

Andrew Christofides

Evolving Hierarchies

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2 April - 27 April, 2024

During my art school days in London in the mid-1970's, a number of European and English non-objective and systems artists were using the term 'non-hierarchic' to indicate that no one part of a painting was any more important than any other part. This was an attempt to escape the traditional Renaissance idea of a composition being critical to the understanding of a painting. Traditionally, the composition provided a guide to the viewer as to what was more or less important within a painting and therefore gave some clue as to how to read the painting and its hierarchic significance. At the same time, and with similar intentions, the Americans were using the term 'all over painting'.

In both cases, whether non-hierarchic or all-over painting, the aim was to rid the work of any specific meaning that composition or hierarchy might bring to it thereby allowing it to exist, and be experienced, in its own right without external references.

Within my own practice the more 'concrete' works have been generated by numeric sequences and therefore have no intended hierarchic structure, their composition being pre-determined by the numeric system. However, when my work does contain a subject, then the composition is determined by the needs of that subject and the breadth and limitations of my own chosen visual language. As my experiences, imaginings and subjects have changed over time, so too has the composition / hierarchy of the work changed, or, as I would prefer to say 'evolved', hence the title of this exhibition 'Evolving Hierarchies'.

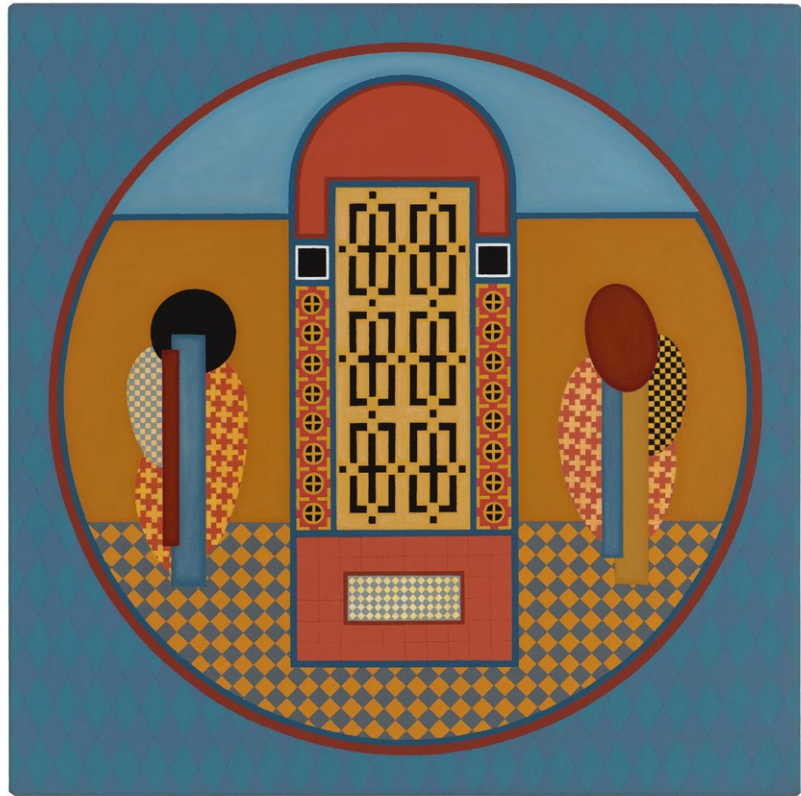


Chippendale Studio, Sydney, 2023. Photograph courtesy the artist.

Evolving Hierarchies

Professor Jenny Zimmer AM

I
In this exhibition Andrew Christofides, artist and traveller, continues his odyssey where the mode of transport is a creative mind and geometric abstraction. But how does such a journey proceed from the confines of the artist's studio and the skills, methods and materials necessary for the production of significant art? In Christofides' case it is largely via compositions and constructions of lines, squares, rectangles, triangles and ovals accompanied by a myriad of meaningful patterns dependent on these geometric elements for their structures. More recently, as seen in this exhibition, the circle has become predominant in the artist's efforts to address issues at large in the world today. This intent is assisted by deep thought, knowledge, imagination and a determination to invent and use a personally constructed, long-practiced and carefully executed visual language.



Patriarchs II, 2020, acrylic on polyester canvas, 46x46cm

Where did this journey begin? Firstly by arriving in Australia as a Greek Cypriot from a culture dating back to classical antiquity and then, I would argue, from early studies of mathematics for his degree in economics undertaken in Sydney between 1968 and 1971. Charts, graphs and flow-charts – all require lines, divisions and grids to make visible the results of mathematical calculations and logarithmic systems. Then, travelling to London to further his studies, he diverged – as chance will have it – finding himself enrolled at the Byam Shaw Art School followed by studies at the Chelsea School of Art in the company of artists who were finding new approaches to abstraction while still enamoured of European art movements such as Suprematism and Constructivism. Back in Australia in 1982, he created works like the large *Untitled Constructions*, featuring rectangles separated by vertical lines and

accompanied by a scatter of abridged triangles and rectangles – elements still present in his recent works some forty years later.

Although Christofides has not abandoned his odyssey, much has changed since 1995 when I first wrote about his checkerboard crosses on square backgrounds and learned that he was in the midst of developing a unique visual language, a venture that continues to this day. Extending this language in recent times has accommodated the introduction of subject matter that gives meaning and expression to things that have concerned him as the world goes through a time of dramatically accelerated change and at a pace unknown to any previous civilisation – and this is what this current exhibition is all about.

But, back then in the mid-90s, he was using purely geometric forms devoid of reference to the observed world and without explanatory subjects – indeed, he actively avoided the expression of personal intuition in an effort to approach the universal by transcending time and place. The more radical the abstraction the more transcendental it became, and more poetically and imaginatively seductive. In the mid-1990s Christofides said:

I see my work as being a distillation of certain states of feeling. I feel that the combination of neutral geometric forms charged with more traditional values may provide the quietude of spiritual essence I'm looking for in a universal language.

This emphasis on 'states of feeling' at that stage in the development of his geometric abstraction seems fundamental to any explanation of his obsession with geometry and ambition to create a universal language that would produce 'feelings' in viewers of his works. Gary Catalano sensed the presence of 'ghosts' lingering in Christofides' paintings where a mute line could suddenly look like an object of meditation or possess an inner life. Such 'ghosts' and 'souls' are to be found in this current exhibition, indicating Catalano's instinctive perception of the beginnings of a train of thought to materialise in Christofides' current concentration on 'evolving hierarchies'.

In 1995, while striving to understand why the geometric abstraction of Christofides and other artists prompted instinctive responses in viewers, I wrote:

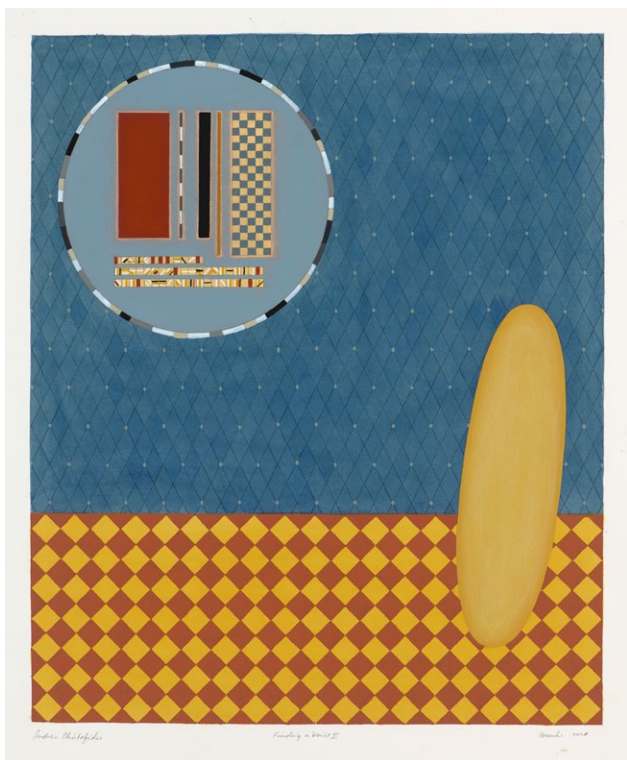
Christofides' concept of a universal visual language (devoid of verbal explanation) explores that delicate duality of the mystical and the concrete. Neither aspect can demonstrate itself without elements of the other. Christofides' painting painstakingly explores that crucial poise between the two, those visual moments when the spectator is caught between the sublimity of the ineffable and the certainty of what is seen.

And what is seen and responded to in this case is geometry. There is something instinctive in all human beings, ancient

or modern, that causes us to apprehend the importance of mathematical calculations and geometric forms and to use them to plan, map, chart, arrange, record, estimate and explain – whether addressing cultural issues, as for example in archaeological work and architectural planning, or in the documentation of more mundane, day-to-day matters by means of flow-charts and spread-sheets.

An example of the mystery surrounding the often inexplicable instinctive responses to things seen, and how such things become imbedded in human culture, is the so-called 'golden mean', which describes a mathematical ratio applied in creating an 'ideal rectangle'. It was known to Pythagoras and his circle and used in the construction of the Parthenon, and has come to the attention of philosophers and artists as they ponder the human condition. It serves as an example of the unity of art and nature, depending as it does on humanity's instinctively 'felt' responses to its presence. Division of the 'golden mean rectangle' into diminishing rectangles according to its original ratio allows for the mapping of a logarithmic spiral if the key points are joined. Such a spiral is found in nature, in the structure of seashells and the unfurling of fern leaves. Apparently, the essence and feeling of this basic geometry lies semi-dormant in the human brain – we are all part of nature.

Evolving from ancient Greece, the pursuit of beauty has been based on a perception of ideal harmony that is often dependent on mathematics and, in particular, geometry. The allure of geometric abstraction is partly its intellectual intractability whereby an ever-expanding or evolving universe of possibilities evades closure while at the same time dramatising infinitude. All art is abstract but artists like Christofides who deal in its strictest applications are, like mathematicians and formal logicians, relatively rare. They often attempt to visualise and then symbolise a promise of absolutes that never quite materialises, and then the quest continues. Given nature's laws and human instincts, geometric abstraction can be powerful even without reference to the more comfortable world of the particular.



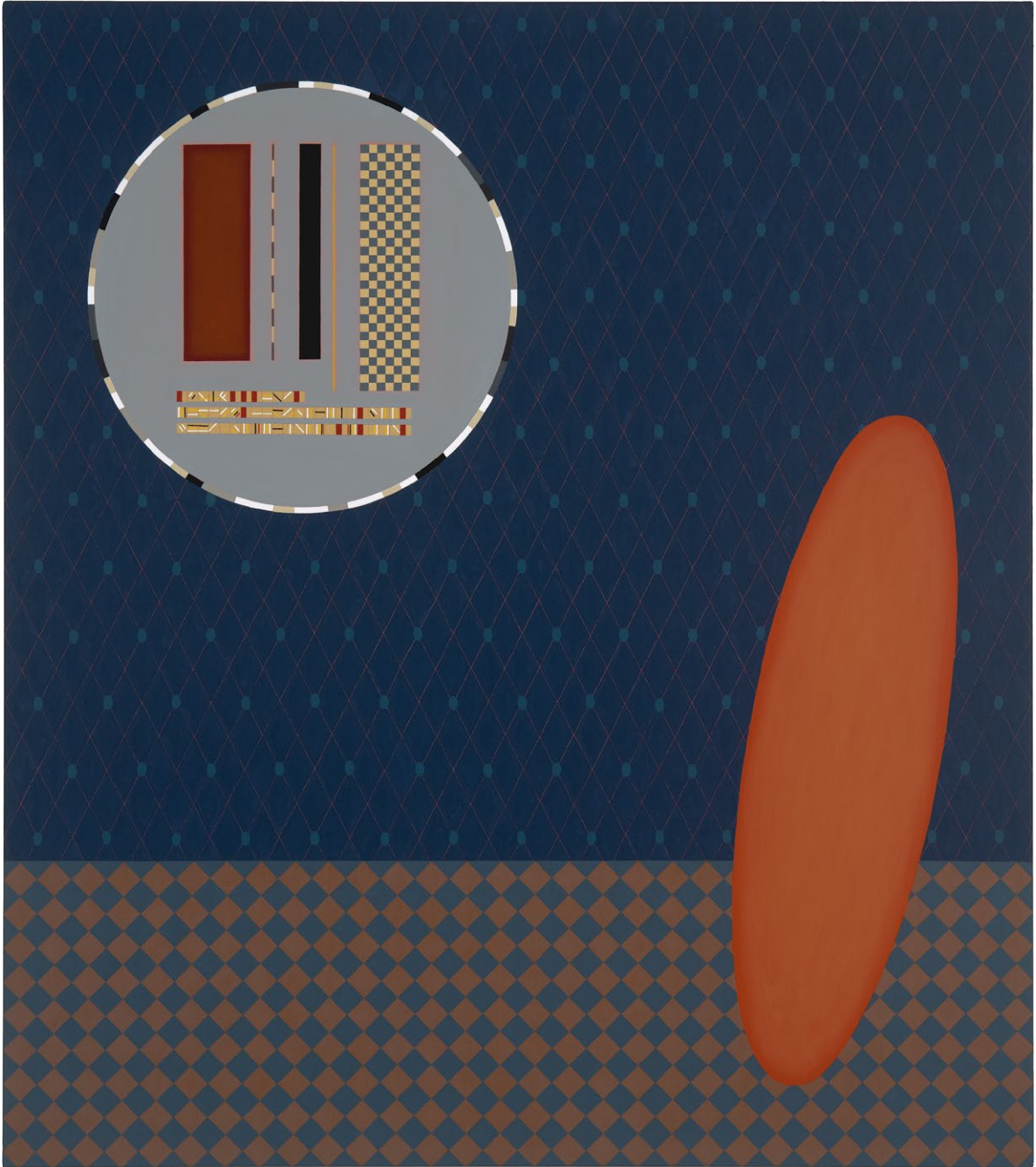
Finding a Voice II, 2020, acrylic and watercolour on paper, 45.8x38cm

Accordingly, apart from necessary information such as sequence numbers, nominated colours and mode of production such as 'painting' or 'construction', Christofides' works, such as *Grey Painting Number 40* (1994) remained for a long time basically untitled. The series of 'grey paintings' included at least 82 works which were largely tonal and square in format, with vertical rectangles of varied widths and grids of chequer-patterned squares. Then came tiny ovals, sometimes unobtrusively dotted over the lines of geometrically sectioned backgrounds with squared or diamond-shaped formats. Usually small and sometimes randomly placed, the ovals suddenly seemed to signify a

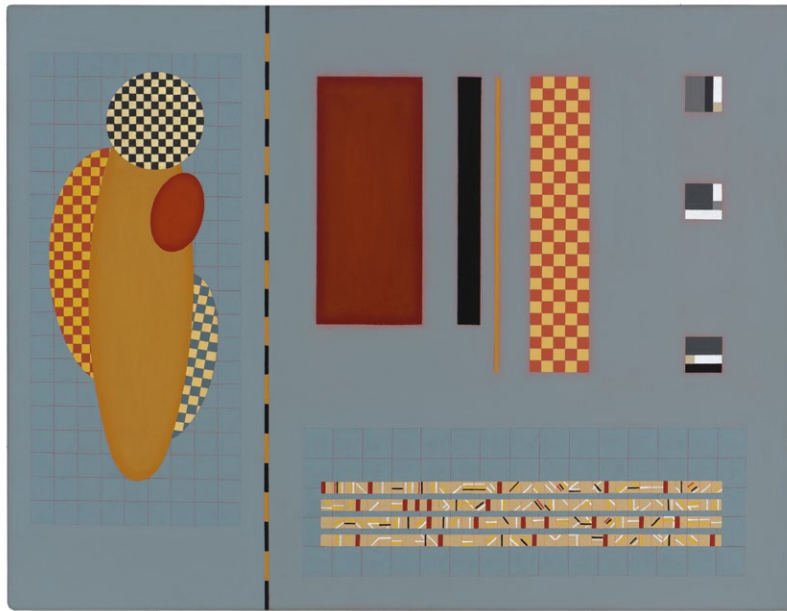
human presence which, with extra elaboration, appeared intent on unravelling the mysteries of life whether by logic or religion. Over time, intricately patterned compositions of multiple ovals, unable to achieve an ultimate and ideal circularity, began to take an explicit place in Christofides' hierarchy of forms by fulfilling the roles of priests, saints and prophets in the age-old history of collisions over logic and belief. But much of this was to come after 1997 when he produced works such as a square painting in acrylic on canvas entitled *First Journey*, where ordered patterns of diamonds and squares, within square and rectangular sections, encounter a large patch of tangled lines suggesting a degree of confusion and disorientation. It is as if, having created the visual language, he was now able to express, in words, the thoughts that had determined the choice of geometric elements and their placement in the composition.

II

Post-1997 what Christofides had previously left unsaid, and which relied on the viewer's instincts and imagination for any application of meaning, would in most cases be replaced by titles. In *Dreams of an Alzheimer's Patient* (1999) a large black oval in the lower register seems to identify the patient. In the upper register are two rectangles, one containing a fine and intricately squared grid and the other with randomly scattered bundles of non-geometric lines suggesting confusion. Enter *Odyssey* (2004), a beautiful, softly-coloured and toned composition, square in format with overlapping and intersecting linear elements, all but one given the tiny chequer pattern treatment. The un-chequered line may suggest the odyssey is incomplete, unresolved? Is the artist admitting that life experiences and world events have provoked him to 'contemplate and meditate' on how such matters can be translated into geometric imagery using the visual language he had invented? From here there are many titles with reference to his Greek heritage and to Orthodox religion, to tussles between logic and belief and all the complexities of the written and recorded word.

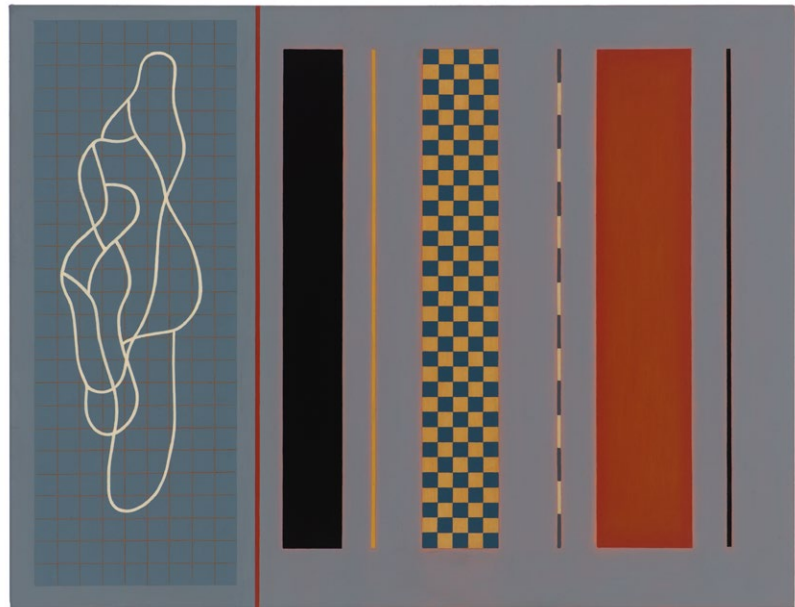


Finding a Voice II, 2021, acrylic on polyester canvas, 137x122cm



Finding a Voice I,
2020, acrylic on
polyester canvas,
51x66.5cm

Finding a Voice III,
2021, acrylic on
polyester canvas,
51x66cm



As recently as 2021, during the worldwide contagion, Christofides wrote:

I have felt for some time now that my studio practice has existed in a parallel universe that, when coupled with lived experience, observation, introspection and, above all, imaginings, has evolved into a paradise of images – one with its own poetry and harmonies.

And yet it was with the exhibition of that year that a note of considerable disquiet emerged, despite its title, *Parallel Universe: A Paradise of Images*. It covered a lot of ground from Greek Orthodoxy in works like *Iconostasis* (2016); mathematics in *(2,3,5) × 4 Rotations* (2017); philosophy in *Faith and Reason* (2017); language and writing in *Written Word* (2018), and history in works like *Remembering the Past* and *Studio Archaeology*, both of 2018.

In *Remembering the Past* we see recollections of Christofides' early paintings of 1982. In the top register of the square format, rectangles and squares are separated by vertical lines; in the next they play as if engaging in ritual dance, music or the recording of written words, while at the bottom a row of haphazard vertical rectangles suggests a library shelf. It is as if history has been described from pre-linguistic beginnings to today's obsession with documentation. Similarly, in *Studio Archaeology* of the same year, the long horizontal format is divided into sections which begin with rectangles and squares, proceed to line, square and rectangle with more than a hint of written text before moving on to an important circular constellation.

It was this exhibition, the first to feature large compositions with concentric circles dominating their usually square backgrounds and some with pessimistic titles. The inner circle of *Death of Faith* (2020) with its grid of Greek Orthodox crosses, is surrounded by a circle of indeterminate grey-blue randomly occupied by individual entities similar to those identified as Sceptics in another work of 2020. The thin outer rim of the concentric circle is divided into shorter or longer sections in various tones of arguments. A circle such as this had already

appeared in *Origins and Evolution* (2019), where the outer rim is similarly divided, perhaps referring to archaeological investigations reaching back to the earliest signs of human habitation. The large inner space of this circle contains elements that may be of significance to an archaeological reading of this work – a vertical line suggestive of a surveyor's pole; tonal sections marked out like areas of a dig with different levels of depth; a chequered square fundamental to Christofides' own personal iconography and vertical notations composed of rectangles of varying heights that suggest the recording of times of turbulence or calm. These inferences become even more strident in another circular work, *Evolving Universe* (2020), with its detailed inner sphere mapped out like an archaeological site with fine black markers pinpointing relevant moments within the ongoing complexity of evolution.

It was this exhibition of 2021, with its *Followers* (2019) and *Sceptics* (2020), that eventually led to *Death of Faith* (2020), and that introduced the direction of the works to follow. However, despite a looming sense of civilisation on the brink of dramatic change, the exhibition carried a positive title, *Parallel Universe: A Paradise of Images*, and Christofides re-iterated his ongoing mission to invest meaning in a range of geometric shapes using a personally invented visual language. This language at first relied on aesthetic interpretation of abstract compositions based on humanity's instinctive responses to geometry and mathematical calculations dependent on logarithmic and other systems and did not require verbal explanation. However, once the paintings and studies began to receive titles suggestive or descriptive of the artist's own odyssey, that involved both his heritage and contemporary observations of life today, his art began to collide with world affairs and current concerns.

III

Andrew Christofides has recently written: 'I do not think it possible to live in the current world without having some emotional response to the cruelties the world is presenting every day.'

With such thoughts in mind, developments in the evolution of his iconography have become monumental and are clearly evident in this new exhibition of paintings and studies entitled *Evolving Hierarchies*. It is in the predominantly circular works that measurement and comparison of time and place, certainty and confusion and faith and logic take place – and, where there is measurement, hierarchies of relative importance are created. Although references to Byzantine buildings, Greek Orthodox religion, patriarchs, evangelists and scholars persist, it is the introduction of the concept of fate that plays a major role in this exhibition. Free will might help determine fate, but fate is ultimately beyond an individual's or population's capacity to control and therefore achieves hierarchical supremacy.

With *Four Fates and Free Wills* (2021), it is within the large circle on a square blue-grey background that a competition takes place. The outer rim of the circle is divided into eight alternating segments, four given a positive, uncomplicated overall tone and four accommodating tangled lines suggestive of anxious and muddled thoughts or actions. Inside the circle is a scatter of Christofides' now familiar geometric forms – triangles, rectangles and chequerboard patterns – which appear to be vying with a vast variety of clipped, interrupted and indeterminate shapes. It is as if, on behalf of the world and its inhabitants, calm positivity is in competition with premonitions of dire fate in the struggle for hierarchical status.

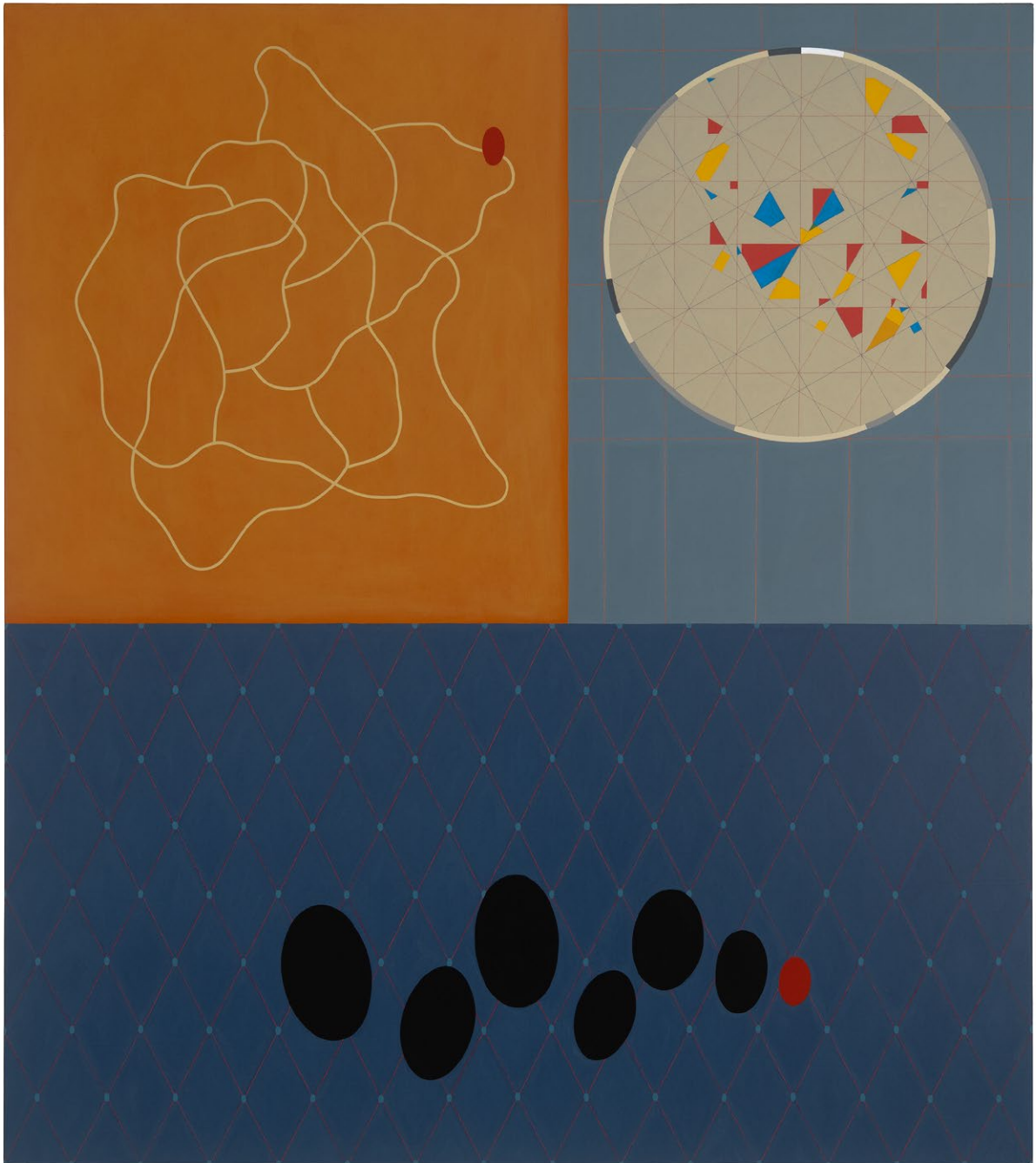
While rejecting any classification of 'expressionist' in his work, Christofides believes that: '... any language of abstraction, and even a very formal language, should be capable of visualising some of the experiences and events that impact on one'. Back in his student days during the 1970s a number of European and English 'systems artists' were using the term 'non-hierarchic' to indicate that no part of a composition was any more important than another. Like-minded American artists used the term 'all-over painting'. Obviously, Christofides has taken a completely different direction with each element within a composition having its own significance according to his personally constructed visual language.

Christofides' half-century of art practice and life experiences have caused him to respond to changes within the world and also within his art. He says: 'This, along with my chosen visual language has caused my work to evolve compositionally'.

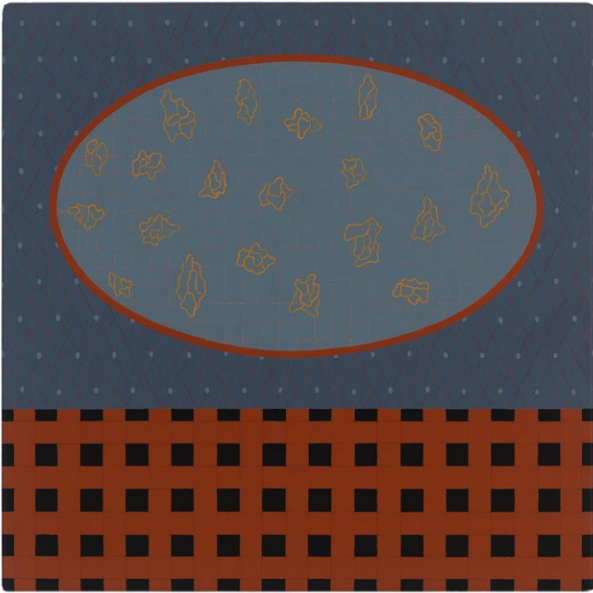
Before addressing the 'fates' that form the essence of this exhibition there are also a number of works like *Patriarchs II* (2020) that continue the earlier spectrum of subjects with allusions to Greek Orthodoxy. *Scholars* (2021) posits two clearly outlined rectangles on a diamond-patterned background, the first containing a scatter of rectangular elements within a grid. Its energy suggests chatter, writing, and perhaps electronic messaging, while at its base is what might be interpreted as a library shelf. The vertical rectangles in grey, black and white lean at different angles and are suggestive of books. The second outlined vertical rectangle contains two ovals, one black the other white, surrounded by an area made up of Greek crosses. These could be interpreted as figures with absolutely divergent opinions.

Evangelists (2022) is a beautiful painting with four figures, each composed of vertical rectangles and a variety of patterned ovals and set within a clearly outlined rectangle against a background of Greek crosses. Its study is a finely crafted work in acrylic and collage on graph paper with the four figures floating on a softly painted background. Other works in this exhibition that share these compositional elements include *Grand Piazza* (2022), with its references to ecclesiastical buildings, and *Small Piazza* of the same year, made up of fine diamond patterns, hinting at pavements that have experienced centuries of footsteps, Greek crosses and a circular area with an arc of scattered shapes at the top, perhaps also suggesting the passage of time.

Coming closer to the aforementioned 'Fates' is a work entitled *The Souls of Chimney Sweeps: After William Blake* (2023-24), and its study on paper. Both trap the viewer in a dark circle containing allusions to a universe of scattered souls and little

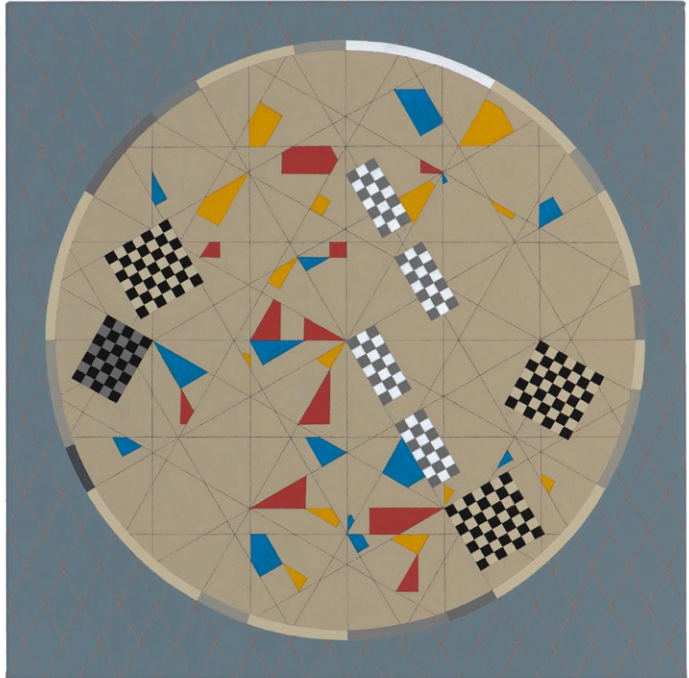


Free Will and Fate, 2021, acrylic on polyester canvas, 137.5x122cm



Silent Memories, 2020,
acrylic on polyester canvas, 41x41cm

Four Fates, 2021,
acrylic on polyester canvas, 45.7x45.7cm



scribbled shapes that might possibly be interpreted as the fear experienced as the fate is met. The centre of this dark painting hosts a claustrophobic, brick-like grid of squares.

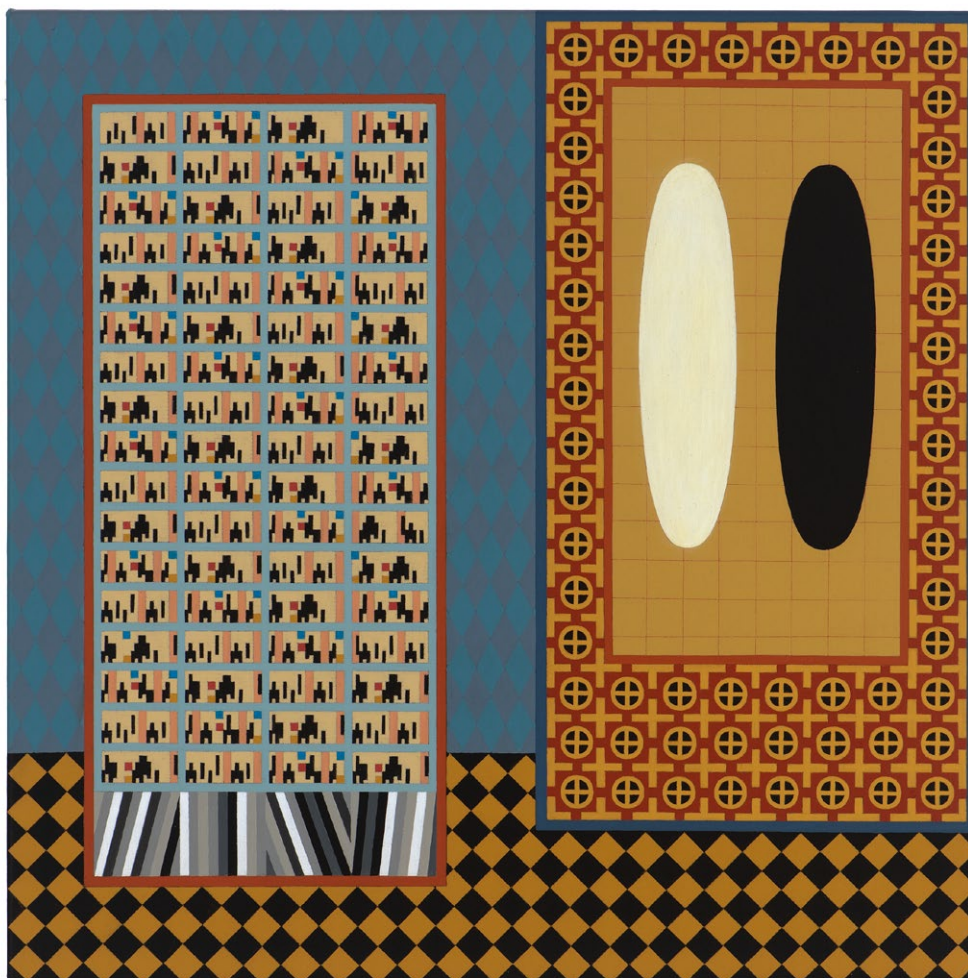
The studies for the work are executed in ink and watercolour on graph paper with occasional notations in pencil. In *Study 1* (2023), ovals representing the souls are of different sizes and range from black to white. They are distributed over a squared background but continually collide with the grid, perhaps suggesting the inevitability of death and differences between individual fates. An earlier painting, *The Souls of Chimney Sweeps*, also of 2023, has squares and circles imposed over a blue-toned ground. The circles contain triangles, rectangles and wedge shapes of varying intensity – some with chequer patterns or loose scribbles. The turquoise blue arc above the brickwork is suggestive of utter desperation.

The Fates of Small Children (2023) and its study are perhaps the works that best demonstrate Christofides' concept of hierarchical evolution. They are accompanied by numerous paintings and studies of less specific fates beginning with *Simple Fates* of early 2023, with its large circle divided into four wedges starting from a central point and sparsely occupied by a few random shapes. *Simple Fates III* and *IV*, which follow, also feature large concentric circles in warm tones occupying sombre grey-blue squares with ruled lines creating all-over, geometrically patterned, background grids. In each case the central circle is mapped out with only a few areas occupied by truncated triangles and clipped rectangles, leaving some spaces within the irregular wedges relatively empty. The disfigured geometric forms possibly imply the inability of various fates to reach their potential during life on earth. The series of *Interrupted Fates*, and its studies executed in mixed media on paper with pencilled notations, was begun in early 2022 and also presents warm-toned concentric circles, this time on dark blue, diamond-gridded backgrounds interrupted by small ovals situated on the connection points. Inside the circles of *Interrupted Fates II* to *V* triangles are

scattered irregularly over the background grid. They are closely confronted by powerfully chequered rectangles and both contend with scatters of clipped, truncated and severed geometric shapes. The utter complexity destroys any hope of the circles being divided into orderly wedges.

A seminal work, *The Fates of Small Children* (2023) is foreshadowed by its preparatory studies beginning with *Initial Distribution Calculation for the Fates of Small Children* (2023) where Christofides, the mathematician and economist, provides a spreadsheet with the now familiar central circle divided into variable wedges representing the situations of children in different cultures and various parts of the world, together with the concomitant financial implications. The major *Study for the Fates of Small Children* (2023) is executed in acrylic and watercolour on graph paper with the familiar warm-toned circle on diamond patterned blue-green background. It is colour-coded at the base, along with other pencilled notations, some surrounding the square background and adding specific information as the result of research. The thin outer circle is divided into sections of varying lengths and tones depending on the centrally determined wedge to which they belong. Some of these sections are occupied by extensions of the geometrically ruled out map of the whole work while others contain clusters of tangled lines. It is intended that the viewer moves around the circle in a clockwork fashion, apprehending the different situations and prospective fates of children throughout different parts of the world with their varying capacities to serve the needs of children. The inner circle, as elsewhere, has the usual complexity of scattered shapes within occupied and partially occupied wedges that tabulate the variations of fate that children may endure. The finished work, in acrylic on canvas, replicates this study.

After addressing the concept of fate, using his unique visual language and cognisant of the now intended hierarchies within it, where will Christofides' odyssey lead next?



Scholars, 2021, acrylic on polyester canvas, 50.2x50.2cm



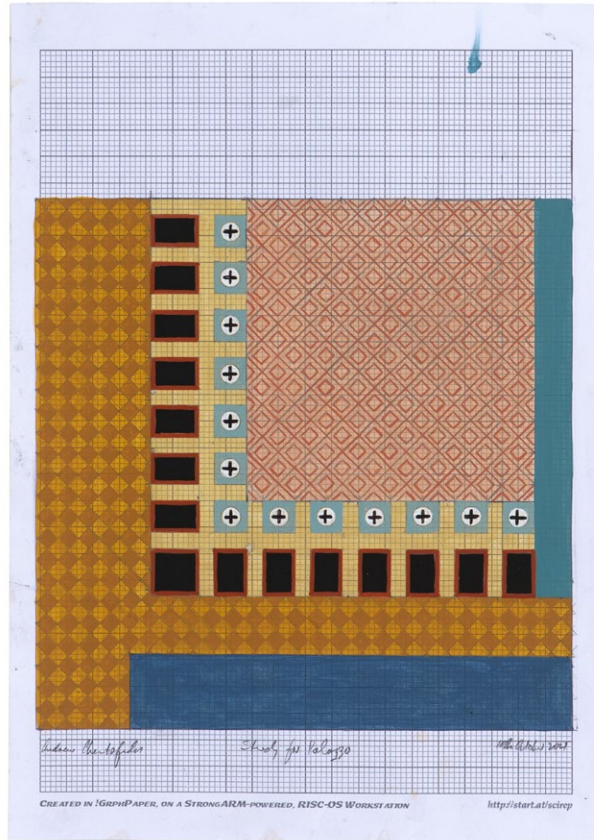
Chippendale Studio, Sydney, 2023.
Photograph courtesy Mary MacDougall



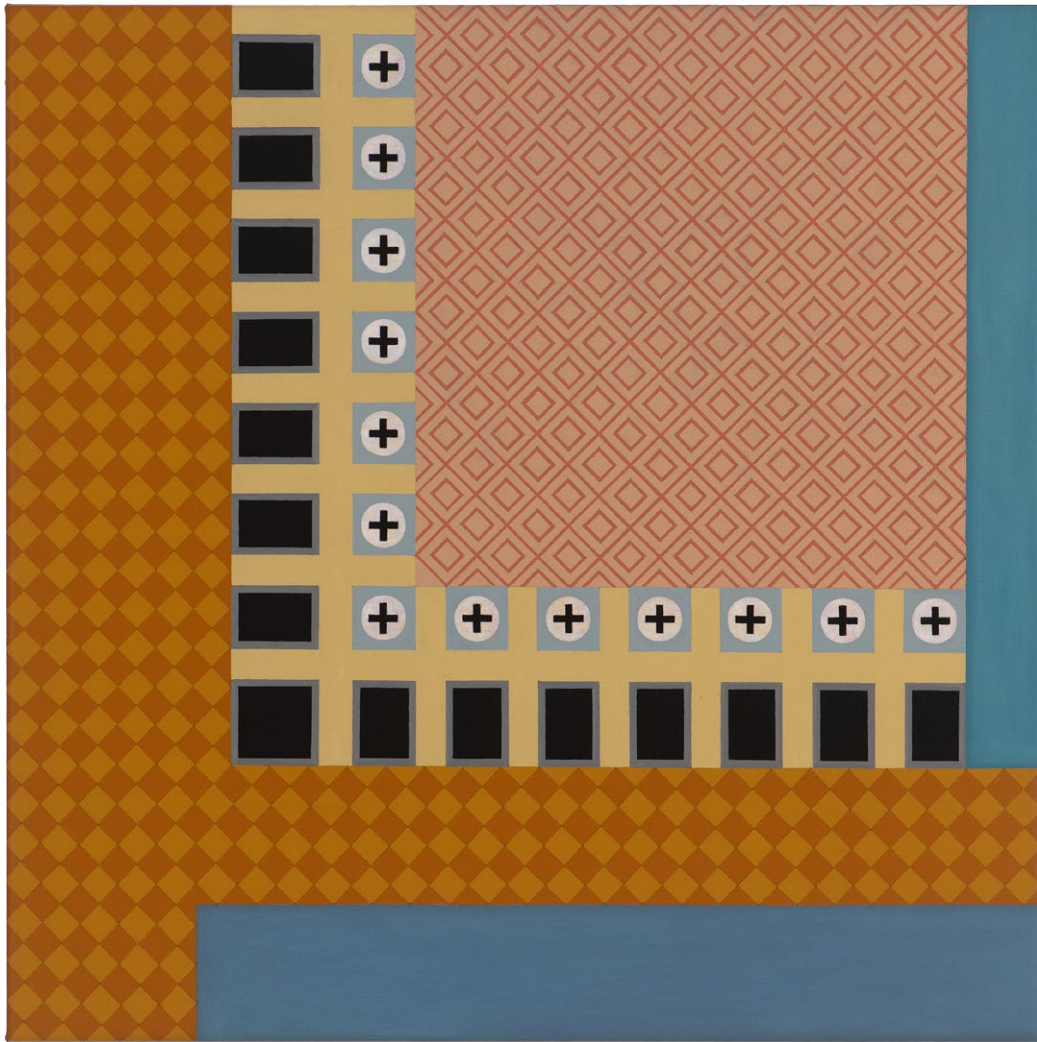
Study for Leap of Faith, 2022, watercolour and collage on aquatint fragment, 23.6x23.6cm



Leap of Faith II, 2022, acrylic on polyester canvas, 61.5x51cm



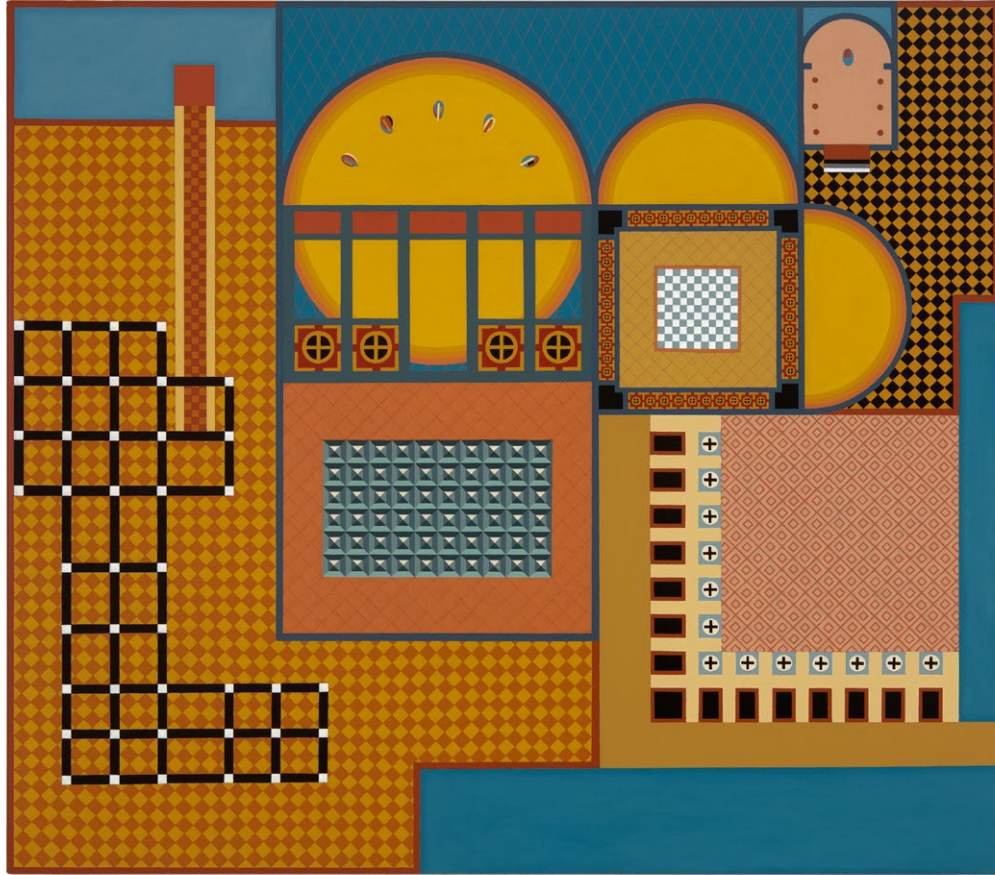
Study for Palazzo, 2021, acrylic and watercolour on archival photocopy paper, 29.7x21cm [paper size]



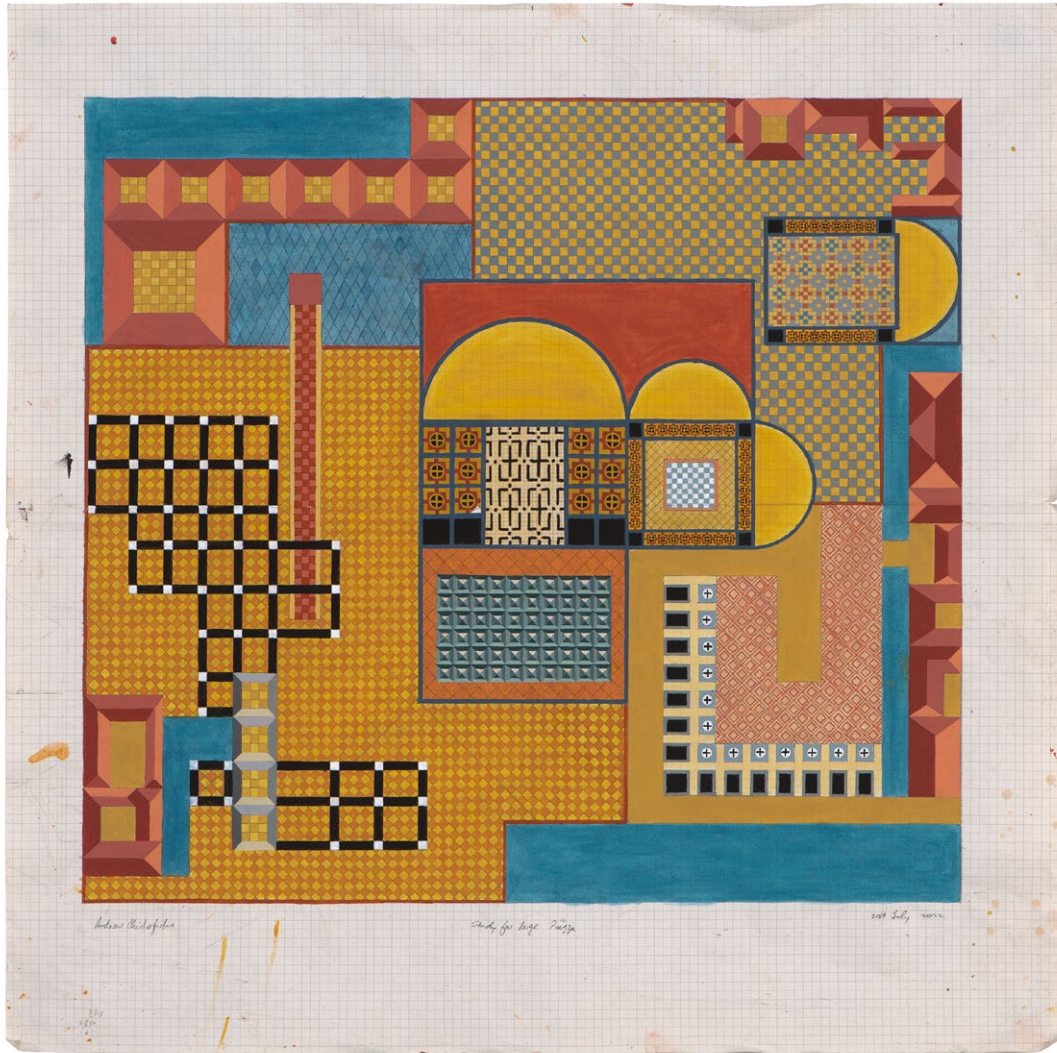
Palazzo, 2021, acrylic on polyester canvas, 51x51 cm



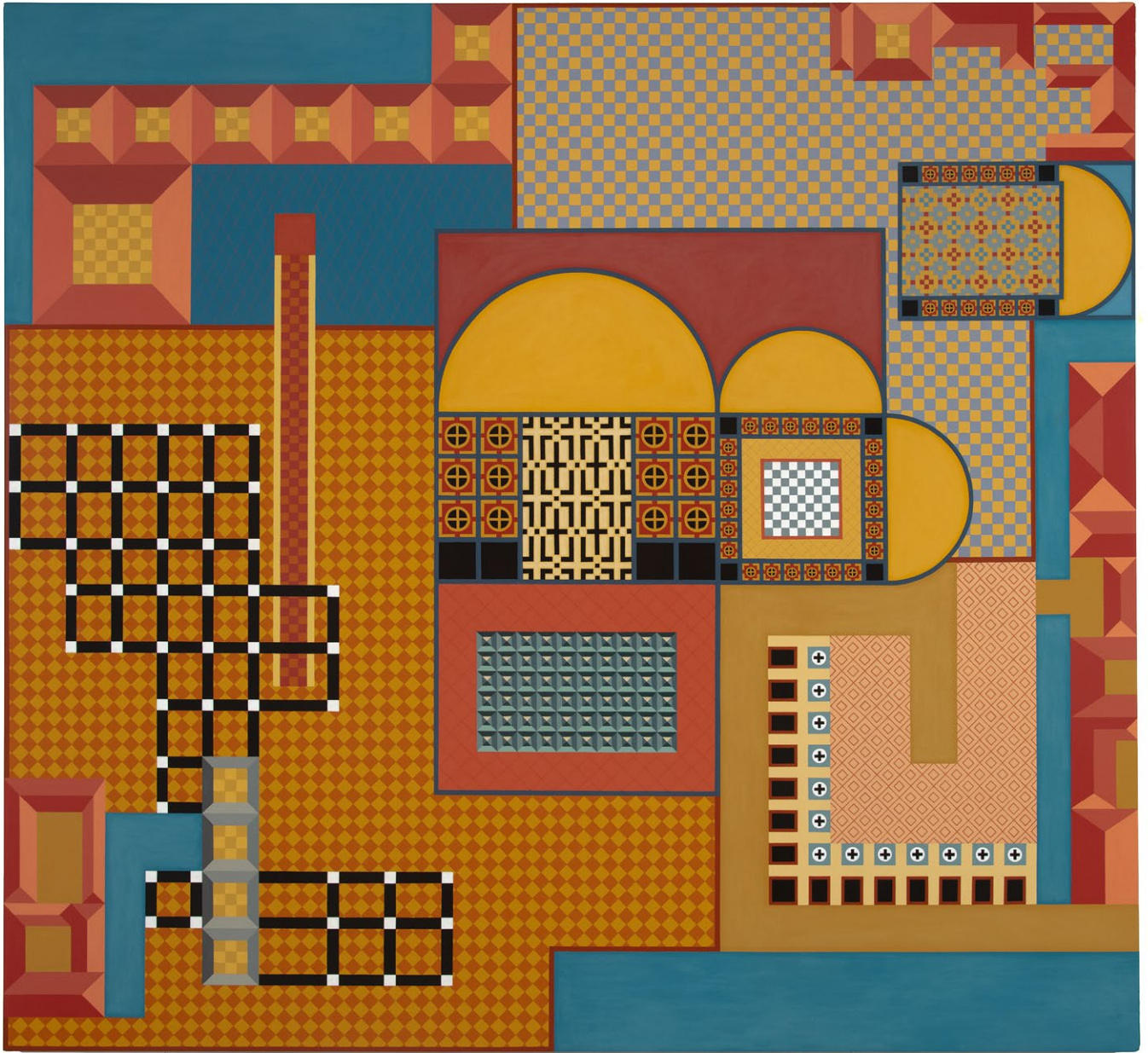
Four Fates and Free Wills, 2021, acrylic on polyester canvas, 102x102cm



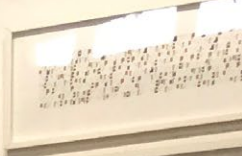
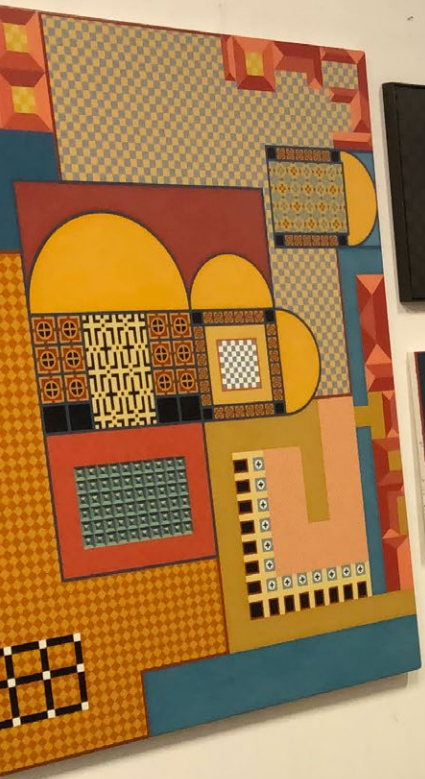
Small Piazza, 2022, acrylic on polyester canvas, 76.5x86.5cm



Study for Large Piazza, 2022, mixed media on graph paper, 59.5x59.5cm [paper size]

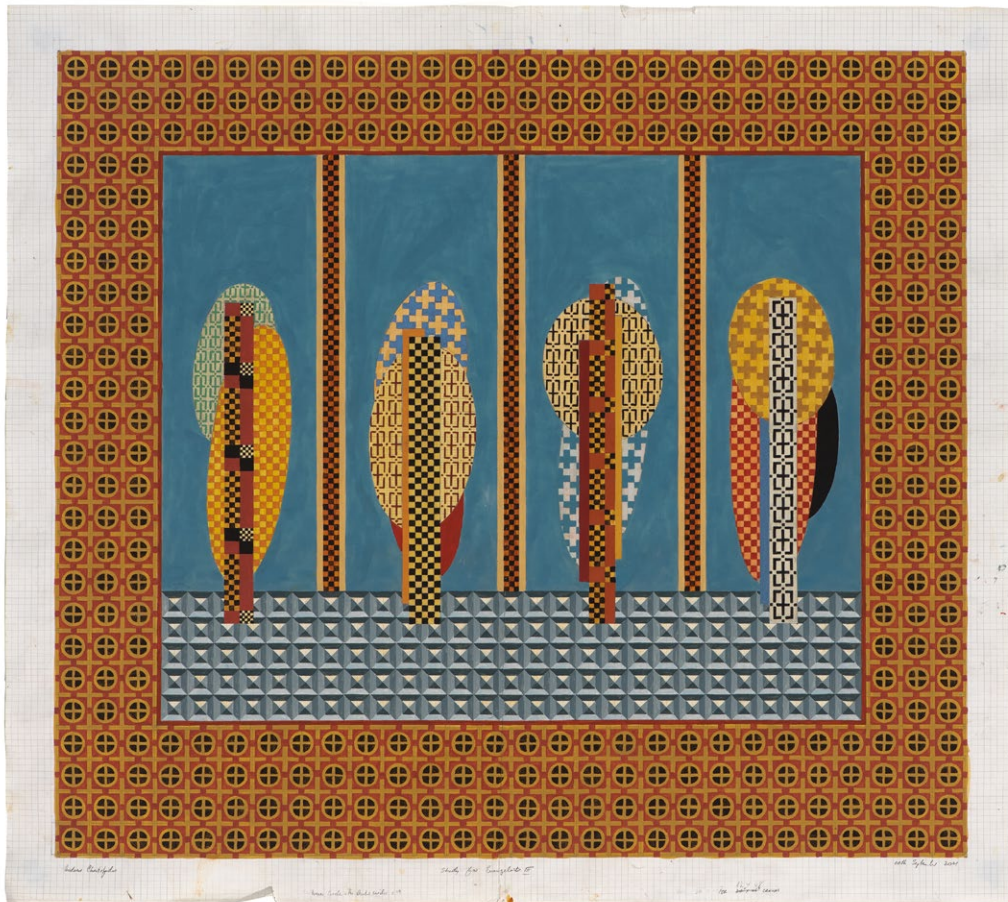


Grand Piazza, 2022, acrylic on polyester canvas, 183x198cm

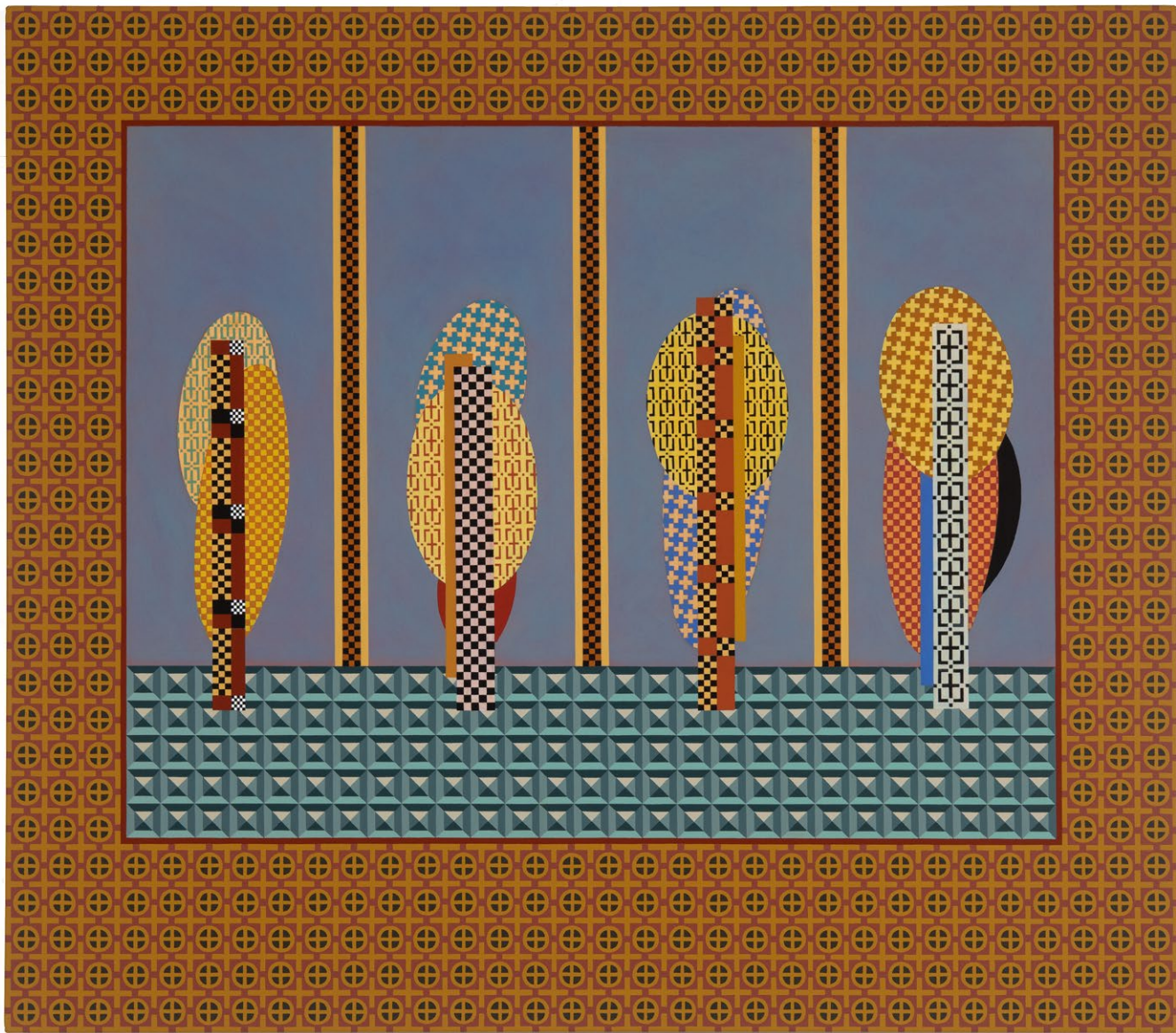




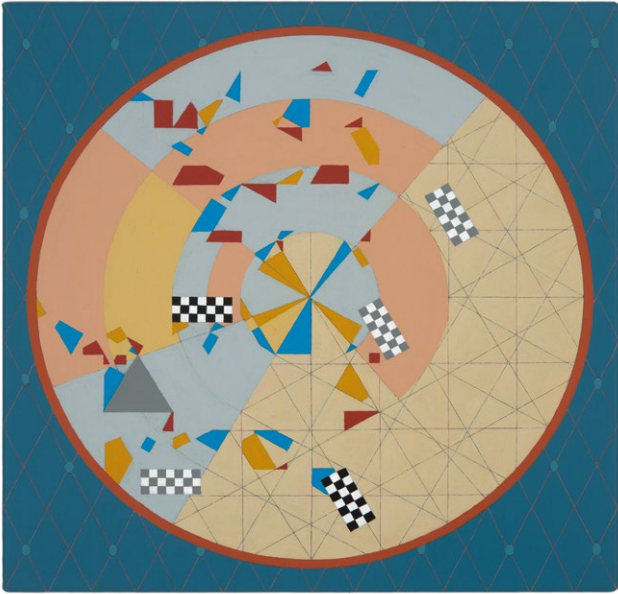
Study for Evangelists II, 2021, acrylic, watercolour and collage on graph paper, 59.5x61 cm [paper size]



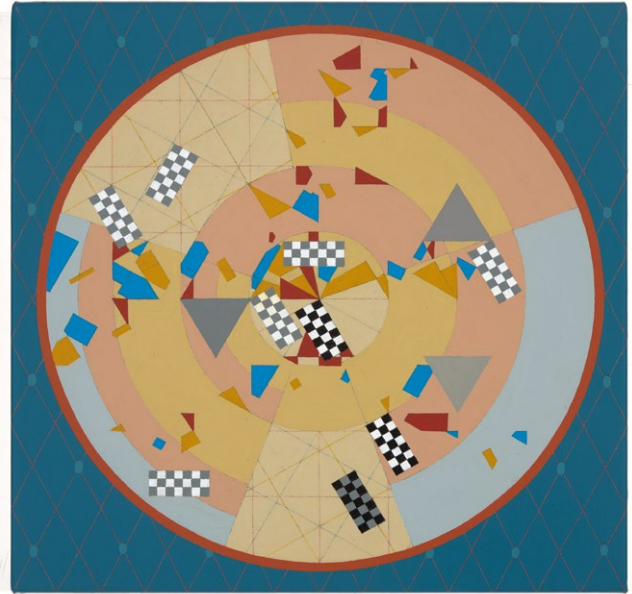
Study for Evangelists III, 2021, acrylic, watercolour and collage
on graph paper, 69.8x77.5cm [paper size]



Evangelists, 2022, acrylic on polyester canvas, 107x122cm



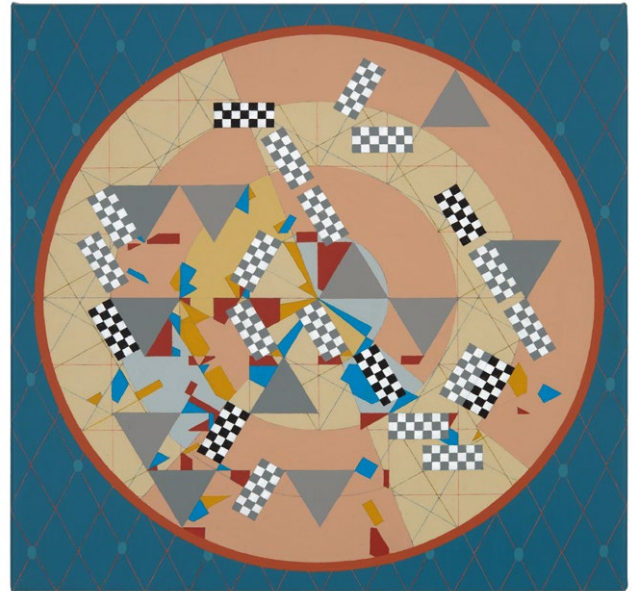
Interrupted Fates I, 2023, acrylic on polyester, 36x36cm



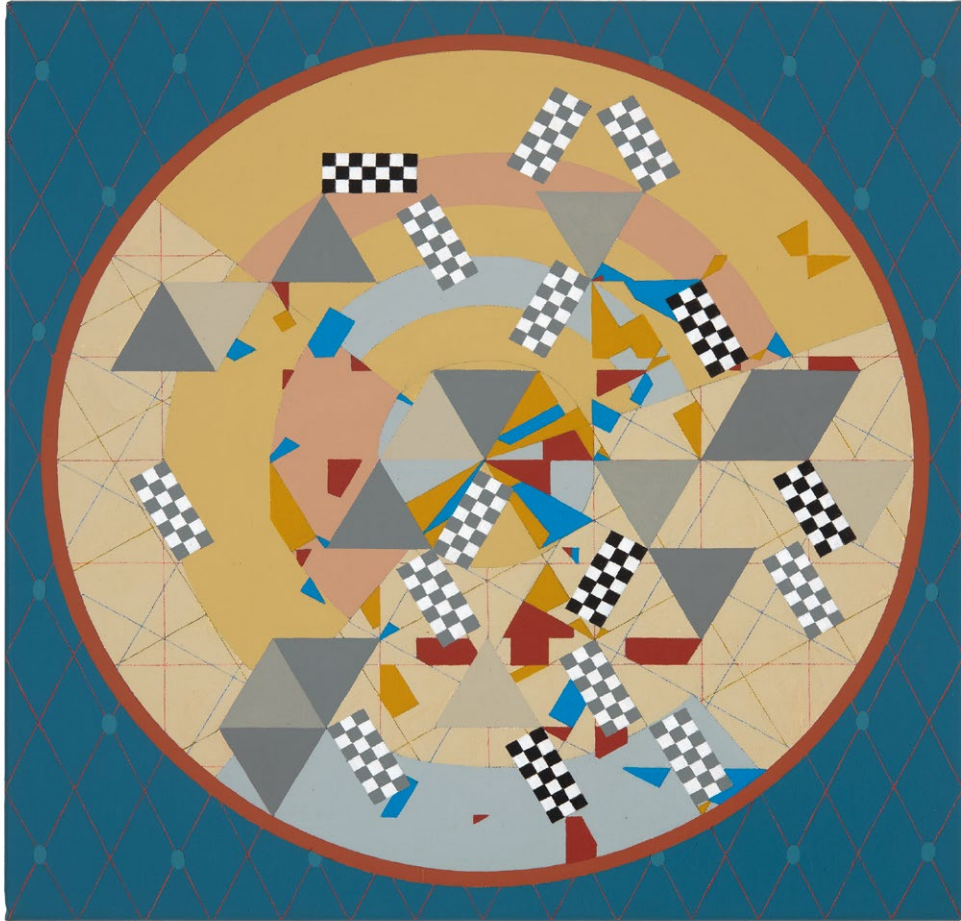
Interrupted Fates II, 2023, acrylic on polyester, 36x36cm



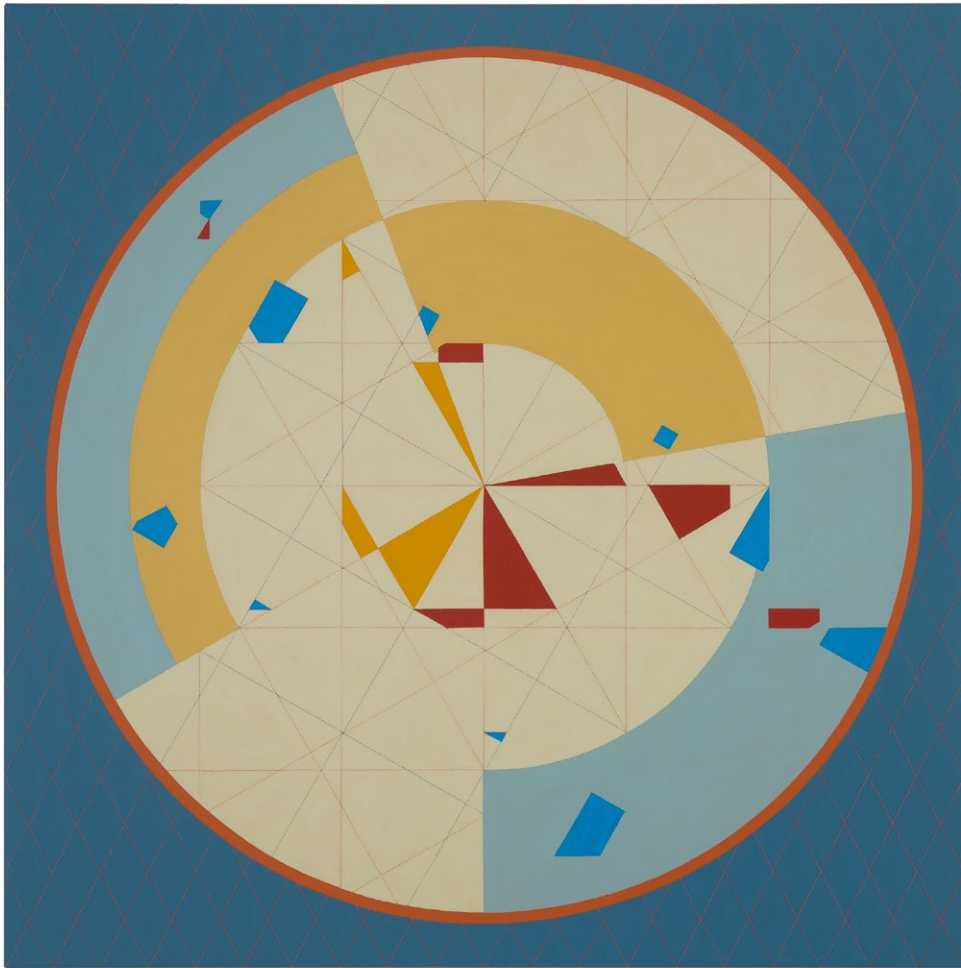
Interrupted Fates III, 2023, acrylic on polyester, 36x36cm



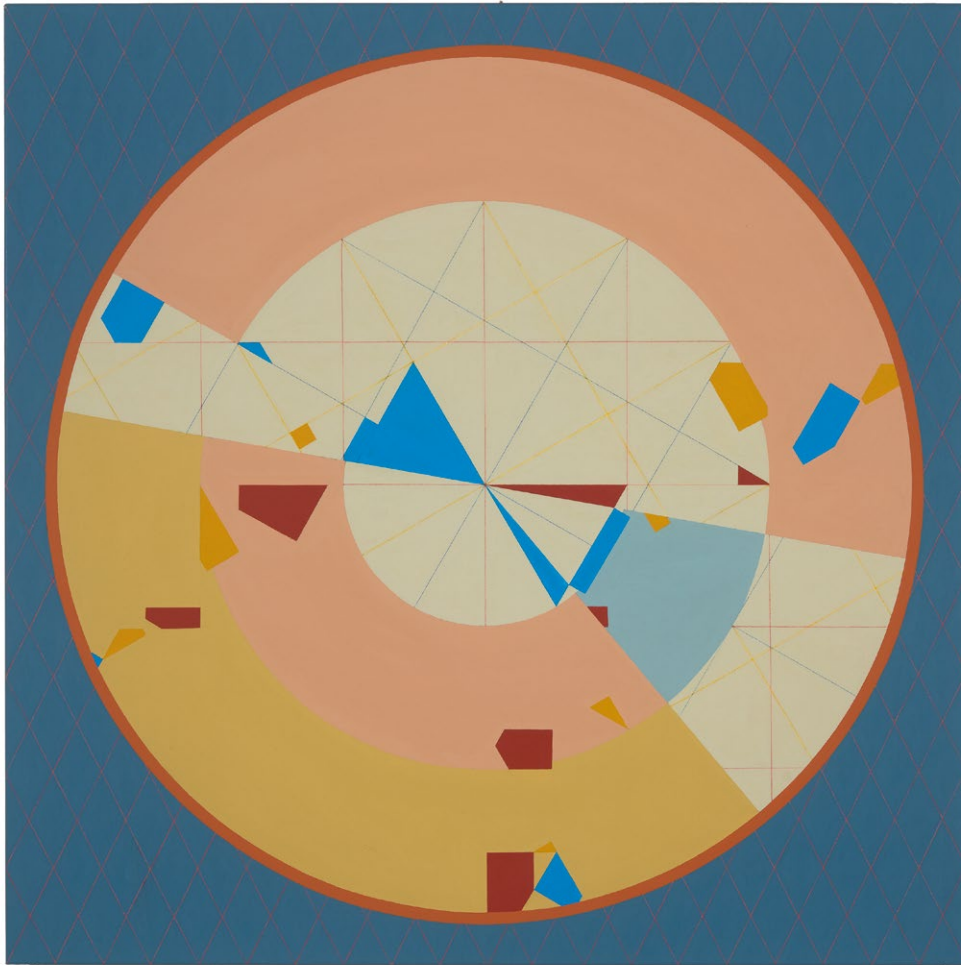
Interrupted Fates IV, 2023, acrylic on polyester, 36x36cm



Interrupted Fates V, 2023, acrylic on polyester canvas, 36x36cm



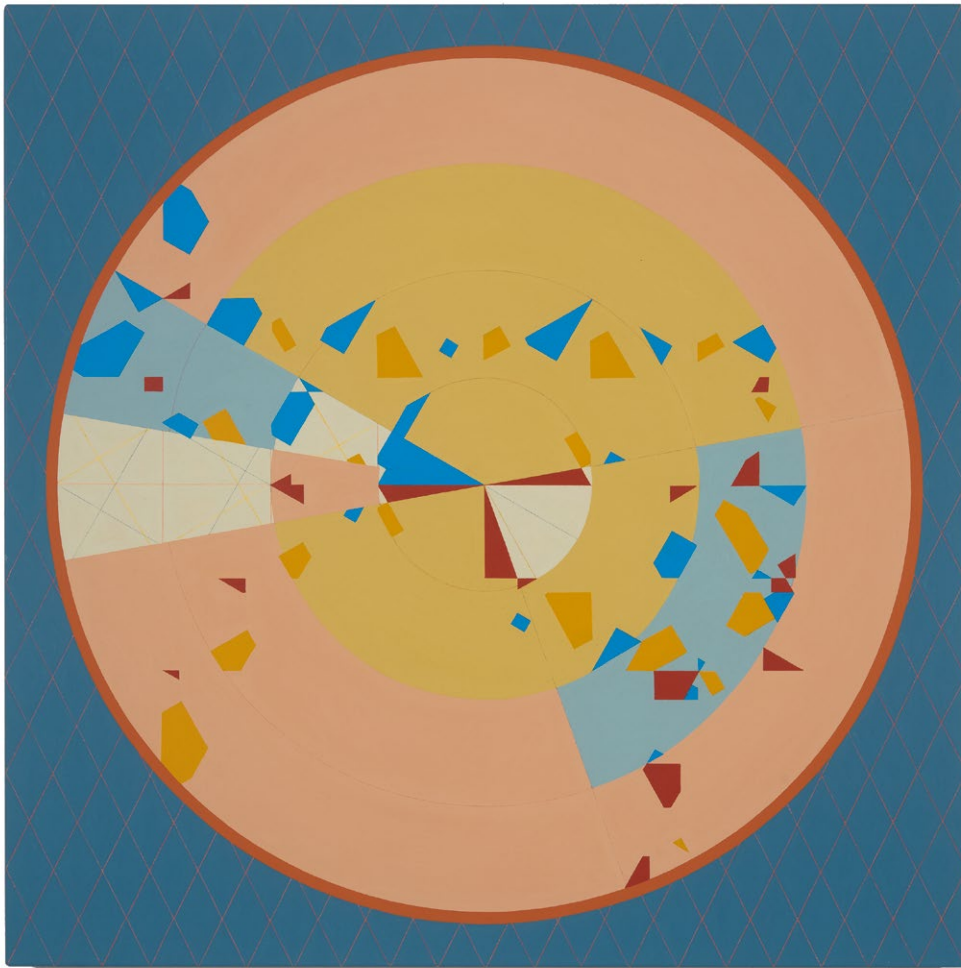
Simple Fates, 2023, acrylic on polyester canvas, 102x102cm



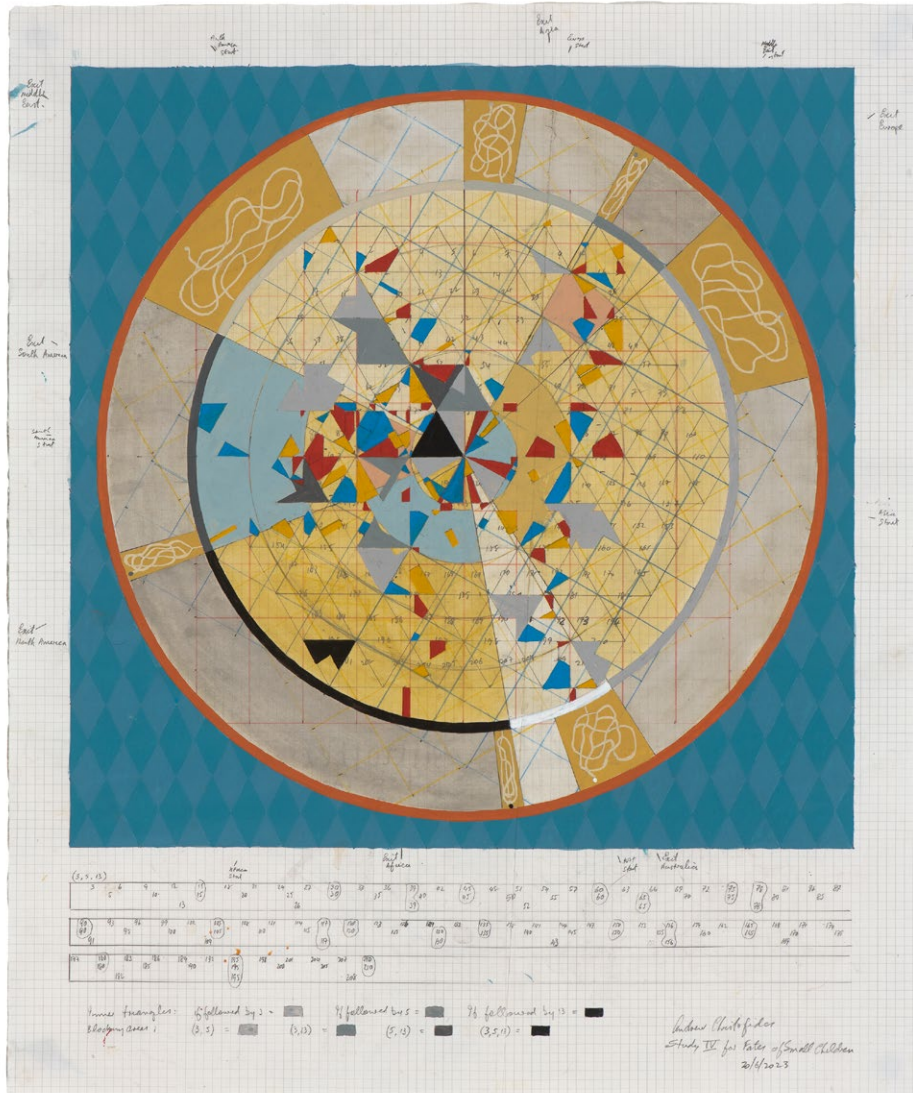
Simple Fates II, 2023, acrylic on polyester canvas, 102x102cm



Simple Fates III, 2023, acrylic on polyester canvas, 102x102cm



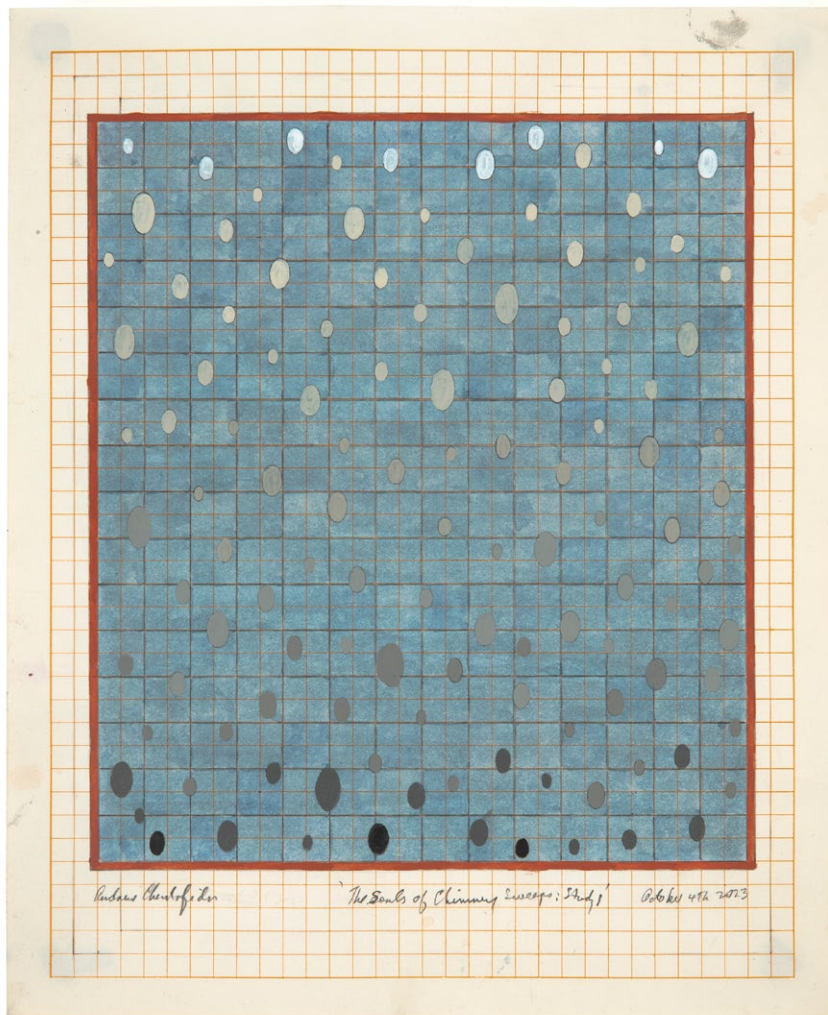
Simple Fates IV, 2023, acrylic on polyester canvas, 102x102cm



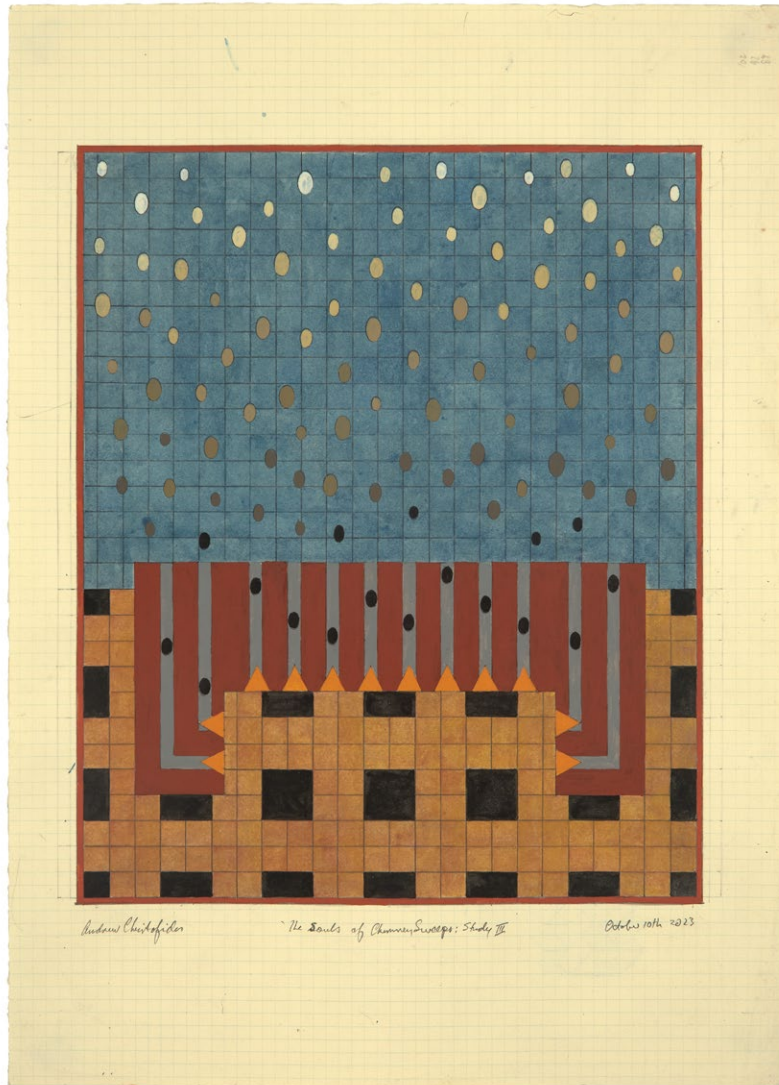
Study IV for Fates of Small Children, 2023, acrylic and watercolour on paper, 61.5x51.5cm [paper size]



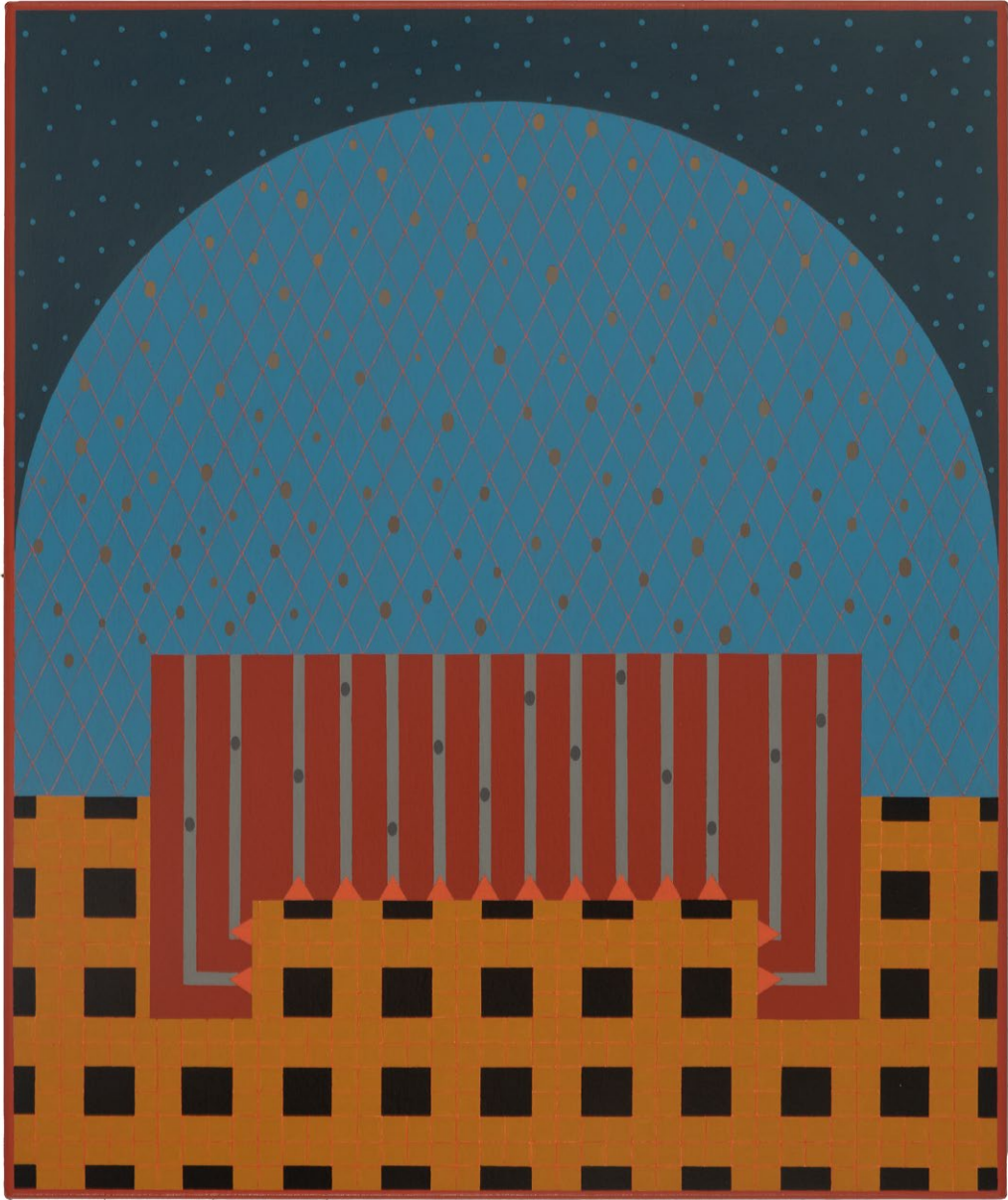
The Fates of Small Children, 2023, acrylic on polyester canvas, 183.5x183.5cm



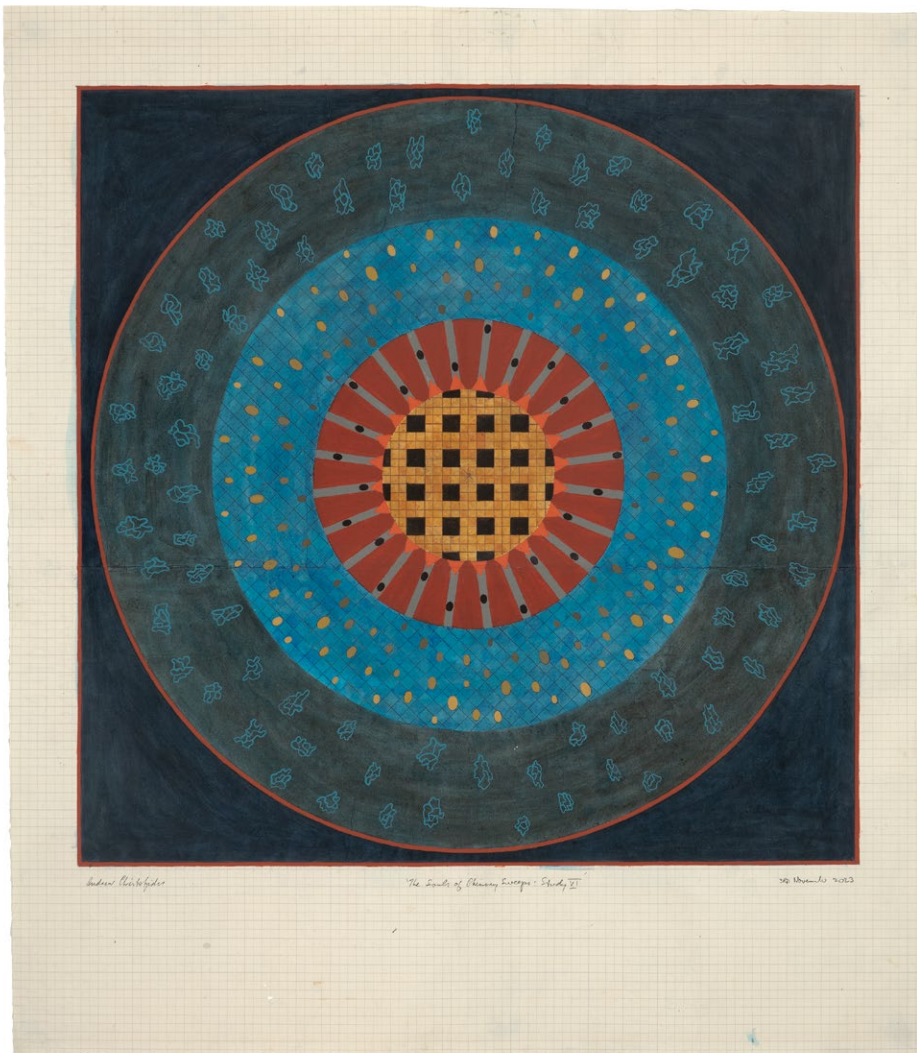
*The Souls of Chimney Sweeps - Study I, 2023,
acrylic and ink on graph paper, 28x23cm [paper size]*



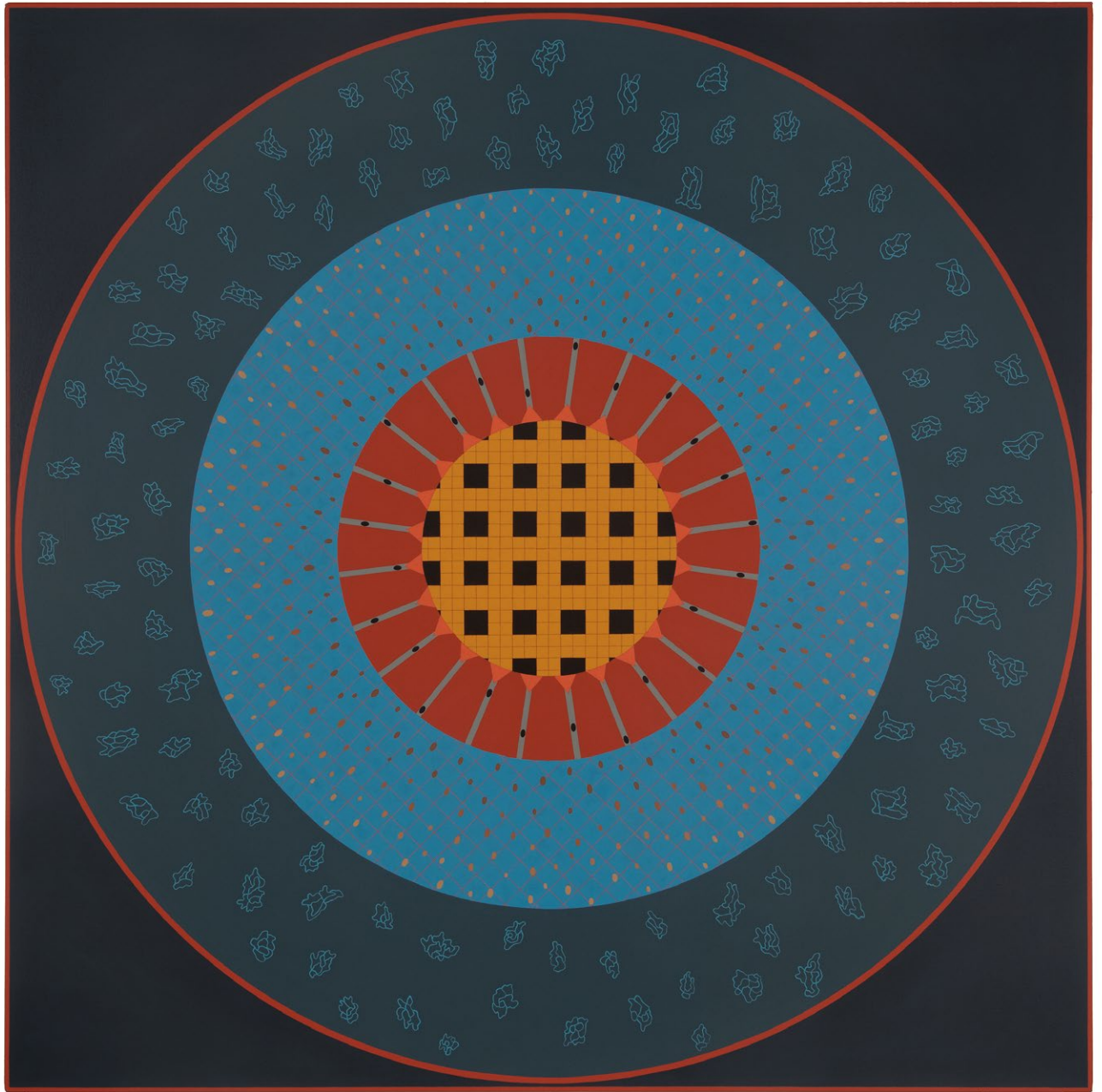
The Souls of Chimney Sweeps - Study III, 2023, acrylic, ink and watercolour on graph paper, 42x30.5cm [paper size]



The Souls of Chimney Sweeps, 2023, acrylic on polyester canvas, 61x51cm



The Souls of Chimney Sweeps - Study VI, 2023,
acrylic, ink and watercolour on graph paper, 61x53cm [paper size]



The Souls of Chimney Sweeps After William Blake, 2024, acrylic on polyester canvas, 153x153cm

Andrew Christofides

Andrew Christofides was born 1946 in Cyprus and migrated to Australia with his family in 1951.

After studying Economics from 1968 to 1971 at the University of New South Wales, he travelled to Cyprus and then to the United Kingdom, where he lived from 1974 to 1982.

In London, Andrew studied Fine Art at the Byam Shaw School of Drawing and Painting (1974-1975) and Chelsea School of Art (1975-1978). Whilst at Chelsea, he was awarded a Rome Scholarship and a studio residency at the British School in Rome from 1978 to 1979 and the Picker Fellowship in Painting at Kingston Polytechnic in London from 1979 to 1980.

Since then, Andrew has lectured in painting and drawing at numerous colleges of art in the United Kingdom and Australia. He was Head of Drawing at The College of Fine Arts, Sydney, from 2003 to 2012.

Andrew has had thirty-eight solo exhibitions in New York, London, Rome, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide. Since 1978 he has been included in over 170 group exhibitions throughout Australia and overseas, including numerous museum and institutional exhibitions. He is represented in public, institutional, corporate and private collections in Australia and overseas.

Andrew currently lives and works in Sydney, Australia.

For a full CV, earlier works and studio archive, visit:

www.kingstreetgallery.com

andrewchristofides.com



Chippendale Studio, Sydney, 2023.
Photograph courtesy Mary MacDougall

King Street Gallery
on William



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