

: artist profile **jeffrey simmons**



Since the term first appeared in 1964, Op Art has given representation of recognizable form a wide berth. Instead it has been linked to trippy hard-edged abstractions that befuddle the mind. Seattle artist Jeffrey Simmons deftly dances with ideas inherent to both. In the process he creates bright and beautiful canvases of color and light that subtly hint at objects from heaven and earth.

Simmons produces geometric patterns on canvas with raised bumps of acrylic paint, layering them with multiple thin washes of transparent pigment that eventually become opaque. Using a wet sanding process, he then carefully removes layers to reveal the luminescent forms below—unearthing images that recall, ironically, scenes from the skies. Simmons notes, "I like taking a substance that has the consistency of mud and turning it into something that appears to be glowing."

"I've always been interested in geometry," says Simmons, "and certain visual contrasts that appear between soft edges and hard edges." "Nebulae," the title of Simmons' most recent show at Greg Kucera Gallery in Seattle, referenced the gas, dust and other materials that coalesce to form stars in outer space. If Simmons' latest inspiration was found in the cosmological realms, his materials are altogether earthbound. Striping tape, squirrel hair pin-stripping brushes, fine grade wet/dry sandpaper and sanding blocks are purchased from automotive supply stores.

TOP RIGHT:
"DEEP FIELD"
2008

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS OVER WOOD
24" x 30"

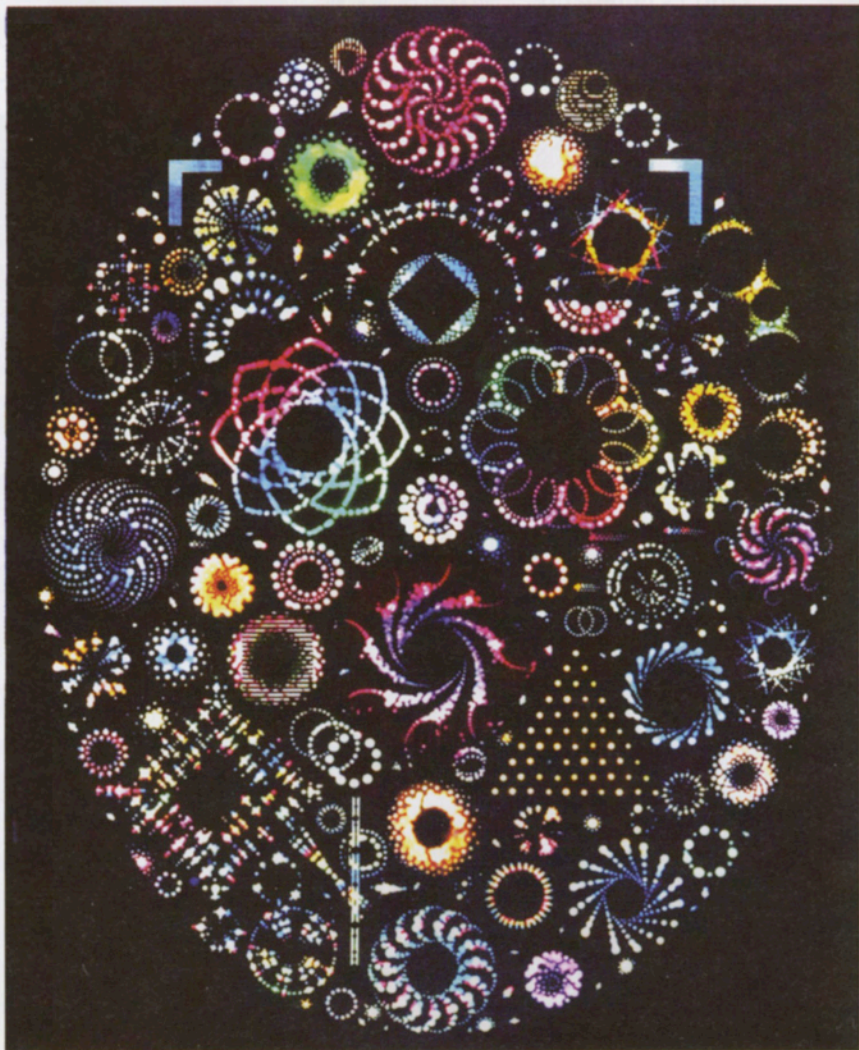
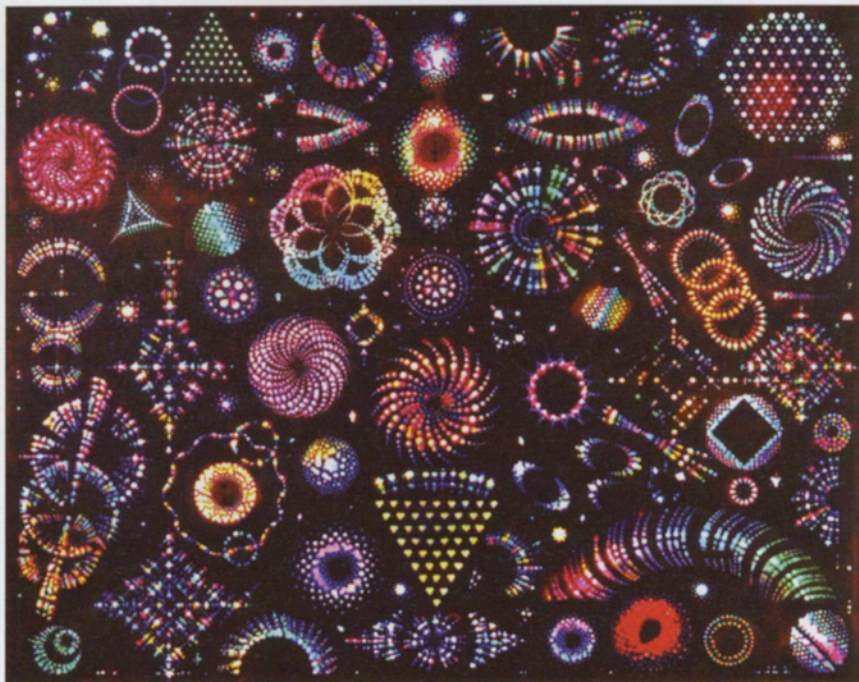
PHOTO: COURTESY OF
GREG KUCERA GALLERY, INC., SEATTLE

"MENISCUS"
2008

ACRYLIC ON CANVAS OVER WOOD
30" x 24"

PHOTO: COURTESY OF
GREG KUCERA GALLERY, INC., SEATTLE

PHOTO OF JEFFREY SIMMONS BY ROBERT WADE



"Whereas art supplies are often designed to be flexible," explains Simmons, "automotive supplies are designed to do one job and to do it very well." Some nebulae are the result of stellar explosions: Despite a labor intensive and controlled process, Simmons' paintings often suggest blasts of unrestrained energy. Offset against white walls his patchwork constellations of radiating forms glowed against black ground, transforming the gallery into an intergalactic journey, or an LSD trip.

His current body of work evolved out of neatly delineated concentric circles (created by turning his canvases on a Lazy Susan), paired with drips of paint. It was followed a few years later by paintings of fluorescent Spirographs. In 2001, Kucera invited Simmons to participate in a works on paper show. "I hadn't used watercolors much before and it seemed like there were a lot of possibilities there. I was looking for something quieter." His watercolor rings from that time evoke the target paintings of Kenneth Noland and Jasper Johns as well as Peter Sedgley's rings of pulsating light. But Simmons' orbs of striated color, in which lighter hues encircle darker cores, also evoke objects designed for spiritual contemplation such as mandalas. "In reality I could never make a painting as bright as the stars, or one that captured the vastness of the sky. But light has other connotations, spiritual connotations."

Simmons' work celebrates the optical pleasure derived from fireworks, astronomical phenomenon or even Lite-Brite, the 1967 Hasbro toy that allowed players to create glowing images with plastic pegs offset against black paper. If his work calls to mind specific experiences or concrete objects, it also suggests that which we only think we see: Simmons' 2008 work was inspired by images of astronomical phenomenon: "Images, explains Simmons, "that are heavily edited. What they represent might have looked this way millions of years ago, but they don't any longer." His paintings are literally a shadow of their former selves. Neither smoke and mirrors nor representations of actual objects, his work basks in the glow of nostalgia, brilliantly towing the line between the here-and-now and the all but forgotten past.

—SUZANNE BEAL

Jeffrey Simmons' show "Nebulae," was on view this Spring at Greg Kucera Gallery in Seattle, from April 3 - May 10, 2008.

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an illustrated catalog accompanies this exhibition



Cog, 2008, Steel, 5' x 5' x 1'

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Thursday, November 6, 2008
from 5 - 8 p.m.

Second Saturday Reception,
Saturday, November 8, 2008
from 6 - 9 p.m.

November 8 - December 6, 2008

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