



Susan Thomas: Sublime Repose

The
Square

Janis Gibson Square
MUSEUM OF ART

Susan Thomas: Sublime Repose

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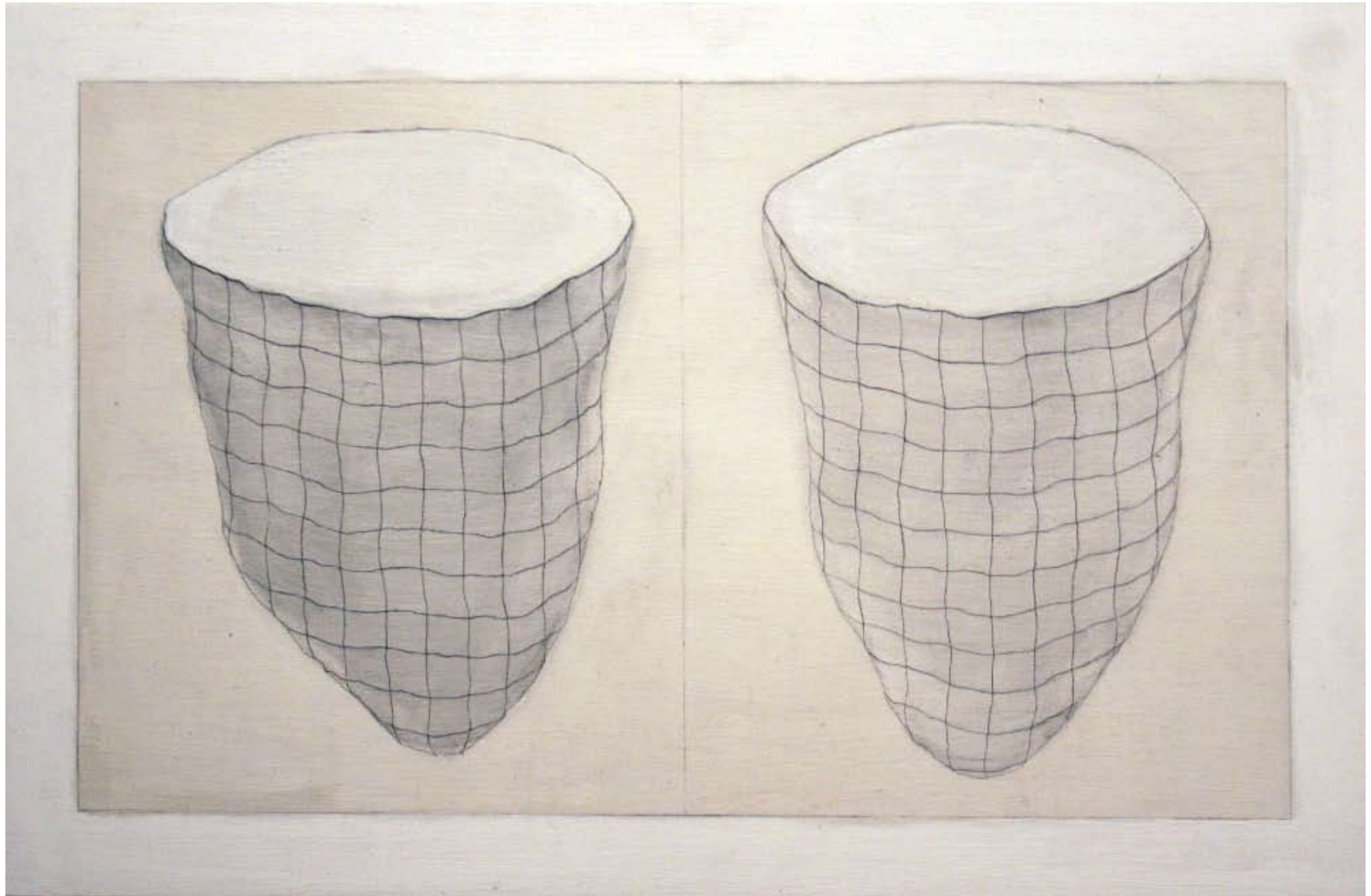
Paris Gibson Square
MUSEUM OF ART

September 16 - December 31, 2010
Reception 5:30 - 7:30pm September 16th
ArtShare Presentation by Susan Thomas at 6:30pm



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Grey Wax Gridded Vessels, 2010, wax and graphite on gessoed wood panel, 16 x 24 1/2"

Observations

Bob Durden, Curator of Art

Life in the 21st century is rife with chaos, noise and confusion. Perhaps this condition is not dissimilar to the industrial age, full of the traction and pace that must have seemed frantic to the culture of the time. With the speed of new technologies entering into daily life and messages being streamed at us almost constantly via television, the internet and satellite radio, respite from the loud din of such messages can be difficult to find in the public and private realms of our lives. Amongst that hustle, bustle and riotous noise that surrounds us, calm moments can seem too quiet and out of place. However, when we decompress and relax into our natural rhythms, the peace found in these moments can be profound. And so it is with viewing recent work by Susan Thomas. In creating all new works for this exhibition, she has dared to delve into the solace that can too easily elude us.

To fully appreciate these sublime works it may be necessary to take a deeper breath and slow the pace of the day. Once this is achieved, one will find the sincere message/s conveyed by the artist. There is a pulse at play in her work that is as our own pulse that responds to our movements and states of mind. This subtle physical phenomenon occurs without our thinking about it and we adapt to it naturally. While viewing these elegant visual statements, the grandness is found in the quiet repose of the basket form that is repeated throughout this body of work. All are connected to one another, but like that beating heart, each object reveals sublime nuances in color, line, form and pattern.

The graphite records a hand-drawn pathway determined by the artist that responds to shifts in the landscape on textured gessoed surfaces. At first glance, this mark making may seem minutely simple but in reality it is a complex and sensitive demonstration of intention by the artist. The line helps define form but alternately it is in itself simply a line—a mark that distinguishes a path in time and space. The repetitive process of applying each line is akin to the Zen search for perfection, but in the search, the seeker resolves that perfection is as it should be, imperfect. It is mysterious, paradoxical and subjective. The journey is where meaning can be found.

Susan Thomas' application of color also adds to the sublime quality of the work. These are not the garish colors that call our minds to the loudness of urban settings. They are soft, tranquil and steadfastly organic, recalling flesh, earth, grass and winter skies. The color lacks symbolic reference and like the artist's application of line, it contributes to a perceived sense of balance and well-being.

The vessel form, repeated throughout the exhibition, pulsates with sublime intensity. The elements that shape it (line, texture and color) both complement and resist the implied function of the form. The artist's intent is not to create an illusion of an actual basket but to capture its essence. Observe that the vessels are full. We are not certain of what they contain—perhaps pureness of light or being, joy or contentment. In the quiet examination of each object, we can each find our own answer to that question; however, fulfillment or the search for fulfillment is implicit in this work. The vessels rest balanced and full on pivot points that are not grounded or bound by gravity or the perceptual visual conventions of establishing a figure ground relationship. The forms rest in neutral spaces that do not compete with the central form. The forms simply "are"—complete, natural and at ease in their austerity. If any symbolism is present, it is a mature perspective on life and the artist's understanding of how to portray it in a visual language.

Susan Thomas was born in Connecticut and lived in many parts of the U.S. before moving to Great Falls in 1995 with her husband, artist Ken Kohoutek and son Ethan. Susan served as Curator of Education at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art from 1996-2004 and currently is an Adjunct Professor of Art at the University of Great Falls. She earned a Master of Fine Arts degree in Sculpture from Southern Illinois University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Arts from Indiana University. Inspiration for her work comes from the natural environment of each place where she has lived, particularly areas near streams, rivers and woodlands and from the rhythms of daily life.



Green Wax Gridded Vessel #2, 2010, wax and graphite on gessoed wood panel, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

Artist's Statement

Susan Thomas

The process of putting words to this body of work has been elusive. I believe this is because in creating the work I have been searching for something intangible—a place beyond words and ideas. That said, I can offer some words and ideas that have occurred to me in the process of making the work.

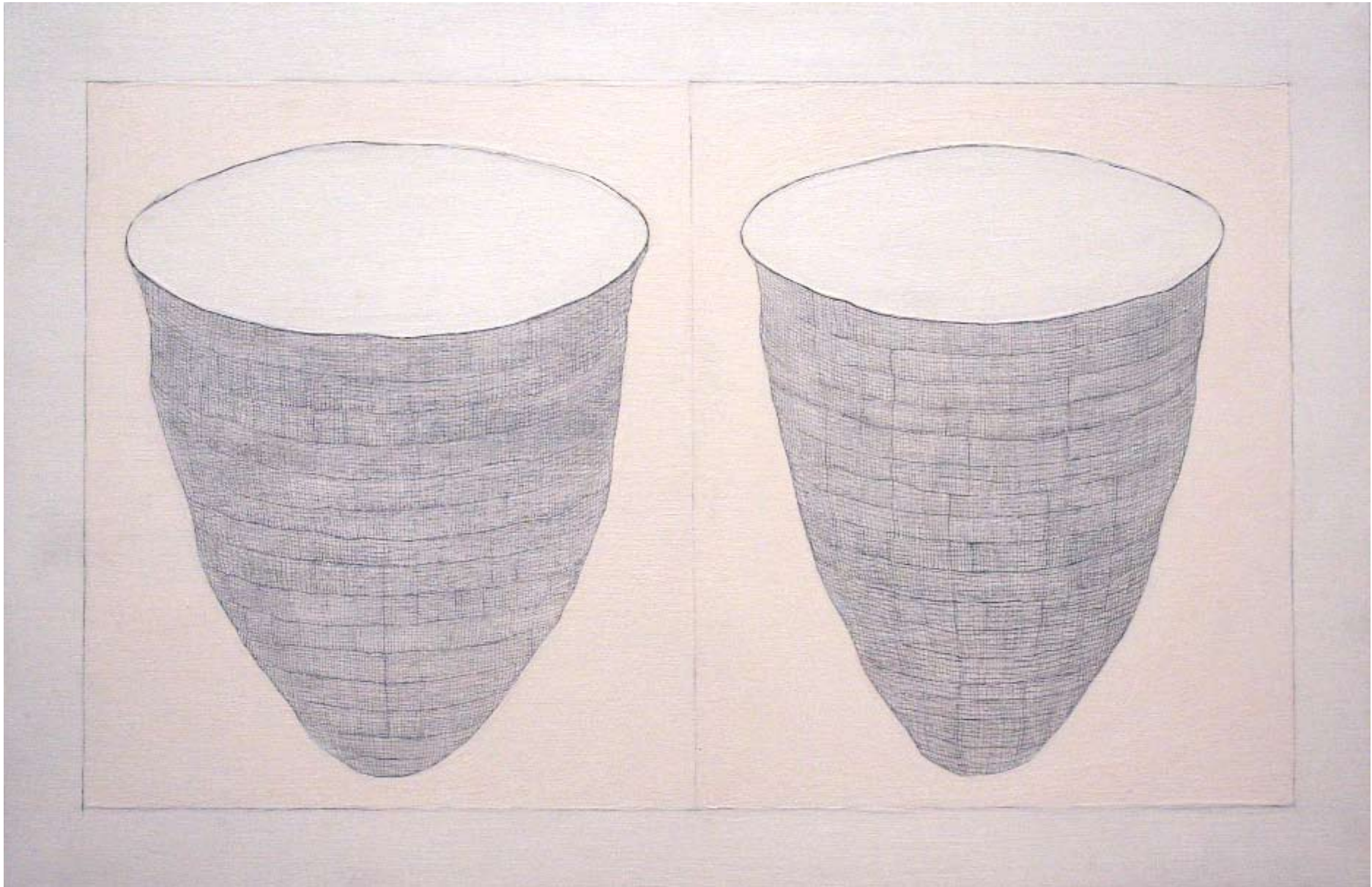
This series of vessels is about (the hope of) finding balance physically, spiritually and emotionally. They are a search for perfect form. Like repetitive prayer, the doing of the work is as much an aspect of achieving this goal as are the end results. Trying to attach meaning to every mark and shape doesn't quite add up to the whole.

There is sameness about the vessels, but they are also like variations in a species, small changes within a constant form.

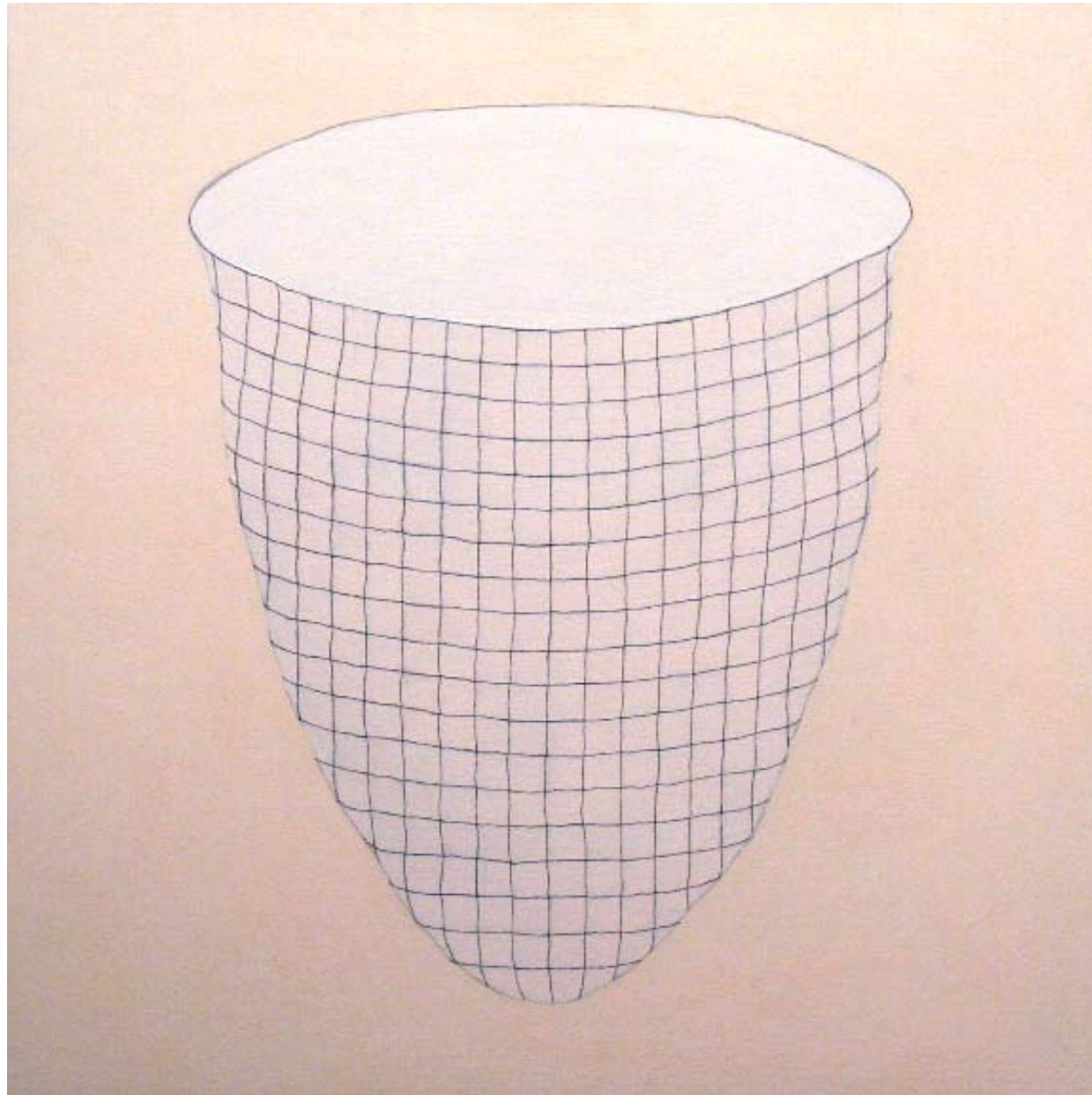
What exactly do the vessels hold? They are receptive.

On another level, these are drawings of woven vessels—patterns achieved with pencil and brush marks, physical surfaces of gesso, pigment and wax. They come from an ongoing interest in shells, nests, seed pods and sacred architecture, and baskets and architecture of indigenous peoples. The 1 1/2" deep panels become a type of object rather than an illusionistic representation. The flat grid negates the illusion of the ellipse—each piece is part of the world but doesn't inhabit space.

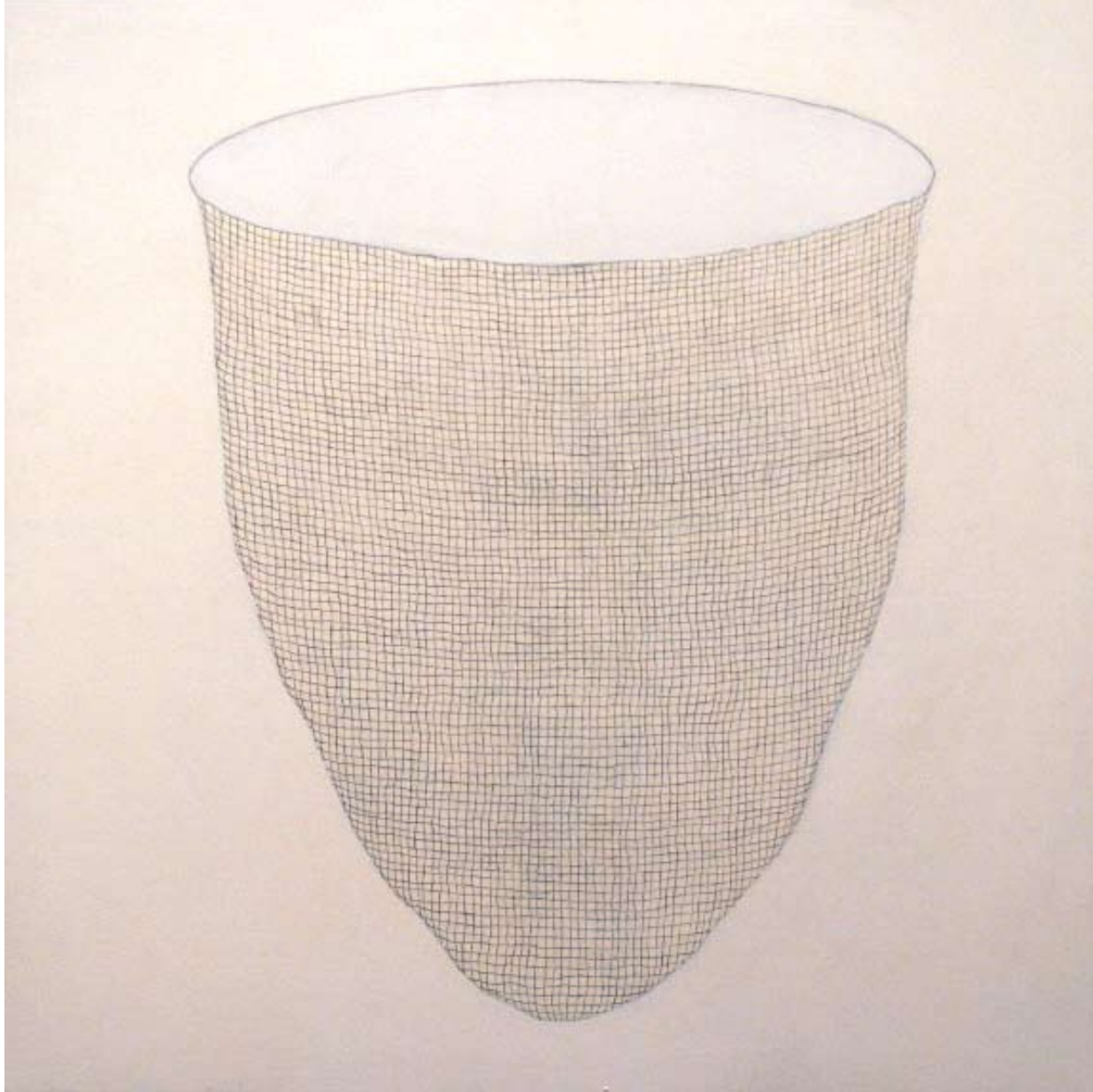
A profound simplicity. A state of being.



Grey Gridded Vessels, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 16 x 24 1/2"



Pink Gridded Vessel # 3, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ "



Pale Umber Gridded Vessel #1, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ "



Exhibition Check List

1. Green Wax Gridded Vessel #1, 2010, wax and graphite on gessoed wood panel, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
2. Green Wax Gridded Vessel #2, 2010, wax and graphite on gessoed wood panel, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
3. Grey/Green Wax Gridded Vessels, 2010, wax and graphite on gessoed wood panel, 16 x 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
4. Grey Wax Gridded Vessels, 2010, wax and graphite on gessoed wood panel, 16 x 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
5. Pale Green Wax Gridded Vessel, 2010, wax and graphite on gessoed wood panel, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
6. Large Pink Vessel #1, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 48 x 38"
7. Large Pink Vessel #2, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 48 x 38"
8. Pink Gridded Vessel #1, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
9. Pink Gridded Vessel #2, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
10. Pink Gridded Vessel #3, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
11. Grey Gridded Vessel, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
12. Grey Gridded Vessels, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 16 x 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
13. Pale Umber Gridded Vessel #1, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
14. Pale Umber Gridded Vessel #2, 2010, graphite on gessoed wood panel, 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 27 $\frac{3}{4}$ "



Paris Gibson Square
MUSEUM OF ART

Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art is dedicated to fulfilling the artistic needs of the general public. This is accomplished through:

- * Fostering accessibility and understanding of modern, contemporary and self-taught art;
- * Collecting, preserving, exhibiting and interpreting art that actively engages a diverse and growing audience;
- * Providing educational programming that inspires artistic expression and understanding;
- * Expanding public knowledge of, interest in and support for the arts and artists of the region; and
- * Serving as a cultural center, and continuing the preservation of the historically significant Paris Gibson Square building.

- Approved April 29, 2008 by the Board of Trustees

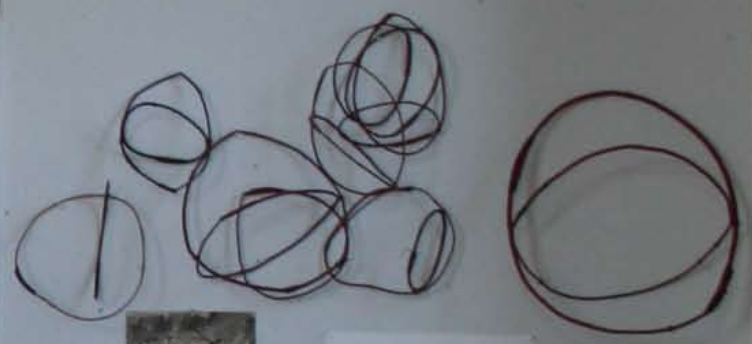
Admission to the museum is free to the public courtesy of

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Hours of operation:
Monday – Friday 10am to 5pm
Tuesday Evenings 7 – 9pm
Saturdays 12 – 5pm
Closed Sundays





The Square

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