

*Chapter Four***Low tech and high tech: the tail should not wag the dog***Pip Dickens*

Figure 4.1 Dickens, *Katagami 6*, 2009, oil on paper, sketch.  
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Most painters start a new series of works with the harrowing ‘whiteness of the whale’ that is the blank canvas. Anna Jackson, in *Kimono Patterns*, describes the format of the T-shaped kimono as a ‘blank canvas, or scroll, for the kimono designer’.<sup>1</sup> As the kimono has developed, so has the design evolved across more of the garment in more ‘painterly’ ways, using multiple techniques, colours, motifs and patterns. This has resulted in

greater dynamism – whether from abstract or more representational arrangements. However, wherever there is design, then prescriptive methods, tactics and processes are not far behind.

In the precarious field of painting there is the ever-present risk of error, correction, or even total destruction. Painting’s excitement resides on the razor’s edge between success and failure: of knowing when to stop and

determining when to risk all. This is not the case for artists using technology, where a master or copy is protected, or where variations on an original may be formulated and appraised with no jeopardy to the original work. Simply put, if the painting fails, the artist must start again.

Therefore, there is little point in painting if the risk of error, correction or overkill upsets you. The ritual of painting builds ‘muscles’ and techniques, empirically, through trial and error over many years and through an endless variety of approaches. Habits are formed, techniques are developed, processes are explored. Making mistakes is a big part of innovation. How much to force oneself through a planned approach (imagined or prescribed) and when to adapt, or jettison, that approach is a real-time negotiation between the painting and the painter. We return to the ‘X’ factor – the painting itself – and the role it plays in ‘suggesting’ to the artist what moves to make next. The pendulum swings between intent and adaptation throughout a painting’s progress.

Early in this audio-visual collaboration, Monty Adkins and I exploited the low-risk use of high technology in order to communicate, quickly, possible approaches, or responses to one another’s ideas. The use of high technology was relegated to a tool for communication. This is not *art* but *thinking* through digital sketches (the recording of an idea in a rapid format), just as a sketch made with a pen on an envelope is *thinking* not *art*. The production of many sketches, both hand-drawn and digital (sound and visual), allowed us as collaborators, often geographically separated or busy working on other projects, to propel ourselves down lines of enquiry, and to develop an understanding of one another’s thinking and approach to individual practices. In essence, these visual and sound sketches were efficacious in working our way through a large learning curve and multiple approaches in a short period of time. The ritual of sketching, producing variations on a theme for comparison and debate, was critical, given that it takes time to compose sound works and time to make oil paintings. Moreover, the activity not only allows one to create but also to discard.

Adkins’s practice as a composer of electroacoustic music equips him with a vast array of high-technology sound equipment and state-of-the-art studio facilities. Because of the low-risk factor high technology offers compared to the high-risk, low technology of the painter’s studio, it is important to recontextualise the parallels between both in creating works. Success comes when the composer *commands* the high technology (sound equipment), not the other way round. In this regard, Adkins calls upon his own repertoire of skills, accrued over many years. These include his experience of state-of-the-art music and sound technology, as well as his skills as a musician – with in-depth knowledge of instruments and playing them, composition, theory and as an academic. Understanding the equipment and calling upon it to do what he wills it to do is distinct from merely asking a machine to undertake a task. In this regard, the equipment he uses to compose *is* an instrument – within which is contained a vast palette of sounds (pure and hybrid) that can be further manipulated at will. As with any instrument, it can only function under the direction of the brain and the hand, and what results from that instrument is dependent on the skill of the musician.

In Adkins’s compositions, methods of layering are set within ‘deep space’. The repetitions of motifs, series of notes and sounds are apparent, but their proximity and scale within that space seem to travel on their own trajectories and revolutions: sometimes they pass close by, sometimes they recede. There are differences in the ‘size’, ‘hue’, ‘temperature’ and ‘vibration’ of those motifs, dependent upon how close and insistent they call to us; or they may, like brief pyrotechnical bursts, taper off ... falling away in the darkness toward a more silent and distant horizon. Some have the crisp, clear quality of crystal or raindrops; they have an intimate proximity – a purity and clarity that appears to come from within the listener rather than any external source. Others are complex ‘choirs’ of amalgamated sounds that boom, flicker and vibrate – knocking against the senses, circling and wrapping around the listener.

Imagine your body travelling through a space made of pure sound. Imagine your skin did not just ‘feel’ but was a vast surface area of hearing sensors – not so ridiculous when you consider the sophistication of this organ, which uses neuronal afferents that send inwards the stimulants and sensations to the brain for interpretation. This is what experiencing Adkins’ compositions is like: particles, layers, surfaces, temperature, light, darkness and colour – all seem physically ‘excitant’, not just audible. There is even a ‘fourth dimension’, as he builds upon an ever-evolving history and richness with a light and supremely delicate touch. These are not linear or parallel histories; they are more like spatial echoes – active sonars – recognising and signalling to one another across vast spatial locations.

These astonishingly complex yet melodic electroacoustic compositions can only become what they do through the route of skilled processes and controls. Armoured with his controls and skills, Adkins can allow the composition to evolve into something wholly experimental and new. The issue of exploiting computer technology is really a question of *how* it is exploited and to what ends, for there are skills in using technology (as indeed with gaining expertise in anything). Richard Sennett states in a discussion with Grayson Perry and Laurie Taylor (*Thinking Allowed*, BBC Radio 4) that we need to be careful about assessing what skills stand for:

What tends to happen in Britain is that the word ‘skills’ stands for procedure – how to do ‘X’. It doesn’t stand for ongoing experience of doing ‘X’ better, so when we test young kids we test whether they can do a procedure or whether they are capable of learning from whatever baseline they start from them. It is tick-box learning.<sup>2</sup>

Sennett also defines the relationship between the artisan and technology:

The greatest dilemma faced by the modern artisan-craftsman is the machine. Is it a friendly tool or an enemy replacing work of the human hand? In the economic

history of skilled manual labour, machinery that began as a friend has often ended up as an enemy.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most significant elements of our collaboration was having to exchange concepts and developments with another person – things that are normally very private and difficult to articulate. The received image of a sketch does not always convey, wholly, what the artist is aiming to accomplish. Sketches are visual/audible notations for self-reference – shorthand solutions, or approaches, indicating processes that might be called into play in a painting or sound work. The sketch, be it hand-wrought, or digitally created, can be misleading, or mysterious, to anyone other than the artist, without some form of supplementary explanation – appraised only on its visual/audible merits, not for its hidden meaning or intent. Over a period of some months we exchanged numerous sketches (see Figures 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5), before developing preliminary paintings and sound works. This process prompted valuable discussions of the sketches where both our interpretations and ideas could be shared. The sketches, then, are thoughts in their nascency – sometimes fixing only on a single aspect of a concept.

As a process, or ‘tool’, the sketch has four purposes: exploration, germination, filtration and design. Different artists’ ‘sketches’ filter and evolve concepts in different ways – that is the freedom artists have in developing skills independently of an external agency. It is research, and research is part and parcel of many artists’ practice. But the how, why and what of this research is individually determined.

#### **From Gillies to Gaga: the sculptures of Paddy Hartley**

Paddy Hartley’s *Project Façade* exemplifies how a dedicated and passionate interest in a subject matter can result in a body of artworks that develop a momentum of their own. Hartley believes in the skill of making – hands-on – but has also been shrewd in exploiting



Figure 4.2 Dickens, *Shibusa series – Katagami Sketch 36*, 2011. Many hybrid sketches were produced using photographs of works in progress (oil on canvas), which were then reworked in Adobe Photoshop.  
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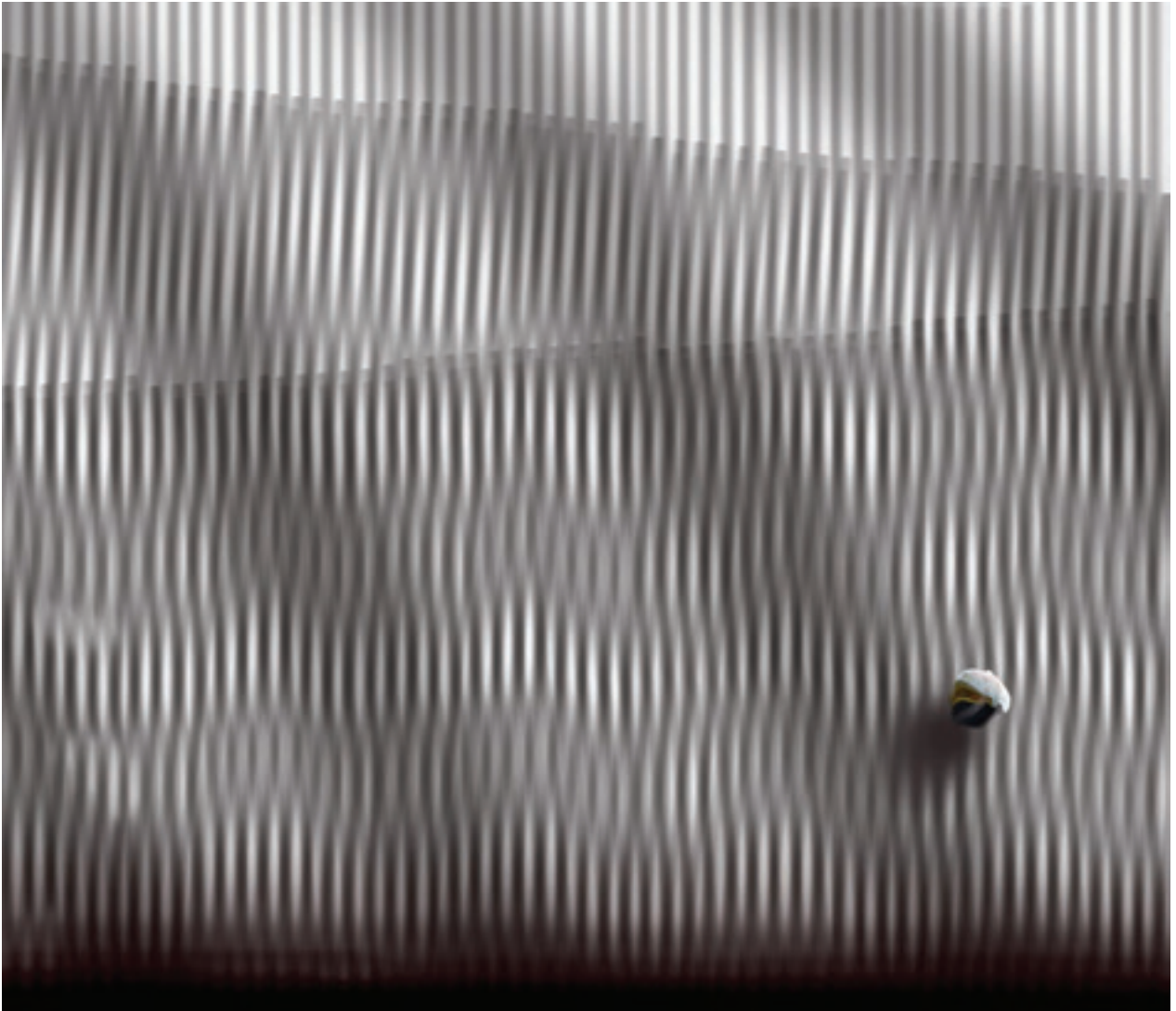


Figure 4.3 Dickens, *Shibusa* series – *Katagami Sketch 32*, 2011, digital and painting hybrid sketch. This study resulted in *The Offing* (see Figure 5.2). © Pip Dickens

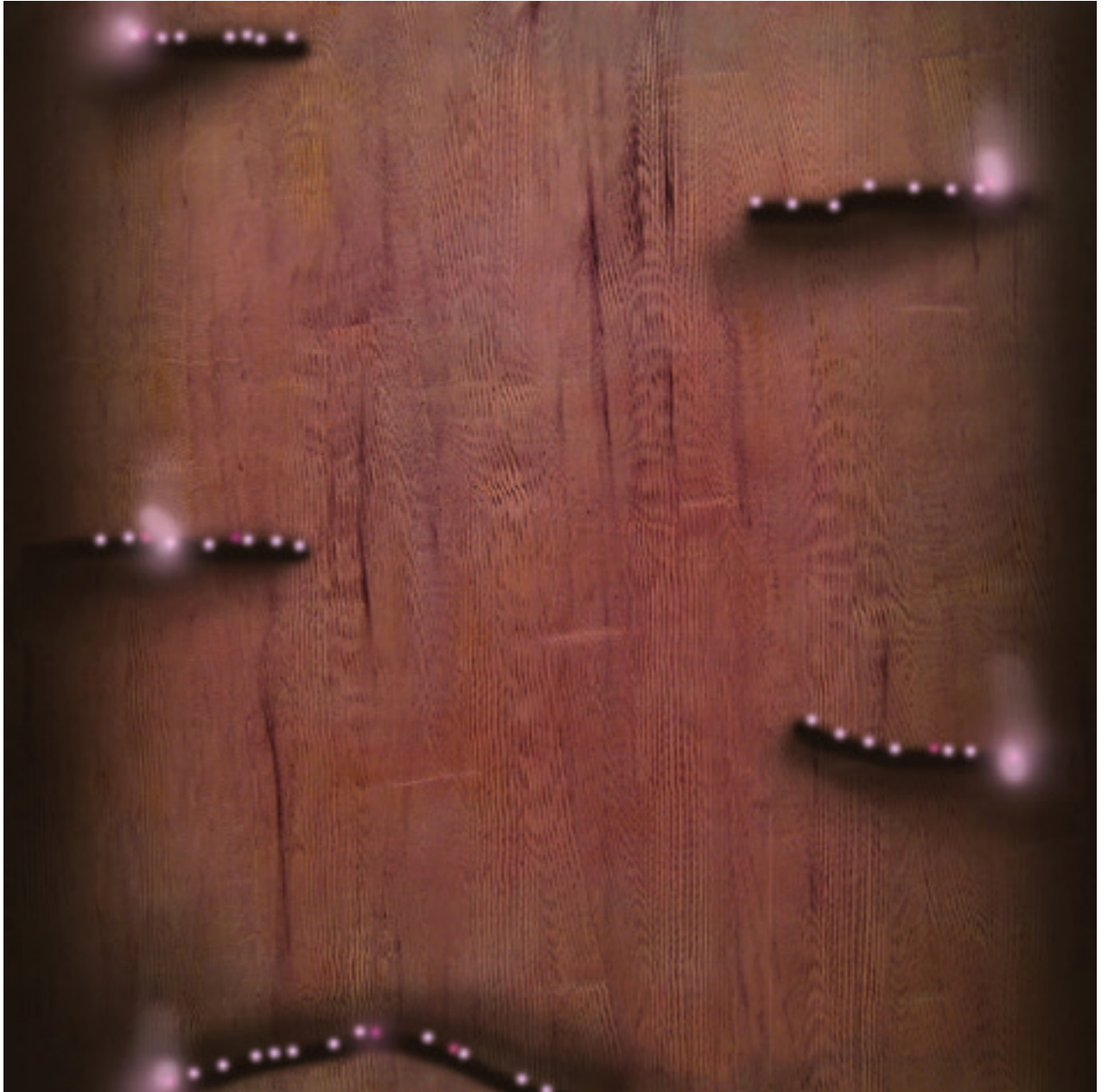


Figure 4.4 Dickens, *Shibusa* series – *Katagami Sketch 50*, 2011, digital and painting hybrid sketch.  
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Figure 4.5 Dickens, *Shibusa* series – *Katagami Sketch 51*, 2011, digital and painting hybrid sketch.  
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high technology in order to share the histories and research behind the work and so place his artworks in specific context.

*Project Façade* is a series of 16 sculpturally embroidered garments that interpret and symbolise personal histories of servicemen who suffered severe facial injuries during the First World War. Hartley's focus is on the New Zealand surgeon Sir Harold Delf Gillies, who developed crucial facial surgery techniques. Gillies worked with pioneering surgeon Hippolyte Morestin (dubbed the 'Father of the Mouths' for his innovative surgery in skin grafting), which Gillies observed during the First World War at the British General Hospital in Rouen. Gillies returned to England and began his own groundbreaking work in the field of maxillofacial surgery. His work predates that of his cousin Archibald McIndoe, and his equally extraordinary work (with Rainsford Mowlem and Tommy Kilner) with facially disfigured Second World War servicemen, which became known as the 'Guinea Pig Club':

Archibald McIndoe went to the Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead. Mowlem worked at St. Albans and Kilner at Roehampton, while Gillies established the army service at Rooksdown Hospital, near Basingstoke. All were involved in the treatment of facial casualties in the Second World War and McIndoe in particular was instrumental in the rehabilitation of his patients, the majority of whom were badly burned bomber crews and fighter pilots.<sup>4</sup>

The large proportion of serious injuries and disfigurement in the First World War was unprecedented, due to mass production and development of artillery. Guns, rifles, tanks, machine guns, gas and grenades bombarded and killed, injured and traumatised surviving servicemen. The first self-powered machine gun, the Maxim, was nicknamed the 'devil's paintbrush' because of the physical damage it wrought in the First World War. Such damage was graphically illustrated in François Dupeyron's 2001 film *La Chambre des officiers*, based on the book of the same name by Marc Dugain, which charts the experiences

of Adrien Fournier, a lieutenant in the Engineers during the First World War. Fournier was struck down in the field and was removed to a maxillofacial unit shared by similar victims, and spent the rest of the war undergoing experimental reconstructive surgery.

In an interview on National Public Radio, Caroline Alexander (author of an article on this subject in *Smithsonian* magazine) described two artists who made masks for victims of facial disfigurement during the First World War:

They lost their faces, I suppose is the bluntest way to describe what happened ... they lacked, eyes, noses and chins ... mirrors were banned. Doctors learned that when a man caught sight of his face he really was devastated – there was no preparation for this.<sup>5</sup>

Francis Derwent-Wood was an English sculptor who volunteered to be an orderly in the Third London General Hospital. He developed the idea of making masks that gave soldiers enough confidence to go out into the world. The British government supported his proposal and set up a workshop, which became informally known as the 'Tin Noses Shop'. The American sculptor Anna Coleman Ladd picked up on this concept, developing masks for servicemen in Paris. She made a plaster cast of the face and then from that squeeze she would make a metal mask of galvanised copper, and then experiment with paint to achieve the greatest likeness and compatibility with the rest of the face. The masks were carefully scrutinised by the victim, their family and friends, to make them look as good as possible.

Artillery used in the First World War was the product of technology and mass production. Hartley's work touches upon a number of issues relating to notions of low and high technology, both from the historical perspective of the subject matter and through the making of the resultant artworks. *Project Façade* is also an example of a series of works developing from an earlier related yet distinct project. In 2002 the Victoria and Albert



Museum invited Hartley to exhibit these earlier works at their *Short Cuts to Beauty* event, which examined attitudes toward the beauty and cosmetic surgery industries. Hartley questioned what it might mean if it were considered socially unacceptable to undergo facial surgery for cosmetic purposes alone. Could the appearance of a face be temporarily altered instead in non-invasive ways, using methods to shape the face, just as a corset has been traditionally used to shape the figure? The result was a series of works called *Face Corsets*. These pieces are mimetic in that they physically reshaped and contorted the wearer's face into forms that pronounced, uplifted or drew attention to lips, cheeks, chin and eyes.

This initial project was funded by the Wellcome Trust, and with further support from them Hartley expanded his research into the origins of modern facial reconstructive surgery. This led him to the Gillies Archive at Queen Mary's Hospital in Sidcup, which contains detailed written and photographic records of the evolution of facial surgery through the treatment of First World War servicemen in a unique period of social, military and medical adaptation.

Survivors of the First World War have spoken of psychological dislocation – that of being one person before the war and another during and after. This war was one of entrenchment:

creating a bewildering landscape of indistinguishable, shadowy shapes, illuminated by lightning flashes of blinding intensity and then obscured by phantasmagoric, often gas-induced haze. The effect was even more visually disorientating than those produced by such nineteenth-century technical innovations as the railroad, the camera, or the cinema. When all that soldiers could see was the sky above and the mud below, the traditional reliance on visual evidence for survival could no longer be easily maintained. The invention of camouflage and the disappearance of differences in uniform between men and officers added to the experience of war as at once a

frightening reality and a not so grand illusion.<sup>6</sup>

Expressing a similar sentiment, Eric J. Leed writes:

The expectation that men would return from the war to pick up their lives where they left off was, of course, impossible. Those who continued to be troubled physically by their war experience were troubled by the sense of having lived two lives and of being unable to resolve the contradictions between them.<sup>7</sup>

In *Project Façade*, military uniforms morph into outer 'skins' of human warfare: ripped, cut, resewn, grafted and surgically readjusted. Flaps reform, great holes appear in the fabric and gasmask-like headgear graft themselves on to jackets (see Figure 4.6). These carefully tailored constructions mirror attempts at corrective surgery of the time but, perhaps, more harrowing, register the wish of society to put servicemen back together again (like Humpty Dumpty) – to become 'normal':

The sense of difference and strangeness which marked the relations of the veteran with his social origins derived from a species of structural disjunction, an imprecise fit between distinct forms of social life, which imposed upon the combatant a contradictory sense of his own status and value. Thus the question of a 'change' of character necessarily became a question of how the distinctiveness of war experience and civilian experience was defined, comprehended and portrayed.<sup>8</sup>

Here the facial garments that form part of the embroidered uniform sculptures interpret patients' stories, illustrating how Gillies transplanted skin from one part of the face or body to another to repair injuries. Hartley's work is also mimetic in the sense that he 'operates' on authentic First World War uniforms through cutting, sewing and retailoring. The issue of touching and handling is important. Hartley writes:



Figure 4.6 Hartley, *Project Façade – Spreckley 1 & 2*, 2006–7, vintage officer uniforms, digital print on fabric, digital embroidery, vintage lace.  
© Paddy Hartley

I feel that evidence of the maker's hand is crucial, not just in terms of authenticity but in the way in which the maker handles the material. I am often asked 'Did you make this artwork yourself?' This I find a bizarre and somewhat sad query – it being a recognition of the fact that many [contemporary] artists don't actually have a hand in the fabrication of their work. Would one ask a writer if they had written a piece themselves? Every artist brings their own skill set and knowledge base to a material and how they use it to describe an idea, be they trained in the use of the media or not.<sup>9</sup>

The wealth of Hartley's research, experimentation and interpretation through hand skills and technology has evolved into artworks responding to, and acknowledging, serious developments in reconstructive surgery and the bravery of servicemen in the First World War in general. Hartley says: 'If the work I make merely provokes viewers to want to find out more about these amazing heroic people and acknowledge their sacrifice, it has been successful'.<sup>10</sup>

In recent years, Hartley has 'liberated' elements of this research into a completely different sphere – fashion design. He has been professionally astute in distinguishing the discipline of art from that of design, in order to retain the sanctity, rigour and respect of *Project Façade* and its subject matter. Indeed, within the sphere of fashion he is not Paddy Hartley but Patrick Ian Hartley, and it is interesting to note the care he takes in ensuring that this distinction is made.

Two years after the conclusion of *Project Façade* the *Face Corset* project re-emerged, largely due to interest in those early works by the fashion industry. In 2009 I was contacted by iconic British fashion photographer, Nick Knight,<sup>11</sup> who wanted to shoot my work for a number of features for high fashion publications including *AnOther Magazine* – one garment was, interestingly, worn by Lady Gaga.<sup>12</sup>

From this point on Hartley's *Face Corsets* have taken on a theme of their own – they are less about manipulating the wearer's face and more about the spectacular shapes and forms that sculpt themselves around and interact with head, facial features, hair and neck. They are astonishingly innovative, dramatic and futuristic constructions that remind us – in terms of their design ambition – of the bizarre palisade wire scaffolds supporting ladies wigs (some up to 75 cm in height) that abounded in the eighteenth century, when nothing was too bold or fanciful. Moreover, as a case history for this book, there is no more apt demonstration of 'extracting beauty'. Looking at the face corset shown in Figure 4.7, it is hard to discern it originates from thoughts about cosmetic surgery and investigations into facial injuries suffered by servicemen in the First World War.

#### Notes

- 1 A. Jackson, *Kimono Patterns* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010).
- 2 Laurie Taylor, Grayson Perry and Richard Sennett, *Thinking Allowed*, BBC Radio 4, 6 February 2008.
- 3 R. Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Penguin, 2009), 81.
- 4 [www.projectfacade.com/index.php?/about/glossary\\_comments/guinea\\_pig\\_club](http://www.projectfacade.com/index.php?/about/glossary_comments/guinea_pig_club) (accessed 15 May 2011).
- 5 *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, USA, 24 February 2007, [www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7556326](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7556326) (accessed 15 May 2011).
- 6 M. Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 212–13.
- 7 E. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 9 Communication with P. Dickens, 19 May 2011. Hartley worked in partnership with Gillies archive curator Dr Andrew Bamji at Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup, and biomaterial scientist Dr Ian Thompson in the Oral Maxillofacial Department, Guy's Hospital, London.



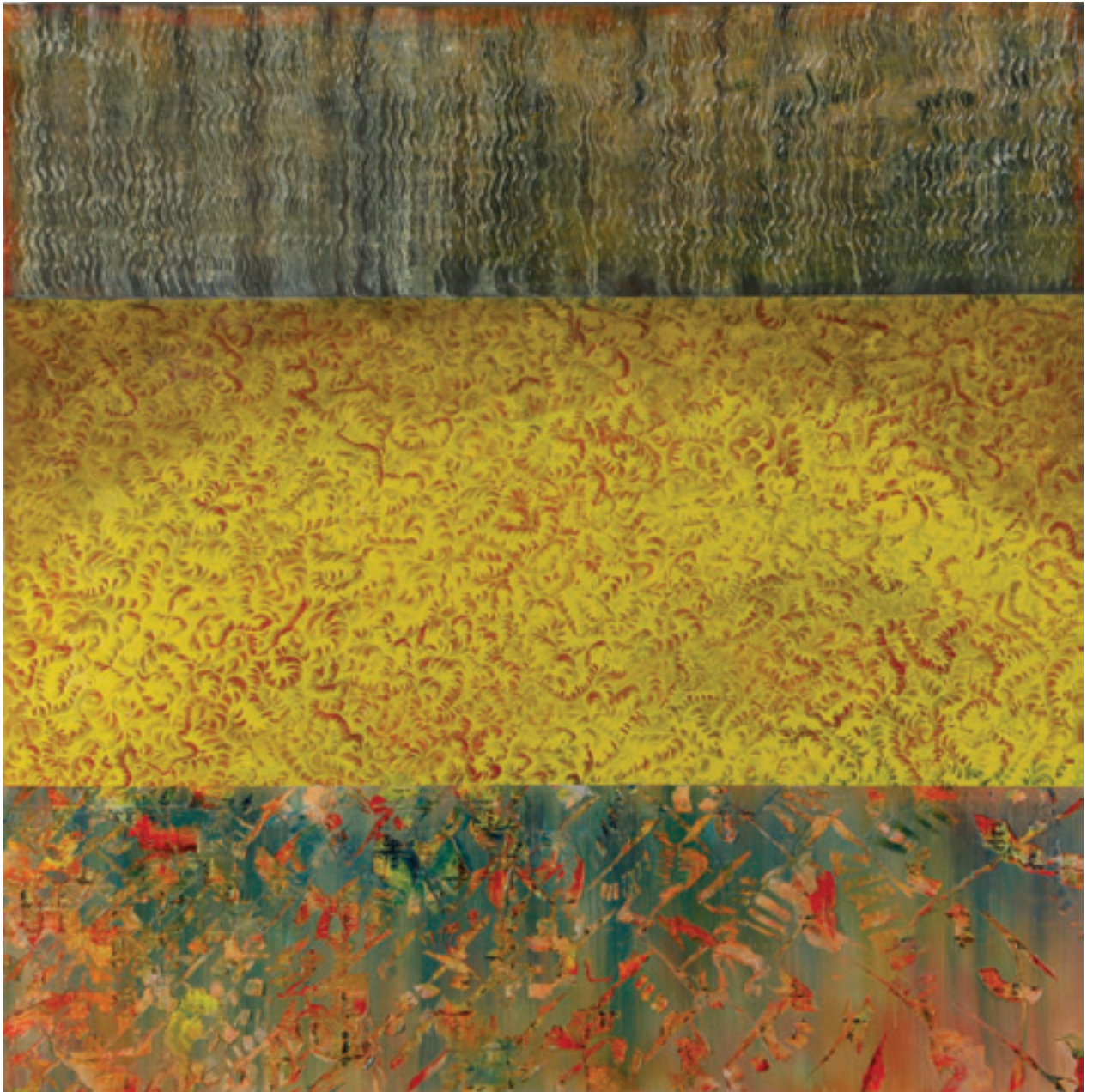
Figure 4.7 Patrick Ian Hartley, facial garment design, 2010.  
Photographer: Sophie Pycroft; styling: Ihunna; hair and make-up: Kenny Leung; model: Ruby Slate-Balthazaar; © Paddy Hartley

- 10 Paddy Hartley, interview with P. Dickens,  
19 May 2011.
- 11 Nick Knight OBE (b. 1958) has  
undertaken photography projects for  
clients including Alexander McQueen,  
Audi, Calvin Klein, Christian Dior,  
Lancôme, Levi Strauss, Mercedes-Benz,  
Royal Ballet, Royal Opera House,  
Swarovski and Yves Saint Laurent.  
He exhibited his work at the Victoria  
and Albert Museum, Saatchi Gallery,  
Photographers' Gallery and Hayward  
Gallery and recently Tate Modern.  
In 2011 he directed Lady Gaga's video  
*Born This Way*.
- 12 Paddy Hartley, interview with P. Dickens.





Dickens, Oriental series – *Auspicious Ribbon*, 2010, oil on MDF, 91.4 x 106.6 cm



Dickens, Oriental series – *Between Wu and Yu*, 2009, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 152.5 cm





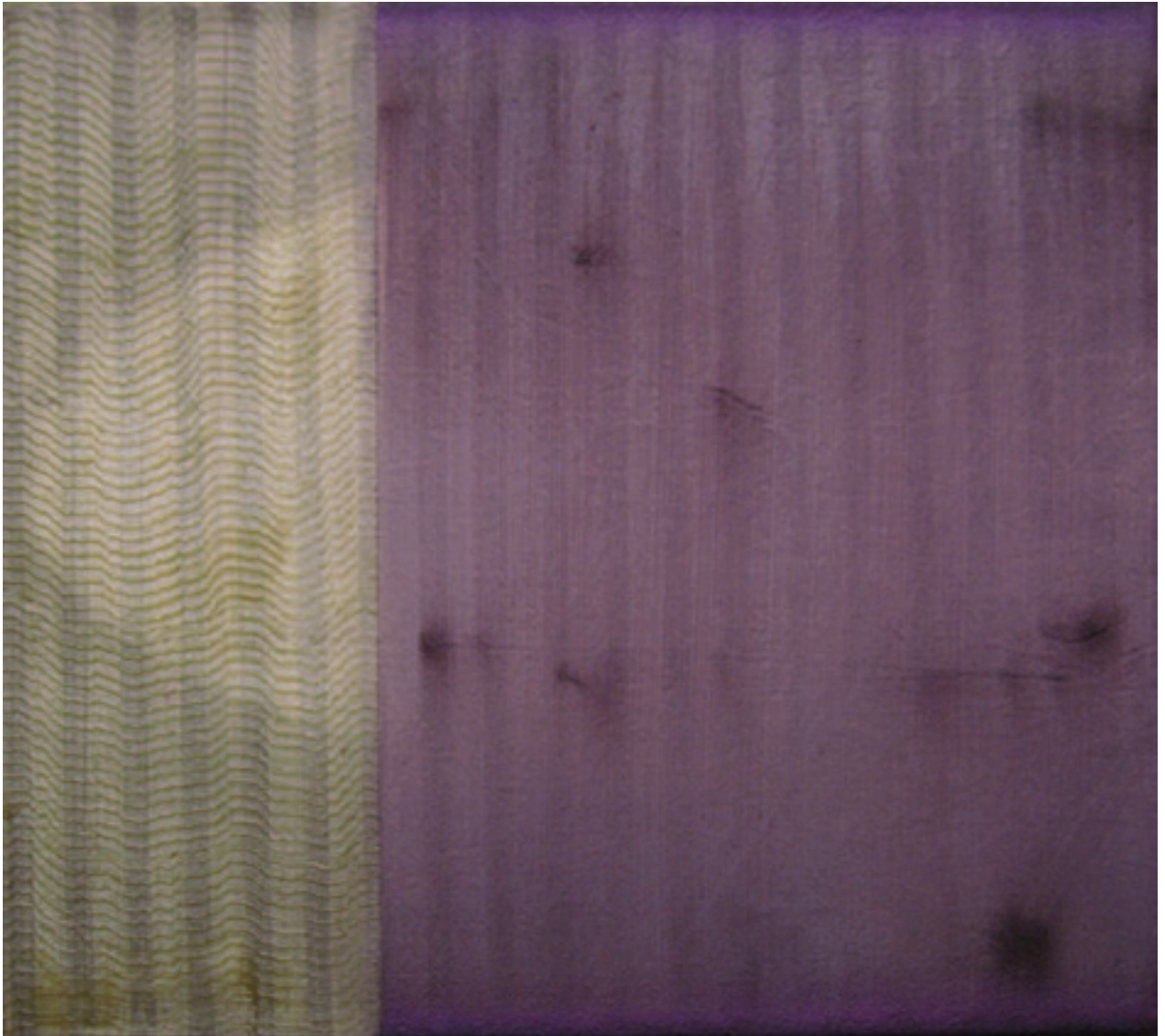
Dickens, Film Forensic series – *Kan No Uchi* (The Cold Time), 2010, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 152.5 cm



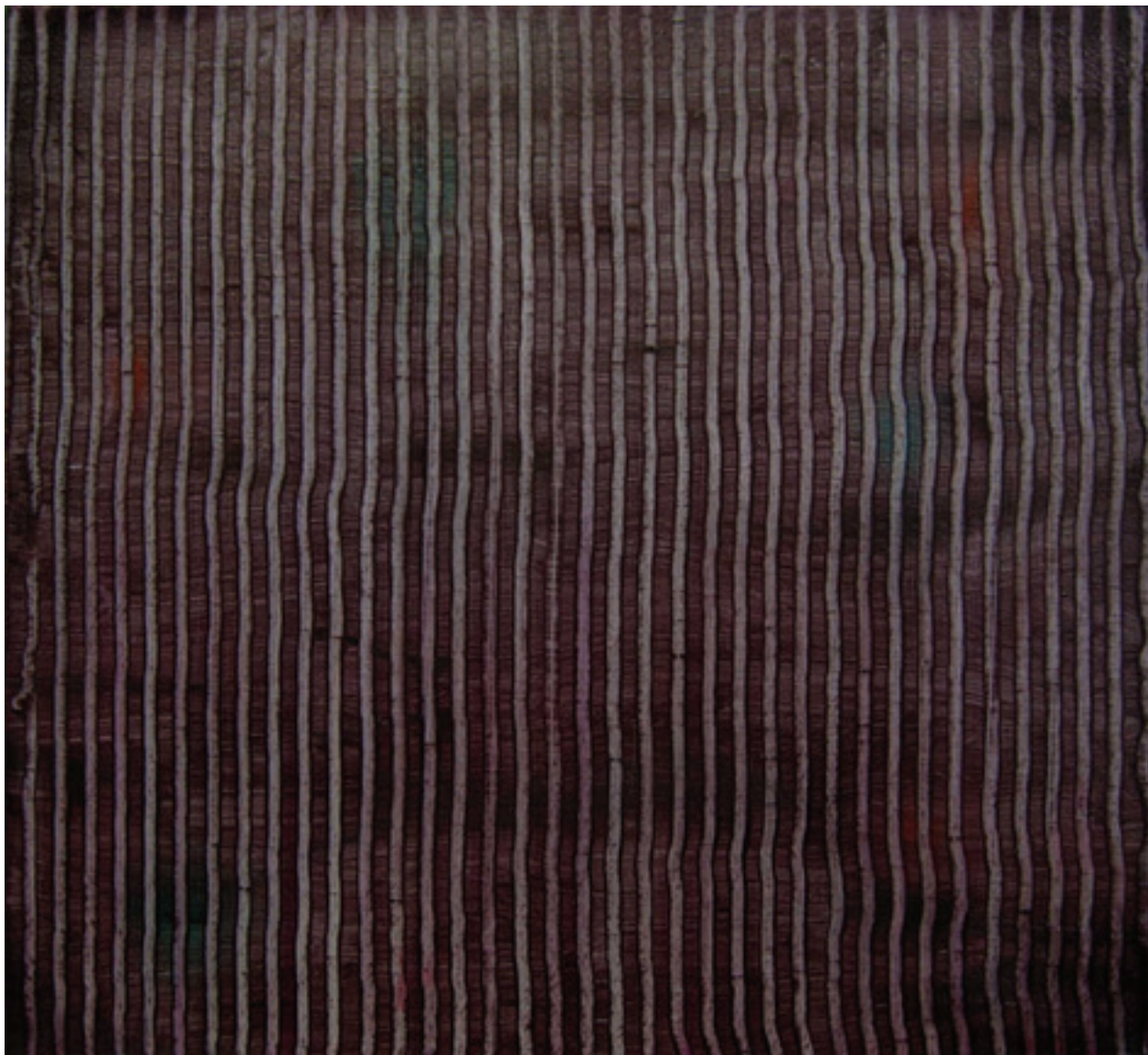
Dickens, Film Forensic series – *Okii Nami* (after Hokusai), 2009, oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm



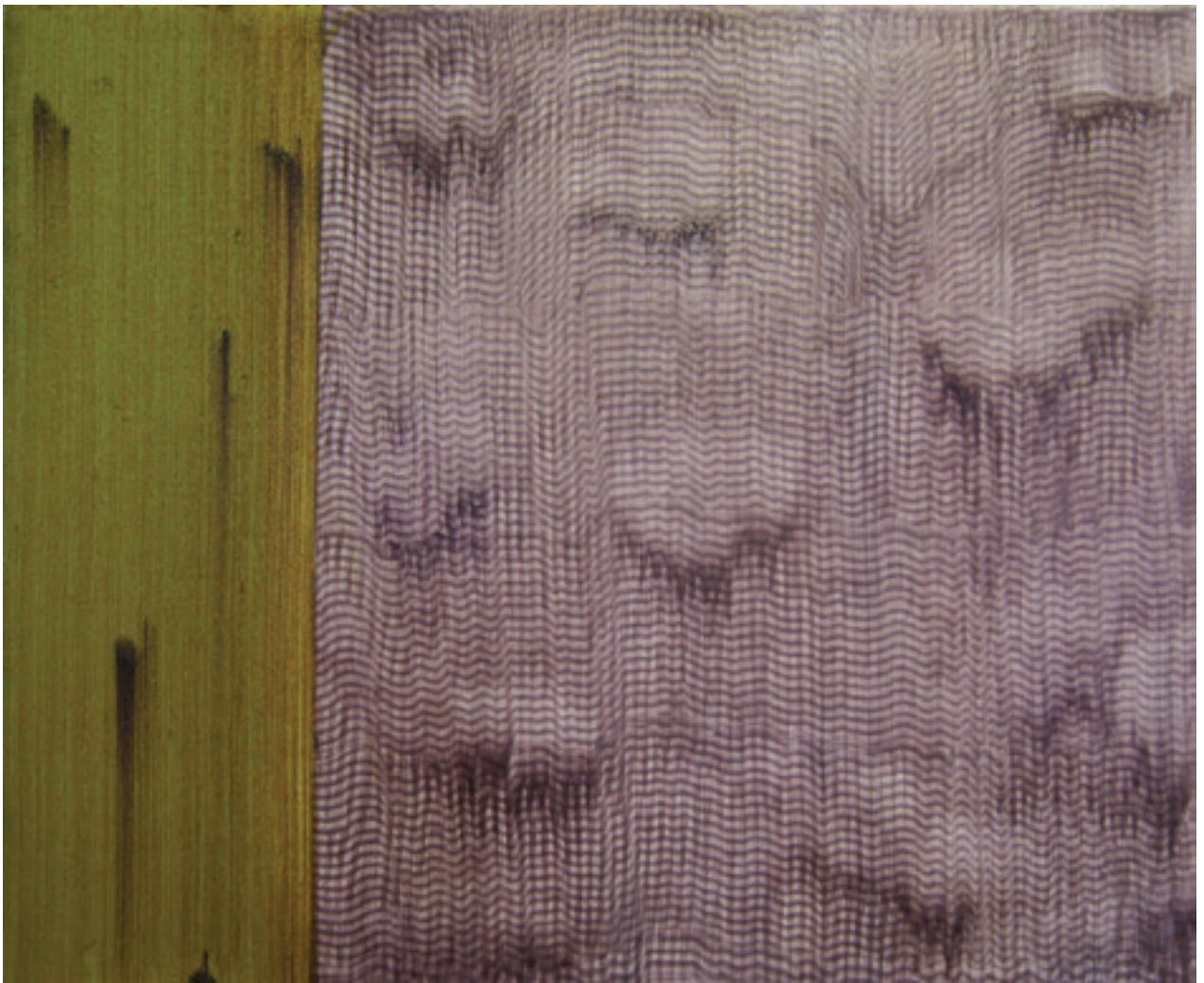
Dickens, Film Forensic series – *Hikari To kage* (Light and Shadow), 2009-10, oil on canvas, 152.5 x 152.5 cm



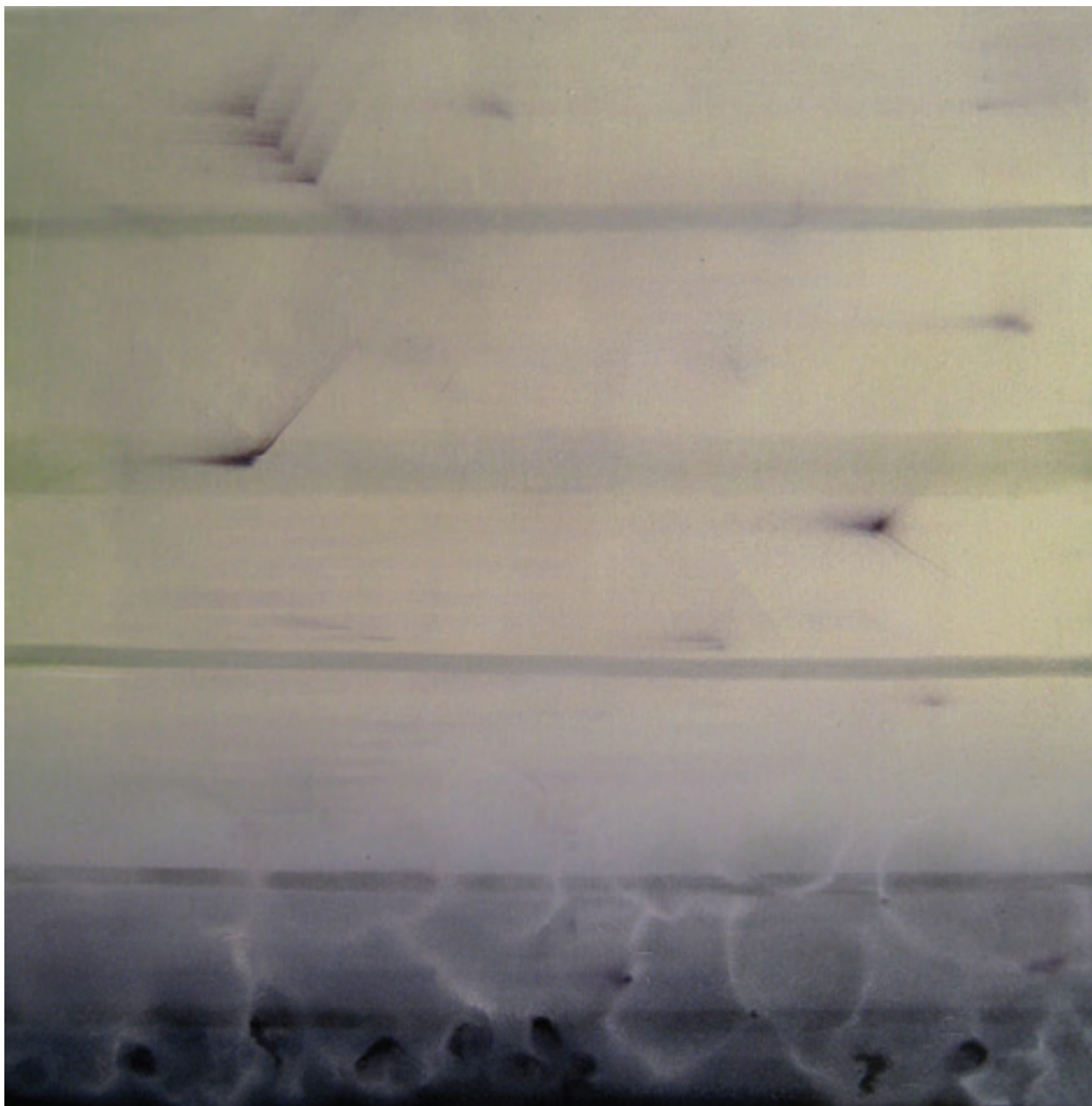
Dickens, Shibusa series – *Composition #8*, 2012, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 41 x 45.8 cm



Dickens, Shibusa series – *Composition #4*, 2011, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 51 x 56 cm



Dickens, Shibusa series – *Colour of a Clarinet*, 2011, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 51.5 x 66 cm

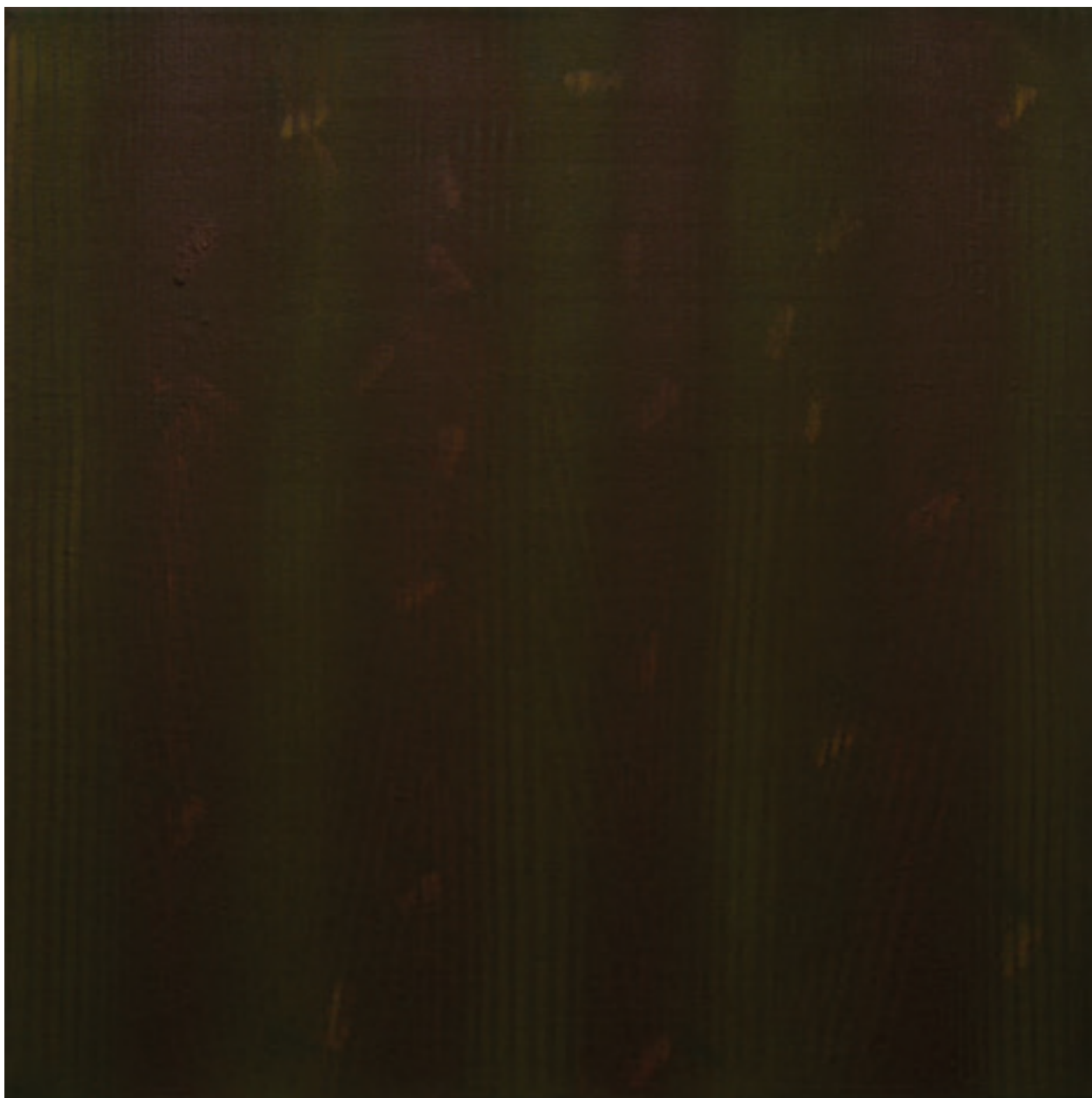


Dickens, Shibusa series – *Five Kinds of Dusk*, 2012, oil on canvas, 89 x 86 cm



Dickens, Shibusa series – *Dusk – Vibration of Air*, 2012, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 47 x 51 cm





Dickens, Shibusa series – *Composition #9*, 2012, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 51 x 46 cm



Dickens, Shibusa series – *Composition #2*, 2012, oil on hand-dyed and washed canvas, 51.5 x 66 cm



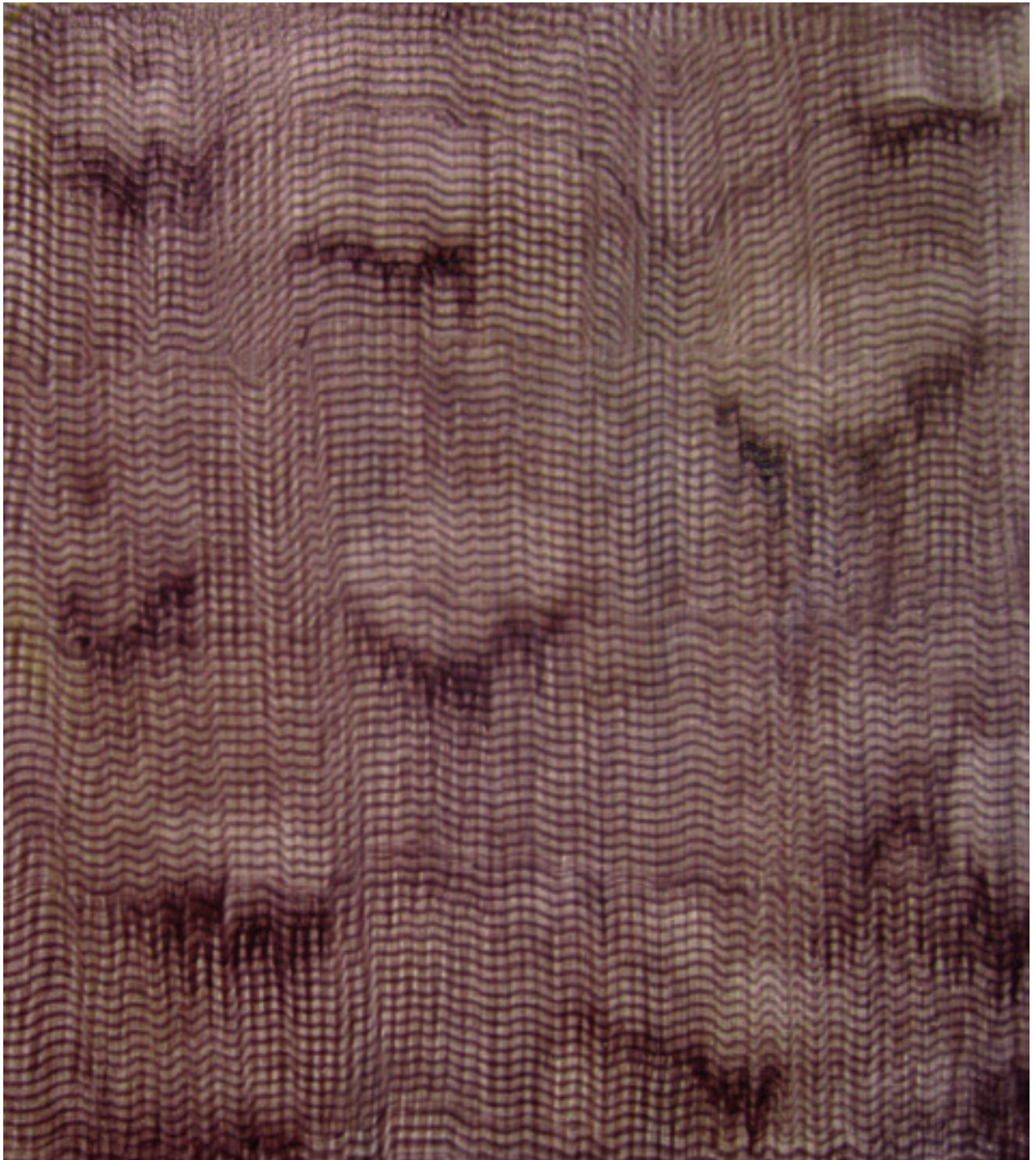


Figure 5.1 Dickens, *Shibusa* series – *Colours of a Clarinet* (detail), 2011, oil on canvas.  
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