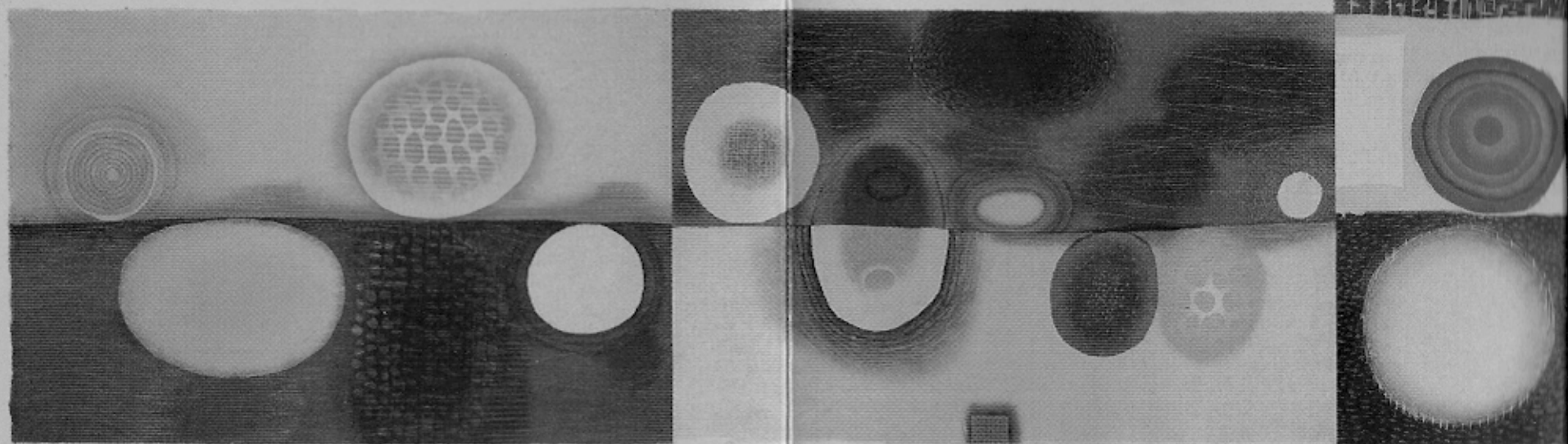


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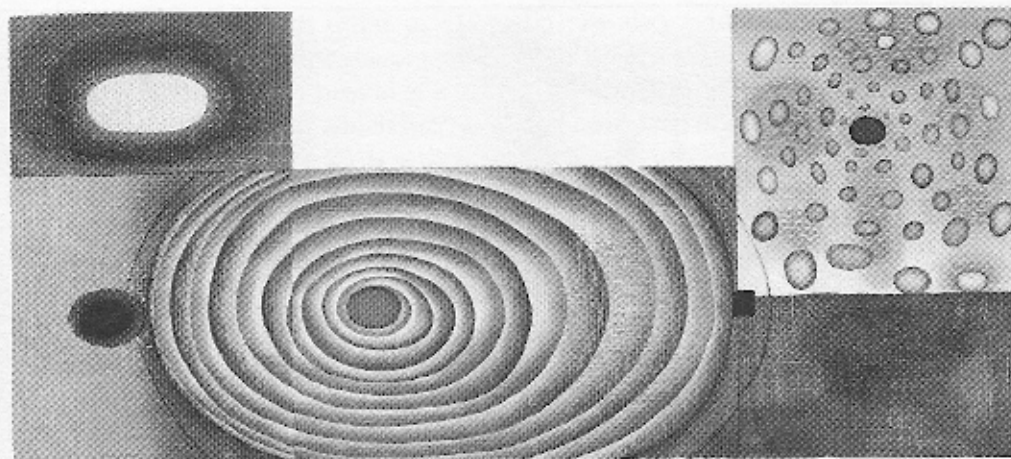
Karen Kunc *Horizon's Edge* 2007
woodcut, triptych 45"x17"

paper

works

Spring 2008 Volume 8.3
www.paperworks.info

Karen Kunc
Dreaming Blue
woodcut triptych, 2007 39 x 17



Sensory Source: The Work of Karen Kunc

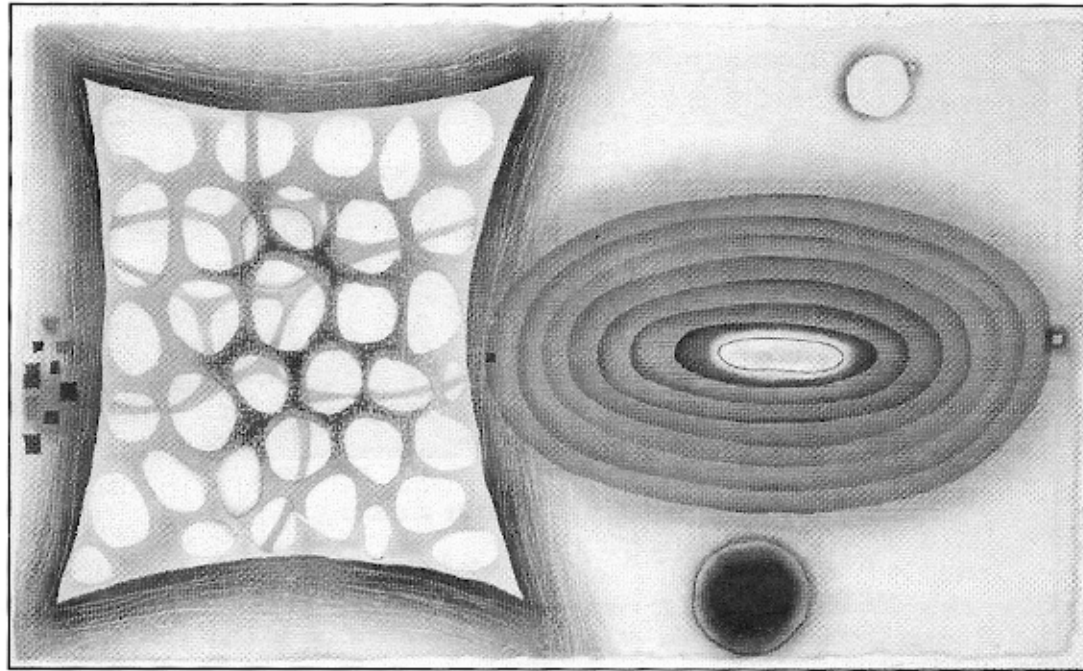
Editor's Note: It is inspirational to learn about the journey of an artist who excels in their field. As guest editor, I wanted to introduce the work of Karen Kunc, a nationally and internationally-known printmaker and book artist. Karen is Cather Professor of Art at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her work has been collected by major public collections including the Museum of Modern Art; The Library of Congress; The Walker Art Center; The New York Public Library and The Portland Art Museum. The following are excerpts from a review of Karen's 2007 exhibition at the Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, written by Janet Farber for the Kansas City publication "REVIEW" magazine.

In spring's upheaval, when green sprouts shoot up between the composting leaves of seasons past, it seems fitting to welcome the regenerative art of Karen Kunc, the Nebraska-based printmaker whose work celebrates nature and its cycles of wonder. Kunc, who is regarded internationally as an inspired experimenter and consummate practitioner of an admittedly archaic art form, was bestowed recently in Kansas City, Missouri, with the Printmaker Emeritus Award from the Southern Graphics Council, a true honor among her peers.

Kunc's particular passion has been for the art of the color reduction woodcut. It is a risky method in which a block is cut, inked, printed and cut again, until the composition is achieved. There is no turning back and little chance to edit in a way that is inherent in more traditional printmaking, where color and image are layered through the superimposition of separate blocks. Hers is a process pregnant with metaphor - of creation through erosion, of compositions that blossom to live.

That Kunc finds inspiration in the natural world is evident in every artwork. Over the course of her career, she has invented a vast array of ciphers, marks, and symbols that stylize the earth we see - trees, rivers, fences and furrows - and suggest the forces we can't - current, gale, gravity and growth.

cont.



Karen Kunc *Luminous Wonders*, 2006 woodcut, 12x20

Kunc's woodcuts have always displayed a purposeful tension between inherent properties of this medium and a desire to push the object beyond a reading as woodcut to one of print, or more simply, artwork. She exploits the grain and texture, the rough cut marks and gouges of woodcut vocabulary, yet counterbalances them with a soft edges and bleeds of color that evolve from her inking techniques. Though the paper support is essential to her expression, she often tries to escape the "tyranny of the rectangle" by printing on shaped paper, giving the works an enhanced object quality and greater emphasis on relationships between edges and internal forms.

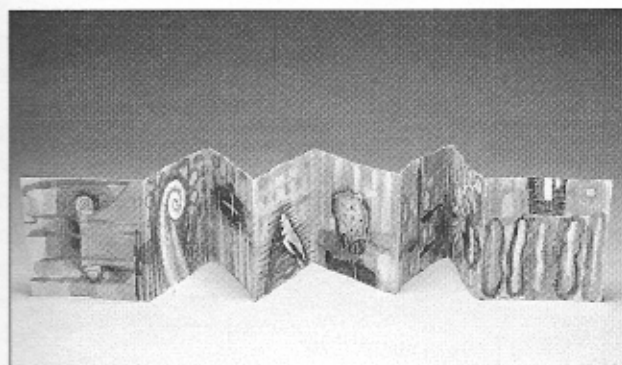
Kunc has long been producing artist's books with a strong sculptural presence, whether made of carved, inked blocks or accordion-folded papers. In her new prints, she translates onto the wall the experience of the books - of an intimate relationship with the viewer marked by time.

In some of her pieces, Kunc references Tibetan prayer flags - colored cloths imprinted with symbolic Buddhist designs, prayers and invocations; hung outdoors, they are thought to carry their wishes off in the breeze. The varied twigs function as a kind of ecological sign language; given our complicated relationship with nature, a wish to the winds is the least signal we might send.

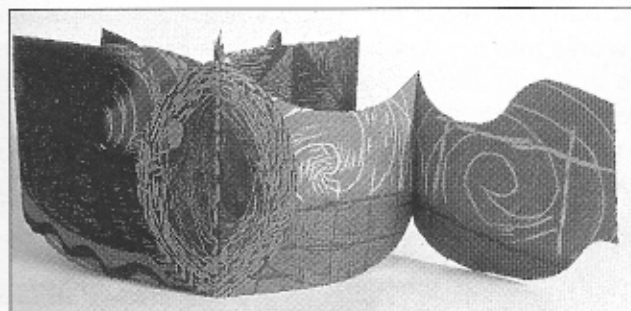
Kunc's cyclical flirtations with other print media are also evident in her work. She has approached etching, lithography, screenprinting and intaglio, sometimes as a solitary medium, sometimes in a mix. Each provides a unique kind of line and surface quality as well as the luxury of a reusable matrix, which her reductive approach does not. Characteristic of her seamless approach to mixed media, it is difficult to discern where one technique ends and the next begins.

Just as reading into Kunc's ciphered world of nature is key to appreciating her art, it is equally important to step back and enjoy the artist's gift for abstract expression. Her compositions reveal an elegant cohesion of opposites; of the organic and synthetic, stasis and motion, robustness and delicacy, deliberation and improvisation. They are visually complex and conceptually enlivening and always offer some new surprises. Whether your view of earth is fly-over or drive-through, you may never see it quite the same way again.

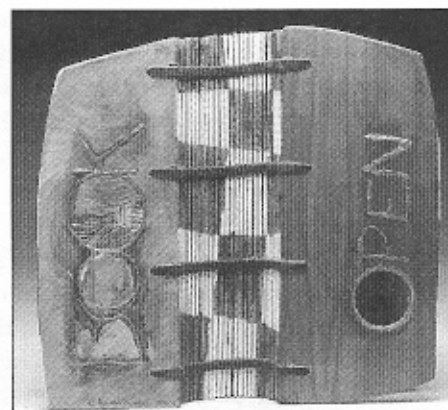
Editor's Note: Our special thanks to Karen for generously sharing images of her work for this issue and for permission to print portions of the article by Janet Farber. I encourage readers to view her work in color! More information and images can be found on Karen's website at www.karenkunc.com.



Karen Kunc, *Predella* 2003, watercolor, wood veneer



Karen Kunc, *O* 1991, woodcut, intaglio, letterpress on shaped paper



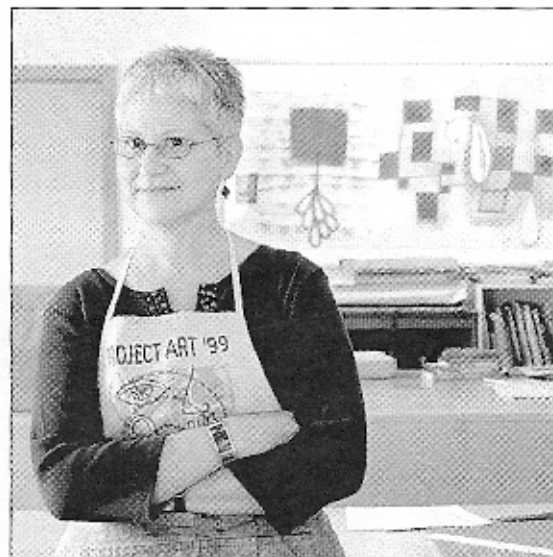
Karen Kunc
Open Book 1992, acrylic & graphite on walnut wood with foil lettering, sewn binding. 12x5x5

Karen Kunc - Artist's Statement

I have created new prints of invented landscapes and forms, derived from visions, or imaginings of invisible realities, such as breath, wind, currents, evolutionary growth. My interest continues in color, abstraction of natural forms, images that push against the limitations and the extremes of natural phenomenon, within my own inverted "quasi-science". My inner mental geometry of natural images is meant to create previously inaccessible landscapes - hybrid forms that are themselves the weird aberrations sometimes caused by human interference but which are necessary for survival: knots, whirls, mazes, circles, tumors, embedded seedlings, sproutings. This work is a celebration of process and surface physicality.

This new work invites folding, and the prints themselves seem to fly like kites, with border undulations and irregularities, architectural structures that imply movement, the play of inside/outside, negative space that fills and implies positive space as the images turn and reverse.

Towers can stand or lie down as images of inner sancta, rooms unfold like maps, to be refolded and carried into and out of danger, perhaps political or personal; mazes that threaten / promise to unfold and contain as well as release; there is spatial tension between a geography of danger and safety with linked images that, like synapses in the human brain, lead to vision.



Karen Kunc in her studio.

This new work deals with my own "print" issues - reading and perception questions - how one is aware of subtle printed elements, how one reads on multiple dimensional printed levels, how the eye moves through the works into my designed entrances and exits, where one gets entwined and held, and where a simple ending forms. How I transform my world, what I see, study and the ways I interpret my simple surroundings - from instinct, to forms, to concept, to abiding life issues. The experience of making, thinking, influences my visual instinct and interconnections, which results in the works themselves. They are the proof of my art - the evidence.

My real creative experience is purposefully strange, otherworldly, and I hope uniquely, powerfully intriguing on many levels.