

FORTNIGHT INSTITUTE

ONLY Small Paintings

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60 East 4th st. NYC

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Legendary NYC gallerist Betty Parsons' 1975 exhibition ONLY Large Paintings inspired ONLY Small Paintings at Fortnight Institute.

Parsons' eponymous gallery was open from 1946-1981. An artist and collector herself, she was an early advocate of the Abstract Expressionists, including Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Ad Reinhardt, long before they achieved notoriety. At a time when few women were being exhibited, she showed Agnes Martin, Anne Ryan, Hedda Sterne, and Sonja Sekula, among others. Parsons was fearless and uninterested in trends. "I give them walls. They do the rest," she famously said of her artists. An innovator in gallery design, Parsons rejected the common style of simulated domestic interiors, choosing instead white walls, plain floors and bright lights.

She exhibited work by artists who were totally unknown and this she said "stimulated a great deal of hostility because they were so unusual." When Parsons made a sculpture, she always thought about the back of the work first. She was drawn to the unknown, "that thing you don't see but it's there."

Over four decades later, Fortnight Institute pays homage to Parsons' legacy through an inverted re-interpretation of her concept: exhibiting a group of only small paintings. The diverse group of painters assembled in this exhibition references Parsons' affinity for the unusual and defiance for painting trends. The exhibition explores the contemporary currency of intimacy through scale with its potential for the political. Courting the modest and compact is a practical statement as much as a social one.

What would Betty Parsons show today? Only small paintings.