

Mary Weatherford

The Surrealist

May 16 – June 28, 2025

David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present *The Surrealist*, an exhibition of new paintings by Mary Weatherford. The exhibition, which will occupy two of the spaces at the Los Angeles gallery, is on view at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. from May 16 through June 28, 2025. An opening reception will be held on Friday, May 16 from 6 until 8 PM.

Weatherford is a fearless believer in painting's ability to reflect and express facets of life that would otherwise remain invisible, unexplored, and unfelt. She reveres and challenges legacies of modernist formalism, Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, and other twentieth-century—as well as a host of earlier—art historical movements in equal measure, producing both grand gestures and subtle disruptions that allow her work to communicate extremes of beauty and pathos.

In *The Surrealist*, Weatherford demonstrates this emotional and technical range by working at an array of different scales and formats, and by using a variety of materials. The show features everything from vast murals to medium-format canvases. In addition to the neon lights that she has affixed to some paintings, she has also incorporated coral and starfish, revisiting an interest in such objects that dates to the late 1990s. These additional elements introduce a bracing—even surreal—presence in the fields of luminous color that characterize Weatherford's work.

The painting that gives the show its title is an alternately brooding and seductive expanse of warm, pinkish, and reddish tones and high contrast chiaroscuro. Anchoring its upper left corner are a vertically oriented white neon tube and a large starfish whose curving arms find echoes in the swooping, organic movement with which Weatherford's paints move across the linen. While the starfish—disjunctive, surprising, disarmingly somatic and sexual—is the most readily “surrealist” part of the painting, the work establishes a nocturnal, dream-like ambience that manages to be both menacing and comforting. The achievement of such poetic paradoxes is possible only because Weatherford takes risks, and because she understands that pleasure in painting is dependent on its ability to surprise viewer and maker alike.

Such risk-taking is not limited to compositional or conceptual moves. Even when it comes to the selection and sourcing of her materials, Weatherford is known to embark on quests, often international in scope, to find what she needs. In the case of this exhibition, several of the works feature the prominent use of cadmium red pigment, which plays an important role throughout the history of painting, but which is no longer available in the United States. As she found that the rich saturation and radiance of true cadmium were too integral to her process to give up, she developed a series of workarounds that eventually enabled her to make her own paints with internationally sourced cadmium.

A major mural, eleven feet tall and twenty-four feet wide, is one of the most vivid and layered works of the artist's

career, and one that demonstrates the merits of Weatherford's material commitments. Like the infinite recesses of flowers or the engulfing folds of supernovas, the cadmium red, white, and black passages that dissolve into one another across the painting's surface are as strange and familiar as the insides of our own bodies or the contents of dreams. Despite its scale—and the boldness and freedom of Weatherford's approach to paint application—the work offers innumerable small, mysterious moments of transition in which colors give way to each other and to the textures of the linen support. It also exemplifies the synthesis of ambition and intimacy that makes her paintings at once immersive and immediately relatable.

These qualities are readily apparent throughout *The Surrealist* as Weatherford makes productive use of her own history by finding new life in the coral and starfish elements that have returned to her work after more than thirty years. This process of self-observation, revision, and eternal return finds an echo in a fourteenth-century anonymous illumination of a woman named Marcia as described by the poet Giovanni Boccaccio, who cited her as a notable woman from antiquity who excelled in the visual arts. Depicted in an act of self-portraiture, the woman holds a mirror that holds her image, just as the painting she creates does, and just as the illumination itself holds all three Marcias. Weatherford took inspiration from this uncanny representation of what it means to observe the self observing itself, reflecting in turn on the renewal and transformation of her own processes—whether these are technical and formal approaches or her responsiveness to events in the world, other works of art, the natural environment, or fluid elaborations of thought and feeling. As the show's title suggests, harder-to-define phenomena like dreams, urges, and intuitions are also part of her purview. Weatherford makes the immaterial material, not only by evoking it or creating visual metaphors for it, but by making paintings that function as physical, immediately knowable objects with elusive, seemingly ever-shifting cores.

Mary Weatherford was the subject of the survey exhibition *Canyon–Daisy–Eden*, presented at the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY (2020) and SITE Santa Fe, NM (2021). Other solo exhibitions of her work have been presented at Museo di Palazzo Grimani, Venice, Italy (2022); Aspen Museum of Art, CO (2021); Marian Miner Cook Athenaeum, Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, CA (2014); Todd Madigan Gallery, California State University at Bakersfield, CA (2012); and LAXART, Los Angeles, CA (2012). Recent group exhibitions include *Color is the First Revelation of the World*, Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, CA (2024); *Making Their Mark*, Shah Garg Foundation, New York, NY (2023); *America: Between Dreams and Realities, Selections from the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden*, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, Montreal, Canada (2022); *Aftereffect: Georgia O'Keeffe and Contemporary Painting*, Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, CO (2019); *Between Two Worlds: Art of California*, SFMOMA, San Francisco, CA (2017); and *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (2014). Her work is in the permanent collections of institutions including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, CA; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Tate Modern, London, England; Brooklyn Museum, NY; K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA. In 2019, Lund Humphries published an in-depth monograph surveying the artist's oeuvre. Weatherford lives and works in Los Angeles.