

Kayne Griffin Corcoran

AnOther

The Californian Artist Posing Questions of Light and Space

The subject of an upcoming show, Mary Corse's work – spanning the 1960s to present – is an exploration of whether objectivity can exist in art



Mary Corse (b. 1945), *Untitled (White Multiple Inner Band)*, 2003. Glass microspheres and acrylic on canvas, 96 × 240 in. (243.8 × 609.6 cm). *Courtesy Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, Lehmann Maupin, New York; and Lisson Gallery, London. Photograph © Mary Corse*

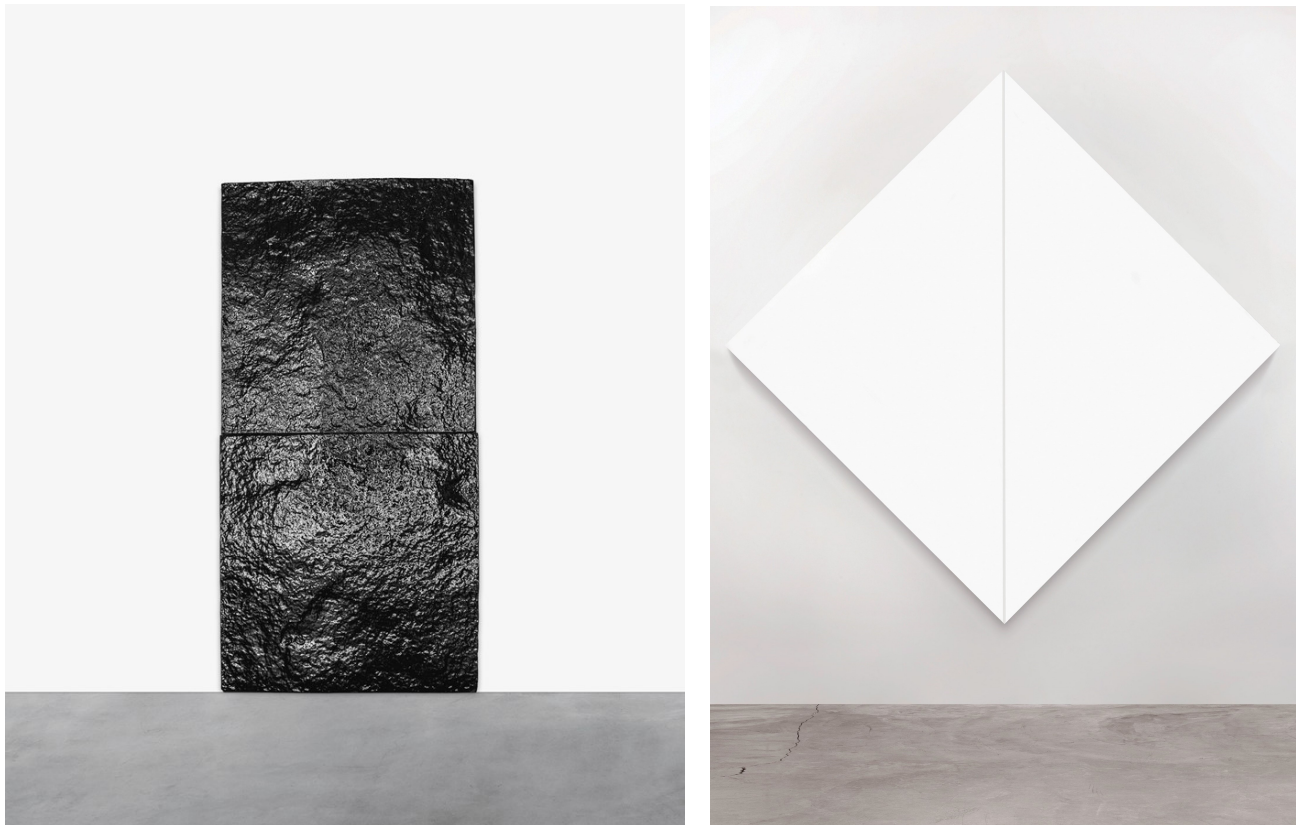
With a recent gallery installation at Dia:Beacon and an upcoming solo show at the Whitney in New York, Mary Corse is having a significant, well-earned moment of recognition. Working as a dedicated artist since the 1960s, she is one of few women connected to California's west coast Light and Space movement. Directionally, though, her artistic focus contrasted with her Light and Space peers. "I'm not a landscape artist, the literal aspects of the environment don't influence me," says Corse. "I'm not influenced by the outside world at all, really. I would paint the same in New York as California. It's an internal impulse to paint the way that I do." Corse's art explores the question of perception through painting – specifically, finding light within painting. In her visionary work, light is both subject and medium, where seeing is a wholly subjective experience.



Mary Corse (b. 1945), *Octagonal Blue*, 1964. Metal flakes in acrylic on canvas, 93 × 67 1/2 in. (236.2 × 171.5 cm).
Courtesy Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, Lehmann Maupin, New York; and Lisson Gallery, London. Photograph © Mary Corse

After receiving an MFA from Chouinard Art Institute, presently CalArts, Corse began her lifelong calling as an artist, first in downtown Los Angeles and then in nearby bohemian Topanga Canyon, where she has worked since. "I never had much of an interest in painting realism and was committed to abstraction by the time I started art school," she says. "I consider my painting to be a conversation with an abstract entity; I pose questions and get answers through my process." Throughout her career, Corse's art has centered around working with light, principally white and black monochromes. Her best-known works are white, glittering paintings made with glass microspheres, the material used to illuminate road work and traffic signs at night. In the late 1960s, Corse was experimenting with ways to bring light into her paintings when she had a moment of insight while driving. Seeing the sun cast onto the road work microspheres, Corse noted how the beads could prism light. She found that she could realise similar effects by combining paint with the miniature glass spheres, affecting a triangle of perspective unique to the light, surface and audience. "More than time, it's space, in my work, that impacts perception," says Corse. "You move around the painting, and it moves with you, it changes. It's never the same in one room to the next, one viewer to the next."

Colour first found its way into Corse's artwork during the 1970s. She incorporated light-reflecting, micro acrylic squares into an all-black aesthetic to achieve the impression of deep, limitless space. She also discovered that alternating black and white bands and grids produced further optical illusion, where the borders between colours appear to float aglow. Corse then went on to integrate primary colours into her art for a period. She further experimented with removing the artist's hand and gesture, such as in her light box series. During this era, the artist sought total objectivity. Ultimately though, her work returned to its roots in painting. "Subjectivity and perception are part of reality, and it's impossible to experience reality outside of these," says Corse. "This is what led me to incorporate the brush strokes back into my work as an acceptance of subjectivity."



Left: Mary Corse (b. 1945), *Untitled (Black Earth Series)*, 1978. Ceramic, two tiles, 96 × 48 in. (243.8 × 121.9 cm). *Courtesy Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, Lehmann Maupin, New York; and Lisson Gallery, London. Photograph © Mary Corse.* Right: Mary Corse (b. 1945), *Untitled (White Diamond, Negative Stripe)*, 1965. Acrylic on canvas, 84 × 84 in. (213.36 × 213.36 cm). *Collection of Michael Straus. Photograph © Mary Corse*

Corse's upcoming exhibition at the Whitney, her first museum retrospective, charts all phases of her artistic career. Despite long-standing immersion in her craft, Corse has received notably less visibility and acclaim than many of her contemporaries. As is true for many women artists of her generation, there was a lack of institutional support, particularly for artwork that did not conceptually dovetail with an artistic or political movement. Corse's response has persisted: a steadfast resolve to develop her art, placing secondary emphasis on its promotion or commerce. In a quest to understand human collective experience, she has looked to her work as a vehicle to realise philosophical and metaphysical ideas. "Prior to studying quantum physics, I had an idea of an objective truth, which that completely obliterated," she says. "I realised that there is no such thing." Even in the wake of her recent artistic veneration, Corse's personal truth is an unwavering focus on the art itself, and its plural, distinctive meanings.

—Jennifer Sauer