

**MERCEDES MATTER (1913-2001)**

Mercedes Matter, an artist, writer, and educator, was an important figure in postwar art who played a significant role in the development of Abstract Expressionism. She was a founding member of the American Abstract Artists and the Founder and Dean Emeritus of the New York Studio School.

Born Jeanne Carles in Philadelphia in 1913, the future artist, writer, and educator was the daughter of Mercedes de Cordoba, a former model for prominent photographers such as Edward Steichen and other key figures of the Photo-Secession movement, and Arthur B. Carles, an American painter who studied the works of Paul Cézanne and Henri Matisse in Paris during the 1910s. Matter began painting at the age of six years old. After spending time in Italy and France, she pursued formal art studies, first at Bennett College, Millbrook, New York, and later, in the early 1930s, with Hans Hofmann at The Art Students League, New York.

During the Great Depression, Matter worked for the Works Progress Administration alongside Elaine de Kooning, Arshile Gorky, and Lee Krasner. She spent a brief period in Los Angeles and returned to New York after World War II. She discovered that the artistic community she had known during the WPA years had further evolved. In the early 1950s, Mercedes became one of the first female members of the Club, a downtown artist collective that hosted regular discussion evenings and frequented the Cedar Tavern.

In 1953, Matter began her career as an art educator, teaching at the Philadelphia College of Art, New York University, and Pratt Institute. By 1963, she became disillusioned with her exposure to arts education and began to hold off-campus drawing classes for students who craved teaching that focused on studio time, a factor that Matter believed was crucial to an artist's development, instead of simply accreditation requirements. In September 1963, she published the article "What's Wrong with U.S. Art Schools?" emphasizing the need for a shift in educational philosophy to, "Strip away everything but . . . basic, serious components: drawing, painting, sculpture, history of art."

In response to this article and call to action, Matter founded the New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture in September 1964. The school's founding manifesto, dedicated to the principle that art education should mirror the life of the artist, was signed by Willem de Kooning, Alexander Calder, Adolph Gottlieb, Barnett Newman, Isamu Noguchi, Mark Rothko, and others.

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Matter spent a great amount of time working on drawings and paintings that began as still lifes and gradually evolved into abstraction. In addition to her own art and teaching, she wrote articles about artists such as Hofmann, Franz Kline, and Alberto Giacometti. She also authored the text for a book of her husband's photographs of Giacometti, published in 1987, four years after his death. Mercedes Matter passed away in 2001. Matter's work can be found in the Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington, the Parrish Museum, Water Mill, New York, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others.