

Figuratively Speaking

A new exhibition at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery reveals artistic heritage.

Through January 20

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

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The paintings of Irving Norman (1906–1989) are beautifully terrifying. Their bright colors and intense patterns convey images of societal dysfunction. The singer-songwriter Graham Nash recalled looking at the paintings with the artist in 1972, “The images were stunning, almost as if George Orwell’s 1984-ish nightmare

had been brought vividly to life.”

He continued, “I felt a great affinity with Irving; it seemed our souls had met before, that he and I were part and parcel of the same person, a person who wanted to make this crazy, beautiful/awful world a better place for our children and grandchildren. I believe he recognized my passion for singing about the world as it really was, not as the state-controlled media would portray it, and his work affected me on deep, deep, level.”

Years later, at the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery in New York, he saw several of Norman’s paintings. “In particular *Supreme Justice*, 1974, resonated with me,” he relates, “the Supreme Court justices with their closed, blind eyes and

their empty notepads is so disturbing in light of what is happening today in our country. One has to have great courage to speak truth to power and Irving Norman found that courage, time and time again.”

Supreme Justice has returned to the Michael Rosenfeld Gallery for the exhibition, *Figuratively Speaking*, through January 20. The work in the exhibition ranges from the classic magic realism of Jared French (1905–1987), Paul Cadmus (1904–1999) and George Tooker (1920–2011) to powerful portraits by Bob Thompson (1937–1966), Charles White (1918–1979) and Alice Neel (1900–1984). It is an extraordinary gathering of figure and portrait paintings that reveal our artistic heritage, as well as the



Benny Andrews (1930–2006), *The Way (Revival Series)*, 1995. Oil on canvas with painted fabric collage, 60 x 40¼ x ¾ in., signed and dated. © Estate of Benny Andrews / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY. Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.



Beauford Delaney (1901–1979), *Untitled (Self-Portrait with Odalisque)*, ca. 1943. Oil on panel, 23½ x 31⅞ in. © Estate of Beauford Delaney. Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.



Irving Norman (1906-1989), *Supreme Justice*, 1974. Oil on canvas, 99¾ x 75¾ in., signed. © Crocker Art Museum Association, Sacramento. Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.



George Tooker (1920-2011), *Fountain*, 1950. Egg tempera on gesso panel, 24 x 24 in., signed. Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.

psyche and social standing of the sitters.

White's drawing *I Been Rebuked & I Been Scorned*, 1954, might represent himself as it represents not only a particular African American woman, but every African American. As a boy he was twice awarded scholarships to study art, but when he arrived to claim them he was told the scholarships were no longer available. The gallery notes, "With the rise of McCarthyism after World War II, the FBI began a surveillance file on White. Undaunted, White continued to advance a politics of struggle in his art, celebrating historical figures who resisted slavery, such as Truth and Harriett Tubman, and depicting ordinary black farmers, preachers, mothers and workers with an unwavering strength and a silent, solid grace. In 1952, he began to execute these works in charcoal and sepia tones, rendering his subjects in monumental, rounded forms."

Beauford Delaney (1901-1979) was an accomplished colorist. His Fauvist *Untitled (Self-Portrait with Odalisque)*, ca. 1943, is in the exhibition. Delaney "felt marginalized along the lines of race, class and sexuality," the gallery states. He moved to Paris in the mid-50s where he wrote, "One must belong before one may then not belong. I belong here in Paris. I am able to realize myself here. I am no expatriate."

Benny Andrews (1930-2006) created his oil and painted fabric collage *The Way* in 1995 as part of his *Revival Series*. He grew up as a sharecropper and became an artist, activist and educator. He sat for a humorous and moving interview for the Archives of American Art in 1968. Andrews explained, "...And one [thing] has always interested me because, like I mentioned about my background and my heritage and things, and I have this need to contribute now... In my way, I'm trying to contribute in this particular instance, to the Negro. I'm trying to contribute to the development of a kind of equality, visually. This is what I think I can offer in relationship to the Negro. That is to present him as the man that he is. Now that might not sound like much but that's a very, very big thing, the man that he is. Because he's always been a man. He's always been. It is just that he has been depicted—and I don't just necessarily mean in art, I mean our whole psychology—of less than a man. And so my little contribution is to do just that. Is just to make him the man that he is, whatever he's doing." ■



Charles White (1918-1979), *I Been Rebuked & I Been Scorned*, 1954. Charcoal and Wolff crayon on paper, 55 x 27⁷/₈ in., signed and dated. © The Charles White Archives. Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery LLC, New York, NY.