

From proto to retro: Surrealism reinvented

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Alfonso Ossorio
Klan Picnic, 1949
gouache on paperboard
40" x 60", signed
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Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York, NY

Alfonso Ossorio: Horror Vacui (Fear of the Void)

Alfonso Ossorio was born in Manila (Philippines) in 1916 and came to America in 1930 to continue his studies. In 1934 he entered Harvard University, where he met Jared French, George Platt Lynes and Paul Cadmus. Actively participating in the early '40s in Surrealist circles, he starred in his first solo show at Betty Parson's (1941); after the war, he moved to New York City just as abstract expressionism was beginning to emerge, and he formed a close friendship with Jackson Pollock, Willem DeKooning and Jean de Buffet.

In the 1950s Ossorio returned briefly to Manila to execute a mural for the Chapel of St. Joseph the Worker. After spending much of 1951 in Paris with Jean Dubuffet, he returned to New York and purchased the East Hampton Estate known as The Creeks, which he cultivated into becoming "the Eighth Wonder of the Horticultural World." He remained there until his death in 1990.

Ossorio was an integral part of the avant-garde community that included Lee Krasner, Pollock and DeKooning. His estate housed Dubuffet's extraordinary L'Art Brut collection for more than 12 years. In the '60s Ossorio began to create his own visionary assemblages, which he called "congregations." But I think more appropriately they should be called sculpture-accumulations — esoteric groupings of antlers, found objects and wooden shapes, specifically cut to fit the whole. His paintings, colorful abstract-expressionist compositions, are exhibited in museums all over the world, including the Albertina Museum in Austria, L'Art Brut Museum in Switzerland, the Museo Nacional Centre de Arte Reina Sophia in Madrid, and the Centre George Pompidou in Paris, along with many American museums.

Horror Vacui ("Fear of the Void") is a 50-year survey of this artist, exhibited in two major galleries: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery in New York and the Ossorio Foundation in Southampton, Long Island. These simultaneous shows will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with a foreword by Mike Solomon, director of the Ossorio Foundation, and an essay by Helen Harrison, Director of Krassner/Pollock Study Center.