

BY GUSSIE FAUNTLEROY
PHOTOS BY KATE RUSSELL



PAIRED

Ceramist Susan Stamm Evans and painter Dick Evans make a life of love and art

Susan Stamm Evans and her husband Dick Evans were deep into planning a new studio for Susan on the couple's property in the foothills southeast of Santa Fe. It was 2005, and the ceramic artist had shifted from small porcelain figures to larger pieces in bronze. Susan drew out elaborate plans for a new structure 100 yards or so from the home she and Dick built in 1992, where Dick's painting studio was just down the hall from her now too-small space. The couple showed Susan's father the plans. He hesitated, then said, "You know, this just doesn't seem like the way you two live together—with Susan off in a separate building."

"That was so insightful. It was huge to realize, 'gosh, he's right, that's not us. We do need our studios close.'" After 40 years of marriage, Susan and Dick still enjoy spend-

ing time together, both as life partners and as artists creating internationally collected work in vastly different mediums. Dick jokes that if Susan were sequestered in a studio, she would zone in and forget everything else. "I can see you going down to your studio and missing lunch," he says, smiling at her. "And I'd miss you."

This all-encompassing professional and personal interest has infused the couple's life almost since their first encounter in 1974. A University of New Mexico fine art major, Susan signed up for introductory ceramics as a change of pace from drawing and painting. She remembers the moment Dick Evans walked into the room. "I thought, oh no, I don't want a professor that handsome; it's too distracting," she says, flashing a wide grin. Quickly she realized he was also a great teacher, serious about ceramics as sculpture.

While studying with him she turned her focus entirely toward three-dimensional art.

For his part Dick recalls being struck by Susan's imagination and skill. For the first project, she came in with a detailed clay model of her parents' Albuquerque house, complete with trees in front, that functioned as a planter. "I thought, who is this person? This is beginning ceramics, where you make a little vessel to put peanuts in." Susan took another course with Dick and began producing elaborate life-sized, baroquely designed stoneware fireplace facades. He was astonished, and at some point another thought inched forward: "You know, she's pretty attractive too." Dick kept this to himself. Divorced and 11 years Susan's senior, he had a policy of never dating someone who was currently his student.

Some time later, when Susan had taken

off a semester to work, the two ran into each other in the parking lot of an Albuquerque restaurant. Dick invited her to accompany him to a show of his ceramic art at the UNM Art Museum, and they ended up having coffee, then walking and talking through the night. A few days later she left a pair of toe-socks on his doorstep as a gift. The characteristically playful gesture was Susan's way of letting him know she hoped their relationship would grow. Indeed it did.

They were married in 1975, just before moving to Wisconsin where Dick had accepted a teaching position at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. He continued to teach until 1987, when he turned his attention to making art, which for a time took the

form of large ceramic murals. These evoked dense, abstracted landscapes of intensely hued sawtooth-edged flora and strange flying creatures—imagery later echoed in some of his paintings. They were arduous and time-consuming to create, involving multiple steps of cutting slabs of porcelain clay, laminating, drying, cutting, glazing, firing, and glazing again.

One day in 1991, after the couple moved to Santa Fe, Dick went to his rented studio in La Cienega, opened the kiln, and found it full of ceramic tiles that had warped and cracked. "I thought—why am I doing this? I have a degree in painting. I just closed the lid and didn't open it again for weeks." Instead he started painting again. Today he works in

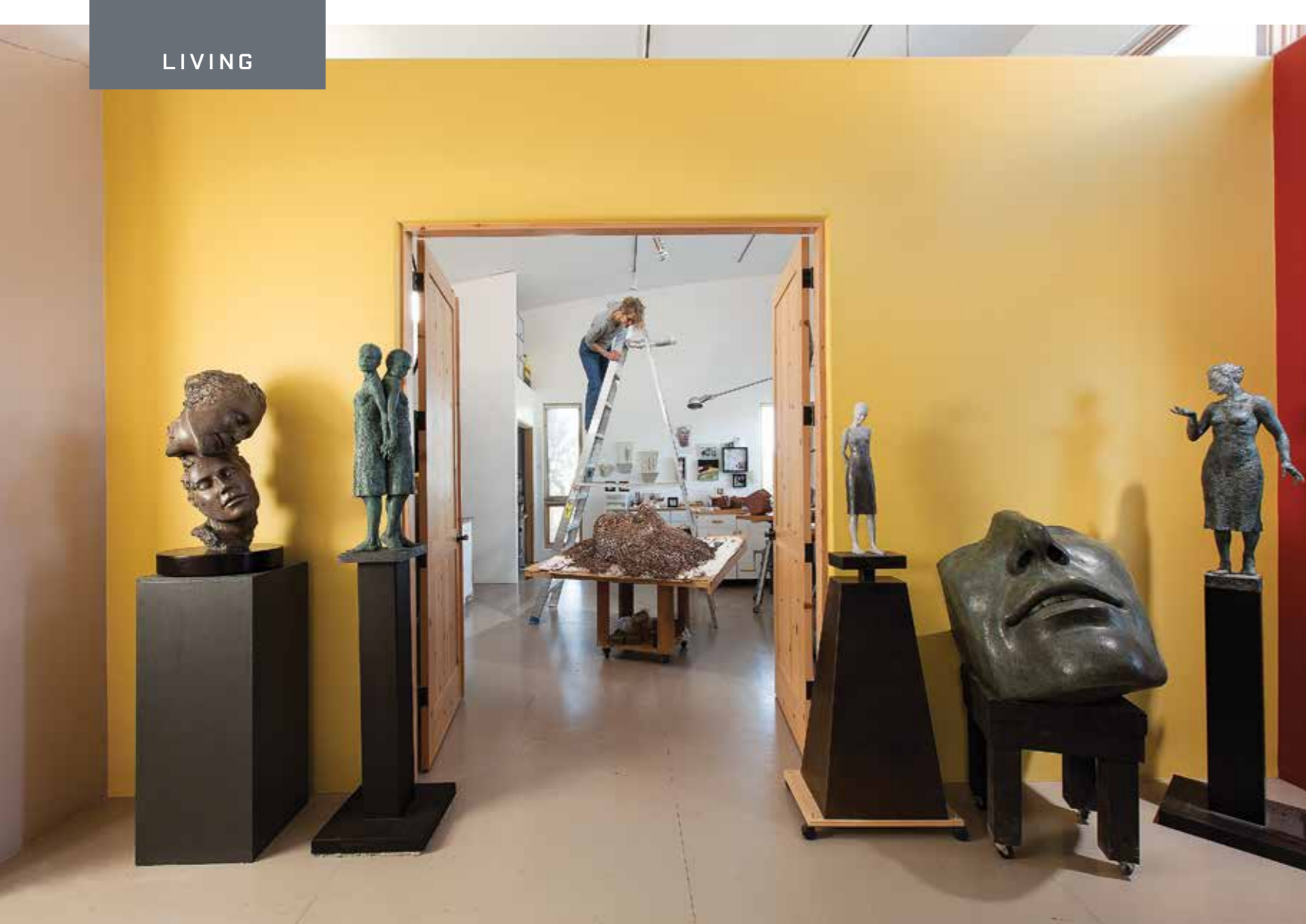
an expansive studio the couple added to the house's north end, as Susan moved to the larger studio that had been Dick's, where the western light is not ideal for painting but is fine for working in clay.

Everything about the home was designed around the couple's life in art. When they saw the five-acre hillside lot in 1990, Susan got busy drawing ideas for a house. They needed two studios and a woodworking shop, which they both use. ("When we got married Dick started giving me my own tools," Susan says.) They needed wall space and ledges for displaying art. They didn't even plan a guest room at first.

At some point they turned to professional assistance, and they were wowed by the



Dick Evans and Susan Stamm Evans designed their home with a focus on their studios and displaying art. In the living room, along with paintings by Dick, are a landscape by William Nichols (top, on white wall) and a wooden figure by Robert Brady. Opposite: Susan Stamm Evans, *Interface* (2010), bronze.



Susan puts final touches on the netting of a new piece, *Threads #6*. She first sculpted the face in clay and then draped it with wax-dipped, hand-knitted jute netting. The solidified netting, holding the shape of the face, will be cast in bronze to become wall-mounted art. Top: In her studio, Susan uses a stepladder for perspective.

designs produced by Sofia Marquez, a young architect who at the time was with Southwest Solar Design. The contemporary design balances expansive windows, interesting angles, and idiosyncratic touches—including a galley kitchen just big enough for two—with generous wall space where several of Dick's large-scale abstract paintings set the primary color tone in grays, reds, and touches of black.

Every day after breakfast the artists head for work. Susan climbs a 10-foot stepladder to get a better perspective on the five-foot-long face that gazes up from her worktable. She sculpts these faces in clay then creates netting out of jute with a pair of comically huge wooden knitting needles that she made. The jute netting she dips in molten wax to cover the face, where it solidifies in form. Eventually the face-shaped, wax-covered netting is cast in bronze at Shidoni Foundry and ends up on a wall. >



Dick's studio is just steps from Susan's, facilitating an almost-continuous exchange between the two artists about their work, art in general, and the life they've shared for 40 years.



A drawing by Santa Fe artist Karina Noel Hean hangs to the right of the space Susan and Dick refer to as the “guest corral,” outside the two-person-sized kitchen. Overhead is a Robert Brady angel sculpture and one of Susan’s earlier figurative pieces rests on a pedestal. Right: Dick’s ceramic wall piece, *X Form II*, grounds the front hallway.

Opposite: Dick in his studio with *Keeper of the Keys* (2016), acrylic diptych.



“It’s fun to do something in bronze that has flow to it,” she says. “I like that it’s partially here and partially not. It has a little breath through it.”

As with the small porcelain figures and fragmented faces—solid bronze but often with eyes missing—that she was known for earlier in her career, she prefers to leave out any narrative. “Susan has the ability to capture complex human expression in the faces and bodies she sculpts—a tilted face, parted lips, a dangling foot,” says Selby Fleetwood, co-owner of Selby Fleetwood Gallery, where Susan’s work is represented in Santa Fe. “It is in the nuances that human emotion is communicated and it resonates with so many people. The connections are made because they are familiar and true to life.”

Down the hall in his painting studio, Dick also aspires to engage the viewer in subtle and varying emotional ways. His distinctive award-winning abstracted paintings contain shapes that could suggest landforms or plants, but at the core of his process is his own

experience of a mark, color, or juxtaposition in forms, and the feelings that arise in response.

“I’ve been thinking about how the things that are most personal are the most universal,” he says, standing in front of paintings on a high studio wall covered in a grid of nails, which serve as an adjustable hanging system for working and viewing. The more abstract a painting is, he believes, the less likely it will be experienced through the filter of labels and preconceptions, and the more direct the emotional impact. Notes Chiaroscuro Contemporary Art gallerist James Rutherford, “There is something about his gestural layering of colors and abstract forms that instills a deeper awareness of what we see and how we see—not only his artwork but the everyday world around us.” Which is exactly what Dick is aiming for in his work.

“I’m convinced we all have a capacity for seeing a huge amount more than we identify,” he says. “I’ve been trying to distill it down to the very basics, not only with form, but with

emotion. Like this relationship—” He points to a slash of yellow set against a wide curve of white. “It means something to me, the mystery of how this intersects with that, and with the flow of time coming through. Someone else wouldn’t necessarily say it that way, but they might feel it.”

As sounding boards for each other, Susan and Dick provide a knowledgeable perspective on the other’s work in process, each having experience in both two- and three-dimensional art. “We’re lucky to have another pair of eyes to give feedback right away,” Susan says.

As a result, they are companions in exploring some of the more inscrutable, indefinable aspects of what they do. “Seldom a day passes that we don’t have meaningful discourse about art,” Susan reflects, adding, “I see the landscape differently because of his paintings.”

Speaking of both his and Susan’s work and its potential to move the viewer, Dick says, “People respond to it even if they don’t know why. That’s the magic of art.” ❁



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Sed, bronze, 55" x 22" x 60"; *Estrella*, aluminum, 60" x 24" x 60"

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