

Elizabeth Murray

Painting in the '80s

510 West 25th Street, New York
November 2, 2017 – January 13, 2018

Opening Reception:
Thursday, November 2, 6 – 8 PM

New York—Pace Gallery is pleased to present its ninth exhibition since 1996 devoted to the work Elizabeth Murray. The exhibition draws together sixteen paintings created by the artist in the 1980s, including loans from the Colby College Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Continuing where Pace Gallery's 2011 exhibition *Elizabeth Murray: Painting in the '70s* left off, *Elizabeth Murray: Painting in the '80s* explores another critical decade in the artist's career, the decade during which Murray began painting her iconic shaped canvases. The exhibition will be on view from November 2, 2017 to January 13, 2018 at 510 West 25th Street, with a public opening held on Thursday, November 2nd from 6 – 8 p.m.



Elizabeth Murray: Painting in the '80s presents formal and narrative content that continues to influence the techniques and subject matter of contemporary painting. Murray arrived in New York in 1967 during the heyday of Minimalism and the rise of Conceptualism, and amid prevailing assertions of painting's demise. As she recollected, "The mood was that painting was out, that hip people, people who were avant, weren't involved in painting. That was unnerving, but then I didn't give a damn." Fully committed to painting, Murray broke new ground depicting personal, poetic and at times feminist narratives on complex multidimensional shaped canvases. Murray's compositions from the 1980s suggest large scale breaking cups, tumbling wineglasses, tilting tables, windows, rooms, attenuated human forms, letters, symbols and abstract shapes constructed through positive and negative, real and imagined space. As Roberta Smith has written, "She has put the vocabulary of twentieth-century abstraction to new and different uses, tracing in irresistible formal terms a psychological narrative that is not explicitly feminine but that women, thanks to society's relentless conditioning, know best and most completely."

In her paintings of the '80s, Murray balances seemingly opposing forces—combining geometric and biomorphic shapes, hard edges and feathery brushstrokes, imagery and abstraction and oil paint and three-dimensional structure. These combinations give the paintings a sense of movement and a dynamic ambiguity. The works do not prescribe a certain reading: Murray wanted viewers to see what they saw, it was okay if they didn't see images or if they saw something different than the imagery she intended. As she said, "The way it looks is just the way it looks in the end."

As the decade closed, and Murray's paintings became more and more three dimensional, she was adamant that they remained paintings. "I always thought they were paintings. I wasn't thinking of sculpture; I wasn't even thinking of relief, to tell you the truth. I was always thinking of painting." Leaving her brush strokes visible, the edges of her canvases raw and allowing paint to drip down the sides of her works while showing glimpses of underpainting, Murray emphasized her paintings as hand-built and hand-painted reminding the viewer of the physicality of her process and the importance of the formal aspects of painting.

Pace will publish a catalogue to accompany the exhibition that will include an essay by art historian and curator Dr. Kellie Jones, Associate Professor in Art History and Archaeology at the Institute for Research in African American Studies at Columbia University. Both MacArthur Fellows, Murray in 1999 and Jones in 2016, Kellie met Murray as a child and remained friends with the artist throughout her life.

Elizabeth Murray's (b.1940, Chicago; d. 2007, Washington County, New York) work blurs the distinction between abstraction and representation, and her shaped canvases and multipart supports challenge traditional conventions of painting. She transformed modernist abstraction by redefining the sculptural dimensions of the medium and exploring layered planes of canvas. Using bold colors and biomorphic forms, figures, and everyday objects, Murray introduced a dynamic sense of movement to her imagery. Murray earned a BFA from the Art Institute of Chicago (1962) and an MFA from Mills College in Oakland (1964). Her work is held in over sixty public collections in the United States, and has been the subject of over eighty solo exhibitions worldwide, including exhibitions organized by institutions such as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1988) and the Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, Ohio (1991 – 1992), among many others. Her first retrospective, *Paintings and Drawings*, jointly organized by the Dallas Museum of Art, the Albert and Vera List Visual Arts Center, MIT, Cambridge, and Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, opened in 1987, and traveled to The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Des Moines Art Center; and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, closing at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in 1988. In 2005, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, organized a second retrospective that traveled to Institut Valencià d'Art Modern in Spain. In 2007, her work was included in the 52nd Biennale di Venezia, *Think with the Senses, Feel with the Mind: Art in the Present Tense*.

Murray was the recipient of numerous academic and institutional honors, including an award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York (1984), to which she was elected as a member in 1992. She was awarded the Skowhegan Medal for Painting, New York (1986), and was named a MacArthur Fellow by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (1999).

Pace is a leading contemporary art gallery representing many of the most significant international artists and estates of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Founded by Arne Glimcher in Boston in 1960 and currently led by Marc Glimcher, Pace has been a constant, vital force in the art world and has introduced many renowned artists' work to the public for the first time. Pace has mounted more than 900 exhibitions, including scholarly shows that have subsequently traveled to museums, and published over 450 exhibition catalogues. Today, Pace has nine locations worldwide: three galleries in New York; one in London; one in Palo Alto, California; one in Beijing; and spaces in Hong Kong, Paris, and Seoul. In 2016, the gallery launched Pace Art + Technology, a new program dedicated to showcasing interdisciplinary art groups, collectives and studios whose works explore the confluence of art and technology.

Elizabeth Murray, *Making It Up*, 1986, oil on canvas, 10' 4-1/8" x 7' 11-1/8" x 16" (315.3 cm x 241.6 cm x 40.6 cm)
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