

Under The Volcano

John Isaacs

11.04 - 13.07.2024



Under the Volcano

Hoy en día las personas parecieran estar divididas entre pragmáticas o idealistas. En la mayoría de los casos, ser artista significa pertenecer a esta segunda categoría. Un artista suele seguir un proceso un tanto torpe para navegar el mundo. Y en cualquier caso, aquella persona que tiene la capacidad de, mediante combinaciones lógicas, construir argumentos coherentes será escuchada y comprendida a la primera. Esto parecería traer aparejada una cierta desventaja en el arte: si se omite la búsqueda que conduce al significado entonces la curiosidad no se satisface, y no hay resultados artísticos.

John Isaacs (n.1968, Lancaster, Inglaterra) es un artista intensamente curioso, y quien no teme a explorar repetidamente, ni a limitarse o casarse con un solo medio. Su obra se enriquece de todas las actividades y materiales existentes, incluyendo dibujos, pinturas, collages, carnes hiperrealistas, cerámicas, neones, y esculturas en mármol. Estos diversos procesos y materiales traen consigo una insólita libertad creativa que vincula lo sensorial con lo simbólico, y concluye en una comprensión empírica.

Para *Under The Volcano*, Isaacs emprende un viaje en el tiempo. El título es una referencia directa al Monte Vesubio, sin embargo está tomado de la icónica novela homónima de 1947 de Malcolm Lowry, ambientada en México. Mientras visitaba Pompeya en 2023, Isaacs descubrió otro formato para producir imágenes abstractas y objetivas en las ruinas de la antigua ciudad romana.

Pompeya, junto con Herculano, su ciudad hermana, quedó sepultada bajo 4 y 6 metros de ceniza volcánica y piedra pómez en la erupción del Vesubio en el año 79 d.C. Un desastre natural enterró y preservó la ciudad, que permaneció oculta por siglos. Durante sus excavaciones, los arqueólogos insertaron tejas de terracota en las paredes para indicar la separación entre las estructuras originales y la restauración posterior. Líneas de mosaicos crean gestos gráficos que fueron formados por un evento apocalíptico. Éstas le recordaron a Isaacs a las simples y delicadas marcas de los artistas abstractos, tales como las líneas a lápiz de las pinturas de Cy Twombly.

Por lo tanto, como se ve en *Via de la Fortuna, Via del Abbondanza, Vicolo dei Labirinto*, (2024), las líneas abstractas de Isaacs que aquí parecen gestos

rápidos y formados al azar, tienen una pesada autenticidad histórica. Si el arte se puede entender como un sistema que produce y establece significados, *Under The Volcano* es un paisaje emocional cargado de significados que Isaacs encontró en las trágicas líneas del evento apocalíptico. Los ladrillos de terracota besan las antiguas ruinas en un gesto rápido y funesto como *El beso* (1907-1908) del artista rumano Constantin Brâncuși.

En su libro *De qué hablo cuando hablo de escribir Haruki Murakami* escribió:

Dos hombres iban a contemplar el monte Fuji. Uno de los hombres, el más inteligente de los dos, observaba la montaña desde diversos ángulos y regresaba a casa después convencerse que, en efecto, el famoso monte Fuji, era una maravilla sin duda. Era un hombre pragmático, rápido a la hora de comprender las cosas. El otro, por el contrario, no entendía bien de dónde nacía toda esa fascinación por la montaña y por eso se quedó allí solo y subió hasta la cima a pie. Tardó mucho tiempo en alcanzarla y le supuso un considerable esfuerzo... pero logró comprender físicamente qué era el monte Fuji... fue capaz de entender la fascinación que producía en la gente.

No cabe duda que el proceso artístico de Isaacs para esta exposición consistió en escalar repetidas veces la tragedia que se encontró en Pompeya. Para ello, se embarcó en trabajar con cerámicas para mostrar físicamente el poder de las temperaturas infernales del desastre (*Sleepwalking into the Anthropocene*, 2024); dejó huellas de pies sudorosos cubiertos de sal (*A perfect soul*, 2022).

Sin duda, el bronce es percibido como algo permanente. Pero esto no es así para Isaacs, el inherente calor de su trabajo lo hace casi líquido, transformado en otra cosa, como en una zanahoria en *If your dreams are not your own how can you claim to own them*, (2024). El trabajo de Isaacs genera distintos modos de percibir la historia: con un considerable esfuerzo y fascinación se aproxima a los materiales que declaran su tiempo, restablece los parámetros de significado y valor. Transforma la historia desde ambiguos objetos y finaliza con ello un viaje en el tiempo exitoso para un artista idealista.

Romeo Gómez López

Under the Volcano

Nowadays people seem to be categorized as either pragmatists or idealists. In most cases an artist is in the second category. Just being an artist can involve a clumsy process of navigating the world. In any case, anyone who has the ability to construct coherent arguments, through logical combinations, will be heard and understood immediately. This would seem to bring about a certain disadvantage in art, if the quest that leads to meaning is omitted, then curiosity is not satisfied, and there are no artistic results.

John Isaacs (b.1968, Lancaster, UK) is an intensely curious artist who is not afraid to explore ideas repeatedly, nor limit or commit himself to one medium. His work is enriched by all available and existent activities and materials, including drawing, painting, collage, hyperrealistic pieces of flesh, ceramics, neon signs, and marble sculptures. Isaacs' diverse process and materials brings along an extraordinary creative freedom that links the sensory with the symbolic, which is consummated in an empirical understanding.

In *Under the Volcano*, Isaacs time travels. The title is a direct reference to Mount Vesuvius, however it is taken from Malcolm Lowry's iconic 1947 homonymous novel set in Mexico. While visiting Pompeii in 2023 Isaacs discovered another format to produce objective, abstract imagery in the ruins of the ancient Roman city.

Pompeii, along with Herculaneum, its sister city, was buried under 4 to 6 meters of volcanic ash and pumice during the eruption Vesuvius in 79 AD. A natural disaster buried and preserved the city, which was hidden for centuries. During later excavations, archeologists inserted terracotta tiles into the walls to indicate the separation between the original structures and the subsequent restoration. Lines of tiles made graphic gestures that were formed by an apocalyptic event. They reminded Isaacs of the simple and delicate marks of abstract artists, such as the pencil lines of Cy Twombly paintings.

As seen in *Via de la Fortuna*, *Via del Abbondanza*, *Vicolo dei Labirinto* (2024) Isaacs' abstract lines appear to be fast and randomly formed, yet they carry a heavy historical authenticity. If art can be understood as a system that produces and establishes meanings, *Under The Volcano* is an emotional landscape loaded with meanings that the artist found in a devastating event.

The terracotta bricks kiss the ancient ruins in a quick and fatal gesture reminiscing *The Kiss* (1907-1908) by the Romanian artist Constantin Brâncuși.

In his book *Novelist as a Vocation* Haruki Murakami wrote:

Two men were going to contemplate Mount Fuji. One of the men, the more intelligent of the two, observed the mountain from different angles and returned home after becoming convinced that, in fact, the famous Mount Fuji was a marvel without a doubt. He was a pragmatic man, quick to understand things. The other, on the contrary, did not fully understand where all this fascination with the mountain came from and that is why he stayed there alone and climbed to the top on foot. It took him a long time to reach it and it required a considerable effort... but he managed to physically understand what Mount Fuji was... he was able to understand the fascination it produced in people.

There is no doubt that Isaacs' artistic process for this exhibition consisted of repeatedly scaling the tragedy he found in Pompeii. He embarked on working with ceramics to physically show the power of the disaster's hellish temperatures (*Sleepwalking into the Anthropocene*, 2024), leaving imprints of sweaty feet covered in salt (*A perfect soul*, 2022).

Without a doubt, bronze is perceived as something permanent. But this is not the case for Isaacs, the inherent heat in Isaacs' work makes it almost liquid, transformed into something else, like a carrot in *If your dreams are not your own how can you claim to own them*, (2024). Isaacs' work generates different ways of perceiving history. With a considerable effort and fascination he approaches materials that declare their time, reestablishing parameters of value and meaning. He transforms history from ambiguous objects, thus making an extensive, idealist artist's journey through time successful.

Romeo Gómez López

TRAVESÍA CUATRO



JOHN ISAACS (1968. Lancaster, UK)

ENG

ESP

The work of John Isaacs (1968, Lancaster, UK) produces an initial estrangement with his works, that shared essence between humans that the artist decides to sublimate but also to parody, using a great diversity of mediums and materials. Approaching materials from a temporary understanding, the artist transforms oldness and newness into ambiguous categories. Simultaneously, Isaacs reverts the symbology used by religious institutions or popular culture to establish parameters of value and meaning. By liberating these signs from their regular references they can be arranged as a common ground where a truly human aspect manifests itself, with the disposal and tendency towards transcendence. John Isaacs employs language and referentiality for an adverse purpose, instead of reaffirming meaning, he cancels it in order to reveal the emotional dimension of things and their relation to the human body.

John Isaacs has exhibited extensively on an international level. Exhibitions include: A Gateway to Possible Worlds, Centre Pompidou, Mertz, France (2022); Energetic Gestures, Kunstsaele, Berlin, Germany (2022); Le Moyen Âge Réinventé, Palais des Beaux Arts, Lille, France (2022); Today I started loving you again, Galerie Michael Haas & Kunst Lager Haas, Berlin, Germany (2021); Archipelago, Galleria Poggiali, Milan, Italy (2018); Eat me, Kunstmuseum Trapholt, Kolding, Denmark (2018); Da uno a Dieci, Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia, Italy (2018); The inner skin - Art and Shame, Marta Herford Museum, Germany (2016); The 13 Corners, Travesía Cuatro Guadalajara, Mexico (2016); A Brief History of the Future, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (2015); About Trees, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland (2015); Fleischeslust, Museum Villa Rot, Burgrieden-Rot, Germany (2015); The Thousand-Thigh Hospice: experiments in healing, CAN Centre d'Art de Neuchatel, Switzerland (2015); Absurd builders, handymen utopia, Abbaye Saint André, Centre d'art contemporain, Meymac, France (2015); Forgiveness and Reconciliation, Musei Vaticani, Rome, Italy (2015); INCONSOLUS votes for children, Travesía Cuatro, Madrid, Spain (2015); Alice im Wunderland der Kunst, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany (2012); Highlights from the Collection II, The Goss-Michael Foundation, Dallas, United States (2012); Dream Time, Les Abattoirs, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Toulouse, France (2009); In the darkest hour there may be light, The Serpentine Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2007); Rockers Island: The Olbricht Collection, Museum Folkwang Essen, Germany (2007); Paul Thek in the context of contemporary art, ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany (2007); Mike Kelly's The Uncanny, Tate Liverpool, United Kingdom (2004); Les Grands Spectacles, Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Austria (2004); Melodrama, Centro Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz and Palacio de los Condes de Gabia/Centro José Guerrero, Granada, Spain (2002) and MARCO, Vigo, Spain (2003); Minimal Maximal, Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan (2001); Spectacular Bodies, The Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2000); Disasters of War, KW, Berlin, Germany (2000); Young British Artists VI, The Saatchi Gallery, London, United Kingdom (1996); among others.

His work is part of the following collections: Fondation Antoine de Galbert, Paris; Celine Art Project, Paris; KADIST, Paris & San Francisco; British Art Council, London, UK; Olbricht Collection, Berlin, ; and of Murder Me / Damien Hirst, UK; Les Abattoirs, Musée - Frac Occitane, Toulouse; Arts Council Collection, London UK; blackflag; Galleria d'Arte Moderna Achille Forti, Verona ; Major Art Foundation, Amsterdam; Collection Antoine de Galbert, Paris; Sammlung Michael und Anna Haas, Berlin; Richard Harris Collection, Chicago; Kadist Art Foundation, Paris; The Goss-Michael Foundation, Dallas; Murderme Collection - Damien Hirst, London ; Musac Foundation, Lisbon; The Olbricht Collection, Essen; The Roberts Collection, London, among many others.

John Isaacs lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

John Isaacs produce con su obra un extrañamiento inicial, habla de una esencia compartida que el artista decide sublimar pero también parodiar. Desde una concepción plenamente temporal de los materiales, el artista convierte lo antiguo y lo nuevo en categorías ambiguas. Isaacs también revierte las simbologías utilizadas por los ámbitos religiosos o la cultura popular para establecer parámetros de valor y significado. Al liberar estos signos de sus referencias comunes, pueden ser dispuestos como presencias poéticas puras. El oro, la carne humana o incluso los objetos cotidianos se convierten en un territorio común donde reside algo auténticamente humano, con una disposición y tendencia a lo trascendental. Utiliza el lenguaje y la referencialidad con una función adversa, en lugar de adjudicar y reafirmar un significado, lo cancela para así revelar la dimensión emocional de las cosas y su relación con el cuerpo.

John Isaacs ha expuesto extensivamente a nivel internacional. Las exposiciones incluyen: A Gateway to Possible Worlds, Centre Pompidou, Mertz, France (2022); Energetic Gestures, Kunstsaele, Berlin, Germany (2022); Le Moyen Âge Réinventé, Palais des Beaux Arts, Lille, France (2022); Today I started loving you again, Galerie Michael Haas & Kunst Lager Haas, Berlin, Germany (2021); Archipelago, Galleria Poggiali, Milan, Italy (2018); Eat me, Kunstmuseum Trapholt, Kolding, Denmark (2018); Da uno a Dieci, Galleria Massimo Minini, Brescia, Italy (2018); The inner skin - Art and Shame, Marta Herford Museum, Germany (2016); The 13 Corners, Travesía Cuatro Guadalajara, Mexico (2016); A Brief History of the Future, Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (2015); About Trees, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland (2015); Fleischeslust, Museum Villa Rot, Burgrieden-Rot, Germany (2015); The Thousand-Thigh Hospice: experiments in healing, CAN Centre d'Art de Neuchatel, Switzerland (2015); Absurd builders, handymen utopia, Abbaye Saint André, Centre d'art contemporain, Meymac, France (2015); Forgiveness and Reconciliation, Musei Vaticani, Rome, Italy (2015); INCONSOLUS votes for children, Travesía Cuatro, Madrid, Spain (2015); Alice im Wunderland der Kunst, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany (2012); Highlights from the Collection II, The Goss-Michael Foundation, Dallas, United States (2012); Dream Time, Les Abattoirs, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Toulouse, France (2009); In the darkest hour there may be light, The Serpentine Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2007); Rockers Island: The Olbricht Collection, Museum Folkwang Essen, Germany (2007); Paul Thek in the context of contemporary art, ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany (2007); Mike Kelly's The Uncanny, Tate Liverpool, United Kingdom (2004); Les Grands Spectacles, Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, Austria (2004); Melodrama, Centro Museo Vasco de Arte Contemporáneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz and Palacio de los Condes de Gabia/Centro José Guerrero, Granada, Spain (2002) and MARCO, Vigo, Spain (2003); Minimal Maximal, Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan (2001); Spectacular Bodies, The Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom (2000); Disasters of War, KW, Berlin, Germany (2000); Young British Artists VI, The Saatchi Gallery, London, United Kingdom (1996); among others.

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tears welling up inside



















John Isaacs

The Architecture of Empathy, 2013

Hand blown glass neon tube, transformer

127 x 30 x 7 cm | 50 x 11.8 x 2.7 in

Ed. 6 + 2 AP

J1127



John Isaacs

Sleepwalking into the Anthropocene, 2024

Hand painted glazed ceramic

200 x 53 cm | 78.7 x 20.8 in

J1198



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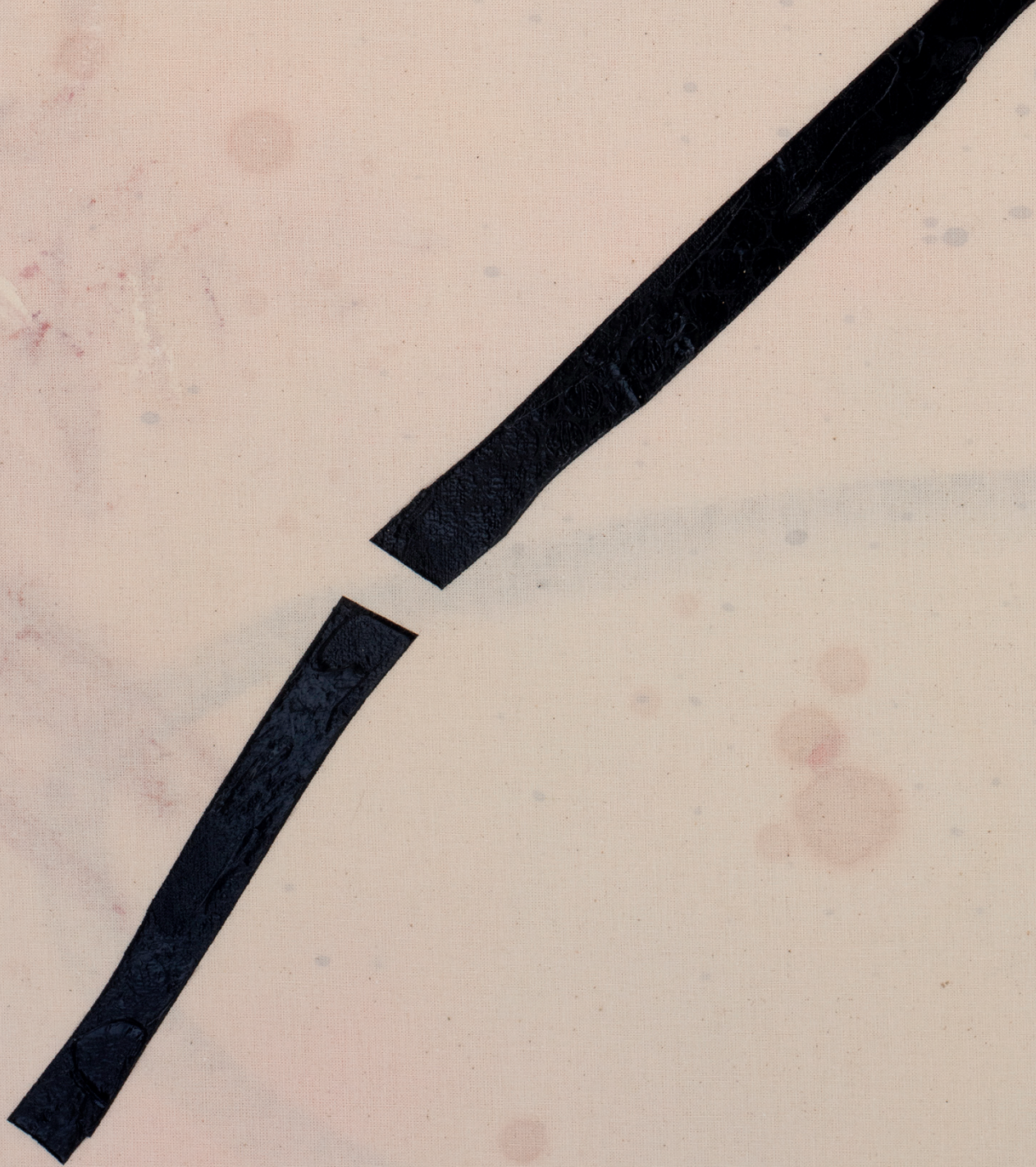
John Isaacs

Via della Fortuna, 2024

Oil paint, acrylic paint and linen on canvas

160 x 120 cm | 62.9 x 47.2 in

J1194





John Isaacs

Under the Volcano, 2023

Oil paint, collage and linen on canvas

152 x 101 cm | 59.8 x 39.7 in

J1199





John Isaacs

A child and dreamer my whole life long, 2023

Oil paint and linen on canvas

152 x 101 cm | 47.2 x 39.3 in

J1196





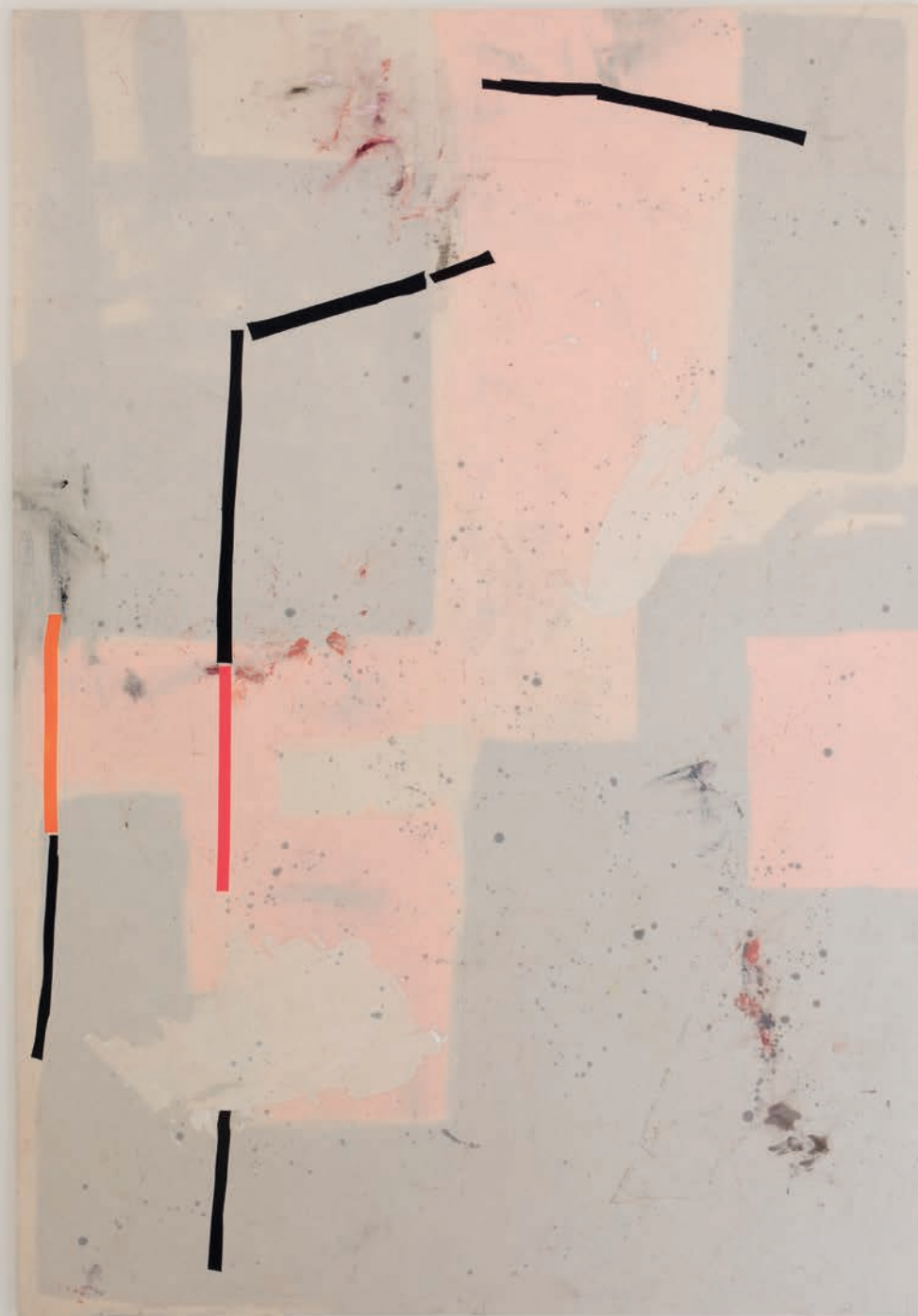
John Isaacs

Via del Abbondanza, 2024

Oil paint, acrylic paint and linen on canvas

200 x 140 cm | 78.7 x 55.1 in

J1193



TRAVESÍA CUATRO

John Isaacs

Vicolo dei Labirinto, 2024

Oil paint, acrylic paint and linen on canvas

200 x 140 cm | 78.7 x 55.1 in

J1193



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John Isaacs

A perfect soul, 2022

Ceramic, dried flowers, Dead Sea salt, 23 carat gold leaf,
metal drum

170 x 62 x 50 cm | 66.9 x 24.4 x 19.6 in

J1195



John Isaacs

Are you like me full of hope and full of fear, 2021

Stage black out fabric and Dead
Sea salt on cotton

73.5 x 76.5 x 4 cm | 28.9 x 30 x 1.5 in
JI189



John Isaacs

HOTEL, 2024

Hand woven tapestry made from hand dyed wool

197 x 168 cm | 77.5 x 66.1 in

J1200



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John Isaacs

The forgotten temple, 2024 Glazed
ceramic
50 x 30 x 30 cm | 19.6 x 11.8 x 11.8 in
JI201



TRAVESÍA CUATRO



John Isaacs

*If your dreams are not your own how can you claim
to own them, 2024*

Ceramic, 24 carat gold plated bronze carrot

Variable dimensions

J1202



TRAVESÍA CUATRO



John Isaacs

there is no story that is not true, 2016

Spray paint on ceramic

72 x 46 x 46 cm | 28.6 x 18.1 x 18.1 in

J1117



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All prices are exclusive of any applicable taxes or VAT.



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