

The New York Times

4 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now



Installation view of "Deborah Remington: Five Decades" with "Dorset" (1972) at left, and "Saratoga" (1972), right, at Bortolami Gallery. Credit Bortolami; Kristian Laudrup

Deborah Remington

Through June 12. Bortolami, 39 Walker Street, Manhattan. 212-727-2050; bortolamigallery.com.
Through July 30. Craig Starr Gallery, 5 East 73rd Street, Manhattan. 212-570-1739; craigstarr.com

Deborah Remington's precisely composed, undefinable paintings are getting more attention these days. Lingered somewhere between abstraction and representation, industrial diagrams and popular illustration, their combination of forms look incredibly fresh. Two current shows — "Five Decades," at Bortolami downtown, and "Early Drawings," at Craig F. Starr uptown — focus on her work from the 1960s until a few years before her death in 2010.

Canvases like "Big Red" (1962), at Bortolami, show Remington dutifully creating abstract compositions, with a bold, muscular swagger. (One of her teachers was Clyfford Still, who was among the most uncompromising of the first-generation Abstract Expressionists.) Her stripped-down palette and dark hues echo Still and perhaps her distant relative, the Western painter Frederic Remington — but also the calligraphy she studied while living in Japan in the 1950s. Remington's sketchbooks and drawings, often created with soot (on view at Craig F. Starr) move away from the gestural approach of "Big Red." Instead, they resemble the darker, chillier Cold War-era work of Lee Bontecou or Lee Lozano.

The mirror, a central motif of her work, appeared later in paintings like "Dorset" (1972) and "Saratoga" (1972), drawn with a flat, unexpressive application of paint that recalls '60s Pop Art, the machine-paintings of Duchamp and Picabia and science fiction book covers.

Some of the later canvases also include what look like jagged metal or glass shards, as if something in the painting has blown apart at high impact. It's a curious but surgically crafted mix. Looking at Remington's paintings becomes an exercise of staring into the void — or a deceptively painted mirror that hides its reflection: We never materialize, or actually see ourselves.