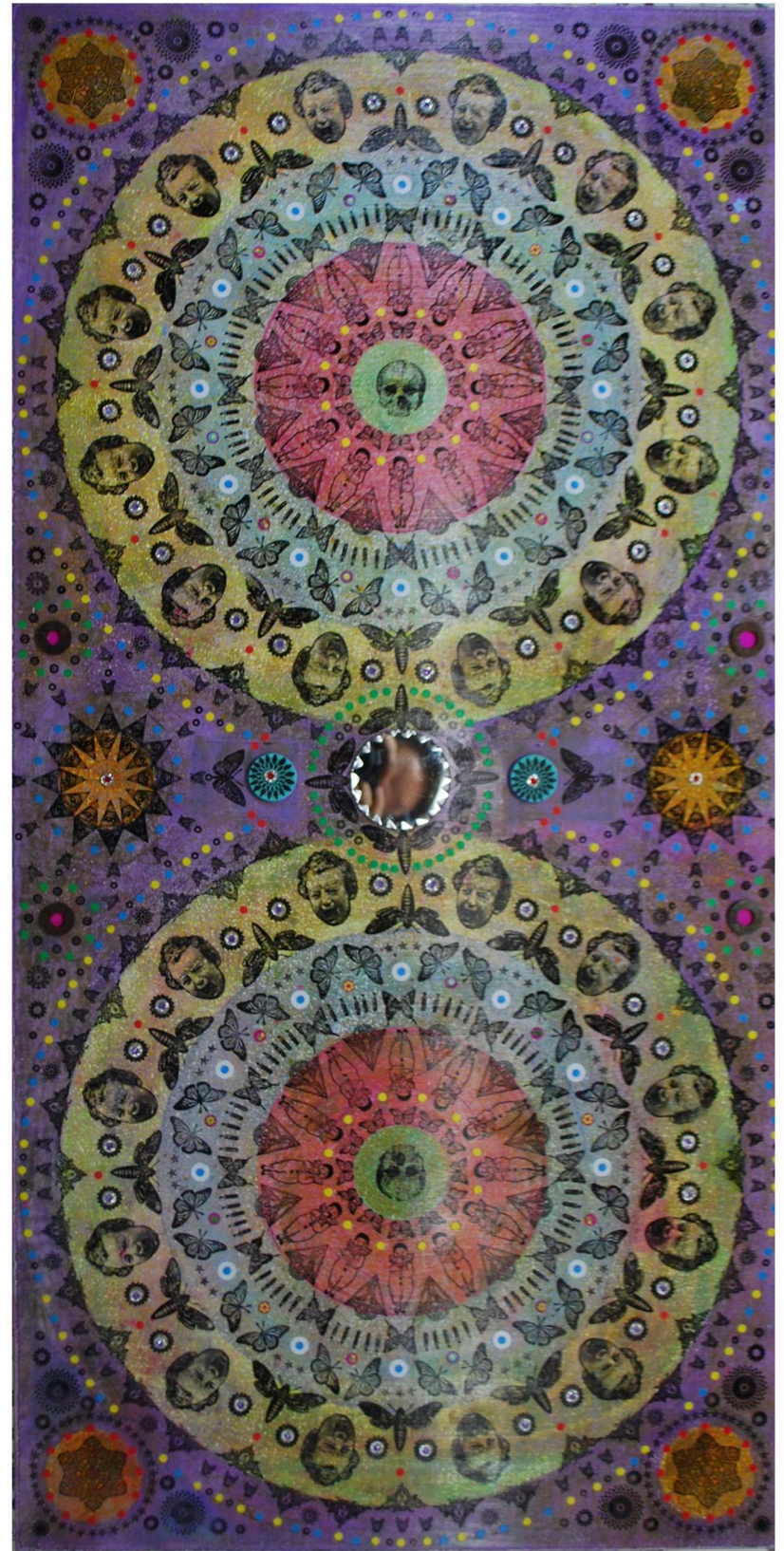


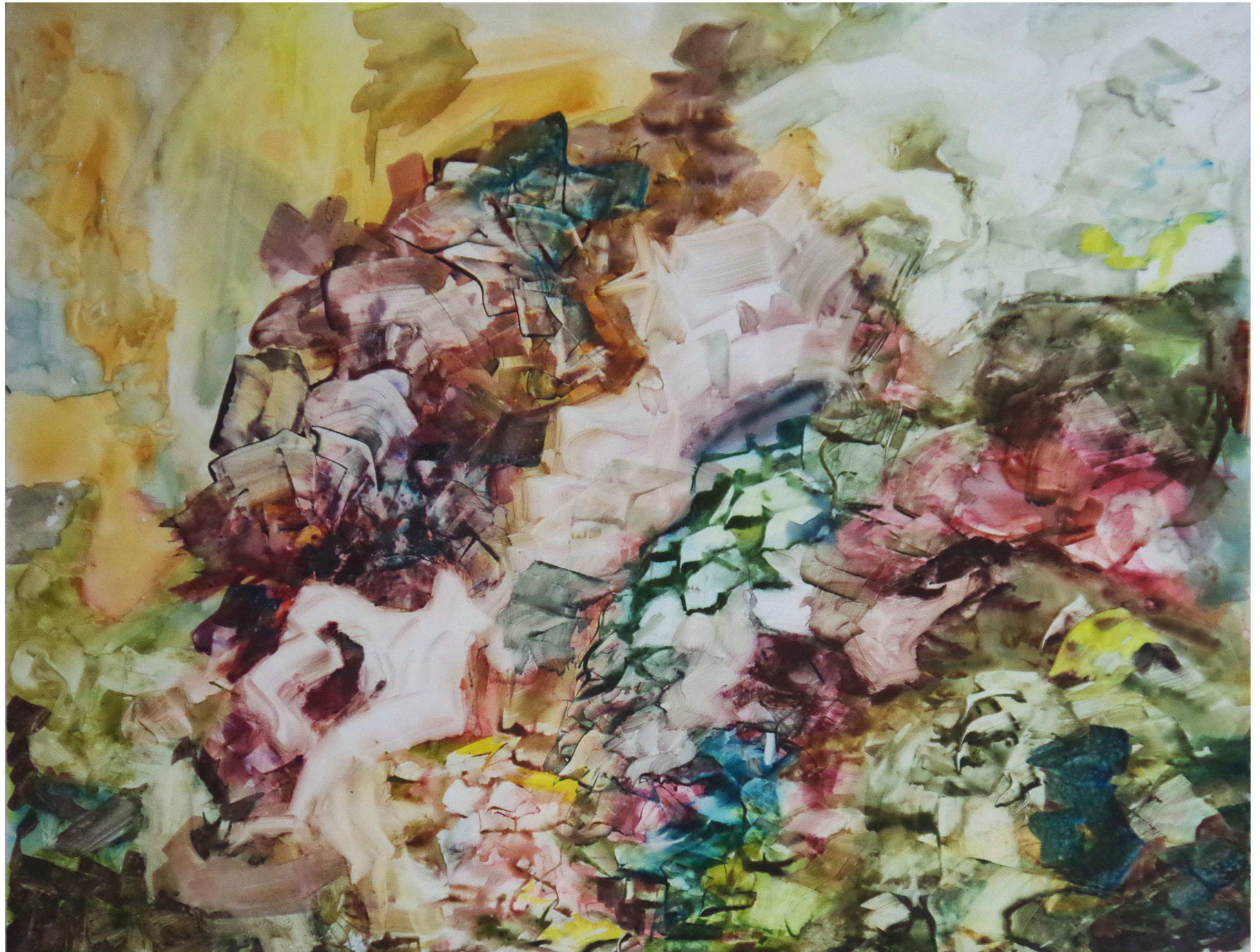
M. Colleen Harrigan
Cape Pogue

mixed media collaged papers with watercolor

12 x 10

Explanation
Carl Gombert
mixed media on panel
24 x 48





Amy Smith
Solid as a Rock
watercolor on yupo
24 x 30



Carol Barber
Hill and Mountain
watercolor, gouach, water-soluble crayon, colored pencil on paper
9 x 12



Randy Akers
Walking Palm 5
watercolor and graphite on paper
8 x 10

Annie Parham
Eden
watercolor and marker
37 x 35





Chee Rickets
Oh Shenandoah!

transparent watercolor on watercolor gessoed canvas
triptych format, 16 x 48

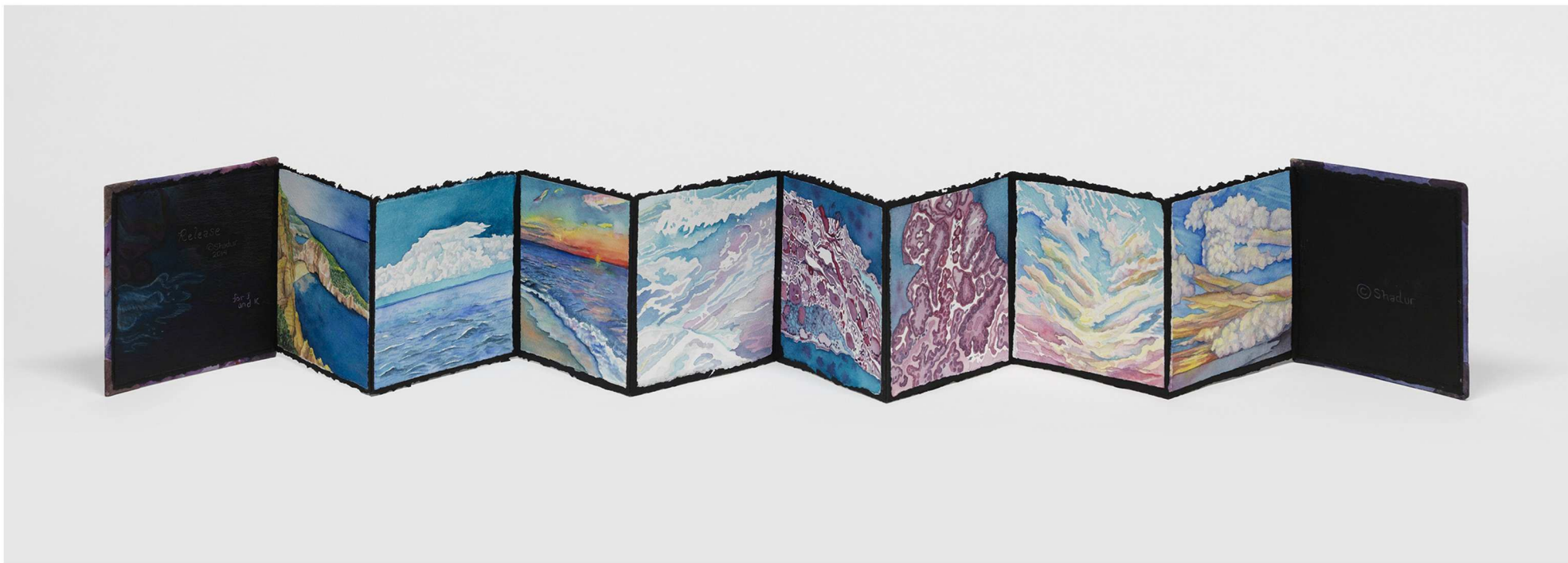


Steven Wolf
Row of Burnished Trees
15 x 22



Junko Yamamata
05

acrylic and ink on strips of japanese paper, mounted on wood panel
9 x 12



Beth Shadur
Imperiled
watercolor with mixed media in a handmade artist book
7 x 15, 7 x 7.5 open

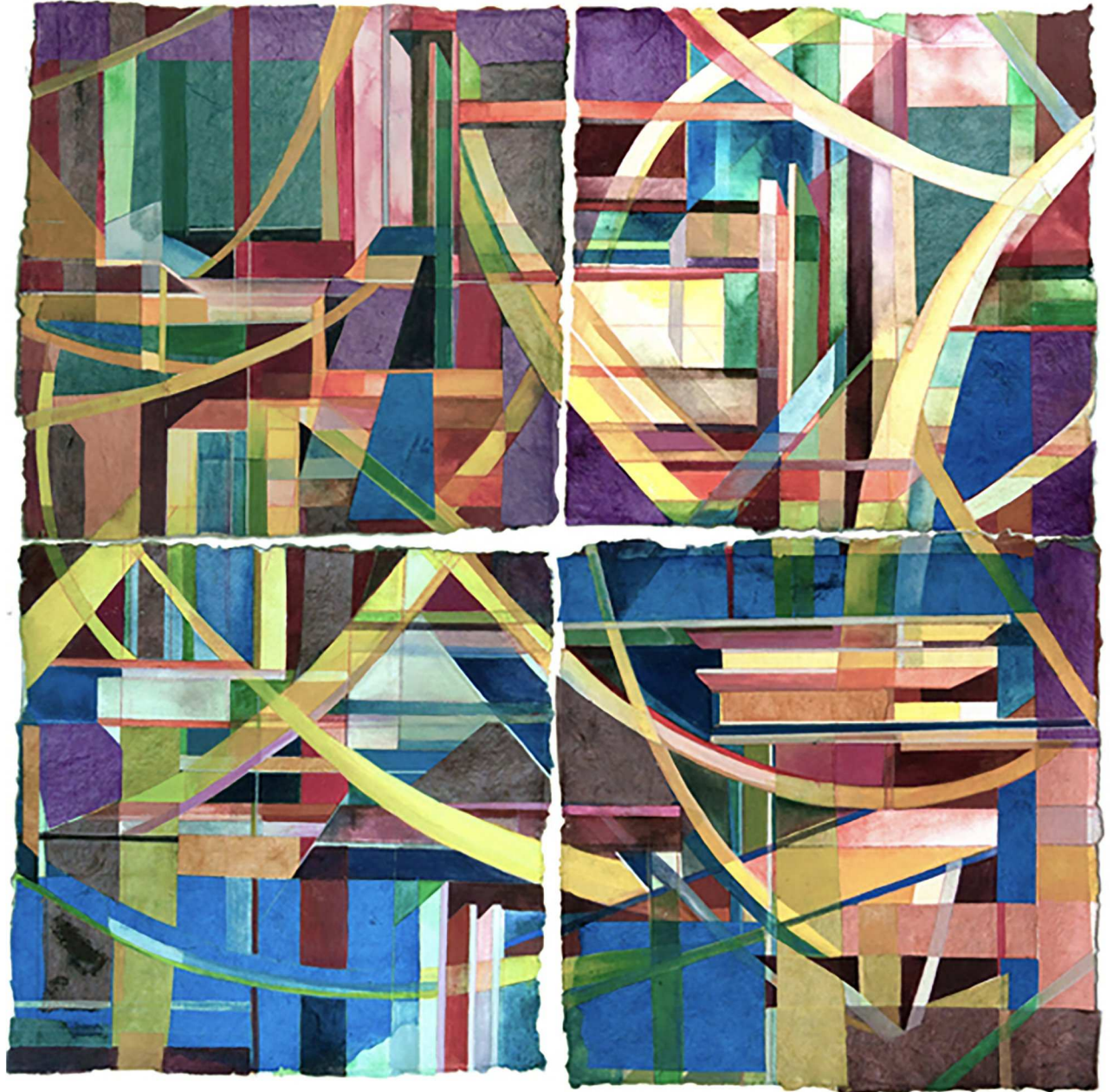
Rachel Gaudry
Pheonix
watercolor on paper
22 x 30



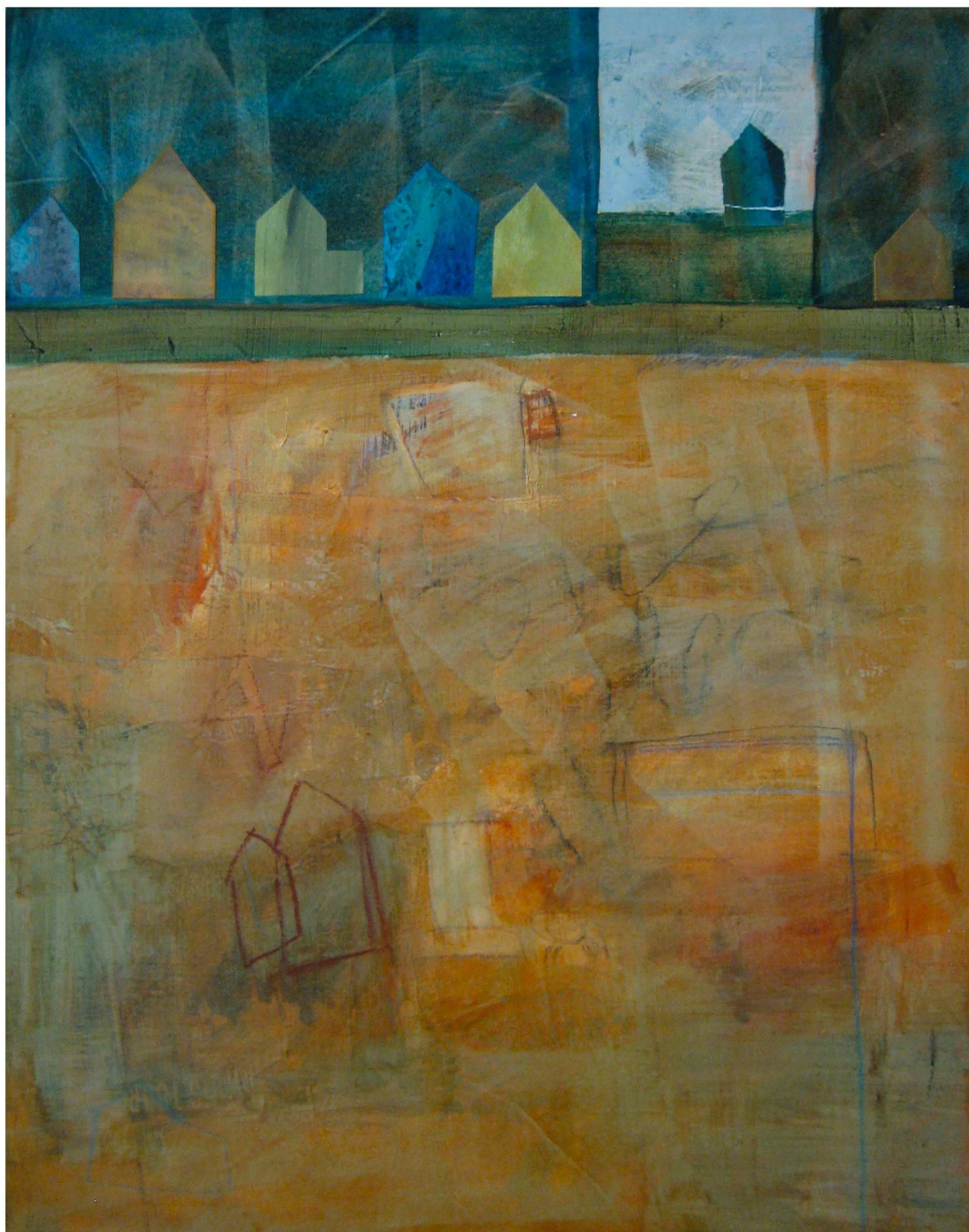
Scott Hillman
On the Reef
watercolor, pen and ink
22 x 30



Jane Skafte
Four Sisters
gouache and collage
on mixed papers
24 x 24



Susab Rosen
The Neighborhood
acrylic, crayon, and collage
21 x 35



Ananda Balingit-LeFils

Her

gouache, graphite
and watercolor on paper

29 x 43





Jane Forth
Woodland Autumn
watercolor, watercolor sticks
and pencils on paper mounted over panel
18 x 24

Chhiv Taing
Rue Graveolens
watercolor on paper
translucent paper cutouts
transparent colored film
9 x 12





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