

*Martha Edelheit: Naked City,
Paintings from 1965–80*

January 25–March 18, 2023

eric firestone gallery

40 Great Jones St., New York, NY 10012 – ericfirestonegallery.com – 646.998.3727



Martha Edelheit: Naked City, Paintings from 1965–80

Eric Firestone Gallery is pleased to announce ***Martha Edelheit: Naked City, Paintings from 1965–80***.

Opening on January 25, 2023, this is the gallery's second solo exhibition with the 91-year-old artist. The show will include historic monumental paintings of nude women and men situated on luscious drapery or montaged into familiar locations around New York City; surrealist multi-panel self-portraits; close-ups of torsos with imagined tattoos; and intimate pastels of the body. Edelheit's practice is transgressive, whimsical, and sensuous all at once. The artist's output from the mid-1960s through early '80s reflects her abiding love of art history and her reimagining of the discipline that was largely created by men, for men.

Over the last several years, Edelheit's oeuvre has been increasingly recognized by museums across the world. Her works have been featured in recent exhibitions such as *New York: 1962–1964* (2022–23) at the Jewish Museum, New York, NY and the forthcoming *Action, Gesture, Paint* (2023) at Whitechapel Gallery, London. Institutions including the Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN and Moderna Museet, Stockholm have acquired significant paintings by the artist.

Edelheit was born in New York City in 1931, where she lived until moving to Sweden in 1993. She currently divides her time between the Stockholm area and New York City. Edelheit studied at the University of Chicago and Columbia University in the 1950s with artist Michael Loew and art historian Meyer Schapiro. She credits Loew and Schapiro with inspiring a new way of thinking about image construction and pictorial space. Yet as a painter, Edelheit was largely self-taught.

The title of Eric Firestone Gallery's show recalls the artistic milieu in which Edelheit emerged—bringing to mind legendary photographer Weegee's first book *Naked City* (1945) that documents the frenzy and spectacle of life in New York City as well as the film noir *The Naked City* (1948) that captures the violence and mystery of urban experience. Indeed, in the late 1950s, Edelheit established herself at the center of the downtown avant-garde. She became a member of the Reuben Gallery, a Tenth Street artist-run space where her first solo show was held in 1960. Along with fellow members Jim Dine, Rosalyn Drexler, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg, Lucas Samaras, and Robert Whitman, Edelheit was expanding the definitions of art-making by creating experimental objects. Her second solo presentation in 1961 was held at another significant nucleus of experimental art: Judson Gallery.



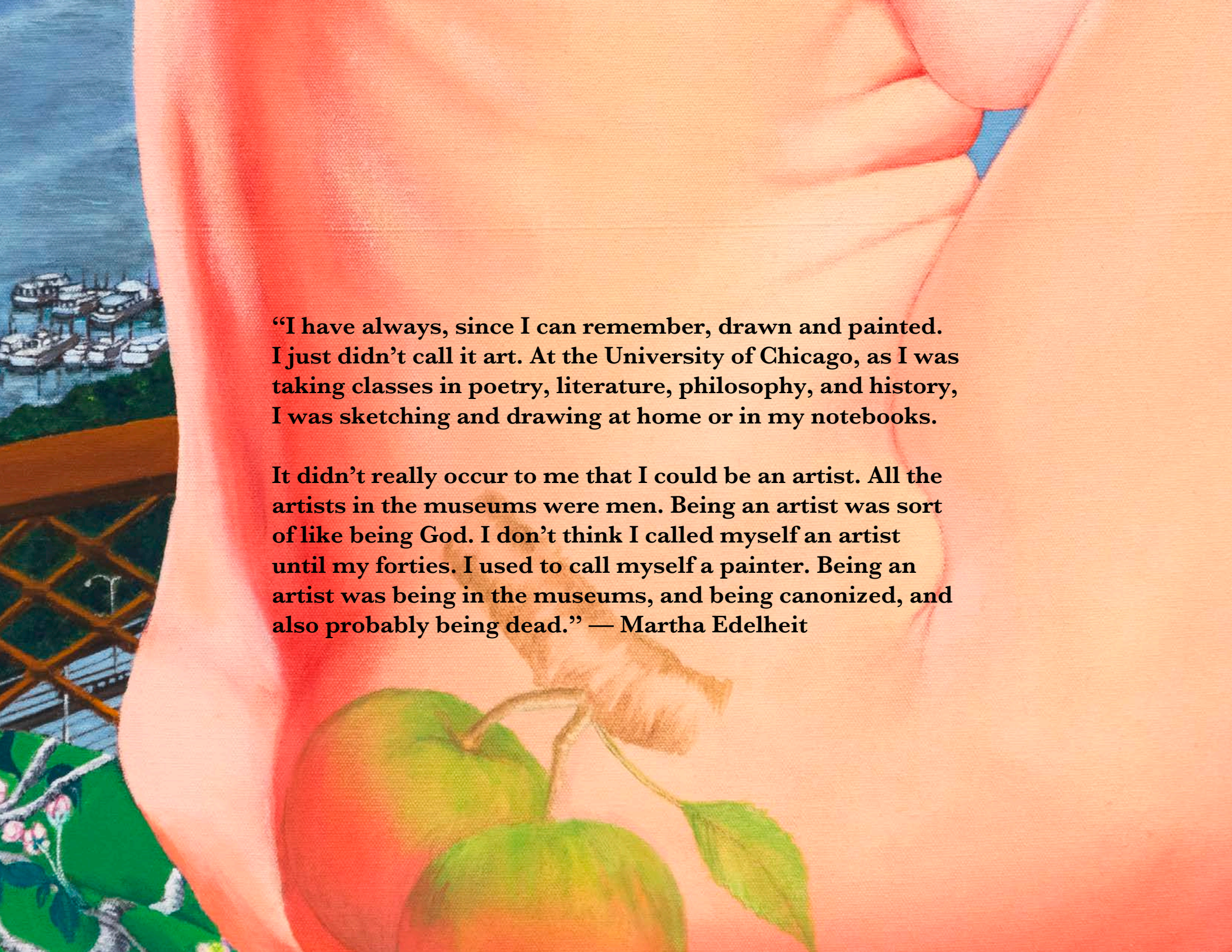
Edelheit's earliest work was abstract. In the 1960s, she began working from the nude model—a watershed that would transform her practice. Edelheit related to the writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss. In his 1955 book, *Tristes Tropiques*, Lévi-Strauss speculates that tattooing was the first art, before cave art, and that the human body was the first canvas. Yet by 1962, Edelheit had begun incorporating tattooing into her art practice. In her hands, flesh became a place where the dreams and fantasies of her figures emerge.

Edelheit has always prioritized an empathic relationship with her subjects. Her paintings evoke the friendships that developed between painter and model—an intimate exchange during which the sitter would often share private thoughts and experiences. Invented tattoos inscribed on backs and torsos within Edelheit's more intimately scaled paintings became a kind of journal for recording these exchanges. The fabrics on which figures recline are replete with symbols and patterns that represent life events. After getting to know her models, Edelheit often painted directly on textiles before using them as props within her rendered tableaux.

Edelheit reconceived the traditional point of view and male gaze in Western and Non-Western art as well as pornography by portraying male nudes and non-idealized female bodies. The artist ruminated on her travels across Europe, realizing that Renaissance

masterpieces were about men and produced for a male audience. She began, in her own work, to position nude or partially dressed women in confrontational stances.

In 1974, Edelheit's work was the subject of a solo exhibition at the Evanston Art Center in Illinois. On view were large-scale canvases that will be presented at Eric Firestone Gallery such as *View of Empire State Building from Sheep Meadow* (1970–72) and *Seals, Central Park Zoo* (1970–71). The Evanston Art Center show caused an uproar, with viewers calling for Edelheit's paintings—especially those depicting male nudity—to be taken down. In response, letters of defense addressed to the Evanston Art Center were penned by esteemed scholars and artists such as Marcia Tucker; Linda Nochlin; Allan Kaprow; Lawrence Campbell; and Irving Sandler. This was not the first nor last time that Edelheit's work (and even the artist herself) would be deemed obscene, despite the fact that she came of age as a woman artist against the backdrop of the sexual revolution.



“I have always, since I can remember, drawn and painted. I just didn’t call it art. At the University of Chicago, as I was taking classes in poetry, literature, philosophy, and history, I was sketching and drawing at home or in my notebooks.

It didn’t really occur to me that I could be an artist. All the artists in the museums were men. Being an artist was sort of like being God. I don’t think I called myself an artist until my forties. I used to call myself a painter. Being an artist was being in the museums, and being canonized, and also probably being dead.” — Martha Edelheit

In addition to such paintings, on view at Eric Firestone Gallery will be a group of related pastels in which Edelheit abstracts and defamiliarizes the body, with extreme close-ups of the torso: stomachs, breasts, and thighs. Her palette of reds, oranges, and pinks is warm and luminous; these pastels hum with erotic energy.

Edelheit's output at large implicitly challenges societal expectations of women. By using quotidian materials and responding to Non-Western erotica, she also challenged formalist paradigms and traditional nude figuration. She pushed forms and issues to the surface (literally and figuratively) that our culture preferred to ignore. Edelheit was a pioneer of the era, and the conversation that her practice raises about taboo sexual imagery and the censorship of women artists remains topical today.

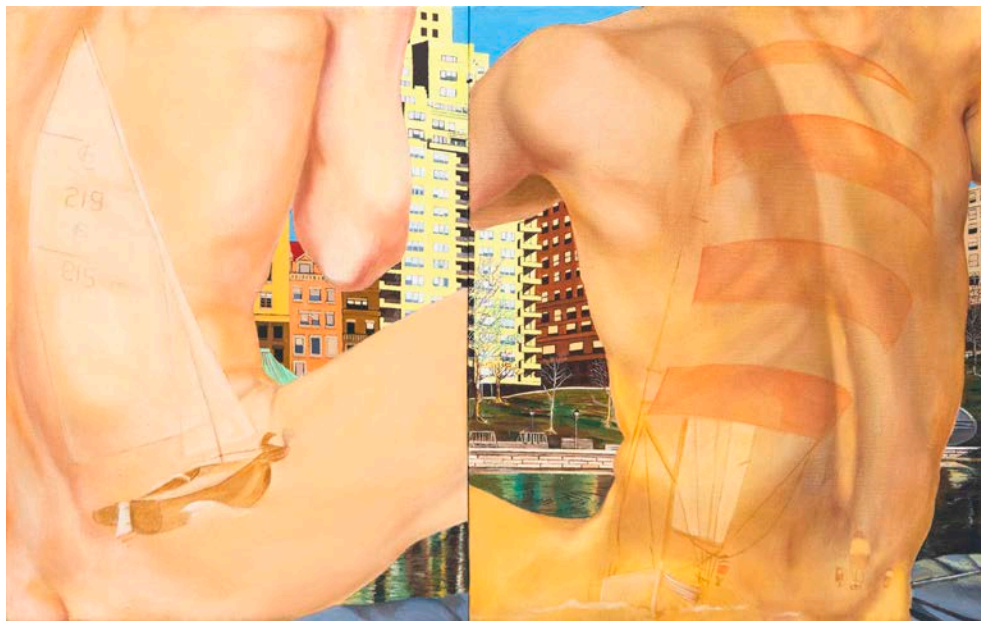
Martha Edelheit: Naked City, Paintings from 1965–80 will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue as well as a public program with the artist herself.



Portrait of the artist in the studio of Maria Lassnig.



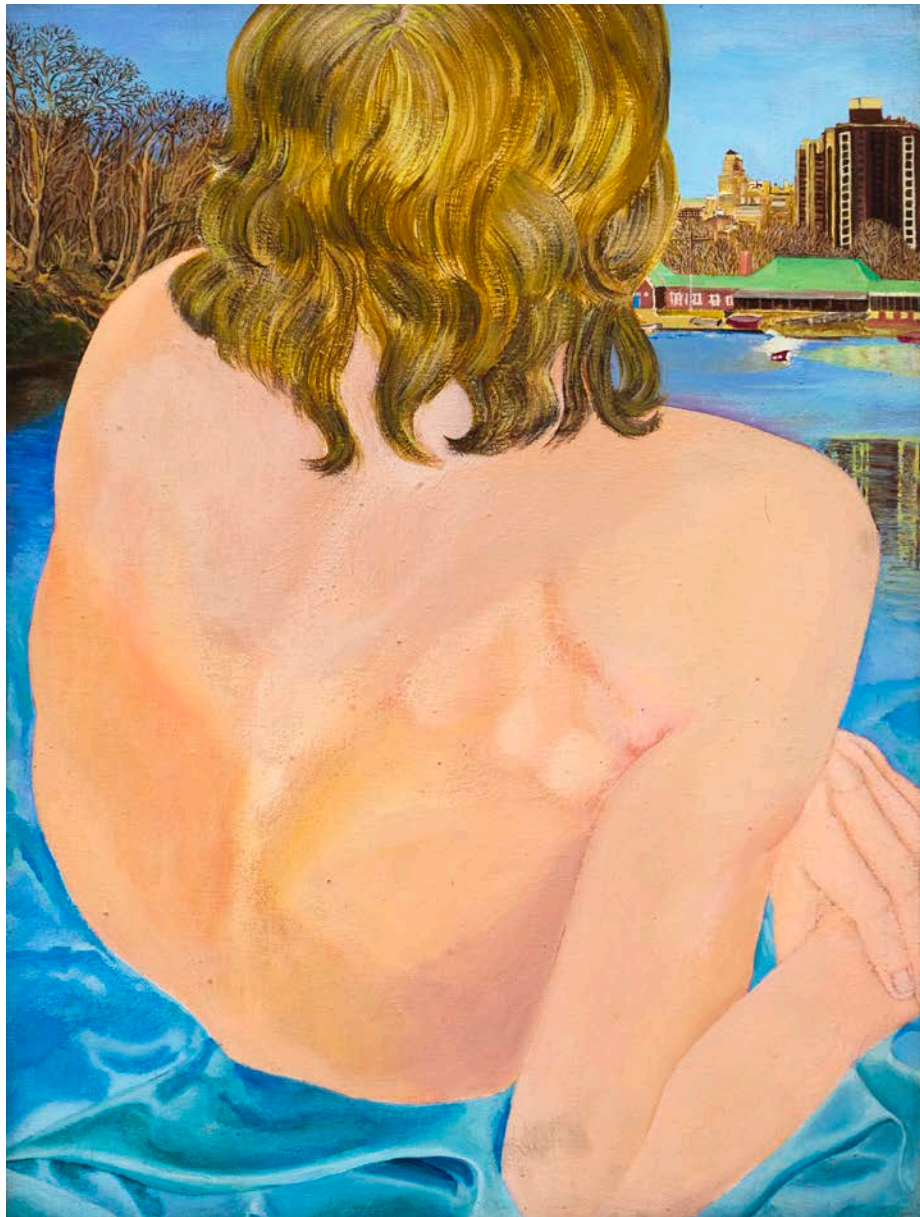
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Martha Edelheit
Model Boat Pond, 1972–73

acrylic on canvas, in two parts
24h x 38w in
60.96h x 96.52w cm
MEDE725

eric firestone gallery



Martha Edelheit
Boathouse Central Park, 1972

acrylic on canvas
20h x 24w in
50.80h x 60.96w cm
MEDE462

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Martha Edelheit
Boating Central Park, 1973

acrylic on canvas
24h x 20w in
60.96h x 50.80w cm
MEDE102



1911
W. H. P. 1911

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Martha Edelheit
*Seals, Central
Park Zoo, 1970–71*

acrylic on canvas
74h x 103w in
187.96h x 261.62w cm
MEDE723

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Martha Edelheit
*View of Empire State Building
from Sheep Meadow, 1970–72*

acrylic on canvas
76h x 94w in
193.04h x 238.76w cm
MEDE091



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Martha Edelheit
*View of Central
Park West, 1971*

acrylic on canvas
24h x 20w in
60.96h x 50.80w cm
MEDE674

eric firestone gallery

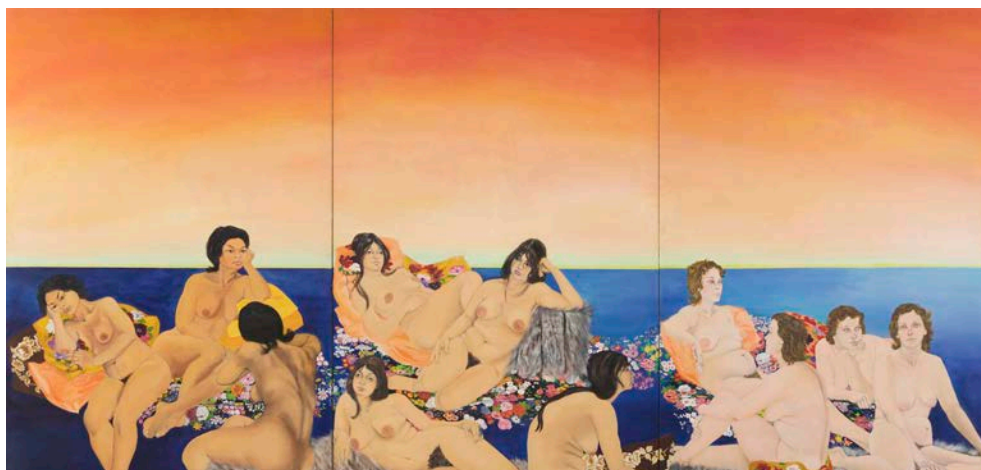


Martha Edelheit
*Birds: A View from Lincoln
Tower Terrace, 1974*

acrylic on canvas
54 1/2h x 87w in
138.43h x 220.98w cm
MEDE085



eric firestone gallery

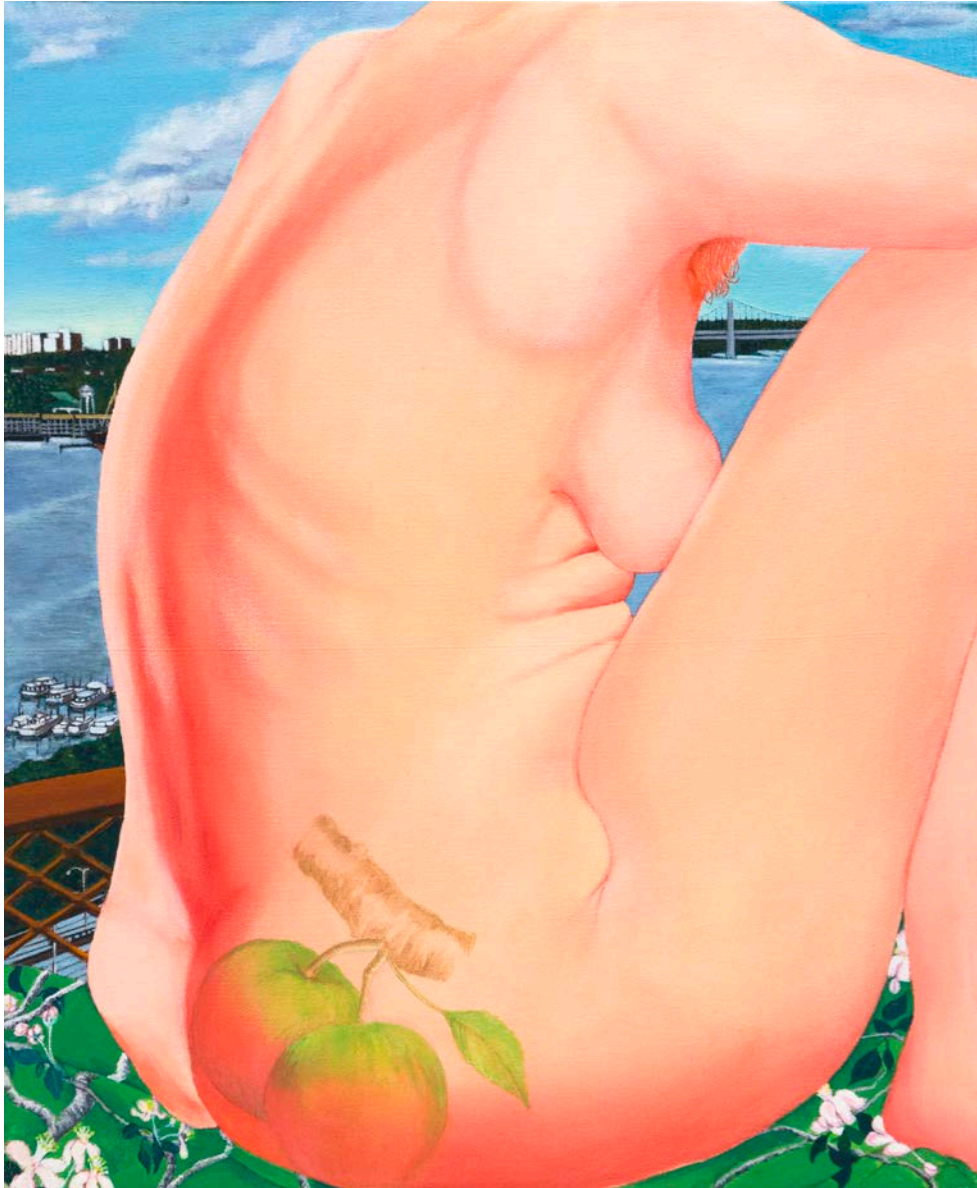


Martha Edelheit
*Women in
Landscape, 1966–68*

acrylic on canvas, in three parts
98h x 202 1/2w in
248.92h x 514.35w cm
MEDE141



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Martha Edelheit
*View of George
Washington Bridge, 1975*

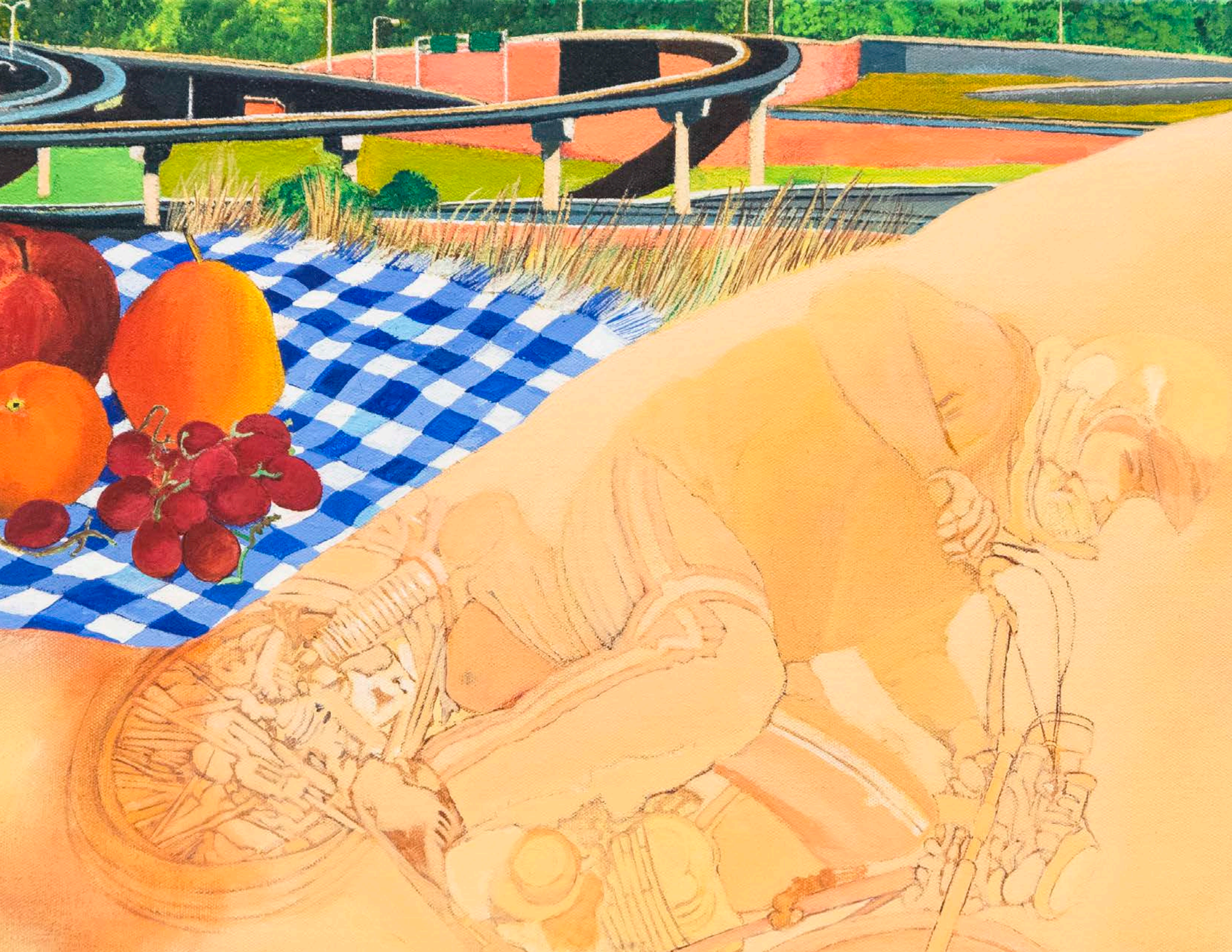
acrylic on canvas
24h x 20w in
60.96h x 50.80w cm
MEDE461

eric firestone gallery

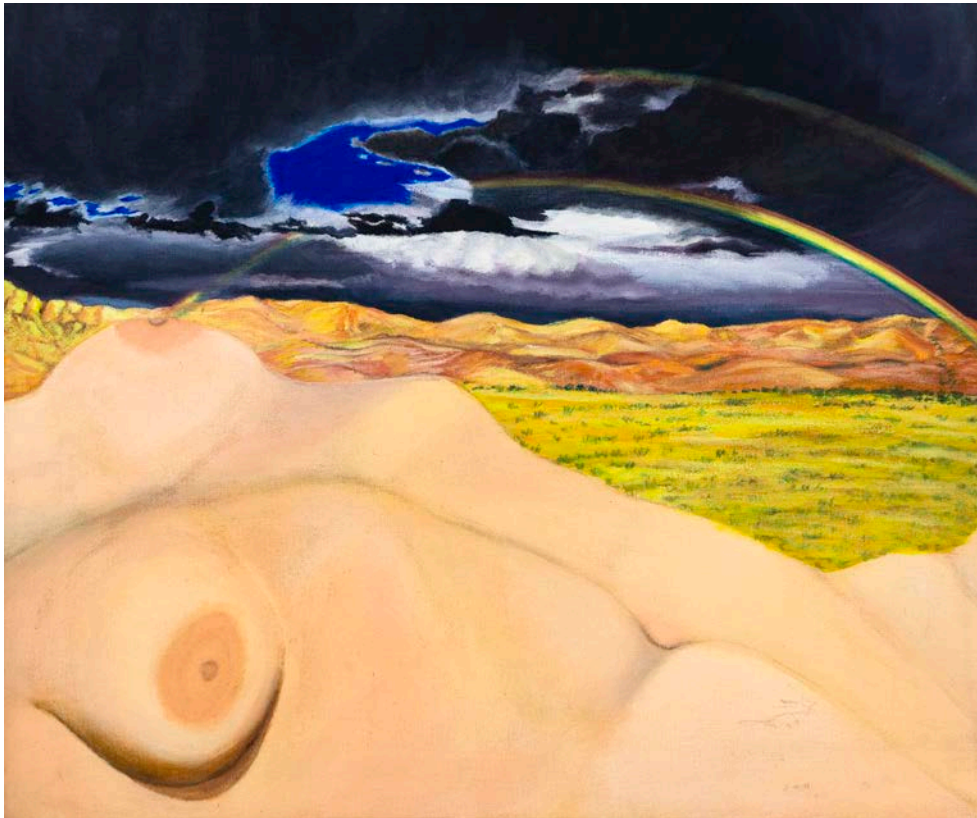


Martha Edelheit
*Major Deegan Expressway
with Fruit, 1972–73*

acrylic on canvas
18h x 24w in
45.72h x 60.96w cm
MEDE459



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Martha Edelheit
Painted Desert
Rainbow, 1974–75

acrylic on canvas
20h x 24w in
50.80h x 60.96w cm
MEDE457

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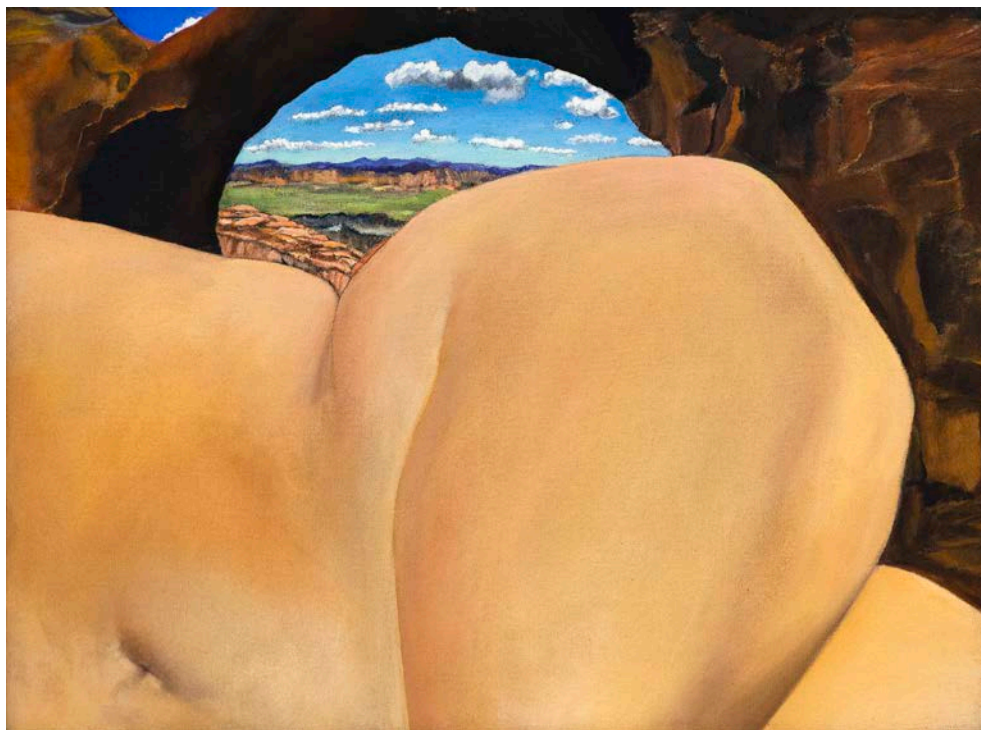


Martha Edelheit
Highbridge, 1973

acrylic on canvas
24h x 20w in
60.96h x 50.80w cm
MEDE097



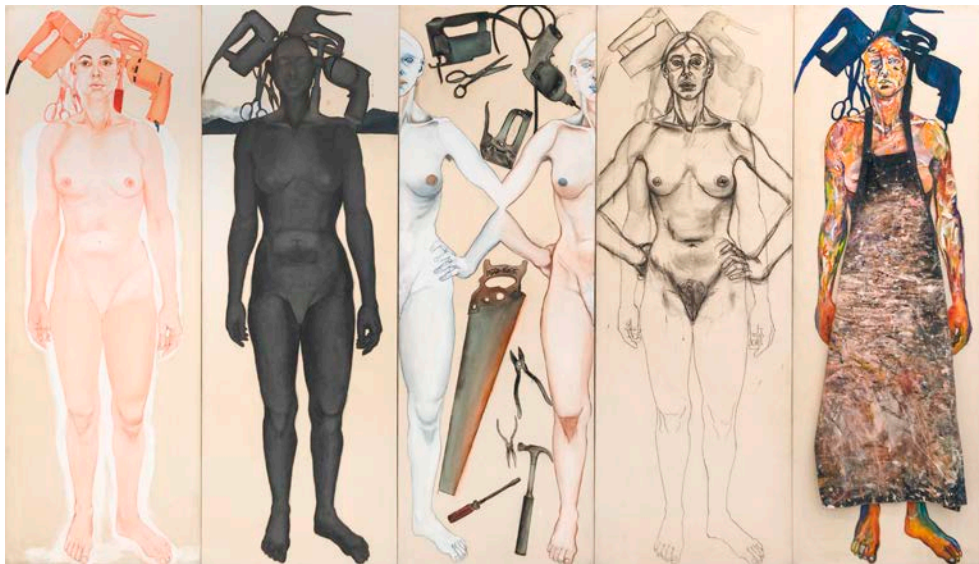
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Martha Edelheit
Arches Nat'l Park, 1974–75

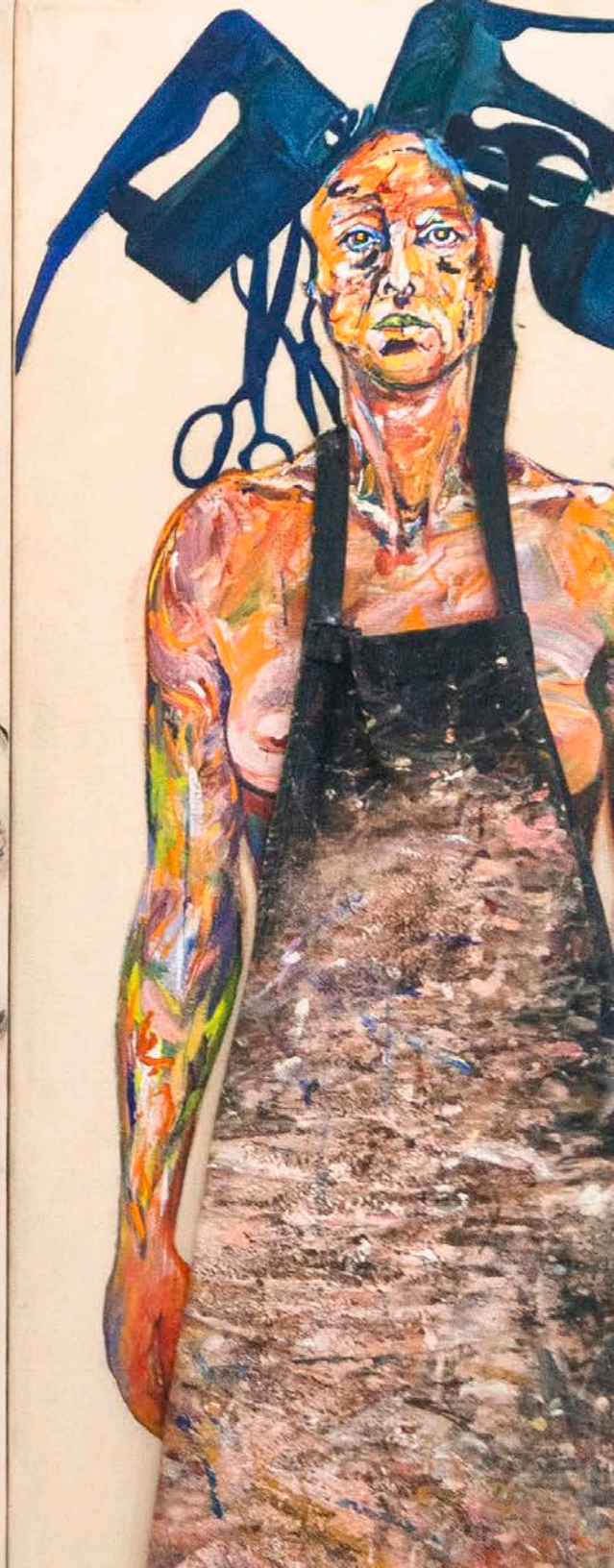
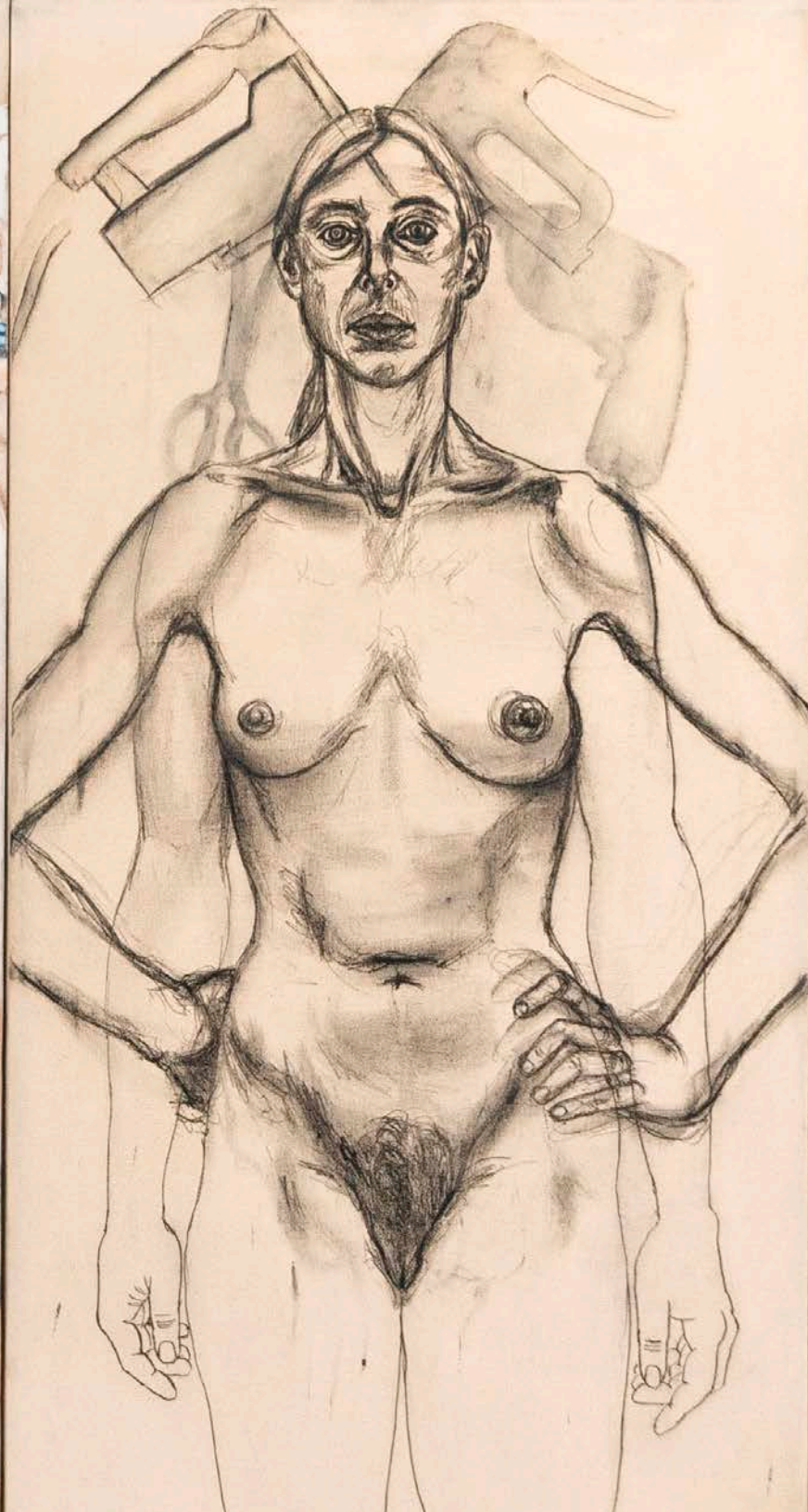
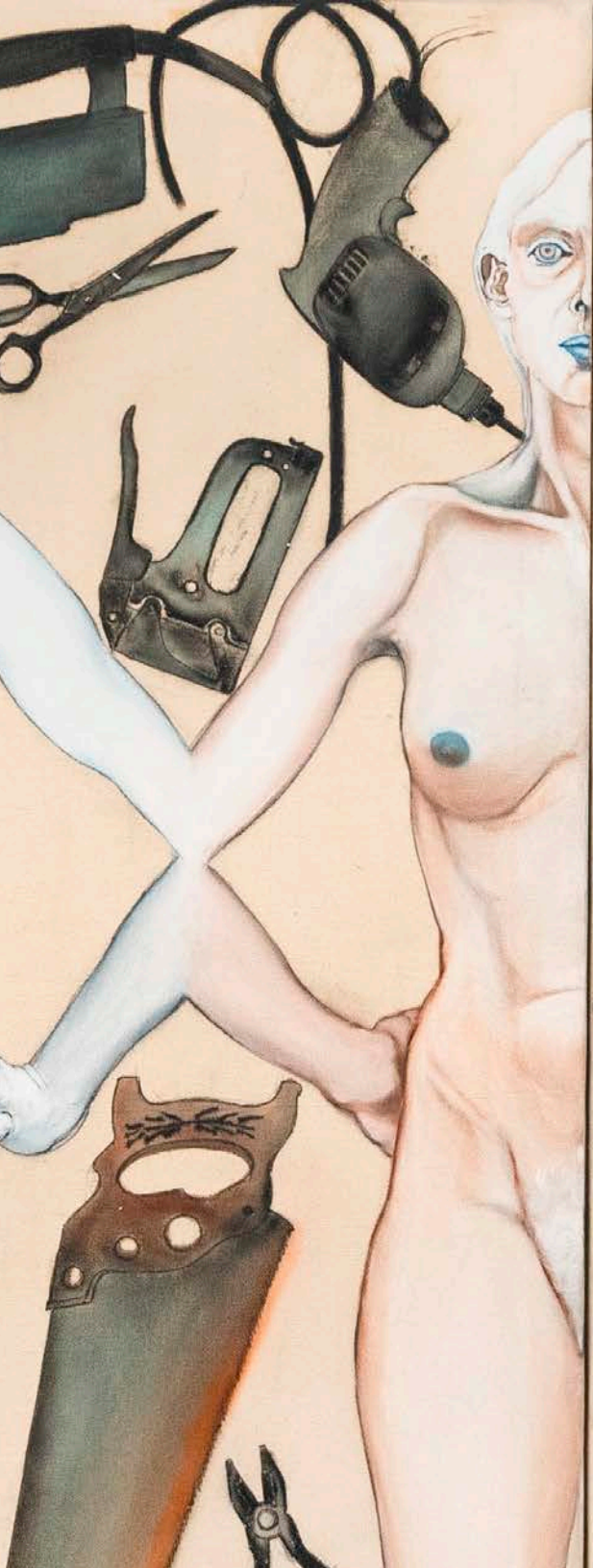
acrylic on canvas
20h x 24w in
50.80h x 60.96w cm
MEDE458

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Martha Edelheit
Self-Portrait with Tools, 1975

acrylic, ink, and collage on canvas, in five parts
60h x 120w in
152.40h x 304.80w cm
MEDE159



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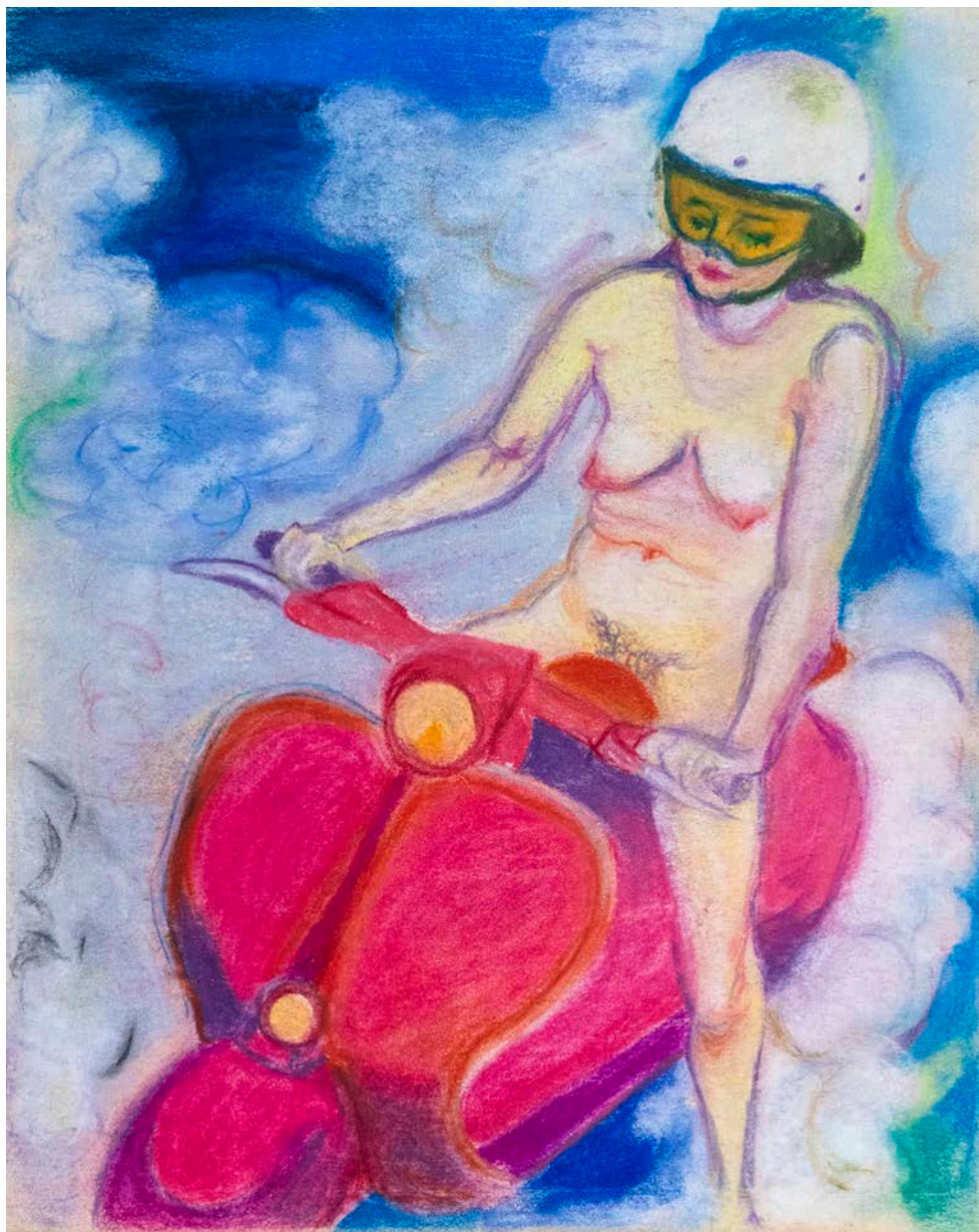


Martha Edelheit
Fleshcycle, 1969

acrylic on canvas
83 1/2h x 68w x 1 1/4d in
212.09h x 172.72w x 3.18d cm
MEDE175



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Martha Edelheit
Untitled, 1970–71

pastel on paper
17h x 14w in
43.18h x 35.56w cm
MEDE698

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Martha Edelheit
*From Sea to
Shining Sea, 1974–75*

acrylic on canvas
18h x 24w in
45.72h x 60.96w cm
MEDE409

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Martha Edelheit
Monument Valley, 1974–75

acrylic on canvas
48h x 90w in
121.92h x 228.60w cm
MEDE469



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Martha Edelheit

Nora x 3, 1970

acrylic on canvas
54h x 72w in
137.16h x 182.88w cm
MEDE088



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Martha Edelheit
David x 2, 1971

acrylic in linen
42h x 68w in
106.68h x 172.72w cm
MEDE112

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Martha Edelheit
J x 2, 1971

acrylic on canvas
52h x 53w in
132.08h x 134.62w cm
MEDE089





7

→ 7A

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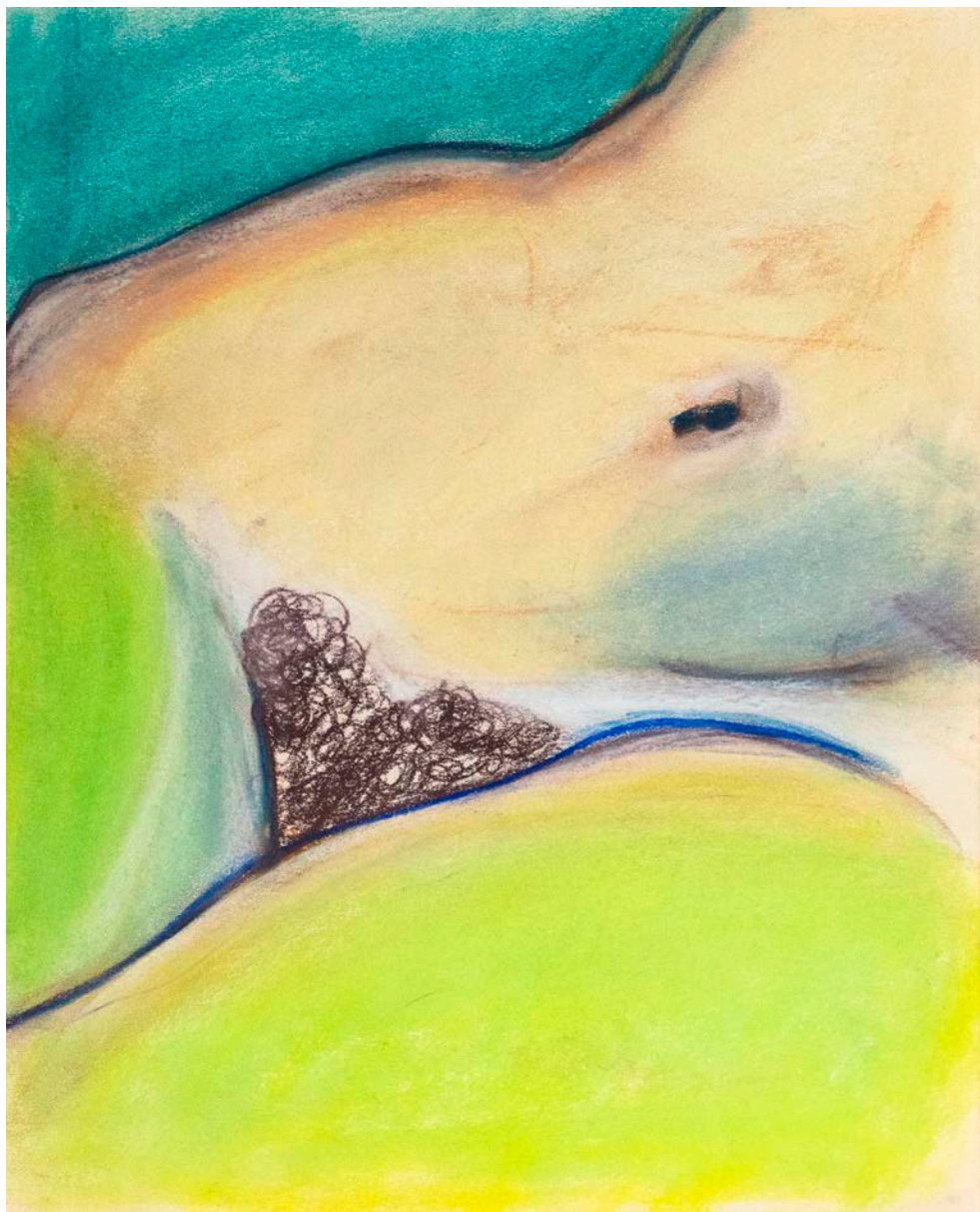


8

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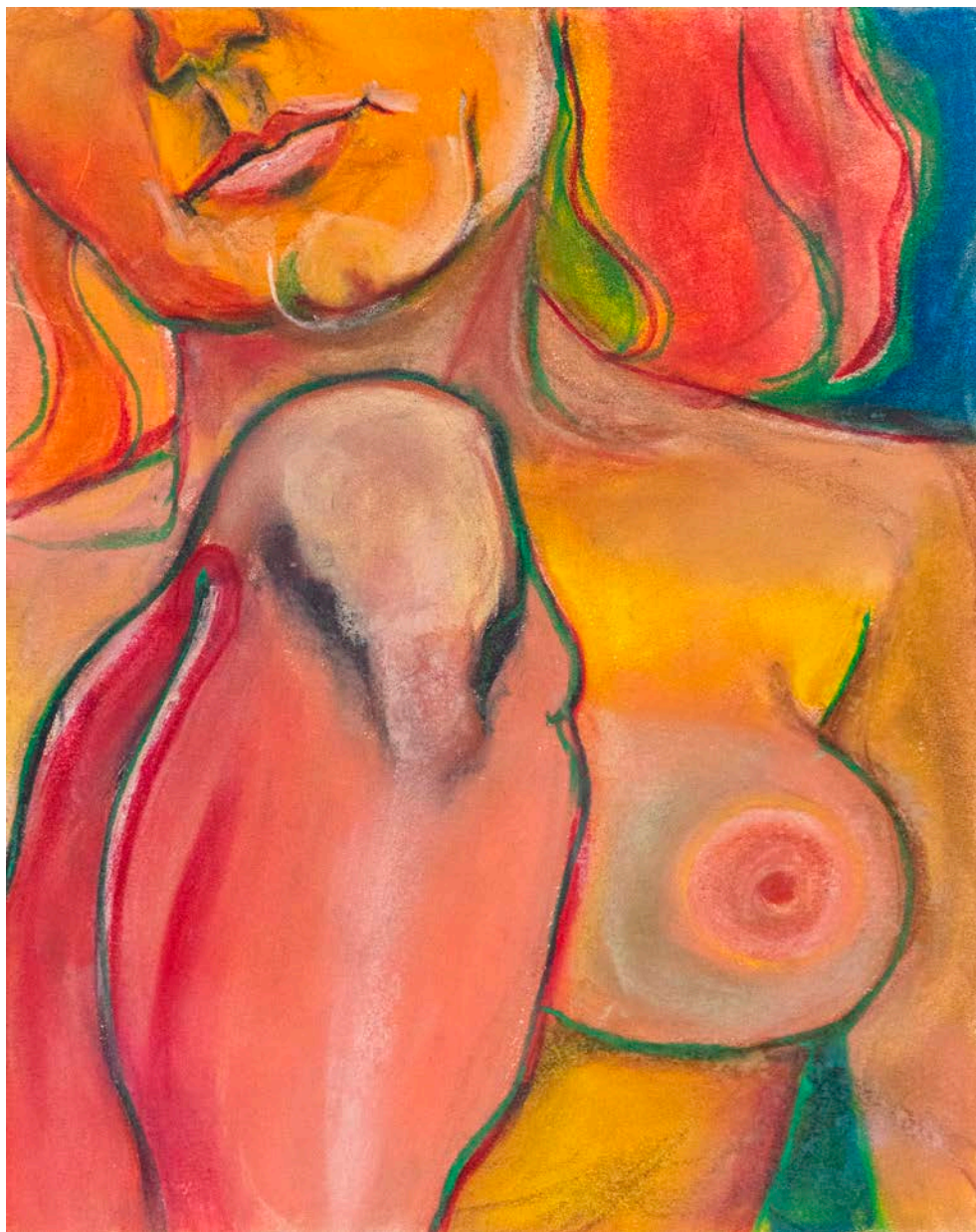
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Martha Edelheit
Untitled, 1970–71

pastel on paper
17h x 14w in
43.18h x 35.56w cm
MEDE685

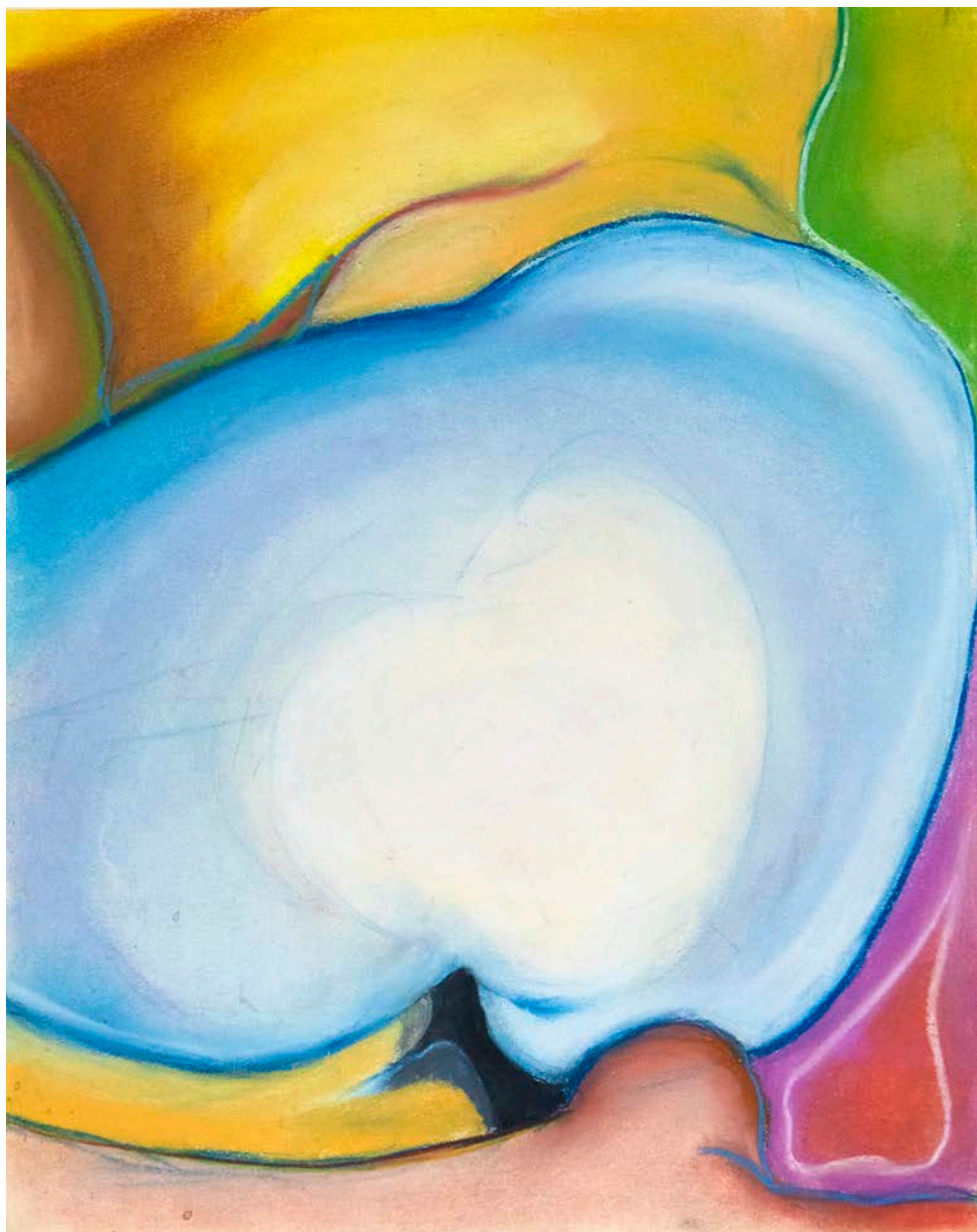
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Martha Edelheit
Untitled, 1970–71

pastel on paper
17h x 14w in
43.18h x 35.56w cm
MEDE677

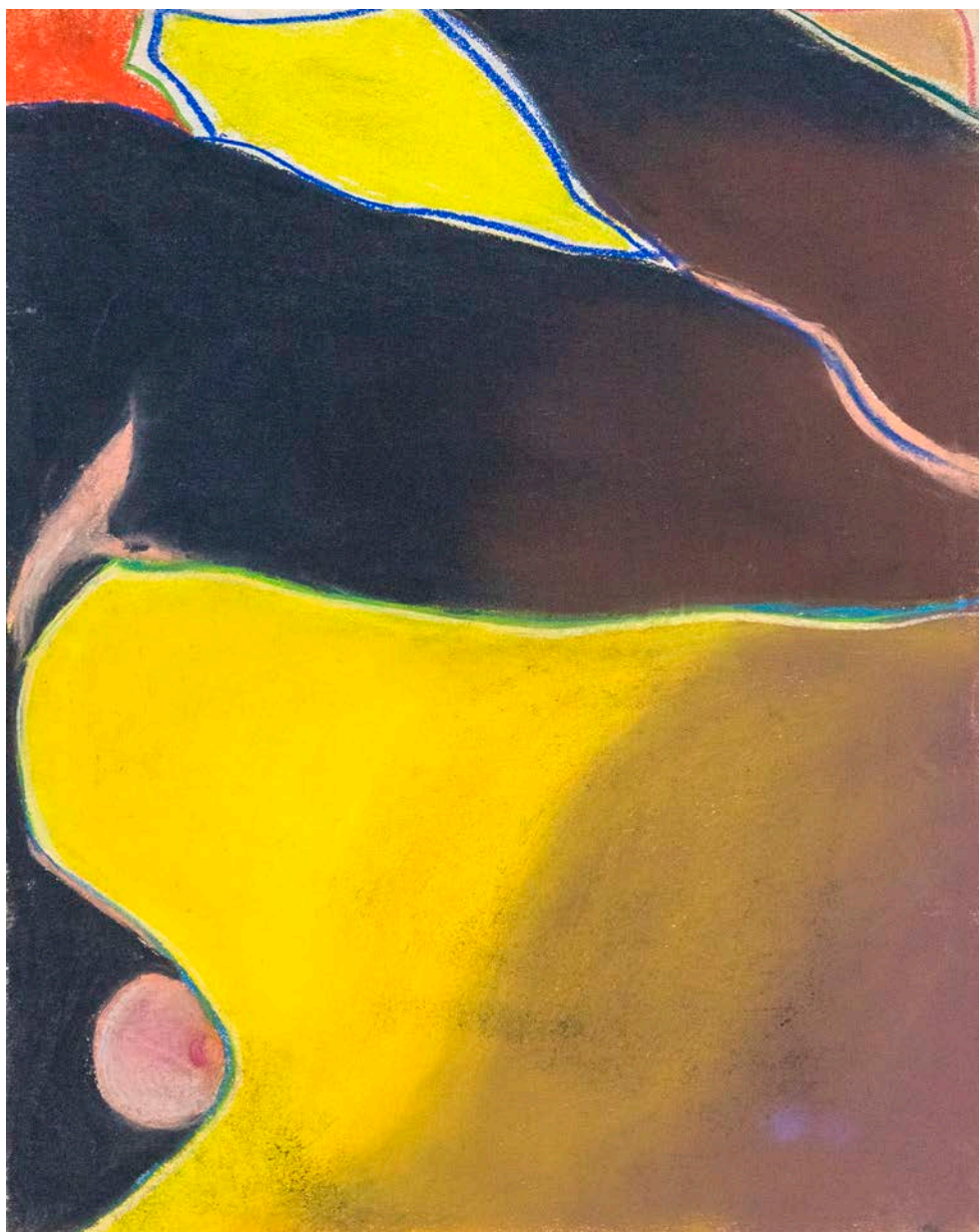
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Martha Edelheit
Untitled, 1970–71

pastel on paper
14h x 17w in
35.56h x 43.18w cm
MEDE680

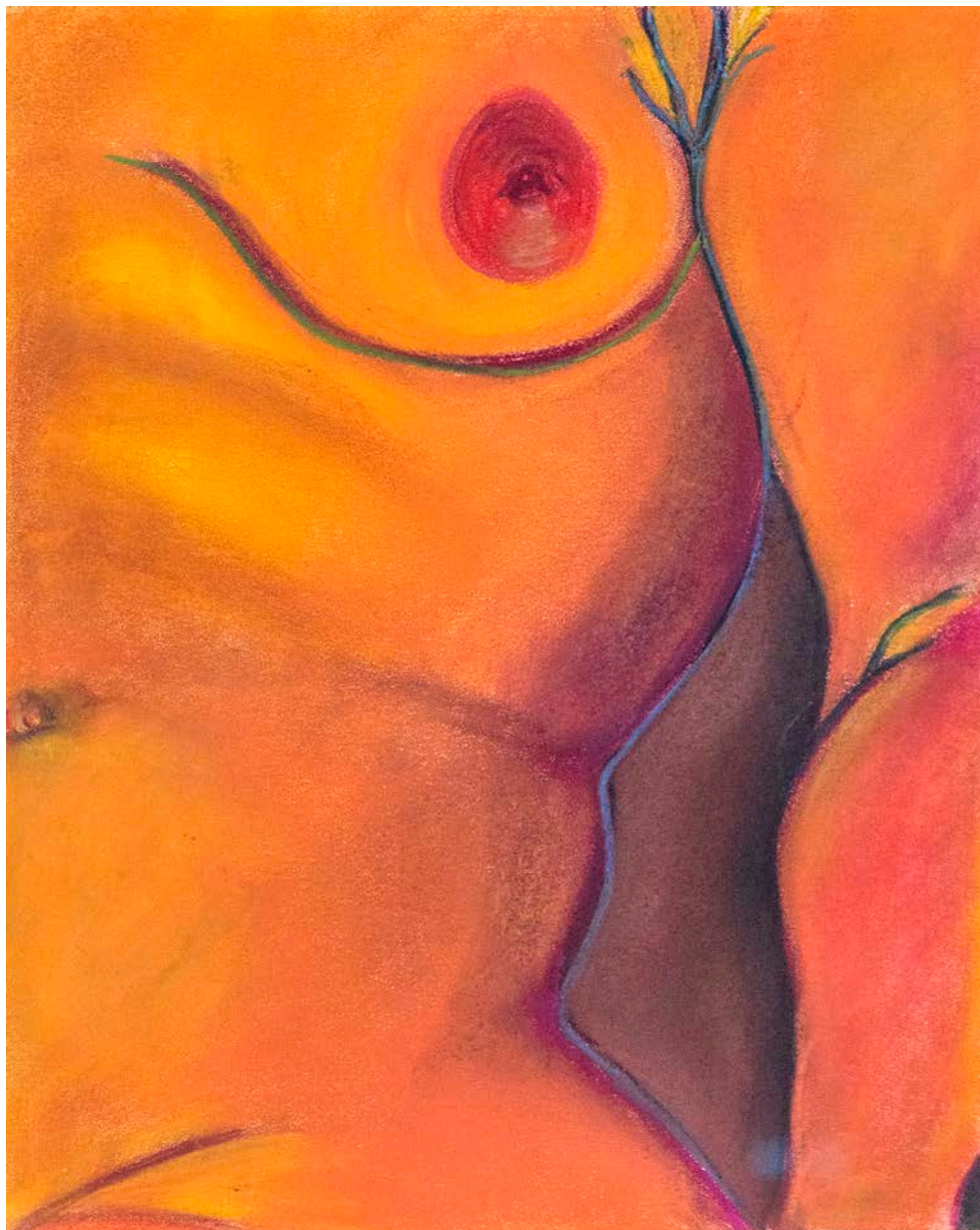
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Martha Edelheit
Untitled, 1970–71

pastel on paper
17h x 14w in
43.18h x 35.56w cm
MEDE691

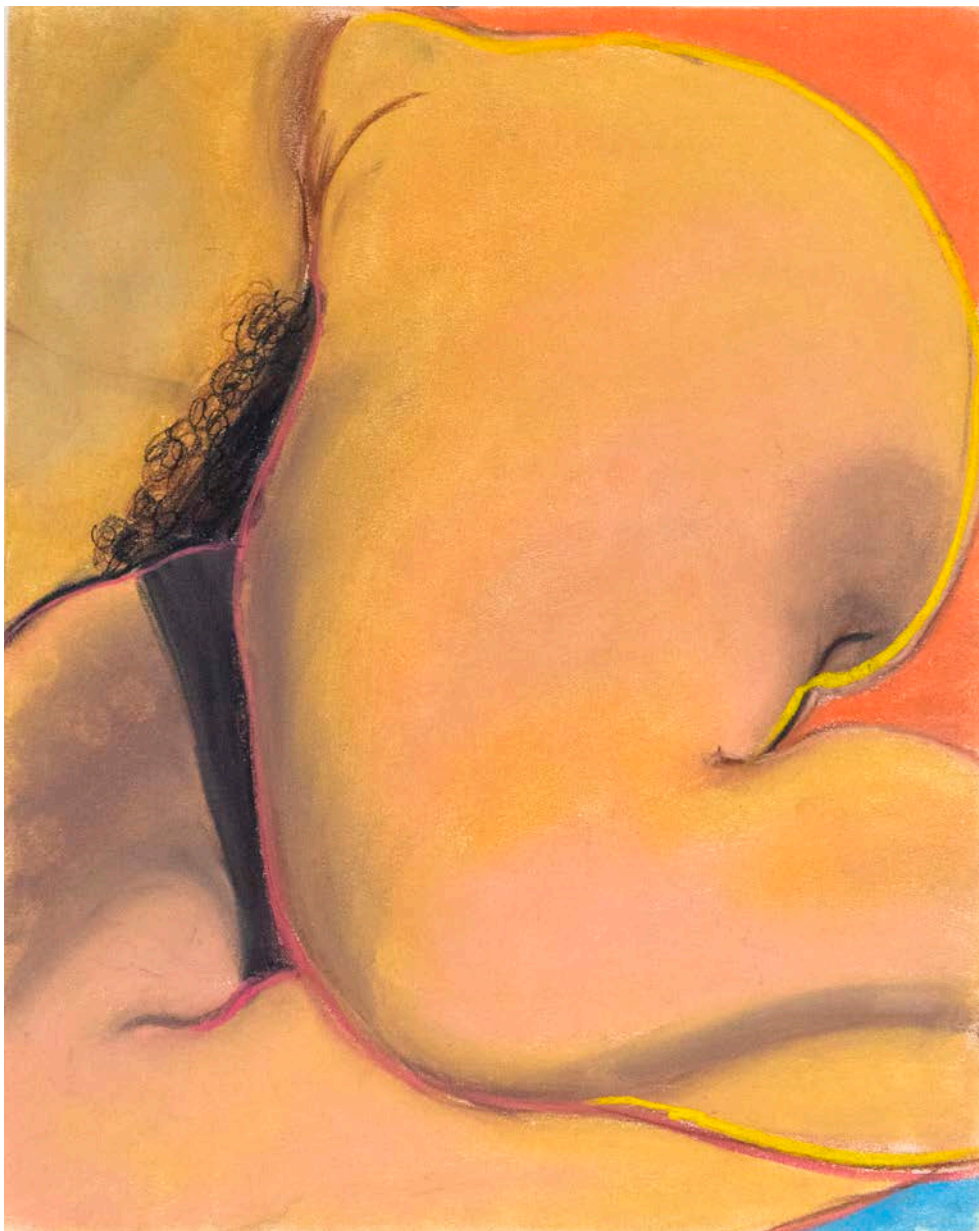
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Martha Edelheit
Untitled, 1970–71

pastel on paper
17h x 14w in
43.18h x 35.56w cm
MEDE712

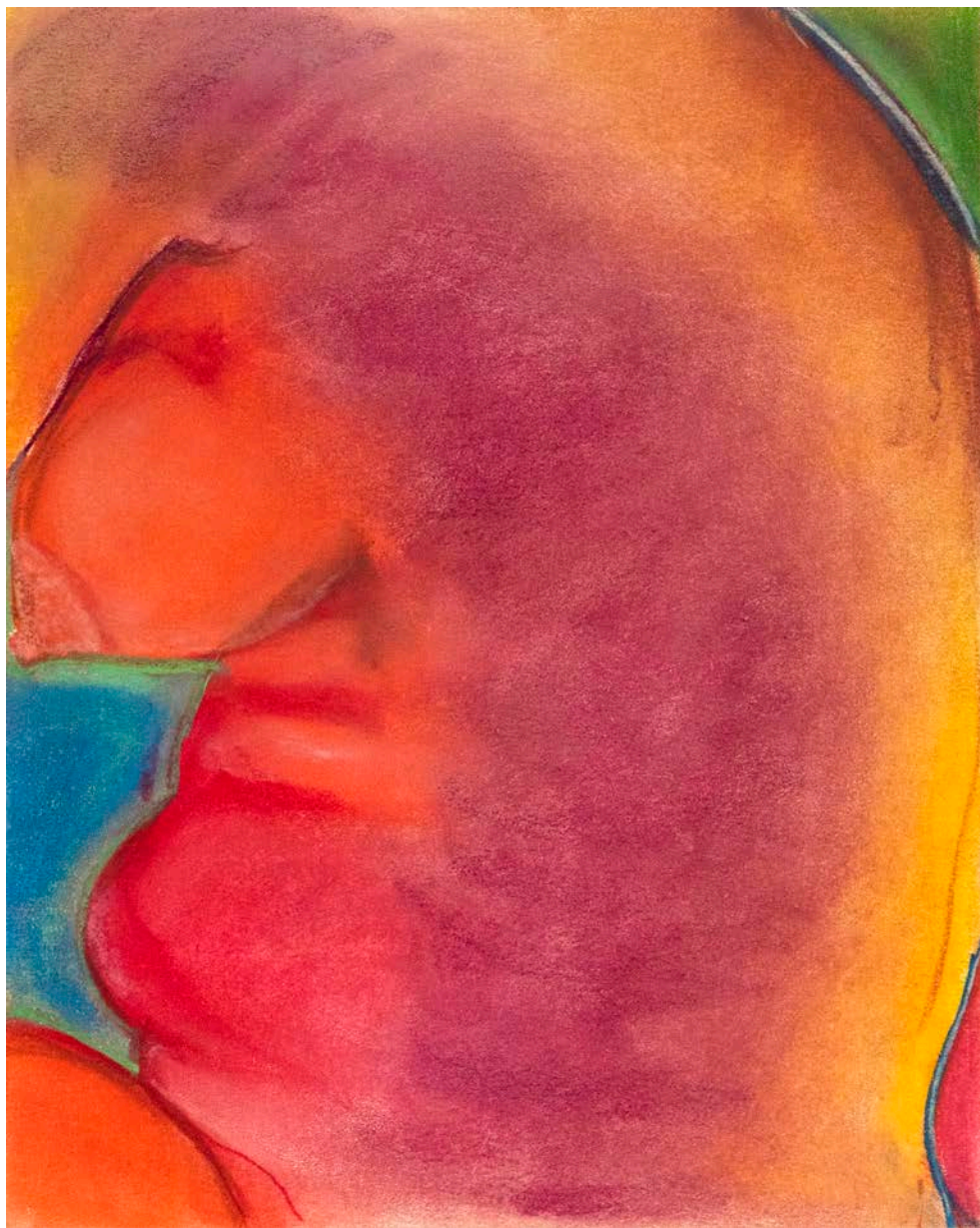
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Martha Edelheit
Untitled, 1970–71

pastel on paper
17h x 14w in
43.18h x 35.56w cm
MEDE724

eric firestone gallery

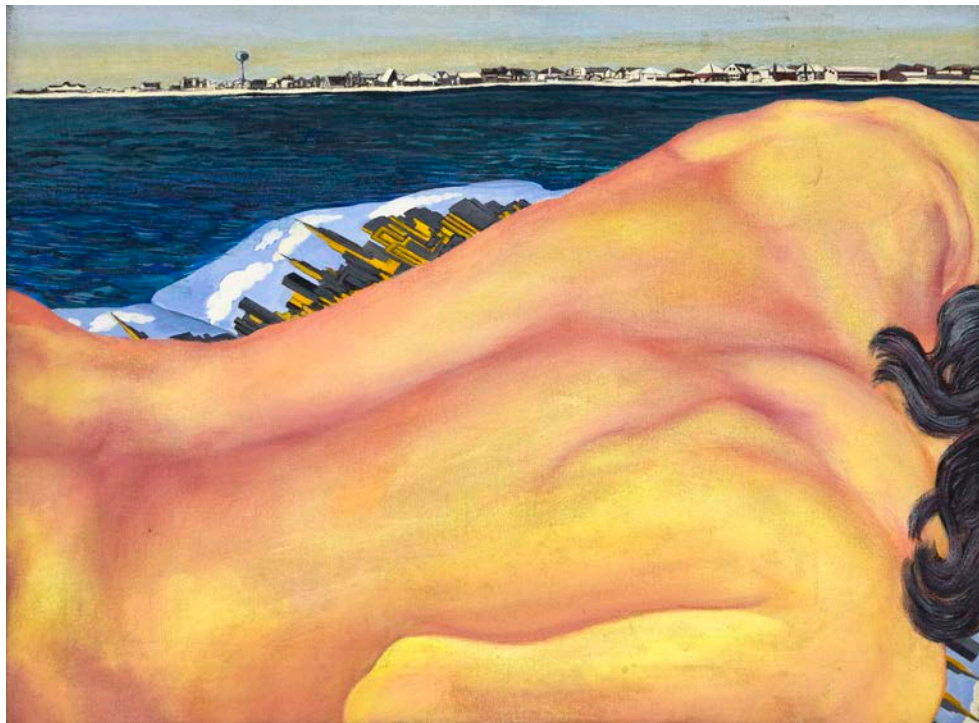


Martha Edelheit
Untitled, 1970–71

pastel on paper
17h x 14w in
43.18h x 35.56w cm
MEDE678



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Martha Edelheit
*Jones Beach,
West End, 1972-713*

acrylic on canvas
18h x 24w in
45.72h x 60.96w cm
MEDE455

Museum Comparatives

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Museum Comparatives

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Martha Edelheit
Tattooed Lady, 1962

oil on canvas
45h x 50w x 1 1/2d in
Private Collection
featured in *New York: 1962–1964*,
July 2022–January 2023,
Jewish Museum, New York, NY



Martha Edelheit
*Flesh Wall with
Table, 1965*

oil on canvas, in three parts
80h x 195w in
Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN



Martha Edelheit
Tattooed Lady
Performing, 1962

oil on canvas
50h x 50w in
Moderna Museet Stockholm, Sweden





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