

ARTFORUM

Marcia Marcus

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The twenty-three paintings by Marcia Marcus here deliver one knockout after another. In the oval portrait *Nude with Mirror*, 1965, a woman languorously appraises her own reflection. In *Florentine Landscape*, 1961, three ghostly, pale figures and a pumpkin patch appear like holograms beamed into an ancient garden. In *Frieze: The Porch*, 1964, three distinctly different pictures—a double portrait of the critic Jill Johnston and the painter Barbara Forst, a self-portrait of the artist in a billowing floral robe, and a picture of her as a child with her father—are all crammed together in a way that feels weirdly spacious.

Marcus, who is now eighty-nine and no longer working, excelled at a very particular style of compositional strangeness. She used oils and acrylics, canvas and linen, gold and silver leaf, graphic patterns and actual textiles, hand-drawn leaves and piles of sand, all collaged into singular paintings holding elements of portraiture, still life, and landscape together in awkward but exhilarating tension. Her figures, highly stylized though often sketchy, occupy an extremely shallow picture plane, while her exquisitely detailed grounds plunge into perspectival spaces characterized by preternatural clarity.

Johnston, a friend of the artist, described Marcus's style as "rigorously formal yet dramatically intimate," combining a sense of "intense lyrical abstraction" with an "uncanny realism," which accounts for the fact that her figuration is all detail and defiance. In her heyday, Marcus was bold, her milieu decidedly mixed, her work clearly innovative. Nearly half of the paintings here have been drawn from private or institutional collections. Her historically pivotal, star-studded biography screams for greater recognition. Why does Marcus remain so little known? Maybe this show, museum-like in quality and covering fifteen key years, will at least shift the question from a why to a what-if.



Marcia Marcus, *Nude with Mirror*, 1965, oil and gold leaf on canvas, 47 1/2 x 30 1/2".

— Kaelen Wilson-Goldie

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