



# BUNKERS

Christopher Schade



1



2



3



4



5



6

# BUNKERS

Christopher Schade

September 5 - 30, 2023

Essays by Paul Caranicas and  
Giovanni García-Fenech

**THE PAINTING CENTER**

547 West 27th Street, Suite 500, NY, NY 10001, 212-343-1060  
Tues 10-4 pm, Wed-Sat 11-6 pm, [www.thepaintingcenter.org](http://www.thepaintingcenter.org)

## ***Waiting Before the Infinite Ocean* by Paul Caranicas**

In 1975 I discovered *Bunker Archeologique*, urbanist Paul Virilio's seminal book on "the nature of war and existence, in relation to both World War II and contemporary times". It was a revelation.

I had been living in France for 5 years and was well aware of these vestiges of architect Albert Speer's Atlantic Wall that dotted the coast. Virilio's photographs, coupled with my memories of the American bunkers on the east coast, specifically those in Rehoboth Beach Delaware near where I grew up, fanned a long-glowing ember of interest that led to a 15 year obsession with these structures.

Painting fantastic architecture was already my stock in trade. Pivoting to more literal "portraits" of these fortifications came naturally. The finer points of their presence, their purpose as well as their differences seemed a reflection of the European vs the American intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of the times in which they were built.

Hitler had ordered his Organization TODT to mastermind a series of fortresses that blended in with the surrounding landscape; sleek and rounded, their outlines often mirrored the coastlines and cliffs they inhabited, rendering them hard to spot.

The GSA (General Services Administration) in America, responsible for the thousands of bunkers present on both the East and West coasts, had a one-size-fits-all approach: right-angled, brutalist and utilitarian. Attempts at masking their presence consisted mostly of painting them with camouflage colors or covering them with army fishnet.

Chris' approach to the bunker, – whether sleek or brutal- is more visionary.

He says: "I'd been thinking about visual clichés for decades and how clichés can encapsulate visual memory." adding "I feel a kinship to the painter Philip Guston and especially to his late paintings where painter, subjects and space are all interwoven. "

He has taken the existence of these structures as a starting point for an exploration of much more than their shapes. The psychological underpinnings for his works are not necessarily the obvious ones. Because Chris is also a plein-air painter, he can take a bunker – a trope if you will – and render it in many different guises, revealing a series of hidden or unexplored facets of meaning. By doing so the works often evince a panoply of emotions; the bunker becomes a stand-in for a feeling.

When the bunkers in Europe were too obvious a target (some of the shapes, because of their size and function were hard to hide) they were disguised as churches and houses, with steeples and windows. Some of Chris' iterations of these fortifications also take on a kind of domestic or anthropomorphic aspect, making them seem fearful like a Charles Burchfield house, imbued with romance like a Ralph Albert Blakelock tree, or as magical as a Hilma af Klint abstraction.

## ***Timeless: On Christopher Schades' Bunkers* by Giovanni García-Fenech**

We all know what bunkers are, don't we? Those blocky buildings built to protect people from attacks. We recognize them from war and sci-fi movies, and from the always popular account of Hitler's last crazy days. And not so long ago, we all got a little taste of what it feels like to shelter in one, that depressing combination of tedium and terror of sheltering from death outside.

As timely as the subject continues to feel post-pandemic, what with forest fires, mass shootings, and a horrific war dominating the news, Christopher Schade has been thinking about — and painting — bunkers way before the latest batch of shit hit the fan.

Looking at Chris' bunkers made me realize what ideal modernist structures they are — all function, no ornament. I wonder, did Adolf Loos design any? Also, for something that serves as protection, they look quite menacing. They don't make any attempt to blend in with the nature around them — and bunkers are always in nature, since cities are going to be the enemy's first target.

All this connects with what I've long admired in Chris' work: his modernism, a very American strand that, to me, harks back to the Stieglitz circle, particularly the idiosyncratic abstractions of nature by Arthur Dove and John Marin (just look at his skies! His clouds, his rocks!); his love of landscape; and the subtle but always-looming sense of menace in his work.

Beyond historical echoes, I get a promise of security from these bunkers, a psychological or emotional refuge where one can retreat from the pressures of everyday life. Yet, separated from the world, with no figures in sight, Chris' depictions of bunkers also suggest isolation, a retreat from society. Am I projecting, or are these bunkers starting to sound like artist studios?

Putting my neuroses aside for the moment, it occurs to me that since bunkers are designed to withstand attacks and protect us, Chris' drawings and paintings might just represent our collective determination to survive and overcome adversity. And god knows we need that right now.

## ***Notes on the Bunkers* by Christopher Schade**

“Why this insane situation looking out over the ocean? This waiting before the infinite oceanic expanse?”

Paul Virilio, Bunker Archeology, p.11, Princeton Architectural Press.

“The mind without passions is a fortress. No place is more secure. Once we take refuge there we are safe forever...”

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations, Book 8, 48, p. 79, translation Gregory Hays, Random House Publishing Group.

### **Pointe du Hoc**

The *Bunkers* series began with a visit in 2009 to Pointe du Hoc, Normandy. This is where you can find the untouched remains of German bunkers, part of the Atlantic Wall, that were shelled by the invading Allied ships on D-Day. These fortifications recall eons old building history (front inside cover image 1), and were utterly unequal to the modern technology of ships capable of shelling them from miles away. Psychologically, I am fascinated by the futility of the impulse to guard such a vast coastline inside basically a medieval structure. These charged ruins, although from a particular moment in history, can become unmoored and evoke different places and times. The remaining structures recall ancient pre-Columbian civilizations (front inside cover image 2) or futuristic sci-fi forms, anything but when they were built in 1943. The landscape in this location is itself otherworldly: a seemingly lunar landscape dotted with twenty-foot diameter impact craters (front inside cover image 3).

### **Psychological Landscape**

There are many types of psychological landscape that interest me. For the *Bunkers*, I've thought of painters who have charged absence or empty space with meaning. In this vein, I think of Edward Hopper's figures looking out a window or off frame as in my favorite Hopper, *People in the Sun* an image which eerily recalls the photographs of witnesses to atomic tests in the 1950s.

### **Black**

At the age of twelve I decided to become a painter while looking at Francisco Goya's *Black Paintings* in the Prado Museum. I remember being struck by the intensity of feeling, the idiosyncrasies, and the wild invention of the images. The limited palette of those paintings seemed essential to the depth and complexity of those images. Since then, I have learned about the long tradition of the use

of black in Spanish painting. For the last 25 years, I have worked in several series that used black as a dominant or defining color. In the *Bunkers*, the restricted palette tends to suggest simplicity, clarity, and seamlessness, while simultaneously generating uncertainty. In these works, black is a vehicle for polymorphism, it makes things visually slippery by perceptually acting as a lack of light, graphically as a hard-edged shape, and volumetrically as a concave void and a convex mass.

### **Biography**

My beloved brother Philip struggled with schizoaffective disorder (schizophrenia and bipolar disorder) for the last 21 years of his life until his premature death in 2018. He was much more than his illness, but the severity of his symptoms profoundly affected our family and deepened my engagement with ideas around ambiguity, uncertainty and related psychological states. Crises were impossible to predict or control as their manifestations always changed. This situation led us to a perpetual state of anticipation, unease, and vigilance.

### **Feeling**

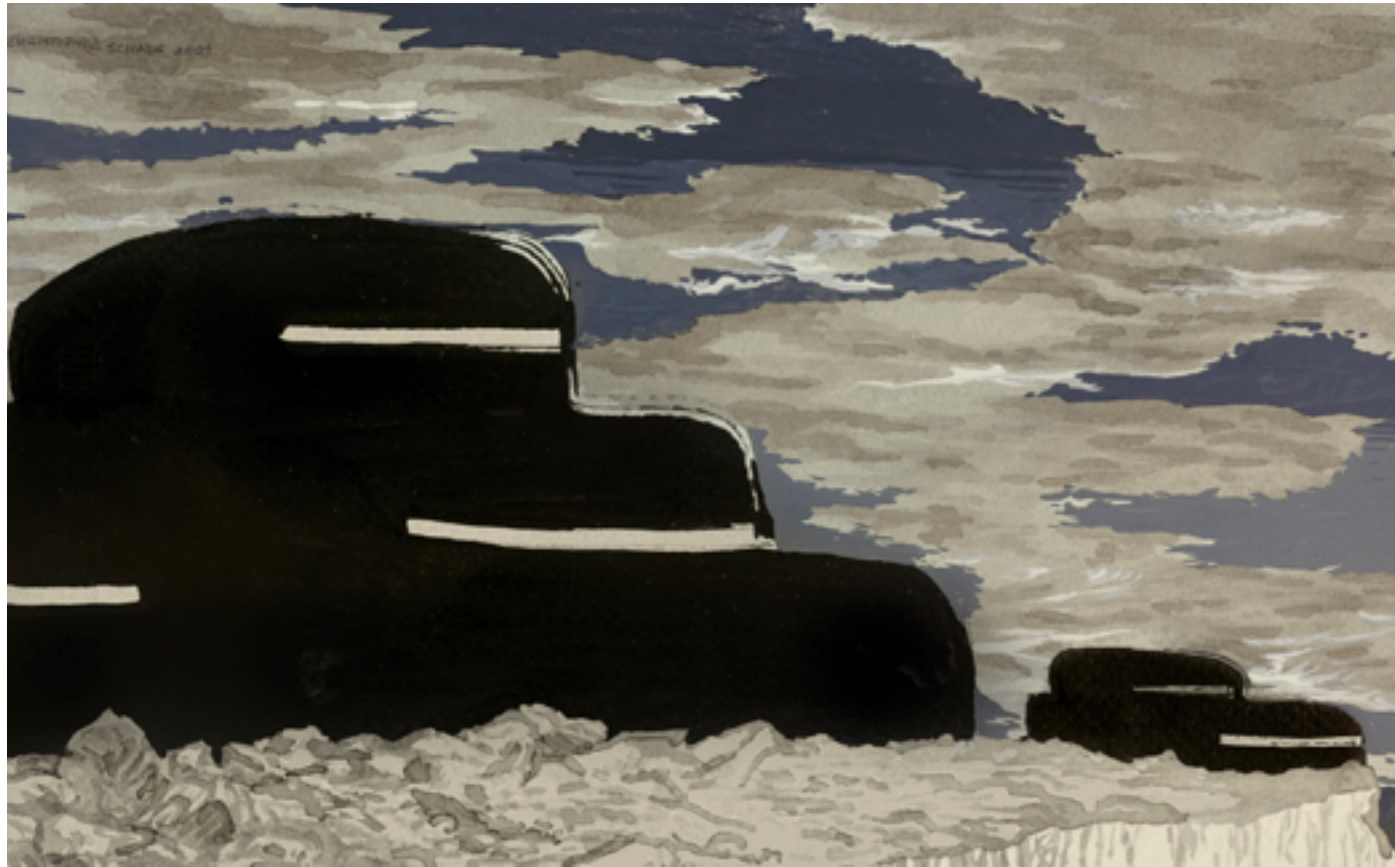
Right before the pandemic, I started thinking about using feeling as a criteria for assessing visual decisions. In the *Bunkers*, I aimed to generate a sense of dread or heightened expectation. The pandemic forced a collective and intimate experience of sheltering in place. We have now all experienced being isolated from one another, fearful of an unseen and potentially exterior threat.

### **Icon, Symbol and Cliché**

In 2012, our friend the poet, artist, curator, and former gallerist Geoffrey Young included *Bunker 5* in a group show at his gallery in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and spoke of the works' relationship to visual clichés. I was so struck by this because I'd been thinking about visual clichés for decades and how clichés can encapsulate visual memory. I am also drawn to the efficiency of the cliché, icon, and symbol. Each of these forms that feel very known, can lull you into an expectation. I am interested in how this terrain of assumptions allows for the unexpected.

### **Vantage Point**

I want to complicate where we are, and by extension who we are, in these images. Sometimes we are approaching the *Bunkers* from the ocean, sometimes we are on the shoreline possibly as part of the defense, looking out over the water. Often, we are next to them with our relationship to them uncertain. In this search for ambiguity, I feel a kinship to the painter Philip Guston and especially to his late paintings where painter, subjects and space are all interwoven and the meaning of the paintings is often profoundly unknown and unknowable.



*Bunker 1*, 2009, Acrylic and ink on paper, 6.5 x 10 inches



*Bunker 2*, 2010, Acrylic and ink on paper, 9.5 x 6.5 inches



*Bunker 3*, 2010, Acrylic and ink on paper, 7 x 9 inches



*Bunker 4*, 2012, Acrylic and ink on paper, 5 x 7 inches



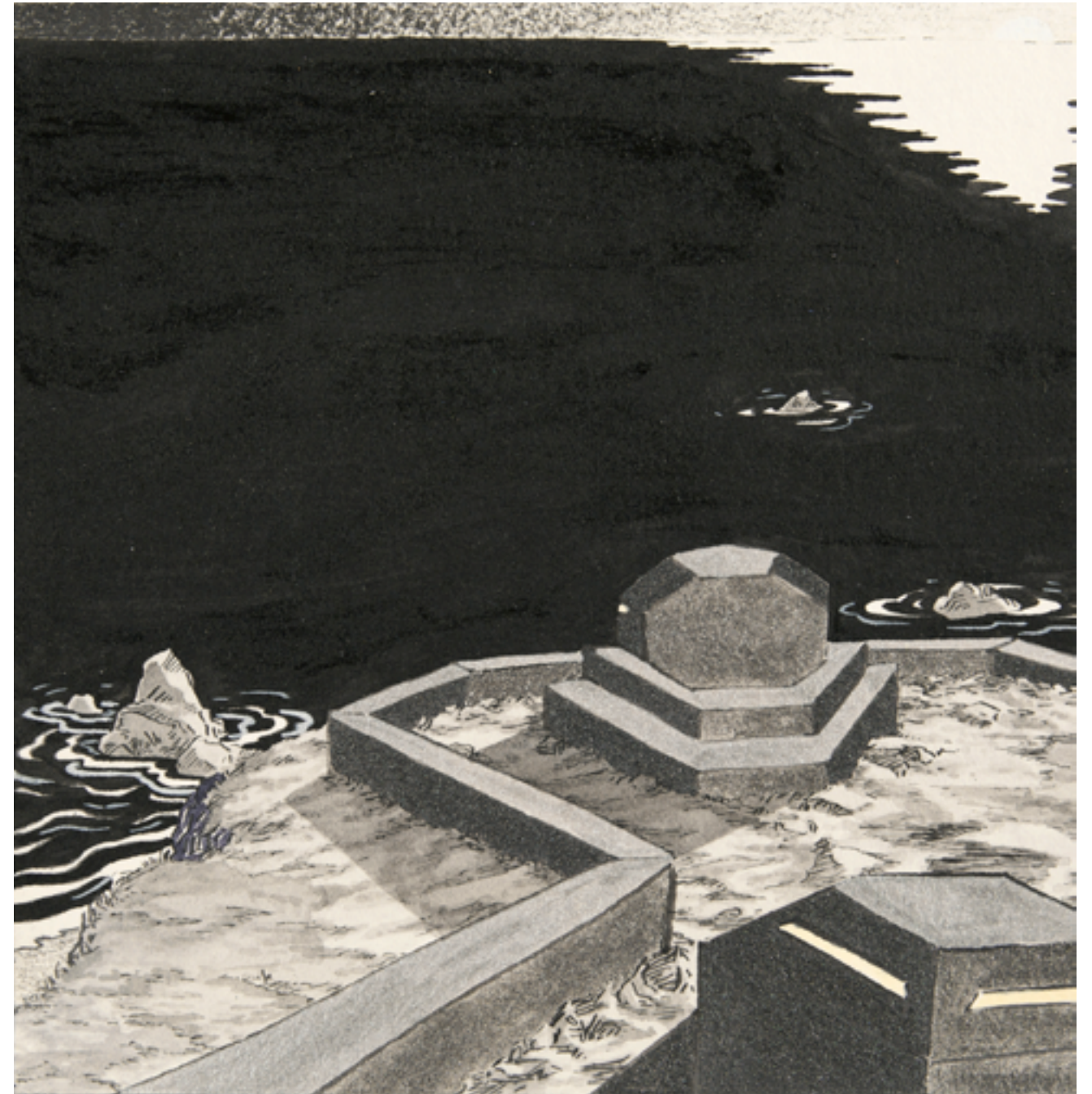
*Bunker 5*, 2012, Acrylic, ink, colored pencil and graphite on paper, 7.25 x 5 inches



*Bunker 6*, 2012, Acrylic, ink and colored pencil on paper, 4 x 5.75 inches



*Bunker 7*, 2013, Acrylic, ink and graphite on paper, 6 x 4.25 inches



*Bunker 8*, 2013, Acrylic, ink and graphite on paper, 7.25 x 7 inches





*Bunker 9*, 2013, Ink on paper, 9 x 9 inches



*Bunker 10*, 2013, Ink on paper, 9 x 9.5 inches



*Bunker 11*, 2014, Acrylic, ink and graphite on paper, 9.25 x 13 inches



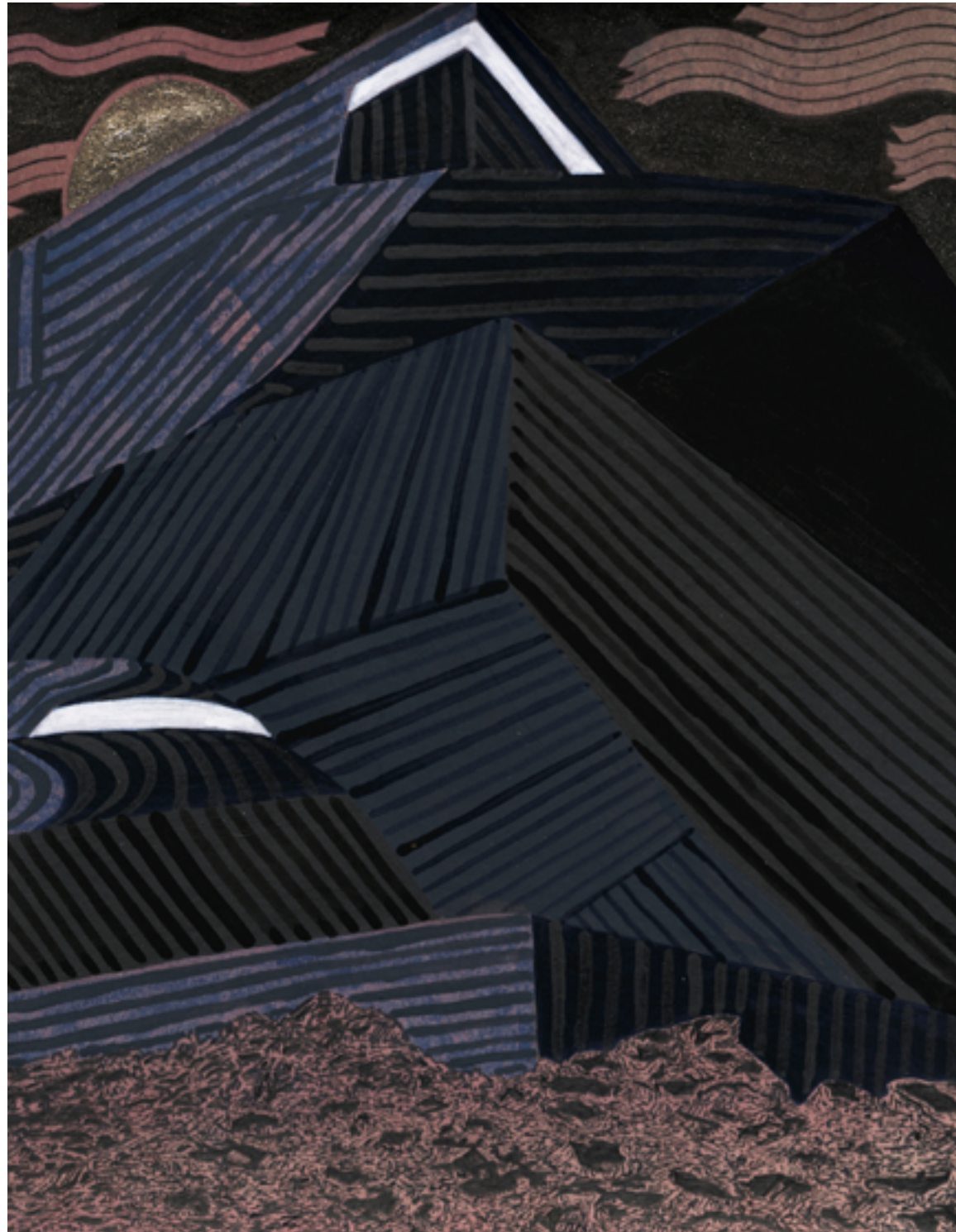
*Bunker 12*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



*Bunker 13*, 2015, Acrylic, ink and graphite on paper, 11.75 x 13.25 inches



*Bunker 14*, 2015, Acrylic, ink, colored pencil and graphite on paper, 7 x 7.5 inches



*Bunker 15*, 2016, Acrylic, ink and graphite on paper, 7.75 x 6 inches



*Bunker 16*, 2019, Acrylic and ink on paper, 10 x 8.5 inches



*Bunker 17*, 2019, Ink and colored pencil on paper, 2.5 x 3.5 inches



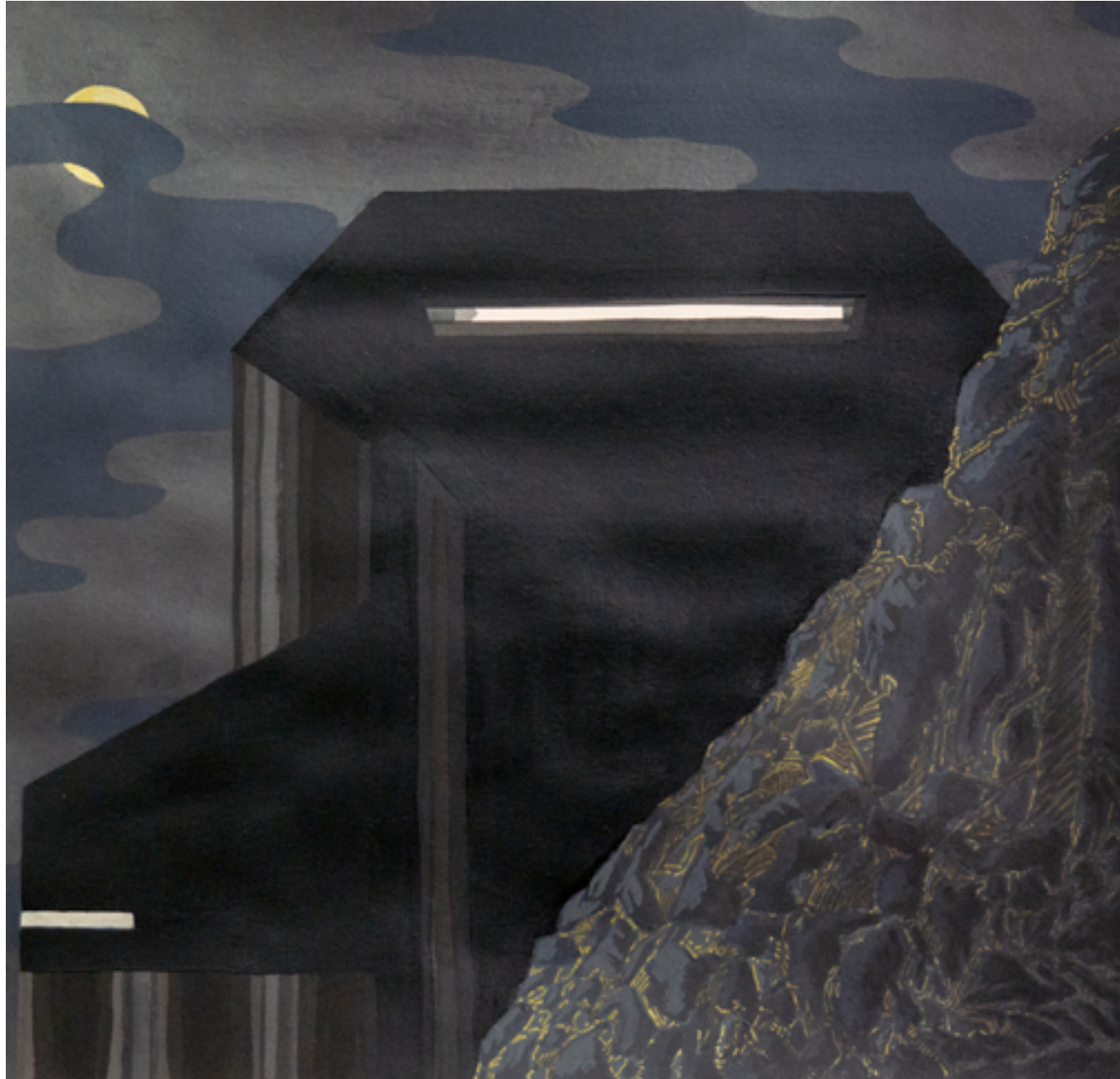
*Bunker 18*, 2019, Acrylic and ink on paper, 15 x 12.5 inches



*Bunker 19*, 2019, Acrylic and ink on paper, 12.5 x 9.5 inches



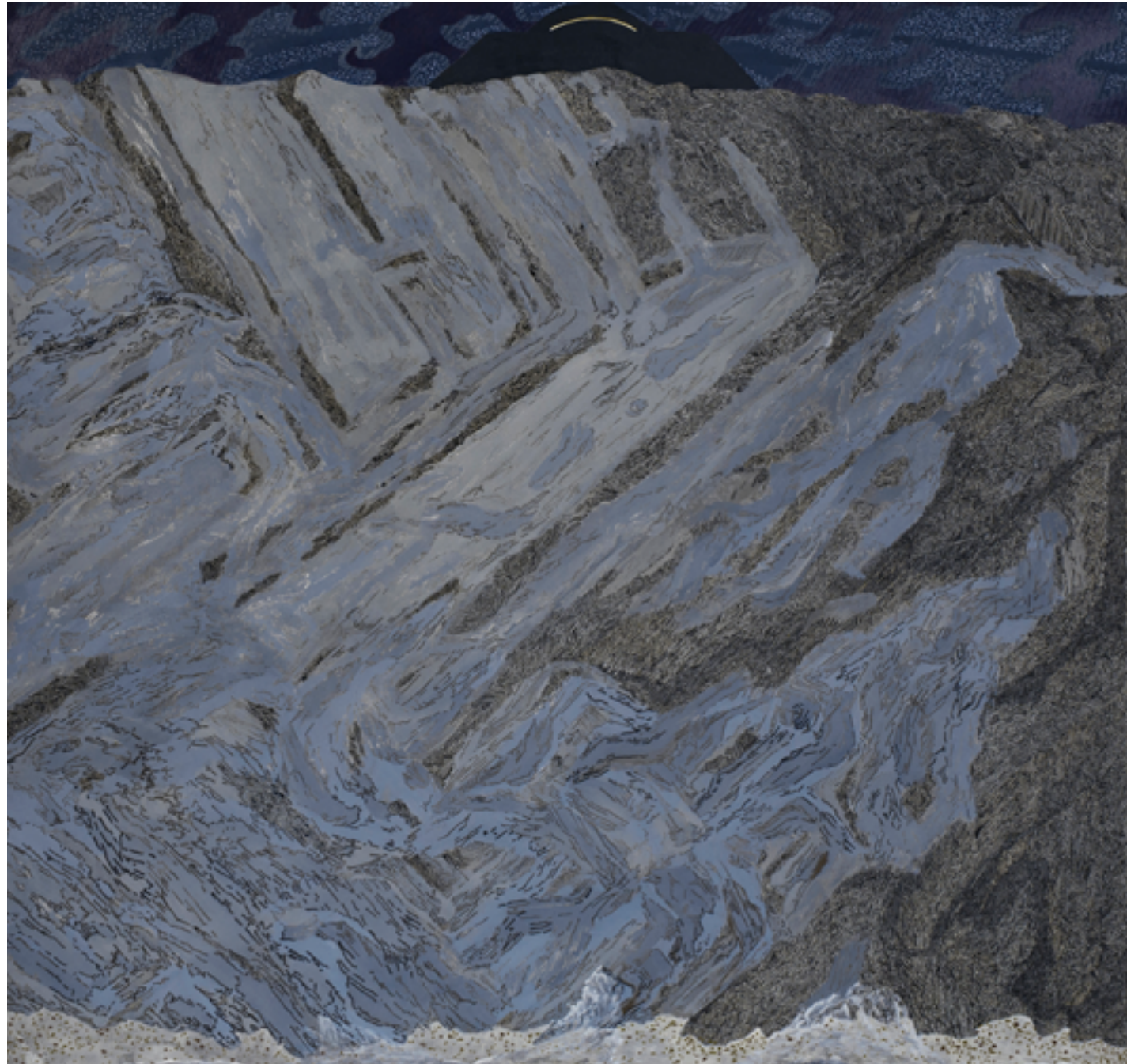
*Bunker 20*, 2021, Acrylic and ink on paper, 27 x 22.5 inches



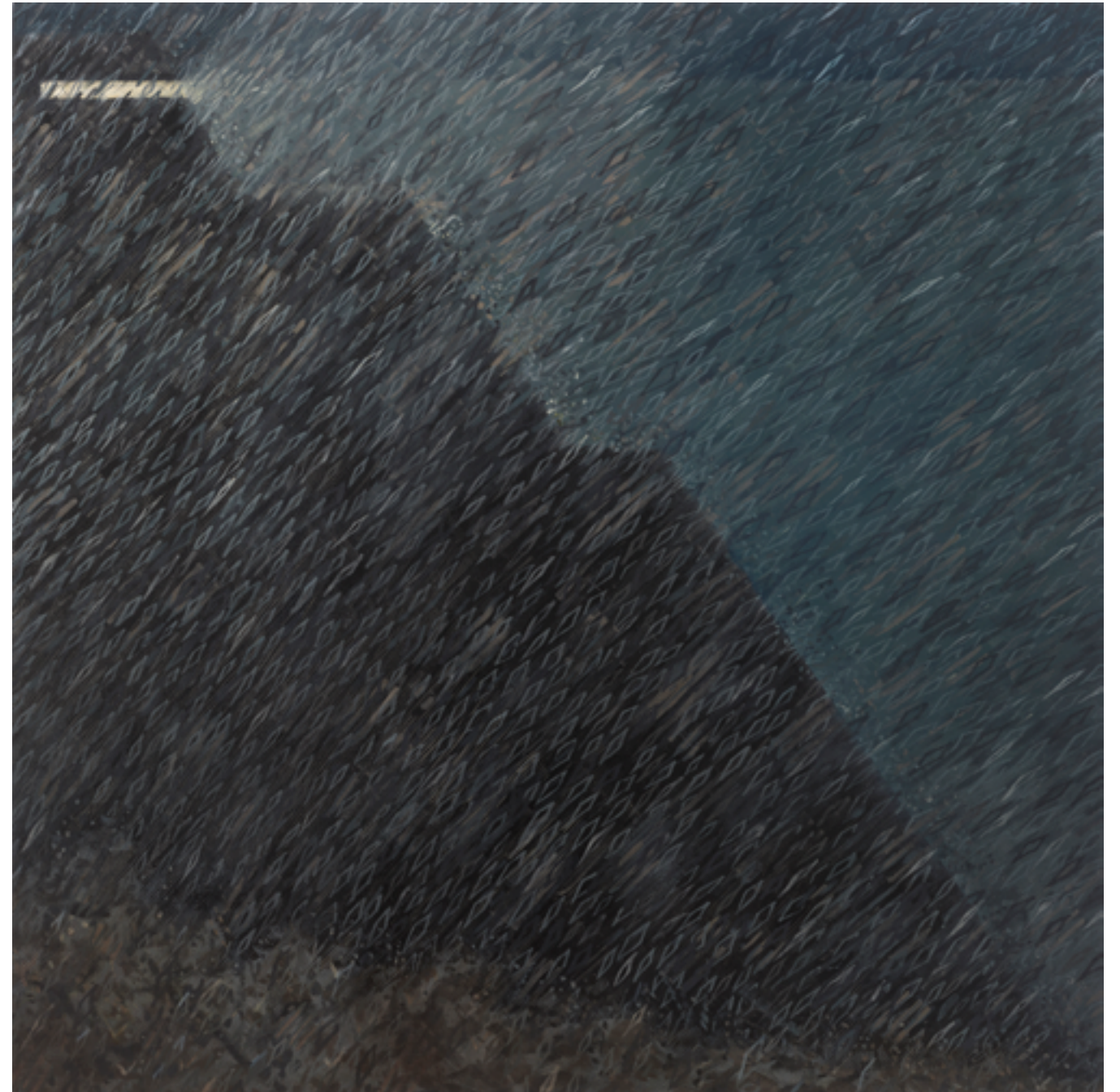
*Bunker 21*, 2021, Acrylic and ink on paper, 13 x 14 inches



*Bunker 22*, 2021, Acrylic on paper, 25.5 x 21.5 inches



*Bunker 23*, 2021, Acrylic and ink on paper, 21.5 x 23 inches

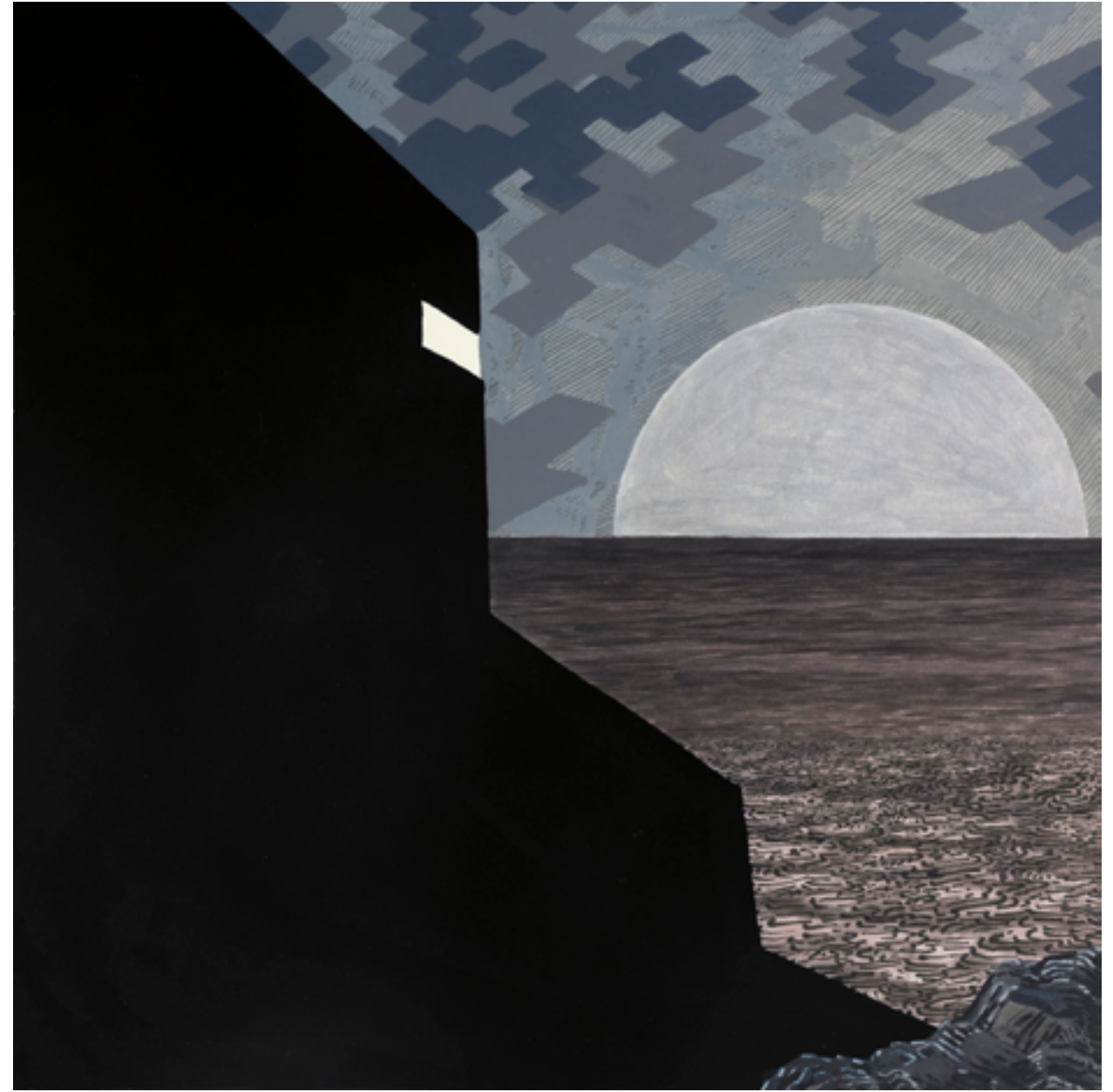


*Bunker 24*, 2021, Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches





*Bunker 25*, 2022, Acrylic, ink, colored pencil and graphite on paper, 8 x 9 inches



*Bunker 26*, 2022, Acrylic and ink on paper, 11 x 11 inches



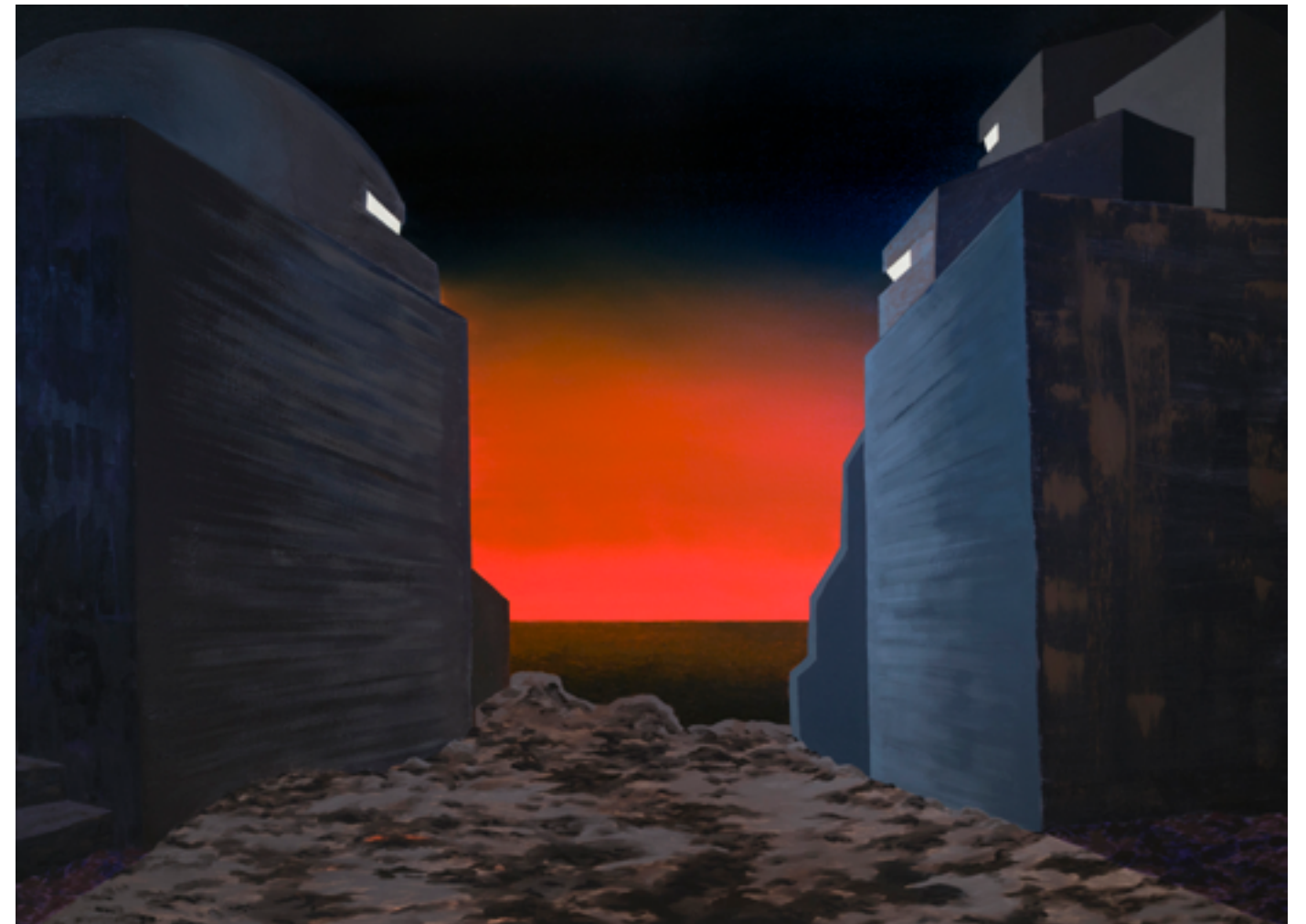
*Bunker 27*, 2022, Acrylic, ink, colored pencil and graphite on paper, 7 x 11.25 inches



*Bunker 28*, 2022, Acrylic and ink on paper, 12 x 8.75 inches



*Bunker 29*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 48 x 48 inches



*Bunker 30*, 2023, Oil on canvas, 48 x 67 inches

## Christopher Schade

Christopher Schade was born in Austin, Texas and was raised in Austin and in Quirihue, Chile. Schade received his Bachelor of Arts in Art from the University of Texas at Austin in Plan II Honors Humanities and Studio Art in Painting and then received his Master of Fine Arts in Painting and Printmaking from Yale University. Upon graduation he attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. He has had solo and two-person exhibitions at The Painting Center in New York, Park Place Gallery in New York, Kai Matsumiya Gallery in New York, Boston Design Center in Boston, dberman gallery in Austin, and Conduit Gallery in Dallas. Group exhibitions in New York City include shows at The Painting Center, Park Place Gallery, Blackburn 20/20, Tiger Strikes Asteroid, Brian Morris Gallery and GRG gallery, in Massachusetts at VERY, Drive-By Projects, Geoffrey Young Gallery, Sampson Projects Gallery, and in Texas at The Contemporary Austin Jones Center, dberman Gallery and Conduit Gallery. His work is also in the flat files of Pierogi Gallery, New York. He has received the Adolph and Esther Gottlieb Foundation Individual Support Grant, New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Painting, Blanche E. Colman Award from BNY Mellon, and the Arch and Anne Giles Kimbrough Grant from The Dallas Museum of Art. His work has been written about in Boston Art Review, Interview Magazine, The Huffington Post, Hyperallergic, Dallas Art Revue, Austin American-Statesman and The Austin Chronicle. He is a founder of the Artist Lecture Series in Greenpoint, Brooklyn and has curated numerous group shows, most recently “Prime Matter” at the Teckningsmuseet (Museum of Drawings) in Laholm, Sweden. In the spring of 2021, he joined The Painting Center in New York City as a member. He teaches painting and drawing as Associate Professor of Art at the University of Massachusetts Boston Art and Art History Department.

## Acknowledgements

My endless thanks go to my dear wife Zoe and my daughter Azalea- my two everything. For their generous contributions to this catalog, I'd like to thank the two wonderful painters Paul Caranicas and Giovanni Garcia-Fenech for their catalog essays, and Susan Alzner, Jon Bakos and Julia Featheringill for their photography. Also, deep thanks to my stepmother and stepfather Monica and Jay Winston; Director Shazzi Thomas and all the members at The Painting Center, my colleagues in the Art and Art History Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston, all the gallerists, writers and institutions who have supported my work over the years; my inspiring friends and my students.

## Credits

Catalog designed by Shazzi Thomas

Photography by Susan Alzner, Jon Bakos, Julia Featheringill and Zoe Pettijohn Schade

@ 2023 The Painting Center. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without prior consent of the publisher.

## Front inside cover images

1 Photograph of a bunker entrance at Ponte du Hoc. These and the following four photographs I took in the summer of 2009.

2 Photograph of a circular track of a vanished gun turret that now recalls an ancient calendar or some kind of sacred space.

3 Photograph of one of the many huge craters.

4 Photograph of the face of a bunker.

5 When our sweet daughter Azalea was really small but could walk, and talk, about a year and a half old, she took to giving my oil paintings an affectionate thwack with her open palm as she passed them. Being a little worried that one day she might do this to a wet area of the painting, I gently told her, “Paintings are for looking” at which point she leaned way into Bunker 12 to get a close look. I managed to snap this photo at that moment.

6 Azalea and I in front of Bunker 24 August 24, 2021.

## Back inside cover images

Ten stages of Bunker 28 that slowly developed over the course of 2022. It was a continuation of my explorations into having the Bunkers get enveloped (here literally) and obstructed by atmosphere.

