

#### Lisa Phillips

#### The Self Similar

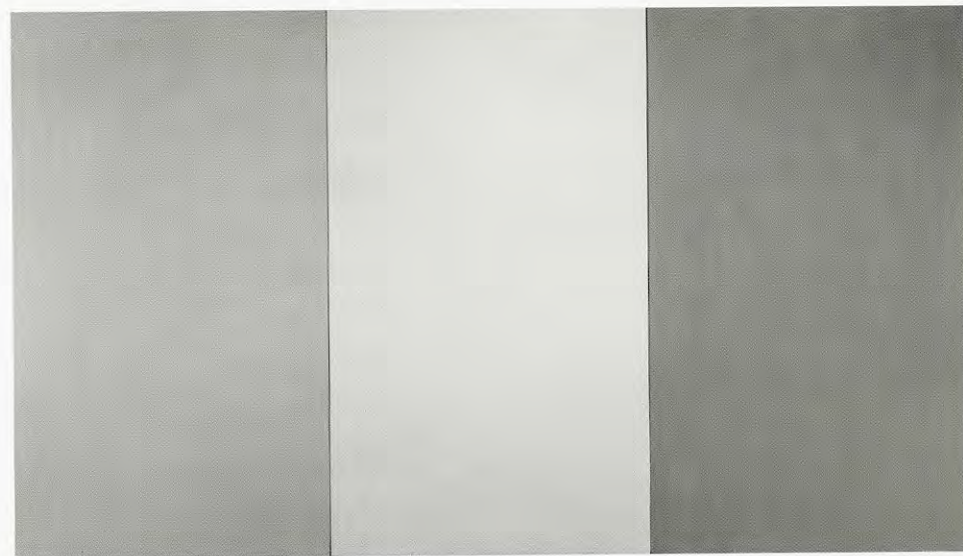
Terry Winters has been exhibiting for ten years, working for twenty. When he began painting in the early 1970s he consciously chose not to show his work publicly but to keep his painting a private activity – which it remained for quite some time. His development as an artist has been a quiet, deliberate one and his work reflects a steady, intense growth. Winters has used organic forms to depict an intimate, quietly ecstatic natural world that serves as a metaphor for his own artistic evolution. His work, with its technical virtuosity and psychologically loaded imagery tempered by historical self-consciousness and ironic reserve, has helped to carry abstract painting into a new domain. Eschewing the hyperbole of much so-called Neo-Expressionism and the cool, mechanical approach favored by Neo-Conceptualists, Winters is something of an anomaly in his generation. But he occupies an interesting position within it and is very much a product of his time and place. He provides a link to the past, responds to the needs of the present, and opens up new ground for future exploration. He belongs with a small international group of artists who have continued to make abstract painting a credible enterprise for the late twentieth century.

There is a continual play of opposites in Winters' work: between outer and inner worlds; between clarity and obscurity; and between traditional painterly expressiveness and postmodern strategies of appropriation and repetition.

Like so many artists of his generation, he has been open to a promiscuous range of sources, subjects, styles, and references. But his unflagging respect for craftsmanship and relentless perfection of technique are rare among contemporary artists. His unabashed sensuality and attention to process – to gesture and traces of the hand – give his works an undeniably tactile presence and “presentness,” while his fantastic and ambiguous imagery reaches down to the primitive and the primal and out to the frontiers of space, astronomy, and science fiction. Though many references abound in his mixture of the found and imaginary, the recontextualized and purely invented, Winters always returns to one basic impulse: the desire to form – to make paintings, drawings, and prints come into being. All illusion and allusion point back to this; and his entire project can be seen as a meditation on the nature of art making as a physical and mental activity and as a testimony to the ongoing mutation of the visible.

By the time Winters entered Pratt Institute in the late 1960s, he was already well acquainted with current developments in art. The late sixties and early seventies marked a watershed in American art, a period many consider both the apotheosis and demise of modernism. A high degree of self-consciousness prevailed: artists were acutely aware of their position within the history of modernist developments and were pushing its issues to the end point. There was a

Fig. 1  
Brice Marden  
Summer Table, 1972-73  
Oil and wax on canvas  
60 x 35 (152.4 x 88.9)  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;  
Purchase, with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts  
73.30



sense of urgency about progress – and about the need to take the next step in the inexorable march forward. For painters like Robert Ryman or Robert Mangold, this meant forming a syntax from the essential elements of painting – its internal language of surface, edge, color, and support. These artists and others undertook an epistemological investigation by limiting their vocabulary to its purest components. The grid was the primary icon of this reductivist notion. All other content was systematically eliminated, especially any evidence of subjective expression, leaving only the signifiers of painting itself – including the process of its making.

Initially, Winters was preoccupied with these same concerns. The Minimalist canon represented a point of view that was rigorous and had a moral justification in its clarification and revelation of painting's conventions, but it was clearly also an endgame. He found himself most drawn to the tactile physicality of Brice Marden's paintings (Fig. 1) and to Marden's reference to both locale and to the human body. Winters was also attracted to the renewed possibilities of gesture, soft geometries, and controlled chaos that Postminimalism offered. Beginning in the early 1970s, he worked serially on a group of monochromatic field paintings on paper that explored the specific, physical character of certain pigments (p. 35). Their heavily worked grounds recall the desiccated surfaces of Arte Povera as well as the

mythic power of an ancient landscape bearing traces of prehistory. Winters had a prolonged encounter with such a landscape in 1977 when he spent four months in New Mexico helping to build Walter De Maria's large earthwork *The Lightning Field*. He recalls being impressed by the desert landscape, the color of the earth, and the indigenous Native American culture – particularly the organic geometries of Pueblo architecture and pottery.<sup>1</sup> He must have felt an affinity for their essential interconnection between nature and culture.

Winters' field paintings from this period have an organic feeling in their analogies to the earth and elemental forces. Their excavated look is reminiscent of the works of Anselm Kiefer and Mario Merz. Though still formative, these Winters paintings have a raw power and a rich vocabulary of mark making and tonal variation within the limits of his chosen palette. The overpainting, transparent washes, scratching, and erasure lend immediacy to them, as does the atmospheric quality that such an inflected surface inevitably produces.

A number of Winters' abiding interests are already clear here: his preference for working in a series, the centrality of drawing to his whole project, and the physical and allusive characteristics of the particular materials being used. Since his Pratt years, Winters had been assembling a collection of books on pigments from secondhand bookstores out of a

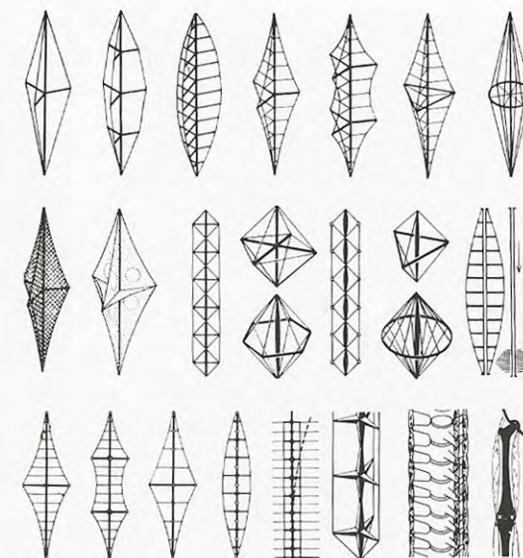
passionate desire to know not only the history of painting, but also the history of its technology. Coming out of Process Art, he had an idea about "state of the art" – a desire to build the paintings from the ground up by grinding his own pigments and making his own paints. Through this exploration, he became increasingly involved in the biological and mineral sources of the pigments and in their places of origin – a knowledge that gave the pigments an associative or metaphoric potential.

Many of the pigments Winters experimented with came from descriptions in book 35 of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*.<sup>2</sup> Completed in 77 AD, it was one of the first texts on pigments and their mineral sources. For Winters there was a sense of going back to the beginning – both of history and of the process – to make a painting. Most of the minerals in the pigments he used were from the Mediterranean region, and they had a romantic, exotic appeal. The pigment asphaltum, for example, which Winters has employed repeatedly, is an organic raw material found in natural deposits in and around the Dead Sea (Lacus Asphaltites to the Romans) and in Trinidad. The pigment was used in ancient times and from the seventeenth century on was greatly prized as a color for glazing and chiaroscuro because of its perfect transparency. Also known as pitch, and practically insoluble in water, it was applied as a protective coating on ships.<sup>3</sup> For Winters, asphaltum was linked

Fig. 2  
Spine Series (E), 1980  
Frei Otto  
Casein on paper  
30 x 22 (76.2 x 55.9)  
Robert Miller Gallery, New York



Fig. 3  
Frei Otto  
Cable-trussed compression members  
From Conrad Roland, *Frei Otto: Tension Structures* (1965)



not only to the ancient world, to a place and landscape with religious and mythical resonance, but also to the ancestry of painting.

By the end of the 1970s, Winters had become frustrated with the limitations of late modernism, particularly with its taboo against depiction and illusionism in painting. He recognized that illusionism was an inescapable consequence of mark making. Depiction and illusionism were, in fact, just as real and elemental to painting as surface, edge, and color. He had already made tentative efforts to get outside the picture by embracing the associative content of the pigments. And in his field paintings, his mark making had evolved into a Twomblyesque script etched into the smooth skin of paint. But it remained embedded as nascent form and was not permitted to surface as image. Now he sought to expand the referential possibilities of painting and to structure a spatial ambiguity from the different degrees of illusionism that paint and pigment create.

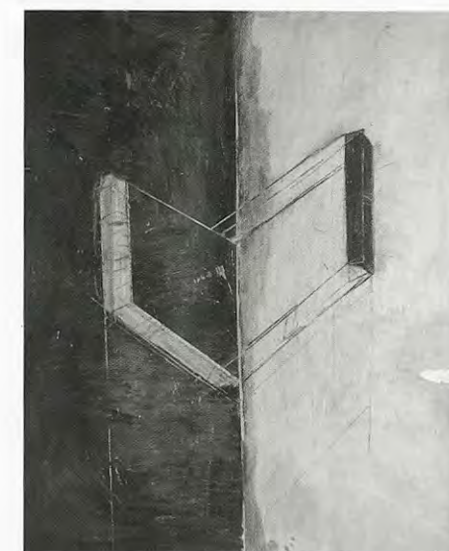
Schematic, diagrammatic forms began appearing in a group of paper works done in 1979-80 called the *Spine Series* (Fig. 2). The paintwork and abstract imagery all occur within vertical columns that divide the sheet into three sections. The central column, or spine, is distinguished from the others by an abstract network of lines. These lines too evoke a spinal column or skeletal structure, but they also suggest a world of machines or buildings – Gothic vaulting, bridge

trusses or television antennae. In fact a series of drawings by Frei Otto for compression members (Fig. 3) seems to be the direct source for the *Spine Series*. Clearly hand-drawn, Winters' forms are rendered in a rough, irregular manner, as if in a state of formation or disintegration. The distinction between figure and ground is equally ambiguous, an ambiguity Winters continued to exploit in later works. Forms can often be read as emerging from or obliterated by the surrounding ground in a simultaneous process of creation and cancellation.

Winters had been making a lot of notebook sketches of different botanical and architectural structures during 1979-80, triggered by his reading of such works as nineteenth-century natural history texts, D'Arcy Thompson's *Cartesian Transformations of Natural Forms*, and Buckminster Fuller's and Frei Otto's architectural experiments with organic structures (Figs. 5, 6).<sup>4</sup> At a certain point he realized that he was devoting much more time to these sketches than to the paintings and that there was something in the graphic explorations that could be mined for a new body of work.

What he had seized on in the drawings was a way to reflect on the creative process itself by invoking the natural world and natural growth as a process and force. A large tripartite piece, called *Plane of Incidence* (1980-81; Fig. 4), announced this turning point. An image of a crystal struc-

Fig. 4  
Plane of Incidence I (one panel of three), 1980-81  
Frei Otto  
Oil on linen  
87 x 69 (221 x 175.3)  
Collection of Robert and Susan Sosnick



ture is schematically depicted on each panel in a set of shifting relationships or multitude of moments that can be interpreted as different stages of directional growth or different perspectives – protruding into space, receding, and bifurcating. Contrary to several published accounts of Winters' artistic development, these images are not literal illustrations of the mineral pigment from which the painting was made. Rather, they represent a schematic idea about structure that deliberately alludes to both the microscopic origins of pigments and to the process of structuring or building a painting.

Quasi-architectural, geometric, and diagrammatic, the rudimentary images read like a plan or a blueprint, that is, as potential structure. Winters had found a way of extending and complicating the Minimalist grid by shifting it from the ideal model to the mental construct of the diagram, blueprint, chart, or map – in other words, to functional, analytical tools for imparting information. The use of these tools to analyze natural structures created multidimensional grids that could include allusion and illusion and allow for more manipulation and emotional range.<sup>5</sup>

Winters continued to translate his acute sense of physical structure into other images. Soon forms that were more specific in character began to creep into the pictures: organic, botanical shapes resembling buds, sprouting seeds, spores, tubers, and rootless plants. These were primal elements of

Fig. 5  
Frei Otto  
Study for flexible column, 1963

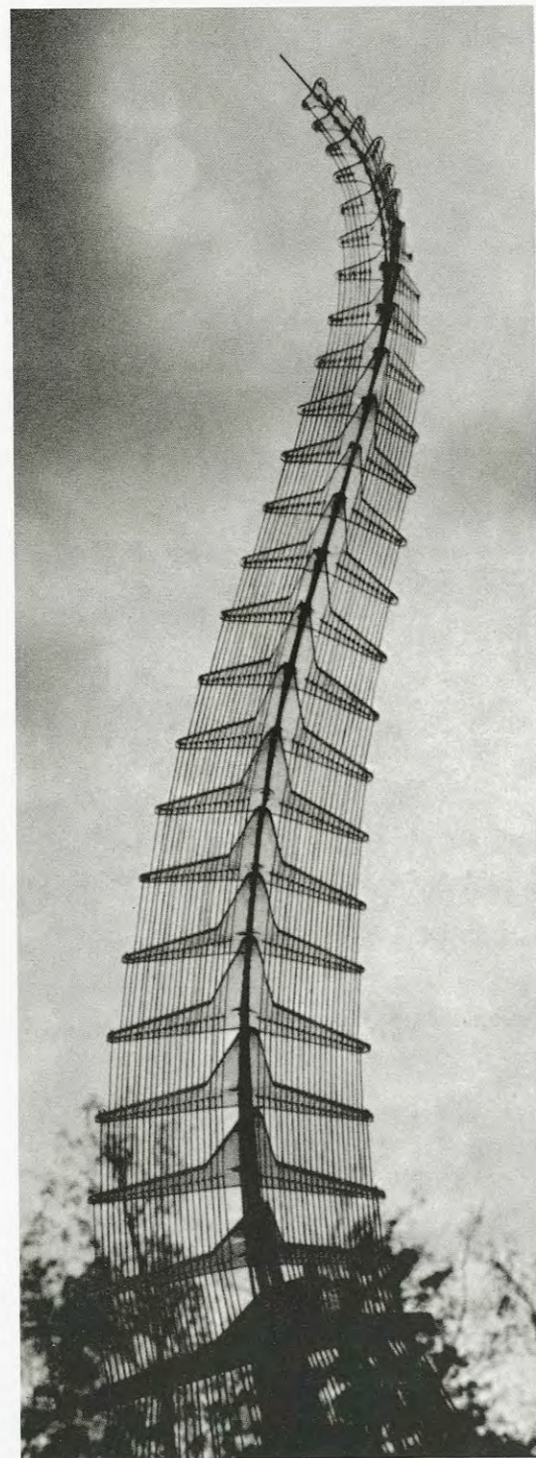


Fig. 6  
Buckminster Fuller  
Geodesic dome, Aspen, Colorado, 1952; US Pavilion, Trade Fair, Poznan, Poland, 1958; "Plydome," Des Moines, Iowa, 1957  
Courtesy Buckminster Fuller Institute

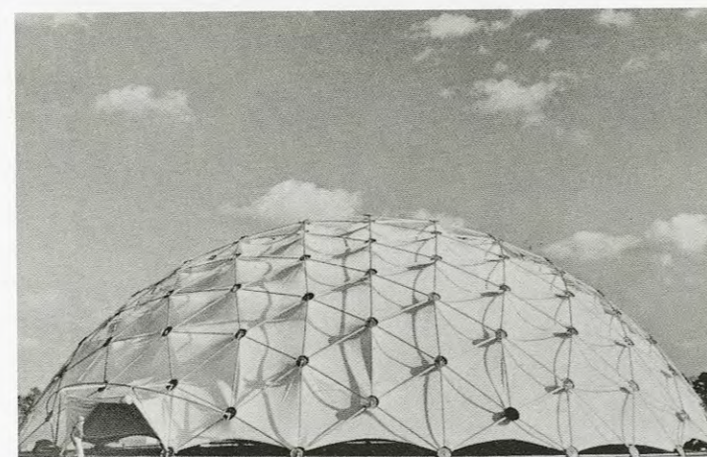
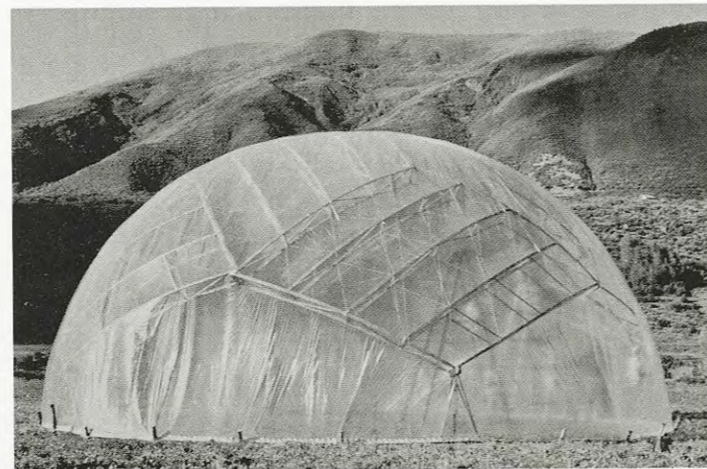


Fig. 7  
Early Animals, 1982  
Oil on linen  
68 x 79 (172.7 x 200.7)  
Collection of Massimo and Francesca Valsecchi

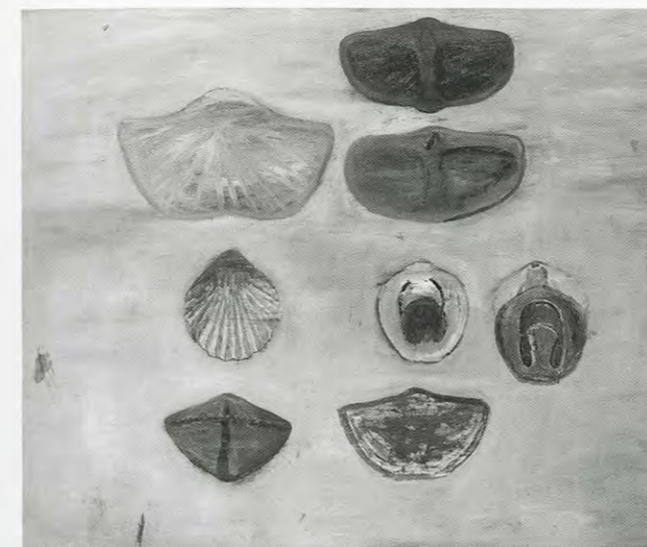


Fig. 8  
Botanical Subject 6, 1982  
Oil on linen  
48 x 36 (121.9 x 91.4)  
Saatchi Collection, London



the natural world – images of things on the threshold of being, on the border between material and immaterial, between articulated form and the inchoate. The vulnerability and ambiguity of these forms and their sexual suggestiveness, in paintings like *Folio* (1981; p. 41) and *Botanical Subject 6* (1982; Fig. 8), have strong affiliations with the American modernist experiments of Georgia O'Keeffe and Arthur Dove; with biomorphic Surrealism's polymorphous perversities; and with early Abstract Expressionism's search for symbolic subjects that were neither wholly representational nor totally abstract.

Biomorphism was mined in the 1940s for its psychosexual content – for its visceral lyricisms, ambiguous body allusions, and totemic affinities. At the same time, technology was expanding the frontiers of the visible to include the microscopic and the astronomical. Consequently, the inner life of natural phenomena became an alternative to the automatic perception of nature as landscape. Biomorphs were also seen as an analogue for the unconscious, for an adventure into the unknown regions of the psyche. For artists in the thirties and forties, organic subjects offered a way out of Regionalism and Social Realism and into abstraction. For Winters, fifty years later, they offered an escape from the stifling formalist endgame posed by pure, literalist abstraction and opened the door to a world of referential allusions.

Though Winters was intent on extending the emotional range of his paintings, he was not comfortable with anything too recognizable or literal. He insisted that he approached the paintings in a strictly abstract manner, building pictures instead of depicting or illustrating something. "My whole first years of doing these things were really about trying to come to terms with the fact that I was actually making pictures."<sup>6</sup> The forms always come from a specific place – from diagrams, drawings, photographs – but never function as illustrations. They are things in themselves with links to the world of events and phenomena. Grounded in objectivity, they are then re-formed, re-specified through their painted fiction. Winters' iconography, as it evades definitive identification, suggests prior meanings while acquiring new ones; it serves as a constant reminder that any representation is a fiction.

In paintings such as *Fungus* (p. 47) and *Early Animals* (Fig. 7), both of 1982, images are spread out across the canvas as if on a dissection table. They are presented with a mock-scientific objectivity and emotional neutrality. The pod, mollusk, and mushroomlike shapes are impersonal and denatured. Curiously vacant and inert, they hover, untethered and unresponsive to gravity, on subtly worked grounds of rich earth tones – muddy pinks, dense clays, cool slates, soft blacks, chalky whites. The expressiveness of the paintings resides largely in the way they are painted.

Fig. 9  
Theophrastus' Garden, 1982  
Oil on linen  
87 x 70 (221 x 177.8)  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Harry W. Anderson

There is a new idea of beauty, of seduction, in these broody, tenebrous pictures. Totally uningratiating and visceral, they are nonetheless tactile and sensual. The paint itself is a psychologically and sexually charged material. Its mucilaginous texture reeks of a sticky sexuality. The forms are vulnerable as they emerge only partially articulated from their muddy ochre, brackish green, and gummy black grounds, or descend into a decaying miasma of swampy brine. As in *Plane of Incidence*, the same image is often repeated in a variety of scales, perspectives, or stages of growth. These works demand to be read as abstract narratives of transmutation, corresponding both to the life cycle of organisms and to the development of paintings. In *Folio* (1981; p. 41) or *Seed* (1982; p. 42), are we looking at a picture of biological growth or of the process of painting – of the different rendering techniques, from heavily encrusted impasto to delicately veiled washes, that determine the morphology of form? The frequent pairing of nearly identical shapes makes us question the practice of defining identity as static, fixed reality. Winters' work jettisons this notion in favor of a more contemporary, relational view in which identity is defined through the amorphous and shifting relationships between things.

By 1982, Winters' imagery could range from the highly abstract, unidentifiable shapes in *Botanical Subject 6* (Fig. 8) to more literal depictions of natural forms, most evident in

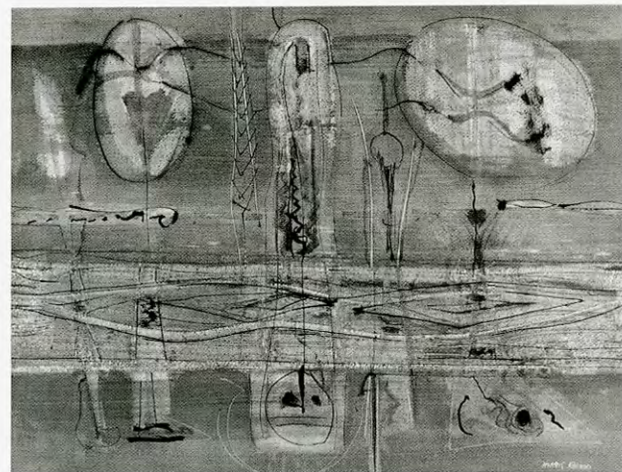
Fig. 10  
Free Union, 1983  
Oil on linen  
79 x 104 1/4 (200.7 x 264.8)  
Collection of Suzanne and Howard Feldman



the *Dark Plant* drawings and a cycle of four paintings called *Theophrastus' Garden* (Fig. 9). In this cycle, the title and the repeated image of a single flower create the strong, illustrative suggestion of a landscape. Theophrastus, a fourth-century BC philosopher and disciple of Aristotle, was one of the earliest naturalists. He formulated a whole cosmology through the study of botany and wrote one of the first treatises on plants. The exotic, orientaling flavor of Winters' paintings delineates the garden as a space for meditation on nature, existence, and the cosmos. In this sense, the garden was an obvious metaphor for painting and the canvas, emphasized by the demarcation of the ground into three parts, corresponding to the traditional foreground, middle ground, and background. This degree of legibility, however, made Winters uncomfortable, and he would guard against it in the future. But he cultivated the passages of seductive paint handling and the quality of light and atmosphere to enrich the grounds of future paintings.

By the time of his first one-artist show at the Sonnabend Gallery in 1982, Winters already had something of an underground reputation. Several artists were aware of his work, including Jasper Johns, who singled him out in print as an interesting young artist.<sup>7</sup> Collectors were buying work privately from the studio before he had commercial representation. In 1981, after seeing his work in a group show at the Castelli Gallery to benefit the Trisha Brown Dance

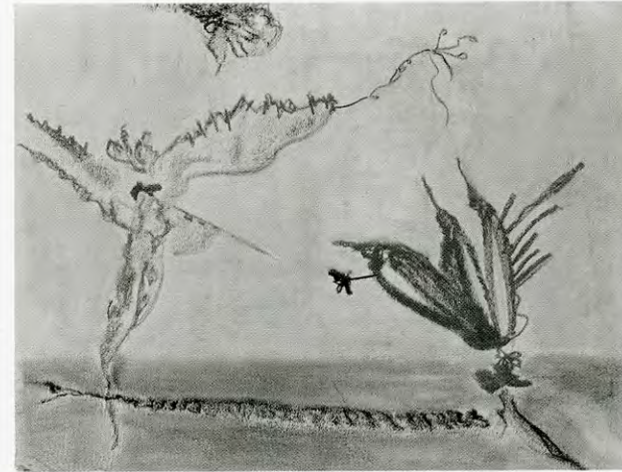
Fig. 11  
Mark Rothko  
Entombment, I, 1946  
Gouache on paper  
20 3/8 x 25 3/4 (51.7 x 65.4)  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase 4710



Company, Ileana Sonnabend invited him to exhibit with her gallery. The next year he had his first show there and was immediately established as an accomplished painter to be reckoned with. His understated, nuanced approach to art making was valued as a welcome antidote to the attention-getting posturing and exaggerated claims made by many artists beginning to receive media acclaim at that time. Winters' impressive technical skills and exquisite draftsmanship, in tandem with his evolving vocabulary of forms, made it clear that he was staking out some new territory for painting while keeping its tradition alive.

Confidently taking his paintings to a new level of complexity and ambition, Winters increased their size from an intimate, easel scale to 7 x 9 feet. The imagery in paintings like *Colony* (1983; p. 55), *Free Union* (1983; Fig. 10), and *Double Gravity* (1984; Fig. 13) became at once more expansive and more focused. Winters began to favor microscopic and cellular structures on a molecular, corpuscular, and genetic order. These are the building blocks of morphology, the forms that seem recognizable as the basis of all life, of our being before identity is fixed. There is a sense, as there was in the preceding work, that small things have been greatly enlarged, imparting paradoxical sensations of familiarity and strangeness, intimacy and expansiveness. Furthermore, in paintings such as *Colony*, the relationships between the forms are more dynamic than in earlier frontal composi-

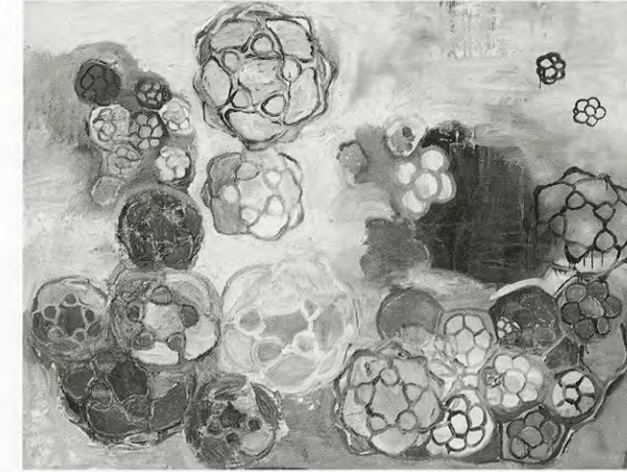
Fig. 12  
Barnett Newman  
Untitled, 1945  
Oil, oil crayon, and pastel on paper  
19 3/8 x 25 1/2 (49.5 x 64.5)  
Annalee Newman and Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London



tions: the cells twist and turn in an inchoate space, drifting in and out of focus. The grounds become more elaborate, emboldened by rich passages of gestural painting, varied textures, and subtle modulation. The sense of rotation, agitation, and turbulence of cellular changes is paralleled, perhaps even determined, by the constant fluctuation of paint activity, which draws the eye from the deep, indeterminate space of the field to the skin of the surface, reminding us again of the artifice of picture making. The paint increasingly announces itself as substance: as viscous, primordial liquid, the unspecified, undifferentiated matter out of which life and art are born.

In *Free Union*, one of Winters' most striking works from this period, irregular fan-shaped membranes float like apparitions on a silvery vaporous ground where bits of rudimentary, cellular matter surface and dissolve. The feeling of genesis is unmistakable here: the filmy space of this biological low life is where identity begins. Again, Winters' interest in origins is apparent, as is his connection to early Abstract Expressionism – to the primal evocations of Gorky, Baziotis, Rothko, and Newman (Figs. 11, 12). But in contrast to these artists, who used organic forms emblematic of virgin birth and the creation myth, Winters uses generic, diagrammatic forms, drawn from preexisting sources, and these are frequently repeated within a painting or from one painting to the next. They have the familiarity of what Johns called

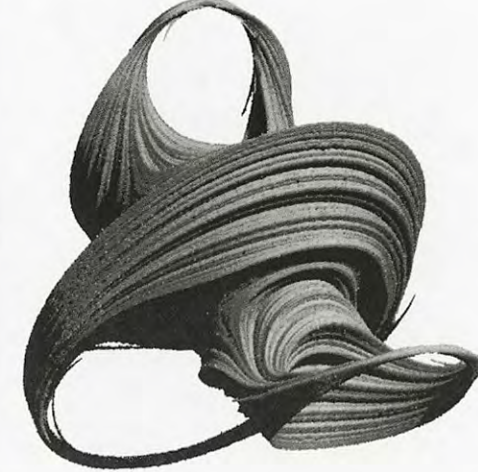
Fig. 13  
Double Gravity, 1984  
Oil on linen  
80 x 104 (203.2 x 264.2)  
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York;  
Gift of The Louis and Bessie Adler Foundation, Inc.



“things the mind already knows,” and speak as much of cultural as they do of natural phenomena. Like New Image painters Susan Rothenberg and Elizabeth Murray, Winters was reinventing vigorous form through a combination of physical gesture and psychologically loaded imagery – through the merging of paint and image. All three artists were exploring the metaphoric possibilities and multiple readings of ambiguous subjects and hybrid forms, so that their evolving imagery was poised between abstraction and representation.

Winters was also at the forefront of a group of younger artists – among them Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Ross Bleckner, Carroll Dunham, and John Newman – who were putting a new spin on organic abstraction by acknowledging the effects of emerging technologies and scientific developments on the changing nature of visibility.<sup>8</sup> If painting had, by the early seventies reached “degree zero,” then the next generation had to explore the other side of zero, which might include concepts like negative numbers, N-dimensional space, and black holes. Earlier antecedents, especially Surrealism, had offered a model of non-Euclidean space. But now there were real scientific systems in place – fractal geometry, computer mapping, and topology – to help define and configure, through cybernetic data, previously undefinable and unquantifiable spaces and shapes (Fig. 14).

Fig. 14  
Computer-generated spatial fractal  
From Benoit B. Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* (1983)



These new systems provided a whole new way to visualize and think about space, a testimony to the mind's ability to project beyond optical observation. They also offered a new understanding of nature's complexity by uncovering the hidden organizing structures beneath its seeming randomness, irregularity, and discontinuity. Winters' shifting, ambiguous spaces and forms that open up, close down, warp and deform acknowledge this revolution in comprehending the order of disorder and fragmentation, of the way things cluster or disperse. From this new sensual geometry has also emerged another kind of symmetry: the patterning of forms on different scales, what is known in the biological sciences as the principle of self-similarity. Winters uses all these scientific and perceptual advances to elicit a broader range of psychological equivalents from chaotic, turbulent, twisted, jagged, and fractured forms – or from the complex patterns of interaction among simpler forms.

Psychological tension is further implied through Winters' obsessive reworking of certain images, particularly the spherical cell clusters that have become something of a signature motif. The cellular structure, as a basic unit, becomes a surrogate for the self in a vague terrain where identity is never finite, where the possibility of naming is always foreclosed. But the way that these units aggregate and interact suggests social structures and relations: joining, separating, transmuting, and colonizing. That the elements of Winters' paint-

ings often work together in this way is reinforced by his choice of titles – *Colony*, *Good Government*, *The Psychological Corporation*, for instance – and in his use of structures that suggest beehives, crowds, or nests.

Winters has employed the archetypal cellular image in countless configurations and media over the past eight years, as he developed his epic narrative about evolution and transformation. The cells evoke a range of things microscopic and macroscopic, from protoplasmic beginnings, sexual union, and segmenting eggs to balloons, soap bubbles, soccer balls, cosmological or cabalistic charts, an atomic blast, even the earth itself (Figs. 17-22). In 1983, they formed the subject of a group of small paintings (p. 57) in black, white, and gray. Thick paint is used to articulate the cell partitions and boundary walls, and they assume sculptural proportions as the relief of oil defines their spherical three-dimensionality. The interaction of the two orbs on each panel implies both attraction and repulsion, as does the surface texture. In *Dome* (p. 67), a rich charcoal drawing of 1985, two blastulas seem to be merging, sexually fusing, or possibly dividing. The developing ball of cells is dense with vesicles emitting energy through a series of radiating, sooty smudges. The repetitiveness of these forms suggests compulsive sexuality, as does the life cycle of the cell – the unrelenting coupling and fusion that promotes growth and development, which has been likened to “the vitality of

Fig. 15  
Eureka, 1989  
Oil on linen  
96 x 156 (243.8 x 396.2)  
Fukuoka City Bank, Ltd., Fukuoka, Japan

Fig. 16  
Compound, 1987  
Oil on linen  
96 x 120 (243.8 x 304.8)  
Collection of Bob and Linda Gersh;  
Partial gift to The Museum of  
Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Fig. 17  
Atomic blast  
Photograph by Harold Eugene Edgerton, c. 1950

Fig. 18  
Tree of Holy Fruit (Cabala chart)

Fig. 19  
Taoist talisman (cosmology chart)  
From Tao-tsang, early twelfth century

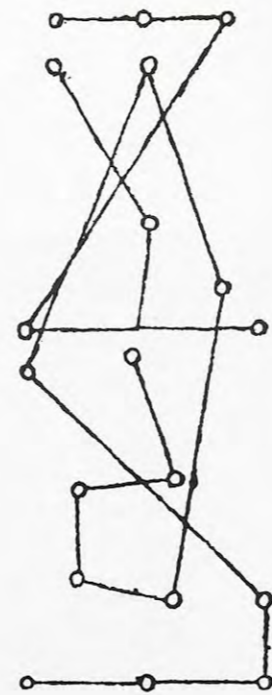
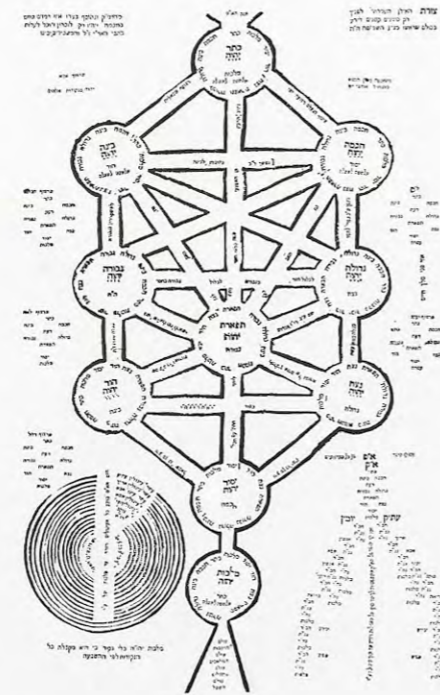


Fig. 20  
Skeleton of the sponge *Aulonia hexagona*  
From D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *On Growth and Form* (1917)

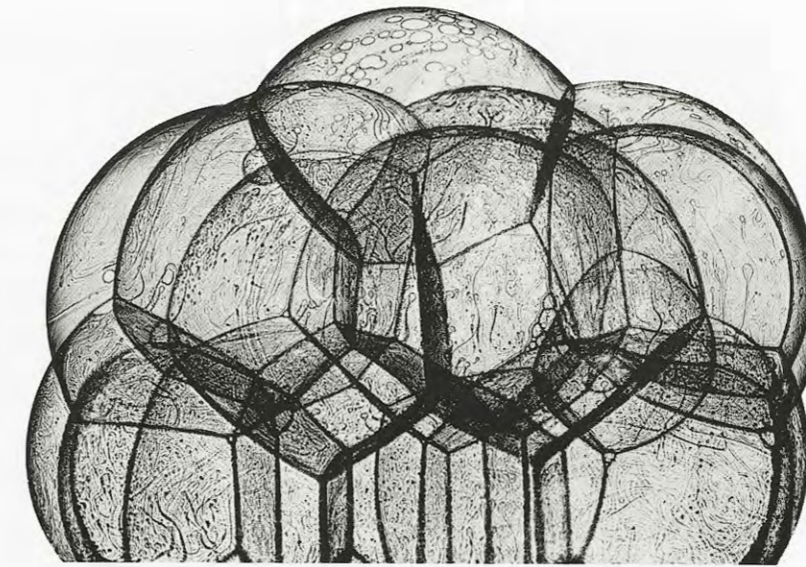
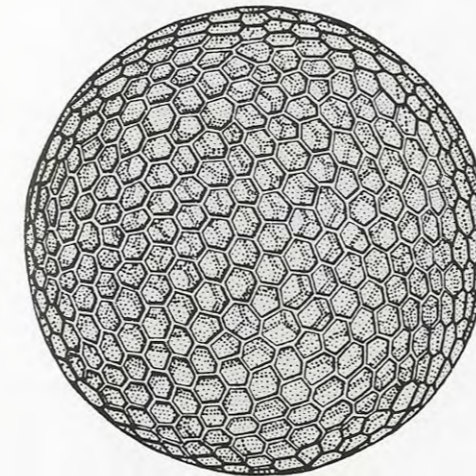
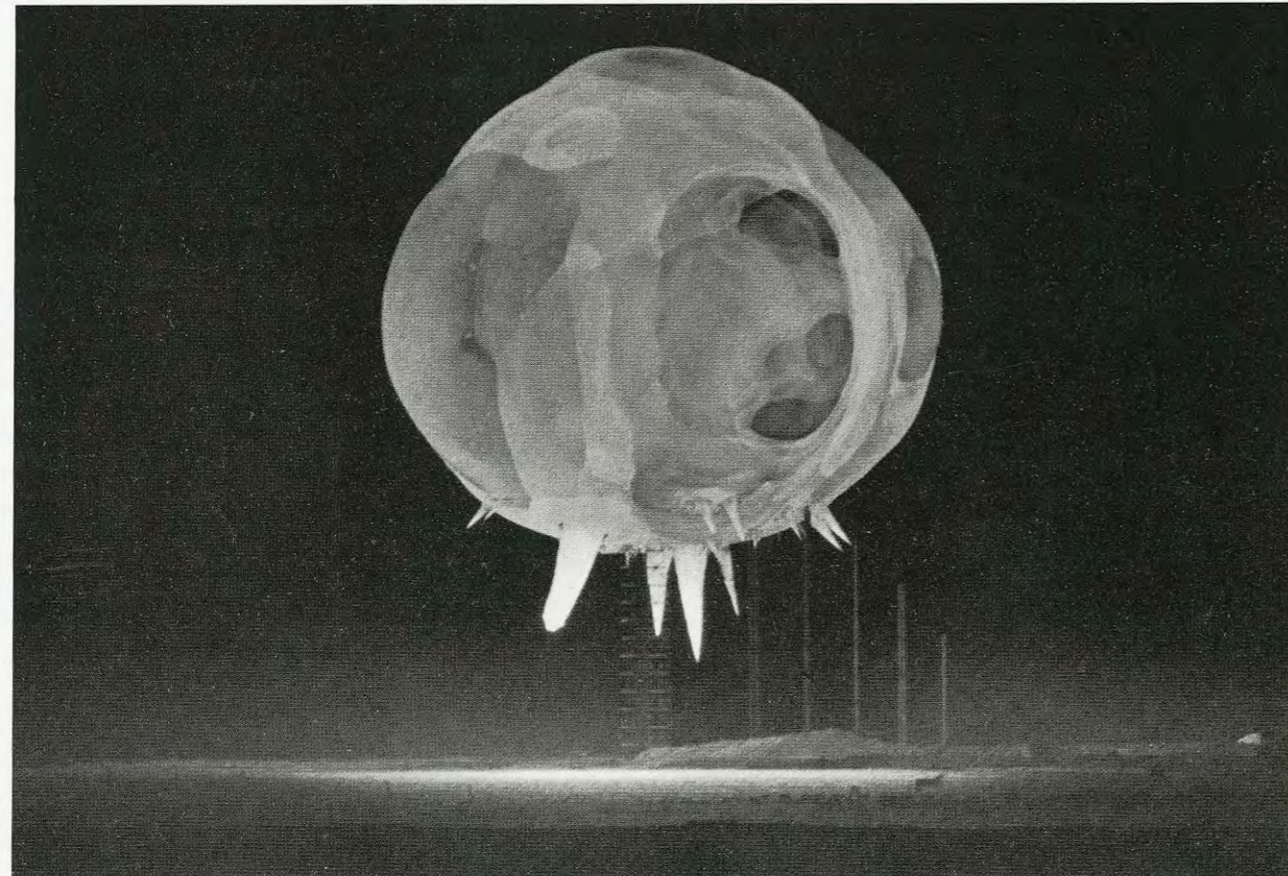
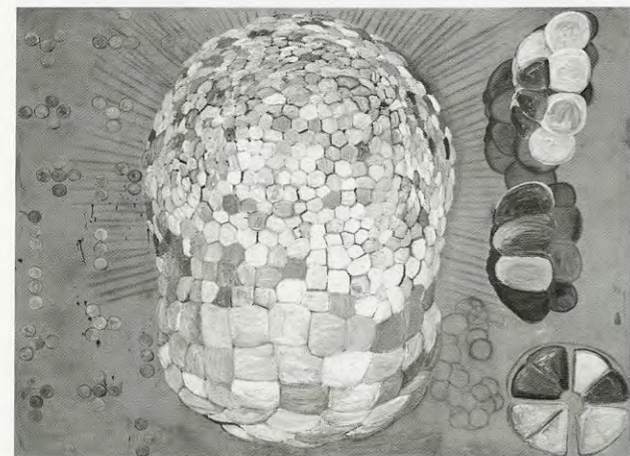
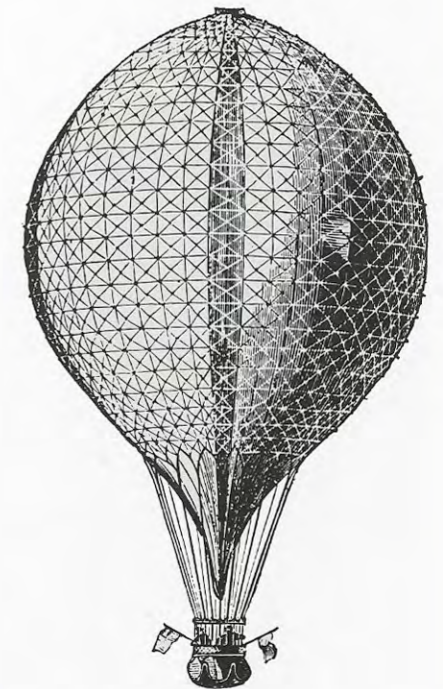


Fig. 21  
Soap bubble model

Fig. 22  
Hot-air balloon  
From *Illustrated London News* (1844)



young lovers galvanizing a cascade of changes in the cell that culminates in division.<sup>9</sup>

*Double Gravity* (1984; Fig. 13) shows dozens of these faceted forms, accumulating in chaotic fashion in a deep, broad field. There is a sense of great rotation and animation imparted by the active brushwork and surface energy of the field. In the lithograph *Morula I* (1983-84; p. 56), a large orb floats above a smaller one. Like a line of balloons passing overhead, the scale change could be factual or perceptual. A later work, *Montgolfier* (1987; p. 109), literally commemorates the eighteenth-century balloonists through the title. Although these images, like the earlier botanical forms, have analogues in the outside world, they exist as independent entities, in "actual size," as Winters has written. "I want my paintings to function both as an illustration of something outside itself and as a self-contained material fact whose physicality amplifies and undermines this illustrative aspect. Although I start out with existing configurations, my images are respecified through shifts in scale, artificial juxtapositions, the physical manipulation of paint and the inevitable emotional effects that accrue from these procedures."<sup>10</sup>

The blastula form can be traced straight through Winters' work to later paintings such as *Compound* (1987; Fig. 16), where a single elongated cluster of cells occupies a space 8 x 10 feet, that is, larger than human scale. *Compound* is

pointed directly on raw linen so that the material of the support defines the form. A series of thin rays creates a halo around the image. These lines, with their mathematical or chartlike precision, appear again in the somewhat larger, horizontal *Eureka* (1989; Fig. 15), where a linear network seems to plot an orbit or perhaps the directional movement of a growth formation. There are several tight, densely packed spheres clustered together on the left, as if attracted by some magnetic force. To their right are two loosening clusters, where particles seem to disperse and no longer adhere to a spherical contour. The title refers to Edgar Allan Poe's "Eureka," which Winters had contemplated illustrating with a series of drawings. In this pseudo-scientific prose poem, the universe and all phenomena are conceived as being ruled by laws of attraction and repulsion, which Poe demonstrated through mathematics and references to the dynamics of heat, light, and electricity. Winters felt a natural empathy with the way Poe combined scientific investigation, intuition, and the workings of his own imagination.<sup>11</sup>

Though sometimes, as in *Eureka*, Winters starts with a title and then makes a painting, usually the title is an aftereffect of how a painting develops. In *Good Government* (1984; Fig. 26), for instance, a painting Winters spent three months on, he made a concentrated effort to combine several different kinds of forms. At first it was difficult getting the disparate elements to cohere, but finally he "thought it looked

like one of those maps you saw in grammar school and it said 'good government' and everything was working together."<sup>12</sup> *Good Government* is a synoptic work, bringing together within Winters' largest single panel painting to date a number of previous concerns and images. Once again, overlapping blastula forms of varying sizes cohabit the field with chunky minerals, thorny crystals (Fig. 24), and bits of chromosomal matter arching through space. The paint surface is a compendium of the ways paint can be carried across a surface. Thinned out washes turn into heavily brushed sections; there are parts that seem squeezed right out of a tube and others that are drawn with linear precision. There are forms defined by painted lines and others defined by encrusted paint. The syncopated surface gives the painting a pulsating quality. The whole scene of painterly and biological episodes has an animated, even cartoonlike quality. In its presentation of discrete and dissociated events in a broad space, it belongs to a tradition of panoramic visions in art from Bosch and Brueghel to Ensor. The images often grow out of the gestures and the way paint is applied; procedure, in other words, becomes a catalyst to form. The process also determines the arrangement of forms. Here as elsewhere the paint handling is both repulsive and celebratory. In the matter of paint we sense where matter begins, as protoplasm, and ends, as excrement. There is a strong scatological component throughout

Fig. 23  
Lumen, 1984  
Oil on linen  
101 x 68 (256.5 x 172.7)  
Sonnabend Collection

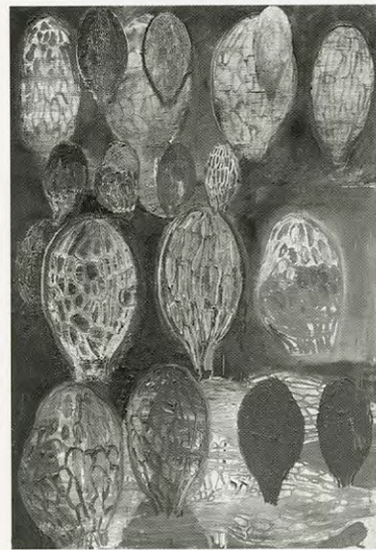


Fig. 24  
Electron-micrograph of crystals



Fig. 25  
James Ensor  
Tribulations of St. Anthony, 1887  
Oil on canvas  
46 3/8 x 66 (117.8 x 167.6)  
Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Purchase



Fig. 26  
Good Government, 1984  
Oil on linen  
101 1/4 x 137 1/4 (257.2 x 348.6)  
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;  
Purchase, with funds from The Mnuchin Foundation and the Painting  
and Sculpture Committee  
85.15



Fig. 27  
Schema 8, 1985-86  
Graphite, charcoal, pastel, and gouache on paper  
12 x 8 1/2 (30.5 x 21.6)  
Collection of Hendel Teicher

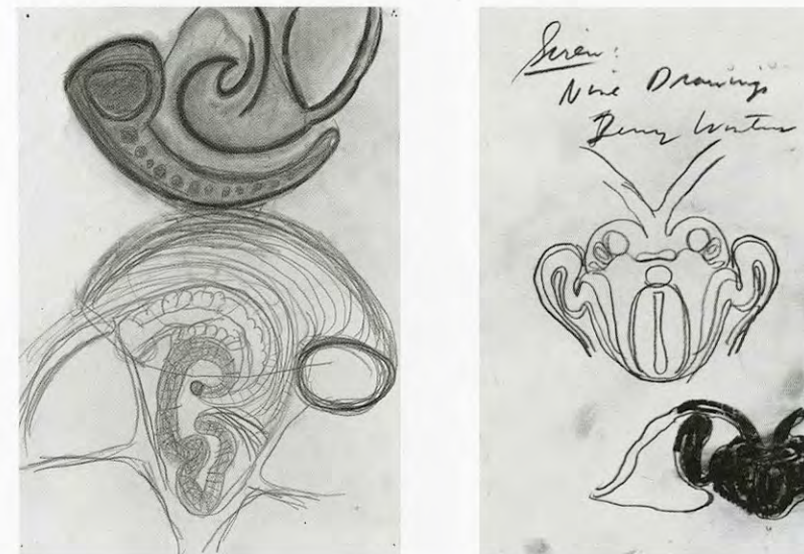


Fig. 28  
Siren: Nine Drawings  
The Paris Review (Fall 1984)

Fig. 29  
Siren: Nine Drawings  
The Paris Review (Fall 1984)



Fig. 30  
Aesculus parviflora  
Photograph by Karl Blossfeldt  
From *Urformen der Kunst* (1928)



Winters' work that has an integral place in both the physical life cycle (as waste and fertilizer) and in the life of the psyche (as the first thing created and lost). Like Ensor in his *Tribulations of St. Anthony* (Fig. 25), Winters equates blood, excrement, and other bodily secretions with the material of paint itself.<sup>13</sup>

After working intensively on *Good Government*, Winters, as he characteristically does, changed his pace and focus. He has always resisted a fixed way of working, continually altering the rhythm of his process by switching media or formats. This time it was a shift to a group of smaller, vertically oriented canvases and from a somber, subdued palette to a new range of high key, non-descriptive colors. These are some of Winters' most sensual and ecstatic works, where the intensity of color has a palpable libido. They build on the chromatic potential already evident in the slightly earlier 1984 paintings *Lumen* (Fig. 23) and *Ricochet* (p. 62). From the lush, warm red and yellow of *Point* (p. 79) to the almost photographic, hyperillusionistic cool blue space of *Signal* (p. 75), Winters' color is aggressively non-naturalistic. The molten, phosphorous glow and self-generating light in these 1985 paintings, emphasize the unreality, even surrealism, of the forms and space. Color – glowing orange, blood red – is exploited for its symbolic content and for its existence as light and energy. There is an increased painterliness in the rapturous grounds of these works and a new pictorial

device is introduced: the occasional division of the field into horizontal bands or strata.

There is an intoxicating decadence about these works that brings to mind the Symbolist visions of a century ago. And, like the poetry of Mallarmé, Winters' paintings cannot be decomposed. A multiplicity of paradoxical sensations flows out of them: transparency, lightness, sharpness, cold, heat, silkiness, roughness, brightness, iridescence, opacity, broodiness, excitement, and repose. It is just as difficult to name the tone of the colors as it is to name the image. Such sensual incongruities, promises and refusals, are deliberate, for they make us consider the way that language limits our description of the world.

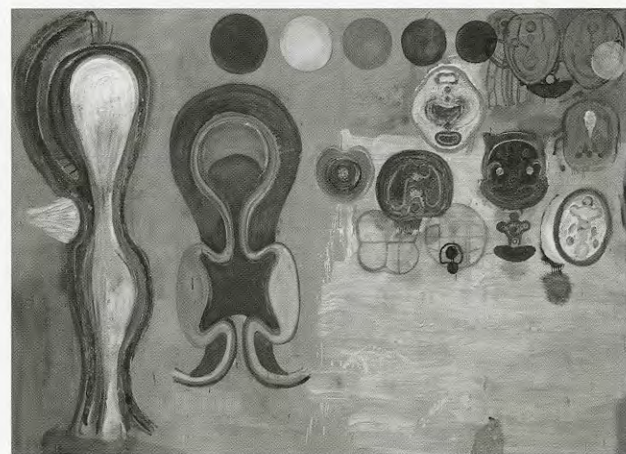
Winters soon changed his rhythm of working again: he spent 1986 immersed in drawings and prints. He had admired the prints of Johns and Rauschenberg – their quality and sense of independent achievement – and had similar ambitions for his own work in this medium. "I have tried to use all three media equally without any kind of hierarchy of importance."<sup>14</sup> He had started making lithographs with Universal Limited Art Editions in 1982, mining the medium for its special physical characteristics – its mark-making possibilities and the way lithographs appeared to be like drawings in their greasy density and vaporous smudges, but were in fact constructed of different plates and printed with different layers. In *Folio* (1985-86; pp. 84-89), for

instance, there were 136 plates, 140 printings, and 102 colors used to complete the eleven-sheet suite. In 1987, Winters began to work with master printer Aldo Crommelynck in Paris on a group of etchings (pp. 125-27). He explored the potential of tonal qualities in soft- and hard-ground etchings, using spit-bite and sugar-lift techniques and exploiting the thin line that corresponds to the etcher's tools. Using etching's small-scale focus and requisite precision and control, Winters was able to respecify certain of his characteristic forms by working, reworking, and recombining them through different processes.

Winters has continually recast his formal vocabulary not only through such experimentation with print techniques but also by crossing over from one medium to another. *Schema*, a group of seventy-five drawings completed between the *Folio* and *Album* projects, forms a veritable catalogue of drawing styles, media, and iconographic possibilities. These are also the first of Winters' drawings to extensively embrace color. "I used as many different kinds of drawing materials as I could think of or was attracted to, from graphite pencil to others that combined wax and oil crayons with gouache and acrylics."<sup>15</sup>

From the delicate ink and graphite wash and controlled precision of *Schema 23* (p. 92), to the fine pencil lines describing a womb enclosure in *Schema 8* (Fig. 27), to the Zen-like blue watercolor strands of *Schema 6* (p. 91), to the

Fig. 31  
Dumb Compass, 1985  
Oil on linen  
94 1/2 x 132 1/2 (240 x 336.6)  
Collection of Larry Gagosian



physically elaborate, brushy painting on paper of *Schema 38* (p. 94), these drawings once again play clarity against obscurity, showing how mark making can simultaneously form and de-form, reinforce and erode representation, determine or undermine meaning. Different materials and approaches are often combined in a single work – loose, undulating forms that come out of dripping or staining, or pooling paint paired with very precise rendering. This was a seminal series that yielded a whole new group of forms, of spatial and scale relationships, of ways to divide the field, to treat figure-ground, to use color, to mix and overlay materials – and these spatial and emotional complexities nourished Winters' paintings for the next several years.<sup>16</sup> With the introduction of uterine forms, fallopian passages, and priapic extensions in *Schema 8, 9 and 70* (Fig. 38; p. 97), the latent, implied sexuality of much of Winters' organic imagery became more explicit. Though these forms had made a first appearance in a series of drawings done in 1984 for *The Paris Review* (Figs. 28, 29),<sup>17</sup> they were not developed until a year later, in the *Schema* drawings and in the large painting *Dumb Compass* (1985; Fig. 31). Conjuring up both male and female anatomy and the reproductive cycle, these literally sexualized forms have strong anthropomorphic analogies. They are usually presented frontally, in a mute, dispassionate, "dumb" way – with the same neutrality as forms in *Early Animals* (Fig. 7). Now, however, they

Fig. 32  
Jews Pitch, 1986  
Oil on canvas  
81 x 106 (205.7 x 269.2)  
Collection of the artist



have ascended the evolutionary ladder and, while still connected to the forces of natural growth (Fig. 30), the range of associations has grown equivalently wider: tubes, cavities, orifices, and protuberances become haunting totemic presences, especially when enlarged to near-human scale. As the subjects continued to expand in their range of physical and psychological reference, Winters persisted in pushing the emotional possibilities of material and color – its capacity to speak radically and to elicit fears and desires. A group of paintings from 1985-87 returns to a limited palette of earthy black and browns and to the ongoing experimentation with the pigment asphaltum. In *Pitch Lake, Montgolfier*, and *Jews Pitch* (Fig. 32; pp. 101, 109), the paint has been poured, dripped, and stained over the canvas. While these works share certain lyrical effects with Color Field painting, they also have a distinctive smell of death and of putrefaction; moreover, the sticky, oozing, oily transparency of the pigment is vaguely excremental. Yet the pigment still recalls the earth and its geological evolution. Evanescent brown clouds spread across the surface like an atmospheric change, suggesting a kinship with Sigmar Polke's "alchemical" paintings of roughly the same period, paintings that were created to continually change and transform over time. By recalling natural and biological forces, Winters offers a metaphorical counterpart to Polke's literal mutability and flux.

Fig. 33  
Cast, 1989  
Oil on linen  
96 x 76 (243.8 x 193)  
Collection of Alexander Nakijien



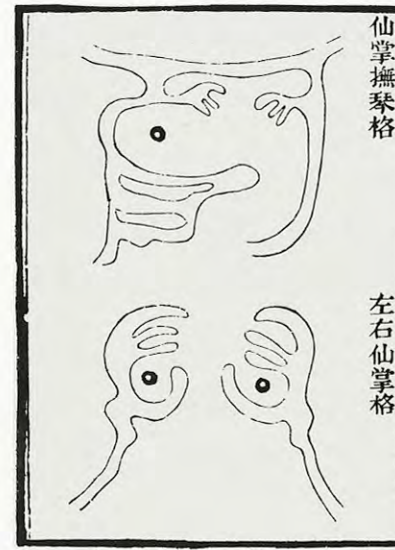
In works of the past two years, Winters has pushed the correspondences between natural and biological transformations and changes in emotional states (Fig. 33). Simultaneously threatening and mirthful, his newer images read as caricatures in a dark comedy, like those in Philip Guston's late work. At first, Winters limited his palette to melancholy tones of gray, gray-blue, and brown that recall the dark mysteries of Symbolist paintings and the omnipresence of death. Filling the brushy monochromatic fields are single images that have the look of charms or amulets, breastplates or helmets (Figs. 35, 36). They are animated by the way they are painted and in their masklike effect seem to register the capacity for consciousness and self-awareness. Furthermore, they often seem to combine male and female attributes, a hermaphroditism that implies autonomy and self-generation. "They" belong to an indeterminate world where the comfort of science encounters the fear of the unknown. The scene could be taking place within the body or somewhere in outer space, where mutation, confabulation, and hybrid distortion run rampant. Bending, twisting, folding, and stretching before us, these forms are evidently subject to some powerful physical or psychological pressures (Fig. 34). Winters continues to discomfort and unsettle as much as he seduces. By cultivating forces that create friction, irresolution, ambiguity, and fluctuation, he infuses his work with

Fig. 34  
Pneumatically tensed membrane  
From Frei Otto, ed., *Tensile Structures* (1962)



unusual metaphoric power. We are witness to both entropic and creative processes; disorder and formation; fragmentation and coalescence. All logical opposition – figure/ground, inside/outside, male/female – is subsumed within paradoxical incongruities and cyclical movements of stasis and growth, morphology and psychology, chaos and order, mystery and precision, deliberation and spontaneity. Winters offers his speculative natural history to counter official systems of scientific theory, religious experience, and psychoanalytic definitions, which can never adequately describe the structure, complexity, and sensuality of the world.

Fig. 35  
Taoist geomancy patterns  
From Laszlo Legeza, *Tao Magic* (1975)



Notes  
1. Interview with the artist, January 28, 1991.  
2. Ibid.  
3. See R.D. Harley, *Artists' Pigments, c. 1600-1835: A Study in English Documentary Sources* (London: Butterworth & Co., 1970), p. 142.  
4. Terry Winters, lecture at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Seminars with Artists series, October 16, 1990, audiotope, Whitney Museum of American Art.  
5. Winters remarked on his use of plans and diagrams in the symposium "Art Off the Grid," October 22, 1989, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, audiotope, Whitney Museum of American Art.  
6. Winters, Seminars with Artists.  
7. See Grace Glueck's interview with Jasper Johns, in "The Artists' Artists," *Art News*, 81 (November 1982), p. 94.  
8. For the effects of these technologies on vision, see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: October Books, MIT Press, 1990), pp. 1-24.  
9. Natalie Angier, "Biologists Unravel Key Events of Cell Division," *The New York Times*, November 6, 1990, p. C1.  
10. Terry Winters, in *The 40th Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting*, exhibition catalogue (Washington, D.C.: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1987), p. 68.  
11. Winters, Seminars with Artists.

Fig. 36  
Taoist magic calligraphy  
From Laszlo Legeza, *Tao Magic* (1975)



12. Ibid.  
13. Terry Winters, gallery talk on James Ensor's *Tribulations of St. Anthony*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, March 3, 1988, audiotope, The Museum of Modern Art.  
14. Winters, Seminars with Artists.  
15. Ibid.  
16. For further discussion of the *Schema* drawings, see Roberta Smith, in Terry Winters, *Schema* (West Islip, New York: Universal Art Editions, 1988).  
17. "Siren: Nine Drawings," *The Paris Review*, 26 (Fall 1984), pp. 197-206.