

Pasadena Museum of California Art Presents Claire Falkenstein: Beyond Sculpture

First retrospective of Claire Falkenstein, prolific, international female artist working in variety of media, opening at Pasadena Museum of California Art in April

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Corona (Fusion), 1971. Brazed copper and fused glass, 8 1/4 x 12 1/4 x 7 1/2 inches. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., Gift of Mr. and Mrs. David K. Anderson, Martha Jackson Memorial Collection, 1981.109.8

The Pasadena Museum of California Art (PMCA) is proud to present Claire Falkenstein: Beyond Sculpture, the first comprehensive museum exhibition of international artist Claire Falkenstein (1908–1997). Though her enduring reputation rests on her sculpture, this prolific female artist began and ended her career as an inventive painter, and her body of work also includes printmaking, jewelry, glass, films, stage sets for dance, public murals, fountains, and monumental architectural commissions. The retrospective assembles preeminent examples from each media, presenting the full range of one of America's most experimental, productive, and peripatetic twentieth-century artists.

Although Falkenstein was respected among the burgeoning post-World-War-II art scene in the United States and Europe, her disregard for the commodification of art coupled with her movement from one international art metropolis to another made her an elusive figure. She spent her early years in San Francisco teaching at Mills College and California School of Fine Arts, where she gained entrée into the prominent artistic circle of Alexander Archipenko, who introduced her to key principles in abstract sculpture. Falkenstein was intellectually rigorous and relentless in her exploration of media, techniques, and processes, and her art was often ahead of her time. Her three-dimensional work broke from traditional boundaries as early as the late-1930s. In addition, some of her early paintings took the form of three-dimensional shapes years before these were common; her early-World-War-II murals were exceptionally modern for the time; and her jewelry, in its form and materials, was extremely venturesome.

In 1950, Falkenstein moved to Paris. There, French curator and critic Michel Tapié championed her exploration of theoretical concepts and associated her work with the radically experimental art *autre* group. In Paris, Falkenstein began to create based on the repetition of forms but without strict symmetry, an idea she outlined in *Structures Drawing*. Her most celebrated sculptures, including the gates to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, combine brilliantly-colored Venetian glass fused with numerous elements of welded metal joined into unified, repeating forms. Many Falkenstein paintings and drawings from the 1950s on—such as her *Moving Points* works—were also based on repetition, with profuse, small marks of the brush.

By 1963, offers of commissions and promised exhibitions drew Falkenstein to Los Angeles where she created a series of public works, including the celebrated stained glass window “sculptures” for St. Basil Church in Los Angeles and a fountain at the Long Beach Museum of Art in Long Beach, California. Falkenstein continued creating and exploring materials until her death in 1997. Throughout her career, Falkenstein’s abiding interest lay beyond the physical form; she was most interested in the transmutation of concepts, ideas, and theories, which were worked through both her materials and methodologies.

Beyond Sculpture is the artist’s first retrospective, and it, along with the accompanying catalogue, firmly contextualizes the varied oeuvre of this significant California and international vanguard within the art historical canon. The exhibition will include approximately 65 works by Falkenstein from the mid-1930s through the early 1990s, comprising sculptures, paintings, drawings, etchings, lithographs, jewelry, and watercolors, as well as large-scale photographs of her major public commissions. A video about her work by artist and filmmaker Jae Carmichael also will be included.

Curated by Jay Belloli, the exhibition is organized by the Pasadena Museum of California Art. Following its debut at the PMCA, the exhibition will travel to the Crocker Art Museum in Sacramento.

Pasadena Museum of California Art, 490 E. Union St, Pasadena, (626) 568-3665 or visit pmcaonline.org.