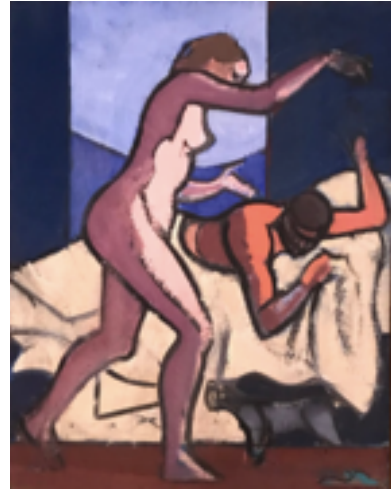


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Press Release:
PARIS/ NEW YORK/ NEXUS
March 14 - April 15, 2018
Opening Reception:
Wednesday, March 14, 6 - 8pm
208 Forsyth Street, New York, NY



Leland Bell, Two Figures and a Cat,
1980, oil on linen, 22 x 17

SHFAP presents PARIS/NEW YORK/NEXUS, an exhibition of five American painters two French artists. They were figurative painters working in Paris after World War II through the 60s and 70s. These artists saw representational painting as a living language when historical tendencies seemed stacked against them. The American artists include Leland Bell, Robert De Niro Sr, Anne Harvey, Jean Helion, Louisa Matthiasdottir, and Bob Thompson, along with Balthus and Jean Helion from France.

Louisa Matthiasdor went to France as an eighteen year old, before World War II, to study with the popular cubist teacher Marcel Gromaire. After the war, she came to America and studied with Hans Hofmann. Through another Hofmann student, Albert Kresch, she met her future husband Leland Bell. Her paintings in this show come from the early seventies when she and Bell worked together in Paris.

Bob Thompson came to Provincetown, MA (where Hofmann taught) from Louisville, Kentucky when he was eighteen years old. Thompson's meteoric career started in Provincetown where he gravitated to the painter Gandy Brodie, whose rough totemic figures inspired him. He also discovered the figural expressionism of Hofmann alum Jan Muller, who had only just died. Muller's widow, Dodie, encouraged Thompson to work from the old masters, which lead to his travels in Spain, France and Italy.

Robert Di Niro Sr. was a life-long Francophile. After his studies with Hans Hoffman, his personal mythology was centered around French culture. In the early 60s, he finally made his way to France in a heartfelt yet difficult voyage. He had access to the Louvre, and he worked from the painters that inspired him, such as Ingres and Mantegna. He

steven harvey fine art projects

208 forsyth street new york ny 10002

p 917 861 7312 e info@shfap.com w www.shfap.com

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worked in some incredibly dire studio conditions, not far from Bob Thompson, who was there concurrently.

Anne Harvey's story is different from the other American painters. Her family took her to France when she was still a girl. Along with her mother and aunts, she spent the rest of her life there as an expatriate. From Chicago and New York, the family came to France to live affordably after the depression. They honed into the artistic currents of French culture. Anne Harvey was mentored by Brancusi when she was 18 years old. She painted a major portrait of him, now in the collection of the Pierre and Gaetana Matisse Foundation. Her work made in the early 1930s, when she was just coming into her twenties, shows the influence of early figural Miro, whom she knew. Anne came back to America during World War II with her mother, and after the war immediately returned to France where she worked until she died in 1967.

Jean Helion was an abstract painter before he fought in the French army during WWII, during which he was captured by the Germans. He escaped from the German prison camp and went to America and wrote the bestselling memoir, "They Shall Not Have Me." After the war, his work had changed from abstraction to figuration. In New York, Helion lived on Hudson Street with Pegeen Guggenheim, where coincidentally Leland Bell was his building superintendent. Going to the super's apartment for help with a problem, the French painter was shocked at the level of artistic sophistication displayed by the American building super, who happened to be his greatest fan.

Leland Bell became the central apologist for Helion in America. He had followed a similar formal path in his own work moving from high modern abstraction, influenced by Arp, into figuration. Like Helion, Bell's forms contained hosts of abstract shapes. Helion had said that it was impossible to be an abstract painter after the war. Bell became the embodiment of this zeitgeist. RB Kitaj characterized Bell's work as, "a world view of daily existence at the level of myth."

Balthus embraced all the trappings of old master painting and the revolutionary 19th century modernity of the painter Courbet, meanwhile side-stepping current mid-century concerns with abstraction. He and Helion were friends who offered the younger Americans a way to look at figuration as a noble yet practical path at a time when representational painting seemed to be on the wane in relation to abstract expressionism.

These artists incorporated modernist French painting (from Matisse, Derain and others) into a new kind of figuration. Bell, Helion, Thompson, De Niro, Matthiasdottir, and Harvey painted as though their expanded figuration was the most exciting discovery of the 20th century. As though they could build a whole new world on the shoulders of Matisse, Giacometti, Bonnard, and Derain.

Please contact Lauren Fowler at lauren@shfap.com or call 917-861-7312 for more information or images.