

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

Shirley Jaffe

January 30 – April 25, 2026

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri, Paris 4^e



Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present a solo exhibition in homage to the American artist Shirley Jaffe, ten years after her passing. Reuniting a selection of twelve paintings made between 1956 and 2008, this presentation covers over fifty years of her practice, demonstrating the evolution of her influential perspective on post-war abstraction. This exhibition takes on a special significance after the recent death of the artist's brother, Jerome Sternstein, who was a constant supporter and untiring defender of Jaffe's oeuvre. A second instalment of the show, dedicated to screen-prints and works on paper, will be held at the Brussels gallery from 26th March to 23rd May 2026.

This show comes after increasing institutional recognition for Jaffe's work, resulting in a renewed visibility since 2016. It follows in the wake of the major retrospective held at the Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou in 2022, which then toured to Kunstmuseum Basel in 2023, and the Musée Matisse in 2023-24. Numerous significant museums have also acquired her work over the last decade, including the Art Institute of Chicago, The Morgan Library in New York, the MFA Houston, The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Kunstmuseum Basel, The National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin, Le Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon and Le Musée d'arts in Nantes. Over the coming years, The Shirley Jaffe Foundation, established in 2025, will guide the project of a Catalogue Raisonné, directed by art historians Olga Osadtschy and Jelle Imkampé.

Born in the United States in 1923, Shirley Jaffe moved to Paris in 1949. She quickly became part of the circle of French and American artists committed to reviving abstract painting, including the likes of Joan Mitchell, Sam Francis, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Kimber Smith and Al Held. A student of both The Cooper Union School in New York and The Phillips Gallery Art School in Washington D.C., she shared with her fellow artists a foundation in abstract expressionism, while also developing her own distinct direction, attentive to the transformations of the urban environment. Works from the 1950s and 1960s are testaments to these explorations: their forms interlock, overlap and sometimes even collide, like in *Crazy Jane at Appomattox* (1956) or *Dominos II Replayed* (1961). Each element is a part of an evolving system, founded in a constant recalibration of balance and tension.

Her time spent in West Berlin, from 1963-1964, made possible by a Ford Foundation grant, marks a decisive turning point in her practice. In a city wrought with political and symbolic rupture, Jaffe tightened her visual language. Her use of colour became flatter and more geometric, while the influences of Wassily Kandinsky, Sophie Tauber-Arp, and the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen refined her sense of structure and rhythm.

From the late 1970s until her later canvases, her work oriented itself towards a singular language, articulated across hard-edged forms and brightly-coloured flatness, often described in the manner of Matisse. Through her controlled precision of line, surface and interval, Jaffe elaborated a form of painting that is both frontal and autonomous, freed from the classical axioms of horizontality and verticality. In her work, the colour white is not just a simple background: it becomes a field of action, dynamically bringing together and breaking apart the different elements of her compositions. This accentuates the legibility of the ensembles, allowing the gaze to circulate and grasp the totality of the composition. In the canvases from the 2000s, this vocabulary culminates in a lucid architecture, created out of displacement, rupture and reciprocity, harmony reborn from tension – like in *Intrusive Black* (2008).

Shirley Jaffe, *La Mer Rouge*, 1980, Oil on canvas, 346 × 382 × 4 cm / 136^{3/16} × 150^{3/16} × 1^{9/16} in.

Considered as an essential connecting figure between American and European abstraction after the 1950s, the oeuvre of Shirley Jaffe has had an enduring influence on a younger generation of artists – including Robert Kushner, Fiona Rae, David Reed, Mary Heilmann, Peter Halley and Jessica Stockholder. Since 1999, Galerie Nathalie Obadia has proudly renewed its commitment to the artist and her Estate, dedicating itself with conviction and determination to the preservation and promotion of this major artistic legacy. Jerome Sternstein having passed away, Nathalie Obadia wishes to extend her heartfelt thanks to his wife Trina and his two daughters, Adria and Ava, for the trust they have shown her in continuing this collaboration.

About Shirley Jaffe Foundation and the Catalogue Raisonné

The Shirley Jaffe Foundation is dedicated to the preservation, research, publication, and dissemination of the artistic work of Shirley Jaffe. In furtherance of this mission, the Foundation supports and initiates projects that advance the study and public understanding of the artist's work.

The Foundation has launched a Catalogue Raisonné project to document, honor, and protect the work of Shirley Jaffe, ensuring that her contribution to modern and abstract art is studied and presented with scholarly rigor. The Catalogue Raisonné will be edited by art historians Olga Osadtschy and Jelle Imkampe, who have worked extensively on Jaffe's oeuvre.

The Foundation invites collectors, institutions, and individuals with knowledge of or works by the artist to contact the Foundation at info@shirleyjaffefoundation.org

Born in 1923 in New Jersey (USA), Shirley Jaffe worked and lived in Paris until her death, on September 29th, 2016.

Shirley Jaffe graduated from the Cooper Union School in New York (1945) and the Philips Art School in Washington (1949).

She moved to Paris where she lived until her death at the age of 92, leaving in 1949 the United States where she would still exhibit regularly. A close friend of Sam Francis, Joan Mitchell, Jean-Paul Riopelle and Al Held, Jaffe first came to be known in the art scene for her abstract expressionist work. She broke away from an expressionist abstract and gestural style in 1963-1964 after a residency in Berlin with the Ford Foundation, adopting instead a colourful, geometric style. This radical break fundamentally alters her painting, moving her away from «gestural» action, which she replaces with the inclusion of movement in form.

Considered one of the most influential painters in contemporary abstract art, she caught the attention of artists from younger generations, such as Shirley Kaneda and Bernard Piffaretti. She was also very well-respected from artists such as Jessica Stockholder, Claude Viallat, Fiona Rae, Carole Benzaken, Amy Sillman, Charline von Heyl and Stanley Whitney.

A major traveling solo exhibition was held at the Centre Pompidou (Paris), then at the Kunstmuseum Basel (Basel) in 2023, and at the Musée Matisse (Nice) in 2023-2024.

Her work is collected by many prestigious public and private collections, notably at the MoMA (Museum of Modern Art, New York), SFMOMA (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), the Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago), The Museum of Fine Arts (Houston), the Menil Collection (Houston), the Morgan Library and Museum (New York), The Dayton Art Institute (Dayton), the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Montreal), the Kunstmuseum Basel (Basel), the National Gallery of Ireland (Dublin), the MUDAM (Luxembourg), the Berardo Museum (Lisbon), the Centre Pompidou (Paris), the MAC/VAL (Vitry), the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain (Paris), the Musée d'arts de Nantes (Nantes), the Musée de Grenoble (Grenoble), the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon (Lyon), and the Musée Fabre (Montpellier).

Galerie Nathalie Obadia has devoted six exhibitions to Shirley Jaffe, in 1999, 2001, 2008 and 2013, 2023 and 2026.

Shirley Jaffe has been represented by Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels since 1999. The Estate of Shirley Jaffe was entrusted to Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels, in 2016, after the artist's death.

The Shirley Jaffe Foundation has initiated a Catalogue Raisonné project that will be developed over the next years, to document, honor, and protect the work of Shirley Jaffe, ensuring that her contribution to modern and abstract art is studied and presented with scholarly rigor.

Paris Saint-Honoré

Sophie Kuijken
February 12 - March 28, 2026

Rosson Crow
April 9 - May 30, 2026

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri

Shirley Jaffe
January 30 - April 25, 2026

Jérôme Zonder
May 21 - August 1, 2026

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri - Espace II

Hoda Kashiha
The Tale of a Pot's Voyage That Longed to Become Human
January 30 - March 28, 2026

Romana Londi
April 7 - May 2026

Brussels

Viswanadhan
January 15 - March 14, 2026

Shirley Jaffe
March 26 - May 23, 2026

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