

Jo Baer textes de salle

Salle 3.1

Jo Baer was born Josephine Gail Kleinberg in 1929 in Seattle and earned a degree in biology at the University of Washington before enrolling in The New School for Social Research, where she studied Gestalt psychology. She then moved to Los Angeles, where she befriended a circle of artists associated with the Ferus Gallery. Though she first experimented with abstract expressionism—the dominant movement of the era—and soon came to focus on spare, geometric compositions.

The Risen (Wink) features stark geometry and clear outlines, both characteristic of hard-edge abstraction, a style that underwent intense development in California by such artists as Billy Al Bengston and John McLaughlin. A chevron-like shape evocative of heraldic imagery hangs above a second, incomplete geometrical shape, both surrounded by a painted frame of the same colors. This fusing of minimalist and pop elements shows Baer's inclination for blending high and low culture and her interest in the vernacular turn in the Los Angeles art scene.

Salle 3.2

Not long after she returned to New York, Baer's work started to be shown in conceptual and minimalist exhibitions. Lawrence Alloway invited her to join his survey exhibition of "systemic painting," and Mel Bochner included her in the documentary collection *Working Drawings and Other Visible Things*, a cornerstone of Conceptual art. The following year, she participated in the group exhibition *10* at the Dwan Gallery in Los Angeles, alongside Dan Flavin, Agnes Martin and Robert Smithson. But Baer diverged from the Minimalists by embracing the vitality of painting unfettered by perspectivism, exploring syntactic, rather than spatial, abstraction.

From 1962 to 1970, Baer produced several "minimal" paintings whose forms illustrated the dialectic of presence in her work. The square and rectangular compositions consist of shapes in negative—black frames and thin bands of color painted on a white backdrop—creating a relational principle both within and among the works, as well as with the viewer. In this series, Baer experimented with the phenomenon of Mach bands—named after Ernst Mach (1838–1916), the founder of modern phenomenology—in order to observe the optical effects of simultaneous contrasts.

Salle 3.3

The eight works on paper displayed here, all dated between 1960 and 1963, reveal Baer's interest in Minimalist abstraction during that period. These modest works made from simple materials are formal, geometrical sketches that showcase her explorations of pattern, perspective, and symbolism.

Among the drawings, the star is the only geometrical shape that references, in our collective imagination, an object that exists in reality. For the artist, however, it has the same status as any other form. The constellation-like image also bears a logical rather than symbolic meaning, with a system of lines connecting a cluster of points to one another. Despite the rigid, mathematical appearance of these small-scale works, the artist's hand-drawn lines remain visible in a departure from most minimalist art.

Salle 3.4

In 1971, Baer developed a passion for orchids and produced *H. Arcuata*, which takes its title from a Latin botanical name. The long and unusually thick-edged canvas is part of a series that Baer generally referred to as her "Radiator Paintings" and is intended to be hung at floor level. The painted forms are less geometric and more organic than in Baer's earlier work and spill onto the edges of the canvas, inviting the viewer to move around the painting, which is clearly presented as an object. As with her Minimalist works, the artist uses painting to create a relationship between the canvas and viewer.

Starting in 1974, Baer gradually began to abandon abstraction and incorporate linguistic signs into her work. Her 1981 painting *Demi-Pirouette (Half Turn on the Haunches)*, with its choreographic title, includes a feminine form in profile, an ameba, and a mysterious cluster of symbols. Paleolithic forms—and a form of writing made up of circles that evokes megalithic topography—also became a recurring motif in her work at this time. Baer thus forged an alternative path to modernism in order to approximate, as she put it, "some ideal molecular sublime encoded on the cave-walls of our brains."