

## Eli Bornowsky

BLANKET CONTEMPORARY ART, VANCOUVER

**E**li Bornowsky claims to have arrived at abstract painting backwards. Neither the depictive arts in general nor the history of abstraction in particular initially concerned him. Instead, it was music (as diverse as Autechre, La Monte Young and Ornette Coleman) that brought him to abstraction. Bornowsky's new series at Blanket Contemporary Art consists of groups of circles executed in gouache on paper and oil on canvas. Bornowsky wanted to make visual work that has the same effect as music; if one lets them, these works exhibit a sustained play between shapes and colours, a play similar to that in music.

The relationship in visual art between music and abstraction is old. Wassily Kandinsky attempted to represent music visually a hundred years ago, but what Bornowsky does bears only the most superficial affinity to Kandinsky. Although Bornowsky makes abstract paintings, and is interested in music, his work is unlike Kandinsky's or even Mondrian's, because Bornowsky does not try to *represent* music. Instead, he tries to make pictures that might operate like music, creating a similar experience. There are no expressive brush strokes here to represent an arpeggio, no colour to symbolize tone.

In most of the paintings, a series of circles frames a series of smaller circles, with each smaller circle corresponding in colour to a larger one. Each is also slightly different in terms of the application of oil paint or gouache. The more time one gives to these works (the more one looks at them—these are, after all, paintings which ask to be *looked* at), the more they reveal. These works trust viewers to take their time. They present themselves candidly, without pretense or demands. The repetition they contain might warn of their being dull, but one is reminded of John Cage's injunction: if one finds something boring, consider it until it isn't.

The arrangements of circles have been painted in various consistencies. As such, the paintings are meditations on difference and repetition. Each circle is subtly different from the others: in the way the paint is applied, the subtle variations of colour, even the size of the circles and how circles painted with the same pigment vary. Some pictures have more obvious variances: some have three white circles, or three black plus one brown circle, creating an imbalance in the compositional symmetry. The more one looks at the paintings, the more ways one discovers to look at them, to contemplate their differences.

Variation encourages the eye to play back and forth across the painting's surface, examining differences, and that play affords an experience similar to listening to music. The mind moves. **AARON PECK**



ELI BORNOWSKY *Untitled*  
2008. Gouache on paper  
73.7 x 73.7 cm

*Untitled* 2008. Gouache on  
paper 73.7 x 73.7 cm

