



Mary Ann Aitken  
September 23 - November 5, 2016

## Mary Ann Aitken

September 23 - November 5, 2016

What Pipeline is honored to present a selection of previously unshown works by Mary Ann Aitken.

Mary Ann Aitken (b. 1960, Detroit, d. 2012, Brooklyn) was for thirty years a prolific artist whose output included painting, drawing, and impastoed assemblages. During the late 1980s she often painted everyday scenes including the view of Downtown Detroit as seen through the windows of her studio at the Cary Building, and objects at her parents' house in the University District of Detroit. Cropped into 48x48 and 24x24 inch squares, these paintings elude being labelled landscapes or still lives; anticipating Aitken's later interest in photography, they evoke the snapshot moment of a Polaroid square. Viewed through contemporary eyes (which might relate them to the cropping of an Instagram post) they escape their original, now decades-old time period and click effortlessly into our post-digital perspective. Yet what may appear effortless in Aitken's work never was: she spent ample time realizing each work. Her dedication to her vision, largely conceived and contemplated behind private studio doors, will continue to engage audiences well beyond her, and our, lifespans.

Aitken grew up in Detroit and attended Wayne State University, receiving a Bachelors of Fine Arts in 1983. Aitken studied and worked in the shadow of the recognized Cass Corridor artists. She later earned a Masters in Art Therapy from WSU in 1989. During those years she maintained, and lived in, a studio in the Cary Building in downtown Detroit, depicting her environment with a heavy palette. Thick layers of paint consumed whatever material she could get her hands on, including linoleum tile, newsprint, cardboard, and used paper. Her rough impressions recorded unconsidered objects and mundane street scenes.

In 1989, Aitken relocated to Brooklyn where she worked as an art therapist in the drug rehabilitation ward of Woodhull Hospital. She exhibited her work in several group shows in Brooklyn as well as Detroit. Her work from 2007–2010 shows a shift toward abstraction with with color fields of red, yellow or black, embedded with hardened crusts of paint, sand, or even lobster shells. She printed out dozens of copies of digital photographs depicting family and cherished locations such as the Brooklyn Botanical Garden, and manipulated these multiples using water, paint and the printer's own settings. Her investigative nature with materials never subsided.

Aitken was hesitant to ambitiously pursue attention for her work. She did not invite people into her studio until she knew them well. Rather than discuss her own art, she preferred to talk about the exhibits she frequented in New York. But that attitude changed along with her fight against what would be a terminal illness and she left wishes with her loved ones that her life's work be seen. Due to their belief in and dedication to Mary Ann, her work is now known and collected worldwide.

Posthumous solo shows include Cleopatra's, Brooklyn; What Pipeline, Detroit; Trinosophes, Detroit; and Urban Institute of Contemporary Art, Grand Rapids, MI. Group exhibitions include Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland, Tomorrow Gallery, NYC; and Marianne Boesky, NYC. 2016 exhibitions include Marlborough Chelsea, NYC; PSM Gallery, Berlin; and What Pipeline, Detroit. Her work is in the collections of Wayne State University, Grand Rapids Art Museum, and the Detroit Institute of Arts.



Mary Ann Aitken, installation view



Mary Ann Aitken, installation view



Mary Ann Aitken, installation view



Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled (view from Cary Building fire escape)*, circa 1985 - 89  
Oil on masonite  
48 x 48 inches (122 x 122 cm)



Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled (night scene)*, circa 1985 - 89  
Oil on masonite  
48 x 48 inches (122 x 122 cm)



Mary Ann Aitken, installation view





Mary Ann Aitken, installation view



Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled (Sherman Brothers awning)*, circa 1985 - 89  
Oil on masonite  
48 x 48 inches (122 x 122 cm)



Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled (Gratiot and Broadway)*, circa 1985 - 89  
Oil on masonite  
48 x 48 inches (122 x 122 cm)



Mary Ann Aitken, installation view



Mary Ann Aitken, installation view



Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled (red car)*, circa 1985 -89  
oil on masonite  
48 x 48 inches



Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled (basketball net)*, circa 1985 -89  
oil on masonite  
48 x 48 inches



Mary Ann Aitken, installation view





Mary Ann Aitken, installation view



Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled (projector)*, circa 1985 -89  
oil on masonite  
48 x 48 inches (122 x 122 cm)



Mary Ann Aitken, installation view



Mary Ann Aitken, installation view



Mary Ann Aitken, installation view



Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled*, circa 1985 - 89  
Oil on masonite  
24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm)



Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled (Broadway)*, circa 1985 - 89  
Oil on masonite  
24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm)



Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled (Broadway)*, circa 1985 - 89  
Oil on masonite  
24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm)





Mary Ann Aitken  
*Untitled (Gratiot and Broadway)*, circa 1985 - 89  
Oil on masonite  
24 x 24 inches (61 x 61 cm)