

# Masako Kamiya

New Work 2009-2010



*Messenger*  
2009  
gouache on paper  
20 x 16 "

Cover: *Messenger*, detail

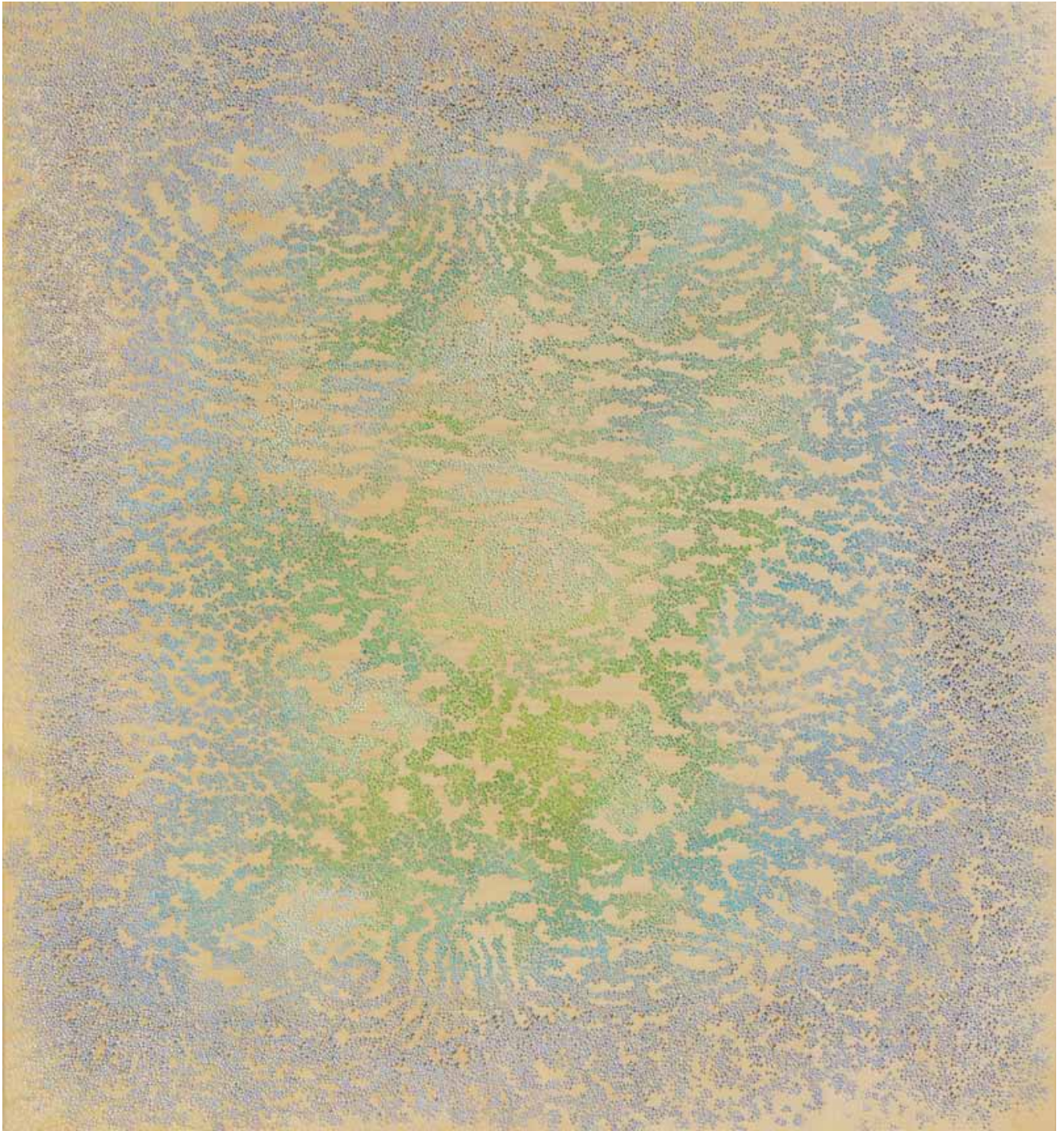
# Masako Kamiya

New Work 2009-2010

April 3 – May 1, 2010

Gallery NAGA  
67 Newbury Street  
Boston, Massachusetts  
02116





*Legend*  
2009  
gouache on panel  
40 x 37"

# Outspoken: Masako Kamiya, 2002 - 2010

by Katherine French

*“I engage in a dialogue with paint. My statement is contained within each dot I make with the brush. I respond intuitively to the unexpected play of dots as they accumulate.”*

Masako Kamiya

The works of Masako Kamiya have a lot to say for themselves. Columns of paint rise up, bristling with energy. Dots of color vibrate, forcing the eye to dive beneath their uneven surfaces to consider painting in an entirely different way. “Pointillism is the first thing people think of when they see my work,” observes Kamiya, but she challenges viewers to go beyond scientific ideas about color theory or optical mixing of paint. “A point is very different from a dot,” she states. “And my paintings start with dots.”

“Mark making is important,” she observes. “Dots not only make individual marks. They also make shapes that are clear and simple.” But simple does not mean not simplistic. Kamiya’s dots provide a complex narrative of painterly experience in pursuit of technique. After years of painting expressively in oils, she began using gouache to create dots - hundreds of thousands of dots. Gouache dries quickly and allows her to build up form. She piled one dot of paint on top of another, and her brushes grew increasingly smaller to more strictly control gesture. “My inspiration comes from the paint,” she remarks when speaking of these delicate accumulations. “It comes from the process of making the work.”

Experts in cognitive development argue that early experience determines how we see the world and that we seek to repeat this experience as adults. Children begin drawing by waving their hands in the air and gradually master use of a crayon. In the earliest stages of development, mark-making - that first step in the process of drawing - provides great pleasure. Kamiya remembers the joyful intensity of drawing and painting in her elementary art class in Japan. “I loved art,” she says emphatically. “It was what I wanted

to do.” As a mature painter contemplating dots, she adds, “I slowly arrive at my own truth, which is visual satisfaction.”

As a student, Kamiya tried “everything” in her pursuit of this visual satisfaction and was inspired by art history. She appreciated the expressive landscapes of Constable and Turner and found herself inexplicably drawn to the round shape of a sun or moon whenever it appeared. She loved Cezanne’s use of specific form to build strong foundations for his painting. Mondrian spoke to the spiritual harmony found within interlocking color, and the dream-like imagery of Paul Klee left a lasting impression. “I like his fantastic world,” she says, “the way he creates an abstraction that a viewer can enter naturally. I love Klee’s paintings in the same way children love picture-book illustrations. His world is in my head. I think about it a great deal.”

When reminded of the use of dots by Australian Aborigines to specifically record (or camouflage) their dreamtime creation myths, she’s quick to acknowledge the influence of non-western art and the unique palette used by Polynesian artists. She loves embroidery and needlepoint - crafts that depend upon focused and repetitive gesture - as well as handmade quilts that integrate blocks of color. As a young woman growing up in Japan, she was aware of the work of Yayoi Kusama, whose love of dot shapes has often caused art critics to compare the two. “Kusama has been very influential to me,” remarks Kamiya. “Not only her work, but also that she was a woman and Japanese - she provided me with an example of how I might become an artist myself...” But Kusama’s obsessive, neurotic embrace of the dot has little to do with Kamiya’s more meditative approach to applying pinpricks of color onto panel or paper.

“Painting is like breathing,” she says. “It’s pretty much what I do everyday.” A self-possessed and clear-sighted vision allows her to admire - and remain dispassionately separate from - the scientific impulse

that inspired Seurat; the ironic use of comic book imagery that defines Lichtenstein; or the pixelations of Chuck Close. While aware of what can be revealed through digital breakdown, Kamiya knows that her version of abstraction comes from a different place. “My inspiration comes from the paint,” she observes. “It comes from the process of making the work, the kind of conversation I will have as each particular painting evolves.”

Kamiya has worked to build up surface through accumulation of dots only since 2001. In many early pieces such as *Remaining of the Summer* (2002) or *Canary* (2003), nodules of paint are tightly compacted. The surface is uniform. Standing cheek by jowl, these independently formed bumps allow us to experience moments of intense focus. Sometimes we are directed to consider delicate, almost translucent color found in *Embrace* (2007), or the vibrant intensity of red in *Momentum* (2007). Sometimes Kamiya forces our eye to move through the painting by lining up dots of contrasting colors in works like *Dance* (2002) or *Flying Lesson* (2005). It is as though she consistently wants the viewer not only to feel the sensation generated by looking at art, but also the very act of painting itself.

Most recently she has she begun to tempt fate by building higher and higher dot accumulations. Gouache rises proud and defiant from the surface and achieves seemingly impossible height. Kamiya’s uneven topography offers us an imaginary world filled with tiny erupting volcanoes, rivers flowing through deep ravines, and not so quiet valleys. Whole areas of color have been left unpainted to contrast the natural grain of the wood panel. *Monologue* and *Trace* (both 2010) reveal her determination to sometimes “not paint.” The conversation that has always been so important “is now happening between the area painted and the area not painted. I now find that each mark is more intensely considered.”

In her examination of artists’ statements culled from four sequential volumes of *New American Painting*, linguist Karen Sullivan considered how artists use language as a metaphor to discuss their relationship to their work. Specifically citing Kamiya’s statement, and her use of the word “dialogue,” Sullivan observes that abstract artists tend to speak *with their materials*, while representational artists are more likely to speak *to the viewers*. Both kinds of artists use words such as

*language, vocabulary or conversation* in writing about their work, but they use these words differently. Like many abstract artists, Masako Kamiya prefers to converse with her material.

It’s the sincerity of this discourse that makes Kamiya unique. Spare and eloquent, her paintings are inviting - asking viewers to go beneath their constructed surface to experience mark-making activity for themselves. They contain none of the cold formalism found in some abstraction. Instead, Kamiya’s works are full of feeling. “I can be very emotional,” she admits. “Even within this suppressed language, I can be expressive.”

*Katherine French is the director of the Danforth Museum of Art in Framingham, Massachusetts, where she organized the mid-career retrospective Masako Kamiya Outspoken: 2002-2010, on exhibition March 17 to May 16, 2010.*





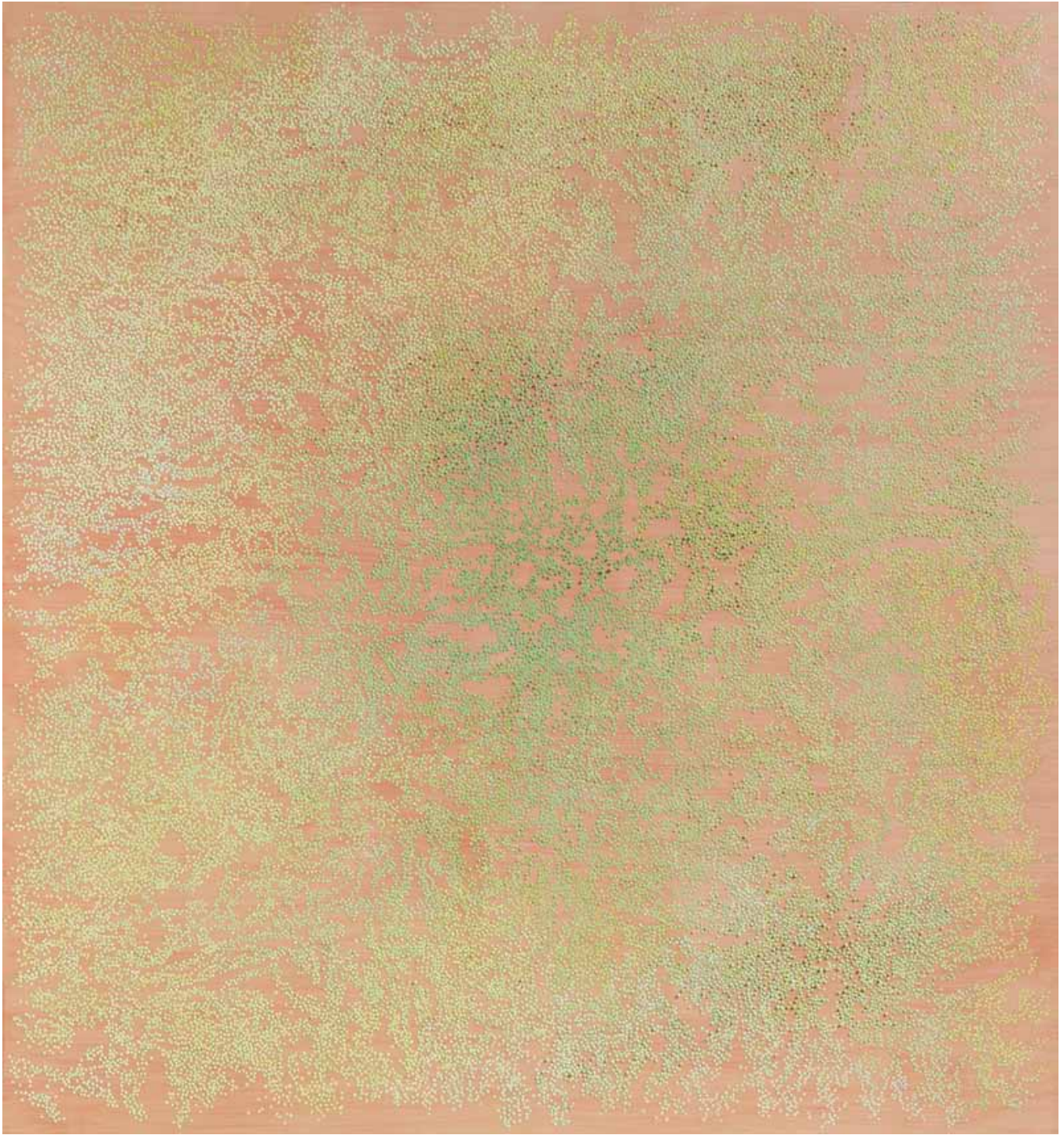
*Drift*  
2009  
gouache on panel  
40 x 37"





*Spell*  
2009  
gouache on panel  
40 x 37"





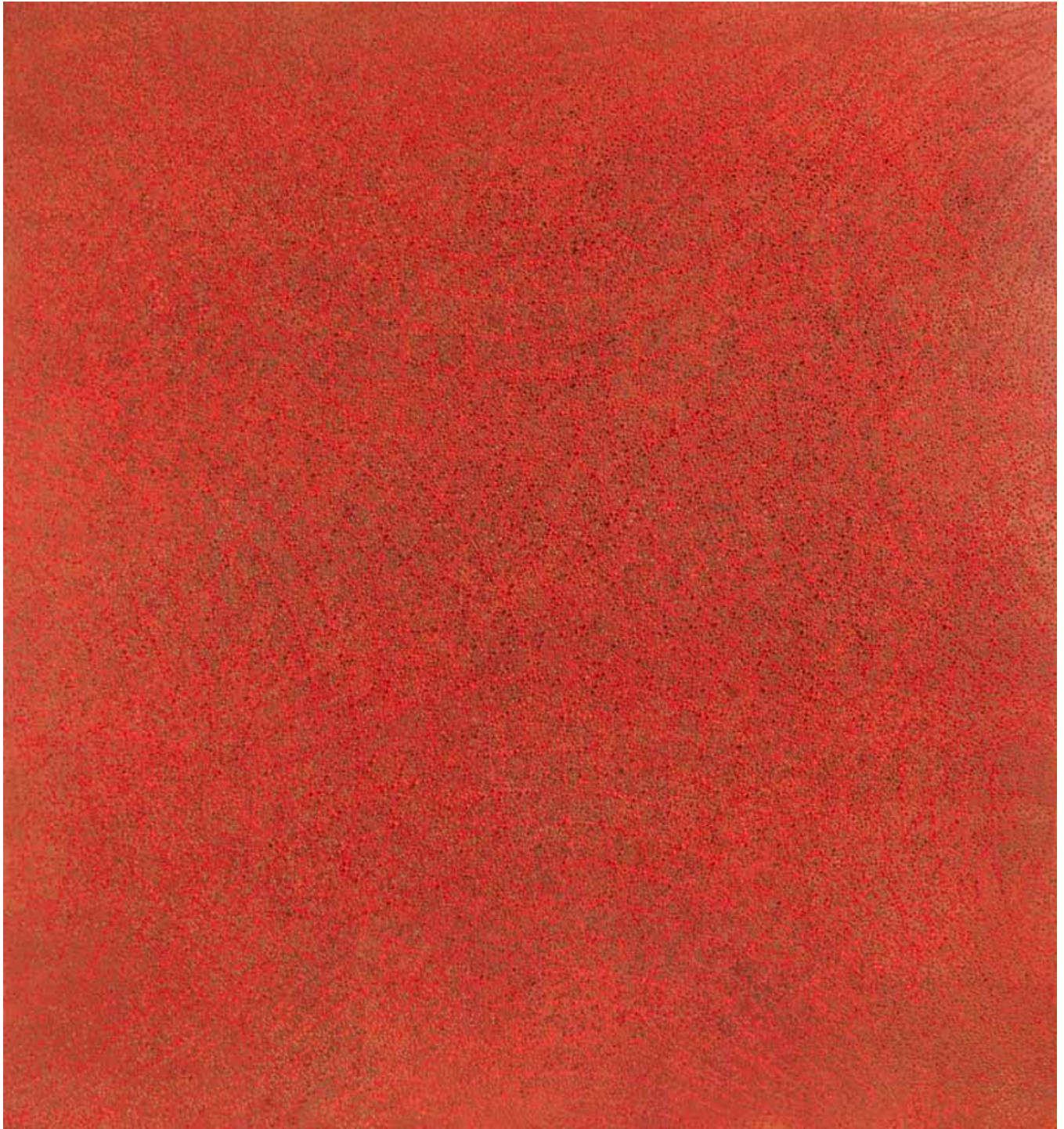
*Trace*  
2010  
gouache on panel  
40 x 37"





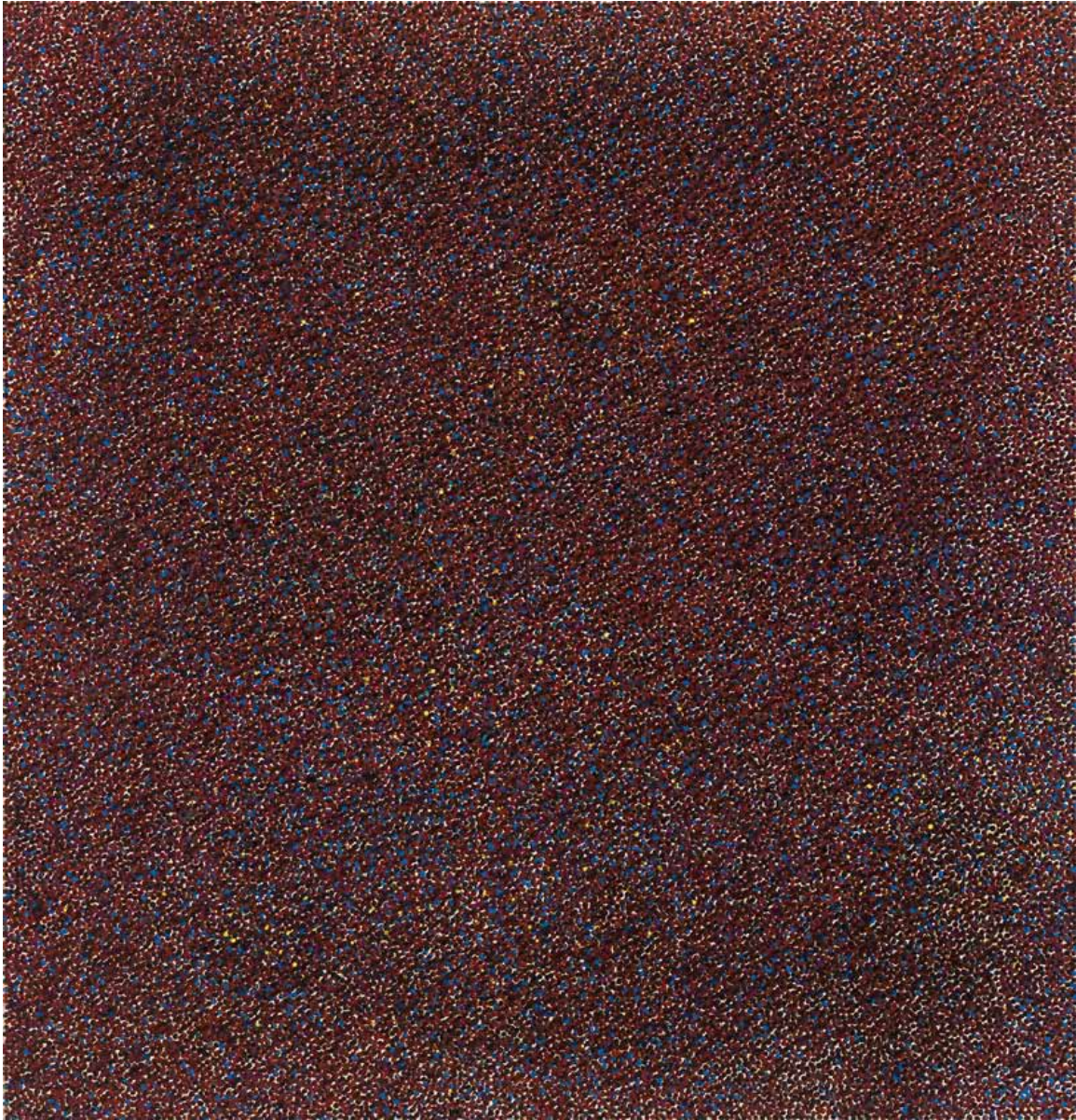
*Grassroots Dream*  
2009  
gouache on panel  
47 x 44"





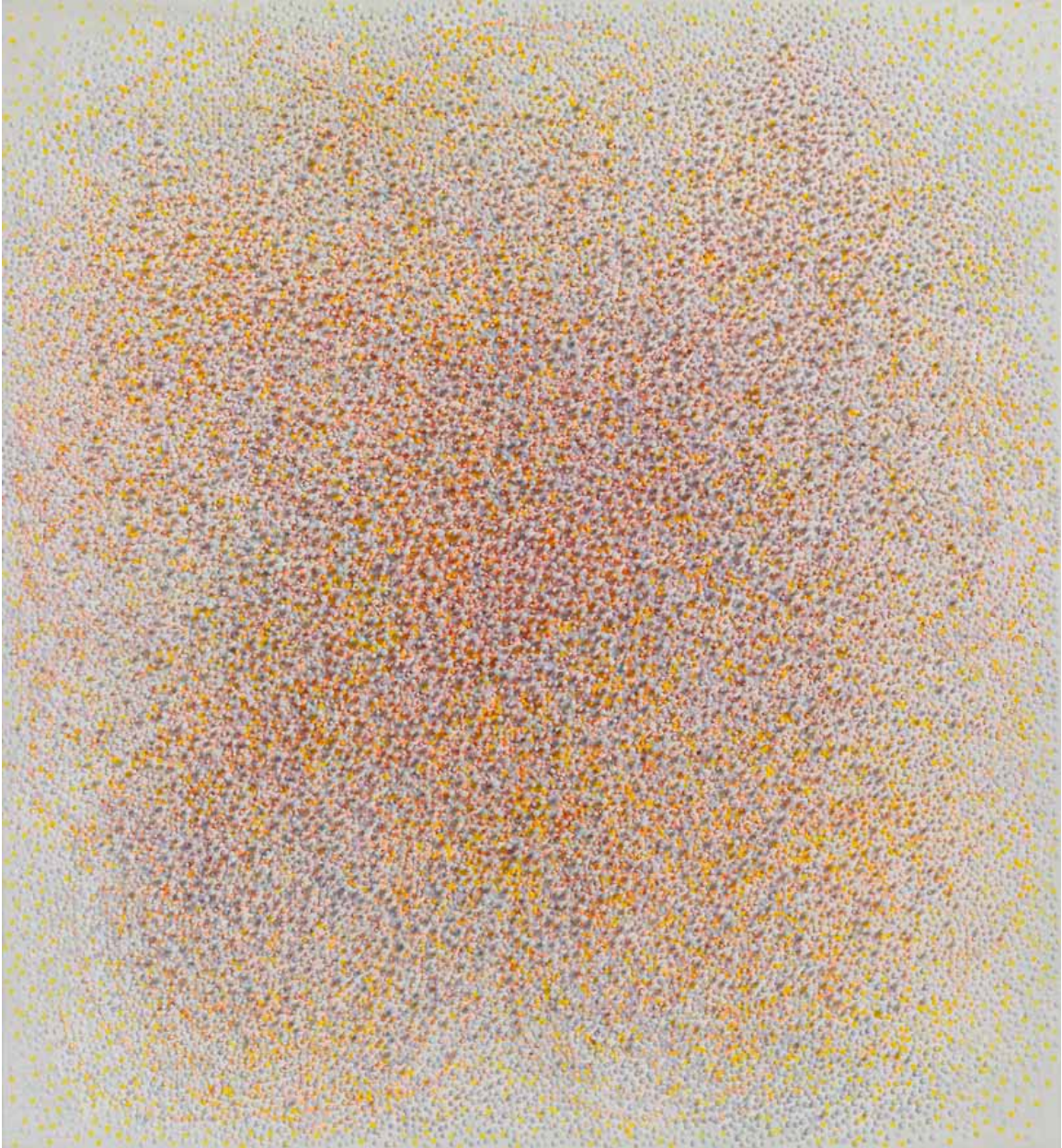
*East*  
2009  
gouache on panel  
47 x 44"



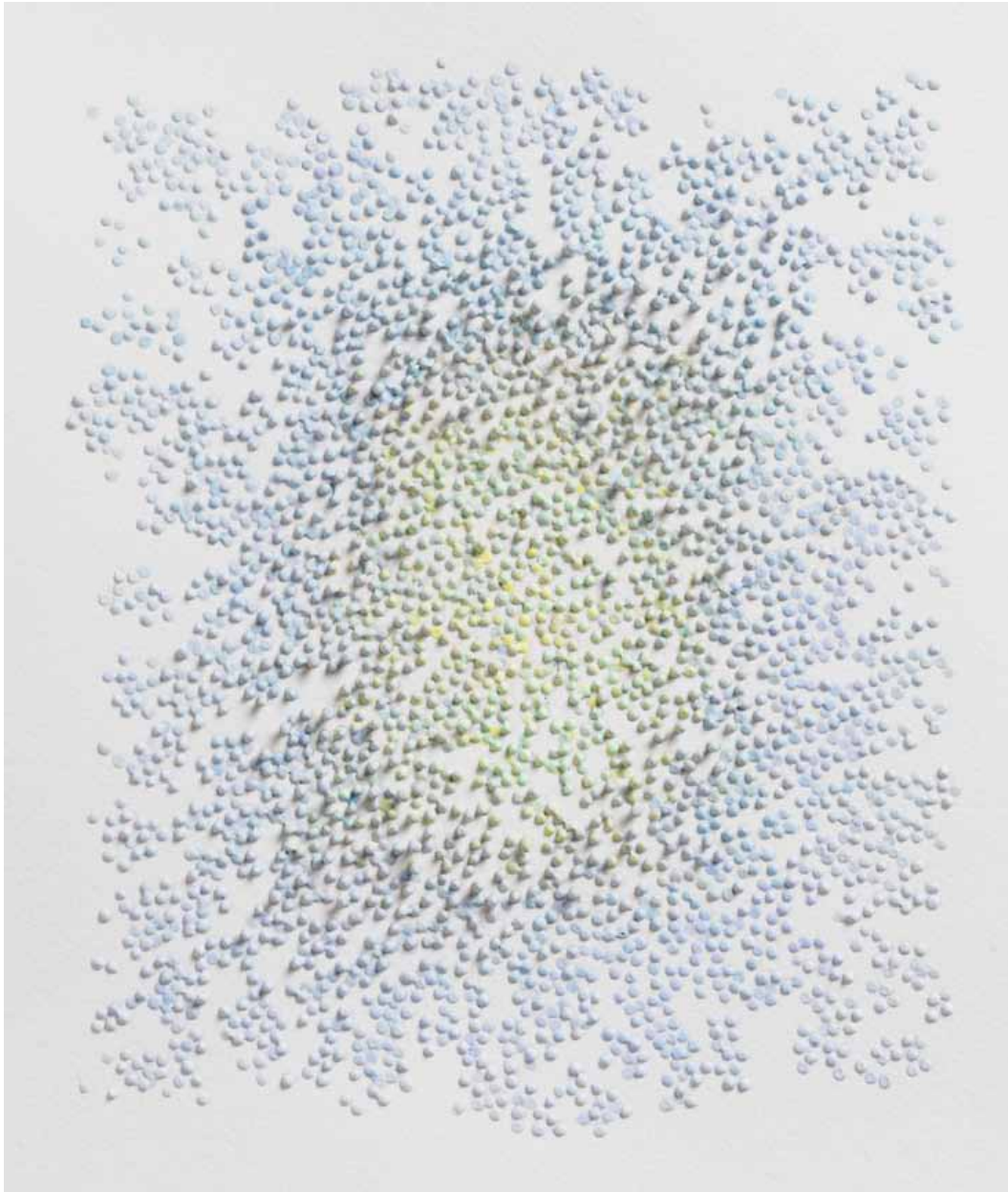


*Night Owl*  
2009  
gouache on panel  
23<sup>1/2</sup> x 22"





*Circus*  
2009  
gouache on panel  
20 x 19"



*Impulse*  
2009  
gouache on paper  
20 x 16"



## Masako Kamiya

Born Chiba City, Japan

### One Person Exhibitions

Gallery NAGA Boston MA <i>New Work 2009 – 2010</i>	2010
Danforth Museum of Art Framingham MA <i>Outspoken: 2002 – 2010</i>	2010
Gallery NAGA Boston MA <i>New Paintings</i>	2007
University Gallery, University of Massachusetts Lowell MA <i>Paintings On Paper</i>	2006
Gallery NAGA Boston MA <i>New Paintings</i>	2005
Gallery NAGA Boston MA <i>On Paper</i>	2004
Gallery NAGA Boston MA <i>Paintings</i>	2003
HallSpace Boston MA <i>New Work</i>	2002
Kingston Gallery Boston MA <i>New Paintings</i>	2002
Carol Schlosberg Gallery, Montserrat College of Art Beverly MA <i>New Paintings</i>	2001

### Selected Group Exhibitions

New Art Center Newtonville MA <i>Opening Lines</i>	2009
Gallery 51, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts North Adams MA <i>Painted Visions</i>	2007
Jane Deering Gallery Gloucester MA <i>By Arrangement</i>	2005
Concord Art Association Concord MA <i>By Arrangement</i>	2005
Lillian Immig Gallery at Emmanuel College Boston MA <i>Wonderment</i>	2004
Montserrat College of Art <i>Ocean View</i>	2004
Institute of Contemporary Art at Maine College of Art Portland ME <i>Curators' Intuition</i>	2004
New England School of Art & Design Suffolk University Boston MA <i>Different Strokes: Boston Painters</i>	2003
Studio Soto Boston MA <i>Between Constraints</i>	2003
Gallery NAGA Boston MA <i>On Closer Inspection</i>	2003
OSP Gallery Boston MA <i>Boston Abstraction Now</i>	2003
Mills Gallery Boston MA <i>Annual Drawing Show</i>	2002
Kingston Gallery Boston MA <i>Charged</i>	2000
Gallery at Green Street Boston MA <i>New Work, New Idea</i>	2000
Perrin Gallery Brookline MA <i>Recent Work</i>	2000
HallSpace Boston MA <i>Open Season</i>	2000
Montserrat College of Art Beverly MA <i>30th Anniversary Alumni Exhibition</i>	2000
Codman Square Center Boston MA <i>Artist Spirit</i>	1999
University Gallery University of Massachusetts Lowell MA <i>Faculty 1999</i>	1999
Haywood Gallery Worcester MA <i>Northeast Open</i>	1998
Bakalar Gallery Massachusetts College of Art Boston MA <i>Almost a Billion Seconds</i>	1998

Brickbottom Gallery Somerville MA  
*In the Spirit of Drawing*

1998

### Public and Corporate Collections

Boston Public Library Boston MA	
Danforth Museum of Art Framingham MA	
Danforth Associates Wellesley MA	
Fidelity Investments Boston MA	
Merck Research Labs Boston MA	
Neiman Marcus Boston MA	
Wellington Management Company Boston MA	

### Awards

Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship in Painting	2010
Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship in Painting	2006
Best Gallery Show of an Emerging Artist in New England, International Association of Art Critics/Boston	2006
St. Botolph Club Foundation Grant in Aid Boston MA	2004

### Education

Massachusetts College of Art Boston MA MFA Painting	1999
Montserrat College of Art Beverly MA BFA Fine Arts	1997



More information and images at  
[masakokamiya.com](http://masakokamiya.com) and  
[gallerynaga.com](http://gallerynaga.com).

*Photos* Clements Howcroft, Boston  
*Design* Behemoth Media

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