

Nothingness as a State of Mind

The texts that follow are excerpts from a small book, “Cycling and Nothingness” that we created earlier this year. The book explores “nothingness as a state of mind”, a state that is facilitated by cycling, in this case in the Mojave Desert and in the mountains of California’s Sierra Nevada.

In “nothingness”, a sort of bliss, induced by the cadence and effort of cycling, and the sheer vastness of the desert, flows from the letting go of self-awareness, conceptual thought and “earthly desires”. What is left is an appreciation not only of our condition as a particle in time – with immense geological times laid bare in the surroundings – and space – through immeasurable galactic night skies – but also a feeling of connectedness with an incomprehensibly larger “sum”.

Texts

Tristan Laflamme

Art

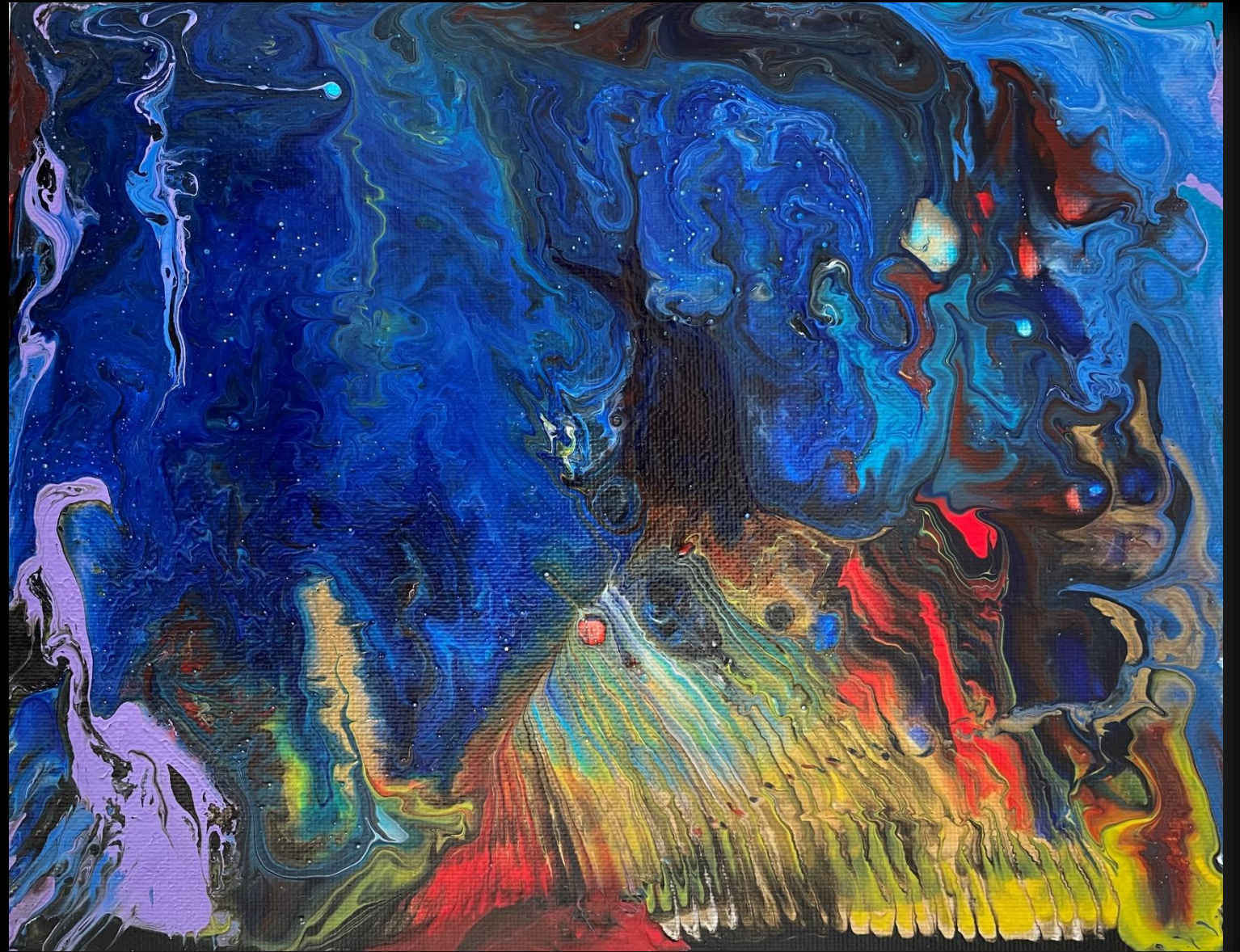
Marzia Martina, PhD

Alone with my ridiculous little light in the vastness of the desert on a biting cold October night, I am riding into nothingness. The next human is an hour away, asleep in Stovepipe Wells. I could not possibly have a bigger smile on my face!

I woke up at two o'clock, leaving the murder of crows, quiet like a line of dreaming Buddhas in the solitary tree by the saloon, to ride away into the night – into perfect, solid blackness except for the little candle of my light and, when I turn my head upward, the string of pearls attached above.

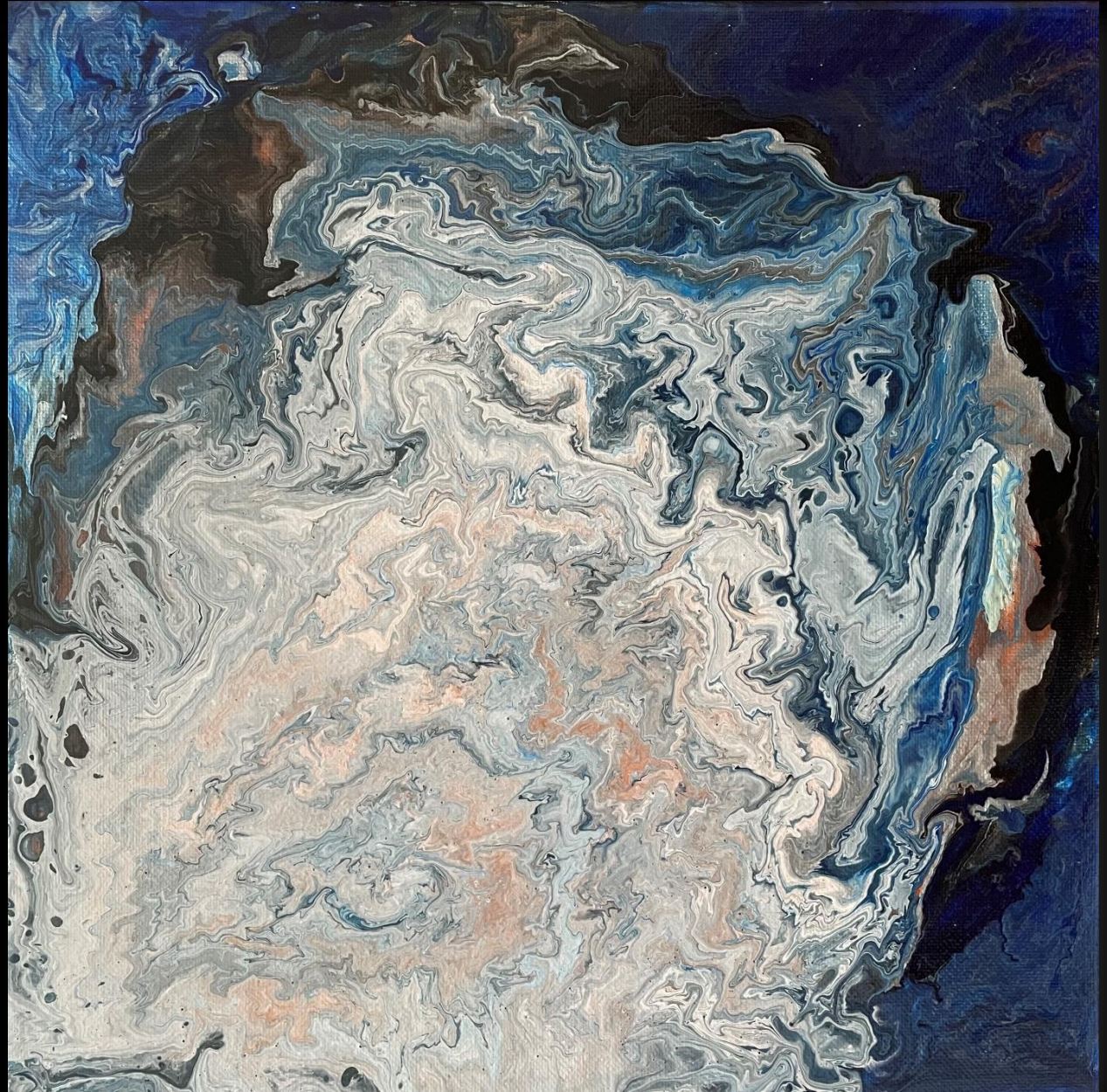
Occasionally, my ecstatic smile is suddenly replaced by a dark, primeval fear that shoots up from the core of my being. I can't help it. There *is* something about the night that transcends reason. My infinite smallness leaves me entirely defenceless against everything that could be lurking in the dark. Half-mad, I shout at the top of my lungs. And the raging smile comes back, more alive than ever in the cold air rushing by.

After a long time in this insanity, without a sound I open the door of our motel room again, and go lie under the covers, letting the warmth my wife has gently nurtured penetrate my bones.



If nothing subsists
No trace of my steps
No echo of my passage
No memory at all of me
I will be happy

Even if my journey
Was remembered forever
The mountain ahead
Would be exactly the same



In the House of Seldom Seen Slim and Shorty Harris

This wealth is beyond description. The floor of the house is made of fine sand. The roof is a stupefying heap of stars. Throughout flows the torrid breath of the desert.

The desert has room only for what is most essential. With shells and fossils running down every naked cliff, the immense geological times that have preceded us stripped bare, it reminds us we are alive only for a day. The pinks and the purples that greet us when we awake, the blistering yellows of midday, the ultimate conflagration of deep reds and dark blues of the dying light, all agree.

Many prospectors came here to find treasures. But a few went through the full arc of earthly desires only to return to the beginning, happy with just a blanket and water. For them, gold's real value was in bringing them here.

