

The background of the cover is a light, warm-toned surface. It features several horizontal strips of fabric or paper, some in shades of blue and others in brown or tan, with frayed edges. On the left side, there are several organic, rounded forms in shades of green, yellow, and brown, resembling leaves or petals. The overall composition is abstract and textured.

MORPHOGENETIC FIELDS

Rudolf Bickers

Craig Scott Gallery

95 Berkeley Street
Toronto M5A 2W8
T: 416 365 3326
E: info@craigscottgallery.com
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Interview by
Sterling Beckwith

All artwork
photographed by
Yvonne Duivenvoorden

Artist photographed by
Thera Bickers

Catalogue design
Samuel Chow

Printed In Canada

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Front Cover
Morphogenetic Fields XIV
2008 (detail)

R u d o l f B i k k e r s

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C R A I G S C O T T G A L L E R Y

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FOREWORD: AN ART OF MIND

Born in Hilversum, the Netherlands, Rudolf Bickers is a Toronto-based printmaker, painter, and art professor. His work is characterized by supreme technical skill, meticulous execution, and, in many of his works, a unique visual vocabulary. This vocabulary generates prints, paintings and mixed-media works that exhibit a surprising combination of grace, equipoise, and calm, on the one hand, with tension and explosive energy, on the other.

Bickers' arts education involved both the visual arts and music. He received his MFA from the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht. That period of art study (1960-1966) overlapped with ten years (1956-1966) dedicated to studying the cello in both Hilversum and Maastricht. In 1966, Bickers immigrated to Canada and settled in London, Ontario, until his appointment as Head of the Printmaking Department at the Ontario College of Art (OCA, now OCAD) in 1983. After serving in that capacity for a decade, he has continued as Professor of Printmaking until the present.

Bickers is one of the few remaining all-round master printmakers in Canada. In lithography, he is the acknowledged master of masters. His artistry and printing skills – whether displayed in his own prints or in various print series he has published for major artists (such as Karel Appel and Paul Jenkins) through his Editions Canada – are admired worldwide. As the *Morphogenetic Fields* exhibition (April 10 – May 4, 2008, Craig Scott Gallery, Toronto) reveals,¹ he is also a painter of exceptional talent. Rudolf Bickers has exhibited widely, including over 20 solo shows. His works appear in dozens of major public and private collections.

One of the unifying threads connecting Rudolf Bickers' works over the years has been a remarkable synergy between imagination and interpretation that has yielded his unique synthesis of the abstract and the representational. Those unfamiliar with Bickers' art will find it helpful to note that Bickers has frequently drawn inspiration from the realm of music and the discoveries of biology. In Bickers' fecund, sometimes even hyperactive imagination, both become playgrounds of the spirit, domains of mind.

For often, although not invariably, what Bikkers paints or draws, inks, and pulls from limestone is not something the human eye can ever have seen before its translation from fantasy to material art.

Let us turn first to biology. In his essay for the catalogue of Rudolf Bikkers' 1982 exhibition, *Icons*, at the London Regional Art Gallery, Martin L. Robinson described the forms in Bikkers' mixed media works (colour lithographs with acrylic painting) as "biomorphic, biocentric, or, perhaps better, biodynamic."² These forms are "bursting with energy and anticipation..., [s]ome divid[ing] in a biological or cellular way while others...explode." Just over 25 years later, Bikkers' work remains true to Robinson's observations. Then, as now, Bikkers' imagery has a "distinctively sensuous quality," many of his works bursting with fecund pod-like forms. Now, as then, his images are "crystallizations of...shapes conceived in his fantasies or imagination, suspended in a weightless state giving the viewer an awareness of space."

The subject matter of Bikkers' dreamings of the bioimaginary has, however, evolved. The preoccupation in earlier work tended to be with the inner life of the microscopic organism, including morphogenesis (intra-organism biological processes that generate tissue shape and biological form in plant and animal embryos). In the last several years, Bikkers has become fascinated by hypotheses that morphogenesis may either exist as a phenomenon, or be extended as a metaphorical idea, beyond the physical to the psychic realm and beyond the single organism to inter-organism connectedness. Influenced by the ideas and writings of biologist and philosopher Dr. Rupert Sheldrake, Bikkers' new series engages the premise that invisible and phenomenologically ambiguous "morphogenetic fields" may explain how certain forms of knowledge can be transmitted between organisms. Behaviour based on such knowledge can quite suddenly be widely emulated within a species, despite no known physical connection or communication linking an initial setting (in which knowledge and associated behaviour are first generated) and a new setting (in which they appear, inexplicably, to be replicated).³ At their most far-reaching, these hypotheses of "morphic resonance" – put forward both by Sheldrake himself and by others who seek to explore and build on his theories – postulate not only spiritual interconnections between beings but also the cumulative development of a collective consciousness as morphogenetic fields interact, with existing fields folding into emerging fields and new fields building on older ones.

Let us now take a detour from biology in order to arrive back at biology through music. Bikkers' career has been marked by periodic projects that connect his love and knowledge of music with his visual arts creativity. In 1994 he produced the *Shostakovich Quintet*, a set of 5 lithographs. In 1999 Bikkers

created another elegantly lush portfolio of lithographs, *From Cello to Stone*, based on J.S. Bach's Cello Suites as inspired by Yo-Yo Ma's interpretations. His most recent such project, *My Muses, a Visual Offering*, is a bound set of 20 triptychs inspired by great music. Each 47 x 108 cm. triptych comprises a portrait of a composer, an interpretative visualization of the music, and a text related to the composer or to Bickers' relationship to that composer. The set of 20 (in a limited edition of 100) has been bound in a cloth-and-leather cover. The composers with whom Bickers engages are: Bach, Vivaldi, Scarlatti, Handel, Telemann, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven, Schumann, Dvorak, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Britten, Popper, Schnittke, Gubaidulina, Peterson and Schafer. With respect to the last composer, Bickers plans, later in 2008, to create a small set of lithographs to honour the life and music of Murray Schafer on the occasion of Schafer's 75th birthday.

When the *From Cello to Stone* works were released a decade ago, Robert Fulford wrote that, like Bach's music and Ma's interpretations of that music, "Bickers' prints have achieved the bracing, clear as- a-mountain-stream clarity that illustrates a remark by Northrop Frye: 'The simple, which is the opposite of the commonplace, is normally one of the last secrets of art to be mastered.'" ⁴ Fulford concluded his "Seeing Music" essay by noting how the works of both Bach (the Cello Suites) and Bickers (the visualization of Bach's music) share a "wondrous sense of order," adding:

Order can never be far from the mind and instincts of artists, whether musical or visual. We humans are pattern-making animals. We spend much of our lives searching for an order that transcends, in a place we cannot name, the chaotic world in which we live. Art, says Schopenhauer, rescues us, if only for a short time, from our narrow, limiting obsession with self, and moves us "into the state of pure knowledge." This is the achievement of Bach's Unaccompanied Cello Suites in the Yo-Yo Ma performances, an achievement to which Rudolf Bickers provides a richly appropriate accompaniment.

What is fascinating (or, at least, fascinating to the present writer) is that the pursuit of order and the making sense of the world through patterning that Fulford sees as underlying the music of Bach, the performances of Ma, and the prints of Bickers find their thematic parallel in the search for the fabric of connectedness that animates Sheldrake's speculations, hypotheses, and experiments. The parallel goes further. Just as Bickers, as lover of music and as practising cellist, got 'inside' the music of Bach through years of playing the Cello Suites and listening to others, like Ma, also doing so, Bickers, as the vociferous knowledge-seeker, has for years been reading and reflecting on the various writings

of Rupert Sheldrake. As with the music of Bach (and all the other composers whose work he has translated into visual art), Bikkers draws, prints and paints what he sees in his mind's eye, unaided by anything visible 'out there' in the universe to see and thus to represent in any realist mode.

The *Morphogenetic Fields* works are thus pure abstractions even as they are, like Sheldrake's bold hypotheses, efforts to convey something nonetheless real that may operate or, if it does operate, operates mysteriously in some combined physical and psychological manner. And they leap off the surface of Bikkers' works, as the text leaves Sheldrake's pages, as very tangible intangibles. They feel like exploratory mappings of uncharted territories of existence, like visionary insights into an aspect of nature that we can only dimly contemplate at this stage of human history and human understanding. In this sense, it may also be that the *Morphogenetic Fields* works will come, with the passage of time, to be seen as not (or not only) the product of a supremely imaginative mind but also as an art that dares to ask (artistically and non-theistically) whether bio-psychological structures of Mind are part of the fabric of our universe.

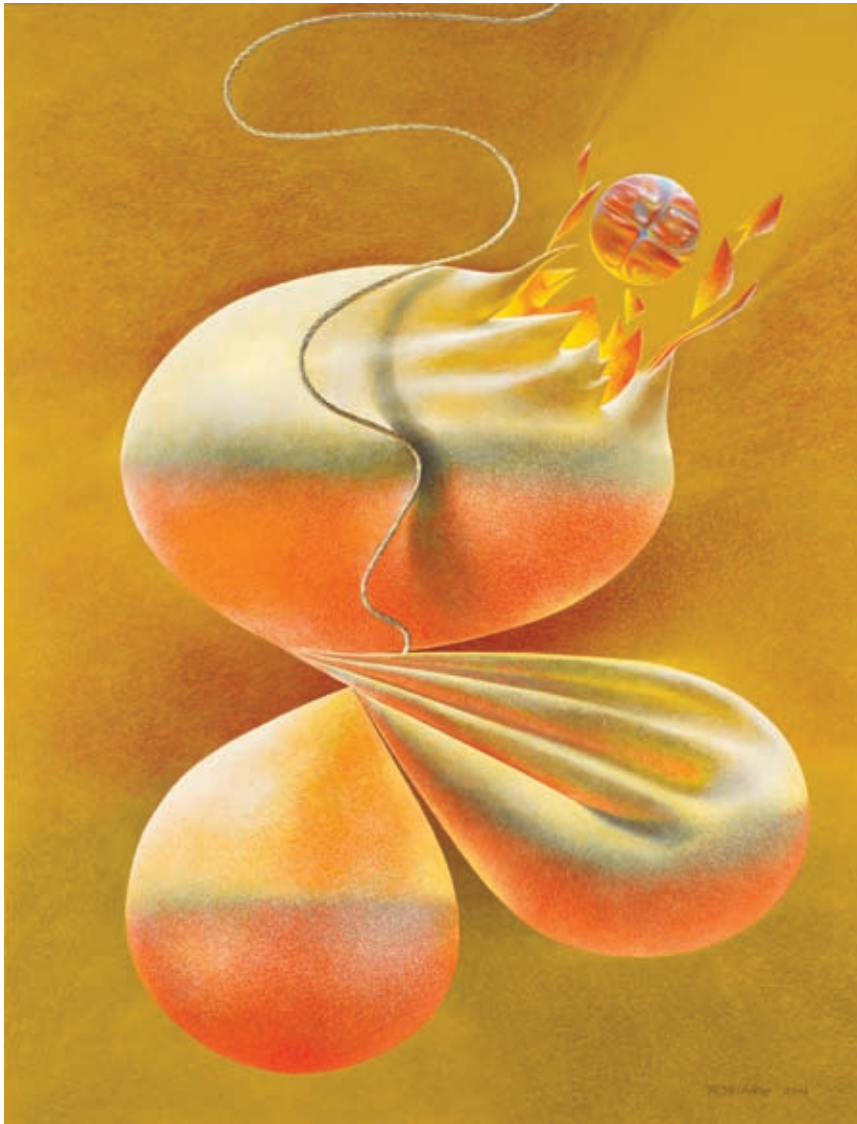
Craig Scott, Director
Craig Scott Gallery, Toronto

1 In the exhibition, there are 17 mixed-media works (colour lithographs pulled from limestone followed by acrylic painting, on fine archival paper); each work is 91.4 cm x 68.6 cm before framing. The works are named serially, *Morphogenetic Fields I*, *Morphogenetic Fields II*, and so on. As well, as a centrepiece for the show, there is a single large painting named *Release*.

2 Martin L. Robinson, "BIKKERS: Painter and Masterprinter" (*Icons* catalogue essay, London Regional Gallery, London, Ontario, 1982)

3 Rupert Sheldrake is author or co-author of a wide range of volumes, including *A New Science of Life: The Hypothesis of Formative Causation* (1981) and *The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature* (1988). He was the subject of CBC Ideas, on June 23, 2006, for his ideas in *The Sense of Being Stared At, And Other Aspects of the Extended Mind* (2003) and, on January 30, 2008, for the relevance of his thinking to the Ideas' series "How to Think About Science." He is presently Director of the Perrott-Warrick Project, Trinity College, Cambridge University. Upon viewing Bikkers' *Morphogenetic Fields* images, Sheldrake wrote to say, "I am delighted that Rudolf Bikkers has produced these striking images based on the idea of morphogenetic fields, exploring some of the fundamental processes in the emergence of natural form."

4 Robert Fulford, "Seeing Music" (*From Cello to Stone* catalogue essay, Toronto, 1999).



Release, 2008

Acrylic on canvas
182.9 cm by 121.9 cm
72 in by 48 in

A CONVERSATION WITH THE ARTIST

[The following is a summary of remarks by Rudolf Bickers made while discussing his upcoming exhibition at Craig Scott Gallery with a good friend and colleague, Professor Sterling Beckwith of York University, on February 19, 2008 in Toronto.]

SB: How would you describe the scope of your work as a visual artist? And why does it seem so difficult to fit you into a single category?

RB: Fortunately, I can express myself visually in a number of different ways. They include the whole gamut of printmaking—including relief printing, intaglio, lithography, serigraphy, digital printing—as well as every sort of drawing and painting (charcoal, egg tempera, etc.). In the Seventies, I experimented also with three-dimensional work, using screenprinting on vacuum-formed plastic to make ecological statements with objects found in nature. The selection of works in this show represents me as both a painter and printmaker, since the *Morphogenetic Fields* monoworks are a combination of both media.

Throughout my career, all sorts of other concerns have had an influence on my work as an artist— especially my longstanding interest in music and in biology. Lately, there is a renewed emphasis in my work on the dynamics of growth and change, in all life forms as well as in the arts. Depending on the particular project at hand, these various sources of inspiration will result in quite different choices of imagery.

A good example of this diversity is the book *My Muses*, a bound collection of twenty triptychs devoted to my most treasured composers, completed in 2006. These triptychs include a hand-drawn lithographic portrait of each composer, along with my visual interpretation of his music. The overall visual effect is distinctly different from the current show, yet both contribute equally to my evolving personal “style”, one that may not always seem very fashionable or easily labeled. (Could that mean it is also less likely to go *out of style*?)

SB: Are there other specific sources or influences that may have helped to shape that evolution?

RB: Perhaps because I was born in Holland and studied at the Van Eyck Academy there before coming to Canada, I am totally mesmerized by the exquisite, other-worldly quality of the paintings by the great Flemish masters, such as Jan Van Eyck, Memling, or Hieronymus Bosch. Though theirs was a very different era, I’ve tried to adapt their meticulous approach to painting and drawing so as to achieve a similarly magical atmosphere, while creating artworks that still belong entirely to our own century and can speak directly to us today. A favourite line of Steve Martin’s, from the American poet e. e. cummings, could probably apply also to me: “Like the burlesque comedian, I am abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement.”

Of course I have been influenced by other artists over the past fifty years. Certain works by Henry Moore, Jean Arp, or Victor Pasmore have been a revelation, giving me the confidence to fully explore ever more intriguing shapes and forms in my own way. My personal point of view is also the product of many years of thinking and reading, many memorable visual experiences. By now I’ve lived long enough as a working artist to have my own particular message to convey, using my own visual vocabulary.

Then too, each of the various complex technologies of image-making has its own inescapable impact, like a language that one gradually learns to master and control. In my teaching studio at OCAD, I must regularly analyze these methods and procedures as explicitly and simply as possible for my students. So I am usually quite conscious of every step that is involved, and of the whole range of resources at my disposal.

How best to apply these techniques in each specific case? That is the kind of thing I might work out in my head while driving from Toronto to Montreal, for example, so that by the time I arrive, both the final look of the created image and all the steps needed to realize it effectively as a finished work have become clear.

SB: How do you manage to create such a sense of dynamic vitality, in a visual artwork that is essentially “static” and unchanging?

RB: I am mainly inspired by forms in the world around me, often very simple forms, and by qualities of texture and energy and movement in nature that I am moved to convey and exploit in my work. I could be looking at something quite ordinary—even just a crease in a hand, for example—when its form or shape suggests a new image that comes to my mind in a flash. For each such particular idea that presents itself, I can pick and choose the medium and technique that’s best suited to express it. Then I am free to play with the idea, always up for the exciting challenge of finding the right way to capture it and infuse it with life and energy on paper or canvas.

All the works in this show were produced in the last twelve months, and a number of them seem, in one way or another, to evoke a sense of weightlessness in space. I am enormously intrigued by such organic, sensuous forms. There is now a whole imaginary world I can tune into at will, and draw upon as an endless reservoir of ideas. What I have tried to create is a series of snapshots that come from this other universe. Each is a split-second glimpse of what I see unfolding in my imagination, yet only part of a huge field of evolving forms and shapes that could go on and on.

Often while I am at work, more such images will keep coming to me every few minutes, so fast that I need never worry about running out of new ideas to explore. No doubt my traditional training, which emphasized drawing and painting from life, has also helped me ever since to realize imagery that goes far beyond the mere imitation of natural objects.

I hope people will be drawn into the special atmosphere of these works, and find something there that can lift their spirits and spark their imagination each time they look at them, even if they may not be able to explain why or how that happens.



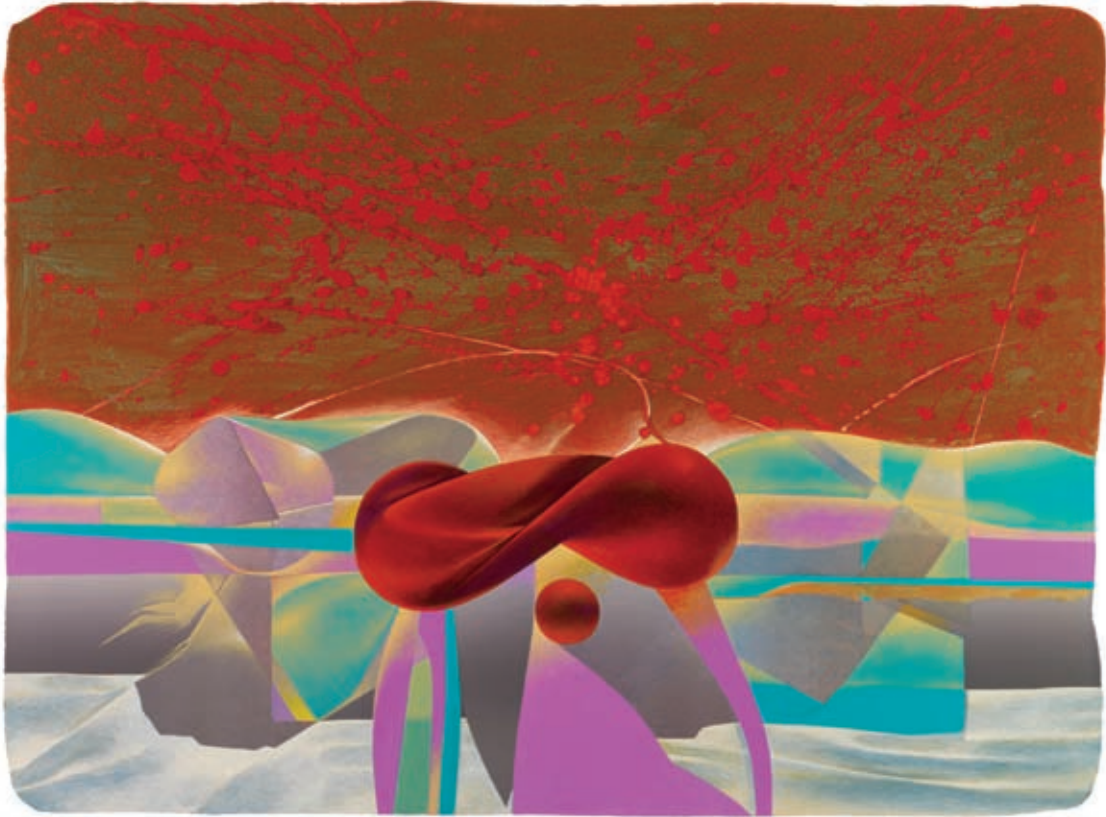
Morphogenetic Fields I, 2007, 1/1

91.4 cm by 68.6 cm
36 in by 27 in



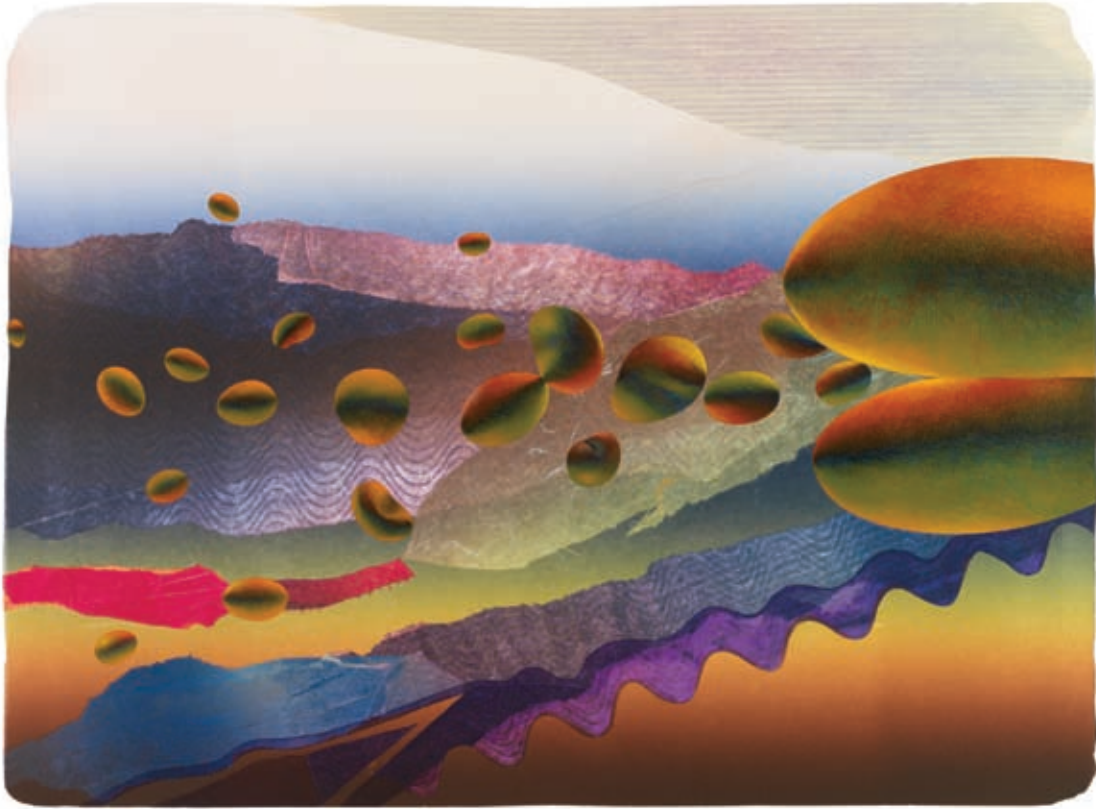
Morphogenetic Fields II, 2007, 1/1

91.4 cm by 68.6 cm
36 in by 27 in



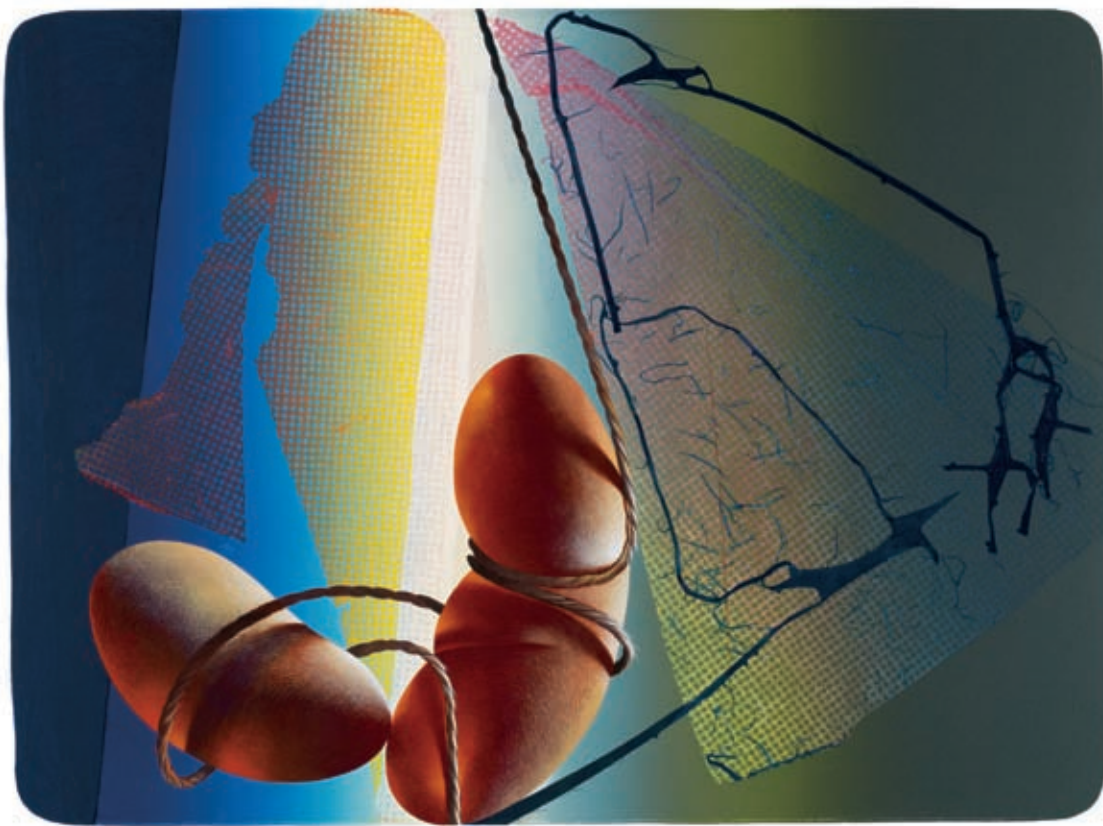
Morphogenetic Fields III, 2007, 1/1

68.6 cm by 91.4 cm
27 in by 36 in



Morphogenetic Fields IV, 2007, 1/1

68.6 cm by 91.4 cm
27 in by 36 in



Morphogenetic Fields V, 2007, 1/1

68.6 cm by 91.4 cm
27 in by 36 in



Morphogenetic Fields VI, 2007, 1/1

68.6 cm by 91.4 cm
27 in by 36 in



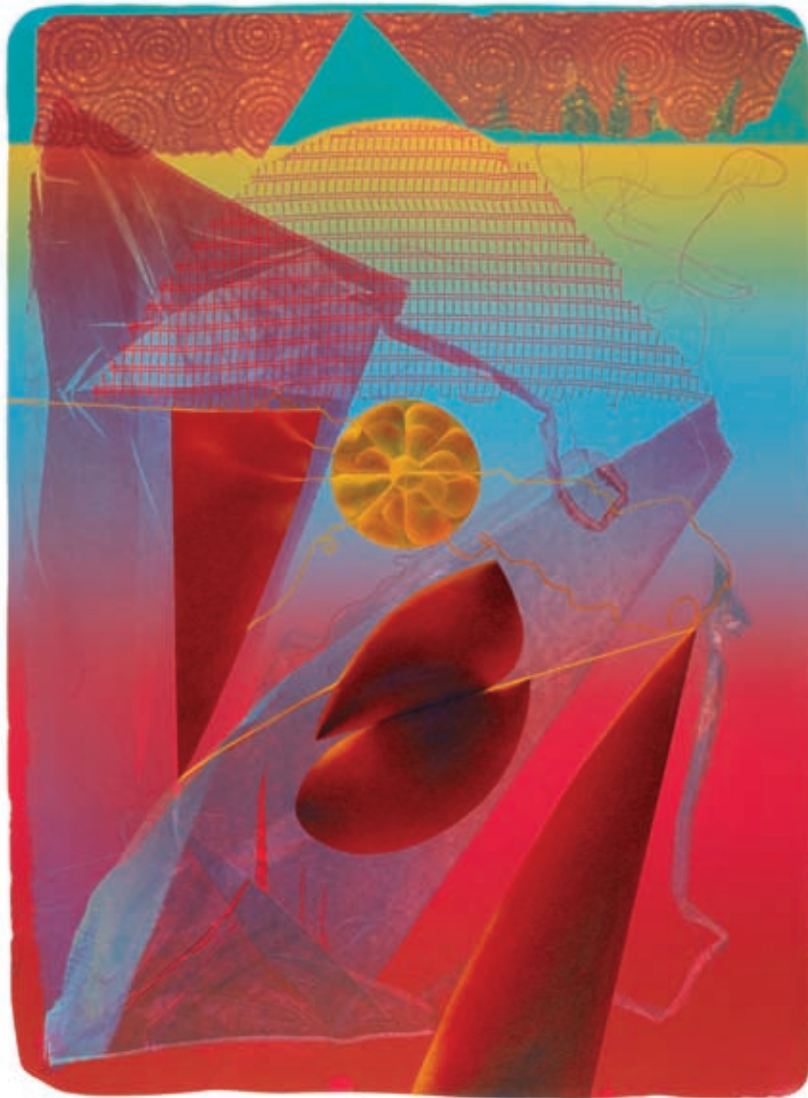
Morphogenetic Fields VII, 2007, 1/1

68.6 cm by 91.4 cm
27 in by 36 in



Morphogenetic Fields VIII, 2007, 1/1

91.4 cm by 68.6 cm
36 in by 27 in



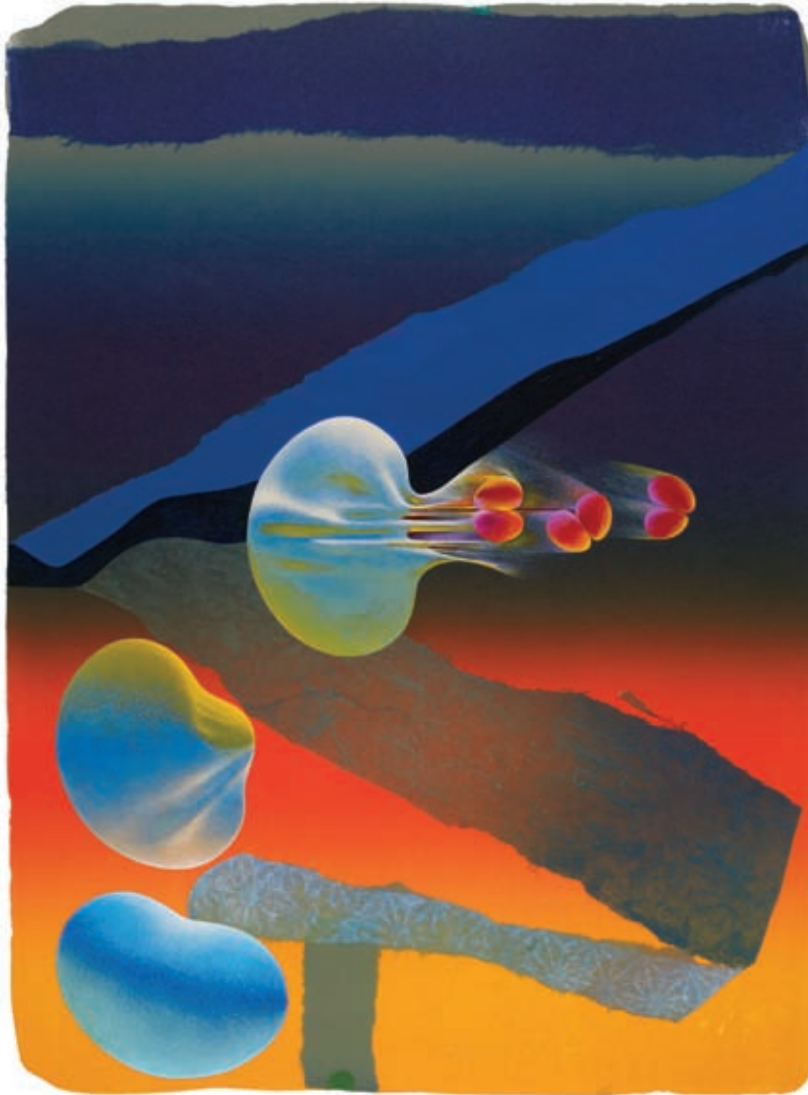
Morphogenetic Fields IX, 2008, 1/1

91.4 cm by 68.6 cm
36 in by 27 in



Morphogenetic Fields X, 2008, 1/1

91.4 cm by 68.6 cm
36 in by 27 in



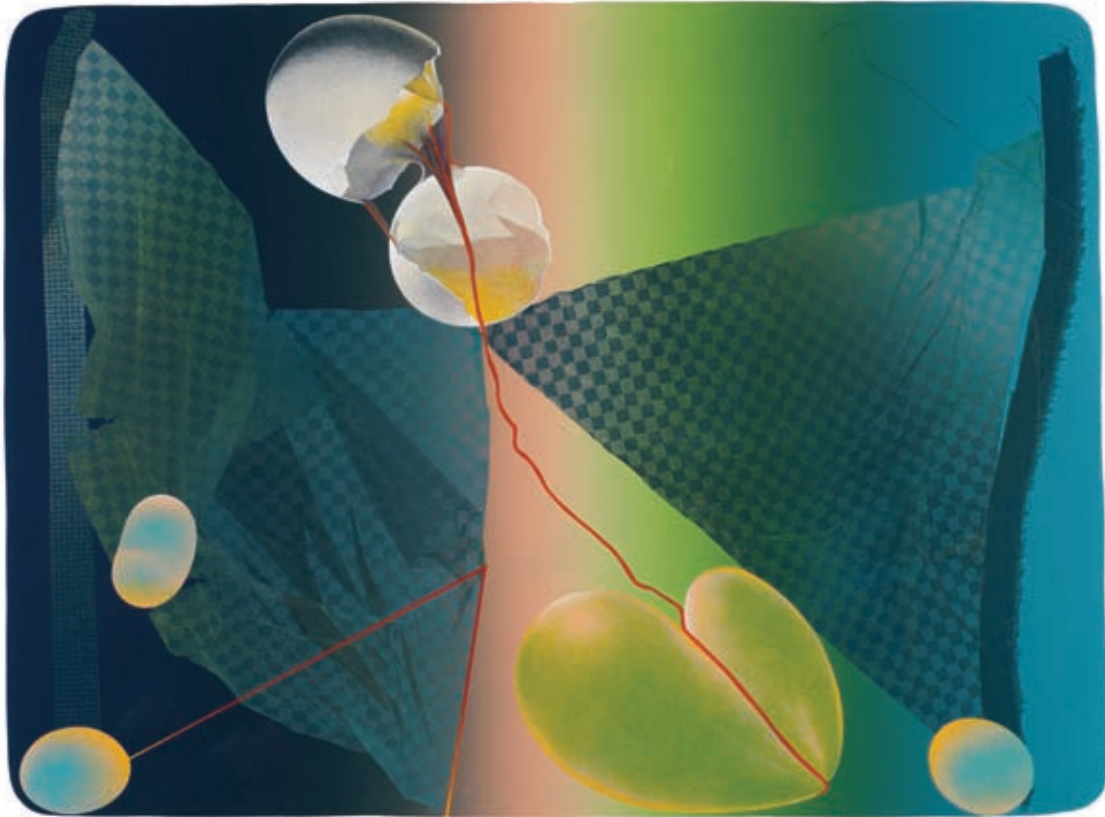
Morphogenetic Fields XI, 2008, 1/1

91.4 cm by 68.6 cm
36 in by 27 in



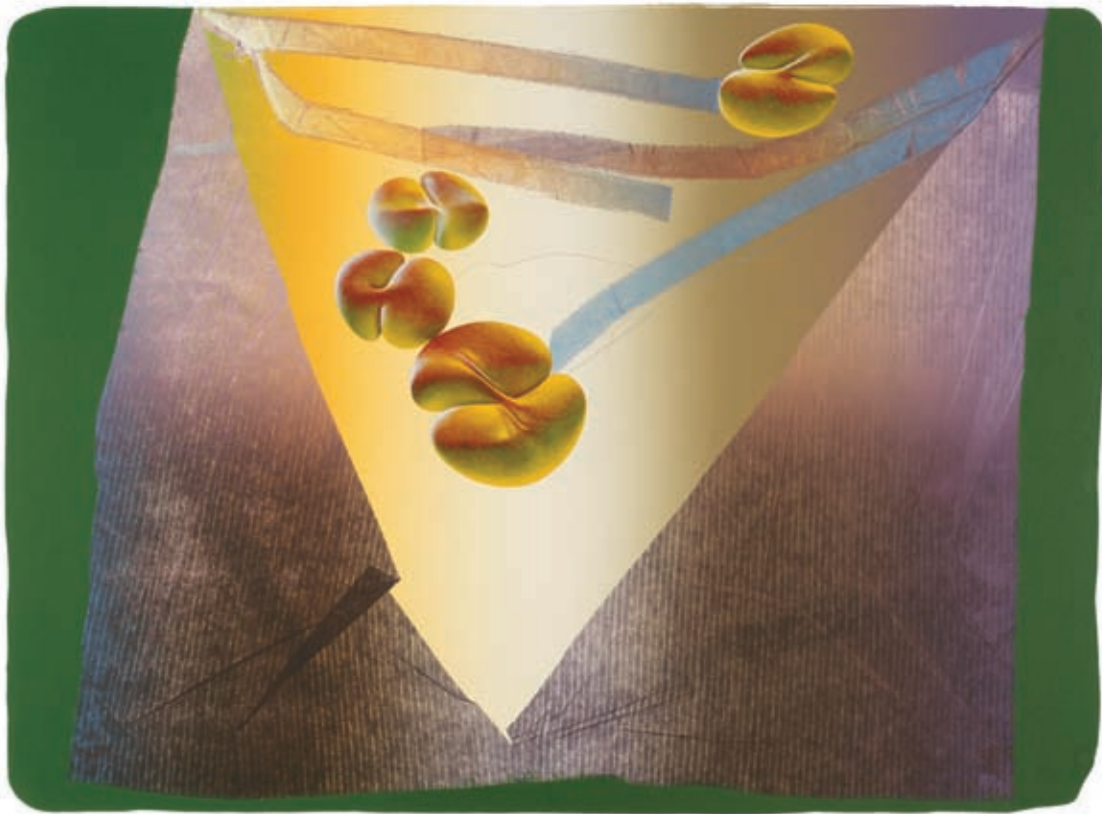
Morphogenetic Fields XII , 2008, 1/1

91.4 cm by 68.6 cm
36 in by 27 in



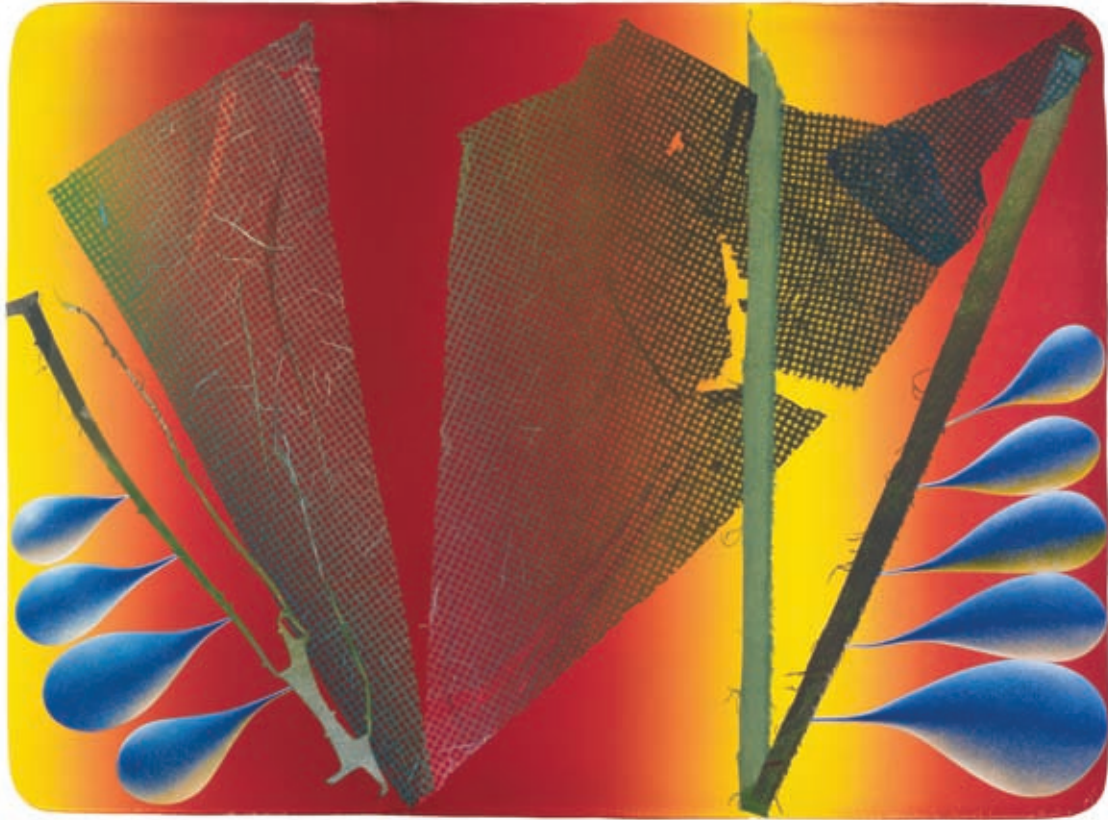
Morphogenetic Fields XIII, 2008, 1/1

68.6 cm by 91.4 cm
27 in by 36 in



Morphogenetic Fields XIV, 2008, 1/1

68.6 cm by 91.4 cm
27 in by 36 in



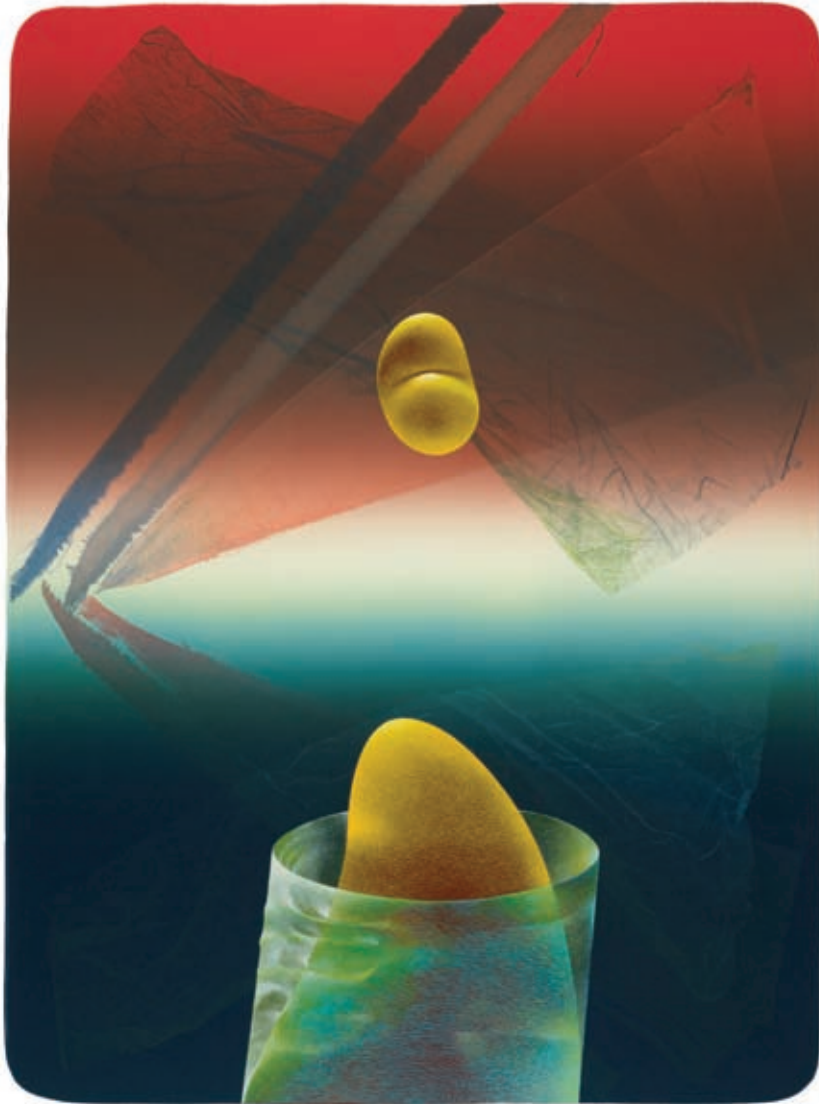
Morphogenetic Fields XV, 2008, 1/1

68.6 cm by 91.4 cm
27 in by 36 in



Morphogenetic Fields XVI, 2008, 1/1

91.4 cm by 68.6 cm
36 in by 27 in



Morphogenetic Fields XVII, 2008, 1/1

91.4 cm by 68.6 cm
36 in by 27 in

BIOGRAPHY OF RUDOLF BIKKERS

Rudolf Bickers was born in Hilversum, Holland, in 1943.

He graduated from the Masters in Fine Arts programme of the Jan van Eyck Akademie in Maastricht, Holland, in 1966 and immigrated to Canada that same year.

For the past 37 years, Bickers has taught in London, Ontario, at H.B. Beal Technical School, the University of Western Ontario, and Fanshawe College (where he served as Chair of Printmaking), and in Toronto at the Ontario College of Art & Design (originally Ontario College of Art) where he was Chair of Printmaking and is currently Professor of Printmaking.

In 1975, he established the master print studio, Editions Canada, where he printed and published many national and international artists (such as Karl Appel and Paul Jenkins), with the best of his graduate students as assistants.

In 1986, Bickers established the Extension Gallery in Toronto. It served the dual purpose of headquarters for the Canadian Print and Drawing Council and special exhibition space for his OCAD students.

In 1988 he published *An Artist's Journey*, a handmade autobiographical book. In 1994 followed the *Shostakovich Quintet*, a set of 5 lithographs and, in 1999, his print portfolio *From Cello to Stone*, based on J.S. Bach's cello suites. In 2002, he organized the collaborative *3 X 3 = 9* portfolio. In the fall of 2006, he celebrated the launch of *My Muses* at Toronto's Goethe Institut; this limited-edition, handmade book consists of twenty (mostly lithographic) triptychs that are unique tributes to twenty of Bickers' most treasured composers.

Among Bickers' fundraising initiatives are, in 2000, the Artists International Direct Support (AIDS) portfolio for Sub-Saharan children affected by HIV/AIDS and, in 2002, the RCA/EPSON Painters Portfolio.

Since 1967 Rudolf Bickers has had over 20 solo exhibitions. He has participated in more than 40 group shows in Canada and abroad including at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow as well as part of MAAPS'

International Printmaking Exhibition tour of Seoul and Beijing during which Bikkers' Beethoven triptych from *My Muses* received extensive media and critical attention in both cities.

Bikkers' work is represented in many national and international collections, including the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Royal Conservatory of Music, Toronto; the Canadian Graphic Society; Kitchener/Waterloo Art Gallery; University of Western Ontario; London Regional Art Gallery, London, Ontario; Philips, Eindhoven; Sears Building, Chicago; Art Bank, Canada Council; National Archives of Canada, Ottawa; Metro Toronto Reference Library; Banff Art Centre, Alberta; Hamilton Art Gallery; New Orleans Museum of Fine Art; Blauwhoed, Rotterdam; KLM Airlines; Rolex Watches; the Toronto Stock Exchange; the Ontario College of Art and Design; the Tamarind Institute, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; the Association Internationale "Dimitri Chostakovitch", Paris; and the Britten-Pears Foundation, Aldeburgh, UK.

He has received several honourable mention and purchase awards of which the most recent is a 1997 Honourable Mention in the Ernst & Young Printmaking Competition. Bikkers was elected to membership in the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in 2001 and awarded the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal in 2002.



Rudolf Bikkers at his easel at an early stage of his painting *Release*.

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