

G A L E R I E F O R S B L O M

Iria Leino

Galerie Forsblom, March 28–May 4, 2025

It is a unique privilege for a contemporary art gallery to become part of the history of modern art. Galerie Forsblom has been granted the rare opportunity to explore an undeservedly forgotten and undervalued artistic estate in which history is palpably present. It is with special excitement and anticipation that we announce our forthcoming exhibition featuring Iria Leino, a pioneer of the 1960s New York art scene and a figure enigmatic to contemporary audiences.

Iria Leino (1932-2022) was a Helsinki-born artist and fifties supermodel who made her mark as a pioneer of abstract art. At the height of her international modelling career, she left the fashion world to settle in New York's SoHo, where she forged an exceptional career as an abstract expressionist. Her artistic journey reflected the cultural and artistic upheavals of New York in the 1960s.

Leino combines the influences of Color Field painting with a meditative style of brushwork. After surviving a serious accident in 1968, she turned to Buddhism, which added a spiritual dimension to her artistic practice. Exemplifying this spiritualism is *The Elephant Series*, in which elephants symbolize wisdom and enlightenment. Leino's exhibitions were well received by contemporary critics, who praised her innovative, norm-defying style of abstract expressionism.

Leino's meditative approach to painting is epitomized by *The Dreamings Series* (1988-1989), in which spiritual dimensions are invoked by colorful arches and dotted details. Leino was a reclusive figure whose one-of-a-kind serial oeuvre owes its existence to her dedication to solitude and spiritual guidance. Leino fused elements of Finnish nature and design with the traditions of American abstract expressionism to create an enduring legacy that is unique in art history.

Leino surrendered herself to a life of solitude, meditation, and the guidance of a spiritual guru, enabling her to perfect her idiom through steadfast dedication to painting serially. By interweaving cross-cultural influences – Finnish nature and design with American traditions of abstraction – she created an unprecedented legacy shared by Finland and the United States.