

Martha Diamond

After Image
May 1 – June 14, 2025
New York

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present *After Image*, an exhibition of paintings and studies by Martha Diamond. The exhibition will be on view in New York at 520 W. 20th St. from May 1 through June 14, 2025. An opening reception will take place on Thursday, May 1 from 6 to 8 PM. A panel discussion featuring Min Sun Jeon, Chris Martin, and Eileen Myles on Diamond's work and legacy will be held at the gallery on Thursday, May 8 at 6 PM.

Over the course of several decades of material and formal exploration, Diamond developed a singular, yet iterative, approach to representing urban spaces, predominantly from a pedestrian perspective. Featuring works made between the 1980s and early 1990s, *After Image* charts a significant transition in Diamond's work from the representational to the abstract. While the artist became known for her dramatic depictions of the New York City skyline—which she continued to make throughout her career—the works in this exhibition offer an important elaboration into more focused forms in which physicality and volume are implied through the use of sketch-like gesture, color, and light.

Inspired by a fascination with the buildings that filled the world around her, and, as she noted in a Skowhegan lecture in 1980, by an interest in “forms people would arrange, forms that were used symbolically,” Diamond found enduring inspiration and framework early on in her career. Just as person-to-person relationships develop with a kind of back-and-forth, ever-changing adaptation to meet both parties' needs, so too did Diamond respond to the mutation of the city's topology, cultural networks, and daily frictions. Her interpretations of what it means to represent the city continued to evolve and fluctuate throughout her life: At times the city was a skewed grid piercing a dark sky, while at others—as in the works on view—the city existed as painted movement, oblique shapes, dense shadows, reflected light, and felt expressions rather than representational ones.

The viscosity with which Diamond's paint lives on the canvas is a result of her wet-on-wet process that builds up the surface of the painting, lending a sculptural quality to each work. Diamond began experimenting with oil because of her desire to push the paint further around the canvas, something that cannot be achieved with quick-drying acrylic paint. After being given several unwanted tubes of oil paint by a fellow artist, Diamond took the opportunity to manipulate the material and also to use the brush as a tool with which she could draw out longer strokes through this wet-on-wet technique.

Diamond would regularly create studies for her large-scale paintings, each study becoming an opportunity to gain a better understanding of what paint could do. By including several of her studies, *After Image* emphasizes Diamond's commitment to her subject, producing with each iteration a composition that allows the viewer a new entry point to engage not only with the built environment but also with the material possibilities of oil paint. Painting, as Diamond viewed it, is about physicality and the way a body interacts with a paintbrush and

canvas. The artist approached each painting from a human perspective and with an innate understanding of that physicality.

After Image celebrates not only the technical skill and approach to materials, color, and subject that is specific to Diamond, but—more importantly—the distinct visual recollections, memories, and experiences that made up her life. In a city like New York, comprised primarily of angular concrete and brick, organic shapes emerge through warped images on a mirrored glass facade or rainfall that covers the streets. In this way, Diamond's paintings catalog her own unique experiences in an urban landscape as well as more universally understood interactions with the outside world.

Martha Diamond (b. 1944, d. 2023) was the subject of the major survey exhibition *Deep Time*, co-organized by the Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville, Maine (2024) and The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, Connecticut (2025). Other solo exhibitions of her work have been held at the New York Studio School (2004); Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Maine (1988); and Portland Museum of Art, Maine (1988), among others. Notable group exhibitions include *Surface Tension: Etchings from the Collection*, Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, Maine (2024); *Beautiful, Vivid, Self-contained*, Hill Art Foundation, New York (2023); *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); and Whitney Biennial 1989, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1989). Her work is in the permanent collections of 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; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.