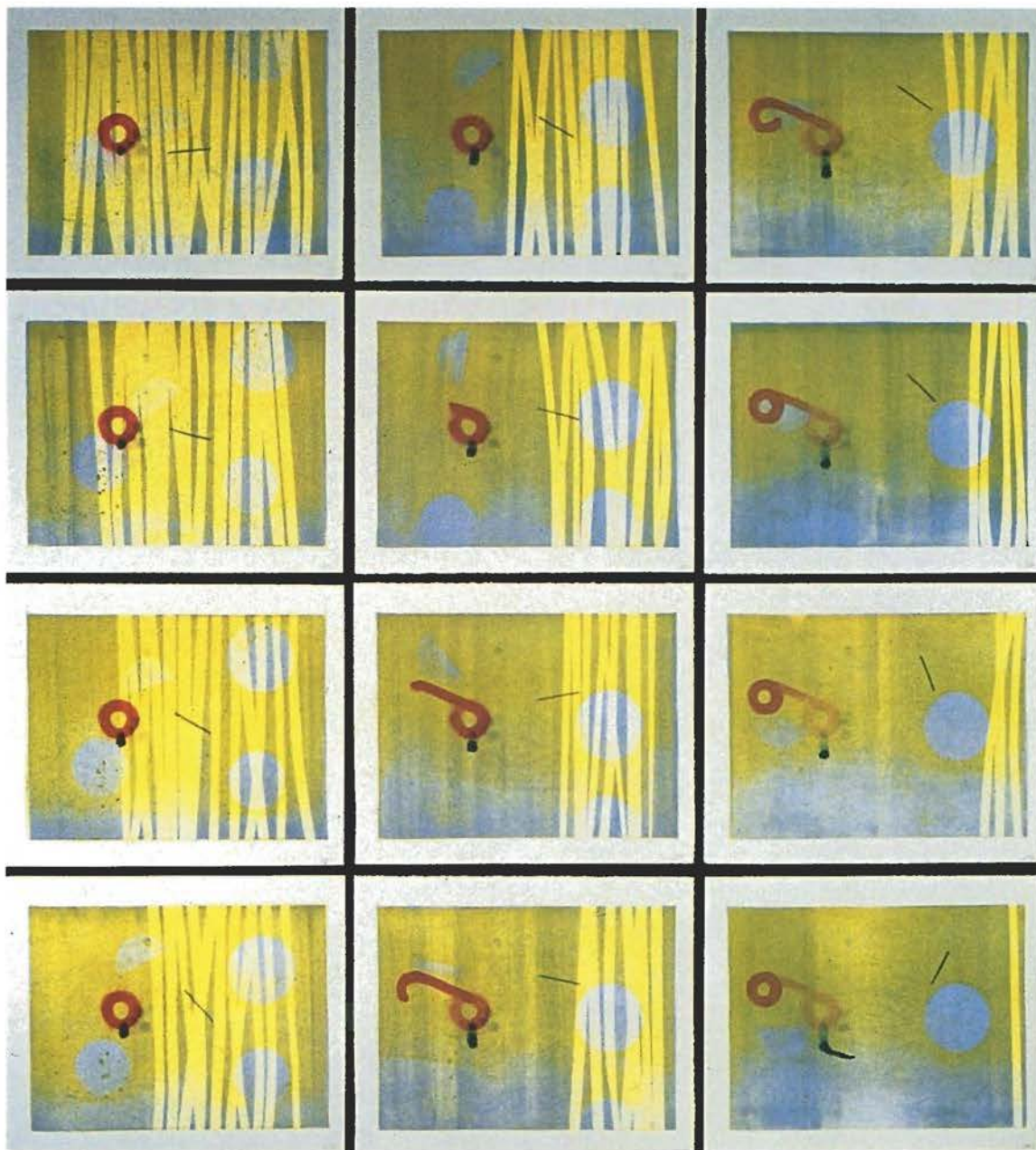


# GABEL KARSTEN

## COLOR MOVEMENT



## WOMEN & THEIR WORK

AUGUST 8 - SEPTEMBER 14, 2002

AUSTIN, TEXAS

GABEL KARSTEN  
*COLOR MOVEMENT*

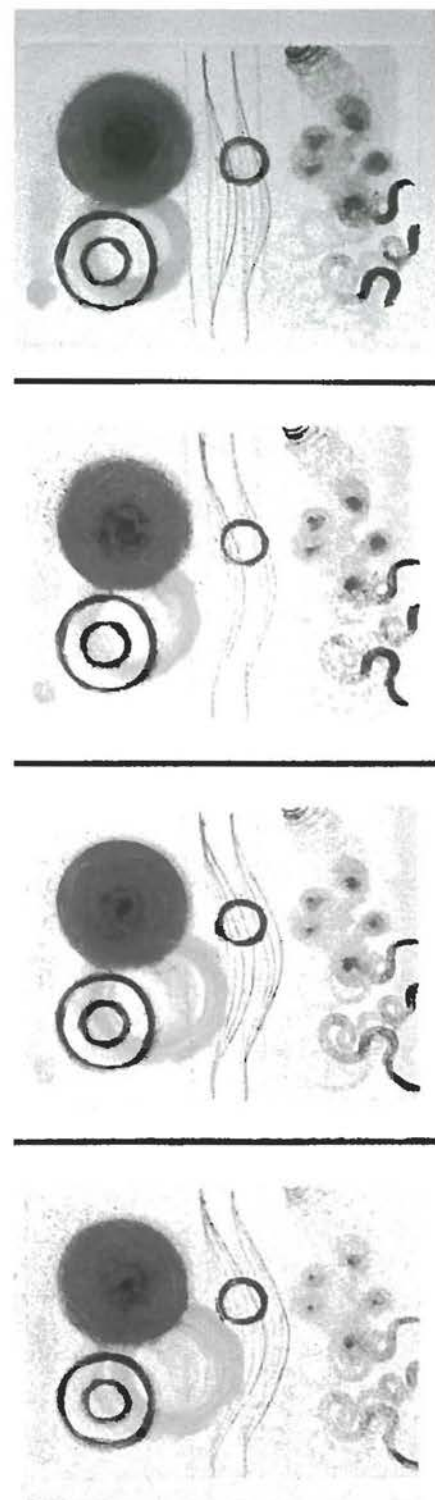
Much of film's mystery—what allows it to penetrate so deeply into our imaginations—originates in its power to transform objects, people, and gestures from everyday life into visually charged images that enliven our normal ways of looking at the world. The French Impressionist filmmakers of the 1920s called this transfiguring power *photogénie*: the ability of film to condense the essence of a person or locale, thus giving its subject a simultaneous strangeness and familiarity.<sup>1</sup> The strangeness inherent in film imagery is heightened by the medium's fleeting nature—frames flicker quickly past our eyes, and we are unable to register their individual content before they vanish. But if film does not permit the luxury of lingering, it does allow a blithe freedom of movement and time in a world unbounded by the physical laws of nature. In her recent works *Monotype Movement* (2001) and *Color Movement* (2002), printmaker and filmmaker Gabel Karsten has harnessed these elusive qualities of film without dispelling the medium's fundamental mystery. For each project, Karsten has made thousands of prints based on abstract or semi-abstract forms and then animated them, creating short, evanescent films that flow and metamorphose effortlessly in space.

In combining animation with the printmaking technique of monotype, Karsten has chosen two media that allow her to create images fluidly and spontaneously. Through animation, she can incorporate the rhythms and structures of music into her films; through the process of monotype, she can approach her imagery intuitively and in a spirit of discovery, aware that no one print is ever final or definitive. Karsten's images—alternately organic or geometric, abstract or

representational, simple or complex—communicate with the viewer on an intimate level because of their origins in playful experimentation and the subconscious. Her works remind us of the images—with their shifts, variations, and recurring motifs—that are projected on the internal screens of our own minds.

Karsten was first drawn to the challenges of conveying movement and rhythm in two-dimensional artworks while studying printmaking at the University of California Irvine. After moving to Austin in 1993, she began to focus on the printmaking technique of monotype, responding to its flexible, improvisational properties. During this time, Karsten was also making short, non-narrative, time-lapse films of people and objects from daily life, in which she wanted to convey a visual experience of change or evolution. Her deepening interest in portraying movement in both media made her consider how animation might breathe life into the static images of her prints. She decided to combine the two media when she embarked on *Monotype Movement* in 1998.

Experimental animation did not directly inspire Karsten in making *Monotype Movement*, but her work is a part of this tradition. The field has a long, idiosyncratic history, co-existing with mainstream Hollywood animation and fueling many of the latter area's innovations. Frenchman Emile Cohl (1857-1938), for example, credited with having made the first animated film, created short films in the 1910s composed of thousands of drawings and paintings based on oneiric, stream-of-consciousness imagery.<sup>2</sup> Oskar Fischinger (1900-1967), who emigrated from Nazi Germany in the 1930s, was another influential filmmaker who is best known for works in which he animated his own kaleidoscopic, modernist paintings brushstroke



Gabel Karsten, *Color Movement*, #143-146.  
(Video Installation) 2002 Monotype 10 1/2" x 12"

by brushstroke.<sup>3</sup> More recently, South African visual artist William Kentridge (b. 1955) has brought the tradition of animation into the realm of contemporary art, using drawings and paper cutouts to

construct condensed, dreamlike narratives that address the personal and historical legacies of apartheid.

Visual artists, particularly painters focusing on the expressive use of color and gesture, have had a more obvious influence on Karsten. Her films contain echoes of Kandinsky's colliding, intersecting fields of color and Klee's rhythmic, semi-abstract forms derived from the subconscious, as well as the shifting balances between line and color found in Joan Miro's paintings. Sculptors such as Alexander Calder have also had an impact, as seen in Karsten's enjoyment of the playful, movement of lines through space.

In *Monotype Movement*, Karsten wanted to thoroughly explore the particular qualities of the monotype, which has always occupied a liminal position between printmaking and painting. The monotype is the most direct form of printmaking: The artist draws or paints onto a surface such as a metal plate, wood, or glass, then transfers the image to paper (Karsten applies printer's ink to Plexiglas and runs it through a small press). As its name implies, a monotype can only be printed once; because the artist applies the ink to the plate in such a loose, painterly fashion, the image is highly unstable and cannot be reproduced. All that is left behind are the traces, or "ghost," of the original image. One of the most innovative aspects of Karsten's work is her use of this instability and the ghost image as the point of departure for her films. After completing the first monotype for a film, Karsten begins creating the next image directly from the ghost, allowing her imagination free rein in responding to its faint outline. The use of the ghost permits Karsten to generate images intuitively, but also provides an underlying visual structure for her prints. Thus, while the imagery in Karsten's films undergoes a continuous process of

permutation, the ghost images remain constant—sometimes invisible to the eye, at other times detectable only as the echo or halo of a shape.

Throughout the history of film, animators who make abstract films and others have sought to develop the medium's rhythmic qualities in order to make a kind of "visual music." In her work, Gabel Karsten creates rhythm on three levels. The first level is that of the individual print, which Karsten compares to a musical chord. In *Color Movement*, for example, she builds up four to five layers of images on each print, with each layer acting as a musical note. These multiple layers of line and color in turn lay the groundwork for the next level of rhythm, in which Karsten follows the movements and metamorphosis of colors and shapes as they meet, separate, and intertwine with one another, like harmonies in a song. At the third and broadest level, she devises a format of cycles or loops for animating her prints. Just as a composer introduces a theme at the beginning of a piece of music, then returns to it repeatedly to explore different facets of the motif, so in *Color Movement* Karsten develops loops of images, made up of 300 to 400 prints each, that can be repeated or juxtaposed with other loops in endlessly varying patterns. Each time we re-encounter a particular sequence of images within the film, but in a different context, our familiarity with and comprehension of the sequence deepens, and we engage with the work in a more satisfying way.

In past presentations of *Monotype Movement* and in the current exhibition of *Color Movement*, Karsten has chosen to display hundreds of prints massed alongside the single film that contains them. The physical juxtaposition of the prints and films reminds us that each is necessary for the fullest experience of the other and that neither

would be entirely meaningful without its counterpart. Many of the prints are complete visual entities in themselves, while others function simply as bridges linking together longer sequences of images; only by viewing the film, however, does the entire array of prints make visual sense. Likewise, the film gains richness from our ability to follow closely Karsten's choice of imagery frame by frame in the prints upon the wall. By experiencing Gabel Karsten's films and prints together, the viewer ultimately has the unique opportunity to witness the different gears of time exposed—the painstaking moments in life, symbolized by the prints, in which we must fully dedicate ourselves to a task that demands everything from us, and the mysterious insights and moments of effortlessness, represented by the films, that come to us unexpectedly and vanish quickly, leaving us wanting more.

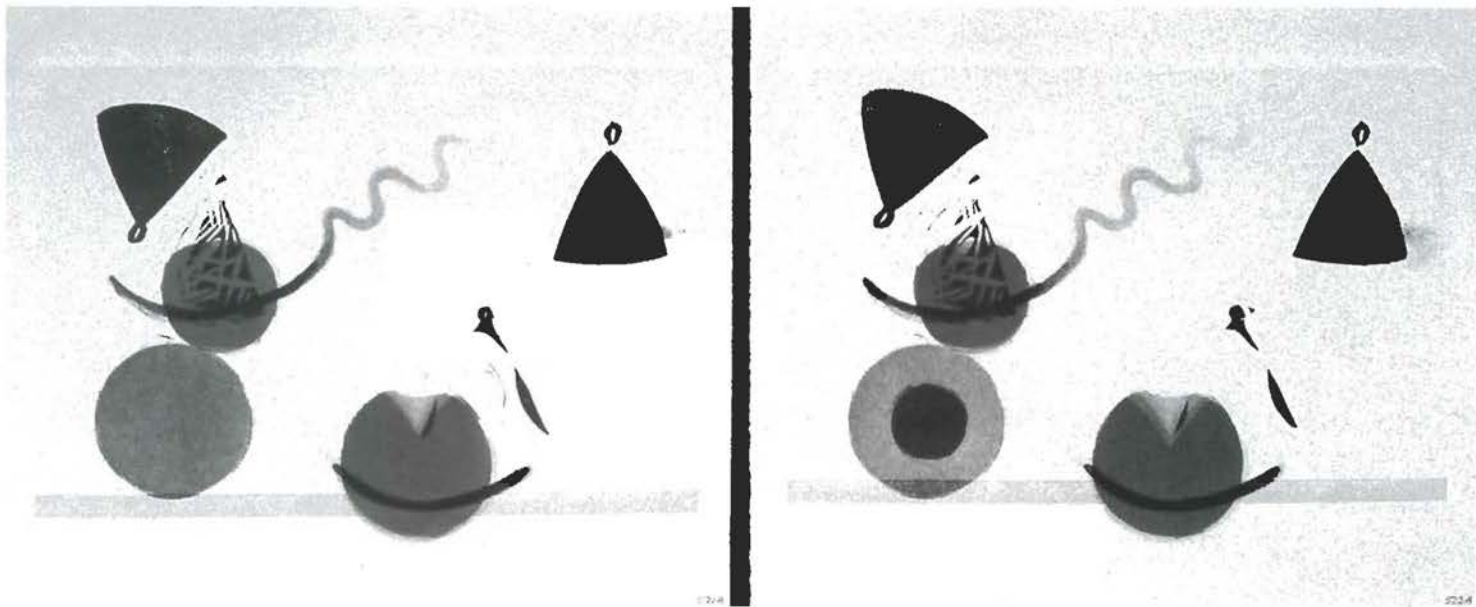
Gail Sanders  
Austin, TX.  
May 2002

<sup>1</sup> Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), p. 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Film History*, p. 49, and <http://www.lips.org>.

<sup>3</sup> *Film History*, p. 366, and <http://www.brightlightsfilm.com>.

Many thanks to Gabel Karsten, Lynne Chapman, Patricia Citty, Lisa Dirks, and Dana Friis-Hansen for their valuable comments on the text.



Gabel Karsten, *Color Movement*, #521A-522A. (Video Installation) 2001 Monotype 10 1/2" x 12"

## GABEL KARSTEN

*Resides in Austin, TX.*

### EDUCATION:

- 1992 B.A., Studio Art,  
Concentration in Printmaking,  
University of California at  
Irvine, Irvine, CA.
- 1998 Il Bisonte International School  
of Graphic Art, Florence, Italy.  
Certificate in Color Printmaking

### SELECTED EXHIBITIONS:

- 2002 *Color Movement*, Women &  
Their Work Gallery, Austin, TX.  
*22 to Watch: New Art in Austin*,  
Austin Museum of Art  
Austin, TX.
- 2001 *Terra Cognito*, Cinema Texas  
International Film Festival,  
Davis Gallery, Austin, TX.  
*New Austin Film and Video:*  
*Transmedia*, 1/4 Hora  
Project Space, Elgin, TX.  
*New Texas Prints*, Women & Their  
Work, Austin, TX.
- 1998 *Painted One*, Cinema Texas  
International Film Festival,  
Animation Division, Austin, TX.  
*Refreshingly Unfamiliar*, Tarrytown  
Gallery, Austin, TX.
- 1997 Ironworks Industries Gallery,  
Austin, TX.  
Concordia University, Austin, TX.

1996

1995

1994

1992

1991

1990

- A Bestiary*, Women Printmakers of  
Austin, Dougherty Fine Arts Center,  
Austin, TX.  
*New Lines*, St. Edward's University,  
Austin, TX.
- Multiple Originals*, Women  
Printmakers of Austin,  
Dougherty Fine Arts Center,  
Austin, TX.
- Plate Marks*, San Marcos  
Fine Arts Center, San Marcos, TX.  
*ACC Fine Arts Exhibition*,  
*Group Show*, Dougherty  
Fine Arts Center, Austin, TX.
- Miracle on Hopkins Street*, Juried  
*Group Show*, San Marcos  
Fine Arts Center, San Marcos, TX.
- One of a Kind Jewelry*  
*Invitational*, Juried *Group Show*,  
Kittrell Riffkind Gallery, Dallas, TX.  
*ACC Fine Arts Exhibition*,  
*Group Show*, Dougherty  
Fine Arts Center, Austin, TX.
- One of a Kind Jewelry Invitational*,  
Kittrell Riffkind Gallery, Dallas, TX.
- Una Passione per l'Art*,  
Galeria della Stozzina, Italia/USA,  
Florence, Italy
- The Work of Apprentices*, Il  
Bisonte International School of  
Graphic Art, Florence, Italy
- Black Market Art Gallery,  
Costa Mesa, CA.

### FILMS

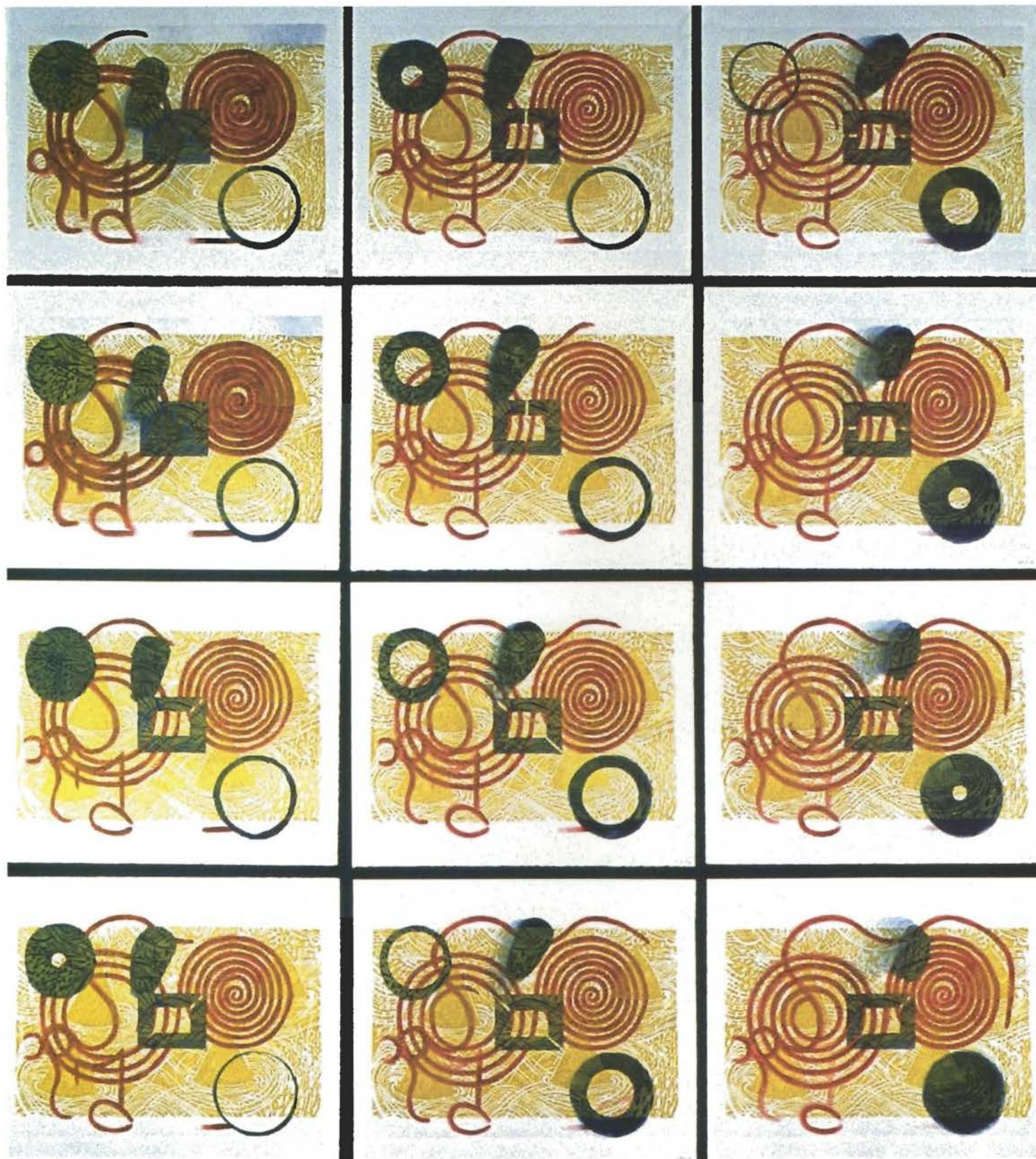
- 1998-2002 *Front Door*, 58 min. to date  
(4/02) Super 8, Austin, TX.
- 2001 *Monotype Movement*, 6 min.,  
16mm film, Austin, TX.
- 1999 *Morning to Evening: March 1*,  
3 min, Super 8, Austin, TX.
- 1998-1999 *Moscow Painting*, 7 min.,  
Super 8, Austin, Texas, TX.
- 1998 *Painted One*, 3 min., 16mm  
hand painted film, Austin, TX.  
*One Year: Oak Tree*, 6 min.,  
Super 8, Austin, TX.
- 1992 *Geese and a Chair*, 3 min.,  
Super 8, Irvine, CA.

### AWARDS:

- 2002 Nominated for a Rockefeller  
Film and Video Fellowship
- 2000-2001 Cultural Contract Fund, Austin, TX.
- 1999 Texas Filmmakers, Production Fund,  
Austin, TX.

### COLLECTIONS:

- Bergstrom International Airport, City of Austin  
Art in Public Places, Austin, TX.  
University of California at Irvine Student Center,  
Irvine, CA.



This Panel: Gabel Karsten, *Color Movement*, #339A-350A. (Video Installation) 2002 Monotype 10 1/2" x 12"

Cover Panel: Gabel Karsten, *Color Movement*, #272-283. (Video Installation) 2001 Monotype 10 1/2" x 12"

Back Panel: Gabel Karsten, *Color Movement*, #57-58. (Video Installation) 2001 Monotype 10 1/2" x 12"



57



58

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Now celebrating its 24th anniversary, Women & Their Work presents over 50 events a year in visual art, dance, theater, music, literature, and film. The gallery features on-going exhibitions of Texas women artists and brings artists of national stature to Texas audiences. Since its founding, Women & Their Work has presented 1,661 artists in 210 visual art exhibitions, 100 music, dance, and theater events, 12 film festivals, 20 literary readings, and 226 workshops in programming that reflects the ethnic and cultural diversity of this region. Nationally recognized, Women & Their Work has been featured in *Art in America*, *ArtForum* and National Public Radio and was the first organization in Texas to receive a grant in visual art from the

National Endowment for the Arts. Women & Their Work reaches over 5,000 school children and teachers each year through gallery tours, gallery talks with exhibiting artists, participatory workshops, in-school performances, dance master classes, and teacher workshops.



WOMEN & THEIR WORK

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