

**Martha Diamond: *Night Lights***

November 5—December 17, 2022

Opening Reception: Saturday, November 5, 6—8 pm

Level Three

*"I know the city has straight lines or edges but as I walk around the ending or beginning of substance becomes less absolute. Dark areas around lights appear blurred. Several buildings may be perceived as one large mass, at night you may see lit windows and not the facade."* —Martha Diamond, 1990

Magenta Plains is pleased to present *Night Lights*, a solo exhibition of Martha Diamond's lyrical paintings on canvas depicting sections of larger, monumental paintings alongside small-scale masonite paintings with vertiginous proportions. Born out of a desire to create a direct sensory experience of painting through emphasis on gesture and color, Diamond forces the psychology of the city streets onto the viewer as a physical experience.

An urban romantic, Diamond paints her perception of the city from memory only, the masonite studies akin to automatic writing. Closely cropped forms and shadows of buildings loom out of a dense ether of color (John Coffey). Enigmatic structures such as windows, scaffolds, and gesturally rendered facades collide or haphazardly enter into the frame from the edges. In some cases the built environment vanishes entirely in favor of pure abstraction. The formalist device employed is a reliance on familiarity to provoke the act of looking and "reading" the paintings literally.

A vermilion monochrome triptych from 1983 exemplifies the richness of Diamond's imagination: structures dramatically lean in reverence to the dark night sky. In another single panel work, a tangle of cadmium chartreuse chews up a grid of windows leaving no planar depth between foreground or background. Shifting in scale between the small masonite and larger sectional paintings, Diamond's order of magnitude seems based on a factor of brush size, controlling her marks only as much as necessary within the wet-on-wet technique.

The narrow confines of these paintings slice the city into moments, more akin to a pedestrian's sightline between skyscrapers. Diamond is a wanderer, her mind's eye recording her senses, thoughts, and feelings on long walks. Instead of relying on expressionism or emotion, she builds the case for an art looking experience as an encounter between paint, performance, image, idea, expectation, and oneself. *Night Lights* exemplifies the unbridled curiosity and rigorous painterly intelligence at the heart of Diamond's gaze.

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; 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.