

DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Skin of the City, a solo exhibition of paintings made between 1980 and 2000 by Martha Diamond (1944–2023), on view in Los Angeles at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. from March 23 through April 27. Join us for a panel discussion featuring Katherine Brinson, Daskalopoulos Curator of Contemporary Art at the Guggenheim Museum; Olivia Funk, Director of the Martha Diamond Trust; Paulina Pobocho, Robert Soros Senior Curator at the Hammer Museum; and artist Mary Weatherford, at 5 PM on Friday, March 22, followed by an opening reception from 6:30 to 8 PM. Skin of the City is Diamond's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles.

Throughout her six-decade career, Martha Diamond dedicated herself to the investigation of built environments, exploring corporeal relationships to volume and perspective that often manifested through depictions of the metropolis. Born in New York City in 1944, Diamond moved with her family to the borough of Queens. From an early age, she accompanied her father—a doctor—on long car rides into Manhattan, where he would go on house calls. These trips imprinted the memory of urban movement, a shifting skyline, evolving infrastructure, and a sense of place as she continued to encounter—and draw inspiration from—skyscrapers in her life and work. In 1969, Diamond moved into a studio in the Bowery, where she would live and work for her entire career. She drew direct inspiration from friends and influences, such painters as Willem de Kooning, Alex Katz, Franz Kline, and Jackson Pollock, and poets such as Bill Berkson, Ron Padgett, Peter Schjeldahl, and many others. As evidenced by her long-standing friendships, Diamond was deeply invested in the community and kept an active curiosity for a range of perspectives influenced by a fully engaged exterior world.

Skin of the City surveys a range of paintings on canvas and Masonite studies made by Diamond over two pivotal decades, during which she solidified her standing in post-war American painting, specifically the New York School. The exhibition documents an intricate study of volume, mass, scale, and space along with the formal and thematic developments Diamond made during this period, characterized by earlier depictions of cityscapes from

pedestrian and aerial perspectives and a later move towards the less referential visual language of abstraction.

Diamond's early works responded to architectural forms and ancient monuments, such as pre-Columbian mounds—but New York City, in its many views and iterations, became her signature motif. Vibrant paintings of the metropolis were an exercise in interrogating what architecture is and can be, especially when represented in painting. However, Diamond's oeuvre moves beyond this foundational interest in modern infrastructure—it possesses an acute sense of formal exploration that pushes her work into the realm of abstraction. Using her nondominant left hand, Diamond worked *alla prima*, creating gestural, almost liquid-like brush strokes across her canvases. And, while her process evolved with maturity and knowledge of the medium, she consistently began her ideas on Masonite to address any material concerns more immediately on a smaller scale. In the 1990s, she also added the creation of "Atlases": a collection of sketchbooks filled with art, people, and places, which she continuously referenced to make her paintings.

In the 1980s, Diamond developed an emotive use of color characterized by dramatic contrasts of gray shadows across facades and deep blue skies, as seen in works such as High-C (Detail) (1982). Her continued experimentation of what a brush can do pushed her technical form and dedication to the aerial-viewed edifices and shadowed, noir-like corners of Manhattan. Influenced by the motion of moving images and the shifting perspective of the camera lens, the works Diamond made during this era call to mind cinematic representations of the metropolis employed in early film noir and French new-wave cinema. In the same way that a camera lens can zoom into the non-visible towering corners of a skyscraper, so too did Diamond's canvas, foregrounding a single building into a focused image of reflective mass and tone in a populated skyline. The late 1980s were also a time in which Diamond literally expanded her vision, making her largest paintings to date and working in even more vibrant colors; the scale of these works, such as Yellow Sky (1986),

allowed her to immerse herself—and the viewer—in the infrastructure she was so dedicated to.

In Towers (1986), a wash of fleshy pink gives shape to two buildings that puncture the surface of the canvas. Here, Diamond inscribes herself into the work, marking her place in the memory of the buildings and the site itself by featuring two diamond-shaped rooftops at the center of the work. The way Diamond experienced New York City and its rapidly changing topography is crucial to understanding the development of her work. She painted her own perception of the city and its environs from memory, interested in how places, and her own subjectivity, could leave lasting visual impressions on the mind and body.

If her paintings from the 1980s were referential to the cityscape, the 1990s was an era in which Diamond condensed the rush and the frenetic energy of the city by capturing its environmental qualities and turning them into materially rich abstractions. Narrowing the width of the canvas, Diamond began working vertically as she moved away from the defining representation of architecture toward a kind of softness that made way for lush, melting lines and over-expressive broad swaths of color. In these works, Diamond's use of pale reds, blues, and yellows addressed more atmospheric conditions—refractive light, the direction of wind—percolating on the surface of the canvas.

Diamond's life and work emerged from a response to her beloved New York City and the energy that pulsed around her. Formally, her advanced understanding of the painterly medium—specifically color and line—was used to show the urban city in transition over several decades. As such, the artworks on view in Skin of the City are a direct reflection of the haptic encounter that the body has to space—an intimate impact in which Diamond dedicated herself so wholly to studying and depicting during her storied career.

Martha Diamond (1944–2023) will be the subject of an upcoming survey exhibition, Deep Time, on view at the Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville, Maine from July 13 through

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October 13, 2024, and at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut from November 17, 2024 to May 18, 2025. Diamond has also been the subject of solo exhibitions at the New York Studio School (2004); Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Maine (1988); and Portland Museum of Art, Maine (1988), among many others. She has also participated in important group exhibitions, including Beautiful, Vivid, Self-contained (curated by David Salle), Hill Art Foundation, New York (2023); Visionary Painting (2017) (curated by Alex Katz), Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine; Changing Soil: Contemporary Landscape Painting, Nagoya/Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Nagoya, Japan (2010); Invitational Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture, American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York (2001, 1991, and 1990); Inventing the American Landscape: A Dialogue with the Visual World, North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh (1998); Whitney Biennial 1989 (curated by Richard Armstrong, John G. Hanhardt, Richard Marshall, and Lisa Phillips), Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1989); American Painting Since the Death of Painting (curated by Donald Kuspit and presented in association with the USSR Union of Artists), Kuznetsky Most Exhibition Hall, Moscow (1989); and MetaManhattan, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1984). Her work is in the permanent collections of many institutions, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine; Guggenheim Museum, New York; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. The recipient of an Academy Award for Art from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2001), Diamond has taught at the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Madison, Maine. For thirty-six years (1982–2018), Diamond served on the Skowhegan School’s Board of Governors.