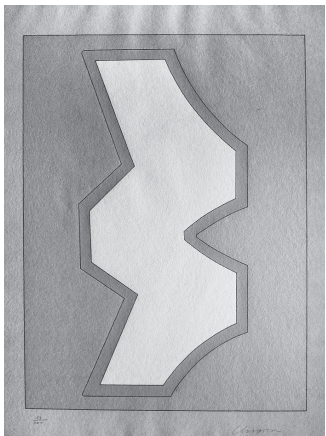
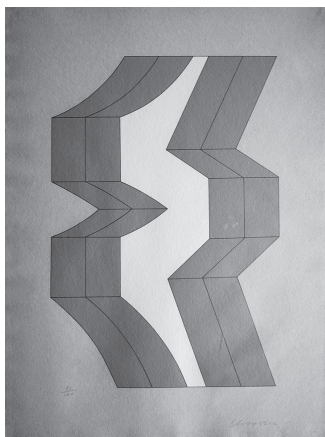


CHRYSSA

*GATES TO
TIMES SQUARE*

University Art Museum
Collections Study Gallery

August 8 –
December 5, 2022



Chryssa

Gates to Times Square, 1978

Portfolio of 16 screenprints on paper

40 x 30 inches each

Collection of University Art Museum, University at Albany, State University of New York on behalf of The University at Albany Foundation

Gift of Mrs. Ivan Radin

Taking language from the world, specifically the letterforms and characters from neon lights in Manhattan of the 1960s and 1970s, Chryssa refigures them in her series of screen prints *Gates to Times Square* (1978) on view in the University Art Museum’s Collections Study Gallery. These sixteen large-scale prints from the University at Albany Fine Art Collections represent an important moment in the artist’s lifelong, inexhaustible investigation of text as image. It is as if a word—even a fragment of a word—engendered a thousand pictures for Chryssa.

Emerging from the Coenties Slip community in Lower Manhattan in the 1950s and 1960s alongside artists Agnes Martin, Ellsworth Kelly, Lenore Tawney, Robert Indiana, and Jack Youngerman, who were working in contrast to their Abstract Expressionist counterparts, Chryssa drew inspiration from her immediate urban environment as well as from ancient Cycladic sculpture from her native Greece, and became a forerunner in the use of neon in the fine arts. Her work links her present moment with an archaic past, distinguishing it from both the atemporal abstraction of Kelly and the topical work of her Pop art contemporaries.

Recurring patterns and structures appear in the *Gates to Times Square* screen prints as Chryssa reused a core set of silkscreens to explore variable relationships between figure and ground, challenging the ways an image can be read. One is initially struck by the tension between highly saturated red and blue hues, which we perceive differently depending on colors surrounding them, in a phenomenon known as simultaneous contrast. Her intense colors, along with at times nested lines, whose weight corresponds to a neon tube’s diameter, and double circles suggesting electrodes all specifically reference her neon source material. However, sky blues and stone grays in other

works, seemingly at odds with the neon inspirations, allude to natural elements and underscore the sense of classical balance found throughout Chryssa’s work.

The *Gates to Times Square* prints show Chryssa continuing to explore the visual and textual ideas of her magnum opus: the monumental and immersive neon, Plexiglas, and steel sculpture *The Gates to Times Square* (1966, Albright-Knox Gallery). The ten-foot-tall, A-shaped work housed her sculpted fragments of neon signs. In her words, Chryssa found both “wisdom and Homeric poetry” beneath the vulgar consumerism of Times Square lights. She went on to make fifteen “studies” after this work: neon sculptures on timers and encased in dark gray Plexiglas to mimic nocturnal flashing. These allowed her to explore singular fragments in isolation, as she does in the prints on view.

Chryssa’s interest in text began early in her career, notably in her *Cycladic Books* (1954–55), plaster casts of cardboard boxes whose corrugated texture gave the impression of a lost language, as critic Barbara Rose observed; and in her bronze or aluminum tablets (1956) cast from capital Roman letter type arranged in monumental grids. Metal type, newspapers—sometimes copied through a rubber stamp process—and lightbulb marquees of Broadway and Times Square were among the many sources for Chryssa’s sculptural and two-dimensional work of the 1950s and 1960s, and she expanded her vocabulary to include Chinatown shop signs in work she produced in the 1970s and 1980s, concurrent with the prints on view.

Recombined here and throughout her work, Chryssa’s lexicon of letters and letter fragments open the gates to endlessly inventive ways of reading pictures.

—Robert Shane, PhD, Associate Curator

Chryssa (Chryssa Vardea-Mavromichali, b. Greece, 1933–2013), known for her sculpture and assemblage, was one of the first to use neon as a fine art medium, beginning in 1962. She studied in Paris and San Francisco, moved to New York in 1954, and also established a studio in Athens in 1992. Her work is in numerous collections including The Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, and the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. In 2023, Dia Art Foundation and the Menil Collection in Houston, TX will present *Chryssa & New York*, the first comprehensive survey of her work to take place in North America since 1982.



Chryssa in her New York studio. Image from Cultural Ghosts.

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University Art Museum, University at Albany

State University of New York

Collections Study Gallery

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Albany, New York 12222

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www.albany.edu/museum

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The Collections Study Gallery will follow a rotating exhibition schedule highlighting artworks from the University at Albany Fine Art Collections in tandem with past exhibiting artists and/or emerging or established contemporary artists.

In 2018 the University Art Museum (UAM) unveiled its new Collections Study Space, a multipurpose space designed to safely house over 3,000 objects reflecting 50 years of modern and contemporary art, and simultaneously make them accessible to students, faculty, other researchers and scholars, and the community. The UAM is proud to further this mission through the new Collections Study Gallery, as well as a redesigned digital database launched in 2020. The database can be viewed at: universityartmuseum.org

Support for the University Art Museum Fall 2022 exhibitions and programs is provided by The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Office of the President, Office of the Provost, The University at Albany Foundation, the University at Albany Alumni Association, the University Auxiliary Services at Albany, and the Robin Kanson Lewis '70 Exhibition Endowment Fund.