

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Adaline Kent
May 30 – July 13, 2024

Altman Siegel is pleased to present an exhibition of sculpture, drawings, and uniquely incised paintings on Hydrocal by midcentury artist Adaline Kent (1900-1957). This exhibition marks the gallery's first presentation with the artist's estate and is the first exhibition dedicated to Kent's work in San Francisco in more than two decades.

Adaline Kent lived and worked in the San Francisco Bay Area for most of her life. Inspired by time spent in the mountains of the High Sierra - and her observations of the way bodies move through space - her work captures elegant, elemental movements through biomorphic shapes and forms. Evoking a diverse array of imagery ranging from mountains, streams, and trees to the more abstract infinity symbol, Kent was a pioneer of the mid-century modernist aesthetic, working with luminaries from renowned landscape architect Thomas Church to storied gallerist Betty Parsons. Her dedication to creating visual movement and balance through static form transcends time, remaining as deeply resonant today as it was during Kent's lifetime.

Adaline Kent was born in 1900 into a prominent family of early environmentalists. Her father, California Congressman William Kent, and her mother, Elizabeth Thacher Kent, a leader in the cause of women's suffrage, donated the land that established the Muir Woods National Monument, preserving a large swath of old growth coast redwoods in Marin County, California. In the 1920s, after graduating from college (Vassar 1923), Kent studied under the social realist sculptor Ralph Stackpole while attending the California School of Fine Arts (later known as San Francisco Art Institute) and traveled to Paris to study with Émile Antoine Bourdelle at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. Upon returning to San Francisco, Kent established a studio in the "Monkey Block," becoming a fixture in the vibrant neighborhood of artist studios on Montgomery Street where the Transamerica building stands today.

A self-described addict of the High Sierra, Kent and her husband, fellow artist Robert Boardman Howard, sought inspiration for their sculptures in the mountains, often spending their summers traveling on horseback for weeks at a time. In drawings and sculptures, Kent sought to distill her experiences among these natural landscapes into shapes, gestures, and images. The exhibition includes examples from her 1944 series, *Cascade from the Mountain*, depicting a fluid stream that begins in the shape of an infinity symbol and

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

flows between craggy mountain forms. This symbol, to Kent, represented the endless, regenerative characteristics of the physical world, and formed a recurring theme in her body of work.

Kent was drawn to the mountains in the winter as well; she was an avid skier and an early investor in Sugar Bowl, the Lake Tahoe ski resort that continues to attract San Franciscans into nature today. The 1944 drawing, *Winter Landscape* depicts the bowl from above with sculptural biomorphic beings gliding across the snowy vista.

The 1940s and World War II brought many Americans home who had been living abroad, including Kent's brother-in-law, Charles Houghton Howard (1899–1978), a Surrealist painter who returned from living in London. The influence of Surrealism is evident in Kent's increasingly abstract work. The exhibition includes three incised paintings in Hydrocal, in which the landscape dissolves into biomorphic shapes and forms. Unique in the history of modernism, these works straddle the line between drawing, painting, and sculpture. The infinity symbol recurs here in *Song*, from 1945, which echoes the fluid composition of the *Cascade from the Mountain* drawings, and again in *Writ*, 1947.

By 1949, Kent's work found a wider audience as she became one of the few woman artists to exhibit with storied American artist and New York gallerist, Betty Parsons. As Kent evolved alongside contemporaries such as Ruth Asawa, Mark Rothko, and Isamu Noguchi, her work grew more abstract. Punctuated with negative spaces, these malleable sculptures lacked specificity, evoking imagery ranging from the branches of evergreen trees to the slopes of mountain ranges using dimpled, earthen terracotta. A 1954 trip to Greece, Egypt and Paris inspired a series of later terracotta sculptures on view. These vessel forms draw from the Mediterranean landscapes and ancient artifacts that Kent encountered and documented on her travels. The perforated terracotta forms are reminiscent of a series of her lamps commissioned for the Ahwahnee Hotel, Yosemite National Park's iconic lodge in 1954.

Adaline Kent was a member of the San Francisco Bay Area's most prolific midcentury artistic circle. The second gallery of the exhibition places the work of this Bay Area legend within the context of the dynamic artistic milieu in which she lived and worked. In marrying Robert B. Howard, she joined the "First Family of Bay Area Modernism" including architect John Galen Howard, who designed the Campanile at the University of California Berkeley, surrealist painter Charles Howard and his wife Madge Knight, social realist muralist and printmaker John Langley Howard, architect of Coit Tower Henry Temple Howard, and his wife artist Jane Berlandina.

Adaline maintained close artistic friendships throughout her life and the exhibition includes letters from fellow artists, Dorr Bothwell and Ray Johnson, as well as a painted invitation from Gordon Onslow Ford and a portrait of Adaline Kent by Victor Arnautoff, her classmate at California School of Fine Arts. Kent became acquainted with Diego Rivera, who stayed at the "Monkey Block" with his wife Frida Kahlo while working on his *Allegory of California* fresco for the San Francisco Stock Exchange in the 1930s. She shared a drawing group with David Park and Elmer Bischoff, and Mark Rothko stayed in her family home while teaching in San Francisco during the summers of 1947 and 1949. Adaline studied with master calligrapher Hodo Tobase in 1955 alongside Gordon Onslow Ford and Ruth Asawa.

Adaline Kent's prolific career ended abruptly in a tragic car accident in 1957. The following year, her life and work were celebrated in a retrospective exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art which then traveled to the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York. Through the steadfast advocacy of her family, Kent's work is represented in the collections of many important American Museums today. In 2023, Apsara DiQuinzio

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

curated the first solo museum presentation of Adaline Kent's work in nearly sixty years at the Nevada Museum of Art. *Adaline Kent: The Click of Authenticity* was accompanied by a major monograph solidifying Kent as one of midcentury America's most innovative artists and a key figure in the history of the San Francisco Bay Area. Kent's deep commitment to capturing the authentic energy of our natural landscape, and the feeling of infinity these vistas elicit, continues to resonate through her work. This evocation of limitlessness, this rush of fresh air her art inspires, speaks to the timeless qualities Kent strove to capture in vibrant physical form.

Adaline Kent's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV; Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, NY; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, CA; and Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA. Group exhibitions include Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, CA; Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Utah State University, Logan, UT; Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO; Mead Art Museum, Amherst College, Amherst, MA; Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ; Bolinas Museum, Bolinas, CA; Oklahoma City Museum of Art, Oklahoma City, OK; The Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, CA; Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA; Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA; Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach, CA; National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D.C.; Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, CA; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, TX; Golden Gate International Exhibition, Treasure Island, CA; and Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, Dallas, TX.

For more information please contact Altman Siegel at info@altmansiegel.com or 415-576-9300.