



## BETH KING: PAINTINGS ON CANVAS

Earl & Birdie Taylor/Pacific Beach Branch Library  
November 29, 2009 to February 15, 2010

### CURATOR'S STATEMENT

At first glance, Beth King's paintings come as somewhat of a shock. Their graphic power, impeccable design, stunning use of color, and perfectly resolved composition are startling in an era when conceptual approaches, more often than not, have outweighed, even usurped, formal concerns. In general, King avoids representational imagery in her paintings (she classifies them as non-objective abstractions), yet they are highly personal, unusual, engaging, and, as a testament to her skill, evoke an immediate and visceral response in the viewer.

Throughout her career, King's admirers have ranged from artists to scientists. Nobel Prize Laureate Francis Crick and his wife Odile (an accomplished artist) owned several of King's works. Other noted artists and art world figures who have collected King's paintings include Flavia Gilmore, Smithsonian curator James Goode, and the late Ethel Greene. Certainly, not many paintings created these days are imbued with the spirit of icons of modernism like Stuart Davis, Arthur Dove, Arshile Gorky, and Adolph Gottlieb.

King, now in her late seventies, continues to follow her own vision and defy art world trends. Although she is known among her peers as a "painter's painter," she exhibits her art only infrequently. Most of the works in "Beth King: Paintings on Canvas" were painted especially for this exhibition. To give viewers a broader perspective of her work, a few earlier paintings, including three on illustration board, were included. The character of these works is quite different from the others in the show, yet they are successful in their own way.

King's paintings are notable for the odd and mysterious shapes that make up their compositions, their unusual color schemes, and the boldness of their designs. By any standards, they are inventive and interesting. The starting point for King's paintings is one or two rudimentary shapes on which she subsequently builds. Often these shapes are derived from nature, but she makes a conscious effort not to convey a literal translation of anything she sees. As the notebooks from her travels (on display in this exhibition) demonstrate, anything unusual is likely to catch her eye, but she is primarily interested in form and spatial relationships. These impressions are captured on location via quick thumbnail sketches which may be revisited years later. However, King is also a colorist and she has been inspired by observations as simple as two colors playing off one another in a striking way. "I'm ruled by shapes. Sometimes I don't know whether the shapes or the colors are the most important," she confesses.