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Vija Celmins at the Hammer Museum

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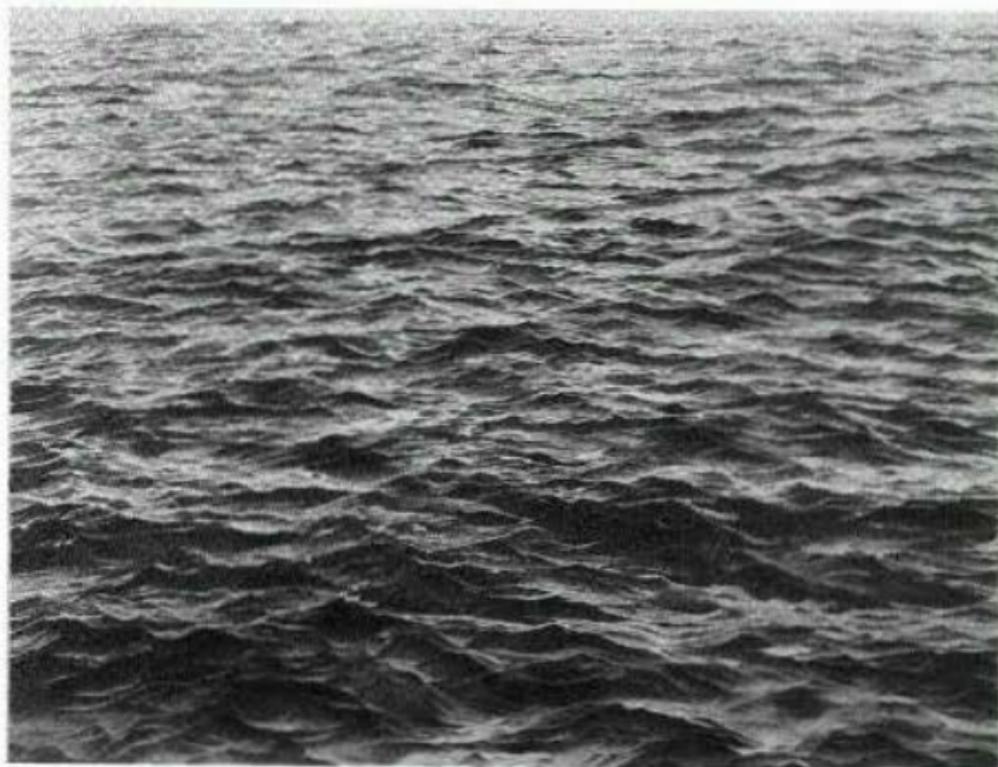
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VIJA CELMINS

HAMMER MUSEUM

A child gazing upon a starry sky feels a sublime sense of wonder, possibility and meaning. It is a similar experience to view Celmins' exquisite graphite and charcoal drawings of desert floors, seascapes, or starry skies. This well-curated show features 68 works from the 1960s to the present, that include trompe l'oeil drawings of newspaper clippings, terrestrial and celestial landscapes, and a suite of spider webs. Celmins is a virtuosic technician, but makes equal impact as a conceptual artist, perhaps precisely because of the pairing of aesthetics and semiotics in her works. She makes drawings of newspaper clippings or photographs, and occasionally even draws a smaller version of the source photograph atop the drawing itself, as in *Moon Surface, (Luna 9), #1*, 1969. In other works, she has



VIJA CELMINS, *Untitled (Big Sea #1)*, 1969. Graphite on acrylic ground on paper. Private Collection, New York.

drawn in the crease lines or a torn edge from the original paper (*Zeppelin*, 1968), thereby converting the drawing into a rumination on the very notion of representation and the viewer's relationship to reality. The boundless planes offered in her sea-, sky-, moon- and stars-scapes recall the limitless plane of a Jackson Pollock drip painting, yet the *mise en abyme* illusionism is more akin to one of Ed Ruscha's word drawings from the 1960s. While many of the drawings were made during the eras of the Vietnam and Cold Wars, they reference Celmins' experience as a World War II refugee. The repeated meditations on surface connote a contemplation about one's place in the universe, about territory, territorialism and exploration. The iterations of seemingly similar subjects (twelve drawings of the ocean) beckon the viewer to look closer, and consider the very intricate marks that one makes — on paper, or in the world.

Micol Hebron