

GORDON CHEUNG  
LINES IN THE SAND





*Great Wall of Sand (Detail)*, 2016  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and sail cloth  
150 x 200 cm



## WARP SPEED

### EN LIANG KHONG

*"Life is being phased-out into something new, and if we think this can be stopped we are even more stupid than we seem." – Nick Land, "Circuitries", 1992.*

In order to broadcast his vision of hyper-capitalism, artist Gordon Cheung's starting point is to coat the stock listings pages of the *Financial Times* in varnish, before arranging them on canvas. Over this, he constructs sacred mountainscapes in layers of digital print and spray paint, and sculpts islets out of sand: a mirror for how new cartographies are constantly created between the superpowers of the US and China. In these white hot landscapes of new military and commercial frontiers, drenched in the data flow of financial markets, Cheung makes us wonder what it is we really feel: enchantment or corruption?

This exhibition, "Lines in the Sand", returns repeatedly to the idea of sand as an actual material for collage. But 100 tumultuous years after the controversial Sykes-Picot agreement, and as a new order unfolds across the Middle East, "Lines in the Sand" also interrogates narratives of imagining and demarcating territory. Cheung taps into the threatening rhetoric of 'crossing a red line', with its origins in the 1928 Red Line Agreement, drawn up by American, British and French petroleum companies to decide the fate of the former Ottoman empire's oil sources, and the red pencil that is said to have been used by entrepreneur Calouste Gulbenkian to define its borders. In Cheung's title-triptych, *Lines in the Sand (Unknown knows)*, snaking Middle East oil pipelines morph into a map of ISIS-controlled territory, with national borders vanished. Splashed across the background, like a vaporous *fata morgana*, is Mount Sinai.

The South China Sea – said to be rich in resources – is where China is making claims to territory, and creating new artificial islets (by dredging up coral and covering it in concrete) to bolster these claims. As China faces the US pivot to Asia, the South China Sea has become an arena for military manoeuvring and posturing. At the bottom of *Great Wall of Sand*, Cheung traces these man-made islands. Above, he places a floating halo – a diagram of trade routes – extracted from China's intended 'One Belt, One Road' project: a modern day 'silk road'. This constellation falls like a fisherman's net over two landscapes cut out of a painting which hangs in Beijing's Great Hall of the People.

Of Hong Kong origin but born in the UK in the 1970s, Cheung's personal sense of flickering identity, of belonging and not, has pushed him into another world, where time and space become muddled. His way of stretching the definition of painting, influenced by a Chinese calligraphic tradition of 'painting without paint', produces throbbing frames that are populated by dense, digitally-manipulated photo-collages. Cheung begins to articulate a space "that's in-between – this information space, the landscape that is globalisation", as he tells me.

Into this world, Cheung introduces the traces of traditional Chinese landscape painting, which looks out onto the natural world as both philosophy and physicality. Called *shanshui* in Chinese, it is the art of mountains and water, composed through multiple perspectives of height, depth and distance that are meant to induce a psychic state of

dream travel: *woyou*. "Unrolling paintings in solitude, I sit pondering the ends of the earth", wrote the celebrated fifth-century *shanshui* artist Zong Bing. In the twenty-first century, the appropriation and disruption of classical landscape painting has been a major site of exploration for contemporary Chinese artists, from Yang Yongliang's ink-wash forests of construction cranes, to the 'landscipt' notebooks of Xu Bing, where the written word melts into Himalayan vistas.

In Cheung's *A Thousand Plateaus*, a traditional Chinese vista is pierced by the appearance of a 'nail house': the term for properties whose residents defy developers and remain where they are, while the old neighbourhood around them is destroyed. These real-world phenomena are named according to a Chinese proverb: "the nail that sticks up will be hammered down". This violent disruption of the structural space of *shanshui*, and its corresponding mental state of *woyou*, unravels the Chinese state's own embrace of the idea of an 'eternal civilisation' to legitimise its global rise, while the tragic aftershocks of transitioning to a mode of hypermodern capitalism are papered over: a process which Slavoj Žižek describes as "necessarily painful".

The figure of the cowboy is a favoured motif throughout Cheung's work, inspired by how David Lynch uses the cowboy as a threatening, dreamlike character. For Cheung, the cowboy offers both a metaphor for colonisation, as well as a haunting personification of the once great certainties of American culture. In his piece *When The Stars Bleed*, the cowboy rides a snarling bull – a reference to the stock market – painted in colours that evince a feeling of *hypnagogia*, a sensation between dreaming and awakening. Behind them burns the red-hot glow of a dying sun.

*Here Be Dragons* is similarly bathed in the radiant ignition of an apocalyptic explosion. This piece takes its name from a phrase with dual meanings, used both by map-makers for unplotted territory, as well as programmers for complex or messy regions of code. In the filigree flowers that curve out of a dragon-decorated vase, Cheung reaches back to the still-life paintings of the Dutch Golden Age, and the 'tulip mania' of the seventeenth century, when bulbs were traded for increasingly extraordinary sums until the market crashed, and suggests where future economic bubbles may emerge.

Is this a critique of the world of globalised capitalism, or instead, sublime submission to it? Gordon Cheung's practice fosters a bitter anti-capitalist edge, while also luxuriating in it. Perhaps we can suggest a term for this hybrid sensation: accelerationism – the nightmarish philosophy that the sensuality and violence of capitalism should be urged on until we reach the only two possible endpoints of collapse or revolution. Which one will it be? We'll only know when we've pursued capitalism's relentless arc to its terrifying, thrilling conclusion.

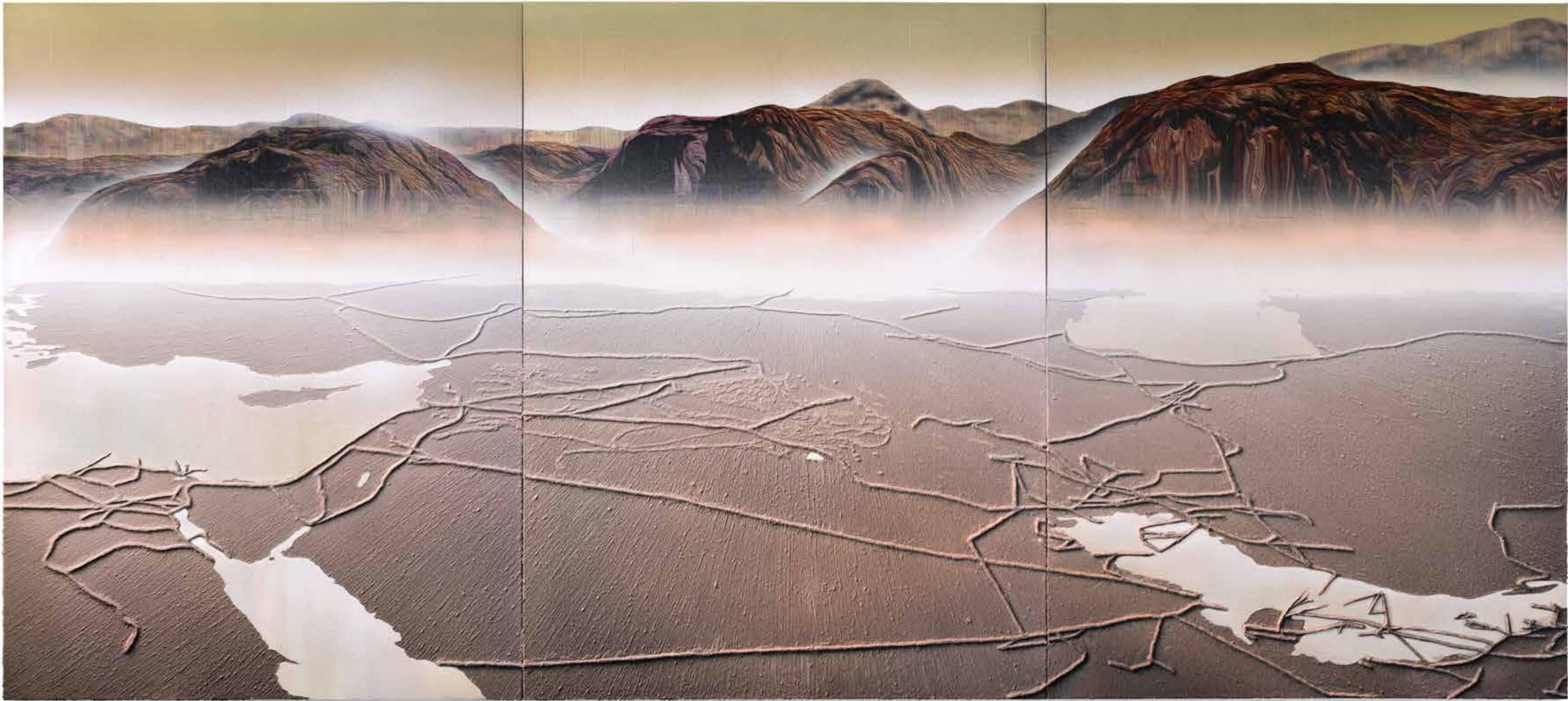
*En Liang Khong is assistant editor at openDemocracy. His writing on art and politics, and the spaces in which they intersect, have appeared in the Financial Times, Prospect, the New Statesman, the Los Angeles Review of Books and the Daily Telegraph.*



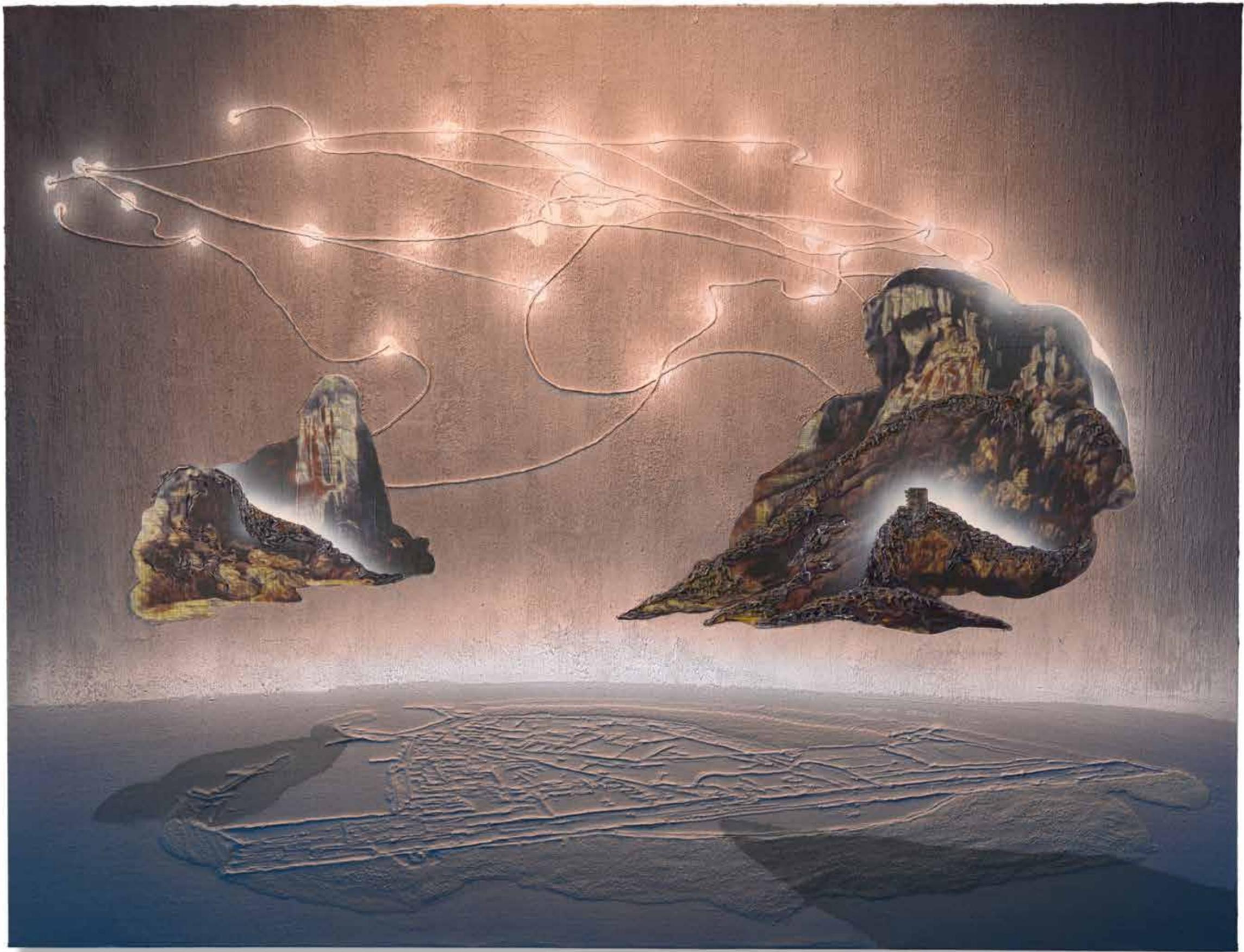


*A Thousand Plateaus*, 2016  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and aluminium  
200 x 450 cm (Triptych)

Previous Pages  
*Lines in the Sand (Unknown Knowns)* (Detail), 2016



*Lines in the Sand (Unknown Knowns)*, 2016  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and aluminium  
200 x 450 cm (Triptych)



*Here Be Dragons*, 2016  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and sail cloth  
200 x 150 cm

Previous Page  
*Great Wall of Sand*, 2016  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and sail cloth  
150 x 200 cm





*Here Be Dragons II (Detail), 2016*

Facing Page  
*Here Be Dragons II, 2016*  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and sail cloth  
200 x 150 cm



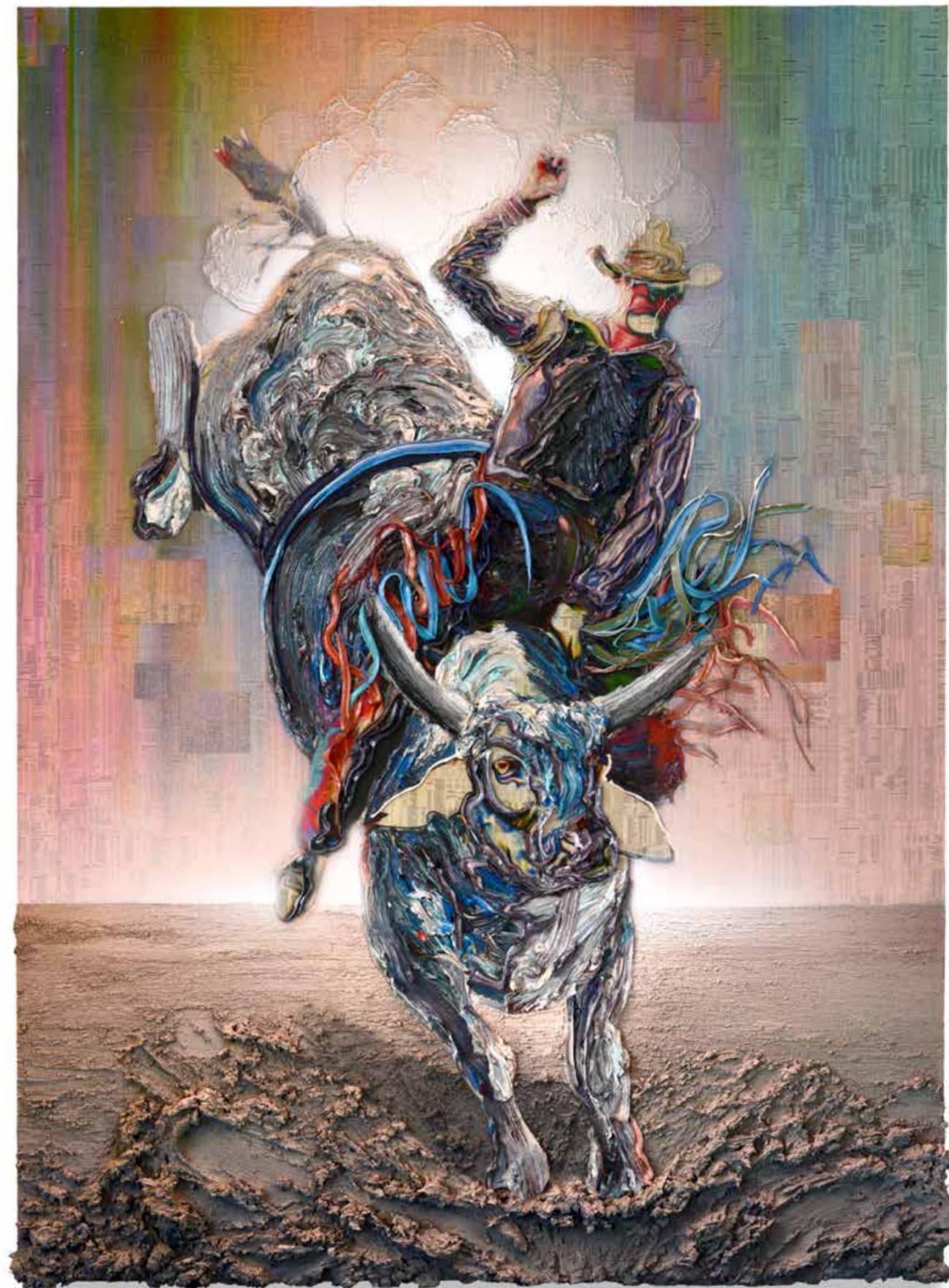


*Promised Land*, 2009  
Financial newspaper, acrylic and spray paint on sail cloth  
163 x 489 cm (Triptych)



*Continuum of Conflict (Minotaur) (Detail), 2016*

Facing Page  
*Continuum of Conflict (Minotaur), 2016*  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and sail cloth  
200 x 150 cm



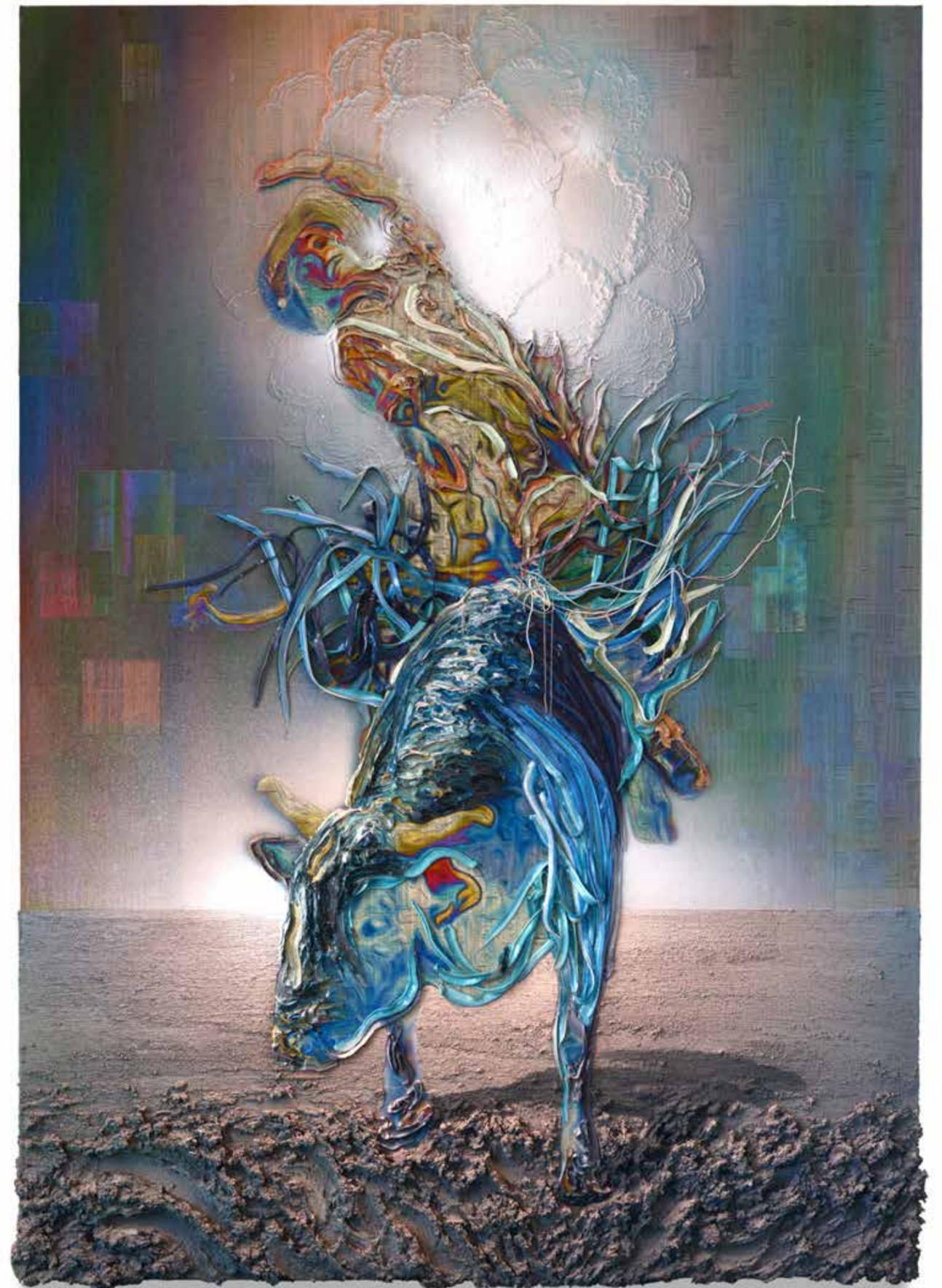


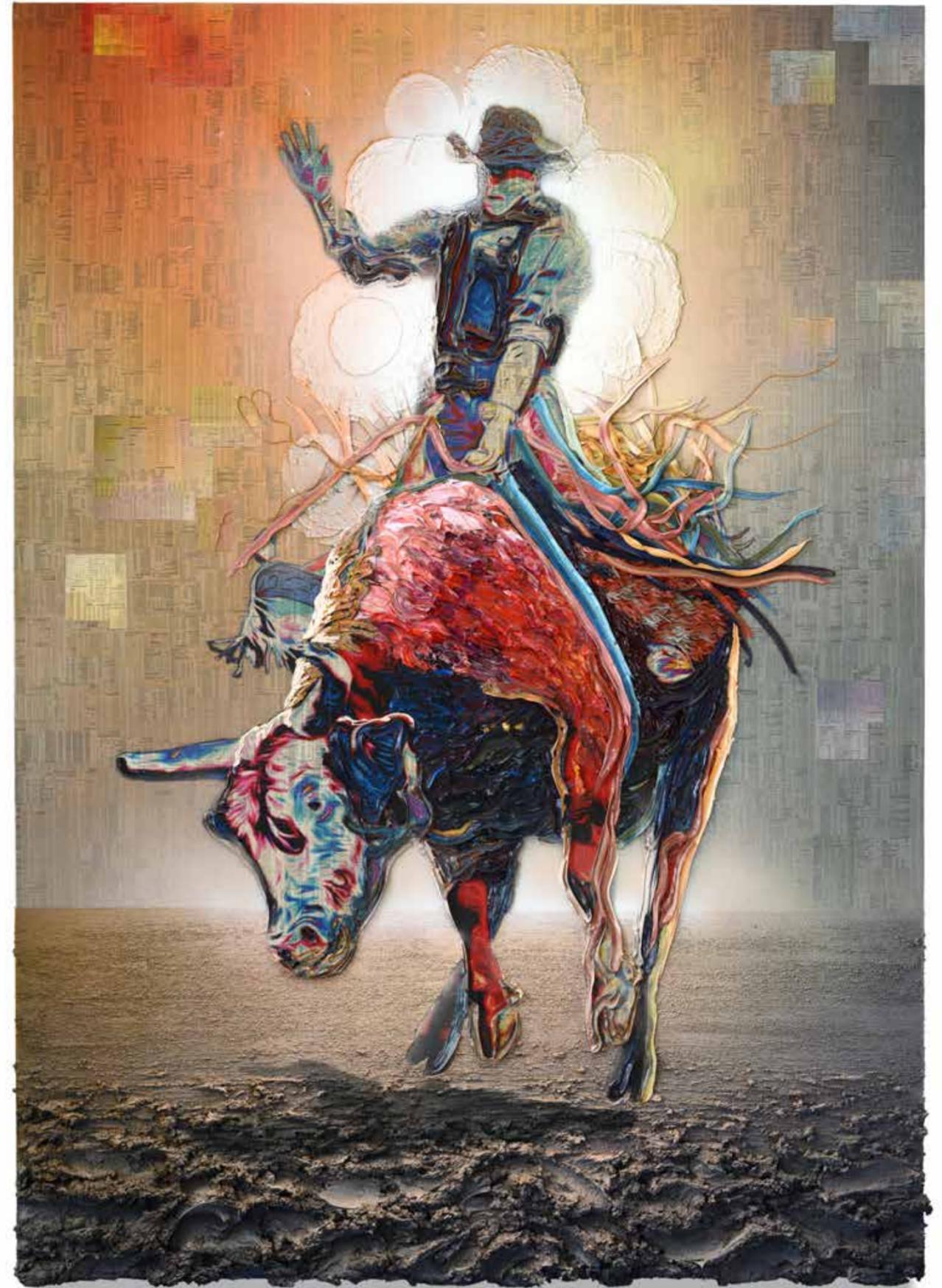
Shock and Awe (Minotaur), 2016  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and sail cloth  
200 x 150 cm



*Giver of Light Endures Burning (Minotaur) (Detail), 2016*

Facing Page  
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Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and sail cloth  
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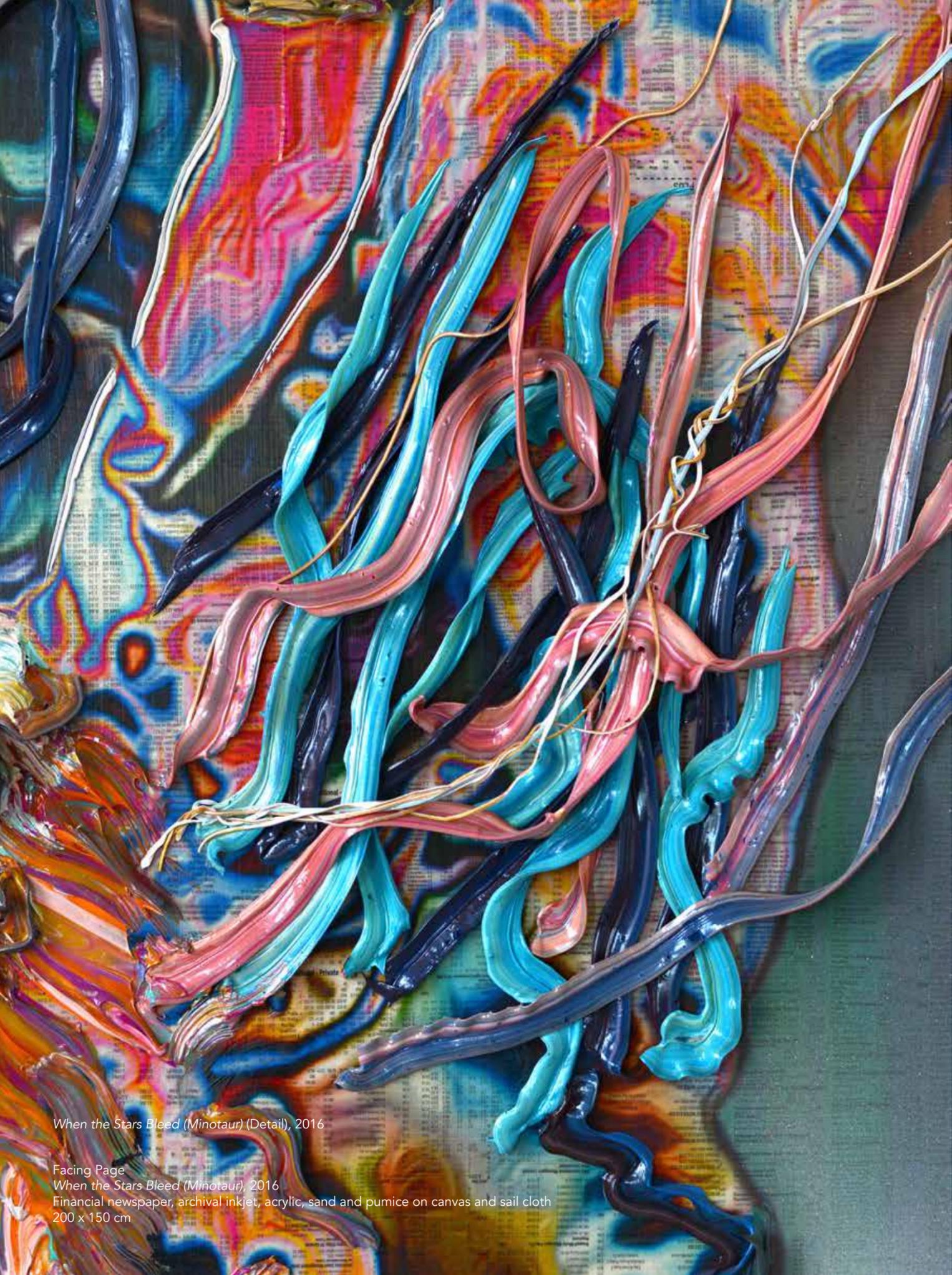




*Hearts and Minds (Minotaur)*, 2016  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and sail cloth



*Delicate Balance of Terror (Minotaur)*, 2016  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and sail cloth  
200 x 150 cm



*When the Stars Bleed (Minotaur) (Detail), 2016*

Facing Page  
*When the Stars Bleed (Minotaur), 2016*  
Financial newspaper, archival inkjet, acrylic, sand and pumice on canvas and sail cloth  
200 x 150 cm



# GORDON CHEUNG

B. 1975

Lives and works in London, UK

## EDUCATION

1999-2001 Royal College of Art - MA Fine Art Painting  
1995-1998 Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design - BA (Hons) Fine Art in Painting

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 *Lines in the Sand*, Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai  
*Here Be Dragons*, Nottingham Castle Museum and Art Gallery, Nottingham, UK  
*30 Years of CFCCA: Gordon Cheung*, Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester, UK

2015 *The Abyss Stares Back*, Edel Assanti, London, UK  
*Breaking Tulips*, Alan Cristea Gallery, London, UK

2014 *Gordon Cheung*, Art14 with Edel Assanti, London, UK

2012 *The Solar Cry*, Edel Assanti, London, UK  
*Techno Sublime*, Touchstones Rochdale, Rochdale, UK

2011 *The Light that Burns Twice as Bright*, Alan Cristea Gallery, London, UK  
*The Sleeper Awakes*, Other Gallery, Shanghai, China

2010 *Altered States*, Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, AZ, USA

2009 *Gordon Cheung*, ROOM Artspace, London, UK  
*Gordon Cheung & Jonathan Seliger*, Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn, NY, USA  
*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, New Art Gallery Walsall, Walsall, UK  
*The Promised Land*, Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, USA

2008 *Wilderness of Mirrors*, Galerie Adler, Frankfurt am Main, Germany  
*Death By a Thousand Cuts*, Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester, UK  
*The Fall of the Rebel Angels*, Alan Cristea Gallery, London, UK  
*Gordon Cheung*, Kirkby Gallery, Liverpool, UK  
*Technophobia*, Harris Museum, Preston, UK

2007 *God is on Our Side*, Unosunove Arte Contemporanea, Rome, Italy  
*Paradise Lost*, Laing Art Solo Commission, Newcastle, UK  
*The 1000 Yard Stare*, Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth, UK  
*Gordon Cheung: Recent Paintings*, Djanogly Art Gallery, Lakeside Arts Centre, The University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

2006 *Heart of Darkness*, Galeria Thomas Cohn, São Paulo, Brazil

2004 *Hollow Sunsets*, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London, UK

2002 *Sprawl*, Domo Baal Gallery, London, UK

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2015 *Summer Show*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK  
*Vita Vitale*, Azerbaijan Pavilion, 56th International Art Exhibition (All the World's Futures), la Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy  
*Clarks: Rebooted*, Design Shanghai; Salone del Mobile, Milan; Frieze New York; London Fashion Week; London Design Festival; Frieze London  
*20th Anniversary Exhibition*, Alan Cristea Gallery, London, UK

2014 *Show Me the Money: The Image of Finance, 1700 to the present*, Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sunderland, UK  
*Contempo: International Contemporary Art Festival*, Varna, Bulgaria  
*How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, Pristine Gallery, Monterrey, Mexico  
*Look at Me: Portraiture from Manet to the Present*, Leila Heller Gallery, New York, USA

TIME::CODE, WhiteBox, New York, USA

2013 Permanent Contemporary Collection, San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX, USA  
*Currents: Recent Art from East Tennessee and Beyond*, Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville, TN, USA  
*Now Playing Everywhere: A Survey of Social and Political Works from the Stéphane Janssen Collection*, Mesa Arts Center, Mesa, AZ, USA  
*The Big M 'On The Precipice' Tour*, ISIS Arts, Newcastle, UK  
*Accumulator III*, Limerick City Gallery of Art, Limerick, Ireland  
*Accumulator II*, Oriol Myrddin Gallery, Carmarthen, Wales

2012 *Wild New Territories*, Camley Street Natural Park and The Foundling Museum, London, UK; travelled to Berlin-Dahlem Botanical Garden and Botanical Museum, Germany; SFU Galleries, Vancouver, Canada (2013)  
*Difference Engine*, West Cork Arts Centre, Cork, Ireland  
*Immortal Nature*, Edel Assanti, London, UK  
*Cheer Up, It's Not the End of the World*, Edinburgh Printmakers, Edinburgh, Scotland

2011 *40 ARTISTS - 80 DRAWINGS*, The Burton Art Gallery and Museum, Devon, UK  
*Future Can Wait*, Torrance Art Museum, Torrance, CA, USA  
*John Martin*, Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle, UK  
*John Martin: Painting the Apocalypse*, Millennium Gallery, Sheffield, UK  
*Public Enemy Number 1*, Exhibit 320, New Delhi, India

2010 *Recent Aquisitions*, Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville, TN, USA

2009 *Press Art: The Annette and Peter Noble Collection*, Museum der Moderne Salzburg, Salzburg, Austria  
*Wasteland*, WhiteBox, New York, USA  
*We the Artists*, National Museum and Art Gallery of Trinidad & Tobago, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago  
*Public Enemy Number 1*, Exhibit 320, New Delhi, India  
*Premio Lissone*, Museo d'arte contemporanea, Lissone, Italy  
*Reich Sein*, Künstlerverein Walkmühle e.V., Wiesbaden, Germany  
Beijing International Art Biennale, Beijing, China  
*Negotiable Values*, Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester, UK  
*Dazed and Confused Chinese New Year*, New Loon Fung, London, UK  
*New and Classic works by Eleven Artists*, Alan Cristea Gallery, London, UK  
*Superunknown*, Edel Assanti, London, UK

2009 *PS: Parsing Spirituality*, Affirmation Arts, New York, USA  
*Projections*, Carré d'Art - Musée d'art contemporain, Nîmes, France  
*Difference Engine*, Cake contemporary arts, Kildare, Ireland  
*British Friends of the Art Museums of Israel Charity Art Auction*, Sotheby's and Louise Blouin Foundation, London, UK

2008 *Jerwood Contemporary Painters*, Jerwood Visual Arts, London, UK; travelled to Royal West of England Academy, Bristol, UK  
*Painting the Glass House: Artists Revisit Modern Architecture*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, USA; travelled to Mills College Art Museum, Oakland, CA, USA (2009)

2007 *Currents: Recent Acquisitions*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., USA  
*The Lucifer Effect*, Gallery Primo Alonso, London, UK  
*Drawing from History: Permanent Collection and Loans*, Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, AZ, USA  
*Blood Meridian*, Galerie Michael Janssen, Berlin, Germany  
*Arrivals/Departures*, Urbis, Manchester, UK

2006 *Fresh*, Museum of Glass, Tacoma, WA, USA  
*John Moores 24*, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, UK  
*Stéphane Janssen: The Collector*, Amarillo Museum of Art, Amarillo, TX, USA  
*ASU Collection*, Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, AZ, USA

2005 *British Art Show 6*, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, UK; travelled throughout UK

2004 *Faux Realism*, Royal Academy Pumpshouse Gallery, London, UK  
*Thermo 04*, The Lowry, Salford, UK

- 2003 *Le Petit Paysage*, Liverpool Biennale, Liverpool, UK; travelled throughout UK  
*Yes, I am a Long Way from Home*, Nunnery Gallery, London, UK; travelled to Wolverhampton Art Gallery, West Midlands, UK; Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury, UK; Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland, UK  
*Intervention*, John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, UK  
*Trans-*, Kyoto Art Center, Kyoto, Japan
- 2001 *ARTfutures*, Contemporary Art Society, London, UK  
*CD1*, Marlborough Fine Art, London, UK

#### AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

- 2010 *Premio Lissone*, award finalist, Museo d'arte contemporanea, Lissone, Italy
- 2007 *Artes Mundi Prize 3*, nominee
- 2006 *Braziers International Artists Workshop*, residency, London, UK  
*deciBel Visual Arts Award*, finalist, London, UK
- 2005 *Arts Council England*, funds awarded; travelled to Hong Kong and China  
*Arts Council of England Individual Arts Award*
- 2004 *The BOC Emerging Artist Award*, London, UK  
*Pizza Express Prospects Prize*, finalist  
*Jerwood Drawing Prize*, finalist, London, UK  
*Breathe Residency*, Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester, UK
- 2003 *Triangle Arts Trust International Artist Fellowship*, Gasworks, New York, USA  
*VASL Residency*, Lahore and Islamabad, Pakistan  
*Diffuse Asia*, residency, Kyoto Art Center, Japan  
*Lexmark European Painting Prize*, finalist
- 2000 *Socrates Travel Award*; travelled to Berlin, Germany  
*John Minton Travel Award*; travelled to Paris, France  
*TI Travel Award*; travelled to Budapest, Hungary  
*Paris Studio Residency*, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France  
*The Gilchrist-Fisher Award*, finalist
- 1999 *SPACE*, residency, Old Street, London, UK
- 1998 *Arte Viva Residency and Competition*, First Prize Winner, Painting, Italy

#### SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, AZ, USA  
Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, CA, USA  
British Museum, London, UK  
Central Saint Martins, London, UK  
Government Art Collection, UK  
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., USA  
Hiscox Collection, London, UK  
Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville, TN, USA  
Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA  
New Art Gallery Walsall, Walsall, UK  
Royal College of Art, London, UK  
San Antonio Museum of Art, San Antonio, TX, USA  
Speed Art Museum, Louisville, KN, USA  
Progressive Corporate Art Collection  
UBS Art Collection  
Whitworth Art Museum, Manchester, UK  
Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT, USA

Published on the occasion of the exhibition

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Hearts and Minds (Minotaur) (Detail), 2016



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