

For more than five decades, Mary Corse (b.1945) has pursued a central question in her work: How can a painting embody light? This challenge has long fascinated artists seeking to translate light's ephemeral glow into color and material form, but Corse has approached the problem differently. Rather than depict the effects of light through paint, she captures it directly, engaging light's unique properties—the way it travels in waves, bends, and can be reflected and refracted—to create paintings that appear to move, shift, and radiate from within.

This exhibition, the artist's first museum survey, presents an introduction to Corse's work and highlights key moments across her career. It begins in 1964, when Corse moved to Los Angeles from Berkeley, California, to attend art school. There she began an extraordinary period of technical experimentation that yielded bold, shaped monochrome canvases and three-dimensional constructions employing industrial materials such as metal, plexiglass, and electric light to achieve luminosity. Her discovery in 1968 of glass microspheres—the tiny beads used in highway signs and lane lines to reflect car headlights—opened the door to the White Light paintings, Corse's breakthrough series that she continues to investigate today.

Corse's ongoing interest in perception and in light as both a subject and material of art has aligned her work with that of the West Coast Light and Space movement. Yet while most of the artists associated with that group—such as Robert Irwin and James Turrell—explored light's ambient qualities by making work to be experienced in a space rather than on the wall, Corse strove to bring the physical and metaphysical qualities of light into the two-dimensional field of painting.

Movement and time are critical components in Corse's work. Through the shifting position of our bodies in relation to the paintings, we become active participants in the creation of our perceptual experiences of them. At once minimal and maximal, material and immaterial, Corse's paintings resist immediate apprehension and invite us to take part in the act of discovery.

Hear from the artist and the exhibition's curator at [whitney.org/Corse](https://whitney.org/Corse), or borrow our free multimedia guide.

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