

Forbes

"Marilou Schultz: 3 Unique Women United By Abstraction At CCS, Bard"

By Chadd Scott

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Marilou Schultz, 'Multiple Rugs,' c. 1980. 100% Wool, aniline and vegetable dye and natural wool yarn. 62 x 51 in.
Gochman Family Collection.
THATCHER KEATS

Three women. Three different worlds.

Somali-born, Kenyan-raised, self-taught painter Uman (b. 1980).

Legendary mid-century New York gallerist Betty Parsons (1900-1982). Early promoter of Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock. Little-known as an artist in her own right.

Fourth generation Diné weaver Marilou Schultz (b. 1954). Born and raised in the Navajo Nation.

Connected by art. Abstraction in particular.

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The Hessel Museum of Art at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, brings them together through three solo exhibitions spotlighting artists pushing the possibilities of abstraction and color.

Marilou Schultz

In 1994 an employee of Intel Corporation in Chandler, AZ was looking for a Diné weaver to weave a rug with the image of a Pentium chip. That was a popular brand of microprocessors Intel produced from the 1990s into the 2000s. No one seemed interested.

"I'll take it," Schultz remembers telling the man.

She had no idea what a computer chip looked like.

"When he brought the image to my office I said, 'Oh my gosh, what did I get myself into,' because it was so complicated, but I loved the colors in it," Schultz told me via video interview. "I took on the project and did it, not realizing that (the weaving) was going to be to the exact image of the picture that he gave me."

It wasn't only Schultz' expertise as a weaver that allowed her to exactly replicate the intricate chip in a rug, it was her background with math.

"I was always good at (math). Part of it had to do with counting, because with the warp, my mom always counted by threes, never by twos, which is easier," Shultz explained. "For some reason she always counted by threes, and learning that at an early age, you do the multiples. From there, math became real easy for me so all through elementary and high school, math was my strong area."

When weaving, "warp yarns run lengthwise, providing the fabric's backbone and stability." Turns out math and weaving share much in common.

"Math has always been in weaving, except it wasn't (recognized) specifically as math," Schultz said. "I also liked to do things with my hands, which was sewing, weaving, spinning, working with my hands, but then math was always there in the background."

Schultz' aptitude for math led her to become a math teacher on the Navajo Nation. Weaving, of course, all along. Her Intel Pentium commission, *Replica of a Chip* (1994), reflected her adaptation to new forms of weaving while pointing to the deeply intertwined history of Navajo women and semiconductor manufacturing.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Fairchild Semiconductors operated a plant on the outskirts of the Navajo Nation, employing primarily Diné (Navajo) women. The plant closed in 1975 following reports of poor working conditions and a peaceful standoff between Navajo workers and local law enforcement, resulting in widespread layoffs of Navajo workers. Schultz's chip-inspired weavings

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give visibility to this history and to the technical achievements of Indigenous communities that have gone unrecognized.

"There's always hands involved. Somebody has to make both of them, the chip and the weaving, and they're both over-under technique that we use with the weaving, and the tech part of how the punch card cards came about," Schultz said. "Those are the common threads that run through both the technical part of the chip and the weaving, to me, they go hand in hand."



Mariou Schultz, 'Popular Chip,' 2025. 100% respun wool, aniline and natural dye. 50 x 39 in.
GOCHMAN FAMILY COLLECTION

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The Intel commission marked the launch of a new body of chip-inspired weavings by Schultz, including *Popular Chip* (2025) and *Integrated Circuit Chip & AI Diné Weaving* (2024), which further illustrate the aesthetic and technical relationship between weaving and computer chip design. "After I did the Pentium chip, I approached (weaving) proportionately and took the proportions of the warp and the image and wove in that format. That's how I realized, 'Wow! I can do this visually without drawing it out,'" Schultz said. "That's how math-thinking back and looking back—it's all math because you're counting the strings, you're dealing with the angles of the shapes and the incline, which is the slope of those angles, and trying to control those. It's all math."

A selection of Schultz' computer chip weavings highlights "Replica of a Chip: The Weaving Technology of Marilou Schultz," on view through November 29, a presentation showcasing Schultz's sustained engagement with technology and the digital world throughout her career. "Replica of a Chip" traces the full arc of Schultz's artistic practice, demonstrating how she has consistently pushed the boundaries of experimentation within Navajo weaving, first through teaching herself new weaving styles, dyes, and techniques and later, using it as a means to reflect on the digital technologies shaping contemporary culture and society—from early computer microprocessors to stock market tickers and other digital data.

Uman



Uman, 'Transgender Day of Remembrance (Installation View),' 2019. ©Uman.
COURTESY OF THE ARTIST, NICOLA VASSELL GALLERY AND HAUSER & WIRTH.

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Uman's art has often been framed through biography: her path as an immigrant and arrival in post-millennium New York. CCS Bard shifts the focus toward her motifs and technique, revealing how she transforms a wide range of influences, including memories from her East African childhood, the natural world, and portraiture, into a distinct vocabulary of signs, symbols, and chromatic textures.

"Uman: In Between," through November 29, charts the artist's practice from the 2010s to the present, beginning with works from her early years in New York. At the center of the opening gallery is a handmade collapsible kiosk from which Uman first presented her paintings. Painted over and collaged, the structure reflects the resourcefulness and independence that continue shaping her art making.

Nearby, a selection of early collages and paintings highlights motifs that have endured throughout her work. Together, these early works foreground a material inventiveness that runs throughout Uman's practice. Surfaces assembled from canvas, paper, cardboard, and wood reflect her habit of refashioning found materials often salvaged from the streets of New York's garment district and Chelsea neighborhood.

Across these varied supports, Uman develops dynamic geometries of squares, points, curves, splotches, grids, stains, and letterforms that lay the groundwork for a sensorial visual alphabet connecting works throughout the exhibition.

Featuring more than 100 works, the exhibition traces the evolution of Uman's prolific painting practice from the intimate portraits she made in the 2000s to the commanding images she creates today, including two new murals developed for the exhibition.

Betty Parsons

Betty Parsons' name is legendary in the art world. In one respect, Betty Parsons Gallery in Midtown Manhattan launched the careers of Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, and Clyfford Still among others in addition to Rothko and Pollock. Her platform and advocacy were essential to establishing Abstract Expressionism as the preeminent contemporary art form in the 40s and 50s and establishing New York as the epicenter of contemporary art worldwide. She ran the gallery from 1946 until her passing in 1982.

She had another side.

Parsons maintained a dedicated artistic practice throughout her life. The gallery closed every summer so she could focus on her art making. "Betty Parsons: An Expanded World," through October 18, centers her output as a painter and sculptor while exploring the radical history of her gallery and its support of underrecognized, experimental artists. This is the first major retrospective to examine her intertwined legacies.

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Betty Parsons, 'Canary Islands,' 1932. Graphite and gouache on paper 18 1/8 x 21 2/8 in (46.04 x 53.98 cm).

COURTESY ALEXANDER GRAY ASSOCIATES, NEW YORK © 2025 BETTY PARSONS AND WILLIAM P. RAYNER FOUNDATION

"Looking expansively at her role in defining 20th-century American art, this retrospective provides a comprehensive understanding of who Betty Parsons was: an artist, visionary art dealer, poet, aesthete, and restless traveler who was drawn to and supportive of otherness and outsidership," exhibition curator Kelly Taxter said in a press release. "Decades ahead of institutional norms or validation, she gave equal weight to women and queer artists as well as artists positioned well outside of the established and narrow circuits of the art world, while simultaneously forging her own distinctive artistic path."

Though Parsons exhibited her work years before opening her gallery, her artistic output has remained largely underrecognized. "An Expanded World" charts the full range of Parsons' output from 1922 to 1982 through approximately 80 works spanning painting, sculpture, and works on paper. Early watercolors led to developments in abstractions. As a mature, skillful painter, she continued exploring oddball color combinations and compositions.

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A newly commissioned, multi-channel film brings to life the history of the Betty Parsons Gallery. Funny thing about that. Many of the male AbEx artists she helped turn into household names left after growing frustrated by her minimal interest in the market and ceaseless search for the new and undiscovered. Throughout her life she remained devoted to artists who were excluded by galleries and major arts institutions at the time, including Agnes Martin, Forrest Bess, Robert Rauschenberg, Ellsworth Kelly, Leon Polk Smith, Sonja Sekula, and Barbara Chase-Riboud, all of whom went on to great acclaim. Parsons also made efforts to present Indigenous art during her lifetime, recognizing its foundational importance to the artists of her generation.

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