

THESIS  
THREADS IN COMMON

Submitted by  
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Fine Arts  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, Colorado  
Spring 2001


COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

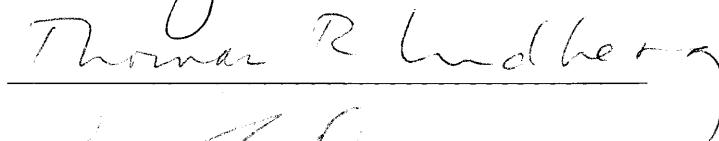
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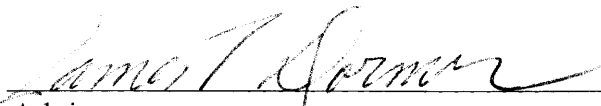
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THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

Committee on Graduate Work

  
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ABSTRACT OF THESIS  
THREADS IN COMMON

There is a complex and alluring involvement resulting from the printing of reductive and multiple wood blocks that I am currently exploring. My imagery frequently involves the formal structural elements of the grid combined with the organic qualities and movement found in natural materials such as wood. Rather than representing literal or figurative images, I am more concerned with sharing a feeling or thought, inviting the viewer to have an experiential response to my work. I am exploring and utilizing the nature of different materials, which helps me to deal with my imagery in a gentle, thoughtful approach. I value the involvement of the processes of printmaking and the myriad possibilities that come with working with multiples. The elements of the spirit of the creative journey and the act of discovery are significant factors in enhancing the development of my imagery.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Mahalo a nui loa i ku'u o'hana, a me ku'u kaikunane, Al, no ho'i.*

I would also like to thank and acknowledge the members of my graduate committee, Mary Crow, Jim Dormer, Tom Lundberg and Steve Simons for the time they gave and the help they shared. I would like to give my deepest appreciation to Sara Dentoni, Hanna Mulu Selassie, Mary-Ann Kokoska and Ruth Pettigrew for their thoughts and support.

## DEDICATION

The past three years of work is dedicated to my father, Vernon Arney, because I know that, after all, he is here with me. Thanks, Dad.

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## THREADS IN COMMON

I have always been preoccupied with the disparity between appearance and reality. Sometimes what you see on the surface belies the truth of what is underneath, or hidden. In Hawaiian language the word, *kaona*, refers to something that is hidden or has a double meaning, or that which may be concealed or veiled. With the concept of *kaona* as a reference I use the process of printing and layering to establish an image that invites the viewer to look beyond the surface of the texture or color that is printed and to be involved with exploring the image. I am not trying to establish a hidden or double meaning in my artwork; I am presenting the viewers with an image that is not limited to a specific response, allowing room for them to define their own experience. I would like my audience not to take the artwork at face value but to be contemplative and take the time to be involved with the overlaying of color and lines and what they imply.

In the course of my life I have developed hesitations and reservations in dealing with people and experiences. I have used caution in my actions and decisions. This is reflected in the way I create my art. Process, or the spirit of the trip -- the journey -- is very important to me. Each step of layering ink, removing surface or repeating an image becomes an unveiling or creation of something new. The act of synergy, or the creation of something more than the sum of parts, occurs. There is a flow or a visual stream of consciousness that takes over the creative impulse, so that each action is a response to what occurred before, not preplanned or thought out.

The involved processes of printmaking (and weaving) provided ample time for contemplation and self-evaluation. The multiple layering of colors and textures reminded me of the interweaving of the complexities inherent in the relationships of my family. The overlapping of the printed grid or the entwined thread started to symbolize to me the strengths and quirks that reinforce and bind my family. The fiber piece, Relationships, (p. 18) visually represents to me the connections and overlapping intersections of family dynamics and interaction. Through the process of involvement with my artwork I developed a deeper appreciation of my family and through the understanding of my family I strengthened the connection I have in my art.

In my artwork I explored the relationship between the formal geometry of a grid structure and the loose flowing nature of organic shapes. In pieces such as Squares, (p. 8) and Graphite Grid, (p. 11) I discovered the beauty and tranquility in the formal relationships of the wood grained, textured squares printed cleanly on paper. In Reverence, (p. 17) a mixed media, three-dimensional piece, the structure of the grid implied a structural quality to an otherwise organic yet fragile and delicate construction of translucent containers. I try to maintain a cleanness and simplicity in the formal elements of my work but, because of the repetitive and multiple nature of the forms, a sensation of visual activity occurs that draws the viewer in.

I referred to works by Agnes Martin and Sol LeWitt who are both concerned with the formal and minimalist elements of the grid. LeWitt is specifically noted for his conceptual approach involving order, repetition and permutation. He believes the *idea* of an aesthetic creation is as important as the art object itself. LeWitt also places



less value on the physical object and the role of the creator by having other people produce his art according to his plans or diagrams. In Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960, Marjorie Welish approached her assessment of LeWitt's work in her article "Ideas of Order"<sup>1</sup> by stating that LeWitt calls on art to reinvent itself by giving us structures developed from non-visual form. In contrast, Agnes Martin's work was derived from specific visual references such as a tree, the sky or a mountain. She was considered a Minimalist because of her works' visual economy but she differed from other artists in the Minimalist movement because her aim in reducing visual elements was considered more expressive than formal.<sup>2</sup> Martin's work grew out of visual experiences she had in the wide-open spaces of Oklahoma and New Mexico. Upon viewing the expansive horizon line of the plain she proceeded to paint a horizontal line. And then another, and then another. She started to break up the horizontal lines with vertical lines, which resulted in her involvement with sparse, contemplative grid paintings. Although some of her work bears resemblance to that of LeWitt's, the intention and the involvement is quite different. In an interview in The Artist Observed,<sup>3</sup> she states, "the artist lives by perception. What we make is what we feel. The making of something is not just construction. It's all about feeling..." It was helpful for me to explore the art of Agnes Martin and Sol LeWitt because, while both used the grid, they had unique approaches to their art making. I was able to feel more comfortable with my work's grounding in feelings or experiences and in its being

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<sup>1</sup> Marjorie Welish, Signifying Art: Essays on Art after 1960. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

<sup>2</sup> Mara R. Witzling, "Agnes Martin", Voicing Today's Visions: Writings by Contemporary Women Artists. (New York, N.Y.: Universe Publishing, 1994)

<sup>3</sup> John Gruen, "Agnes Martin", The Artist Observed: 28 Interviews with Contemporary Artists. (Chicago, IL: a cappella books, 1991)

non-representational. It was also intriguing to consider a more analytical approach such as that of LeWitt with his use of repetition and permutation.

I have enjoyed being involved with layering and placing elements of grids, colors and textures. I have created an invitation to look beyond the surface of the print and to play with the implied depth and movement created by the relationships of the formal elements. As I have explored, I encourage the viewer to explore. It is a gentle journey I offer.

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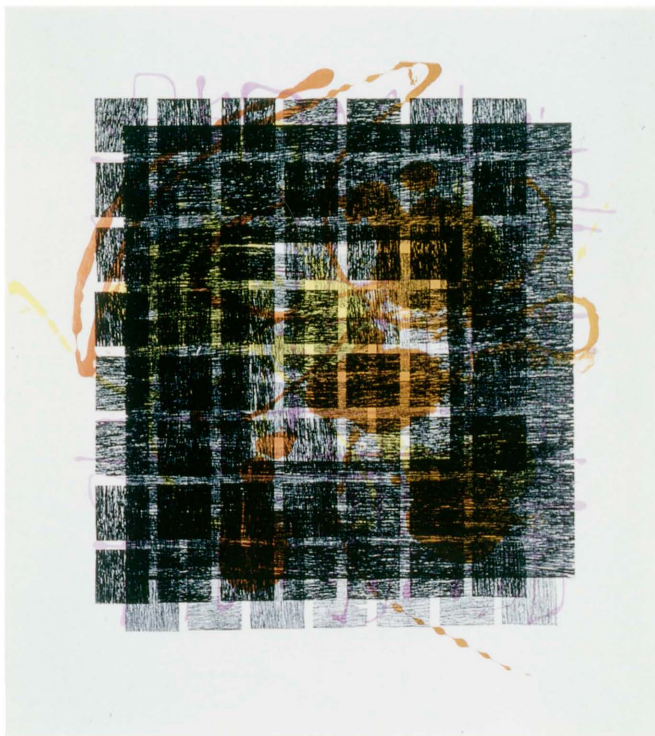
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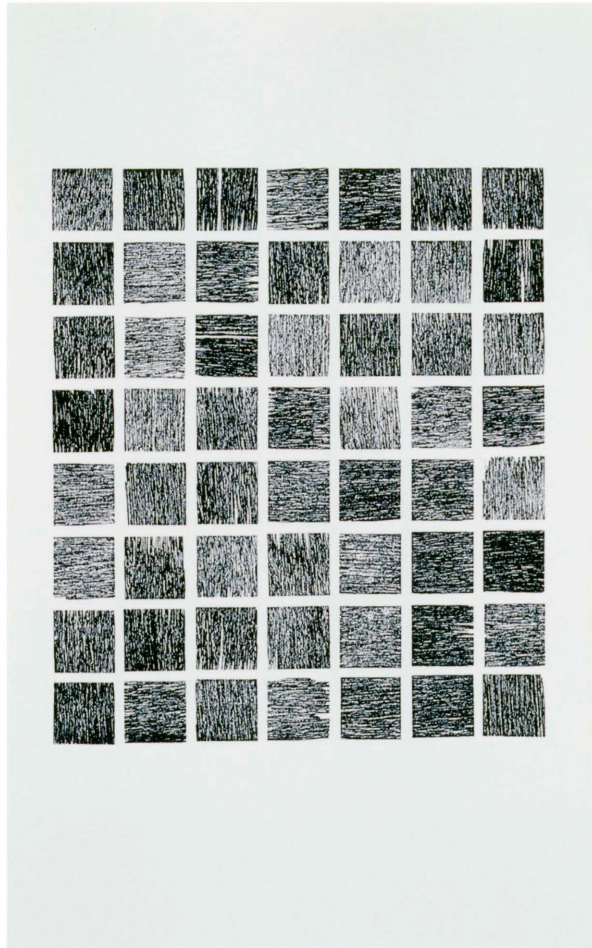
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Trying to Make Order, Lithograph, 10" x 10"



One Hour, Lithograph/Woodcut, 17" x 17"

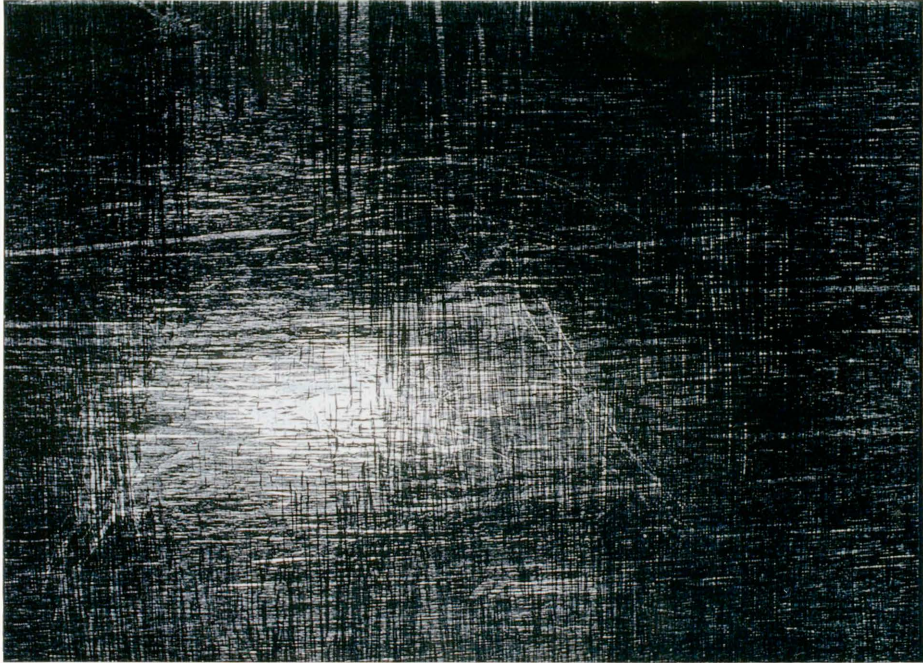


Squares, Woodcut, 14" x 12"



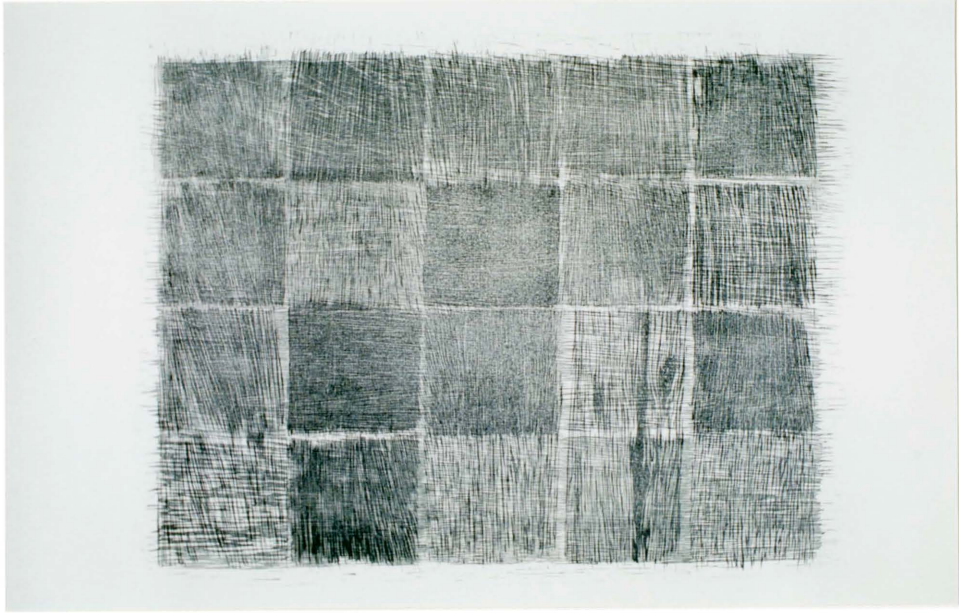
Millenium, Intaglio, 24" x 15"



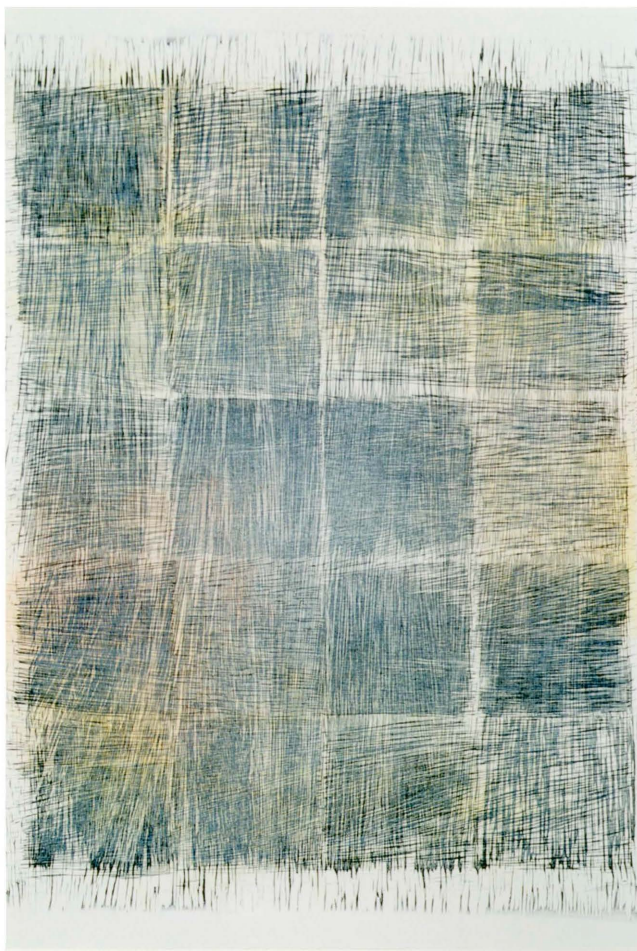


All Time, Woodcut, 22" x 30"





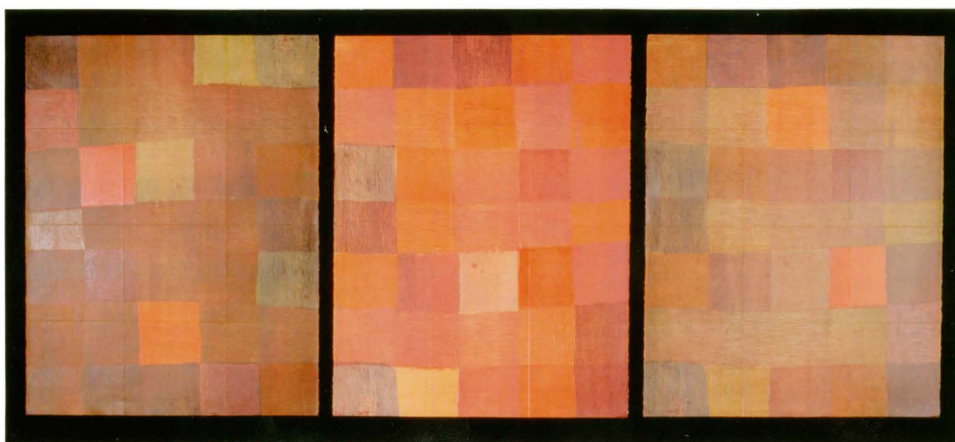
Graphite Grid, Woodcut, 30" x 44"



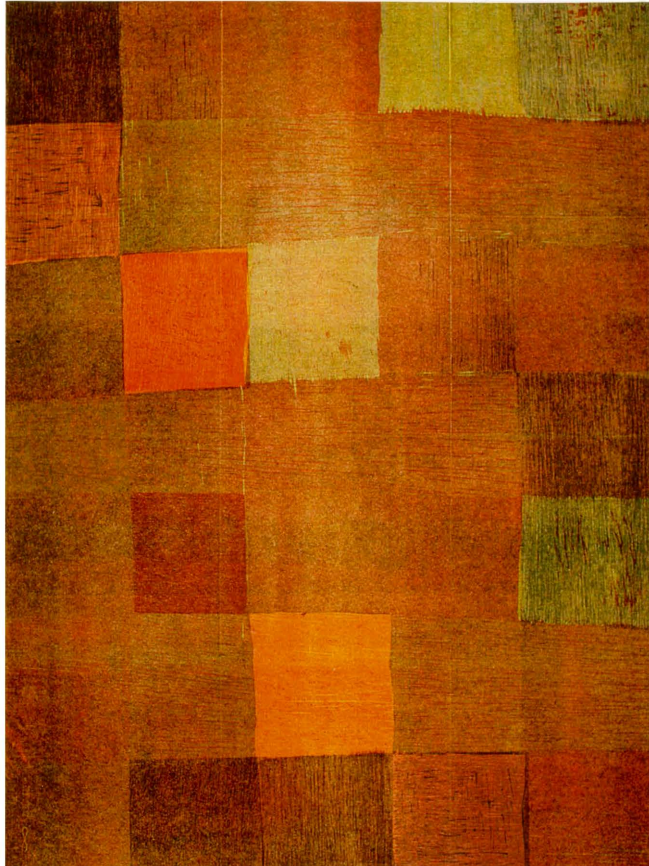
Untitled, Woodcut, 34" x 23 ½"



Kiele, Woodcut, 22 ½" x 21"



Quilt, Woodcut, 34" x 78"



Quilt (detail), Woodcut, 34" x 26"

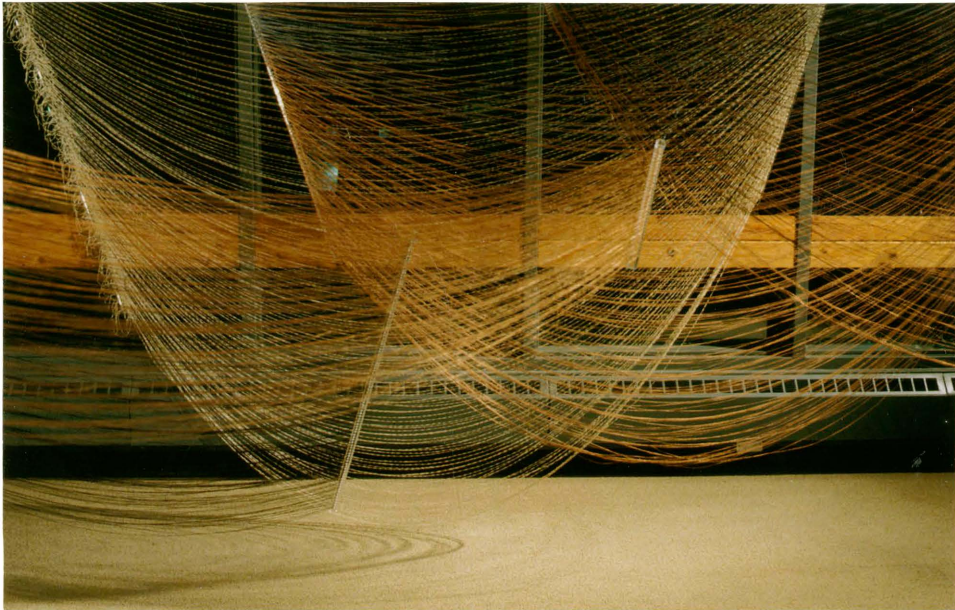




Untitled, Woodcut, 26" x 34"



Reverence, Mixed Media, 21 ½" x 22 ½" x 2"



Relationships, Installation/Fibers, 20' x 15'