

GEOETHICS

ARTWORKS BY YING KIT CHAN

European Geosciences Union
General Assembly
EGU21 session EOS4.2
April 26, 2021



Introduction

For four decades, I have engaged in the production of artworks that observe humanity's relationship with nature and examine the human impact to our planet.

In 2016, I presented a body of work at the ArtSpace in Oklahoma City. The title of the exhibition was GeoEthics, to underscore the centrality of the ethical obligations we bear as inhabitants of the earth.

It was during this time that I joined the International Association for Promoting Geoethics (IAPG) and began communication with my colleagues in the geosciences.

I appreciate the tremendous contributions that Giuseppe Di Capua and Silvia Peppoloni have made to tirelessly promote the awareness of geoethics. I want to thank Giuseppe and Silvia for hosting this session, and providing me this opportunity to exchange ideas with international colleagues in the geosciences.

As I mentioned, Silvia and Giuseppe established IAPG, and have been actively promoting geoethics as a way of thinking. I identify with their platform to both advocate for professional ethics within the geoscientific community, while simultaneously emphasize the importance of raising awareness in society at large.

I wholeheartedly concur with the premise that Geoethics must be promoted as a way of thinking for all communities. I will call on all fellow artists to adopt Geoethics as an integral part of their professional ideals.

Geo is a word derived from the Greek root which means the earth. Ethics is the philosophical study of the principles and practices of morality. As a branch of philosophy, ethical thinking helps us understand our environmental issues, formulate critical and comprehensive thought, examine the nature of the subject, comprehend the big picture, and form intellectual decisions without bias.

Geoethics is to follow moral standards and actions involving the treatment of the earth, and is the correct position when measured by any of the three nominal ethical standards: deontological, teleological and virtue ethics.

From the images of the Blue Marble (1972) and the Pale Blue Dot (1990), we are reminded that our planet is beautiful, unique and all that we have. Therefore we must treat it with love and care. Inspired by these intrinsic values of the earth, I have developed a geocentric world view to deem the preservation of earth as my highest priority.

As an artist whose work focuses on environmental and ecological issues, I have the utmost respect for the work of geoscientists. I am particularly grateful for the great work done to help the general public understand the climate crisis. Geoscientists collect the data on climate change and sensitivity, identify the agents, and measure the anthropogenic forcings which impact global warming. The findings are used as a foundation to educate the world's political leaders. First by convincing them to come together to sign the Kyoto Protocol in December 1997, and then the Paris Agreements in December 2015.

I am pleased to see that President Biden, reflecting the will of the American voters (according to a Yale University survey at climatecommunication.yale.edu, 69% of the voters say the U.S. should participate in the Paris Agreement), rejoined the

Paris Agreement earlier this year. On Earth Day (April 22, 2021), Mr. Biden announced his pledge to keep the global temperature at 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, and committed the United States to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 50% below its 2005 emissions levels by 2030. This change of position is great news for the world since the U.S. has the world's highest carbon footprint per capita.

Another trend that offers me optimism is the emergence of international young activists like Greta Thunberg and Xiye Bastida who have passionately demonstrated their sophistication and ability in organizing a dynamic global campaign for a more livable planet.

In addition to climate change, there are numerous problems and crises threatening the earth. There are severe environmental issues which compromise our health and life, such as air and ocean pollution, deforestation, plastic waste, overpopulation, animal extinction, and the spread of viruses in pandemics.

It is also important to recognize that impacts from environmental problems to countries, regions, communities, and individuals are not all equal. Therefore, we must integrate our ethical thinking with environmental justice, and incorporate the positions of ecofeminism, social ecology and other social justice perspectives.

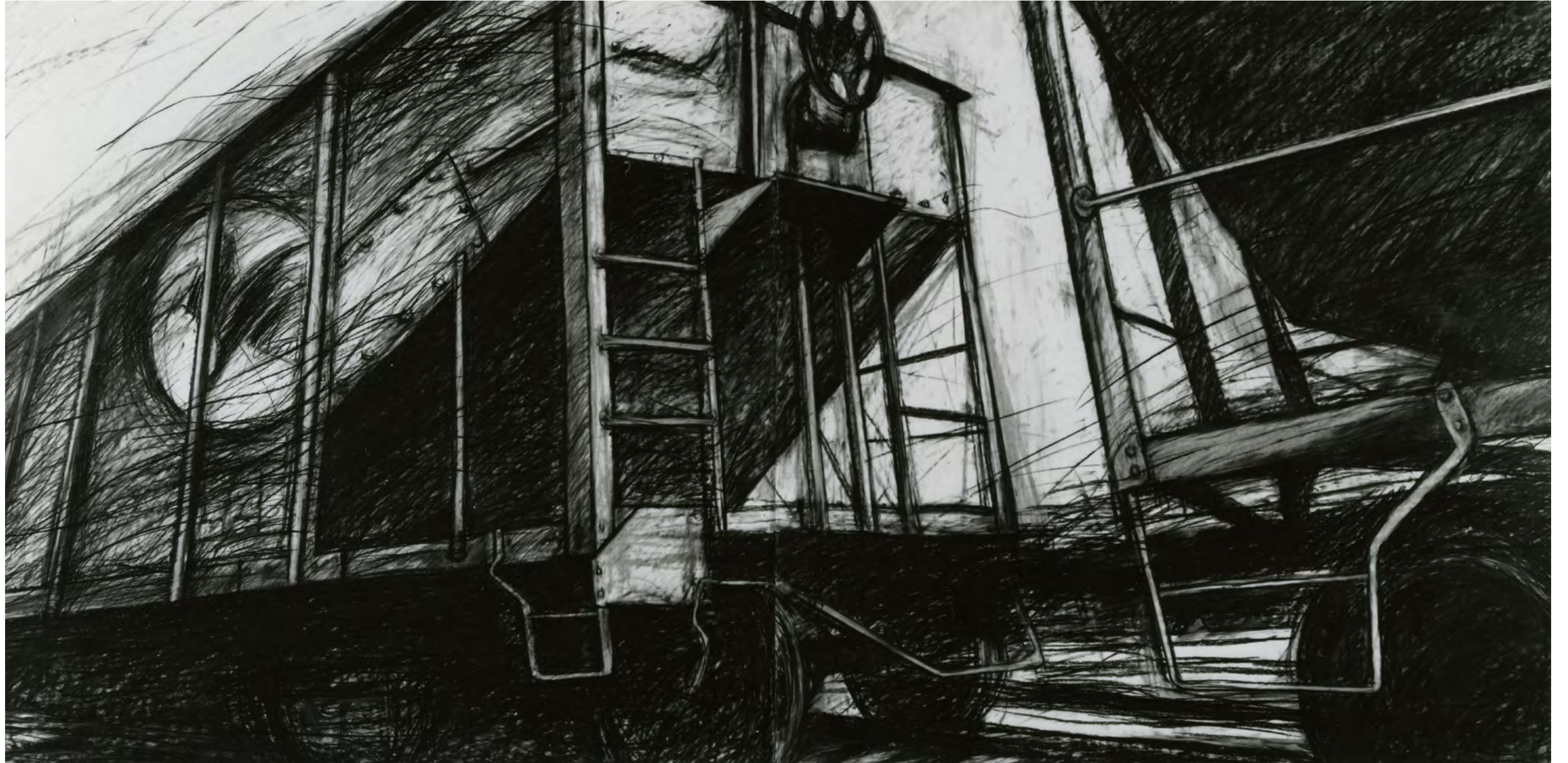
It is my honor to join my colleagues at the European Geosciences Union General Assembly to promote geoethics as a common attitude and general practice as well as to share our passion to care and conserve our planet.

Industrial Landscape

My earlier works consist of paintings and drawings of industrial landscapes, as well as traces of industrial and mining activities observed in the Midwest region of the United States. These artworks depict scenes of interaction between the man-made structures and nature. Images such as smoke stacks, silos and powerlines, as well as sites that violently disrupt the natural environment.



Oil Refinery, charcoal on paper, 1994.

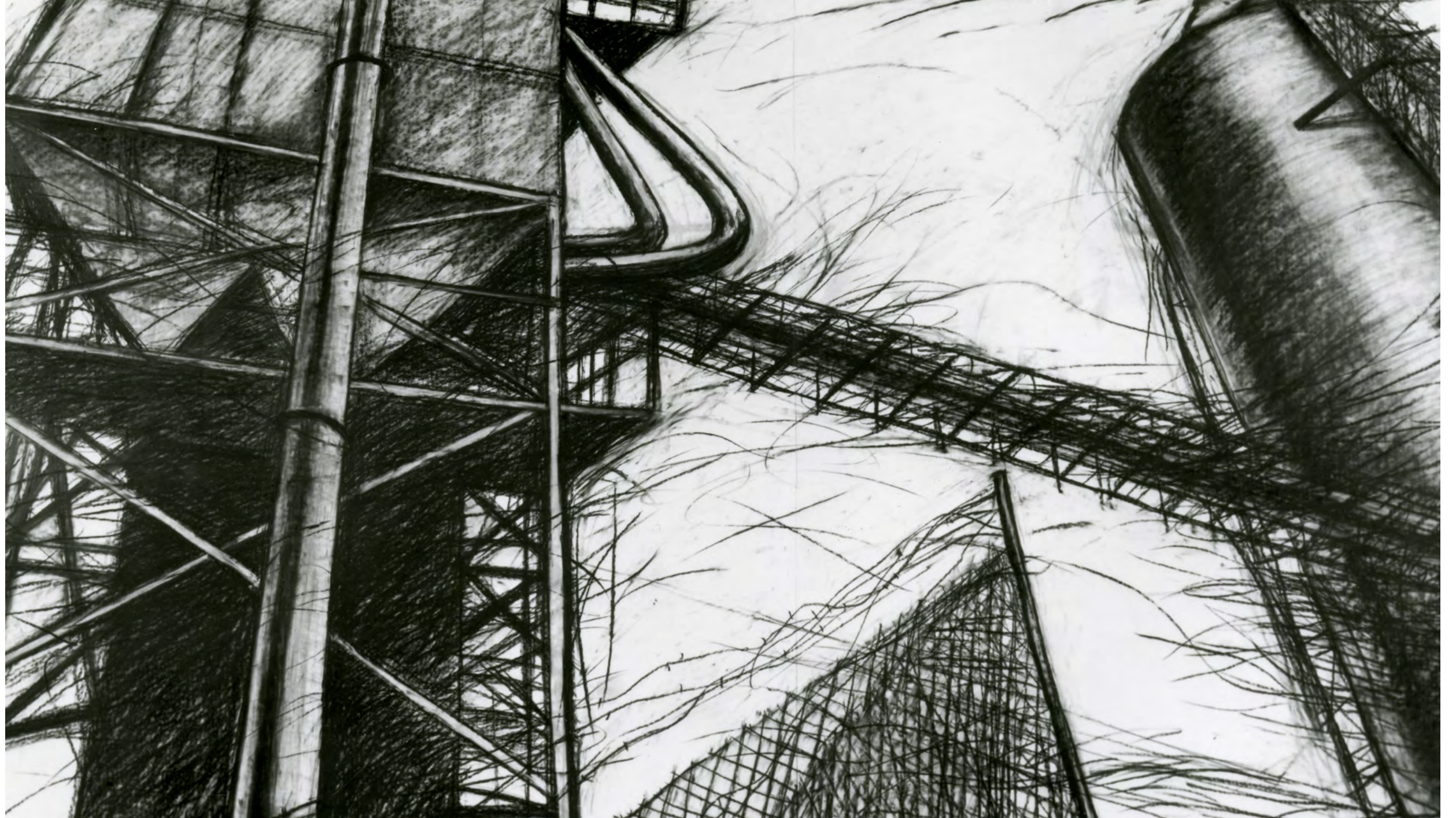


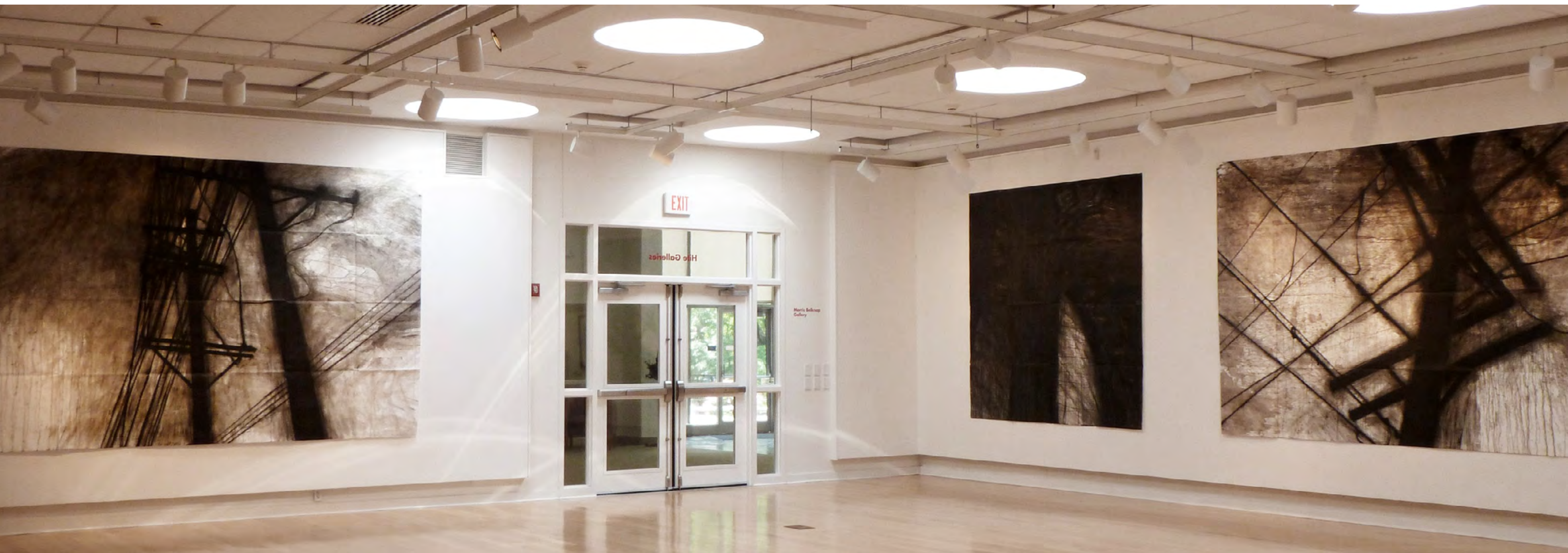
Coal Train, charcoal on paper, 1983



Industrial Land,
charcoal on paper, 1994.

Industrial Structure,
charcoal on paper,
1986





Installation View, *New Work*, 1999.



Installation View, *New Work*, 1999.

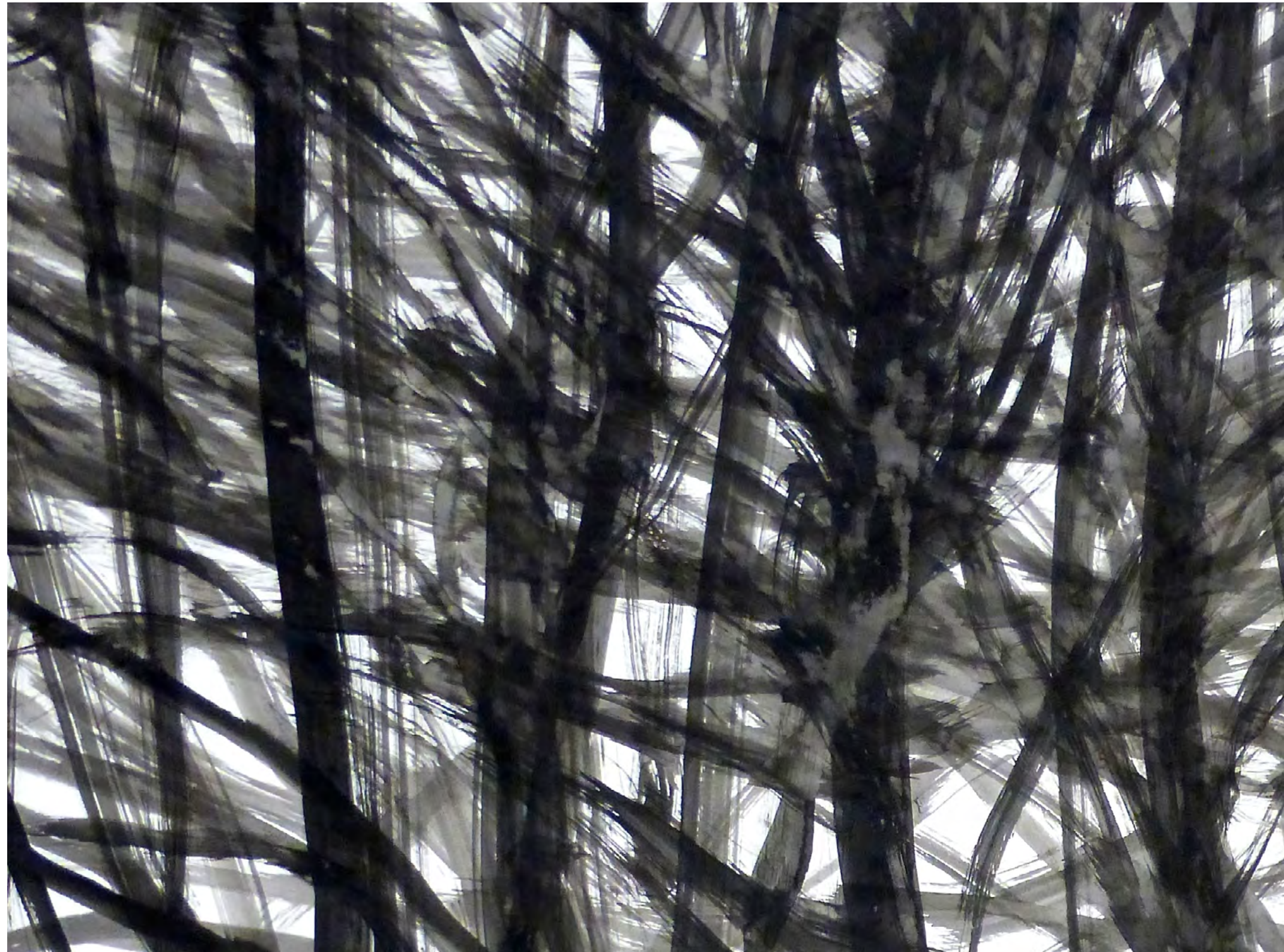
Deep Ecology

Deep Ecology is a series of multimedia artwork that examines environmental philosophy. This body of work comprises artworks in mediums of drawing, photography, print and installation.

The term “deep ecology” was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in 1973. Deep ecology follows the ideas of conservation from the American transcendentalists such as Henry David Thoreau, modern naturalists Aldo Leopold and John Muir, as well as scientist/activist Rachel Carson.

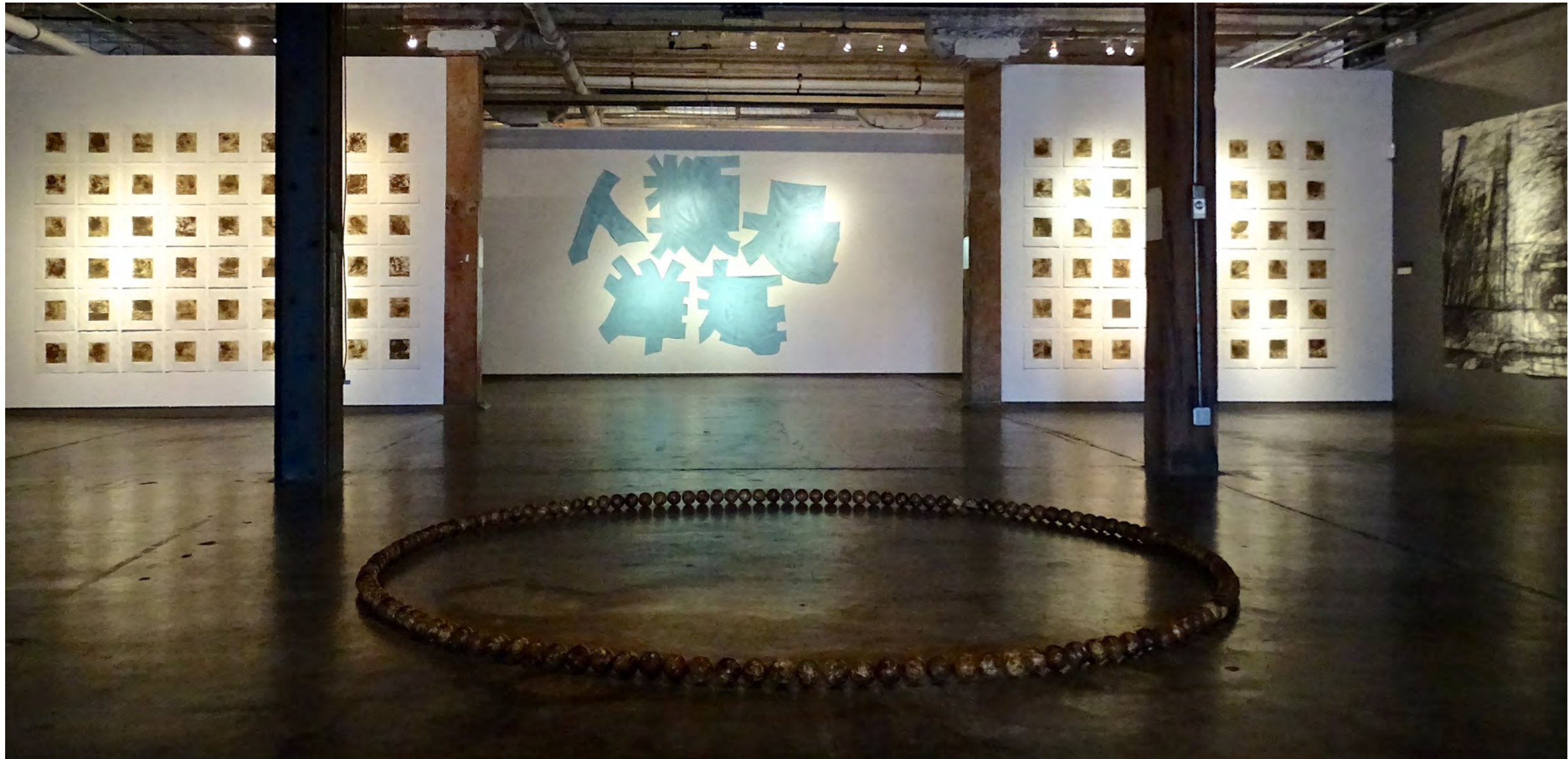
Deep ecology is highly compatible with the metaphysics of Baruch Spinoza and the contemplative views of nature of the Eastern philosophy such as Zen Buddhism and Taoism.

Trees, ink on paper, 2016.





Walden Pond, digital photography, 2008. Photographed at the site where Henry David Thoreau built the cabin.



GeoEthics exhibition, installation view at Art Space at Untitled, 2016

Gulf Fire is a series of 138 monoprints made after the 2010 BP oil spill, one of the most severe petroleum disasters in history.

“On April 20, 2010, the oil drilling rig Deepwater Horizon, operating in the Macondo Prospect in the Gulf of Mexico, exploded and sank resulting in the death of 11 workers on the Deepwater Horizon and the largest spill of oil in the history of marine oil drilling operations. 4 million barrels of oil flowed from the damaged Macondo well over an 87-day period, before it was finally capped on July 15, 2010.”

United States Environmental Protection Agency website.

“The sheer volume of prints conveys several features of the disaster. First it communicates the magnitude of the Gulf fire. Second the collection communicates the longterm accretion of damage to nature and its psyche. The damage is enduring and profound, and this work is a memorial to that fact; disaster has multiple iterations of aftereffects. These prints also represent many angles of viewing the fire, as if to emphasize that such an event requires multiple viewings, not only reinforcing the idea of magnitude but also the reverberation of suffering.”

Ch’ien, Evelyn Nien-Ming. *Deep Ecology: New Work by Ying Kit Chan*, exhibition catalog, Hite Art Institute, University of Louisville, 2014.



Gulf Fire, installation view of 138 prints, Cressman Center, 2014



Gulf Fire, one of the
138 monoprints, 2014.

Tarballs are sticky oil globs washed up on beaches after an oil spill. The tarballs installation is inspired by the tarballs collected from the Gulf Coast a year after the gulf fire.

“On a trip to the Gulf of Mexico in Florida, Chan collected a dozen that he characterized as resembling gigantic raisins, he wanted to use the original tar in his work in some way. He thought about melting the tar down and making drawings from it, but was dissatisfied as he wanted to recreate the tar balls’ spherical shape and thus generate an ode to the forces of nature. He had an inspiration for an approach while observing paper use at his office. He removed paper from the department office’s recycle bin, printed the text of Lao Tzu onto the used paper, created papier maché balls from it, and finally then spread a tar mixture onto the outside of the balls. To create the tar mixture (because there was not enough tar for all the balls), Chan diluted the substance with recycled wax. He reused wax from classes that were learning the lost wax process of creating sculpture. During the lost wax process, the artist creates a sculpture mold with wax, puts it into a container filled with sand, and molten bronze is poured in. Chan recovered this wax at the end of the process, which contained traces of sand and other impurities. He then mixed it with the tar from the tar balls he had found. The new balls created from papier maché were covered with this semi-translucent mixture. Thus, the products of the oil spill are reconfigured as Dukkha, or “suffering,” in a format that memorializes the trauma done to nature at the hands of human machinery.”

Ch’ien, Evelyn Nien-Ming. *Deep Ecology: New Work by Ying Kit Chan*, exhibition catalog, Hite Art Institute, University of Louisville, 2014.



Tarballs are paper mâché balls wrapped with reused paper which was printed with the text of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* and coated with reused wax from a foundry.



Tarballs arranged in the formation of the Sanskrit word Dukkha. Dukkha is a Buddhist concept which means suffering.



Red Alert series

The *Red Alert* series critiques the increasing hazardous existence of plastic pollution in our environments. Objects in this series are all made of discarded plastic including household and industrial products collected from riverbanks and city streets. The red hue symbolizes the final warning, signaling an emergency state of our planet of unprecedented magnitude and scope.

One of the objects from the *Red Alert* series, discarded plastic, 2018.

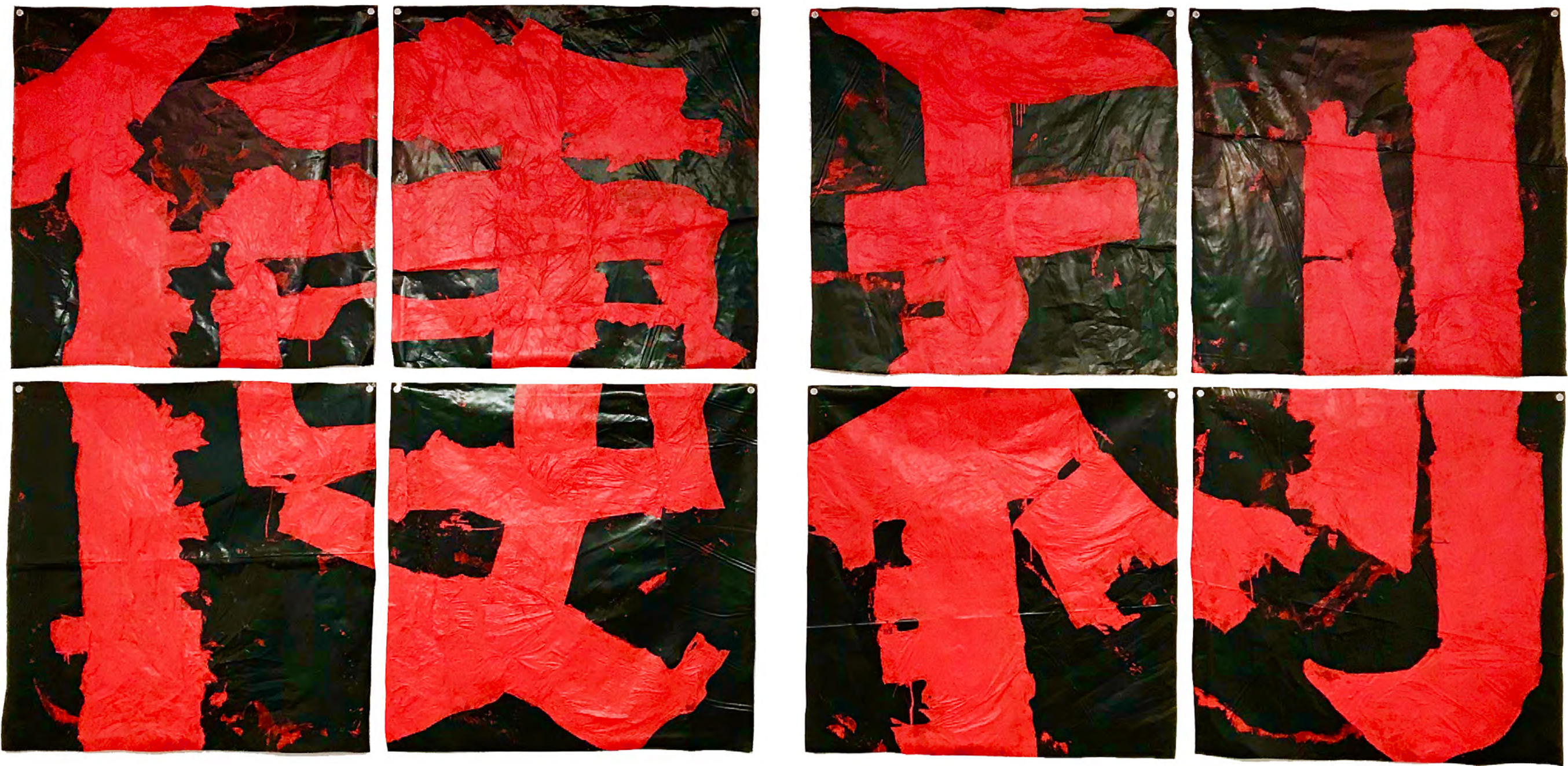




Red Alert exhibition, installation view, University of Montevallo Art Gallery, 2018



Red Alert exhibition, installation view, University of Montevallo Art Gallery, 2018. The large piece in the center consists of two Chinese characters which mean convenience. The word convenience is inspired by the quote “The ‘control of nature’ is phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man” from *Silent Spring* (1962) by Rachel Carson.



Red Alert series: Convenience, discarded plastic, 2018

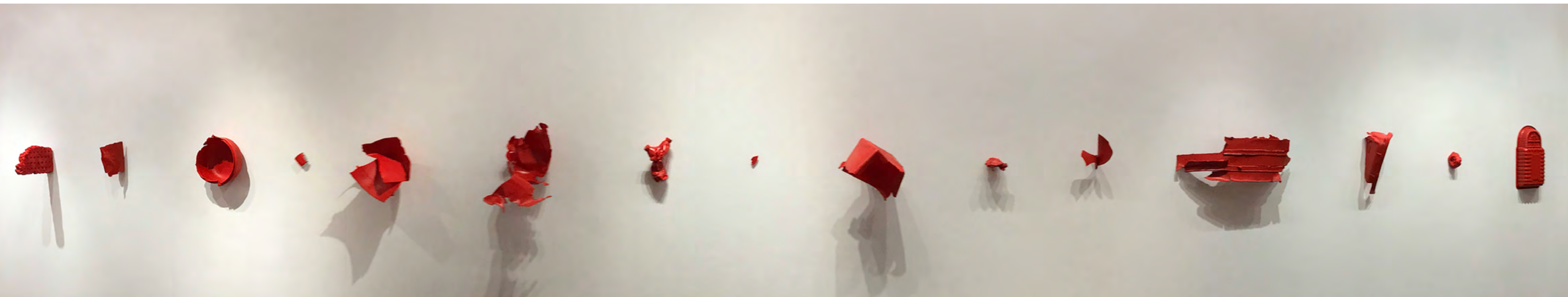
Bitterness, enamel on
discarded plastic, 2018.

This is a Chinese character
that means suffering as
translated from Sanskrit
word dukkha.





Red Alert series, discarded plastic, 2018



Red Alert series, installation view, discarded plastic, 2018

Red Alert series: Seaweed

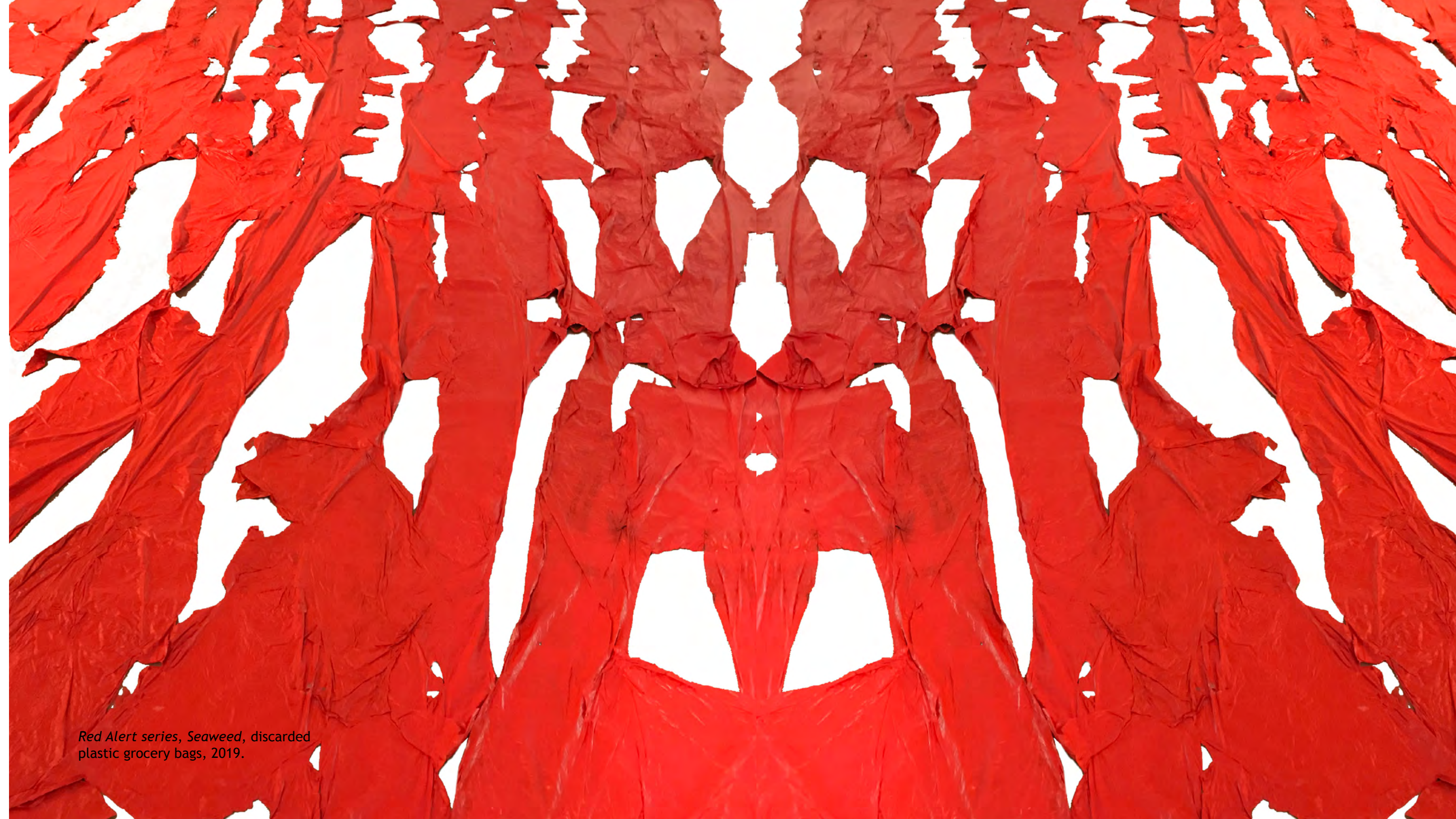
Seaweed is made of plastic grocery bags and painted in red with acrylic paint. *Seaweed* serves as an alarm to the catastrophic state of plastic pollution in our oceans. Plastic releases toxic chemicals which threaten our health and the environment. Just as destructive is the physical presence of floating plastic bags, fish nets, and packaging materials which choke and kill marine animals by ingestion and entanglement.

Red Alert series, Seaweed, discarded plastic grocery bags, 2020.



Red Alert series, Seaweed, discarded plastic grocery bags, 2020.





Red Alert series, Seaweed, discarded plastic grocery bags, 2019.

Seaweed, installation at the
Science Library, Humboldt
University of Berlin, 2018-19.
Photo by mp Warming.



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Links:

University of Louisville

<https://louisville.edu/art/faculty/ying-kit-chan-m.f.a>

YingKitChan.com

<https://yingkitchan.com>

Coming soon

GeoEthics: Works by Ying Kit Chan art catalog

<https://oldstonepress.com/library/geoethics/>

GEOETHICS: Works by Ying Kit Chan

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