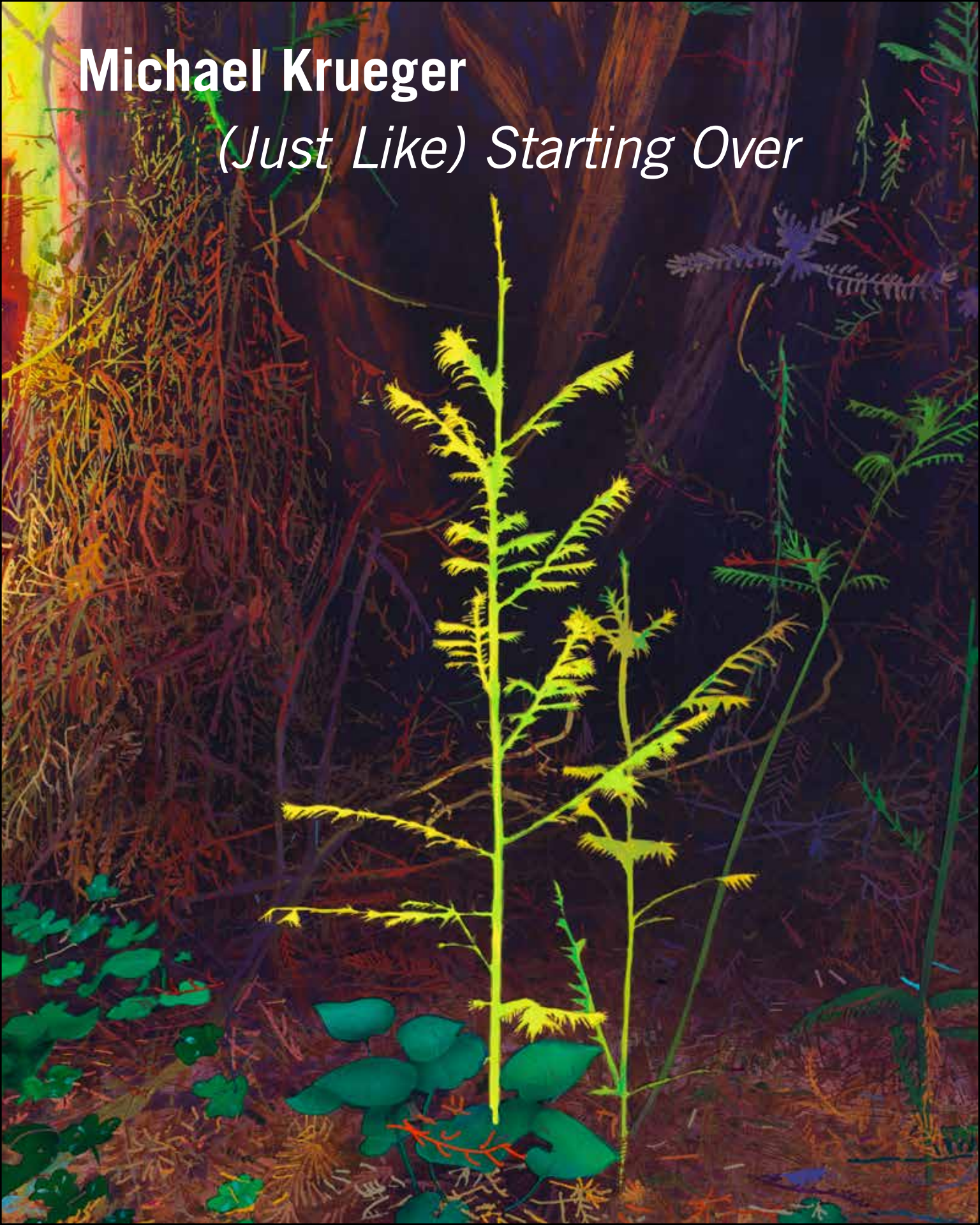


Michael Krueger

(Just Like) Starting Over



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HAW/CONTEMPORARY

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This limited edition publication documents the *Michael Krueger: (Just Like Starting Over)* exhibition at Haw Contemporary, March 12–April 21, 2021.

Haw Contemporary Stockyards
1600 Liberty Street, Kansas City, MO 64102
www.hawcontemporary.com

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(Just Like) Starting Over Mourning our losses, fresh faced Trees sing, we begin again

POSTSCRIPT

A tree can be a friend to another tree, in the sense that one tree can help another tree and they might spend a lifetime together, side-by-side. Humanity is not one thing, and the world another. We share in the experience of the tree by knowing the tree, we share in the losses and new life around us.

Language is inadequate to describe our experiences: however shared, words fall short and create limits and boundaries. I prefer poetry. But mostly, images. Suffice. With the pictures I make, I hope to share something beyond language, multiple truths; truths unique to an individual and others— ubiquitous yet unspoken. The poetic truth and the mythic truth can exist simultaneously, at once revealed and concealed. You can see something for what it is, what it depicts, or you can see something for more than it is. And you can see something for what it means to you.

Michael Krueger



Here Comes the Sun

Fire can be tremendously destructive. It is also a source of regeneration. Farmers burn their fields in the spring to remove dead organic matter and release nutrients into the soil, fostering new plant life. Forest fires likewise promote new growth by clearing out dead trees and decaying plant matter, returning nutrients to the soil and allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor. The sun itself, a huge nuclear furnace colloquially termed a ball of fire, radiates light and heat essential to life on Earth.

Fire's complementary associations with annihilation and renewal have been much on Michael Krueger's mind over the past year, as another destructive force, Covid-19, raged around the world like a forest fire. In the face of the terrible loss, suffering and distress caused by the pandemic, Krueger has imagined healing and new beginnings in its wake – a hope conveyed through his exhibition title, “(Just Like) Starting Over,” borrowed from John Lennon. (Krueger reminds us



that Lennon was killed a month after the release of this song, generating a global wave of sorrow that resonates with the grief induced by the pandemic on a vastly magnified scale.) Krueger finds organic metaphors for optimism in flowering trees and forests filled with fresh life. He became enchanted with the latter on a spring 2019 family trip to the redwood forest in Trinidad, California – a potent source of inspiration for the art he has made during the pandemic.

Krueger conceived of his exhibition in the three spaces of Haw Contemporary's main floor as presenting the narrative of a single day, inaugurated by *Begin with the Sun*. This large vertical acrylic painting depicts the solar orb hovering against a field of pure brilliant color laid down with a spray gun, subtly modulated from orange at the base to ocher and then yellow. Krueger referred to photos of the sun in creating his image of it, which he produced by pressing thickened acrylic

paint through a laser-cut stencil, rendering the star as a tangible presence in relief rising several millimeters off the canvas plane. He embellished the sun's surface with numerous clusters of small red and white marks representing explosions, and, unexpectedly, a meandering allover pattern of small bright yellow stencil-painted leaves and tendrils, alluding to sunlight's role in powering photosynthesis. The use of photographs as visual references and the techniques of spray painting and stenciling, often combined with direct mark-making, recur throughout Krueger's recent work. His proclivity for stenciling, an unusual painting method, is rooted in his long experience as a printmaker.

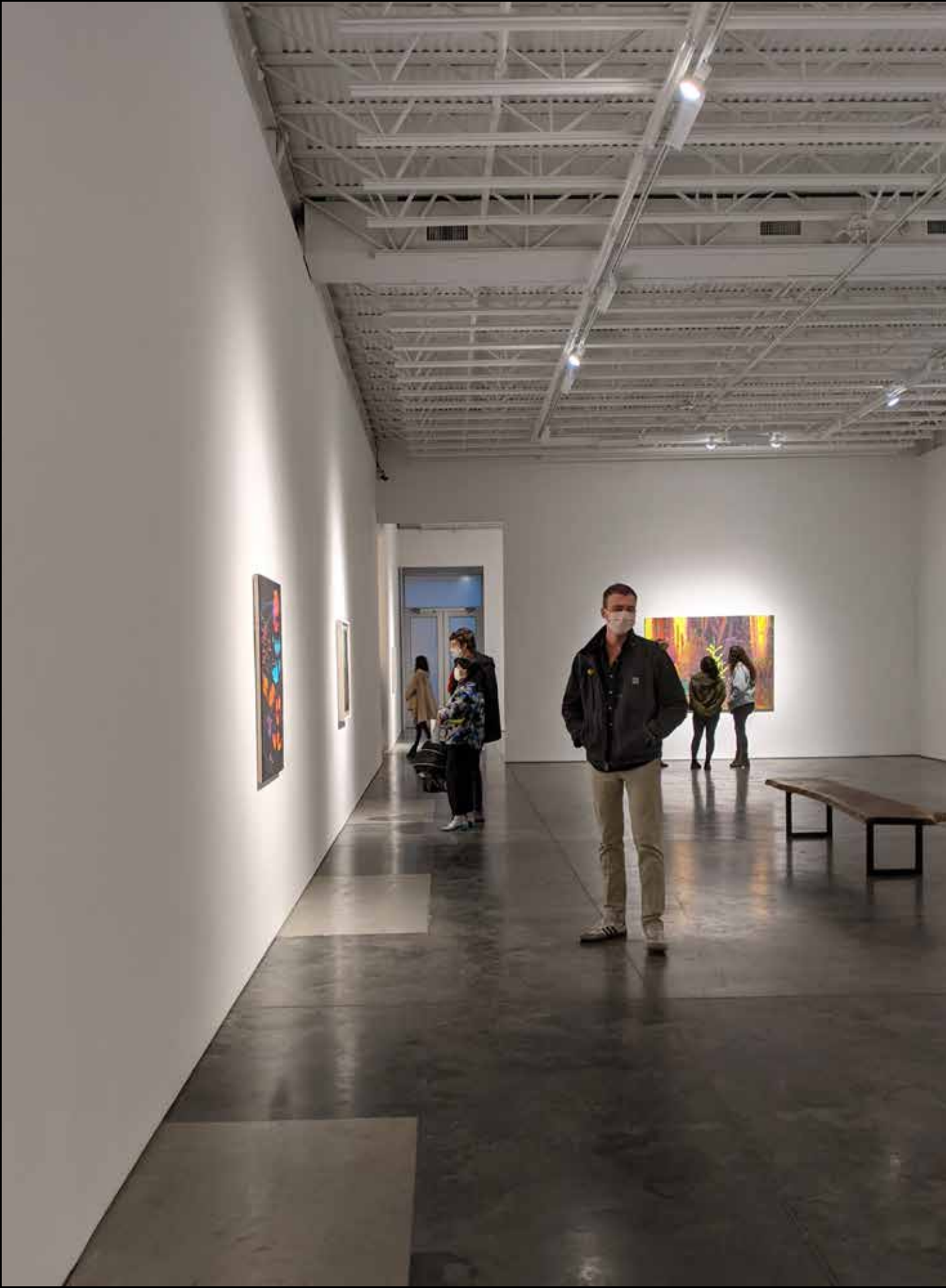
Hanging elsewhere in the first space at Haw, In *Through the Out Door* (named for Led Zeppelin's last album) – the first drawing Krueger made during the spring 2020 pandemic lockdown – presents a view from inside a purple cave onto a sunlit yellow and green forest, expressing hope for emergence

from a dark situation and conjuring the Easter miracle through allusion to an opened tomb. A recent drawing, *(Just Like) Starting Over* – which gives the show its title – shows a blazing red comet with a yellow tail descending through the black sky above the Kansas prairie. Krueger associates this motif with comets that appeared in the heavens during wars, including the U.S. Civil War and World War I. Throughout history, comets have been interpreted as portents of calamities, yet to Krueger they could also be marvelous signals of new beginnings. Although comets hitting the Earth are associated with mass extinction, recent scientific experiments indicate that comet impacts on the Early Earth could have caused substantial synthesis of peptides – the fundamental building blocks of life.

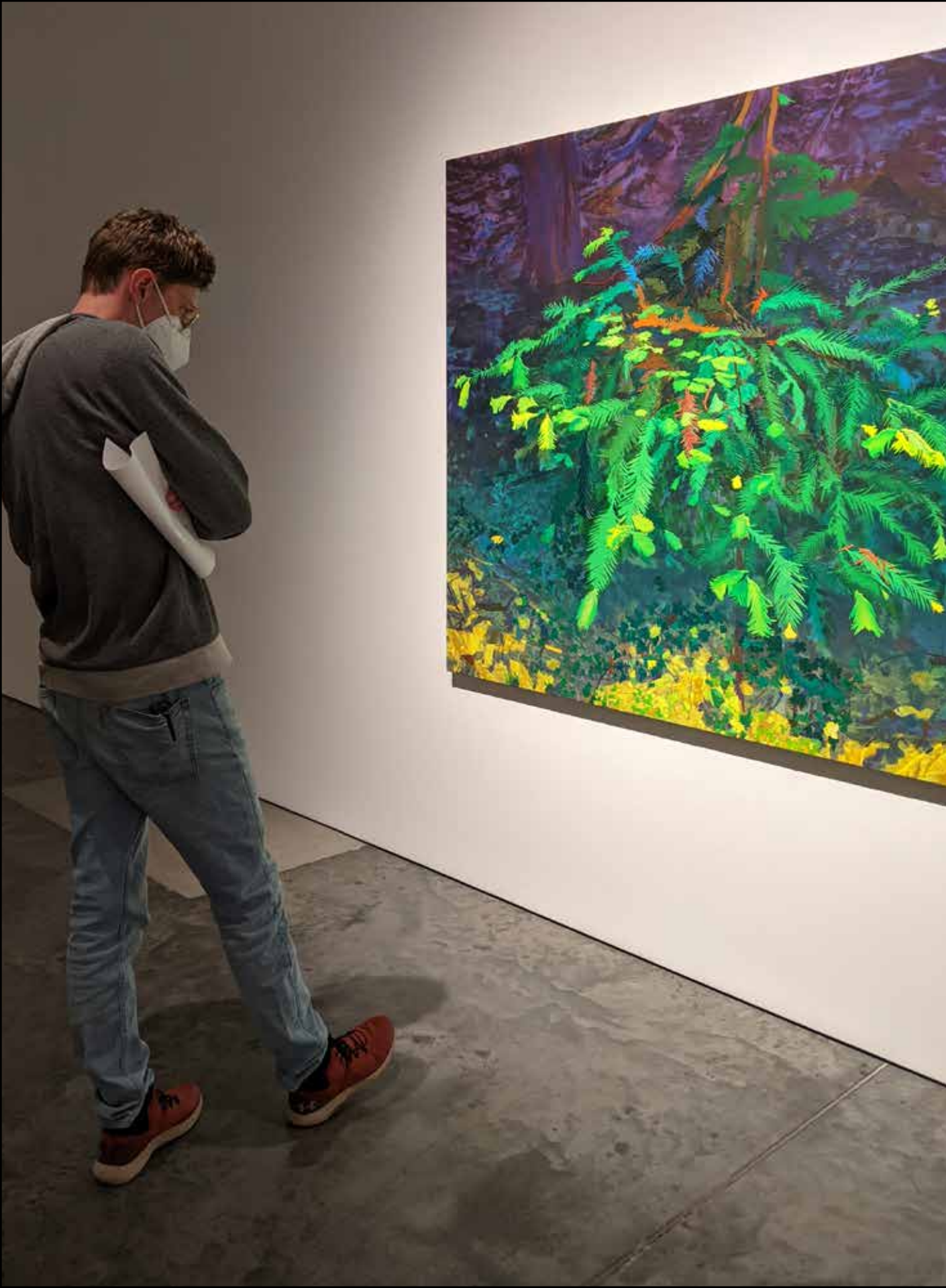
Haunted by media images of the conflagrations that ravaged California in summer 2020, Krueger created two striking works on paper showing forests ablaze, displayed in the second space at



Haw Contemporary. *Fire (Say You're Gonna Leave Me)* and *War is Over (If You Want It)* – their titles nodding to Led Zeppelin and to John Lennon and Yoko Ono, respectively – both combine stenciled areas of sprayed color with intricate linear drawing in colored pencil. Their imagery of dark trees in purple gloom standing helpless amidst glowering flares of yellow, orange, and red is simultaneously ravishing and terrifying. Fire is also the subject of a large horizontal painting, *Spark*, rendered as a welter of layered staccato lines, blobs and squiggles of red, orange, and yellow – all applied through stencils – shooting upward from the base of the picture against a black field and dissipating toward the edges. The coarse hemp support sprayed with an admixture of black and other hues generates a sense of atmosphere through which the hot sparks shoot and dance. One can almost hear the crackle and sizzle of the unseen fire fueling this spectacular pyrotechnic display.



At the opposite end of the color temperature spectrum, Krueger's enthralling drawing *True (Like Ice, Like Fire)* – its title taken from Bob Dylan lyrics – depicts a small island with a stand of light blue pine trees engulfed in dark blue flames and streaming with white smoke. Directly below the island, a blue and white waterfall cascades between rugged green rocks into the foreground. Green forests and hazy blue mountains rise in the background beneath a pale mint sky. White dots of snow sprinkle the picture surface. The scene combines views of actual places – Spirit Island in Maligne Lake in Jasper National Park in the Canadian Rockies, and rapids elsewhere in the park – which Krueger knows only through photographs, and has transformed into a dreamscape in which scorching flames paradoxically burn icy blue. He considers the fiery island a metaphor for human reinvention – a figurative burning down of the self, a preparation for starting over.



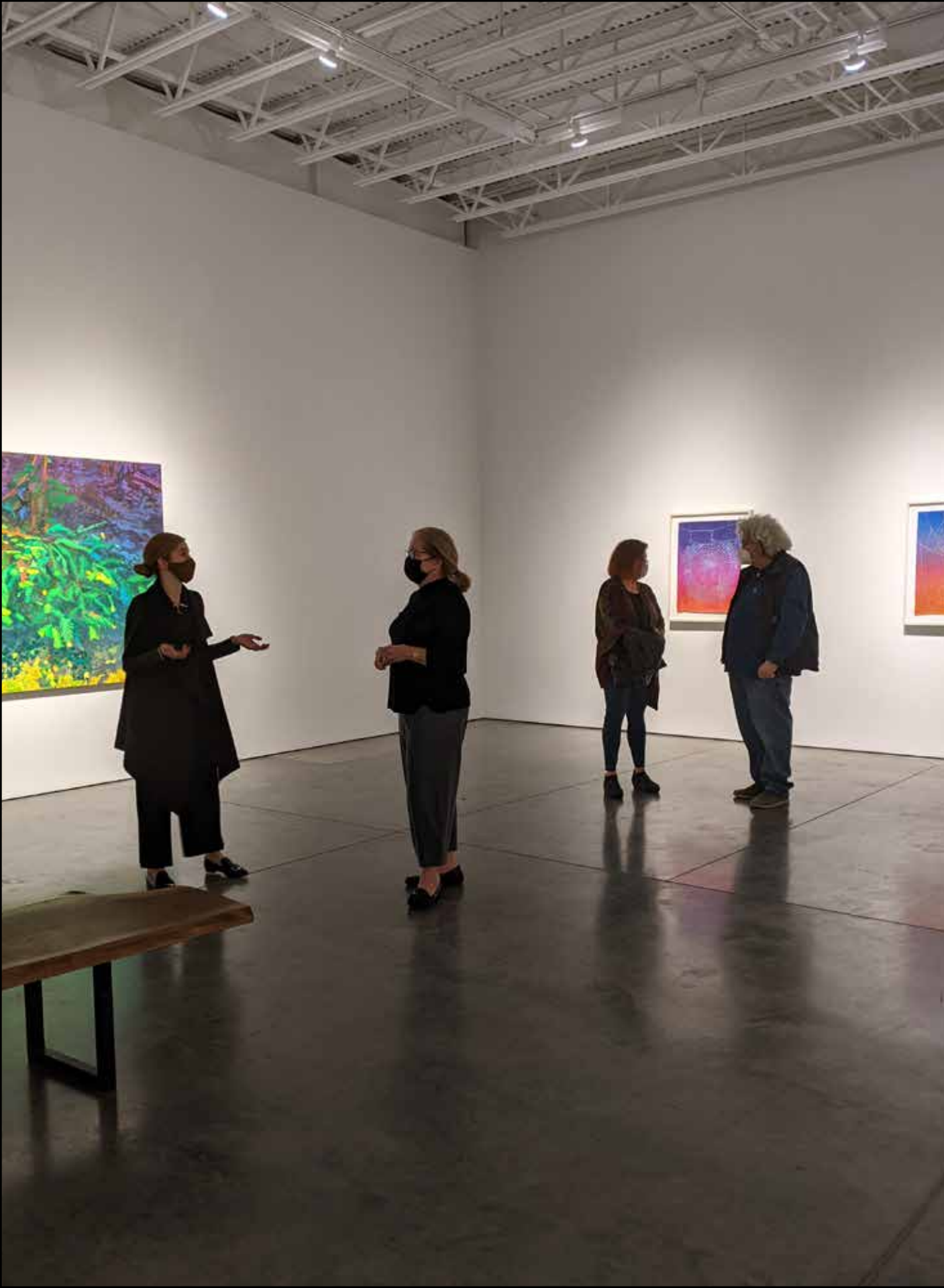
Krueger's experience of the California redwoods directly inspired the show's two most ambitious paintings, *New Growth in an Old Forest* and *The Tree Forgives (The Night)*, hung in the third space at Haw Contemporary. The first canvas offers the hallucinatory vision of a glowing chartreuse redwood sapling, centrally placed and silhouetted against the massive blue and purple base of a parent tree. Hot colors pulsate in the background wings – now not connoting fire but nurturing sunlight, which seems to be the foreground sapling's very substance. In the second canvas, a lush mass of thickly stenciled and layered redwood leaves in vivid shades spanning yellow green to dark green spreads laterally across the composition's midsection. Roughly brushed dark blues, purples and greens suggest the background foliage while vivid patches of yellow green and orange at the painting's base signify sunlight caressing the forest floor. Krueger's title imagines

the redwood forgiving the night for taking away the light upon which it thrives; he understands the power of forgiveness in helping to clear the way for the optimism of starting over.

In *(Trees Sing) A Lullaby for Humanity*, Krueger embraces the vibrant beauty of spring trees in bloom, likened by the title to visual music for humankind in need of comfort. About a dozen silhouetted branches in various hues enter from the canvas's left and right sides, sprouting brightly colored stylized versions of cherry, plum, crabapple, and magnolia blossoms, applied in thick acrylic through stencils and glowing against a nocturnal black background. Redolent of a Japanese aesthetic, likely influenced by Krueger's 2017 visit to that country, the picture possesses an unabashedly decorative quality that is a departure for the artist – a new beginning consonant with theme of starting over. Other fresh ventures in the exhibition are two images of forest-floor plants in watercolor, a medium

in which Krueger has just begun working, and pendant compositions of a spider web, a motif he has never before used. *Dusk (Like the Web Implies the Spider)* and *Dawn (Like the Web Implies the Spider)* offer before-and-after images of the same web: freshly spun at day's end and ready to snare bugs; damaged, drooping and dew-drenched at sunrise. Krueger drew the spider webs and dew drops using phosphorescent pigment so that they glow under black light like psychedelic posters, insinuating a reference to the late 1960s drug culture that has been one of his abiding interests.

As evidenced by the rich and variegated body of work that comprises “(Just Like) Starting Over,” Michael Krueger was enormously productive during the first year of the pandemic. Like many artists, he was already accustomed to working in isolation. He relished the gift of extra time in his studio to generate resonant images of nature that both express his personal feelings and meet

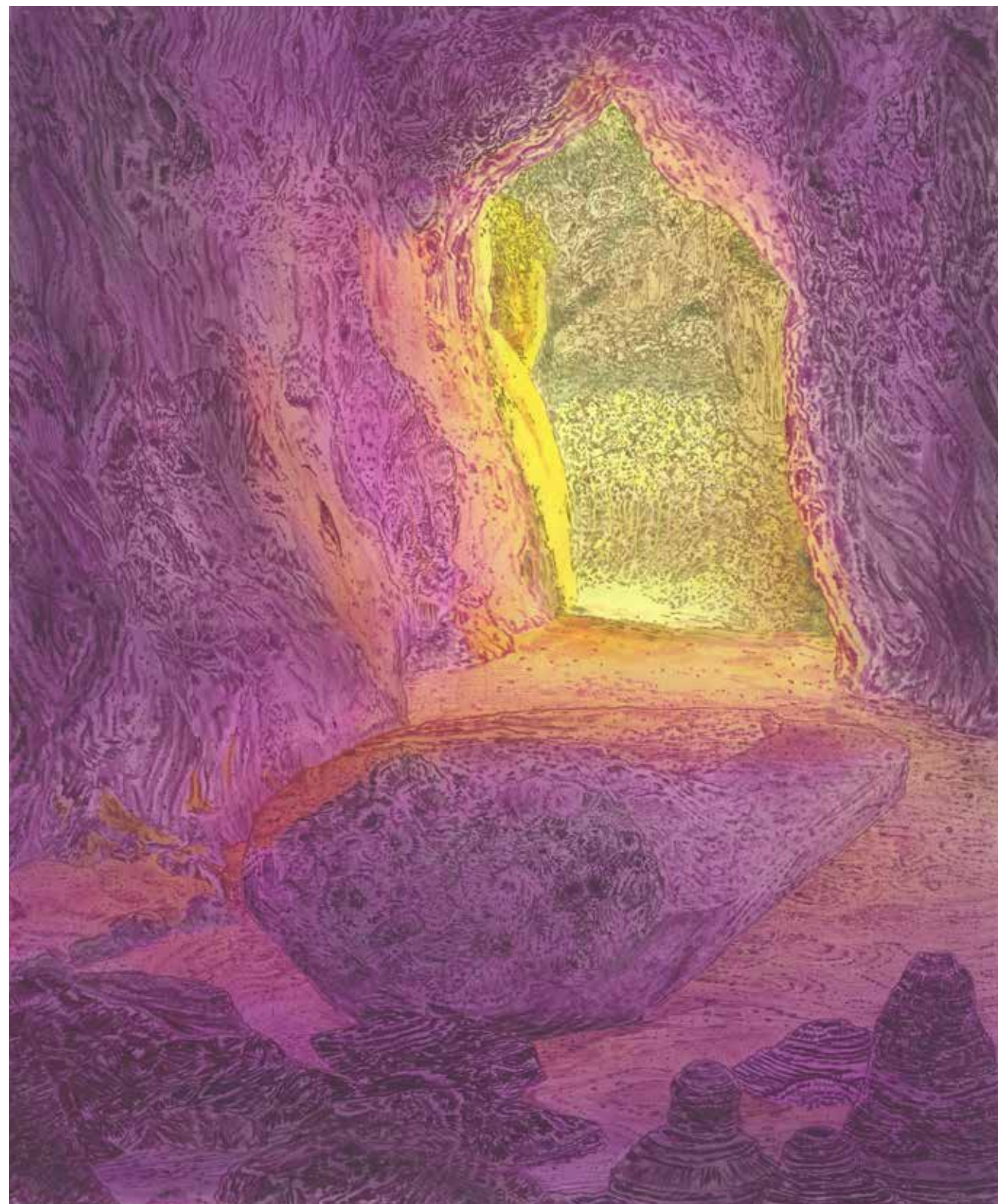


the emotional needs of our moment. Burning with creative energy, Krueger acknowledged metaphorically the pandemic's devastating impact by depicting forest fires, yet he emphasized the renewal that follows the flames through paintings and drawings of fresh forest growth, gorgeous spring flowers, and the life-giving sun. These are his gifts to us – encouraging us to forgive the night, embrace the light, and start over.

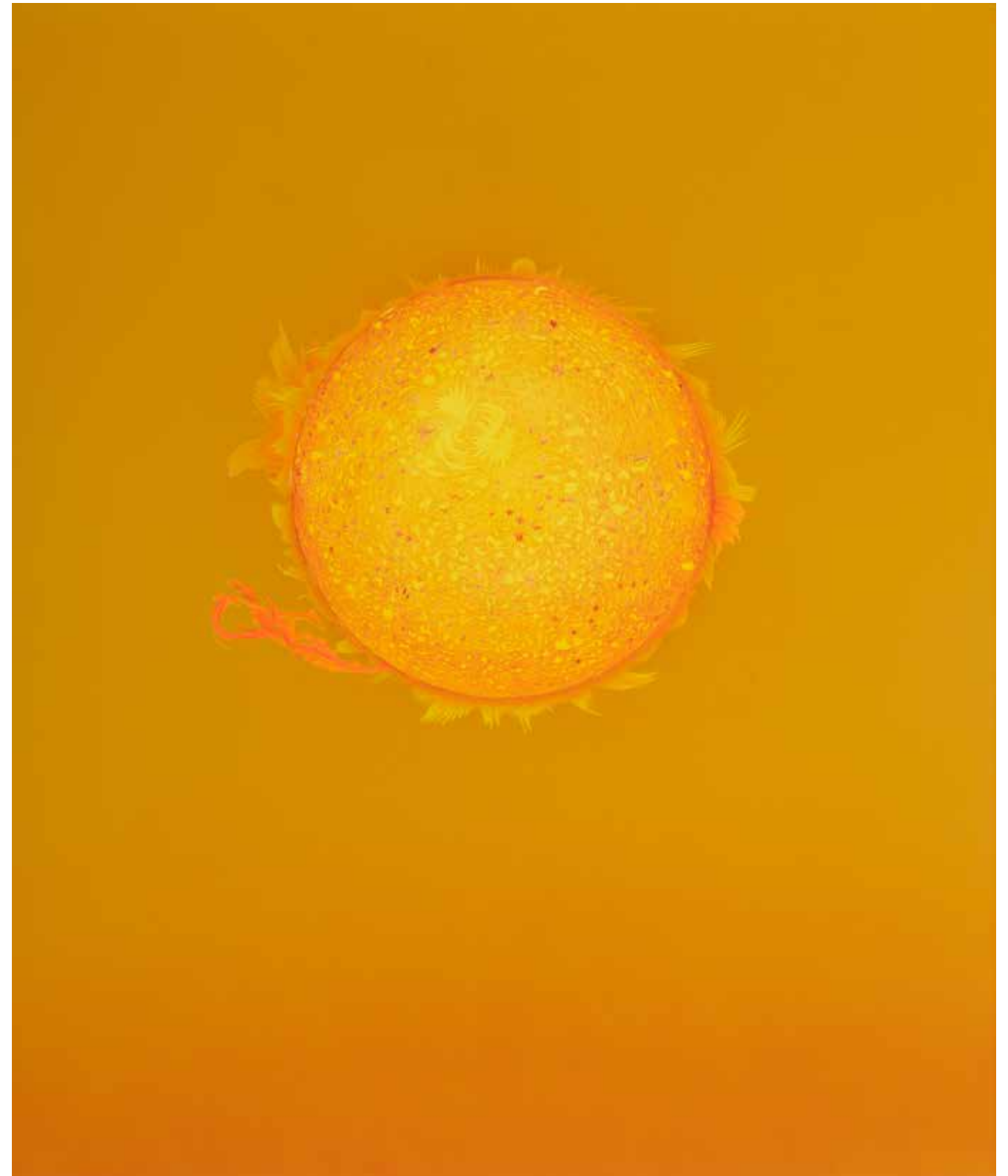
David Cateforis
Lawrence, Kansas
March 2021

David Cateforis is Professor of Art History and Chair of the Kress Foundation Department of Art History at the University of Kansas. He has published extensively on international contemporary art, 20th-century American art, and art in the Kansas City region.





In Through the Out Door, 2021
COLORED PENCIL AND ACRYLIC ON PAPER
24"x 20"



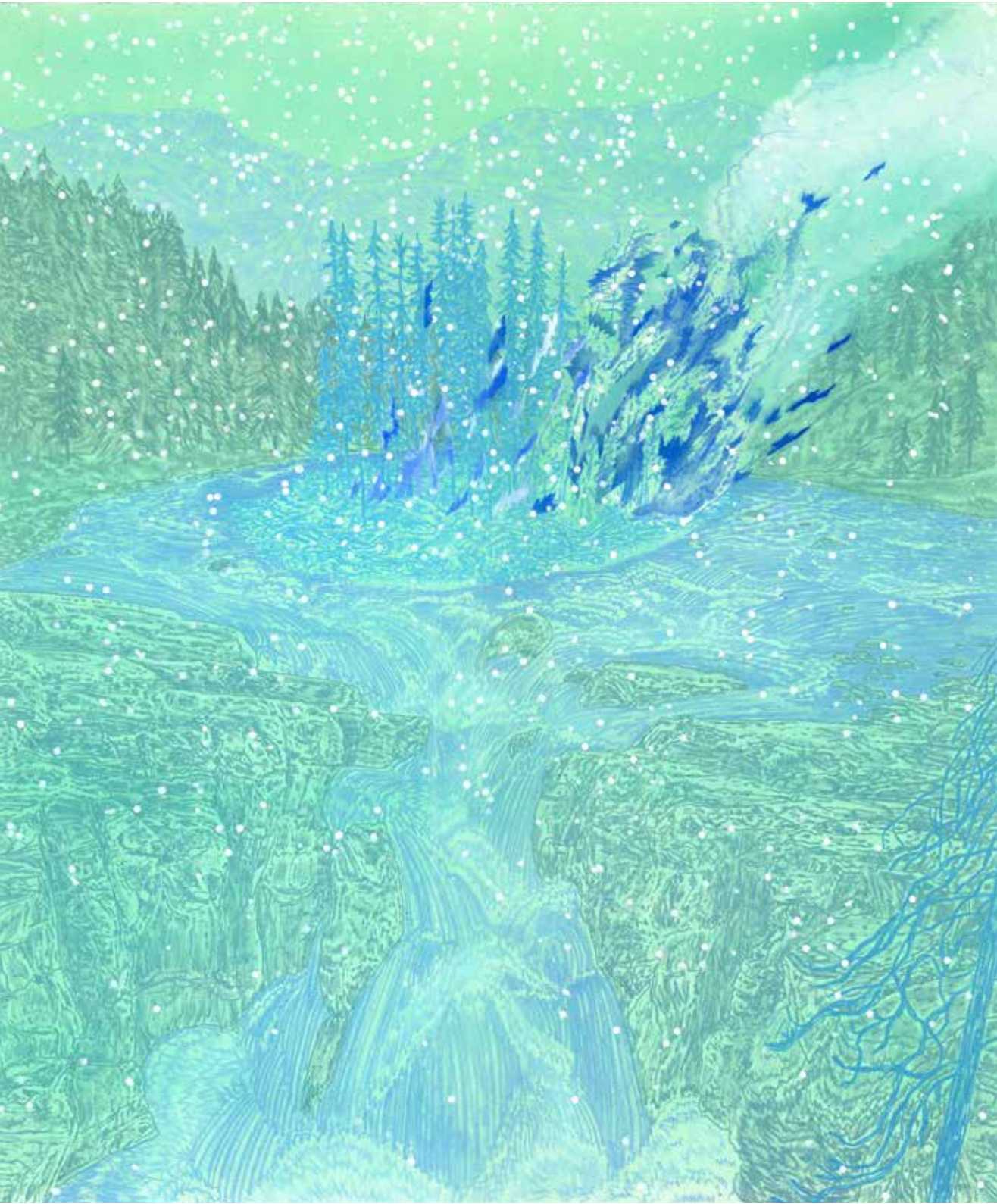
Begin with the Sun, 2021
ACRYLIC ON LINEN
62"x 52"



(Just Like) Starting Over, 2021
COLORED PENCIL AND ACRYLIC ON PAPER
20"x 24"



Fire (Say You're Gonna Leave Me), 2021
COLORED PENCIL AND ACRYLIC ON PAPER
20"x 24"



True (Like Ice, Like Fire), 2021
COLORED PENCIL AND ACRYLIC ON PAPER
24"x 20"



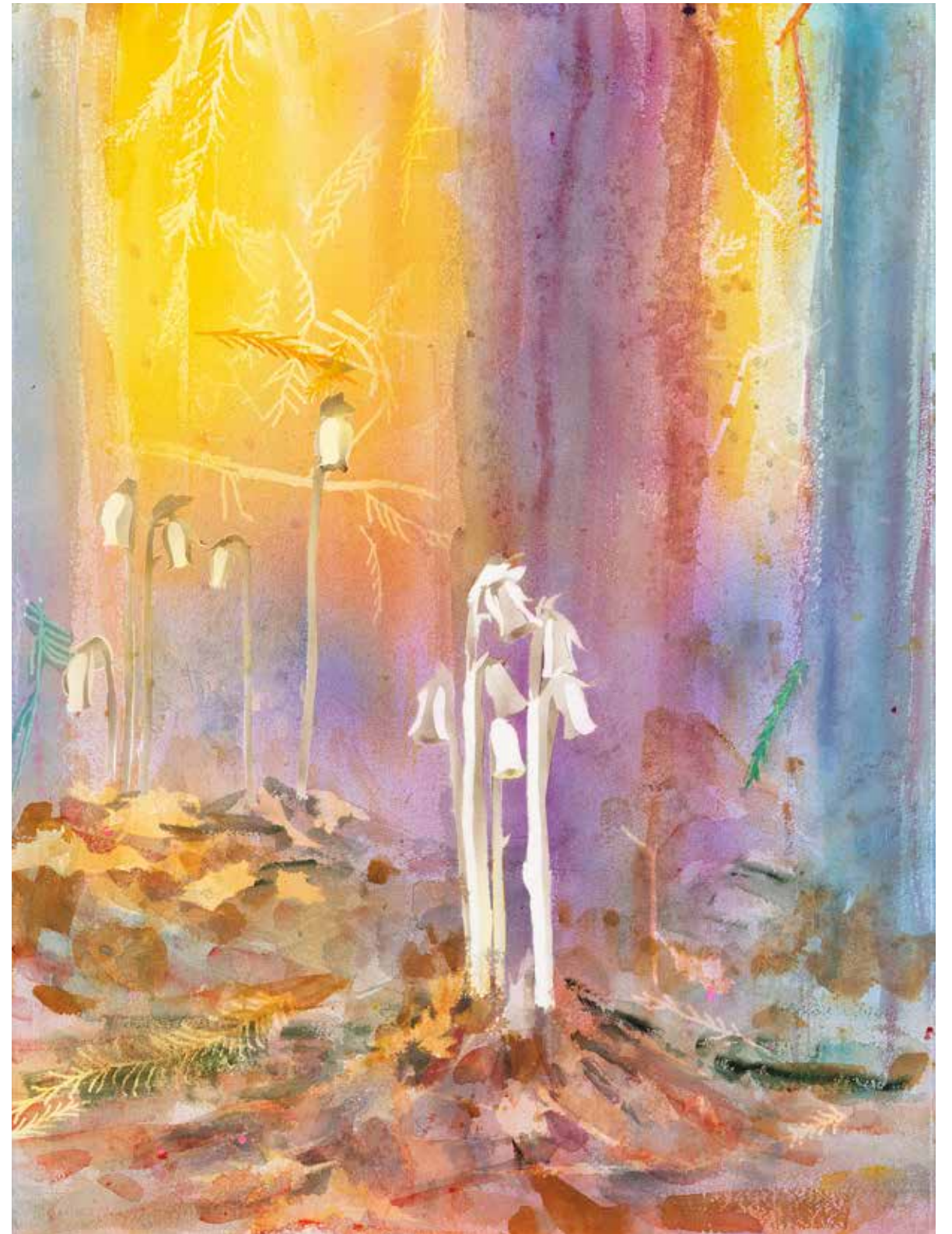
Spark, 2021
ACRYLIC ON HEMP
52"x 94"



War is Over (If You Want It), 2021
COLORED PENCIL AND ACRYLIC ON PAPER
20"x 24"



New Growth in an Old Forest, 2021
ACRYLIC ON LINEN
55"x 75"



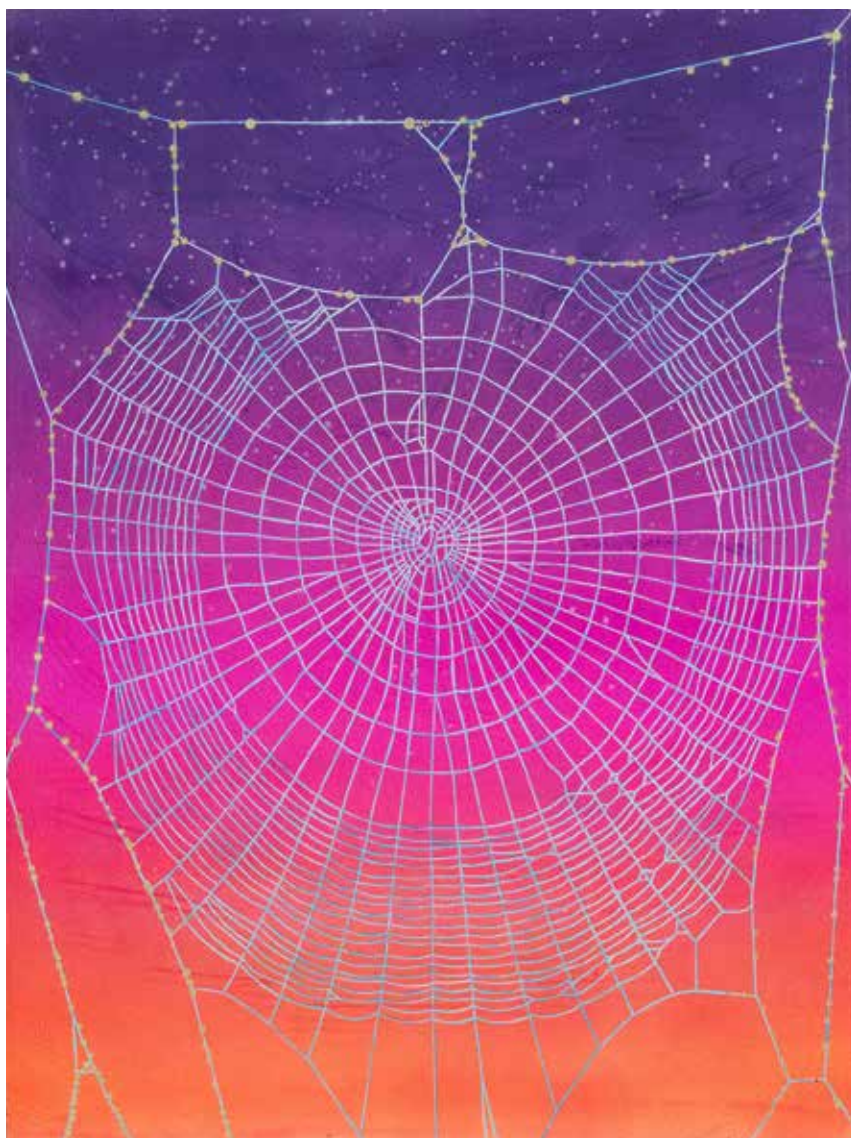
Ghosts of Summer, 2021
WATERCOLOR
30"x 22.5"



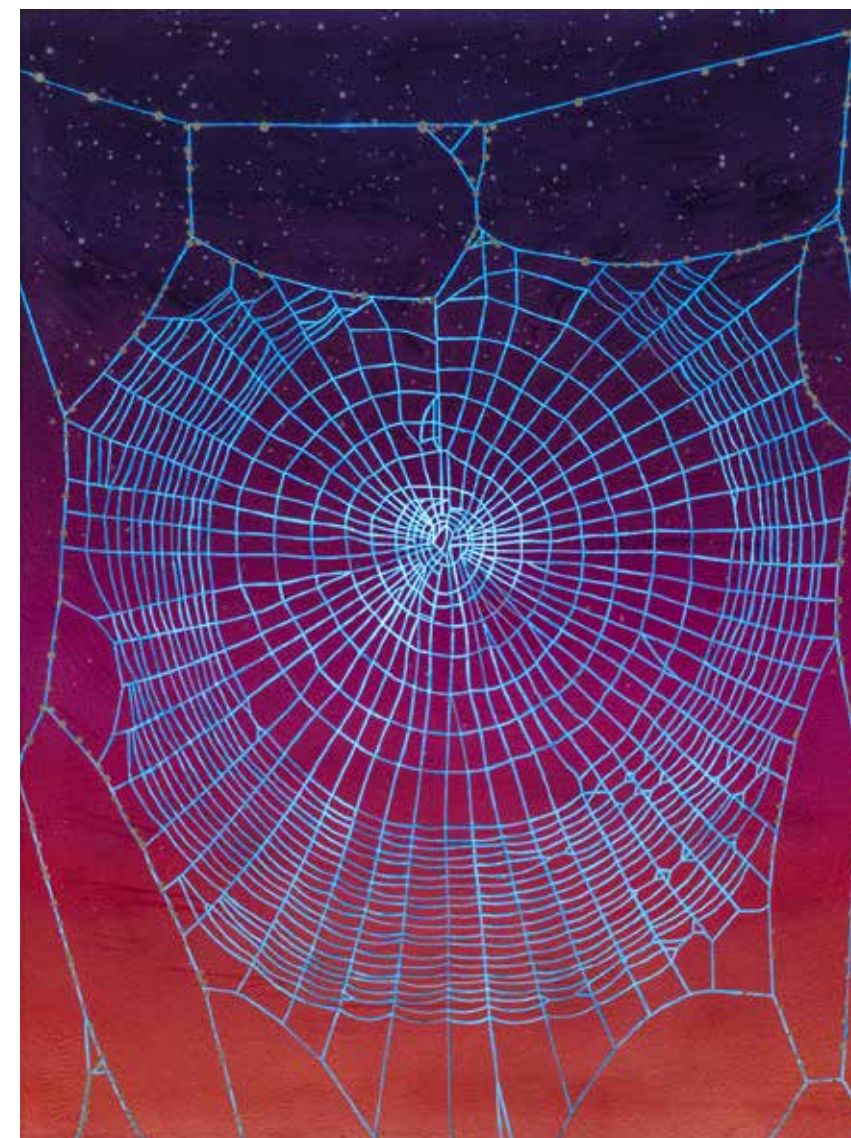
The Tree Forgives (The Night), 2021
ACRYLIC ON LINEN
60"x 80"



Unfurl (This Mortal Coil), 2021
WATERCOLOR
30"x 22.5"



Dusk (Like the Web Implies the Spider), 2021
 WATERCOLOR WITH GLOW-IN-THE-DARK POWDER
 30"x 22.5"



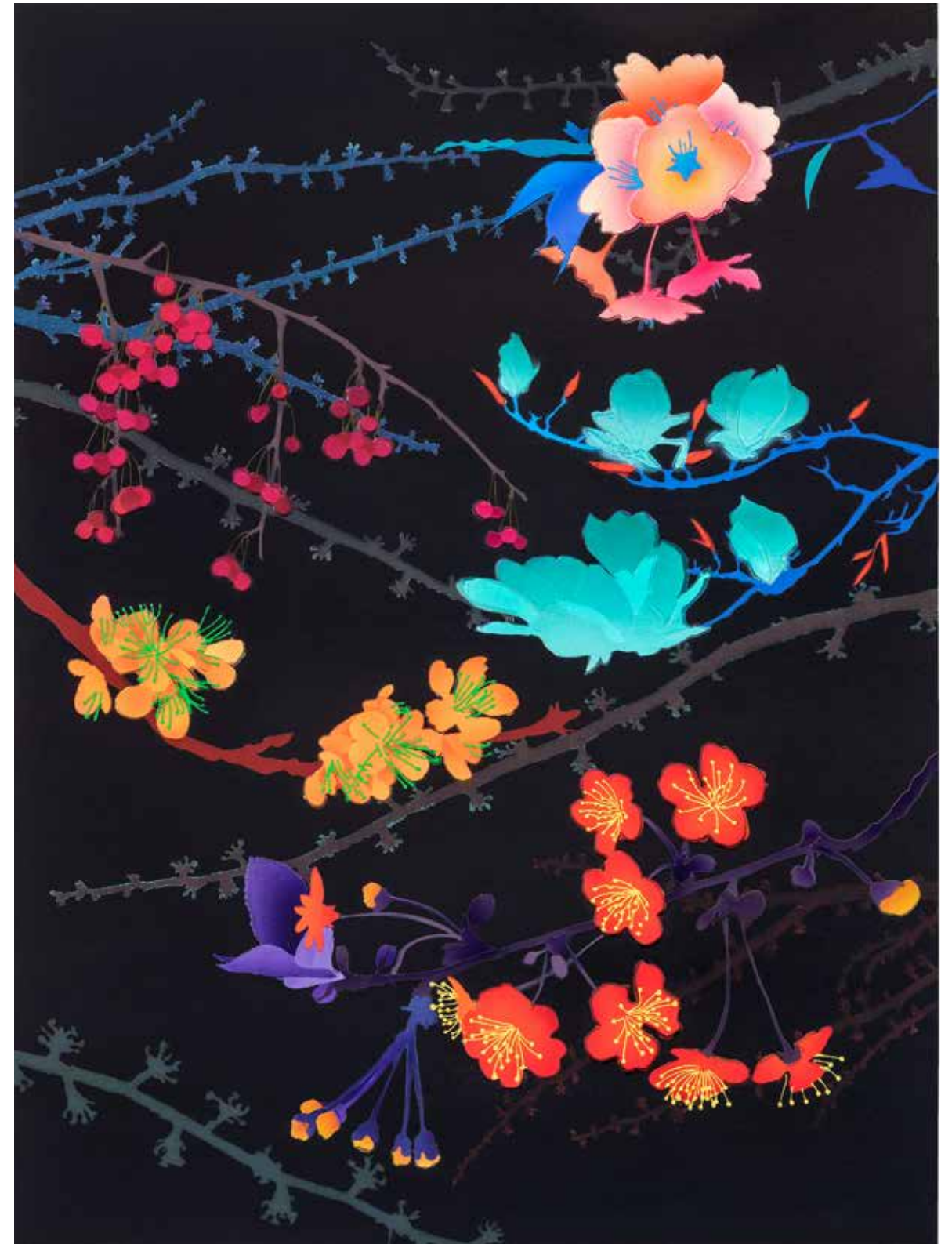
Dusk (Like the Web Implies the Spider), 2021
 WATERCOLOR WITH GLOW-IN-THE-DARK POWDER
 30"x 22.5"



Dawn (Like the Web Implies the Spider), 2021
 WATERCOLOR WITH GLOW-IN-THE-DARK POWDER
 30"x 22.5"



Dawn (Like the Web Implies the Spider), 2021
 WATERCOLOR WITH GLOW-IN-THE-DARK POWDER
 30"x 22.5"



(Trees Sing) A Lullaby for Humanity, 2021
ACRYLIC ON LINEN
42"x 31"

ARTIST'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Bill and Emily at the gallery for their profound generosity and graciousness. It is because of the work that they do that we have a place to be enriched by the culture of art and to revel in the company of our great arts community. I also want to thank Archie for being there for me when I needed him, and his tremendous expertise. To Katie, for her miraculous, meticulous and always cheerful returns. To EG for his incomparable skills and beloved friendship. I am humbled by the good humor, keen curiosity and collaborative spirit of my friends Tim & David. And foremost, I am deeply grateful for the endless support from my partner Donika and the continuous inspiration that I glean from my three boys; Jasper, Strayhorn and Maceo.

BIO

Michael Krueger is an artist, a father, and teacher, a Love Librarian, a Tamarind Artist and an Honorary Resident Dropper. Grounded firmly in drawing, Michael Krueger works in a variety of media including, painting, drawing, printmaking, animation, and ceramics. Krueger’s artwork reflects a deep interest in American history, contemporary American culture, art history, the human experience, and personal memoir.

Michael Krueger’s artwork has been included in over 300 exhibitions, and recent solo exhibitions include prestigious venues such as: Académie Beeldende Kunsten, Ghent, BE, Haw Contemporary, Kansas City, MO, Steven Zevitas Gallery, Boston, MA, Sunday L.E.S., New York, NY and Blackburn 20/20, New York, NY. Important group exhibitions include, The Drawing Center, New York, NY, KRETS Gallery, Malmo, Sweden, The Denver Museum of Art, Denver, CO, Ambacher Contemporary, Munich, Germany, Glasgow Print Studio, Scotland, UK, Adam Baumgold, New York, NY, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts Museum, Philadelphia, PA and the Kala Art Institute, Berkeley, CA. From 2010 – 2012, Michael created animations for the feature length documentary film *Drop City* by Joan Grossman & Tom McCourt. There are 15 short animations in the film. To date the film has screened at major venues such as, the Museum of Modern Art, P.S. 1, New York, NY, Mills College Art Museum, Oakland, CA, Bosch Art Film Festival, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, CO and Electro Media Scope, Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO and the *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia*, Exhibition at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN.

Krueger’s artworks have been collected by numerous public and prominent private collections, ensuring the longevity of his work in the public sphere. A selection of the collections that have acquired his work include; Fidelity Investments, Boston, MA Polsinelli, Kansas City, MO Progressive Insurance, Cleveland, OH Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, Denver Museum of Art, Denver, CO, Fogg Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, Estonian National Museum of Art, Tallinn, Estonia, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, Monticello, Thomas Jefferson Estate, Charlottesville, VA, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, MO, Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park, KS, New York Public Library, New York, NY, RISD Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS & the Weisman Museum of Art, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

Michael’s primary teaching responsibilities at the University of Kansas include, drawing, intaglio and relief. He has also taught numerous workshops across the country and abroad including, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, City College of New York, Edinburgh College of Art, Scotland, St. Luc, E.R.G., Brussels, Belgium, Santa Reparata Graphic Art Centre, Florence, Italy, Instituto Superior de Arte, Asunción, Paraguay, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston and the San Francisco Art Institute.



