

Catalogue Text for Susan Dopp's Exhibition, *Ether*
Roswell Museum, August 2008

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To behold the paintings in Susan Dopp's *Ether Series* is to be quietly beckoned into a strange, new world. As inviting as it is unfamiliar, the world that opens up before us is a world of pure form, a world that transcends our usual sense of space and time and hovers somewhere in a dimension of its own. The inhabitants of this world, Dopp's compositional elements, are geometric forms—but only in the broadest sense, for this is no ordinary geometry. The shapes, aggregates, and clusters that occupy this dimension are of a higher order of complexity than the circles and squares of Euclidean geometry. And yet as irregular as the forms are, a discernible order asserts itself in the reappearance of many of the same elements across the series, suggesting a kind of symbolic language whose meaning defies logical understanding. Logic and reason being inadequate to the task, we realize that if we are to enter this world, another kind of knowing will be needed.

A universal order is established in Dopp's realm by way of a subtle irregular grid that pervades the space of all the paintings. Barely visible from a distance, the delicate lines that make up this grid suggest threads in a kind of metaphysical fabric that renders the world a unified whole. By virtue of this all-pervasive grid, we know we are not gazing into an empty space, punctuated here and there by forms, but rather into a space that has as much substance as the forms it envelops. Subtle fluctuations in the weight of the lines indicate that this is no dead, mechanical space; it is very much alive, and its pulse activates everything it contains, sending subtle vibrations to all its inhabitants.

Nothing is arbitrary inside this world. Within each painting, the forms and configurations are suspended in an exquisitely complex equipoise, replete with tensions and counter-tensions, all perfectly balanced in relation to each other. One senses that the displacement of a single form just a hair's breadth to the right or the left would upset the whole cosmic order, that even the slightest rupture would send the symphonic harmony spiraling into cacophony. In its inherent *rightness*, each piece seems to represent a singular and unique moment in this other dimension, a small sliver of whose internal dynamics we are privileged to witness.

And yet the privilege of observation is not all these suspended moments have to offer. Indeed, these paintings are more than mere windows onto a world we can never know directly. Given sufficient time, and the willingness to let one's self go, one can be taken into the realm of these strange forms, into a full participation in the rhythms and vibrations that animate their space. For as transcendent and otherworldly as this work is, its emphatic materiality keeps it at the same time firmly rooted in *this world*, in the world of the body. Beginning with the activation of the senses, the work's rich colors and warm, skin-like textures gradually seep into the innermost rhythms of the body, whose movements begin to fall into correspondence with those coursing through the work. In this state of sympathetic identification with the work, *its* tensions, pulsations, and vibrations become *our* tensions, pulsations, and vibrations.

It is ultimately in these higher tensions between physical and metaphysical, here-and-now and *beyond*, that the work's profoundly spiritual orientation reveals itself. For if it is by way of bodily participation that we achieve access to the work's transcendent realm, surely we have moved beyond the mind/matter dualism that stands at the threshold of the spiritual. In its intimations of a higher unity, the experience of Dopp's work is a truly transcendent experience.