

Bartosz Sikorski

Works from 2007 to 2012

An Introduction by Gabriel Hubmann



Bartosz Sikorski: Works from 2007 to 2012. An Introduction

Gabriel Hubmann

The works of Bartosz Sikorski are rooted beyond painting as it is understood in a classical sense: namely in music as well as in the digital image. His beginnings as an artist are marked by an education in music; his basic vocabulary of forms has been derived from the enlarged structure of a medium that is alien to painting: the digitally recorded and then reproduced (reworked) image.⁽¹⁾ The square or the angular shape, which is composed of squares in turn, play a seminal role in the work of Sikorski as parts of a system: They are manifestations of pixels arranged in a two-dimensional grid and are formatted by algorithmic processes, which remain invisible to the eye, into a digital image.

The structure of pixels however, which serves as an inspiration for Sikorski's works, may not be imagined as static or an-organic. Rather one deals at a first glance with diffuse and amorphous shapes (especially in earlier works), that can only be tamed and systematized with the help of stencils, which were occasionally employed by the artist.⁽²⁾ This specific liveliness of the picture elements is repeatedly thematised by the works and their titles: for example by the series Pixel Migration (2007-2008), including the image Pixel Zucht (or Pixel Breed) from 2008 (fig. 3).⁽³⁾ In the image oT from 2009, a square is so to speak 'born' out of another angular form, the birth of which is further suggested by splashes in different colours (fig. 4).⁽⁴⁾ In the medium of Sikorski's short films, which are accompanied by music, this moment of birth is translated into movement: In jazz armatki (2010), square elements are released from larger rectangular conglomerates (fig. 5). These angular picture elements begin to resemble notes upon which a composition is based, additionally emphasized by the accompanying music. Sikorski himself made improvisations on the double-bass in this process (therein the project of a conjunction between image and sound becomes recognizable, an interest the artist pursues on various levels). The structure of pixels however, from which the works of Sikorski are inspired, is not the only hint that points to an engagement with the digital image: The coarse texture of the linen canvas used by the artist with its vertical and horizontal weaves maintains an interesting correspondence with the structure of the screened digital image (with the 'visual noise' of the image).⁽⁵⁾

Beside these formal characteristics, the colour models used by Sikorski also form a hinge between his works and digital image processing. The RGB (red - green - blue) and CMYK (cyan - magenta - yellow - black) colour models, with which the artist experiments, point to an additive mixing of light colours like in TV screens and computer monitors, and respectively, to the subtractive mixing of concrete, standardized colours (which are either bought by the artist as prefabricated acrylic paints or as mixed pigments) as is the case with colour printers, with both models maintaining an interdependent relationship.⁽⁶⁾ The resulting rich implications concerning colour theories play an important role in Sikorski's work.

Sikorski's works operate on different levels against the unity of the picture seen as the tableau, which is characterized by completeness and coherence. His works are comprised of several applications of paint that have been layered or superimposed one on top of the other. Through this superimposition, the hues are generated in the form of a physiological-additive colour mixing, and not in the form of a physical-subtractive colour mixing, as is produced on a palette. The transparency of the single layers of paint (additionally increased through binding agent) lends a temporal thickness or depth to the pictures, otherwise only visible in radiographs or pentimenti.⁽⁷⁾ This temporal thickness is literally exposed at the edges of the works: Since they lack framing in a narrower sense, the layered structure of the picture becomes visible on the side of the canvas. One sees wood cut coarsely with frayed surfaces. The linen fabric with a white prime coat is stretched across it, followed by individual layers of paint and ultimately a final layer with little pigment and more of the binding agent, which acts like a varnish. The drips on the sides of the pictures allow the different colours to be visible, merging optically-physiologically when seen from the front (fig. 6). This exposure of the pictorial structure accounts for the artist's interest in the dimension of material-workmanship that is part of the creative production.

Sikorski's works do not disturb the unity and coherence of the pictorial surface alone, but also of the picture's support: The works on wood protrude plastically while several of them appear as if composed of individual parts, seeming to be connected by superimpositions of paint.

Sometimes a piece of wood actually detaches from the larger form and starts to take on a life of its own on the surface of the wall (in the same manner as the 'born' square in oT or the forms in jazz armatki) - the picture support thus frays at its edges (fig. 7). According to these observations, one could thus formulate that in his works, Sikorski reflects upon the basic elements and conditions of painting as a medium. Its material foundations are exposed by the layered structure, the single applications of paint act out different optical mixtures, without mixing physically (our physiological-receptive agency is thus emphasized). The inversed drips particularly draw the observer's attention to a contemplation of the medial condition: The artist applied paint to transparent foil and subsequently cut out the generated drip. Then he mounted the cut-out form onto the picture support, after inverting it against the downward flow. This drip can also be used as a stencil for further drips, thus turning an accidentally generated drip into artificial drip forms. Sometimes such 'drip quotes' and real drips (which cannot be controlled completely) are juxtaposed (fig. 8). This working procedure extends the layering of the picture and therefore the reflective mediation to yet a further level. In this respect, one is inclined to describe the works of Sikorski as 'satellites', constantly orbiting the medium of painting from a certain (reflective) distance.(8)

After these short insights into some important aspects and characteristics of Sikorski's work, it may appear only consequent that, in the most recent works, the artist has combined his engagement with the medium of the digital image and of painting under the thematic frame of music. His Five short pieces for LED-Painting (2012, fig. 10) present themselves as an utterly tense combination of wooden pieces plastered with painted canvas and LED-Paintings on aluminium. This yields a collision of disparate visual effects, surface textures and materials. The title of the group alludes to pieces of music, which have been written for a certain instrument (for example, 'five short pieces for violin'). But the five short pieces of music are pictures in this case, which have been composed for the 'instrument' LED-Painting. The positioning of the pictures, their particular compositional-material structure as well as their titles do not refer to the realm of music and its systems in a severe illustrative manner, but rather in an associative way. This is not meant in the sense of a mere loose and superficial association. Rather, manifold references to musical structures resound in the interplay of the works' appearances, titles and their position on the wall.

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Notes

1. This reference is made explicit by the titles of earlier works, as is the case with *Bildschirm* (Screen) from 2008 (oil on canvas, 220 x 170 cm), (fig. 1).
2. Sikorski cut out pixel structures by hand and then painted with the help of the stencils, which were produced in this process. These stencils also could turn into autonomous works, for example in a book project or in a film. The artist also produced intaglio prints by means of stencils (fig. 2).
3. Oil on canvas, 180 x 140 cm.
4. Watercolour and acrylic on paper, 56 x 76 cm.
5. In earlier works, Sikorski used unprimed burlap to emphasize the holes of the fabric as 'hollows' in the porous surface when painted. Now the artist uses a thicker canvas, which has a more neutral effect than burlap. The crosswise application of paint imitates the 'screening' of the linen fabric, but does not always follow its structure exactly (the application is thus more emphasized as a layer in its own right).
6. If the three basic colours of the RGB model red, green and blue are added together in equal brightness, then the colour sensation white is produced. Whereas subtracting one of these three colours leads to the addition of the respectively remaining colours, producing the colour sensation cyan (a mixture of green and blue), magenta (from red and blue) and yellow (out of red and green). If none of these three basic colours is given, the colour sensation will be black (therefore the colour K has been included in the CMYK model). This correlation also forms the basis for a reciprocal convertibility of the two colour models RGB and CMYK. In high-quality image processing programs, images can be presented and saved in a CMYK colour format, without converting them to a RGB format.
7. Sikorski has painted in oil before, but now he exclusively uses acrylic paints because they facilitate the construction of the picture out of transparent layers. The paints are mixed with pigments by the artist himself. Working in oil would be too time-consuming, since the single layers take a long time to dry completely (otherwise they would mix mechanically when applied on the picture support).
8. Cf. the group exhibition *Satelliten der Malerei* (Satellites of Painting), which was shown in the artist's studio Suterena from 12 April to 5 May.

Plates

Selected works and documentation, 2007-2012

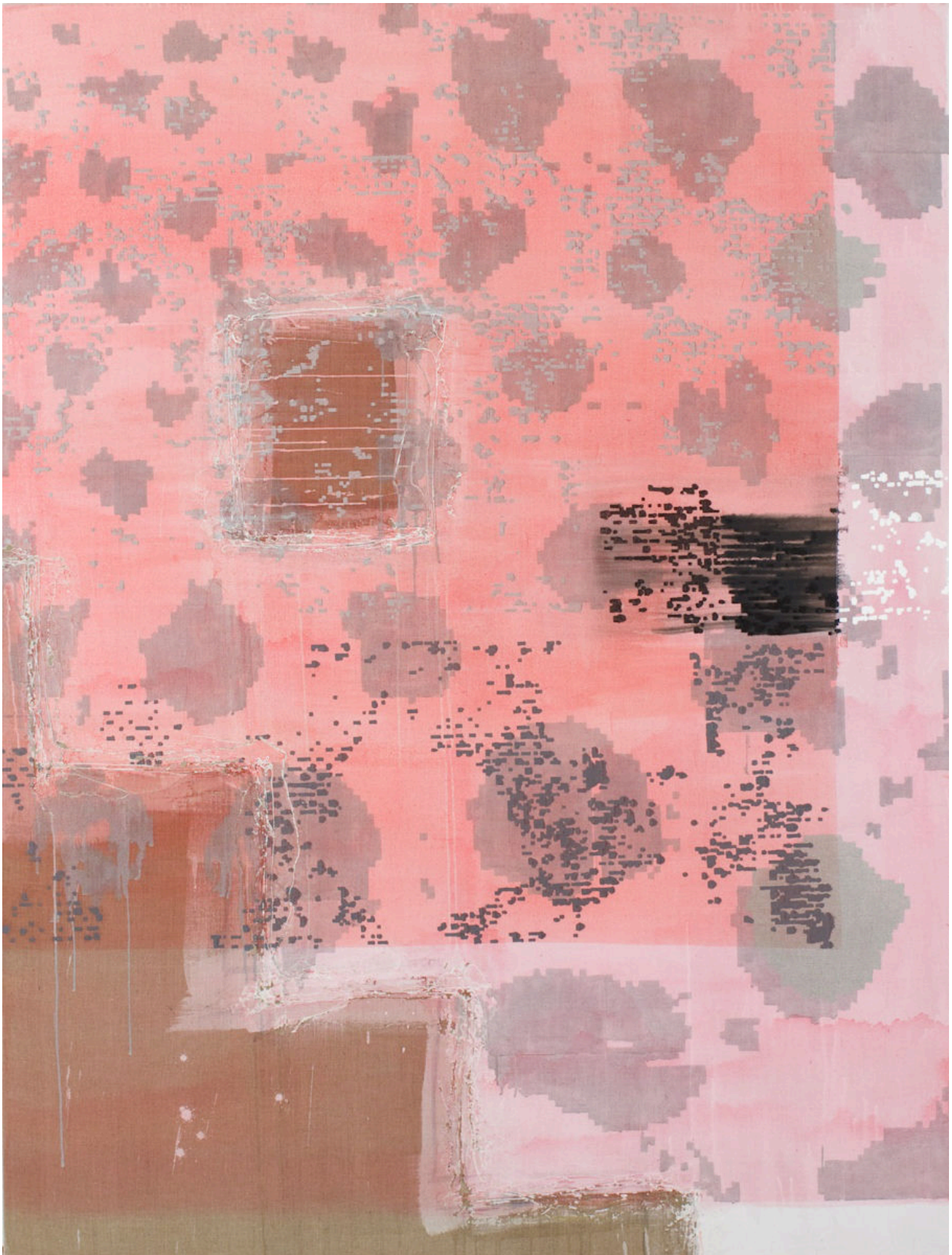


fig. 1

Bildschirm, 2008, oil on canvas, 220 x 170 cm

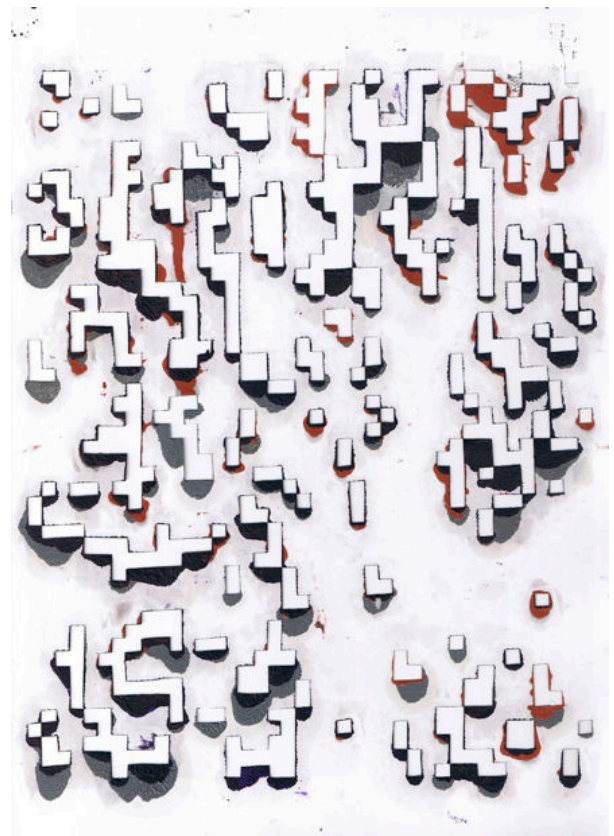
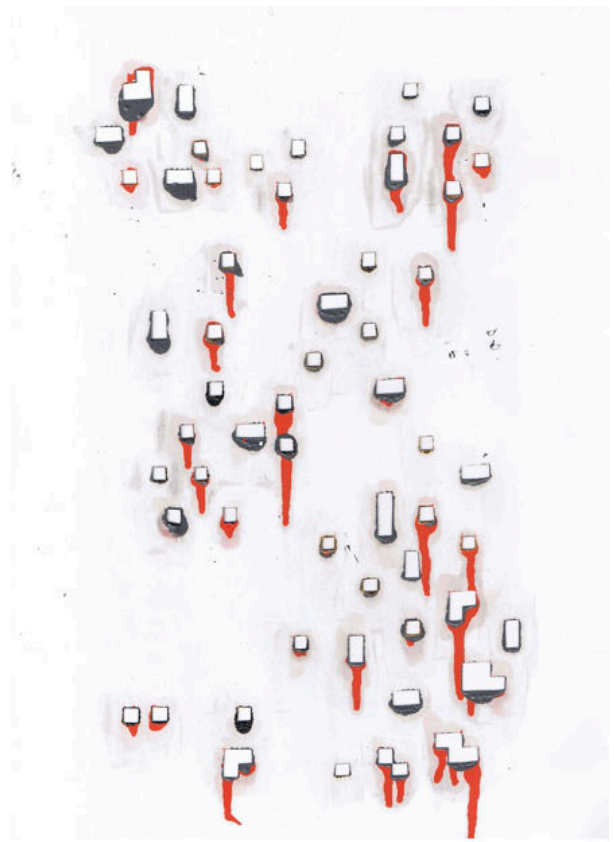
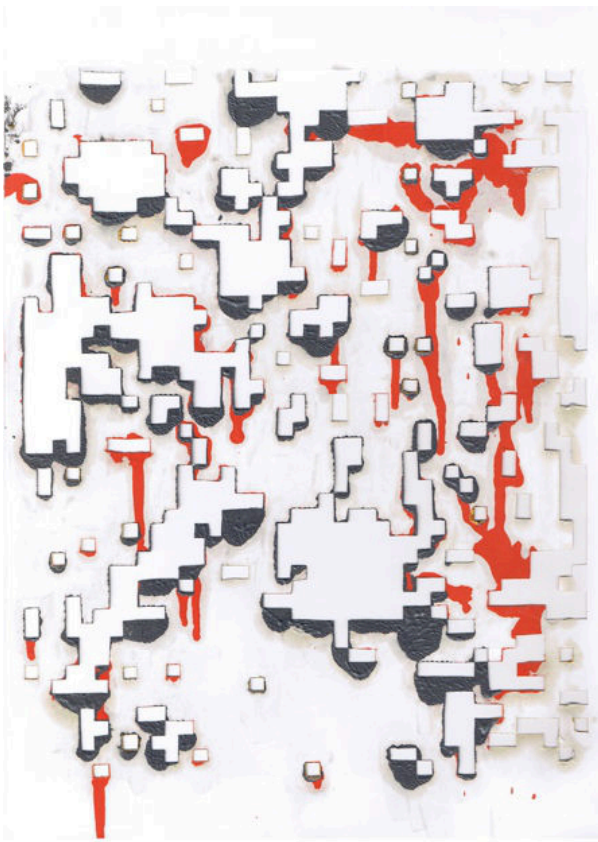


fig. 2

Template examples, A4 paper, oil, 2007



fig. 3 Pixel Zucht, 2007, oil on canvas, 180 x 140 cm



fig. 4 oT, 2009, aquarelle and acrylic on paper, 56 x 76 cm

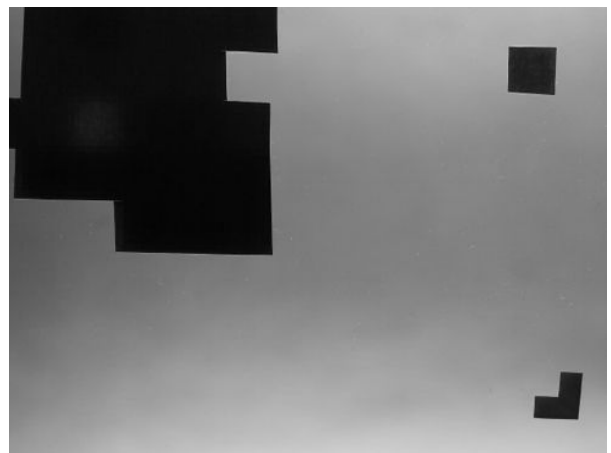
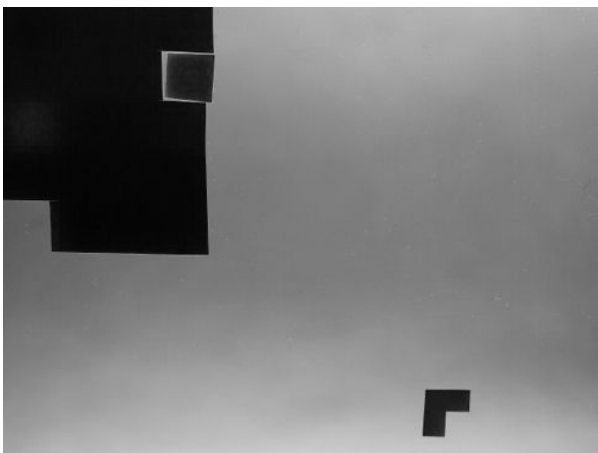


fig. 5 Stills from short film jazz armatki, 2010



fig. 6 Untitled from CMYK Mixer project, 2009, ca. 50 x 50 cm, acrylic, canvas, wood

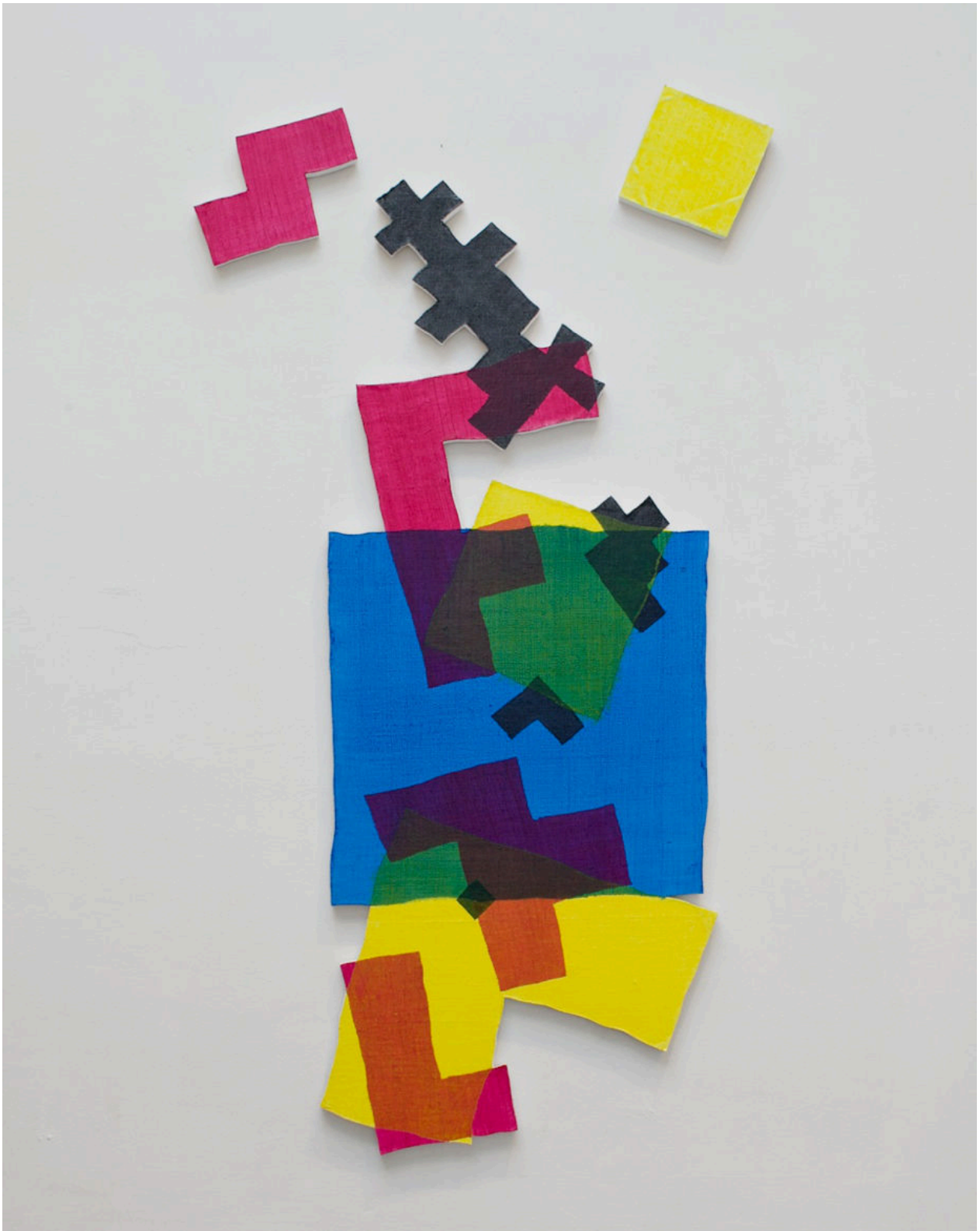


fig. 7

Untitled, 2011, ca. 180 x 80 cm, acrylic on canvas on wood



fig. 8

Five short pieces for LED-Painting - No. 5 Chain, detail, 2012, Lambda on aluminium and acrylic on canvas on wood

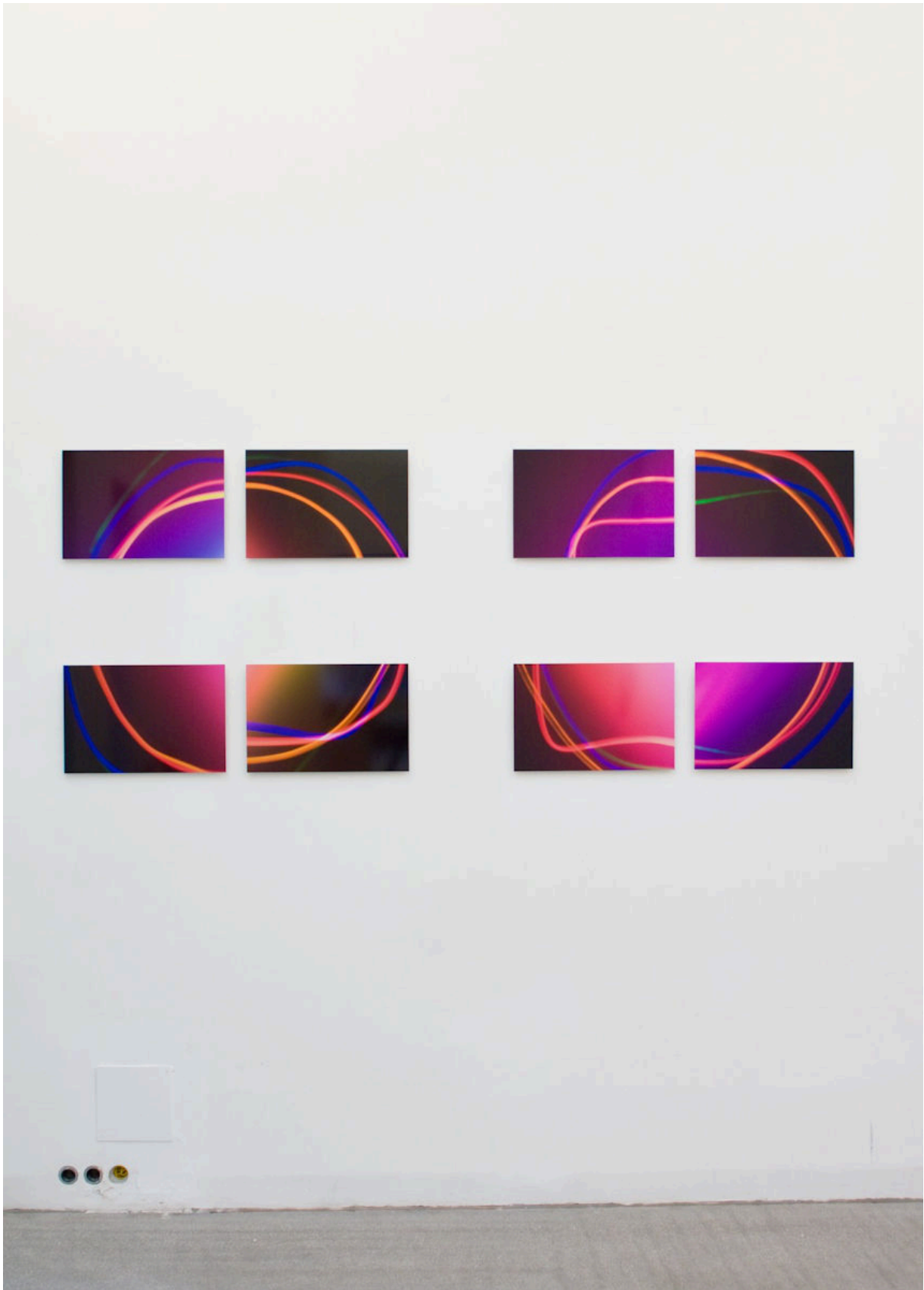


fig. 9

Untitled, 2008, 8 LED paintings, 32 x 48 cm each, Lambda on aluminium



fig. 10

Five short pieces for LED-Painting, 2012, installation ca. 4 m x 15 m, Lambda on aluminium and acrylic on canvas on wood

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Works and photographs: Bartosz Sikorski

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