

MAD WOMEN

Kornblee, Jackson, Saidenberg, and Ward
Art Dealers on Madison Avenue in the 1960s

Curated by Damon Brandt and Valentina Branchini

September 8 - October 22, 2022



DAVID NOLAN GALLERY

24 East 81st Street New York NY 10028

Billy Al Bengston
Norman Bluhm
Lee Bontecou
Louis Bourgeois
John Chamberlain
Jim Dine
Rosalyn Drexler
Jean Dubuffet
Claire Falkenstein
Dan Flavin
Julio González
Joe Goode
Grace Hartigan

Alex Hay
Hans Hofmann
Robert Indiana
Alfred Jensen
Bob Thompson
Alex Katz
Paul Klee
Joan Mitchell
Louise Nevelson
Pablo Picasso
Richard Stankiewicz
Paul Thek
Andy Warhol

David Nolan Gallery is pleased to announce MAD WOMEN, an exhibition profiling pioneering women gallerists Jill Kornblee, Martha Jackson, Eleanore Saidenberg, Eleanor Ward, and their respective exhibition programs that flourished along Madison Avenue in the 1960s. During a complex and fraught decade in American history, each of these groundbreaking women became an essential and defining part of the contemporary cultural landscape, all of which remains relevant today.

Madison Avenue, located on an Uptown-Downtown axis in Manhattan, is the ideal retail destination between the residential gold coasts and museums of Fifth and Park Avenues. Shops and galleries proliferated in the 1950s and 1960s along or close to Madison Avenue, forming a robust inter-connected community that catered to an expanding and inquisitive audience. Influential art critics Lawrence Alloway, John Ashbery, Dore Ashton, John Canaday, and Donald Judd were frequent Saturday afternoon visitors, moving amongst a fluid crowd of well-heeled clients and penniless young devotees of the more freewheeling Downtown art scene. Every Friday, The New York Times ran an expansive black and white patchwork quilt of printed ads, calling attention to the extraordinarily diverse array of the best of both European and American artistic creativity. It was in the midst of this fertile urban avenue of art and commerce that the Kornblee Gallery, Martha Jackson Gallery, Saidenberg Gallery, and Stable Gallery flourished.

In 1955, **Eleanore Saidenberg**, no doubt over the protestations of her almost exclusively male competition, was awarded the sole representation of Picasso for North America. Armed with an already vibrant classical exhibition program that included Paul Klee, André Masson, Julio González, and Jean Dubuffet amongst others, throughout the 1960s she became an early inspiration, mentor, confidant and supporter of the neighboring Madison Avenue dealers working in the often more arduous and volatile contemporary art field. It was an extension of her character and the professional concern for her colleagues that she became a founding member of The Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA).

Jill Kornblee, a reserved and intense graduate of Bryn Mawr College, opened her first gallery in 1961, moving soon after to 58 East 79th Street, where she quickly earned a reputation for being a dealer of astute intellectual and aesthetic vision. She gave inaugural exhibitions to such maverick talents as Michelangelo Pistoletto, Dan Flavin, Rosalyn Drexler, and Alex Hay.

Further down Madison Avenue, often dressed in Dior, **Eleanor Ward** reigned over Stable Gallery for close to twenty years with a similarly impressive roster of fresh talent, including Andy Warhol, Paul Thek, Marisol, and Joan Mitchell. Quoting Dore Ashton, "Eleanor [Ward] injected the art scene, which sometimes seemed a little bland, with a sense of urgency. Her decision, at a key time in American art, made Stable important." Ward suddenly closed the gallery in 1970, when she felt "the art world had gotten too commercial. Although some dealers may get a 'high' from their sales, that aspect was far less interesting to me than discovering new artists, selecting work and installing the show itself."

Less than six blocks away from Ward, **Martha Jackson** worked her own brand of personality and magic, a kindred spirit to Ward and Kornblee in both her evangelical approach to being an artist-centric dealer and emotional commitment to cutting edge contemporary art. Early exhibitions of such future art world luminaries as John Chamberlain in 1960, Lucio Fontana in 1961, Louise Nevelson in 1963, and Bob Thompson in 1964 are just a part of this compelling story until her untimely death in 1969 at age 62.

Where ultimately only four dealers became the necessary curatorial focus of this exhibition, it should be noted that there were a heartening number of other quality galleries run by women along Madison Avenue at that time: Grace Borgenicht, Antoinette Kraushaar, Helen Serger, Marian Willard, Virginia Zabriskie, Gertrude Stein, Terry Dintenfass, and even a young Paula Cooper (then under the name of Paula Johnson) either initiated, nurtured, or inherited serious and well considered programs that warrant acknowledgment.

Jill Kornblee, Martha Jackson, Eleanore Saidenberg, and Eleanor Ward each possessed that essential talent of a keen and prescient eye working in tandem with an innovative and responsive approach to a business that was often as challenging as it was rewarding. Their shared passion and courage, exemplified by the advocacy and connoisseurship reflected in each of their exhibition programs, remain a testament to a tenacity and brilliance that is worthy of closer attention. In a curatorial celebration of the very artists that helped define their respective legacies, it is our pleasure to bring these four women together, examine their extraordinary careers, and highlight the connective tissue that bound them together in a special time and place.

KORNBLEE GALLERY

Jill Kornblee was born in New York City in 1920. She studied at Bryn Mawr College and later took art history courses at the Institute of Fine Art at New York University. In 1961, with two partners, she bought the Barone Gallery on Madison Avenue near 79th Street. She soon took over her partners' interests and began operating the gallery under her own name.

With an eclectic taste and a keen eye for new talent, Kornblee gave shows throughout the 60s and 70s to a number of artists whose work is now well known. Among them were the British painter Howard Hodgkin, whose first solo exhibition in this country sold out at the gallery in 1973. Others included Dan Flavin, Malcolm Morley, Rosalyn Drexler, Al Hansen, Janet Fish, Nina Yankowitz, Alex Hay, Richard Smith, Robert Graham, Rackstraw Downes, Peter Phillips, Mon Levinson and Michael Mazur. Kornblee had close friendships with other dealers who she also worked with; among them Leo Castelli, Ivan Karp, and Betty Parsons.

In the mid 60s, the gallery moved to 58 East 79th Street, and then later in the 1970s to 20 West 57th Street, where it remained until Kornblee's retirement in 1986.

MARTHA JACKSON GALLERY

Martha Jackson, born Martha Kellogg, is one of the paramount powers in the history of American art. Born in 1907 in Buffalo, New York to a successful business family, Martha was inspired at a young age to create her art legacy from the ground up. Jackson attended Smith's College and studied honors English literature, as she determined that the classes for art history were "too depressing". After the birth of her son David with her first husband John Anderson, Martha chaired the first major social benefit of the Albright-Knox Gallery, the Grecian Ball, in 1939. The gala placed the Albright-Knox Gallery in the spotlight of Buffalo's art scene. Martha remarried to David Jackson in 1940, whose surname she would use for her gallery.

While at Baltimore, Jackson studied art history at Johns Hopkins University. In 1944, she returned to Buffalo and was appointed to the Advisory Council of the Albright Art Gallery (now, Albright-Knox), director of the Art Committee of the Garret Club. It was here that she became a force to be reckoned with as an art collector.

Following her divorce from David Jackson in 1949, Martha moved to New York City and studied with renowned painter Hans Hofmann. Hofmann praised Jackson for her passion for art and encouraged her to open an art gallery. In 1953, Martha Jackson Gallery opened its first exhibit on 22 East 66th Street. The opening marked a new era in art history, as Jackson featured then unknown artists who have reached international acclaim today. Jackson's main objective for the gallery was to "create a place where artists of similar vitality and creativeness from diverse countries and working in a diversity of personal idioms could be brought together". Jackson proved to be a revolutionarily gallery owner ahead of her time when she discovered and presented work by non-white and women artists. The artists she exhibited included Karel Appel, Norman Bluhm, Jim Dine, Alex Katz, Marisol, Joan Mitchell, Louise Nevelson and Bob Thompson.

Martha Jackson passed away in 1969 but her son David Anderson continued running the gallery until 1989. He and his wife, Becky Anderson donated her substantial collection of postwar art to the Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

SAIDENBERG GALLERY

Eleanore Block Saidenberg, was the owner of the Saidenberg Gallery in New York City, which opened its doors in 1950. In 1955 the Saidenberg Gallery was tapped to be Pablo Picasso's primary representative in the United States. Saidenberg's partnership with influential Paris art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler was the genesis of her representation of Picasso until his death. The gallery also represented other renowned artists such as Paul Klee, Georges Braque, Fernand Leger, and Wassily Kandinsky.

Eleanore was a professional dancer from Chicago, specialized in modern dance. She was the daughter of the steel industrialist Leopold E. Block, and her brother, Leigh Block, was a prominent art collector based in Chicago. In 1934 Eleanore married Daniel Saidenberg, a professional cellist and conductor who had studied under André Hekking in Paris, and at the Juilliard School in New York. Sixty years ago, in 1962 she was a founding member of the Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA). The Saidenbergs opened their gallery in 1950 at its first location, the ground floor of the family townhouse at 10 East 77th Street.

Mrs. Saidenberg was a driving force in the arts community as noted by her founding of the Art Dealers Association of America. She mounted ambitious exhibitions, including the 1962 exhibition *Picasso: An American Tribute*, in collaboration with eight New York art galleries and *Seven Decades: Crosscurrents in Modern Art* in 1966.

STABLE GALLERY

Born in 1912 in Pennsylvania, Eleanor Ward began her career as fashion aide to Christian Dior in Paris. The designer encouraged Ward's transition into the art world after she had worked with him for several years, "You have the instinct, the taste and the eye. Use them". It was Ward's curiosity and attraction to art that led her to move to New York City and lease a livery stable in 1952. Its origins would be the agent for appointing the name of Stable Gallery, which opened in 1953 following its remodeling.

The Stable Gallery began as a gallery that sold mannequins and exhibited photography that pertained to fashion. Eventually, Ward would move beyond her permanent stable of artists to include those of riskier curatorial choices, such as Robert Rauschenberg, who was working as a custodian for the gallery at the time of the exhibition in 1953. Rauschenberg presented his work alongside Cy Twombly's graffiti paintings that were met with disdain and sold for \$50 a piece.

The gallery was praised for its successful series of group shows from 1953-1957 called *Stable Annuals*, which featured works selected by the artists themselves, including Robert Indiana, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Robert Motherwell, Ad Reinhardt, Philip Guston, Jack Tworokov, Robert Rauschenberg and Richard Stankiewicz. Ward also promoted the developing careers of Marisol, Louise Bourgeois, Joan Mitchell, Alex Katz and Joseph Cornell. Her gallery was distinguished for its brilliant installations. The Metropolitan Museum of Art was inspired by Ward's ability "to create a sense of theater," as said by sculptor Marisol.

In November 1962, the Stable Gallery held Andy Warhol's first solo exhibition which exhibited eight of the twelve single images of Marilyn Monroe. Unlike previous showings of Warhol's work, the exhibition at the Stable Gallery was met with praise from art critics, patrons, and celebrities and set Warhol down the path of acclaim. Eleanor Ward established a reputation for the Stable Gallery as a rendezvous point of contact for emerging and established artists.

By 1960, the Stable Gallery had moved to a townhouse at 33 East 74th Street in New York, a location that possessed enough space for the gallery exhibition area, and became one of the most prominent spaces for Abstract Expressionists artists of the time. She was also one of the first people to recognize and exhibit photography as fine art. In 1970, Ward closed the doors to the Stable Gallery as a result of the commercialization of the art world and a loss of enthusiasm. However, she continued dealing art on a private basis and traveling around the world for her craft, "Although some dealers may get a "high" from their sales, that aspect was far less interesting to me than discovering new artists, selecting work and installing the show itself."



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FROM THE CURATORS

MAD WOMEN is a homage to four women art dealers who were very influential in New York City in the 1960s and who helped shape the contemporary art world as we know it today. Some of the most renowned and respected artists of the 20th century would have remained unknown to American audiences if not for these highly innovative gallerists who recognized the true value of their art in the 1950s and 1960s.

It was an admittedly difficult endeavor to single out Jill Kornblee, Martha Jackson, Eleanor Ward, and Eleanore Saidenberg from among the unusually rich and varied circle of women art dealers active in that period. A primary consideration in doing so was our desire to showcase the gallerists who had an extraordinary history of producing culturally significant exhibitions as well as exposing groundbreaking installations by some then relatively unknown artists, many of whom would go on to have deeply influential and illustrious careers with work that would have undeniable cultural and political resonance today.

MAD WOMEN features a selection of 26 of the artists these four gallerists championed during the 1960s, exhibiting them in both solo and group shows. Inspired by the galleries' programs, we chose to install the artworks in dialogue with one another in order to highlight the rich aesthetic innovations of the period while also fostering a multi-level discourse that will encourage newly meaningful art historical connections.

In assembling the exhibition, when it was not possible to find specific artworks that had been shown at these galleries in the 1960s, we chose pieces dating back to that decade, finding exemplary works that would correspond to what the artists were making at the time they were associated with the gallerists' programs. An exception is Hans Hofmann, who is represented by an exuberant painting from the late 1940s. He was Martha Jackson's teacher from 1949, and encouraged her to become an art dealer and open her gallery.

We were able to locate a number of significant pieces specifically associated with these galleries in the 1960s, such as a vibrant blue painting by Billy Al Bengston that was included in the artist's solo presentation at Martha Jackson Gallery in May 1962; a painting by Robert Indiana created as the basis for the poster announcing his solo exhibition at the Stable Gallery in 1962; a Louise Bourgeois latex sculpture featured in Louise Bourgeois: Recent Sculpture, which ran from January 7-30, 1964 at the Stable Gallery; a Ground Drawing by Alex Hay presented at the Kornblee Gallery on the occasion of the artist's solo show in 1969; and a three-dimensional work by Paul Thek dedicated to Lyndon B. Johnson that has never been seen publicly since it was first exhibited at the Stable Gallery in 1967, on the occasion of Thek's solo exhibition that opened that year. Slightly different is the case of Eleanore Saidenberg's gallery, which showcased artists already established in the 1960s, with presentations that included work from earlier decades.

The ephemera featured in MAD WOMEN illustrate an inspirational aspect of the art dealer's business model in the 1960s: Kornblee, Jackson and Saidenberg, notably collaborated with other gallery owners (men and women) based in New York City. For instance, Kornblee shared with Leo Castelli and Tibor de Nagy the exhibition *Drawings: To Benefit the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts* in December 1965; Eleanore Saidenberg spearheaded a majestic tribute to Picasso in 1962 in collaboration with eight New York galleries (Knoedler, Rosenberg, Duveen, Perls, Staempfli, Cordier-Warren, New Gallery, and Gerson) showing Picasso simultaneously in April-May; Martha Jackson and Jill Kornblee mounted the op art exhibition *Vibrations Eleven* with Amel, Sidney Janis and Stephen Radich galleries "to make better known some of the younger American artists whose work is somewhat similar," on view in January 1965.

Our focus on the historically vibrant cultural ecosystem along Madison Avenue originated from our wish to celebrate the current crop of innovative galleries, among which David Nolan Gallery, that have emerged or continue to thrive in many of the very same locations as their memorable predecessors.

Our research made us realize that many of the inherent challenges and rewards of sustaining an intellectually ambitious artist-centric program remain remarkably similar over time. Jackson, Kornblee, Saidenberg, and Ward each possessed that essential quality of a keen and prescient eye, working in tandem with an innovative and responsive approach to what can often be a volatile business. To survive art dealing in the 1960s, not unlike today, took stamina and an aesthetically driven sixth sense for the strategic evaluation of a rapidly evolving local and international scene. Whether with quiet resolve or sufficient self-confidence to buck popular trends, these four women had the force of character to support the audacity and genius of the artists they worked with. That Kornblee, Jackson, Ward, and Saidenberg were able to flourish in an entrenched androcentric society is both a testament to their brilliance and tenacity, and a source of true inspiration to all of us.







