

# Art in America

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Barbara Takenaga at DC Moore

*by Carol Diehl*

Barbara Takenaga's paintings are gorgeous—so elegant, opulent and vigorous that they can make your breath catch. Filigreed swirls of graduated dots, from nearly microscopic to the size of a coin, appear like pearls or lustrous precious stones strung on impossibly fine threads to create dizzying cosmic patterns. Her undulating constellations glow and vibrate with metallic and interference paints so that the surfaces appear to change color as the viewer moves and the light shifts. These are paintings of both excess and restraint: the artist takes us to the edge of sensory overload, but the sheer rigor and crisp precision of her rendering hold us in the necessary suspension to stay engaged and mesmerized.

Takenaga's work has been described as psychedelic, but that implies a loss of control, where these paintings are the result of acute attention. While they no doubt owe much to the precedents of Op art and Pattern and Decoration, Takenaga's repetitive forms, like Ross Bleckner's, inspire more mystical interpretation. If her idiosyncratic images can be said to resemble anything, it is van Gogh's *The Starry Night*, with its swirls of celestial light updated to the computer age.

Like van Gogh's painting, they are landscapes of a sort. Takenaga's horizon lines make the implication clear - especially in the two large triptychs that dominated this exhibition of 15 works from 2010 and '11. *Forte* and *Rise/Fall* (both 54 by 135 inches) are like sunrises gone berserk, surging eddies of white and black particles that radiate from a tiny central point and are reflected in the ocean or land below. In Takenaga's smaller paintings, it's as if electrical impulses, sometimes jagged, are engaged in a frantic, hyperkinetic race to a median that seems to offer no relief.

The relatively recent addition of the horizon line is a major development for Takenaga, who has been exhibiting since 1993. Few could have predicted that this normally balanced and stabilizing element would provide the disruption her work needed and a place from which it could expand. Previously her images

were beautiful but congested, overshadowed by her painstaking and obsessive methodology. One would simply marvel that anyone could create such fine and intricate work freehand, especially with a material as mundane as acrylic paint. Further, the emphasis was on a kernel-like center that brought the eye from the outside in, whereas now the horizon line allows the nucleus to burst forth in burgeoning whorls that imply galaxies outside the picture plane.

Takenaga's paintings portray matter and energies beyond what we know, beyond the everyday world. Whether we look inward with a microscope or outward with a telescope, systems are at work that we can barely comprehend, and of which we are a very small part. Her depictions of these systems can be seen as cold and threatening or exuberantly optimistic—I choose the latter view - but, regardless, there is a sense of order, not chaos, and a trust that the universe is taking care of itself.