ASH KEATING Duality

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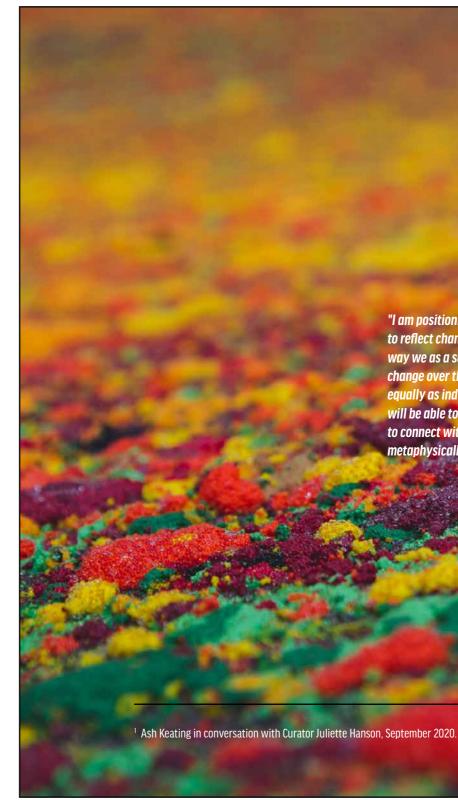
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ASH KEATING

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IMAGE > [Front cover] Ash Keating, Aerial # 1 [installation view], 2020, pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on canvas, 375 x 246cm. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography. [Right page] Ash Keating, Fall [studio view], 2020. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.



"I am positioning a body of work as a means to reflect change, like the seasons, like the way we as a society have endured significant change over the course of this past year and equally as individuals. I hope these works will be able to provide a space for the viewer to connect with themselves, physically and metaphysically." 1

ASH KEATING Duality > Aerial

In December of 2020 I went to Ash Keating's studio to view the series of works presented in Duality > Aerial. The studio space is very large with natural light pouring in from the ceiling. After many months of lockdown in Melbourne and not seeing any art in real life, these works completely transported me, breath-taken, into another place, outside of time. This kind of transcendence is only made possible by the strongest manifestations of artistic vision and creative energy. After less than a minute, tears ran down my face as I communed with these works. A cushion to sit on and a cup of tea were supplied by the artist whose capacity to understand the physicality of emotion is second to none.

The longer I looked, the more I became absorbed by the luminous complexity of the works' surfaces. In an alchemical furore, the works seem at once hot and cold, natural and unnatural, calm and fiery. They breathe and change, and yet they are monumental

in their stillness. It felt as if the works could absorb my own emotions and reflect them back with an intensified clarity. These works are compelling at a primal level, they speak the language of time, erosion and longing. They are deeply meditative and peaceful.

That the works emit an intense energy is hardly surprising when considering the processes involved in their making. Keating worked on the larger canvases simultaneously, applying and manipulating countless layers of media, including pigments, perlite, mica flakes, paint and water, across the surfaces. As each layer is applied, there is also removal, in a process of building and paring back that involves seed sprayers, leaf blowers, wire brush, electric sanders, vacuums, and Stanley knives.

As the layers dry and set, the surface is hosed with water and dry pigments and binders are separately added. Keating stretches the canvases on the floor of his

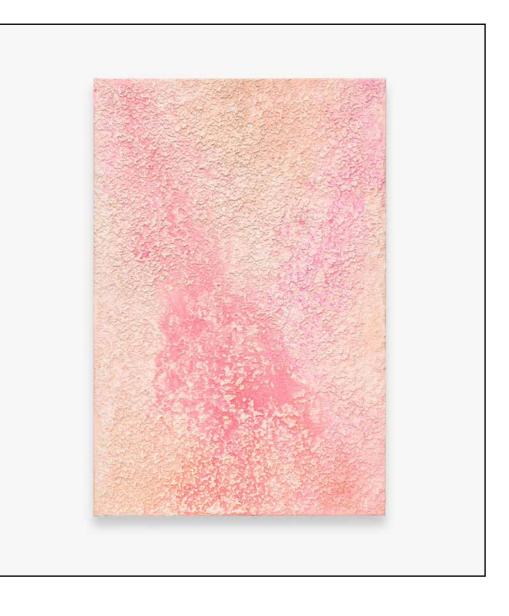


IMAGE > Ash Keating, Aerial #16 [installation view], 2020, pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on canvas, 90 x 60cm. Photograph: Matthew Stanton



IMAGE > Ash Keating, Aerial #3 [installation view], 2020, pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on canvas, 375 x 131cm. Photograph: Matthew Stanton.

studio to work on them. The floor is slightly sloped which allows the pigments to swim and set, like silt or sediment, using gravity and the natural movement of the water through the various textured channels of the work, to form ripples and waves.

This liquidity characterises much of the works' surface, emphasised by the sweeping silver paint that highlights the oranges and pinks. The shimmering rivulets and flowing undulations on the works' surfaces, contrast with areas of cracked, dry, earthy substance, highlighted with matte white. The works intentionally conjure the image of a salt lake environment at sunset. They have an iridescent glow, in equal measure wet and fluid, crystalline and parched.

Importantly, these works change depending on where you stand in relation to them. You have to interact with them physically in order to experience their intricate surfaces that shimmer and shift depending on how they catch the light at different angles. Making the work over the course of one month during Melbourne's second lock-down period, at the end of 2020, Keating intentionally created work that was designed to be experienced in real life. After

so many months of viewing everything and everyone via a screen, these works celebrate the power of physical presence.

The scale of the works can also only be appreciated as they tower over you. To work at this scale is challenging, requiring physical endurance as well as specially designed mechanisations to allow the works. which weigh up to 70KG, to be constructed and moved around. Keating relishes this challenge and always seeks to push the limits of what is possible in terms of size and materiality. He has looked to artists such as Anselm Kiefer, in terms of the scale and scope of his practice, as well as Mary Corse and Jack Whitten who have also inspired him to work with new textures and materials.

As a teenager, Ash Keating trained as a student pilot, able to fly solo in a light aircraft, as his grandmother Elva Rush and mother, Pam Keating, had done before him. Keating though, was drawn more to the visual experience of viewing and capturing the landscape than the experience of flying the plane itself. Some of his very first studio paintings, from over twenty years ago, were textured abstract aerial landscapes, based on photographs taken from these flights.

Duality > Aerial shows a return to Keating's early fascination with representing the world from above. The visual resemblance to aerial photography is clear, with the surface of the canvases emulating large natural phenomena, such as rivers, lakes or desert planes as if seen from a great height. It is interesting to note that gravity has been a constant force at play in Keating's work, either defying its pull, or harnessing it.

The smaller works act as a counterpoint to the larger ones. They provide a sense of closeness whilst the larger works represent distance. It is as if they are magnified sections of the larger works, providing a more intimate viewing experience. To think about distance and closeness is particularly poignant following the events of the global pandemic. So many of us felt the intensity of living in close quarters, whilst also feeling a terrible distance from many of the things and people we love. These works, created sensitively and purposefully as an antidote to isolation and anxiety, encourage reconnection, reflection and solace.

"I am positioning a body of work as a means to reflect change, like the seasons, like the way we as a society have endured significant change over the course of this past year and equally as individuals. I hope these works will be able to provide a space for the viewer to connect with themselves, physically and metaphysically."¹

Juliette Hanson

Curator January, 2021



¹ Ash Keating in conversation with Curator Juliette Hanson, September 2020.

IMAGE > Ash Keating, Duality > Aerial [installation view], 2020. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

ASH KEATING Duality > Fall

ASH KEATING IN CONVERSATION WITH DAVID HAGGER

DH: Before we talk about this new series Fall. why don't we start by talking about the idea of splitting this exhibition into two parts. Where did the idea for that come from? Was it being afforded more time in the delay of the opening date?

AK: It was definitely about time. Both in having more of it due to the events of last year and the fact that an institutional exhibition runs longer than a commercial show or an art fair does. With last year panning out the way it did I was able to make an expansive body of work, and rather than pack too much into the one show, I could keep it grand but minimal by thinking about it curatorially.

DH: It was a very deliberate plan. Before you even made the first set of paintings, you knew were going to make a second set of paintings as well. Mimic the number of works, mimic the scale - literally a swap over - and give an audience not one, but two different experiences?

AK: Yes, yes.

DH: So how did you approach that? Did you set out to make complimentary or contrasting works? Taking aside what they are now, can you go back to your thinking at the time?

AK: I remember that the first series I began making is actually the second series in the exhibition, Fall. I was building up the texture on the canvas and the linen repeatedly with vermiculite and acrylic, layer upon layer, wire brushing and vacuuming them, adding to them again with a seed sprayer onto the wet pigment to build up what became almost a bitumen or render type surface. It was at that point in time that I knew that there needed to be a contrasting body of

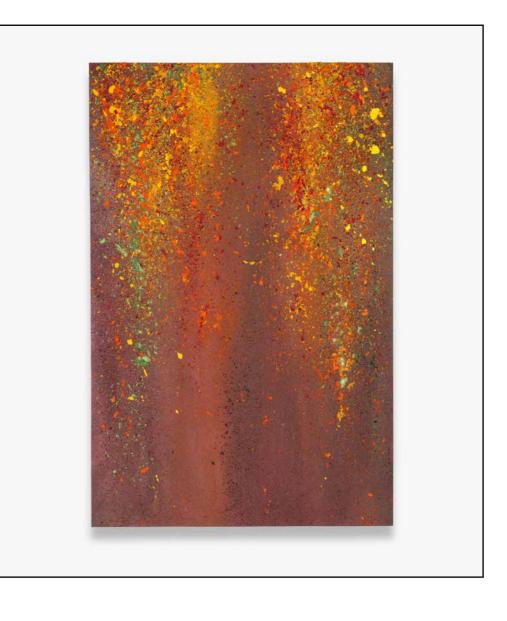


IMAGE > Ash Keating, Fall #1, 2020, synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on canvas, 375 x 246 x 5cm. Photograph: Matthew Stanton.

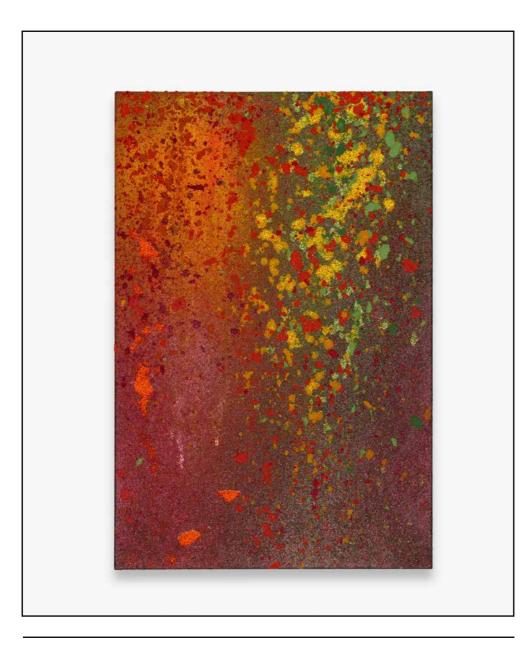


IMAGE > Ash Keating, Fall #12, 2020, synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on linen, 90 x 60cm. Photograph: Matthew Stanton.

work. I didn't know where this body of work was going though, so I put it aside and then began what eventually became Aerial.

DH: Knowing though, that you would return to them? That is not something you would usually do, is it?

AK: No. it isn't. Unlike Fall. I started Aerial on the ground, adding perlite and mica flakes. I found that after adding layers and using leaf blower across the surface it was breaking apart. I realised that result was reminiscent of aerial landscapes, and the undulating ground, so why take them off the floor? Why not explore that idea more? And that in itself was a contrasting way to work than the other series.

DH: You've mentioned mica flakes. perlite and vermiculite. What lead you to experimenting with and adding these materials? We are used to your work being about the strategic removal of paint by washing in order to reveal the layers below. Why this shift to adding materials?

AK: It is a combination of looking back to when I was first painting, 20 odd years ago in high school, when I was using paint straight out of the tube, building these sorts of aerial landscapes in a gestural and textural manner,

and the polished appearance of more recent *Gravity System Response* works. The surface of these were so smooth and so clean, even though they were made up of 10 or 12 layers of paint, that some people read them as digital prints. In a way this was a compliment as I know how hard it is to make a drip painting look that flat, smooth and beautiful, but I was very far away from being able to be gritty and raw, where I can make mistakes and have those mistakes be absorbed into the artwork. I think I really wanted a break from the process I had been refining over recent years and this opportunity presented as an outlet for that.

DH: Is this how you arrived at the glass beads? They add not only a reflective element to the works, but significant texture. So much so that Fall feels like a negative mould of Aerial. Was this intentional?

AK: I think, in a way, because I knew I was going to make textured work in Fall, I allowed Aerial to remain so minimal and soft. It was only ever one half of a story, with each part relying on the other to make sense of it all. That they fed off each other in terms of their physical attributes was intentional. Having said that, it wasn't until the eleventh hour in making Fall that I decided to really go all in with the glass beads. I had packets of them here in the studio and I was starting to add them sparingly on top of the vermiculite layers to see how they would work but I felt it needed more. I mixed them into the paint until it became almost sand like.

DH: Which doesn't go through an airless spraver l assume?

AK: Right. Which meant I had to apply it in a different manner, almost dropping it on the lowered, angled canvas. Dropping and flicking. It became messy, even more so when I applied the unmixed beads onto the final wet surface. Working with these gloss polymers, the beads and the bronze underlayers I found the works became almost a strange, alien, environmental space.

DH: This wasn't planned out was it? It is the result of the raw experimentation you were chasing.

AK: Yes, and in a way that is what I was hoping for. The reality is there is 90% planning in terms of having all the materials, the studio setup and mindset ready to go, but you can have that and not take risks. Or you can have it and take risks - considered or not – and let it break open the practice. The main concern for me was that this whole project opened up the practice to create new

ways to make paintings. I didn't want to turn these into Gravity System Response paintings over the textured surface, as easy as that would have been.

DH: Yet, these Fall works were exactly that at one point in time. If we look at the early studio shots that Dan Preston took, we can see this clearly - when you returned to those first textural layers, the bitumen you referred to, that you had set aside while making the Aerial series.

AK: Yes. These layers informed the direction of the beads that were added later. It was a way in which I could create depth of field, bringing the viewer closer to the surface, as if they are witnessing the process of their making.

DH: Let's talk about colour. Despite starting out dark. these are vivid works.

AK: While I lost a lot of the darker blacks in those foundation layers through to the addition of bronze pigment, I feel like the works are closer to nature as a result, which is what I was attempting to achieve in the final layers. I very rarely use green, but it serves a purpose here, acting as a counterpoint to the yellows and reds, and figuratively, by alluding to Autumn as falling leaves.



IMAGE > Ash Keating, Fall #9, 2020, synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on linen, 90 x 60cm. Photograph: Matthew Stanton.

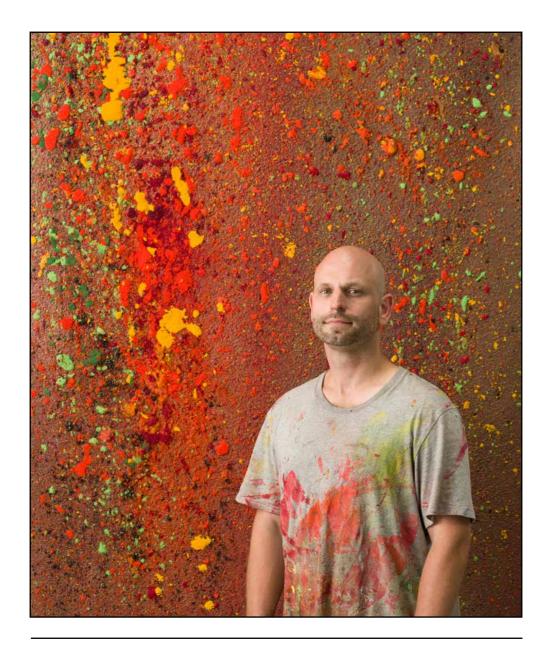


IMAGE > portrait of Ash Keating, 2020, Photograph: Matthew Stanton.

DH: It's a clever play on words Fall, both in production, with the dropping of pigment and beads, and the more obvious seasonal reference.

AK: When the new dates for the exhibition were presented to me, I was conscious of the change in season at the halfway point, around the time of the changeover of series. so I intended to make works that were deeper and richer in their tonal gualities to reflect this and offset the softness of Aerial. This idea of change felt inevitable, felt even more pertinent, living through lockdowns. Day to day, time felt like it was standing still. Change is just the starting point though.

DH: Within all of your paintings we have to grapple with the idea of macro and micro worlds. They are as equally expansive as they are microscopic. In these two bodies of work though, I feel like you have brought this to a critical juncture. In Aerial we could be high above a vast landscape, but in Fall we are right in the middle of you making the work, as if the paint is passing by us before hitting the canvas.

AK: The works are abstract compositions. The way in which I have painted and sculpted these works are not representations of any one thing. They may appear like falling leaves but could equally be organisms under

a microscope or the close-up photography of deep space. We look for a reference point of what we know of the real world, a lived experience or a memory, but in the end what I am looking for is a feeling.

DH: That's true of all of your work. If we look back to the Meat Market exhibition you turned up the theatrics, took the lighting off the people and placed them in this dark room with paintings that glowed like stained glass windows.

AK: For sure. I wanted to create a spiritual experience. I was looking at stained glass windows and how colour and light are combined within spiritual spaces, which is why that show was presented the way it was - placing the audience in the dark. Similarly here, it is about tempting the viewer to tune into themselves through the work. It's not necessarily familiar as a painting when it is nearly four meters in height, so how do we navigate that?

DH: To that point, you've suspended the larger works in the gallery space, almost floor to ceiling and left all the walls bare. What led to this line of thinking?

AK: The building is 150 years old. As beautiful as it is, it is scattered with information skirting boards, angles and fireplaces - so

to work away from the wall felt like I was free from intervention. In this way I am also mimicking what I create on tilt slab walls in my exterior works which are large and immersive. So, with these paintings it is not simply an experience reliant upon standing in front of them but circling them to reveal their three-dimensionality and presence.

The way I see a lot of my previous work, and this work in particular, is being made and operating through improvisation. Everything is happening carefully by chance. Carefully considered, carefully applied, but governed by elements of chance. I have to decide what works and what doesn't. I am able to mitigate risk in their making, and definitely refine them along the way, but chance rules it.

DH: What comes with that element of risk? It must be a very fine line in deciding whether to leave a work at a certain point and consider it finished, or to keep pushing and potentially lose everything up to that point, not just for Aerial or Fall, but for all of your paintings.

AK: I remember that with the larger works they were at that point where I could have happily pushed them a little further and added a few more marks - tie them closer to the smaller works - but they felt right on the edge of being successful or taking them too far. In hindsight, I was probably a little more reluctant to take these further than I would have with *Gravity System Response* work where I have more knowledge and control of the processes.

DH: In past series you have made far more works than are exhibited, so you have often taken a reductive approach. Much the same here, where you are mindful about the presentation of your work even though you are somewhat maximalist in the way that vou produce it.

AK: Yes, and in this instance, I was thinking not only about myself and being able to really open up the experimentation with materials across a wider series, but also thinking about the audience. I am always thinking about the audience with my larger shows, be it the Meat Market installation project or otherwise. So, for Linden it was very much about how to energise and then reenergise the audience over a three-month period. It has been a while since I have held an exhibition of that length. The idea of showing works for more than a few days or a few weeks felt a little bit foreign to me and I wanted to address that.



IMAGE > Ash Keating, Fall #3, 2020, synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on canvas, 375 x 130cm. Photograph: Matthew Stanton.



IMAGE > Ash Keating, Fall #11, 2020, synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on linen, 90 x 60cm. Photograph: Matthew Stanton.

DH: I think it feels foreign to everyone at present. We have, as a result of lockdowns, become accustomed to the increase in online content and equally accustomed to discarding it just as quickly.

AK: Well that's just it. The screen-based consumption of art is what we were all dealing with in the pandemic, and I wanted to make sure that what I was producing during that period was not for that period, if that makes sense. It was about inviting people to confront it, physically.

DH: We've spoken about the physical properties of the works and how they may affect one's experience of them. How do you hope they are experienced?

AK: I bring what I can remember of my own experiences in the natural world to the improvised nature of my work. Subconsciously, I guess what I see digitally on a day-to-day basis also filters into my thinking about these experiences and therefore into my work. So, it is not real, in the purest sense, but that doesn't mean it isn't valid. The experience in the making is different to the experience in their reading and I have no control over that aspect.

Interview with Ash Keating, conducted by David Hagger in March 2021.



ASH KEATING

Ash Keating works within an expanded contemporary field, through painting, performance, sculpture, video and intervention. Keating's large outdoor murals, created with paint filled fire extinguishers, can be found across Melbourne.

Following a year of creative experimentation and marking a significant transition in technique, Keating's latest series, Duality, reaches a new level of physical and psychological complexity. The works have been constructed with many layers of pigment and textural materials in a process of building and paring back. The works' surfaces hold an intense depth and richness, giving the series a meditative quality that invites slow and reflective viewing.

IMAGE > Portrait of Ash Keating. Photograph: Dan Preston.

Keating has exhibited extensively in galleries and created numerous large-scale, site-responsive art projects in Australia and internationally since 2004. He has undertaken numerous large-scale painting commissions in public spaces, including the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2013), the Adelaide Festival Centre (2015) and Sydney's Domain (2018). His works are held in many public and private collections including the NGV, NGA, MCA, AGNSW, MUMA and Artbank.

www.ashkeating.com



IMAGE > Ash Keating, Duality > Aerial [installation view], 2020. Photograph: Theresa Harrison Photography.

LIST OF WORKS **DUALITY > AERIAL**

Aerial #1, 2020 pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on canvas, 375 x 246cm POA

Aerial #2, 2020 pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on canvas, 375 x 246cm POA

Aerial #3, 2020 pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on canvas, 375 x 131cm POA

Aerial #4, 2020 pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on canvas, 375 x 131cm POA

canvas, 90 x 60cm \$4.000 Aerial #12, 2020 pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on canvas, 90 x 60cm \$4.000

Aerial #10, 2020

Aerial #9, 2020

\$4.000

Aerial #13, 2020 pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on canvas. 90 x 60cm \$4,000

Aerial #14, 2020 pigment, urethane acrylic, pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on perlite and mica flakes on canvas, 90 x 60cm canvas, 90 x 60cm \$4.000 Aerial #16, 2020 pigment, urethane acrylic, pigment, urethane acrylic, perlite and mica flakes on perlite and mica flakes on canvas, 90 x 60cm \$4,000 Prices are inclusive of GST

LIST OF WORKS **DUALITY > FALL**

Fall #1, 2020 synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on canvas, 375 x 246 x 5cm POA

Fall #2. 2020 synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on canvas. 375 x 246 x 5cm POA

Fall #3. 2020 synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on canvas, 375 x 130cm POA

Fall #4, 2020 synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on canvas, 375 x 130cm POA

Fall #6, 2020 synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on linen, 90 x 60cm \$4.000

Fall #7, 2020 synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on linen. 90 x 60cm \$4,000

Fall #8, 2020 synthetic polymer. pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on linen, 90 x 60cm \$4,000

Fall #9, 2020 synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on linen, 90 x 60cm \$4,000

Fall #11, 2020 synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on linen, 90 x 60cm NFS

Fall #12. 2020 synthetic polymer, pigment, vermiculite, mica flakes and glass beads on linen. 90 x 60cm \$4,000

Prices are inclusive of GST



IMAGE > Ash Keating, Duality > Fall [studio view], 2020. Photograph: Matthew Stanton.

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David Hagger for project management.



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