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Helen A. Harrison, Curator

"Ten Artists" Catalogue

Guild Hall Museum

I am a painter and writer based in New York City, where I was born, and in Mattituck on the North Fork of Long Island. My earliest influence as an artist was my Grandmother, Mary Sherwood Wright Jones. She was a professional artist who for over 30 years created illustrations at her drawing table at home in Newark, Ohio for the national children's newspaper, *My Weekly Reader*. As a child I was not aware that my Grandmother's drawings were seen by millions of school children each week, but I did learn about mixing colors and shading forms at her side. My interest in drawing, painting and art history was cultivated by visits to museums and classes outside of school. In grade school I studied at the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, D.C. In addition to my Grandmother, my teachers encouraged my work, which was frequently selected for honors and display.

As I grew up, my family often moved throughout the United States, from the midwest, to the far west, and from the east coast to the west coast. As an undergraduate, I studied fine art at Pomona College in Claremont, CA where my first serious conversations about what it means to be an artist took place. I studied with the painter Timothy App and was exposed to bonafide painters in Los Angeles and the Bay Area such as Richard Diebenkorn and David Park. App was the cause of my first identity crisis as an artist. He, as young teacher, was adamant I become a hard-edged, abstract painter. I was confused by his belief that there was only one correct style. This was not my inclination at the time so I left my study of painting. It wasn't until my semester abroad in Paris, where after experiencing the city's sensuous, aesthetically rich environment, I realized I could not leave the arts. Ironically, my senior show at Pomona College in 1978 was comprised of large free-form works on paper covered with atmospheric, gestural marks made with oil pastel, that while not hard-edged—as App had wanted—were entirely abstract. I was also pursuing dance and filmmaking alongside my painting studies. During my undergraduate studies I was invited by the graduate art faculty to exhibit my work at the Claremont Graduate School. I received the Mary Drew Art Award from the Pomona College Art Department at my graduation in 1978.

After college, I worked for a year at The Allen Memorial Art Museum in Oberlin, Ohio in their art conservation department. I had a studio and continued to paint, exploring styles ranging from pattern and decoration to figuration. I had an exhibition of my work in the College's Allen Art Building in 1980. The next year, my application to the graduate program in painting at the Rhode Island School of Design was accepted and I began their two-year MFA program. My formal exploration of painting continued alongside trips to galleries and museums in New York City and conversations with faculty and guest critics including Pat Adams, Barbara Schwartz, David Salle, Richard Merkin and Eric Fischl. Conversations with my fellow student Karen Yama about what constitutes credible painting have continued through the decades as we each have followed our paths. My graduate exhibition was figurative work based on family narratives. After graduate school I returned to the Bay Area and supported myself as a landscape architect while maintaining studios first in San Francisco and next in Oakland. I exhibited my work most notably at The Palo Alto Cultural Center at the Women's Building in Los Angeles in 1985.

In 1986 I was awarded the one-year William Steeple David Fellowship and Artist Residency in Orient, NY. I was able to dedicate the year to painting in a rural environment with occasional visits to New York City. The work I produced that year was directed by my interest in focusing on themes and materials with personal significance. Helen Harrison, Curator at the Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton, NY, where my work was shown in a group exhibition the next year, wrote about my painting, "[Pundyk's] work suggests that understanding requires another interpretive tool, or perhaps a personal surrender to a deeper, less accessible, level of cognition." After my residency I remained

in New York City, exhibiting in galleries in the Hamptons and in Brooklyn. Karen Yama and I collaborated on the creation of a fictional woman painter named “Oma Minion.” We showed “her” paintings and life effects at The Minor Injury Gallery in Greenpoint, Brooklyn in 1988. In 2012, MIT Press published the book, *Alternative Histories, New York Art Space, 1060 – 2010*, in which Yama and I are interviewed about this exhibition.

I married my husband, Jeff, in 1988 and started a family right away. The demands of working and raising our two children, Phoebe and Evan, with my husband produced my second identity crisis as an artist. I felt outcast by my artist community and found no support. I set painting aside for six years. When our daughter’s first-grade teacher found out I was an artist, she suggested I meet her husband, painter Michel Alexis. Alexis encouraged me to get back to my painting and get a studio outside our apartment. With the support and encouragement of my family, I found a space in Tribeca and resumed my work, making large works on paper collage. My experience as a mother figured into the work; my children were frequent subjects as part of what I see now was a philosophical exploration of subjective identity. I began exhibiting my work in New York City at the DFN Gallery, in the Hamptons at The Elaine Benson Gallery and in New Jersey at The Forrest Scott Gallery. I also worked with curators including Nancy Hoffman and Suzanne Randolph.

My parents made their last move to Lexington, VA in 1993. Coincidentally this is the same year that painter, Cy Twombly, returned to live there part-time. My father made his acquaintance and introduced us, and I had the pleasure of meeting with him and showing him the small collages I was working on at the time. He asked if he could have one, and I was pleased to offer him his choice. Through my exposure to the art scene in Virginia I was invited to have solo shows as Washington & Lee University in Lexington, at The University of Virginia in Charlottesville and participate in several group shows at local galleries. Through an introduction from Twombly, I was invited to have a solo show back in New York City, at the Asyl Gallery in Chelsea in 2000.

In 2001, I moved my studio to an industrial space in lower mid-town near our apartment provided by my father-in-law, whose business held the lease. During the next 12 years, as my children made their way from grade school to high school, I sought to locate my work within the contemporary moment. I wrote at the time, “While what you first see are objects made using the vocabulary of materials associated with a traditional painting process, before I manipulate these elements my work originates within a non-material, interior realm.” I was pleased to be associated with the Susan Eley Gallery in Manhattan from 2009 through 2015 where I had two solo exhibitions and was part of several group exhibitions.

My work was primarily focused on an individual studio practice until 2008. Two very different experiences impacted my work that year. The first was my diagnosis and treatment of lung and breast cancer. I spent the year coming to grips with my own mortality while negotiating the health care system. The second, on the other end of the spectrum, was the excitement and pleasure I found later in the year taking a philosophy and aesthetics course at The New School with Professor Timothy Quigley. We read Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and other more recent philosophers in phenomenology. I refer to both these experiences often because they opened the way for a radically different new chapter in my artistic pursuits. Kant’s writing cemented my belief in the power of the subjective voice with my health crisis as proof. Shortly after taking the class I began writing reviews for *The Brooklyn Rail*. This led to writing for other publications including *Art In America*, *artcritical*, *Hyperallergic*, *Slutist*, *Hysteria*, and *ART21 Magazine*. I also began engaging in collaborative curatorial exhibitions at Fordham University in Manhattan and at Queens College Art Center in Flushing with Director Tara Mathison and Suzanna Simor, Head of the Art Library at Queens College. I was invited to participate in their Artist-in-Residence program in 2011 and again in 2012 when I lead a six-month collaborative exhibition program based on the story of Rapunzel.

From 2011 to the present I have pursued both collaborative writing and performance projects outside my studio while re-investigating painting in my individual practice. For example, as co-editor with

Bianca Casady, of the feminist arts magazine *Girls Against God*, I was co-curator with her of a large-scale, multimedia performance called "Wolf Moon Gathering" at MoMA PS1 in 2014. The year before I was invited by Creative Time and The Brooklyn Museum to lead a consciousness raising discussion group in Suzanne Lacy's large-scale performance, "Between the Door and The Street." Among other collaborative projects over the last four years, this past spring I led the creation of a dance performance at the opening of my solo show of paintings at the Christopher Stout Gallery, New York called "The Revolution Will Be Painted." Most recently, this August, I performed a solo piece, "Numbers and Lines," at the Dillon Gallery, New York, based on my publication of a journal-like essay in the art critical publication *The Forgetory*.

In thinking back to my first serious painting conversations with Timothy App many years ago in Southern California, I find it interesting that my painting is now, in fact, entirely abstract. It is driven primarily by color interactions something I first talked about with my Grandmother. My work now comes out of a formal conversation between organic forms alluding to natural forces and ideas of chaos; and open-ended geometric responses I associate with regaining balance and control. The figurative elements I was drawn to are now expressed in written narratives and dance gestures. I am pleased that my work has been written about recently in *artcritical*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *Hyperallergic*, *The Washington Post*, *Hamptons Art Hub*, *ArtUS*, and *ARTslant* and London-based periodical: *The Contemporary Zine*, among others. During the last five years, I have sought to bring what I have learned from my experience with collaborative projects on publications, readings and performances back into my studio. In 2014 I relocated my studio to Mattituck on the North Fork of Long Island. The rural landscape has provided a setting conducive to processing not only my personal experiences with family and friends, but larger world events. My ability to reflect on these experiences and relationships as a contemporary maker of art objects and framer of experiences has deepened within the context of the east end countryside. Traveling the world is important, but so is having a home and place to make sense of it all.