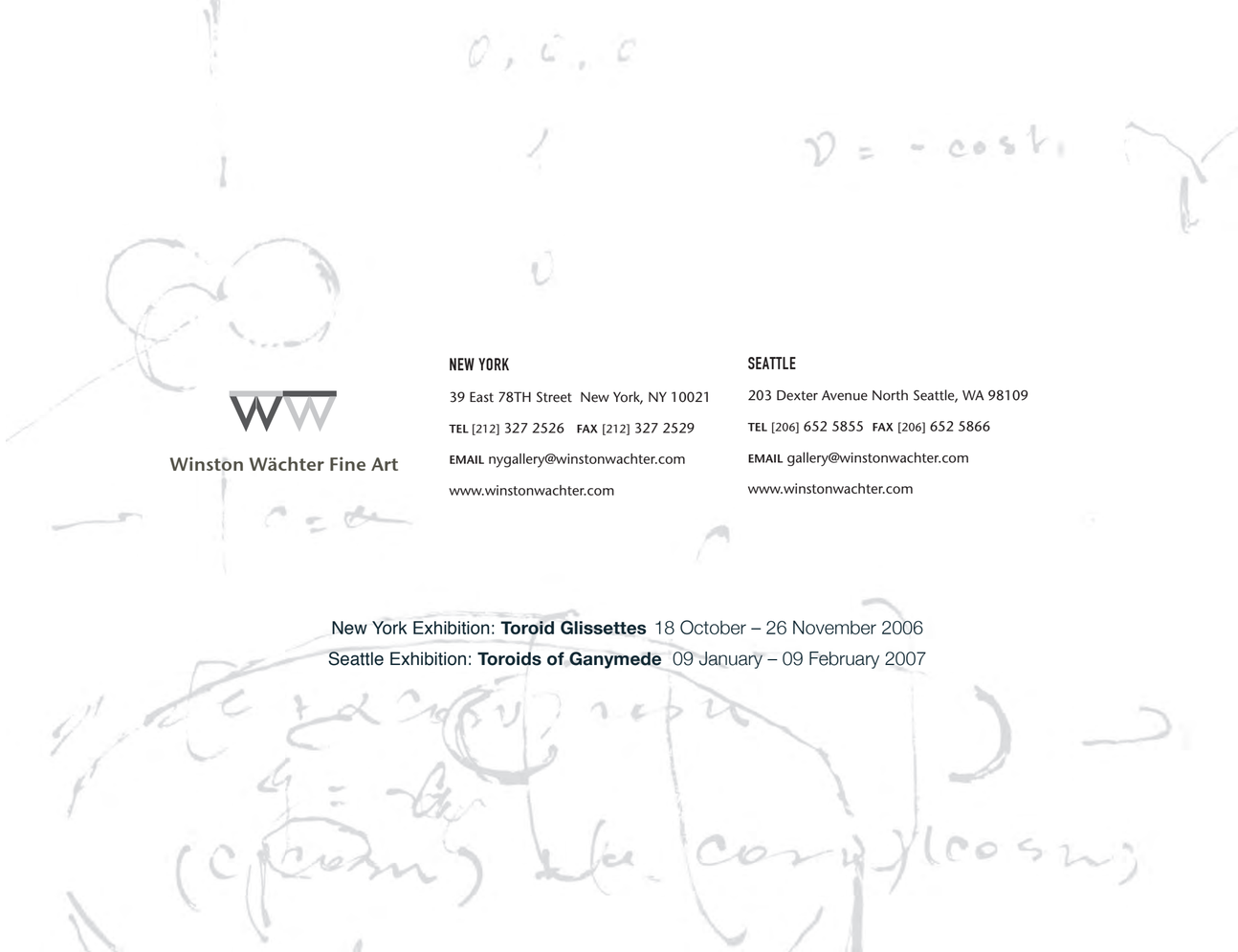
MICHAEL SCHULTHEIS (TOROIDS)



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New York Exhibition: **Toroid Glissettes** 18 October – 26 November 2006

Seattle Exhibition: **Toroids of Ganymede** 09 January – 09 February 2007

The Geometry of Desire: New Paintings by Michael Schultheis

Michael Schultheis translates his observations of the material world into a hybrid sort of abstract painting. He blends measurable, scientific, and precise formulas that codify some material object with intuitive freedom fueled by his human imagination and passion.

By deftly conjoining these two ends of human creativity and observation, Schultheis sets into play a series ways to understand the world and evokes of swirl paradox. What is real becomes theoretical and intangible, and the formulas scrawled in the paintings reinforce the materiality of the phenomena. Further attempts to describe this relationship simply flip the order again. The paintings highlight the absolute relationship between purely mathematical operations and the human desire for understanding. One cannot exist without the other.

Each of Schultheis's paintings simulates an overloaded blackboard after a particularly vigorous class. Inspired by graduate-school lectures in economics at Cornell University and his recent work at Microsoft where he applied this knowledge, Schultheis scatters fragments and ghostly diagrams across each canvas. Without his Latin-heavy titles, awareness of the formulas he describes for toroids, cones, and lunes would be non-existent for most people. However, the things he describes are part of the everyday world. His formulas can be used to describe the shape of ice cream cones, dress ruffles, and sagging pillows. And here is Schultheis's first paradox: the formulas describe real-world things in a mathematical language that exists only because a carefully arranged series of numbers and variables operate consistently in the human mind.

Recently, Schultheis added an overt psychological element to his paintings. Previous series were inspired primarily by his fascination with visual phenomena, most recently the cycloids used to create the auditorium of the national Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. **note 1 Related directly to the cycloids, Schultheis has turned his attention to toroids and variations. His utter fascination with the mathematical permutations of the forms has illuminated instances where the formulae have surprising resonance with his personal life. In his newest series Toroids, Schultheis's inspiration sprung from his musings on art by Robert Rauschenberg, Peter Hujar, and David Wojnarowicz. Motivated by both formal elements and the impulses of these precedents, Schultheis uses the mathematical formula torids to delve into the lasting implications of the art and, unusually, begins an interrogation of the cultural systems that embraces such art.

Toroids describe the gentle arcs of the drooping pillow of Rauschenberg's combine Canyon. **note 2 Arguably one the most powerful works of Rauschenberg's career, this combine is a angst-ridden, mid-20th-century retelling of the rape of Ganymede. A taxidermied eagle hovers above the metaphorical Ganymede, a pillow suspended by a rope, hanging forever just beyond the eagle's talon. The pillow, bound and suspended, symbolizes the all-pervading power of physical desire and passionate love.

Deeply coded in Western art history as a motif for surrendering to sexual desire, the rape of Ganymede was recorded by Homer, Ovid, and Virgil. The Phrygian Ganymede, a youth of extraordinary beauty and royal descent, was abducted by Zeus in the guise of an eagle. Despite Hera's jealousy, Zeus elevated the youth to his personal attendant on Olympus. He immortalized his beloved by transforming Ganymede into the constellation Aquarius.

The rape of Ganymede was a frequent subject in Renaissance art: a drawing by Michelangelo now in the collection of the Fogg Art Museum, a painting by Correggio now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, a series of paintings and drawings on the theme by Parmigianino, a sculpture by Cellini now in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, a fresco in the Salle du Bal in Fontainebleau by Francesco Primaticcio. The legend also appears in As You Like It by William Shakespeare. **note 3

Its appearance in mid-20th century American art raises eyebrows. Unlike the Renaissance emphasis on the difference between the power of the ruler of all the gods and a youthful shepherd (or any other suggested religious or profane symbolism), Rauschen-

berg's Canyon codes his passionate relationship with Jasper Johns. **note 4 Katz dissertation For a gay man like Schultheis, who came into his adult consciousness in the 1980s, Rauschenberg's representation of Ganymede stands a beacon for the most ancient of human impulses. It is an early and unapologetic representation of gay sexual desire.

Schultheis's Toroids try to codify the parameters of sexual attraction and love suggested by Rauschenberg. With his ability to describe real-phenomena through mathematical formulae, Schultheis accurately defines the arc and droop of Rauschenberg's bifurcated pillow. He plays with the equation's variables and scrawls lines of the formula across the canvas. The arc of Rauschenberg's pillow has been translated into another abstract form that can be transmitted across cultures and languages.

It is tempting to seek further parallels and affinities between Schultheis's equations and his understanding of the world. Might the equations also offer insight sexual attraction and desire? Might the graceful arcs of a toroid chart the inevitable course of a romantic relationship? Could Schultheis as easy solve turbulent moments when two lovers disagree? Might one of his equations alleviate any pending disappoint? Do his formualae offer proof of the elegance and beauty of love? The questions are as endless as the pairs of lovers across history. Despite their accuracy and elegance, Schultheis's variables and equations only hint at the ebb and flow of human attraction.

In addition to voicing aspects of sexual desire, Schultheis's found resonance with another gay artist, David Wojnarowicz. His self-portrait *title is a painful reminder of the suffering and violence inflicted on gay men during the first years of the AIDS crisis. The brutal and clumsy stitches through his lips reflects back the silence of the powerful as men suffered and died by the tens of thousands. As a symbol of helplessness and rage, Wojnarowicz's image remains unsurpassed.

Like the curve of Rauschenberg's pillow, the volume and curves of Wojnarowicz's can also be expressed through related mathematical formula. Following Schultheis's logic, Wojnarowicz's anguish and rage become solid, definable. The formulas allow Schultheis to articulate a tangible variation of the artist's response to pain and suffering wrought by AIDS. The geometric solid represents Schultheis's refusal to remain silent. It is a careful articulation of his own compassion and sympathy for the emotional scars and illness wrought by AIDS on his predecessor remain active and immediate. The paintings make manifest in Schulthies's mind those experiences, those emotions that defined American life for his generation.

Using a highly personal vocabulary straddling abstract painting and pure geometry, Schultheis found a synergy between Rauschenberg's sexual desire to Wojnarowicz's rage. Schultheis forged his fascination with a family of geometric structures and a whisper of formal affinities into an articulation of his own understanding of the world.

With his Toroid series of paintings, he deftly reveals the value of advanced mathematics as a tool to describe and define responses to the human condition. He recontextualizes these idealized forms into symbols and reminders of human perception. Melding the beauty of an abstract painting with the elegant sophistication of pure mathematics, Schultheis describes the imperfections of the human condition. He seeks to understand the connections between lovers and caregivers. He defines the boundaries of compassion and tolerance, and he gives shape to psychological tenderness.

The brilliance of Schultheis paintings is how he distills the imperfect reality of objects into the exquisite and concise language of pure geometry. The abstraction allows the subject to be understood in specific ways usually at opposite ends of perception—purely rational through mathematics and fully intuitively through color and gesture. By joining them on canvas, Schultheis creates his own kind of torroidal logic. Experience and reason are forged into a single concept. For Schultheis, this duality of his notion can be comprehended through a single impression.

Rock Huska, Curator, Tacoma Art Museum

ANALYTICAL EXPRESSIONISM

As humans, we have a fascinating capacity to visualize mathematics. Our analytical concepts can be visualized, written down in notation, and then shared as a logical and visual language for others. These creative ideas are analytical expressions, and the visual process of rendering them is analytical expressionism. This is the world I explore while painting.

Working in mathematics and art, I discover the milieu in which those two subjects meet, showing viewers, on canvas, what the process of thinking about math looks like to me. By allowing the paintings to operate like a chalkboard in my studio, gradually filling up with abstract concepts, I translate the intricate world of mathematical relationships into something everyone can see. Translating abstract scientific ideas into artistic work has existed since Leonardo da Vinci translated abstract concepts into beautiful drawings that maintained their scientific accuracy. I see a similar world to explore in mathematics and invite the viewer to consider this visual component of abstract ideas in my paintings.

TOROIDS

These paintings were initially inspired by two geometric forms: the Cycloid (Galileo, 1599) and Spherical Lunes (Leonardo da Vinci, 1510). A Cycloid is a geometric curve formed by a point on the circumference of a circle that rolls along a straight line. Spherical Lunes are geometric shapes formed by intersecting circles and, when opened, form elegant petal-like Hypocycloids.

However, the evolution of my interests never seems to be linear, and once I understand how a certain geometry “works” in the notation and visual manifestation, then I see that geometry everywhere around me; everything is a Lune, everything can be constructed from Cycloids. And these provoke new analyses and new geometries. The following paragraphs describe where curiosity took me and the subsequent analytical exploration evidenced in these paintings.

This visual analogy of “wrapping” Lunes around a circle continued with the wrapping of the geometric forms of Limaçons (Dürer, 1525) and Cardioids (de Castillon, 1741). At about that time, I came across Peter Hujar’s 1963 photograph of “Girl with Ruffles” in the Palermo Catacombs. The Lunes in her eyes and the multi-faceted Hypocycloids in the roses took away my breath.

After seeing Hujar’s photograph, I reacquainted myself with some of his art and discovered the self-portrait of David Wojnarowicz. His lips are threaded with perfect Toroidal precision, and I drew this geometry over and over until eventually the geometric form of a Toroid evolved. Rotating a circle around a line tangent to it creates a Toroid, which is similar to a donut or ring-like shape where the center exactly touches all the rotated circles. I also found a wonderful sculpture titled “Equilateral Torus II” by John Duff and it too became my muse along with Hujar and Wojnarowicz’s photographs.

Another significant influence in these paintings comes from seeing the Rauschenberg retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The most compelling of his Combines was “Canyon,” in particular, I was fascinated by the Toroidal bifurcation of the pillow representing Ganymede as he was spirited away by Zeus. Inspired by Rembrandt’s “The Abduction of Ganymede,” this work by Rauschenberg carries my muse of a Toroid Glissette.

Michael Schultheis
Seattle, 2006

ELLIPTIC CONES 04
2006 36 x 48 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

ELLIPTIC TOROIDS 01, 02
2006 60 x 96 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

TORUS GLISSETTES 06
2006 48 x 72 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

EQUILATERAL TOROIDS 03 (detail)
2006 48 x 72 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

OPENING TOROIDS 04
2006 60 x 48 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

TORUS GLISSETTES 01, 02
2006 72 x 120 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

ELLIPTICAL CONES 03
2006 · 36 x 48 · ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

TOROIDS OF GANYMEDE 01, 02, 03
2006 72 x 144 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

CURVATURES 09, 10
2006 48 x 96 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

EQUILATERAL TOROIDS 07, 08
2006 36 x 72 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

EQUILATERAL TOROIDS 10 (detail)
2006 48 x 72 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2007 **Toroids of Ganymede**, Winston Wächter Fine Art, Seattle, WA
New Work, Chase Gallery, Boston, MA
2006 **Toroid Glissettes**, Winston Wächter Fine Art, New York, NY
Equilateral Toroids, Davis and Cline Gallery, Ashland, OR
Spherical Lunes, Froelick Gallery, Portland, OR
Limaçons, Chase Gallery, Boston, MA
2005 **Cardioids**, Ballard Fetherston Gallery, Seattle, WA
Cycloids, Rotunda Gallery, National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C.
Cycloids, Keck Center Gallery, National Academies, Washington, D.C.
Cycloids, Preview, Froelick Gallery, Portland, OR
Cycloids, Preview, Ballard Fetherston Gallery, Seattle, WA
Harmonic Oscillations, Fairbanks Gallery, Oregon State University, OR
2004 **Writing on the Wall**, Ballard Fetherston Gallery, Seattle, WA
Harmonic Quadrants, Cervini Haas Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ
Parabolic Symmetries, Davis and Cline Gallery, Ashland, OR
Harmonic Oscillations, Froelick Gallery, Portland, OR
Geometric Progressions, Soren Christensen Gallery, New Orleans, LA
2003 **Correlations**, Ballard Fetherston Gallery, Seattle, WA
Elasticity, Margo Jacobsen Gallery, Portland, OR
2002 **Equilibria**, Soren Christensen, New Orleans, LA
Open Systems, Ballard Fetherston Gallery, Seattle, WA
White Math, Margo Jacobsen Gallery, Portland, OR
2001 **White Matrix**, Patricia Cameron Fine Art, Seattle, WA
2000 **Outliers**, Patricia Cameron Fine Art, Seattle, WA
1999 **Griot**, Patricia Cameron Fine Art, Seattle, WA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2006 **Gallery Artists**, Chase Gallery, Boston, MA
Please Do Not Touch, Winston Wächter Fine Art, New York, NY
Two Person Show, Cervini Haas Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ
Spring Highlights, Winston Wächter Fine Art, Seattle, WA
Parabolic Urns, Cheryl Pelavin Fine Arts, New York, NY
Gallery Artists, Froelick Gallery, Portland, OR
2005 **Gallery Artists**, Chase Gallery, Boston, MA
Gallery Artists, Ballard Fetherston Gallery, Seattle, WA
Ballard Artists, Seattle Art Museum, Rental/Sales Gallery, Seattle, WA
Dialog Between Space, Shenzhen, China
Gallery Artists, Froelick Gallery, Portland, OR
2004 **Blue Waters**, Ballard Fetherston Gallery, Seattle, WA
Gallery Artists, Froelick Gallery, Portland, OR
Gallery Artists, Seattle Art Museum Rental/Sales Gallery, Seattle, WA
2003 **Invitational Group Show**, Cervini Haas Gallery, Scottsdale, AZ
Grand Opening, Seattle Art Museum Rental/Sales Gallery, Seattle, WA
Group Show, Washington State Convention & Trade Center, Seattle, WA
2002 **Gallery Artists**, Margo Jacobsen Gallery, Portland, OR
Best of Show, Benefit Auction, Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, WA
Northwest Print Council Exhibit, Portand Art Museum, Portland, OR
2001 **Gallery Artists**, Patricia Cameron Fine Art, Seattle, WA
1995 **Pacific Northwest Annual**, Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, WA

AWARDS

2004 Artist Trust Gap Grant, Seattle, WA
2004 Carnegie Library Project Finalist, Seattle, WA

CORPORATE & PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Citigroup, Seattle, WA
City of Seattle, Seattle, WA
Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, Seattle, WA
Four Seasons Olympic Hotel, Seattle, WA
The Mathematical Association of America, Washington D.C.
National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C.
Portable Works Collection, City of Portland, OR
Portland Community College, Portland, OR
Rainier Pacific Bank, Tacoma, WA
Seattle Athletic Club, Seattle, WA
Swedish Medical Center, Seattle, WA
Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA
University of Washington Medical Center, Seattle, WA

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Emily Hall, “Bio: Art,” **The Stranger**, Seattle, WA, December, 2000
Regina Hackett, “Art Invitational,” **The Seattle Post-Intelligencer**, Seattle, WA, 2000.
Cornish Music Student Composition Cover, Seattle, WA, January, 1999
“New Works Exhibited,” **The Jefferson County Leader**, Port Townsend 1997
Allyson A. Goldin, **CutBank 46**, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, Summer, 1996

EDUCATION

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Endnotes

Note 1: See Office of Exhibitions and Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences, Michael Schultheis: Cycloids (Washington, D.C.: Office of Exhibitions and Cultural Programs of the National Academy of Sciences; Seattle, Wash.: Ballard Fetherston Gallery; and Portland, Ore.: Froelick Gallery: 2005).

Note 2: Rauschenberg's Combine exhibition.

Note 3: James M. Saslow, Ganymede in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society (New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1986).

Note 4: Katz dissertation

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Front cover:
Toroids of Ganymede 06 (detail)
2006
48 x 72 inches
Acrylic on canvas

Back cover:
Torus Glissettes 05 (detail)
2006
60 x 72 inches
Acrylic on canvas

Page 2:
Opening Toroids 01, 02, 03
2006
72 x 144 inches
Acrylic on canvas

Page 4:
Toroids of Ganymede 04, 05
2006
48 x 96 inches
Acrylic on canvas

Page 6:
Equilateral Toroids 09
2006
60 x 72 inches
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