

LÉVY GORVY

LÉVY GORVY ANNOUNCES UNITED STATES REPRESENTATION OF MARTIAL RAYSSE

First Exhibition with Renowned French Artist to Open Late February

Martial Raysse: Visages

February 28 – April 14, 2018
909 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10021

Opening Reception: February 28, 6–8 PM

New York, NY... Dominique Lévy and Brett Gorvy, co-founders of Lévy Gorvy, announced today that the gallery will represent French artist Martial Raysse in the United States. A key figure within the European neo-avant-garde, Raysse is a self-taught artist who first achieved recognition as a painter in the late 1950s in Nice, collaborating with such peers as Arman, Yves Klein, and Ben Vautier. Acclaimed as an antecedent to Pop, the bold work of Raysse is often exhibited alongside that of such American and British artists as Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, and Richard Hamilton, among others.

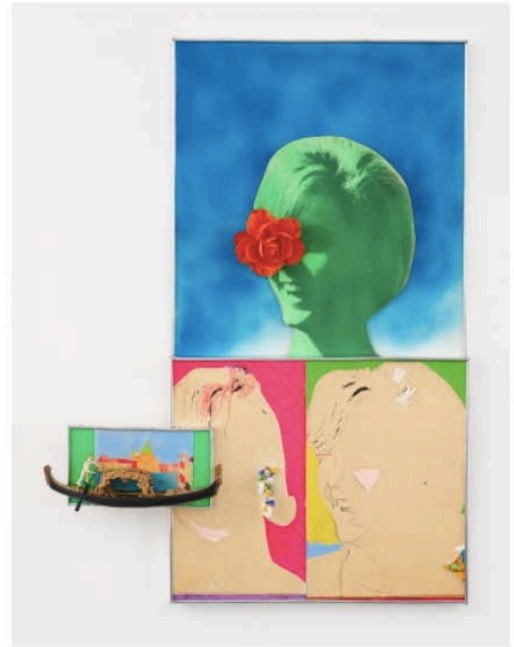
Portraiture has been an important aspect of Raysse's practice throughout his career, and has been central to the relevance of his work through the decades, even after his departure from the art world in the 1970s. In

1960, Raysse became one of the founding members of Nouveau Réalisme, a collective of artists led by critic Pierre Restany. Moving between Paris, New York, and Los Angeles over ensuing years, Raysse created works that subtly critiqued consumer culture through their incorporation of media imagery and store-bought products, in a practice many historians cite as a precursor to American Pop. He soon became a figure of international stature, notably with the 1962 debut of Raysse Beach at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

Galvanized by the events of May 1968, a period marked by civil unrest and protests in France, Raysse returned to Paris to join the student-led demonstrations. He declared his rupture with the official art world in 1970, citing discouragement with the movement's failure to enact revolution-



Martial Raysse in his studio. Photography by Jean-François Jaussaud. Image courtesy of Lévy Gorvy.



LEFT: *NOW*, 2017, acryl on canvas, 82.28 x 69.09 inches (209 x 175.5 cm). **RIGHT:** *Portrait de Gabriella la jolie vènetienne*, 1963, mixed media on canvas, 34 5/8 x 24 7/16 x 3 3/4 inches (88 x 62 x 9.5 cm).

-ary change. But in the late 1970s, he bravely returned to painting with renewed intensity, creating dream-like landscapes and portraits in lush, sumptuous colors. His singular and prolific painting practice has continued to the present day, defined by increasingly large-scale compositions layered with allusions to art history, mythology, and literature, with a particular emphasis on portraiture. Contemporary artists, including many at mid-career, have demonstrated a renewed interest in figuration. Raysse’s oeuvre may be credited as a significant source of inspiration for this new generation.

Lévy Gorvy’s first exhibition with the artist will be *Martial Raysse: Visages*, opening February 28th at the gallery’s New York City space. Focusing on the subtleties of appearance, or visage, the exhibition will showcase over twenty recent paintings, many never before exhibited, alongside *Portrait de Gabriella la jolie vènetienne* (1963), an exceptional work that anchors Raysse’s decades-long engagement with the art historical tradition of portraiture and celebrates his unique position as a contemporary classical painter.

Dominique Lévy commented: “I have known and deeply admired Martial Raysse for over a decade, and have been involved with his work for over 25 years. He has always understood the fabric of society in an uncanny way, and he has been able to channel his perception of the world into an art that is consistently surprising, challenging but lyrical. It is a tremendous honor to rep-

-resent Martial in the United States and to work with him to share his vision with broader audiences and new generations.”

Composed in vivid, high-key hues, the portraits presented in the upcoming exhibition are marked by a contrived beauty and innate strangeness that mirrors the psychological complexity of human beings. While bright, Raysse’s most recent paintings are more brooding than the works from his Pop years, demonstrating a less utopian vision of society. These recent works are generally based on real people, titled poetically and punctuated with mysterious symbols. *Martial Raysse: Visages* will be complemented by a publication featuring essays by curator and art historian Jane Livingston and sociologist Dr. Eduardo de la Fuente, as well as a specially commissioned poem by Leopoldine Core.

About the Exhibition

Raysse began making portraits in 1961. Composed in a bold, exuberant palette that he termed “Martialcolor,” these early paintings were based on stereotypical images of the female face gathered from classical paintings and popular media, such as advertisements, fashion catalogs, and publicity stills. Defined by vibrant hues and sharp contrasts, they dispensed with naturalism in deliberate pursuit of what the artist praised as “false relationships” and “bad taste.” Raysse’s most recent portraits, while still executed in an intensive color palette, seek to convey the essential nature of their sitters. His subjects gaze out from the canvas but seem to simultaneously look inward, as if lost in thought, exuding a sense of pathos and enigma that leaves the viewer intrigued and unsettled.

Martial Raysse: Visages presents *Portrait de Gabriella la jolie vènetienne* (1963) alongside works that date from 2008 to the present. Combining canvases with store-bought trinkets, including a fake rose, a plastic earring, and a miniature gondola, this mixed-media work uses the female face to explore the entwinement of beauty and artifice. Its subjects— two anonymous women whose mouths are frozen in forced smiles—are made nearly unidentifiable through Raysse’s distortion of their images.



TOP: QUE VEUX TU DIRE MON BEL AMI, 2017, oil on canvas, 44 1/2 x 35 7/16 inches (113 x 90 cm).
MIDDLE: Un beau merle, 2008, acryl on cardboard, 31 1/2 x 23 1/4 inches (80 x 59 cm).
BOTTOM: Songeuse Roxane, 2013, distemper on canvas, 24 13/16 x 24 13/18 inches (63 x 63 cm).

The kitschy objects that adorn this construction further obscure the faces, and the canvases are joined in an uneven, almost slapdash, manner.

Over twenty recent works on view build upon the themes of this early important example. Shown at Lévy Gorvy for the first time, *NOW* and *QUE VEUX TU DIRE MON BEL AMI* (both 2017) are marked by ambiguity and disjuncture. In the first, four men, each resembling a stock character from painting or literature, stand behind a seductive woman whose legs are alluringly crossed atop a patterned chair. The relationships between these figures is undefined, and each appears detached from the others. Posed before a violent tableaux (a picture within the picture that pays homage to the sweeping compositions of classical history painting), the scene appears as a suspended moment in a mysterious narrative. *QUE VEUX TU DIRE MON BEL AMI* is characterized by a similar sense of incongruity. Its subject, an androgynous figure dressed in a coat and blazer, balances a blank notebook in one hand and a worm-ridden apple atop the other. Though symbolically suggestive, these objects remain ambiguous, leaving the viewer to wonder at the artist's intention.

Un beau merle (2008), *Ces deux gars-là* (2008), and *Songeuse Roxane* (2013) further demonstrate Raysse's talent for cultivating mystery in portraiture. The first features a man, his skin colored green, staring quizzically out at the viewer. The second pairs two figures. One is clad in a soiled gardener's hat, while the other sports a laurel wreath topped, inexplicably, with an open can. The third depicts a young woman against an acid red-and-orange ground. Her expression is haunting and her lips are parted, as if on the verge of speech. Each of these paintings moves between surface appearance and psychic depth, conveying a nuanced range of emotions that are left to viewers' interpretations. Together, they express the eccentric wonder of Raysse's artistic vision, and his desire to strike what he has described as an "equilibrium between the classical and the modern, between that which remains exemplary and that which suits the present."

About the Artist

Martial Raysse was born on February 12, 1936 in Vallauris, France, to a family of ceramicists. His parents' involvement in the French Resistance against the occupation of the Nazis had a profound impact on his childhood. As Raysse stated in 2000, "I know what it is like to be torn from my bed at 3 o'clock in the morning by the Gestapo." His first creative experiences in poetry and fine art began at the age of 12. He went on to study literature at the University of Nice and attended the School of Decorative Arts run by François Bret, co-founder of the Peintre de Vingt Ans group, in the same city. In 1955, he met Ben Vautier and Arman in Nice at the Club des jeunes, an informal salon held in the basement of a brasserie. Introduced to Yves Klein through Arman, he began to pursue painting in earnest and had his first solo exhibition in 1958 at Galerie

Vieil-Olivier on the Côte d'Azur. In 1960, at Klein's apartment in Paris, he became one of the founding members of Nouveau Réalisme, a collective of artists led by critic Pierre Restany. Breaking with the lyrical, abstract styles then dominant in Paris, the nine artists present declared their commitment to "new perceptions of the real," incorporating found objects and quotidian materials into their work in an attempt to blur the distinction between art and everyday life.

In 1962, Raysse traveled to New York, where he joined the bohemian artistic circle around the Chelsea Hotel, whose regulars included Claes Oldenburg and Robert Rauschenberg. That year, alongside environments by Rauschenberg, Niki de Saint Phalle, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely, and others, he debuted Raysse Beach at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Consisting of an inflatable pool, artificial palm trees, mannequins, radiant heat lamps, and sand, this immersive installation simulated an idyllic scene from the artist's native French Riviera. Shortly thereafter, he moved to Los Angeles, where he lived and worked until 1968. Inspired by the city's combination of sunshine and consumerist excess, his aesthetic gradually tended toward that of American Pop, whose embrace of new materials, media, and techniques, such as plastic, silkscreening, and filmic projection, paralleled his own. Declaring his commitment to a "hygiene of vision," he filled his work with store-bought items, glamorous women, and bucolic landscapes: symbols of purity that engaged the period's fascination with novelty and surface appearance.

Galvanized by the events of May 1968, a period marked by civil unrest and protests in France, Raysse returned to Paris to join the student-led demonstrations. Discouraged by the movement's failure to enact revolutionary change, he declared his rupture with the official art world in 1970. Joining an artists' commune, he experimented with collective forms of production and psychedelic themes, developing a series of small sculptures and assemblages titled after a hallucinogenic mushroom. In the late 1970s, he returned to painting in earnest, producing visionary tableaux that drew on a plethora of literary, pictorial, and cinematic references. His pursuit of large-scale formats grew over time, structured, all the while, by his fascination with artifice and his eclectic store of allusions. Increasingly drawn to sculpture, he executed multiple large-scale commissions for public spaces in France, including the Place du Marché in Nîmes and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. Exploring the comic, the cosmic, and the beautiful in equal measure, his works maintain a strong critical edge that calls both artistic conventions and established orders into question.

Raysse's work is included in numerous important public collections, including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate, London; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Musée d'arts de Nantes; and Museum

Ludwig, Cologne. He participated in the Venice Biennales of 1966, 1976, and 1982. In 2014, he was awarded the prestigious Praemium Imperiale for Painting by the Japan Art Association. The first retrospective of his work was held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in 1965. Since then, major surveys of his work have been organized at the Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, in 1992; the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in 2014; and the Palazzo Grassi, Venice, in 2015.

About Lévy Gorvy

Lévy Gorvy cultivates a program devoted to innovation and connoisseurship in the fields of modern, postwar, and contemporary art. Founded by Dominique Lévy and Brett Gorvy, Lévy Gorvy maintains gallery spaces at 909 Madison Avenue in New York and in Mayfair, London. In September 2017, Lévy Gorvy opened an office in Shanghai. The gallery fosters continued dedication to the living artists and artists' estates it represents and pursues a robust program of exhibitions and multidisciplinary events. Lévy Gorvy also produces ongoing art historical research and original scholarship, publishing exhibition catalogues, monographs, and other key publications.

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