

# NINA YANKOWITZ

## IN THE OUT/OUT THE IN

**JUNE 21 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 21, 2025**

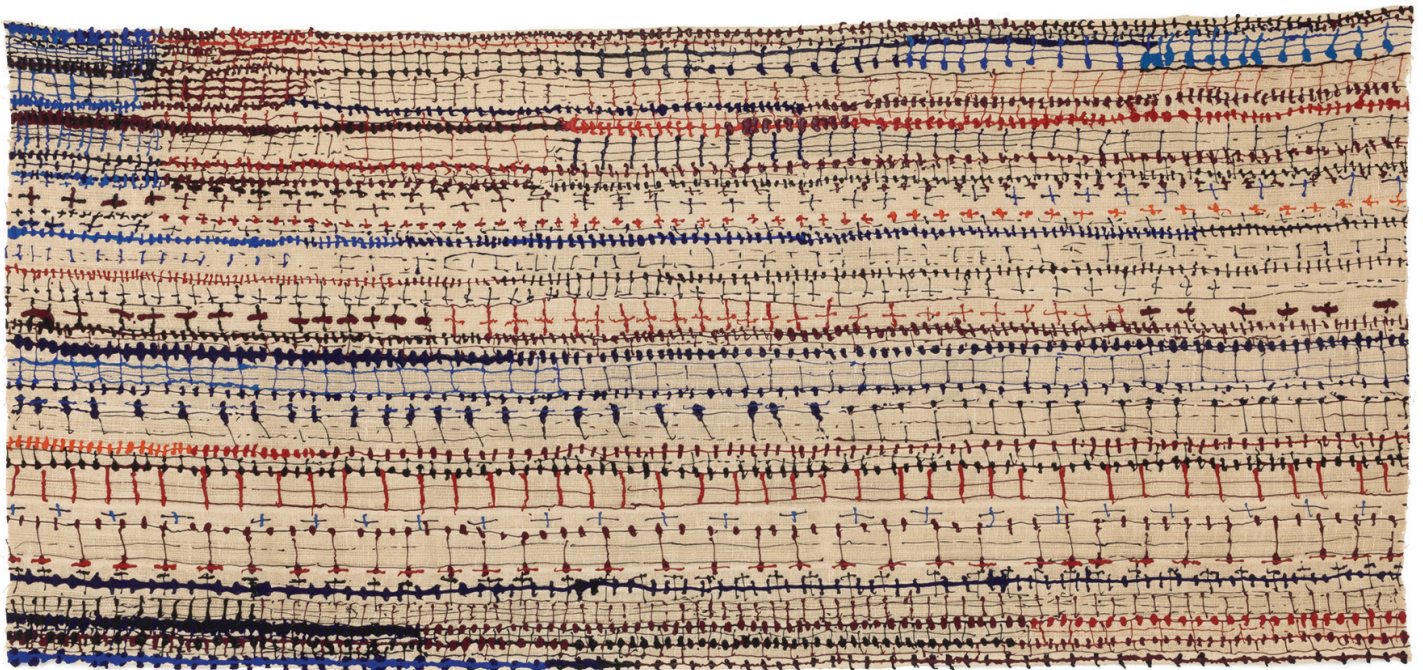
Over a career spanning six decades, Nina Yankowitz (American, b. 1946) has created a multidisciplinary practice that defies singular definition. Her work pushes against traditional boundaries: her paintings have resisted not just strainers but gravity; her abstract compositions have gone beyond the canvas to embrace the aural. Most recently, Yankowitz has deepened her interest in technology and new media to create immersive environments that spotlight women-centered histories that have gone unknown for far too long. Despite the stark individuality of Yankowitz's practice, she has long understood the importance of collective action and was

a founding member of the feminist Heresies Collective (1976-1993). Elements of social justice underpin Yankowitz's work, as does humor and a fearless approach to medium. A defining aspect of her early work was a lack of strainers—she did not require supports for her paintings, which were draped, pleated, shirred, puckered, and ultimately pinned to the wall. This exhibition serves as a course correction, ensuring that the work of this boundary-defying artist is honored with a career retrospective within her lifetime.



Nina Yankowitz, *Ms. Majesty*, 1970-71. Courtesy of the Artist and Eric Firestone Gallery, New York.

As a teenager, Yankowitz would take a bus from New Jersey to Manhattan's West Village, ensconcing herself in the thriving music and artistic scenes. She eventually found herself at the 212 summer program in Woodstock, where she began experimenting with draped canvases and musical accompaniment to her paintings. A highlight of the exhibition will be *Oh Say Can You See* (1967-68), an early work that involves an audio component composed by Ken Werner (aka Phil Harmonic). From this literal depiction of musical notes grew Yankowitz's more abstract visual and musical language.



Nina Yankowitz, *Dilated Grain Reading: Scanning Reds and Blues*, 1973, Extruded acrylic and Flashe on linen

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Soon after graduating from the School of Visual Arts in New York City, where Yankowitz adamantly rejected divisions between painting and sculpture, she was included in the 1973 inaugural Whitney Biennial, exhibiting *Painted Thread Reading* (1972). Made from torn canvas strips, then stitched together and “read” laterally, this work led to a series of paintings that allowed for a unique interpretive visual process that she calls “scanning.” The artist repeatedly uses that term, stating, “I am interested in scanning. I wish to interpret it in a visual language because I consider it a principal way of experiencing the world.” Throughout the 1970s, Yankowitz worked through this idea of scanning, creating an alphabet from sources of visual movement, sound, and shape, hoping to create a trance-like state for the viewer. In addition, Yankowitz has synesthesia, which is the transference of one sense impression into another. For the artist, it is a correlation between sound and color: “Sound in your eyes.”

Painted on unstretched linen, the *Dilated Grain Readings* can be read as abstract music scores, and indeed, they are often accompanied with sound: recordings of voices woven together, pitches stretched. Yankowitz has stated, “When I hear sound, I see color, and when I see color, I hear sound.” *Dilated Grain Reading/Blue Pitches* (1973) can be read in three parts, or in layers. The precise mark-making offers pauses and quick staccatos, tangles of tones, and areas of rest; Yankowitz was able to wield such tight control of the paint by using a squeeze bottle to create each line.

This exhibition will include early draped, shirred, and pleated paintings, as well as the *Dilated Grain Readings* series and later scanning works. It will also include Yankowitz’s experiments in ceramics, including *Hell’s Breath* (1981), an immersive work created for PS1 that has not been exhibited since, and her more recent immersive new media installations. A brand-new work titled *Closing Bell*, which involves multimedia collaborations with more than 30 visual artists, poets, and musicians, will premiere as part of the exhibition.

*In the Out/Out the In* is a phrase that came to Yankowitz as a means to describe her goals of making her art as accessible as possible (bringing the so-called “outside” “in”). However, it also suggests the sense of imbalance that occurs when experiencing the artist’s work. Her *Cantilever* series, for example, suggests paintings crashing through walls, causing disorientation that can be almost visceral. An audio work from 1974, titled *Lips Knees Neck Elbows Chest Rear*, which will be included in the exhibition, urges visitors to engage with their own bodies. The Museum of Fine Arts will also be installing *Criss Crossing the Divine*, an interactive work that allows participants to explore themes of world religions; this will be a fitting installation in our encyclopedic institution.

Nina Yankowitz was born and raised in New Jersey and lives between New York City and Sag Harbor. Her works are in public collections, including the Franklin Furnace Collection at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Guild Hall, East Hampton, NY; Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA; Virginia Museum of History & Culture, Richmond, VA; and the Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA. Her archival materials are found in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Her 2022 solo exhibition at Eric Firestone Gallery garnered reviews in *Artforum* and *Art in America*, and in 2024 she was inducted into the New York Foundation for the Arts’ Hall of Fame.



Nina Yankowitz with *Sagging Spiro* (1969)  
installed at Eric Firestone Gallery, 2022



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Nina Yankowitz, *Draped Impotent Squares*, 1969, Acrylic compressor spray on canvas

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