

Susan Eley

Fine Art

***LIZ RUNDORFF SMITH***

***BARBARA STRASEN***

**On View: May 16 - June 30, 2024**

**Opening Reception: Saturday, May 18, 4-6PM**



Susan Eley Fine Art, Hudson

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Susan Eley Fine Art's Upstate location in Hudson, NY is pleased to present an exhibition of recent works by Barbara Strasen and Liz Rundorff Smith. The show will be on view from May 16th to June 30th at SEFA's location in Hudson. Strasen will be present for the opening reception on Saturday, May 18th from 4-6PM.

In this exhibition, the pairing of Rundorff Smith and Strasen is based on their approaches to abstraction, layering and color. Both artists are fearless colorists who meld unique forms into their specific visions. The layers of pigment and material—primarily acrylic, flashe and collage for Strasen, and encaustic and pastel powder for Rundorff Smith—allow for visual transformations and vibrations within each canvas. Beyond their aesthetic interplay, memory is the concept that most connects the artists' practices. The sense of loss and the passage of time, as well as how to best memorialize these feelings, are acknowledged throughout their works. Reality is paused while absorbing their paintings. Imagery shifts into the imaginary—forms dance as viewers dive into layers of color and motif.



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Barbara Strasen manipulates memories by finding the malleable moments of perception. In the “S” series, a figure appears in each painting. Yet, it is only a silhouette, blending into the architecture and backgrounds. For the artist, this figure’s identity and significance are personal. For the viewers, she crafts mysterious worlds. Is the figure going into a cave, or perhaps emerging from it? The exhibition at SEFA Hudson presents three canvases from Strasen’s series. Viewers see this ambiguous figure in a blue architectural drapery, a textured red firestorm and a confetti haze amongst a pastel sky. Her creations reside in an unknown state that echoes the human experience—beginnings and endings, obscurity and clarity.

Strasen states that she seeks “to slow people down and to be surprised.” In her painted lenticular prints, viewers are met with different images as they move across the piece. The works are combinations of multiple images, revealing that perception is not stable: “something is interrupted; something is underneath; something is alive and changing.” Strasen employs both nature and art history, with a particular fondness for Albrecht Dürer’s compositions and cloud formations that mingle with owls and suggestions of foliage.

The artist seeks to “take the ancient things and make them contemporary” and vice versa within her visual practice. Strasen achieves this through painted needlepoint equivalents and collage methods as well. She finds connections between seemingly unlike things within her layering, thus proving a new perspective on reality. In her work *NEEDLEPOINT NEUROLOGY*, she employs images of brain scans and layers them onto the surface using pigment acrylic and golden paint. The luminescent qualities throughout her work echo the changing and memorizing qualities of stained glass as viewers move throughout the space.



Rundorff Smith deals with central shapes that she develops by referencing urns, shrines, burial mounds and places of veneration. As a current resident of South Carolina, she associates cemeteries, particularly locations in the South, as spiritual spaces of veneration. Her paintings are reliquaries for memories. Urns are vessels to hold ashes while also acknowledging life—what we mourn and what we celebrate.

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In the exhibition at SEFA Hudson, Rundorff Smith presents the latest in her series entitled “Trophy.” These small scale encaustic paintings are hung in a grid that mirrors the geometric patterns within each piece. The artist works in layers by melting and combining pigmented wax to create a literal history on the materials’ surface, while simultaneously implying the personal story that each vessel is meant to hold. Rendered in colored wax from sky blue to bright pink to vibrant yellow—a rectangular pattern blankets many of the paintings.

This patternation references the constructions of Rundorff Smith’s father, a builder. Thus, the “Trophy” paintings are manifested into small awards to herself. They are an acknowledgement of her own successes and of the care and work that she does to ensure her daughters are raised differently than herself. She states: “I get into the grid and I lose the state of structure because it is fascinating to destroy the grid itself.” She memorializes her childhood and she leaves other elements behind.

Rundorff Smith is interested in kitsch as an accessible form of beauty, related to the aesthetics of her youth. The nostalgic color choices and build up of encaustic is reminiscent of mid-century American decor. In recent paintings like *Good Girls*, the artist added fringe to the bottom of the canvas. This tactile embellishment plays into kitsch, reminiscent of party decorations, parade floats and prize ribbons—elevating the vessel to something to be celebrated. Patterning, grids, reflected and mirrored vessels suggest the artist's need to nurture the painting through repetition. It is a means to transfer the desired memories and emotions. The artist associates the vessels with her two daughters—or herself and her sister. While many of the forms are repeated, they are never perfect copies. Color is allowed to bleed; lines cut off; previous marks shine through both paper and encaustic pieces. This undulation between symmetry and irregularity creates a need to examine every inch.

Press Release Text by Liz Lorenz and Shannon O’Deens



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## **BARBARA STRASEN**

### **ARTIST BIOGRAPHY**

Barbara Strasen was born in Brooklyn, raised in the New York area and lives in Los Angeles. She received a BFA from Carnegie-Mellon University and an MFA from the University of California at Berkeley. Strasen has exhibited extensively in Europe and the US since 1977, achieved numerous public commissions, acted as curator for several exhibitions and has taught at the University of California at San Diego. Museum exhibitions include the Whitney Museum, New York; Santa Barbara Museum of Art; PS 1 MoMA, New York City; Fisher Museum of USC, Los Angeles; Islip Art Museum, East Islip, NY; Long Beach Art Museum, Los Angeles; San Diego Natural History Museum and Allen Art Museum of Oberlin College, among others. Strasen has recently been awarded a prestigious City of Los Angeles Artist Fellowship Award and a recent large commission titled *Flow & Glimpse* fills the ticketing and departure levels of Los Angeles World Airport's Terminal 2. She has shown with Susan Eley Fine Art in its locations on the Upper West Side, NYC; Lower East Side, NYC; Hudson, NY.

### **ARTIST STATEMENT**

I am a visual artist whose work is about finding beauty and harmony in the turbulence and complexity of apparently unrelated and contradictory images. My perennial focus is on finding unexpected visual connections between seemingly unlike images and ideas, and to discover new relationships between them.

My art deals with the realization that every memory contains multiple perceptions, which layer themselves in some form of priority. Memories do not remain constant, but are the result of a continuing process of perception and re-perception, the mind constantly trying to reconcile the sublime with the horrific, the trivial with the vital. I have always been driven to make art that comments upon and re-presents these ideas, seeking to reveal the interconnectedness of all things. Over time I have taken different approaches to manifesting this vision, pushing boundaries of painting, photography and printmaking and exploring other media to create multi-image works that reflect upon these complexities.

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## LIZ RUNDORFF SMITH

### ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Liz Rundorff Smith currently lives and works in Greenville, SC. She received a BA in Studio Art with a concentration in sculpture from the College of Wooster in Wooster, OH in 2000 and an MFA in Painting from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania in 2005. Rundorff Smith studied abroad at The Marchutz School of Painting in Aix en Provence, France and the British Institute of Florence in Florence, Italy and was awarded a fellowship and residency at the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. Her work can be found in private and corporate collections including the Marilyn Monroe Bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel and Sun City Showa Kien Koen, Tachikawa, Japan. Rundorff Smith is a member of the Painting Center Art File in New York. Her work has been featured in *Southern Living* and *Create Magazine* Issue 20. Recent exhibitions include the two-person show *But We've Come So Far* at Susan Eley Fine Art's Lower East Side location in NYC; *Counterbalance* at Susan Eley Fine Art's locations in both NYC and Hudson; *The Shape of Things* at 701 Center for Contemporary Art in Columbia, SC; *Coined in the South: 2022* at the Mint Museum, Charlotte, NC; and the solo exhibition *Street Garden* at Florence County Museum Waters Gallery, Florence, SC.

### ARTIST STATEMENT

I am interested in the need to assign meaning to seemingly valueless things because they are things that represent a connection to the deeper experience of loss. My work elevates the mundane, in a process of assigning meaning, that mimics the way we bring significance to loss with keepsakes and memorials. I want to create work that evokes a sense of nostalgia and exposes the sentimentality in memory. Color choice is tied to the decor and design trends of decades past that have become kitschy artifacts. Patterns reference fragments of common spaces and utilitarian objects while shifting to suggest the passage of time and the loss of stability that accompanies remembrance. Shapes intimate things that are no longer identifiable but retain familiarity. I am mimicking the past, attempting to reproduce the original while allowing imperfection and a lack of precision to create work that exploits the failure in repetition and the fragility in recollection.