

RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC
515 WEST 26TH STREET
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RYANLEEGALLERY.COM

Michael Mazur

Wakeby Islands

October 25 – November 25, 2023

Opening reception: Saturday, October 28, 4:00-6:00pm

RYAN LEE Gallery is pleased to present *Michael Mazur: Wakeby Islands*, the artist's sixth solo exhibition with the gallery. The exhibition celebrates the artist's most famous *Wakeby* series (1982), a remarkable study of landscape and memory that follows Wakeby Pond's full cycle of birth, life, death, and renewal—a subject Mazur would return to for years to come. The exhibition includes two monoprints (including some of the largest monotypes to date), an oil painting, and three pastels—all of which display his multidisciplinary dexterity across mediums to create a stunning variance in mood and technique.

Wakeby Pond, an idyllic body of water landlocked on Cape Cod, was where Mazur and his wife, poet Gail Mazur, spent much of their time from the 1970s on. Working from a long-time art studio on the bay, Mazur created prints and paintings of the pond, exploring shifts in perception and time through multiple horizon lines and inclusions of cut-outs of previous *Wakeby* landscapes, creating 'picture-within-picture' compositions. These details disrupt the seemingly linear timeline of a landscape and offer an exciting tension to the composition.

In *Gail's Garden, Wakeby* (1983), gentle purple and white flowers convey a patient study of nature and its overgrowth. There are psychological undertones to the loose and gestural flowers overtaking the garden scene, conveying metamorphosis through their sprawl. A series of pastel-on-paper *Wakeby* studies also approaches the subject with softness, albeit with suggestions of capriciousness. Mazur pays particular attention to creating a nimble horizon line, interrupted by treetops and shrubbery against a colorful, cloudy sky.

Layering, of both subject and content, plays prominently in Mazur's work. Originally discovering monotype through an exhibition of Edgar Degas's works in the medium, Mazur was encouraged to explore its capacities. In practice, Mazur worked with master printmaker Robert Townsend in choreographic motions to achieve the extremely experimental and painterly washes in the *Wakeby* sessions. He eventually began incorporating simulacra through "ghost" impressions of print-over-print layering, and employing the technique of chine-collé, which effects diaphanous backdrops to each print.

Beyond the technical aptitudes underlying each artwork on view, the content itself speaks of a serene, somewhat mystic place. In the *Wakeby Night* triptychs from 1983 and 1984, we see oversized flowers loitering over a moonlit lake. In the earlier work, the moon glows in green tones, with flora exploding in the foreground; in the later iteration of the scene, while the sunflowers beam yellow, the night light casts a deep blue haze over the more subdued plant life, evoking an entirely different feeling of the placid pond.

Each panel in the original *Wakeby Day/Wakeby Night* series represented the single largest monotype ever printed at that time, placing the works themselves squarely into the realm of canonical, art historical touchpoints. Not only have the works been produced on massive scales, such as a grand in situ commission in 1982 by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but they also now belong to the collections of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, DC and Brooklyn Museum, NY.

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The masterful range of technical nuances used to make these works—like the use of a roller to offset an image on one plate to another, the use of solvents to create painterly drips and layers, and the artist's uses of his own fingers and rags to create impressionistic, tactile landscape portraiture—are not only iconic to Mazur's career and oeuvre, but to the evolution of the medium and art form of monotype at large.

Michael Mazur (b. 1935 New York, NY - d. 2009 Cambridge, MA) is known for his use of abstract and figurative visual vocabulary across a wide range of media, including painting, drawing, pastels, and printmaking. Influenced by elements of Impressionist art, Abstract Expressionism, and traditional Chinese landscape scroll painting, Mazur uniquely combines aspects of several periods of art history separated by nearly seven centuries to create lush and luminous work. Mazur's career is marked by an inventive use of various media and a wide range of interests, alternating between psychological portraits, celebrations of nature, and political engagement, among other themes.

Mazur received numerous awards throughout his illustrious career, including the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (1964); American Academy of Arts and Letters Fellowship (1964); and Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant (1962), among others.

His work has been included in several notable solo exhibitions, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston's 2006 exhibition *Michael Mazur: The Art of the Print* and Zimmerli Art Museum's 2000 exhibition *Michael Mazur: A Print Retrospective*, which travelled to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts, Stanford University, CA; and Minneapolis Institute of Art, MN. Recently, his work has also been included in exhibitions at RISD Museum, RI (2022); deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, MA (2021); Springfield Art Museum, MO (2021); Nagoya/Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Nagoya, Japan (2018); Mead Art Museum, MA (2017); and International Print Center of New York, NY (2015), among others. Mazur's work can be found in numerous prominent museum collections, including the British Museum, UK; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; Museum of Modern Art, NY; National Gallery of Art, DC; and Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, among others.

About RYAN LEE

Celebrating emerging and established artists and estates, RYAN LEE takes a multi-generational approach to its programming, presenting innovative and scholarly exhibitions across all spectrums of art practices, including painting, photography, video, sculpture, and performance. The gallery takes chances on a wide variety of boundary-pushing artists; their work consistently transcends political, cultural, material, or technical boundaries. In addition, RYAN LEE has, throughout its history, demonstrated its long-standing interest and dedication to feminist, Black and Asian American, as well as queer narratives in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Founded in 2013 by Mary Ryan and Jeffrey Lee, the gallery is led by partners of different generations and backgrounds with over six decades of combined experiences informing its unique approach.