

# VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

## RETINAL HYSTERIA CURATED BY ROBERT STORR

November 16, 2023 – January 13, 2024

Opening: Thursday, November 16th, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

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



(New York, NY) – Beginning November 16, 2023, **Venus Over Manhattan** will present **Retinal Hysteria**, an expansive two-venue exhibition curated by **Robert Storr**, who was previously Senior Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, and Dean of the Yale University School of Art.

Featuring works by more than forty artists, *Retinal Hysteria* draws its inspiration from *Eye Infection*, the landmark 2001–2002 exhibition presented to critical acclaim by the Stedelijk Museum. Curated by Jan Christiaan Braun, *Eye Infection* achieved enduring international impact—and influence that continues today—via Storr’s accompanying catalogue essay, a tour de force that captured and advanced the maverick sensibility shared by the exhibition’s five artists: a small cadre of Americans united by their interest in the unsightly aspects of contemporary life, a challenge to establishment and avant-garde standards, a flair for blending meticulous facture with audacious vulgarity, and a distinct linguistic style frequently misread as mere jest or anti-intellectualism.

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Now, almost a quarter century later, Storr revisits these central concerns and expands upon them in the present tense by organizing a cross-generational array of works that irritate, provoke, and unsettle, all against the backdrop of a world he perceives as “coming apart at its seams.” At the heart of *Retinal Hysteria* are key works by artists included in *Eye Infection*—R. Crumb, Jim Nutt, and Peter Saul—who are here joined by a host of others, including historical figures and contemporary artists ranging in age from 32 to 89, who share a vigorous dedication to what Storr terms “disorienting intensity.”

Most works on view have never been presented publicly, with the majority created expressly for this exhibition.

*Retinal Hysteria* will include works by **Elliott Arkin, Ana Benaroya, Judith Bernstein, Ashley Bickerton, Louise Bourgeois, Robert Colescott, George Condo, Patricia Cronin, R. Crumb, Steve DiBenedetto, Carroll Dunham, Mark Thomas Gibson, Mark Greenwold, Daniel Herwitt, Julia Jacquette, Kim Jones, Jamian Juliano-Villani, Deborah Kass, Martin Kersels, Maria Lassnig, Asher Liftin, Paul McCarthy, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Woody De Othello, Gary Panter, Ed Paschke, Joyce Pensato, Lamar Peterson, Raymond Pettibon, Peter Saul, Sally Saul, Dana Schutz, Jim Shaw, James Siena, Art Spiegelman, Robert Storr, Keiichi Tanaami, Chibuïke Uzoma, Kara Walker, Rebecca Warren, John Waters, Robert Williams, S. Clay Wilson, Karl Wirsum, and David Wojnarowicz.**

Spanning both of Venus Over Manhattan’s exhibition spaces at 39 and 55 Great Jones Street, *Retinal Hysteria* will be on view from November 16, 2023, through January 6, 2024. An exhibition publication will be released in conjunction with the exhibition.

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## CURATORIAL STATEMENT

"Hysteria," as Wikipedia would have it, is "ungovernable emotional excess." To his lasting shame the good doctor Sigmund Freud deemed it a predominantly feminine complaint in line with the theories of his mentor, Jean-Martin Charcot who documented—and staged—the paroxysms of passion that plagued his oversexed, underserved female patients. Their spasms are illustrated by numerous, photos, drawings and prints that Charcot published, images that later inspired Louise Bourgeois, who was fascinated by the iconography of women in distress, to make still more hysterical renditions of their agony. But as even the Parisian madhouse clinician and the Viennese mental conjurer knew hysteria could afflict men as well as women, and the whole body as well as the womb whence it was originally thought to emanate.

This show is devoted to how it affects vision. Indeed, to how the eye engenders it in traumatic conditions such as those we have been going through. Disorienting intensity has been the main criteria for selection instead of medium or manner. Stylistic affiliation has been of no concern to me whatsoever: Funk, Imagism, Underground Comix, you name it, are all just temporary labels for the expressive imperatives characteristic of Retinal Hysteria.

I have also played fast and loose with chronology since it is a recurring phenomena. We saw it aplenty in the 1960s and 1970s when the world appeared to be coming apart

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at the seams. The world is indubitably doing so again now. Whether crisis and chaos prompt hysteria in artists, or whether it is more a matter of how they trigger audience reception within the general public is a question for professors. I am interested in experience – at its height. So welcome to rooms full-to-overflowing with images that vibrate with panic, uncontrollable anger, out-of-control laughter, orgasmic release and the sheer vertigo of living in a state of hypersensitivity to the disparate stimuli of, quoting one of Retinal Hysteria's modern masters, H.C. Westermann, "a world gone nuts!"

– Robert Storr, Brooklyn, June 2023

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## GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday  
10:00 am – 6:00 pm

## PRESS CONTACT

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## IMAGE CREDITS

David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (Alien Mind)*, 1984. Courtesy the Estate of David Wojnarowicz, P.P.O.W., New York. Ana Benaroya, *You're Good Girl's Gonna Go Bad*, 2023. Courtesy the artist. Joyce Pensato, *The Original Mickey*, 2018. Private Collection. Robert Colescott, *6 Witnesses*, 1968. © 2023 The Robert H. Colescott Separate Property Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy of The Trust, BLUM, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo, and Venus Over Manhattan, New York. Mark Thomas Gibson, *The Dinner Party*. Courtesy the artist. Portrait of Robert Storr. Courtesy Robert Storr. Jim Shaw, *Large Trump Chaos II*, 2017. Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery. All images additionally courtesy Venus Over Manhattan, New York.