

# Martha Keller 1993 Paintings

© Stephen Rosenberg  
Gallery and Martha Keller  
1993

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Martha Keller's painting  
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**ON THE COVER**

*Fautrice del Tempo*,  
India ink on wall,  
55 Ferris Street,  
installation detail, 1993.

Essay By Stephen Westfall

# Martha Keller 1993 Paintings

Stephen Rosenberg Gallery  
115 Wooster Street  
New York, NY 10012

## **BOTH THERE AND HERE**

*By Stephen Westfall*

Martha Keller has a studio in a warehouse section of Brooklyn that looks out across the fenced lots and loading yards to the mouth of the East River where it joins the Hudson in a wide glide into the Atlantic. It's one of the most horizontal places in New York City, with flat yards, low buildings, long trucks, and out on the river, longer boats moving so massively that they actually seem to rest while the Island of Manhattan slides by. Keller's paintings are abstract but they seem to embody some of the character of the place where they were made by invoking horizontality, industrial materials, and on a more intimate scale, the concrete theatre of their own objecthood. This is not to argue that her paintings are primarily concerned with place as a recollection at all, they are emphatically not. But it is my observation that they are nevertheless inhabited by place even as their own acutely articulated abstractness (which embraces and reinforces the shape of their physical perimeters) in turn induces at least a transitory sense of place in the neutral space prepared to receive them.

Most of Keller's recent paintings are squares or vertical rectangles that are divided horizontally into four bands of equal width. She mixes many of her own colors into an oil binder. Her smoky blacks and greys come from powdered graphite and zinc, and her rust red is really earth taken from Siena. The surface of each band is worked by brush or palette knife, often both together. Each band has its particular density, transparency or opacity, and force of gesture. Stacked on top of each other they resemble film strips, horizontal frames depicting blurred motion in different levels and chroma of light. This group of works makes one aware of the dualistic quality of a painting's presence, its simultaneous enactment of evoked space and concrete materiality; how even its depicted light or the light of a local color is always both *there* and *here*, in this room where we are now standing before it.



### **UNTITLED**

Oil, wax and graphite,  
on linen, 20" x 10",  
1993



**PERPETRATOR I**

Oil and alkyd on canvas,  
16" x 16", 1993



**FAUTRICE DEL TEMPO**

India ink on wall, 55 Ferris Street, 13' x 35', 1993

**"IS SOUL THE WORD?"**

India ink on paper,  
29.5" x 30", 1993



Keller has been developing another body of work that is tangential, one might even say perpendicular to her horizontally banded paintings. In these concurrent paintings she builds up transparent washes of thin vertical strokes. Some of the canvases subdivide into broader vertical sections of muted primary colors while others are an overall grisaille of varying densities. She has also lightened her grisaille stroke considerably in transferring India ink wash directly to the wall. If the paintings condense the veiled illusionistic space created by the overlaid strokes into an image/object, the wall painting tends to dematerialize the architectural site into shimmering rules of light.

In bringing these distinct bodies of work together Keller is proposing an ongoing dialectic within her own artistic practice. Each format brings an intensity of address to phenomenal territory ceded by the other—horizontal to vertical, plane to line, tonal color to primaries, color to grisaille, image/object to architectural site, and the place of memory to literal conditions of materiality.

Observed together, the divergent iconography and formats of Keller's art cohere in sensibility. Every one of her paintings exhibits the same high degree of focus and concentration. Even those with the same color schemes, such as *Estate Senese I* and *Summer Dispersion #64*, are discrete works in scale, shape, gesture and material density. A spirit of genial urbanity presides over her entire enterprise. Culture is invoked as an intervening agent for a harmonious ordering of matter and perception by her use of geometry, mediated color, and labor intensive surfaces. In all her work the painting process is simultaneously meticulous and luxuriant, an ardent collaboration between hand and matter. The burnished, meditative beauty of her art reflects a contemplative devotion to process coupled with a deep sense of the structure of painting's presence.



**NATIVE DECLENSION**

Oil and pigment on  
canvas, 39.5" x 37.5",  
1993



**UNTITLED (Study)**

Oil on paper, 6" x 5",  
1992

**SUMMER DISPERSION #64**

Oil and pigment on  
canvas, 39.5" x 37.5",  
1992





**FROM PRELUDE**

**TO TAILPIECE**

Oil, graphite and zinc  
on canvas, 84" x 42",  
1993



**ESTATE SENESE I**

Oil and pigment on  
canvas, diptych  
32" x 16", 1992





**TAO, WOW**

Pigment and oil on  
canvas, 42" x 24", 1992

**"IS LOVE THE WORD?"**

Oil and graphite on  
canvas, 24" x 12", 1992



**EMBRACE**

Oil and pigment on  
paper, 32" x 16", 1992



**MARTHA KELLER**

Born in New York City  
in 1948

**SELECTED SOLO  
EXHIBITIONS****1994**

Galleria Turchetto,  
Milan, Italy.

**1993**

Stephen Rosenberg  
Gallery, NY.

**1992**

Stephen Rosenberg  
Gallery (two-person).

**1991**

Galleria Plurima,  
Udine, Italy.

**1990**

Conlon Gallery,  
Santa Fe, NM.

**1989**

Stephen Rosenberg  
Gallery, NY.

**1987**

Stephen Rosenberg  
Gallery, NY.

**1986**

Stephen Rosenberg  
Gallery, NY.

**1982**

Whitaker Foundation  
Museum, Palermo, Italy.

**SELECTED GROUP  
EXHIBITIONS****1993**

*Drawings from 55 Ferris  
Street*, Wynn Kramarsky,  
NY and Jessica Berwind  
Gallery, Philadelphia, PA.

*Structure*, Lillian  
Heidenberg Gallery, NY  
Hugh Keenan, curator.

*55 Ferris Street*  
Frederieke S. Taylor and  
Joseph Zito, curators,  
(catalogue).

*Family Ties*, Krasdale  
Foods Gallery and  
Lehman College, NY.

*The Tenth Summer*  
Stephen Rosenberg  
Gallery, NY.

**1992**

*Vertical Slice*, Cummings  
Art Center, Connecticut  
College.

*The Persistence of  
Abstraction*, Edwin A.  
Ulrich Museum of Art,  
Wichita, KS, (catalogue).

Galleria Plurima,  
Udine Italy

Galleria Turchetto,  
Milan, Italy.

**1991**

*Paper Trail*, Stephen  
Rosenberg Gallery.

**1990**

*Surface and Light*,  
Stephen Rosenberg  
Gallery, Fran Kaufman,  
curator.

**1989**

*Abstract Painting*,  
Illinois Center Gallery,  
Chicago, IL,  
Dennis Adrian, curator.

*Contemporary Abstract  
Drawing*, Stephen  
Rosenberg Gallery, NY.

**1988**

*Formal*, Dart Gallery,  
Chicago, IL, Lance Kinz,  
curator, (catalogue).

*The Gold Show*  
Genovese Gallery,  
Boston, MA.

*Altar/Alter*, Carlo  
Lamagna Gallery, NY,  
Ken Tisa, curator.

**1986**

*One and One*, Stephen  
Rosenberg Gallery, NY.  
Collectors Gallery XX,  
McNay Art Museum,  
San Antonio, TX.

*Line Drives*, Gallery 53,  
Cooperstown, NY.  
William Zimmer, curator.

*Black, White & Grey*,  
Stephen Rosenberg  
Gallery, NY.

**1984**

*Small Works, New  
Abstract Painting*,  
Williams Center  
for the Arts, Easton, PA  
and Muhlenberg College,  
Allentown, PA. Hudspeth  
and Janowich, curators.

*Fourth Annual*, John Davis  
Gallery, Akron, OH.

**AWARDS****1990**

The Mac Dowell Colony,  
fellowship.

**1989**

National Endowment  
For the Arts, grant.

New York Foundation For  
the Arts, grant.

The Mac Dowell Colony,  
fellowship.

**1988**

*Commission*,  
Progressive Companies,  
Mayfield Heights, OH.

**1987**

Ludwig Vogelstein  
Foundation, grant.

**1978**

CETA grant.

**SELECTED  
BIBLIOGRAPHY****1993**

*55 Ferris Street*,  
Frederieke S. Taylor,  
catalogue.

**1992**

*Tema Celeste*, Diego  
Collovini, Italian Edition,  
Spring.

**1991**

*Messaggero Veneto*,  
Luciano Perissinotto,  
"Variazioni cromatiche  
nell'arte della Keller",  
June 17.

*Flash Art*, Italian Edition,  
Paolo Centioni, "Martha  
Keller, Plurima, Udine",  
Summer.

**1988**

*Formal*, Joseph Masheck,  
catalogue, Dart Gallery,  
Chicago, IL.

*Art in America*,  
Stephen Westfall,  
"Martha Keller", March.

*ARTnews*, Eleanor  
Heartney, "Martha  
Keller", February

**1987**

*Arts Magazine*, Vered  
Lieb, "One and One:  
A Study of Scale", Feb.

**1986**

*Arts Magazine*, Stephen  
Westfall, "Martha Keller",  
May.

*Attenzione*, "Views &  
Reviews", Sept./Oct.

**1984**

"Can Small Works Carry  
It Off", William Zimmer,  
catalogue, Williams  
Center For The Arts,  
Easton, PA., and  
Muhlenberg College,  
Allentown, PA.

**1982**

"Martha Keller, Systems  
For Visions," Charles F.  
Stuckey, catalogue,  
Fondazione Whitaker,  
Palermo, Italy.

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