

**News Release
Public Information
Department**

November 2000

Retrospective of Leon Golub Paintings on View at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, May 18–August 19, 2001

Press Preview Thursday, May 17, 10 a.m. to Noon

Leon Golub: Paintings, 1950–2000, an exhibition of some thirty-five works depicting the effects of individual and institutional power, will be presented from May 18 through August 19, 2001 at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the final venue of an international tour. These expressive political paintings, many of which are mural-sized, explore issues of race, violence, war, and human suffering.

Golub, who has always painted in a unique figural style, draws upon diverse representations of the body from ancient Greek and Roman sculpture, to photographs of athletic competitions, to gay pornography; often pulled directly from a huge database he has assembled of journalistic images from the mass media. He has likened his painting process to sculptural technique and employs a method of layering and scraping away paint, sometimes using a meat cleaver, leaving varying amounts of canvas untouched.

Born in Chicago in 1922, Golub received his B.A. in Art History from the University of Chicago in 1942. From 1947 to 1949 he studied, under the G.I. Bill, at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he met the artist Nancy Spero, to whom he has been married for nearly fifty years. In Chicago he became involved with other painters, known as the *Monster Roster* group, who believed that an observable connection to the external world and to actual events was essential if a painting was to have any relevance to the viewer or society. This is a view that has informed Golub's work throughout his career.

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Included in the exhibition are works from the 1950s that are based on a single totemic figure and were intended to portray the post-war sensibility and systems of power and conflict. These figures refer to classical mythology and portray kings, warriors, and shamans, as well as hybrid man-and-beast monsters, among them *The Bug (War Machine)*(1953); *Prince Sphinx*(1955); and *Birth III* (1956); a part of a series inspired by Golub's becoming a father. An extended trip to Italy in 1956 deepened his interest in Roman and Etruscan art and influenced works such as *Fallen Warrior (Burnt Man)* (1959) and *Gigantomachy II* (1966), which reference the warriors of classical art.

From 1959 through 1964 Golub and his family lived in Paris, a move occasioned in part by the belief that Europe would be more receptive to his figural style. During this period Golub's work increased in size because of larger available studio space and the inspiration of the French tradition of large-scale history painting. He also switched from using lacquer to acrylics, turned leaving more of the surface unpainted, and began to grind the paint directly into the canvas.

When Golub returned to New York, the Vietnam War was escalating, and he responded with his two series: *Napalm and Vietnam*, which are represented in the exhibition by *Napalm I* (1969), which marks a transition in the artist's work from generic to specific social issues, and the wall-sized *Vietnam II* (1973), which depicts the bodies of civilians under attack.

In the mid-seventies Golub was beset with self-doubt. He destroyed nearly every work he produced during this period and nearly abandoned painting. In the late seventies, however, he produced more than a hundred portraits of public figures, among them political leaders, dictators, and religious figures. *Leon Golub: Paintings 1950–2000* includes several portraits of Nelson Rockefeller and Ho Chi Minh, along with images of Fidel Castro, Francisco Franco, Richard Nixon, and Henry Kissinger.

In the 1980s Golub turned his attention to terrorism in a variety of forms, from the subversive operations of governments to urban street violence. Killing fields, torture chambers, bars, and brothels became inspiration and subject for work that dealt with such themes as violent aggression, racial inequality, gender ambiguity, oppression, and exclusion. Among the work produced in this period are the series *Mercenaries*, *Interrogation*, *Riot*, and *Horsing Around*, examples of which are included in the exhibition. *Horsing Around III* (1983) and *Two Black Women and A White Man*, (1986), containing images that resonate with racial and sexual tension, have broad cultural and psychological meanings.

From the nineties to the present, Golub's work has shifted toward the illusionistic, with forms now semi-visible, and appropriating graphic styles from ancient carvings, medieval manuscripts, and contemporary graffiti. As an older person now considering mortality, he has moved towards themes of separation, loss, and death. Text appears in many of the paintings and is combined with a series of symbolic references, including dogs, lions, skulls, and skeletons.

Golub's work has been seen in solo exhibitions throughout the world, among them *World Wide* (1991), a Grand Lobby project at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. For *World Wide* the artist created a process, repeated in exhibitions at several other museums, by which he enlarged images and details from his paintings and screened them on transparent sheets of vinyl, hung so that they surround the viewer. He has also been represented in many group exhibitions and was one of the few white artists included in *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1994.

Leon Golub: Paintings 1950–2000 was organized by the Irish Museum of Modern Art, where it was curated by Jon Bird. The presentation of this exhibition at the BMA has been organized by Associate Curator, Brooke Kamin Rapaport, Department of Contemporary Art and is supported, in part, by a generous contribution from The Broad Art Foundation. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue, *Leon Golub: Echoes of the Real*, by Jon Bird, published by Reaktion Books.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Admission:

Contribution \$4; students with valid I.D. and older adults \$2. Free to Members and children under 12 accompanied by an adult. Group tours or visits can be arranged through the Education Division, ext. 234.

Directions:

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (2 or 3) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop. Bus: B71, B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available.

Museum Hours:

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
First Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; all other Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Museum Caf open until 4 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday and holidays. Museum Libraries and Archives are open by appointment. Museum shops are open 10:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; till 6 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.