

Dona Nelson: Recent Paintings - A Journey Through Materiality **May 16th - July 1st 2023**

Dona Nelson's artistic philosophy is rooted in the material specificity of each painting rather than expressionism, as she does not intentionally create paintings to convey emotions beyond the materiality of the work. This commitment to materiality requires complete presence in the moment and a sharp focus on the physicality of the process. It has allowed her to consistently push past familiar boundaries of the medium, experimenting with unconventional techniques that emphasize the act of painting. Nelson's paintings are vibrant and unpredictable.

In her celebrated two-sided canvases, Nelson presents the viewer with two visually distinct, materially interdependent planes. Viewers are encouraged to navigate around the paintings, rendering the encompassing space as conceptually engaging as the artworks themselves. Nelson often works from both sides of the painting, stretching and re-stretching the canvas before discerning the front from the back. She stains her paintings with fluid acrylic paint, using both a spray bottle and a garden hose. The stretcher is sometimes used as a tool. Paint is forcefully and randomly bounced on the stretcher bars so that it stains through to the other side of the canvas in unpredictable ways. Also, Nelson sometimes removes the original stretcher and restretches the painting on a backless stretcher so that both sides are fully visible.

In the lavender, gold and blue-green painting, *Twilight*, Nelson worked solely on the front of the canvas with collaged wads of gel - soaked cheese cloth which were eventually removed, resulting in a unique, unpremeditated pattern on the back of the painting. This captivating work offers a rich dynamic exploration of space, color, and materiality.

The front of *And the Sun Went Down* is an image that is constructed from the back of the painting with successive passes of fluid paint over the non-permeable materials that masked most of the canvas. Although the front of *And the Sun Went Down* looks very gestural, it was never directly touched. The paint permeates the weave of the canvas from the back, rather than being on the surface of the canvas. The front of *And the Sun Went Down* is both wildly active and completely still.

With the wall works, *Top* and *Ruby Sky*, Nelson adopts an exploratory and light-hearted approach, repeatedly drenching the canvas in water and acrylic paint. The ensuing water stains generate organic and unpredictable shapes and patterns, which Nelson accentuates and intensifies with supplementary lines and puddles of paint. These lively works present a vivid and dynamic investigation of chance, control, and the symbiotic relationship between the artist and her materials.

Dona Nelson (b. 1947, Great Island, NE) moved to New York City in 1967 to participate in the **Whitney Independent Study Program**, and received her BFA from **Ohio State University** in 1968. Nelson participated in the **2014 Whitney Biennial** and her work, which was originally included in Lucy Lippard's ground-breaking 1971 feminist exhibition, **Twenty Six Contemporary Women Artists** was also a featured part of a revisiting of the original exhibition with the addition of twenty six younger artists in 2022, **52 Artists: A Feminist**

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Milestone at the **Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art** in Ridgefield, CT. Participations in numerous institutional group shows include **Unpainting**, **Art Gallery of New South Wales**, Sydney, 2017 (Nicholas Chambers, curator), and **Pretty Raw: After and Around Helen Frankenthaler**, **Rose Art Museum**, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA (curated by Katy Siegel), and at such institutions as the **Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts**, **Contemporary Art Museum (Houston and South Florida)**, **Boston University Art Gallery**, **New York University 80WSE**, **CCS Bard**, **MIT List Visual Art Center**, **Milwaukee Art Museum**, **P.S. 1**, **Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum**, and **Guggenheim**.

Thaddaeus Ropac, London and Paris, **Zeno X Gallery**, Antwerp, **Morán Morán**, Los Angeles, **Ceysson & Bénétière**, Luxembourg, as well as **Deitch Projects**, **Lisson Gallery**, **Robert Miller**, **Mary Boone**, **Canada Gallery**, and **d'Amelio Terras** (all New York), included Nelson's work in their exhibitions. Most recently the **Whitney Museum** acquired Nelson's work for their holdings. Other institutional collections include the **Carnegie Museum**, **Art Gallery of New South Wales**, Australia, **Buffalo AKG Art Museum**, **Museum of Fine Arts Boston**, **Guggenheim Museum**, **Kadist Foundation**, **Metropolitan Museum of Art**, **Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts**, **Perez Art Museum**, **Centre Pompidou**, **Rose Art Museum**, **The Weatherspoon Art Museum** and **The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery**, **Skidmore College**, **New York**, (selected).

Nelson has received many grants and awards including an *Anonymous Was a Woman* grant in 2015, an *Artist Legacy Foundation Award* in 2013, a *Foundation for Contemporary Arts Award* in 2011, and a *Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship* in 1994.

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