

Press Release

Susan Sommer

Plein Air Abstraction

January 29, 2021- October 31, 2021

Painting *en plein air* is a long and storied tradition, but Susan Sommer finds ways to build on the time-honored strategy rather than simply add to it. Sommer began working out-of-doors in the Catskills in 2001, producing a series of abstract canvases that combine vigorous brushwork with deep, sensuous color, interlacing clustered strokes in such a way that recognizable imagery is obliterated but atmosphere and association are retained and emphasized. They are compositions that hint at profound emotion and vigorous life.

Susan Sommer is based in the Hudson Valley, New York City, Los Angeles, and the West Indies. She graduated with a BFA from the Moore College of Art and Design, Philadelphia, in 1968, and later studied the figure at the Art Students League, New York, with Macabi Greenfield, Nathan Cabot Hale, and Rudolf Baranick. An immersive focus on natural forms and forces runs throughout her oeuvre, and while there is imagery in her paintings, it tends to be ambiguous. She alludes to the places in which she lives and works—from the Caribbean islands to Manhattan—in a subtler way than via simple depiction, shifting the rhythm of her application to mirror the pace and mood of each locale. This alternation between town and country also helps to distinguish her from that of influences such as Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Barnett Newman.

Sommer's current paintings amalgamate human, plant, mineral, and animal worlds, again without recourse to direct illustration. They evoke a range of moods and milieus, seasons and weather conditions, often by combining subtle references to more than one place or time. Through hard-won but fluid-looking paintwork and a judicious use of color combination and tonal contrast, the artist achieves an effortless-seeming harmony that gestures toward the natural sublime. As this exhibition demonstrates so vividly, her work uses gesture to immerse us in the traces of memory and the lingering aura of place.

Susan Sommer has exhibited at venues including the Silvermine Arts Center, New Canaan, CT; Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland; Housatonic Museum of Art,

Bridgeport, CT; Mark Gruber Gallery, New Paltz, NY; Riverside Arts Museum, Riverside, CA; and Woodstock Artists Association and Museum, Woodstock, NY. Her work is represented in the collections of the Albuquerque Museum of Art & History, Albuquerque, NM, de Saisset Museum of the University of Santa Clara, California; Government House, Saint Vincent; and Albuquerque Museum of Art and History. She is the subject of three monographs published by Maiden Lane Publishing, and appears in the *Who's Who of American Art*.