



left page: **Figure in Arcade I (2017)** - acrylic on canvas (170.2 x 130.8 cm) right page: **Figure in Arcade II (2017)** - acrylic on canvas (170.2 x 130.8 cm)

16 **FILAMENTS OF PAINT**

creation **Gail Rothschild**

photos **Sam Monaco**

text **T'ai Smith**



Slowing down to study the details of brushwork in a painting, or the fragile lines that have been carefully applied with graphite to paper, or the unruly filaments that protrude from an ancient sliver of cloth: these decelerated processes, it seems, are remarkably comparable. Such an insight flushes to the surface while examining the work of Gail Rothschild.

Looking at her older drawings from the Fabrications series, or the more recent Figure in Arcade I (2017), the minugia of each

square centimeter of her work reveals a universe of form only after moving (at the pace of something like a snail) between a focused, close-up examination of the object's nano-texture to the far-sighted view of the picture's figure from ten or twenty feet away. In this transition – where the haptic meets the optic, touch overlaps with vision – time dissolves to the imperceptible. "Coptic" or Dead Sea artifacts from the past, studied closely and with care, become material things of the here and now.



Like the delicate remnants of an ancient artifact, Rothchild's finely spun threads appear to conjoin and unravel simultaneously.

Rothchild's painterly and graphical marks, it could be said, have created a language, a *textus*, or what some might have called, once upon a time, a *style* (after *stylus*) – two Latin words that similarly migrated from material to rhetorical usage sometime between Ancient Rome and the 18th century. But her marks are not made from the imprints of a wedge-like

instrument into a surface of clay and used to create a clearly coded system. Rather, they reveal what already speaks in the cloth (perhaps the canvas): the structure, the grid, is only as meaningful as its *textura*, or material utterance.

Nevertheless, her shorthand scripts (which can only be made with the finest brush and the most distilled acrylic paint) become legible as a kind of language with a bit of distance. By walking back, we recognize a pattern (perhaps an image or



story) out of what are, in proximity, just a plurality of molecular abstractions, tiny calligraphic marks. Hence, each painting, each piece of cloth, at once foregrounds the regularity of the overlapping structure and manifests the friction caused by agitating and aligning filaments into yarn. Like a language, the threads emerge out of incoherent sounds and skeins of paint into a complex, methodical system.

Rothschild's oeuvre invokes the digital coordinates of warp meeting weft, the matrix of yarn. And yet it also draws our attention to the insubordinate nature of this woven fragment, rebelling after centuries of wear.