

HOLLIS TAGGART

Hollis Taggart Announces Exclusive Representation of Two Estates: The Michael (Corinne) West Estate and the Estate of Leon Berkowitz

The Gallery Will Host Solo Exhibitions of Each Artist's Work in Fall 2019 At Its Primary Space in Chelsea

Hollis Taggart announced today the exclusive representation of the Michael (Corinne) West Estate. Michael West (1908-1991)—born Corinne Michelle West—is recognized by art historians as a vocal and active participant in the development of Abstract Expressionism, bringing a highly developed personal philosophy and vision to her work. Despite her substantive contributions to the dialogues and artistic innovations that shaped the movement, West is largely remembered for her relationship with artist Arshile Gorky—her own narrative obscured by the sexism of the period and the passage of time. With its new representation of West's estate, Hollis Taggart aims to rectify the omission of West's practice within our understanding of Abstract Expressionism and its relationship to subsequent modern art movements. The gallery's representation of West follows its work in bringing to light and deepening scholarship on other historic female artists, including Audrey Flack, Grace Hartigan, Kay Sage, Marjorie Strider, and Idelle Weber, among others. Hollis Taggart will present an exhibition of West's work in November 2019.

Hollis Taggart concurrently announced the exclusive representation of the Estate of Leon Berkowitz (1919-1987). Berkowitz founded the Washington Workshop Center for the Arts in 1945, creating the fertile ground on which the Washington Color School would be established. Although frequently associated with the group, Berkowitz resisted the School's formal investigations in favor of more poetic and spiritual evocations of color and light. While his earlier works suggest a deliberate and ordered study of color, his later—and most recognized—canvases vibrate with luminescent bursts and mists of color that seem to extend well beyond the surface plane. The collaboration with the Estate marks an opportunity to further examine Berkowitz's practice, which has connections to a wide range of artistic movements, from Color Field Painting to the California Light and Space Movement. Hollis Taggart will present an exhibition of Berkowitz's work in September 2019.

“Hollis Taggart's program has always been driven by a vision of discovery—one that gives particular emphasis to both revealing and resurrecting the work and stories of significant but little-known historic artists. This year, the gallery will celebrate its 40th anniversary, and with this milestone, we are reaffirming our commitment to the vision that has made us successful for the last four decades,” said Hollis Taggart. “With that in mind, we are delighted to bring the estates of Michael West and Leon Berkowitz into our program. And more importantly, we look forward to enhancing knowledge of and fostering new dialogues on these two gifted artists, who have both made substantive contributions to the development of art history.”

Michael (Corinne) West

Corinne Michelle West moved to New York in 1932, where she became a member of Hans Hofmann's first class at the Art Students League. Hoffman's teachings on the “inner eye” and emphasis on capturing the essence of things would serve as a fundamental tenet of West's work throughout her career. In the winter between 1932 and 1933, she was introduced to Arshile Gorky, with whom she developed an intense relationship that would last for nearly a decade. Their prolific correspondence highlighted the philosophical underpinnings of their artistic interests and practices. Although Gorky tried to convince West to marry him, she declined, citing her drive and desire for a career of her own. In the early 1940s, West, determined to find artistic success despite her gender,

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began using the masculine name, Michael West, joining other female Abstract Expressionists like George (Grace) Hartigan and Lee (Lenore) Krasner. And in 1945, her work was featured in a group exhibition at Pinacotheca Gallery, which also included the work of Milton Avery, Adolph Gottlieb, and Mark Rothko, among others.

West was deeply engaged in current events, writing extensively in personal journals about the importance of the contemporary moment to the development and experience of art. Her examination of the relationships between global events, the individual, and creative process yielded a personal philosophy, which she referred to as the “new mysticism in painting.” Her works in the 1940s and 1950s were guided by this vision, and loosely referencing her experiences and concerns were characterized in turn by both vibrant, arabesque-ing lines and sharp and aggressive brushstrokes. She was rewarded with solo exhibitions of her work at Manhattan’s Uptown Gallery in 1957 and at DC’s Domino Gallery in 1958. Reviews of these exhibitions in *Arts Digest*, *Times Herald*, and the *Washington Post* spoke to the vibrancy, vitality, and power of West’s work and actively positioned her alongside some of the greatest artists of the period.

The relationship between life and spirit continued to occupy West’s works through the remainder of her career, and she participated in a wide array of group and solo exhibitions. In 1976, West suffered a stroke, and while she continued to paint until her death in 1991, she actively withdrew from the art world, ceasing to exhibit her work. Five years after her death, the Pollock-Krasner House Foundation mounted an acclaimed retrospective of the West’s work, titled *Michael West: Painter-Poet*.

Leon Berkowitz

Although Leon Berkowitz is most frequently associated with Washington D.C., where he spent a large period of his life, he received his education across a wide range of institutions, including the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, the Art Students League in New York, and academies across Paris, Florence, and Mexico City. In 1945, Berkowitz established the Washington Workshop Center for the Arts, which became an important platform for creative production and dialogue across the visual and performing arts, bringing together acclaimed and emerging artists from across Washington and New York, among other locales. Through its participants the Center would become closely associated with the development of the Washington Color School, as an extension of Color Field Painting. Although he played a pivotal role in the founding of the group, Berkowitz would, throughout his career, eschew the positioning of his work within that movement, noting his commitment to capturing the poetics of color over the formal inquiries of the group.

Berkowitz’s early works combined loose figurative elements with inspirations from some of the most important artists of the time, including Morris Louis, Willem de Kooning, Barnett Newman, and Mark Rothko, as he experimented and honed his own approach and style. Following the closing of the Center in 1956, Berkowitz moved abroad, where he would spend the next decade living and traveling. It was during this time that Berkowitz cemented his commitment to evoking the emotional resonance of color and light within the surface plane. By the 1970s, his works had become entirely abstract, characterized by both vibrant bursts of color and subtle gradations of light and hue. Berkowitz’s fascination with perceptions of light connected him to the artists of California’s Light and Space Movement, and indeed, his canvases exude a captivating luminescence that seems to emanate from deep within. When a selection of his paintings was displayed at the Phillips Collection in 1976, he

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said of his work, “I am endeavoring to find that blush of light over light and the color within the light; the depths through which we see when we look *into* and not *at* color.”¹

Throughout his career, Berkowitz participated in a wide range of solo and group exhibitions, including those at the Baltimore Museum of Art, Chicago Arts Club, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Phillips Collection, and Ringling Museum in Sarasota, Florida, among others. His work is held in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, High Museum of Art in Atlanta, and the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, among numerous others. In addition to his own practice, Berkowitz was a well-recognized teacher. He served as the chairman of the painting department at The Corcoran Gallery’s School of Art, where he taught for nearly twenty years until his death in 1987.

About Hollis Taggart

Founded in 1979, Hollis Taggart—formerly known as Hollis Taggart Galleries—presents significant works of American art, showcasing the trajectory of American art movements from the Hudson River School to American Modernism and Post-War and Contemporary eras. Its program is characterized by a deep commitment to scholarship and bringing to the fore the work of under-recognized artists. The gallery has sponsored several catalogue raisonné projects, most recently for Surrealist artist Kay Sage, and has been instrumental in advancing knowledge of such compelling artists as Alfred Maurer, Arthur B. Carles, and more recently, Theodoros Stamos, Marjorie Strider and Michael (Corinne) West. In summer 2015, the gallery moved its primary location from the Upper East Side to Chelsea. In fall 2018, it opened a newly renovated street-level location on W. 26th Street, a private viewing and storage annex across the street, and a project space at the High Line. With 40 years of experience, Hollis Taggart is widely recognized by collectors and curators for its leadership, expertise, and openness, on matters of art history, and market trends and opportunities.

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For more information, please contact:
Alina Sumajin / Sascha Freudenheim
PAVE Communications & Consulting
alina@paveconsult.com / sascha@paveconsult.com
646-369-2050 / 917-544-6057

¹ Quote drawn from: American Art at The Phillips Collection, “Biography: Leon Berkowitz (1919-1987)”.
phillipscollection.org