

eric firestone gallery

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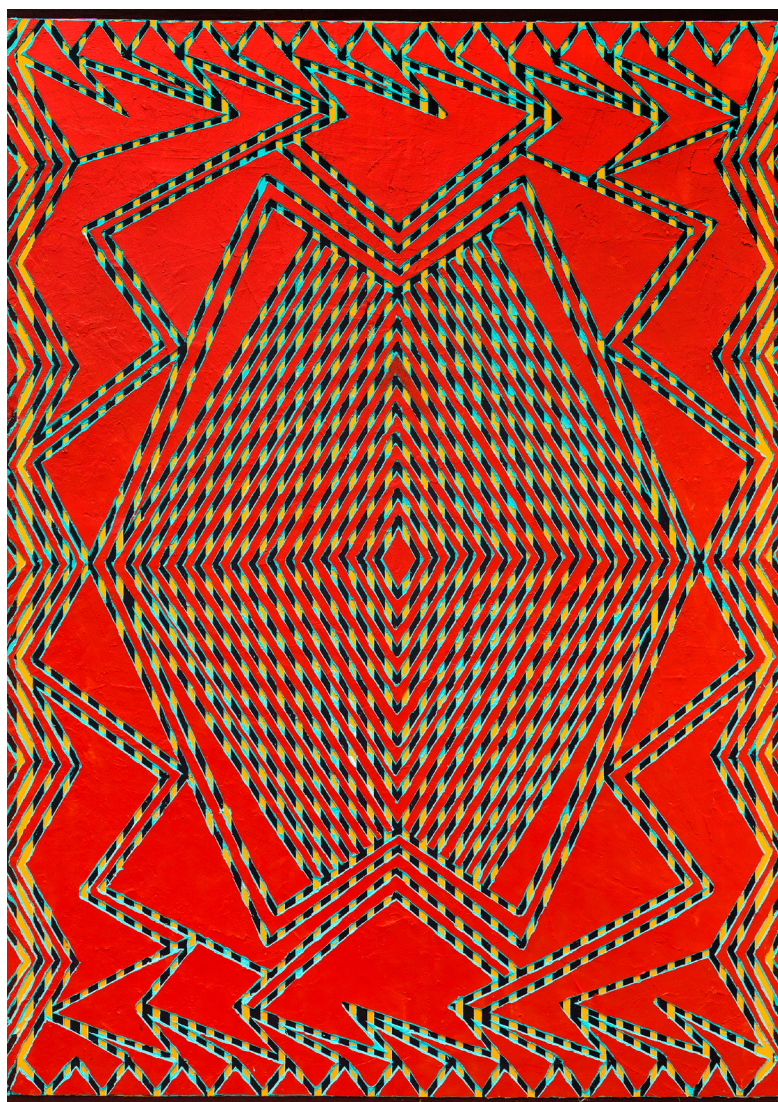
SUSAN FORTGANG The Spaces in Between

Eric Firestone Gallery
40 Great Jones Street, New York, NY 10012
January 15 – March 1, 2025
Opening Reception: Wednesday, January 15, 6:00–8:00PM

Eric Firestone Gallery is pleased to present *Susan Fortgang: The Spaces in Between*, a survey of Fortgang’s career spanning from the mid-1960s through the present. The exhibition will be on view at the gallery’s 40 Great Jones Street location from January 15 through March 1. Susan Fortgang (b. New York, NY, 1944) is a painter who has been working in her SoHo loft since the early 1970s and is known for her highly impastoed gridded paintings. Over the past five decades, Fortgang has developed a singular artistic process and a deep oeuvre; however, this is notably the artist’s first solo exhibition.

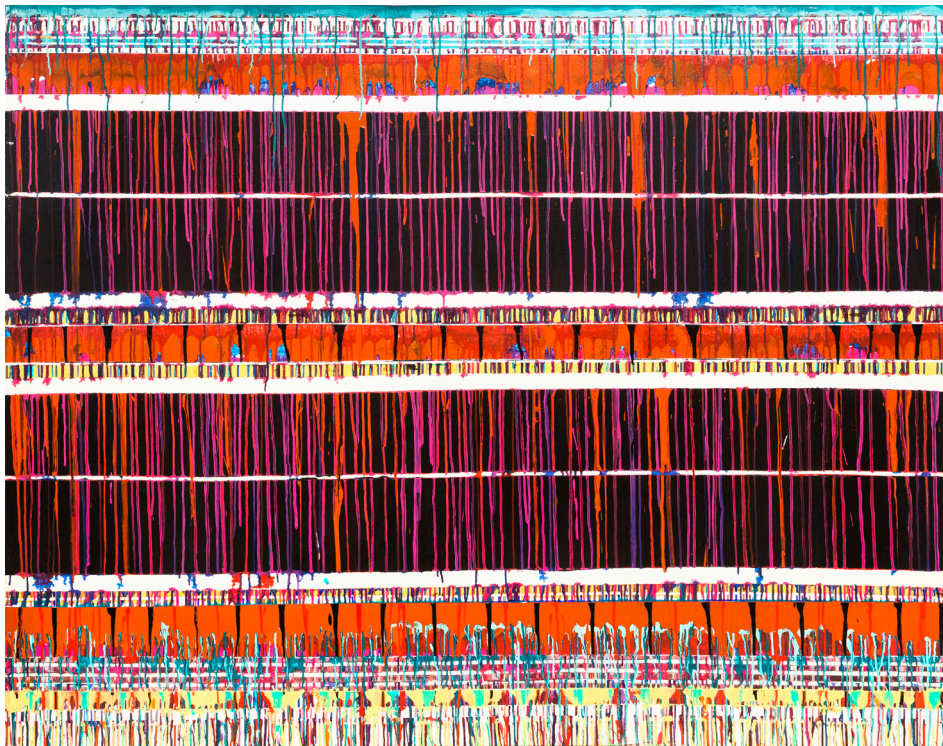
The exhibition will trace the arc of Fortgang’s stylistic evolution, from her early “action paintings” made at Yale’s School of Art & Architecture, to her gridded paintings that honor personal, familial, and canonical histories of craft: crocheting, knitting, and needlepoint embroidery. For decades, Fortgang has both worked with the grid—that structure synonymous with modernist painting—and simultaneously broken from it.

Fortgang is a native New Yorker—born and raised in Sunnyside, Queens—who studied painting with Louis Finkelstein at Queens College before going to Yale, where she earned her BFA in 1966 and MFA in 1968. At Yale, she studied with Jack Tworkov and Al Held, alongside fellow students including Howardena Pindell, Fred Sandback, and William Conlon. Her early abstractions



Susan Fortgang | *Tsunami* | 2011
acrylic on canvas
48 x 34 in.

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Susan Fortgang | *Rhapsody* | 1975
acrylic on canvas
66 x 84 1/8 in

used interiors as their starting point. They are composed of biomorphic shapes, energetic wet-on-wet oil painting, and a variety of mark-making approaches, dominated by pink, red, and orange palettes. Her next body of work utilized horizontal color bands, interrupted by dramatic vertical drips across their surfaces. By the mid-1970s, Fortgang had become disillusioned with what she considered a performative way of painting, and sought to change her working method. As opposed to the existentialist philosophy of Abstract Expressionism, in which the artist might endlessly question the composition, Fortgang sought a clear beginning and end to each painting's progression. She looked for systems of "making things," as one approached craft production.

Instead of shape-making, Fortgang turned to the grid; and instead of dripping paint, she began to systematically build layers. She continues to work in this manner: developing very built up surfaces with thick acrylic medium and applying tape in grid formations. As she works, adding layers of acrylic paint, she removes the tape to reveal what is underneath. This process—of working in the reverse—is one Fortgang finds rewarding and satisfying. The resulting paintings are optically provocative, with unexpected juxtapositions of color and metallic pigments. The surfaces are defined by impasto hills and deep valleys. This lends them a curious trompe-l'oeil effect: although they are entirely made with paint, their highly physical nature often causes viewers to first assume they are woven, carved, or built with other materials.

Over the decades, Fortgang has explored systems dominated by primary shapes and forms. Her paintings of the late 1970s explored the diamond, while in the 1980s, her process revealed the shape of an amphora (a two handled vessel used in ancient Greece). Her work of the 1990s suggests patterns found in Native American art, and utilizes an earthy, desert-like palette. In the 2000s, her paintings had black grounds with complex patterns suggesting stars, flora, and fauna. They have a shimmering effect; Fortgang likes her paintings to "shake" with their inner energy.

Fortgang's works become physical objects to contend with, rather than illusions to escape into. As such, her painting practice becomes one of politics: they shock the viewer into being fully present. For the artist, the very act of art-making became political within the context of the 1970s tenants rights movement. Fortgang has been a SoHo neighborhood activist since that time, and was part of an early wave of artists who achieved protections under the New York Loft Law. Later, Fortgang became a founding member of the SoHo Alliance to try to fight rapid gentrification, development, and to protect historic buildings. Through her efforts, alongside those of

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her artist husband, Robert Schecter, and other working artists, she has maintained a vibrant studio in the heart of Lower Manhattan. Although her paintings don't have direct references, she has tied her formal process—using tape to resist layers of paint—to political resistance. She is a fighter who distances herself from the romantic in favor of a structural approach.

Fortgang was the subject of a two-person exhibition with Cora Cohen at the SoHo Center for Visual Artists, New York, in 1977; and a three-person exhibition, with Jenny Snider and Miriam Beerman, at Pratt Institute in 1989. Her work was included in the influential exhibition *Pattern Painting* at P.S.1 in 1977, and these paintings will be on view in the gallery's exhibition. Fortgang is represented by Eric Firestone Gallery, and this is the gallery's first solo exhibition of her work.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring an essay by Stephen Westfall.



Susan Fortgang | *Interior with Red & Green* | 1966
oil on canvas
71 1/8 x 64 1/8 in.

SUSAN FORTGANG: THE SPACES IN BETWEEN

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For further information, contact: press@ericfirestonegallery.com