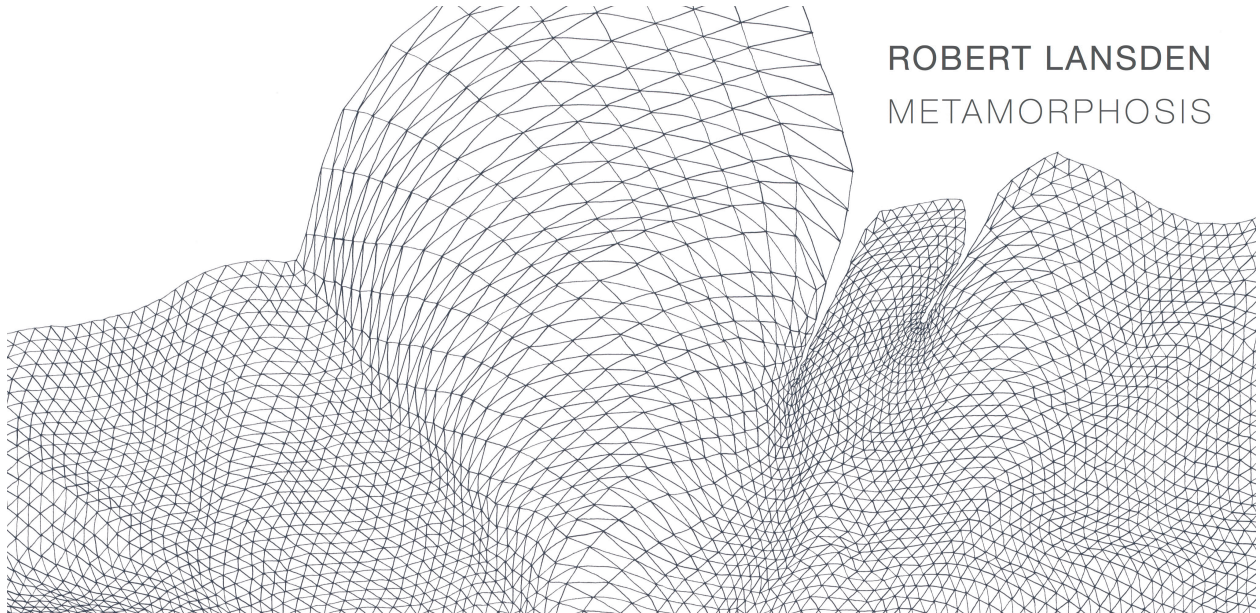


Robert Lansden: Metamorphosis, a Practice in Mutation

By Margaret Zuckerman



ROBERT LANSDEN
METAMORPHOSIS

Lansden describes his work as based on a series of algorithms. Each drawing begins with self-ascribed mark-making rules and boundaries to which the artist adheres systematically. The overall idea seems mechanical, but as he draws, slight human error and chance eventually morph lines and grids of the work, exemplified in *Coming Down*, into fluid, exquisite forms. Consequentially, the works made from his simple strokes are a spontaneous embodiment of an algorithmic game, and although the artist may have a general idea of its outcome, the effects materialize organically. As chaos slowly seeps in, what begins as a very stringent concept results in amorphous, flowing shapes, shimmering texture and intricate three-dimensional nets.

In reflecting on the title of this exhibition, *Metamorphosis*, a process of radical change comes to mind, especially in nature and all her enigmatic influences. In Lansden's work the resulting shape does change radically, but even more so, his process reveals how such a change is initially driven and designed. When we think of metamorphosis, the course has been set, that is to say, nature has

intended it over time. Much of Lansden's work is not only reflective of metamorphosis (his algorithm begets art), but of its very conception: the miracle of mutation itself. If Lansden's algorithm were a DNA chain, the slight wobble of his pen would be a genetic mutation. Without mutation there would be no differences for nature to glean from, and essentially, no evolution. With Lansden's works, if his strokes were perfect, the results would be insipidly arithmetical instead of so beautifully variegated. Life is born from mutation. Splendor is in imperfection.

In addition to symbolically re-enacting evolutionary processes, Lansden's work addresses celestial, atomic and mathematical themes. Mathematics has always been closely associated with classical concepts of beauty, which is said to reside within the rules of symmetry, stable pyramids, the golden ratio or the rule of thirds. The simplistic beauty of his algorithmic works certainly demonstrates that. His works, *Awakening* and *Chain*, show perfect circles cleaving like embryonic cells, replicating amoebas or even colliding super novae. The slight blotches in the ink application create an optical effect, an energetic flickering: a glimmer of life coming into being.

Contrary to such cosmic associations, looking at his work is also a very intimate experience. Tracing your eye along a maze-like network is unmistakably introspective. It's quieting and hypnotic. As the artist comes from a place of spiritual practice, he describes the act of making his works as trance-like and meditative, requiring a state of heightened awareness. Seeing his works in person re-creates that same altered yet sentient state. The inclusion of Mandela-like circles, Celtic and Aztec-like tribal patterns (*Knot* series) also evokes themes of 'sacred geometry': the phenomena of ancient religions' reverence for geometric shapes worldwide. The human race has always been drawn to these shapes, and with the artist's works, we are pulled back into that mystical sense of wonder.

From an art historical perspective, Lansden's works emerge from a prestigious dynasty of conceptual painters. From Sol Le Witt and Roman Opalka, who vehemently adhered to neurotic rules to create intricate works, to Yayoi Kusama, who paints her hallucinogenic world ad infinitum with obsessive strokes and dots. Lansden, like his predecessors, works in series like a shaman-scientist, fervently experimenting to solve unsolvable hypotheses, from the origin of life, to equations for beauty or the very significance of the artist himself in a vast and sublime world.