# EDWARD COUNTEY

## 1921 - 1984

October 23 - November 13, 1984

*"Art is part of all science and not a specialized craft. It has the same importance as math and science in that it is a training in use of the human mind. I've found at least as many talented and intelligent scientists and mathematicians as I have artists. Giving artists a special and separate title is an insult to artists and scientists. And yet I find the understanding of scientists of art and artists of science in both cases inadequate. I evaluate art as I evaluate everything in the world around me . . . quality, not tricks, or so-called imagination, but clarity, a gift given to only a few in the world in general. I want my art judged as I judge any human act, as an example of human insight and clarity."*

Edward Countey, 1983


## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to guest curator Aldona Jonaitis, Associate Provost and former Chairman of the Art Department, State University of New York at Stony Brook, who helped develop this exhibition and contributed the catalogue essay.

Thanks are due to Robin Box, a 1984 graduate of the Art Department and former Gallery Intern, for her assistance with the preparation of the works in the exhibition; and to Jana-Rose Mosbacher, Gallery Assistant and a graduate student in the Masters in Art Criticism program, for her assistance in coordinating the exhibition.

Special thanks are also extended to Ellen Countey who has given generously of her time to help us to realize this memorial to the artistic career of Edward Countey.

Rhonda Cooper
*Director*

Photographs by Maxine Hicks

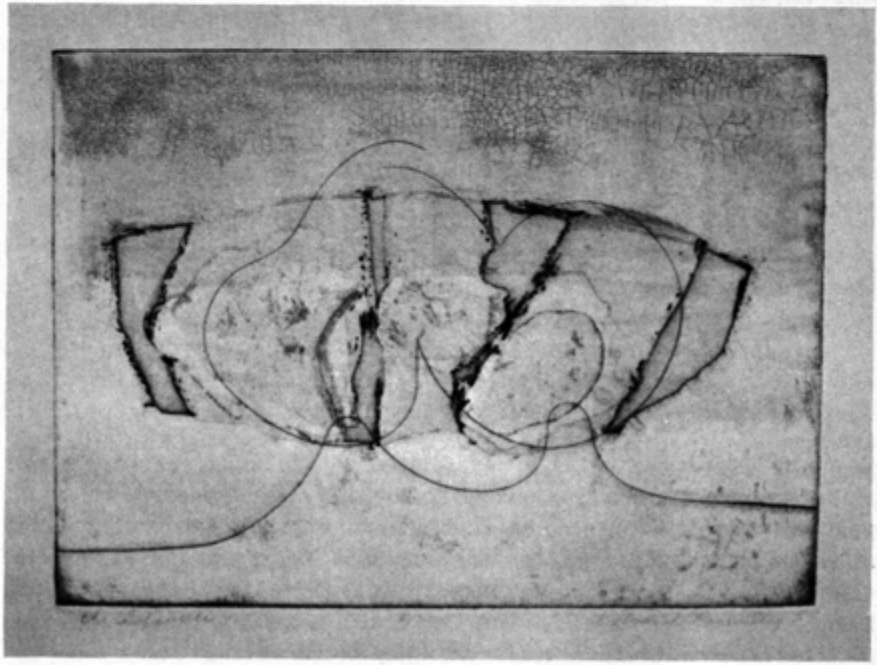
Front cover: CUPS, 1964

Back cover: ABSTRACT WITH JAPANESE PAPER, 1964

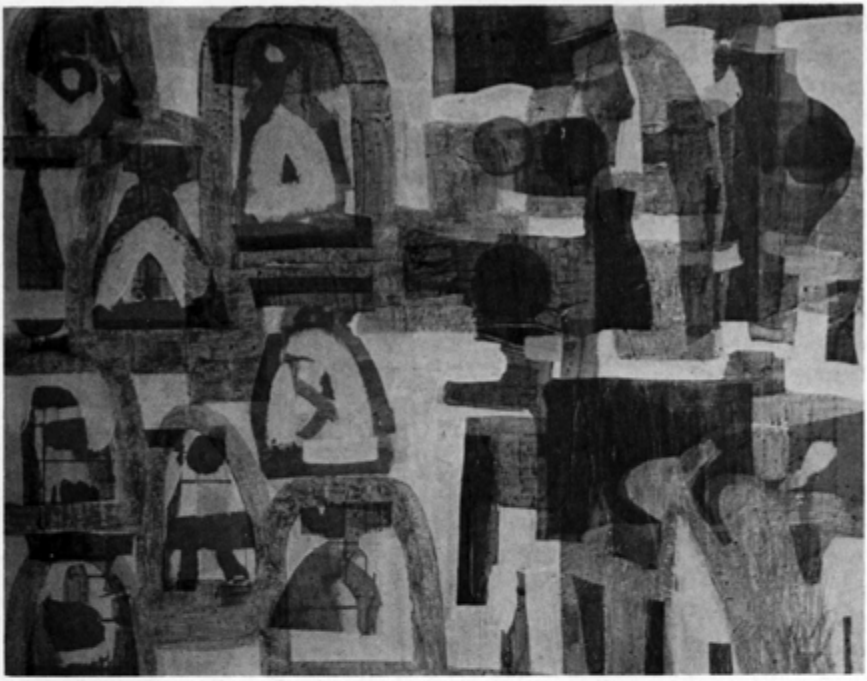
## Art and Science: An Essay in Memory of Edward Countey

In *The Savage Mind*, Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that "art lies half-way between scientific knowledge and mythical or magical thought."[1] Throughout history, different artists have leaned towards either the scientific, involving themselves in detailed investigations of the world by means of mathematics, anatomy, botany, engineering, and other experimental methods, or towards the mythic, engaging in mystic speculations about the cosmos and man's place within it. Edward Countey was among those artists who promoted the integration of art and science. As such, Countey was part of a long tradition that dates back at least as far as the fifteenth century. Three periods stand out as moments of intense involvement of artists with science: the Renaissance, the turn of this century and its first few decades, and the present.

In the course of the fifteenth century, Western artists became self-conscious about their connection to science. This was in part the response of artists to the secularization of their culture, which was turning away from medieval spiritual values. Although several fifteenth-century Italian artists — like Brunelleschi, who is said to have "discovered" linear perspective, and Masaccio and Donatello, who used mathematical measurements — were known to be scientifically-



*The Islander, 1951*



*Abstract, 1959*

oriented, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) stands out as the paradigmatic Renaissance man who functioned comfortably, indeed brilliantly, as both an artist and a scientist. In his famous letter to the Duke of Milan (some today would call it a curriculum vitae!), Leonardo wrote of himself:

> I can contrive various and endless means of offense and defense . . . In time of peace I believe I can give perfect satisfaction and to the equal of any other in architecture and the composition of buildings, public and private; and in guiding water from one place to another . . . I can carry out sculpture in marble, bronze or clay, and also I can do in painting whatever may be done, as well as any other, be he whom he may.[2]

Leonardo was truly remarkable: he displayed skills in optics, mechanics, anatomy, engineering, geology, zoology, botany, and mathematics, as well as in painting, his most lasting accomplishment, but the one he listed only at the end of his credentials. Although Leonardo is still considered a unique genius, his distinguished German contemporary, Albrecht Dürer, the "Leonardo of the North," also wrote theoretical works on fortifications and perspective and depicted plants with such scientific accuracy that they could be used today as botanical illustrations.

Although many artists after Leonardo and Dürer used anatomy, perspective, and color theory in their work, it was only at the end of the nineteenth century that a number of painters once again became self-conscious about their relationship to science. Perhaps the rapid industralization of both the United States and continental Europe, coupled with remarkable technological advances which were radically altering society and thus the lives of artists, influenced some to re-examine their relationship to technology and science. The American artist Thomas Eakins, a man well-versed in mathematics and expert enough in anatomy to teach it at the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, was so concerned with precise scientific knowledge of his subjects that he, along with Eadweard Muybridge, started using the relatively new technology of photography to investigate the "truth" about physical movements. Eakins and Muybridge experimented with rapid-exposure and multi-camera sequences of people and animals in motion, using the camera to reveal what the human eye had not been able to discern.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the machine had seized the imagination of numerous artists. The impact of technology on art became even more striking at this time as new spurts of industrial achievements encouraged artists to contemplate unprecedented speeds as well as overwhelming modern military power. The Italian Futurists, who believed that technological advances were means by which their country could overcome its stagnant traditions, created dynamic paintings which celebrated speed, machinery, and a highly industralized militarism. For the Russian Constructivists, especially Vladimir Tatlin, an integration of art and technology would lead to a more perfect world. According to Tatlin, a book by Einstein was more profound than a Dostoevsky novel and a modern factory more representative of contemporary life than an opera or a ballet. Marcel Duchamp, who studied non-Euclidean geometry, chemistry, and alchemy, also believed that the machine could serve as a new metaphor for our time. In describing his *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1916), Duchamp said:

> When we consider the motion of form through space in a given time, we enter the realm of geometry and mathematics, just as we do when we build a machine for that purpose.[3]

Like Leonardo, Duchamp and several colleagues invented machines which appeared in their artworks; unlike those of the Renaissance master, these machines, conceived in the Dadaist spirit, were nonfunctional and usually absurd.

The enthusiasm of artists for science and technology lessened somewhat after World War I, primarily in response to a recognition that technology was not a panacea for society's ills but instead, as was plain to see in the bloodshed of the war, could be a source of great suffering. Many artists retreated into a consciously anti-scientific, anti-technological attitude, such as that held by the

Surrealists, who found machines and other manifestations of "progress" threatening.

Although at the present many artists still view science and technology with suspicion, a few are once again flirting with science. An early harbinger of this movement was Nam June Paik who, in the 1960's, started working with images on television screens. His words about the relationship of his art to science have a striking significance for the present:

> I have treated cathode ray tube (TV screen) as a canvas and proved that it can be a superior canvas. From now on, I will treat the cathode ray as a paper and pen . . . If Joyce lived today, surely, he would have written "Finnegan's Wake" on videotape, because of the vast possibilities of manipulation in magnetic information storage[4].

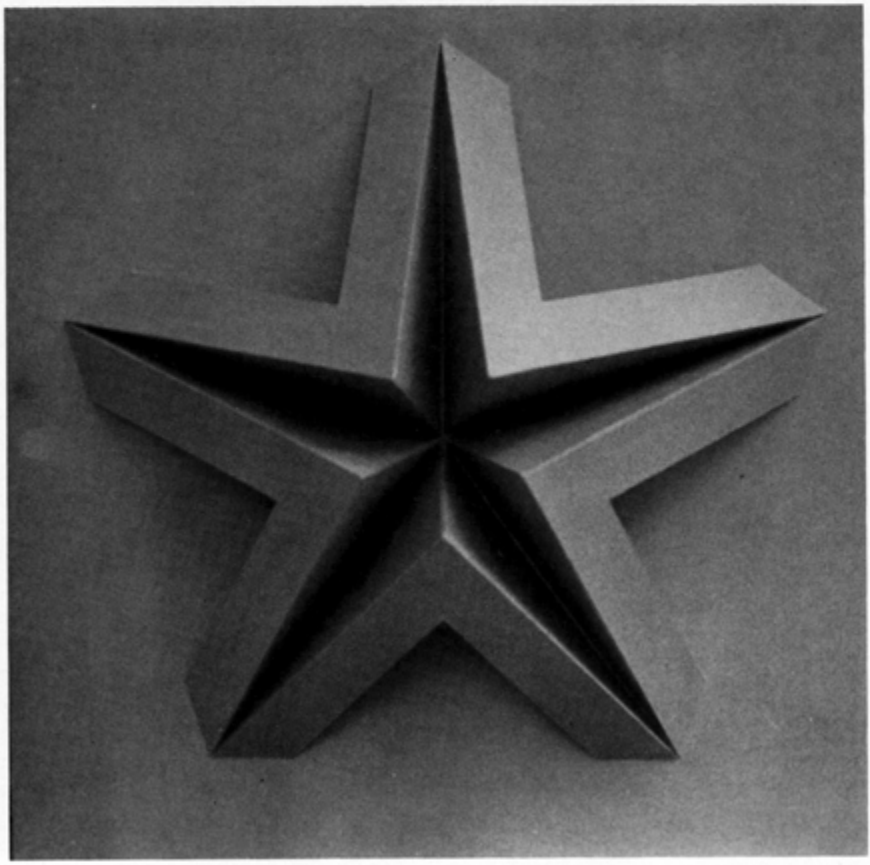
What Nam June Paik seems to have been anticipating is the current excitement over computer art.

Scientist-artists at Ohio State University, the IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Center, and George Lucas's Lucasfilm Ltd., as well as at other universities, research institutes, and in the film industry, are working with computers to create visual images that are "perfect" representations of the "real world." A recent issue of *Science 84* carried a remarkable photograph of an "art" class. A nude model is posed on a platform, surrounded by "artists" who sit not before easels but, instead, before computer monitors and keyboards. Both teacher and students wear white laboratory coats rather than the paint-splattered smocks more often seen in art classes.[5]

Within the last few years, some artists have been experimenting with a new technique, much as the Renaissance artists experimented with linear perspective or the nineteenth century artists explored the uses of photography. Although these techniques were sometimes ends unto themselves, they were more often means by which artists created entirely new and original works. We are currently experiencing a phase in the history of art which Edward Countey would certainly have found fascinating. The period of the computer revolution, which has been growing in significance over the last several years, is finally influencing the creation of art, and once again, a number of artists are shifting towards the scientific. Perhaps this new affiliation of art and science will, as it has before, foster creativity and encourage the production of original artworks. Artists will use science and technology as tools for discovering new visions of reality, which, paradoxically, will transcend the rational, the scientific, and the technological, because they are ultimately products of an artistic consciousness which, as Lévi-Strauss so perceptively noted, always contains a dose of the mythic.

*Aldona Jonaitis*

1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 22.
2. E.G. Holt, ed. *Literary Sources of Art History,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947, p. 170.
3. In Katherine S. Drier, *Société Anonyme: Museum of Modern Art 1920.* New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1950, p. 148.
4 Quoted in K.G. Pontus Hultén, *The Machine As Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age.* New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1968, p. 197.
5. Susan West, "The New Realism: The Fine Art of Mimicking Life on a Computer Screen," *Science 84,* vol. 5 no. 6, p. 30-39.



*Geometric Construction #1, 1968-69*

*Flax Pond #127, 1979*

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Measurements are given in inches, height preceding width preceding depth. All works are on loan courtesy of Mrs. Ellen Countey.

### PAINTINGS

*Abstract*, ca. 1959, acrylic on masonite, 26 x 32"
*Abstract Stripes*, ca. 1967-68, acrylic on board, 18 x 72"
*Flax Pond #113*, 1979, acrylic on Japanese paper, 14¼ x 20"
*Flax Pond #127*, 1979, acrylic on Japanese paper, 14¼ x 20"
*Flax Pond #140*, 1979, acrylic on Japanese paper, 14¼ x 20"
*One Marmoset*, 1980, acrylic on Japanese paper, 20 x 15"
*Two Marmosets*, 1980, acrylic on Japanese paper, 20 x 15"
*Two Marmosets*, 1980, acrylic on Japanese paper, 20 x 15"
*Lefkas*, 1982, acrylic on Japanese paper on board, 18½ x 25¼"
*Meteora*, 1982, acrylic on canvas, 49 x 44½"
*Meteora*, 1982, acrylic on Japanese paper on board, 25¼ x 18½"

### CONSTRUCTIONS

*Cups* 1964, acrylic on styrofoam, 27¼ x 21½"
*Construction #1*, 1968, acrylic on styrofoam, 24 x 24"
*Construction #2*, 1968, acrylic on styrofoam, 24 x 24"
*Construction #3*, 1968, acrylic on styrofoam, 24 x 24"
*Construction #4*, 1968, acrylic on styrofoam, 42¼ x 37"
*Construction #5*, 1968, acrylic on styrofoam, 45½ x 48¾"
*Construction #6*, 1968, acrylic on styrofoam, 45½ x 48¾"
*Geometric Construction #1*, 1968-69, acrylic on cardboard, 34 x 34"
*Geometric Construction #2*, 1968-69, acrylic on cardboard, 34 x 34"
*Geometric Construction #3*, 1968-69, acrylic on cardboard, 34 x 34"

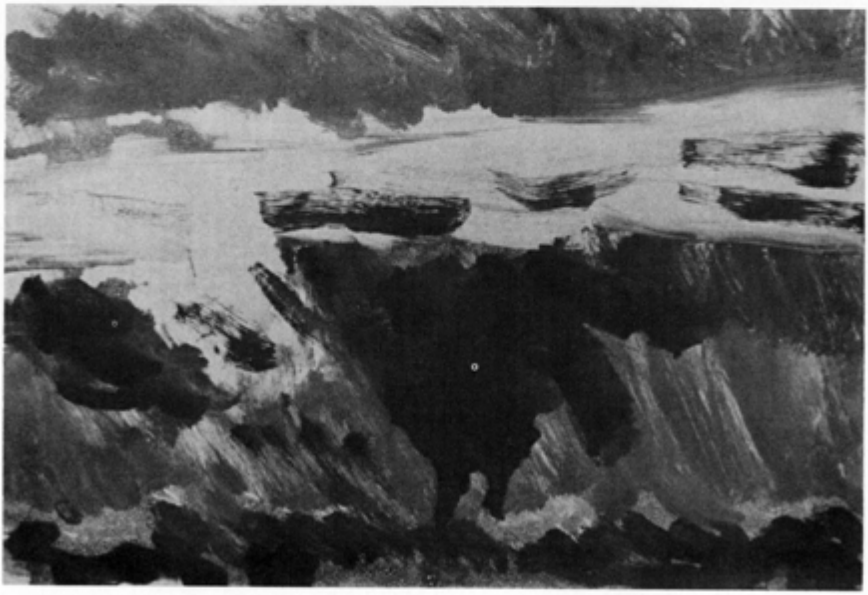
### PRINTS

*The Islander*, 1951, etching, 8½ x 12"
*Paw-Paw*, 1949, etching, 14½ x 18"
*Salamis*, ca. 1960, etching, 6¼ x 8¾"
*Landscape TC*, 1969, etching, 13¾ x 16½"
*Series #1 (1)*, 1980, monotype, 7¼ x 7"
*Series #1 (2)*, 1980, monotype, 7¼ x 7"
*Series #1 (3)*, 1980, monotype, 7¼ x 7"
*Series #1 (4)*, 1980, monotype, 7¼ x 7"
*Series #2 (1)*, 1980, monotype, 8 x 12"
*Series #2 (2)*, 1980, monotype, 8 x 12"
*Series #2 (3)*, 1980, monotype, 8 x 12"
*Series #2 (4)*, 1980, monotype, 8 x 12"
*Series #3 (1)*, 1980, monotype, 7½ x 9"
*Series #3 (2)*, 1980, monotype, 7½ x 9"
*Series #3 (3)*, 1980, monotype, 7½ x 9"
*Series #3 (4)*, 1980, monotype, 7½ x 9"

### COLLAGES

*#2*, 1965, collage, 15 x 15"
*Bus Ticket*, 1980, collage, 10 x 11"
*Abstract with Japanese Paper*, 1964, collage, 15 x 14½"
*Abstract with Japanese Paper*, 1964, collage, 14¾ x 15"
*Abstract with Japanese Paper*, 1964, collage and ink drawing, 15¼ x 14½"

*Series #2 (3), 1980*



*Series #2 (2), 1980*

**EDWARD J. COUNTEY (1921-1984)**
Born August 28, 1921, Princeton, New Jersey

Edward Countey studied painting with Moses Soyer at the New School of Art, New York City from 1938 to 1942. While serving in the Signal Photographic Corps from 1942 to 1945, Countey did the animation for "Attack," a film that is now in the Museum of Modern Art film library. In 1945, he received a three year fellowship to study graphic arts with S.W. Hayter at the Atelier 17. He later became Hayter's assistant and helped produce the educational film "New Ways of Gravure." Between 1945 and 1971, Countey worked at various design studios and as a design and graphic consultant and technical illustrator.

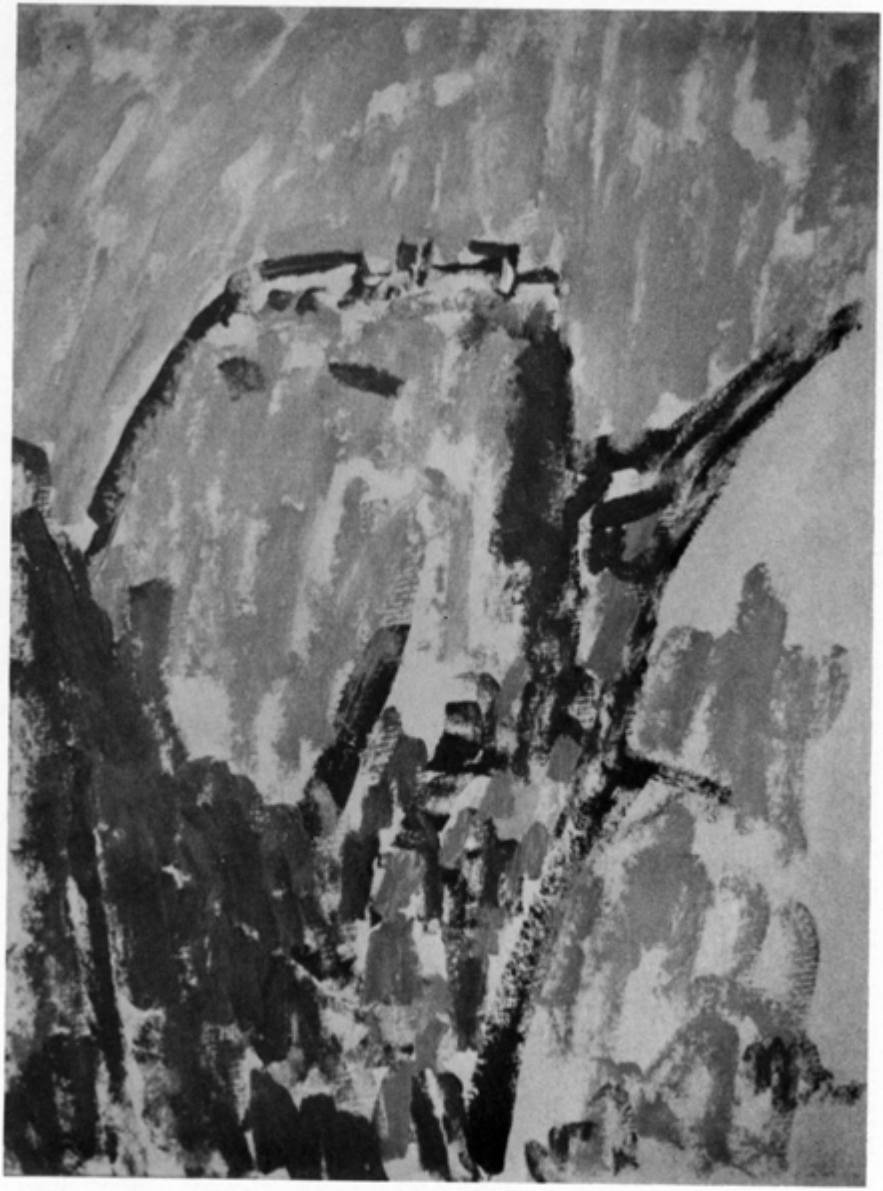
Edward Countey taught at the State University of New York at Stony Brook for 22 years, first in the Engineering Department and subsequently in the Department of Art. An Assistant Professor from 1962 to 1967 and Associate Professor from 1967 to 1984, Countey conceived and taught "Anatomy for Artists" from 1980 to 1984. This unique course made it possible for Stony Brook art students to work in the University Medical School laboratories.

EXHIBITIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| 1948 | Stanford University, Palo Alto, California<br>Philadelphia Print Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania |
| 1949 | Leicester Gallery, London, England<br>Stuttgart Museum, Stuttgart, Germany<br>Laurel Gallery, New York, New York<br>Honolulu Academy of Art, Honolulu, Hawaii<br>Philadelphia Print Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania |
| 1950 | Seligman Gallery, New York, New York<br>Philadelphia Print Club, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania<br>Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York<br>Museum of Modern Art, Rome, Italy<br>Chicago Art Institute, Chicago, Illinois |
| 1951 | Boston Graphic Art Exhibit, Italy<br>Grace Borgenicht Gallery, New York, New York |
| 1951-53 | U.S. State Department Graphics Exhibitions<br>(Rome, Paris, Vienna, Salzburg, Linz) |
| 1953 | Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York |
| 1954 | Museum of Modern Art Traveling Show<br>(major European countries) |
| 1958 | Museum of Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv, Israel |
| 1960 | Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania |
| 1961 | Ruth White Gallery, New York, New York (one-person) |
| 1962 | Kay Mar Gallery, New York, New York (one-person) |
| 1963 | SUNY at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, New York |
| 1965 | SUNY at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, New York |
| 1966 | Gallery North, Setauket, New York (one-person) |
| 1967 | Faculty Show, SUNY at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, New York |
| 1969 | State University of New York Convocation on the Arts<br>(traveling exhibition) |
| 1972 | Gallery North, Setauket, New York |
| 1983 | The Faculty Show, Fine Arts Center Art Gallery,<br>SUNY at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, New York |

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS:
Conover Nast Publication, New York City; Museum of Modern Art, New York; New York Public Library, New York City; Tel Aviv Museum of Modern Art, Tel Aviv, Israel.

*One Marmoset, 1980*



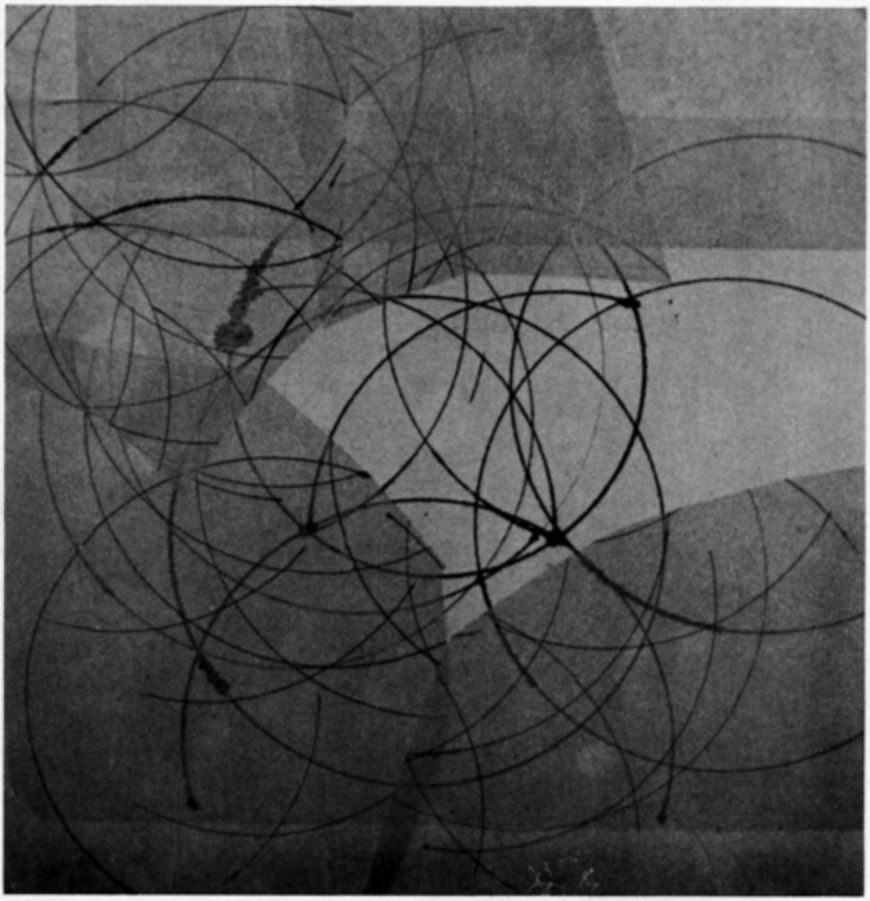
*Meteora, 1982*

**PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY**

| | |
|---|---|
| **1975** | FACULTY EXHIBITION |
| **1976** | MICHELLE STUART |
| | RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION) |
| | SALVATORE ROMANO |
| **1977** | MEL PEKARSKY |
| | JUDITH BERNSTEIN |
| | HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION) |
| **1978** | LEON GOLUB |
| | WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK |
| | JANET FISH |
| | ROSEMARY MAYER |
| | THE SISTER CHAPEL |
| **1979** | SHIRLEY GORELICK |
| | ALAN SONFIST |
| | HOWARDENA PINDELL |
| | ROY LICHTENSTEIN |
| **1980** | BENNY ANDREWS |
| | ALEX KATZ |
| | EIGHT FROM NEW YORK |
| | ARTISTS FROM QUEENS |
| | OTTO PIENE |
| | STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY |
| **1981** | ALICE NEEL |
| | 55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS |
| | JOHN LITTLE |
| | IRA JOEL HABER |
| | LEON POLK SMITH |
| **1982** | FOUR SCULPTORS |
| | CECILE ABISH |
| | JACK YOUNGERMAN |
| | ALAN SHIELDS |
| | THE STONY BROOK ALUMNI INVITATIONAL |
| | ANN McCOY |
| **1983** | THE WAR SHOW |
| | CERAMIC DIRECTIONS: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW |
| | CINDY SHERMAN |
| | THE FACULTY SHOW |
| **1984** | BERNARD APTEKAR: ART AND POLITICS |
| | ERIC STALLER: LIGHT YEARS |
| | NORMAN BLUHM: SEVEN FROM THE SEVENTIES |

Director ..... RHONDA COOPER

**STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK**
**THE FINE ARTS CENTER**
**art gallery**



THE FINE ARTS CENTER ART GALLERY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK