

About: **Early Work 1974-76**

In 1974, I decided to do five series of paintings wherein each individual series would visualize one of the five “classical elements” of nature or, as the Chinese might maintain, one of the five forces (*wǔxíng*, 五行). I felt imbuing my art with a sense of elemental energy might help the new work express a sense of the feminine empowerment that I first unleashed with my 1973 *Projected Power* paintings. Also, I was well aware that the concept of five elements was one associated with many different cultures, thereby promoting my intention for using art to help unite people of differing backgrounds.

[The ancient Greek concept of four basic elements—these being earth, water, air, and fire—dates from pre-Socratic times (circa 450 BCE) and persisted throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, deeply influencing European thought and culture. Plato was responsible for naming them “elements.” Plato’s student, Aristotle, named the concept of a fifth element, *aether*. A somewhat similar philosophic view of the world evolved in China during the Warring States period (475-221 BCE). In Hinduism, the five elements (*pancha bhoota*), are the basis of all cosmic creation.]

I began with water, with *Umi*. (In Japanese, *umi* means “sea” or “ocean.”) Even though I (and others) have called these early works “watercolors,” all use acrylic paint. Over time, I developed various ways of working with acrylic that infused these works on paper with a sense of spontaneity; one early critic pertinently said that I was the “master of the controlled accident.”

After water, I took on air: first with a series of pieces conceived as *Flight* but later with more abstractly representational depictions of air. The *Air* works were painted with an airbrush.

Aristotle's *aether* birthed my *Prana* series. In Hinduism, *prana* means "breath"; it is a life-giving energy that flows in currents through and around the body. In my mind, *prana* conveys a sense of the universality of human thought; it echoes the *qi* (pronounced *chi*, 氣) so essential to Chinese metaphysics. A consistent color scheme united the appearance of the *Prana* works.

My extensive *Earthflow* series cycled between the complexity of *Earthflow #1* and the simplicity of *Earthflow #3*. By including the word "flow" in the series title, I followed the Chinese concept that none of the five forces are fixed, but rather, one flows into the next and is transmuted; existence means change, nothing is static. Intriguingly in retrospect reflection, I did not introduce any earthen material into the media of these *Earthflow* pictures even though later I would do so repeatedly in my *Fire Works*. Toward the end of the series, the paint flow began breaking-up, darkening the mood of the works. My mother who had Parkinson's had her first heart attack in 1975 and I began to reconnect with my early childhood abuse as my paintings morphed into my *I Love Mommy* series. This ambivalent ode to my mother brought out the anger, pain, and lasting trauma that resulted from my mother's wildly inappropriate behavior toward me as a very young child.

Scripture records the statement "Physician, heal thyself"; surely the same is true for an artist. My career as a painter resulted in part from a continuing need to become an incorrigible internal explorer and external researcher; my art practice has been my greatest teacher . . . a devotional activity dedicated to all aspects of healing.