

MNUCHIN GALLERY

O C U L A

Rediscovering Lynne Mapp Drexler in New York



Exhibition view: Lynne Drexler, *The First Decade*, Mnuchin Gallery, New York (27 October–17 December 2022). © The Estate of Lynne Drexler. Photo: Tom Powel Imaging.

By Rory Mitchell

October 27, 2022



Lynne Mapp Drexler, *Gotterdammerung* (1959). Oil on canvas. 177.8 x 205.7 cm. Courtesy Mnuchin Gallery.

Lynne Mapp Drexler is the historical artist everyone is talking about now.

Mnuchin Gallery and Berry Campbell Gallery are opening their major exhibition, Lynne Drexler: The First Decade in their respective New York spaces this week, which focuses on work produced between 1959–1969.

This comes hot on the heels of Amy Cappellazzo's Art Intelligence Global group show in Hong Kong, *Shatter: Color Field and the Women of Abstract Expressionism* (3 October–2 December 2022), which includes three of Drexler's paintings.

Lynne Drexler's tale shares some traits with other women artists of her time, and indeed much of the 20th century. She moved to New York in 1956, where she studied under Hans Hofmann and Robert Motherwell, and even showed at the prestigious Tanager Gallery in 1961.

The following year she married the painter John Hultberg, under whose shadow she lived for some time. The couple often spent summers on the remote Monhegan Island in Maine, but eventually separated. Drexler lived alone on Monhegan throughout most of the 1980s—still painting prolifically—up until her death in 1999.



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Drexler's estate clearly still holds a great deal of material from the later period, but works from the 1960s are rare and have seen some spectacular auction results recently.

Herbert's Garden (1960) sold for 1.5 million USD at Christie's in May this year, and there is buoyant confidence in these prices continuing to soar given the players involved.

The speed at which things have moved, and the clear strategy in place to create the market from next to nothing, has drawn skepticism from some quarters—but I would argue that Drexler's paintings from this period point towards something exceptional.

There is no doubt that the Virginia-born artist stands up to some of the great abstract painters of the postwar period. Not unlike Joan Mitchell, there is a subtle yet clear debt to artists such as Monet, Derain, and Bonnard, as well as the Pointillists. Drexler's mark-making also draws parallels with the style of her better-known contemporary, Alma Thomas, who was actually the subject of Mnuchin's major exhibition in 2019.

Drexler's paintings exude the atmosphere of the East Coast landscapes, which she inhabited throughout much of her life in Maine.

Her rich tones are beautifully composed in subtly differing shades, with each brushstroke varying in direction. Combined with variations in the thickness of impasto and the size of marks, Drexler's resulting compositions possess a layered depth, and still are able to breathe with precisely articulated areas of negative space.

Drexler's best paintings achieve that quality rarely found in abstraction, by which our initial perceptual reaction begins to slowly unravel, revealing memories wrought from the natural world whilst stirring the inner parts of our subconscious. Nature is prevalent in her works, but there is something else unknown and magical that renders Drexler's paintings remarkable.