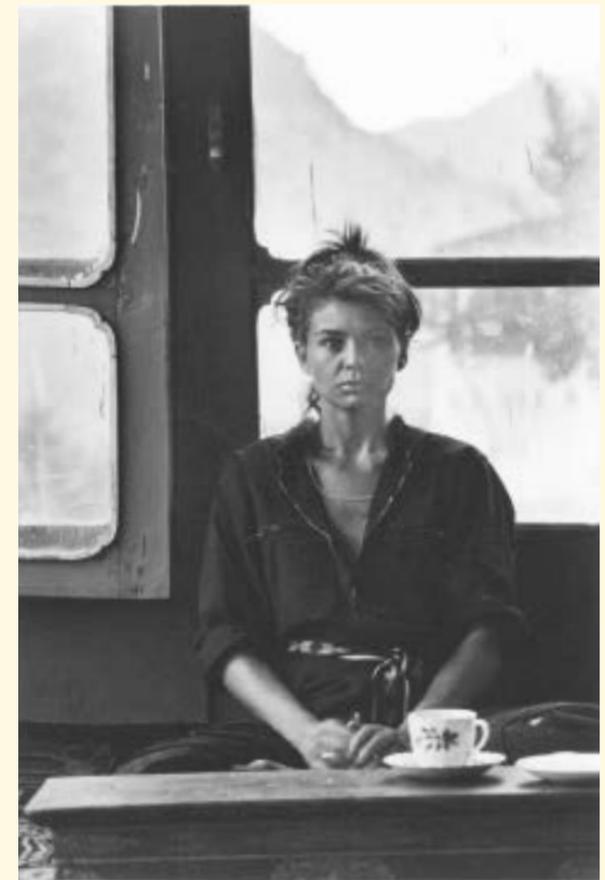


SYLVIAMARTINS

Gli
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thanks to

I would like to thank my editor and dear friend Paola Gribaudo for your guidance and energy; your encouragement finally made this book a reality. My assistant Ana Dantas, thank you for your unending dedication to this project, without you I could never have done this book.

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To my family, your love and support throughout my life have always carried me through. Lastly, thank you to all of my friends who have been with me throughout this journey.

credits

“Sylvia’s text” by Max Blagg based on conversations with the artist in 2017.

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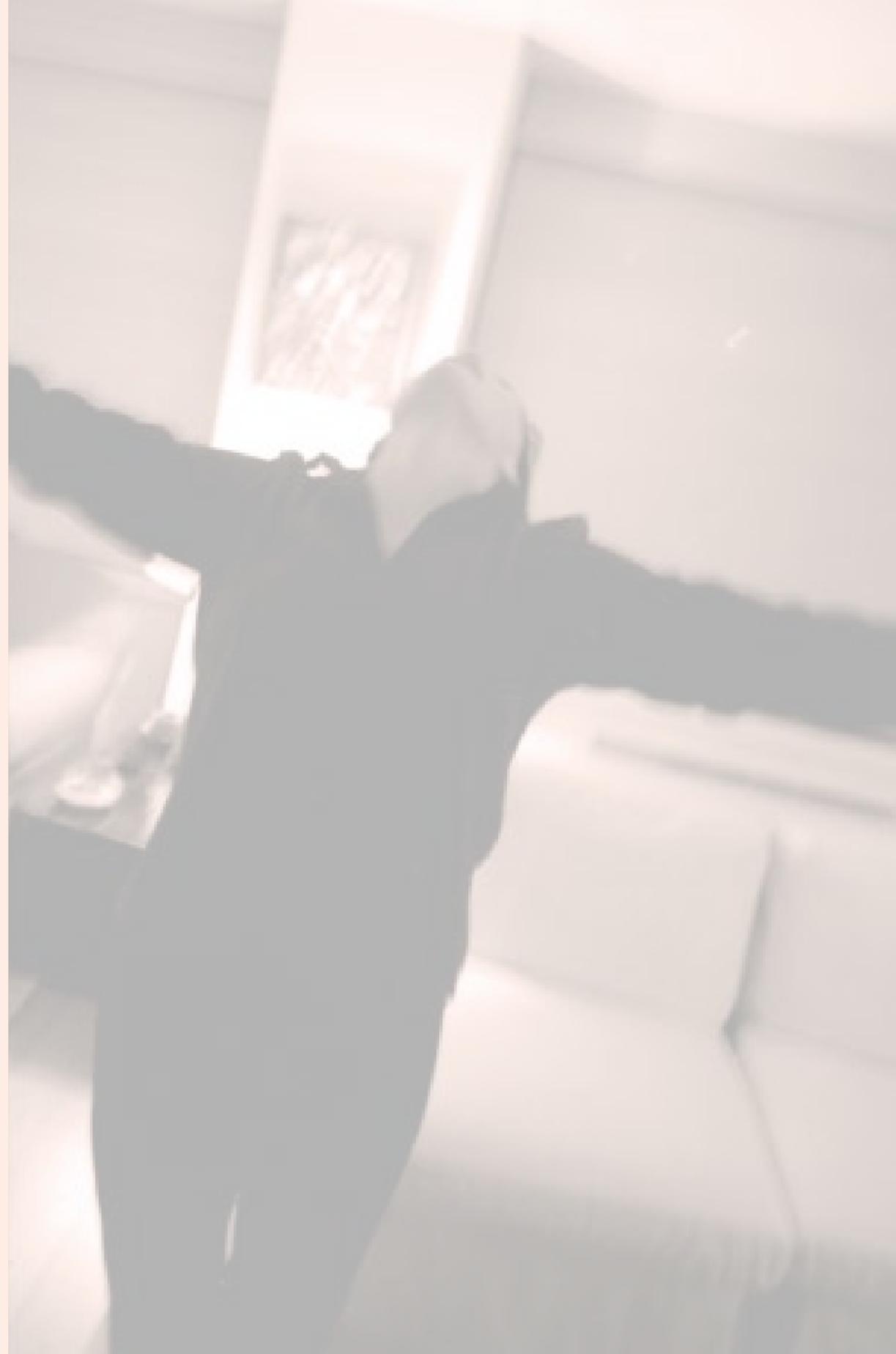
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foreword

“Nature holds the beautiful,
for the artist who has the insight to extract it.”
A. Dürer

Nature has always been a major source of inspiration for artists and Sylvia Martins has been able to extract “art” from it, translating it by means of a very personal technique and a very wise use of color: her palette. In fact, it evokes the greens of Brazilian and Balinese forests, the yellows and oranges of India and Morocco, the blues and turquoises of the southern seas, but also, and foremost, the energy of New York.

New York City in the eighties, the place to be, the artistic center of the world. Sylvia Martins was immersed in the universe of the protagonists of contemporary art, studying, exposing and partying with them. We met in New York, in 1992. From the beginning I found myself attracted by her energy and a few months later we published the book *Fragments*, the first of our collaborations. From that moment on, I have curated many catalogues for her exhibitions and urged her to write a monograph that talked about her life as an artist and as a woman — the result of which you now hold in your hands.

Thus came a book that is, above all, a visual tale, a diary of her life intermingled with her art, a kaleidoscope of images, texts, photographs, poems and artworks, everything enriched by contributions from many authors who have followed her history.

Sylvia Martins is an ambassador of color, as proven by this book. In fact, there are pages where you can practically smell the paint, as if you had entered her studio.

Paola Gribaudo

“Toda a arte encontra-se na natureza
e pertence a quem é capaz de extraí-la”
A. Dürer

A natureza sempre foi uma grande fonte de inspiração para os artistas e Sylvia Martins soube extrair dela a “arte” e decliná-la com uma técnica pessoal e um sábio uso da cor: a sua paleta. De fato, lembra os verdes das florestas brasileiras ou de Bali, os amarelos e as cores de laranja da Índia ou do Marrocos, os azuis e os turquesas dos mares do sul, mas também e sobretudo a energia de Nova York.

New York City *in the eighties, the place to be, the artistic center of the world*. Sylvia estava imersa no mundo dos protagonistas da arte contemporânea e com eles estudava, expunha e se divertia. Nos conhecemos em Nova York, em 1992. Desde o primeiro momento fiquei atraída pela sua energia e depois de poucos meses publicamos *Fragments*, o nosso primeiro livro juntas. A partir daquele momento fiz a curadoria de muitos catálogos das suas exposições até quando a levei a publicar uma monografia que falasse sobre ela como artista e como mulher, e este é o resultado.

Assim surgiu um livro que é sobretudo um conto visual, um diário da sua vida entrelaçada com a sua arte, um caleidoscópio de imagens, textos, fotografias, poemas e obras, enriquecido pelas contribuições de muitos autores que seguiram a sua história.

Sylvia Martins é uma embaixadora da cor e este livro é testemunha disso. De fato, há algumas páginas nas quais se pode quase sentir o cheiro da tinta, parece que entramos no seu estúdio.

Paola Gribaudo

early years

My father was a horse breeder, so I grew up on a farm in the Pampas of Southern Brazil. There was no connection to art in my household, but despite this I was a compulsive drawer—to the point that I wouldn't sleep because I had to draw. I used to draw in my school-books, decorate my homework; it was almost like an addiction. Living in an isolated place, there were no kids around apart from my two brothers, I created friends from my imagination. I made very figurative drawings of my imaginary friends, and how I would dress them, and myself. My first "models" were the wild horses that I observed from the porch of my house.

I always had these dreams about the big city. I knew I wanted to live there, so I went to Rio, to boarding school. I loved it. I loved studying. Everything interested



me, and I was still drawing all the time. There were no real art schools in Rio in early '70s, certainly not like you have in the United States, but there were classes at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio, taught by some of the best artists around at the time. One of my teachers was Ivan Serpa, a terrific artist, certainly an early influence. I was fascinated by abstract painting.

rio My grandmother was a big influence on me in the way she looked at life. She was living in Rio while I was in school, and I spent a lot of time with her. She didn't care that I partied, or stayed out late—she was really cool. She was a spiritualist and a medium, channeling spirits. She definitely watched over me, and still does, I often feel her presence. My grandmother was a free spirit like me. If something happens, I call out to her, she is like my higher power. She brought mysticism into my life, that was a spiritual awakening that I had, and I try to maintain the thread. Similar to painting, I try to keep the channel always open.

By chance, I got into modeling, and I actually made quite a lot of money doing it—it was fun! It gave me a great sense of independence at a very early age. My friends and I would hang out at the beach and go to clubs until three o'clock in the morning, waking up at six to go to school. I was very serious about school. By the time I graduated, I was ready to leave Rio, I wanted to go somewhere else.

school I left Rio and came to New York, where I started to meet other artists, and soon I was painting at Mati Klarwein's studio on Laight Street in downtown Manhattan. A wonderful painter and great friend, he lived in a loft. It was the first time that I went to a real loft, you know the big industrial lofts, and he let me paint there.

When I first started out, there were artists I was naturally drawn to, like Max Beckmann and Richard Lindner. I would really study their work, not to copy them of course, but to absorb what they had made and then express my version of what they gave me, get a little bit of a thread, a golden thread hopefully, of their inspirations.

left: The Pet, 1980, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in | 76 x 100 cm

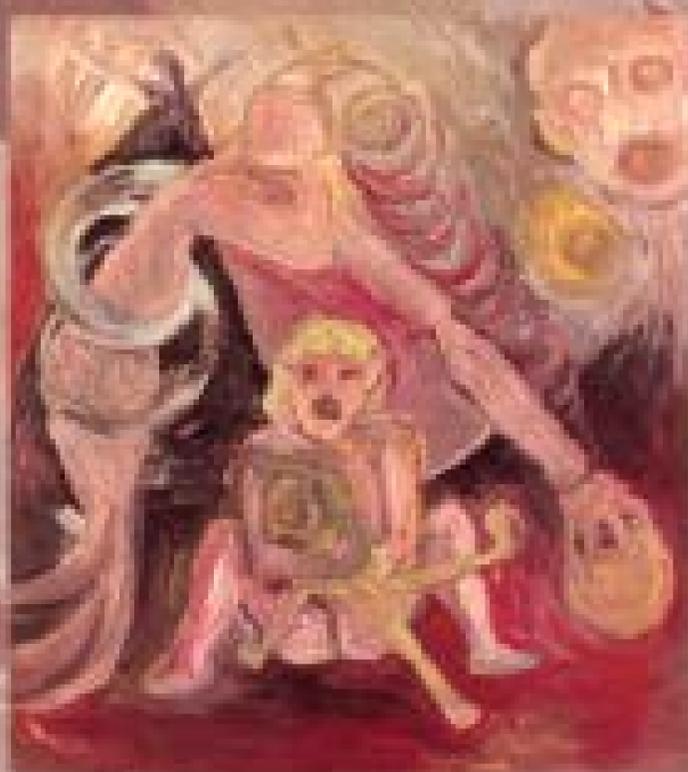
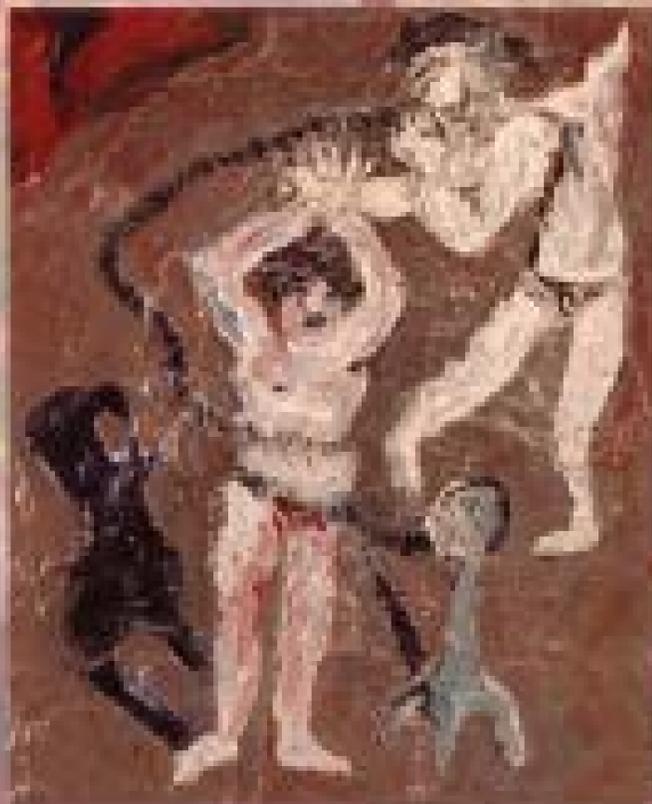
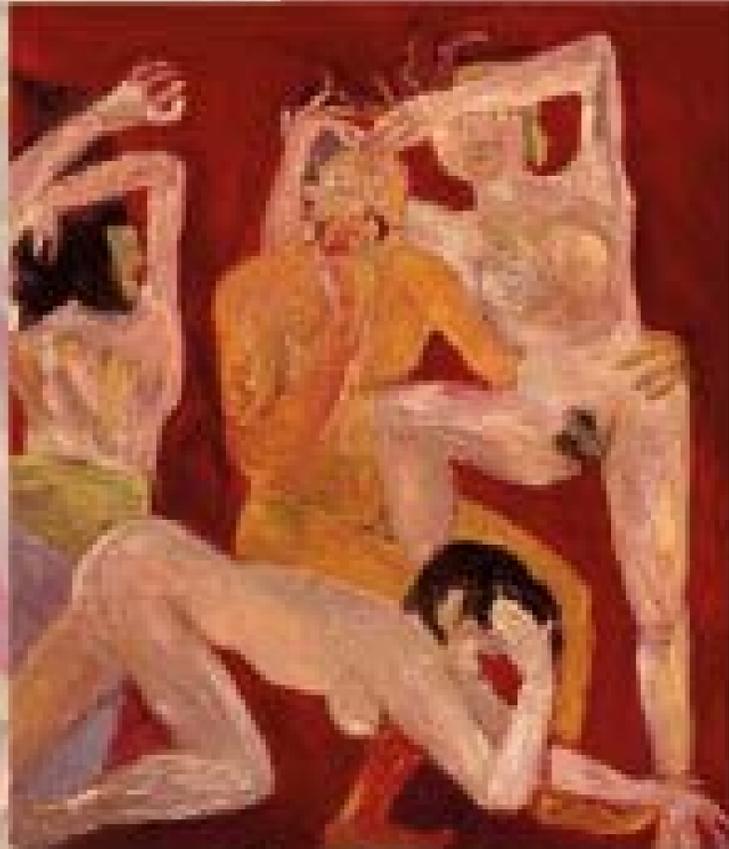
My parents did not take art seriously; they never thought it was something one could have as a career. But all artists have a certain trajectory that they are compelled to follow. Of course, there's a lot of craziness, but even in the wildest times, I never stopped studying, painting, working. That really was one of the reasons I came to New York. I wanted to work here.

It's like a river that you keep crossing. You're crossing the river and there's all kinds of currents, riptides, trying to pull you in different directions. There is so much going on, a lot of stimulation. And you try to stay afloat and channel everything into your art.

channel everything



top: Family, 1981, oil on canvas, 36 x 40 in | 92 x 101 cm
right: Olga, 1981, oil on canvas, 40 x 36 in | 102 x 91 cm
left: Mother, 1980, oil on canvas, 36 x 40 in | 91 x 102 cm



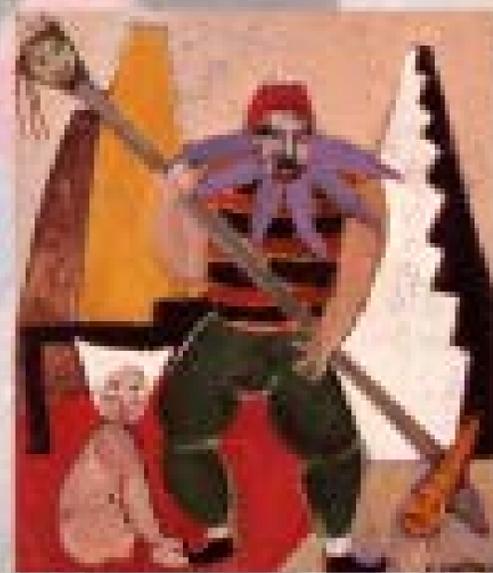
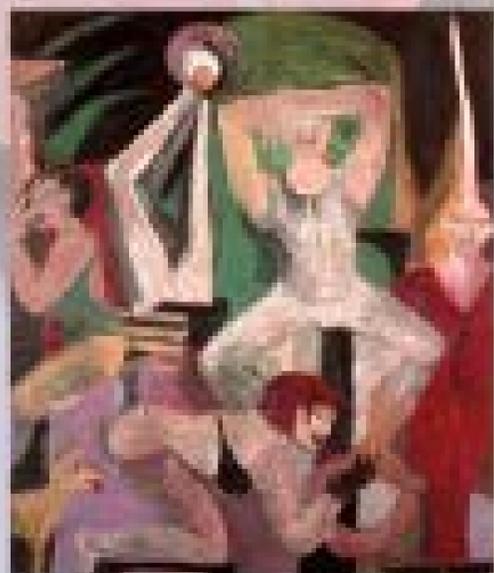
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top: Carnal, 1984, oil on canvas, 20 x 17 in | 51 x 43 cm

bottom left: Control, 1984, oil on canvas, 16 x 13 in | 41 x 33 cm

bottom right: Fear, 1984, oil on canvas, 23 x 20 in | 58 x 51 cm

above: Uma, 1984, oil on wood, 12 x 8.5 in | 30 x 22 cm



top left: Interview with Odilo Licetti, 1986
top right: Enemies, 1985, oil on canvas, 27 x 22 in | 69 x 56 cm
bottom left: Carnival, 1985, oil on canvas, 27 x 22 in | 69 x 56 cm

bottom middle: The Dancer, 1985, oil on canvas, 27 x 22 in | 69 x 56 cm
bottom right: The Ruler, 1985, oil on canvas, 27 x 22 in | 69 x 56 cm
opposite page: Surreal City, 1985, oil on canvas, 78 x 68 in | 198 x 173 cm



new york

Just before I came to New York, I met Bob Colacello in Rio, who said I should meet “Andy.” I then went to New York to study art, and I needed a visa, so I went to the Art Students’ League. It was so much easier back then, coming to America, getting visas. Somehow I ended up at the Factory meeting Andy Warhol. He had a big studio—a less frantic version of the original Factory—down on Union Square, at 860 Broadway, and I got a studio across the street, right on Union Square. So after my studio day was done, I used to go and hang out over there, and quickly met a lot of the art crowd in New York.

There was a mixed group from all over the world around Andy at that time, and I fit in really well. There were some other Brazilians too, it was the right place at the right time, and I was the right age—early twenties—the world was ours! Pretty and funny and lots of friends. There was also the club scene, of course. Being at the Factory and hanging out, you constantly met a lot of interesting people! One of whom was an American actor who Andy thought was going to become very famous. He had just finished this film

Yanks, directed by John Schlesinger. We became really close and eventually moved in together. Most of my friends at the time were artists, or were at least connected to art. I couldn’t think about any other way to live—I was always so happy making art. I think just being in New York, you’re absorbing all the energy that’s around at the time. You don’t do it consciously, but it’s all there.

Andy was very... well, he could be very vicious with a lot of people, but he was always so nice to me. The guy had a great body, nobody knew that, I mean, I saw him exercise one day and wow! I said, “how can you have such a great figure because you’re always at those dinner parties with all those people every night?” And he said, “The secret is always eat *half* of what you have on your plate.”

So he influenced my eating habits maybe, but I always went my own direction with my art. I never wanted to paint like Warhol. I would learn how to do things, and then go my own way.

I love painting more than anything. I thought everything was boring but painting. I think painting is the only technique that allowed me to really express myself, or at least release myself. It’s almost sexual for me—not literally but that’s the closest comparison. My work, even from my early drawings, has always been very sensual, highly charged. I liked abstract painting but I didn’t really fit into abstract, or figurative, or any specific style. I just thought that I could try everything. I didn’t feel like there were any limits on what direction I might take.

In New York it seemed like everybody sort of knew everybody. You didn’t have to be famous to show in a gallery. They actually liked the fact that there was new blood. Some of those galleries were just little tiny store fronts, so there was that kind of ‘do-it-yourself’ energy.





Ladakh, India, 1984

