



PRESS RELEASE

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BAMPFA Mounts Major Survey of Paintings by Noted Surrealist Artist Sylvia Fein

On View November 13, 2019–March 1, 2020

Exhibition Encompasses Seventy Years of Work by Martinez-Based Artist, Who Turns 100 in 2019



(Berkeley, CA) *October 23, 2019*—Sylvia Fein, one of the most prominent artists of the Midwest Surrealist movement, is the subject of a major new exhibition at the UC Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive ([BAMPFA](#)) this fall. [Sylvia Fein / MATRIX 275](#) features nearly three dozen paintings made over a seventy-year period by the Martinez-based artist, who will observe her 100th birthday shortly after the exhibition opens. The first solo museum exhibition Fein has received in more than a decade, **Sylvia Fein / MATRIX 275** marks the latest installment BAMPFA's [MATRIX Program](#), an exhibition series that highlights distinctive and important voices in contemporary art.

Born in Milwaukee, Fein studied painting at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and became closely associated with the community of Midwest Surrealists that emerged in the mid-twentieth century as an American response to the European Surrealist movement. Fein's paintings are noted for her use of egg tempera, a centuries-old practice that endows her imagery with a distinctively luminous quality. Like other Surrealists, Fein often employs strange or dreamlike imagery in her work, frequently repeating certain motifs, such as disembodied eyes or catlike visages emerging from colorful abstract

backgrounds. Many of her works, however, are more representational in character, such as a series of Northern California landscape paintings made after she settled with her husband in the East Bay during the postwar era.

Fein first rose to national prominence in the late 1940s, when she exhibited in the Whitney Annual along Jackson Pollock, Roberto Matta, and others. Over the course of a long and celebrated career, her work has been exhibited alongside that of other notable Surrealists, including Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington, Dorothea Tanning, and Remedios Varo. Today, Fein continues to paint frequently, and she cultivates an extensive orchard of olive trees outside Martinez.



The thirty-five paintings chosen for Fein's MATRIX exhibition represent the full spectrum of the artist's varied creative output, from figurative landscape paintings to surreal images of eyes, trees, and the cosmos. The exhibition includes works as early as a fantastical 1946 landscape made in Mexico, and a painting from 2012 that depicts four towering infernos against a vivid green-and-black background. Fein is expected to attend the exhibition opening and deliver an artist's talk on [Wednesday, November 13, at noon](#); the artist's talk is free with museum admission.

"We're delighted to celebrate Sylvia's remarkable body of work—and her 100th birthday—with an exhibition that will reacquaint Bay Area audiences with her unique contributions to the American Surrealist canon," said BAMPFA Director and Chief Curator Lawrence Rinder, who curated the exhibition. "Together with BAMPFA's other surreal exhibition this season, *Strange*—which prominently features one of Sylvia's fascinating eye paintings—Sylvia's MATRIX presentation reminds us of Surrealism's power to suggest new and evocative ways of seeing the world around us."

Thanks

Sylvia Fein / MATRIX 275 is organized by Director and Chief Curator Lawrence Rinder with Curatorial Assistant Lucia Momoh. The MATRIX Program is made possible by a generous endowment gift from Phyllis C. Wattis and the continued support of the BAMPFA Trustees.

Above

- 1) Sylvia Fein: *The Painting Told Me What to Do*, 2012; egg tempera on gesso board; 24 x 24 in.; collection of the artist; © 2019 Sylvia Fein.
- 2) Sylvia Fein. Photo: Stephanie Smith.

Visitor Information

Address

2155 Center Street, Berkeley, CA 94720

Hours

Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

\$13 general admission

\$11 non-UC Berkeley students, disabled, 65+

FREE BAMPFA members; UC Berkeley students, faculty, staff; 18 and under; one adult per child 13 and under

Information
bampfa.org
(510) 642-0808

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About BAMPFA

An internationally recognized arts institution with deep roots in the Bay Area, the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) is a forum for cultural experiences that transform individuals and advance the local, national, and global discourse on art and film. BAMPFA is UC Berkeley's premier visual arts venue, presenting more than 450 film screenings, scores of public programs, and more than twenty exhibitions annually. With its vibrant and eclectic programming, BAMPFA inspires the imagination and ignites critical dialogue through art, film, and other forms of creative expression.

The institution's collection of more than 28,000 works of art dates from 3000 BCE to the present day and includes important holdings of Neolithic Chinese ceramics, Ming and Qing Dynasty Chinese painting, Old Master works on paper, Italian Baroque painting, early American painting, Abstract Expressionist painting, contemporary photography, and Conceptual art. BAMPFA's collection also includes more than 17,500 films and videos, including the largest collection of Japanese cinema outside of Japan, impressive holdings of Soviet cinema, West Coast avant-garde film, and seminal video art, as well as hundreds of thousands of articles, reviews, posters, and other ephemera related to the history of film.