

The background of the entire image is a close-up of the American flag, showing the stars and stripes. The flag has a heavy, cracked texture, similar to old paint or stone, with numerous fine, light-colored fissures running across the red, white, and blue sections. The text is overlaid on this textured background.

AMERICAN ANTHEM

BERNIE TAUPIN

anthem 1: a song or hymn of praise or gladness a patriotic anthem.
anthem 2: a usually rousing popular song that typifies or is identified with a particular subculture, movement, or point of view.
anthem 3: a psalm or hymn sung antiphonally or responsively.

In the novel “**Anthem**” by Ayn Rand, the protagonist finds a hidden tunnel and hides in it to write, solitude suits him. Cursed with terrific curiosity he becomes inventive. Creates what has not been created before. Society pushes back. The hero finds peace in his own confidence and creations.

Bernie Taupin is such a creative. Each with its own story.

While each of the approximately 50 works in the exhibition, “**Bernie Taupin - American Anthem**” have their individual merit and significance, a complete review experience, taking each artwork in context with others, one can begin to see a portion of the anthem of life created by Bernie Taupin.

***“A creative man is motivated by the desire to achieve,
not by the desire to beat others.” -Ayn Rand***

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BERNIE TAUPIN

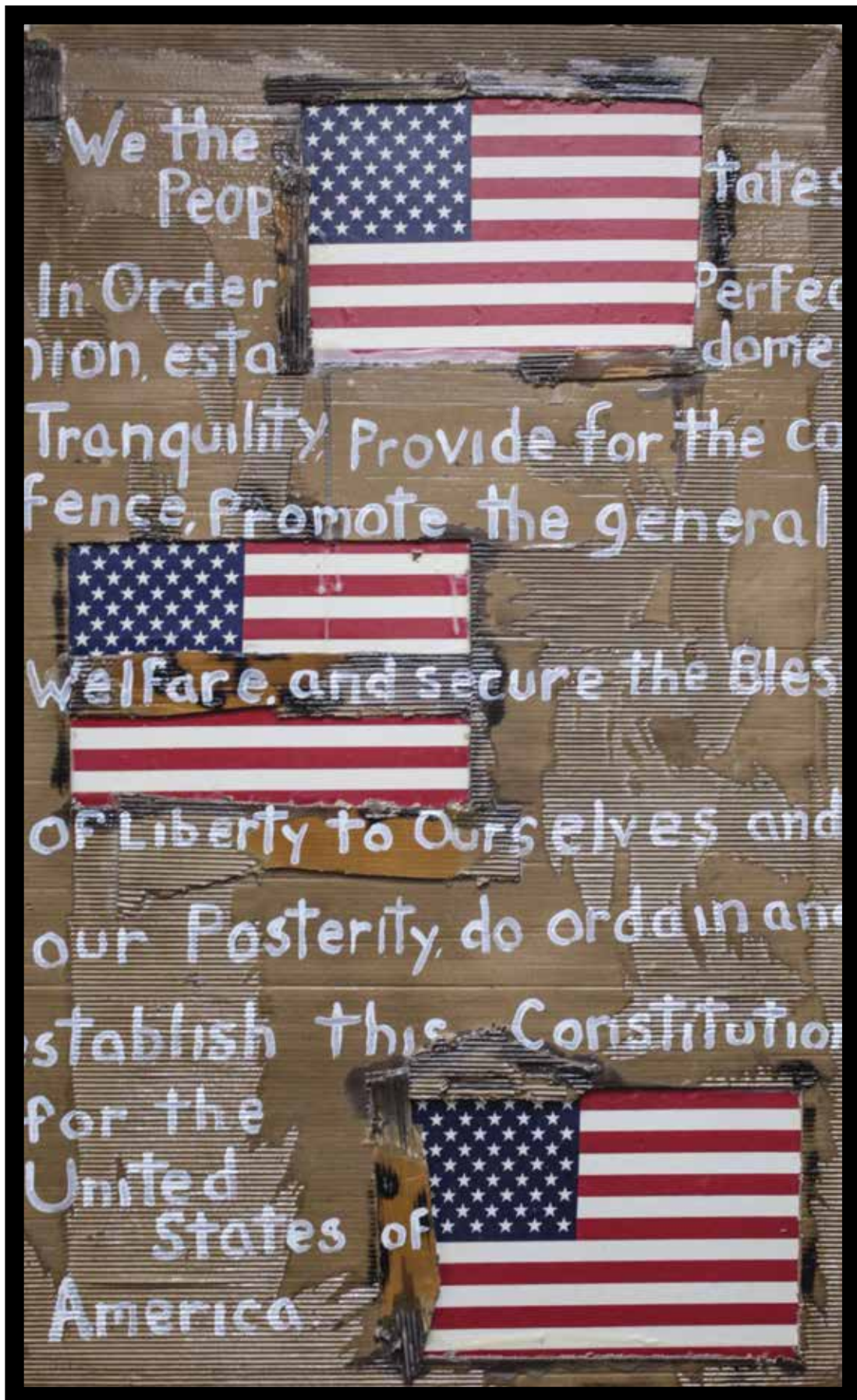
AMERICAN ANTHEM

February 2020 - August 2021

Museum of Biblical Art



Give Me Your Tired
2019



Fragment

2016



New Morning
2019



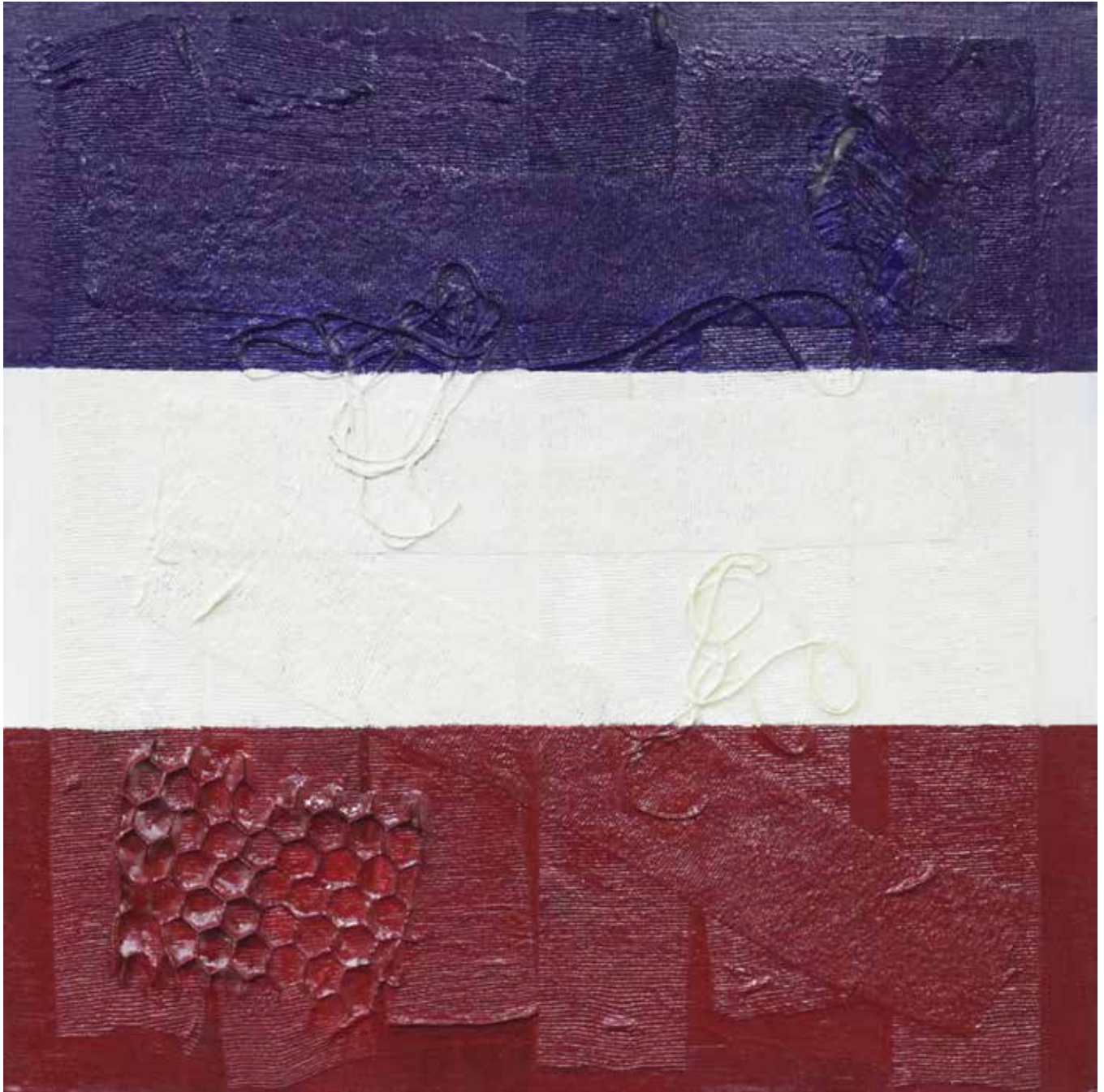
*From the Burning House
of Link Wray*
2017



Tragic Songs of Life
2019



Texas Lightnin'
2019



Ragged Glory II
2013

Bernie Taupin's Visual Anthem

by Richard Bailey

Bernie Taupin's lyrics have had a shaping influence on the culture for over fifty years. Probably his songs will be enjoyed and wondered about for another one hundred and fifty. And perhaps even longer than that. His lyrics have an appealing strangeness. They're often mysterious, but not hermetically resistant to interpretation. "Burn Down the Mission," for example, seems to involve spiritual or dreamlike situations. There are also enough details about resistance and survival distilled into the story that it seems to recount a historical occurrence. "Mission," like so many of his classic songs, is otherworldly, yet relatable.

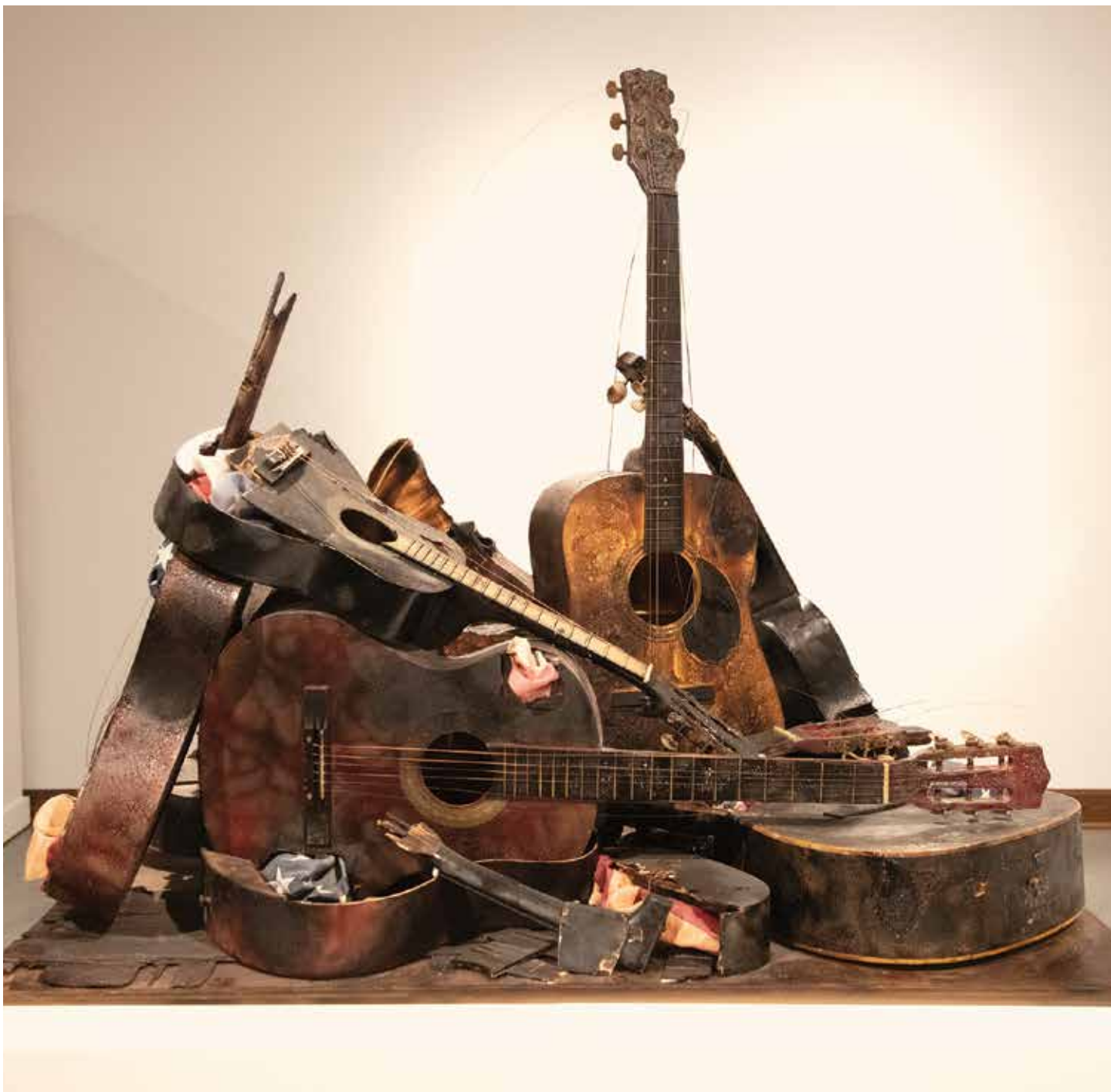
His relatability lies in the details. Spellbinding relationships between people and objects occur throughout Taupin's songs. Sparks light up in the imagination when his characters bring to hand the things in their milieu. Or else lose the things they once held on to. Here are just a few of the luminous details: "It's time we put the flame torch to their keep"; "Levon sells balloons"; "She's quite safe up far away in her eiderdown"; "Poor little darling with a chip out of her heart"; "Where were all your shoulders when we cried?"; "You can't plant me in your penthouse / I'm going back to my plow." He has such facility with people and objects that his involvement in a visual medium seems an inevitability rather than an exception to his art in song.

Taupin's visual art is forceful. Many of his pieces involve shards of wood, broken guitars, blocky, hand-painted letter forms, items wrapped around with barbed wire and places scorched and blistered with a blow torch. Rather than to seem rough and ornery, there is tremendous generosity in Taupin's art. He arranges objects in a way that invites the viewer to move around the work in the same way he did while he was making it. Essentially, an invitation to share a space with him and to admire the things that he admires. The majority of work celebrates people and ideals that have influenced him. There are art historical references to Robert Rauschenberg, Clyfford Still and Jasper Johns, among others. But Taupin's methodology seems mostly to be an homage to the unique roadside images that crop up along small highways and farm roads.

Roadside images can seem both otherworldly and deeply familiar. The improvisational constructions of farmers and ranchers and the expressive messages of gate builders and sign painters have folkloric qualities. Taupin invests these qualities into his own art. He's keenly aware that objects out of folklore say as much about the future of a place as they say about the past.

The sculpture *Excavating State Street, Bristol Tennessee* is like an altar in a fabled ruin. Bristol has been called the “Big Bang” of country music, and indeed the sculpture looks as though a bomb recently went off. Several hurt guitars are piled up. There is one that stands upright, scorched but resilient. It is the designated mourner, a tower of hope and remembrance. In 1998, Congress declared Bristol the birthplace of country music. Perhaps that congressional act is signaled by the U.S. flags that poke through the broken places of the guitars like strange fluorescence. The sculpture’s scorched state and partial flags suggest the hollowed rubble at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building and the World Trade Center. The guitars in *Excavating State Street* have lost their strings and are silent. But they’re still recognizable as guitars; their curves remain the embodiment of song. The funerary sense of this sculpture is given a national scale for the appearance of the flags. That the flags seem to be blooming in wounded places suggest the possibility of enrichment after loss. The viewer might abhor what happened to the guitars, but might also feel some sense of purpose in the flags.





Excavating State Street, Bristol, Tennessee
2020

The assembly *Mother Maybelle Hears The Angels Sing* also features a dead guitar body with a blooming flag. This time the flag seems to be leaving the guitar like a spirit. The painting appears to carry an eschatological message, news about the ultimate destiny of God's creation, including a future for people beyond death and human history. The Maybelle in the title is probably Maybelle Carter, a singer with the legendary country music group The Carter Family, and an innovative guitarist. There's an old timey "washed in the blood" religious quality to some of The Carter Family songs, and the flags in this assembly may be taken to refer to the moment in which the human and historical are, at once, set in crisis and in glory by the divine eternity impinging on this world.

No Left Turn at Babylon (page 12) also situates the U.S. flag in a deeply complex religious cosmology. A crucible of experience is suggested by the artist's use of a blow torch. Again, the flag suggests some future regeneration. Its state is altered by experience, but perhaps one day it will be made stronger by its trials. The Babylon in the title refers to the Babylonian captivity of Judah, which is the situation behind the book of Exodus. To put it generally, a religious mediation on exile involves symbolic thinking about social, moral, and cultural displacement and the dominance of false powers and values. Although it is unlikely that Taupin intends to make religious art, he is very clearly concerned with the problems facing "aliens" in the dominant culture. He moved to Southern California from England in the mid-1970s and became a U.S. citizen in 1990. His heroes are the originators and innovators of American roots music. These musicians are often fascinatingly out of step with mainstream culture, and yet their rhythms and words have ancient qualities and evoke a sense of homecoming.

As a lyricist, Taupin has the gift to express the paradigm of faith and exile in the American roots tradition for what could amount to several albums of songs. But the impulse to explore these ideas physically is stronger. His art is highly expressive, with lots of pieces strongly adhered together. His preference for these materials attests to his willingness to work hard with his hands. When text is employed, the letterforms more often appear as painterly elements than expository ones. Taupin is calling our attention to the art of written gesture. And he has clearly thought about the craft of itinerant sign painters, artisans who reckon with the problem of shaping language onto a limited surface.

The assembly titled *Fragment* (page 2) recalls the hand painted street signs you'd see posted on a fading town square. The letters run edge to edge with interruptions from three painted flags. The language is the charged language of the U.S. Constitution, but there's



Mother Maybelle Hears the Angels Sing
2019



No Left Turn at Babylon
2015

scarcely enough room to fulfill an idea of it on the sign. How many of us can fill in from memory the missing text? Whether we might do so entirely or only in bits, the painting prompts us into a mode of interpretation. *Fragment's* hand painted letters express innocence. They are simple and touching, but also provocative for the way that words are cut off. This expression of innocence left exposed to misinterpretation and elided by hard boundaries is a way for Taupin to explore the allusive (and elusive) quality of the American dream.

Taupin's dreamy song lyrics and his action-oriented visual art may seem like a sort of creative dualism. It's tempting to put Taupin on the couch, as it were, and wonder what's going on. A familiar analytical mode is to dissect a person's language and actions. Language can often feel like an alternative to action. The perception that words are less than deeds is a situation Shakespeare explores in *Hamlet* and Beckett explores in all his plays. But it's useful to remember that Taupin is always transforming situations from the past into ensuing possibilities. In his songs, ancient occupations like revolution, prophecy, sex work and cosmic wonder are put in contemporary language that trends toward future interpretations. Consider how these occupations are treated, respectively, in the songs "Burn Down the Mission," "Levon," "All The Girls Love Alice," and "Rocket Man." There's a quality to these songs that draws on old symbols, a quality that ties them to the time that they were written in, and a quality that casts them forward like messages in bottles for future audiences.

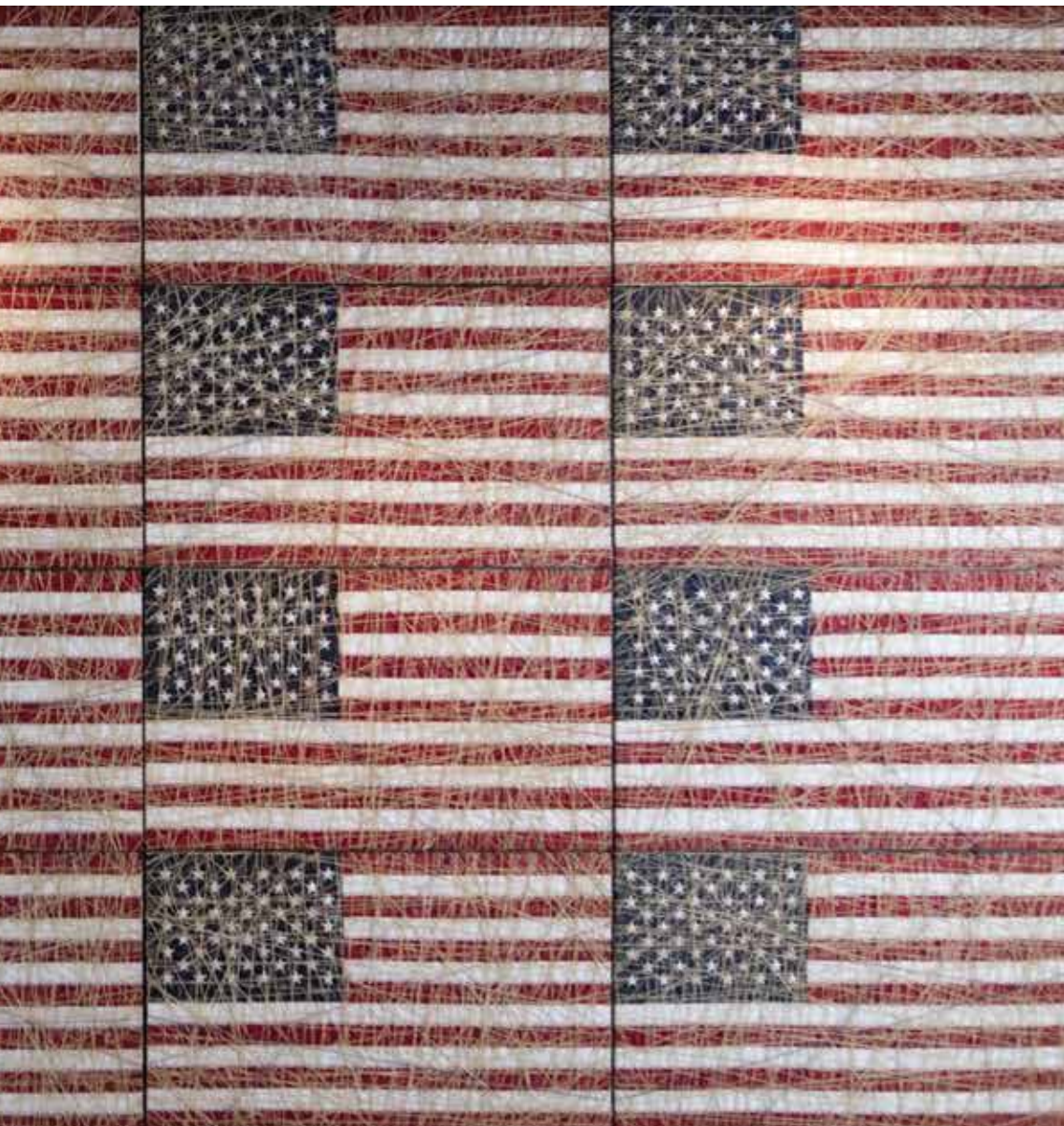
Ezra Pound famously described this situation of art staying relevant from antiquity into the future as news that stays news. In his visual art work, Taupin endeavors to unite language and deed, also past situations and future ones. His chief image for doing this is the U.S. flag. Unlike Jasper Johns, he doesn't explore the flag as a pattern. For Taupin, the flag is a charged image. And unlike Hamlet's problem and those of Beckett's characters, words and deeds are not in doubt of having equal impact in Taupin's art—at least not in art that features the flag. The means by which the flag exists both as a banner and the very essence of the United States is a mystery rather like the mystery of the eucharist. There is consensus among the faithful that somehow the flag is a material creation and the embodied humanity of the country. Whether it is hallowed in ceremony or treated roughly in protest, the flag, both as image and embodiment, is a means through which news of the U.S. stays news. In the case of Taupin's art, the flag is a material that offers a future tense for old glories.

The assembly called *The Wall* is massive, 25' by 12'. It features twenty U.S. flags laid flat, each one with twine running across it. In biblical numerology, the number twenty implies a period of waiting. Jacob, a fugitive and dreamer deeply in love, has to wait twenty years to marry Rachel in the book of Genesis. It should be reiterated that Taupin probably doesn't intend strictly religious interpretation of his art. The numerology connection is mentioned because of a coincidence with the larger title of this assembly: it is part of Taupin's *Sleeping Beauty* series, which involves various explorations of the U.S. flag. In the folk tale, Sleeping Beauty dreams and waits until she can be awakened with a kiss. A kiss is a deeply romantic gesture and in mythology may also symbolize a promise or prayerful intercession. The taut twine in the art work recalls another famous sleeper, Gulliver, who in Swift's novel is tied down in his sleep by Lilliputians, a population that views him as a menacing giant.



The point is not to conform these narratives into an interpretation of The Wall, but rather to bring together certain details from these legends that are applicable in a discussion about the assembly: intrepidity; enchantment; and enormity. These are three states of being that exist within the art work. And one other detail from those stories applies as well—promise. There is God’s promise to Jacob, the promise of reawakening for Sleeping Beauty and Gulliver’s promise to work peacefully with the Lilliputians. The Wall looms like a large impediment, but it also signals the promise of freedom within a republic. For an immigrant intent on a life in the U.S. the journey can present the same effect, the sense that one is facing a barrier and a promise.

This sort of paradox is at the heart of all of Taupin’s visual art. He shows an incorrigible commitment to synthesis and tension: the near/far relationships of images and words, language and deeds. The art is highly demonstrative and conveys a restless dreamer’s journey down to the roots and fringes of the U.S.A.



The Wall

2020

20 artworks arranged
in a specific pattern,
connected by red-white-
blue colored cords

12 ft x 25 ft



Norman Rockwell Cried Last Night
2015



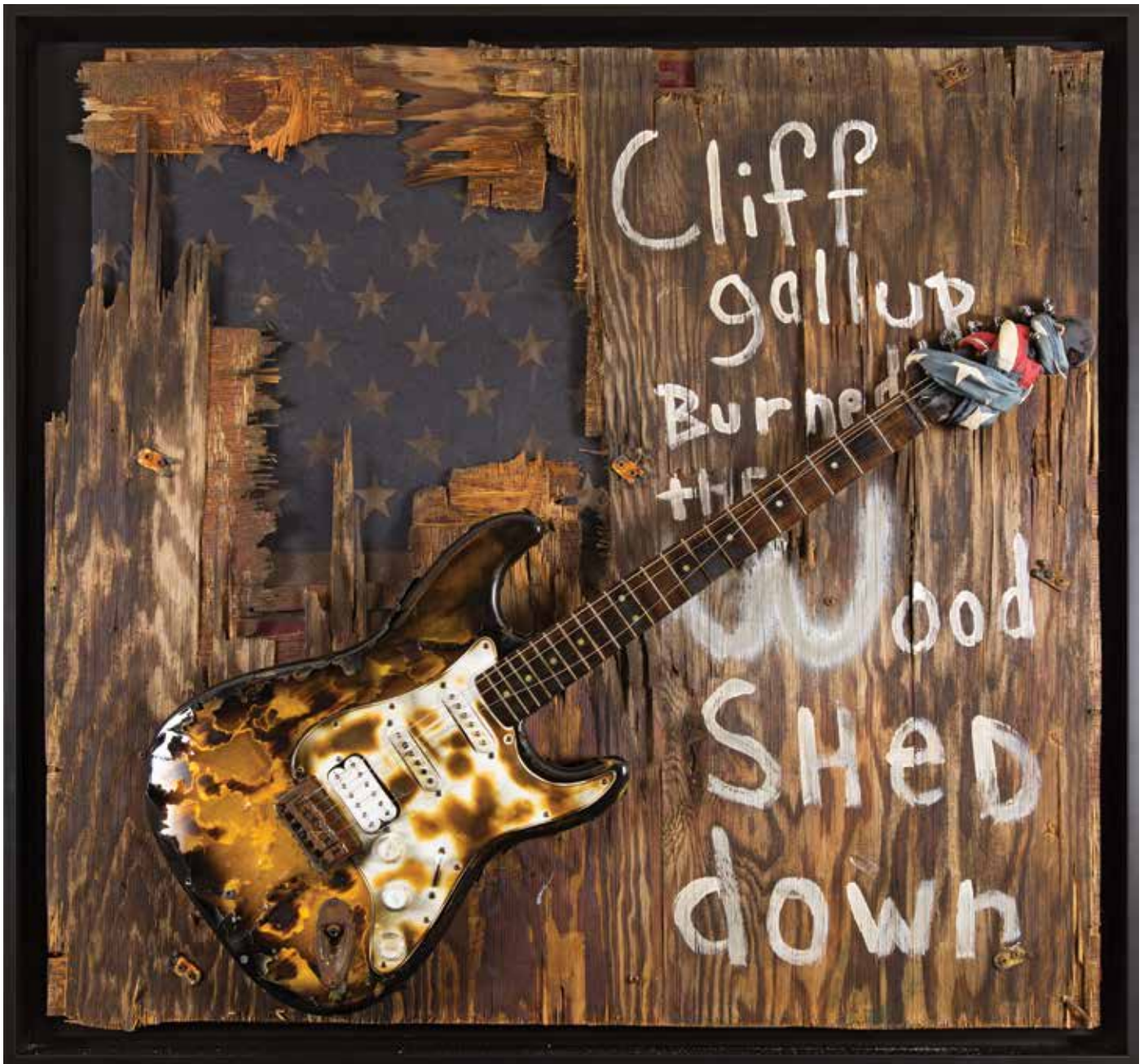
When Woody Guthrie Left Oklahoma
2015



Hillbilly Medicine
2019



Clear Lake '59
2019



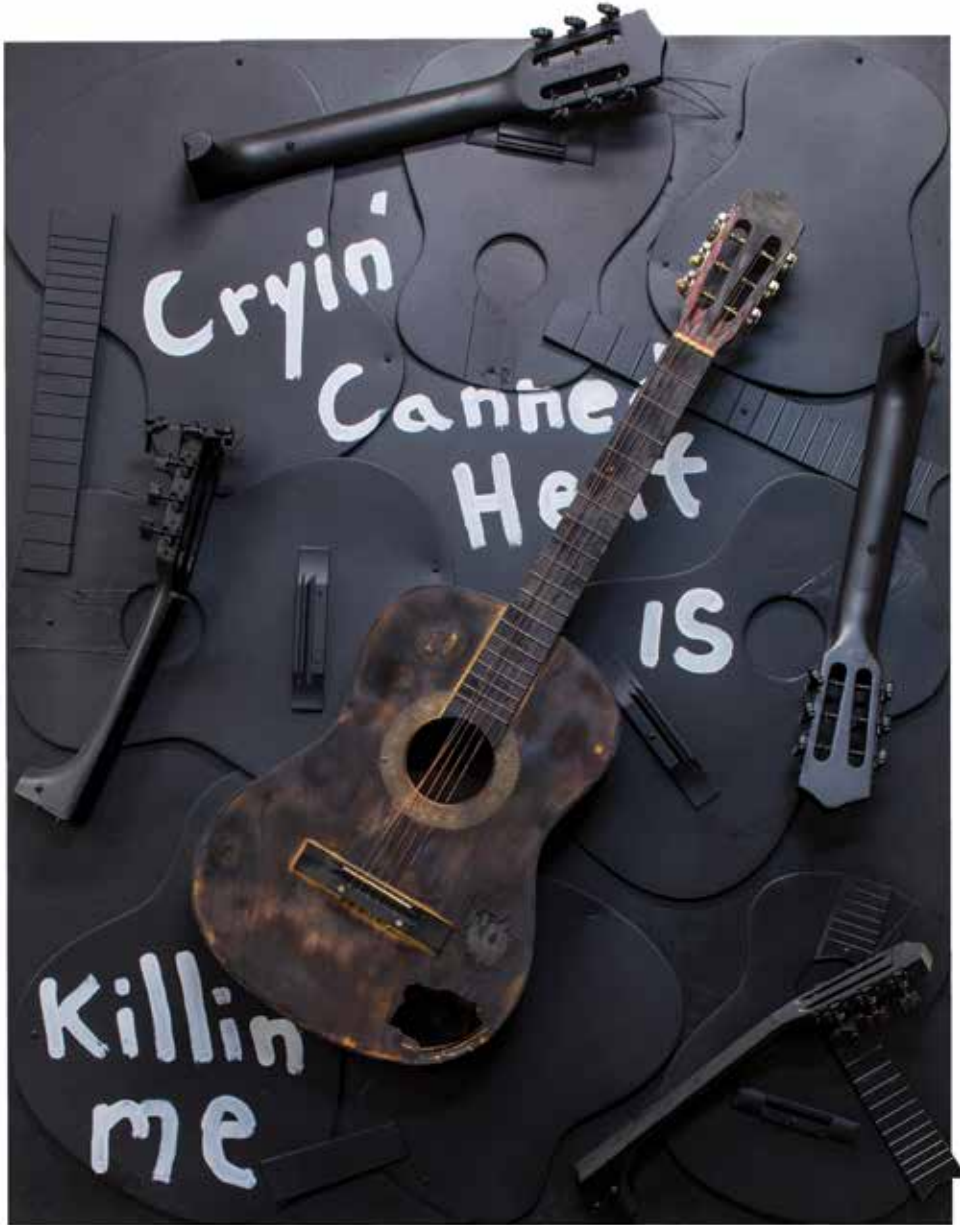
Cliff Gallup Burned the Wood Shed Down
2019



Haggard
2019



Born Blind
2019

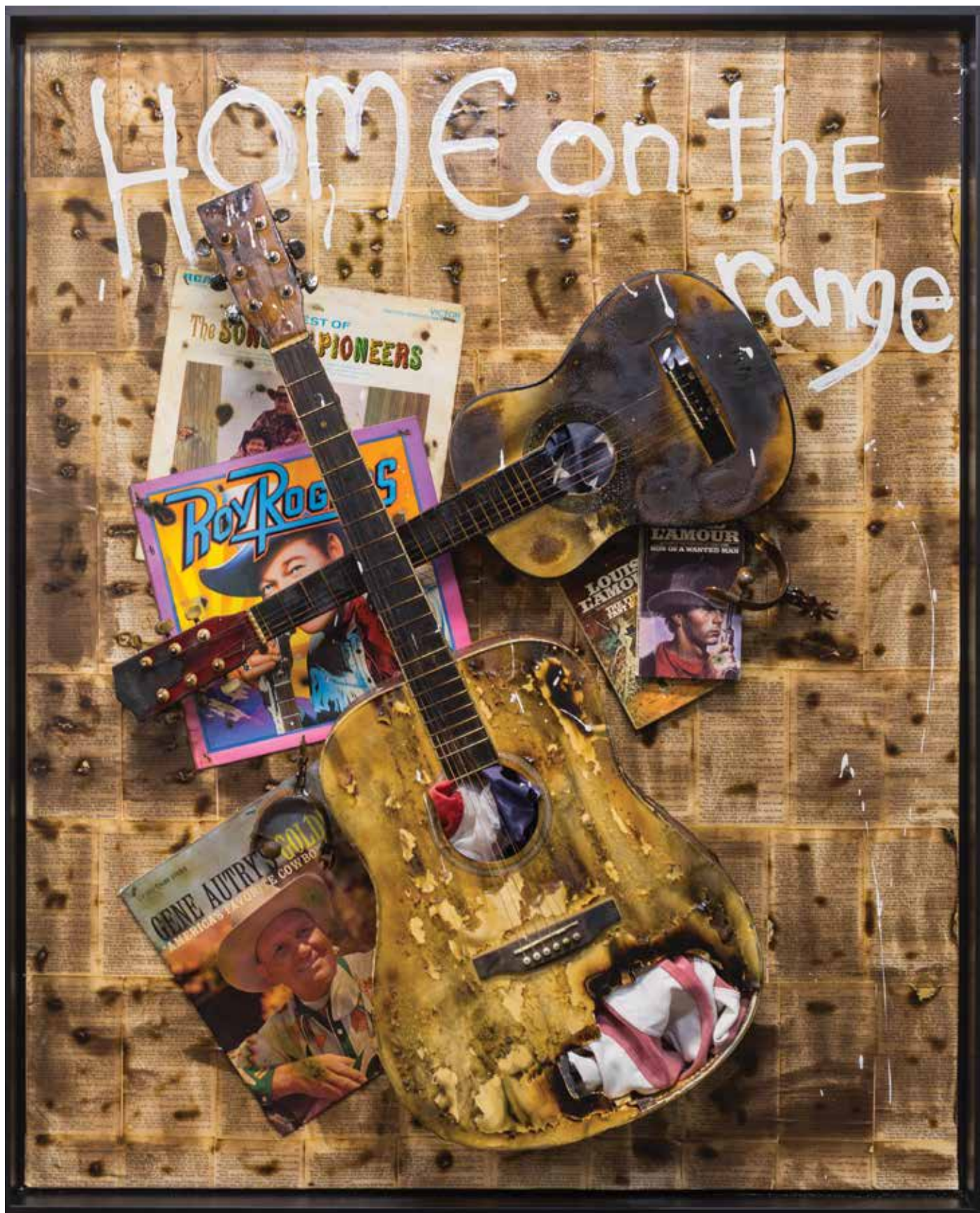


Canned Heat
2019





*Corn Liquor and
Mothballs*
2019



Home on the Range
2020

I saw a young cowboy, all dressed in white linen
(Marty Robbins, Nashville 1960)

[My mother] was a huge influence on me - on a literary and artistic level. Even when I was a small child, she would sit me down on her knee and show me books with pictures by Turner and Gauguin, so I was very much in tune with art in general, whether it be visual or audio. It was always in the back of my mind.
(Bernie Taupin, Nashville 2013)

From White to Green: A Brief Introduction to the Visual Art of Bernie Taupin

by David MacFadyen

Bernie Taupin attributes his earliest creative impulse to three sources: “My Mother set me on the right track; Marty Robbins made me want to write songs; and Jesus Christ did the rest.” Thus a young man, raised in rural Lincolnshire, expresses enduring gratitude not only for his family and faith, but also for the distant sounds of Arizona. Marty Robbins was born in Phoenix, but would go on to find considerable renown on the silver screen, on NASCAR circuits – and even on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry. A young boy in post-war England dreamed of Robbins’ America via song and cinema, as did so many children of the time. To this day Taupin declares a love for the conventions of the American Western, whilst also admitting to being a Civil War buff.

That imaginary landscape, scarred by dust storms or cannon fire, would then reverberate with a very British kind of thunder:

One of the first things I remember is sitting on my mother’s knee looking at J.M.W. Turner pictures in this big book she had. What appealed to me was not so much a sense of the art, but rather a sense of the adventure within the art. I had a very fertile imagination and didn’t play rudimentary childhood games. I would invent my own scenarios. And Turner’s paintings were so vivid, you know, with a lot of sea battles...
 (“The Harmony of Music and Art,” New York)

These objects of desire, positioned far from home, took a composite form in painting, popular music, and movies: “I grew up in a place without even seeing what would [nowadays] be called a major town. It was culturally vapid - so anything I saw visually, I saw in books. My mother loved Turner, so he was the first artist I remember.” That oft-quoted maternal influence led to an early, yet enduring admiration for the prime visionary of English Romanticism. Despite being strange bedfellows, Turner and Robbins then became a single lyric voice coming from *somewhere* beyond modern urbanization. Both the Industrial Revolution (1760-1820) and America’s post-war economic boom (1954-1960) fostered the kind of abstract, elusive values that were painfully absent in a



Snow White's Guitar
2019

world of steel and smoke. Taupin was saddened by modernity's triteness from an early age; he has admitted to voluntarily reciting substantial sections of Tennyson at school – and to enacting playground scenes from Walter Scott's "Marmion" (1808).

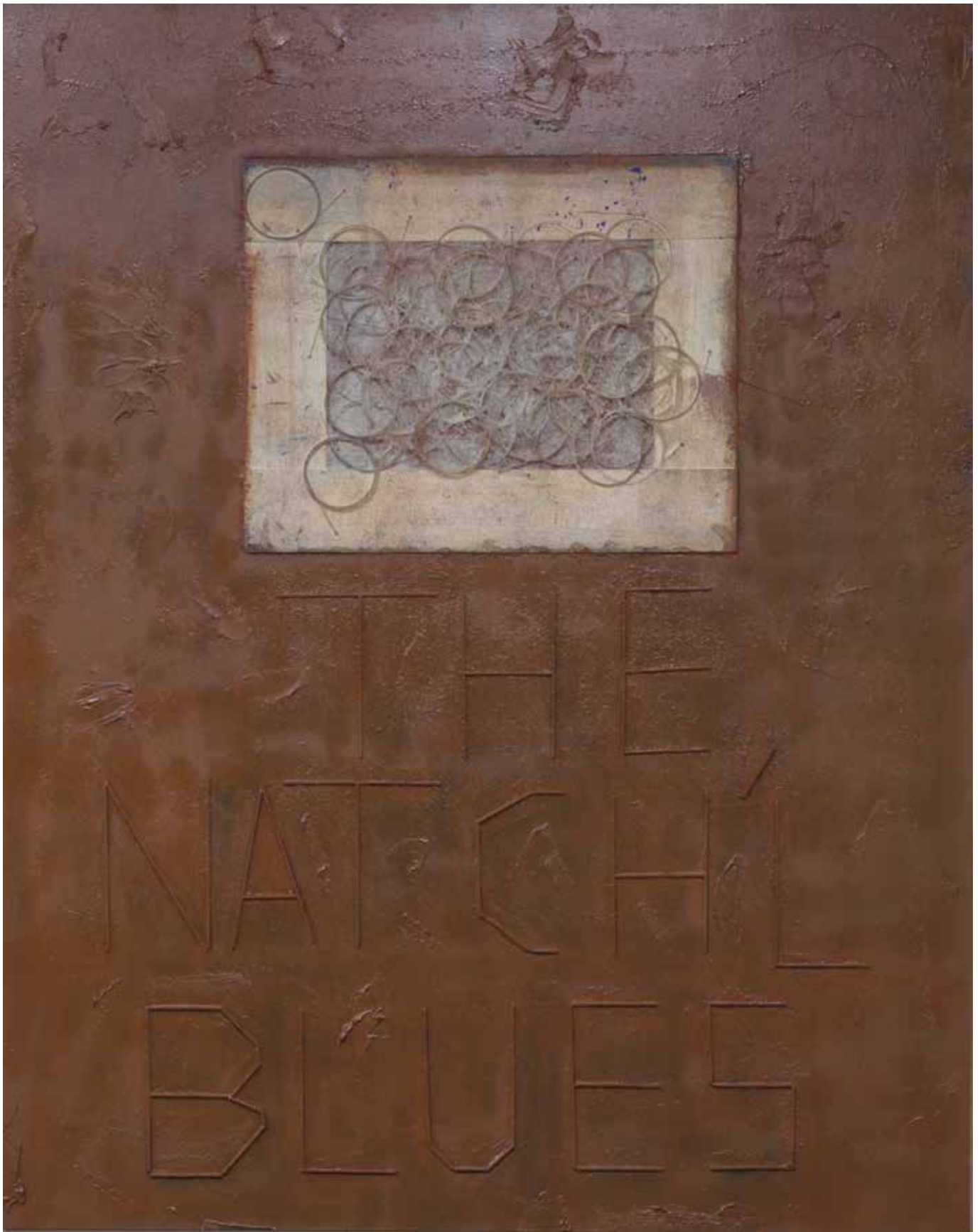
Taupin now recalls that his first paintings were equally "big and noisy," not only as a result of a particularly British idealism, but also under the additional and welcome influence of Hans Hoffman. Romantic literature, country music, and abstract impressionism found common ground. Inspiration – from all those sources – quickly trumped anything resembling deliberation: a "straight-from-the tube intensity" fueled Taupin's first visual experiments. "Painting is much like writing a song," he remarked. "It's a lyrical thing. A lot of people find my lyrics obscure to a certain point, and I like to create art that will also allow people to use their imaginations." A modern romance, touched equally by daydreams of Arizona and Ayrshire, began slowly to foreground things immaterial.

This distinctive blend of Nashville melancholy and Caledonian sorrow would continue as Taupin's commitment to abstractionism also evolved. One interview of 2012 contains important memories of – and gratitude for – "Rothko and de Kooning, Clyfford Still, and Ellsworth Kelly." In the same year, another conversation celebrates the overt lyricism of Helen Frankenthaler together with "Anselm Kiefer, Hans Hofmann, Paul Gauguin... and the Looney Tunes Guys." Taupin even remembers his first and joyful response to Hoffman's formal deconstructions: "*That's what I want to do. Those are the colors.*" Nonrepresentational color fields were an escape from the crudity of common form – including language. Turner would have approved.

Hans Hofmann and Anselm Kiefer were certainly early influences, Hofmann for his fearless use of basic colors and Kiefer for the complexity of his mediums... I'm also a huge fan of abstract expressionism from the '40s, '50s and '60s, including all the usual suspects. The pop art movement also included some wonderfully imaginative and creative individuals, including Warhol, whom I've always admired simply for the fact that no one ever called him a painter: He was always simply an artist. ("Composing Art," Miami)

Mingling Hoffman's chromatic measures and Kiefer's witty critique of commercialism, Taupin has continued – in the tradition of English metaphysical poetry, perhaps – to apply that same wit to material drudgery. His Anglo-American romantic quest sounds clearest in those moments when Taupin appends simple binarisms to his craft. Imagination is juxtaposed with carnal existence; nonfigurative colors are contrasted with verbal monotony. Bernie Taupin the poet and the painter occupy similar spaces – and together participate in a search for the sublime. The spirits of J.W. Turner and Marty Robbins remain central in that search.

A canvas to me is simply the visual extension of what I have spent my life creating through words. The imagination, in my estimation, is the most powerful tool the artist possesses – enabling us to conjure up a beautiful distraction for the ears and eyes. I have no formula except that which comes from what I dream, feel and see. To me colors are like words... they express emotions... Likewise, texture and mediums display an abundance of moods. ("A Conversation," Los Angeles)



The Natch'l Blues
2010

The most important year in this growing “abundance” was arguably 1970, specifically when Bernie Taupin and colleague Elton John happened to be in New York. A young man was shot outside their hotel, and the lyricist decided to take emotional refuge from such violence in the Museum of Modern Art. Mid-century abstraction proved both a consoling alternative to tragedy and spawned numerous potential, positive ideas. Any visual projects in the future, Taupin resolved, should try and express that which remains frustratingly invisible in the world – without recourse to crude directness.

Given Taupin’s long-standing fondness for Gerhard Richter, it’s worth recalling the German’s belief that superior visual performance should declare its immediate “divorce from [brusque, and logocentric] government.” Romance should be kept at arm’s length from policy and pragmatism, at which point we also enter the realm of Vladimir Nabokov’s assertion that: “A work of art has no importance whatever to society. It is only important to the individual.”

Taupin admits to the significance of verbally, precisely titling his canvases, yet beyond that initial phrasing, he hopes mainly to prompt subjective interpretation. The canvases’ intent is to have no singular intention; they belong to no one concept, term, or trend. The painter’s ideal gradually becomes synonymous with pure individuality – with nameless difference. The material art of contemporary shoptalk is contrasted with blissfully abstract vagaries; a late twentieth-century Romanticism inhabits nonfigurative enterprise. Nothing is home to individual dignity. “I want people to look into the paintings and find what they want in them.”

The colorful romance of inexactitude is then soundtracked by the sounds of a Lincolnshire boyhood (again). “There are colors that symbolize jazz. I think there are colors that symbolize old time country music. I don’t say the darker colors symbolize jazz and blues, but the darker [they are], the more complex the color and the music. [For] the brighter, more ‘straight-out-of-the-tube’ stuff, I’d probably be listening to the Louvin Brothers or George Jones.” Jazz and country complement one another. Wynton Marsalis famously contended that jazz improvisation “teaches you about yourself.” In which case country, perhaps, offers tales of consolation when any such freedom is curbed. Whenever Taupin engages a new canvas, he usually does to the *contrasting* sounds of “jazz or blues... with the occasional spin of classic country.” Freedom and failure inhabit the same realm - as romance and reality. Together they create what Taupin has called a “deeper style of muted exuberance,” the confluence of joyfulness and ennui.

This demand that human idiosyncrasy be given an empty, nameless space of its own on the canvas is not just a linguistic or chromatic issue; it also takes has a formal consequence, sometimes by way of Jackson Pollock’s drip paintings. Taupin says of such artists: “It’s very gratifying to know that there are people out there that can’t be fenced in, because it is frustrating to see how many great artists did stay within the box of one style.” Any display of freedom within formal, generic, or even philosophical limitations becomes vital. “People say all musical genres have been exhausted, but there are always



Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory

2013

some more chords that will work together, and you can say the same thing about art.” An unidentified, vacant space is the home of manifold, unique meanings. It houses an ideal and noiseless multiplicity.

I really loved the fact that these [abstract impressionist] paintings made you think... using your eyes to figure it out. When people ask me today what something means, whether it's a song or a piece of art, my feeling is, what does it mean to you? (“Lyrical Abstractions,” Nashville)

Taupin’s love for the eccentricity and vivacity of abstraction sounds loudest in discussions of Vasily Kandinsky. “Music is the ultimate teacher,” said Kandinsky... [and] I’m not about to argue. Music and art are impossibly combined. They both come from creative thought: one visual, one sonic.”

Kandinsky’s corpus, over and above any synesthetic representation of tones, chords, or frequencies, was also shaped by a spiritual drive. It spoke of art’s transformational powers – both privately and publically. Taupin’s catalog may not be overtly religious in tone, but it is undoubtedly futural. Put differently, he speaks of the “creative *process*” when invoking Kandinsky, and that noun is key. It validates future movement over current stasis, flux over formal permanence, and – as a result – humility (if not spirituality) over material hubris. No claim is made to long-term, clearly defined status or significance.

Kandinsky’s theory of “inner necessity” is echoed in Taupin’s credo; a claim made in 1910 that creative gestures should, ideally, display a triple “obligation.” They must express pure subjectivity, the artist’s epoch, and the abiding “cause of art.” Put differently, there persists a moral obligation to the future. It is a pressing desire to discover free space in life for the ineffable or unfathomable. That ideal, as we see, took both audible and visible forms for Bernie Taupin.

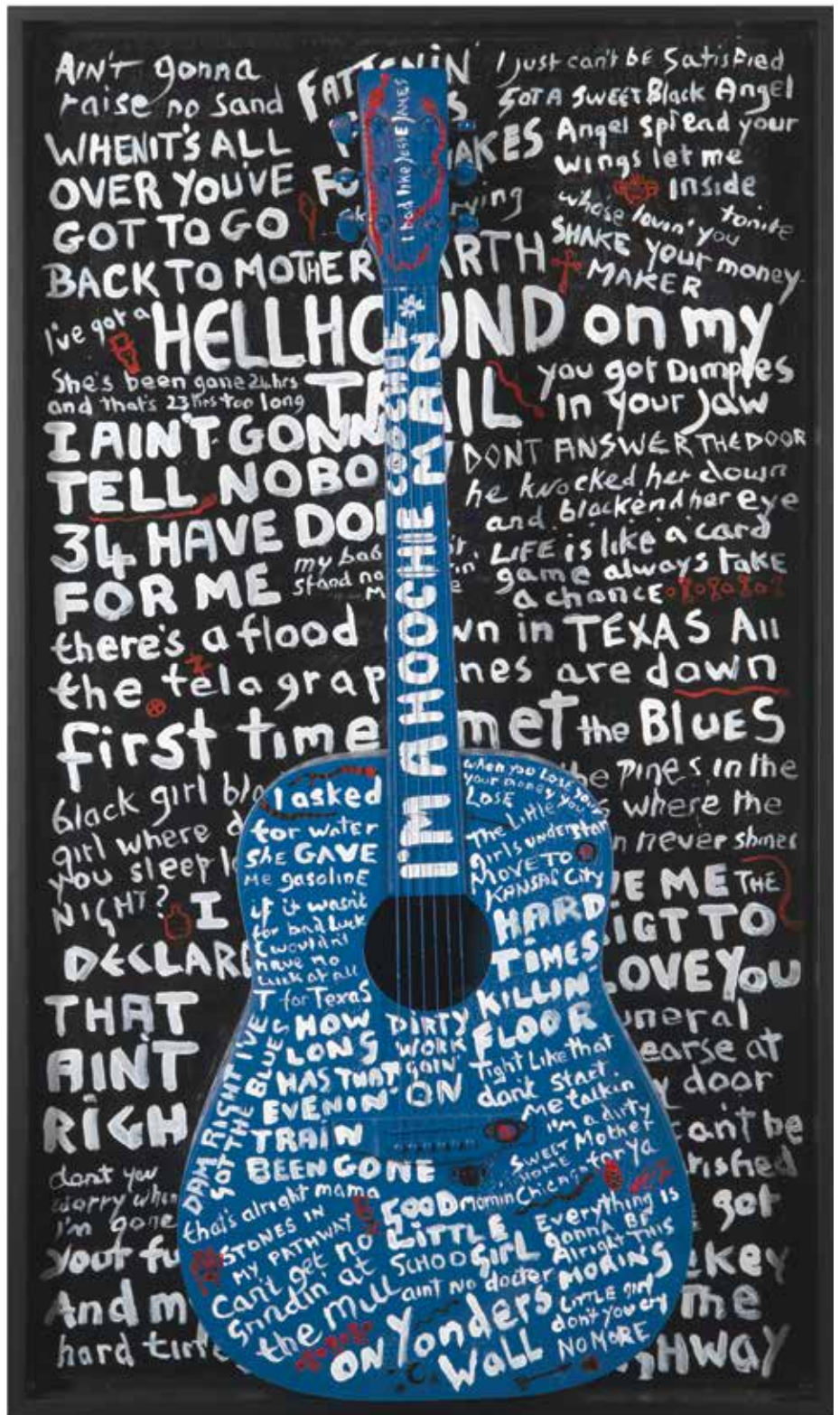
The color white, in Kandinsky’s “Principle of Inner Necessity” was often tied to the adjective *svetlyi*, meaning both “radiant” and “spiritual.” The Russian, in actuality, wrote of white space as both a “*non-color*” and “something that sounds like silence. A silence that might become comprehensible – all of a sudden.” Space, stillness, and lightness here embody *potential*. They allow freely imagined movement towards a perfection that’s associated by Taupin and Kandinsky with idiosyncrasy. And, as something unwritten or unnamed, that same ideal uniqueness can potentially mean *anything*.

Bernie Taupin’s artwork, initiated both by Turner’s stormy Romanticism and the sandstorms of America’s West, continues to demarcate a place of promising, even spiritual tranquility. It still gazes fondly at Marty Robbins’ “young cowboy, all dressed in white linen” – who himself stubbornly dreams of a heavenly “green valley,” even as he dies from a gunshot wound. The physical world may conclude with a brutal clash of forms, but an ideal perseveres. It is always located somewhere else, in a quiet, radiant, and nameless space.



Deconstruction Blues
2020





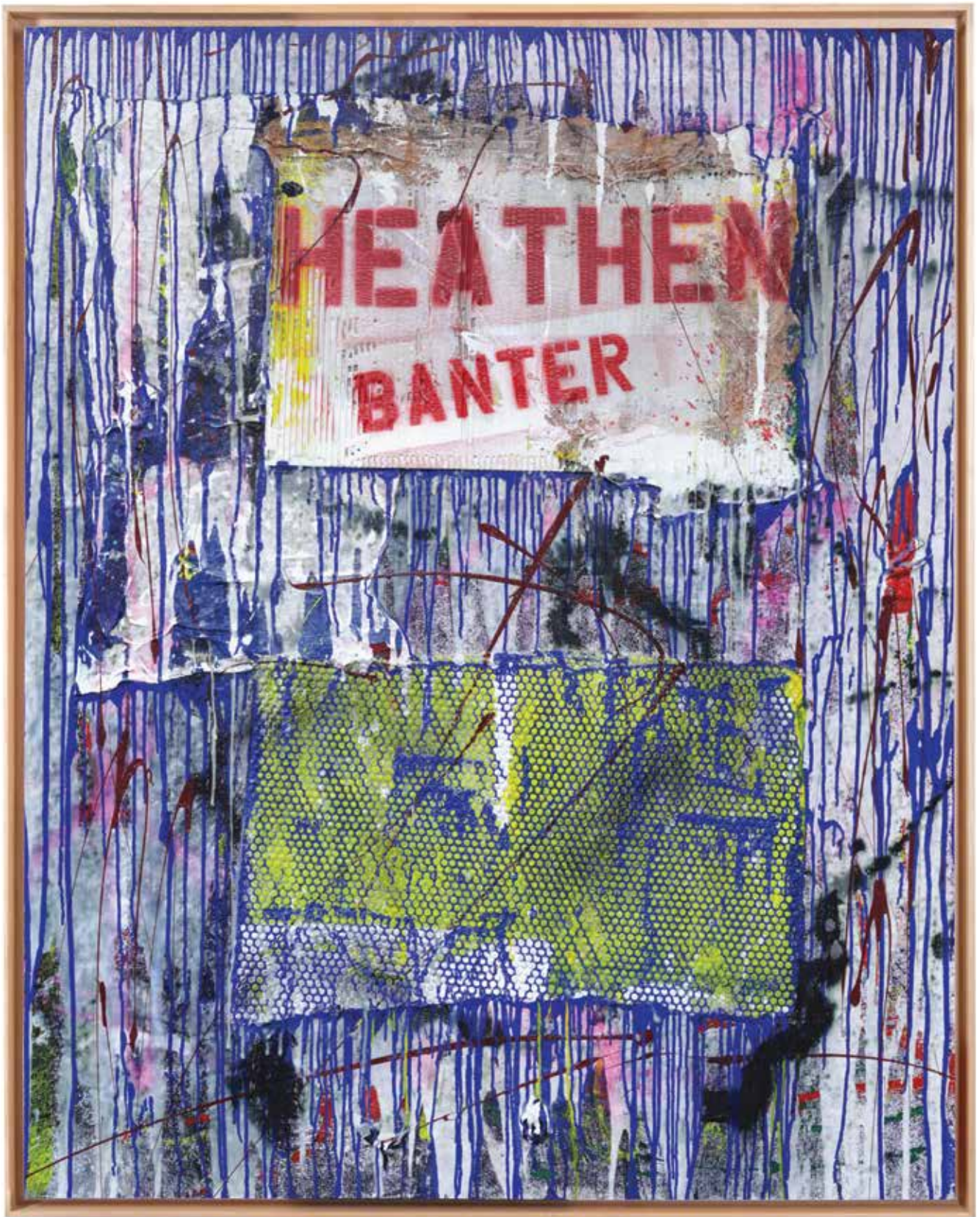
Graffiti Blues
2019



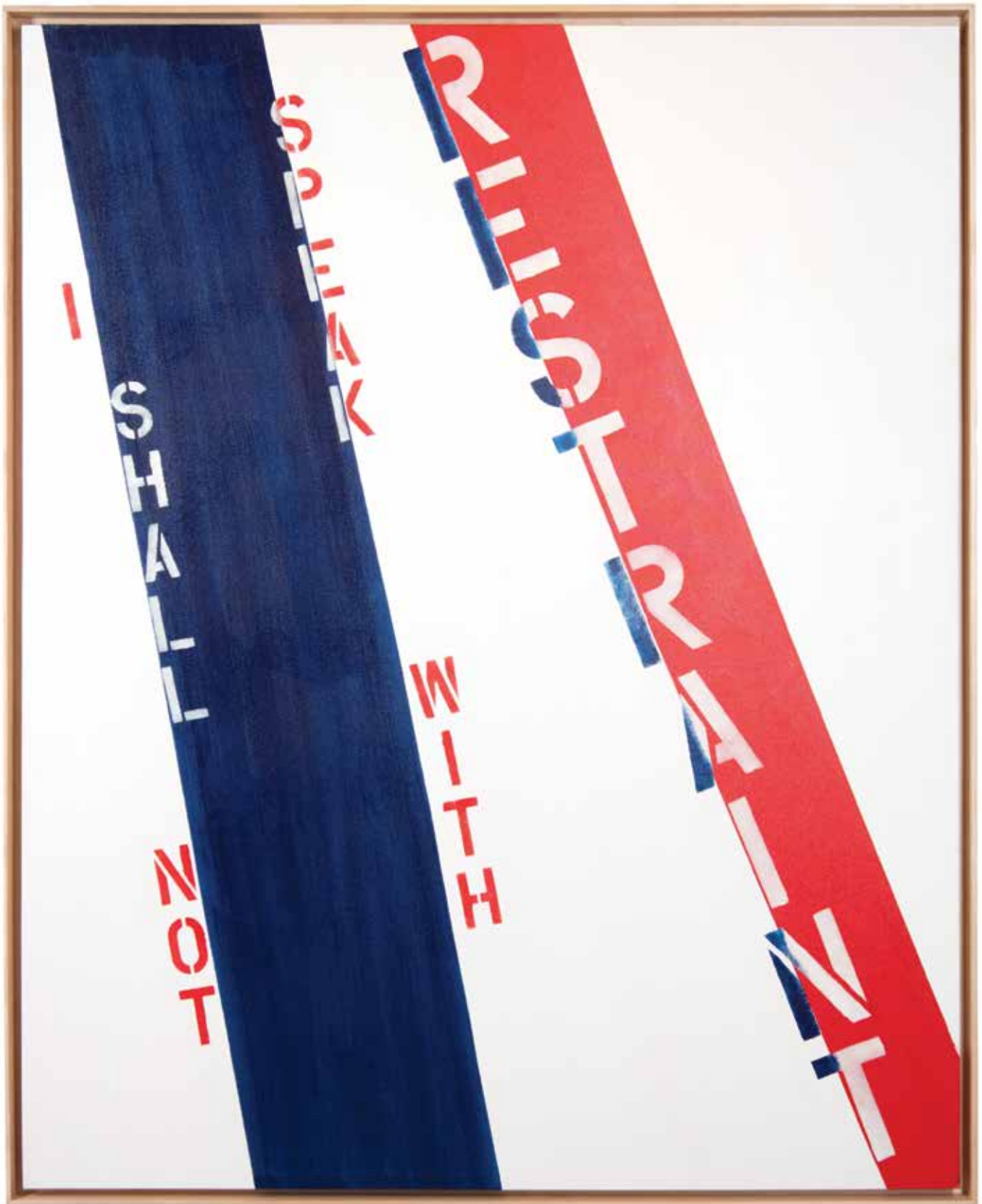
Don't Go Into The Woods
2018



*Det Nobis Mentem
(Give Us Back Our Minds)
2011*



Heathen Banter
2015



I Shall Not Speak With Restraint
2013



Exit and Entry
2015



Mondo Politco
2017



Collateral Damage
2020



The Political Divide of Don and Phil
2020

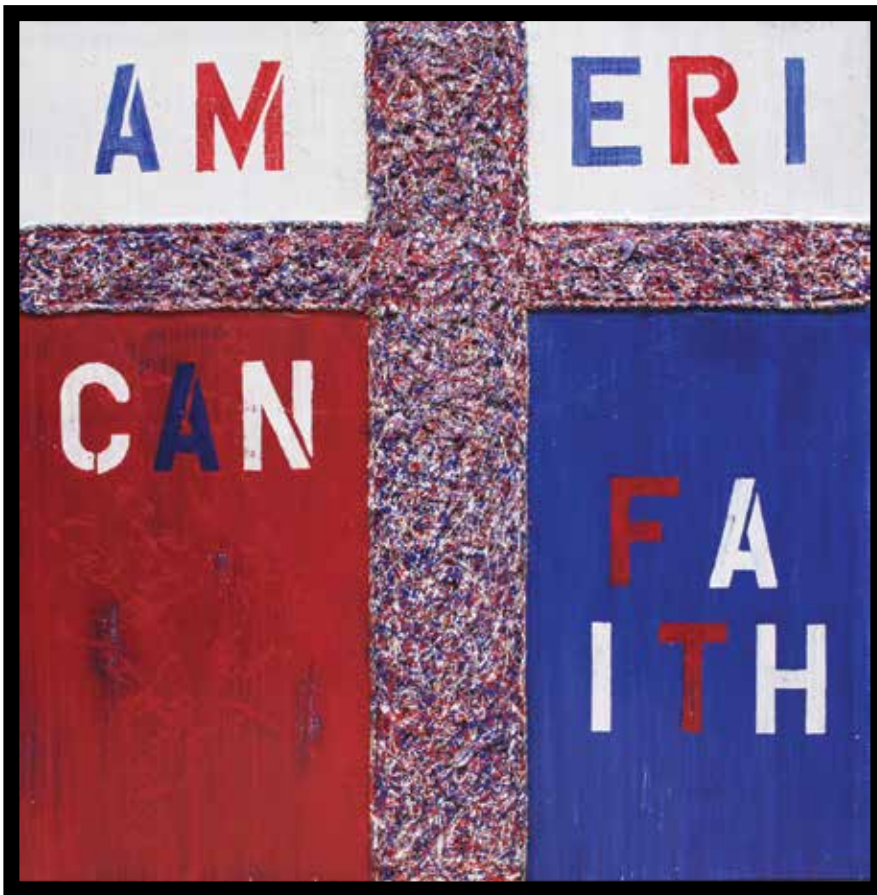


Trippin' With Fonda
2020





Acoustic Calvary
2020



American Faith
2013



Noah
2012

Jesus Surfed
2014





Chaplin
2013



Straitjacket
2016



From Batman to Minneapolis
2016



Bleeker Street '61 & '62
2019



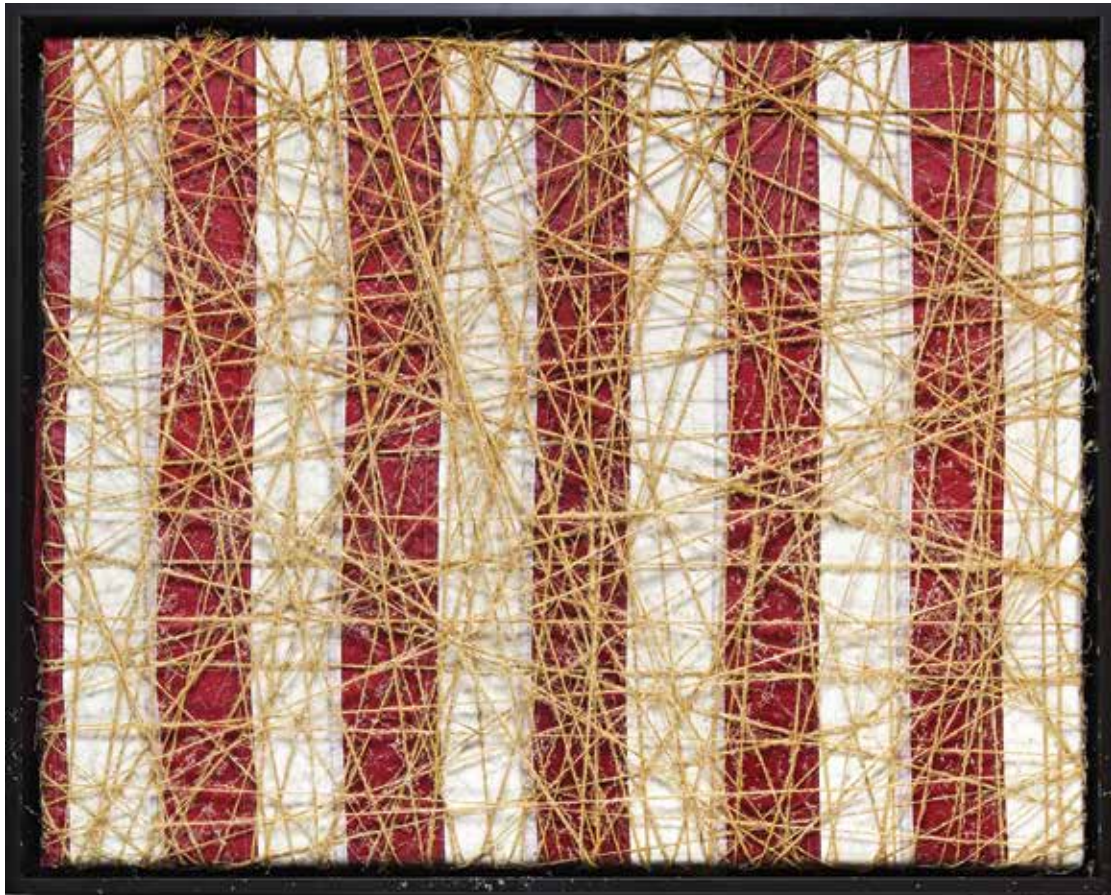
I Do Not Play No Rock 'N Roll
2016



I Was a Highwayman
2019



Hang
2015



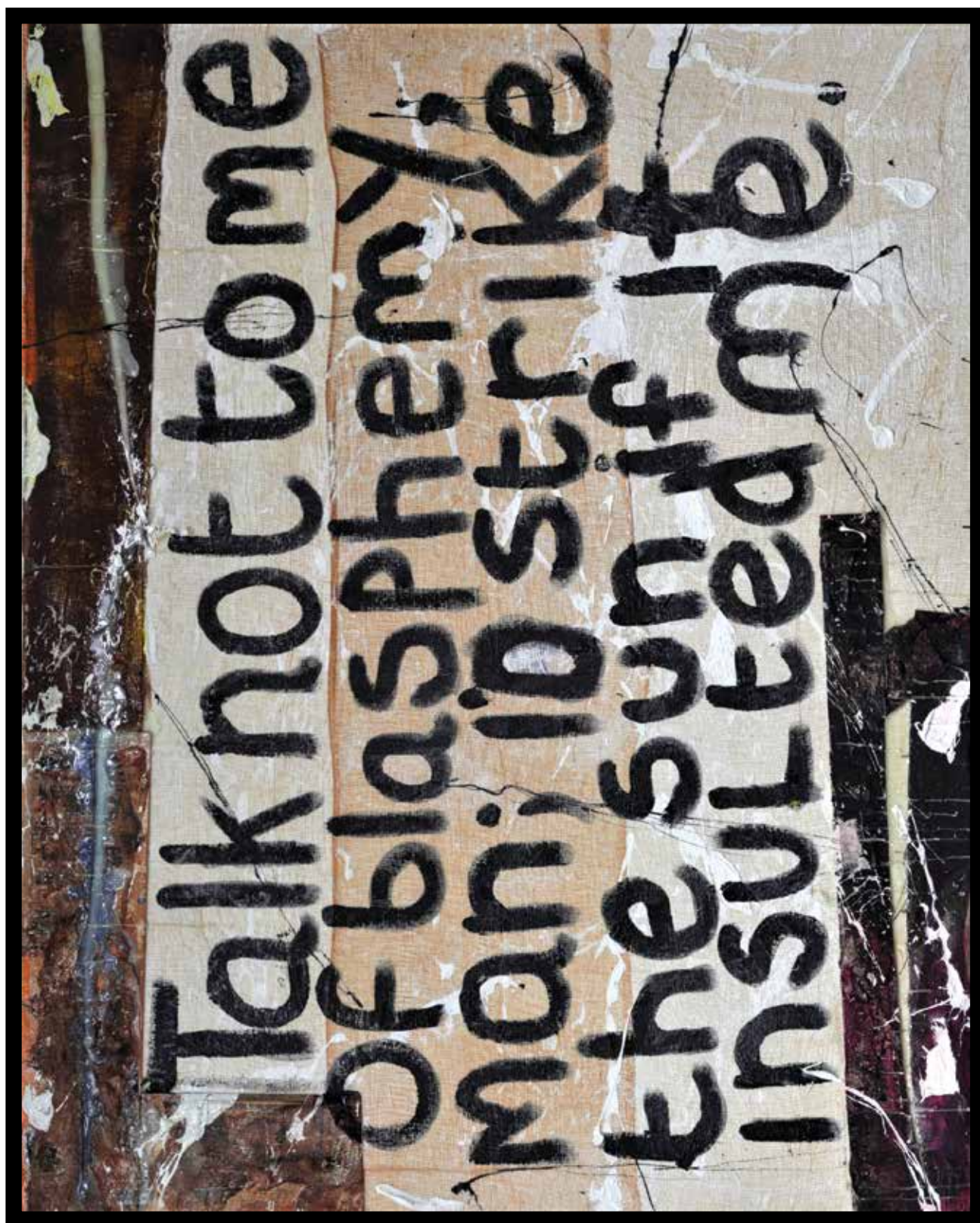
A New Take On An Old Tradition
2019



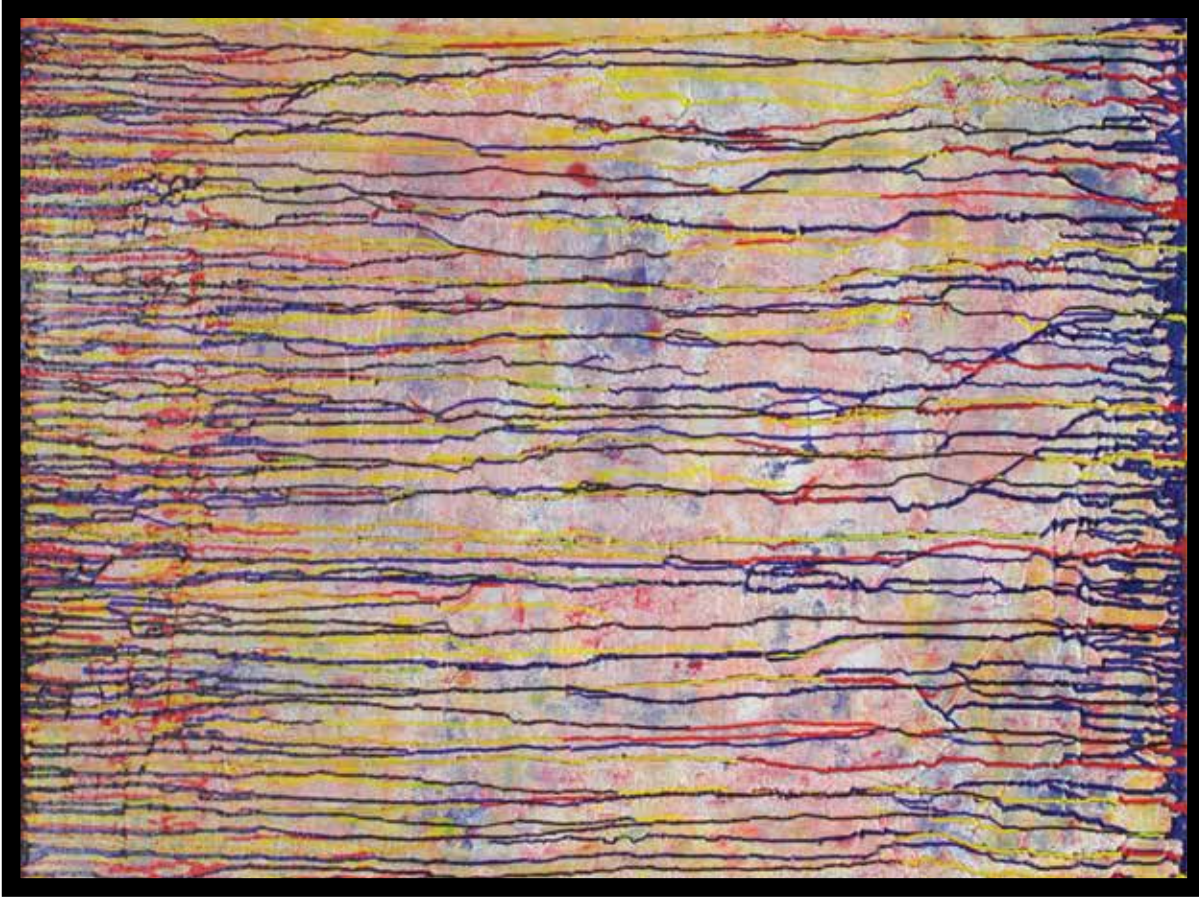
The Currency of Denial is Not Accepted
2017



The Burial of William Sycamore
2017



Whaling Stories
2015



Obedient Fire
2014



Lear in Madness
2014



Martyrs in the Cornfield
2016



The Barricade
2015



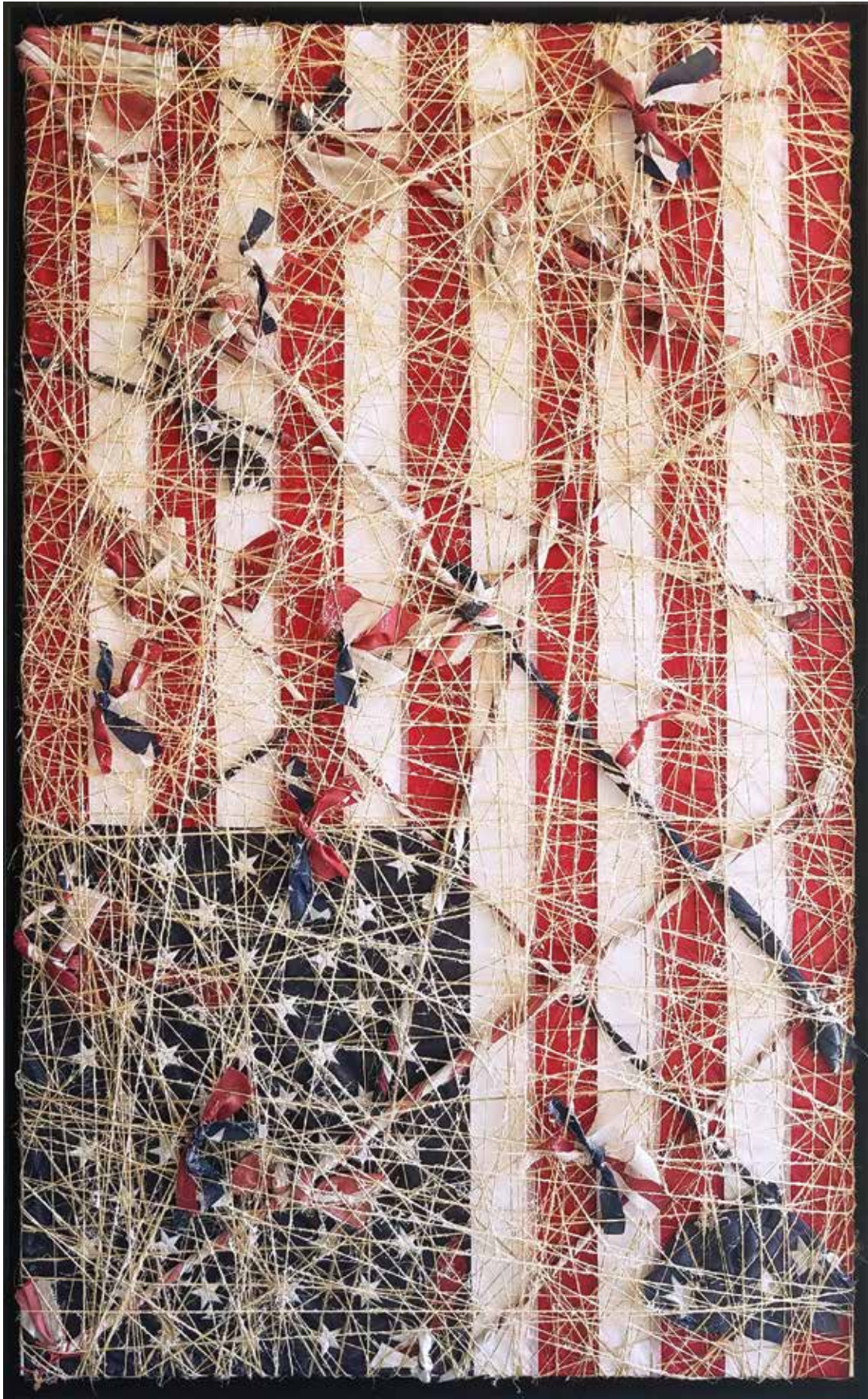
Colors
2019



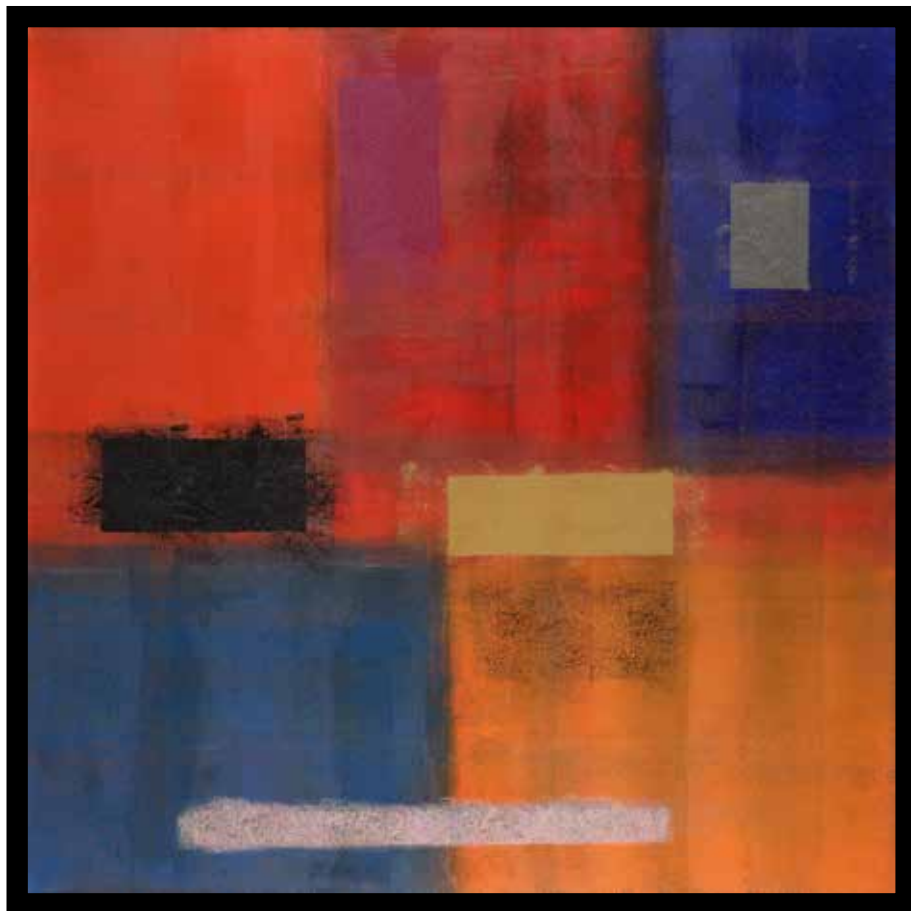
Rules and Engrainment
2019



Wreck in White
2015



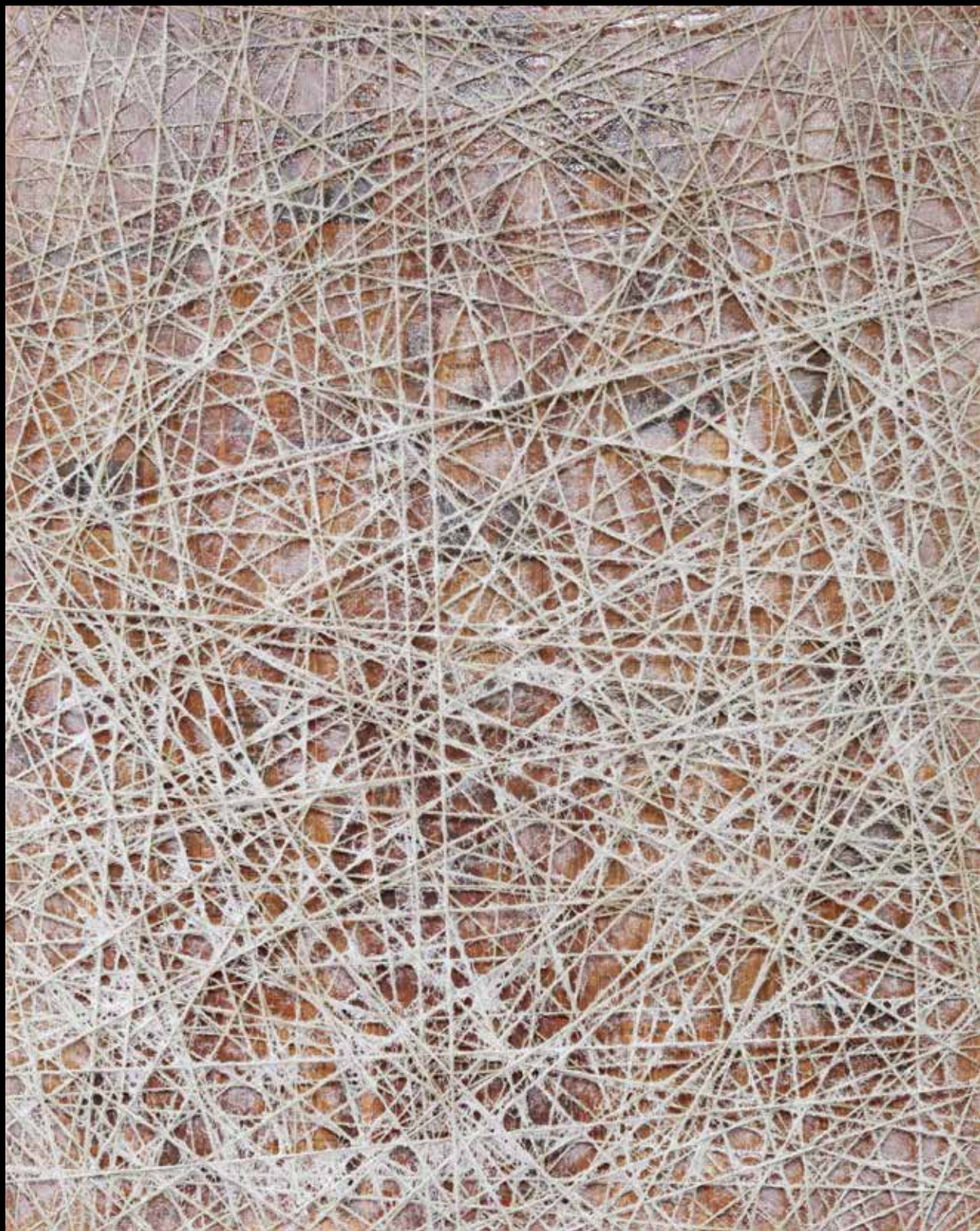
Sleeping Beauty - Temporary Abduction
2020



*Authority in
Perspective*
2012



Fusion
2002



Plain Brown Wrapper

2015



Civil War Trilogy I
- The Union
 2010



Civil War Trilogy II
- Battle Dress
 2010



Civil War Trilogy III - The Coming of the Lord
2010

BERNARD JOHN TAUPIN

b 1950. Sleaford, United Kingdom

BERNIE TAUPIN is a life-long artist. In the early 1990's painting became the main thrust of his creative endeavors. In his early work Taupin was inspired by ground-breaking abstract expressionists including Franz Kline, Mark Rothko and Hans Hofmann, and Anselm Kiefer in scale and materials.

Taupin says, *"As in any creative field, we start by emulating work we like, following the path that ultimately leads to finding our own vision, a style we feel is original and unique in its own beliefs, on its own merits."*

Taupin artwork evolved from Ab-Ex explorations to a level of self-satisfaction followed by experimentations with text-based content and minimalist pop-art concepts. By 2016 and 2017 works become sculptural constructions off and through the canvas and bound with cord and wire. Expressing with found objects and repurposed material and artifacts, Taupin's multi-layered creations include manipulated flags, scorched canvas, wax, wire, wood, cardboard, fabric, resin.



Photo by Heather Taupin

"The imagination is the most powerful tool artists possess enabling us to conjure up beautiful distraction for the eyes and ears. My dimensional work is simply the visual extension of what I have spent my life creating through words."

1950. Born in very rural northern England on a farm in a house with no electricity. Taupin's earliest education came from his mother reading him English classics including the narrative poetry of Alfred Lord Tennyson and Lord Byron and exploring picture books of the paintings of JMW Turner. Bernie's father, a multi-decorated World War II veteran, became a cattle hand after the war.

1958. Growing up in post WW-II Europe, with appreciation that America lead the way to victory, Bernie's earliest imaginations aligned himself with the dreams of America. Fascinated by the history of America and the American West, 8-year old Bernie begins to write and dreams of becoming a true cowboy.

1967. Writes *"Your Song"*. The 17-year old Taupin answered an advertisement for new song-writers placed by London's Liberty Records. There were many applicants including former child prodigy Reginald Dwight, who had been admitted to the Royal academy at age 11, then a 20-year old talented pianist and singer, becomes Elton John.

1969. Completes lyrics for album, *"Empty Sky"*.

1970. Completes lyrics for albums *"Elton John"* and *"Tumbleweed Connection"*.

1970. Appears at the Troubadour, Los Angeles.

- 1970 - Present. Writes lyrics for over 700 songs.
1985. Buys a ranch in California and becomes a real 'brown dirt cowboy' training cutting horses.
1988. Writes autobiography, *A Cradle of Haloes: Sketches of a Childhood*.
1990. Becomes US citizen.
1991. Writes a book of poems, *The Devil at High Noon*.
1992. Inducted into Songwriters Hall of Fame.
1995. Creates art studio at his ranch.
1996. Writes lyrics/produces albums: "*Immigrant Sons*" and "*Last Stand in Open Country*".
2003. First art exhibition, Los Angeles.
- 2010 - 2014. Hosts weekly *American Roots Radio* show from his ranch studio on Sirius XM.
- 2010 - Present. Art Exhibitions: Aspen. Atlanta. Austin. Beverly Hills. Bridgehampton. Chicago. Dallas. Denver. Edmonton. Los Angeles. Miami. Nashville. New York. Palm Beach. Palm Springs. San Diego. San Francisco. Toronto. Vancouver.
- 2019 "He Will Set Your Fields on Fire". The Earl Scruggs Center, Shelby, North Carolina
- 2020 Conference of American Jewish Museums, Essential Conversations, Dallas
- 2020-2021 American Anthem, Museum of Biblical Arts, Dallas, Texas

*"I've been called a writer, poet, lyricist, painter, sculptor.
I prefer: Artist."* Bernie Taupin



Photo by Daniel Coston

Bernie Taupin, "*He Will Set Your Fields on Fire*." Music and Stories from the American South at the Earl Scruggs Center, Shelby, NC.

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Jimmy Martin Nashville Martyr
2015



The Shipwreck News
2015

THAT IS WHAT ARTISTS DO

by James Surls

From a personal perspective I don't know how anyone can be separated from their past / regardless of how great or small that vapor trail may be. It is said in certain belief systems that when one shared the warmth of their heart with another, humanity was the beneficiary, it goes to many. Bernie has shared his life with the world, his vapor trail is as long as the comet trailing the night sky. Regardless of how he may long for the solitude of a private moment, he has made himself available to the many.

That is what artists do.

Even as his personal art comes from the deep depths of his living lake, it has been stocked with a history as old as humanity itself. I cannot say. It has meaning only as a spectator or viewer may perceive. At its center, it is his and only his. I take it at face value, it is his, personal to the core of his being. That is the seed bulb of great art.

Bernie does not have to give his core to the world, he only shares his gift with the world and in so doing, the world will paste their life over it in opaque patterns, particularly the "art critic" who has their own beast to feed.

But this is Bernie's lake, you may fish in it, but it is his and only his.

Creativity is spawn from many sources, but there is no question that a person's window of reality shows the vastness of what is in and around them.

My interest in Bernie's art work comes through the folded blend of the known of our times. The iconic symbols that dwell deep within our being, the known coming back to us through new visions. I take that reality for its psychological worth on a personal level.

I had no idea who made the works when I first saw them in the museum in Dallas. I do like seeing art that way, it gives me a clear view and since I do not know who the fair haired boy is, it means there is no axe to grind, no score to settle or no point to make other than simply breathing deep the air of what is in front of me.

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Contact: BernieTaupin-AmericanAnthem.com

ESSAY PAGE 7

“Bernie Taupin’s Visual Anthem” Richard Bailey, MA, is an arts writer and filmmaker. He lives in Dallas.

ESSAY PAGE 25

“From White to Green: A Brief Introduction to the Visual Art of Bernie Taupin” David MacFadyen, PhD., UCLA, professor of comparative literature, musicology, and digital humanities.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY PAGE 70

Written by Dana Yarger, Curator

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The Wall, March 2021, Dallas, Texas
Bernie Taupin and guests

RAGGED GLORY

by Bernie Taupin

My father was a quiet soldier who went to war in the desert fighting Rommel's Afrika Corps before he became part of the "Forgotten Army" that pushed the Japanese out of the jungles of Burma. He won several medals for bravery, but never discussed his experiences. Reserved and modest, he chose to store them away until I grew to an age where my inquisitiveness forced his hand. Needless to say he remained a soldier all his life even after he was long out of uniform. I say this with a sense of pride; I also say it as a means to establish my feelings for symbols of patriotism, the foremost being the flag that flies above that which we serve.

Of all the flags of all the nations, you would be hard pressed to find one having a more far-reaching effect on the psyche of the world than our own Stars and Stripes. There are flags, and there are flags, and then there is Old Glory, its dramatic symbolism and powerful connotations reverberating with undeniable influence. Nations may quibble, but no other country displays its flag with more diligence and fervor than the U.S. On the main street of my little town in southern California, you can stand in the gas station and see eight American flags flying above grocery stores, barber shops, coffee houses, schools and private homes. There is a bond between the American people and their flag that cannot be duplicated anywhere else in the world. The handling of the flag, however, comes with an explicit set of rules, and this is where ideology and interpretation can clash.

There is a rigid respect and almost clinical kid glove approach to flag etiquette that one might argue seems ironic given its history. It's a touchy subject made all the more sensitive given the nature of my work that some may interpret as disrespectful. Rest assured my motives are honorable. Every slash and burn, every stain and embellishment, all the billowing, twisting and folding, stitching and deconstruction are intended to project a sense of strength and resilience in the face of abject adversity. The correct way to dispose of a flag is by destroying it in a dignified manner preferably by burning it, while my way of respecting it is by breathing new life into it.

The United States flag has been shot through, shot down, trampled under foot and hidden under the floorboards of POW camps. She's been defaced by our enemies, ripped by ill winds, raised at Iwo Jima and rescued from the rubble of 9/11. Between 1777 and 1960 the flag has changed face 27 times embracing its extended horizon. It has forged heroes and inspired poets, painters and authors. It is celebrated in song and eulogized like a living breathing entity.

I am equally as thrilled as others by the reverence afforded her and the pageantry that unifies great crowds whenever our anthem is played and that pristine beauty snaps in the wind. Although having said, that I think I'm always going to be a little bit in love with the organic grass roots version, slightly rough around the edges and flapping above some small town county courthouse - that ragged old glory.

