

Brice Marden : [leaflet] a retrospective of paintings and drawings

Author

Marden, Brice, 1938-

Date

2006

Publisher

The Museum of Modern Art

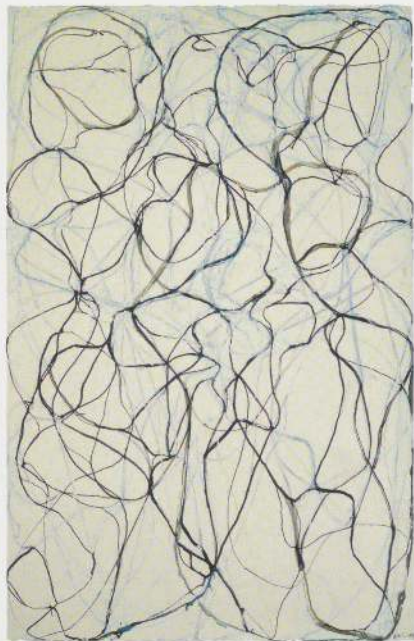
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Brice Marden

A Retrospective of Paintings and Drawings



DRAWING HAS ALWAYS BEEN CRUCIAL TO BRICE MARDEN. "Drawings for me take a number of stages," Marden has remarked. "Little notebook drawings, then a little bit more elaborate ones, and then the point where I'm familiar enough so that I work it on a major scale."

Marden draws both in the studio and directly from nature. The medium has often been his method of working through problems before attempting a painting dealing with the same issues. The relationship runs in both directions: drawings may inform paintings, and paintings may also affect drawings. Marden calls drawing "an intimate medium. It's very direct, it's very close. There is less between the artists and the art. There is real closeness, direct contact. A painting is about refinement of image. And drawing isn't. Drawing is not refinement. I don't think drawing is less than painting. . . . I find that painting doesn't have the fluidity that drawing has. And that's always, to me, the battle, to get fluidity into the painting."

While Marden makes numerous sketches and studies, he is among a small group of artists for whom the finished, autonomous drawing is as important as a painting. A statement he made about the drawings of Jasper Johns applies equally to his own work: "The drawing stood as a statement. It wasn't just a study or something on the way to something else, and so I've always had that in mind about drawing. A drawing is a complete experience in itself." For this exhibition, finished drawings have been selected and grouped into three broad but closely related groups—the grid, the plane, and the gesture. Selections from one of Marden's work books are included in the last section.

The grid was a primary subject of Marden's drawings in the 1960s and 1970s, although it never entered into his paintings. The earliest works in the exhibition are a group of four-part grid drawings made while he was still a student at Yale. Quickly Marden began to break the grid into numerous sections, and the surface treatment became increasingly dense and less gestural. Speaking of his grid drawings, Marden says, "I've always thought of the grid as a measure or a way of measuring a space, and each different grid makes a completely different space, but they're all very similar spaces. Like I think of these drawings as, say, details of that space. I see space as infinite—an infinity with lots of changes, permutations, shifts, plays happening in it. And lots of tension . . . and I try to get that into the work."

In other drawings, the plane predominates. In the five Grove Group drawings, 1972, which preceded the series of paintings by the same name, the picture plane as image is the primary subject. It begins as a single undifferentiated plane, then is broken down vertically and horizontally into two and three sections, maintaining its integrity—its character as a single object—while still being open to investigation and imagination. In *Inside Outside*, 1977, and other drawings from this time, Marden suggests the puncturing of a wall by a window or door, and the sharp contrast between light and darkness found at midday in the Mediterranean. In the two drawing series *Homage to Art*, begun in the early to mid-1970s, and *Souvenir de Grèce*, which he began at the same time but completed two decades later, Marden scraped away the paper so the postcards could be set into the sheet, keeping the plane intact. The postcards are fragments of memories, while the drawings into which they have been incorporated are intensely present.

Made at the same time as the series *Homage to Art*, the *Suicide Notes* drawings are a counterpoint in which Marden for the first time explores a variety of lines and gestures, including diagonals and curves. Only many years later would he take up the ideas initiated here in finished drawings and, finally, in paintings. From the 1980s through to the present, Marden has given the gestural line pre-eminence in his drawings. He has been greatly inspired by Asian calligraphy, using it as a jumping-off point for more subjective and complex forms and at times fusing drawing and painting. Discussing his interest in calligraphy, Marden says, "Calligraphy is very personal because it is very physical. It's not a technique or an ideology; it's a form of pure expression. Each time a calligrapher makes a mark, it will be distinctive because he has a particular physicality. Great artists exploit this; their thinking and their physicality become one."

This exhibition is sponsored by LEHMAN BROTHERS.

Major support is also provided by the Mimi and Peter Haas Fund.

Additional generous funding is provided by The Henry Luce Foundation and by Jerry and Emily Spiegel.



Homage to Art 14 (Fro Angelico). 1974. Graphite, beeswax, and collage on paper, 30 3/4 x 20 3/4" (76.8 x 52.7 cm). Private collection

COVER: *Aphrodite (Negril) with Green*. 1991–94. Ink and gouache on paper, 40 1/4 x 26" (103.5 x 66 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago. Restricted gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Manilow in memory of B.C. Holland; Adelaide C. Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Philip B. Heller, and William H. Tuthill funds; Margaret Fisher Endowment