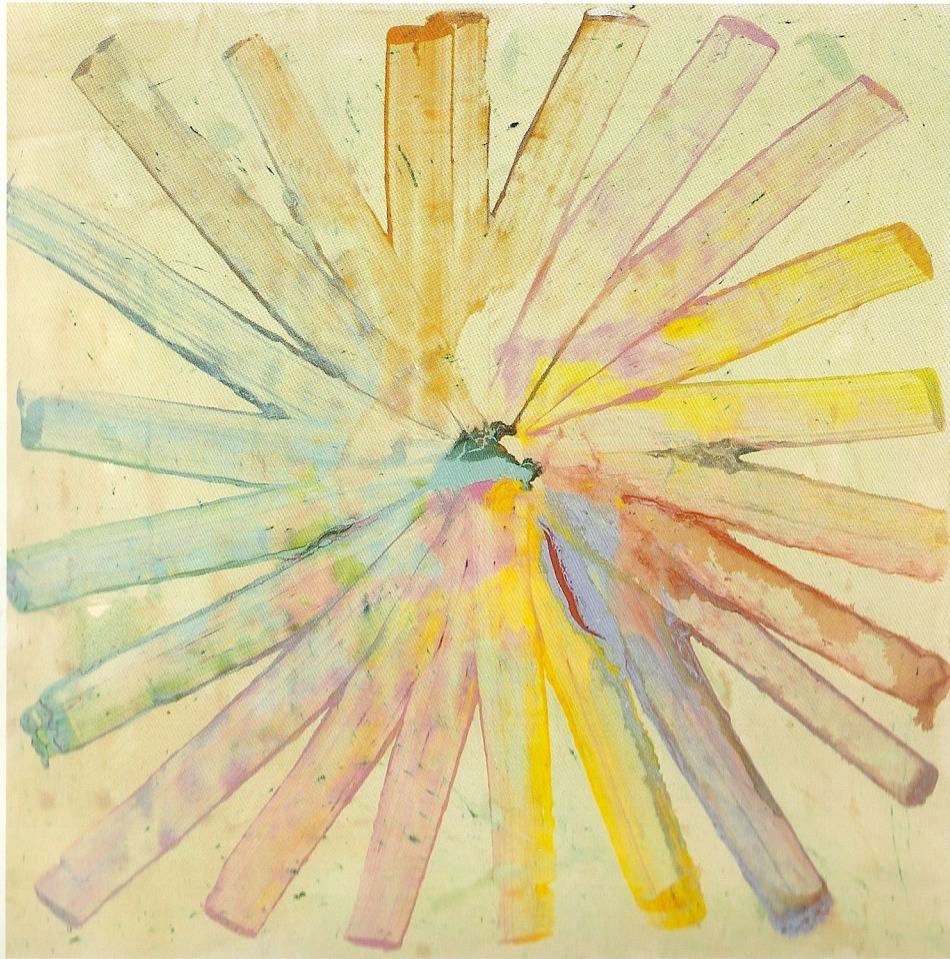


Harold Feist: *Genesis of an Image*





KAREN WILKIN

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17 January – 28 February 1988

Agnes Etherington Art Centre Queen's University Kingston, Ontario, Canada

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Karen Wilkin

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Harold Feist is represented by Gallery One, Toronto.

I wish to thank all those on the Art Centre staff who have been involved with this project: Michael Bell, Bruce Millen, Catherine Gold, Jeri Harmsen, Lynn Hughes and Brooke Hetherington.

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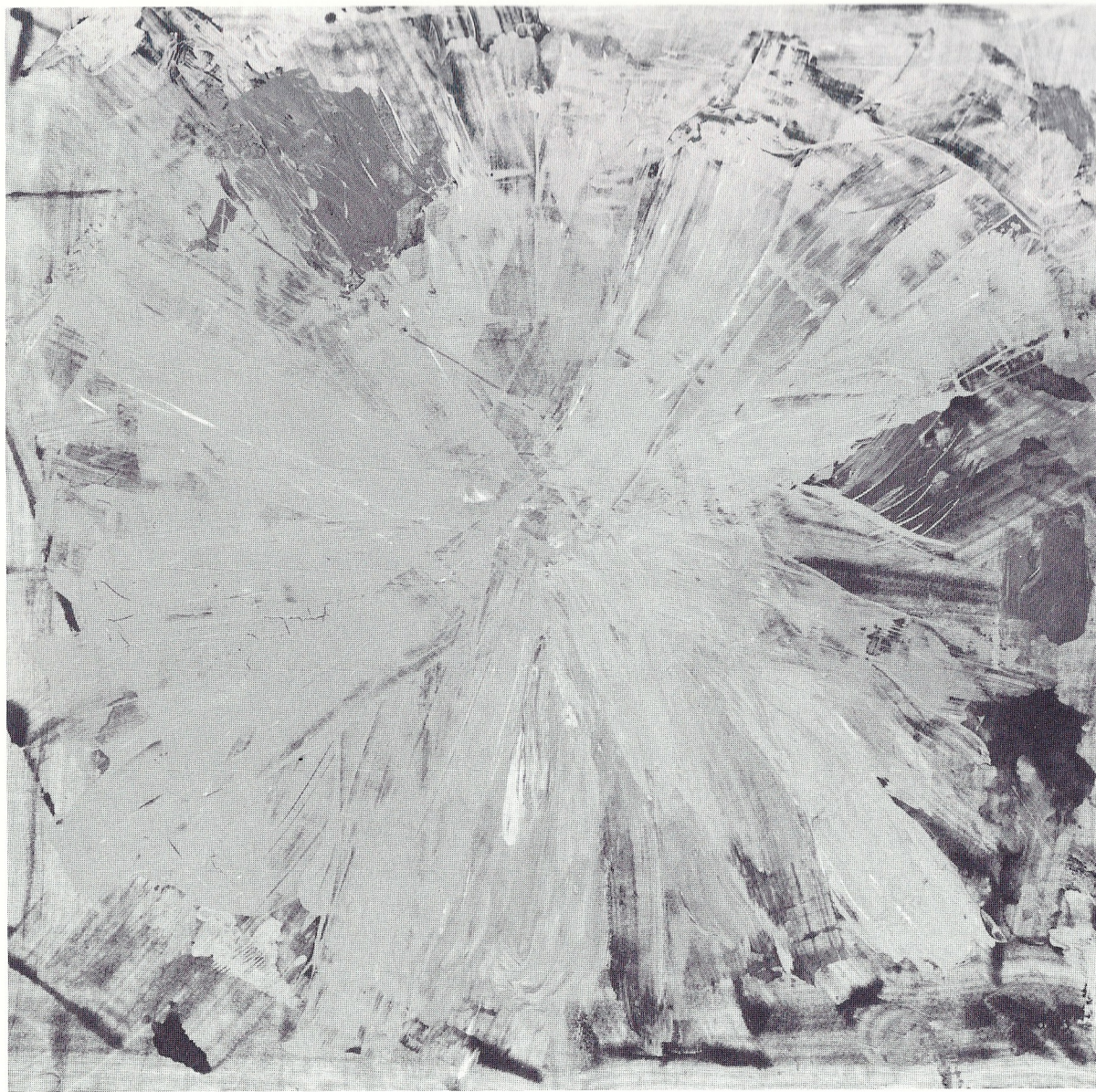
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FOREWORD

One glance at the exhibition history that is the record of Harold Feist's energy and his works' appeal and one is surprised that this exhibition was not organized sooner. It certainly seemed an oversight of some magnitude to us so it is our pleasure to have rectified the situation.

We have only been able to do this because of the great deal of co-operation and support the project has received. First and foremost, among those who must be thanked is the artist himself who has borne the burden with a seraphic smile throughout. Next to thank is the guest curator, the prodigious Karen Wilkin, who has selected the works to be exhibited and has written about Feist's oeuvre as much as an act of friendship as from the strong critical stance the exhibition and her involvement in it represent. The artist's dealers Goldie Konopny and Sharon Fischtein of Gallery One in Toronto have been helpful beyond the call of duty and have exhibited a strong faith in the project from the beginning.

The many lenders to the exhibition are to be thanked for without their co-operation no show would be possible. We are grateful.

Many individuals were supportive not only with loans but financially as well in order to make the exhibition a success and in order that there be appropriate documentation through a catalogue. We owe them a debt which we trust this exhibition will repay.

Robert Swain
Director and Supervising Curator

I think about painting as a way of putting something good into the world. Adding to it the best I can. Nothing to do with 'moving' anyone or communicating, just trying to keep busy the way Nature does and maybe making a little something good before leaving. To me 'abstract' art is far from abstract. When something's at home in a work of art there's really something home there, something to be reckoned with, something concrete. You can never have enough of something 'home.' Presence.

Harold Feist





When I was a rookie curator at the Edmonton Art Gallery, in 1971, my first task, inherited from my predecessor, was an unwieldy juried show. Hundreds of entries came from across Western Canada, yet only a few works stood out. Not surprisingly, Dorothy Knowles' and William Perehudoff's pictures criticized many of the others. And then there were two strange, unignorable (and, as it turns out, unforgettable) canvases by an unknown called Harold Feist. I remember thinking that Feist's pictures were like clunky, oversized versions of Paul Klee and at the same time thinking that I'd never seen anything quite like them. They were large, murky stain paintings, distorted checkerboards of uningratiating colour: bottle green, turbid purple, poison blue. With their mottled surfaces and slapdash grids, they looked crude for the first minute or two, then steadily grew more subtle and complex.

The juror, Kenneth Lochhead, was fascinated by the Feists and recommended one of them for a purchase award. It's embarrassing to admit that the Acquisition Committee – and I along with them – ignored his suggestion; we couldn't resist adding our first Knowles and our first Perehudoff to the Gallery's woeful contemporary collection. (That collection has since grown to be one of the best in Canada and includes three Feists.) Despite this apparent lack of commitment, I was interested enough to start visiting Feist's Calgary studio. I learned that he was an Army brat who had grown up with a father in the Air Force. He had been trained in the US, at the University of Illinois and at the Maryland Institute College of Art, before emigrating to Canada in 1968, and was now teaching at the Alberta College of Art, his first

Canadian job after a stint as a teaching fellow at the Maryland Institute. There was a baby in a highchair, a mop of a dog, and a studio full of paintings as tough and provocative as the ones he had submitted to West '71. Feist was a shy young man with the vestiges of a Texas twang. He didn't take himself particularly seriously – self-deprecation is still one of his strong suits – but he certainly took his art seriously. He was ambitious in the best sense, in terms of a quest for excellence, and while he liked to style himself as groping his way, it was evident that he had a clear notion of what he was after. Feist once described his way of making pictures as 'somewhere between decisiveness and discovery'; (it still seems apt).

The pictures in the Calgary studio, like the ones he had sent to Edmonton, were recent manifestations of what could be described as minimalist or systematic preoccupations. The grid, in the form of a slashed checkerboard, underlay almost all of Feist's compositions, apparently deduced from the given vertical and horizontal dimensions of the canvas. He has since said that in making these pictures, he thought of himself as being 'almost like a bricklayer,' adding one section and then another, until the canvas was filled. Feist says that he has always been enthralled by orderly systems. 'There was some kind of fascination I still have and still can't figure out. Mandalas, progressions, growth patterns, things changing by orders, powers of two, three, ten.'

A series of spiral images with wedge shaped divisions had, in fact, preceeded the slashed checkerboards – explorations of yet another sort of system. Nonetheless, 'minimalist' and 'systematic,' with their connotations of preconception, neatness, and regu-

larity, are misleading words. There was a remarkable sense of struggle in Feist's paintings, evidence of a battle between instinct and theory that gave them a disquieting energy. Sheer willfulness outweighed dispassionate logic. The paintings were messy, obviously hand-made, with an urgent touch; they suggested that the artist had wrestled a recalcitrant medium to the ground. Their ostensibly systematic basis seemed like a disguise or, at least, something to throw the viewer off the scent.

Feist's recent recollections of the origins of these pictures confirm that the grid was more of an organizing device than a prime generator of images, contradictory as that may sound:

I had discovered the Glenbow's collection of North American Indian artifacts. I was reading (looking at the pictures) about pre-historic art, tribal stuff, African, Oceanic, etc. Some of the Glenbow things cut through my art fog and hit home. Direct, open, straight-forward. You may laugh, but there was a movie I saw then that sent chills through me and generated years of momentum in the studio. Only a couple of scenes, really. *A Man Called Horse* with Richard Harris. He's captured by Shoshone, I think, and taken back to their camp where he goes through a protracted initiation rite (or something arduous anyway). There's one shot that stays with me. A brave sticks his hand into some sort of bag and then pulls it out and slaps the flank of his horse, leaving a brilliant yellow handprint. Of course, it was thirty-seven feet wide to me sitting there in the third row and felt about that size in my brain. All those checkerboard and slash paintings happened then and were conscious attempts to get close to that '!'. The Indian had a horse but I had only a rectangle so I sought the most

natural proportions and schemes of dividing it up. I was looking for conventions so I could adhere to them.

The convention, the grid, served as an armature for Feist to hang his deepest feelings on; it allowed him both to display and control them; it may even have released them. In retrospect, this kind of coexistence between neutral structure and passionate expression has been a constant in Feist's work from the beginning. Ambiguities have attracted him as much as 'progressions, growth patterns, things changing by orders.'

I vowed in art school to have the broadest palette possible – from black all the way to white. Didn't want to cut myself off from anything. You need black and white to make grey and grey is where the art seemed likely to be. All those greys of the world in experience, between book-ends like good/evil, love/hate, truth/untruth.

I knew three things, through Hofmann, I guess. 1. The most unified picture is one with nothing in it. 2. The most active is one in total chaos. 3. Art tries to marry the two. Chaos included, for me, intentions, influences, 'content,' quirks, personalities, innuendoes, iconography, etc. – the whole gamut of the experienceable – including paint. I was big on 'magic' and had even looked into alchemy in student days. It seemed there was something similar going on with those efforts at transmutation from lead to gold. Paint into art. Thank God for Hofmann through all that! And Klee.

Over the next few years, I watched Feist's paintings become simpler but more opulent. The drawn grids, which he had referred to as 'the bones,' started to disappear, along with strong colour contrast; paint became thicker. It was as though he had decided, consciously or unconsciously, to explore the extreme opposite of the apparently ordered checkerboards. It was a slow process: first he enlarged the

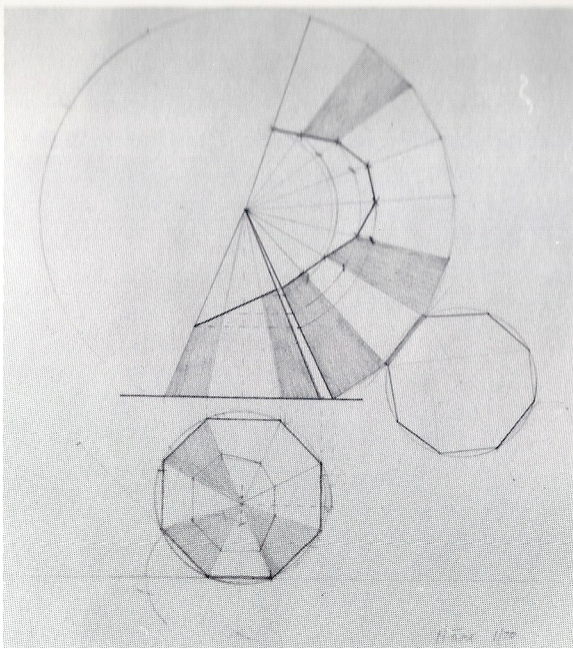


Fig. 1 *Untitled 1/1970*, graphite on paper, 19 × 18 cm

divisions of the checkerboards, then he butted together separate monochromatic canvases, as if each was a section of a grid. Finally these monochromatic canvases became independent. Jules Olitski's work was beginning to be seen in some depth in Edmonton at this time and Feist was responding to his example. He was ready for some sort of change and Olitski pointed the way – as he has for many painters of Feist's generation, some of whom have found ways around him; others have been immoveably blocked. Two workshops at the Edmonton Art Gallery, led by Stephen Greene in 1972 and Michael Steiner in 1973, accelerated the process.

Steve Green asked me if there was anybody painting pictures I wished I'd done. I was surprised to hear myself saying, firmly, Jules Olitski. It was at that workshop that I decided to jump right in with Jules and sink or swim. I think Steve may have said something to the effect 'The best way around someone may be to go right through.' As soon as I started painting I could see it was the right move. I wanted to make 'Olitskis,' tried hard, and when I failed, the way I failed was in making 'Feists.' That's when I began to figure out what resignation is all about. Saw that I was stuck with Harold Feist and that was that and the only game around.

Despite his declaration of his debt to Olitski – whom he admires greatly – I suspect that the changes in Feist's paintings of 1972 and '73 were probably inevitable, once he had begun to rely less on the drawn checkerboard armature. As long as drawing dominated and colour was contained in discrete zones, Feist's pictures were already so complicated that he needed the literal continuousness of a thin stain to hold everything in place. Once he dispensed with the grid, there was no longer any reason to change colours across the canvas, but it became necessary to pay more attention to surface. Instead of filling in pre-established zones, Feist had to be alert to every nuance of the stuff he was manipulating. Delicate *gestalt* relationships of these nuances could provide a substitute for the more overt geometric structure he had previously relied on.

In any case, Green's influence was not limited to making Feist try to emulate a painter whom he admired. He had a more subtle effect that Feist can pin down only by analogy:

It's like the image of a gunfighter in the West. (Well, it isn't 'like' it; it's the very image I got from Steve.) That the world out there in those days was such that a person could talk, argue, reason, all he wanted but when the dust settled the one who was faster and/or more accurate would be the

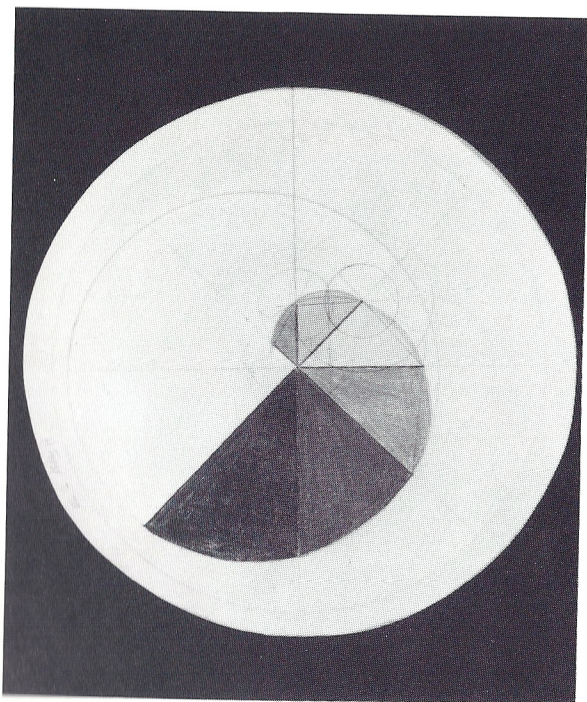


Fig. 2 *Untitled* 4/1970, graphite on paper, 25 × 23 cm

growing up in a military environment). That nobody gives a damn HOW you do it; just DO it. It doesn't matter how difficult or impossible it is. It's got to be done so DO it. Like fighting a battle. You don't get into it for the fighting, just the winning. It's at once unjust, unfair, but right.

By about 1974, Feist's paintings had become so sparse, so pale, and so close-valued that they threatened to disappear. Only surface inflections defined events on canvas. At the time, it was often difficult to see what he was getting at, but in retrospect, it looks as though he was simply testing the limits of what could be left out. It had something to do, I think, with his notion of 'getting on with it,' of 'just doing it' – exploring extreme conceptions of what a picture could be by painting them, not by theorizing. He was testing the limits of expressiveness *inherent* in his medium, seeing how its density, its transparency, and so on could be made to carry emotion. Lawrence Poons had joined Olitski as one of Feist's heroes and Poons' emphasis on the physical properties of paint – its ability to be thick or thin, to flow, to drip or pool – seems related to Feist's efforts of the period, although there is no obvious resemblance. It's worth noting that Feist's long-time friend, Douglas Haynes, went through similar investigations at more or less the same time. Although the two painters eventually went in quite different directions (Haynes to a kind of scaled-up 1980s abstracted Cubism and Feist to a full-blown exploration of colour), in the early 1970s, they appear to have both been trying to see how pared down they could make their pictures and, simultaneously, how rich they could make their surfaces. In those days, before the ubiquitousness of gel, it was a challenging task.

Feist had started a cross-Canada progress about the time his pale, elusive pictures developed. 1974 found him at the University of Regina, replacing Art MacKay on the faculty of the art department and

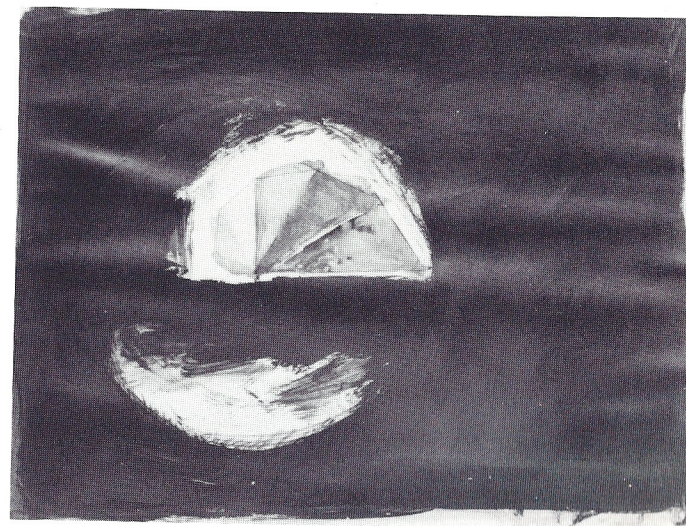


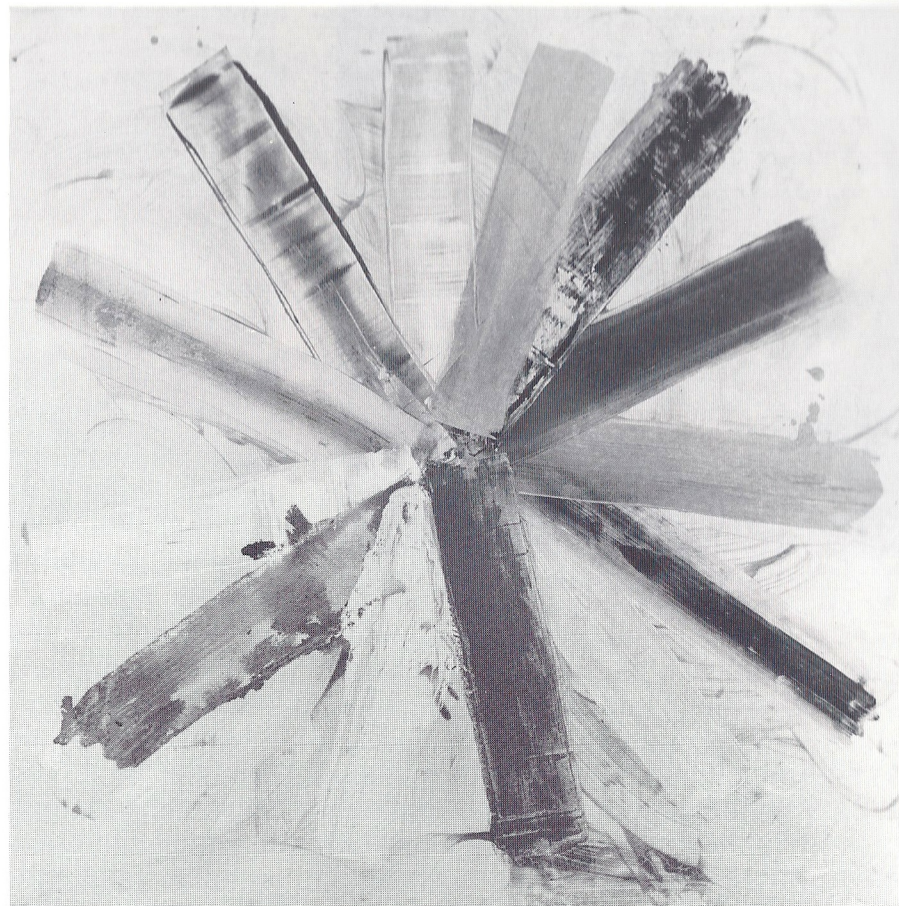
Fig. 3 *Untitled* 5/1970, acrylic on paper, 47 × 57 cm

working in MacKay's studio. Feist claims 'something rubbed off' from being in that studio. It's possible that MacKay's severe, centralized 'bicycle wheel' abstractions, with their transparent, scraped away surfaces, helped Feist to see his own robust later work, but while he was in Regina, he was painting some of his most ethereal canvases to date. His work changed radically in 1975, when he was teaching at Mount Allison University, in Sackville, New Brunswick. The Sackville pictures proved to be the genesis of an image that would preoccupy him for most of the next decade. They were roughly square, each with a 'wheel' of broad, overlapping strokes that all but

one who was left standing. That deeds are the equalizer – the 'sense-maker.' I remember that image hitting me like a slap. It was on the second day of the workshop. I had prepared notes the night before and was brimming over with ideas – lots of ideas – about what was said the first day, taking off from there. But when I got to the gallery and the opportunity to talk came around again I suddenly saw the foolishness of it all, my foolishness. I don't remember that it was anything specific that he said that opened my eyes. I remember it as part of the image he projected. That too-tired-to-horse-around-seen-it-all-and-let's-just-get-on-with-it-look. It had something in common with what I'd been taught (or had learned by default/experience when



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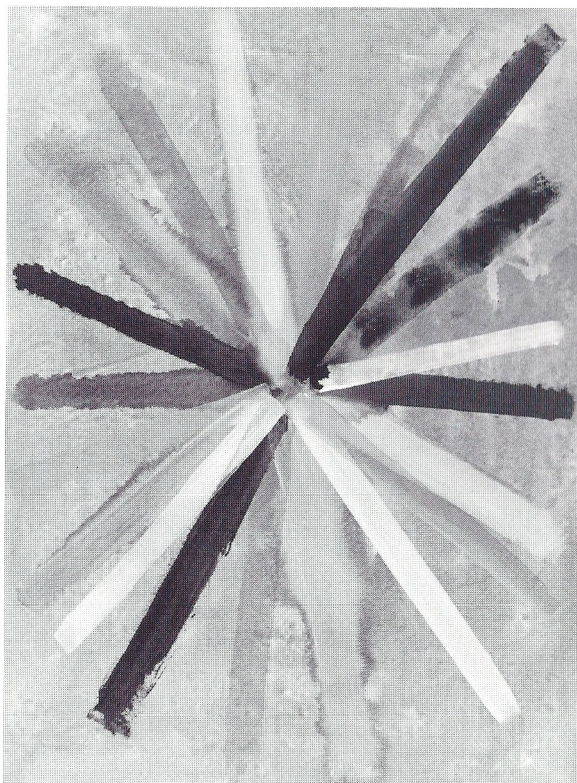
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obliterated the raw canvas of the ground. Their mottled scraping, their earthy red and brown palette and, above all, their rational, symmetrical, readily graspable format seemed the antithesis of what had immediately preceeded them. There was a fleeting, superficial resemblance to MacKay's work (which may have been somewhere at the back of Feist's mind) but it seemed equally clear that Feist had returned to some of his earliest preoccupations, as if having made his pictures as spare and apparently unstructured as possible, he was newly interested in the complexity and ordering that had characterized his work of five years earlier. The brutal immediacy and deliberate rawness of the Sackville 'wheels' allied them with the stained, slashed grid pictures of the early '70s. Like them, too, the wheel's depended on a rather rigid geometry that was in turn warped by the very energy it attempted to harness. The radical, centralized format itself went even further back, to works on paper of 1970, variations on a spiral with 'wedge' and 'umbrella' configurations.

Feist recalls making the first wheels:

It happened almost by accident. I simply wasn't paying attention to what I was doing. I think I was trying to get the paint moved out from the centre where I'd unthinkingly dumped it instead of spreading it around like I normally did to where it would be easier to brush into a ground. It was to be yet another ground for yet another painting in whatever mode I was working in at the time.

It was definitely step one in maybe a ten step process and I must have moved 90% of the paint towards the edges before I woke up to what I had. It was genuine Eureka. Paintings came one after the other like it was just a matter of letting them loose. It was obvious that they wanted to exist and should exist. My job was to get the paint right. I vowed to myself to keep doing them for at least a year. (Now I wonder how young I must have been to think that



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a year was of any meaningful length.) I think I must have recognized how great an enemy I could be to myself – that boredom and wandering were character flaws to be resisted for the pictures' sake.

I remember jotting down a whole long list of reasons why I was excited by these pictures.

□ That they were a superficial opposite to Olitski's edge paintings and therefore, I hoped, closer. I mean Jules had edges and now I had centres. It seemed a start anyway.

□ They tied in to all those spirals I'd done right after art school. I used to draw them and calculate ways to generate them with no idea about how they were or weren't related to art.

□ The layout was so simple and *knowable* that no one could get sidetracked into iconology or iconography. It was dynamic and full of problems (round pegs and square holes). I saw it as a great chance to prove again that it's not the subject that makes the quality. But the knowable thing – I wanted to use that. Like bones or a skeleton. Every body has a skeleton but the fleshing out can lead to anything from a Muhammed Ali to a Woody Allen. (I thought like that.) The viewer could look at the pictures, see the middle, see the spokes, see that it all followed more or less a system, then maybe –having been enticed straight in through the front door – see the painting as a painting and see the magic, if it's there.

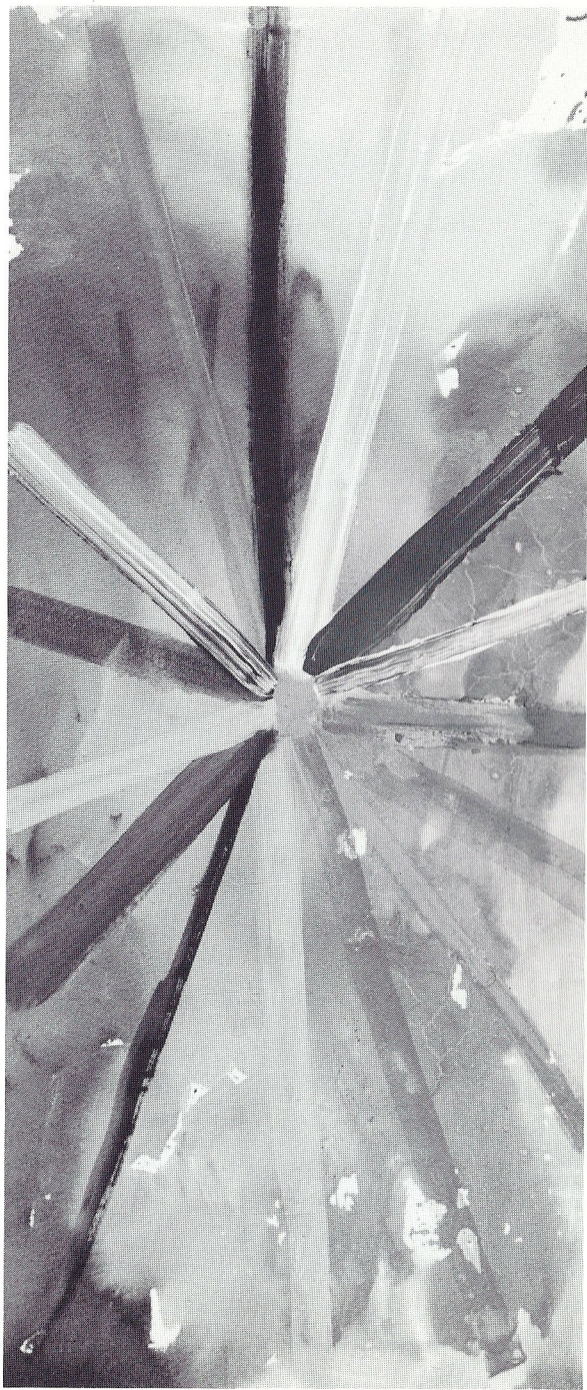
□ I thought of those X's of masking tape they put on new plate glass windows that say 'There is a plane you should know about exactly right here.'

□ All this and I didn't even have to think about them. The fact that it was detrimental if I did think made it all that much more attractive and exciting. Perversity. Not thinking about art beforehand may yield the best thoughts afterwards.

At the end of 1975, Feist exhibited these seminal pic-

tures at Hart House, University of Toronto, in what was then his strongest show to date. And that, for the time being, was that, as far as the centralized radial image was concerned, despite his initial enthusiasm. Good as these paintings were, Feist was apparently not sure how to deal with them. (It may have been their very goodness that scared him.) Whatever the reason, a few months after the show, he sidestepped the implications of the rough, earth-coloured wheels and started a series of 'wedge' pictures with asymmetrical layouts and elegant pastel hues. Their triangular compositions were like slices of the radial wheel image – or sections of the old slashed grid, for that matter – but the sense of confrontation, the potent all-at-onceness of the wheels was missing. In its place was a cool restraint reminiscent, like the pale colours, of the all but invisible Regina pictures. It was, however, becoming increasingly clear to Feist that this was not the direction that he wished to explore. He wanted more colour and more substance. As if he needed to rationalize his format in order to give greater play to chroma, his next paintings were once again symmetrical, a group of multi-colour 'fans.'

Feist didn't return wholeheartedly to the wheel image until 1978, when he has living in New York on a Canada Council grant. He continued to make other kinds of pictures at the same time (which have proved unmemorable) but he was beginning to think that the Sackville format of 1975 answered all of his needs. It was neutral and immediately comprehensible; it offered many places to put colour; it was variable. It allowed him great scope for expression – or rather, it forced him to exploit the expressive possibilities of paint. He could use all the permutations of the medium that he had explored in the





monochromatic, inflected Regina pictures as well as everything he knew about colour. All of which is a roundabout way of saying that he made better, richer more resonant paintings with his centralized radial image than any other way.

Feist fully engaged with the spoke pictures after he moved to Toronto, where he still lives, in 1979; the image is still capable of generating startling paintings for him. Yet the evolution of his radial pictures has not been a detached systematic working out of permutations. Acknowledging the centre has always been simply a way of starting a picture, not a formula. The best of the spoke paintings seem fresh, newly discovered, improvised. They are, if anything, deceptively casual. Feist makes it look easy. Nonetheless, the relative rigidity of the underlying structure is important. Composition is more or less given, as it was in the grid pictures; so is the repetitive gesture of the radiating spokes. The symmetrical layout ensures that attention is equally distributed over the entire surface, but the deadpan image generated by marking the centre of the canvas and reiterating that centrality makes nuances of edge and interval, shifts of density, and progressions of colour enormously significant. Feist maintains that these self-imposed restraints are essential to him and he traces the need back to student days. A book whose author he no longer remembers, ready early on, still stays with him:

It had a premise somewhere in it that perhaps nothing is more debilitating than total freedom, that without resistance and friction we just spin our wheels.

I knew I needed structure, a 'nail to hang my hat' that would give me a home base to work from so I could go winging off into the yonder after whatever it was I was after as an artist.

The most elemental relationship of Feist's spoke format – that between the centralized 'image' and the shape of its support – establishes the friction and resistance he thrives on. Givens provoke variations; the canvas can be square, rectangular, generous or attenuated; spokes can be densely packed or distributed with parsimony, rhythmically spaced or eccentrically clustered, perfectly symmetrical or warped to fill out the corners. They can be broad or narrow, precisely defined or elusively bled, thickly piled or transparently stained. Each one can have its own colour (as well as its own density or degree of definition) or it can be subservient to a dominant monochrome. And so on. Yet this catalogue does nothing to convey the impact of Feist's best paintings and it does nothing to describe the range of moods and emotional temperatures he can evoke.

Like his pictures of the early '70s, Feist's paintings since 1978 are testimonials to his attempt to tread the boundary between rational geometry and unchanneled instinct, even unchanneled emotion. On its simplest level, I suppose it has to do with the tensions he sets up between 'cool,' symmetrical, geometric layout and 'hot,' energetic, irregular fracture, but the paintings are so rich in associations and so full of complex confrontations that this simple opposition of formality and informality doesn't explain very much. It certainly doesn't tell you how good the pictures are and it doesn't account for the heightened effect of unity that has characterized his paintings of the past two or three years, their illusion of having happened almost instantaneously and wholly.

After several years of making essentially narrow spoke pictures (the first of the Toronto wheels) Feist seemed to become dissatisfied with the figure-ground nature of his format. He'd been somewhat troubled by this ever since he thinned down the





broad, overlapping scrapes of the first wheel pictures, but in 1979 and '80, he appeared to rely on colour to hold the painting together. In the early '80s, however, he began to paint grounds that were gesturally – and often chromatically – as varied as the spokes themselves. There was a risk of the ground becoming so agitated that it would compete with the dominant central spin, but in the most successful paintings of this type, the spokes no longer seemed imposed on the ground. Instead, they were visually subsumed by their surroundings. In slightly later pictures of this kind, Feist frequently poured the 'ground' over the spokes, literally homogenizing the image, so the notion is not merely metaphorical. (Spokes in these paintings could be incised or re-excavated or made their presence felt through relatively transparent areas.) These canvases of the early '80s are less about the relationship of a clear configuration to a background than they are about an all-over inflected surface whose inflections may or may not take the form of spokes.

Most recently, Feist's once predominantly linear spokes have turned into melting pools of translucent colour that seem to have arrived at their (barely) centralized orientation both spontaneously and momentarily. Morris Louis' *Unfurleds* and *Veils* and, perhaps, his less-known *Florals* inform these paintings, but they are also logical expansions of the increasingly 'painterly' qualities of Feist's earlier work. In any case it is possible to make many analogies between the art of painters Feist admires and his recent pictures. He calls up innumerable associations, of both art and non-art, not by making his paintings remind us of other things in simple ways, but by dissecting and reconstructing experience in terms of his materials. Golden brown tonalities and luminous darks can evoke autumn light or an homage to Rembrandt; flows of brilliant colour and silvery greys

can suggest both Feist's delight in Matisse or in the Midi landscape that surrounded Matisse in his last years. I don't propose to provide a prescription for associations, but it is clear that Feist's most powerful paintings are reverberant objects, charged with – among other things – his strongest opinions about the art of the past. This is not 'appropriation' as it is fashionably understood. Feist does not, as many of his contemporaries do, treat the history of art as a grab bag from which to seize whatever he can, at random. Rather, he sees himself as part of a long, continuing tradition.

It was a Goya at the National Gallery in Washington that had truly opened my eyes in the first place, and opened them to Matisse especially. Who knows how? I had taken more than the usual number of art history courses at school (I'd found a miraculous loophole in the curriculum at Illinois that let me take art history courses to satisfy various requirements, even 'natural science' – they had to rewrite the school's catalogue and almost didn't let me graduate because of it) and fell back into the books almost immediately when faced with the total isolation of my first studio in Calgary in 1968. I had all the magazines coming, too, but they were more confusing than anything. Everybody seemed to want to reinvent the wheel and ignore the traditions up to himself. It all seemed to be built on iconoclasm, ego, bluff, and willing, even proud-of-it ignorance. I saw it as vainglorious and impudent and coming out of the hippie 'we're where it's at' conformity. It was liberating to realize that back then, even though I didn't know how much a part of it I was – or it of me.

I saw all the 'new' criteria *Artforum* was trying to dream up for ART to be self-defeating in the least and exactly wrong-headed. If the tradition of painting had lasted from the caves all the way to Pollock, as Kozloff and Pincus-Witten et al seemed to allow, then I figured it had more resilience than they knew and wasn't about to be killed off





by some magazine. It seemed unlikely that painting, all of a sudden, in our time, decided to run out of gas. Logically it seemed there was more for an artist to learn from a long tradition spanning centuries than from any of Kozloff's series of articles, no matter how interesting.

Most recently, Feist has even begun to mine his own past (in terms of the *look* of his pictures – I am assuming that he has always done so in terms of the content of his art). Lately he has returned to a kind of zig-zag 'slash' configuration that may have been triggered by looking again at his earlier work, during the preparation of this exhibition. It may simply have been an inevitable result of off-setting the centralized format: what happens if I begin the picture by *not* marking the centre of the field? The zig-zag survives as a memory, a hint of geometric 'bones' that serves to stiffen, support, and bridle Feist's economical floods of colour. His newest paintings are among the most pared down of recent years and among the most delicately balanced, like distillations of the already distilled images that preceeded them. And, like those first grid pictures of 1971, they seem a little crude at an initial viewing.

In the years that I have been visiting Feist's studio regularly, this time-lag assertion of quality has been a constant. (The baby in the highchair in Calgary is now a poised young man of sixteen with a charming toddler of a half-sister; two cats, as diametrically unlike one another as any of Feist's spokes, have replaced the dog.) Feist's pictures have always declared themselves slowly. They are complex and evocative, but they are hard paintings to 'get,' in part because they seem so artless. They can appear, at their best, effortless, a little clumsy, even simple, and their true intelligence is less obviously apparent. They reveal their intricacies only over time. Their eccentric drawing, unexpected colour harmonies,

and varied surfaces demand a great deal of the viewer, but they reward that attention.

There are no rules, no guidelines, and no proofs that help us to make critical distinctions. Only experience and effort allow us to sort out our aesthetic responses. It is far easier to follow fashion instead of looking for ourselves, but if we do look for ourselves, we may be challenged and excited in unexpected ways. Harold Feist is not a fashionable painter. He is a thoroughly serious practitioner of an idiom that followers of trend will declare moribund, but his work plainly demonstrates that far from being exhausted, abstraction is still fertile ground. Feist believes in the expressive possibilities of his medium, the eloquence of touch, the potency of the raw materials of painting. The quality of his work speaks for itself.

Karen Wilkin
New York
September 1987

All quotations from Harold Feist from correspondence with the author, 1972-1987.



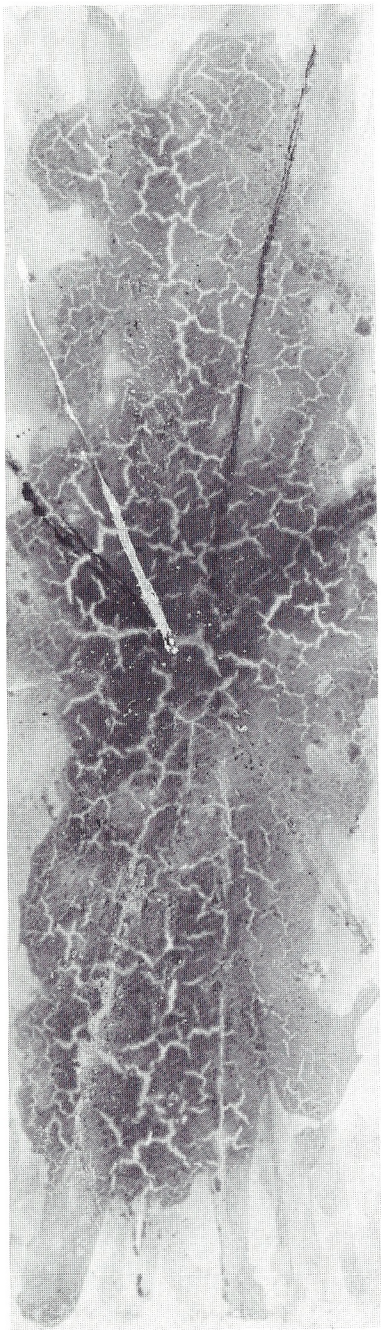


WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

All works are acrylic on canvas. Measurements are in centimetres, height by width.

- 1 *Untitled* 1975
145.5 × 145.5
Professor Virgil Hammock and Dr Janet Hammock, Sackville, N.B.
- 2 *Distant Contact* 1978 (diptych) 167 × 170 each painting
Courtesy Gallery One, Toronto
- 3 *Orange Around* 1978
170 × 170
Courtesy Galerie Elca London, Montreal.
- 4 *Black Quadrant* 1979
157.5 × 165.1
Westburne Collection
- 5 *Last Bouquet* 1979
158 × 169.5
Collection of the Artist
- 6 *4459* 1980
164 × 162.5
Alcan Aluminum Ltd.
- 7 *Good Suit* 1980
123.5 × 115
Private Collection
- 8 *Ex Post Facto Fan* 1980
192.5 × 85.5
Memorial University Art Gallery
- 9 *Wraparound* 1980
143.5 × 142.5
Ronald and Sandra Steiner
- 10 *Never Say* 1980
170 × 109
Private Collection
- 11 *Touch and Go* 1980
200 × 138.5
Mr and Mrs Harold Konopny
Courtesy of Gallery One
- 12 *Whistling Fugue* 1981
142.5 × 88
Mr and Mrs Harold Konopny
Courtesy of Gallery One
- 13 *After Rain* 1981
143 × 193
Private Collection
- 14 *Shoulder Touch* 1982
143.5 × 184.5
Private Collection
- 15 *Slow to Anger* 1983
224 × 106
Sharon and Morris Fischstein
Courtesy of Gallery One
- 16 *Two Sighs* 1983
51.5 × 109.3
Joan and Harold Somer
- 17 *Sotto Voce* 1983
244.9 × 27
The Edmonton Art Gallery
Purchased in 1983 with funds donated by P.L.C. Construction and matched with funds from the Canada Council Art Bank
- 18 *Handel and Jules* 1984
75 × 214
Courtesy of Gallery One
- 19 *First Game* 1984
153 × 148
Purchase and Placement Collection
University of Alberta, Edmonton
- 20 *High Ring* 1984
147 × 213
Beaverbrook Art Gallery
Purchased with matching funds from the Canada Council Art Bank Special Purchase Assistance Programme and Friends of the Beaverbrook Art Gallery
- 21 *Soft Chartres* 1984
145.6 × 249
Private Collection
- 22 *Two Thirds* 1984
147.5 × 213
Private Collection
- 23 *Vi's Rama* 1984
146 × 162
Private Collection
- 24 *Block Move* 1985
86.3 × 124.5
Courtesy Galerie Elca London, Montreal
- 25 *Chant* 1986
87.5 × 176
Courtesy Gallery One, Toronto
- 26 *Basso* 1987
152 × 175.5
Westburne Collection
- 27 *Hot Blood* 1987
244 × 175
Private Collection
- 28 *Incross* 1987
137.5 × 175.5
Collection of the Artist





17

BIOGRAPHY

1945

Born January 23, in San Angelo, Texas. Father, E.F. Feist, from Collinsville, Illinois, was a career officer in the Air Force, so the family moved from base to base every two years, on average. Mother, Ruth F. Cronan, from St. Louis, painted and wrote poetry. The Cronan family house in St. Louis was home between moves.

1947

Brother Robert is born September 1.

1952

Family moves to Terceira, Azores, where father serves with Air/Sea Rescue Squadron.

1954-57

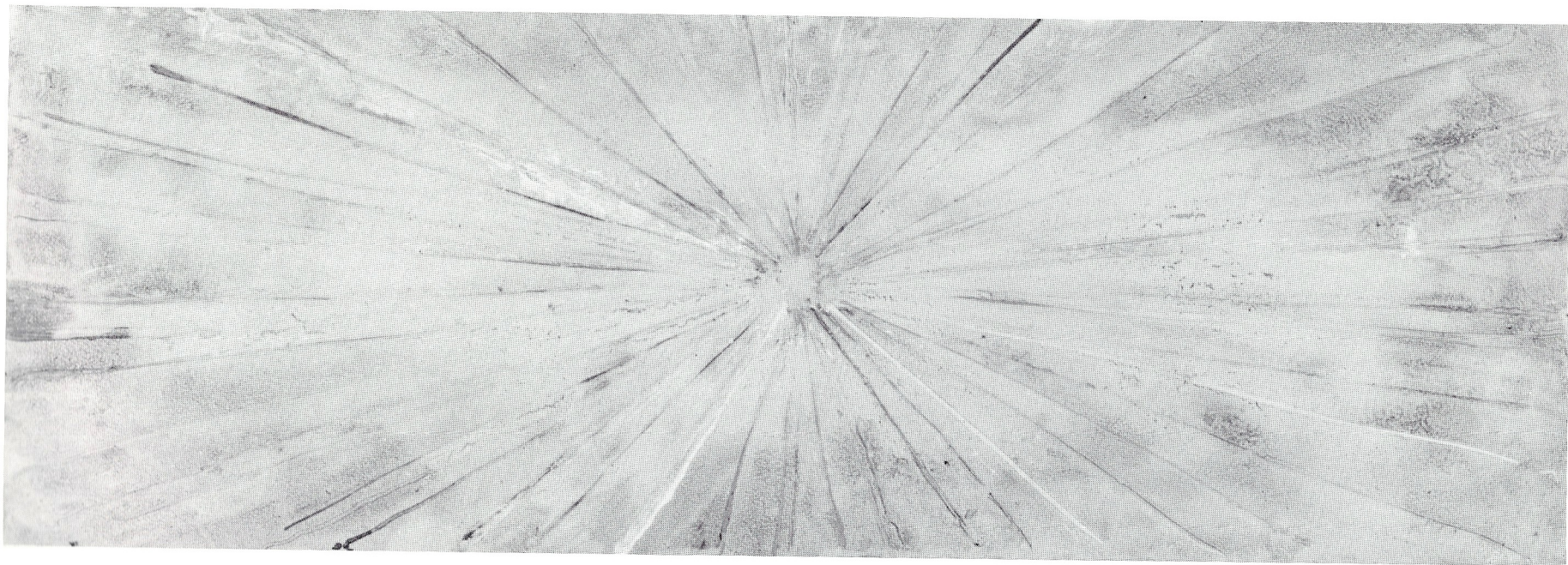
Family returns to Texas. Parents divorce. The boys move with their mother to grandparents' house in St. Louis., then to Collinsville in 1957.

1963

Enrolls in Fine Arts at the University of Illinois, intending to study architecture as a combination of academic strength in mathematics and interest in art. All students – advertising art, painting, sculpture and architecture – take the same core art courses in the first year, to gain some acquaintance with each area. Enrolls in the painting program (instead of architecture) after hearing in a lecture that painting was not a career to be recommended, since only 'those with something to say' get anywhere. Diebenkorn and de Kooning are regarded as major influences within the program.

1965

Marries Suzanne Benoit of Collinsville.





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1966

Exhibits at 'Central Illinois Open Exhibition,' Champaign, Illinois and wins award.

1967

Receives Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Illinois. Enrolls as a graduate student at the Hoffberger School of Painting, Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore. Clyfford Still, Grace Hartigan, Sal Scarpitta are artists associated with the school (along with Arthur Miller and Alistair Cooke). Fairfield Porter, Philip Pealstein and Alex Katz are visiting critics. Morris Louis was an alumnus. Feist visits museums in New York, Washington and Philadelphia frequently and is deeply impressed by the Baltimore Museum's Cone Collection, with its emphasis on Matisse. Begins to be concerned with colour 'as it was everywhere in the air' in Baltimore, stimulated by the memory of Louis and Kenneth Noland, who had painted, along with Louis, only thirty miles away in Washington.

Teaches survey courses in Renaissance to Contemporary art history as a graduate assistant. Meets Helen Frankenthaler. Marriage ends.

1968

Included in 'Maryland Regional Exhibition,' Baltimore Museum of Art.

During the summer, after completing first year of graduate study, helps a friend move to Calgary to take a position at the Alberta College of Art. During Feist's visit a second position becomes available and is offered. The Maryland Institute agrees to regard this an out-of-residence year, so Feist joins the faculty of the Alberta College of Art, where he continues to teach studio courses and art history until 1974. Robert Scott and Terry Keller are among his students. Bruce O'Neil is a fellow teacher.

1969

Exhibits in 'Environment '69,' Jubilee Auditorium, Calgary.

Receives Master of Fine Arts degree from the Maryland Institute after submitting year's work to jury.

Marries Verlyn Achen.

1970

Solo exhibition, Glenbow Museum, Calgary. Included in 'All-Alberta Exhibition,' Edmonton Art Gallery and a four-man show at the Allied Arts Centre, Calgary.

1971

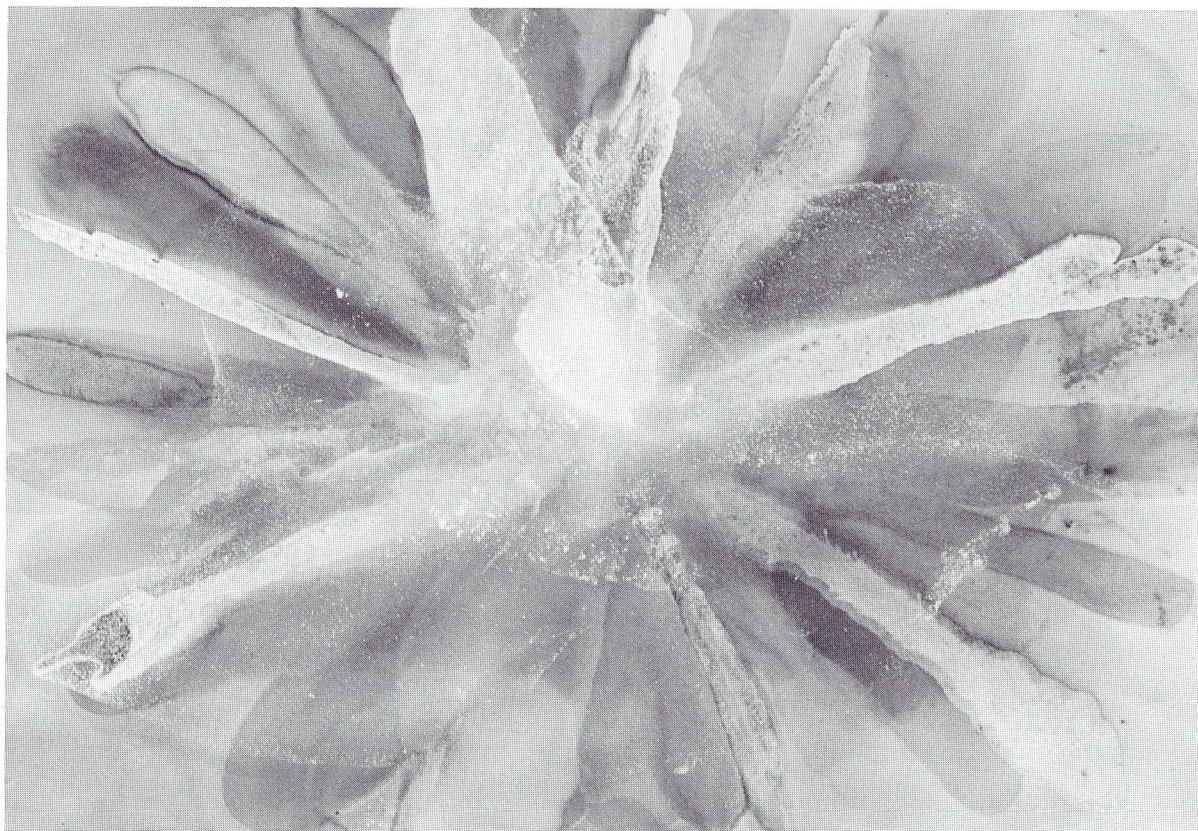
Solo exhibition, A.C.A. Gallery, Calgary. Included in '6th Burnaby Print Show' Burnaby Art Gallery, B.C.; 'West '71' Edmonton Art Gallery and Canadian tour (award); 'Canadian Print and Drawing Show' Canadian Society of Graphic Arts, Toronto; 'Eleventh Calgary Graphics Exhibition' A.C.A. Gallery, Calgary; 'Environment '71' Jubilee Auditorium, Calgary. Meets Karen Wilkin and Douglas Haynes.

Son Benjamin is born September 12.

1972

Solo exhibition, A.C.A. Gallery, Calgary. Included in 'Survey of Canadian Art Now' Burnaby Art Gallery, B.C.; 'Twelfth Calgary Graphics Exhibiton' A.C.A. Gallery, Calgary. Meets Terry Fenton. Makes a long automobile trip through the US and Canada, visiting as many museums and galleries as possible. Is struck by a number of Lawrence Poons' works seen individually in various museums. At first is irritated and unreceptive, but is gradually convinced after seeing *Ruffles Queeg-Queeg* in 'Masters of the '60s' a touring exhibition organized by the Edmonton Art Gallery, at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Takes part in workshop led by Stephen Greene at the Edmonton Art Gallery. Ann Clarke is also a participant.



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1973

Represented by Espace 5 Gallery in Montreal.

Takes part in workshop led by Michael Steiner at the Edmonton Art Gallery. Alan Reynolds is also a participant.

Visits New York and meets, through Steiner, Poons and Dan Christensen. Makes regular visits to New York after this time. Meets Clement Greenberg and Sidney Tillim when they visit Edmonton.

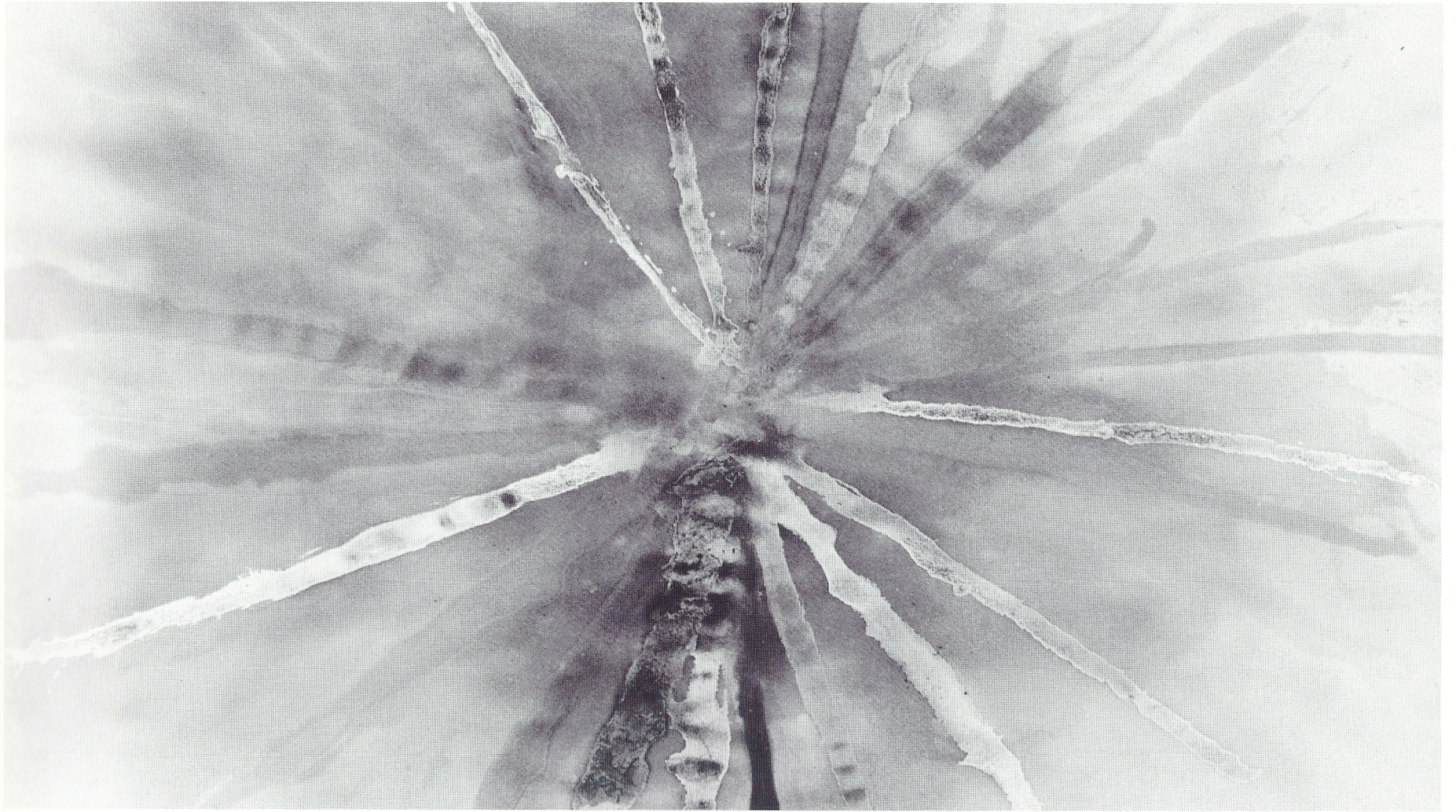
Included in 'Art Bank Exhibition' Canadian Cultural Centre, Paris; a group show at the Galerie de l'Art, Paris; 'Alberta '73' Edmonton Art Gallery (award); 'Elliott, Feist and Sen' the Pyrch Building, Edmonton; 'Elliott and Feist: Paintings on Paper' Peter Whyte Gallery, Banff, Alberta.

1974

Resigns from full-time position at the Alberta College of Art. Moves to Regina, Saskatchewan to take a part-time appointment to relieve Art Mackay. Paints in Mackay's studio on the campus of the University of Regina. Meets Robert Christie, Douglas Bentham, D.T. Chester.

Included in 'The Canadian Canvas' organized by a group of Canadian curators for Time Canada, which toured major Canadian museums from 1974 through 1976. The Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, purchases a major work from this show. 'Prairies '74' Edmonton Art Gallery; 'Western Canadian Painting' Saidye Bronfman Centre, Montreal; group exhibition at Espace 5 Gallery, Montreal; 'Canada x Ten' Edmonton Art Gallery and tour, including the Art Gallery of Ontario. Travels to Toronto for this exhibition and meets David Bolduc and Dan Solomon whose paintings are also in the exhibit.

Solo exhibition, Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, University of Regina.





1975

Solo exhibition, University of Saskatchewan Gallery, Saskatoon.

Moves to Sackville, New Brunswick to teach at Mount Allison University. Begins first series of radiating 'spoke' paintings, exhibited at the end of the year in a solo show at Hart House, University of Toronto.

Included in 'Painting in the West: Emma Lake and After' National Gallery of Canada touring exhibition; 'Major Saskatchewan Artists' Mendal Art Gallery, Saskatoon (toured); 'Abstract Art on Paper' Edmonton Art Gallery (toured); 'Western Canadian Painting' Edmonton Art Gallery.

1976

Daughter Leslie is born February 13.

Guest artist at Emma Lake Artists Workshop. Meets André Fauteux, Otto Rogers, Dorothy Knowles, William Pehudoff, Ernest Lindner. Later visits Toronto and meets Carol Sutton.

Espace 5 Gallery closes. Represented by Waddington Galleries, Montreal and Toronto.

Separates from wife, who returns to Regina with the children.

1977

Included in group exhibitions at Waddington Galleries in Montreal and Toronto; 'Abstract Art Now' Edmonton Art Gallery.

1978

Included in 'Certain Traditions: Recent British and Canadian Art' Edmonton Art Gallery and the British Council (toured Canada and Great Britain).

Receives Canada Council grant. Moves to New York where he remains until January 1979. Paints second group of radial paintings.

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1979

Moves to Toronto with '800 pounds of rolled up canvases.' Takes studio in former candy factory. Meets Joseph Drapell. Included in group exhibition '25 Canadians,' Birmingham Arts Festival, Alabama. Teaches part-time at University of Guelph and Sheridan College during academic year and summer session at University of Alberta.

1980

Studio visit by Clement Greenberg, Kenworth Moffett, then curator of Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Aaron Milrad, Toronto lawyer and collector. Moffett chooses two of the radial pictures painted in New York for 'The New Generation: A Curator's Choice' André Emmerich Gallery, New York. Changes representation to Gallery One, Toronto; moves studio to former sock factory. Included in group exhibition at Gallery One; solo show at Marcus-Krakow Gallery, Boston.

1981

Douglas Haynes visits Toronto. He and Feist paint together side by side and even try to paint each other's paintings. Both are surprised to find it impossible. They drive to Washington and New York, 'look at a lot of art together and compare reactions'; en route, they visit Clement Greenberg in Norwich, New York and Darryl Hughto and Susan Roth in Syracuse. Feist later travels to Boston for opening of Poons' retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts and meets many Boston artists. Meets Jules Olitski and Anthony Caro, when they visit Toronto. Begins correspondence with Olitski. Also meets Stanley Boxer and Joyce Weinstein and, at an artists' symposium in Toronto, Katja Jacobs, Peter Hide, Leopold Plotek, among others.

Solo exhibitions, Gallery One, Toronto; Martin Gerard Gallery, Edmonton.

1982

Moves home and studio, in Toronto. Solo exhibitions, Gallery One, Toronto; Virginia Christopher Gallery, Calgary; Martin Gerard Gallery, Edmonton. Included in 'Selections from the Westburne Collection' Edmonton Art Gallery (Canadian tour). Meets Margo Welch, then curator of Shell Collection, at opening of his exhibition at Virginia Christopher Gallery. Travels to Bermuda to conduct workshop for Bermuda Society of Artists.

1983

Solo exhibitions, Gallery One, Toronto; Gallery Elca London, Montreal.

1984

Solo exhibition, Buschlen/Mowatt Fine Art, Vancouver. Included in 'The Hines Collection' University Place, Boston (collection selected by Kenworth Moffett); 'Fifteen Canadians from the Art Bank Collection' National Arts Centre, Ottawa. Travels in France. Impressed by dependence of Cézanne and Matisse on specifics of South of France – landscape, colour, light, architecture – despite inventiveness and originality of both artists.

1985

Marries Margo Welch. Son Benjamin moves to Toronto to live with his father.

Mother dies.

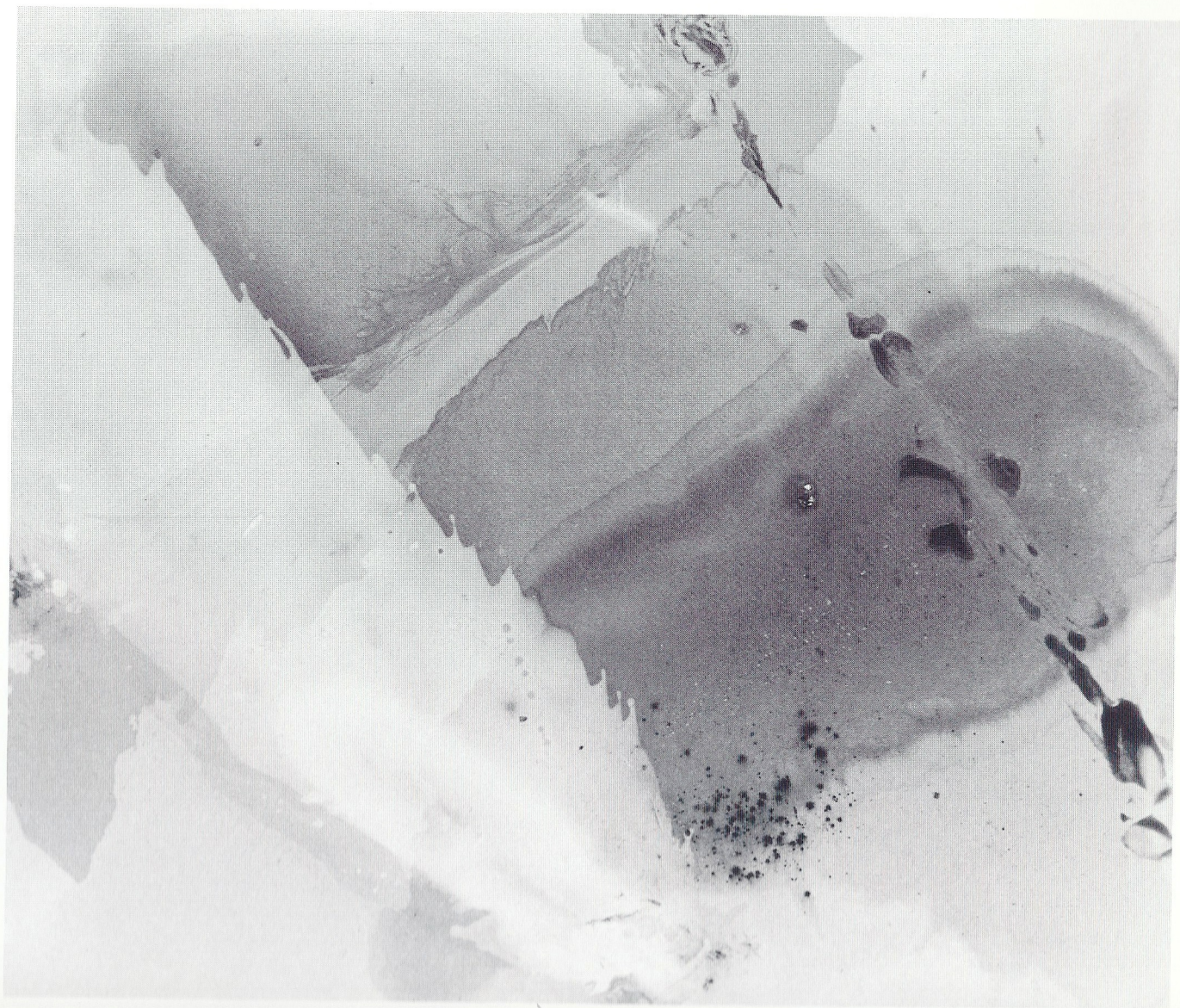
Solo exhibition, Gallery One, Toronto. Included in 'Abstraction x Four' Canada House, London (European tour). Joseph Drapell, Douglas Haynes and Leopold Plotek are also included.

1986

Daughter Emily is born January 10. Solo exhibition, Gallery One, Toronto. Included in 'Toronto Three,' Eva Cohon Gallery, Highland Park, Illinois; Joseph Drapell and Katja Jacobs are also included. Builds new studio.

1987

Solo exhibition, Gallery One, Toronto.





SELECTED COLLECTIONS

- Albert Art Foundation, Edmonton,
Alberta
- Alberta College of Art, Calgary, Alberta
- Alcan, Montreal, Quebec
- Art Gallery of Hamilton, Ontario
- Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton,
New Brunswick
- Canada Council Art Bank, Ottawa,
Ontario
- Canadian Commercial Bank, Calgary,
Alberta
- Counsel Trust, Toronto, Ontario
- Edmonton Art Gallery, Alberta
- Edmonton Law Courts Building, Alberta
- Esso Resources, Calgary, Alberta
- First Marathon Securities, Toronto,
Ontario
- Goldfarb Consultants, Toronto, Ontario
- Goodman and Goodman, Toronto,
Ontario
- Guaranty Trust, Toronto, Ontario
- Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, Ontario
- S.S. Kresge Foundation, Detroit,
Michigan
- Mathers Oil and Gas, Austin, Texas
- Memorial University of Newfoundland
Art Gallery, St. John's, Newfoundland
- Mendel Art Gallery, Saskatoon,
Saskatchewan
- Mercantile Bank of Cathay, Toronto,
Ontario
- Milrad and Agnew, Toronto, Ontario
- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,
Massachusetts
- New Brunswick Art Foundation,
Fredericton, New Brunswick
- Owens Art Gallery, Sackville, New
Brunswick
- Roberts and Drabinsky, Toronto, Ontario
- Rothman's of Pall Mall, Toronto, Ontario
- Rubinovitch, Newton, Back and Strom,
Toronto, Ontario
- Saffer Advertising, Toronto, Ontario
- Security Pacific Bank of Canada,
Toronto, Ontario
- Security Trust, Toronto, Ontario
- Shell Canada, Calgary, Alberta
- Trans-Mountain Pipeline, Edmonton,
Alberta
- University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta
- University of Calgary, Alberta
- George Weston Company, Toronto,
Ontario
- Wolf Advertising, Toronto, Ontario
- Wycombe Investments, Toronto, Ontario

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