

DAVID SHAPIRO
INFINITE CENTERS

BETTY COOKE
SELECTIONS

APRIL 17 – JUNE 5, 2014

DAVID SHAPIRO

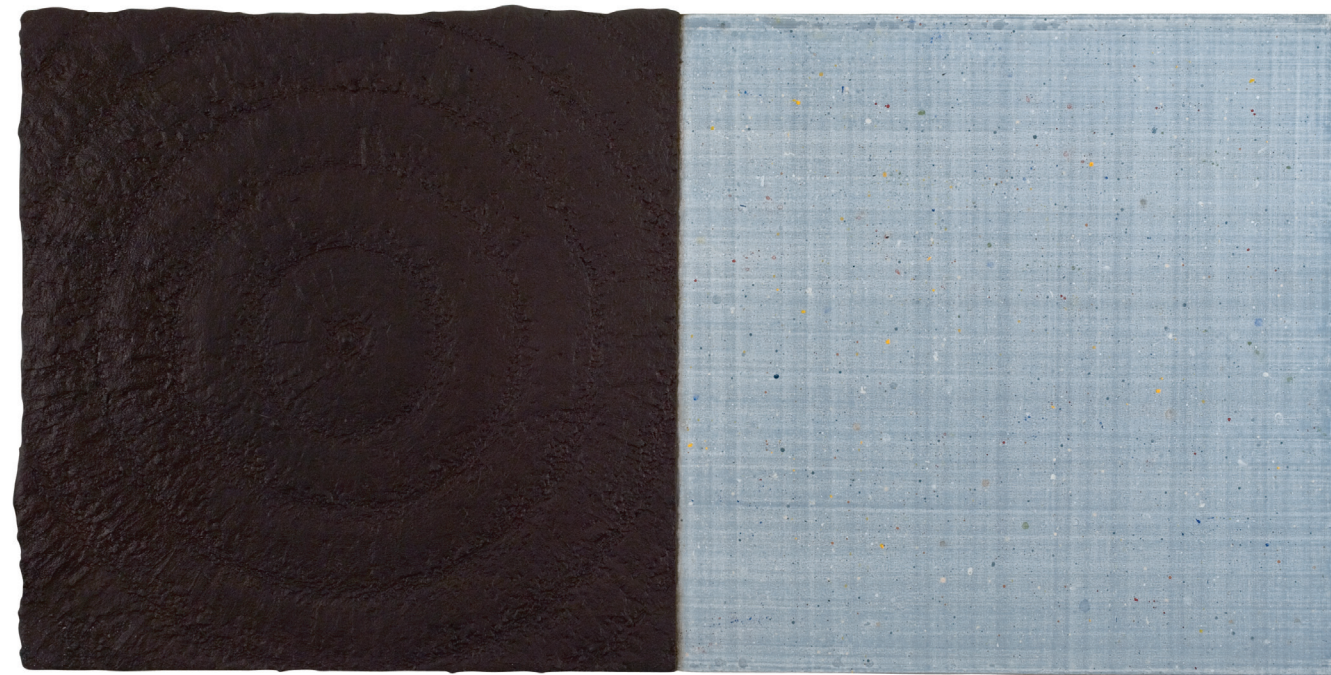
The New York-based American artist David Shapiro is an internationally celebrated non-objective painter whose signature style of partitioned compositions creates boundless platforms for meditative awareness and contemplative tranquility through a complex union of color, texture, light, and form.

Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York in 1944, Shapiro studied at Skowhegan School of Art in 1965, and earned his BFA from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn in 1966, and his MFA from Indiana University in Bloomington in 1968.

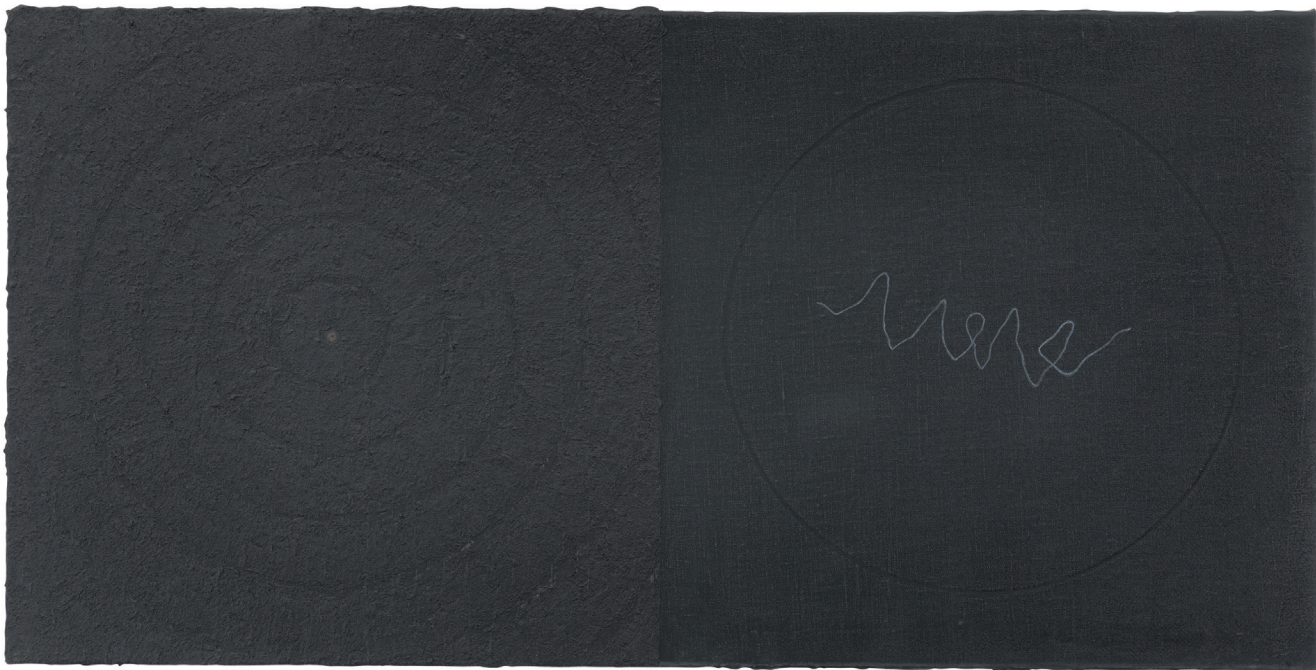
Compared with the visual equivalent of a mantra, Shapiro developed a practice that included contrasting Eastern concepts such as *mudra*, a symbolic Buddhist or Hindu hand gesture; *savasana*, the lying-down posture in yogic practice; “clearing,” as in to clear the mind, and “origin and return,” which represents the opening and concluding points of meditation. The artist equates his work to the opposing metaphors of the limitlessness of the warp and weft of weaving, and the inward centering associated with wheel pottery. While one might expect dissonant tension from such divergent metaphors, Shapiro’s images harmoniously pulsate, and mesmerize the viewer with quiet urges to both reach out from and move toward the middle.

Shapiro’s paintings and prints, according to the author Mason Riddle, “comprise a highly personal language of signs and symbols. Circles, spirals, dots, wave and knot patterns, ... and textures resonate on richly hued, tactile surfaces of Nepalese and Japanese papers, burlap, nylon screening, and canvas evoking a subtle mood of contemplation. Suggesting constellations of heavenly bodies, or human thoughts, these works appear to visually and psychologically, if not mythically, intersect, overlap, and merge with one another.”

For over three decades, David Shapiro has exhibited in more than eighty solo exhibitions throughout the United States as well as in Japan, Canada, and England. His work is represented in many public, private, and corporate collections including respected institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Solomon Guggenheim Museum, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Mint Museum in Charlotte, North Carolina, the Smithsonian Museum of American Art, Washington D.C., the Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art in Nagoya, Japan, and the Kunsthalle der Stadt in Nuremberg, Germany.



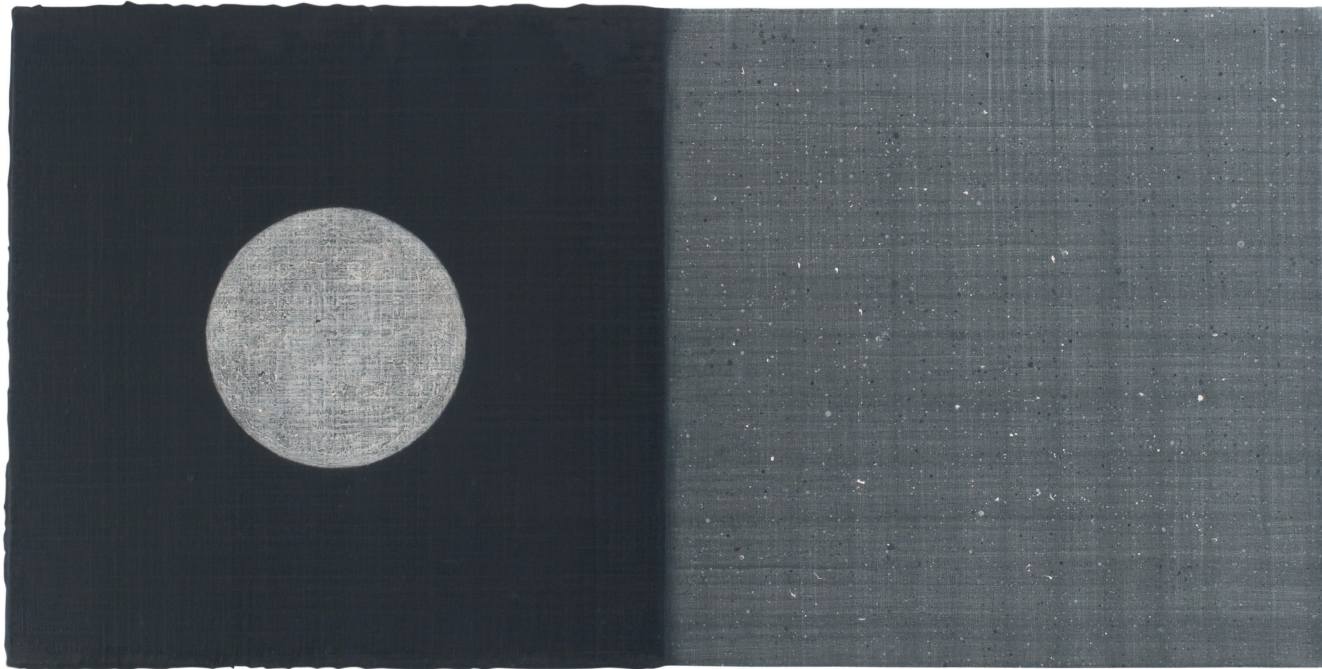
David Shapiro
Clearing 72
2006
Acrylic on Canvas
30 × 60 inches



David Shapiro
Clearing 111
2012
Acrylic on Canvas
22 × 43 inches



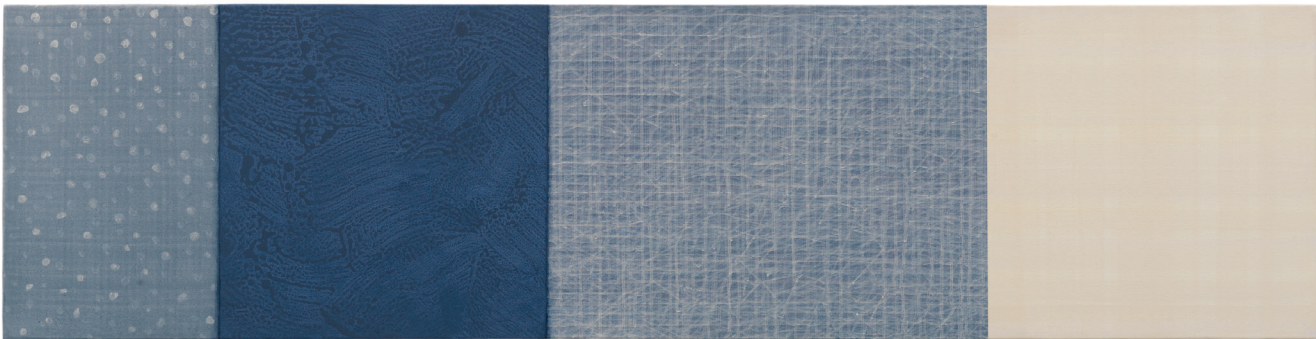
David Shapiro
Clearing 71
2006
Acrylic on Canvas
22 × 44 inches



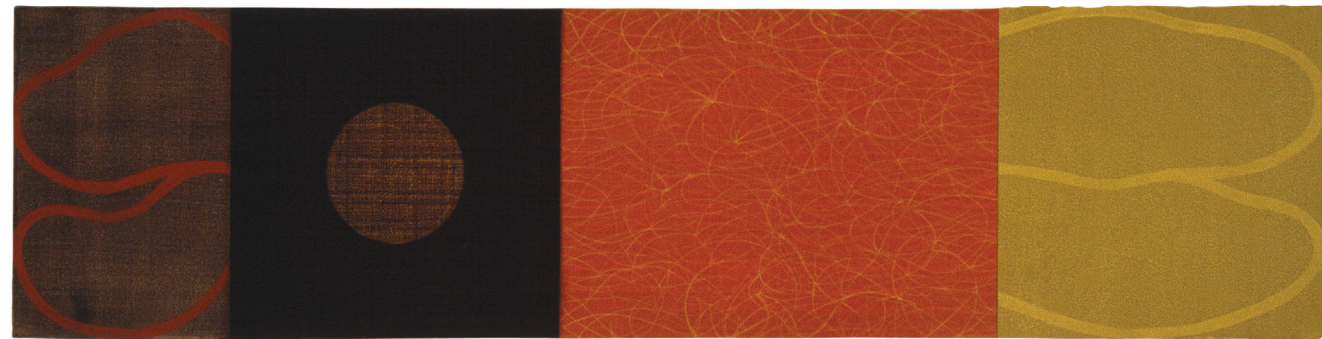
David Shapiro
Clearing 56
2005
Acrylic on Canvas
22 × 44 inches



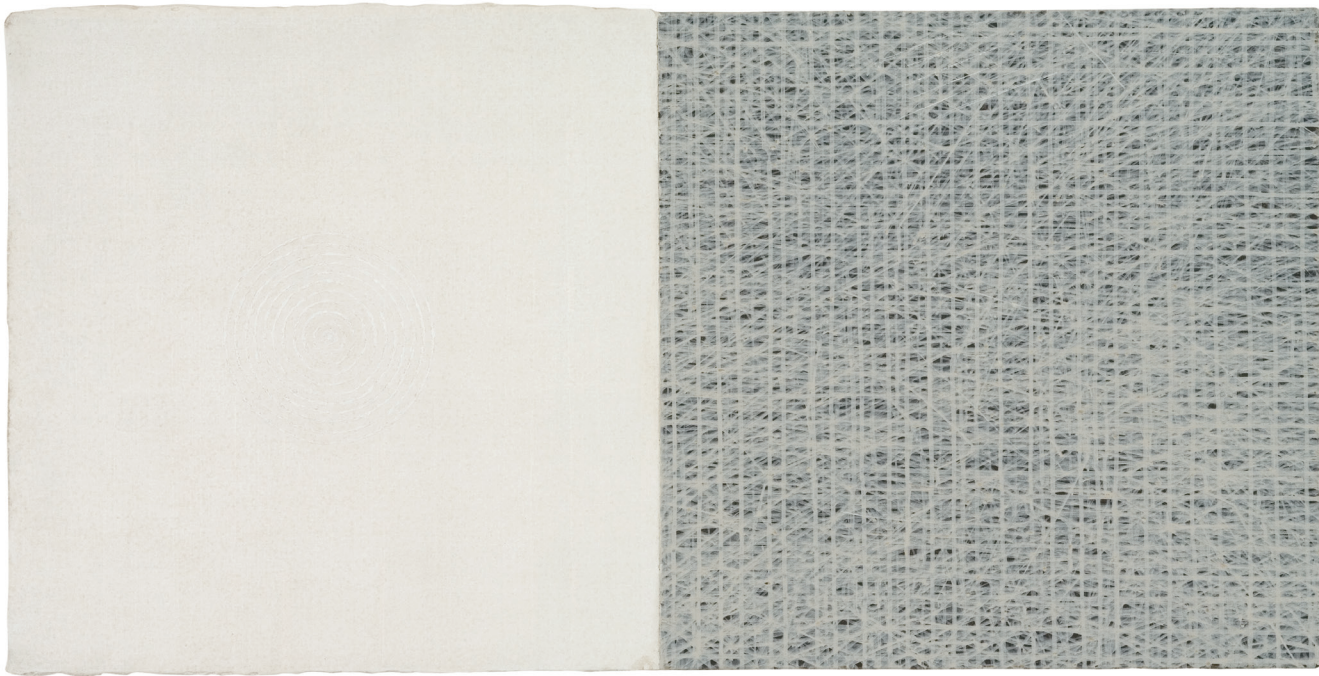
David Shapiro
Clearing 112
2012
Acrylic on Canvas
22 × 44 inches



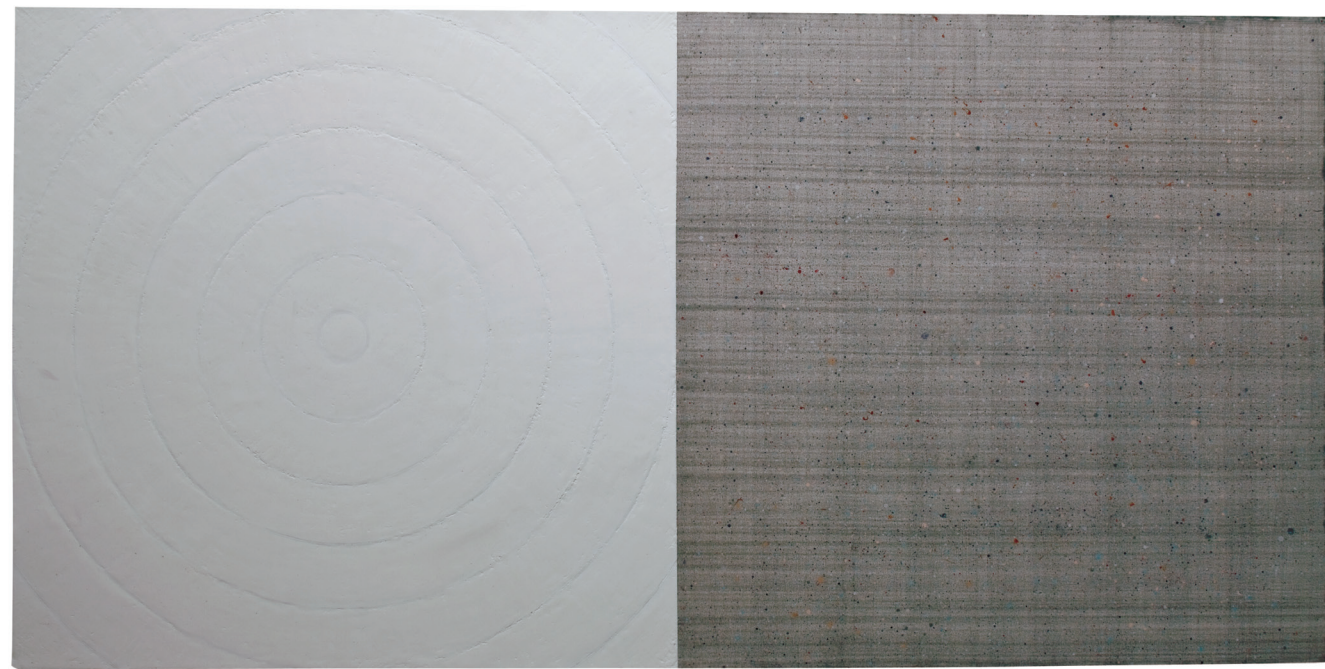
David Shapiro
Origin and Return 131
2009
Acrylic on Canvas
18 × 72 inches



David Shapiro
Origin and Return 79
2004
Acrylic on Canvas
18 × 72 inches



David Shapiro
Clearing 82
2007
Acrylic on Canvas
22 × 44 inches



David Shapiro
Clearing 91
2008
Acrylic on Canvas
48 × 96 inches

REDUCTIVE BRILLIANCE Jeannine Falino Adjunct Curator, Museum of Arts and Design

When two artists share in an exhibition, the relationship can sometimes be uneasy. Not so with this installation featuring Betty Cooke and David Shapiro, both masters of their crafts and delightfully suited to one another. Cooke and Shapiro have maintained their singular visions by disregarding changing fashions in the visual arts, honing their individual aesthetics, and remaining true to their inner compasses. Although age and choice of media separate them, both artists share a distilled expression in geometry, space, gesture, and surface.

“The simpler and clearer, the better”¹ has been Betty Cooke’s mantra. Yet within that straightforward directive, she has designed and fashioned a virtual constellation of jewelry, each one of which celebrates a single element – circle, square, line, or space – delineated as a sculptural form. From her earliest years to the present day, Cooke’s design focus has held true.

Her career as a jeweler began in 1946, shortly after graduation with a degree in art education from the Maryland Institute (now called the Maryland Institute of Contemporary Art, or MICA) and Johns Hopkins University. At the time, creating jewelry and teaching at MICA were intended as a means of making a living – she planned to be a sculptor. But her studio on Tyson Street in Baltimore soon expanded into a retail space for the display of work by artists in harmony with her aesthetic – including Nancy Wickham, Robert Turner, and Karen Karnes, furnishings by Isamu Noguchi, and Japanese folk artists.

From the beginning Cooke created limited-production jewelry using silver in a spare, modernist style that soon attracted awards and inclusion in exhibitions. During a western camping trip, Cooke traveled to Minneapolis where she visited the Walker Art Center with her “little box of jewelry.” And thus it was that she was included in their upcoming show, *Modern Jewelry Under Fifty Dollars* (1948), despite the fact that the publication had already gone to press. Her work was displayed amidst those by early masters Alexander Calder, Margaret DePatta, Harry Bertolia, Art Smith, and others. Like their works, Cooke’s designs were in dialogue with the modernist canon and refined into the most intimate art form of all – jewelry. As with Dadaist artists who integrated found objects in their work, Cooke occasionally included bits of shaped wood as a way of broadcasting an attitude that valued design over precious materials, a sign to those who disdained the predictable and high-carat designs of commercial firms and embraced the concept of sculpture to wear.

Prizes in 1951 and 1953 at the *Young Americans* competitions held by the American Craftsman's Educational Council, and inclusion in the Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) 1954 *Good Design* show confirmed Cooke's place in the emerging craft and design arenas. America House, Georg Jensen, Tiffany's, and museum retailers such as MoMA and the Hirshhorn Museum all showed her work at various times, a testament to her popularity among museum and retail audiences. And such museums as the Museum of Arts and Design, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Baltimore Museum of Art include her work in their permanent collections.

When Cooke married designer William O. Steinmetz in 1955, they began a partnership that continues to this day. For the first ten years of their marriage, they designed interiors for showrooms, offices, exhibitions, including the popular Fairlanes bowling centers, the first of their type designed for family entertainment. In 1965, the couple opened The Store, Ltd., in the Village of Cross Keys, a shopping enclave in Baltimore. Their shop is a small version of the better-known Design Research (DR) retailers formerly based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that included a combination of American and Danish design mixed with various folk sources. Unlike DR, which closed its doors in 1978, The Store, Ltd., remains a mainstay in the region. Cooke and Steinmetz still closely oversee the shop, and Cooke continues to design her jewelry there.

Today, Cooke's jewelry is a bit larger than the modestly-scaled work of the 1950s, and may include gold or precious stones for the occasional client. Nonetheless, her focus remains unchanged: creating rigorously modern silver jewelry for comfortable, elegant wear.

More than twenty years after Betty Cooke commenced her artistic journey, David Shapiro began his at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and continued with graduate works at Indiana University in Bloomington. His touchstones were – and still are – artists such as Paul Klee, whose delicate lines and luminous colors are a strong inspiration. Shapiro admires the work of Brice Marden, whose minimalist and monochromatic paintings emerged in the mid-1960s. From Mark Tobey, Shapiro absorbed an interest in mark-making and in diffused light, a subject that he shares with colleagues Ron Slowinsky, who taught at the Kansas City Art Institute, and Power Booth at the University of Hartford. Eastern philosophy has come to inform Shapiro's practice as a painter and serves as an important point of reference.

A lifetime of painting has resulted in acclaim and significant sales to respected museums and corporate collections in the United States and abroad. The Smithsonian, Guggenheim, Library of Congress, and Brooklyn Museum are just a few of the American museums that possess examples of his work, while Chase Manhattan, Novartis, Dun & Bradstreet International, and General Electric are among his many corporate collectors.

Shapiro utilizes similar shapes – circle, square, line, and space – as does Betty Cooke, but to different ends. Where Cooke projects her sculpted designs onto the wearer and thereby into the world, Shapiro's canvases and prints represent the interior life of the mind. Supported by a wellspring of subtle painterly devices and executed with great sensitivity to surface refinement, he creates and clarifies the spaces around and among them.

Shapiro uses the power of the circle and the sphere to draw the viewer close. An important symbol in the Buddhist world and in the West, a circle can be viewed as a *mandala* that can be used to focus the attention, establish a sacred space, or serve as an aid to meditation. Concentric circles and spirals can enhance the power of this form, which may also be endowed with the significance of cyclical change or circular time. The center of the circle can be experienced as both void and window, and for some, as a representation of human breath or form of spoken meditation. For Shapiro, circles are often depicted as sizeable and stable shapes that can fill a panel and appear even larger in contrast to their surroundings, or that can be subtly built up by manipulating the surface of a monochromatic ground.

Shapiro often creates tension by dividing his canvases in half vertically and pairing paintings, a format he calls “Origin and Return.” Juxtaposing solid and imposing forms with a formless but deep ethereal space allows the eye and the mind to wander, moving between tiny droplets of paint, which are described by Stephen Westphall as “myriad inflections of painterly incident” that have been painstakingly applied, sometimes in conjunction with a fine grid.² On other occasions, Shapiro employs an unraveling line drawn from bits of wire, or curving gestural lines that fold back upon themselves, or wisps of swirls that draw the viewer deeply into the picture plane. When painted in this manner, the mind reads them in terms of macro and micro worlds, the circle or square usually being most prominent. His integration of opposites on one picture plane lay out the ancient primeval contrasts between order and chaos, material and spiritual, light and dark. These terms move beyond signs and symbols to metaphysical states of mind, the realm that Shapiro is exploring.

Another of Shapiro’s methods involves subjects laid out as a series of six sections, each of the same size, joined in a linear fashion. In this arrangement, the eye moves from one to the next and back again, allowing the viewer to compare and contrast between deep and near space, and between thickly painted and thinly veiled surfaces. Even-numbered sections mean that there is no hierarchical center as is generally expected in western art, and his omission is intentional. For Shapiro, these sectioned canvases invoke a form of yogic meditation called savasan, interpreted as “lying down” and generally analogous to the seven *chakras* that are physical, meditative movements, each of which flows into the next. For Shapiro, the seventh chakra can be perceived as the entire painting taken as a whole image. Thus, in addition to the visual experience, Shapiro invites the viewer to participate metaphorically in a kind of passage or movement and leading to a sum of its parts. Westphall has interpreted this series as a “poetry of interiors” in which each panel serves as a stanza, or in which each panel, with its unique color and treatment, could be considered as musical tones. Word, sound, or color, the progression from one to the next that invites a process of viewing that has no real beginning or end. As noted by Janet Koplos, “viewers enter the work through any of these doors, and roam within the painting space.”³

In minimalist fashion, Shapiro often has employed monochromatic colors, but he achieves a rich range of tonal values within this ascetic approach. He also has explored lush greens, deep reds and yellows, and cool blues that are sometimes organized into *savasans* of brilliant color. The raw and painted surface holds enormous interest for Shapiro as both printmaker and painter. The paintings reach even to the edge of the canvas, which he has extended into a kind of deckle edge of its own. Shapiro’s craftsmanlike approach to building the surface of his paintings as seen in his light-filled studio amidst the array of brushes and colors is evident throughout his work.

A spare vocabulary of elemental forms, inventively pursued in metal and on canvas, has served both Cooke and Shapiro as inexhaustible resources for their imaginations, and with brilliantly reductive results.

Endnotes

1 Richard Martin, *Design – Jewelry – Betty Cooke*, (Baltimore: Maryland Institute College of Art, 1995), unpag.

2 Stephen Westfall, *David Shapiro – Paintings and Works on Paper*, (Tokyo: Kaoru Gallery, May 1994), unpag.

3 Janet Koplos, *David Shapiro*, (London: The Fine Art Society, June 1999), unpag.

The author would like to thank Janet Koplos, Yara Trokel, Nan Brewer, and Amy Eva Raehse for their insights and assistance in preparing this essay.



Betty Cooke
Untitled (Sliver)
Pin, circa 1960
Sterling silver with
ebonized walnut
Approximately 1 × 5 inches

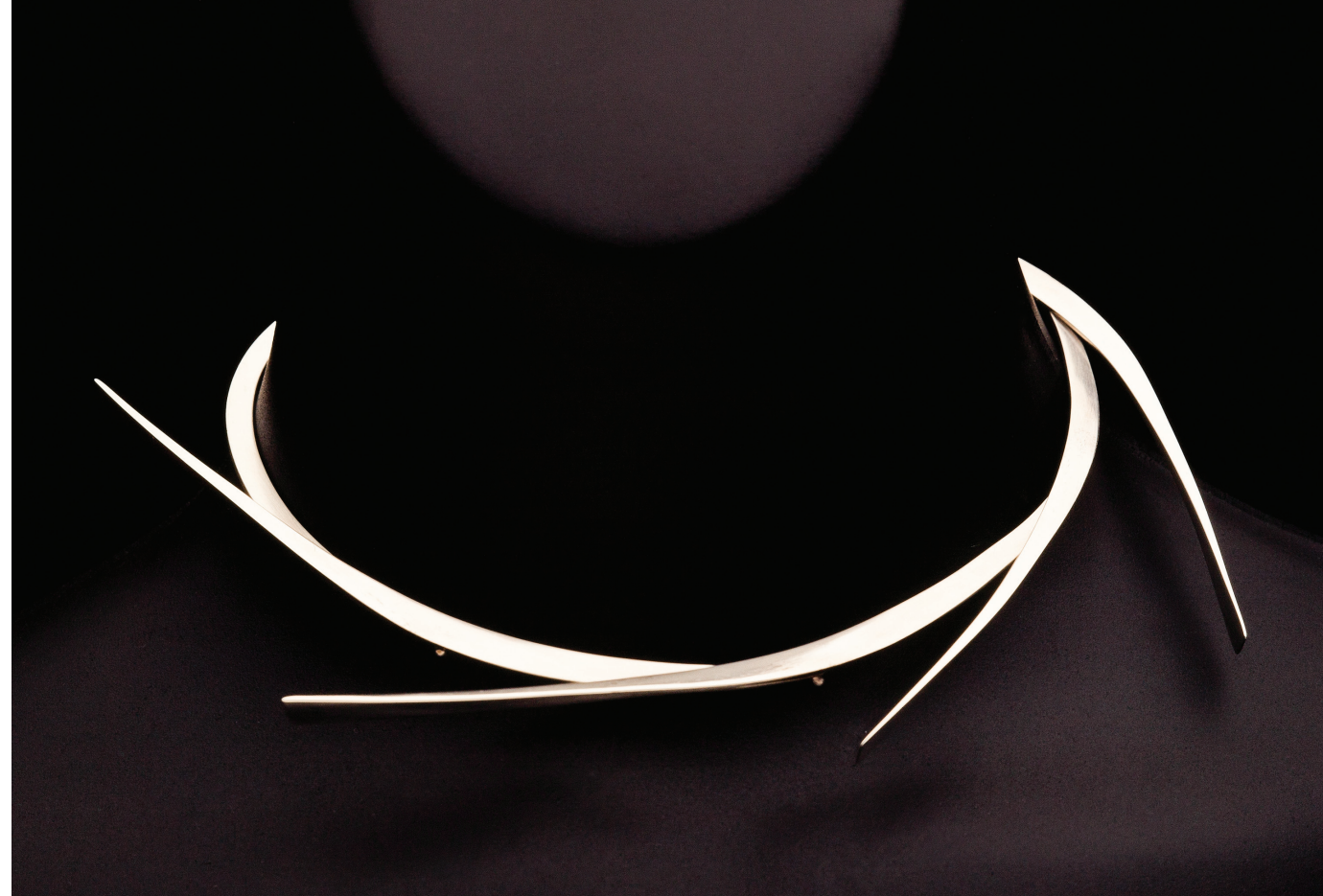
Betty Cooke

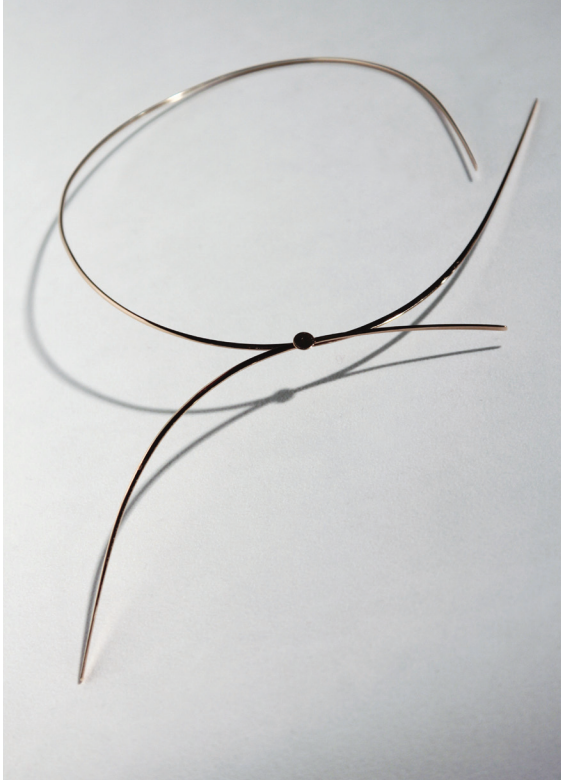
Untitled (Spin)

Neckwear, circa 1970

Sterling silver

Approximately 6 × 9 inches





Betty Cooke
Untitled
Neckwear with movable segment, circa 1980
14 karat yellow gold
Approximately 6 × 10 inches (adjustable)



Betty Cooke
Untitled
Neckwear and pendant, circa 1960
Sterling silver
Approximately 8 × 6 inches (pendant width: 1 inch)

BETTY COOKE

Betty Cooke is a seminal figure in American Modernist studio jewelry. Born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1924, she has been designing and creating one-of-a-kind works and multiples since the 1940s, and continues to do so today. Cooke's timeless forms and distinctive visual vocabulary merging architectural simplicity, geometry, logical proportion, and aesthetic clarity have earned her a prominent place within the canon of design history among influential figures such as Alexander Calder, Harry Bertoia, Margaret De Patta, Paul Lobel, and Ed Wiener.

Cooke studied at the Maryland Institute of Art (now MICA)/ Johns Hopkins University, from 1942 to 1946 and earned a BFA in education. Upon graduating, Cooke taught at MICA, a tenure that lasted 22 years, while establishing a studio/ shop on Tyson street and later with her husband, artist and designer Bill Steinmetz, the *Cooke & Steinmetz Designers & Consultants* company, which specialized in "good design." Their clients have included architectural firms, the Department of State, and the American Institute of Architects, for its 100th anniversary exhibition at the National Gallery of Art. In addition to these efforts, Cooke and Steinmetz founded *The Store, Ltd.*, an iconic and long running object-based design store that carries Cooke jewelry as well as items of functional beauty with understated complexity that transcend the limitations of the wall.

Widely recognized both nationally and internationally for her contribution to the social and art historical context of the decorative arts movement, Cooke's work can be found at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Museum of Arts and Design in New York, and the Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts. She has won many prizes including the prestigious DeBeers' Diamond award in 1979 and again in 1981. She exhibited in the 1950 "Good Design" exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art as well as the 1950 "Young Americans" show in NY. In 1951 Cooke was included in the "Textiles, Ceramics, Metalwork" exhibition at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 1955 and 1959, at the Montreal Museum of Decorative Arts "Messengers of Modernism" exhibition in 1997, and at the Fort Wayne Museum of Art in 2008. A retrospective exhibition at MICA in 1995 celebrated Betty's enduring relevance over a span of 50 years. At 87, the artist was elected to the American Craft Council's College of Fellows.

Featured in many books such as *Modernist Jewelry 1930-1960*, *American Art Jewelry Today*, and *Form & Function: American Modernist Jewelry*, Cooke is credited with stimulating the acculturation of craft-based mediums within the context of fine art.



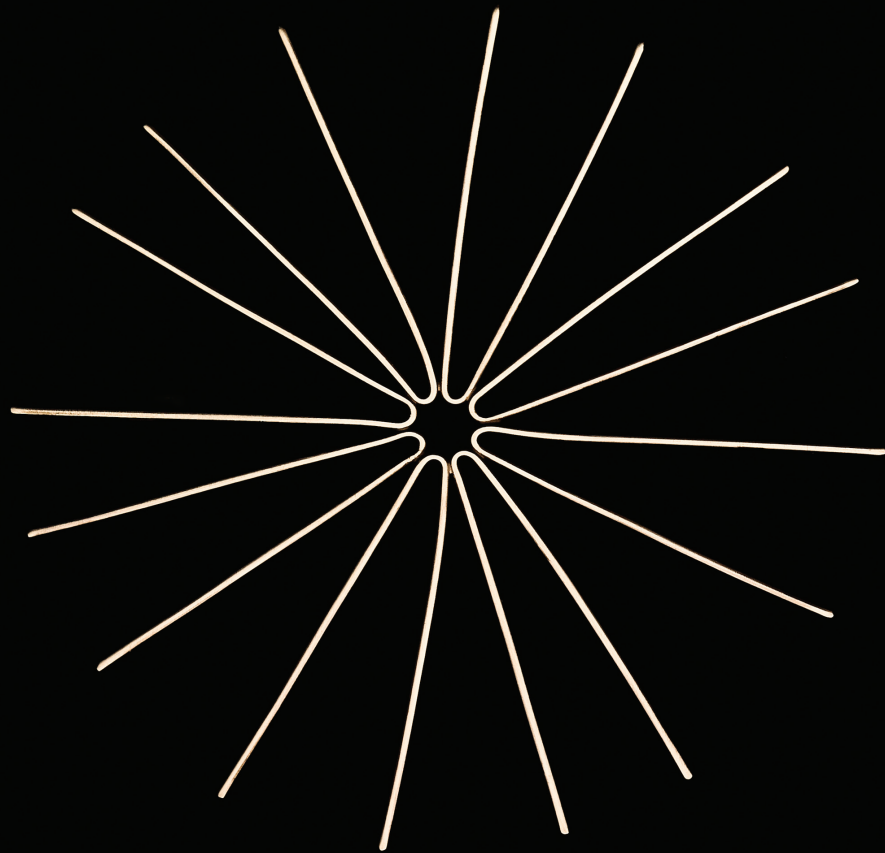
Betty Cooke

Untitled

2012

14 karat yellow gold and sterling silver

Approximately 6 × 6 inches



Betty Cooke
The Star
Pin, reoccurring motif
circa 1946-2014
Silver (variable)
Approximately 3 × 3 inches

This catalogue was published by Goya Contemporary on the occasion of the exhibitions **David Shapiro: Infinite Centers** and **Betty Cooke: Selections**.

Goya Contemporary wishes to acknowledge **Yara Trokel** and her noteworthy dedication to David Shapiro's legacy.

Goya Contemporary wishes to acknowledge **Betty Cooke** and **Bill Steinmetz's** outstanding contributions to MICA and the Baltimore arts community at large.

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Christopher Burke Studio

Betty Cooke Photography
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Glenn Dellon

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