

# BERGGRUEN

GALLERY

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## NATHAN OLIVEIRA: A SURVEY, 1959-2010

September 6 – October 13, 2018

Berggruen Gallery is pleased to present *Nathan Oliveira: A Survey, 1959-2010*, an exhibition of paintings, watercolors, monotypes, and sculptures by Bay Area artist Nathan Oliveira. This show marks the gallery's thirteenth solo exhibition of Oliveira's work since his first show at Berggruen in 1979. The exhibition will be on view September 6 through October 13, 2018. The gallery will host an opening reception on Thursday, September 6 from 5:00 to 8:00pm.

Spanning over a half-century, this exhibition highlights Oliveira's iconic work from his rise to fame in the 1950s through his final years. The evolution of his artistic practice exists in his myriad subjects and styles across a range of media, yet an inherent sense of raw emotion and complexity unites his body of work to express Oliveira's unique translation of the world around him. The artist does not follow a disciplined approach to painting or drawing but rather explores the spectrum of pure emotion and beauty achieved by artistic gesture. The physical act of creation is emphasized through textural compositions imbued with a sense of energy and motion, allowing expressive brushstrokes to bring to life a human figure, an animal, or a place. The content and style of his work thus becomes a vehicle by which one can establish an intimate connection to the art object, as a certain tension between representation and abstraction incites emotional engagement and contemplation. The psychological probing of Oliveira's work thus derives from the artist's dynamic engagement with both his medium and his subject, for he does not merely create a representation but rather crafts an intimate moment between the viewer and the art object. Thick, textured brushstrokes, volumetric pools of paint, and jagged undulations of metal form a body of work grounded in an enigmatic evocation of raw and complex beauty, while vacant, decontextualized backgrounds invite the viewer to enter an otherworldly atmosphere outside of discernable space and time.

Oliveira brings his subjects to life through the experimental manipulation of his medium. Evocative surfaces, bold lines, and complex compositional arrangements create an impression of physical and emotional complexity, while a vivid spectrum of strong colors reveal dramatic sensitivities to light, creating a soft and intriguing luminosity that animates the atmosphere surrounding the central subject of the work. Meanwhile, the body positioning of his figurative subjects create dynamic spatial relationships that draw the eye across the work. Inspired by European artists such as Beckmann, Munch, Dubuffet, and Giacometti, Oliveira's work pays homage to pioneers of early twentieth century art, as they grappled with finding a mode of representation to describe their multifaceted world. As this exhibition demonstrates, while Oliveira's style has been associated with Abstract Expressionism, his continual penchant for figuration remains the cornerstone of his work as a leading figure of the Bay Area Figurative Movement. Embedded throughout his artistic output during these years is a probing of relationships between humanity, animals, and place – subjects continually reworked and reimagined to create a vision of life that is at once timeless and futuristic. While no single idiom nor style defines his artistic practice, at the heart of Oliveira's painting and drawing is a powerful interplay of representation and abstraction. His graceful balance between the two tinges his body of work with a theatrical bravura that remains simultaneously elegant and formal.

Nathan Oliveira was born in Oakland, California in 1928 to a family of Portuguese immigrants. He studied painting and printmaking at the California College of Arts and Crafts (now the California College of the Arts, or CCAC) in Oakland, and in the summer of 1950 with Max Beckmann at Mills College in Oakland. After two years in the U.S. Army as a cartographic draftsman, he began teaching painting in 1955 at CCAC and drawing and printmaking at the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute, or SFAI). In 1959 Oliveira was the youngest painter included in the groundbreaking exhibition, *New Images of Man*, which included

10 HAWTHORNE STREET  
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94105  
TEL 415 781 4629  
INFO@BERGGRUEN.COM  
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established artists such as Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Since then he held numerous guest teaching appointments at various art schools and universities. He held a tenured teaching position at Stanford University from 1964 until he retired in 1995. During his career, surveys of his work were held at the Art Gallery of the University of California, Los Angeles (1963); Oakland Museum of California (1973); California State University, Long Beach (1980); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1984); California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco (1997); and the San Jose Museum of Art (2002). Oliveira was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1994 and has received many other awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, two honorary doctorates, and, in 2000, membership in a distinguished order conferred by the government of Portugal. His work is collected nationally and is held in the collections of many distinguished institutions, including the Art Institute of Chicago; the Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh; the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Oliveira passed away in 2010 at his home in Palo Alto, California.

*Nathan Oliveira: A Survey, 1959-2010*, September 6 – October 13, 2018. On view at 10 Hawthorne Street, San Francisco, CA 94105. Images and preview are available upon request. For all inquiries, please contact the gallery by phone (415) 781-4629 or by email [info@berggruen.com](mailto:info@berggruen.com).

Gallery Hours: Monday – Friday, 10:00am – 6:00pm  
Saturday, 11:00am – 5:00pm

## About Berggruen Gallery

John Berggruen first opened his pioneering gallery in the spring of 1970 on Grant Avenue in downtown San Francisco. Berggruen Gallery opened in its new 10,000-square-foot space at 10 Hawthorne Street, an historic three-story brick building across from the recently expanded San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, on January 13, 2017. The gallery specializes in contemporary art and 20<sup>th</sup>-century American and European paintings, drawings, sculpture, and limited edition prints. The gallery exhibits the work of major American post-war artists as well as established and emerging contemporary artists, such as Alicia McCarthy, Julie Mehretu, Richard Serra, Mark Tansey, George Condo, Bridget Riley, and Tauba Auerbach. In addition, Berggruen Gallery presents curated exhibitions of historic works by artists, including those of the Bay Area Figurative movement, such as Richard Diebenkorn, Nathan Oliveira, and David Park, as well as Alexander Calder, Willem de Kooning, Mark di Suvero, Ellsworth Kelly, Henri Matisse, Georgia O'Keeffe, Ed Ruscha, Frank Stella, and Wayne Thiebaud.

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