

WIDEWALLS

The Prolific Practice of Mary Obering Comes to the Spotlight at Bortolami



Mary Obering - *Paler I*, 1978. Egg tempera on plywood, 2 panels: 30 x 24 in (76.2 x 60.9cm) each. Courtesy of Bortolami Gallery, New York and the artist. Photography by Kristian Laudrup and Guang Xu

The 1960s brought significant changes in the ways artists perceived their role and used established techniques. Among novel trends, including performance and land art, new artistic movements developed that simplified the expression and used the painterly plane in new ways.

Minimalism and geometric abstraction reduced the expression to basic forms and simple compositions. One of the leading figures, Frank Stella, famously said about his work - *what you see is what you see*, which can be used as a banner of these movements.

Mary Obering, being one of the representatives, built her practice around explorations of form and color. Starting January 2022, a retrospective of her works will be on view at Bortolami Gallery in New York City.

Entryways into Artist's Imaginings

The exhibition will occupy both floors of the gallery, with the upper level dedicated to her works from the 1970s, representing a nod to the artist's SoHo studio. During this period, she created minimalist paintings that pushed beyond the boundaries of internal pictorial space. Her *Drop Series* consists of canvas cut in strips and tacked with fishing nails to the top edges of monochrome canvases, resembling entryways into landscapes of the artist's imaginings.

Some of the pieces, such as *Through Snowy Mountains at Dawn* (1973), exhibit her interest in Eastern art and philosophy, particularly in poetry from Tang Dynasty. Artworks from Obering's Window Series, one of the first she presented in New York, will also be included in the show.

During the 70s, the artist also started to paint on Masonite panels, using different approaches. One of the works, *Dream Plane* (1975), features titanium white and blue colors that splice two curved panels, creating a tension between abstraction and compositional elements of a landscape.

Signature Mediums

Thematic explorations led Obering to mediums that would become her signature over the following decades, including egg tempera and gold leaf. She used Old Masters techniques in pieces that reflect on the blending of painting and architecture.

Obering later production is represented with a series of jewel-like works done in multiple panels, including *Sail on (For Hyde)* (1998), *Story* (1999), and *KCB, BKC, CBK* (2003). Rhythmical in composition, these works show cascades of shapes that are repeated with tonal shifts across distinct surfaces. The spaces between panels are painted, which is a reference to her earlier works that pushed beyond the painterly plane.

Tempera wraps around the tops and edges of panels devised to resemble objects in the *Hanging Series*, recalling Obering's 1970s draped paintings. The most curious viewers are rewarded - the edges are gilded and painted in bright hues and are revealed to those who closely observe each segment of a painting.

Mary Obering: Works from 1972 to 2003 at Bortolami

Born in 1937 in Shreveport, Louisiana, Mary Obering started her artistic practice in the color field style inspired by Mark Rothko, but soon found her unique approach to painterly plane and painting as an object that can be explored beyond its inherent boundaries.

The exhibition *Mary Obering: Works from 1972 to 2003* will be on view at Bortolami Gallery in New York from January 7th until February 28th, 2022. The closing reception will be on Friday, February 25th.