

# WHITNEY

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# PRESS RELEASE



Carmen Herrera (b. 1915), *Blanco y Verde*, 1959. Acrylic on canvas, 68 1/8 × 60 1/2 in. (173 × 153.7 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee 2014.63 © Carmen Herrera; courtesy Lisson Gallery, London

## The Whitney to Debut *Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight*, opening September 16

**New York, NY, July 12, 2016**—This fall, the Whitney Museum of American Art will present *Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight*, the first museum exhibition of this groundbreaking artist in New York City in nearly two decades. Focusing on the years 1948-1978, the period during which Herrera developed her signature, hard-edged style, the exhibition will situate Herrera's pioneering abstract work in its proper place in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century art. *Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight* features fifty works, including paintings, three-dimensional works, and works on paper. Organized by Dana Miller, until recently the Richard DeMartini Family Curator and Director of the Collection at the Whitney, in close collaboration with the artist, the exhibition will be on view at the Whitney from September 16, 2016 through January 9, 2017 and at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus, Ohio from February 4 through April 16, 2017.

“Herrera has been painting for more than seven decades, though it is only over the past decade or so that acclaim for her work has catapulted the artist to international prominence. This overdue evaluation offers the first comprehensive look at her early career, the result of time spent in the art worlds of Havana, Paris, and New York,” explained Miller.

*Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight* is comprised of three sections, organized in rough chronological sequence. The first section features earlier works from the formative period, 1948-1958, during which Herrera experimented with different modes of abstraction before establishing the visual language that she would explore with great nuance for the succeeding five decades. Featuring more than a dozen paintings made while Herrera lived in Paris (1948-1953) in the years following World War II, many of

these works have never been displayed before in a museum. It was during this period that Herrera developed her distinctive style of geometric abstraction, moving towards cleaner lines and a reduced palette. Crucially, she also began using the edges of the canvas and the frame as compositional elements.

An unprecedented gathering of works from what Herrera considers her most important series, *Blanco y Verde*, comprise the second section and this room will serve as the centerpiece of the exhibition. The nine paintings from the series, spanning the years 1959-1971, illustrate the groundbreaking ways in which Herrera conceptualized her paintings as objects, using the physical structure of the canvas as a compositional tool and integrating the surrounding environment. These *Blanco y Verde* works will be isolated in their own gallery, illuminating the various compositional twists and inflections of the dichromatic works and creating dynamic interplay of visual correspondences.

The final section will feature work dating from approximately 1962-1978, illuminating Herrera's continued experimentation with figure/ground relationships. Also included in this section are four sculptural works, which Herrera refers to as "estructuras". These wooden works, alongside several drawings from the 1960s, will illustrate the crucial architectural aspect of her vision and the way in which many of Herrera's paintings begin with a three-dimensional concept. The latest works in this section will be seven vivid paintings that comprise her brilliant *Days of the Week* series from the 1975-78.

### **About Carmen Herrera**

Born May 30, 1915 in Havana, Cuba, Carmen Herrera was educated in Havana and Paris, studying art, art history, and architecture. In 1939 she married an American, Jesse Loewenthal and moved to New York City, where she attended classes at the Art Students League and was a frequent visitor to the Whitney Museum of American Art. From 1948 to 1953, Herrera and Loewenthal lived in Paris, where she became associated with an international group of artists, the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles. Herrera exhibited her work with them regularly and developed a distilled, geometric style of abstraction, reducing her palette to three colors for each composition, then further to two. Herrera's hard-edged canvases emerged at the same time that Ellsworth Kelly, whose time in France overlapped with Herrera's, began producing his own abstractions and around the same time that Frank Stella began producing his famous black paintings.

Herrera's ascetic compositions, which prefigured the development of Minimalism by almost a decade, did not find a warm reception when she returned to New York in 1954, a time when Abstract Expressionism still reigned supreme. As both a woman and an immigrant, Herrera faced significant discrimination in the art world; yet she persisted, and continued to paint for the next six decades, only rarely exhibiting her work publicly. Today at the age of 101, Herrera continues to work almost every day in her studio, and her oeuvre demonstrates a disciplined but highly sophisticated exploration of color and form. As she once stated, "I believe that I will always be in awe of the straight line, its beauty is what keeps me painting." Since the late 1990s Herrera has garnered increasing attention for her work, selling her first painting in 2004. The last significant museum presentation of Herrera's work in this country was a 2005 show at Miami Art Central, which was preceded only by a 1998 show of her black and white paintings at El Museo del Barrio and a 1985 show at The Alternative Museum, both in New York. Her first monographic presentation in Europe was held at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham, England in 2009, which then traveled to Museum Pfalzgalerie, Kaiserslautern, Germany. In the last decade, the Museum of Modern Art, Walker Art Center, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and Tate Modern have all acquired works by the artist.

### **About the Catalogue**

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully-illustrated catalogue, with essays by Miller and the following authors: Serge Lemoine, Emeritus Professor at the Sorbonne and former Chief Curator and director of the Musée d'Orsay; Gerardo Mosquera, art historian, critic, and curator based in Havana and Madrid; Edward J. Sullivan, Helen Gould Sheppard Professor in the History of Art, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. The catalogue will also contain an illustrated chronology by Monica Espinel addressing the entirety of Herrera's life.

*Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight* is organized by Dana Miller, former Richard DeMartini Family Curator and Director of the Collection at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

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### **About the Whitney**

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

### **Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art**

<i>Human Interest: Portraits from the Whitney's Collection</i>	Through Feb 12, 2017
<i>Stuart Davis: In Full Swing</i>	Through Sept 25, 2016
<i>Virginia Overton: Sculpture Gardens</i>	Through Sept 25, 2016
<i>Danny Lyon: Message to the Future</i>	Through Sept 25, 2016
<i>Sophia Al-Maria: Black Friday</i>	Through Oct 31, 2016
<i>Carmen Herrera: Lines of Sight</i>	Sept 16, 2016–Jan 9, 2017
<i>Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016</i>	Oct 28, 2016–Feb 5, 2017
<i>Virginia Overton: Winter Garden</i>	Oct 28, 2016– Feb 5, 2017
<i>RED IN VIEW</i>	Nov 11, 2016 – Feb 27, 2017
<i>Whitney Biennial</i>	Spring 2017
<i>David Wojnarowicz: History Keeps Me Awake at Night</i>	Spring 2018

The Whitney Museum of American Art is located at 99 Gansevoort Street between Washington and West Streets, New York City. Museum hours are: Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday from 10:30 am to 6 pm; Friday and Saturday from 10:30 am to 10 pm. Closed Tuesday, except in July and August when the Museum will open on Tuesdays from 10:30 am to 6 pm. Adults: \$22 in advance via [whitney.org](http://whitney.org); \$25 day of visit. Full-time students and visitors 65 & over: \$17 in advance via [whitney.org](http://whitney.org); \$18 day of visit. Visitors 18 years & under and Whitney members: FREE. Admission is pay-what-you-wish on Fridays, 7–10 pm. For general information, please call (212) 570-3600 or visit [whitney.org](http://whitney.org).

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