

CYNTHIA-REEVES

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MICHAEL MULHERNIN 9/11 MUSEUM'S NEW EXHIBITION: RENDERING THE UNTHINKABLE

(New York, New York) The National September 11 Memorial and Museum at the World Trade Center in New York City opens a new exhibition entitled *Rendering the Unthinkable: Artists Respond to 9/11*, on September 12, featuring seminal, mural-sized works from the estate of New York artist Michael Mulhern (1940 – 2012). Each provides a very personal narrative around the national tragedy and its aftermath, both for viewers and for members of our national community, as we all continue to process its reverberative effects.

Jan Ramirez, the Museum's Chief Curator, met recently with gallerist Cynthia Reeves, who represents Michael Mulhern's estate. Ramirez and Reeves reflected on the artist, the genesis of his work, and the curatorial narrative now, more than a decade after the attack. They especially addressed the life and times of the late Michael Mulhern in vivid detail, as the narrative around his seminal *Ash Road Paintings* series is a living tribute to the victims.

On the morning of September 11, Mulhern was in his studio on the 9th floor of a Cedar Street building, directly across from the Towers. When they came down, the windows along the façade of his building shattered. The tremendous onrush of air brought with it a tidal wave of ash and detritus. Feet upon feet of gray ash enveloped him and his workspace. With tremendous presence of mind, he grabbed the respirator he used in the studio, and felt his way along the walls until he reached the bath where he was able to shut himself in and wait. He had no idea if the City was under attack, and if so, how much more was to come. Hours passed. He finally felt his way out to the stairwell, and got out on to the street and, like all other New Yorkers that day, began walking through the thick, swirling air.



Michael Mulhern, *OV2 – 45th Road*,
2002, oil on canvas, 78 x 80 inches

For several years prior, Mulhern's work had been centered on a strict monochromatic palette of black, white and gray, often incorporating aluminum paint. He found a tremendous range in this stark spectrum, often referencing them as "color paintings" in spite of their lack of color. Highly influenced by the New York Abstract Expressionist movement in the 1960's, Mulhern's surfaces were heavily marked by pooling paint, drips and curves, paintings of tremendous vibrancy and depth and nuance. In the years immediately following September 11, Mulhern decamped to a temporary studio in Long Island City, where he began experimenting with paints from his Cedar Street studio – paints mixed and infused with the ash from the lost Trade Towers. In his words, the paintings became more "severe", and Reeves agrees: "They have a power and force that

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distinguish them from prior works. Many have a roiling dynamism that one cannot help but equate with the events of that day”.

Mulhern had a very personal connection to the towers and felt he could “reach out and touch the south tower” and he got to know the office workers across the way in Four World Trade Center, who would watch him at work in the studio. “It was like having an audience”, he recalled, “but we got used to each other.”

Chief Curator Jan Ramirez is responsible for archiving the personal stories of courage, loss and resilience from the events of 9/11, and this exhibition is a next step in bringing those stories alive in new ways, through the lens of thirteen select artists with firsthand experience of these events. This exhibition is a departure from the tasks that have absorbed much of her time thus far as Curator at the Museum -- the artifacts, images and recorded sounds that defined that transformative day. The Museum is open daily 9:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. For more information, please visit online at: www.911memorial.org.

Michael Mulhern was born in Paisley, Scotland in 1940. He attended the Newark School of Fine and Industrial Arts in Newark, NJ and then continued his fine art education at the Brooklyn Museum Art School in Brooklyn, NY. He began exhibiting in the early 1960s, and continued showing work consistently over forty years, through the mid- 2000’s, before he retired in Maine to be near his family. Notably, Mulhern had exhibitions in New York City at CYNTHIA-REEVES, The Drawing Center, The Painting Center, Stephen Haller Gallery, and at Exit Art. The upcoming book by Exit Art acknowledges his contribution to their exhibition history. Mulhern was the recipient of two Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grants, a National Endowment for the Arts painting fellowship, and a Gottlieb Foundation Grant.

CYNTHIA-REEVES has galleries on the campus of MASS MoCA in the Berkshires, and in Walpole, New Hampshire, with additional staff offices in New York and Boston. For more information on these artists, please visit the online gallery at CYNTHIA-REEVES.com or call 212 714 0044.

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