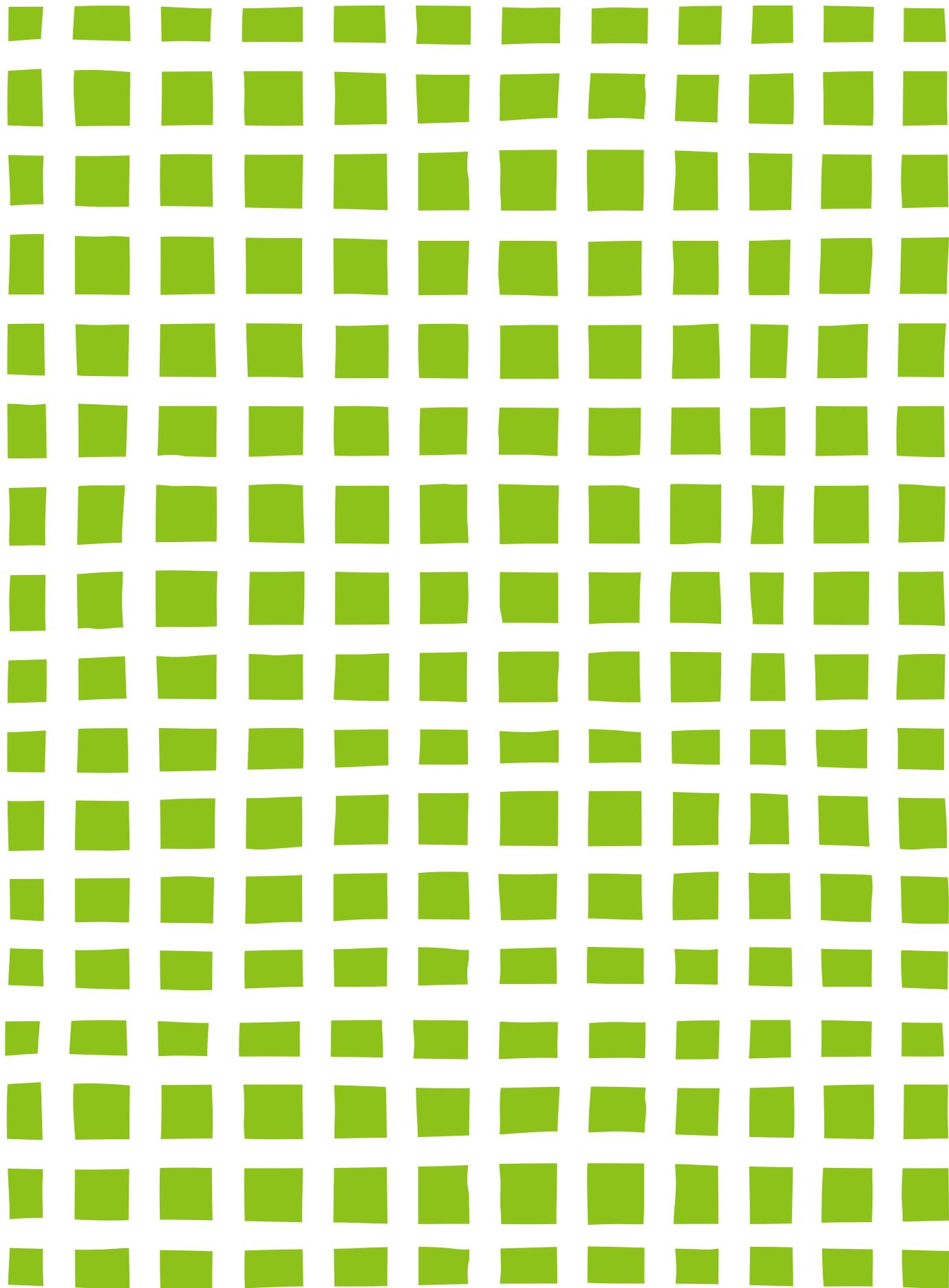


LAWRENCE PHILP'S COLOR GRID





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The Temptation of Saint Anthony, c. 1973, acrylic on canvas,
71½ x 65 inches, Collection of Kerry and Betty Davis



As president of University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC), I am honored to introduce the exhibition *Lawrence Philp's Color Grid*.

For 75 years, our university has worked to open doors of opportunity and learning to broader audiences in Maryland, across the country, and around the world, and our Arts Program supports and aligns with that mission.

Lawrence Philp is a celebrated artist and former educator whose vision and voice are remarkable and whose work defies categorization. It combines color, line, shape, and texture in pleasing and

sometimes challenging ways and in the process reveals new facets of our world. We are proud to showcase it in this colorful exhibition that explores the concept of things seen and unseen within a defined area.

I hope you enjoy Philp's unique vision and all that it reveals, and I thank you for your support of the arts and of our Arts Program, now and in the future.

GREGORY FOWLER, PhD
PRESIDENT
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS



The UMGC Arts Program finds great artists through research, studio visits, and word of mouth. Lawrence Philp came to our attention through Kerry and Betty Davis, who have amassed a huge collection of art by African Americans. Believing that Philp's works needed to be seen by a larger audience, Kerry Davis reached out to colleagues and friends in the arts community. I knew, after seeing the images of Philp's art, that we wanted to have an exhibition of his works at UMGC.

Philp spends his every waking moment thinking about, experimenting with, and creating art. At an early age, he isolated himself somewhat from city life and retreated to his studio to make art. He walked the streets to go to school, get items for his family, and obtain art supplies. He witnessed hardships firsthand. But he did not get involved to a point where it would keep him from making art. As he said, "All I wanted to be and do was to become an artist, even when my friends discouraged me." It was this discouragement that fueled him to succeed.

Because of the limited space in his home, which also served as his art studio, Philp created small works. As space became available in the early 1970s, he started creating works that were larger in scale. His art comes from walking through his communities in New York, Michigan, Florida, and now Georgia. He said, "I would walk down the street

and look at a crack in the pavement. Most people just saw the crack. I saw layers, dimension, depth, movement, and color."

It is these layers and dimensions that are present in Philp's collages, assemblages, paintings, and works on paper. He believes in building things up to find out how or if they work for what he wants to create as a finished work of art. He enjoys working with his hands; he has done so all his life. He was a handyman, contractor, house painter, and drywall installer. These jobs became useful life experiences as he made art. This is evident in the works that are presented in this exhibition.

UMGC, the Arts Program, and the Art Advisory Board are indebted to Kerry Davis for the introduction to Philp and to Carter Cue for providing the scholarly essay for this catalog. Additionally, the Arts Program would like to extend special thanks to the lenders for this exhibition: Kerry and Betty Davis, Kenneth and Cynthia Prince, Linda Singletary, and Donnell and Dorothea Walker. We are excited to showcase the art of Lawrence Philp and further the artistic career of such a masterful artist.

ERIC KEY
DIRECTOR, ARTS PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
GLOBAL CAMPUS

LAWRENCE PHILP: THE GRID, COLOR, AND AUTHENTICITY

CARTER B. CUE

ADULT SERVICES LIBRARIAN,
DURHAM COUNTY LIBRARY,
NORTH CAROLINA

For all its utilitarian value and ubiquitous, everyday purposefulness, the notion and idea of “the grid” has different meanings and possibilities for different people—depending on their outlook, worldview, and philosophy and tempered by their own nuanced expectations.

A grid is defined by *Collins English Dictionary* as “something which is in a pattern of straight lines that cross over each other, forming squares.” For the Western world, the grid means technological advancement and modernity. For the state of Texas in February 2021, the grid meant a lack of heat and energy and homes inundated by frigid, icy conditions. For editors and design professionals, the scripted organizational principles of the grid mean a pleasantly ordered reading experience. For architects, engineers, and city planners, the grid means harmonious alignment between structures and streets void of haphazardness. Whether we realize it or not, the grid is an integral part of daily human existence.

CONSTRUCTS OF THE GRID IN ART

For visual artists, the grid has influenced engagement and interaction with abstract artmaking for more than 100 years. For artists like Lawrence J. Philp, the grid, in its multiplicity of colors, has symbolized an authentic, productive, half-century of multisensory exploration that enables one to find clarity and order in confusion and chaos.

Art historian Rosalind Krauss’s poignant 1979 essay “Grids” points to the salient universal nature of the grid: “In the early part of this century there began to appear, first in France and then in Russia and in Holland, a structure that has remained emblematic of the modernist ambition within the visual arts ever since.”¹ Krauss goes on to deconstruct the cultural and practical applications of the grid within the context of pre-WWII cubist theory and practice popularized by Picasso and Georges Braque. While this history has great merit in understanding the trajectory of Philp’s creative output, it does not go far enough into plumbing the depths of Philp’s ancestral memory as a visual storyteller.

THE SLAVE TRADE AND COLOR GRID MEMORIZATION IN THE BLACK ATLANTIC

According to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, between 1525 and 1866 at least 12.5 million Africans were shipped to North America, the Caribbean, and South America as free labor to power the economic engines and fiscal well-being of industrial Europe and America. While some of the historical literature on slavery in the Americas suggests that the traumatic and dehumanizing experiences of the Middle Passage resulted in deculturalization and loss of ancestral memory and certain African cultural norms, scrutinizing the artistic, religious, cultural, and spiritual traditions of the descendants of enslaved Africans points to a continuum of African expressive culture in contemporary times.

One such visual, cultural paradigm that migrated from Africa was the writing system of the Kongo people of Central Africa, the primary mechanism by which they transmitted and shared their mythology, philosophy, cosmology, and creative aesthetic.

Scholars have noted that these African graphic writing systems were not dissimilar from the graphic script traditions found in Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Egyptian, and Islamic cultures using Arabic for written communication. The Kongo people referred to their graphic writing system—comprised of *bidimbu* (symbols) and *bisinsu* (codes)—as *Sinsu kia Nguisami*, which translates as “communication by code and symbol.”

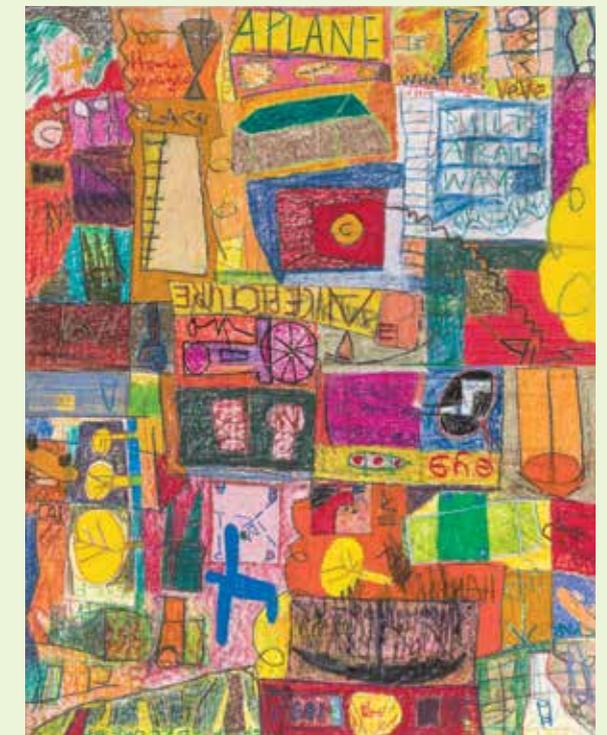
Robert Farris Thompson’s *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* was one of the first treatises to extensively document African visual communication relative to the Black Atlantic. In his book *Kongo Graphic Writing and Other Narratives of the Sign*, Afro-Cuban scholar Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz expands the trajectory of African graphic writing systems within the new world syncretic African religion of Palo Monte while recognizing traditional spiritual and religious corollaries in enslaved African populations in Jamaica, Haiti, Trinidad, Brazil, Suriname, and Belize.

While Philp’s pictographic, abstract mixed-media color grid works are not exactly Central African in form, there is no denying that his conceptual drawings of everyday objects and street-level detritus (e.g., telephones, fruit, cars, houses, bicycles, trains, traffic lights, cardboard, crumpled paper, images of graffiti, and a mismatch of lines, squiggles, and shapes) derive from his early life in New York City and embody the spirit and elemental aspects of the Kongo graphic writing format.

In *S. M. I. B.* (c. 1995), the patchwork of squares and rectangles contains images, shapes, and words about taking a journey somewhere, possibly to escape a situation, as seen by the two pictures of moving trucks, a house, and several writing journals spelled out by “journal.” One of the journal pages reads, “It takes real character to suffer indolence well.” In the painting *Flashlight for George Clinton and Parliament-Funkadelic* (c. 1995), Philp seems to be turning his attention to funk music icon George Clinton or



S. M. I. B., c. 1995, *Leaving Here* series, mixed media on paper, 51½ x 40 inches



Flashlight for George Clinton and Parliament-Funkadelic, c. 1995, *Leaving Here* series, mixed media on paper, 50½ x 40 inches



Above: *Golf Course of Life*, c. 1972, oil and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 inches

Right: *Nobody Told Me I Had a Banana on My Head*, c. 1973–76, acrylic on canvas, 86 x 60 inches, Collection of Kenneth and Cynthia Prince



Clinton's Afro-futurist music, which Philp listened to while traveling. He took the time to depict cars and other representations of travel and to spell out "a plane" and "built a railway" in various colored grids.

AMERICAN DIMENSIONS OF A LOGOGRAPHIC COLOR GRID

Following the horrific aftermath of World War II, which was punctuated by millions of deaths, countless wounded and maimed soldiers, scores of homeless and dispossessed civilians, poverty, isolations, mass destruction, and societal loneliness, many artists abruptly abandoned nationalistic social realism in favor of the pictographic and psychocathartic paintings popularized by Paul Klee and inspired by Sigmund Freud's and Carl Jung's theories of the collective unconscious.

Klee, the Bauhaus master, never traveled to the United States, but his use of idiosyncratic symbols and signs from his personal life—not to mention an intense interest in botany, zoology, astronomy, music, and

typology—influenced artists like William Baziotés, Gene Davis, Adolph Gottlieb, Norman Lewis, Robert Motherwell, Kenneth Nolan, Jackson Pollock, Theodoros Stamos, Mark Tobey, and Bradley Walker Tomlin. Klee and these artists were featured in the Phillips Collection 2018 exhibition *Ten Americans: After Paul Klee* and shared an interest in surrealist automatism, non-European calligraphy, and the collective unconscious. In an essay penned in 1920 entitled "Creative Confession," Klee said, "Color and I are one." Philp has also used the tenets of automatism (i.e., subconscious improvisation), surrealism, religion, music, and abstraction to capture the zeitgeist of humanity's external and internal nature, while merging them in a symbiotic relationship with nature, human emotions, and lived experiences.

Philp's brand of surrealism—no doubt predicated on his studied interest in the surrealist movement, automatism, African traditional religions, Black music forms, and Jung's and Freud's theories on the collective unconscious—is fun, humorous, and brightly colored. He takes playful jabs at human foibles as

well as psychological states of being, as seen in the paintings *Golf Course of Life* (c. 1972) and *Nobody Told Me I Had a Banana on My Head* (c. 1973–76).

A close examination of Philp's oeuvre reveals a gestural line similar to that found in the abstract expressionist work of Adolph Gottlieb. These two New York-born artists have in common a proclivity for pictographic, color grid paintings and drawings, similarly inspired by intense study of prehistoric cave paintings and the iconography of African and Native American art, which tends to consume every inch of the painted surface. Philp's extensive *Leaving Here* series shares a similar conceptual DNA with Gottlieb's long-running *Pictograph* series, begun in the 1940s, in that both "reconcile the flat planes of geometric abstraction found in Piet Mondrian's paintings with the swelling shapes characteristic of synthetic cubism seen in Fernand Léger's work."² Thus, Gottlieb might be considered a contextual bridge to understanding some of Philp's later work.

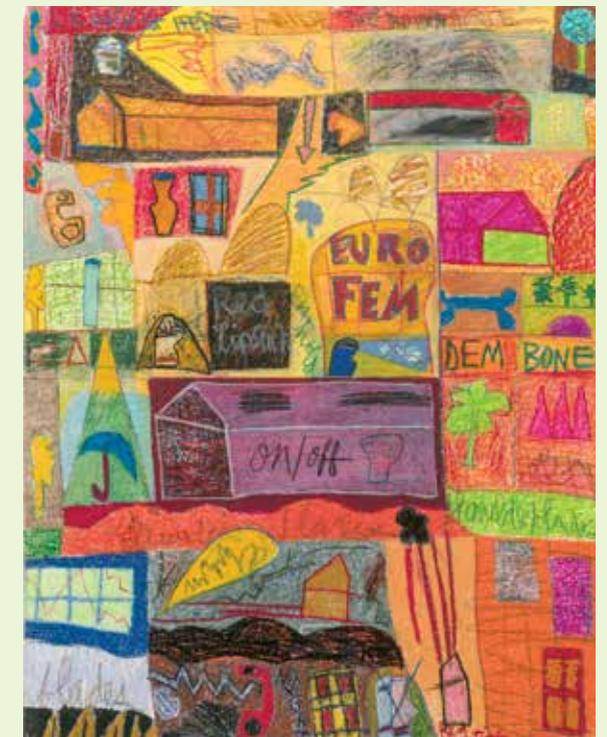
Philp's work *Euro Fem Dissonance, Red Lipstick* (c. 1995) introduces the viewer not only to the primary red-lipstick-wearing antagonist in the work's title but also to the mounting drama that ensues between the antagonist (Euro Fem) and the protagonist (possibly Philp) through the blue box at the bottom left with the word "Hades" and another box displaying a symbol for an electrocardiogram.

BLACK ART OR ABSTRACT ART

The 1960s and 1970s were a pivotal and intellectually and morally challenging time for African American artists whose art practice leaned toward the non-objective or abstraction. Writers, theorists, and pundits within and beyond the scope of the Black Arts movement stridently declared that Black artists were duty bound to produce art that reflected positive and culturally enriching imagery of Black people. Poet and activist Amiri Baraka said in Tom Lloyd's *Black Art Notes* that "Non-political black artists do not actually exist in the black world at all. . . . To force them on black people, as examples of what we are at our best, is nonsensical and ugly."³

Al Loving, Philp's fellow alumnus of the University of Michigan Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program and associate in the New York City art scene, was the center of much of the representational/abstraction debate during this time. Despite having been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Loving's geometric abstraction—and the artist himself—came under blistering attacks by many Black Arts proponents. Other New York-based Black abstractionists—including Jack Whitten, Norman Lewis, William T. Williams, Frank Bowling, Frank Wimberley, Joe Overstreet, Howardena Pindell, Stanley Whitney, McArthur Binion, and Ed Clark—faced similar resentments and critiques.

Philp, the son of Jamaican immigrants who had migrated to New York City in 1920, was raised with his siblings in a supportive, disciplined, culturally rich, and ethnically diverse environment infused with the concepts of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and the Brooklyn West Indian communities' engrained credo of academic excellence, self-sufficiency, and personal



Euro Fem Dissonance, Red Lipstick, c. 1995, *Leaving Here* series, mixed media on paper, 51½ x 40 inches

responsibility. As a “citizen of the world” steeped in a well-rounded mixture of philosophies and activities (ranging from youth theater, dance lessons, studying jazz theory under pianist Cedar Walton, and learning to play the congas), Philp “knew he was culturally and physically Black” and felt no real need to portray the Black figure in his work. Although the human figure encroached on his paintings while he was studying at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), this figurative tendency began to vanish by the time he graduated from Michigan with his MFA in 1973.

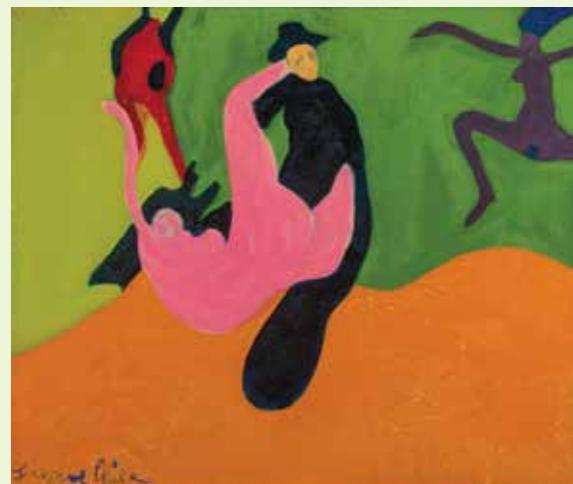
Philp’s early interest in figurative work and his study of the old masters of the baroque and Renaissance periods—not to mention some appropriation of painter Bob Thompson’s stylistic approach—is evident in his work *Expulsion from the Garden* (c. 1972–73), which was inspired by a 15th-century fresco by the Italian Renaissance painter Masaccio. The painting *Some of These Chicks Are Afraid of Me* (c. 1970), done while Philp was still a student at RISD, is another decoding of the old masters, specifically Titian, in the style of Bob Thompson. A male figure wearing a black cloak holds a pink-hued, female humanoid figure upside down, while another black humanoid female figure leaps in the background with outstretched arms.



OTHER INFLUENCES IN GRID, COLOR, AND PRAXIS

Artist Raymond Saunders’s gridded, layered mixed-media collages have aesthetically and philosophically influenced Philp’s stylistic interpretation of color and the grid. Saunders, an independent-minded and self-assured artist, chose to disavow portraying any tangible hints of race or ethnicity in his work. In response to writer Ishmael Reed’s May 1967 article “The Black Artist: Calling a Spade a Spade,” Saunders argued in the pamphlet *Black Is a Color* that he and other Black artists could and should paint what they wanted without including a Black figure.

The abstract expressionist tenor of Philp’s work is on full display with *Untitled (Greyish)* (c. 2021), which adheres to elements of color grid painting, with nonobjective shapes generously slathered with layers of black and gray paint. The black grid on the far left has been scratched, surreptitiously revealing the picture’s white undertone surface. In *Untitled (Blue)* (c. 2021), distinctive blocks of color are dispersed throughout the work; however, a thick brown-textured bar appears to provide a solid, stable base to the otherwise ethereal painting.



Left: *Expulsion from the Garden*, c. 1972–73, assemblage (wood cutout, acrylic), on canvas on plywood, 49 x 43 inches, Collection of Donnell and Dorothea Walker

Above: *Some of These Chicks Are Afraid of Me*, c. 1970, oil and acrylic on canvas, 30 x 36 inches



Clockwise from above: *Untitled (Greyish)*, c. 2021, acrylic on board, 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches; *Untitled (Light Green, Black Border)*, c. 2021, acrylic on cradled board, 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches, Collection of Lisa Gaines McDonald; *Untitled (Blue)*, c. 2021, acrylic on cradled board, 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches



Philp’s dense and heavily plastered painting *Untitled (Light Green, Black Border)* (c. 2021) supports the purpose and ideologies of the grid with a solid, vertical support beam of brownish-black paint beside a two-part, light-and-dark color band and a third, larger block on the far right embedded with streaks, strokes, and splashes of paint.

Two of Philp’s contemporaries who have used color and grid with outstanding success are Stanley Whitney and McArthur Binion. Since turning to abstraction in the 1960s, Whitney has experimented with drawing and painting blocked and branded sequential rows of color that merge fluidly while maintaining rigid separation of color in square and rectangle composition. Like Whitney’s riotously bright palette traversing up to a surface’s boundaries, Philp’s paintings embody the improvisation, spontaneity, and freedom of jazz.

Binion’s seductively challenging *DNA* series incorporates the best of the grid, using blackened surfaces of tightly scarified tribal marks that slumber with bits of telephone book pages and shards of Binion’s own birth certificate—not unlike Philp’s expert incorporation of pages from books, magazines, and newspapers in his art. Philp demarcates his visual autobiographical works with continual blips of intersecting minimalist paint lines that bind each chapter of his lived experiences into a bold and daring autobiography.

CONCLUSION

Lawrence Philp has lived through and experienced various art movements. Abstract expressionism and surrealism have influenced his work, which others have described as a blend of folk/primitive and cubism. However, Philp is an artist of unique perspectives and talents. His work and art practice are forever growing and evolving—defying most definitions. At the end of the day, Philp’s greatest aspiration might just be “getting up every morning and squeezing out some paint.”

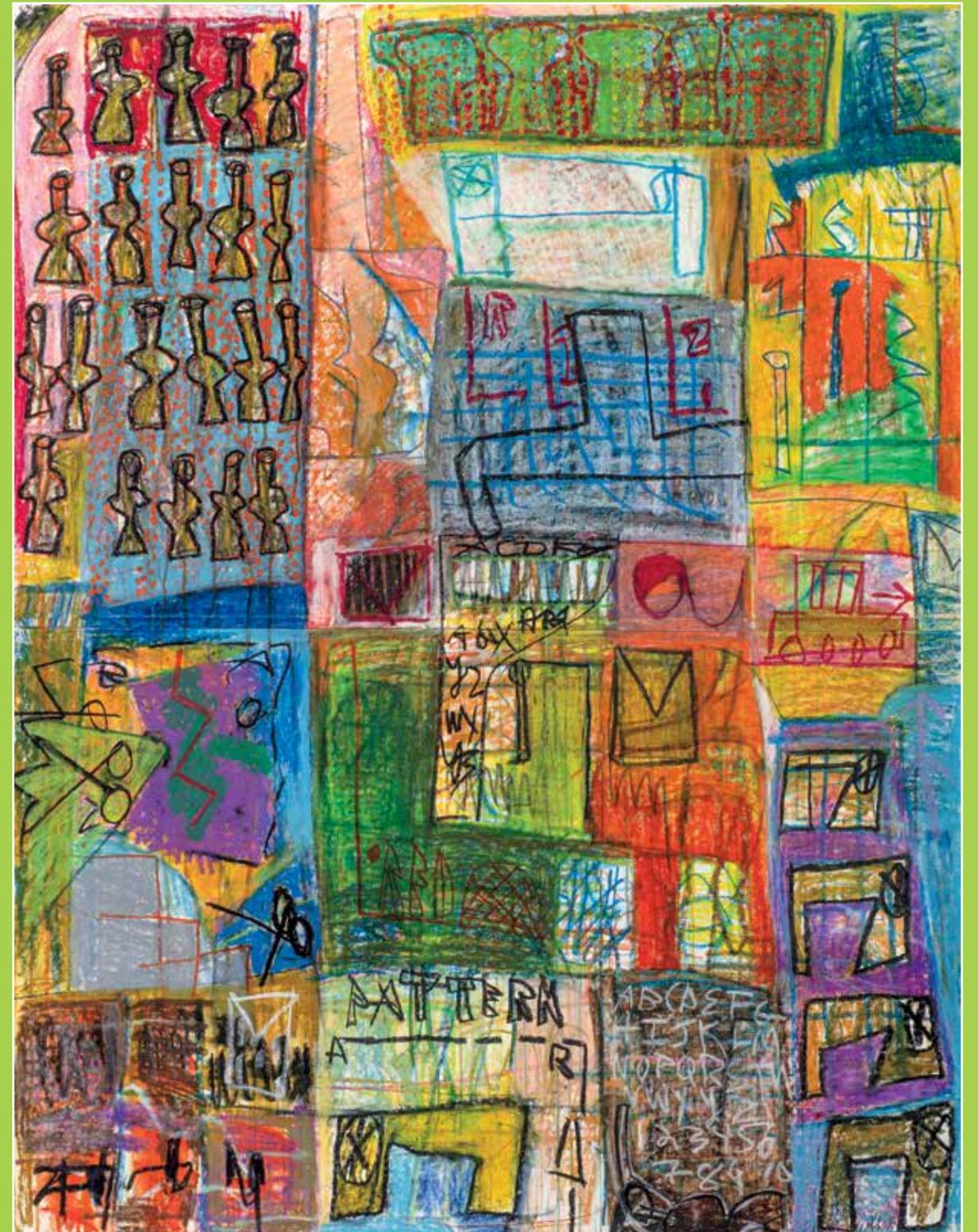
NOTES

- 1 Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 50–64.
- 2 Charlotta Kotik, “The Legacy of Signs: Reflections on Adolph Gottlieb’s Pictographs,” in *The Pictographs of Adolph Gottlieb* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1994, exhibition catalogue), 59.
- 3 Imamu Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones), “Counter Statement to Whitney Ritz Bros” in *Black Arts Notes*, ed. Tom Lloyd (1971), 5.

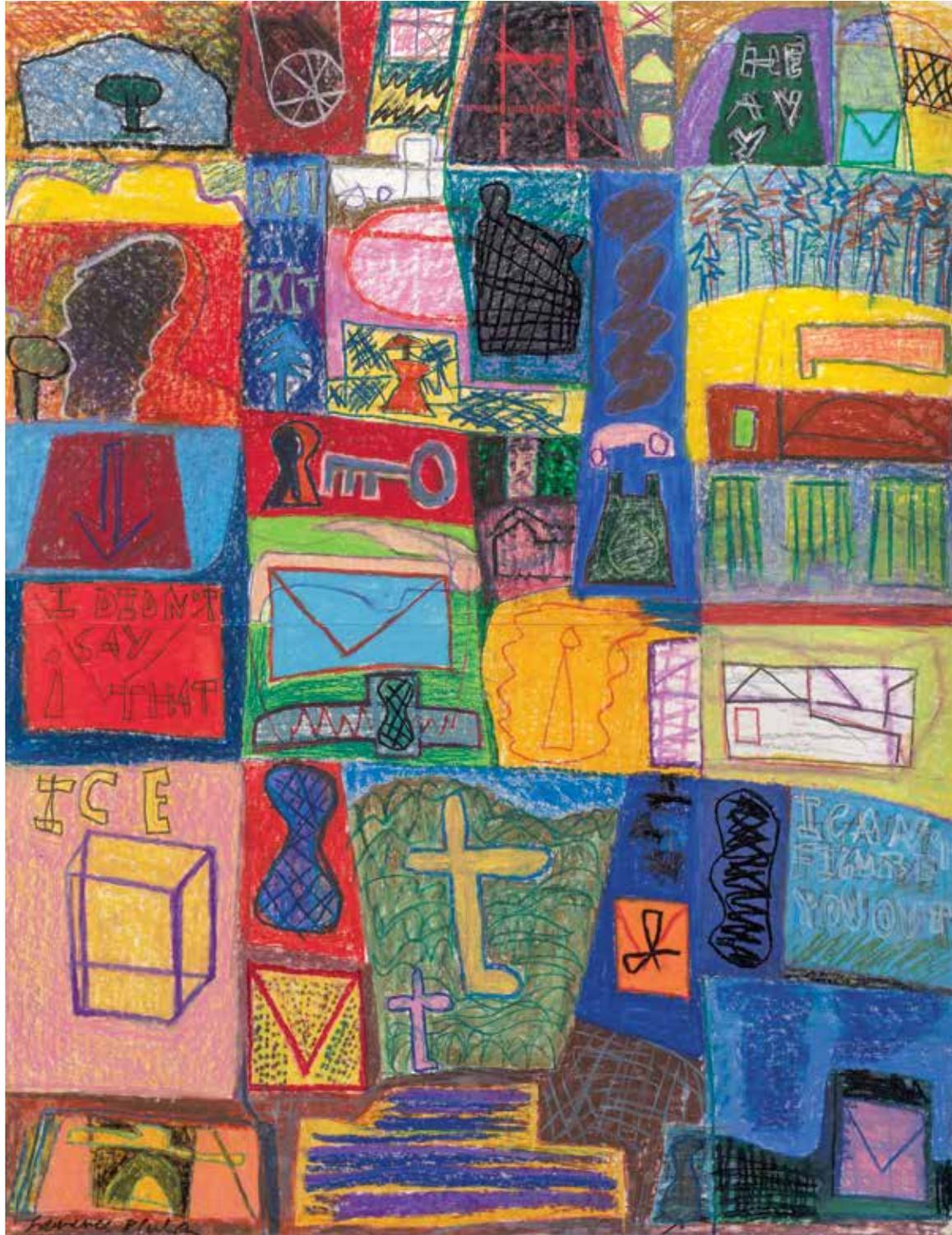
LAWRENCE PHILP'S COLOR GRID

I endeavor to make paintings that I would like to see and that resonate with my vision. I also wish to regale the viewer looking at these compositions.

My drawings are based on automatic drawing. . . . I have utilized copious drawing and marking techniques, juxtaposition of imagery, and two-dimensional compositional methods to make drawings on paper. The essence of making a drawing or painting series is to sustain an idea from start to end. All drawings in a series will have a commonality of materials and techniques. There are no rules on how to be in the thick of this drawing project or how to come out of it.



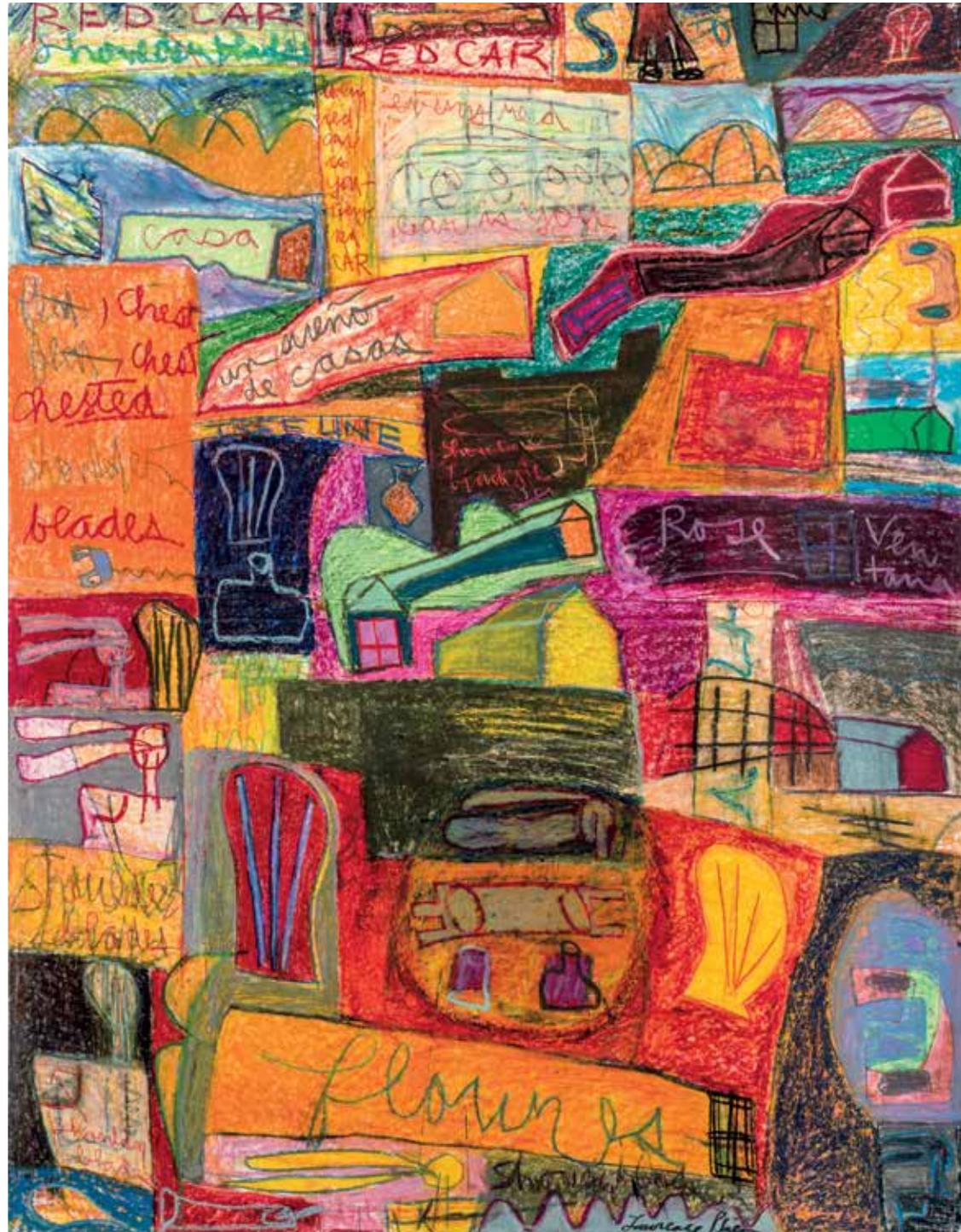
Pattern, c. 1995, *Leaving Here* series, crayon and paint on paper, 51½ x 40 inches



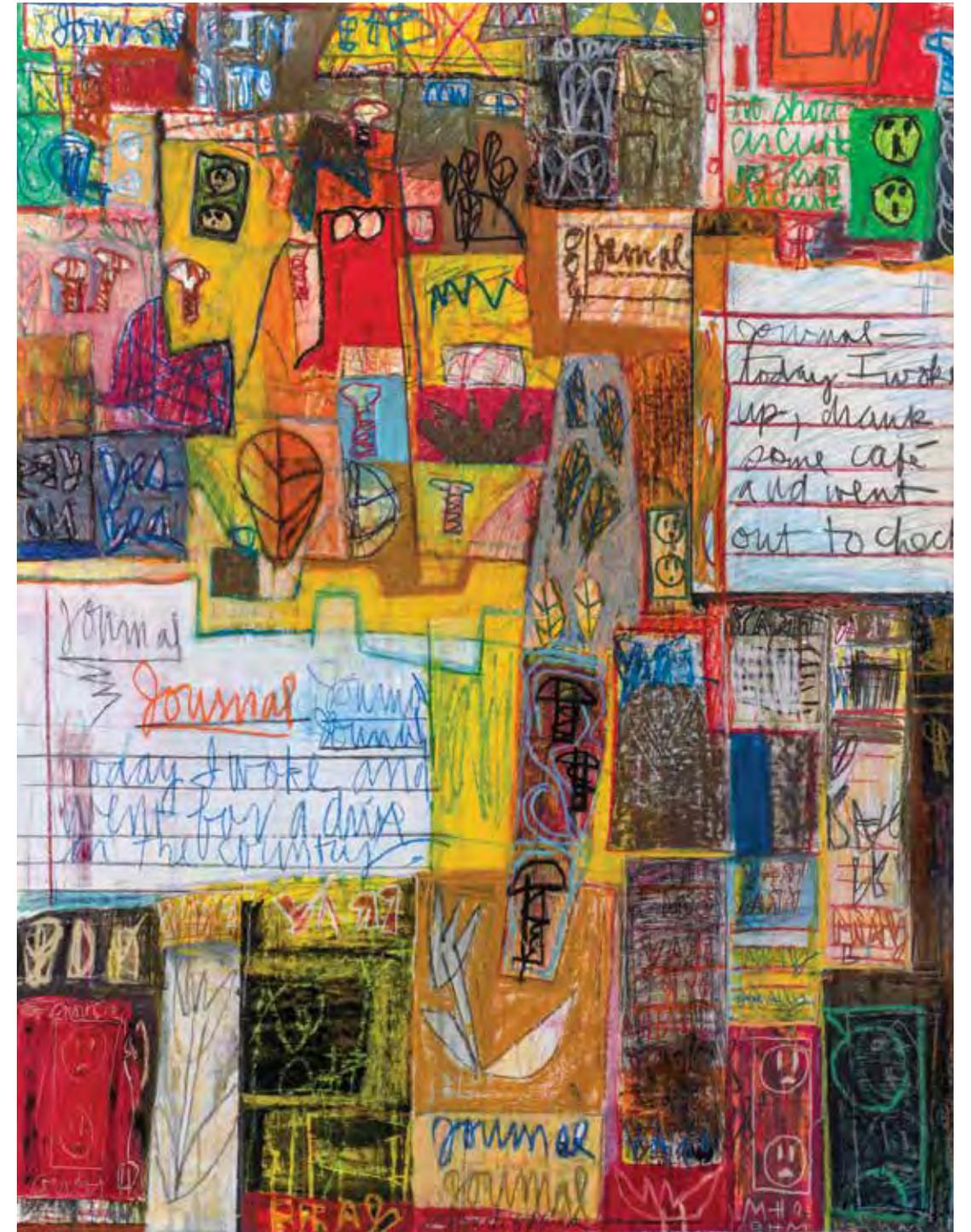
Sverre Fehn, *Dead, Phone Sex*, c. 1995, *Leaving Here* series, crayon and crayon pastel on paper, 51½ x 40 inches



Sverre Fehn, *Stone Hinges*, c. 1996, *Leaving Here* series, mixed media on paper, 62 x 48 inches



Florescent Landscape w/Rose Ventana, c. 1995, Leaving Here series, crayon and pastel on paper, 51½ x 40 inches



Today I Woke And . . . , c. 1995, Leaving Here series, mixed media on paper, 51½ x 40 inches



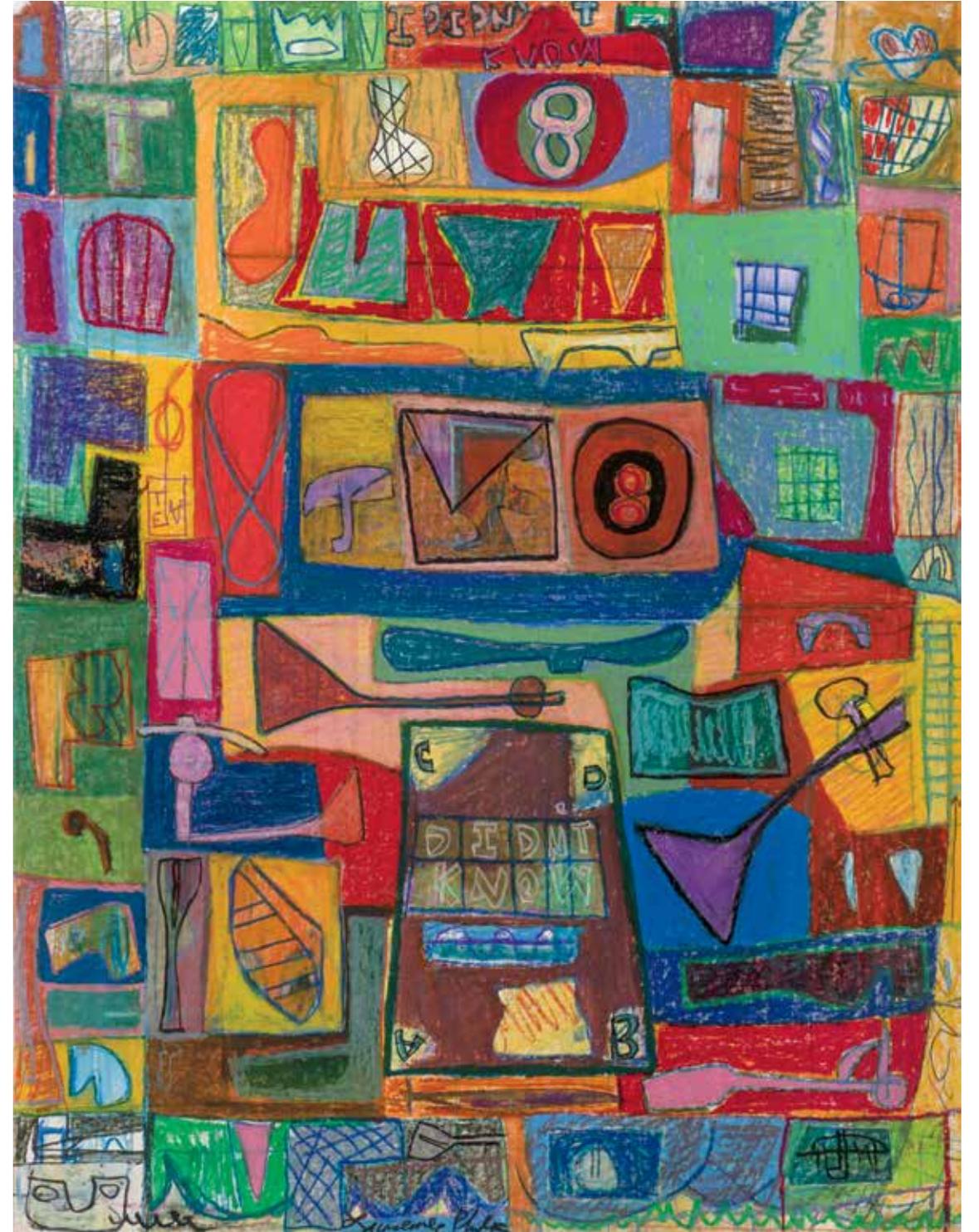
Flashlight for George Clinton and Parliament-Funkadelic, c. 1995,
Leaving Here series, mixed media on paper, 50½ x 40 inches



Bird Mother and Microscope, c. 1996, Leaving Here series, oil pastel on paper,
62 x 48 inches, UMGC Permanent Collection, International Collection,
Gift of Kerry and Betty Davis in honor of Lawrence Philp



Upstate Aggression, c. 1995, Leaving Here series, mixed media on paper, 51½ x 40 inches



Up the Creek, c. 1995, Leaving Here series, crayon and oil pastel on paper, 51½ x 40 inches



Untitled, c. 1996, *Leaving Here* series, oil pastel on paper, 62 x 48 inches



Feminine Voice, c. 1995, *Leaving Here* series, mixed media on paper, 51½ x 40 inches



Camouflage 2, 2014,
Summer/Garage/Music series,
mixed-media wood assemblage,
15½ x 12¾ x 2¾ inches



Camouflage, c. 2013-14,
Summer/Garage/Music series,
mixed-media wood assemblage,
12¾ x 15½ x 3 inches



Camouflage, c. 2014, Summer/Garage/Music series,
mixed-media wood assemblage, 17¾ x 12¾ x 3 inches



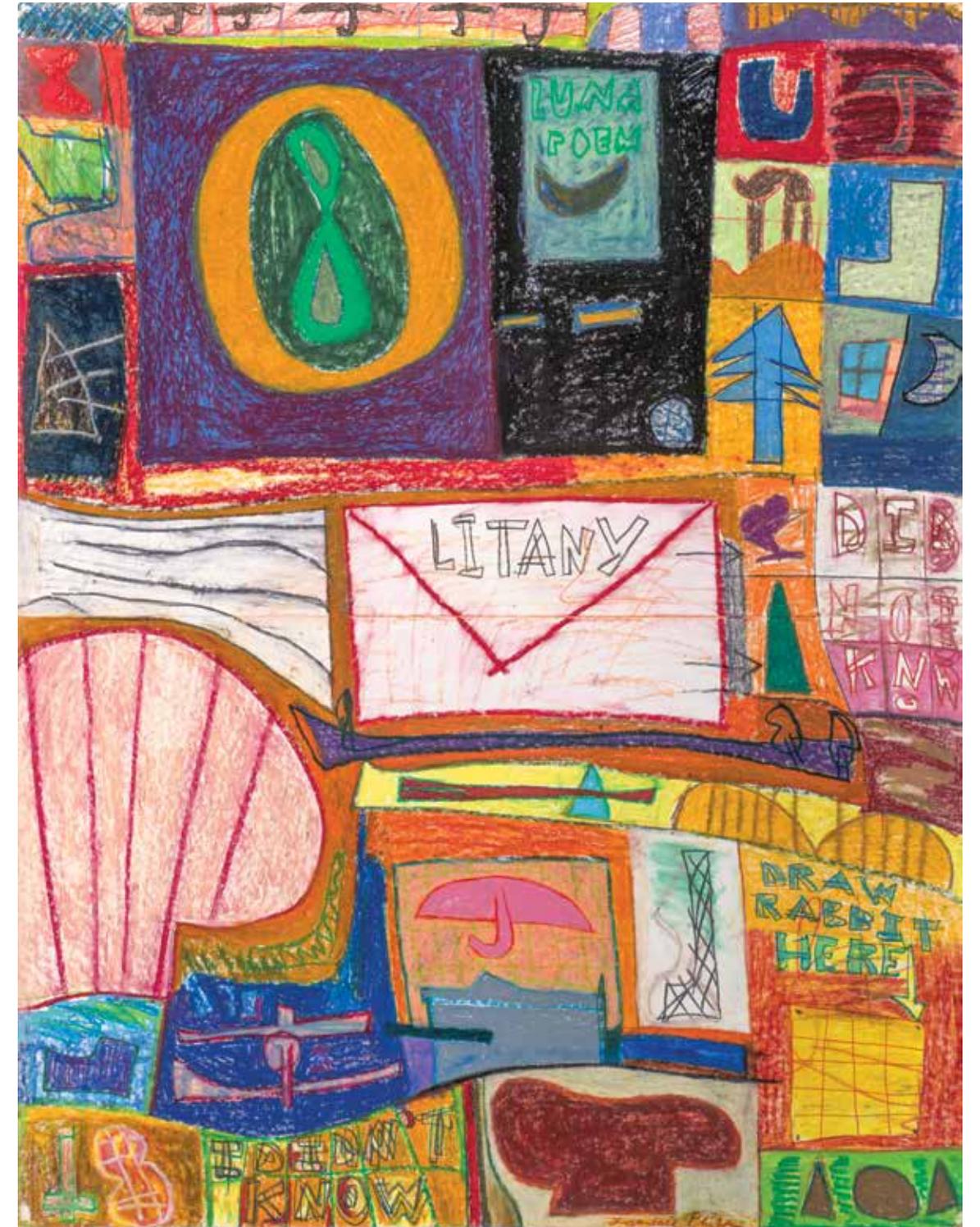
The Temptation of Saint Anthony, c. 1973, acrylic on canvas,
71½ x 65 inches, Collection of Kerry and Betty Davis



Expulsion from the Garden, c. 1972–73, assemblage (wood cutout, acrylic), on canvas on plywood,
49 x 43 inches, Collection of Donnell and Dorothea Walker



Camouflage, 1999–2000, mixed media on paper, 50 x 47 inches



Luna Poem: Euro Femme Voice: Do Not Bend . . . Fold, Mutilate (Self Portrait), c. 1995, mixed media on paper, 51½ x 40 inches



Untitled #1, c. 1972, acrylic on canvas, 73 x 60 inches



Hot Fun in the Summer Time #3, c. 1973, acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches,
UMGC Permanent Collection, International Collection,
Gift of Kerry and Betty Davis in honor of Lawrence Philip



Untitled, 1971–72, assemblage (wood and canvas cutouts, acrylic)
on canvas on plywood, 48 x 42 inches, Collection of Eric Key



Untitled, c. 1969, acrylic and oil on canvas, 38 x 25½ inches



Thousand Maniacs, c. 2003, mixed media on paper, 51½ x 47 inches



The Birthday Party, c. 1972–73, acrylic on canvas, 62 x 61 inches,
Collection of Linda Singletary, MD



The Death of Picasso, 1973, acrylic and oil on canvas, 61½ x 61½ inches



Adventure of Batman in the City, c. 1976, assemblage (wood, acrylic) on canvas on cradled board, 49 x 37 inches



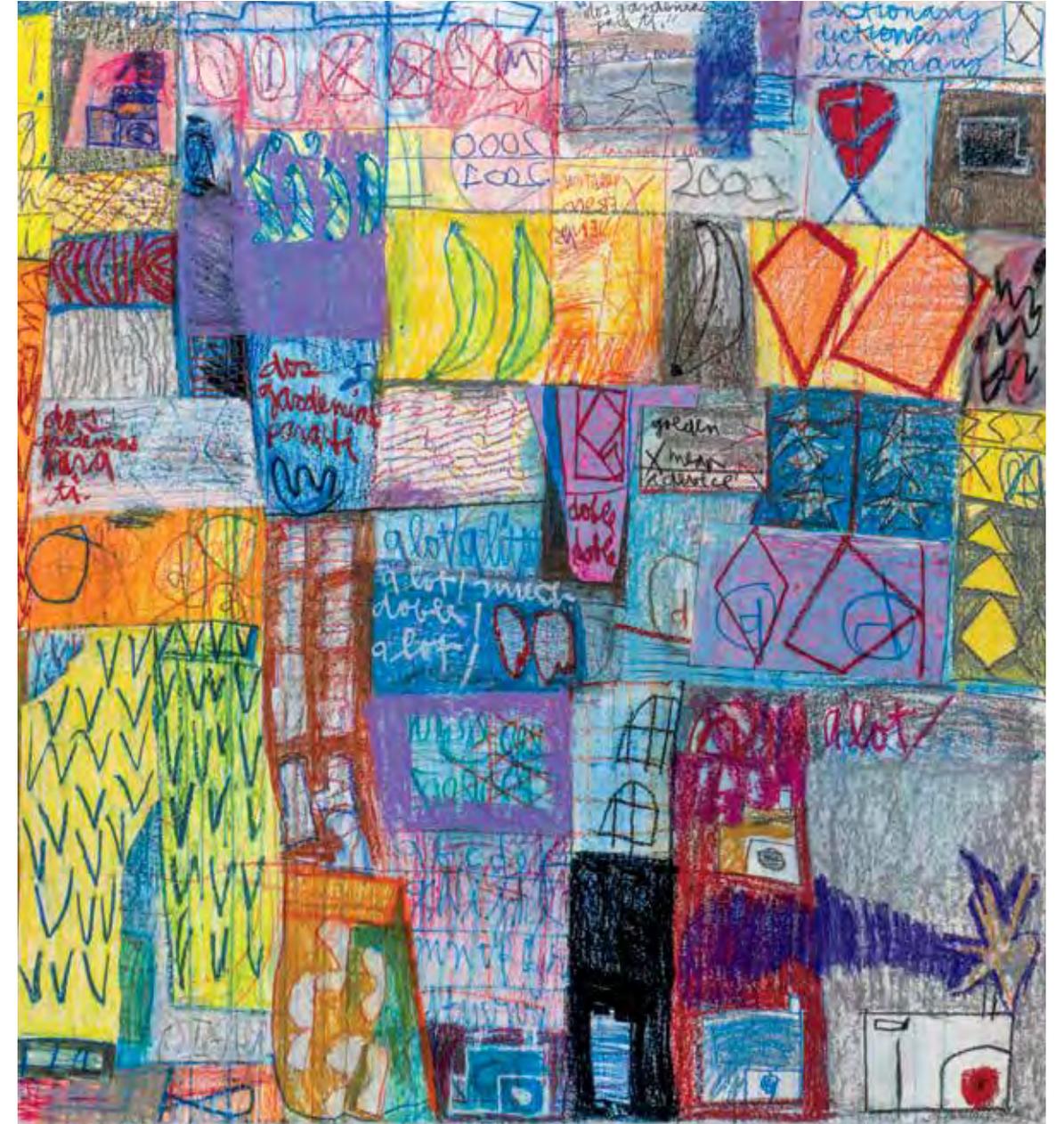
Yoruba, c. 1970–71, oil and acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches



Some of These Chicks Are Afraid of Me, c. 1970, oil and acrylic on canvas, 30 x 36 inches



Untitled, c. 1999, mixed media on paper, 51½ x 47 inches



Camouflage II, 1999–2000, mixed media on paper, 50 x 47 inches



Golf Course of Life, c. 1972, oil and acrylic on canvas, 60 x 60 inches



Nobody Told Me I Had a Banana on My Head, c. 1973–76, acrylic on canvas, 86 x 60 inches, Collection of Kenneth and Cynthia Prince



Untitled (Blue), c. 2021, acrylic on cradled board, 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches



Untitled (Purple), c. 2021, acrylic on cradled board, 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches



Untitled (Light Green, Black Border), c. 2021, acrylic on cradled board, 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches, Collection of Lisa Gaines McDonald



Untitled (Greyish), c. 2021, acrylic on board, 14 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches



“I am a kid from Brooklyn who wanted to paint pictures. I set out in my youth to achieve that goal. I make paintings and works on paper now!”

LAWRENCE PHILP

EK (Eric Key): What was your childhood like? Describe your community and education.

LP: I grew up in Manhattan in the midst of my parents’ Jamaican community. I went to school with a lot of different friends from the United States, Jamaica, Europe, and Africa. I enjoyed my school art classes. I graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn in 1967. High school was during the beginnings of the civil rights movement and the war in Vietnam. In high school, we did a lot of talking and reading about the African diaspora and my place in it. I hated high school except for the major art, English, and Spanish classes. I went to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in Providence, Rhode Island, from 1967 to 1971. There, I majored in painting and minored in drawing. I also attended the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, School of Art and Design (now renamed) from 1971 to 1973.

EK: Did you do art as a child?

LP: When I was a child, my father drew horses for me, and I was really intrigued by that and drew horses also. My mother drew teacups for me too. I drew from a kit and in coloring books. My mom exhorted me to draw and color between the lines, which I didn’t follow. I was a child who drew a lot and not always on paper. In the house I would find things to get into—white chalk, for example, which I remember drawing on the metal backyard door with. I would draw “The Fox and the Crow” comics.

EK: Did your parents support your artistic talents at an early age?

LP: My parents supported my artistic talents within their means. It wasn’t a priority for them that I wanted to be an artist. They wanted me to be a statesman, doctor, lawyer, etc.

EK: What made you become an artist?

LP: I don’t know that you become an artist. I think that artists, like clouds, are formed, as the artist Richard Tuttle has said. I was a fair-skinned kid growing up in Brooklyn with a father who had straight hair and looked white. My mother had brown skin. My family unit was awesome. For the most part, I grew up around people who were very African looking, as well as older Jamaicans. At house parties and so forth, I told everybody that I wanted to be an artist. Everyone made jokes about this. It was a tough time, but I decided that I was going to do it because that’s what I was good at. You know, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Sounds funny now, but in reality, that’s all I had at the time. I was learning how to maneuver in society, and I was learning how to paint and draw. Becoming an artist at an early age was a challenge, because a lot of people told me I couldn’t do that. So I wanted to prove them wrong.

EK: So your art became your tool for communicating? Did it become your voice?

LP: I became an artist because I wanted to make stuff. I wanted to find my own way of making my

work. So essentially, I wanted to find my voice. It’s probably up to people who are looking at my work to determine whether or not I have achieved it.

EK: Who were your most influential teachers in college? How did they affect your artistic talent?

LP: I had a number of influential teachers in college, especially at the RISD and the University of Michigan, where I did my graduate work. They let me work. They gave me a bit of direction. And they told me about things like cleaning my palette, making stretchers, generally just comporting myself as an artist and a gentleman. These influential artists and mentors included John Torres Jr., Mahler B. Ryder, Richard Merkin, Bryce Hobbs, Dean Richardson, and Robert Stull. Stull was a ceramicist and head of the art department at the University of Michigan at the time.

Going to art school was like a breath of fresh air for me. And I had a sense of being where I wanted to be and starting to learn what I wanted to do. I went to art school, where I learned how to sit, do stuff, correct stuff, and sit, and move stuff, and sit, and finish things.

EK: How do you define your art—impressionism, pop, expressionism, realism, etc.?

LP: I define my art as a search for meaning inside the relative absurdity of life and a way of valuing life and spending minutes, days, and hours working on stuff. Expressionism, abstract expressionism, impressionism, and realism were movements in art that helped me in some way. They helped me sharpen my thinking about painting. However, I don’t consider my art to be a part of these art movements or classifications.

EK: Does your art reflect your environment, thoughts, emotion, etc.? How? What do you hope to convey with your art?

LP: Since I’m pigeonholed as a Black person in the United States of America whose parentage is for the most part British, I have learned especially through reading that I am basically invisible. If I state that I’m an artist of this, that, or the other, because I’m Black,

I’m invisible. My efforts in painting art are to show me what kind of mind I have, what sort of imagination I have, what kinds of ideas I have. Yes, I want to convey through my art that I can make art or at least that I have a path to work on that’s related to making things and making things that I want to see.

EK: Talk a little about your series of works that are on paper, board, canvas, etc. Is there a theme in this body of works? Why are they important?

LP: I’ve been working on series in various mediums for a long time. It started in the early 1970s. The idea is to make paintings that express themselves. I don’t want to use the word “problem solving” with color, texture, line, and form on paper, but that is what I am doing. Generally, I work within 8 x 10 inches at a time. This allows me to do something while I’m doing something else. For example, if I can do house-keeping while the paint is drying, I can come back to it later. Larger paintings take weeks and months because you have to allow the paint to dry over a longer period. In the smaller paintings or grids, I can allow the paint in one grid to dry and come back to it while I create another grid on the same paper or canvas.

I’ve done a series called *Leaving Here*. This is a series of about 75 drawings. Each is about 51½ by 40 inches. They are generally mixed-media works consisting of oil pastels, acrylic, wood, glue, crayon, china markers, and tempera paint. In some cases, there are pieces of photocopied paper attached. Usually, I use whatever glue I have at the time as the adhesive.

Another series of paintings that I’ve done is the *Summer/Garage/Music* series, which consisted of about 150 paintings. I also did a series of watercolors while I was in Palm Coast, Florida, called the *Architectonic Meditations* series. This series had various sizes and allowed me to experiment with watercolor and collage and layering the watercolor on paper. The work is important because it deals with the idea of the “beginner’s mind” and is aligned with putting “colored water” on paper—allowing paint, water, scrubbing, automatic drawing, blotting, layering, and frottage to marry.

EK: Do you consider yourself a storyteller through your art?

LP: I don't think I am a storyteller through my art. I think that there's a narrative that runs through my artmaking that's about me going to a place where I work in my head and conquering slings and arrows of outrageous fortune and perhaps reliving and retelling instances of things that may or may not have happened to me. Things that I remember well! Things that I don't even know if they're really real or not. Speaking of it like this, maybe I am capturing the stories in art.

EK: Color is important to you. Why?

LP: Color is very important in my work. Color, lines, shapes, and forms create backgrounds for the kinds of paintings that I'm trying to make. Color is also important because sometimes it is the only thing that lets you know what's going on in a piece of work. This has more to do with the degree of light and dark that you're using. The amount of pigment or the amount of crayon that you're rubbing onto a surface to make a color lighter or darker makes for a more transparent or opaque image. You are working the color surface until it appears to be what you want, rather than just placing it down and looking at it. In my case, I make a lot of changes and color mixtures to test what I am trying to achieve in the work. Color for me is the reason to paint. Color is the great equalizer. Color can be used to change volumes. For me, color is king.

EK: Who influenced you the most in art?

LP: I have two major influences. One is Bob Thompson, whose work intrigued me way before I learned about his actual life through people who knew him, like Al Loving, Hettie Jones, or his wife, Carol Plenda Thompson. Loving had some stories about Thompson, but no one really spoke about his love of jazz. I love looking at his work—the coloration, the flat figures that are reminiscent of the classicism of a painter like Masaccio or Piero della Francesca. Thompson was sampling the whole of the European Renaissance and making it his own subject matter playground.

The other major influence in my artistic life is Mahler B. Ryder, who I met as a student at the RISD in 1968. He was a serious art worker and a jazz pianist. He would practice his piano playing in the late afternoon in the study rooms of the RISD library. Ryder was a stickler for detail and technical correctness in his drawing, painting, and printmaking work. He also made assemblage work using found objects or vacuum-formed work. He also worked with fiberglass resin in some of the larger construction vacuum-formed artwork. I do not think he liked the direction of my work, but he talked to me and interacted with me on the painting level.

I admired these two men because of their dedication to their work. I learned how to work and was able to garner experience as a painter by painting every day even under the pressure of school or the everyday particulars that take time away from painting. Thompson taught me that you could borrow other people's art as a starting point, but you always had to arrive at your own conclusions. Ryder taught me to butt color against color and to get out of the habit of outlining things in black and coloring them in.

EK: Talk about your experience with Robert (Bob) Blackburn. When and how did you meet him?

LP: I met Bob Blackburn at a few openings in New York City, but I really didn't know who he was. I never talked to him at length until the day I bumped into him on Broadway and 27th. He was walking to the Printmaking Workshop (PMW) from Columbia University, and I was walking uptown. He stopped me and said, "Why don't you come down to the workshop and make some prints." I was stunned. I hadn't been in a working printmaking shop since 1970. I later found out that Bob was major and had run the workshop for quite a while. I was told that everyone who was an artist had worked there at least once since its inauguration.

Bob was a stern supervisor and did not suffer fools gladly. He was not running a coffee clutch, so when you were there you printed, processed plates, levigated lithography stones, changed acid, cleaned

lithographic rollers, dumped garbage, and met other artists from around the world. The workshop was attended by Cuban communists, Eastern European communists, jazz musicians, dancers, college professors, art students, non-art students—in short, an array of humanity, including every ethnic minority in the United States. The PMW was a national and international construct/community built by Bob Blackburn. Lots of arguments and points of interest were made. I never saw any physical altercations, and all Bob had to do if there was trouble was walk into the area, look over his glasses, and ask why folks were not making prints.

I helped Bob in the workshop. We moved a printing press owned by Tatyana Grosman from a studio space in the Seagram's Building—broke it down to fit in the elevator, put it in a truck, and drove it uptown to then move it into another elevator system and into the workshop for reassembly. I recoated and refurbished solvent sinks for him. Anyone who could do something in the PMW to help Bob did.

EK: Describe the medium you use. Why that medium? Have you explored using other mediums? What do you hope to achieve by using this?

LP: I used to paint strictly with oil paint. I went from painting strictly with oil paint to painting with acrylic underpaintings and oil, overpainting, or over layering. I work with printmaking. I've made lithographs, etchings, linocuts, woodcuts, and collagraphs. I'm using these different mediums. I'm attempting to find a way of working that is suitable for me. I don't know what other artists are doing in reference to that, but paint doesn't say anything unless you use it. And art mediums, in general, are muted until you use them expressively and open up to using the material truthfully.

EK: Tell us about your artistic approach, such as style and specific techniques.

LP: I start working by just putting down something on paper: a smudge, a form, a gesture, a studied line, an unstudied line. I scribble. I work with watercolor, tempera, and gouache on paper. I have painted large

works on paper with acrylic paint. My work tends toward the abstract, the nonphotographic representation of a fleeting image or something seen. I draw or paint something on a piece of paper and then I find something in the drawing or painting to specifically emphasize, like a pattern or a form. I coat a piece of paper with paint, remove paint, add more paint, blot the paint, splatter and spatter more paint, blot the paint, find a resonant shape, enlarge that figure, erase the figure, remake the figure. I concentrate on remaking the work with that emphasis over and over until it doesn't make any sense to do anything else to it, and then I do something else to it. I paint flatly. Abstraction is a notion that I try to make known on the paper. I think with a brush or a crayon, brushing paint and scribbling on paper. My mode of composition reminds me of the stream-of-consciousness technique used by writers in which they just write, things form, and they work with or against the burgeoning sentence or idea forming. In my case, I am making a drawing on paper or a painting on canvas.

EK: How are you inspired to create works of art? Describe your process.

LP: Making art involves a lot of perspiration. Ideas are sometimes tough things and are not arrived at overnight. I start paintings and drawings by just making marks or putting color down; I do not outline ideas in pencil and fill in surfaces with media. I borrow the idea of automatic drawing and the notion of the beginner's mind, which is a Buddhist concept, as opposed to the expert's mind—the point being that I do not know what I will do until I start doing it. I work, rework, layer, layer more, and edit the surface until I get a "yes" from the inner dialogue taking place during the work process. If I have a way of making work, if there is a process that I use, this is close to what I make do with in the studio. This is a way of working that works best for me, especially in the way I use my hands and materials.

BORN

New York City, New York, 1949

EDUCATION

1973 MFA, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

1971 BFA, Rhode Island School of Design
Major: Painting, Minor: Drawing

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2019 *Lawrence Philp: Works on Paper from the Series 16 Times 8 Equals 1*, Lockhart Gallery, SUNY Geneseo, Geneseo, New York

2003 *Lawrence J. Philp, Resident Artist*, Stanley Gallery, The Arts Center, St. Petersburg, Florida

1998 Flagler County Auditorium, Bunnell, Florida

1995 Albany Center Gallery, Albany, New York
Night Eagle Emporium and Coffeehouse Gallery, Oxford, New York

1994 Gallery 53 Artworks, Cooperstown, New York
Kubiak Gallery, Upper Catskill Community Council of Arts, Oneonta, New York
West Kortright Center, East Meredith, New York

1993 *Lawrence Philp, Works on Paper*, Gallery 53 Artworks, Cooperstown, New York

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2017 *GAP V Mazatlan*, Global Artist Project, Baupres Gallery, Mazatlán, Mexico
100 Years/100 Artists, Morean Arts Center, St Petersburg, Florida

2016 *Art x 9*, The Casements, Ormond Beach, Florida

2014 *Expressionism*, Mary McLeod Bethune Performing Arts Center and Visual Arts Gallery, Daytona Beach, Florida

I Kan Do Dat, Skylight Gallery, Brooklyn, New York

Odyssey, Mary McLeod Bethune Performing Arts Center and Visual Arts Gallery, Daytona Beach, Florida

Forte, Mary McLeod Bethune Performing Arts Center and Visual Arts Gallery, Daytona Beach, Florida

2013 *Three Roads to Now: A Show of Works by William B. Brant, Donald Kolberg, and Lawrence Philp*, Larimer Arts Center, Palatka, Florida

Expressionism, Mary McLeod Bethune Performing Arts Center and Visual Arts Gallery, Dayton Beach, Florida

2010 *Art from Private Collections*, Peg Alston Fine Arts, New York, New York

Selected Contemporary Works by Regional Artists, Hollingsworth Gallery, Palm Coast, Florida

Music Theme Exhibition, Hollingsworth Gallery, Palm Coast, Florida

2003 *Nurturing the New Benefit Exhibition of Fine Art*, NURTUREart, Chelsea, New York

2001 *66th Annual National Invitational*, Cooperstown Art Association, Cooperstown, New York

Artist-in-Residence Exhibition, Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, Colorado

1999 *Annual Holiday Show*, Artists-in-Residence and Staff Exhibition, Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, Colorado

1995 *Adamec, Dempsey, Nuzum, Philp: Ceramics, Paintings, and Drawings*, Buckham Gallery, Flint, Michigan

1994 *The Art of the Game*, 13th Annual Fine Arts Baseball Exhibition, Gallery 53 Artworks, Cooperstown, New York

Retrospectrum, On Paper, Buckham Gallery, Flint, Michigan

Philp/Volo, Adams Art Gallery, Dunkirk, New York

Big and Little Show, Cooperstown Art Association, Cooperstown, New York

1994 *Art on Fire*, Bremer Farm, Otego, New York

1993 *Figuring It Out on Paper: Prints from the Printmaking Workshop*, Foreman Gallery, Hartwick College, Oneonta, New York

1992 *Historical Crosscuts Juried Exhibition*, Buckham Fine Arts Project, Buckham Gallery, Flint, Michigan

The Child, Pyramid Gallery, Rochester, New York

Jazz Dimensions '92, Schenectady Museum, Schenectady, New York

1991 *Extra Innings, Annual Baseball Show*, Gallery 53 Artworks, Cooperstown, New York

Beyond Boundaries, Narrative Works on Fiber and Paper Inspired by Personal Histories and Distant Places, Gallery 53 Artworks, Cooperstown, New York

Faculty Exhibition, Foreman Gallery, Hartwick College, Oneonta, New York

Ninth Annual Tribute to Black Artists Exhibition, Pyramid Gallery, Rochester, New York

1990 *In Our Own Voices*, Bevier Gallery, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York

Biennial Faculty Exhibition, Foreman Gallery, Hartwick College, Oneonta, New York

David MacDonald and Lawrence Philp: Recent Ceramics and Paintings, Fine Arts Gallery, SUNY Oneonta, Oneonta, New York

Contemporary African-American Printmakers, Lyman Allyn Art Museum, New London, Connecticut

Recent Trends in Work on Paper, Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires, Argentina

SELECTED AWARDS

1999 Artist-in-Residence, Pamela Joseph Fellowship, Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Snowmass Village, Colorado

1996 Artist-in-Residence, Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, Vermont

Alexander Twilight Visiting Artist/Scholar, Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont

1994 Artist-in-Residence Grant, New York State Council on the Arts, Sponsored by Gallery 53 Artworks, Cooperstown, New York

1991 Artist-in-Residence Program, Washington State Arts Commission, Seattle, Washington

1988 Emerging Minority Printmaking Fellowship, National Endowment for the Arts, Bob Blackburn's Printmaking Workshop, New York, New York

Adventure of Batman in the City
c. 1976
assemblage (wood, acrylic)
on canvas on cradled board
49 x 37 inches

Bird Mother and Microscope
c. 1996
Leaving Here series
oil pastel on paper
62 x 48 inches
UMGC Permanent Collection
International Collection
Gift of Kerry and Betty Davis
in honor of Lawrence Philp

The Birthday Party
c. 1972–73
acrylic on canvas
62 x 61 inches
Collection of Linda Singletary, MD

Camouflage
c. 1999–2000
mixed media on paper
50 x 47 inches

Camouflage
c. 2013–14
Summer/Garage/Music series
mixed-media wood assemblage
12³/₈ x 15⁷/₁₆ x 3 inches

Camouflage
c. 2014
Summer/Garage/Music series
mixed-media wood assemblage
17⁷/₈ x 12³/₈ x 3 inches

Camouflage II
1999–2000
mixed media on paper
50 x 47 inches

Camouflage 2
2014
Summer/Garage/Music series
mixed-media wood assemblage
15¹/₂ x 12³/₈ x 2¹/₄ inches

The Death of Picasso
1973
acrylic and oil on canvas
61¹/₂ x 61¹/₂ inches

*Euro Fem Dissonance,
Red Lipstick*
c. 1995

Leaving Here series
mixed media on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

Expulsion from the Garden
c. 1972–73
assemblage (wood cutout, acrylic)
on canvas on plywood
49 x 43 inches
Collection of Donnell and
Dorothea Walker

Feminine Voice
c. 1995
Leaving Here series
mixed media on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

*Flashlight for George Clinton
and Parliament-Funkadelic*
c. 1995

Leaving Here series
mixed media on paper
50¹/₂ x 40 inches

*Florescent Landscape
w/Rose Ventana*
c. 1995
Leaving Here series
crayon and pastel on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

Golf Course of Life
c. 1972
oil and acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 inches

Hot Fun in the Summer Time #3
c. 1973
acrylic on canvas
72 x 60 inches
UMGC Permanent Collection
International Collection
Gift of Kerry and Betty Davis
in honor of Lawrence Philp

*Luna Poem: Euro Femme Voice:
Do Not Bend . . . Fold, Mutilate
(Self Portrait)*
c. 1995
mixed media on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

*Nobody Told Me I Had a
Banana on My Head*
c. 1973–76
acrylic on canvas
86 x 60 inches
Collection of Kenneth and
Cynthia Prince

Pattern
c. 1995
Leaving Here series
crayon and paint on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

S. M. I. B.
c. 1995
Leaving Here series
mixed media on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

*Some of These Chicks Are
Afraid of Me*
c. 1970
oil and acrylic on canvas
30 x 36 inches

Stone Hinges
c. 1996
Leaving Here series
mixed media on paper
62 x 48 inches

Sverige, Dead, Phone Sex
c. 1995
Leaving Here series
crayon and crayon pastel
on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

The Temptation of Saint Anthony
c. 1973
acrylic on canvas
71¹/₂ x 65 inches
Collection of Kerry and
Betty Davis

Thousand Maniacs
c. 2003
mixed media on paper
51¹/₂ x 47 inches

Today I Woke And . . .
c. 1995
Leaving Here series
mixed media on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

*UFO Drawing: Krypton
and Africa*
c. 1995
Leaving Here series
mixed media on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

Untitled
c. 1969
acrylic and oil on canvas
38 x 25¹/₂ inches

Untitled
1971–72
assemblage (wood and
canvas cutouts, acrylic)
on canvas on plywood
48 x 42 inches
Collection of Eric Key

Untitled
c. 1996
Leaving Here series
oil pastel on paper
62 x 48 inches

Untitled
c. 1999
mixed media on paper
51¹/₂ x 47 inches

Untitled #1
c. 1972
acrylic on canvas
73 x 60 inches

Untitled (Blue)
c. 2021
acrylic on cradled board
14⁷/₈ x 22⁷/₈ inches

Untitled (Greyish)
c. 2021
acrylic on board
14⁷/₈ x 22⁷/₈ inches

*Untitled (Light Green,
Black Border)*
c. 2021
acrylic on cradled board
14⁷/₈ x 22⁷/₈ inches
Collection of
Lisa Gaines McDonald

Untitled (Purple)
c. 2021
acrylic on cradled board
14⁷/₈ x 22⁷/₈ inches

Upstate Aggression
c. 1995
Leaving Here series
mixed media on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

Up the Creek
c. 1995
Leaving Here series
crayon and oil pastel on paper
51¹/₂ x 40 inches

U.S. Dollar
1999–2000
Leaving Here series
mixed media on paper
62 x 48 inches

Yoruba
c. 1970–71
oil and acrylic on canvas
72 x 60 inches

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UMGC ARTS PROGRAM MISSION STATEMENT

The UMGC Arts Program is dedicated to furthering the university’s objectives by creating a dynamic environment in which our diverse constituents, including students and the general public, can study and learn from direct exposure to our art collections, exhibitions, and educational programs.

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ABOUT UMGC

University of Maryland Global Campus was founded 75 years ago specifically to serve the higher education needs of working adults and servicemembers. Today, UMGC continues its global tradition with online and hybrid courses, more than 175 classroom and service locations worldwide, and more than 90 degrees, certificates, and specializations backed by the reputation of a state university and the University System of Maryland. For more information, visit umgc.edu.

ABOUT THE ARTS PROGRAM AT UMGC

Since 1978, UMGC has proudly shown works from a large collection of international and Maryland artists at its headquarters in Adelphi, Maryland, a few miles from the nation’s capital. Through its Arts Program, the university provides a prestigious and wide-ranging forum for emerging and established artists and brings art to the community through special exhibitions and its own collections, which have grown to include more than 2,900 pieces of art.

Artworks are on display throughout the College Park Marriott Hotel & Conference Center and the Administration Building in Adelphi. The main, lower-level gallery in Adelphi is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. seven days a week, and the Leroy Merritt Center for the Art of Joseph Sheppard is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. seven days a week. More than 75,000 students, scholars, and visitors come to the Adelphi facilities each year.

Cover artwork:

Up the Creek

c. 1995

Leaving Here series

crayon and oil pastel on paper

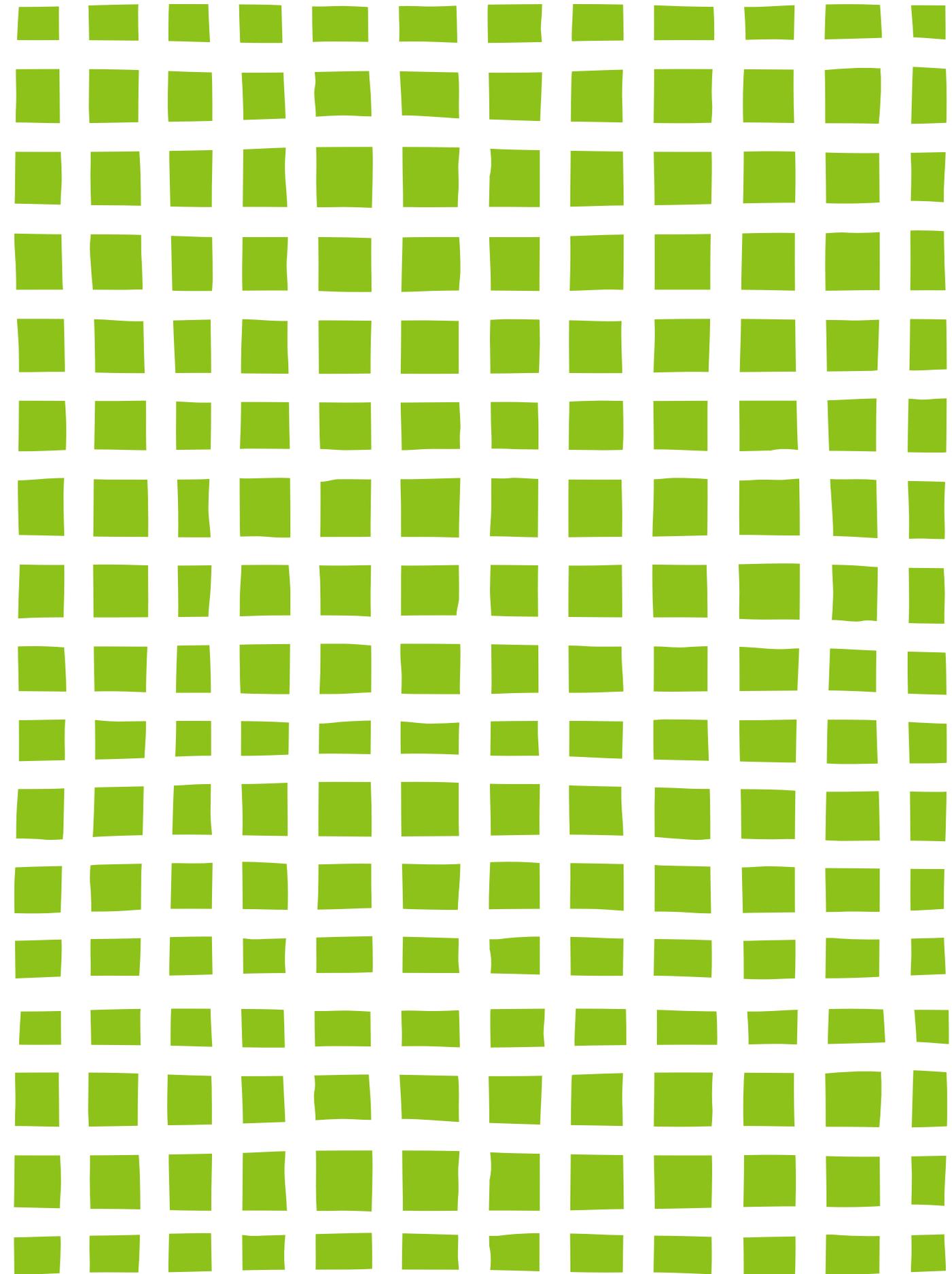
51½ x 40 inches

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