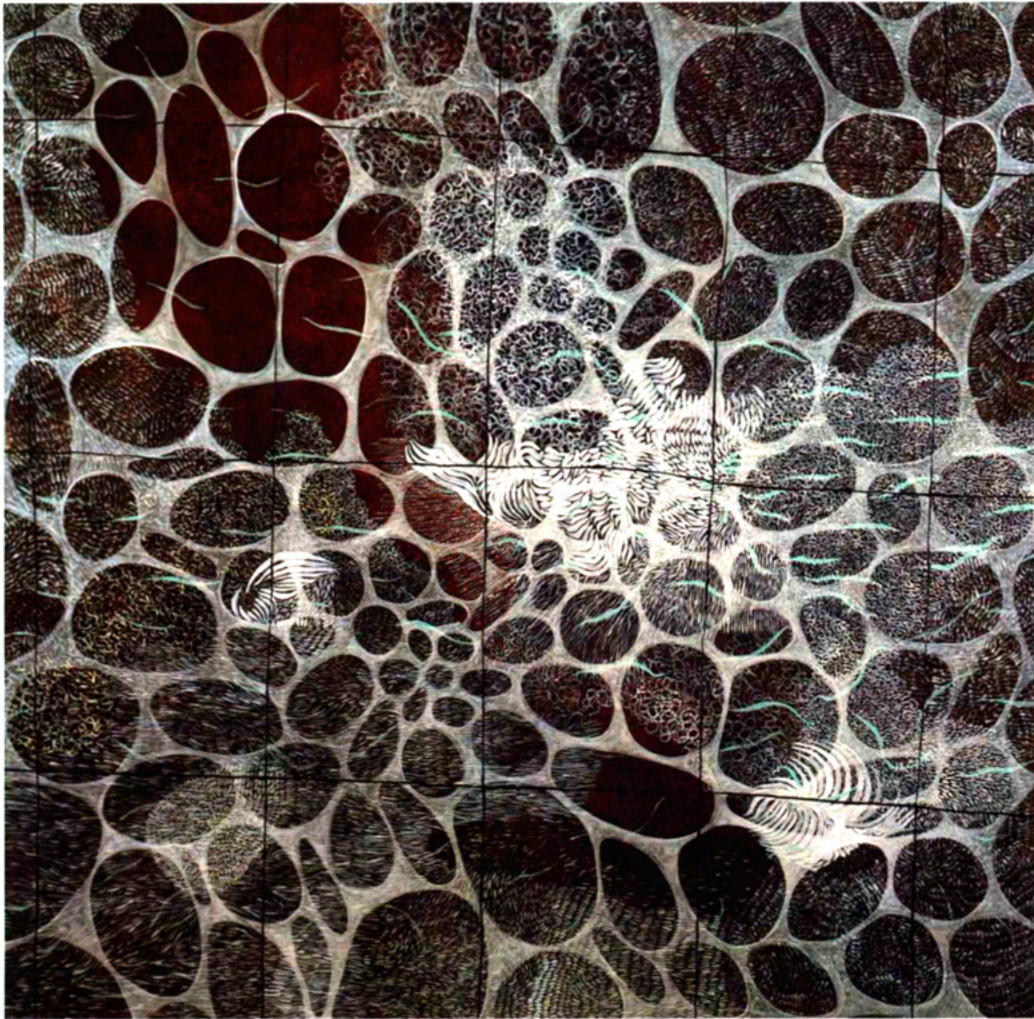


CREIGHTON MICHAEL



Mesh, 599 60 inches square

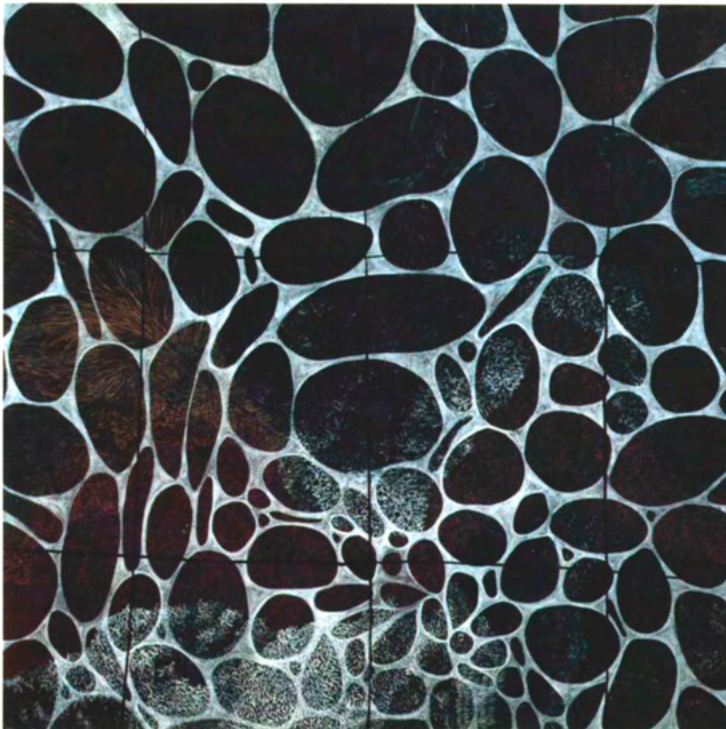
CURRENT PAINTING *Summer 1999*

RÖBISCHÖN
GALLERY

Creighton Michael has lived for the last ten years in the Hudson Valley, about an hour north of New York City, and both his sculpture and two-dimensional work reflect his involvement with and affection for the area. At the same time, the artist has always found ways of introducing conceptual insight into his image making, which is regularly concerned with markings, the way patterns and structure evolve out of small, individual actions. Deeply interested in the way perception affects nature, and the way nature returns the favor by influencing sight, Michael documents in his paintings and drawings the play of the mind and the hand in contact with the given world. His art depicts what he calls “incremental structures,” the kind of cumulative compositional approach seen in the drawings of the Surrealist Yves Tanguy, an early influence on the artist.

According to Michael, he began developing the pictorial vocabulary now found in his drawings in early 1995. Intent on reducing the language of his draftsmanship to basic form, he began working up intricate patterns through the use of very simple individual marks. This enabled him to pay attention to two things: portraying the image as a process; and exploring the way we shift from the part to the entirety as we look at art. Because Michael regularly addresses these issues in series, it is possible to see him formulate his

ideas as a fluid method—nothing is really fixed in his drawings and paintings, either individually or in procession, just as nothing is truly fixed in nature.



Mesh, 499 45 inches square

The conceptual flair of Michael’s recent work suggests that he is primarily interested in breaking apart the way the eye coheres form. But it is also true that he works in dialogue with the early American modernists who found inspiration in the sensuousness of nature: Milton Avery, Arthur Dove, Georgia O’Keeffe. Like them, Michael also wants to understand how his hand fulfills the implicit structures he encounters in a forest or pond. It may be that nature is just as much a jumble of fragments, an inspired anarchy, as the surface of Michael’s art.

Michael's current paintings consist of two new groups of images—the “Notation” and “Mesh” series. Both sequences are oil works on a squared canvas, a format which heightens the marks' activity by contrasting them with the determinedly regular ground.

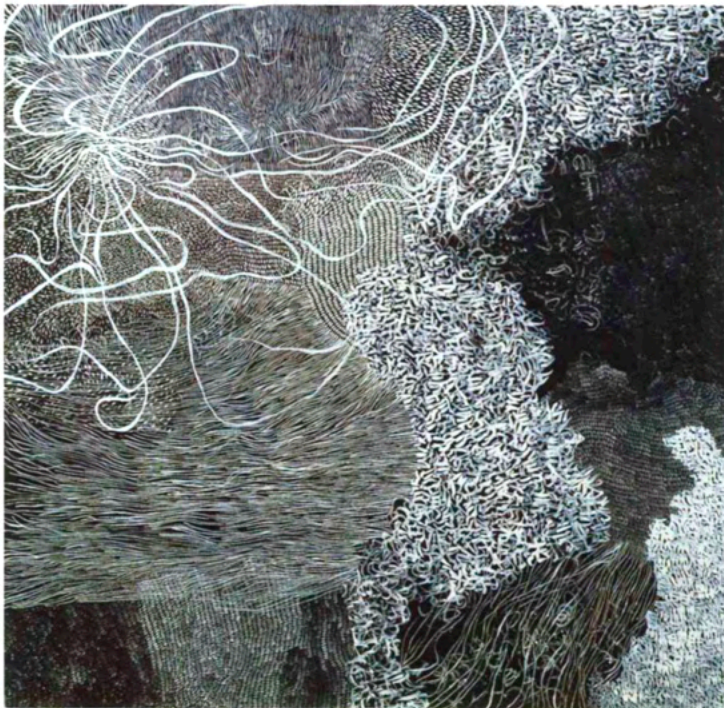
Notation, 798 (1998) well examples Michael's broad repertoire of textured imagery, which usually consists of nests of scribbled linear effects, white on a colored ground. In the center of the painting there are three clusters of whitish curved lines that vary in length; at times, the marks feel calligraphic and remind the viewer of Mark Tobey's lyric calligraphy; at other times, the schematic repetition of small strokes bring the work of Agnes Martin to mind. The allover, barely directed patternings in *Notation, 798* and other examples in the series result in a seemingly spontaneous organization—a kind of imagistic regionalism within a single picture plane.



Notation, 798 60 inches, square

The artist's broad repertoire of marks is also evident in *Notation, 898* (1998). In this oil, the areas given over to one particular shape are larger, with a large, involved ribbon coming down from the top, over several kinds of lines and marks: small, curved strokes; thin, pencil-like lines; and tight checkerboard rows in the middle of the painting. The different effects create surface densities of pattern that have much to do with the way abstraction asserts itself in Michael's art. But for all the nonrepresentational bent of this work, we can see how the surface lends itself to several kinds of natural interpretations: the detritus of a backyard toward the end of fall, the scumbled texture of late winter ice, the rhythmic accumulations of a coral reef. This is how Michael tells the truth about nature even as he claims a conceptual intent—by remaining true to the minutiae of the world, its transparent, and disarrayed, attractiveness.

In the “Mesh” series, the preparatory procedure is the same as the “Notation” works; however, color plays a greater part. Michael first gessoes the canvas, over which he applies a wash of burnt sienna; on top of that, he uses oil to paint his elliptical circles of white, which seem to describe the kind of topological tension that occurs on a pond's frozen water. The color, a brown bordering on black, is mysterious, both beautiful and



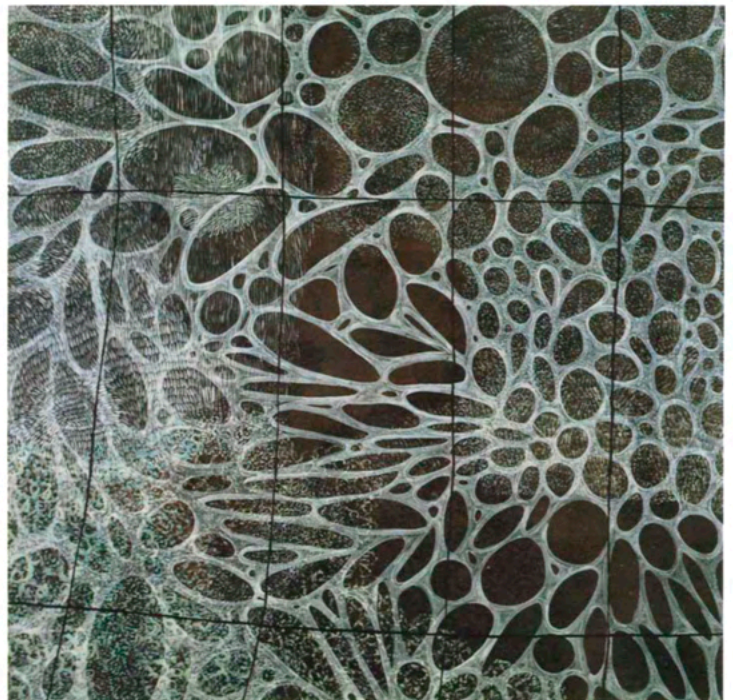
Notation, 898 60 inches square

psychologically resonant in its intimations of depth. The mesh superimposed on this intensity of hue lifts the gaze away from profundity and up toward the surface of the painting—an intricate overlay meant to order feeling. The viewer is singled out, made vulnerable by the realization that he or she is looking out from within the netting—one is quite literally enmeshed by the imagery.

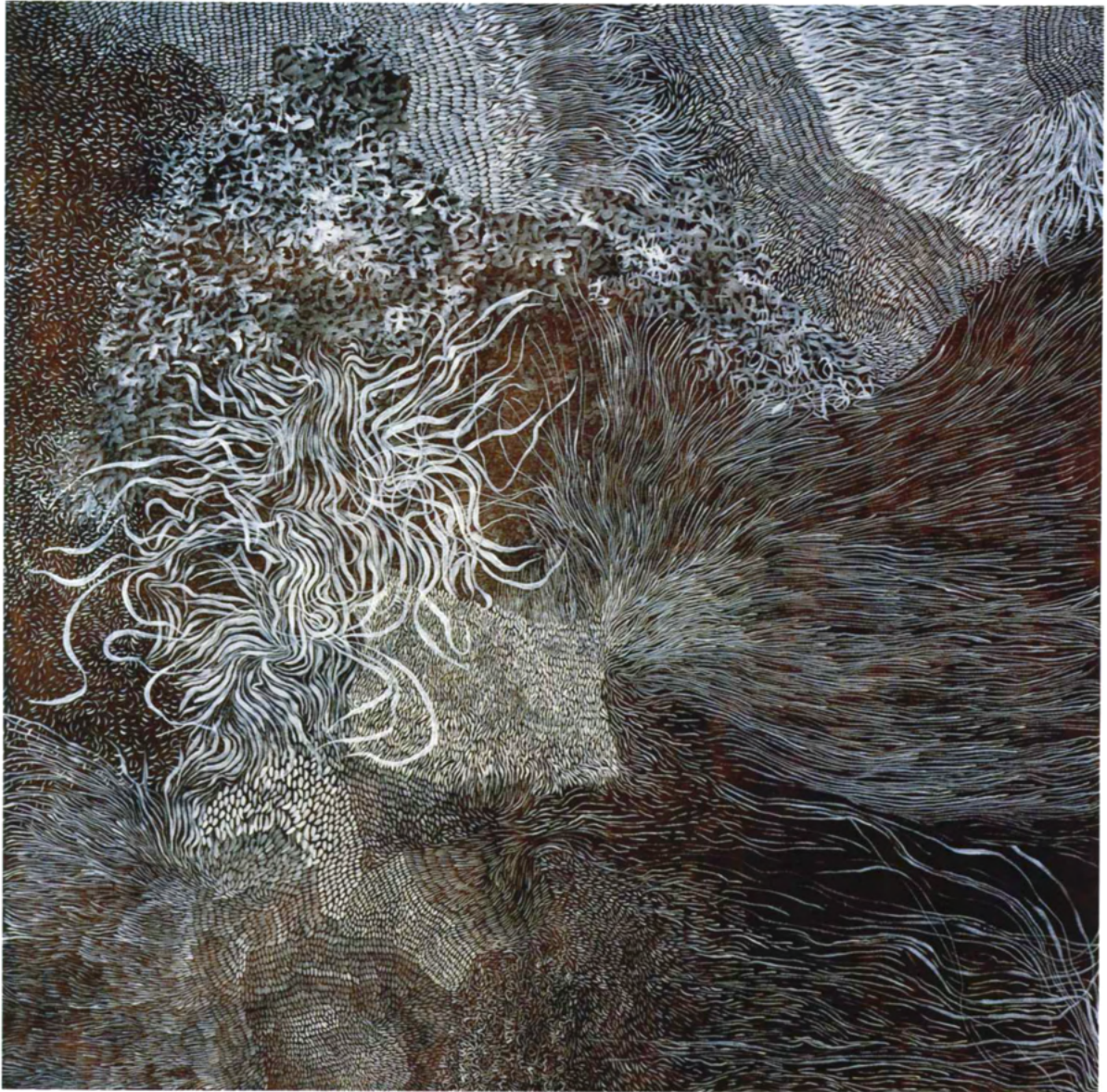
Just in case we become too attached to the image's attractiveness, Michael grids the "Mesh" series in recognition of the rational arrangement of our perception; we want to find the world reasonable, even if we know that it is not.

Mesh, 599 (1999) starts with the suggestion of fossillike rock imagery: thin skeins of curved white lines create a mesh of elliptical circles, through which the deep brown ground comes through. Green linear markers enliven the thin white haze painted over the screening; it appears as though life is returning to an ancient piece of geological history. These markers move in and through the strata of the painting, which includes, on the topmost layer, a minimalist grid; they animate a scene in which time is presented metaphorically, as inanimate stone followed by cultivated order, in the form of the grid.

In *Mesh, 399* (1999), Michael offers, in the larger configuration of white ellipses, a slight spiral movement. The complexity of the pattern is impressive, and the grid, which sits atop the natural imagery, shifts our



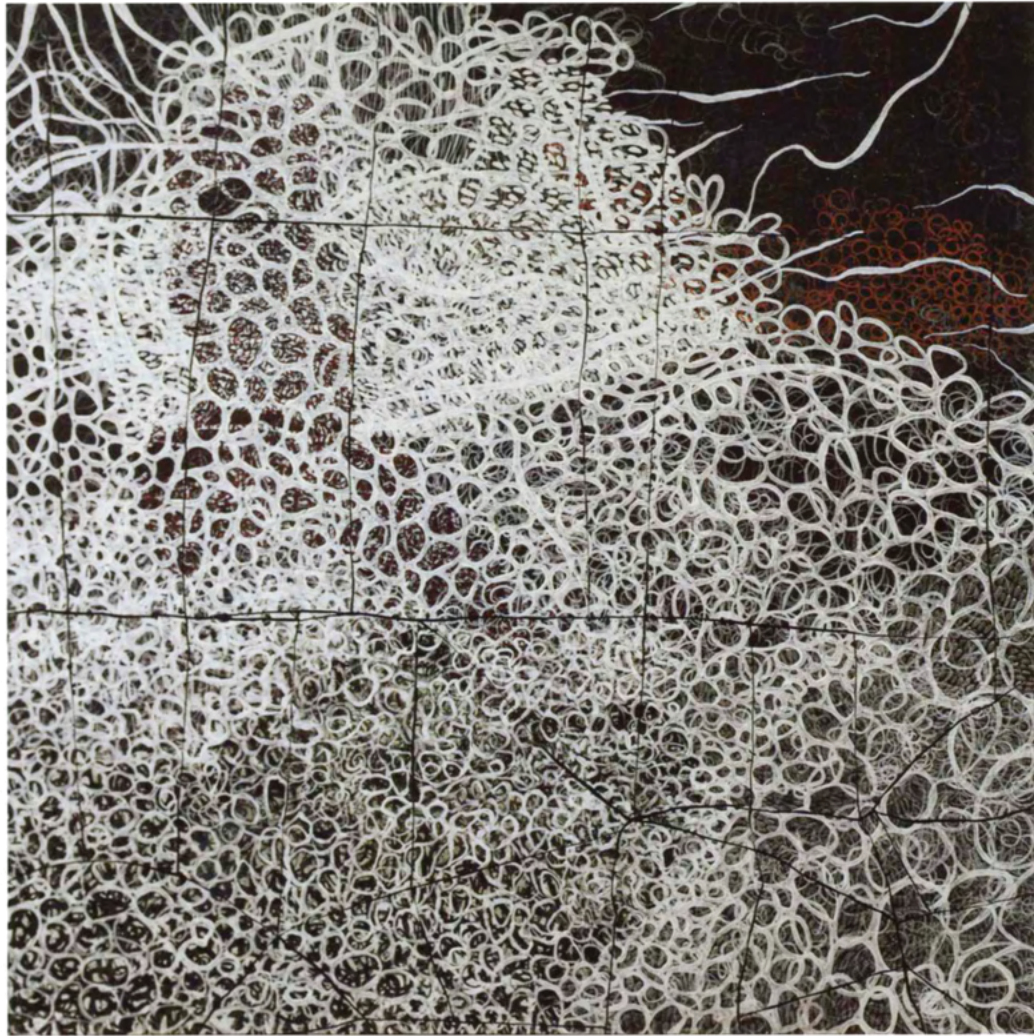
Mesh, 399 45 inches square



Notation, 998 60 inches square

sight to thought: why impose a right-angled vision on an organic model? The grid not only references recent art history, it also makes sense of the impressive, but unsettlingly random sweep of nature, which resists interpretive analysis. Michael's point of view is exactly that—an outlook and a stance, informed by what he sees and what he considers. His elegant hand bridges sensibility and material life so that both are credited.

JONATHAN GOODMAN



Mesh, 198 60 inches square

About the Artist

Creighton Michael received his M.A. in art history from Vanderbilt University and an M.F.A. in painting and multimedia from Washington University in St. Louis. He is a recipient of a Pollack Krasner Foundation grant and a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship.

Michael has had solo shows at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta; Vanderbilt University; the Katonah Museum of Art in Katonah, NY; the Queens Museum of Art at Bulova Corporate Center; Galerie Trois Points in Montreal, Canada; the Reynolds Gallery in Richmond, VA; Pence Gallery, Santa Monica, CA; Haines Gallery, San Francisco, CA; David Beitzel Gallery; Ruth Siegel Gallery; and Littlejohn Contemporary in New York City. Group exhibitions include *Perspectives of Nature*, Jan Abrams Fine Arts, New York City; *Inspired by Nature* at the Neuberger Museum of Art in Purchase, NY; the *1994 National Drawing Invitational* at the Arkansas Arts Center in Little Rock; and *Art on Paper* at the Weatherspoon Art Gallery, the University of North Carolina. Upcoming solo shows include *Intuitive Drawing*, Sept. 9-Oct. 9, 1999, Kim Foster Gallery, New York City and *Visual Matrix*, May 16-July 9, 2000 at the Elmhurst Art Gallery in Elmhurst, IL.

The artist lives and works in New York.

RÖBISCHÖN GALLERY

1740 Wazee Street Denver CO 80202

303 298-7788 fax 303 298-7799

email robischo@ccentral.com

www.artnet.com/robischon.html

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