

TIBOR DE NAGY

15 Rivington St New York NY 10002
212 262 5050 info@tibordenagy.com
tibordenagy.com

Jess

Secret Compartments

March 29 to May 6, 2018

Opening reception: Thursday, March 29, 6-8PM



Jess *Xrysxrossantheums*, 1978, collage, 19 1/2 x 23 3/4 inches

Tibor de Nagy is pleased to present Jess - Secret Compartments an exhibition of works from the late 1940s to the early 1990s. This exhibition will present examples of work from Jess' most important series - including painting (Romantic, Erotic, Translation, Salvages), Paste-Ups, as well as drawings and collaborations with writers and poets. This will be the first exhibition of Jess in the gallery's 15 Rivington Street location.

The earliest works in the exhibition are paintings that date from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s - these paintings are generally considered Jess' Romantic series. Created shortly after he left art school in San Francisco, and influenced by his teachers Clyfford Still and Edward Corbett, these works are colorful, impressionistically painted landscapes, sometimes with figures or moody abstractions. Here Jess foments his lifelong fascination with fantasy, legend and storytelling. From this point on Jess' source material and influences will grow in complexity, and become an enormous personal archive or as he called it a "constellation" composed of varied literary, scientific, historical, and mythic material.

Also included in the exhibition are three studies for *Narkissos*, (*Narcissus*) and examples from a related body of work, Jess' Erotic works, which are homoerotic paintings with mythic allusions. The Erotic paintings can be seen as precursors to the final *Narkissos*, 1976/1991, a monumental pencil on paper *Paste-Up*, arguably one of his single most important works, now in the collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. *Narkissos* was conceived in 1959 and completed in 1991. Jess described the making of this work as his "grand obsession, and obsessions don't always have a logical or perfect conclusion. When I made that first little drawing (1959), I saw immediately that it was a vision capable of expanding into great complexity. In the second drawing (1964), I elaborated the field of possibilities and then the *Paste-Up* took me years and lured me into what still seems to me to be an endless magical realm – it took well over 20 years."

The *Paste-Up*, Jess' most notable series of works, also have their origin in the 1950s when he became aware of Max Ernst collages and the writing of James Joyce. These collages, which he dubbed *Paste-Ups*, in deference to their scrapbook nature, were drawn from his archive, which he added to constantly as he visited bookshops and junk stores in San Francisco. The *Paste-up* allowed Jess to integrate his many interests. He worked and re-worked the found images until they are woven into a tapestry. Even a small *Paste-Up* could be made up of over 100 separate images, which he sliced and manipulated with a special exacto knife that had a pivoting blade. The Jess scholar and curator, Michael Auping, quotes Jess speaking of himself and his *Paste-Ups*, "Our (he and poet Robert Duncan) life is essentially a grand collage of fantastical images in books, paintings and puzzles (Jess loved elaborate puzzles) from inside the house and my imagination of the world outside the house (where Jess seldom ventured)."

An additional early sculptural piece included in the exhibition is titled *Heavy Water: a Novel or The 40 & 1 Nights or Jess's Didactic Nickelodeon* from 1955. This work is a three dimensional flipbook, or nickelodeon, which was an early 20th century moving-picture device that cost a nickel to operate. The work is composed of 41 collages on panels, hinged together so that they fit in a suitcase Jess designed. A year after Jess made this piece, he collaborated with the filmmaker Lawrence Jordan who filmed Jess' 41 collages in quick sequence, with audio such as a James Joyce soliloquy, an image of a mushroom cloud appears with the sound of haunted screams and an underwater library is set to orchestra music. This film will be exhibited with the piece.

Jess (1923-2004) was born Burgess Collins in Long Beach, California, he initially studied chemistry at the California Institute of Technology. He spent three years in the army at the Atomic Energy Laboratory, and had a small part in the Manhattan Project developing the first atom bomb. While working on an atomic energy project, he became disillusioned with science after having a nightmare about the world destroying itself, and instead turned to art.

Jess studied painting at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute). His teachers included some of the most influential West Coast painters of the period, including David Park, Elmer Bischoff, and Clyfford Still. During this time, Jess met poet Robert Duncan, who would become his lifelong partner and frequent collaborator. They were an influential force in the San Francisco artistic community, who brought together painters and poets and organized exhibitions and readings.

About Tibor de Nagy

Tibor de Nagy continues its significant role in contemporary American Art since its founding in 1950. In June 2017, the gallery moved to the Lower East Side, joining Betty Cuninghams Gallery in a shared space at 15 and 11 Rivington Streets.

Tibor de Nagy Gallery presents exhibitions of such contemporary artists as Sarah McEneaney, Trevor Winkfield and Jen Mazza, as well artists from the Post War second generation New York School. Its long history includes the first exhibitions of Carl Andre, Helen Frankenthaler, Jane Freilicher, Red Grooms, Grace Hartigan, Alfred Leslie, Fairfield Porter, and Larry Rivers. The gallery's program continues its mission to present a broad overview of contemporary art of singular vision including recent exhibitions of Hannah Wilke, Francis Picabia, and Jess. This unique history has also fostered collaborations between poets and artists. The gallery was the first publisher of the poems of John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler.

Listings Information:

Tibor de Nagy Gallery is located at 15 Rivington Street on the Lower East Side

Tel: 212 262 5050. | Web: www.tibordenagy.com | Email: info@tibordenagy.com

Gallery Hours: Wednesday – Saturday 10am – 6pm, Sunday 12pm – 6pm

Social Media:

Join the conversation on social media by mentioning Tibor de Nagy and using the hashtags #Jess and #JessCollins when posting. Facebook: Tibor de Nagy Gallery | Instagram: @tibordenagygallery | Twitter: @tibordenagy