

franklin parrasch gallery, inc.

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Joan Snyder: *Mulberry and Canal*, 1971 © the Artist, Courtesy Franklin Parrasch Gallery

Mulberry and Canal

April 18—June 8th, 2019

Women are emerging from history because history needs them to show the way to peace and the way to another kind of strength and reflection.

Joan Snyder, "8 Women Artists: A series of exhibits at the Library, Douglass College, 1971-1972"

Franklin Parrasch Gallery is delighted to present *Mulberry and Canal*, an exhibition which examines the early years of the careers of **Joan Snyder**, **Keith Sonnier**, and **Jackie Winsor**, with a particular focus on the period between 1967 and 1975 when the three lived together in a converted multi-story warehouse at 105 Mulberry Street, near Canal Street in lower Manhattan.

In 1967, after having recently completed their graduate studies at Rutgers University (New Brunswick, New Jersey), Joan Snyder (b. 1940) and Keith Sonnier (b. 1941), both a year out of school, and Jackie Winsor (b. 1941), who had just graduated, decided to all live together in New York along with their art history professor Mark Berger. Snyder negotiated an eight year lease at 105 Mulberry Street. The building offered few amenities beyond cold water on the second floor, electricity from the stairwell's exit light sockets, windows, and lots of raw space. The work of these three artists thrived on that latter element, and this is where each would develop a vocabulary, if not an entire language, that would redefine the boundaries surrounding the definitions of art to this day. Relationships, art making, other artists, support, arguments, breakups, experimentation, no money, construction, marriages, and even a resident chimpanzee all played roles in the everyday stories of this trio. Their lives intersected and so did their thoughts and aesthetic concepts. Young, ambitious, and completely renegade, the move to 105 Mulberry marked their emergence as artists in Manhattan. As Sonnier recently remarked, "Each one of us had very different attitudes when it came to work - three very unique and different sources of materials and influences."

The newness of arriving in New York affected each of them in different ways, and for each, their aesthetic visions were, and still are, deeply rooted in the effects of their geographical and cultural backgrounds. Snyder, the daughter of a five-and-dime toy wholesaler, was raised in suburban Highland Park, New Jersey surrounded by her father's stock-in-trade: brightly colored whirligigs, hula hoops, streamers, marbles, and the like that filled the family garage; Sonnier, the son of a hardware store owner, grew up in the rural Cajun town of Mamou, Louisiana, where sunlight scattered and flickered across vast rice marsh vistas, and Cajun culture defined one's sense of humor, creativity, and community; and Winsor, one of three daughters of a house builder descended from centuries of Canadian ship captains, was born in the coastal village of St. John's, Newfoundland, where thorough appreciation of every resource and its potential for use and survival was requisite, and communing with nature was a common social activity. Each brought to the table backgrounds that span North America's latitudes and varied cultural heritages. Everything they poured into their art, and likewise to their lives in their shared residence, evolved from those distinctly embedded roots.

Joan Snyder has said that "the strokes in [her] paintings speak of [her] life and experiences." In 1969, at a crossroads in her work, Snyder described her thoughts while agonizing over how to proceed with her next painting. "One day I was sitting and looking at a painting of mine trying desperately to figure out what I wanted and what I wasn't getting." Her husband at the time, the photographer Larry Fink, was heading to the Woodstock Music Festival in upstate New York while she stayed in her studio. "I looked at the wall beneath the canvas. The wall has wooden boards so it's a vertical grid. And there were these delicate little drips - pink, red, and blue - beautiful, water-like drips from my canvas." Snyder recognized a relationship between pencil drawn grid lines and the physical gesture of a paint stroke within the grid, and began a new exploration into the nature of her process, creating the first in a seminal series she called "Stroke Paintings". "I knew while I was doing it that I had made a breakthrough," Snyder recalled. "I was painting paint strokes. The strokes had become a physical reality, not an illusion." Snyder's 1971 painting *Mulberry and Canal*, from which this exhibition derives its title, reflects the artist's matured contemplation of the physical stroke structure within a vertical grid format. This painting, along

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with a 1969 work entitled *Flock Painting of Women*, both included in this show, illustrate the dramatic course of change and growth during her time living and working in the building.

Keith Sonnier first began incorporating neon and light elements in his work shortly after he moved into 105 Mulberry, recalling his fascination with the materials that he had had access to in his father's store in Mamou. These media - readily available, given the various vendors stationed along Canal Street - were, for Sonnier, something that allowed his work to upend ordinary spatial relationships and travel limitlessly through space. His "light extensions," as he calls the neon pieces, use light to collapse dimensionality and distance, resulting in images that exist in their own realm of time and space. One such early lyrical work, included in this show, *Neon Wrapping Incandescent III* (1970), incorporates, as its title suggests, two sources of light media, contrasting the viewer's reception of color and light that weaves throughout the swirling gestures of this nine foot tall form.

As a graduate student at Rutgers, Jackie Winsor determined she would become a sculptor after having studied painting at Massachusetts College of Art and Design (Boston, Massachusetts). "Winsor's sculpture is as stable and as silent as the pyramids; yet it conveys not the awesome silence of death, but rather a living quietude in which multiple opposing forces are held in equilibrium," art historian Ellen H. Johnson noted in the exhibition catalogue for Winsor's 1979 mid-career retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (New York, New York). Included in *Mulberry and Canal* are two rare and historic works by the artist, *Pink and Blue Piece* (1985), and a totemic cylindrical coil of thick maritime rope entitled *Dark Vertical Cylinder* (1969), which Winsor made while living at 105 Mulberry, the first "Rope Sculpture," in a series that would become an iconic reference in contemporary art discourse. As Winsor once commented, her sculpture "contains energy but doesn't express energy." A "counterpoint," in her sculpture as she describes, creates an equilibrium between the energies of physical matter and negative space. In *Dark Vertical Cylinder*, each thread, wound and coiled into rope, is itself an element of drawing. The spaces between each of these threads, as well as the void in the center of the sculpture, are the elements and areas that Winsor is concerned with.

Although this is a show about the time these three artists shared while living together at 105 Mulberry Street, it is equally a show about a shared sense of awareness and sensibility towards life and art that was essential to their bond. While Snyder's, Sonnier's, and Winsor's work is stylistically different in a physical sense, it is very consistently connected on a level that reflects their deeper concerns with society, culture, and spiritual understanding.

Mulberry and Canal will be on view at Franklin Parrasch Gallery, 53 E 64th Street, New York, NY, from April 18—June 8, 2019. An opening reception will take place at the gallery on April 18 from 6-8p. For images, biography, and further information, please contact the gallery at info@franklinparrasch.com or at 212-246-5360 during business hours: 10a-6p, Tuesday-Saturday.