



MICHAEL  
KNUTSON

Paintings and Drawings, 1981–2006



# Michael Knutson

Paintings and Drawings, 1981–2006

Curators:

Terri M. Hopkins, Director and Curator, The Art Gym,  
Marylhurst University

Stephanie Snyder, John and Anne Hauberg Curator  
and Director, Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery,  
Reed College

October 29–December 10, 2006

The Art Gym  
Marylhurst University  
Marylhurst, Oregon

Ronna and Eric Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art  
Lewis & Clark College  
Portland, Oregon



**Michael Knutson**  
**Paintings and Drawings, 1981–2006**

© Marylhurst University  
 17600 Pacific Hwy  
 Marylhurst, Oregon 97036  
 www.marylhurst.edu

and

The Reed Institute  
 DBA Reed College  
 3203 SE Woodstock  
 Portland, Oregon 97202  
 web.reed.edu

ISBN # 0-194435-47-7

This catalog is being published on the occasion of the exhibition *Michael Knutson, Paintings and Drawings, 1981–2006* on view at The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, and the Ronna and Eric Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art, Lewis & Clark College, from October 29–December 10, 2006. The exhibition is organized by Terri M. Hopkins, Director and Curator, The Art Gym, Marylhurst University; and Stephanie Snyder, Anne and John Hauberg Curator and Director, Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College. Linda Brady Tesner, Director and Curator of the Ronna and Eric Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art, selected the watercolor drawings for the exhibition.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner without written permission from the publisher, except in the context of reviews.

Catalog design by Joshua Berger, Plazm, Portland, Oregon. www.plazm.com

Typeface: Akkurat  
 Printed by Hing Yip Printing Company, Ltd.

Photography credits:  
 Paintings photographed by David Krapes, with the exception of *Wheel IV, Crossing Oval Coils III* and *Fall of Phaeton*, which were photographed by the artist.  
 Watercolors photographed by the artist, with the exception of *Convoluting Coils #1-6*, which were photographed by David Krapes.  
 Photograph of Michael Knutson by Robert Reynolds.

Cover image:  
*Convoluting Coil III*, 2005 (detail)  
 Oil on canvas  
 84 x 84 in.

# Table of Contents

<b>Prologue and Acknowledgements</b> Terri M. Hopkins	04
<b>Between Structure and Gesture</b> Stephanie Snyder	07
<b>Paintings</b>	13
<b>A Curious Condition</b> Lawrence Rinder	56
<b>Geometry Askew: The Drawings of Michael Knutson</b> Linda Brady Tesner	59
<b>Drawings and Watercolors</b>	62
<b>Exhibition Checklist</b>	68
<b>Curriculum Vitae</b>	70

# Prologue and Acknowledgements

I have had the pleasure of following the development of Michael Knutson's paintings for more than 20 years, and have included his work in numerous exhibitions in The Art Gym. Stephanie Snyder, Director and Curator of the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery at Reed College, has long shared this deep interest in Knutson's art. Two years ago, she proposed that we collaborate on a retrospective survey for the artist. This exhibition and accompanying publication, for which Snyder has written the excellent lead essay, are the fruits of that collaboration. Michael Knutson is an important West Coast artist, one who is highly respected by curators, artists, and critics, but not as well known to the public. We hope that this exhibition will bring him the recognition that he deserves and provide the public with the opportunity to engage these artworks and reap the significant rewards they have to offer.

When it became clear that we needed more space than The Art Gym could provide in order to give the public a full experience of Knutson's work over the last twenty-five years, another colleague came forward. Linda Brady Tesner, Director and Curator of the Ronna and Eric Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art at Lewis & Clark College, graciously made her gallery available to co-host this two-part exhibition. Tesner worked with the artist to select the drawings and watercolors for the exhibition, and has written a beautiful essay on those works for this publication. We are privileged to present that essay alongside Snyder's essay on the paintings to provide the reader with a complete picture of Knutson's work.

In 1983, The Art Gym presented Knutson's paintings for the first time. "Hascall, Knutson, Rey" was an exhibition that looked at the work of three Northwest artists—Knutson of Portland, and Seattle artists Mike

Hascall and Dyan Rey. Critic Matthew Kangas, writing in the introduction to the catalog for the exhibition, commented astutely on Knutson's paintings, "By reiterating and gradually changing the sphere, cone, and plane so dear to Cézanne, he reminds us that any combination of shapes can sustain a visual language for years in the right hands."<sup>1</sup> In the subsequent two decades, Knutson has indeed sustained that visual language.

*Michael Knutson, Paintings and Drawings, 1981–2006* seeks to give viewers an opportunity to track the development of that language while immersing themselves in the optical and intellectual richness of Knutson's work. Stephanie Snyder and I worked with the artist to develop the content and design of the exhibition at both Marylhurst University and Lewis & Clark College. We are presenting the paintings in a manner that seeks to combine the experiential and thematic with the chronological. Several sections of the exhibition provide an immersion into themes that each span decades of the artist's career. As Stephanie Snyder notes in her catalog essay, the exhibition's "Red Room" is the metaphorical heart of the exhibition and an homage to Matisse. Other sections present explorations of different chromatic combinations—some cool and austere, others brilliant and raucous. In still other areas we have grouped paintings concerned with texture and gesture, mythology and figuration, verticality or horizontality. A large room at the Hoffman Gallery is devoted to Knutson's watercolor drawings and related paintings. It is our hope that this organization of the exhibition will encourage viewers to immerse themselves in the physical experiences and pleasures of these artworks while engaging the artistic concerns Knutson has explored, re-explored, and expanded upon over the course of his career.

We have many people to thank for helping make this project possible. It has been a true pleasure to work with Stephanie Snyder, co-curator of the exhibition and author of the major essay on Knutson's paintings. Snyder is a Reed College alumna and was one of Knutson's thesis students. It was at Reed that she first encountered his work as he was making the sand and mirror paintings. Snyder is an artist and a scholar who brings her eye and intellect to bear in her essay, placing Michael Knutson's work in its historic context.

Both Stephanie Snyder and I would also like to thank Lawrence Rinder, Dean of the College, California College of the Arts, for his insightful comments on Knutson's work. Rinder, an alumnus of Reed College, is the former Curator of Contemporary Art at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

Once again, The Art Gym thanks the Regional Arts & Culture Council for providing seed money for an exhibition and publication on the work of an important Northwest artist. In addition, The Art Gym recognizes program support from the Oregon Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery at Reed College has also been a major contributor to the project, not only through Director Stephanie Snyder's contributions as curator and author, but also as a catalog sponsor along with the Office of the President of Reed College. Many wonderful individuals have come forward as well, including John and Joan Shipley, Robert Dozono, Lucinda Parker and Stephen McCarthy, Stephanie and Jonathan Snyder, Marie Watt and Adam McIsaac, Robert Hanson and Judy Cooke, Judith Wyss, Michael Parsons and Marte Lamb, and Greg Kucera of Greg Kucera Gallery.

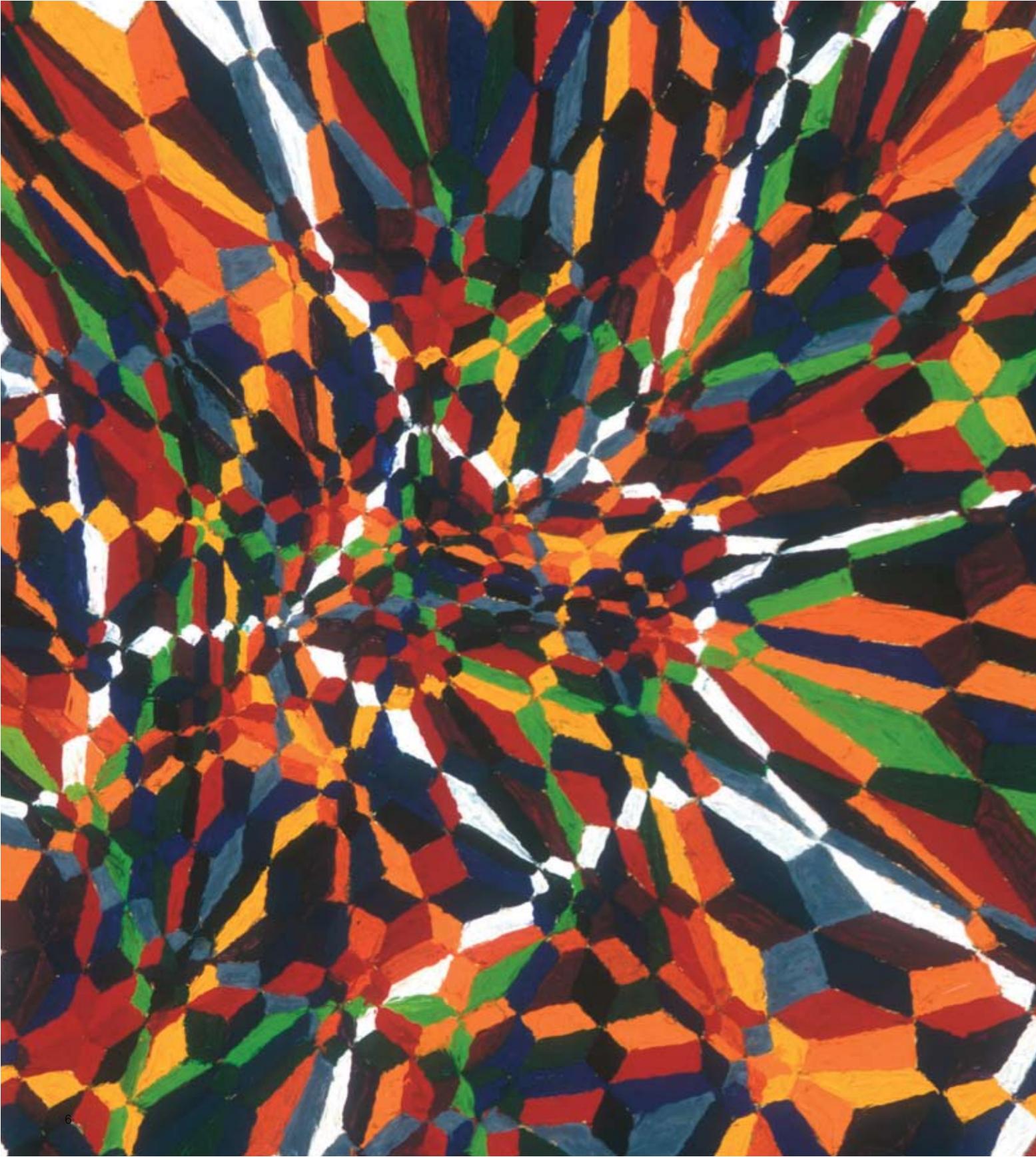
We thank the collectors who have graciously loaned their paintings and drawings for presentation at Marylhurst University and Lewis & Clark College. Robert Dozono has built a significant collection of Knutson's art and we appreciate his generosity in loaning so many critical works. We are also deeply thankful to all the collectors whose willingness to share works from their collections with the public makes an exhibition of this scope possible: Jane Beebe, Robert Hanson and Judy Cooke, Meridawn Duckler, John Kvistad, George and Alice McCain, Lucinda Parker and Stephen McCarthy, Michael Parsons and Marte Lamb, Maureen and Peter Steinberger, Dorie and Larry Vollum, and the State of Oregon.

We are also indebted to Joshua Berger of Plazm for a catalog that is both elegantly designed and in tune with Knutson's work.

Finally, we are grateful to Michael Knutson for his invaluable assistance in preparing the exhibition and publication. Most importantly, we thank him for the art.

Terri M. Hopkins  
Director and Curator  
The Art Gym  
Marylhurst University

<sup>1</sup> Kangas, Matthew. *Hascall, Knutson, Rey*. Exhibition catalog. The Art Gym, Marylhurst College, Marylhurst, Oregon, 1983. p. 2 and 4



## Between Structure and Gesture

Michael Knutson's undulating fields of aggressive, saturated color—the kind of color that, in Rilke's words, "could heal one of indecision once and for all"—fuse structure and gesture in dizzying, fantastical constructions.<sup>1</sup> The recursive, twisting patterns in works such as *Convolute Coil III*, 2005, and *Tripolar Coils*, 2004, seem to struggle against resolution, warping and buckling under the pressure of unknown forces.<sup>2</sup> Knutson begins his paintings by unfurling their geometry across the canvas in pencil, establishing each work's eccentric, improvisational logic. It is a deceptively simple process that results in a dense network of shapes whose hand-drawn edges vibrate with life; this energy intensifies as each shape is painted. Decoding a work's structure requires close observation and results in many false starts. Sometimes even the artist loses his way and must enlarge a section off the canvas in order to reorient himself. One enters these fields with an anchor: sidestepping into a painting on a path of skewed rectangles or tracing a ribbon of color as it weaves throughout a work. Regardless of the entry point, one quickly finds oneself careening through spatial distortions or drifting across a painting's surface, savoring its intricacies. Knutson's recent abstractions are the result of a thirty-year exploration of painting's formal and expressive qualities. The works contain a shifting admixture of analytic and expressive elements: picture planes veer between flatness and illusionism; geometry is accurate but irregular; imagery appears referential at one moment, resolutely abstract the next. The paintings' perpetual motion within a constellation of *almost opposites* creates an unyielding sense of multiplication.

Knutson's abstract investigations have long been inspired by Modernist painting, and in particular by Miró, Mondrian, and Matisse. The artist cites the intense color (resulting in an overall compositional density) and the play between squared and curvilinear forms of Matisse's 1911 painting *The Red Studio* as a primary, sustaining influence. For this exhibition, Knutson has arranged a body of pulsating red work (spanning twenty four years of production) in a small, enclosed room—a conversation with Matisse—as the symbolic heart of the exhibition. Knutson's modernist preoccupations orbit the relationship between structural formalism and gestural subjectivity. Writing on the distinction between Mondrian's non-hierarchical compositions and the improvised uniformity of Pollock's surfaces, Clement Greenberg noted

*Crossing Oval Coils V*, 2005 (detail)  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 84 in.

that Mondrian’s work “... presents itself as the scene of forms rather than as one individual piece of texture.”<sup>3</sup> This distinction illuminates Knutson’s methodology as well. Like Mondrian, Knutson crafts rigorous formal equivalencies. His geometries are self-referential, correspondent: form and color evolve relationally in arrays based on color theory and inspired by a myriad of art forms. Concurrently, Knutson’s formal “scenes” possess an all-over material texture—and are executed on a scale—in dialogue with Abstract Expressionism and more expansive forms of post-painterly abstraction, such as the work of Al Held, one of Knutson’s instructors in the Yale University graduate painting program.<sup>4</sup>

The repetition and intricacy of Knutson’s emphatic surfaces suggest obsession. They recall carefully pieced together objects such as crazy quilts and Renaissance floor mosaics (both have inspired the artist). Knutson’s obsessive “attitude of practice”<sup>5</sup> bears a resemblance to the single-minded production of outsider and visionary artists such as Adolph Wölfli and Alfred Jensen. Obviously Knutson is not an outsider; he is a product of the Yale University painting department, but Knutson’s work displays a keen appreciation of folk art, outsider art, and kitsch. Walking into his studio at Reed College, the first thing one sees is a wall of 3-D postcards. Like many artists, Knutson and his wife, the painter Carol Benson, collect folk and decorative art. The pair has amassed a large collection of Mexican Dia de los Muertos figurines; and their brightly colored kitchen is filled with shelves of Fiestaware in every imaginable color. These colors have found their way into Knutson’s paintings on a number of occasions. The colors of *Runner*, 1983, for instance, are based on Fiestaware. The colors of its companion, *Harlequin*, 1983, are based on another dinnerware line of that name.

Vernacular motifs such as six-point stars, interlocking rings, and tumbling blocks ebb and flow through Knutson’s work, even as the artist references art history. Paolo Uccello’s 1455 work *Niccolò Mauruzi da Tolentino at The Battle of San Romano* inspired the title of the earliest work in the exhibition: *San Romano*, 1981. Knutson saw an affinity between his painting and Uccello’s tangle of men, swords, and spears. *San Romano* shares Uccello’s color palette—deep vermilion, ultramarine, and lead white. But Knutson draws our attention to Uccello with a sense of playfulness, here Uccello’s hard-edged outlines of horses’ buttocks are read as cottony balloons buttressed and punctured by boxy forms. Knutson’s *San Romano* possesses a giddy constructivism, like the sculptural paintings of Elizabeth Murray, whose work Knutson admires for its odd humor and experimentation.<sup>6</sup> Knutson saw Murray’s first show at the Paula Cooper Gallery in 1976. For Knutson, Murray’s work charted a course around the imposing presence of Frank Stella, particularly the inductive logic of Stella’s annual production of serial paintings.

In the early 1980s, Knutson completed a series of large, square acrylic paintings whose titles were inspired by Fats Waller songs (see *Your Feet’s Too Big* and *Hold Tight*, both 1983).<sup>7</sup> The paintings contain a jumble of shapes pulled from a schematic of overlaid box grids and tangent circles.<sup>8</sup> The geometric forms appear poised in momentary stasis, while the overall compositions struggle between projection and recession. The brushwork is loose and scrubbed, often stopping raggedly short of the canvas edges. Studying these works, Knutson began to see fragments of figures embedded in the geometric matrix. In *Runner*, 1983, the whole, albeit complicated figure of a running man with extended arms and legs emerged and inspired the artist to complete a series of tall, rectangular paintings based on Greek myths. The figure’s motion has a directional, stop-action quality similar to Marcel Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase*. Knutson acknowledges the influence of Michael Spafford, one of his University of Washington instructors, in exploring mythological subjects. Along with Leon Golub and Nancy Spero (who Knutson met when they were visiting artists at Yale) Spafford was one of the few artists Knutson knew who was engaged in a serious study of myth. While Spafford’s work explores myths of aggression and sexual transgression, Knutson was primarily interested in the tragic failures of mortals in relation to divine artistry and power. Subjects in this body of Knutson’s work include *Icarus and Daedalus*, 1984, *Odysseus and Calypso*, 1983, *The Fall of Phaeton*, 1984, and *Apollo and Marsyas*, 1984. Knutson completed over twenty mythological paintings during the next three years. Two were included in the 1985 Portland Art Museum Oregon Biennial; *Icarus and Daedalus* received the Juror’s Award.

Following the mythological paintings, Knutson invigorated his exploration of abstract visual fields.<sup>9</sup> In the spring of 1988, the artist traveled to New York and studied, among other works in the Museum of Modern Art, Jackson Pollock’s large field paintings and Jasper Johns’ “hatched” paintings from the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> The experience renewed Knutson’s commitment to abstraction. Knutson describes feeling acutely aware at the time of Pollock’s intimate relationship with the painting process, stating: “It was as though Pollock had emptied his pockets onto them.”<sup>11</sup> Knutson describes *Fool’s Start*, 1988, as the first manifestation of a significant shift toward an overall patterning of surface. *Fool’s Start* is composed of entangled lines and splotchy patches of primary colors anchored by black and white. Knutson sought to redirect his focus onto, rather than through, geometric structure, increasing the visual noise of the painting and obliterating any clear spatial hierarchies. The painting’s multicolored ground competes and, at times, fuses with its webbed surface. The title of the painting is a mischievous conflation of the titles of Jasper Johns’ works *False Start*, 1959, and *Fool’s House*, 1962.

Closely following this re-engagement with structure, Knutson began to experiment with surface texture. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the artist mixed sand, pumice, and sawdust into acrylic paint, imbedded bits of broken mirror into highly-textured fields crossed by bucking boxes and swirling pinwheels, and re-opened the pictorial space of his paintings (see *Cradle*, 1989–91; *Villa*, 1990–91; and *Bramble*, 1990–91). In these mostly large works, bright folksy colors evoke the ornamented surfaces of folk art constructions and vernacular architecture. The mirrors dematerialize the paintings, bouncing the pictorial field back into the surrounding environment while incorporating the viewer.<sup>12</sup> Concurrent with this body of work, Knutson completed a series of paintings with languorously curving grids roaming and sometimes cluttering the visual field (see *Current*, 1990, and *Armiliarium*, 1991). Knutson began to tone down his colors, applying layers of transparent washes on smoother canvas surfaces. The rhythmic lines of *Armiliarium* are submerged within a deep red field; the work is quieter, more contemplative. By 1992, Knutson had stripped down his compositions to single, distorted grids of “baby block” patterns. In some of the works, such as *Quarry*, 1992, the stretched and compressed geometry resembles natural formations, such as basalt outcroppings, calling to mind the wall drawings of Sol Lewitt. *Quarry’s* grid cascades down the streaked translucent surface of the painting like falling boulders. In the diptych *Hinge*, 1994, pinkish gray and blue-black alternate as line and field colors, creating an open crystalline lattice.

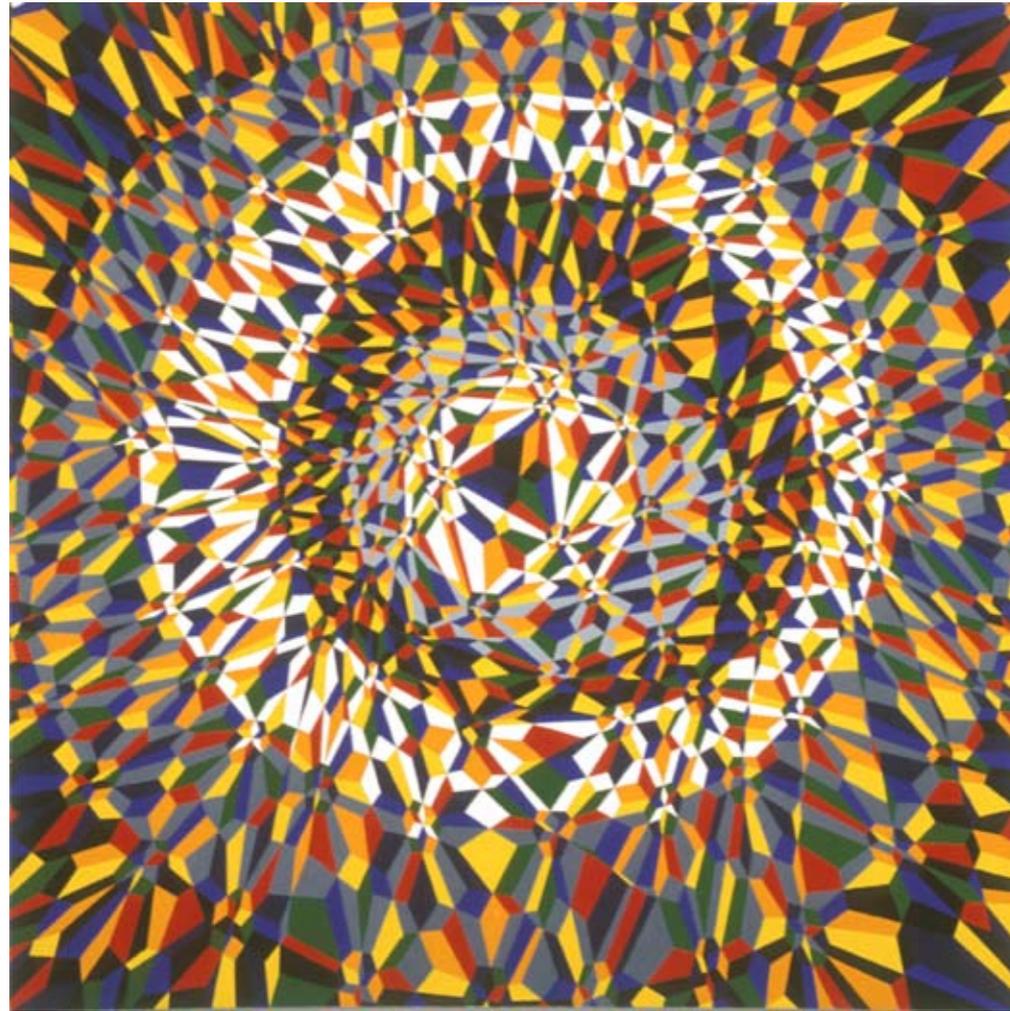
In 1996 Knutson’s work again changed radically. On a trip to New York in the fall of 1995, the artist visited the Piet Mondrian retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art and was transfixed by the palpable, tactile quality of Mondrian’s surfaces. Knutson’s re-encounter with these paintings compelled him to return to oils after twenty years of painting in acrylics.<sup>13</sup> The first large painting Knutson completed during this transition, *Triplecross*, 1997, contains a highly optical but clearly worked surface—brush striations are visible within each delineated shape. The painting’s abutting cubic forms—each roughly the same size—have a five-color pattern that creates the illusion of constant motion. The three primary colors and black and white of *Triplecross*, like most of Knutson’s paintings at this time, recognized Mondrian’s distilled palette, one shared by other pioneer modernists. As with Knutson’s periodic return to black and white, the primaries served to focus the work on basic structural problems. At this point, Knutson began to skew the shapes in these all-over patterns in increasingly oblique forms, anchoring them with alternately black or white hexagonal rings created by six corner-touching diamonds. In *Gothic Sea*, 1997, and *Arabian Sea*, 1997, these fields became more elongated (sometimes vertically, at other times horizontally), sharper, and more jewel-like. Scrims of two dominant colors (in *Arabian Sea* they are yellow and white; in *Gothic Sea* they are blue and black) meet corner to corner across the surface of the paintings, binding networks of distorted cubes around

hexagonal clusters, expanding and contracting the cubic grid. One’s attention weaves between individual shapes and spiky ribbons of color. These paintings have no center; rather they contain a constellation of interconnecting nodes vigorously containing the visual field.

Studying this evolution, Knutson began to notice orbits of six small hexagons collected around larger central hexagons. This led the artist to deliberately channel the pictorial space in concentric compositions (see *Oculi*, 1998, and *Clock*, 1999). In *Clock* Knutson creates the illusion of rippling depth, defining “rings” within the geometry by weaving black, grey, and white into a system of primary and secondary colors. The central hexagon of *Clock* is recognizably larger than the surrounding forms, creating a gaping space that is echoed in the elongation and distention of the surrounding shapes. The visual field appears to explode from a central core.

Although Knutson’s previous paintings had largely been composed directly on the canvas, as the compositions of the concentric paintings became more complex, Knutson began to make more detailed preliminary studies. This was suggested to the artist, in part, by an exhibition of Kandinsky’s paintings and drawings from the 1910s at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Knutson was particularly struck by the extent to which Kandinsky’s paintings were preplanned in his drawings. Knutson was bemused to see delineated in pencil what he had always assumed were improvisatory and accidental proto-abstract expressionist events on the canvas. Within a short time Knutson was scrupulously drawing out his compositions. The concentric studies and paintings led to ones based on spirals, which Knutson came to prefer. Knutson liked the radiance of the concentric paintings, but he was bothered by their bull’s eye effect and the tendency of the rings to secede from the field. Knutson describes having an aversion to “situational” abstraction—forms freefloating in space. In contrast, the spiral—which appears to channel space and possesses a more elusive focal point—became a more flexible, less problematic motif. Knutson’s first two spiral paintings were *Coil*, 1998, and *Sprung*, 1999; and the works compositionally mirror each other.<sup>14</sup> In these early spiral paintings, a traceable center is crowded within a multitude of hexagonal junctions, and the dominant, interlacing colors—so easy to read in the “sea” paintings—are here tightly wound within a rotating patchwork.

Preparing schematics allowed Knutson to push the emerging spirals further, and the artist began to multiply and warp them in the paintings that followed. In *Red Black Double Wobble Coil*, 2000, two spirals composed of black, six-point stars flow outward and around one another from a shared central point, unfurling across a red field. Shape size is tightly managed, creating linear rings of hexagons that imbue the pattern with a sense of regularity and controlled motion. During this period, Knutson often reduced his color palette to black



*Clock*, 1998  
Oil on canvas  
78 x 78 in.

and white, monochrome, or pairs of contrasting colors, flattening the surface and moderating the expansion of shape size from the center to the edge of the painting. As a result, many works from this period, such as *Red Black Double Wobble Coil*, have a more “pieced-together” quality. Knutson also began to increase the number of spirals. In the tetra-coil paintings (see *Red Tetra Coil*, 1999, and *Black/White Tetra Coil*, 2000) four spirals emerge from a central area, each brushing against one of the edges of the painting before exiting, creating stronger spatial distortions. Knutson further manipulated the appearance of volume and motion by subtracting colors from within spirals—*Yellow/Orange Twisted Ribbons*, 2002, for instance, contains only two colors—and by playing with cubic lattices until they resembled delicately expanding

and twisting ribbons (see *Black/White Wobble Coil*, 2002). These “wobbling” ringed and ribbon-like forms are energetic experimentations that read like oscillating sound waves. Knutson’s “oscillating” patterns recall 1960s Op Art, such as the hard-edged geometric abstractions of Bridget Riley. In contrast to Riley, and to Al Held, however, Knutson infuses his geometric structures with a high degree of gesture and voice. Each shape is eccentric and tactile, and the picture plane is never sited at a ninety-degree relationship to the canvas: perspectival intensity is subjugated to idiosyncratic form. Interestingly, many of the compositional strategies Knutson employed at this time—ones in which twisted ribbons, staircases, stars, and such, are “pulled out” from the visual field—developed from a project in which the artist scanned his

watercolor *Warpt Coil*, 1999, into Photoshop and created a digital key to its construction, revealing different patterns within the work.

In describing the rotating, coiling fields that have preoccupied Knutson during the last several years, the artist states: “These paintings embody my conflicting desires for order and solidity (every inch of the surface is mapped, every shape is set in the pattern like a brick in a wall), and slipperiness (each shape is unique, oblique, teetering—no horizontals or verticals to provide stability).”<sup>15</sup> Nowhere is this more apparent and engaging than in several of the artist’s most recent works: *Tripolar Coils*, 2004; *Crossing Oval Coils V*, 2005; and *Crossing Oval Coils VI*, 2006. In these paintings, geometric relationships reach frenetic states of perpetual motion. The forms that result from the warping of cubes across overlapping coils appear to bloom and undulate like sea anemone. The paintings suggest invisible structures lurking within quotidian reality, road maps to future potentialities. Interrelated primary, secondary, and tertiary colors pulsate within the work’s patterned complexity. Such rich phenomenological resonance isn’t common; it is the result of experience, patience, and an unwavering relationship with paint. It can be found in the work of a handful of contemporary painters such as John Zurier and Brice Marden, though in their work presence is achieved through markedly different means. Zurier and Marden explore paint’s intrinsic properties outside of strict geometric formalism. In Zurier’s painterly fields, gesture consumes structure (and simply becomes structure) seeping through layers of brushwork. Marden creates elegant, unconstrained fields of curved, interlacing forms. Marden’s fields are permeable membranes. Knutson’s packed surfaces force paint into a rather masochistic relationship with itself. This is again where Knutson’s methodology is closer to Mondrian’s or to Ad Reinhardt’s.

There is another movement in contemporary painting that must be mentioned in relation to Knutson’s work: the creation of fantastical spaces and imagined worlds. This aspect of contemporary painting was recently explored in detail in the exhibition *Remote Viewing*, 2005, curated by Elisabeth Sussman for the Whitney Museum of American Art. Knutson’s paintings share a slightly hallucinatory quality with the spatial architectures of Julie Mehretu and the organic/information-based networks of Terry Winters. However, the thrust of Mehretu and Winters’ work is in its associative properties: their works are texts collaged from a wide variety of sources: architecture, biology, and, in Mehretu’s case, historical works of art (see Mehretu’s appropriation of Leonardo da Vinci’s drawings of wind and water). Knutson’s work is closer to artists for whom the representation of space is designed according to formal, metaphysical, or social models, as in the meditative pattern paintings of Iranian-born British artist Shirazeh Houshiary, the work of the visionary artist Alfred Jensen, or

the watercolors and lattice-like wall constructions of Seattle artist Victoria Haven. Haven shares Knutson’s preoccupation with recursive, multiplying form and spatial distortion. In distinction to Alfred Jensen, Knutson does not attribute spiritual and moral import to his work, and Knutson has made it clear that he does not base his paintings on ancient theologies and mystical systems of any sort. (Jensen studied Mayan and Cabalistic numerology.) However, Knutson has said in conversation that he admires Jensen’s densely textured surfaces and irregular geometries for their sustained meditative quality—like the work of a medieval manuscript painter but carried out on the grand scale of Abstract Expressionism. Jensen titled and annotated his paintings to provide the viewer with clues to their esoteric metaphysics. The pragmatic titles of Knutson’s paintings (beginning in 1999 with *Red Tetra Coil*) remind us that ultimately we are in the presence of paint and structure—that for Knutson art is art, not philosophy, not life.

Here we come face to face with what Ad Reinhardt called “Art-as-art.” In the 1950s, Reinhardt authored a set of texts entitled the *Documents of Modern Art*. In *The Next Revolution in Art*, Reinhardt offered a simple credo that is exemplary of Knutson’s perspective:<sup>16</sup>

Art has never ruled the world.  
Art-as-art cannot win the world without losing its soul.  
Art’s reward is its own virtue.

Knutson’s elastic patterns assert themselves at every turn—igniting the urge to order our experience in tandem with what we see. In the face of such dynamism, one searches for meaning and accepts the pleasures of being overwhelmed. To say that one *looks* at Knutson’s paintings seems suspect. Looking suggests a moment along an arch of visual attention that ends fairly quickly without any particular goal: a conceit in pursuit of gratification antithetical to the requirements of a multilayered and complex system, or simply a painting. Looking may be brief, spontaneous, and consumptive. Rather, Michael Knutson’s paintings require observation—like phenomena—an embodied and articulate thinking-through on their own terms. Knutson’s work has evolved from figure-based forms of abstraction into an assailing synthesis of form and gesture. Knutson’s most complex constructions, though experienced with such somatic resonance, are not created in relationship to the body. Instead they cathect form in gestures liberated from physical referents, animating geometry in ways that are ultimately more mysterious and rewarding.

Stephanie Snyder  
John and Anne Hauberg Curator and Director  
Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery  
Reed College

1 One of the most difficult things to describe about Michael Knutson’s paintings is the quality of their color, and yet, their color is the most obvious thing about them. Describing it analogously ends in disappointing adjectives that bear no meaning on the relationship between form and color in Knutson’s work. I find Rilke’s discussion of Cézanne’s use of color helpful—Rilke is discussing the weighted correspondence of color in Cézanne’s work. The passage reads: “Today I went to see [Cézanne’s] pictures again; it’s remarkable what an environment they create. Without looking at a particular one, standing in the middle between two rooms, one feels their presence drawing together into a colossal reality. As if these colors could heal one of indecision once and for all. The good conscience of these reds, these blues, their simple truthfulness, it educates you; and if you stand beneath them as acceptingly as possible, it’s as if they’re doing something for you.” Ranier Maria Rilke, *Letters on Cézanne*, translated by Joel Agee (New York, Fromm, 1985) p.30.

2 On more than one occasion, I have heard Knutson question how someone can *live* with his work.

3 Clement Greenberg, “The Crisis of the Easel Picture,” in John O’Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: Arrogant Purpose—The Collected Essays and Criticism, vol. 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) p.223.

4 Al Held (1928–2005) was on the faculty of the Yale University Art Department from 1962–1980. Knutson received his MFA from the program in 1975. Held’s influence on Knutson’s practice and work cannot be overestimated, and it is particularly evident in Knutson’s compositional rigor and careful study of color in relation to spatial dynamics. A rigorous, dedicated studio artist, Held’s artistic practice has been a life-long inspiration for Knutson. In 2003, Knutson helped organize an exhibition of Held’s work at the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery at Reed College. Knutson gave a lengthy and passionate introduction to Held’s lecture in which he stated that from his perspective, Al Held, more than any other living artist, exemplified what it meant to be a painter. Knutson remembers Held saying often that he was attempting to bring Mondrian and Pollock together in his work, and Knutson liked this idea so much that he also gave it considerable thought.

5 This expression is used by outsider-art scholar Lyle Rexer in “Art and Obsession,” *Art on Paper, Vol. 10 No.5*, May/June 2006.

6 In 1983, Knutson helped bring Murray’s work to Portland for an exhibition at PCVA—the Portland Center for the Visual Arts (now closed), and he wrote the text for the brochure that accompanied the exhibition. Knutson’s PCVA text is the first (unattributed) entry in the bibliography of Elizabeth Murray’s 2005 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, curated by Robert Storr.

7 Knutson used acrylic paint until 1996—the point at which his geometry first exhibited tight highly-optical surfaces—see from *Nambam Diptych*, 1995–96, to *Triplecross*, 1997. Although it has never been Knutson’s intention to “illustrate”

music, the artist notes in conversation: “I have to admit that music has long been an undercurrent in my work. And when I first painted *Coil* I was reminded of some of George Crumb’s musical scores I had seen that were configured as spirals.”

8 *Coil* and *Sprung* were included in Knutson’s first exhibition at The Art Gym at Marylhurst University: “Hascall, Knutson, Rey,” 1983, curated by Terri Hopkins.

9 There was an intervening year, however, during which the artist completed a series of huge still life paintings, and drawings from the human skeleton.

10 Knutson was influenced by Johns’ early paintings such as *White Flag*, 1955, which was hanging at the Yale Art Gallery at the time Knutson was in graduate school. The artist notes that probably more than any other painting, this work made abstraction comprehensible and accessible to him.

11 This thought was shared in conversation during the course of curating the exhibition.

12 The use of mirrors and broken glass can also be examined in the context of Avant-garde practice. In 1919 Duchamp included a note in the *Green Box* stating: “To place mirrored pieces of glass on the floor so that the room and the viewer are mirrored simultaneously.” Buskirk and Nixon, *The Duchamp Effect*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996) p.48, quoted in Chrissie Isles, *Into the Light: the Projected Image in American Art 1964–1977* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 2002).

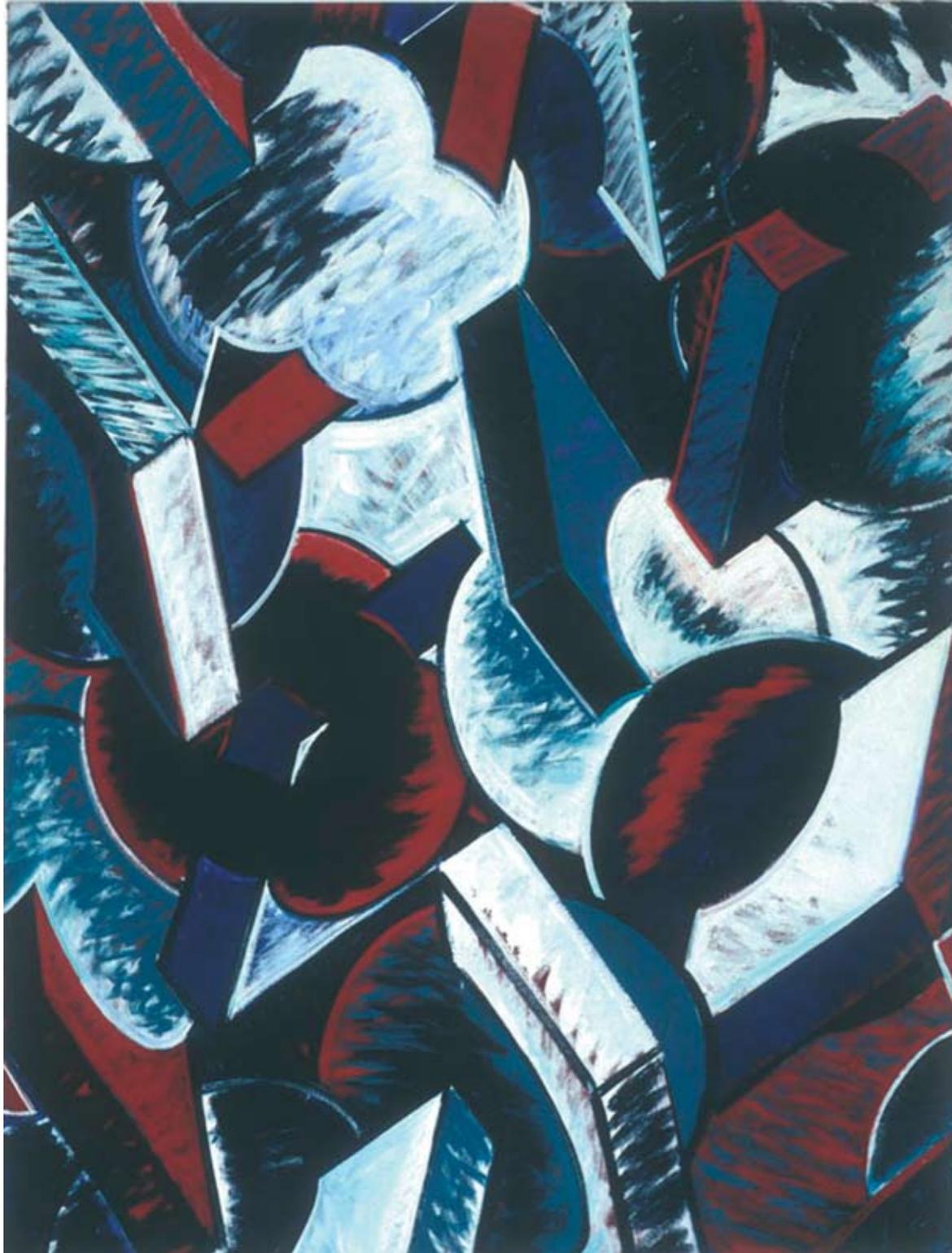
13 Though Knutson had switched from painting in oils to acrylics during graduate school, he had long wondered if this had been a good move.

14 *Sprung* was included in the 1999 Oregon Biennial at the Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon. Knutson created *Sprung* by projecting a slide of *Coil* backwards onto a canvas. This is the first (and only) time that the artist used projection to create composition.

15 This statement is included on the artist’s web site, which also includes a “virtual tour” of the geometry of one of his paintings. Knutson’s web site may be accessed through the faculty pages of the Reed College Art Department site [web.reed.edu](http://web.reed.edu).

16 From “The Next Revolution in Art (Art-as-Art Dogma, Part II)” in *Ad Reinhardt* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991) p. 119.

# Paintings



*San Romano*, 1981  
Acrylic on canvas  
84 x 60 in.  
MU (Maryhurst University)



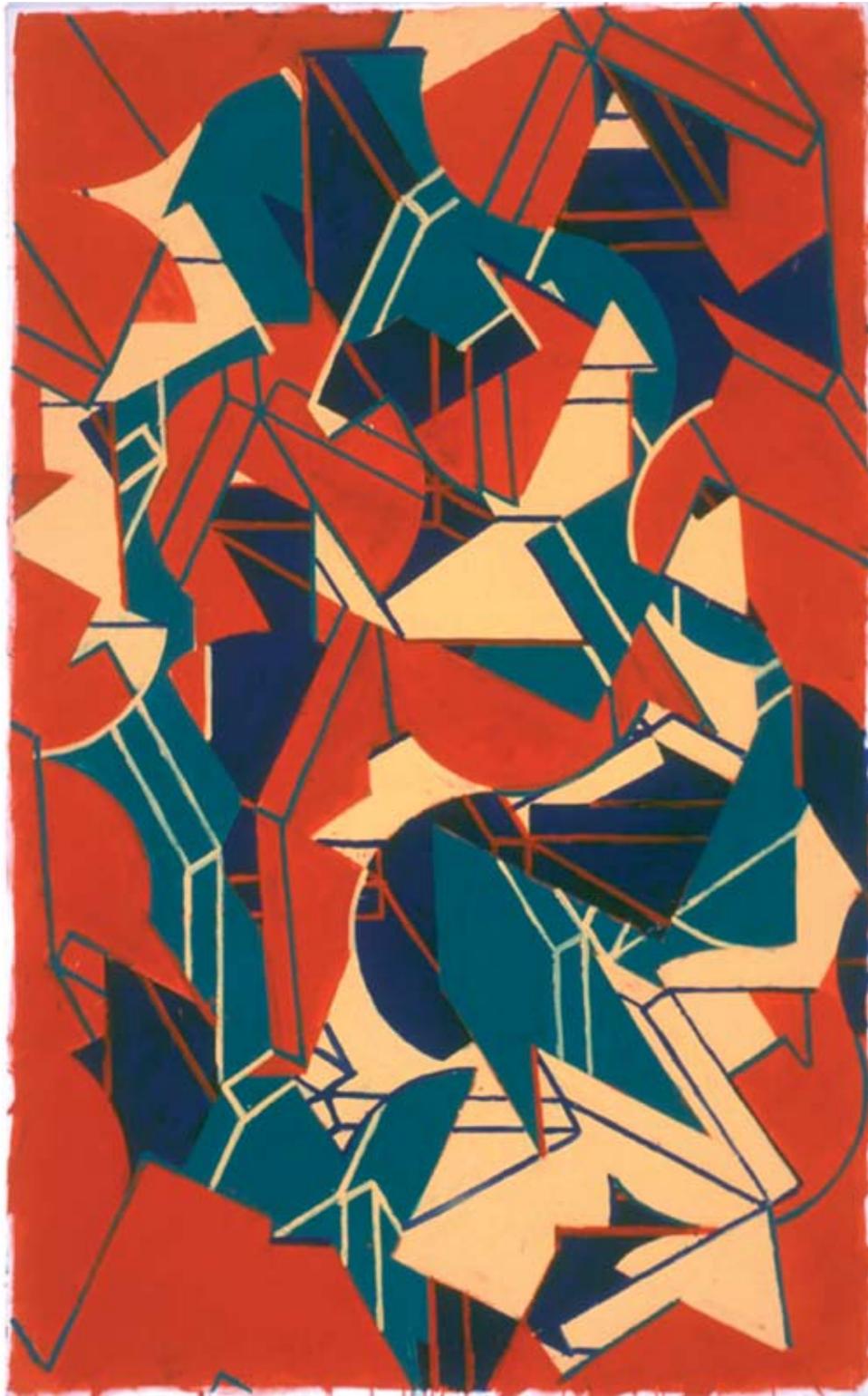
*Tango*, 1981-1982  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 84 in.  
MU



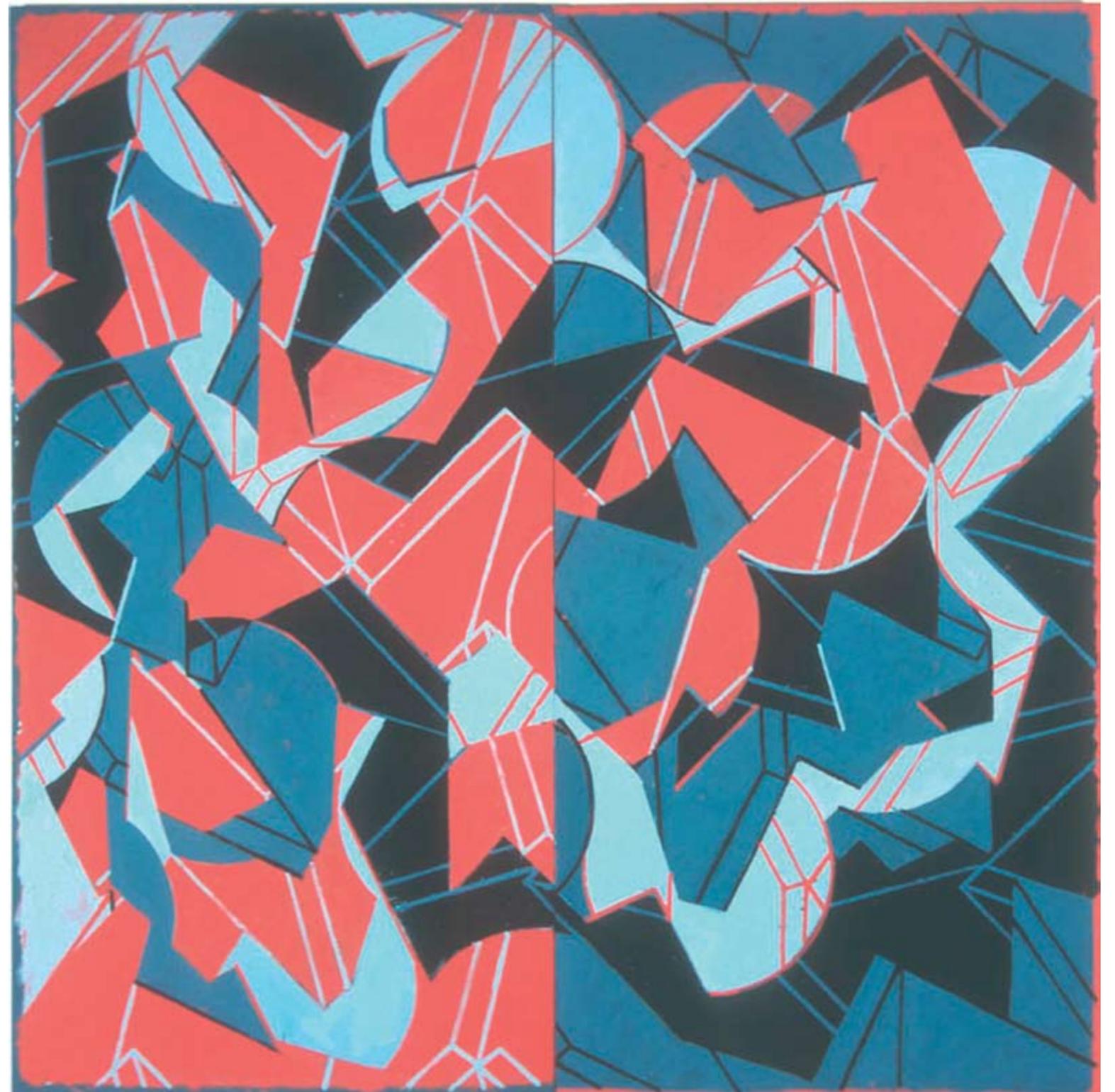
*Your Feet's Too Big*, 1983  
Acrylic on canvas  
66 x 66 in.  
LCC (Lewis & Clark College)



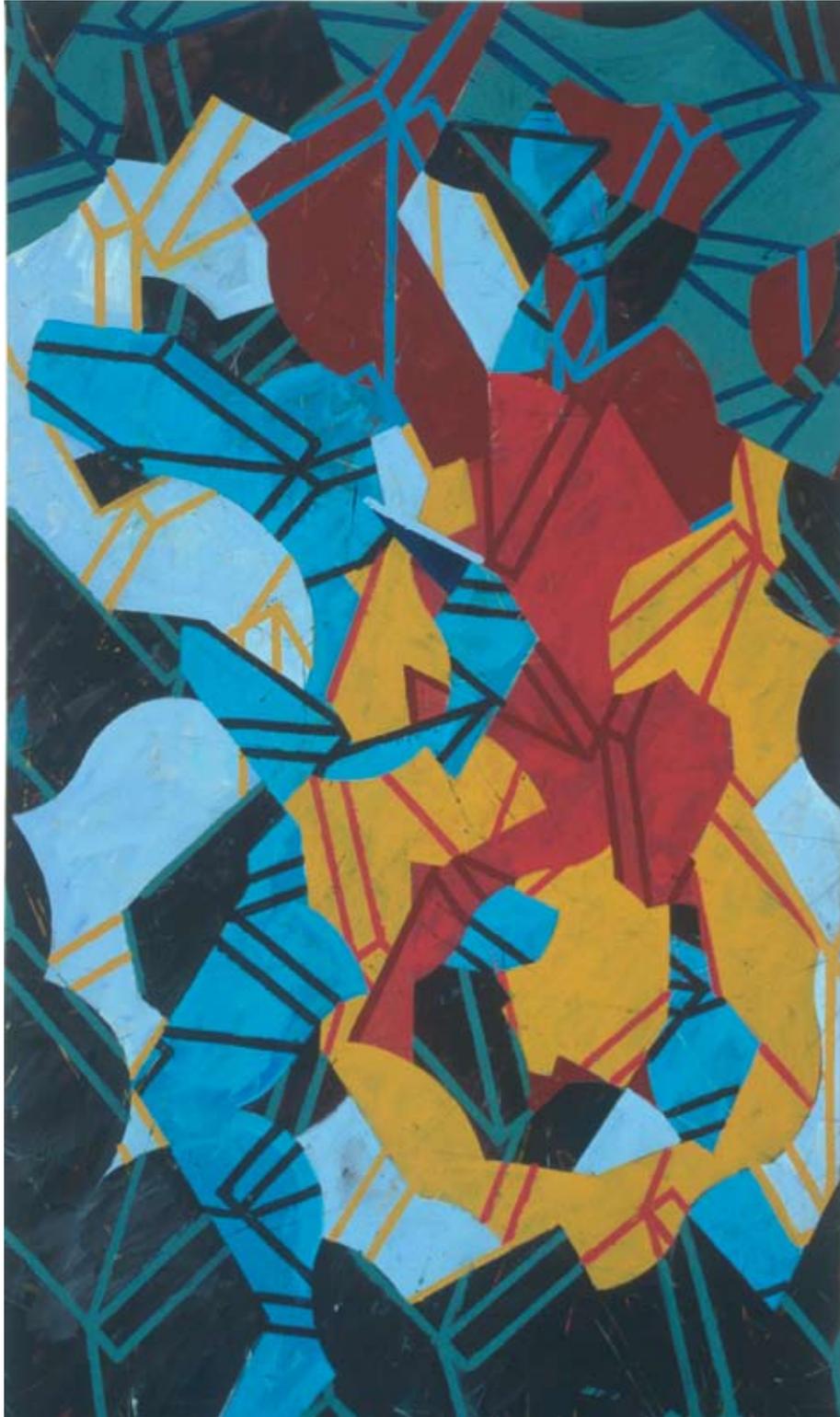
*Hold Tight*, 1983  
Acrylic on canvas  
66 x 66 in.  
LCC



*Runner*, 1983  
Acrylic on canvas  
96 x 66 in.  
LCC



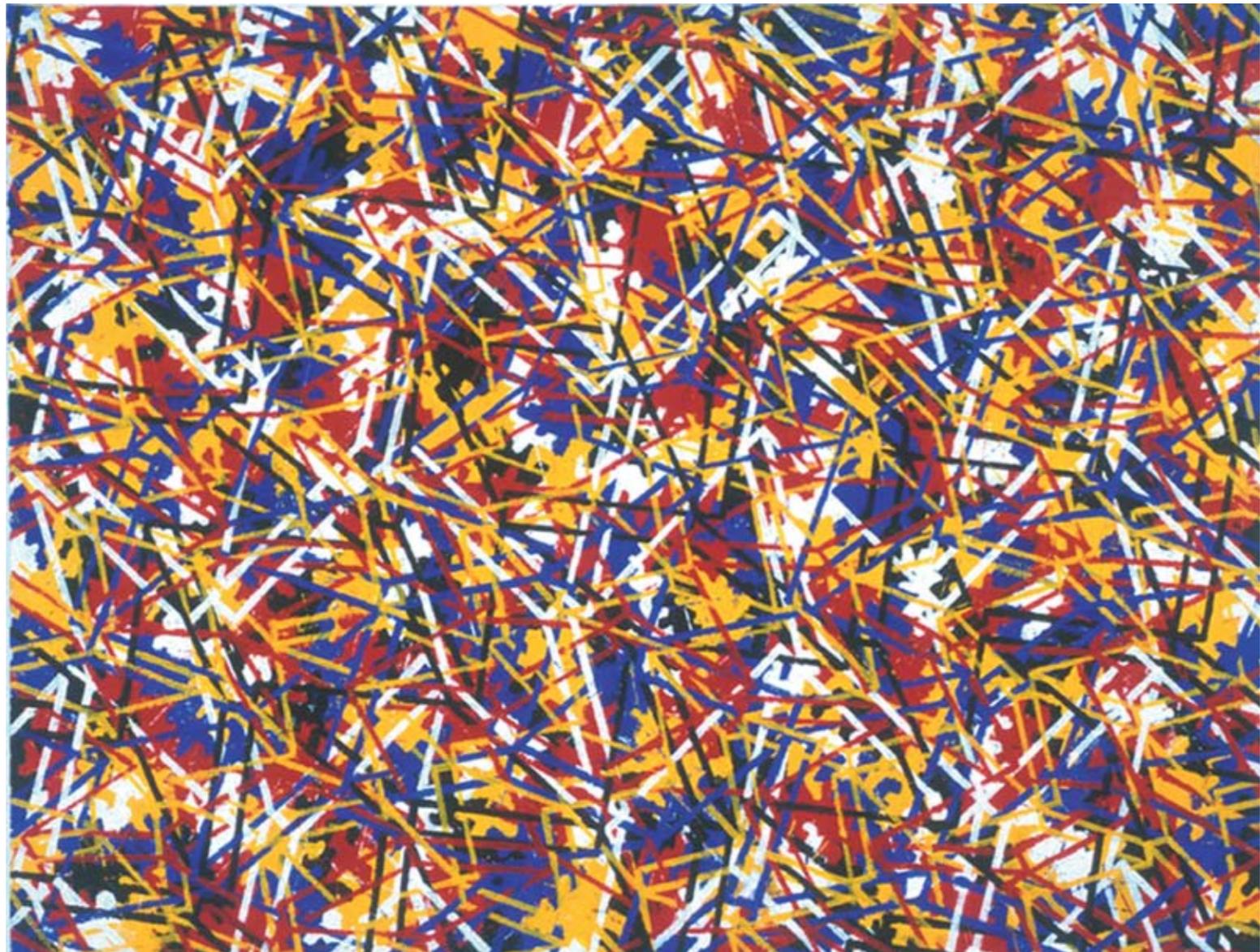
*Odysseus and Calypso*, 1983  
Acrylic on canvas  
120 x 120 in.  
LCC



*Apollo and Marsyas*, 1984  
Acrylic on canvas  
118 x 68 in.  
**LCC**



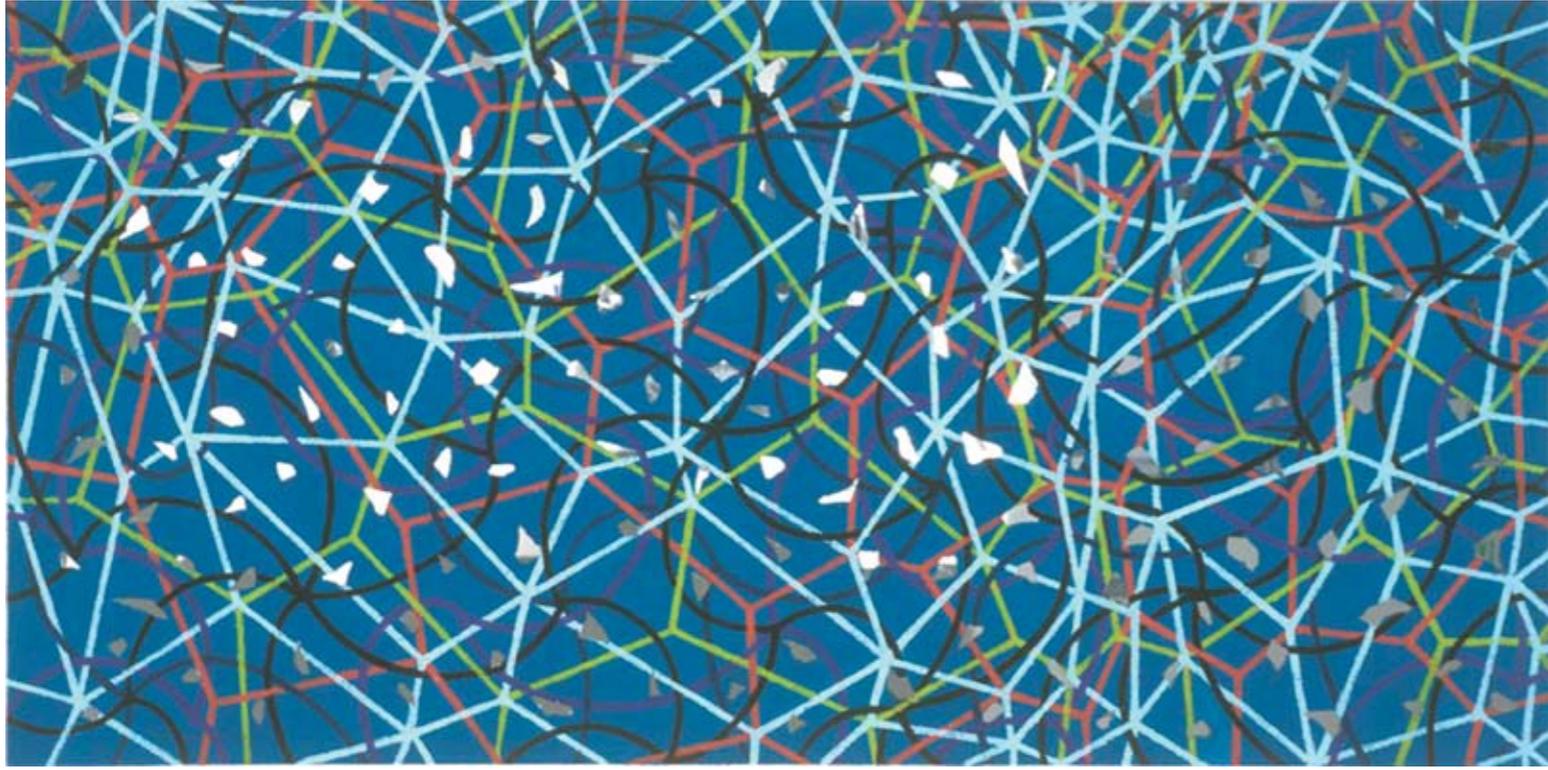
*Fall of Phaeton*, 1984  
Acrylic on canvas  
116 x 78 in.  
Collection of Robert Dozono  
**LCC**



*Fool's Start*, 1988  
Acrylic on canvas  
69 x 90 in.  
**MU**

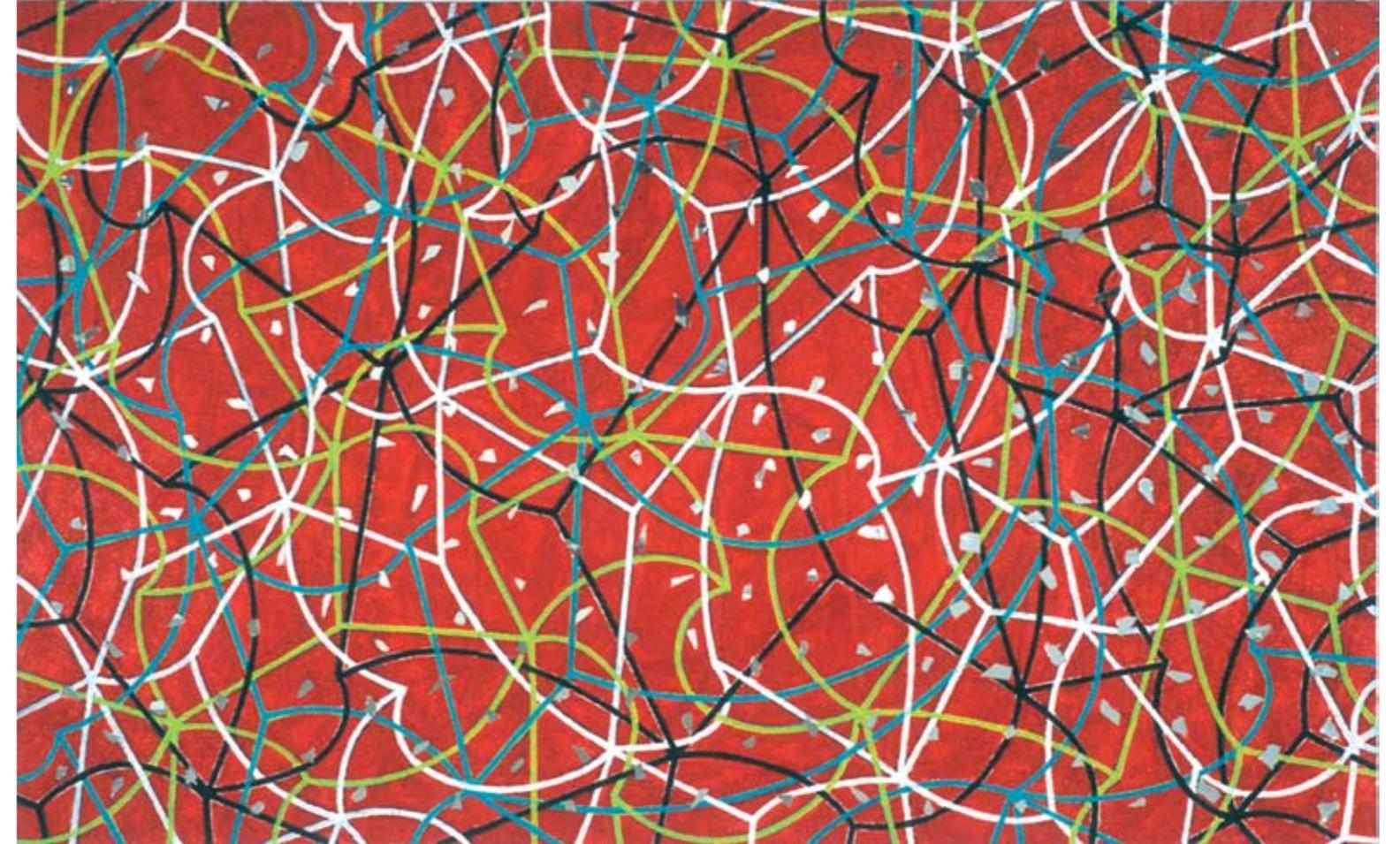


*Bramble*, 1990–1991  
Acrylic, sand and mirror  
72 x 72 in.  
**MU**



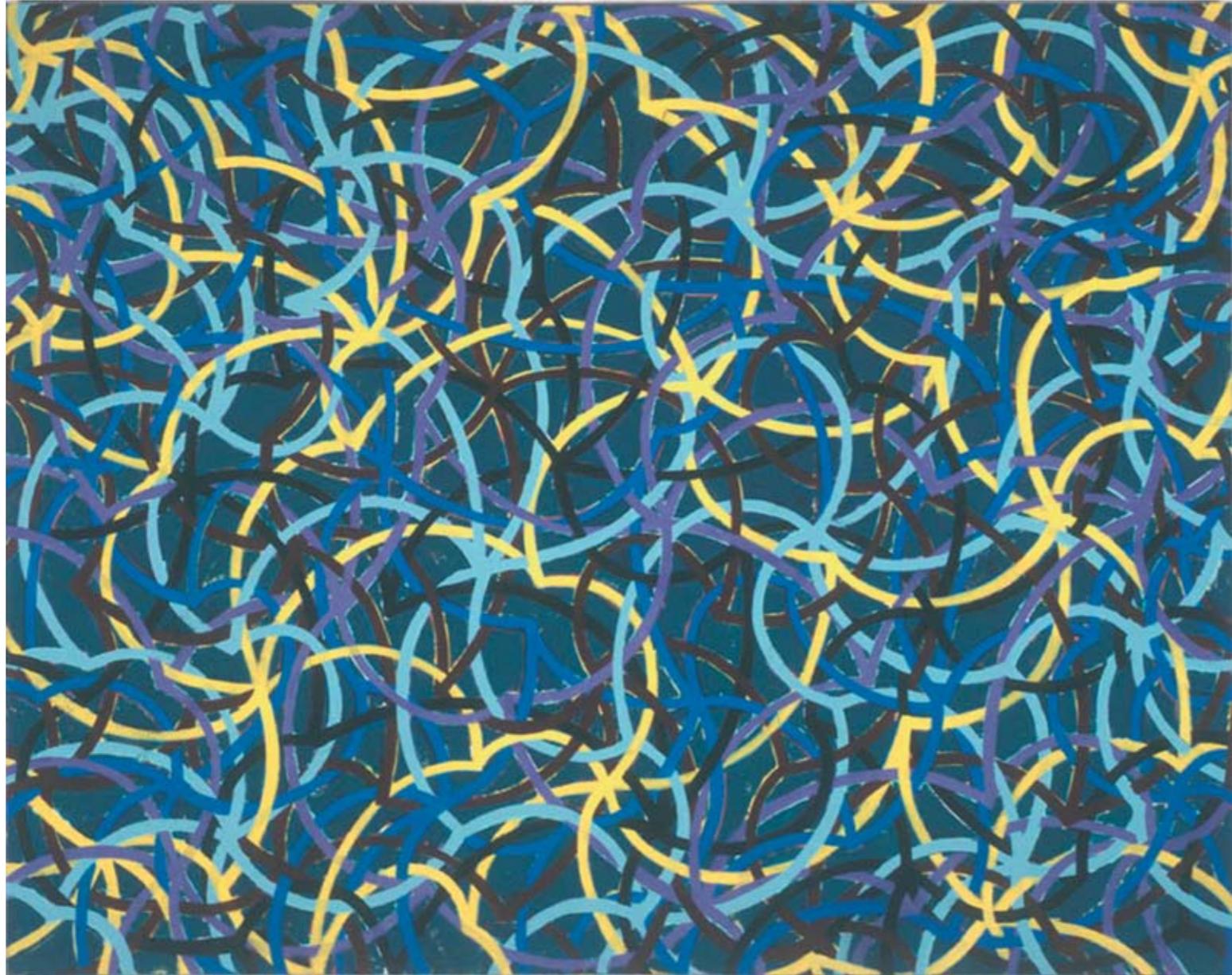
*Cradle*, 1989–1991  
Acrylic, sand and mirror  
54 x 108 in.

**MU**

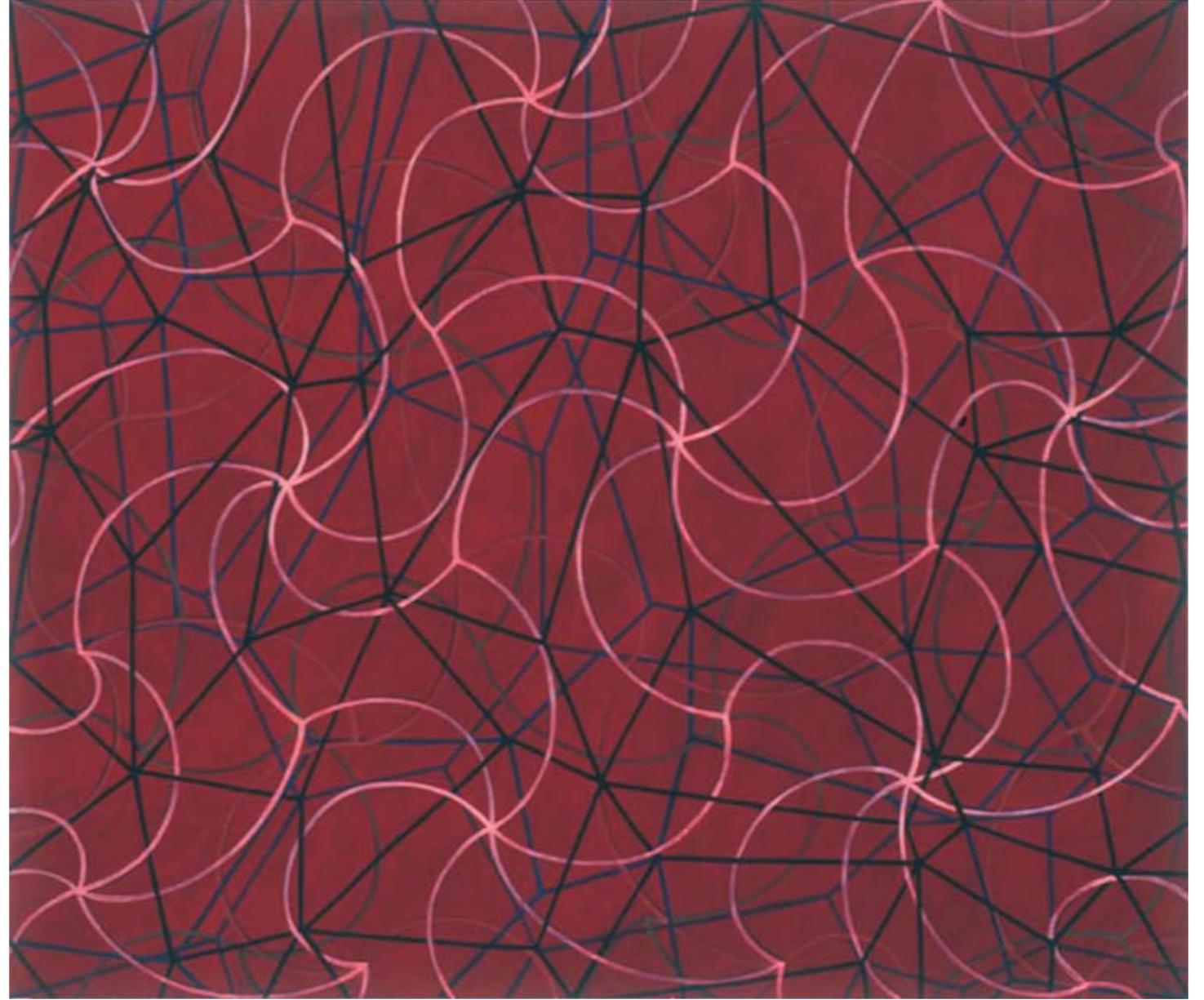


*Villa*, 1990–1991  
Acrylic, sand and mirror  
60 x 96 in.

**MU**



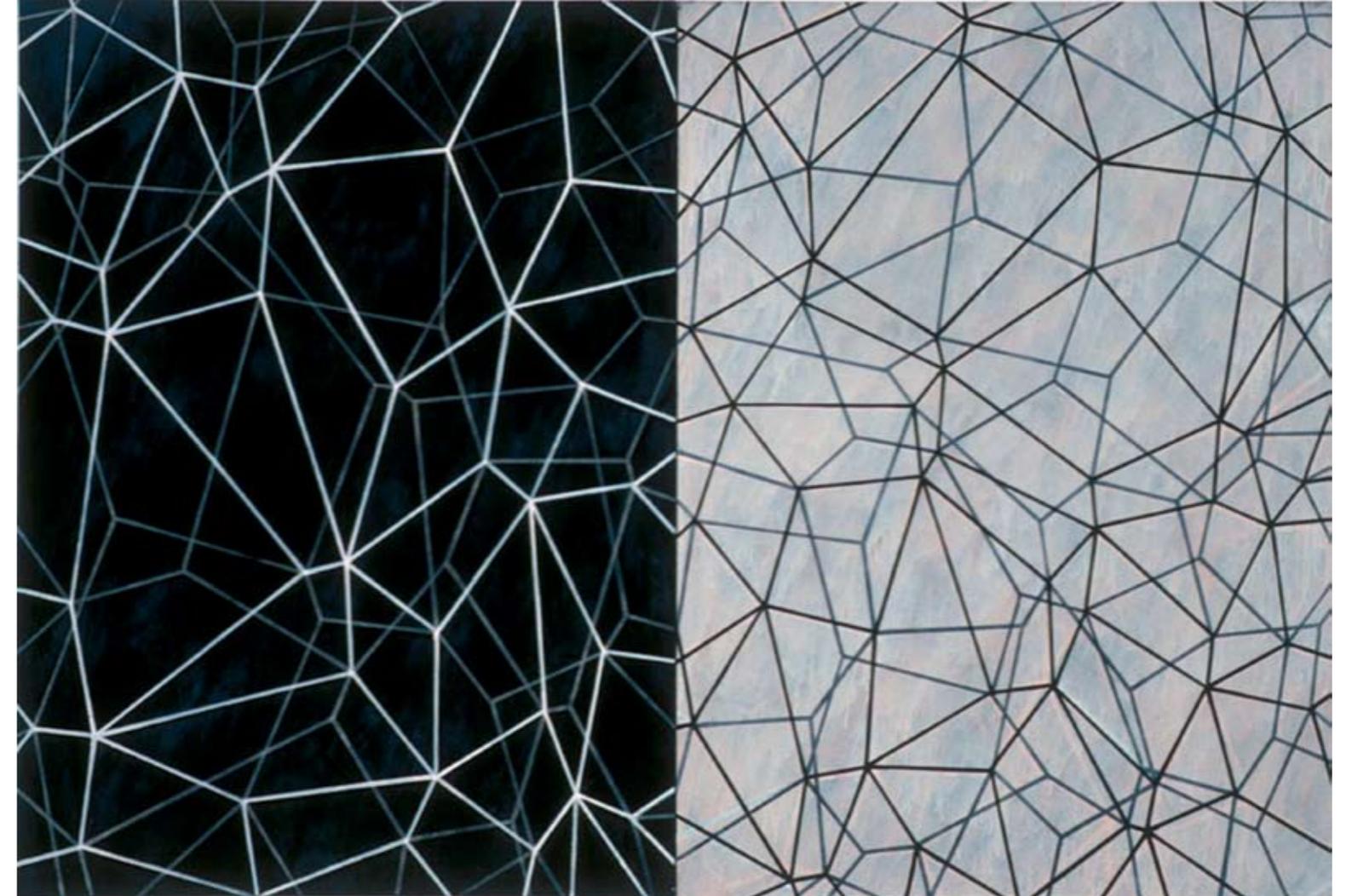
*Current*, 1990  
Acrylic and sand on canvas  
96 x 120 in.  
**LCC**



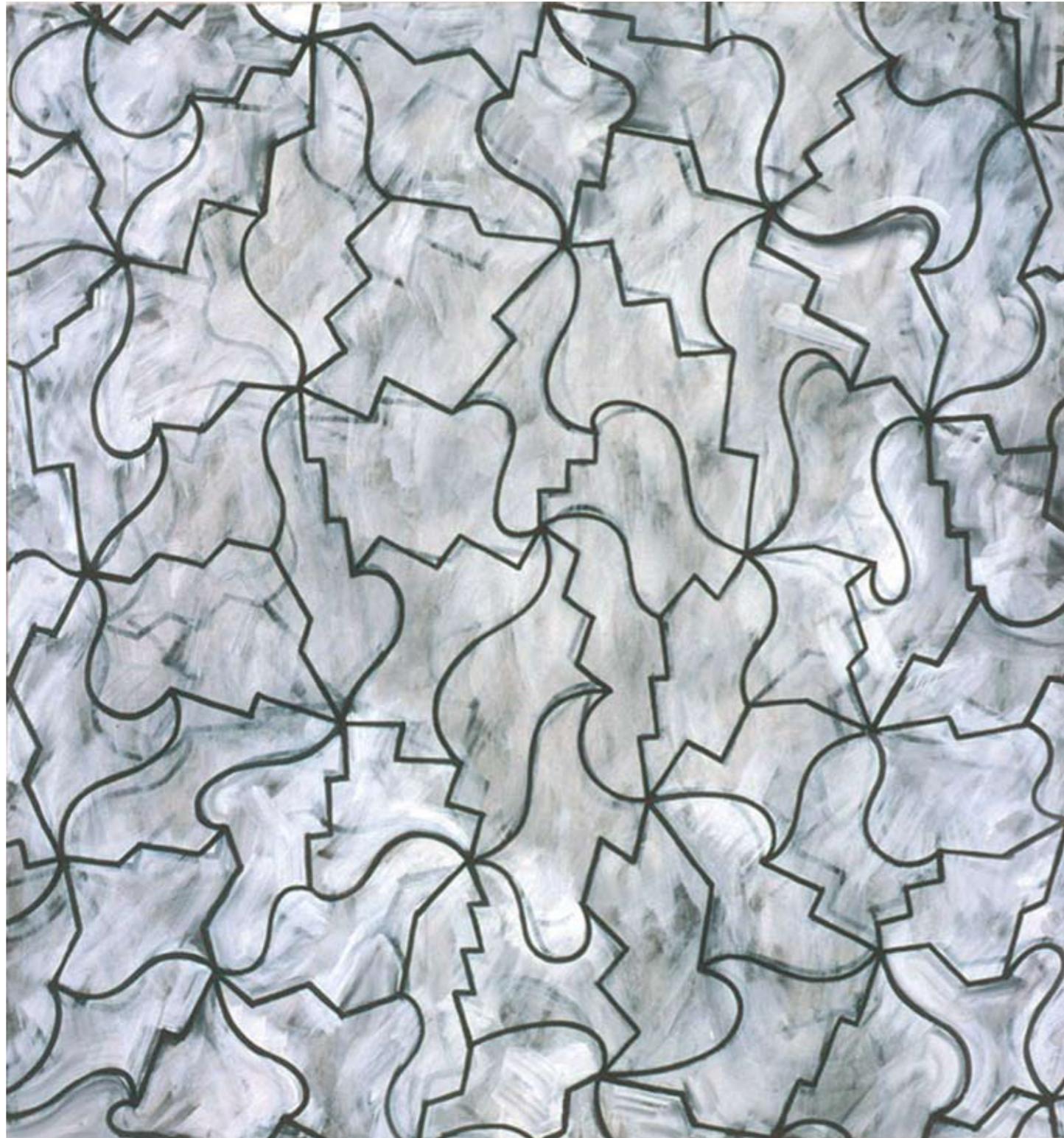
*Armillarium*, 1991  
Acrylic on canvas  
68 x 80 in.  
**MU**



*Quarry*, 1992  
Acrylic on canvas  
96 x 120 in.  
**MU**



*Hinge*, 1994  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 96 in., diptych  
**MU**



*Shapeshifter 1*, 1991  
Acrylic on canvas  
72 x 67 in.  
**MU**

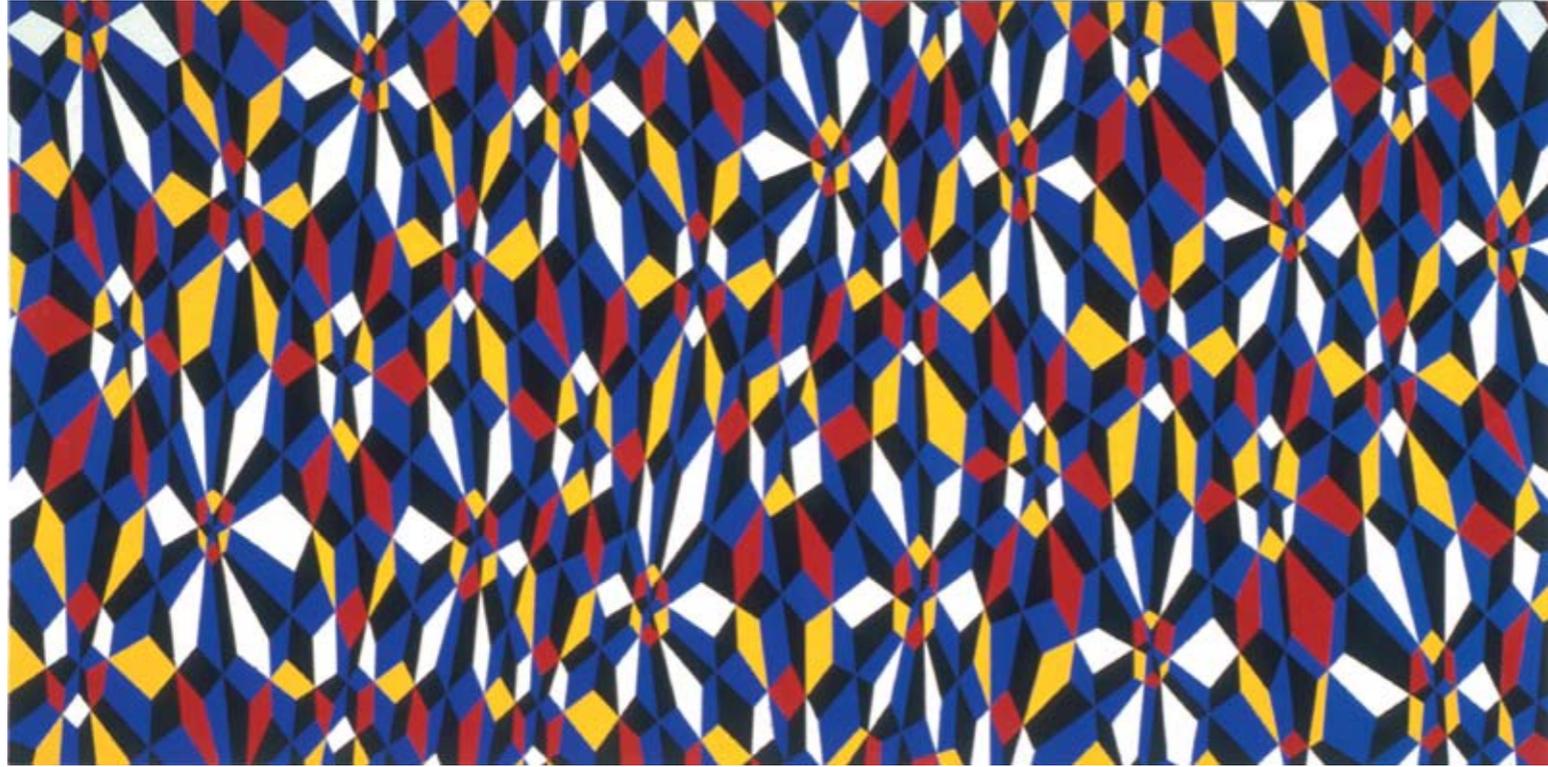
*Moonstalker*, 1995  
Acrylic on canvas  
66 x 114 in.  
**LCC**



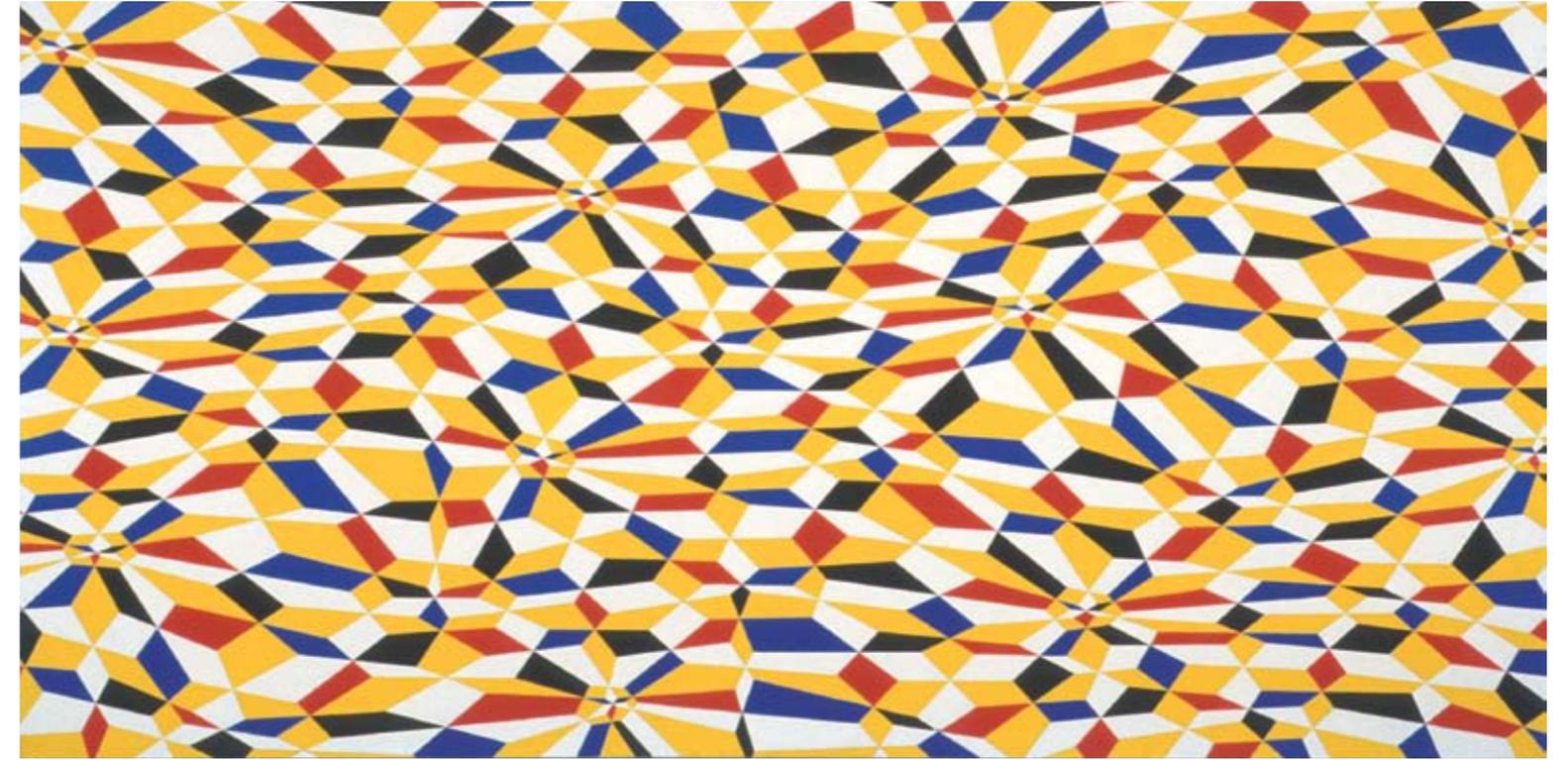
*Nambam Diptych*, 1995–1996  
Acrylic on canvas  
66 x 132 in.  
**MU**



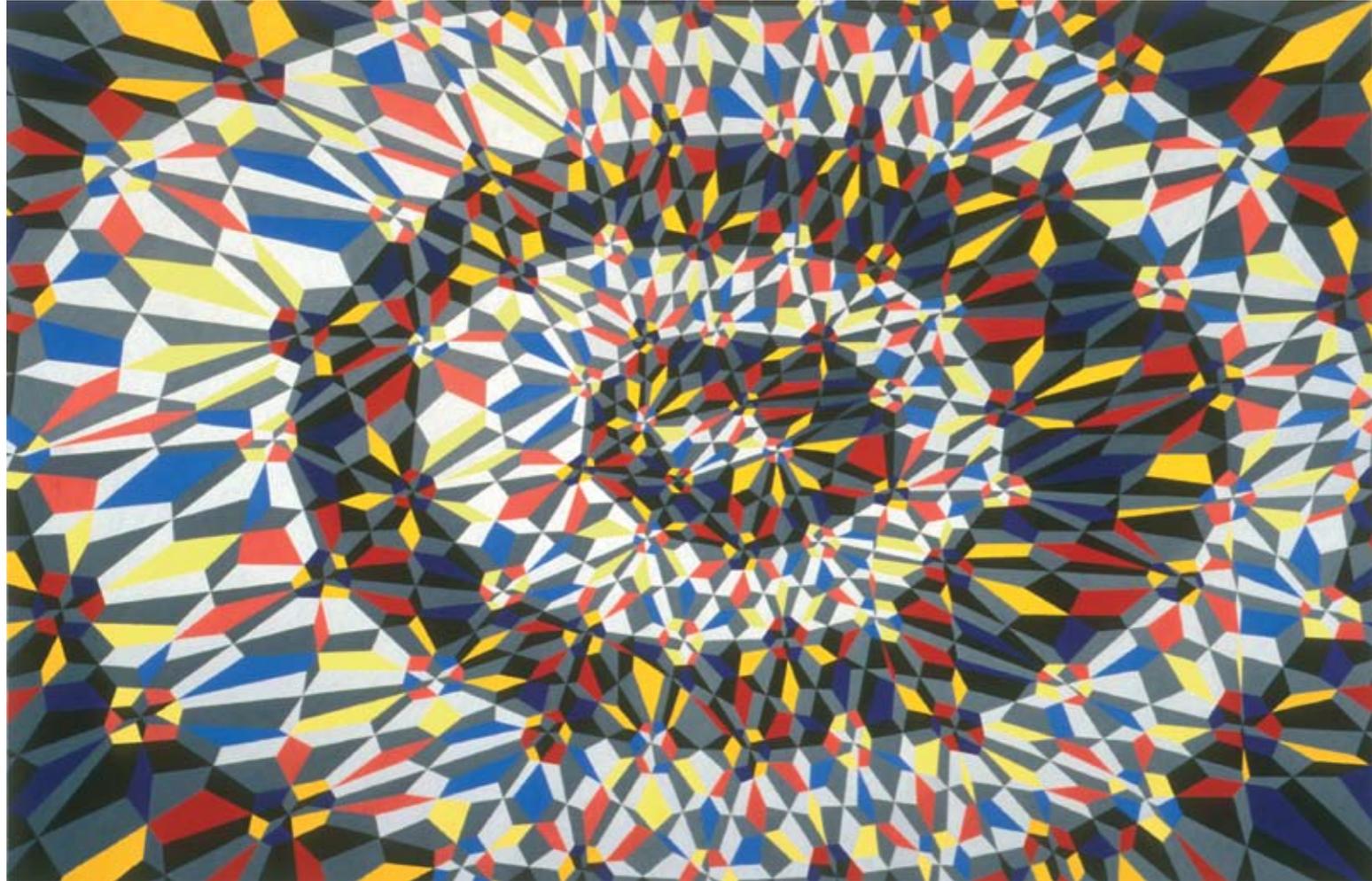
*Triplecross*, 1997  
Oil on canvas  
66 x 66 in.  
**MU**



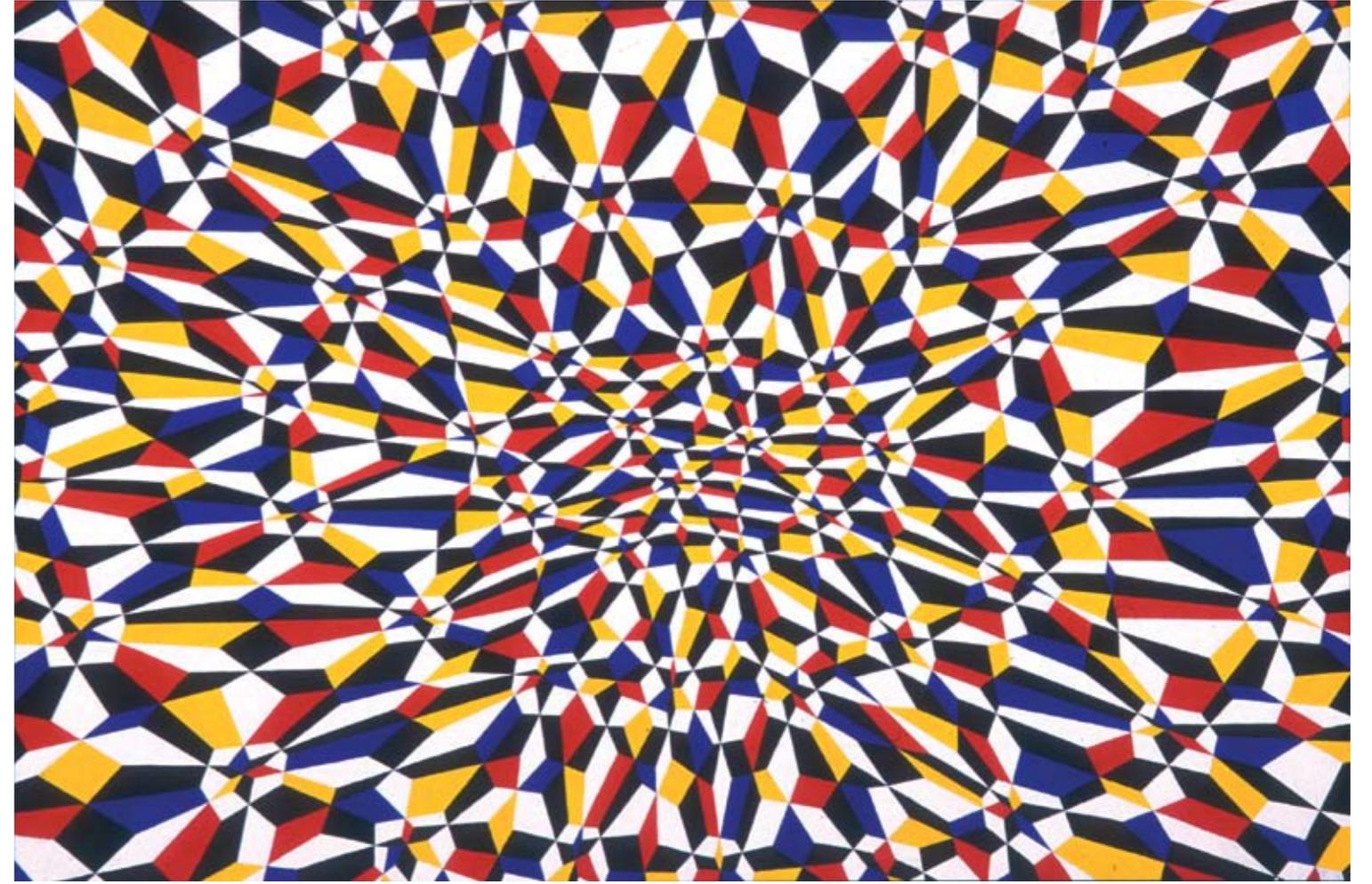
*Gothic Sea*, 1997  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 120 in.  
**MU**



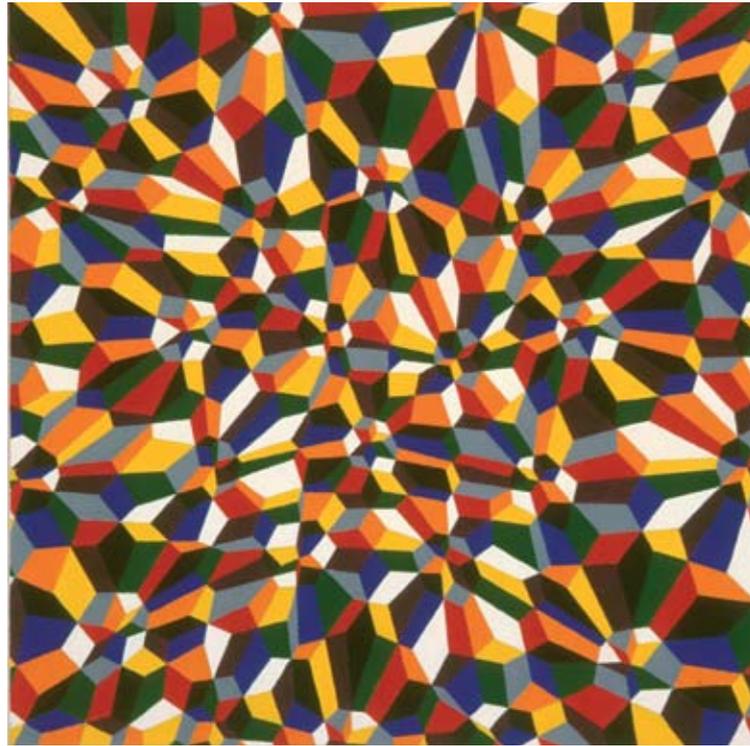
*Arabian Sea*, 1997  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 120 in.  
**MU**



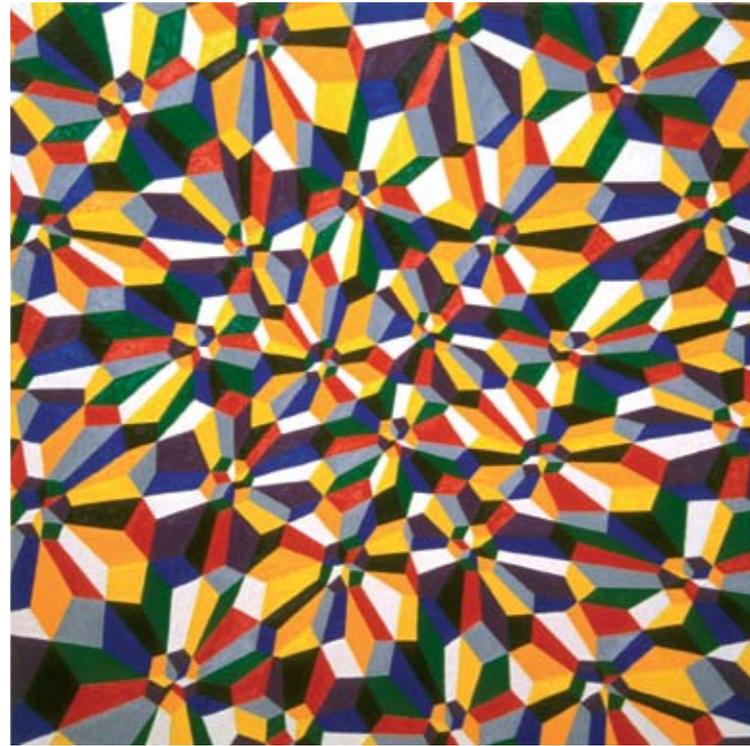
*Oculi*, 1998  
Oil on canvas  
79 x 120 in.  
**MU**



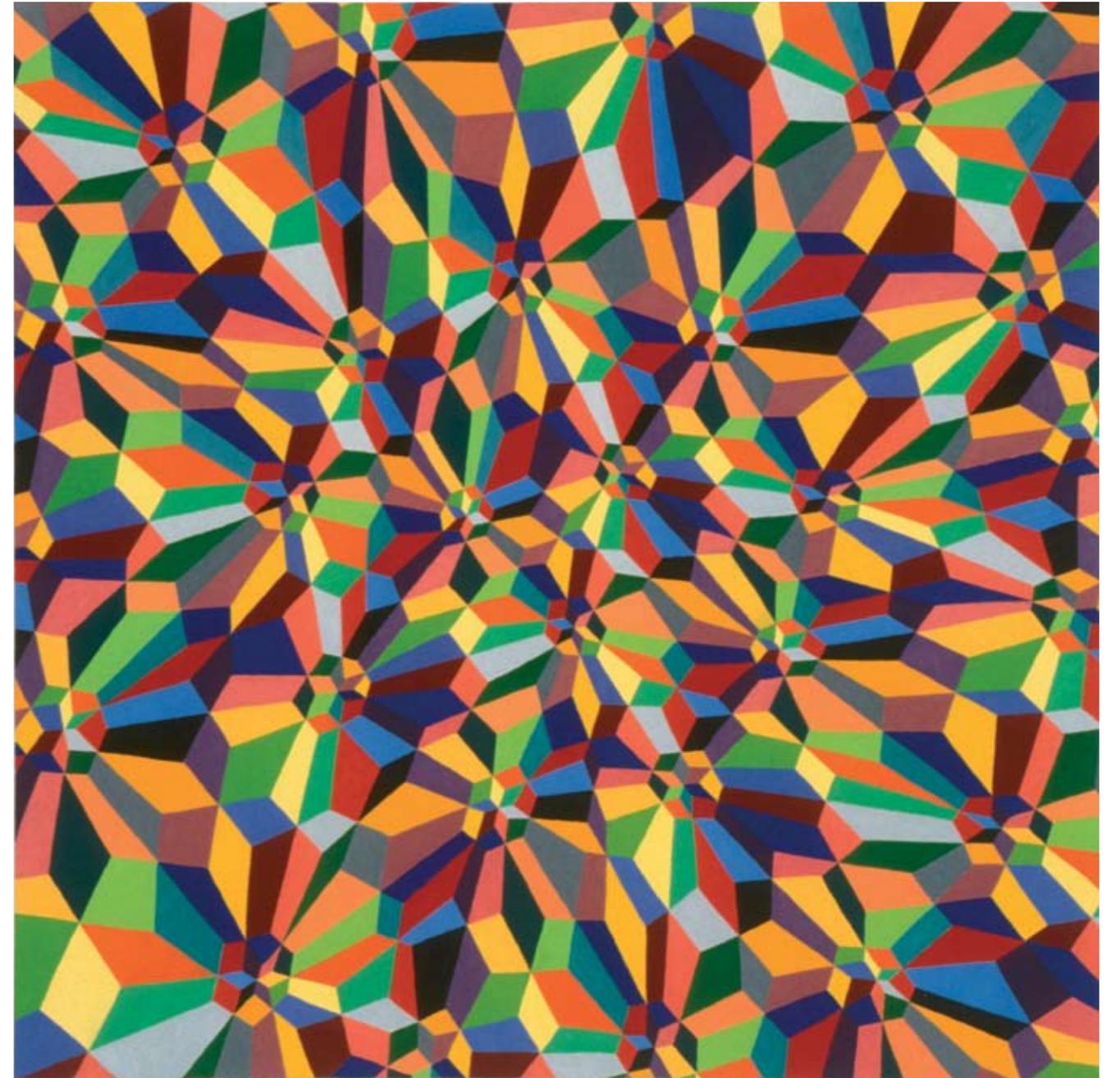
*Echo III*, 1998  
Oil on canvas  
49 x 60 in.  
Collection of Maureen and Peter Steinberger  
**MU**



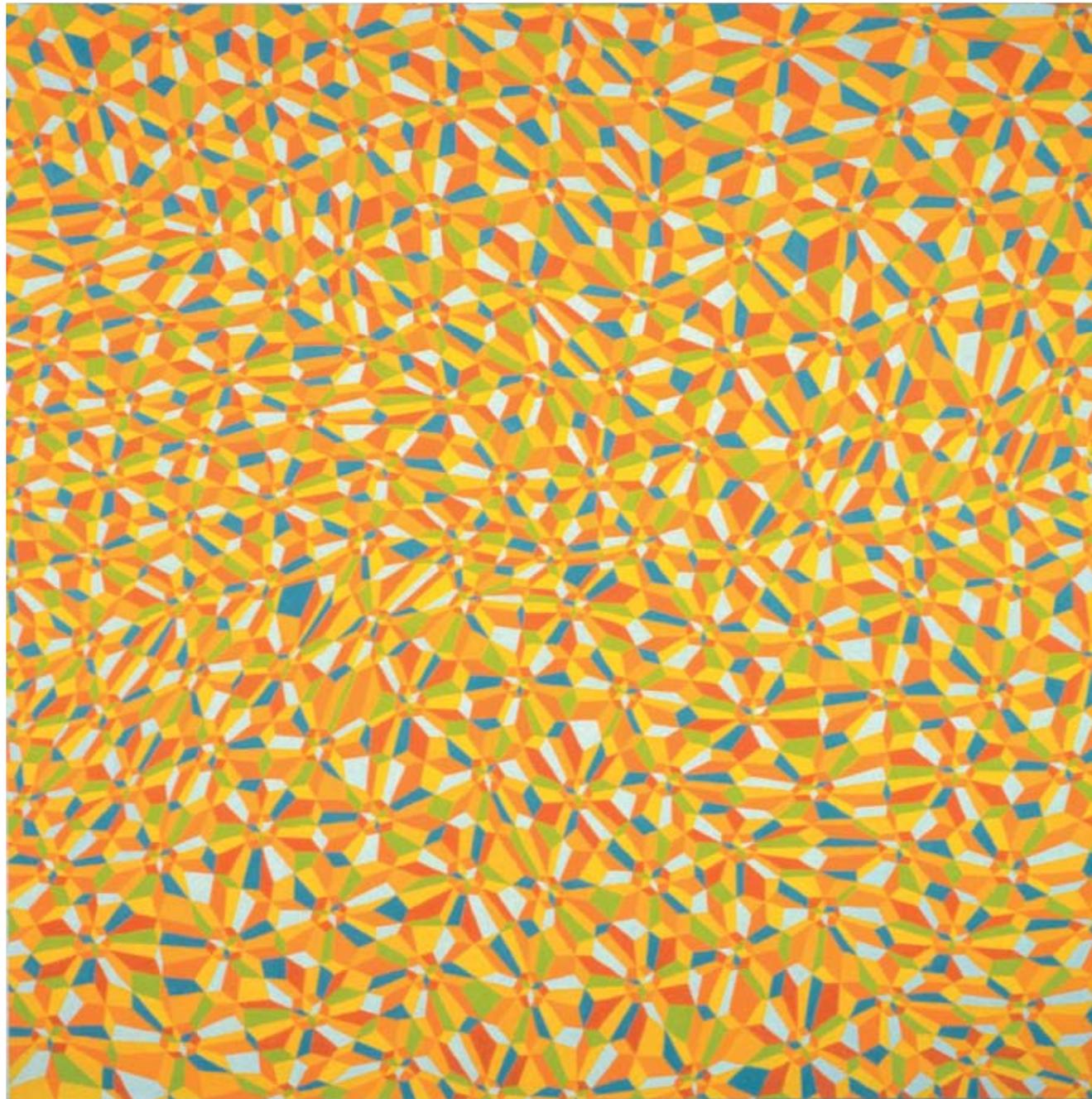
*Wheel II*, 1998  
Oil on canvas  
36 x 36 in.  
**LCC**



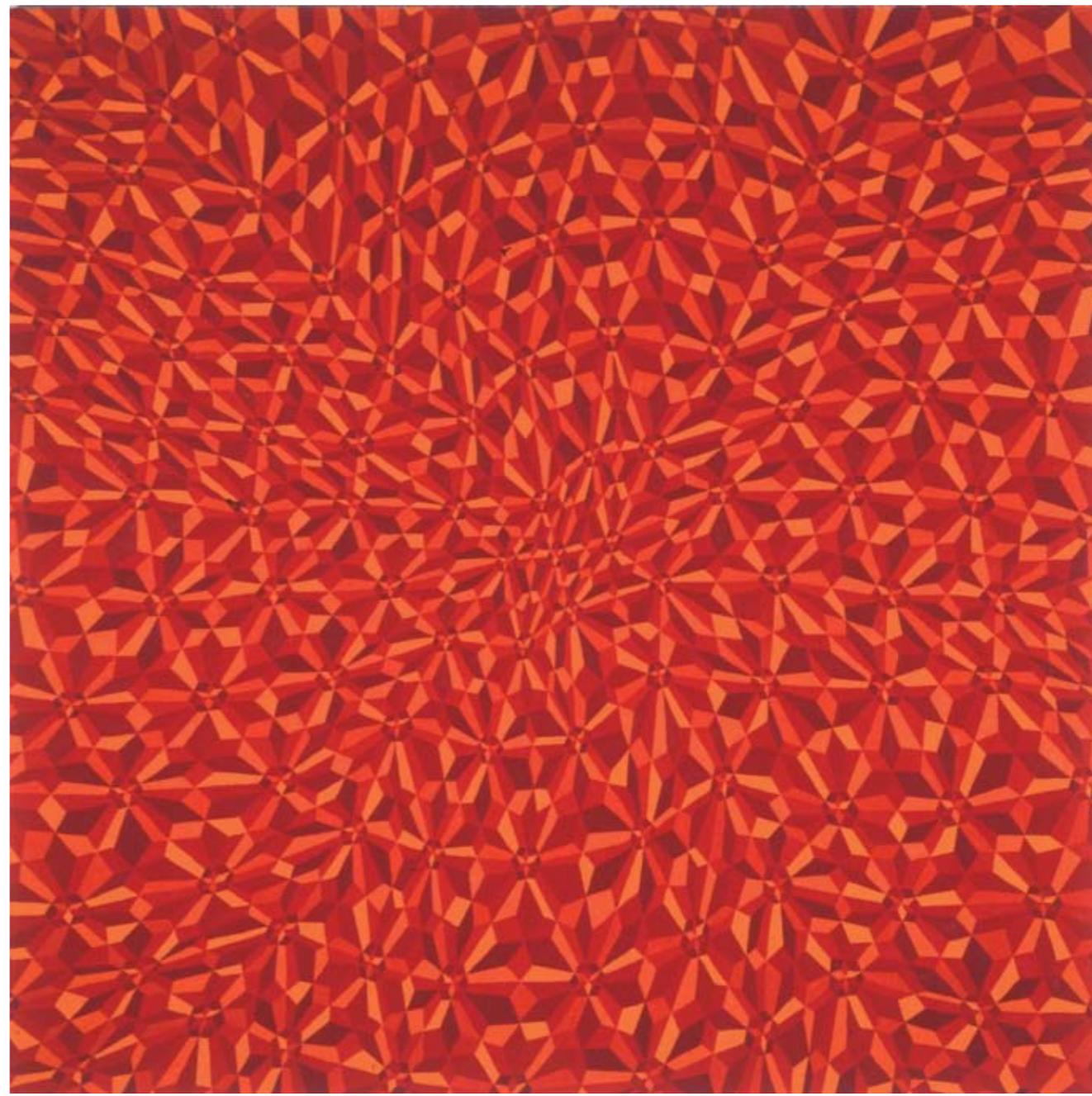
*Wheel IV*, 1999  
Oil on canvas  
36 x 36 in.  
Private collection  
**LCC**



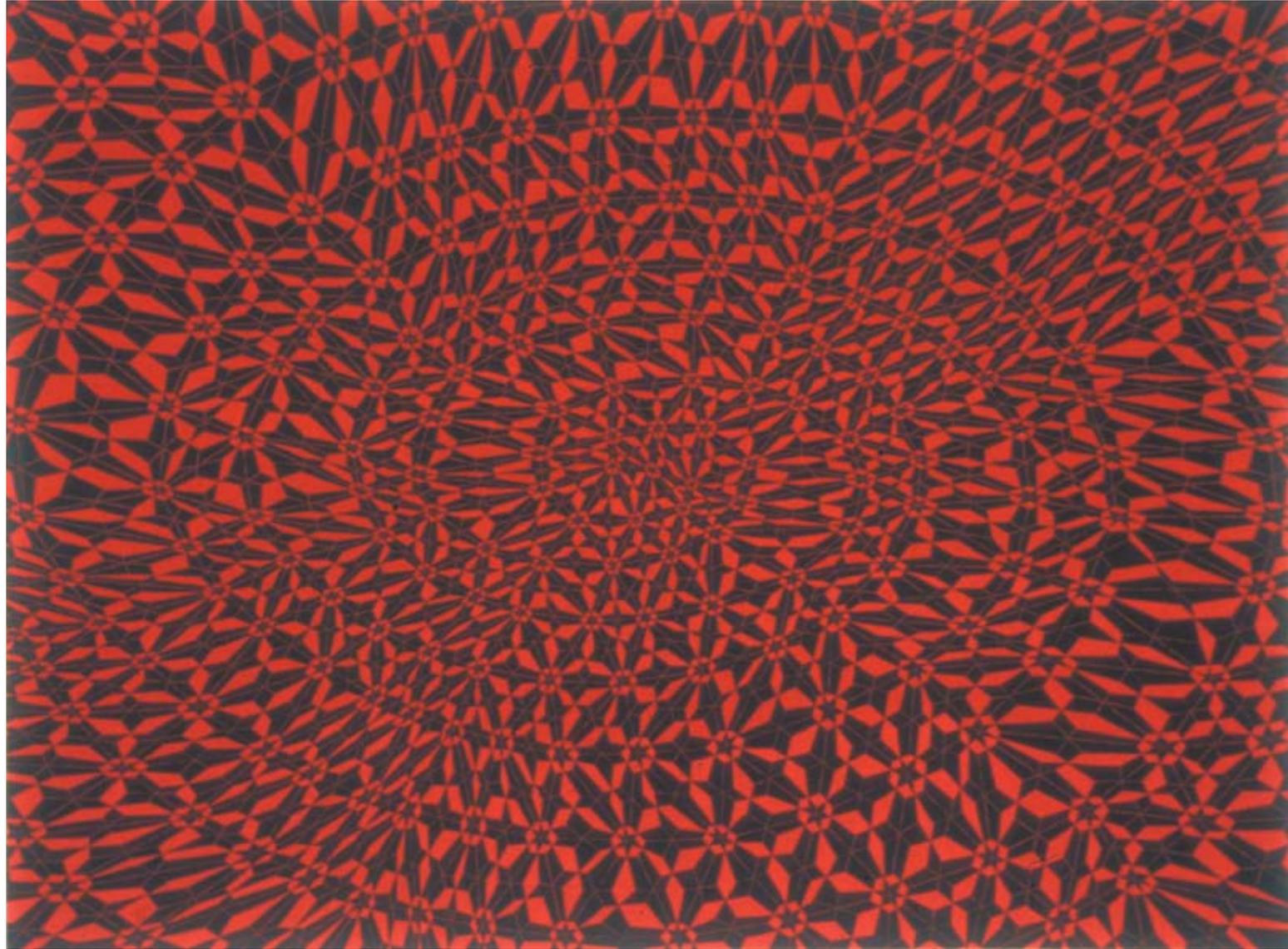
*Wheel V*, 1999  
Oil on canvas  
48 x 48 in.  
Collection of Michael Parsons and Marte Lamb  
**LCC**



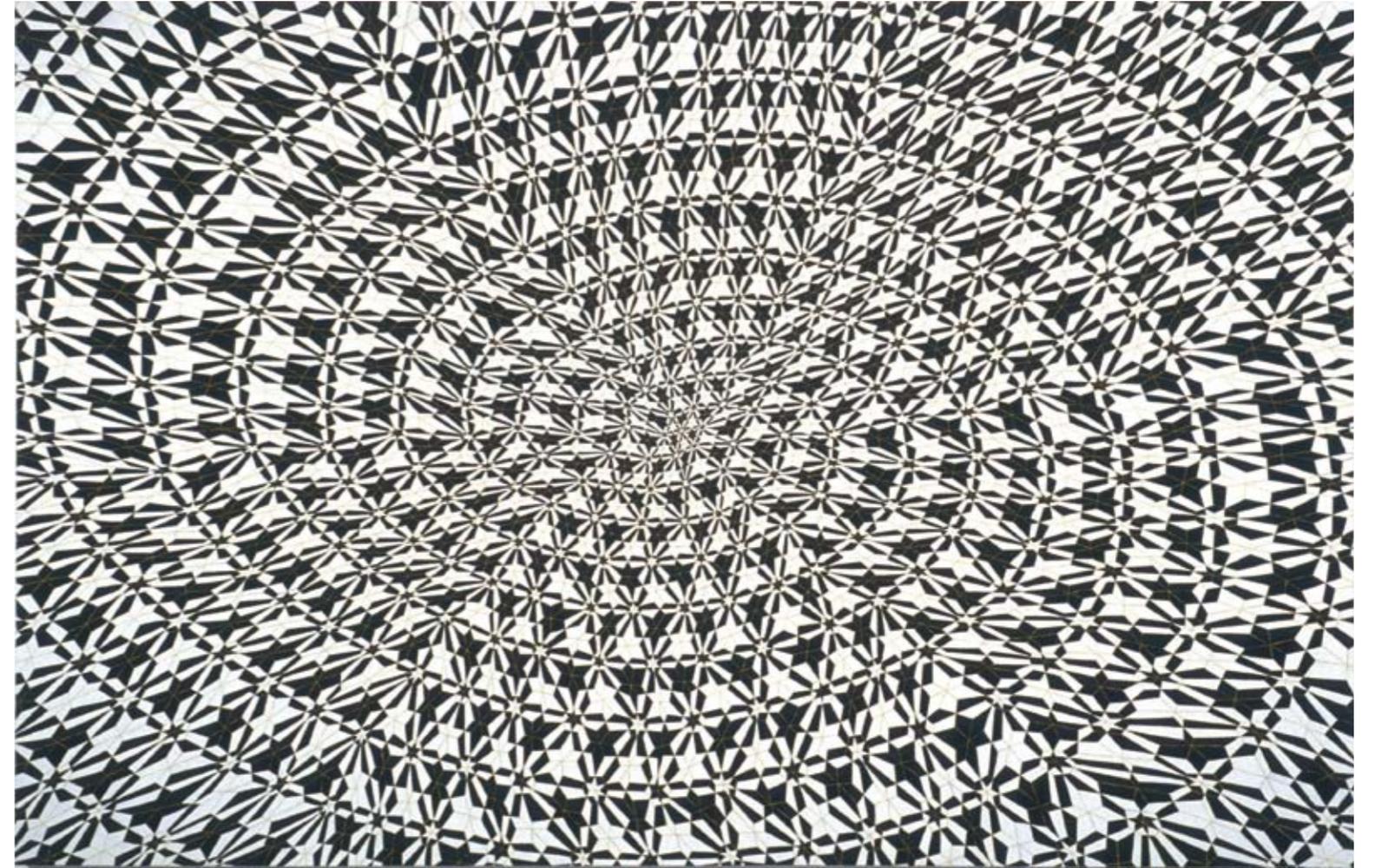
*Sprung*, 1999  
Oil on canvas  
66 x 66 in.  
Collection of Robert Dozono  
**MU**



*Red Tetra Coil*, 1999  
Oil on canvas  
66 x 66 in.  
Collection of Robert Dozono  
**MU**



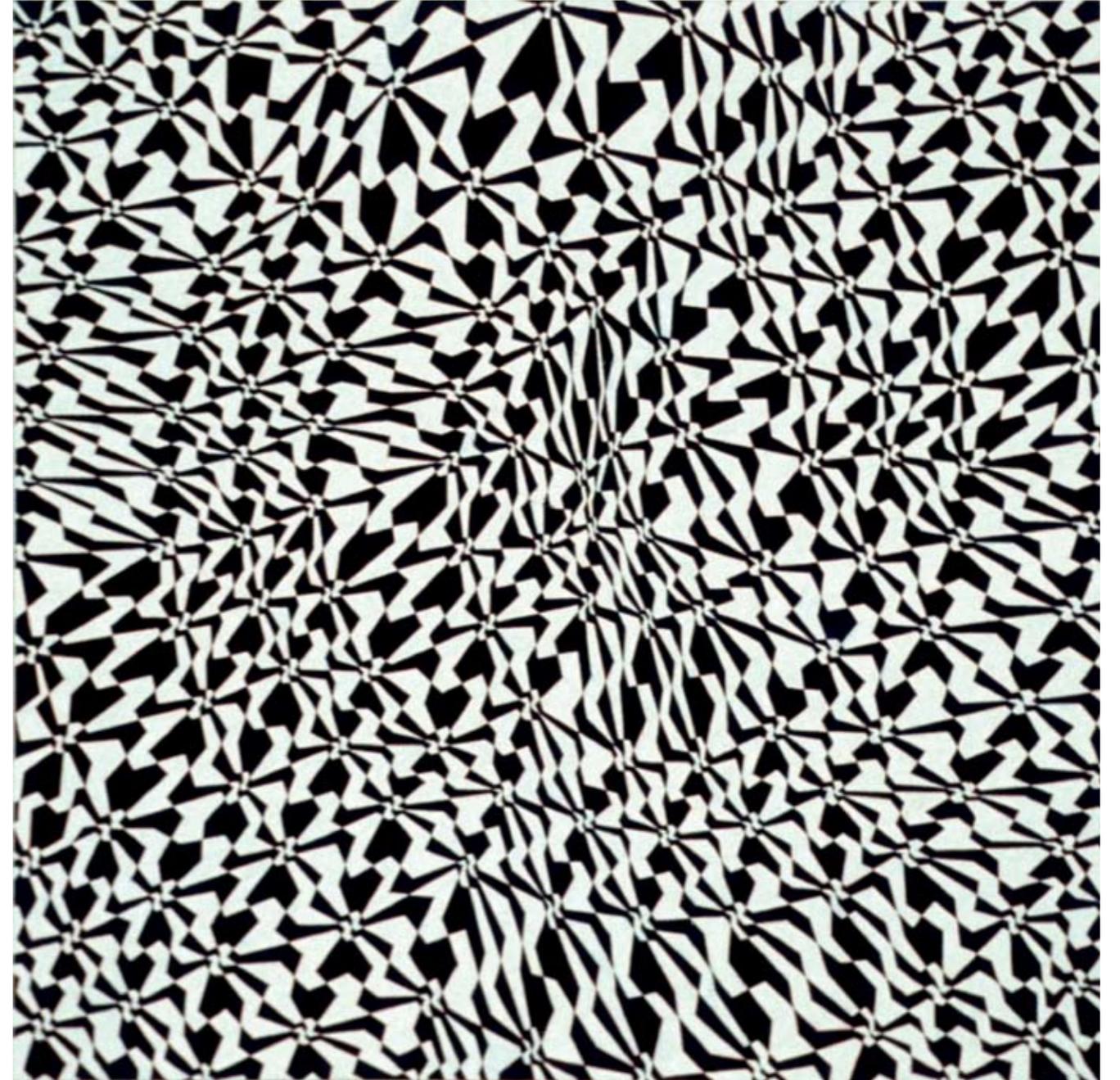
*Red Black Double Wobble Coil, 2000*  
Oil on canvas  
68 x 90 in.  
**MU**



*Black/White Tetra Coil, 2000*  
Oil on canvas  
78 x 120 in.  
**LCC**



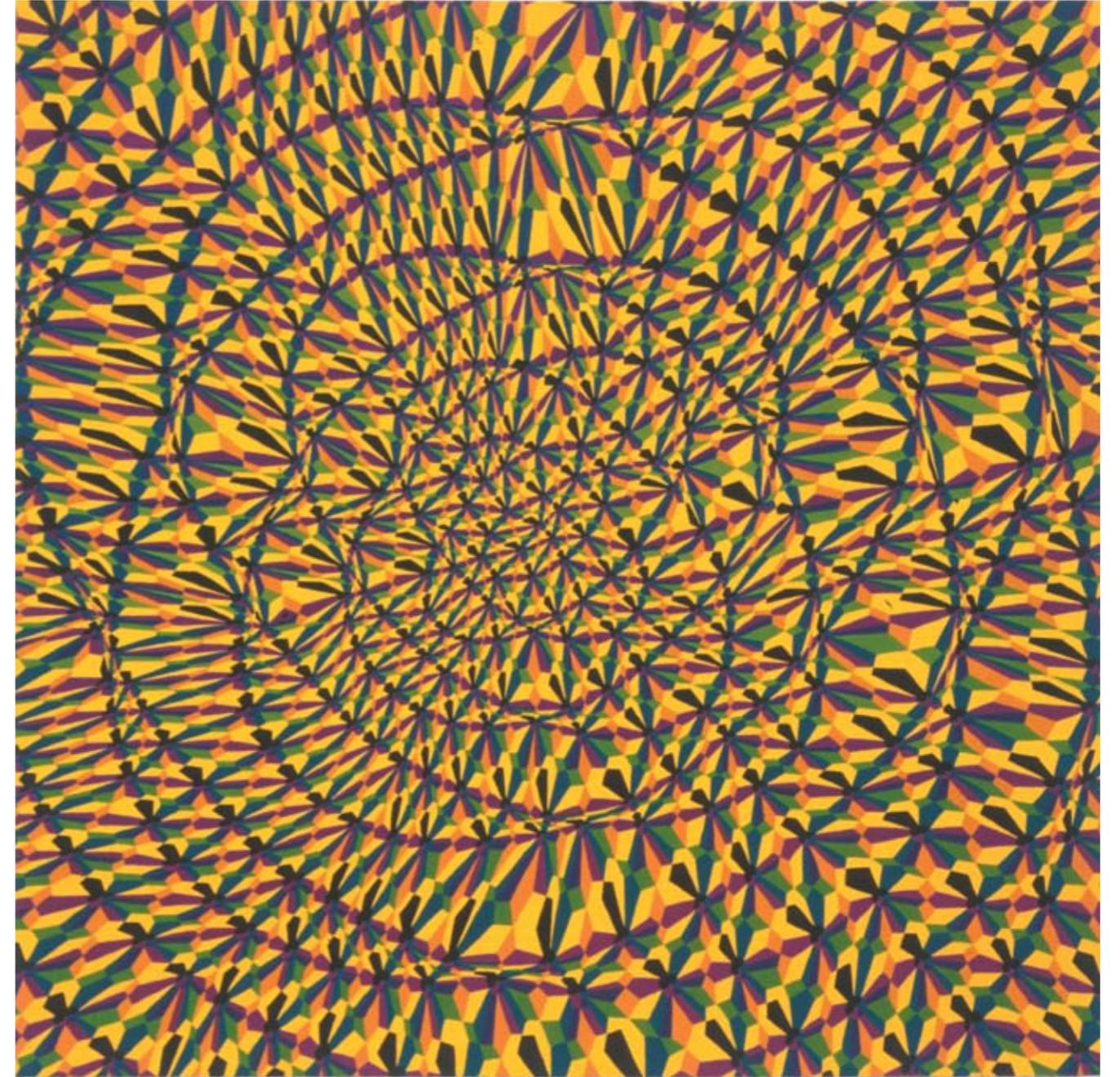
*Yellow/Orange Twisted Ribbons, 2002*  
Oil on canvas  
48.5 x 64  
**MU**



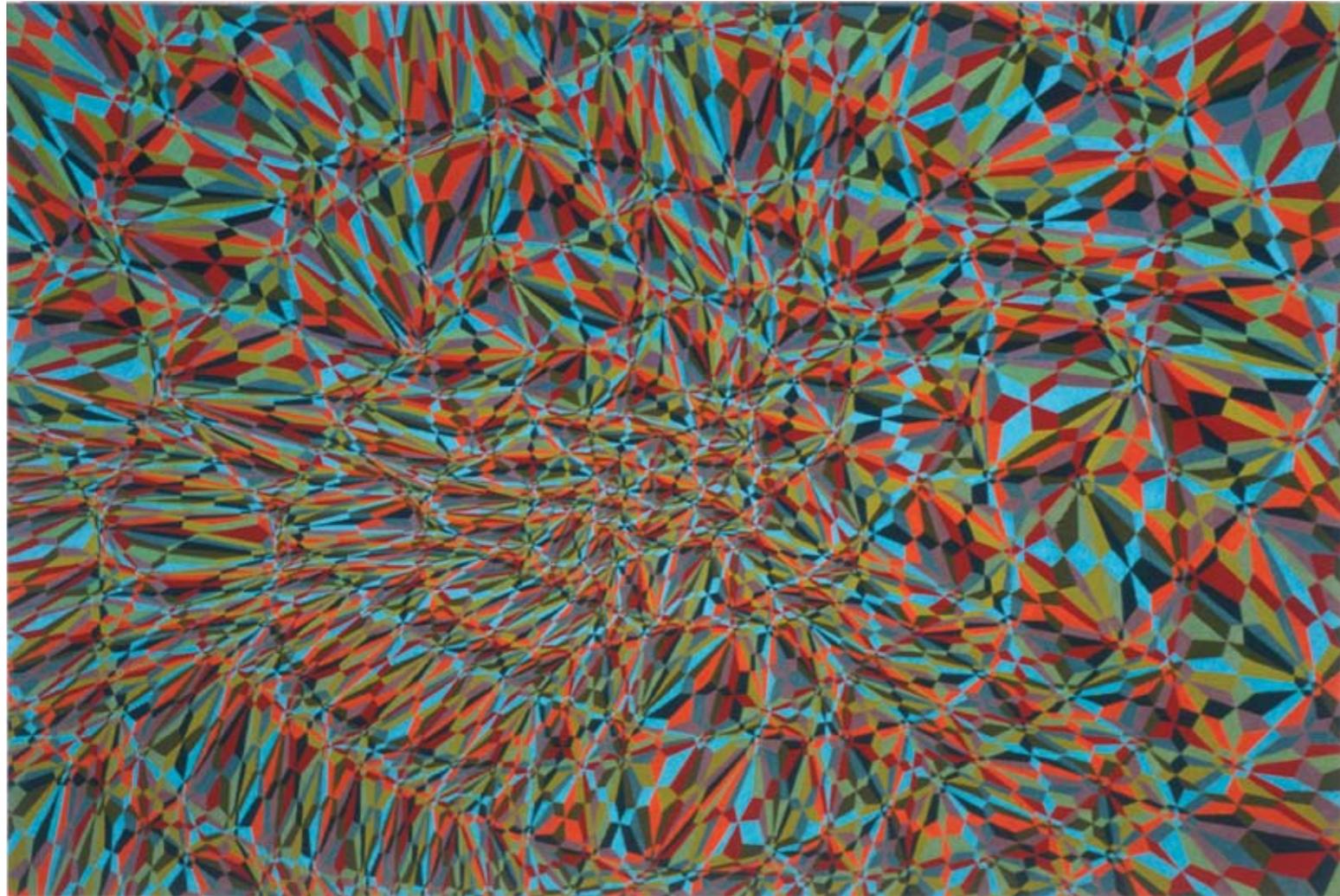
*Black/White Wobble Coil, 2002*  
Oil on canvas  
63.5 x 63.5 in.  
Collection of Robert Dozono  
**LCC**



*Warpt Coil*, 2003  
Oil on canvas  
62 x 64 in.  
LCC



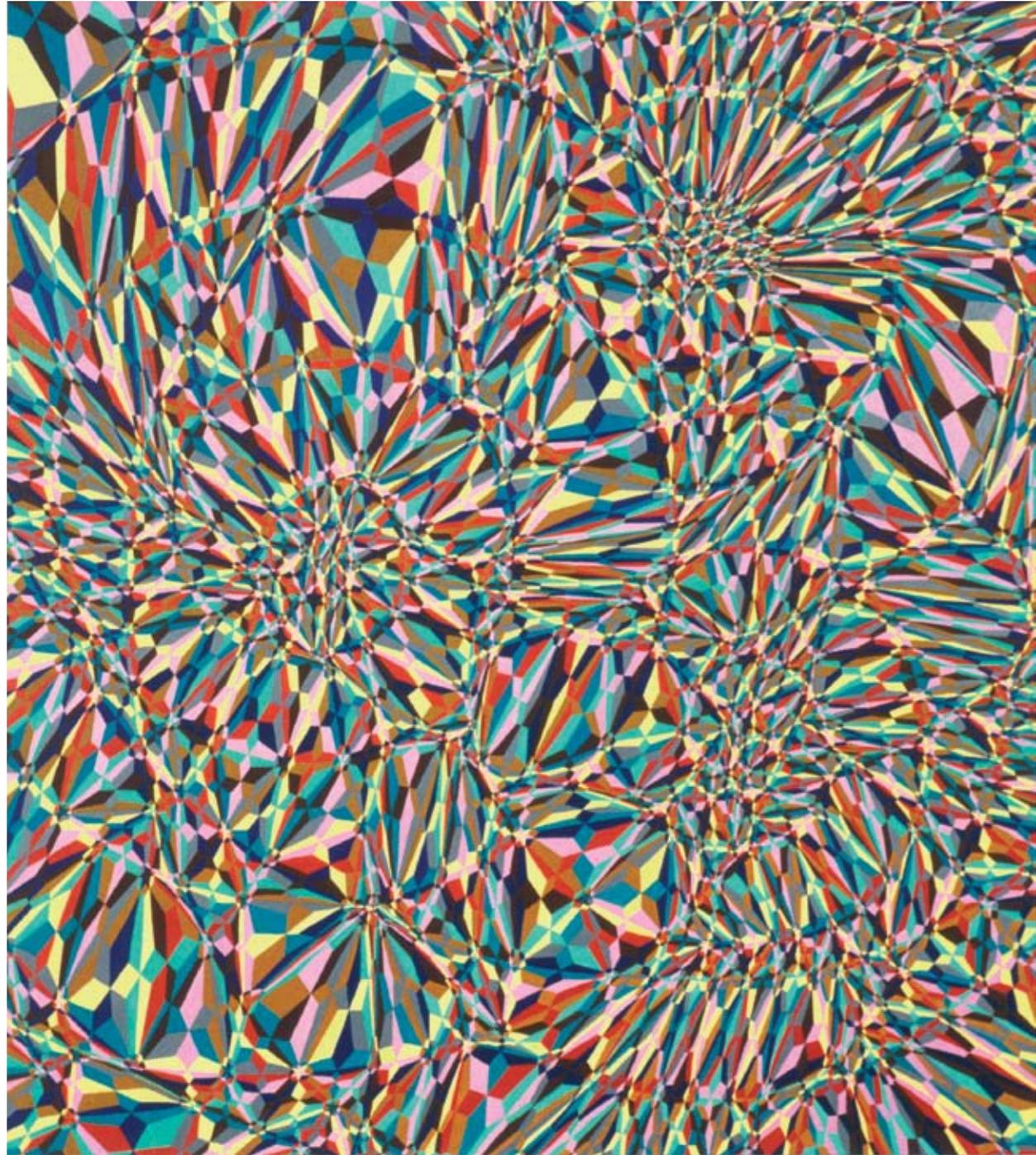
*Crossing Oval Coils I*, 2003  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 60 in.  
LCC



*Crossing Oval Coils II*, 2004  
Oil on canvas  
78 x 108 in.  
Collection of the State of Oregon  
**LCC**



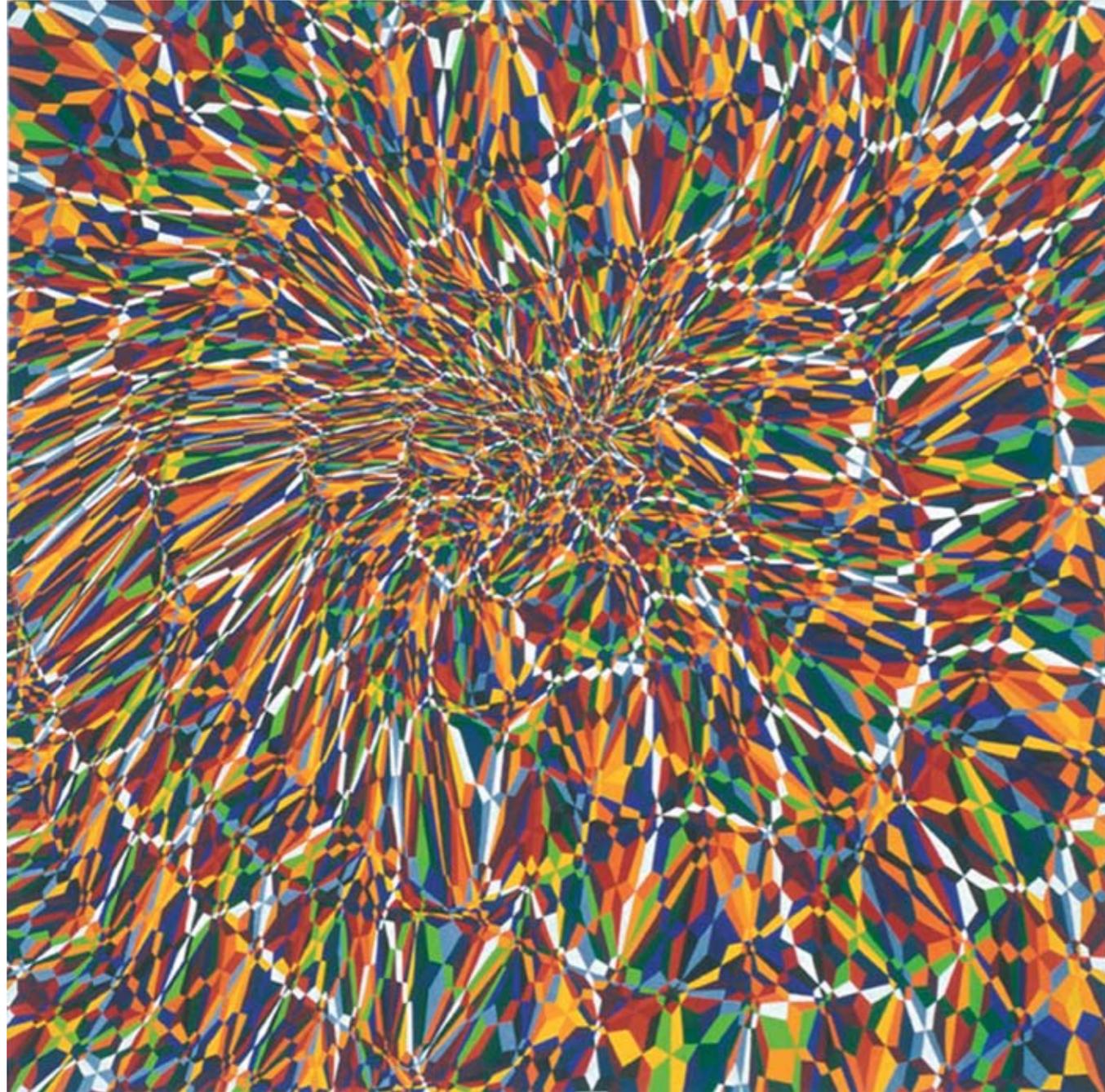
*Crossing Oval Coils III*, 2004  
Oil on canvas  
48 x 48 in.  
Collection of John Kvistad  
**MU**



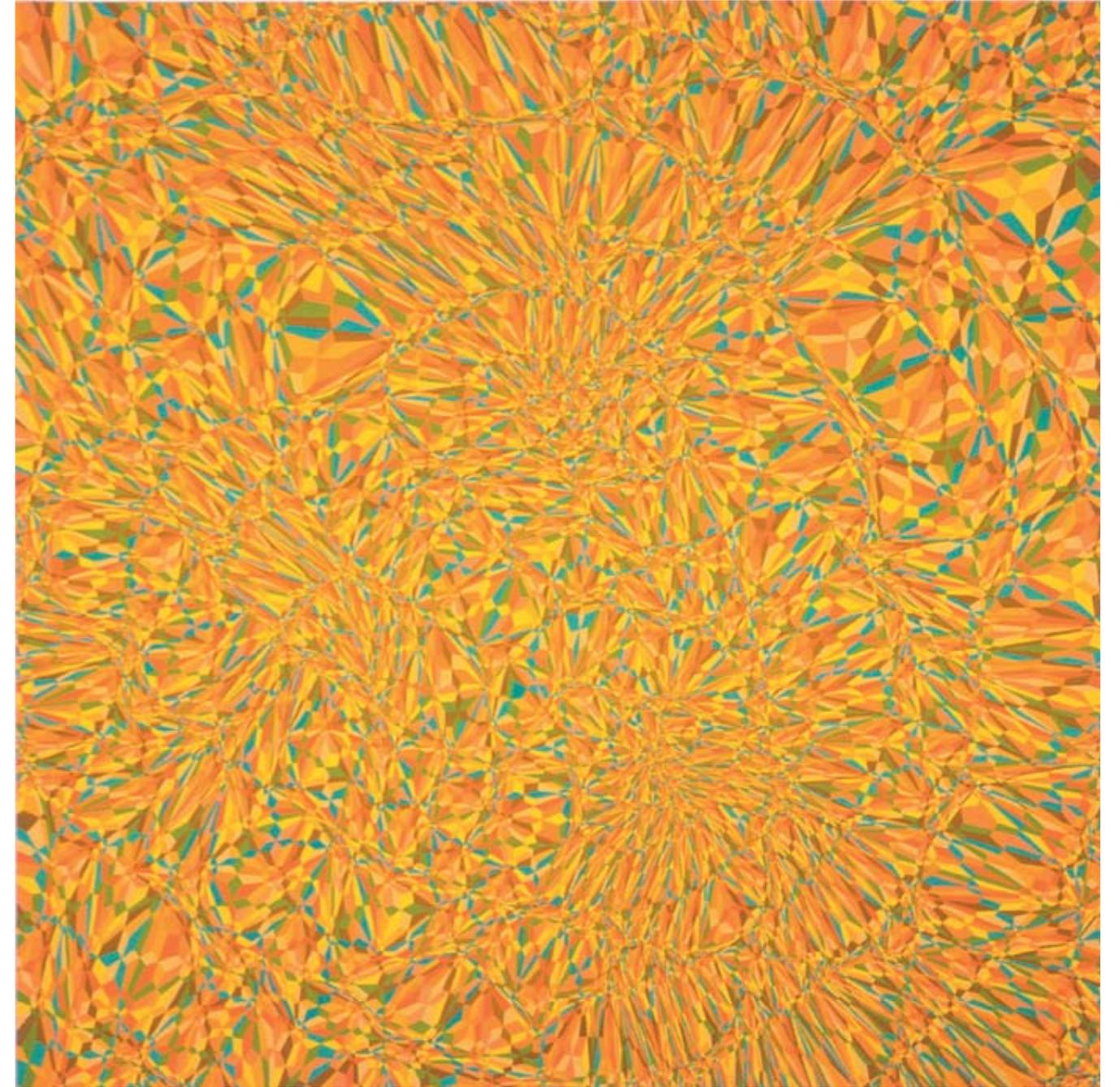
*Tripolar Coils, 2004*  
Oil on canvas  
67 x 60 in.  
LCC



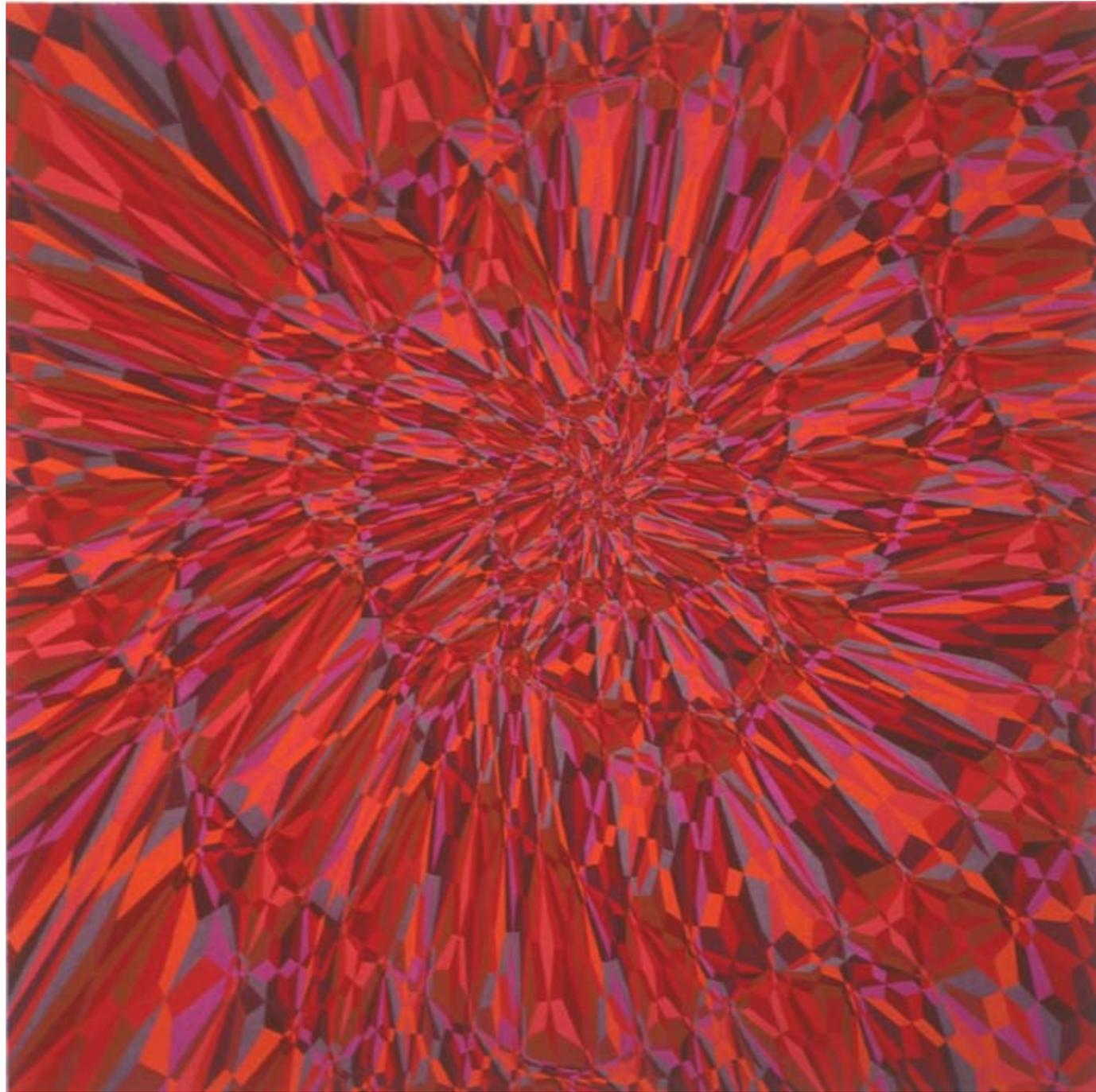
*Bipolar Coils, 2004*  
Oil on canvas  
96 x 72 in.  
LCC



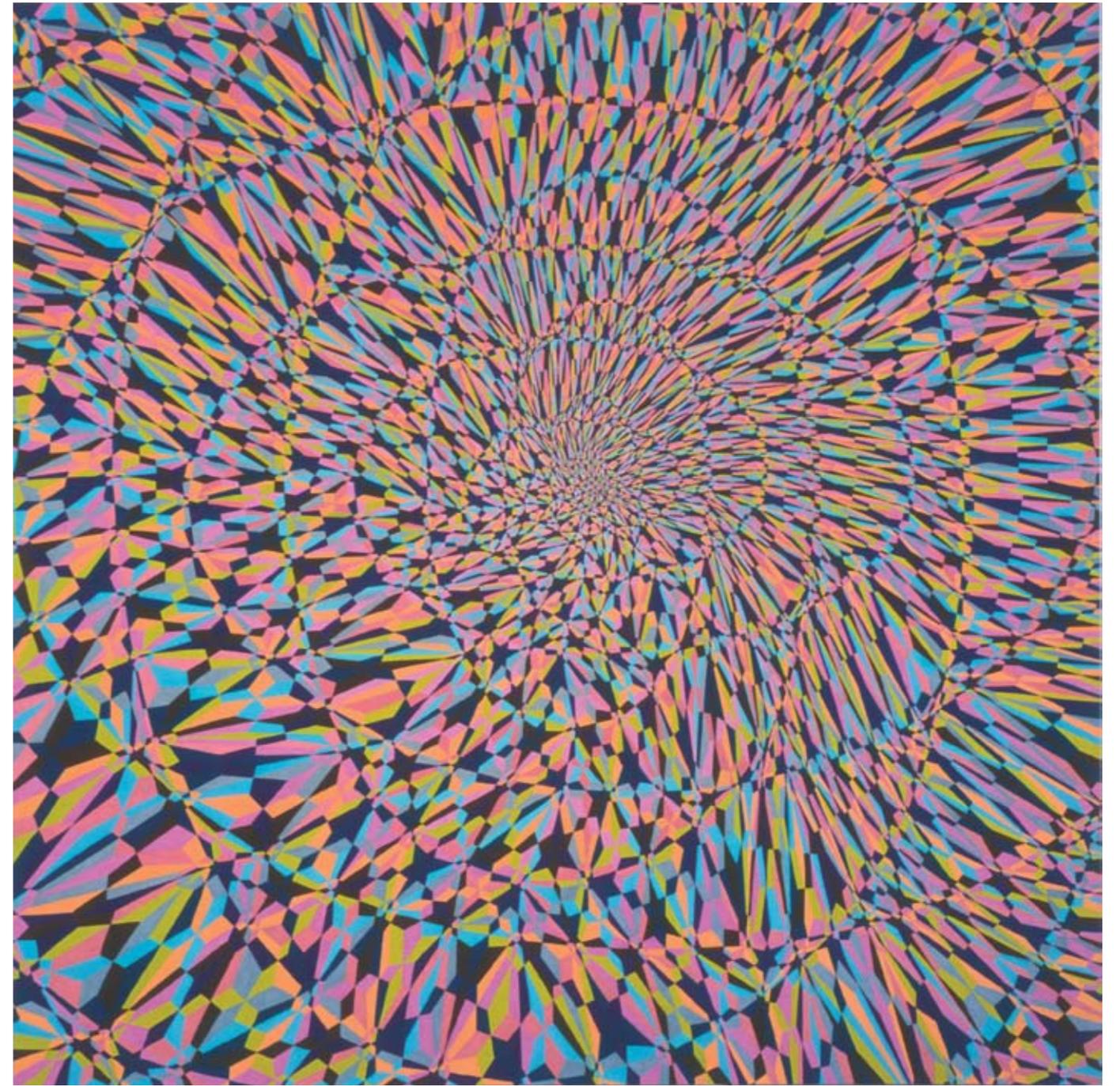
*Crossing Oval Coils V, 2005*  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 84 in.  
**LCC**



*Tripolar Coils II, 2005*  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 84 in.  
**MU**



*Convolved Coil III*, 2005  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 84 in.  
**MU**



*Crossing Oval Coils VI*, 2006  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 84 in.  
**LCC**

# A Curious Condition

Abstraction has returned to the contemporary art scene. Of course, for many it never left, but it is interesting to see the renewed attention to this mode. Recent exhibitions have foregrounded the tendency among young artists to experiment with pure form. Among the artists blazing adventurous new paths in the direction of abstraction are Vincent Fecteau, Mitzi Pederson, Ara Peterson, and Patrick Hill. Some, like Barry McGee, whose careers are based on distinctively figurative approaches, now exult in the possibilities of shape, color, and line. Michael Knutson, who has been working abstractly since his days at Yale, has something to teach these newcomers and they should look carefully at his work.

Like the art of the emerging generation, Knutson's abstraction possesses neither the personal, emotional underpinning of Abstract Expressionism, nor the rationalist bias of geometric abstraction in the de Stijl tradition, including Minimalism. Instead, Knutson's art embodies a giddy attitude of ebullient play. Hard-edge and systematic in its own way, Knutson's paintings and drawings always exceed the logic of their making, exploding into the viewers' experience as ludic epiphanies. As the younger generation is slowly discovering, the greatest release often results from the greatest control, and this is the skill that Knutson's work reveals in spades.

A little-remembered moment in American abstraction prefigures Knutson's sensibility, the lyric abstractionists of the so-called Park Place Group. This loose association of painters and sculptors, including Leo Valledor, Mark di Suvero, Peter Forakis, and Robert Grosvenor, was united by an effort to breath life into the moribund formalities of Minimalism. Robert Smithson, who was tangentially connected to the group and who showed with Valledor in the Park

Place Gallery in 1966, wrote that same year, "How could artists translate this verbal entropy, that is 'ha-ha,' into 'solid-models'? Some of the Park Place artists seem to be researching this 'curious' condition. The order and disorder of the fourth dimension could be set between laughter and crystal-structural, as a device for unlimited speculation."<sup>1</sup> I believe that Michael Knutson is still mining the powers and pleasures of this "curious' condition," leading our eyes where our minds would so dearly like to go.

Lawrence Rinder  
Dean of the College  
California College of the Arts  
San Francisco and Oakland

<sup>1</sup> Smithson, Robert. "Entropy and the New Monuments." *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*. 2nd Edition. Jack Flam, ed. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996).

*Tripolar Coils II*, 2005 (detail)  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 84 in.



# Geometry Askew: The Drawings of Michael Knutson



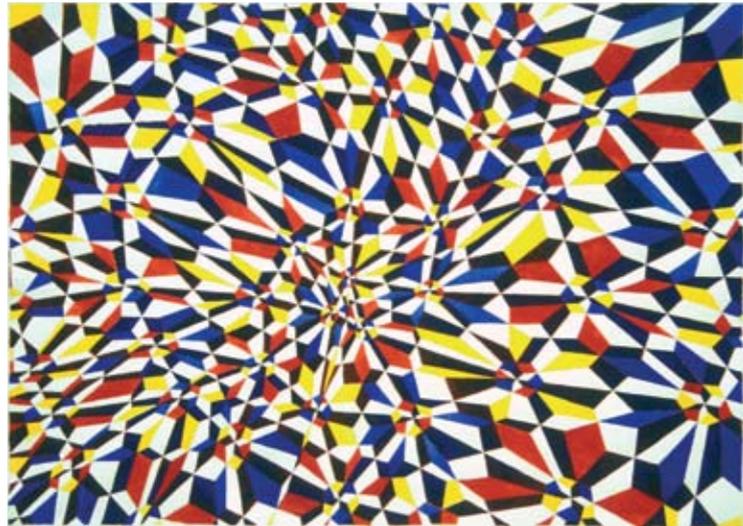
*Red Tetra Coil II, 2000*  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 30 in.  
Private collection  
**MU**

The visual effect of a Michael Knutson drawing conjures a multitude of fantastic impressions: a cosmic galaxy, a psychedelic spider's web, a geometric hybrid of carnival paintings that kids make on a spinning turntable. With all their spatial complexity, the watercolor wash drawings in this exhibition are born of a simple visual premise. They are best viewed first at a distance, to appreciate the full impact of Knutson's design; then at close range, to grasp the measured calibration of his drawing practice.

Knutson begins each drawing with pencil in hand, developing a basic grid of graphite on paper. Somewhere near the center, he draws a simple spiral—but a spiral that might be lopsided or ovoid, or might overlap itself as it winds outward. Sometimes the artist overlaps two or even three spirals that originate at different points on the page and cross each other like the multiple ripples of stones thrown into a pond. The spiral serves as an armature for the next step, a process of triangulation. Starting at the spiral's center, Knutson bridges its arcs with six radiating lines, creating six irregular triangles. He repeats this process until the spiral is locked into a hexagonal pattern of triangles. Next, he draws small, hexagonal "nodes" around the convergence points of the six triangles, truncating and changing them into irregular hexagons. Finally, he subdivides each hexagon into interlocked cubes, a pattern of diamond shapes known to quilters as "tumbling blocks." Triangulation is a discipline better known in surveying, navigation, astrometry, and stereopsis. In Knutson's hands, it is an almost Zenlike practice to create a sense of order in what will become a seemingly chaotic drawing. At the center of the drawing, the geometric shapes are most dense and contracted; as he spins out from the core, the shapes expand, stopping only where the spiral flows off the page.

This intricate line drawing, made without a straight-edge, forms the basis for exploring the endless possibilities of illusion from a basic, cubic grid. Although the underlying spirals, triangulations, and color patterns are different in each of the drawings preceding the *Large Convoluted Coil* series, they all have a similar underlying cubic pattern. In the *Large Convoluted Coils* series, 2004–05, however, the underlying drawing is identical. The artist has harnessed the benefits of contemporary mechanical reproduction for these works, scanning the original 30-by-44-inch graphite drawing into the computer, a process that is simultaneously low- and hi-tech. Because the drawing is so large, Knutson must scan it in eight parts, rejoining the lines in Photoshop software. The digitized drawing is then printed at full size onto Rives BFK, an acid-free cotton paper. This process alters the color of the line drawing somewhat, turning the graphite line silver-green, an ironic echo of Old Master silverpoint drawings. It takes Knutson six or seven days to make the original drawing, scan it, and digitally adjust it before he is ready to apply watercolor.

Knutson's large-format oil and acrylic paintings remind us that he is nothing if not a colorist. The colors in his paintings are usually intense and assertive. His drawings, however, reveal his more subtle handling of hue, as he chooses colors—or a color—to pick out shapes and passages in the lacy honeycomb of his drawn matrix. Each drawing presents an opportunity to experiment with variations on the color wheel, with illusions of transparency, or with gradations of saturation of a single color. In *Warp Coil*, 1999, for example, Knutson limited his palette to red, yellow, blue, black, and the white of the paper. Following the crossing staircases pattern of the cubic grid, each color alternates with black and white every third step. The color staircases also extend diagonally in three directions. In another drawing, *Warp Ovals*



*Warpt Coil*, 1999  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
LCC

*Wheel*, 1999, the artist limited himself to the six hues of the color wheel (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet), plus black and the white of the paper. Or, in his monochromatic watercolor drawings, Knutson rigorously applied layers of paint to achieve—in the case of *Study for Wobble Star Coil*, 2003—91 steps of saturation. Each darkening of the blue pigment represents another application of the same watercolor as the base—one can see the tick marks in the upper left corner of the sheet, where Knutson kept track of the number of shadings.

The color patterns of the watercolors from 2004 and 2005 are even more complex. *Large Convoluted Coil #1*, 2004, and *Large Convoluted Coil #2*, 2004, contain intricate sequences of colors, highly concentrated in minute slivers of shapes at the drawing's core. In *Large Convoluted Coil #1*, the nine secondary and tertiary colors are laid out in hexagonal lattices, like nine interlocking chain-link fences. *Large Convoluted Coil #2* contains 15 colors—the 12 primary, secondary, and tertiary colors and black, white, and gray—in hexagonal lattices.

Knutson can surprise even himself by the finished watercolor; it is impossible, of course, to visualize exactly how the patterns will emerge and shift before the colors create cadence. Around the time that Knutson executed *Warpt Coil*, he began to notice other ways to “read” across the painting than the color step sequences he had been intent on. Alternative color patterns and puzzling shifts of the field competed for his attention. To better understand each of these variant readings, Knutson scanned a slide of *Warpt Coil* into Photoshop and, by muting some colors and not others, isolated patterns of spirals, triangles, stars, ribbons, cubes, clusters, and lattices in a series of

digital images. This was his first use of the computer as a tool to see his drawings anew. Five years later, for the *Large Convoluted Coil* series, Knutson employed digital technology as a time-saving device, reproducing a complex drawing to explore various color pattern possibilities.

Certainly the first reading of Knutson's drawings would suggest Optical Art. This mathematically themed variation of Abstraction, which found its apogee in the 1960s, is most closely associated with Victor Vasarely, Bridget Riley, Richard Anuszkiewicz, and a few others. Knutson's drawings bear the repetition of simple geometric forms and colors that create the vibrating effects, moiré patterns, and foreground/background confusion associated with Op Art. But cool tricks of visual perception are not paramount in Knutson's work.

Rather, Knutson cites Joan Miró's celebrated *Constellation Series*, 1939–41, as a historic reference that resonates with his own drawing practice. While exiled in France, the Spanish painter made 24 obsessively meticulous drawings triggered by the Spanish Civil War and World War II. All of the drawings feature Miró's familiar motifs—circles, squares, triangles, spirals, and other geometric figures—held in tension within a free-floating web of line. Piet Mondrian (especially the Pier and Ocean drawings and paintings, circa 1915, and his late painting *Victory Boogie-Woogie*, 1944, Wassily Kandinsky, and Alfred Jensen are also artists whose works have influenced Knutson. The artist credits Leonardo da Vinci's water movement studies and deluge drawings, circa 1508–18, and the early Christian mosaics in Ravenna as other historical works that inform his imagery. He has even commented, only half jokingly, that his own drawings lie somewhere

*Warpt Ovals Wheel*, 1999  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
LCC

between Dr. Seuss (the topsy-turvy architecture of Whoville in *Horton Hears a Who*) and the intricate knots of the carpet pages of Celtic manuscript illumination.

Knutson is a graduate of Yale University School of Art (M.F.A. 1975), where the influence of Josef Albers' color theory was a pervasive presence though Albers had been retired for years. Even today, Knutson's tendency toward simple color combinations recalls Albers' work. Also teaching at Yale during Knutson's time was Abstract Expressionist Al Held, whose early black and white linear paintings—huge drawings of stripped-down geometric volumes that created kinetic illusions—piqued Knutson's interest. Crediting Held as his most direct influence, Knutson continues to strive for the spatial cohesiveness and dynamism of Held's work.

Intending his own illusions to be a bit slippery, Knutson counters an ingrained need for stability by equally and purposefully seeking the disarming quality of his pitched grids. One of the most impressive aspects of Knutson's work is that he creates an enormously energetic image while simultaneously holding the viewer's gaze to the subtle intricacy of the drawing surface. From a slight distance, these drawings appear almost alive, pulsating and flowing with movement. This is due, in part, to the absence of dominant horizontal or vertical lines—the work is always slightly ungrounded and therefore eccentric. Sometimes Knutson interweaves colors, as in *Large Convoluted Coil #5*, 2004, where a band of yellow crosses paths with a band of red. This creates the dizzying sensation that the paper has actually buckled or warped. But as one examines the surface of the drawing, the indicia of hand-applied pigment become evident. Especially as Knutson lays one watercolor wash over another, the pigment slightly pulls to the outside edges of each cell of color, a trace of the aqueous medium as it is absorbed by and resists the tooth of the paper. In other works, the geometric shapes of color maintain the slightest thread of negative white space where two colors abut, alerting the viewer to the hand-application of these pigments. (Imagine, for a moment, how different Knutson's drawings would look if he applied his colors digitally in Photoshop.)

Knutson's most recent drawings have a resolutely unfinished quality about them. The watercolor application is much more intensely defined at the center, and much more sparingly at the edges, giving the resulting color shape a certain odd placement on the page. Knutson calls this the “narrative of process,” indicating that the viewer can anticipate and participate in how these drawings are designed and constructed. In the end, the viewer might imagine these drawings to be blueprints for some confounding structure, or a map of a mysterious space.

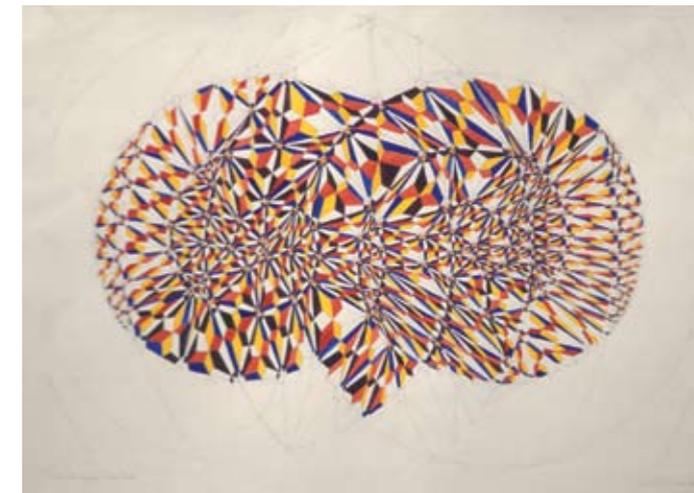


Knutson's drawings that are digitized and then hand-colored exist within the interface of technology and the most traditional methods of art making. In this, Knutson is aligned with only a few other contemporary artists who tap into the possibilities of technology while remaining resolutely committed to making images by hand. Paintings by Jeffrey Simmons and Tim Bavington, Anne Appleby's color study prints, Julie Mehretu's drawings and paintings, and Tobias Putrih's drawings and sculptures share an interest in exactitude and crispness of execution, but insist on the maker's mark in the finished work. Or perhaps Knutson has just as much in common with traditional and contemporary quilt makers, other artists who divine color and shape combinations out of infinite possibilities.

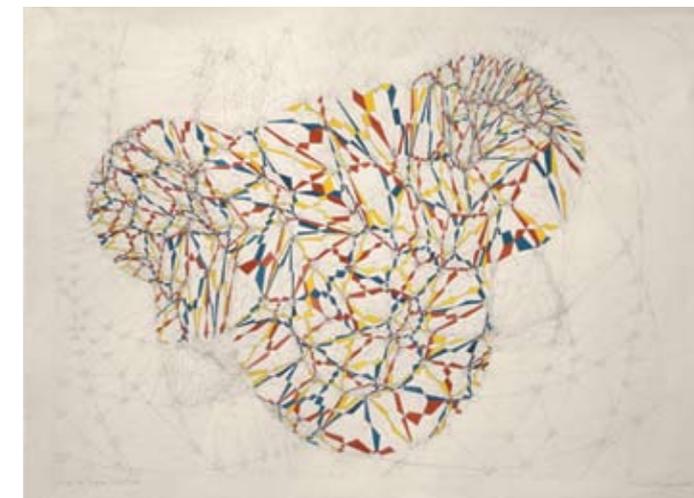
It is important to note that Knutson's drawings share common concerns with his knock-your-socks-off monumental paintings. The drawings are not, however, studies for the larger works—the drawings may serve as tests for spatial and color sequences the artist might like to apply to his massive canvases, but they are not studies in any traditional sense. Instead, Knutson combines traditional drawing, technological reproduction, and watercolor wash painting to consider new combinations of colors and shapes, challenges that are formal and fundamental considerations for any artist. In these concise drawings, he gives us patterns that are paradoxically otherworldly and comfortably familiar.

Linda Brady Tesner, Director  
Ronna and Eric Hoffman Gallery of Contemporary Art  
Lewis & Clark College

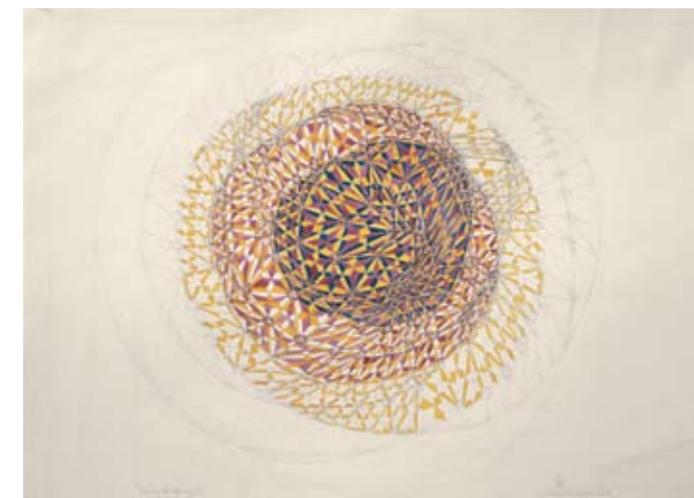
## Drawings and Watercolors



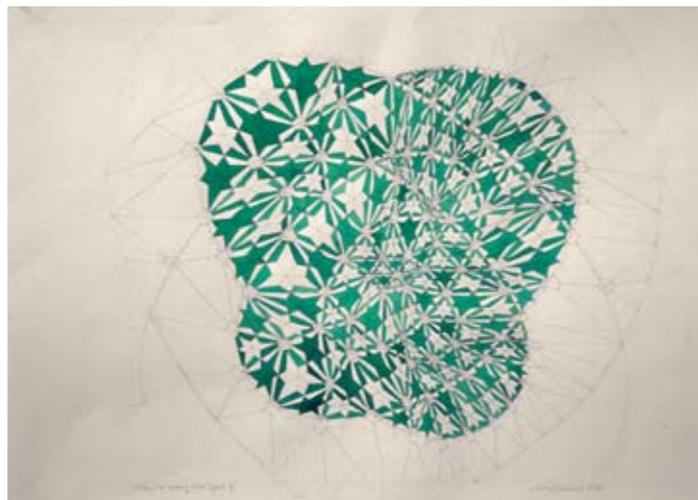
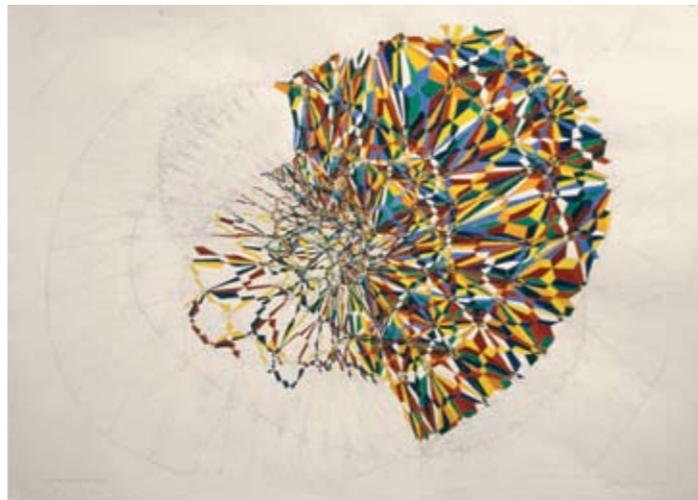
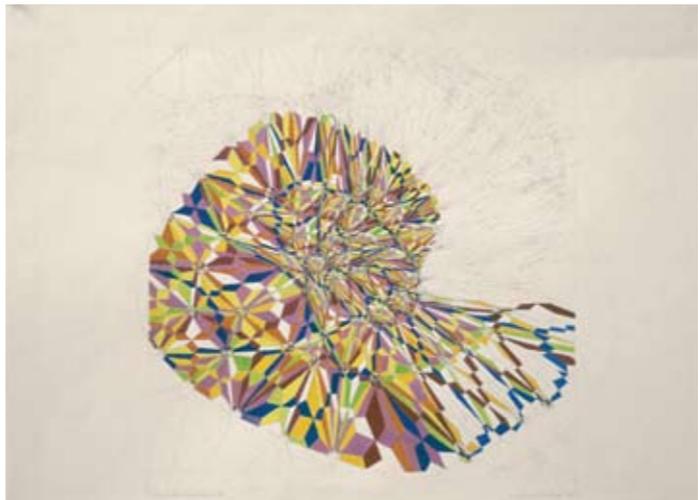
*Study for Bipolar Coiled Field, 2003*  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Robert Hanson and Judy Cooke  
**LCC**



*Study for Tripolar Coiled Field, 2003*  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
**LCC**



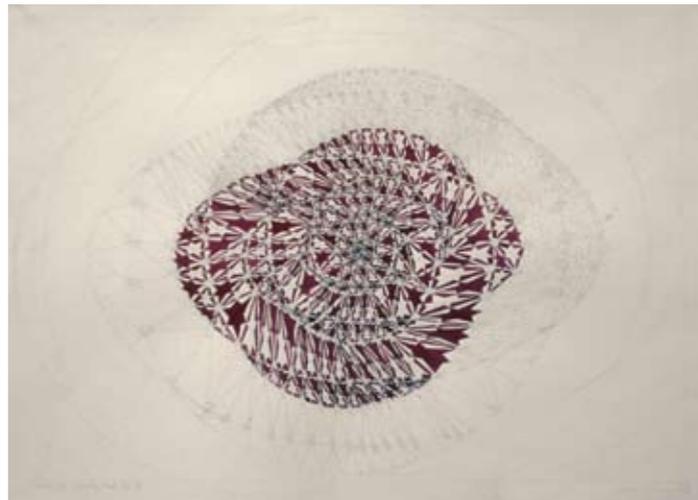
*Study for Sprung Coil, 2004*  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Lucinda Parker and Stephen McCarthy  
**LCC**



*Study for Convoluted Coil II, 2003*  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Dorie and Larry Vollum  
**LCC**

*Study for Convoluted Coil III, 2003*  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Jane Beebe  
**LCC**

*Study for Crossing Oval Coils II, 2003*  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
**LCC**



*Study for Crossing Oval Coils III, 2003*  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
**LCC**

*Perpendicular Crossing Coils I, 2004*  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
**LCC**

*Perpendicular Crossing Coils III, 2004*  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Michael Parsons and Marte Lamb  
**LCC**



*Large Convoluted Coil #1, 2004*  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.  
**LCC**



*Large Convoluted Coil #2, 2004*  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.  
Collection of George and Alice McCain  
**LCC**



*Large Convoluted Coil #3, 2004*  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.  
**LCC**



*Large Convoluted Coil #4, 2004*  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.  
**LCC**



*Large Convoluted Coil #5, 2004*  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.  
**LCC**



*Large Convoluted Coil #6, 2005*  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.  
**LCC**

# Exhibition Checklist

## Paintings

*San Romano*, 1981  
Acrylic on canvas  
84 x 60 in.

*Tango*, 1981–1982  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 84 in.

*Hold Tight*, 1983  
Acrylic on canvas  
66 x 66 in.

*Your Feet's Too Big*, 1983  
Acrylic on canvas  
66 x 66 in.

*Runner*, 1983  
Acrylic on canvas  
96 x 66 in.

*Odysseus and Calypso*, 1983  
Acrylic on canvas  
120 x 120 in.

*Apollo and Marsyas*, 1984  
Acrylic on canvas  
118 x 68 in.

*Fall of Phaeton*, 1984  
Acrylic on canvas  
116 x 78 in.  
Collection of Robert Dozono

*Fool's Start*, 1988  
Acrylic on canvas  
69 x 90 in.

*Cradle*, 1989–1991  
Acrylic, sand and mirror  
54 x 108 in.

*Current*, 1990  
Acrylic and sand on canvas  
96 x 120 in.

*Bramble*, 1990–1991  
Acrylic, sand and mirror  
72 x 72 in.

*Villa*, 1990–1991  
Acrylic, sand and mirror  
60 x 96 in.

*Armiliarium*, 1991  
Acrylic on canvas  
68 x 80 in.

*Shapeshifter 1*, 1991  
Acrylic on canvas  
72 x 67 in.

*Quarry*, 1992  
Acrylic on canvas  
96 x 120 in.

*Hinge*, 1994  
Acrylic on canvas  
60 x 96 in., diptych

*Moonstalker*, 1995  
Acrylic on canvas  
66 x 114 in.

*Nambam Diptych*, 1995–1996  
Acrylic on canvas  
66 x 132 in.

*Triplecross*, 1997  
Oil on canvas  
66 x 66 in.

*Gothic Sea*, 1997  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 120 in.

*Arabian Sea*, 1997  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 120 in.

*Oculi*, 1998  
Oil on canvas  
79 x 120 in.

*Echo III*, 1998  
Oil on canvas  
49 x 60 in.  
Collection of Maureen  
and Peter Steinberger

*Wheel II*, 1998  
Oil on canvas  
36 x 36 in.

*Wheel IV*, 1999  
Oil on canvas  
36 x 36 in.  
Private collection

*Wheel V*, 1999  
Oil on canvas  
48 x 48 in.  
Collection of Michael Parsons  
and Marte Lamb

*Sprung*, 1999  
Oil on canvas  
66 x 66 in.  
Collection of Robert Dozono

*Red Tetra Coil*, 1999  
Oil on canvas  
66 x 66 in.  
Collection of Robert Dozono

*Red Black Double Wobble Coil*, 2000  
Oil on canvas  
68 x 90 in.

*Black/White Tetra Coil*, 2000  
Oil on canvas  
78 x 120 in.

*Yellow/Orange Twisted Ribbons*, 2002  
Oil on canvas  
48.5 x 64 in.

*Black/White Wobble Coil*, 2002  
Oil on canvas  
63.5 x 63.5 in.  
Collection of Robert Dozono

*Warpt Coil*, 2003  
Oil on canvas  
62 x 64 in.

*Crossing Oval Coils I*, 2003  
Oil on canvas  
60 x 60 in.

*Crossing Oval Coils II*, 2004  
Oil on canvas  
78 x 108 in.  
Collection of the State of Oregon

*Crossing Oval Coils III*, 2004  
Oil on canvas  
48 x 48 in.  
Collection of John Kvistad

*Bipolar Coils*, 2004  
Oil on canvas  
96 x 72 in.

*Tripolar Coils*, 2004  
Oil on canvas  
67 x 60 in.

*Tripolar Coils II*, 2005  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 84 in.

*Convoluting Coil III*, 2005  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 84 in.

*Crossing Oval Coils V*, 2005  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 84 in.

*Crossing Oval Coils VI*, 2006  
Oil on canvas  
84 x 84 in.

## Drawings and Watercolors

*Warpt Coil*, 1999  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.

*Warpt Ovals Wheel*, 1999  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.

*Red Tetra Coil II*, 2000  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 30 in.  
Private collection

*Study for Wobble Star Coil*, 2003  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Meridawn Duckler

*Study for Crossing Oval Coils II*, 2003  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.

*Study for Crossing Oval Coils III*, 2003  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.

*Study for Tripolar Coiled Field*, 2003  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.

*Study for Bipolar Coiled Field*, 2003  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Robert Hanson and Judy Cooke

*Study for Convoluting Coil II*, 2003  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Dorie and Larry Vollum

*Study for Convoluting Coil III*, 2003  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Jane Beebe

*Perpendicular Crossing Coils I*, 2004  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.

*Perpendicular Crossing Coils III*, 2004  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Michael Parsons and  
Marte Lamb

*Study for Sprung Coil*, 2004  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Lucinda Parker  
and Stephen McCarthy

*Large Convoluting Coil #1*, 2004  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.

*Large Convoluting Coil #2*, 2004  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.  
Collection of George and Alice McCain

*Large Convoluting Coil #3*, 2004  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.

*Large Convoluting Coil #4*, 2004  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.

*Large Convoluting Coil #5*, 2004  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.

*Large Convoluting Coil #6*, 2005  
Watercolor on paper  
30 x 44 in.

**Preliminary studies and color charts**  
Collection of the artist

**Boldface = exhibited at Marylhurst University**  
Romanface = exhibited at Lewis & Clark College

# Michael Knutson

Born: May 1, 1951, Everett, Washington

Resides: Portland, Oregon

**Gallery Representation**  
Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon  
Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle, Washington

**Education**  
University of Washington, BFA, 1972, magna cum laude  
Yale University School of Art, MFA, 1975

**Teaching**  
Yale University School of Art, Teaching assistantships, 1974–1975  
Swarthmore College, Instructor and Assistant Professor, 1975–1982  
Reed College, Professor of Art, 1982 to present

**Fellowships and Major Awards**  
Alice Kimball English Traveling Fellowship, Yale University School of Art, 1975  
National Endowment for the Arts Individual Artist Grant, 1982  
Oregon Biennial, Portland Art Museum, Juror’s Awards in 1985, 1999  
Betty Bowen Memorial Special Recognition Award, Seattle Art Museum, 1995

**Solo Exhibitions**  
1976 “Paintings, Drawings & Collages,” Florence Wilcox Gallery, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania  
1982 “Recent Work,” Vollum Gallery, Reed College, Portland, Oregon  
1985 “Recent Paintings,” Vollum Gallery, Reed College, Portland, Oregon  
1989 “Reflective/Objective Fields,” Vollum Gallery, Reed College, and Hallie Ford Gallery, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon  
1993 “Baby Block Variations,” Catlin Gabel School, Portland, Oregon  
1999 “Radiant Fields,” Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon  
2002 “Convolutd Coils,” Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon  
2004 “Recent Paintings,” Vollum Gallery, Reed College, Portland, Oregon  
“Coiled Lattices,” Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon  
“Watercolors, 1996–2004,” Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon  
2006 “Recent Paintings and Watercolors,” Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle, Washington  
“Selected Representational Works,” Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon  
“Michael Knutson, Paintings and Drawings, 1981–2006,” presented in two parts at The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, Oregon, and the Eric and Ronna B. Hoffman Gallery, Lewis & Clark College, Portland, Oregon

**Selected Group Exhibitions**  
1972 “Northwest Watercolor Society Annual,” Seattle Art Museum Pavilion (also 1974), Seattle, Washington  
1973 “Northwest Annual,” Seattle Art Museum Pavilion, Seattle, Washington  
“Tacoma Art Museum Biennial,” Tacoma, Washington  
“Bumbershoot,” Seattle Center (also 1974, 1983, 1989), Seattle, Washington  
1974 “New Generation Drawing,” Cheney Cowles Museum, Spokane, Washington (traveling 1974–1976)  
1979 “Kit-Yin Tieng Snyder and Michael Knutson,” Florence Wilcox Gallery and Lang Music Building, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

“Rutgers National Drawing Exhibition,” Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Stedman Art Gallery, Camden, New Jersey, and University Art Gallery, New Brunswick, New Jersey (also at both Rutgers galleries in 1981)

1981 “Tradition and Innovation,” Alfred O. DeShong Museum, Widener University, Chester, Pennsylvania  
Butcher More Gallery, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
1983 “Hascall, Knutson, Rey,” The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, Oregon (also shown at 213 First Avenue South, Seattle, Washington)  
“Salon des Refusés,” Symbol/Form/Gesture exhibition, Belltown Cafe, Seattle, Washington  
1985 “Painted Structures,” Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington  
“Portland Painting Now,” The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, Oregon

“Oregon Biennial,” Portland Art Museum, Portland, Oregon (also 1991, 1995, 1998)  
“Washington-Oregon Exhibition,” Maryhill Museum of Art, Goldendale, Washington

1987 “Art is the Center,” Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Portland, Oregon  
1988 “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon  
“University of Washington Alumni Exhibition Part Three,” 1975–85, Safeco Plaza Gallery, Seattle, Washington  
1991 “Abstract Painting,” Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, Oregon  
1994 “Abstract Art in the Seattle Arts Commission Collection,” Seattle Center Pavilion, Seattle, Washington  
1997 “Drawing Conclusions,” Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon  
1998 “New Members Exhibition,” Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon (also “2 x 2 x 2000,” 1999; “Paper products.” 2000; “December Show,” 2001; “Over the Couch,” “Old and New,” 2003; “Floats and Flowers,” 2005, “Myth-fest,” 2006)

1999 “Breaking Down the Barriers,” Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, Santa Monica, California (Blackfish exchange exhibition)

2001 “Exponential: 4 Huge Paintings,” The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, Oregon  
“Michael Knutson and Carol Benson Knutson,” Blackfish Gallery, Portland, Oregon

2003 “Draw,” Core Sample: Portland Art Now, Portland, Oregon  
2005 “Unexpected Watercolors,” The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, Oregon

“Chroma,” Gallery 500, Portland, Oregon (invitational)  
“New Inventory,” Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle, Washington

2006 “Blackfish at 55 Mercer,” 55 Mercer Gallery, New York, New York  
“Self-portraits,” Clackamas Community College Gallery, Oregon City, Oregon  
“Patchwork: Affinities & Influences,” Greg Kucera Gallery, Seattle, Washington

**Professional Activities**  
Florence Wilcox Gallery, Swarthmore College, Exhibition Coordinator, 1976–82: Curated over 35 exhibits, including the works of Ilya Bolotowsky, Joan Brown, Leon Golub, Alex Katz, Joyce Kozloff, Jacob Lawrence, Duane Michals, Robert Motherwell, Robert Morris, Jody Pinto, Charles Simmonds, Michael Spafford, Michael Spano, Nancy Spero, and George Trakas.  
Portland Center for the Visual Arts, Exhibition Committee, 1982–86.  
Author of brochure essay, “On Elizabeth Murray,” for the PCVA exhibition “Elizabeth Murray, Recent Paintings & Drawings,” 1983  
Creative Arts Community, Board Member, 1986–90  
West Side Light Rail Advisory Committee, 1992–98  
Hillsboro Extension Art Advisory Committee, 1994–98  
Co-curated “Robert Morris, 1963–1992,” Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, Portland, Oregon, 1997. Author of catalog essay “Robert Morris.”

**Bibliography**  
Allan, Lois. “Grids that Attract and Tease.” Artweek, March 3, 1989.  
“Michael Knutson at Blackfish Gallery.” Artweek, February–March 2003.  
Bruce, Chris. “Painted Structures.” Exhibition catalog. Seattle, Washington: Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, 1985.  
Coleman, Patrick. “Chroma.” The Daily Vanguard, Portland State University, February 9, 2005.  
Edmunds, Kristy; Roberts, Prudence; Toedtemeier, Terry; and Weber, John. *Crosscut: Contemporary Art from Oregon*. Exhibition catalog. Portland, Oregon: Portland Art Museum, 1993.

Ron Glowen. “Sculpture is artist’s canvas.” Everett Herald, July 18, 1985.  
—“Color as structure.” Artweek, 1985.  
—“A region examined.” Artweek, November 16, 1985.  
Goetze, Janet. “Different strokes.” The Oregonian, January 6, 2005.  
—“A show of extraordinary proportions.” The Oregonian, January 4, 2001.  
Gragg, Randy; “Cornering variations on an abstract theme.” The Oregonian, February 5, 1993.  
—“State of the Art.” The Oregonian, July 18, 1993.  
Gragg, Randy; Taylor, Sue. “Oregon Biennial, two views.” The Oregonian, July 4, 1999.  
*2 x 2 x 2000, Blackfish Gallery 1979–1999*. Exhibition catalog. Portland, Oregon: Blackfish Gallery, 1999.

Graves, Jenn. “Michael Knutson at Greg Kucera.” The Stranger, May 5, 2006.  
Hackett, Regina.“Six artists combine for new show at Henry Art Gallery.” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, July 10, 1985.  
—“Three unnoticed painters put on own show to get deserved attention.” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, December 8, 1983.  
—“Hascall, Knutson, Rey.” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, December 28, 1983.  
—“Michael Knutson’s logical, geometric patterns have a living, free-flowing quality.” Seattle Post-Intelligencer, May-26, 2006.  
Hayakawa, Alan. “Show’s second part improves on first.” The Oregonian, November 14, 1985.  
Hopkins, Terri. “Exponential: 4 Huge Paintings.” Curator’s statement. Marylhurst, Oregon: The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, 2001.

Hopkins, Terri; Rinder, Lawrence; Snyder, Stephanie; Tesner, Linda. *Michael Knutson, Paintings and Drawings, 1981–2006*. Exhibition catalog. Portland, Oregon: Marylhurst University and Reed College, 2006.

Jahn, Jeff. “Michael Knutson at Blackfish.” nwdrizzle.com, December 2002.  
Johnson, Barry. “New visual center show harmonious and diverse.” The Oregonian, July 8, 1987.

—“Midsummer Night’s Dream.” The Oregonian, July 8, 1988.  
Kangas, Matthew. “On SIZE.” Bumbershoot curator’s statement. Seattle, Washington, 1984.

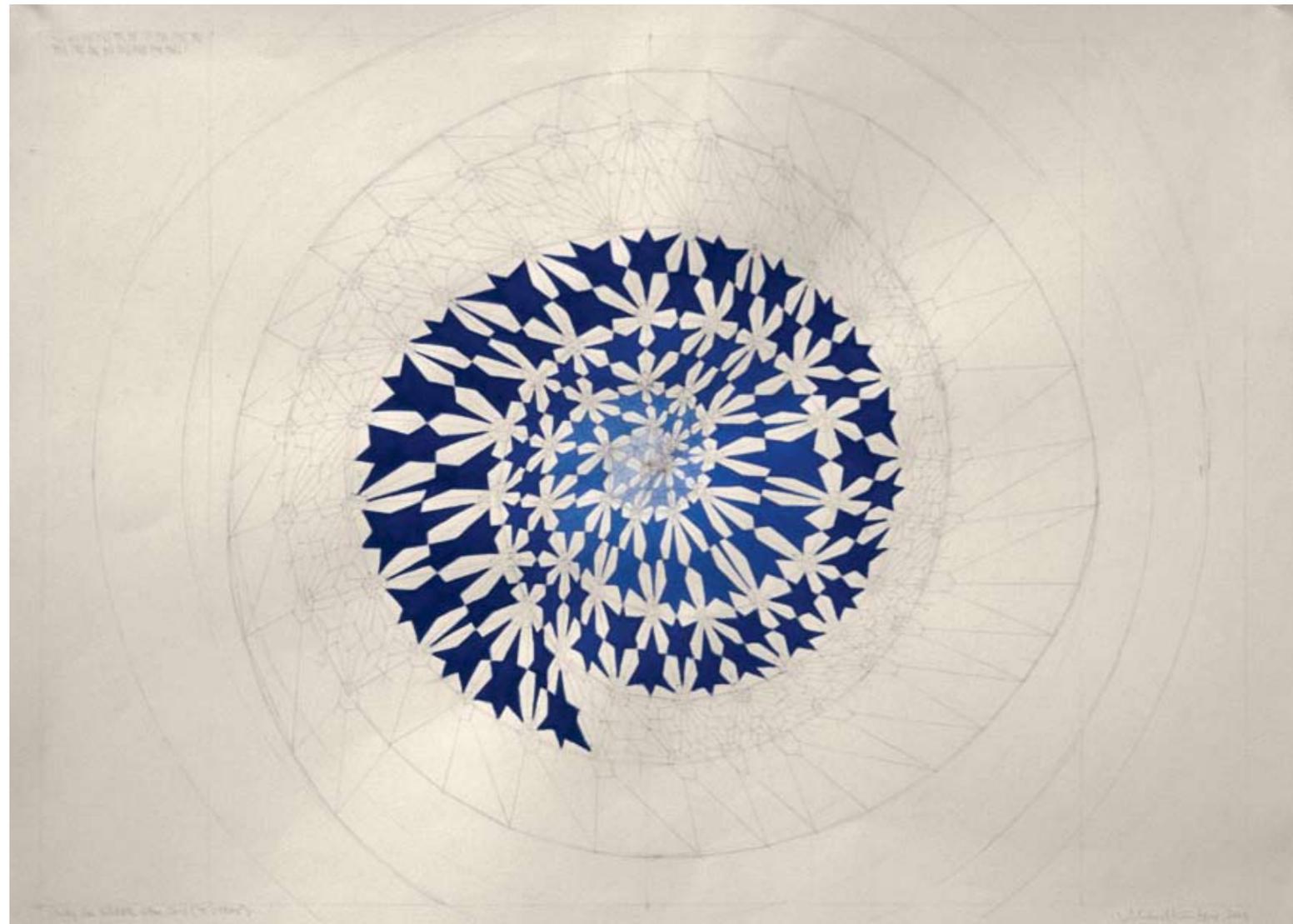
—“Knutson: Form and Myth.” West Art, June 28, 1985.  
—“Seattle Painting 1925-1985.” Bumbershoot curator’s statement. Seattle, Washington, 1985.  
—“Re-critical Modernism.” Bumbershoot curator’s statement. Seattle, Washington, 1983.

—“Michael Knutson, Reed College.” Vanguard, February 1983.  
—*Hascall, Knutson, Rey*. Exhibition catalog. Marylhurst, Oregon: The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, 1983.  
Kanjor, Katherine. 1999 Oregon Biennial. Exhibition catalog. Portland, Oregon: Portland Art Museum, 1999.

Lake, Eva. “The convoluted coils of Michael Knutson.” The Daily Vanguard, Portland State University, October 20, 2004.  
Lambert, Lisa. “Big Thinking.” Willamette Week, February 6, 2001.  
McMorran, Megan. “Oregon Biennial suffers from excessive ‘prettiness.” The Business Journal Magazine, April 15, 1985.  
*New Generation Drawing*. Exhibition catalog. Spokane, Washington: Eastern Washington State Historical Society, 1974.  
Parkinson, Trude. “Unexpected Watercolors.” Curator’s statement, The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, Marylhurst, Oregon, 2005.  
Raymond, Camela. “Michael Knutson Convoluted Coils.” The Organ, November–December 2004.

—“Draw.” Core Sample: Portland Art Now. Exhibition catalog essay. Astoria, Oregon: clear cut press, 2003.  
Row, D. K. “Livin’ Large.” The Oregonian, January 21, 2001.  
—“Painting by numbers.” The Oregonian, November 22, 2002.

—“Shows of note.” The Oregonian, October 10, 2004.  
*Rutgers National Drawing Exhibition*. Exhibition catalog. New Jersey: Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, Stedman Art Gallery, Camden; and University Art Gallery, New Brunswick, 1979.  
Sutinen, Paul. *Portland Painting Now*. Exhibition catalog. Marylhurst, Oregon: The Art Gym, Marylhurst University, 1985.  
Tarzan, Delores. “Exhibit features painted sculpture.” Seattle Times, July 12, 1985.  
Taylor, Sue. “Michael Knutson at Blackfish Gallery.” Art in America, April 2005.  
Wilner, Lucy. “Abstract Art in the Seattle Arts Commission Collection.” Reflex, October/November 1994.



*Study for Wobble Star Coil*, 2003  
Watercolor on paper  
22 x 30 in.  
Collection of Meridawn Duckler  
LCC





Marylhurst University / Reed College