

# Thomas Erben Gallery

Press Release



*Phigor*, 2014. Acrylic and acrylic mediums on canvas, 117 x 70 inches, (back, front).

## **Dona Nelson**

### *Phigor*

April 3 – May 24, 2014

*Opening reception: Thursday, April 3, 6-8:30 pm*

Thomas Erben is very excited to present a third solo exhibition by American painter **Dona Nelson**, a participant in the 2014 **Whitney Biennial** (on view until May 25). With an impressive group of newly produced, large scale works, Nelson once again confirms her position as a vibrant, tough, and visually and materially inventive artist – a continued influence in the discussion around current painting practices.

Dona Nelson's work is rooted in the very fundamentals of what a painting is. Throughout her process, she lets the medium itself dictate the form, using its basic components: canvas, paint, stretcher. Working from both sides of the canvas, and often stretching and re-stretching it several times before deciding what is front or back, she stains, soaks and pours paint, sometimes forcing it through incisions or hosing down the canvas with water.

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The stretcher, equally affected, becomes an integral part of the painting/object, either adding another surface, or lingering as an imprint if the stretcher is removed. She articulates her works further with strips of fabric soaked in acrylic medium, and painted string poked through the canvas. Regarding the two-sidedness, Nelson says, "That's the process I've found that works best for me, soaking paint through the canvas, using fluid acrylics and acrylic flow release. The painting on the back comes into existence without my seeing it. The backs are received paintings, like the back of *March Hare* is a completely received image, and the front is worked like crazy. I work with the painting gods. We drink together."<sup>1</sup>

This communication between the two sides of Nelson's works makes them more than just painted surfaces – each piece becomes an entity in itself. Often, as through a geology of painting, the work accumulates successive strata throughout its creation, resulting in layered works, seemingly formed through an interplay between sedimentation and rushing rapids. This drawn-out process is contrasted with the almost instantaneous character of other pieces – a sudden splash of paint across an unprepared canvas – forming a body of work that, as a whole, is as lively as it is considered.

In a current context, Dona Nelson's work stands out for its lack of pretension. Her paintings speak about Painting without being self-conscious. Guided by her own increasingly accurate instinct, she has continued to challenge herself throughout her long career, always willing to follow where the work takes her. In recent history, others have broken up, questioned, or violated the well-established surface of the canvas, but Nelson ventures further, as she creates an interdependence between its two sides, semiotically diluting the material in between.

Dona Nelson (b. 1947, Grand Island, NE) moved to New York City in 1967 to participate in the **Whitney Independent Study Program**. She received her BFA from **Ohio State University** in 1968. Over the years, she has had numerous, widely reviewed solo shows, at galleries such as **Rosa Esman, Michael Klein, Cheim & Read** (all New York); including a mid-career exhibition at the **Weatherspoon Art Gallery** (Greensboro, NC). More recently, she was included in survey shows at **Harris Lieberman, D'Amelio Terras, Mary Boone, Robert Miller**, and **Boston University Art Gallery**. Her work has also appeared at institutions such as the **Contemporary Arts Museum Houston**, New York University's **80WSE, Bard College, Apexart**, the **Milwaukee Art Museum**, and the **Aldrich Museum**, and is included in the collections of the **Metropolitan Museum of Art**, the **Guggenheim Museum**, and the **Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts** – among others. In 2013, Nelson received the **Artists' Legacy Foundation Award**, she was a 2011 **Foundation for Contemporary Arts** grant recipient, and received a **Guggenheim Fellowship** in 1994. She is a Professor of Painting and Drawing at Tyler School of Art, Temple University, Philadelphia.

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<sup>1</sup> *Conversation*, Dona Nelson, 03/19/14

## DONA NELSON

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Installation view, west and north wall  
From left: *Top*, *Bright!*, *Phigor*, *Red and Green Noses*

*Phigor*, solo exhibition at Thomas Erben Gallery, April 3 – May 17, 2014

## DONA NELSON

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Installation view towards east wall  
From left: *March Hare*, *Orangey*

*Phigor*, solo exhibition at Thomas Erben Gallery, April 3 – May 17, 2014

## DONA NELSON

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Installation view towards west and north wall  
From left: *Orangey*, *Red and Green Noses*, *March Hare*

*Phigor*, solo exhibition at Thomas Erben Gallery, April 3 – May 17, 2014

**DONA NELSON**

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Installation view towards north and east wall  
From left: *March Hare* (detail), *Violet Bridge*

*Phigor*, solo exhibition at Thomas Erben Gallery, April 3 – May 17, 2014

## DONA NELSON

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Installation view towards west and north wall  
From left: *Phigor*, *Division Street*

*Phigor*, solo exhibition at Thomas Erben Gallery, April 3 – May 17, 2014

## DONA NELSON

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Installation view towards west wall  
From left: *Red and Green Noses*, *Bright!*, *Division Street*, *Phigor*

*Phigor*, solo exhibition at Thomas Erben Gallery, April 3 – May 17, 2014



## DONA NELSON

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Installation view towards east wall

From left: *Phigor* (detail), *Red and Green Noses*, *Orangey*

*Phigor*, solo exhibition at Thomas Erben Gallery, April 3 – May 17, 2014

**DONA NELSON**

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*Phigor* (2014)  
Acrylic and acrylic medium on canvas (double-sided)  
117 x 70 in

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*Red and Green Noses* (2013)

Acrylic, acrylic medium and painted string on canvas (double-sided)

83 x 78 in

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*March Hare* (2014)  
Acrylic and acrylic medium on canvas (double-sided)  
83 x 78 in

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*Orangey* (2011)  
Acrylic mediums and dyed cheesecloth on canvas (double-sided)  
83 x 81 inches

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*Top* (2014)  
Acrylic and acrylic medium on canvas  
70 x 79 in

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*Division Street* (2013)  
Acrylic and acrylic medium on canvas (double-sided)  
56 x 50 in

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*Violet Bridge* (2014)  
Acrylic and acrylic medium on canvas  
48 x 48 in