

Susan Eley
— Hudson —
Fine Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Refracted Wilderness
Katharine Dufault & Michael Wright

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

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April 13—May 28, 2023
Opening Reception: Saturday, April 15th, 5-7PM

Susan Eley Fine Art is pleased to present an exhibition of paintings by Katharine Dufault and Michael Wright. Entitled *Refracted Wilderness*, this two-person exhibition will be on view at SEFA Hudson from April 13 through May 28, 2023. There will be an opening reception with both artists present on Saturday, April 15th from 5 to 7PM.

In *Refracted Wilderness*, the artists share interpretations of their surroundings via an intimate lens. The essence is the landscape—geography and topography. Yet, the visual results have been distilled and interpreted with care and reflection. Thus, the abstracted paintings of Dufault and Wright are more honest than any naturalistic representation. Their images refract the wilderness. The locations of their paintings encompass the Berkshires, the Hamptons and the Southwest.

Refraction is not simply reflection. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, refraction is defined as “the change in the apparent position of a celestial body due to bending of the light rays emanating from it as they pass through the atmosphere” and “the action of distorting an image by viewing through a medium.” These characteristics are apparent in the works of Dufault and Wright. The artists begin by studying the natural vistas around them. They photograph or sketch or purely take in the memories. Their paintings evolve in the studio to encapsulate their

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experiences. Their landscapes represent the changeability of the earth—from sunsets to rock formations. Light is key in capturing color, both a celebration of movement and beauty.

Dufault and Wright recognize that everything in the wilderness shifts, based on the natural and the personal point of view. Indeed, Dufault notes: "The artist is refraction; we take things in and are seeing things and bending them to our will; we are the medium which does the refraction. My work is a refracted reflection." The artist is the conduit through which the wilderness is translated.

Refracted Wilderness is the second exhibition of Dufault's work at SEFA Hudson and the debut exhibition of Wright's work at the Gallery.



Currently living in the Berkshires region of Massachusetts, **Katharine Dufault** is influenced by the nature enveloping her home. Her works are based in the tradition of observational landscape painting. Yet, she decisively moves toward an abstract style, creating atmospheric, impressionistic renderings of the neighboring trees, fields and mountains—prominent motifs throughout the works on view at SEFA Hudson.

In *Refracted Wilderness*, the red moons or perhaps suns—intentionally left ambiguous—are notable in the "Lake View" series. Dufault recently relocated to the Berkshires full-time, providing her the opportunity to experience this mountainous and lush environment on a daily basis. She absorbs its particularities and its energies on her daily walks, witnessing the changes throughout the seasons. As the time she spends Upstate increases, she finds that her connection to the land also deepens. Thus, to the artist, it has become "a living landscape." *Refracted Wilderness* features her new pieces with larger areas of similar colors such as *Clear Pink Sky*. The painting *Dawn* reveals the linen below, peeking out at its edges—hinting at the materiality within every creation in her oeuvre.

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Relying on her lasting impressions of a place, Dufault captures its most fundamental elements by eliminating the details. To achieve this, she manipulates pattern and space through palette, and color generally takes precedence over form. The artist stated: “I am a colorist.” Typically, she approaches a new canvas by selecting one or two hues—such as her signature earthy red or her new favorite oil paint Zinc Yellow. Then, she “takes the color *beyond* how it actually does look” in nature. She plays with paint and “the way that it moves into itself materially, or merges and bleeds” in order to “find out which colors make each other sing.” Dufault applies oil paint in thin washes to build up layers, resulting in a range of opacities within a single piece. Nearly translucent strokes of a morning sky morph into the deep, opaque tones of a shadowy mountain. Throughout her working process, the artist moves the canvas between vertical and horizontal positions to attain her desired visual effects. She drips paint directly onto the canvas to create density; she slaps paint on with a brush to create splatters; she wipes paint away to create depth—never overthinking her next move. Dufault’s way of seeing—this zooming out—embraces simplicity, self-reflection and intuition rather than reproduction or precision, and her hazy, meditative landscapes become more truthful in their obscurity.



For his debut exhibition with SEFA, **Michael Wright** presents two series in *Refracted Wilderness*. The first are large horizontal paintings from the late 1960s that abound with verdant green tones. The “Amagansett Fields” series were created in the Hamptons when Wright was residing there—first arriving as a studio assistant to Willem de Kooning. Wright has always been inspired by the natural views around him. Yet, he was never content to simply depict it exactly as it appeared. Abstraction was his language. Indeed, he had extensive training in this visual style. He associated with many of the great Abstract Expressionist artists of the period during his time in New York and later in the Hamptons.

Currently, Wright lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He was initially drawn to the area by his family ties there, and also its pure natural beauty. He primarily paints abstract works with swooping forms and vibrant colors. However, *Refracted Wilderness* chooses to showcase his

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more naturalistic landscapes. For this exhibition, SEFA is interested in the tensions and the harmonies between the real and the beyond within nature.

The “Diablo Canyon” series will also be on view at SEFA Hudson. This rocky area just outside of Sante Fe is a constant allure for the artist. He appreciates how the colors change with each day, and he visits it often for inspiration. While technically a “desert,” Diablo Canyon is enlivened by the light and its changing patterns. Wright is a prolific creator and keeps his works in his barn studio in New Mexico, a veritable archive of places and of visions.

After a studio visit with the vibrant octogenarian artist, Susan Eley Writes of the Diablo Canyon works: “He paints the landscape with thick, impasto brushstrokes in warm red, orange, terracotta, and green. Wright captures craggy outcrops, canyons and hilltops using a rich and substantial application of oil paint. 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 Liz Lorenz, Assistant Director

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Katharine Dufault

Biography:

British born Katharine Dufault (1966, Cambridge, England) is a *New York Times*-reviewed artist, curator and visual arts consultant. Dufault graduated with honors from Columbia University, with a degree in painting and literature after studying visual arts, graphic design and photography at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, England. She regularly exhibits her work and has been in numerous shows in New York City, Boston, Ohio, Connecticut, Westchester county, the Berkshires and Cambridge, England. Dufault's work is included in many corporate and private collections. Dufault lives and works in the Berkshires, MA.

As a multimedia artist, Dufault's practice includes working in oils, encaustic paint, watercolor printmaking and photography. Each medium imposes its own set of limitations which challenge and excite her practice. The recent work moves towards a freer composition, away from the didactic horizon line of her earlier landscape paintings, as she creates a new vocabulary with discrete areas of rich opaque color. Dufault regularly exhibits throughout the US. Her work is included in numerous corporate and private collections including Brian Murphy Interior Design; CoveLeigh Club, Rye, NY; Dearborn Design Studio, Westchester, NY; Matthew Yee Interiors, NY; Westchester Medical Center, Westchester, NY.

Artist Statement:

Painting is a meditation and a kind of alchemy in which I concentrate and transform my feelings and memories into something material which can be experienced in various ways by others. In this recent body of work, I draw on my deep love of nature: the impressions from my new rural life Upstate and in the Berkshires, earlier years in Westchester adjacent to an external marshland and my childhood in the Cambridgeshire countryside in England. I want to create paintings which are both familiar yet unknown.



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, 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.