

RAQUEL RABINOVICH

**HUTCHINSON MODERN
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RAQUEL RABINOVICH

Over the course of a seventy-year-long career, New York-based Argentinian-American artist Raquel Rabinovich (b. 1929, Buenos Aires) has been concerned with the paradox of making the invisible visible. She integrates themes of mythology, existence, nature, and transcendence in her monochromatic paintings and drawings, as well as in her sculptural practice that encompasses large-scale glass environments and site-specific stone installations along the shores of the Hudson River. Exploring a range of material choices and artistic processes, Rabinovich's work conveys "how that which is concealed emerges into view."¹

Raised in Córdoba and trained in Buenos Aires and Paris, Rabinovich moved to New York in 1967. As she became immersed in the local art scene, her earlier lyrical painting style gave way to more refined, near-geometric abstractions and she began to work increasingly in sculptural modes. While her work shares the aesthetics of contemporaneous trends like Minimalism, Light and Space, and Land Art, it is suffused with her interests in literature and poetry, spirituality, and a lifelong investigation into what Rabinovich calls the "dark source." For Rabinovich, the dark represents neither negativity nor absence but a rich realm of knowledge and wisdom. Each body of work, whether painting, drawing, collage, or sculpture, represents an embodiment of those "concealed aspects of existence which lie behind the appearance of things, thoughts,

language, and the world."²

Rabinovich's work has been featured in national and international exhibitions, including at the Americas Society, New York; the Bronx Museum of the Arts; Fundación Alón para las Artes; the Jewish Museum; P.S.1; and El Museo del Barrio. Recent solo exhibitions include *Raquel Rabinovich: The Reading Room* at Vassar College (2018), *Thresholds* at the Y Gallery (2017), and *Raquel Rabinovich: Excerpts* at the Pratt Institute Libraries (2017).

Rabinovich's work is held in numerous private and public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Pérez Art Museum Miami; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Rabinovich has received numerous grants and fellowships, including two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships and the 2011–12 Lee Krasner Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. She is also included in the Oral History Program of the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art. Rabinovich currently lives and works in Rhinebeck, New York.

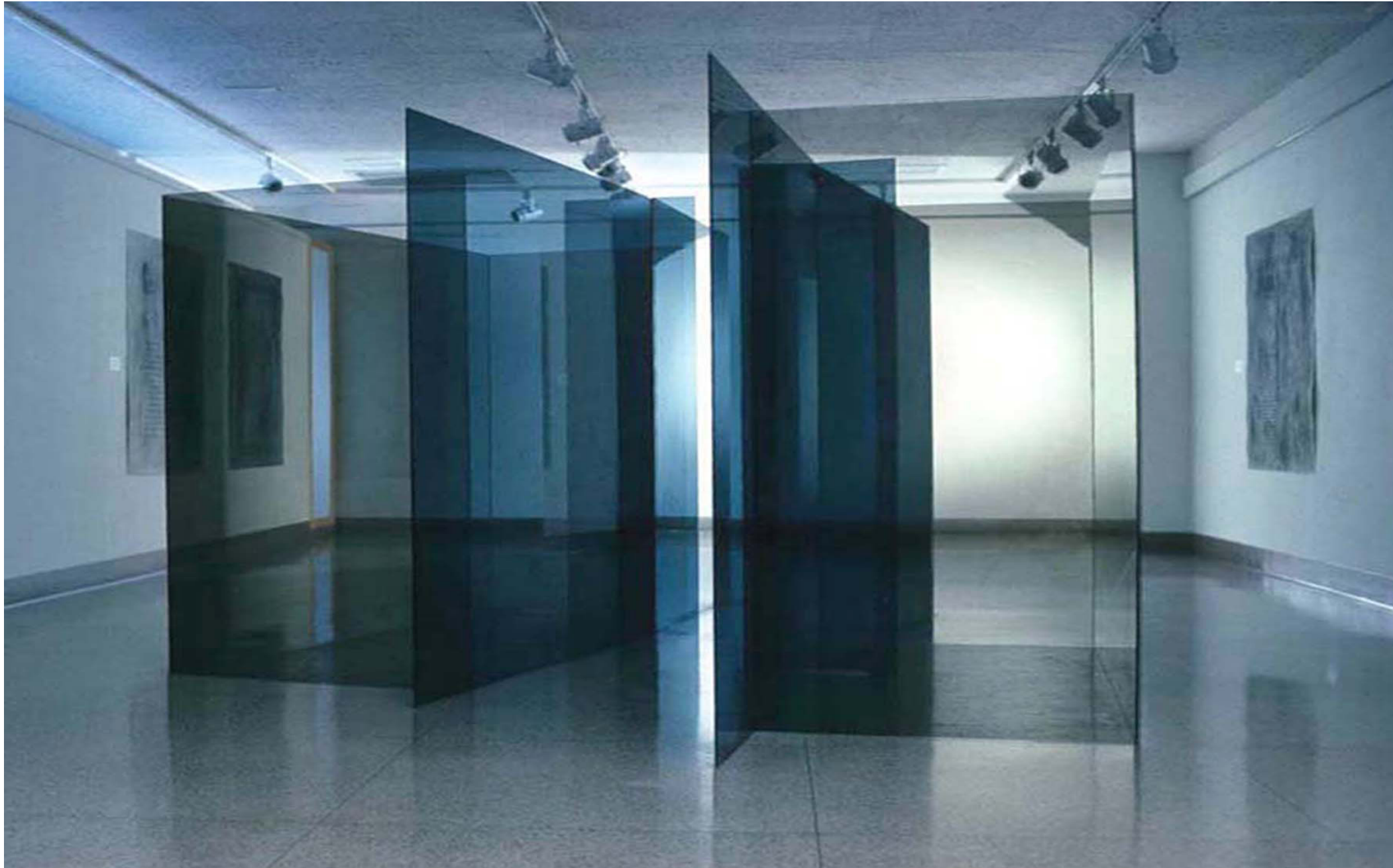
GLASS ENVIRONMENTS, 1970s AND 1980s

Not long after Rabinovich relocated from Argentina to New York in 1967, she began work on a series of sculptures made from plates of tinted grey and bronze glass with the help of the nonprofit organization Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.). Working with fabricators of tempered glass, Rabinovich produced a series of sculptures that range from tabletop maquettes to large-scale environments. She sees these as spatial extensions of her paintings, allowing her to work with transparency and opacity in three dimensions and create spaces that are “simultaneously accessible and inaccessible, open and enclosed, tangible and intangible, private and public, visible and invisible”—a set of paradoxical conditions that are present throughout her various bodies of work.³ By revealing the mechanics of human vision and perception, these glass environments evoke the work of Light and Space artists like Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, and James Turrell who, like Rabinovich, work primarily with “the medium of [one’s] own awareness.”⁴ While these works evoke the paired-down visual language of Minimalism, for Rabinovich they are metaphors for metaphysical, symbolic, and mathematical worlds.

Rabinovich’s glass environments were exhibited at venues such as the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York; the Jewish Museum Sculpture Court, New York; and the Institute for Art and Urban Resources at P.S.1, Long Island City, New York.

Raquel Rabinovich
Gasaki
1987
Grey and bronze tempered glass and wood
120 x 60 x 57 in.





Raquel Rabinovich
Invisible Cities: A City
1986

Grey and bronze tempered glass and silicone adhesive

74 x 144 x 102 in.

Exhibited in *Raquel Rabinovich: Invisible Cities* at The Bronx Museum, NY, from December 13, 1986 through February 5, 1987



Raquel Rabinovich
Point/Counterpoint
 1985

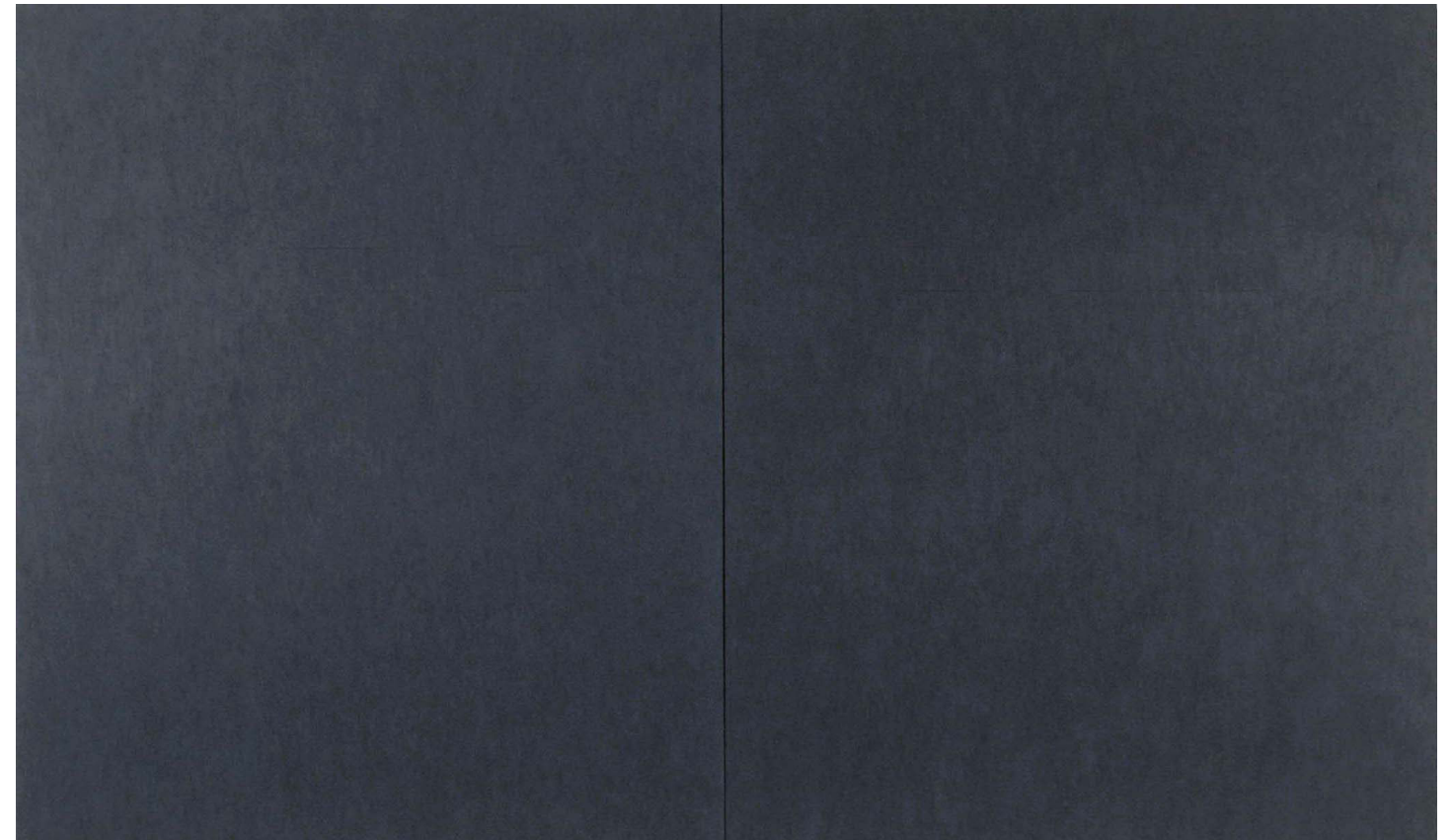
Bronze tinted tempered glass and silicone adhesive
 102 x 210 x 120 in.

Site-specific sculpture installation for the exhibition *Sculpture on the Square* at the Robert Moses Plaza at Fordham University at Lincoln Center, NY from September, 1985, through September, 1986

PAINTINGS AND WORKS ON PAPER, 1980s TO MID-1990s

When Rabinovich arrived in New York—settling first in Long Island and later moving to Manhattan in 1979—she was introduced to the work of Jasper Johns, Barnett Newman, and Ad Reinhardt. Over the years, her paintings and drawings became increasingly monochromatic; in these works, layers accumulate and meld into varied fields of grey, black, and white, creating a muted shimmering effect. Rabinovich was particularly inspired by the subtle gridded canvases of Agnes Martin, whose practice of simply “sitting and looking” as an essential part of her artistic process resonated deeply with Rabinovich.

While living in Manhattan, Rabinovich became interested in the spiritual practice of Vipassana, a form of Buddhist meditation. With its connotations of perception, contemplation, and insight, Vipassana is an apt extension of her artistic pursuit to create a “visual silence” in her work. Her subsequent travels in South and Southeast Asia, where she experienced the regions’ various cultures and sacred architecture, would go on to have a significant impact on her work, including series such as *Chhodrtens* (1989–90), *Garbhagrihas* (1991–93), and *Thrones for the Gods* (Suites A and B, 1992–95).



Raquel Rabinovich
Garbhagrihas 25 (diptych)
1991-93
Oil, pencil and wax on canvas
50 x 80 inches

Raquel Rabinovich
Invisible Cities 5
1984-1985
Graphite wash and rubber stamps on Arches paper
58 x 44.5 inches



Raquel Rabinovich
Thrones for the Gods, Suite B 7
1992-1995
Charcoal, pastel graphite and chalk on Nepalese paper
32 x 20 in.



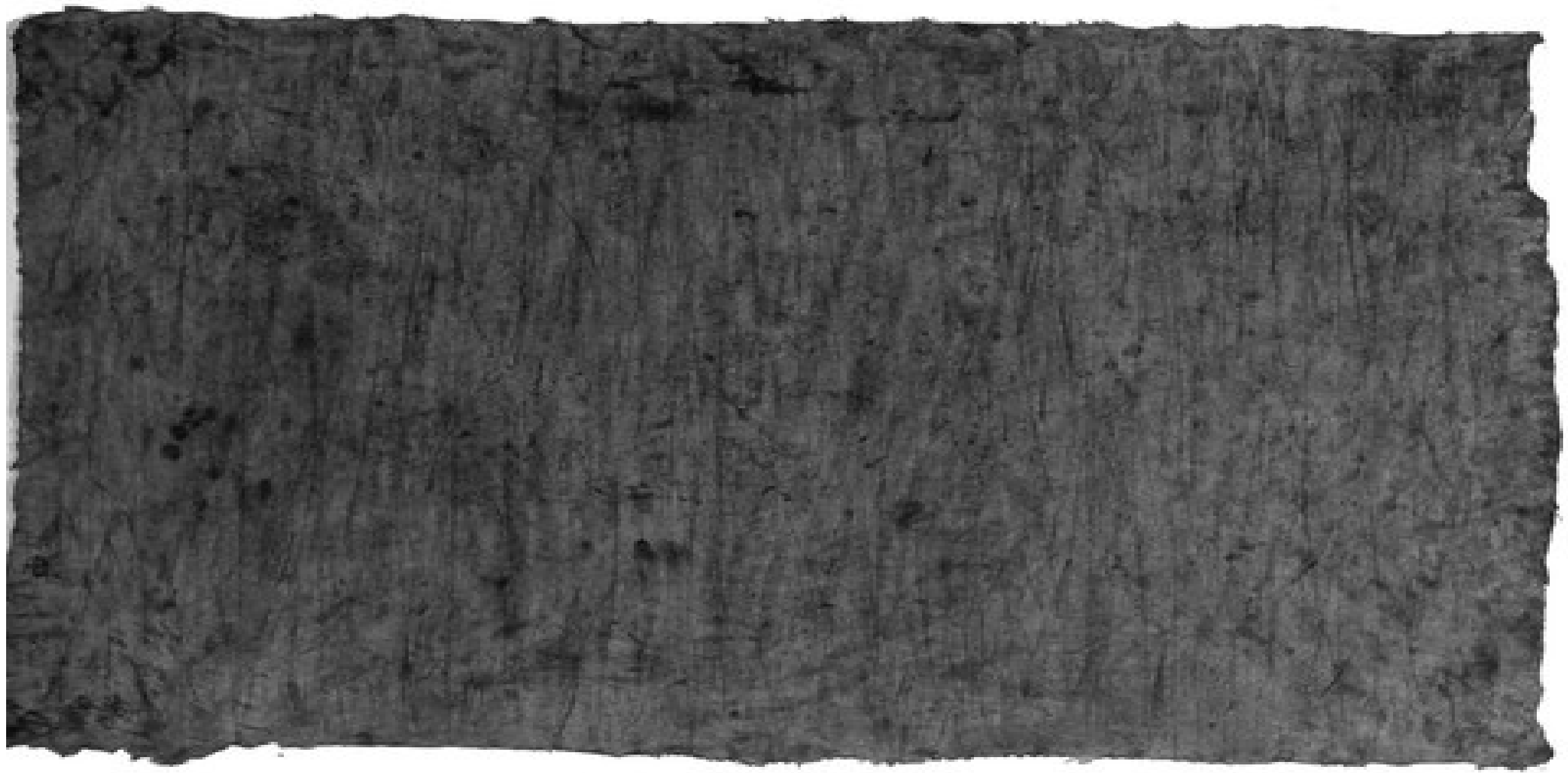
PAINTINGS AND WORKS ON PAPER, MID-1990s TO 2020s

Rabinovich's deep-rooted love of poetry and literature has always been central to her practice. She is especially drawn to the magical worlds present in the work of Latin American writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, and Luisa Valenzuela. Rabinovich explains that "beyond the language of the novel or the poem or the story, there is always an element that is beyond the words, in between the lines, which is not literal....I resonate with that world."⁵ Many of Rabinovich's series of paintings and works on paper can be seen as odes to the intangible, liminal space between language and silence. In *Gateless Gates* (1995–97), *Enfolded Darkness* (1998), and *Light Unworn* (1998–2000), for instance, the artist conceals words and phrases within monochromatic fields of color; in order to discern these embedded passages, viewers must linger with the work over a period of time, visually excavating them from beneath layers of oil paint and wax.

In Rabinovich's most recent series of works on paper and paintings, features the subtle gridded form of the magic square, a mathematical conundrum in which a set of numbers placed in each of the grid's rows and columns adds up to the same sum. According to Rabinovich, "magic squares are ancient symbols of mythical significance and esoteric spirituality. They imply the combination of numbers that were believed to be the source of the essentials of wisdom. In this series of drawings I don't inscribe the numbers, which are present in their absence."⁶

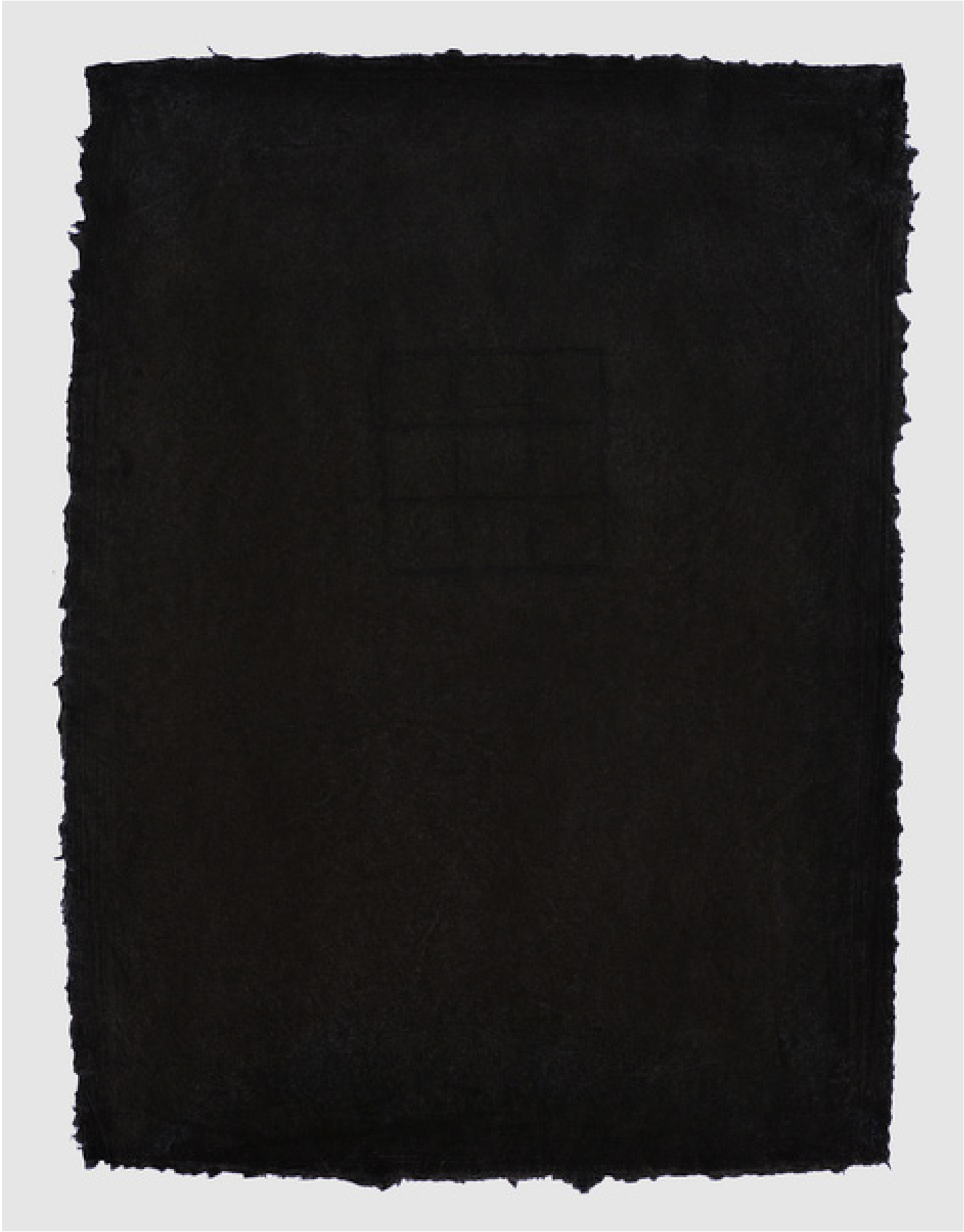
Raquel Rabinovich
Gateless Gates 3
1995-1997
Oil, wax and pencil on canvas
50 x 40 in.



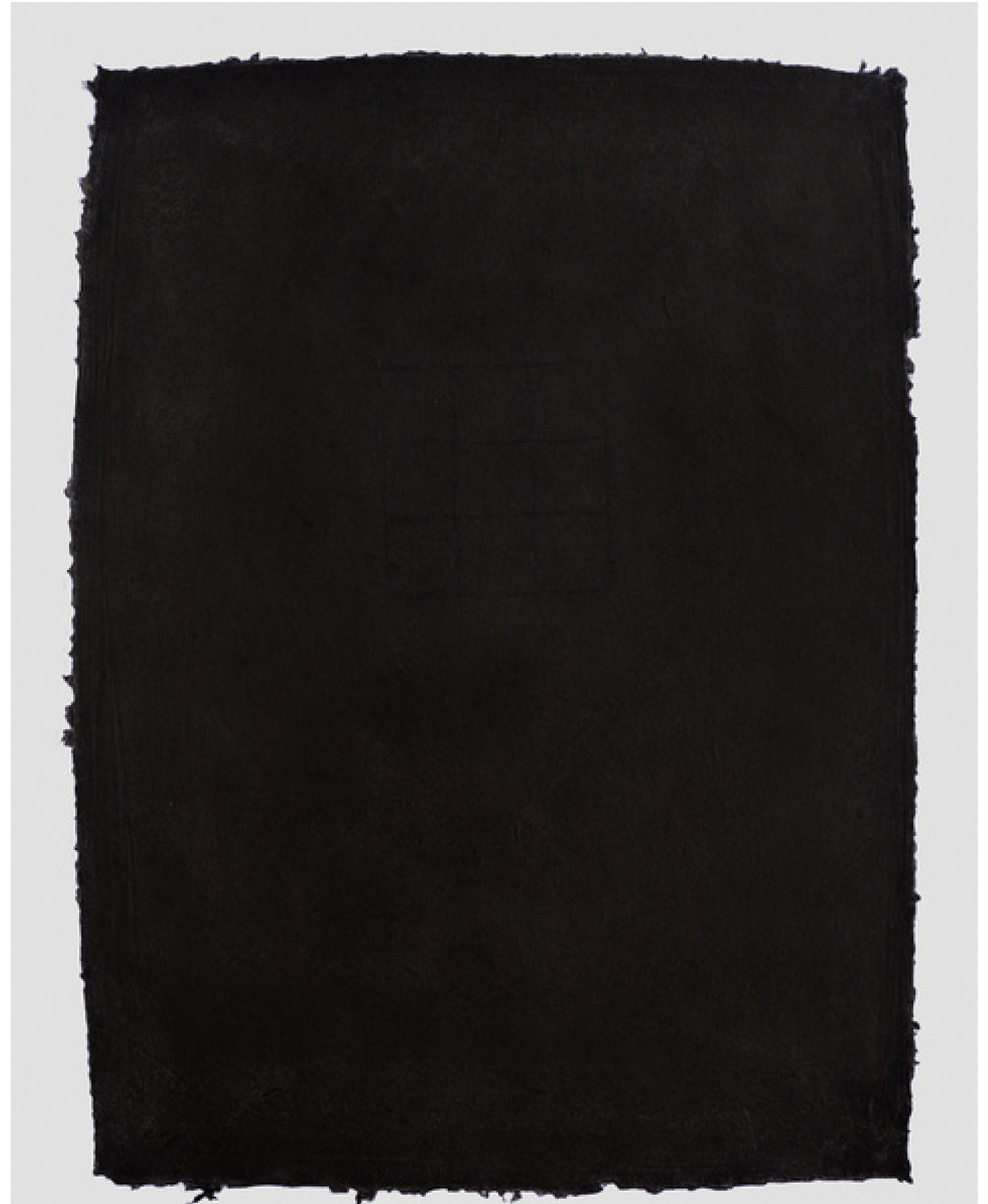


Raquel Rabinovich
Across the Perilous Line 9
2000
Graphite, charcoal wash and pastel on Nepalese paper
21 x 33 in.

Raquel Rabinovich
Magic Squares 2
2018
Danube River mud, pastel, and ink wash on Essindia paper
30 x 22 in.



Raquel Rabinovich
Magic Squares 7
2018
Danube River mud, pastel, and ink wash on Essindia paper
30 x 22 in.



PABHAVIKAS (1995–2000)

Given her longstanding interest in “spaces of silence and darkness”—including the ruins at Machu Picchu, the caves at Lascaux, and even the Catholic churches of Córdoba that she sought out for their quietude in her youth—it is not surprising that Rabinovich would eventually return to working in site-specific, architectural modes.⁷ By the early 1990s, Rabinovich had moved from Manhattan to upstate New York, where she created her first stone installations on her property in Rhinebeck. Titled *Pabhavikas*, a Pali word meaning “emerging from,” these stone mounds reference the ancient temples that Rabinovich encountered in Nepal and India, as well as the metaphorical process of something concealed coming to the surface, revealing itself. To create these works, Rabinovich purchased truckloads of stones from local quarries and positioned them around existing rocks in the forest, gradually building up piles that resemble the remnants of aging ruins.



Raquel Rabinovich
Pabhavikas 1
1995-96
River split stone
3 x 13 x 32 in.



Raquel Rabinovich
Pabhavikas 19
1999-00
Field stone
2 x 30 x 15 in.

EMERGENCES (2001–2012)

In 2001, Rabinovich transferred her practice of assembling stone sculptures from the woods to the shores of the Hudson River. Titled *Emergences*, these site-specific stone installations are daily concealed and revealed by the cyclical rising and falling of the river tides, enhancing their themes of impermanence and flux. While many *Emergences* still exist, others have succumbed to the fluctuations of currents and time, an effect Rabinovich embraces; in this way, her stone installations differentiate themselves from the monumental gestures of some iconic Land artists, deriving instead from a quieter impulse akin to the ephemeral practices of Andy Goldsworthy or Richard Long.

Raquel Rabinovich
Emergences, Riverfront Park, Beacon, NY
2003
Algonquin Fieldstone, S. Bay Quartzite stone, and on-site stone
Dimension variable
Hudson River, mid- tide





Raquel Rabinovich
Emergences, Lighthouse Park, Port Ewen, NY
 2012
 On-site stone
 Dimension variable
 Hudson River, low tide

RIVER LIBRARY (2002–PRESENT)

Rabinovich's interests in rivers and language merge in the series *River Library*. To create these works, she submerges handmade paper into mud from rivers as near as the Hudson and as far-flung as the Ganges and the Paraná. When dry, she sometimes arranges them into diptychs resembling open codices, or rolls them into scroll-like forms. She has made hundreds of these "drawings" to date, each with a color and quality unique to its source. For Rabinovich, rivers, like stones, are "repositories of history," containing information about a region's geology as well as the past and present civilizations that have congregated along their shores.⁸ As such, the *River Library* works function like visual documents that record both natural and cultural history, where mud becomes "the alphabet of a language yet to be deciphered."⁹



Raquel Rabinovich
River Library 388 and 389 with Footnotes
2011
Mississippi River (USA) mud and glue on Essindia paper
18.5 x 26.5 in.



Raquel Rabinovich
River Library 349
2007-2010
Orinoco River (Venezuela) mud and glue on Essindia paper
16 x 23 in.



Raquel Rabinovich
River Library 426 with Notes
2014
Jordan River (Israel) mud and glue on Essindia paper
7.75 x 23 in.

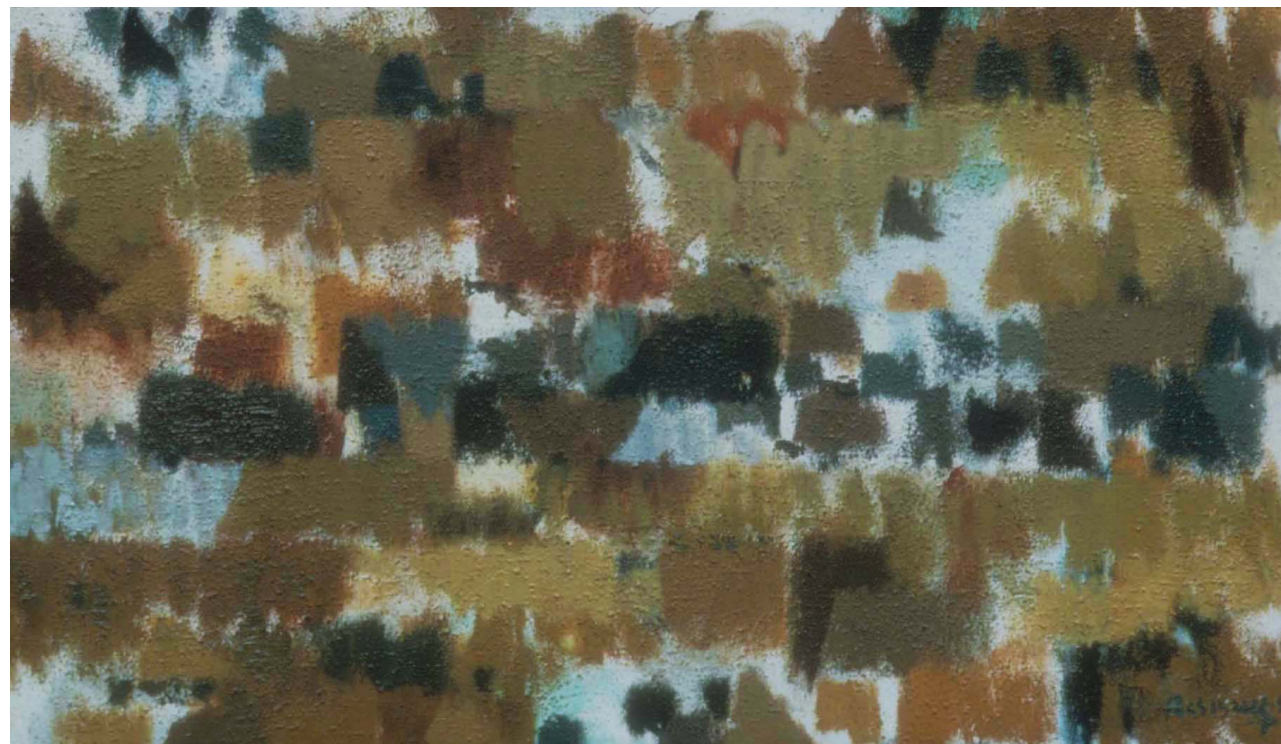


Raquel Rabinovich
River Library 430 with Punctuation Marks
 2016-17
 Nile River mud and glue on Essindia paper
 7.25 x 10 in.

EXTENDED BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1929 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to a Russian and Romanian Jewish immigrant family, Raquel Rabinovich was raised in nearby Córdoba. There she began taking painting and drawing classes with Italian artist Ernesto Farina. At this time she was also politically active and was briefly held as a political prisoner under Juan Domingo Perón's regime. She later studied medicine and studio art at the Universidad de Córdoba before moving to Buenos Aires, where she studied with painter Héctor Basaldúa.

In the mid-1950s, Rabinovich moved to Europe, where she lived in Paris, Edinburgh, and Copenhagen, and married her husband, José Luis Reissig, in 1956.



Raquel Rabinovich, *Bestechetwinde 13*, 1959, oil and sand on linen, 25 x 39 in.

In Paris, she attended classes at La Sorbonne and at the atelier of French Cubist painter André Lhote. Her studies and travels introduced her to the work of Modern European artists such as Georges Braque and Piet Mondrian, the Art Informel movement, and Old Masters—in particular Diego Velázquez—all of which drove her work into a more non-objective mode of painting, evolving from semi-figurative portraits and still life paintings to pure abstraction.

Upon her return to Buenos Aires in the early 1960s, Rabinovich began a series of near-monochromatic paintings titled *The Dark is Light Enough*. These textural works, realized in a spectrum of earthy



Raquel Rabinovich, *The Dark is Light Enough 12*, 1963, oil on linen, 39.5 x 39.5 in.

hues, marked the beginning of a lifelong investigation into what Rabinovich calls the “dark source.” For Rabinovich, the dark represents neither negativity nor absence but a rich realm of knowledge and wisdom. Each subsequent body of work, whether painting, drawing, collage, or sculpture, represents an embodiment of those “concealed aspects of existence which lie behind the appearance of things, thoughts, language, and the world.”¹⁰

As the political climate in Argentina became increasingly unstable, Rabinovich moved with Reissig and their three children to New York in 1967. They settled in Huntington, Long Island, where Rabinovich became immersed in the contemporary art scene. She joined the American Abstract Artists (AAA) and was introduced to the work of Jasper Johns, Agnes Martin, Barnett Newman, and Ad Reinhardt. From the late-1960s to the mid-1970s, her earlier lyrical gestures gave way to more refined, near-geometric abstractions—most notably in her series of paintings titled *Dimension Five*.

Following her divorce from Reissig in 1979, Rabinovich moved to Manhattan, where her loft became a meeting place for fellow artists. There she continued to pursue a series of sculptures made from plates of tinted grey and bronze glass, a project she had begun in the early 1970s with the help of the nonprofit organization Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.). Working with fabricators of tempered glass, Rabinovich produced a series of sculptures that range from tabletop maquettes to large-scale environments. She sees these sculptures as a spatial extension of her paintings, allowing her to work with varying states of transparency and opacity in three dimensions.

This impulse to ground the viewer in perceptual observation can be traced to her own spiritual practice of Vipassana, a form of Buddhist meditation. With its connotations of perception, contemplation, and insight, Vipassana is an apt extension of her artistic pursuit to create a “visual silence” in her work.¹¹



Raquel Rabinovich, *The Dark is Light Enough 11*, 1962-63, oil on linen, 39.5 x 39.5 in.



Raquel Rabinovich, *Dimension Five 25*, 1973-74, oil on linen, 32 x 54 in.

In the late 1980s, around the time that she began practicing Vipassana, Rabinovich reunited with Reissig and traveled throughout South and Southeast Asia; her experiences of the regions' various cultures and sacred architecture would go on to have a significant impact on her work, including series such as *Chhodrtens* (1989–90), *Garbhagrihas* (1991–93), and *Thrones for the Gods* (Suites A and B, 1992–95).

By the early 1990s, Rabinovich had moved from Manhattan to upstate New York, where she created her first stone installations on her property in Rhinebeck. Titled *Pabhavikas* (1995–2000), a Pali word meaning “emerging from,” these stone mounds reference ancient temples that seemed to Rabinovich to be born from the earth itself, as well as the metaphorical

process of something concealed coming to the surface, revealing itself. To create these works, Rabinovich purchased truckloads of stones from local quarries and positioned them around existing rocks in the forest, gradually building up piles that resemble the remnants of aging ruins. In 2001, she transferred this practice from the woods to the shores of the Hudson River. Titled *Emergences* (2001–2012), these site-specific stone installations are daily concealed and revealed by the cyclical rising and falling of the river tides, enhancing their themes of impermanence and flux.

Rabinovich currently lives and works in Rhinebeck, where she maintains a studio practice. Though she set aside painting in the early 2000s to pursue her stone installations and the series *River Library* (2002–present),

she has returned to the medium in recent years, producing series such as *Thresholds* (2014–2017) and *Thresholds: A Sequel* (2017–2018). Most recently, Rabinovich has completed a series of works on paper titled *Magic Squares* (2018–2020). Each work features the subtle gridded form of the magic square, a mathematical conundrum in which a set of numbers placed in each of the grid's rows and columns adds up to the same sum. According to Rabinovich, “magic squares are ancient symbols of mythical significance and esoteric spirituality. They imply the combination of numbers that were believed to be the source of the essentials of wisdom.”¹²

Rabinovich's work has been featured in national and international exhibitions, including at the Americas Society, New York; the Bronx Museum of the Arts; Fundación Alón para las Artes; the Jewish Museum; P.S. 1; and El Museo del Barrio. Recent solo exhibitions include *Raquel Rabinovich: The Reading Room* at Vassar College (2018), *Thresholds* at the Y Gallery (2017), and *Raquel Rabinovich: Excerpts* at the Pratt Institute Libraries (2017). Her work is held in numerous private and public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Pérez Art Museum Miami; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art. She has received numerous grants and fellowships, including two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships and the 2011–12 Lee Krasner Award for Lifetime Achievement from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. She is also included in the Oral History Program of

the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art.

Notes:

1 Raquel Rabinovich, “Biography,” *Raquel Rabinovich*, web, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://www.raquelrabinovich.com/biography>.

2 Rabinovich, “Statement,” *Raquel Rabinovich*, web, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://www.raquelrabinovich.com/statement>.

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7 Rabinovich, “Biography.”

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12 Rabinovich, “Magic Squares, 2018,” *Raquel Rabinovich*, web, accessed April 18, 2020, <https://www.raquelrabinovich.com/work-on-paper/work-on-paper-2000-present/magic-squares-2018/statement>.

Cover
Raquel Rabinovich
Chhodrtens 15
1989-1990
Oil, wax and pencil on linen
40 x 32 in. (diptych)

Page 2
Raquel Rabinovich
Chhodrtens 8
1989-1990
Oil, wax and pencil on linen
58 x 48 in.

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**HUTCHINSON MODERN
& CONTEMPORARY**

47 East 64th Street, Suite 1B
New York, NY 10065
(212) 988-8788
info@hutchinsonmodern.com
hutchinsonmodern.com