

Statement for Louise Fishman Show – Dona Nelson, 05/14/25

Louise was wonderfully eloquent about the nature of her life experience in relationship to painting. In 1992, she said:

There are many things that artists are just not conscious about in their work. I'm not thinking all the things I would have to think in order to make a painting. I'm not thinking those things consciously. But they have to be present or I couldn't put those hundreds of things together. I'm talking about strands that come from the past and from peripheral vision, and what I see now, and all that's in my mind. And a certain sense of grace about being alive.

While Louise Fishman did make important series of works that brilliantly express feminist outrage, for instance, her works on paper that feature the names of her friends, the *Angry Paintings* from 1973, 52 years ago, the substantial body of her mature paintings, such as those displayed in this exhibition, are abstract paintings. Abstract paintings are not gendered. They are objects that relate to other abstract paintings. For instance, I would love to see Louise's paintings hung with Brice Marden's. The dates of Louise's life are 1939 to 2021. The dates of Marden's life are 1938 to 2023. Both painters had a passionate life-long interest in the work of Paul Cezanne.

Louise and I met in 1977 or 78. We were both serious painters. We visited each other's studios. We talked painting. In the catalogue for the 2014 Whitney Biennial, in which we were both included, there is a conversation between Louise and I about the paintings we were looking at the Museum of Modern Art - Cezanne, Picasso, Kurt Schwitters and others. My friend, Louise Fishman, was intellectually sharp, deeply and accurately intuitive, generous, measured, disciplined and passionately committed to her art. She was very proud of her accomplishments as a painter, but there was no trace of the illusions, fostered by egotism, that one sometimes finds in celebrated artists. A grounded humility and a love of painting allowed her to keep developing her paintings right up until she died. Most of the paintings that are in this exhibition are from the early 2000s. They are quite different from her large, spare, muscular late paintings.

When I went to see a contemporary woman's solo painting show at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, two years ago, I imagined Louise's paintings hung in the long narrow gallery. How beautiful they would be, I thought, because Louise's paintings have a deeply felt quality of located scale so there is a real relationship between the overt size of her paintings and the scale of the surface activity happening on the paintings. Maybe it was on that visit to the Metropolitan that I noticed they had finally hung a big Lee Krasner painting in the gallery with a Clyfford Still, Ellsworth Kelly, Jackson Pollock and others. Lee Krasner, like Louise, came from a family of Russian Jewish immigrants. She died in 1984, so, 38 years, and she finally gets hung in the same museum gallery as Jackson Pollack! Krasner's painting was very interesting, very strong and individualistic in relation to the Kelly and the other works. I was very pleased to hear from a friend that Louise's big, powerful painting, *Mars* from 1992, was recently hung in the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburg. It is the responsibility of artists who know about painting and were friends and admirers of Louise Fishmen to foster a recognition of the vital, irreplaceable contribution she made to American Painting.

Dona Nelson, May 15th, 2025