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**NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN  
FACULTY OF FINE ART  
DEPARTMENT OF PRINTMAKING**

**MARY FARL POWERS: PRINTMAKER  
(1948-1992)**

By

ANNE MC DONALD

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## INTRODUCTION

### Aims

In this thesis I am going to explore the work of the artist Mary Farl Powers (1948-1992) and look at her influences. Mary Farl Powers was a contemporary Irish printmaker, born in the USA, who had a larger than life personality and who was a complicated person and artist. This echoes throughout her artwork. She made etchings, lithographs, woodblock prints and sculptural paper-works. In a publication coinciding with the artist's Retrospective Exhibition in the Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1995, writer and critic Aidan Dunne refers to Powers' work as dealing with the theme chaos and order.

"The sense of an enfolding chaos, and the instinct to create order in the face of chaos, are perhaps the dominant features of the work of Mary Farl Powers, just as they were significant traits of her character and her approach to life."  
(Dunne, 1995, p.11)

I will begin by looking at her family history, and will go on to examine influences on her work, both Irish and American, and how Oriental artwork affected her. I intend to describe how chaos and order are merely one of many themes in Powers' work. I shall examine works dating from the early 1970s to her last piece, *In Search of Order* (1992), and will consider how the work went in very different directions, while staying with subjects that she felt most comfortable with, i.e. the landscape and the human figure. It is in the various ways her subject matter is represented that stimulates particular interest in Powers' work.



### Methodology

Other than N.C.A.D's file library which contains catalogues and news-clippings and the catalogue written by Aidan Dunne, other published information was limited. I gained further material by independent means, speaking to the artist's family, Jane E. Powers and Katherine A. Powers, to whom I am most grateful. I was also given the opportunity to see in person the tactile quality of Powers' work when I saw the actual plates of both her bean series and Emblems. This allowed me to give a description of the various changes her work went through over a twenty year period. I also took photographs to document development chronologically of approximately eighty images.

I visited two commercial art galleries who both exhibited Powers' work, the Taylor Galleries, Dublin and the Graphic Studio Gallery, Dublin, to try and get a sense of the general public reaction to her work. As a result of many conversations with both Powers' contemporaries and friends at the Graphic Studio, I feel confident in describing Mary Farl Powers as both an artist and person, particularly in how her initiative helped develop various new techniques in the field of printmaking.



## CHAPTER ONE: *PERSONAL HISTORY*

Mary Farl Powers, was born beside the Mississippi River in St. Cloud, Minnesota, USA in 1948. When Mary was three years old her father and mother, both writers, were impressed by a film they had seen about Joyce and set sail for Ireland. The Powers family arrived in Ireland in 1951. For much of Powers' younger years she lived a bohemian life, her family moving back and forth between Ireland (Greystones, Dalkey) and the United States. The wife of Patrick Pye, a well known Irish painter, recalls the Powers family renting from her mother. James J. Powers, a private person, was a well known and respected writer, mainly in short stories. The craftsmanship and humour in his work were to be reflected in his daughter's work and personality. Her sister recalls:

"She had an innate aloofness, apparent even in snapshots of her as a young person. Without a doubt, it was this detached quality which fed the making of her peculiar and idiomatic brand of art. Art which caused and still causes my father to shake his head, wishing that she would make something more comprehensible."

(Powers J., 1995, Irish Times)

Powers acknowledged that her art was hard to understand; it was as simple and as clear in definition as one wants it to be. Powers' mother, Betty Wahl Powers, was also a skilled and meticulous person. Yet, unlike her mother or her father, Powers was a non-conformist. She rebelled against the strict Catholicism of her parents. When Powers was nine and a half years old and living in Ireland, Jane, her younger sister, was born. Jane, like Powers, studied at the National College of Art and Design.



She also managed the gallery for the Graphic Studio, which both sisters joined in 1973. Jane recalls working on the etching called *Emblems* (1981), with Powers as she frantically approached her exhibition date.

"She engaged in the art of printmaking; it was her complete and utter vocation, making prints."  
(Powers J., interview, 1997)

Powers showed an interest in drawing and making at an early age. She enjoyed making things out of paper and clay. In later years paper was to become an even bigger fascination, particularly in the 1980s, allowing the element of playfulness shine through more than ever. There was a year in the difference between Powers and her older sister Katherine, who recalls:

"She had a huge mouth, enormous eyes, a bad temper and an astonishing number of phobias."  
(Powers K., 1995, p.11)

Among the things Powers disliked were doctors, worms and eggs. The egg aroused the strongest emotions in her. Similarly, she found babies dismaying, their general aura of worminess. Still, she was content with them when they were wrapped and buttoned up. The artwork that describes this best is Fig.1, *Circa* (1976), a Christmas card she made of the baby Jesus swaddled up tightly.

Powers' older sister Katherine returned to America in 1972. Powers wrote to her about her everyday quests and explorations both in her life and in the way she approached her work. Powers spent a year as Printmaker in Residence at the Northern Ireland Arts Council's print workshop, 1980-81. About it she wrote, "Belfast is fine. I was frightened a bit at first.



Luckily the indiscriminate bombing seems to be on the decline. There are fewer soldiers around also. But it can be upsetting coming across them with their great guns pointing at you." Katherine refers to the way her sister made a clear distinction between working for a living and working as part of one's life:

"She was utterly opposed to working for a living - taking jobs, and adjured me to stay clear of it when I returned to the United States in 1972."  
(Powers K., 1995, p 2)

When Powers' parents returned to America in 1975, she decided to stay as she was just beginning to gain recognition for her work here in Ireland. She preferred Ireland to the USA, but was fascinated by the United States of America, a place she loved to visit.

Powers continued to work at the Graphic Studio and Gallery, until her untimely death in 1992 at the age of 43. Powers was a director at the Graphic Studio for many years. She exhibited at solo and selected group exhibitions. The majority of Powers work is presently on long term loan to IMMA (Irish Museum of Modern Art). IMMA also held Powers retrospective exhibition in 1992 called after her last artwork *In Search of Order*.



## CHAPTER TWO: *INFLUENCES*

Powers did not follow any one particular artist or belong to any one style or school of art. Yet, she admired many artists. The Graphic Studio was where Powers worked along side both Irish and international artists throughout her career. This is where she worked with a complete range of subject matter and styles, from rural landscape to figurative and abstract works. The connection between Powers' landscape compositions and those of Japanese artists was made at least as early as 1975. In this chapter I will explore her admiration for various Irish artists and how they influenced her. I will then look at American and Oriental influences on her work.

### *Irish Influences*

Powers owned work by various Irish artists, for example a painting by Patrick Pye whom she admired as a colourist and a large predominantly green painting by Tony O' Malley, who is presently working in the Graphic Studio on the Visiting Artist Scheme. The Printmaker James O'Nolan remembers her owning a black ink drawing by Barrie Cooke of a crow that was very calligraphic. Powers was not directly influenced by any one of these artists. Most people in Ireland did not know a lot about printmaking in the 'sixties or early 'seventies. They would not have known the difference between a reproduction and an original print. Unlike today, printmaking in that era was used in a monotonous and strictly traditional way.



Powers dealt with new methods, new materials, and technical departures within each medium. Powers was an inspiration both as a teacher and Printmaker to people that worked along side her in the Graphic Studio.

"She dragged Irish printmaking out of the stodgy, one-colour, fuzzy-imaged, early period in the 1970s into its present vibrant age."  
(Powers J., 1995, Irish Times)

Powers invested a lot of her time and energy in the Graphic Studio for personal satisfaction and to promote the awareness of printmaking in Ireland.

### Graphic Studio

The Studio was founded in 1961 in a small basement in Upper Mount Street, by a number of artists, most notably, by Patrick Hickey. He had studied etching and lithography in Urbino in Italy, and this knowledge he passed on to a generation of artists, who in turn have increased and disseminated it. Hickey's and Powers' had two things in common their love of Oriental artwork. The other was their commitment to promoting the understanding of printmaking among the Irish public. After much negotiation and hard work the studio had finally achieved its objective of acquiring a permanent gallery for showing and selling original prints. "A permanent base in which to show and sell the works of Ireland's printmaking artists." (Dowey, 1989, Irish Times) The printmaker James McCreary credits Powers with the suggestion of having a large acquaint box, acid bath and etching presses in the studio. The Graphic Studio provides excellent facilities for artists that work with a broad range of styles and techniques. Among the first artists to work in the studio were John Behan, Michael Kane, Ruth Brandt. In the late 'sixties early 'seventies Patrick Pye, Brian Bourke John Kelly and Mary Farl Powers joined.



### Visiting Artists Scheme

One of the Graphic Studio's important projects over the years has been its *Visiting Artists Scheme*. Here Powers collaborated with artists who specialise in media other than print. When Powers was interviewed by an art critic in the 1980s she stated how she hated the word printmaker because of its arts and crafts image, "I'm an etcher. People tend to think of prints as being second or third best to paintings or sculpture - but that's just not the case." When I talked to James McCreary he told me about the numerous conversations he and Mary would have while having coffee and biscuits. She often mentioned how good it would be to work with some good Irish artists. With this in mind the *Visiting Artists Scheme* was set up by Powers, James O'Nolan and James McCreary in 1980.

Powers' initiative and the way she questioned the language of printmaking is what made her an influential printmaker. For most artists today making prints is a collaborative venture. Powers was an intensely private person and artist; in some sense, making art with others goes counter to an essential part of her. It can also be argued that Powers' working method has a natural affinity with the many techniques of printmaking. Artists that have participated in the *Visiting Artists Scheme* more recently include: Micheal Farrell, Felim Egan, Cecily Brennan and Gwen O'Dowd.



## American Influences

### Helen Frankenthaler (1928)

The artist whom I feel has similar qualities in her work to Mary Farl Powers is Helen Frankenthaler, an American abstract expressionist painter who has also made woodblock and lithograph prints. The most obvious connection between both artists is the influence of Oriental, particularly Japanese, traditions; both artists' use of format, material, and motif all suggest the Orient. In Fig. 2, *Untitled* (1990), the paper used is Japanese. Powers leaves no single strong shape to dominate the composition; the forms, although created from linear elements, are amorphous and suggestive, setting up a subtle interplay among themselves. The print Frankenthaler created, Fig. 3, *East and Beyond* (1973), printed on Nepalese handmade paper, has the subtlety and fluidity of outline that is similar to Powers' woodcuts. The composition, even though it is non-figurative, evokes Japanese prints both because of its method of cutting and its name. I have found out recently in conversation that for years Frankenthaler had owned the Hiroshige print *Horse Market*; it is impossible not to sense that Japanese image behind this print.

Even in Frankenthaler's earlier work she confidently used shapes that strongly resembles Oriental calligraphy to create in prints an almost minimalist effect. Fig. 4, *Lilac Arbor* (1970), uses specific shapes against a white background which is similar to Fig. 5, *II* (1989). Here Powers uses her forms in a very fluid calligraphic way that suggests slow movement similar to the slow movement of any type of thick liquid.



The subtle use of colour in Powers' woodblock prints in particular reflect both Oriental and Frankenthaler's use of colour.

"The warmer colour seems to hark back to the era of Morris Louis, Sam Francis and even Helen Frankenthaler; that is to say it has a very American ambience and belongs to the second wave Abstract Expressionism."  
(Fallon, 1988, Irish Times)

I agree that Powers' use of warmer colours relates to the work of these artists mentioned. I do not totally agree that her woodblock prints have an American ambience. They may have in Powers' later cast paper pieces with woodblock. Her earlier woodblock prints have a pronounced Japanese ambience which strongly echoes her interest in Oriental art. The proportions of the print and the large un-printed areas of Frankenthaler's prints are similar to Powers' work.

Adolph Gottlieb (1903-1974)

Gottlieb made some of the most interesting prints of the 1940s while developing his own narrative style his work eventually became more abstract. It was the late 1980s that Powers began to experiment and interfere with traditional printing techniques, such as in Fig.6, *Blot* (1987), where a disc floats or merges, suspended in the centre. The spontaneous, unpredictable marks of dragged fingers break the monotony of this image. A comparison can be made with the work of Adolph Gottlieb, who in the late 1950s had been experimenting with symmetrical patterns, evoking a kind of duality. In Fig.7, *Cool Blast* (1960), Gottlieb suspends a disc above a dark tactile splash. In both his and Powers' compositions there is a suggestion of the tactile and the immaterial, the explosive and the calm, the gesturally free and the controlled.



Powers was attracted to various aspects of art, evolving a personal approach that was influenced by different modern styles throughout her career. The influence of Abstract Expressionism, particularly Gottlieb, is evident. Images are refined and simplified; style and elegance predominate.

### Oriental Influences

#### Hiroshige (1797-1858)

Hiroshige's work was inspired by watching closely the natural features of Japan such as in Fig.8, *Yatsukoji, inside Sujikai Gate* (1857). Unlike Western plazas, Japanese urban hiroba (broad spaces) tended to be used for passage rather than gathering. Traditional Oriental landscape painting or printing has strong metaphysical and mental elements, that is to say it idealized and conceptualised, though it is naturally related to actual climate and physical landscape. I suspect that Powers was influenced by this Japanese artist and his woodblock prints.

"I suspect the influence of Japanese prints in some of the works of this period (Hiroshige), but if so it has been well absorbed."

(Fallon, 1995, Irish Times)

It was approximately around the 1850s when Hiroshige introduced a striking new technique of composition, which involved enlarged framing elements against a distant background. Combined with superb printing skills and evocative depiction of landscape, Hiroshige's compositional inventiveness was guaranteed to grasp Powers' attention. This is evident in her work of the 1970s. For example, in Fig.9, *Red on Green* (1975), Powers uses Hiroshige's enlarged framing device by layering flat images over one another, which suggests a vague kind of recession between foreground and background.



Fig.10, *The Plan* (1975), suggests the colonising aspect similar to Hiroshige's landscape studies. The critic Aidan Dunne refers to *The Plan*, as a grid of human (perhaps pregnant women) and animal (dogs) figures that are superimposed over a landscape.

There is a strong resemblance between Hiroshige's woodblock print, Fig.11, *The Waves off Kanagawa, from Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji* (1833), and Powers' etching Fig.12, *Red Rain Seascape* (1977), a season of dull skies and earthy browns that Powers has captured perfectly. In the waves below there is a great sense of adrenaline. The movement is captured by use of conflicting marks but does not dominate the picture surface; the calm flat liquid red/orange form, balances the composition just right. This two dimensional flat surface placed upon the conflicting movement of the waves once again suggests the gesturally free and the controlled. The original print called *The Great Wave* (1830) was made by Japanese artist Hokusai. Both Hokusai's and Powers' composition in their prints are perfectly balanced. Hiroshige's print implies that Hokusai's Great Wave was designed to tumble into the viewers face.

Both Hiroshige's and Powers' seascapes present us with the waves looming large in the foreground against a more distant landscape of an ordinary sort. They both use the foreground and background in provocative ways. Typically the foreground is more active, more symbolic, while the background is more passive and neutral. The precise relationship between foreground and background, however, remains as ambiguous as the perceived spatial relationship, as in Fig.13, *Waterfall* (1977). In the majority of Powers' prints there is anti-illusion of space similar to that in Hiroshige's woodblock prints. Any object or figure within this space appears relatively flat, unlike Powers' torso etchings of the 1970s where the image provides a good representation of three-dimensional shapes.



## Calligraphy

We must define, however briefly, the term calligraphy for it plays an important part in Powers' work since the early 1970s. Calligraphy is of course the art of writing. It is the art of a linear graphic. Take a close look at any page of Islamic calligraphy as in Fig.14, *Naskhi script* (1298), a page from a Qur'an written by the leading calligrapher Yaqut al-Musta'simi. You will find a delicate balance in the construction of the signs and the colour similar to Powers' work. Calligraphy is emotionally charged and yet rigorously precise.

Calligraphers create their compositions by joining letters together. When I talked to Jane Powers she recalls how her sister studied Italic handwriting. As a child, Powers scribbled fluid lines over and over again on her copy book. The continuity of the black line used throughout Powers' work is another characteristic of Eastern art.

"Many of her prints are like calligraphic studies,  
black strokes fluttering against pale surfaces."  
(Ferguson, 1995, Independent)

Fig.15, *Emblems* (1981), shows Powers' interest in the gestural quality of Eastern art. There is a great sense of flowing harmony in the way the precise marks are set against the amorphous form.



The dominant feeling from most of Powers' calligraphic work is one of control. Powers shared the Japanese cool, formal dexterity, and their regard for space.

"She goes on to refine it considerably, combining its terrific kinetic energy with increasing degrees of precision and startling spatial effects, sometimes using an elaborate low-relief technique."  
(Dunne, 1995, p.8)

In Fig.16, *Red Torso* (1977), the red calligraphic mark imitates the torso of a female figure lying still against the movement of the swooping calligraphic lines in the background.

This etching belongs to a series of *Ribbon Torsos*, inspired from extraordinary studies of the phallus she made around 1975. Fig.17, *Form I* (1975), is a remarkable example of this series of etchings. They were made for a group exhibition on the theme of the male nude at the *Project Arts Centre, Dublin*. It was very brave of Powers to exhibit that aspect of the male genitals. She liked to shock people and overturn their expectations. As bold as the image is, *Ribbon Torsos* was an appropriate name for this work in the way the thick band resembles a ribbon in mid air. One cannot be blamed if the viewer were to interpret it in another way, a study of a ribbon that takes into consideration the elements of both Islamic calligraphy and the male figure. According to Powers' sister Jane, the elegant, calligraphic turgid penises were 'a must have for 1970s art-lovers'. At the time of the exhibition on the theme of the male nude, the press commented on an ongoing argument that while female nudes are beautiful, male nudes are not. To look at the series of *Ribbon Torsos* and know it is a part of the male genitalia does not alter the beauty of the print.



Aidan Dunne suggests a more contemporary medium to describe this series of Powers' etchings:

"In terms of their spatial play, some of these etching are reminiscent of computer-generated three-dimensional images, figure-ground illusions in which objects gradually resolve themselves out of backgrounds of usually abstract, finely woven pattern."  
(Dunne, 1995, p.8)

A perfect example of the likeness between Powers' etchings and a computer-generated image can be seen in Fig.17, *Form I*, mentioned earlier. It is in this way the graphic side of printmaking is high-lighted. The flowing movement of the ribbon indicates the sheer lightness that can be achieved, floating buoyantly against a solid background of intricate detail. Once again we see how Powers strives for that perfect balance.



### CHAPTER THREE: IMAGES-MOTIFS

There is a considered and developed view of the world reflected in Powers' work throughout her career. She achieves this through formal strategies and thematic notions such as her use of symmetry. As a result one can see a recognisable and refined artistic vocabulary when looking at Powers' work. In the early 1970s there is a suggestion of what might be described as representational hints, and sometimes much more than hints. Powers could reasonably be described as an abstract artist, particularly when looking at some of her later work. I hope to give a sense of the diversity of the work which, in turn, echoes the varied approaches that have shaped Powers' work over the period of twenty years. For now let us analyse the motifs commonly used throughout her work.

#### Landscape

The landscape underlines much of her work both in a metaphorical and symbolic way. Powers did not see much of the vast plains of Minnesota, however, memory served her well concerning the place where she spent much of her childhood. Minnesota is primarily classic Midwestern terrain, big open farming land and numerous lakes. Fig.10, *The Plan* (1975), the continuity of mark and colour suggest all patches on the landscape blend as one vast plain. This print contains a scattering of human figures with large bellies (perhaps pregnant women) and a dog (that same dog also appears in Powers' self-portrait). Both figure and animal are on the same plain and in no particular order. Fig.18, *Esker* (1981), refers to specific geophysical phenomena (Ice-Age). Although a lot more abstract than earlier landscape work, this ribbon-like band holds on to the unique style of Islamic calligraphy, a motif Powers used in her work in the late 1970s.



Both Fig.18, *Esker* and Fig.19, *Scarp* (1981) share the idea of an orderly formation read into unruly natural processes. Powers makes gestural strokes that reads as both a character from an Eastern alphabet and a landscape. The image fading to pale washes indicates the direction and the movement of the natural processes of deposition and erosion in the landscape. One of my own personal favourites is Fig.20, *Landscape* (1980). The contour of this dashing maroon image has a great sense of movement. Once again, the movement and the black contour line suggests characteristics of Islamic calligraphy.

Minnesota represented the dangers and fears of nature to Powers: a vast land with climatic extremes and invasions of insects. The pleasant and natural characteristics of Ireland, along with its damp climate, provided Powers with inspiration of a different sort. Both places have one thing in common, the insects.

"The fungus I could tolerate, the moths I killed,  
the spiders I ignored or hoovered up, the centipede  
in the bath nearly finished me but I washed it down  
the drain, the strangely flattened mouse in the court  
yard I put in the bin despite the fly that was crawling  
all over it."

(Powers K., 1995, p.8)

Insects appear regularly in Powers' landscape prints. This may be her own way of assembling order both in the landscape and confronting her phobia for these small chaotic creatures. Fig.21, *The Desert* (1977), could either represent what the title indicates or an extremely dried out farmland due to the hot summers. It can go up to one hundred and five degrees in temperature in the summer in Minnesota. While the Powers were living in Dalkey they would regularly go to the beach, definitely a place Powers took note of for some of her early work, as in Fig.22, *At the Beach* (1972), an early print treated heavy handed with awkwardly placed figures.



When I was talking to Powers' sister Jane, she told me about her sisters' disgust at fat vulgar bodies that lay quite proudly out on the beach drawing attention to themselves. Powers definitely shows their arrogance and laziness in this print. The order of the beach was disturbed by such chaotic people being there.

### Human Figure

One of Powers' first prints was an etching, Fig.23, *Boy and Rabbit* (1972), a black and white image where the figure appears to be very stiff and inanimate. The rabbit is treated in the same way, very similar to a cardboard cut-out. Powers had a fondness for animals of all kinds and they appear quite often in her earlier work. Fig.24, *It's Not So Much Fun* (1973), is quite crudely assembled with the figure Marilyn Monroe as the main focal point. In Fig.25, *Untitled (Woman with orange background)* (1973), she uses personal experiences in these dramatic filled images. Powers enjoyed reading and, as a result, there was often a hint of parody in her early work.

She was known to have a private sense of humour in her work. Fig.26, according to Katherine Powers in the essay she wrote, "the work of art that expresses this best, *A Real Fighter* (1974), is so awful to look at", that it does not even appear in the Retrospective exhibition on Powers' work in 1995. This print sums up what Powers thought of men in general. Men, she pointed out, routinely add two inches to their height with their promiscuity, flatulence and bluster.(Powers K., 1995, p.6)



Fig.27, *Three Kings Resting* (1977), is a Christmas card etching. Katherine Powers refers to it as having a hint of parody attached.

"These are good boys, their manly little heads affixed to abstract sleeping bags. No doubt when they climb out in the morning the usual rumpus and pomp will begin, but, for the moment, a touching order reigns."  
(Powers K., 1995, p.6)

The abstract shape of the sleeping bags also appears in Fig.28, *Long Grain* (1980). From approximately the mid 1970s Powers turned away from representational art to express herself. Although some critics consider Powers an abstract artist, figural and other referential elements are consistently found in her art. Powers describes herself as an abstract artist in the simplest possible terms. In 1989, when she was asked to make Fig.29, a *Self Portrait* (1989), for the University of Limerick's National Self-Portrait Collection, she was asked what personal significance the undertaking had for her. It was, she replied in writing, the only portrait of any kind she had made in her adult life. (Dunne, 1995, p.12). "De Kooning's breakthrough, following his first series of essential or reductive images, is the female figure reduced to "two eyes, a nose, a mouth and neck." (Paulson, 1990, p.80).

Around the same time Powers began to experiment with Islamic calligraphy and as a result she produced a series of *Ribbon Torsos*. Fig.30, *Form 4* (1975), was inspired from extraordinary studies of the phallus. There is definitely an element of symmetry by duplicating the image of the phallus. Both the background and image also suggest the shape of a moth's wings.



This image, along with other prints like it, were made for a group exhibition on the theme of the male nude at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin. When I talked to the artist Patrick Pye he told me his view on this particular series of work:

"She was a very witty person and very sophisticated; her outlandish sense of humour comes across in her work. Her etchings of the male penis are a witty visual comment."

(Pye P, Interview, 1997)

In the case of the *Ribbon Torsos*, when you first look at them what you see is a beautiful calligraphic image. James McCreary told me about one particular lady that hung one of the pieces of the series up in her kitchen and immediately took it down when she discovered that the image was actually male genitalia. According to Jane Powers the work was not as simple as it was often seen. Powers was happy to see her own work in one way and if it was not seen in that way it also gave her pleasure. Powers did not mind confusion over her work. The *Ribbon Torsos* were probably Powers' best known prints of the 1970s.

### Beans

At some stage in the 1970s Powers acquired a microscope and began to examine beans of various kinds. Her etchings were inspired by studies of soya, kidney, black, mung, pinto and other beans. This work conveys her sense of wonder at the unexpected richness of the new worlds that became evident with magnification.



The pregnant ambiguous forms of the beans themselves, were a new set of organic shapes for Powers.

“Her attitude towards her subject was somewhat like a biologist at times. She would always share her discoveries with you.”  
(Pye P, Interview, 1997)

Powers had a profound interest in things that fascinated and disgusted her. The perfect packaged shape of the bean is executed very well in her prints as a bulbous character that is an organic living form.

A perfect example of the bean's simplicity can be seen in Fig.31, *Soya III* (1981). The shading underneath each form suggests the bean is floating. Powers treats the shape of the bean in a very flat, two-dimensional way. As a result the shading may also indicate the bean's three dimensional form. In Fig.32, *Soya* (1981) and Fig.33, *Soya II* (1981), Powers becomes more concerned with the actual package or shell of the bean. By this time Powers had started treating the human figure in an extremely stylised and abstracted manner. The figure still appears in early work like Fig.34, *Blue Spotted Torso* (1976), or Fig.35, *Torso on Stripes* (1976), but shortly after the figure's presence becomes irrelevant. Powers allows the bean's human connotations speak for themselves. Fig.36, *Purple Torso* (1977), is an early example of how Powers exaggerates the breast and belly, emphasising the human torso. The torso is in a posture which describes vulnerability and pain.



Aidan Dunne refers to J.G. Farrell's novel *The Singapore Grip*:

"A sympathetically portrayed young girl labours under the delusion that an American visitor is describing himself as a 'human bean', and constructs an elaborate theory to what this might be. Similarly, one strand of Powers' long series of etchings that come under the heading *Torsos* are, in many respects human beans."  
(Dunne, 1995, p.22)

She changes the biomorphic shape of the bean (perhaps a kidney bean), so that we can read it as a very stylised torso, as in Fig.37, *Torso* (1975), the prize-winner at Listowel Graphics Exhibition. In Fig.38, *Torso II* (1980), there is a more obvious connection with the female torso. This is shown in the way the breast protrudes and there is a definite suggestion of the nipple. The rounded form contains contrasting marks similar to calligraphy. The female torso became a lot more sensual and soft in comparison to the earlier work on the human figure.

### Moths

This insect provides a basic structural pattern for many of the later pieces. The moth is typically symmetrical and, hence, emblematic of a fundamental ordering tendency in nature. However, it also represents something quite negative for Powers; she regards the moth as a dangerous animal.

"I admire the elegant symmetry utilised by the moth, but I am terrified of moths themselves."  
(Dunne, 1995, p.25)

Unlike her precise work of the 1970s, her images of moths are filled with uncertainty because of the way she chooses to make them.



In Fig. 39, *Cast Species* (1991), and its partner, Fig.40, *Species with Loop* (1990), the wings of the moth particularly take her interest. The woodblock areas suggest a mountainous landscape. This is far from describing the delicacy of the moths' wings. Powers went on to make extraordinary sculptures of giant moths of cut and folded paper with water-colour markings.



## CHAPTER FOUR: *TECHNIQUES*

While attending the National College of Art and Design, Powers found the medium she felt most comfortable with to express herself artistically. In the Faculty of Fine Art Print the possibility of endless experimentation was to gain Powers' attention as her main area of interest. For now let us analyse the various mediums Powers used throughout her work. She made etchings, lithographs, woodblock prints and cast-paper with watercolour work.

### *Etching*

Technique and artistic accomplishment are more closely interrelated in Powers' etchings than any other printing medium she uses. Work such as *Blue Spotted Torso* (1976), *Form I* (1975) or *Emblems* (1981), are but a few excellent examples of the etchings Powers made. These are etchings where the principal shapes, achieved by several bites of aquatint, are powerful and mysterious in their concentration. In 1980 Powers remarked to journalist Elgy Gillespie that she felt etching was close to sculpture in terms of the sheer physical work involved. (Dunne, 1995, p.23) Powers rarely used any less than three, and definitely no fewer than two plates in any one print. Her perfection while registering was an art in itself.

Fig.41, *Q* (1987), was made for the Black church Mini Print Exhibition. Around this time Powers was experimenting with smears in her etchings. These smears were applied to the plate with a mixture of titanium white printing ink, soap, oil and water. The idea of symmetry was unconsciously achieved by Powers while experimenting. The well-controlled handmade mark and the movement of the sensitive scribbled line play with the idea of symmetry.



### Lithography

Powers did not explore in this area as she did in others. An extremely early lithograph like Fig.42, *The Weather I* (1972), is a very subtle print. However, It lacks the sensitive quality of line or tone needed to give it richness in comparison with Powers' etchings.

The compositional elements are conservative, the technical aspect shows the willingness to try almost anything new in the field of printmaking. Exploration has been a constant throughout Powers' printmaking. In 1986 she made a more experimental lithograph with the help of James O'Nolan called *Lithograph II* (1986), Fig.43, there is a striking resemblance to the female vagina suggested by the two red blobs in the centre of the image, which also seems to be the main focal point. The use of a hot and cold colour may suggest weather or body temperature. Powers wrote to her sister:

"James O'Nolan and myself printed another colour on my new lithograph. I don't know how good it's going to be. There are another 3 (I think) colours to go. It has red in it so it may please you."  
(Powers K., 1995, p.2)

This particular lithograph was done with her hands covered in lithographic ink. According to James O'Nolan she often described the hand as the best brush available. He recalls Powers making trial drawings in ink with her hands. Powers related to and was excited by the 'hands on' approach in printmaking. In Fig.44, *Aka "Lithograph I"* (1986), Powers was experimenting as she was in etching by smearing soap on to the Lithographic stone. Once again there is a suggestion of moths' wings and circles. These simple strong shapes reoccur and reinforce the idea of balance throughout Powers' work.



### Woodblock

Since approximately the early 1980s Powers worked with what is traditionally used in Japan for printmaking, the woodblock, one of the oldest of all the printmaking media. This medium that had been touched by very few artists since the German Expressionists, had almost never been used for abstraction. Naturally embodied in any piece of wood are its own unique marks and textures. Powers allows these subtleties to enhance her prints as in Fig.28, *Long Grain* (1980), or Fig.2, *Untitled* (1990). The forms, although created from mainly linear elements, are amorphous and suggestive, setting up a subtle interplay among themselves. The method Powers chose to use, particularly in later woodblock prints.

Powers was to form her own shapes by cutting them with a jigsaw rather than cutting lines. This method was an Oriental one and was used in her last artwork, *In Search of Order* (1991).

### Cast Paper Work

Since the early 1970s in the US and approximately a decade later in Japan and Europe, contemporary paper art made out of pulp has displayed its numerous facets. Very few Irish artists have tried their hand at the medium of hand made paper incorporated with their images. Both the of medium watercolour and of woodblock were used successfully in Powers' cast paper work.

In the late 1980s Powers uses this new and innovative technique for making prints and sculpture. Powers used an industrial blender and a garden pond as a vat to make up the quantity of hand made paper needed to make her cast paper pieces.



Relief-like impressions were first explored along with two dimensional pictures as in Fig.45, *Figure of 8* (1984). The use of torn pieces of hand made paper are placed against a mainly white background painted with a subtle grey wash. Her use of pigment and vague indication of shadow around each and every torn piece of paper works as a divide between background and foreground. The impression of the shadow was achieved by placing a mount underneath each rectangular shape slightly smaller in measurement. The element of calligraphy is used with as much strength as before, with a looped black band resembling the figure 8. It not only illustrates movement but a great sense of space. Powers successfully combined woodblock prints with cast paper particularly when dealing with her images of moths, as in *Cast Species* (1991), and *Cast Species* (1990).

An excellent example of Powers' *Cast Paper with Water colour* pieces of the late 1980s, is Fig.46, *Untitled* (1988), spontaneous but still as controlled as earlier work. According to printer James O'Nolan the techniques she used in the later prints such as paper-casting with woodblock have been regarded as complex, complex simply because they are procedures she invented her self and are not generally known about. For example, Fig.47, *In Search of Order* (1991), shows Powers' pleasure in exercising her sense of order by making and contemplating simple configurations regardless of their reference to the natural world. There is one visual effect which clearly occupies a lot of Powers' work: the element of symmetry and the impression of balance it creates spontaneously.



### *In Search of Order*

There is both a serious and playful quality in Powers' work. Abstract forms are placed in a particular order, in one way resembling a jigsaw puzzle that is not completely finished. In another way, it is as if we, the onlookers, are in the position of the artist when studying the ariel perspective of a particular landscape. To view this work in person is truly rewarding; it reminds me of a very intricate piece of tapestry. (Public reading room, National Archives, Co. Dublin)

The complex technical procedure involved in the making of this print was a time consuming process. The surface marks draw our attention to the print's physical surface. For this particular print, first of all a mould is made with deep edging. Then the actual texture of the piece is worked on by putting layers of cement into the mould. The cement is deeply incised with either the artist's hands or by found objects, so that under the pressure of the press or weight used, the paper is forced into the cavity, resulting in an area of raised relief.

The pieces of wood used are inked separately and placed into the cemented area while still wet, along with torn pieces of coloured tissue paper. It is at this stage that the white pulp is poured in onto the pre-prepared surfaces. Because the pulp is dense and unsized, it responds unpredictably to the introduction of water-based inks used on the woodblock pieces, as a result leaving blotting marks not intended on the artist's part.

Fig.47, *In Search of Order* was made for the Large Format Print Show in the Black Church Print Studio 1991, organised by Andrew Folan (printmaker). The aim of this exhibition was to promote printmaking as a visual large format medium of equal importance and attraction to painting and sculpture in major group exhibitions.



It also presented the artists involved with a challenge, to encourage them to question current attitudes to printmaking and to re-examine the medium in relation to aesthetic and technical considerations and to scale in particular. *In Search of Order* (102 x 204cm) is the largest print Powers made.



## CHAPTER FIVE: *PICTORIAL ELEMENTS*

The aspects of Powers' prints which I intend to examine critically in this chapter are the following: Chaos and Order, Symmetry, Gesture, Decorative Qualities and Colour. Powers lets one element play one off against the other.

### *Chaos and Order*

Powers felt strongly about creating order where there was chaos in both her artwork and her life. According to Powers' sister Jane, her sister was overly concerned with creating order with everything in her life. Everything had to be in its proper place. In Powers Retrospective Exhibition catalogue, Aidan Dunne refers to a talk Powers gave in the National Gallery, where she referred to her concern with order and chaos, dating from her early Minnesota years. She talked about her encounter with a large number of worms when she was five years old.

"Go into the field at night. That's when you really see them. It's just as though the field was alive with them."

(Powers K., 1995, p.15)

She goes on to mention invasions of grasshoppers, cutworms, sawflies, mayfly, a plague of frogs and deluges of gigantic hail.



Powers compares unruly natural processes to the sterility and safety of the kitchen. As Powers puts it; "Elements of both chaos and order are apparent in my work." This fundamental concern with order and chaos stems from the way Powers saw the world through her eyes.

"To me the world was a dangerous place, a ghastly contrast to the sterility of the formica kitchen. Order needs to be composed to protect one from this fearsome place."  
(Dunne, 1995, p.15)

In Powers' work of the 1970s there is a strong suggestion of specific geophysical phenomena. James McCreary recalls Powers looking at the period of the Iceage. Powers' prints particularly during the 1980s, reflect her interest in such historic periods. The idea of an orderly formation introduced into unruly natural processes fascinated Powers. The seriousness of this concern is also implicit in every print she made.

"Mary, like every other member of our family, spent her life trying to bring order to chaos. It defines us. Aside from the look of her work and what she attempted to convey in it, she was a perfectionist in its execution. This was part of her insistence on order."  
(Powers K., 1997, unpublished correspondence)

In Fig.48 *Chequered Landscape* (1977), the earth in the lower half of the composition is squared off in shades of red. The squares may represent how Powers imposes the landscape with a particular order, she creates neat little packages similar to her study of the beans.



Dunne refers to this tendency in Powers' last piece, *In Search of Order* (1991):

"Often Miro comes to mind in relation to the later, woodblock or water colour and cast paper works, with their calm acceptance of the limits of control, their autonomous abstract forms and their quality of playfulness, as in the revealingly titled *In Search of Order* (1991)."  
(Dunne, 1995, p.27)

Powers' attitude to the prints reflect how much she is content with her work at the end of the day. It would be wrong to assume that the name of her last piece categorises her life's work. Yet a glance back through her images show significant traits of both order and chaos and playfulness, just as they were significant traits of her character and approach to life. The work in general exudes an understated harmony, some of them the chaos that she attempts to confront.

### Symmetry

Powers' use of symmetry plays with the arrangements of parts either side of the dividing line so that the opposite parts are exactly similar in shape and size. According to Powers sister Jane, a lot of her work had to do with balance particularly in the late 1980s as in Fig.49, *Cast Paper with Watercolour* (1988), two large circles each side of the dividing line.

The one on the left hand side attempts to take the attention away from the darker area of watercolour where our eye is immediately attracted. Circles like these have appeared throughout Powers' work. Fig.50, *Comma* (1983) and Fig.51, *Fragments* (1980), suggests once again her relentless pursuit of harmony in her work. "De Kooning often added one form or colour to balance the other, in a sort of continuous seeking and rejecting of resolution or closure." (Paulson, 1990, p.76).



Her work of the late 1980s, early 1990s include the idea of symmetry as it can be seen in its extreme use in nature. Let us look at how Powers utilises the symmetries of the moths' wings in her work. Fig.38, *Species with Loop* (1990), is a cast paper and woodblock print where contrasting material and colours (red, blue) are set against each other suggesting conflict. Powers controls this conflict by placing them in a certain order within the composition. It is in this way that she successfully achieves the perfect balance in this piece.

"A theme which pre-occupied her for much longer was the idea of symmetry, both in nature and the human body. Forms often occurred in her work in twos, similar but different. Shapes often echoed one another, for instance, one was dark and one was light."  
(O'Nolan J, Interview, 1997)

In Fig.52, *II* (1986), there are two almost symmetrical elements, one pink, one black. By looking very closely at the image your eye is pulled back and forth between the red calligraphic dash in the top left hand corner and the large black area on the right hand side. The fragments floating about, the lines and small oval forms, help in balancing the weight between both sides. Jane Powers recalls the work of the late 1980s:

"More cerebral works, not just prints, but cast paper pieces, torn paper works and paper sculptures - explorations of light and dark, plus and negative, being and not being."  
(Powers J., 1995, Irish Times)

The harmony throughout Powers' work is sustained successfully by the introduction of various elements and the medium used, the calligraphic line, the woodblock shape and the sensuous form of the torso. It is the combination of one or more of these elements at any one time that achieves this beautiful balance.



Let us now look at the torso etchings of the 1970s, where there is a sense of biological symmetry as in Fig.53, *Spotted Torso* (1976). This is an early example of how Powers plays with the idea of balance. The floating spotted forms placed within the interior of the larger more sensuous shaped torso. One balances the other when placed against their contrasting flat linear background.

“Her pursuit of balance and symmetry - such a good idea and so successful as can be seen by its extreme use in nature - is the focus of the work, full of rich texture and almost architectural shapes.”  
(Ferguson, 1995, Independent)

Powers' choice of woodblock shapes do not reflect architectural shapes as much as they echo the landscape of the vastness of Minnesota's farmlands.

### Gesture

A particular rhythm of form emerged in most of Powers' prints, whether her subject was the human figure or the landscape. From the late 1970s, Powers' prints used a confident and unique style. In her use of line, as in Fig.54, *Calligraphic Form No. 5* (1975), the eye shifts from one plane to another and a sensation of movement is created. The pictorial divide causes the page to move. Movement itself could never be represented, only suggested. Powers' cast paper work deals with movement in a totally new way, with texture playing a major part in her work. However, she still maintained control when balancing the unpredictable movement of the medium water colour.



Powers slowly executed the watercolour to the surface. Figurative shapes might appear of their own accord. Allowing an unexpected twist to the content of the artwork stimulating the imagination such as in Fig.55, *Cast Paper 8* (1988), suggests a damp, dense and dark, extremely rough landscape.

"I think the nearest she came to 'gesture' was in the paper pieces with water colour where she flooded on the colour from small jars. The water colour then spread and soaked into the hand - made paper finding its own way through."

(O'Nolan J, Interview 1997)

If you are sufficiently close, these are blobs of paint on a well worked surface that suggest landscape but are merely various colours of watercolour pulling your eye away from the beautifully worked embossed surface. Throughout her series of water-colour pieces there is the use of chance in a fun and spontaneous way. Fig.56, *Cast Paper with Water colour* (1988), is an example of how Powers knows her control over the water-colour when applied is limited.

"But an important starting point as well is the use of chance within certain parameters, admittedly, to some extent controlled but still chance, given increasingly free rein."

(Dunne, 1995,p.19)

Powers had the choice of what colour used and where to place the first mark. The medium of water colour otherwise it gave incredible freedom, a gradual slow motion as the image itself emerges.



Fig.57, *I* (1989), a woodblock print, echoes the movement of various calligraphic forms. Keeping in mind that the wood is intentionally cut by the artist into these particular forms, it is now certain that the artist intended to suggest movement. There is no abrupt or angular finish to any one shape.

The black liquid shape on the left hand side breaks the boundary (i.e. the edge of the page), suggesting movement that the artist is not in control of. There is an affinity between Japanese zen and Powers' work.

"The free-flowing line that quickly becomes one of the staples of Her style, with a distinct overtone both of zen spontaneities and Islamic calligraphy, seem to have originated in these relatively rough works."  
(Dunne, 1995, p.23)

I agree with Dunne when he refers to "a sizeable chunk of Powers' work deals with a Venn diagram with three intersecting circles labelled Torso, Bean and Ribbon." When Powers deals with any one of these subjects there is an element of gesture in a serious or playful way whatever the subject matter is.



### Decorative Qualities

Decoration can be described as superimposing one pattern on another. Powers' prints of the late 1980s became refined and simplified. The skill of this printer is her control of the shape, combining these shapes with an exceptional sense of chromatic balance that may too easily be regarded as principally functional or decorative.

"In a sense that art at the moment seems to be a faction fight between the Minimalists on the one hand and the new Expressionists on the other, these works belong to the first category rather than the second."

(Fallon, 1984, "Work in paper by Mary Farl Powers")

They may be abstract works, but this does not necessarily fit her work into the Minimalist era. The landscape itself underlies so much of her imagery during the 1980s.

It may be possible that clarity and order reign for the first time without a struggle. The chaotic situations have lessened. "Some critics of her work, while praising her technical excellence, bemoaned the fact that she had nothing to say with it. Yet it is precisely what she chooses not to say that defines what she is about." (Dunne, 1995, p.14.) Powers was an artist who was very content doing her work. She did not concern herself with how her work was interrupted; you either like the work or not.

Let us take a look at Fig.58, *Imago* (1984), a new and very different way to approach her work. Unlike the regular three dimensional pieces, *Imago* can only be viewed from two sides. Again the idea of symmetry is at play.



The two circular shapes appear along with a very sterile use of black and white. The black base between the white plinth and the print may act as a dividing line, balancing print alongside sculpture and the painted image. Powers probably got fairly involved with the technicalities of making a sculptural piece and the actual image suffers. Powers was unfamiliar at this time with working large. According to Pat Taylor at the Taylor Galleries, her relief paper work was much more popular than the free standing pieces.

"A number of 'Free-standing' pieces make effective exhibition works, but the content of these is dangerously slight, and when she moved beyond a certain scale she tended to become decorative and faintly bloodless."  
(Fallon, 1988, Taylor Galleries)

When Powers moved beyond a certain scale it reflects how she became braver and more confident with her subject matter, dealing with positive and negative, an area she had become very familiar with.

This series of works are not pretty pieces of art to be looked at in a decorative way. The Free-standing pieces are merely a small part of Powers' life and work as a constant struggle to assemble everything into order.

### Colour

Powers' work from beginning to end demonstrated a natural feel for colour. According to James O'Nolan, she claimed never to have been able to successfully use green in a print. For example in Fig.59, *Dappled Torso* (1977), the colour green is quite muted and as a result the form of the torso merges into the background, unlike her later torso etchings where there is a great sense of background and foreground.



The dominant colours in Powers' work are red, blue and brown. There is a fondness for black, particularly in her early work but not so much later.

When dealing with colour in any work of art there is a fine line between being decorative and setting a mood. Powers' work is concerned with the latter. Her work is most definitely beautiful not ornamental, another word that suggests decorative. De Kooning and his fellow artists describe nothingness as intrinsic to their subject matter, involved as they were with the relationship between the formless and the formed. De Kooning's editions are all black and white. When asked why, he replied: 'sometimes there is more light in black and white'.(Haftmann, 1971, p.59). Powers is not very interested in how things look in a certain light. She treats her material in conventionally representational ways. The tonal quality of her imagery has a terrific sense of light and dark.



## CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have explored the work of Mary Farl Powers to get a sense of what her work is about. The life and work of Mary Farl Powers deal with her constant pursuit to create order. Powers' images have a character of their own and develop parallel to her personality.

Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s exposed Powers to two different attitudes to both life and art. This was a result of living in both the USA and Ireland. Throughout Powers' work there is a significant use of parody. In Fig.21, *At the Beach* pokes fun at the typical Irish summer scene where the bloated bask in the sun. Powers preferred Ireland to the US but was fascinated by the United States, a place where Powers refers to throughout her work.

Both Powers' fears and phobias date back to her childhood. An insect like the moth reoccurs on a continuous basis throughout her work. A way for Powers to identify with her fears is to confront them in her work.

Powers owned and admired work by various Irish artists; however, There was no direct influence of any one Irish artist in her work. She worked alongside many Irish artists in the Graphic Studio.

The original purpose of the Graphic Studio was to promote the understanding of printmaking among the Irish public. Powers helped bring Irish printmaking out of a monotonous traditional period into its present vibrant age. Thanks to Powers the studio provides excellent facilities for artists that work in a broad range of styles and techniques.



In the Visiting Artists Scheme the studio collaborates with artists who specialise in media other than print. Artists from sculptural and painting backgrounds gave Powers a little insight into how her work could diversify.

Experimentation began in Powers' work when she started to use her hands to make the image. In both Gottlieb's and Powers' compositions there is a strong suggestion of the tactile and the immaterial, the gesturally free and the controlled.

This is particularly evident in Powers' *Cast paper with Watercolour* works of the 1980s. In the late 1980s technique became an additional device when Powers was making art. The use of a printing press can aid work like a bottle of turpentine or a paintbrush.

Both Helen Frankenthaler's and Powers' prints echo Oriental art. Both artists' prints confidently use shape that strongly resembles Oriental calligraphy that creates in each print an almost minimalist effect. The subtle use of colour in Powers' woodblock prints, in particular, reflects both the Oriental and Frankenthaler's use of colour.

Oriental artwork had a major influence on Powers' work. A Japanese artist of the 1850s, Hiroshige, introduced a striking new technique of composition, which involved enlarged framing elements against a distant background. This technique Powers executes well in her prints. Both Hiroshige's and Powers' framing device by layering flat images over one another suggests a vague kind of recession between foreground and background.



Calligraphy is one of the most dominant themes in Powers' artwork. Secret messages and ambiguities of meaning underlie the script-like writing as seen in Fig.15, *Emblems*. In one approach Powers seems to fill a copper plate with scribbled words as if it were a written page. On the other hand such notation suggests the familiar childhood doodling.

The sculptural dimension and gradation of layers of aquatint give a hint of figural presence, as they communicate through the etched lines that link them. Similarly a landscape quality is evident in pieces like *Esker and Scarp*. A lot of Powers' later prints have calligraphic gestures. The *Ribbon Torsos* are an excellent example of Powers' calligraphic work.

The formal approach in Powers' landscape prints of the 1970s is unlike the freedom and gesture evident in the more abstract landscape work of the 1980s. In the early 1980s Powers lets the viewer read the image as they please. The use of chance and playful exuberance are elements of her later cast paper pieces they also suggest the landscape. There is a great sense of movement in her landscape prints of the early 1980s. When she includes the calligraphic line as part of the image there is a greater sense of movement. Fig.18, *Esker*, is an excellent example of erosion or pattern in the landscape.

During the 1970s Powers' work primarily focused on the human figure. Powers represents both the male and female imagery through the use of fragmentation and positive and negative imagery. The female often appears to be pregnant and inanimate in her earlier work. There is greater emphasis on the female torso in the late 1970s both inside and out as in Fig.38, *Torso II* (1975).



The *Ribbon Torsos* were extraordinary studies of the phallus and probably Powers best known prints of the 1970s. There is no sexual connotation, and though this series of work is beautifully made, they manage to convey a sense of the Oriental by their calligraphic form.

The organic living form of the bean fascinated Powers for some time. Similar to the cross over of calligraphy in her images of the early 1980s, the torso became a lot more sensual as a result of studying the pop-belly shape of the bean. The treatment of the female torso now suggests a neutered figure. At times the upper half of the torso suggests the roundness of struggling shoulders.

In Fig.29, *Self Portrait*, the symmetrical wings are those of a moth. The moth is a symbol of both fear and fascination. Both areas are explored in full throughout Powers' work. The moth is an insect on its way to maturity and full development. Powers' work is developing and going in new and different directions searching for perfect harmony.

Powers felt strongly about creating order where there is chaos. The work of the late 1980s in particular deals with Powers' obsession with order. Her work becomes ordered and simple as well as relaxed and playful. In comparison to her earlier work of the 1970s there is an extreme loss of definition, as in her *Cast paper with Water colour* work of the late 1980s.

Although their pictorial ideas are similar, de Kooning and Powers' developed their own individual styles. Since the 1970s Powers' use of symmetry plays with the arrangements of parts either side of the dividing line. Both the wings of the moth and circles appear both sides of her compositions. The calligraphic mark may have suggested the use of circles. Forms often occur in Powers' work in twos, particularly the use of circles one light, one dark.



A particular rhythm appeared throughout Powers' work whether her subject was the landscape or the moth. Powers application of various media suggests movement as does her use of the dashing calligraphic form. The visual aspect of her prints and the enjoyment of their production is evident in her later work of the 1980s.

Critics base their ideas of decorative on the content of the artwork. Their judgement has room for correction. To give any piece of art credit or the criticism it deserves. The artwork should be receive the scrutiny it's open to.

During the 1970s and 1980s there was a marked evolution in Powers' style. This style would eventually result in a quite new kind of composition, one that would predominate in the second decade of her life's work. Two principle compositional formats had been seen in the 1970s: the human figure from the bust up and the landscape treated in an oriental fashion. Both figure and landscape are flat and linear. In one strange etching, Fig.60, *Babies in Bed* (1974), the centre section may represent the landscape, infested with insects or the blanket that covers Powers as a young child hiding from such creatures. Insects represented the horrors of nature to Powers.

In the late 1970s Powers' figures are not representational in the realistic sense, nor are they depicted whole. Rather, their presence is implied through body parts. They become abstract components in an overall pictorial structure. The well placed torso becomes part of a compositional equation, personalised by the familiar use of tonal work as in Fig.34, *Blue Spotted Torso* (1977). This print, along with other torso etchings, became a lot more sensuous in comparison to Powers' earlier studies of the human torso. Her study of various belly shaped beans emphasised the soft sensuous form of the female torso.



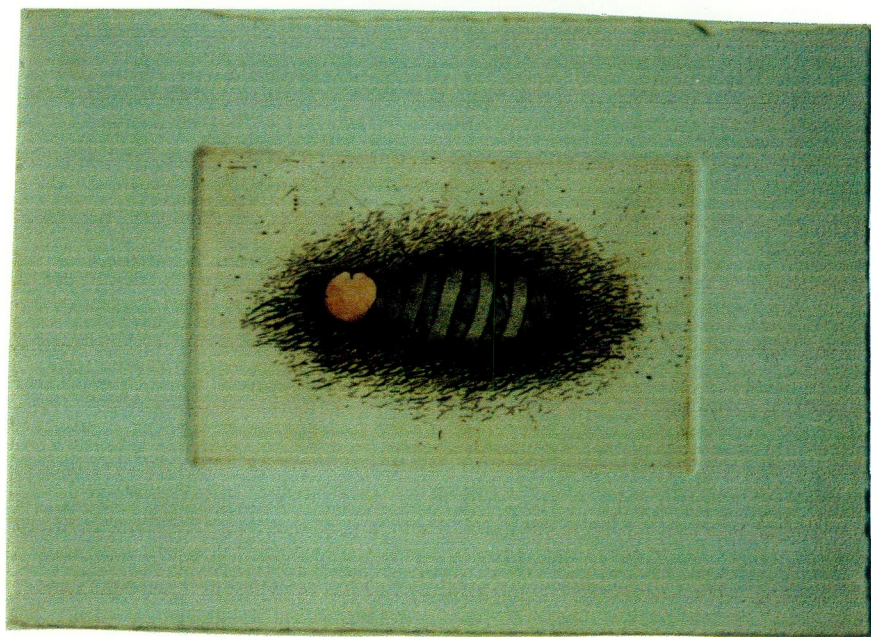
In the late 1970s early 1980s Powers introduced the use of a fast calligraphic line. This calligraphic line she used when making a series of *Ribbon Torsos*, largely arising from remarkable studies of the phallus around 1975. This motif is successfully combined with other areas she became familiar with in the 1980s.

Powers' *Cast paper with Water colour* pieces are a perfect example. In the late 1980s a certain kind of composition began to occur with increasing emphasises on textural planes and watercolour washes. Introduced at a later stage, the woodblock presents us with an ambiguous field of marks. In these works shapes and colours are hard to define. Her last piece, *In Search of Order* (1991), is an example of how all elements mingle with each other.

"Throughout her professional life, one strand critical response inclined to the view that she had less and less to say more and more elaborate technical apparatus."  
(Dunne, 1995, Sunday Times)

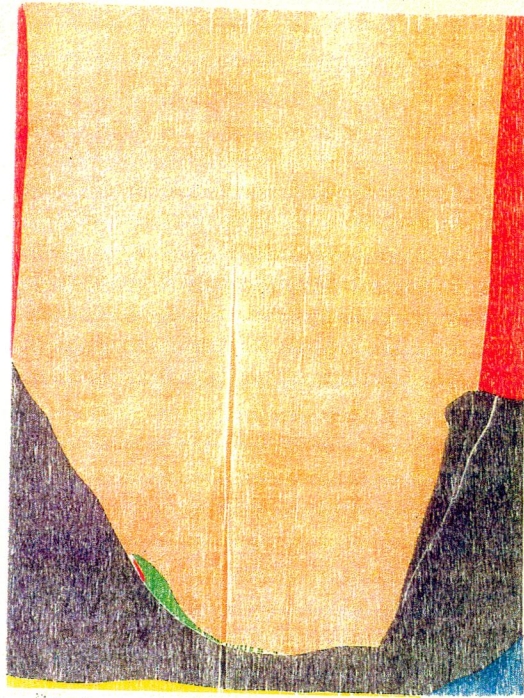
Powers technical excellence never faltered throughout her work. It acts as an aid to the producing of any one image. Critics allow her technical abilities to become a shadow over her art making, art that represents in many ways her relentless pursuit for a perfect harmony.



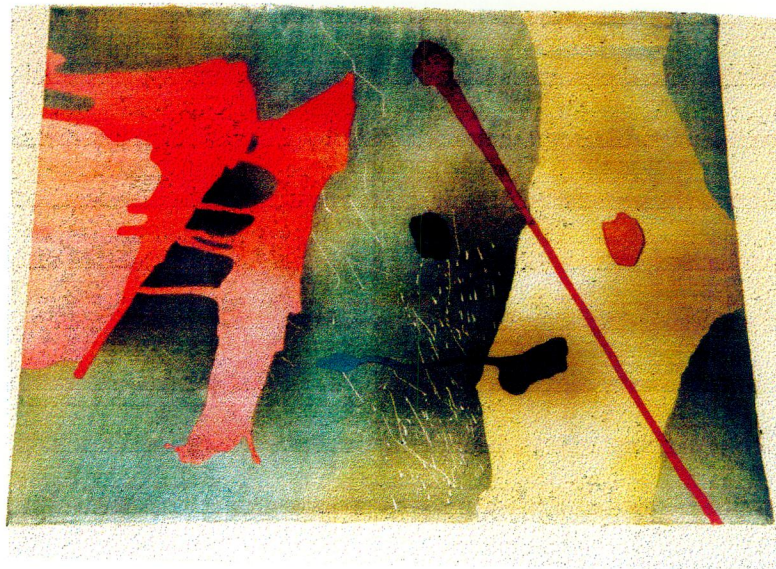


**Fig.1, *Circa* (1976)**



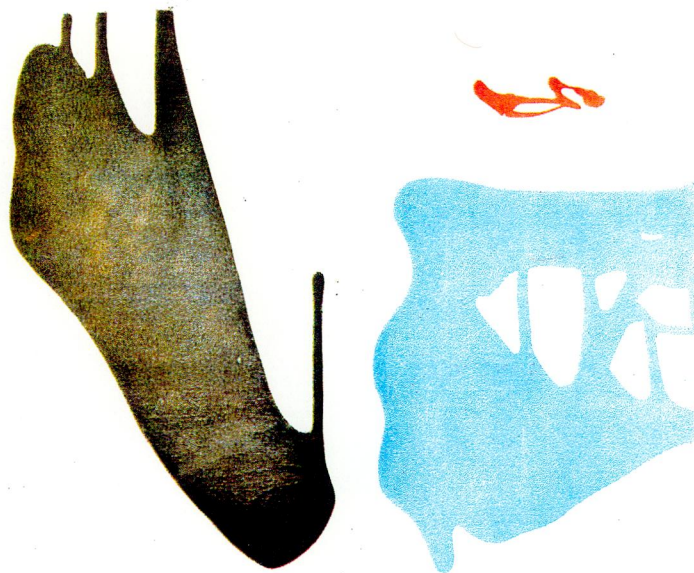


**Fig.3, *East and Beyond* (1973)**  
(Frankenthaler)

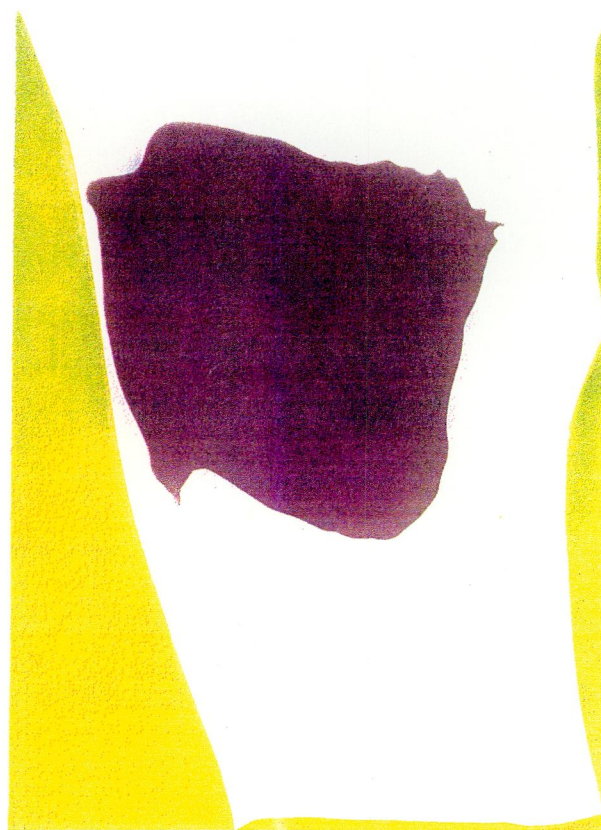


**Fig.2, *Untitled* (1990)**





**Fig.5, II (1989)**



*Art. 6. 10. 1/2*

*L. J. J. J.*

**Fig.4, *Lilac Arbor* (1970)  
(Frankenthaler)**



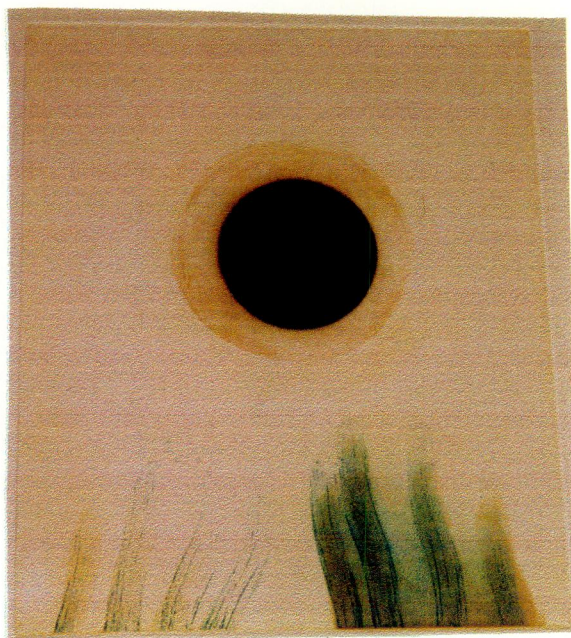


Fig.6, *Blot* (1987)

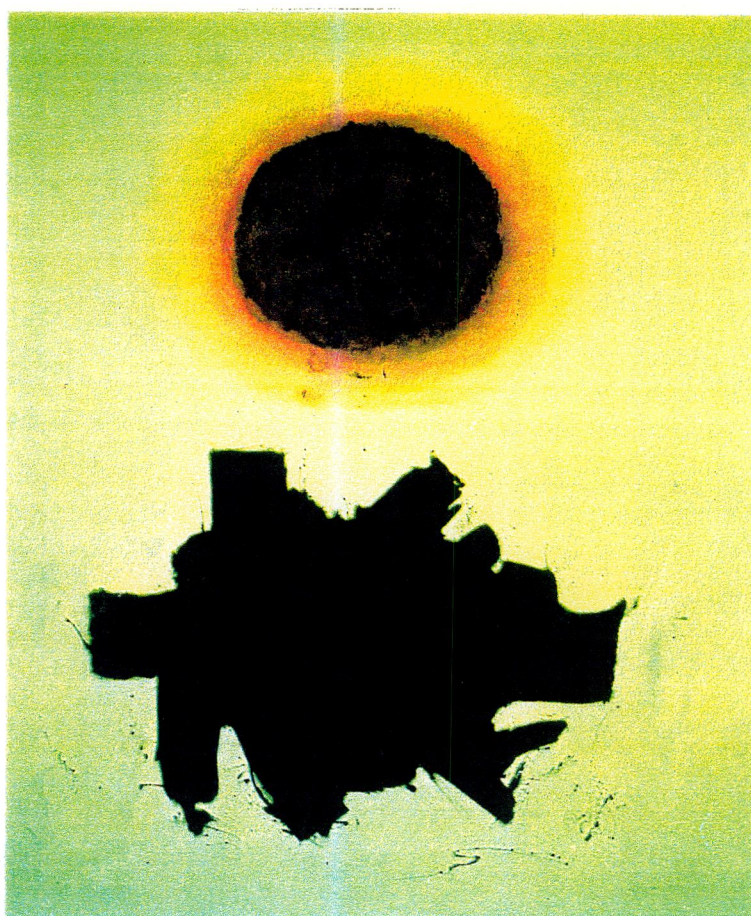
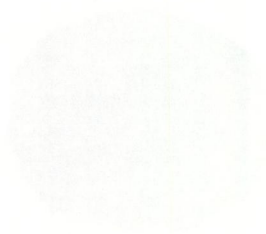
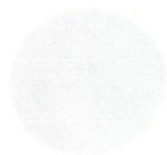


Fig.7, *Cool Blast* (1960)  
(Gottlieb)





**Fig.8, *Yatsukoji, inside Sujikai Gate* (1857)  
(Hiroshige)**

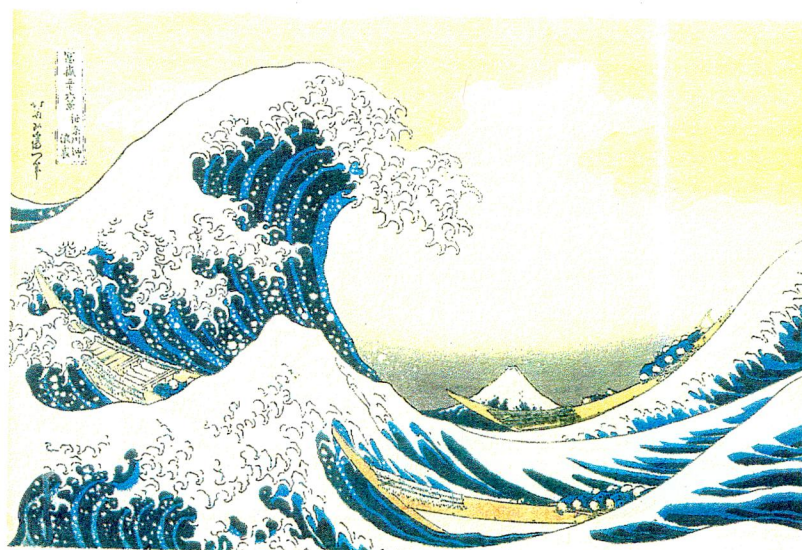


**Fig.9, *Red on Green* (1975)**





**Fig.10, *The Plan* (1975)**

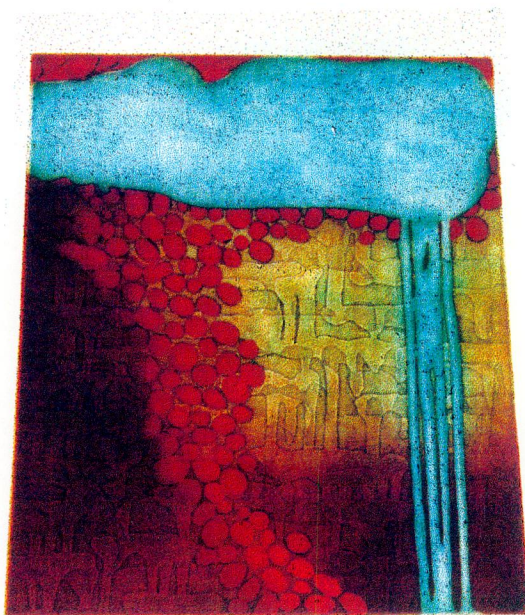


**Fig.11, *The Waves off Kanagawa* (1833)  
(Hiroshige)**





**Fig.12, *Red Rain Seascape* (1977)**



**Fig.13, *Waterfall* (1977)**





Fig.14, *Naskhi Script* (1298)  
(*Islamic Calligraphy*)



Fig.15, *Emblements* (1981)



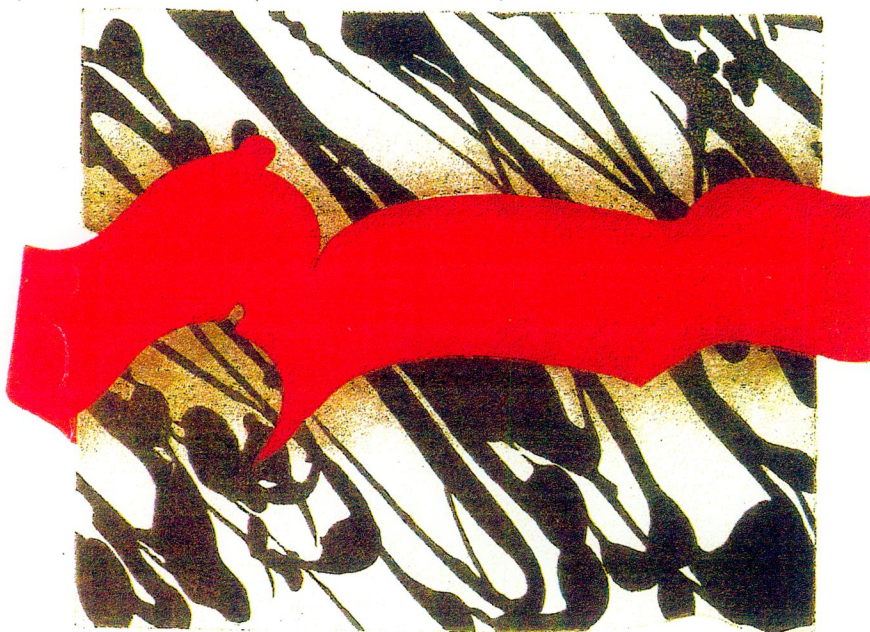


Fig.16, *Red Torso* (1977)

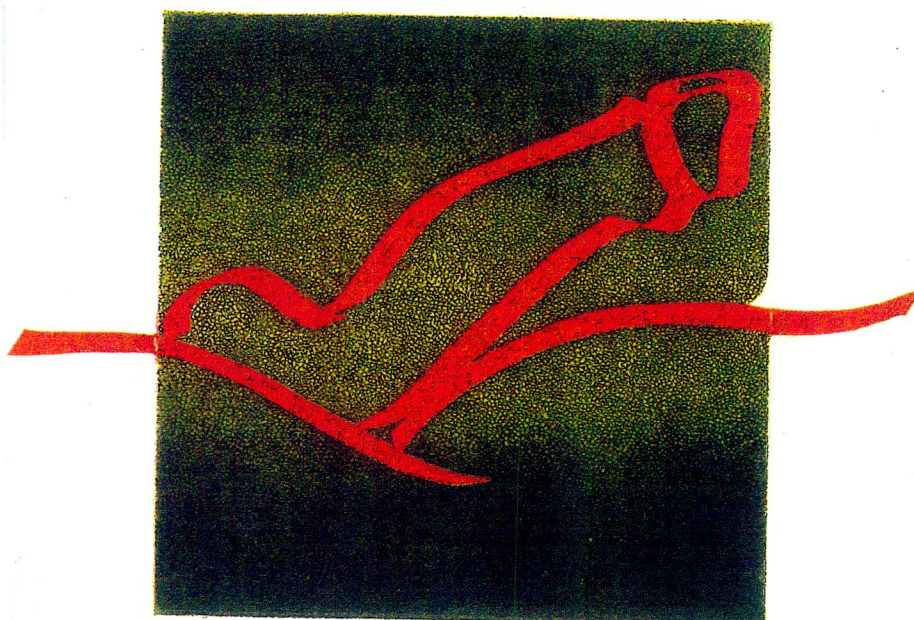
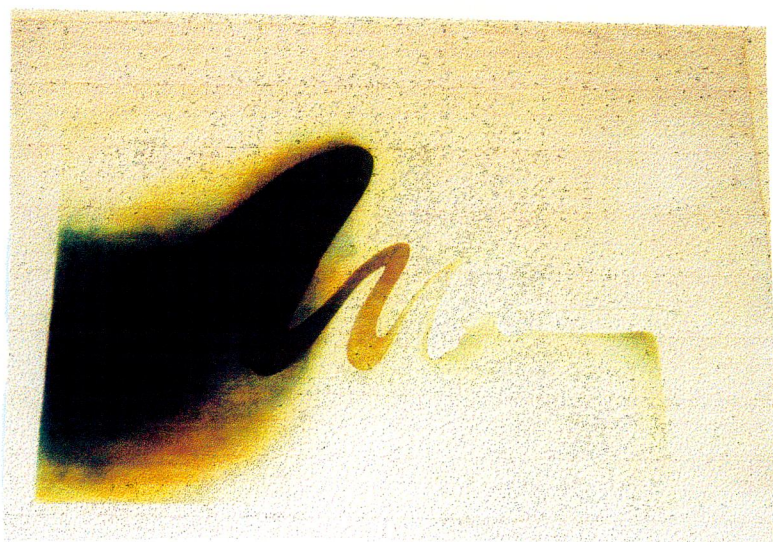


Fig.17, *Form I* (1975)





**Fig.18, *Esker* (1981)**



**Fig.19, *Scarp* (1981)**



**Fig.20, *Landscape* (1980)**





Fig.21, *The Desert* (1977)



Fig.22, *At the Beach* (1972)





Fig.23, *Boy and Rabbit* (1972)

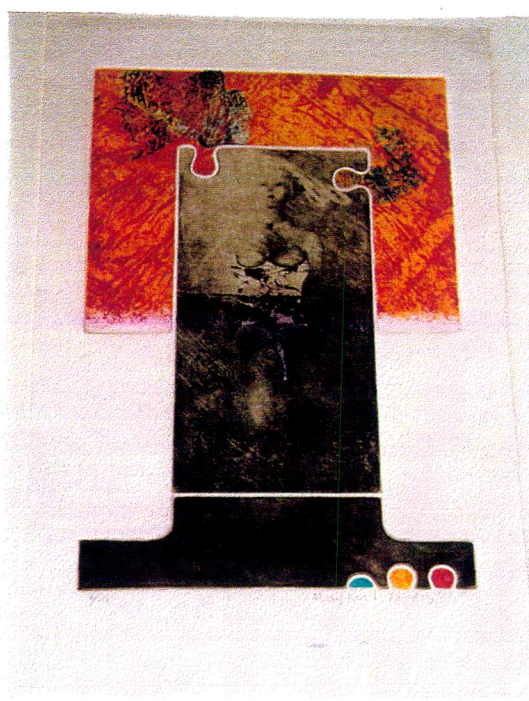
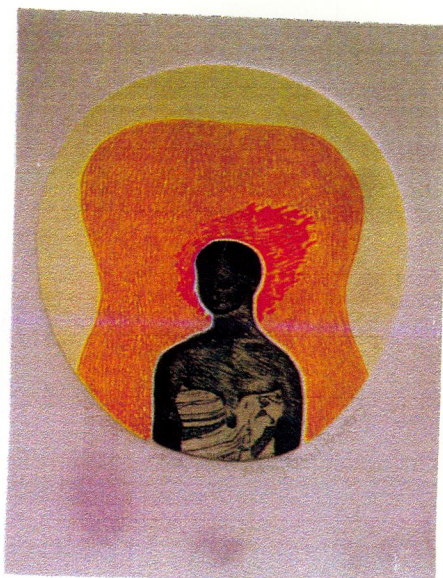
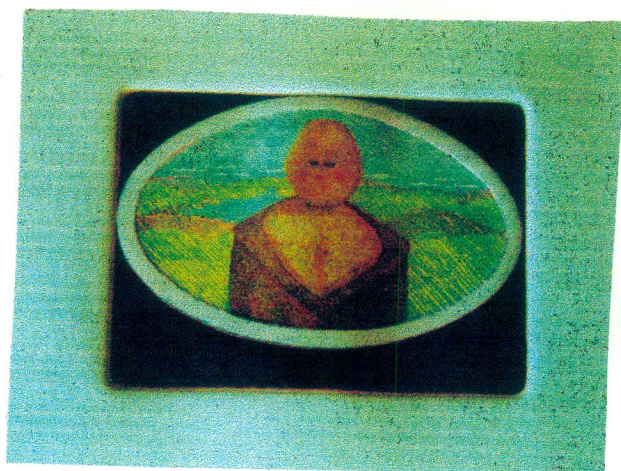


Fig.24, *It's Not So Much Fun* (1973)

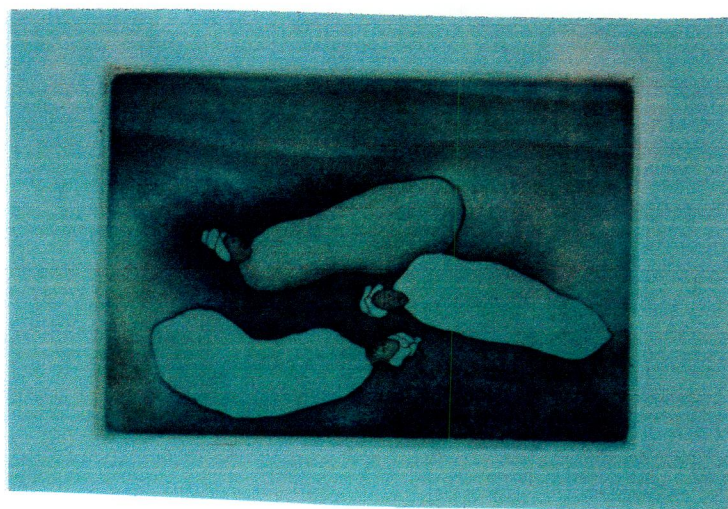




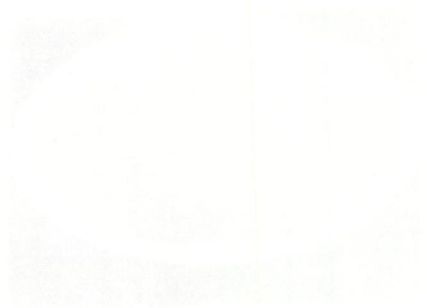
**Fig.25, *Untitled* (1973)**

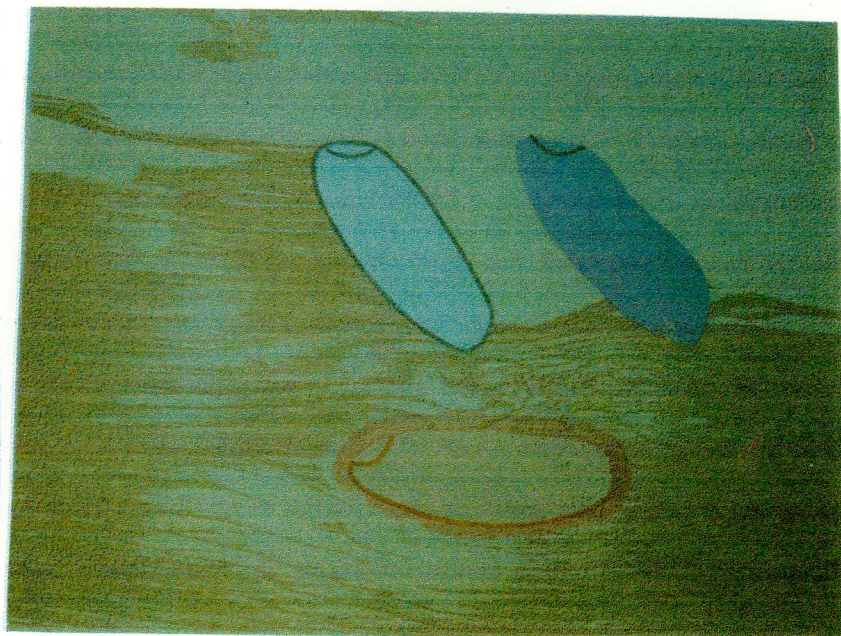


**Fig.26, *A Real Fighter* (1974)**



**Fig.27, *Three Kings Resting* (1977)**





**Fig.28, *Long Grain* (1980)**

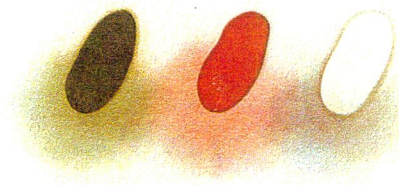


**Fig.29, *Self Portrait* (1989)**

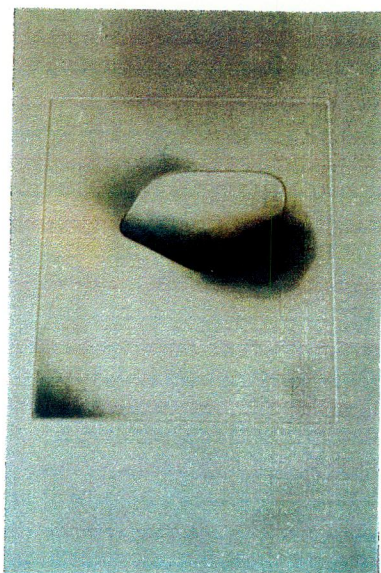




**Fig.30, *Form 4* (1975)**

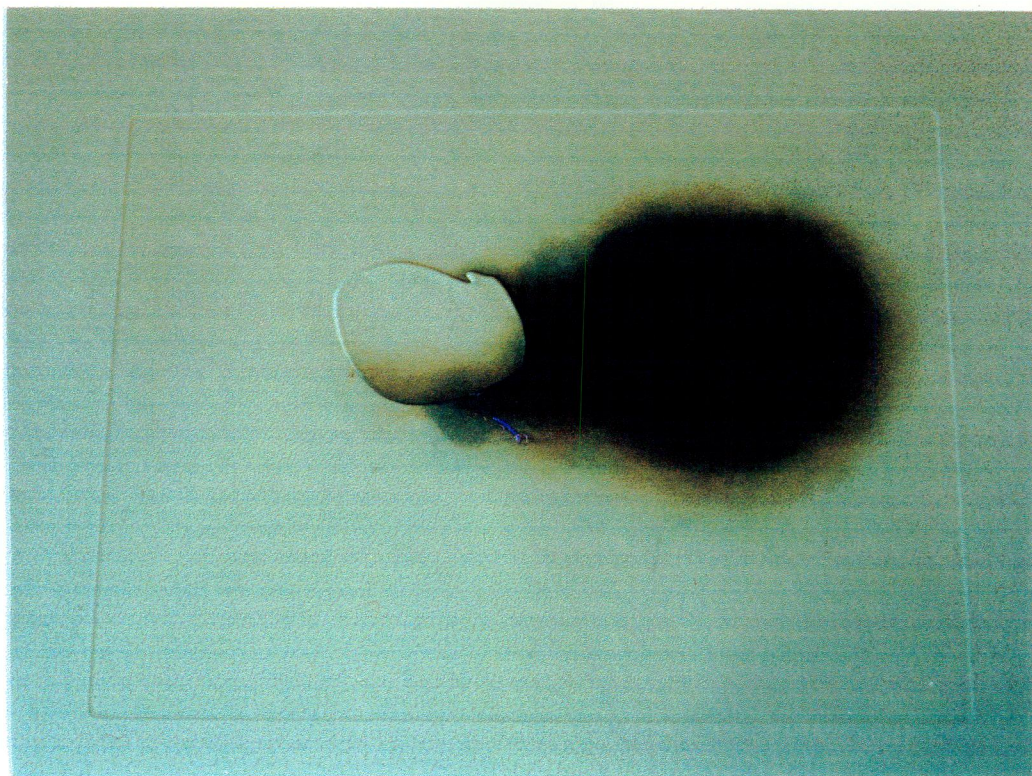


**Fig.31, *Soya III* (1981)**



**Fig.32, *Soya* (1981)**





**Fig.33, *Soya II* (1981)**



**Fig.34, *Blue Spotted Torso* (1976)**

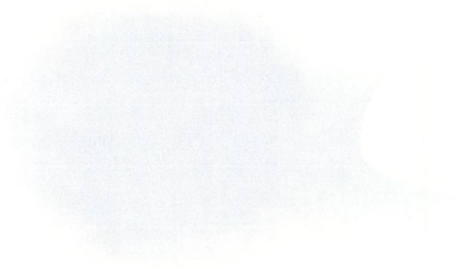




Fig.35, *Torso on Stripes* (1976)

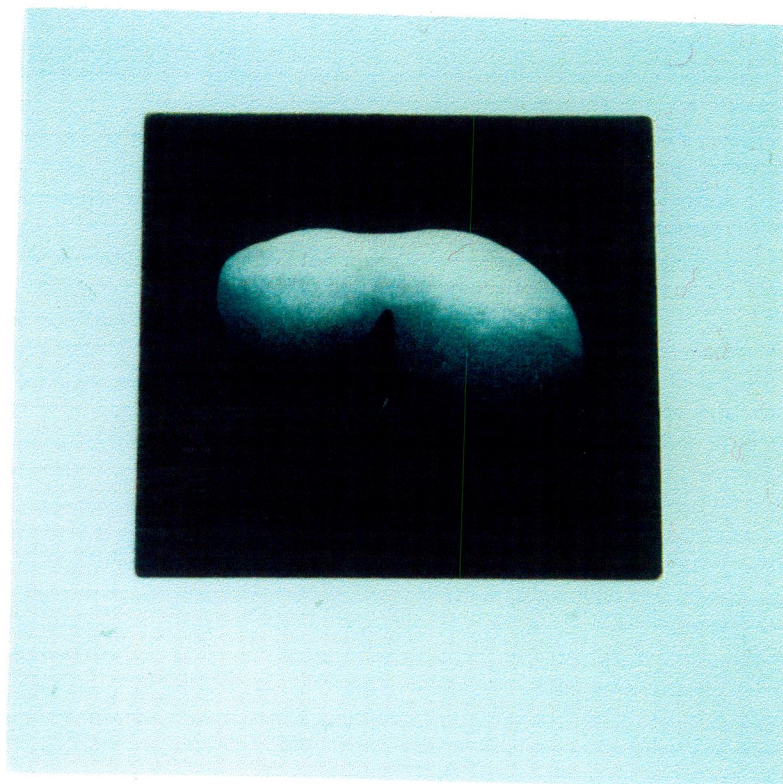
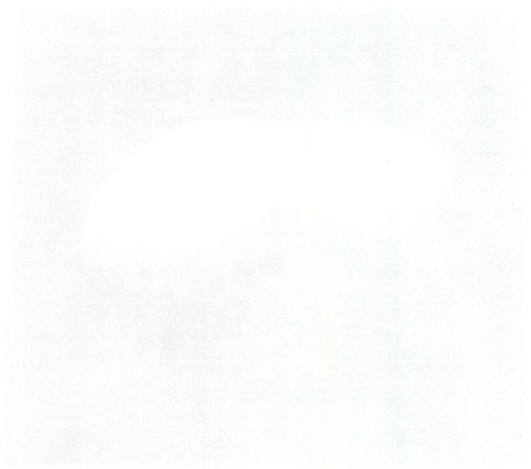
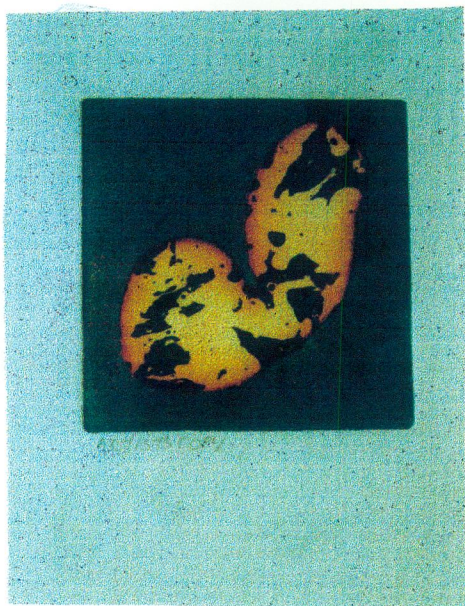


Fig.36, *Purple Torso* (1977)





**Fig.37, *Torso* (1975)**



**Fig.38, *Torso II* (1980)**



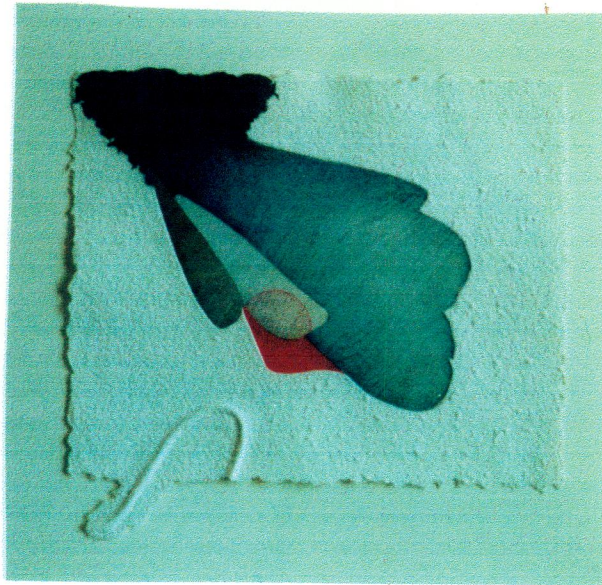


Fig.39, *Cast Species* (1991)

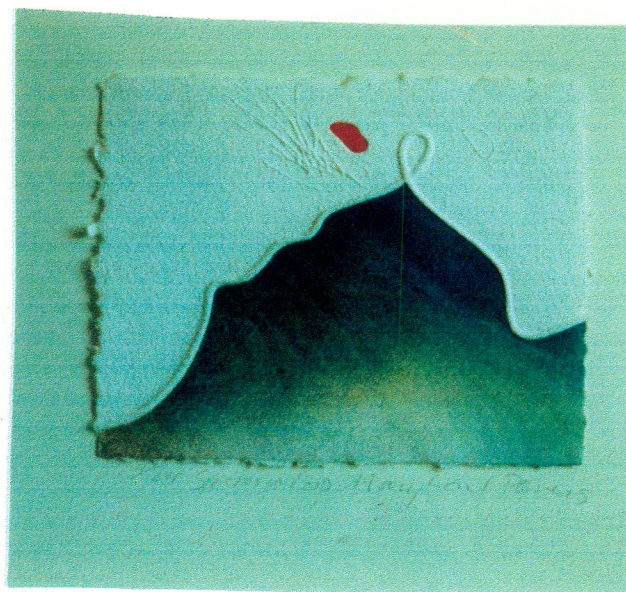


Fig.40, *Species with Loop* (1990)



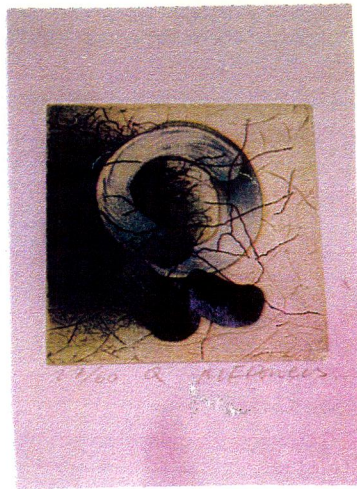


Fig.41, *Q* (1987)



Fig.42, *The Weather I* (1972)

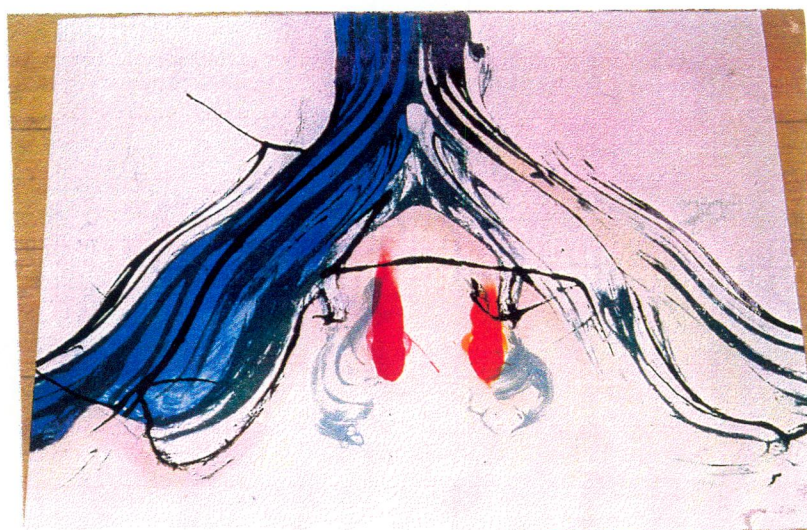


Fig.43, *Lithography II* (1986)



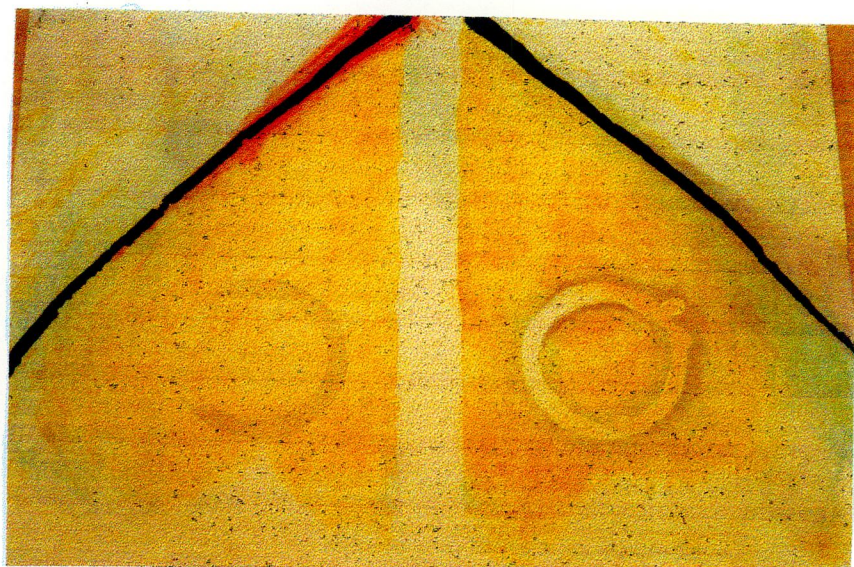


Fig.44, Aka "*Lithography I*" (1986)

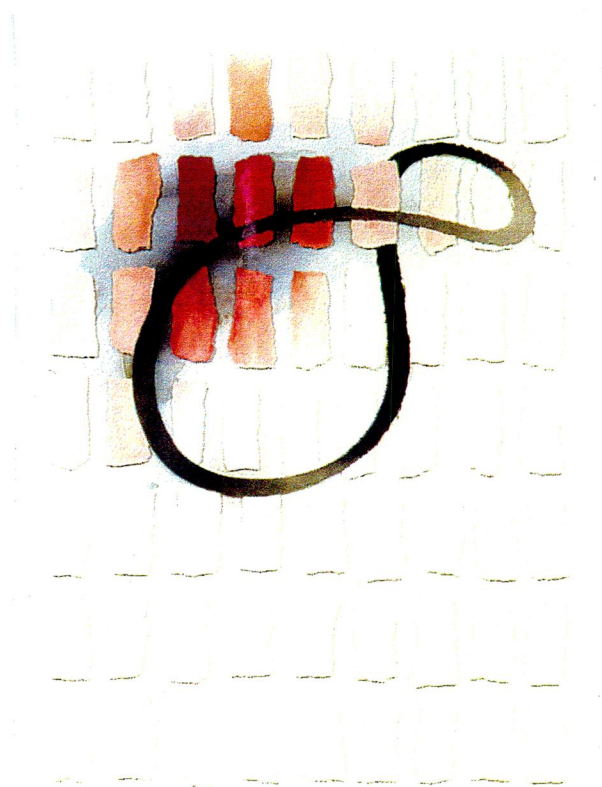


Fig.45, *Figure of 8* (1984)



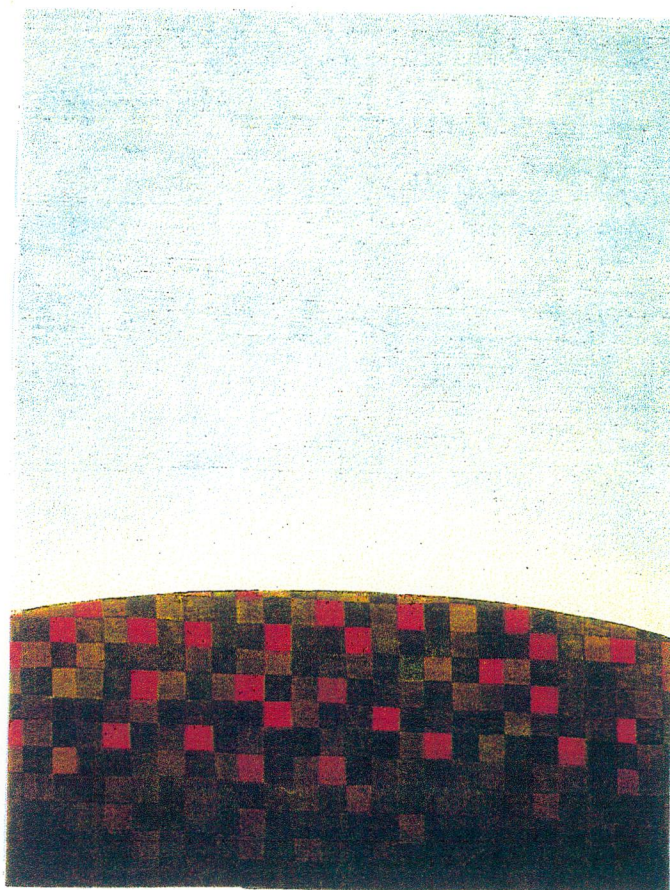


Fig.46, *Cast Paper with Watercolour* (1988)

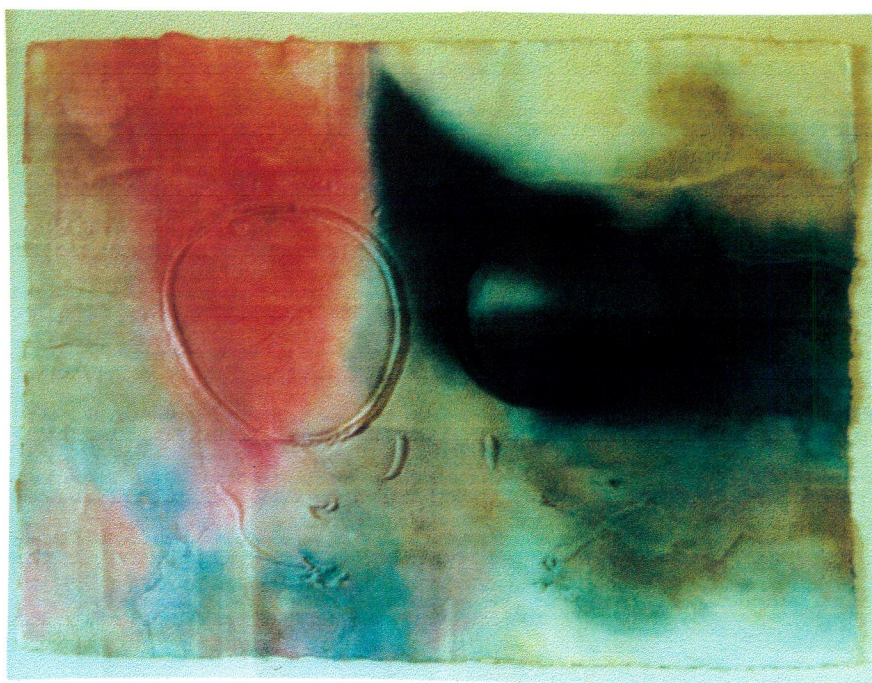


Fig.47, *In Search of Order* (1991)





**Fig.48,** *Chequered Landscape* (1977)



**Fig.49,** *Cast Paper with Watercolour* (1988)



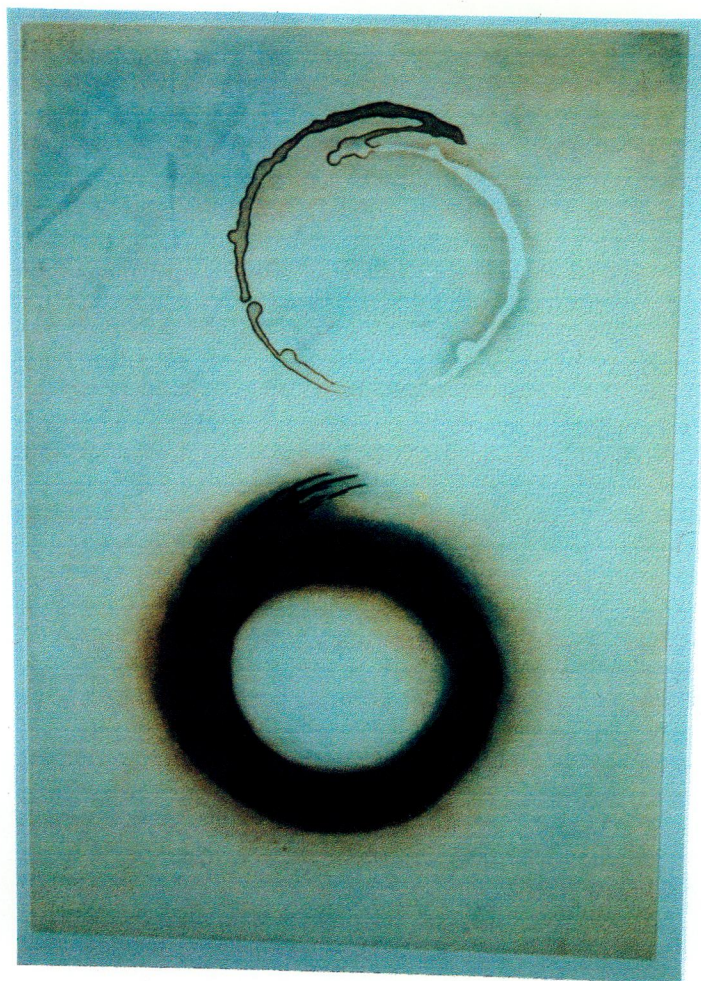


Fig.50, *Comma* (1983)

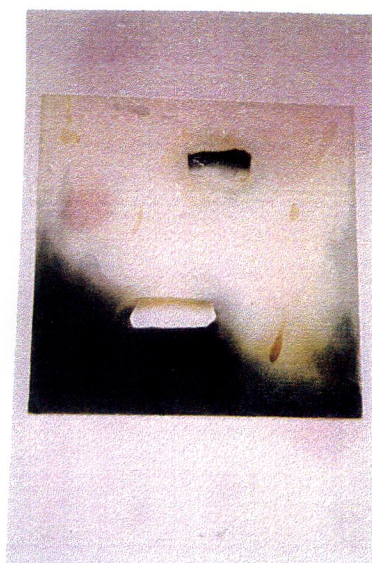


Fig.51, *Fragments* (1983)





Fig.52, II (1986)

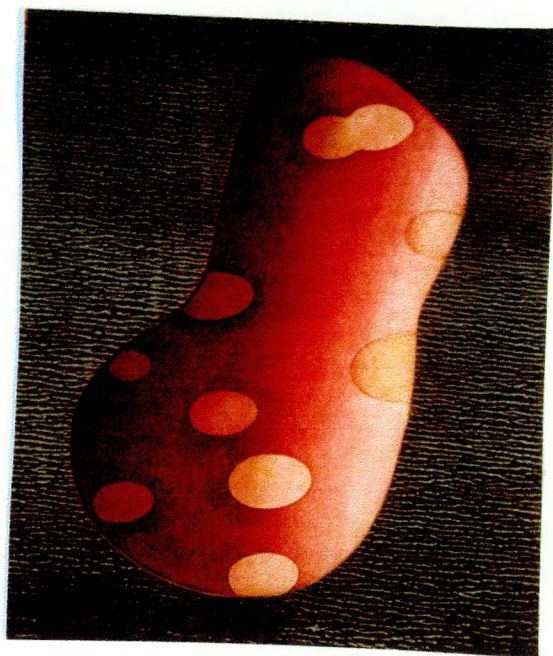
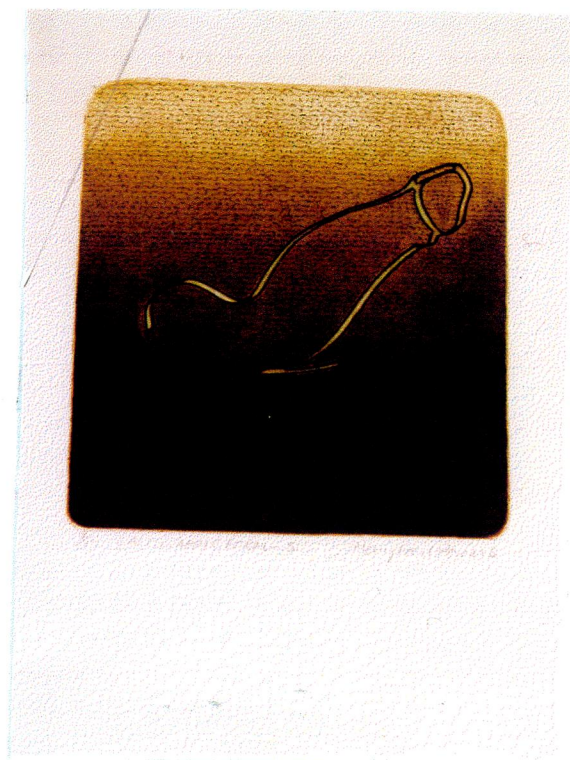


Fig.53, Spotted Torso (1976)

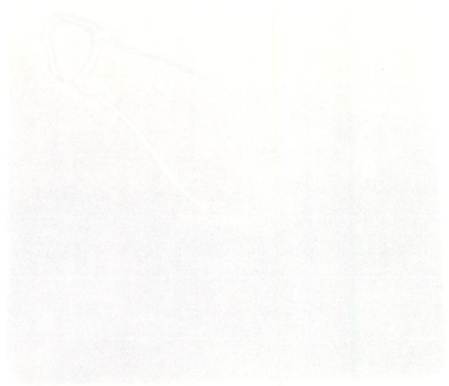




**Fig.54, *Calligraphic Form No.5* (1975)**



**Fig.55, *Cast Paper 8* (1988)**



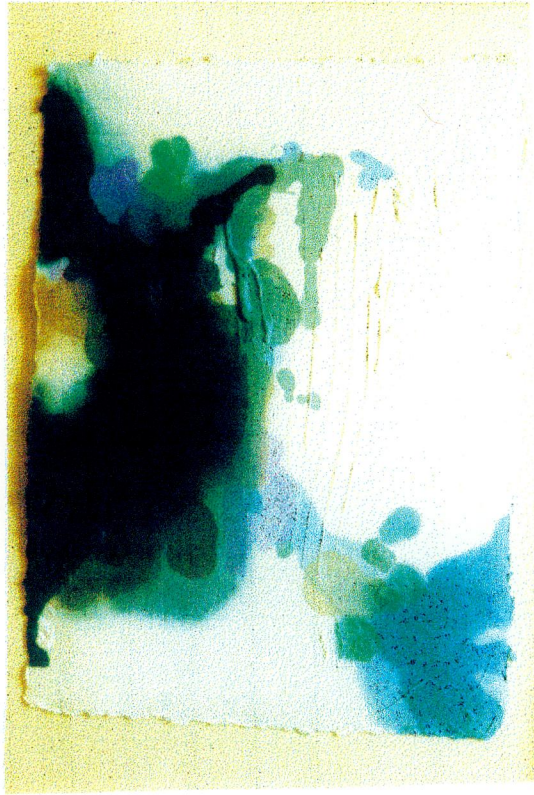


Fig.56, *Cast Paper with Watercolour* (1988)

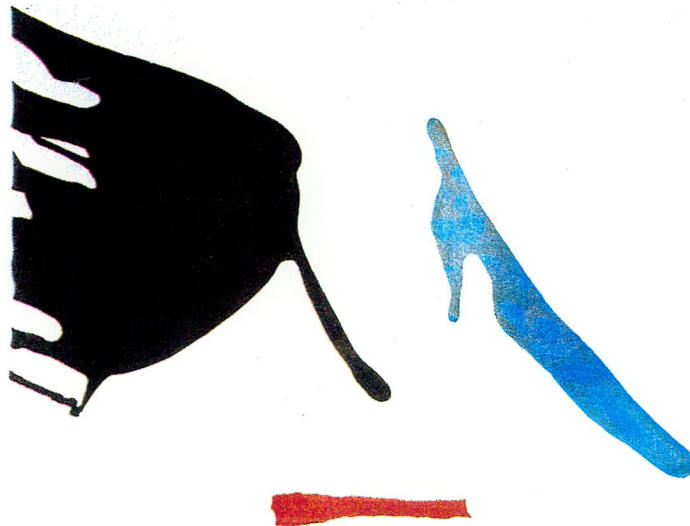


Fig.57, *I* (1989)



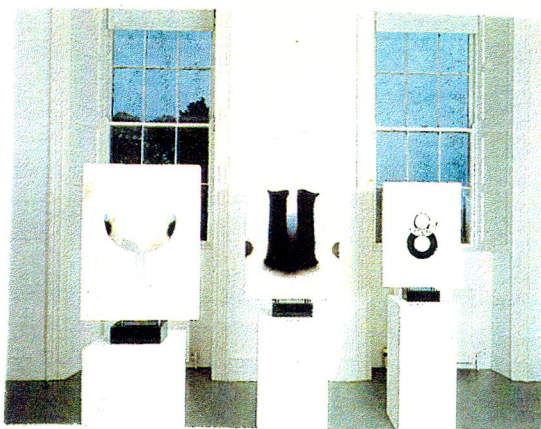


Fig.58, *Imago* (1984)



Fig.59, *Dappled Torso* (1977)

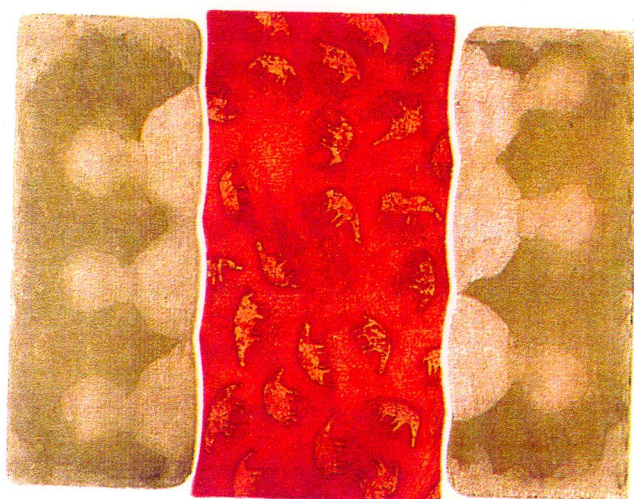


Fig.60, *Babies in Bed* (1974)



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