

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Eric Firestone Gallery is pleased to announce its participation in the **Survey Section of Art Basel Miami Beach 2019, Booth S8** with a solo presentation of work by **Miriam Schapiro** (1923-2015), highlighting her hard-edged geometric work from 1966-71. This body of work, made during her years in Southern California, is perhaps less known than her work as Pattern and Decoration artist and pioneer of the Feminist art movement. However, it is no less radical. In the freedom of her studio at the University of California, San Diego, Schapiro explored the use of large scale, iconic geometric forms which connected to her identity as a woman, along with the architecture, light, and landscape of the area. In the scientific community of La Jolla, Schapiro discovered the potential of computers in relationship to her work, becoming one of the first artists to explore computer imaging.



Miriam Schapiro, *Big Ox*, 1967, acrylic on canvas, 90h x 108w in.

In this period, Miriam Schapiro was represented by André Emmerich Gallery; she was the first woman to join the gallery in 1958. At the time she was making work in the Abstract Expressionist vocabulary, although it was still rooted in the body and experiences of womanhood. By 1960 Schapiro began to include more geometric elements in her paintings, especially the motif of windows and boxes. She was captivated by the aperture form, and its relationship to a woman's home and her body.

In 1965 Schapiro continued to explore geometric elements in her work and began to work with what would become a recurrent motif: a grid of sixteen windows. Her New York studio had a large gridded window, looking over Broadway. The motif allowed her to explore the modernist grid, while also referring to actual, observed objects.

In 1967, Schapiro moved, along with her husband Paul Brach, to Southern California, to teach at the University of California, San Diego. Free from the constraints and hegemony of the New York art world, Schapiro would challenge core assumptions about painting. This catalyzed a breakthrough in her style. She began to use iconic forms and symbols, which often reference letters of an imaginary alphabet, as the starting-point of her painting process. Working with a physicist at UCSD, Schapiro developed a system that allowed her to feed a drawing consisting of basic geometric shapes into the computer, which would plot each point on vertical and horizontal axes and generate infinite variations.

Barbara Rose contextualized her work in a 1967 Artforum essay as "abstract illusionism," noting that Schapiro's paintings, unlike her peers, "have the imagistic overtones of a quasi-Surrealist architectural fantasy. But the type of space they employ is similar because it takes advantage of reversible illusions—in Miss Schapiro's case, illusions of a highly complex and sophisticated variety—in order to establish

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the purely imaginary and artificial nature of pictorial space.”

“Big Ox” (1967) a seminal work of this period, will be on view at Art Basel Miami Beach. The painting can be read variously as an illusionistic rendering of the letter O superimposed on the letter X; an abstract hexagonal spatial construction in orange and pink; or — as Schapiro would later describe it — her “explicit cunt painting.” She considered it a declaration of herself, on a grand scale. In conversation with Linda Nochlin, she noted that it was “a very aggressive painting” made in her studio at UCSD: the only department studio occupied by a woman. An alternate version of Big Ox is in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, California. The form, which Schapiro considered to encapsulate “so much of myself” would be explored from different angles, in paintings like “Side Ox” (1968) and “Fallen Ox” (1969-70).



1971 installation of works by Miriam Schapiro at André Emmerich Gallery. André Emmerich Gallery records and André Emmerich papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The area around the OX shape is painted in metallic silver. She used metallic, reflective paint as a way of suggesting illusionistic, infinite space, and also proclaiming the painting as a mirror of the self.

The spirit of these works would lead Schapiro into further experimentation. Their play between figure and ground set a tone for how painting can morph into unexpected directions. While in California, Schapiro would, along with Judy Chicago, found the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts, and create the legendary installation “Womanhouse.” She challenged the dichotomy of “high” art by incorporating decorative art and crafts that were traditionally gendered as female. These became part of works she termed “femmage” to denote the continuity of high art collage and work made by anonymous women - which she collected and was given by other artist friends.

Schapiro’s pioneering work and her history are more relevant now than ever. Schapiro’s work is featured in museum exhibitions around the world. A hard-edged painting (“Jigsaw,” 1969) was part of the Whitney Museum’s 2019 exhibition “Spilling Over: Painting Color in the 1960s.” Her work is currently on view in “With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972- 1985” at MOCA, Los Angeles; as well as “Where Art Can Happen: The Early Years of CalArts,” recently on view at the Kestner Gessellschaft, Hanover, Germany; and traveling to the Kunsthaus, Graz, Austria, in early 2020.

Art Basel Miami Beach | Opening Hours:

Wednesday, December 4, 2019, 11am to 8pm
(Private View, by invitation only)

Thursday, December 5, 2019, 11a, to 3pm
Vernissage (by invitation only)

Public Days:

Thursday, December 5, 2019, 3pm to 8pm
Friday, December 6, 2019, 12 noon to 8pm
Saturday, December 7, 2019, 12 noon to 8pm
Sunday, December 8, 2019, 12 noon to 6pm

For Further information, contact efg@ericfirestonegallery.com

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