

Anna-Eva BERGMAN

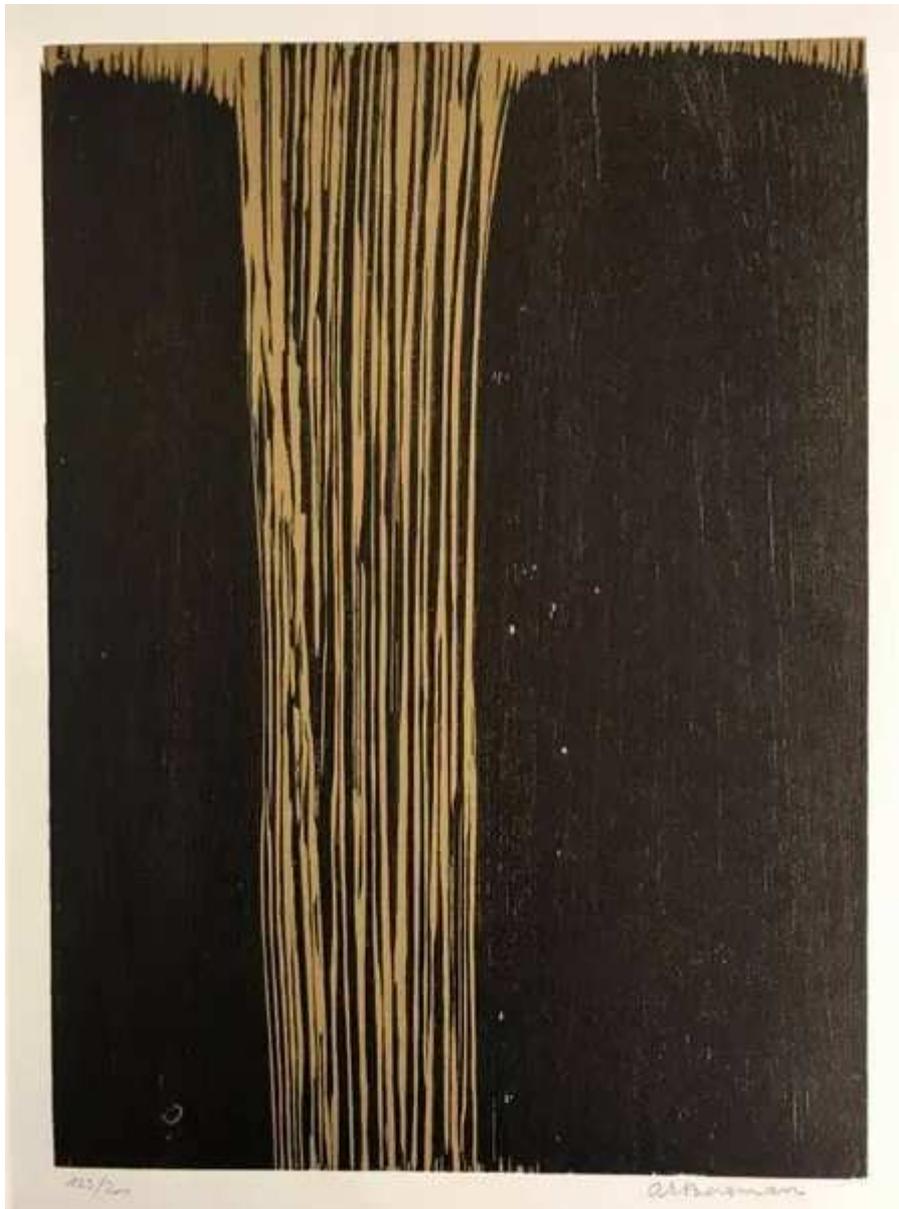
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Spiritual abstractions—lush, divinely inspired paintings by artists such as [Sonia Delaunay](#), [Hilma af Klint](#), and [Agnes Pelton](#)—have permeated the white cube over the past few years. And for good reason: Hallucinatory geometries, explosive hues, and absorbing patterns are especially appealing in an age of systemic failures, illness, uncertainty, and climate catastrophe. Spiritual abstractions take us to entirely different realms.

Following this trend, the previously overlooked Norwegian painter [Anna-Eva Bergman](#) is now getting her due. Her recent popularity also coincides with ongoing reconsiderations of 20th-century female painters. Thanks to recent institutional and gallery support, collectors and the broader art viewing public are now appreciating the artist's mysticism and material ingenuity more than ever.

“When you are mystical, others can consider you as a fool, even insane, and you may be ostracized,” said Thomas Schlessler, director of the Hartung-Bergman Foundation, in an interview with Artsy. The Foundation is dedicated to the work and legacy of Bergman and her husband, the German French painter Hans Hartung. Until her passing in 1987, Bergman was loyal to her materials’ optical alchemies and their promise to convey more than what the eye sees—especially with regard to the landscape and other natural forms.

N°60-1961 Montagne | N°60-1961 Mountain (1960), for example, translates the titular geological feature into an asymmetrical mount of tempera and metal sheet. *N°7-1956 Forme d’Argent Concave | N°7-1956*, on the other hand, features a dense oil and metal sheet atop canvas, stretching the central shape like a spider’s web.

Anna-Eva Bergman, *N°63-1961 Big universe with small squares*, 1961. ©Anna-Eva Bergman/ADAGP, Paris ARS, New York 2022. Courtesy of Fondation Hartung-Bergman and Perrotin.

After a two-year renovation, the Hartung-Bergman Foundation reopened earlier this year. The space features exhibition galleries, a residency program, and a library, all situated in the French Riviera home where the couple spent their last decades—from the 1960s through the 1980s—together.

The foundation’s second life overlaps with that of Bergman’s career. In recent years, soaring auction results and decorated solo exhibitions have put Bergman on a radar that omitted her during her lifetime. At an auction in March, *N°9-1954, petit univers rouge* (1954) sold for \$145,040, far surpassing the modest estimate of \$11,156–\$16,735. Her previous two records, both from 2018, hammered down at \$103,078 and \$80,000.

Anna-Eva Bergman, *N°17-1976 Nunatak II*, 1976. © Anna-Eva Bergman/ADAGP, Paris and ARS, New York 2022. Courtesy of Fondation Hartung-Bergman and Perrotin.

The Musée des Beaux-Arts de Caen and Madrid’s Museo Reina Sofía gave Bergman’s work solo shows in 2020 and 2021, respectively. Next year, two separate retrospectives will hit the Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris and the National Museum of Oslo. New York—which Bergman first visited in 1964 to meet Mark Rothko—will enjoy a major show dedicated exclusively to the artist’s paintings when Perrotin opens “Revelation” later this month. The gallery has already tested the artist’s paintings on this side of the pond: This past May, at TEFAF New York, it sold two of her pieces to separate institutions, both in the \$250,000–\$500,000 range. Schlessler’s comprehensive biography on Bergman, and Perrotin’s new monograph on the artist, are slated for release later this year.

The artist’s painting practice similarly featured many lives. Bergman was born in Stockholm in 1909 and eventually moved to Paris in 1929 to launch her painting career. She married Hartung, and the pair relocated to the Spanish island of Menorca. Bergman’s early abstractions were lush watercolors that referenced landscapes.

Anna-Eva Bergman, *Untitled*, 1950. © Anna-Eva Bergman/ADAGP, Paris and ARS, New York 2022. Courtesy of Fondation Hartung-Bergman and Perrotin.

After the Nazis invaded Norway in 1940, and Bergman suffered a creative and psychological downfall, “she fully committed herself to cosmic theory and spiritual abstraction,” Schlessner explained. “This is a striking example of how history can become a complete turning point in an artist’s career path and lead to concrete changes.”

In addition to such global upheavals, Bergman suffered personal turmoil. She grew up poor, faced dismissal from the European art world’s machismo, went through a divorce from Hartung, moved back to Scandinavia from Paris, then made a grand return to both Paris and Hartung at the beginning of the 1950s.

Yet it was World War II that really devastated Bergman. About the war’s shattering impact on her life, Schlessner said, “There were two Anna-Evas—one before World War II and another one after.” Bergman’s emotional tumult led her towards an explosive, nonfigurative lexicon and material experiments with radiant layers of gold leaf, tempera, and metal sheet.

The 51 paintings at Perrotin all focus on the post-war Anna-Eva and feature a unique visual language that attempts to translate a world in ruins onto the canvas. They reference icebergs, furious volcanoes, and silent mountains, and are layered with unapologetic amounts of gold and metal leaf. On other canvases, these materials are protagonists who combat thick swaths of black—and they win. Hints of chunky rock formations, glittery sunsets, and turbulent whirlwinds appear throughout the show.

Anna-Eva Bergman, *N°30-1986*, 1986. ©Anna-Eva Bergman/ADAGP, Paris and ARS, New York 2022. Courtesy of Fondation Hartung-Bergman and Perrotin.

In 1950, which is also the first date on the Perrotin checklist, Bergman coined a term for her subliminal approach to representing natural phenomena: *abstrahende* (roughly translatable as “abstractization”). This was in contrast to the Norwegian word for abstraction, *abstrakt*. Bergman saw her way of working as what Schlessner called “a process of abstraction, a balance between material feelings and simplicity of formal vocabulary.”

He added that “big storms, waves, and droplets of rain hitting the ground” were natural occurrences that Bergman encountered after moving to Antibes, France, in 1973. She consequently created visually demure but texturally abundant paintings that refused simple interpretation. Her new Mediterranean vistas, and the fjord marvels where she grew up, perhaps prompted Bergman to craft a unique visual language and terminology that finally felt like home.