Julie Mehretu: Black City

Julie Mehretu: Black City is the catalog that accompanied a recent exhibition at the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Castilla y Leon in Spain. Though Mehretu had a major solo show, Julie Mehretu: Drawing into Painting, at the Walker Art Center in 2003, and has participated in many group shows, most recently Comic Abstraction: Image Breaking, Image Making (MoMA, 2007) and Artists Map Downtown New York (New Museum of Contemporary Art), Black City, was her first solo exhibition at a European museum. The show was, ostensibly, an overview of Mehretu’s work from 2003 to 2006, but it included the majority of works Mehretu created since she received her MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1997.

Mehretu, an Ethiopian-born artist living in Manhattan, creates dazzling and complex works of art that are influenced by both precise architectural drawings and modernist abstraction. She describes her work as having “multifaceted layers of place, space, and time that impact the formation of personal and communal identity.” Her works often combine layers of drawing and painting, which reflect her life and memories and the tensions and chaos of politics. Her art incorporates elements of maps, architectural drawings and plans, graffiti, comic books, expressionist painting, landscape painting, and graphic design. The catalog features some 200 lush, full-color, full-page reproductions of many of the artist’s paintings and drawings.

The catalog’s scholarly essays are written by curators and art historians including Lawrence Chua, Cay Sophie Rabinowitz, Agustín Pérez Rubio, and Marcus Steinweg. Written in both English and Spanish, they are complemented with small color images of places and things, such as photographs of architecture, cities, and art by other artists, that may have influenced Mehretu’s work.

With a selected bibliography, biography, and exhibition history, this publication is an essential source of information on the artist and highly recommended for all libraries with collections in contemporary art.

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