

NEW BRITAIN
MUSEUM OF
AMERICAN ART

MILDRED THOMPSON:
Cosmic Flow

MAY 19, 2022 — NOVEMBER 27, 2022



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Richard and Virginia McKernan Gallery

Mildred Thompson (1936-2003) was fascinated by micro- and macrocosmic worlds of particles, energy waves, stars, and planets. Inspired by physics, mathematics, music, and astronomy, she sought to represent natural phenomena through a distinctly unique language of abstraction. Her dynamic mark-making, color, and compositions visualize the force of unseen energy and forms in the universe, as reflected in this suite of 14 prints, on view at the NBMAA for the first time ever.

Thompson's career spanned half a century, from the 1950s to the early 2000s, during which she developed her visionary and expressive style in a large body of paintings, drawings, prints, and sculptures. Born in Jacksonville, Florida, and educated at Howard University in Washington, D.C. (1953-57), she spent much of her adult life teaching, traveling, and exhibiting in Germany and France, where she was free from some

of the gender and racial discrimination she faced as an African American woman in the United States. In 1985, Thompson returned to the U.S. and spent the last 15 years of her life in Atlanta, Georgia, where she taught at several colleges, served as the associate editor of *ART PAPERS* magazine, and produced accomplished bodies of fine art and music.

These captivating prints were produced in 1993 during an artist's residency at Littleton Studios, North Carolina, where Thompson experimented with vitreography, a process that uses a glass plate to produce a printed image. Through forms and colors that convey velocity, density, energy, and dynamism, Thompson depicted her personal interpretation of scientific phenomenon and systems—or as she described, “what goes on beneath the earth and things of the atmosphere.” Several works titled *Helio-Centric* refer to planetary revolution



“My work in the visual arts is, and always has been, a continuous search for understanding. It is an expression of purpose and reflects a personal interpretation of the universe. Each new creation presents a visual manifestation of the sum total of this life long investigation and serves as a reaffirmation of my commitment to the arts.”

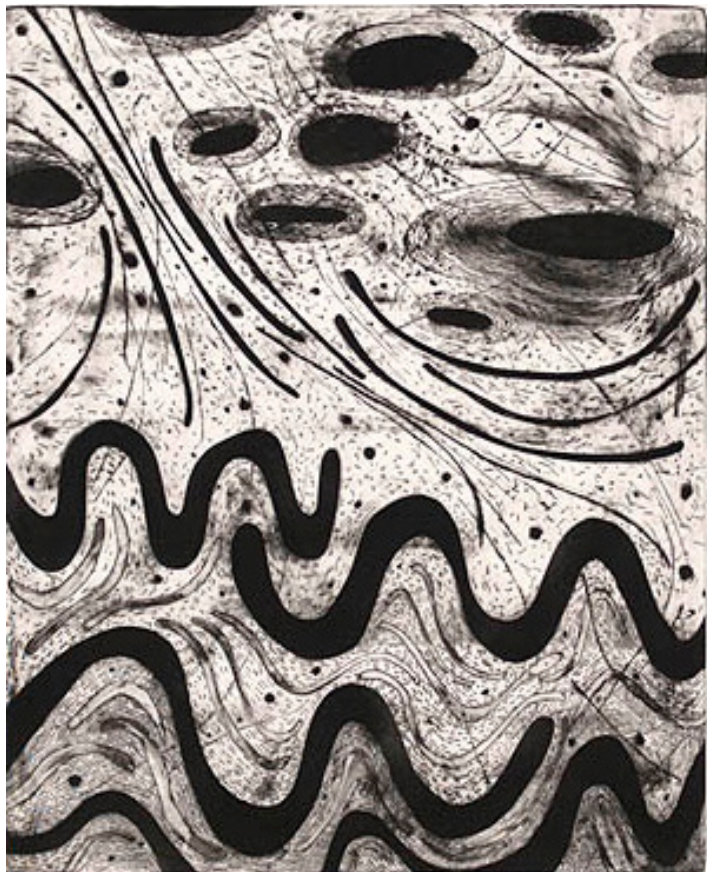
– Mildred Thompson

Left: Mildred Thompson, *Helio-Centric III*, 1993, Vitreograph print from glass plates, 30 x 24 in. (image), Gift of Judith O'Rourke, 2012.50.80

around the sun. Others, entitled *Wave Function*, refer to the wave characteristics of a particle, as described in quantum mechanics. Finally, her richly hued print, *Particles*, refers to both micro- and macrocosmic elements: while astronomers associate particles with stars in the night sky, physicists associate them with electrons—the smallest elements that make up an atom.

These works, as well as more than 700 additional vitreographs, were donated to the NBMAA by Judith O'Rourke, an associate at Littleton Studios for seventeen years and an important artist in her own right.

Below: Mildred Thompson, *Helio-Centric II*, 1993 Vitreograph print from glass plates 30 x 24 in., Gift of Judith O'Rourke 2012.50.78, D, 77
Right: Mildred Thompson, *Particles*, 1993, Vitreograph print from glass plates 30 x 24 in., Gift of Judith O'Rourke 2012.50.77, D, 77
Bottom Right: Mildred Thompson, *Helio-Centric*, 1993, Vitreograph print from glass plates, 30 x 24 in. (image), Gift of Judith O'Rourke 2012.50.79, D, 77





Cover: Mildred Thompson, *Wave Function I*, 1993 Vitreograph print from glass plates, 20 x 16 in. (image), Gift of Judith O'Rourke 2012.50.76, D, 77
Mildred Thompson, mildredthompson.org

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