

**New York, NY:** Eric Firestone Gallery is pleased to present: *What About the Human Figure?* featuring historic work by: **Martha Edelheit, Shirley Gorelick and Marcia Marcus.**

The title of this exhibition is based on title of a 1962 Dore Ashton article, published in response to two New York figurative exhibitions, one at the Museum of Modern Art, and one at Kornblee Gallery. In the article, Ashton says, "...it has always struck me that the problem of the human figure is never far from the thoughts of any painter."

In her article, Dore Ashton critiques most of the artists in the MoMA show for trying to have it "both ways" - generalizing the figure into near-abstraction and treating it with "little real love."

This show considers Ashton's critique, looking at three artists who were dedicated to attentive observation of the figure: not generalizing or abstracting. They each believed in capturing the essence of personality and identity through painting, and bringing people on the margins into the center.

**Shirley Gorelick (1924-2000)** depicted people that society often preferred to leave invisible. Libby Dickerson, a middle-aged African American woman, was a repeated model. Gorelick painted Libby with her husband and their two children, bringing attention to their mixed-race family. She recast the Three Graces as three African-American women, as well as three African-American men who worked as art handlers. A woman with muscular dystrophy, shown in her wheelchair beside her husband, was another subject.

**Marcia Marcus (b.1928)**, who was included in the Kornblee show, was singled out by Dore Ashton as an exception to her critique. She called Marcus a "good draftsman" who "can plot a canvas with unreal, flexible spaces without losing the impact of the lineaments of her figures."

In her paintings, Marcus addressed motherhood, race, and identity. Her monumental painting "Frieze: The Studio" shows a self-portrait of the artist, the cultural critic Jill Johnston, the choreographer Sally Gross, and the filmmaker Raymond Saroff, who was known for documenting artist "Happenings."

**Martha Edelheit's (b.1931)** work addressed female desire, the body, and skin as a "canvas" for tattoo imagery. The flesh of the figures Edelheit depicted became places where the dreams and fantasies of the models emerged. In the 1960s, Edelheit began to work from life. She was captivated by the experience of working with models in the studio, and the interaction between artist and model that allowed her access into people's personal lives and challenges.

In a landmark article on feminist art, writer Maryse Holder said, "One of Edelheit's talents is to offer a portrait of a personality through the body. She removes the female from the abstract realm of current female flesh fashions to show us familiar bodies. What Edelheit, who is acutely attuned to her models, was doing in the act of her painting was

letting the woman's life define her —her existence was her essence.” Edelheit does all of this with a sense of humor: showing real people in familiar, non-scenic New York locations.

***What About the Human Figure?*** examines the feminist achievement of figurative painting from the 1960s and 70s.