

McCLAIN
GALLERY



CELESTIAL VOIDS | DOROTHY HOOD

September 28 – December 28, 2024

Opening Reception: Saturday, September 28, 2–4 PM

McClain Gallery is pleased to present *Dorothy Hood: Celestial Voids*, an exhibition of paintings by the late artist. This marks Hood's second solo painting exhibition with the gallery among many other presentations since 2019. Best known for her monumental canvases that evoke fractured color fields, Hood used a similar approach in a spare and minimal series of paintings made in the 1960s to early 70s, wherein her color palette is limited to moody blues and gray washes. The exhibition focuses on this series of paintings and expands upon a theme of weightless expansiveness also present in other works with more open palettes; the show spans the late 1960s through 1993. The works are expressive, bestowing a cosmic scale to her sensitive staining techniques. These paintings explore the artist's groundbreaking method of

abstraction, her ideas about celestial landscapes, and the deep psychological undercurrents that defined much of her practice.

A keystone for our exhibition, *Ingeli* from 1969 is a large canvas stained in gray then overpainted in warm sienna and burnt ochre tones. The upper half of this vertical composition features Hood's characteristic fractures, made using tape and other materials to disrupt the flow of her thinned grisaille pigments. The angular and chopped lines are followed by surprisingly bright orange and pink passages, earthy green scoops and black paint tucked throughout the mostly brown of Hood's overpaint. The result, with its vertiginous streak of gray plunging and thinning toward the bottom edge of the canvas, is spectacular.

As a counterpoint to this muscular and powerful painting, the *Illuminated Gray* series, punctuating the latter part of the exhibition, veers toward a bluer tone of flowing paint. The compositions in this group of works are stripped down to spilling washes, interrupted by delicate forms that appear in the under layers. Some of these shapes are in-painted, resulting in floating and groundless objects in a breadth of ultramarine. Hood cleverly utilizes the direction of her pours to create a sense of weightlessness and reversal: the call of void, as it were, moves up, down, or sideways across the room, sending us skittering through the cosmos.

With this presentation we hope to hone the understanding of Dorothy Hood's prolific career and the seemingly infinite source of ideas she engaged with. While her talent as a colorist is hailed widely, her contributions to a minimalist methodology and quietly surreal abstraction remain under-observed. *Celestial Voids* aims to fill this quiet chamber.

Dorothy Hood: Celestial Voids will be on view at McClain Gallery through December 28, 2024.

Dorothy Hood (b. 1918, Bryan, Texas, US; d. 2000, Houston, Texas, US), whose paintings, collage work, and drawings McClain Gallery has presented in exhibitions and art fairs in New York, Dallas, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami and Houston, was a modern master. Hood spent her formative years in Mexico City from 1941 until her return to Houston in the early 1960s. During this dynamic period, poet and political activist Pablo Neruda introduced her to renowned muralist José Clemente Orozco, who not only gave her her first studio but also served as her mentor from 1943 onward. While in Mexico, she developed close ties with Latin American artists, literati, and intellectuals, many of whom were fleeing war-torn Europe. Hood quickly became a respected artist in Mexico City, with her work deeply influenced by the surrealists she encountered there.

In 1944, Hood's drawing *The Seeming Beginning* (1943), an ink and pencil work on paper, was acquired by the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York through the efforts of John McAndrew, MoMA's curator of architecture, who introduced the work to Dorothy Miller, MoMA's eminent curator and foremost expert on American art. The piece was subsequently featured in two significant MoMA exhibitions—*Drawings from the Museum Collection* (1947) and *Figures and Faces* (1954)—both of which received critical attention, with the drawing specifically highlighted in the MoMA press release for both exhibitions. Hood had her first New York solo exhibition at the prestigious Willard Gallery in 1950.

Upon her return to Houston in 1961, Hood produced some of her largest and most celebrated works, including expansive canvases that merged Color Field theory with post-painterly abstraction. These works, executed at a grand scale, place Hood among the few recognized American women painters of her era who pioneered at such scale and ambition.

Hood's work is held in the permanent collections of prestigious museums such as the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Everson Museum in Syracuse, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Menil Collection in Houston and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.