

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

Vija Celmins

February 10 – April 22, 2017

Opening: Thursday, February 9, 6:00 to 8:00 PM

Matthew Marks is pleased to announce **Vija Celmins**, the next exhibition in his gallery at 522 West 22nd Street. It is the artist's first exhibition of new work in seven years and includes nineteen new paintings, sculptures, drawings, and prints. This is her first one-person show with Matthew Marks Gallery.

Celmins has been rendering nature imagery from black and white photographic sources since the 1960s, exploring the same subjects repeatedly in paintings, drawings, and prints. For this exhibition, she focuses on two motifs she has employed for several decades: the ocean's surface and the night sky. Imagery, however, is not her foremost concern: "The recognizable image is just one element to consider. The paintings seem more a record of my grappling with how to transform that image into a painting and make it alive." This process can be seen in *A Painting in Six Parts* (1986-87/2012-16), a group of six oil paintings based on a photograph she took fifty years ago from a pier in Venice, California. The role of the photograph, she explains, is to provide an "armature on which I hang my marks and make my art" — in this case, six distinct variations on one moment frozen in time.

The exhibition's largest work, an oil painting nearly five feet wide, depicts an array of stars floating on a dark field. As in the other night sky paintings on view here, its seemingly monochromatic palette includes vivid colors applied in numerous layers to create a sense of depth. Other works in the exhibition show a night sky inverted, with black stars on a light-gray or white field.

The scrutiny of Celmins's gaze is perhaps most evident in her new sculptures. *Two Stones* and *Four Stones* (both 1977/2014-16) consist of small rocks accompanied by painted bronze replicas virtually indistinguishable from the originals. For each of the three *Blackboard Tableau* works (2007-15) Celmins collected a nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century writing slate and then used wood, paint, and pastel to create an identical twin. Exhibited side by side, each pair is a perceptual conundrum that invites sustained looking.

Accompanying the exhibition is a fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by Bob Nickas.

Celmins was born in Riga, Latvia, in 1938 and immigrated to the United States with her family in the late 1940s. She studied painting and printmaking at the John Herron School of Art in Indiana and attended a summer session at Yale University in 1961 before pursuing a master's degree at UCLA. In 1992 the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia organized the first retrospective of her work. She has had one-person exhibitions at museums across the United States and Europe, including the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Menil Collection in Houston, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Vienna Secession.

Vija Celmins is on view at 522 West 22nd Street from February 10 to April 22, 2017, Tuesday through Saturday, from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM.

For additional information, please contact Jacqueline Tran at 212-243-0200 or jacqueline@matthewmarks.com.