

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Elizabeth Murray
Drawings (1974-2006): Curated by Kathy Halbreich
April 30 – June 12, 2024
Opening Reception: April 30, 5pm - 7pm
130 East 64th Street
New York

Gladstone presents Elizabeth Murray: *Drawings (1974-2006)*, an exhibition of over sixty rarely seen works, curated by Kathy Halbreich. Familiar with Murray's oeuvre across mediums, Halbreich co-organized the first retrospective of her work, *Elizabeth Murray: Paintings and Drawings* in 1987, which originated at the Dallas Museum of Art and traveled to major institutions nationally. Halbreich once again contributes to shaping Murray's legacy as an inventive painter whose drawings provide insight into her drive to blur traditional distinctions between abstraction and figuration in order to make work that was both intimate and formally muscular. This exhibition expands understanding of how Murray used drawing as a critical tool. It also highlights how her hybrid experimentation laid the foundation for innovative artists working today, particularly those who embrace and portray the tensions of everyday life.

Elizabeth Murray's expressive and often poignant work unites carefully crafted three-dimensional structures and layered surfaces that appear to be found through an almost jazz-like improvisation. Her works are starkly contrarian, avoiding easy categorization and resisting association with a singular historical movement or style. While painting as a medium fluctuated in popularity during the latter half of the 20th century, Murray's aesthetic ambition, distinctive style and gestural certainty mined the ongoing rebellious qualities inherent in painting. Undeterred by the rise of conceptual art in New York in the 1960s and the growing popularity of video and performance art in the '70s, Murray challenged the prevailing belief that painting was a less innovative and timely medium with her irregularly shaped and often monumental canvases, destabilized and surreal interiors, and biomorphic often cartoon-like forms.

Through this presentation of drawings spanning from 1974 to 2006, Halbreich foregrounds work of all sizes and finish that has remained largely unseen. Unencumbered by the demands of large-scale painting, Murray found, through drawing, an explosive freedom in mark-making that also served as a quick way to work through compositional problems before beginning her complex paintings. Murray's drawings serve as both studies for paintings and standalone works, capturing the gradual emergence of images and ideas from initial sketches to polished pictorial illusions, reflecting her unwavering experimentation and dissatisfaction with pat or pre-determined solutions.

In *Elizabeth Murray: Drawings (1974-2006)*, the artist's compositions capture a haptic reality representative of her conceptually and sensorily driven practice. Throughout her career, Murray embraced the precarious, humorous, and zany aspects of domestic life, allowing an emotional awkwardness and vulnerability to emerge that also is visible in Cezanne's still lifes and portraits of his wife, which Murray knew well. Out of a web of repeating and often anxious gestures, identifiable interiors or objects such as tables, chairs, shoes, and cups emerge and shatter. Murray finds the line she needs to express her emotions, navigating a breadth of diverse and nuanced mark-making—ranging from rushed and labored to smooth and jagged, from nervous to joyful. By installing these drawings in Gladstone's Upper East Side townhouse, Halbreich underscores the domestic subject matter as well as small scale of many of the artist's sketches and drawings. The curator's choice of drawings also reflects upon Murray's deep knowledge of the history of painting and her relationship to artists such as Jasper Johns and Pablo Picasso.

For Halbreich, "the freedom Elizabeth managed to fight her way towards is especially vivid in her drawings. She was fearless and joyful even when the shadow of doubt surfaced; she explores throughout her career how to use uncertainty to push her inventiveness forward. Her humor, intelligence, and intensity are clear in this exhibition, providing, I hope, a vision of how much of a model Elizabeth was for her peers as well as artists of all stripes working today. Those who appreciate her most understand the honesty of her endeavor: how she never shied away from displaying the life force found in her daily life, in the studio and at the kitchen table. This has nothing to do with style and everything to do with being human."

Accompanying the exhibition is an idiosyncratic brochure written and designed by artist and writer Paul Chan that thoughtfully explores Murray's sensitivity in her approach to drawing, highlighting the delicate connection between pencil and page.

For further information, please contact press@gladstonegallery.com
New York gallery hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm
Brussels gallery hours: Tuesday-Friday, 10am-6pm and Saturday, 12pm-8pm
Seoul gallery hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 10am-6pm