

Ophir and Friends

a tribute to Ophir Agassi

November 6 — December 18, 2022

Reception: November 6, 2022, 5-7pm



Ophir Agassi in the studio. Photo by Sterling Baston.

The New York Studio School is pleased to present *Ophir and Friends: a tribute to Ophir Agassi*, curated by Karen Wilkin, with Christina Kee, on view from November 6 to December 18, 2022. An opening reception will be held Sunday, November 6 from 5-7 PM.

Ophir Agassi received an MFA from the New York Studio School in 2010. His thesis exhibition “Fortunes Told” – a series of small, mysterious narrative paintings – announced the presence of an inventive, imaginative artist who had already embarked on a highly individual path. Over the next years, he explored the implications of literally iconic images from the history of art – a Madonna and Child, for example – expanding their meaning to more universal ideas – motherhood and tenderness – while emphasizing their underlying Platonic, archetypal structures. Agassi experimented with different mediums, including drawing at large scale in the earth and filming the process. He rang changes on sages, gurus, scenes of judgement and struggle, and even the view from his studio when he and his family moved to rural Pennsylvania, always finding a delicate balance between an emotionally charged narrative and cool-headed structure. This duality is perhaps an echo of the coexistence of Agassi’s intensity, curiosity, and commitment to art-making with his disciplined, well-furnished mind and wide-ranging intelligence. It can be read, too, as paralleling his ability to combine his early traditional Yeshiva education with a deeply informed understanding of spirituality, in many forms, as manifested in many different cultures and in the history of Western art.

Agassi’s untimely death in 2022 reverberated among the wide-spread community of artists who were his friends, colleagues, fellow students, mentors, former teachers – just about anyone who had come in contact with him was struck by this remarkable man. This exhibition brings together some of Agassi’s most accomplished works,

including paintings from his last years that he felt were leading in directions that he found compelling, along with a selection of “Fortunes Told” and their variants, in the context of the work of artists whom he admired and learned from, and who admired and often learned from him. Artists include John Bjerklie, Glenn Goldberg, Barbara Grossman, Elisa Jensen, Stanley Lewis, Jeremy Long, John Mitchell, Jill Nathanson, Graham Nickson, Karlis Rekevics, Rachel Rickert, Clintel Steed and Patricia Treib.

Ophir Agassi was born in Haifa, Israel, in 1977, and raised in the United States. Educated at Yale University and the New York Studio School, he also took part in art programs at the Art Students League, Chautauqua, the NYSS Orvieto program, Triangle Artists’ Workshop in Brooklyn, NY, and the Triangle Alumni Residency program on Governor’s Island. Agassi taught at St. Mary’s College of Maryland and Mt. Gretna School of Art. He died in Pennsylvania in January 2022.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue featuring texts by Karen Wilkin, Christina Kee, and Ophir Agassi, as well as remembrances by friends and fellow artists.

The New York Studio School offers this exhibition as a tribute to one of our most gifted alumni, taken from us far too soon. *Ophir and Friends* is made possible with support from the Center for Figurative Painting and an anonymous donor. NYSS extends a special thank you to Zehava Packer and family, and to the artists in the show for their generosity.