



TESTING

JAQ CHARTIER

ESSAY BY ROBIN HELD

MARQUAND BOOKS • SEATTLE



THE BLEEDING EDGE OF A DOT

JAQ CHARTIER'S FUGITIVE PLEASURES

Jaq Chartier creates sensuous abstract paintings that are a compelling mix of art and science, the visceral and the cerebral, and painstaking trials and fugitive pleasures. Her minimalist compositions of blurred ovoids and inky lines chart the interaction of stains and dyes as they leach, bloom, bleed, merge, and mutate. The surfaces, composed of painted stains, milky films, and translucent layers, are visually seductive; they are also archives of the artist's rigorous testing and analysis of her materials. Finally, these luminous, tactile panels are the result of Chartier's active intellect, insatiable curiosity about her medium and process, and long hours of hard work—in short, works of fixation and accident. The artist confesses, "I'm really obsessed with the bleeding edge on a dot [of paint]. . . . There's something about that edge."¹

Recent genetic research has provided artists with new tools, new materials, and new issues for critical consideration. In exploration of that theme, I recently curated an exhibition titled *Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics*,² in which I included several of Chartier's panels. This exhibition demonstrates the impact of genetic and genomic research on artistic practice and on our notion of the artist-subject. Chartier's practice has only an oblique connection to this subject, but like a number of contemporary artists including Christine Borland, Catherine Chalmers, Joe Davis, Eduardo Kac, and Susan Robb, Chartier is engaged in a hybrid artistic-scientific endeavor: her studio is more like a laboratory than the traditional artist's garret, and her practice involves non-hypothesis-driven research.

Chartier's use of organic rows of dots, which resemble images of gel electrophoresis—the process used to map DNA—dates back to her Master of Fine Arts exhibition at the University of Washington in 1994. At that time, the artist pared her oil and beeswax paintings to essentials and began an investigation of the grid, the quintessential modernist painting composition. In 1997 Chartier began working for Golden Artist Colors, a worldwide leader in acrylic-paint technology, teaching workshops on how to best use their products. Her testing of the variables of Golden paints began to influence her approach to her own process. Eventually, the tests became the work itself. Each painting is the result of a test Chartier performed to discover something about her materials and what they do.

Through experimentation, observation, and notation, Chartier charts the migration of water-soluble inks, dyes, and chemical stains through the painstaking application of layers of paint and acrylic resin. As these materials interact, the composition emerges. For example, *Dil vs. Acrylic* (1998) and *Blots and Dilutions* (2000) compare paints of different chemical composition on various grounds. Regarding these trials, Chartier speaks less of creating a painting than she does of finding a painting.

Although her works clearly involve meticulous investigation and analysis, chance is also a key component of the process. In the first forty-eight hours after a painting is finished, water evaporates and stains continue to shift and migrate. As some stains respond to other materials, to light, and to the passage of time, the painting continues to evolve. The most dramatic of these changes occur in the first few weeks, but the painting is never quite stable or completed.

The visual surprises that result from accepting this lack of control appeal to Chartier's restless imagination. She is thrilled by the "unruly moment when the painting jumps out of my hands and surprises me, speaks to me . . . [then] I see how little I really know, which means this journey isn't over yet."³ The thrill of this "unruly moment" compelled Chartier to expand her materials beyond traditional artist pigments to include dyes, household paints commonly used as stain killers, and laboratory slide stains. The instability of these materials allows the kinds of migration and unexpected effects the artist now considers essential to her conceptual framework.

Works such as *4 Chemical Tests* (2000), *Red Fall* (2001), *5 Greens (October)* (2003), and *Extraction Group 3 & 4* (2003) demonstrate Chartier's fascination with images of

gel electrophoresis. These paintings—which constitute a visual record where her findings are collected, managed, and stored—mirror scientific tests that pictorially represent and archive the vast information of a DNA strand. Chartier's process-oriented panels parallel the intensive attempt to test and understand this biological information.

The artist's rigorous testing creates an unusual tension between the polished and raw aspects of her work. These paintings are generally small in scale, inviting the viewer to engage intimately both with Chartier's luminous surfaces—in which colors float, migrate, and bleed—and with her detailed system of notation. In this way, the panel front functions both as a painting in the traditional sense and as an archive of Chartier's experimentation and reference for future tests, planting seeds for works yet to come. Along the side, she charts notations in her personal shorthand: findings obtained, effects created. For example, *Green & Red Sequence* (2003) is a composition of four quadrants in which the same repeated stain pattern is subjected to four different household stain blockers and then coated with layers of acrylic resin. Like photographs developing in a darkroom, the combination of paint and resin activates the underlying water-soluble stains, dyes, and inks, creating a visually compelling array

of surface effects. Depending on the concentration, density, evenness, and chemical composition of the spray coat, the stains migrate and leach, splatter and craze, and drift to the edges of a stain, creating halos. Notations along the sides of *Green & Red Sequence* document the specific materials used. These notes aid in the charting of variables and reactions and remain useful for current and future experimentation.

Although they were long understood as negative outcomes to be avoided, fading and impermanence have always been a part of Chartier's experimentation. However, as the artist attempted to identify the most reliably lightfast of paints and stains, what began as an avoidance of fugitiveness developed into an active interest in instability, ephemerality, and impermanence. In this trajectory, the recent series *Sun Tests* is distinctive in its active embrace of disappearance. For example, *40 Whites* (2004) is composed of twenty precise strips of spray paint on each of two panels. For several months, one half of each panel was shielded from exposure to the sun while the other half was subjected to the full effect of its rays. Both panels were then coated with a special varnish with UV light stabilizers, although one half of each panel received a much heavier application. The two panels of *40 Whites* will continue to evidence differing

responses to the passage of time, the effects of light, and the artist's active manipulation of these factors.

It is in the balance between exacting experimentation and the courting of chance that Chartier's color experiments align less with the artist Joseph Albers, a major twentieth-century theorist of the visual and psychological effects of color, than with those of Polly Apfelbaum or Merrill Wagner. Apfelbaum is best known for her floor sculptures consisting of sumptuously colored, hand-cut velvet fragments. These individually numbered pieces are painstakingly placed on the floor in a highly organized system. Wagner marks rock, slate, and steel surfaces with pressure, heat, friction, and paint, creating distinctive amalgamations of process experiment and strongly suggestive landscapes. She is also well known for a series of site-specific works she created in the 1980s near her studio on West 16th Street in New York City, in which she compared the properties of oil paints, acrylics, and oil pastels. Documented by the artist in photographs taken over several years, these paintings demonstrate the ongoing effects on these materials of exposure to heat, wind, rain, and sun. Chartier shares these artists' sense of exploration, rigorous approach to process, embrace of accident, and sheer love of materials, as well as their creation of conceptually rich and visually compelling art.

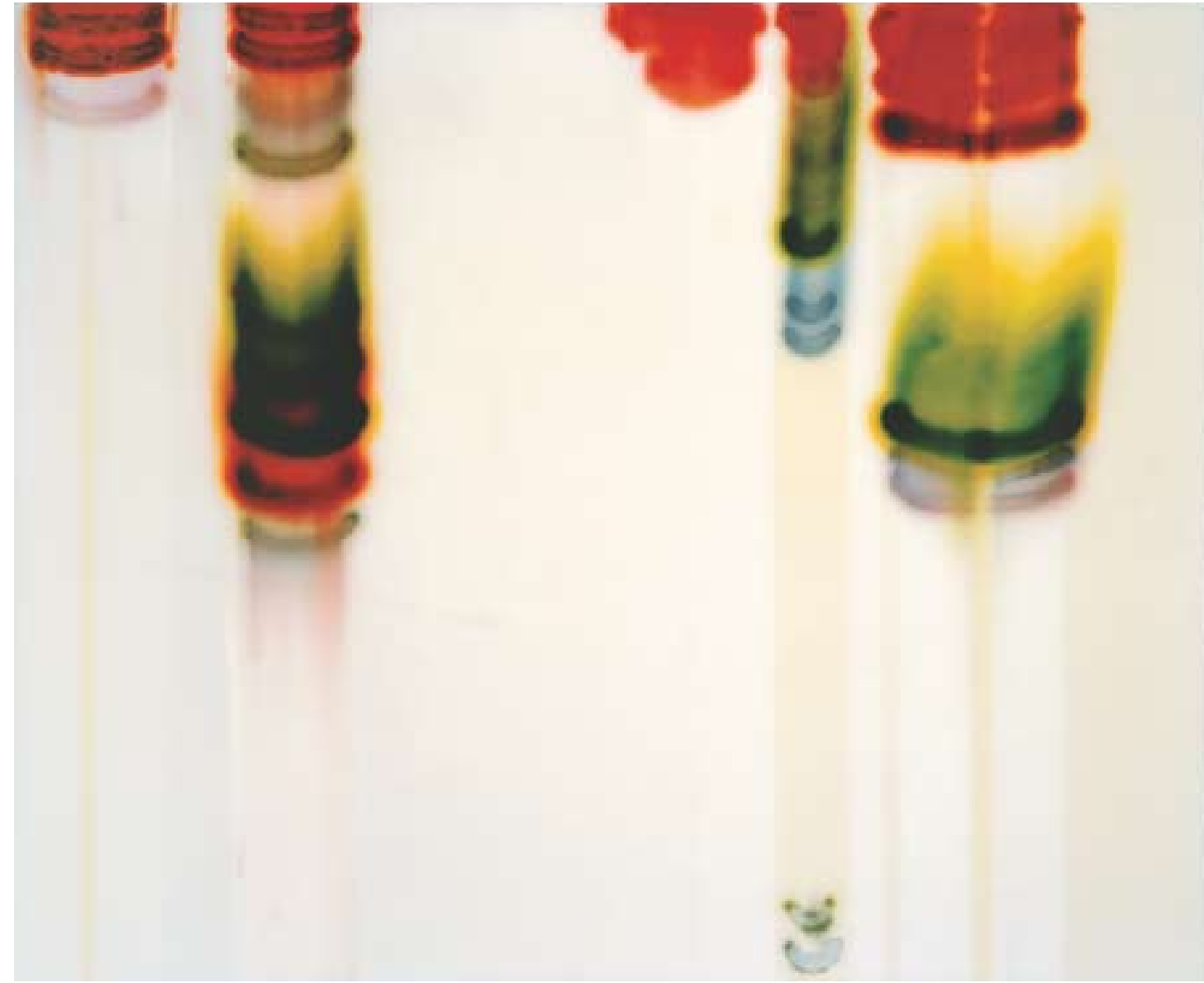
In her latest twist, Chartier has conceptualized an unusual role for collectors of her recent *Sun Tests*, where the laboratory has been extended from the studio to the collector's domestic environment. If, for example, *40 Whites* were placed in a collector's home in light conditions similar to those to which the painting was exposed in the artist's studio, and if the routines of controlled exposure were continued, the charting of light's effects and variations would continue and add to an ever-growing archive of information. This extenuation of the artist's tests adds an exciting new dimension to her practice and a new venture for collectors, who can now actively collaborate with Chartier in her research, enhancing their appreciation of her opulent abstract paintings.

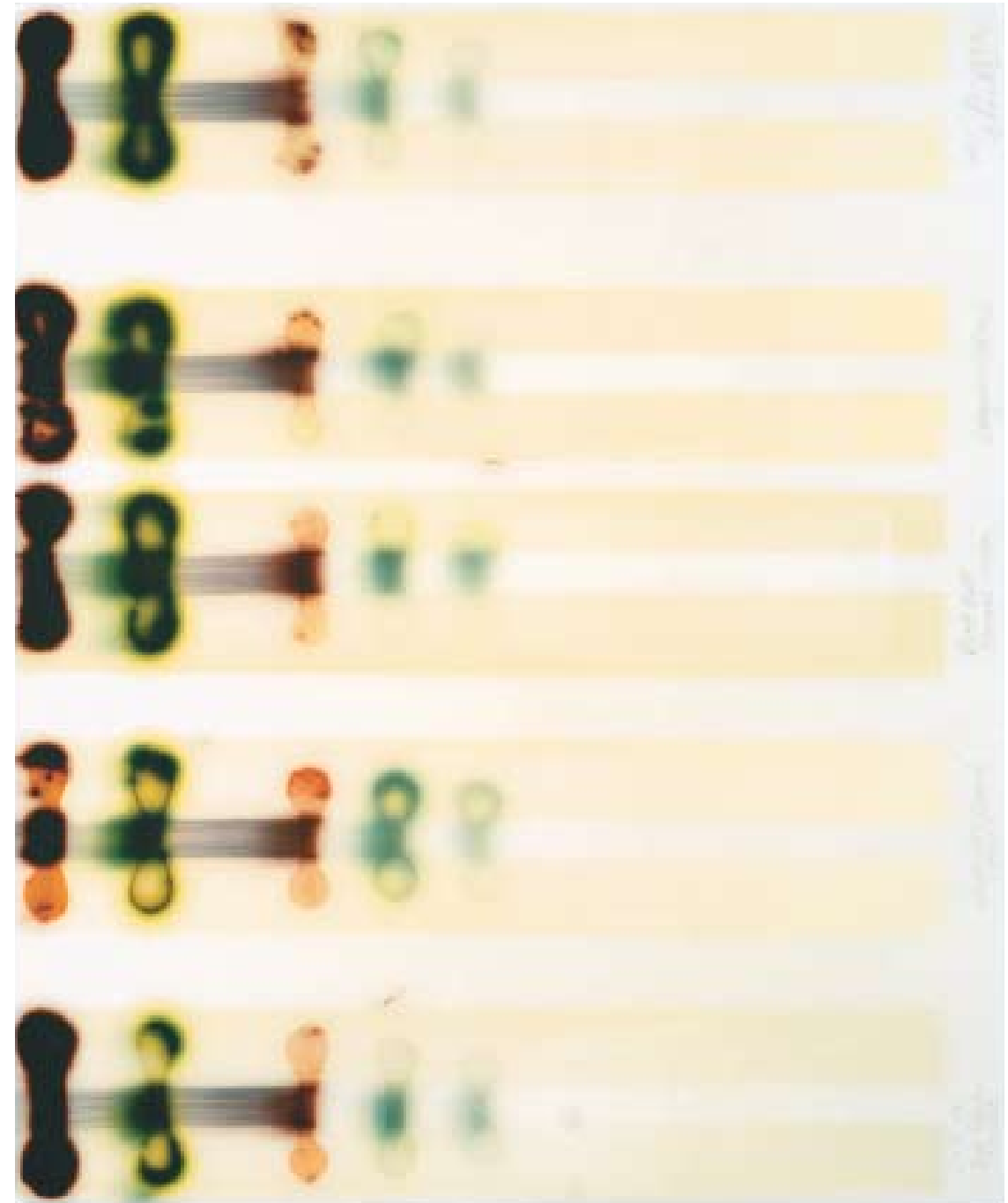
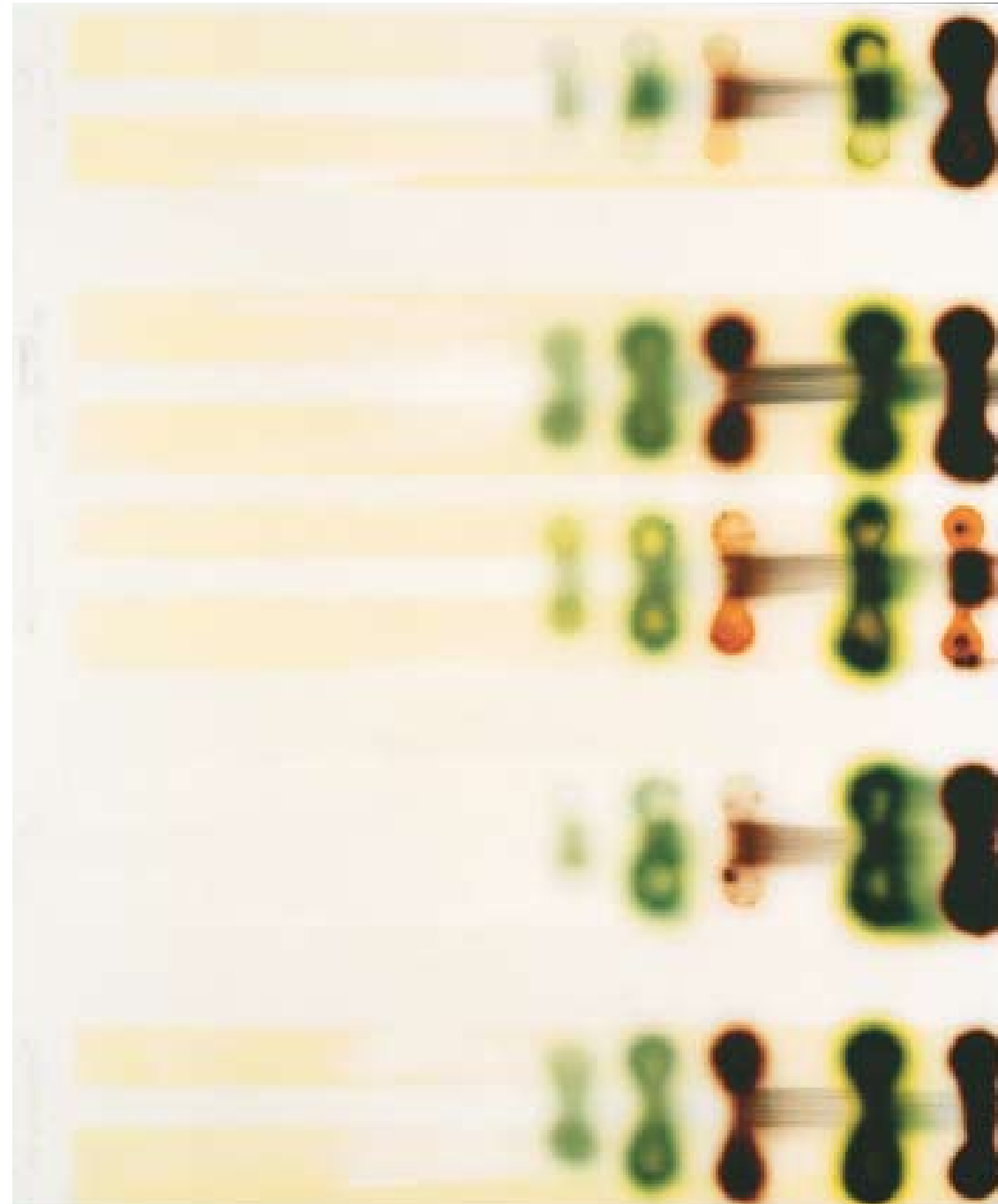
ROBIN HELD, ASSOCIATE CURATOR
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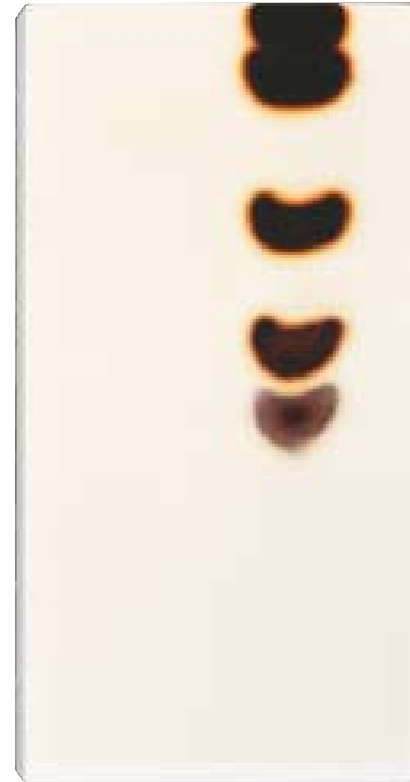
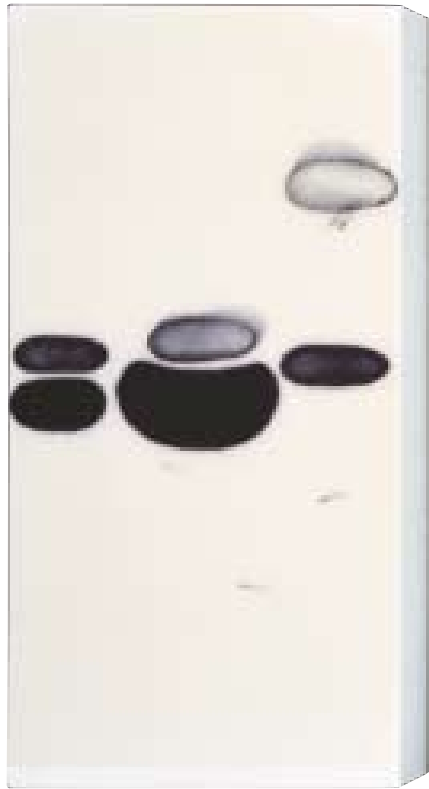
NOTES

1. Andrew Engelson, "Dot Matrix," *Seattle Weekly*, March 28, 2002, p. 63.
2. *Gene(sis)* tours nationally through 2004. Venues include Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle (April 6–August 25, 2002); Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, University of California (August 26–December 7, 2003); the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis (January 25–May 2, 2004); and the Mary & Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill. (September 10–November 28, 2004).
3. Engelson, op. cit., p. 63.

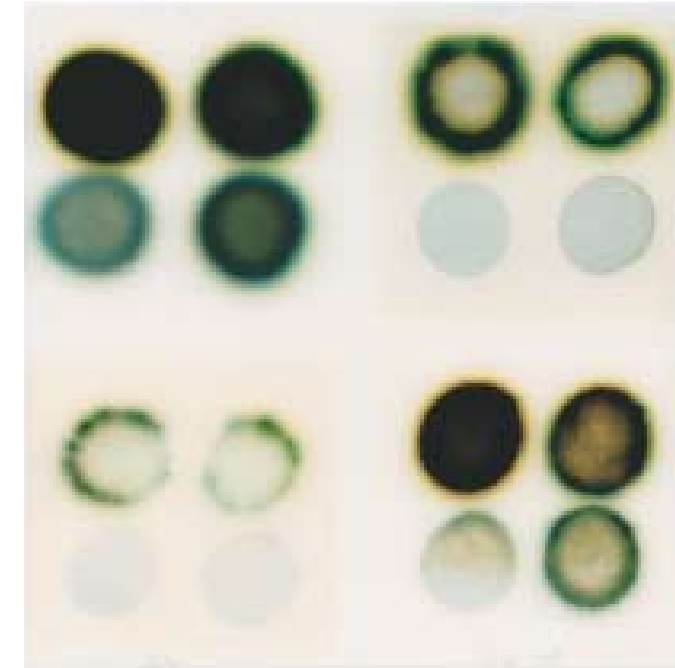
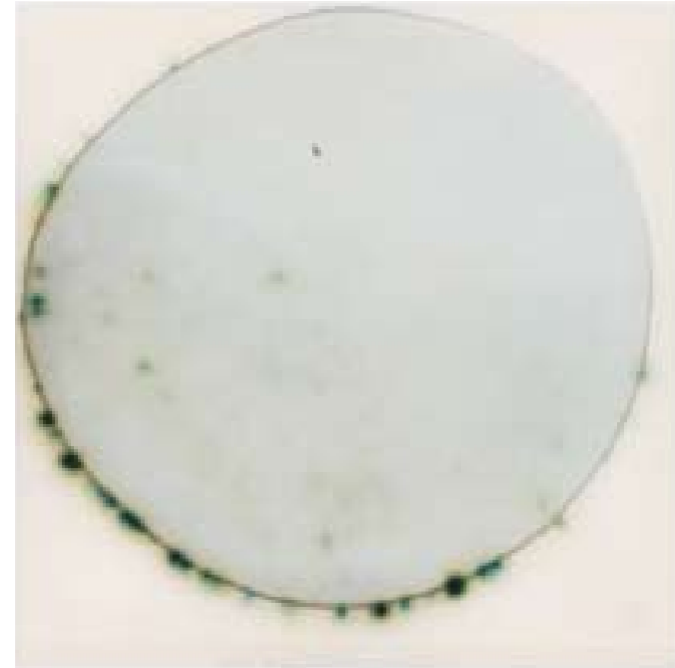
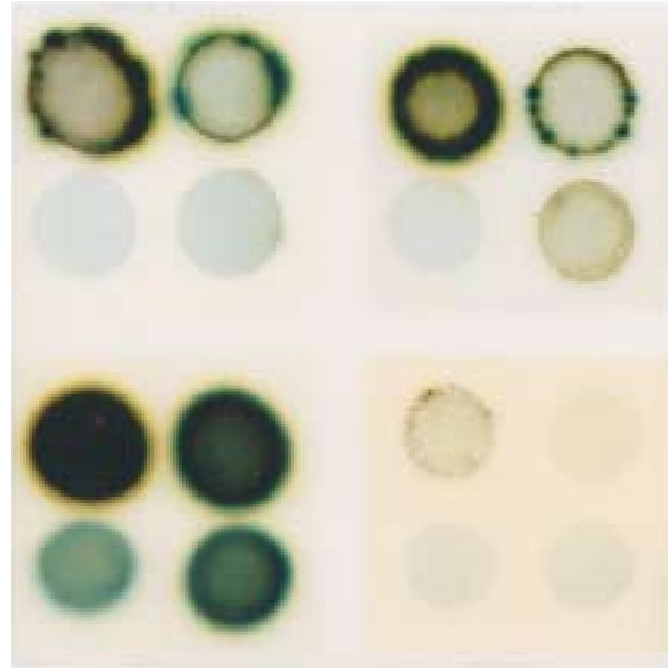
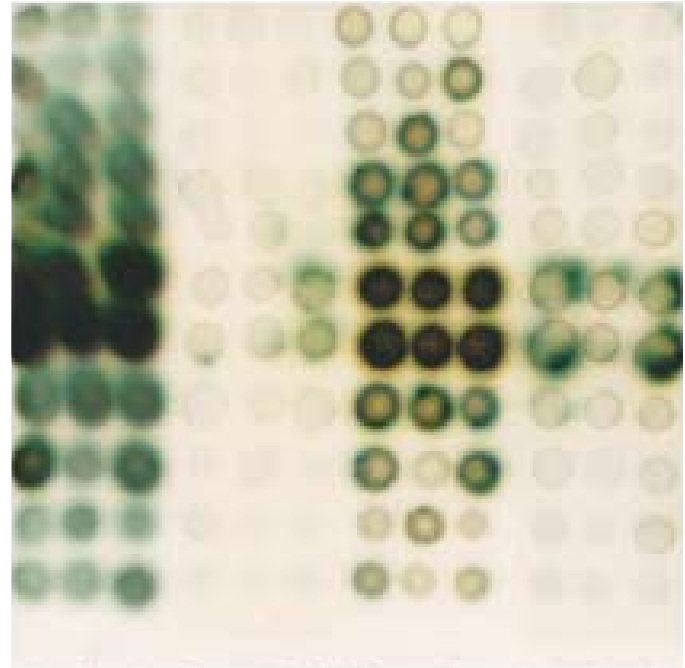
THE PAINTINGS

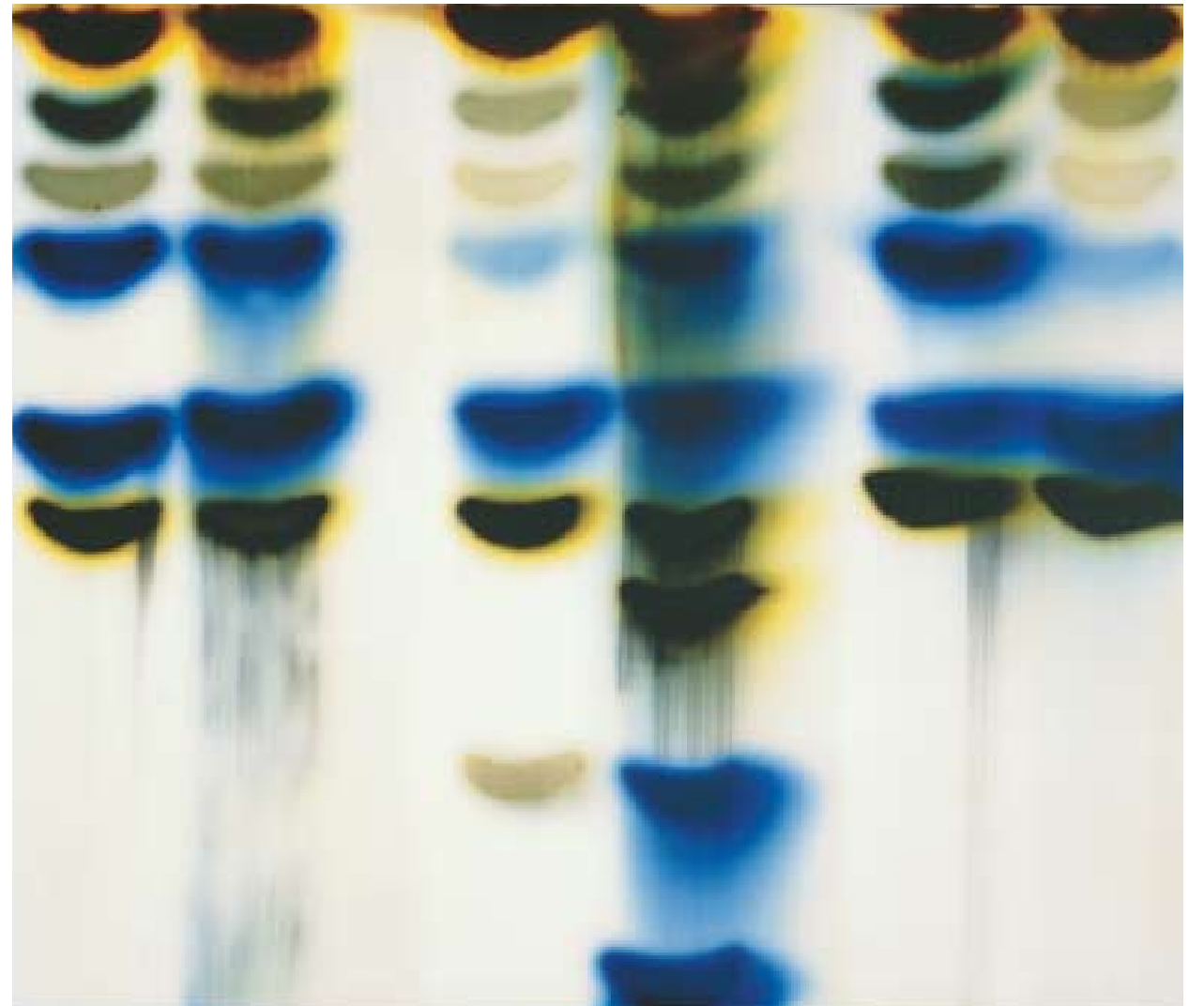


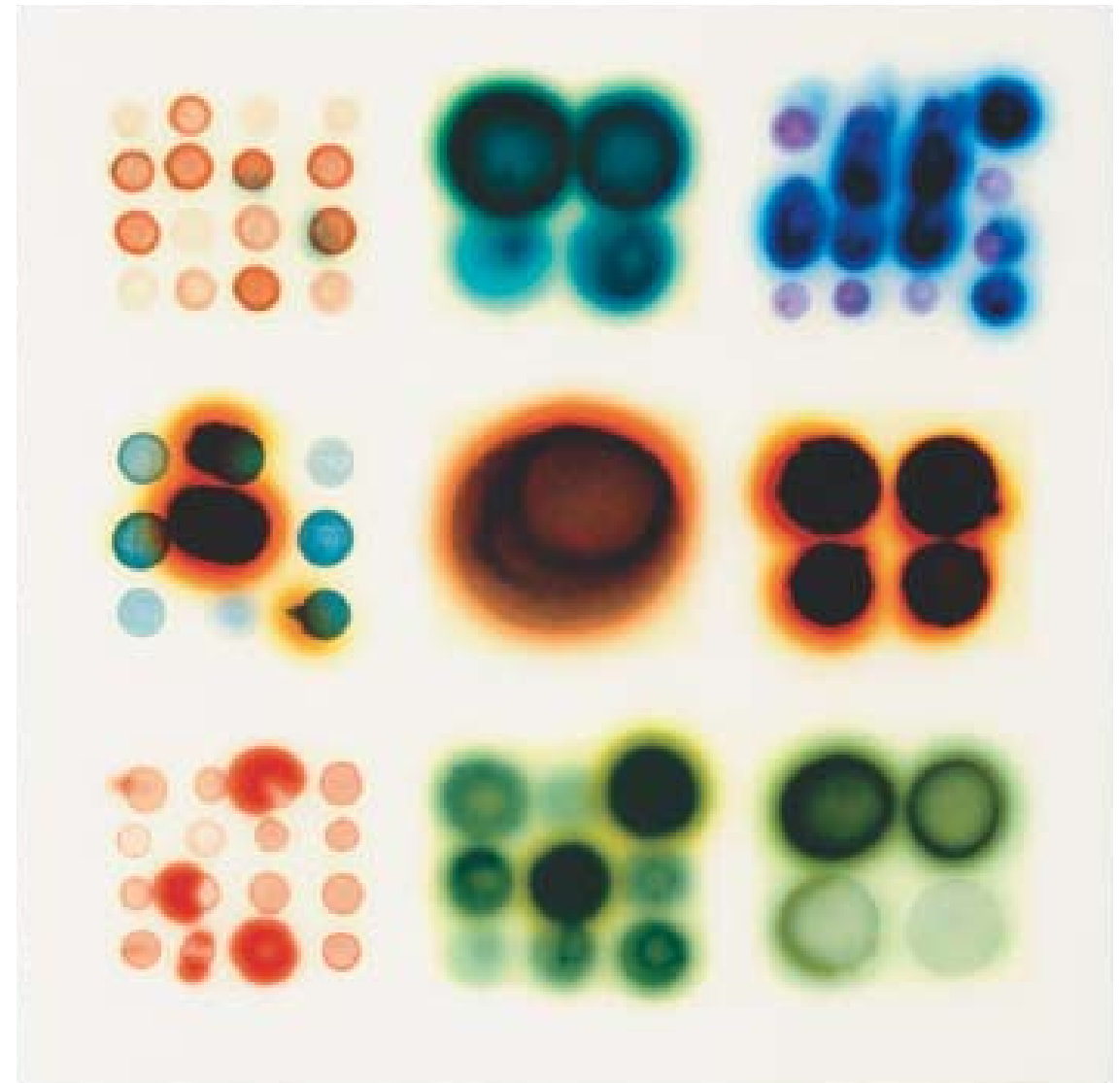
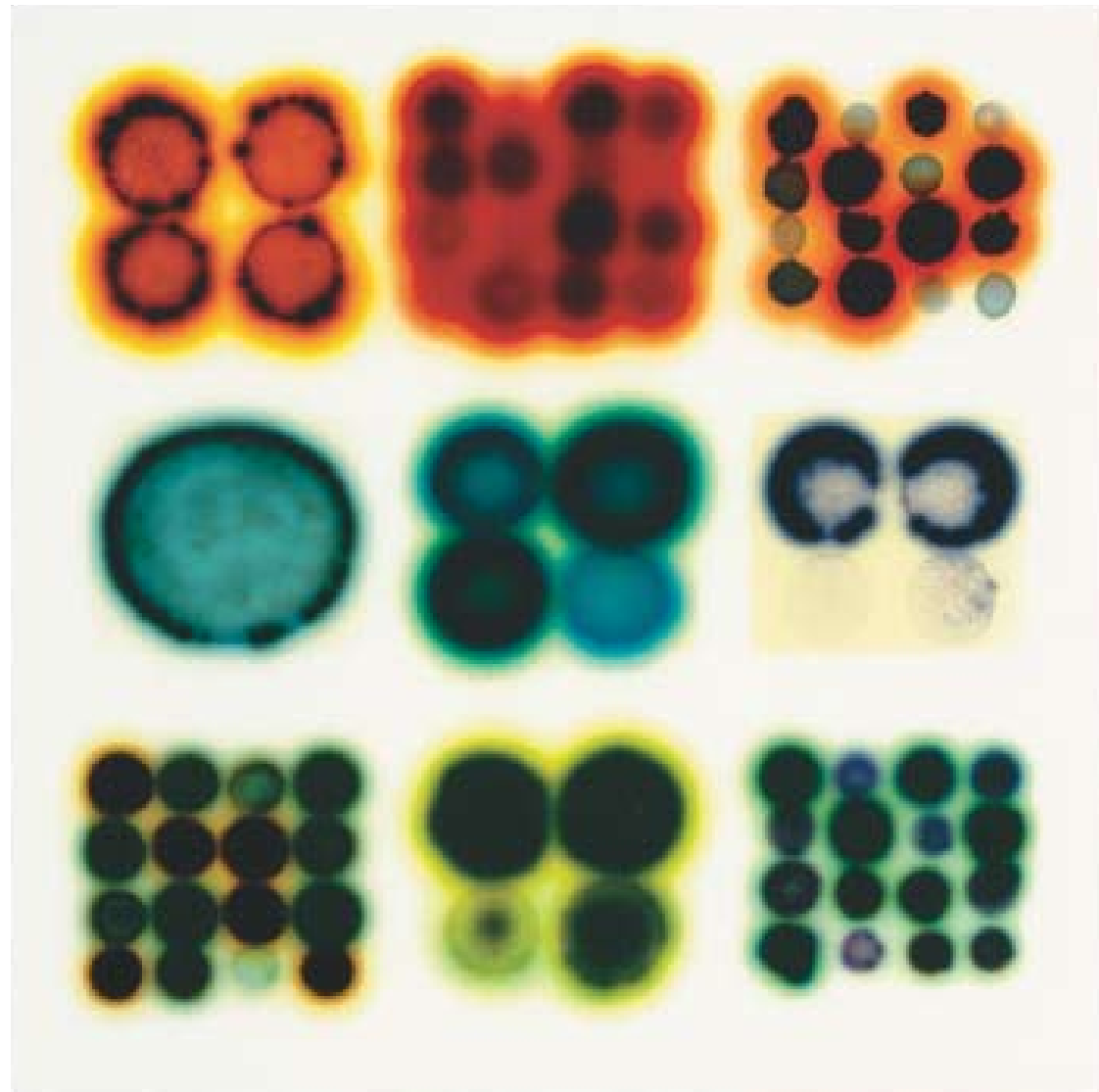






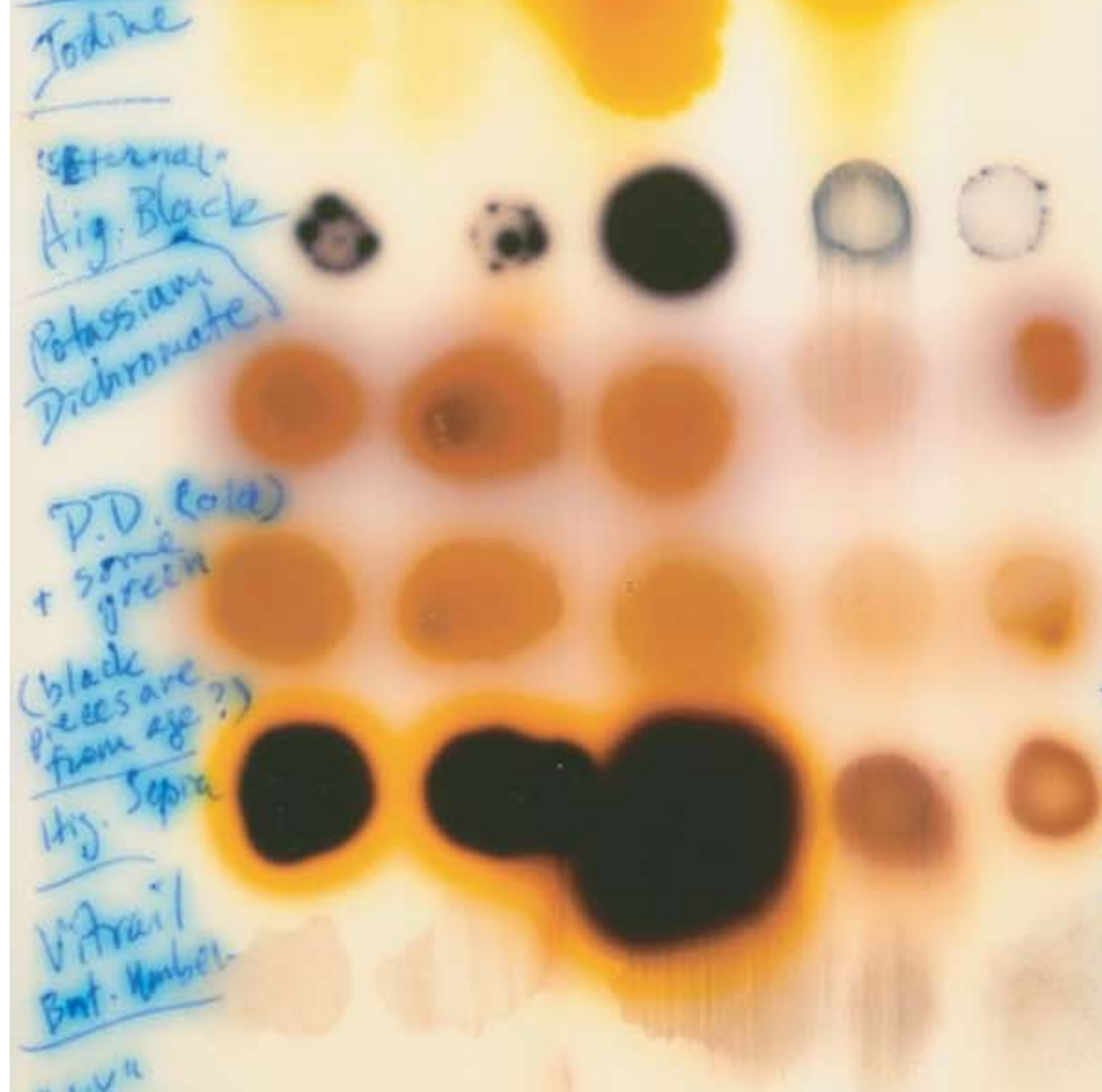
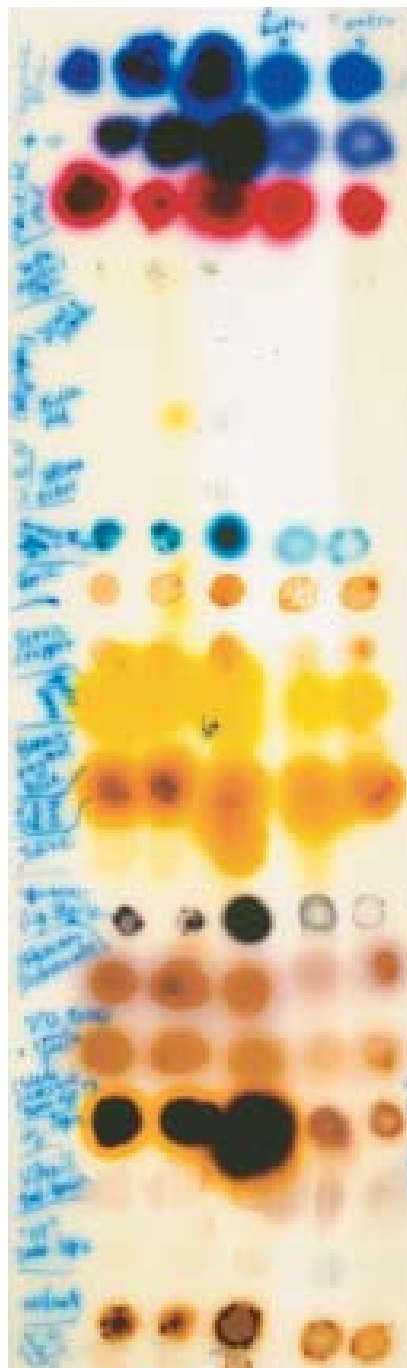


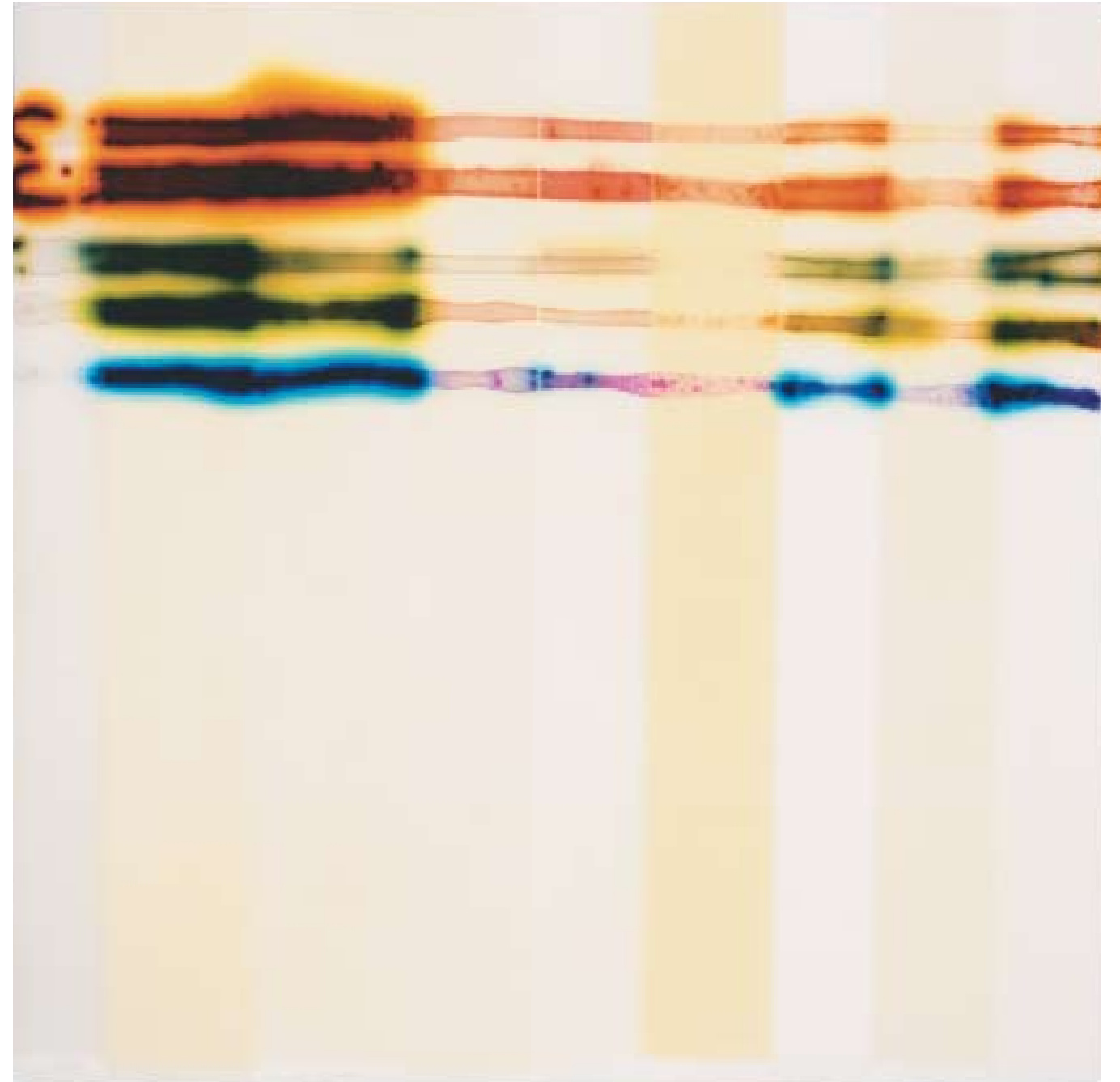
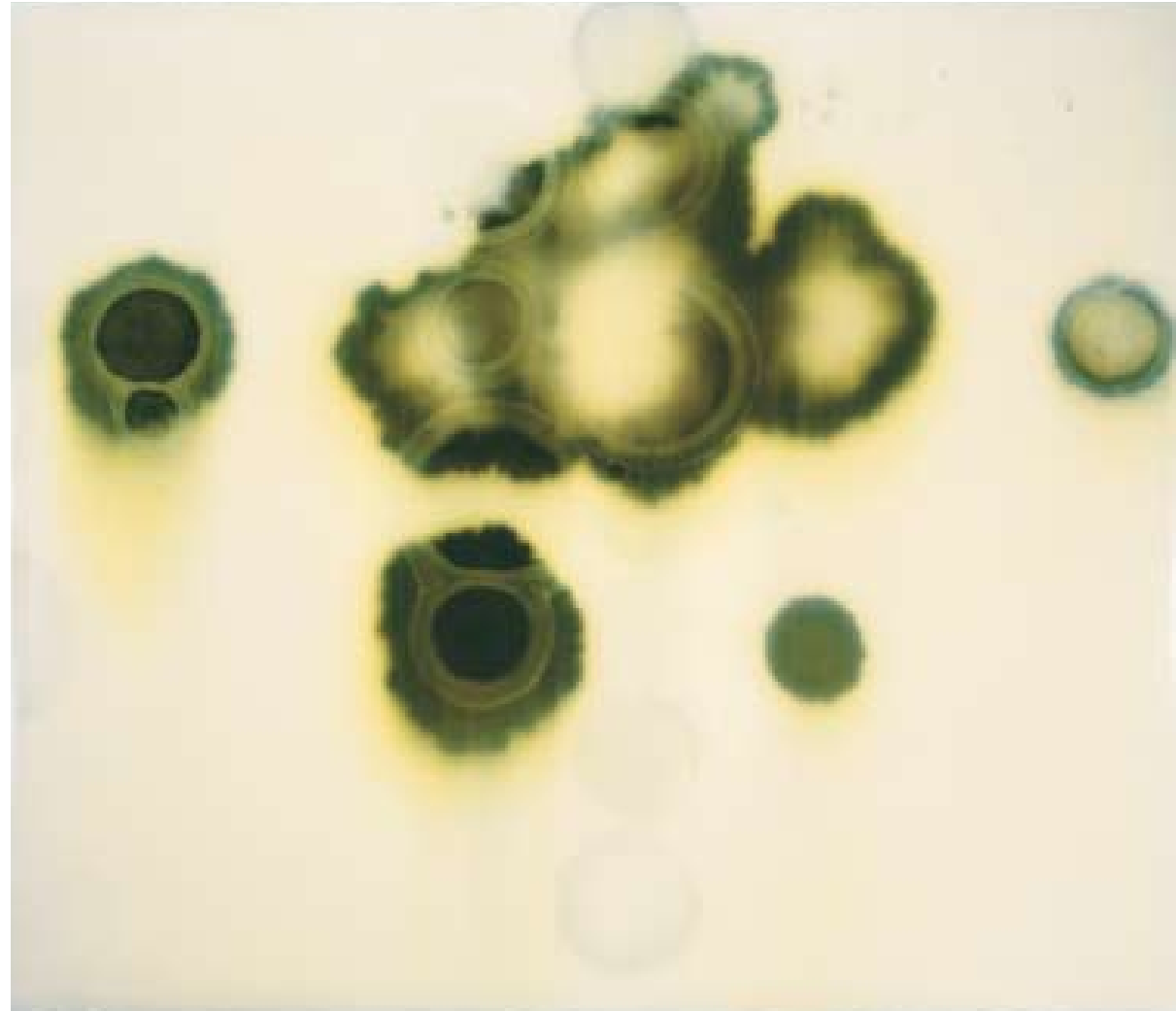


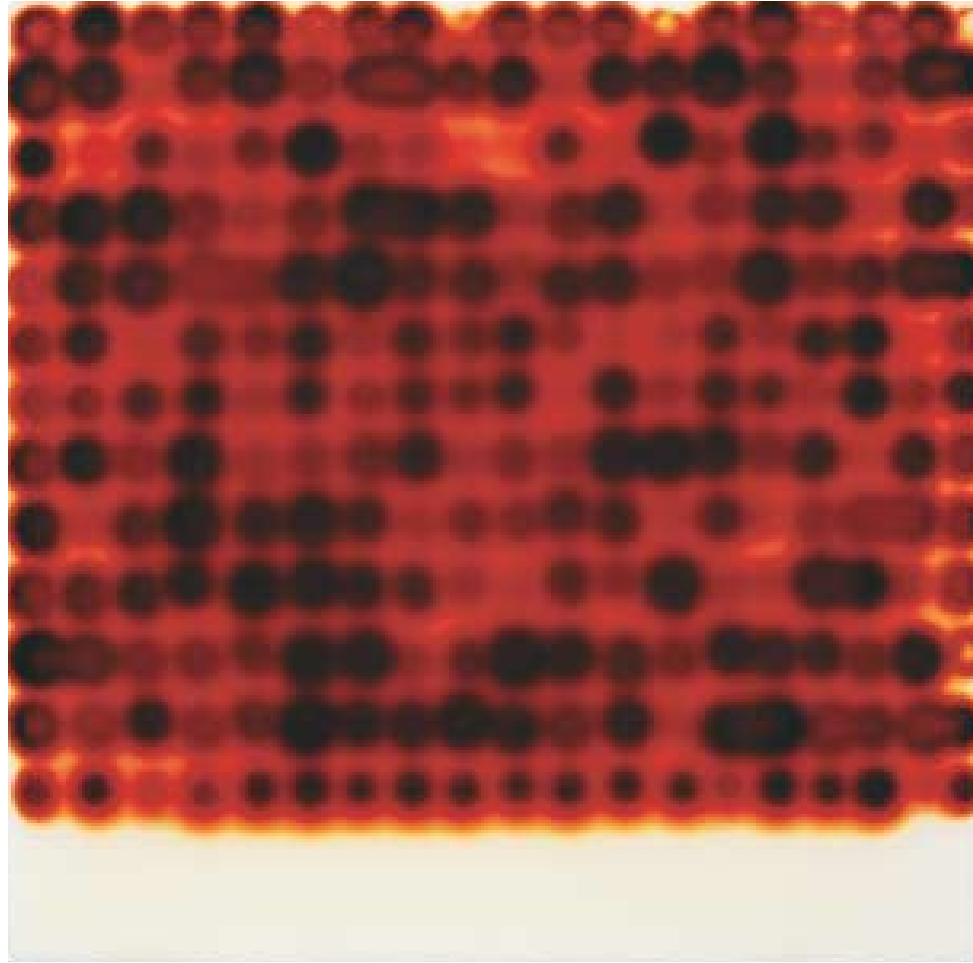


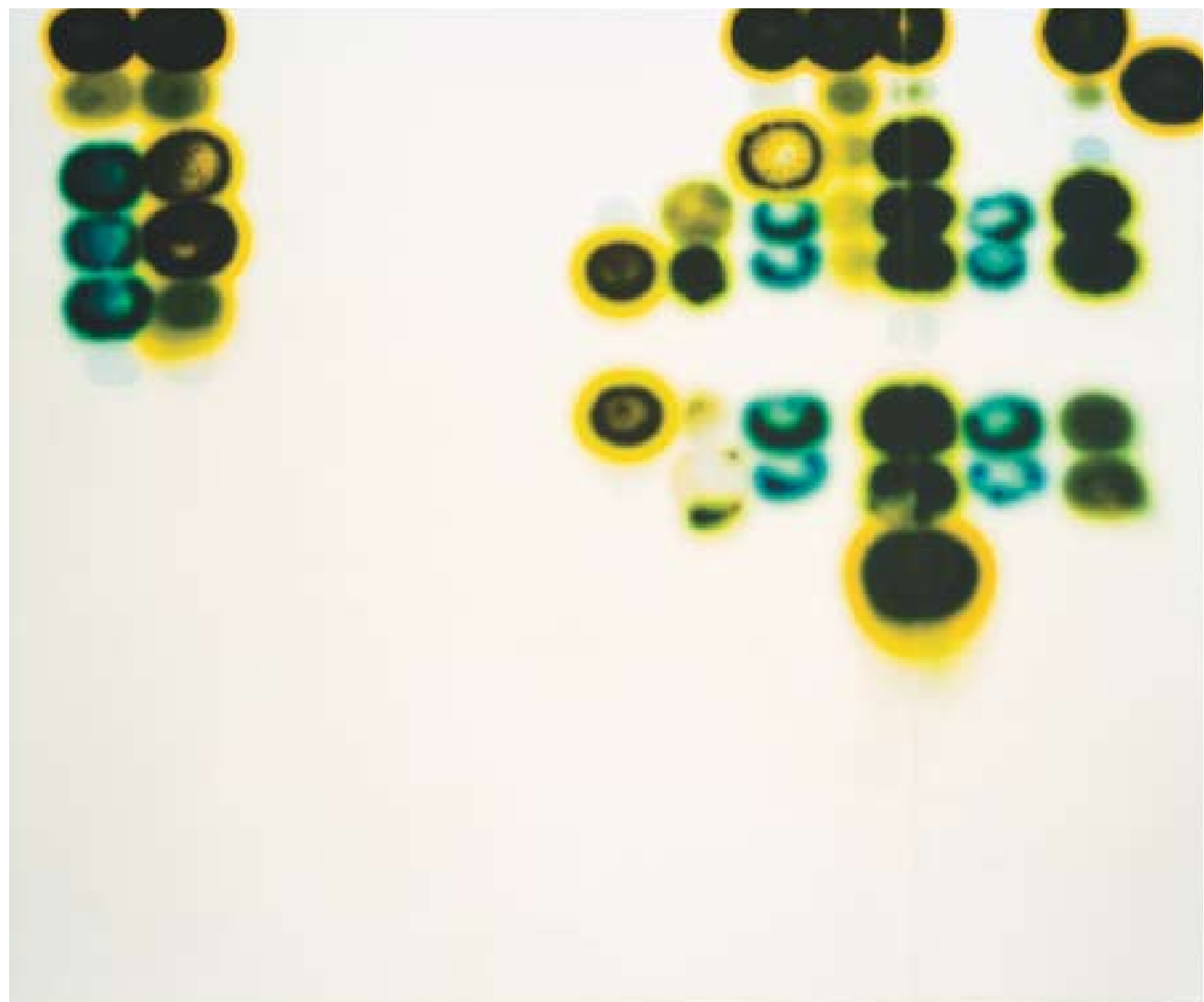


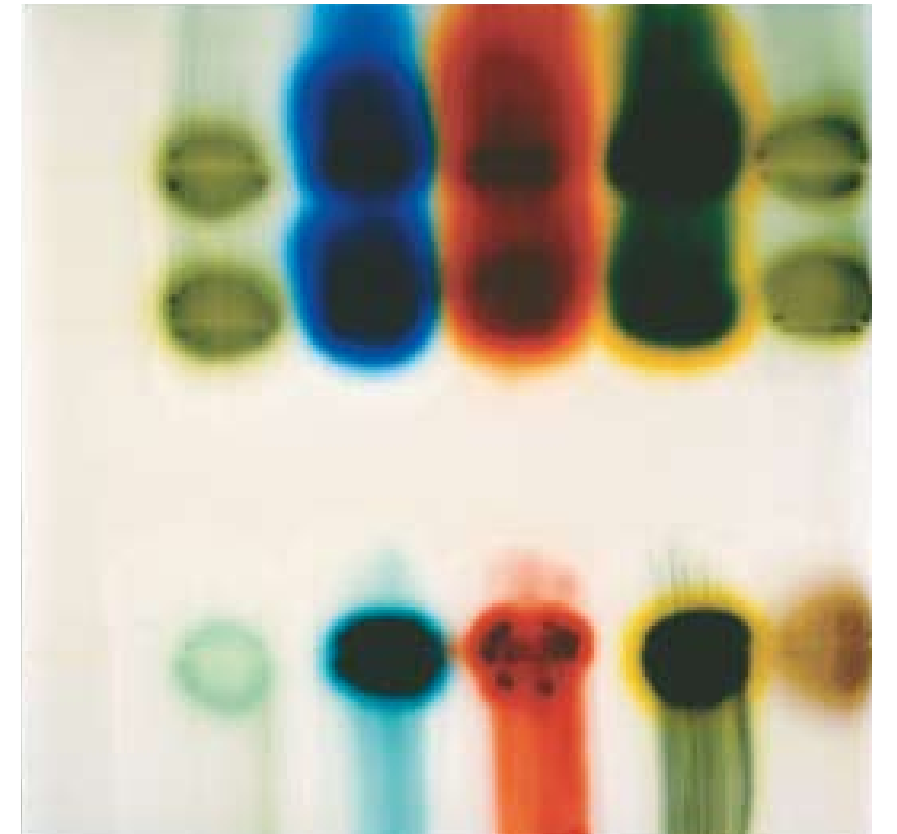


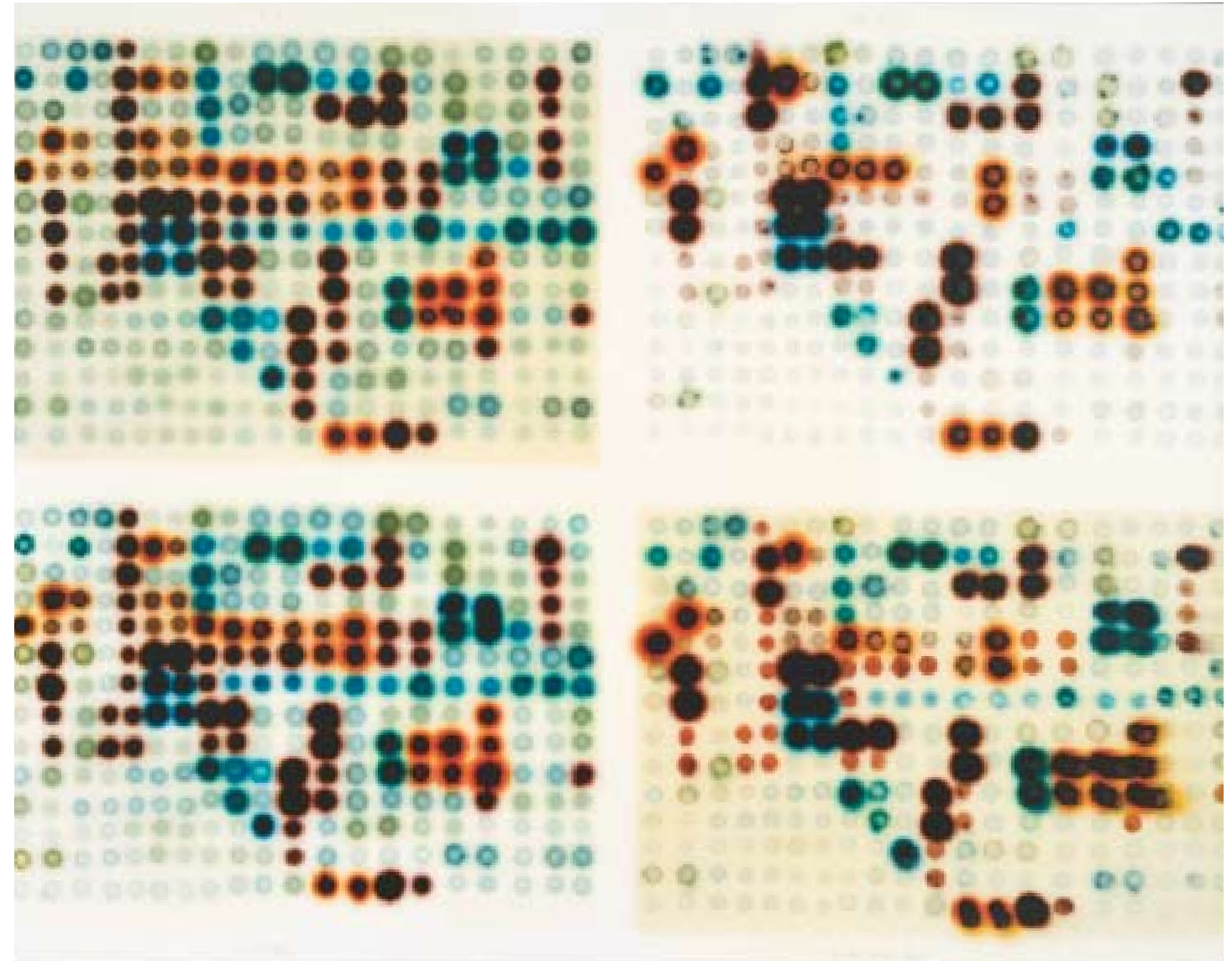
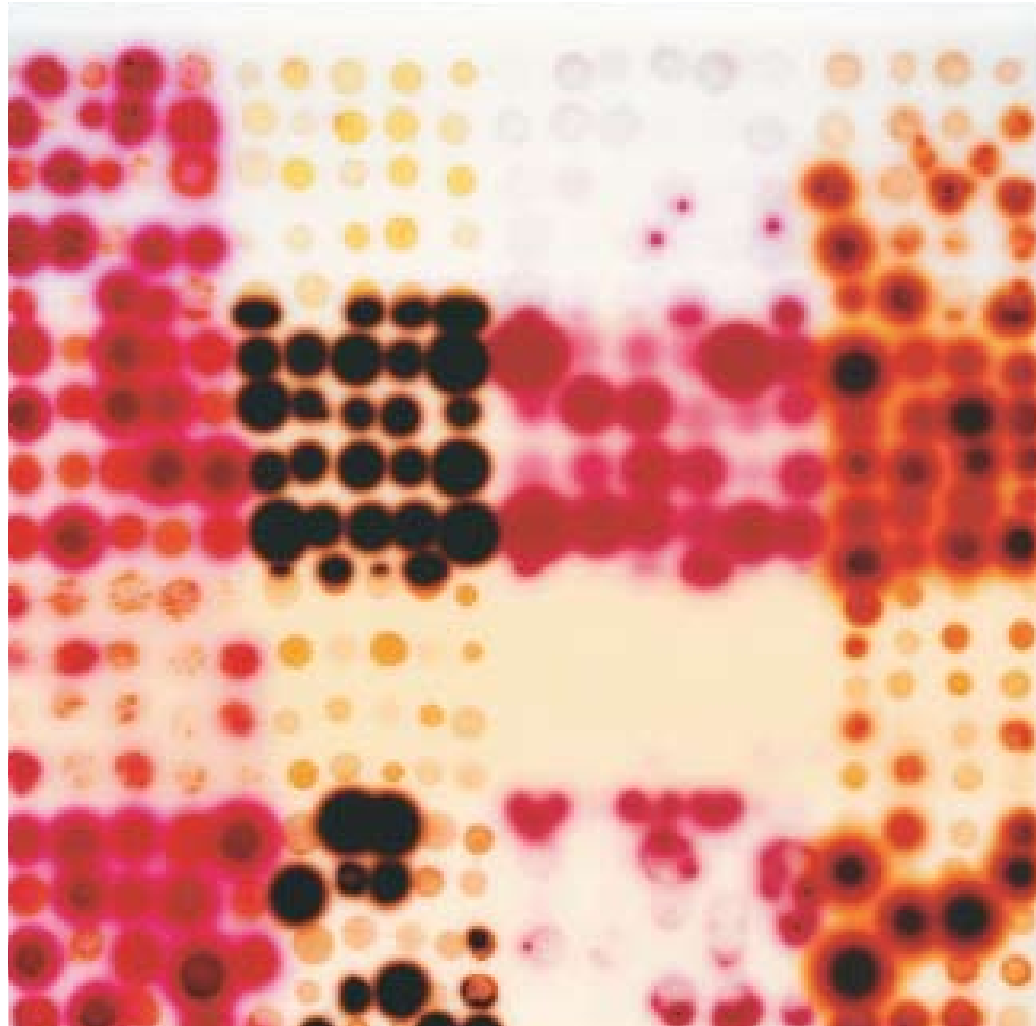


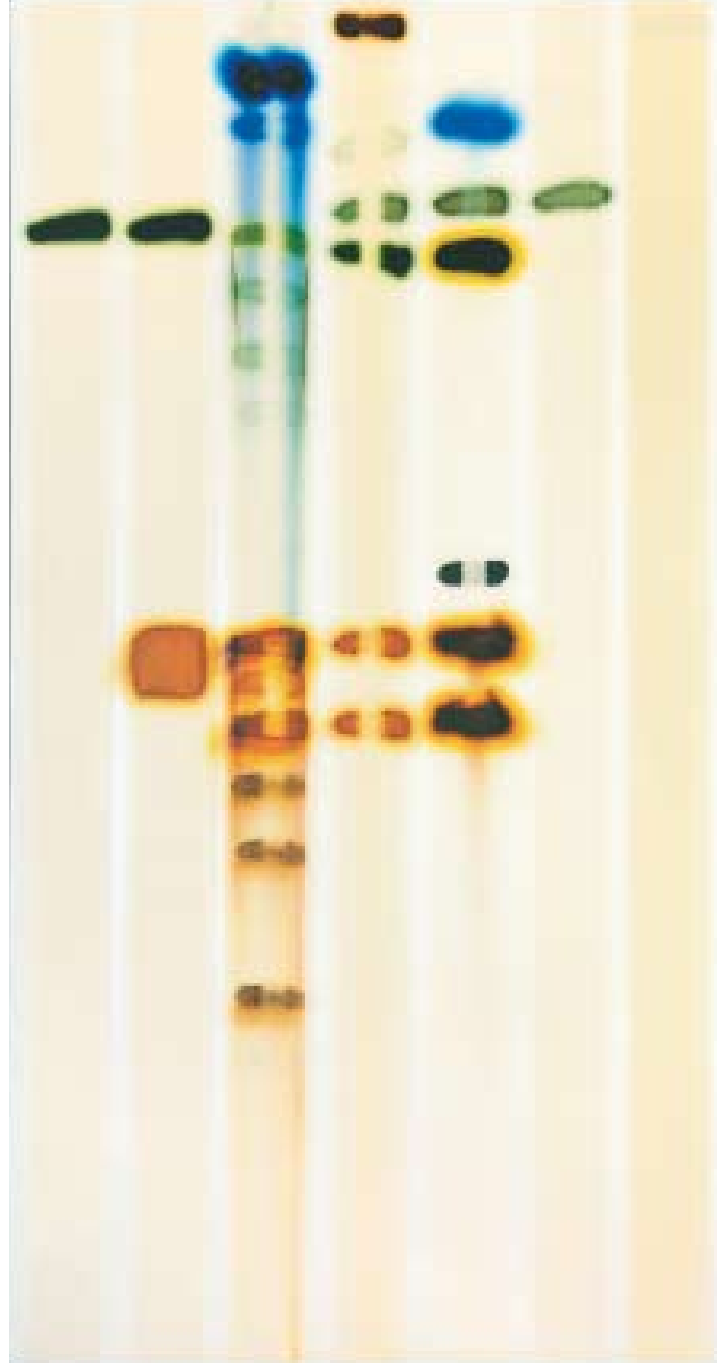


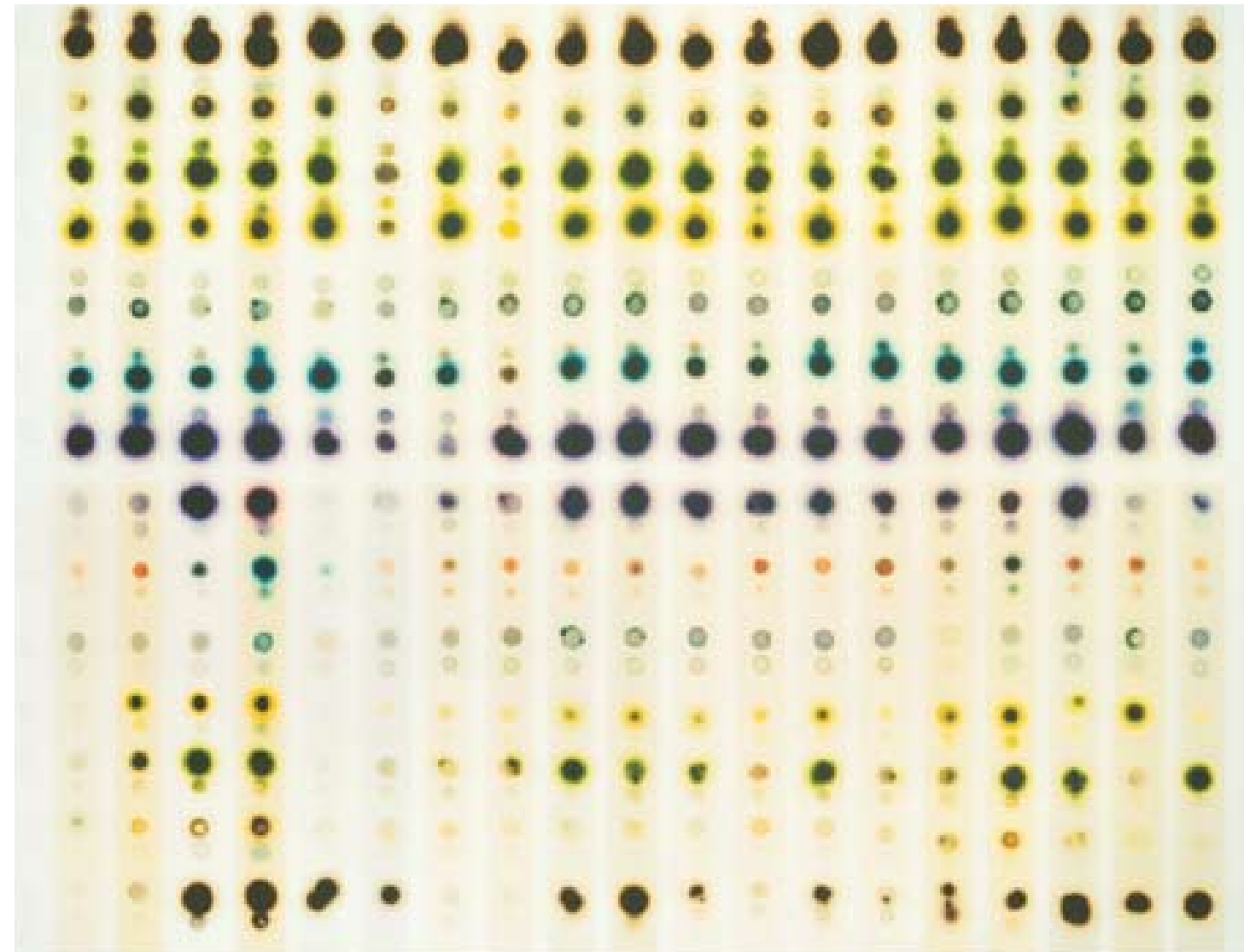












LIST OF PLATES

All objects are acrylic, stains, and paint on wood panel unless otherwise noted.

YG & Red C (Part 1—before sun test exposure), 2004 [front cover, detail]
24 × 30 in.

Courtesy of the artist and Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn

Green I, 2003 [back cover]
7 × 7 in.

Collection of Ian Dunsmuir, San Francisco; courtesy LIMN Gallery, San Francisco

Extraction Group 3 & 4, 2003 [page 2, detail]
Diptych, 30 × 33 in. overall
Collection of Mark and Barbara Golden

4 Tests (amplified), 2002 [page 4, detail]
Panel 2 of 4, 7 × 37 in. overall
Collection of Candace Vance and Melody Kegley, Seattle

2 Reds, 2003 [pages 9, detail, & 32]
7 × 7 in.
Collection of the artist

Red Fall, 2001 [page 11]
14 × 17 in.
Collection of Sir Elton John

10 Samples, 2003 [pages 12, 13]
Diptych, 14 × 24 in. overall
Collection of Nicholas Ehr, San Francisco; courtesy LIMN Gallery, San Francisco

5 Blacks, 2003 [pages 14, 15]
5 panels, 16 × 50 in. overall
Collection of Allison Arief and Bryan Burkhardt, San Francisco; courtesy LIMN Gallery, San Francisco

Ink Bleeds with Spray Paint, 2000 [pages 16–17]
11½ × 24 in.
Collection of the artist

Gray #6, 2003 [pages 18, 19]
4 panels, 7 × 37 in. overall
Collection of Tacoma Art Museum, Washington

Red & Blue Deposits, 2001 [page 20]
24 × 12 in.
Private collection, New York; courtesy Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn

Carbon Blue, 2001 [page 21]
Acrylic and stains on wood panel
12 × 14 in.
Collection of Nancy Worden and William Reed, Seattle

18 Tiny Tests, 2003 [pages 22, 23]
Diptych, 9 × 20 in. overall
Collection of Joann Hermance and David Horsley, Portland; courtesy Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland

The artist's studio, May 2004
[pages 24–25]

Sun Test: 40 Whites (Part 2—after first exposure, March–May '04), 2004 [page 26]
Diptych, 20 × 15 in. overall
Courtesy of the artist and Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn

Stain Lines (w/ Watermelon), 2004 [page 27]
28 × 36 in.
Collection of David Bahl and David Munzer, San Francisco; courtesy LIMN Gallery, San Francisco

Tiny Stain Chart, 2000 [pages 28 & 29, detail]
12½ × 3¾ in.
Collection of the artist

Ink & Translucent White, 2000 [page 30]
Acrylic and stains on wood panel
12 × 14 in.
Collection of the artist

9 Reactions (6/03), 2003 [page 31]
15 × 15 in.
Collection of Rosetta Inpharmatics, Seattle

Stain Chart (9/02), 2002 [page 33]
28 × 35 in.
Private collection, New York; courtesy Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn

5 Greens (October), 2003 [page 34]
20 × 24 in.
Collection of Ian Dunsmuir, San Francisco; courtesy LIMN Gallery, San Francisco

Red/Green, 2002 [page 35]
Diptych, 11 × 11 in. overall
Collection of Wilhem Dehl, San Francisco; courtesy LIMN Gallery, San Francisco

Ink Bonds, 2001 [pages 36, detail, & 37]
6 × 6 in.
Collection of Chambers Hotel, New York; courtesy Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn

4 Red Tests, 2003 [page 38]
12 × 12 in.
Collection of Jimmy Guerre & Jeff Kubinec, San Francisco; courtesy LIMN Gallery, San Francisco

Green & Red Sequence, 2003 [page 39]
24 × 30 in.
Collection of Peter Waterloo and Jon Taylor, San Francisco; courtesy LIMN Gallery, San Francisco

Relative Proof, 2001 [pages 40, 41]
Diptych, 30 × 34 in. overall
Weintraub Family Collection, Seattle

Saturation Chart (9/02), 2002 [page 43]
28 × 36 in.
Collection of Base Gallery, Tokyo; courtesy Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn

BIOGRAPHY

Education

- 1994 MFA, painting, University of Washington, Seattle
- 1984 BFA, painting (cum laude), University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- 1980–81 Syracuse University, New York

Solo Exhibitions

- 2004 Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn
LIMN Gallery, San Francisco
- 2003 Schroeder Romero, Brooklyn
William Traver Gallery, Tacoma, Washington
- 2002 Frumkin/Duval Gallery, Santa Monica, California
LIMN Gallery, San Francisco
Cervini Haas Gallery, Scottsdale, Arizona
- 2001 William Traver Gallery, Seattle
- 2000 Cervini Haas, Scottsdale, Arizona
- 1998 William Traver Gallery, Seattle
- 1997 Laura Russo Gallery, Portland, Oregon
William Traver Gallery, Seattle
- 1996 William Traver Gallery, Seattle
- 1995 William Traver Gallery, Seattle
- 1992 NACUL Center for Ecological Architecture, Amherst, Massachusetts

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2004 *DNA: Art & Science—the Double Helix*, Contemporary Art Museum, University of South Florida, Tampa [online exhibition]
Thought Patterns, Kent Place Gallery, Kent Place School, Summit, New Jersey
- 2003 *Portals*, Urban Institute for Contemporary Arts, Grand Rapids, Michigan
Components, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, Oregon
- 2002 *Gene(sis): Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics*, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle. Travels through 2004: Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, University of California, Berkeley; Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; Mary & Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois
25 Years, William Traver Gallery, Seattle
- 2001 *Theory or Faith*, LIMN Gallery, San Francisco
De-Bashery, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle
- 2000 *4 x 4: Four Decades of University of Washington Alumni*, Jacob Lawrence Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle
Splendor in the Bash, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle
Assemblage, William Traver Gallery, Seattle
- 1999 1999 Neddy Artist Fellowship Exhibition, Seafirst Bank Gallery, Seattle
Pacific Northwest Annual, Bellevue Art Museum, Washington [also 1998, 1997, 1994]

- 1998 *Hands On Color*, Bellevue Art Museum, Washington
Pattern, Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, Oregon
- 1997 *Drawings . . . A Bi-Coastal Invitational*, Meyerson & Nowinski Gallery, Seattle
Beeswax, SOIL Gallery, Seattle
They Came Here First! Center on Contemporary Art, and Bumbershoot: The Seattle Arts Festival
Dehesive 2, SOIL Gallery, Seattle
- 1996 11th Annual Combined Talents: Florida National, Museum of Fine Arts of Florida State University, Tallahassee
New Abstraction, Seattle Art Museum Rental/Sales Gallery
 Artists Council 27th Annual Exhibition, Palm Springs Desert Museum, California
- 1995 14th Annual September Competition, Alexandria Museum of Art, Louisiana
- 1993 *Dehesive*, University of Washington, Seattle
Faber Birren Color Show, Stamford Art Association, Connecticut
- 1991 *The Figure: Personal Views and Collaborations*, Northampton Center for the Arts, Massachusetts
Common Past, Recent Work, Wheeler Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- 1990 *Viewing Ourselves*, Hampden Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- 1989 *Art and Soul*, Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts

Awards and Grants

- 2004 Special Projects Grant, 4Culture (Cultural Development Authority of King County), Seattle
- 2003 Purchase Award—Portable Works Collection, City of Seattle, Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs
- 2002 Artist Trust/Washington State Arts Commission Fellowship, Seattle
- 2001 PONCHO Special Recognition Award, administered by the Betty Bowen Committee of the Seattle Art Museum
 Joan Mitchell Foundation Award nominee, New York

- 1999 Artist Trust GAP Grant (Grants for Artists' Projects), Seattle
 Betty Bowen Finalist, Seattle Art Museum
 Neddy Fellowship Award nominee, Behnke Foundation, Seattle
 Centrum Residency, Port Townsend, Washington
- 1997–99 Open Studio Seattle, website mentoring project sponsored by the NEA, Benton Foundation, Seattle Art Museum, and Seattle Public Library
- 1993 Nordstrom Scholarship, University of Washington, Seattle
 Fred Kraus Memorial Award, Faber Birren Color Show, Stamford Art Association, Connecticut
- 1991 Massachusetts Cultural Council Arts Lottery Grant, Northampton, Massachusetts

Publications

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- 2002 Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly. *Bioethics and the Book of Life*. New York: Thirteen/WNET. Reproduction on video box and booklet covers.
- 2001 *New American Paintings*. Vol. 13. Pacific West Coast edition. Needham Heights, Mass.: Open Studios Press.
- 1999 *Neddy Artist Fellowship Exhibition*. Exh. cat. Seattle: Seafirst Gallery. Reproduction.
- 1997 *New American Paintings*. Vol. 31. Pacific West Coast edition. Needham Heights, Mass.: Open Studios Press.
- 1996 *11th Annual Combined Talents: Florida National*. Exh. cat. Tallahassee, Fla.: Museum of Fine Arts, Florida State University. Reproduction.
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- 2003 Connor, Jill. Jaq Chartier: Testing. *Contemporary*, no. 53/54, pp. 117–18. Reproduction.
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- 2001 Cullum, Jerry. Seductive Changes. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Dec. 28, p. Q-5.
 Hackett, Regina. Seven Good Reasons . . . *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, March 23, p. 17.
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 Updike, Robin. Sketchbook: Bellevue Annual Sparks Vitality of Art Scene. *Seattle Times*, June 16.
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 Updike, Robin. Gallery Walk. *Seattle Times*, July 12, p. E-6.
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 Kangas, Matthew. A Showcase of Pacific NW Artists' Work. *Seattle Times*, Aug. 3.
- 1991 Russell, Gloria. Paintings Map Unconventional Path. *Springfield Sunday Republican*, April 14.
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Collections

- Chambers Hotel, New York
 Amgen, Seattle
 Rosetta Inpharmatics, Seattle
 City of Seattle, Portable Works Collection
 Tacoma Art Museum, Washington
 USAA, Seattle

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