

BOMBLOG

ART

BOMB on the Scene: Dorothea Rockburne, Part 1

by Richard J. Goldstein Sep 08, 2011

Richard J. Goldstein explores the shifting, spectral geometry of Dorothea Rockburne's retrospective, *In My Mind's Eye*. Watch a video of his visit in the first of a two part installment of BOMB on the Scene.



Left: Dorothea Rockburne, *Inner Voice*, 1983, oil on gessoed linen, 92x59 x 4". Right: Dorothea Rockburne, *Narcissus*, 1985, oil on gessoed linen, 92 1/2x123 x 6 3/8". © 2011 Dorothea Rockburne/Artists Rights Society, New York. Photos by Billy Jim.

I met Dorothea Rockburne at the Parrish Museum before opening hours to view and discuss her retrospective *In My Mind's Eye*. Memories of childhood paper fortune tellers came to mind when I was standing in front of one of her shaped canvases *Inner Voice*. The allusion to a game of d.i.y. divination seemed too simple to share with an artist, looking on with me, who has plumbed the structure and significance of the Golden Mean, Non-Euclidian Geometry, Three-Point Manifold, and astral events.¹ But there was something about the work that led me to half expect it to snap into motion, to open and close like those origami fortune tellers, which the painting's tilted central square resembled, an impression emphasized by flanking deep purple twin scalene triangles. Answers were written in the folds of those preteen game pieces, something I found to be true in Rockburne's work and thoughts as well.

Part 1 of a two-part video conversation

Greenberg Van Doren Gallery

NEW YORK

Inner Voice, 1983, was one of the first of her shaped canvases, rooted in the Golden Mean, which grew from her folded linen works, forms oftentimes used as the basis for the shaped canvases. Even as she stretched the linen tight over a shaped frame, the concept of the fold persisted through transparent layers of paint, a sensation aided by Rockburne's Beaux-Arts-influenced glazing of colors giving the sensation of continuous overlapping surfaces. Rockburne describes her exploration of folds and topology as an emotional inquiry, "There was always an aspect or redefining perspective in my precious folded work. Because of the transparency of the materials, I was able to make art that investigated perspective from a viewpoint other than the Renaissance concept . . . The use of perspective—whether Persian, Renaissance, or Rockburne—is an emotion."² Equating perspective to emotion, the viewer becomes the center of the piece and the body's relation to the experience of the painting, prime.

Rockburne told me that art history has shown her that all artists are bound to repeat themselves which is something she always eluded through her ever evolving practice. In spite of the difficulties of being a single mother and woman artist, her diverse body of work—ranging in media from crude oil, folded paper, pig iron, shaped canvas, and Duralar—are proof of the mutability she finds through active inquiry. Contrary to her stance against recurrence of modes and methods in her practice, there is an interesting moment of "repetition" in her work concerning the aforementioned *Inner Voice*. Two years after its completion, Rockburne painted *Narcissus* in 1985, within which *Inner Voice* appears in the lower half. Like Velasquez in his *Las Meninas*, it is as if Rockburne makes a cameo in the painting with her inner voice, pun and all. She has related that every artist's work is a self-portrait. In *Narcissus*, the "repetition" of *Inner Voice* functions more as a reflection, captured so well by its title.³ These two works comment on more than reflection: there is a sense of expansion—formally present in *Narcissus* as the ground expands around *Inner Voice* and overall in her work as Rockburne's thoughts and inventiveness continue to unfold.

Video available to view at: <http://bombsite.com/articles/5984>

Video editing by Lauren Bakst.

Special thanks to the Parrish Museum and Alicia G. Longwell.

Richard J. Goldstein is a Brooklyn-based painter and writer.

¹ Walking on the beach one night, Rockburne looked to the sky and had a hunch she saw a sun in Pegasus later to find it was discovered some time after she made a painting about it. In the video, she shares her thoughts about the electromagnetic field around Saturn.

² Dorothea Rockburne: In My Mind's Eye, D.A.P., 2011, p.66.

³ For more on *Narcissus*, and much more of Rockburne's words check out her original BOMB interview with Sol Ostrow [here](#).