

Susan Eley  

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Fine Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

July 1, 2024

**Rachel Burgess**  
***Simple Gifts***

Susan Eley Fine Art, Hudson  
433 Warren Street, Hudson, NY 12534

On View: July 5—August 18, 2024  
Opening Reception: Saturday, July 13, 4-6PM

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Susan Eley Fine Art is pleased to present a series of recent monotypes by Rachel Burgess in the solo exhibition *Simple Gifts*. This show is on view from July 5th through August 18th. There will be an opening reception with the artist present on Saturday, July 13th from 4-6PM. *Simple Gifts* is also featured in Upstate Art Weekend, a local event and curated tour highlighting the region's premier galleries and artists from July 18th-21st. Burgess debuted her series of still life monotypes at SEFA NYC in the exhibition *Deli Flowers My Husband Bought Me* in 2023. In this current presentation, the Gallery will display them for our audiences in Upstate, along with additional new works that expand upon the concept of gestures of sharing, simplicity and intimacy. With these works, Rachel Burgess shares a glimpse into a seemingly small act of care that punctuates the artist's daily life with meaningful moments.

In *Deli Flowers My Husband Bought Me*, Rachel Burgess presents large-scale monotypes that serve as windows into her experiences. In this newest series the artist reinterprets bouquets given to her by her husband. An NYPD detective, he often comes home late at night, bearing flowers from their local deli, the only store open at the nighttime hour. The series began when Burgess decided to sketch the flowers. Attracted to their color and shape, the artist carved out simplified chromatic compositions in the small-scale drawings. These small sketches, included in the exhibition, give an even more intimate experience of the ephemeral gift. Then, Burgess immortalized the short-lived flowers by printing them on a monumental scale. Each composition consists of large, smooth areas of bright bold color that depict the subjects in silhouette. Burgess creates snapshots of a moment as shadow figures of pure color fill the frame.

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The artist's depictions are abstracted and blurred at the edges, as if the scene itself has been filtered through the artist's personal lens. The viewer can only experience the private moment secondhand. Perhaps the soft edges emphasize the brief lives of these gifts from nature, allowed to live on as fleeting visages. Much like Pop artists Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, Burgess uses a familiar object or scene and reimagines it, associating the imagery with its context and inherent connections. Not only do Burgess' monotypes give her audience a look into an intimate moment in her own life, but they remind us of a universal feeling, of the small gestures made by and for the ones we love. In printing these simple gifts, Burgess wishes to not only express gratitude to her husband, but also to memorialize the city's essential workers and services.

In the show *Simple Gifts* at SEFA Hudson, Burgess continues with her commemorations of the seemingly minor, but ultimately epic, beautiful aspects in human existence and interaction. Her title inspiration for *Simple Gifts* draws from a Shaker hymn: "Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, / 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be, / And when we find ourselves in the place just right, / 'Twill be in the valley of love and delight."

Burgess conceived of the exhibition design at SEFA Hudson. Within the Gallery, she juxtaposes a yellow and orange work with a red and purple work. She uses colors in cohesive ways within each monotype. Her presentation here is a pleasant surprise for the eye—perhaps in a similar way to how these flower gifts acted for her. Viewers see blue daisies and violet peonies dancing on a plane of color. In the space, Burgess' larger framed works are interwoven with her sketches on paper—the studies for these monotypes. By changing the scale of the works within the exhibition layout, viewers can also remember how the simple things are not little. Anything can be the best thing. It is the acts of love and care that we will remember.

Text by Shannon O'Deens and Liz Lorenz

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## Rachel Burgess

### Biography:

Rachel Burgess is a visual artist based in New York. Originally from Boston, she received a B.A. in literature from Yale University and an M.F.A. in Illustration from the School of Visual Arts. Her interest in narrative and sequential forms continues to inform her work. She has been an artist in residence at Zea Mays Printmaking and the Schoodic Institute in Acadia National Park.

The coastal landscapes of Maine have been the main source of inspiration for Burgess for many years. Her ongoing fascination with how land meets water—along rivers, lakes and the seaside—fuels the creation of her stunning, expressive painterly monotypes. Gradations of subtle colors—pinks to blues to warm yellows—underscore the impressionistic views the artist captures, first in sketches and sometimes years later when she revisits particular images from her many sketchbooks.

Burgess has exhibited nationally and internationally, including at the International Print Center of New York, the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art, the American University Museum, the Monmouth Museum, the University of Connecticut, the Katzen Art Center, the Newhouse Center for Contemporary Art at Snug Harbor and the Seoul Museum of Art.

### Artist Statement:

I make autobiographical works on paper of landscapes and domestic scenes. Window-like in scale, my pieces combine elements of oil painting, folk art and commercial illustration, exploring our attempts to impose narratives on our lives. I grew up in New England, and my traditional pieces are inspired by memories of its landscape that have stayed with me since childhood. I'm interested in the discrepancy between what we experience and how we remember it by the way we take a specific moment and turn it into an abstract memory. Attracted by the accessible, democratic nature of printmaking, I work primarily in monotype, straddling the divide between popular and elite forms of storytelling.

"Deli Flowers My Husband Bought Me" is based on flowers that my husband, an NYPD detective, has brought home over the years from our local corner deli. Through iconic renderings of these simple gifts, I pay tribute to the things we take for granted, to the city, to its essential workers and services and to the fundamental relationships that underpin our lives.

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Originally attracted to the flowers' bold shapes and colors, I began sketching them for fun before eventually turning them into large-scale monotypes. To make each piece, I paint in oils on a large sheet of plexiglass, then lay a piece of paper on top of the painting and run it through a printing press, creating a single, unique impression. The fact that traditional deli flowers like daisies, daffodils, lilies and mums are simultaneously quotidian and beloved makes them a perfect metaphor, both for the unassuming beauty of works on paper and for the humble joy of day-to-day life.