

1

Constellations

J. MILLAY

J. MILLAY

Constellations

The 16 paintings that comprise the series “Constellations” are paused polarities, at once dynamic and still, deep and flat. United by the organizing principle of reflection and a refined palette of scarlet and charcoal, each 36-inch square canvas is mapped by an unseen coordinate plane. Expansive and mostly curvilinear forms, made alluring by indentations and horizontally truncated tops and bottoms, are anchored in one (or two vertically adjacent) quadrants and then reflected over the invisible y-axis—creating a charged, fertile space between the opposing sides and igniting a flickering between figure and ground.

Inspection of Millay’s twinned shapes, assured and double-barreled compositions—whether warped or jagged, in the act of fusing or bracketing—suggests the biomorphic forms of Jean Arp freed from the German-French artist’s illusions of chance and snapped back to the armature of the grid. The vitality that Arp sought in happenstance, Millay finds in surprisingly sensual materiality—the product of at least 15 layers of buttery, high-pigment acrylic paint, applied over the course of one or two months—coupled with a distinctly human scale. “I aimed for the viewer to encompass the entire image while standing in front of the painting,” she says.

The stepwise process of their making is palpable, infusing depth and dimension that is enhanced by compositions barely contained by their square fields. Developed within and around a series of grids taped temporarily atop the canvas, the layered and sculpted quality of these paintings also aligns them with the cosmos, where bodies float between objecthood and the infinite. “I wanted to give weight and structure to the idea of the celestial world,” explains Millay, echoing the late John Berger’s notion of the invention and naming of constellations by storytellers who—in “tracing an imaginary line between a cluster of stars gave them an image and an identity”—illuminating the heavens with narrative threads.

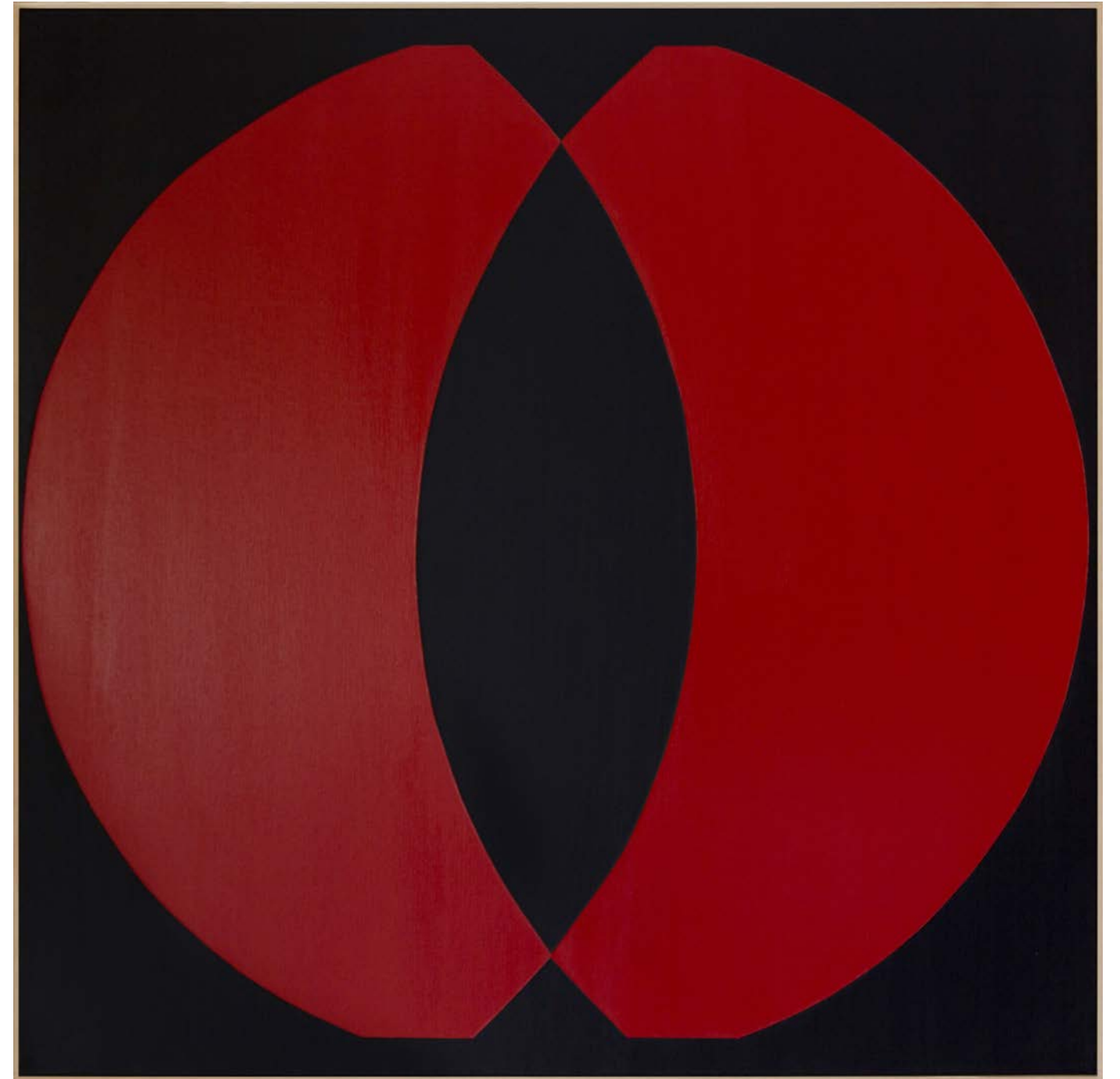
“Imagining the constellations did not of course change the stars, nor did it change the black emptiness that surrounds them,” noted Berger. “What it changed was the way people read the night sky.” In alluding to ancient tools of navigation and meditation, Millay’s canvases enchant with their compressed energy and their promise of a universal code, bringing splendid, sky-bound signals down to earth.

1

Dorado

Acrylic on canvas

36x36

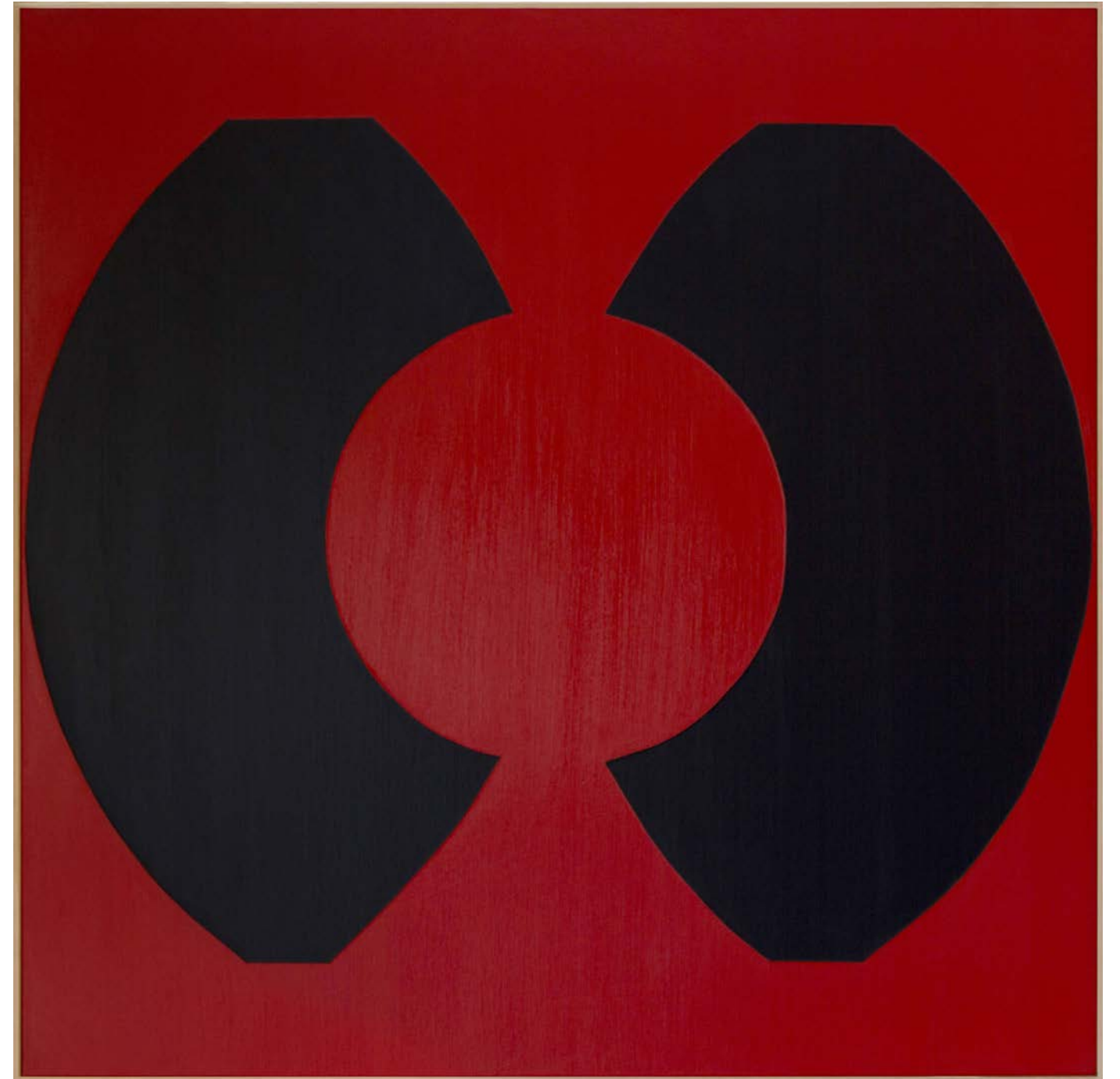


2

Vela

Acrylic on canvas

36x36

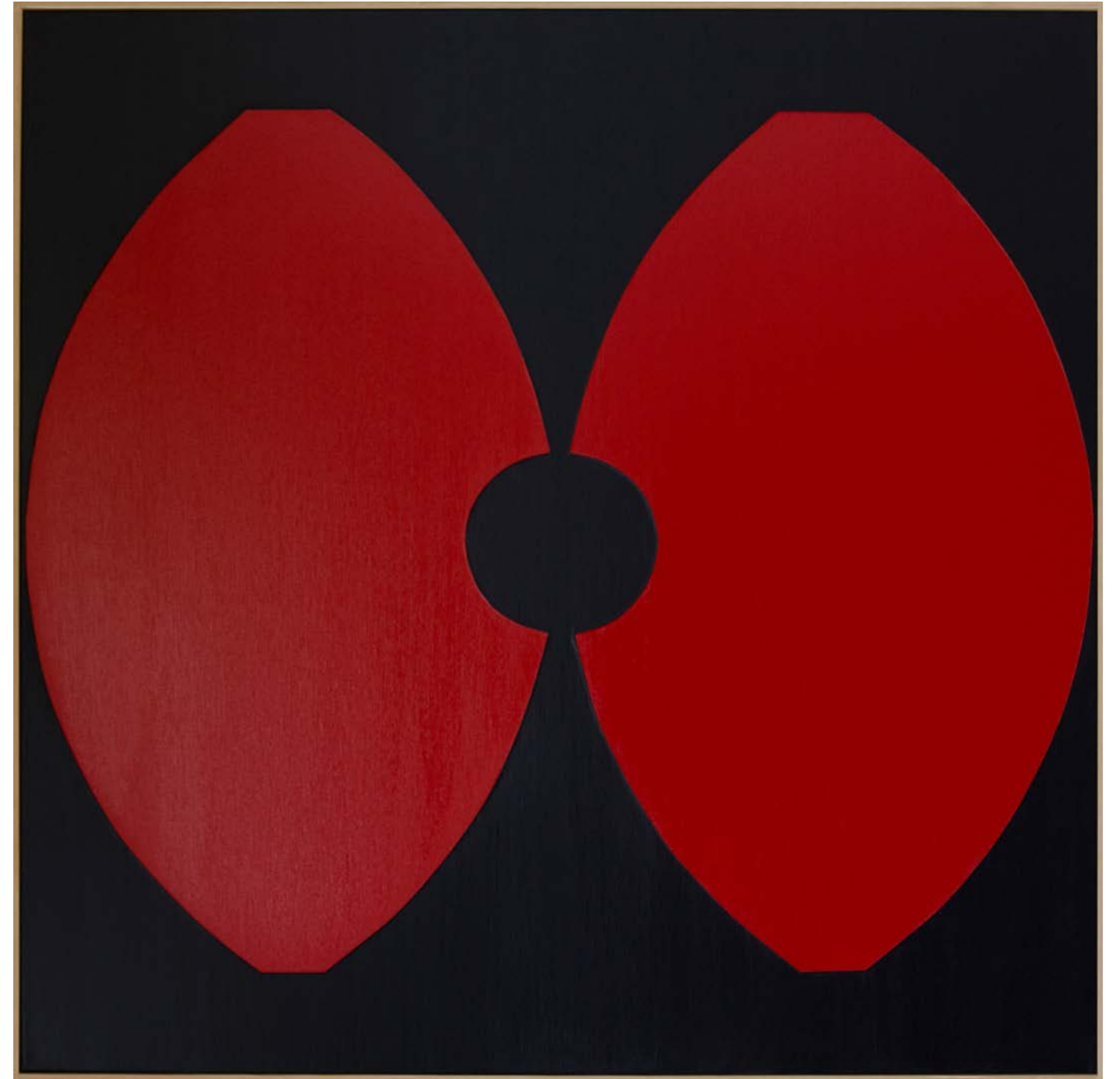


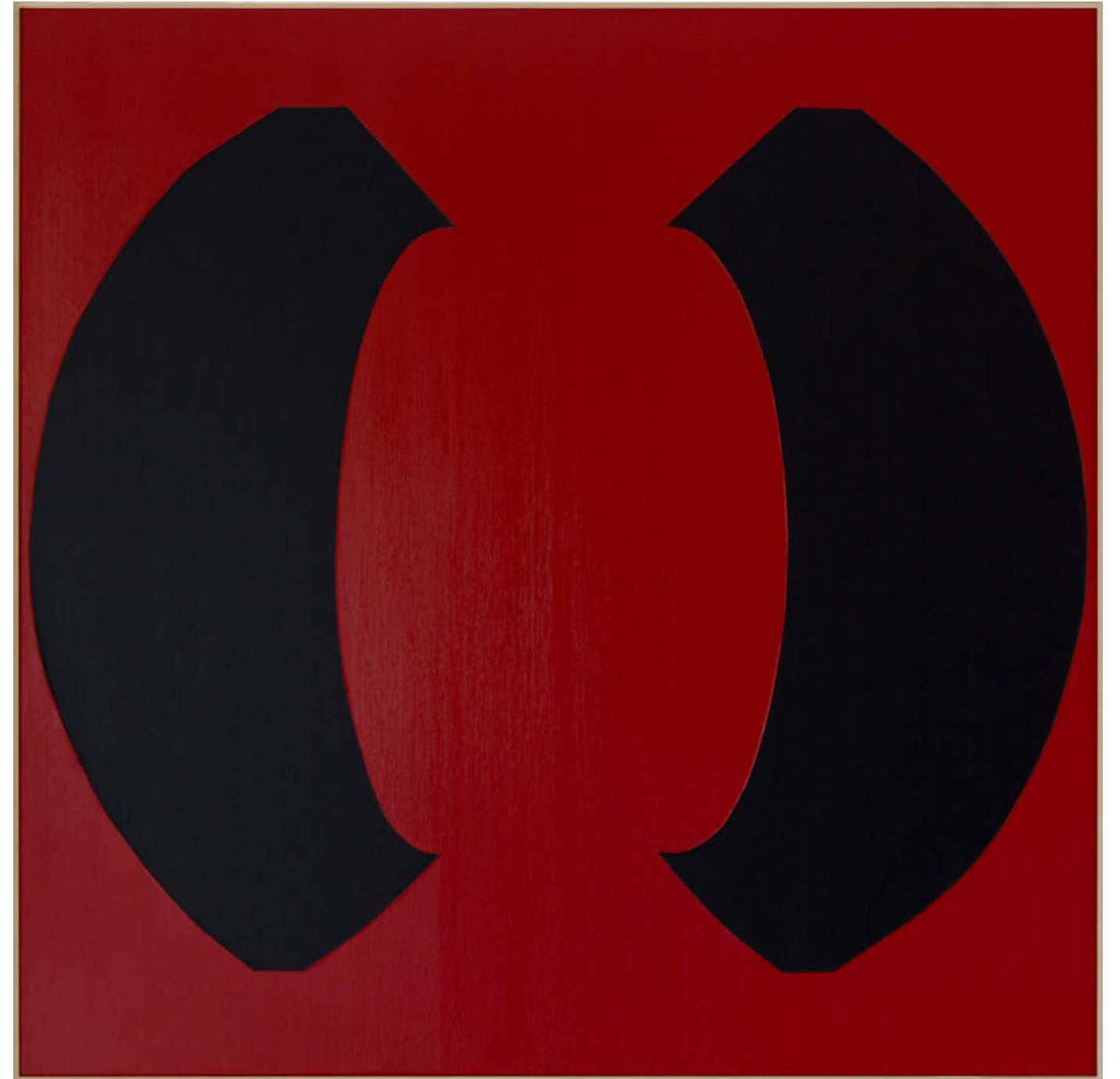
3

Volans

Acrylic on canvas

36x36





5

Monoceros

Acrylic on canvas

36x36

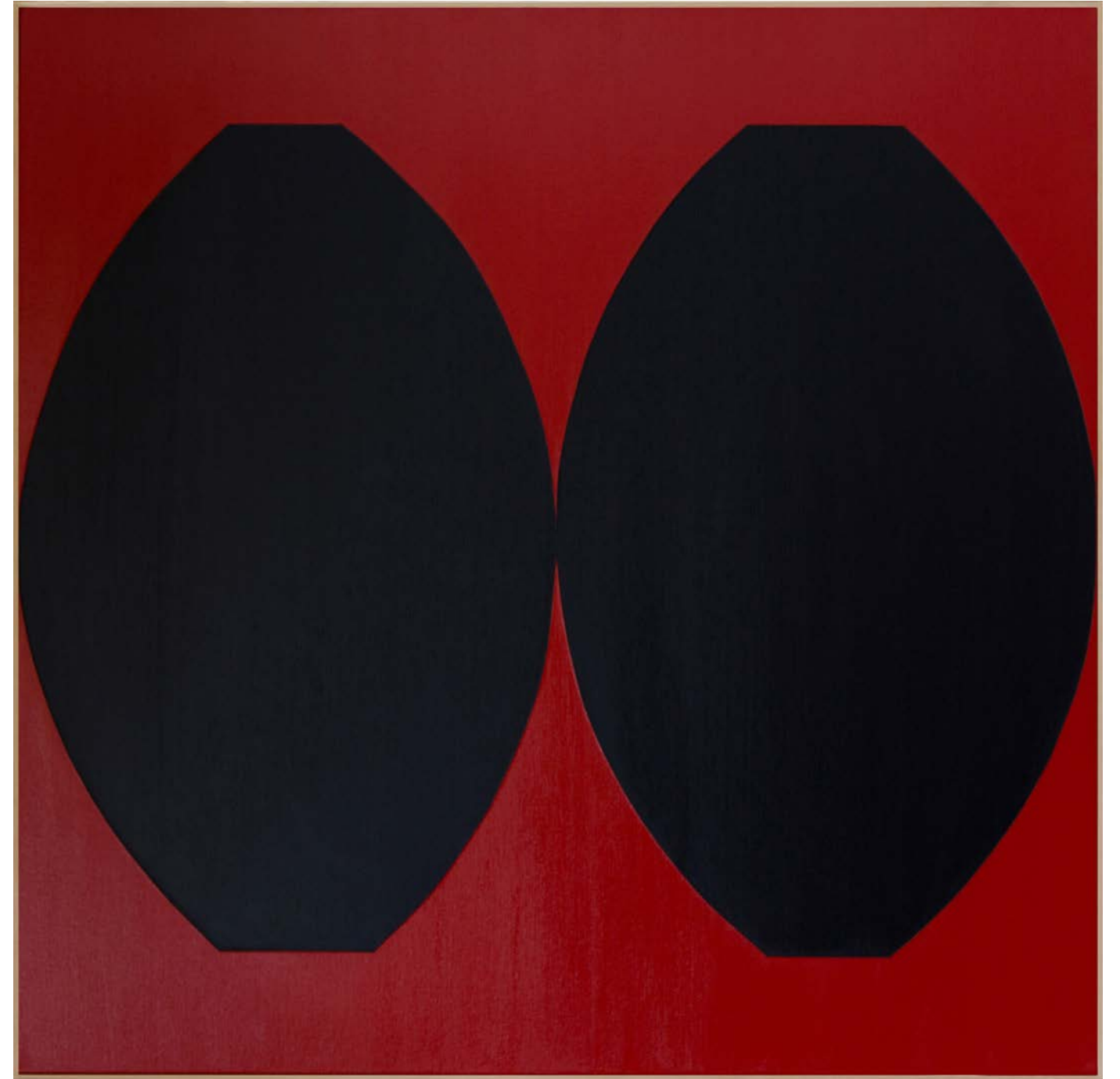


6

Pictor

Acrylic on canvas

36x36

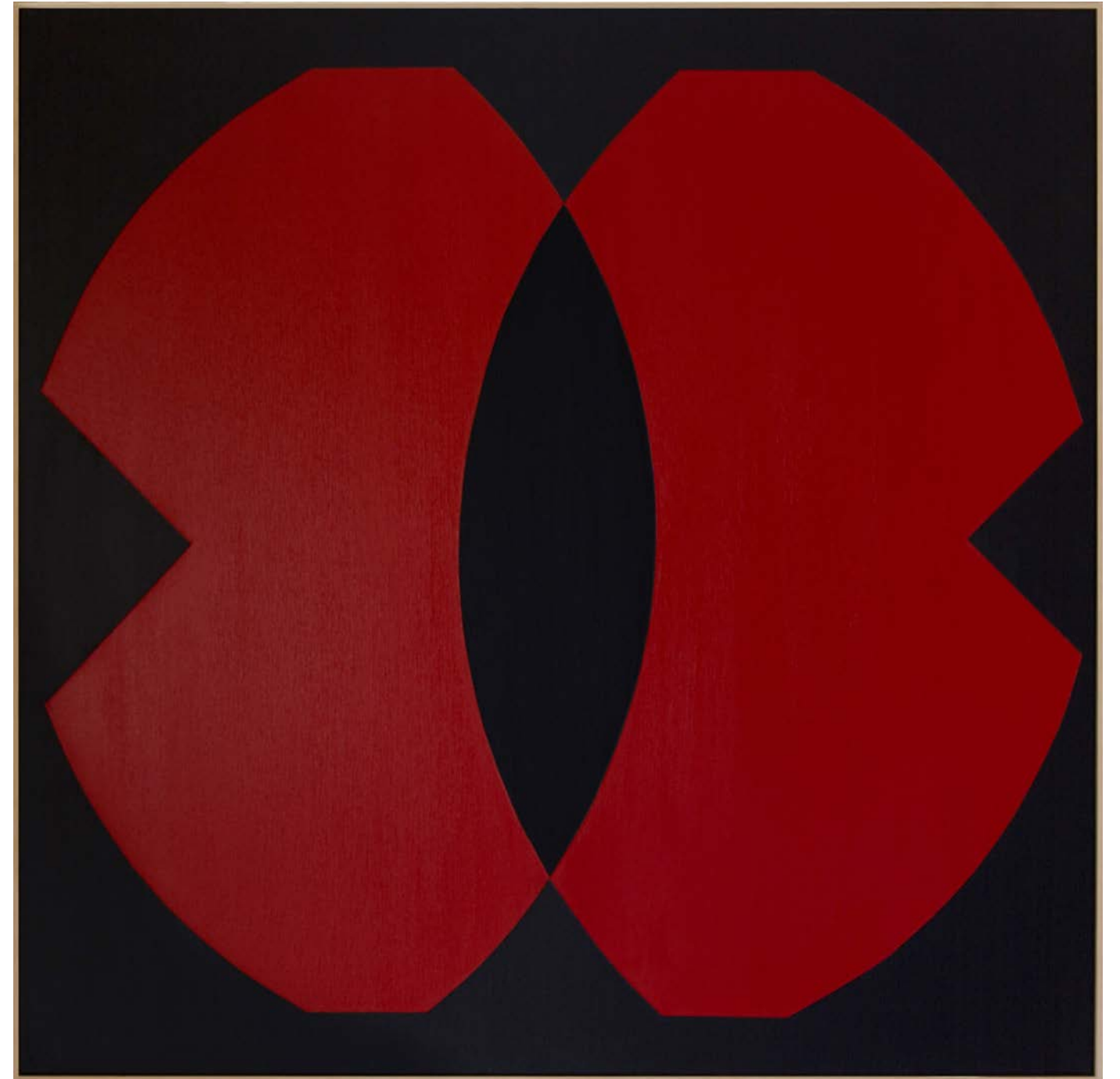


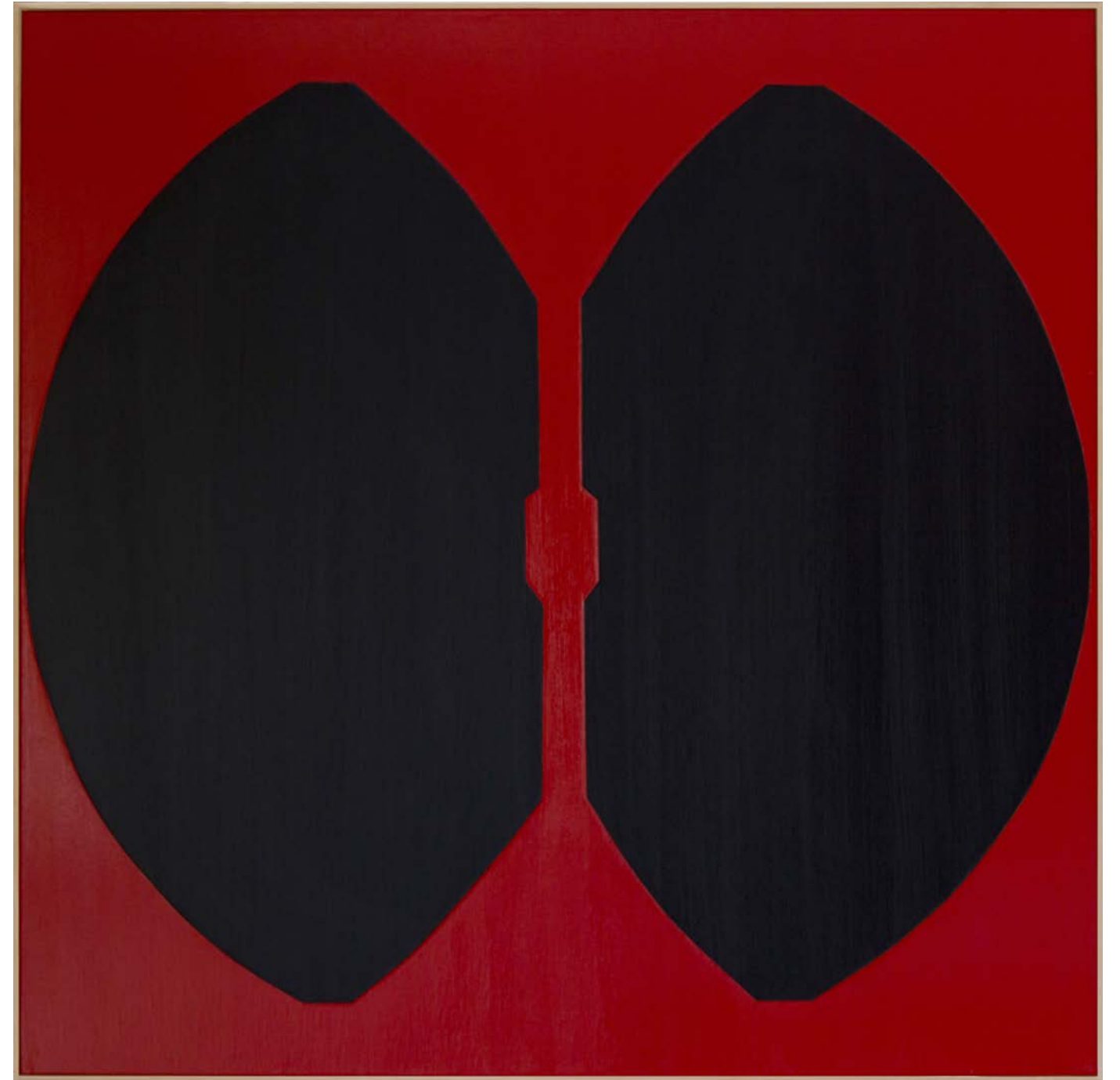
7

Puppis

Acrylic on canvas

36x36

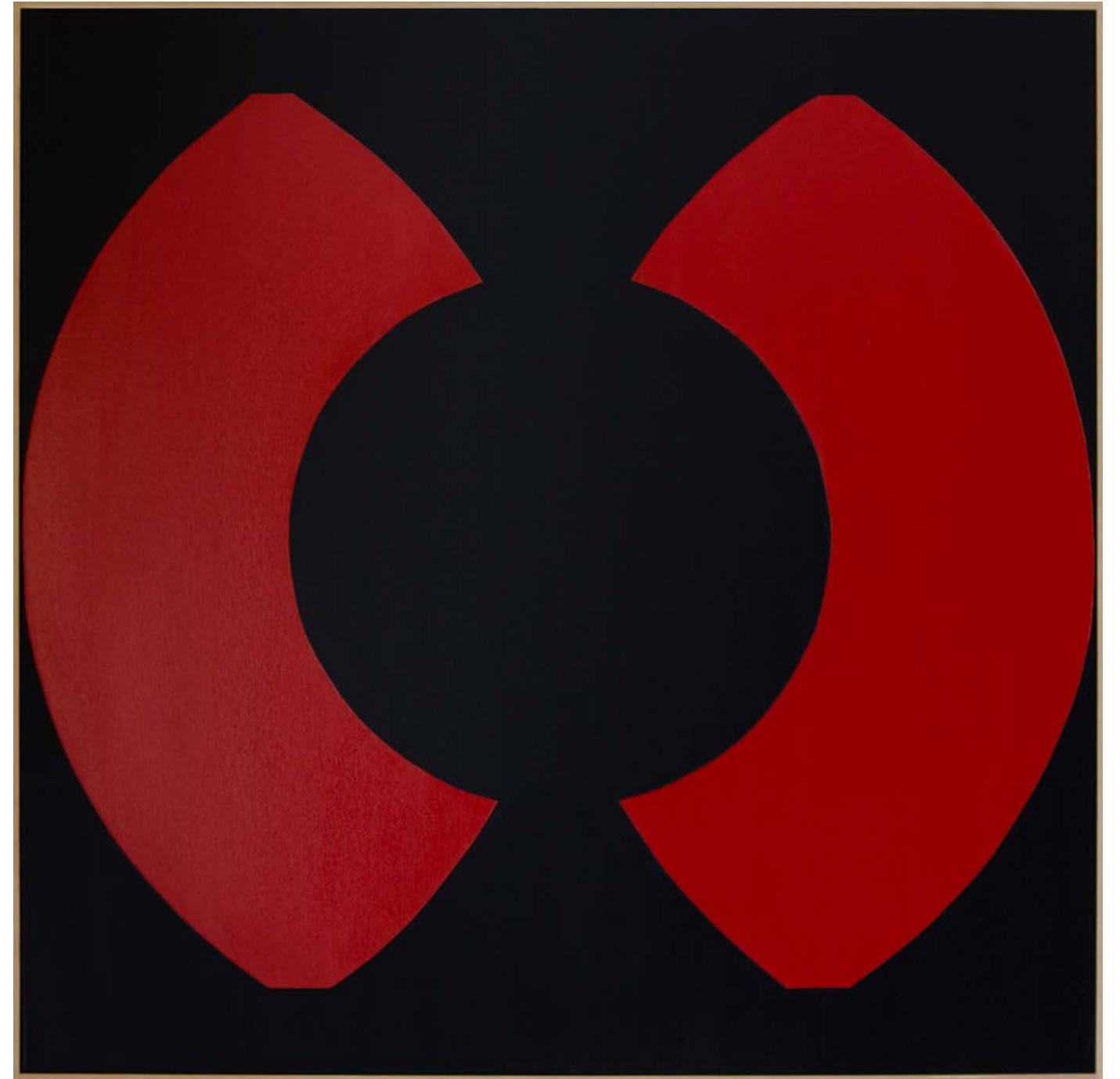




Argo Navis

Acrylic on canvas

36x36



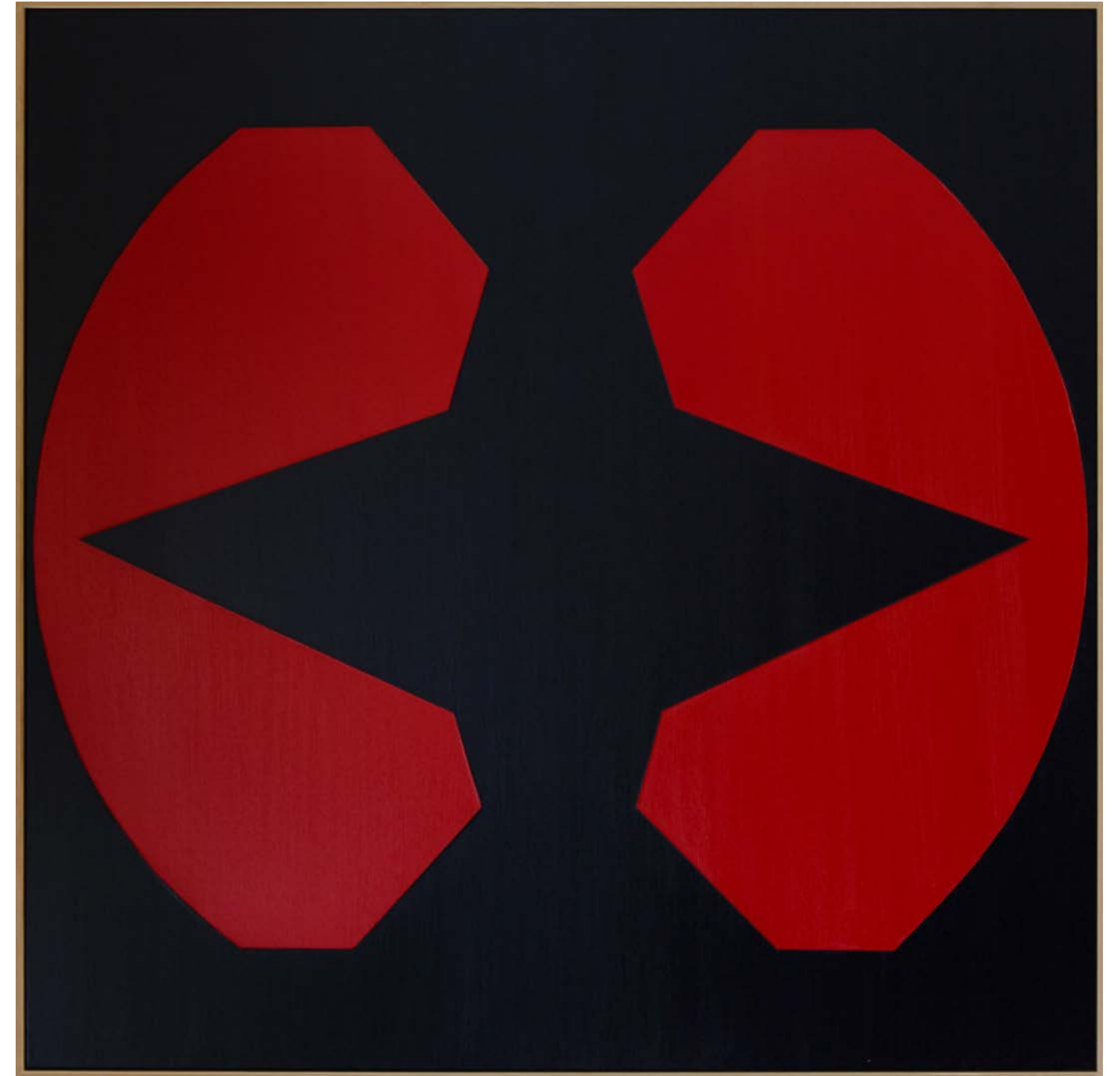
10

Hydrus

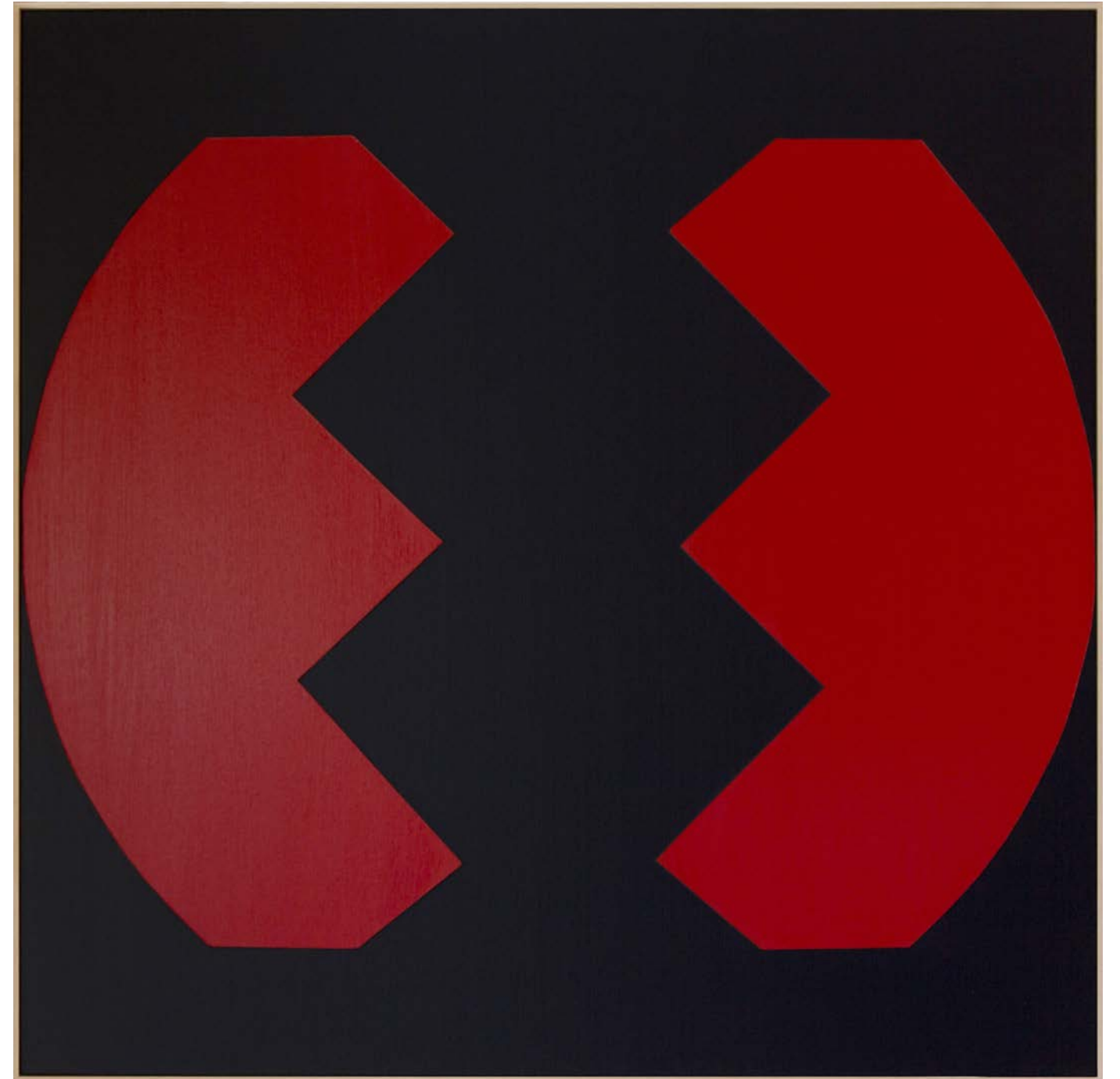
Acrylic on canvas

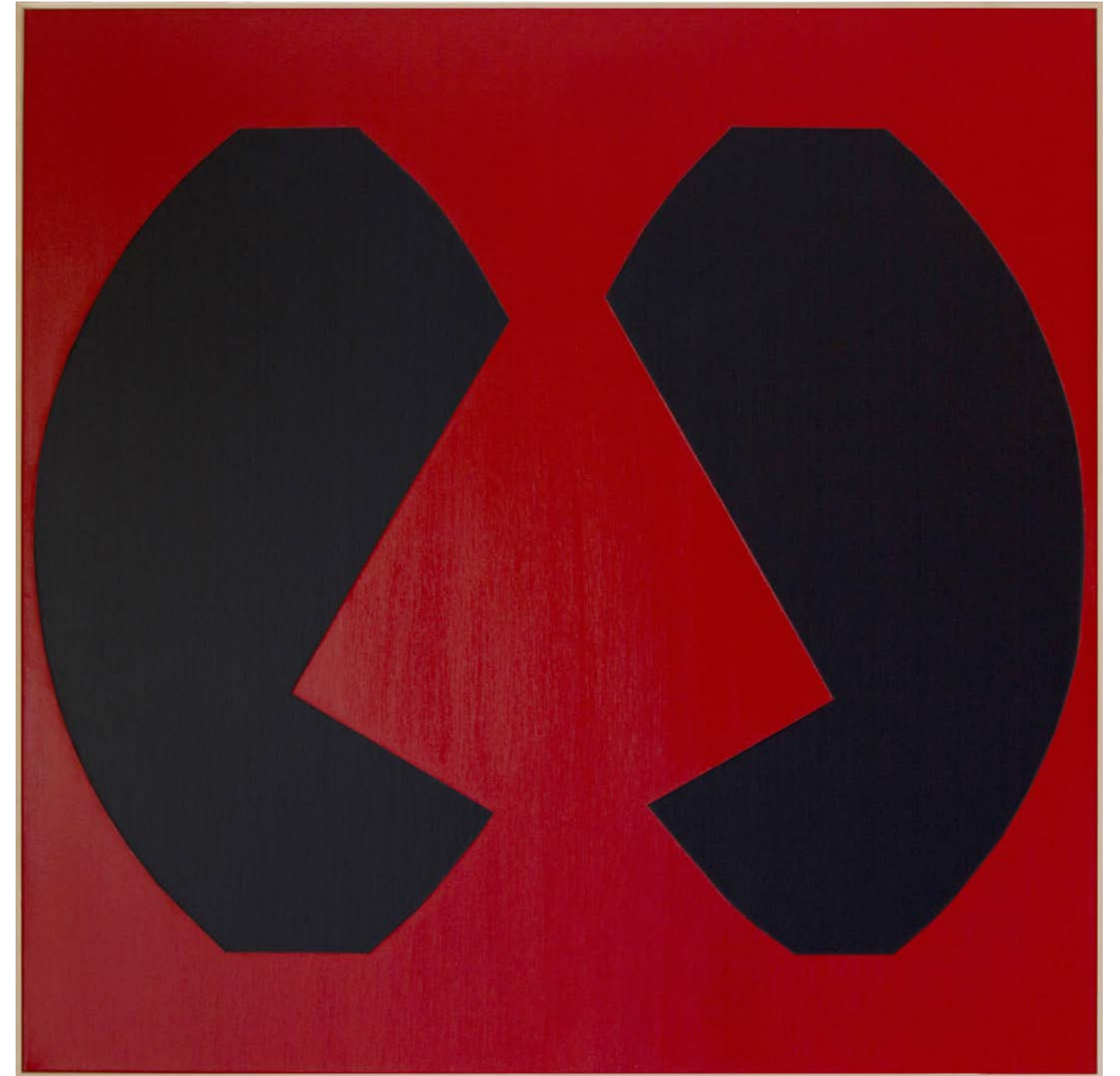
36x36

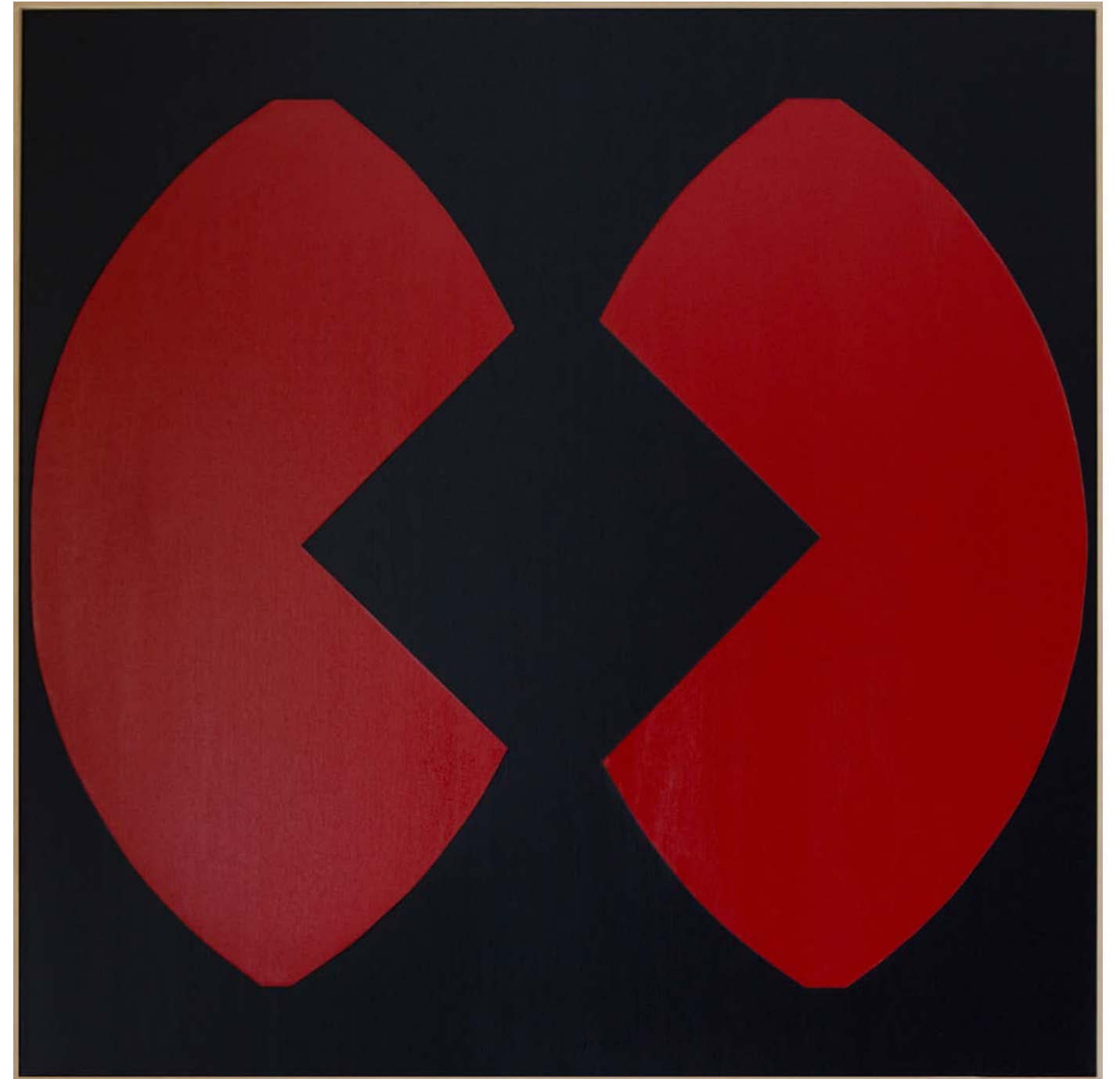


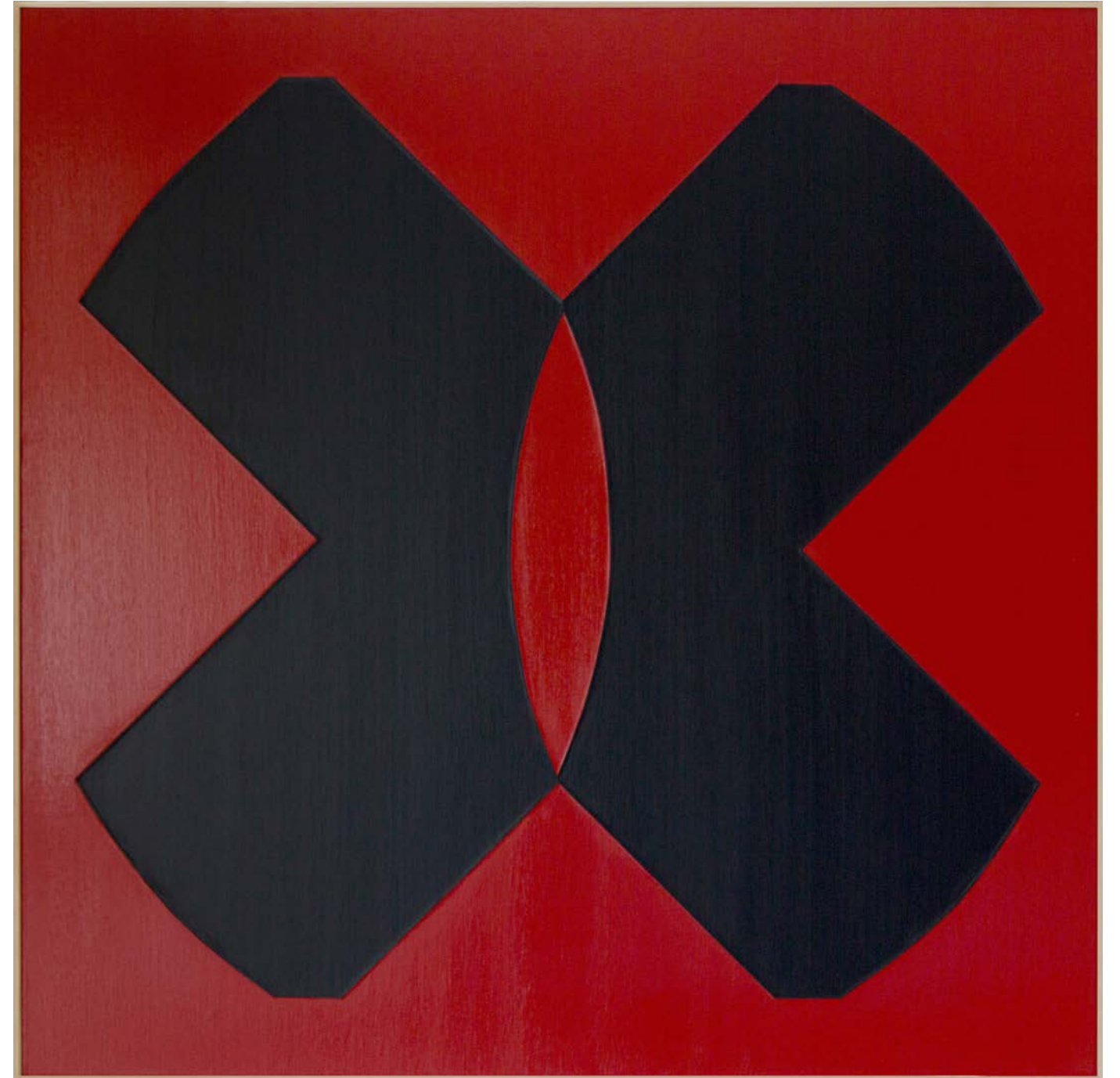














1

2

3

4



5

6

7

8



9

10

11

12



13

14

15

16

1	Dorado	Acrylic	36x36	9	Argo Navis	Acrylic	36x36
2	Vela	Acrylic	36x36	10	Hydrus	Acrylic	36x36
3	Volans	Acrylic	36x36	11	Columba	Acrylic	36x36
4	Corvus	Acrylic	36x36	12	Circinus	Acrylic	36x36
5	Monocerus	Acrylic	36x36	13	Aquila	Acrylic	36x36
6	Pictor	Acrylic	36x36	14	Eridanus	Acrylic	36x36
7	Puppis	Acrylic	36x36	15	Apus	Acrylic	36x36
8	Cetus	Acrylic	36x36	16	Pyxis	Acrylic	36x36

J. MILLAY

J. Millay was born in New York City. She studied at the Rhode Island School of Design, and received her BFA from Wheaton College.

The history of art, particularly postwar abstraction, provides a vital foundation for Millay's practice. Seeking to extend rather than break from the legacies of Hard-edge painting, Lyrical Abstraction, Color Field painting, and Minimalism, she is constantly exploring the material, formal, and emotional possibilities that lie beyond figuration. At once still and forever in flux, her work shares a magnetic vitality with that of artists such as Ellsworth Kelly and Blinky Palermo.

Millay's early interest in gestural energy soon evolved into a more contemplative approach. Among the catalysts for this transition was her search for novel tools. Experimenting with wooden sticks, trowels, and patterned blades in lieu of brushes allowed Millay to change the pace of painting without sacrificing its power.

The deliberate solidity of Millay's work is balanced by its sensuality. Underlying each distilled composition is the dynamic energy of the series of grids she creates—and recreates—on surfaces of wood, linen, or cotton and overlays with multiple layers of paint. The cumulative effect brings the paintings into the realm of sculpture: an intersection she is now exploring in relationship to scale, through a new series on large, shaped canvases.

J. Millay lives and works in Los Angeles.

1 — Constellations
J. Millay
Los Angeles, 2017

Design by
Jillian Kasimow

Bio by
Stephanie Murg

Printed by
Typecraft

