

# Southwest Contemporary

REVIEW / NEW MEXICO

## Ellen Berkenblit's *In Motion* Expresses the Magic of Mark Making

OCTOBER 9, 2023

Ellen Berkenblit's exhibition *In Motion* at Tamarind Institute surveys the New York-based artist's continuing collaboration with the renowned lithography workshop in Albuquerque.



Ellen Berkenblit, *Alley of Peacocks*, 2022, ten-color lithograph on Gray Rives BFK, 26 3/4 x 37 in. Collaborating Printer(s): Valpuri Remling and Lindsey Sigmon. Ed. of 20. Courtesy Tamarind Institute.

flower-adorned hat, in profile view, tugging on a few measly threads attached to a magnificently blue—and painfully alert—triangular peacock, also in profile, which she faces, all against a velvety black background. The woman's kohl-lined emerald eyes (faceted black and green squares), smooth beige cheek (a swath of uniform color), pursed lips (a whisper of a mark), and tucked chin (a mere curve) are complemented by her scuttled blonde

### *Ellen Berkenblit: In Motion*

August 25 – December 22, 2023

Tamarind Institute, Albuquerque

I can't get enough of Ellen Berkenblit's artworks. "Enough," of course, is relative. Can color be evocative enough to prompt personal associations without being prescriptive? Is a subtle mark versatile enough to reference a mouth, a nipple, or an eye? My answer is yes, at least in the case of Berkenblit, whose exhibition *In Motion* is on view at Tamarind Institute through December 22. The exhibition of prints from 2003 to 2022, curated by Kylee Aragon Wallis, functions as a survey of the New York-based artist's ongoing collaboration with the renowned lithography workshop in Albuquerque.

Berkenblit's compelling figurative work is in service of abstract expression. Her bold use of line and bright saturated colors fill closely cropped storyboard-like compositions that, most often, feature one woman and animal companions engaged in magical encounters with mundane elements of daily life.

For example, the ten-color lithograph *Alley of Peacocks* (2022) features the torso of a young woman in a

bob (vertical brush marks of black and yellow) and perky breast draped by a sheer strapless blouse (a hint of magenta amidst lightly brushed black ink). A line trails across her forehead as one long, thin eyebrow. The composition also exists as a one-color (black and white) litho, an irresistible noir drawing.

Color and line dominate Berkenblit's *Large Stripe Ribbon*, *Leopard Ribbon*, *Daisies*, and *Flower Hat*, a 2021 series of four large duplicated but unique faces, again in profile. The left side of the prints include patterns of stripes and spots that read as printed fabric, choppy rectangles of lavender-gray Ben-Day-ish dots that form gauzy daisies, or bulbous forms that could be peonies, each with bars of glitter — barrettes — situated within vertical yellow swipes of hair. Opposite, a large green or blue oval encircled in black hovers beneath the bisque-colored hump of a forehead and nestled against the swoop of a nose. The geometric and organic shapes flip back and forth between positive and negative space, subject and ground, facial details and formal arrangements. If stepping back provided a broader view, we might see that the woman is screaming.



Ellen Berkenblit, *Large Stripe Ribbon*, 2021, six-color lithograph with glitter element on antique white Somerset velvet, 29 13/16 x 39 7/8 in. Collaborating Printer(s): Valpuri Remling, Alyssa Ebinger and Lindsey Sigmon. Ed. of 20. Courtesy Tamarind Institute.

The show also includes earlier prints from Berkenblit's first residency, which depict similarly dynamic compositions of a woman, cat, bear, mouse, and bird. Here, she elicits feelings of intrigue and tension through the printing process's mirroring effect, positioning the figure as looking back as compared to beyond, and using color as a more overtly animating force.

Berkenblit's works are not narrative, although they do include recognizable narrative components, a "recurring cast of characters" that has held the attention of other artists, art writers, and patrons. These players operate as an open set of letters, as someone articulated during Berkenblit's recent talk at Tamarind, abstract marks to which we the viewers assign meaning. Images are containers for her "doing" — explorations of material, process, color, pattern, texture, form, and mark making. The leopard as a way to draw spots, a squiggle of hair as an excuse to go wild. They hold the line for when enough is enough.





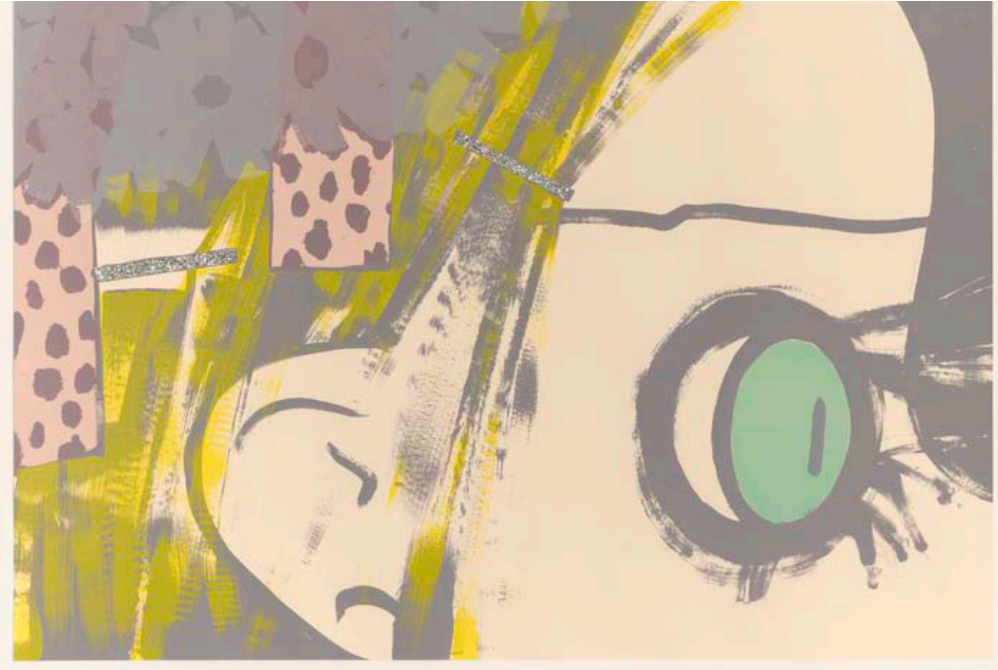
Ellen Berkenblit, *Laboratory on Rt. 66*, 2003, five-color lithograph on German etching paper, 24 1/8 x 17 in. Collaborating Printer: Lee Turner. Ed. of 15. Courtesy Tamarind Institute.



Ellen Berkenblit, *Alley of Peacocks*, 2022, one-color lithograph on Gray Rives BFK, 26 3/4 x 37 in. Collaborating Printer(s): Valpuri Remling and Lindsey Sigmon. Ed. of 10. Courtesy Tamarind Institute.



Ellen Berkenblit, *Night Peonies*, 2022, eleven-color lithograph on gray Rives BFK, 26 15/16 x 36 7/8 in. Collaborating Printer(s): Valpuri Remling and Lindsey Sigmon. Ed. of 20. Courtesy Tamarind Institute.



Ellen Berkenblit, *Leopard Ribbon*, 2021, five-color lithograph with glitter element on antique white Somerset velvet, 29 13/16 x 39 7/8 in. Collaborating Printer(s): Valpuri Remling and Lindsey Sigmon. Ed. of 20. Courtesy Tamarind Institute.



Ellen Berkenblit, *Flower Hat*, 2021, six-color lithograph with glitter element on antique white Somerset velvet, 29 1/2 x 39 7/8 in. Collaborating Printer(s): Valpuri Remling, Alyssa Ebinger and Lindsey Sigmon. Ed. of 20. Courtesy Tamarind Institute.