

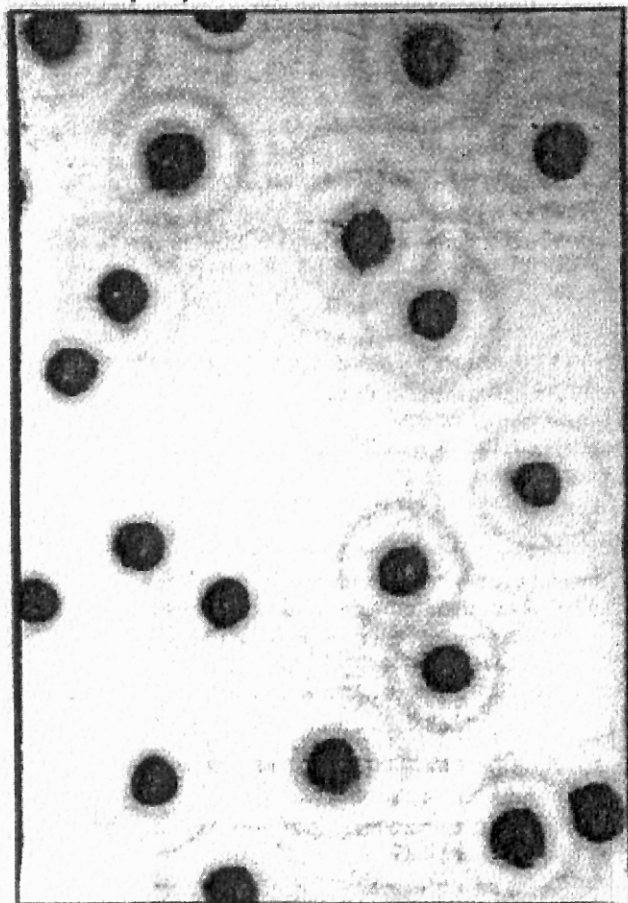
collin shutz

Spiritual Reproduction

FUEL GALLERY
SEATTLE, DECEMBER

Recently, physiologists have proposed that 'the mind' isn't necessarily located in the brain, but is constituted by waves of hormones and enzymes that traverse the entire body, encoding sensation as touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight. "There is no way to understand the world without first detecting it through the radar-net of our senses," writes Diane Ackerman, "Our senses define the edge of consciousness, and because we are born explorers and questors after the unknown, we spend a lot of time pacing that windswept perimeter."

Collin Shutz is such an explorer, scrutinizing the unknown at a cellular level and transcribing it in two dimensions. In "The Forest," shutz's first solo exhibit, he visualizes the smallest particles of living matter: minutiae become meditation, coaxed into rhythmic patterns. Clustered on the walls, his elegant drawings and paintings reflect reproduction, growth, and decay. Yet these sensual images do not literally transcribe what shutz sees, rather, they evidence a relationship between the artist and his perceptual field, with the forest as conduit.



Surface (Water), detail, charcoal on paper, 1993

REVIEWS cont'd

The arrangement of work in the exhibit mirrors his fascination with the cyclical nature of the life process: On one side of the room, shutz has grouped a series of charcoal drawings which are primarily concerned with origin. Glowing, pristine expanses of paper are marked by spherical forms that resemble eggs—or merging gametes at that moment when a zygote is formed and life begins in earnest. Yet these drawings are as much about absence as they are about nascent presence.

In shutz's visual lexicon, reproduction is a spiritual—rather than a visceral—phenomenon. Nowhere in these drawings is there room for mutation and messiness. In *Gestation (Rise)*, a dark, ovoid form (which itself contains numerous, darker spheres), seems to float in a fragile tissue of flesh-like vertical marks. Shutz has sought—and found—a common denominator for all life forms: that moment of cell division before the embryo can be recognized. Technically, these are subtle, gorgeous drawings: Shutz's skill with charcoal gives his cell-forms startling transparency and substance. And yet, as beautiful as these images are, shutz has tamed the unknown with clinical precision.

Gestation, on one side of the room, mirrors decay. shutz's drawings contrast with equally articulated, but slightly more organic paintings. The most striking and ambitious is a piece comprising five discreet parts, entitled *Sunyata (Earth)*. The title refers to a word based in the Japanese Shinto faith, meaning "things in their essential nature present no duality." And yet the duality inherent to this piece gives it resonance. Each elliptical panel, painted in acrylic, enamel, and gesso, is covered with a plethora of small forms which radiate, star-like, from central points. They spread across the surface like natural crystal formations, or outgrowths of fungus on a downed tree. Visually, these pieces create the effect of spongy, soft tissue beginning to rot: The stacked, broad panels shift from light to dark, each panel resembling a cross section of an unknown specimen. In transcribing decay—like gestation—shutz traps and immobilizes an ephemeral process.

The stillness of these images contrasts with the glowing, shifting black-and-white visuals of his large-scale drawing *Surface (Water)*. Conjuring the illusionism of Ross Bleckner, shutz deliberately verges on Op-art with this multi-panelled drawing. Like rain on a pond, it becomes hypnotic, each concentric, ghost-grey ring overlapping and fading. In this piece, shutz has managed to transmit the sensation of perception with fixed marks. That sense of motion is also present in two smaller drawings, *Dancers* and *Target*. Yet these images lack some of the singular intensity of his other drawings, such as *Stacked Orbs* and *Pods (Release/Decay)*.

In seeking to understand the world through close—even microscopic—scrutiny, shutz's image-making doubles as a metaphor for a spiritual quest. The precise, elegant body of work represented in "The Forest" marks the relationship between artist and environment: a visual poem to inexorable life. Yet in spite of his reverent artistic and intellectual search, it sometimes appears as though shutz has already decided what he will discover. His own act of creation, as manifested by this work, appears to leave nothing to chance. Surrounded by such clarity of execution, I longed for evidence of an unpremeditated impulse.

—Lach Ackerson