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Richard Koh Fine Art Sdn. Bhd., Kuala Lumpur

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A digital catalogue for “Warriors”, a solo exhibition by Sergio Fermariello at Richard Koh Fine Art, Blk 47 Malan Road, #01-26 Gillman Barracks, Singapore 109444 from 7 - 29 February 2020.

Cover page:  
Sergio Fermariello, *Warriors III* (Details), 2019, Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm

# Warriors

by  
**Sergio Fermariello**

7 - 29 February 2020



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channel video, 3 minutes



# Sergio Fermariello: Hitting God's Head with a Hammer Until It Breaks

by Naima Morelli, 2019

Imagine feeling completely relaxed. The palms of your hands are softening. The soles of your feet are melting. Your cheeks sink slightly. Your tongue relaxes from its tip to the root.

Perhaps you are sitting in an introspective posture, with your torso slowly drooping over your legs. Your body takes the shape of a little cave. In this dark, cosy space you lift a torch – the torch of your consciousness that is – to see what is on the walls. And what you light up are primitive signs. As you loosen up and depart from your rational mind, your Lascaux figures start to dance.

In the beginning, you just observe the figures with quiet curiosity. You are unable to identify these shapes just quite yet. You watch the lights for a while then turn your eyes away, but your vision still bears the mark of those shapes.

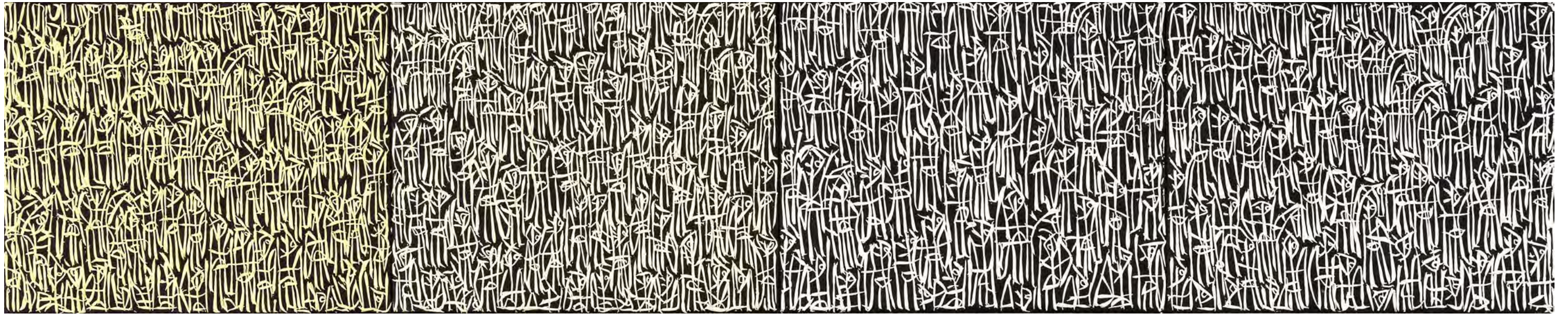
Perhaps what appears are the exact forms of those tree branches exactly as you see them from the window of your studio. Or the shutters in your living room. Even if you have never actively registered those unremarkable lines, you realize that they are stamped into your consciousness.

These shapes are dynamic. As your torso sinks further into your legs, freeing up your lower back, they keep morphing. The branches become avant-garde art as you start associating what appears in your mind to paintings – you know which ones – you were exposed to them over and over again in your childhood. That hateful yellow and blue Paul Klee in your parents' "Music Room". That Mirò you saw in one of your first, beloved, art books. The shapes combine together and drift apart again, to become then that Capogrossi on your ex-boyfriend's Whatsapp display picture. And finally,

Opposite:  
Sergio Fermariello, *Warriors V* (Details),  
2019, Acrylic paste on canvas,  
20 x 400 cm







the signs give you a break. They become a single tribal silhouette – that of the warrior.

Look at it – it stands before you bearing a spear and a shield. Then the figure starts splitting... one, two, three times. Warrior Warrior Warrior. Over and over again. Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior... And as it replicates, a slow feeling of anguish starts taking a hold on you. Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior...Ninety-three, ninety-four warriors. It begins to spiral out of control.... Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior Warrior... In that overwhelming moment, you feel you are almost getting somewhere, to a revelation of sort, but... one hundred and twenty-seven, Warrior Warrior Warrior, one hundred and twenty-eight Warrior Warrior Warrior... and then...

NO!

No More!

Stop! Danger! Back out of there! You catapult out of the cave, fast! You are back to normal, out of your consciousness. You breathe again, trying to find some calm, but you are still shaking. Something so mighty frightened you to the bones. It was like approaching Zeus to look at him right in the eyes. Like the Semele from Greek mythology, you knew you could end up burned. You stop one minute earlier. You do not want that. So, you could not go there. Not yet. It was too much. There was something revelatory for you there, you almost saw it. But not at this time.

While you are still holding your head in your

hands, trying to understand what you just went through, in the distant horizon appears Sergio Fermariello. His warm Neapolitan smile is lit by the soft candle-light. He knows exactly what happened because he has been through it many times. Leaning against the door, amused, he gives this explanation: “It’s like hitting God’s head with a hammer until it breaks.”

As if to say, it is no wonder you feel a bit dizzy, pal.

## Unlimited Writing

The God Fermariello is menacing with a hammer is our collective intelligence, our limited ratio. Born in Naples, Italy, Sergio Fermariello is the kind of artist who is not afraid to enter the cave of the subconscious repeatedly.

Fermariello started his practice in the ‘80s, exhibiting with one of the major galleries in Naples at the time, Galleria Lucio Amelio. While his art practice revolves around the warrior sign, he has explored a variety of mediums, from video to installation, then to land art and many others.

In 1993, he was invited by Achille Bonito Oliva to participate in the forty-fifth Venice Biennale with a solo exhibition room at the Italian Pavilion. Today his work is collected by a number of national and international museums and institutions.

Despite the breadth of his practice, its essence is encapsulated in that deep state of relaxation and subconscious that we just explored. In that

space, one lets down his guard, and the creative process unfolds freely. It is from that safe space that the artist retrieves familiar memories and collective archetypes sedimented in the collective consciousness. That is also the space where he first met the figure of the warrior.

Being such an archetypal figure, the warrior sign represents a multitude of symbolisms. We can look at the warrior as bearing a spear and a shield, but also a bow and an arrow. It encapsulates the feminine and the masculine element at once. This ideogram forms the Italian pronoun “IO”, I. The artist, drawing from Lacan, acknowledges that the I – the self- is the trademark of our species. The IO can also be 1 and 0, a binary system.

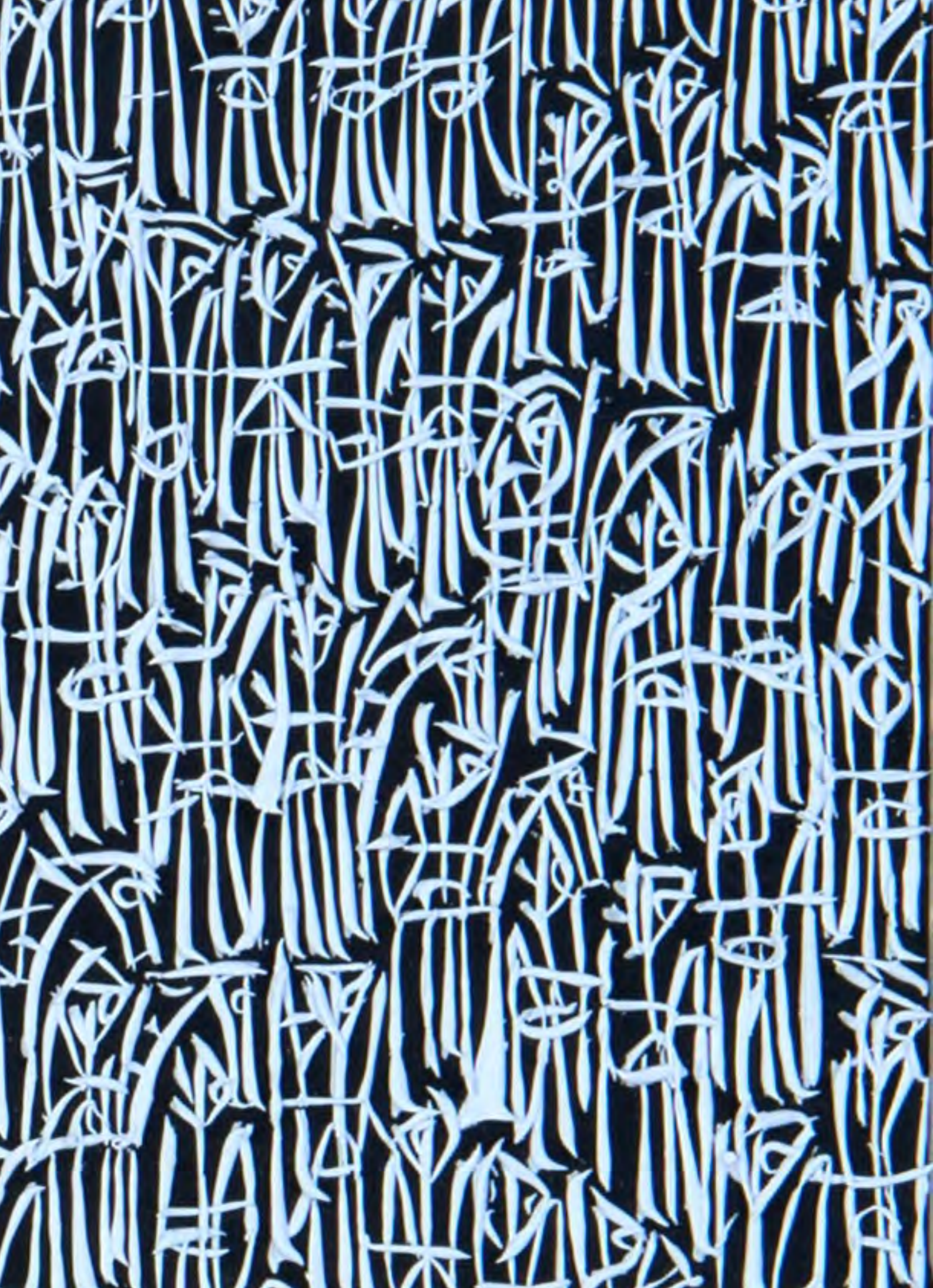
While in English (or Fermariello’s native Italian) we use the alphabet of 21 phonemes, Fermariello decided to use just one – the warrior. In doing so, the artist defines himself as “writer of a single word”. This pictogram and its obsessive repetition became a regular feature of Fermariello’s oeuvre from ‘89. Excluding all other phonemes, he becomes free in his neurosis, his maniac impulse.

“It’s like the Palaeolithic man rubbing stones to get fire,” he explains. “I rub warrior against warrior to get an incandescence. This white-hot element is what gets to the viewer of my paintings.”

His “unlimited writing” covers the entire surface of the canvas. It is the repetition that allows Fermariello to reach a trance-like state. This process is common to many cultures, not only in art, but also in rituals, prayers and dances. From his hometown Naples, we are reminded of the

Above:  
Sergio Fermariello, *Warriors V* (Details),  
2019, Acrylic paste on canvas,  
20 x 400 cm





Opposite:  
Sergio Fermariello, *Warriors V* (Details),  
2019, Acrylic paste on canvas,  
20 x 400 cm

continual repetition of the “Ave Maria” prayer in Catholic churches while shelling the rosary, or the repetition of OMs in the yoga studios of the Vomero posh area of Naples. All these practices are meant to get the mind into a loop, allowing consciousness to free itself from thought.

## A Paleolithic of the Mind

The artist identifies language as the factor that distinguishes humans from nature. To him, homo sapiens is just a gorilla looking at itself in the mirror, looking to understand its own cosmic nature: “In the moment we are born, we are excluded from nature,” he says. “We learn to see things only through language. But the words can’t help being approximations, deviations. Words are a filter, a kaleidoscope. We humans would like to get rid of this semantic collar, however only the madman gets to do it.” In a way, Fermariello aims to become this ‘madman’ by transcending words.

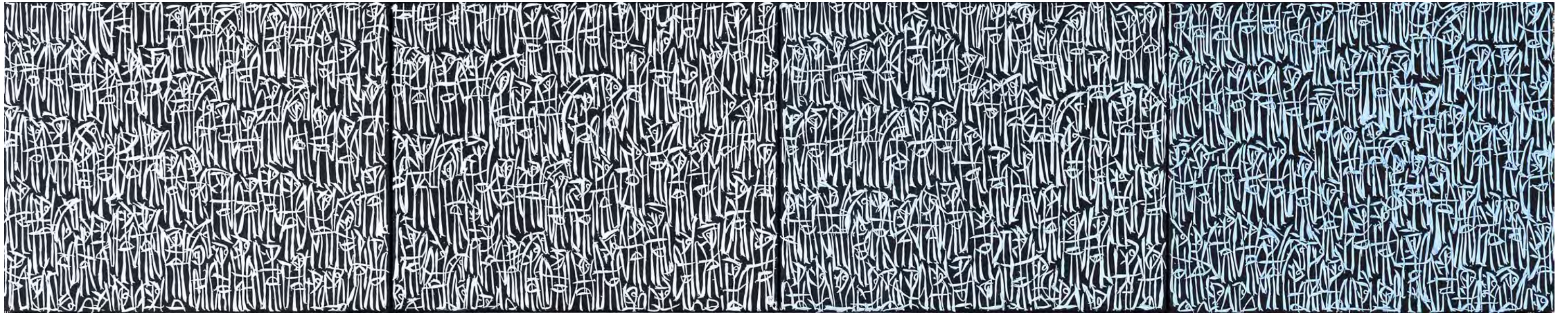
While the artist expresses himself on the canvas with a simple sign, the post-practice reflections on his work appeals to different disciplines. As Fermariello himself is interested in the subconscious, a psychoanalytic approach really helps his understanding of his own process, and even the motivation behind his art making.

Indeed, another concept that is near and dear to the artist’s heart is Freud’s “Death Drive.” This is the tendency of individuals to repeat a traumatic element from their past. A real-life example is the drug addict who is compelled to return to the substance that is killing him, where he is pushed by a mysterious force he cannot oppose. The human psyche follows similar patterns.

According to Freud, humans struggle between two opposing drives: Eros, which produces creativity, harmony, sexual connection, reproduction, and self-preservation; and Thanatos, which brings destruction, repetition, aggression, compulsion, and self-destruction.

Fermariello brings this death drive theory to the extreme, believing that human nature does not inherently tend towards the good. To him, we tend to regress to a condition of “nothingness”; a pre-life of sort, longing for the mother’s womb. We are inevitably attracted by the empty space,





Above:  
Sergio Fermariello, *Warriors V* (Details),  
2019, Acrylic paste on canvas,  
20 x 400 cm

so we can either stare at the void first, or have it stare back at us.

By going first, every time the artist embraces this “death impulse” through repetition, he comes back to it somehow immune to it. Art is his vaccination. He ventures into what he defines “a Palaeolithic of the mind”, which is to open up to a wide, cosmic dimension common to all humans.

Keenly interested in the theories of the astrophysicists, he does not regard the empty space as “nothing”. Rather, he sees it as subtraction, as a form of potential energy: “The entire universe is born through a fluctuation of the empty space. And coming from stardust, we are nothing other than that. Stardust.”

## The Warrior and the Agrimensor

When you ask Fermariello what kind of warrior forms his legion, he would immediately say: a Samurai.

“I have always thought of the principle of Akido; becoming empty to allow energy to discharge itself. My warrior is a samurai that in the heart of fire annihilates his own ego. He becomes void. And the entire universe emerges from there.”

We find the warrior resurfacing in his most recent works regardless of the medium, in oils on canvas, acrylics or laser cut works. It remains the core symbol that Fermariello decided to return to for this show in the space of Richard Koh Fine Art

in Singapore. Being the first time Fermariello engages in a dialogue with an Asian audience, he decided to introduce himself with what he calls “the basic, founding elements of my kitchen.”

For this exhibition, the warrior sign multiplies like a virus, occupying the space of four big black and white canvases. In another series, composed by smaller canvases in marble paste, the warrior materialises as a chromatic gradient - going from yellow, to white to blue; forming an alchemic rainbow of sorts.

With this show, Fermariello goes back to the sign of the farmer, the agrimensor – namely the land surveyor in ancient Rome. Fermariello says he is no regular farmer; rather he cultivates sand gardens. Unlike the farmer, his aim is not reaping fruits from the soil. Fermariello declares that his contentment is to make the furrow itself. In that, his art practice becomes also a meditation – it does not need to get anywhere. The meditation itself is the end. It is a state of consciousness, presence and awareness the artist is interested in.

In these modern times, the artist becomes a spokesperson against the “productivity at all costs” that capitalist systems impose on the lives of individuals – an idea that particularly resonates with many Singaporeans. To him, boredom is necessary for creativity, as to joy and contentment. He deeply treasures all lost emotions, especially the ones which are functionless. “I admire the wine-maker lazily sitting with crossed-leg; I love the a-functional,” he says. “I’m a believer in the free space in which all the free thoughts are possible, where all streets are viable paths.”

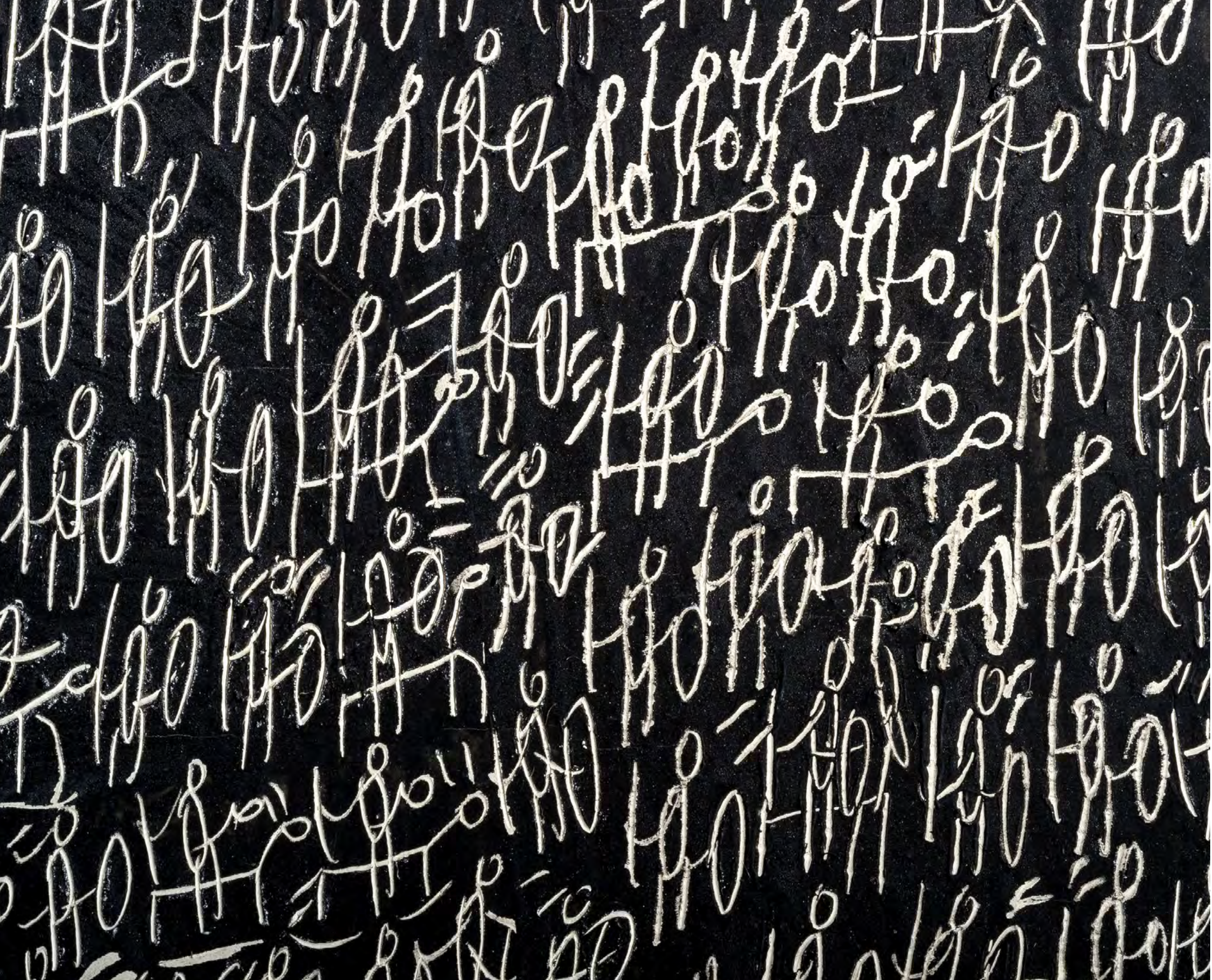




*Warriors I*

2019  
Acrylic on canvas  
150 x 150 cm





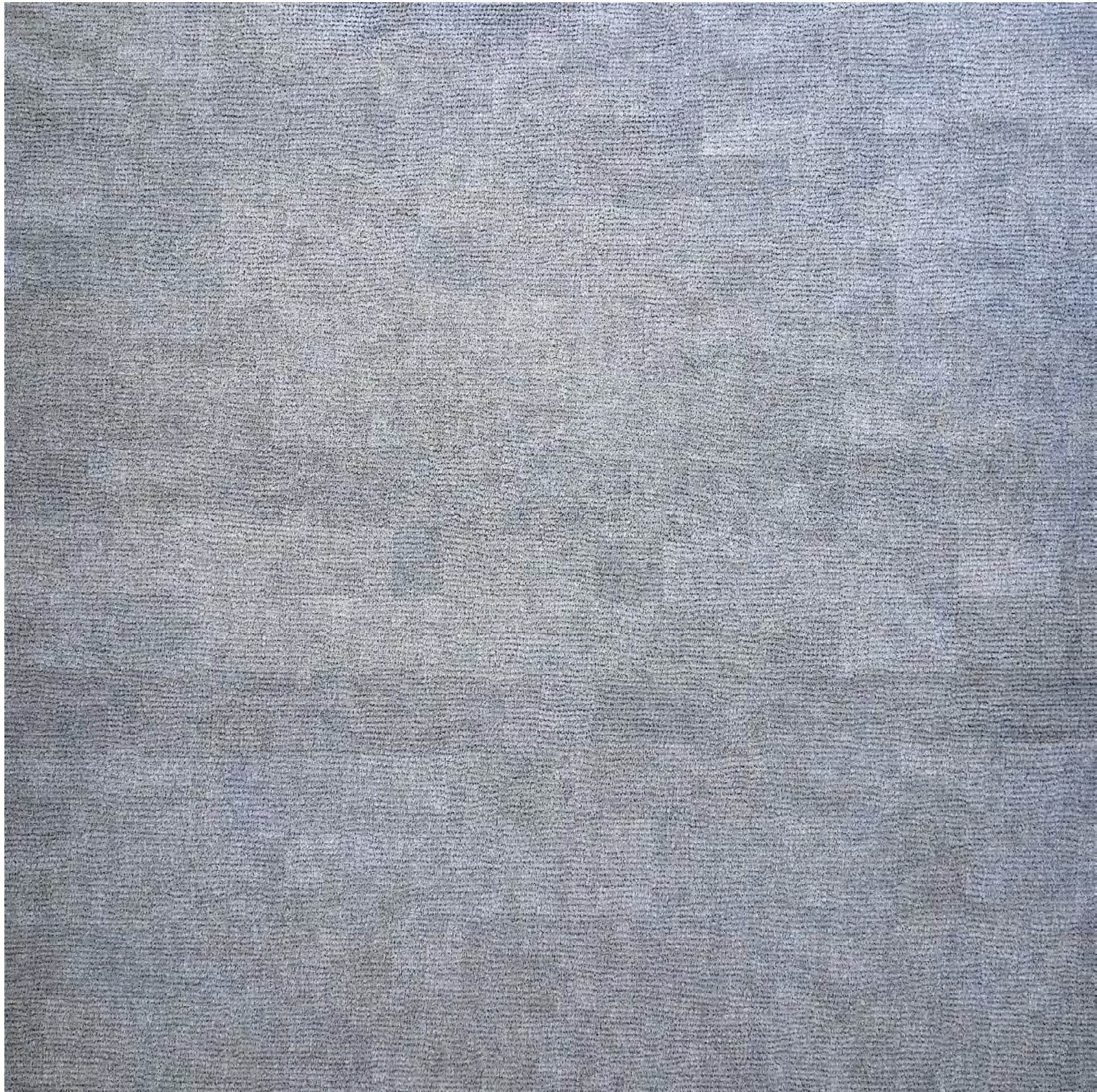




*Warriors II*

2019  
Acrylic on canvas  
150 x 150 cm





*Warriors III*

2019  
Acrylic on canvas  
150 x 150 cm

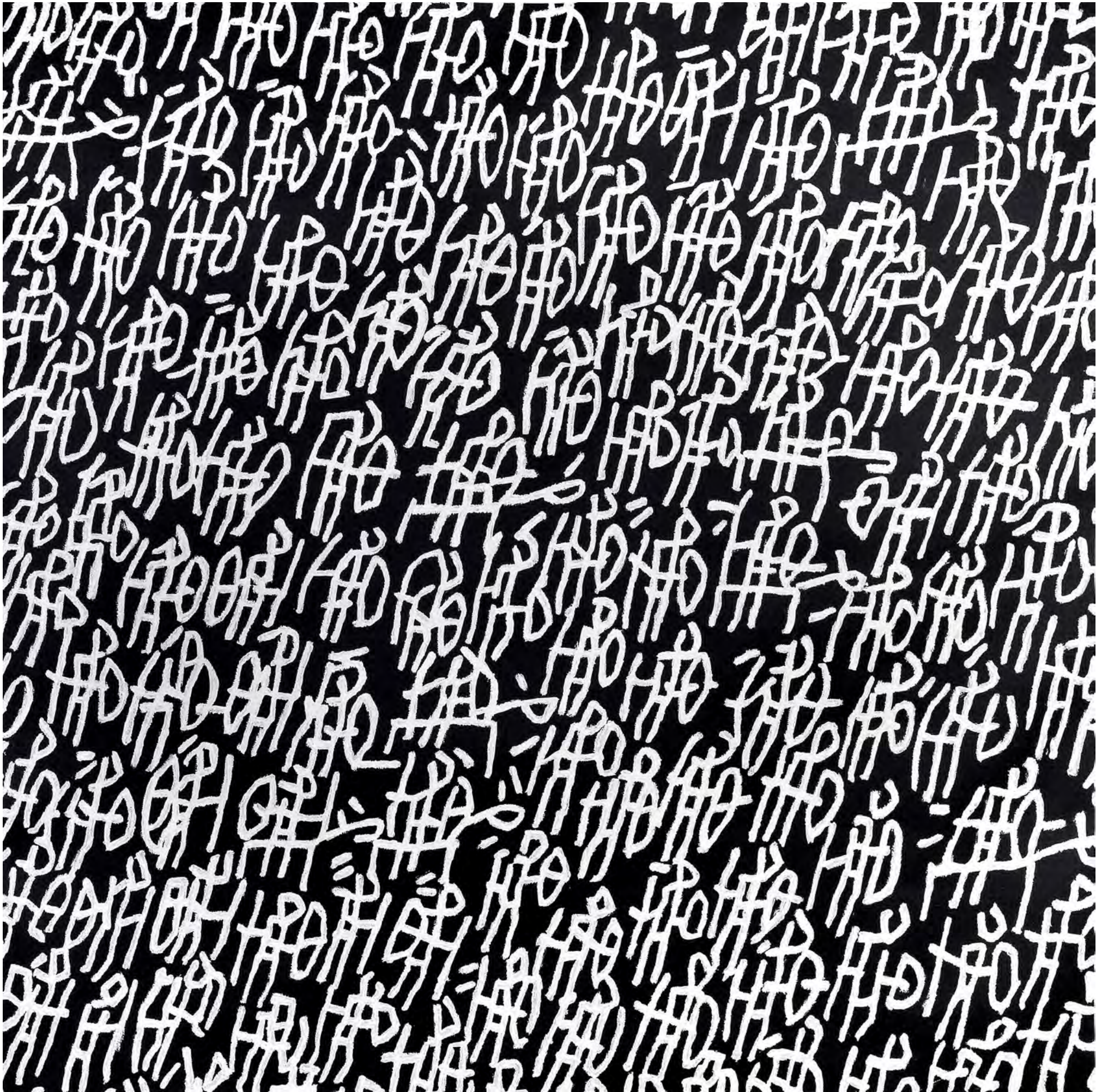






*Warriors IV*

2019  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 100 cm

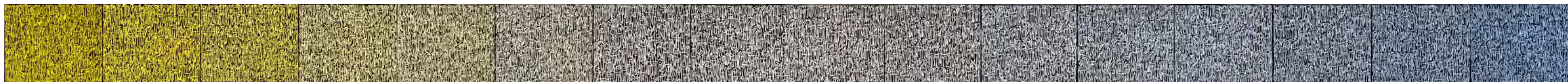






Right:  
Details of *Warriors IV*

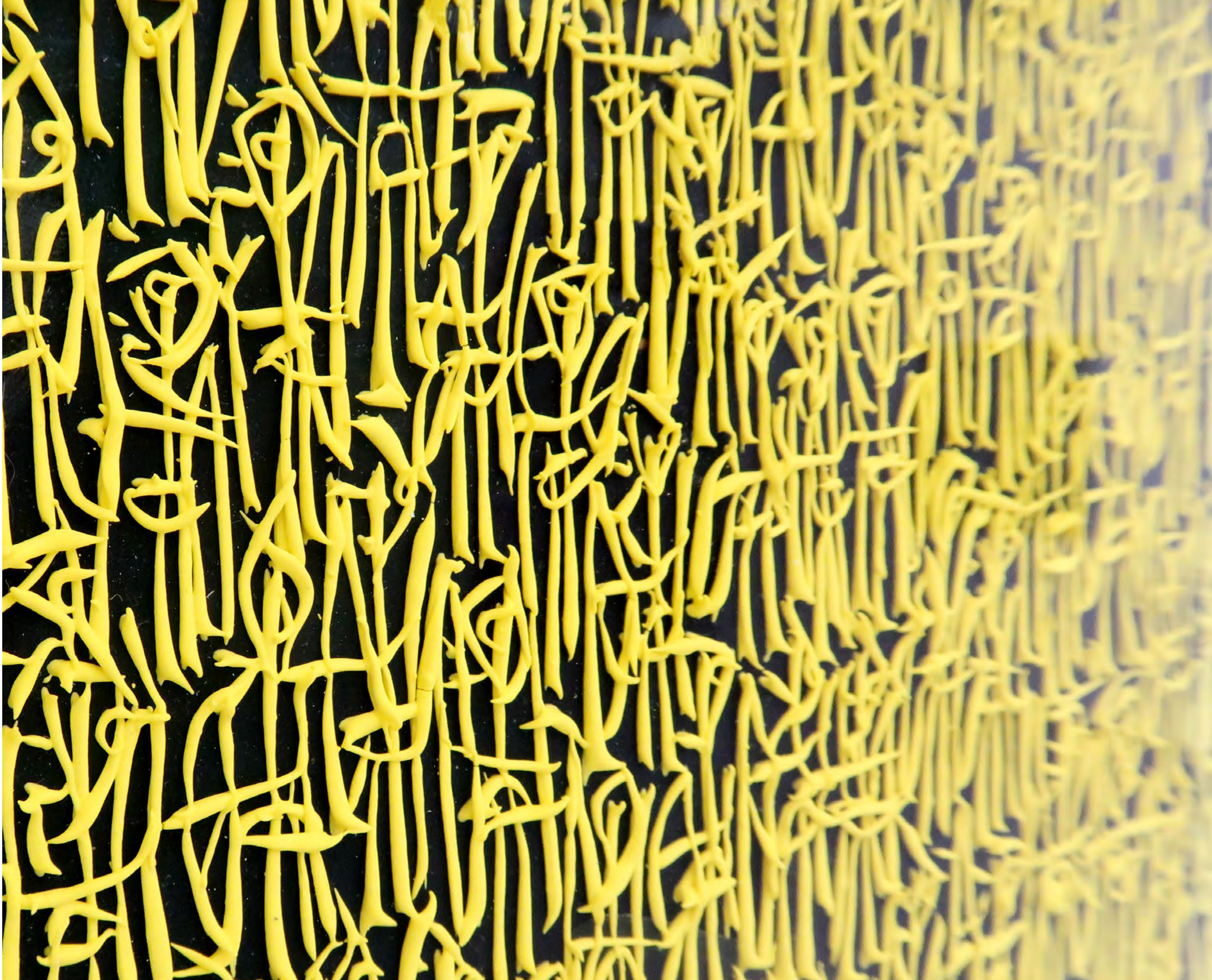




*Warriors V*

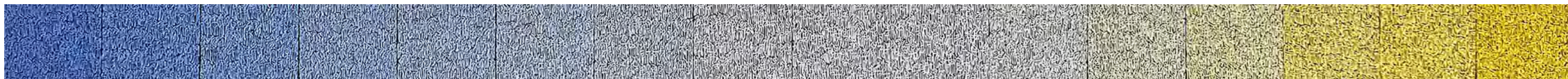
2019  
Acrylic paste on canvas  
20 x 400 cm





Right:  
Details of *Warriors V*





*Warriors VI*

2019  
Acrylic paste on canvas  
20 x 400 cm

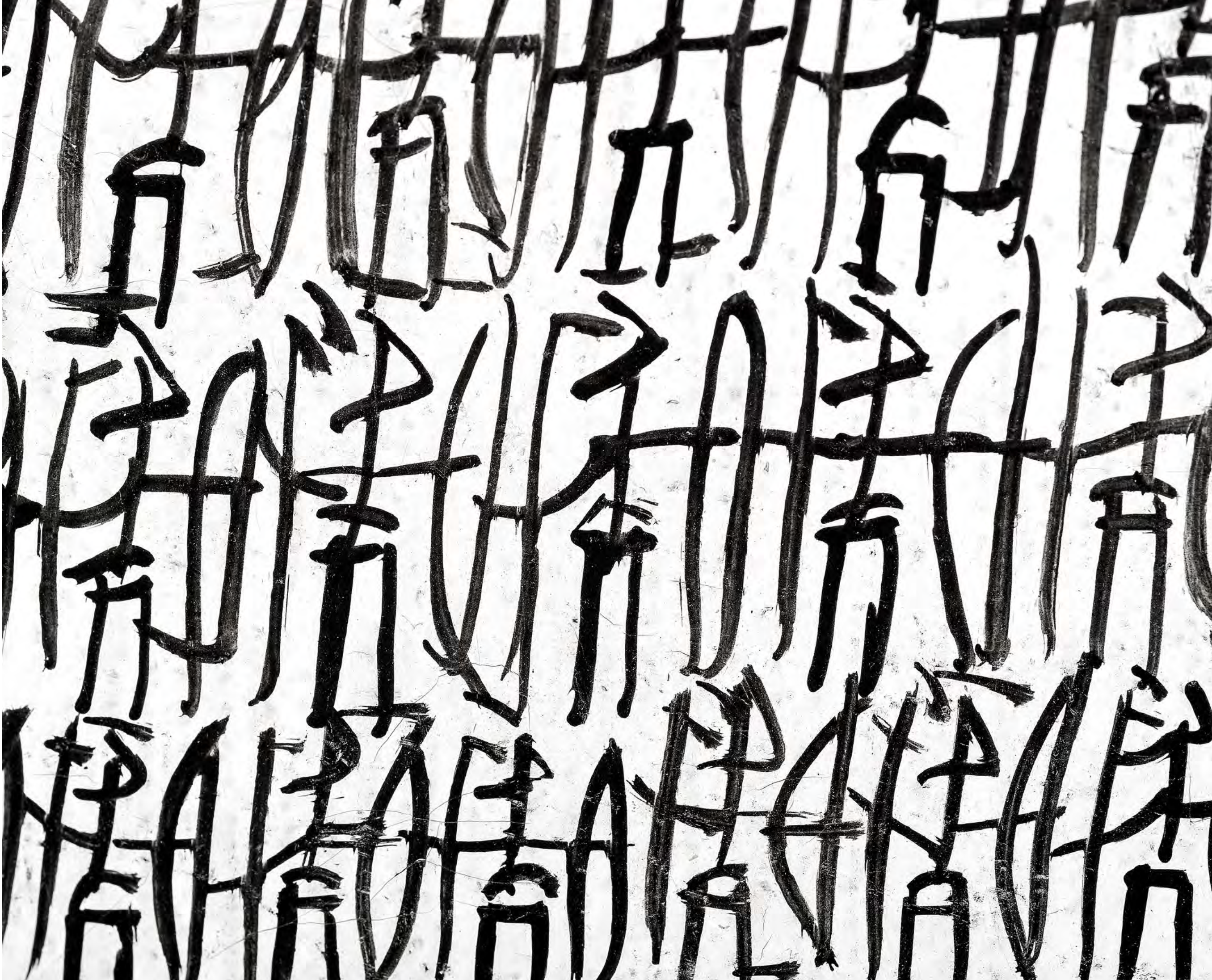


*Warriors VII*

2019  
Oil on canvas  
180 x 220 cm







Right:  
Details of *Warriors VII*





*A Parable: 101 Zen Stories*

2020  
Single channel video  
3 minutes



Sergio Fermariello was born in Naples on April 29, 1961. After high school he attended courses in natural sciences at the University of Naples. At the age of 20, he decided to devote himself exclusively to art. His research started from a retrieval of models and familiar memories which later extended to a deeper investigation of universal archai in the recovery of collective unconscious memories.

In 1989, he won the inaugural Saatchi and Saatchi International Prize for Young Artists at the Palazzo delle Stelline in Milan. That same year, he had his first solo exhibition at the Lucio Amelio Gallery in Naples. Afterwards he staged several one-man shows, including one at the Capricorno Gallery in Venice (1990) and at the Galerie Yvon Lambert in Paris (1992). His work was also shown at a number of international events, such as the Metropolis exhibition at the International Kunstausstellung in Berlin (1991) and the exhibition Les pictographs at the Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix in Les Sables-d'Olonne. In 1993, at the age of 32, he was invited by Achille Bonito Oliva to take part in the 45th Venice International Biennale Exhibition of Art as part of the Italian Pavilion. In 2009, he exhibited in Brazil at the MAC Niteroi Museum.

Besides his solo exhibitions, Fermariello is interested in land art. He has created some installations including Avviso ai naviganti (performed in Naples in 1999 and at Pier 17 in New York in 2004) and La Terra di Nessuno in Cuma (Naples) in 2014. Fermariello's works are permanently shown in several public collections: Capodimonte Museum in Naples; Terrae-Motus Foundation, Royal Palace Caserta; Museo Madre, Naples; Building One, Canary Wharf, London; BAG Bocconi Art Gallery, Bocconi University, Milan; Capodichino Airport, Naples.

Opposite:  
Sergio Fermariello, 2019





<b>Solo Exhibitions</b>		Collection of Contemporary Art of BAG, Bocconi Art Gallery, Milan	Il Capricorno Gallery, Venice	Ma l'amore no. Ricordando Lucio, Mimmo Scognamiglio, Naples
2020	Warriors, Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore		1992 Yvon Lambert Gallery, Paris	
2019	Flora Bigai Gallery, Pietrasanta, Lucca	2007 Fioretto Gallery, Padua	Il Capricorno Gallery, Venice	2003 Traits, Centre International D'Art Contemporain, Carros, France
2018	Avviso ai Naviganti Installation, Posillipo, Naples	2006 Buonanno Gallery, Mezzolombardo, Trento	Lucio Amelio Gallery, Naples	Risalto, Casale Monferrato (Alessandria)
	Villino del Balzo, Retrospective, San Martino V.C. (AV)	Erica Fiorentini Gallery, Roma	1991 Lucio Amelio Gallery, Naples	2002 Col Sale, In Arco Gallery, Torino
	Cone, Warriors 2018, Permanent Installation, Piazza Europa, San Martino V.C. (AV)	2005 Warriors, obtained a place in the permanent Collection of Contemporary Art of Capodimonte Museum, Naples	1990 Il Capricorno Gallery, Venice	Piazza Dante/ Le stanze dell'Arte, Libreria Pironti, Naples
2017	Writing Warriors, acquired by Museo Madre, Naples	Mimmo Scognamiglio Artecontemporanea, Naples	1989 Galerja Protiron, Split	2001 In riva al mare mai stanco, Napoli Berlino, Casina Pompeiana, Napoli
2016	Warriors, acquired by Naples-Capodichino International Airport, Naples	Ronchini Gallery, Terni	Lucio Amelio Gallery, Naples	Conversation/s, Musée Départemental de Gap, France
	PAC - Porto d'Arte Contemporanea, Acciaroli (Salerno)	2004 Museum Chartreuse Saint Jacques, Capri	1985 Start Gallery, Marigliano, Naples	2000 Stadt Museum Weimar, Bauhaus Universitat, Weimar
2015	The Brother Gallery, Lugano	Inox, Castel Sant'Elmo, Naples	<b>Group Exhibitions</b>	
	Museo Axel Munthe, Villa San Michele, Anacapri, Capri	Avviso ai Naviganti, Pier 17, New York	2018 In relazione, dialogo tra Jota Castro e Sergio Fermariello, Musia, Roma	Bandiere di maggio 2000, Piazza del Plebiscito, Naples
	Mediateca Marte, Cava dei Tirreni, Salerno	2003 Pietro Calamandrei Square Installation, Barilla Center, Parma	Collettiva di Natale- Tonelli Gallery, Milan	Arte in giro 2000, Ex Mattatoio, Rome
2014	La Terra di Nessuno, Land Art Perfomance, Castelvolturmo, Caserta	2002 Mudimadue Gallery, Milan	2016 Arte Cinema, Docu-Film La Terra di Nessuno International Festival of Film on Contemporary Art, Naples	Rien plus de rien, Musee de la Vallée, Barcellonette, France
2013	AR, Flora Bigai Contemporary Art, Pietrasanta, Lucca	Bum-Bum, permanent installation in the restaurant of the Consiglio Regionale della Campania, Naples	2015 Una collettiva, Tonelli Gallery, Milan	Cartolina per Napoli, Royal Palace, Naples
	ML Design Gallery, Antwerp	2001 Permanent Installation, Cilea Station	2014 Dentro e fuori la pelle, Museo Arcos, Benevento	Napoli/ Weimar andata e ritorno, Casina Pompeiana, Naples
	Warriors, acquired by Building 1, Canary Wharf, London	Naples Subway, Naples	2012 Senza Fine, Museo PLART, Naples	1999 Arte moltiplicata, Pinacoteca Comunale, Bagnacavallo, Ravenna
2012	Studio Trisorio, Naples	2000 Ronchini Gallery, Terni	2008 Agenore Fabbri Prize, Kunstlerhaus, Graz, Austria	Sulla Pittura, Artisti italiani sotto i quarant'anni, Conegliano Veneto (Treviso)
	Ronchini Gallery, London	Scognamiglio & Teano Gallery, Naples	Agenore Fabbri Prize, Stadtgalerie, Kiel, Germany	The Turn of the Century, In Arco Gallery, Turin
	Mitico Minimale, Galleria Civica d'Arezzo, Arezzo	Avviso ai Naviganti, Castello Aragonese di Baia, Naples	Signes de memoire, Le Maison des Arts, Carces, France	1998 Novecento Nudo, Museo del Risorgimento, Rome
2011	La Casa Rossa, Anacapri, Capri	1999 Avviso ai naviganti, Castel dell'Ovo, Naples	2007 Agenore Fabbri Prize, Museo della Permanente, Milan	Quels Dessins, Cloitre des Cordeliers, Tarascon, France
	Ronchini Gallery, Terni	Jan Wagner Gallery, Berlin	2006 C'era una volta il re, Museo Arcos, Benevento	Mito-velocità, Museo di Stato, San Marino
2009	Migranti, MAC, Museu de Arte Contemporanea, Niteroi	1997 Italian Institute of Culture, Koln	2005 Brevi- Dorazio- Fermariello, Centro Steccata Gallery, Parma	Opera in nero, Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea, San Martino Valle Caudina (Benevento)
	Palazzo delle Arti PAN, Naples	1996 Contemporanea 2, Mythology and Archetype, Villa Olmo, Como	56-esima edition Price Michetti, Francavilla al mare (Chieti)	Tracce significanti, Italian Art Nowadays, The J. F. Costoupoulos Foundation, Athens
2008	Flora Bigai Gallery, Pietrasanta, Lucca	Lucio Amelio Gallery, Naples	Le Clou, Ouvres du F.R.A.C. Provence Alpes- Cotes d'Azur, Nice, France	1997 Galleria Civica, Siracusa
	Ronchini Gallery, Terni	1995 Opus Alchemico, In Arco Gallery, Turin	Attraversamenti '05, Corvino+Multari, Fondazione Flash Art Museum, Narni (Terni)	Il giardino dei segni, Galleria Alberto Valerio, Brescia
	Niccoli Gallery, Parma	Opificio Contemporary Art, Benevento	2004 Sequence graphique, Lurs, France	Terrae Motus, Artissima, Lingotto, Turin
	Warriors, obtained a place in the permanent	Sergio Tossi Contemporary Art, Prato (Florence)		1996 Immagini Italiane, Medienmeile am Hafen, Dusseldorf
		1993 XLV International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, Italian pavilion		



	Il nibbio di Leonardo, Carpi (Modena)
	Antologia, Trevi Flash Art Museum, Trevi (Perugia)
	XII Quadriennale, Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome
1995	Mazzocchi Gallery, Parma
	Un cuore per amico, Palazzo della Triennale, Milan
	Dodici pittori italiani, Spazio Herno, Turin
	Libro d'artista, Chiesa San Severo al Pendino, Naples
	Biblioteca Comunale, Ponticelli (Naples)
1994	Neapolitan artists, Opera Gallery, Naples
	Il circolo vizioso, In Arco Gallery, Turin
1993	Ecbatana, Associazione Dioce, Turin
	Profil d'un galerie, LAC, Sigean, France
	Emergenze '93, Galleria Civica d'Arte contemporanea Trento
	Del mistero della terra, Casina Vanvitelliana, Bacoli (Naples)
	La linea dell'immagine, Associazione Culturale Piano Nobile, Ceppaloni (Benevento)
	Trismegisto, Lucio Amelio Gallery, Naples
1992	Cadencias, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo Sofia Imber, Caracas MAM, Bogota Centro Cultural Recoleta, Buenos Aires
	Les Pictographes, Musee des Sables d'Olonne, France
	3rd International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul
	Terrae-motus, Royal Palace, Caserta
1991	Magico primario, Galleria Comunale A. Bonzaghi Cento (Ferrara)
	Metropolis, Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin
	The ninety, Galleria Comunale d'arte Moderna, Bologna
	Intercity Tre, Bevilacqua La Masa Foundation, Venice
1990	Massimo Minimi Gallery, Brescia
	30th Anniversary Peter Styvesant Foundation, Holland
1989	Regina Blu, Frac, Marseille

### Awards

1989	Young Italian artists, First prize Saatchi & Saatchi, Palazzo delle Stelline, Milan
	Three winners of Saatchi & Saatchi prize, Sala 1, Rome

Founded in 2005, with spaces in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Singapore, Richard Koh Fine Art is committed to the promotion of Southeast Asian contemporary art on regional and international platforms. Centred around a core belief in developing an artist’s career, the gallery looks to identify understated, albeit promising practices, and providing it opportunities to flourish. Through its regular exhibition cycles, print & digital publications and cross-border gallery collaborations, Richard Koh Fine Art engages the art community with the aim of developing regional and intercultural dialogue.



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