

Susan Eley
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Fine Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Earthen Energies, Ancient Roots

Ashley Norwood Cooper

Jackie Shatz



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



June 23—July 31, 2022
Opening Reception: Saturday, June 25th, 6-8PM

Susan Eley Fine Art is pleased to present *Earthen Energies, Ancient Roots*, a two-person exhibition featuring recent work by Ashley Norwood Cooper and Jackie Shatz. The exhibition is on view from June 23 to July 31, 2022 at the Gallery's Upstate location in downtown Hudson. The artists will be present for an opening reception on Saturday, June 25th from 6-8PM. Both Norwood Cooper and Shatz are based in New York State, and this exhibition marks their first presentation with the Gallery.

Norwood Cooper and Shatz are grounded in nature for their subjects and their materials. They produce ceramics, multi-media sculptures and paintings that reflect their immediate and imagined environments—as well as capture the lyrical movements of the humans and animals residing within. Thematically, Norwood Cooper and Shatz confront fragility and anxiety; then joy and rejuvenation. The artists often conjure ancient mythologies in their visual motifs and contextual references. This quality endows their artworks—rendered in wax and in clay—with a visceral, sometimes primordial, energy that is grounded by female agency.

The exhibition *Earthen Energies, Ancient Roots* is an opportunity to emphasize sculpture at SEFA Hudson—whether posed on shelves, mounted on walls or suspended in windows. The layout activates the unique architecture of the Gallery's space, moving beyond the traditional

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“white cube” model via a dynamic arrangement of three-dimensional artworks. Additionally, this show reflects the broader programmatic arc of SEFA Hudson’s Spring/Summer 2022 season, which also included *Flora Inhabited* (Angela A’Court and Ellen Hermanos) and *Malia’s Garden* (Allison Green). Each presentation was conceptualized around interpreting the natural world and the organisms and ecosystems within—here envisioned through the lens of female experiences to manifest personal transformations and states of being.



Ashley Norwood Cooper will present her newest body of work at SEFA Hudson: sculptures of bees that are made of wax, then painted. The three-dimensional insects are suspended by twine in the Gallery’s front windows overlooking Warren Street—swaying and dancing for the pleasure of passersby. In nature, the Queen Bee is ruler of the hive, and her status is dependent on her ability to reproduce. However, Norwood Cooper’s bees are a contrast to this idealized matriarch. Her bees are imperfect creatures with a rough-hewn look, rendered with layers of pigmented wax, frozen in irregular drips over their bodies. To the artist, they are “menopausal ballerinas” whose physical appearance contrasts that of the Queen. Perhaps they negate her primacy and uncontested value within the hive—until she is replaced, of course.

The artist was influenced by two principal textual references: Virgil’s *Georgics* which contain instructions for beekeeping and managing “the swarm,” and Sylvia Plath’s series of poems including “Stings” and “Wintering.” Both authors employ the behaviors of these insects as metaphors about human relationships and life stages. Floating at various heights, the sculptures’ arrangement mimics the actual motion of bees—their frenetic flight patterns. Made of wax, Norwood Cooper’s bee sculptures manifest an interconnectedness—a synchronistic use of materials based on their initial source. Often considered as frightening attackers, bees are in fact pollinators and essential for life on the planet—another poetic tension that Norwood Cooper revels in.

The artist will also exhibit new figurative paintings that depict humans interacting with insects and flowers. They are built with layers of oil paint to become colorful, thick impasto surfaces. Norwood Cooper’s paintings feature beekeepers in their traditional protective garb: one is

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swarmed by the creatures; another is armed with a smoker to retake control. Other canvases are decorated with flora including blackberry bushes and wisteria vines, or fauna like rabbits and butterflies. They enhance the veritable apiary that Norwood Cooper creates at SEFA Hudson.



In *Earthen Energies, Ancient Roots*, Jackie Shatz will exhibit a number of recent earthenware sculptures. Her ceramics, which she considers paintings and sculptures, are intimately-scaled. They will hang in lively configurations on the walls throughout SEFA's space. Shatz's works primarily depict human and humanoid forms that seemingly dance, twist and contort. Grouped together, the biomorphic shapes are leaning, reaching, floating and bending—as if engaged in an exuberant waltz.

Often rendered in neutral tones, Shatz's figures evoke the earliest human creations—sculptures of female goddesses. They appear to reference works such as the famed *Venus of Willendorf*, a Paleolithic "Venus figurine" carved in stone, or perhaps early Minoan and Cycladic sculptures of fertility goddesses from Ancient Greece: smooth, graceful, natural—an elegant icon, yet an animated one. The artist fully embraces the allure and energy of such ancient mythologies.

At SEFA Hudson, Shatz's works are hung to foster a sensory experience. Her characters are anonymous yet relatable; faceless yet "every-woman;" primordial yet contemporary. The blue abstracted form *Other Minds* seems like an amalgamation of a ballerina and an octopus. In *Mist*, a person either rides or morphs into a pink swan—ultimately ambiguous. The female figure *Eidolon* may reference the Greek myth of the "spirit-image," a shadow or phantom of the human body. Rather than relying on a perfect imitation or naturalistic representation of an individual—viewers connect with Shatz's beings on a deeper visual and internal level, which is rooted in movement and tone.

Together, Norwood Cooper and Shatz present us with the earth—at its truest and finest—and as sculpted by female hands. Indeed, the goddesses emerge to craft "lived-in" bodies, centering the vision and agency of these women as creators.

Text by Liz Lorenz, Assistant Director, SEFA Hudson

ASHLEY NORWOOD COOPER

BIOGRAPHY:

Ashley Norwood Cooper was born in Atlanta, GA in 1970 and raised in Greenville, SC. She studied Latin and Greek at the University of Georgia, where she received a B.A. in 1995. Norwood Cooper taught Latin in South Carolina before returning to school for her MFA in Painting at Indiana University in 2000. Currently, she teaches at SUNY Oneonta. The artist lives with her husband and their two sons and daughter in Cooperstown, NY. Norwood Cooper makes intensely colored, painterly figurative work, explores the creative lives of women, the awkwardness of family relationships, and the schizophrenic role of the artist-mother-wife teacher. Her works have been exhibited throughout the United States, as well as at international venues—including First Street Gallery, NYC; Cooperstown Art Association, NY; ZINC Contemporary, Seattle, WA; and Galerie Thomas Fuchs, Stuttgart, Germany. She has received an award from the National Society of Arts and Letters and was included in the Young Painters Competition at Miami University. Her recent debut at VOLTA NYC 2020 garnered press in the NY Times and Arcade Projects Zine (Columbia University).

ARTIST STATEMENT:

“To find a form that accommodates the mess, that is the task of the artist now.”
--Samuel Beckett

Nothing will ever replace painting because nothing makes a mess like paint. It oozes and stains, drips and streaks, fades, chips and permeates. Paint refuses to abandon its illusions almost as stubbornly as it refuses to follow through on its own lies. Of all the genres in art, none is as problematic as figure painting. Here the battle between form and content plays out on the fields closest to home.

I paint because I am drawn to messiness. It fascinates me. I swoon when I see a gracious accident on the easel, but I have a perverse respect for the truth I see in clumsiness. I revel in inconsistencies and can't make myself fix them or cover them up.

We are living in a shit show. New technology brings the collective id of the whole world to a tiny screen that you hold in your hands as you fall asleep each night. My family and friends are plagued with nightmares.

Paint is ancient technology, a long discredited medium, but I take a brush to whatever vexes me. I am a middle-class mom, raising a family in a world I cannot understand or sooth. Paint is the form that accommodates my mess.

JACKIE SHATZ

BIOGRAPHY:

Jackie Shatz is a sculptor, painter, teacher and lecturer. She attended Bennington College and earned a BFA degree in painting (magna cum laude) and an MFA degree in sculpture, both from Hunter College. Shatz feels that her recent pieces fall somewhere between painting and sculpture, stillness and movement and figurative and abstract. The dimensions of her sculptures allow one to look into an intimate space and she believes they owe a debt to the scale and narratives of Medieval art. Shatz's work has been displayed in numerous solo and group shows, including exhibitions at the June Kelly, Monique Knowlton and Kouros galleries, in New York City. She has also curated and organized many exhibitions, including "CollageLogic," which was last presented in 2012, at Hampden Gallery, at UMass, in Amherst. Shatz is a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Individual Fellowship, a Craft Alliance New Techniques grant and several NYFA SOS grants. She has been artist-in-residence at the Kohler Arts/Industry program, where she created a series of music box sculptures and has collaborated on sound and sculptural installations for Glyndor Gallery, at Wave Hill and on Governors Island. Shatz has taught and lectured at many places, including at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York City. Her work has been reviewed by The New York Times, The New York Daily News and The Village Voice, among others.

ARTIST STATEMENT:

My wall sculptures involve suspended states of being and the permeable nature of time. The images of swimming, floating and "about to" gestures imply anticipation, hesitancy, anxiety or relief from anxiety. I did not set out to express specific qualities - they emerged from the selection of the figures and the creation of the pieces themselves. The meanings are hidden like the meanings in dreams.

These works ride the edge between painting and sculpture; between stillness and movement; between the figurative and the abstract. The dimensions of the sculptures allow one to look into an intimate space; they owe a debt to the scale and narratives of archaic and Medieval art.

These sculptures are part of a continuing series of reimagining symbols of the past about forces of history and nature and creating contemporary sculptural archetypes. They forge a bridge between past icons of art by reimagining them as icons with contemporary relevance. Ideas of transformation, anthropomorphism and myth are implied.