

Exhibition: *Mary Corse: A Survey in Light*

On View: July 28–November 11, 2019

Location: BCAM, Level 3



(Image captions on page 5)

(Los Angeles—June 13, 2019) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Mary Corse: A Survey in Light*, the artist’s first solo museum survey, from July 28 through November 11, 2019. The exhibition, with 20 paintings, two sculptures, and three prints, brings together for the first time Corse’s key bodies of work, including her early shaped canvases, freestanding sculptures, and light encasements that she engineered in the mid-1960s. Also featured are her breakthrough White Light Paintings, begun in 1968, and the Black Earth series that she initiated after moving in 1970 from downtown Los Angeles to Topanga Canyon, where she lives and works today. Organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in association with LACMA, *Mary Corse: A Survey in Light* was on view at the Whitney from June 8–November 25, 2018. The presentation at LACMA is organized by Carol S. Eiel, the museum’s senior curator of Modern Art.

“Though Mary Corse is associated with the first generation of California Light and Space artists, this is—surprisingly—the first museum exhibition devoted exclusively to her work,” says Eiel. “Corse’s abstractions are extremely creative and exquisitely beautiful, and we are honored to acknowledge her work here in Los Angeles.”

“LACMA has extensive holdings of art made in Southern California, and this exhibition plays to that strength,” says Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “We are fortunate to have Corse’s work in the museum’s collection including *Untitled (White Arch Inner Band Series)*, which was featured in the exhibition *SoCal: Southern California Art of the 1960s and ‘70s from LACMA’s Collection* in 2007. We are pleased to showcase the painting again, along with *Untitled (Black Grid)*, a

gift in 2008 from Cindy and Tony Canzoneri—now within a larger body of Corse’s work in this long overdue survey.”

About the Exhibition

After early abstract work, Mary Corse emerged in Los Angeles in the mid-1960s as an artist associated with the West Coast Light and Space movement. She shared with her Southern California contemporaries a deep fascination with perception and with the possibility that light itself could serve as both subject and material of art. This focused exhibition, organized in loose chronological order, highlights critical moments of experimentation as Corse engaged with tropes of modernist painting while charting her own course through studies in quantum physics and complex investigations into a range of “painting” materials.

The majority of works in the exhibition are paintings on canvas or board, featuring refractive materials such as glass microspheres and reflective acrylic squares. The remaining works include two sculptural paintings made out of Plexiglas and light fixtures, two free-standing sculptures, one wall-bound ceramic “painting,” and three prints. The exhibition includes three paintings from LACMA’s permanent collection, *Untitled (Hexagonal White)* (1965), *Untitled (White Arch Inner Band Series)* (1966), and *Untitled (Black Grid)* (1988), the last of which is unique to the presentation at LACMA.

Exhibition Highlights

Mary Corse’s early works from 1964–1966 capture her range of experimentation as her studio became a laboratory for formal and material investigation. One of Corse’s first shaped paintings, *Untitled (Octagonal Blue)*, 1964, reveals the artist’s early interest in making a large encompassing field of color that breaks free of a standard rectilinear format and suggests an expanded compositional space. In an early effort to suffuse her paintings with light, she experimented with reflective materials, sprinkling tiny metal flakes across this work’s painted surface. For the artist, the subtle sheen produced by the metal fell short of achieving the inner glow she was seeking, leading her to explore the perceptual possibilities of standard white acrylic paint. Corse’s foundational explorations from this time set in motion much of what was to come in the subsequent years.

In 1966 Corse engineered her first electric light boxes. These “light paintings,” as she has described them, prompted a brief but transformative shift away from the canvas as she replaced painted white fields with radiant fluorescent light. Over the

next two years Corse developed a series of argon light boxes such as *Untitled (Electric Light)*, 1968/2019, that are suspended from the ceiling and powered wirelessly with a Tesla coil, a high-frequency generator that transmits an electromagnetic field through a wall. Corse began taking physics classes—she needed to pass a proficiency test to procure certain capacitors and wires—which upended her worldview. She interpreted the ideas of quantum physics in relation to her own artistic concerns, recognizing that perception is always subjective and that uncertainty is at play in all systems.

A few years later, when driving through Malibu one evening, Corse made a serendipitous observation. She noticed that when light struck the painted highway lines in front of her, they illuminated for an instant as she drove past. Realizing that the same glass microspheres embedded in road paint could be used to transform her white paintings into light-responsive works, Corse began covering the surfaces of canvases with these tiny refractive beads. In the resulting White Light series, begun in 1968, Corse embraced the potential for her paintings to exist in ever-changing states, to appear alternatively flat and full of brushwork, depending on the positions of the viewer. *Untitled (White Grid, Vertical Strokes)*, 1969 and *Untitled (White Grid, Horizontal Strokes)*, 1969, for example allowed her brushwork to shine through and serve as the distinguishing feature as she varied the direction of her brushstrokes from painting to painting. When Corse first exhibited her White Light grid paintings in the early 1970s, she presented them in pairs, side-by-side, acknowledging that their compositional distinctions are best understood in relation to one another.

Since the 1970s Corse has pushed the formal and perceptual possibilities of her White Light paintings to ever more complex ends. She has worked in increasingly larger formats, integrated new motifs such as arches and bands, and incorporated black and occasionally color alongside her glowing white fields. Corse's most elusive White Light paintings are her Inner Band series including *Untitled (White Arch Inner Band Series)*, 1996; *Untitled (White Inner Band)*, 2003; and *Untitled (White Inner Band, Beveled)*, 2011. These works are defined by an interior band (or multiple bands) that mysteriously shifts in and out of view as the viewer walks alongside them. They have no ideal vantage point and cannot be fixed to a single image, underscoring the subjectivity of perception and acknowledging that everyone experiences visual phenomena differently. With their inconstant surfaces and

immersive scale, the Inner Band paintings encourage an active viewing experience that directly engages viewers as participants.

About Mary Corse

Mary Corse (b. 1945, Berkeley, CA) studied for a year at the University of California, Santa Barbara and received her BFA from the Chouinard Art Institute in 1968. Select group exhibitions featuring her work include *Art and Space*, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Spain (2017); *Light and Space*, Seattle Art Museum, WA, (2015); *Reductive Minimalism: Women Artists in Dialogue*, 1960–2012, University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor (2014); *Venice in Venice—Glow and Reflection: Venice California Art from 1960 to the Present*, organized by Foundation 20 21, New York as a collateral exhibition at the 54th Venice Biennale (2011); *Pacific Standard Time: Crosscurrents in L.A. Painting and Sculpture, 1950–1970*, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2011); and *Phenomenal: California Light and Space*, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (2011). Corse's work is in numerous public collections, including the Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas Austin; Dia Art Foundation, New York; The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Menil Collection, Houston, TX; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA; Seattle Art Museum; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

In 2016, Corse was commissioned by the U.S. General Services Administration to create a work for the new Los Angeles federal courthouse building. Corse is the recipient of the Cartier Foundation Award (1993); a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship (1975); the Theodoron Award, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1971); and the New Talent Award, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (1967).

Exhibition Catalogue

Mary Corse: A Survey in Light by Kim Conaty with contributions from Robin Clark, Michael Govan, Alexis Lowry, and David Reed

\$50.00 | Hardcover, 156 pages, 10.3 × 11.3 × 0.9 inches, illustrated

Mary Corse: A Survey in Light is the first comprehensive examination of this singular artist's work, and features new scholarship and object studies that underscore how Corse's groundbreaking approach to light, perception, and subjectivity forged a new language of painting.

Credit

This exhibition is organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, in association with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The Los Angeles presentation is made possible in part by Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Lisson Gallery, Pace Gallery, and Marietta Wu and Thomas Yamamoto. Additional support is provided by the Wallis Annenberg Director's Endowment Fund.

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About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of nearly 140,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. lacma.org

Image captions: (Left) Mary Corse, *Untitled (Octagonal Blue)*, 1964, metal flakes in acrylic on canvas, collection of the artist, courtesy Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Lisson Gallery, and Pace Gallery, © Mary Corse, photograph © Mary Corse; (Center, left) Mary Corse, *Untitled (White Light Series)*, 1966, fluorescent light, plexiglass, and acrylic on wood, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, gift, Michael Straus, 2016, © Mary Corse; (Center, right) Mary Corse, *Untitled (White Grid, Vertical Strokes)*, 1969, glass microspheres and acrylic on canvas, collection of Andrea Nasher. © Mary Corse, photograph © Mary Corse; (Right) Mary Corse, *Untitled (White Arch Inner Band Series)*, 1996, glass microspheres and acrylic on canvas, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Modern and Contemporary Art Council, New Talent Purchase Award by exchange, M.2007.99, © Mary Corse, photograph © Museum Associates/LACMA

Press Contact

Erin Yokomizo | Senior Associate, Communications | eyokomizo@lacma.org | 323 932-5825

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