

Frederick Wight: Time and Place

June 25 – August 6, 2022

Louis Stern Fine Arts is pleased to present a selection of paintings by Frederick Wight (1902-1986), painted in the last decade of the artist's life. The works represent the culmination of an illustrious career spent writing on, exhibiting, and advocating for art and artists as a celebrated educator and art gallery director. Upon his retirement in 1973 from a 20-year directorship of the art gallery at the University of California, Los Angeles, Wight was able to fully devote his twilight years to his own artistic practice.

"I suppose that I would have been a good transcendentalist 100 years ago," Wight proclaimed in *Time Magazine* in 1956. This philosophical vein pulses through these meditative paintings, which center the possibilities of mystical experience and spiritual discovery through the revelatory medium of nature. Rendered in agitated brushstrokes and hallucinatory colors, Wight's landscapes capture the dreamlike wonders and cruel extremes of the deserts and coastlines of Southern California. The yawning vistas of the region and the relentless, searing intensity of its sunlight are infused with an otherworldly charge, offering a spiritual conduit for reflection on the matters of human frailty, resilience, and mortality.

Flung between the seismic violence of the earth and atomic ferocity of the sky, rugged cacti and stalwart palms thrust defiantly upward. They grow tall and thrive in these hostile environments, yet their existence feels precarious, if not entirely improbable. Shimmering and mirage-like, the lifeforms in these paintings are at once persistent and transient, both nourished and threatened by the wild energies of the world.

The tension between the cosmic pull of time and its experience on a human scale is a primary focus of Wight's painting, embodied in the multiple celestial bodies arcing across his incandescent skies. Their positions in the heavens mark points on an infinite continuum, parceling out digestible increments of hours and days. Meanwhile, the earth below remains indifferent, grinding along on its own imperceptible geologic time scale. With the spectrum between an hour and an eternity compressed into a single image, the fullness of a human lifetime feels simultaneously insignificant and immeasurable.

Frederick Wight served as Associate Director of Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, Department Chairman of the art department at the University of California, Los Angeles, and directed UCLA's art gallery from 1953 – 1973. The gallery was renamed the Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery upon his retirement and was later absorbed by the Hammer Museum. Works by Wight have been exhibited throughout the United States and are included in numerous public collections, including the Laguna Art Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Orange County Museum of Art.