

# Sullivan Goss

AN AMERICAN GALLERY

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## THE SUBLIME

WHERE WORDS FAIL

DECEMBER 22, 2023 - FEBRUARY 26, 2024

OPENING RECEPTION:

1<sup>ST</sup> THURSDAY, JANUARY 4<sup>TH</sup> | FROM 5-8 pm

**SANTA BARBARA, CA** – Sullivan Goss begins 2024 with a **major survey on the concept of the sublime in American art.** *THE SUBLIME: Where Words Fail* will include works spanning the last 120 years highlighting how the sublime has been a recurring source of inspiration for artists even as art has moved from romanticism to realism, and representation to abstraction.

**The sublime** is a concept that was first brought to the popular consciousness by Edmund Burke in the mid 18th century. Burke argued that confronting vastness or danger in nature could lead to a sense of awe and self-awareness, ultimately reinforcing our appreciation for human strength and resilience. The Romantic movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries embraced the sublime with fervent enthusiasm. Artists and writers like William Wordsworth, Caspar David Friedrich, and J.M.W. Turner sought to capture the power and majesty of nature in their works. In our exhibition historic works like *Sun and Mist, New Milford*, c. 1905 by LEON DABO (1864-1960), and *Tonal Moon* by LOCKWOOD DE FOREST (1850-1932) demonstrate that these aesthetic inspirations had made their way into the American consciousness; while contemporary works by JOSEPH GOLDYNE, HANK PITCHER, ALEX RASMUSSEN, MARIA RENDÓN, and MONICA WIESBLOTT build on this tradition.

By the middle of the 19th century, romanticism had evolved into a more focused effort to express the overwhelming power of nature, often by highlighting our own relative insignificance. This was most commonly depicted by evoking the awe felt in the untamed wildernesses of the Hudson River Valley or grand vistas in places like Yellowstone, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon in the American West. For this exhibition, similar themes are found in contemporary works by NATALIE ARNOLDI, and TOM PAZDERKA whose inspiration comes from the very 21st century concern for extreme weather.

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In the Modern era, the concept of the sublime continued to evolve in parallel with new developments in physics and astronomy, which greatly changed our understanding of nature and our place within it. Modernist artists experimented with new, abstract forms of expression at a time when the universe seemed to grow infinitely large, while the power of the infinitesimally small first provided humanity with the potential to destroy itself. OSKAR FISCHINGER's (1900-1968) masterwork *Centrifuge* from the late 50s, is a stunning example of a painting explicitly inspired by the birth of the atomic era.

As the 20th century progressed, the sublime took on new meaning, going into the territory of the infinite and the unknowable which became an inspiration to a new group of non-objective artists interested in exploring the limits of rational understanding. For artists like EMIL BISTRAM (1895-1976) and RAYMOND JONSON (1899-1985) of New Mexico's **Transcendental Painting Group**, the pursuit of the sublime was grounded in the depiction of an ethereal, inner landscape, with natural inspiration and spiritual aspirations. CIEL BERGMAN's (1938-2017) monumental *Untitled 1 -The Illusions Of (Full of Knowing)*, 1988, and WERNER DREWES' (1899-1985) late work *Unfolding*, 1984 bridge these earlier works with recent paintings by NATHAN HUFF, CHRIS WINFIELD, and a sculpture by R. NELSON PARRISH.

CHRIS PETERS' groundbreaking *Symbiosis No. 6* from 2019, was also informed by the artist of the early romantic era, but the source of his imagery was an artificial intelligence built by the artist and trained on historic tonalist paintings to "imagine" new landscapes. These views, produced by this non-human intelligence, were then faithfully transcribed into oil paint by Peters. Developments in A.I. technology within just the past few months, anticipated by Peters' work nearly 5 years ago, represent one of the newest and most novel sources of existential anxiety common to ideas of the sublime.

The defining characteristic that has tied all of these aims and diverse aesthetics together through the years is the attempt to communicate through the visual arts an experience that is by definition beyond words. This exhibition presents important historical examples along with innovative contemporary works that demonstrate the evolution of the sublime experience as it continues to inspire artists into the 21st century.

#### ARTISTS INCLUDED IN THE EXHIBITION:

Natalie Arnoldi | Ciel Bergman | Emil Bisttram | Leon Dabo | Lockwood de Forest | Werner Drewes | Oskar Fischinger | Joseph Goldyne | Nathan Huff | Raymond Jonson | R. Nelson Parrish | Tom Pazderka | Chris Peters | Hank Pitcher | Alex Rasmussen | Maria Rendón | Monica Wiesblott | Chris Winfield