

A selection of works by Mavis Pusey, 2022



Decaying Construction, Detail, Mavis Pusey

Mavis Pusey was a master of abstraction at the height of the movement. Her work is inspired by the pulse and energy of New York City, particularly the construction and demolition of skyscrapers. Pusey's work combines abstractions of the literal and symbolic. In her work there are shapes that definitively evoke construction materials like steel beams, but Pusey also enriched her art with more conceptual elements. "I see the new construction as a rebirth, a catalyst for a new environment... in each of my works... there is a circle to depict the never-ending continuation of natural order and all matter."

Pusey's works are innovative, striking, and expertly executed. Her work is regarded to be on par with great Abstract Art contemporaries such as Ellsworth Kelly and Frank Stella. Despite this, and numerous high-profile exhibitions throughout her life, Mavis Pusey's name is somewhat obscure in the art world and from households. As a Black woman, Pusey was often overlooked by the white, male dominated Abstract Art scene. As an Abstract artist, she was simultaneously overlooked by Black Art circles that were limited by a focus on narrative, figurative styles deemed more important at the time.



Demolitions Sixth Ave, Detail, Mavis Pusey

"I use color and texture to convey the tension that is the heartbeat of the city"



Meet the Artist!

Mavis Pusey was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1928. She studied art in New York City and abroad and has taught at several universities and schools. Her work has been in many major exhibitions and is held in permanent collections at The National Museum of African American History and Culture, The Museum of Modern Art, The Studio Museum in Harlem, and others. Pusey died in 2019.

City Walk

Mavis Pusey was strongly inspired by the “energy and beat” of New York City. This activity invites you to explore your own surroundings and cultivate inspiration.

Essential Questions

What has caught your attention?

What are the qualities of this thing you’re observing? Is it unusual, ordinary, loud, quiet, big or small? What has you interested in it? Why?

What shapes, lines or colors are you observing?

Are there any deeper meanings, metaphors or stories you can connect to what you’re seeing?

How do you feel when you look at this scene?

What shapes, lines or colors would you associate with these deeper connections and feelings?



1. Review this activity with your family and make a plan to take a walk. You can depart from your front door or start in a different neighborhood. This exercise could be completed multiple times, exploring different areas in your city.
2. Begin your walk. Take the time to walk slowly and look around you in every direction. Pause to really take in the scenery. Consider climbing or crouching to get a different point of view. Point out different things as you go along to your walking partners.
3. When someone in your group finds something of particular interest, take turns asking each other the essential questions.
4. Feel free to bring along a camera or sketchbook to capture the interesting details of your walk.
5. If you'd like to take your inspiration further make some art when you return home. This art could be simple drawings, collages, paintings, prints, or even poems, songs, or dances. It's up to you how you'd like to utilize your inspiration. Keep in mind, the art of gathering inspiration is a complete artistic act in and of itself. The time spent out of doors, with your loved ones, thinking creatively, expressing yourself, observing the world, slowing down and appreciating everyday beauty is an art. Take pride in completing this activity and enjoy!