

# VAN DOREN WAXTER

**Hedda Sterne**

*Patterns of Thought*

*Paintings from 1985 - 1989*

October 7 - October 24 | 3rd Floor



*Untitled, 1985, Mixed media on canvas, 52 x 52 inches*

“I have a feeling my painting is about thinking.”

—Hedda Sterne, 1981

Van Doren Waxter is very pleased to announce *Hedda Sterne: Patterns of Thought Paintings from 1985-1989*, an exhibition of prismatic abstractions by the visionary and endlessly experimental Romanian-American artist to go on view at the gallery's 1907 townhouse 23 East 73rd Street from October 7 to October 24, 2020. A prolific artist whose extensive body of work was a process of exploration and discovery, Sterne's legacy is a rich and multilayered contribution to the history of 20th century art. The geometric canvases from her 'Patterns of Thought' cycle in oil, oil pastel, and acrylic have not been exhibited in New York since 2000. The exhibition coincides with a renewal of interest and visibility in the artist, including permanent collection reinstallations at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. The prescient canvases will initially be presented in the gallery's townhouse in a historically sweeping group installation of the Van Doren Waxter virtual stand in Frieze Viewing Room.

An active member of the New York School and raised among the European avant-garde, Sterne's art is remarkable for its diversity and autobiography. “A well-working lens, a perceiver of something that exists independently of me: don't look at me, look at what I've found,” she continuously sought new ways of interpreting the world around her, including a variety of surroundings and locales in the Northeastern United States and Italy, shifting from urban landscapes, interiors, and machinery in the 1940s, to atmospheric space and organic shapes in the 1950s, to open spaces and horizons in the 1960s, and the face and the figure in the 1970s. “Always the observed,” the American art critic Dore Ashton wrote of Hedda Sterne's work in the 1980s, “eventually is subsumed by the metaphorical impulse.”

The six canvases were made in New York City by Sterne in her 70s between 1985, the year she was celebrated in a survey spanning four decades at Queens Museum, Queens, New York, and 1989. The works evince her ongoing interests in the universality of signs and symbolism and in perspectival space and light. The period later led to a more meditative mode of drawing in which dense, intricate organic abstractions took on a more central role in her practice.

*Untitled* (1985), pictured, is a mystical mixed media painting measuring more than four feet tall suggesting transcendence and eternity. A pair of canvases, both made in the late 1980s and measuring 36 x 24 inches, are graceful, vertical structures rendered in subdued, pale washes of color that reflect and refract light with planes that open and close out. The late and legendary 20<sup>th</sup> century art historian, curator, and critic Kathrine Kuh likened this body of work to a trompe l'oeil, enthusing that the paintings transition from "geometric statements to metaphysical space inventions...with light distilled through the most elusive transparencies." The canvases are yet another example of her ability to create highly activated, energetic art, undeniable in its power and unclassifiable.

### **Frieze Viewing Room**

The canvases will initially be presented in the gallery's townhouse in a historically sweeping installation of the Van Doren Waxter virtual stand in Frieze Viewing Room, October 7 to 16. The group presentation, on view at 23 East 73<sup>rd</sup> Street, will place Sterne's productions in conversation with the gallery's stable of estates, foundations, and specialized inventory emphasizing American Abstraction, such as an early 1949 oil made by Richard Diebenkorn (1922-1993), before his switch to figuration; a sharply defined 1965 canvas by John McLaughlin (1898-1976); a geometric 1974 oil on canvas by Elizabeth Murray (1940-2007); and a hand painted acrylic on wood by Anne Truitt (1921-2004); a seminal geometric abstraction from 1971 by Jack Tworkov (1900-1982). The inclusion of these artists proposes a decades long dialogue about the development of art in America in the second half of the 20th century.

### **Appointment Only**

Van Doren Waxter is open by appointment with visits limited to one to four people for 30 minute increments. The public is invited to schedule a visit [here](#), or via [vandorenwaxter.com](http://vandorenwaxter.com). Safety precautions are taken in accordance with CDC guidelines to ensure the health and safety of staff and guests.

### **About the artist**

Hedda Sterne, visionary and endlessly experimental Romanian-American artist, was born in Bucharest in 1910. She attended classes in the Paris ateliers of André Lhote and Fernand Léger and at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in the late 1920s and early 1930s. In 1929, she began studying philosophy and art history at the University of Bucharest. She produced a variety of mixed media works on paper and collage invoking Constructivism and Surrealism while living again in Paris from 1932 to 1939, leaving France that year to return to Bucharest before the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1941, Sterne traveled across war-torn Europe departing for New York City, where she established a studio on East 50th Street and became close friends with Peggy Guggenheim, who in 1943 began exhibiting Sterne's work. In 1948, she received the first of many solo exhibitions with Betty Parsons Gallery. A self-proclaimed "well working lens," Sterne continuously sought new ways of interpreting the world around her, shifting from urban landscapes, interiors, and machinery in the 1940s, atmospheric space and organic shapes in the 1950s, open spaces and horizons in the 1960s, the face and the figure in the 1970s, prismatic abstractions in the 1980s, and graphite and pastel abstractions on paper in the 1990s and 2000s. She died peacefully in her home in New York City at age 100 in 2011.

Sterne has been included in recent and significant exhibitions, such as *Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2017); *Epic Abstraction: Pollock to Herrera*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2018); *Crossroads: Carnegie Museum of Art's Collection, 1945 to Now*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA (2018-2021); and *The Whitney's Collection: Selections from 1900 to 1965*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2019).

The artist has been represented exclusively by Van Doren Waxter since 2015.