

This exhibit was curated by Lydia Beachum, Anna Blackman, Rosemary Cruse, Olivia DeAngelis, Elizabeth Gordon, Kylie Jensen, Alexis Larrow, Vivian Newman, Callie Oliveira, Ava Shutze, Caroline Wissig, and Emily Wonders. These Furman University students worked under the direction of Dr. Sarah Archino, Associate Professor of Art History and coordinated with the Matthew Baumgardner Estate.

Since 2019, Baumgardner's art and archives have been studied, documented, and curated by the Furman University Art Department through an ongoing collaboration with his estate, as reflected in their website [www.BaumgardnerArchives.com](http://www.BaumgardnerArchives.com).



Additional information on the artist can be found at [www.BaumgardnerArt.com](http://www.BaumgardnerArt.com).

All images © Estate of Mathew Baumgardner / Artists Rights Society (ARS).



## Matthew Baumgardner: Renewals

Earth, air, fire, and water are four essential elements. They are a part of a life cycle, providing both nourishment and destruction in a process of continual renewal. Just as the earth replenishes itself through these elements, Matthew Baumgardner connected with these energies to find inspiration and solace. In this selection of his work, we see him explore these points of exchange between the natural and spiritual realms.

Thompson Art Gallery  
January – February 2023

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

- *#25 Water*, 1992. Powder pigment, joint compound, polymer, acrylic, soluar, graphite, vegetable ink, on 3/4" birch plywood, 23 x 7 in.
- *#34 Scattering Seeds*, 1992. Mixed media on birch plywood, 27 x 16 in.
- *#154 Fire of the Child*, 1995. Mixed media on canvas over birch plywood, 13 x 13 in.
- *#155 Burnt Offering I*, 1995. Mixed media on canvas over birch plywood, 13 x 13 in.
- *#169 The Wilderness is Cracked*, 1995. Pigment, dispersion, gypsum, soluar on canvas over birch plywood, 13 x 13 in.
- *#174 Burn Pile*, 1995. Mixed media on canvas over birch plywood, 13 x 13 in.
- *A Place of Opening #13*, 2002. Mixed media on canvas, 25¼ x 48 x 2 in.
- *Burning Desire #7*, 2003. Mixed media on canvas, 24 x 48 in.
- *Crows over Head #3*, 1998. Mixed media on canvas on board, 12 x 12 in.
- *Cube #1*, 2010. Golden acrylic products, graphite, powder pigments, gypsum, Lascaux varnish on wood, 12 x 12 x 12 in.
- *Cube #8*, 2011. Golden acrylic products, graphite, powder pigments, gypsum, Lascaux varnish on wood, 12 x 12 x 12 in.
- *Cube #12*, 2013. Golden Acrylic Products, graphite, powder pigments, gypsum, Lascaux varnish on wood (MDF), 12 x 12 x 12 in.
- *Dream Field*, 2016. Arches 300 lb. aquarelle, gypsum, Golden acrylic mud inlay, graphite, varnish, 11½ x 15¼ in.
- *The Fire Within*, 1997. Mixed media over lauan, 72 x 34 in.
- *Inner Sanctum*, 2018. Golden Acrylic products, spray paint, powder pigments, and gypsum on birch plywood.
- *Memory and Desire #2*, 2002. Golden Acrylic products, graphite, powder pigments, gypsum, Lascaux varnish on canvas over lauan, 24 x 48 in.
- *Memory's Floor #5*, 1998. Mixed media on canvas over board, 24 x 22 in.
- *Red Suspicions*, 1999. Mixed media on canvas over lauan, 14 x 32 in.
- *Sacred Trance #4*, 2002. Mixed media on canvas over lauan 18 x 24 x 2 in.
- *Scientific Prayer #12*, 2015. Mixed media on canvas over lauan, 33 x 33 x 2 in.
- *Storm at Sea*, 1995. Mixed media on canvas, 69 x 60 in.
- *Visitation #9*, 2002. Mixed media on canvas over board, 16 x 13 in.
- *Waiting Drawing #777-We Needed the Rain*, 2015. Paper collage elements, inks, paints, gypsum, Golden Acrylic spray, soluar, graphite on stationary, 8 x 11½ in.
- *Wall of Troy*, 2013. Golden Acrylic Products, graphite, powder pigments, gypsum, Lascaux varnish on canvas over lauan, 36 x 48 x 2 in.
- *The Way Out #3*, 2010. Powder pigment, golden acrylics, painters tape, duct tape, 14¼ x 11¼ in.
- *The Way Out #6*, 2010. Powder pigment, golden acrylics, painters tape, gypsum, duct tape, oil, pencil, acid-free paper, 14¼ x 11 in.
- *Windows in the Sky #48*, 2000. Golden Acrylic products, graphite, powdered pigments, gypsum, Lascaux varnish on canvas over lauan, 16 x 32 in
- *Windows in the Sky #54*, 2000. Golden Acrylic products, graphite, powdered pigments, gypsum, Lascaux varnish on canvas over lauan, 24 x 24 x 2 in.
- *Women in the Wheatfield*, 2014. Powder pigments, gypsum, Golden acrylics, graphite, Lascaux varnish on canvas over lauan, 48 x 48 x 2 in.



*Cube #12, 2013.*

*Cube #12* is an earthy tan, with square blocks of colored pigment and etched segments that evoke plots of farmland. The squares are less orderly than *Cube #1*, also featured in this gallery, but some of the etched glyphs on *Cube #12* give structure to the squares of pigment. Underneath the glyphs are bright blue, yellow, and magenta pigments that harmonize with the warmer tones of the background paint. The

sides appear muddy, evoking the sensation of saturated ground after rain.

On two corners of the cube are brightly colored sections that evoke Baumgardner's work from the 1980s—the rectangle with solid black and multi-colored squares are most similar to his more vibrant paintings. The green cube with a pearlescent center that envelops a full corner of *Cube #12* provides a point of weight and direction for the work. Both bright sections are eye-catching and may seem jolting, but ultimately they provide places of focus for the viewer's eyes after they trace over the cube's glyphs.

## Water

*Baumgardner's spirituality emerges from many of his works as manifestations of powerful elemental forces. Water— baptizing and cleansing those who enter it— evokes inner peace, yet is a forceful energy that shapes the earth, dissolves matter, and gives life. In his evocations of waters and seas, Baumgardner's work moves and churns as the ocean and rivers do, and his materials and colors ground each piece in the confident presence of an enduring yet ever-changing nature.*



*#25 Water, 1992*

Brilliant blue pigment peaks out from behind swathes of foamy gray to evoke churning waters in *#25 Water*. The verticality of the work and the organic glyphs etched into the layers of paint give an impression of a flowing river or waterfall, the golden-pigmented glyphs emulating light dancing off the current. Baumgardner's joint compound pieces involve several layers of paint, pigment, and "mud" that roughen the edges of the wood he uses as a support. This organic edge allows *#25 Water* to resemble a chunk of river lifted out of the earth and onto the gallery wall.

In his profile on Baumgardner's work, Anthony DeLorenzo writes, "Some of the forms and movements seem to correspond to both biological organisms and/or astronomical or cosmological bodies and patterns at the same time... both the imagery and the materiality evoke the natural world... in their echoing of natural forms and processes, be they biological, astronomical or cosmological, these works act as a kind of mirror or encapsulation of these vast systems."



Storm at Sea, 1995

In *Storm at Sea*, Baumgardner creates these echoes of the natural processes of the ocean. These processes have a turbulent movement to them which Baumgardner conveys on the canvas. What appears deceptively still and monochromatic reveals itself to contain pops of greens and darker shades, creating an impression of turbulence and seafoam. The mix of colors and textures creates an impression of the powerful, intense sea. At

the same time, the large piece creates a sense of serenity in the viewer. The tension between a tumultuous sea and a tranquil moment created here is powerful.

Baumgardner was deeply interested in the concept of noumena - defined as things that exist independent of our experiences. One example of this would be water or the sea. In these works on paper, from the series, *The Way Out*, Baumgardner creates an impression akin to driftwood, using materials to create a weathered effect. As opposed to most of his works about water, these pieces are



The Way Out #3, 2010

geometric, yet this geometric balance creates a cohesive feeling of serenity. There is a tension here between the relentless sea and the tranquility it brings.



The Way Out #6, 2010

## Cubes

*Baumgardner's cubes are something stylistically unique to his craft and reconcile the paradox between geometric order and organic line which brings energy and life to his work. While rooted in their geometric, cubic shape, they highlight his style of energetic abstraction. The grids of his paintings are animated in three-dimensional space, moving and interacting with the light along different vectors and surfaces. These sculpturesque forms are kinetic with no "dead sides" that remain unpainted. As we engage with them in real time and space, they become an active presence in the room.*



Cube #1, 2010

Baumgardner's cubes are experimental forms, bringing together both sculpture and painting in an animated three-dimensional space. Each has a different aura; Cube #8 that creates a scorched earth aesthetic through the contrast of brilliant reds and oranges against the dark ground. These colors crack and come through the ashy black, evoking fire. Fire brings life but also destruction: new beginnings and renewal. This piece suggests a more

dystopian energy, as we know Matthew drew inspiration from science fiction. Yet even in this dystopian state, there remains a sense of rebuilding for the future or the oppressed overcoming the oppressors.



Cube #8, 2011

These cubes bridge real and abstract spaces since they are in fact three dimensional objects. As you walk around or move the box, the viewer is engaged physically and intellectually. Without knowing what will be visible as the viewer moves through real space, these cubes create an immersive and changing experience.



Wall of Troy, 2013

*Wall of Troy* depicts a long beach that is surrounded by both sky and sand. In this piece, Baumgardner uses his iconic pearlescent portal and geometric shape motifs to represent the vastness of the sky and roughness of the earth. The historical references to the literal walls of ancient Troy represent a

new perspective on the protective role of sand dunes. The sky is covered in several small squares, which Baumgardner referred to as portals, but which suggest here a field of twinkling stars. These portals are perfectly spaced out; they are unified and cohesive. The geometric perfection of the sky represents its vastness and never-ending nature. Conversely, the earth is treated with a deep tan color, likely meant to resemble sand or mud. The patterns on the earth are free moving and abstract. They resemble the coarseness of the sand on a beach, shifting space unlike the longevity of the sky. The water, interestingly, does not have any pattern, representing its peacefulness and stillness. These patterns come together to form an abstract depiction of the beach.

The title of this piece, *Wall of Troy*, has a historical reference. Walls of stone once surrounded the ancient city of Troy; they were meant to fortify the city as a boundary. Similar to these walls, Baumgardner depicts the sand dunes in this scene as protection from the elements. Through the abstract patterns, he emphasizes the notion that dunes are always shifting and moving as time passes, and yet, they remain intact.

## Air

*Air is ubiquitous, yet invisible. It is nearly impossible to represent the element so fundamental to our survival. Air, as Baumgardner represents it, is an atmosphere created by light and clouds. The haziness of the clouds, muted color palettes, and warm light in many of his works provide a sense of peace, complemented by his pearlescent grids. The reflection of physical light from the pearlescence gives a physical quality to air by embodying light and energy. As Baumgardner explains, the pearlescent elements “promote an internalized experience of the cosmos and yet at the same an expansive one.” Some of his works also contrast the light with the dark: the dualities of storms and the sunny sky. This contrast gives air a greater sense of life and movement—the natural world can be calm but also violent.*



Visitation #9, 2002

The soft palette that defines the composition of *Visitation #9* is reminiscent of a clouded sky with faint patches of blue and gray peeking through a dense expanse of clouds that loom over a shoreline. Occupying the bottom right corner, blue-green paint runs seamlessly into a contrasting dark beige in a sweeping motion. This serene scene is interrupted only by an overlaid rectangular portal in the canvas's center. Yet while this shape creates a rupture, it also creates a focal point. The

resulting tranquility may reference Baumgardner's meditative practice that he credited for providing his ideation and spiritual vision. The faint lines that extend from the rectangle evoke a grid, something that the artist intuitively incorporated into his paintings for decades.



*Scientific Prayer #12, 2015*

In 2010, Baumgardner started his series titled *Scientific Prayer* as a continuation of his *Windows in the Sky* series. The term “Scientific Prayer” was inspired by the writings of Emmet Fox, a mid-20th - century New Thought spiritual leader. Fox described Scientific Prayer as lifting one’s consciousness above the problem at hand by allowing the divine to work

through the person and solve the issue. In this series, Baumgardner explores a minimal palette, expressing ideas through a variety of muted tones. *Scientific Prayer #12* incorporates a geometric grid, which is an iconic feature seen in many of his works. In this series, there exists a perfect harmony between the grid and the surrounding layered mud field, allowing the squares to become the main subject matter of each piece.

*“This series represented a drastic change for me. (I was perfecting once again my process- I don’t like predictability of knowing the outcome of my work)- reducing my palette to variations of white. The pearl iridescent pigments allowed me the reduction and at the same time a fresh element” – Matthew Baumgardner*



*Waiting Drawing #777-We Needed the Rain, 2015*

Baumgardner embraced automatic drawing as a way of creating images without premeditation or overt control; many of these drawings feature geometrically designed flowers or plants. In this image, we see a collection of different flowers and patterns all yearning for a small rainfall. While

Baumgardner gave many of his works numeric titles, this one suggests a deeper meaning with the number 777, which is considered by some to be an angel number. Angel numbers are sets of three repeating digits ranging from 111-999, each of which represents a different guardian angel within a spiritual realm. Seeing an angel number coincidentally within the world is said to give a sign of peace or yield a warning that the specific angel knows the viewer might need. While we don’t know if Baumgardner intended for this reading, given his interest in spiritual symbolism, this potential meaning of 777 feels plausible, especially since this number signifies a feeling of fulfillment and spiritual awakening. Combined with the phrase ‘We Needed The Rain,’ the work suggests that good things are coming in a time of need. There is a sense of renewal from the old and a new sense of life brought back from this ‘rain,’ a symbolic message of hope that could mean different things to different people.

*“My paintings are captured spiritual moments. They are poetic and mystical acts of faith and passion. Like our thoughts, my paintings are layered.”—Matthew Baumgardner*

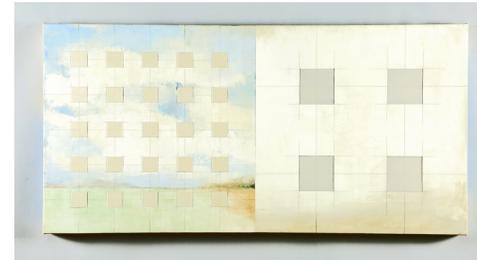
This painting is reminiscent of wheatfields by Jean-François Millet or Vincent van Gogh, both artists who sought to bring together the rhythms of life with larger spiritual energies. Its muted grays, browns, and yellows create an earthy tone which is emphasized by the vertical glyphs which suggest the titular stacks of wheat. The non-vertical glyphs which populate the rest of the squares wriggle and squirm within their confined space, creating movement and animation. The pearlescent squares create an additional textural contrast and catch the light in variable ways to bring an additional sense of energy. Through the use of colors, glyphs, and pearlescent squares, a cyclical grid-like pattern is formed. This cyclical aspect of the work evokes the feeling of the passage of time and the cycle of the harvest.



*Dream Field, 2016*

This work and its mystical, layered composition conjures its dreamlike qualities through intertwined, unique, colorful strokes. The orange, yellow, brown, and green glyphs are carved into a paper surface layered with gypsum. These strokes are contained within the

bottom half of the composition, leaving an airy space along the top. “Field” suggests an earthen quality, which is emphasized by materials derived from the earth with natural, tangible qualities, including gypsum, golden acrylic mud inlay, and graphite. The dreamlike forms evoke shapes dancing across the field – these long, vertical, brown markings suggest trees or tall grasses on the edge of the field. The use of color in this work has a broad range of warm and cool colors, creating a sense of scattered chaos as if amidst a wild dream. *Dream Field* uses natural materials to create an ethereal, dreamy space with brightness and darkness twisted about.



*Memory and Desire #2, 2002*

In *Memory and Desire #2*, another diptych the landscape canvas is separated into two halves. The left is a warm, airy beach scene while the hazy white of the right suggests clouds. This contrast plays with our

sense of space and openness, contrasting the lighter aspects of the left with the denser nature of the right. The overlaid grid features Baumgardner’s use of “intuitive mathematics,” a process by which the squares are determined according to the shape and measurements of the canvas as though they formed themselves. The use of pearlescent paint on these squares reflect the light and shimmer, further energizing this grid. These squares or “portals” draw the viewer into another world; the portals on the left shimmer and dance invitingly atop the pleasant landscape while the portals on the right suggest a threshold to a darker world.

*A Place of Opening #13* represents the duality of air in the atmosphere of the open sky.

Baumgardner was fascinated by air’s variation, juxtaposed with its eternal and spiritual nature. He saw the open



*A Place of Opening #13, 2002*

sky as a place to reflect on its everlasting quality, emphasized through his techniques and motifs. In this diptych, Baumgardner portrays two different treatments of the sky, one at daytime and one at dusk. The left panel depicts a daytime beach scene, as seen through the aquamarine-toned water, horizon line, and shore. The sky on this side has grandiose clouds with a baby blue undertone.

Air, in this panel, is depicted as abundant, bountiful, and full of life. Conversely, on the right-hand panel, Baumgardner portrays the sky in the evening. With dark, looming clouds, there is almost a sense of tension in this panel, one that is unsure of what is to come. The massiveness of the sky is almost daunting, as opposed to the daytime scene which portrays the bountiful nature of air in the open sky. Each scene suggests the everchanging flux of air and sky, with his pearlescent portals that suggest an entry into the spiritual realm. These panels, and their portals, are a way for the viewer to connect with the spiritual nature of the sky the way Baumgardner saw it.



*Sacred Trance #4, 2002*

*Sacred Trance #4* is part of a larger series of works that feature thickly layered squares geometrically arranged atop an organic and natural background. In this image, Baumgardner features vertical lines of shimmering pearlescence that break up the blue sky, a variation on his more common grids. He refers

to these pearlescent overlaid shapes as “windows” or “portholes” that promote “an internalized experience of the cosmos” which is further emphasized in this image by the soft light blue sky and blurred clouds that give the image a hazy, ethereal energy. Air here is not explicitly represented but rather felt as the viewer takes in the bright, cloudy sky. The portals draw the viewer deep into and beyond the sky towards another world, another state, a “sacred trance.”



*#34 Scattering Seeds, 1992*

Even the cracks and darkened edges of the plywood background add to the whimsical feeling of *#34 Scattering Seeds*. The paint is pulled into the cracked wood, pushing the viewer’s eye along the lines and shades of the images. Baumgardner places soft pinks, sages, and blues on a warm cream color background, with a sense of playfulness. Behind the colors, figures suggest the forms of plants, birds, and dragonflies, challenging viewers to step closer and identify possible shapes for themselves. Viewers must use their imagination to see nature. The work’s title encourages one to look for the flowers and a tree, with the birds that might be spreading seeds throughout the piece. Baumgardner’s works often challenge his viewers to look to the spiritual world; this work subtly presents spirituality in nature. However, Baumgardner does not force this reading on his viewers; instead, he allows the imagination to wander.



*Women in the Wheatfield, 2014*

In *Women in the Wheatfield*, Baumgardner’s signature geometric grids and glyphs create an abstract pattern across the broad canvas. Beyond the title, the work evokes a sense of agrarian cycles through its warm palette and repeated forms. Throughout his career, Baumgardner drew inspiration from other artists.



*Crows over Head #3, 1998*

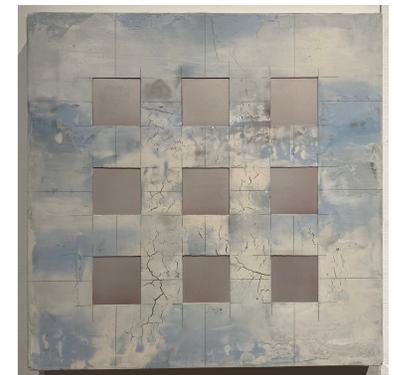
*Crows over Head #3* is unmistakably earth toned with predominantly green pigment and areas of brown, off-white, and light blue. The dark green in the top right corner of this work has a wood-like quality that evokes for the viewers the feeling of standing in a grassy field on a cloudy day, gazing up at a flock of screeching crows speeding past high in the sky overhead. Crows emerge from the cracks in the painting, reminding the viewer of natural phenomena within Earth's ecosystems. In contrast, *Memory's Floor #5* has a more dreamlike quality about it. Its cracks are reminiscent of the scarring from an earthquake. In the top right and bottom left corner, the predominantly solid light blue and off-white sections have tones that echo the background and undertones of its companion pieces in this show. *#169 The Wilderness is Cracked* is mostly composed of this creamy off-white tone, yet its splashes of brown and light blue and its cracks provide the feel of wilderness either hiding beneath a foggy haze or wilderness as a dry and desolate entity. These three works relate to the artist's common theme of tuning into the elements, creatures, and subtle tones of the earth's phenomena.



*Windows in the Sky #48, 2000*

With its field of portals, common in many of Baumgardner's paintings, the representational nature of the *Windows in the Sky* series is curiously secondary to its abstract nature. Yet these are windows, different views of the same window or two different windows, one showing the dark of night or a terrible storm, the other revealing a bright and sunny day. Despite their differences, the nine-squared grids are consistent and stable throughout the pieces. Baumgardner challenges his viewers to join this fascination with the grid, to look through and see what is on the other side. Even the unseen materiality of this painting adds a layer of meaning, as the work is on canvas stretched over lauan. Like the grid, this lauan suggests a structure of strength and stability. At the same time, the grid remains open to interpretation; how this work is interpreted will depend on the viewer's mood the day it is seen. *Windows in the Sky #48* dares the viewer to see the world beyond the work and to see beyond divisions of abstraction and representation.

Along with the four elements, Matt often explored themes of juxtaposition in his work. For instance, *Windows in the Sky #54* combines the ethereal, natural world with the structural, human-made world.



*Windows in the Sky #54, 2000*

The grid pattern of nine perfectly measured and orderly squares collides against the swift movement of the wispy, airy clouds in the background, creating a contrast between the soft, whimsical background and rigid squares.

As the title *Windows in the Sky* suggests, the square windows exist within the sky as if they are a part of the sky itself, suggesting the harmony of organic and inorganic elements and the human world with the cosmological. As this work affirms with the unification of the soft and hard and flowy and rigid, opposition does not always have to mean conflict. The lively, dynamic energy evoked by the floating clouds illuminates the constant movement and change within the air and atmosphere. Even though the harsh lines of the squares contrast with the idea of the flowing background, the shine of the pearlescence of the squares illuminates movement from reflected light, further suggesting the harmony between opposing ideas and energies

“My work imparts a transformative experience that resonates with my longings to channel universal and spiritual planes; I want to transport the spirit, to remind us all that we are perfect beings passing through a transient world. My soul craves expression through poetic and timeless art that beckons the viewer to return time and again to find renewal and fresh experiences.” *Matt Baumgardner*

## Earth

*Matthew Baumgardner's art pulls together the four elements: fire, water, air, and earth. Earth represents the beginning of life, like a seed taking root. Baumgardner regularly imbued natural forms with deeply spiritual qualities, explaining that his paintings were "captured, spiritual moments" and extensions of his layered, flowing thoughts. Matt's grounded-ness through an appreciation of the Earth and nature's cycles are highlighted within his earth paintings. His repeated geometric shapes add a sense of structure and stability to his works while the patterns he creates incorporate a cyclical nature to his paintings which suggest the passage of time. His material use of pigmented gypsum, or "mud," which he blended with his hands, also gives a tactile process and result.*

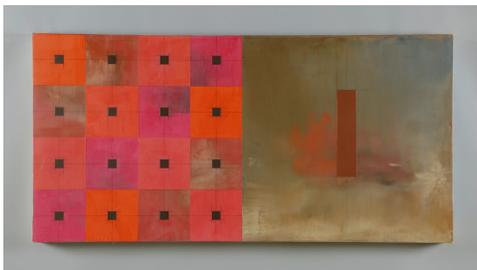
For this group of paintings, Baumgardner uses materials that feel like earth, with a thick, pasty quality. He creates a surface rather than a painting by building these materials up and etching glyphs into sections of them. In his own words “The primitive simplicity and freedom of these glyphs give rise to pure, honest, unadulterated discovery and expression.” This is a common theme throughout his earthen works and is what makes the grouping of these three specific paintings shine.



#169 *The Wilderness is Cracked*, 1995



*Memory's Floor #5*, 1998



*Burning Desire #7, 2003*

After watching the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapse on September 11, from the rooftop of his New York studio with his daughter, he renamed his *Burn Invisible* series as *Burning Desire*. One of the most

notable characteristics of this series is the incorporation of the vibrant orange, pink, and red pigments seen here. While the visual program is strikingly beautiful, Baumgardner invites his audience to look deeper into these energizing colors. While inspired by fire, these colors illuminate the dark squares and ashy clouds surrounding them. This piece is a diptych featuring an overlaid bronze pearlescent grid on the left that create a balance of symmetry and loud colors. On the right, a fiery hue and engulfing ash grow behind a metallic, burnt orange rectangular portal which reflects the intensifying flame.

Painted on an expanse of found plywood that had been covered with tar, Baumgardner's black monochrome evokes the heaviness and texture of a charred remain. At the same time, the arrangement of shapes across its surface transforms the board into a possible book cover, suggesting the possibility of opening new realms of knowledge – the *Inner Sanctum*. The result builds on a tradition of deeply spiritual color field paintings, including the works of Kasimir Malevich and Mark Rothko.



*Inner Sanctum, 2018*

## Fire

*Fire is an element of both destruction and creation. When something is set ablaze and burnt down, it gives room for the creation of another. While the processes of erasure and renewal can be fearful, we can also find beauty and hope in that clean slate. Baumgardner explores this idea through creating multi-layered paintings that have cracked surfaces to create a sense of embers burning, especially within his birch plywood canvas. Baumgardner also uses this technique to correlate back to major themes of religion and spirituality with multiple references to scripture or biblical narratives.*



*Red Suspicions, 1999*

*Red Suspicions* creates a juxtaposition between two opposing sides, creating a sense of narrative through contrast and tension. On the left side, we see an array of gray, black, white, and red abstract forms that create a sense of disarray, smoke, and fire-styled imagery. The cracking of the paint on the left side allows for sparks of red to seep through the overall darker background, creating a sense of embers being displayed and burning through. The left side is messy and sporadic compared to the uniformity seen on the right, with its geometric order of nine red squares uniformly arranged against a gray and black background. These two sides work against each other and with each other, creating a tension and sense of reciprocity between order and chaos.



*The Fire Within, 1997*

In *The Fire Within*, Baumgardner's signature glyphs spiral and crackle across the piece in a chaotic, but contained, manner which is highlighted by their intense red color. Their movement creates a red-hot chaotic energy, which is only subdued and kept in line by the dark rectangular portals. These bright red glyphs pierce through the dark background and travel across the work. Tall dark gray rectangular portals on the sides of the painting contrast against the bright reds utilized in the work, elongating the painting and

creating a sense of foreboding. The lighter portal opens to reveal more organic glyphs whose shapes seem to emulate organs. Bright red cragged ribs encapsulate irregular shaped lungs at the top of the work while contorted bodily shapes continue down the center of the painting and end with short, crooked legs. The use of red and black, a portal shape, and organ forms evoke a phoenix rising up from ashes into its new body. Fire catalyzes the destruction of a phoenix while simultaneously being the reason for its rise through its ashes into a new life. Despite the intimidating size of the work, the three tall rectangles that form a triptych within the work create a sense of a doorway or passageway that reaches out to the viewer to bring them into the piece.

*"I believe I am a spiritual creature in a human body, constantly experiencing the spiritual world and the natural world simultaneously. My work thus draws from this." – Matthew Baumgardner*



*#155 Burnt Offering, 1995*



*#154 Fire of the Child, 1995*



*#174 Burn Pile, 1995*

The fire paintings series enforce the spiritual and natural themes that lie beneath the surface of much of Baumgardner's work. Using his signature "mud" as their medium, the artist enhanced the lively cracking flame effect with hot tools like hairdryers. In works such as *#154 Fire of the Child*, one large burning flame emerges out of the black background, evoking a divine ignition that creates that warmth out of nothingness. In other pieces,

the titles reference ideas of offerings and fire sacrifices as a process of renewal, a concept also referenced in many spiritual and religious practices.

*"These paintings are from a group of work started in 1999 and through 2004, which deal my own yearnings of heart and soul. Burning Desire – The passion and fire within that cannot be put out, only directed, obediently towards God but is often directed towards this world and self eventually consuming me" – Matthew Baumgardner*