

TIBOR DE NAGY

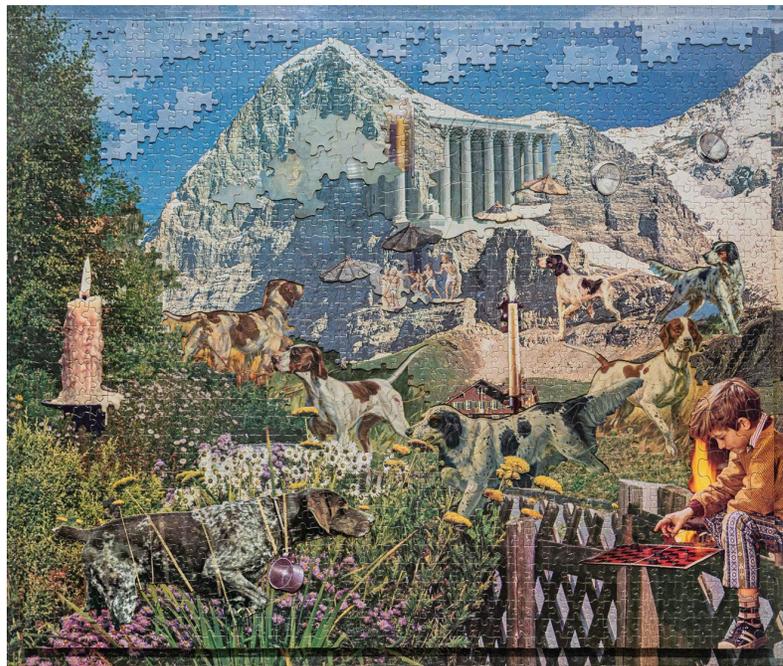
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Jess

Piling Up The Rectangles

Paintings, Paste-Ups and Puzzle Collages

March 8 to April 13, 2024



Jess (Collins) *Game's Up*, 1981 puzzle collage 28 1/2 x 33 1/2 inches

Tibor de Nagy is pleased to present Jess - *Piling Up The Rectangles* an exhibition of Paintings, Paste-Ups and Puzzle collages. This will be Jess's seventh exhibition with the gallery. 2023 marked the centenary of the artist's birth.

The exhibition focusing on Jess's collages and paintings presents the two mediums which the artist pursued in equally singular fashion. Jess's collages which he called Paste-Ups, because of their scrapbook nature, have their origin in the 1950s when he became aware of Max Ernst's

collages and the writing of James Joyce. Each collage is made from his collection of images reflecting his sources and influences. Over the decades, this collection grew in volume and complexity to become an enormous personal archive or as he called it a “constellation” which he added to continually.

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. This was a labor intensive-process and even a small Paste-Up could be made up of over 100 separate images. It required an intense concentration and the use of 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).” The exhibition includes an example of one of his layered puzzle collages, *Game's Up*, (pictured above) which beautifully combines disparate images into an harmonized whole.



Jess (Collins) *Don Quixote's Dream of the Fair Dulcinea*, 1954 oil on canvas 40 x 52 inches

Jess also made paintings. In the exhibition, the earliest paintings come from Jess's Romantic period. These date from early 1950s to the mid-1950s and were created shortly after he left art school in San Francisco. These works were influenced by his teachers Clyfford Still and Edward Corbett. They are colorful, impressionistically painted landscapes, sometimes with figures or moody abstractions. Here Jess foment his lifelong fascination with fantasy, legend and

storytelling. Many have titles that evoke their inspiration such as *A Wish in the Form of a Landscape* and *Don Quixote's Dream of the Fair Dulcinea* (pictured above).

A highlight of the exhibition is the inclusion of three paintings from Jess's *Translation* series. The *Translations* are a group of 32 paintings made between 1959 and 1976, with most of the 32 now in major museum collections. Each translation begins with an existing black and white image. Thickly painted, these works faithfully re-represent the black and white image *translated* into color. The subject of each painting is pulled from one of Jess's wide ranging sources. The three paintings in the current exhibition are (1) *Mort And Marge: Translation #26* composed of a poem by Lewis Carroll, illustrated by A.B. Frost, (2) *Piling Up The Rectangles: Translation #27* comes from a book on the Chinese interpretation of the Pythagorean Theorem and (3) *Crossing And Recrossing The Heart: Translation #28* is a pictograph from a study of Aztec mythology. In 1974, the complete *Translation* series, up to that date, were shown at The Museum of Modern Art, New York in a solo exhibition.

Jess (1923-2004), born Burgess Collins in Long Beach, California, 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. Following the war, while working again with atomic energy, 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.

Jess and Robert Duncan lived together in the Mission District of San Francisco for over thirty years – their house was filled with a vast and incredible range of visual and literary culture, including Gnostic texts, Greek poetry, volumes of *Scientific American*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Life* magazines, as well as first and early editions of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Duncan said of their home, "you can't take a piss in this house without getting hit with a myth." Jess and Duncan were an influential force in the San Francisco artistic community, who brought together painters and poets and organized exhibitions and readings.

Jess was recently the focus of the exhibition *Mythos, Psyche, Eros – Jess in California* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 2019, curated by Nancy Lim and Solomon Adler. Other major exhibitions are the 1993 traveling retrospective *A Grand Collage*, organized by Michael Auping at what was then known as the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the 2007 exhibition focused on Jess's collaborations with poets and writers, *To and From the Printed Page*, curated by Ingrid Schaffner for ICI International. Jess is in the collection of most major museums including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Art Institute of Chicago, and the Detroit Institute of Art among many others.