

**Jonny Niesche**

***Fat Lava***

**03 May - 07 June 2025**

## It's Getting Ugly

Disgust is ... evidence of the existence of the fundamentals of art; that representation has the power to frame and hold disgust, to lessen or even completely transmute its affect. But to whom is this evidence displayed? What is it evidence for?

John Macarthur, *The Picturesque*

Si vis vitam, para mortem (if you want life, prepare for death.) What is at stake here is what we should call, not the life, but the vivacity of the subject... Vivacity is the capacity of the subject to endure, indeed, to enjoy, a reality which includes his own death, without retreating behind a defensive wall.

Mark Cousins, *The Ugly*

When you entered this gallery, you encountered a soundtrack, a colour palette, and – perhaps – a faint sense of foreboding. There may have been a slight discomfort in your belly, a touch of breathlessness, a passing worry about the rhythm of your heart, a light-headedness when the image before you moved. And for a moment you may have turned away: quickly glanced at the concrete floor beneath your feet or the familiar face of your companion, sipped your drink, blinked hard.

Now imagine Jonny Niesche as a 15-year-old, traipsing around a second-hand shop and coming across some pots. He hates them. These pots are too material, too much. They appear deformed and unstable. Their glazes, in the most intense oranges, yellows and browns, erupt and ooze all over the place. They are surrounded by the smells of age and failure, and they are ugly. They have rightfully been discarded and left to moulder.

This encounter happens at a moment when his aesthetic preferences are only just beginning to form. He has already seen things he knows are beautiful, like the Sistine Chapel. That was no ordinary feeling. But this too is no ordinary feeling. It's something like a test. These objects hold space in a different way. To recognise this feeling and utilise it will mean to know what can be valued, to understand the economy not only of beauty, but of ugliness too.

In *Fat Lava*, we are immersed in the colour palette Niesche identified in post-war West German ceramics, the palette that at first repelled and disgusted him. It is arranged as an experience of light underscored by Mark Pritchard's sound, a sense of being in that volcanic glaze as it flows. There is a reflection that is sometimes distorted and sometimes clear, that shudders and pulses and threatens to break from its frame. There are colours pushed to the very edge of saturation, densely hued to feel thick as clay. And there is Niesche's ability to turn this unsettling palette into beautiful paintings, to control its eruptions and oozes through the rigours of form and frame. As John Macarthur argues above, this is one way to overcome disgust: to frame the encounter and put it to work aesthetically. It is presented to us as a new visual experience without a trace of the dust and decrepitude of the original.

And yet, why would Niesche revisit this memory? West German pottery is, of course, not to everyone's taste, but what exactly was so repellent? Perhaps what Niesche experienced as ugly was an awareness of the passage of time. These objects, he would later discover, had once been valued but became outmoded and obsolete. Perhaps this experience was a harbinger of his own future: the art he could not yet know he would make flashing before him as abandoned. Art is forever caught in cycles of taste, popularity, and saturation. And Niesche does not want his work to go the way of those pots: collecting dust along with other discarded objects. But confronting the implications of that dreaded feeling now, giving in to it and reliving it with us, asking us to come into that apprehension with him? This is not only an aesthetic project.

At the end of his third lecture on the ugly, Mark Cousins notes that Freud, reflecting on the psychic state of Europe after the First World War, sensed one positive – having been so close to death and annihilation had transformed what it felt like to be alive. In that great vulnerability, one could find a matching vitality. We may not (yet) be at war or living in its craters and immediate fall-out. But, as we join Niesche in revisiting his harbinger, we may recognise our selves. We know what it is to anticipate our own end, whether professionally, physically or psychically. We know what it is to live with that sense of foreboding. It is tempting to tune out that ugliness, to sip drinks and blink hard, to look away. And yet, along with the artist, for a moment, we could emerge from behind that defensive wall. Into a vital reality.

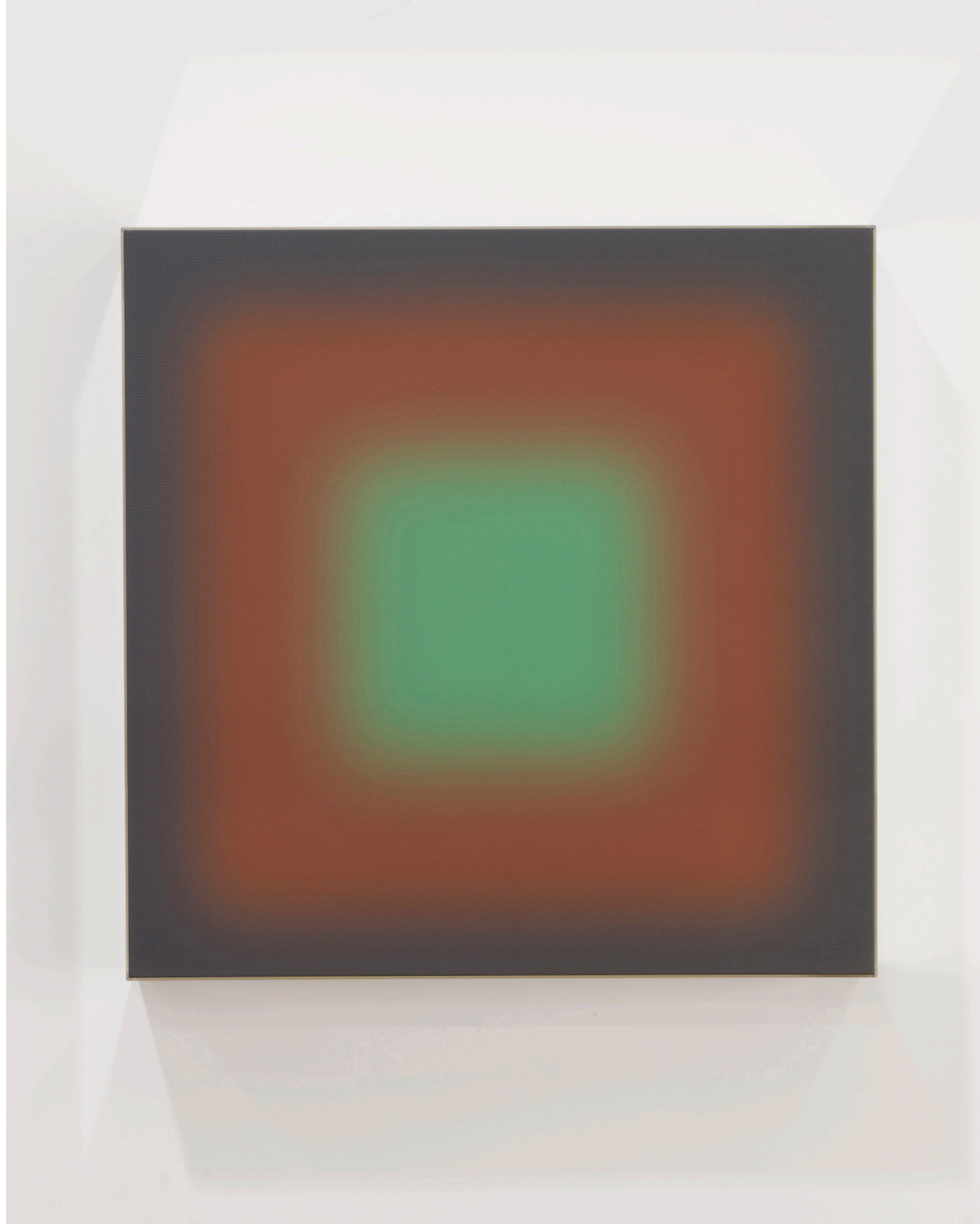
Charles Rice and Mikhaela Rodwell

Epigraphs:

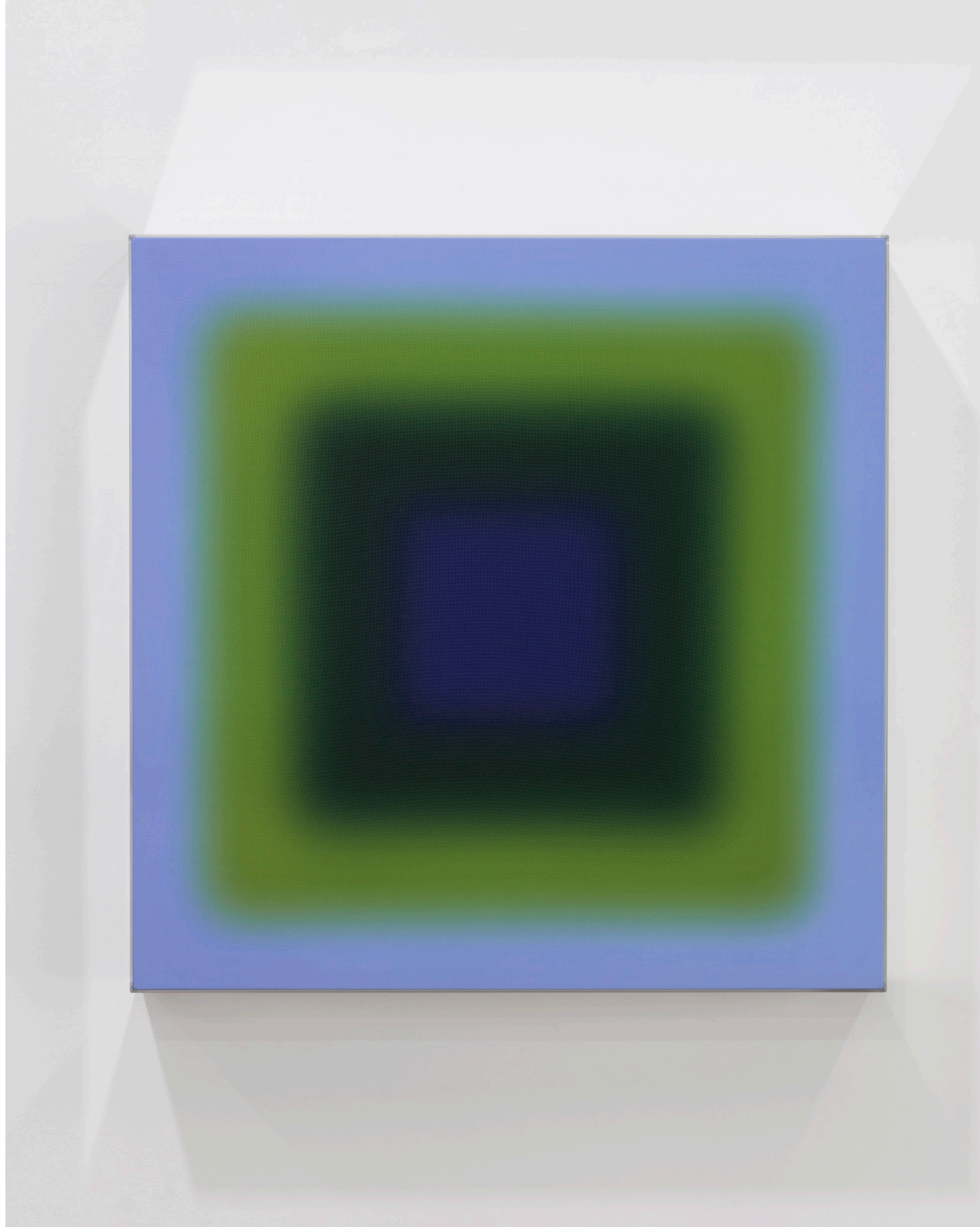
John Macarthur, *The Picturesque: Architecture, Disgust and other Irregularities* (London: Routledge, 2007), 72.

Mark Cousins, *The Ugly, Parts I, II, III* (Santiago: Ediciones ARQ, 2020), 51.

Jonny Niesche  
*Barium Dreaming (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$13,500 incl. GST

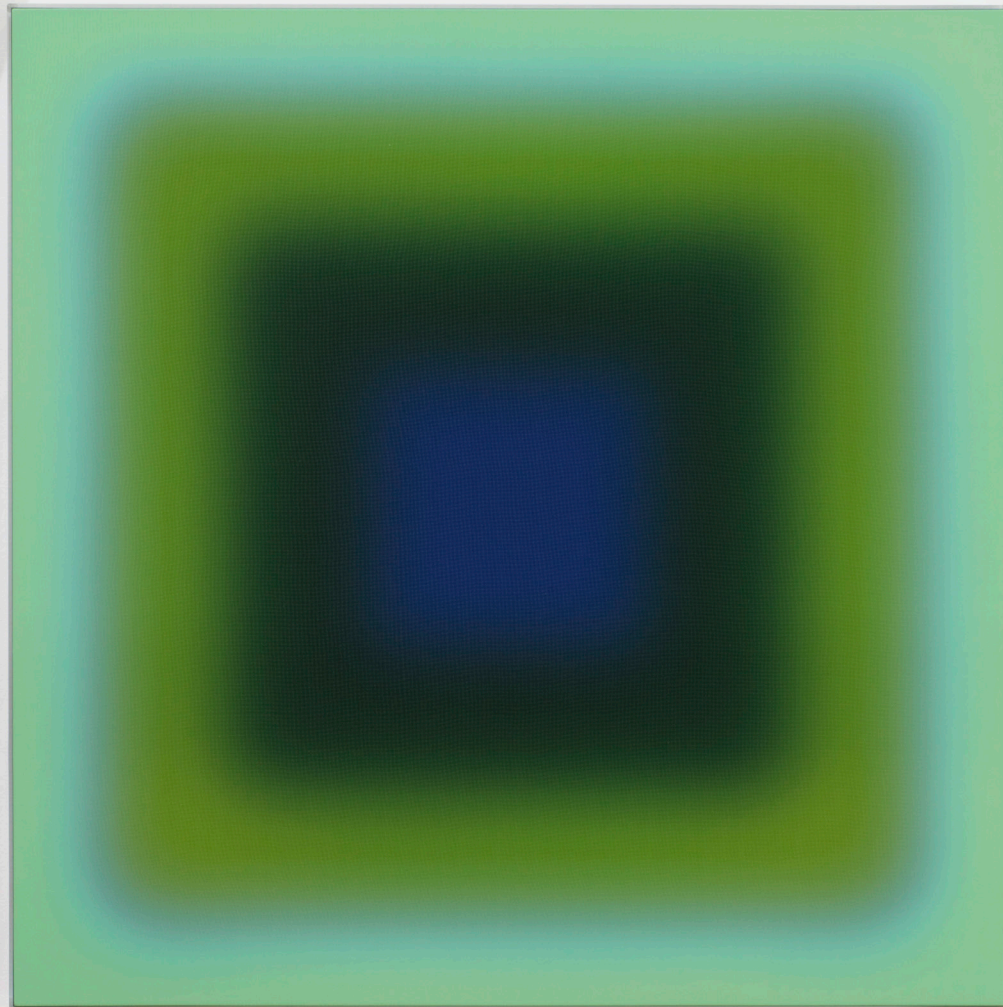


Jonny Niesche  
*Barium (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$13,500 incl. GST





Jonny Niesche  
*Barium Firecracker (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$13,500 incl. GST

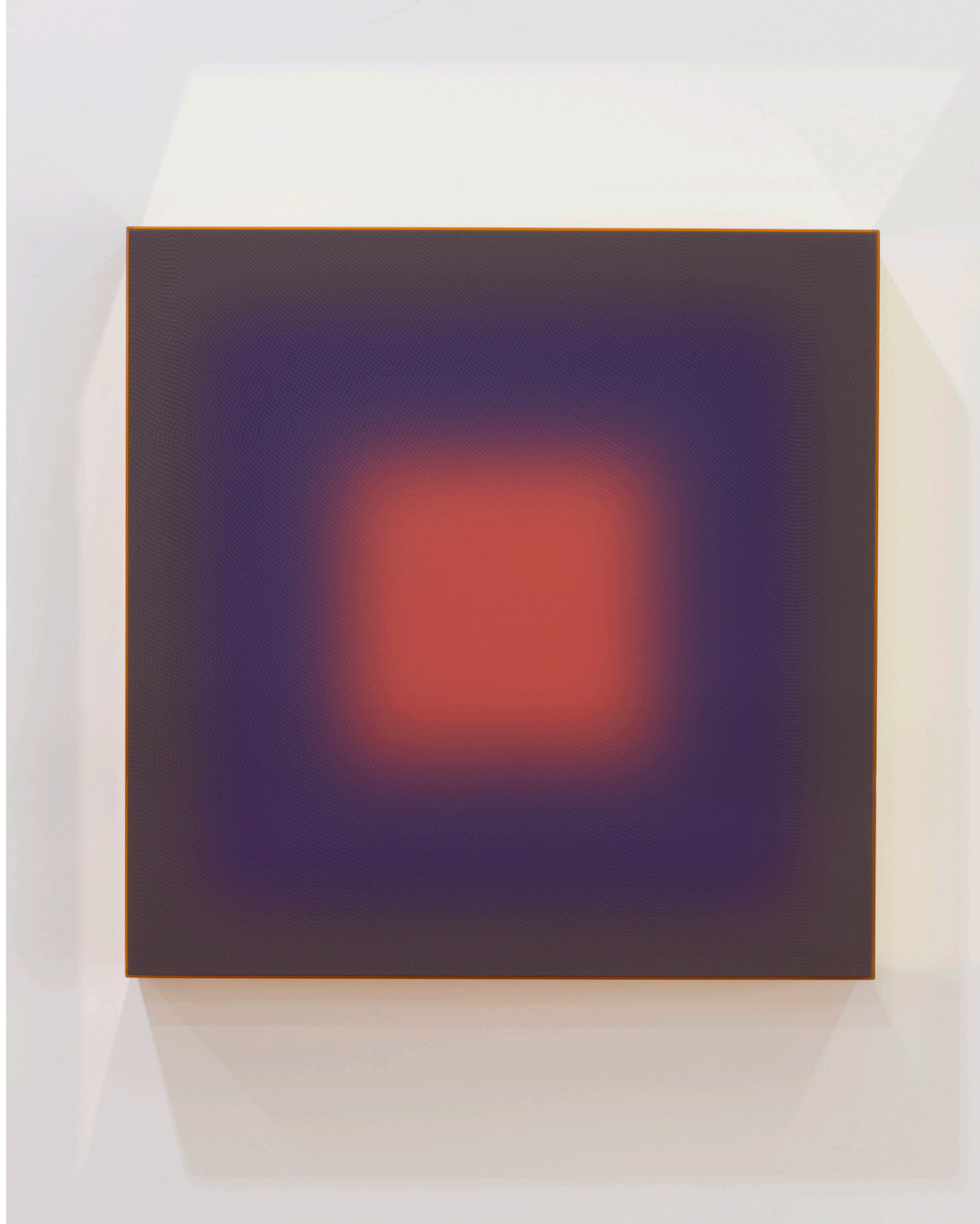


Jonny Niesche  
*Cobalt Dreaming (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$13,500 incl. GST





Jonny Niesche  
*Cobalt Oxide Dreaming (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Gold acrylic mirror  
70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$13,500 incl. GST

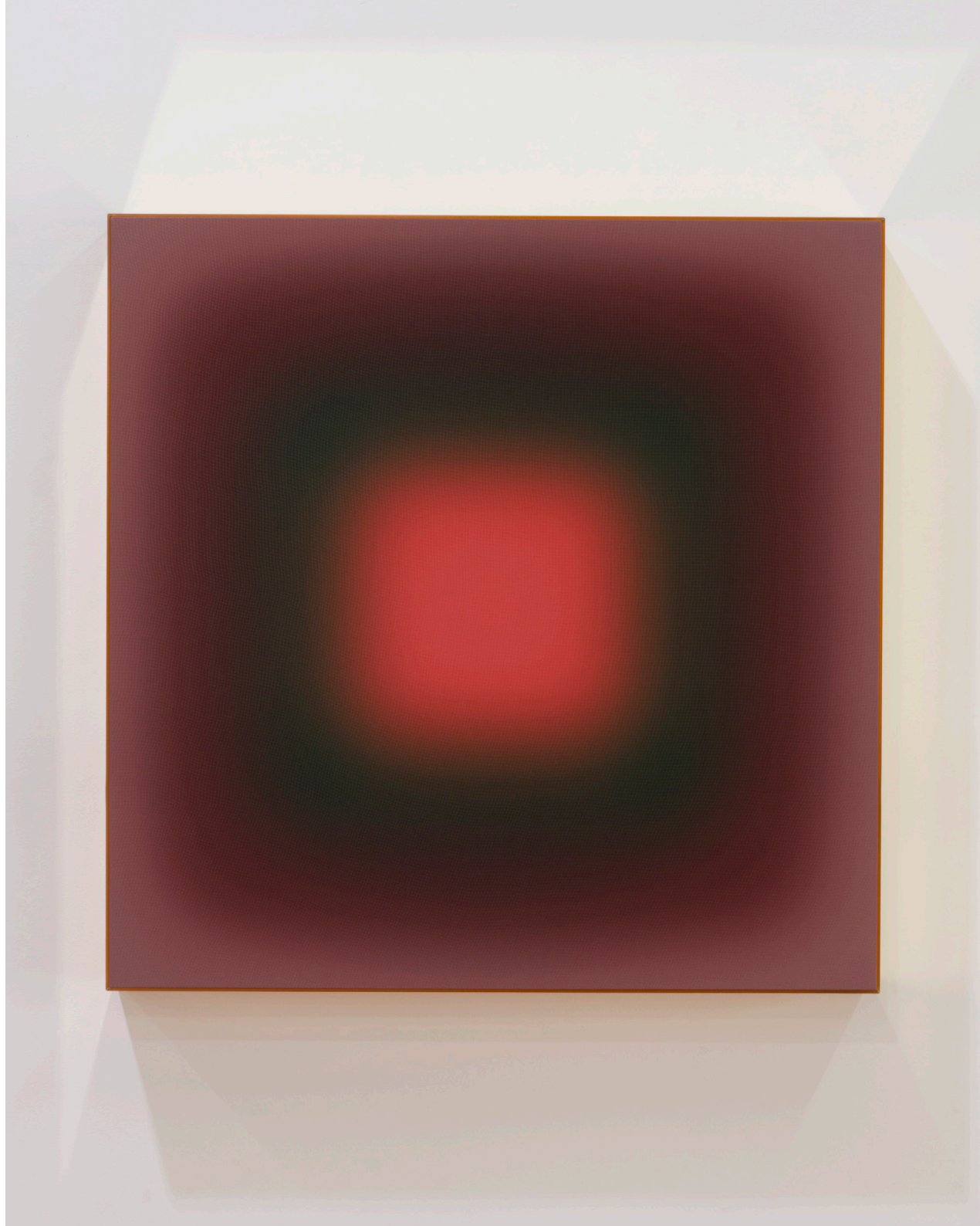




Jonny Niesche  
*Deep Hotpot Surge in Amber (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$13,500 incl. GST

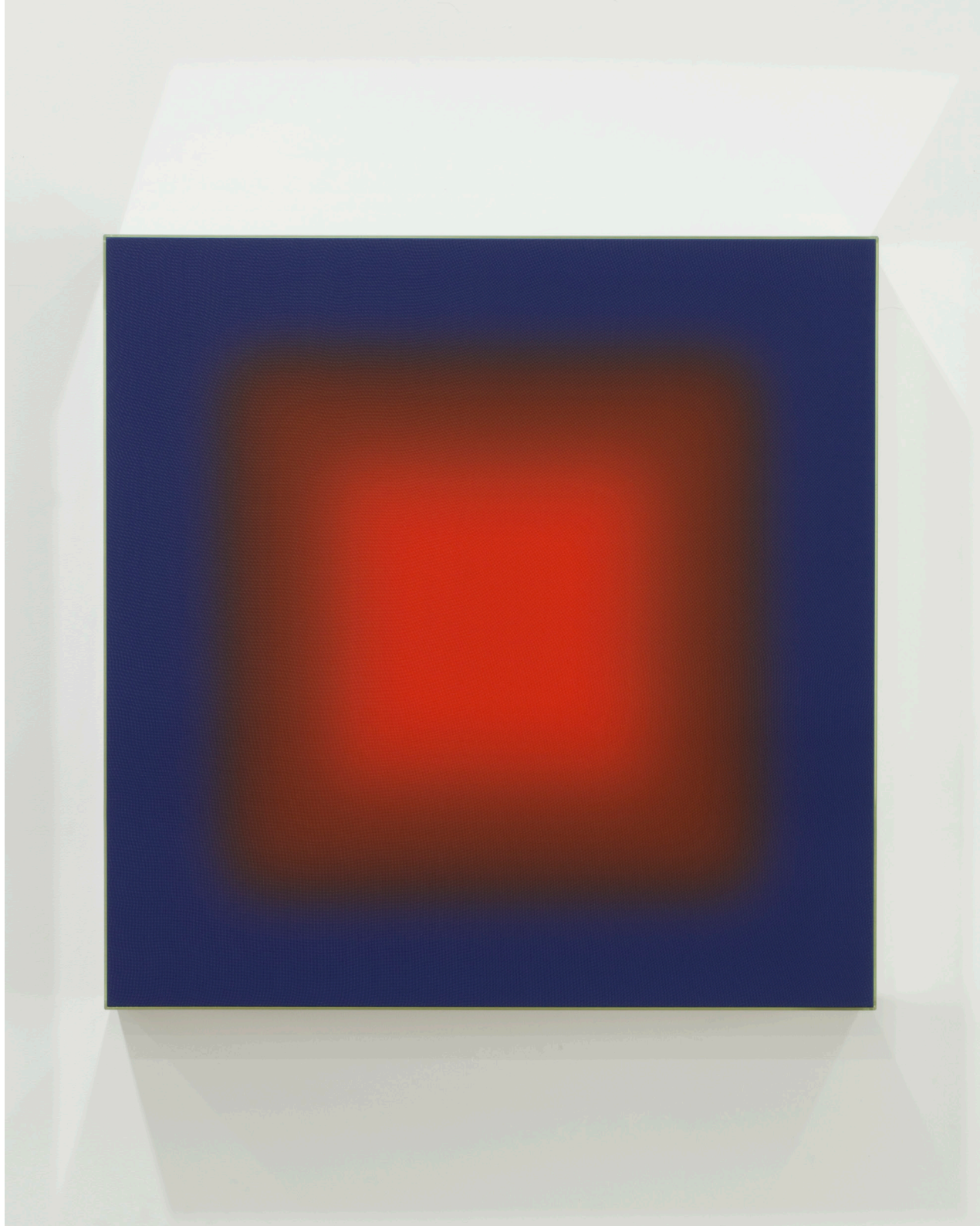


Jonny Niesche  
*Vulkano (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Gold acrylic mirror  
70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$13,500 incl. GST





Jonny Niesche  
*Fat Fire Oxide (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$13,500 incl. GST





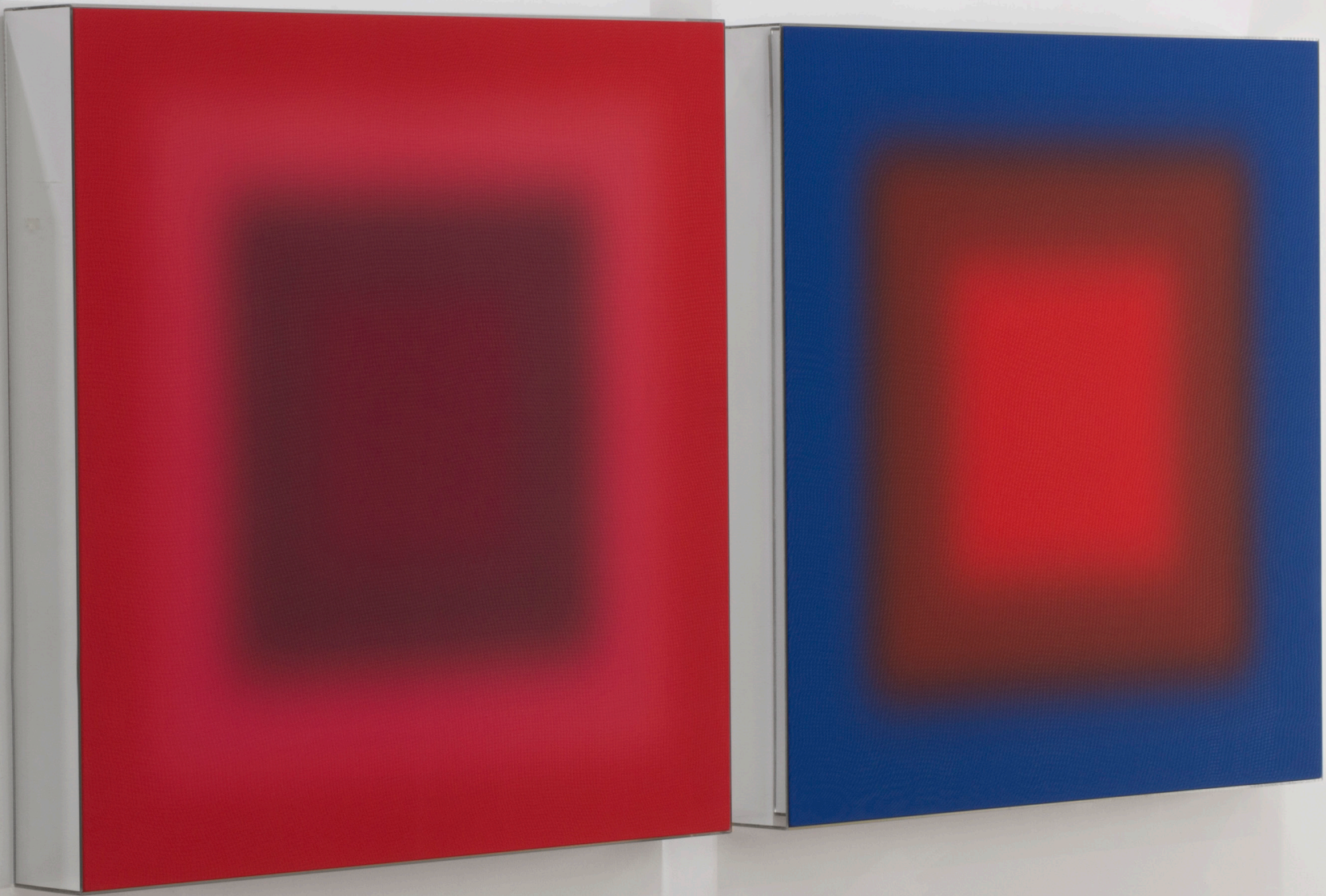
Jonny Niesche  
*Mustard Hotpot (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$13,500 incl. GST



Jonny Niesche  
*Vulcanic Drift (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$13,500 incl. GST







Jonny Niesche  
*Fat Lava (small study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
Diptych, each work 70h x 70w x 9d cm  
NZD \$22,000 incl. GST



Jonny Niesche  
*Barium (medium study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
101h x 101w x 9d cm  
NZD \$20,000 incl. GST



Jonny Niesche  
*Barium Firecracker (medium study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
101h x 101w x 9d cm  
NZD \$20,000 incl. GST



Jonny Niesche  
*Colbalt Dreaming (medium study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Gold acrylic mirror  
101h x 101w x 9d cm  
NZD \$20,000 incl. GST





Jonny Niesche  
*Colbalt Oxide Dreaming (medium study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Gold acrylic mirror  
101h x 101w x 9d cm  
NZD \$20,000 incl. GST



Jonny Niesche  
*Deep Hotpot Surge (medium study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Silver acrylic mirror  
101h x 101w x 9d cm  
NZD \$20,000 incl. GST



Jonny Niesche  
*Vulcanic Drift (medium study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, Gold acrylic mirror  
101h x 101w x 9d cm  
NZD \$20,000 incl. GST

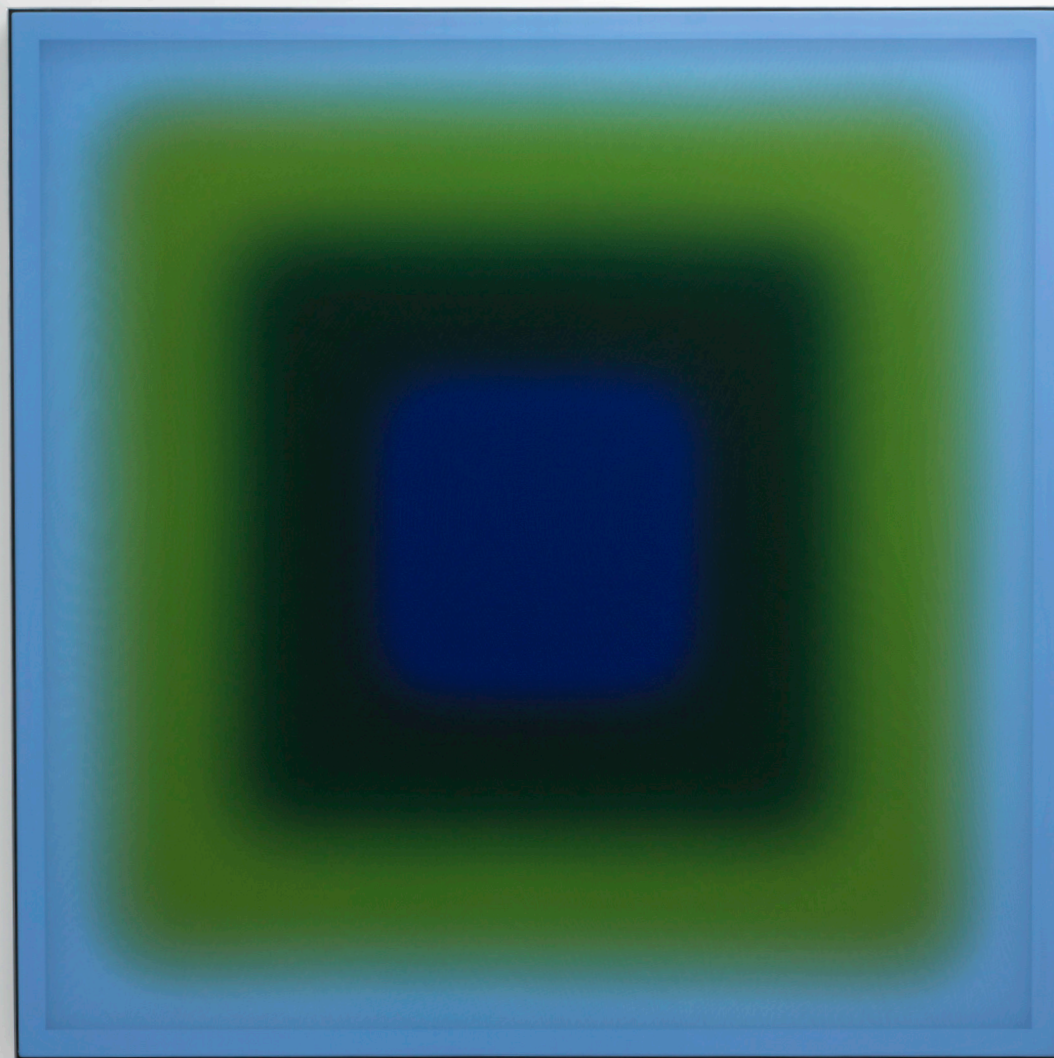




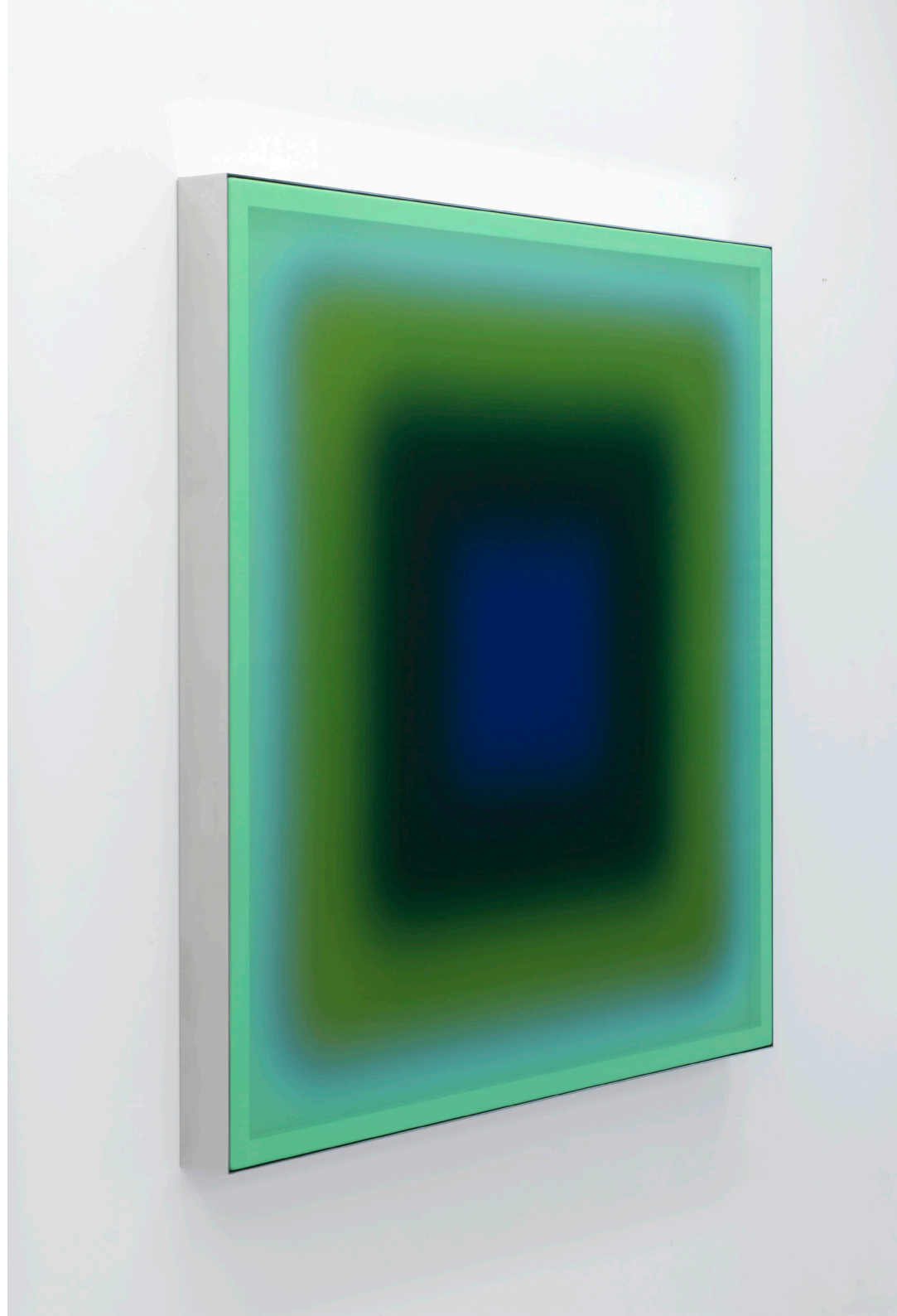
Jonny Niesche  
*Vulkano (medium study)*, 2025  
Voile, MDF, rose gold acrylic mirror  
101h x 101w x 9d cm  
NZD \$20,000 incl. GST



Jonny Niesche  
*Barium*, 2025  
Voile, mirror polished stainless steel and aluminium  
150h x 150w x 10d cm  
NZD \$36,000 incl. GST



Jonny Niesche  
*Barium Firecracker*, 2025  
Voile, mirror polished stainless steel and aluminium  
150h x 150w x 10d cm  
NZD \$36,000 incl. GST

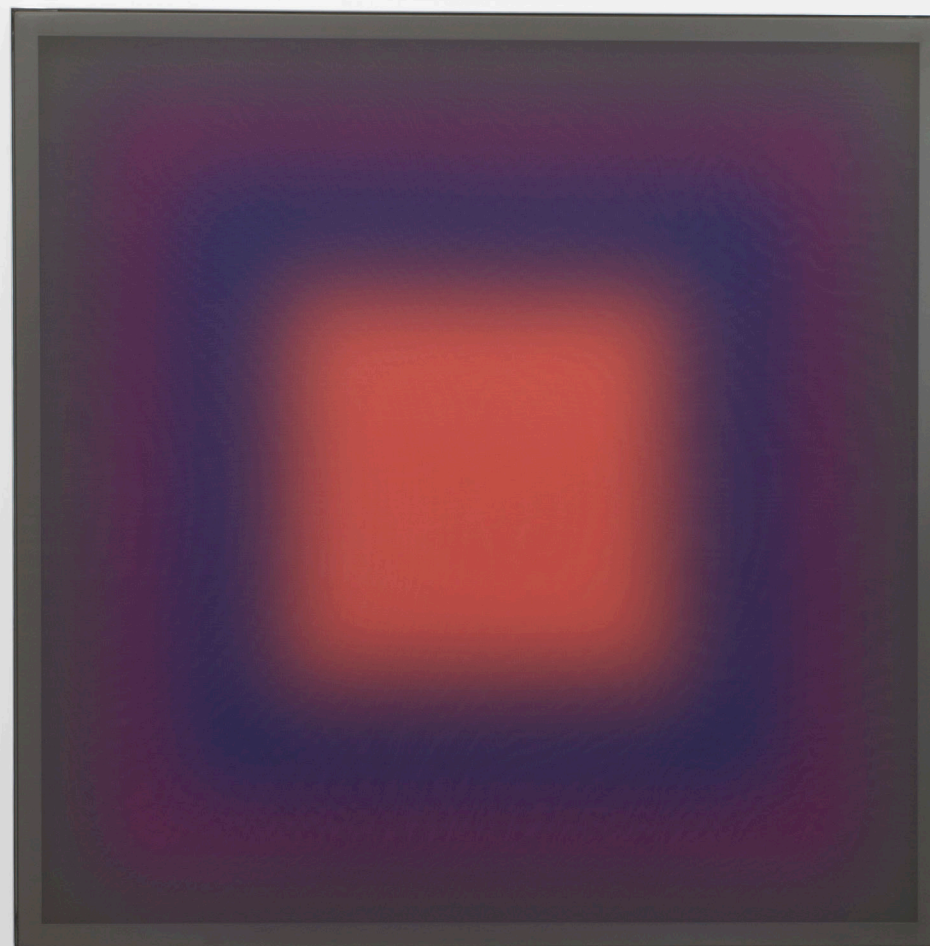


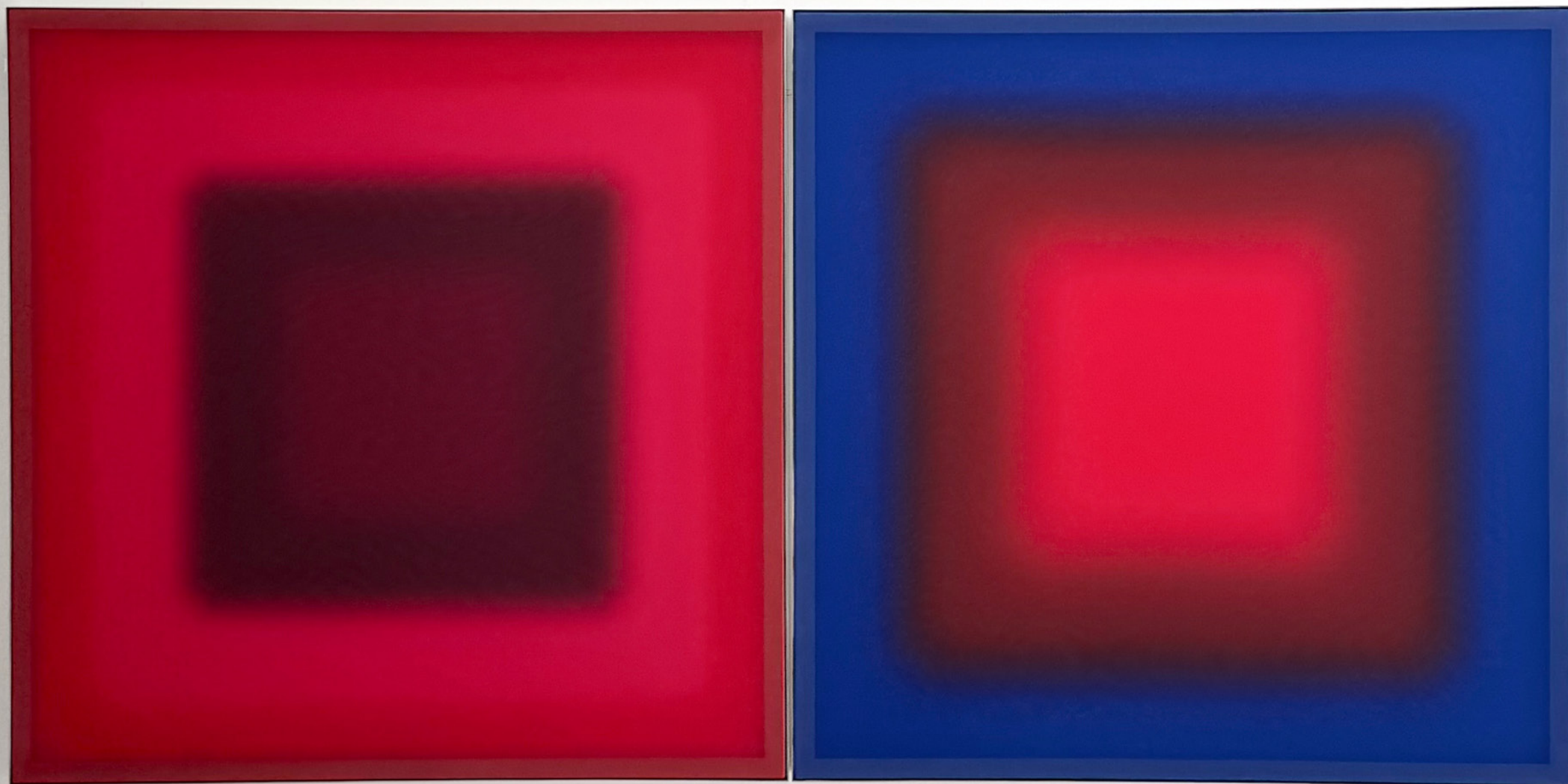


Jonny Niesche  
*Deep Hotpot Surge*, 2025  
Voile, mirror polished stainless steel and aluminium  
150h x 150w x 10d cm  
NZD \$36,000 incl. GST



Jonny Niesche  
*Vulcanic Drift*, 2025  
Voile, mirror polished stainless steel and aluminium  
150h x 150w x 10d cm  
NZD \$36,000 incl. GST





Jonny Niesche  
*Fat Lava*, 2025  
Voile, mirror polished stainless steel and aluminium  
Diptych, each work 150h x 150w x 10d cm  
NZD \$65,000 incl. GST