MARTHA DIAMOND

Martha Diamond (b. 1944, New York, NY) received a BA from Carleton College in Minnesota in 1964 and an MA from New York University in 1969, the same year she moved into her loft on the Bowery. In the 1970s, she exhibited in group exhibitions at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT, Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo, NY, and The Renaissance Society, Chicago, IL. Diamond was represented by Brooke Alexander Gallery from 1976 to 1985 and in 1988, mounted her first museum solo exhibition at Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, ME. In 1989, three large-scale paintings were included in The Whitney Biennial, curated by Richard Armstrong, John G. Hanhardt, Richard Marshall, and Lisa Phillips. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, she was represented by the legendary Robert Miller Gallery and in 2004, The New York Studio School organized a retrospective titled *Martha Diamond: From Three Decades.*

Recent solo exhibitions in New York include *Martha Diamond: 1980-1989* at Magenta Plains (2021); *Cityscapes* at Eva Presenhuber (2018); *Martha Diamond: Broad Strokes*, at Harper's Books (2017); and *Recent Paintings* at Alexandre Gallery (2016). Recent group exhibitions in New York City include *Painting in New York: 1971-83*, curated by Ivy Shapiro at Karma (2022), *In Her Hands*, curated by David Salle at Skarstedt (2020), and *Downtown Painting*, curated by Alex Katz at Peter Freeman (2019). Her work is in the permanent collection of numerous institutions, including Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY; Perez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston, TX; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Boston, MA, and Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany, among others. Diamond lives and works in New York, NY

The Canvas

September 2021

Capturing *the* Light

With Martha Diamond

By: David Carrier

If I were a senior curator with a major museum collection at my disposal, I would love to organize an historical show devoted to urban art. The exhibition would start with one of Bernardo Bellotto's great eighteenth-century scenes of Dresden, then display a Paris cityscape by Camille Pissarro, and continue with a painting of Manhattan by Rackstraw Downes. Undoubtedly, I would show one of Claude Monet's scenes of the Rouen cathedral. And, in my catalogue essay I would include the description of Manhattan by the greatest modernist painter of light, Henri Matisse. When he first visited America in 1930, reports his biographer, Hilary Spurling, "he was enchanted by the light," which was, he said, "so dry, so crystalline, like no other," and "by the combination of order, clarity, and proportion." Ultimately, I would conclude my exhibition with a 1980s painting by Martha Diamond, whose work extends this grand tradition into the present. Like these prior masters, she is a city artist. However, where Bellotto, Pissarro, and Downes show the details of their urban scenes, what interests Diamond most is the light of the city. In that way, her painting, which moves toward (but doesn't aspire to achieve) abstraction, propels this way of thinking into the late twentieth century.

● ***David Carrier:*** **Late last night, I was thinking of your work, Martha. It's really fascinating to me, this conception of being an artist of the city, and your relation to the Baudelairian notion of the painter of modern life. This idea has been around for so long, and yet it's still clearly alive in your art.**

Martha Diamond: Well, I always appreciated this idea of 'Old New York.' I was sort of raised up through it.

David Carrier: **You have this fascinating quote in which you said that "As I child, we did just anything we wanted to do. I was never intimidated by cars, or people, even." That is just a wonderful response to New York City.**

Martha Diamond: My version of the city was borne out of being raised in Queens. When you're a city kid, I think you're convinced that nothing can hurt you. Although, apparently, when I was a little kid, I climbed outside the window and took away all my mother's jewelry. Evidently, I was not afraid of the outside.

David Carrier: **And what floor were you on when you did that?**

Martha Diamond: I don't know, really. I was a little kid, a really little kid. I probably could count, but I don't have any idea.

David Carrier: **Do you feel that that essence of the city has gone, now? Or is it a place you can still walk around and enjoy?**

Martha Diamond: I miss all the old stores and the old neighborhoods. You know, like the book area or the area where they designed clothes. Or the jewelry area.. I liked all the neighborhoods that there were, and I don't think there are so many distinct and individualized neighborhoods anymore.

David Carrier: **I knew an artist, Harvey Quaytman, who lived on your street. When I knew him in the 1980s, the Bowery was close to Soho, but it felt so far away. Now, of course, it's changed completely; the Bowery's just another gentrified neighborhood.**

Martha Diamond: It was different, then. I mean, the humans were different; the doorways were different; the cars were different.

David Carrier: **Do you see your art as a kind of chronicle of a New York that's disappeared, or currently disappearing? Or do the scenes depicted in your paintings exist in the present for you.**

Martha Diamond: I think of them as showing the present. But I don't distinguish my art from what exists outside because my idea of what I make is really kind of primitive. At one point, I remember going to people and explaining, "I make it just like this," and would mimic painting brushstroke by brushstroke in a very simple way. I know that's not how buildings are made, but that's how I understand them. That's primitive thinking!

David Carrier: **You have a very focused interest in the city's light. You're not interested in the pedestrians on the street, you're interested in the light hitting the building. That seems to me a very peculiar and particular interest.**

Martha Diamond: Well, the pedestrians change all the time. And life doesn't, really. It changes, but not in its essence. I like the consistency of the city's buildings, or at least its early buildings.

Installation view, Martha Diamond: *1980–1989, Magenta Plains, New York, NY.*

David Carrier: **I was just looking at the paintings that you're going to show next month, Martha, and I was interested in how you have those structures, those grids. It seems to be really central to this group of paintings. They're very basic, almost primitive, to use that word again. In fact, I would definitely call your Green Cityscape (1985) primitive! How would you describe it?**

Martha Diamond: Green. What else can I say? That's it. It's a realistic painting in greens because I wanted to see if I could get away with doing that. I don't know how I initially conceived of it. Maybe I was thinking of the buildings I saw out of the windows of various places I lived when I was young. But I didn't go up to the Metropolitan and imitate what I saw. The subjects of my art are the buildings around us. These were the buildings outside my window... I'm a very primitive person in that way, I think. And I don't mind that. No, I don't mind that at all.

'Green Cityscape' (1985). Oil on linen. 90h x 72w inches. Courtesy of the artist and Magenta Plains, New York.

David Carrier: **One commentator says, "Diamond is doing for the cityscape what Joan Mitchell does for the greater outdoors." And I thought, that's interesting, but also weird, in a way, because what's more different than a tree and a building? You couldn't work outdoors? That wouldn't interest you?**

Martha Diamond: I'd really have to know more about it in order to feel comfortable doing it, whereas with the city buildings, I take it for granted. I was born in Manhattan. I've lived in Manhattan for a long time, and I've walked through it for a long time. But trees are specialized, and I guess I don't think of buildings as particularly specialized.

David Carrier: **When you call yourself a "primitive" painter, do you mean that the histories of Bellotto in the eighteenth century, and Pissarro, in the nineteenth, don't particularly matter to you as much as the immediate and visceral experience of being on the street? Would that be a fair characterization?**

Martha Diamond: I never thought of that, exactly. But, yes, for me, I think that's true.

David Carrier: **The German Expressionists of the 1920s were doing scenes of the city, and they were interested in the aggressive, visual life of Berlin, at that point.**

Martha Diamond: I guess if I were going to paint the people or the social aspect of the city, that's probably where I'd go with it. It would be interesting. I remember very clearly growing up in New York City and noticing how the other kids I went to school with dressed, and how their parents dressed for their jobs, and other little differentiating details about their families. But now, everybody dresses alike. My closet must have 25 pairs of dungarees. It's the same every day.

David Carrier: **You've cited two painters – Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol – who, early on, were important to your work. Reading that, I thought, wow! Really? Such different people. Heavens! Can we talk about that for a moment?**

Martha Diamond: Jackson Pollock tossed paint. But Warhol? I guess I just take him as it comes, you know? If someone's painting soup cans, that's okay with me. And if someone's throwing paint, that's also okay with me.

David Carrier: **You remain, in a certain sense, a figurative painter, a painter who needs the city. You didn't move all the way into abstraction, as did many of the artists who followed de Kooning. You wanted to remain attached to that city grid; that city structure – the life, and the buildings, and so forth. You didn't want to be an Impressionist painter of the city, but you also didn't want to make a purely abstract work. You sort of wanted to be in a place in between? Here I think of your painting, Structure (1993), as an important example.**

Martha Diamond: When I made that painting I was thinking, "Can I make an orange cityscape, or can I do it with a different color?" That's all I thought. It wasn't realism...I mean, I really think that is how simple-minded I was. I know I've described my approach as primitive before...

'Structure' (1993). Oil on linen. 60h x 49w inches. Courtesy of the artist and Magenta Plains, New York.

David Carrier: **Often, intuitive artists like you have difficulty finishing. Certainly, de Kooning did. Is that ever a concern of yours? How do you know when something is finished and ready to leave your studio?**

Martha Diamond: Pretty much when I don't feel like doing anything else to it.

David Carrier: **In other words, after it achieves a certain kind of rightness?**

Martha Diamond: Yeah, a point where whatever information I was thinking of putting down seems to exist now on the canvas.

David Carrier: **Right. And do you ever come back to a painting, over months and years? Or is the process faster than that?**

Martha Diamond: I put together something that holds together visually, and makes some kind of sense, visually. All the hints should be there, somehow. So, I'm not documenting the city for anybody. I've never done wrist work; it's not what I do. As a matter of fact, one friend calls me "slasher!" I wave the brush around wildly. The fact that I use brushes, I think, is a big part of what I do. Brushes have limited definition. I care more about evoking the light than depicting the details.

***David Carrier:* Do you ever look out from the Bowery onto the street and make art?**

Martha Diamond: Yes. And I've done drawings on the street, in crayons, in pen. I love the city, so I look at it often. And I have a memory of places which I can also use to my advantage.

***David Carrier:* I pulled out this statement I like from Bill Berkson: "The light on buildings against the high, Atlantic sky, makes New York life tenable." The buildings and the light – the combination – it seems like you need both? You don't want to just show the building structure, it really is all about the light against the buildings?**

Martha Diamond: That's the New York City I live in. I mean, the buildings are there, and the light is there. I'm not often out in places where there isn't natural light. Unless I'm in a coffee shop.

***David Carrier:* Do all of these super skyscrapers give you a sense of how the city has changed and morphed throughout the years?**

Martha Diamond: The details aren't interesting. I mean, what am I going to look at? There are some buildings with real decoration, but they were built, 50, 70 years ago. The light's all there is defining anything. I think that must be what I see. I mean, I'm sort of simplified, but there it is.

***David Carrier:* What would be the first painting that you would think of as being a work of yours?**

Martha Diamond: When I was young, we lived across the street from a relatively new grammar school. I tried to draw my street outside the window of my class, in the second or third grade, or so, and I only had paints that weren't really subtle. Anyway, my first art problem was how to paint asphalt.

***David Carrier:* You were a self-trained artist in New York. That's amazing to me. There are so many art schools, yet you taught yourself?**

Martha Diamond: I did go to classes on 57th Street, at the art school that was there, and learned from somebody about painting with brushes. I loved that, and I still use those kind of Asian brushes that I first learned about at the time.

***David Carrier:* In one of your past interviews, you speak about your time teaching and your female pupils, and the often-difficult place for women in the American art world. Can you say anything more about that, especially now, after looking back at all the changes the artworld has seen over the years?**

Martha Diamond: Well, I think the only changes I know of are changes that other people made, really. I taught at Skowhegan a few times, and sometimes the men wouldn't teach the female students. Obviously, I didn't approve of that. And I wasn't a lunatic about social stuff but, I thought, how could you not pay attention to all the women artists out there? And somehow, at a certain point, I just made a point of teaching the women students and telling them stuff that I thought they needed to know.

Martha Diamond photographed by Georges Piette in her studio in 1993. Courtesy of the artist and Magenta Plains, New York.

***David Carrier:* Was that when you began to form a community of friends around you who were poets and artists?**

Martha Diamond: That came later when I lived in Manhattan. And, with Peter Schjeldhal, whom I met when I was studying at Carlton College, in Minnesota. There were all kinds of people there, and it was great.

***David Carrier:* When did you move to the Bowery?**

Martha Diamond: 1969

***David Carrier:* When you got there, was it already crowded with artists?**

Martha Diamond: Yes. Living on the Bowery, that's where I first started really meeting artists in earnest. That was a wonderful time. And it was a great time for parties, really good parties. And you could walk at night and find other parties if the one you were invited to wasn't so great. You could just go up and ask a random stranger if you could go to their party since the one you were at wasn't so good. We would do that all the time when a boyfriend of mine and I hosted parties. People would call and say, "Could we come?" And we'd say, "Yeah!" It was a great and interesting time to meet a lot of artists who were talented at many of the things that I didn't really experience growing up in Queens. Like cooking, for instance. I mean, my mother cooked nothing. So, you know, I discovered food during my time living in the Bowery. You know, after all these years, I've never really had any complaints about living in New York.

***David Carrier:* At the end of the day, from your perspective, has the artworld changed over the years?**

Martha Diamond: Where is the artworld? If you can find it, sign me up! ■

Artsy

8 September 2021

22 Artists to Discover at New York's September Fairs

Martha Diamond

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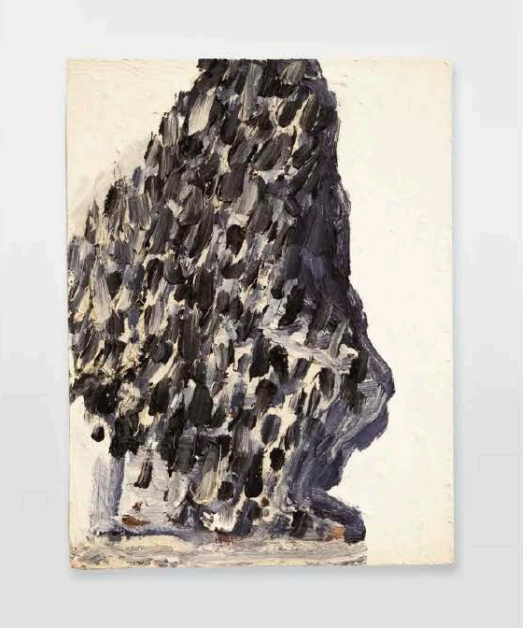
Independent New York, Magenta Plains



Martha Diamond
Untitled, 2011
Magenta Plains
US$6,800

Martha Diamond
6, ca. 1980s
Magenta Plains
US$7,500

Earlier this year, Magenta Plains put on a much-lauded solo show of paintings from the 1980s by New York–based artist Martha Diamond. Works from the same decade are being featured at Independent New York, demonstrating the artist's loose, brushy impressions of the city, at once ominous and charming, often featuring slices of architecture. Diamond's works encapsulate the city in a way only a New Yorker can; she grew up in Stuyvesant Town and has been painting from a studio on the Bowery since 1969.

The New York Times

January 2021

The New York Times

3 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

Irving Penn's notion of photographism; Martha Diamond's spectacular cityscapes; and the sculptor Fawn Krieger's "experiments in resistance."

Martha Diamond

Through Feb. 17. Magenta Plains, 94 Allen Street, Manhattan; 917-388-2464; magentaplains.com.

Martha Diamond's "Orange Light" (1983), oil on linen.
Martha Diamond and Magenta Plains

The building in Martha Diamond's 1983 painting "Orange Light," an anonymous hulk near the Bowery studio she's occupied since 1969, is soot gray and simplified halfway to abstraction. Silhouetted against a dense orange sky, it looks like an accidental vortex of ash in some supernatural forge. It's made of nothing but straight lines and angles, but the brush strokes themselves are too slippery to lie even. And though no bodies or faces are visible, it feels inhabited all the same. In its self-contained grandeur and eerie harmony, the piece evokes a Mondrian windmill.

Along with "Orange Light" and three other spectacular cityscapes the size of skyscraper windows, "Martha Diamond: 1980-1989" includes two striking large still lifes and 22 tiny Masonite studies. The studies are surprisingly substantial, exhibiting a range of textures, compositional possibilities and colors that get sheared away in the headier large paintings. It's interesting, too, to compare first drafts to two of the final cityscapes. The small version of "Facade 1982" feels less successful than its full-size simply because the colors aren't quite as dreamy, whereas the miniature "Red Cityscape" matches point for point but, at nine inches high, feels drastically different.

Still, it's the cityscapes you'll remember. Red strokes as broad as floorboards roil like crashing ice floes in "Red Cityscape," while in "Facade 1982," buoyant yellow lines float against midnight blue.

WILL HEINRICH

Artforum

February 2021

ARTFORUM

Over the course of her fifty years as a painter in New York, Martha Diamond has applied her love of place and structure to canvases that capture the architecture of the five boroughs in striking hues and energetic, wet-on-wet brushstrokes. On the occasion of "1980–1989," an exhibition of oil paintings and studies on Masonite made during the titular decade—on view at Magenta Plains in New York through February 17—Diamond looks back on her childhood in the city, her affiliation with the New York School, her informal education in painting, and her artistic community.

I WAS BORN IN NEW YORK, and I always drew. My father worked in the city as a doctor, and sometimes I would go with him on the weekends to make rounds in the hospital on Fifth Avenue and 105th Street, across from the conservatory gardens in Central Park. Taking the highway into Manhattan, I got to see buildings and bridges and tanks, and I liked what I saw. I'd ride my bicycle from Queens to the city, and I had a friend I would run around with named Lonnie, and we just did anything that we wanted to do. I was never intimidated by cars, or people even.

My first art problem, though I didn't think about it in those terms, was when my family lived across from this nice little public school and I tried to paint the city street. Try and paint asphalt with Tempera. I did paintings that I didn't like when I was a kid because I didn't know how to plan for them. You know if you try painting without any preparations whatsoever, you can make a mush for a long time. Eventually I figured out how to break things down into pieces and parts. I once heard a talk with Brice Marden about choosing a color to make a painting out of, and so I used that, like in *Orange Light*, 1983. I just wanted to find out how to make a painting and maybe how to make a good painting.

I went to college with Peter Schjeldahl and the sculptor Donna Dennis, and he was in Paris when she and I were there. When we came back, Peter took us to great places, and so you saw different apartments, different neighborhoods, different people doing different things. I used to go to the movies with Ted Berrigan. He was so supportive of the people that he encountered and knew, and the artists and the poets, and he would pay attention to and talk with them about their work, and that's a blessing as far as I'm concerned. And the women were doing ambitious things, people like Jane Freilicher—she painted with paint and she made pictures you wanted to look at. The Museum of Modern Art—there were paintings I loved in that place, like Picasso's figures. So I went to the MoMA to apply for a job in the film department organizing programs of study for schools and I got it. I learned a lot working there, helping with different openings. I would have meals in the gardens, and a poet would bring drugs, and that was great.

Martha Diamond, *Projects*, ca. 1980s, oil on Masonite, 9 x 7".

One day, a friend of mine brought Joan Mitchell to my studio. I was painting with pieces of linen on the floor at the time and she said *you have to put a painting wall up*. So Forrest Myers built one for me and helped me get my work up onto it and light it. That was a big deal—she was useful and treated me like a painter and made suggestions. I think being useful to someone is a big deal. I loved her work and appreciated the things she did with yellow particularly.

My studio is on the Bowery. I've been there about fifty years. The works in the show are from the '80s, and most were in storage. Seeing the paintings again, I am amazed that I made them! They are muscular and athletic. Once I had paints mixed and a study on the canvas, I would start painting probably around ten in the morning, and I would just keep going until I was done, which could have been 2 AM. I was raised a righty, but I paint with my left hand because it's connected to the part of the brain that sees space, volume, and probably colors better. You can do it too, and you'll concentrate much more because the dominant hand has all the habits. During Covid, I've been hanging out on my roof, lifting weights and making paintings of Stuyvesant Town, where my family once lived when I was young.

I just try to give back something of what I was lucky enough to come into. When I was teaching at the School of Visual Arts, I tried always to help the women, because the women were not the focus in the university at the time. Nobody helped me out when I was a kid. No grammar schoolteacher helped me do bubkis. Without really making even a big thing about it to myself, I always tried to make sure that I gave the women what they needed to do what they wanted to do.

— As told to Canada Choate

The Brooklyn Rail

February 2021

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

Martha Diamond: *1980-1989*

By David Rhodes

New York has an enduring image. It's one that has seduced, awed, and excited in equal parts, the large scale of its built environment, an intense natural light, and the constant artificial light of façades: windows, flickering signs, streaming traffic. Henri Matisse, a master of painted light, visited the city aged 60 en route to Tahiti and saw the Manhattan skyline reflected in the Hudson River like "a sequined dress." He said that if he had visited New York as a young man he would never have left. Martha Diamond, an habitué of the Bowery since 1969, has herself never left and continues to paint the illuminated forms of the city. This current exhibition at Magenta Plains, a few blocks over from her Bowery studio, presents paintings from the 1980s; on view are large canvases in oil at street level and, downstairs, small painted studies on Masonite.

Martha Diamond, *Orange Light*, 1983. Oil on linen, 84 x 56 inches. Courtesy Magenta Plains.

ON VIEW
Magenta Plains
January 13 – February 17, 2021
New York

Diamond's paintings are gestural, wet paint applied into wet paint. She uses her left hand and not her usual right hand to further spontaneity: denying facile skill, skill that is more or less inevitable with painters who are as dedicated, and who have worked for several decades. There is a direct technical line to Ab Ex, for Willem de Kooning also worked wet into wet, often with the hand he was not in the habit of using, and for very similar ends. But whereas de Kooning's paintings depict movement across an abstract landscape or the kinetic activity of a figure, Diamond paints cityscapes, usually from particular points of view. *Orange Light* (1983) is a canvas 84 by 56 inches; light pours across the surface of the depicted building. Paint flows across the surface of the canvas as it is rendered: vivid orange sky and luminous gray shadow appear as through a filter—think of the cinematographer Christopher Doyle's treatment of urban scenes of subdued, rich color in the films of Wong Kar-wai. The light in this painting is *unheimlich*, and yet any New Yorker can tell you that exactly this light exists here: everyday moments of ordinary magic. It's the kind of sublime experience that northern European Romanticism associated with a mountainside or the edge of a wood at sunset, now recast in this city and seen from a window, balcony, roof, or street.

14 (ca. 1980s) is an oil on Masonite, 9 by 6-inch painting. A single edifice reaches up centrally, partially blocking a light source, with dark shadow—cloud or smoke perhaps —on the left, a brightening aureole of sunlight emanating from the right. The loose and broad strokes of oil leave any specifics open, which is not to say the image is vague. Like looking into strong daylight, or recalling a view glimpsed, this representation is clear in the same way memories are. In other words, the painting acts mnemonically, as something once seen or imagined and then recalled, as well as itself, paint on board, in front of the viewer. Both the larger paintings and the smaller paintings included here are fragmentary in that they frame vision very distinctly, directing the gaze. They communicate a way of looking at and composing with what is seen. This emphasizes the frontal space and process of painting rather than painting as a simple generic scene in much the same manner as Édouard Manet . And, thinking of the impact of photography on Manet's approach to composition and the way it brought a sense of the transitional and informal to his urban subject matter, I couldn't help but be reminded of the Swiss-American photographer Rudy Burckhardt's images of New York in relation to Diamond's paintings. Take for example, *Menckels Sewing Machine* (ca. 1948), a view of a tightly framed, shadowy New York avenue. As chance would have it, Burckhardt too had an exhibition up in January at Tibor de Nagy, a gallery also on the Lower East Side.

Martha Diamond, *14*, ca. 1980s. Oil on Masonite, 9 x 6 inches. Courtesy Magenta Plains.

The Brooklyn Rail

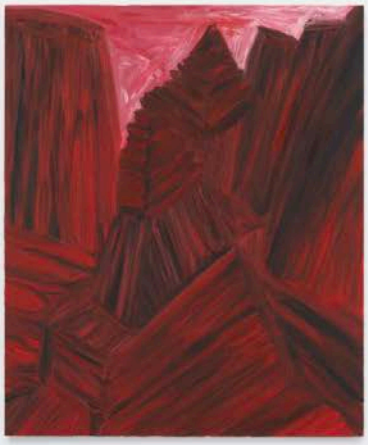
February 2021

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

Martha Diamond: *1980-1989*

By Nina Wolpow



Martha Diamond, *Red Cityscape*, 1989. Oil on linen, 72 x 60 inches. Courtesy Magenta Plains.

I have not been seeing much art in person lately. There is something to be said for the thrill of browsing galleries at "limited capacity"—walking back and forth along a stretch of Judd's works in plywood without encountering the obstacle of another body, for example—but I also find it unnerving to be so conspicuously alone with art. Recently, though, while on the Lower East Side for another reason, I stopped in to Magenta Plains, having heard that works by Martha Diamond—a relatively unknown painter who palled around with John Ashbery and Peter Schjeldahl when he was just a party-boy—were on view. Inside, I found New York, which is not to say that I found New York in the representational sense—though Diamond's paintings do represent the city's urbanscape—but in the sensorial way that I once heard foghorns through Arthur Dove's painting of that name. For many months I had been unable to answer the question, "What is New York like these days?" and now, encountering Diamond's paintings, I could.

ON VIEW
Magenta Plains
1980-1989
January 13 – February 17, 2021
New York

Curious, then, that none of the paintings featured in the show are new, particularly because—as many artists have managed, gratefully, to be productive—today's penchant seems to be for displaying art made in the throes of 2020. As the title of the show makes clear, these are all paintings from the 1980s, a time that was both different from and the same as what we are experiencing today. Different in that we were not uniformly immersed in a pandemic, but the same in that we were: AIDS, however ignored, is indivisible from New York during that decade, and the cultural product that resulted. Different in that America had not yet been subjected to the autocracy of Donald Trump, but the same in that this country was in the palm of his political and ideological progenitor. Looking at Diamond's paintings is like looking at a picture of your mother and seeing, in only roughly outdated clothing, yourself.

Martha Diamond, *Facade 1982*, 1981–82 Oil on linen, 84 x 56 inches. Courtesy Magenta Plains.

1980–1989 consists of two related bodies of work. The first comprises six large, rectangular canvases depicting aspects of the city in Diamond's favored neo-expressionist style. Fat, eccentric brushstrokes, applied wet-on-wet, dysregulate architectural planes. Colors are either nocturnal—I imagined Diamond roaming, as Virginia Woolf once did in London, along New York's dusky avenues—or infernal. *Red Cityscape* (1989) barely looks like a city at all, or at least not a city anyone would want to live in. Slashes of a red that can be described in no other way but as indicative of blood are low-lighted by black and hash together to form the ridges of roofs, the facades of unearthly buildings, an eerily pinkened sky. *Orange Light* (1983) prefigures San Francisco this past September, when the morning sun, scattered by particles of dense smoke from nearby forest fires, turned that city's sky an electric tangerine. In Diamond's painting, the roof of one building, painted an ashy gray, runs from the foreground into the middle ground where it intersects with the side of another structure, like a road to nowhere.

Martha Diamond, *Orange Light*, 1983. Oil on linen, 84 x 56 inches. Courtesy Magenta Plains.

Martha Diamond, *Moonlight / City View #2*, 1981. Oil on linen, 84 x 56 inches. Courtesy Magenta Plains.

The most arresting of the larger paintings is *Facade 1982* (1981–82). The palette here is blackened cerulean and a fluorescent powder yellow like that found in *Moonlight/City View #2* (1981), in which light seeps from the windows of skyscrapers after nightfall. In *Facade 1982*, however, photic normalcy is reversed so that the facades of two tall buildings are illuminated—as if spot-lit—and their windows black. Against one of the two is what is probably the shadow of another building, but that looks unmistakably like the projected silhouette of Dracula or—more auspiciously—Batman. The painting's effect is reminiscent of the complex light and shade in Vermeer's *Officer and Laughing Girl* (c. 1657) at New York's Frick Collection, in which a soldier's shadowed back contrasts with the resplendent torso of the woman sitting across from him, smiling uneasily; it is an emotional moment, echoed by the play of light across an open window and its casement. Such a feather-thin line between fear and delight, that which sucks the soul and that which saves it, is patently New York, and by the transitive property I have realized, patently Martha Diamond.

The show's second body of work is a group of Diamond's small-scale studies from this period. All about eight or nine inches high and six or seven inches wide, they remind me of postcards sent from that era into ours. A few reference some of the larger paintings in the first room, but most don't. Some are lighter colored and less severe, but most depict jagged, at times cubistic forms, done in apocalyptic hues. The prevailing sentiment, however, is not sinister; it's one of empowerment. These are painterly renditions of New-York-style resilience, which is an admittedly reckless fortitude, no matter what the threat, no matter who the menace.

Artlyst

February 2021

Artlyst

A New York Gallery Field Trip February 2021 – Ilka Scobie

Martha Diamond 1980-89 Magenta Plains

Since moving back to my hometown in 1985, I have been an ardent fan of the painter Martha Diamond. I first saw her jazzy urban abstractions at Robert Miller Gallery. Her loose and lyrical canvases immediately inspired me, and I am fortunate that she is now a friend and neighbour. Diamond, a native New Yorker and Bowery resident since 1969 is a master of the gestural wet on wet brushstroke and has long been considered an artistic downtown treasure.

Martha Diamond 1980-89 Magenta Plains

Kudos to the young, hip and visionary gallery Magenta Plains, for curating a brilliantly curated show that has garnered much critical acclaim. Diamond's painterly paean to NYC includes small jewel-like studies on masonite, plus six large canvases. Using her studies as sketches, Diamond's images range from off-kilter geometrics to an eerily prescient view (done in the eighties) of the Twin Towers against a flaming sky. "Red Cityscape" turns brick buildings into elemental mountainsides, echoing flaming Southwestern sunsets. And in 1981's "Facade" a punky spike-haired shadow (perhaps one of Richard Hambleton's painted obsidian silhouettes?)is darkly counterpointed against sweeping monoliths. The much-admired artist has spoken about "simple things with their own magic." Vision, light, gesture and nuance enrich Diamond's singular paintings with potency and poetry.

Air mail

January 2021

A MONTHLY
CULTURE MATRIX
FOR THE COSMOPOLITAN TRAVELER

Martha Diamond, "Facade 1982," 1981-82. Courtesy of Magenta Plains, New York.

Martha Diamond: 1980–1989

UNTIL FEBRUARY 17
MAGENTA PLAINS / NEW YORK / ART

The New York-based artist Martha Diamond has lived and worked on the Bowery since 1969, painting semi-abstract cityscapes in loose, vibrant strokes of color. Today, as then, she isn't intent on depicting physical detail so much as capturing the essence, the raw energy, of what she sees. Describing her first childhood trip to the Big Apple, she recalls, "This is what I saw, simple things with their own magic." In Diamond's work, buildings in scatty layers of red, yellow, and black hang against uniform backgrounds—as imposing, dramatic, and tumultuous as the city itself. —*E.C.*

The T List

January 2021

The New York Times The T List

Glimpses of New York, Painted by Martha Diamond

From left: Martha Diamond's "Facade 1982" (1981-82) and "Orange Light" (1983). Courtesy of the artist and Magenta Plains

As the poet Bill Berkson once wrote, Martha Diamond, who is known for her indelible New York cityscapes rendered in thick, gestural brush strokes and bold, contrasting colors, "builds edifices that bring citified chaos into focus as character, condensing the rush and stabilizing it as an emblem." Next week sees the opening of a new show, at Magenta Plains gallery on Manhattan's Lower East Side, that explores the depths of Diamond's affinity for these structures. Culled from pieces completed in the '80s, a pivotal decade for the artist that culminated in her work appearing in the 1989 Whitney Biennial, the six large-scale oil paintings to go on view share a palette of muted grays, midnight blues, glowing yellows and burnt scarlets — shades encountered on a lonely stroll at night, or thanks to a peek through the blinds after dark. (A number of preparatory studies on Masonite will also be on display.) Having lived and worked on the Bowery since 1969, Diamond indeed draws on scenes from her own walks through the city, depicting grids of buttery windows (as in "Moonlight/City View #2," 1981) or stacks of green fence screens on identical balconies ("Untitled 11," 1987). She also paints with her nondominant hand, which gives her canvases their intimate, figurative quality. They brood, slump and occasionally menace, and yet they're also solitary and anonymous — in other words, the works themselves are true city dwellers. More than a particular place, says Olivia Smith, the gallery's director, they "represent a memory of something that we all recognize." For this New Yorker, whose city has felt all but unrecognizable these past 10 months, it's a welcomed remembrance. *"Martha Diamond: 1980-1989" is on view from Jan. 13 through Feb. 17 at Magenta Plains, 94 Allen Street, New York City, magentaplains.com.*

The Brooklyn Rail

July 2019

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

Downtown Painting
Curated by Alex Katz

By Jonathan Goodman

ON VIEW
Peter Freeman, Inc.
June 5 – July 26, 2019
New York

Installation view: *Downtown Painting*, Peter Freeman Gallery, New York, 2019. Photo: Nicholas Knight. Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.

As I write, the nonagenarian artist Alex Katz, long a mainstay of downtown painting, is involved in two major shows: the one he has curated at Peter Freeman's gallery and the other is an extraordinary show of recent work at Gavin Brown's Enterprise in Harlem. The first exhibition establishes him, very quickly, as a curator of repute, while the second makes it clear that Katz is moving into a territory wholly his own, particularly in the wonderful scenic studies that pass on, completely successfully, his love of nature. In the *Downtown Painting*, there are nearly eighty paintings to look at, including from such well-known artists as Franz Kline, Al Held, Rackstraw Downes, Carmen Herrera, and Sylvia Plimack Mangold. Other names, as prominent in recognition, seen here are Martha Diamond, Yvonne Jacquette, Chantal Joffe, Justen Ladda, and Robert Moskowitz. It is impossible to do justice to all the individual efforts of these painters, but we can look at examples indicative of Katz's forceful point: "Whereas uptown art is uncontroversial, unproblematic, and more easily commodified, downtown art is intuitive, self-indulgent, and not made to fit comfortably into a home or institution."

Installation view: *Downtown Painting*, Peter Freeman Gallery, New York, 2019. Photo: Nicholas Knight. Courtesy Peter Freeman, Inc.

Certainly, the art in this show regularly takes risks, in ways that assert the painter's right to make work that cannot be easily introduced into a comfortable environment outside the studio. But it is also true that the show —in part because it is as good as it is—begs the question whether such principled and formally accomplished work can escape the inevitable commodification of its economic life once the painting has been finished. Maybe the point is moot—it is not within the painter's power to control who buys the work or its meteoric rise in value in an art world in which pricing seems primarily to signal social status. When Franz Kline painted *Sketch for Painting (4 Square)* in 1953, the work, a rectangle with extended columns in black, was innovative to the point of being culturally dangerous. Now, of course, it is an invaluable artifact. The same might be said for Al Held's wonderful *Out and In* (1965), a painting of stripes creating a partial frame around a white square, in the middle of which is another square, mostly red with a green band at the bottom. It is a remarkable work whose rough surface quotes the thick layers of paint favored a generation before. Martha Diamond's *New Space* (n.d.), a lovely abstractions consisting of slightly rough yellow rectangles containing slightly darker yellow stripes, on a background of white framed in black on the left and the top, shows how this kind of painting remains very much alive.

The New Yorker

June 2018

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Martha Diamond

The veteran abstracter of Manhattan cityscapes—long esteemed by her fellow-artists and deserving of wider fame—shows intimately grand paintings from the past two decades. Working fast and loose—she is right-handed but, to avert facility, paints with her left—Diamond romances the town in darting and slashing strokes. Her buildings, seen as if from the street, are as zestfully urbane as the perambulatory poems of Frank O'Hara. Most striking is a suite of vertical canvases entitled "New York with Purple," each eight feet tall and four feet wide, which vary the colors of a skyscraper against a cloud-raddled sky. Their dynamic is like a cross between John Marin's watercolors of the city and Monet's "Rouen Cathedrals": giddily celebratory and drunk on daylight.

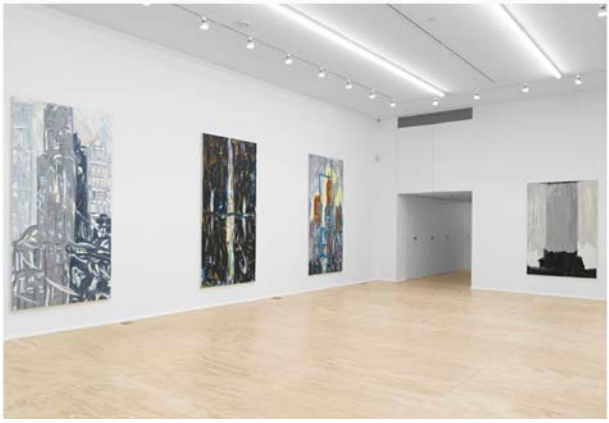
— *Peter Schjeldahl*

Mousse Magazine

July 2018

Mousse Magazine

EXHIBITIONS
Martha Diamond "Cityscapes" at Galerie Eva Presenhuber, New York



A lifelong New Yorker, Martha Diamond has spent decades breathing in, recording, and understanding the spaces, light, and memory of the city. Those experiences are her guide. Diamond grew up first in an apartment on the 11th floor of a building in Stuyvesant Town, Manhattan. She remembers looking out a window and seeing, across a circular courtyard, only the geometry of other buildings; later, her family lived in Queens. Her father, a doctor, would take her with him in his car on his Saturday rounds to patients, and Diamond remembers the sense of cavernous space she felt down the avenues and streets of the island. Another memory: Her grandparents lived in Silver Lake, Staten Island in a fourth floor apartment with a brick balcony. Martha would walk out on the balcony: First came the reservoir, then a long road, then the Goethals Bridge to New Jersey. One shape, then a space, then another, and then more shapes. One thing, and then another. Then another.

Like other natives of the city, Diamond is a great walker. She walks to see and remember the spaces and buildings, not as distinct architectural moments, but rather as pieces of her rich memory bank of human-made forms, which are her sole subject. She translates these experiences into sites for expressive, generous color and mark making. And because Diamond is a believer in systems, materials and techniques, she carefully translates these experiences into sites for expressive, generous color, and mark making.

The Brooklyn Rail

March 2016

The paintings themselves show a practiced awareness of contemporary art conditions. They feel leading-edge in spirit. In *Untitled Structure* (2014), the imagery is of tall black rectangles grouped in rows against a white ground. The top part of the background consists of a rough surface of dark tan color,

ArtSeen

MARTHA DIAMOND

By Jonathan Goodman

Martha Diamond, *Untitled Structure*, 2014. Oil on panel, 12 x 10 inches. Courtesy Alexandre Gallery, New York.

Martha Diamond: Recent Paintings is a terrific show of forty-one small abstract paintings, done since 2002, continuing her ongoing exploration of a world characterized both by rough figuration and abstraction. She is a true New York artist, a veteran of the still active and productive decades of the New York School whose work demonstrates a predilection not so much for the lyric, gestural abstraction we know so well in the city, but a more uncouth reflection of urban life. Despite the mostly non-objective nature of her work, Diamond's paintings reflect the knowledge that abstraction and representation can effect a forceful merger in pictures that communicate both presence and legible form. Alex Katz, in Diamond's catalogue essay, characterizes the paintings as "blunt," and he is right. They take their position as direct statements about art and city life, and lead the way to a balanced view of the means by which successful work of this sort can be made. Diamond knows that painting remains a mixture of craft and visionary insight, usually (but not always) rooted in an appreciation of the visual structures in real life. As a result, her pictures convey a sense of integrity that borders on the moral, for her sensibility does not so much retrieve as accentuate the grand legacy of New York painting.

ON VIEW

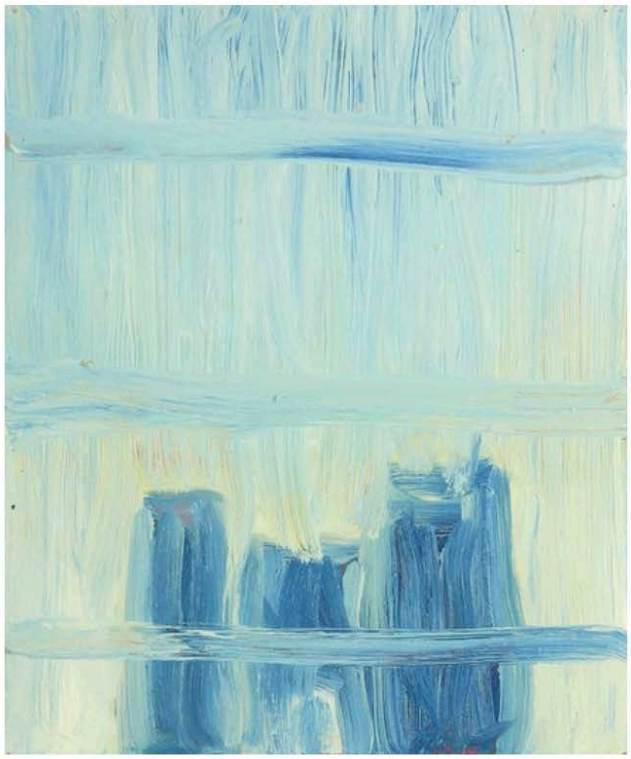
Alexandre Gallery

January 7 – February 13, 2016

New York

The paintings themselves show a practiced awareness of contemporary art conditions. They feel leading-edge in spirit. In *Untitled Structure* (2014), the imagery is of tall black rectangles grouped in rows against a white ground. The top part of the background consists of a rough surface of dark tan color, contrasting with the white and the black existing beneath it. As a composition, *Untitled Structure* almost seems modest, but there is a highly satisfying sense of design and expressiveness that results in an experience quite a bit larger than the sum of its parts. As has been noted by Katz, the early twentieth-century painter of natural abstraction, Arthur Dove, feels like a mentor in much of this work. Diamond, a friend of the poet and critic Peter Schjeldahl and a participant in THIS IS FINE, the ambient poetry scene of New York some time back, owes more than a little to the intimate emotional life of the lyric. Her work reminds the viewer that poetic writing can translate feeling and ideas into a communicable entirety—one characterized by a united sense of form. In this way, *Untitled Structure* connects with deep emotion—this despite the fact that nothing recognizable in a figurative sense is being shown. Its rapport with the viewer is unmistakable.

Untitled Framed Cityscape (2004), only 12 by 10 inches in dimension, nevertheless captures the large spirit of urban life. It consists of a tall rectangle painted abstractly in orange and yellow, with the orange forms rising up into the yellow, which exists at the top of the picture but moves downward in the center and the right edge of the composition. Around is a border of black stripes that surround the center imagery; the stripes are fairly transparent with darker edges. The entire painting is framed by a thin black line. There is no verifiable image we would associate with New York as we know it; however, the center of the piece might refer to buildings on a hot day, while the circumference of stripes could avenue of transport. All in all, it is a terrific picture, one that works profoundly well as nonobjective statement, but which also describes, in a wonderfully roundabout manner, the aura of metropolitan life. Like *Untitled Structure,* it is a painting that resonates beyond the actual picture it is presenting.



Martha Diamond, *Blue Wash*, 2011 – 2014. Oil on panel, 12 x 10 inches. Courtesy Alexandre Gallery, New York.

The exquisitely lyrical oil on panel, *Blue Wash* (2011 – 2014), consists of an image divided by three roughly equidistant horizontal stripes, which separate an upper half that is mostly a blue wash, with an undercoating of pale yellow. In the bottom half, the pale yellow ground is more visible; in the middle there are three column-like figures, roughly painted, which don't look like anything recognizable, conferring only a sense of pure form. Between the stripes and the columns, there is a good sense of structure to this small work of art. But *Blue Wash* is also an excuse for portraying the elegant consequence of a wash that has been handled lightly but expertly, building an atmosphere that is both radiant and evanescent. In this kind of painting, intuition amounts to a lot. We feel its ambience first, and only later analyze its structure. Diamond's art shows us how we might gain from a certain openness of perception, rooted in the history and physical environs of New York. As a painter, her evolving aesthetic is extremely varied, with color, and black and white, and abstraction, and representation, moving in an out of one work to the next. This affords the feeling of diversity within the unity of a single sensibility that is consistently experienced in Diamond's art.

Artnews

February 2016

ARTnews

Martha Diamond at Alexandre Gallery

BY STEPHEN MAINE February 11, 2016 10:00am

Martha Diamond, *Blue Wash*, 2011–14, oil on panel, 12 x 10 inches.

COURTESY ALEXANDRE GALLERY, NEW YORK

In the context of the operatic excesses of 1980s Neo-Expressionism, Martha Diamond's contemporaneous paintings appeared strikingly reserved. Her ultra-relaxed yet emphatic touch banged out angled grids that congealed in elevated views of office buildings and high-rise apartment complexes. With no more than two or three colors, the artist could limn a faceless, noir-inflected world of intrigue and anxiety.

Less edgy but no less engrossing are Diamond's paintings of the last 15 years, 41 of which are on view here. The oil-on-thin-panel works, which range from 10 by 8 inches to 15 by 10 inches, float about an inch from the wall. Featuring tints of greenish blue that veil a sly golden glow, *Blue Wash* (2011–14) serves as a conduit to Diamond's earlier, distinctly urban imagery—a brushy, hazy view through mullioned windows to a blocky structure in the distance. *Untitled* (2004–15), a painting in which three elongated cones, calling to mind teepees or cathedral spires that emerge from what could be a snowdrift or sand dune, looks unlabored despite its prolonged development, while the burly, black-on-white lines in *Untitled (Weather)*, 2015, imply both architecture and precipitation with zero fuss.

Individually and collectively, these paintings span a spectrum of pictorial experience, ranging from the linguistic to the lushly material; Diamond construes them as both symbol and surface but avoids any sense that she's equivocating. Two contrasting sets of stripes—in Bible black and sullied white—collide in *Flag and Text* (2010–11). The repercussions just might have as much to do with the institutional structures of societal control as with the theoretical demise of the Modernist grid. Diamond's touch is still endearingly clunky, but her paintings' formal dynamics are tight as a drum, and their thematic associations remain open-ended without being cryptic.

Diamond shoehorns a tremendous amount of experience, deliberation, and studio smarts into these beautifully understated works. Young artists pursuing an interest in small, nonchalantly executed paintings should see this show.

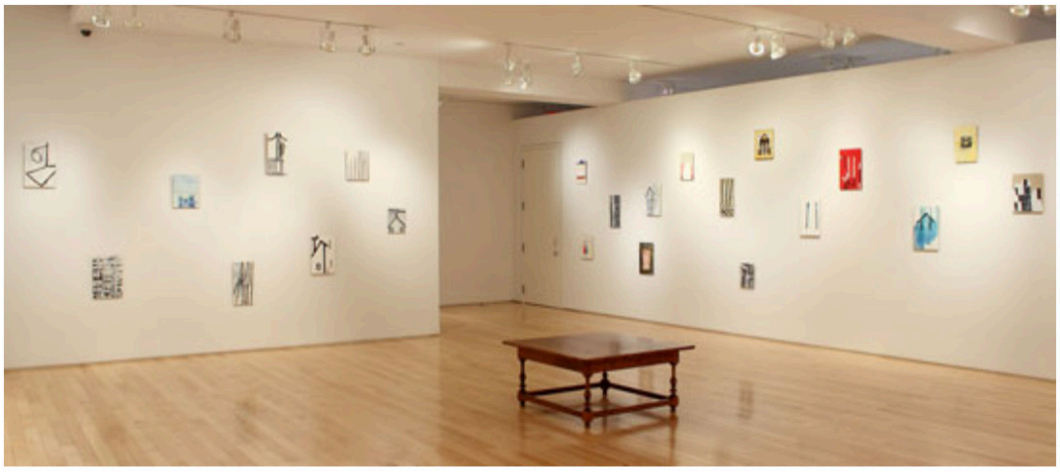
artcritical

February 2016

artcritical
the online magazine of art and ideas

An Awesome Pursuit of Variety: Martha Diamond's Little Pictures

by **David Carrier**



installation view, Martha Diamond: Recent Paintings at Alexandre Gallery, 2016

Forty-one small paintings completed since 2002 fill the central but still relatively intimate room at Alexandre Gallery. All rectangles, many are twelve by ten inches, though some are a bit larger than that. Many are untitled or have titles generically identifying such subjects as a cityscape or church, or describing their content—*Untitled Frame With Construction* (2002-3) and *Blue Wash* (2011-14) being examples of that. Most (but not all) have internal painted frames surrounding a central image or shape. Otherwise, her compositions are very varied. Consider just three: *Untitled Frame Painting* (2002-3) places short vertical black lines in a frame; *Untitled* (2002) centers iridescent red brushstrokes on a blue background within an orange frame; and *Frame Painting With Stride* (2002-3) sets a striding black stick figure on a white background in a dark red frame. Sometimes Diamond's titles are simply mysterious. Are there two philosophers in *Two Philosophers* (2009-15)? And what in the world are the three tie-like shapes within the frame of *Untitled Frame Series With Red Yellow and Blue* (2002-3)?

Diamond is devilishly hard to place. Drawing on her own comments, should we, perhaps, identify her as a very belated Abstract Expressionist who is often engaged with figurative subjects? Long ago she did express affinities felt with Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko, and fascination with Jackson Pollock and Andy Warhol. But since her paintings look very different from any of these artists, what I think that she learned from them is the importance of incessant, willful improvisation. She certainly has an identifiable personal style. When you give them even the briefest flicker of awareness, her very varied paintings all are immediately hers. Sometimes, as Roberta Smith wrote in the New York Times of her 1988 exhibition at Robert Miller Gallery, it is easy to think

> *[…] that there's not much going on, that this painter of lush, fragrantly colored, nearly abstract skyscrapers and city views is falling apart in public. At times, this seems to be the case.*

Martha Diamond, Untitled, 2002. Oil on panel, 12 x 10 inches.

Courtesy of Alexandre Gallery

"But others," this reviewer adds, "may be among the best paintings she has made." This exhibition is different—it has some ups and downs, but I don't find it particularly uneven. I believe, rather, that because Diamond's happily awesome pursuit of visual variety never slips into cliché, her show is more than the sum of its parts, which is to say your pleasure in each of these painterly pictures involves awareness that many otherwise different looking paintings are at hand. In that way, the effect is the exact opposite of looking at works in series by Frank Stella, when multiple repetitions of one basic visual conception can be deadening.

So far as I can see, Diamond is a completely intuitive artist, one for whom it is hard to associate any theorizing in her pictures. This is what makes it difficult to place her historically. In the usual histories of New York painting, Abstract Expressionism yields to minimal art, Pop Art and conceptualism just when, circa 1965, she took up residence there. You don't feel that she has much to do with these developments. In his essay "Style now" (1972) the aesthetic philosopher Richard Wollheim notes that "the most powerful pressure under which the contemporary painter labours" is the pressure "to seek recognition through the recognizability of his work." What defines convincing art, he argues, is the achievement of a style. Style "has a unity," which is to say that it involves employment of "something like a coherent set of rules," which are difficult (or even impossible) to spell out in so many words. The difficulty of quantifying what is, nonetheless, a visually self-evident felt unity in this body of Diamond's art, provides a way of placing her. In an admirably brief essay in the exhibition catalogue, Alex Katz says that these paintings "will eat up almost anything you put near them." He's absolutely right—they are terrific.

Alexandre Gallery

January 2016

ALEXANDRE GALLERY

Martha Diamond in 2016
by Alex Katz

Martha Diamond attended Carleton College and went to the Sorbonne in Paris to study French. When she returned, her friends from college, Donna Dennis and Peter Schjeldahl, had become part of the New York poetry scene. Martha's aesthetic friends were John Godfrey and Jim Brodey. The three were socially fugitive and not interested in connecting to the mainline world, as Ginsberg and Bob Dylan were.

The first work I saw of Martha's was a black reproduction in a magazine. Amazing energy with no styling. In the early '70s she started painting teepees, tents and houses on flat grounds. She then proceeded to enlarge buildings and paint them with thick paint. They were part of the "bad painting" movement and were fashionable. The paintings were gestural with very little scale but a lot of surface energy.

Starting about 2000 the paintings became smaller with more scale and concrete forms. Outer directed artists include Jeff Koons, Bacon and Warhol. She's inner directed. The work relates to Forrest Bess, Charles Burchfield and Arthur Dove. The paintings are blunt. They will eat up almost anything you put near them. It's painting that makes sense now.

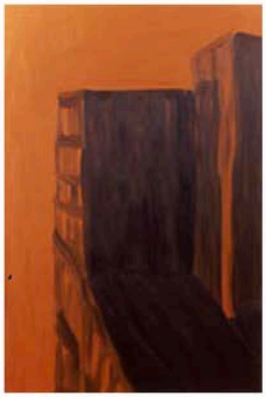
Alex Katz is a painter based in New York City.

artnet

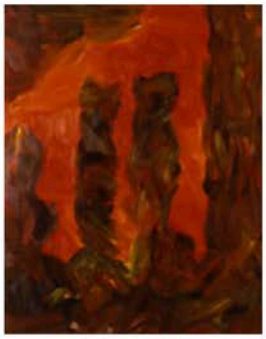
December 2004

artnet

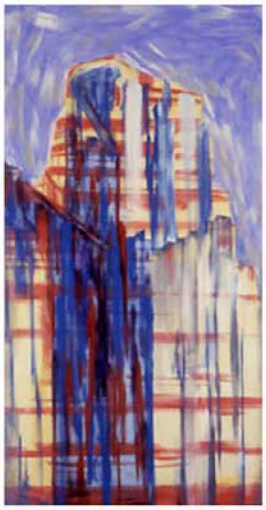
A Hip Homage to New York
by Ilka Scobie



Martha Diamond
Orange Light
1983



Across the River
1988



Cityscape (Blue Shadow #3)
1994

"Martha Diamond: From Three Decades," Oct. 28-Dec. 18, 2004, at the New York Studio School, 8 West 8th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011

Martha Diamond's boldly gestural paintings span the course of three decades, and this meticulously curated show provides a chance to view an accomplished artist's evolution. The show features trios and pairs of large paintings as well as a series of 14 small oils on masonite, all united by their startling originality.

Diamond has frequently used small-scale studies to clarify her vision, and paints the larger works with a performance artist's intensity. What Diamond explains as "stuff just beginning to develop" commenced with her painting of idiosyncratic frames around older images. Leaping from the playful to the profound, this series ensconces each enigmatic image with jewel-like precision.

Obliterating details and experimenting with transparency, Diamond's coolly distinct iconography touches on a wide range of subjects, from Doric nobility and Russian constructivism to street art.

The earliest large paintings in the show date from the 1980s. *Orange Light*'s obdurate skyline, silhouetted against a burning sunset, suggests the view after a summer storm. The revved-up romance continues in the roughly abstracted *Across the River*, in which buildings transmute into raw stalagmites.

Verticality is further explored and expanded in the three works of the '90s. The unlikely palette of *Cityscape (Blue Shadow #3)* creates a loose and luscious urban hallucination. The later *Black, White, Gray Cityscape* imbues brick and glass with mystical shimmer and cathedral-ike grandeur. The jazzy sky's agitated brushstrokes, which recall El Greco's crazy clouds, is a gorgeous dreamy skyscraper vision.

Diamond's latest work explores the experience of a post-9/11 New York. The urban grid is ever-changing -- boxlike high-rises sprout along the downtown streets as the leveled Twin Towers await resurrection. The architectonic images of the three new canvases flip between energetic abstraction and fractured cityscapes. Forms and colors are constantly moved by fluid manipulation of paint.

One of these untitled works presents an almost pastoral calligraphy, with a simplified palette creating a lyrical surprise. The remaining pairs feature brilliant colors highlighted by white swathes bursting with energy. Could the pulse of red spilling between columns be the River Styx? Recognition of images never obscures the powerful painting itself; in fact, it osculates architectural abstractions and figuration.

Since Diamond's career began, her work has been ahead of the curve, which is why the earliest canvases in this show remain compelling and absolutely contemporary. She continues to integrate elements of painting in a new ways, as evidenced by her very latest canvases. By dueling between the symbolic and cogent, Diamond portrays her city with impassioned probity and her work continues to be a vital force in the reinvigoration of painting.

artnet

2001

artnet

Urban Visionary
by Ilka Scobie

Martha Diamond
Cityscape #3
1994

Untitled
1997

Untitled
1998

Martha Diamond, a native New Yorker, received a 2001 art award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. At the ceremony last month, Chuck Close presented her with the award and the citation, which read, "Martha Diamond's paintings are based on vision, nuance, gesture, light, reflection and atmosphere. The work is elegant, hip, compelling and thoroughly modern. This is serious painting, uncompromised, deep and infinitely rewarding."

Diamond has been a vital member of the New York art world since graduating from NYU with an MFA. She has lived and worked in the same downtown loft for many years, long before fancy shoe boutiques replaced the local Hell's Angels chapter.

In her sun-filled loft, flea market finds like 1950s lamps coexist elegantly with Italian leather sofas. Diamond's art collection includes works by Lois Dodd, Alex Katz, Hunt Slonem, Merlin James, Stephen Westfall and other contemporary artists with whom she has traded work. Her pristine studio boasts no distractions, save whitewashed wooden furniture, neat racks of paintings and Diamond's current work.

Diamond, who is widely known for her gestural urban imagery, has long been regarded as a brilliant oil painter. She works from small, jewel-like studies that she then translates to larger canvases. Her methodology takes on the immediacy of performance art. We spoke in her living room on a recent rainy afternoon.

Ilka Scobie: What were your first encounters with the art scene?

Martha Diamond: It was much smaller. The current scene is much more international. There were a lot of Abstract Expressionist painters to look at. Pop art was happening. Castelli had a small gallery uptown on 77th Street, the shows there were fabulous. Donna Dennis and I went to Paris for about a year, and when we came back, Peter Schjeldahl took us out to parties. I met a lot of people right away. The first party I went to in New York was at Bill Berkson's on 57th Street. Frank O'Hara, Larry Rivers, Alex Katz were all there. And John Ashberry, who said I brought out his latent heterosexuality, which I immediately told my parents.

IS: Was there a lot of socializing with poets?

MD: The people I knew, and still know, are artists and writers. There was the whole St. Marks scene. Ted Berrigan, who talked to and supported everybody. And Ron Padgett. Anne Waldman edited the Poetry Project at St. Marks and edited *The World*. There were a lot of collaborations between artists and poets. Joe Brainard and George Schneemann were especially active. It was a very dynamic scene.

IS: Which artists were you interested in, early on?

MD: I loved Jackson Pollock, Chinese brush paintings, Piero della Francesca and gothic cathedrals. I wasn't consciously influenced by other artists, until I learned more fundamentals myself.

IS: What inspires you as a painter?

New York
1999

Untitled
1998

Grisaille Cityscape
1994

MD: I always look at the city, and I do draw from life. I look a lot, I have a good memory for spaces, places. A lot of times, it's not the building itself that inspires the work. It's the idea of some type of composition to try, or some kind of brush handling to use. And then, you make the image out of it, or find an image that you can use with that idea of space or color.

IS: Tell me about how you work.

MD: I don't use lines a lot. When I put paint down, I hope it's going to have a certain light or weight or space, or to imply the same. The definition of the image comes out of the way the paint is handled. And the formal properties, the light, the space.

I actually began working this way many years before I turned to city images. After school, for a while, I painted with anything but brushes. Then I went back to oil painting and experimented with as many paint handlings as I could think of. It turned out for me to always be the brush.

IS: Tell me about the '70s...

MD: In the early '70s there were a number of people who were putting art work on the ceiling, around the room, growing from the floor up, working from the top down, using materials directly. That was an influence. And I began to go to museums more. And the Bykert Gallery, which was so hot.

IS: Jump start to the '80s...

MD: I remember Julian Schnabel, whose work I saw way early on, before he had a gallery. I was sort of shocked, but I never forgot the experience of seeing those works. They were huge, very tall. Slowly, I began to understand what he was doing, just in terms of scale and energy. And Joel Shapiro, whose work I always paid attention to, once gave me great advice, "Don't edit in advance."

Paula Cooper Gallery was the place to look at new art. I began to appreciate Alex Katz's paintings, when I went back to using a brush. And the Italians came, and the Germans came, and a there was a lot more kinds of content, from all over the place, all over the world, ranging from Clemente to Keifer.

A lot of people began to paint again, when painting was supposed to be dead. The amount of energy in the '80s was a big deal.

IS: Which gallery were you at then?

MD: Brooke Alexander, and then Robert Miller in the '90s.

IS: And what are you working on right now?

MD: Figurative things where all the definition comes from the brush marks. I'm experimenting with anything that comes to me. You try everything, and eventually, all the ideas coalesce into a new idea you didn't know you were going to have.

Martha Diamond's work is currently on display at the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and her prints are available at Stewart & Stewart.

ILKA SCOBIE is a poet.

Artforum

January 1990

ARTFORUM

PRINT JANUARY 1990

MARTHA DIAMOND: SENSATION RISING

THE LARGE OIL PAINTINGS that Martha Diamond showed in New York two seasons ago took some extra scrutinizing before their visibility, and even their sensational impacts, could register. Disoriented viewers tended to shrug them off precipitously. Taken as exercises in a postreductive, painterly abstract style, Diamond's blithely charged surfaces seemed too glib, too erratic, diverse, or, worse, hastily slapped down; as emotive imagist glyphs, too nonchalant, rarefied, and obscure. "Nothing much at first," "not much going on," went the adumbrations in two local critics' lead sentences before those writers settled into telling what, after staying with the work for a time, they had seen and appreciated.

The nonplussed reactions to Diamond's show suggest a cautionary tale about the checkout quotient from works that require more than a first glance in the stressed-out sensorium of the art public. A highly sensual, nuanced art, it seems, won't cause much disturbance in the millennial spillway of theoretically quick reads. A few months before Diamond's show, the experience of watching people enter and leave a small installation of Robert Ryman's paintings in San Francisco had resulted in my estimating a 30-second requirement for the viewer willing to see either that there was anything there but bare walls, or that the Rymans, once their recognizably literalist formats were brought into focus (they were in fact white and aluminum-gray constructions bolted to the walls), had much to offer by being inspected further. Most of those ho gave the installation a half minute's close study were hooked, and likely to remain for anywhere from 20 minutes to an hour or more while each of Ryman's nominally perfect blanks intimated light and sense.

By comparison, Diamond's pictures are far from blank, though some of them deal, much like any Ryman, with great gobs of evanescence. Rather, each is painted fully, near to impaction, which is where some of the work's difficulties lie. At a glance, you can't see the painting for the paint; and the massive image the paint amounts to spreads nonsensically, as if some essential, mediating focal point were missing. Only over time do you see that the strangely resolved, surface-wide image is the point, and that its time of arrival is double: fast for color and light, slow for graphic statement. The paradox is that these slow-to-be-perceived surfaces evoke the kind of unscheduled rushes of perception that most keenly fall to sight in ordinary experience.

For most of the past ten years, Diamond has painted cityscape abstractions based on the canted New York vistas one's eyes meet inadvertently out the window several stories up, or in passing from the street. Such discrete actualities tend to impinge on one's consciousness as sensations only tenuously connected to the solidities of things. All of a sudden, one is struck by a ratcheting amalgam of stone-and-glass gridwork with the reflection or shadow of a second architectural bit, plus perhaps the cropped profile of an incongruous third across a chemically coated slip of tumbled island sky—and all of this bunching upward from no foothold in a spatial continuum that flattens out much as the distances across the Grand Canyon when observed from the rim. Animated by weaves, darts, and scrubbings, alternately glistening and dry, of Diamond's pigment, such mirages claim the giddiness and pathos of the aimlessly grandiose.

Diamond's New York views developed out of a number of generic city images the artist made after switching from acrylic to oil paints in the latter half of the '70s. Her earlier acrylic paintings were, she says, "about brushstrokes,"[1] with some landscape references. Her first oils were a variety of what Rene Ricard then called "single-image painting"—one rudimentary form per painting, floated in the center of the pictorial field—a mode to which she occasionally reverts, though with a broader attack (especially in a series of enigmatic, thorny abstract still lifes beginning in 1986 called "Sets"). By 1980, when she zeroed in from memory on specific Manhattan subjects, her pictures began to project a footloose elegance commensurate with a sensibility at home with its motifs.

Diamond is a New York visionary. Her pictorial embodiments of the stuns and implosions of urbanity are best understood in the company of those painters of Manhattan across whose surfaces the arguments between representation and abstract form are deflected by the urge to nail down the forces that contend at just about any intersection. One thinks of the vector-ridden outcroppings of John Marin's "downtown" pictures, Georgia O'Keeffe's night-blooming monoliths, and the hectic avenues looming up in pictures by Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning. The energetic realist wing of the New York School belongs here, too: Jane Freilicher's ever-deepening skylines, John Button's reveries upon cornices and clouds, Yvonne Jacquette's contemplative particularist overviews, and the recent "black" paintings of Lower Manhattan at night by Alex Katz.

A Manhattan native, Diamond returned in 1965, after graduating from Carleton College in Minnesota and a year in Paris, to discover New York School painting: "I felt sympathetic to Kline, de Kooning, and Rothko," she has said, "but I was most influenced and fascinated by Pollock and Warhol." For the young painter starting out in the mid '60s, the "persistence" of Andy Warhol's images and Jackson Pollock's "graceful, complex space," as she saw them, presented the necessary challenges. De Kooning at the time seemed "more graphic." Nevertheless, it is to de Kooning's highway abstractions of 1957–63 that the physicality of Diamond's recent pictures most relates. In the highway pictures, de Kooning brought forward an image of the sweep at the peripheries of vision—literally, the landscape rushing away at the side of the road as seen from the passenger seat of a car. Frontality—the paint in front of the picture—put the viewer on intimate terms with the accelerated image as it spread out in scale and light.

More accurately, it could be said that Diamond has retrieved the blunt physicality of de Kooning's and Kline's paint at one remove—by seeing it through the use Alex Katz made of it during his own phase of directly handling imagery that included, besides landscapes and portraiture, a series of head-on window-frame views done circa 1959–62 in his West Side loft. (Somewhat earlier, Katz had announced his sense of the procedural issues involved by the remark "The paint goes across the canvas making discriminations.") Apprehending the agitated marks of action painting through Katz's nimble, more circumspect realism means removal for the painter in another sense: the image agglomerated of a dual attentiveness to the external world and to the contiguous behavior of paint is objectified and transposable. Hence Katz's progress away from direct painting and into his current "artificial" phase of working from drawings, through oil sketches, to the transpositions of images (via drawing and pouncing) onto huge canvases where, as he has said, "you see the image first and not the paint, but if you want to look closely you can see how it's painted." Hence, too, Diamond's way of similarly transposing images worked out on small Masonite panels to big, mostly vertical paintings in which the basic scheme is altered only by more refined touches and a greater care as to scale.

It's as if Diamond has put the paint back in front of the picture where de Kooning had it, and from where Katz eventually (and other '60s reductivists, generally) smoothed it away. But, like Katz's, Diamond's art is distinguished from that of the exemplars of action painting by a heightened intentionality apropos image and appearance, including a pragmatic approach to the mediating messages of style. "On the surface," she told me,

my work resembles expressionist paintings, but I'm more concerned with a vision than expressionism and I try to paint that vision realistically—I try to paint my perceptions rather than paint through emotion. A familiar subject in a radically generalized or edited treatment is a formalist device I use, so that recognizability or familiarity leads the viewer to look for expected detail. For the most part the details are not there so you look harder at the paint and the painting. You begin to distinguish between paint, performance, image, idea, expectation, and you.

The normally rigid components of the urban grid—of what James Schuyler calls "the continuous right-angled skin of the city"[2]—yield to the eliding fluency of Diamond's brushstrokes. Contrariwise, for oil paint to look so fresh and articulated—for it to articulate solids and gases as seamlessly as they appear in the bat of an eye—it must be handled dryly: thus unblended white and blue streaks, through which poke the extremities of tall buildings in *Tips*, 1987, make, Diamond says, "a sign for sky, mist, and water on a gray day." The atmosphere left by the brush doesn't undulate but zips laterally or hunkers down. Atmosphere and light cushioned by mass and tone are a view's most salient traits. Tingles of offshore light and weather modify the diaphanous facades in *World Trade* and *Winds*, both 1988. But the particulars of those skeletal prospects are left for memory (including memory's illogical color statements) to extrapolate. What appear most nonsensical—the gummy penumbras and moonstruck calcium rows of girders, or a sunny apartment tower's feathered-off, dithering incline, as in *Reflections*, 1989—ring most true. In the overall image a precise look of combined architecture, light, and air may be reflected, but the reflection is without objects; it veers instead to fasten on sensations analogous to those high-pitched, random instants of vision when our associations of contour and particular objects merely percolate in the effect.

Diamond extends the optical life of her sensations with bold integuments that verge on cartooning. Like a comic strip artist, she has come up with a repertory of marks with interchangeable connotations: a reduplicated single stroke hooked into an open *V* can stand for a rooftop ledge in one painting and a stack of balconies in another. This as much as anything—as much as her taste for jarring (or, as she says, "conspicuous") colors—has led some critics to mistake her as a latecomer to the ranks of neoExpressionism. Diamond's vision may be subjective—sensation, finally, can be nothing else—but her painting's expressivity derives from a feeling for live fact. Joan Mitchell has spoken of "a feeling that comes . . . from the outside, from landscape."[3] And it may be that Diamond is doing for the cityscape what Mitchell does for the great(er) outdoors. Where Mitchell layers her canvases with the irregular swatches of nature perceived as chaotic sense impressions, Diamond builds edifices that bring citified chaos into focus as character, condensing the rush and stabilizing it as an emblem.

Diamond's brand of real-life abstraction reminds us that, conversely, the most piquant New York realism has always made the object of its contemplations the city dweller's quick response to the immediate environs. What becomes visible with a cursory turn or lift of the head is what makes the city click into place, revealing its larger nature and dynamism. One gives oneself up to such excess with a plausibility that briefly overrides the baseline bludgeonings by which whole zones of sense are quashed. The city seen with a naturalist's bent transcends its witless negotiations. Light on buildings against the high Atlantic sky makes New York life tenable.

Diamond's pictures make a close analogy of brushed-on oil paint to immanent light. Indeed, some of her latest paintings take light alone for their subject matter. A spree of closely adjusted color values, *Red Light*, 1988, is four red tones folded against each other to envelop a blushing white wedge. "*Red Light* is light that's white in red," Diamond says. "Light and rhythm are such basic parts of order. Almost everything can be defined by them —joy as well as monumentality. They can be thrilling even before they become attributes. That's where my spirituality lies."

Bill Berkson is a poet and critic who lives in Northern California. He writes regularly for Artforum.

The New York Times

March 1988

The New York Times

Review/Art; Action in New Paintings By Martha Diamond

By Roberta Smith

It is easy to walk in and out of Martha Diamond's latest exhibition at the Robert Miller Gallery and think that there's not much going on, that this painter of lush, fragrantly colored, nearly abstract skyscrapers and city views is falling apart in public. At times, this seems to be the case. Several of these paintings look unfinished, falling victim to Ms. Diamond's wide-brushed, wet-on-wet painting method. But others may be among the best paintings she has made. This exhibition has a reach to it that one had ceased to expect from Ms. Diamond. It shows her taking on new subjects (particularly an unspecified, generic still life), aligning herself more aggressively with painters of the past and present and honing the vaudevillian bravura that always characterized her work.

Ms. Diamond seems to be devising her own special brand of ''action painting,'' as Abstract Expressionism is sometimes called. Crossed with a grossly magnified Impressionism, it incorporates more than a dash of slapstick in the way it reduces urban reality to the scaled-up specifics of color laid bluntly into color. The artist clearly wants us to experience paint viscerally and directly the way we do in paintings from the 1950's by Franz Kline or Philip Guston, and wants also to give us impressionistic, nearly disintegrating images of a sundrenched world where a building's shadow can suddenly darken a golden intersection or a scaffolding can form a nonchalant grid against an aqua sky. Color counts for a lot here, as do the way the brushstrokes of contrasting widths and lengths are played off against one another.

In the painting ''World Trade Center,'' horizontal bands of green, blue and red are broken by two vertical swaths of light brown that are in turn broken by a couple of spiraling swishes of nearly white paint. Thus does the artist telegraph the image of the Twin Towers with the Hudson River, New Jersey and the setting sun in the background and some devilish wind currents in the foreground. In the process, she claims for herself a motif that has been used repeatedly by the New Image painter Robert Moskowitz, while making an image that fleetingly suggests a dish towel ready for the laundry.

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November 1985

sensibility that it can't work up any guile. He even lets every opportunity for a crescendo pass by (you can easily imagine the kind of bullying anthems Longo would have made of the same material) and just lets conceptual gravity and painterly grace spin out elegiacally. —*Holland Cotter*

Martha Diamond at Brooke Alexander

Reviewing a Martha Diamond exhibition several years ago, Gerrit Henry [*A.i.A.*, Dec. '82] noted that Diamond, unlike many of her Neo-Expressionist peers, creates canvases filled with "a great good humor," even if her subject matter is at times apocalyptic. This perception is clearly sustained by Diamond's new work, which celebrates the vitality of the contemporary American city in a series of paintings largely devoted to high-rise buildings under construction.

The Neo-Expressionists—and the German Expressionists before them—have elaborated the anxious drama of modern urban life. For all that she shares the Neo-Expressionist painting style, Diamond is more concerned in her art to celebrate the excitement inherent in the New York cityscape. One might think of Diamond's recent city paintings as a kind of late 20th-century landscape painting, in which the dynamism of the great 19th-century American landscapists is transferred from mountains, craggy pinnacles, glaciers or waterfalls to the gigantic urban structures in the making that fill New York's sky. Diamond has as positive a vision of this scenery as Bierstadt ever had of Yellowstone.

In these most recent works Diamond is interested in expressing the happy power embodied in new construction. Painted in long, broad and continuous brushstrokes, the skeletons of her buildings move up and across the canvas. Yet despite their grandeur—Diamond creates a fictional space that is more expansive than would really be possible—one sees these buildings intimately. Diamond's structures do not occupy vertiginous spaces; rather, they seem to have been painted from some safe vantage point. The brightness and clarity of her palette—light blues, yellows, comforting oranges and tans—also puts the viewer at ease.

Diamond is a pro at creating slightly off-center images which are memorable because of the unstated relation of the image to the center and edges of the canvas. This exhibition included many successes—above all, *Pale Blue Construction*, made only of shades of blue, and *Facades*, where a simple diagonal, formed by the juxtaposition of two buildings, is a particularly strong and surprising element of design. The failures were few, occurring only when the off-center image, as in *High View*, related unsuccessfully to the painting's overall geometry.

Diamond's reliance on off-center imagery owes something to Alex Katz. She seems to share some metaphysical concerns with him as well. Like Katz, Diamond never demands a heavy moral or metaphysical reaction from the viewer, although she has often chosen scenes which would permit this. In her apocalyptic paintings of the early '80s, for example, Diamond painted New York going up in flames. Yet even here, the luscious yet placid painterly attack acts to check the development of somber emotions.

Diamond is now clearly a painter of mature capacities. Yet in spite of the authority of her works, one misses a certain breadth of emotion. Without wishing that she join the gloomy Neo-Expressionist camp, one might hope tht Diamond would express a darker, more critical mood in certain of her paintings—as her 19th-century forebears sometimes did. Given her skills, the results would be well worth the risk.

—*Edmund Leites*

Dianne Blell: *The Origin of Drawing*, 1984, Cibachrome print, 54½ by 68½ inches; at Castelli.

Dianne Blell at Castelli

Dianne Blell's large-scale Cibachrome prints bring back Greco-Roman culture. For our edification and delight, Blell—who spent hours in libraries, poring over classical tomes—has built sets, posed toga-clad models, arranged lighting "as it would fall in each particular situation," says the artist, and even created little aerially suspended doll-cupids to liven up the mythological picture. Her care and research inform all of her pictures, which almost fulfill the dream of having Cibachromes of ancient Greece or Rome.

In *Work Interrupted*, a lady seated amidst palatial appointments bathed in an enveloping taupe atmosphere stares at an apparently embarrassed companion, who stands clutching her green toga to her. Overtones of Lesbos? In *Beauty*, a young girl sits on a gilded chair, her tan and yellow toga wrapped around her legs; a marble-floored corridor stretches out through the archway to her right, and a little cupid hovers above.

The work is witty, but relatively straightforward, as befits a self-proclaimed classicist. Blell's scenes, indeed, seem at times to come straight out of a painting by David—a more erotically inclined David, perhaps, but still with his pomp and handsomeness of execution. Her works also make one think of the classically minded Pre-Raphaelites and, indeed, of every artist who finds himself out of step with his times and begins constructing nostalgic interpretations of a better day.

Like any good idealist, Blell has chosen only those elements she wants—there is in all the torrid serenity of her photographs no hint of the beggars or the whores outside the palace gates.

There is a seriousness to the work, to the comely maidens, to the elegant remote young men—the pride and joy, as we know, of Greco-Roman culture. But Blell plays down the patriarchal nature of this society in many of her pictures; in fact, maidens and older women usually predominate.

It is to the scenes of men and women together that Blell brings a very personal kind of sentiment—as opposed to sentimentality. In *The Origin of Drawing*, a lovely young girl traces the shadow profile of a handsome, nude young man; the picture is both touching and highly erotic. In *Cupid and Psyche*, the goddess sits at the edge of her bed, head bowed—pensively? modestly?—before a full-grown sensual nude Cupid who waits in the archway. It's a clear case of Eros over Agape in Blell's dream culture. What is remarkable about these works is the life and nature, the sense of place, time and emotion, that Blell has managed to inject into her very composed tableaux. This is a classicism brimming with *jeunesse*, a more than mild intoxicant that thoroughly stirs the passions—and the heart. —*Gerrit Henry*

Luigi Ontani at Jack Tilton

The first painting in this show was *24 West 57th Street*, a quirky panel in the shape of a house; only on my way out did I realize it is a spoof of Jack Tilton's house-shaped gallery logo. This kind of playfulness is typical of Luigi Ontani, who is well known in Europe for various forms of self-portraiture,

arts Magazine

September 1985

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MARTHA DIAMOND

The vast steel and stone armature of New York City is one of the great subjects of American painting and photography. It's a man-made landscape of terrifying beauty and squalor on a scale corresponding with the 19th-century romantic view of the natural sublime. Over the last several years Martha Diamond has presented us with one of the most powerful visions of New York ever committed to canvas. The buildings she paints are animated by her sweeping gestures to the point where they seem to be coming awake before your eyes. When she paints older masonry buildings their separate windows have an eye-like quality that is reminiscent of Burchfield's houses. But Burchfield's buildings were more isolated and on a human scale. Diamond's structures are supra-human, mythic creatures, many-eyed deities. What is important to keep in mind is that most, if not all, of her buildings actually exist. Her larger paintings spring from on-site oil sketches.

Martha Diamond, Union, 1984. *Oil on canvas, 72 x 60". Courtesy Brooke Alexander Gallery.*

Diamond has at times referred to herself as a realist painter, but it is clear that she has never been content to record the scruffy details of the observable world that even so imaginative a painter as Rackstraw Downes will concern himself with. She is, rather, a realist on the order of Neil Welliver, for whom the plasticity of paint and the structure of the painting are conditions as "real" as the ostensible subject of the mimetic picture. Diamond's vision is, if anything, even more transformative than Welliver's. Welliver strikes a simultaneously blunt and exquisite balance between paint and image. Diamond brings the two together with such force that it sets off a chain reaction, generating a psychic energy that recalls the impact of first-rate Stills, Klines, and de Koonings.

In her latest show she appears to have moved away from her glowing nocturnal views of the city and into the full light of day. This time much of the architecture she depicts is under construction, unpopulated skeletons that eerily seem to be building themselves. The new paintings are, on the whole, bigger and riskier than any undertaken in the past. She seems to be returning to her abstract roots in diptychs where her characteristic attack, like sheets of flame, twists free of outright representation altogether. Huge areas of salmon pink or whited-out ceruleans are 'sky' for only as long as it takes the viewer to recognize their representational function. Then they convert to structurally acute passages of pure bravura painting, existing for the fierce joy of the act itself.

It's fitting that this show was mounted in the spring, for a fresh wind of change blows through them. It's not just the new climates in her colors (I never anticipated that a palette leaning toward pastels could be so scary). But what impressed me was the sense of letting go in these paintings. Diamond has owned her subject for a while now, not because she's the only one painting the urban wilderness but because her paint handling and formal acumen overwhelm any genre classification she might otherwise be burdened with. As a critic I was thrilled to see the artist who I regard as the most exciting painter of our time transcending her own very big subject. As a painter, temples pounding, I wanted to get back to the studio. (Brooke Alexander, *April 2-27*)

By STEPHEN WESTFALL

The New York Times

April 1985

The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, FRIDAY, APRIL 5, 1985

By JOHN RUSSELL

Also of interest this week:

New Paintings by Martha Diamond/Jasper Johns Prints (Brooke Alexander Gallery, 20 West 57th Street): Anyone who has lived opposite a major building site for several months will know what it looks like on Sunday, when work is suspended and nobody's around. An unspoken "What if we call the whole thing off?" seems to hang over the whole huge enterprise, and we almost expect to see it taken apart on Monday.

It is that Sunday look that Martha Diamond captures in her new paintings of tall buildings that have still a long way to go. Fragments of the multimillion-dollar enterprise are brought up close beneath our noses, where they look like bits of beat-up old wicker baskets or bedsprings not worth sitting on. But we get the big scale of it all, even so, and Diamond also suggests rather well the vast quantities of air that are moving in and out of the strange carcass.

In the smaller room, there is an exhibition of proofs on which Jasper Johns has worked in ways that set the images apart from the ones with which followers of his prints are already familiar. Some of them are quite extraordinary. The image of the Savarin can, full of paint brushes, that was used for the poster for his Whitney Museum retrospective here takes on a gaunt, elegiac quality, for instance, and the name of the French novelist Céline plays an unaccustomed part in it. The two celebrated ale cans look like two prizefighters overdue for retirement. As for that rarity, the alphabet image, it is given a tremendous going-over, not altogether to its benefit. (Through April 27.)

The New York Times

December 1983

The New York Times

Martha Diamond (Brooke Alexander, 20 West 57th Street): City buildings are the theme of Martha Diamond, but buildings with wild, Expressionist personalities of their own. Using big, brushy strokes, she lays on colors in juicy textures, bathing her anonymous edifices (no Helmsley Palace here) in the violent tones of New York light, from flaming sunset red to the glowing yellow hues of morning. The unpeopled buildings lean vertiginously into one another, as in the show's big, untitled triptych, a frenetic scene in murky browns and rich reds, in which the streets seem like stormy seas; and sometimes huddle tribally, as in "Heavy Duty," where a cluster of buildings, seen from above, almost melts into a single mass. Miss Diamond has been at this theme for a while now, but she still handles it with freshness. (Through Dec. 29.)