

74/509
(1912-1993)

WALLY FINDLAY GALLERIES

Leonard Nelson

(1912-1993)

Leonard Nelson, leader of the *Philadelphia School of Art*, was born Leonard Louis Nelson in Camden, New Jersey on March 5, 1912 to Anna (nee Bryen) and Morris Nelson. Nelson's father owned several local businesses and provided a comfortable lifestyle for his family, but tragedy struck in 1928 when both Nelson's parents died in their early 40s (his mother from unexplained causes, his father from a heart attack). Nelson was then 16 years old. He and his two sisters lived on trust funds until the stock-market crash of 1929 left them completely destitute.

In the autumn of 1936, lacking both a portfolio and formal art instruction, Nelson won a scholarship to the *Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts* in Philadelphia. Nelson so impressed the school with his work that he was awarded the *Cresson Traveling Fellowship* in 1939.

After six weeks of touring both Eastern and Western Europe, Nelson returned to Philadelphia for another year of study at the *Academy*, earning his certificate in 1939. He took classes at the *Barnes Foundation* in Merion, Pennsylvania from 1939 to 1941 and became friendly with Dr. Barnes and the British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell. In 1942, Nelson was drafted into the Army and became a Private in the Medical Detachment at Fort Eustis, Virginia. During Nelson's time in the service, he designed murals and humorous drawings for the hospital to which he was assigned, as well as for the Works Progress Administration.

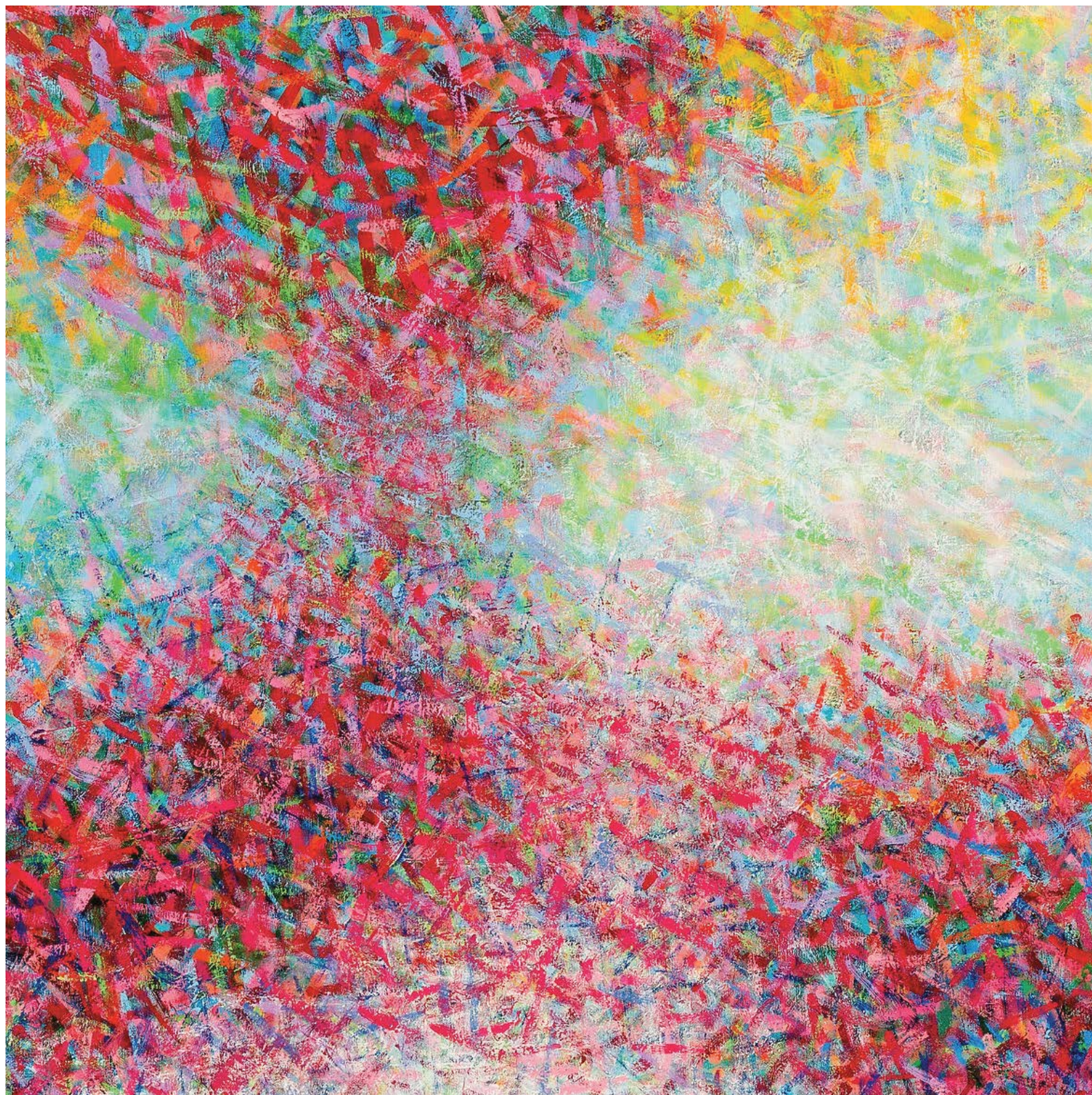
After his Honorable Discharge from the Army on September 15, 1943, Nelson focused all his attention on his art, holding shows and participating in exhibitions in Philadelphia and New York City. The influences of Native American art and the Native American-inspired murals of Rufino Tamayo and Diego Rivera can be seen in his work from this period.

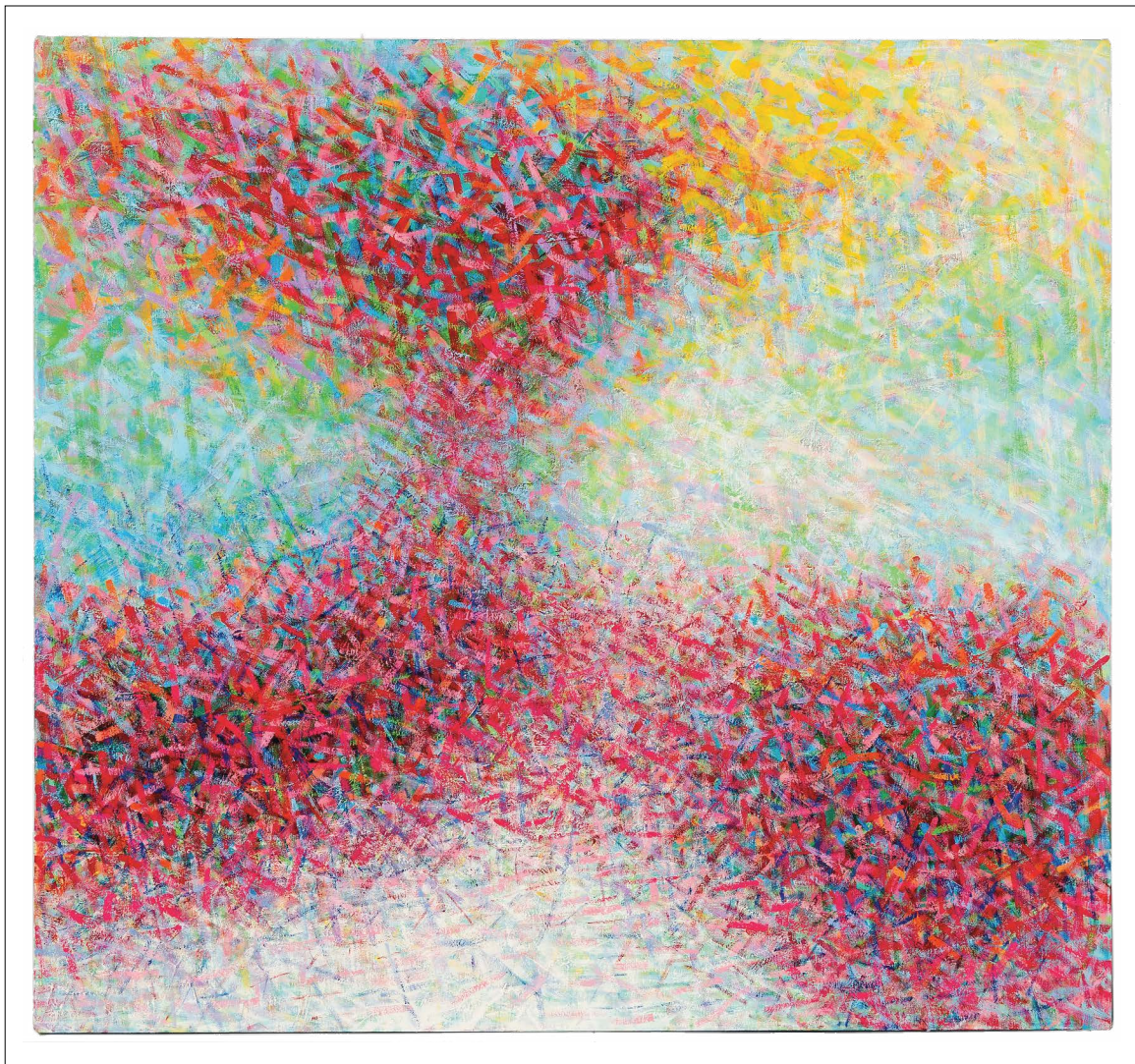
By the mid 1940s, Nelson made two important contacts who would assure his ascendancy in the nascent *New York School*: the art dealers Peggy Guggenheim and Betty Parsons. He began to exhibit in the New York galleries, in particular Parsons' gallery, and his work reflected the *Abstract Expressionist* style made famous by this school. Nelson counted among his contemporaries at this time Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Willem de Kooning, Adolph Gottlieb, and many others from the *New York School*.

The late 1940s and early 1950s took Nelson in a new direction. He began to teach art, most notably at the *Moore College of Art* in Philadelphia, where his *Abstract Expressionist* works metamorphosed into a new style that was all his own. This style was a combination of gestural *Abstract Expressionism*, *Color Field*, and landscape art. It would go on to become his signature style, but to his dismay, the New York art world disavowed it. Nelson was told that in order to remain a heavyweight in the New York scene, he would have to adhere to the *Abstract Expressionist* style that had brought him to prominence in the first place. Feeling that New York was impeding the direction he was taking his work, Nelson immediately relocated to Philadelphia, where he would reside for the remainder of his life. This quieter art scene allowed him to work unfettered and unjudged. Nelson was aware that his relocation could isolate him into obscurity, yet he was willing to take the chance in order that his new style would thrive.

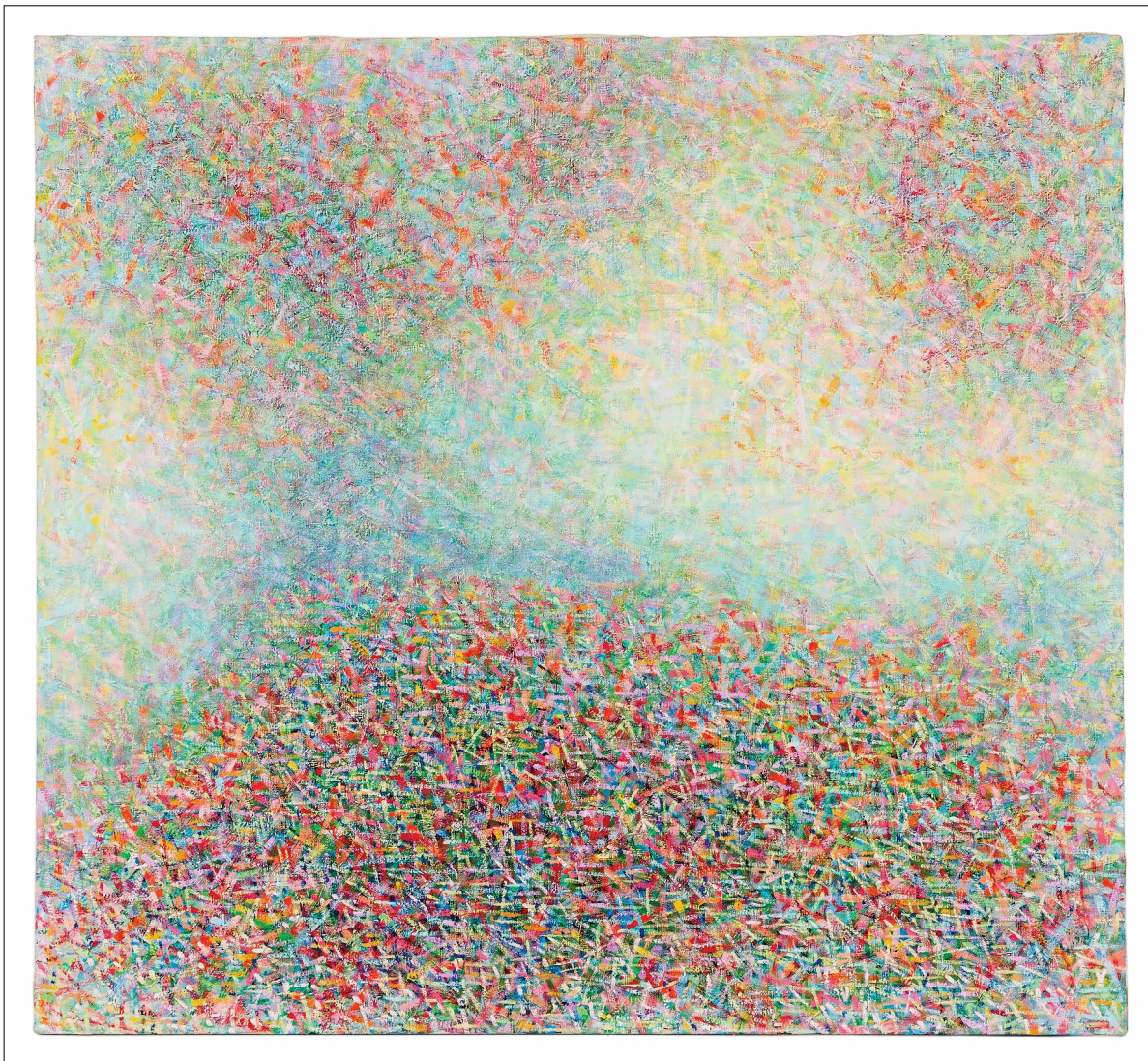
Nelson spent his time in the 1950s and 1960s teaching at *Moore*, traveling, painting, and exhibiting. It was during the 50s and 60s that he perfected his vision of landscape color field that is the earliest representation of the *Philadelphia School of Art*. In 1963 he married Alma Neas, a former *Moore* student.

Although New York had rejected Nelson's new style, his aesthetic began to influence Philadelphia painters such as Warren Rohrer, Murray Dessner, and Stephen Estock, all of whom incorporated Nelson's tonal, atmospheric, and perceptual qualities suggesting landscape – the hallmarks of the *Philadelphia School of Art*. *Moore College of Art* and select Philadelphia galleries regularly exhibited Nelson, with *Moore* hosting his retrospective in 1977. In 1985 he and Alma moved to their permanent home in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, a Main Line town on the outskirts of Philadelphia. Nelson's luminous canvases of the 1970s and 1980s were described by art historian Sam Hunter in his 2001 text *Leonard Nelson: A Life in Art*, as "pathbreaking." Hunter believed that Nelson's name should be mentioned on par with color field artists Noland, Olitski, and Frankenthaler, and he ranked Nelson as one of Philadelphia's most important painters. Leonard Nelson died on November 23, 1993 but posthumously has become recognized for his originating the *Philadelphia School of Art*.

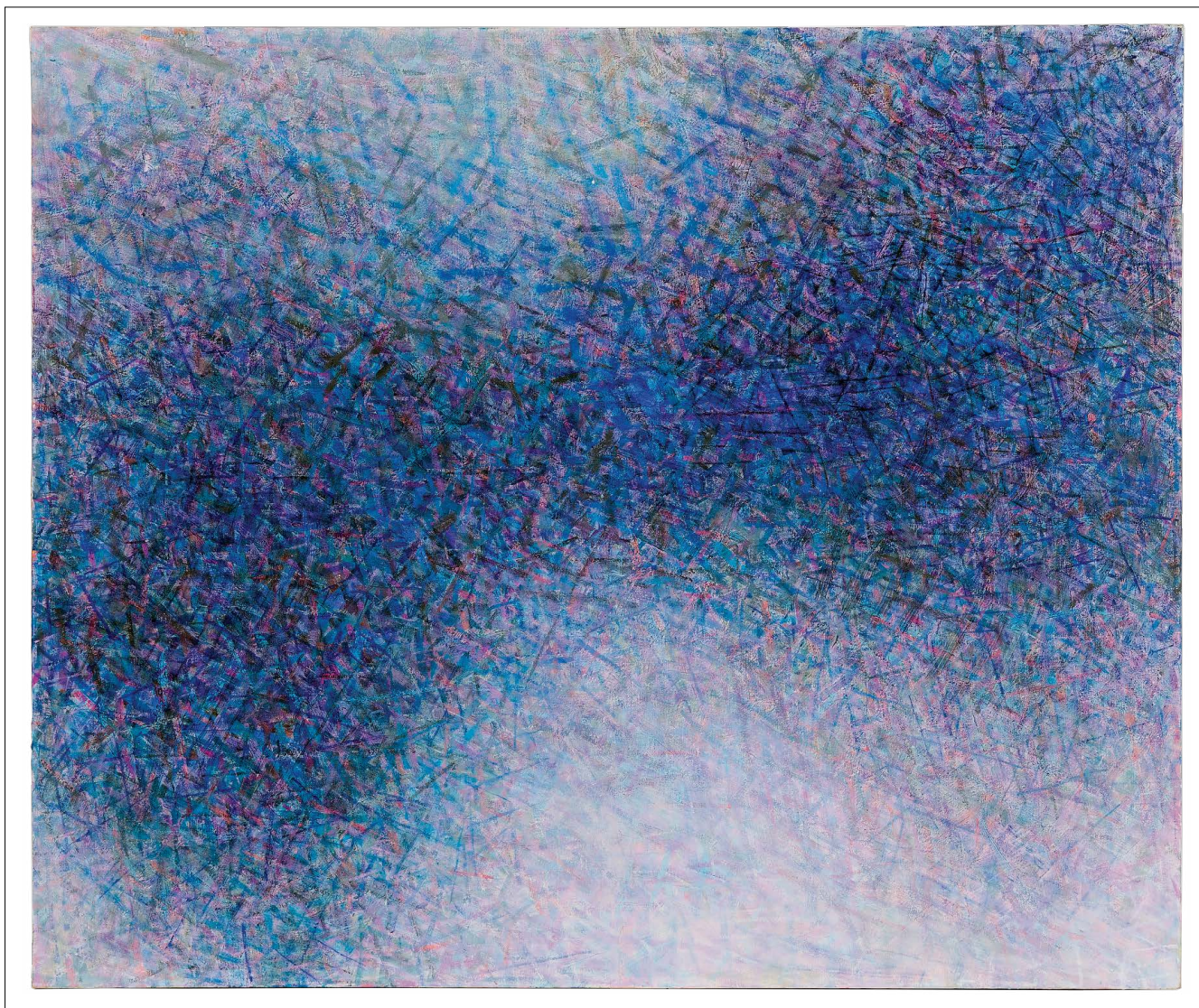




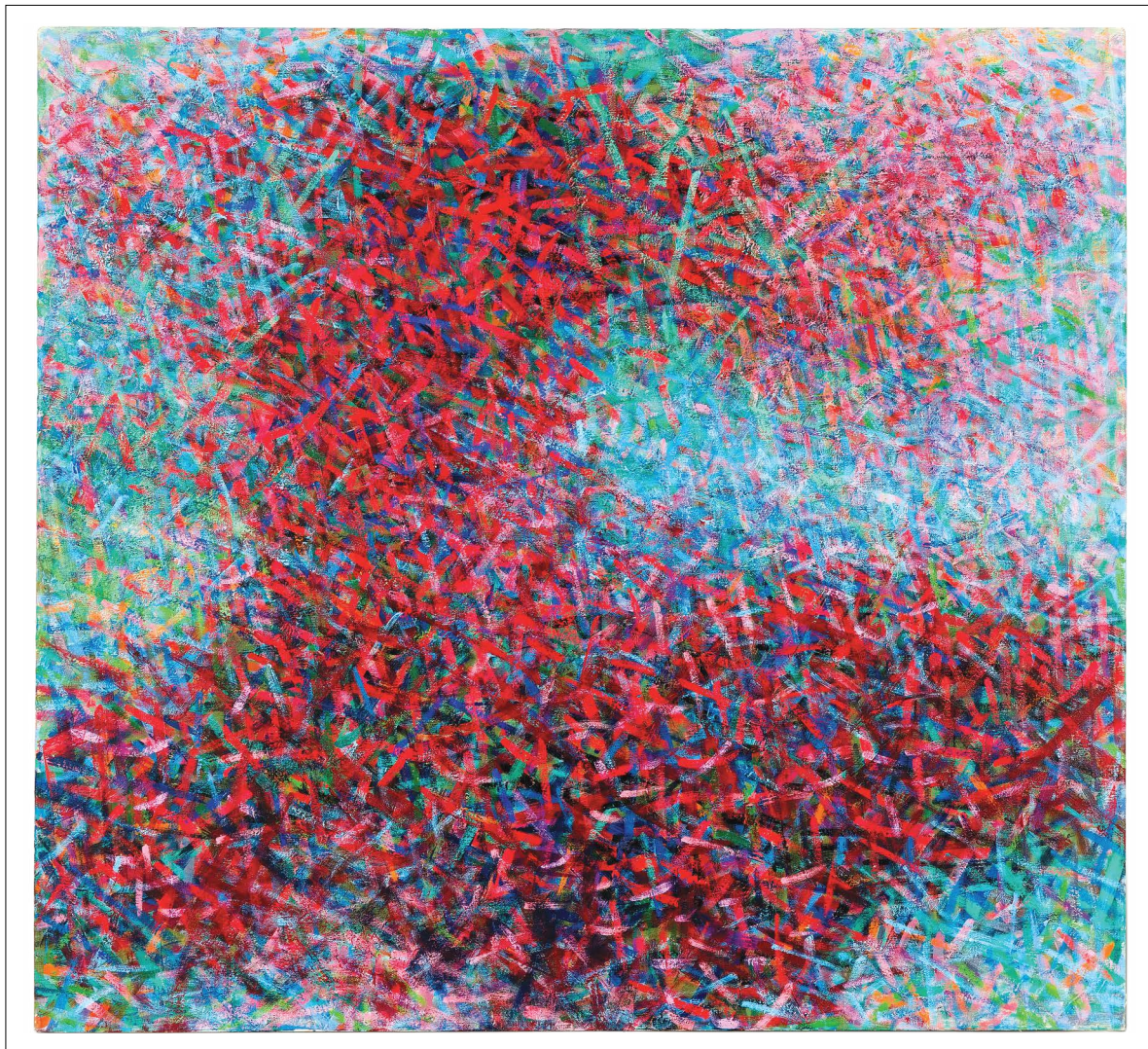
Colorfield, 1990 - 92
50 x 54 ¹/₄ inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1990 - 92 | 135423



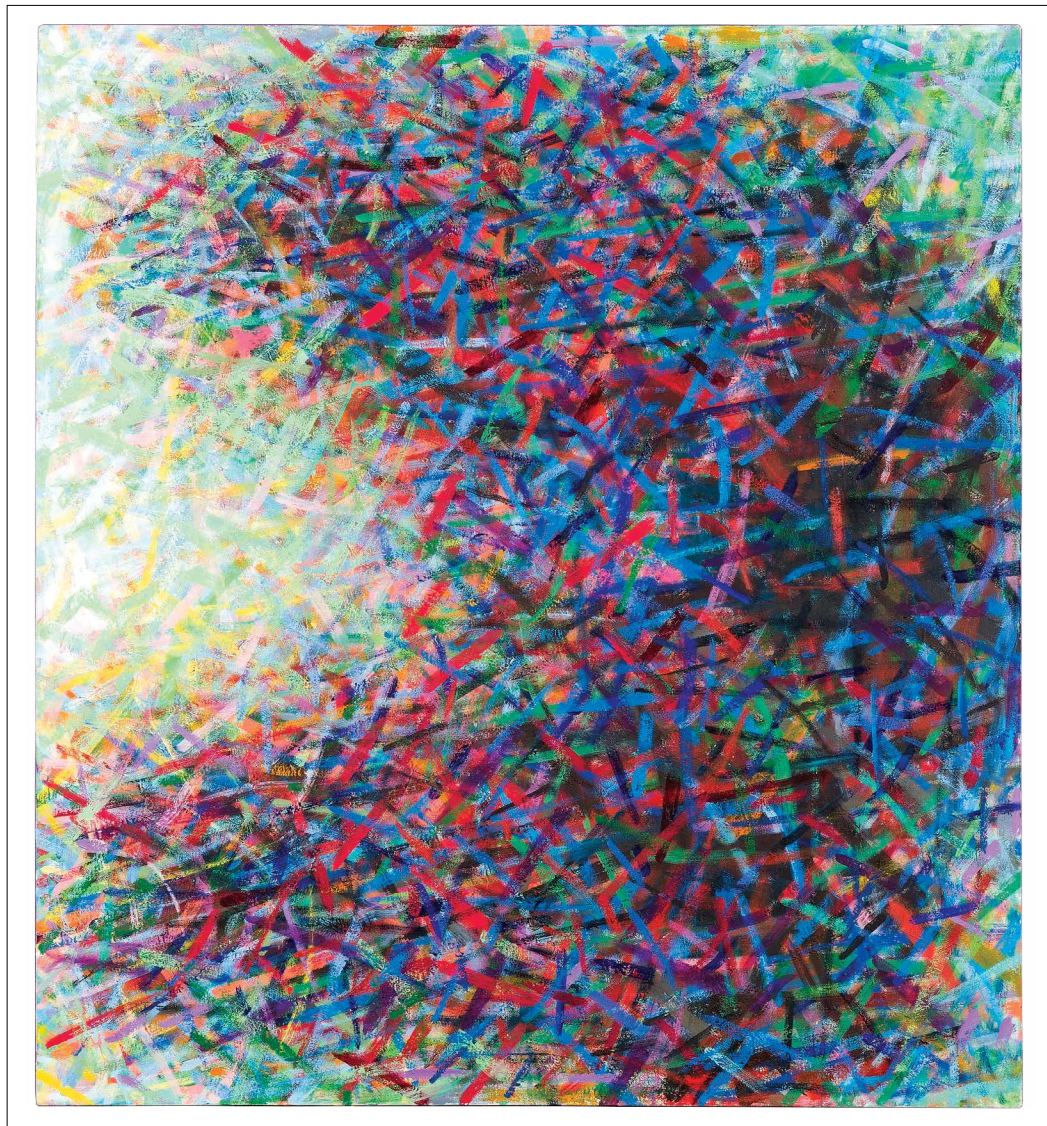
Colorfield, 1990
48 x 52 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1990 | 135420



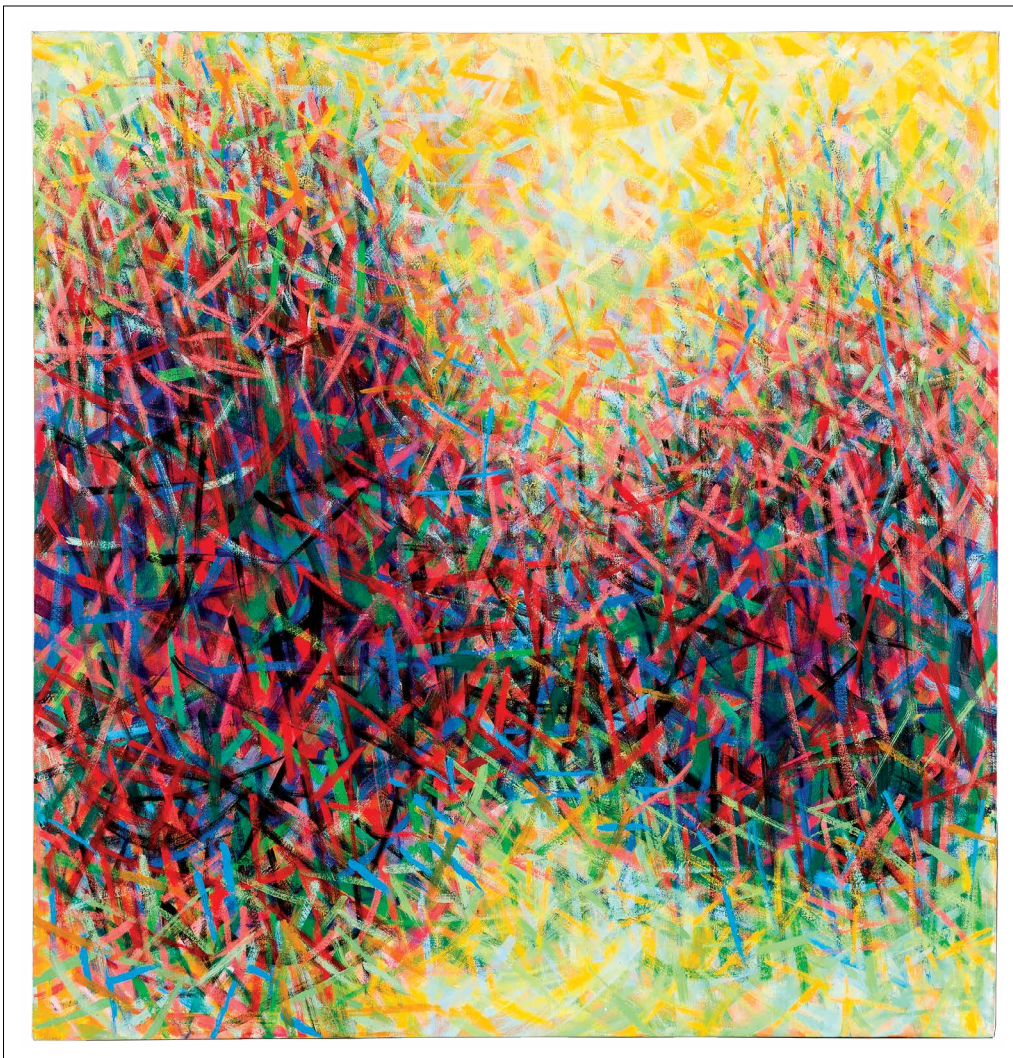
Colorfield, 1990 - 92
50 x 60 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed between 1990 - 92 | 135438



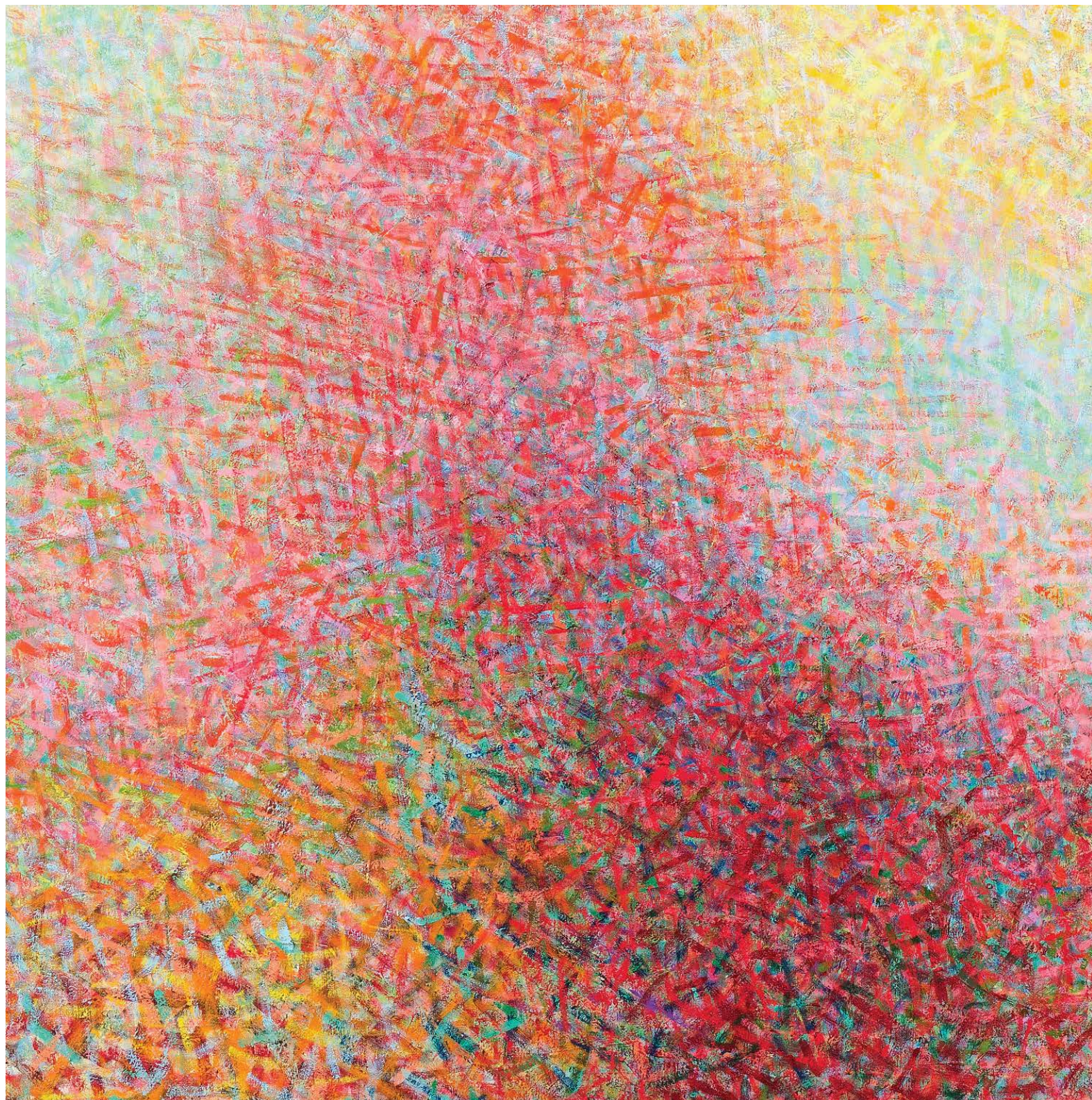
Colorfield, 1989 - 92
46 x 50 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1989 - 92 | 135414

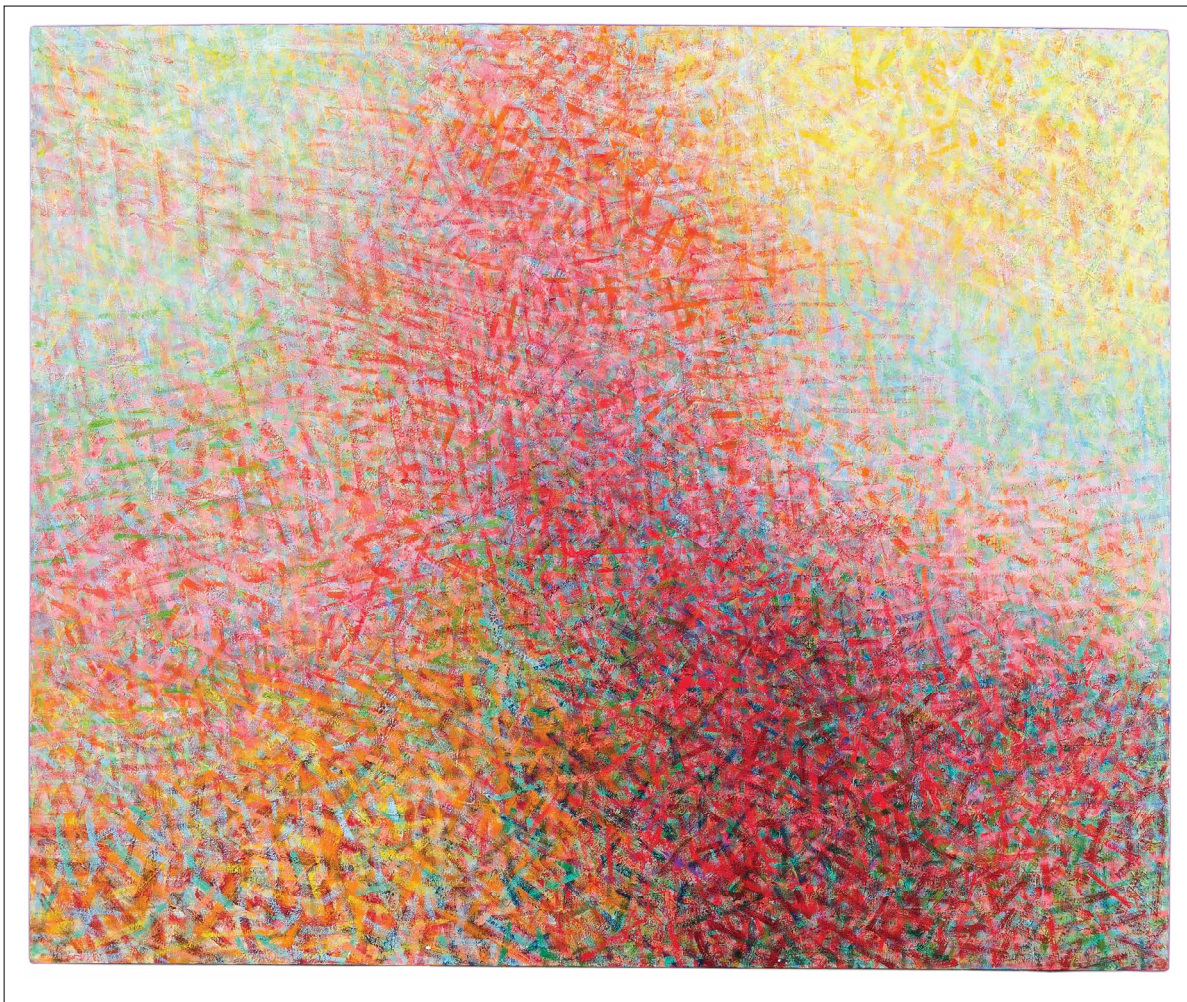


Colorfield, 1991 - 93
54 x 50 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1991 - 93 | 135443

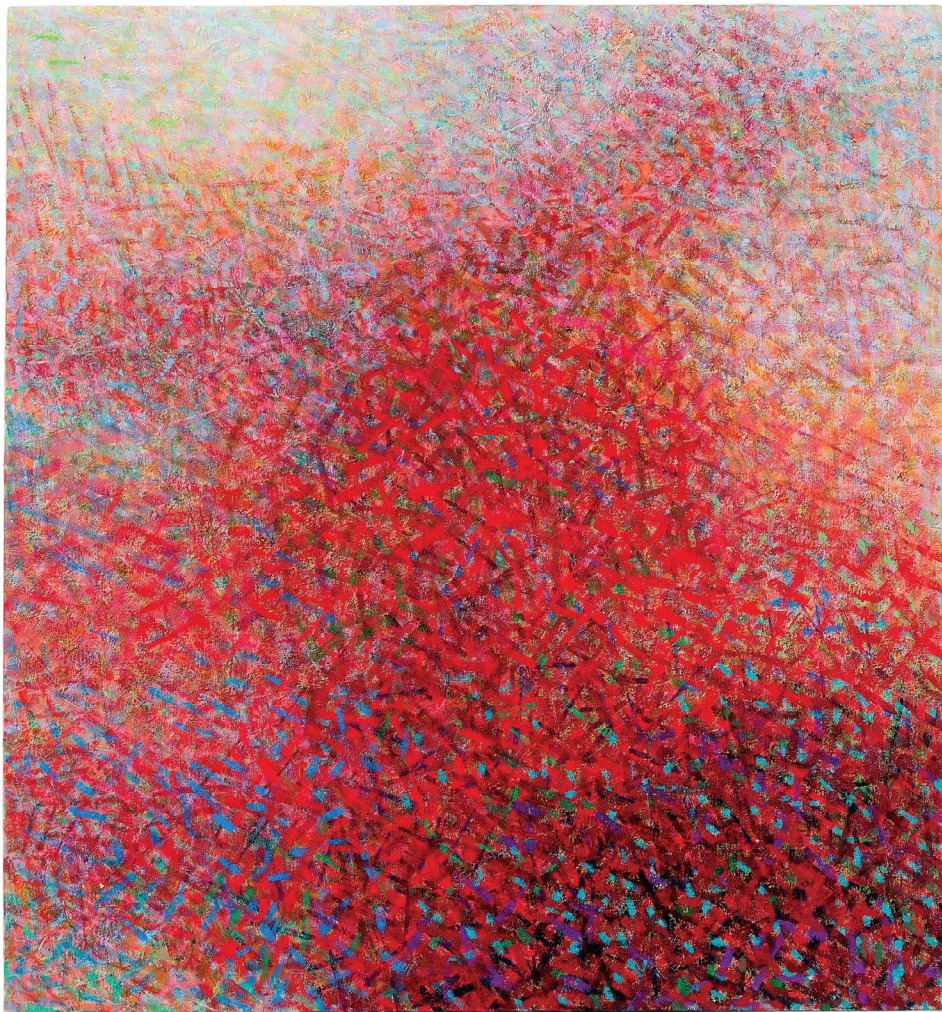


Colorfield, 1992 - 93
50 x 48 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1992 - 93 | 135446

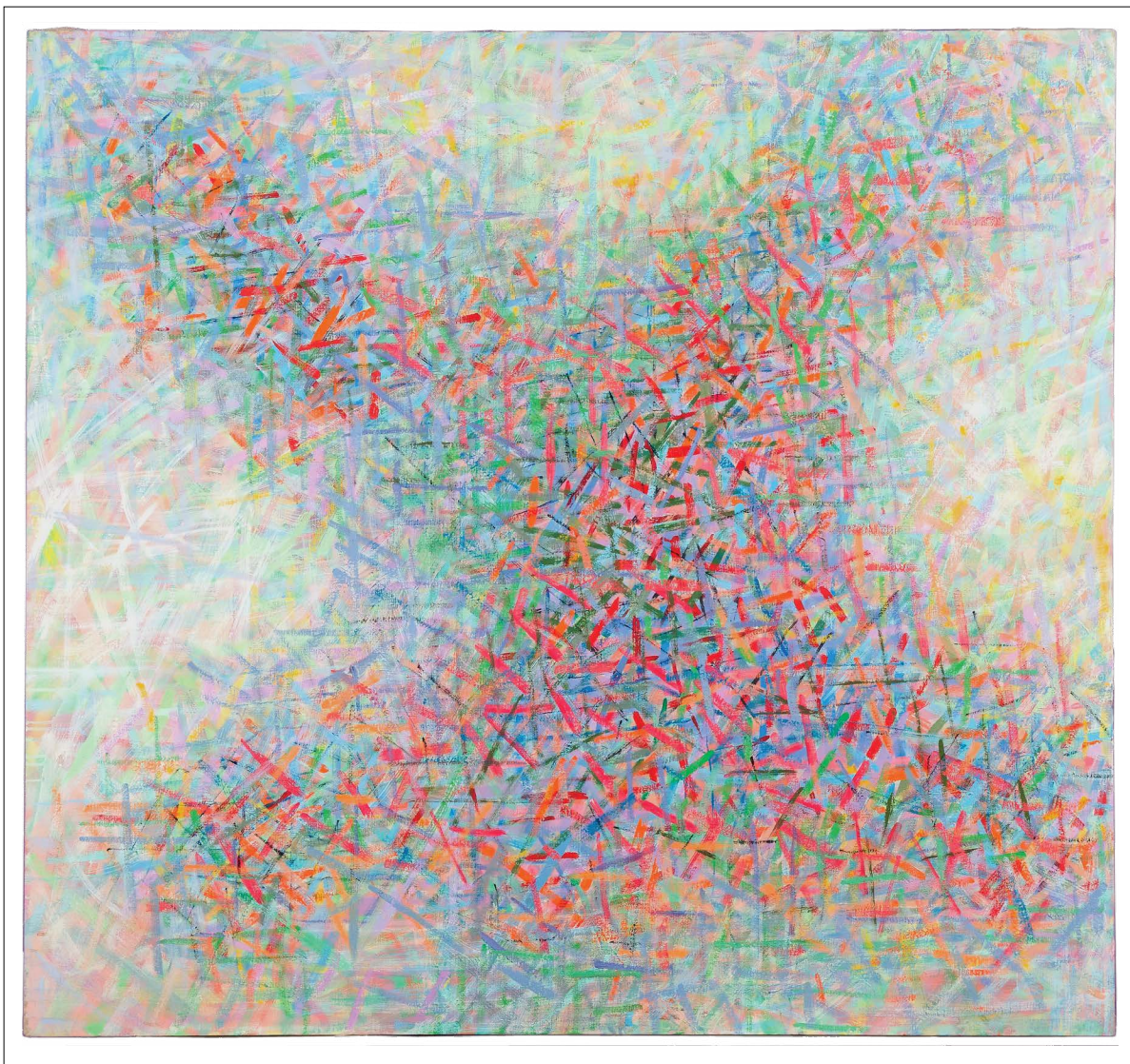




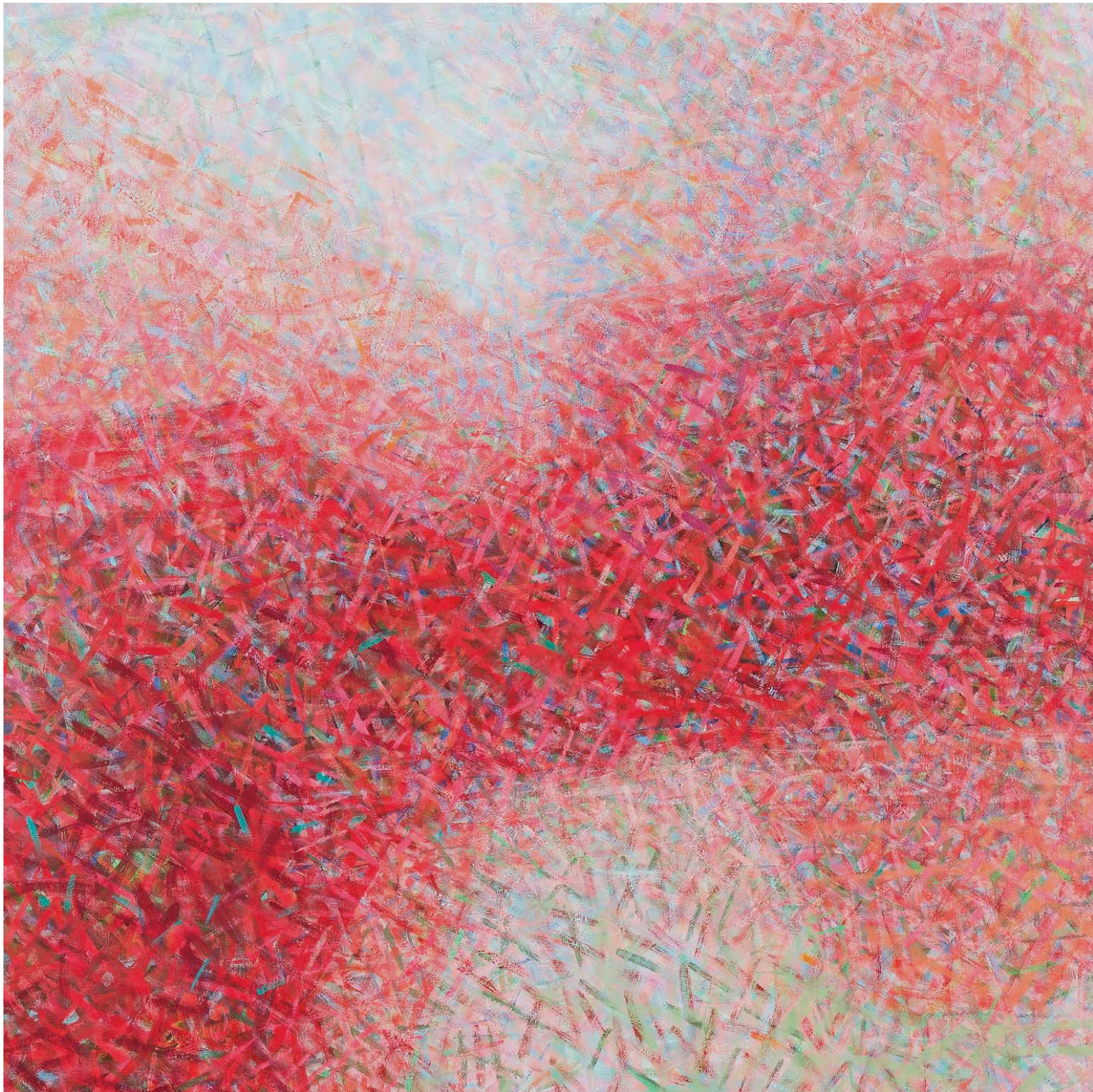
Autume Fire, 1990 - 92
50 ¹/₄ x 60 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1990 - 92 | 135421



Autume, 1990 - 92
50 X 46 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1990 - 92 | 135419



2 + 2 = 5, 1990 - 92
50 x 54 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1990 - 92 | 135425

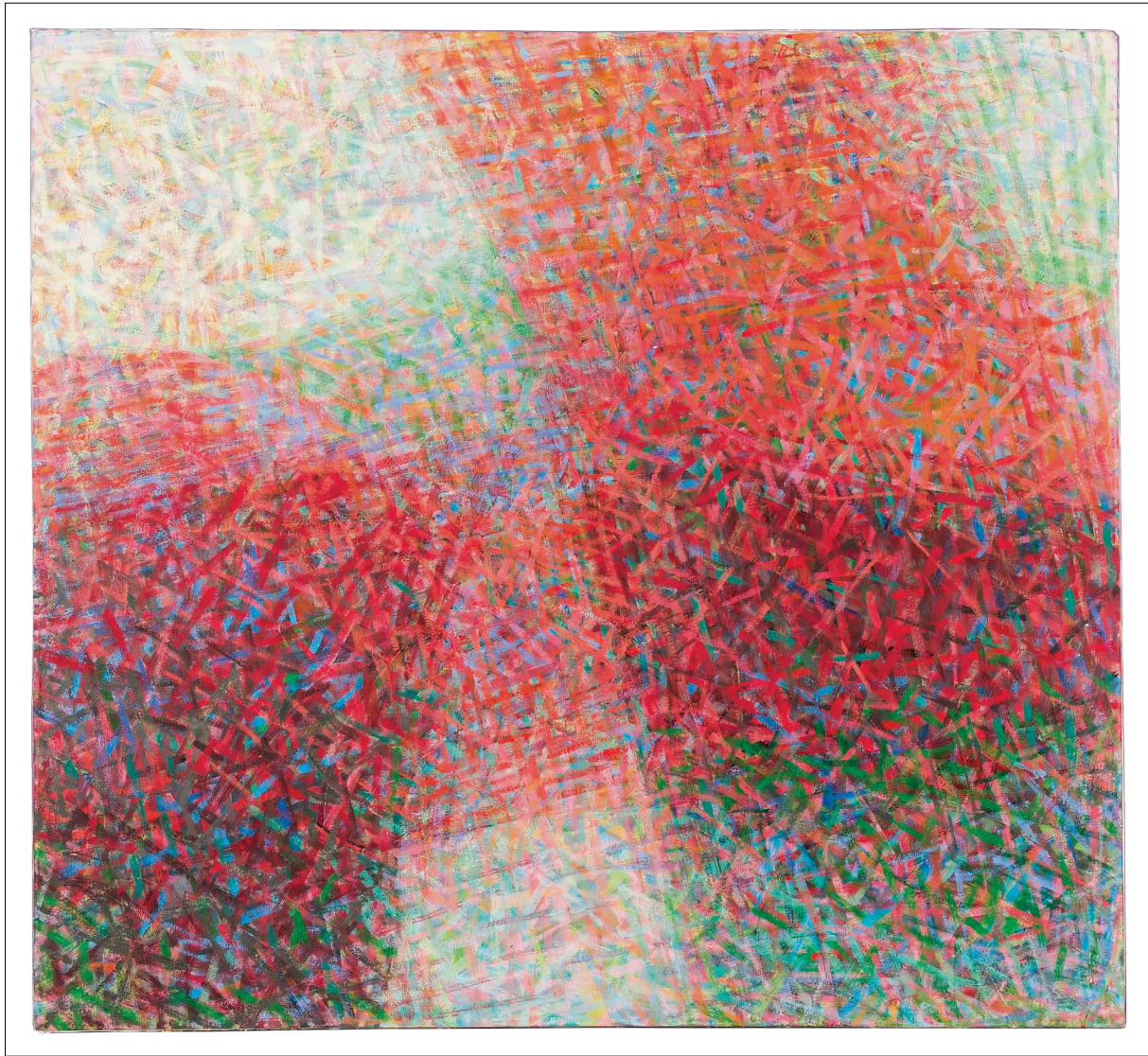




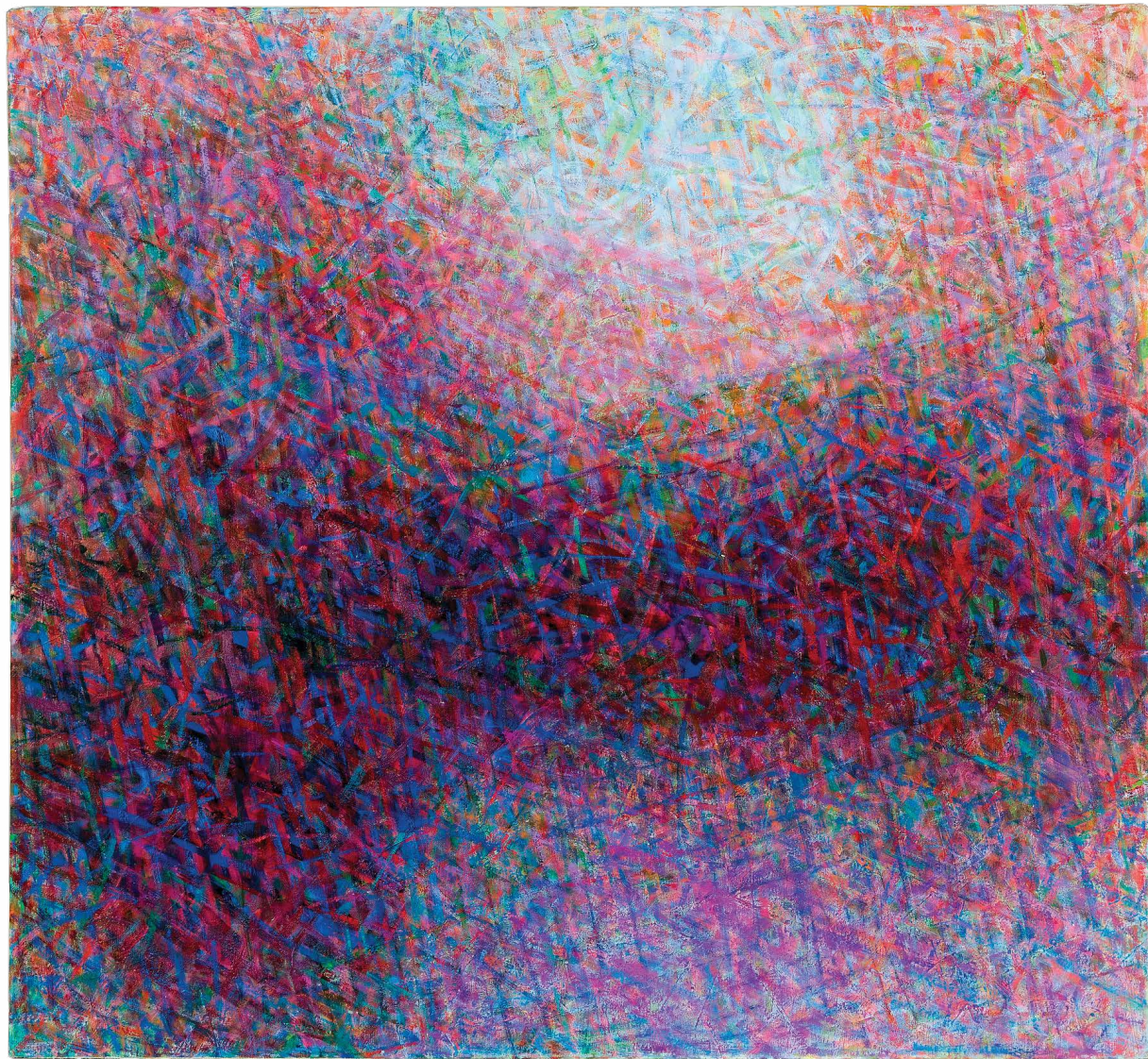
Folksong, 1991 - 92
54 X 60 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1991 - 92 | 135429



Rock, 1990 - 91
50 x 54 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1990 - 91 | 135432



Be Bop, 1991
50 ³/₄ x 54 ¹/₄ inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1991 | 135434

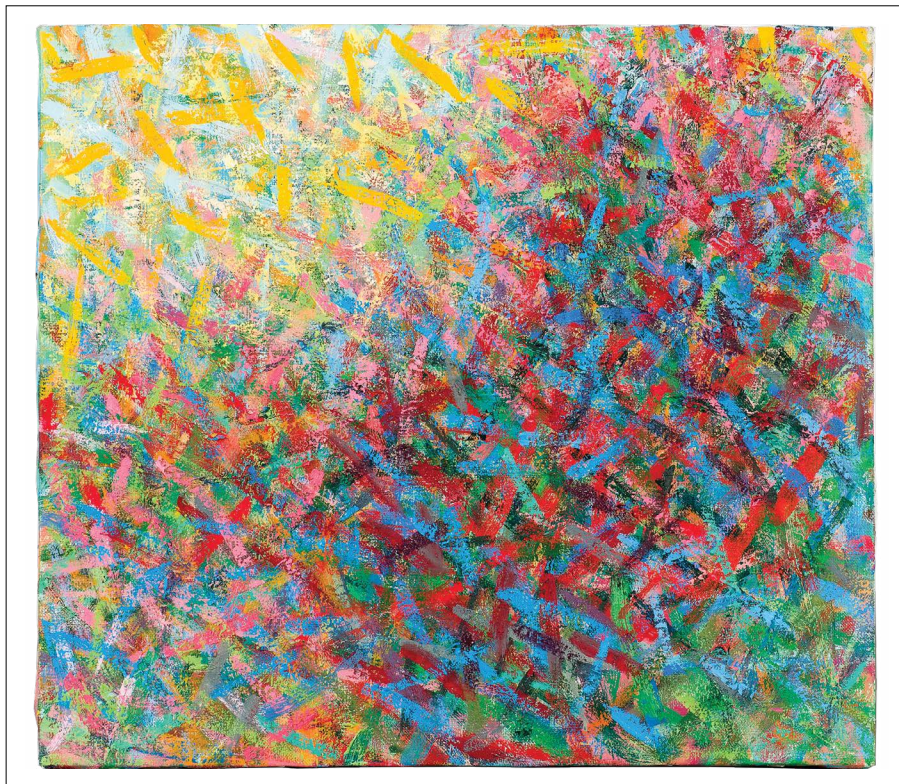


Symphony, 1990 - 91
50 x 54 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1990 - 91 | 135433





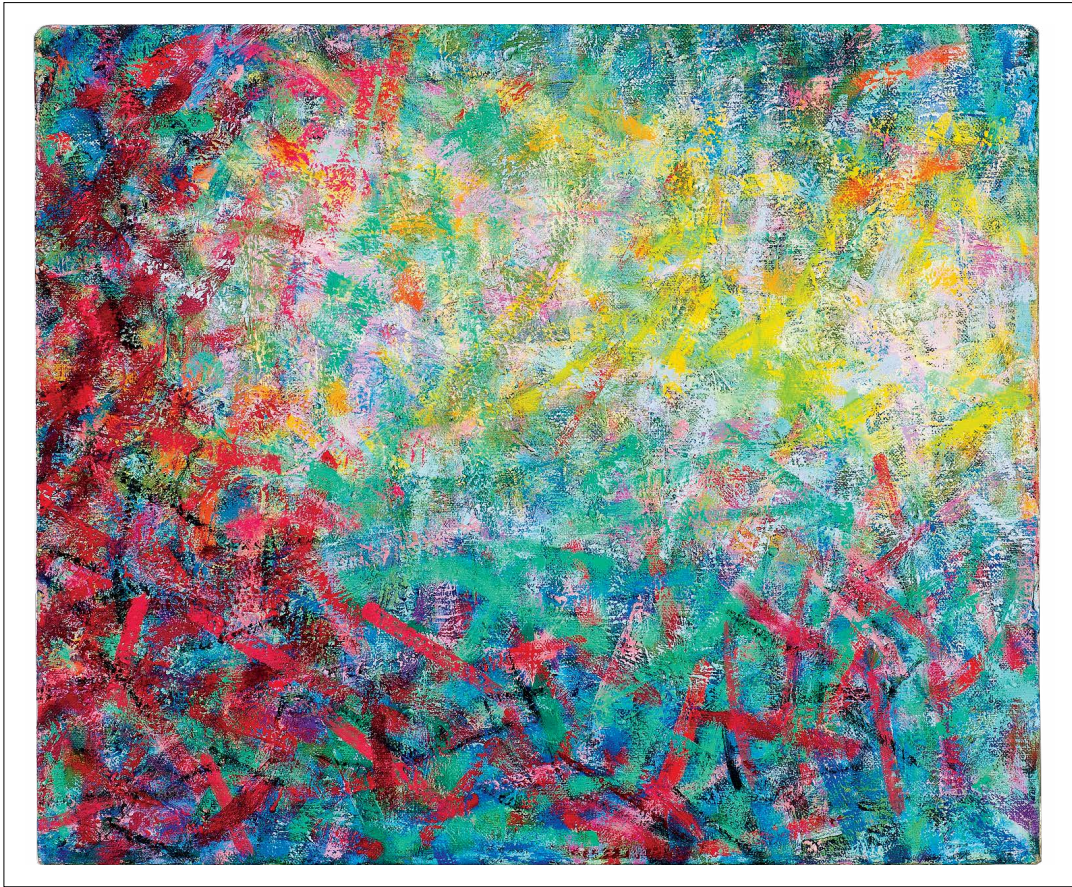
Colorfield, 1990 - 92
18 x 20 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1990 - 92 | 135459



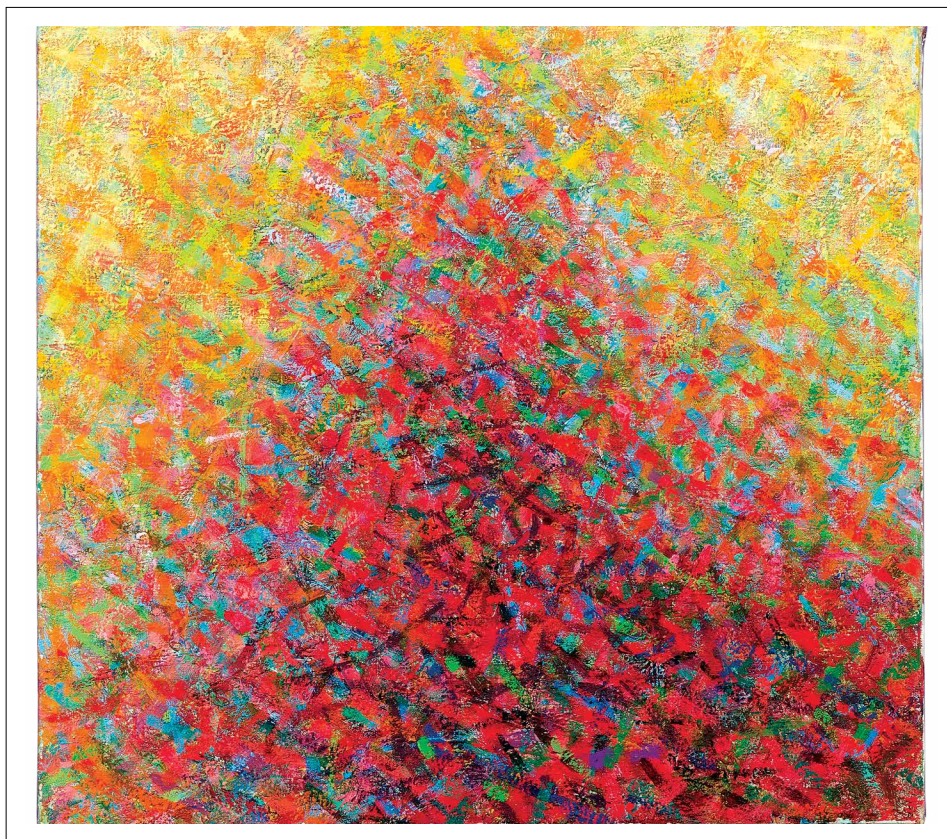
Colorfield, 1992 - 93
17 x 19 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1992 - 93 | 135483



Colorfield, 1992 - 93
17 x 19 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1992 - 93 | 135481



Colorfield, 1990
20 ¹/₄ x 24 ¹/₄ inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
executed 1990 | 135461



Colorfield

20 x 22 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas

undated | 135460





Colorfield, 1992 - 93
 14 ¹/₄ x 17 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
 executed 1992 - 93 | 135478



Colorfield, 1992 - 93
 12 ¹/₄ x 16 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
 executed 1992 - 93 | 135498



Colorfield, 1992
 15 x 17 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
 executed 1992 | 135472



Colorfield, 1992 - 93
 17 ¹/₄ x 19 inches, oil and acrylic on canvas
 executed 1992 - 93 | 135489

WALLY FINDLAY GALLERIES



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