

Sonia Gechtoff

*Objects on the New Landscape*

Bortolami (The Upstairs at 39 Walker) 12 Jan — 2 Mar 2024

Andrew Kreps Gallery (394 Broadway) 12 Jan — 17 Feb 2024

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There is little stillness in the frenzied abstractions of Sonia Gechtoff (Ukrainian American, b. 1926, d. 2018), whose paintings evoke colliding waves, gusts of wind, and falling water. As with other Abstract Expressionists of her era, Gechtoff had a reverence for the sublime and a penchant for dramatic, boundless form. Though she largely eschewed any objectivity or symbolism, she delved deeply into a mysticism derived from non-Western sources and lineages.

Gechtoff was born in Philadelphia to Jewish émigrés from Odessa and Bessarabia. Leonid, a notable landscape painter, died when she was just 15 but left an indelible influence on his daughter. Gechtoff inherited his knowledge of Byzantine art and developed a fascination with icon painting. She utilized several recurring motifs in her compositions which resemble some of the hallmarks of icons: a heavily stylized natural world; a “reverse perspective” in which distant forms on the horizon are enlarged; frame-like borders which recall the inset rectangular *ark* within an icon’s wood panel; and moons and celestial shapes reminiscent of halos.

She later began to look to the asymmetries and aesthetics of Japanese ukiyo-e. This is seen most overtly in *Hiroshige Revisted II*, 1988, and a companion painting, *Streamers II*, 1989, rendered in the distinctive materials she utilized the last several decades of her career—lavish brushstrokes of acrylics overlaid with lustrous, feverishly applied graphite line.

This exhibition’s title references the title of the inaugural group exhibition at the influential Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles, *Objects on the New Landscape Demanding of the Eye*. Gechtoff was exhibited alongside Clyfford Still, Richard Diebenkorn, Jay DeFeo, Frank Lobdell, and John Altoon. This 1957 show was immediately followed by Gechtoff’s first major solo show, also at Ferus Gallery.

Sonia Gechtoff exhibited during her lifetime at institutions including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco; The Menil Collection, Houston; and the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. She was also notably featured in the 1958 Brussels World Fair and the 1960 São Paulo Bienal, organized by the Museum of Modern Art, New York. She had solo exhibitions at galleries including Ferus Gallery, Poindexter Gallery, Gruenebaum Gallery, and Kraushaar Gallery.

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Works by Sonia Gechtoff are in the permanent collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Legion of Honor, San Francisco; Denver Art Museum; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Academy of Design, New York; Oakland Museum of Art; Stanford University, Palo Alto; Worcester Museum of Art; and the San Jose Museum of Art, among many others.