



Vera Neumann, *Sundown*, from the "Abstracts" series, n.d.,
Watercolor on paper, 34h x 34w in (86.36h x 86.36w cm)

Vera Neumann: *Vera Paints a Rainbow*

July 9 – August 7, 2015

Alexander Gray Associates presents *Vera Paints a Rainbow*, an exhibition of artworks by Vera Neumann (b.1907, Stamford, CT – d.1993, North Tarrytown, NY), created between the 1960s and 1980s. The presentation focuses on the artist's use of color as means to express emotions through compositions characterized by a colorful palette. The works on view, organized following the rainbow spectrum—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet—emphasize Neumann's rich use of color, which in her words, "is a marvelous way of expressing emotion."

Neumann loved color. She often opted for warm tones, with a particular penchant for yellow and orange. As she used to say, "Color sings to me...[it] is the language I speak best." Her artwork is defined by single gestures that convey maximum expression by employing few, yet visually strong tones. Among Neumann's motifs are stylized florals, abstract color fields, and avant-garde geometrics rendered in singular combinations. When designing, she stated, "If you have too many colors, you could very easily get tied down to just one color scheme that can't be changed [...] I feel I have given people more joy with the designs I create."

The exhibition's title, *Vera Paints a Rainbow*, alludes to the Vera Company's promotional materials and showrooms, whose ads from the 1970s featured the tagline "Vera paints," as an ongoing campaign. Every season featured a new theme, from "Vera paints a bunch," a cluster of carrots, to "Vera paints suns," a recurrent motif in all her collection. As the artist expressed: "I'm a Leo. I'm a sun person." Neumann's vivid watercolor paintings and collages were used on an array of fabrics to create wallpaper, home linens, apparel, and most famously, her silk scarves. *Vera Paints a Rainbow* brings together a selection of her artworks representing the solar spectrum, which became key visual references of mid-century design.

A revolutionary icon of American design and brand development, dating from the 1950s onwards, Neumann became one of the most successful female entrepreneurs of her time. As writer Stephanie Mansfield wrote, "When they dig up the remains of this land, known as America, archaeologists of the future will undoubtedly come across cultural curiosities of the 20th century that might be mistaken for objects of religious worship: millions of rainbow-colored relics bearing the name *Vera*." Throughout her business career Neumann was first and foremost an artist,

Alexander Gray Associates

510 West 26 Street
New York NY 10001
United States
Tel: +1 212 399 2636
www.alexandergray.com

whose works translated graphically into everyday objects. She maintained close relationships with her contemporaries in art and design, sharing similar aesthetics. Among her closest friends were Alexander Calder, Joan Miró, and Marcel Breuer. Neumann was an avid traveler, gathering inspiration from her visits to countries around the world, including Mexico, Peru, China, Japan, India, and Iran, among others. Neumann's curiosity and experiences abroad impacted her vision, palette and understanding of the world. It emboldened her use of color as a way to communicate happiness. As she once expressed, "We have so many problems in this world, color brings just a little bit of joy into our lives."

Vera Neumann graduated from Cooper Union with a degree in Fine Arts in 1928, and in the 1930s attended the Traphagen School of Design. During the 1940s, she began designing placemats with a handmade silkscreen. Neumann's work as a designer indelibly impacted the American visual landscape, from the Truman White House and inspiring the designer Perry Ellis. In 1972 the Smithsonian National Museum of American History commissioned her to paint the museum's Foucault Pendulum installation, which was displayed in the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History from 1964 through 1998. Neumann's designs are represented in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Goldstein Museum of Design, St. Paul, MN; and the Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA, among others.