

Susan Eley

Fine Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

February 9, 2024

Enchantments: Ode to New Mexico

Carole Eisner, Margaret Fitzgerald & Michael Wright

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

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February 22 — April 6, 2024
Opening Reception: Thursday, February 22, 6-8PM

The Southwest has long been a place of respite and inspiration for artists. New Mexico in particular became home to several thriving artistic communities in cities including Santa Fe, Galisteo, Belen, Albuquerque and Taos. Known as the “Land of Enchantments,” New Mexico energized not only modern artists of the last century and a half, but also thousands of years of Native American Art. *Enchantments: Ode to New Mexico* is on view at SEFA LES from February 22 to April 6, 2024. SEFA will host an opening reception on Thursday, February 22 from 6 to 8 PM.

In *Enchantments: Ode to New Mexico*, Susan Eley Fine Art presents three artists with distinctive styles. Carole Eisner, Margaret Fitzgerald and Michael Wright each have a connection to New Mexico and attest to the impact it has on their artistic practice. The three artists, like so many before them, utilize the open skies, light quality, solitude, expansiveness and imaginative landscape to enliven their canvases.

Though the three artists take different stylistic approaches, the paintings are in conversation with one another. Margaret Fitzgerald scrawls patterns and intuitive swaths of color on her canvases depicting an urgency in her gestural abstractions. Michael Wright’s landscapes straddle

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representation and abstraction with surfaces that undulate between soft blends, bold swaths of *impasto* and impactful moments of *sgraffito* that together interpret the extraordinary landscape of Diablo Canyon. Carole Eisner's calm and airy geometric abstractions create a moment of pause within the gallery and allude to the bright skies and enchanting sunlight of the southwest.

Artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Agnes Martin, Bruce Nauman, Ken Price, Marsden Hartley, Dennis Hopper, Larry Bell, Nancy Holt, Harmony Hammond, Judy Chicago and Richard Tuttle all found themselves drawn to the spirit of New Mexico. It was in her South West retreat that Agnes Martin found her minimalist style. Feminist artists like Harmony Hammond and Judy Chicago moved to follow in the footsteps of the women artists and collectors who built the New Mexico scene, viewing their settlement there as a rebellion to live outside of societal expectations. Georgia O'Keeffe was drawn to the affecting landscape stating in a letter to her husband, Alfred Stieglitz, "I'm out here in New Mexico—going somewhere—I'm not positive where—but it's great...Not like anything I ever saw before...There is so much more space between the ground and sky out here it is tremendous. I want to stay."

A trip to Santa Fe in the 1980s inspired Carole Eisner's *Pueblo* series. In these paintings Eisner's geometric abstractions take on a still, openness that speaks to the desert landscapes and bright skies she observed. They are calm and bold alluding to both landscape and architecture. Movement is implied in the floating forms and color associations but the balance that the artist imbues counteracts any urgency, leaving harmonious conversations.

Margaret Fitzgerald lives and works in Albuquerque, New Mexico. When asked how this impacts her work she writes, "I find New Mexico a good place to make art and maybe especially Albuquerque because it's an unfinished place that is still not gentrified. There is a rawness and an expansive, open-endedness about New Mexico that I find very conducive to making art." Fitzgerald's art responds to the challenges facing the world and so these qualities are perhaps the perfect environment to tackle all that she wants to say. Her work is spontaneous, immediate and filled with tension. In them mark making becomes a language and the act of covering and uncovering a practice in non permanence. The work is intuitive and always developing. In this way she likens them to her surroundings both natural and urban. The overlap between these

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spaces is, much like her paintings, a fight between structure and gesture, containing and out growing.

Michael Wright lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Initially drawn to the area by its natural beauty and family ties, Wright moved his studio to Santa Fe in 1986. The paintings in this exhibition are largely from the *Diablo Canyon* series which depicts a rocky gorge just outside of the city. On the Canyon, Wright states, "There is a variety of forms there and you can always find something different...there would be cliffs there and a very dramatic landscape... I would go into the canyons and pick something, anything I saw to start with...and if I'm in the right mental state where I'm not thinking about anything, really and just working through instinct that's when I usually turn out good things." After a studio visit with the vibrant 92 year old artist, Susan Eley writes of the Diablo Canyon works: "He paints the landscape with thick, impasto brushstrokes in warm red, orange, terracotta, and green...The imagery is abstracted, yet as entirely identifiable as specific locations in this unique part of the American Southwest...Wright has painted for many decades and has been influenced by a myriad of mid-century abstractionists. It would be difficult to assert that his practice was not influenced by some aspects of every major art movement of the latter half of the 20th century...These works capture Wright's particular story to tell about a few of the places where he has lived and loved."

Press Release Text by Shannon O'Deens



Carole Eisner

Artist Biography:

Carole S. Eisner was born and raised in New York City and received a BFA from Syracuse University (1958). She has had eight solo shows in New York City at David Findlay Gallery, Elizabeth Weiner Gallery, Syracuse University's Lubin House, the Jack Gallery, the Segal Gallery and the First Women's Bank; and elsewhere at the Jill Youngblood Gallery, LA, the Silvermine Center for the Arts, New Canaan, CT, and in Tokyo, at Gallery Tanishima and Gallery Sagan. She has participated in group shows at The Guggenheim Collection, NY (Recent Acquisitions show, 1986), The Atria Gallery, Hartford, CT, Neill Gallery, NY, The Institute of Contemporary Art, London, The Michael Stone Gallery, McLean, VA, and Gallery 99, Bay Harbor

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Islands, FL. Eisner is represented in private, public and corporate collections and has been published in The New York Times, New York Magazine, Who's Who in American Art, Vogue and New York Newsday. Eisner, her husband and three dogs live in Weston, CT.

Artist Statement:

My interest in pure color and geometric shapes has been an overarching theme in the many artistic pursuits I have undertaken in my career. From my first years as a fashion designer, I gravitated to painting and sculpture. Abstraction, geometry, shape and color have always been at the core of my work. The paintings in this exhibit, from 1977 to the early 80s, are based on the rectangle. I was influenced by Albers and Rothko, Mondrian and Bolotowsky. I loved the experimentation and simplicity of Albers work in examining the juxtaposition of two colors vibrating off each other. His work was more cerebral, more controlled than mine; Rothko's more passionate and emotional and Mondrian and Bolotowsky, more linear and graphic. I endeavored to create work in response to these Masters, by using my own color palette, adding personal symbols and hieroglyphics to animate and create a conversation on the canvas. Later in the series, I tested the addition of glitter, adding texture and playfulness to the paintings.



Margaret Fitzgerald

Artist Biography

Margaret Holman Fitzgerald was born in London, England. She grew up in Japan and the United States. She studied fine art and art history in New York City at the School of Visual Arts and the Art Students League. She also studied at the Instituto Allende in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico and received a Bachelor of Fine Art from the University of New Mexico. Margaret has enjoyed solo shows in New York City, San Francisco and New Mexico. Her work is in private and corporate collections across the United States and abroad.

Artist Statement:

I paint about the struggle and events in my life and the wider world. I draw from my unconscious as well as things seen, heard and felt. The paintings are a combination of natural and urban

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environments. My current work is about this moment in time in which life is carrying on, albeit at a frenzied pace, while facing an existential threat.

I paint about relationships, conversations, the seasons, plants growing and decaying, birds migrating, underground roots systems, sidewalk cracks, breathing in and out and the overlay of nature within the urban.

I'm interested in the language of graffiti and its inherent urgency to speak out. I'm interested in popular culture juxtaposed with the natural order and the struggle to survive.

Living in New Mexico means that my life is intertwined with nature on a daily basis. The sky envelops the city and the mountains and desert sitting on the edge of town. The weather brings extremes of wind, sun and cold. All of this influences my work and how I view the world.



Michael Wright

Biography and Statement

Born in New Rochelle, New York in 1931, Michael Fitzhugh Wright studied art at the Yale Music and Art School, Albright Art School, and the Brooklyn Museum School. After serving in Korea as a regimental artist, he began his career as a painter in New York City in 1954. As a young painter, he was a friend and colleague of Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and David Smith in the famous days of the Cedar Bar and Eighth Street Art Club. He studied with Paul Brach through the New School and showed in several Tenth Street galleries with Howard Kanovitz, Aristodimos Kaldis, Earl Kerkam and Philip Pavia.

After ten years in New York City, he moved to East Hampton and assisted Willem de Kooning from 1964 through 1967. While in East Hampton, Wright had several solo shows at the Guild Hall and in 1966 won the prestigious Long Island Painter's Award. Although he remained life-long friends with de Kooning, he wanted to further explore his own personal vision and did not want to be identified as a regional Long Island painter.

In 1972, he moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts. Feeling the need to be closer to nature, Wright moved his studio in 1976 to the isolation of the woods in Barnstead, New Hampshire. For the next ten years he continued to expand his expression through the personal use of the line,

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the stroke, and the paint itself, creating well-defined groupings of forms, always influenced by nature. He has traveled extensively through Europe, North Africa, the Caribbean, Indonesia, and India. Traveling has always provided him with new inspiration for his work. Wright's first visit to the Southwest in 1974 left an impression on him. Intrigued by the clarity of light and variety of forms, he made annual visits and finally moved his studio to Santa Fe in 1986.

Wright has always loved to explore the land, as well as, paint the forms of nature, to hunt for birds, and fish the streams. In recent years his paintings have evolved into natural abstractions, as he simplifies the shapes and forms he sees and remembers from nature. Powerful, often sensual, often surreal, his shapes always seem to breathe.

Michael Wright is an accomplished craftsman and his line remains an integral part of his work. He has always loved drawing the figure. His mediums are most often oil, acrylic, watercolor, and colored paper. He continues in printmaking. His exceptional vision of nature, through lyrical imagery, is always there.

In 1998 Michael suffered from a stroke which left him legally blind in his left eye; amazingly it has not interfered with his ability to produce high quality work. Wright now paints in his new studio on Agua Fria St., Santa Fe, New Mexico.