

Chronogram

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“Voice of Silence”: Photographs by Susan Wides at Public Private Gallery in Hudson By Taliesin Thomas

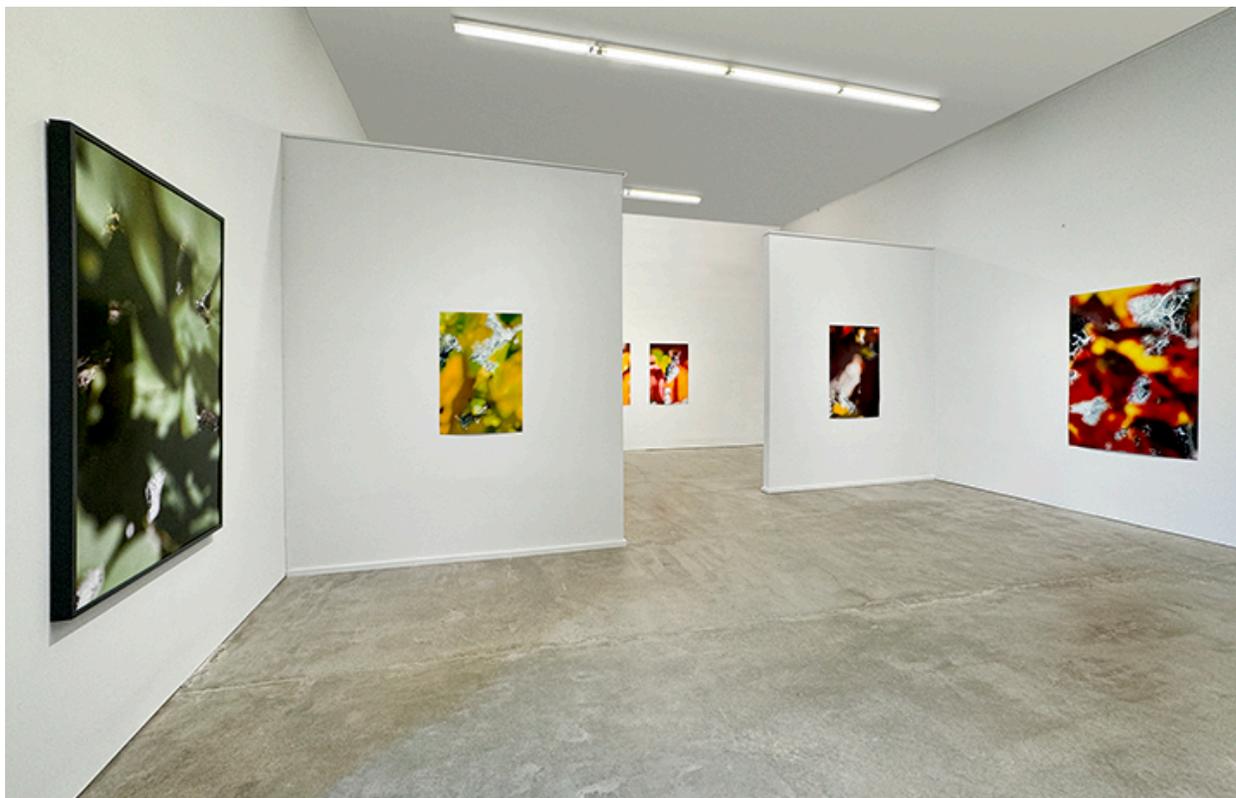


photo courtesy of Private Public Gallery

Last spring, I met Susan Wides at an arts gathering in Kingston and we immediately launched into a passionate conversation about environmental crises and ecological forces as it relates to her art practice. It was the kind of intense chat that leaves one devastated and elated at once: devastated for the ills that our species has inflicted on the planet yet elated by this straight-talking woman whose art offers a poetic meditation on the urgency of these matters.

Wides’s current solo show, “Voice of Silence” **Private Public Gallery** in Hudson through November 10 features a group of exquisite images that she photographed at tributary locations along the Hudson River, including the Kaaterskill, Catskill, and Plattekill creeks. Her sanguine photographs provide a visual healing through aesthetic embodiment, as if face-planting straight into the magical molecular make-up of the natural world and breathing in the divinity of Mother Nature herself. (Longtime readers might remember the Wides’s photograph that appeared on the **cover** of the September 2012 issue of the magazine.)

Wides’s focus on water sources highlights this indispensable foundation of our existence: “Water—our most valuable life-force: a site of impermanence, transformation, flux, renewal, instability, environmental peril. All those meanings are in play in the work,” she states. These powerful themes establish a baseline that grounds her explorations in photography and discloses a metaphysical-meets-ecological dialogue. The work reveals a cosmos both familiar and fantastic, where scenes from nature morph into abstract compositions drowned in rich hues that invite us to submerge into a gloriously gooey ambience.



Voice of Silence 0305 (2024) Fuji crystal archive print, 45 x 30 inches

Consisting of chromogenic, dye sublimation aluminum, or UV pigment on Dibond, Wides' series of sublime visions defy their status as photographs and appear more like transcendent imaginings conjured by a supreme architect with a flair for exalted details. In *Voice of Silence 0305 (2024)*, for example, a hazy green and yellow color field stretches outward while a swath of icy condensation tears through the middle of the composition in an act of magnificent defiance, leaving a cascade of dancing disco-ball shimmers as it boogies along.

Another syrupy work, *Voice of Silence 7931 (2024)*, could be a fleeting glance of the overwhelming neon-tinged blowout of Times Square on a raucous Saturday night, yet on second look we are made ever more aware of the miraculous power of nature as the ultimate lighting designer. In yet another sumptuous work, *Voice of Silence 9896 (2023)*, a frosty shape reaches up the middle of the image while a black shadow illuminates the white configuration from behind, a moment further sanctified by patches of lime-green and hazard-orange in the background, producing a hallucinatory three-dimensional effect that is quasi holy in its grace. In the words of the artist, this "abstracted method provides direct access to pure color and light, coaxing direct emotion, imagination, an experience of the spirit."

Wides indicates that her creative process includes "building the photos slowly" by using a focal manipulation of the camera lens, welcoming improvisation and reflections as she gives over to the development of the images that manifest. "The lens manipulations are made poetic by a synthesis of abstract shapes and (often) focused water shapes with a formal rigor that imbues the work with a presence, optical gravity, beauty hinting at optimism" she states. Responding to this pure orchestration of color by Wides, a poem by Robert Kelly is included in the exhibition catalog: "We forget, in our shallow reasoning, that light once made is permanent, has a life of its own" he writes. Indeed, the feeling that each of Wides's photographs possesses a singular soul is the blessing of this lush exhibition, a reminder that Mother Nature favors beauty and bounty above all.