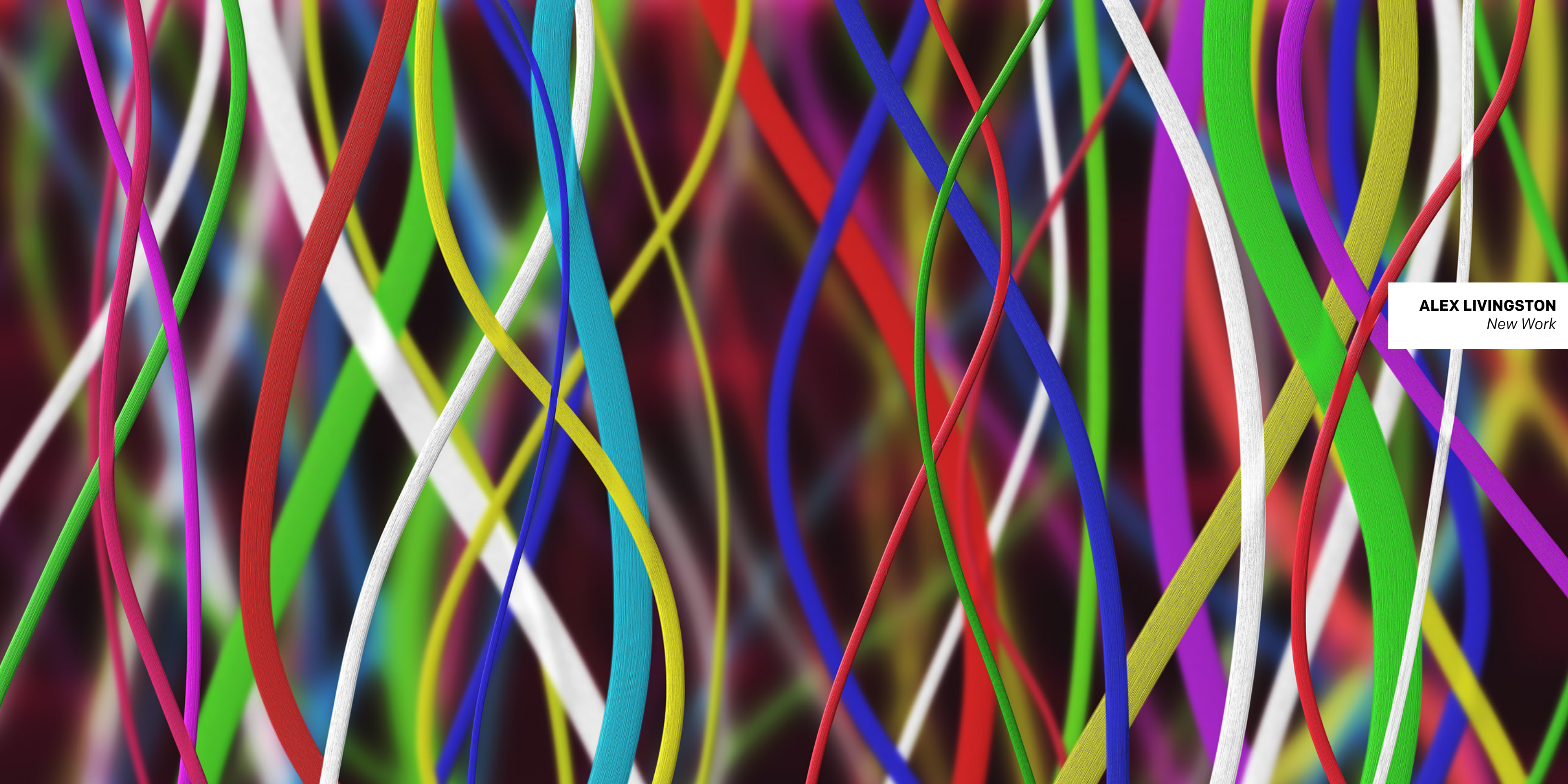




ALEX LIVINGSTON
New Work



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Alex Livingston is a well known Halifax based painter who has produced and widely exhibited diverse bodies of work over his 30 year career as an artist.

The range of Livingston's imagery was highlighted in a 2005 Dalhousie University Art Gallery twenty-year survey exhibition. A recurring theme in his paintings has been the varied expressions of nature. His representational work has included cultivated landscapes, emblematic flower and plant structures, iconic tree images, natural history themes and water/land patterns. The visual investigations in his abstractions range from consideration of cell structure microcosms, to color fields/patterns with surrealist references, and the juxtaposition of historic woodcut imagery with gestural marking.

In 2006, Livingston first began experimenting with digital image making using the latest computer software programs to create hybrid digital paintings. This represented a juncture in Livingston's practice. His shift from oil on canvas painting to digital explorations had numerous triggers. Having developed environmental sensitivities to paint solvents, he sought different approaches to art making. But an even stronger impulse was Livingston's keen interest in the emerging possibilities of digital image making that could be applied to painting by experimenting with and manipulating software technologies.

Livingston's pioneering efforts have created fresh visual phenomena and unique visual experiences. This catalogue is the first examination of Alex Livingston's digital paintings and focuses on his most recent work.

Born in Kingston, Ontario, Alex Livingston received a BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and an MA Fine Arts from the Chelsea College of Art and Design in London, England. Livingston has exhibited his paintings in many solo and group exhibitions in public and commercial galleries across Canada and internationally in England, Scotland, Germany, South Korea, China and the United States. His work is in numerous private, corporate and public collections. Livingston is a Professor in Painting at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD University).

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Inner front cover: *Theta* (detail), 2013
Back cover: *Untitled 3* (detail), 2014.

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ALEX LIVINGSTON: *Chromophilia Digitalis*

Gary Michael Dault

The title can be translated, perhaps with a touch of useful imprecision, as “love of colour, generated digitally.”

The dictionary definition of “chromophilia” is “the property possessed by most cells of staining readily with appropriate dyes.” That works for Alex Livingston: the “cells” of his pictures (his skein-like falls of reed-like colour, his bounding, shiny-black coils of energy) are readily enough “stained” with his personal colour choices—digitally generated (it might be noted at this point that “digitalis” is here being used in an insistently personal, slightly perverse way, meaning “of the digital domain”).

This admittedly rather forced, dialled-up language can be made to bear enough idea-cargo, I think, that the colour-space imperatives of Alex Livingston’s recent work—particularly that body of work he exhibited recently at Halifax’s Studio 21 Fine Art—can both support such a title, ingest it, and transpose it into a clutch of ever-wider concerns.

Some of which address the idea of the estate of The Painterly as it is carried on by other means.

Livingston wages new art with old armaments: colour, shape, configuration, texture, manipulations of presentness (albeit a *faux*-presentness), depth (albeit a *faux*-depth) and movement (albeit a *faux*-movement), accessing these time-honoured realms of visuality in inventive ways and with new tools.

Anybody working digitally lives in an always provisional world of italics and quotation marks and (sometimes) walks hand-in-hand with an odd sort of special pleading (see, for example, the handful of faux-conditions added to the last paragraph and, eventually, settling in everywhere in this essay). Setting

up a practice in the instant, no-time, reflexive, self-conscious digital outpost is to be in a constant state of trying and testing, working in a cool frenzy, finding out—weekly, daily, hourly—what such a still endlessly evolving resource can provide.

People who gaze earnestly, wonderingly, quizzically, tremblingly upon the always developing visual world (and that is *all of us*, surely?) are both bedazzled by and often suspicious of that which is generated in the digital forge. What, we are sometimes tempted to ask, became of the old verities: the chthonic gumminess of paint, the autobiographical, dead-giveaway dragging of a heavily-laden brush (the followable trail), the comfortable illusions of a cubistic, see-through-the-window fictive space we have hitherto been privileged to collaborate optically with the artist in creating?

The fact is, these aesthetic comfort zones are, of course, not lost (nothing is ever lost in art). They have simply, inevitably, been increasingly displaced into an electronic, Hydra-headed, dial-up realm where the artist now makes all the same decisions he made before—but at a certain physically objectified and therefore critical remove. Come to think of it, maybe that’s what often makes people restive about digital procedures: they invariably seem more private, more *onanistic* than before.

Livingston’s chromatically assertive new colour-works—in steady evolution since 2005—can legitimately be referred to as “digital *paintings*” (though Livingston has sometimes called them “*hybrid* digital paintings” as well). They can also be identified, with equal legitimacy, as “prints,” specifically (technically) as “Chromira prints on dibond,” dibond being the almost self-effacing aluminum composite

panel (ACP) which supports and presents Livingston’s virtual space-colour manipulations with electronic drawing tablets and the fecund contributions of new computer software.

The dibond is important, and is an integral part of the work: you surely don’t want to compose in the limitless spaces of the digital realm and then have to run to earth the results of your hitherto unfettered quest by confining it within conventional presentational systems of *boundary* (normal frames, etc.). Livingston’s dibond supports, while strong and—he tells me—very heavy, are so physically insubstantial, so non-corporeal, they seem more like *exhalations* of his chosen subjects than presentations of it.

The dazzling digital prints making up the artist’s recent Studio 21 exhibition can conceivably be seen as “painterly” (indeed they are often referred to that way) because they offer—especially in the case of the coloured prints—many of the attributes of a conventionally performing painterliness.

They offer, for example, what appear to be vibrant, intensely saturated “tubular” skeins of colour (one wants to think of them as “tubular” because they frequently demonstrate a digitally-hewn, shadow-casting “roundness”), sometimes juxtaposed, sidling up to one another, and shouldering one another in a demonstration of a (sentimentally) satisfying fictive “mass” or “weight”: see the use of two rather majestic yellow-golds pressed as close together as ardent lovers in *Mu* (all of Livingston’s colour prints, by the way, bear names drawn from the Greek Alphabet; it provides a way for the artist to maintain something of the fragrance of his innate romanticism, while leavening it and toughening it up with the clarified, classical, fundamental, indivisible *ur*-quality of the ancient linguistic signs and sounds).

In addition to instances of brawny juxtapositioning, most of the colour works show brightly or subtly-hued rods or tubes apparently criss-crossed and intertwined in a shallow fictive but still cubistically persuasive space. When they aren’t nudging up to one another asymptotically, they “cross” one another, creating an imaginary, digitally fabricated sandwiching condition.

In *Nu*, for example, there is a strong, highly realized orange rod/tube/cable “crossing”—even “crossing” has to be held in the self-conscious grip of quotation marks—“in front of” (“in front of” needs quotation

marks too) a violet one. I know this perfectly well, not because my memory is impeccable, which it isn’t, but because, enthralled by the sprightly “performance” of these richly-hued tubes (e-dreams money can buy), I made a close-up photograph of the moment). The violet cable is thinner and more “delicate,” and has picked up, on the side facing the orange cable, its own glow of orange colour outwash, as if deferring to the “passing before it” of the “stronger” orange tube (the quotation marks are coming thick and fast now).

Speaking of romanticism, the artist who works digitally does have to bid farewell to the presence in the work of any hard-won “handwriting” proclaimed by his past works—the brush-stroke-as-signature. What Livingston does, as compensation—or so it seems to me—is to devise for his digitally incarnated objects (skeins of colour, coils of black “hose” or “conduit”)—remarkably convincing surface “textures” for them: rhythmic “stutters” and defining “calibrations.” There is a salmon-coloured cable in *Omega*, for example, that evinces “mechanically” repeated linear striations that we may well associate in our minds with the ongoing imprint of industrial production.

In the graphically striking, always untitled, bounding black “coil” pictures, the rubber-like surfaces of the wild, *Laocoon*-like twistings, writhings, whorlings, loopings, windings, twirlings, convolutions, gyrations and tendrilings of the artist’s entirely hypothetical para-industrial “objects,” born in the petri dish of pure digital hand-jive, are so profoundly textured they sometimes remind one of inner tubes or of automobile tires.

It is amusingly clear that imagery from the corporeal world and from the realms of memory (I haven’t seen an inner tube in *years*) will steadfastly *not* be engulfed and defeated by the incoming tides—*nay*, *tsunamis*—of the digital angel-of-history blowing from the past towards the future.

Imagery is with us always—just as narrative and melody are. It is not surprising—though perhaps it could sometimes be construed as alarming—that we hold on to images the way children hold on to teddy bears at night.

Imagery is always with us. And therefore, when addressing Livingston’s new works, you are perhaps amused to find yourself rummaging through old, dusty boxes of similes from the attic of your mind.

Writing about a Toronto exhibition of Livingston's works I curated in 2007, I found myself referring to his "gesture-like entanglements of line" and "interwoven cable forms" (there are no "entanglements of line" in cyberspace, nor "interwoven cable forms" either).

It was charming to find, in a Halifax *Chronicle-Herald* review of Livingston's recent Studio 21 exhibition, the writer's identification of the artist's forms (and even the term "form" is suspect in Digitalia) as "jungles or sea beds or magic forests begging a viewer to brush aside the hanging ropes and enter" and to encounter references to the black-coil-works, as "animated black lines like bicycle tires" (but who cannot readily forgive these cheerful incarnating shapings of the endless spaces of cyber-possibility, where—the phrase is lifted from Sartre—we can otherwise find ourselves *condemned to freedom*).

Even the artist himself has not been entirely immune to a little gentle anthropomorphizing of his works, having once referred to his digital structures [in my 2007 Index G catalogue essay, "The Mechanized Gesture: New Digital Prints by Alex Livingston"] as "magnified patterns of organic life, as well as textured extrusions."

Clearly, we have constant recourse, in transcribing, in descriptively annotating, the weightless, all-at-once digital universe, to some hoary word-hoard that has served us adequately in the past. What we require—and do not yet possess—is a wholly new digital-descriptive vocabulary—a whole cyber-writerly discourse—for what is, as yet, the electronically intangible.

A word about Digital colour. Back when colour TV was new, Marshall McLuhan used to point out that colour TV was not just black-and-white TV dyed red and green and all the other hues. Colour TV, he maintained, was, rather, a *whole new medium*. Similarly, in extension, e-colour is not just some ethereal equivalent to or surrogate for painted colour, but offers an entirely new colour resource. Digital colour is see-through colour. It is the colour out of space, to slightly distort novelist H.P. Lovecraft's famous title.

Digital colour hovers on—or near—the retina, like mist on a lake.

A painter might normally have used an arsenal of maybe a dozen squeezings of pigment on his palette, from which he could then mix hundreds of hues and tints.

Just for fun, the other day, I queried the computer about how many digital colours there could actually be. It tried to be helpful and brought my attention to the concept of the *gamut* ("a complete subset of colours") or "the complete set of colors found within an image at a given time" (see, for example, Thomas De Quincey's noting that "Porphyry, I have heard, runs through as large a gamut of hues as marble").

Yes, but my query remained childishly tenacious. How many digital colours *are* there (gamut piled upon gamut)? The boyish voice of a blog called *Serpentspeak* had this to offer (on May 7, 2013):

16 million is an estimate of how many different colors a 24 bit RGB computer monitor can simulate and while most of us may not care how many colors we can see in a computer, this does have a little relevance to how many different colors the human eye can distinguish. "True" color is also called 24-bit color. Here, each color is 8 bits, for a total of 24 bits. Since each color has 256 shades, we can multiply 256 for red, times 256 for green, times 256 for blue and get millions of colors, (256 x 256 x 256 = 16,777,216). Millions of colors are pretty much what's accepted for a monitor's colors to look "true" to the human eye... So, we have a general idea of how many "colors" we can distinguish or at least see in a computer screen.

This runaway abundance of colour, this omni-directional *chromophilia* (colours gnashing everywhere in space) is the vastest palette in the world, and you can imagine Alex Livingston seated at his computer (the screen is just another window), *dialing up* instead of mixing, pursuing, selecting, modifying, amplifying, mediating his choices of shape and hue and density and saturation—it's all rather Jackson Pollock-esque, is it not?

There's Jackson famously saying that if he lost control of the painting, it ran to mud, ended as a mess, and that the pivotal moment of aesthetic hardball came not while he was pouring out the painting but *afterwards* (all passion spent) when he looked the thing over and decided whether or not to keep what he'd done or to throw it away. The painterly act is here backed up in time (and takes place after the painterly action). It is this after-time where Alex Livingston, too, must work: after the digital harvesting, come the old, time-honoured decisions all artists must make, regardless of the medium or method they are using. Is what I have made, is what I have found, any good?

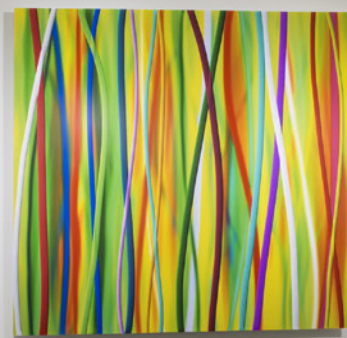
The making of any aesthetically meaningful object or experience—digital, analogue or manual—is primarily an act of intense and sustained attention. In an absorbing discussion of the "reciprocity of the visible" in his book, *Sublime Poussin* (Stanford University Press, 1999), art historian and theorist Louis Marin suggests that "one might think that the painting [for which substitute "digital print"] is in some sense the final document concluding the pact by which the visible is accomplished, since the painting ["the digital print"] is the trace, the index, and the sign both of a fold in the world [here, a fold-in-cyberspace] that has become a seeing body and a body changed into a world seen."

A work [digital or otherwise], implies a contract, Marin suggests: "I show only myself, I offer only myself. I am an offering of colours and forms only if you see

me, only if in a prolonged gaze you give me back what I give you to see" (p.172). It must be remembered that Marin is here talking about the 17th century painter, Nicolas Poussin.

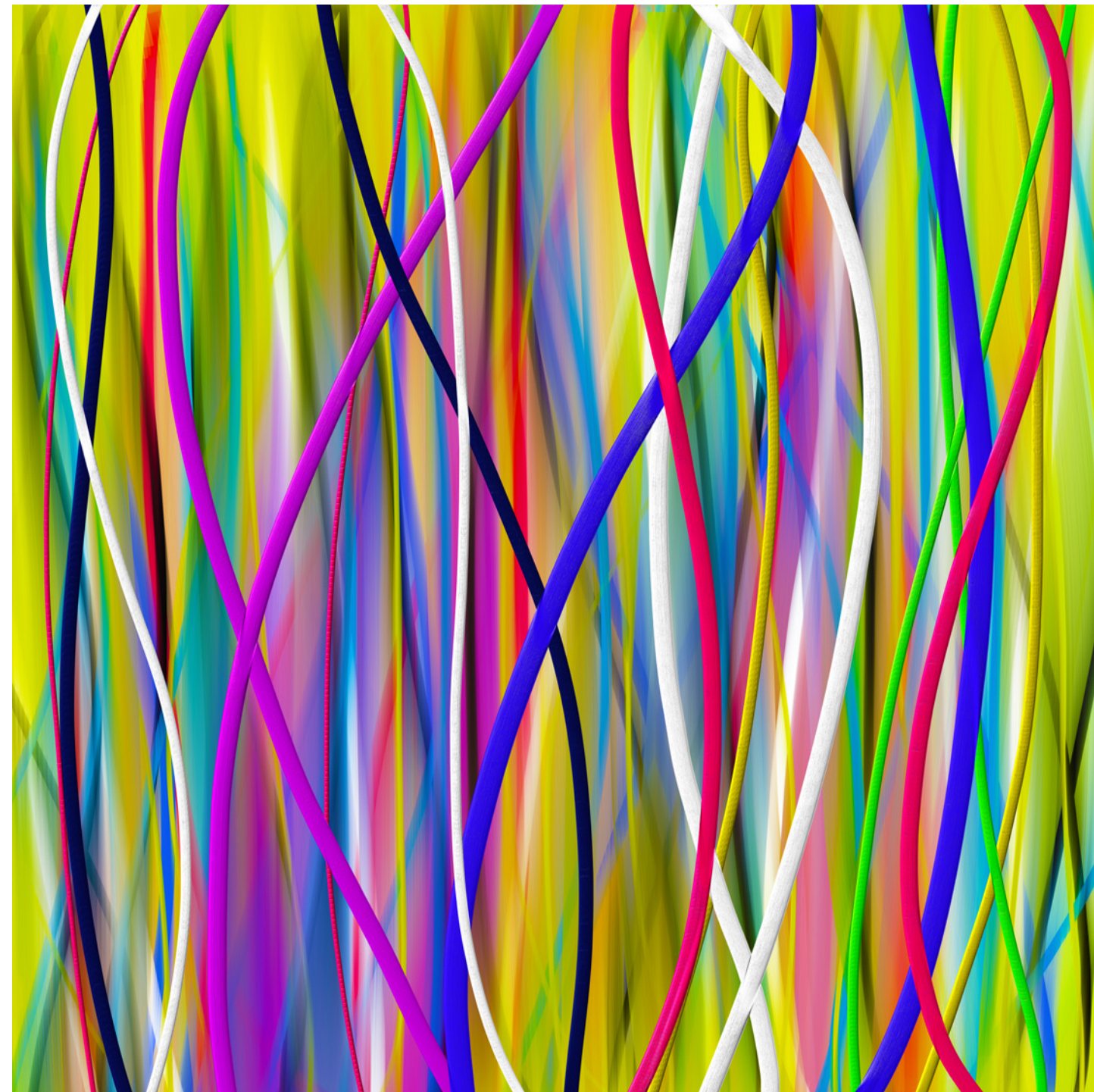
We live in an all-at-once, everything-at-once world. Though Louis Marin is writing, in his brilliant book, about Poussin, the points he makes can be seen to apply with equal appropriateness to Alex Livingston's mercurial forays into the endless spaces and hyper-spaces and mega-spaces offered by that adjacent Plato-cave, that floating Over-soul, the computer. Art is as elastic and inclusive as Mind. Not only are Livingston's digital prints not eccentric or fugitive or techno-anomalies, they are as solid as paintings by Poussin—which, after all, are not really there *either*.

Gary Michael Dault is a Toronto writer, artist and art critic. He has taught at a number of Canadian universities—most recently as an adjunct associate professor at the University of Waterloo School of Architecture. Dault is the author, or co-author of a number of books about the visual arts, and has written countless gallery and museum catalogues. He has written frequently for newspapers and magazines including *Border Crossings* and *Canadian Art* magazine. Until recently he wrote a weekend visual arts review column ("Gallery-Going"), which ran in *The Globe and Mail* for over a decade. He continues to make forays into the realm of critical writing—when the subject warrants it—but spends most of his time painting, and writing novels and plays.



Previous pages 6-7:
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ALEX LIVINGSTON: NEW WORK

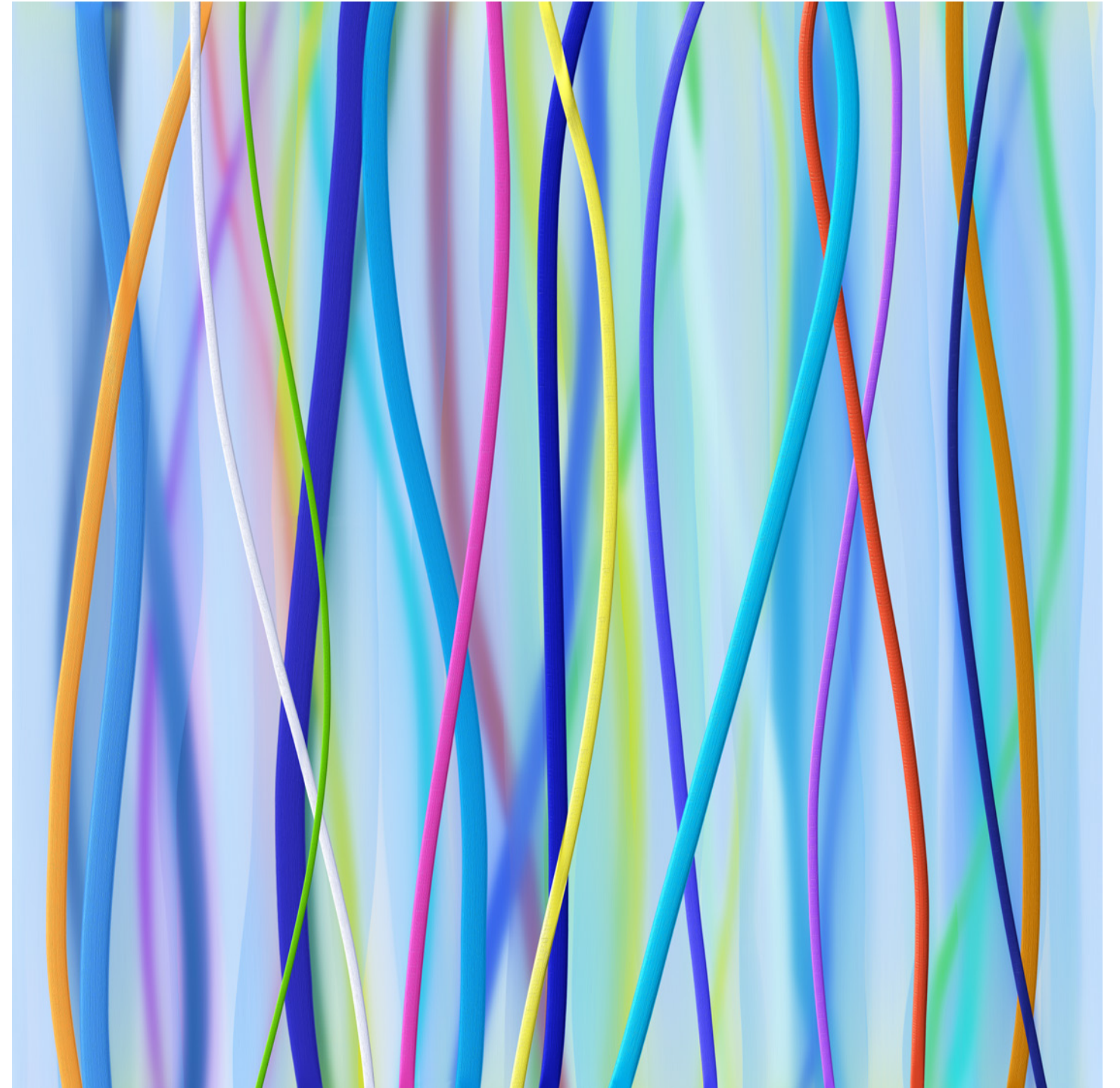
Opposite page:
Omega, 2013.
Chromira print on dibond, 48 × 48 in.



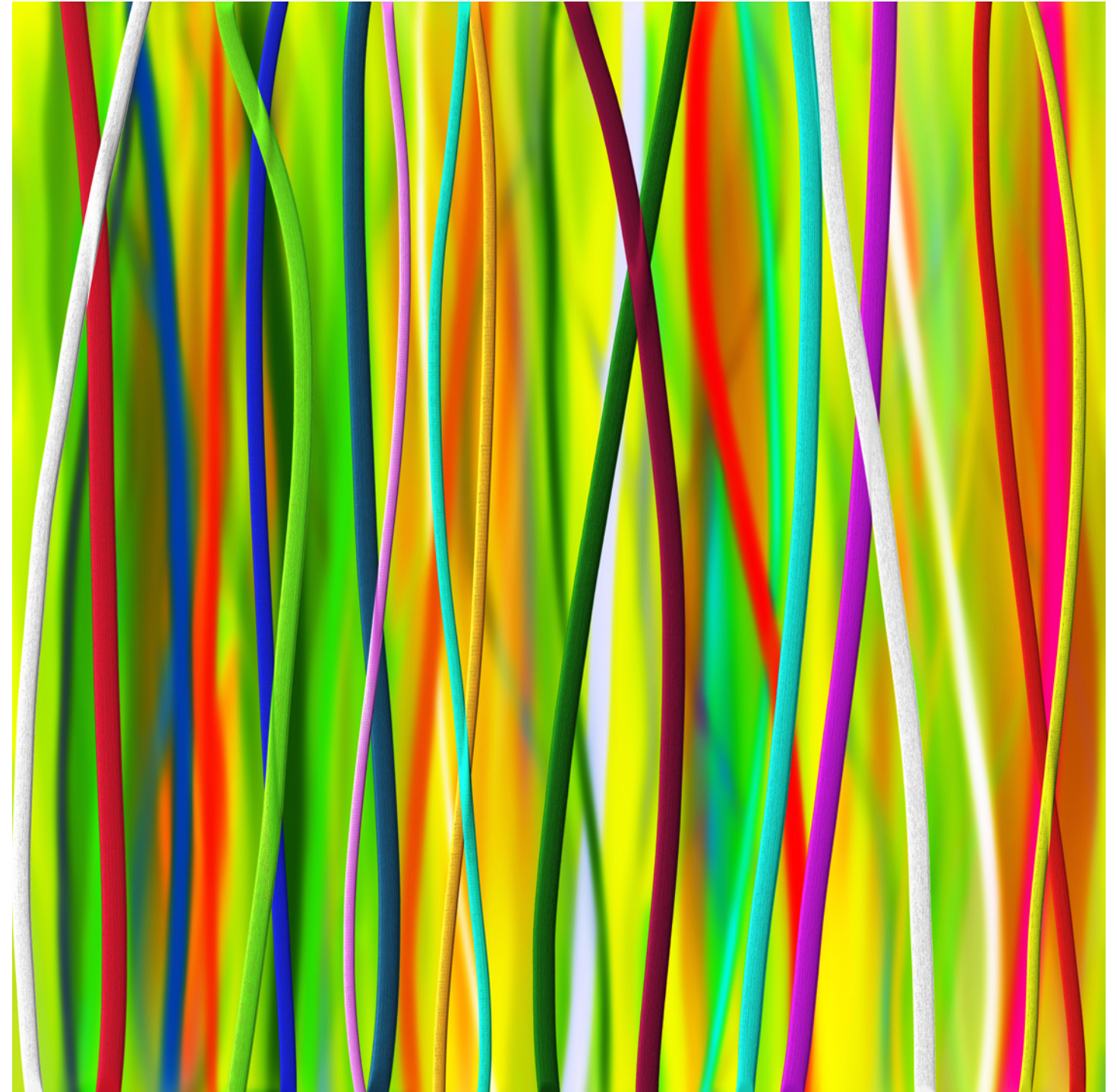
Theta, 2013.
Chromira print on dibond, 48 × 48 in.



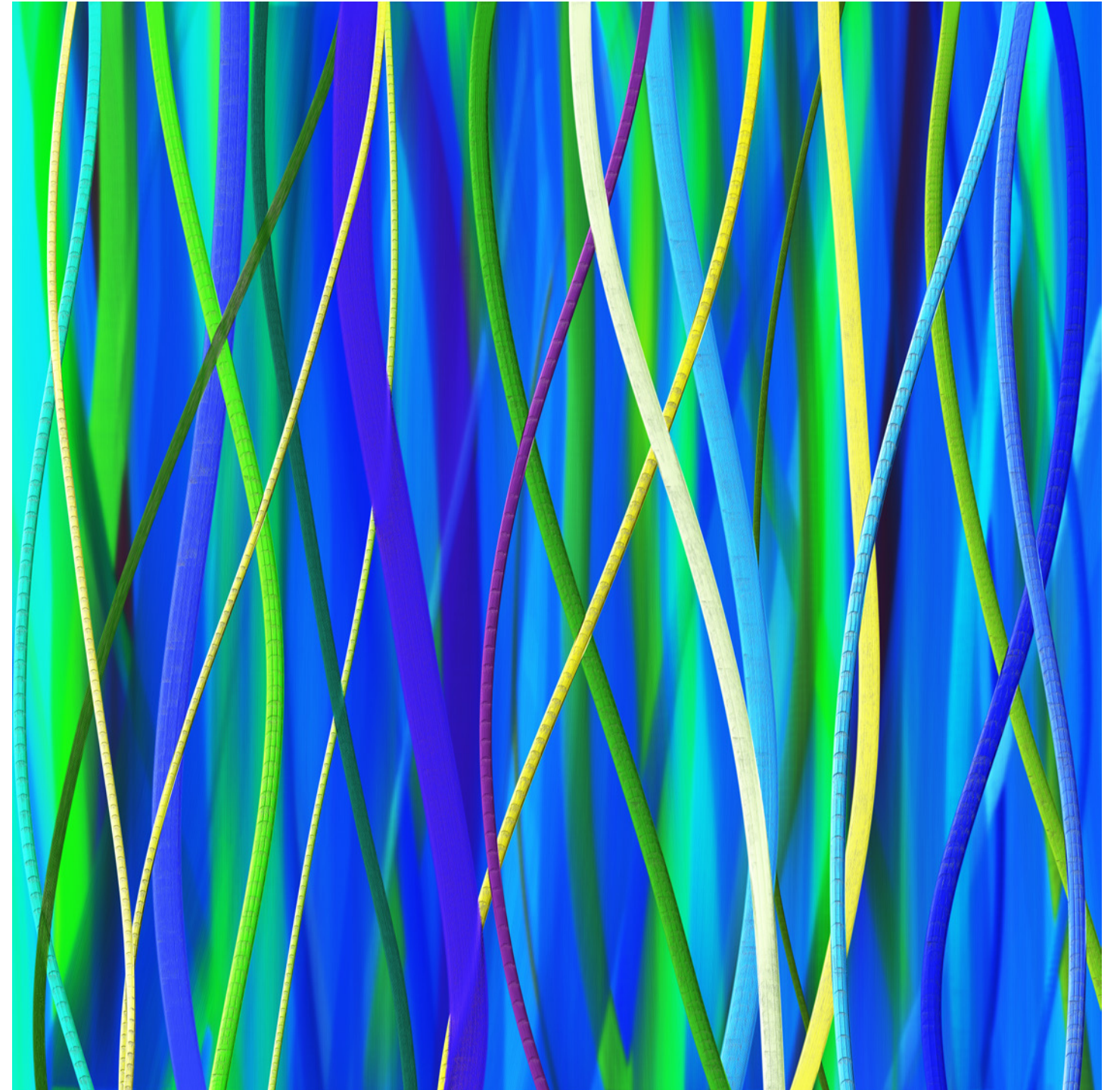
Nu, 2014.
Chromira print on dibond, 48 × 48 in.



Mu, 2014.
Chromira print on dibond, 48 × 48 in.



Eta, 2014.
Chromira print on dibond, 48 × 48 in.





Previous pages 18–19:
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Opposite page:
Untitled 1, 2014.
Chromira print on dibond, 66 × 48 in.



Untitled 2, 2014.
Chromira print on dibond, 66 × 48 in.



Untitled 3, 2014.
Chromira print on dibond, 66 × 48 in.



Untitled 4, 2014.
Chromira print on dibond, 66 × 48 in.



Curriculum Vitae

EDUCATION			
1995	MA Fine Art, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, England	1982	The Cooper Union, New York City, N.Y.
1983	Bachelor of Fine Art, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, Nova Scotia		

SOLO EXHIBITIONS			
2014	Alex Livingston: <i>New Work</i> , Studio 21 Fine Art, Halifax, Nova Scotia	1997	<i>A History of Four-footed Beasts and Other Curiosities</i> , Sir Wilfred Grenfell College of Art Gallery, Corner Brook, Newfoundland; Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
2011	<i>Recent Work</i> , Studio 21 Fine Art, Halifax, Nova Scotia		
2011	<i>New Work</i> , Leo Kamen Gallery, Toronto, Ontario		
2010	<i>Recent Digital Prints</i> , Where Where Gallery, Beijing, China	1996	<i>Alex Livingston: Paintings</i> , Khyber Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
2009	<i>Alex Livingston</i> , Galerie ZK, Berlin, Germany	1995	<i>MA Fine Art Graduate Exhibition</i> , Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, England
2008	<i>Alex Livingston</i> , Studio 21, Halifax, Nova Scotia	1994	<i>Alex Livingston: New Paintings</i> , curated by Leslie Sasaki, Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, New Brunswick
2007	<i>The Mechanized Gesture: New Digital Prints by Alex Livingston</i> , curated by Gary Michael Dault, G + Galleries, Toronto, Ontario	1994	<i>Paintings</i> , Anna Leonowens Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
2006	<i>Alex Livingston</i> , Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia	1991	<i>Recent Paintings</i> , Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
2005	<i>Alex Livingston: 1985-2005 Paintings</i> , curated by Susan Gibson Garvey, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia	1989	<i>Recent Paintings and Drawings</i> , Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, curated by Robin Metcalfe, Halifax, Nova Scotia
2003	<i>Alex Livingston</i> , Studio 21, Halifax, Nova Scotia	1988	<i>Recent Paintings</i> , Eye Level Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
2002	<i>Land and Water Paintings</i> , Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario	1986	<i>Vistas</i> , Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
2001	<i>Alex Livingston</i> , Studio 21, Halifax, Nova Scotia	1985	<i>Trees</i> , Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
1999	<i>A History of Four-footed Beasts and Other Curiosities</i> , The Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Ontario; Artspace Gallery, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario	1983	<i>Paintings</i> , Anna Leonowens Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
1999	<i>Alex Livingston</i> , Studio 21, Halifax, Nova Scotia		
1998	<i>Alex Livingston: Paintings</i> , Gallery 1.1.1., curated by Cliff Eyland, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba		
1998	<i>Alex Livingston</i> , Studio 21, Halifax, Nova Scotia		

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS			
2011	<i>I Level</i> , Katzman Kamen Gallery, Toronto, Ontario	2002	<i>Wild Things</i> , Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, Ontario
2011	<i>Faves</i> , Leo Kamen Gallery, Toronto, Ontario		
2011	<i>RCA Inductee Exhibition</i> , Harbinger Gallery, Waterloo, Ontario	2002	<i>New Additions</i> , Museum London, London, Ontario
		2001	<i>Vault Series VI: Water</i> , New Bedford Art Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts, USA
2010	<i>Arboretum</i> , Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia	2000	<i>The Single Tree</i> , curated by Laura Millard, London Regional Art and Historical Museums, London, Ontario; Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Ontario
2010	<i>New Canadiana: The Chancellor Richardson Memorial Fund and Art as Social History</i> , Anges Etherington Art Center, Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario		
2010	<i>Safe Passages and Welcome Harbours—Works from the Permanent Collection</i> , curated by Peter Dykhuis, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia	2000	<i>Artists in a Floating World - Marion McCain Atlantic Art Exhibition 2000</i> , curated by Tom Smart, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick (regional and national touring exhibition)
2009	<i>Paintings On Paper</i> , New Bedford Art Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts, USA	1998	<i>Alex Livingston: Paintings</i> , Gallery 1.1.1., curated by Cliff Eyland, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2008	<i>Big, Big Bangs / Small, Small Bucks</i> , Dean Jensen Gallery, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA		
2007	<i>The Ulsan/Halifax Project</i> , Gallery H, Ulsan, South Korea	1997	<i>Theatrum Mundi—Marion McCain Atlantic Art Exhibition</i> , curated by Susan Gibson Garvey (regional and international touring exhibition)
2006	<i>Fabulous</i> , curated by Susan Gibson Garvey, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia,	1997	<i>Eastern Front</i> , Carl Davis Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario
2005	<i>Vault Series VII</i> , New Bedford Art Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts, USA	1997	<i>R + D (Research and Development)</i> , curated by Patrick Macaulay, York Quay Centre, Toronto, Ontario
2005	<i>From New Image to New Wave: Legacy of NSCAD in the Seventies</i> , Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia	1996	Far and Wide: The VANS 20th Anniversary Exhibition, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia
2005	<i>A Garden of Forking Paths</i> , curated by Bruce Johnson, Art Gallery of Newfoundland and Labrador, The Rooms, St. John’s, Newfoundland	1995	<i>Alex Livingston and Carolina Rastrilla</i> , Francis-Graham Dixon Gallery, London, England
2003	<i>Atlantic Canadian Art</i> , National Art Centre, Ottawa, Ontario	1995	<i>Swiss Bank European Art Competition</i> , Smith’s Gallery, London, England
2003	<i>Boat Show</i> , Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario	1994	<i>Anecdotes and Enigmas - Marion McCain Atlantic Art Exhibition</i> , curated by Herménégilde Chiasson, The Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick (national touring exhibition)
2003	<i>Dualities: Contemporary Works from the Permanent Collection</i> , Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia		

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Bruce Barber, *NSCAD: The 80’s*, Anna Leonowens Gallery, pg. 42, 2006

Susan Gibson Garvey, *Alex Livingston: Paintings 1985–2005*, Dalhousie Art Gallery, 2005

Susan Gibson Garvey, *Dualities: Contemporary Works from the Permanent Collection*, Dalhousie Art Gallery, 2003

Laura Millard, *The Single Tree*, The London Regional Art Gallery and Historical Museums, pg. 19, 2000

Laura Millard, *Each Creature is Story*, The Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, 1999

Cliff Eyland, *Alex Livingston: Paintings*, Gallery 111, University of Manitoba, 1998

Susan Gibson Garvey, *Theatrum Mundi — The 1997 Marion McCain Atlantic Art Exhibition*, pp 17–18, 1997

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Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture, Exhibition Assistance Grant 1996, 1994, 1989, 1988, 1986

Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture, Skills Development Grant 1996

Canada Council, “B” Grant 1992

Canada Council, Project Grant 1986

Canada Council, Short-Term Grant 1985

COLLECTIONS

- CI Financial
- Department of Foreign Affairs, Government of Canada
- Telesat Canada
- Purdy’s Wharf Development
- Nova Corporation
- McInnes Cooper
- Blois, Nickerson & Bryson

- Department of National Defense
- Agnes Etherington Art Centre
- Art Gallery of Nova Scotia
- Museum London
- Dalhousie Art Gallery
- Canada Council Art Bank
- Nova Scotia Art Bank

RESIDENCIES

- OCAD University Digital Painting and Drawing Lab (2011)
- Beijing International Residency and Exhibition Center (2010)

- Banff Centre for the Arts, Banff, Alberta (2003)
- WASPS Artist’s Studios, Glasgow, Scotland (1994)

MEMBER

- Royal Canadian Academy of Arts



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