

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

RICHARD MAYHEW: NATURAL ORDER

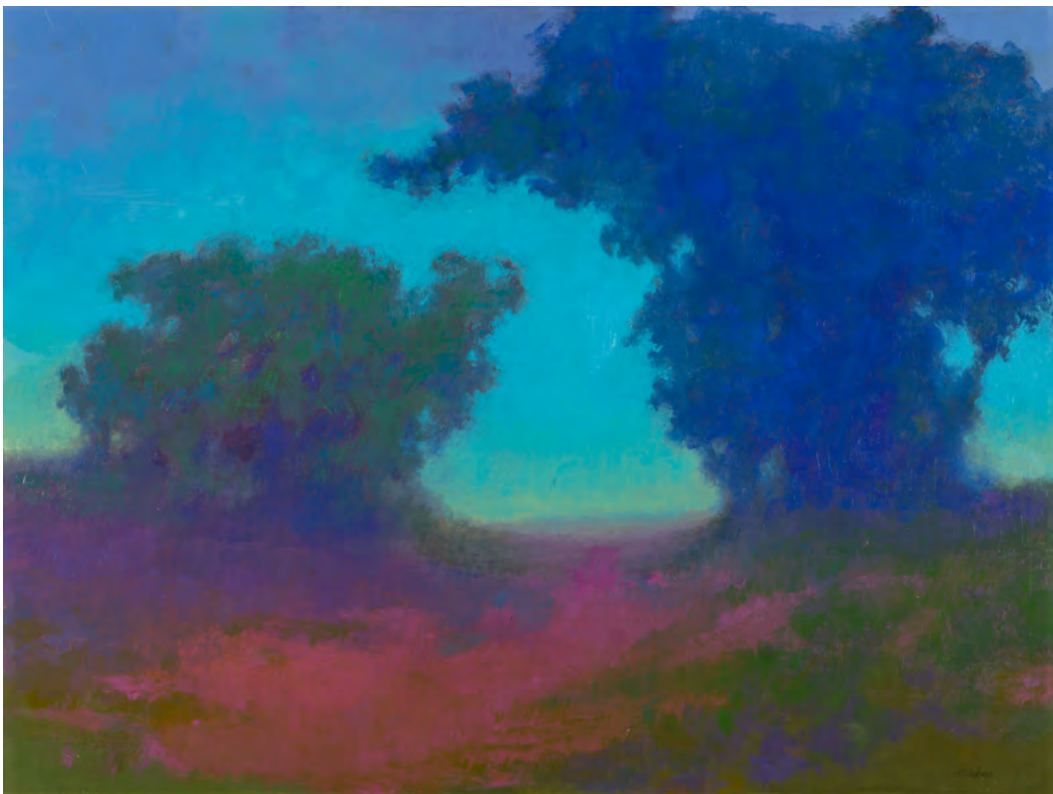
May 6 – June 23, 2023

Opening: Saturday, May 6, 6:00 – 8:00 pm

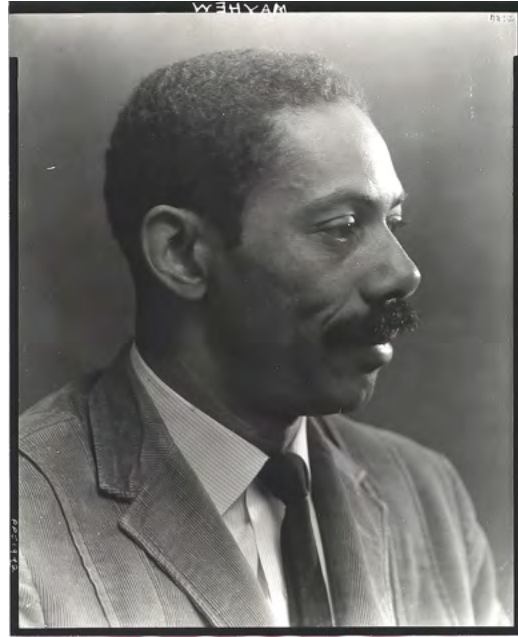
Venus Over Manhattan

39 Great Jones Street

New York, NY 10012



(New York, NY) – **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to present **Richard Mayhew: Natural Order**, the inaugural presentation at its new gallery space at **39 Great Jones Street**. This landmark exhibition, featuring some twenty paintings and works on paper, marks the gallery's debut exhibition with the artist, and features key loans from the collections of important supporters of Mayhew's practice. The only living member of the storied Spiral group, Richard Mayhew has achieved wide renown for lurid, improvisational paintings that render emotional visions of the American landscape. An artist of African American and Native American descent, Mayhew draws heavily on his relationship to his dual ancestry in his work, creating a unique visual language that explores the intersection of nature and culture, memory, and identity. Mayhew variously refers to these imagined terrains

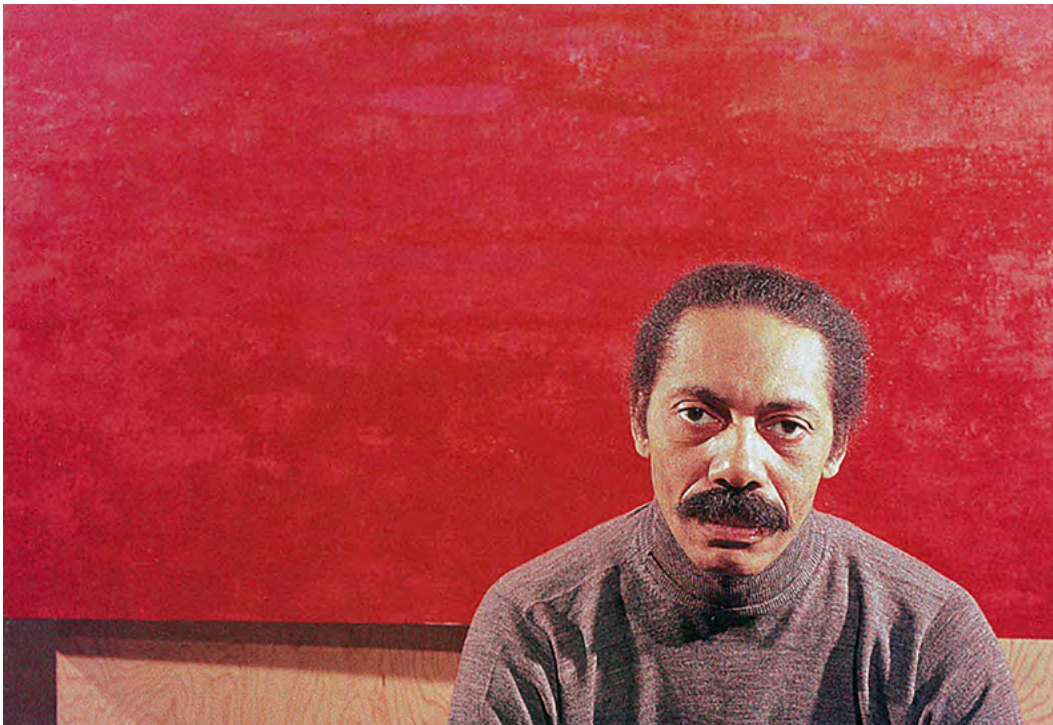


as “mindscapes” or “moodscapes,” locating his work in conversation with that of his forebears—American Tonalists George Inness and Edward Mitchell Bannister; his teachers Edwin Dickinson and Reuben Tam—as well as that of his contemporaries like Norman Lewis, Alma Thomas, Ed Clark, and Emma Amos. Mayhew continues to work at 99 years old, making paintings and works on paper that push the category of landscape to the verge of total abstraction, foregoing the trappings of representation in pursuit of pure color. A catalogue will accompany the exhibition, featuring a newly commissioned text on the artist and his work, and in September, the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art will open a survey of Mayhew’s work, titled “Richard Mayhew: Inner Terrain.” Venus Over Manhattan’s exhibition, will be on view from May 6 through June 23, 2023

Richard Mayhew was born in 1924 in Amityville, Long Island, to Alvin Mayhue and Lillian Corse Mayhue (the family later changed the spelling of their name to Mayhew). His parents were of Cherokee, Lumbee, Shinnecock, and African American descent; his grandmother Sarah Steele Mayhue encouraged his creativity and passion for the landscape from an early age. He started painting on the shores of Long Island Sound alongside James Willson Peale, who mentored him and encouraged his move to Brooklyn, in 1941. He studied at the Brooklyn Museum Art School with Edwin Dickinson, Reuben Tam, and spent time at the Cedar Tavern with Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock. Mayhew supported himself as a jazz singer and portrait painter at resorts in the Catskills and worked as an illustrator for children’s books and medical textbooks. His first solo exhibition, at the Morris Gallery, was positively reviewed in *Arts Magazine*, with critic Vernon Young writing “Mayhew paints so well in a realist idiom that his pictures, at first glance, are easy to take for granted. The second glance convinces one that Mayhew is a Tonalist.” A solo museum show followed in 1959 at the Brooklyn Museum.

Richard Mayhew speaks about his relationship to his dual heritage—African American and Native American—as a critical element in his life and work. Mayhew is of Cherokee, Lumbee, Shinnecock, and African American descent, and his cultural background has influenced his artistic style in significant ways. As Janet Berry Hess describes in her book on Mayhew's life and work, Mayhew's images "suggest the spiritual depth of the artist, but it is in the context of artistic production and community reception that they truly emerge as African American, and in their emphasis on land and lucidity that they reveal a heritage of Native American Spirituality." In this sense, his work assumes a political dimension; Mayhew has often said of his landscapes, "I'm painting my forty acres." Mayhew has titled several paintings and exhibitions of his work "Forty Acres and a Mule," referring to the history of Reconstruction, when freed slaves were "supposed to get forty acres and a mule. And they never got that. It's a whole land thing—and Native Americans [too]. It has to do with the treaties that were supposed to [give them land], which [have] never been honored. So that's part of the paintings [...] I'm involved with, the whole spiritual sensitivity and concern, which [becomes] landscape."

Richard Mayhew was a founding member of Spiral, a New York-based collective of African American artists that came together following the 1963 March on Washington to discuss their relationship to the civil rights movement and the shifting landscape of American art, culture, and politics. Mayhew is the only living member of the group, which included Charles Alston, Emma Amos, Romare Bearden, Calvin Douglass, Perry Ferguson, Reginald Gammon, Felrath Hines, Alvin Hollingsworth, Norman Lewis, William Majors, Earl Miller,





Merton Simpson, Hale Woodruff, and James Yeargans. Mayhew played a key role in the group, operating as a bridge between the collective's older and younger members. He participated in the group's first—and what became its only—exhibition, "First Group Showing (Works in Black and White)," which ran from May 14 through June 5, 1965, at 147 Christopher Street in New York. Mayhew continued to attend the group's weekly discussions at Romare Bearden's studio on Canal Street until the collective disbanded in 1965.

Mayhew found success early on in his career, showing with the Robert Isaacson Gallery, the Durlacher Brothers Gallery, and finally Midtown Galleries, where he exhibited for some 30 years. His exhibitions were consistently well-reviewed, and his work featured prominently in major exhibitions around the country. These included landmark shows like "30 Black Artists" at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Newark Museum's 1971 exhibition "Black Artists: Two Generations"; and Dr. David C. Driskell's monumental survey "Two Centuries of Black American Art," which opened at LACMA in 1976 and toured throughout the United States. He was active in the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, cofounded by Benny Andrews and Clifford R. Joseph in response to the Metropolitan Museum's exhibition "Harlem on My Mind," which omitted the work of African American painters and sculptors. The Studio Museum in Harlem mounted a retrospective of his work in 1978, and he features as the final entry in Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson's

tome *A History of African-American Artists from 1792 to the Present*. He won numerous awards during this period, including a MacDowell Residency, the John Hay Whitney Fellowship and a Grant from the Ingram Merrill Foundation, which allowed him to study at the Accademia di Belle Arte in Florence. In tandem with his practice, Mayhew devoted himself to teaching younger artists, and held positions at the Art Students League, Pratt Institute, and Smith College before ultimately earning a tenured professorship at Penn State University, where he taught until retiring in 1991.

In the past fifteen years, Richard Mayhew has begun to receive the attention he deserves. In 2008, the Telfair Museum of Art organized a retrospective of his work in Savannah, which was followed by a second retrospective in 2009 that spanned three venues, including the de Saisset Museum, the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco, and the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History. These exhibitions were accompanied by the first major catalogue of Mayhew's career. His renown has continued to grow through major institutional exhibitions, including "Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power," and "Acts of Art and Rebuttal in 1971." In 2020, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art announced a major gift from Pamela J. Joyner and Alfred Giuffrida, which included six major paintings by Richard Mayhew. The museum immediately displayed the works in their permanent collection galleries, where they garnered significant attention and praise. In 2022, the Heckscher Museum of Art mounted a retrospective of Mayhew's work, and the South Etna Montauk Foundation mounted a solo exhibition in Montauk. Now 99 years old, Mayhew continues to paint and inspire generations of artists who admire his work.

ABOUT RICHARD MAYHEW

Richard Mayhew was born in 1924 in Amityville, New York. He received his BFA from Columbia University in 1959 and studied at the Brooklyn Museum Art School, and the Art Students League under Edwin Dickinson, Max Beckmann, Reuben Tam, and Hans Hofmann. In 1978, The Studio Museum in Harlem hosted a retrospective exhibition of his work titled "Richard Mayhew: An American Abstractionist." Mayhew's work has been the subject of numerous international solo presentations, including recent exhibitions at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; South Etna Montauk Foundation, Montauk; Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, NY; Lois + David Stulberg Gallery, Ringling College, Sarasota, FL; Museum of the African Diaspora, San Francisco; Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History; the de Saisset Museum, Santa Clara; and Avram Gallery, Stonybrook University, Southampton, NY. Mayhew's work is frequently featured in major group exhibitions at institutions both stateside and abroad, including recent presentations at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT; Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, NY; Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, Athens, GA; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ; David Owsley Museum of Art, Ball State University, Muncie, IN; Hauser & Wirth, Southampton, NY; Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit; Smithsonian American

Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Portland Art Museum, Portland, ME; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn; The Broad, Los Angeles; Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, de Young Museum, San Francisco; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. His work is held in the permanent collections of numerous public institutions, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn; Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, de Young Museum, San Francisco; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; National Academy of Design, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among many others. Richard Mayhew is Professor Emeritus at Pennsylvania State University and previously taught at Sonoma State University, San José State University, Hunter College, Smith College, the Art Students League, Pratt Institute, and the Brooklyn Museum Art School. He is among the youngest members ever elected to the National Academy of Design, and is the recipient of the Brandywine Lifetime Achievement Award (formerly known as the James Van Der Zee Award); the Grumbacher Gold Medal; the Benjamin Altman Landscape Prize; the Henry Ward Ranger Purchase Award; the Hassam, Speicher, Betts and Symonds Fund Purchase Award; Prize, and the John Hay Whitney Fellowship, in addition to grants from the Ford Foundation, Ingram Merrill Foundation, and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation. Richard Mayhew lives and works in Soquel, California.

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

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

39 + 55 Great Jones Street
New York, NY 10012

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday
11:00 am – 6:00 pm

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IMAGE CREDITS

Richard Mayhew, *Mood Indigo*, c. 1995. Oil on canvas; 30 x 40 in (76.2 x 101.6 cm). Private Collection. Courtesy the artist and Venus Over Manhattan, New York.

Richard Mayhew, photographed by Peter A. Juley & Son, c. 1963. Photography Collection, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

Richard Mayhew with one of his paintings, c. 1974.

Richard Mayhew, *Montalvo*, 2005. Oil on canvas; 48 x 60 in (121.9 x 152.4 cm). Private Collection. Courtesy the artist and Venus Over Manhattan, New York.