

HOLLIS TAGGART

Hollis Taggart to Present Sheila Isham's Monumental, Ethereal Works from the 1960s and 1970s, Created Using a Spray Gun

Beyond the Brush: Sheila Isham 1969-1978 will be on view at Hollis Taggart

February 9 – March 18, 2023

Opening Reception Thursday, February 9, from 5-8PM

January 17, 2023 – Hollis Taggart is pleased to announce *Beyond the Brush: Sheila Isham 1969-1978*, the gallery's first exhibition devoted to the artist since announcing the representation of her estate late last year. Isham led an extraordinary life traveling around the world with her diplomat husband, carefully absorbing and transforming the myriad cultures and traditions she encountered into her own distinct abstract style. *Beyond the Brush* explores Isham's enduring interest in philosophy, nature, and spirituality through the lens of a specific technique and decade in the artist's illustrious career: her spray gun works from 1968 through 1978. Although Isham's work is held in some of the country's most esteemed museum collections – including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum; Washington, D.C.; and Minneapolis Institute of Art; to name just a few – it has not been the focus of a major solo exhibition in the United States for over a decade. Spanning both floors of Hollis Taggart's recently expanded flagship at 521 West 26th Street, *Beyond the Brush* intends to reintroduce audiences to Isham's ethereal works and celebrate her remarkable ability to translate the metaphysical into the visual.

Born in New York City in 1927, Sheila Isham married Hayward Isham, a U.S. Foreign Service officer, after she graduated from Byrn Mawr College. Her husband's career caused the couple to frequently relocate internationally, while Isham's inquisitiveness led her to fully immerse herself in each culture, diligently studying local beliefs and traditions. In Germany, she became the first American to be accepted at the Berlin Academy of Fine Arts, where she studied from 1950 to 1954 under German Expressionists. In 1955, Isham accompanied her husband to Moscow, where she immersed herself in Russian avant-garde art, and in 1962, to Hong Kong, where she began a rigorous study of classical Chinese calligraphy as well as Eastern philosophies. During her time in Hong Kong, Isham was especially influenced by her studies with the master Feng Kanghou, who oversaw her calligraphic efforts. After a brief return to the United States, the Ishams moved to Haiti in 1974, where the artist became especially preoccupied by the natural world and studying the effects of light.

While in Hong Kong and upon her return to the United States in the early 1970s, Isham became interested in merging Eastern and Western artistic traditions and philosophies. This spiritual inquiry led her into the atmospheric color abstractions that are the focus of *Beyond the Brush*. Aiming to achieve an impressionistic light effect and to imbue her abstraction with spirituality, Isham embraced the spray gun – an instrument that releases pigment under pressure – which she had been experimenting with since the mid-1960s. This technique, along with her delicate palette, allowed her to create cloud-like forms that capture the sensation of ethereality. As Patricia Lewy notes in her catalogue essay, "Isham followed an internal drive to affirm a higher consciousness through color and form," leading her to develop of a singular, meditative visual language. Beyond

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specific cultural influences, it is Isham's commitment to spirituality and interest in the sublime that provides the strongest thread between the works in *Beyond the Brush*.

"We are thrilled to devote both floors of the gallery to this incredibly rich decade of Sheila Isham's career," said Hollis Taggart. "Though Isham – now in the ninety-fifth year of her life – contributed greatly to the art of the twentieth century, her fascinating life and oeuvre has not been studied or exhibited extensively, especially in the past decade. With *Beyond the Brush*, we hope to not only begin to give Isham's work the scholarship it deserves – starting with Patricia Lewy's scholarly catalogue essay – but also to share the sheer beauty of her canvases with wider audiences."

Isham has had solo exhibitions at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. (1961); Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo (1974, 1981); Georgia Museum of Art, Atlanta (1993); and Russian State Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia (2004), among others. Her work is held in major public and private collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Baltimore Museum of Art; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Minneapolis Institute of Art; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; New Orleans Museum of Art; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Parrish Art Museum, Water Mill, New York; Princeton University Art Museum; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Yale University Art Gallery.

About Hollis Taggart

Founded in 1979, Hollis Taggart presents significant works of American art, showcasing the trajectory of American art movements from the Hudson River School to American Modernism and the Post-War and Contemporary eras. Its program is characterized by a deep commitment to scholarship and bringing to the fore the work of under-recognized artists. The gallery has sponsored several catalogue raisonné projects, most recently for the American Surrealist artist Kay Sage, and has been instrumental in advancing knowledge of such artists as Alfred Maurer, Arthur B. Carles, and more recently, Theodoros Stamos, Marjorie Strider, and Michael (Corinne) West. In the summer of 2019, the gallery announced the formal expansion of its primary market business and focus on the presentation of contemporary work. It continues to expand its roster of contemporary artists, focusing on emerging and mid-career talents. With more than 40 years of experience, Hollis Taggart is widely recognized by collectors and curators for its leadership, expertise, and openness, on matters of art history, market trends and opportunities.

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