

Sonia Gechtoff

Country of the Mind, Paintings 1982–1987

Olney Gleason presents a solo exhibition of paintings by Ukrainian-American artist Sonia Gechtoff (1926–2018), a key voice in postwar American abstraction whose seven-decade career continues to gain significant critical and institutional recognition. Highlighting the artist's technical innovation and unique combination of acrylic paint and graphite, the exhibition reflects Gechtoff's hallmark interests in nature, architecture, and the urban landscape. The exhibition will focus on a concise five-year period of works spanning 1982–1987 and will be on view at 297 Tenth Avenue from November 6 through December 20, 2025.

While working in New York between 1958 and her death in 2018, Gechtoff transformed her visual language and technique on several occasions. After gaining recognition for creating abstract expressionist paintings with a palette knife in the early 1950s, Gechtoff moved from San Francisco to a studio on Canal Street, where she continued to experiment restlessly. By the 1970s, after transitioning from oil to acrylic and adopting traditional paintbrushes, she introduced geometric structures to frame her expressionist gestures. Gliding graphite against luminous planes of color, Gechtoff achieved a textural immediacy on these new surfaces, marking a direction in her practice which she would pursue for the remainder of her life—and which would earn her praise as “one of the most gifted artists of her generation” by the influential critic Hilton Kramer.

The exhibition's title is drawn from a 1982 review by Kramer for *The New York Times* in which he praises Gechtoff's breakthrough landscapes: “Yet the real countryside in these pictures is a country of the mind, poetically imagined and painstakingly executed with a technique that remains flawless, fluent and lyrical despite its arduous demands. These new pictures sustain a remarkably consistent level of realization, and mark a new stage in the artist's career.” She continued to garner critical acclaim in the ensuing decades, while exhibiting at New York galleries and in major venues including the Museum of Modern Art.

Gechtoff's explorations of form and color soon gave way to expressive compositions inspired by landscapes and cityscapes alike. Through the 1980s and 1990s, her subjects ranged from the sea and the moon to industrial architecture, capturing waves crashing against cliffsides, expansive skies, and smokestacks rendered in the distance. These motifs recur through Gechtoff's late work, reflecting a unique working method on canvas and paper. As Gechtoff once recalled: “I wanted to be able to combine drawing and painting...That was a terrific experience for me.”

Gechtoff's profile has risen over the last decade, following her inclusion in major exhibitions and publications dedicated to the underrecognized contributions of women to Abstract Expressionism, including those

organized by the Denver Art Museum, Whitechapel Gallery, and American Federation of the Arts. Critic John Yau has written: "Gechtoff attained a resonant, independent vision that, in her case, spans seven decades. It is time we look closer at what this marvelous artist achieved."

The exhibition runs concurrently with Gechtoff's inclusion in *Abstract Expressionists: The Women*, organized by the American Federation of Arts, at the Wichita Art Museum before touring to museums across the United States until 2027. Gechtoff's work has elsewhere been highlighted in the major institutional touring exhibitions *Action, Gesture, Paint: Women Artists* and *Global Abstraction 1940-70*, organized by the Whitechapel Gallery, London in 2023, and *Women of Abstract Expressionism*, organized by the Denver Art Museum in 2016.

About Sonia Gechtoff

Sonia Gechtoff was born in Philadelphia in 1926 and died in New York in 2018. She graduated from Pennsylvania Academy of Arts before moving to San Francisco in 1951, where she established herself among the Beats Generation. She gained national recognition for her inclusion in *Younger American Painters* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1954, alongside Jackson Pollock, Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline and others. She staged a solo museum exhibition at the De Young Museum in San Francisco in 1957. She participated in the inaugural exhibition at the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles, where she later staged solo exhibitions, as well as in the American pavilions of the Brussels World's Fair (1958) and the VI Biennial de São Paulo (1961). She received a Lee Krasner Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013. Her work resides in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum of Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Denver Art Museum, Denver, CO and The Menil Collection, Houston, TX, among other museums.

For more information, contact info@olneygleason.com

For press requests, contact press@olneygleason.com