

KENNETH NOLAND

Handmade Papers

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Text by Judith Goldman

Tyler Graphics Ltd.
Bedford Village, New York
1978

Designed and printed by The Press of A. Colish
Color Separations by George Rice & Sons

Cover Paper: Strathmore Americana
Text paper: Vintage Velvet

Library of Congress Card No. 78-64545
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Printed in U.S.A.

Photography credits: Kay Tyler; frontispiece, 4, 6, 15, 16. Steven Sloman; 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, 18. Lindsay Green; 5, 12, 14, 17, 19. Anthony D'Ancona; 7, 8, 9, 13.

Frontispiece: Kenneth Noland holding the rectangular paper mould to insure correct placement and registration of the horizontal band formed from colored pulp.

From April to August 1978, Kenneth Noland made images out of paper at Tyler Graphics in Bedford, New York. Working with oriental and western fibers and bits of colored paper, he produced over 200 images. The results were staggering. At first glance, many images seem quite like each other. But no two are the same. Colors vary from filmy blues and bright yellows to soft purples and murky greys. Textures range from wafer-thin oriental surfaces to surfaces, thick as encrusted cardboard. In some pieces, image prevails; in some, structure does. Papermaking is never the point; for Noland, it is a way to explore color and create texture.

Kenneth Noland made his first handmade paper pieces in 1976. He had not planned to. When he produced a screenprint in 1969, he found printmaking uninteresting. At the time, he was uncomfortable with the collaborative process. Depending on others for results, on master printers and technicians, made him uneasy, and he disliked the idea that prints were reproducible. It seemed to him that many artist's only contribution to printmaking was their signature. Often in the late 1960s, that was the case.

In 1976, Noland agreed to participate as a Master-in-Residence in a Paper Workshop which sculptor Garner Tullis gave at Bennington College. That May, he decided that before assuming the role of Master, he'd best try the medium, and he went to work with Tullis in California. Papermaking intrigued him, and on his return to Vermont, he set up a paper studio in North Hoosick, New York.

Making paper felt as familiar to Noland as staining color in canvas. It was fast, direct, and not like the traditional print media, a transfer process. He did not have to wait for inks to dry or acids to bite, and he need not depend on anyone else. He could make one-of-a-kind images himself.

In some ways, papermaking was more direct than painting. A brush was unnecessary; he could use his hands. Instead of raw canvas, he could begin on a colored ground. To create texture and color, he could overlap pulp, and add colored pulp and cut-up papers at any point in the process. By embedding color inside the paper, he could define its shape.

Tyler's paper studio is in a small cement-walled room, formerly a garage; it holds a vat, Hollander-type beater, hydraulic press, arched couching table, and three people, comfortably. The place is as snug as an efficiency kitchen. The process is fast. It is also wet. Noland, Kenneth Tyler and Lindsay Green wear rubber aprons and rubber boots, and every so often someone mops water off the floor.

Before each series, and sometimes each image, Noland decides on the base sheet's color, texture and thickness. He selects fibers to be macerated in the beater, the mould to form paper and the material to color pulp.

A mould is a wooden frame, covered with a woven wire cloth, or screen. The kind of mould determines the paper's texture, thickness and translucency. To form each base sheet, Kenneth Tyler and Lindsay Green dip the mould in the vat, remove and shake it back and forth, so that pulp covers the surface evenly. Then, they turn the mould over, exerting pressure, to transfer the paper to the wet felt on the arched table. This procedure is called couching, pronounced cooching.

The day I was at Tyler's, Noland was busy working on the *Diagonal Stripes* series. He has clearly become comfortable with the collaborative process. He doesn't talk much when working, but he makes occasional jokes, which he thinks are funny. While Tyler and Green were creating the base sheet, Noland selected colors in an adjoining room where thirty plastic pails filled with colored pulp covered the floor. There were at least eight different blues, as many greens, every imaginable yellow, grey, fuschia, peach. The array of colors seemed more than sufficient, but from those thirty colors, Noland created 100. Studying the options, Noland moved around the pails. Occasionally, he stopped to mix a new color. To indicate his pleasure, he tossed small buckets into the larger ones which an assistant filled and placed on a small table beside the hand-made paper. Noland lined up the pails of color, rearranged them, put handfuls of color in a line on a ledge, looked at the sequence and began.

A plastic frame in a diamond shape sat on top of the base sheet. The frame was divided into seven evenly spaced bands. Into them, Noland pushed and patted colored pulp. Using his hands, he sometimes smeared pulp to create a ragged edge or poured water over the pulp, causing color to ooze and bleed into the sheet. In the middle of one image, he stopped to change the color. He went into the adjoining room to look at the buckets of color. He decided he needed a different cobalt blue and waited while it was mixed. On more than one occasion, pulp accidentally fell into a diagonal stripe and Noland left it there.

Noland calls everything he puts into the paper "stuff," which is the trade name for pulp. The term suggests the sexiness of the material, which can be held in the hand, squeezed and made into shapes.

When Noland finishes laying on color, Tyler and Green remove the plastic frame, put the wet sheet between felts and then into the press. The press removes excess water, and fuses the layers of pulp into a continuous surface. The process radically changes the image. Wet pulp looks as glossy and thick as paint; as paper dries, color turns matte, paper and color become inseparable. The color is no longer on top of the paper, but in it. A cobalt blue on top of grey is a different blue than a cobalt blue embedded into grey and contiguous with it.

The specially designed hydraulic press exerts 200 tons of pressure; it is essential to the process, and after a while, Noland developed a feel for it. For example, when thick, deckle-edged sheets, like the *Horizontal Stripes* are flat and dry, they stiffen into objects, while in thin sheets, like *Circle I* and *II* (made from a Japanese mould and fibers and a western mould and fibers), the paper's surface tends to dominate. After the images come out of the press, Noland continued to work on them. Over sections of *Circle I* and *Circle II*, he added colored lithographic circles, each in a different color. Sometimes one transparent lithographic circle created as many as five new colors. In *Horizontal Stripes V*, he added monotype lithography and screenprinting. In *Horizontal Stripes I, III* and *IV*, he stained paint into the sheet's center.

Noland's methods take on interest as they reveal the intelligence and decisions of his art. To the papermaking process, he brought not only an intuitive, extravagant sense of color, but more than thirty years of painting experience.

Noland always has a reason for what he does. In *Circle I*, he began with a peach or beige base sheet made from a laid mould. Onto that, he couched one-ragged edged colored circle from a wove mould, and onto that another smaller, transparent rectangular sheet. He made the second rectangle with a flexible bamboo mould, from one of three oriental fibers, *Kozo*, *Gampi*, and *Mitsumata*. Along the way, he added bright bits of cut-up rag paper, wool and silk threads. The two rectangles reinforce the paper's shape and hold the image on the surface. The colored linen bits and threads reiterate each other, pinning attention to the surface. When the final lithographed circle overlaps paper and pulp, it creates additional colors. It also melds the colors into one plane and like the lines of thread, draws attention to the surface.

For the *Circle II* series, Noland used the same color pulp for the second, smaller couched rectangle, so that the way the two rectangles,

echo each other, can hardly be seen. Then he couched three concentric, differently colored circles onto the sheet, continuing to add nubs, and sometimes placing a ring of *Gampi* fiber into the smallest circle. Like a whisper of a drawn line, the *Gampi* fiber enforces the circle's shape and draws attention to its surface.

In each series, Noland pushed the process further. In the *Horizontal* and *Diagonal Stripes*, he focused on each image's volume and framing edge. Throughout, he found additional ways to order color. As a painter, that is what he does. Papermaking affords him endless options.

There has been a good deal of talk about artists rediscovering craft, and as is often the case when the words "revival" and "renaissance" are bandied about, the talk misses the point. In the name of revival, mediocre work often gets made. Only Noland and a handful of other artists have successfully worked in paper. The distinction between craft and art has long been misconstrued. The craft of an object is how it is made; its art is the originality and intelligence brought to the making. Noland brings art to the craft of papermaking. He finds ways to use pulp like paint.

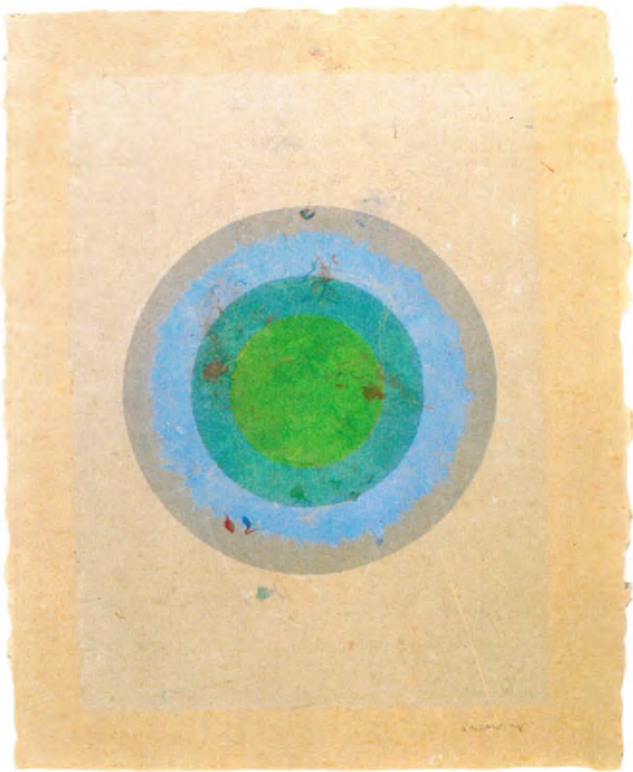
Judith Goldman



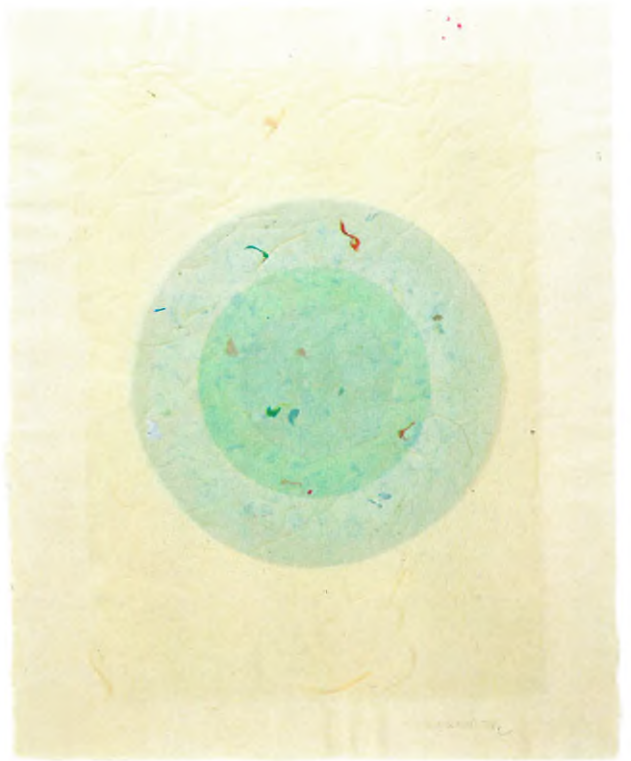
Circle I (I-37), 20'' x 16''



Circle I (II-35), 20'' x 16''



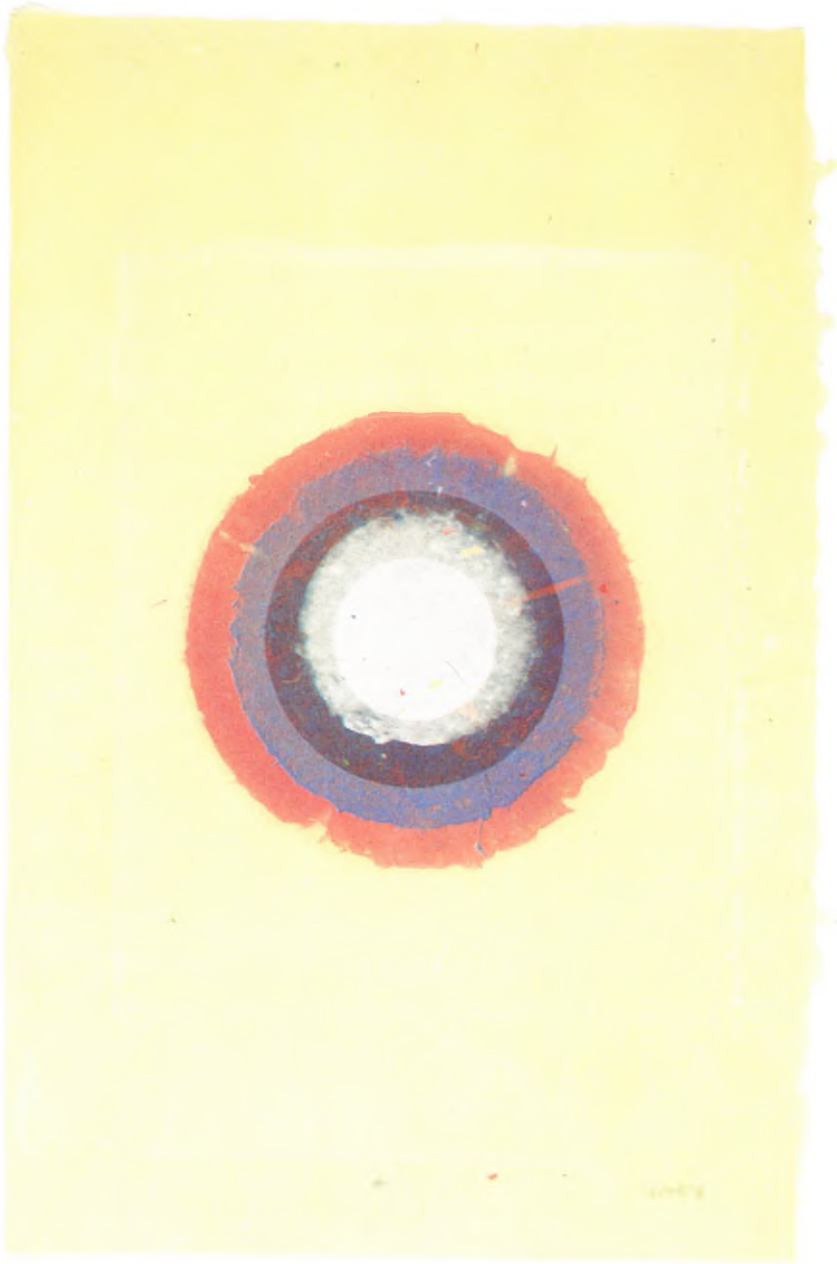
Circle I (II-36), 20" x 16"



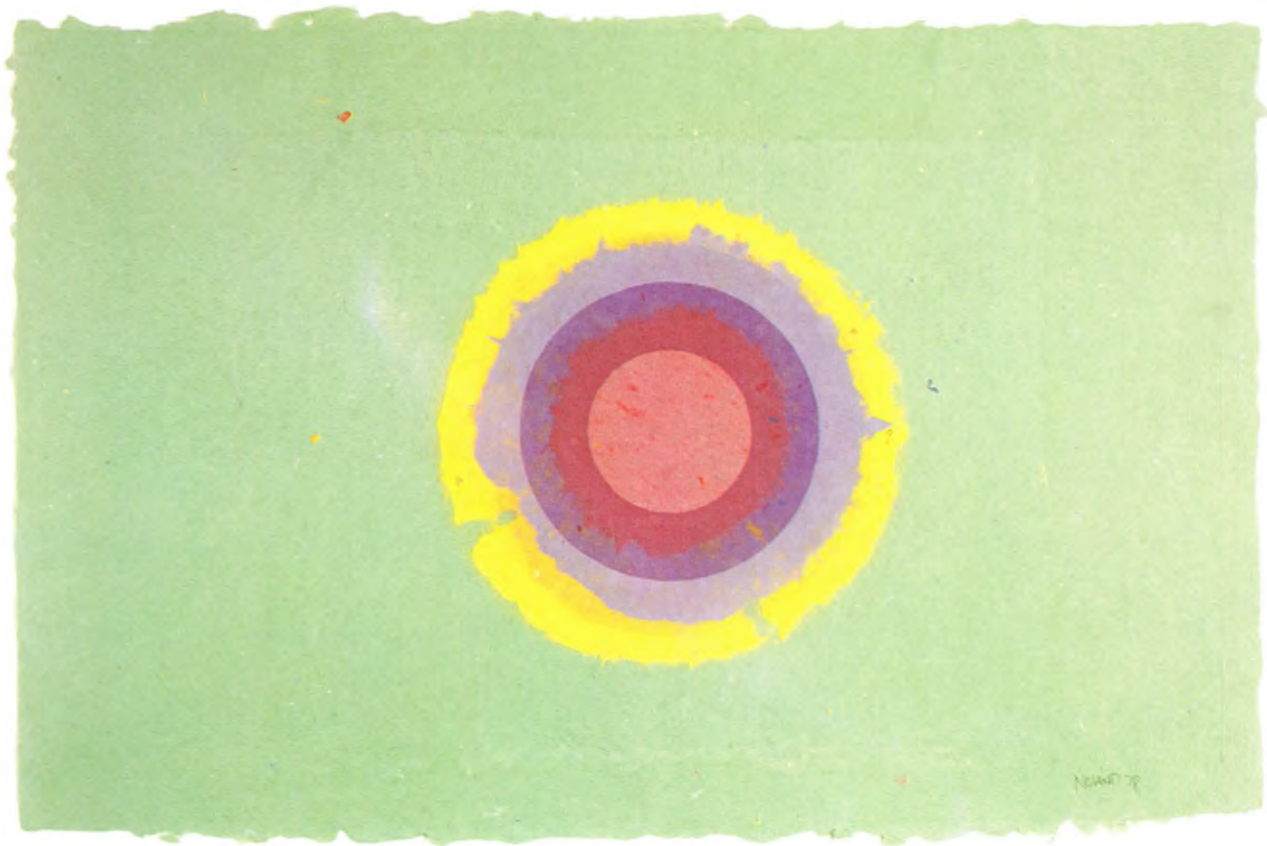
Circle I (I-49), 20" x 16"



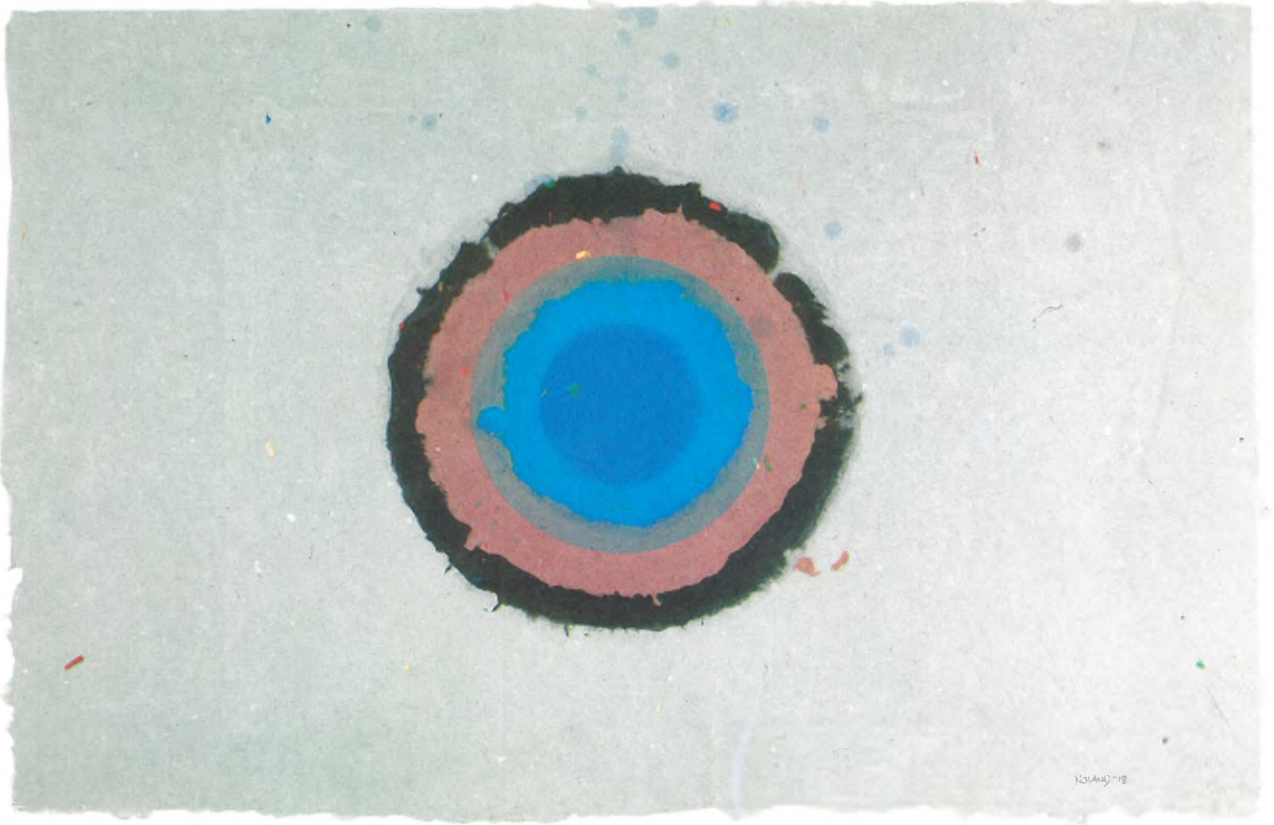
Circle II (IV-4), 32" x 21"



Circle II (V-1), 32" x 21"



Circle II (I-17), 21" x 32"



Circle II (II-35), 21" x 32"



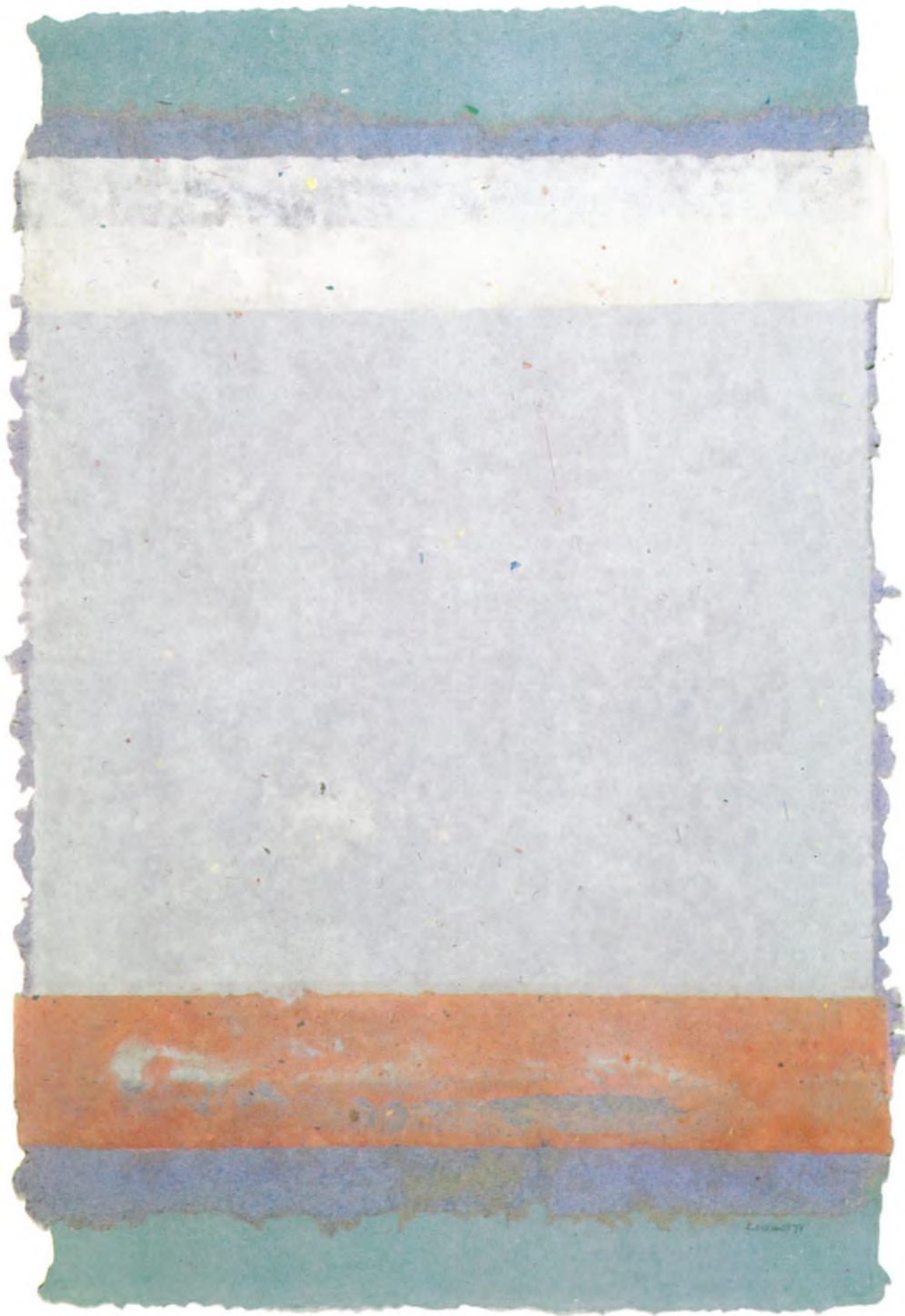
Horizontal Stripes (II-12), 51'' x 32''



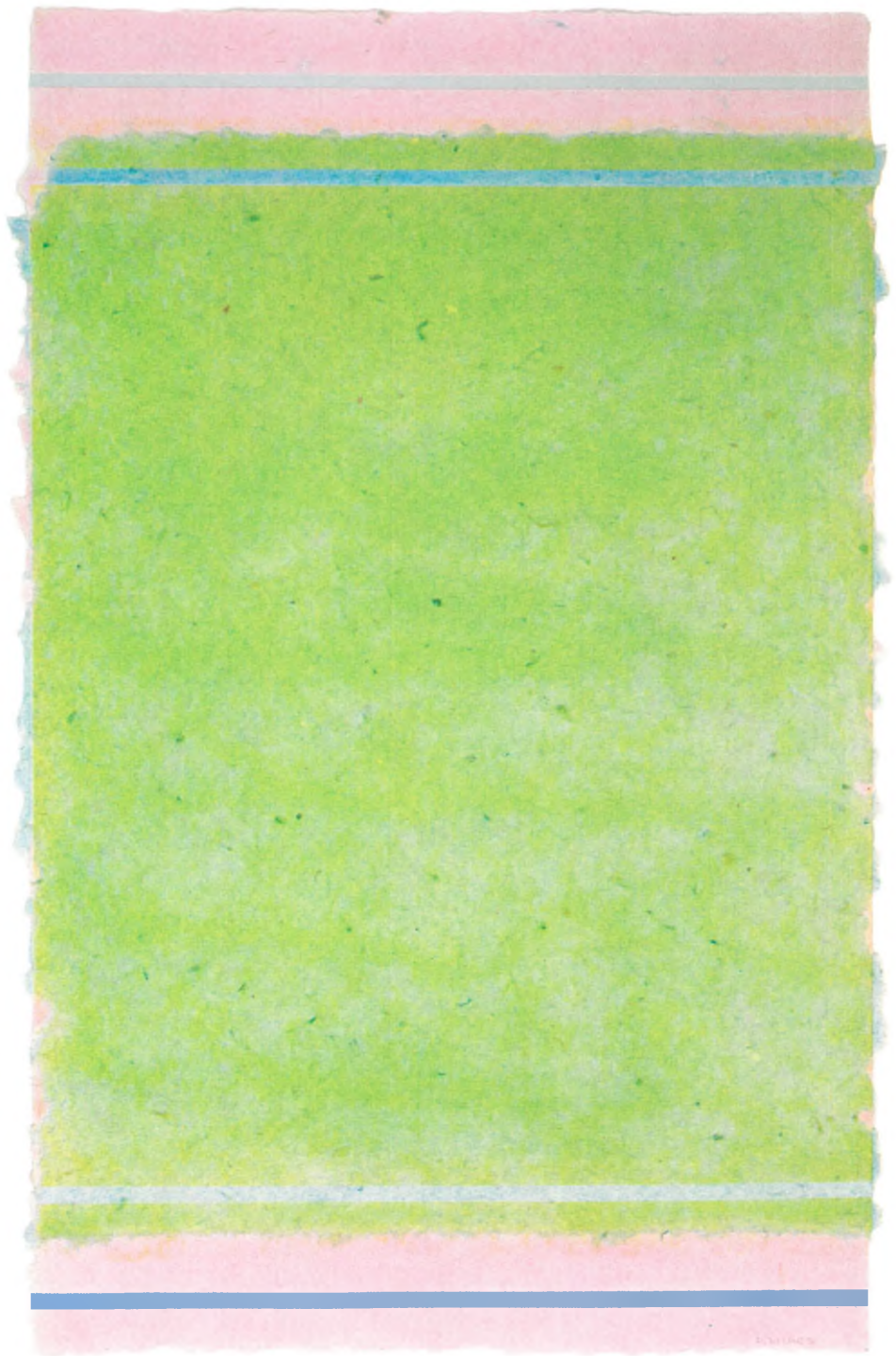
Horizontal Stripes (III-9), 51" x 32"



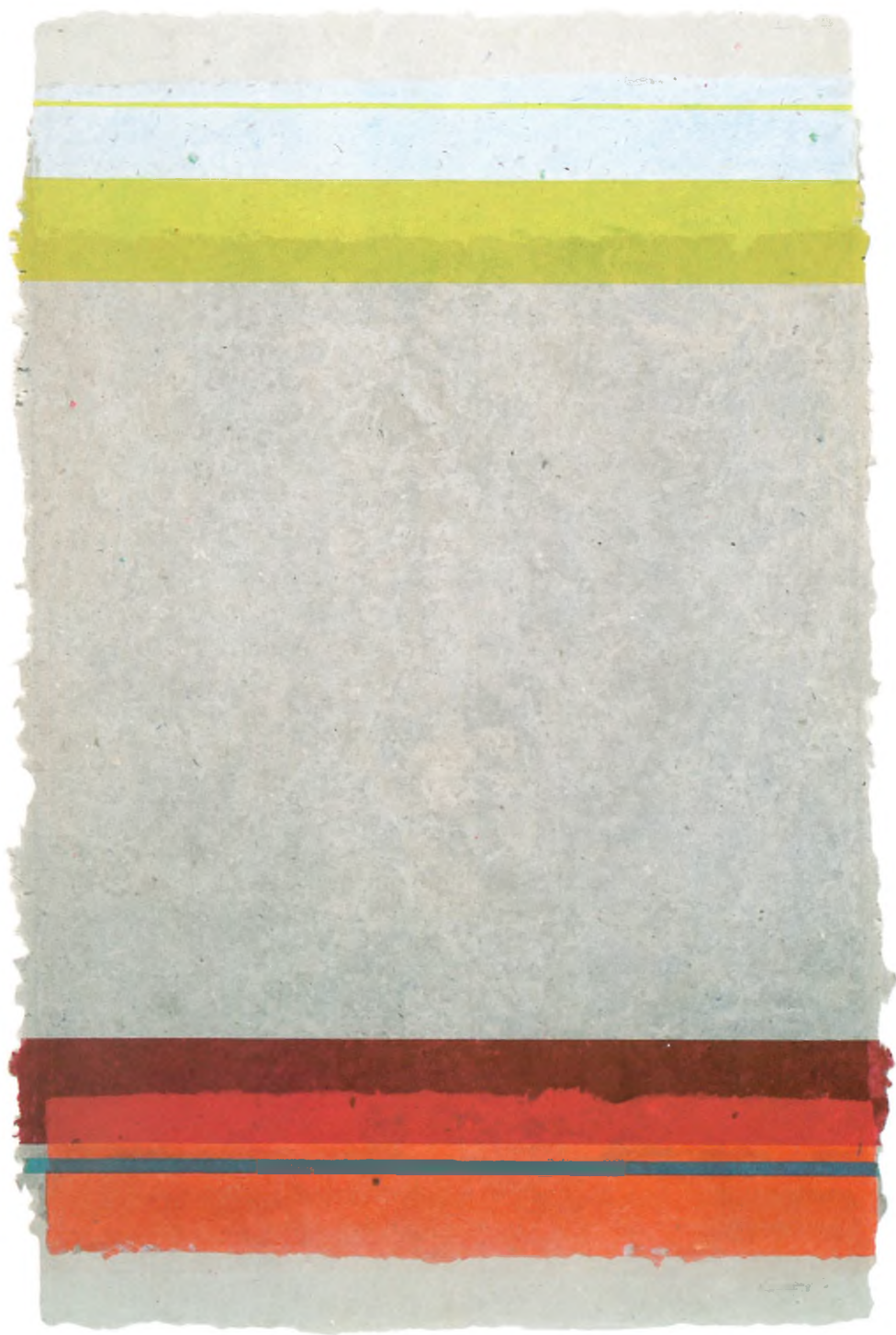
Horizontal Stripes (III-19), 50'' x 32''



Horizontal Stripes (II-18), 51" x 32"



Horizontal Stripes (V-8), 51" x 32"



Horizontal Stripes (V-11), 51" x 32"



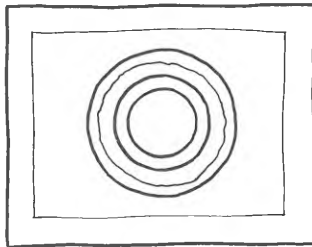
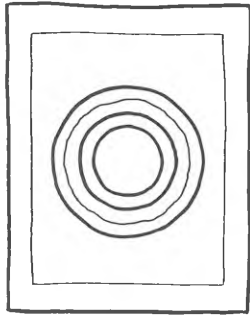
Diagonal Stripes (VI-9), 50" x 32"



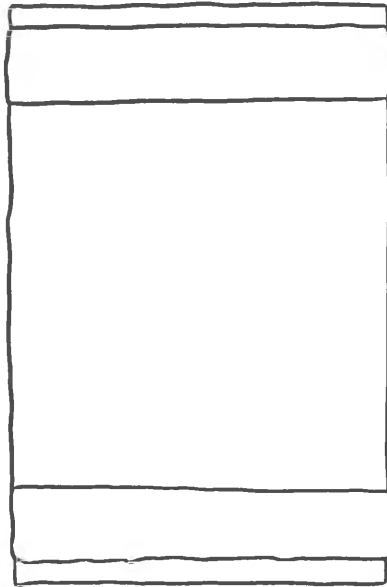
Diagonal Stripes (VI-19), 50'' x 32''

Kenneth Noland began collaboration on *Handmade Papers* with Kenneth Tyler and the staff of Tyler Graphics Ltd. in Bedford, New York in April 1978. Several months prior to Noland's visit Kenneth Tyler, assisted by Lindsay Green, researched, developed and built the equipment and fixtures for making Occidental and Oriental handmade papers. They obtained special materials, tools, pigments, dyes and various kinds of cotton fibers to make the Western rag papers. For the Oriental papers, they imported raw Japanese bast fibers of *Kozo*, *Gampi* and *Mitsumata* which were processed into pulp at the workshop. Safflower seeds were also used as a color additive. The complexity of this project with its numerous processes required close collaboration and every creative step was directed or done personally by the artist. After the papers were completed and pressed flat under pressure to dry, works were sometimes further colored by printing with monotype lithography and screenprinting. Lithography printing was by John Hutcheson and screenprinting by Kim Halliday. During the time of the project, the following people collaborated in the construction of equipment and fixtures as well as directly with the artist: Duane Mitch, Anthony D'Ancona, Rodney Konopaki and Susan Millar.

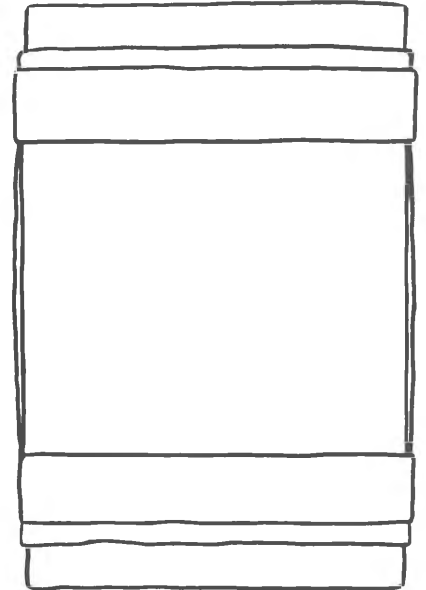
Each individual work in this project is an original colored handmade paper. Many techniques, traditional and new, were employed to color the pulp, either in the vat or in the beater, or by coloring the newly couched sheet of paper by staining or by pouring layers of colored pulps. Often material was *embedded* in the pulp such as rags, wool, silk threads, paper clippings, etc. Since each work in this project is uniquely a one-of-a-kind paper, we have separated them into four series with groups within each series. The following diagrams with notations will further explain the categories.



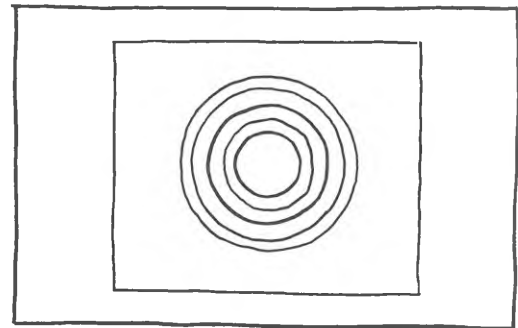
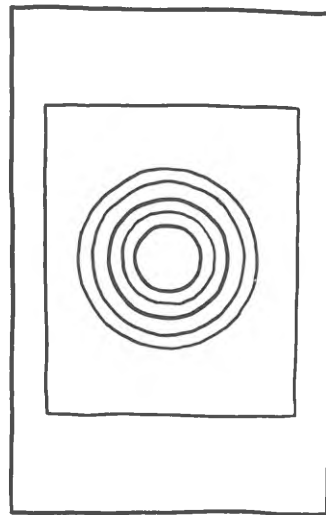
Circle I Series, 20'' x 16''
(16'' x 20'')
Three layers of colored pulp with
three monotype litho printings



Horizontal Stripes Series I, 53'' x 32''
Four layers of colored pulp

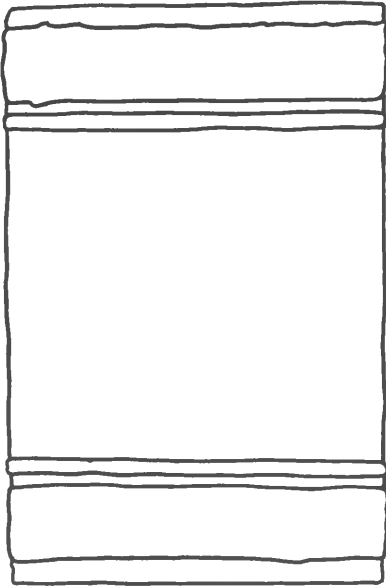


II, 51'' x 32''
Five layers of colored pulp

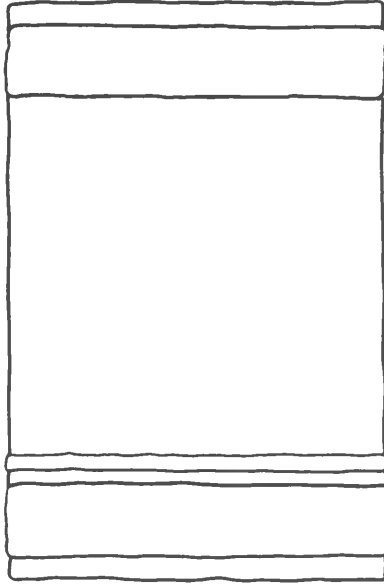


Circle II Series, 32'' x 21''
(21'' x 32'')
Five layers of colored pulp with
one monotype litho printing

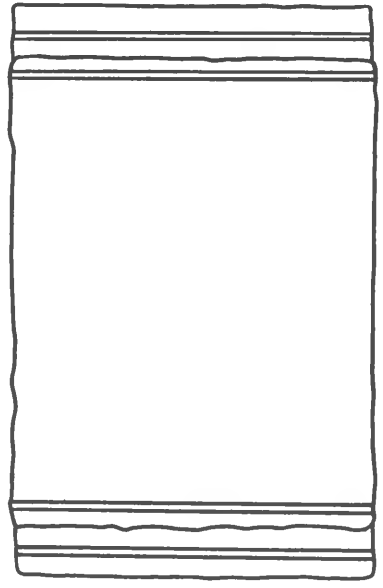
Note: All dimensions in the above diagrams are approximate. Individual works may vary as much as 1 1/2'' in either dimension. Height precedes width.



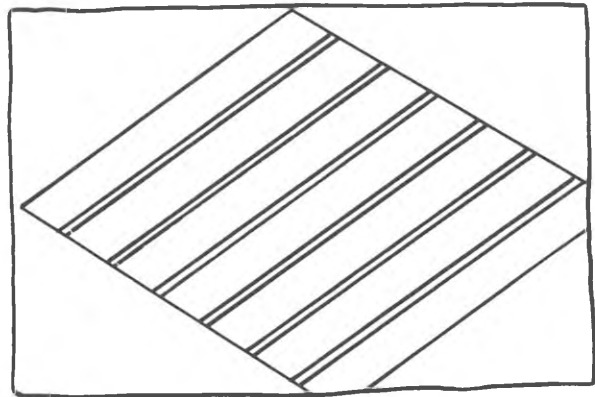
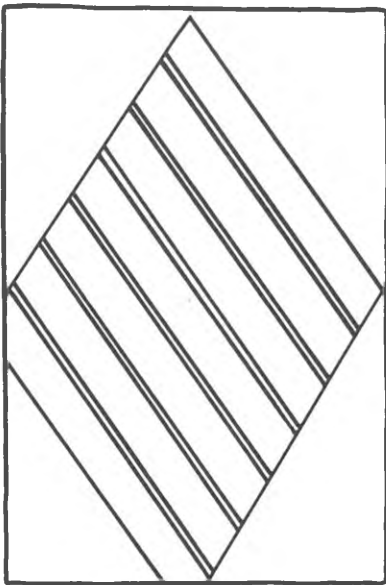
III, 51'' x 32''
Six layers of colored pulp



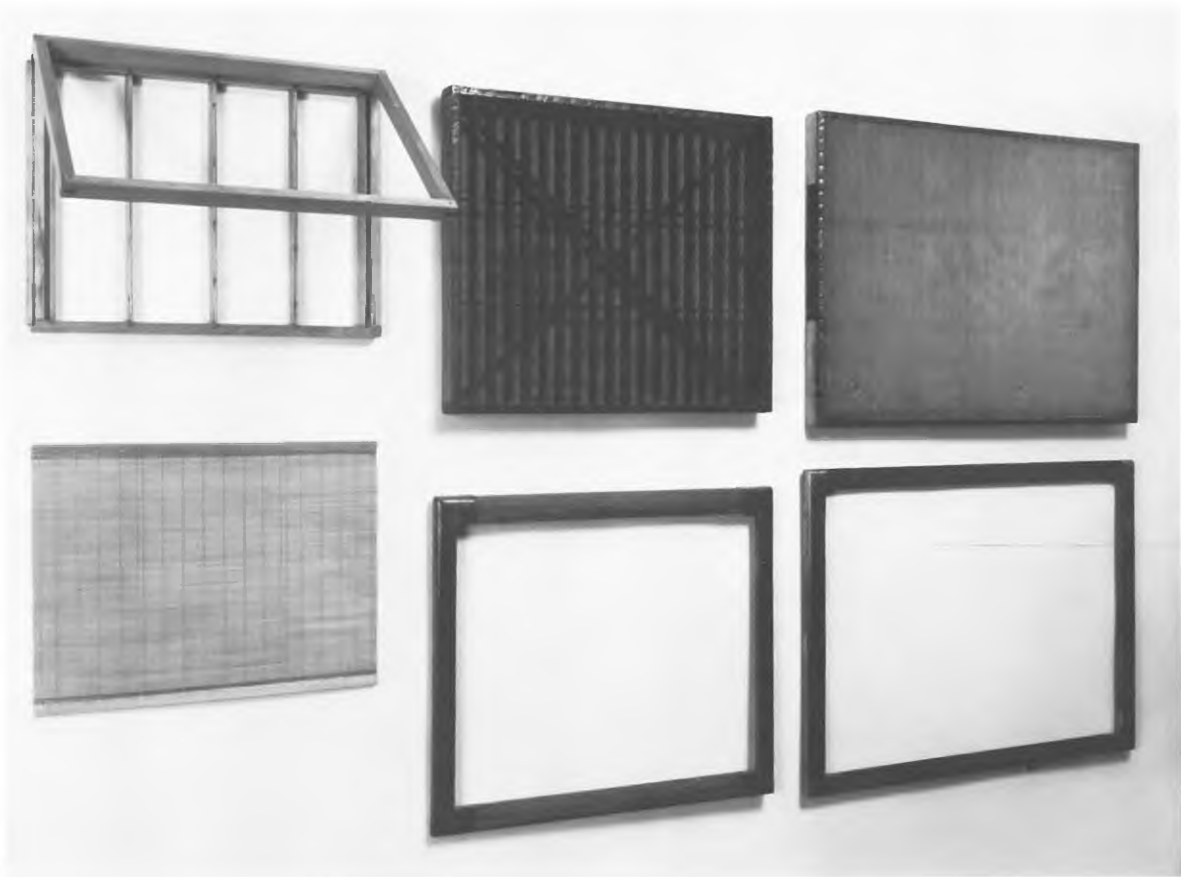
IV, 51'' x 32''
Five layers of colored pulp



V, 51'' x 32''
Two to four layers of colored pulp
with three to four monotype litho
and screen printings



Diagonal Stripes Series
VI, 50'' x 32'' (32'' x 50'')
Eight layers of colored pulp



1

Japanese mould (above) and
bamboo screen (below)

Antique laid mould (above) and
deckle (below)

Wove mould (above) and
deckle (below)



2 After boiling, the strips of inner *Gampi* bark are picked clean of impurities.



3 The beating of the clean inner *Gampi* bark is done by pounding the material with a wooden mallet. This process breaks down and macerates the oriental fibers which will be added to the vat with water in preparation for paper-making.



5 Kenneth Tyler forms a sheet of *Gampi* paper by gently rocking a Japanese paper mould which acts as a carrier for the *Gampi* pulp slurry he has scooped up onto the mould from the vat. With this constant rocking motion from side to side, most of the water will drain through the porous mould (screen) leaving an even layer of matted fiber on the surface of the bamboo screen. This process of dipping, rocking and draining the fibers on the mould can be repeated until desired fiber thickness is achieved in preparation for forming the couched sheet.



4 Kenneth Tyler agitates and evenly distributes the pulp slurry of *Gampi* fibers in preparation for the Japanese method of papermaking.

The flexible Japanese bamboo screen covered with the wet *Gampi* pulp is carefully laid down and transferred to the duplex cotton sheet for *Circle I*. This process of transferring the pulp from the mould surface onto another sheet or to a wet felt is called *couching*. Note the watermark and chain lines on the paper surface made from the impression of the antique laid mould.





7

Lindsay Green sorting cotton fibers referred to as "half-stuff" for the *beater*.



9

Pouring the liquid pulp into the vat in preparation to making paper.



8

Adding cotton fibers to the *beater*. The *beater* machine macerates the fibers in water to produce pulp in liquid form.



13

Lindsay Green and Kenneth Tyler indicate mould placement for Kenneth Noland who holds paper mould covered with wet pulp ready for couching.



14

Kenneth Noland stains one of the pieces from the *Horizontal Stripes* series with transparent dye.



15

Kenneth Noland couches freshly formed sheet of paper for *Circle I* from antique laid paper mould.



16

Kenneth Noland couching one of the concentric rings of colored pulp from a circular wove paper mould for the *Circle II* series.



17

John Hutcheson pulling a monotype printing from a lithographic aluminum plate for the *Circle II* series. The single color printing is printed over five layers of colored pulp.



The hydraulic press extracts excess water from the newly formed sheet of paper and fuses the layers of pulp into an even surface.

18



19

Judith Goldman observes Kenneth Noland spreading colored pulp into the plexiglas mould for the *Diagonal Stripes* series.

