

Wilma Tabacco

## *Corallium*

Ovid, in Book 4 of *Metamorphoses*, explains the story of the origin of red coral.

Perseus, having just slain the Gorgon Medusa and still carrying her severed head, sees Andromeda, chained naked to a tidal rock as a sacrificial offering to sea monster Cetus. '...[Perseus] washed his hands in the water drawn from the sea, and in case Medusa's head, with its growth of snakes, should be injured by the harsh sand, he made a soft bed of leaves on the ground, covered it with seaweed, and there laid down the head of Phorcys' daughter. The freshly gathered weed, still living and absorbent, drew into itself the power of the monster; hardening at the touch of the head it acquired a strange new rigidity in its leaves and branches. The sea nymphs tested this miracle, trying it on several twigs, and were delighted to find the same thing happening again. By scattering seeds from these plants over the waves, they produced more of the substance. Even today coral retains this same nature, hardening at the touch of air: that which was a plant when under water becomes rock when brought above the surface'<sup>1</sup>.

All works are collectively titled *Corallium*, 2016-17, acrylic and pigment on canvas panels.

Works 10.2 x 15.2 cm

Works 12.7 x 17.8 cm

Works 15.2 x 20.3 cm

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, translation by Mary M. Innes, Penguin Classics, pp123-24