



**Dorothy Gillespie**









# Dorothy Gillespie

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## Preface

As an artist, Dorothy Gillespie shapes sculptures. As a caring and committed person, she shapes lives.

Radford University, which now honors Gillespie with this publication, has been the privileged recipient of her generous spirit, both as an artist and as an arts advocate. Her paintings and sculptures enliven our campus, and her dedicated teaching has touched many.

Gillespie began Radford University's now well-established permanent collection by taking an "art van" to her friends' studios to collect pieces from the many prominent artists. As she puts it, "I think permanent collections are important, and I like to start things."

That simple statement reveals much about this dedicated artist. Gillespie shares her considerable energy and expertise without reservation, enriching the world through art and education. Her vision extends beyond the present to the future, enabling her to transcend momentary distractions and reach deeper, to art's basic elements. Rather than following fads, she blazes trails.

Whether or not they realize it, artists through the ages will owe much to Gillespie. She was among those who transformed the art world, opening doors for women artists. She forged her own style, expressing a vision to which people responded, visually and viscerally. She pioneered many collaborative efforts. And through it all, she has consistently been a beacon of the best of humanity, both as an individual and as a person who will leave a valuable artistic legacy.

Douglas Covington, Ph. D.  
President, Radford University

Royal Concerto II, 1992, enamel on  
aluminum, 64" x 80" x 10"





It may seem a simple truism that an artist's work resides in the achievement of material objects as works of art and in an identity, a personality, or a self as represented in the body of the work when viewed over a period of time. Too often, however, we see myopically only that which is immediately in front of us. Dorothy Gillespie's art tests the truism, so clearly defined is the character of her works of art and so committed, too, the character and integrity of the artist through the course of the work. As we are particularly drawn to artists just now who consider the conditions of moral art in this time, not in massive matters of honor, but in the smaller discourses about truth in our history and truth in our time, the example of Gillespie becomes particularly pointed and especially important.

Gillespie once said, "I never teach religion or politics." In this avowal, she is specifically right, but demonstrably wrong as well. For Gillespie's art is a comprehensive vision of the rightness of making art and the justice of ideas surrounding art. Her art and her art world are a moral universe, a place wherein the promptings of feminism in the 1970s have been sustained in both an individual growth and a collective conviction, a civic spirit that is rare in contemporary art.

In the 1970s, Gillespie was asked by the New School for Social Research to create a pioneering course she called "Functioning in the Art World," initially taught in collaboration with the late Alice Baber. Its objective was comprehension of how the art world works, an intellectual and emotional attainment in seeing how the system one is engaged in actually operates. Many art schools and related institutions came to offer corresponding courses, though more often oriented by title and content to the "business of art" or "making it in the art world." Once asked if her course addressed "making it," Gillespie candidly admitted that it did not and suggested that her approach was personal understanding, not some external standard of success. Two decades ago, few saw Gillespie's motives and enterprise as clearly as she. The College Art Association offered a panel in the late 1970s on "making it" in the art world, and Gillespie was rightly indignant. Her ideas had been subverted in a way so deeply pernicious that we are only now coming to grips with the damage we have all done to a world we cherish in allowing ourselves to be part of the business and commercializing mechanisms of a new, more cynical, crasser art scene.

She expanded on her original concept with an annual workshop at the New School and once at the Maryland Institute, College of Art (her alma mater), called "Art and the Community." The workshop was a sublime expression of faith in the world of art as a single community, surpassing boundaries among curators, collectors, artists, art handlers, dealers, advisers, and many more. There were always a few who attended for the purpose of "getting ahead," but Gillespie's vision was steadfastly on getting knowledge, getting to know some people, and getting to know how other people viewed art.

In retrospect, "Art and the Community" was one of the last idealistic convergences in the New York art world. In the demise of her workshop and its almost Bauhaus-theoretical conviction, what has followed is another kind of art world and another prevailing view. As Dan Cameron has rightly argued in the *New Art Examiner* (October 1987), "hype" is an inevitable presence in contemporary art and art culture. That it may or may not vitiate the art and the system that fosters art remains to be seen, but the change in values that places the names of the collectors on all art world lips even before the names of the artists is a significant shift. Contemporary art must – and will, I am certain – finally be seen beyond the current hype and the obsessive interest in the conditions of the marketplace and collecting. Gillespie's "Art and the Community" can be seen only as one of the last great art-world bulwarks against the world of over-assessed values and hyperbole in our current art.

Today, "community" is an awkward word for the world of art, perhaps too redolent of ideas of civic virtue or those senses of community invoked at the end of the Second World War, when Franklin D. Roosevelt exhorted Americans to become "members of the human community" and Robert Maynard Hutchins responded to the threat of the atomic bomb by invoking a "world community" as the only means to survival. In the ebb and flow of the values tangent to art, Gillespie's "Art and the Community" workshops continued into the early 1980s, but a sea-change was already contributing to their cessation. What Gillespie had sought in deep knowledge rather than easy success, in community rather than commercialism, had lost its moment. It has not lost its value.

When Gillespie says that she does not teach religion or politics, she fails to mention that she teaches a kind of



moral politics about art and its conditions. She insists on the possibility of women artists and women's issues; the education of artists as evident in her participation in the Governor's summer program in art at Radford University in Virginia; the dissemination of art and its information to and from New York even as her travels demand unrelenting hard work away from the studio and the hard work of returning immediately to her own art; the possibilities of art for enlightenment, therapy, and joy; and the achievement of dialogue among the parties involved with contemporary art and art history.

Indefatigable as a juror, unceasing as an artist, friend to countless curators, critics, historians, and artists, Gillespie is the embodiment of a civic and moral spirit in contemporary art. She used to respond, when asked about the common ground of the lawyers, curators, artists, dealers, and collectors she would convene for a morning or afternoon, that all of them "love art." She resisted a cynical view of the dealer, a commerce in art-as-investment on the part of the collectors, or superficial fashionability on the part of curators. In defining the art world as a part of art values and of a covenant with art as much as with one another, Gillespie offered a passionate idealism in "Art and the Community." Few who participated can forget their involvement, even more so for the changes in art-world principles and interests since the "Art and Community" series ended. Nonetheless, the conditions of her own art have remained unchanged for several decades, suggesting a like set of values. The integrity of the work, meaning its continuity as a whole and its moral wholeness, has stayed and flourished.

Gillespie likes to describe her process of making her paper pieces, which are formed while wet with water and pigment: "They bloom just a little." So, too, Gillespie's art. At first glance, it might seem that Gillespie's art is of several incompatible styles – abstract painting into sculpture to representational painting – but the styles are reconciled by their idealism and their convincing compatibility in Gillespie's development. Moreover, while Gillespie's art and accomplishments seem to be so much about art-world values, one of their strengths is that she transcends the art world to address others. Working in performance art in the 1960s and early 1970s, Gillespie created circumstances and objects, many of which demonstrated responsiveness to the viewer. For example, an exhibition in 1966 at the Gertrude Stein Gallery was summarized by Gillespie as "the audience was the show." Gillespie played the role of interlocutor and psychologist in basing the exhibition on

devices of the flag and Americana. But her conclusion is overly deferential. Indeed, if Gillespie's show, *U.S.*, is really only the audience, then Jasper Johns's *Flag* is also only the spectator, as any major work of art offering multiple readings might be. Gillespie invited the audience to participate and valued their participation and their responses, but the art was undeniably Gillespie's.

A John Philip Sousa room with Mylar stars invoked all the senses as well as patriotic fervor; a room filled with flag variations required a viewer's participation and a room with two videos and the incessant playing of all-news radio promising up-to-the-minute news played in this third room. Playing with both art as a permanent image and the immediacy of current events (as does Johns's *Flags*), Gillespie opened up post-Vietnam ideas of American community and values. In her claim not to address politics, Gillespie considers that this exhibition was not politically prompted. Her distinction is, however, not correct. There are healing politics, there is a moral statement, and there is a new beginning in what Gillespie offers. That new beginning could serve the spectator to reexamine the meaning of patriotic images as well as the meaning of America, but it was also a watershed work for Gillespie, bringing her performance art to the moral plane where she was likewise confronting issues of the women's movement.

Gillespie's piece for the 1973 group show *Erotic Garden* was likewise a work of moral dimension and of the participation of the spectator. Once again, Gillespie engaged the spectator by soliciting him or her to use knowledge or information of a basic kind to become engaged in the work. While Gillespie claims she "did it instinctively," the *Erotic Garden* work is exemplary of Gillespie's art and convictions. That is, it is based on knowledge and it promotes a new collective knowing. Gillespie offered flowers and vegetables for association with gender with the rather predictable results of women associated with tomatoes and men linked with cucumbers. Sounds were also gender-selected with options of boat whistles, trains, and lions' roars among others, and Gillespie tabulated results from the spectators' participation to see that men preferred thunder and rain whereas women most wanted to hear the surf. Most erotic flowers were selected, a process that anticipates Gillespie's 1980s works that implicitly speak of flowers as organic forms. The spectator could feel that he or she was participating in a game (later on, Gillespie would participate in the *Games* show of 1974-75 and create a witty and challenging women's art crossword puzzle) but

also realize that he or she was sharing with others in that game and in the assignment of values to bodies, flowers, sounds, and the like.

In the probing of information that Joseph Kosuth, Robert Morris, and others made in the 1960s and 1970s, we have a natural kinship to what Gillespie was proposing in the same period. Surely in part because they are the work of a male artist devoted to male-oriented themes, we all know Morris' *I-Box* or *Litanies*, but few have acknowledged Gillespie's *Erotic Garden* as a work in which ideas are generated by the seeming disavowal of aesthetic experience only to return us to the essential role of the aesthetic experience as an idea. Furthermore, Gillespie made her work provisionally and spiritually, not dogmatically and not permanently. Her questioning of the spectator led to a result other than that with which she began. Her scientism did not suppose that she had all the answers; she posed and questioned and allowed the answers to happen.

In this, we have the discrepancies between Gillespie and the male artists. Gillespie did not seek her answers from a high semantics and assumptions of philosophical speculation; she sought her answers in common knowledge, in the joys and sense of the spectators. Her results arise from the everyday and become symbolic as opposed to the results of others that have their origins in assumptions of the symbolic and aesthetic. Picking sensations is an idea we would more frequently associate with a children's museum than with the rarefied aesthetic experience of adults, but in that assumption, Gillespie drives home her strong sense of art and its community.

At the same time, having allowed such participation to define art, her "content" is gender. Once again, Gillespie's work can only begin to be assessed with full clarity decades later. Her concern in the women's movement was with

women's rights and women's art, but not, despite her founding and sustained participation in the Women's Interart Center in New York City, with women alone. Gender or difference, the issue that now animates much of the academic discourse in women's studies according to Catherine Stimpson and others, was the essential question of Gillespie's work. Men perceiving women and vice versa

as well as women seeing themselves and men seeing themselves in reference to objects and sensations is a statement beyond the women's movement in any parochial form.

The women's movement in art is an important factor in Gillespie's work even as she has conscientiously never sought to exploit her work in the movement for personal benefit. Gillespie sees her works on paper as especially indebted to the women's movement not only for the simplistic sense of paper being an available medium to women and resembling or extending the decorum of women allowed to be illustrators or genteel watercolorists (in fact, extending

dainty watercolors to 12-foot rolls of paper), but also for the adventures of putting together shows of women's work as they might travel around the country by quick and efficient cargo services. Her own idea for a 1976 exhibition at New York University, more informal than her other works previously shown there, was rolls and rolls of paper unfurled and creating a colorful and exuberant space at a minimum of cost. As her metal sculptures manifest a defiance of gravity, seeming to curl on unseen trampolines of legerdemain, her paper pieces extend the ideas of a floating sculpture. Gillespie coyly points out that the NYU students welcomed a show on paper that could be taken down on the Friday preceding a planned Saturday night rock concert (and, for Gillespie, easily transported to the Jersey City Art Museum for another show). But Gillespie again invests the circumstances with great value and depreciates the innovation





and imagination of the art. To be sure, she insists on guiding her own artistic career and takes pride in exhibition direction of many of her own shows, but that role in the art community does then have a direct feedback into the character of the art. An artist who passes up a show because he or she would be obligated to move it out in a day in order to accommodate a rock concert misses the opportunity that Gillespie seizes, both for the exhibition and for the creativity of her work.

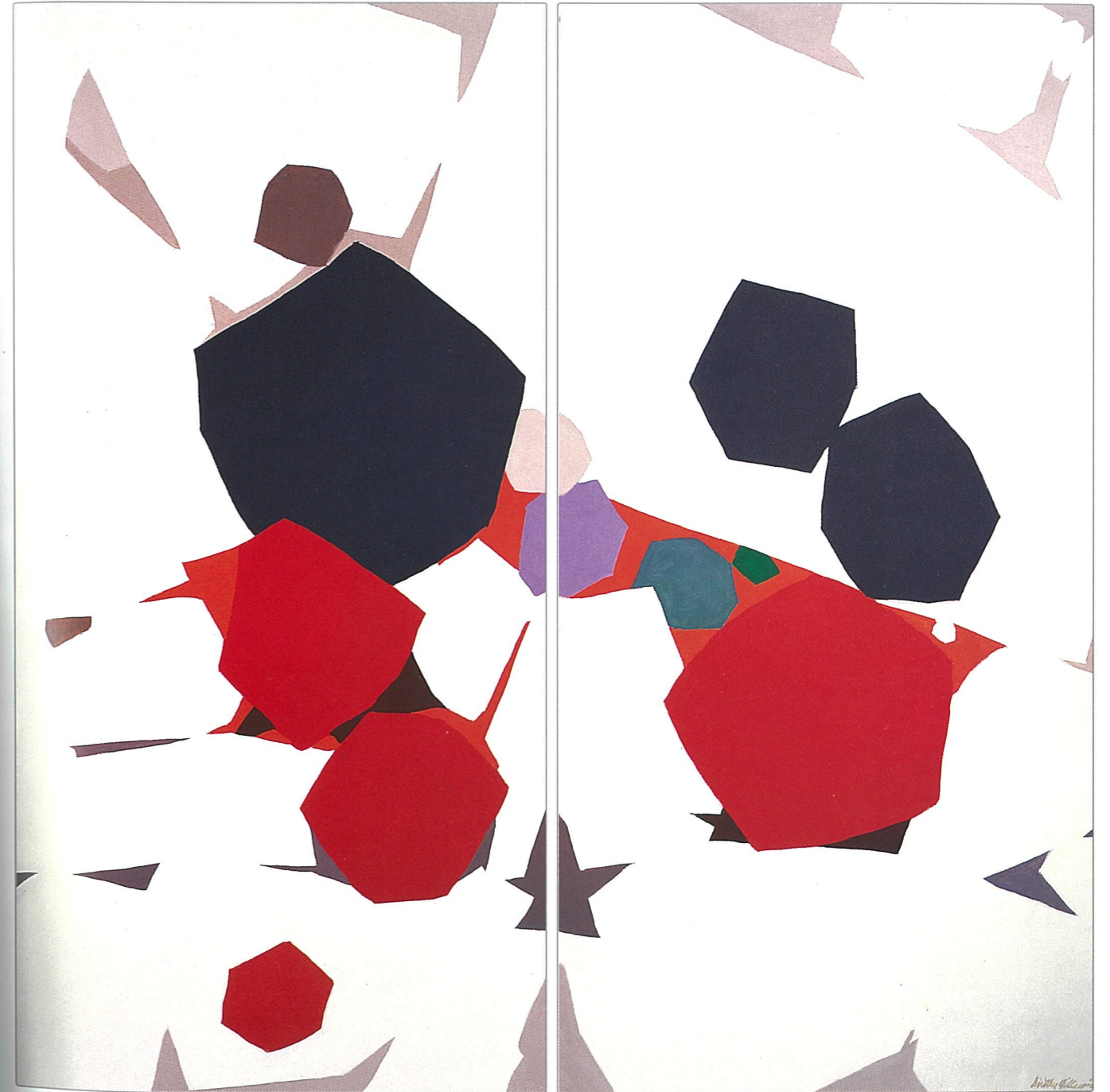
Gillespie cites the formative influence of the Atelier 17 printmaking studio, with its ethos of never quite completing, always experimenting in the matter of making art. Gillespie has therefore spoken of the artist making her or his world anew in the manner of stepping off the edge of the world into a vast uncertainty with every gesture and with every mandate of being an artist. Art as an experiment is also a concept perhaps out of favor over the past few years, when certainty prevailed among an elite group of artists of apparent success. Like the results of her *Erotic Garden*, the factor of the uncertain, the yet-to-be-proved is ever strong in Gillespie's art. It is evident in the unceasing experimentation she brings to the color, materials, and form of the paintings and sculptures of the past two decades that make up the centerpiece of this monograph. Her sculptural color, once hard-edged, has become blurred and softly diffused. Her materials vary at one time from aluminum to paper and her contexts from the decors she has done for the Cleveland Ballet to indoor works, portable pieces, and large-scale outdoor sculptures. Her forms are necessarily uncertain in their flowing penetration into space, tentacles curling outward from a center. One more crimp creates another sculpture; another twist resolves a matter of form so deftly that one realizes her gift for composition.

Has Gillespie, then, moved in this body of work away from involvement of the spectator that is her surrogate for the community, her expression of the engaged art?

No. On the contrary, she has created a body of highly suggestive works that moves across all patterns of resemblance and expectation as if to provide us with the reading of our minds and senses as clearly as her experimental involvement of the viewer in the pieces of the early 1970s. The sculptures are sea creatures, dancers, polychromed and playful spiders, meteorites, chrysanthemums, sculptures, cartoon octopuses plus extra legs, and all that one can think of. They recognize so much that is familiar and suggestive and they transform it into art. Their reading in architectural installations creates a perfect interstice between architecture and animation, creating a free flow and joyous balance between the wall as structure and a climbing, alternatively cascading disassembly of the architecture. As much as ever, Gillespie's art encourages the viewer to see options. Those options may seem to be the wonders of the spectator's imagination, but they exist in the art of Gillespie.

When Gillespie saw the great Picasso retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, she returned to her work empathetic to the pain and anguish of an artist who was constantly experimenting, never satisfied, always questioning. Her own work has those characteristics. To this day she maintains a steadfast and enlightened view of the community of art, and she is an exemplary citizen in that community. At the same time, she is an artist who engages the community of art and the spectator not only in her worldly ventures, but also in an invitation to enter into a world of beautiful objects. Her good citizenship has never contradicted her artistic originality. Her art has never been banal polemics. Indeed, when Gillespie says, "I never teach religion or politics," she is right only in a literal sense. Dorothy Gillespie's work and her life teach all of us a spirit about art and a moral principle about the community of art that are the most important and most precious lessons one can learn.





Return from the Journey, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 60" x 60"





Shadows of the Evening Clouds, 1979, acrylic on canvas, 56" x 59"





Rearrangement, 1981, enamel on aluminum, 87" x 64"



*Conjured Image #2*, 1982, enamel on aluminum, 74" x 25" x 30"

*Conjured Image #1*, 1982, enamel on aluminum, 82" x 33" x 30"

*Conjured Image #3*, 1982, enamel on aluminum, 79" x 30" x 30"



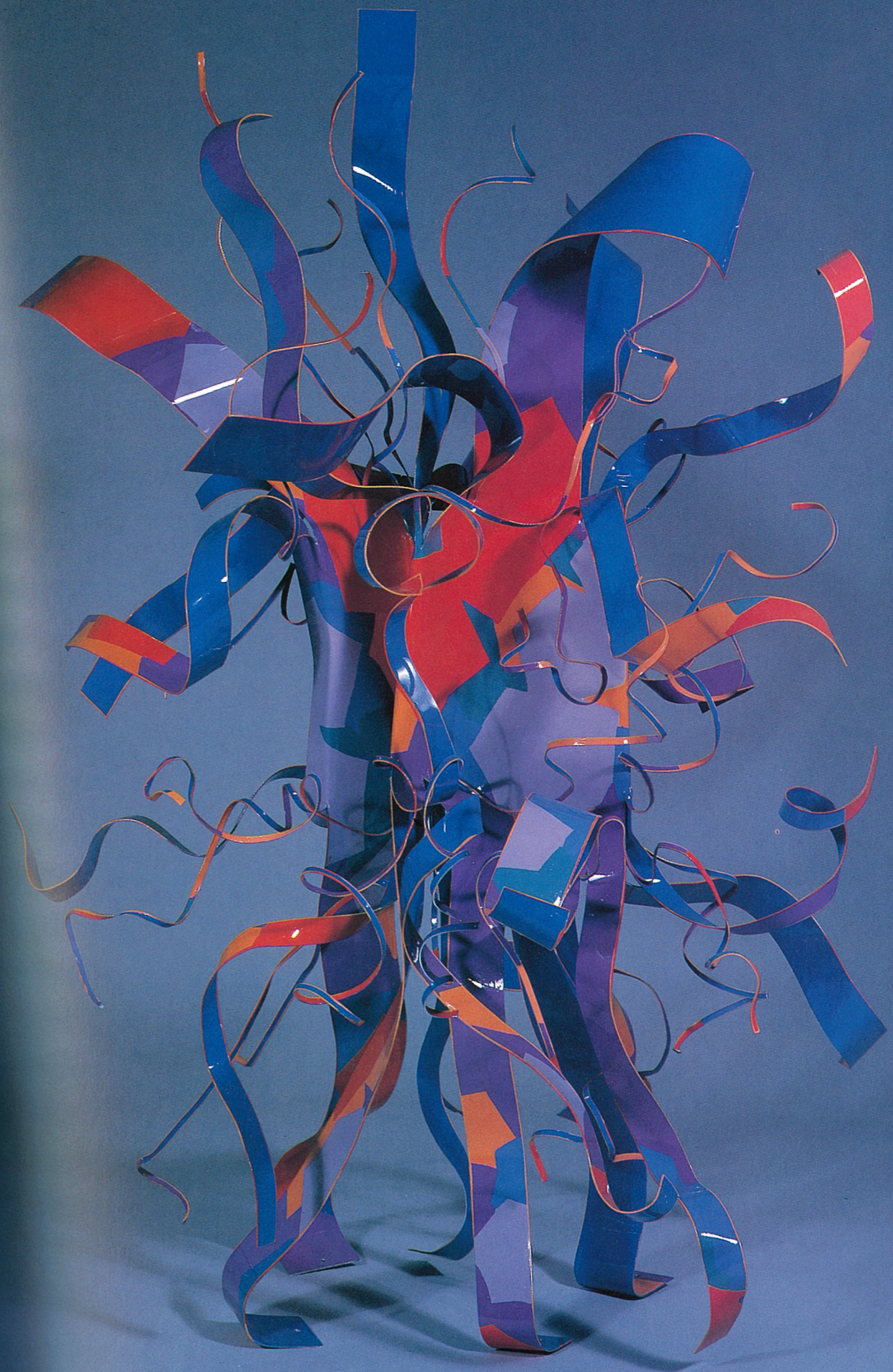


Festival Concerto, 1982, enamel on aluminum, 43" x 46" x 8"





Conjured Image, 1984, enamel on aluminum, 42" x 33" x 30"





Ballet Royale I, 1985, enamel on aluminum, 58" x 16" x 3"

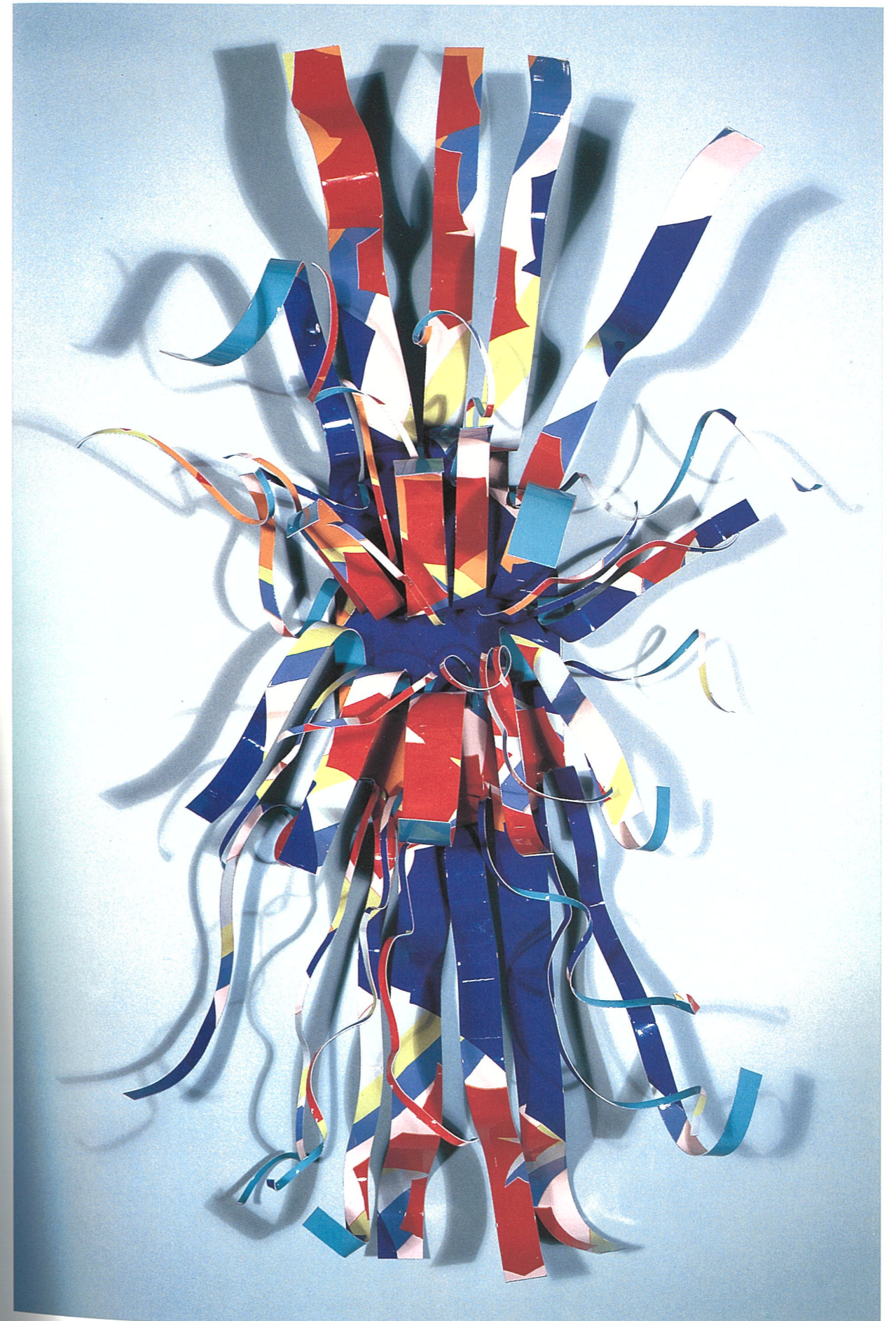




Encounter with a Distant Past, 1985, enamel on aluminum, 59" x 46" x 6"







*Night at the Fair*, 1986, silk screen on aluminum, 36" x 20" x 8"



*Magic Carpet Slides*, 1987, enamel on aluminum, 96" x 48" x 20"



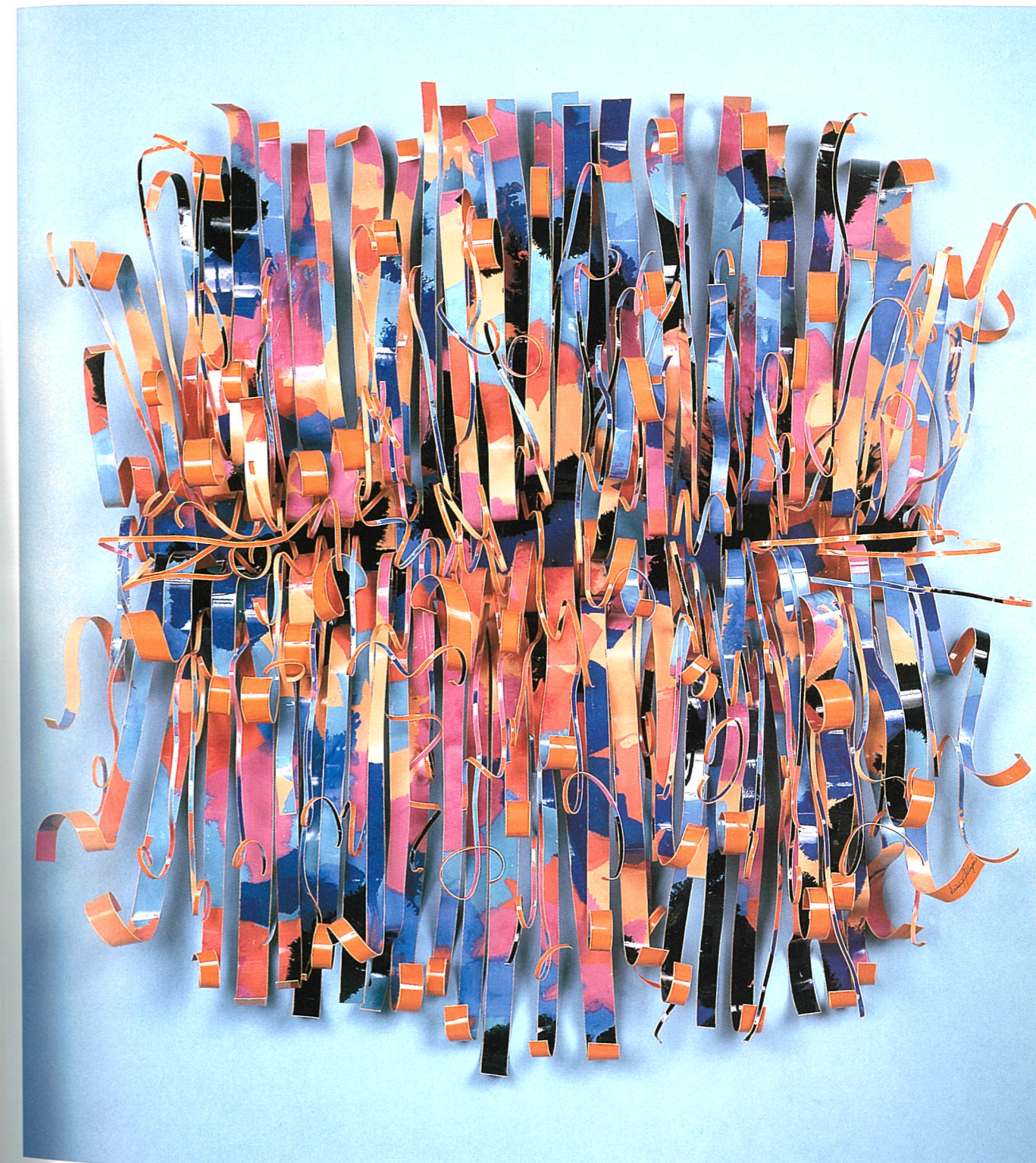


Rain Dance II, 1987, enamel on aluminum, 77½" x 29" x 12"





Rain Dance III, 1987, enamel on aluminum, 44" x 40" x 15"







Sounds of the Rain Dance, 1988, enamel on aluminum, 68" x 58" x 14"



Penelope's Tree, 1987, enamel on aluminum, 9' x 6' x 6'



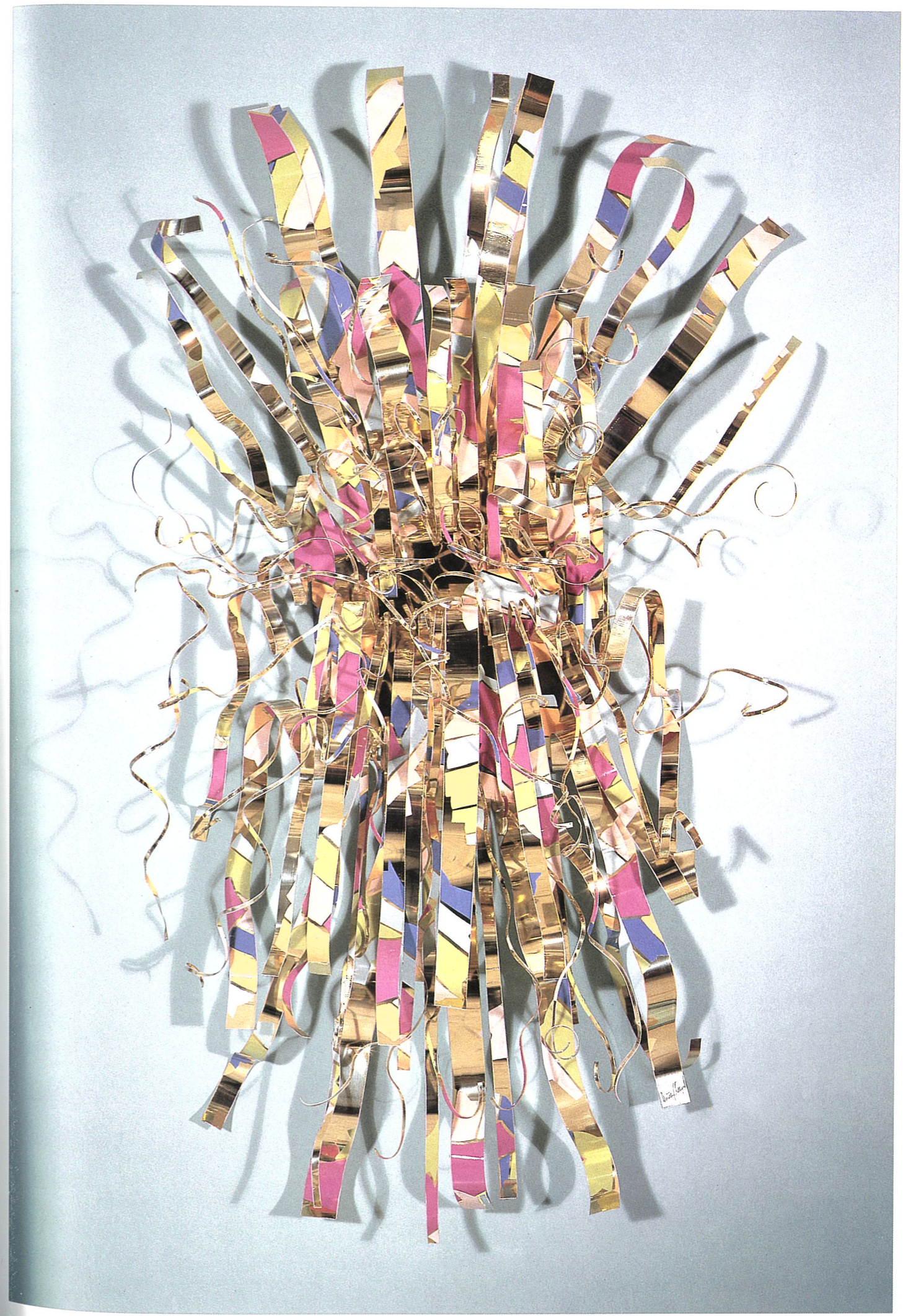




Celestial Journey, 1987, enamel on aluminum, 58" x 40" x 15"

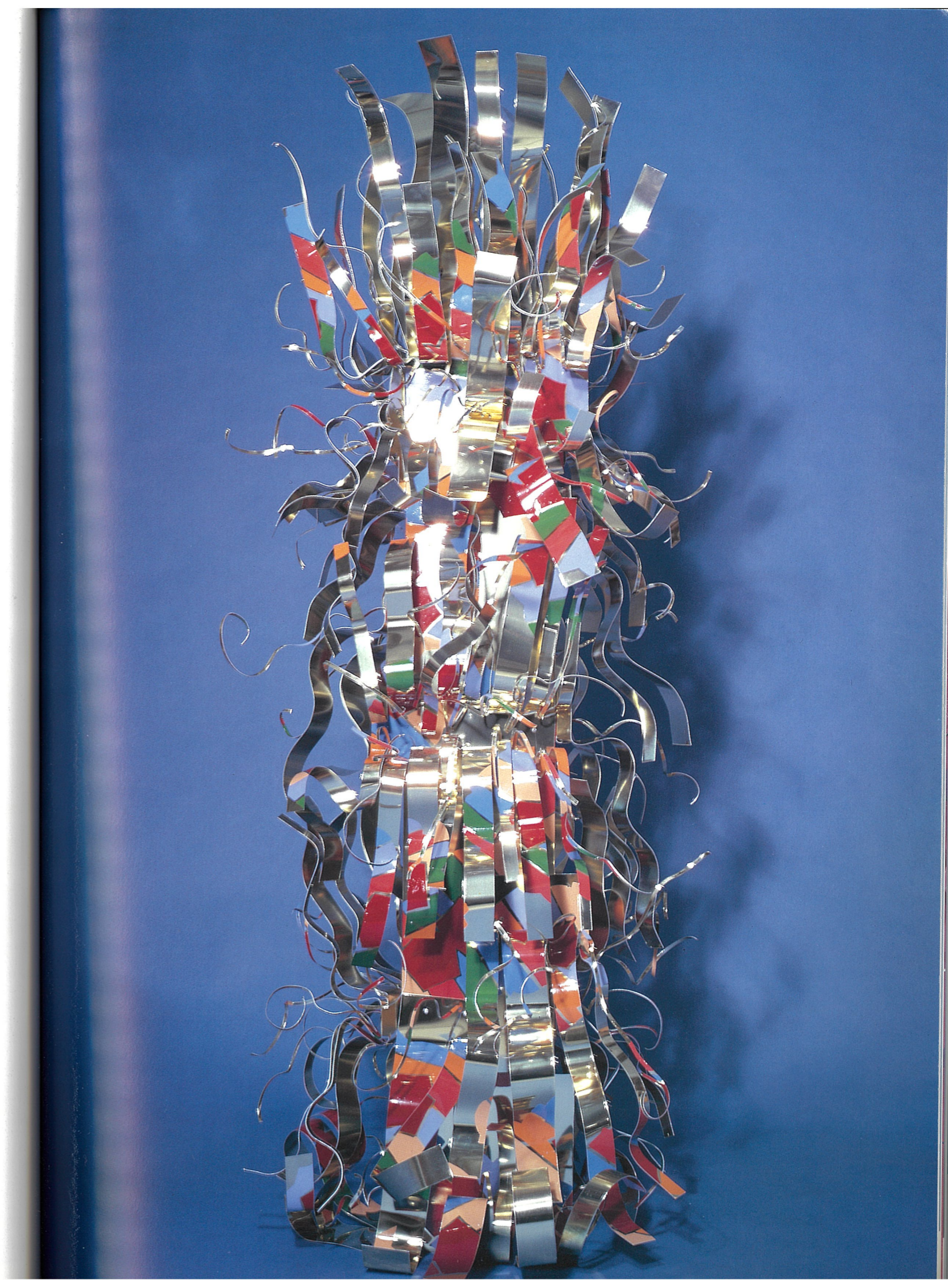


Once upon a Royal Moonbeam, 1988, enamel on aluminum, 48" x 28" x 10"





Royal Sentinel, 1984-1988, enamel on aluminum, 72" x 28" x 20"







Encounter with a Past Presence, 1988, enamel  
on aluminum, 76" x 96" x 12"





Festival: Sierra Sunset, 1988, enamel on aluminum, 53" x 36" x 8"



Festival Concerto, 1988, enamel on aluminum, 48" x 27" x 7"





Harlequin Song, 1989, silkscreen on aluminum, 16" x 16" x 16"





Detail of Color-  
falls (page 145),  
1989, enamel  
on aluminum,  
42' x 11' x 3'







Winter Jazz, 1989, enamel on aluminum, 35" x 29" x 29"





Color and Forms in Flight, 1989, enamel on aluminum, 12'2" x 22'2"





Encounter with a Future Promise II, 1989,  
enamel on aluminum, 64" x 80" x 8"





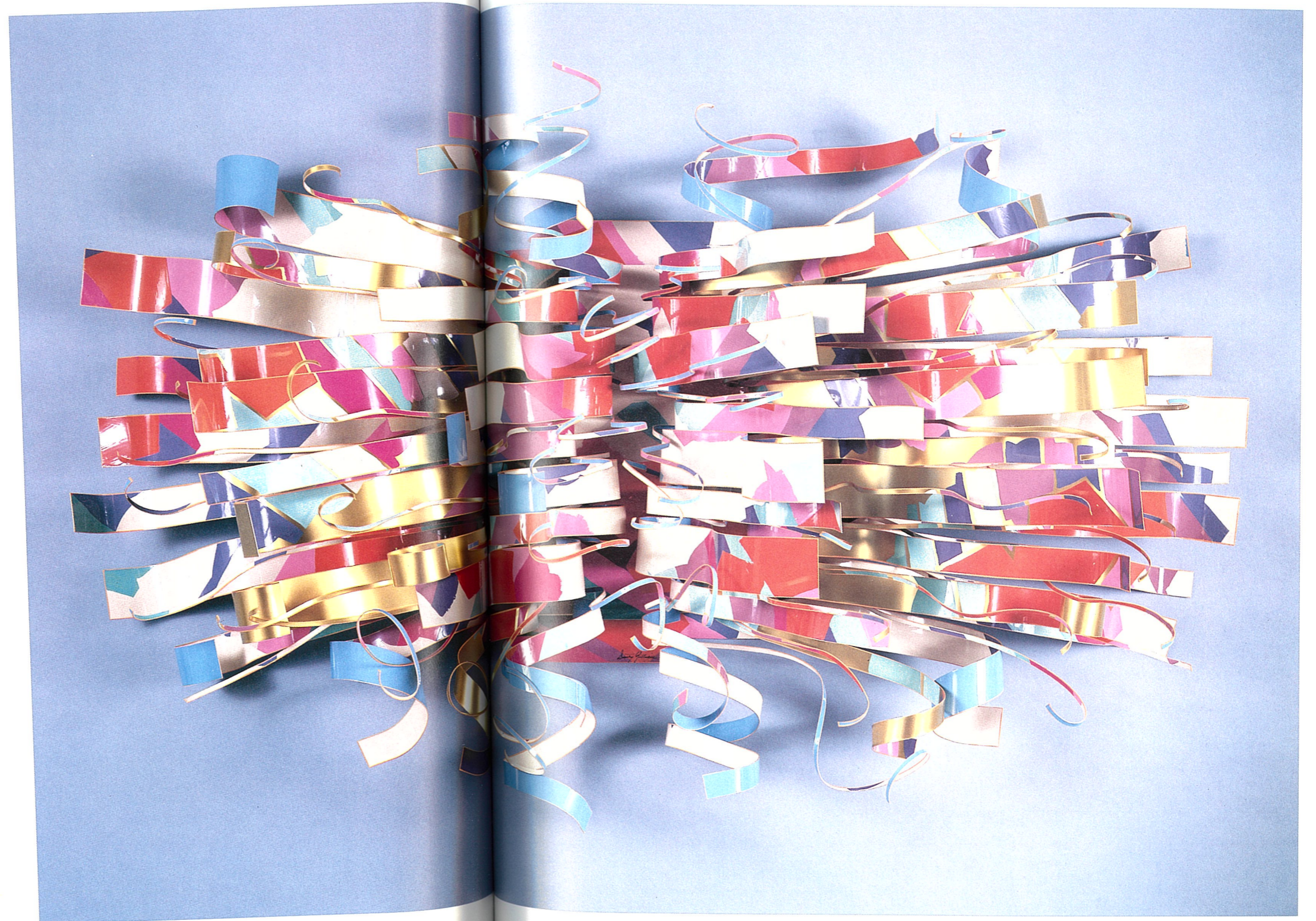
Encounter with a Future Promise III, 1989,  
enamel on aluminum, 64" x 80" x 10"





Colorfall: Landscape, 1990, enamel on aluminum, 48" x 40" x 7"





Royal Garden Crest, 1990, enamel  
on aluminum, 35" x 54 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 16"



Autumn Beanstalk, 1990, enamel on aluminum, 96" x 23" x 10"





*Color Clouds and  
Ribboned Currents,*  
1990, enamel on  
aluminum,  
10' x 20' x 10"



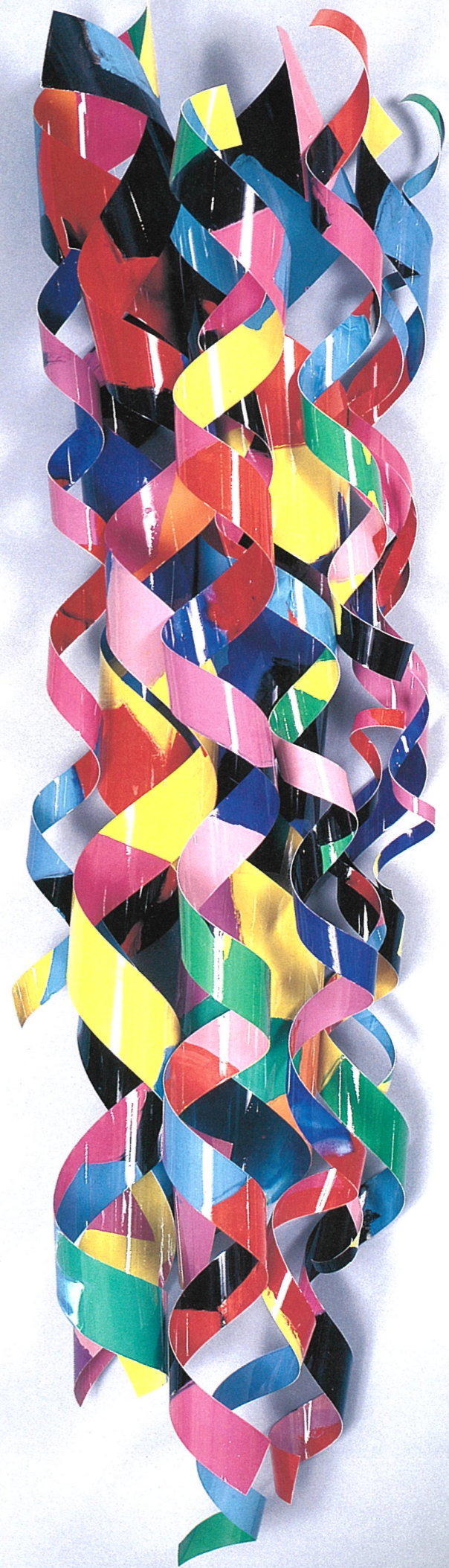


Rite of Spring, 1990, enamel on aluminum, 102" x 53" x 53"

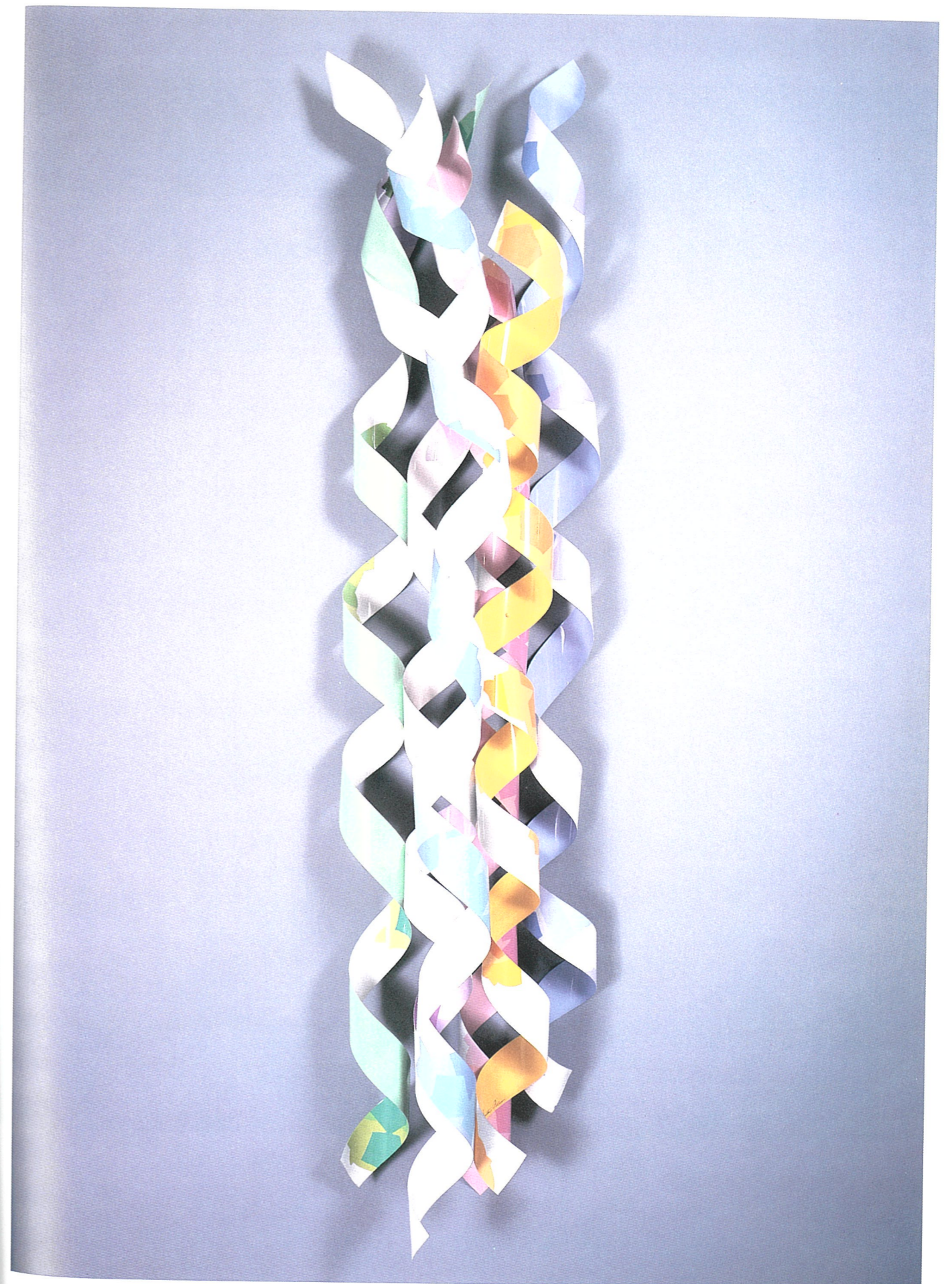




*Shaman II*, 1990, enamel on aluminum, 89" x 24" x 16"







Crayolas, 1990, enamel on aluminum, 44" x 29" x 12"





Royal Concerto, 1990, enamel on aluminum, 34" x 80" x 7"



Royal Tribute, 1990, enamel on aluminum, 108" x 62" x 12"







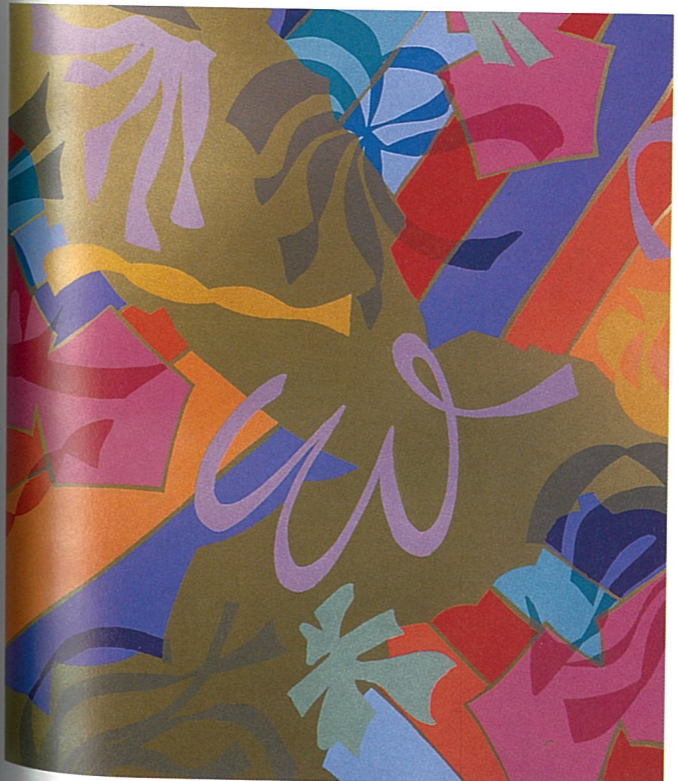
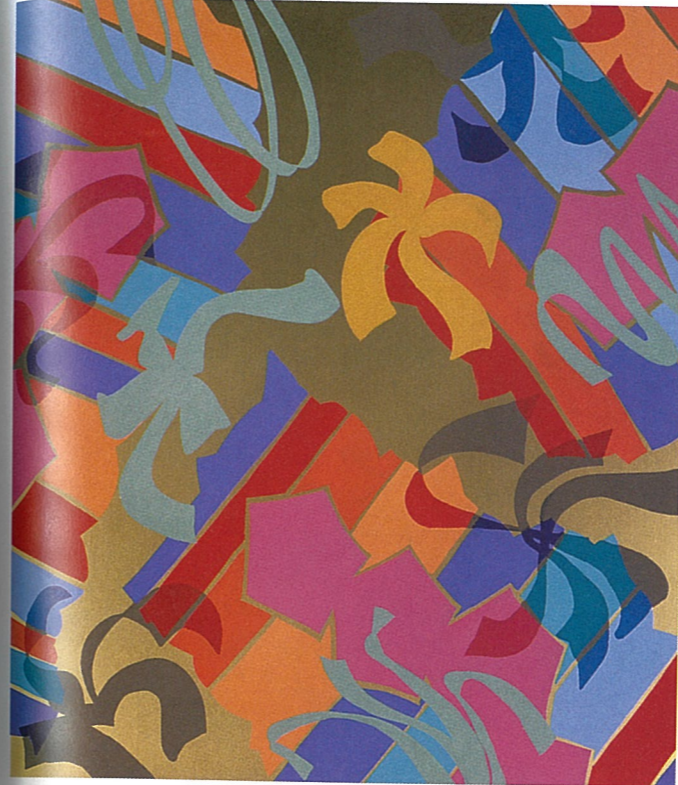
*Shadows in the Royal Garden*, 1991, enamel  
on aluminum, 90" x 117" x 1 1/2"





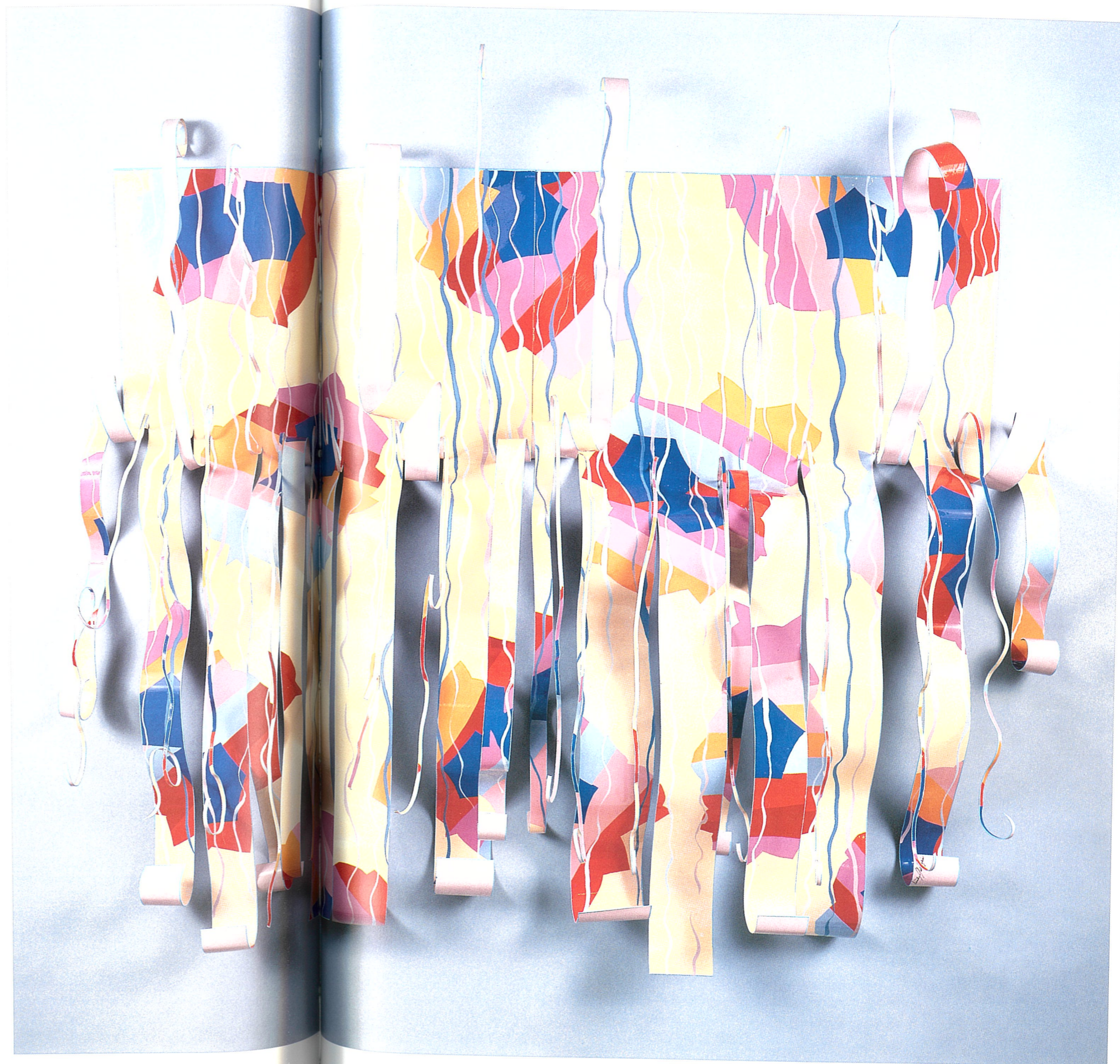
Changing Shadows, 1991, enamel on aluminum, 12' x 8' x 1 1/2"





Shadow Tapestry, 1991, enamel on aluminum, 67" x 90" x 1 1/2"





Colorfall: Mardi Gras, 1991, enamel on aluminum, 48" x 56" x 8"



Shaman III, 1991, enamel on aluminum, 84" x 20" x 15"







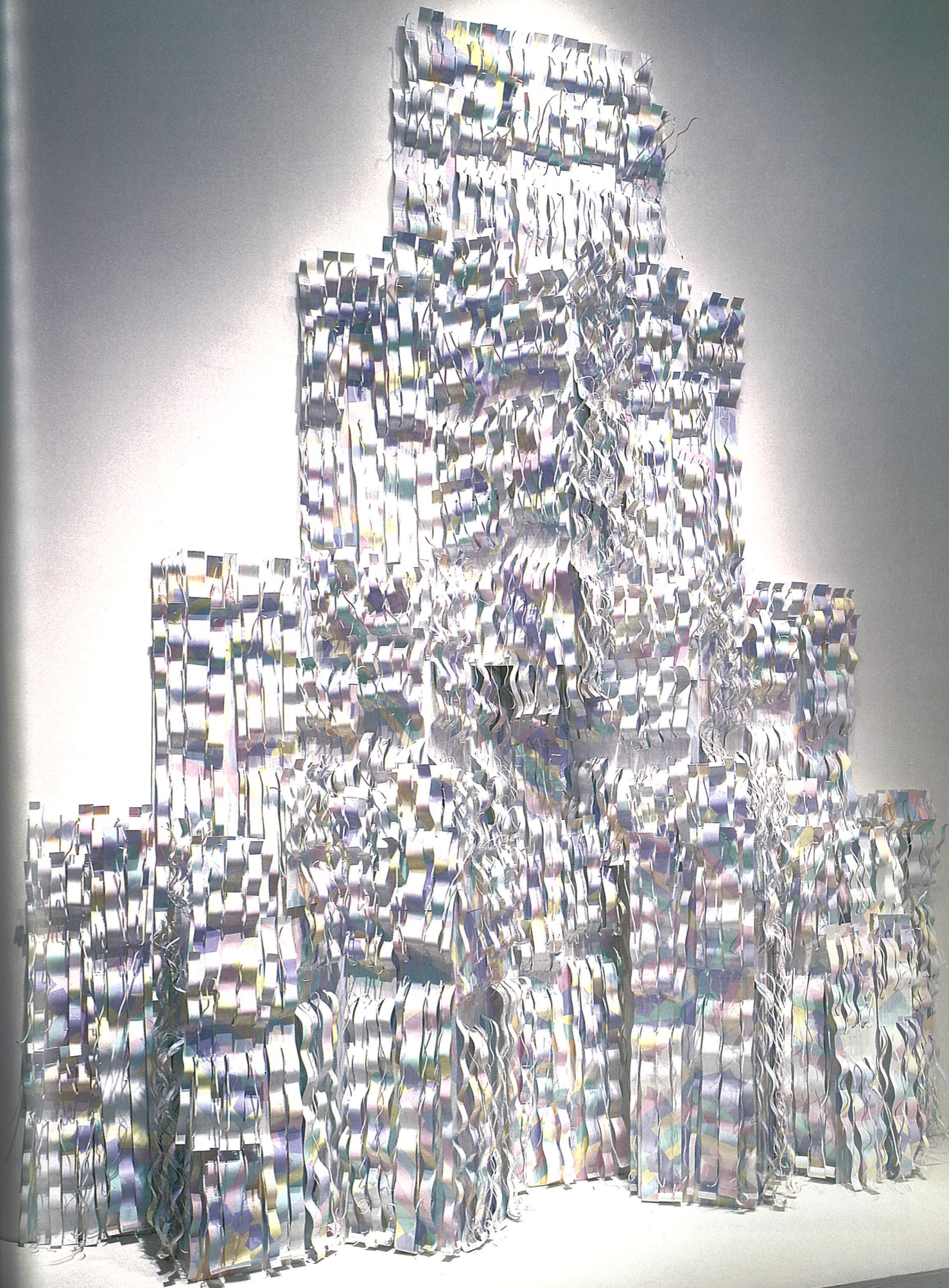
*Bulrushes*, 1993, enamel on aluminum, 30" x 30" x 30"



Colorfalls, 1992, enamel on aluminum, 14' x 15'4" x 14"







Entrance to the Enchanted Castle, 1993, 14'7" x 15' x 30"





*Landscape Memory*, 1993, enamel on aluminum, 96" x 100" x 6"





Colorfall: Garden, 1993, enamel on aluminum, 73" x 80" x 4"



Triangled Celebration, 1985 – reinstalled 1993, enamel on aluminum, 120" x 40" x 42", 120" x 40" x 42", 120" x 48" x 48"





Celestial Celebration, 1994, ink and paint on plastic, 108½" x 76"





Magic Carpet Slides V, 1994, enamel on aluminum, 55" x 34" x 5"

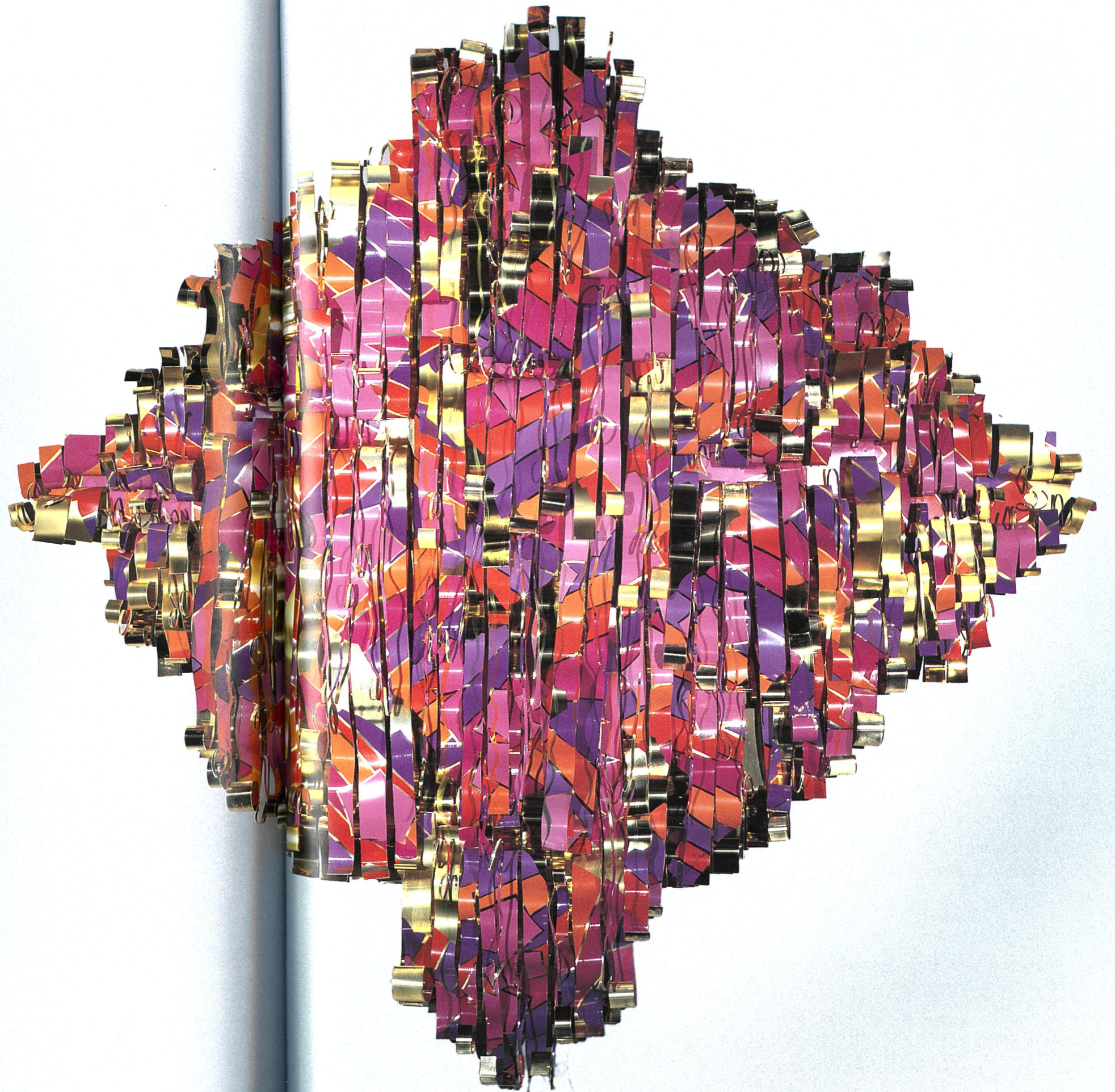






Royal Mardi Gras Encounter, 1995, enamel  
on aluminum, 48" x 72" x 7"





*Wings of Song*, 1995, enamel on aluminum, 85" x 88" x 9"





Ribbed Image I, 1996, enamel on aluminum, 54" x 24" x 28"



Lower section of *Encounter at the Winter Palace* (page 147), 1997, enamel on aluminum, 19'10" x 7'11" x 8"





Dorothy Gillespie was born in 1920 in Roanoke, Virginia, where an early affinity for art (at school she was always the classroom artist) was encouraged by her parents – until she declared her intention to go to an art college. “Nice” girls did not go to art school. The family hope was that she would study at nearby Radford University and become a schoolteacher. Her wish was sanctioned by the fortuitous family visit of a minister who declared that Dorothy’s was a God-given gift. She was duly enrolled at the Maryland Institute, College of Art, in Baltimore. There, the director, Hans Schuler, guided her away from only commercial art – with which she later supported herself for several years – and into fine art.

Having traveled from the South to Baltimore, Gillespie set her sights on the roistering art scene of New York City, where she arrived on June 5, 1943 (she memorized the date) at age twenty-three. To support herself, she took a job as assistant art director at the B. Altman department store, and promptly entered the Art Students League, a hotbed of eager students sharing ideas on technique, materials, and marketing one’s work. At Atelier 17, the printmaking studio then recently relocated from Paris to Greenwich Village, experimentation was a keynote; Gillespie was encouraged to seek and produce her own ideas and images.

In 1946 Gillespie married Bernard Israel and soon bore their first two children, Dorien and Gary, which forced her to set aside her twelve-hour studio days. By the time their third child, Richard, arrived in 1957, Gillespie succumbed to her need to make art, however circumscribed the hours might prove to be. The family traveled extensively; in Peru and England Gillespie explored an interest in archaeology that affected her later work, with its elements of buried memory and discovery. Beginning in the mid-1950s the family spent eight years in Miami, Florida. By then Gillespie was moving away from the realism that had marked her work to establish herself as an abstract painter. She worked ferociously in a studio in Coconut Grove, showed locally and internationally, and founded a group called Six South Florida Abstract Artists.

In 1963 at age forty-three Gillespie returned to New York and full-time creative work. She also determinedly lent herself to the city’s roiling art scene, its Happenings and loft events. Her gentility and lack of pretension notwithstanding, she fought fervently through the 1970s to rectify the plight of women in art, picketing the Whitney

Museum, helping to form the Women’s Interart Center and other organizations, curating women’s art exhibitions, and authoring consciousness-raising articles.

By the 1980s Gillespie’s work was well known and displayed internationally. Successive, sometimes overlapping commissions rolled in for works in public spaces, especially pleasing to Gillespie, who feels that art should be accessible to a broad audience. This sense of outreach brought her to teaching and coaching young artists, as a Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellow since 1986, at Lehigh University and, in a mellow return to her roots, at Radford University, where she is Distinguished Professor of Art. The association with Radford began when, with a deposit of her own work, she helped start the university’s permanent art collection. Today Gillespie’s *joie de vivre* is still manifest, in her continuing travels to exotic locales and in her continuing curiosity about what sundry mediums can produce: painting, sculpture, editions, and most recently jewelry to wear or display.

Underlying the nostalgic appeal of Gillespie’s art is an expertise developed over more than five decades of daily application in the studio. Since her work assumed its abstract character in the 1950s, it has moved from easel to wall to space, without denying its origin in the plane. Her higher education included drawing from casts and life as an introduction, and then moving to color – pastels and watercolor followed eventually by oils – for which she had a natural facility. Her style was a direct, unembellished form of realism, centered around portraiture (which she revived in the early 1980s). As with most art students and artists of the time, she was aware of the developments in modern art in Europe and the United States that led to abstractionism. She began the move in that direction as she turned to more and more ephemeral subjects.

From the beginning, Gillespie found correspondences between her abstract and realistic styles. She saw that patches of color in the shadows placed on skin areas in her portraits were the same irregular shapes that she employed in her abstract inventions. In the realistic paintings these shapes were subdued in color, elided and fused by her painterly style, and as often revealed from beneath the surface as imposed upon it. Similarly polygonal in contour, such shapes in her abstracted paintings sometimes joined, sometimes separated, but always functioned responsively with one another and the spaces



between them. As Gillespie's works became undeniably abstract, she simply clarified the contours of the shapes and heightened them in hue. An additional element relating her late to her early style is an outstanding sense of imminent movement.

To Gillespie the full shift into abstraction was a real breakthrough, and like other abstractionists she projected a very individual style. She is proud that her autographic imagery came not by influence from others but from inner imperative (which is why she never wished to study with famous artists). All along, the entities with which she worked had become stronger and the ground more interactive, but it soon occurred to her that virtual space was not enough. A desire to incorporate actual movement and dimension inspired her to bring her paintings into the viewers' space and let the spectators move around them. She did this first by placing three or four canvases together in boxlike shapes, sometimes suspended from the center of a ceiling at eye level, so that viewers had to walk around or among them to see all their facets.

Gillespie's move toward compositional variation came when she turned directly to wooden cubes, with each side painted like one of her canvases to be complete in itself, but also to coordinate with other sides when the cubes were stacked or arranged according to their multiple possibilities. Her standard number of cubes for a composition was nine, since this grouping could be logically stacked together as well as built into arches or squares. The next step was to regularize their arrangement by providing a setting for the cubes consisting of a base with a back attached at an upright angle that would ostensibly hold nine cubes; but now there were only four, which allowed the remaining ones to interact with the empty spaces and to project a patterning across several surfaces in any possible arrangement. She said that the shapes on the form as well as the form itself could be accommodated by the "mobile eye," but until this time she had depended on the spectators' mobility to give the needed animation. Now, she began to look for ways to make her work have a vivacity of its own.

The means presented itself in the 1960s when she discovered Mylar, a new plastic material, lighter than cellophane and stronger than steel of its own thickness. She first used it on flat surfaces, so that its mirrored finish left unpainted would reflect the spectators, thus drawing them into interaction with the painting. A watershed came around 1972, when she covered cardboard with

Mylar and made a construction consisting of eight cylindrical pieces. This was when she started to do "paper things," as she calls them. The cylinders got larger and she then placed them in contact with paper that hung on the wall or fell to the floor so that they appeared to unroll. The next step was to let the paper actually unroll and fold back onto itself as it spread across the floor, eventually opening the way for all sorts of forays including increasingly larger paper strips going up steps or along walls.

Over the years Gillespie turned more and more to metal, backing Mylar with galvanized steel and paper with polished aluminum, before using these metals in their own right for works that are as flexible as paper yet able to stand alone. Being impervious to wear and weather, such materials offered perfect opportunities to carry outside what she was doing indoors. Two of her early exterior metal pieces were paradigmatic: one shot up a ten-and-a-half-foot head above a forty-three-foot-long body; the other was a ten-piece group of bowing and swaying "ribbons." The complex movement of these and similar pieces, which stand on one end and extend the other in vertical arabesques, caused art critic David Shirey to dub them "pictorial semiquavers," from which Gillespie adopted the name "quaver" to refer to any of them. Another outstanding variation on her metal works was a relief, consisting of a large rectangle from which strips of metal extrude in all directions before turning back toward the surface in what she calls a "peeled paint" effect. Whereas she had formerly superimposed her more muted shapes on a white space, here she painted them with pure-hued colors and continuously interlocked them so that the colors became "Fauvish."

As Gillespie's works became more multidimensional, she equivocated about calling them paintings or sculptures. The question was resolved when she saw the 1979 exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum called *The Planar Dimension*. Curator Margit Rowell explained the titular phrase in her catalogue: "'The Planar Dimension' is the painter's dimension. Yet, to the generations which came of age in the 1960s and 1970s planar is synonymous with sculpture and planar sculpture synonymous with one aspect of modernism."

This idea applied to Gillespie and others who brought their sculptures completely into space, but who kept them (in Rowell's words) "pictorial through the use of color, planes, and a strongly graphic articulation." In the fluidity and mutability of her art, Gillespie was extending the scope and scale of Modernism. It was once pointed

out by Arnold Glimcher that the only thing about Modernism that did not still exist was its dogma: "The only rule is to break all the rules. . . . The only way to find the next step is to examine the last. Sometimes a break is the next step; you can take it by making something the most unlike as well as the most like the last. What is Post-Modernism but a break that is a continuation of Modernism?"

Gillespie's work grows out of the object-orientation of Modernism, at the same time representing the "break that is a continuation of Modernism." Respecting the past, she knows that participating in her own era does not remove individuality, especially in a period of pluralism. Currently, she has assumed a baroque stance, with more movement, more color, and more variety than ever. She continues to exhibit constantly and to sell her work, but there is a great deal of it left over to inhabit her magical studio, which looks to some like a "sculptural botanical garden."

In the essays that follow, Dorothy Gillespie's work is examined in all its diverse forms by Kyra Belán, professor of art and art history at Broward College in Florida; George S. Bolge, executive director of the Boca Raton Museum of Art; art critic and author Marcia Corbino; Francis Martin, Jr., professor of art history at the University of Central Florida; and Richard Martin, curator of the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Francis Martin, Jr., concentrates on paper as having inspired all of the sculptural work. He surveys Gillespie's development in the medium, which began in the usual way with drawings, pastels, and watercolors; next for printmaking; and then in her unorthodox, monumental uses of paper.

George S. Bolge sees Gillespie's paintings as closest to her intent to communicate with directness and immediacy. Her notion that size could be associated with the environment led to the large-scale sculpture, but the gestural quality of the two-dimensional work so close to Gillespie's artistic personality remains the aesthetic heart of all her work.

Marcia Corbino's first essay addresses the radical social changes that erupted in the 1960s and the concomitant new forms in art, *Environments and Happenings*, in which Gillespie was a pioneer. A second essay chronicles the Women's Art Movement and Gillespie's tireless work on behalf of women artists – encouraging them to uphold the highest standards in education and in their art as well as to take political action – always with herself in the vanguard as exemplar.

Kyra Belán offers a thoroughgoing survey of Gillespie's site-specific projects. These difficult-to-categorize pieces are formal crossovers: artisanal, painterly, and sculptural. They are meant to enhance, to play with and against, the places in which they are set – attached to walls, free-standing in gardens and fields, suspended from ceilings, even inhabiting the ballet stage.

Richard Martin, in his essay on the sculptures of Gillespie's mature style, selects and provides a close analysis of seminal works from the past two decades. Behind the surface exuberance and technical mastery of these abstract constructs, he finds a persistent, nondogmatic statement of a specifically woman's art.

Of her consuming love of art, her productivity, and that of the very few like herself, Gillespie says: "There must be some reason why we make art, why it becomes priceless; the question has almost nothing to do with analysis – why some art is bigger than life and lasts longer than individual life. The artists I know with this respect for art had the feeling they wanted to do something terribly important and were willing to sacrifice everything for it."

Perhaps one explanation lies in the statement with which she ended the 1983 commencement address at the Maryland Institute: "The dedication of a life to producing works which have no practical purpose, which may or may not be preserved, which may or may not be sold, which may or may not be exhibited, and which may or may not be worth the original costs of materials, is a curious phenomenon that has existed in all civilizations. The creative artist is truly the great adventurer of all times."





## Works on Paper

Francis Martin, Jr.

Dorothy Gillespie loves paper. It represents a passion rooted in childhood: her fascination with art. As a five-year-old, she worked a good deal with paper, cutting out strange and wonderful forms and, yes, paper dolls to which she applied transparent layers of succulent watercolor. She still works with paper, but paper beyond anyone's expectations. It overflows from closets and storage bins, making the decor of her New York and Florida studios resemble paper warehouses during an after-Christmas sale.

But there is a difference between her love of paper and that of other paper addicts: for Gillespie, paper is spiritual, and its receptiveness, freedom, and flexibility are metaphors for her role as artist. She is paper and paper is Gillespie. Without the special blend that exists between the two, her work, as it is known, would not exist. "Without paper, I would never have realized or produced the metal sculptures I do today," she says. But while her sculptures owe their form to paper, paper is more than a rehearsal for her metal sculptures: it has its own *raison d'être*. It is both the core and the scaffolding of her art. She cuts it, she unwinds it, she stains it, all the while performing her magic as she physically moves in and around this material she imbues with life.

Gillespie has never designed for the faint of heart or for the art foggies of this world. Her patrons, too, are unfazed that her paper flies through space and dips into pools of resplendent hues. "Paper should be fun," she says. "It should be accessible, too. And if you are too conscious of its more traditional functions (framed and hung against the wall), you can't be spontaneous. Paper can lose its whimsy, and for me that's its charm."

Although she began her career as a painter, at the age of eleven Gillespie had won her first award with a colorful pastel design on paper. The significance of this is not lost on her today: "The award exhilarated me and cemented my interest in paper." Once in New York City and working at Stanley William Hayter's printmaking shop, Atelier 17, she explored and discovered new qualities of paper. "It was a terrific experience, but I always thought how strange that in the same building as this avant-garde artist there was an all-male art club that very definitely admitted no women artists."

As a Hayter protégée, she is not concerned with copper plates or massive litho stones for printmaking. Yet she

still is close to what he stood for: an art that was self-justifying, that accounted to no one. "My work has no hidden stuff that needs to be explained. It simply is – clever or otherwise." Hayter's philosophy, "to subordinate ideas about art" to "the process of making it," took root in Gillespie. So did his insistence that painters – and she was a painter – learn the craft of printmaking from beginning to end.

During the war years artists were short of paper. "We worked on a smaller scale during those years," she says. Hayter's idiom was the print, and he gave free play to any technical innovations devised by artists. "I very much liked his emphasis on experimenting and learning. But while he himself used some color, he encouraged his students to work only in black and white." Gillespie was a printmaker who longed for color, and after Atelier 17 her prints would in fact bloom with luxuriant color. She has always had a particular fondness for the intense color of the silkscreen medium. Whether a screenprint or poster, her graphic work typically reproduces abstract fields of luminous, glowing color, often incorporating gold or silver foil in designs of Byzantine richness. For example, *Scattered Forms* (26" x 39"), a colored silkscreen on gold-colored foil board published as a signed, limited edition in 1986; or the extraordinary poster (40" x 32") she created in 1989 for Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. The poster medium maintains a special meaning for her: over the years she has produced many in conjunction with her exhibitions.

Following her student days in Baltimore and New York, Gillespie developed her career as a painter, but she never set aside her love of paper. For the art world, 1971 was the beginning of another decade; for her it was the decade of a new beginning. In that year she began to paint on paper – enormous sheets of paper – for *Rituals '71*, a Happening that lasted for just three hours on a Sunday afternoon. If some viewers were amazed at the theme and ambitious scope of the project, no one seemed taken aback by the use of paper, except perhaps Gillespie herself. "It was at this event," she is quick to point out, "that I discovered that not only could I paint on paper, but I could paint on massive sheets of paper."

Since then, whatever the material – pliant aluminum or paper – she relishes grand scale and dimensions; when she thinks paper, she thinks big. It is not unusual for her





Paper Works, 1976, New York University

work to span 150 feet or more, up a wall or into a room. She sees not only the walls but also the space between them: "Distinctive spaces are truly wonderful, they invite use." Space is as much her concern as the objects she places in it. She likes to send paper soaring into space. The work may hang on the wall, be suspended from the ceiling, or spill, cascade, plunge, and thrust assertively into the surrounding space.

In her 1977 exhibition at the Jersey City Museum, Gillespie installed four paper pieces, 18 inches wide and 150 feet long, suspended in the staircase. Paper seemed to stretch and yawn for miles, as it rolled into the exhibition space below. Reaching across space, into many directions, her paper soared unfettered. It confronted the spectator with unconventional postures and luminous oil-stained configurations. As David Shirey, critic for the *New York Times*, pointed out, one gets the feeling that, if she had the time, she would take over the entire building – perhaps the surrounding areas, too – with her "art." He might better have said "paper."

Size, she feels, contributes its own statement: "Without a doubt, today, size is significant in determining the acceptance of a paper work. Often a small paper piece is much less acceptable, less marketable, especially for large interior spaces." She does realize that size can be immaterial, even misused, but points out that her own involvement with large-scale formats is necessary, as her art is often destined for spacious interiors. "Obviously, the work in question must be strong, creating a firm impact but, at the same time, it must be able to successfully compete with its environment."

To that end she also follows through with the installa-

tion of her work. While she may use a conventional mode for small pieces attached to a wall, suspending large paper pieces requires a degree of inventiveness (as well as effort). For this purpose she uses thin wire, which is never seen. With no visible means of support, the result – forms levitating in space – is magical. In other instances heavy paper rolls may provide support, but again the method of attachment is invisible. The success of the installation determines the success of the illusion: large paper forms that are self-supporting, free of the wall.

In addition to what she does with paper, Gillespie is concerned with the quality of her paper. Whatever the purpose, she buys a high-quality acid-free paper. While she realizes the perishable nature of the medium, she also is aware of paper's strength and variety. All types of paper – stiff, coarse, smooth, textured – are used, the type depending on the project. Paper may also be recycled. After some handling, a piece of paper that is 10 feet wide by 20 feet long, becomes dogeared and may need to have its scarred edges trimmed off: "I often end up with a much smaller sheet of paper."



Paper Works, 1977, Jersey City Museum

She is also sensitive to how the paper will receive her color. "Water-based paint tends to pucker the paper, oil paint does not. Therefore, for the big constructions I use an oil paint applied with a brush to stain the paper and then I rub the color in with my hand or a cloth." She applies splashes of bright color to yards of paper, which may subsequently be rolled, crimped, pinched, or simply allowed to flow smoothly.

Action is essential in Gillespie's art. Her imagery flows as well, although it is difficult to describe: abstract shapes that suggest all sorts of unclassified zoomorphic or biomorphic forms. Whatever they are, they exist in a pulse of electric blues, oranges, reds, greens, purples, shimmering mauves, and even virulent magentas and chartreuses – all set against a nourishing and crisp white background. While color has a definite role to play in her art, it is paper that carries the work. In fact, the properties of paper determine the shape of her paper sculptures: "The paper itself dictates what I do. It is the paper that forms the the art." Whether rolled, cut out geometrically, arranged in groups, painted both inside and outside, or cylindrical, flat, or curved in shape, paper is the show. It certainly was so in her 1985 exhibition at the Maryland Institute, College of Art.

For the Institute, Gillespie produced one of her most spectacular paper works. The Institute has a policy of inviting recognized artists to install temporary projects



Maryland Institute, College of Art, Facade, 1985



Lantern Festival, 1981, silkscreen on paper, 29" x 22" x 3"

whenever a new building nears completion and before the occupants move in. Gillespie was invited as guest artist and given complete freedom. She undertook a project of extraordinary scope and dimensions: to face the glass facade of a building 28 feet high and 36 feet wide. Not only that, but she also transformed the interior and exterior glass wall, making paper perform, to tremendous popular and critical success.

The building's facade consists of eight window panels across, and six panels from top to bottom. The rectangular windows are 7 feet high and 2 feet wide, and some are subdivided into two smaller sections. Seeing the building, she knew immediately what she wanted to do: a form of point coupé (cutwork) in which spaces cut from a ground material are filled with decorative elements. Using large sheets of photographer's black background paper for her forms, she carefully cut out with an X-acto knife a myr-



riad of large and small negative shapes – round, oval, star-like, and patterns of two, four, or more shapes. It was exhausting work, but exhilarating. The only thing missing was the color. But not for long.

Like a child's Lite Bright set waiting for its colored pegs,



*Fantasy Garden*, 1986, ink on paper, 40" x 32" x 5"

Gillespie filled all the cutout shapes in her black paper with dyed nylon fabric. Each opening came alive with color; colored shapes danced everywhere against the black background. To bring unity to the design she incorporated a yellow border around each modular form, in an effect reminiscent of the stained-glass windows in Gothic cathedrals. During the day, colored light illuminated the inside of the building. The reverse took place in the evening, when the facade took on a sense of mystery. Like Japan-

ese lanterns in the night, color reached through blackness to illuminate the darkness outside. It was startling: a gigantic spectacle of color and abstract patterns.

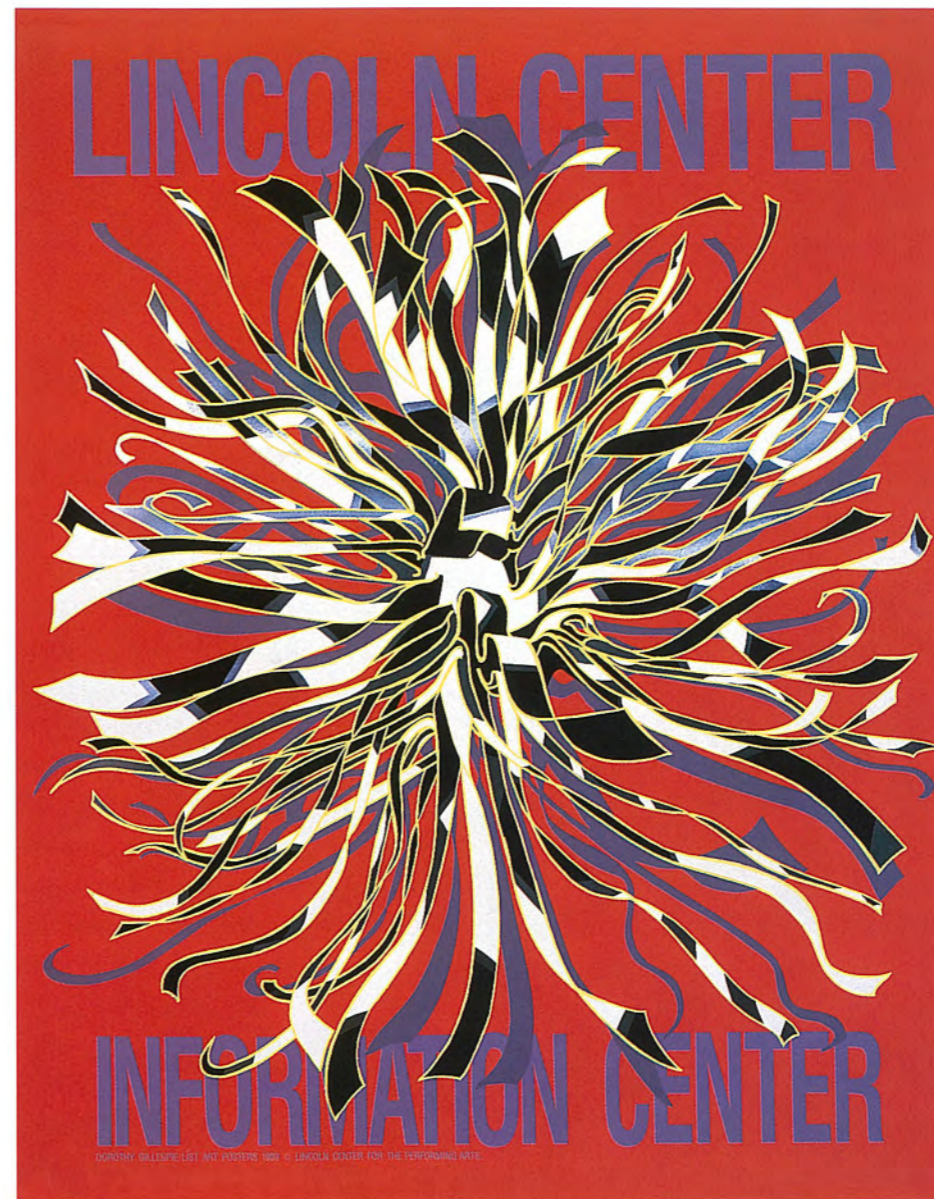
Gillespie did not have cathedrals or paper lanterns on her mind when she designed the Maryland project. She was thinking of the women she had known who spent hours in the privacy of their homes doing fancywork, such as quilting, tating, crocheting, knitting, embroidery. Women in art were realizing that much of what was considered just "women's work" was, in fact, art, and Gillespie had taken the idea of women's traditional handiwork and transformed it on a monumental scale.

In the years that followed, Gillespie continued to develop her interest in paper and to expand the stylistic parameters she had first established in the 1970s. An artist of rare innate ability, she has pushed her paper art to its highest fulfillment during the past two decades. And she has received a good deal of critical acclaim for her work in the medium.

In 1986 she had a solo exhibition at Gallery West in Los Angeles. One of the most memorable works shown was a colored ink-on-paper collage, *Fantasy Garden*. It is a symphony of exquisitely

constructed, superbly orchestrated paper curls overlaid with dazzling hues of many shades – everything to delight the spectator's eye. How could simple paper and colored ink create such an extraordinary sense of the beautiful?

In 1990, she produced her *Phantom: Opera*, a work measuring 31 by 23½ by 3 inches and now in the Castellani Museum at Niagara University in western New York state. The *Phantom* series is a demonstration of her best efforts,



*Lincoln Center Poster*, 1989, silkscreen on paper, 40" x 32"

as well as showing a new and expressive direction in the use of form and color. Unlike *Fantasy Garden*, where multiple shades of delicate hues act like a veneer on white paper, in the *Phantom* series color completely dominates the paper. The delicate and translucent colors seen in the earlier works have been replaced with deep russets, purples, burnt oranges, dark greens. Instead of unfolding in tinted steam, Gillespie's flowers now close in opaque pools of color. In addition to new color, there is a different approach to forms. The energetic curls and twists of *Fantasy Garden*, for example, are now tighter, more controlled, as if they are constricted by maturity. While something of the organic and spontaneous quality is lost, the forms maintain a baroque richness and exuberance.

If twentieth-century art unframed paintings and removed them from the sacrosanct wall of the museum in order to integrate wall area and room space, then clearly Gillespie's releasing of paper from its traditional uses and restrictions is a singularly important contribution. Now that critics are beginning to grasp the role that paper has played in her work, they acclaim her use of it, particularly in the large sculptures, with lyrical phrases such as "divinely imaginative, radiant like visual music." But they somewhat miss the point, not explaining *why* she uses paper. To answer this question, one must turn to the artist herself: "I find it full of energy, full of promise. It has a feeling all its own, a life all its own. For me, it is unblemished, like youth – a world of magic."

What a wonderful sense of the macroscopic as well as the microscopic Gillespie possesses: "Sometimes I feel like working big, sometimes little, sometimes average size." Large or small, her paper pieces sing. There is paper under Plexiglas, and there are simple, straightforward paper works in watercolor and ink that are no larger than a few inches, like oversized stamps or undersized postcards. There is a gentleness and a wonderful preciousness about these smaller works. Although they are reminiscent of hand-painted miniatures from some medieval monastery, close inspection proves they are not; they are small paper worlds that whet one's visual appetite.

Then there are the wove paper sketchbooks, her "little creatures," as she calls them. These are universes filled with the sights and sounds of her fantasies and observations. Whenever she travels, they travel with her; and in them she compulsively records new images and fresh ideas.





## Paintings

George S. Bolge

Centuries of thought and impassioned argument have not yet succeeded in explaining why it is that *homo faber* must make things, and neither has the key to the impulse to use matter to recreate experience been discovered. The one fact we can confidently proffer is that throughout human history there have been individuals driven to shape matter in ways that we have come to call artistic. Dorothy Gillespie belongs to one of the many Heraclitan currents flowing through the history of art, the current that carries the need to express, through the shaping of matter, the strongest and often deepest emotions common to human beings. Such artists obey a compelling command from within, grabbing at earth, metal, paint, or anything that is congealed matter to shape some analogue to what they feel. Emotions are at their fingertips. There have been many attempts to classify this particular stream in the history of art with labels such as romantic, primitive, and expressionist. Whatever we call it, the need to communicate a strong response to experience in the most direct way presupposes an instinctive faith in what modern philosophers call transsubjectivity. In making a painting, or looking at one, we want to have our own experiences universally confirmed.

As an artist, Gillespie allows her imagination and sensibilities free reign to wander where and how they will. Seemingly without conscious control, colors call to and respond to other colors, lines interact upon shapes, textures erupt out of smooth surfaces. Only when sensibility and intuition are blocked will she allow experience and skill to see what can be done to resolve matters. She is a consummate master of this method of working. She understands that trust in one's intuitions and sensibilities can result in as consistent a creative method as can tight and rigid control over every step of the creative process. All that is required is an alertness to whatever happens on the canvas and the ability and willingness to follow through. In order to do so, however, she has to be in step with the rhythms and patterns of growth, and she has to be able to prod along gently the pictorial image, much as the sun and rain incite the growth of delicate, living things.

Compared with the glories of Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling or Rembrandt's studies of humanity, this skill and talent may not seem extraordinary. However, very few artists have this gift. Gillespie is one of the few who does,

and one of the very few able to bring it to life in others, both by example and through teaching.

Gillespie made her stylistic breakthrough in the 1950s, but her roots were in the discontents of the 1940s. American museums and galleries were backing American Scene painting, those nostalgic, rural idylls epitomized by the productions of Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry. They were also espousing Social Realism, which recorded the human cost of hard times but frequently sacrificed aesthetic control in order to score a simplistic political point. For Gillespie, those approaches to subject matter were artistically bankrupt; they did not take into consideration the achievements of European giants such as Picasso, Matisse, and Miró. Furthermore, provincial modes were inadequate for suggesting the tenor of the times. Her solution was to burrow inward.

What she sought to explore and affirm on canvas in paintings such as *Dancers* (1944) were states of feeling: an intense psychological moment, a religious or mystical experience, a deeply subjective reaction to a person, place, or occasion. Inner necessity, and nothing but inner necessity – as father-of-abstract-art Wassily Kandinsky put it – was to decide line, form, color, design, and rhythm. A painting equivalent of such inner states had to be invented. Since fears, obsessions, and the like do not have concrete, objective forms, it would be misleading to illustrate them as landscapes or still lifes. In Gillespie's view, therefore, a picture could be composed of shapes representing nothing in nature, yet it could be of great emotional and formal significance. As Robert Motherwell has noted, "States of feeling, when generalizing, become questions of light, color, weight, solidity, airiness, lyricism, somberness, heaviness, and strength."

After a period of flirtation, Gillespie put aside the literal, clearly recognizable image. In the composition entitled *Winged Flight* (1957), the size, paths, and autographic quality of the individual brushstroke became of profound concern to her because of the emphasis placed on process and the signs of the artist's active presence in the work. The enlargement of the physical dimensions of the canvas assumed a similar urgency. She wanted viewers to be pulled into paintings like *Celebration* (1960) and to respond to them as an environment. Deep space, mass, and blinding bursts of light were seemingly hewn from the picture plane. These early paintings were given reso-





Winged Flight, 1957, oil on canvas, 40" x 22"

nance by the range of poetic and metaphysical speculation she was able to bring to bear on her subjects.

Achieving a specific, visual reality has been the goal of abstract painters during the last decade. It is not, and cannot be, their only goal, yet abstraction focuses on this problem in a singular manner. Yet once achieved, reality, whether in art or in life, has a way of evaporating, of

becoming shopworn and less immediate, and of being replaced by a new reality. The form of abstraction presented in Gillespie's early paintings indicates both the speed and seriousness of this process. One of the greatest problems in approaching abstract painting, as exemplified in the painting titled *Primitive Theme* (1961), is to find ways in which abstract forms and paint handling may convey meaning. Consequently, this painting is not so much a demonstration of some "action" principle as it is a luminous sign of moments of consciousness, moments that have their source in great depths and bear their own mysterious charge of poetry.

A close examination of her work in the early 1970s reveals particularly important aspects of her creative contribution to this field of expression. In paintings such as *Forms in Space #8* (1973) and *Motion and Space #10* (1973) we can retrace the complex synthesis of her symbolic naturalism to its constituent parts, often subconsciously assembled by the artist. She seems to be interested in how to present an inner, emotional state in abstraction but related to nature. This artist believes strongly in her power of subconscious association; she arrests the process of painting at the moment when what she was seeking flashes into view. Her canvases contain layers of "colored mistakes" buried in them, layers of consciousness, of willing. The images in earlier paintings such as *Voyage* (1975) and *Displaced Journey* (1976) are intended to strike something that is an emotional involvement and that has to do with the human personality and all the mysteries of

life, not simply colors or abstract balances. What happens on the canvas is surprising and unpredictable, for to her the act of painting becomes the experience.

Gillespie's work from the late 1970s, as exemplified by *After the Storm* (1976) and *The Promise of the Hidden Sun* (1978), is occupied with breaking through the linear continuum by isolating forms of a shape that would repel

each other, then relating them to a slightly felt scaffolding and an irrational, meandering line. The adjustments of opposites in the painting constitute the core of her art: closed form versus open line, clear definition versus ambiguity, and, most significantly, chance versus deliberate manipulation.

The earlier pieces achieve a new synthesis of formal elements and content, thus making more explicit Gillespie's conviction of the interaction among life, nature, and abstract art. Her use of the expressive potential of the large painted canvas propels her toward a content that is both powerful and emotional. In *Shadow of the Evening Clouds* (1979), the animated surface of the painting conveys a sense of endless, harmonic rhythm extending beyond the confines of the picture's actual edges. The canvas becomes a large enough arena in which to lose

oneself. Her paintings exist as a gestural record of the aesthetic process at a particular instant, regardless of how long it takes actually to complete the pictures. In effect, her painting is painting about the act of painting.

In *Mythical Summer Day in the Hidden Valley* (1983), there is an interplay between the picture plane and the background areas of the canvas that creates a shifting, changing space in which the forms appear to be in a state of flux: matter becomes energy. Within this evolving space, the eternal tensions between man and nature, land and sea, surface and depth, toughness and sweetness, emotion and reason create infinitely complex structures. The restless quality exuded by these shifting relationships gives the work a tension and complexity that is challenging.

Gillespie's work continued to grow, becoming stronger



Primitive Theme, 1961, oil on canvas, 40" x 48"



each year. By withdrawing into her own world as an artist, she won through to an even surer, freer, and more complete understanding of her complex vision of man



*Motion and Space #10, 1973, oil on canvas, 98" x 48"*

and nature. What Gillespie does is this: she meditates; she connects her hand and paintbrush to the deeper, quieter, more mysterious parts of her mind, and she paints

pictures of what she sees and feels in there.

Gillespie's later paintings can be linked to landscape themes. The association depends primarily on scale. Large, grid-formatted works such as *Through the Looking Glass* (1988), page 140, or *Changing Shadows* (1991), page 85, signify her rejection of preciousness. They repudiate the viewer-connoisseur and solicit a situation in which the power of the work reaches everyone in its vicinity. Her paintings look as big as all outdoors; evoking the grandeur of nature itself, they aim to present overwhelming forces. The scale of these "painterly grids" affects aesthetic elements differently. The biggest changes relate to color, where a really large area can change our sense of the total amount and quality of light around us, and to line, where kinetic force increases geometrically with the amount of the visual field it covers.

The marks Gillespie makes on a canvas or sheet of metal and the way the picture surface retains or absorbs the evidence of that marking are crucial elements of the experience the picture provides. This process produces images recognizable as uniquely her own. Her images are as individual as speech patterns and physical gestures, both biologically and temperamentally. But the personal identifiability of her pictures is not the point; it merely testifies to the authenticity of their "statements." In her work, both the objective world and the subjective self are supposed to be consumed in the fiery experience of encounter. Exactly that fusion of the separate parties is a quasi-existential encounter in



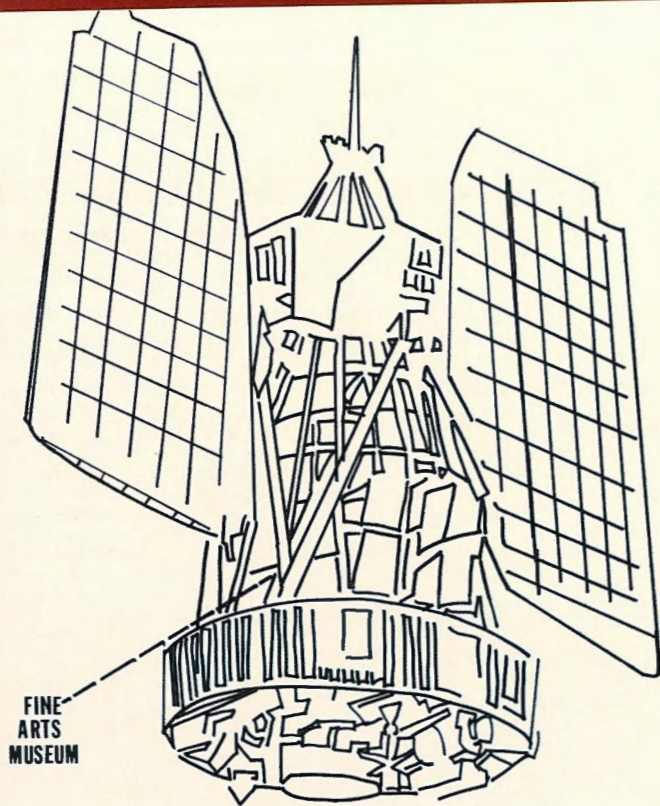
*Mythical Summer Day in the Hidden Valley, 1983, oil on canvas, 30" x 42"*

what sets them apart. It is also what her viewers are meant to achieve. The aim is a contagion of ecstasy that results from a passionate absorption in the painter's immediate, contingent situation.

Gillespie tries to abandon intention and to reach a "no man's land" where the ephemeral and the eternal become one. The names of her paintings specify her recognition of what has emerged, and the titles she gives the works become something like T. S. Eliot's objective correlative. They are verbal clusters that correspond to nonverbal complexes, parallel inventions that imply no logical or

causal relation to the first creation. Landscape imagery is, for her, an ever-present but passing reference in a perennial experience of transformation and flux. She achieves complexity of meaning in her recent work, *Kaleidoscope* (1993), detail on page 126, for example, by multiplying allusions and associations. Her style continues to assert the possibility of shared meaning in a world where the units of meaning have become stale and frayed. She is an expresser of adoration for a world that has colors, shapes, and spaces that may manifest the human spirit as it moves and has its being.





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## SPACE CITY

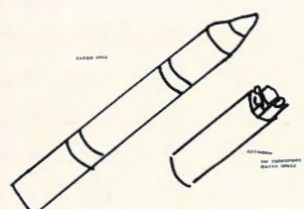


EXHIBIT A



EXHIBIT B



EXHIBIT C

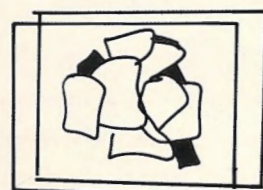


EXHIBIT D

## Environments

Marcia Corbino

During the social and political turmoil of the 1960s there was a vanguard of underground artists, such as Allan Kaprow, Red Grooms, and Claes Oldenburg, who rejected the consumer-oriented marketplace of the art establishment. They advocated a dramatic and revolutionary new medium – real objects and real people gathered together in Environments and Happenings. There were also new collaborative groups such as Fluxus in Europe and the No!Artists in New York's East Village, a group whose history has been documented in an anthology, *No!Art*, published in Germany in 1988.

Dorothy Gillespie quickly became a major force in the avant-garde scene with her first Environment, *The American Way of Death*. Her friend and collaborator in this exposé of consumerism was No!Artists leader Sam Goodman, who was described at the time by Tom Wolfe as “short, plump, shaggy, rumpled up, 45 and never too old for the life of Artist in Protest. He and his friend Boris Lurie have been working for the last seven years down on the Lower East Side in the general field of shocking the bourgeoisie and revolting against the establishment.”

Gillespie's first Environment was motivated by an intensely personal experience – the sudden death of her father. While arranging his funeral she unexpectedly became entangled in a labyrinth of exploitative and expensive scams devised by the funeral industry. In the transition from real life to art event she and Goodman visited funeral parlors throughout the city, where they were appalled to discover that death was a big, big business in America. As the directors of funeral homes began to refuse their requests for information, they realized that there were many suspect practices that should be exposed to the public as fraudulent if not criminal.

The “Unveiling of an Exhibit dedicated to *The American Way of Death*,” was held on April 8, 1964, at the Champagne Gallery in Greenwich Village. The show was described by Lurie in *No!Art* as a “realistic environment of a funeral parlor with coffins, burial-lot plans, burial accessories, all faithfully realistically reproduced, scrupulously marked out with payment plans, prices and attractive sales descriptions – precursor of present sociological art. Coffins with the deceased on display as well: Sam Goodman horribly prophetic here, this was next to his last show – a few years later only he died himself in anger to the last.”

The two garish open coffins, designated His and Hers, were heavy with satire and the meaninglessness of typically American burial rituals. His coffin was lined with artificial grass, and a set of golf clubs shared his final resting place. On the lid was a painting of a putting green at the 18th hole with real golf balls forming a design. Her coffin featured the latest decorator colors in satin fabrics and metallic paper. A white kitten and the newly marketed Princess telephone were placed inside the coffin. There was a mirror on the lid so that the deceased, represented by a manikin, could see herself when the lid was closed. A light was installed in the event she was afraid of the dark.

Banners of pretense denying death, printed with “Just Resting” and “Peace at Last” in gold letters, were hung so low that they brushed against people as they walked through the Environment. A sculpture was created of samples of wood the mortician deemed suitable for cremation, as a coffin was required by law to burn with the body. A profusion of dusty plastic flowers with a projected lifespan longer than the corpse adorned both coffins and tombstones. Prophetic signs announced the acceptance of credit cards and the dispensing of green stamps, sales tools later adopted by the funeral industry. A money box was provided for those who “want to take it with them.” The musical background was a recording of Gregorian chants played backward to dispel any aura of reality. Viewers, who included celebrities like Allen Ginsburg, were served black champagne. Al Valentine filmed the show as a black comedy, with Gillespie and Goodman as performers and the gallery visitors who appear as unwitting mourners. Gillespie's interest in film as an art form was initiated by this experience, and she purchased a camera for the purpose of shooting her own films in the future.

*Made in the USA*, described on its poster as “A Critical Environment” and also devoted to consumerism, opened in early 1965 at the Champagne Gallery. A Gillespie catalogue published later by the Gertrude Stein Gallery, which had sponsored *Made in the USA*, described it succinctly: “It consisted of blinking lights, peep holes, mirrors, revolving figures, three-dimensional shadow boxes which utilized theatrical gauze, plastic and aluminum to depict the stereotypes on the American scene. Colored lights rotating continually created a startling psychedelic effect heightened by stereo tape recordings of street sounds,



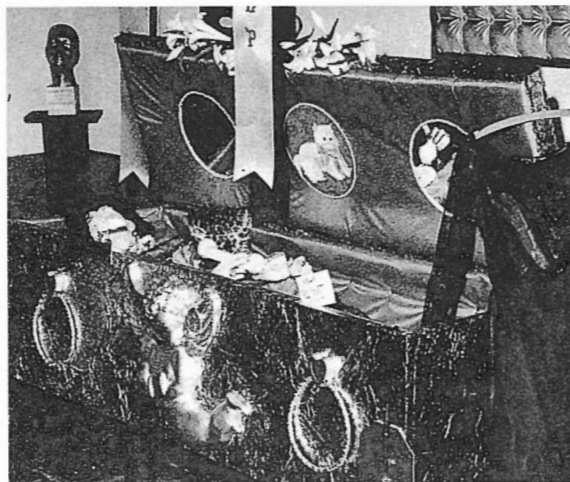
music, news, speeches and sirens – all combining to give the viewer, who was also a participant, a feeling of unreality while seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting the familiar.”

Gillespie built huge shadow boxes with scrim tacked to the open side. When the light went on a life-size painted silhouette inside the box was illuminated. Each shadow

box was a satire devoted to a current fad. Dieting was represented by a thin silhouette inside the shadow box along with pictures of low-calorie foods and words such as “thin.” In contrast, the silhouette painted on the outside was a fat female body. Some of the figures were also reproduced in the center of the room as metal cutouts that would swing and twirl; the obese woman, for example, was flesh-colored on one side and painted with red and white stripes suggesting a flag on the reverse.

As people entered the space, they were disoriented by the rotating colored lights and hanging figures. The scent of newly developed deodorant sprays filled the air, while a television set played a looped tape showing an ominous mushroom cloud rising from the explosion of an atomic bomb. Sounds and music recorded on stereo tape competed with a beeping, blinking computer. The sense of unreality was so pervasive that viewers assumed that the real dollar bills scattered on the floor along with play money were also fake. An eight-minute film was shot documenting Gillespie installing the exhibition and showing guests arriving at the opening reception. There is a spooky feeling to the film as the revolving lights give the effect of darkness alternating with an eerie burned-out white light. The figures swinging from the ceiling and the real people wandering through the gallery seem to materialize and evanesce like phantoms. Perhaps in reaction to *The American Way of Death* and *Made in the USA*, Gillespie mounted a solo exhibition the following year titled *Light and Motion* that intentionally used the energy and activity she felt emanating from her beloved city of New York.

Film became an integral component for her next Environment, U.S. She spent months shooting her own



*The American Way of Death*, with Sam Goodman, 1964, mixed media

footage on trips throughout the city or along its highways. Sam Goodman sometimes went along and one scene features him eating a hot dog at Coney Island. The multitude of ideas and images in this film represents the creativity and energy of an artist who is intimately engaged by diverse activities. Yet the scenes are all shot through or contain some version of the American flag. The film opens with stars twirling on the screen followed by stripes in a circle swirling about. Sometimes

the flag is a scrim with images such as newspaper headlines, space capsules, or children visible through the stars and stripes. As there was no live soundtrack for the film, a radio tuned to a news station was concealed behind the screen. The film was shown continually as part of the Environment and again in 1974 during a film festival at the Women's Interart Center.

Gillespie's U. S. Environment opened to critical acclaim on September 27, 1966, at the Gertrude Stein Gallery. A *New York Times* headline proclaimed, “Flag is Subject of an Art Show.” The Sunday review by Alfred E. Clark said, “A modern-day Betsy Ross, named Dorothy Gillespie, figured last week that she had cut, snipped, shaped and painted about 3,500 stars of mylar, aluminum, plastic and sundry materials for her one-woman show devoted to representations of the American flag.

“Miss Gillespie, a onetime abstract artist whose works hang in museums from Tel Aviv to Miami Beach, said she could not estimate the number of yards of red and white ribbons she had created. The stars and ribbons glittered from paintings, collages and sculptures in her exhibition, which she described ‘as an extension of pop and op art.’ Walls and ceilings of the Gallery Gertrude Stein . . . were festooned with the cut-outs that rippled as mobiles . . .

“Asked what she was seeking to achieve in her show, she replied: ‘My basic idea is to involve the viewers in all of their five senses.’ . . . In the main room about two dozen representations of the American flag, mostly fragments of the white stars and blue background or sections of the stripes, hung from the walls. Some were paintings, several mobile sculptures and collages made of various materials. In her sculptures, Miss Gillespie said she sought to obtain a ‘third-dimension feeling’ by creating the forms

out of clear plastics on stands that could be revolved. The spectator can see through the stripes as it turns and can experience a symbolic rendition of the flag. ‘What I am trying to do is to make people think of what we have here. Not everything is right, but we are living in the most wonderful time in the world and I think most of us take too much of it for granted.’ At the opening, Miss Gillespie satisfied the sense of taste by providing Scotch whisky in which she used a food-coloring additive to change it to a vivid red color. The bourbon was turned blue, and the gin remained clear.”

There were a number of aesthetic breakthroughs for Gillespie in this exhibition, as she expanded her artistic dimension from painting on a flat surface to combinations of media such as film, collage, and sculpture. Perhaps most important was her discovery and use of reflective materials, which are now such an integral part of her work. She had used aluminum foil in the past but was always searching for a more flexible material that could be manipulated visually as well as physically. For the first time she used Mylar, a new material that Gillespie had first seen at the New York World's Fair. Over enormous wood frames she stretched thin panels of silvered Mylar, which shimmered and quivered like fun-house mirrors. The walls of the first room were covered with these panels so that viewers saw themselves reflected grotesquely as a stage light revolved, flashing different colors. The critic for *Art News*, writing for the section of double-liner reviews in the November 1966 issue, concluded, “Dorothy Gillespie likes to make use of slapstick, puns and the absurd. She does so with the aid of movie news and flashing lights surrounded by American Flag reproductions that reflect it all endlessly.”

One of Gillespie's most prestigious exhibitions of the time was for the New York University series Sundays at Three. Many avant-garde artists, such as John Cage, had been honored with an invitation to prepare or perform one of these coveted Sunday-afternoon events. With her undaunted energy and exactitude, Gillespie

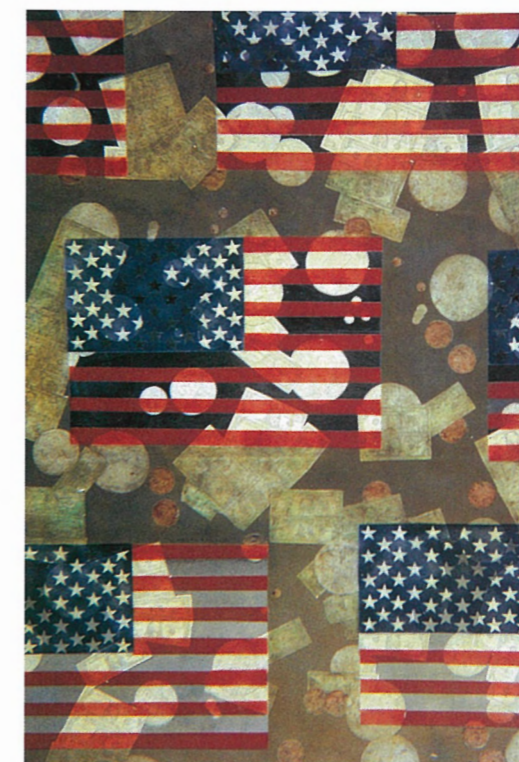
worked full time for one year on this exhibition – which would last only three hours. *Ritual '71*, as she called it, went beyond an Environment to a Happening in which viewers participated. Gillespie and her children installed the complicated exhibition in the Eisner and Lubin Auditorium at the Loeb Student Center in May 1971.

The theme was an extension of Gillespie's investigations into the influence of rituals – such as death and the flag – on American culture. She determined that the most popular contemporary ritual in the United States was the Super Bowl; statistics confirmed that on that Sunday every year almost everyone in America is in front of a television set watching football. To avoid the simplistic, Gillespie decided to present a historical perspective of rituals culminating in the Super Bowl. For research she enrolled in a course on witchcraft at NYU, and for six months she delved into the shadowy world of magic and the occult.

To announce this “Special Event” a handbill was printed with a drawing of a wheel of fortune surrounded by the words Astrology, Palmistry, Tarot Cards, Numerology, Fortune Wheel, Magic Disc, Handwriting, and Voodoo. Inside the circle were the words Touch, Smell, Hear, See, and Taste. Admission was listed as one dollar. All the seats were removed from the auditorium and the walls were draped in black to create a dark and supernatural ambi-

ence. Enormous paintings of various occult symbols were hung on the walls. Passageways led to separate booths where each ritual was staffed by a person dressed in an appropriate costume. As viewers were guided from booth to booth, they heard Gillespie's voice on a tape recorded by George Jacobs, discussing and explaining each ritual. Music ranging from Indian chants to the dances of voodoo ended with the crashing sound of thunder.

The most popular exhibit was a display of fertility rituals from the past and present. Gillespie had discovered that in some primitive cultures women ate ginger-



*Flag Snow Collage*, 1960, paper, aluminum and paint



bread men to encourage pregnancy. She and her children baked hundreds of gingerbread men, served alongside M&M's candies that represented birth-control pills. Viewers were encouraged to make an ideological choice by eating a gingerbread man or taking the controversial "pill."

A booth with a jungle setting featured voodoo dolls that Gillespie had made by hand. The 14-inch dolls were fashioned of black cloth and had faces painted on them to represent real people, such as Mohammed Ali, Ted Kennedy, J. Edgar Hoover, or Nelson Rockefeller. One doll had a question mark instead of a face, so that viewers could visualize their own victim. Colored pins were available, encouraging viewers to put a curse on a person of choice. By the end of the afternoon all of the dolls, except Kennedy's, were pierced by pins. Gillespie's daughter Dorian, now a well-known channeler, was in charge of the booth.

The route through the Happening was leisurely, as viewers lingered to consult astrologists, numerologists, palmists, or ouija boards. The final installation, the ritual of 1971, was assembled like a theatrical set on the stage of the auditorium. A man, seen from the back, was sitting in an overstuffed chair watching the game on a television screen. As videotape was not yet commonly available, an audiotape of the most recent Super Bowl was playing. Gillespie's husband, Bernard Israel, always supportive of her work, assumed the role of sports fan for the three-hour event, beer and pretzels by his side.

Ritual '71 was a great success and cemented Gillespie's relationship with New York University, where she subsequently mounted a number of exhibitions and organized seminars. At the time Environments and Happenings received scant coverage from the art press, which tended to dismiss the whole movement as a rejection of traditional aesthetic values and commercial requirements. But idealistic and committed artists like Gillespie felt they had nothing to lose by using nonaesthetic materials to create alternative exhibitions in which there was nothing to sell. Today, every group show throughout the country includes "Installations" and "Performance Art," the contemporary sequels to the pioneering Environments and Happenings of the 1960s.

## Women's Movement

During the 1960s women began to confront the primeval ritual of male domination. Activists united to form organizations to challenge the perception of women as economically, socially, and culturally inferior to men. In the art world the inequality between men and women was particularly obvious. Men controlled exhibitions, denying access and visibility to women artists. The discrimination actually began in art schools, where female students were not taken seriously and not encouraged to become professional artists. The bias followed women beyond the campus and was reinforced if they married and had children.

But for Dorothy Gillespie, the joy of making art had always taken precedence over the mythic promise of fame and fortune. This objectivity has given her life an enviable satisfaction and status, which is obvious to anyone who meets her. Deep within herself is an awareness that is more significant and valuable than any of the external symbols of success. When she attended the second meeting of the newly organized Women in the Arts, she felt that she was "too naive" to understand the intensity of anger dominating the room. Her independence and involvement in her own work had protected her from many of the injustices suffered by other women artists whose work was ignored by museums, galleries, and collectors. She had had more than twenty-three solo exhibitions and her work was in museum collections throughout the world.

Gillespie's involvement in the Women's Art Movement became more than simply a membership in a clique of angry women artists. Although many competent groups were forming to protest inequalities in the art world, Gillespie chose her affiliations carefully. In retrospect she recalls that a psychic impulse seemed to activate her commitment to the movement, compelling her to assume a role of leadership despite her reluctance to become involved in the disputes and

quarrels that inevitably surface in such a collective endeavor.

Although Gillespie admits that she had some early reservations about participating in public demonstrations, she was on the picket line when Women in the Arts and other feminist groups protested at the Whitney Museum in 1970, demanding that the curators choose more women artists for their "Annual" exhibitions. She still recalls the feeling of exhilaration that swept through the crowd of protesters. Although the Whitney Museum did include a few more women in the next Annual, the protest organizers felt that too little progress was made. Subsequently, Women in the Arts decided to sponsor their own exhibitions devoted solely women's art.

One of the first shows in which Gillespie participated was *Unmanly Art* at the Suffolk Museum in Stony Brook, Long Island, in October 1972. For the first time she exploited one of the channels opened by the Women's Movement by creating imagery specifically related to women. She constructed an Environment of tubes that were similar to the shape of bolts of fabric or rolled-up rugs. The cylinders were covered in silver Mylar and painted in her colorful abstract expressionist style to incorporate the Mylar as a random reflective background. The tubes were suspended from the ceiling in groups of eight and were continually in motion, so that the reflected colors were continually shifting. Gillespie continued her interest in feminist issues with her first sexually oriented imagery created for the Women in the Arts exhibition at the C. W. Post Campus of Long Island University in the summer of 1973. Her Environment, *The People Factory*, highlighted themes of aggression and domination. She constructed female body parts, such as arms and hands, that were hung from the ceiling with signs reading "For Rent" or "On Loan."

In 1973 a landmark show, *Women Choose Women*, at the New York Cultural Center, presented the work of one hundred artists selected by members of Women in the Arts from seven hundred slides submitted anonymously. *Artforum* magazine (March 1973) published a major article by April Kingsley that described the exhibition as "a pioneering enterprise with repercussions for the entire art-institutional structure. It is the first example of a large-scale exhibition held in a major art museum and organized entirely by the members of a minority group

within the art community. We have often heard in the past few years, since women artists have been forming politically active groups, that hundreds of talented women artists are working without recognition. This is our first opportunity to see what a large body of their work is like, and its quality more than justifies the rhetoric."

Despite the critical success of the exhibition, Gillespie felt that Women in the Arts was losing its focus as a group dedicated to political activism. In order to reestablish a powerful political voice, Gillespie and Joyce Weinstein founded a new group called New York Professional Women Artists. The fourteen members lectured at universities and wrote articles to encourage women artists. Artistic quality was the emphasis of their exhibitions. In 1974 Gillespie organized an innovative outdoor exhibition, *Walk Through Art*, that was mounted in New York in Central Park, Battery Park, and Rockefeller Center, and then traveled to fifty colleges, universities, and street fairs around the country. Always compelled to involve viewers in her work, she created triangles more than 7 feet in height, assembled so that people could walk through the sculpture.

In 1972 Gillespie was asked by Ruth Van Dorn, director of the Human Relations Center at New York's New School for Social Research, to originate a course that would enlighten and educate women in the visual arts. The intent of this pioneering class, "Functioning in the Art World," was to prepare women for a new, more aggressive role in that world. As Gillespie already had a heavy schedule of painting, traveling, and lecturing, she asked artist Alice Baber to share the task of revealing and interpreting the "system" that drives the New York art world. Following Baber's untimely death, Richard Martin taught the course with Gillespie. The emphasis of the course was to "get your bearings" in the art world and then work from a solid base of acquired knowledge to attain your goals. She was brutally honest with her students regarding the difficulties of succeeding in New York City, stressing that the person who works the hardest gains the most. From 1977 to 1983 Gillespie was also the director of the Art and Community Institute at the New School for Social Research. Once a year Gillespie organized an intensive five-day seminar which began with breakfast meetings and ended late at night in artists' studios.

One of the early achievements of the Women's Movement was the first national Conference for Women in the



*Devil*, 1971, acrylic on paper, 75" x 60"



Visual Arts held in April 1972 at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C. The Corcoran had been picketed by faculty members of its own art school for not including any women in its Biennial, and in a conciliatory gesture the director agreed to host a conference devoted to the marginalization of women. Cindy Nemser, writing in *Art in America*, described the two-day conference as "one of the most stimulating, irritating, exciting, disturbing, debilitating, tension-filled, thought-provoking, sleep-stealing experiences of my life. . . . Over 350 women involved in the visual arts came from all over the country, each bringing her own needs, hopes, desires, frustrations. . . . As Dorothy Gillespie, a New York painter, later told me, she couldn't put her finger on what exactly set the audience off, but . . . things really started to erupt. . . . It seemed to me that the basic antagonism, the love-hate relationship between the artist, the critic and the curator, was undermining our common ground as women that had brought us to the conference."

Gillespie, who had been asked to report on the conference to the Women's Interart Center, recognized that the confrontation between the powerless women artists and the powerful women critics and curators – who were ignoring their work – threatened to obliterate the goals of the meeting and movement. But she saw the attack by the women artists as an act of courage that served to emphasize the interdependence of women's roles in the art world. Gillespie was elected co-coordinator of the Women's Interart Center, a position she held from 1973 to 1976. She was directly involved with its program of exhibitions, fund-raising, and workshops. She founded the Women Artists Historical Archives, which includes film and taped interviews with leading artists. The Center, which is devoted to the advancement of women artists of all disciplines, is located in a converted warehouse on the west side of midtown Manhattan; since 1972 Gillespie has been its Artist in Residence, establishing her studio in a vacant space she discovered one night while walking down the stairs when the elevator was broken.

Gillespie's only foray into hard-core feminism was her participation in the Women's Interart Center's 1973 exhibition *Erotic Garden*. Described as "a sensual environment," featuring the work of twelve women, the exhibition was further defined as "an act of liberation – liberation from the traditional taboos that have prevented women from publicly expressing their sensual or erotic feelings and sensibility." Gillespie, who admits that she is not and has never been an erotic artist, created a survey,

the final presentation at the end of the tour through giant panting flowers, penis pillows, walls of breasts, a vagina hammock, and a womb-dome. Her portion of the exhibit was separated by a black curtain from the preceding displays of erotica, so that viewers could answer questions about various objects and images Gillespie had arranged on tables and panels. The exhibition was reviewed in *Ms.* magazine by Harriet Lyons under the headline "One Man's Cucumber is Another Woman's Tomato." The text read in part, "Raisins or Cheerios – which are more erotic? This was just one of the questions raised by a recent art exhibit . . . a kind of erotic rezoning designed to arouse all the senses. . . . Dorothy Gillespie dished up 20 touch-taste-smell-feel exhibits and a questionnaire – the answers to which indicated that women found tomatoes the most erotic vegetable, while men chose cucumbers."

For a 1974 exhibition at the Center called *Works in Progress*, Gillespie built on her previous work with tubes, creating a small three-dimensional construction. *The First Museum in Outer Space* was a humorous work, which included small abstract expressionist paintings rolled into cylinders and packed into rockets for the journey to outer space. Inside the museum, tiny people could be seen floating upside down looking at the paintings. In a review in the May 1974 *Arts Magazine*, Jane Bell devoted almost half her text to Gillespie: "Certainly one of the most charming, stimulating 'works in progress' . . . was Dorothy Gillespie's conception of the place of art in the near future. She has conceived a space city, in which a new museum displays an ever-changing light sculpture, operating on self-sufficient solar energy. . . . Gillespie's statement was the most arresting in a show overflowing with statements: 'Art in outer space will be viewed from all angles. . . . The viewer will become part of art itself.'"

*Ms. en Scene*, a program of films by women filmmakers was held at the Women's Interart Center in 1974. Gillespie showed two of her films: *U. S.*, the short film made for her eponymous 1966 *Environment*, and *The Pope*, shot in St. Peter's Square with zooming, spinning, and floating images of religious banners and portraits of the Pope. Gillespie and her work were featured in three work-in-progress films, *Color*, *Logo*, and *Silkscreen*. At the time Gillespie was shooting experimental pieces she called "Scratch Films," using a number of chance techniques such as abrading the surface of the film before or after processing and dyeing the footage with food coloring.

The following year she collaborated with filmmaker Rikki Ripp to make a biographical video for the United Na-

tion's International Year of the Woman. Called *Dorothy Gillespie in Her Studio*, it is a seventeen-minute black-and-white documentary in which Gillespie describes the feeling for life, both joy and frustration, that motivates her work. She demonstrates how her paintings gradually began to come off the wall to become free-standing sculptures, a transitional accomplishment that was changing the direction of her career as an artist.

For the International Year of the Woman, the Women's Interart Center inaugurated the festivities with a special exhibition curated by Gillespie. *Women Artists/Games* opened on December 17, 1974, and included thirty women artists whose work ranged from Photo-Realism to



*Women's Art Crossword Puzzle, Art World Maze, and other objects from Women Artists/Games, 1974*

Conceptualism. For an exhibition called *Works on Paper – Women's Art*, sponsored by Women in the Arts, Gillespie changed her art medium from acrylic to pastel. She used it because pastel had always been denigrated as a woman's art medium, seen as weak and unacceptable for serious work. Gillespie's piece for the show was an assertive rediscovery of pastel's pure color and variable texture.

In 1975 Gillespie mounted her third solo exhibition, *Paintings*, at New York University. The miniature rolled canvases from her construction *The First Museum in Outer Space* were enlarged to cylinders, which she described as "pick-up sticks." The outsides of the cylinders were similar in color composition to her abstract paintings, while the insides were painted a single color. Spotlights gave the works an illusion of transparency. She persuaded the university to sponsor ten days of panel discussions, slide shows, and films by women artists to commemorate the International Year of the Woman. Posters and flyers announced the event and every woman's art

group in New York was invited to participate. She also arranged for the university to tape record twelve women artists discussing their thoughts on the future of the Women's Movement.

An additional event proposed by the United Nations was an International Women's Art Festival. Gillespie was a member of the Fine Arts Committee, assigned to organize the first worldwide exhibition of art by women. As the projected costs of a global exhibition spiraled into the hundreds of thousands of dollars, Gillespie suggested a slide exhibition, which would give visibility to the largest number of women artists and could travel to countries throughout the world. To inaugurate the slide show, a prestigious ceremony was arranged, with Gillespie presenting awards to twelve living women artists born before 1900. She also assisted her friend Alice Baber in curating *Color, Light and Image*, which opened in November 1975 at the Women's Interart Center. The exhibition included the work of 115 women from the Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia. A six-page review in *Art International* concluded, "In its overall impact, the show was an esthetic-political event evidencing high esthetic value directly while political importance remained implicit. . . . Baber and Gillespie were able to mount an exhibit that was impressive apart from feminist concerns while it advanced the cause of women in art with an admirable openness and evenhandedness."

Gillespie continued to conceive and curate exhibitions featuring women, such as *Women Artists' Sketch Books* drawn from the historical archives of the Center and *Women Artists Paint Women Artists*, which traveled to galleries in Florida and Virginia. She wrote a number of essays, including "Professionalism and the Woman Artist," which was included by Judith Loeb in *Feminist Collage*, published by Teachers College at Columbia University. Another text, "Overcoming Barriers: Special Problems of the Woman Artist in the South," was printed in the *Southern Quarterly*.

Gillespie is still a role model for women artists because she seems to have had it all: a successful career, a happy marriage with children, and a sense of purpose concerning the inequalities endured by women artists. She feels that the most important accomplishment of the Women's Movement was that the women artists got to know each other, which eased a terrible feeling of isolation. Today she says simply, "The Women's Movement was an exhilarating time."





Dorothy Gillespie remembers clearly just when her personal artistic expression took form in the 1950s. She was painting a Gothic cathedral and kept abstracting the form by taking out more and more detail. Then, while working on the steps that led to the front portal, she “did not want to tell anyone how many steps they had to walk up”; instead, she “wanted to paint what they felt entering their house of worship.” At that moment, she “was ready to paint abstract art.” She suddenly became aware that, for her, completely abstract or nonobjective painting was not the result of a “natural progression from realism to total abstraction; rather it is a ‘mental thing’ at which you arrive through a quantum leap of sorts.”

Then through a deep commitment to the Environments and Happenings of the 1960s, she embarked on the creation of site-specific projects beginning in the next decade. In 1975 Gillespie made her first major, public, site-specific work. Called *New York City Wall*, the giant mural, measuring 53 feet by 90 feet, has a horizontal composition. The location that Gillespie selected offered her work great visibility owing to its location on the corner building that faces north on Houston Street at Mercer Street. Pedestrians, passing traffic, and aircraft passengers are able to view the work. (Gillespie herself has seen it from the air on more than one occasion.) She carefully mixed the cool and delicate tints for the mural out of exterior flat house paints. Her configuration of nonobjective forms, in predominantly light violet and gray-blue muted tints and shades, joyfully contrasts with the drab colors of the building.

Gillespie’s ability to integrate a variety of spatial configurations into an art work is clearly evident in *Paper Works*, her Environment shown at New York University in 1976. Paper as her primary material allowed Gillespie to maximize experimentation within numerous environmental and site-specific locations. By having an abundance of material, she could create a variety of positive and negative spatial relationships. Gillespie was involved with the extensive expanse of horizontal space, while also venturing into the exploration and the permutations of vertical space. This thorough engrossment into the surrounding space allowed her to develop a special sensitivity to the challenges of the spatial configurations in which her abstract two- and three-dimensional forms took residence.

The *Paper Works* installations consisted of groupings of

cylindrical shapes, painted both inside and outside, and of various flat and curved shapes, painted with colorful abstract designs. Additional dimensionality was generated by shadows and reflections, producing an integrated universe of forms. Self-contained within its confinements, this was a universe of playful wonder. This playfulness of “moving” forms seems to be Gillespie’s artistic signature and her major contribution to the art of the twentieth century. Although we may trace the origins of this playful, joyous element to some of her modern fore-runners, such as Miró, Klee, or O’Keeffe, it was not isolated with such crystalline purity in their works, in which somber, ambiguous, or sexual overtones can be detected. Gillespie, however, wishes to explore the feeling of joy: pure, distilled, and totally abstracted.

In 1979, Gillespie’s *Roanoke Wall*, a 50-by-50-foot mural on the Court House Square Building, was financed by Ann Lee, a developer in Roanoke, Virginia. The mural provides visual relief within the urban environment. Its effect of a “moving” pattern or group of forms infuses a burst of joyful energy into the otherwise routine street life of a city.

The following year nature became an integral part in Gillespie’s outdoor site-specific work *Sentrees*, which is located at a private residence in Londonderry, Vermont. It consists of three vertical aluminum structures, each 12½ feet high. These units are painted with automotive lacquer in order to prevent discoloration from the drastic weather conditions in the area. The white totemic and curving aluminum shapes are covered with colorful geometric designs in brilliant reds, yellows, blues, and violets. The friendly but powerful forms seem to overlook the surrounding landscape that generates their negative shapes. In summer, the dominant greens of the foliage create textures that converge with the shimmering water of a lake, which also mirrors the sculpture. Reminiscent of three totem/toys, the forms are designed to interact differently with the same environment during the winter season. The usually abundant snowfalls submerge part of the sculpture – up to six feet – under the white mass, allowing spectators to view the triple structure from a different vantage point. This phenomenon occurs six months out of a year; the area is part of a cross-country ski trail, bringing viewers throughout the winter.

*Summerscape*, designed in 1982 for the Cleveland Ballet, might be considered Gillespie’s *magnum opus*. This



work was not only sculpted for a particular space, but also came into existence in order for another work of art to be born: a ballet by Dennis Nahat choreographed to Dmitri Shostakovich's Concerto No. 2 in F. Collaborations among sculptors, painters, choreographers, and composers have a long tradition in Western art, especially in this century, with artists such as Salvador Dali, Alexandra Exter, Natalia Goncharova, Pablo Picasso, Sonia Delaunay, Andy Warhol, and Isamu Noguchi preceding Gillespie. *Summerscape* may be the first time, however, that a visual artist's work initiated the planning.

The series of ten sculptures of enameled aluminum she cre-

ated for the stage space range in size from 4 to 7 feet in diameter. The undulating ribbons that form the celestial configurations are reminiscent of starbursts, colorful suns, or even flowers. A playful mixture of cosmic energy and joyful toys, they reminded the choreographer of the exuberance of youthful happiness and enthusiasm. This youthful energy established the mood for the ballet, enhanced by Nahat's selection of appropriately youthful music: the concerto Shostakovich wrote for his son's nineteenth birthday. The costume designer for the ballet, David Guthrie, based his color scheme on Gillespie's sculpture.

The ten units of this environmental sculpture radiate their ribbons/rays from the central core outward. The feeling of motion is established by the starbursts executing their own ballet at the beginning of each performance. After the curtain is up, the starbursts are located a few inches above the floor. They gradually rise, ending their journey in exactly designated locations. The shadows that are cast by each unit increase in size during the upward trajectory. Then, the motion of the sculptures ceases and the motion of the dancers begins, while the starbursts continue to contribute subtly to the movement by casting their shadows and dispensing shimmering reflections into the surrounding stage space. Nahat was also inspired by the directions of the starbursts' tenta-



*Cathedral*, 1956, oil on masonite, 72" x 48"

cles. The movements of individual dancers and the groupings of dancers were in part determined by the shapes and locations of the rising/raised starbursts. The interaction between the vibrant bodies of the dancers and the inanimate forms above proved emotional and sensual.

Another project by Gillespie emerged as a result of this collaboration. Nahat, aware of the emotional benefits that the dancers derived from the presence of the sculptures during the performances, decided to extend this benefit into the classroom. He asked Gillespie to create an environmental work for the dancers' rehearsal space. This work, completed

in 1984, was named *Cleveland Ballet Rehearsal Studio*. The sculpture, located on the upper half of the entire wall space, consists of multiple interconnecting ribboned forms of enameled aluminum. The forms are rhythmic and musical, suggesting motion and bursts of energy. The colors are a mixture of muted lavenders, golds, reds,



*New York City Wall*, 1975, 56' x 93'

and blues. The shapes cast shadows and generate reflections of light, enhancing the feeling of motion and evoking a fantastic musical forest. The effect on the dancers is energizing and uplifting.

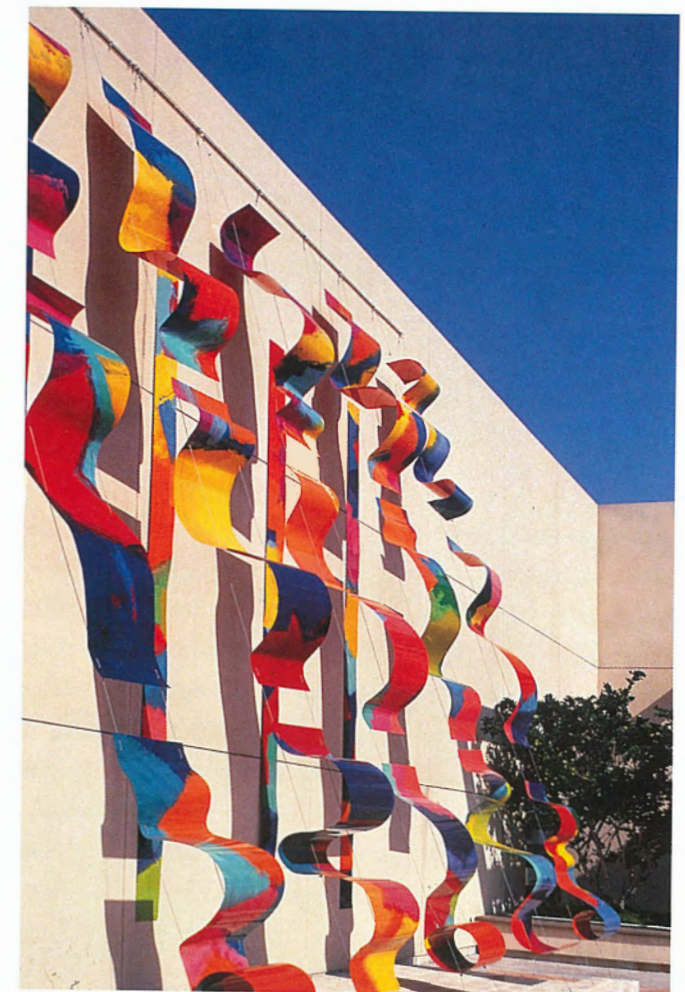
In 1985 Gillespie completed a site-specific project for the main lobby of the South Square Corporate Center in Durham, North Carolina. The large work, *Triangled Celebration*, was shipped flat and then finished by her on the site. The 880 feet of flat, enameled aluminum were transformed into three 16-foot-high totemic forms. All pos-

sessed triangular silver cores, to which ribbons of metal, ranging from 6 inches to less than 1/4 inch, were bolted. The brightly multicolored free-form shapes were painted over a silver background with gloss enamel. The giant assemblage's ribbons bent, twisted, and spiraled outward, radiating color, energy, and movement caused by the flow of air from passing crowds, who could view the work from two levels. The project remained in the lobby for more than seven years. Life often presents interesting and surprising twists of fate; *Triangled Celebration* became part of a synchronistic event when, in 1993, it was acquired by the Asheville (North Carolina) Museum of Art, page 103. Gillespie redesigned the work for its new space. The three totems now hang from the ceiling of the atrium of the museum. Three arched windows allow them to be viewed from the exterior space in front of the atrium, and they are also visible from various vantage points within the museum. The powerful forms are reminiscent of the lush tropical trees from a child's fantasy of a planet of happiness, or the magnificent elongated garments of the Native American matriarch, the Buffalo Woman.

A commission from Indiana's Greater Lafayette Museum of Art for an outdoor environmental sculpture presented Gillespie with a special challenge: to harness the forces of technology by transforming space-age materials into a work of art, which she completed in 1985. This project, *Launched Ribbon*, was sponsored in part by the Indi-



*Summerscape*, 1982, for Cleveland Ballet, enamel on aluminum, 10 units 4' to 7' diameter



*Magic Carpet Slides*, 1986, enamel on aluminum, 28' x 26' x 8', Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, Florida





*Centered Celebration*, 1985, enamel on aluminum, 60' x 50', Center in the Square, Roanoke, Virginia

ana Arts Commission, The National Endowment for the Arts, and the Alcoa Foundation, which supplied the material for the sculpture – mirrored airplane aluminum. This thick aluminum sheet cannot be permanently bent or twisted, but bounces back to its original flat state. Gillespie had to devise new methods to deal with this high-tech material, resulting in a new basic unit for her sculptures – the loop. She riveted each section of the sculpture together in order to force it to hold a curve permanently. She also had to paint its abstract design on separate, thin aluminum (airplane aluminum does not accept paint) and then cut out and bolt it to the mirrored surfaces of the loops. Gillespie is convinced that “in the high-tech age, using the hands is even more important than ever. If

cultural complex that consists of the Roanoke Museum of Fine Arts, the Mill Mountain Theatre, the Roanoke Valley Historical Society, the Roanoke Valley Science Museum, and the Roanoke Valley Arts Council. The extensive wall space serves as the negative space for the installation of more than forty multiple units, which can be observed from different levels and angles as well as from the glass wall of the adjacent high-rise building. The three-dimensional units of ribbons, enamating from their centers, often touch each other and intertwine. The brightly colored free-form shapes are painted on the metal over the original white finish. The smooth, gleaming surfaces contrast against the textures of the brick wall. The effect is multi-dimensional and multifaceted: the subtle motion of the

something is all high-tech, it seems foreign, removed from human beings, and they can't relate to it.”

*Launched Ribbon* is a sculpture with its highest point at 15 feet. Its composition allows it to cast strong shadows on the background wall, while also breaking into the sky above. Serpentine and vertical, the sculpture seems to have the countenance of a benevolent guardian or a toy dragon. This playful “dragon” has bright, free-form blotches of color over its “body,” painted in red, orange, yellow, and blue. The background color of the ribbons is the mirrored silver surface that reflects into itself the surrounding environment, becoming a part of the site; it also reflects the sky, the clouds, and the spectators. These reflective properties generate an interconnectedness among the artist (who can also enter her sculpture via reflection), her art work, and the environment.

The year 1985 was prolific for Gillespie's site-specific projects. Among them was a five-story-high environmental art work she designed as a personal tribute to the city of Roanoke, her place of birth. The monumental work, *Centered Celebration*, was created in her studio out of sheets of aluminum, painted and partially cut into shapes. Subsequently, they were shipped to Roanoke and installed at the Center in the Square, a

ribboned forms and the change in light as the day passes create numerous permutations of glints and shadows. The shapes produce an illusion of a paradise of exotic vegetation.

Gillespie designed an environmental sculpture for the Museum of Art in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1986. The installation (28' x 26'8"), commissioned by the Cypress Savings and Loan Association for the museum, consists of nine sections of painted aluminum, with alternating ribbons that are either attached to the wall or suspended by cables to float over the wall surface in a vertical configuration. The floating shapes are three-dimensional, curling and curving as if in a process of upward ascension. Called *Magic Carpet Slides*, the sculpture suggests the world of fairy tales and a promise of a happy skyride on these ascending “magic carpets.” Gillespie used cables to secure the floating carpets/magic serpents, allowing them to sway gently and to produce their own sound as wind currents touch the ribbons. The wall is the tallest of the three that enclose the sculpture garden, located on the second floor of the museum. Both the height of the wall and the size of the sculpture force the spectator's eyes to glide over *Magic Carpet Slides*, past the wall, and into the Florida sky, causing a perception of the possibility of a flight into the realm of spirituality.

Three years later the Art in Public Places of Broward County, Florida, commissioned Gillespie to create a mural suggesting the theme of flight. She completed it in 1989, and it was installed in the Delta Air Lines terminal of the Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport, inside the escalator well on the left side. *Color and Forms in Flight*, page 58–59, consists of forty rectangular units of enameled aluminum, 12 feet 2 inches by 22 feet 2 inches. Each square is surrounded by negative space that forms a framed grid. Although the surface is two-dimensional, the multitude of colors – more than 130 hues, tints, and shades – generates a spectacular view for the thousands of returning passengers who use the escalator. The moving staircase, by gradually bringing the viewer closer and closer to the work's surface, adds to the participatory effect, allowing the viewer to become briefly but intensely absorbed into Gillespie's world, a world that may be perceived as a tropical forest, viewed from a descending aircraft.

Another commission brought Gillespie to Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1989. *Colorfalls*, a 42 feet high by 11 feet wide sculpture, detail on pages 54–55, is located in the center of city life, Thalian Hall. Its fifteen-foot-wide atrium is

four stories high. The staircase and balconies allow the sculpture to be viewed in its entirety from every level. A skylight in the atrium's ceiling provides the nuances of changing illumination at different times of the day. Gillespie created the painted aluminum work section by section in her studio in New York for “Artluminium,” an in-



*Colorfalls*, 1989, enamel on aluminum, 42' x 11' x 3', Thalian Hall, Wilmington, North Carolina



vitational exhibition in Montreal, Canada, sponsored by Alcan. Much of the final shaping of the cascading, waving, and curling ribbons, however, was done by her on the Canadian site. The top of the sculpture was designed to fit within the Wilmington atrium, gracefully hugging a cylindrical fixture, with several tendrils stretching in the direction of the skylight.

*Colorfalls* consists of two sections of uneven proportions, thus generating a negative space that provides the illusion of depth. The sculpture cascades down – its “waves” spilling and getting wider as they reach the floor – a monumental splash of vivid reds, pinks, oranges, yellows, greens, blues, and violets, with a touch of black. The sculpture forms a fantastic waterfall of imposing proportions.

Two sculptures were created by Gillespie for Broward



Lawn Sculpture, St. John's Museum, Wilmington, North Carolina, 1993



Winter Palace Concerto, 1993, enamel on aluminum, 74" x 90" x 4", Buena Vista Palace Hotel, Disney World, Orlando, Florida

Community College in Pembroke Pines, Florida, in the 1990s. *Royal Crest*, a work of enameled aluminum, is located indoors, where it is attached to the wall, extending from the window on the building's north side to the second-floor balcony, and from the ceiling to the upper level of the first floor. The sculpture consists of ribbons radiating from one center, a sunburst configuration also reminiscent of an elaborate bow on a gift package. The background color is gold, possessing a high degree of luminosity and reflectability. The free-form shapes that Gillespie painted over the gold metal surface are in reds, oranges, greens, and blues. The undulating tendrils twist and curl, as if the mass that they form is imbued with the exuberant life-force of youth. The work can be viewed from several levels: the first floor, the steps leading up to the second floor, and the second floor itself. The shadows and the reflections on the white wall change throughout the day, since the lighting is both natural and artificial. The golden glow of the metal surface contrasts with the bright colors.

The second sculpture, *Color Clouds and Ribbonded Currents*, pages 70–71, is an outdoor piece located on the east wall of the lecture hall, oppo-

site the art gallery. When planning the work, Gillespie kept in mind the amount of pedestrian traffic in the area, the shapes and colors of the surrounding architecture, and the environment. The sculpture occupies nearly two-thirds of the upper level of the wall. It can be seen from several vantage points outside the campus, especially by motorists and by people in the low-flying aircraft of adjacent Hollywood Airport.

The work consists of seventeen aluminum ribbons, nine of which are wide and wavy, and eight of which are flat and firmly attached to the wall. The nine wavy strips of painted aluminum curl away from the wall on both the top and the bottom. The background color of all the ribbons is white, and the geometric free-form shapes are painted in reds, yellows, blue-greens, blue-grays, blues,



Encounter at the Winter Palace, 1997, enamel on aluminum, 19'10" x 7'11" x 8"

and shades of violet. These forms seem to travel through the ribbons themselves and are connected by serpentine shapes in a variety of blue and gray colors, from light to dark. The seventeen ribbons are all visually interconnected by the rhythm of their own floating patterns. The ever-changing shadows of the nine undulating ribbons elongate with the sun. This work's connection with the continuum of the passage of time as well as its majestic verticality force the spectator to glance heavenward, particularly during sunsets.

It seems very natural that Gillespie's next work found a home where fantasy is reality. *Winter Palace Concerto* was installed at the Buena Vista Palace Hotel at Disney World in Orlando, Florida, in 1993. Gillespie used a neutral white wall as the background for a rectangular, enamel-painted aluminum sculpture of some 7 feet by 8 feet. The metal ribbons are arranged vertically in a flow of wavy configurations in exuberant colors: brilliant reds, oranges, pinks, violets, and yellows. The silver background of the serpentine and curling ribbons shimmers and reflects both the colors present in the sculpture and the glow of the surrounding lighting. The ribbons break out of the rectangular shape and into the wall space, creating a variety of subtle shadows that surround the work like a halo. The spectator is presented with a feast of real and illusionary three-dimensionality, accented by the rhythmic groupings of the colors themselves.

The examination of Gillespie's site-specific art makes clear that her creative manipulation of natural, urban, and interior space transcends that of her predecessors and establishes her major place within postmodernist art. Clearly, other artists have used these aspects in a similar way, such as Alexander Calder, who painted and bolted together metal constructs and played with the concept of real or implied motion, or Chryssa, who is interested in shadows and in actual and reflected lights. But it is only in Gillespie's art that the interplay and layering of shape, shadow, light, motion, and the illusion of motion are thoroughly explored, reinvented, and constructed into a new art form, in which the art of painting and sculpture become one and external space is integrated into the work itself. In the hands of Dorothy Gillespie, the arts of painting and sculpture become one with the environment that they occupy. She is able to transmit to the viewer the emotional impact of her art: the pure essence of joy, energy, and spirituality. Gillespie may be the current artist who best prophesies the art of tomorrow: the sibyl of site-specific art.





## Sculptures

Richard Martin

The magic and the energy of the pinwheel are the only explanation or metaphor sufficient to Dorothy Gillespie's sculptures. Long compelled by the enchanted and spiritual elements seized from the mundane in her performance art, Gillespie developed her exceptional sculptural vocabulary from a like innocence and a like mysticism.

Indicative of the magical matrix is her *Rain Dance to the Sun II* (1990) and the *Rain Dance* series dating back to the mid-1980s (pages 32–37). A cascade erupts from a fundament of the aluminum base, barely discernible toward the top. But both above and below, the flat plane is twirled and twisted into new shapes and given all the kinetic powers of rushing water, the still plane of the placid pond reengineered in a short passage to the turbulent and three-dimensional. As a river's run can give dimension and tint to the plain and planar pond, Gillespie discovers both color and energy in her torrent into three-dimensionality. Gillespie, in this title and many others, acknowledges that the inspiration and reference are in the motion and commotion of natural phenomena, not a formal process alone. In all the permutations of her sculptural ideal, Gillespie never succumbs to mere formalism, always shaping ideas as significant as the form itself. Thus, the concept of a rain dance, suggesting plumed Native Americans and the mystery and striving for mastery over nature, are the inexorable elements of thinking that accompany Gillespie's forming and looking. What does the rain dance try to do, but to give human beings a dominion over (or, at least, a negotiation with) the immense power of nature?

Thus, *Rain Dance to the Sun II* is the mediation of human dance upon the authority of the world as a given. Such interpretation demonstrates the connection between Gillespie's sculpture of the 1980s and 1990s and the earlier work. The sculptures that burst from the wall or plunge from heights are not discontinuous with Gillespie's sensitive earlier work. On the contrary, these sculptures sustain Gillespie's deep involvement with the real world and her will to transfigure that world in the mystical powers of art. Her "rain dance" precipitates torrents; her sculpture gives us every reason to believe in the supernatural power of a work of art. In *Rain Dance to the Sun II*, the colors that remain more or less unfulfilled on the plane are made into curls of energy as they lash into space, letting the spectator realize the unleashed, unlacing dynamic of a

sculptural line that truly functions in the three dimensions. Color becomes released and liberated when it is not confined by the plane. Further, for Gillespie, the eccentricity of shape, allowing tendrils and extensions, shaggy edges, and frothy elongations, defies any parameter. She believes in the self-defined shape that defies the rectangle or any other given geometry. One of the reasons why her work feels so organic is that she resists the easy solution of form gathered, ungathered, and then gathered again. Gillespie genuinely lets forms seem to go awry, even as she so often works on the large scale. In *Rain Dance to the Sun II* the general shape is hard to define: it is not quite ovoid or any other demarcated form.

Inchoate, self-determined form is an abiding characteristic of Gillespie's work. Even the public and commissioned works do not regularly fill the wall or the space offered, but are much more likely to situate themselves on the site as if they had grown there, subject to the perverse rules of nature, not the standardizing segments of human geometries. Like the artist's age-old investigation of the water-stain on the wall as a grail for bestowing form and defying absolutism, Gillespie's search for form inspires every spectator to a similar scrutiny toward art. As impulsive and as unplanned as primal dance, the configuration Gillespie causes is sublimely organic, suggesting the spontaneous and free.

Gillespie creates the tempest. The "rain dance" has manifestly succeeded as color surges down the wall as if leaping along river cataracts or plummeting from the skies. A supernatural magic has been wholly invoked in the properties of sculptures to be observed and enjoyed as form and as wizardry subduing nature, defying expectations.

Likewise, three of Gillespie's early stalagmites testify to the same fusion of the formal and the occult. *Conjured Image #1, #2, #3* (1982), page 19, are three related sculptures seminal in Gillespie's work. Their impact is primary; their colors are the optic primaries of red, yellow, and blue, but their "conjured" impressions are even more than color alone. These are bewitched sculptures as startling in their presences in our physical world as anything dreamt up in Hollywood's alien-happy history. Yet, as impressive as anything Steven Spielberg could create, Gillespie's standing free-form figures are both of art's world and of human reference. After all, each of these is larger-



than-life, standing just above 6 feet, stretching out with outlandish and exotic curls, ringlets, and swirls, their corkscrew animation suggesting something a little bit out of Uncle Remus's tar baby, but something equally out of the contemporary alien. These are space invaders of the most basic kind in their relative congruity to human beings, but also in their spiny foreignness. Gillespie had set out, as early as 1982, to describe a sculptural form pertinent to the human body, primary in its shapes yet inexorably new and different. Her images are not merely made in the twisting and manipulating of three-dimensional space, though there they are crafted and innovative. Gillespie's images are conjured: summoned up in pure magic as well as in sculptural shape.

A similar floor-sited sculpture, *Royal Sentinel* (1984-88), page 45, is also a 6-foot-high sculpture as spiny as a cactus and as animated as a pirouetting dancer. While Gillespie tends to explicit reference rather than wordplay, it is hard to imagine that she has not thought of the sentinel as one who is sentient and alert in feeling as well as a watch-person. *Penelope's Tree* (1987), page 39, glitters with resplendent light. Penelope is, of course, the woman who weaves in order to fend off her suitors. By assuring such suitors that she cannot meet with them until she finishes a funeral garment for her father-in-law, Laertes, the faithful wife to Odysseus connives not only to weave, but also each night to rip apart the day's weaving so that the task is never achieved. What, then, is this tree dedicated to the weaver? It is the celebration of a traditional woman's craft and it is the implanting of that tedious craft into the grandiloquent aesthetic of sculpture, the medium aluminum and the scale 9 feet tall.

How did Gillespie arrive at this amalgamation of the physical and metaphysical as the nexus of her sculpture? The origin of her magic is, of course, her assimilated feminism, the impact of Mother Nature and such forms as rivers in their course, stalagmites in their free-standing assertion, and the amorphous aspects of forms familiar and forms invented. To be sure, there are other artists who have willfully shared art's invention with Mother Nature's and with the feminine form-giving property. Gillespie is no O'Keeffe; she does not yield to one recurrent metaphor, soon jejune. Gillespie is no Bourgeois; she does not answer Freud or Eliade. Gillespie is no Mendieta; she is not earthbound, though she is earth-referring and earth-enlarging. But Gillespie's sculpture, as her culminating achievement, effects the synthesis of agenda, fully assimilated into the work, and the exultation in form. We

know how humanoid, how natural, even how wonderful Gillespie's sculptural forms are even while they enrap-ture us visually. It is the reconciliation of the formal and the mystical, physical energy and the delightful incorporeal feeling that is Gillespie's conjuring and image-making. Simply put, it is amazing grace, an intangible rendered palpably physical.

Knowing that we are drawn to the physical in Gillespie's sculptures but are inevitably taken into her metaphysical dimension, the erupting flowerlike sculptures of the mid-1980s constitute a major step for Gillespie. These sculptures, in particular, seem to explode off the wall with the effect of fireworks or confetti shooting all from multiple centers. In one example, that eruptive force is compared to a *Celestial Journey* (1987), page 41. The journey is an important simile for Gillespie. The cliché of life's journey is rendered profound in the complexity of Gillespie's artistic and personal life, her indomitable conviction in being an artist, and her will to advance her art, never letting it rest in one psychic place or formula.

Moreover, Gillespie employs a favorite description of a sky journey to recall her astonishment the first time she flew above the clouds in a plane. That upper zone – once heavenly, now visible and certain – is Gillespie's most frequent explanation of the amazements of a modern artistic and visual life. Therefore, when Gillespie depicts a celestial journey, it is based in her own experience in flight but no less the ambition of life as well. The white field of *Celestial Journey* is, of course, the "ground" of the clouds; the inflections of color above and the projectile spurs of aluminum lick into a three-dimensional space, but Gillespie's exploration of a formal space is always her sensibility for the astral and heavenly, not forgotten in her sculptural blast. As much as Gottlieb's bursts stirred not only canvas but also earth and bomb, Gillespie's explosions send us into an outer space of the mind and of life's journey as much as they articulate the circumscribed space of the wall.

The wall-rippling music series of the 1990s (especially *Royal Concerto*, pages 78-79, and *Royal Concerto II*, pages 4-5) are sculptures that cease the eruption and begin to orchestrate the plane. Color is more dramatic than ever; this is, after all, baroque music. But the convulsive rupture of the 1980s is replaced by rhythm in the 1990s. After all, Gillespie knows the tempered sculpture as much as the all-out burst. In a sense, the *Royal Concerto* sculptures are influenced by and most like her 1970s stewardship of artist quilts, understanding fields of color. Gentle fluctua-

tion waves across the broad expanses of these sculptures, a mellow moment of musicality for Gillespie, whose relations to music and dance are recurrent throughout her art. Moreover, Gillespie's sculptural music had begun earlier in works such as *Festival Concerto* (1982), page 21, a germinal work in which swirl and curl begin to be more independent of the wall and the process of shredding is progressively more a process of knitting and suturing and twisting.

Among the musical subjects, Gillespie's *Winter Jazz* (1989), page 57, befits its name, recognizing the syncopation of the music in a burst form of large petals, augmented by a system of smaller tendrils. Jazz's natural form, without seeming to be unduly controlled, is a perfect counterpart to Gillespie's innate improvisations. As dauntless as ever, Gillespie set herself the double task of embodying music and of capturing the season in one sculpture. If music is, as Goethe imagined, an ultimate abstraction, the flickering white light of the sculpture is an abstraction but also a glimpse across a snowy winter landscape shimmering with color.

Gillespie captured another season the following year. *Rite of Spring* (1990), page 73, is again a musical refrain and a season's evocation. At first the shape and the colors suggest a Christmas tree, but Gillespie deftly leads us in the direction of spring as the yellow, chlorophyll green, and vermillion of her exuberant stele declare the colorful season. Ribbons of bright color, intensely conjoined, are like a spring garden of bounty and budding verdure, a spectacular feast for the eyes. Characteristically, Gillespie gives us Stravinsky, but reminds us of spring's first flowers as well. In another season, the music is unheard; *Autumn Beanstalk* (1990), page 69, narrates instead the sky-climbing story of Jack and his bean. Given that Gillespie is in virtuoso command of gravity in such sculptures, rippling them along a wall to which they

cling with tenacity but never feel pressed, the aspiring beanstalk is an apt metaphor. Further, Gillespie is never afraid to express her sophisticated optimism in terms as fundamental as a child's story.



*Ritual Grande*, 1982-84, enamel on aluminum, 122" x 72" x 18"

Gillespie's abundant joy is evident in all her art. In *Crayolas* (1990), page 77, the artist takes from the child's crayon box, but laces and plaits with a special deliberation. The raveling forms take on the circles of parings, as if skinning an apple, sharpening a pencil, or (as every child does at one time) stripping the colored paper from a crayon. Of course, the crayon is color within as well as col-



or outside. Gillespie offers a similar revelation: her peels, clumped together in cascade, rotate color exposed and color within in a continuous strip. The pigtail-like interlacing of Crayolas is merely reinforced in *Shaman II* (1990), page 75. The sweet memories of childhood are supplanted by bright colors and a mystical ideal of a shaman (magician, conjurer, healer). Gillespie's belief in this healer is apparent. The luscious colors make a ribbon candy of this mystical magician, but even more importantly Gillespie attributes to the shaman the dynamic of interlocked colors and twists. In fact, *Shaman II* defies the wall, seems to suspend gravity, and generates a spunky, shiny pointillism of colors lashed together.

By 1989-1990, Gillespie was so confidently in control of her legerdemain of the wall to begin a colorful series and to initiate a series on landscape, our references to the phenomena of nature. Great splotches of color, reminiscent of Jasper Johns's 1960s parodies of abstract painting, prevail in *Colorfall: Landscape* (1990), page 65; here, she definitely plays with words as well as the wall, concomitantly delighting in a waterfall of color and a colorful scene. Gillespie leads the eye of the viewer through the colors of her labyrinthine ribbons, letting us identify motion without ever being certain that we can follow one line. Waterfall, color, and landscape should perhaps conspire to deny sculpture and to affirm painting, but Gillespie is supremely the sculptor by 1990. *Landscape Memory* (1993), pages 98-99, even takes on the accustomed rectangle of modern painting, but insists on her ability to render even landscape as something fully sculptural. The massive *Colorfalls* (1989), pages 54-55 and 145, which had initiated this effort, renders the waterfall in the manner of a Matisse cut-out of the 1950s. Rich, juicy color abounds and pushes the falls toward an abstraction so intense that no natural kaleidoscope



*Rain Dance I*, 1987, enamel on aluminum, 46" x 19" x 14"

could match its brilliance or its boldness. The irresistible sparkle of *Colorfalls* (1992), pages 94-95, functions in the same way: the intense painterly field is even heightened by the aluminum medium, made more vivid by the curling, twirling forms and their propensity to catch light at any angle, and the quiltlike intense field of the sculpture's giant rectangle. It is Wordsworthian nature rendered in neon-acute hyperbole, but with the passion we reserve to the cosmos.

In *Wings of Song* (1995), pages 110-111, Gillespie conveys her interest in the quilt's field of color under the impact of her constructed field into three dimensions. The shape is more or less a square, but, like Mondrian, Gillespie converts the square to a diamond, subverting our orderly flatness and directing our attention to the ribbons of color, concave and convex, flexing across its surface. Even when we discern the outline - a diamond, or is it Africa? - we see more clearly the rippling structure of the aluminum ribbons basted and puckered and plaited.

Gillespie, the great feminist, has thus insinuated another quiet revolution. Not with the declamation of Judy Chicago, but with her own quiet fortitude, Gillespie has placed sewing and weaving in a man's medium of metal and of sculpture. Her poetry of intentions, her lyricism of beauty, and her willingness as an architectural sculptor to collaborate with space are all signs of the feminine. But is the stitch - elsewhere, "the subversive stitch" - not the rippled replacement for the masculinized gesture of painting, or facture? Sculpture as something intractable has been replaced in Gillespie's sculpture by the bouncy, animated vivacity of color and improvised sculptural form.



*Rain Dance to the Sun II*, 1990, enamel on aluminum, 59" x 24" x 8"





New River: Celebration, 1997, enamel on aluminum, 18" x 17" x 17"

Her free-standing sculptures seemed to bounce into being in the early 1980s as something taken from the sea, so spongy and so flexible were these whippy shapes. Gillespie's *City Tumbleweed* (1986) is like a Bertioia sculpture in the sense in which the spectator longs to touch its swirling tentacles, knowing that it will, like its namesake tumbleweed, spring and bounce with the touch. Gillespie by the mid-1980s was not manufacturing obdurate form in the tradition of male sculpture; she was developing a springy, tremblant, responsive form; she was employing the vigor and elation of things that move and cohabit, not sculptural objects that stand and command.

Is this an accident of time and technique or is this one of the bold signals of our time? Gillespie is too modest to propose the correct answer; she has customarily deferred to Schapiro, Spero, and Chicago and others in offering grand solutions to the problem of what emerging women artists and the feminine sensibility do in creation. But Gillespie's sculptures are the metaphors and they are the materials of decisive, substantive feminism. Impish

curls are not coiffure; Gillespie's are the maximum expression of how sculpture is transfigured from the overpowering and weighty to the ingratiating, lacing, and appealing. Flex, curls, ribbons: these are major instruments of sculpture for Gillespie. She is Penelope, the woman of craft who outsmarts the men around her.

Gillespie is not ashamed of pleasure in art. Her sculptures are figuratively lightened by their delight, the puckish joy of aluminum ribbons in ringlets along with the consummate joys of unabashed entertainment in color. Perhaps because her work so conspicuously lacks the angst that characterizes so much modern art, some have failed to notice Gillespie's innovative and visionary work.

Gillespie refers to another story in her work, the magic carpet. What her art creates is a kaleidoscopic carpet we might all admire and wish to ride. Her sculptures flutter off the wall and whip into the space of a room. But what one might cherish most of all is that they afford everyone a fantasy, a dream, and a transport, a magic-carpet ride on a sculptural spectrum of brilliant color.



## Honors and Appointments

Artist in Residence, Women's Interart Center, New York, 1972-present  
Co-coordinator, Women's Interart Center, New York, 1973-76  
Board Member, Women in the Arts, 1974-75  
Board Member, Women's Caucus for Art, 1975  
Chairperson, Fine Arts Committee, Interntional Women's Art Festival, 1975  
Doctor of Fine Arts (honoris causa), Caldwell College, New York, 1976  
Artist in Residence, New School for Social Research, New York, 1977  
Mayor's Certificate and Key to the City, Roanoke, Virginia, 1977  
Director, Art and the Community Institute, Human Relations Center, New School for Social Research, New York, 1977-83  
Artists Representing Environmental Art, Board Member, 1978  
Board Member, Clayworks, 1978-79  
Mayor's Certificate and Key to the City, Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1979  
Director, Art and the Community Institute, Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, 1980  
Outstanding Woman of Virginia, James Madison University, 1981  
Visiting Artist, Radford University, Virginia, 1981-83  
Visiting Committee, Fine Arts Department, Lehigh University, Pennsylvania, 1981-85  
Distinguished Alumni Award, Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, 1983  
Outstanding Service Award, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 1983  
Governor's Arkansas Travelers Award, 1983  
Allied Professions Award, Virginia Society, The American Institute of Architects, Richmond, 1986  
Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellow, 1986-96  
Women of Distinction Award, Birmingham Southern College, Alabama, 1987  
Alice Baber Art Fund, Inc., Grant, 1990  
Doctor of Pedagogy (honoris causa), Niagara University, New York, 1990  
Art in Public Places Committee, Broward Cultural Affairs Council, Florida, 1993-96  
Bachelor of Fine Arts (honoris causa), Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, 1996.  
Board of Trustees, Maitland Art Center, Florida, 1996-97  
Chair, Alumni Council, Maryland Institute, College of Art, Baltimore, 1996-1998  
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Distinguished Professor of Art, Radford University, Virginia, 1997

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