

Sonia Gechtoff

*Guardian of the Green*

14 Jan–19 Feb 2023

Organized by Bortolami and Andrew Kreps Gallery

Hosted by Regen Projects, Los Angeles

---

Bortolami and Andrew Kreps Gallery are pleased to announce *Guardian of the Green*, our second exhibition with the late Ukrainian-American artist Sonia Gechtoff (b.1926, d. 2018). Hosted by Regen Projects, the exhibition will mark the first presentation of Gechtoff's work in Los Angeles since her solo exhibitions at the legendary Ferus Gallery in 1957 and 1959 and their inaugural group show in 1957.

*Guardian of the Green* includes a painting by the same title from 1991-2002, as well as a suite of previously unexhibited paintings from 1987, made with acrylic paint overlaid with finely detailed graphite drawing. While Gechtoff often suggested representations of the natural world in her abstractions, this body of work most clearly referenced recognizable landscapes, rendering crystalline forms evocative of waterfalls and ice capped mountains in hard, angular line and long, swooping curves. In some of these works, she divided her pictorial space in half, placing two nearly symmetrical images beside one another. These double image paintings, which are unique to this series, invite a greater scrutiny of her rigorous draftsmanship and the near symmetrical compositions, while further compressing the implied landscape of Gechtoff's work into narrow, compartmentalized spaces.

Gechtoff synthesized the innovations gleaned from three previous decades of her practice – ranging from the frenetic gesture of her 1950s Abstract Expressionist paintings to the architectural sensibility that characterized her geometric abstractions of the 1960s and 1970s. She would return to these naturalistic motifs from 1987 in works such as *Guardian of the Green*, a large canvas completed over an 11 year period. One of the largest, and most significant paintings from the later part of her career, the work depicts overlapping wave-like shapes, which frame a bright and effervescent abstraction in a darker, foreboding palette of green, purple and crimson.

Sonia Gechtoff was born in Philadelphia in 1926 to a landscape painter, Leonid, and a gallerist, Ethel. In 1950s San Francisco, Sonia Gechtoff quickly became recognized for her palette knife oil paintings and delicate graphite drawings on paper. Her early palette knife oil paintings were exhibited at the de Young Museum, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York and a small group exhibition at the 1960 São Paulo Bienial, organized by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. She permanently relocated to New York in 1958 with her husband, the painter James Kelly, and exhibited with dealers such as Poindexter Gallery, Gruenebaum Gallery and Kraushaar Gallery. In New York, Gechtoff began utilizing the flat, matte, fast drying surfaces of acrylic paint to combine painting and drawing in her works on paper and canvas, a technique which she continued to employ until her death. Since her passing in 2018, there has been a reevaluation of Gechtoff's singular approach to abstraction and presentations have been staged of works rarely or never exhibited during her lifetime.