

# DAVID KORDANSKY GALLERY

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present Betty Woodman: Diptychs, an exhibition of ceramic sculptures produced between 1990 and 2013, on view in Los Angeles at 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. from May 13 through June 16, 2023. An opening reception will be held on Friday, May 12 from 6 to 8 PM.

Woodman (1930–2018) was a pioneering artist whose groundbreaking approach to ceramics encompassed a wide range of global influences. Her symphonic understanding of the formal and cultural histories of the vessel gave her the space to experiment with techniques and compositional strategies borrowed from painting, sculpture, architecture, and other genres.

Beginning in the late 1980s, Woodman began to devote significant attention to the production of two-part ceramic sculptures in which paired vessels, with daringly constructed wings, served as supports for lush, detailed, and often figurative painting. Conceived in collaboration with the Woodman Family Foundation, Betty Woodman: Diptychs is a focused survey of the artist's explorations related to this type, which developed from her triptychs and her interest in the visual movement from one vessel to another. "I then became interested in thinking about these ideas with diptychs. The space in the middle became the center of the piece. The diptychs themselves also took on a new life," she wrote. The exhibition charts the evolution of her ideas about the dynamics of positive and negative space in sculpture and painting, as well as her ever-shifting conceptualization of the ways in which vessel forms and the human figure are linked in the cultural imagination.

The works on view speak to the heterogeneous nature of Woodman's interests and her belief that every artwork can say something unprecedented about its medium. The exhibition's earliest sculptures share an earthy, classically oriented palette that speaks to the elemental tactility of clay. As their titles suggest, Woodman often conceived her works as conversations with the potters, painters, and architects of antiquity. The lack of

strict separation between the functional and aesthetic aspects of ancient Egyptian and Greek vessels, for instance, is in large part responsible for their ability to communicate a felt sense of what domestic, ceremonial, and mythological life was like in those civilizations.

In a similar way, Woodman's diptychs constitute pictures of contemporary attitudes toward art and pleasure. Glazed images of fragmented interior scenes, complete with renditions of vessels, result in animated, richly saturated surfaces that exude the analytic curiosity of Cubism and the emotional exuberance of Fauvism. Her long-standing interest in modernist painting aside, these works also find Woodman fully leaning into the spaces between and around sculptural forms. These voids do not so much separate the vessels as join them together in a single, variously articulated visual field in which two-dimensional representations come alive in three-dimensional space. Woodman's understanding of spatial illusion is notable for the insistence with which she also emphasizes the viewer's embodied experience of the physical environment in which a work is seen.

It is no accident, then, that such effects are often driven by Woodman's depictions of the human body. With their baroquely sculpted wings, the vessels seem to portray active figures that lean, dance, and pose around each other. Glazed images engage in a contrapuntal relationship with these sculptural silhouettes, perhaps most notably in instances where Woodman paints figures that are alternately contained by and push against the confines of their supports. These works exemplify the ways in which the artist treated ceramic objects as canvases for increasingly complex, choreographed compositions where she gave surprise, joy, humor, and wide-ranging art historical research free rein. Even the glazing itself often traces parallels between human- and vessel-based forms. A stylized female figure appears on one side of Irene Reclining (2013), the halves of her reclining body divided across its elongated wings; on the other,

Woodman uses similarly linear brushstrokes to create a torqued, abstracted image that doubles as a ghost-like reproduction of the vessels on which it has been inscribed.

In works of this kind, Woodman demonstrates how the products of human creativity can feel as though they are imbued with human sentience. Buildings, artworks, and domestic objects are not inert things, but living phenomena that change according to what—and who—appears inside and alongside them. This proposition is both playful and slyly provocative because it suggests that art is not only a way of making, but a way of seeing, one that pervades the spaces people inhabit, the clothes they wear, and the food they eat. Diptychs provides ample evidence of this fervent democratic streak in Woodman’s project, even as it emphasizes her virtuosity and insistence on an individual point of view. Because they are at once some of her most classical and genre-defying works, the diptychs also distill her highly original notion of what it means to be contemporary: attuned to the past, finding the future in each moment, and translating perceptions of the immediate environment into an expansive and variable visual language.

Betty Woodman was born in Norwalk, Connecticut, raised in Newton, Massachusetts, and studied ceramics at the School for American Craftsmen in Alfred, New York from 1948 to 1950. Woodman was the subject of numerous solo exhibitions worldwide during her lifetime, including a 2006 retrospective at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York—the first time the museum dedicated a survey to a living female artist. In 2022, David Kordansky Gallery presented the first major exhibition of Woodman’s work in New York in six years, Betty Woodman: Conversations on the Shore, Works from the 1990s. Other solo exhibitions have been presented at K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong (2018); Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2016); Museo Marino Marini, Florence, Italy (2015); Gardiner Museum, Toronto (2011); American Academy in Rome (2010); Palazzo Pitti, Giardino di Boboli, Florence, Italy (2009); Denver Art Museum (2006); and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1996). Recent group exhibitions include The Flames:

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The Age of Ceramics, Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (2021–2022); Less Is a Bore: Maximalist Art & Design, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (2019); and Liverpool Biennial, England (2016). Woodman's work is in numerous permanent collections worldwide, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Museu Nacional do Azulejo, Lisbon, Portugal; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and World Ceramic Center, Incheon, Korea. Woodman lived and worked in Boulder, Colorado; Antella, Italy; and New York.