

Forrest Bess | Joan Snyder

March 1 – April 15, 2017

Franklin Parrasch Gallery is pleased to announce *Forrest Bess | Joan Snyder*, an exhibition of paintings and works on paper dating from 1947-1968 that reconsiders the immense visions of these two artists.

While much critical analysis of Forrest Bess has concentrated on the unique narrative of the artist's hermetic life, the focus of this exhibition is to explore the correlations in style and intent of Bess' and Snyder's work, ultimately enriching the conversation surrounding each. Although they have both been the subject of attention from several of the same critics, curators, and galleries who have examined their work in similar ways, Bess and Snyder have never before been exhibited in this context. Separated by a generation and geography (Bess from Bay City, TX and Snyder from Highland Park, NJ), there is nevertheless a mutual sense of urgency and immediacy in the gestures and palettes of each of these artists that persistently responds to a Jungian understanding of the natural, the carnal, and the mythical.

Though Forrest Bess (1911-1977) and Joan Snyder (b.1940) both maintain a primary foundation in abstraction and other elements of modernism, each moved toward a new understanding of inventive systems of communication. Bess' and Snyder's largely non-figurative approaches utilize systems of private symbolism that, while autobiographical and subjective, maintain the capacity to encourage viewers to reflect upon their own experiences.

Forrest Bess was largely a self-taught artist. Although he took a few art classes from a neighbor when he was young, Bess learned to paint by copying images from books and magazines, as well as works by artists he admired such as Vincent van Gogh and Albert Pinkham Ryder. Bess studied architecture at Texas A&M University and the University of Texas at Austin, but left school in 1933 and went to work in the oil fields at his father's behest. During this period he traveled frequently to Mexico where he saw Diego Rivera's murals. Later, Bess moved to Houston where he launched a cooperative art gallery with a group of local artists. He enlisted in the Army during World War II, but never saw combat; instead, he was assigned to design camouflage patterns. After suffering a psychotic break, an army psychiatrist encouraged Bess to paint the visions he saw during the intense hallucinations he had been experiencing throughout his life. After he was discharged in the mid-1940s, Bess moved to his family's bait fish camp on an island off the coast of Bay City, TX, where he remained for the next twenty years, in relative isolation. He scraped out a living by fishing, crabbing, and selling bait. He would paint at night rendering the visions he had just prior to falling into deep sleep. The paintings were typically small, referencing what he perceived on the backs of his eyelids, and were faithful to his hallucinatory visions. By the 1950s, Bess had become known in New York City, having established correspondence with art historian Meyer Shapiro and gallerist Betty Parsons. Parsons took him on, representing him in her eponymous gallery where she mounted six solo exhibitions of Bess' work between 1950 and 1967. Bess was fascinated by the theories of Carl Jung, at one point eliciting a reply (albeit a somewhat dismissive one) to a letter he wrote to the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. In particular, Jung's insights into the "universal unconscious" inasmuch as those theories related to his own visions and interest in hermaphroditism, were a repeated subject of Bess' queries, as he strove to unite oppositional states in both his work and life.

Joan Snyder began painting in 1962 when she took an elective course in art as a senior and sociology major at Douglass College, Rutgers University. Snyder's early paintings exhibited an anti-representational effort to render sensation over likeness. Her stylistic development can be charted from that early undergraduate training to the present as it progressed from endeavors of expressionism to the critical communicative abstraction she exhibits in her later work. Though widely recognized for her distinctly physical and layered works on canvas, this show focuses on Snyder's late-1960s drawings that match Bess's much more intimate demeanor and scale. After receiving her BA in Sociology in 1962, and MFA in Painting from Rutgers University-New Brunswick in 1966, Snyder moved from New Brunswick, NJ in 1968 to a loft on Canal Street in New York City, which she shared with artists Keith Sonnier and Jackie Winsor. As the daughter of a traveling toy salesman, Canal Street's myriad purveyors of fabrics, tools, gadgets, and notions held a potent familiarity for Snyder, with sights and colors reminiscent of her early childhood once again right at her doorstep. Snyder's early drawings effectively derived from her formative visual experiences and worked to establish a language of symbols that, as they evolved, were used to address the diverse issues in her later paintings. Many of these works on paper incorporate collage techniques using found materials such as printed fabrics, glitter, feathers and cotton; this would eventually become a signature practice. Similar to Bess, Snyder cites a moment of emotional intensity as a major inspiration for her work. Viewing a 1964 Max Beckmann retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, the year her grandmother died, she was extremely moved by the German modernist's painting *The Death Scene*, especially the crouching nude mourner, and consequently began to "express her own agony" in her work.

Forrest Bess' art has been shown in numerous museums, including solo exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1981), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (1988), and Museum Ludwig, Cologne (1989). In 2013, the Menil Collection, Houston, hosted a major survey of Bess's work titled *Seeing Things Invisible*, curated by Claire Elliott, which traveled to the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2013-2014), the Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase (2014), and the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley (2014). Bess received the Mark Rothko Foundation Grant in 1973. Robert Gober presented a room of Bess' work for the 2012 Whitney Biennial, which drew renewed critical attention to the artist. Bess' works reside in the permanent collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Menil Collection (Houston), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Museum of Fine Arts (Houston), The Phillips Collection (Washington, D.C.), and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), among many others.

Joan Snyder's works reside in the permanent collections of numerous museums including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), and the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), among others. In 2005, the Jewish Museum (New York) presented a survey of Snyder's work from 1965-2005; a fully illustrated monograph published by Abrams with an essay by Hayden Herrera accompanied the show. In 1994, the Rose Museum (Brandeis University, Waltham, MA) hosted a mid-career survey entitled *Joan Snyder: Painter, 1969 to Now* (catalogue published), which traveled to the Parrish Art Museum (Southampton, NY,) that same year. Snyder is a 2007 John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Fellow. She received a 2016 Arts & Letters Award in Art from the American Academy of Arts & Letters, and is the recipient of a 1983 John Simon Guggenheim Award, and a 1974 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship.

Forrest Bess | Joan Snyder will be on view at Franklin Parrasch Gallery, 53 East 64 Street, New York, from March 1—April 15, 2017. For images, biography, and further information, please contact Katharine Overgaard at info@franklinparrasch.com or at 212-246-5360 during business hours: 10a-6p, Tuesday-Saturday.