

HOLLIS TAGGART

Hollis Taggart to Present an Exhibition of Michael (Corinne) West's Paintings and Archives From 1950s – 1970s

*Chronicling an Artistic Practice:
Michael West Paintings and Archives from the 1950s to 1970s*
On View January 9 to February 22, 2025

December 19, 2024 – Hollis Taggart is pleased to present its fourth solo exhibition of Michael (Corinne) West (1908–1991) since taking on representation of her estate in 2019. Her featured works from the 1950s to '70s —some of which will be exhibited for the first time—will be presented with related ephemera sourced from her archives, providing viewers with a more holistic look at the inner workings of this Abstract Expressionist artist by exploring her thoughts, motivations, and varied contemporary influences. *Chronicling an Artistic Practice: Michael West Paintings and Archives from the 1950s to 1970s* will be on view on the first floor of Hollis Taggart from January 9 through February 22, 2025, with an opening reception on Thursday, January 9, from 5-8PM.

A painter and poet of great spirit and vitality, West produced explosive, highly gestural Abstract Expressionist works. A student of Hans Hofmann and a close friend of Arshile Gorky, West associated and exhibited with members of the thriving New York avant-garde scene starting in the mid-1940s. Though her early compositions closely resemble those of some of her peers, in the late 1940s and early 1950s West moved confidently into a more original aesthetic mode. The artist began to rework earlier, more colorful gestural abstractions with heavy accumulations of neutral-colored paint. West's works from the late 1950s onwards exemplify her powerful use of automatism, with vigorous slashes, splatters, and brushstrokes that coalesce into energetic masses.

Though at the forefront of dialogues that shaped the Abstract Expressionist movement, the fiercely independent West was largely indifferent to art world fame and distanced herself, though not entirely, from the contemporaneous art scene. Even so, her artistic contributions to Abstract Expressionism and American art history deserve to be highlighted. When Hollis Taggart acquired the artist's archive, the gallery was delighted to discover that West was a studious cataloguer of her thoughts and experiences from the New York art world. She left behind a voluminous collection of journals, personal photographs, correspondence, sketchbooks, studio notes, poems, and philosophical essays on art.

For this exhibition, the gallery has chosen to display archival material specific to individual paintings, such as images of the works when they were first exhibited, the original exhibition catalogues, or notes the artist took about specific paintings. At times these notes reveal her cutting commentary about the art world of her time – in one she describes “third rate realism displayed in gold frames [that] looked like someone had just cleared the attic” – and at others they reveal important details about the first times these works were exhibited. In a note about the painting *White Writing* (1966) – displayed here for the first time since its original exhibition – West notes, “Last night, a Buddhist leader bought it.” The notes accompanying *Gento Nise* (1978) include West's meditations on the title and meaning of the work alongside a to-do list that includes a visit to the dentist.

Chronicling an Artistic Practice demonstrates not only the important insight that can be gained from showing artworks alongside relevant personal papers, but also how an artist's personality,

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sense of humor, and approach to daily life can be revealed through such archival materials. These materials lend valuable context—not just to specific works of art—to West’s highly distinct vision and style. In doing so, this exhibition captures the gallery’s ongoing engagement with expanding the narratives of art history by illuminating not just the artworks of an underrecognized artist but also her essence and personhood as a whole, as embodied by the informal records she maintained throughout her life.

Born in 1908 as Corinne West, the artist spent most of her formative years in Ohio, first in Columbus and later in Cincinnati. There she attended the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music before enrolling the Cincinnati Art Academy in 1925, after opting for a career in the fine arts. West relocated to New York in 1932, continuing her art education the following year at the Art Students’ League under Hans Hofmann, though she quit after six months as she felt his following was too cultish. West exhibited widely during her lifetime, including at the Rose Fried Gallery in 1948 and three years later at the Stable Gallery. In the late 1950s, West received a solo exhibition at the Uptown Gallery, New York, as well as the Domino Gallery in Washington, D.C. Her one-person show at the Uptown Gallery received praise for its energy and vitality, drawing comparisons to Pollock’s work. The artist’s work has received critical attention over the past six decades, including exhibitions at Art Centre, NY (1935), Stable Gallery, NY (1953), Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center (1996) and a traveling exhibition at the Georgia Museum of Art (2007-08).

About Hollis Taggart

Founded in 1979, Hollis Taggart presents significant works of American art, showcasing the trajectory of American art movements from the Hudson River School to American Modernism and the Post-War and Contemporary eras. Its program is characterized by a deep commitment to scholarship and bringing to the fore the work of under-recognized artists. The gallery has sponsored several catalogue raisonné projects, most recently for the American Surrealist artist Kay Sage, and has been instrumental in advancing knowledge of such artists as Alfred Maurer, Arthur B. Carles, and more recently, Theodoros Stamos, Marjorie Strider, and Michael (Corinne) West. In the summer of 2019, the gallery announced the formal expansion of its primary market business and focus on the presentation of contemporary work. It continues to expand its roster of contemporary artists, focusing on emerging and mid-career talents. With more than 40 years of experience, Hollis Taggart is widely recognized by collectors and curators for its leadership, expertise, and openness, on matters of art history, market trends and opportunities.

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