

JULIA FISH Threshold

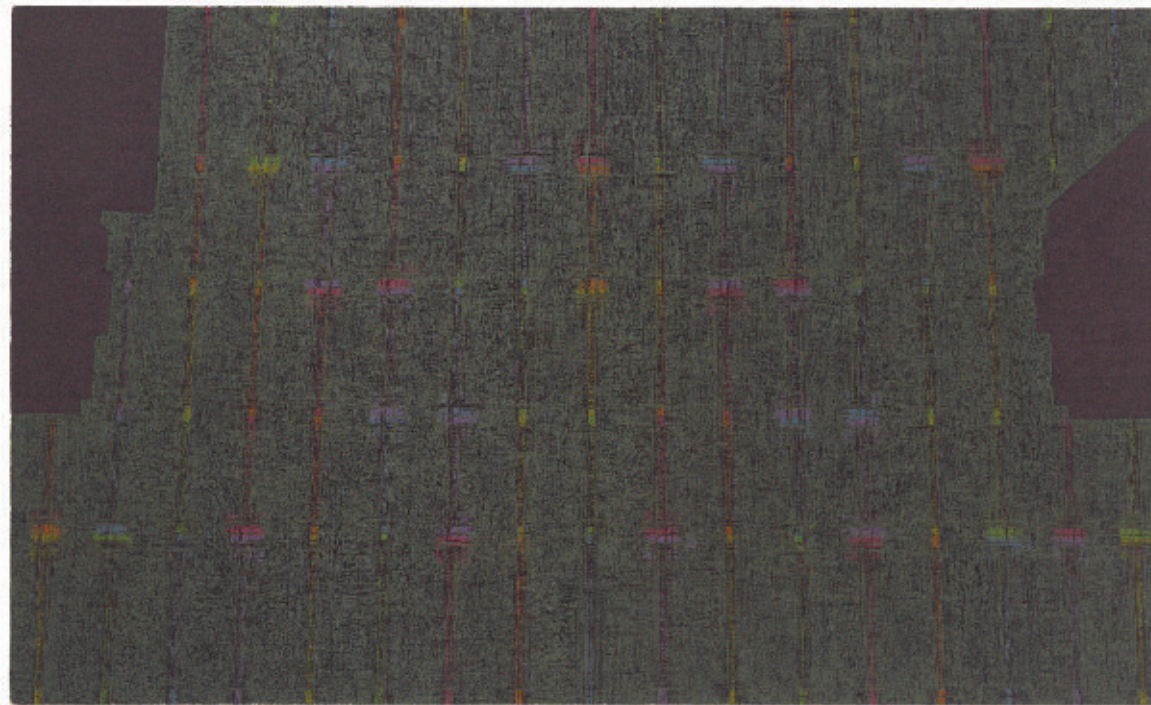
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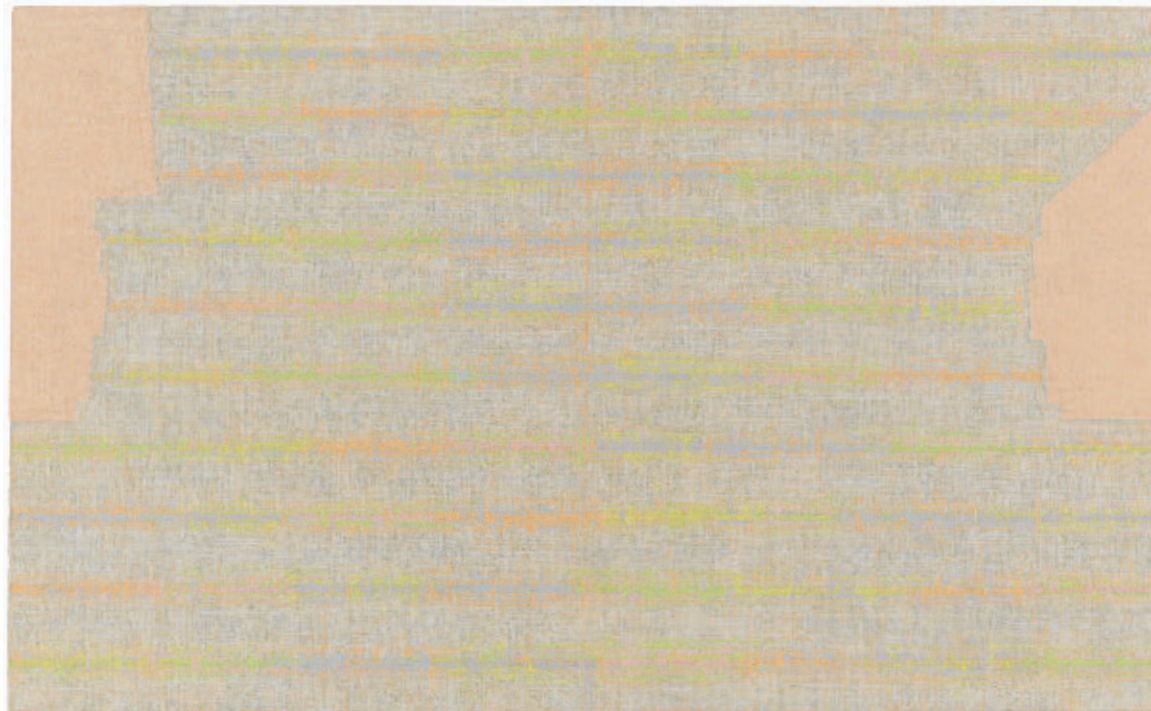
Threshold — Matrix : fragments [spectrum with grey]
2014 — 2015, transfer chalk and oil on canvas
30 x 70 inches
76.2 x 177.8 cm.



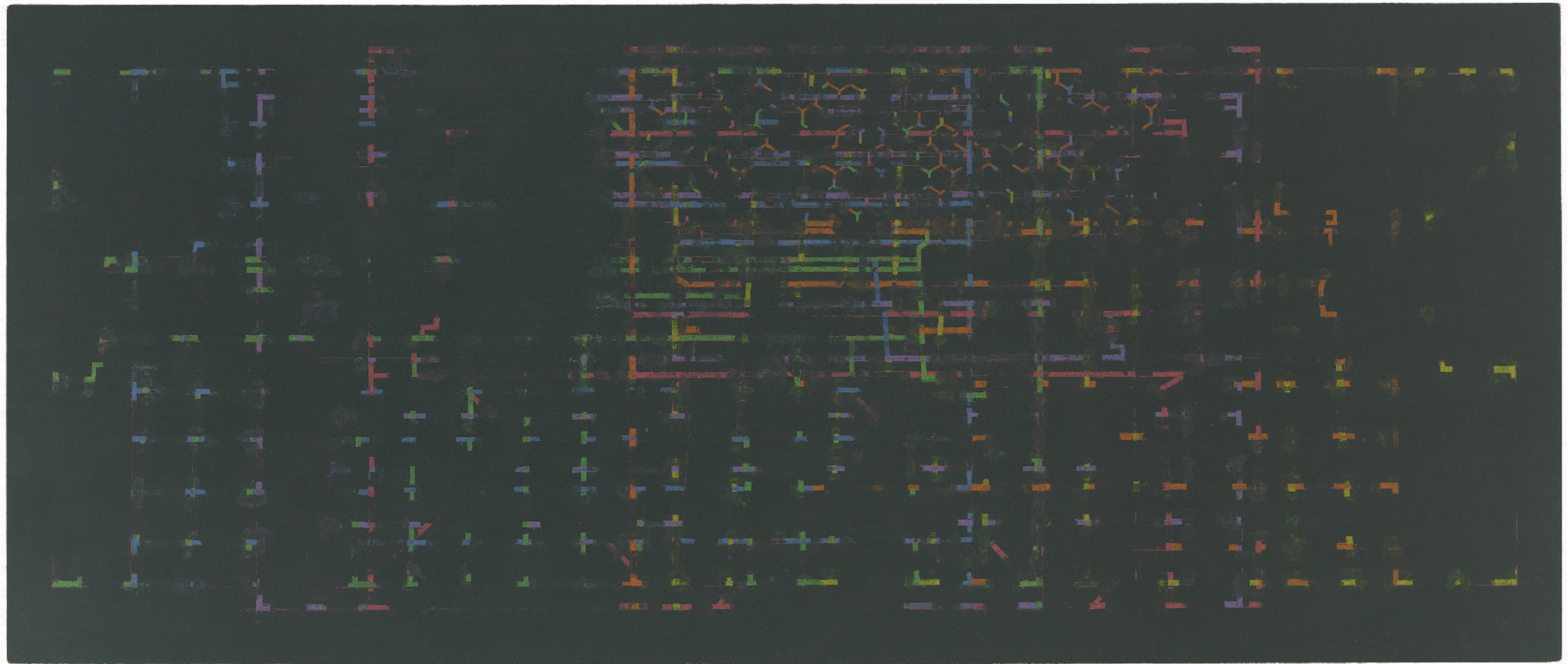
Lumine III — NorthWest [Parhelion]
 2014 — 2015, oil on canvas
 29 × 27 inches
 73.6 × 68.5 cm.



Threshold, NorthWest — One [spectrum : violet with grey]
 2010 — 2011, 2014, oil on canvas
 23 × 38 inches
 58.4 × 96.5 cm.



Threshold, SouthEast — Two [spectrum : orange with grey]
 2010 — 2011, 2014, oil on canvas
 23 × 38 inches
 58.4 × 96.5 cm.



JULIA FISH **Threshold**

Threshold — Matrix : harbour [spectrum : transposed] / for E and L
2014 — 2015, transfer chalk and oil on canvas
30 x 70 inches
76.2 x 177.8 cm.

“Threshold”: it is, to begin with, the name of a series on which Julia Fish has been at work since 2009. Centrally comprising six mid-format paintings in oil on canvas, this suite also includes works on paper realized in varied materials and diverse scale, thus testifying to the longstanding importance of drawing within the artist’s practice. The present exhibition is an opportunity to consider the two most recent—and indeed final—paintings in that group, as well as three additional, closely related canvases. Yet this evocative title also speaks to Fish’s broader understanding of her enterprise, in which painting appears a certain experience of limits: the patient and exacting exploration of the boundaries that at once divide and join adjacent things, the edges and articulations that structure finite being.

This commitment is bound in part to her ongoing investigation of a particular place: the house and studio at 1614 North Hermitage Avenue, in Chicago, where Fish has lived since the early 1990s. “Entry,” 1997–2001, her first mature painting group, focuses on the key liminal area between house and world, showing variously interpreted fragments of its familiar tile pattern, as traced and transposed from floor to canvas at 1:1 scale. Subsequent suites reveal a marked interest in the building’s internal partitions and passageways: the blueprint-based “Living Rooms,” 2001–2005, present spaces that are at once highly particularized in their own right and necessarily defined by the neighboring zones, while the “Stairs/Landings,” 2006–2009, focus on the communicating areas par excellence. The impression that emerges from all this work is that dwelling, for Fish, is always already a certain rhythm of displacement, defined by the daily, repeated acts of going away and coming back again, moving around and through, being in one place and not another at any given time.

Folded into this project is the artist’s increasingly explicit preoccupation with light—both as it orients and enables movement within the house (the ways in which it functions, as Fish has said, as “GPS”), and as itself given over to displacement in the spectrum. Already in the “Living Rooms,”

Fish had marked the placement of artificial and natural light sources with glowing, jewel-like +- and T-shaped symbols, respectively. By contrast, the later and in many ways quite singular *Lumine II, NorthWest [Parhelion]*, 2009, focuses intensively on one fixture in particular: the double-headed lamp attached to the ceiling above the painter’s bed. With its twinned forms, this source is already, as it were primordially, one thing beside another; and that thought of division is prolonged in the repeating, hexagonal halos that traverse the bottom register of an otherwise gray field. These six-sided spectra are even more pronounced in the further repetition-with-difference of *Lumine III — NorthWest [Parhelion]*, 2014–15, where they all but eclipse the fixture itself. Inspired in part by Fish’s experience of a 17th century painting depicting a radiant efflorescence of so-called “sun dogs,” or luminous circles, in the Stockholm sky—a painting known simply as the “*Parhelion*”—these canvases are at once deeply rooted in everyday fact and palpably indebted to a prior history of picturing. They open onto broader questions of the role of light, and therefore color, in painting past and present.

The “Threshold” paintings take over and transform all of this, effectively mapping the dispersal of light in the spectrum onto the distribution of space in the house. Each depicts a particular transition between communicating rooms, as defined both by the differently striated floor patterns and by the variously stepped silhouettes of the framing doorjamb structures that enter the composition from either side; and each portrays the latter pair of shapes in one of the colors of the spectrum, as figured in the “Lumine” paintings. Individual canvases are thus distinguished by location as well as hue. Yet even as they operate within this larger system, the two paintings included in the present exhibition, *Threshold, SouthEast — Two [spectrum : orange with grey]* and *Threshold, NorthWest — One [spectrum : violet with grey]*, both 2010–11, 2014, also appear meaningfully coupled. As the only pair within the suite to share identical dimensions and bracket forms alike, they are further differentiated from their siblings by their predominantly grey central zones and greater material density. Last but not least, they appear

uniquely attuned to prevailing conditions of lightness or darkness in the house, the former canvas appearing noticeably brighter than the latter—as if these two, among the six, were additionally tasked with locating larger thresholds of perceptibility.

Two other, closely related paintings then gather up anew what is elsewhere dispersed across the suite. *Threshold — Matrix : fragments [spectrum with grey]*, and *Threshold — Matrix : harbour [spectrum: transposed]*, both 2014–15, layer the linear armatures of all six “Thresholds” in one plane. In the former work, each structure reprises the dominant color of its respective canvas; while in the latter painting, it appears in that hue’s complementary. Although cast by Fish as an attempt to find the “skeletons” or the “innards” of pictures construed increasingly as fields, these canvases also appear indexed to a different kind of thickness, that of all the paintings’ co-presence in her mind—the ways in which, as she has repeatedly stressed, they “help one another out” in the studio. Yet even this reunion is in the interest of a further labor of articulation that shows the artist editing what she calls “redundant color,” so as to focus increasingly on the places where different armatures meet. Partner images of another sort, these paintings show us the thresholds internal to “Threshold,” the multiple crossings and divisions that define the whole.

Molly Warnock is an assistant professor in History of Art at Johns Hopkins University.

Published on the occasion of the exhibition
Threshold
March 19, 2015—April 25, 2015
David Nolan Gallery

: **JNL graphic design, Chicago.**
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Julia Fish received her BFA degree at Pacific Northwest College of Art, and her MFA degree at the Maryland Institute, College of Art. She has lived and worked in Chicago since 1985. Her paintings and drawings are included in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Yale University Art Gallery, The Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, and Illinois State Museum, Springfield.