

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

RICHARD MAYHEW: WATERCOLOR

November 7 – January 18, 2025

Opening: Thursday, November 7th, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Venus Over Manhattan

39 Great Jones Street

New York, NY 10012



(New York, NY) – **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to present ***Richard Mayhew: Watercolor***, the first exhibition in over two decades dedicated exclusively to the artist's remarkable work in watercolor, and the first presentation of Mayhew's work since his passing in September at the age of 100.

Opening on **Thursday, November 7th**, the show features some twenty-five works spanning the last thirty years of his practice, including several created expressly for this exhibition, and many that have never before been publicly exhibited. The exhibition showcases Mayhew's enduring vision across a notoriously challenging medium. *Richard Mayhew: Watercolor* will remain on view at **39 Great Jones Street** through **Saturday, January 18th**.

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The exhibition builds upon the gallery's 2023 presentation, *Richard Mayhew: Natural Order*, by shifting the focus exclusively to watercolor—an under-known yet deeply significant aspect of Mayhew's practice. Known for his atmospheric "mindscapes," Mayhew's work in watercolor reveals the same nuanced sensitivity to color and form that characterizes his broader practice and highlights the unique qualities of the medium itself. *Richard Mayhew: Watercolor* underscores the breadth of his creative evolution, showcasing never-before-seen works and demonstrating how, even late in life, Mayhew continued to push the boundaries of his art.

Richard Mayhew: Watercolor offers a rare and intimate look at the depth of Mayhew's practice, highlighting his ability to synthesize personal narrative, cultural heritage, and formal experimentation. "We are honored to have worked closely with Richard and his family on this exhibition," said Adam Lindemann, founder of Venus Over Manhattan. "The works on view reflect not only his mastery of watercolor but also his enduring legacy as one of the great artists of our time."

In both an art historical and cultural context, Mayhew's work embodies a profound political dimension. As the last surviving member of the Spiral group—a collective of African American artists including Norman Lewis, Romare Bearden, and Emma Amos, who came together to in 1963 discuss their relationship to the civil rights movement and the shifting landscape of American art, culture, and politics—Mayhew's landscapes stand as meditations on land, heritage, and belonging. His dual heritage as African American and Native American informed his approach to landscape painting, as he often referred to his work as a statement on the unfulfilled promises of land to freed slaves and the broken treaties with Native American nations. His landscapes, he once said, were his way of "painting my forty acres," a symbolic reclamation of space and identity.

The works in *Richard Mayhew: Watercolor* span from 1990 to 2024, a period largely corresponding to Mayhew's years living in California after his retirement from Pennsylvania State University. Watercolor, which had been part of his practice early on—encouraged and influenced by his first wife, Dorothy Zuccarini—reemerged as a key part of his practice following his move West. This



exhibition highlights the stylistic range of these watercolors, which oscillate between abstraction and representation, each imbued with the spiritual and emotional depth that defined his career.

Ranging from vivid landscapes to compositions that verge on pure abstraction, Mayhew's watercolors evoke the textures and emotions of memory rather than literal depictions of place. His bold use of saturated color—sometimes naturalistic, sometimes surreal—invites viewers into a world where landscapes pulse with life. Trees, geological forms, and horizons emerge and dissolve, as though the viewer is experiencing nature through a dream. These works, created from feeling and memory rather than direct observation, are as much about Mayhew's emotional connection to the land as they are about its visual representation.

Mayhew's work in watercolor was not only a continuation of his deep connection to nature but also a site of material experimentation. After moving to the West Coast, he often employed water from the Pacific Ocean, rich in salt and sediment, to wet the paper before applying his pigments. Occasionally, he would sprinkle table salt directly onto wet pigment, allowing the natural properties of salt to create complex stippled patterns as it absorbed the water—resulting in richly textured surfaces. In some compositions, he integrated colored pastel into the dry pigment, a technique infrequently explored in the history of art but famously employed by Edgar Degas. Through these methods, Mayhew's works became more than representations of the landscape; they became an index of the land itself, physically incorporating its elements into his compositions.

Mayhew's work exists within a broad continuum of landscape painters, drawing from the influences of his early mentors and extending into his dialogues with contemporary abstraction. His admiration for artists such as George Inness and J.M.W. Turner—whose seascapes and evocative use of color deeply informed his practice—can be felt in the atmospheric quality of his watercolors. These works also resonate with his peers, including Alma Thomas, Sam Gilliam, and Beauford Delaney, whose vibrant palettes and abstract explorations paralleled and informed his own.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the gallery will publish a fully illustrated catalogue featuring a newly commissioned essay by acclaimed author Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts, whose book *Harlem Is Nowhere* was a *New York Times* Notable Book and a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. The catalogue will also debut a comprehensive biographical timeline, chronicling his extraordinary career and lasting impact on American art.

ABOUT RICHARD MAYHEW

Richard Mayhew was born in 1924 in Massapequa, New York. He studied at the Brooklyn Museum Art School, the Art Students League of New York, and Columbia University. Mayhew's work has been the subject of numerous major solo exhibitions, including recent exhibitions at Venus Over Manhattan, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, Sonoma; South Etna Montauk Foundation, Montauk; the Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington; the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD), San Francisco; and the Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah. In 1972, The Store Front Museum—founded by Tom Lloyd, an artist and founding member of The Studio Museum in Harlem—organized a solo exhibition of his work in collaboration with the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1978, The Studio Museum in Harlem mounted a retrospective exhibition of his work "Richard Mayhew: An American Abstractionist," curated by Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell. Mayhew's work frequently features in major institutional exhibitions, including recent presentations at the National Academy of Design; Brooklyn Museum; Wadsworth Atheneum; Hudson River Museum; Columbus Museum; Detroit Institute of Arts; Smithsonian American Art Museum; The Broad; Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, de Young Museum; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. His work is held in the permanent collections of over ninety public institutions, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Detroit Institute of Arts; High Museum of Art; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Metropolitan Museum of Art; National Gallery of Art; Smithsonian American Art Museum; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; The Studio Museum in Harlem; and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Richard Mayhew retired from the Pennsylvania State University as Professor Emeritus in 1991, having previously taught at numerous institutions including Hunter College, Smith College, the Art Students League, Pratt Institute, and the Brooklyn Museum Art School. He is among the youngest members ever elected to the National Academy of Design, and is the recipient of numerous awards, fellowships, and residencies. Richard Mayhew lived and worked in Soquel, California, until his death in 2024.

ABOUT VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Venus Over Manhattan is dedicated to illuminating the work of a diverse range of historical and contemporary artists through dynamic rotating exhibitions and scholarly publications. Since it was founded by Adam Lindemann in 2012, the gallery has been responsible for revitalizing and establishing commercial, scholarly, and public interest for artists such as Peter Saul, Richard

Mayhew, and Joan Brown. Venus Over Manhattan operates from two locations on Great Jones Street and its distinct exhibitions program, which has recently featured works by Claude Lawrence, Peter Saul, Richard Mayhew, Chéri Samba, Keiichi Tanaami, and Joan Brown, attracts a broad spectrum of collectors, curators, writers, and arts enthusiasts. As art world trends continue to shift, Venus Over Manhattan remains steadfast in its focus on the discovery of artists across generations, geographies, and cultures and to expanding the depth of artists celebrated across global institutions, by audiences, and within the art market.

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IMAGE CREDITS

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