

THESIS

BETWEEN THE LINES

Submitted by

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY MARK LAWRENCE HOWARD ENTITLED BETWEEN THE LINES BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ART.

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THESIS ABSTRACT  
BETWEEN THE LINES

In my exploration of line and structure of a picture's surface I have relied on analysis, as well as intuitive response to the work as it progresses, as a method of creating art. Attitude is an important element in influencing what inevitably is produced. A rigid mind produces rigid art and, conversely, a more fluid mind can create freer art, art which may therefor evoke an emotional response from an audience, rather than intellectual analysis of form or objects.

In my use of materials I chose encaustic for the majority of the works, which requires heat in its application. While researching the history of prehistoric art, I serendipitously discovered that heat and fire are commonly associated with shamans in tribal cultures, and since the axis mundi is an integral shamanic motif in this series, it seems appropriate that another shamanic element is included. The material of beeswax is another connection to the shamanic aspect of my work in that it is a natural substance, and thus reinforces the theme of nature in this body of work. It is the shamans' respect and communion with nature, and their art, created from this perspective, which has motivated my own artistic investigation as well as inspiring historical research into primitive cultures.

The nonobjective forms I have employed serve to function artistically as language or symbols rather than representation of objects. It is this symbolic nature of visual art that is the core of my thesis. This form of art, abstract or nonobjective, relates to music in its structure and transcendence of material reality, as well as explores a temporal dimension. What is communicated in this art is conceptual as well as observational, as much of my imagery is inspired by concepts of natural systems, formed by unseen forces, yet manifested in pattern and structure.

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All works are on paper

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We may, through our personal exploration of art, transfer personal experience to another via the object created. Our five senses are our only immediate means of interpreting and interacting with the world. Believing that we each perceive the world with personal bias, unique context, and preconceptions, I attempt to create images which evoke an emotional or instinctual response in the viewer. A successful image has a physical presence and may evoke an emotional response from a viewer without their knowing how or why. The potential for abstract art to transcend literal interpretation or even conscious understanding and still be appreciated on a deeper or subconscious, emotional level intrigues me and directs the development of imagery in this series.

In this body of work I explore aspects of structure as well as a number of formal concerns such as the relationships and transposition of lines across the pictures' surface, color to create mood, and development of space - real and illusory, and the juxtaposition of form and space. In my exploration of structure and composition I create a matrix of lines as the essential core of my imagery. The primary focus in these works is the matrix of structural relationships and more specifically the dissolution and resolution of abstract form. I see the content related to the form of these works. It is the transient nature of reality and our relation to the world that we live in which I see as relevant to the dissolution and resolution of form, the cycle of life.

\* \* \*

I began the series with simple drawings and progressively developed more complex compositions and materials application. (Fig.1) Initially I focused on the relationships created amongst the matrixes of interweaving lines and as the work

progressed I saw potential for further exploration of this theme. In my course of experimenting with various materials I built up thin layers of drawing with minimum actual increase to the thickness of the surface. (Fig.2) My interest in transparency, layering, and building a physical depth upon the surface began in the midst of this series and resulted in my shift to a more physically substantial material, i.e. beeswax, in order to create a paradoxical illusory sense of depth in the surface. I applied paper strips in a few of the watercolor series which added texture and visual weight but lost some of the transparency. (Figs.3,4)

The technical and material explorations in this series strongly influenced the development of the imagery. Images from the first phase which were mixed media with water based pigments were suited to improvisation and quick application of materials as they dry quickly and can be mixed with little effort. This fluid characteristic is evident in the line quality and speed as well as the wash watercolor layers which is very different from the later encaustic works. (Figs.5,6)

Wax is only fluid when heated to 160 degrees and cools at room temperature within seconds of removing it from the heat. When applying the wax to the surface each layer must be heated or fused to the previous layer to ensure adhesion. Because of the fusing and need to apply heat in order to blend areas the manipulation of wax in this application is much more time consuming, but much more plastic than the water based materials used previously. Because of this plasticity and mass the works created using encaustic result in a thicker surface than the relatively thinner and more transparent watercolor works. (Figs.7,8,9)

Art embodies a unique history of humanity created by individuals focused on the visual expression of their relationship to their specific environment, events and/or personal issues. The perspective of artists is expected to be more subjective

than the that of historians, who are trained to maintain a more objective analysis of events. This alternative record of humanity through the eyes of artists is reflected in artwork that reaches as far back into time as mankind itself, prehistoric if you will. The earliest remaining forms of painting and drawing are petroglyphs and pictographs which are believed to have been created by shamans for ritual purposes during prehistoric times. (Figs.10,11,12) Prehistoric art in general has an elegant simplicity or primitive aesthetic that I find arresting. Art from this period displays an honest immediacy of execution which requires a significant mastery of crude but effective materials as well as considerable insight into the natural world. The ability for art created thirty thousand years in the past to reach across such an enormous time span and make a profound impact on a person completely removed from that culture, speaks of the power of art to transcend temporal and social contexts. It is this ability of art to communicate as an abstract visual language which elicits universal appeal, regardless of comprehension of content. Carl Jung's concepts of the collective unconscious and his use of visual art in psychotherapy is based on this notion, that the intellect is not the core of our perception. Such common images and themes are widespread among diverse cultures which Jung referred to as archetypes.

One surviving prehistoric archetype that I am drawn to is that of the axis mundi and the associated relevance of directions, prevalent in many archaic cultures. Axis mundi is the symbolic axis which links heaven, earth, and the underworld. Shamans frequently carried a stick or staff which symbolized the axis mundi and their ability to travel among the three dimensions as communicator with the spirits, natural forces, and ancestors. (Fig.13) Sometimes referred to as medicine men/ women because of their healing abilities, shamans delved into the realm of

the metaphysical to fend off “evil spirits” as part of the healing ritual, or comforted spirits as they left the physical body upon dying. Shamans frequently used naturally occurring psychotropic substances such as peyote and tobacco to induce an altered state of consciousness and hallucinations to aid in their communication with the “spirit world”. In *Dreaming with Eyes Open* Michael Tucker speaks of contemporary artists, writers, filmmakers and musicians as shamans who function as society's’ mediators with this invisible realm<sup>1</sup>. It has been said that art makes visible the invisible or expresses the intangible. Therefore one might say that artists travel back and forth between different realms or perceptual dimensions and the real material world.

The metaphorical path traveled along the axis mundi and the cardinal directions constitute the basis for many archaic society's world view. I mention this because the axis mundi is a multicultural artifact that is relevant to my work, as I transpose it into the vertical line/ stripe which is the integral structural element, in fact the foundation of the work. In addition I find the relevant philosophy and world view related to these cultures very intriguing, as do many contemporary artists<sup>2</sup>.

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The structure of the format is a key issue in this series. The transposition of lines/ stripes across the page and the prevailing movement is in the horizontal directions, right or left. The format is exaggeratedly horizontal and thus compels a horizontal scanning of the piece. A strong horizontal format suggests landscape due to the intimations of an implied horizon.(Figs.14,15) This connotation is unavoidable and I believe it adds to the content of the works. Being aware of this tendency to see

<sup>1</sup> Tucker, *Dreaming with Open Eyes*

<sup>2</sup> Rubin, *Primitivism in the Twentieth Century*



landscape in this series, I have eschewed any additional reference to it and concentrated on abstract elements and principles, not wanting to develop the landscape theme beyond suggestion. My interest in designing a picture is in depicting complex multiple relationships using a simple, primary motif, i.e. line. The slant of the individual lines contributes to the impression of lateral movement and this is an important consideration when establishing its angle. Hence the verticality of the axis mundi is combined with the horizontal dynamic in the multiplicity of the vertical element.

I am interested in the conventions of artists such as Kandinsky, Klee, Miro, Hartung, Tapies, Twombly and others who use abstract visual forms as a personal language to convey nonobjective subject matter. By using such elements an artist minimizes references to recognizable physical form such as landscape, but gains freedom in the ability to create within a relatively unlimited horizon. Mark Tobey wrote about seeing mathematical formulae written on a chalkboard and regardless of his comprehension of the content he appreciated the abstract aesthetic of the writing. As in writing, the transposition of vertical lines with interludes of space creates pattern and rhythm in a manner similar to calligraphy. Since my works are nonobjective I use the dynamic of lines to create abstract relationships rather than to describe forms. In some of the works, such as Axis X, the sheer magnitude of the line brings it to the foreground and it asserts its own unique individuality. (Fig.16) The character of line may also be distinguished by color, scale, weight, speed, orientation, gesture, and geometry. Multiple lines create an interactive relationship which becomes a dance across the page creating various tempo, phrasing, rhythm, harmony, texture, movement, direction and pattern. After several years of

exploring this visual language I still discover new possibilities for expression within this theme.

In the earlier series of my works the predominant material I used was water based pigments which I applied by various means on Rives BFK and Arches Cover rag papers. Due to the fluid nature of the materials most of these works were created while on a flat or slightly tilted table. The layering of repeated applications of thin color and drawing with various materials was the prime system I employed in the series of 2002. Using a combination of dry materials as pastels and graphite applied to wet and/ or dry paper, liquid pigments dispersed from small plastic bottles with fine tips, and subtractive techniques, I created transparent map like surfaces. Between layers I would apply acrylic polyurethane or lacquer to preserve that layer before the application of the next. (Figs.17,18) Due to the rapid drying time and ease of application water based materials enabled me to create several drawings per week and to work on them in tandem. It was also more convenient to work on a large scale with water based materials. More importantly, using the larger scale and the looser application of mixed media contributed to a greater physical involvement in the making of the work, which in turn resulted in more gestural, freer marks than I had previously been creating in smaller drawings using other methods such as the mylar drawings in my photolithographs. (Fig.6) This increase in scale also resulted in creating a different physical relationship between the audience and the piece in that the work seems more accessible and perhaps less intimate.

The more recent works in the Axis series are made using beeswax (or encaustic) and various wet and dry media applied to Rives and Arches print paper which is first mounted onto plywood with contact cement. A longitudinal format was

used for the majority of these recent works as it is appropriate for my compositions which require latitude in order to spatially accommodate the exposition of the theme. The plastic and transparent nature of wax makes it a perfect material for layering. Previous layers are fused into the new surface but retain their own characteristic marks, color, and design. The coexistence of multiple layers in a single image creates a tension between those layers, spatially and temporally. In my watercolor series the leitmotif of the axis mundi moves laterally with little emphasis on creating actual depth. The encaustic works are much more involved with the exploration of this dimension. The physical characteristics of wax are conducive to the building of layers that can attain significant actual and visual depth. This added direction of movement in the physical depth of the picture plane and preservation of time between layers enriches the concept of direction and movement within the picture plane as well as symbolic transcendence of the surface. Between layers I engraved the surface prior to the next application of molten wax which fills the gouges as with intarsis in woodworking. This surface of newly applied wax would then be scraped back level with the preceding surface so that only the furrow and other crevices would hold remnants of that layers' color, much as in the wiping of an intaglio plate prior to printing. At times the scraped layers were extremely thin allowing a careful exploration and exposure of previous layers. The result is a clear cut line slicing through layers, in a sense transcending its reality and physically connecting to the past of the work, and adding to it an archeological dimension that parallels my interest in archaic cultures. (Fig.19)

Through this exploration and delving into the strata of my work, through the delicate excavation of layers of intentions and hopes, each piece is revealed. I approached this process as any other, allowing accidents to happen and leaving

them as evidence of the serendipity of creating. My approach to choosing color in the early wax works was more considered because of the slow, methodical approach required by this technique. The color harmonies in these drawings are very important to the overall tone of each piece. In an effort to create variations of color and tone I did not rely on any premeditated color scheme or repeated combination as I prefer the color scheme of a work to evolve spontaneously. After completing one layer I would decide on the next color and proceeded in this semi-spontaneous manner until the piece was complete. The recent, larger encaustic works are more direct and are labored over less than earlier, smaller encaustics. (Fig. 20) The directness or relative simplicity of design combined with the increased scale creates a bolder image which makes a more vigorous visual statement. At this scale the lines become entities that achieve independence from the ground they emerge from. (Fig.21)

As I mentioned in the opening paragraph, a primary issue in these works is the dissolution and resolution of abstract form. Other artists have examined this theme in various ways. The Impressionists sought to capture the ephemeral quality of the world around us, and modern artists such as Mark Rothko, Alberto Giacometti, and Giorgio Morandi, have peered into that realm where material and essence merge and dissolve. In his still life drawings and watercolors Morandi created his most abstract works. The simple objects he had become so familiar with after seeing them and representing them over and over for fifty years finally began to lose their substance and began to merge with the ground of the paper. His marvelous exploration of form and the dissolution of it, as well as his compositional arrangements, inspires my own inquiry into this theme.

My use of nonobjective form, differentiates my work from Morandi's, specifically from his still life images. Where Morandi "was to represent the structure of the reciprocal processes of dissolution of the *object* and reconstruction of its form"<sup>3</sup> my stripe series represents the dissolution of *structure* and the reciprocal relationship of form and ground. Visually, the structure created by the arrangement of stripes, which are sometimes lines of great scale of which only a portion is seen as in Axis X and Axis V, implies a larger visual field that is beyond the boundary of the actual physical piece. (Figs.16,20) This effect became very obvious to me when I put Axis X on a gallery wall. The unframed drawing seemed to expand into the surrounding space. The degree to which a work will exhibit subjective extension is difficult to predict with certitude but influences my approach and decisions pertaining to their composition.

I believe that the *manner* or *attitude* with which one approaches the making of art can create art that transcends an artist's perception and imagination. Combining intuition with conscious analysis is an approach that relies of faith in one's abilities and more patience with regard to the outcome. I choose to approach my art in a spontaneous or improvisational manner because of the nature and quality of the type of evocative image which I desire to create as well as the enjoyment received in this personal experience of creating unencumbered by intellectual preconceptions and expectations. I am also inspired by jazz musicians who improvise whereby they explore a theme or etude without a score. This can lead to unexpected results and invites individual expression using the theme or structure of a piece as the agent for exploration. This improvisational approach requires experience and demands discipline to be able to respond and react to the

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<sup>3</sup> Morat A., Morandi as a Draughtsman, p.95

work as it evolves in new and unexpected ways. Making art from this psychological precipice causes discomfort and anxiety in many artists because the results of their labor are uncertain and perhaps surprising. But without surprises we do not discover anything new. My exploration and investigation with various materials and concepts has been a humbling and enlightening experience, rewarding when ideas work and frustrating when they do not. It is my hope that a viewer of my art can stop briefly and become engaged in something new, evocative and mysterious, and that this engagement might initiate an internal dialogue in the viewer. I am delighted, when upon contemplation, a viewer decides to pursue further investigation and then responds on a deeper level, if not emotional then intellectual. I think of the works in this series as windows looking into a separate reality, a place I have visited, and these are the postcards to prove that such a place exists, if only briefly in my mind.

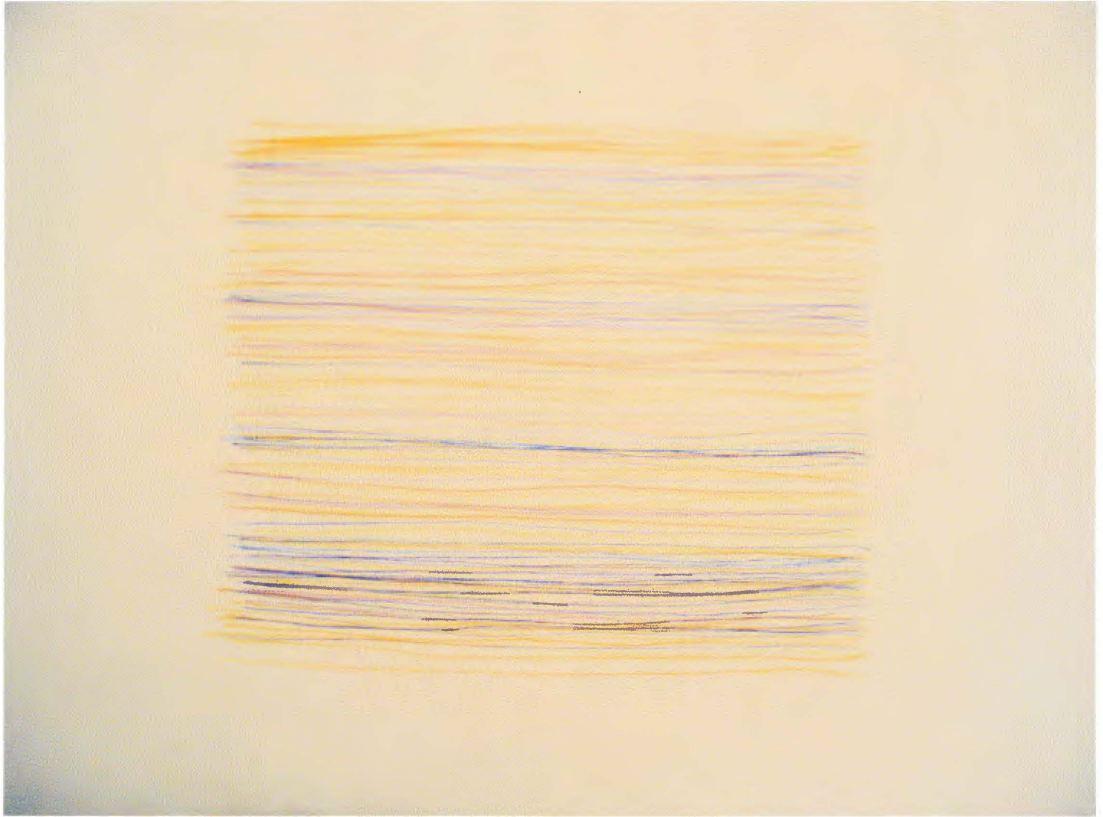


Fig. 1, Untitled, Color pencil on paper, 24 x 28 in., 2002



Fig. 2, Untitled, Water based paint, graphite, on paper, 24 x 35 in., 2002





Fig 3, Untitled, Water based paint with paper strips, on paper, 28 x 42 in., 2002



Fig. 4, Detail of fig. 3 showing paper strips

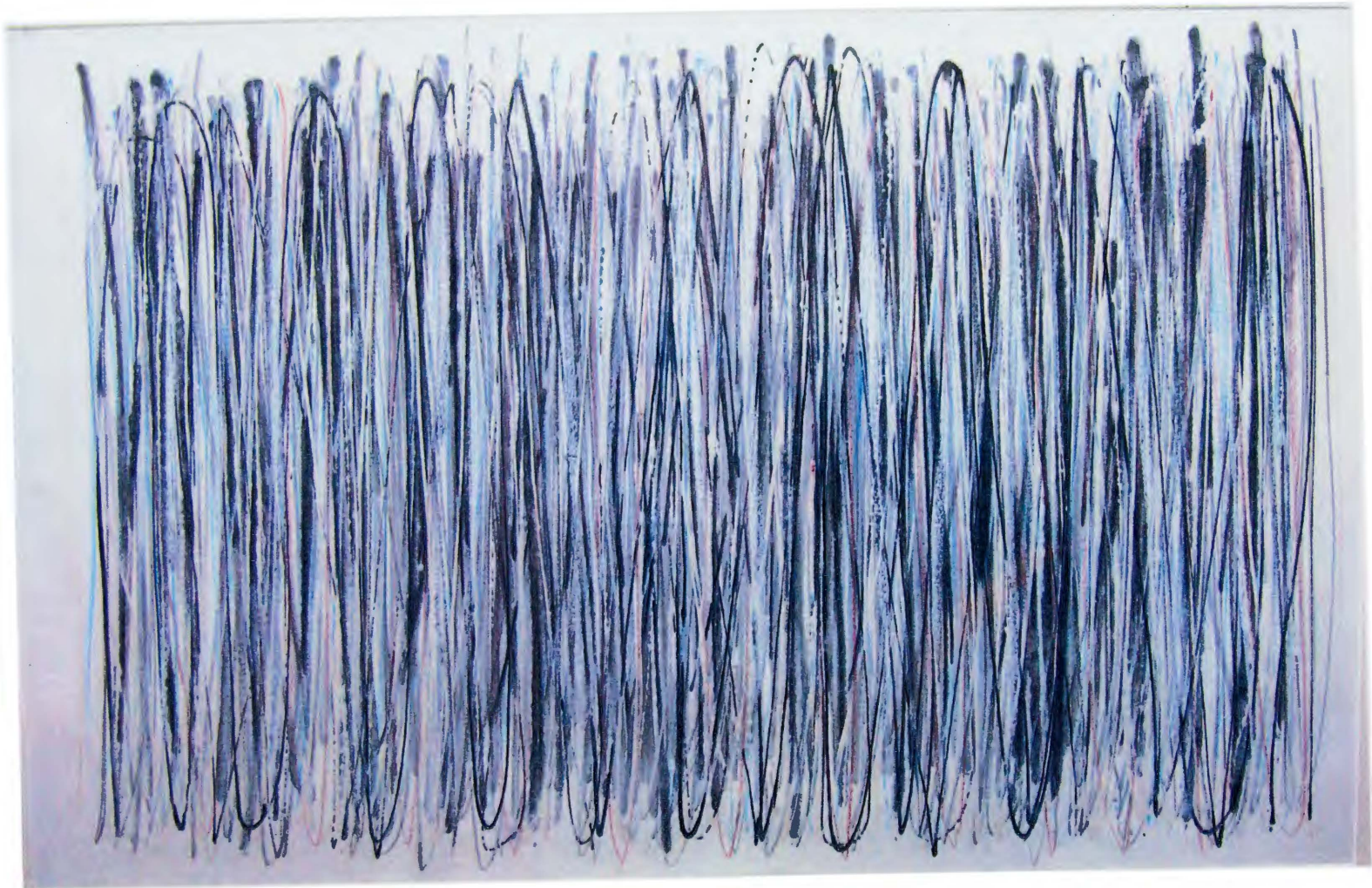


Fig. 5, Flow, Water based paint, graphite, color pencil, pastel, ink, on paper, 28 x 42 in., 2002



**Fig. 6, Detail of fig. 5 showing rapid mark making using bottled pigments**



Fig. 7, Axis VII, Encaustic on paper/ panels, 16 x 78 in., 2004



Fig. 8, Detail of fig. 7 showing transparency



Fig. 9, Detail of fig. 7



Fig. 10, Lascaux, France, prehistoric, showing shamanic rock art painting





Fig. 11, Shamanic prehistoric rock art, Santa Barbara, CA.



Fig. 12, Dinwoody tradition rock art, Mountain Shoshone, prehistoric, Wyoming



Fig. 13, Drawing of shaman with stick, mask, and drum, Mark Howard, 2003



Fig. 14, Axis III, Encaustic on paper/ panels, 15.5 x 45 in., 2004



Fig. 15, Axis VI, Encaustic, water based paint, oil pastel, on paper/ panels, 16 x 46.5 in., 2004



Fig. 16, Axis X, Encaustic on paper/ panels, 16.5 x 79.5, 2004



Fig. 17, Untitled, Water based paint, oil pastel, 24 x 35 in., 2002



Fig. 18, Detail of fig. 17





Fig. 19, Untitled, encaustic with intarsis, paper/panel, 15 x 16 in., 2004



Fig. 20, Axis VI, Encaustic on paper/panels, 16 x 79, 2004



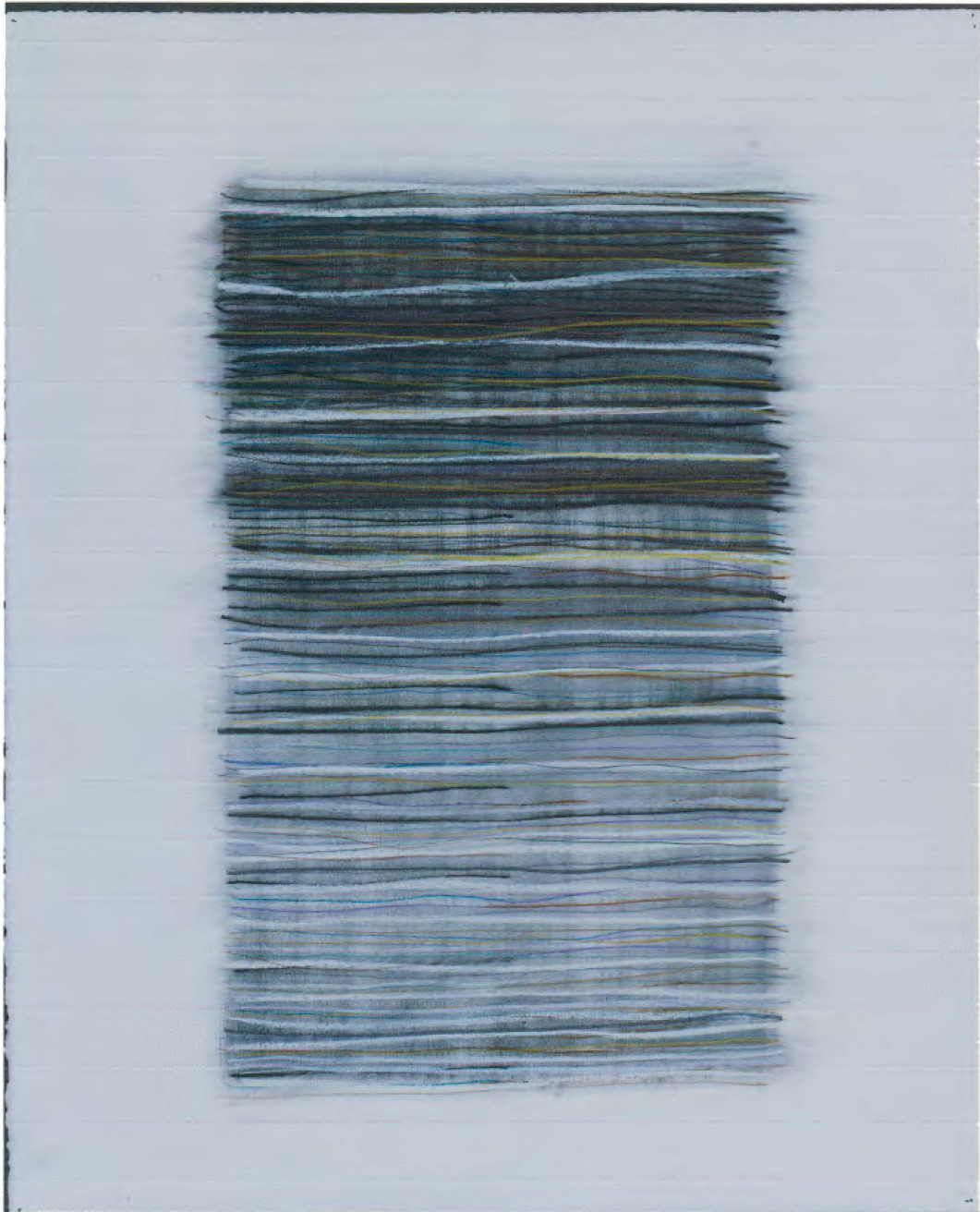
Fig. 21, Axis XI, Encaustic on paper/ panels, 20 x 100 in., 2004

## PLATES

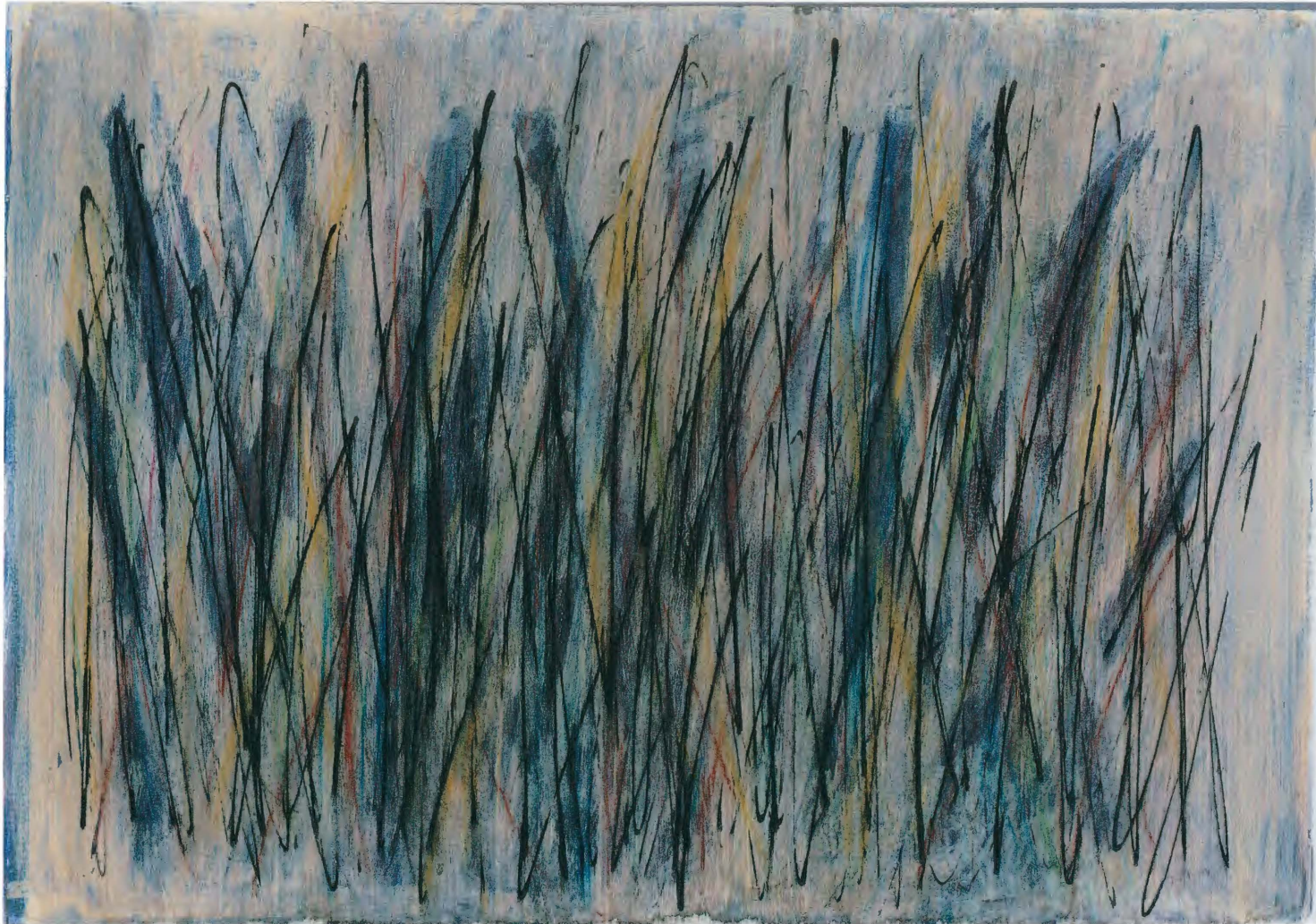
1. Reverie. Pastel, graphite on paper, 26 x 21", 2002
2. Euphony. Water color, graphite, color pencil, acrylic polyurethane, on paper, 21 x 51", 2002
3. Flow. Water based paint, color pencil, graphite, pastel, on paper, 28 x 42", 2002
4. Untitled. Water based paint, graphite, oil pastel, on paper, 24 x 35", 2003
5. Untitled. Water based paint, paper strips, acrylic polyurethane, on paper, 28 x 42", 2003
6. Fluxion. Water based paint on paper, 34 x 42", 2003
7. Ubiquity. Water based paint, color pencil, oil pastel, paper strips, on paper, 18 x 51", 2003
8. Frost 2. Water based paints, charcoal, graphite, oil pastel, pastel, on paper, 42.5 x 56.25", 2003
9. Con Fuoco. Water based paint, graphite, color pencil, pastel, on paper, 21 x 51", 2003
10. Diminuendo. Water based paint, color pencil, pastel, on paper, 21x 51", 2003
11. Rhapsody. Water based paint, oil pastel, on paper, 21 x 51", 2003
12. Axis I. Encaustic on paper/ panel, 16 x 16", 2004
13. Axis II. Encaustic, ink, on paper/ panel, 16 x 16", 2004
14. Axis III. Encaustic on paper/ panel, 15.5 x 45", 2004
15. Axis IV. Encaustic on paper/ paper, 15.5 x 45", 2004
16. Axis V. Encaustic on paper/ panel, 16.5 x 79", 2004
17. Axis VI. Encaustic on paper/ panel, 16 x 46.5", 2004
18. Untitled. Encaustic on paper/ panel, 15 x16", 2004
19. Untitled. Encaustic on paper/ panel, 16 x 14", 2004
20. Axis VII. Encaustic, water based paint, color pencil, oil pastel, on paper/ panel, 16 x 79", 2004
21. Axis VIII. Encaustic, charcoal, graphite, on paper/ panel, 16 x 31", 2004
22. Axis IX. Encaustic, charcoal, graphite, on paper/ panels, 16 x 31", 2004
23. Axis X. Encaustic, water based paint, graphite, on paper/ panel, 6.5 x 79", 2004
24. Axis XI. Encaustic on paper/ panel, 20 x 100", 2004

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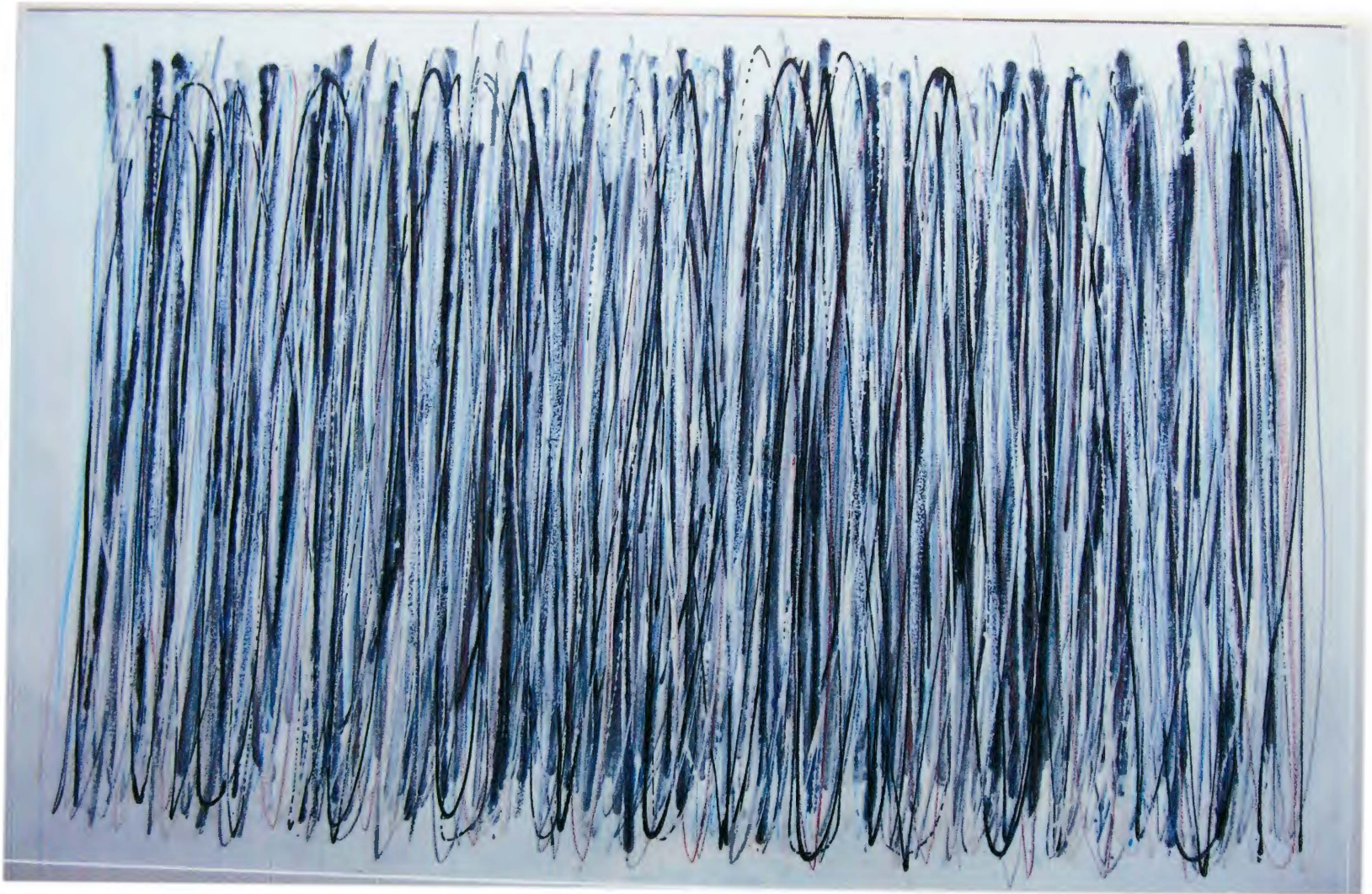
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1. Reverie, Pastel, graphite on paper, 26 x 21 in. 2002



2. Euphony, Water color, graphite, color pencil, acrylic polyurethane on paper, 21 x 51, 2002



3. Flow, Water based paint, color pencil, graphite, pastel, on paper, 28 x 42 in. 2002

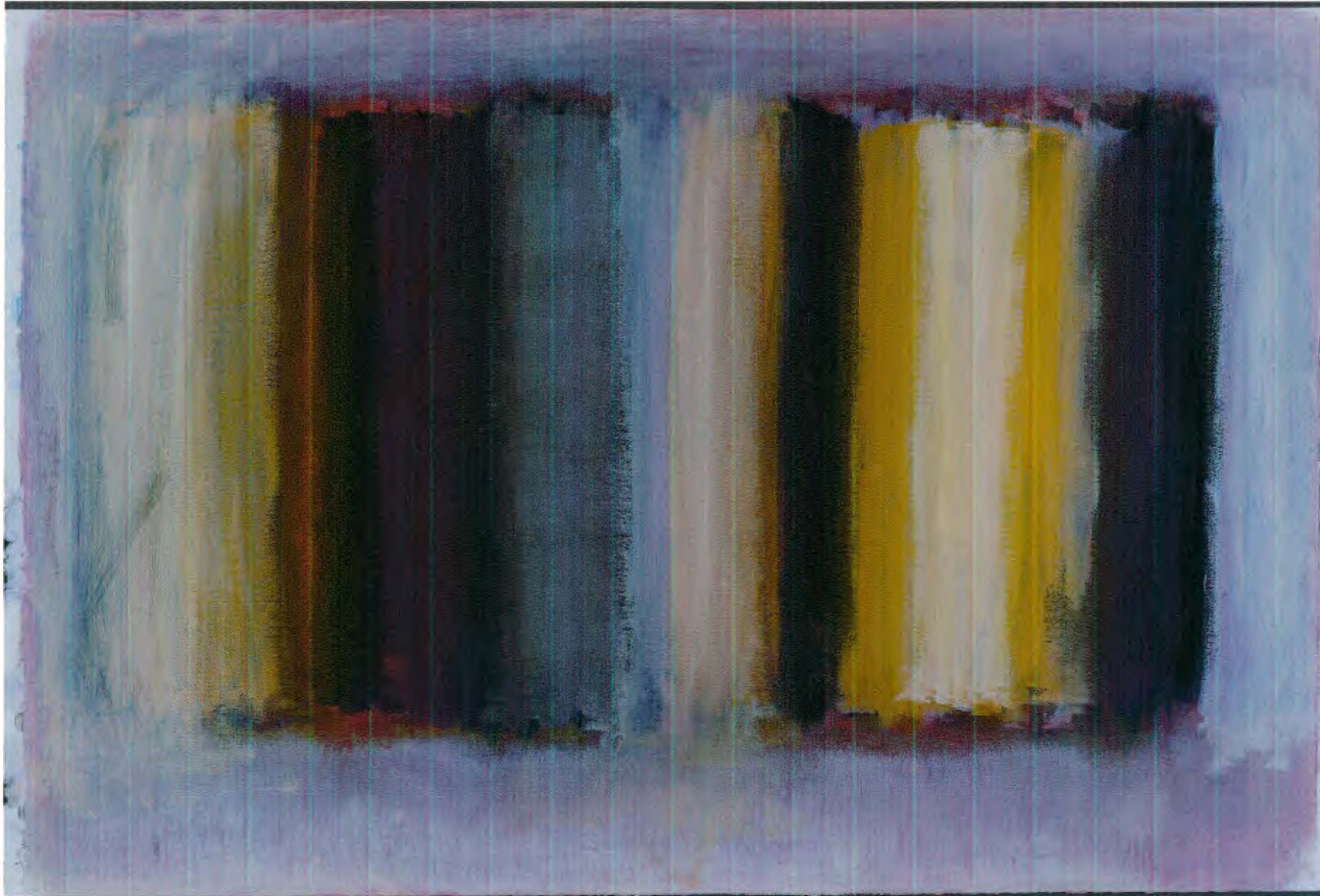




4. Untitled, Water based paint, graphite, oil pastel, on paper, 24 x 35 in., 2003



5. Untitled, Water based paint, paper strips, acrylic polyurethane, on paper, 28 x 42 in., 2003



6. Fluxion, Water based paint on paper, 34 x 42 in., 2003



7. Ubiquity, Water based paint, color pencil, oil pastel, paper strips, on paper, 18 x 51 in., 2003



8. Frost 2, Water based paints, charcoal, graphite, oil pastel, pastel, on paper, 42.5 x 56. 25, 2003



9. Con Fuoco, Water based paint, graphite, color pencil, pastel, on paper, 21 x 51 in., 2003



10. Diminuendo, Water based paint, color pencil, pastel, on paper, 21 x 51 in., 2003



11. Rhapsody, Water based paint, oil pastel, on paper, 21 x 51 in., 2003

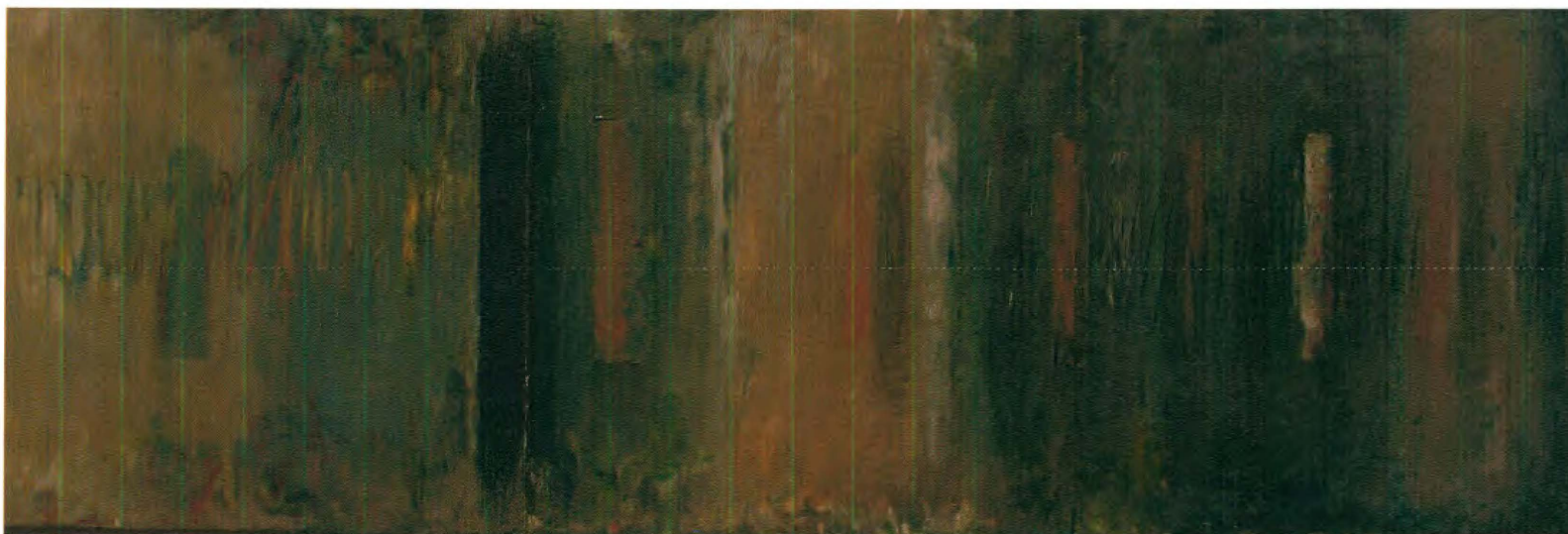




12. Axis I, Encaustic on paper/ panel, 16 x 16 in., 2004



13. Axis II, Encaustic, ink, on paper/ panel, 16 x 16 in., 2004



14. Axis III, Encaustic on paper/ panels, 15.5 x 45 in., 2004



15. Axis IV, Encaustic and oil pastel on paper/ panels, 15.5 x 45 in., 2004



16. Axis V, Encaustic on paper/ panels, 16.5 x 79 in., 2004



17. Axis VI, Encaustic, water based paints, color pencil, oil pastel, on paper/ panels, 16 x 46.5 in., 2004



18. Untitled, Encaustic, oil pastel on paper/ panel, 15 x 16 in., 2004



19. Untitled, Encaustic on paper/ panel, 16 x 14 in., 2004

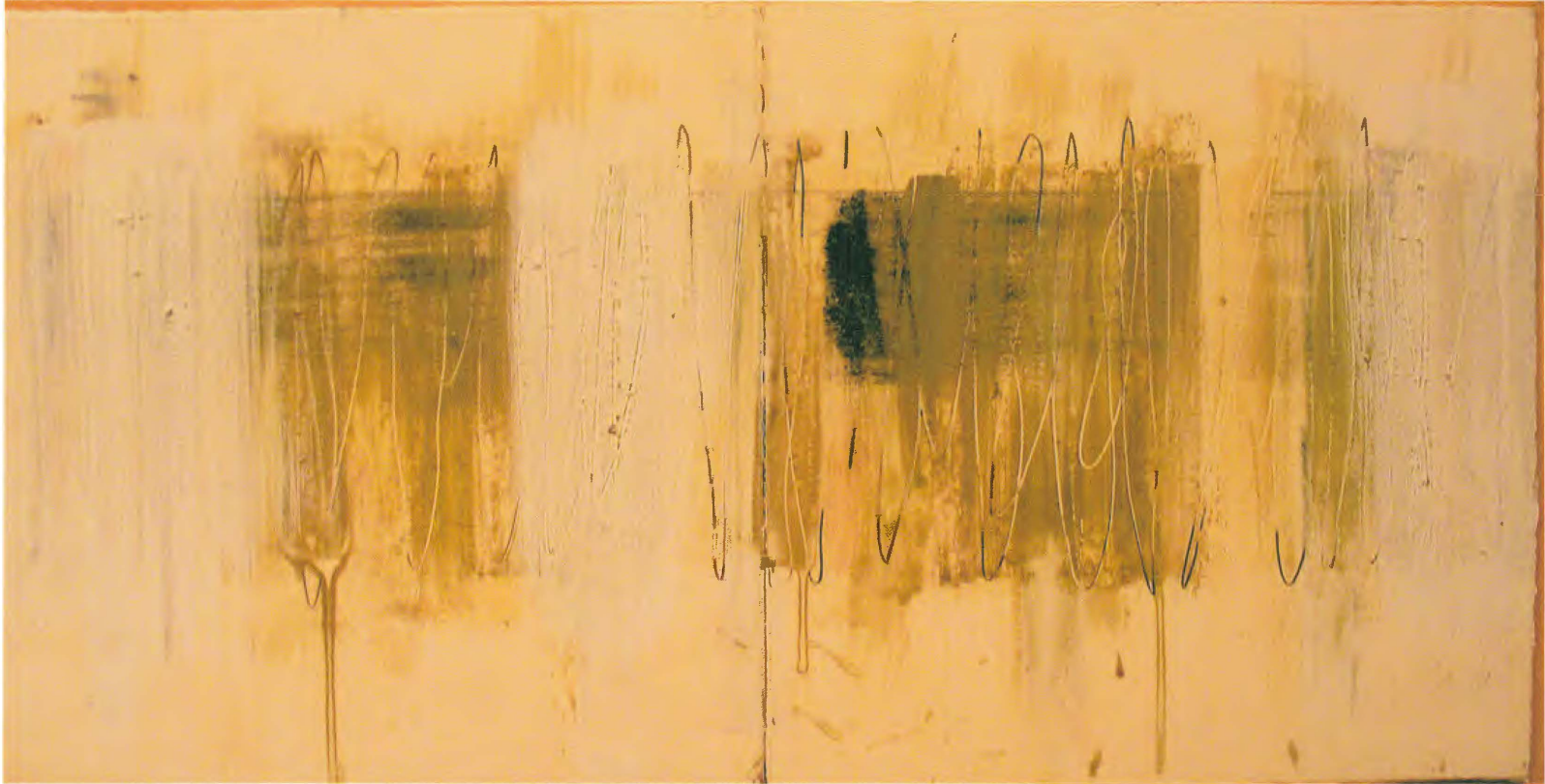




20. Axis VII, Encaustic, water based paint, color pencil, graphite, oil pastel, on paper/ panels, 16 x 79 in., 2004



21. Axis VIII, Encaustic, charcoal, graphite, on paper/ panels, 16 x 31 in., 2004



22. Axis IX, Encaustic, charcoal, graphite, on paper/ panels, 16 x 31 in., 2004



23. Axis X, Encaustic, water based paint, graphite, on paper/ panels, 16.5 x 79 in., 2004



24. Axis XI, Encaustic on paper/ panels, 20 x 100 in., 2004