

eric firestone gallery



Throughout the last six decades, **Nina Yankowitz (b. 1946)** has created daring and dynamic works of abstraction imbued with her formal and social justice concerns. A founding member of the iconic feminist collective Heresies, Yankowitz since the 1960s has worked across and beyond traditional art forms. Whether taking radical approaches to painting or mounting ambitious multimedia installations, Yankowitz has probed the material, political, and even sonic nature of abstract art.

Born and raised in New Jersey, Nina Yankowitz would skip class in high school to hang around legendary folk music venues in Greenwich Village. By word of mouth, Yankowitz learned of Group 212: a collective of artists, musicians, and poets with whom she spent the summer of 1968 in Woodstock, New York (which thereafter became the site of the famed Woodstock Festival). Group 212's collaborative spirit, and liberal mixing of music and art, inspired Yankowitz to embrace emerging technologies and media. Sound especially came to underpin her practice.

Yankowitz studied at Temple University and the New School for Social Research before graduating with an MFA from the School of Visual Arts. She presented *Draped Paintings* and *Pleated Paintings* in a series of group shows between 1967 and 1972 at Kornblee Gallery, New York, where she also

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mounted important solo exhibitions in 1969 and 1971. Leaving behind painting's drum-taut support, the *Draped Paintings* are unstretched canvases that she sprayed with mists of acrylic paint—producing atmospheric expanses and bleeding bands of color. She then hung these works in loose soft folds that cascade vertically down or horizontally across the wall. The artist created her *Pleated Paintings* in a similar way, yet instead ran lengths of canvas through pleating machines before spraying them with paint. By eschewing the historical precedent of wood stretcher bars, these adaptable paintings assume various forms and identities each time they are installed.

Some of the *Draped Paintings* are also sonically inclined. For example, *Oh Say Can You See: A Draped Sound Painting* (1967–68) is painted with the first musical notes of the National Anthem. Yankowitz invited Ken Werner (another member of Group 212 who is known as Phil Harmonic) to use a Moog Synthesizer to stretch the sounds of the same notes to echo how they appear on the surface of her painting. *Oh Say Can You See: A Draped Sound Painting* not only demonstrates the subtlety of her antiwar critique, but also harnesses what was cutting-edge technology at the time to explore the sensorial presence of painting.

Only a few years after graduating from the School of Visual Arts, Yankowitz was invited to participate in the inaugural 1973 *Whitney Biennial*. It was during this time that she began attending meetings with a group of feminist artists that would become the legendary Heresies collective. Heresies sought to challenge patriarchal art institutions by publishing the *Heresies Magazine on Art and Politics* from 1977–92, among other initiatives. Also in 1973, Yankowitz moved from her TriBeCa studio to a loft building on Spring Street in downtown New York City, where she began another important painting series. The artist created *Dilated Grain Readings* and *Dilated Paint Readings* by squeezing paint from plastic bottles onto unstretched raw linen woven with tight and loose grain patterns. She outlined the threads with relief paint markings that read like color notation sound scores.

Throughout the 1970s, Yankowitz spent weeks in Southampton at the summer rentals of friends such as the artists Hermine Freed and Marjorie Strider and the architect James Ingo Freed. Yankowitz became an integral part of the booming postwar art scene on the East End of Long Island. The sonic environment there framed and even influenced her practice. Yankowitz recalls being struck by the melodies produced by birds and insects, in response to which she created a series of painted scores

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and audio recordings that evoke the symphonic-like sounds of various voices. She eventually purchased a house in Sag Harbor in 1993, where she continues to live and work.

Yankowitz's art is found in public collections including the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; the Franklin Furnace Collection at The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Bank of Boston International. She has been featured in exhibitions or presented installations at institutions such as the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield (1970); Art Institute of Chicago (1972); Kunsthaus, Hamburg (1972); MoMA PS1, New York (1982); installation at the 51st Street Lexington Avenue subway station commissioned by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, New York (1989); Art in General, New York (1998); Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill (1998); Guild Hall, East Hampton (2005; 2014); and MuseumsQuartier Vienna (2011).

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