

MNUCHIN GALLERY

WIDEWALLS

After Decades, the Abstract-Expressionist Painter Lynne Drexler Is Finally Getting Her Due



Installation view of Lynne Drexler: The First Decade at Mnuchin Gallery, presented in collaboration with Berry Campbell, October 27 - December 17, 2022. ©The Estate of Lynne Drexler. Photography by Tom Powel Imaging.

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Art history always remains unjust to certain figures, with reasons differing from one situation to another. An interesting example is an American painter Lynne Drexler whose domains have been obscured for decades until the recent revival in the art market.

Although many women have been excluded from the canons simply because of the patriarchal norms, that was not really the case with Drexler. In fact, in 1971, the artist settled on a remote Monhegan island and practically withdrew from the art world. Nevertheless, she continued painting with the same vigor without having to comply with the latest tendencies or demands of

the art market. To secure some earnings, at a certain point, Drexler even painted seascapes for tourists.

After her death, her works were exhibited in several regional galleries, and ten years later, the first proper retrospective of her work took place at the Monhegan Museum in Maine. Ever since, the interest in her work has been increasing. However, it wasn't until recently that Lynne Drexler gained wider recognition thanks to the increasing demand following several prominent sales in auctions.

Her legacy will now be properly honored with an exhibition jointly organized by two New York galleries - Mnuchin Gallery and Berry Campbell. Titled *Lynne Drexler: The First Decade*, the exhibition will be her first solo one in the city after almost forty years.



Lynne Drexler - *Untitled*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 55 1/4 x 84 3/8 inches (140.3 x 214.3 cm) © The Estate of Lynne Drexler

Who Was Lynne Drexler?

In the mid-1950s, Lynne Drexler studied art at Hunter College under Robert Motherwell and Hans Hofmann, who informed her interest in Abstract Expressionism. Thanks to Motherwell, she learned much about composition and draftsmanship techniques, while her liberated brush stroke was greatly influenced by Hofmann, who insisted that color very much impacts the composition.

By 1959, Lynne Drexler developed a personal and rather innovative style characterized by swatch-like brush strokes delivered in dense clusters. Alongside the teachings of her above-mentioned tutors, the artist was dazzled by her own reflections and art historical influences such as

Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and Fauvism. She stepped out of the constraints of Abstract Expressionism and explored the impact of color and gesture at the time Pop and Minimalism became dominant tendencies.

In 1961, Lynne Drexler had her first solo show at the prestigious Tanager Gallery, a co-op whose members included Willem de Kooning and Alex Katz. The same year she met painter John Hultberg (1925-2005), whom she married in 1962. The two had a tumultuous relationship. Hultberg's gallerist, Martha Jackson, helped him buy a house on Monhegan Island as a perfect getaway from the art world and the place he could deal with alcoholism. Initially, the couple used it as a temporary vacation spot and later turned it into their full-time home. Hultberg's alcoholism and a shifting art world disrupted their relationship, and they eventually separated. Drexler stayed living at the island, continuing to depict the island people and the surrounding landscape.



Left: Lynne Drexler - *Untitled*, c. 1960. Oil on canvas, 61 x 57 3/4 inches (154.9 x 146.7cm) © The Estate of Lynne Drexler Photo: Timothy Doyon / **Right:** Lynne Drexler - *Rose Nocturne*, 1962. Oil on canvas, 68 x 49 1/2 inches (172.7 x 125.7 cm) © The Estate of Lynne Drexler Photo: Timothy Doyon

The Exhibition

In joined efforts, Sukanya Rajaratnam, Partner at Mnuchin Gallery, Christine Berry, and Martha Campbell, co-owner of Berry Campbell, are revisiting the oeuvre of Lynne Drexler to give the nod to a woman artist who has been marginalized for decades. The exhibition will bring a selection of paintings and works on paper the artist made between 1959 and 1969, including loaned works

from public and private collections and those from the Estate of Lynne Drexler that have never been seen before.



Installation view of Lynne Drexler: *The First Decade* at Mnuchin Gallery, presented in collaboration with Berry Campbell, October 27 - December 17, 2022. ©The Estate of Lynne Drexler. Photography by Tom Powel Imaging.

At Mnuchin Gallery on the Upper East Side, visitors can see the works created between 1959 and 1964, including the immaculate *Rose Nocturne* (1962), marked by highly concentrated pink shades. Berry Campbell showcases the works Drexler made between 1965 and 1969, among them *Smoked Green* (1967), a painting that encapsulates how her abstract imagery moves toward more defined blocks of color.

The aim of this two-folded chronologically framed presentation is to contextualize Drexler's domains concerning post-war American abstraction by highlighting the signature style she was devoted to for decades. The goal of the exhibition is to provide scholarships on the artist. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalog authored by Gail Levin, with contributions by Lois Dodd and Jamie Wyeth. Levin perfectly emphasized the story of Drexler:

Imagine a story of an artist who escaped from an art world rife with competition and her struggle to find herself, landing on an enchanted island, where she lived happily ever after, painting, though forgotten, for the rest of her life... After she died in 1999, her paintings got discovered, and collectors now compete to own them.

Unraveling The Lynne Drexler Oeuvre

Drexler's early abstract works seem to be in increasing demand in the art market as the interest in the artist's work progresses. This March, Christie's New York sold Drexler's mosaic-like painting

Flowered Hundred (1962), for \$1.2 million, which was originally estimated at \$40,000 to \$60,000, while another work, *Keller Fair* (ca. 1959), estimated for \$15,000, was sold for \$69,300. Two months later, the same auction house sold yet another Drexler painting, *Herbert's Garden* (1960), for \$1.5 million. On November 18th, Drexler's *Tropical Calm* (1963) will be auctioned at Christie's, with an estimate of \$60,000 to \$80,000.

This sudden boom in the art market of a female artist who was barely known to the art world is in complete opposition to the fact Drexler despised the art world. Nevertheless, the current exhibition definitely provides a unique opportunity for the wider audiences to get to know her work and showcase that Abstract Expressionism was far from a male-dominated movement.

The exhibition Lynne Drexler: The First Decade will be on view at Mnuchin Gallery and Berry Campbell Gallery in New York until December 17th, 2022