

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

**IN MY ROOM:
ANA BENAROYA
TOM OF FINLAND
KARL WIRSUM**

June 8 – July 8, 2023
Opening: Thursday
June 8, 6:00 – 8:00 PM

Venus Over Manhattan
55 Great Jones Street
New York, NY 10012



(New York, NY) – **Venus Over Manhattan** is pleased to present **In My Room**, an exhibition showcasing works on paper and board by **Ana Benaroya**, **Tom of Finland**, and **Karl Wirsum**. This presentation comprises a series of seventeen new drawings by Ana Benaroya, alongside six pieces by Karl Wirsum from 1966-67, and three by Tom of Finland from the 1970s and 1980s. “In My Room,” the first exhibition to focus exclusively on Benaroya’s works on paper and to consider them in conversation with those of her forebears, explores questions of personal identity, queerness, and alternative art histories. The exhibition, accompanied by a publication featuring a new text by Emile Mausner, will open on Thursday, June 8, and remain on view at 55 Great Jones Street through July 8, 2023

Drawing inspiration from The Beach Boys song of the same title, “In My Room” pays homage to the introspective spaces of artistic production and delves into the intimate register of works on paper. The exhibition features a group of carefully selected drawings by Tom of Finland and Karl Wirsum, each of whom had a profound and personal impact on the development of Benaroya’s work.

Works on paper occupy a unique position within the landscape of artistic production, serving as platforms for creative experimentation and spontaneity. They can capture the fluidity of an artist’s thought process, create a roadmap for the development of later work, or offer deeply personal insights into an artist’s thinking. Although often viewed as preparatory or conditional, artists frequently create works on paper as complete pieces in their own right.

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Benaroya's new series of works on board reflects an impressive level of detail and finish while retaining the intimacy and experimental spirit usually associated with drawing. Her subjects—dynamic women in varied settings such as driving, lounging, smoking, horse-back riding—participate in Benaroya's reimagining of conventional art historical genres, and make visible forms of lesbian desire typically rendered latent or invisible. Drawn in vibrant colors with markers and India ink, Benaroya's women, muscular, voluptuous, and radiant with power, assert positions of strength, echoing the exaggerated bodies in Tom of Finland's drawings. This muscularity not only enhances their visual impact but also upends traditional power dynamics, imbuing her subjects with a strength that is both physical and symbolic. The graphic intensity of Benaroya's work is matched by their colorful and dynamic settings, which references both the language of illustration and comic books.

Discovering Tom of Finland's work during her undergraduate years at MICA, Benaroya was drawn to the joy, freedom, and queerness of the muscular male figures that pervade the artist's *oeuvre*. This exhibition features a group of three pencil drawings typical of the artist's style, evidencing a celebration of queer identity and desire that so resonated with Benaroya. Tom of Finland, a visionary pioneer in his field, courageously brought his personal desires to life through his explicit and lovingly rendered drawings long before they had found wide acceptance beyond the gay community. His work, characterized by its unapologetic and vivid portrayals of homosexual desire, helped to illuminate, liberate, and redefine societal perceptions of sexuality. Demonstrating both boldness and bravery, Tom of Finland translated his personal desires into a unique artistic expression, contributing significantly to the development of contemporary figuration.

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The visual intensity of Benaroya's work, paired with her deeply personal imagery, sets up an intriguing connection with a group of sketchbook drawings by Karl Wirsum, also on view. Pulled from a spiral-bound sketchbook and individually dated as though they were pages from a diary, Wirsum's drawings render the development of his personal iconography. Benaroya first encountered Karl Wirsum's work in 2014, in the exhibition "What Nerve! Alternative Figures in American Art, 1960 to the Present," at the RISD Museum. Wirsum's drawings, along with those of his peers from the Hairy Who and the wider group of Chicago Imagists, were a revelation, providing her with an alternative vision of art history to connect with. Wirsum's bold use of color, linework, comics, popular culture references, and humorous, monstrous figures resonated with Benaroya, inspiring her continued development of her signature style. Karl Wirsum, a founding member of the influential group of artists known as the Hairy Who, was steadfast in his pursuit of a deeply personal visual language, drawing influences from comic books and a multitude of diverse sources, often in defiance of contemporary tastes. His commitment to following his own creative vision tied him to other members of the group, embodying their shared ethos of favoring the personal over the prevailing. Culled from sketchbooks from 1966 and 1967—the same years as the first Hairy Who exhibition—the group of six works on view in this exhibition exemplifies this approach, featuring powerful and alluring women, vividly rendered in bold colors and strong lines, reflecting Wirsum's distinctive style and artistic vision.

"In My Room" not only celebrates the talents of these three artists and the impact of formative influences but also highlights their shared dedication to the pursuit of an individual visual identity. By bringing together the works of Ana Benaroya, Tom of Finland, and Karl Wirsum, the exhibition proposes an alternative lineage of figuration, and suggests the liberation that comes with a dedication to a personal artistic language.

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ABOUT ANA BENAROYA

Ana Benaroya (b. 1986, New York City, NY) lives and works in Jersey City. She holds a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), and an MFA from the Yale University School of Art. Benaroya's work has been the subject of numerous solo presentations, including recent exhibitions at Carl Kostyál, Stockholm and London; Ross + Kramer Gallery, New York; Postmasters Gallery, New York; and the Masur Museum, Monroe, Louisiana. Her work features frequently in major group exhibitions both stateside and abroad, including recent presentations at Almine Rech, Paris; Adler Beatty, New York; Allouche Benias Gallery, Athens; and the International Print Center, New York. Benaroya's work is held in the permanent collections of many public institutions, including the Bass Museum, Miami; the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, New York; the Mint Museum, Charlotte; the Pérez Art Museum, Miami; and Zuzem Art Centre, Riga, among others.

ABOUT TOM OF FINLAND

Tom of Finland (Touko Laaksonen, 1920-1991) is widely regarded as one of the twentieth century's most influential artists for his groundbreaking representation of the male figure. In his youth, Tom trained at an advertising school, but what he would come to call his "dirty drawings," which he first began developing as a teenager, were the true focus of his attention, both during this formative period and throughout the entirety of his life. These masterful renderings of virile men engrossed in acts of homoerotic desire can be approached along several interpretative lines—art historical, social, technical—but each of them points to the revolutionary nature of his project. A master draftsman, whose passion for both his medium and his subject matter enabled him to become a powerful cultural force, Tom gave form to an imaginative universe that in turn helped fuel real-world liberation movements and enabled gay men to access their strength in new ways. Tom's drawings reaffirm the centrality of sexuality, joy, and the body in all areas of human endeavor.

"Tom of Finland: Bold Journey," a solo exhibition featuring over six decades of the artist's work is on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Finland from April 28 through October 29, 2023. Tom of Finland has been the subject of numerous solo and two-person exhibitions across the globe, including "Tom of Finland – The Darkroom," Fotografiska, Stockholm, Tallinn, Estonia, and New York (2020–2021); "Tom of Finland: Love and Liberation," House of Illustration, London (2020); "Reality & Fantasy: The World of Tom of Finland," Gallery X, Tokyo and Osaka (2020); "TOM House: The Work and Life of Tom of Finland," Mike Kelley's Mobile Homestead, Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (2018); "The Pleasure of Play," Artists Space, New York (2015) and Kunsthalle Helsinki (2016); and "Bob Mizer & Tom of Finland," Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2013). Recent group exhibitions include "Art & Porn," ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Aarhus, Denmark, and

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Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2020); "Camp: Notes on Fashion," Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2019); "Keep Your Timber Limber (Works on Paper)," Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2013); and "We the People," Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York (2012). His work is in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Helsinki; Art Institute of Chicago; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, among many other institutions. The Tom of Finland Foundation is represented by David Kordansky Gallery, New York/Los Angeles.

ABOUT KARL WIRSUM

Karl Wirsum (1939–2021) lived and worked in Chicago until his death. His work has recently been included in "Hairy Who? 1966-1969" at the Art Institute of Chicago; "How Chicago! Imagists 1960s and 70s" at Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London and De La Warr Pavilion in East Sussex, UK; "3D-Doings: The Imagist Object in Chicago Art, 1964-1980" at The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, Saratoga Springs, NY. Wirsum was also featured in "Famous Artists from Chicago" at the Fondazione Prada, Milan, Italy; "America is Hard to See" at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; "What Nerve!" at Matthew Marks Gallery and the RISD Museum of Art; "Sinister Pop" at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; "Made in Chicago: The Koffler Collection" at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C; and "Seeing is a Kind of Thinking: A Jim Nutt Companion" at Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago. Wirsum's works are in numerous public collections such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Modern Art, High Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and RISD Art Museum. The Estate of Karl Wirsum is represented by Derek Eller Gallery, New York.

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

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GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday
10:00 am – 6:00 pm

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IMAGE CREDITS

Drawing announcing “In My Room: Ana Benaroya, Tom of Finland, Karl Wirsum” at Venus Over Manhattan, New York, by Ana Benaroya. Ana Benaroya, *Chantilly Lace*, 2023. Marker and India ink on archival Bristol board; 20 x 15 in (50.8 x 38.1 cm). Tom of Finland, *Untitled (Preparatory Drawing)*, c. 1981. Graphite on paper; 11 1/2 x 8 1/4 in (29.2 x 21 cm). Ana Benaroya, *Evergreen*, 2023. India ink and marker on Bristol board; 23 x 26 1/2 in (58.4 x 67.3 cm). Karl Wirsum, *Untitled*, 1966. Ink on paper; 14 x 11 in (35.6 x 27.9 cm).

Images of work by Ana Benaroya: courtesy the artist and Venus Over Manhattan, New York. Images of work by Tom of Finland: Courtesy Tom of Finland Foundation, David Kordansky Gallery, New York/Los Angeles, and Venus Over Manhattan, New York. Images of work by Karl Wirsum: Courtesy the Estate of Karl Wirsum, Derek Eller Gallery, New York, and Venus Over Manhattan, New York.