

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

EMANUEL PROWELLER: SURFACE SENSIBLE

October 13 - November 7, 2022

Opening: Thursday, October 13th, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Venus Over Manhattan

120 East 65th Street

New York, NY 10065



(New York, NY) – Beginning October 13th, **Venus Over Manhattan** will present ***Emanuel Proweller: Surface Sensible*** the first US exhibition since 1963 to showcase the work of the Polish-French artist and his pioneering approach to figuration. This landmark presentation, organized in close collaboration with the artist's daughter, Élisabeth Brami-Proweller, comprises more than twenty works spanning the artist's nearly six-decade career.

Emanuel Proweller: Surface Sensible will be on view at Venus Over Manhattan's uptown location at 120 East 65th Street from October 13th through November 7th, 2022.

Emanuel Proweller was born in 1918 to a Jewish family in the city of Lwów located on the then-Polish border of Ukraine. Proweller's interest in painting emerged in his youth



and flourished through his special interest in the work of Cézanne. Pressured by family to undertake studies in architecture, he began painting in his free time while at Lwów Polytechnic. In 1941, upon the outbreak of World War II, Proweller and his family were sent to a Nazi labor camp. The only member of his family to survive the genocide, Proweller escaped death by assuming the false identity of Anatol Wroblewski in 1942, effectively concealing his Jewish identity. The artist would work and live most of his adult life in France, moving to Paris after the war in 1948 with his wife Rena and young daughter Élisabeth. There, he and his family shed their pseudonym and were restored as Prowellers.

Paris would play a major role in both Proweller's life and artistic practice: he later reflected that Paris represented an opportunity "to emerge from the tragic chaos of the past towards reconciliation, contemplation, a certain joy, where life is still worth living." The theme of a new life and an appreciation for the everyday that followed their move to Paris proved essential to Proweller's artistic practice throughout his career.

While he had shown his work as a student in Lwów in several small exhibitions, Proweller was fully inaugurated as an artist and a member of the post-war Parisian scene in 1950 with his inclusion in the group exhibition "Espaces Nouveaux" at Galerie Denise René. There his work was presented alongside that of such peers as Alexander Calder, Le Corbusier, Serge Poliakoff, Alberto Magnelli, and Gérard Schneider, among others. Particularly important during his early years in Paris was his relationship with the Galerie Colette Allendy, who mounted his first solo exhibition in 1951, and five subsequent shows between 1952 and 1958. The gallery positioned Proweller's work at the forefront of the avant-garde, alongside artists who became his friends and compatriots, like Francis Picabia, Serge Poliakoff, Yves Klein, and Albert Gleizes. At this time, Proweller's painterly practice was firmly focused on geometric abstraction; his works of this time rendered blocks and angular shapes through vibrant color formulations, often via mixing each new shade and never using the same mixture twice. Proweller described how deconstruction of elements into



pure geometric forms enabled him to engage with the essential form of the subject, writing: “the objective element, the subject, is for me a pure, ideal geometric form.”

Proweller’s relationship to the subject of his work evolved, ultimately pushing him to depart from geometric forms and, in 1953, to include hints of figural elements in his paintings, exemplified by increasingly round, soft shapes, which he rendered superimposed against prismatic backgrounds or firm fields of primary color. During the early 1950s, such organic shapes would come together in unpredictable ways that whispered toward familiar scenes and subjects. Proweller’s early exploration into the world of figuration during a time when abstraction still dominated has led critics and historians to remark upon the ways in which his evolution remarkably preceded *La Nouvelle Figuration*—the movement with which Proweller soon found himself loosely affiliated. The artist would later state that his “return to figuration was a true love story (*Le retour à la figuration fut pour moi une véritable histoire d’amour*).”

In 1959, Proweller and his family moved to the Parisian suburb of Créteil. There, the artist took as his subject scenes from his quotidian family life and neighborhood. As his daughter Élisabeth Brami-Proweller describes, he “threw himself into highlighting the sublime of ordinary life.” Indeed, by the mid-1960s and ‘70s Proweller unapologetically embraced the figure and produced works that celebrate the simple moments of life, placing color at the forefront of his narratives. He deployed his unique approach to mixing and applying contrasting pigments to delineate forms, highlighting the essential elements of his subjects, and carving out the shape of objects in space. Color would play a starring role throughout Proweller’s lifelong negotiation between abstraction and figuration. Or, as he put it, “I put my only hope in color.”

Proweller received criticism during his lifetime for moving between different modes of representation. In recent years, however, many have come to view to his rejection of one style or visual language as a profound defining attribute of Proweller’s practice. While the artist would return to geometric abstraction in the 1960s and then turn back to figural

modes again, his deft negotiation of these disparate modes of expression are what many critics and curators today cite as further proof of Proweller's singularity and true contemporaneity.

ABOUT EMANUEL PROWELLER

Emanuel Proweller was born in Lwów, Poland (now Ukraine) in 1918. Between 1936 and 1940, he studied architecture at Lwów Polytechnic. His work has been the subject of numerous international solo exhibitions at both public institutions and galleries, including recent presentations at Galerie Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Vallois, Paris; Villa Montebello, Trouville-sur-Mer; Galerie Convergences, Paris; Group d'art contemporain, Annonay; Galerie du Centre, Paris; and Musée de l'Abbaye de Sainte-Croix, Les Sables d'Olonne. Proweller's work is frequently included in major group presentations, including exhibitions at Galerie Prisme, Paris; Centre d'art contemporain, Châteauevert; Château Lescombes, Eysines; and Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix, Les Sables d'Olonne. His work is held in the permanent collections of public institutions including Musée de l'Abbaye de Sainte Croix, Les Sables d'Olonne; Fonds National d'Art Contemporain (FNAC), Paris; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; and Villa Tamaris, Centre d'Art, la Seyne-sur-Mer. Proweller lived and worked in Créteil until his death in 1981.

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

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120 East 65th Street
New York, NY 10065

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday
10:00 am – 6:00 pm

PRESS CONTACT

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IMAGE CREDITS

Madame Parelou, Créteil, 1967. Oil on canvas; 25 9/16 x 36 3/16 in (65 x 92 cm). Photo: © Clérin-Morin.
Pied (5 ronds), 1960. Oil on cardboard; 19 5/8 x 12 3/4 in (50 x 32.5 cm). Photo: D.R.
Chat dévorant un oiseau, 1961. Oil on canvas; 31 7/8 x 39 5/16 in (81 x 100 cm). Photo: D.R.
Le couple, 1972. Oil on canvas; 35 x 45 5/8 in (89 x 116 cm). Photo: D.R.
L'Artiste et son modèle, ou Autoportrait « œil de bœuf », 1967. Oil on canvas and oval wooden panel; 21 5/8 x 26 3/4 in (55 x 68 cm). Photo: © Clérin-Morin.

All images of works by Emanuel Proweller: Courtesy the Estate of Emanuel Proweller, Venus Over Manhattan, New York, and Galerie GP & N Vallois, Paris.