

VENUS

MANHATTAN LOS ANGELES

Billy Al Bengston

September 29 – November 2, 2016

VENUS

980 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10075



(New York, NY) – VENUS is pleased to present a collection of work by legendary Los Angeles-based artist Billy Al Bengston. The exhibition will feature twelve historic paintings from Bengston's 1961 "B.S.A. Motorcycle" series alongside a selection of newly painted works from the artist's iconic "Chevron" series. The show will also include the original B.S.A. motorcycle once raced to Bengston's longtime friend and race coach, Aub LeBard.

As one of the original Ferus Gallery artists in Los Angeles—which also included Ed Ruscha, Ken Price, Edward Kienholz, Dennis Hopper, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin and others—Billy Al Bengston and his peers shaped the Southern California art world. He embraced the aesthetics of Los Angeles car culture and "Finish Fetish," a movement pioneered by Los Angeles artists based around creating objects with sleek pristine finish. Along with these

influences, Bengston also adopted a series of motifs that appear throughout his paintings, the most prominent being the "Chevron," or "Sergeant's Stripes." With the recognizable emblem set against carefully painted patterned or color field backgrounds, Bengston's Chevron paintings oscillate between abstraction and representation, refusing to settle exclusively as either. While the earlier iterations of the Chevron are painted on lacquered Masonite reminiscent of a gleaming car hood, the newer versions demonstrate Bengston's softened, more fluid painting style adopted in the transition onto canvas.

In 1961, Bengston was approached by Ferus Gallery and offered his third solo exhibition in the space. Rather than exhibiting the Chevron paintings he'd become known for, Bengston chose to expand his practice outside of abstraction, turning to his interest in flat track motorcycle racing for inspiration. The experiment resulted in a series of representational paintings based on various components of a B.S.A. motorcycle. The isolated and decontextualized motorcycle parts and B.S.A. logo are presented in the canvas' center against monochromatic matte backgrounds with an auratic surrounding color field, as can be seen in works such as *Gearbox* and *Carburetor Floatbowl*. With the B.S.A. series, Bengston's interest in Los Angeles car culture and flat track motorcycle racing emerged in both style—with the sleek Finish Fetish aesthetic—and subject matter. The paintings have been compared stylistically to Francis Picabia's early machine paintings. Bengston's BSA Motorcycle series was adopted into the contemporary discourse surrounding the 1960s Pop Art movement with the paintings appearing in a number of important institutions, including the Whitney's 1974 exhibition, *American Pop Art*. The VENUS presentation will mark the first time the paintings have been shown together since their creation in 1961.

The exhibition at VENUS will present historic paintings from Bengston's career alongside new Chevron paintings from 2016, offering viewers a survey of the artist's unique style and his undeniably important cultural impact both in Los Angeles and throughout the United States.

ABOUT BILLY AL BENGSTON

Billy Al Bengston was born in 1934 in Dodge City, Kansas and moved to Los Angeles with his family in 1948. He studied painting under Richard Diebenkorn at California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland. In 1957, Bengston began showing with the Ferus Gallery (founded and run by Walter Hopps, Edward Kienholz, and Irving Blum), participating in solo and group exhibitions regularly until the gallery closed in 1966. Bengston has had major solo presentations at the San Francisco Museum of Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. His work is included in a number of important public collections including the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Chicago Art Institute; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Bengston retains friendships with international art world celebrities including Frank Gehry and Ed Ruscha, as well as local Los Angeles legends such as Sonny Nutter. He lives and works in Venice, California.

ABOUT VENUS

Founded in 2012 by Adam Lindemann and with spaces in both Manhattan and Los Angeles, VENUS is dedicated to curated exhibitions both historic and contemporary, which cast a unique and often iconoclastic view on the work of established artists or artists whose works have been somewhat overlooked. The gallery continues to collaborate with prominent artists, foundations, estates, and galleries.