

## Pattern recognition

Philip Taaffe's latest all-over paintings are inspired by the war in Syria and the brilliance of Matisse. By **Paul Laster**

One of the most significant painters of his generation, Philip Taaffe has been exhibiting since the early 1980s. A master of mechanical processes, he mixes cross-cultural references in patterned compositions that bring the past into the present. With a new show in Bushwick, Taaffe weighs in on the role of ritual in art and his debt to the French master of the cutout.

Art

### What does painting mean to you?

It's a personal artistic interaction with the history of images and a way of creating an intimate pictorial reality that can be shared with the world. I often think of it as a liturgical practice, as a form of sacred theater.

You recently wrote an essay on Matisse's cutouts, in which

“Painting is about capturing light. Light is the crux of the matter.”

you state how they're “as brilliant for their economy of means as they are for their vibrancy and energy of expression.” You also singled out their razor-sharpness and crystalline light. How do these qualities apply to your own work?

I use a limited vocabulary of signs or elements. And for me, razor-sharpness creates a sense of infinitude. It corresponds to how our eyes shift focus and emphasis. As for light, painting is primarily about capturing light, which is critical to the power of a work. Light is the crux of the matter.

### What are some of the things you explore in this new work?

I visited the Syrian city of Aleppo once a long time ago, and I've been quite disturbed by its destruction, thanks to the conflict there and other parts of the Middle East. I've dedicated one painting, *Nocturne with Architectural Fragments*, to the people in Aleppo who've suffered such a decimation of



their cultural and historical heritage. I'm meditating on that quite extensively.

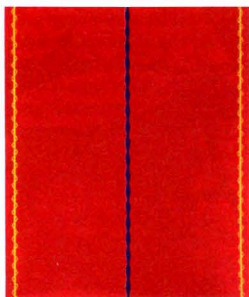
You've referred to painting as a journey. How has your own journey progressed, especially

### since turning 60?

I've always tried to avoid a sense of closure and keep work open to new possibilities. I'm confident I'll continue to do so.

**Philip Taaffe opens Sat 17 at Lushing Augustine (see Brooklyn).**

## TAAFFE FEST *Four paintings that define the artist's cross-cultural style*



**WE ARE NOT AFRAID, 1985**



**OLD CAIRO, 1989**



**CAPE VITUS, 2006-07**



**ENCHIRIDION, 2014**