



Recent Works:
Jane Lackey
Warren Seelig

April 17 - May 27, 1994

Jane Lackey

"The map is not the territory, and the name is not the thing named."

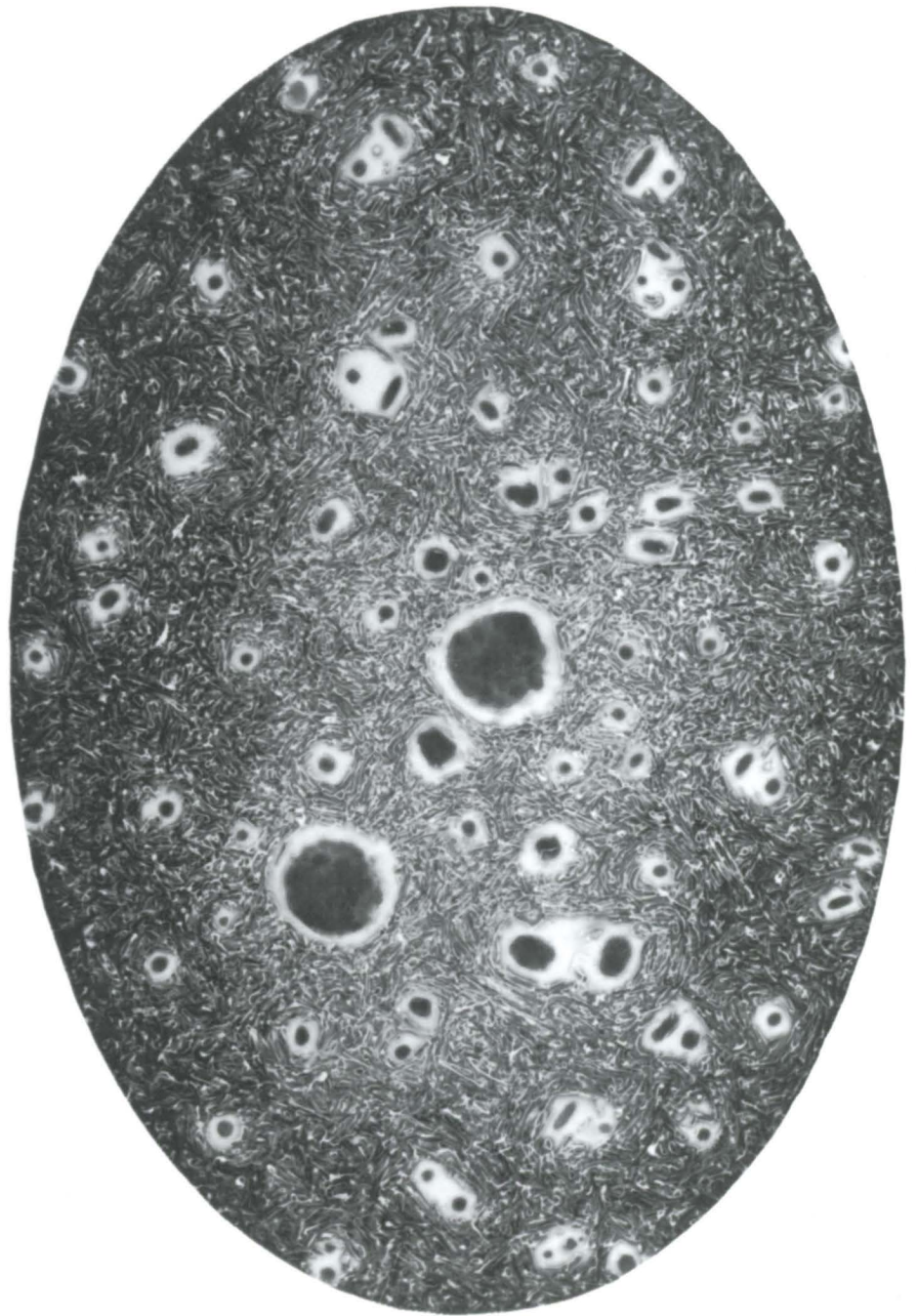
– Alfred Korzybski

Jane Lackey's prints and felt drawings/paintings remind us that while the map is not the territory, such mind and matter oppositions are not as clear or helpful as they might at first seem. Using the process of mapping – of expanding what is too minute or condensing what is too vast to be directly perceived – as both method and metaphor, Lackey poses such oppositions as dualities.

Professor and chair of the Fiber Department of the Kansas City Art Institute since 1980, Lackey has shown extensively since the late '70s. In these most recent works, she has combined two formerly parallel interests in drawing, as a system of recording and recalling images into being, and working with diverse materials such as felt and wood or wire to construct objects from tactile associations. Her work began to change about four years ago.

"I was in a residency in LaNapoule, France, in a studio with nothing familiar around, and I started a new series of drawings. Each drawing started when I would rub my fingertips through oil and then feel my way across the paper, leaving a path of fingerprints. Mapping the mental space began with a physical rhythm and proceeded as an excavation of thin layers. Through this method of touching and leaving a mark, I came to understand the physical material as an abstraction somewhat akin to a surface of skin or earth."^{*}

This process of drawing as both a mental and physical mapping is the basis for the most recent work on industrial felt and the collagraph prints. Using scanned topographies that are accessible only through sophisticated imaging technologies – from such diverse sources as MRI and cell diagrams and aerial and space photographs – as a starting point, Lackey scores and burns into the paper or felt. Carving and excavating, returning to rebuild with pigment or wax and scraping again, she creates both an image/object and the map of its retrieval over time. From this process of destroying and eroding the surface, lines converge into paths and nets, vaguely recognizable cell-like forms emerge and



Magnifications: Cell (2), Jane Lackey, 1993, 95" x 65" x .5", burned industrial felt, acrylic, encaustic. Photo: Jerry Kobylecky

recede. Both drawing and object, the works have a sculptural presence, front and back containing both the print and imprint, an inside and outside.

Shifting from the microscopic to the cosmic and back again, the large oval felt pieces such as *Magnifications: Cell (1)* and *Magnifications: Cell (2)* swim with an all-over, frantic activity, alternately pulling the viewer into the fine mesh of seismic lines and fractures and pushing him or her a step back in order to regain some perspective or grasp of the whole. The surface pulses and swirls with flashes

of energy punctuated by dark voids of collapse or regeneration, recalling the magnified images of both a single organism or cell and bodies moving through space. The sheer size of these works – some up to 9 feet high – and Lackey's placement of several distinct pieces in relation to one another reinforces their ambiguous associations and disorienting effects. In the most recent felt works, Lackey has bent or folded the ellipses off the wall and more completely into the space of the viewer, heightening the need to pursue a more engaged physical

investigation of surface and form.

Where the felt pieces hold cellular and astral perspectives in a tenuous balance, Lackey's prints present a more intimate duality. Framed in frosted glass, these smaller cropped details simultaneously resemble slides of tissue and aerial photographs of the earth's surface. Hinged to the wall so that they may be flipped 180 degrees – turned like the pages of a book, front and back – these finely textured surfaces elude a fixed reading. The eye travels over this suggestively familiar territory in a very sensual manner, alternately searching for a known system of description or landmark and feeling the way.

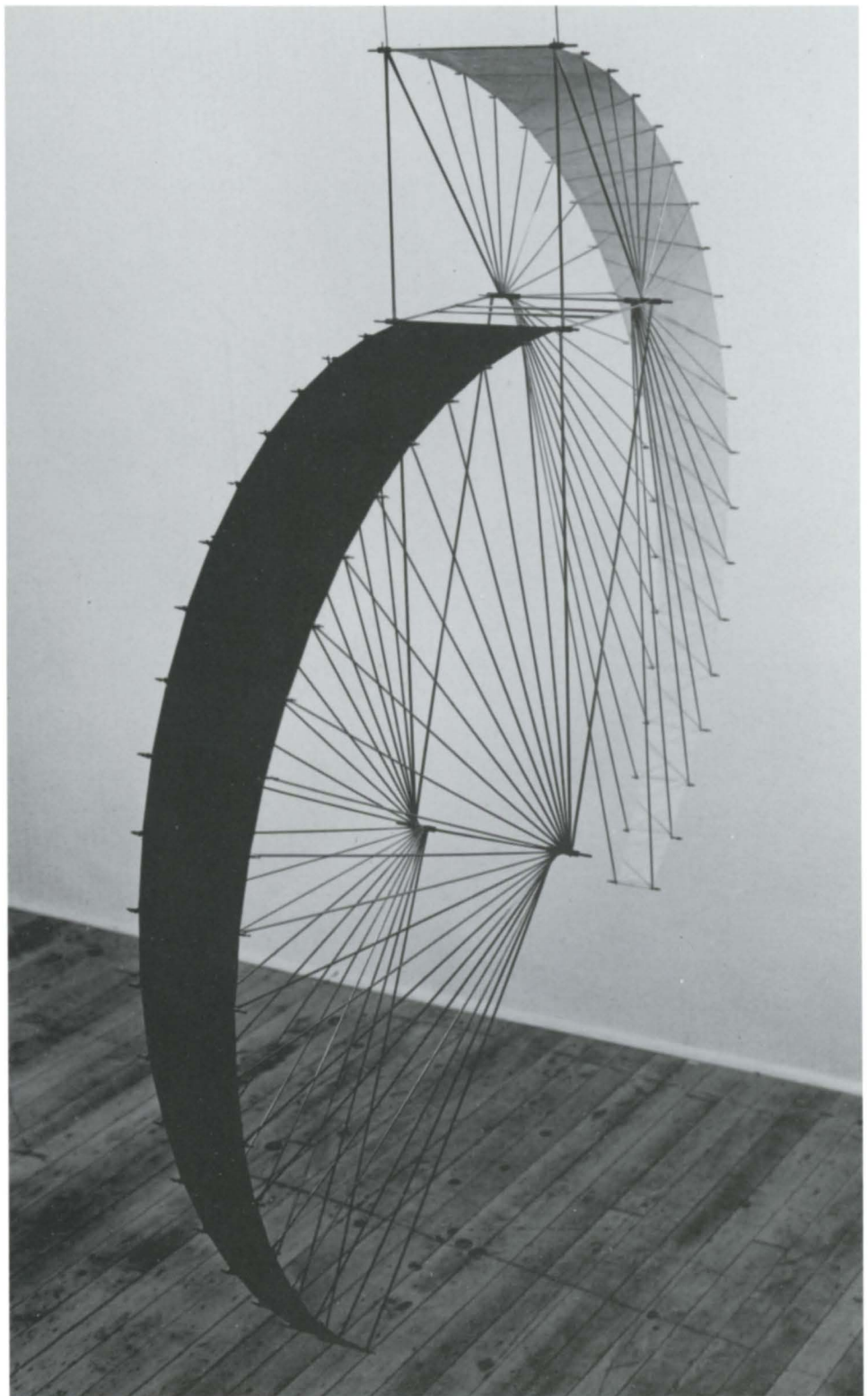
With the ability to produce complex images of the inside of the body and of the universe, the distinction between representation and abstraction, between imaging and imagining, collapses. In Lackey's work, these distinctions overlap and converge, suggesting alternative ways of seeing and multiple readings of the maps we produce.

*From notes for a panel presentation, *Tradition and Transition*, Fiber Symposium, 1993.

Warren Seelig

For Warren Seelig, abstraction is simply an unfettered delight in the sensual and structural possibilities of materials put into motion. And, in a play of light and shadow, volume and diaphanous expanse, his most recent arc and wing-like suspended membranes seem enchantingly to materialize from nowhere – a point becomes a line, then a plane – only to vanish almost as quickly as they appeared.

Underpinning all of Seelig's work – from early woven textile pieces of the '70s through the wall relief and suspended constructions included in this exhibition – is a fascination with ideal, nonobjective form discovered through an intuitive and organic intersticing of material and process. For Seelig, who studied at the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science in the early '70s and received his master of fine arts degree from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1974, weaving has provided the conceptual and metaphoric framework for this process of discovery. Remembering weaving his first length of cloth on a hand loom in 1971, Seelig writes:

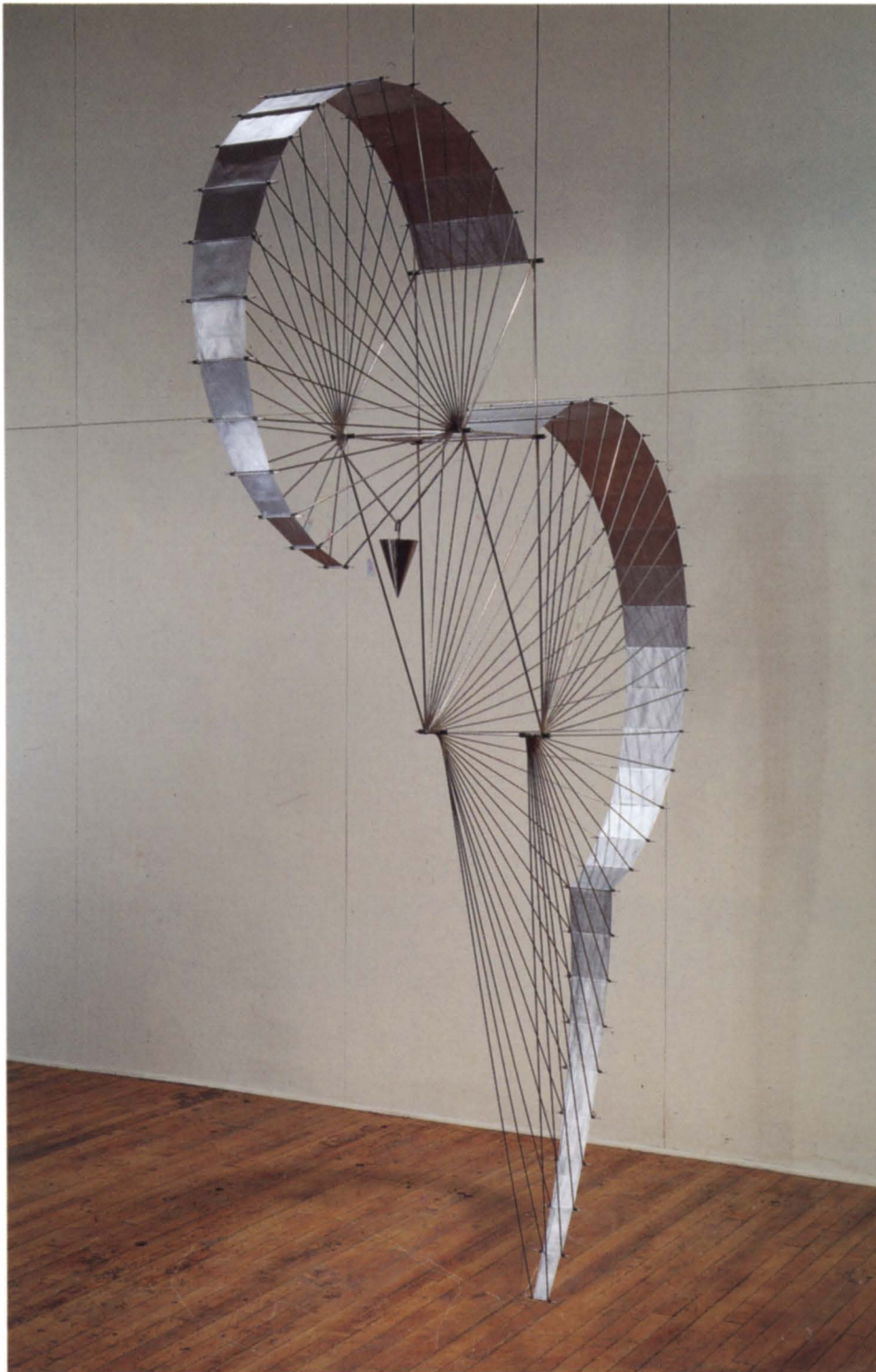


Double Ended II, Warren Seelig, 1992, 46" x 57" x 10", black and white oil stick on Tyvek and stainless steel spokes on axles. Photo: Jack Ramsdale

"There was alchemy in the way that a plane of cloth emerged – a gossamer screen built up out of hundreds and thousands of particles of threads, interlacing both vertically (warp) and horizontally (weft). I was mystified by a process and by materials that allowed me to construct a surface with both the hand

and the appearance of something organically whole. This experience has never left me, and in some ways it has informed most of my work, from the early woven constructions to the present."*

Seelig's appreciation of textiles and weaving lies in the way that the form



Silver Double Ended, Warren Seelig, 1994, 103" x 70" x 13", aluminum powder on Tyvek and lathe-turned stainless steel cone. Photo: Jack Ramsdale

contains and completes its making. The great-grandson of a textile superintendent at the Pontoosuc Woolen Mills in Massachusetts, the grandson of a textile machinery designer and the son of an engineer and inventor of textile machinery, Seelig as a child was entranced with the dance of looms and textile machinery. As a student at the Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science, he

became interested in the language of textiles, the schematic notations of fabric designs and the intricate precisions of the machines that produce them. At Cranbrook, exposure to Constructivist and Bauhaus theories further fueled his intuitive pursuit of ideal, nonobjective form.

From the early 1970s through the mid-1980s, Seelig, who since 1980 has headed the teaching of fibers and textiles at the

College of Art and Design, University of the Arts, Philadelphia, produced spare textile constructions using double cloth weaving, a technique where two layers are woven on the loom simultaneously. Hinging the two planes of cloth to intersect in repeated squares and rectangles across the width and length, Seelig produced patterns that became both the formal and physical structure. In the "pocket" junctures, he inserted flexible pieces of mylar, thus the skeletal structure was literally woven into the skin of the cloth, allowing him to bend and fold the planes into radiating fans and arcs.

By the mid-'80s, Seelig, using the conceptual logic of weaving, had achieved fully realized objects that unfolded through space and over time. In a marked shift from the compact density of weavings, he began to experiment with how ethereal and tenuous a structure could become while still retaining a discrete autonomy. In the resulting wall relief and suspended structures, he unravels the logic of the cloth constructions, stretching skin and skeleton, surface and support, to the brink of stability. Radiating pairs of steel spokes from a horizontal axle to form an arc, he suspends a fine mesh of nylon or Tyvek, held in place by a sleeved cross rod. The spray of spokes and fabric membrane hover in suspended animation. As the skin ripples out into space, it is both supported by and support for the threaded spokes.

The dynamic balance of these collapsible forms, arching out through space according to their own predetermined mechanics, produces a sense of pure wonder. As one moves around these bodies, point, line and plane unfurl and recede in a delicate yet articulate gesture that speaks not to an end or resolution but to the joys of aspiration itself.

*From *Wall Relief and Three Dimensional Suspension Sculpture Utilizing Tension and Membrane Structures*, a paper for IASS-ASCE International Symposium, 1994, *Spatial, Lattice and Tension Structures*.

— Essays by Allison Gamble
Free-lance writer and former managing editor of the *New Art Examiner*

Cover: Paired Ellipses, Jane Lackey, 1994, 93" x 62" x .5", burned industrial felt, encaustic, transfers. Photo: Bill Kildow

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