



OAKLAND

Sylvia Fein: "Surreal Nature" at Krowwork

In 1943 the young Sylvia Fein painted a double portrait, *The Lady and the White Knight*, showing herself as a small sorrowful girl standing next to the heroic figure of the young man whom she had recently married, who, a kingfisher bird on his shoulder, has a picture of an open eye fastened to his tunic. This is a prophetic picture: Her husband will soon go to war and the open eye becomes an icon in Fein's later paintings. As a young painter, Fein studied with Magic Realists at the University of Wisconsin, and had a solo show at the prestigious Klaus Perls Gallery in New York at 27. Her work has been compared to that of her female contemporaries, such as Dorothea Tanning, who also came from the Midwest, Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo. In fact, Fein lived in a remote place in Mexico during the War but had no contact with either these painters or with the Dynaton group. Her paintings are best described as indigenous Midwest Surrealist; several of her works were included in the 2012 LACMA exhibition "In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States." In the 1950s and '60s, living in California, Fein produced evocative paintings of fantasy landscapes, imaginary trees and mountains, surging oceans. During this period she exhibited regularly. Then in 1973 she stopped painting, devoted herself to research and produced a significant study on the development of visual thinking by children, relating it to the art of early cultures.

One gallery in this mini-retrospective is devoted to Fein's amazing paintings—always in the demanding process of egg tempera—of the Eye, disembodied, floating, gazing, watching and staring, sometimes of eyes with revolving pupils, all-knowing eyes, eyes which sink as the sun, soar in the sky, are immersed in water, are in the process of exploding, which wander in orbit, are transformed into stars or, in a wondrous picture of 2010, become a *Spiral Galactic Eye*.

In addition to being painter and researcher, Fein is also a farmer with an olive grove near Martinez, California. With eyes in the sky, she has remained close to earth. As a nonagenarian she produced a remarkable series of paintings of trees. In 2013 as a *memento mori* to her husband who died last year, she created a large painting of a tree with a thick trunk and widely spreading branches. It was done 67 years after the double portrait of *The Lady with the White Knight* and is called *Together For Ever*.

—PETER SELZ

"TOGETHER FOR EVER," 2013, Sylvia Fein

EGG TEMPERA ON BOARD, 30" x 40"

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND KROWWORK GALLERY, PHOTO: NICHOLAS PISHVANOV