

Fergus McCaffrey commemorates the life and works of Marcia Hafif with an exhibition curated by Alanna Heiss, Richard Nonas, and Hanne Tierney

Marcia Hafif Remembered

Fergus McCaffrey, New York
September 27 – October 27, 2018

Opening Reception: September 27, 6:00–8:00PM

Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to present *Marcia Hafif Remembered*, an exhibition commemorating the American abstract painter who was renowned during her life for her astute engagement with the material conditions and art historical tropes of monochrome painting. *Marcia Hafif Remembered* is co-curated by friends of the artist Alanna Heiss (who included Hafif's work in her iconic 1976 exhibition *Rooms at P.S. 1*), Richard Nonas, and Hanne Tierney. The exhibition will be on view at Fergus McCaffrey's New York gallery beginning September 27, 2018.



Hafif passed away on April 17, 2018; this exhibition honors her decades-long practice. Rather than giving a complete accounting of the artist's oeuvre, *Marcia Hafif Remembered* serves as a statement of remembrance and friendship, including four bodies of work spanning from the 1970s to the artist's death. Each group of paintings is installed in an individual gallery space, allowing the viewer to consider distinct moments in Hafif's life and work. Many of the paintings in *Marcia Hafif Remembered* have never before been exhibited in New York.



Works on view include her *Double Glaze Paintings* (2001), a series of canvases that engage the body in their warm tonality and generous scale. To create the brilliant transparent colors of the *Double Glaze* series, Hafif layered one glaze of oil color over another to create a vivid third hue. These works evoke the artist's early career in Southern California, where she began painting in the 1950s during the height of West Coast minimalism and conceptualism, and was exposed to the meticulous, light-drenched paintings of peers such as Robert Irwin. In conjunction with her painting practice, Hafif studied art history during this time, and also began writing critical essays and experimental

texts—something she would continue to do for the rest of her life.

In 1961, Hafif moved to Rome, where she lived and worked until 1969, steeped in the city's rich art historical tradition and the radical politics of the decade. Hafif engaged in contemporary conversations surrounding labor and production, reading the work of feminist activists and Autonomist



philosophers, and began to think more critically about her own artistic in terms of labor and materiality. She started to conceive of her paintings as “open” signifiers completed in the mind of the viewer—ideas that stemmed from conversations with activists, artists, and writers in the Italian avant-garde.

Hafif left Rome in 1969 to study at the University of California, Irvine, where she stopped painting to experiment with new media. She received her MFA in 1971. Seeking a way back to painting, she moved to New York, where her art practice and critical writing proved to be a catalyst in the art world, reigniting discourse around the reemergence of conceptual painting after Minimalism. She shared an apartment building in SoHo with Joan Jonas and Jackie Winsor and lived on the same block as Donald Judd.

In New York, Hafif imagined a burgeoning “synthetic” period for painting; from 1972 until her death, she propelled the medium toward this synthetic horizon, undertaking a systematic exploration of the possibilities of pigment and process. Before beginning a body of work, Hafif would select all the implements of the painting's material support, choosing the precise brushes, paint, canvas, and stretchers she planned to use. Only then would the artist embark on the actual act of painting. In early “synthetic” paintings, Hafif applied pigment to canvas in deliberate vertical gestures, using singular, visible brushstrokes that provide an indexical trace of her physical labor. This precise and structured approach allowed her to question the practice of painting itself, investigating the structures and assumptions undergirding the medium.

In 1978, Hafif's essay “Beginning Again” was published in *Artforum*. Here, she thinks through her own critical deconstruction of painting—paring down the medium to its constitutive elements and techniques—which proved to her the continued necessity of monochrome painting. Hafif takes the “death” of painting as a provocation rather than a closure, using the moment of painting's “erasure” as a critical juncture for rediscovery. Shortly after the essay's publication, Hafif began work on her *Black Paintings* (1979–80), reversing Kazimir Malevich's formula in which the black monochrome functions as the end of painting. In Hafif's black monochromes, the “erasure” or absence typically associated with black reveals itself upon close observation as a sensuous amalgam of ultramarine blue and burnt umber. A selection of Hafif's *Black Paintings* are installed in the natural light of Fergus McCaffrey's upstairs exhibition space.

In a remarkable subversion of the art historical tropes of the painter as individual genius and paintings as precious objects, Hafif referred to her oeuvre as her “Inventory.” Although she worked systematically and primarily in monochrome, her canvases are remarkably complex and varied, demonstrating the rich possibilities that continue to be available in painting. In “Beginning Again,” Hafif writes that the painter must “examine the pigments used in making paintings in order to make visible the qualities and attributes of a specific pigment color in a specific medium and format.” The paintings in *Table of Pigments* (1991) exemplify this tendency, forming a gridded installation of monochrome canvases methodically worked with handmade pigments. *Table of Pigments* teems with internal complexities and moments of visual meditation, creating an extensive dialogue on medium, environment, color, and light.

Marcia Hafif Remembered will be on view in New York until October 27, 2018. An exhibition of the artist’s work will be held concurrently at the Pomona College Museum of Art from September 4 – December 22, 2018. An exhibition of Hafif’s experimental films, made between 1970–99, is currently being held at the Lenbachhaus, Munich until September 30, 2018.



About the Artist

Marcia Hafif (née Woods) was born in 1929 in Pomona, California. She studied at Pomona College from 1947 to 1951, marrying Herbert Hafif. After interning at Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles in 1961, she moved to Rome, where she spent the next eight years making her first body of mature work. She exhibited these paintings, which she referred to as “Pop-Minimal,” at her first solo show at Galleria La Salita in 1964. Returning to California in 1969—and leaving painting for a time to experiment with film, photography and sound installation—Hafif completed a MFA degree at the University of California, Irvine. In 1971, she moved to New York to search out a return to painting during a time when the validity of the medium was in doubt. Exhibiting for more than eight years with Sonnabend Gallery in New York and Paris from 1974 to 1981, Hafif developed body of work that would become the basis of what she came to call *The Inventory*. Hafif continued to work on her *Inventory* paintings until her death in 2018.

Hafif’s work has been exhibited widely in Europe and the United States. Recent major exhibitions include *Marcia Hafif, The Inventory: Painting* at Laguna Art Museum, 2015; *Marcia Hafif: The Italian Paintings 1961–69* at Fergus McCaffrey, New York, 2016; and *Marcia Hafif, The Inventory: Paintings* at Kunstmuseum St. Gallen and Kunsthaus Baselland, Switzerland, 2017. For the last three decades of her life, Hafif divided her time between Laguna Beach, California, and New York City. She died on April 17, 2018.

About Fergus McCaffrey

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey is internationally recognized for its groundbreaking role in promoting the work of postwar Japanese artists such as Sadamasa Motonaga, Natsuyuki Nakanishi, Kazuo Shiraga, and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists such as Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, Sigmar Polke, and Carol Rama.

In keeping with the gallery's commitment to Japanese art and culture, we are pleased to announce that Fergus McCaffrey opened its Tokyo outpost this past March with an exhibition of paintings by Robert Ryman, followed by an exhibition of works by Tetsumi Kudo and Carol Rama in June.

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Images:

1. Marcia Hafif in her studio, New York, 2013. Photo by Taketo Shimada. © The Estate of Marcia Hafif; © Marcia Hafif Trust; Courtesy of Studio Marcia Hafif, New York
2. Marcia Hafif, *Double Glaze Painting: Terre Verte, Indian Yellow*, 2003. Oil glaze on canvas, 30 x 30 inches (76.2 x 76.2 cm). © The Estate of Marcia Hafif; © Marcia Hafif Trust
3. Installation view of *Black Paintings, 1979-80*, in *Marcia Hafif, The Inventory: Paintings* at Kunstmuseum St. Gallen and Kunsthaus Baselland, Switzerland, 2017. © The Estate of Marcia Hafif; © Marcia Hafif Trust
4. Installation view of *Table of Pigments, 1991*, in *Marcia Hafif, The Inventory: Paintings* at Kunstmuseum St. Gallen and Kunsthaus Baselland, Switzerland, 2017. © The Estate of Marcia Hafif; © Marcia Hafif Trust