

*What's your name? Mary Jane. Where do you live? Down the lane.*

*What do you eat? Pig feet. What do you drink? Pink Ink.*

*What's your phone number? Cucumber.*

Though still relatively unknown, Mary Jane Hanja was a prolific artist with a wide-ranging oeuvre. Born in Toledo, Ohio, in 1949 to parents of Polish descent, she developed her artistic ability as a young child, taking after her mother's tactile and physical nature, which was, in large part, the foundation of Hanja's career. This palpability is evident in her works, specifically in her major paintings from the 1980s, in their passion and urgency.

In 1971, Hanja received her BA from the University of Toledo, and she completed her MFA at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1974. Shortly after graduating, she flocked to New York City with her fellow students. There she found SoHo, a post-industrial neighborhood with cheap, rarely finished or heated lofts that were full of light and space ideal for the artist community to thrive. Throughout the '70s and '80s, Hanja participated in several residencies and group shows in renowned New York galleries, including the Drawing Center and Kathryn Markel.

Possessing sage-like qualities, Hanja let her intuition lead her to people who were suffering, yet she only expressed her own pain in her work. Her enigmatic and unsettling paintings from the '80s explore themes of motherhood, temptation, and death. They contain crudely drawn figures—often a mother and child—landscapes, wolves, and giant martini glasses. She also made sculptural shadowbox-like collages and large pop-abstract banners cut from pieces of fabric and embroidered with images.

Hanja stopped painting almost entirely in the 90s, when she was in the throes of family life. Like the artist, her paintings are reluctant to reveal themselves—the viewer is allowed in, but she must work to decode the images without any guarantee of answers. Hanja gives us just enough to conclude uncertainty. But what we do know is this: a work of art can serve as a passageway to places otherwise inaccessible. This exhibition of paintings—seen publicly for the first time since her passing in 2006—is an attempt to conjure Mary Jane.

We would like to thank Mary Jane's husband, Siim Hanja, and their two children Rudi and Siri. Without you three this show wouldn't be possible.

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