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## **NANCY GENN** ***Beyond the Grid***

curated by **Francesca Valente**

Vernissage Saturday 1 April 2023 at 11.30 a.m.

Palazzo Collicola, Spoleto

**1 April – 31 May 2023**

The Galleria d'Arte Moderna Giovanni Carandente in Palazzo Collicola will host a comprehensive retrospective of California artist Nancy Genn, reaffirming the city's role of Spoleto as a key center for the presentation of seminal international art, where the Festival of the 2Worlds has taken place for over 65 years. In the wake of her recent success in Venice (Palazzo Ferro Fini, 2018; Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna Ca' Pesaro, 2019) and following her solo show in Todi (2020), in the context of the first Festival of the Arts, Nancy Genn will be present, once again, in Italy to lend a personal context to a selection of works that reveal the intensity and depth of the aesthetic pilgrimage she has been on for more than half a century. The exhibition begins with a room devoted to her abstract paintings from the Sixties and Seventies, applauded at the time by art critic Michel Tapié, who included Genn among the most significant painters of the Postwar Informal Art period, along with Alberto Burri, Sam Francis, Louise Nevelson and Jackson Pollock (*Morphologie Autre*, 1960). We are then offered a selection of *Artworks of Handmade Paper* (1975-1989) that highlight her superb virtuosity and illustrate her pioneering technique of tear-ups, known as "the Genn method", which in 1978 gained her an eight-month residence in Japan under the prestigious *United States/ Japan Creative Arts Fellowship*. As curator Francesca Valente points out, in Genn's hands «paper transcends its role as simple support and fully unfolds its extraordinary potential in a transformation from flat surface to tangible three-dimensional structure». The works of the so-called "Roman period" (1989-2014) follow and reveal her passion for travel: driven by an irrepressible curiosity, she unflinchingly captured the *genius loci* of the sites she visited, producing architectural paintings that combine archeological stratifications, topographic maps, fragments of ancient papers and cryptic messages. Her most recent paintings on paper and canvas, such as the series *The Shape of Water, Rainbars, Patagonia, Gather* (2000-2023) possess a new, more intimate and meditative feel: their theme, water, as source of renovation and purification, is ever-present, inviting us to reflect on the most precious resource of the planet. The vision that runs through the exhibition culminates in the last room, which features examples of open-form or linear sculptures – *Expanding Oval* (2008), *Oriental Magnolia* and *Continuum* (2023)– cast in bronze using the lost-wax casting method. Unique pieces modeled on organic elements, the three works «explore the tension between levity and gravity, discipline and exuberance, fullness and emptiness, in a process of glorious alchemy». As curator Francesca Valente has observed, in Genn's works opposites do not collide; they come together in a happy formal complicity. In her spiritual and aesthetic voyage Genn devised an abstract mobile grid through which to approach reality from multiple perspectives: tensions dissolve to be replaced, with a seeming absence of effort, by a frail, precise equilibrium. In the frenetic vortex of contemporary Western life, her art invites us to silence and reflection in a dreamlike other dimension where the mind is at ease and the spirit restored.

The exhibition, co-sponsored by Marignana Arte, Venice, runs parallel to a retrospective of the works of Michael Venezia, who represents the second generation of Abstract Expressionism of the New York School, the same generation as Genn, eminent representative of the counter-movement that flourished in the Bay Area on the same post-war years.

## Biographical notes

Nancy Genn (1929), a California artist of international stature, lives and works in Berkeley. She studied at the California School of Fine Arts (now The San Francisco Art Institute) and the University of California, Berkeley between 1947 and 1949. Michel Tapié, the first theorist of informal art, included Nancy Genn in his seminal text *Morphologie Autre*, (1960) among contemporary illustrious European, American, Canadian and Japanese artists, placing her next to Carla Accardi, Alberto Burri, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Lucio Fontana, Emilio Vedova, Sam Francis, Robert Motherwell, Louise Nevelson, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Antoni Tàpies, Jean-Paul Riopelle and Atsuko Tanaka. In 1978 she was awarded the prestigious *United States/Japan Creative Arts Fellowship* that brought her to travel and lecture about her tear-up pioneering technique in Japan for over eight months. In the 1980s she received wide recognition for her experiments with paper, exhibiting with Robert Rauschenberg and Sam Francis in the US and in Asia (*New American Paperworks*, 1982-83). She was invited several times as visiting artist to Rome by the American Academy, to Turin by ICAR (International Center of Aesthetic Research), to Venice by the Cini Foundation (2019) on the occasion of her exhibition at Ca' Pesaro and most recently to Todi (2020), in the context of the first Festival of Arts in the context of a tribute to Beverly Pepper. Her most important retrospectives include *Planes of Light* (2003) at the Fresno Art Museum, CA, and *Architecture from Within* (2018) at Palazzo Ferro Fini, Venice. Her latest show, *Handmade paper 1981-1988*, was held at Marignana Arte, Venice (2022-2023). Genn's work is part of the permanent collections of international institutions such as MoMA and the Brooklyn Museum in New York; the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the University Art Museum of Berkeley, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC; Ca' Pesaro, Palazzo Fortuny, Palazzo Ferro Fini and Fondazione Cini, Venice.

A lavishly illustrated bilingual monograph entitled *Nancy Genn. Architecture from Within/Architettura interiori* by Francesca Valente was published by Skira, Milan, 2018, and includes essays and appreciations by a number of internationally renowned critics.

The museum exhibition in Spoleto, curated by Francesca Valente, will be followed by a solo show entitled *Nancy Genn: Light and Time* at David Richard Gallery, New York (May 23 to June 30 2023), and by *Nancy Genn: Beyond the Grid* (a selection) at Marignana Arte, Venice, (June 23 to September 23 2023).



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