

Press Release

Pat Steir. Painted Rain

28 February – 4 May 2024
Hauser & Wirth West Hollywood



'The first time I went to LA to teach at CalArts in the 1970s, I remember thinking that the city had endless roads, many, many cars, no place to walk, and shockingly bright sunlight. I saw blue skies and ocean.

I was used to New York light, to seeing all colors muted by a gray screen. CalArts gave me a wonderful studio to use. It had a large window the size of a wall. The light was so bright and saturated I couldn't see the paint colors I mixed. To counteract this light, I made black paintings with rainbows and color scales outside the picture field.

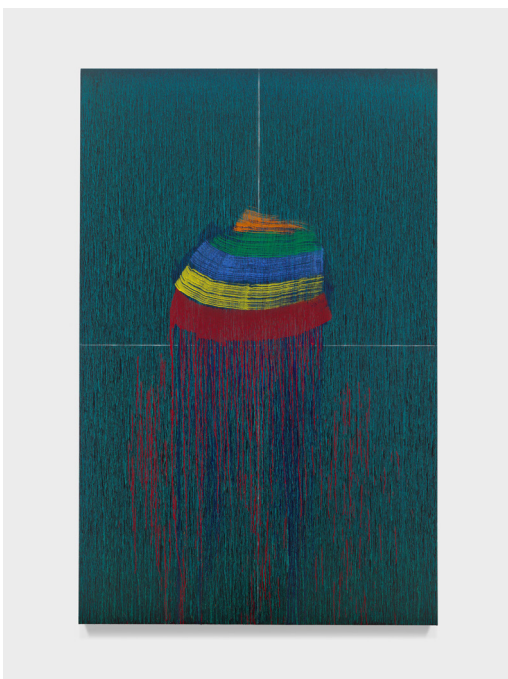
That was 50 years ago. When I think of LA now, I think of the sky and the ocean even more than the light, and that's the origin of my latest work.'

—Pat Steir

Los Angeles...Renowned for a pioneering approach to painting that synthesizes conceptual art, figuration and abstraction, celebrated American artist Pat Steir will unveil a brand new body of work in her first Los Angeles solo exhibition in over 30 years. Opening 28 February, 'Painted Rain' will fill Hauser & Wirth's West Hollywood space with canvases that take as their origin point Steir's recollections of her time in Los Angeles, in particular, the ocean and sky she experienced while teaching at California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in the 1970s.

With their reverberating tones, the new works on view are united by Steir's exploration of the color blue, here punctuated by other vivid hues, achieving and obtaining mesmerizing optical effects via the artist's signature streaming, pouring and layering technique. The luminous results extend and expand Steir's ongoing Waterfall series wherein she intentionally cedes control and allows the paint to create its own image. The expressive power

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of the canvases in 'Painted Rain' affirms Steir's position as one of the most enduringly original contemporary painters whose conceptual practice challenges and transcends the divide between figuration and abstraction.

The paintings that will line the walls of West Hollywood's skylit space together form an undulating current, a river of color and energy that accrues from the rivulets of aqueous pigment cascading in each canvas. Against the delicate and complex verticality of their grounds, thick bands of horizontal paint attach the viewer's focus to the specific lines and curves—the central points of action in the different paintings.

Steir begins each of her monumental works by employing a Verdaccio underpainting technique first popularized during the Italian Renaissance: she primes her canvases in green, endowing their backgrounds with a distinct glow that radiates into and through the work. On top of this ground, she overlays a grid of chalk lines, forming a faint scaffolding on which she plans her composition. Carefully calibrating the opacity and viscosity of each pigment, Steir then begins her process of pouring, allowing the twinning of gravity and chance to chart out the path of each stream. The results—breathtaking rivers and showers of color—materialize her relentless inquiry of the circular relationship between abstraction and representation.

In 'Painted Rain #2' (2022 – 23), lines of purple, orange and green are suspended in a single column that morphs into a torrent of red and white paint, shimmering amid electric streams of a sea-like plane. In 'Friday Circus' (2022 – 23) the wavelike hairs of Steir's brush form slightly rounded and upturned strokes that rest in perfect tension with the spilling red lines below.

Perhaps most evocative of the sky among the works on view is 'Blue' (2022 – 23). Pale azure variations are finely stacked in the middle of a 9 by 8-foot expanse where a stunning swath of white pours out into a blue mist. Oscillating, yet held together by both gravity and Steir's soft but determined gridlines, the canvas achieves an astonishing alchemy of control and chaos, of the familiar and the infinite. 'Blue' is an enveloping homage to the color from which it takes its title.

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Programming

A passionate enthusiast of music, on the occasion of the exhibition Steir collaborated with Trina Basu, a New York-based violinist, improviser, composer and teacher to create a durational soundscape that will engage the works on view, activating the viewer's experience of the paintings. For more information on Basu, please visit <https://www.trinabasu.com/about>

Editions

Complementing her paintings on view in West Hollywood, Hauser & Wirth's Downtown Los Angeles art center will feature a special presentation of Steir's limited-edition etchings and aquatints from the 1990s and early 2000s, produced in collaboration with San Francisco's Crown Point Press, highlighting the artist's longstanding explorations with printmaking and its importance within her practice. A fine art print shop founded by master printmaker Kathan Brown and specializing in etching, Crown Point Press began publishing Steir's editions in 1977, a collaboration that would last 35 years and produce more than 100 prints. In further recognition of her achievements, Steir will be honored by the Print Center New York at their Spring Benefit on 13 May 2024 for her daring work in printmaking over the last five decades.

About the artist

Born in Newark, New Jersey in 1938, Pat Steir is among the great innovators of contemporary painting. She first came to prominence in the late 1970s and early 1980s for her iconographic canvases and immersive wall drawings. By the late 1980s, her inventive approach to painting—the rigorous pouring technique seen in her Waterfall series, in which she harnessed the forces of gravity and gesture to achieve works of astonishing lyricism—attracted substantial critical acclaim. Informed by a deep engagement with art history and Eastern philosophy, and a passion for artistic advocacy in both the visual and literary realms, Steir's storied five-decade career continues to reach new heights through an intrepid commitment to material exploration and experimentation.

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Gallery hours:

Tuesday – Saturday, 11 am – 6 pm

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Caption and courtesy information:

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Painted Rain #2
2022 – 23
Oil on canvas
274.3 x 213.4 cm / 108 x 84 in

Friday Circus
2022 – 23
Oil on canvas
213.4 x 137.2 cm / 84 x 54 in

Blue
2022 – 23
Oil on canvas
243.8 x 213.4 cm / 96 x 84 in