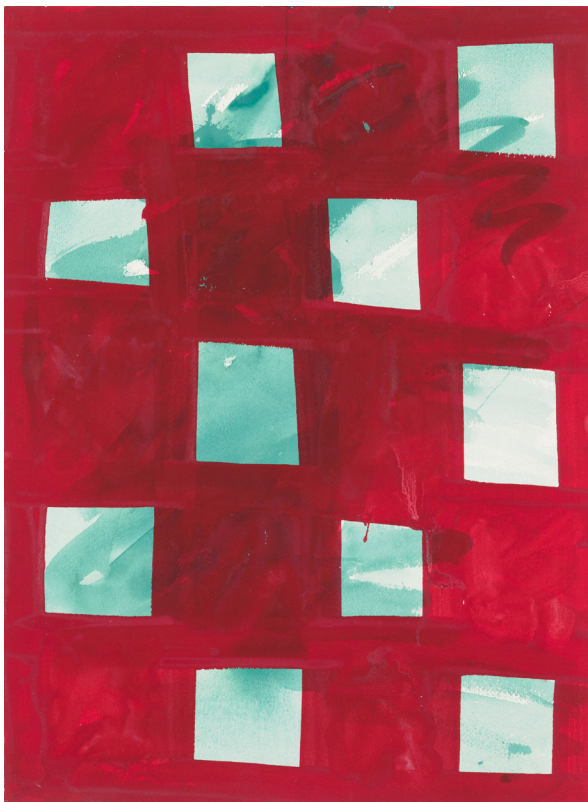


Press Release

Mary Heilmann. Daydream Nation

Hauser & Wirth New York, 22nd Street
2 May – 26 July 2024



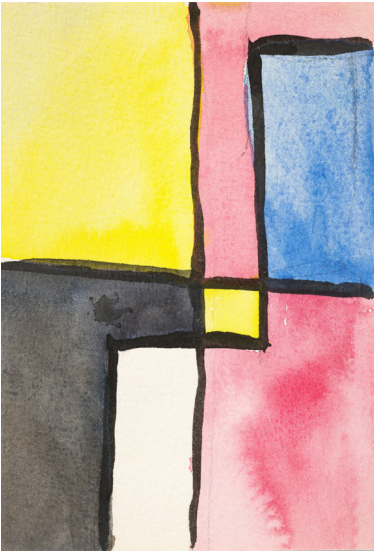
‘A body of work starts by daydreaming...’ —Mary Heilmann

New York... On 2 May, Hauser & Wirth will open ‘Daydream Nation’ at its 22nd Street gallery, exploring Mary Heilmann’s ongoing interest in drawing as a form of transcribing memory. Curated by artist Gary Simmons, Heilmann’s friend and former student and colleague at New York’s School of Visual Arts, the exhibition celebrates her talent for distilling complex images and ideas into deceptively simple geometric forms and abstract gestural marks. Through rarely and never-before-seen works on paper from the 1970s to early 2000s, this presentation reveals how drawing functions as a form of daydreaming—of conjuring the sights, sounds and events of her past travels or her imagined future—in Heilmann’s creative process.

‘I’ve known Mary through many chapters of my life,’ Simmons says. ‘Selecting these works and collaborating with her, I’ve learned more about her practice than I thought possible. In her drawings and paintings, there’s this sense of a dreamscape, a mosaic of her travels through the desert and from coast to coast.’

Heilmann is known for working across mediums and for installations which playfully combine disparate works. Reflecting on the artist’s approach to exhibition-making, ‘Daydream Nation’ brings together works on paper, ranging from watercolor studies for larger paintings to works that function as paintings on paper in their own right, alongside a selection of her ceramic sculptures and sculptural chairs to create an ambly whimsical yet conceptually rigorous environment. Heilmann often works in series, revisiting and reimagining certain arrangements of form and color over time, as evidenced here in such recurring motifs as the chair, rosebud, spiral, wave and web. But in Heilmann’s oeuvre, repetition begets difference and from this multiplicity emerges important truths about the functions of memory and our process of translating it.

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Drawing has always factored significantly into Heilmann's practice, manifesting in a variety of forms in 'Daydream Nation.' The exhibition features a new mural-like installation that reimagines and expands an existing work into a new form of expression. Heilmann's seventh wall drawing to date, this installation was developed in conversation with Simmons, who frequently explores the monumental scale of this medium in his own work.

The title of this exhibition is taken from Sonic Youth's groundbreaking album 'Daydream Nation' (1988), beloved by both Heilmann and Simmons. Evoking Heilmann's longstanding interest in daydreaming as a creative exercise and the importance of travel for her in this process, it also situates her oeuvre within the culture of youthful rebellion in New York City, the California-born artist's adopted home since 1968 and a constant source of energy and inspiration for her both personally and professionally.

About the artist

Influenced by 1960s counterculture, the free speech movement, and the surf ethos of her native California, Mary Heilmann ranks amongst the most influential abstract painters of her generation. Considered one of the preeminent contemporary Abstract painters, Heilmann's practice overlays the analytical geometries of Minimalism with the spontaneous ethos of the Beat Generation, and are always distinguishable by their often unorthodox—always joyful—approach to color and form.

Raised in San Francisco and Los Angeles, Heilmann completed a degree in literature, before she studied ceramics at Berkeley. Only after moving to New York in 1968 did she begin to paint. While most artists at that time were experimenting with the concept of dematerialization and demanding that painting should avoid any references to experience outside the material presence of the work itself, Heilmann opted for painting, rebelling against the accepted rules. 'Rather than following the decrees of modern, non-representational formalism, I started to understand that the essential decisions taken during the creative process were more and more related to content. The Modern movement was over...'

Since then, Heilmann has created compositions that evoke a variety of associations. Her work may be non-representational and based on an elementary, geometrical vocabulary—circles, squares, grids and stripes—but there is always something slightly eccentric about them. The simplicity of the forms is played down by a deceptive form of nonchalance: the contours are not clearly defined. In some paintings, amorphous forms appear to melt into each other like liquid wax. Splashes of color can be discerned, sharp edges bleed for no apparent reason, and the ductus of the brushstrokes is always perceptible. Heilmann's casual painting technique conceals a frequently complex structure that only gradually reveals itself to the viewer.

The artist's 1967-1971 celestial works are also currently on long-term view at Dia Beacon in the presentation 'Mary Heilmann. Starry Night.'

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Caption and courtesy information:

All images:

Mary Heilmann

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Courtesy the artist, Hauser & Wirth and 303 Gallery, New York

Untitled Watercolor Study

c. 1983 - 1986

Watercolor on paper

14.3 x 9.8 cm / 5 5/8 x 3 7/8 in

Photo: Genevieve Hanson

Tea Garden

1984

Watercolor on paper

76.2 x 55.9 cm / 30 x 22 in

Photo: Thomas Müller

Untitled Watercolor Study

c. 1986 - 1988

Watercolor and pencil on paper

12.7 x 17.5 cm / 5 x 6 7/8 in

Photo: Thomas Müller

Palm Tree

c. 1996

Oil on gessoed paper

105.4 x 74.3 x 105.4 cm / 41 1/2 x 29 1/4 in

Photo: Thomas Müller