

Wanda Koop & Richard Nonas

Fergus McCaffrey St. Barth

December 16, 2021 – February 12, 2022

Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to announce *Wanda Koop & Richard Nonas*, opening at the gallery's St. Barth location on Thursday, December 16. The exhibition will include four new paintings by Canadian artist Wanda Koop, marking the gallery's first presentation of Koop's work, alongside a score of wall sculptures by the late American sculptor Richard Nonas. Each artists' systematic and secular approach to an open activist and anthropological position invites viewers to consider their own formal and elusive relationship to objects and environments in controlled and still highly interpretive situations.



Wanda Koop (b. 1951) was born to Russian Mennonite immigrants in Vancouver, and moved to Winnipeg shortly thereafter. Koop's artistic practice grew out of her experience as a cultural outsider; as a result of her family's religious background and peripheral relationship to Canadian culture.ⁱ While Koop remains firmly rooted in Winnipeg, where she became involved with movements for environmental justice and established Art City, a community art center, she has traveled extensively, living in Paris, Rotterdam, Tokyo, and New York. Her layered, meditative paintings draw from the rich natural landscapes of the artist's surroundings, and are made otherworldly by her surreal style and complex color structures.

In *Luminous Sun* (2021), the viewer is positioned at a distance from a dreamy landscape; fuzzy, distorted cliffs cascade towards an almost-serene body of water that is interrupted by the reflection of a startlingly neon sun. Similarly, *Moon Note* (2021) presents a sedative yet somewhat foreboding atmosphere, with branches in the painting's foreground serving as an elegant partition between the viewer and the lambent night sky. Two paintings from Koop's *Reflect* series round out the sequence, enlarging Koop's signature tear-drops into painstakingly painted, but deceptively expressionistic, bands of color that punctuate complexly layered backgrounds.

American Post-Minimalist Richard Nonas (1936–2021) is known for his abstract, industrial interventions, that use candid materials to negotiate interior settings, or outdoor conditions. Over the course of his ten years of field-work as an anthropologist, Nonas was, by necessity, positioned on the outskirts of others' communities. However, his geometric assemblages feel deeply attuned to their environments, a testament to Nonas' life-long passion for curious observation. Like his New York contemporaries (and fellow 112 Greene Street artists), Gordon Matta-Clark and Suzanne Harris, Nonas was interested in the philosophical resonance conveyed by direct action in relation to space. He wrote of his desire to create sculpture "that does not grow, but simply appears—shuddering, like a knife stabbed into wood."ⁱⁱ



The rarely exhibited small steel and wood sculptures presented in this exhibition span three decades (1990 to 2020) and are playful and poignant; their rough materiality contrasts with Nonas' poetic impulse for arrangement.ⁱⁱⁱ Simple primary color palettes instill the objects with a careful sense of balance, resulting in assemblages that feel like miniature architectures unto themselves. As a series, they draw the viewer's attention to Nonas' clever repetition of, and variations on, material and form.

Both Koop's and Nonas' work explore the relationship between natural and human geographies, conveying, in Nonas' words, "an almost inevitable juxtaposition of presence and absence." Although Koop's work considers the slow, durational impact of climate change, and Nonas' sculptures are charged with a sense of blunt spontaneity in capturing space, both artists' investigations emerge from thoughtful observation and consideration of their immediate environments. Together, they serve to transport the viewer into an experience of dynamic exchange between places both real and imagined, inside and out, figure and ground.

About Fergus McCaffrey

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey is internationally recognized for its groundbreaking role in promoting the work of postwar Japanese artists such as Sadamasa Motonaga, Kazuo Shiraga and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists including Anna Conway, Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, Sigmar Polke and Carol Rama. In keeping with the gallery's commitment to Japanese art and culture, McCaffrey opened its Tokyo outpost in March 2018. Fergus McCaffrey has locations in New York, St. Barth, and Tokyo.

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Images:

1. Wanda Koop, *Luminous Sun*, 2021. Acrylic on canvas, 30 x 40 inches (76.2 x 101.6 cm)
© Wanda Koop
2. Richard Nonas, *Untitled*, 2010. Oil paint on wood, 6 x 3 x 4 inches (15.2 x 7.6 x 10.2 cm)
© Estate of Richard Nonas

ⁱ Enright, Robert. "The Beautiful Lament: An Interview with Wanda Koop." *Border Crossings Magazine*, no. 151, September 2019.

ⁱⁱ Nonas, Richard (2016). *The Man in the Empty Space*. MASS MoCA.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nonas, Richard. "Two Installations by Richard Nonas." *BOMB Magazine*, July 1, 1989. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/two-installations/>.