



## Chaos meets Order

REVIEW

*To know yet to think that one does not know is best; not to know yet to think that one knows will lead to difficulty.*  
—Lao Tzu

*Dialogues Part II*  
by Julia Stoops  
Alysia Duckler  
Gallery  
1236 NW Hoyt St.,  
223-7595  
Ends Jan. 16

Portland artist Julia Stoops takes her cue from the humility of Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, creating worlds where chaos and order, the known and the unknown, cohabit. In many of her newest mixed-media works, visual symbols for cycles and eternity (such as the circle, the spiral, the cross, the sign of infinity and the cycles of the moon) reside in grid formation among blue-gray washes and drips of ink. If the grid represents order and the drips symbolize randomness, then they have equal footing in Stoops' creations.

The dialogue between these forces is most apparent in the largest (and aesthetically strongest) works. These canvases are about five feet high and taller than they are wide, like an Asian hanging scroll. They're grommeted at the edges and push-pinned to the wall, raw and exposed rather than framed and under glass.

*Dialogue II (Johnson)* and *Dialogue VI (VonGuerrard)* are vertically divided into three parts. In each, the central image is a narrow portion of an idyllic landscape that Stoops copied from the work of the 19th-century painter acknowledged in the title. The left and right thirds are like curtains, covered with splashed and dripped ink and other pigments; superimposed on them is the faint outline of a target or radar screen. They bar entry to the peaceful, romantic place beyond—and even past such barriers, the journey won't be easy. Terra firma is in the far distance, and water (or is it air?) fills the foreground.

Stoops studied philosophy in her native New Zealand, and her philosophical bent is clear in her artwork. She is an adherent of chaos theory, the science that finds patterns in the erratic. Douglas Hofstadter, one of the theory's champions, states, "It turns out that an eerie type of chaos can lurk just behind a facade of order—and yet, deep inside the chaos lurks an even eerier type of order."

Stoops aptly titles her exhibit *Dialogues*, referring to conversations between confusion and method, East and West, and the understood and

In *Dialogues Part II*, Julia Stoops presents conversations between philosophy and science, East and West, the intuitive and the empirical.

the yet-to-be-understood.

Stoops also creates dialogues between techniques and materials. She transfers, stencils, paints and drips imagery in ink, acrylic, oil, graphite and watercolor. The results of layering oil-based pigments with water-based ones are difficult to predict. The possibility for lack of control feeds Stoops' conceptual intent. The sheer quantity of materials and processes might account for the success of the large-scale works relative to the small ones. With few exceptions, the 5-by-5-inch and 5-by-11-inch pieces are less visually exciting than the larger ones because the layers and patterns are more difficult to discern. In addition, Stoops uses the image of a human hand in several of the small works to suggest, in her words, "that certain actions have unseen ramifications." But the spiral sends a message of connectedness more clearly. The introduction of a human body part is an unnecessary aberration that dilutes the rhythmic quality of the more geometric symbols.

The most enigmatic and intriguing of these symbols is the horn. In *Horn of Naples* it lies dead center in a grid of circles overlaid by three intersecting spirals. Stoops claims that she is not yet sure about the horn but feels that it is an offshoot of the spherical shapes that have held her interest for many years. She likes its ambiguity and its allusion to the generation of sound, calling it "a location of energy out of which energy will come." It also suggests a cornucopia, the abundance of a fall feast.

Stoops' postgraduate career is short but impressive. She was one of 34 artists granted a coveted position in the 1997 Oregon Biennial. That same summer, she painted images of flying animals on the walls of the Nine Gallery, toying with viewers' perceptions of the shape and size of the gallery. In April 1998, she transformed the installation space in the lobby of the Portland Building with *Encyclopedia*, a room-size illustrated scientific chart. The success of the installations and of the large-scale works in *Dialogues Part II* indicates that Stoops should focus on grander presentations. She says she's influenced by medieval manuscripts; if she imbues her small-scale work with the grandeur of her large pieces, she will indeed capture the spiritual fervor of the books of the Middle Ages. **WW**

Concurrent with *Dialogues Part II*, Alysia Duckler hosts *Mundus Imaginaria*, a group show of artists' books.