

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

JIM NUTT: PORTRAITS

May 24 – June 25, 2022

Opening: Tuesday, May 24th

Venus Over Manhattan

55 Great Jones Street

New York, NY 10012



(New York, NY) – **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to present **Jim Nutt: Portraits**, an exhibition of rarely seen paintings and works on paper by one of the most important artists to emerge from Chicago in the last fifty years. Comprising some twenty examples of his work, the exhibition focuses on the portrait format that has structured Nutt's practice for nearly forty years. Presentations of Nutt's work are exceedingly rare: Venus Over Manhattan's exhibition marks the first solo presentation in New York in over a decade, and the first solo gallery presentation in the United States since the MCA Chicago's 2011 retrospective, "Jim Nutt: Coming Into Character." Featuring previously unexhibited works, Jim Nutt: Portraits will be on view at 55 Great Jones Street, the gallery's downtown location, from May 24th through June 25th, 2022.

Jim Nutt began exhibiting his work in the early 1960s, alongside a group of artists known collectively 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 that shirked the cool, stylistic orthodoxies dominating on

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the coasts. Nutt moved to Chicago in 1960 and enrolled at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where professors Ray Yoshida and Whitney Halstead fostered a community of artists, encouraging them to engage unexpected sources in their work: Yoshida organized trips to the Maxwell Street Flea Market, famous for its visually powerful, non-traditional objects, and Halstead lectured on the work of non-Western, self-taught, and vernacular artists. Like that of his peers, Nutt's earliest work registers the influence of sign painting, comic books, and even pinball machines, which partially inspired his signature method of painting on the reverse side of Plexiglas. These immaculately constructed works, which often featured a large, distorted figure at the center of the composition, constituted a breakthrough for Nutt, who showed them in a series of exhibitions called "Hairy Who?," mounted between 1966 and 1969. Organized with fellow artists Gladys Nilsson, Art Green, Suellen Rocca, Jim Falconer, and Karl Wirsum, these now-infamous presentations signaled the arrival of a new visual sensibility. Adopting the name "Hairy Who" for their riotous, colorful, and engaging installations, Nutt and his peers made work that renegotiated art historical hierarchies, helping to establish Chicago as a viable site of artistic production.

The "Hairy Who" found meaningful support in Chicago, through an emergent community of young collectors, the recently opened MCA Chicago, and in the figure of Phyllis Kind, whose gallery represented many of them for decades. But critics were quick to call them provincial, choosing to see their work as evidence of a regional style instead of the product of individual artists. Despite this critical assessment, broader recognition on a national—and even international—scale came rapidly for Nutt: by 1974, his work had been the subject of a touring retrospective, with a stop at the Whitney Museum of American Art, and he was one of six artists selected by curator Walter Hopps to represent the United States at the Venice Biennial in 1972. Writing about the development of Nutt's practice, curator Lynne Warren describes "an early period—1966 through the 1970s, during which

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Nutt experienced considerable success as he emerged, first in Chicago and then almost immediately on the national stage—and a late period, beginning in the late 1980s and continuing today, that consists of one motif: portrait-like renderings of imaginary women.” This stylistic progression is evident in Nutt’s work from the 1980s, when he reduced the scale of his paintings, limiting both their palette and the number of figures in each composition. These aesthetic changes, however, belie Nutt’s abiding interest in surreal physiognomies, latent sexual anxiety, and confrontational humor, as well as his permanent dedication to painterly technique and faultless execution.

Around 1987, Nutt settled into the single figure portrait format that continues to structure his practice. The paintings generally comprise an imagined figure, rendered on canvas, and set within a hand-painted or wooden frame. The works on paper, celebrated for their delicate line-work, often precede the paintings, but not all of Nutt’s drawings lead to a canvas. This exhibition pays particular attention to the way the artist’s drawing practice informs his paintings. In several instances, portrait drawings accompany their related paintings, providing a rare chance to track the development of the figure between media. These works demonstrate the refined, iconic, and geometric imagery that has come to define Nutt’s work, with his figures’ strange noses and inflated hairstyles. In format and execution, the works make explicit reference to paintings of the Northern Renaissance, specifically those of Hans Holbein the Younger, whose “Mary, Lady Guildford” he admired while in college. Similarly refined and arduously constructed, Nutt often produces only a single painting each year. Underscoring the tremendous rarity of each work in this grouping, this exhibition affords a uncommon opportunity to trace the development of Nutt’s signature style, testifying to his position as one of the most important artists of his generation.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jim Nutt was born in 1938 in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. He received his BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1965. Nutt’s work has been the subject of numerous international solo presentations, including exhibitions at the MCA Chicago; the Milwaukee Art Museum; the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Rotterdamse Kunststichting, Rotterdam; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Nutt’s work is frequently featured in major group exhibitions at institutions both stateside and abroad, including recent presentations at The Drawing Center, New York; the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Minneapolis Museum of Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Art Institute of Chicago; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Fondazione Prada, Milan, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. His work is held in the permanent collections of

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numerous public institutions, including the Art Institute of Chicago; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; The Morgan Library & Museum, New York; Museum moderner Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Whitney Museum of American Art; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven. In 1972, Jim Nutt was one of six artists chosen to represent the United States at the Venice Biennial. Jim Nutt lives and works in Wilmette, Illinois.

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55 Great Jones Street
New York, NY 10012

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday
10:00 am – 6:00 pm

PRESS CONTACT

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IMAGE CREDITS

Jim Nutt, *Plume*, 1989. Acrylic on canvas in acrylic on wood frame; 25 1/2 x 21 1/2 in (64.8 x 54.6 cm). Private Collection. Jim Nutt, *Drawing for Plume*, 1989. Graphite pencil on brown paper; 13 1/4 x 11 3/16 in (33.7 x 28.4 cm) Private Collection. Jim Nutt, *M.*, 1987. Acrylic on Masonite, and papier-mâché covered wood frame; 27 1/2 x 22 1/2 in (69.8 x 57.1 cm) The Collection of Eleanor Heyman Propp. Jim Nutt, *Untitled*, 2005. Graphite on watercolor paper; 15 x 14 in (38.1 x 35.6 cm) Private Collection. All images courtesy Venus Over Manhattan, New York.