

# **THOMAS CHIMES**

The Entropy Paintings

March 2–April 7, 2007

Interview with Phillip Mitsis



Thomas Chimes interviewed by Phillip Mitsis  
November 11, 2006 at the Locks Gallery

PHILLIP MITSIS

*One of the things that strikes me about these new paintings is the way that the figures are much more solid, standing out from the surface. If you think about your earlier white paintings, they have figures that are transparent, almost pointing to something much beyond. These look more constituted, very solid....*

THOMAS CHIMES

The means that I use to make the image in these small panels is very different from the large paintings, where I mainly use brush and paint. Here I use a very decorative process to create the line, which is raised above the surface itself. Once I've prepared the ground and painted the panel white, I stretch masking tape over the whole thing, draw the image, and then with an X-Acto knife I cut two lines parallel to each other, making a line that is the contour of the image. After the cut is finished I remove the very slender piece of tape that is left, leaving a channel, which I then fill with a wood filler. And then I add layer after layer of white until I get the particular tone that I want. The process brings me much closer to sculpture than to drawing.

Left:

**Earth**, 2000

Oil on panel

5 13/16 x 5 3/4 inches

- PM *How do you get this unique texture?*
- TC After I make the panel from birch plywood and prepare the surface, I put Elmer's glue down, coating it to seal the wood. And then, using Titanium White paint, I cover the whole thing. In the beginning I stroke vertically, and after that dries the next layer would be horizontal. So there is that vertical and horizontal that suggests a texture, a tiny contrast in light and dark in a very subtle way.
- PM *Why the move to miniatures?*
- TC My mind goes back to when I first started working on a large canvas. I recall that to get an image which was abstract, I would use a palette knife and thick paint, and come up to the surface and make a stroke. This would make a small rectangular mark. And then I would repeat it over and over, covering the whole surface. Now, in a sense, I can relate these small paintings to that single stroke I made back in those days. My paintings got bigger and bigger and culminated in the early 60's in a huge canvas I did 18 feet wide. From then on it's decreasing in size ever since until recently I arrived at these small three inch panels, and I thought: Can I get any smaller? Even smaller? And yes I can, because I held onto the three inch but now I put smaller shapes inside of that. So infinitely speaking, I can keep reducing... ad infinitum.
- PM *Interesting, because a lot of these incorporate the word "entropy", which is usually associated with diffusion and dispersal. Is there a paradox between that word and these images, which you seem to be condensing, getting the essence of them, gathered and more focused?*

TC In the concept of chaos, at the beginning- it was the “infinite soup”- there were no distinguishable parts. But once a couple of those infinitely small parts came together, you have the beginning of an increase in size. This continues until the whole universe is filled with matter. At a second point it reverses itself and it goes back to the original state. I look at my own work that way. I began that way, with these little strokes, culminating in the huge canvas which I can hardly see all of while I’m working on it and now I’m back down.

PM *Now that you’ve come to this, what do you think of the way the paintings are grouped? Are these different groups with different themes?*

TC They were done individually and if there was any referential point to it, it would have been my association of each piece to a word in a sentence. One word after another, this one modifying that one. There is a vague sequential element as I go from one to the next. To go to the next piece requires that you deny what you just did. If you can’t find fault with the one you just did, look for it until you do. And then start your next piece. Assertion and denial is really a part of the process. The fact that they can be grouped is very much connected again with literature. You have words, you have phrases, you have sentences, you have paragraphs. To make sense out of a single word you have to build a context in a sentence-a larger thought.

Over:

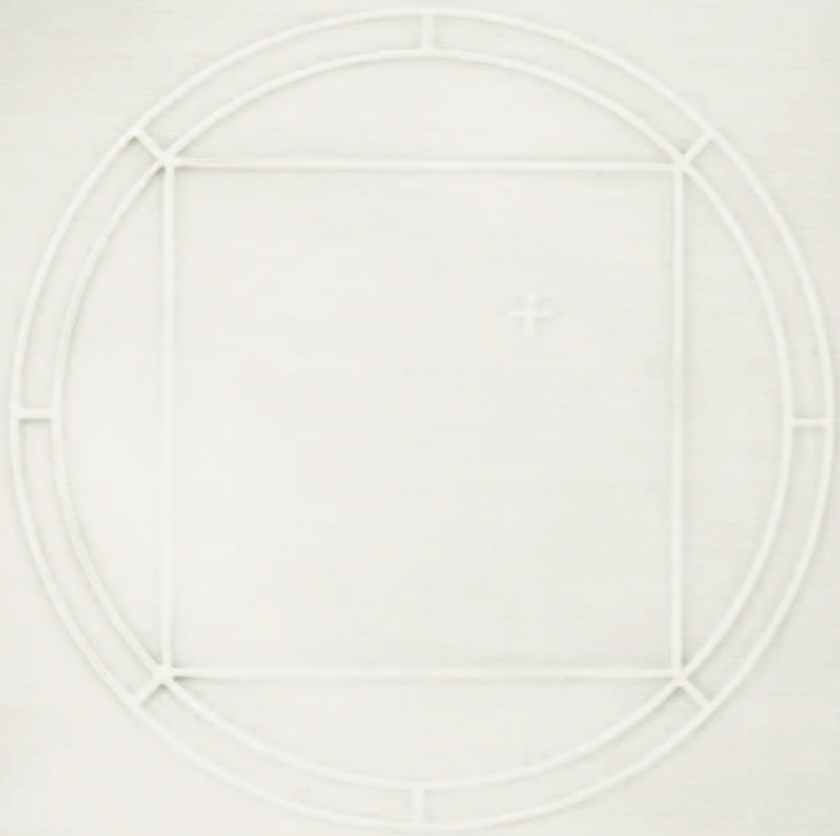
**Dwarf**, 1997–98

Oil on two panels

Each panel approx. 6 x 6 inches







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