

# HOLLIS TAGGART

## Hollis Taggart Presents *Charles Seliger: The Structure of Matter*, A Multi-Decade Presentation of an American Artist Whose Works Explored the Complexity and Mystery of Nature

On view at Hollis Taggart June 4 – July 10, 2026  
Opening Reception: Thursday, June 4 from 6-8pm

**May 24, 2026** – Hollis Taggart is delighted to present its first solo exhibition of American artist Charles Seliger (1926-2009), in celebration of the centennial anniversary of the artist's birth. The works on view span from 1944 to 1993, providing a rare, comprehensive view of the evolution of Seliger's practice. Though often classified as a first-generation Abstract Expressionist, Seliger created work that complicated stylistic boundaries especially with the small scale of his works and his penchant for reworking the same paintings for long periods of time. Collaborating with the estate of the artist, Hollis Taggart has been involved in the process of bringing Seliger's oeuvre back into public view. An opening reception will take place on Thursday, June 4 from 6 to 8pm in the first floor Annex space of Hollis Taggart's flagship Chelsea location.

On view are Seliger's intimately scaled paintings that capture the strange, evocative worlds of natural phenomena. His works were born from his deep reverence for nature and his desire to keep alive its mystery and creative impulses. "For me, to be successful in a painting, I must reflect the nature of becoming or metamorphosis," he once explained. "I attempt through my imagination to make visible the structure of matter. . . I do not observe parts of nature under the microscope. I am not dissecting or analyzing. I have an emotional and intuitive awareness of nature."

The earliest painting in the exhibition--created in 1944 by a precocious 18-year-old Seliger--already shows ample evidence of his hallmark abstract, organic imagery. The next year in 1945, Seliger mounted a solo exhibition at Peggy Guggenheim's tastemaking Art of This Century Gallery, which in addition to Seliger represented Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko. That year, Guggenheim praised the young Seliger in a letter to the British art critic Herbert Read: "Seliger's painting is extremely organic, and his technique highly accomplished, and worked out with extreme care and in considerable detail. His show was very successful, and for over a year the Museum of Modern Art has been contemplating the purchase of a canvas, but being extremely cautious and rather conservative, they seem to be a little frightened of his youth." (1) When the museum acquired Seliger's *Natural History: Form within Rock*, a gift from August Hannibal, Jr, in June 1948, Seliger became the youngest artist to be represented in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection at the age of 20.

Throughout his life, Seliger captured details of his life, thoughts, and observations in journals that he began in 1954. These journals are now part of the permanent collection of the Morgan Library & Museum. The accompanying digital catalogue for this exhibition contains excerpts of Seliger's diaristic reflections on his practice and the breadth of influences he voraciously assimilated, including the great naturalists Thoreau, John Burroughs, W.H. Hudson, J.H. Fabre and physicists Einstein, Heisenberg and Schrodinger. He also reflects on the milieu of Abstract Expressionism in the 1940s and 1950s in which he was immersed. Seliger began experimenting with Surrealist automatism in 1943, a technique he pursued through many decades. Like many of his

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contemporaries searching for a universal language of abstraction in the post-war period, Seliger turned to prehistoric ideas, symbols, and myth as a wellspring of imagery.

Critic Sam Hunter, reviewing the artist's 1948 exhibition at Carlebach Gallery for the *New York Times*, commented that the artist's work "carries the stamp of unborn mysteries and primitive rite." Paintings by his colleagues Rothko and Pollock engulf viewers with their overwhelming scale, yet Seliger's smaller paintings invite close contemplation and provide equally absorbing visual experiences. The artist pioneered a novel stylistic approach in which he bridged a certain naturalist approach with abstraction, which he described in these terms:

"My works, even when most abstract, reflect the natural world. Strata of the earth, forms relating to botany and biology and the ocean depths, all figure in the imagery of my work, no matter how abstract. The images are developed with a feeling for the intricacy of the structure of matter. There is a sense of something happening organically among the forms."  
(2)

In creating his works, Seliger often undertook a laborious process, one which pairs automatist painting with an obsessive reworking of the surface. He began a composition by building up the surface with ample paint, and often other materials, such as wax, to achieve a dense picture plane; he then proceeded by scraping away layers to reveal different tones, shapes, and textures. He would repeat this process as many as seven times, a method that mimics the alternating sense of revelation and concealment offered by the finished compositions.

Like his friend Mark Tobey, Seliger regularly exhibited at the Willard Gallery in New York in the 1950s and 1960s. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York mounted a retrospective exhibition in 1986 and currently holds the largest collection of Seliger's work. Seliger was married to the artist Ruth Lewin for twenty-seven years until her passing in 1975. Together they raised two sons in suburban Mt. Vernon, New York.

Seliger's work is represented in dozens of institutions, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago; Phillips Collection, Washington, DC; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn; British Museum, London; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Morgan Library and Museum, New York; Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; among many others.

1. Peggy Guggenheim quoted in Francis V. O'Connor, *Charles Seliger: Redefining Abstract Expressionism* (Manchester, Vermont: Hudson Hills Press, 2002), 40.
2. Charles Seliger quoted in O'Connor, *Charles Seliger*, 13-14.

## About Hollis Taggart

Founded in 1979, Hollis Taggart presents significant works of American art, showcasing the trajectory of American art movements from the Hudson River School to American Modernism and the Post-War and Contemporary eras. Its program is characterized by a deep commitment to scholarship and bringing to the fore the work of under-recognized artists. The gallery has

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sponsored several catalogue raisonné projects, most recently for the American Surrealist artist Kay Sage, and has been instrumental in advancing knowledge of such artists as Alfred Maurer, Arthur B. Carles, and more recently, Theodoros Stamos, Marjorie Strider, and Michael (Corinne) West. In the summer of 2019, the gallery announced the formal expansion of its primary market business and focus on the presentation of contemporary work. It continues to expand its roster of contemporary artists, focusing on emerging and mid-career talents. With more than 40 years of experience, Hollis Taggart is widely recognized by collectors and curators for its leadership, expertise, and openness, on matters of art history, market trends and opportunities.

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