

# A.I.R.

## ***Process is Life*** **Blythe Bohnen**

September 9–October 8, 2023

Opening reception: Saturday, September 9 from 6–8pm

GALLERY II & III

A.I.R. Gallery is pleased to announce *Process is Life*, an exhibition of brushstroke compositions by founding member Blythe Bohnen (1940–2022). Painted between 1968 and 1972, these compositions unite Bohnen’s art-historical interest in examining the mechanics of the painted gesture with her metaphysical interest in impermanence, memory, and renewal.



Blythe Bohnen, *Untitled, Brushstroke series* (detail), c. 1972, Acrylic on canvas, 72 x 60 inches. Courtesy of David Hall Gallery, LLC Wellesley. Photo: NEP Conservation.

Bohnen sought to slow down and analyze the process of painting by recording sequences of discrete brushstrokes of varying sizes onto paper or canvas, organized by imaginary grids. She allowed the painted acrylic forms to partially cure before rinsing them in the shower, removing the pigment to varying degrees to reveal a visual record of how each gesture came into being. The once-opaque brushstrokes transform into ghostly gray presences that pulse with life, even as they suggest their own disappearance.

By deconstructing the mechanics of painting and imbuing each brushstroke with its own sense of autonomy, Bohnen reversed Abstract Expressionism’s emphasis on the heroism of the painterly gesture. In doing so, she extended the minimalist and conceptual interest in process to a medium—painting—that was, by the early 1970s, viewed by many critics as being on the cusp of obsolescence. Minimalism and post-minimalism, which were more rooted in sculpture, had become ascendant. The post-medium condition was also on the rise. Following suit, the Whitney Museum abolished its medium-specific Annual exhibitions in 1973 in favor of a Biennial program. Bohnen’s spectral brushstrokes would be included in the Whitney’s final Painting Annual in 1972, acting as an unwitting harbinger for the medium’s supposed demise.

Following the Whitney Annual, Bohnen exhibited several of the brushstroke compositions in her first solo exhibition at A.I.R. in November 1972. Afterward, they entered long-term storage, where they have remained ever since. *Process is Life* marks the first time these works will be shown in over fifty years. Viewed from the vantage point of today, they feel like a precursor rather than a swan song. They pre-empt techniques and concerns that would become central to the revival of abstract painting in the 1980s and beyond. Bohnen’s brushstrokes often resemble circles. Cyclical in form, they turn back onto themselves and begin again, reflecting life in all of its stages.

*Organized by David Hall Gallery in collaboration with Elizabeth Wiet and Taylor Bluestine of A.I.R. Gallery.*

A.I.R. Gallery is wheelchair accessible via ramp. There are accessible toilets in the venue. There is comfortable seating with backs. Free tap water is available. The venue is nearest to the F train at York St (0.2 miles) and the A train at High St (0.5 miles). The nearest wheelchair accessible trains is the B, Q, R at Dekalb Av (1.1 miles) and the 2, 3 at Borough Hall (0.8 miles). The roads immediately surrounding the gallery are cobblestone. The nearest accessible parking garage (for an hourly fee) is two blocks away at 100 Jay St. No ID necessary for entry. Please contact [info@airgallery.org](mailto:info@airgallery.org) for more information.

