***MERCER STREET: Marcia Hafif, Joan Jonas, Shigeko Kubota, Jackie Winsor***

**Fergus McCaffey New York**
**February 6–April 25, 2020**

Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to present ***MERCER STREET: Marcia Hafif, Joan Jonas, Shigeko Kubota, Jackie Winsor*** at the New York gallery. The exhibition brings together a selection of work spanning five decades, by four pioneering artists, created in and around a shared space in Lower Manhattan. Residents and neighbors of Mercer Street from the mid-1970s, the women featured here, among a larger group of neighborhood innovative thinkers and initiators, were then and remain now, crucial to capturing the history and creative development of New York's downtown community. Hafif, Jonas, Kubota, and Winsor offer a critical cross section of painting, sculpture, performance, photography and film, that marks each artist's singular artistic approach and process; initially linked by common physical space, ultimately realized by a rigorous feminist ethic that stands apart, in its proficiency and innovative resiliency.

**Marcia Hafif** (1929–2018) moved to SoHo from her native California in 1971, eventually settling at 112 Mercer Street. The development of her signature style "color study" paintings and drawings, that produced the remarkable *Inventory* for which she pursued until her death, unfolded in tandem with writing, film and photography. In *Mercer Street* (circa 1975) (digitized for public presentation for the first time in this exhibition) Hafif uses Super-8 film to track 28 seconds of subtle movement on the quiet nighttime street directly below her window. Softly lit by a single streetlamp, the film moves in near total darkness, much like her *Black Paintings* (1979–80) of which two *Ultramarine Blue*, *Burnt Umber* works are featured here. Exemplary of the single stroke process Hafif cultivated upon arriving in New York, they are emblematic of her carefully nuanced, all-over surface handling that resists the label so often applied to Hafif as a "monochromist." Three framed drawings from 1972 illustrate the switch up of this system, keeping consistent a relationship closely tied to writing, and reading. Facing the street from the gallery's front wall is a grid of black and white prints, 36 photographs from a single roll of film, photographed on one sunny afternoon in 1999, out of the artist's loft window. The unfolding narrative is in keeping with Hafif's previous *Roman Sunday* (1968) a cinematic venture in marking time.

Fluxus founder and downtown co-op organizer George Maciunas urged artists to band together to purchase buildings on Wooster, Greene, Spring Streets, as well as Broadway. The "Dancers' Building" at 541 Broadway, an 1868 five-story, iron-clad structure that connected to Mercer through a full city block from east to west, offered large, column-free spaces with wooden floors—preferential conditions for artists like **Joan Jonas** (b. 1936) who pursued experimental workshops in movement, before she turned to performance-based conceptual video work in the 1970s. Often corroborating with fellow artists and friends, two videos in this exhibition, *Glass Puzzle*

(1972) (with Lois Lane) and *Street Scene* (1976) (with Pat Steir), project a layered interest in intimate and collaborative exploration—one a contained choreographed action, as Jonas and Lane respond to one another in mirrored movements, the other *Street Scene* (1976) captured at night on a deserted Wall Street, where Jonas and Steir perform an apparently unscripted and (almost) uninterrupted intervention on a nocturnally abandoned city block. Jonas' installation at the gallery—an erect galvanized tin cone that is prevalent in *Street Scene*—as well as many of the artist's other films and performances, the live-action made *Body Drawings* (1999–2017), and a working playhouse in miniature *My New Theater V, Moving in Place (Dog Dance),* (2002–05), are the result of already performed and yet-to-be performed maneuvers, evoking a personal pageantry, multifaceted in its language, past and present, which resists routine categorization. Jonas' Mercer Street loft continues to serve as a home, a studio, a film set, and theater stage in process—an ongoing catalyst addressing architectural, environmental, cross-disciplinary mythic traditions, simultaneously realized on a domestic and global level, interchangeably.

Introduced to Fluxus in Tokyo in 1963 by Yoko Ono, **Shigeko Kubota** (1937–2015) arrived in New York in 1964, already a working, exhibiting artist. Living first in the West Village, and needing to expand their studios, Kubota and her partner, artist Nam June Paik took one of the final Maciunas lofts available on Mercer Street in 1974. In Kubota's poignant and wry observations of the everyday, the artist merged vibrant electronic processing techniques with images of nature, art, and personal life. Marcel Duchamp was a keen influence on Kubota: *Duchampiana: Bicycle Wheel One, Two, Three* (1983–90), is one such signature homage to the artist. The bike wheels and front frames spin mini-monitors showing color-synthesized footage Kubota shot of the countryside, is both art historical and intimate. These three versions of the 1981 original were developed by the artist at her studio over a seven-year period, and have a whimsical effect—amusing, self-deprecating—and also serious and advanced for its time. In *Video Haiku-Hanging Piece* (1981), a surveillance camera tracks the gallery visitor, transmits a live feed to a spherical monitor, which methodically swings over a concave mirror that reflects the image from the floor back to the viewer. Minimal in presentation, contemplative in its contemporary close-circuit cyborg aesthetic and intention, the sculpture is Kubota at her most direct. The artist maintained a constant video journal (*Broken Diary*, 1970–2015) while at Mercer street until her death, leaving a robust archive in a studious and laboratory-like loft, which now hosts the Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation, committed to preserving and promoting her legacy.

Since the 1960s, **Jackie Winsor** (b. 1941) has produced sculptures—floor and wall works—that present themselves as situations. One of the first occupants of Mercer Street, she used the loft as a studio, before living there full-time. Constructing many of her earlier works outside, Winsor had a dual exterior/interior mode of production, each setting its own series of conditions to process. *Dark Vertical Cylinder* (1969) is bodily in scale, the heavily patina-ed hemp rope twisted into an upright position is both that of collaborative dance and ab-ex gesture (she began as a painter) – form and force working together. Bound wood trunks, rolled

lattices, and columns of coiled rope, the exterior work is about sculptural self-sufficiency and calls attention to complex relationships between hidden and exposed layers of the internal and external. In the 1980s in her studio in the Mercer Street building, Winsor embarked on a more intramural project, creating reverse reliefs that stand between painting and sculpture; the "inserts," as the artist refers to them, are both on the wall, and in the wall at the same time. Using the industrial and physical treatments with which Winsor is familiar – her meticulous method of mixing, testing, failing, beginning anew, continues until it manifests into a sumptuous, mysterious finish. *Blue Two Grids with Blue Stepped Inset* (1995) is heavy in phthalocyanine pigment, a compound found in automotive painting, ink printing and large-scale dyeing of textiles and paper. In *Black and White Inset Wall Piece, 5 Lines With Black Interior* (1992), Winsor has added lamp black, a petroleum derivative of tar, coal and soot. Physically and intellectually opening out the vocabularies of minimalism and abstraction, Winsor spends years developing certain sculptures, often involving laborious processes that take on a ritual quality, both inside her studio, and out.

Hafif, Jonas, Kubota, and Winsor's studios remain in SoHo, artists relentlessly committed to decades of work in a city that over the years grew to be essentially unaffordable to so many. Each woman became a pioneer in her field and a polymath in her own right, and continue to exert influence upon the generations that follow. Inherent in their work is immeasurable worlds of personal reference, action, and experience, which evolved together in the shared context of the many artists and peers who moved through Mercer Street, and Lower Manhattan.

**About Fergus McCaffrey**

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey represents an increasingly global group of post-war and contemporary artists from the United States, Europe, and Japan. For over a decade, the gallery has developed a multifaceted program, representing over 24 artists and estates worldwide. Internationally recognized for its promotion of postwar Japanese and seminal western artists, Fergus McCaffrey has locations in New York, Tokyo, and St. Barth.

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**Images:**

1. Marcia Hafif, *Mercer Street*, c. 1999. Black & white photograph, 5 × 7 inches (12.7 × 17.8 cm) © Estate of Marcia Hafif
2. Joan Jonas, *Glass Puzzle*, 1973. Video (black and white, sound), 17:27 minutes © Joan Jonas
3. Shigeko Kubota, *Duchampiana: Bicycle Wheel One, Two, and Three*, 1983. Bicycle wheels mounted on wooden stools with motors, six, three inch liquid crystal monitors, single-channel video (color, sound), 58 × 25 × 15 inches (147.3 × 63.5 × 38.1 cm) © Shigeko Kubota Video Art Foundation
4. Jackie Winsor, *Dark Vertical Cylinder,* 1969. Rope, galvanized tin, and wire, 85 x 12 x 12 inches (215.9 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm) © Jackie Winsor