

Pamela Berkeley : From the Hollow

November 29 – Dec 24, 2022

Reception Saturday Dec. 3rd, 3-5 pm



<https://youtu.be/uLOcPg6i1tM>



Blue Mountain Gallery presents Pamela Berkeley's newest solo show "From the Hollow," November 29 – December 24. The twenty-five paintings and drawings include recent work as well as a selection of the artist's work spanning five decades. Berkeley's works are created in oil and pastel on canvas or linen, and range in size from eight by eight inches to six by eight feet. Besides landscapes and interiors of Maine, Michigan, New York and New England, she painted a series of actor and artist friends, arranged in odd environments.

“I paint eye to hand. I paint what I see as honestly as I can. Nature is always in balance if you pay attention. I’ve always been able to draw pretty well, so I don’t think about it too much. Combining still life objects, landscape and sometimes portraits of people and animals is what intrigues me. My main preoccupation in painting is the tension between the still objects close the picture plane and the distant imagery that is farthest away. Foreground and what is behind are of equal importance, painted at the same time side by side, locked into each other. In fact, in a work of lace curtains, sometimes only the holes are made of paint, not the threads.”

Background

Born in Biloxi, Mississippi in 1948, Berkeley grew up in rural Westchester County, New York. As a teenager, she attended classes at the Art Students League and the School of Visual Arts. She married young and traveled a good deal until her husband died. As a young widow raising her first daughter, she enrolled at Brown University in Providence, RI, and received her BFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design. Berkeley attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture where she met her second husband, Rackstraw Downes, and moved to NYC in 1976. The windows of her studio afforded great light for her paintings of lace curtains, gold fish bowls, the sky and the Hudson River. At their farm in Maine, she painted her gardens and meadows, the house and barn, the woods and the sea, still lifes combined with landscapes on her French easel and with 000 brushes. The marriage lasted for 5 years.

In 1976, Berkeley was invited to contribute paintings to the important exhibition “Figurative Painting in New York.” She was in good company with Neil Welliver, Lennart Anderson, Jane Freilicher, Jane Wilson, Paul Georges, Catherine Murphy, Janet Fish, Yvonne Jacquette, and others. The exhibition spaces were in the Green Mountain Gallery (now Blue Mountain), Bowery Gallery, Prince Street Gallery and the First Street Gallery. Hilton Kramer noticed her painting and mentioned it in his article for the NY Times.

Berkeley was just 28 when she was asked to join the G.W. Einstein Gallery in 1977, and continued to be represented by them for 20 years.

In 1981 Berkeley suffered a dog attack which severed the nerves in her right hand and wrist. After microsurgery by the brilliant Dr Vincent Fietta (“I owe him my life and my sanity!”), she spent five years recovering her technique, including painting ambidextrously and expanding the imagery to grand scale tableaux. Artist and actor friends posed for her in various costumes and in incongruous environments, which hint at a private symbolism and literary references. Included in this show is her 1990 portrait

of Willem Defoe, and the 1992 dreamscape “The Song of the Wandering Aengus” with Mark Metcalf and Lisa Rutledge.

“When I slowly started to be able to paint again, I realized that I could dream in my paintings. I wanted them to be very rich. Along the lines of a 19th century novel.”

Gil Einstein and Riva Blumenthal arranged everything: the solo gallery and museum exhibitions, the group and traveling shows, receptions, commissions, interviews, and sold paintings and drawings to collectors. Berkeley received wonderful reviews and articles from Gerrit Henry, Ruth Bass, Robert Sievert, Robert Berlind, Lori Zelenko in American Artist, Art News, Arts, Art Journal. She received awards and grants from The National Endowment for the Arts, CAPS award, Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.

The late 90’s were a difficult time. Many galleries closed, as did Gil Einstein’s when his health was challenged.

And then The Towers fell. Berkeley sold her apartment and SOHO loft and moved to the woods of Western Massachusetts (the Hollow). She lived alone with her animals, heated with wood, and painted.

“During the recent Plague and the isolation, I struggled with a new tendency to tighten up my brushwork. I also think I’ve become stranger than ever, kind of like Ben Gunn marooned on Treasure Island. Being represented by Blue Mountain has been good. I’m with friends that I’ve known for 45 years. You have to know who you are to begin with. Why waste time trying to figure it out. I wouldn’t learn to type as a kid because if I did that, I knew I’d never be an artist. As a result, I really don’t know how to do anything else but paint, and maybe cook a bit.”

The exhibition is a testament to Berkeley’s singular focus on paint and painting.