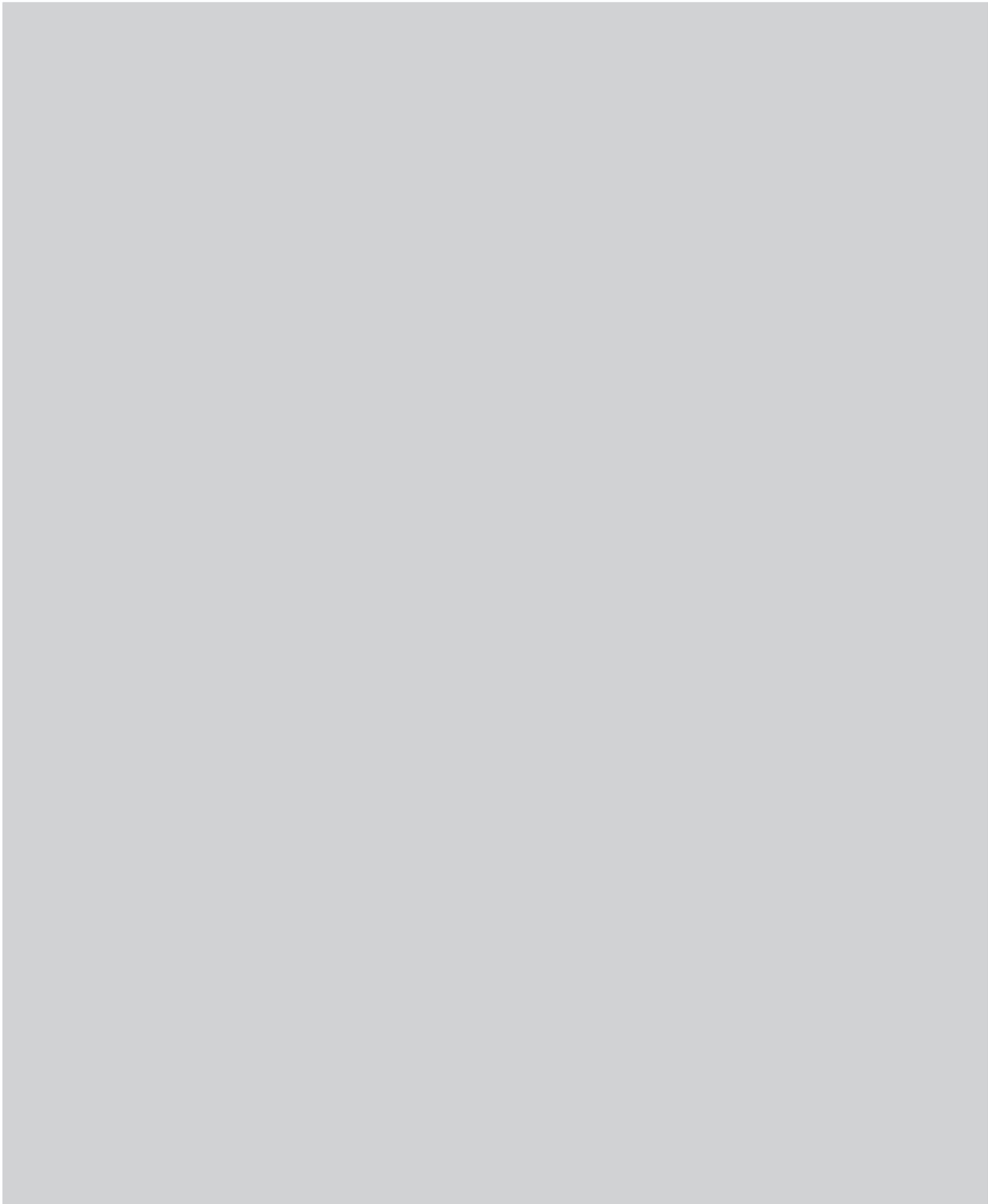
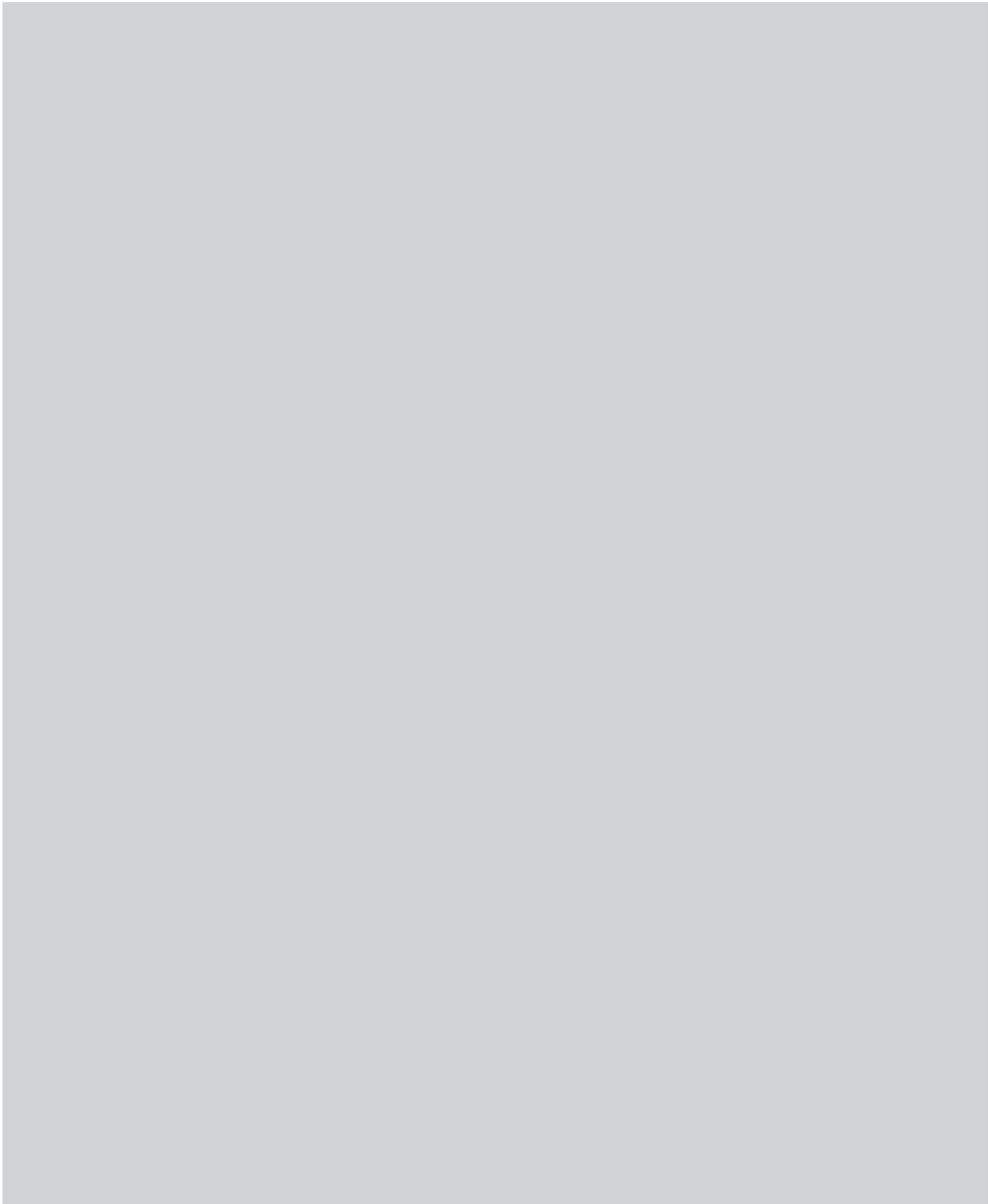
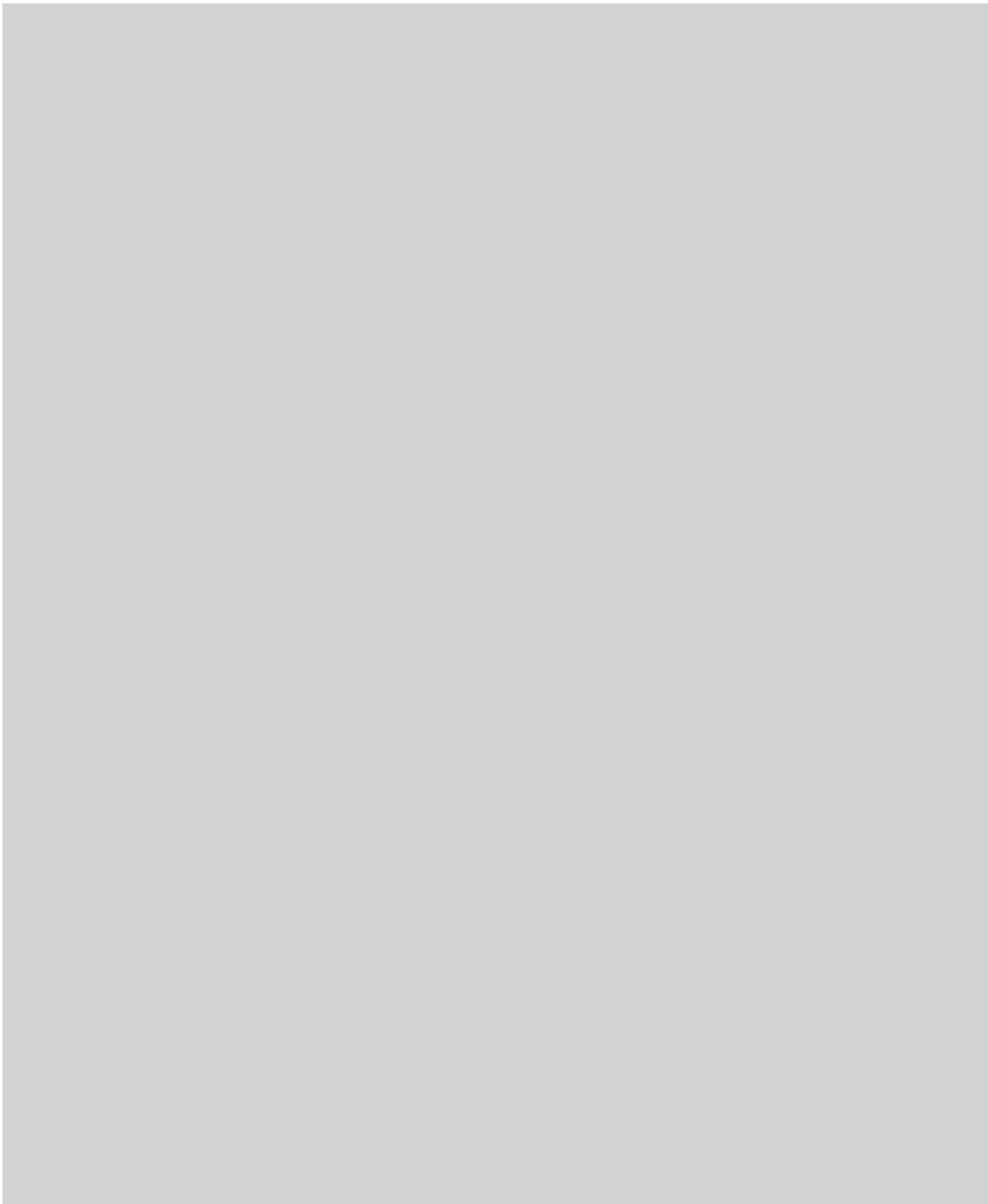


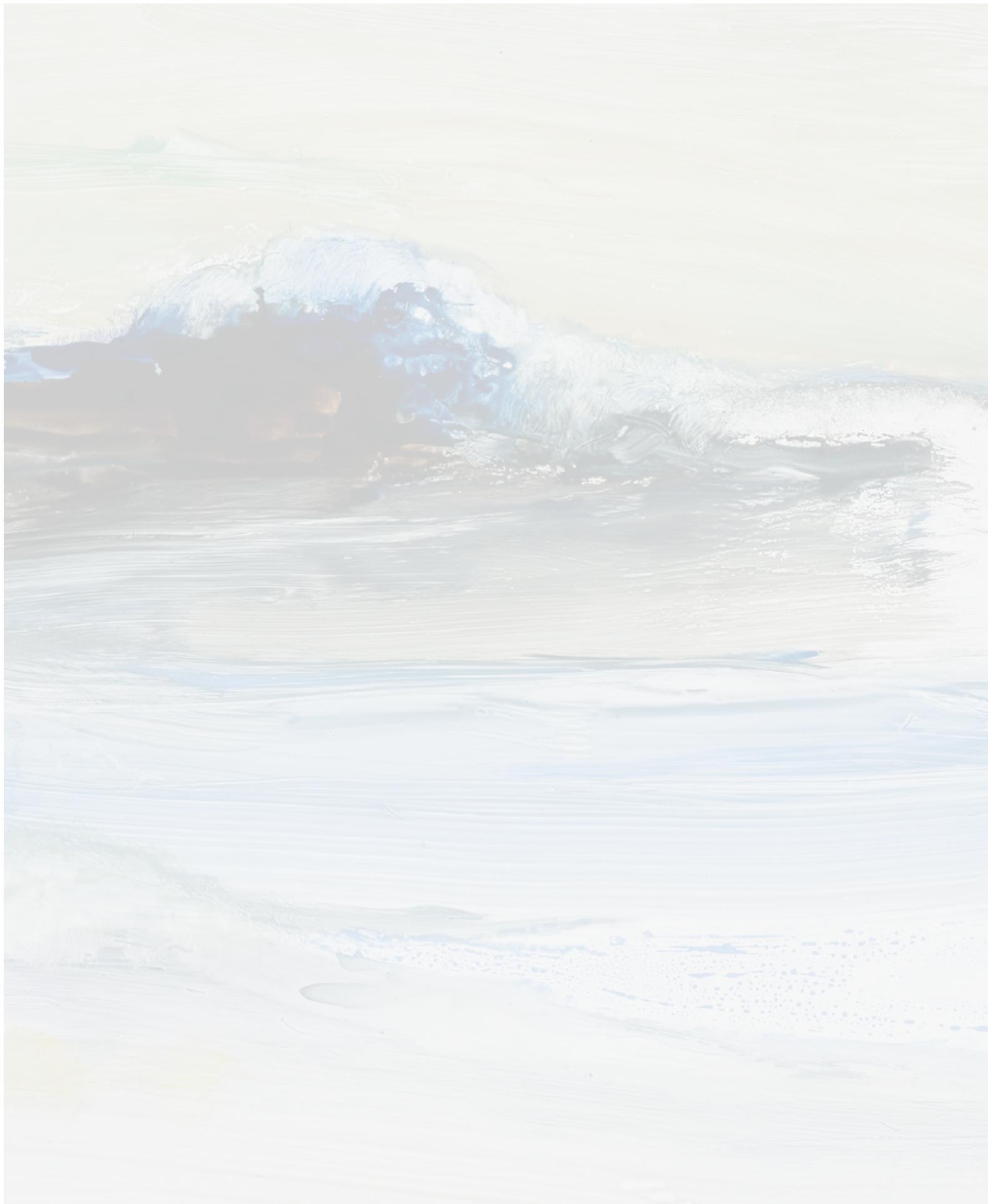
ILANA MANOLSON

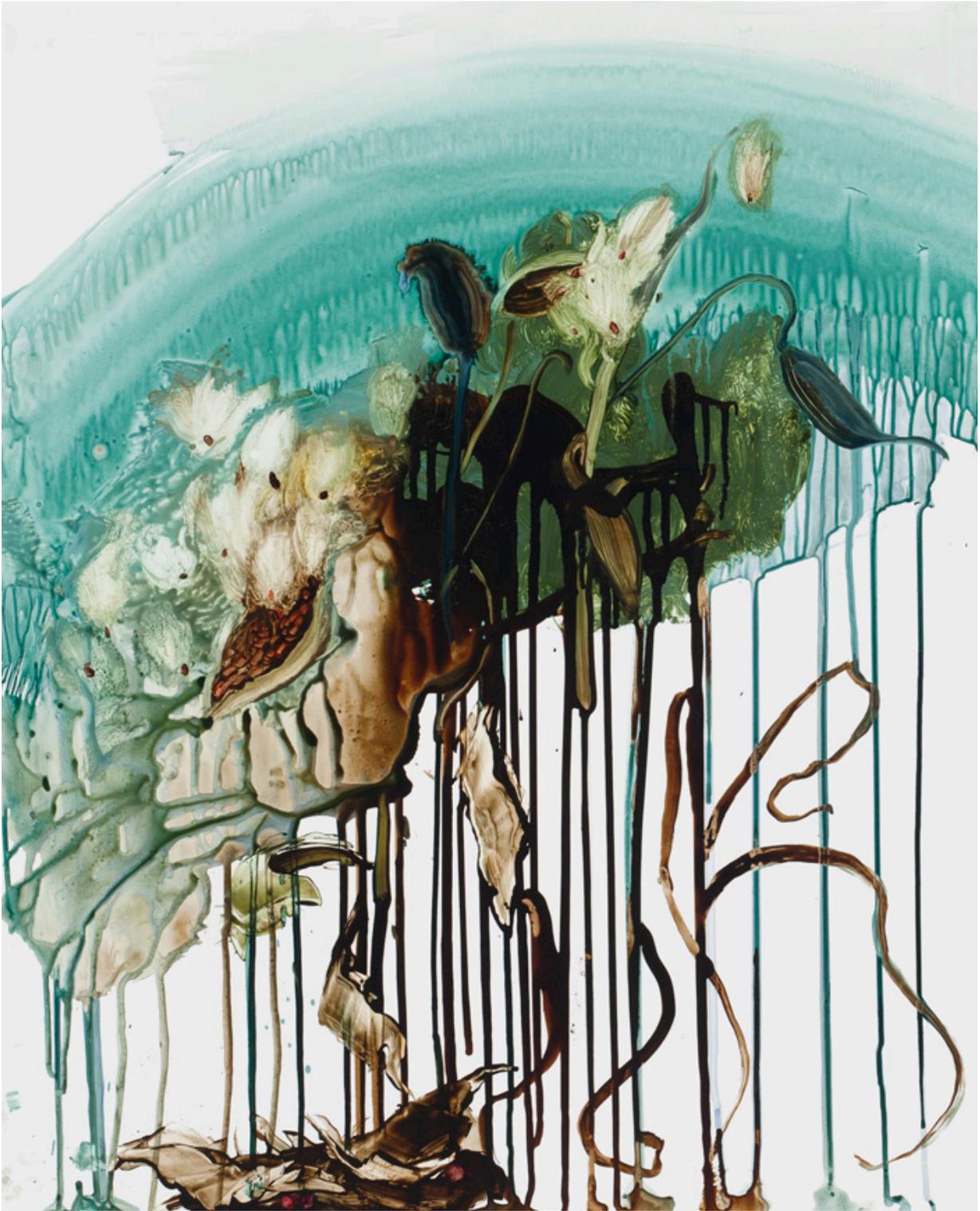












1 *Successor*

ILANA MANOLSON



2 *Mercurial*

ILANA MANOLSON
SUM OF

ESSAY BY
Stephanie Buhmann

JASON MCCOY GALLERY

NEW YORK

Ilana Manolson: Sum of

by Stephanie Buhmann

A botanist and former naturalist for Parks Canada, Ilana Manolson walks through nature on nearly a daily basis. While she used to paint directly from life for years, her recent works are primarily made from recollection. They aim to merge and connect many miles of disparate stretches of landscape, fusing a variety of impressions into a singular image. Skillfully layered, Manolson's subjects range from views of epic expanse to close studies of nature's intricate details. Many of these she observes by revisiting particular places repeatedly, making the passing of time a central notion of her work and with that the fragility of existence.

It is due to the fact that her compositions are made from memory that another aspect gains importance: subjectivity. In the studio, Manolson edits her experiences and combines glimpses of her visual recollections with her knowledge of the topic. Free to associate and elaborate, she collages information. By the time she makes her first mark, the collected images have become detached from their original context. In a sense, they have been liberated from exact locations or seasonal specifications. Stripped of such concrete indicators, they appear timeless and become iconic representations of nature. These paintings are not about an individual place but rather about the idea of one.

In many of Manolson's paintings, sizable swatches of the original landscape might be missing, while other details take on an exaggerated role. In *Edited Remembering*, it is the rushing water that appears as nearly a wash of plain white while a stone and its shadow are carefully rendered with fine detail. In addition, some compositions, such as *Sum of* and *Link*, obviously tie together observations made in different places, from varying perspectives, and perhaps over different periods of time. Nevertheless, every detail remains connected, even leaning on each other in an intricate web of forms, patterns and movements. In Manolson, we find this interdependency of the elements unfolding gradually: new growth slows down the flow of water, which creates more sediment and as a result diverts the stream. This allows for light to hit a new area while also depositing a wash of new soil along the shore, setting the stage for smaller details. Upon closer inspection, one might discover rotting leaves curling on the ground or



milkweed seeds bursting out of their pods, while rain pools up in the lush beds of moss nearby. Though sparked by reality, Manolson's layered scenes are fictitious. They are about an interior response to scenery, relating in approach to Edward Hopper's statement of 1959: "My aim in painting has always been the most exact transcription possible of my most intimate impressions of nature."¹ While identifiable in their fragments, Manolson's compositions become abstractions when considered in their entirety. These landscapes only exist in the artist's imagination and yet, the viewer will access them as something manifest and familiar.

Overall, Manolson's long practice of translating her experience of nature into invented landscapes firmly roots her oeuvre in the 19th Century tradition of Romanticism when landscape took center stage and became a reflection of emotional and spiritual concepts. In the early 1800s, the German painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) remarked: "The artist should not only paint what he sees before him, but also what he sees within himself."² To Friedrich, and many artists of his generation, nature offered both the experience of and a portal to the sublime. As a result, death in the form of leafless trees in winter, glaciers, rough seas, or flocks of crows became a significant and constant component. Suddenly, nature was not only something to be respected and admired, but something that could reflect the human experience. In addition, its details were able to make up a language of symbols. A similar notion can be found much later in the work of the Danish painter and poet Per Kirkeby, whose abstractions are rooted in nature's patterns. To Kirkeby, "landscapes are about beauty and death. The only way you can define beauty . . . is to know that death is hiding behind it. This is what haunts you when you're doing a so-called landscape painting."³

These sentiments are also echoed in Manolson's work, which is rich in contrasts. In many paintings, including *Source*, one of her darkest compositions, various elements of nature are depicted both at their height and the precipice of decay. Despite representing alternating and even opposing states, all components still co-exist harmoniously; together they engage in the infinite rhythm of life on Earth. In fact, it is through the embrace of mortality that Manolson succeeds in embedding a sense of urgency in her compositions. Even though rendered in paint, her images appear somewhat fragile if not temporary. The bodies of water depicted in *Flotsam and Jetsam* or *Noah*, for example, consciously remain beyond grasp; Manolson makes us aware that these are frozen