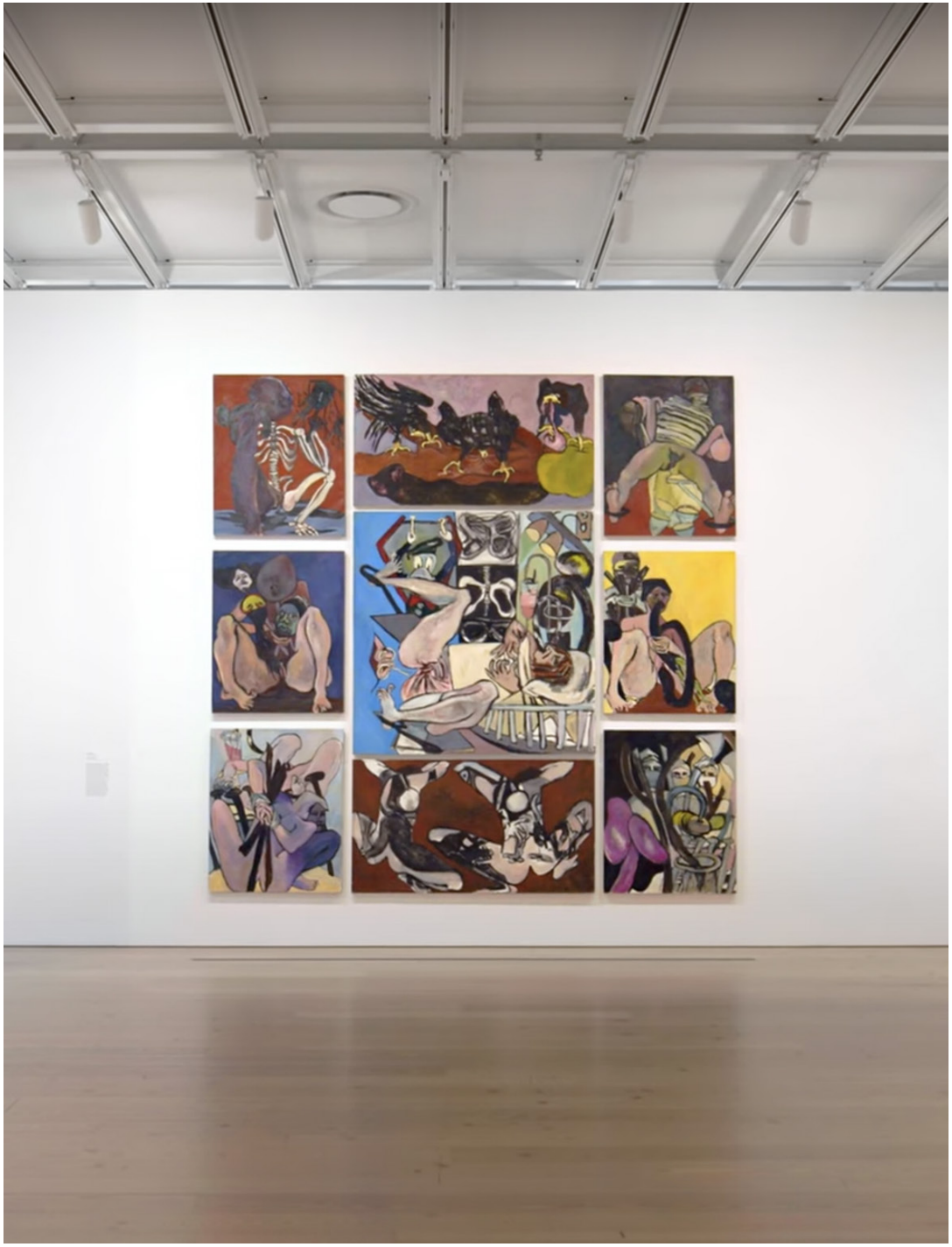
JUANITA McNEELY



Is It Real? Yes, It Is, 1969
Oil on linen
Nine panels, overall: 144 ! 144 inches
Installation view, *The Whitney's Collection: Selections from 1900 to 1965*, Whitney Museum, New York, 2023
Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; purchase, with funds from the Painting and Sculpture Committee

Installation view: *Collection Highlights*, Rubell Museum, Miami, 2024-ongoing

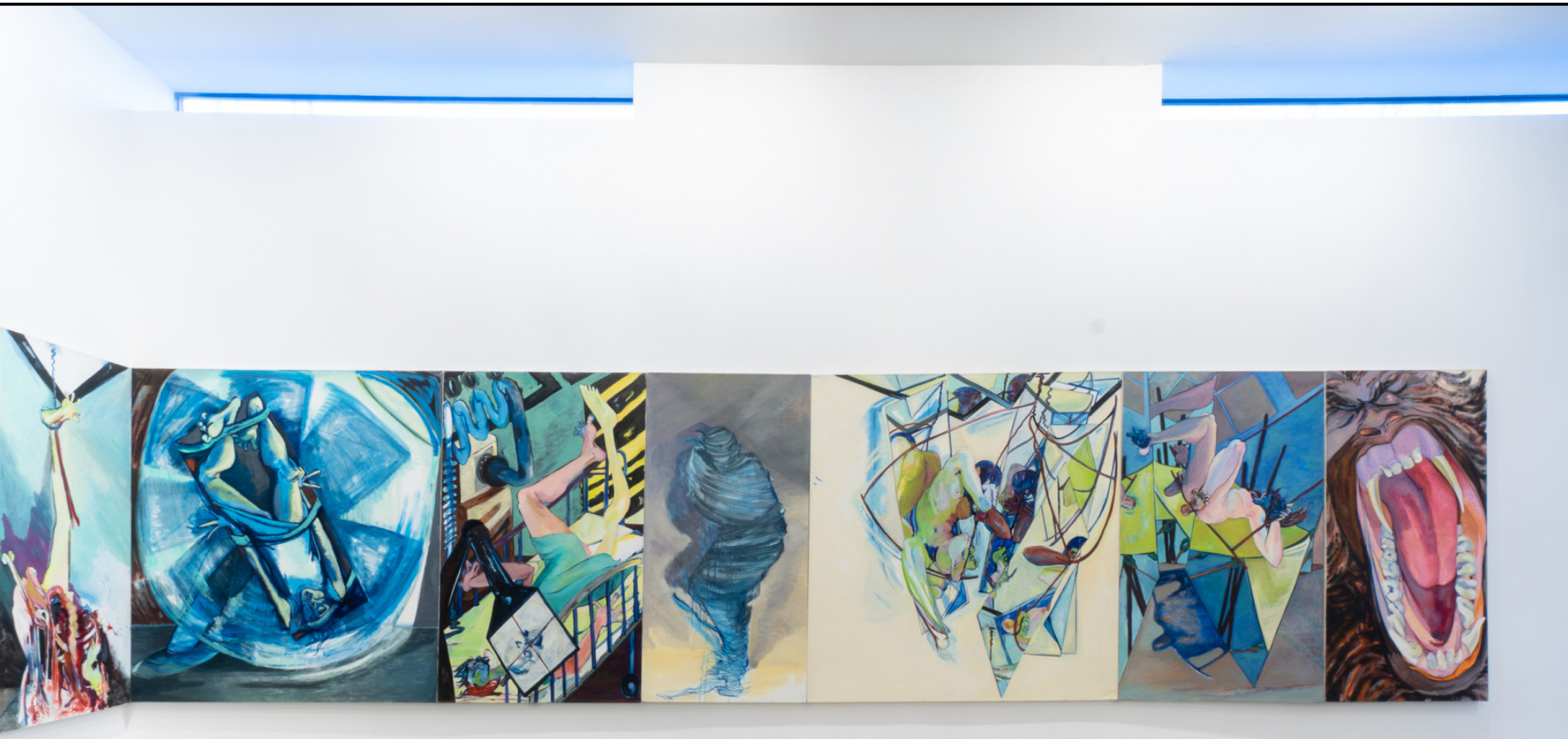
From the Black Space II, 1977
Oil on linen
7 panels, overall: 84 x 312 x 2 inches
Installation view, *For Dear Life: Art, Medicine, and Disability*, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2024-2025

Woman's Psyche, 1968
Oil on linen
Four panels, overall: 146 ! 126 inches
Installation view, *What's Going On*, Rubell Museum, Washington DC, 2022-2023

Moving Through, 1975
Oil on canvas
Nine panel, overall: 84 ! 408 inches

Installation view: *Moving Through*, James Fuentes, Los Angeles, 2023

Triskaidekaptych, 1986
Oil on linen
Thirteen panels, overall: 72 ! 624 inches
Installation view, James Fuentes, New York, 2020



Installation view: *Triskaidekaptych*, 1986, James Fuentes, New York, 2020

Woman's Psyche, 1968
Oil on linen
146 ! 126 inches (370.84 ! 320.04 cm)

Peter and Dolores with Monkey, 1975
Oil on linen
Two panels, overall: 72 ! 112 inches

J & J studio, 1984
Oil on linen
Two panels, everall: 84 ! 142 inches

Pulled into Center, 1990s
Oil on linen
Three panels, overall: 84 1/4 ! 120 inches

Dolores, 1968
oil on linen
40 ! 32 inches (101.60 ! 81.28 cm)

Self, 1968
oil on linen
48 ! 36 ! 2 inches (121.92 ! 91.44 ! 5.08 cm)

The Yellow Womb, 1969
oil on linen
66 ! 60 ! 2 inches (167.64 ! 152.40 ! 5.08 cm)

Metaphor for a Dog, 1969
oil on linen
60 ! 66 ! 2 inches (152.40 ! 167.64 ! 5.08 cm)

Moving Through, 1975
Oil on canvas
Panel no. 4: 84 ! 68 ! 2 inches

Window Shadow: Chameleon on Woman's Face, 1975
oil on linen
84 ! 72 ! 2 inches (213.36 ! 182.88 ! 5.08 cm)

Freedom?, 1976
oil on linen
74 ! 74 ! 2 inches (187.96 ! 187.96 ! 5.08 cm)

Merry Go Round, 1976
oil on linen
78 ! 84 ! 2 inches (198.12 ! 213.36 ! 5.08 cm)

Jeremy, 1977
oil on linen
84 ! 68 ! 2 inches (213.36 ! 172.72 ! 5.08 cm)

Shadow of the Birds, 1980
oil on linen
84 ! 72 ! 2 inches (213.36 ! 182.88 ! 5.08 cm)

Shadow of the Birds, 1980
oil on linen
84 x 72 inches

Eileen Haimowitz, 1980
oil on linen
60 ! 55 ! 2 inches (152.40 ! 139.70 ! 5.08 cm)

Pre-Abortion Law Remembrance, 1985
oil on linen
65 ! 72 ! 2 inches (165.10 ! 182.88 ! 5.08 cm)

Wild Dogs, 1990
oil on linen
44 ! 72 ! 2 inches (111.76 ! 182.88 ! 5.08 cm)

Itch, 2000
oil on linen
36 ! 36 ! 2 inches (91.44 ! 91.44 ! 5.08 cm)

Did You See?, 2003
oil on linen
60 ! 72 ! 2 inches (152.40 ! 182.88 ! 5.08 cm)

Caught, 2007
oil on linen
72 ! 50 ! 2 inches (182.88 ! 127.00 ! 5.08 cm)

I Saw, 2009
oil on linen
40 ! 42 ! 2 inches (101.60 ! 106.68 ! 5.08 cm)

Tagged, 2010
oil on linen
44 ! 48 ! 2 inches (111.76 ! 121.92 ! 5.08 cm)

Balancing, 2010
oil on linen
72 ! 50 ! 2 inches (182.88 ! 127.00 ! 5.08 cm)

Flowers Given to Me, 2010
oil on linen
36 ! 72 inches (91.44 ! 182.88 cm)

Woman and Dog, 2011
oil on linen
36 ! 36 ! 2 inches (91.44 ! 91.44 ! 5.08 cm)

Ashanti Funeral Boat, 2010s
oil on linen
72 ! 72 ! 2 inches (182.88 ! 182.88 ! 5.08 cm)

Boxed In, 2011
oil on linen
40 ! 48 ! 2 inches (101.60 ! 121.92 ! 5.08 cm)

Blue Light, 2011
oil on linen
78 ! 44 ! 2 inches (198.12 ! 111.76 ! 5.08 cm)

Balance, 2012
oil on linen
48 ! 50 ! 2 inches (121.92 ! 127.00 ! 5.08 cm)

Balanced Shadows, 2015
oil on linen
84 ! 72 ! 2 inches (213.36 ! 182.88 ! 5.08 cm)

Falling, 2018
oil on linen
68 ! 68 ! 2 inches (172.72 ! 172.72 ! 5.08 cm)

Moving My Chair, 2019
oil on linen
44 ! 72 ! 2 inches (111.76 ! 182.88 ! 5.08 cm)

The New York Times

The artist Juanita McNeely in 2017 in her studio in Manhattan. “She was able to demonstrate in her work both the pleasure and the pain of a woman’s sexuality,” a friend and fellow painter said. Dean Kaufman

JUANITA MCNEELY, INTENSE ARTIST OF THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE, DIES AT 87

Her searing paintings, which could be sweet but also brutal, reflected her interest in the female body and what it could do.

By Will Heinrich

Juanita McNeely, an uncompromising painter who used the language of Expressionism to immortalize the sweetest and most brutal moments of her own female experience, died on Oct. 18 at her home in Manhattan. She was 87.

Her death was confirmed by her husband and only immediate survivor, Jeremy Lebensohn.

Ms. McNeely’s work was often intense. But the most searing single piece might have been her record of the fragmentary details — emotional as well as physical — of an abortion she underwent in the 1960s. She had been admitted to a hospital for treatment of a tumor when doctors discovered she was pregnant.

Because the pregnancy threatened her life, but with abortion illegal at the time, the doctors prevaricated, argued, even proposed saving the fetus and letting her die. She eventually did receive the procedure she needed, at a different hospital — but the experience left marks.

In the central panel of her “Is It Real? Yes, It Is!,” a polyptych of nine canvases arranged in a 12-foot square, a woman lies splayed and naked on her back, eyes shut, breathing tube in her mouth, her feet in stirrups, while a hand reaches through a slit in a blue curtain to extend a pair of forceps toward her genitals. A pale blue Donald Duck solemnly looks on.

A woman’s body figures in the other eight panels, too, but less literally. In those she is pinioned, or skeletal, or being eaten by carrion birds. Black outlines, exaggerated highlights and striking background colors — powder blue, bright yellow — add to the work’s aggression and intensity without diminishing its unflinching emotional realism. And though complex in design and dense with color, the whole thing looks as if it were painted in a single burst of anger.

But Ms. McNeely’s nudes could also be lush and sensuous; her portraits of friends, New York City passers-by and fellow artists often have a fairylike élan. Painted not from life but from memory, they display Ms. McNeely’s keen eye for anatomy, but their limbs often curve and twist slightly more than natural, evoking fashion sketches or ballet dancers in movement.

Ms. McNeely's 1969 work "Is It Real? Yes, It Is!" was acquired by the Whitney Museum in 2021. via the artist and James Fuentes LLC. Photo by Jason Mandella

Ms. McNeely's interest, from beginning to end, was in the body, particularly the female body and what it could do. If it was suppressed, mistreated or callously acted upon, her canvases filled with rage and the color of blood; when it moved freely under the direction of its inhabitant, however, her depictions captured a winsome, evasive pleasure.

All in all it was the interplay between two basic carnal states — action and passion, motion and rest, health and illness, bitter and sweet — that constituted her basic subject.

"She was able to demonstrate in her work both the pleasure and the pain of a woman's sexuality," the painter Joan Semmel, a friend of Ms. McNeely's since the early 1970s, said by phone. "Those two elements have always been connected, and connected in a way to stress the vulnerability. But she stressed the strength, also, and the confrontation of that."

Juanita Rose McNeely was born on March 13, 1936, in Ferguson, Mo., to Robert Hunt McNeely Sr. and Alta (Greene) McNeely, both of whom had moved from Mayfield, Ky. She was their second child; her older brother, Robert Jr., died before her.

She began making art in high school, where she won a prize for an oil painting and took notes on Shakespeare with figure drawings of his characters. (These drawings, chaste but nude, earned her a reproving telephone call home; her parents took her side.) Another high school experience helped define her direction in life: She missed a full year when she was hospitalized for excessive bleeding.

During her first year as an art student at Washington University in St. Louis, where she earned a B.F.A. in 1959 and an M.F.A. two years later, she was diagnosed with cancer and given three to six months to live. Doctors advised her to spend that time doing what made her happy — so she kept on painting.

"I'm a painter," she told Vogue earlier this year. "That's what I am; that's what I do."

During her second year, while her cancer was in remission, Ms. McNeely began to find the stillness of the figure models tedious and asked to draw from her imagination instead. The school let her try it; after two months, her instructors examined her work and gave her permission to continue.

She also studied with Werner Drewes, a German expatriate who had

Ms. McNeely's polyptych "Woman's Psyche" (1968). via the artist and James Fuentes LLC. Photo by Jason Mandella

After being told that she would never make a large painting again, Ms. McNeely hung 13 enormous canvases around her living space and worked on them for a year, titling the resulting series "Triskaidekaptych" (1986). via the artist and James Fuentes LLC. Photo by Jason Mandella

studied with Max Beckmann. Mr. Drewes imposed a Bauhaus-style regimen, with classes six days a week and on two nights. At the St. Louis Art Museum, she looked at works by Gauguin, Matisse and especially Beckmann, whose color palette and nightmare quality became hallmarks of her style, too, and whose surfaces, the painter Sharyn M. Finnegan wrote in Women's Art Journal in 2011, "look quickly done even when quite reworked."

In 1967, Ms. McNeely moved to a sixth-floor walk-up in Manhattan's East Village with her first husband. Their marriage would end in divorce.

She carried slides of her figurative paintings around to galleries still hooked on abstraction, but she made little progress; according to Ms. Finnegan's article, one gallery expressed interest in her paintings until realizing they had been painted by a woman.

But she found community in New York with groups like Women Artists in Revolution, the Redstockings, the Figurative Alliance and the Prince Street Gallery, an artists' co-op. In 1970, she moved into Westbeth, the affordable artists' residence in the West Village, and began working in its print shop. She stayed there for the rest of her life.

Around that time, her polyptych "Woman's Psyche" appeared alongside work by Faith Ringgold, Alice Neel and more than 100 others in a feminist show organized by the Redstockings. Over the course of that decade she had six solo shows at Prince Street, as well as three elsewhere. In addition to painting on canvas, she made cut-paper pieces and painted ceramics.

In 1982, Ms. McNeely took a six-month sabbatical from Suffolk County Community College, where she taught painting and printmaking for 17 years, to go to France with Mr. Lebensohn, a sculptor, writer, set designer and metal fabricator who had been her on-and-off companion for a decade. They married in Saint-Cézaire-sur-Siagne, on the Mediter-

ranean coast. But three days before their return, Ms. McNeely tripped and fell, damaging her spine, which had been weakened from radiation treatments. Back in New York, she cut down on her teaching and activism and began to use a wheelchair.

Told that she would never make a large painting again, she hung 13 enormous canvases around her living space and worked on them for a year, titling the resulting series "Triskaidekaptych." In that work, more writhing female bodies in challenging, symbolic situations, one per panel, join a flayed horse and a screaming baboon — but pastel colors and a lighter paint application temper rage with soft edges.

Between 1996 and 2018, Ms. McNeely had four solo shows on the Lower East Side with the gallerist Mitchell Algus, and since 2020 she had four solo shows with James Fuentes, including one that ends later this month at his Los Angeles space. "Is It Real? Yes, It Is!" was acquired by the Whitney Museum in 2021.

In a 2022 interview for a book about her work, Ms. McNeely recalled being confronted by a visitor to an early show of hers that had "lots of bleeding women on the walls." The visitor was a mother who was there with her child, and who objected to the subject matter.

"'First of all, you came inside,'" Ms. McNeely said she replied. "'Second of all, can I ask you what is so awful about a woman bleeding?' I said, 'That's how you give birth. That's how you die. That's how you live.'"

A correction was made on Nov. 3, 2023: An earlier version of this obituary misstated where Ms. McNeely died. It was at her home in Manhattan, not at Lenox Hill Hospital.

The third panel of "Triskaidekaptych." via the artist and James Fuentes LLC. Photo by Jason Mandella

THE ART NEWSPAPER

Juanita McNeely in her studio. Photo: Quinn Charles, courtesy James Fuentes

JUANITA MCNEELY, FEMINIST ARTIST WHO CREATED VISCERAL PAINTINGS INSPIRED BY PERSONAL HARDSHIP, HAS DIED, AGED 87

A survivor of cancer and an illegal abortion, McNeely channelled her experiences into very personal work.

By Wallace Ludel

Juanita McNeely, the feminist painter whose massive, visceral canvases were largely inspiredby her personal hardships, has died. She was 87 years old, and her death was confirmed by James Fuentes Gallery, which she had worked with since 2020. Though she had dedicated herlife to painting, it was in recent years that her career had finally begun to build its most substantial momentum and she started to garner institutional support.

McNeely was born in St. Louis in 1936. She found a passion and drive for painting at a youngage, and at 15, she was awarded a merit scholarship for her oil painting. Her family encouragedthe pursuit and turned their garage into a studio for her. Around this time, however, her earliest health troubles began; according to the artist Sharyn M. Finnegan's 2011 essay in *Woman's Art Journal*, McNeely suffered from "a terrifying case of excessive bleeding" that was so severe, she was forced to miss an entire year of high school. Images of bleeding women would go on to bemajor motifs of her work.

McNeely attended the St. Louis School of Fine Arts at Washington University, and it was duringher college years that she had the second major medical trauma of her life—a cancer diagnosis that carried with it the prognosis of only three-to-six months to live. When her doctor suggested she spend the time doing whatever made her happy, she decided to remain enrolled in art school. In an interview for Finnegan's 2011 essay, McNeely remarked that this moment "was the beginning of what really formed me as someone who spoke about the things that are notnecessarily pleasant, on canvas, things that perhaps most people even feel uncomfortable about looking at, much less talking about".

Despite her prognosis, McNeely survived and went on to get a master's degree from Southern Illinois University, after which she moved to Chicago and became a professor at the School ofthe Art Institute of Chicago. In 1967, she moved to New York City, and soon became one of the earliest residents of the Westbeth Artist Housing complex, where she

Juanita McNeely, *From the Black Space I* (panel 6), 1975
Courtesy James Fuentes

would live and work forthe rest of her life.

Shortly after her move to New York, McNeely's cancer returned and, while in hospital, doctors discovered that she was pregnant. Because abortion had yet to be legalised in the US, doctors refused to operate, so

Juanita McNeely, *I Saw*, 2009
Courtesy James Fuentes

McNeely had to get an illegal abortion, nearly dying in the process. This experience inspired her gripping 1969 painting *Is It Real? Yes, It Is!* —shown at James Fuentes Gallery in 2020 before being acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art, where it iscurrently on view. Standing at more than 12 feet tall and 12 feet wide, the nine-panel workdepicts the harrowing physical and mental experience of this medical saga.

"I have known Juanita since the 1970s, from the time when she was a young artist, beautifuland dynamic," wrote the painter Joan Semmel, one of McNeely's closest friends, on the occasion of a 2022 catalogue. "Juanita opened up a world to the viewer of an imagination that had

travelled through the extremes of feeling and managed to extract from it a dynamic and moving panorama of life and art, ever resistant and amazingly resilient, beautiful, rich and alive." Semmel goes on to say that McNeely's style is one of "a female voice coping with a body and flesh that is beyond her control".

Recent years saw a major increase in interest in McNeely's work. Among other exhibitions, her first institutional survey, *Indomitable Spirit*, opened at Brande is University in 2014. A solo show of her work opened this September at James Fuentes Gallery's Los Angeles outpost, where it will remain on view through 18 November.

"When we presented Juanita's work for the first time in 2020, I don't think there had ever been a show that we'd done that had such a visibly visceral impact on everyone who came into the gallery to see it," says Fuentes. "Rarely are there artists who can visually articulate psychology, trauma and other intangible aspects of life."

ARTnews

JUANITA MCNEELY, GROUNDBREAKING FEMINIST ARTIST WHO BRAVELY DEPICTED HER ILLEGAL ABORTION, DIES AT 87

By Maximilíano Durón

Juanita McNeely in her studio. Photo: Quinn Charles, courtesy James Fuentes

Juanita McNeely, a groundbreaking feminist artist whose work has seen a resurgence in interest over the past few years, died on October 18 in New York. She was 87 years old.

"For over six decades, McNeely addressed themes of bodily sovereignty, liberation, pain and resilience through her work," James Fuentes, the New York gallery that has represented her since 2020, said in a statement. "McNeely used her art to convey the extreme physicality and movement of the human figure, informed by her personal observations and experiences of sexism, abortion and infirmity."

In 1967, six years prior to the passage of Roe v. Wade, McNeely moved to New York. During her first year of college, she was diagnosed with cancer and given months to live, but she ultimately survived. Upon her arrival in New York, she became sick again, and also became pregnant. Because abortion was illegal at the time, almost no doctor would operate on her to remove the tumor.

"Nothing was helping me, and nothing would end my misery because the law said you cannot have an abortion," McNeely said in a 2023 video interview with the Whitney Museum, more than 50 years later and months after the Supreme Court overturned Roe with its 2022 decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization.

As artist and art historian Sharyn M. Finnegan recounts in a 2011 essay in Women's Art Journal, McNeely had to travel to two different hospitals in two states, with "numerous meetings among (all male) doctors trying to decide what course to take. She nearly died in the process before she was given the necessary surgeries. (One doctor presumed that she would prefer to save the child than to live.) The experience increased her awareness of how much control men had over the lives of women, and it fed her feminism."

That harrowing experience resulted in the nine-panel 1969 painting Is It Real? Yes, It Is!, which the Whitney acquired in 2022 and quickly put on view in its permanent collection galleries. Figures are shown at awkward angles, some contorted and many in obvious pain, with limbs and

Juanita McNeely, *Moving Through*, 1975.

joints that appear broken or mangled. At more than 12 feet by 12 feet, the overall work is monumental in scale.

For a 2022 monograph published by James Fuentes Press, artist Joan Semmel, who had been friends with McNeely since the 1970s, wrote, "Juanita opened up a world to the viewer of an imagination that had traveled through the extremes of feeling and managed to extract from it a dynamic and moving panorama of life and art, ever resistant and amazingly resilient, beautiful, rich, and alive."

The perspective in each panel of Is It Real? Yes, It Is! varies: the center canvas shows McNeely from above, her legs in stirrups as a hand, holding a medical device, pokes through a slit in a blue medical drape; behind are X-rays of her pelvis. The bottom right panel flips the perspective: the viewer is now McNeely, staring out at the three masked doctors who are to operate on her. One panel shows a figure that is half-human, half-skeleton: this is McNeely at death's door. As with much of her work, these scenes were often painted from memory, and there is a cinematic quality to this narrative painting.

"I was a cartoon. I was not a real person anymore. I had become a something, but not the real person," McNeely said of how she decided to translate the experience into paint. "It's almost making the reality a cartoon to be so horrible. That's what I was trying for anyhow."

In many ways, given the era, it would seem unfathomable that any of what McNeely depicted actually happened. And that was exactly McNeely's point in choosing the work's biting title. It's a reality that women faced prior to 1973 that McNeely wished she had never had to paint in the first place: "I wish I had never had to make the imagery so profoundly real to me." Her words have taken on a new valence 50 years on.

"I think the title's also about her very ambitious decision to take on the topic of abortion in a painting," Whitney curator Jane Panetta, who

Juanita McNeely, *Booked*, 2010.

helped the museum acquire the work, says in the same video. "It's still a taboo topic in many ways but certainly in 1969 to make this graphic a depiction of abortion was really unheard of."

Juanita McNeely was born in 1936 in St. Louis, Missouri. Growing up she always envisioned herself attending art school and she won an art scholarship when she was 15 for an oil painting. She transformed her family's basement into her studio and ultimately began the BFA program at St. Louis School of Fine Arts at Washington University.

Among her teachers was German artist Werner Drewes, who had studied at the Bauhaus. Also influential to her development as a painter were the works she saw by Gauguin, Matisse, and Max Beckmann at the St. Louis Art

Juanita McNeely, *Wild Dogs*, 1990.

Museum. (A 1971 review by critic Hilton Kramer in the New York Times said McNeely was "still too overwhelmed by the example of Max Beckmann to be entirely persuasive in her own right, yet her energy and the reach of her imagination hold out a certain promise of things to come.")

But this time period was also marked by several illnesses. She was hospitalized for excessive bleeding as a teenager, causing her to miss a year of high school. Then during her first year at Washington University, she was diagnosed with cancer and given three to six months to live. When the doctors told her to fill her final months with what she loved, McNeely committed herself to making art, according to Finnegan.

As McNeely said in a 2006 interview with Kate Leonard, "That was the beginning of what really formed me as someone who spoke about the things that are not necessarily pleasant, on canvas, things that perhaps most people even feel uncomfortable about looking at, much less talking about."

But McNeely would go on to live well past that prognosis. She spent time in Mexico, and then moved to Illinois for an MFA program, despite a male professor telling her she wouldn't make it as an artist "because you're too skinny and you don't look like a good fuck." While there, McNeely also participated in a happening in 1964 with Allan Kaprow, who encouraged her to move to New York. After a year and a half in Chicago, where she taught at the Art Institute of Chicago, she ended up moving to a walk-up in the East Village.

Juanita McNeely, *Couple*, 1970s.

An early work that McNeely painted shortly after her arrival in New York was 1968's Woman's Psyche, a four-panel work in which different women are seen in various forms of what can only be described as distress and pain—they are often bleeding. Animals surround them in each scene, often as if they have just attacked these women. The work was recently acquired by the Rubell Museum and displayed in the opening hang of the institution's DC branch.

"Juanita was an artist who used painting to delve into the deepest aspects of her life and she showed tremendous courage in the face of overwhelming adversity," collector Mera Rubell said in a statement.

As with much of McNeely's most powerful work, this painting deals with the lived experiences of women, told from a woman's perspective: the difficulty of labor and birth, monthly menstruation and all that comes with it, and even raw sexuality.

At the start of the new decade, McNeely was among the first artists to move into the Westbeth Artists Housing project, and she also began showing at the artists' co-op Prince Street Gallery in SoHo, which mounted six solo shows of her work between 1970 and 1978. McNeely also aimed to get gallery representation at this time, but like most women of her generation, she found that the commercial art world was not open to her, simply for being a woman. A director at the famed gallery Knoedler & Co. found the work strong but, upon learning that McNeely was the artist, declined to show it.

A 1971 exhibition there included Is It Real? Yes, It Is! Writing in ARTnews, critic Carter Ratcliffe described McNeely's works as "garish, intense and frightening paintings in an Expressionist mode," in which "themes of birth and death, sex and pain, are followed across nine canvases, melting and distorting shapes, conjuring up mythical and ritual objects from bedroom and delivery room procedure. At its climax this drama of metamorphosis seems to tattoo bodies with fragments of other bodies, as if terror were felt in a very specific personage."

Around this time, McNeely became embedded in the feminist art movement, befriending artists like Joan Semmel and Marjorie Kramer and feminist art historian Pat Mainardi. McNeely attend meetings for feminist groups like Redstockings and W.A.R. (Women Artists in Revolution). She joined the Fight Censorship Group, which was founded by artist Anita Steckel as a response to several women artists' work being dismissed because it was considered too erotic or overly sexual; other artists who joined include Semmel, Hannah Wilke, Louise Bourgeois, Judith Bernstein, Martha Edelheit, Eunice Golden, and more.

Despite her success throughout the 1970s, McNeely's art seemed to lose favor in the New York art world. Her CV lists only a handful of group shows in the 1980s and '90s, and even fewer solo shows during that time period. In 1982, she moved to France for six months during a teaching sabbatical. That trip also resulted in a tragic accident that damaged McNeely's spinal cord, which ultimately required her to use a wheelchair.

Juanita McNeely, *Pulled into Center*, 1990s.

For a decade, between 1996 and 2006, she didn't have a solo show, until intrepid dealer Mitchell Algus mounted a solo of McNeely; he would mount two more, in 2016 and 2018. In 2014, she was the subject of her first—and to date only—major institutional survey, titled "Indomitable Spirit," at the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University in Massachusetts. In an accompanying catalogue, exhibition curator Susan Metrican writes, "Unabashed in her vision of woman that is both sensual and macabre, McNeely portrays her monumental figures with a visceral dexterity. … Indomitable Spirit embodies all the energy, courage and forthrightness that it took to challenge how the world views women and their roles in society."

With her star on the rise over the past decade, McNeely began working with closely watched New York dealer James Fuentes, who has mounted three in-person exhibitions and two online showings of her work since

Juanita McNeely, *From the Black Space I*, 1976.

2020. Her first solo exhibition in Los Angeles is currently on view at Fuentes's recently opened space there; it has been extended to November 18. That exhibition features just three multi-panel works from the mid-'70s, including two incredibly spare ones in which fragments of figures are set against stark white backgrounds, as if they are falling.

In an email to ARTnews, Fuentes said, "Working with Juanita McNeely has been one of the great highlights of my career. For Juanita to be able to experience well-deserved recognition and support during her lifetime has been a true gift. Her work will remain a testament to the power an artist has to process, channel, and articulate trauma as a way to invent and heal. We can all learn something from her example."

Through it all, McNeely never faltered in her dedication to painting the world as she saw it—the world as many women see it—full of a range of experiences, including ones that polite society would rather they not talk about. As she once said, "Many times, life's forces are more powerful than we are, and yet we can face them if we have a standing ground that is our own, that we've set for ourselves."

VOGUE

IN JUANITA MCNEELY'S SEARING PAINTINGS, BEAUTY AND PAIN COMMINGLE

By Grace Edquist

It can be hard to look at unpleasant things. Blood, violence, sickness, pain: Who needs it? The world is brutal enough as it is.

But to Juanita McNeely, the 87-year-old artist whose life dealt her an unfair share of hardship, shying away from the taboo was never an option. For more than half a century she has rendered the vicissitudes of her life, gore and all. "I'm a painter," McNeely told me recently from her studio in the Westbeth Artists Housing complex in Manhattan, where she has lived since the 1970s. "That's what I am; that's what I do."

Her work is often gruesome, primal, erotic. She captures her own struggles: bouts with cancer, a harrowing abortion in the 1960s, and a spinal cord injury that largely confined her to a wheelchair. Her whole approach to art speaks to the idea that these were things that she—and other women—experienced, and that visualizing life's discomforts and anguish is powerful, and necessary. Though much of the content is drawn from her life, she is channeling a universal pain, and resilience.

Today, three of McNeely's works from the 1970s will go on view in Los Angeles. "Juanita McNeely: Moving Through," at James Fuentes's new gallery space on Melrose Avenue, features large-scale, multi-panel paintings that combine McNeely's striking depiction of naked bodies—suspended, contorted, kicking, careening—with her exacting use of color.

In the eponymous piece *Moving Through*, from 1975, nine panels are lined up horizontally, like stills from a movie. As she often does, McNeely includes teeth-bearing animals in several of the panels. Taken together, it's an unflinching expression of rage in the face of a society that doesn't often show women the care they deserve.

From the Black Space I (1976) and *From the Black Space II* (1977), the show's other two works, eschew background color and detail to let her nude figures stand alone. No less bold, the panels in these works practically burst with feeling: limbs stretch, backs arch, heads howl. The musculature is breathtaking—especially impressive considering McNeely gave up working with models and photographs back in art school, preferring instead to work "from my mind," as she told me, pointing to her temple.

Juanita McNeely. Panel 8 of Moving Through, 1975. Oil on linen, 84 x 68 x 2 inches. Courtesy of James Fuentes.

Juanita McNeely. Panel 2 of *Moving Through*, 1975.

Juanita McNeely was born in St. Louis in 1936. As Sharyn M. Finnegan recounts in her essay on McNeely from the fall/winter 2011 issue of *Woman's Art Journal*, McNeely had an early calling to art—at 15, she won a scholarship for an oil painting. But this coincided with the beginning of her health troubles. She missed a year of high school when she was hospitalized for excessive bleeding. (Blood factors heavily in McNeely's work in part because she was around it so much, and it just seemed like a normal part of life.)

She attended the St. Louis School of Fine Arts at Washington University, where she studied under Werner Drewes, the German expatriate credited with introducing principles of the Bauhaus school to Americans. A cancer diagnosis in her first year of college came with a grim prognosis: only three to six months to live. Per her doctor's orders, she filled that time doing what she loved: studying art. She beat the odds, and told Finnegan: "That was the beginning of what really formed me as someone who spoke about the things that are not necessarily pleasant, on canvas, things that perhaps most people even feel uncomfortable about looking at, much less talking about."

McNeely went on to graduate school at Southern Illinois University before moving to Chicago, where she taught at the Art Institute while showing her own work. But New York City beckoned, and in 1967, she decamped from the Midwest to the East Village. McNeely found community with fellow feminist artists in New York, joining groups like Women Artists in Revolution, Redstockings, and Fight Censorship, an organization started by Anita Steckel that included Louise Bourgeois, Joan Semmel, and Hannah Wilke. (Semmel, age 90, McNeely's best friend and fellow unabashed painter of nude bodies, just opened a show at Alexander Gray in New York, concurrent with McNeely's show in LA.)

Not long after she moved to New York, McNeely's cancer returned, and an attempt to remove a tumor led doctors to discover she was pregnant. This being pre–*Roe v. Wade*, abortions were illegal. Thus began a distressing process of doctors, mostly men, trying to figure out what to do with her. She eventually got the abortion she needed to save her life, but it wasn't without physical and emotional repercussions.

McNeely's 1969 work *Is It Real? Yes, It Is!* documents this experience. The epic nine-panel work—so brutal it will bowl you over—was acquired by the Whitney Museum of American Art last year. "There was

nothing else in the collection that dealt with abortion in such a head-on way," says Jane Panetta, a curator at the Whitney. "It's such a singular piece: the frank sensibility, the fearlessness of it…. It's unbelievable to think that she made it in 1969."

In *Is It Real? Yes, It Is!*, as in many of her fervent works, McNeely uses color—lush purples and almost sickly greens, burning scarlets and piercing blues—as a way into what is otherwise quite difficult subject matter. But color is just as much a signature in her other paintings. She made lively portraits of friends and loved ones, including Jeremy, her husband, a sculptor in his own right.

The world is catching up to Juanita McNeely. There was a survey at Brandeis University's Women's Study Research Center in 2014. Solo shows at the Mitchell Algus and James Fuentes galleries in New York followed, as did group shows and appearances at Art Basel Miami in 2020 and Independent 20th Century in 2022. *Is It Real?*'s new home on the seventh floor of the Whitney surely means more people will learn about her.

Perhaps others, like me, are finding her work worthy of attention not despite its intensity, but because of it. There's something to be said about taking in work that makes you uncomfortable, that makes you wrinkle your nose, cock your head, let out a sigh. My visit with McNeely was brief, but I couldn't stop thinking about how someone who has been through such traumatic experiences, who has excised her own agony onto canvas, could be so charming and cheerful in person.

But then her mantra reminded me: "I'm a painter. That's what I do." She has made beautiful art out of pain, calling attention to the grave disservice done onto women when it comes to reproductive and medical care. She made us look at things we might rather pretend aren't… real. But there's humanity in revealing the grotesque, in telling the truth about the world.

Juanita McNeely. *Tagged*, 2014.

Los Angeles Times

Juanita McNeely, "From the Black Space II, Panel 6," 1976. (Juanita McNeely / James Fuentes)

JUANITA MCNEELY BARES IT ALL IN HER DEBUT L.A. SOLO SHOW

'Juanita McNeely: Moving Through'

By Steven Vargas, Los Angeles Times Staff

James Fuentes presents McNeely's debut solo exhibition in Los Angeles, "Moving Through." The show centers on three large-scale, multi-panel paintings: "Moving Through," "From the Blank Space I" and "From the Blank Space II." McNeely's work is autobiographical, chronicling her experience with cancer and an illegal abortion before Roe vs. Wade. The paintings, which she made throughout the 1970s, show visceral imagery of contorted bodies, wounds and gauze covering up bloody and broken limbs.

"That's my pain, that's what you're looking at," she told The Times.

Her work is shown across three cities; the other exhibitions are at the Whitney in New York and at the Rubell Museum in Washington, D.C. McNeely shares her cancer experience, placing bodies in the confines of hospital spaces, in the series "From the Blank Space."

Her depictions of an illegal abortion are a testament to her uncensored and unapologetic storytelling. McNeely calls on people to "be awake" and pay attention to the ways the government controls individual agency.

"They're letting their eyes close and letting themselves slip by the reality that is happening to other people," she said.

EPITAPH

Ursula

Juanita McNeely, Triskaidepatych, 1986, panel twelve. Oil on linen, 72 x 36 inches (6 x 3 feet). Thirteen panels, overall: 72 x 624 inches (6 x 52 feet). Courtesy James Fuentes Gallery LLC

EPITAPH

"That's How You Live"
Remembering Juanita McNeely (1936–2023)

By Hall W. Rockefeller

My relationship with the painter Juanita McNeely, who died in October 2023, began with one remarkable work.

Weeks before pandemic lockdowns began in the United States, I had wandered into James Fuentes LLC on Delancey Street on one of my monthly trips to the Lower East Side in search of women artists; at the time, I was conducting interviews for the platform Less Than Half, which has evolved into a series of courses focused on teaching women to collect the work of women artists. Inside the gallery, I was confronted with a continuous painting in thirteen parts, lining two perpendicular walls of the room—McNeely's Triskaidepatych (1986).

Before me was a series of bodies in paint, electrified with life. As she would tell me when we met a few weeks later, anatomical correctness was not her concern when she painted the body. These were not images drawn from a model, but from everyday observation. If they didn't look right, they felt right.

The many bodies that appear in Triskaidepatych are more often incomplete, or upside-down— some positioned with the almost absurd vertiginousness of a Tintoretto—than in possession of a full set of limbs, abiding gravity's pull. They are foreshortened, legless, armless, dissolving into backgrounds of blue or pink, obscured by brushy lines or refracted in a mirror. (The idea that Juanita could paint a staid seated portrait is almost laughable.)

In one frame, a horse, whose faithful rendering is a badge of artistic achievement, is far from a creature drawn with such specificity you can almost see its great haunches moving smoothly beneath its skin. Instead, the barrel of its body—really just a pink oval—is secondary to its legs akimbo, its hooves perched on stilts, threatening to give out beneath the animal's awkward weight.

Nearby is an image of Bacon-like grotesqueness, a foot caught in a rope or chain, the body (a mass of innards and bones, a ribcage spilling carnage) attached to it upended. Another shows a woman crouching, face thrust towards the ground, arms flung straight back in a pose not even the double-jointed could achieve.

From one panel to the next are portraits of psychological distress and relentless physical pain. I think of these works less like a story—acute agony and anxiety lack a narrative—and more like a run-on sentence, tumbling over itself with the energy and emotion of the previous clause. The work's final panel is different from the others, filled by the screaming face of a primate. Teeth bared, eyes squeezed shut, it ends with an exclamation point.

I learned later that this work was one that Juanita began just after she started using a wheelchair, when her doctors told her she wouldn't be able to paint on a large scale again because of a spine injury. That the work was in thirteen parts seemed appropriate—a large enough number to make a point, but also an inauspicious one: bad luck wasn't going to stop her.

I didn't know any of this then, but I could sense in the art her spirit. In fact, I knew nothing of the artist's biography: her upbringing in St. Louis, where she studied the work of Max Beckmann (an influence more obvious in her early work); the cancer she suffered as a young woman; the harrowing abortion she underwent. All I knew is that I had to know more, and immediately asked the gallerist if I could speak to her in person.

Westbeth Artists Housing, founded in 1970 as affordable housing for artists and their families, is a 383-unit apartment building and arts complex. Once home to storied names like Hannah Wilke and Diane Arbus, the building is as significant, but less glamorously tawdry, as the Chelsea Hotel, and immortalized in city lore. I always feel a thrill when I visit an artist there—its check-in desk, elevators and windowless hallways, utilitarian and without frills, bely the artistic lives behind each door.

It was at Westbeth that Juanita McNeely spent decades of her life painting. And it was there that I met her in February 2020.

As in so many artist's living spaces, hers was the antithesis of the gallery, its cluttered fullness neither studied nor unkempt. There were paintings hanging on the walls, of course, but there were also vases and jars scattered on top of bookshelves and on sideboards, covered in the same contorted figures as in her canvases, as if they had found a new home on the surface of domestic objects, evidence of art leaching into life.

I asked Juanita about these, wondering how ceramics had come into her practice. "Create a perfect pot," she recalled her teacher ordering, when she was a student at Washington University in St. Louis. Knowing there was no such thing, she deliberately dropped hers, shattering it completely. When her husband Jeremy Lebensohn passed me one to look at, I worried I would do the same, without her sense of rebellion.

Over the next couple hours Juanita's stories revealed her to be truly individual, setting out on her own path from the very beginning. When she got bored of painting the same models in art school, she asked to take a semester off in order to return with work that would convince her teacher to let her paint what she wanted to—and it worked.

Her choice of medium was also unusual in a moment when the definitions of art were expanding to conceptual, performance, land, happenings and video; pretty much anything that wasn't traditional was on the rise. "For years they were saying, 'Painting is dead,'" she recalled—to which she responded: "Blah blah blah." Hers was not the choice of fellow feminist artists who found in their bodies a new tool, especially to protest sexual violence against women. Why use a medium dominated by men for centuries, when women could explore and claim new frontiers?

As a member of groups like Women Artists in Revolution and the Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement, Juanita was included in feminist shows and counted many of the participants—Hannah Wilke, Louise Bourgeois, Joan Semmel and Alice Neel—as friends and acquaintances. Her forays into ceramics were also shaped by a different ethos than that of her feminist colleagues who were experimenting with craft, like Judy Chicago, whose ceramic plates were fashioned into vulvas in the Dinner Party, or Miriam Schapiro, whose

EPITAPH

"For years they were saying, 'Painting is dead,'" she recalled—to which she responded: "Blah blah blah."

Pattern and Decoration movement was unflinchingly feminine. Painting her work on a vessel seemed like an analog to her multi-paneled canvases; following the figure as it dances around the outside of the pot is similarly episodic to the way a triptych is read. Ceramics solved a formal problem for her, not a political one. "If you're using the figure," she told me, "it's easy to keep going someplace."

Juanita's story is full of bodily pain—she struggled with hemorrhaging as a young woman and early bouts with cancer forced her to have an illegal abortion in 1967. Years later, an unlucky fall left her wheelchair bound. She told me, also, of an attempted rape at the hands of a gallery visitor. For her honesty on these subjects I am grateful.

As an interviewer you never can give to your subject what she has given to you; all you can do is thank her and leave, hoping you asked good questions. What you certainly should be able to do is safeguard those stories—as it would happen, I shattered the metaphorical pot. Soon after I left Westbeth, the pandemic set in and we retreated to our homes. Somewhere in that chaos, I had to reset my phone's memory, and lost the recording of our interview in the process.

I knew Juanita was frail and her memory already fuzzy with old age. I knew, too, that there wasn't much in the way of recorded interviews before I spoke with her. I worried that I had lost a piece of art history. Was there another recording of her voice out there, or had I sacrificed her stories to the ether? I consoled myself by insisting I could rerecord the interview, but when would this pandemic be over? And when it was, would Juanita—in body or mind—be there when I could come back to Westbeth?

Juanita McNeely in front of one of her paintings, 1977. Courtesy Jeremy Lebensohn

Juanita McNeely, Alice Neel, Lucia Vernarelli and Diana Kurz (left to right) at Alliance of Figurative Artists meeting, 1971. Courtesy Marjorie Kramer

Thankfully, in 2022, I arranged another interview. When I did see Juanita again, the change was visible in her face, which was significantly less full than when I had seen her two years before. My heart sank thinking of the lost recording, assuming I would not hear the same anecdotes. But if her delivery was a little slower, the snap of a comeback or punchline of a story were all still there. Our crisis was averted, but not without instilling within me the importance of the Cloud. (The transcription of our talk was published in 2022 by James Fuentes Press.)

Today, the most visible record of Juanita's life is Is It Real? Yes, It Is!, a 1969 painting depicting McNeely's illegal abortion two years before, which was acquired by the Whitney Museum in New York in 2022. It now hangs prominently in their permanent collection galleries, its wall label referencing the Supreme Court's 2022 Dobbs decision, reversing fifty years of federal protection of abortion rights. The work was the first image of an abortion to enter the museum's collection.

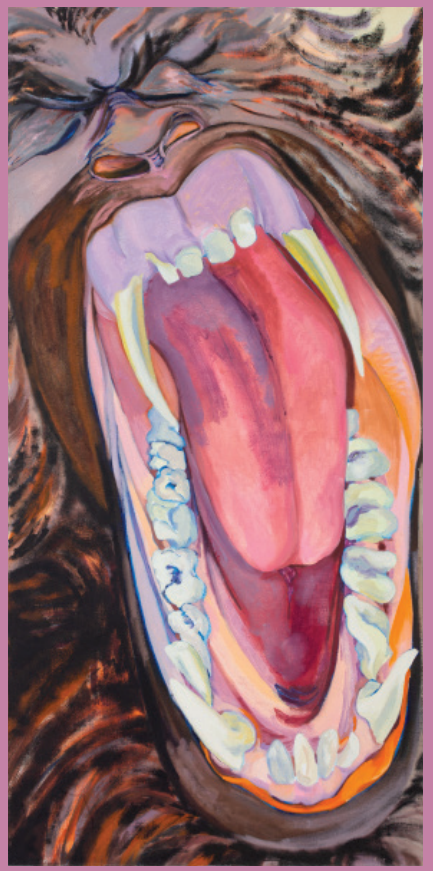
In Google Image search results for the painting, the image is blurred, warning the browser of "explicit content." I am sure Juanita would be disappointed in knowing this, as she emphatically insisted that life be looked at straight in the face. When a mother complained that the work in an exhibition wasn't appropriate for her young daughter, Juanita insisted the opposite. "What is so awful about a woman bleeding?" she said to me. "That's how you give birth. That's how you die. That's how you live."

The monumental work is fractured into nine vignettes, snapshots of a harrowing experience. It was in a similar state that I met Juanita, her long life coming to me in small-but-vivid doses. Like her other paintings, the panels represent exploration, nonconformism, rebellion, torment, pain, friendship—embodying the life she lived in full.

EPITAPH

When a mother complained that the work in an exhibition wasn't appropriate for her young daughter, Juanita insisted the opposite. "What is so awful about a woman bleeding?" she said to me. "That's how you give birth. That's how you die. That's how you live."

Juanita McNeely, Triskaidepatych, 1986, panel three. Oil on linen, 72 x 36 in. (6 x 3 feet). Courtesy James Fuentes Gallery LLC



Juanita McNeely, Triskaidepatych, 1986, panel thirteen. Oil on linen, 72 x 36 in. (6 x 3 feet). Courtesy James Fuentes Gallery LLC

Art in America

Juanita McNeely, "Is It Real? Yes, It Is!" (1969) (all images courtesy of James Fuentes Gallery)

JUANITA McNEELY'S MULTI-PANEL PAINTINGS CHANNEL HARROWING MEDICAL TRAUMAS

By Julian Kreimer

Juanita McNeely's exhibition, her first at James Fuentes, comprised two large multi-panel paintings that transmit the pain of their female subjects with an intensity that is almost too much to bear and a painterly confidence that makes it hard to look away. McNeely, now eighty-four, has been a practicing painter since she was a teenager. Her 1967 arrival in New York from the Midwest coincided with the growth of second-wave feminism, and she actively participated in groups like Women Artists in Revolution and the Redstockings. McNeely conjures the brutal pressure of existing in a repressive culture through her morphing of imagery, while remaining deeply immersed in traditions of figurative painting.

Is It Real? Yes It Is (1969) consists of eight rectangular panels surrounding a larger square one, all depicting different moments in a female figure's nightmarish medical scene. As in Max Beckmann's paintings, which McNeely studied closely as an art student in St. Louis, thick black lines define contours and colors skew to unsettling hues. In most of the panels, warm siennas, purples, and black jar against cool acid yellows and hospital mint greens.

The work speaks to McNeely's own trauma as a young artist, when she was diagnosed with a malignant tumor while pregnant and her life was in the hands of doctors unwilling to operate because of the risk to her fetus. Though she eventually had the operation, the experience was harrowing, and she channels its horror here. In the central canvas, a female figure lies on a hospital bed with her legs in stirrups, a tube stuck in her mouth, and her eyes shut. She is surrounded by pelvic X-rays, medical lights, and, incongruously, a sailor-capped Donald Duck, his arms upraised as if in a cruel taunt. From a small slit in the flat blue background emerges a hand gripping a pair of forceps pointed at her genitals. One panel, painted from the perspective of the patient, depicts three masked doctors seen through a tangle of tubes and lights, while another shows a trio of black buzzards clawing and shredding the flesh of a lifeless body, which casts a giant phallic shadow.

The show's other work, *Triskaidekaptych* (1986), comprises thirteen large panels that wrapped around the corner of the front gallery. The

enormous scale of the work seems designed to prove a point: McNeely painted the canvases four years after suffering spinal damage in a fall that left her reliant on a wheelchair. Each panel shows a figure in a strange space: some are eerie landscapes with elongated cypresses; others, fractured interiors with windows askew. Scumbled paint throughout leaves traces of earlier layers, giving the scenes an ominous undertone. Thin black bars hold figures in contorted positions, while a grouping of spikes forms a bed for a flayed horse. In one panel, a human body hung by its ankle from the ceiling has been torn open—a mess of bloody bones and viscera. As in many paintings throughout McNeely's career, the toes are at once splayed out and bent, powerfully conveying the sensation of extreme pain. The wonderful paradox of McNeely's work is that it takes an enormous vital energy—a combination of rigor and wildness—to depict this kind of despair.

HYPERALLERGIC

View of Juanita McNeely's 2020 exhibition at James Fuentes.

JUANITA McNEELY'S PAINTINGS BARE PAIN AND RESILIENCE IN EQUAL MEASURE

Looking at McNeely's work through the lens of pain is almost inevitable, but it was a feat of strength for McNeely to paint some of these canvases at all, as doctors insisted she would never work at such a scale again.

by Valentina Di Liscia

Juanita McNeely's works illustrate the life of a woman whose body betrayed her from an early age. In her paintings, currently on view at James Fuentes Gallery, McNeely's torment is palpable in blinding fluorescent hellscapes; her physical pain pulses vigorously through the twisted limbs of wrung figures, strapped-in and tied down, as crows peck at formless masses.

But these are also portraits of a woman whose body sustained her. McNeely's strength pours in from the glimpses of blue and yellow that punctuate her figurations like skylights. Her resilience cuts through the misery with beauty and even humor: an absurdly enlarged organ; a buckled horse with an awkward gallop.

Organized in collaboration with Mitchell Algus, Juanita McNeely presents two massive, multi-panel works that bridge nearly two decades of the artist's life. "Is It Real? Yes, It Is!" (1969) chronicles McNeely's nightmarish experience with abortion, before Roe v. Wade decriminalized the procedure. (McNeely discovered she was pregnant while at the hospital for a tumor that required surgery, which made doctors reluctant to treat her.) She rendered bodies wrangled, bound, and confined in coarse black outlines.

The 13-panel work "Triskaidekaptych" (1986) was painted nearly 20 years later, after McNeely suffered a fall that damaged her spinal cord. She shed her heavy outlining in favor of a diverse range of approaches. Meticulous networks of line and form coexist with spasmodic explosions of color. While some images are direct, clear, and explicit — a close-up of a roaring gorilla — others are geometricized and fragmented, jumbling our sense of figure and ground and conveying an unsteady vertigo.

The episodes McNeely paints are harrowing, but her work also makes me think of the routine moments of discomfort women experience every day. It takes me back to my feet in cold stirrups, legs sprawled, as I'm told there isn't enough research on chronic fatigue syndrome yet — one

Detail of Juanita McNeely, “Triskaidekaptych” (1986)

of the many conditions that likely remain enigmatic because they disproportionately affect women.

Looking at McNeely’s work through the lens of pain is almost inevitable — physical suffering literally constitutes her subject matter. But it was a feat of strength for McNeely to paint some of these canvases at all, as doctors insisted she would never work at such a scale again. These two women — the one who agonizes and the one who persists — are one and the same, and they create a rare tension that makes for thrilling painting.

The New York Times

A panel from “Triskaidekaptych,” by Juanita McNeely.

WHAT TO SEE IN NEW YORK ART GALLERIES THIS WEEK
Katherine Bernhardt’s E.T. paintings; Michael Rakowitz’s reconstructions of antiquities; and Juanita McNeely’s contorted female figures.
by Will Heinrich

What if Max Beckmann had made a painting about illegal abortion? He might have produced something like Juanita McNeely’s 1969 “Is It Real? Yes It Is,” a magnificent nine-panel installation showing now at James Fuentes Gallery in collaboration with Mitchell Algus. A squatting skeleton, pinioned women with buckled knees and crows picking the flesh from a prone female body are all rendered with Beckmann’s crashing color scheme and Expressionist urgency. But they don’t come across as allegories — they look like facts. In the central canvas, a hand holding glittering silver forceps reaches toward a woman’s naked crotch under an oversize Donald Duck toy. Altogether it’s a searing evocation of the fractured way we remember traumatic experiences — and of the many bloody realities most people prefer not to look at.

In 1985, after an accident put Ms. McNeely in a wheelchair, a doctor told her she’d never make another large painting. She responded with “Triskaidekaptych,” which comprises 13 substantial canvases parading edge to edge around two full walls of the gallery. Contorted female figures are still here, along with torture, medical horror and a screaming baboon’s face. But the introduction of softer blues and pinks, and of a cloudiness in the way those colors are applied, changes the tone, and these writhing figures could very well be dancing. Two faceless women on trapezes, swinging through banks of mirrors, add a heavy note of self-consciousness: If “Is it real” is the moment of trauma, in all its kaleidoscopic brutality, “Triskaidekaptych” is the elaborate mental process a person goes through to make sense of it.

ARTFORUM

Juanita McNeely, *Is It Real? Yes It Is*, 1969, nine panels, Oil on linen, overall 12 × 12 feet.

JUANITA McNEELY

by Johanna Fateman

The wailing wreckage of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, 1937, the necrotic wrist stump in Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Self-Portrait as a Soldier*, 1915, and the hellscapes of Otto Dix's series *"Der Krieg" (The War)*, 1924, all echo in Juanita McNeely's pained visions. For her exhibition at James Fuentes, presented in collaboration with Mitchell Algus Gallery, the eighty-four-year-old artist showed two epic multipanel paintings from previous decades of her career, rendered in a sui generis expressionist style. The shell-shocked tricks of European modernism find new life in these complex works, depicting the horror of pre–*Roe v. Wade* America and the sadism of patriarchal medicine, as well as the particulars of two traumatic ordeals.

The first: McNeely, who was already a cancer survivor, learned that she had a new tumor and that she was pregnant soon after she arrived in New York in 1967. At the dawn of feminism's second wave, as women's organized rage began to dissolve the sludge of sexual shame, she had to fight to obtain a lifesaving abortion. The furious *Is It Real? Yes It Is*, 1969, which hung in the gallery's smaller room, takes this nightmare as its subject. It's an alternately dark and sickly lit reproach, dense with macabre detail. The center canvas shows a woman in a hospital bed, her legs in gynecological stirrups. A torqued perspective gives us a view of her crotch—a vortex of slashing brushstrokes—as well as the forceps that, with prurience and revulsion, approach it through the slit in a blue curtain. Donald Duck watches from the shadows.

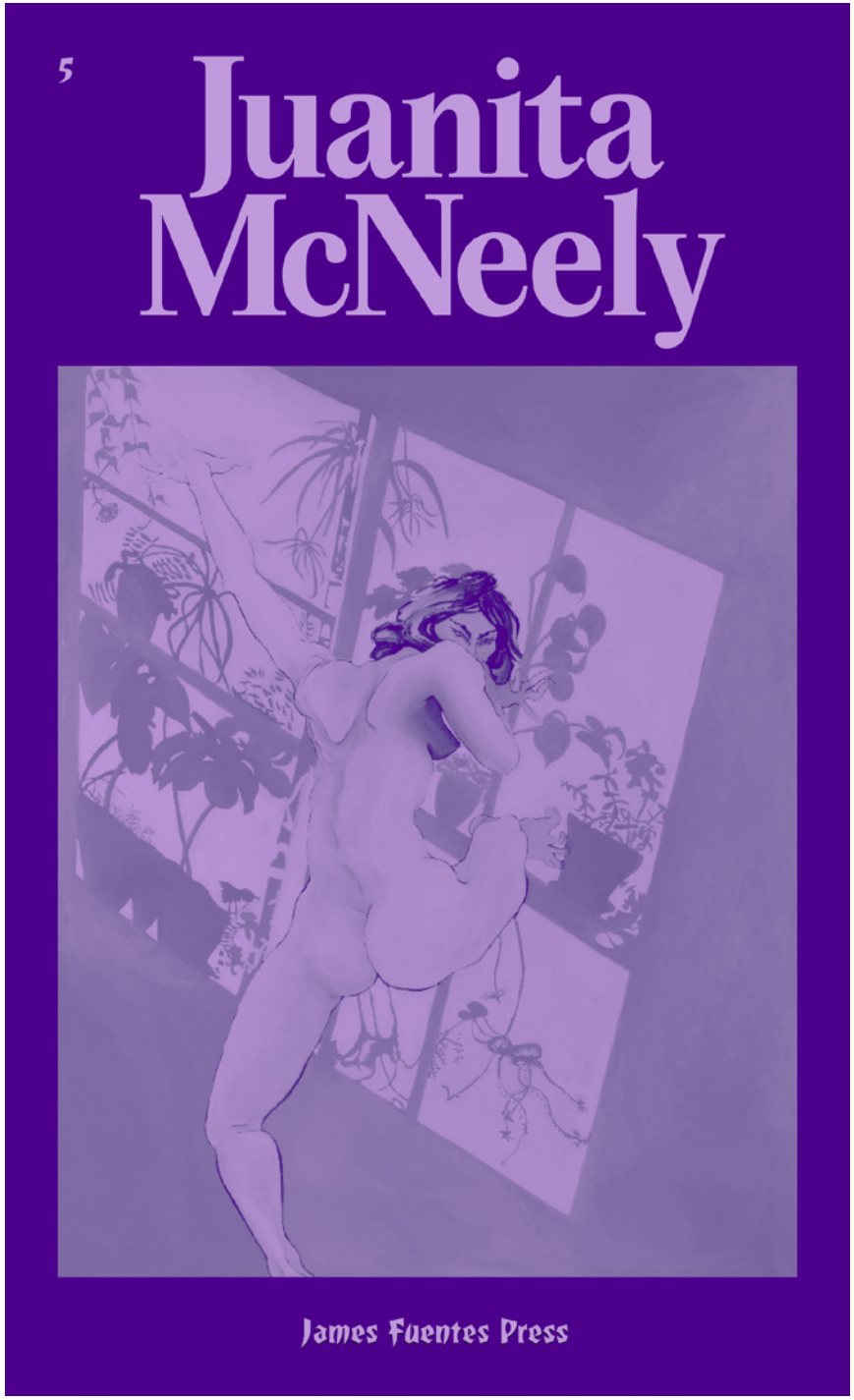
McNeely's execution looks speedy, but she captures the torpor of drugged desolation as well as terror's adrenaline flush in the other panels. One features vultures picking at what might be a shrouded corpse, laid to rest on a sluglike phallus; another shows a foreshortened, spread-legged nude holding a bouquet of ghoulish masks on sticks. Elsewhere, faces obscured by surgical masks stare at us through a tangle of medical equipment, as though we are the patient.

When it was made, *Is It Real?* was radical—virtually unprecedented—for its depiction of abortion, and it is still profoundly confrontational in its demand that we, too, experience the dissociative split produced by objectification and near death. We see what McNeely saw when she was splayed on the operating table, and we are there with her when she hov-

ers nearby, out of body, cursing archetypal misogyny with hallucinatory anguish. The shattered narrative forms an unfolded anti-altarpiece.

So does the larger, harrowing *Triskaidekaptych*, 1986. This massive work, of thirteen panels hung close to the floor in a horizontal line, spanned two walls of the otherwise empty main gallery. Painted over the course of a year after a fall that resulted in a debilitating spinal-cord injury, the dynamic sequence of alarming jump cuts shows bodies—or rather, fantastic variations on the same one—in peril and agony. Rendered in electric pastel hues, a lusciously menacing interior landscape is the backdrop for this dynamic victim. Contorted, she tumbles through space or crouches, flayed. Her monstrous form appears upside down and dismembered; it hangs from a single foot, disemboweled. Here, McNeely abandons Max Beckmann's gloomy figuration for Max Ernst's apocalyptic Surrealism—charred spires rise from poisoned waters; a pink horse desperately balances on them like stilts.

But the artist works in the tradition of another twentieth-century avant-garde, too. She came up in the feminist art movement of the late 1960s and the '70s and has explored—without the attention she deserves—the carnal, mammalian, menstruating, sick, and disabled body in uncommonly imaginative personal political terms. Bless this show, designed to leave us wanting more, for offering viewers the chance to see these landmark works. I hope McNeely gets a retrospective in New York soon.



A Full Circle: Hall W. Rockefeller in conversation with Juanita McNeely

A Full Circle: Hall W. Rockefeller in conversation with Juanita McNeely

Juanita McNeely doesn't live in a hypothetical world. Her images of naked, mostly female figures aren't drawn directly from life, but they are true to the image of Woman that she has in her mind: a synthesis of all the artist has observed of human movement and gesture. This is not to say that her forms are perfect. Anatomically correct, yes, but often exaggerated, lanky, or contorted. Perfection bores her, as she finds nothing in it to work for or against. The flawless simply isn't real and is therefore not worth her time.

It would be easy to read McNeely's grounded attitude as informed by a life of bodily suffering—as she has experienced—but this may also be a result of her upbringing as a Midwesterner, an identity she didn't completely abandon when she left St. Louis as a young adult. A biographical reading of her work, however, distracts from its potent political message, which also unflinchingly depicts a universal human pain.

Though this is on its own is a feminist stance—to bring the reality of women's lives to canvas, to depict bodies in the way they are lived in—painting was not what McNeely's feminist peers of the 1970s were doing. Artists like Hannah Wilke, who lived in the same apartment building, were bringing their bodies into the work, using performance as protest. Others were creating installations and interventions, making political statements with craft materials typically considered feminine, as Louise Bourgeois did and whom McNeely also knew.

So why make art in a medium inextricable from the male canon of capital A Art History? As McNeely most often paints on an epic scale, across numerous connected canvases, she presents an understanding for how painting can incorporate narrative and movement across time, depicting both the psychological and physical truths of an embodied life. The tradition of painting, McNeely proves, can itself serve a feminist purpose.

When she painted her figures on ceramic pots and vases, she wasn't using a craft medium the way her contemporaries were, either. Instead of throwing her own pots, McNeely would swap with ceramicists she knew, hoping for signs of their hand in the clay, which she would use to inform the placement of her figures. McNeely's embrace of pottery was not a bid to elevate craft to the level of fine art, but rather simply another means for communicating a complicated story.

Using the vessel's continual surface she tells of a multifaceted experience, as a theater in the round can reveal the varied perspectives that a proscenium flattens. By no means decorative art, we may sooner read this narrative in relation to what, say, Carolee Schneemann was doing in her feminist performances of the same time. Even when approaching the form of the circle—which perhaps only Giotto, as the legend goes, could

A Full Circle: Hall W. Rockefeller

render perfectly—McNeely keenly found within it signs of human imperfection and complexity. Entering into the long tradition of painting, she transforms it into a dimension of embodied experience.

in conversation with Juanita McNeely

Content warning: the following interview contains a description of sexual assault.

Hall W. Rockefeller

Tell me about your time as an art student at Washington University in St. Louis.

Juanita McNeely

I mean, I was lucky at the school I went to. We had all these models, the same models. They were all good models and all interesting, but I just got very tired of it. I mean, every day you go to look at the same person. I thought, "Oh, it's got to be better than this." And so I went and spoke to the painting professor. I said, "Can I take off from school? Just give me a semester. Let me paint anything I want. And I'll bring it back to you. And if you think it's not worth doing, you let me know. Then I'll just quit."

Hall W. Rockefeller

Wow.

Juanita McNeely

And he let me do that. I made all these images and ideas and brought them back. I was young but I brought it back. I lined them up and said, "May I

come back and stay as long as you say so? But I still would like to do what I want to do." I was surprised they let me.

Hall W. Rockefeller

That's fantastic.

Juanita McNeely

I loved being there. It was a wonderful place.

Hall W. Rockefeller

You saw a lot of Max Beckmann's work in St. Louis, right?

Juanita McNeely

Oh, I used to sit in the library, and say, "I'm going to beat you, [Beckmann]. I'm going to beat you."

Hall W. Rockefeller

And who taught you ceramic?

Juanita McNeely

The only woman ceramicist there taught us. She prompted, "Well, will you make the perfect pot

today?" Right away, my head went zap. I don't like hearing that. "You just keep working on it until it becomes as perfect as you can make it. Come show me afterwards." I spent the time being bored, doing that. Then finally, I just kind of gracefully dropped it as a mistake. Is there such thing as a perfect pot?

Hall W. Rockefeller

No.

Juanita McNeely

I couldn't believe this. And I didn't want to be the one that did it.

Hall W. Rockefeller

It's like a perfect circle. That doesn't exist either.

Juanita McNeely

I mean, it just doesn't make sense, things being perfect.

Hall W. Rockefeller

That's a fantastic story. I think that really sums up something about your character.

Juanita McNeely

Yes. You get a lot of that. I used to knit sweaters. I purposely left a mistake in it because I liked the idea. I always made mistakes anyhow—and just worked it in as the thing to do.

Hall W. Rockefeller

I'd love to talk more about the pots you did make. Are the figures on the pots coming to you from your imagination?

Juanita McNeely

Yeah. My mind. My mind. Wherever I went I was studying where the person put their foot, what angle their head was. I was always studying the figure. And that's all I was interested in, the figure. And so, you start to record it. Basically, if you look at my paintings, they're broken arms and legs. But they're with intent. I get very upset when I look at a painting that someone did as a figure painting and an arm is broken, but not on purpose. That's irritating to me.

Hall W. Rockefeller

They don't understand the figure. They don't understand anatomy. You said you moved on to ceramics

because you were tired of painting and you wanted something different.

Juanita McNeely

Well, if you're using the figure, it's easy to keep going someplace. That's one reason.

Hall W. Rockefeller

So is there sort of a narrative? Or is it a repetition of a single form around the vessel?

Juanita McNeely

It's a narrative. I start someplace... It's very nice when you work on them, because when you start, you begin to feel like you can feel the incised lines. I realized there was something really wonderful to have a drawing already, and then you just start carving around.

Hall W. Rockefeller

So these lines in the clay, those are your lines? You did that? Or was this texture done by the potter?

Juanita McNeely

The potter.

Hall W. Rockefeller

Okay. And then you responded to it.

Juanita McNeely

Right.

Hall W. Rockefeller

When you talk about the circle of the pot, do you think of it in the same way as your multiple canvases, which tell a narrative?

Juanita McNeely

I'm as interested in what is going to happen next, on the other side. I start off with very planned images, what I call thumbnail sketches. This is basically to clear my mind. I don't like clichés. I mean, when you're making something, it could easily become a cliché. So I try to do all of the ideas and just get rid of them. Then I just close in on it and try to erase, erase, erase, erase. Get down to something simple, so that when I look at it, I see it fresh.

Hall W. Rockefeller

Let's see. There's one pot here with an image of a two people on it....

Juanita McNeely

They're couples. What amazed me, a lot of people just assume... one of the paintings that I see they labeled from the gallery as a couple, a man or woman having sex, making love or whatever you want to call it. And they thought it was rape. I thought to myself, if I was depicting rape... I've almost been raped in a gallery that I used to show in and believe me, you just don't roll over.

Hall W. Rockefeller

So you would've depicted it very differently if that were the case.

Juanita McNeely

[She tells the story of her assault:] I had placed a folding table against the wall, to the back of the gallery. So that if someone came by and asked me, "Did you make this?" I always said, "No, I didn't do it," thinking that would save me some. It didn't. And when I ended up on the floor, I started screaming, "I'm going to kill you." And I meant it.

I just kept saying it over and over, "Do you hear me? You have no right to touch me. I'm going to kill you." And the two of us tangled on the floor with this metal table. And we got turned around in it. When I got loose, I started after him and went

out the open door and he stopped and looked and I just took off down Spring Street.

I was yelling the whole time, "I'm going to kill you. Watch out. I'm going to kill you." When I came back down to the door, I felt sorry. This man looked at me and he said, "Was he trying to steal from you?" I remember saying, "Is that all you think that happens to a woman? They lose some money?"

Hall W. Rockefeller

Oof.

Juanita McNeely

I said, "No, I was trying to kill him." The guy was beside himself. He just left.

Hall W. Rockefeller

I think that's the problem we have, the people in power who are men just can't conceive of the experience of being a woman.

Juanita McNeely

In another gallery, I had lots of bleeding women on the walls. I used to paint that a lot, because it was what I knew and what was real to me. I remember this woman came to the door and she said, "What

are you doing here?" I responded, "What do you mean?" She said, "You have my child right here. And they see all this blood coming out of a woman." I turned around and said, "First of all, you came inside. Second of all, can I ask you what is so awful about a woman bleeding?" I said, "That's how you give birth. That's how you die. That's how you live."

Hall W. Rockefeller

Right.

Juanita McNeely

"Blood," I said, "is quite beautiful if you look at it." And I said, "It's a way of teaching. It's okay. It's okay to have this happen." But, she would have no part. I had a wonderful way of not being quite aware of the work's impact on people. It was a gift to me really, because I just do it.

Another time, this lovely older man came to see my work to review it. I had all these women, blood, everything. He looked, looked, looked and I thought, "Oh brother, here we go." Then he did the sweetest thing. He came over, he said, "Would you mind? I'm so fascinated, but I don't want to hurt your feelings. I need a question answered." And it was a beautiful question: "Do you mind if I ask, why do you have all the blood? Do all women bleed this much?" I told him, "Actually, you're the first person

to ask," I said, "It's just my perception that I want to talk about. Some women may bleed as much as I'm showing, but some may just have a spot, that's it. Not everyone may have that experience." And he said, "Thank you." And I realized afterwards that a lot of men in certain situations, they may not be able [to understand], they may not have seen.

Hall W. Rockefeller

When you think of your art out in the world, separate from you, do you think of it as important that other people are looking at it and learning from it? Or is it something else?

Juanita McNeely

It's just something else. But I would love [learning] to be the response because, if I'm truthful, I had a lot of hemorrhaging when I was younger. And very seriously. So that's my experience, not someone else's experience. I found it almost beautiful to me. I could just freely say what I wanted and it just never occurred to me why someone would be upset. Another time an art critic suddenly comes up and I hear her say, "Who's this artist?" She asked, "Is she crazy? She needs a good shrink." I was dying to say something, but I had to say the right thing. I mean, she was a very well known art critic. I mean, I've had men come right up to Jeremy and to me and

say, "Oh, I really love that position. Is that your position?"

Hall W. Rockefeller

Oh, God.

Juanita McNeely

I said, "No."

Hall W. Rockefeller

Yikes.

Juanita McNeely

He continued, "Do you do that with your..." I thought, oh God, It's a moron that's walked in the office.

Hall W. Rockefeller

That's exactly the right word. Why did you find paint to be the right way of expressing what you wanted to express? Why not another medium?

Juanita McNeely

I had started as an oil painter at school and I kept

doing it. I loved the smell and the mood. I just loved it.

Hall W. Rockefeller

And what did you paint the ceramics with?

Juanita McNeely

Well, that's a good question. They're glazes. The other thing with ceramics is that, in a sense, it's frightening because when you paint it, you dry it, you put it in the kiln, and prepare to find out what it looks like afterward. And it doesn't necessarily look like you'd thought and hoped, but it's fascinating to see.

Hall W. Rockefeller

So you're okay with that? You accept that?

Juanita McNeely

Yeah, it's fun.

Hall W. Rockefeller

It sounds like with both oil paints and glazes, it's a commitment.

Juanita McNeely

For years they were saying, "Painting is dead." Blah, blah, blah.

Hall W. Rockefeller

But you painted anyway.

Juanita McNeely

Yeah. I mean, when I was at Washington the new artists coming out of New York were abstract painters. And I thought, oh no, I want to do the figure.

Hall W. Rockefeller

Looking back at the hegemony of abstract art in the '40s, '50s, and '60s—there was a newness and there was excitement around newness and the way it defied traditions, defied the norms—but then it becomes the dominant thing and you can't do anything else. The thing that began as counterculture becomes the culture.

Juanita McNeely

Or you can just think of everything figured as abstract at the same time. I mean, Joan Semmel,

A Full Circle: Hall W. Rockefeller in conversation with Juanita McNeely

I remember seeing her have wonderful abstract painting. And then she came back from Spain. When Joan came back, she found an image for herself. But most importantly, she found a reason, a cause, a particular motive for why she was painting what she painted.

Hall W. Rockefeller

And you think that was because of her experience in Europe, in Spain, that she found the body and painted the body?

Juanita McNeely

The old bodies. I mean, certainly Alice Neel did that as well, but her body really wasn't aged, so it's different.

Hall W. Rockefeller

Do you think that your work is motivated, in the way that Joan Semmel was motivated to depict the body, by the contorted body, the body in pain?

Juanita McNeely

Yes, in pain, maybe. But I don't think of it as contortion.

Hall W. Rockefeller

I see.

Juanita McNeely

But yes, of course they are. I just don't think in those terms, in a sense. I get an idea or a feeling of what I want to say, I think for a long time, and I make loose sketches that are far off from the ideal—I never really think about one particular thing that it has to be. But I do paint blood a lot.

Hall W. Rockefeller

I think that you're right in saying that [blood] is there when you're born, it's there when you're alive, and it's there when you die. And if you're painting life and experience, blood is at every juncture.

Juanita McNeely

Yes.

Juanita McNeely

Art and Life Entwined

By Sharyn M. Finnegan

Fig. 1. Juanita McNeely, *Woman's Psyche* (1968), oil on linen, 146" x 126". Collection the artist.

New York feminist artist Juanita McNeely (b.1936) lives to paint. Her focus on the physicality of the human figure, often herself, with the figure as an active agent in interiorized expressionist images, is "both a response to and the starkest expression of women's burgeoning consciousness of their sexuality," according to April Kingsley.[1] While this is central to McNeely's work, she feels life, with *all* its manifestations, must be embraced, not avoided "to illuminate the act of living, the facing of death and, in between, the emotion and movement of life's journey."[2] No one paints the body like she does or with more imagination—gravity- and anatomy-defying, yet whole and completely believable with every muscle articulated. She trained herself to observe people and the way they move in detail. The inspiring personal journey of this artist has given shape to her intimately entwined art and life. She has the Gaelic gift of storytelling both verbally and visually, and life gave her quite a story.

McNeely's most powerful work tells a survivor's tale in unflinching images of suffering, sometimes involving female genitalia emitting blood, still taboo in a culture that is often death denying. Even though violence suffuses popular media such as television and film, it is generally stylized and unreal, rarely dealing with truly painful consequences. This artist's candid and provocative work creates disquiet, addressing familiar wounds that need attending to.

Growing up in St. Louis, Missouri, during a time when women were supposed to have a family and settle down, McNeely wanted instead to go to art school. Winning an art scholarship for her first oil painting at fifteen convinced her she was an artist, and the basement of her family's home became an art studio. It was also at that time that her health problems began. She lost a year of high school hospitalized with a terrifying case of excessive bleeding that, because of her young age, was perhaps more formative than later problems.

At the St. Louis School of Fine Arts at Washington University, one of McNeely's first teachers was Werner Drewes, one of several German expatriates, and in keeping with their Bauhaus training, the program was demanding, with classes six days and two nights a week. McNeely loved it. Drewes dressed in hand-woven fabrics made by his wife, Margaret Schrobsdorf, a textile artist, and lived in a home filled with art. Beyond exemplifying the sort of life McNeely longed for, Drewes contributed to her strong sense of composition. He was a strict, unrelenting taskmaster, "making my life hell with ruling pens."[3] At the same time, he was supportive and encouraging; he made her believe that her strongly expressionistic work was valuable by asking her to trade paintings with him.

During her first year of studies, McNeely contracted cancer and was given a prognosis of three to six months to live. When her doctors recommended she do whatever made her happy, she went back to art school. She survived, but "that was the beginning of what really formed me as someone who spoke about the things that are not necessarily pleasant, on canvas, things that perhaps most people even feel uncomfortable about looking at, much less talking about."[4] It was the beginning of the bond between her work and her life experiences.

McNeely's intuitive feeling for the figure, evident since childhood, led her during her sophomore year to ask if she could stop working from the model and work instead "from my head." She found looking at models painful, as they appeared to her "to have lost themselves." The professors granted her a two-month trial period, and she never used a model again. It seemed to set her free and was also the beginning of her multipanel works. Her understanding of the figure comes from her keen experience of her own body, enhanced by her quick grasp of anatomy and a strong visual memory that she has honed over time.

During breaks between classes, she learned a great deal walking around in the St. Louis Art Museum galleries. The works of Paul Gauguin became a primary influence: she found his paintings so beautiful, "they could make me cry, and it was a struggle not to be overwhelmed by them." From Matisse she learned how to draw and use underpainting to enrich color, and from Max Beckmann, in one of the largest collections of his work, she discovered how to find a visual vocabulary that could be an artist's own. She also found his surfaces and color exquisite, looking quickly done even when quite reworked. It was a standard she made her own.

Another valuable lesson for this innate feminist was administered by a male anatomy teacher, who took her aside after class, and with no preface, said, "Look, you will never make it as an artist…because you're too skinny and you don't look like a good fuck."[5] McNeely thought then and now, "Best lesson I ever learned. The reality was that a woman was not looked at as anything but a supporter, a lover, a model, and she certainly wouldn't stay with art, regardless of talent. I catalogued it at the back of my head and learned everything that they could teach me, and it was a lot."[6] Early on, she decided that obstacles would not deter her and, if anything, they would only spur her on.

After a hiatus, including a long stay in Mexico, McNeely went to graduate school at Southern Illinois University, where she had the electrifying experience of doing a happening with Allan Kaprow, who clearly "got" her work. Their very first conversation seemed like a continuation of one they'd had before. He soon told McNeely, "You're a New Yorker, go… "[7] Although not quite ready for that, she knew it was true, that being around people whose lives are about art, music, and literature, as well as living near great museums was important for her. McNeely's next move was to Chicago, where, after convincing The Chicago Art Institute administration that they'd never find a better teacher, they eventually gave her a teaching job and the chance to continue her professional career with solo and group shows. She loved teaching, finding it a mutual learning experience, and it was the beginning of a twenty-five year avocation. "As you explain to students, you are constantly checking your perceptions, asking yourself, 'Is that what I really think?'"[8] With figure drawing, she fostered in them the same confidence and visual memory she valued, having the model move around the studio while the students drew the figure in motion. After a year and a half in Chicago, she married and followed her husband to Western Illinois University. While teaching there, she had an epiphany: she *had* to go to New York. So in 1967, she left for that city, with her husband following her this time.

Settling into a sixth-floor walkup studio in the East Village, McNeely experienced the area as lovely and volatile. She was painting female-oriented sexuality, from a woman's point of view, a subject with little precedent then. *Woman's Psyche* (1968; Fig. 1), a four panel work, is full of images that would recur over her entire career, expressing her tragic vision of woman. It deals with the violence of birth, the sexuality that is part of a woman's life and her monthly bleeding, addressing the primitive myths that surround these events in our society. Masks on some of the women emphasize their denial of these realities. The images display pain and desperation because these realities are neither acknowledged nor, for that matter, honored. She was setting out all the themes she would develop and honor in the coming decades. Blood was already a constant in her work, representative of both life and death, which she deals with simultaneously here. One panel shows a swollen woman giving birth to a blue baby, supporting herself with two black, biomorphic phallic symbols that tower over her head. Caught by the foot, it makes the lack of choice clear.

As she made the rounds of the galleries with her slides, the director at Knoedler Gallery found the work strong, and McNeely had to repeat "It's mine" three times before he was convinced the work could be by a woman. Suddenly, though, they were not so interested—at this time female artists represented barely two percent of exhibiting artists in New York galleries.

Over the next few years, McNeely moved away from her German-influenced rawness and dark palette, deciding that

Fig. 2. Juanita McNeely, *Chameleon* (1970), oil on linen, 70" x 70". Collection the artist.

pregnant. Abortion was then illegal, which inhibited their treatment of her. What followed was a journey to two hospitals in two states and numerous meetings among (all male) doctors trying to decide what course to take. She nearly died in the process before she was given the necessary surgeries. (One doctor presumed that she would prefer to save the child than to live.) The experience increased her awareness of how much control men had over the lives of women, and it fed her feminism. McNeely would express this frustration through her painting. In 1969 she was one of the first artists to take on the taboo abortion issue in a nine-panel painting, *Is It Real? Yes, It Is!*, a strong but violent work.

Also around this time McNeely moved to Westbeth, a new housing project for artists in the West Village. It was her kind of place, with a mix of writers, visual artists, musicians, dancers, and choreographers. During Westbeth's early years, there were four galleries on the ground floor where the visual artists could take turns showing their work. These simultaneous solo exhibits yielded friendships with other painters as well as attention from the *New York Times*. Hilton Kramer noted "…her energy and the reach of her imagination,"[8] and Carter Ratcliffe in ARTnews, describing *Is it Real? Yes, it Is!*, wrote vividly of her "…themes of birth and death, sex and pain, are followed across nine canvases, melting and distorting shapes, conjuring up mythical and ritual objects from bedroom and delivery room procedure...at its climax…as if terror were felt in a very specific personage."[9]

painful images needed to be more "seductive" on the canvas, with beautiful color and a smoother surface. The imagery still came out of her experience, but now the central figure was more easily identified as the artist herself. The female nude had become personal with Paula Modersohn-Becker's self portraits, and was pushed further by Frida Kahlo to express her pain. Although unaware of Kahlo's work at this time, McNeely entered that tradition, creating active figures that were not only self-portraits but represented everywoman. *Chameleon* (1970; Fig.2) shows the artist lying stomach down, on a diagonally placed bed seen from above, fully occupying the canvas, in a radical departure from the Western tradition of the reclining female nude. Her turned head looks directly out at the viewer with alert cat-like eyes, fully aware of our gaze. Her bow-legs are spread, with one foot twisting inward in a bone crunching way, toes and fingers splayed. The contrasting pale sheets and dark green blanket with red blood emitting from her mouth swirl beneath her, graphically bringing out the vibrant, fully lit flesh tones. Her lover may have just left or be approaching, but this is no sweetly waiting woman. Her look challenges, while her active feet could propel her up at any moment. The artist seems to be saying that sex for a man may be about pleasure, but this is one woman who knows it is more complex, even as she is full of passion.

Around this time, McNeely found she had another tumor, and in the hospital, the doctors discovered that she was

In 1971 came a call for the first open feminist art exhibit, produced by a member of the Redstocking Artists group, Marjorie Kramer, at Museum, a temporary space at 729 Broadway. The participation fee to cover expenses was $1.50. McNeely carried in the four large panels of *Woman's Psyche*, with its arresting subject matter, and hung it on the wall herself. "I felt immediate love and at home," she said. "We women artists were no longer alone." Artists that participated included Alice Neel, Faith Ringgold, and over one hundred others. The lack of any hierarchy and the supportive community among the women artists would set the tone for the next decade of her life. She went to meetings of the Women Artists in Revolution (W.A.R.), Redstockings and other groups, believing that when women were able to be fulfilled, men would be much freer too.

Through her feminist friendships, McNeely became involved in the Figurative Alliance, an organization of figurative artists that met for panels and discussion Friday nights on the Lower East Side. She, Marjorie Kramer and Pat Mainardi, outraged at how little time was given to the women artists in the group,

proposed a women's panel on women artists' relationship to the male tradition of the nude, with McNeely as chair. She was tall and imposing, with a manner that didn't brook crossing. Despite this, there was a scramble to get the paintings hung around the room because the men did not want them up. NcNeely said that, when the dialogue started:

> If they'd had tacks, they would have thrown tacks at us. It was incredible. On the other hand, we had Alice Neel, sitting in those platypus shoes, looking like your grandmother. The only thing she didn't do was knit, because that's how she looked. But she had a mouth on her…Aristodemis Kaldis said the trouble with we women was that we didn't have any balls and we wanted them. Neel immediately responded, "Oh but dear, we do. We just carry them higher up and they're larger." That brought down the house and there wasn't a bitter or divisive moment from that point.

That was the beginning of the full participation of the women artists in those gatherings.

McNeely also joined an artists' cooperative, the Prince Street Gallery, in the then industrial section of SoHo, where she continued to express the "freedom to say what I had to say as a woman artist."[10] Only in retrospect did she realize how absolutely crucial it was for her as a young artist to have this freedom to paint what she wanted, with the support of her fellow artists. She did not have to worry about sales or whether her work was "too difficult" for the public. The rare combination of independence and the opportunity to show anything she wanted was galvanizing. During the 1970s she had six solo exhibitions at the Prince Street Gallery, each with all new work, as well as three shows elsewhere. (Some members of that gallery became close friends, including this writer.)

"An amazing range of people came into our storefront gallery—factory workers from that neighborhood who might ask first if there was an admission charge, as well as wonderful critics like Lawrence Alloway, who wrote about the artists' work without regard to gallery status or gender. The exposure was great, and critical acknowledgment was key."[11] Alloway wrote, in one of her favorite reviews, "Juanita McNeely pursues an iconography in which she expresses the autonomy of fear and pain in creatures caught in extreme situations. She paints the human body like a stranded starfish dying in the sun."[12] Her final involvement in the cooperative gallery world was with SOHO20 in the early 1980s.

McNeely's subject matter led to her participation in *Fight Censorship*, a group formed in 1973 by Anita Steckel with other women artists who felt their work was being misunderstood because they were using the body in erotic, personal, or sexual art work from a woman's point of view. The erotic tradition had always been about the power of men over women, where the female's sexual experience is one of surrender. Theirs was a new language of the body that critics and the public did not know how to process. McNeely, along with Judith Bernstein, Louise Bourgeois, Marty Edleheidt, Eunice Golden, Anne Sharp, Joan Semmel, and Hannah Wilke, found that often their

Fig. 3. Juanita McNeely, *Woman* (1975), cut paper, 40" x 30". Collection the artist.

Fig. 4. Juanita McNeely, *Birth* (1975), cut paper, 25" x 23". Collection the artist.

Fig.5. Juanita McNeely, *Moving Through* (detail) (1975), oil on linen, 8′ x 34′. Collection the artist.

work was tagged as erotic or pornographic, which was not at all their intention. (When McNeely exhibited prints in a group show at a Long Island gallery, the works ended up in a closet, to be seen only by request.) These women artists wanted to take control over the way their work was presented in the media in a more active way, make it clear that theirs was a new perspective—a woman's viewpoint—but it was still about the art. They lectured and showed work together at New York University, School of Visual Arts, and The New School and participated in discussions on local television in an effort to change the discourse. For McNeely the attention and documentation helped to clarify what she was doing.

Describing an "Artists Talk on Art" panel in March 1976, where McNeely was a participant, Sharon Wybrants reported that

> McNeely described a process in which she deals very consciously with her subject matter. She starts with a specific aspect of herself or a specific state of feeling in mind. Then she attempts to strip the cliché elements from the image. At this point she starts to play with the plastic qualities of the painting until she can identify totally and freshly with it.[13]

This process still forms the basis of McNeely's work. On the technical side, she starts with turpentine, a rag, and color on the brush, drawing and painting at the same time, wiping and moving and shifting continuously until the underpainting emerges. The heart of McNeely's practice is keeping it fresh-looking, so that even with constant changes within a piece, it never looks over-painted. Sometimes she lays the canvas flat on the floor, puts a little water on it and then drops oil paint into it, controlling it by blotting with a paper towel. The process of printmaking, especially monoprints––flicking, drawing, wiping with a cloth––enhanced her painting technique in a freeing way.

Along with prints and paintings on canvas, McNeely has also exhibited paintings on ceramics and cut paper work. These media in particular relate to working the surface in a different way. When at times, she would reach a point in her work on canvas where she felt she needed "to go someplace else," these other media would "shake up her mind and provoke new ways of dealing with the figure." Working on the round surface of a vase or drawing a line with scissors moving through paper (with no preliminary drawing) would suggest new forms to the artist. In 1975, the challenge of the cut paper work led her to create a new mode for this medium. She called it "exercises of the mind," seeing how many cuts she could make to get the imagery without the piece collapsing onto the floor. In these shadow-and-light drawings in space, the figure sits out from the surface, becoming almost a three-dimensional shadow-box paper hanging, quite fragile. These paper works contributed to the stripping down of her compositions. The figures, such as *Woman* (1975; Fig. 3) were now white and alone on a white ground, everything else finally taken away. *Birth* (1975; Fig. 4) is held together by just a few inches of uncut paper around the four sides. A pear shaped portrait of a vagina giving birth to a woman giving birth to a baby utilizes the shadows to project the woman's legs and the small head and arm emerging towards us. It is an image of wholeness and connectivity, both within the medium and psychically. One reviewer wrote: "This sensual and macabre imagery, in combination with the white-on-white delicacy of these works, results in a technical tour de force."[14] The images are both contained, barely, and released, as the light comes through the line and the bas-relief of the figure casts shadows. *Birth* most purely expresses the artist's desire for movement alone to show emotion.

The cut-paper images of figures floating seemingly with no support were of a piece with the artist's paintings that year, about what she was experiencing with a new bout of cancer, her last and the most difficult to beat. She went through a process of lightening her life, discarding possessions, dressing in white, simplifying, as if this lighter self could then fly through this illness. Amidst images of anger and pain, as in *Moving Through* (1975; Fig. 5 [detail]) is a strong woman leaping in front of a beautifully shadowed blue and violet wall. An angled reflection of a window lined with lush plants fills the panel with light. This figure's connection with the other panels lies in the mysterious deep red veils on her chest and pubic area. She bears the marks of the experiences she flies above. The last panel, completely white, also shows a lone woman leaping. She is paradoxically aloft and strong, with no visible means of support.

In the 1970s, McNeely met Jeremy Lebenshon, a sculptor, writer, set designer and professor of art, who would become her second husband. Lebenshon was involved in the Open Theater with Joe and Shami Chaikin and the playwright Jean-Claude van Itallie, and McNeely felt they were doing on the stage what she was doing on canvas: working spontaneously to create work collectively that was full of movement and vibrancy. Dealing with emotions in a direct way, they staged their work in a style that was alive and expressionistic.

She and Lebenshon moved to France in 1982 for six months when McNeely had a teaching sabbatical—she painted while he made sculpture. Unfortunately, their stay ended when McNeely damaged her spinal cord when she bent over to shake hands with a small boy and tripped on an enthusiastic puppy. Over the years, radiation treatments had weakened her body, making her fall quite serious. After returning to New York, she was forced to use a wheelchair, and her recuperation required her to lessen her intense involvement in both feminist and artist collaborative communities[15] and to reduce her teaching schedule. Painting, always a priority, now consumed her energy. Despite doctor's orders, and with Lebenshon's help, she continued working on large canvases—meeting each new challenge as it came.

Many of her paintings celebrated "outsiders." One series of portraits from memory included French prostitutes and flamboyant characters from Greenwich Village and New York. Her color became jewel-like as she allowed herself to enjoy the act of painting, rather than being caught up in more personal subject matter. Portrayed with their most salient characteristics quite prominent, each personage is unique. Admittedly, she is drawn to people unafraid of expressing who they are, often people trembling on the edge. Her encounter with them can be minimal, as in *Tea at B. Altman's Palm Room* (1983; Fig. 6). A mother and a son are dressed fabulously for their weekly ritual of tea: he in a white suit and spats with a red toupee on top of his white curls, and she, belying her age, dressed in a frilly pink summer dress and gloves with a wide sunhat bedecked with flowers. He gently holds up a teacup to her lips while she holds a large stuffed animal with a matching dress. The colors are delicate, light and frothy—shades of pink, pale orange and white, with a spring green pattern behind them representing the palms. The surface movement is like the flutter of butterfly wings. The reality and the fantasy of this odd couple is brought to life. McNeely's power of visual memorization combines with her originality and emotional content to create human imagery of extraordinary energy and life.

Not until a few years after the accident in France did that experience became subject matter for McNeely. Beginning in 1985 she dealt with this life-altering moment in *Tryscadeckatick* (1985-86; Pl. 12 [detail]); her largest work, at 6′ x 52′ and

Fig. 6. Juanita McNeely, *Tea at B. Altman's Palm Room* (1983), oil on linen, 72" x 44". Collection the artist.

comprising thirteen panels, she worked on all the panels at the same time over a period of one year, wrapping them around her entire living space. It is a masterwork by an indomitable spirit, a bridge between her early and later work where she learned again to articulate the nude freely, as her own body no longer exemplified what a body could do. Despite the restrictions of the wheelchair, her body became flexible and moved across her large canvases. Small canvases, says McNeely, seem "impossible"—she needs the large arena for this sense of real physical movement. The large size, she says, enables viewers to imagine themselves walking into the worlds she creates—and for this reason she requires her work to be hung low. The panel paintings tell a story, made with color, form, and content, as the viewer moves from panel to panel.

Tryscadeckatick is organized rhythmically, square panels flanked by vertical panels, with a pulse of dark cypresses or diagonal black poles marching through some of the backgrounds, piercing the space around lighter, brighter human and animal figures in the foreground. Strong contrasts and an open, continuous composition tie the panels together with movement, a constant throughout. Human figures swing

Fig. 7. Juanita McNeely, *Tryscadeckatick, Ape* (detail) (1985-86), oil on linen, 6′ x 52′. Collection the artist.

Fig. 8. Juanita McNeely, *I Saw* (2009), oil on linen, 40" x 42". Collection the artist.

and leap freely; a partially dismembered body hangs from a strap by the leg while another screaming figure spins on a disc. In the last panel, the open mouth of an ape fills the vertical canvas in what appears to be a bloodcurdling scream (Fig. 7). More drips and splashes heighten the energy of the paint as McNeely felt the need "to make the ugly and the terrible beautiful for myself." The delectable violet and turquoise hues and luminous flesh do this.

In the late 1990s, more complex compositions emerged, filling the canvas, often depicting flooded interiors with the figure perched precariously on a ladder or swing. Trapped in the studio by now, her experience of being closed in is expressed clearly in these paintings. Increasingly a more symbolic context emerged, distilling reality and making the statement fresh. She continually strove for rich surfaces and color that sings, sometimes with a clashing chromatic range, as is often the artillery of expressionist painters of difficult work. *Ladder* (1999; Pl. 13) in her Window Series shows a female figure falling towards the water below, surrounded by an enclosing room held up by a metronome-column. Blues and greens with dark shadows in the background help bring the figure forward. Tilted black ladders and lattices in the foreground frame and contain her as she floats in mid-air. Through a push-pull dynamic, McNeely is dealing with fears and nightmares that many of us have and are not easy to face.

Fig. 9. Juanita McNeely, *Free Figure Series: Life* (2009), oil on linen, 44" x 50". Collection the artist.

McNeely's activism took a new turn when she became a spokeswoman for Very Special Arts, founded in Washington, D.C., by Jean Kennedy Smith and internationally by a committee of ambassadors' wives. McNeely participated as a judge in their shows, including the White House 200th Anniversary Art Exhibition in 1992. The experience was inspiring for the artist—an opportunity to take part in an international community, to meet people from different cultures for the purpose of broadening the exposure of all artists, disabled or able bodied. Kara Kennedy filmed the artist in her studio for a PBS special on the organization.[16]

Recently, in more daringly executed works, McNeely has returned to simpler compositions, with canvases dominated by washes of color and masterful drawing for a dynamic effect. These works, done with a feeling of speed and confidence, have great spirituality, as in *I Saw* (2009; Fig. 8), a work sparked by the death of friends. A large monkey seems propelled backwards, as if recoiling from something seen off canvas; open mouthed, its hunched shoulders are pulled back by long arms between extended tapered, diagonal legs. This large sienna-tinted C-shape vibrates on a canvas still largely white, surrounded by rapid, emanating strokes and radiant cerulean streaks. Animals are subject matter McNeely finds powerful, and she often devotes entire canvases to them as metaphors for the inexpressible aspects of our human experiences. They can be put into positions that would be either too brutal or raw for a human, yet they allow powerful, primal emotions to be expressed.

Viewers find McNeely's work either violent or exciting; there seems to be little in between. Her simplified recent work still contains fantastic, acrobatic, leaping, struggling figures, with strong physicality everywhere. This is how she reaches ultimate transcendence. "My goal is painting. I'm in love with painting and with the imagery and with what you see and feel."[17] She directly addresses this in the painting *Life* (2009; Fig. 9) from her Free Figure Series, a thinly painted image of the nude artist, seen from the back, with her hands madly smearing red paint or, more likely, blood, onto the canvas within the canvas. Vibrating lines around the torso and her swirling hair make the movement vivid. *Life* succinctly expresses what Juanita McNeely has in fact been doing for fifty years: becoming one with her painting. Says the artist, "If you lined up all my work, you'd have my life." •

Sharyn M. Finnegan is an adjunct Associate Professor in Art History at Parsons The New School for Design, and a figurative painter represented by the Blue Mountain Gallery in New York City.

Notes

1. April Kingsley, "The Interiorized Image." *The Soho Weekly News*, (February 5, 1976): 21.
2. Juanita McNeely, Artist statement, NYFA application, October 19, 2009.
3. Interview with Juanita McNeely, January 17-18, 2010. All subsequent quotes without citations are from this extensive interview with the artist.
4. Juanita McNeely, Video interview with Kate Leonard, New York City, December 2006.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Hilton Kramer, Review, *New York Times*, (October 31, 1971): D21.
9. Carter Ratcliffe, Review, *ARTnews*, (February, 1971): 23.
10. Juanita McNeely, Artist statement, catalogue, *Better Than Ever: Women Figurative Artists of the '70s Soho Co-ops.* March 1, 2009 (unpaginated).
11. Ibid.
12. Lawrence Alloway, Review, *The Nation* (April 22, 1978): 486.
13. Sharon Wybrants, "Painting Oneself," *Women Artists Newsletter*, (May 1976): 2.
14. Madeleine Burnside, NY Reviews, *ARTnews*, (Summer 1978): 203.
15. In 2003 McNeely was recognized as one of the major contributors to the Second Wave Feminist Revolution, 1966-80 Honor Roll sponsored by the Veteran Feminists of America.
16. Kara Kennedy, "A Very Special Arts Story—Freedom of Expression," Very Special Arts Production, Washington, D.C., October 25, 1992.
17. McNeely, Video interview, Kate Leonard.

JUANITA MCNEELY

b. 1936, St. Louis, MO / lives and works in New York, NY

Self (1968) is a self-portrait and the figure in the fishbowl is me, really. I didn't try to paint me exactly, but the hand in the fishbowl, just for me, said that I was in something, trying to hold on and still live, with just enough water for the day. Look at Matisse's fishbowls—they are different but very beautiful.

I always painted men and women, and when I started thinking about painting women, the vagina was big to me. I wanted to impress how real and important it is: the center of woman is the center of her potential womanhood, physically as well as emotionally. From there, she could hopefully have a child. It's complicated—I had lost the ability to have children because of medical sterilization. I had the imagery to paint women, but I don't know how I was open enough to be able to do it. *On the Edge* (1970s) is a very large vagina. I was showing in SoHo in New York, and it was really when SoHo was just starting to have gallery stuff. Many people walked in. They were so aghast, like they didn't know what they were looking at. And on top of that, if they looked, they didn't know if they should. I remember some men came to the door and asked if they had to pay to come in.

I always envisioned *Woman's Psyche* (1968) as a four- or more-panel piece. Even when I was a very young student, I started making triptychs and things like that. I felt like I was never finished with the story; I just wanted another story, so I just kept adding panels. With *Woman's Psyche*, I really had no idea at first what I was going to have at the end. It made sense that I would have the woman being me of course, an arm outstretched and pulling against what looks like a black phallic form. On the far-right panel of this piece, I was wringing the neck of this chicken-creature because they controlled something. I wanted to physically rip out what I couldn't stand. The animals depicted in the piece became very real to me. Some were really loving, some were hateful. Animals, when you depict them, can be more brutal and more loving than humans. The woman in the central panel I was thinking was quite beautiful. I loved the look of the red coming around underneath her nose. I found out after from a physician—because I didn't know this and I don't know who does—that a lot of women also bleed from the nose during their menstrual cycle. So, I had depicted a lot of blood every place, and many people, particularly women, were shocked. I remember one woman came in and said, "How can you do this? How can you have these bleeding people? Don't you realize I have a daughter who's going to come in here?" I just looked and thought, *Don't come in if you don't want to. I didn't ask you.* But I said instead, "This is life you're looking at. When you're looking at all this blood, these are going to be your children if you're lucky." I never understood people so horrified over blood. I mean, it's both life and death. When I was very young, I had a lot of hemorrhaging going on, so blood was only too real for me, and it was just a part of my life, so I did it. There was a beauty of being so free in my mind at the time. I wanted to paint stories about women.

Things were raw and people were coming right up to the work to see it. A woman who was a feminist and who was always going around doing reviews and who had classes in a few places, was told by some of her students that she should come see my show. I was in the gallery when she came in—I didn't know who she was—and she said to my friends who were in the gallery with me, "Who's the artist here? Is she crazy? There's something really disturbing about the work. Does she need a shrink, or what?" Well, I was standing right there and it was a gift given from heaven. I just went over and said, "Excuse me, I'm Juanita McNeely. I thought maybe you'd want to meet me." And that was it. I never got a review after that. A lot of people thought it was crazy; that didn't stop me. I think there's a certain amount of power in it. I didn't have a gallery director—it was a co-op gallery and so I was on my own. The males that came into the gallery were really insulting. You're listening to their comments and you think you're going to kill them.

You realize you don't ever want to go to another opening because it did away with my illusion of what the safety line was for me. That's when you realize if you have a gallery director, they are protection for you. It was so wonderful when James Fuentes came to me; I was bowled over. No one had ever come to me and said, "I like your work. I think I'd like to show it." I've been very blessed with James and everyone else who has given me the love and support I needed. I'm very fortunate I now have a husband and partner that is everything a person, a man, an artist should be, so I'm very blessed. When we got married it was 1982. We already knew who we were and we're certainly still together and still enjoy the time with each other. You go for a long time where you're trying to say something, and if they don't want to let you say it, you just keep going.

—Juanita McNeely

Left to right: ***Self***, 1968, oil on linen, 48 x 36 in. (121.9 x 91.4 cm), acquired in 2022
On the Edge, 1970s, oil on linen, 90 x 59 1/2 in. (228.6 x 151.1 cm), acquired in 2022
Woman's Psyche, 1968, oil on linen, 146 x 126 in. (370.8 x 320 cm) overall, acquired in 2022

b. 1936, St. Louis, MO
d. 2023, New York, NY

EDUCATION

MFA, Southern Illinois University

BFA, St. Louis School of Fine Arts, Washington University

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2025 Moving Through, James Fuentes, New York, NY

2023 Moving Through, James Fuentes, Los Angeles, CA

2022 Portraits, James Fuentes, New York, NY

Juanita McNeely: Forever, JamesFuentes.Online

2021 Juanita McNeely: I see the change, JamesFuentes.Online

2020 Juanita McNeely, James Fuentes, New York, NY

Juanita McNeely: Man's Injustice to Man, JamesFuentes.Online

2018 Mitchell Algus, New York, NY

2016 Mitchell Algus, New York, NY

2014 Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis University, MA (catalog)

2006 Mitchell Algus, New York, NY

1996 Montclair State University, NJ

1994 Elaine Benson Gallery, Southhampton, NY

1988 Western Illinois University, Grand Gallery, Ill./ Quincy Art Center, Ill. (Dance performance, inspired by and in front of Triskadeckatych)

1987 Southhampton Gallery, Suffolk College, L.I., NY

1983-84 Rutgers University, "Women's Series," Douglas College, NJ

1982 Evelyn Amis Gallery, Toronto, Canada

1978 SOHO 20, New York, NY

Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY

City University Art Gallery, New York, NY

1976 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY

1974 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY

1972 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY

1971 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY

1970 Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY

1968 Ohio University Art Gallery, Chillicothe, OH

1967 Western Illinois University, Macomb, IL

1966 Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL

1964 Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL

1958 Peoples Art Center, St. Louis, MO

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2024-25 For Dear Life: Art, Medicine and Disability, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (MCASD), La Jolla, CA. (Organized as part of Pacific Standard Time, an initiative of the Getty Foundation)

Collection Highlights, Rubell Museum Miami, FL

2023 Venus Unchained, Natalie Seroussi Gallerie, Paris

Looking Like Fire, Sim Smith, London

2022 What's Going On, Rubell Museum DC, Washington, DC

The Whitney's Collection: Selections from 1900 to 1965, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

Westbeth Ink: Paint to Print, Westbeth Artists Housing and Center for the Arts, New York, NY

2020 All of Them Witches, Deitch Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2019 Mitchell Algus, New York, NY

2018 For Freedoms, Fort Gansevoort Gallery, New York, NY

FOTG, Anniversary Exhibit, Michell Algus, New York, NY

2014 Painters of Modern Life, The Box Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

2013 Brooklyn Museum, E.A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art: Feminist Art Virtual Data Base, New York, NY

2012 40 Years of Women Artists, from the Mary H. Dana Women Artists, Virtual Exhibit Series at Rutgers' Douglass Library with the Institute for Women & Art

2010 Anniversary Show, Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY

Westbeth Pioneer Artists 1970s, Westbeth gallery, New York, NY

Small Drawing Invitational, Blue Mountain Gallery, New York, NY

2009 Better Than Ever: Women Figurative Artists of the 70s SoHo Co-ops, Salena Gallery, LIU, New York NY; Dishman Art Museum, TX; and Rowan University Art Gallery, NJ

Contemporary Women Artists, Inst. for Women & Art at Rutgers Mason Gross Galleries, New Brunswick, NJ

Invitational Donation Exhibition, Rutgers University, Feminist Art Institute, New Brunswick, NJ (catalog)

2004 179th Invitational Contemporary American Painting, National Academy Museum, New York, NY

The F Word, Sex & Feminism, Mitchell Algus, New York, NY

2003 Small Works Invitational, Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY

Invitational Salute to Veteran Feminist in the Arts, National Arts Club, New York, NY

1996 Moving Forward, SOHO 20, New York, NY

Women Artists Series, 25 Years, Mason School of Art, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ (catalog)

1993 Red, White and Blue, Alaska Art Center, Anchorage, AK

Women's Collection Exhibition, Bryn Mawr College, PA

1992 Man Revealed, Graham Modern Gallery, New York

1991 Very Special Arts, Gallery and Benefit Auction, Sotheby's, Washington, D.C.

Pyramid Gallery, NYC

1990 Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires, Argentina

FAX-Simile, An Invitational, Western Illinois University, Macomb, IL

1986 Survival of the Fittest II, Ingber Gallery, New York, NY

Nude Self Portraits, Prince Street Gallery, New York, NY

22nd Annual Invitation Exhibit, YM & WHA, Union Art Gallery, NJ

1981 Prints and Drawings, Union Art Center, NJ

The Figure, Evelyn Amis Gallery, Toronto, Canada

Muse Art Gallery Invitational, Philadelphia, PA

1980 Reflections for Renderings of Modern Woman, Joseloff Gallery, University of Hartford, CT

Hera Gallery, Providence, RI

1979 Expressions of Self, Women's Autobiography, Douglas College, Rutgers University, NJ

Invitational Figurative Paintings, Hera Gallery, Providence, RI

From the Imagination, curated by Robert Henry, Green Mountain Gallery, New York, NY

Femnistiche Kunst International Haags, Gemeent Museum, The Hague, Netherlands

1978 The Figure, Richmond College, New York, NY

Print Invitational, SUNY, NY

1977 Olean Library, Olean, NY

Artist's Choice Invitational, Green Mountain Gallery, New York, NY

Keenan Art Center, New York, NY

Oakleigh Collection, Skidmore College, NY

1976 Fairleigh Dickerson College Painting Invitational, NY

Sons & Others, Queens Museum, NY, Schenectady Museum, NY, and others

Westbeth Prints, SUNY Art Galleries, Alfred, NY and Albany, NY

1975 Sons & Others: Women Artists See Men, The Queens Museum, Queens, NY

East Hampton Guild Hall, New York

Sarah Lawrence College, New York

Rabinovitch & Guerra Gallery, New York, NY

Women in the World Development, Painting Exhibition, International Center, New York, NY

The Eye of Woman, Hobart and William Smith College, NY

1974 Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, NY

Leslie Rankow Gallery, New York, NY

Albin Zeglen Gallery, New York, NY

National Museum of Art, Taipei, Taiwan

Ching Hsing Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan

In Her Own Image, Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA

Warren Bendek Gallery, New York, NY

Performing Arts Center, Huntington, NY

Brookwood East Art Gallery, New York, NY

Walcott-Field Gallery, New York, NY

1973 Barnard College, New York, NY

1972 Palacio de las Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Mexico

Woman Artists at International House, New York, NY

1966 15th Annual Peoria Art Center, Peoria, IL

1965 Second Biennial Invitational Print Show, Chicago Art Institute, IL

5th Fine Arts Exhibition Container Corporation of America, Rock Island, IL

1964 IXth Annual Mid-South Exhibition, Brooks Memorial Art Gallery, TN

Annual Exhibition, Middle Tennessee State College, TN

Bradley University, Peoria, IL

Annual Exhibition, Evansville Museum of Art, IN

Happening, Allan Kaprow, IL

1959 St. Louis Artist Guild, St. Louis, MO

Three Arts Center Exhibition, People's Art Center, St. Louis, MO

1958 St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO

People's Art Center, Annual Exhibition, St. Louis, MO

AWARDS AND GRANTS

2004 Ellin P. Speyer Prize for Painting, National Academy Museum 179th Invitational, NY

Contemporary American Painting Exhibition, New York, NY

2003 Honor Roll, Women Artists, Major Contributors to Second Wave Feminist Revolution, 1966-80

1992 Speaker and National Art Juror Exhibition, White House, 200th Anniversary Laying of Cornerstone, Washington, D.C.

1986 -87 Painting Grant, The Pollock-Krasner Foundation

1983 -84 Painting Grant, The Adolph & Esther Gottlieb Foundation

1976 -77 Painting Grant, New York Council for the Arts, C.A.P.S.

SELECTED PUBLIC BROADCASTS

2007 Video interview, Kate Leonard, McNeely's Studio, New York, December

1996 Video of Lecture, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ

1992 "A Very Special Arts Story... Freedom of Expression," VSA Productions, directed by Kara Kennedy, National Public TV Broadcast, October 25

1975 "Arts," WBAI Radio, interview by Judith Veivell, December

"51st State," studio interview by Lisa Finer, Channel 13 TV & Fifth Ave. Cinema, April

1974 -75 "Women Artists" panel, four shows, Feminist News & Comment, Cable TV, Channel C

PUBLICATIONS

2022 JFP05: Juanita McNeely, James Fuentes Press, New York

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Brandeis University, Women's Studies Research Center Collection, Waltham, MA

Haimowitz Collection, NY

Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN

National Museum of History & Art, Contemporary Collection, Taipei, Taiwan

Oakleigh Collection, Skidmore College, NY

Palacio de las Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Mexico

Rubell Museum, Miami, FL and Washington, DC

Southern Illinois University, Morris Library, Carbondale, IL

St. Louis Art Museum, Drawing Collection, St. Louis, MO

The William & Uyendale Scott Memorial Women Artists Study Collection, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, PA

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2023 Francesca Aton, Tessa Solomon, "In Memoriam: Art World Figures Who Died in 2023," Artnews, Dec 29

Julia Halperin, "How Artists Are Breaking the Taboos Around Depicting Birth," The New York Times Style Magazine, Dec 6

Will Heinrich, "Juanita McNeely, Intense Artist of the Female Experience, Dies at 87," The New York Times, Nov 2

Maximilíano Durón, "Juanita McNeely, Groundbreaking Feminist Artist Who Bravely Depicted Her Illegal Abortion, Dies at 87," Artnews, Oct 26

Wallace Ludel, "Juanita McNeely, feminist artist who created visceral paintings inspired by personal hardship, has died, aged 87," The Art Newspaper, Oct 26

Grace Edquist, “In Juanita McNeely’s Searing Paintings, Beauty and Pain Commingle,” Vogue, Sept 8

Steven Vargas, “Juanita McNeely Bears it all in her debut L.A. solo show,” Los Angeles Times, Sept 7

“5 Art Exhibitions You Can’t Miss in Los Angeles This September,” Cultured Magazine

“10 Art Shows to See in LA This September,” Hyperallergic

Shana Nys Dambrot, “Gallery Moves: Making Melrose Hill Happen,” LA Weekly, Aug 10

2022 Deborah Solomon, “After Decades of Silence, Art About Abortion (Cautiously) Enters the Establishment,” New York Times, Sept 10

Brian P. Kelly, “Independent 20th Century and the Armory Show—Conflicting Visions,” Wall Street Journal, September 9

Sarah Cascone, “7 Artists Who Stood Out at Independent’s 20th-Century Fair,” Artnet News, Sept 9

Will Heinrich, “Independent 20th Century’s Artists in a Cozy New Fair Spinoff,” New York Times, Sept 8

Maximilíano Durón, “James Fuentes Gallery, a Lower East Side Stalwart, Joins Growing Exodus to Tribeca,” ARTnews, Sept 7

Valentina Di Liscia, “Your Handy Guide to the NY Armory Week Art Fairs,” Hyperallergic, Sept 2

Philomena Epps, “Juanita McNeely: The Body Laid Bare,” Independent, August

2020 Johanna Fateman, “Juanita McNeely at James Fuentes.” Artforum, May/June

Valentina Di Liscia, “Juanita McNeely’s Painting Bare Pain and Resilience in Equal Measure,” Hyperallerigic, Feb 25

“10 Must-See Exhibitions This Weekend From Paris to Los Angeles and Beyond,” Surface Mag, Feb 24

Will Heinrich, “Juanita McNeely,” New York Times, January 31

Gabriella Angeleti, “Three exhibitions to see in New York this weekend,” The Art Newspaper, Jan 30

Morgan Vickery, “Juanita McNeely,” Flaunt, Jan 30

Gabrielle Leung, “Juanita McNeely’s Raw, Deeply Personal Paintings Take Over James Fuentes Gallery,” Hypebeast, Jan 29

2019 Alison M. Gingeras, Black Sheep Feminism: The Art of Sexual Politics, Mousse Publications, UK 2018

Holland Cotter, “Juanita McNeely,” New York Times, April

John Haber, “Women on the Line: Juanita McNeely,” Haber Arts, April

Rachel Middleman, Radical Eroticism: Women’s Art and Sex in the 60s, University of California Press

Amy Tobin, Art of Feminism, Chronicle Books, USA; Elephant Book Company, UK

2017 Rachel Corbett, “The Feminine Mystique,” New York Times Style Magazine, November; published online, “The Feminist Pioneers Making Provocative Art About Sex,” Oct 31

Jessica Lack, Why Are We Artists? 100 World Manifestos, Penguin, UK

Elena Martinique, “A Look at the Art Worlds Long Overdue Appreciation of Female Artists,” Widewalls, November

2016 Thomas Micchelli, “Not Necessarily Pleasant: The Paintings of Juanita McNeely,” Hyperallergic, Jan 9

Joshua Abelow, “Editor’s Choice,” Art News, February

Thomas Micchelli, “The Pursuit of Art, 2016,” Hyperallergic, Dec 31

Andrew Hottle, The Art of the Sister Chapel: Exemplary Women Visionary Creators, Ashgate Publishing, UK

2015 Amelia Jones, Sexuality, Whitechapel Press, London, UK

2014 Emily Wishingrad, “WRSC portrays the Female Experience,” The Justice, October

Maud Morgan, “Indomitable Spirit at Kzninck Gallery,” Artscope Magazine, August

Joan Marter, Rutgers University, “The Work of Juanita McNeely” in Indomitable Spirit: Juanita McNeely, exhibition catalog, Brandeis University, Women’s Studies Research Center

June Wolff, “She is a Woman,” Boston Globe, June

2011 Sharyn Finnegan, “Juanita McNeely: Art and Life Entwined”, Woman’s Art Journal, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Fall/Winter): 38-45

2007 Cornelia Butler, WACK! Art & the Feminist Revolution, MOCA/LA, CA: MIT Press

B. Love, ed., Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975, University of Illinois

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