

art journal

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A QUEER READER

A Queer Reader

At the beginning of 2001, the staff of the James C. Hormel Gay and Lesbian Center at the San Francisco Public Library began finding books carved with a sharp instrument, then hidden under shelving units in the stacks. Over six hundred books relating to issues of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people as well as AIDS and women's health issues were vandalized. Eventually the vandal was caught and charged with a hate crime. James Van Buskirk, the librarian, sent the damaged books to artists around the country with instructions to make works of art using the damaged books—thereby transforming the destructive acts into creative acts that both acknowledged and reversed the vandalism. Later, these works were exhibited at the Hormel Center and other venues, with the proceeds from sales used to replace the damaged books in the library's collection.

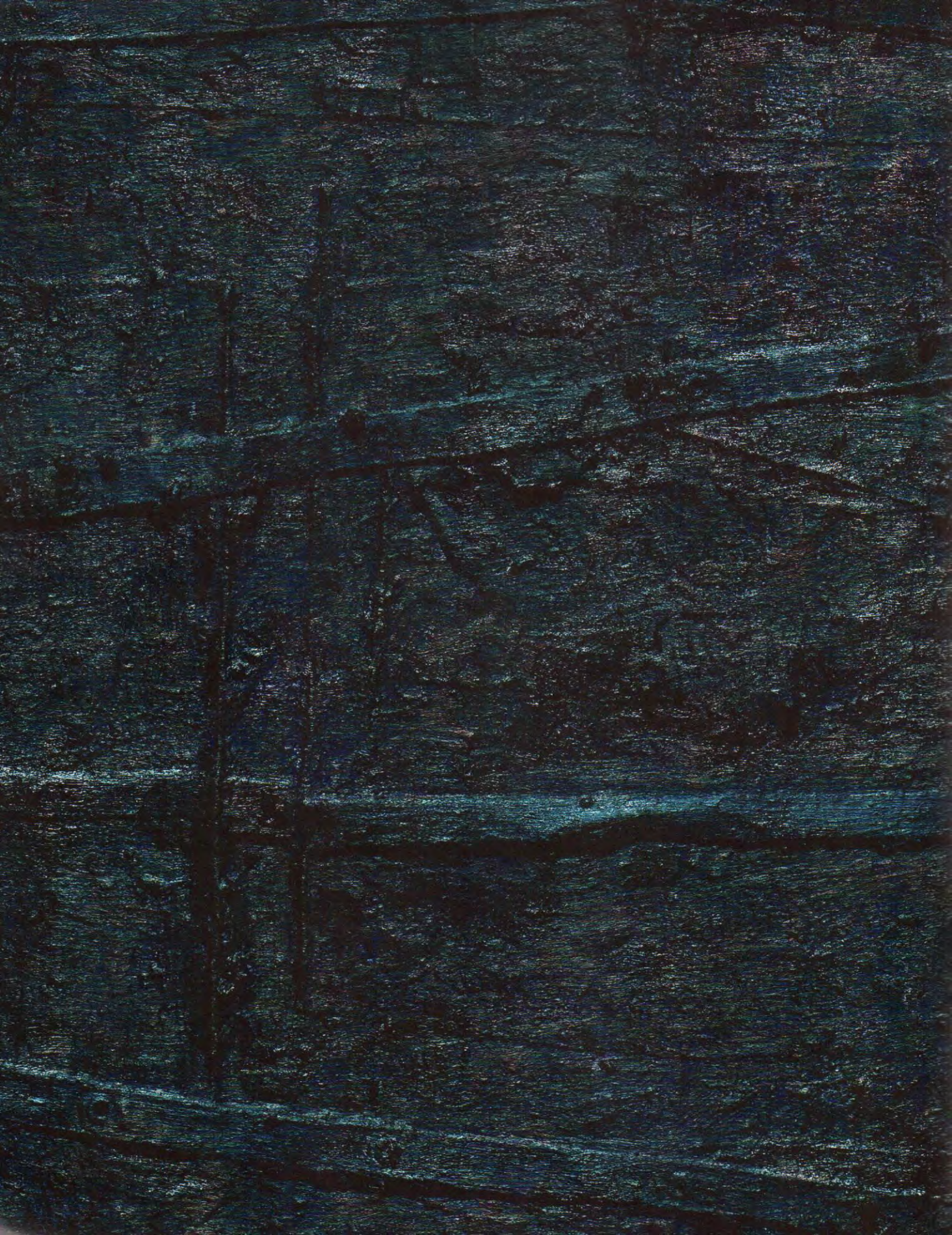
A Queer Reader and *Portraits* are in response to the damaged anthology *A Queer Reader: 2,500 Years of Male Homosexuality*, edited by Patrick Higgins (New York: New Press, 1993). In 2003, I scanned the vandalized book jacket (Design After: The Senate) that already incorporated the 1985 photograph *Le Marin* (Philippe Gaillon) by Pierre and Gilles, two French photographers who work as a team and are well known for their highly stylized and heavily retouched performative portraits of gay male archetypes. I then eliminated the subtitle and name of the editor, thereby shifting the word "reader" from the book to the sailor or possibly the viewer or one who is reading, and enlarged the resulting image to movie poster proportions.

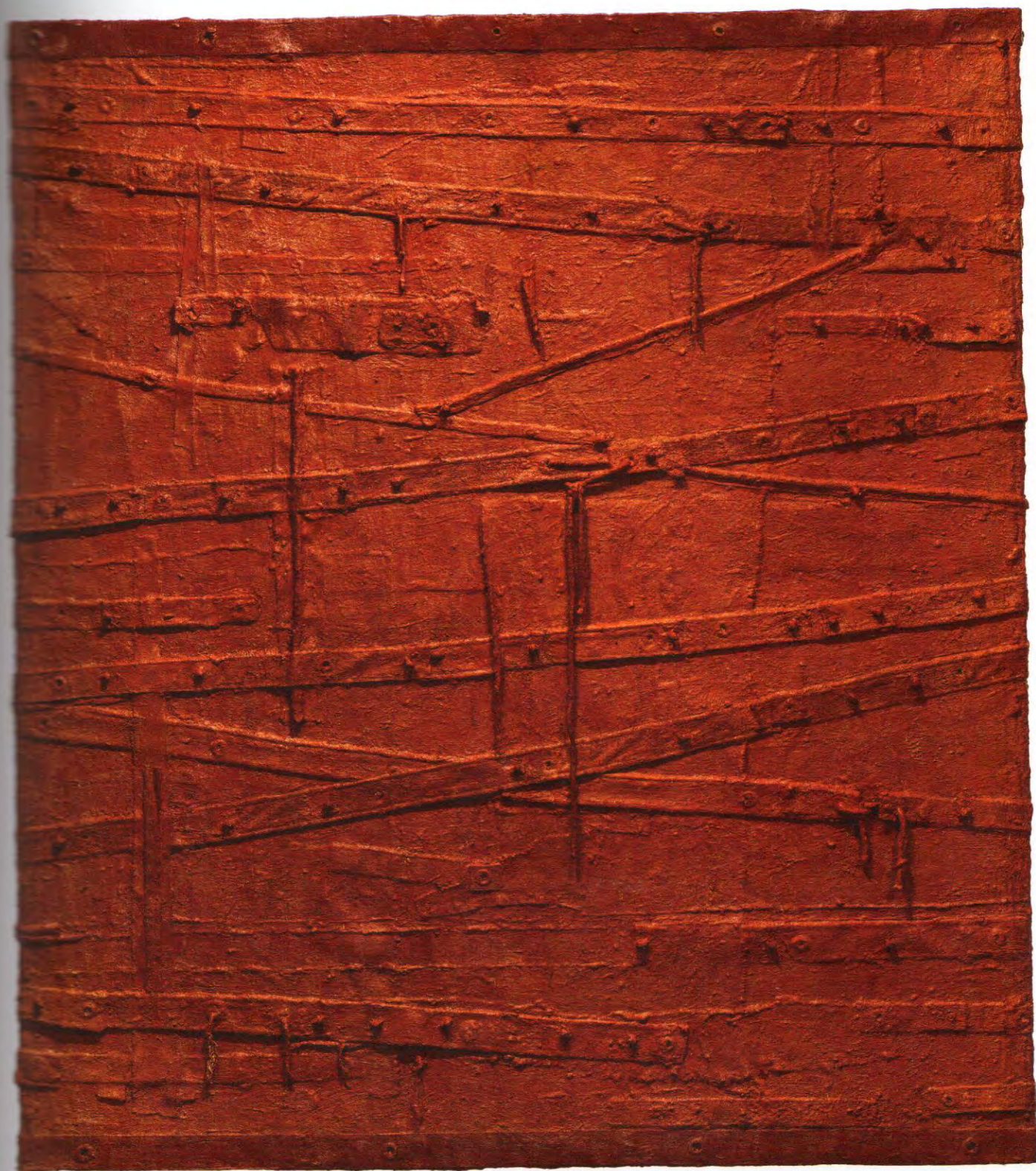
Is the sailor a queer who reads? With his eyes cut out like Cyclops, he is not allowed to see or read at all, much less queerly. Why the fear of queer eyes? The vandalism is a violent act of censorship that calls into question the sexuality of the perpetrator and his fears of being seen or read as queer, and suggests mythological themes of blinding and self-blinding. Pierre and Gilles's idealized sailor is all lipstick, rosy, and sanitized in contrast to the reality of AIDS, gay bashing, anti-human rights initiatives, and censorship. My digital print of the "cut" forces the icon and the image to address homophobia, intolerance, and censorship.

The vandal cut the same eye-shaped hole on the pages inside. The suite of seven *Portraits* repositions suggestive texts by gay male authors included in the anthology—Oscar Wilde, E. M. Forster, W. H. Auden, Jean Genet, Tennessee Williams, Ned Rorem and Allen Ginsberg—so that they are partially seen and read through the orifice.

ments gave him a full awareness. He said, almost sobbingly, 'and at the same time impaled' entered in, and Riton's behind them was great . . . Riton must be you more than before.' Er' been expressed, for as their feel its natural effects. O and each other.

...anned powerful, was
shudders and trembles with
opened up on my belly, his pal
um, and turned, shifting, put
st against his, he helped me t
arm at my back beneath my h
me in,
ur bellies together nestling
each other's hard



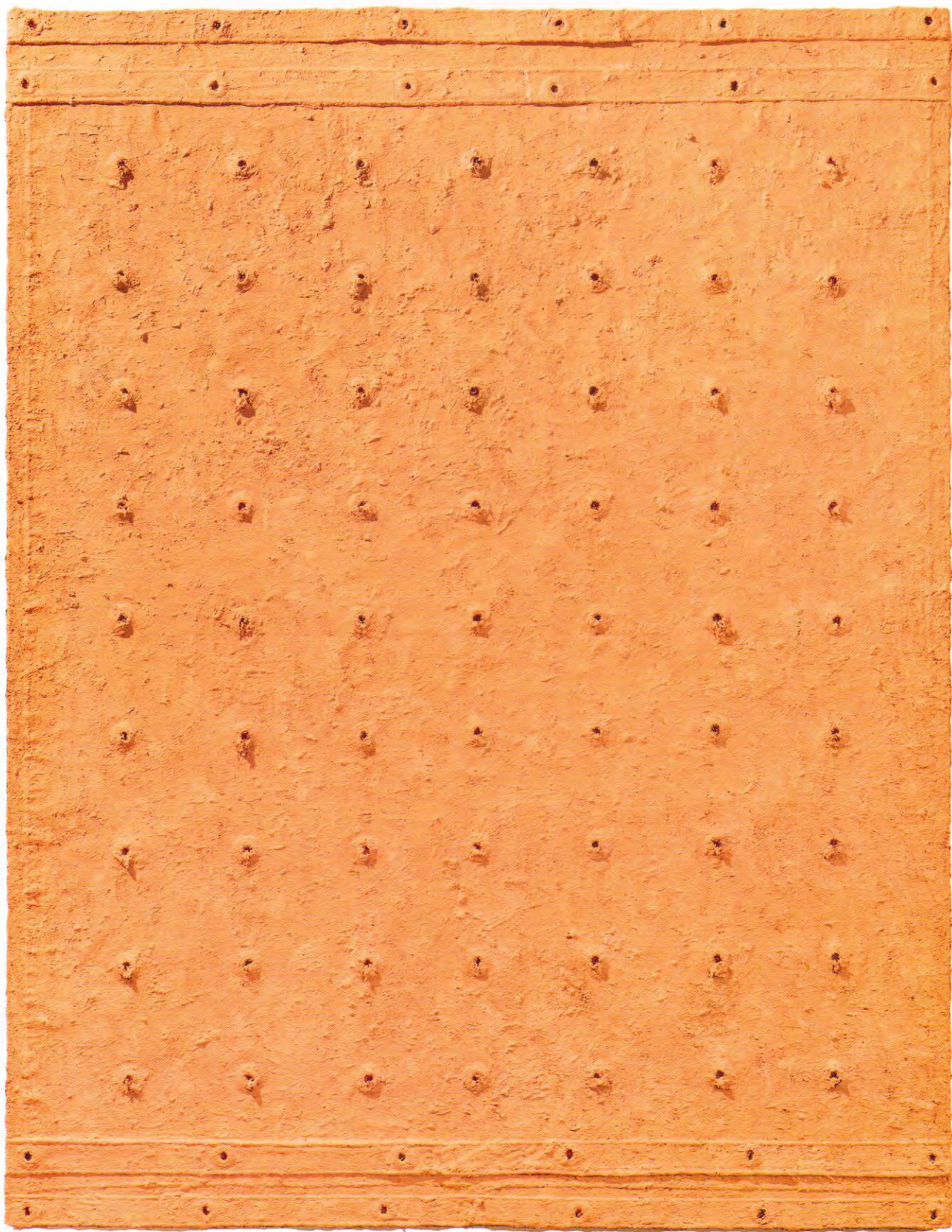


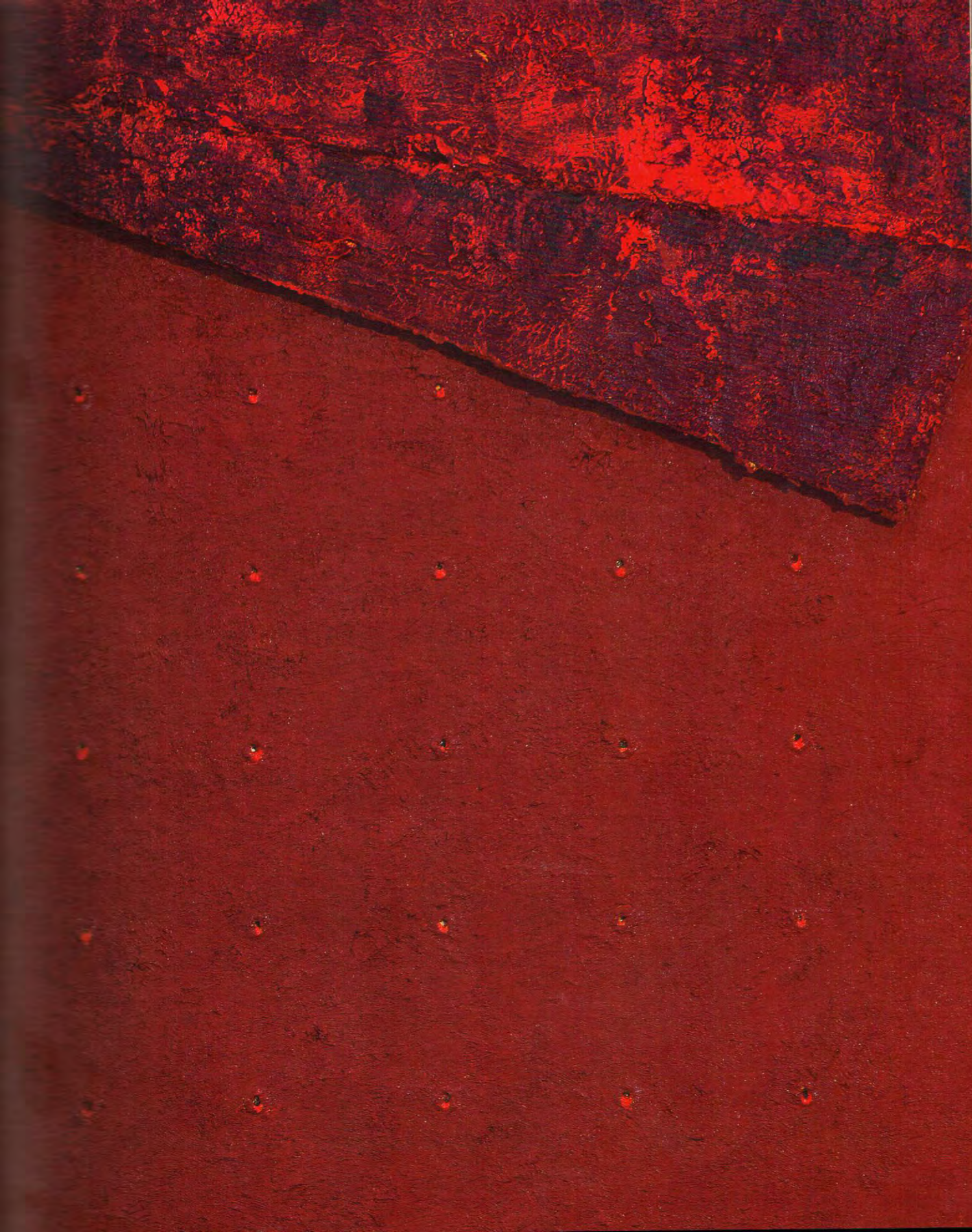


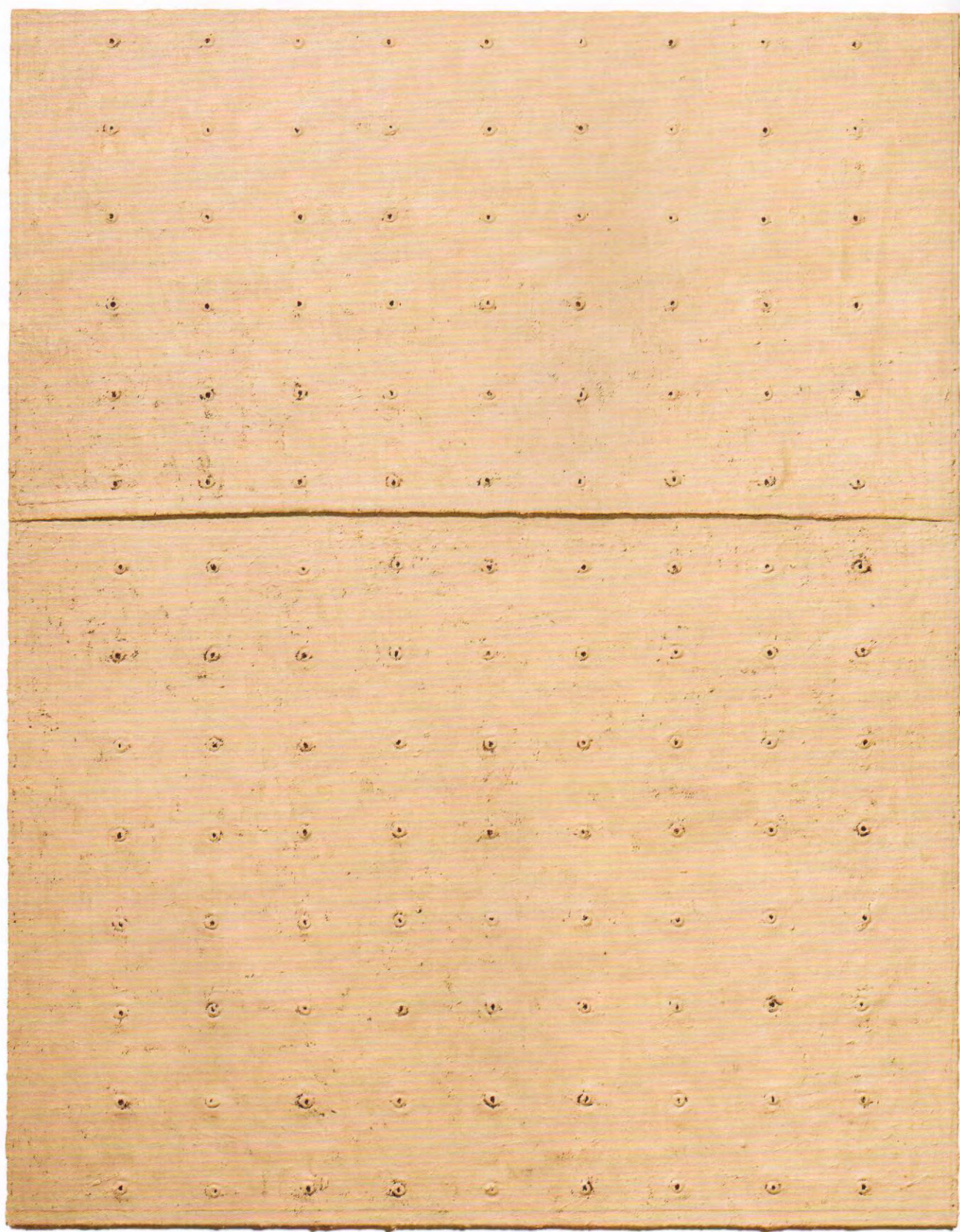


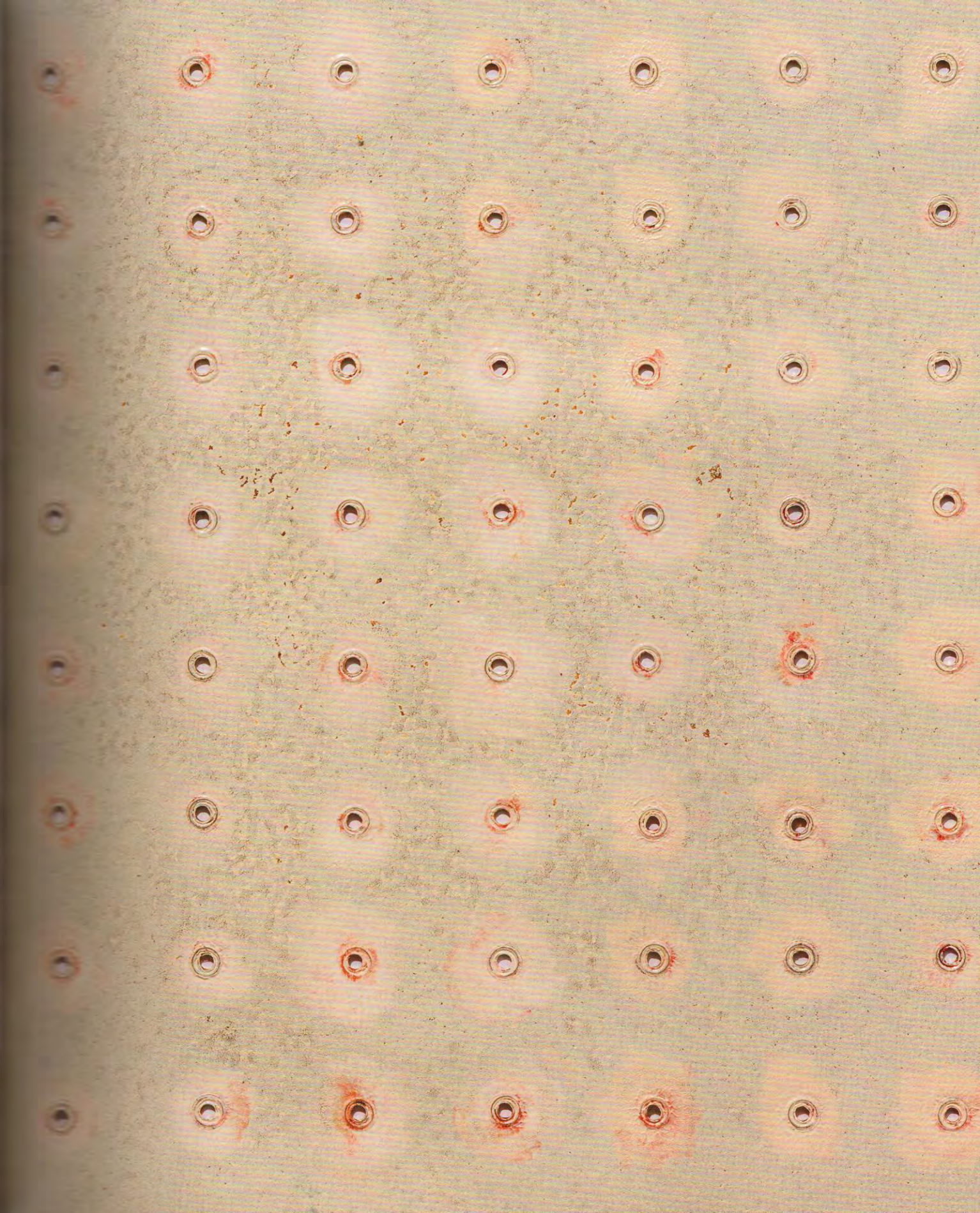






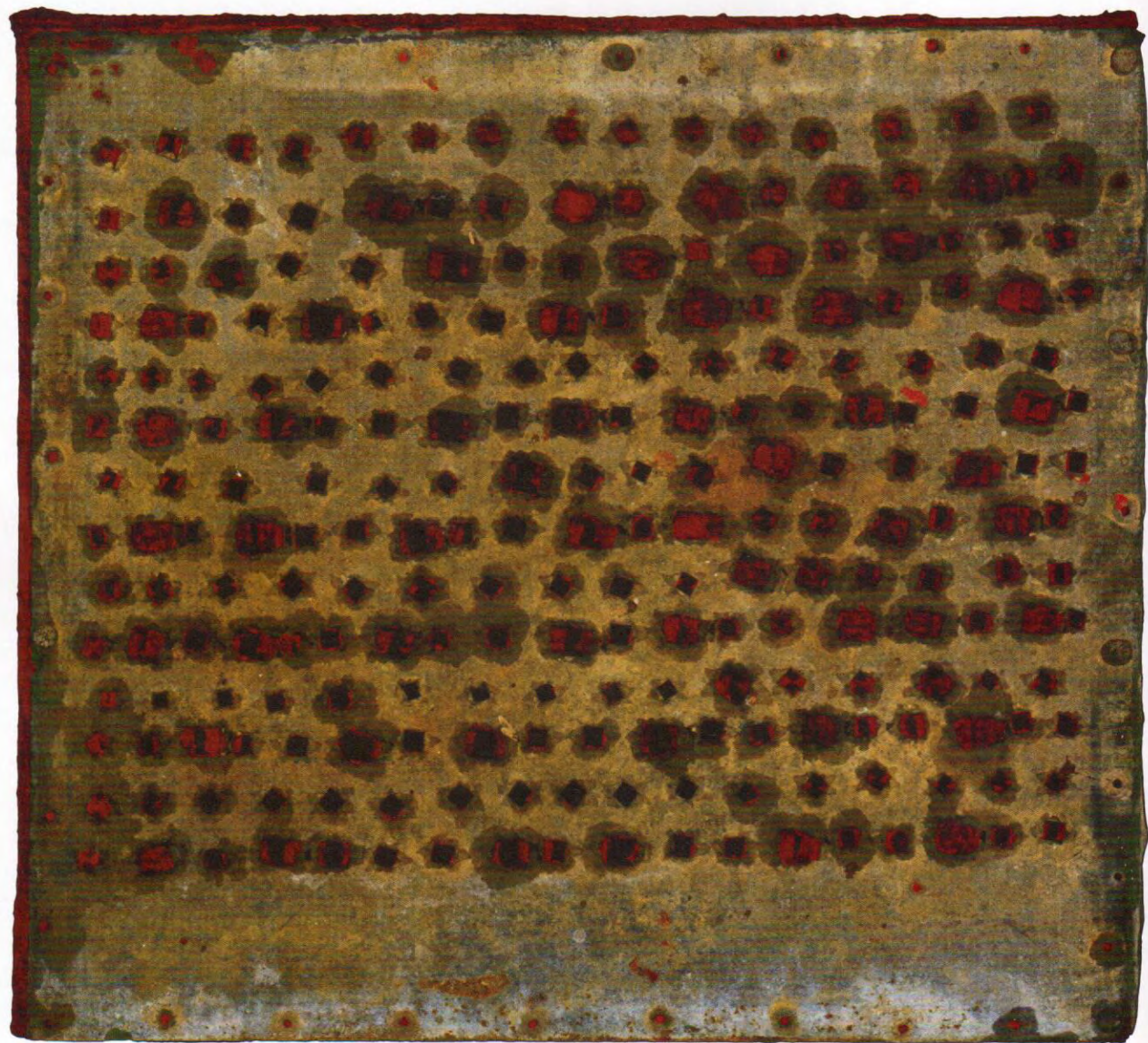












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