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Fine Art

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Femme

Angela A'Court, Charles Buckley, Deirdre O'Connell, Deborah Freedman,
Miriam Hitchcock, Ruth Shively, Jan Testori - Markman, Ulla Scheinemann

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Susan Eley Fine Art, NYC
190 Orchard Street, New York, NY, 10002

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Opening Reception: Thursday, April 11, 6-8PM

Throughout the history of art the feminine form has served a multitude of purposes as muse, model, object of lust and a representation of societal standards or morals. Presented for public consumption, women's bodies were displayed as commodities for the male gaze. In *Femme*, SEFA reexamines these notions and explores contemporary depictions of women at our New York City Gallery. The artists featured in this exhibition are Angela A'Court, Charles Buckley, Deirdre O'Connell, Deborah Freedman, Miriam Hitchcock, Ruth Shively, Jan Testori-Markman and Ulla Scheinemann. *Femme* marks the debut at SEFA for Hitchcock and Testori-Markman.

Women's figuration has always been a staple of visual language globally. Venus figures, such as the *Venus of Willendorf*, are amongst the oldest artworks ever discovered and depict women's bodies sculpted with exaggerated sexual features. Though little is known about their purpose or place in society, scholars have recently suggested they may be self portraits by paleolithic sculptors. In more recent history women were barred from art making for most of the western canon. During the Renaissance few women were permitted to study painting, yet those who were fortunate to have the opportunity depict women as far more nuanced and real than their male contemporaries. Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernese* is a gritty defense of

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women's power, rejecting the delicacy placed on Caravaggio's Judith. Twentieth century women artists began to explore their own bodies, gender and sexuality in their art. Frida Kahlo's self portraits examine her health, relationships and gender expression. Louise Bourgeois created raw and at times grotesque depictions of the body while exploring relationship dynamics, sexuality and mortality. In 1971, Linda Nochlin's seminal feminist text "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists" explored the restrictions placed on women artists and the ever present male gaze. At the same time first wave feminist artists explored the body in its rawest form and rejected the expected propriety around women's issues. In the years following, generations of women artists have expanded on the work of these women and continue to demand a place for marginalized communities in the art world.

In *Femme*, the artists address the figure and femininity in a variety of media. Painting, collage, silkscreening, drawing and traditional craft are employed to delineate each subject. Most of the figures appear alone. Whether surrounded by landscape or set against decorative, patterned spaces, these solo women express the spectrum of life; joy and celebration, contemplation, loneliness, contentment, apprehension, curiosity, pride and so much more. They embody strength and power but do not shy away from vulnerability. Many are androgynous, like Hitchcock's painted figures whose simplified forms play with distorted proportions.

Scheinemann's women stand, waiting, surrounded by landscapes that pulse with life. They are dwarfed by the world around them, yet hold your attention. Graphic and mysterious, A'Court's prints present women that are confronting and bold. Freedman's print, *Royal Flush for Audrey Flack #1*, honors her former professor and poses a proud and unabashedly feminine figure.

Testori-Markman's textile icons reference the long history of religious imagery and reimagine it. Placing her anonymous everywoman in the place of saints she questions the labels and standards put upon women. O'Connell's mixed media paintings are celebratory and contemplative. Like Testori-Markman, her paintings are inspired by Byzantine icons, her own playful holy women to be venerated.

Ruth Shively depicts groups of women that feel set in time and emphasize the importance of community. Like Shively's paintings, Buckley's work appears as if from another era. The nostalgia they exude, when accompanied by the historical reference of Testori-Markman's work

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and historical material of A'Court's *Just for One Day*, harmonize with the largely contemporary feeling of the other work. These women are not bound by time or place, their personhood is not impeded by outside influences.

The women in *Femme* are largely anonymous with obscured or featureless faces. Others like the figures of Freedman or Testori-Markman are depicted through silhouette. The artists imbue character and life with posture and partial glimpses of a face. A tilt of the head, jutting hip or reaching hand brings the women to life. Both real and unidentifiable, they can be anyone or everyone at the same time. The work in this exhibition spans representations of age, race, time and gender expression. These artists depict women in every guise.

Press Release Text by Shannon O'Deens



Angela A'Court

Artist Biography:

Angela A'Court was born in London, UK and lives and works in New York and London. She studied at the University for the Creative Arts UK (UCA), UK, Parsons School of Art and Design, New York, Goldsmiths College, London and in 2022 received a Masters from City and Guilds Art School London in Art & Material Histories. After graduating from Goldsmiths College, A'Court worked as an interior designer in an architectural practice in London. Her work has been recorded in magazines including The Sunday Times, Homes and Gardens and Traditional Interiors. Her studio and interior work has been included in books such as Pure Pastel, Drawing and Painting, The Ultimate Paper Craft Book, Modern Rustic and Interiors by Design.

Throughout her years as a designer, A'Court continued with her studio practice. In 2003, after moving to New York with her family, she decided to put design to one side and return to working in the studio full time. From 2014- 2016 A'Court lived in Tokyo, Japan where she worked with ceramics, returning to New York, she began taking classes at Dieu Donne studio learning about paper making as an art form. After Tokyo, A'Court studied silk screen at Lower East Side Print Shop under Master printer Roni Henning. She is currently the silk screen fellow at City & Guilds Art School.

A'Court has regularly exhibited her work in the UK at venues such as The Pastel Society (London, UK); The Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy (London, UK); The Discerning Eye

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(London, UK); and Thompsons Gallery (London, UK) as well as independent galleries. A'Court is represented by Susan Eley Fine Art (New York, NY and Hudson, NY).

Artist Statement:

This collection of four prints are from a series of ongoing work that explores the medium of print as an interpretation of a moment rather than a particular object. The visual imagery is inspired by a trip to Paris last year: walking amongst ancient wooden carvings in museums and stone statues in palace gardens. From this a vocabulary of images is collected and used as inspiration in the print studio. Using Japanese paper, the work is an intuitive process of mark making using the combination of monotype and silkscreen to create layers and textures that speak to an encounter rather than the rendering of a static object.



Charles Buckley

Artist Biography

Charles Buckley is an American artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Buckley received a BFA in painting from the California College of Arts in Oakland, CA in 1994 and an MFA from Hunter College in New York in 2000. To the artist, the practice of drawing and painting is a means of engaging with the world and investigating preconceived notions. His notable "Progression" paintings are rendered on multiple canvases and are an investigation of the construction of narrative and progress. Often, Buckley's oeuvre deals with the concept of "leakage," which he describes as "the area where things cannot be explained rationally, yet fit within the logic of the painting and seem to be known." His works have been acquired by national and international private collections. The artist has exhibited at venues including Madarts (Brooklyn, NY); Giacobetti Paul Gallery (Brooklyn, NY); Hunter College (New York, NY); Gallery Here (Oakland, CA); and CCA Gallery (Oakland, CA). Buckley is represented by Susan Eley Fine Art (New York, NY and Hudson, NY) and has shown at both of the Gallery's locations.

Artist Statement:

My current work, which I refer to as "The Striated Drawings", is about memory and nostalgia. They are ink drawings made up of horizontal lines (hence, striation) and negative, undrawn space. Their narrative subject matter, based on photographs (both found and my own), provides the work with an initial sense of familiarity, but upon close inspection it falls into abstraction. Though much of the pictorial information has been removed, the general sense of narrative integrity remains. The particulars are hazy and give way to the interactions of the lines. We fill in the details ourselves.

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Forgetting is a necessary part of remembering and nostalgia is produced through selective memory. While the line creates the representation, it's the space in between (the absence & the forgetting) that produces the effect. And much like nostalgia, the closer we get to these drawings the less representational they become.



Deirdre O'Connell

Artist Biography

Deirdre O'Connell was born in Philadelphia and raised in Pittsfield, MA. She is a self-trained artist, who attended the Studio School, NYC in 2003. Since 2007, O'Connell has been featured in numerous solo, two-person and group exhibitions at SEFA's New York City and Hudson locations. She has also exhibited her work at the Gallery at Jimmy's Number 43, NYC and the Broderick Fine Art Gallery, Freehold, NY.

Deirdre O'Connell's series of small paintings, shown since 2007 with SEFA, are inspired by the works of Russian playwright Anton Chekhov. O'Connell's passion for Chekhov's texts is more than that of an avid playgoer. O'Connell is a well-known actress who has appeared in many Chekhov productions as a stage and film actress. O'Connell moves her characters from stage to the canvas, giving them an eternal role in a perpetual performance. The artist's paintings evoke Medieval icons in their small scale, golden hues, built up paint, flat perspective and deliberately distorted anatomy.

More recently, O'Connell has created a series of individual women, triggered by the 2016 election of Donald Trump and the ensuing Women's March on Washington, leading to her current body of work of portraits of women colleagues, friends and family.

In addition to her painting career, O'Connell is a well known stage and screen actor. In 2022, O'Connell won the Tony Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role in a Play for the production Dana H.

Artist Statement

"Making is a form of protection." - Liza Lou

I thought the world was turned upside down when I started this body of work right after the 2016 presidential election. Little did I know. I had gone to the Woman's March in Washington, D.C. and stood in a huge crowd of women silently looking through a chain-link fence at the White House in the distance. That was when I first thought of what I wanted to make; a quiet, fierce row of ladies, a wall of protection, a wall of Eves

Now there are 21 plaques on wood. The initial drawings began as many drafts on paper that I photographed on my iPad, worked on with a painting app, printed out, drew over again and

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finally cut out and glued onto wood as the first of many layers of acrylic paint, water soluble crayons and pencils, gold and silver leaf, fabric and lace, glitter and jewelry that make up the work. Each painting goes through many stages, and I find myself going back and forth between working digitally and detailed handwork with the elements.

While working on them, I thought a lot about depictions of Eve, icons and altars. I thought about hiding and revealing, protecting and challenging. Some began with a specific protection, spell or hope in mind; protection from a violent man, help in getting or not getting pregnant, relief from sickness. Some revealed their meaning to me slowly, some are still a mystery.

The work of making them was a salve in a hard but galvanizing time. I hope that looking at them offers up some of that.



Deborah Freedman

Artist Biography

Deborah Freedman lives and works in New York City and Ulster County, NY. She received her B.A. in studio art from New York University where she studied with Robert Blackburn and Audrey Flack.

Freedman is a painter and printmaker whose work is deeply informed by nature. She makes suites of varying images of the Ashokan Reservoir and the Catskill Mountains. Her inner eye and skill in etching, monotype, and oil painting captures both the physical and emotional transformation of her subject.

After 9/11, what had once been an idyllic scene suddenly became threatened and "disturbed." Deborah's work, even though historically abstract, became less homage to the natural world and more a protest about the potential dangers of environmental and political disaster. The titles of her work—such as Good Night Irene, With or Without You and Disturbed Landscapes—refer to these concerns.

A partial list of collections that feature her work includes The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The New York Public Library, Rutgers University, The Department of State, the Library of Congress, IPCNY, The Hess Collection, CITI, Morgan Guarantee Trust, Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital., and The Smithsonian Institution. She is also co-owner of VanDeb Editions in Long Island City.

Artist Statement

Royal Flush #1 is from an edition of 20 monoprints made with master printer Marina Ancona at Ten Grand Press. The series is titled Royal Flush for Audrey Flack in honor of Audrey who was my professor at NYU where she taught anatomy and watercolor. I learned how to see and how to draw from her. She has always supported my artwork and been a cogent critic as well. When I

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draw any figure, I instantly recall her instruction and love of looking. Flack is the current subject of a solo show at Hollis Taggart titled, *With Darkness Comes Stars*. Accompanying the exhibition Flack published a memoir by the same name which was recently reviewed in the New York Times.

Royal Flush is honoring her painting of that title. I have recently incorporated the figure in my landscapes which inhabit a chaotic but beautiful setting. The figure is standing upright immersed in nature despite its unpredictability and turbulence. In some of the prints the figure merges with the atmosphere in others it stands apart. Royal Flush #1 appears to have wings-another reference to Audrey's work which has images of Angels notably in her sculpture.

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Miriam Hitchcock

Artist Biography

Miriam Hitchcock is a painter and experimental filmmaker whose work has been exhibited nationally and internationally. In 2021 her paintings were profiled and featured on the cover of the book, *Artists of the Bay Area Volume 1*, published by Jen Tough Gallery. Her most recent short film *No Time*, with soundtrack by Zoe Keating, was featured in the Mill Valley 45th Film Festival. *Angels, They Say*, (another of the eight short films that she has completed to date), based on the *Duiño Elegies* of Rainer Maria Rilke, was awarded Best Experimental Film in the Annual International Copenhagen Film Festival in 2018. Miriam is also the recipient of a Mid Atlantic/NEA Grant in Painting, and her works on paper are available to view or purchase in the Pierogi Gallery Flat Files in Brooklyn, New York.

Born in San Francisco, Miriam grew up in a nature-loving family on the peninsula at a time when there was still plenty of open space to enjoy. She completed a BFA at University of California at Santa Cruz and received an MFA in Painting from Yale University.

She is a seasoned instructor of studio courses in painting, drawing and design at all levels. Her teaching career began at Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, where her daughter, now a screenwriter and filmmaker in Los Angeles, was born. As an Assistant Professor of Art at Cornell University she first led studio courses in Rome, Italy and years later created and taught a summer studio program that partnered the American University in Rome with U.C.S.C..

Returning to California to live in Santa Cruz in 1992, Miriam taught studio courses at Stanford University and San Jose State University and was a continuous member of the Art faculty at University of California Santa Cruz from 1992 until 2012. She now works full time in her studio in Santa Cruz.

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Artist Statement

Primarily a painter, I use a hybrid visual language that is both abstract and figurative, and fuse domestic and landscape imagery. I build eccentric formats that promote an improvisational attitude toward composition and playfully references the instability and dislocation characteristic of contemporary life.

In my work, as in life, the past permeates the present and the commonplace collides with the enigmatic and inexplicable. Drawing is the core of my studio practice and the engine that drives everything I make.



Ruth Shively

Artist Biography

Ruth Shively was born in Hastings, NE and received her BFA from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1988. She moved to New York City during the early 1990s to pursue illustration and work in an illustration studio. Her work has been featured in solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States. Solo exhibitions have been hosted at Imogen Gallery, Astoria, OR; Spur Gallery, Portland, OR; Basil Howard Gallery, Portland, OR; Anthony Phillip Fine Art, Brooklyn, NY; and Park Row Gallery, Chatham, NY. Shively was awarded an artist residency at Chateau Orquevaux in Champagne Ardenne, France for the Summer of 2018. One of Shively's paintings was recently pictured in an Ian McEwan novel, Nusschale (Nutshell). The artist lives and works in Portland, OR and is represented by Susan Eley Fine Art.

Artist Statement

I work largely with the figure, concentrating on women. In awe of the strength women behold, I feel the need to express their character through my work. I can't explain how I choose my subjects, I go with my instinct and immediate feelings and am drawn to stark, positive/negative space. I like humor, mysteriousness and intimate mood, wanting the viewer to make their own interpretation. I studied drawing and illustration in school but I'm a self-taught painter and prefer this medium as I love the spontaneity of the paint and using color to create space.



Jan Testori - Markman

Artist Biography

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Jan Testori-Markman is a NYC-based artist who enjoys experimenting with a variety of mediums, from rust to latex to sequins. Sewing, formerly known as “women’s work”, had a powerful impact on her during her childhood and she has continued to incorporate it into her artwork. In the icon series, Testori-Markman explores the ways in which women present themselves. She also examines how women can be either celebrated or overlooked in art and in life. *“My goal is to catch a moment when the sitter reveals a unique aspect of themselves, and I build an image sparked by that glimpse”*. The silhouettes are realized by layers of fabric, held together by a variety of threads and decorated with sequins, metallic trims and symbols, reminiscent of religious icon paintings. The more formal aspects of painting, such as color, form and line are addressed with scissors and sewing needles. With these pieces, she aims to stretch the standard conception of what can be considered a painting while celebrating women from all walks of life.

Jan Testori-Markman received her BFA in apparel design at Massachusetts College of Art in Boston in 1987. After designing clothing and jewelry for many years she transitioned to making paintings in her home studio.

Artist Statement

I work on an intimate scale, creating delicate, hand-stitched images of imposing, dazzling, iconic women. They are depicted without faces or much detail, yet they invoke the shape of women we know, women we see every day, ourselves. Emotions and feelings can be read from the silhouetted angle of the shoulders, a tilt of the head, and the varieties of coiffure presented by the women depicted.

Materiality is a meaningful aspect of my work. My choices of metallic fabrics, florals and stripes, gold and silver threads, sparkly sequins and textured trims represent constructed ideas about beauty, wealth, status and importance.

I have taken the language and images of religious icons and extended them. As each viewer passes the silhouetted voids, he or she can fill in the icon’s identity and decide the meaning of the symbols.

My inspiration was the Biblical character, Mary Magdalene. Defined by men, she embodied contradictions; sinner/saint, leader/disciple, penitent/proud, overlooked/honored. Despite where the inspiration came from, the icons I create can represent any one of us, as we are all many things at once, contradictions included, and have all been fairly and unfairly labeled.

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Ulla Scheinemann

Artist Biography

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Ulla Scheinemann, born 1967, lives and works in Denmark. She studied at the Academy of Fine Art, Denmark with Anette Olesen and Dick Nyhuus and continued her education at the Royal Academy of Art in Copenhagen. Her major exhibitions include Shape, color, figure, Artweeks, Aarhus, DK; Home in change, Hobro Art Floors, DK; Snapshots, West Jutland Art Pavillion, Skjern, DK; Words, The Cultural Center, Aarhus, DK; Mongerson Gallery, Chicago, US; Portrait Now, Ljungberg Museum, Sweden and Frederiksborg Castle, DK. The exhibition *Landscapes of Transcendence* marks her debut with Susan Eley Fine Art, where the Gallery was proud to exhibit Scheinemann's richly detailed paintings of women in nature.

Artist Statement

I have a lot of thoughts while I am painting. I can mention a few that seem to be returning to my mind while painting. Colorist attitude is a theme in all the paintings for me and I compose the paintings in a way that the color I use and the amount of color depends on what the surrounding colors seem to crave.

I am quite curious about trying out new things while painting. I always try to contribute something new. The painting I like the most is therefore always the painting that I am currently working on. My paintings sometimes make me wonder, where the figurative stops and the abstraction begins and I like to be in between terms of "style".

The paintings are a way of expressing my view of the world. The figures are to some degree an expression of the human condition every individual lives by. It is not something that I plan, it just seems to end up that way in the process. I can't be dishonest, while I am painting. Paintings never lie.