

FONDAZIONE PRADA PRESENTS A RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE CHICAGO ART SCENE FROM 20 OCTOBER 2017 TO 15 JANUARY 2018 IN MILAN

Milan, 20 September 2017 – From 20 October 2017 to 15 January 2018, Fondazione Prada will present at its Milan venue a research and information program on the Chicago art scene developed in the aftermath of World War II. The Fondazione thus further expands its strategy of reinterpretation of those moments in contemporary art history that, although not entirely acknowledged by critics, have nonetheless influenced new generations of artists, from graffiti to neo-digital artists. The project is focused on the employment of a painting style characterized by political commitment, figurative narratives and radical graphics, and therefore rejected by mainstream New York culture – which was more interested in the abstract and impersonal dimensions of art. The exhibition is structured around three thematic sections conceived and curated by Germano Celant as a whole - “Leon Golub”, “H. C. Westermann” and “Famous Artists from Chicago. 1965-1975” – all devoted to two generations of artists formed in Chicago between the 50’s and the 60’s. This project further investigates the artistic production of those two decades in a location far from the main artistic centers, from Paris to New York, and explores the development of alternative scenes generated in art schools and academies, namely the School of Art Institute of Chicago, which critically competed or opposed Minimal Art’s industrial and essential approach.

“Leon Golub”, the first part of the project, is hosted in the Fondazione’s Nord and Sud galleries, and explores two complementary aspects of the artist’s production, displaying 27 acrylic paintings on canvas of spectacular dimensions, realized between the late 70’s and the early 80’s, and more than 50 photographs painted on transparent paper in the 90’s. Golub (Chicago, 1922 - New York, 2004), since his formative years in Chicago, developed a personal approach to figurative painting, detaching himself from the dominant styles of New York School’s Action Painting and Abstract Expressionism. The exhibition focuses on the political aspects of his work, which openly denounces the brutality of war, racism, torture and violence. Throughout his life, his subjects became more extreme, such as his direct references to the Vietnam war, which, once depicted on large canvases – in the *Mercenaries* series, for instance – become symbols of the paramilitary conditions of contemporary life. In his photographic transparencies, Golub manipulates and alters existing images of the same dramatic and tragic subjects which, after being photocopied and photographed, are transferred by the artist onto transparent sheets that emphasize the rough realism of his work.

The section devoted to H. C. Westermann reunites on the first floor of the Podium more than 50 sculptures of different dimensions, realized between the 50’s and the 90’s, along with a selection of works on paper. Westermann (Los Angeles, 1922 – Danbury, 1981) began his career in Chicago where, after serving in the army as a Marine, studied Applied Arts at the School of the Art Institute. The exhibition explores his peculiar, intense approach to wood carving which he derived from traditional carpentry. The refusal of formalism and his

predilection for found materials, along with his nostalgic take on old America and a critical gaze on the brutality of present times, have become key inspiration elements for the next generations of artists, active in Chicago or elsewhere, from Jeff Koons to KAWS (Brian Donnelly).

The last section of the project, "Famous Artists from Chicago. 1965-1975", hosted on the ground floor of the Podium, has been conceived as an in-depth analysis of the artists active throughout the 60's and 70's, who were featured in shows that questioned traditional exhibition set-up and presentation conventions, such as "Hairy Who" (1966-'67), "False Image" (1968-'69), "Nonplussed Some" (1968-'69), organized at the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago, and itinerant exhibition "Made in Chicago", first presented at the São Paulo Biennial in 1973. The title of the show highlights the necessity, expressed by curator and teacher Don Baum, to launch Chicago artists into the national and international scene. "Famous Artists from Chicago. 1965-1975" depicts the energy of the cultural environment of this American city as a center for figurative production, as well as the heterogeneity of the contributions of some artists known as Chicago Imagists (Roger Brown, Ed Flood, Art Green, Gladys Nilsson, Jim Nutt, Ed Paschke, Christina Ramberg, Suellen Rocca and Karl Wirsum), who had identified the roots of their personal research in Surrealism and Art Brut, in a way that anticipated the new tendencies of the 80's and 90's, from Graffiti to Street Art, from wild cartoons to urban murals.

The project will be accompanied by three publications in the Fondazione's Quaderni series, which will analyze the themes of the shows through original texts and materials.

Press Contacts

Fondazione Prada

T +39 02 56 66 26 34

press@fondazioneprada.org

fondazioneprada.org