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SUNDARAM TAGORE HONG KONG PRESENTS MONUMENTAL METAL PAINTINGS BY AMERICAN ARTIST MERRILL WAGNER

Exhibition Dates: October 27 – November 27, 2010

Opening Cocktail Reception: Wednesday, October 27, 7 – 9 pm



(l-r) *Running*, 2007, Rust preventive paint on steel, 57¾ x 54¼ inches; *Pasture Flower #1*, 2009, Rust preventive paint on steel, 87½ x 19 inches; *Oasis*, 2010, Rust preventive paint on steel, 19½ x 22 inches

Hong Kong, September 24, 2010—Merrill Wagner, a prolific American artist who composes geometric landscapes using salvaged steel, slate and marble, presents a series of painted works on industrial steel for her first solo show in Hong Kong. Inspired by the negative space in scraps of leftover metal, she creates large wall reliefs that evoke forms in nature such as oceans, flowers, horizon lines and mountain ranges.

Wagner's work is informed by a close investigation of nature and materials. Throughout her career, she has experimented with paint on unusual surfaces ranging from stone to wooden fences. In the late 1980s, she discovered scraps of hot rolled steel, which she adopted as her primary medium.

For years, the artist has been collecting pieces of steel from an industrial machinery parts manufacturer in Pennsylvania. She selects the leftover scraps of metal sheeting that have been cut into parts for objects such as air conditioners, vents and snowplows. Never cutting or reshaping the found metal, Wagner creates dynamic compositions, which are held together with magnets. "My work has to do with what has been made already rather than creating more chaos," Wagner says.

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Alongside examining the shapes of the metal remains, Wagner explores the nuances of the surface of steel. She observed that the process of cooling hot sheets of steel with water results in variegated patterns. Often, subtle grey streaks can be found tearing through solid expanses of dark steel. In some cases, sections of monotone steel are transformed with large areas of purple or dark blue. For Wagner, these patterns and curvilinear marks suggest landscapes of undulating hills and flowing water.

Attentive to the irregularities of the steel, the artist brushes rust-preventive paints on the surfaces. Through subtle shifts in color and texture, she imbues hard industrial materials with an unexpected softness and sensuality making clear allusions to the natural world. The segments of green, brown and grey in the work *Spring*, for instance, are suggestive of a mountainous terrain, layers of soil or stark desert planes. Meanwhile *Oasis* relies on just two vibrant bands of blue and a strip of green to convey a river by a bank with a stretch of clear sky or an underwater landscape perhaps.

Alongside Wagner's minimalist landscape compositions, a series of her more figurative flower works will be on view. In 2006, Wagner discovered an overlap between the shapes of the metal machinery scraps and the anatomy of flowers. Distilling the organs of flowers into simple geometric compositions, she creates massive totemic reliefs. The natural and the manmade converge in Wagner's works.

Wagner's work is included in collections across the United States including those of the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts; the Tacoma Art Museum, Washington; Chase Manhattan Bank and Goldman Sachs Company, New York, New York; and the Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington.

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