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ART IN REVIEW

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ALFONSO OSSORIO

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

24 West 57th Street, Manhattan

Through Oct. 27

Viewers happening upon works by Alfonso Ossorio (1916-90) for the first time might guess he was a great hippie artist. He was actually one of the most original, albeit underappreciated, members of the Abstract Expressionist generation. Born into a wealthy Philippine family, he attended Harvard and settled permanently in the United States in 1952.

Influenced as much by Surrealism as by the formal innovations of vanguard European and American artists, Mr. Ossorio made intensely sensuous paintings and wall-mounted assemblages that seem imbued with otherworldly vision and shamanistic magic.

The biggest and most impressive painting in this selection of works from the '50s and '60s — all from the collection of his brother Robert U. Ossorio, who died in 1996 — is “Beachcomber” (1953), a near-mural-scale canvas covered by a dense, all-over field of spaghettilike lines, spermatic forms and dots. Painted like a Miró with a neat, flat touch in rich, saturated colors, it is a zany, Disneyesque cartoon of a Pollock drip painting.

In other, more conventionally Abstract Expressionist works from the '50s, paint is applied with gestural immediacy and built up into areas of heavy impasto. Yet in these too high-contrast colors and darks and lights produce a hallucinatory impression.

In the '60s, Mr. Ossorio created wall-mounted, jampacked assemblages of wood, beads, glass eyes, bones, feathers, shells, pieces of colored plastic, mirrors and other found materials. Bathed in glossy varnish, those here have a tacky beauty and a daffy, talismanic resonance, like cultish altarpieces by a cosmically inspired, possibly crazy urban folk artist.

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