

Marilyn Lerner: Memory is a Fickle Thing

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By coincidence, David Novros, Al Loving, Alan Shields, and Marilyn Lerner all have work up in NYC during December. These same four artists all danced in the late sixties, sometimes together, with the experimental choreographer Ellen Klein, in performances she staged in her loft on Broadway. The comparisons of their artistic development since this heady time are rich. For Lerner, the improvisation of dancing with Klein's company became her bridge from sculpture and to painting, where she felt the same kind of physical freedom. This is powerfully evident in her third solo show at Kate Werble Gallery, *Memory is a Fickle Thing*, which comprises thirteen radiant paintings, all oil on panel, and all made since 2022.



Installation view, Marilyn Lerner: *Memory is a Fickle Thing*, Kate Werble Gallery, New York, 2023. Courtesy the artist and Kate Werble Gallery, New York. Photo: Adam Reich.

Lerner is known for her intuitive, rapturous color sense that moves the eye across kaleidoscopic geometric compositions. The musicality of her work is notable, and her utilization of harmony, symmetry, and structure are all in full form in these new works. In the titular *Memory is a Fickle Thing* (2023), Lerner's composition unfolds along a vertical axis with a symmetrical design, which is then variegated by subtle shifts in color tonalities from left to right. The strength of the contrasting dimensional forms invites illusions—dazzling hot red, fuschia, and purple triangular shapes emerge from dark, nocturnal toned grounds. For example, the planar dimensions of a mask could be suggested and, in the same instant, the forethought of a futuristic architecture, one that is tantalizingly vibrant and optimistic. Every shape is outlined in a thin band of a contrasting color that enforces the sharpness of the edges and the particularity of each color. Lerner states she has no color theory beyond her intuition, which has been honed with a few ground rules—a concentration on warm and cool tones, and every color consisting of at least 3 hues. The results are mesmerizing and profoundly transporting. It's because of Lerner's particular mastery that our eye keeps moving through slippages of time, association, and spacial references. She embellishes the sensation of depth with soft gradations of opposite colors within some of the shapes, playfully suggesting recessive, illusionistic space.

The weight and heft of the wooden panel support has become essential to Lerner, a vestige of her years