

Susan Eley

Fine Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

March 15, 2023

No Straight Lines
Kate Snow & Joe Sultan

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Susan Eley Fine Art, NYC
190 Orchard Street, New York, NY, 10002

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March 30—May 9, 2023
Opening Reception: Thursday, March 30, 6-8PM

Susan Eley Fine Art is pleased to announce the opening of *No Straight Lines*, an exhibition of paintings on paper by Kate Snow and sculptures in wood by Joe Sultan. This is the fourth exhibition at SEFA's new Gallery on the Lower East Side since our relocation from our Upper West Side space, founded in 2006 by Susan Eley. SEFA NYC is now located at 190 Orchard Street in the heart of the LES arts district.

No Straight Lines will open to the public on Thursday, March 30th. There will be a reception at the LES Gallery with both artists present this evening from 6-8PM. Hours for SEFA NYC are Tuesday-Saturday, 11AM-6PM. Our location in Hudson, NY will continue its regular hours and programming at 433 Warren Street—where the paintings of Katharine Dufault and Michael Wright will be on view beginning April 13th.

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*"To say a grid is limiting is to say that language is limiting.
It is up to us to use these media critically or passively." –Ellen Lupton*

No Straight Lines features recent paintings on paper by Snow and painted wood sculptures by Sultan. Neither artist sketches or makes precise plans before creating. Instead, they let the process guide them. Snow and Sultan simultaneously acknowledge and free themselves from art historical traditions—the grid and architecture, respectively. Snow relishes in limits such as grids and color palettes to ground her mark making. Sultan breaks confines such as the specificity, uniformity and structural integrity of building.

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The artists describe their work with different languages; their visions are rendered in different mediums and materials. Yet, their approaches are surprisingly similar. In conversation with each other, their works produce a yin and yang quality—harmonious visual results when exhibited together. The crossovers in their practices mirror the constructed, yet intuitive, nature of the forms they depict.

Indeed, both artists speak about their intuitive approach. Snow enjoys the rules that she sets for compositions, seeing constraints in form and color ultimately as a portal to artistic freedom. Sultan has come from a background that relies on formal grid with his architectural practice and seeks to deconstruct it by building intuitively with wood pieces. *No Straight Lines* allows visitors to explore questions: Why are practices so rooted in “formula” able to successfully transmit the intuitive? How does architectural construction come to reflect sentiment?



"I find great satisfaction in the rigorous structure of the grid, but I like the organic on the grid so that there's a combination of structure and chaos." –Michelle Stuart

Based in Cleveland, OH, **Kate Snow** is known for her elegant paintings of loose grids in gouache and graphite on handmade paper. Intuitively placed and never uniform, the shapes—ovals, lines, rectangles, dots and squares—are stacked one by one in hues of soft gray, charcoal and off-whites in her “Grids” and “Gravity” series, and brighter blues, yellows and reds for the “Monochrome” series.

Born and raised in Charlotte, NC, Snow has lived in Cleveland for over twenty years. After studying design, color theory, painting and drawing at the community college level and at various makerspaces, Snow worked for many years as a director at Zygote Press, a non-profit community printmaking studio, where she honed her skills as an independent printmaker, while also collaborating with artists from around the world.

Before turning to printmaking, Snow was an avid photographer; both photography and printmaking have impacted how she paints. Snow likes to say that she paints like a printmaker—with an exacting, technical process and with an obsessive attention to detail.

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No Straight Lines features eleven framed works that use the grid as a basis for Snow's visual alphabet of organic, geometric shapes. Each shape, as individual as a fingerprint, is laid down one after the other. She favors gouache paint, which offers the flat, opaque colors she favors and which presents vibrantly on the paper. Her tools of choice are barbecue skewers to make the tiny dots, and wooden chopsticks for larger marks.

The process is long, but never tedious, and never mapped out in advance. Snow slips into a meditative or altered state as she paints from the exterior border towards the paper's center. Intuition tells her when to leave an empty space or when to punctuate the monochromatic rhythm with a contrasting color, such as the three yellow bricks that break the dominant pattern of the gray bricks in the work called *Three Yellow Bricks*; or the meandering current of tiny yellow dots amongst the black dots in *Finding a Way...Like Water*. These surprising elements, which Snow calls "interrupters," reflect the human touch and beautiful care through which Snow puts down each mark.

Once Snow paints a shape on paper, there is no turning back. She must move forward with the mark making, a process she compares to life itself. While we can try to control the chaos, we must reconcile that so much is out of our control. We can simply move forward—mark by mark.



"Don't be governed by the grid, govern the grid. A grid is like a lion cage - if the trainer stays too long it gets eaten up. You have to know when to leave the cage - you have to know when to leave the grid." –Massimo Vignelli

Currently living and working in Germantown, NY, **Joe Sultan** was trained as an architect. Building and constructing have consistently served as integral aspects of Sultan's daily life and creative practice. When he built a house in the Hudson Valley in 2012, he began making furniture and then sculpture from found trees on his property. Literally rooted in the nature of the Hudson Valley—the artist builds his sculptures with sticks and branches that he hand-cuts from fallen trees and logs. He uses a chainsaw and chisels to mine for the forms within each piece of wood, and next begins the additive part of his process. He connects and interweaves the fragments together to create sculptures that are sensitive to space—how it is enclosed, defined and balanced.

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Sultan's skeletal sculptures are not to be looked at, but rather looked through. Whether mounted on a wall, or posed on a pedestal in *No Straight Lines*—his sculptures grow stick by stick. Often, they become towering vertical formations, reminiscent of the buildings he once designed. At other times, they manifest as sprawling horizontal amalgamations—admittedly a greater challenge for the architect, accustomed to designing vertically, from the ground up.

Sultan allows the unexpected twists and turns of the sticks to lead him. According to the artist, the surprises that emerge from the “not-knowing, perhaps the un-knowing” is where the magic resides. After each sculpture is constructed, Sultan paints its components with acrylic or house paint, either multicolor or monochromatic—blacks, whites, blues. For Sultan, the intuitive color choices add to the works' dimensional qualities, creating perspective and balance.

On view in *No Straight Lines*, Sultan's newest body of works has shifted to depicting specific memories—places and people. He states that these latest works are not as focused on the physical composition and now “reflect layers of emotional resonance.” *Joey* is based on a photograph of his grandson sitting on a park bench. *Maragogi* references the palm trees on a trip to Brazil. *The Binding of Issac* was made as a poetic altar, referencing the biblical story. For this sculpture, the character of Isaac was reconstituted from a single slab of wood that had broken. In *Tuna Steaks and the Fishermen*, the red wood panels simply reminded the artist of tuna—an honest monochromatic sculpture in both its aesthetic and intention.

"The grid system is an aid, not a guarantee." –Josef Muller-Brockmann

Press Release Text by Susan Eley and Liz Lorenz

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Kate Snow

Biography:

Kate Snow is a painter and printmaker based in Cleveland, OH. She began exhibiting in 2015, and her work has since been shown across the United States and in Germany. Her work is included in a number of private and public collections including, Baker Hostetler, MetroHealth Hospitals, and Westin Hotels. Snow has been awarded residencies at the Grafik Werkstatt in Dresden, Germany; Brush Creek Foundation for the Arts in Saratoga, WY; The Studios of Key West in Key West, FL; and The Jentel Foundation in Banner, WY. In 2018, Snow was commissioned by the Cleveland International Film Festival to design and create the filmmaker awards for that season. Most recently, she was a recipient of the 2021 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award from the state of Ohio. Snow has exhibited with Susan Eley Fine Art, New York at its Upper West Side Gallery in the juried show *On the Rocks* (2019) and in *Off the Grid* (2019), guest curated by Caroline Blum.

Artist Statement:

As an artist, I find endless possibilities overwhelming and use self-imposed boundaries to focus my work. This often includes some combination of: a literal grid or graphite border, employment of barbecue skewers or wooden chopsticks in lieu of paintbrushes for mark making, use of a monochromatic or limited color palette, and a reliance on shape and pattern to tell a story. Limiting the elements at play adds a measure of gravity to each decision, and every detail about the paper, the viscosity of the paint, micro variations in hues, and even the sharpness of the point on a skewer matters.

I've found that the more restrictions I put in place when I paint, the freer my work has become, allowing a tension to form between the organic and prescribed. Rather than sketch before starting a new piece, I spend time with the paper and begin to visualize possibilities. From there, I can expand the work incrementally. Whether I'm working in an adapted form of pointillism, playing with opacity and hue, or building patterns through repeating shape, the work evolves in its own time. It is an intentionally open process of discovery that seeks to uncover the greatest potential of the basest elements we have at our disposal.

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Joe Sultan

Biography:

Joe Sultan started sculpting later in life after building a home in the Hudson Valley in 2012. He received his degree in architecture from The Cooper Union in 1976 and established his own practice in 1980. He trained, worked as an architect and led his own firms for over twenty years starting in 1980. His focus was special needs housing and other government sponsored commissions. A second career started in 2001 as owner and CEO of Chilewich, the design brand best known for beautiful and functional home textiles. This textile design company was recognized for contemporary place settings and flooring, where Sultan set up the domestic manufacturing of their products. He built the Chilewich factory in Georgia where all of the products are made, with machines and processes of his design. He stepped down as CEO in May of 2022.

During all phases of his career, Sultan made art—first engraving and drawing before turning to sculpture. It was at the Hudson Valley house that he turned exclusively to sculpture using the abundant wood of his land. He mills the wood into sticks, planks and blocks. The milling leaves ridges, valleys and cambers making every raw piece unique.

Sculptures start by putting two random sticks together. There is no plan to start with, nor drawings—but there is always an idea about form, space or memory that guides his works. The idea solidifies as the piece grows and eventually supersedes its initial randomness. All of the works contain the markings of its making.

Sultan's work was first exhibited at Susan Eley Fine Art in August 2021 at the Gallery's Hudson location.