

# VENUS MANHATTAN

## **Roger Brown**

November 12, 2019 – January 11, 2020

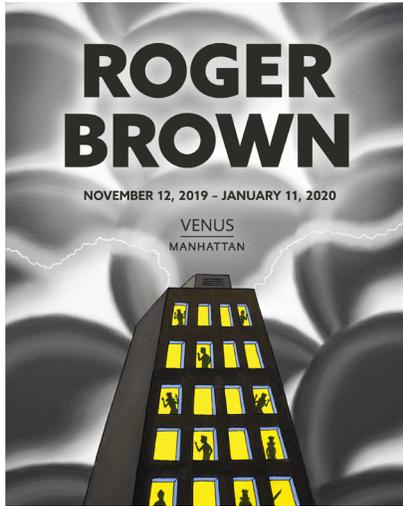
Opening: Tuesday, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

## **Venus Over Manhattan**

980 Madison Avenue

New York, NY 10075

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**



(New York, NY) – **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to present an exhibition of work by **Roger Brown**, organized in collaboration with the Roger Brown Study Collection at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Kavi Gupta. Comprising a large group of paintings that spans the breadth of his career, the presentation surveys the development of Brown's production. In conjunction with the exhibition, the gallery will publish a catalogue featuring two new texts on the artist by Lisa Stone, Curator of the Roger Brown Study Collection, and Dan Nadel, Curator at Large, Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, UC Davis, as well as pages from Brown's sketchbooks that relate to the works on view. The exhibition will be on view from November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 through January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020.



*Runaway, 1968*

Roger Brown began exhibiting his work in the late 1960s, alongside a group of artists often referred to as the Chicago Imagists. Celebrated for their use of imagery, figuration, narrative, and patterning, these artists pulled from idiosyncratic sources to produce deeply personal and visually diverse work, shirking the cool, stylistic orthodoxies that dominated on the coasts. Brown moved in circles around the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, which nurtured the unconventional interests of Brown and his peers. Brown was deeply associated with Chicago during his lifetime: he graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1970; he kept a series of studios, filled with carefully selected art and objects, from both the vernacular and mainstream realms, that culminated in his building in the Lincoln Park neighborhood; and his instantly legible paintings and objects, replete with silhouetted figures, patterned landscapes, and scalloped skies, rendered in dizzying isometric perspective, helped foster a community of artists that announced Chicago as a viable site of artistic production.

The idiosyncrasies of Brown's interests were forged long before he moved to Chicago in 1962. Brown grew up in Alabama, where his parents owned successful groceries and belonged to the Church of Christ, known for its "fire and brimstone" intensity. Brown's father, himself an accomplished woodworker, instilled in his children a love of good craftsmanship and handmade things. His mother and her large extended family recounted their extensive family history, emphasizing the importance of narrative

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*Old and New Eight Ladies Typing, 1972*

and place. Long car trips exposed Brown to the variety of the American landscape, and with his brother, he devoured comic books and movies at the Martin Theater, an Art Deco movie house in Opelika. As Brown said in 1987, "I really think that my going in the direction I did comes from being Southern." Two of Brown's professors at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago encouraged him to draw from these diverse experiences in his work. Ray Yoshida, an artist and Brown's painting instructor, organized trips to the Maxwell Street Flea Market, where Yoshida encouraged students to find inspiration in visually powerful, non-traditional sources. Whitney Halstead, professor of Art History, was an early advocate of the importance of non-western, folk, and vernacular art, and led groups to the Field Museum of Natural History, where Brown saw African and Oceanic objects. Brown synthesized and made reference to these diverse sources for the duration of his career, making and collecting work that renegotiated traditional art historical hierarchies.



*Travelers in a Mist, 1976*

Brown's earliest exhibited works, his theater paintings, are lovingly handmade constructions that depict interiors of classic movie houses. First shown in "False Image," a breakout group exhibition organized by Don Baum at the Hyde Park Arts Center in 1968, the small paintings render simplified theater interiors with draped curtains, proscenium stages, Art Deco details, and silhouetted figures, often lit by surreal compositions depicted on the movie screen. The paintings introduce many of the motifs that remained constant in Brown's work, including the importance of spectacle, isometric perspective, silhouetted figures, and an eerie atmosphere reminiscent of American film noir. Brown began depicting movie house exteriors in 1969, and he continued to zoom out in his subsequent work, painting increasingly complex cityscapes and street scenes, with space that tipped up toward the viewer. Many of these paintings feature complex networks of buildings and highways, and occasionally depict sensational stories from current events.

After a long road trip with his partner, the architect George Veronda, Brown's paintings became increasingly focused on the American landscape. This work is characterized by a reliance on rigid compositional structuring, visually dazzling patterning, and the incorporation of Brown's recurrent motifs. Exploiting repetition and variation, patterned landscapes began to consume entire compositions, where vistas appear like quilted textiles, with stitches suggested by hedgerows. He began to experiment

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*Hole in the Sky (with Nervous Travelers), 1978*



*Sarajevo the Serbian Way, 1993*

with patterned clouds in 1974, and his ominous, scalloped skies became a fixed presence in his later work. With this set of compositional strategies, Brown's paintings became increasingly polemical, political, and sardonic. With meticulously detailed compositions, he skewered the New York art scene, rampant suburban sprawl, and the human forces behind environmental catastrophe. Taken together, Brown's visually powerful and carefully rendered works attest to force of synthesizing a diverse range of sources to make a deeply personal, and widely resonant, art.

### **ABOUT ROGER BROWN**

Roger Brown was born in Hamilton, Alabama, in 1941. He attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he received his BFA in 1968, and his MFA in 1970. His work has been the subject of numerous solo presentations both stateside and abroad, including exhibitions at The Museum of Arts and Design, New York; Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery; and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. Brown's work is frequently featured in major group exhibitions, including recent presentations at Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Fondazione Prada, Milan; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; and Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. His work is held in numerous public collections around the world, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Brown lived and worked in Chicago, Michigan, and California, before his death in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1997.

For further information about the exhibition and availability, please contact the gallery at [info@venusovermanhattan.com](mailto:info@venusovermanhattan.com)

For all press inquiries related to the exhibition, please email [press@venusovermanhattan.com](mailto:press@venusovermanhattan.com)