

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

## Homegrown painter Louise Fishman gets a victory lap in Philadelphia

by Edith Newhall, September 26, 2019



### LOCKS GALLERY

The painter Louise Fishman, now 80, grew up in West Oak Lane and Havertown and lived in Center City as a young person, working as an editor and proofreader and attending Philadelphia College of Art (now UArts), the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and Temple University's Tyler School of Art.

She's been mostly associated with New York since then, producing her abstract canvases in downtown Manhattan. Since her first solo show, in 1964, at the Philadelphia Art Alliance, her work has made only rare appearances here: in exhibitions at Tyler and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Arts in 1992, as part of the three-woman Fishman family show "Generations" at Woodmere Art Museum in 2012, and at the Institute of Contemporary Art in 2016.

So it's a happy surprise to learn, in the catalog for *My City*, Fishman's first solo show at a commercial gallery here, that her art was always informed by her time in Philadelphia — and continues to be.

Her mother, Gertrude Fisher-Fishman, was a painter who studied with Violette de Mazia at the Barnes Foundation and made sure to familiarize her daughter with its collection and the one at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Fisher-Fishman also took young Louise to a life-drawing session at the Print Center — where the daughter upstaged her mother with a sketch of a nude model. Their arts outings typically ended with a stop at the Gilded Cage, a storied bohemian coffeehouse near Rittenhouse Square.

Fishman's paternal aunt, Razel Kapustin, was a social realist painter and communist who lived in Center City, had studied with Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros, and had a large presence in Philadelphia's art world. She doted on Louise and was also a powerful influence as Fishman found her way as an artist, feminist, lesbian, and activist.

Even the grids in Fishman's monumental abstract paintings, which act as a sort of organizing principle or scaffold for her energetic brushwork, date to her youth.

“What I've known for years is that the grid in my painting ... came from two games I played,” Fishman recounts to the catalog's essayist, Andrew Suggs. “One was the basketball court, basically a grid, and I knew where my foot was at all times in relation to the foul line and the half-court line. Same thing when I would play bottle tops. You would make a court on the street with chalk, then get down on the street and shoot these bottle tops around these different boxes.”

You won't find any overt references to Philadelphia in Fishman's recent paintings, which offer evidence of an appreciation for the abstract expressionists Franz Kline, Michael Goldberg, and Joan Mitchell, as her paintings have done in the past — and now of Gerhard Richter's blurrings and Cy Twombly's scribbles.

But knowing of her early life here, you might detect in her painting *As Is* a nod to Piet Mondrian, whose grid-based paintings Fishman saw for the first time while visiting the Philadelphia Museum of Art. And could her *Träumerei*, with its vertical, gash-like strokes of red, owe something to Chaim Soutine, whose brutal, lushly rendered *Flayed Rabbit* she undoubtedly encountered at the Barnes? *Through Oct. 19 at Locks Gallery, 600 Washington Square South, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. 215-629-1000 or [locksgallery.com](http://locksgallery.com).*