

*Dream Lines*: Marian Zazeela is on view at Artists Space from March 1 – May 11, 2024.

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## ARTISTS SPACE

*Dream Lines*:  
**Marian Zazeela**

March 1 – May 11, 2024

*The writhing rising out of the word is a dragon devouring itself. Like a cat cleaning her fur the tongue of the word licks its scales with flame and the body of the word ignites and takes the shape of its destruction. . . .The second dream is the story of its past life, but it does not recognize itself in its previous form. Several lives later the dream recurs. Several dreams later the life recurs.*

—Marian Zazeela, *The Soul of the Word*, 1963

Artists Space is pleased to present *Dream Lines*, an exhibition of the visionary drawings of Marian Zazeela. Beginning with her abstract calligraphy of 1962, this exhibition traces the radical processes and evolution of Zazeela’s graphic work, presenting seminal and formative drawings that became foundational in the development of her light works, many of which are being publicly displayed for the first time.

For the past sixty-three years, Zazeela has been a central figure of the New York avant-garde. Her expansive practice encompassing painting, calligraphic drawing, film, light projection, stage design, sculpture, and light environments applies rigorous formal procedures to enact states of transcendence. After studying with Paul Feeley, Eugene C. Goossen, and Tony Smith at Bennington College, Zazeela first exhibited her paintings in New York—works comprising calligraphic strokes suspended in expansive color fields—at the 92nd Street Y in 1960. Immersing herself in a Downtown literary and art scene that included LeRoi Jones, A. B. Spellman, Angus MacLise, George Maciunas, and many others, she soon became the muse of legendary filmmaker Jack Smith, collaborating on his seminal photography project *The Beautiful Book* (1962) and his infamous debut film, *Flaming Creatures* (1963).

In 1962, Zazeela produced a series of highly singular drawings that charted the course of her subsequent work: “Through my interest in abstract calligraphy I conceived the idea of borrowing from the forms of letters by taking elemental shapes already existing in cursive writing and manipulating them to create interlocking patterns.” Employing both improvisation and an increasing array of rigorous compositional techniques, Zazeela’s ornamental shapes render the page a concentrated visual field of startlingly complex design. She soon began to obliterate words, repeat and mirror letter forms (often the initials *MZ* and *LY*, those of her partner, La Monte Young), and enact complex modular permutations as some of the means to achieve her exquisite, precise abstractions.

Zazeela began her partnership with composer La Monte Young in mid-1962 and since then her work has most often been experienced within their collaboration. Her light installations, projections, album art, graphics, and poster designs have defined the visual and environmental aspects of their output—first within the early New York Downtown avant-garde underground, The Theatre of Eternal Music (alongside John Cale, Tony Conrad, Angus MacLise, and others), and continuing with Young to the present. Zazeela has defined one strain of her output as “borderline art,” a concept with a double meaning: “With this approach I sought to create an art form that ‘borders’ and challenges the conventional distinction between decorative and fine art by using decorative elements in the fine art tradition. Concurrently, I also created drawings in which borders become the actual content of the works themselves.” Zazeela and Young have lived since 1963 at 275 Church Street in New York, two blocks from Artists Space, and since 1993 their collaborative *Dream House* has been on continuous view at this address.

*Dream Lines* offers an unprecedented opportunity to see an extensive gathering of Zazeela’s drawing innovations—from her earliest calligraphic experiments and language deconstructions to glyph-based modular permutations, to later name portraits employing symmetrical, retrograde and mirror-inverted images that detach the written word from its meaning, to still-later fields of dense collinear dots evoking electromagnetic forces and other natural phenomena.

*Dream Lines*: Marian Zazeela is organized by Artists Space in collaboration with Jung Hee Choi and MELA Foundation.

Marian Zazeela was born in New York City in 1940. She studied painting at Bennington College, Vermont, and is one of the first artists to use light as a medium of expression and perhaps the first to compose recurring motivic and thematic statements with light over time as in music. Over more than six decades, Zazeela has displayed a unique iconographic vision in mediums encompassing painting, calligraphic drawing, graphics, film, light performance, sculpture, and environment. Expanding the traditional concepts of painting and sculpture while incorporating elements of both disciplines, she created an original visual language in the medium of light by combining colored light mixtures with sculptural forms to generate seemingly three-dimensional colored shadows in radiant vibrational fields, enveloping the viewer in a continual interplay of reality and illusion.

In 1962, Zazeela began collaborating with composer La Monte Young to create a total art, resulting in a plethora of pioneering and visionary works over the past 60 years. As artistic director of the legendary intermedia group, The Theatre of Eternal Music, Zazeela created works that form innovative visual components that were integral elements of the group's performances. Zazeela has also performed as a vocalist in almost every concert of the ensemble to date. Zazeela and Young were among the first Dia artists who commissioned numerous large-scale, long-term projects, such as *Dream House* sound and light environments and live performances.

In 1970, she became one of the first Western disciples of renowned master vocalist Pandit Pran Nath and has since performed and taught the Kirana style of Indian classical music. She accompanied Pandit Pran Nath in hundreds of concerts throughout the world and continues to perform in The Just Alap Raga Ensemble, which she founded with Young and Jung Hee Choi in 2002.

Zazeela has presented *Dream Houses*, light installations, performances, and calligraphic drawing exhibitions throughout the United States and Europe including the 2019-2022 *Drawings* at Dia Beacon; 2009 Guggenheim Museum; the 2005 Lyon Biennale; Tate Liverpool; Pompidou Center, Paris; 44th Venice Biennale; MELA Foundation's *La Monte Young 30-Year Retrospective*. The first retrospective of Zazeela's drawings was presented in 2000 at the Kunst im Regenbogenstadl *Dream House* in Polling, Germany.

Zazeela's work has been significantly influential. Her abstract calligraphy was the primary influence on the calligraphy of the great poet and founding drummer of The Theatre of Eternal Music and the Velvet Underground, Angus MacLise. The visionary tradition of her curvilinear graphite on black and dot-style calligraphic drawings has been carried on in the pencil and *Light Point Drawings* of her disciple, Jung Hee Choi. Zazeela's *Ornamental Lightyears Tracery* has been credited to have been the direct influence on Andy Warhol's *Exploding Plastic Inevitable*.

**Checklist**  
(All works are courtesy the artist except where noted)

**Entry wall**

*drawword #7, #8*, 1963  
Pencil on cards  
4 1<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 3 7<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches each

*Performance 10 20 62 of La Monte Young Composition 1960 #13*, 1962  
India ink on card with adjacent paper with typed title  
4 × 8 inches  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Committee on Drawings and Prints Fund, 2024

**Gallery, Left wall**

*Untitled abstract calligraphy*, 1962  
Gray ink on rice paper  
9 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13 inches

*Untitled abstract calligraphy*, 1962  
Colored ink on rice paper  
9 5<sup>16</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13 inches

*Untitled abstract calligraphy*, c. 1962  
India and colored ink, pencil on rice paper  
13 × 9 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches

*Untitled abstract calligraphy*, c. 1962  
India ink on rice paper  
13 × 9 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches

*Untitled abstract calligraphy*, c. 1963  
India and colored ink on rice paper  
9 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13 inches

*Untitled abstract calligraphy*, c. 1963  
India and colored ink on rice paper  
9 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13 inches

*Untitled abstract calligraphy*, c. 1962  
India ink on rice paper  
9 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13 inches

*First Flyer*, 1962  
India ink on rice paper  
13 × 8 1<sup>2</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches

*Untitled*, c. 1962  
India ink on rice paper  
9 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13 inches

*Untitled*, c. 1962  
India ink on rice paper  
9 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13 inches

*Untitled*, c. 1962  
India ink on rice paper  
9 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13 inches

*Untitled*, c. 1962  
India ink on rice paper  
9 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 13 inches

*Untitled*, c. 1962 - 1963  
India ink on paper towel  
9 1<sup>4</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 11 inches

**Back wall**

*Message*, 1962  
India ink on marbled card stock  
2 1<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 6 7<sup>16</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches

*Index*, 1963  
India ink on white index list and yellow paper  
8 1<sup>2</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 4 3<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches

*Line of YZ's #2 (3/13/64)*, 1964  
India ink on rice paper  
7 1<sup>2</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 10 inches

*Line of Y's #1 (3/13/64)*, 1964  
India ink on rice paper  
7 1<sup>2</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 10 inches

*Square of Z's in Square of Y's #4 (4/10/64)*, 1964  
Graphite on black paper  
9 × 11 7<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches  
*Circle of Z's in Square of Y's*, 1964  
Graphite on black paper  
9 × 12 inches

*Design D, #3*, 1966  
India ink on graph tracing paper  
8 7<sup>16</sup>/<sub>16</sub> × 10 1<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Committee on Drawings and Prints Fund, 2024

*6 VII 67*, 1967  
Ink and pencil on tracing paper  
11 × 8 1<sup>2</sup>/<sub>2</sub> inches

*88 II 11 after 1968-69*, 1988  
India ink and pencil on Strathmore paper  
9 1<sup>2</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 11 inches

*19 XI 66/2*, 1966  
India ink on card  
3 × 5 inches

*29 XI 66*, 1966  
India and sepia ink on card  
3 × 5 inches

*19 XI 66/1*, 1966  
India ink on card  
3 × 5 inches

*10 VII 67*, 1967  
India ink on card  
4 × 6 inches

*14 XII 67*, 1967  
India ink on card  
4 × 6 inches  
*14 XII 67*, 1967  
India ink on card  
4 × 6 inches

**Right wall**

*Drawing for Tape Box 8 11 69*, 1969  
Colored ink and pencil on Strathmore paper  
9 3<sup>4</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 9 3<sup>4</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches

*Drawing for Tape Box 6-23 X 69*, 1969  
Colored ink and pencil on Strathmore paper  
9 3<sup>4</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 9 3<sup>4</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches

*Drawing 1968*, 1968  
Day-glo ink and pencil on Color-aid paper  
18 × 24 inches

*Untitled drawing for record cover*, 1969  
India ink on Strathmore paper  
13 3<sup>4</sup>/<sub>4</sub> × 16 1<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches

*Drawing for Shandar Disques Cover (VII 73)*, 1973  
India ink on Strathmore paper  
16 1<sup>8</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 20 1<sup>4</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches

*7 x 7 / 1*, 1982-83  
India ink on paper  
10 7<sup>8</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 13 1<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches

*7 x 7 / 2*, 1981-83  
India ink on paper  
10 7<sup>8</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 13 1<sup>5</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches

*Untitled (for posters)*, c. 1978  
India ink on paper  
13 7<sup>8</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 10 7<sup>8</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches

*Untitled (for 30-Year Retrospective)*, 1987  
India ink on paper  
18 1<sup>8</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 24 inches

*Spiral for Big Band 90 II 7*, 1990  
India ink on paper  
18 × 24 inches

**Rear wall**

*81 III 21 (for Raga Cycle posters)*, 1981  
India ink on paper  
10 7<sup>8</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 13 7<sup>8</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches

*7 II 73 - 2 II 74*, 1973-1974  
Graphite on black Color-aid paper  
13 3<sup>8</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 13 3<sup>8</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches  
Private collection

*Portrait of Helen 10/12*, 1977  
Black ink on graph paper  
8 1<sup>2</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 11 inches

*Portrait of Philippa 1/6*, 1977  
Red/brown marker on canary yellow paper  
8 1<sup>2</sup>/<sub>2</sub> × 10 3<sup>4</sup>/<sub>4</sub> inches

*03 X 17/2*, 2003  
India ink on paper  
11 × 13 5<sup>8</sup>/<sub>16</sub> inches