

First Major Survey of Artwork by Chryssa in North America Since 1982

Chryssa & New York

On View at Wrightwood 659 in Chicago, May 3-July 27, 2024



Greek-born artist Chryssa (1933–2013), a pivotal figure of the 20th century who influenced her better-known contemporaries—Agnes Martin, Ellsworth Kelly, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Dan Flavin—was underrecognized for decades

Critically Acclaimed Exhibition Makes its Final Stop on National Tour

(CHICAGO, IL, February 21, 2024) —This spring, Wrightwood 659 hosts *Chryssa & New York*, the first museum exhibition in North America in more than four decades to focus on the Greek-born artist Chryssa (1933–2013). Co-organized by Dia Art Foundation and the Menil Collection, Houston, in collaboration with Alphawood Foundation at Wrightwood 659, Chicago, the critically acclaimed exhibition makes its final stop on its national tour at Wrightwood 659 from May 3 through July 27, 2024.

As an immigrant, a woman, and a queer artist, Chryssa—who used only her first name professionally—became a leading figure of the New York art world in the 1950s and '60s within avant-garde circles. She developed an innovative approach to activating sculptural surfaces through subtle manipulations of light and shadow.

Pathbreaking in its use of signage, text, and neon, her vastly underrecognized body of work bridges Pop, Conceptual, and Minimalist ideas of art making. Focusing on Chryssa's output while she was based in New York from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, the exhibition includes more than 80 works, as well as archival documents and highlights the artist's critical interest in exploring the United States following World War II. In addition to major loans from American and European museums and private collections, the presentation at Wrightwood 659 includes a new section on the artist's relationship to Chicago, featuring works and archival materials from: the Art Institute of Chicago; the Smart Museum of Art; and DePaul Art Museum.



The exhibition is presented by Alphawood Exhibitions at Wrightwood 659.

Chryssa & New York presents the full breadth of the artist's dynamic oeuvre and spans three floors at Wrightwood 659. At the centerpiece of the exhibition—installed on the first floor—is the large-scale work *The Gates to Times Square* (1964–66) (see above), considered Chryssa's magnum opus. Restored for this exhibition in partnership with the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, which owns the work, this towering interplay of neon, plexiglass, and metal pays homage to the signage and dazzling lights of New York's most famous intersection.

Other key early works include the enigmatic *Cycladic Books* (1954–57), a series of plaster and clay reliefs highlighting her early interest in the interplay of light and shadow, installed on the fourth floor. This series nods



to both commercial culture and ancient Mediterranean art. Additional works in plaster and metal from her *Projection* series also deftly capture the phenomenon of shifting natural light, solving what she considered to be one of the greatest problems with sculpture: "How to be static, yet have motion," according to Menil Senior Curator Michelle White. Experimenting with different formal approaches, Chryssa explored typography from a variety of angles and made work using newspaper printing plates, discarded signs, and metal fragments she found in her frequent visits to Times Square.

Chryssa & New York assembles major works from nearly a dozen museums within the United States which collected her work in depth throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s. Her fascination with the sparkling and text-filled urban space of Times Square led to work not only addressing but also radically deploying the phenomena of this commercial environment. It therefore constitutes some of the earliest art critically incorporating these then-new material forms of communication.

CHRYSSA & CHICAGO

Wrightwood 659's presentation of the exhibition includes four additional works from the Art Institute of Chicago, Smart Museum of Art, and DePaul Art Museum. Three of these works are from Chryssa's body of Newspaper works, produced by discarded linotype plates from mainstream newspapers. With this method, she mechanized the imprint of ordinary life onto canvas, from classified ads to stock market listings, obscuring legibility to question the authority of language and mass communication years before Warhol and the prominence of American Pop art. In addition to work from Chicago collections, we will also include archival materials expanding on Chryssa's relationship to the city, noting her 70ft tall commission for Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) in 1981 and a proposal for a new monumental sculpture called *The Chicago Gates* at the Art Institute of Chicago.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Athens, Chryssa studied art in Paris and briefly at the California School of Fine Art, San Francisco, before settling in New York City in the late 1950s. In 1961, Chryssa's first exhibition at the Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, was followed by a solo exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. At the time, she was considered a leading artist of her generation and her early work with neon technology remains at the forefront of light art. Chryssa's work has been exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Buffalo AKG Art Museum; and the Tate Modern, London, among other institutions.

ORGANIZATION

Chryssa & New York is co-organized by Dia Art Foundation and the Menil Collection, Houston, where it was presented in 2023. The exhibition is co-curated by Megan Holly Witko, External Curator, Dia Art Foundation, and Michelle White, Senior Curator, the Menil Collection, Houston, and exhibited in collaboration with Alphawood Foundation at Wrightwood 659, Chicago.

PUBLICATION

The exhibition is accompanied by the first major publication about Chryssa in more than thirty years. Published by Dia Art Foundation and The Menil Collection, the volume is edited by Sophia Larigakis and co-curators Megan Holly Witko and Michelle White. In addition to Holly Witko and White, contributors include Joy Bloser, Assistant Objects Conservator, the Menil Collection; writer Lisa Cohen; Matt Dilling, Creative Director and Partner, Lite Brite Neon; Jonathan D. Katz, Associate Professor, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; artist Tiona Nekkia McClodden; independent scholar Kalliopi Minioudaki; and Tina Rivers Ryan, Assistant Curator, Buffalo AKG Art Museum.

ABOUT WRIGHTWOOD 659

Founded in 2018, Wrightwood 659 is a private, non-collecting institution. Located at 659 W. Wrightwood Avenue, in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood, it was envisioned as a new kind of arts space devoted to presenting exhibitions on architecture and socially engaged art, including issues facing the LGBTQ+ community, and Asian art and architecture. Wrightwood 659 was designed by Pritzker Prize winner Tadao Ando, who transformed a 1920s building with his signature concrete forms and poetic treatment of natural light. Acclaimed

as one of Chicago's "hidden treasures," Wrightwood 659 offers visitors a chance to engage with the pressing issues of our time in an intimate and beautiful space. For additional information, please visit wrightwood659.org.

ABOUT ALPHAWOOD EXHIBITIONS

Alphawood Exhibitions is an affiliate of Alphawood Foundation, a Chicago-based, grant-making private foundation working for an equitable, just, and humane society.

ABOUT DIA ART FOUNDATION

Taking its name from the Greek word meaning "through," Dia was established in 1974 with the mission to serve as a conduit for artists to realize ambitious new projects, unmediated by overt interpretation and uncurbed by the limitations of more traditional museums and galleries. Dia's programming fosters contemplative and sustained consideration of a single artist's body of work and its collection is distinguished by the deep and longstanding relationships the nonprofit has cultivated with artists whose work came to prominence particularly in the 1960s and '70s. diaart.org

ABOUT THE MENIL COLLECTION

Philanthropists and art patrons John and Dominique de Menil established the Menil Foundation in 1954 to cultivate greater public understanding and appreciation of art, architecture, culture, religion, and philosophy. In 1987, the Menil Collection's main museum building opened to the public. Today, the Menil Collection consists of a group of five art buildings and green spaces located within a residential neighborhood in central Houston. The Menil remains committed to its founders' belief that art is essential to human experience and fosters direct personal encounters with works of art. The museum welcomes all visitors free of charge to its buildings and surrounding green spaces. menil.org

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Images:

Chryssa, *The Gates to Times Square*, 1964-66. © Estate of Chryssa, National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens. Image courtesy of Buffalo AKG Art Museum. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York.

Chryssa, *Americanoom*, 1963. Aluminum, welded steel, stainless steel, and neon, 90 × 108 in. (228.6 × 274.3 cm). Collection of the Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami (Coral Gables, FL). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Aron B. Katz, 82.0226. © The Estate of Chryssa, National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens. Photo: Oriol Tarridas © Lowe Art Museum.

Chryssa, *Newspaper Sculpture (One Page of Classified Ads)*, 1963. Chryssa estate © National Museum of Contemporary Art Athens (EMST)