



Abigail Dudley



E M Saniga

# Arcadia

curated by Steven Harvey

**November 13 – February 7, 2025**  
**Opening: Wednesday, November 13, 4 - 6 pm**  
**Hours: Open when the building is open, 8 - 7 pm**  
**info: 917-861-7312**  
**Union Gallery, Union Hall,**  
**(Main Floor), Wagner College.**  
**One Campus Road, Staten Island, NY 10301**

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Press Release:

*Arcadia*

Abigail Dudley and E.M Saniga Paintings

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(Main Floor), Wagner College.

One Campus Road, Staten Island, NY 10301

For further information contact Steven Harvey: 917-861-7312



Union Gallery presents *Arcadia* curated by Steven Harvey at Wagner College, an exhibition of two painters - Abigail Dudley and E.M. Saniga. These two painters are friends of different ages and backgrounds. Saniga offers a landscape residency to students at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art to work outdoors on his 18<sup>th</sup> century farm in rural Pennsylvania. Dudley won the residency grant in 2021. Since then, they have become friends - even painting together in Italy. They share a sensibility arrived at via very different lives.

Their commonality has to do with the poetry of painting derived from looking. Both artists work from observation, yet seeing is a starting point in their work. Their paintings often develop independently from the motif.

Abigail Dudley (b. 1996) depicts aspects of everyday awash in atmospheric color and suffused light. Her compositions are mosaics of interlocking forms where objects and figures shift in and out of soft focus. She blurs images together, skews perspective and adds atmospheric painterly gestures allowing her figures to fade, and merge with backgrounds and interiors. She writes:

*In my paintings, layered constructions of interior spaces and still lives act as portals to build a reality that is malleable. I'm interested in having highly rendered imagery and paper-thin memories exist within one image to bring a deeper level of looking.*

John Yau wrote in his Hyperallergic review of Dudley's 2024 exhibition *In Sight*, at Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects, "Abigail Dudley is an observational painter who can translate her subject matter into a synthesis of the seen and the imagined without faltering." Abigail is a

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young painter, at 28 years old, currently working on her Master's Degree at the University of Delaware. Abigail Dudley received her BFA from the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 2021 and both attended and worked at the Mount Gretna School of Art. While in the undergraduate program at PAFA, Dudley received the Raymond D. & Estelle Rubens Travel Scholarship for European Travel. Dudley's work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions throughout the Northeast including in New York City, NY, Baltimore, MD, and Philadelphia, PA. SHFAP has shown her work in two solo shows, one in 2024, *In Sight*, and the previous one in 2023, *Invention Observed*, as well as in a group show titled *Three Women* in 2022. Dudley is a two-time recipient of the Elizabeth Greenshield Grant, once in 2020 and again in 2022.

Based in Lancaster County PA, E.M Saniga is a mathematician - retired now, he was a distinguished professor of IT at the University of Delaware as well as a painter of stark engaging images of his environs in Lancaster County. Saniga paints from observation and memory, creating a model of reality at once naturalistic and mysterious, analytical and poetic. His motifs are traditional yet paradoxically unfamiliar. His paintings carry a sensitivity to the beauty of death and decay.

Roberta Smith has written in the NY Times, that Saniga continues "to erase the line between progressive and traditional." His still life paintings possess a nocturnal luminosity. Paintings with figures are both surprising and compelling. Saniga's light is often tamped down to assume an almost crepuscular glow. He works in a stone studio building with minimal illumination. A pair of mittens, a bird on a wire, a dancing pointer and a guitarist and a painting of peonies under the moon that exudes a perfume-like atmosphere.

For him science and art share a unique bond as exploratory processes without forgone conclusions. He observes, "There are a few similarities between what I do in painting and in mathematical model building, which is the primary concern of my research. Both are abstractions of reality, and both can yield unexpected outcomes, which is part of their magic. Both involve invention." He was guest of honor at The Jerusalem Studio School residency program in Civita, Italy in 2012 and had a one person show at Rothschild Fine Art in Tel Aviv, in 2018. Though he paints from life he says, "I use everything available in making paintings. I generally start at least parts of a painting from life and then I edit using memory, photographs,

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or whatever else seems to help." Saniga studied with Seymour Remenick at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and privately under Bruce Kurland. He endows a residency program called the Lois and Charles X. Carlson Landscape Painting Prize awarded to a Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts student.

John Yau writes in an essay for this exhibition about her paintings, "With each one, we stand at the threshold of a self contained world that cannot be named. We soon recognize that the ordinary things we see in this world are neither natural nor unnatural. I am rendered speechless. Long after seeing these paintings, I can remember so many details, from the deer looking at us as it crosses the highway to a full yellow moon floating low in band of green sky. It is as if I am recalling a dream."

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Arcadia  
by John Yau

In 2020, Abigail Dudley, who was a student at The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (2017-2021), was awarded The Lois and Charles X. Carlson Landscape Painting Prize. By this time, Dudley was fully committed to painting from observation, and had spent summers enrolled in the Mount Gretna School of Art (2016-2020). More than being a year-round student, she had defined herself a full-time artist intent on pursuing her own trajectory. This is why I don't think it was by chance that Dudley and E. M. Saniga crossed paths, and that she would go on to become a friend and colleague of the older artist, a longtime resident of Pennsylvania's Lancaster County. The recipient of The Lois and Charles X. Carlson Landscape Painting Prize was awarded a residency of 8-12 weeks in a guest house on the property of Saniga and his wife. I don't think it is too much to say that Dudley and Saniga feel fated to meet.

This is how Saniga, in an interview conducted by the Jerusalem Studio School, described the experience of hosting the prize winners:

We have hosted 11 students so far and I learn from them as much as they learn from me.

I also seek their feedback on my own work, and it has always been valuable.

Despite the difference in age, Dudley and Saniga seem destined to have met because of their shared sensibility, which is the transformation of observation, memory, and

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imagination into paint. It is for these reasons the pairing of Dudley and Saniga makes perfect sense.

Represented by 9 paintings each, the biggest of which is Dudley's "Queen Anne's Lace" (oil on linen, 48 x 62 inches, 2021), the aptly titled exhibition, *Arcadia*, achieves two things. The first conveys the nuanced dialogue that Saniga and Dudley have with each other. The second is that Philadelphia, which has long been associated with Thomas Eakins and the rise of a totally distinct realism, continues to produce observational artists of the highest order.

*Arcadia* is a poetic term used to define a kind of pastoral painting in which humans live in harmony with nature. This ideal state is regarded by the artist as unattainable, since humans have never lived in harmony with nature, unless we consider that brief period before Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden. I don't think of the term as descriptive of their work, but as a way of seeing and reflecting upon what Dudley and Saniga are after in their paintings. It is a pursuit that embraces both subject matter and process without sacrificing one to the other.

The first difference one notices in their work is in their palette and the light they evoke. The moody crepuscular light in Saniga's paintings establishes a mood that is very different from the ones found in Dudley's painting. In her painting, "Inside Garden" (2022), the view is of a room whose interior of yellow and green wallpaper is illuminated by the diffuse glow of light coming in through two windows. The view of the room's interior is framed by an open red door on the left and what we read as a

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wall on the right. The dramatically wide space between the open door and red wall accentuates the interior space, whose slanting wall and window on the right further infuses the room with mystery. The longer we look at what might seem like a straightforward view of a room's interior through an open door, the more the painting becomes uncanny.

Saniga's painting, "Peonies with Venus and the Moon (June 14)" (2021) depicts white peonies in a white pitcher against a window through which we see the silhouette of jagged hills and the night sky populated by a quarter moon and Venus. A vertical and horizontal black line, presumably holding the window panes in place, divide the sky into four different-sized rectangles. What seems to be a straightforward depiction of a pitcher of two peonies on a table at night becomes something mysterious. What light is softly illuminating the flowers and pitcher?

By juxtaposing picked peonies and a cloudless night sky seen through window panes, Saniga directs our attention to different cycles of time we are caught in. The moon orbits the earth and the winter hardy peonies, symbols of good luck and love, return each spring. Together, the moon, Venus, and peonies are markers of different cycles of time, as well as symbols of feminine energy, fertility, and love.

Although Dudley and Saniga have painted different times of light or its absence, both are interested in the ways we bring the outside changing world into domestic spaces. The green and yellow wallpaper in Dudley's painting and the peonies are examples of our age-old desire to maintain a bond with nature.

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In each of their paintings, the viewer will discover layers of feeling by looking at what is front of them. In Dudley's "Emmanuel" (2023–24), a barefoot Black man in casual dress, pictured nearly in profile, sits in a chair with his hands clasped on his lap and his eyes closed. Behind him is a textured field of yellowish-to-gray paint that suggests a desert, with a small full moon at the top edge. Is the man dreaming this? There is no single interpretation, which encourages the viewer to closely examine the painting's surface. The shift from the figure's solidity of color to the ambiguous landscape and granularity of what looks like sand underscores the artist's mastery of paint. She doesn't impose a style on her subject, but lets the painting transport her into fresh territory.

This is also true of Saniga, whose painting, "A Dancing Pointer" (2005-2006) is a seamless synthesis of anecdotal scene and complete mystery. We see a man and dog in the foreground of the painting. It is evening and sky is gunmetal gray. The bearded, featureless man, dressed in black is playing a guitar. Beside him, a black and white pointer is standing on his hind legs. The man is turned toward the dog, as if he is serenading him. Behind them, on the right, we see a girl with brown hair wearing a pink dress. Behind her, and to her right, we see one of three structures with a peaked roof. A yellow square of light stands out against the muted palette of grays, scumbled browns and greens, and different grays.

"A Dancing Pointer" occupies a liminal space. While the man and dog appear to be happy in their small, joy-filled world, the girl standing behind, alone in the field, and the single yellow light adding nothing to the twilight, convey a different feeling. What



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are we to make of these collisions? This is one of the touchstones in all the work selected for this exhibition. With each one, we stand at the threshold of a self-contained world that cannot be named. We soon recognize that the ordinary things we see in this world are neither natural nor unnatural. I am rendered speechless. Long after seeing these paintings, I can remember so many details, from the deer looking at us as it crosses the highway to a full yellow moon floating low in band of green sky. It is as if I am recalling a dream.

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ARCADIA



Abigail Dudley

*Studio Life*

oil on linen mounted on aluminum

48h x 40w in

Private Collection

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Abigail Dudley  
*Deer Crossing*, 2021  
Oil on linen  
22h x 15w in  
\$ 2,500.00

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Abigail Dudley  
*Artist at Night, 2023-24*  
oil on linen mounted to aluminum  
44h x 20w in  
\$ 6,000.00

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Abigail Dudley  
*Queen Anne's Lace*, 2021  
oil on linen  
48h x 62w in  
Private Collection

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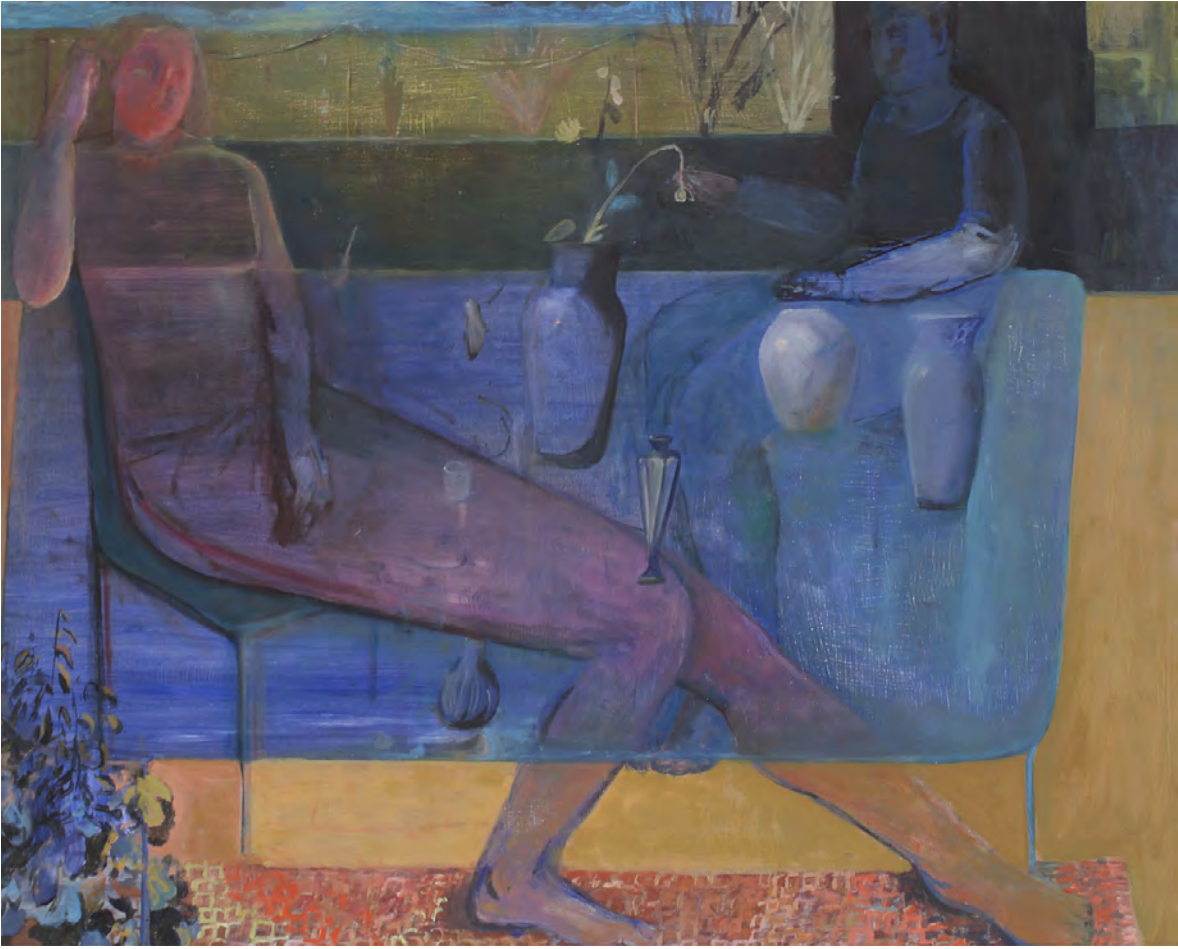
Abigail Dudley  
*Inside Garden*, 2022  
Oil on linen  
36h x 38w in  
6,000

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Abigail Dudley  
*Emmanuel*, 2023-24  
Oil on linen  
32h x 36w in  
\$ 6,000.00

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Abigail Dudley  
*Heart to Heart*, 2024  
Oil On Panel  
24h x 30w in  
\$ 4,000



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Abigail Dudley  
*Spring Passage, 2022*  
Oil on linen mounted on panel  
16h x 20w in  
\$ 3,500.00

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Abigail Dudley  
*Skys*, 2024 Oil On Panel  
30h x 24w in  
\$ 4,000.00

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E.M. Saniga  
*Pink Flowers*  
oil on panel  
10h x 8w in  
\$ 8,000.00

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E.M. Saniga  
*Peonies with Venus and the Moon (June 14), 2021*  
oil on plywood  
12 3/4h x 10 1/2w in  
\$ 10,000.00

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E.M. Saniga  
*Bird on a Wire*  
oil on canvas  
10h x 8w in  
oil on canvas  
\$ 8,000.00

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E.M. Saniga  
*Kirsten*, undated  
Oil On Canvas Mounted On Board  
24h x 19w in  
\$ 10,000.00

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E.M. Saniga  
*A Dancing Pointer*, 2005-2006  
Oil On Panel  
12h x 15w in  
\$ 8,000.00

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E.M. Saniga  
*Child's Dress and Socks*, 2012 - 2014  
Oil On Linen  
18h x 22w in  
\$ 10,000.00



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E.M. Saniga  
*Roses In An Interior*, 2015-2021  
oil on canvas over panel  
17h x 15w in  
\$ 10,000.00

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E.M. Saniga  
*mittens*, 2024  
oil on canvas  
11h x 12w in  
\$ 8,000.00

s h f a p



E.M. Saniga  
*A Meadow*, 2015-2019  
oil on panel  
16h x 20w in  
\$ 10,000.00