

KIM BARTELT

Break Easy
2023

In *Break Easy*, the latest series of works by Kim Bartelt, a sequence of bevelled forms, hover in soft, pastel hues on smooth-coloured canvases. These seemingly rigid geometric structures are far from static but seem to tremble in their own symbolic abstraction. Partly made in response to a statement once posed by the poet, Ocean Vuong, that the most powerful and strengthening thing an artist can do, is to "bring down the shield (they've) been taught to put up around them", the works in the series consider the role of the artist; and in doing so, create a visual language that resonates with intellectual introspection and discordant energy.

A sense of fragility pervades these works, a precariousness as fine and fragile as the thin, membranous paper the artist fixes onto the canvas. These translucent sheets, slightly ripped and alive with snaking lines of capillaries, are pasted on to the rougher (unprimed) side of the canvas, where the fibrous texture comes through and indents itself directly onto the angular forms. For all their apparent formal stability, their vulnerability is conveyed through the structures rising up behind them, shadowing them, as though competing to dominate the other. Like priorities jostling for primacy, they're prone to the distortions of passing time and the alterations that come with moving forward.

In the painting *Caught up*, its more defiant and determinate colours of blue and dark green contrast sharply with the circumspection of *So long* where the soft forms coalesce and seem almost to dissolve into each other. In each we see the gradual alterations throughout the series, as Bartelt explores the progressive layers of thought to produce visual expressions of the inexplicable. Like metaphoric shields, they become symbolic manifestations of the guards we put up around ourselves; channeling the vibration of life's events to move from the personal and subjective to the broad and universal.

The structural forms put us in mind of the clunky computer hardware that frames our view of the world; the interrelated shapes reminiscent of the screens and hidden semiconductors that regiment our existence. Bartelt's monochromatic monitors are deadpan and inscrutable, for her the building blocks of our contemporary age are an observable phenomena, made accessible through a spiritual dimension.

In her sculptural work, the rigid angular blocks may at first appear robust yet they are a hollow shell, made from stiff, everyday cardboard. At a time when the influence of robotics and advanced AI technology are starting to be felt in the contemporary world – with the capacity, according to many experts, to affect our society to a greater degree than electricity and fire – Bartelt's sculptures are nothing but fragile beasts, enfeebled and defenceless. They look as though the slightest push could topple them over. Yet they stand guard across the exhibition, a potent reminder of firmly held convictions now in flux; of beliefs once thought unquestionable suddenly outdated.

These redundant massive forms focus attention on the surrounding wall works that line up side by side, their serene tones quivering in impressive silence. Their power stems from their subtle interplay between depth and flatness and their gently antagonistic use of colour. Even with that delicate intensity the works in the series don't pursue an emotional rawness but reach instead for something elemental and open. Without offering any form of resolution they engage a sensory dimension, articulating unknown sentiments that reveal the contradictory threads of the human condition and the emotional resilience required to be an artist.

Duncan Ballantyne-Way



So long, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 150cm x 120cm



Red as a rose, 2023

paper, pastel and oil pastel on linen, 150cm x 100cm



Easy, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 150cm x 120cm





Candy for you, 2022

paper and pastel on linen, 100cm x 80cm



Solid base, 2022

paper and pastel on linen, 100cm x 80cm

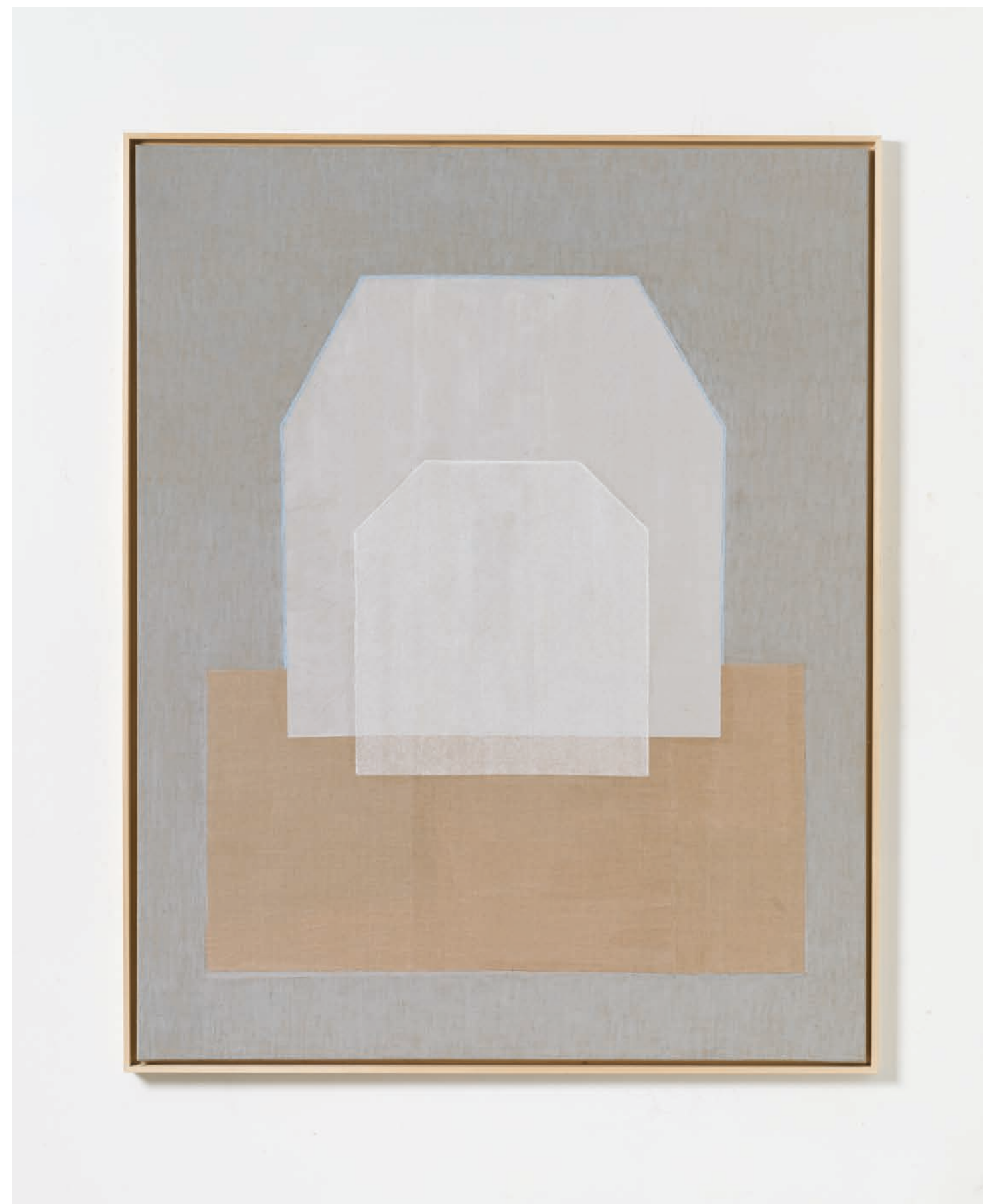
Caught up, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 150cm x 120cm



Still, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 150cm x 120cm





Sympathy, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 100cm x 80cm



Sidetracked, 2022

paper and pastel on linen, 100cm x 80cm



Du spinnst wohl, 2022

paper and pastel on linen, 100cm x 80cm



Die Sonne geht auf, 2022

paper and pastel on linen, 100cm x 80cm

Early on, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 150cm x 120cm



Dusk till dawn, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 150cm x 120cm





High stake, 2022

paper and pastel on linen, 100cm x 80cm



Blausamkeit, 2022

paper and pastel on linen, 100cm x 80cm

Rain check, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 150cm x 120cm



Flipside, 2023

paper, pastel, oil pastel, linseed oil and pigment on linen, 150cm x 120cm



All in, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 150cm x 120cm





Inside out, 2022

paper and pastel on linen, 100cm x 80cm



I'll be your mirror, 2022

paper and pastel on linen, 100cm x 80cm



Here & there, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 60cm x 50cm



Got you covered, 2023

paper and pastel on linen, 60cm x 50cm

Armour I, 2023

cardboard, papier-mâché and pigment, H197cm x W88cm x D49cm



Pillar II, 2023

cardboard, papier-mâché and pigment, H180cm x W62cm x D41cm



Pillar I, 2023

cardboard, papier-mâché and pigment, H135cm x W47cm x D38cm



Pillar III, 2023

cardboard, papier-mâché and pigment, H146cm x W58cm x D41cm





Through the elusive simplicity of both form and colour, the work of Kim Bartelt mediates on the ephemerality of the world and the poetic contradictions that lie at the heart of contemporary human experience. Her method of layering paper sheets of varying degrees of thickness onto canvas produces a unique hybrid of painting and sculpture that contrasts the clarity of the forms with the fine, intimate detail of the textured paper. Creating canvases that draw the viewer inward, to reveal a pulsing inner landscape, that capture the often fragile connection between the seen and the unseen, the permanent and transient.

Her use of a consciously restrained visual vocabulary, consisting mainly of squares and rectangles, harnesses complex emotional states into seemingly controlled, harmonious compositions. A process that echoes the inherent dichotomy in her art-making, that strives for a sense of compositional stability despite being filtered through the intensely personalised prism of its creator. That diametric expression is reinforced by her deliberate choice of colour. Neither quite opaque nor excessively vibrant – her canvases maintain a luminosity that suggest a certain weight despite being suffused with light, like the skies and architecture in the paintings of Fra Angelico and Piero della Francesca, two major influences on the artist.

According to the writer and curator Lorena Juan, Bartelt's ability to make every step in her creative process tangible, amounts to a "study of the poetics of the connective tissue of life..." revealing the "silent mind maps of the support infrastructures running in the backdrop of our existence." This isn't just restricted to the spiritual domain but responds to the world she observes

around her; intuitively reflecting humankind's contemporary detachment amidst the dizzying complexity of our globalised, hyperconnected age.

Born in Berlin, Germany, Bartelt initially planned to study architecture, but a series of events led to her taking up art history in Paris, France before enrolling onto an art Foundation year at Parsons Paris. After moving to the US and finishing her studies in Fine Art at Parsons School of Design in New York, she took a job painting sets for large-scale commercial campaigns. It was there that she began taking an interest in the discarded sheets of paper and slowly started to incorporate it into her art practice; making impossibly open, minimal collages that through their delicate translucence appeared to transcend their own materiality. Returning to Germany in 2003, Bartelt has continued working with canvas and paper and in recent years her explorations into space and volume have evolved into large-scale sculptural works – megalithic-feeling structures that are often made of deceptively fragile, packing material and papier-mâché.

The artist has had numerous solo exhibitions most notably at Cadogan Gallery, Milan in 2023 and Cadogan Gallery, London in 2022. In that same year, her work was a prominent feature in *An Endless Curve – Art Perspectives III* at the Circle Culture Gallery, Berlin as well as *A Double Presentation*, Wilhelm Hallen #2, Berlin in 2021. Bartelt has exhibited all around the world including in Mexico, Belgium, the UK, Germany and the US. In 2019 she completed artist residencies at Numeroventi in Italy and Joya AiR in Spain. Bartelt has been the subject of a number of features including Ignant 2023, Capital Magazine 2022, AD Germany, 2020 and Wall Street Magazine 2020.



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