

VAN DOREN WAXTER

Hedda Sterne: Structures and Landscapes, 1950-1968

November 1 – December 22, 2018

Van Doren Waxter, 23 East 73rd St, New York, NY 10021

Opening Reception

November 1, 2018 – 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Exhibition walkthrough 6:30 p.m.



Hedda Sterne, *Untitled (Lunar Halo)*, c. 1950, Oil on canvas, 30 1/4 x 40 1/2 inches

Van Doren Waxter is pleased to announce *Hedda Sterne: Structures and Landscapes, 1950-1968*, on view at 23 East 73rd Street from November 1 to December 22, 2018. The exhibition traces the prolific artist's shift from man-made forms, such as machines, roads, and cityscapes, to organic and atmospheric ones during two highly productive decades, the 1950s and 1960s. A curated selection of key works, many of which have never been seen before, and in a variety of mediums including paintings, works on paper, and drawings made with early technical, Rapidograph pens elucidate her diverse and experimental practice. Her classically Abstract Expressionist concern, with gestural abstraction and all-over composition is apparent throughout, while at the same time, many works reference the visual world.

In a new scholarly essay commissioned exclusively for the exhibition, art historian Nancy Princenthal asserts that Sterne was an “early adopter” of materials like commercial spray paint, enthusing that the artist “welcomed the super-fine continuous ink line permitted by Rapidograph pens.” Sterne’s energetic, activated, and graceful abstractions suggesting landscapes, moons, and floral forms, Princenthal writes, are “among her richest and most enigmatic compositions.” A striking illustrated catalogue and a selection of archival materials drawn from the Hedda Sterne Foundation, including correspondence and photographs, will contextualize Sterne and her work for viewers and illuminate her command of painting, drawing, philosophy, and science.

This is the second solo exhibition at Van Doren Waxter for the artist since exclusive representation of the Hedda Sterne Foundation was announced in 2015 and comes at a time of heightened critical visibility for the artist. Sterne is included in the forthcoming *Epic Abstraction: Pollock to Herrera* at The Met Breuer in New York, which will explore large-scale abstract painting, sculpture, and assemblage, from the 1940s to the twenty-first century. In 2017, the artist was included in *Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The artist's *New York VIII* (1954), which was on view at the entry to the exhibition, was acquired into the museum's permanent collection in 1954, the same year it was completed. The exhibition

arrives in a cultural moment when a number of female artists are being rediscovered and appreciated for their artistic, intellectual, and technical innovations and critical influence.

Hedda Sterne (b. 1910 - d. 2011) was an active member of the New York School, and is often associated with the first generation of the Abstract Expressionists with whom she regularly exhibited, but she was unique among her AbEx contemporaries, having grown up amongst the European avant-garde. When she fled her native Romania for the U.S in 1941, she was quickly accepted as part of the community of Surrealist exiles who coalesced around Peggy Guggenheim in New York during the war.

The artist's earliest work made in New York continued in the Surrealist context, but once settled in America, the new world that she was exploring took precedent. Paintings of the 1940s reflect the urban landscape, interiors, and the anthropomorphic quality of machinery, but as the decade progressed and her surroundings changed, so did her work. Sterne's travels within the U.S., summers spent in the North East, and a month-long cross-country road trip in 1956 provided the time to explore details of nature. By 1950, Sterne's work had become looser, more atmospheric. Mechanical structures merge with their surroundings, landscapes fill the canvas and organic shapes become the central focus, as can be seen in *Baroque, No. 3*, 1953-54. A year-and-a-half spent living in Venice in the early 1960s lead to new interpretations of wide-open spaces and horizons. Compositions are bisected as though by horizon lines, the notion of reflected water and sky are apparent in paintings such as *Vertical Horizontal*, 1963-64.

Hedda Sterne's exploration and abstraction of structures and landscapes is made even more experimental through her manipulation of materials and variety of techniques. Paintings may be heavily layered, or built thinly by brush or poured paint. In *Yellow Structure* and *Green Landscape No. 2*, both 1952, areas are scraped or buffed down to reveal the canvas or sublayers of paint. In the mid-1960s, Sterne began a series of drawings using Rapidograph technical pens, taking advantage of the uniformity of line to stack and layer ink and dense vegetation.

Structures and Landscapes, 1950-1968 provides a view of this highly inquisitive and exploratory body of work from the 1950s through the 1960s. Sterne was continuously seeking new ways of interpreting the world around her. Experimental and autobiographical, Hedda Sterne's work is a diverse artistic practice, always seeking to explore and process the world in which she lived.

Special walkthrough

On Thursday, November 1, 2018 at 6:30p.m. at the gallery's 23 East 73rd Street location, join Shaina Larrivee, Executive Director of The Hedda Sterne Foundation and Sarah L. Eckhardt, Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, for a special walkthrough of the works and archival materials on view. The walkthrough is free and open to the public.

Gallery Information

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