

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## MERRILL WAGNER

*April 2 – May 2, 2004*

The Sundaram Tagore Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings by Merrill Wagner. Wagner's earliest paintings from the 1950s were somber images, fuzzy New York cityscapes layered with fog off the mountains of Tacoma and Olympia, Washington. She moved to New York from the Pacific Northwest in the late 1950s after graduating from Sarah Lawrence College. In the early 1960s, she transitioned to geometric abstraction using even larger canvases, hard edges and bright contrasting colors.

Inspired by Eva Hesse in the late 1960s, Wagner started to experiment with different materials. She explored textures, patterns and the ways different media would sit on top of or repel one another. This experimentation would prove to be an ongoing fascination for the artist.

By the 1980s, Wagner was painting on stone, steel and slate, focusing on the surface of the material, the geometric patterns inherent within it, and ordering the painting around its individual marks, blemishes and colors. For Wagner, these enormous paintings represented those things within the landscape that cannot be changed – the ocean, the desert, or the night sky. As Roger Boyce noted in a recent *Art in America* review, "The material gravity and anonymous esthetic of the industrially manufactured [materials] stand in for the assertive indifference and receptive sublimity of nature."

Wagner's long-term projects are more akin to scientific experiments than actual works of art. Her "paintings" are sometimes no more than a series of squares of similar hues made by different manufacturers painted on a cedar fence. Their purpose is not necessarily for the contemplation of forms, but rather the study the effects of the elements on the paint itself. The squares are photographed at regular intervals in an effort to allow the viewer to experience the passage of time. The painted sections disappear, reappear, gather texture, and eventually become shadows of their former selves.

Critic and curator Lilly Wei has noted works of this type "give plein air painting literal meaning." Placing the work directly into the landscape and leaving it there, Wei says, "is ultimately a gallant and quixotic gesture, the willful act of an artist who wants to make her mark on nature while soliciting nature's active participation." No matter how varied, concise, or stripped bare Wagner's pieces become, the landscape remains.

**For additional press information contact Sundaram Tagore 212.677.4520**