

# **REAL EYE ON CHANGE**

## **WILLIAM T. WILEY**

### **March 1 – April 19, 2020**

Parker Gallery is proud to present its second solo exhibition with William T. Wiley (b. 1937), which will be on view at Gordon Robichaux in New York as part of a gallery exchange. Marking the artist's first solo presentation in New York in nearly ten years, *William T. Wiley: Real Eye On Change* surveys over five decades of work, focusing specifically on the use of abstraction throughout the artist's multidisciplinary practice.

Since the mid-1950s, Wiley has alternately revered and reviled the emotional gravitas and philosophical grandiosity of abstraction while nevertheless remaining committed to the style. Studying under Frank Lobdell, a leader of San Francisco's Abstract Expressionist movement, Wiley developed an ability to communicate evocative and nuanced messages through this universal language. His talent was recognized early on, and by 1960 his work was included in shows at the San Francisco Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, where he exhibited paintings rendered in thick oil impasto, expressively tilting towards suggestions of landscape and figuration.

In 1962, Wiley received his master's degree and joined the experimental founding faculty of the art department at UC Davis, where his graduate students included Bruce Nauman, Deborah Butterfield and Steven Kaltenbach, among others. During this time, the artist's work adopted a clean, graphic style of abstraction that incorporated animalistic and architectural references as he began to expand into assemblage; several works went so far as to carry with them earlier abstract paintings which had been rolled-up and cast-aside as rejects. An early construction, *Hidden Power #2* (1963) is a wondrously enigmatic object that playfully begs for psychoanalysis, functioning as as an absurdist brain teaser. The work features a pyramid drawn from Ancient Egypt (an image oft repeated in the Wiley lexicon) with dotted lines coursing the viewer's eye on a meandering path through cryptic diagrams and geometric planes.

The curious journey continues in *The Trip to Eureka* (1970), a six-part drawing narrating a hair-raising, autobiographical motorcycle ride to Eureka, California and an out-of-body experience in which Wiley observed rows of birds eggs at a local museum. In these works, small ovoid pools of watercolor are arranged in grids of varying numbers. Five of the six drawings are in monochrome, with the last crescendoing into an exuberant grid containing all five colors. Hand-stamped letters spell out the narrative in captions below the gridded image, with each passage verified by the artist's thumb print. The mark of

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the artist is coupled with a signature, as if author and witness are separate individuals reporting the same event.

Wiley's use of abstraction attempts to be free-flowing and pure, while simultaneously representational and content-oriented. A series of watercolors from 1978-1980 take the silhouette of an artist's palette as a portal to an alternate universe. *Preserve Nan Madol* (1980) makes specific reference to the ancient archeological site on the remote island in Micronesia. Wiley sought to bring greater attention to the preservation of Nan Madol, which was finally declared a historical landmark in 1985.

Wiley's titles bluntly announce their content—a deceptive strategy used to deflect the pretension of making art. *Abstract Painting with Shower and Toilet* (2008) describes the painting succinctly: a monochrome color-field canvas as a room-for-rent, with neat partitioned chambers in the bottom corners revealing a shower and toilet—just as advertised. Throughout his career, Wiley has employed abstraction to encrypt the personal histories and philosophical musings deeply embedded in his lyrical art. What is seen on the surface is most certainly a façade, the rewarding riddle submerged somewhere within.

**William T. Wiley (b. 1937 in Bedford, IN) lives and works in Marin County, CA. The artist has been the subject of numerous solo museum exhibitions, including a retrospective at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, which traveled to the Berkeley Art Museum (2009-2010). His work was first exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Art in 1958 and subsequent venues have included the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Frankfurter Kunstverein, Walker Art Center, the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Whitney Museum of American Art. His work is held in over thirty public collections, including the Art Institute of Chicago, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Whitney Museum of American Art and the Yale University Art Gallery.**