

TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1950

The Sun

Reinventing, Downtown

By XICO GREENWALD | June 24, 2017

Abstract Expressionists Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline urged a pair of friends to start an art gallery. Tibor de Nagy and John Bernard Myers followed their advice and, in 1950, on East 53rd Street, they opened the Tibor de Nagy Gallery.



MEDRIE MACPHEE *A Dream of Peace*, 2017 oil and mixed media on canvas, 60 x 78 inches

In the years to come, Mr. Myers and Mr. de Nagy would exhibit works by a number of second-generation Abstract Expressionists, including Alfred Leslie, Grace Hartigan, Robert Goodnough and Helen Frankenthaler. They also showed figurative paintings by the likes of Larry Rivers, Jane Freilicher, Fairfield Porter and Red Grooms. And Tibor de Nagy editions, the gallery's book imprint, published poetry by Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Barbara Guest and others.

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Mr. Myers left the gallery in 1970. By that time, Tibor de Nagy had relocated to the 57th Street gallery district. When Mr. de Nagy died in 1993, he bequeathed his business to two young gallery assistants, Eric Brown and Andrew Arnot. Over the next 24 years, Mr. Arnot and Mr. Brown built on the gallery's legacy together, exhibiting New York School pictures alongside works by select contemporary artists influenced by New York School poets and painters.

But in the fast-paced New York art world, perhaps the only constant is change. Mr. Brown departed from the gallery this year. And now Mr. Arnot has relocated Tibor de Nagy to the Lower East Side, partnering with Betty Cuningham Gallery in a space-sharing agreement. With adjoining ground floor galleries at 11 and 15 Rivington Street, Tibor de Nagy and Betty Cuningham Gallery will now alternate between the two spaces.

Elegant abstractions by painter Medrie MacPhee inaugurate Tibor de Nagy's downtown location. Using matte, muted colors applied over collaged scraps of clothing, MacPhee aestheticizes garment pattern designs. Inseams and waistbands create rhythmic, curving lines. Buttons and zippers embellish these pictures.

This is Ms. MacPhee's first exhibit with Tibor de Nagy and the simplified pictures here represent a change of course for the artist. In previous exhibitions she presented busy canvases, painting architectural renderings of construction site detritus.

Mr. Arnot has been keeping an eye on Ms. MacPhee's progress. "I have known Medrie and visited with her at her studio many times over the years," he says. "When I knew the gallery would be moving to Rivington Street and I would be able to open our first show at 11 Rivington Street this month, I thought of Medrie's work."

After decades uptown, Mr. Arnot says, the new location "feels like a complete breath of fresh air." In September, the gallery will present a survey exhibition of artworks by New York School painter Larry Rivers.

Mr. Rivers made numerous paintings of poet friends, including iconic portraits of Frank O'Hara. Tibor de Nagy Editions launched sixty-five years ago, publishing Frank O'Hara's first collection of poems. Ever since then, the gallery has played a key role promoting the creative give-and-take between New York School painters and poets, an underappreciated chapter of modern art history. As Mr. Arnot settles in on the Lower East Side, perhaps he can take comfort in a line from Frank O'Hara's poem, "Lines For The Fortune Cookies:" You may be a hit uptown, but downtown you're legendary!