

Susan Eley  
Fine Art

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**April 5, 2010**

***Robert Hite's Imagined Histories:  
Architectural Sculptures & Photographs***  
April 29-June 11, 2010  
Opening Reception: Thursday, April 29, 6-8 pm

SEFA is delighted to announce ***Robert Hite's Imagined Histories***, an exhibition of architectural sculptures and accompanying black and white photographs. This will be Hite's first major exhibition at SEFA (two Hite photographs were included in the summer group show ***Heading Home*** last year) and our first exhibition of a single artist since the Gallery opened four years ago. There will be a reception for the artist on Thursday, April 29 from 6-8 pm.

***Imagined Histories*** features six large sculptures of Hite's signature shelters and nine photographs the artist took of the sculptures after installing them in and around the Hudson River near his home in Esopus, NY. "Imagined Histories" is an ongoing series that Hite began in 2006.

The weather-beaten homes, churches and shacks, all in miniature, are crafted from wood, metal roofing, siding and other found and discarded construction debris. The sculptures are products of the artist's imagination, married with memories of real places recalled from a youth spent in the deep south of the Virginia tidewaters. The sculptures are fictional, sized somewhere between playhouse and life size.

Hite's sculptures deliberately eschew proper proportion and symmetry—notice how impossibly tall "River Tower" and "Pathway House" are and how the windows are too numerous, supports too rickety and doorways impenetrable in such pieces as "Black Creek Black" and "Mud Flat House." Hite's intentional distortion and aging of the sculptures compel us look again and question notions of shelter, throwing into relief stark contrasts of natural and artificial, decay and beauty, past and present.

Hite installs the sculptures along pristine lakefronts or in haunted, fairytale-like settings—by a foreboding swamp or along a dark river. Even if these structures were viable homes, choosing to enter might not be wise—the house *could* offer a haven from nature's tangled chaos, but one doesn't really know what lurks behind the facade.

Once the illusion of home is shattered, one looks more closely at the weird structures in the photographs and sees them in a new context. Devoid of people, they are yet evocative of the dire poverty and patched together lives in forgotten rural communities in the American south. The beat up shacks refer to the war-torn architecture of the Civil War and to the discrimination Hite witnessed growing up in the south during the Civil Rights era.

The documentary style of Hite's photographs recall the classic black and white work of quintessential American photographers, such as Walker Evans, Helen Levitt and William Eggleston, who documented the socio-economic conditions of rural communities, as well as life in urban America.

For all of Hite's nodding to an historical and personal past, in his artwork the past becomes the present. When Hite resituates these buildings into his adopted home in upstate New York, he breathes new life into his rescued memories. Hite's photographs reflect cultures beaten by time, weather and warfare that still stand, albeit precariously.

## **ROBERT HITE**

## **ARTIST BIO**

Born in 1956 in rural Virginia, Robert Hite attended Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond and the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC, and studied ink brush painting in Malaysia. Hite also worked for and studied with Washington Color School painter Leon Berkowitz.

Hite is inspired both by a rich Southern narrative tradition and closeness to nature. He has photographed and made a study of rural houses and shacks in Central and South America, Asia, Europe, the Caribbean and the southern United States. His paintings, sculptures and photographs come filtered through a lens on the natural world, layered with gestures of human and ecological struggle, and with sensitivity to what is beautiful, poetic and harsh within this interaction.

Hite is interested in exploring issues of local knowledge, memory, transience, environment, disenfranchisement and domicile as living art. His subjects often emerge from opt-out communities (where subsistence living is more attractive than wage earning). Although these explorations inform Hite's work, his primary goal is pursuing a profound and moving piece of art and retaining the instinct to do so. Thus, in the breadth of his work – photography, painting, sculpture, and the interactions among these media – Hite realizes abstractions that are inextricably rooted in the real. He prizes meticulous attention to detail and refined technique in orchestrating illusions that are both realistic and transformative.

In 1997, Hite and his family moved to an old Methodist church and parsonage in the small village of Esopus, NY. The clapboard church, built in 1846 and carefully restored by the artist, serves as studio and muse for his ongoing meditations on the social meanings and visual potential inherent in informal buildings.

Hite has recently been featured in solo shows at the Pearl Arts Gallery, Stone Ridge, NY, Lascano Gallery, Great Barrington, MA, Palmer Gallery, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, NY and Ellen Elizabeth Gallery, Cape Cod, MA. His newest sculpture, "Crossing Safely," commemorates the thousands of anonymous people who have crossed the Mexican-US border. In April the work was installed at St. Edward's University, Austin, TX, where it will remain until June 2010.



*Robert Hite, Prayer House, Swamp, Ulster County, NY, 2006*



*Robert Hite, Mud Flat House, Hudson River, Ulster County, NY, 2006*