

Deborah Remington

Mirrors

6 Sep–19 Oct 2024

39 Walker

Bortolami is pleased to present the second solo exhibition by Deborah Remington (b. 1930, d. 2010) at the gallery. *Mirrors* features works from three distinct junctures in Remington's career, from some of the artist's most iconic compositions to rare and never before exhibited paintings. The exhibition coincides with the release of the artist's first monograph, published by Rizzoli Electa.

Remington achieved notoriety in the early 1960s for an inscrutable approach to hard edge abstraction, painting an iconography of irregular, organic shapes rendered with startling precision. Her heraldic imagery, both biomorphic and mechanistic at once, encircled luminous, mirror-like surfaces painted with gradients of black, white and gray. She painted the irregular perimeter of each shape with brilliant bands of orange, blue or green, as if the metallic surfaces within were a conduit for the bold, electric lines which surrounded them.

In 1965, Remington relocated from San Francisco to New York. Both the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and The Whitney Museum of American Art acquired major paintings and in the ensuing two decades, dozens of American museums followed suit. For whatever acclaim she received, Remington evaded contextualization with other contemporary painters. As Grace Glueck wrote in a 1977 *New York Times* review, "One of the oddest, least traceable images in current art is the mysterious form persistently painted by Deborah Remington." Remington was seldom asked to exhibit with other artists and most discourse on her painting avoided the subject entirely.

This body of work culminated in Remington's first survey exhibition, which traveled to several museums in California. Her final hard edge painting, *Zanthus* (1983), was finished just in time for this show. It depicts a reflective surface split in two, illuminated from multiple directions.

Two years after the survey show, Remington opened exhibitions in New York and Los Angeles with radically reinvented paintings. She stripped away almost every recognizable facet of her work, save for her color palette. Her mirrored shapes were now angled into perspectival space, as if they were tabletops in dimensionally ambiguous "rooms." On them, she placed arrangements of painterly, otherworldly forms, as if she had crumpled up the compositions from previous decades and painted them anew, as fully dimensional still life objects. Her thin oil glazes were supplanted by gestural brushstrokes that recalled her Abstract Expressionist beginnings in 1950s San Francisco and the influence of one of her first mentors, Clyfford Still, at the California School of Fine Arts.

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The late '80s exhibitions received glowing praise from critics, who commended Remington's conviction to this hairpin turn in her aesthetics. Nonetheless, Remington seldom exhibited paintings such as *Santee* (1986) or *Troas* (1987) again. *Mirrors* marks the first time they have been shown together in nearly 40 years.

Remington, in fact, rarely exhibited from 1990 until her passing in 2010. She grew disillusioned with the vagaries of the art world, its periodic aversions to painting, and a persistent gender bias towards women artists. Despite a diminished audience in her later years, Remington continued to innovate in the studio, creating many works which would not be seen until after her death. Paintings such as *Vertum* (1995) depict compressed, sculptural masses of blue, red, and white receding into dark and indeterminate space. Her mirrored shapes, now imbued with colorful glimpses of their surrounding environments, were no longer parallel to the picture plane or tilted into space, but twisted into splintered, animated forms suggestive of a constant flux – a fitting parable to an artist who remains unmoored to any art historical canon.

Artist Biography

Deborah Remington, a 256 page monograph, will be published this month by Rizzoli Electa. A forthcoming retrospective of Deborah Remington's work will originate at Phoenix Art Museum, curated by Rachel Sadvary Zebro, the Museum's Associate Curator of Collections.

Recent posthumous exhibitions of Remington's work have led to reevaluations of her work. Exhibitions at Craig F. Starr and Bortolami in 2021 received praise in outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Artforum*, *The Brooklyn Rail* and *Art in America*. Museums and foundations such as the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Hood Museum at Dartmouth University, Rollins College Museum of Art, Denver Art Museum and the Shah Garg Foundation have recently acquired works from different decades of the artist's life.

Remington began her career in 1950s San Francisco as a student of Clyfford Still, Elmer Bischoff and David Park at the California School of Fine Arts. After two years living and teaching calligraphy in Japan, Remington returned to California, exhibiting at Dilexi Gallery alongside artists such as Jay DeFeo and Ron Nagle. In the 1960s and 1970s, she exhibited with Hamilton Gallery and Bykert Gallery in New York, Pyramid Gallery/Ramon Osuna Gallery in Washington, D.C. and Darthea Speyer in Paris, a gallery known for introducing Remington, Sam Gilliam and Leon Golub to European audiences. Following exhibitions in the 1980s at Jack Shainman Gallery in New York and Shoshana Wayne Gallery in Los Angeles, Remington exhibited once more at Darthea Speyer in 1992. Her last solo exhibition of new work was hosted by Mitchell Algus Gallery in 2001. Remington passed away in 2010 from complications of cancer at the age of 80.

Works by Remington are in the permanent collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Whitney Museum of American Art; The National Gallery in Washington, D.C.; Berkeley Art Museum; The Art Institute of Chicago; Smithsonian Museum of American Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Carnegie Museum of Art; Cleveland Museum of Art, among many others.

Remington exhibited at institutions including The Whitney Museum of American Art; The Art Institute of Chicago; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; San Antonio Museum of Art; Cleveland Museum of Art; Fondation Maeght, Saint-Paul-de-Vence; Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne; Auckland Museum, New Zealand. Posthumous group exhibitions have been staged at venues including Addison Gallery of American Art (2023); Munch Museum, Oslo (2023); Whitechapel Gallery, London (2022); Museum Barberini, Potsdam (2022); Albertina Modern, Vienna (2022); Phoenix Art Museum (2022).