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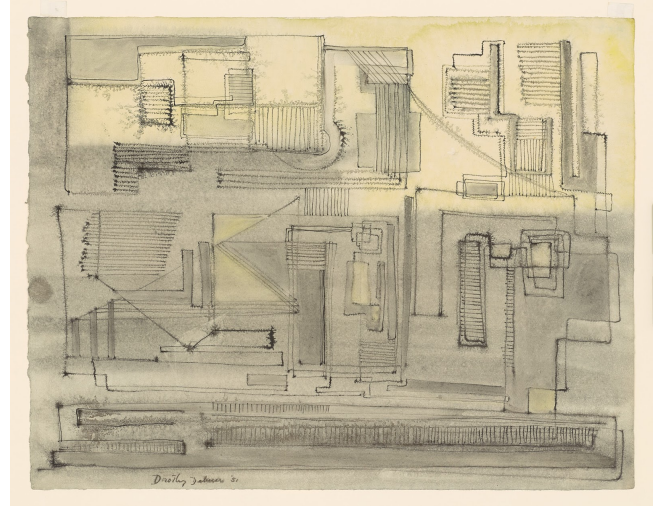
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Rosenberg & Co. Announces Exhibition

## Dorothy Dehner

May 15 – August 21, 2021

Rosenberg & Co. is pleased to present **Dorothy Dehner**, an exhibition highlighting the artist's watercolors and sculptures from the 1950s. It was in this decade that Dehner (1901–1994) actualized her unique form of abstraction, gained critical recognition and representation, and fulfilled her long-standing desire to create sculpture.



Dorothy Dehner, *Untitled #53*, 1951  
Watercolor and ink on paper, 17.75 x 22.5 in.

The nine works on paper on view exemplify Dehner's mature practice in abstraction. A sense of character suffuses each work, animating the biomorphic forms and strong, architectonic lines. Inspired by the biological illustrations in Ernst Haeckel's *Kunstformen der Natur* (1904), Dehner introduced scientific and organic concepts into her watercolors, depicting diatoms and other microorganisms; her compositions activate the entire frame, evoking Haeckel's illustrations as well as architectural drawings, diagrams, and astronomy charts. Structural lines are softened with a "wet on wet" watercolor technique and improvisational, gestural methods. Unlike her Surrealist contemporaries who also engaged in biomorphic representations, Dehner did not emphasize the uncanny or dreamlike. Her drawings feel celebratory in their exploration of biology, animacy, and the architectures of life.<sup>1</sup>

Dehner had been active in New York City circles since 1925, when she began classes at the Art Students League, but she did not exhibit her work in the city until 1950. She was living in upstate New York with her then-spouse sculptor David Smith, who threatened to destroy Dehner's drawings as she transported them to be considered for the 1950 Whitney Annual Exhibition. The Whitney accepted Dehner's work, marking the beginning of immense changes for the artist: a few months after the Whitney show opened, Smith physically assaulted Dehner, breaking several of her ribs, and Dehner left Smith permanently; with her relocation to New York City, Dehner was free to make work without fear of Smith's jealousy, control, or violence. She no longer had to hide her work or her interest in sculpture—early attempts of which she had destroyed. "I defy any woman who is married to David Smith to become a sculptor," Dehner later said in an interview.<sup>2</sup>

Rose Fried Gallery held Dehner's first solo exhibition in 1952, and in 1953 she participated in group shows at both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the MoMA. Dehner began printmaking at Atelier 17, where she became life-long friends with Louise Nevelson, and in 1954 had a solo print

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exhibition at Morris Gallery. In 1955, Dehner began creating sculpture, modeling abstract forms in wax for bronze casting at the Sculpture Center, and Marian Willard signed on as her dealer. The bronze sculpture *Garden at Night* (1957) was made using the lost-wax process, and its open, linear construction is evocative of her earlier watercolors. There is a powerful play of contrasts: despite its small scale, the sculpture alludes to monumentality, and the seemingly delicate, constructed line quality is nevertheless strong, cast bronze. In 1958, in a further exploration of form, Dehner cast two original chess sets in silver and bronze. Her sensitivity to character, composition, and line is masterfully evident in every one of the 32 pieces, each of which is signed. In 1993 Twining Gallery commissioned 25 pewter sets cast from molds of the original silver and bronze; however, only the two 1958 sets were made under the direct supervision of Dehner herself. Rosenberg & Co. is delighted to be able to present one of the original silver and bronze chess sets in this exhibition, which was exhibited in her 1965 retrospective at the Jewish Museum.

Later in Dehner's career, she began making sculptures in wood, and eventually worked with fabricators to create steel sculptures of monumental proportions. Throughout the decades, she utilized a personal iconography of arcs, lines, stars, and wedges; as scholar Joan Marter stated, "Dehner made sculpture that acknowledges that abstract symbols could communicate content that is private, but holding universal implications."<sup>3</sup> Together, Dehner's watercolors and sculpture from the 1950s illuminate her aesthetic trajectory as she launched her artistic career.

Dorothy Dehner's work is held by many public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Storm King Art Center, Mountainville, NY; the Phillips Collection, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, and the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle; the British Museum, London; and Museum of Art, Boston.

**Rosenberg & Co.** is a salon-style space with a focus on the highest standards of connoisseurship and expertise. Rosenberg & Co. exhibits an international roster of works by prominent Impressionist and Modern artists and continues the legacy of working with contemporary artists.

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Marter. "Dorothy Dehner: Sculptor and Printmaker." The Dorothy Dehner Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth DeBethune and Dorothy Dehner. "Dorothy Dehner." *Art Journal* 53, no. 1 (1994): 35-37.

<sup>3</sup> Joan Marter. "Arcadian Nightmares: The Evolution of David Smith and Dorothy Dehner's Work at Bolton Landing." In *Reading Abstract Expressionism: Context and Critique*, edited by Landau Ellen G., 625-45. Yale University Press, 2005.