

Mary Murphy  
Fleisher Challenge Grant  
Artist's Statement

The paintings included in this show continue my preoccupation with patterns as the residue of real-life events. In the past, I have looked to the canonical hours of medieval monasticism as a basis for patterns, allowing the particular hours of the day set aside for prayer to determine the structure and color of individual paintings. Those works alluded to the natural cycle of night and day filtered through an intermediary structure.

In contrast, my new work deals directly with the rhythms of nature by exploring the physical characteristics of sound waves. Being a visual artist married to a composer, I am intrigued by the invisible, yet palpable process through which sound comes into being, in particular by the generation of sine waves as a physical manifestation of this audible process. The use of patterns connects the paintings to Op Art, and specifically to other contemporary painters who also refer to this movement in their work: Ross Bleckner, Philip Taaffe, Karen Davie. My particular interest in patterns is neither decorative nor ironic nor purely formal or optical; rather, I see patterns as visual analogs of physical and mathematical realities rooted in nature. I further see this exploration of nature's "secret geometry" as fundamentally connected to wisdom and essentially feminine in spirit, although not necessarily limited to either gender.

At the same time, I have been interested in making paintings which are structurally rigorous and which refer to ideas outside of painting, yet are connected to the body and its physical parameters; painting which is both organic and conceptual. I am interested as well in the point at which things move, sometimes imperceptibly, from stability to instability. In each of the works shown here, there is a transition from some semblance of a grid to an area of more organic activity - one might even say "chaos". However, in locating this point of transition I found that describing it clearly does not make the process more rationally understandable; rather, it remains inexplicable and supra-rational. It is this ironic contradiction between the clarity of the image (expressed in starkly graphic, linear terms) and its enigmatic mystery (embedded in a richly layered surface) which I have tried to capture. The paintings are at once minimal *and* dynamic; physical *and* spiritual; highly structured *and* freely drawn; deadly serious *and* oddly whimsical.

I have chosen titles which reflect as many of my concerns as possible: while each title refers to a specific physical aspect of sound waves ("Amplitude", "Pitch"), they also carry secondary allusions to the act of looking itself ("Echo", "Resonance") as well as to the more chaotic aspects of life transitions ("Compression", "Interference").

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### "And We Shall be Changed"

The paintings in this show continue my interest in forces of nature and the transformation of matter.

All life is transformation. My previous work examined forces of energy in nature and their transition from one state to another; in this body of work I wanted to pose life and death as transformative aspects of one dynamic whole, which is timeless. The title of the show is a biblical reference to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which he discusses the transformation of earthly bodies into heavenly ones.

These paintings came about largely as the result of my brother's death in the spring of 1994. His death, which profoundly affected patterns of relationship in my immediate family, caused me to examine my own deeper familial roots and to acknowledge the lives and deaths of other family members I feel especially close to. Through this process, I came to realize that while we may be changed in death, who we have been in life remains and becomes part of those whom we have touched. In this way also matter is transformed.

Each painting bears as its title the birth and death years of a close family member. I have used birth/death dates as titles to emphasize the particular time and experience of these lives. The attached sheet identifies the person commemorated and their relationship to me.

The drawings I have chosen were generated digitally on a Sun workstation computer using a pattern-formation algorithm of reaction diffusion. Reaction diffusion is based on the model of developmental biology wherein varying amounts of a chemical or substance (in this case, black and white) are released into a system at unequal rates. Various patterns, documented here, are formed at successive stages of the program. I see these drawings as analogs of the developmental process by which we are formed; they are abstract images but also the record of a process. By contrast, the paintings are abstract conceptualizations of patterns of interaction. Together, the paintings and drawings describe our chronological experience of birth, life and death; but the title of the show hints at a continuing process of evolution which lies beyond our concepts of time.

The drawings shown here were realized at the Advanced Computing Center for Art and Design at the Ohio State University with the assistance of Peter Carswell, Supercomputer Graphics Research Specialist. My thanks to Peter for his generous time and to OSU for the use of their facilities.