

Pat Steir, *Mixed Marks, Grid and Ink Blot*, 2004. Color water bite and spit bite aquatints with soft ground etching.

PAT STEIR

Mixed Marks: a series of seven color etchings. Paper size: 29 x 28"; image size: 20 x 20". Edition 20. Printed by Catherine Brooks.

Pat Steir has said that she makes marks, she doesn't develop forms in space. Her art has active internal parts, but because your eye isn't led from one form to another it also has stillness in it. It is harmonious without being exactly balanced and active without being emotionally manipulative.

In her studio in New York she makes enormous paintings (a recent one is thirty-six feet long) with paint sliding and dripping in waterfall-like rivulets from top to bottom. In her drawings and prints she works with gesture on a smaller scale, often by flinging paint across the surface of the paper or plate. The resulting works, both in painting and printmaking, are abstract but landscape-like. "I've taken the drip and tried to do something with it that the Modernists denied—the image," she says.

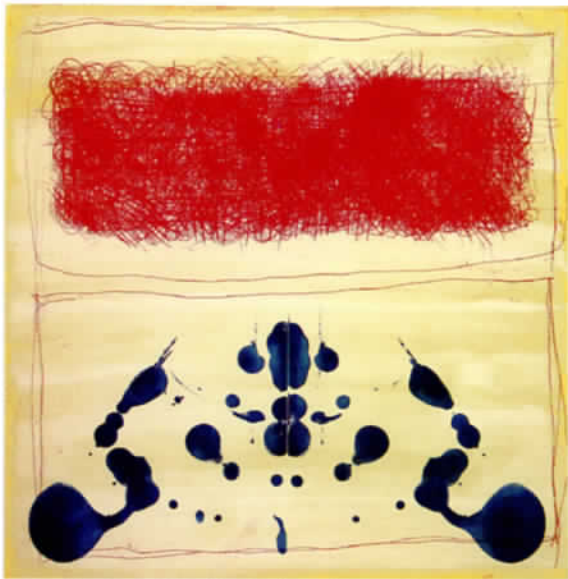
Back in the 1970s, Steir's marks were something she thought about as signs. She developed an almost trademark iconography: short, sometimes dripping brushstrokes isolated or in groups; birds, flowers, clouds and other figurative icons; a pale grid; color charts, squares, and typographic symbols including an X to cross out some images. She still uses some of those elements in some works, but her relationship to them is different than it was when she first began

to use them. She has shifted gradually from intending to investigate mark-making as symbol or sign to intending to do something that evokes an image but involves concentrating mainly on the activity of marking. The image evolves almost on its own.

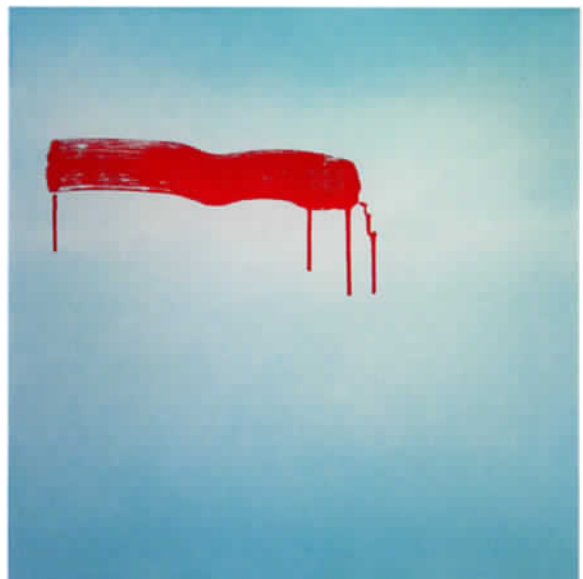
Over time, the stillness always underlying Steir's work has become denser. She says that the making of each mark "is like what a gymnast does—first the meditation, then the leap." Even when she has inserted controlled elements (the cross-hatching in some of these prints, for example), a meditative quality emerges. Ancient Chinese painters taught that the spirit of an artist flows into his hands, and the lines in Steir's prints embody this idea. In fact, Steir greatly appreciates Chinese and Japanese painting and calligraphy, and has made several trips to Asia. She has also been influenced by John Cage, whose chance-derived work was informed by Zen Buddhism. The combination of looking at Chinese paintings and having contact with Cage, whom she met in 1980, lends an extra measure of ease and grace to her work.

Pat Steir makes marks, and her mark making is confident and adventurous, satisfying and ultimately very beautiful.

—Kathan Brown



Pat Steir, *Mixed Marks, Rorschach with Red Rectangle*, 2004. Color sugar lift and spit bite aquatints with soft ground etching and drypoint.



Pat Steir, *Mixed Marks, Floating Mark*, 2004. Color water bite and sugar lift aquatints.



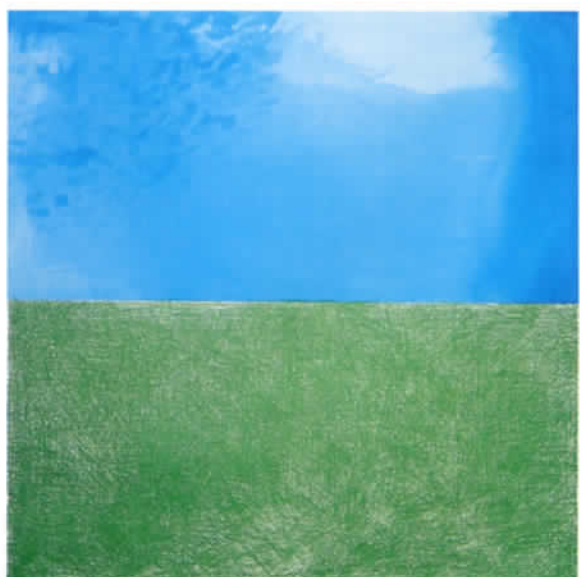
Pat Steir, *Mixed Marks, Double Mark*, 2004. Color water bite and sugar lift aquatints.



Pat Steir, *Mixed Marks, Arc*, 2004. Color water bite and sugar lift aquatints.



Pat Steir, *Mixed Marks, Rorschach with Symbols in Corner*, 2004. Color sugar lift and spit bite aquatints with soft ground etching and drypoint.



Pat Steir, *Mixed Marks, Landscape*, 2004. Color spit bite aquatint and hard ground etching.