xperiencing the paintings of Charles Mary Kubricht sets you rafting the Grand Canyon, hiking the land and witnessing sunrises and sunsets as never before. If the crystalline glow of Marfa doesn’t lure you west, the work she creates from her studio there will. Kubricht’s work strikes a fine balance between the abstract and the striking realities of the landscape, a poise sought after by Houston’s Moody Gallery and Contemporary Arts Museum. In addition, next spring the Austin Museum of Art will pair Kubricht with Annie Leibowitz in a joint show.

Carolyn Farb: When did your love affair with nature begin?
Charles Mary Kubricht: When I was 11, I moved from Houston to Ocala, Florida, with my mother. That’s where they made the Tarzan movies. I spent a lot of time camping, canoeing and hiking in that beautiful, exotic area. That’s where my inspiration was nurtured. My happiest memories are from being in nature – it’s where I feel the safest.

How did your landscape paintings evolve?
I evaluated all my pre-1989 paintings, and they all had human forms with cityscapes or landscapes in the background. I was always dealing with perspective. I started going more into the backgrounds and less into the foregrounds. Now I do both, but it is not figurative.

How do you begin a painting?
Digital cameras are my sketchbook. I move through the land and get as much documentation as possible. What I take back to the studio has to do with the continuous changes in the landscape – light and dark, movement...
and stillness—all of the experiential quality of the land.

Then I try to simulate the same intensity of being outdoors in my studio by making a more discreet formalized language out of it. I break down these pictorial images into smaller panels and create the grids. It becomes a dialogue between my perceptions outdoors and the way I work. I try to create something that resonates with the feeling that I had when I was outdoors.

**What does it mean when people describe your paintings as “moving visually”?**

The devices I create in my studio are based on cinematic film, and the movement comes through the use of many pictorial panels. Each series has its own rhythm, starting at different points in the image. With the current *Grand Canyon* series, movement starts at the center top panel and moves down and out. With the *Sunset* series, it started in the top left hand corner and moved to the right.

**Tell me about the upcoming exhibition of the *Grand Canyon* cycle at Houston’s Moody Gallery.**

Moody will be showing *Day One, Afternoon*. There are six different large-scale paintings, and each is broken up into 49 different panels. Each panel is a subtle variance of light. Noon is the lightest painting, 1 p.m. is slightly darker, et cetera. They are all warm colors because I’m thinking of the temperatures of the Grand Canyon at that time. Each painting represents my movement through it.

**Where else can we see your work?**

In January 2005, I will have a one-person show at the Galveston Art Center of the first 13 paintings of the Grand Canyon series. Also, I’ll be in a group show *Perspectives @ 25: A quarter Century of New Art in Houston* at the Contemporary Arts Museum.

**Your paintings have been described as reminiscent of Impressionism…**

I am influenced by Pieter Bruegel, Cézanne, Giotto, Ambrogio Lorenzetti, the 14th-century Siena School and NASA photography. What viewers may be seeing is the quality of light I try to capture. Color is experiential. You can’t describe colors. The Impressionists were trying to capture the same kind of thing, and they were also influenced by photography.

**What’s ahead?**

I’m focusing on areas that are examples of time. With the Grand Canyon, you have the appearance of Vishnu Schist, a geological formation that is 1.7 billion years old. You go down through layers and are able to describe time. Also,


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in astronomy, the farther an object is away from you, the further back in time. My next series will contemplate deep time significance.

**What first attracted you and your husband, attorney Ron Sommers, to Marfa?**

We had been coming to Big Bend for many years. Marfa was the place we went every year to celebrate New Year’s Eve because we couldn’t think of a better place to wake up New Year’s Day. The landscape initially is what attracted us to the area. The intensity of the experience with the land is certainly what keeps us here.

**Does Marfa live up to its hype as a new art Mecca?**

It is that, but it’s not why we are here. It doesn’t detract, either. I have met some amazing ranchers who know so much about the land—its plants, animals and geology. I can hike these vast ranches in the middle of nowhere without any trails. Although Marfa’s still an isolated place, the art community continues to develop. I can walk out the back door, however, and encounter a six-foot rattlesnake.

**What do you do when you see a six-foot rattlesnake?**

Call 911. Actually, I have a garden hoe. Here, when you go to the local hardware store to get your hoe to kill rattlesnakes, they’ll sharpen it for you.