



Max Ruf, RADIO

10.10. - 08.11.20

Figura Avulsa, Lisboa



RADIO, installation view (room a)



RADIO, installation view (Lichthof)



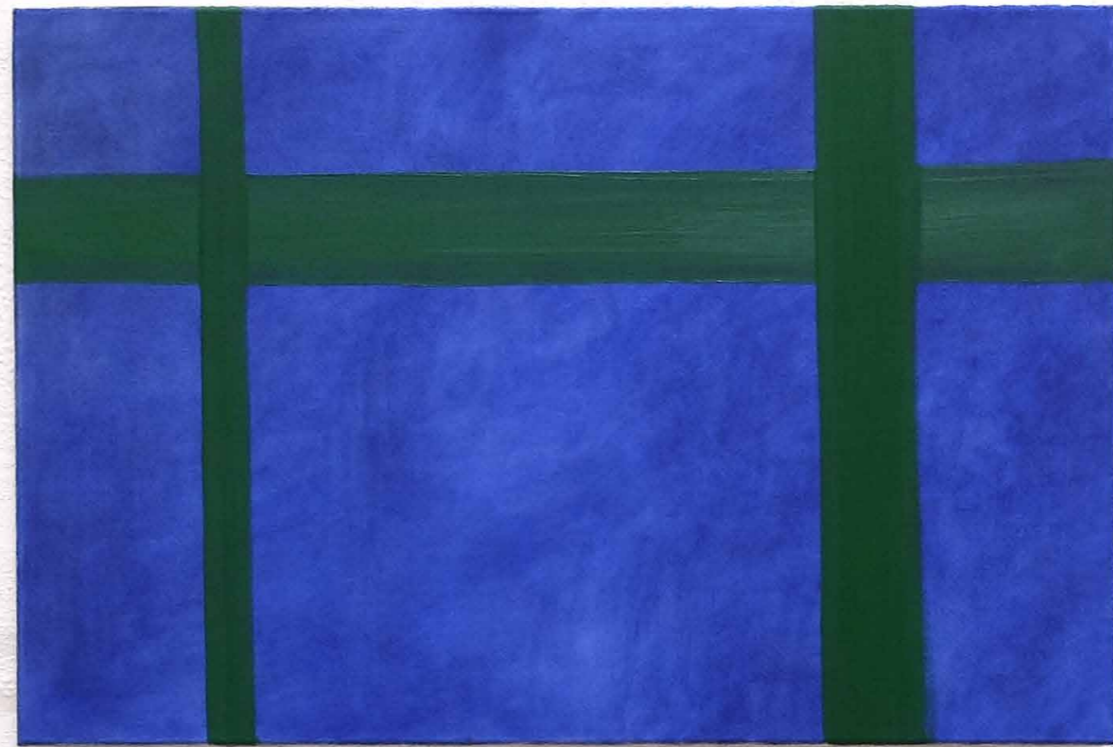
RADIO, installation view (Lichthof)



RADIO, installation view room (Lichthof)



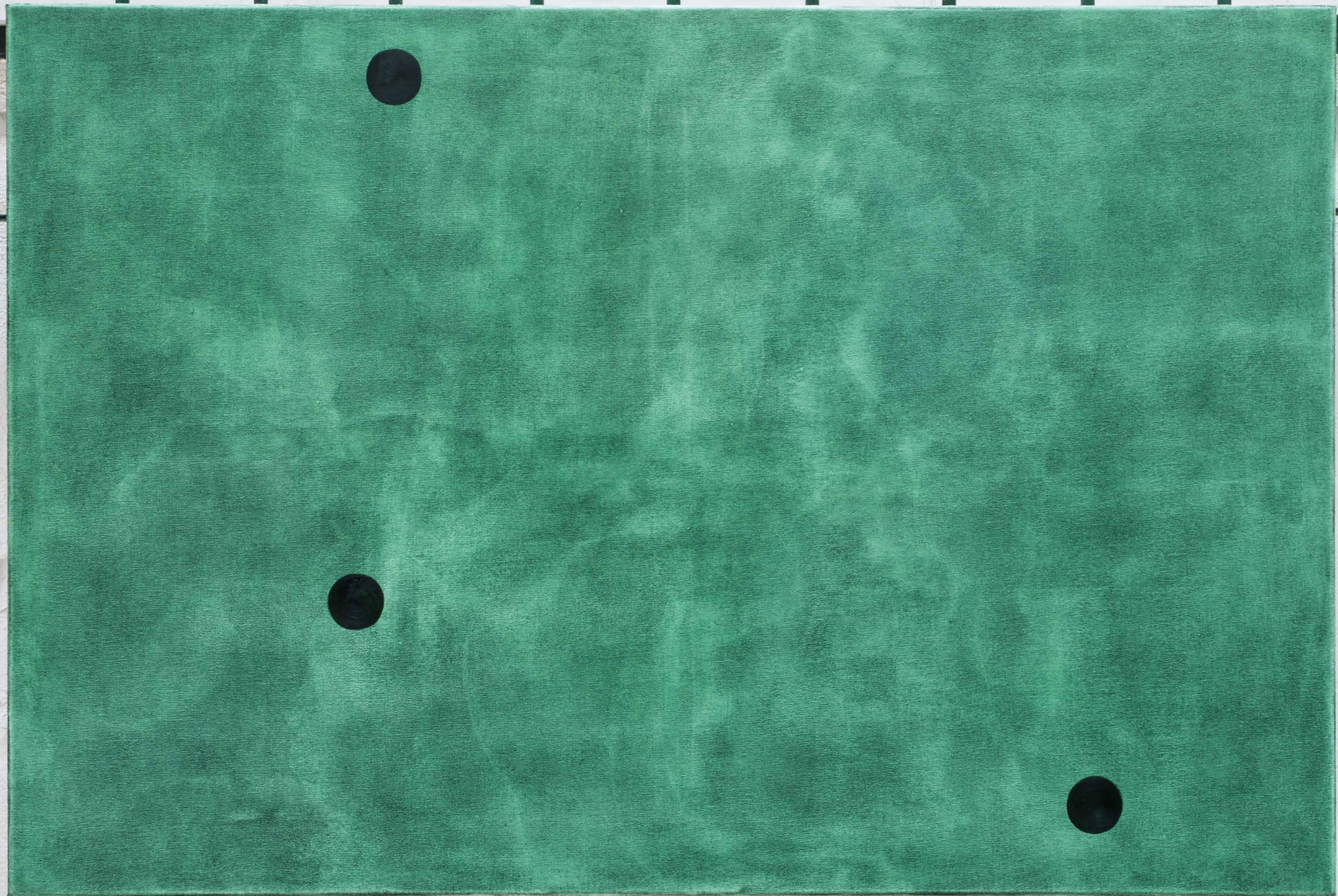
RADIO, installation view (Lichthof)



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RADIO, installation view (Lichthof)



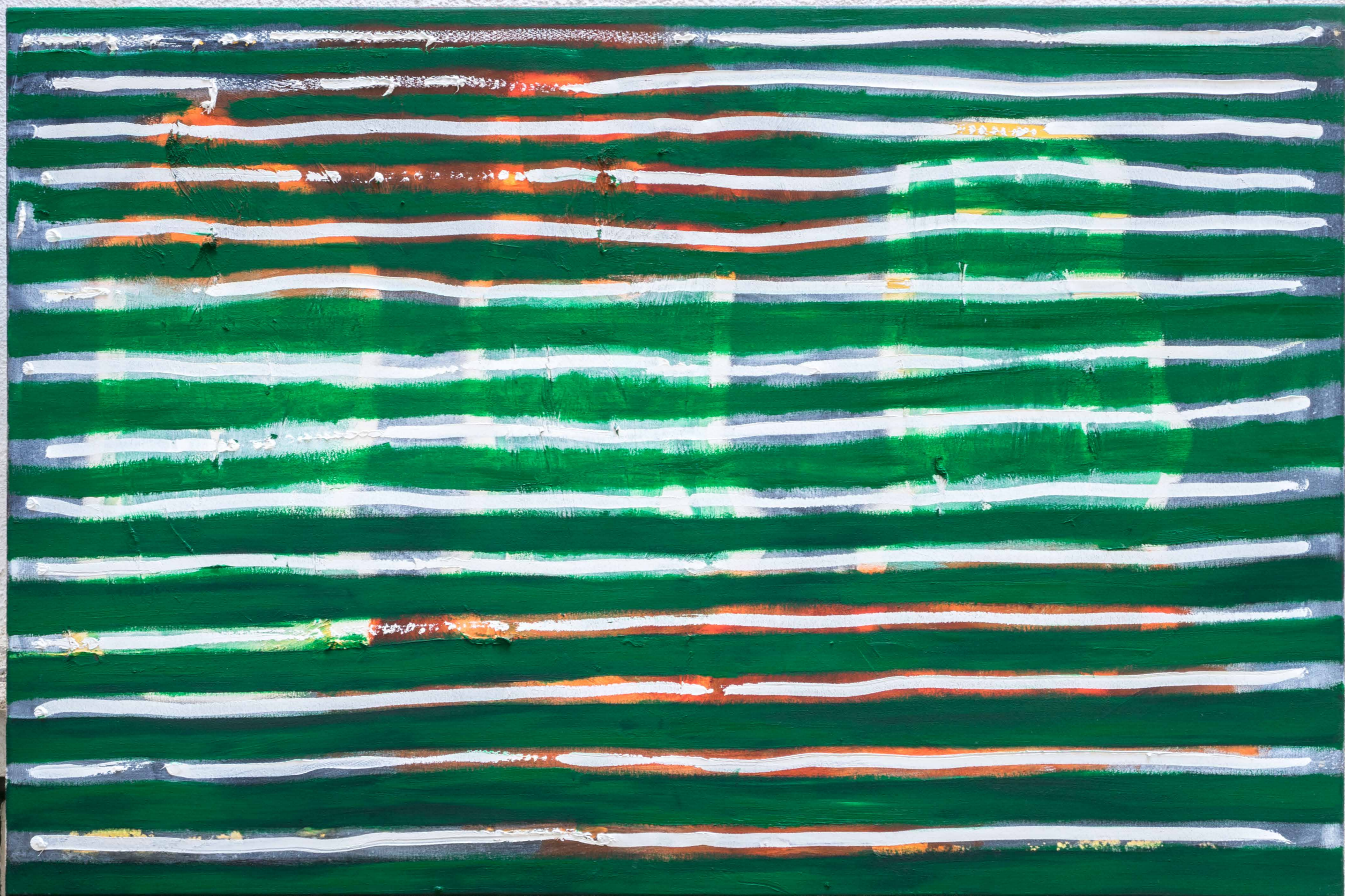
untitled (green, three green points, composition), 2020,
oil on canvas, 150x100 cm



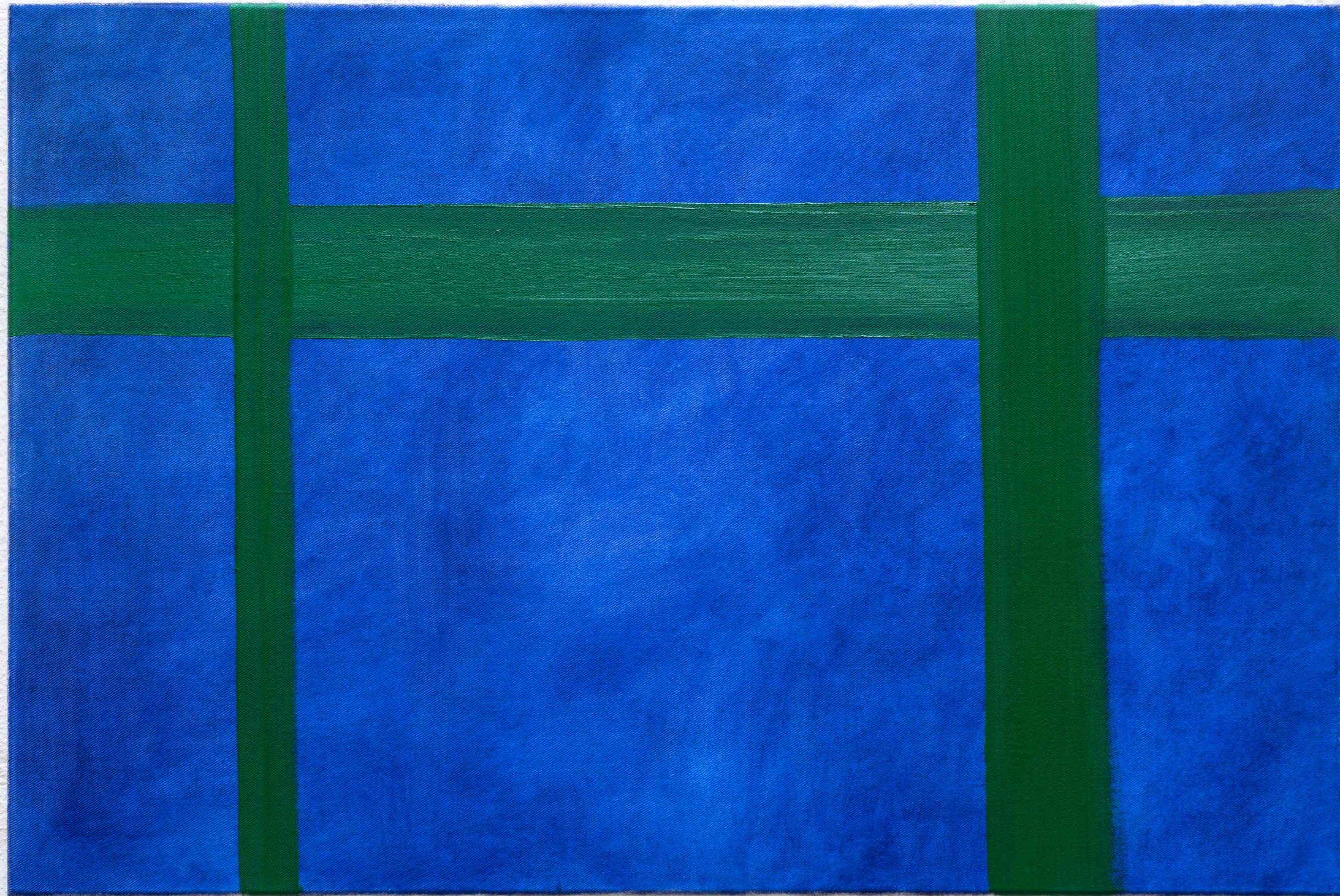
objecto (dois), wood, wood glue, screws, 2020



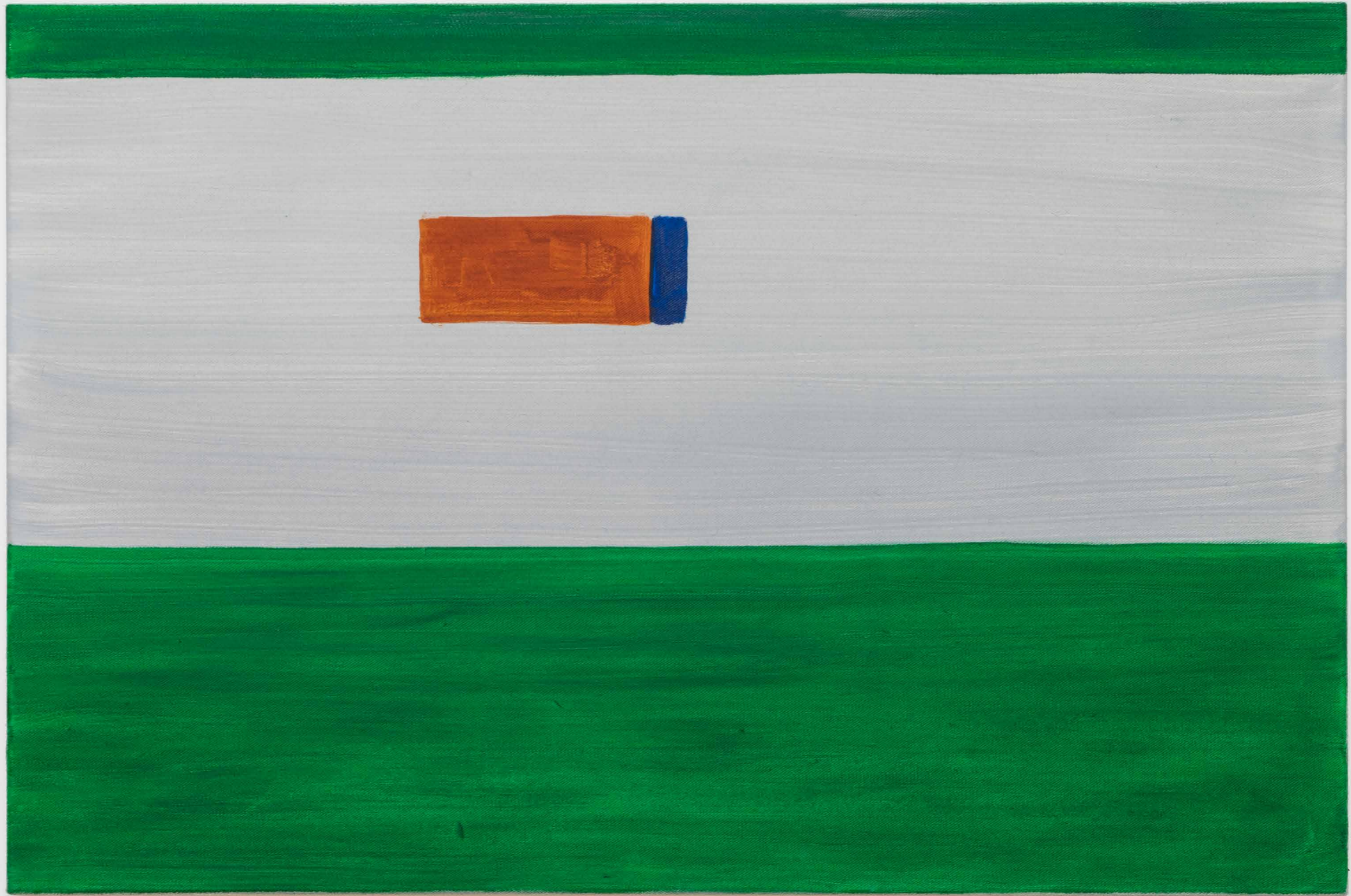
untitled (two green fields, one red field,1-4),
2019, oil on canvas, 90x60 cm



untitled (white lines, horizontal, green fields,
horizontal, over yellow, orange and white wash), 2019,
oil on canvas, 150x100 cm



untitled (blue, green line horizontal, two green lines,
vertical), 2019, oil on canvas, 90x60 cm



untitled (green, grey, red, blue), 2019-20,
oil on canvas, 90x60 cm



RADIO, installation view (Lichthof)



RADIO, installation view (Lichthof)

Max was, at one point, a skateboarder. Perhaps surprisingly, there are a number of painters who were (some still are) skaters during the late eighties, nineties, and early aughts. What conditions make possible such a migration between categories? On the surface, there's a trivial thread of "negativity" underwriting the two but relations go farther. By way of context, I'm going to postulate some characteristics surrounding these conditions that lay along an axis between Punk and Hardcore cultures. For reasons of time and space, the following postulates are somewhat dense.

1. Punk is a discursive position staked against a dominant discourse. It's primarily symbolic in that it is libidinally invested in articulation (ie, though language, gestures, and "politics" in short). It could be seen as an extension of the hysterical positions of 1960s cultural-critique in the various student movements to youth movements more generally. A prototypical punk moment: when Burroughs reports young "punks" adopting his cut-up invention for its iconoclastic negativity; or when Patti Smith extolls Pollock's position as self-forged deviation from high culture. The primary motivation, here, is a mobilization against one discourse (Reagan's moralism, clean culture, proscribed consumerism, etc).

2. The major characteristic of the One discourse invariably targeted by Punk is to always appear as "the dominant" discourse for the speaker in question. The characteristics of such discourses are internally consistent as well, but the consistency requires a deep dive in psychoanalysis to unpack. (For a recent point of entry see: *Oh My God(s): Religions, Laughing under control or nothing funny* here, by Marie-Helene Brousse).

3. Hardcore, which emerges slightly after punk in the historical record, is a turn away from the discursivity of Punk and toward the regulation of the bodies of its members. Anyone who has seen a concert by Black Flag or Rollin's Band will be able to comment on the codification of jouissance on display: affects broadly considered negative elsewhere (substance abuse, aggression, violence) are allowed so long as they follow a code of conduct.

4. By the late 80s and 90s, at the same moment that Hardcore becomes a common name, there was no "one" culture for anyone anymore: there were only many little ones. Lacan remarked that (his) contemporary time witnessed an acceleration of the decay of the "One" dominant culture because of the pervasive expansion of media and advertising. Psychoanalysis calls this general process the fall of the big Other; see Zizek's *Ticklish Subject* for a broad treatment.

Back to painting. Here are a couple of proper names: Jackson Pollock and Albert Oehlen. The first was already mentioned in connection to early Punk and the history is fairly commonly known. The second, both closer in context to Max (German, male, contemporary) and also bearing some relation to Punk, warrants a few additional comments.

"Bad painting" (Herold, Kippenberger, Oehlen) falls firmly in the category of Punk: "de-skilled", impishly political, forged in negativity, it is painting behaving badly (with respect to some definition of well-behaved painting).

While there's morphological similarity between Max's paintings and Oehlen's, there's considerable discursive difference: the paintings are less occupied with opposing another culture; they're primarily engaged with an internal regulation that allows them to consist. In this, they're closer to Pollock and the libidinal regulation effected by their formal coherence: A painting works or does not work based on its composition and its composition with other paintings — present or not — and, here in this show, with the environment in which they are hung. The latter compositional paradigm is inherited from the "post-studio" practices of the early aughts (peppered with a bit of Palermo) while the former constitutes the main engine of modernism.

I would argue that what we (for some definition of "we" that includes the author and some other painters in the city of New York) call the "art world" is (less and less, of course) comprised of the last vestiges of the reactions against One culture that emerges dually in German postwar painting, the lower east side of Manhattan in the late 80s

and 90s, goes round to Cologne and Berlin, and then comes back to David Zwirner as cannon in the twenty-teens.

A point of central tension in painting developed after this cannon, is how one can construct a practice where there is no single discourse — no One, no art world — whose intermediation can effect conditions for articulation while at the same time sharing some codes and conventions belonging to the field formerly known as the discourse of Painting, with a capital P. The concerns of Monika Baer, though still very much coming on the tail end of the aforementioned cannon, are exemplary in this respect. For others, sometimes a solution in this dynamic looks a little like the adaptations between Punk and Hardcore.

A final note on a particular quality of Max's compositions: A former pro skater once told me that the technical execution of skating is so precarious as to demand continuous practice. The moment you stop skating, even for a week, you rapidly lose the ability to reliably execute even basic maneuvers. Likely, this small margin of error has to do with the limited dexterity of one's legs and feet and the crudeness of the materials involved: stiff plank, aluminum trucks, hard wheels, concrete. The crudeness, in turn, is at the same time a consequence of the "initiality" of the sport — there are really no antecedents that underwent practice refinement in skateboarding — and point of pride for the practitioners: You're going to make this thing work despite the unsuitability of its component terms. What's interesting is that the dynamics of Max's paintings share the same quality. Under his own terms, a painting will either succeed, tout court, or fail quickly and sometimes irredeemably, to be put back on the pile until it gets worked into another state completely.

Tim Pierson, October 2020

