

VENUS

MANHATTAN LOS ANGELES

Bernard Buffet: Paintings from 1956 to 1999

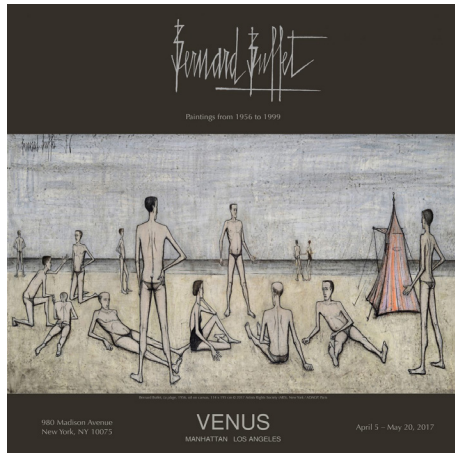
April 5 - May 20, 2017

Opening: Wednesday, April 5th, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

VENUS

980 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10075

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:



(New York, NY) – VENUS is pleased to present **Bernard Buffet: Paintings from 1956 to 1999**, an exhibition of important and historic works by the renowned late figurative painter, who remains one of the most controversial French artists of the 20th century. Comprised of thirteen paintings from exceptional moments in Buffet's career, the show will be on view from April 5th through May 20th, 2017. This exhibition, organized in collaboration with the Estate of Bernard Buffet, marks the first major solo presentation of Buffet's work in New York in nearly three decades.

While Bernard Buffet (b. 1928, Paris, France; d. 1999, Tourtour, France) was once hailed as the next Picasso in France and internationally, the artist's work has weathered dizzying cycles of acclaim and rejection. Immensely popular – and always commercially successful – at numerous points in his career, Buffet suffered long spells of vicious critical repudiation, when his work was considered the ultimate embodiment of poor taste. But curatorial attention has returned to his oeuvre in the years since his death, culminating in a major retrospective of his work at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 2016, organized by the museum's director, Fabrice Hergott. At this moment of renewed relevance, *Bernard Buffet: Paintings from 1956 to 1999* reintroduces the artist's oeuvre to a new generation of American viewers, charting a history of the artist's development through a tightly focused selection of highlights from Buffet's career.

Buffet's signature approach to representational painting emerged while he was a student at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Marked by bold outlines, gaunt figures, and heavy impasto, his ominous depictions of bleak scenarios were championed for the way they channeled a demoralized France, working to rebuild from the privation of the German Occupation and the destruction of World War II. His work was shown to great acclaim in the Parisian salons of the late 1940s and early 1950s; in 1947, Buffet became the youngest artist ever to have work acquired by the French Republic, catapulting him onto the national stage as a young art star. Along with his partner, Pierre Bergé, Buffet became part of the *moins de trente ans*, an international jet set including Brigitte Bardot, Françoise Hardy, and Roger Vadim. Buffet's fame never impacted his production, and in 1952, with the help of dealers Emmanuel David and Maurice Garnier, the artist mounted the first in a lifelong series of annual solo exhibitions in Paris, which he always organized around a single theme. Buffet's appetites were catholic, and although his exhibitions approached subjects as disparate as Jean d'Arc and casual beach scenes, his paintings consistently evinced a dark politic, as well as a deep reverence for art history, specifically the legacies of French history painters Eugène Delacroix and Antoine-Jean Gros.

By the time he turned thirty in 1958, Bernard Buffet was the most famous painter in France. His work was the subject of an unprecedented retrospective at the Galerie Charpentier, and with profits from his paintings, he

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indulged himself with a castle and a chauffeured Rolls-Royce. Buffet's popularity was undercut in the eyes of the left-leaning literati, however, when he was photographed in front of his Rolls-Royce for *Paris Match*: he unabashedly presented himself enjoying the spoils of his success, refusing to square with the image of a bohemian artist that French critics had come to expect. As a result, nearly all institutional support fell away from his work, and when President Charles de Gaulle appointed André Malraux, a staunch supporter of abstraction, Minister of Culture in 1959, state support for Buffet's work vanished. It never returned during his lifetime.

In 1958, Pierre Bergé joined his future business partner, Yves Saint Laurent, and Buffet took up with the striking vedette Annabel Schwob; they married the same year, and she remained Buffet's muse until the end of his life. Buffet's work from this period was focused on French landscapes or depictions of Annabel, with a notable exception for his series *Les écorchés*, which offers violently flayed bodies in a possible response to his critics. Despite nearly universal critical rejection, Buffet remained steadfast in his dedication to figurative painting. Sequestered in a series of castles, he made enormous paintings depicting scenes from the *Odyssey*, the *Divine Comedy*, and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. His work became enormously popular in Japan and, in 1973, the Japanese industrialist Kiichiro Okano opened a museum in Shizuoka dedicated exclusively to his work.

Buffet's technique loosened to great effect later in his life, and he worked on unexpected themes for his annual exhibitions, ranging from the seven deadly sins to exotic primates. In the late 1990s, Buffet was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, making painting difficult, but with a determined hand he completed his final series, *La mort*. Unable to paint, Buffet committed suicide in 1999, and this final series of paintings – two of which are included in this exhibition – was shown in Paris in 2000.

Since his death, Buffet's work has been included in several critically acclaimed and highly publicized exhibitions in New York, including Alison Gingeras's "Pretty Ugly" at Gavin Brown's Enterprise and Maccarone in 2008, and Venus Over Manhattan's inaugural exhibition, "À Rebours," in 2012. In 2009, the Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt mounted "Bernard Buffet: Maler, Painter, Peintre," a major exhibition of Buffet's work, curated by the highly respected state museum director, Udo Kittelmann. Nicholas Foulkes of Vanity Fair penned a monumental biography of the artist in 2016, entitled *Bernard Buffet: The Invention of the Modern Mega-Artist*, which he published just before Buffet's retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

ABOUT BERNARD BUFFET

Bernard Buffet was born in Paris in 1928, and enrolled at the École des Beaux-Arts at the age of sixteen. Between 1946 and 1948, Buffet's work was included in the Salon des Moins de Trente Ans, the Salon d'Automne, and the Salon des Indépendants. In 1947, his painting "Le coq mort" was purchased for the Musée National d'Art Moderne, making him the youngest artist ever to have work acquired by the French state. In 1948, Buffet was awarded the inaugural Prix de la Critique. Between the years 1949 and 1999, Buffet mounted over fifty

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solo exhibitions in Paris. His work has been the subject of numerous international retrospectives, including major exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles (1955); the Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (1991); Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2008); the Meguro Museum of Art, Tokyo (2010); before he achieved his French retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (2016). His work has been included in numerous group presentations around the globe, including "Pretty Ugly," curated by Alison Gingeras, at Gavin Brown's Enterprise and Maccarone, New York (2008); "Oceanomania," curated by Mark Dion, at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Monaco (2011); and "À Rebours," the inaugural exhibition at Venus Over Manhattan, New York (2012). His work is held in the collections of many public institutions, including the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Tate, London. Bernard Buffet lived and worked in Tourtour, France, until his death in 1999.

ABOUT VENUS

Founded in 2012 by Adam Lindemann and with spaces in 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.

For further information about the exhibition and availability, please contact the gallery at info@venusovermanhattan.com

For all press inquiries related to the exhibition, please email press@venusovermanhattan.com