

**BONNIE NEUMANN**



sea clouds

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Photography: Kim Harrington and Wilfred J. Jones

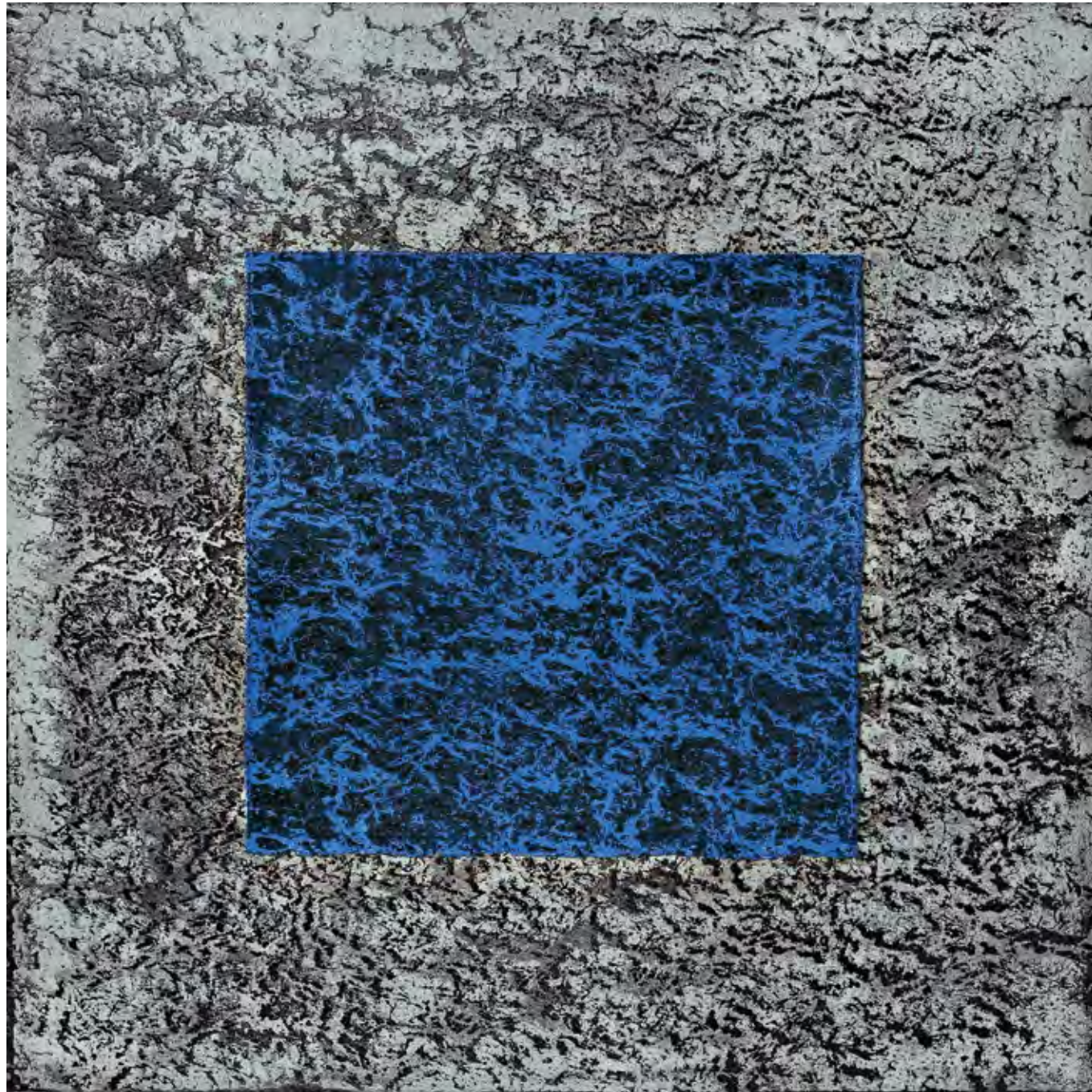
Catalogue design: Catherine Courtenaye

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front cover: *Brilliant Iris on Glistening Blue*. 2014, oil and metallic pigments on panel, 36 x 36 inches

back cover: *Hokusai's Blue*. 2014, oil and metallic pigments on paper, 14.5 x 14.5 inches





*Patch of Blue*. 2014, oil and metallic pigments on paper, 14.5 x 14.5 inches

**THE EFFECTS OF LIGHT ON WATER AND THE TRACES OF MOVEMENT VISIBLE THEREIN** have shaped my artistic vision for many years. Since 2009 I have been making images of my impressions of these surfaces as they are illuminated by various densities of light. The emergence of inherent orderly pattern, signifying a deeper internal structure underlying what is often perceived as chaos, inspires the development of my work. Meditative line drawings from personal observation, photographs, and other selected images are manipulated and then transferred to silkscreens, which are used with oil paint in multiple layers on wood panel or on paper.

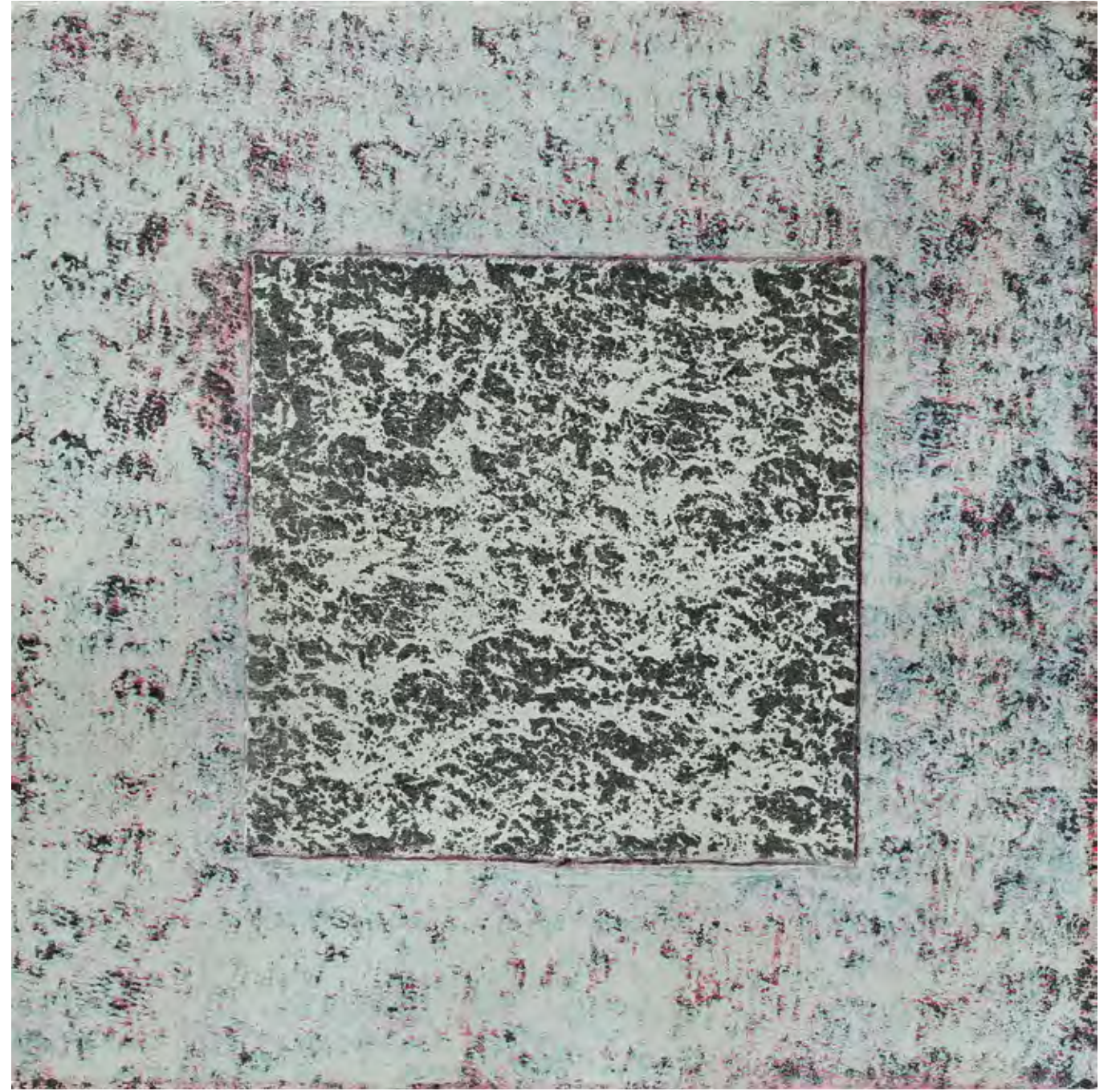
The *Sea Clouds* series is based on manipulated photographic images which are transferred to silkscreen. The series title comes from the Wallace Stevens poem *Sea Surface Full of Clouds*, which was an additional inspiration for this body of work, and for some of the titles.

*Bonnie Neumann*





*Night Moves*. 2013, oil and metallic pigments on panel, 24 x 24 inches



*Pink Shroud*. 2014, oil and metallic pigments on paper, 14.5 x 14.5 inches



MARIA PORGES

## See, Surface

EVERY TIME BONNIE NEUMANN TRAVELS BETWEEN her Marin County home and her Emeryville studio, she crosses the Richmond/San Rafael Bridge. From its suspended roadway, views of the bay are beautiful, in the bird's eye way things are when revealed to us from far above. Neumann professes to never tire of the play of light on the uncertain green and blue of the distant, choppy glass.

It isn't hard to think of paintings depicting water—J.M.W. Turner's magnificent ocean swells; Hokusai's great wave; Claude Monet's images of the half-frozen Seine or of his pond, full of reflections and flowers. Even David Hockney's swimming pools come to mind. It is harder, perhaps, to imagine a way for an artist of the 21st century to approach this subject—a painter who is committed to abstraction. Yet Neumann has spent the last five years experimenting with depictions of currents, wave patterns—even of the shape of water itself, as rendered topographically—in paintings and drawings that are simultaneously rich and minimal in the information they offer about their subject.

Early works in this series were developed out of drawings Neumann made at Clear Lake, a natural fresh-water lake

north and east of the Bay Area where Neumann has a vacation home. Her view of the water there, from 200 feet above, is much like her daily view of the Bay from the bridge. In an interview in 2012, she described her process of observation and inscription:

It's a place where I can watch the light change on the water. The elevation and the distance allow me to watch the reflections, the lines involved, the patterns and movement.... The lines and flickering patterns they form literally led me to the meditative drawings that are the foundation of this work.<sup>1</sup>

In this series, small graphite sketches of her fleeting impressions served as the basis for silkscreens Neumann used to print delicate patterns of lines onto prepared panels. Having studied printmaking as an undergraduate, she later felt burdened by process and moved towards painting, but has now figured out a way to bring the two approaches to image-making together.

Using the screens as painting tools, she builds up complex layers of color and marks. In *First Light* (2013), interwoven lines of green and gray surround the perimeter of

<sup>1</sup>Bonnie Neumann, from interview with Jamie Brunson, 2012



*First Light*. 2013, oil and metallic pigments on panel, 24 x 24 inches



the panel, describing the way in which currents, riffling the water's surface, seem to frame an area of mirror-like calm: a hole in the water's ceaseless action, in which the bright light of early morning is reflected. In the larger work *Broad Daylight* (2013), Neumann's marks achieve a sparkle and a chromatic complexity that begins to suggest the reflection of clouds or trees while remaining abstract—much like Monet's late *Water Lilies*. In *Wave 1* (2013), the view shifts; multiple screens used in different parts of the painting suggest multiple perspectives of a shifting waterscape. A grid of topographical lines, over-printed slightly off-register, evokes a rippled sea receding into the distance. In other areas, scribbly, Twombly-esque marks float on the graphite ground like bits of foam on breaking waves.



**Wave 1.** 2013, oil and metallic pigments on panel, 48 x 48 inches

In her most recent body of work, Neumann's preoccupation with portraying light's evanescent effects has led her to develop new approaches to her subject. Drawings cannot always capture either what she sees or what she wants others to experience. On each of the twenty-one square panels that comprise *Sea Clouds*, the same image, based on a photograph of roiling water, has been screened onto a painted ground. All but one are permutations and combinations of shades of silver and black; Neumann, fascinated by the effects of metallic paint and the way it can suggest a watery, transcendent luminosity, has been using it since 2010. On some, the texture is muffled by the close relationship between the color of printed image and surface, or by light sanding.

The panels form three lines of seven. In the square that is at the center of this configuration, the chop of waves is rendered in a startling, gorgeous blue, like a single, open eye. The blue is the heart-stopping azure invoked in *Sea Surface Full of Clouds*, written by the poet Wallace Stevens about the ocean off Tehuantepec, Mexico, excerpted here:

...The sea-clouds whitened far below the calm  
And moved, as blooms move, in the swimming green  
And in its watery radiance, while the hue  
Of heaven in an antique reflection rolled  
Round those flotillas. And sometimes the sea  
Poured brilliant iris on the glistening blue.

And, again, later in the poem:

...Until the rolling heaven made them blue,  
A blue beyond the rainy hyacinth,  
And smiting the crevasses of the leaves  
Deluged the ocean with a sapphire blue.<sup>2</sup>

Neumann's title *Sea Clouds* is an open homage to Stevens' evocation of tropical light on water. Each of the poem's five sections describes the poet's perceptions of the same moment in time, in a shifting, shape-changing

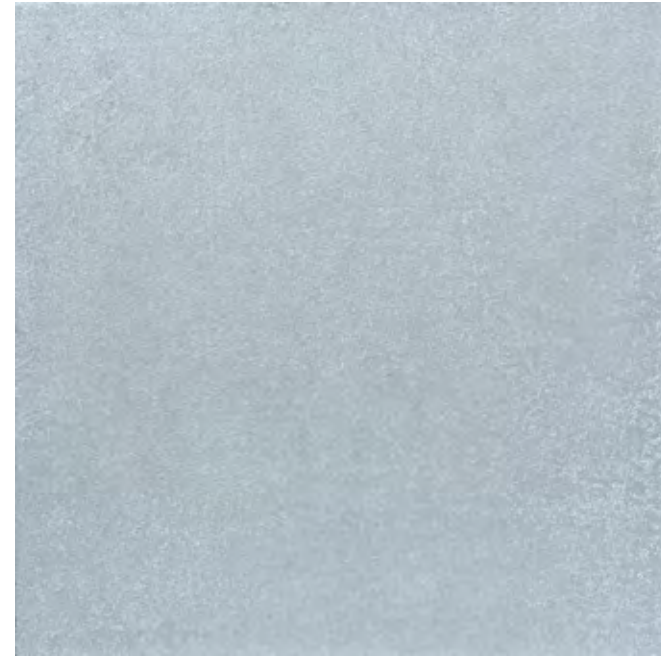
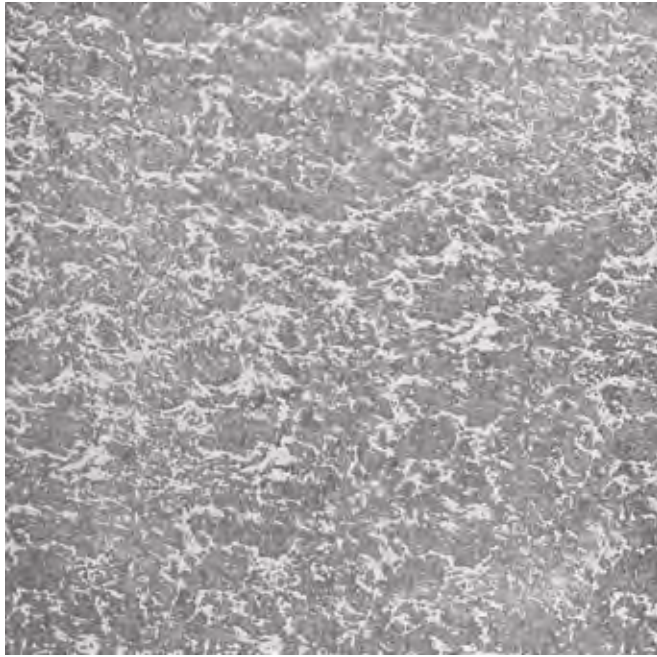
<sup>2</sup> Wallace Stevens, *Harmonium*, Faber and Sons 2001

vocabulary that makes it clear just how impossible it is to capture such perceptions with mere words. When she first encountered the poem, Neumann had already begun her multi-panel project, but—as sometimes happens between idea and execution—it had temporarily run aground. Changing tactics, she had shifted to works on paper like *Pink Shroud*, exploring the same turbulent image of water but enclosing it within a soft frame of jittery, off-register texture and color. She had also begun working on two larger paintings that incorporate the image, one with a



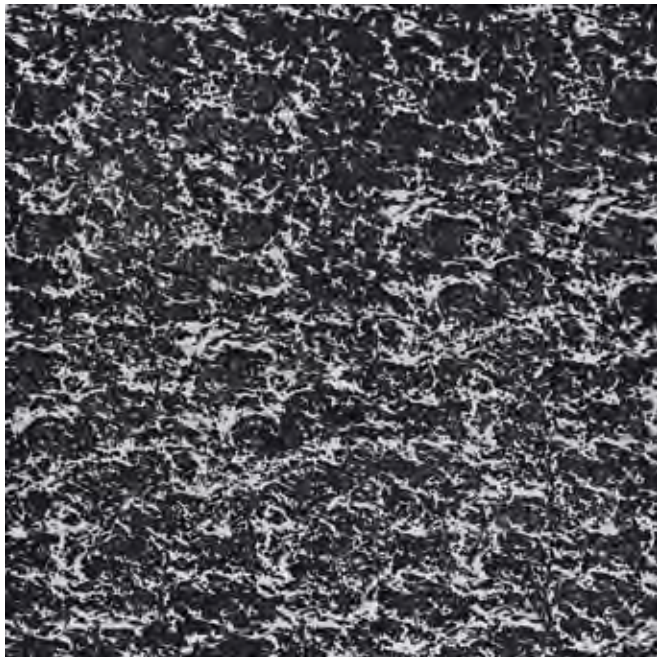
**Sea Clouds.** 2014, 21 panels, oil and metallic pigments on panel, 40 x 68 inches overall. Configuration variable.





soft grayish yellow ground and the other, illustrated on the front cover of this catalogue, a brilliant blue.

Neumann found the poem on the Internet while searching for something related to the images with which she was working. It became the source for the titles for these last two—respectively, *Morning Blooms* and *Brilliant Iris on Glistening Blue*. It also opened up her idea of what was possible, in that she had originally intended to make the ground for all of the panels in *Sea Clouds* black. In the completed work, as in the five sections of Stevens' poem, each of the panels describes the same place, but mood and atmosphere shift subtly, much in the way that the same square foot of ocean changes, day to day and moment to moment. Rendered in silver on silver, the image of water slips away even as we look at it, reflecting our gaze. In black on black, it becomes waves at night, barely perceptible and yet still palpably present.



Neumann has commented that *Sea Clouds* looks very different at various times of day in the shifting natural light of her studio. The arrangement of the paintings in three lines of seven panels both evades the simple symmetry of a square grid and invokes a calendar, reminding us of the passage of time, both fast and slow—marked not only by days, but by years and, for the ocean, at least, millennia.

Light on the water is a real, observed phenomenon that I work from, but it's also a metaphor. Water and life are both fluid and ephemeral. They're of the moment—they keep moving. The moments in your life are the same way, they keep moving.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Bonnie Neumann, interview with Jamie Brunson, 2012

Details, *Sea Clouds*. 2014, oil and metallic pigments on panel, 12 x 12 inches each. Clockwise from top left: *German Silver on Silver*, *Black on Black*, *Black on Silver*, *Silver on Black*.

Details, *Sea Clouds*. 2014, oil and metallic pigments on panel, 12 x 12 inches each. From top: *Silver on Silver*, *Chromatic Black on Silver*.



# biography

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 *Bonnie Neumann at Avenue 64 Gallery*, BRE Properties, Emeryville, California
- 2004 *Bonnie Neumann at The Quarterly At Latham Square*, Pro Arts, Oakland, California
- 1997 *Recent Paintings by Bonnie Neumann*, Zen Hospice, San Francisco

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2013 *December Group Show*, Terminus.Gallery, Oakland, California
- Painting Exhibition*, Triton Museum of Art, Santa Clara, California
- Lure: Bay Area Artists Explore the Sea*, SFMOMA Artists Gallery, San Francisco
- Array*, Berkeley Art Center, Berkeley, California
- Idaho Falls Arts Council's National Juried Exhibition*, Idaho Falls, Idaho
- 2012 *Wonder*, Berkeley Art Center, Berkeley, California
- 2011 *Repetition, Repetition, Repetition*, Eastern New Mexico University, Roswell, New Mexico
- Drawing Connections*, Siena Art Institute, Siena, Italy
- Falkirk 2011 Bi-Annual*, San Rafael, California
- Of Water: Contemporary Paintings by 20 Bay Area Artists*, Bay Model, Sausalito, California

*Art of the Line*, Sebastopol Center for the Arts, Sebastopol, California Merit Award

- 2009 *Forty-Fifth Street Artists' Cooperative 2009 Open Studios*, Emeryville, California
- 2005 *Ornamentation: The Art of Desire*, Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, California
- 2004 *Hidden Order: Pattern & Content in Contemporary Abstraction*, Oakland Art Gallery, Oakland, California
- 2002 *Surface Tension: Pattern and Ornament in Contemporary Painting*, Mills College Art Museum, Oakland, California. Travelled to Western Washington University, Bellingham, Washington
- 2001 *Contemporary Pattern*, Artsource, The Mills Building, San Francisco
- 2000 *Crocker-Kingsley Exhibition*, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California
- Bonnie Neumann and Livia Stein*, 455 Market Street, San Francisco
- 1998 *Architecture and Archetypes: Bonnie Neumann, Pia Stern, and Rob Douglas*, 455 Market Street, San Francisco
- 1997 *Exemplary Contemporary*, Eloise Pickard Smith Gallery, University of California at Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz, California
- 1996 *Master of Fine Arts Exhibition*, Mills College Art Museum, Oakland, California

## SELECTED COLLECTIONS

U.S. Embassy, Tunis, Tunisia

Community Hospital of Monterey Peninsula, California

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS AND REVIEWS

- Bigman, Alex, "Picks" at *Berkeley Art Center's Wonder*, EAST BAY EXPRESS, December 19–25, 2012, Arts & Culture Section, p. 29.
- Buuck, David, "Ornamentation" at SEJICA, ARTWEEK, VOLUME 37, March 2006, pp. 12–13.
- Baker, Kenneth, Oakland Gallery Seeks Abstraction's "Hidden Order," SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, August 28, 2004, Section E, p. 12.
- Bing, Alison, "Hidden Order" at the Oakland Art Gallery, ARTWEEK, Vol. 35, November 2004, p. 14.
- Thompson, Sandy, "Surface Tension" at Mills College Art Museum, ARTWEEK, Vol. 33, April 2002, pp. 18–19.

## EDUCATION

- 1996 Master of Fine Arts, Painting, Mills College, Oakland, California
- 1978 Bachelor of Arts, California State University, Hayward, California

## TEACHING

- 1997–2010 Visual Arts, Olympic High School, Concord, California
- 1996 Teaching Assistant, Painting and Drawing, Mills College





