



"Mama's Cookin' " (1977), 60" x 96"

**LUCINDA PARKER**

**PAINTINGS 1976-1981**

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Introduction by Paul Sutinen  
Catalog Design By Ann Hughes

The Gym exhibition program is sponsored by the Art Division of Marylhurst College for Lifelong Learning, an accredited liberal arts college. Kay Slusarenko, Chairman; Terri Hopkins, Exhibitions Director; Paul Sutinen, Program Assistant.

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# LUCINDA PARKER – PAINTING TODAY

By Paul Sutinen

Painting today is a romantic act. Painting has been stripped of its classical functions. No longer does it provide religious symbolism for a civilization unified by the same church or the records of the likenesses of powerful families, allegorical or historical illustration or storytelling (with or without a moral). In our changing society everyday events replace myth (e.g. the Space Shuttle) and photography and film record events and tell the stories that provide entertainment or moral lessons. The function of painting today has been refined to its intangible essence. Painting must command an imposing place on the wall and point to new ways of considering "art." The viewer must believe in this romantic idea.

A good novel commands our attention. It becomes a "book that can't be put down." We become lost in it, living its story on its own terms. So it must be with contemporary painting. The viewer must believe in the object that is viewed. This is generally a willful act on the part of the viewer. It is a rare painting that forces attention.

It has been over 30 years since Samuel Beckett said of the problem of the contemporary painter, "... there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express." The painter must feel obliged to make paintings even without clear purpose. This is self-obligation that grows out of one's own

experiences and forms one's self-identity as a "painter". And just as the viewer must believe in the act of seeing, so the painter must believe in the act of making.

In Lucinda Parker's paintings of the last five years one can see a painter involved in the act of making objects that command imposing places on walls and provide thorough involvement for the willing viewer. The involvement is not necessarily comfortable. People seeing Parker's work for the first time often feel that the paintings are "just messes." The messy, anything goes, look seems to be Parker's challenge, not to the spectator, but to herself. In speaking of his own writing, Samuel Beckett asks, "How could the mess be admitted, because it appears to be the very opposite of form and therefore destructive of the very thing that art holds itself to be?" But he answers, "To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now." The fight between the mess and structure forms the tension in Parker's work. That's what gives the paintings power, intrigue, joyfulness and humor.

The earliest works in this exhibition show Parker's concern for containing fluid areas of paint. Liquid Rhoplex based paint is pushed and dragged into triangular shapes that abut the edges of the canvas. A few tool marks are apparent and here and there

are sgraffito squiggles. **Cones** and **Stacking** were made in 1976 shortly after the birth of the artist's daughter, Abigail.

It's odd what happens when you're an artist. The most mundane things get into your work. With a small child creating new tasks, Parker's painting style was influenced at least once. She says, "I got really interested in the things your hand does when you're wiping up things on the floor — spilled milk ...". Paint becomes a medium through which the track of the hand becomes recorded. Parker's 1977 paintings begin to include squiggles and looping lines that are either brushloads of paint or brushloads of paint dragged through areas of paint. But the triangular areas are still the containers. The tracks of hand and arm movement are colorful embellishment.

Things begin to shake loose in the 1978 paintings. Triangles and rectangles (made of single broad swaths of paint) co-exist with strokes of paint. No longer are there big areas solidly tied to the edges of the canvas. Parts float about with a felt balance and loose symmetry. Usually a central triangle provides a fulcrum around which the action is balanced. The action in Parker's canvases is the movement of paint.

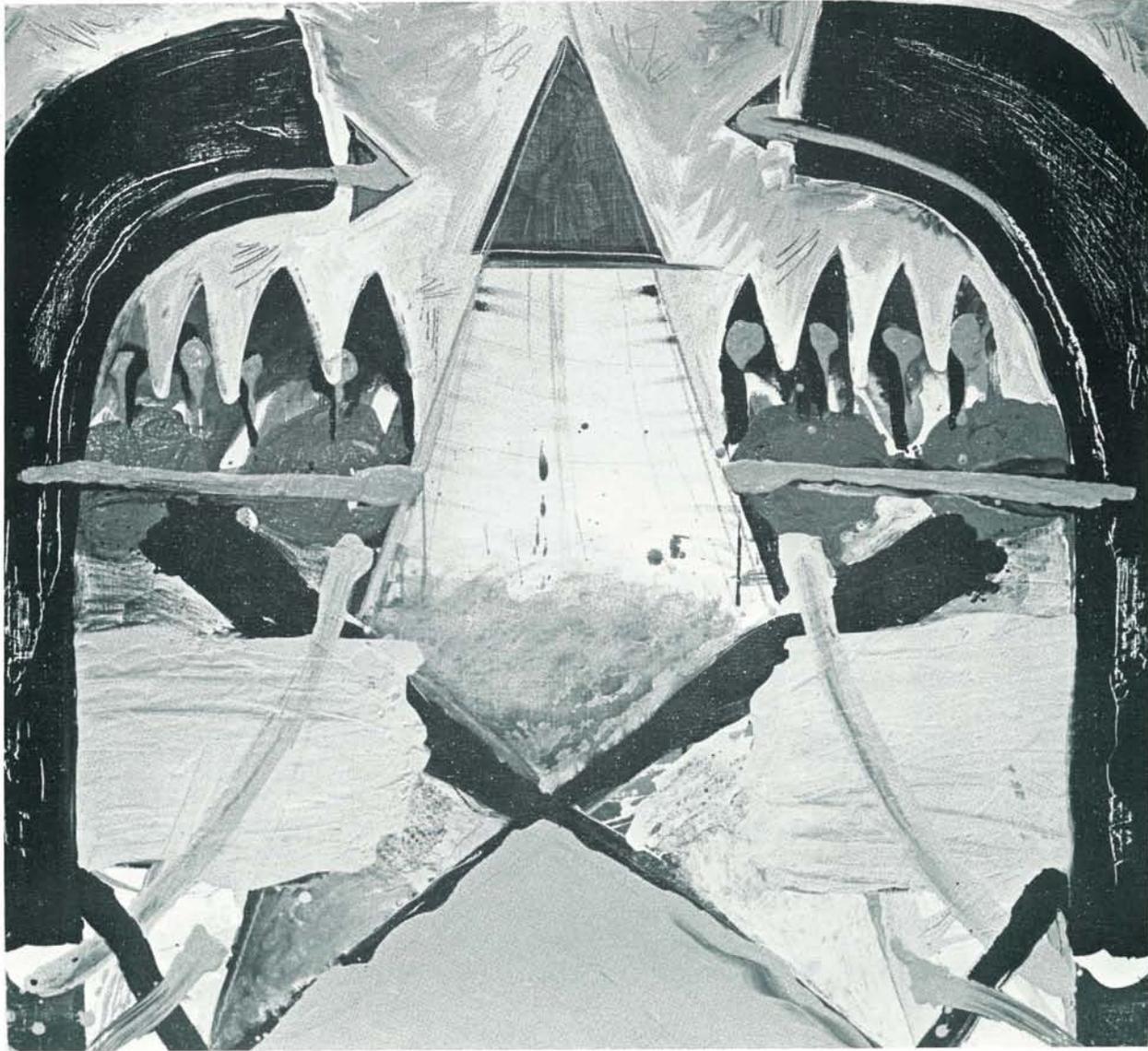
The viewer must believe in the "life" of the paintstroke. Like the separate instruments in an orchestra, paintstrokes exist as individuals and at the same time meld together into the whole. As one scans the painting strokes may zip by, dance a squiggle, or

slowly lumber across the surface. They stand alone, smash into each other, displace each other or pile up into lively crowds.

The life of the paintstroke is intensely investigated in Parker's "Star" paintings. Beginning in 1978 Parker began a series of paintings that were essentially square in format and organized by five strokes forming a star image. Stars had begun to form in the fields of strokes in her earlier canvases, now the shape was used as structure for exploration. The series of over 20 canvases seems to be the point at which Parker let herself go with raucous craziness more than at any other point in her career. The organizing shape of the star is broken down into strokes, swaths and puddles of paint and is confused with other areas and items of pure calligraphic embellishment. Some of the paintings look studious (for Parker) and others take on a cartoon-like character. The series speaks of fearlessness, of not being afraid to go "too far." Parker broke through to a new understanding of how she could use paint strokes alone to provide structure.

Of her process nowadays she says, "Every time I start a painting I think about how close I can get to total, complete falling apart and then tie it together. They start out looking awful. They start out on the floor with great big slabs of paint. They're very ugly, crazy, and then I have to tie them together. It's like a weaving process."

In 1979 Parker went from her drawn structure to actual

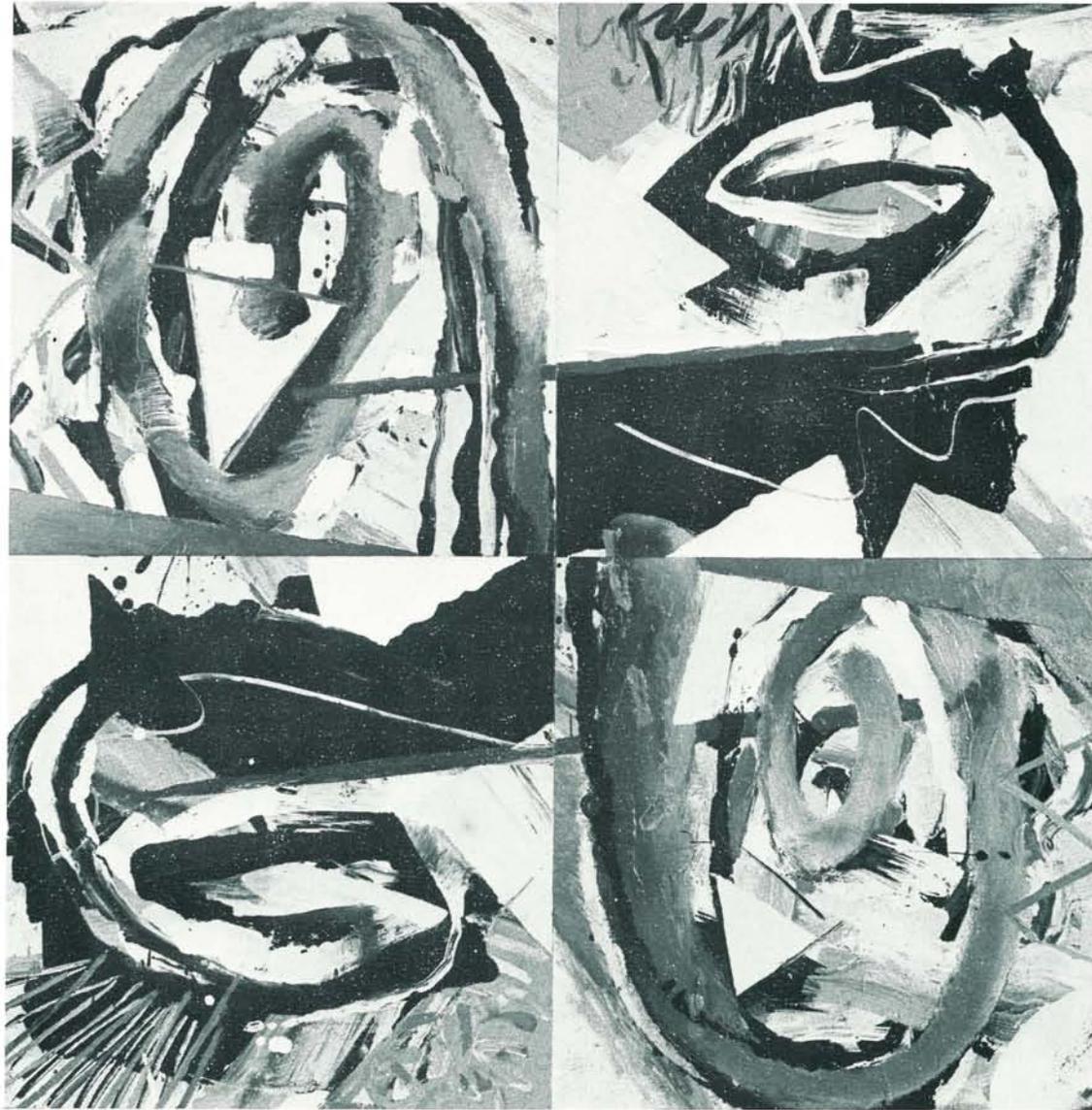


"Starring U" (1979), 44" x 48".

structure in the form of multi-panel (nine to sixteen panels) canvases. The format provided a grid within which the action could be distributed. In the first multi-panel paintings the star shape is continued as a guide to the direction of the brushstrokes. With a star in each of the panels there is a system for applying roughly parallel strokes of color. There is however a great deal of painting underneath the strokes making up the stars and the star strokes are of different colors so the structure is more felt, at first, than seen. In these paintings the elements do seem to "weave" together. They aren't the independent doodles and dashes and shapes of the star studies and before, but pieces of a fabric meshing together.

Over the last couple years Parker has worked in a four panel format. She has distributed the action in these paintings in such a way as to create a feeling of rotation about the central meeting of the four panels. Large shapes are arranged like windmill blades (one painting is called **Dark Windmill**), or sequences of strokes and areas lead the eye round and round. Parker has increased her grasp of organization to the point where she can use a wide variety of shapes, paint strokes and color in a painting and have it remain one compact piece.

All of Parker's work in understanding the dynamics of paint strokes, the personalities of various kinds of squiggles, the structuring of shapes and the interaction of color has produced very strong paintings. This makes the viewer's task no easier. Effective paintings must take the viewer's breath away. Some paintings do it by creating a vacuum of stillness, a void in which we gasp for visual breath. Others, like Parker's, do it with a sharp blow to the chest, knocking the wind out of you as a viewer by making you work so hard that you're worn out by looking. You're pushed, pulled, teased and smacked around the canvas. Parker knows they're loud, but that's who she is as a painter. She says, "It seems to me that when I have a choice I'm always winding up the volume. If I wind down the volume I end up with mush. Some other painter may make wonderful mush, but it's not for me." (The part of a person that's a painter is a very special part, for Parker also says, "I hate loud music and I hate chaos in my environment.") For the viewer Parker says, "I want it to be tough, but I don't want it to be impossible ... I've always been interested in the problem of presenting a lot of really chaotic paint in such a way that there was something in there for you to grasp — a triangle, a star, or now a spiral."



"Mortal Coils" (1981), 60" x 60".

## CATALOG LISTING

All paintings are Liquid Rhoplex on canvas. In the descriptions of dimensions height precedes width.

"Cones" (1976), 60" x 84". Lent anonymously.

"Stacking" (1976), 54" x 78". Lent courtesy of the artist.

"The Pink Dress" (1977), 48" x 90". Lent anonymously.

"Mama's Cookin'" (1977), 60" x 96". Lent courtesy of the artist.

"Court Ship (Small Craft Warnings) (1977), 48" x 87".  
Courtesy of The Fountain Gallery of Art.

"Rambunctious II" (1978), 84" x 90". Courtesy of  
Commissioner Mary Wendy Roberts and State Senator  
Richard P. Bullock.

"Lattice" (1978), 48" x 90". Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. James  
Winkler.

"Twin Birth" (1978), 48" x 87". Courtesy of the State of  
Oregon.

"Carnival Star with One Green Leg" (1979), 36" x 40".  
Courtesy of Evelyn and Stanley Nagel.

"Falling Star" (1979), 36" x 40". Courtesy of the artist.

"Starring U" (1979), 44" x 48". Courtesy of Robert J. Miller

"Shooting Star" (1979), 44" x 48". Courtesy of Jordan  
Schnitzer.

"Stars + Stripes + Arrows" (1979), 57" x 76". Lent  
anonymously.

"Crazy Quilt" (1979), 57" x 57". Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs.  
James Winkler.

"Dark Windmill" (1980), 72" x 72". Courtesy of Ed Cauduro.

"Carnival Engine" (1980), 72" x 72". Courtesy of  
Commissioner Mary Wendy Roberts and State Senator  
Richard P. Bullock.

"Gambling Fool" (1980), 72" x 72". Lent anonymously.

"Mortal Coils" (1981), 60" x 60". Courtesy of the artist.