

Marian Zazeela Draws and Dreams on Her Own

By Andy Battaglia



Marian Zazeela: 03 X 17/2 2003, 2003.

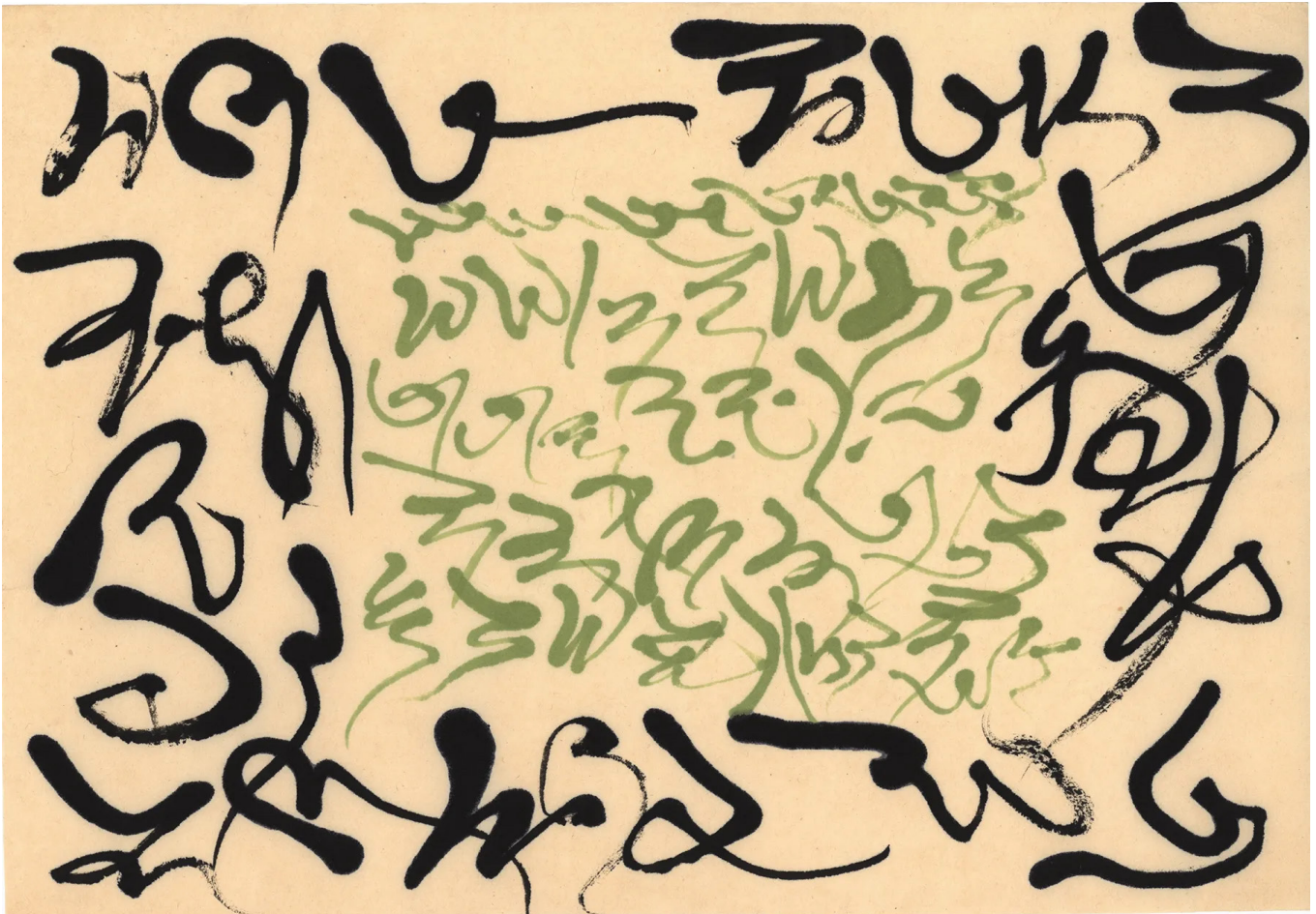
PHOTO JUNG HEE CHOI/©MARIAN ZAZEELA 2024

The drawings in Marian Zazeela's exhibition at Artists Space in New York look like words being born. Most of them are not even words, exactly, but accumulations of marks making their way through transformative stages somewhere between the embryonic and the etymological.

Zazeela's ornate style of drawing and calligraphy has been synonymous for decades with the work of her partner, the minimalist musical composer La Monte Young. The few musically aligned drawings in "Dream Lines," an exhibition of nearly 50 works made between 1962 and 2003, include an early poster advertising a series of performances by Young and fellow drone devotee Angus MacLise, as well as sketches for what would come to be album covers.

But most of the drawings now on view in Tribeca look like searching gestures that fluctuate between differing states of legibility. One brain-scrambling sketch of curlicue forms from 1962 (it's untitled, like all but a few works in the show) seems to bear the strange phrase "frow word" before rearranging itself to look more like "word" spelled both backward and forward—and then, after that, "draw word." Another from 1963 features extremely tiny lines of blurred black flourishes suggestive of writing over top an index page from the back of a book—intimating a store of information that has been obscured and hidden well away.

Zazeela's style is rooted in calligraphy but also grows and sprouts in different ways. And looking at her drawings—most of them in ink or pencil, and for the most part in black and white—is a curious exercise in an age when writing itself has so fundamentally changed. When is the last time you wrote something in cursive? Or had to decipher something written by hand? As it were, on my way to see "Dream Lines," I realized I had forgotten a pen to jot down notes and wandered around looking for somewhere—anywhere—to buy one. The little drug stores and the 7-Eleven I checked no longer stock even simple Bics.



Marian Zazeela, *Untitled 63/1*, ca. 1963.
PHOTO JUNG HEE CHOI/©MARIAN ZAZEELA 2024

Near the end of the show are two evocations (both from 1977) of significant figures rendered solely through the letters of their names. *Portrait of Helen 10/12* is a tribute to Helen Winkler Fosdick, one of the three founders of the Dia Art Foundation, which mounted a memorable Zazeela show at Dia:Beacon from 2019–22. *Portrait of Philippa 1/6* pays homage to Philippa de Menil, a fellow founder who funded Dia’s activities in the early years. Dia played a formative role in *Dream House*, a mesmerizing sound-and-light installation that Zazeela and Young established with Dia’s help in 1979 and continue to maintain (in a different form) above their home two blocks away from Artists Space.

Collaboration will always figure prominently in Zazeela’s legacy. But drawings of the kind in “Dream Lines” tell the story of an artist who awakens different states of dreaming on her own.