

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Richard Hawkins
The Forrest Bess Variations

March 11 – April 23, 2022
Ground Floor

Greene Naftali is pleased to announce its seventh solo exhibition with Richard Hawkins, featuring a series of paintings and works on paper created in response to the work of the visionary artist Forrest Bess (1911-77).

From the artist:

Forrest Bess, in explaining the method for deriving and interpreting the symbols from his unconscious, wrote: "I may be the Devil or I may be Dionysius." Note the extra "i." Dionysus, the Greek god of drunken celebration and religious ecstasy, has clearly been misspelled.

The Forrest Bess Variations originated from a process of cross-referencing Bess's own lexicon of symbols and color codes with the archives of his surviving correspondence, alongside key sources (the psychoanalytic theories of Carl Jung and Herbert Silberer) the artist used as modes of inspiration and interpretation. To get beyond mere corroboration or dutiful copying, I have made use of the two methods for accessing unconscious content essential to Bess's practice: hypnagogia, or the state between sleep and wakefulness, and Jungian Active Imagination.

In *The Penetration* (2022), for example, the manifest content from two separate paintings of Bess's—*Untitled No. 2 (The Penetrated)* (1966), and *The Penetrator* (1967)—have been overlaid to reveal what was otherwise hidden: a diagram of the artist's own experiments in body modification, which doubles as a figural representation of dark anima pierced by the light of conscious integration. Subjecting the combined colors and symbols of *The Penetration* to short sessions of Active Imagination, I found additional interpretations that make up the variation *Passage to Perfection* (2022): a stark cruciform symbol evoking both the pulse of a moment and the long passage of time, enmired in the unconscious but opening up toward a proposed assimilation of mind, body, and spirit.

Throughout the research and experiments that led to *The Forrest Bess Variations* I thought of the misspelling "Dionysius" as indicative of the charming fallibility of Bess's art and method; his enthusiasm for delving into his own darkness and then casting (literally fishing) far and wide for clues to potential meanings. Scratching the obvious error of "Dionysius" into the surface of my paintings became a kind of indelible flaw, a reminder that—try as I might—I would never be able to fully make sense of the manifest (much less the latent) content of Bess's paintings.

That is, until I found the real Dionysius that Bess may have only intuited: Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, a 6th century Neoplatonist referenced several times by Jung, whose *Celestial Hierarchy* set a foundational precedent for accessing supernatural symbolism through mystic meditation.

— Richard Hawkins, March 2022

GREENE NAFTALI

Richard Hawkins: *The Forrest Bess Variations*

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Front Gallery, clockwise:



Regeneration of the Self, 2022
Oil on canvas and artist's frame
23 3/4 x 18 1/4 inches (62.9 x 46.4 cm)



Apis Lapis, 2022
Oil on canvas and artist's frame
12 7/8 x 15 3/4 inches (32.7 x 40 cm)



The Hidden Revealed, 2022
Oil on canvas on board and artist's frame
31 1/4 x 41 1/4 inches (79.4 x 104.8 cm)



The Supreme Becoming, 2022
Oil on canvas on board and artist's frame
33 x 41 inches (83.8 x 104.1 cm)

Main Gallery, clockwise:



Legend, 2022

Collage, oil and pencil on paper

Paper: 14 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches (36.8 x 31.8 cm)

Frame: 19 7/8 x 18 inches (50.5 x 45.7 cm)



Variation 2, 2022

Oil and pencil on paper

Paper: 11 3/4 x 15 3/4 inches (29.8 x 40 cm)

Frame: 17 1/4 x 21 1/4 inches (43.8 x 54 cm)



Variation 1, 2022

Oil and pencil on paper

Paper: 11 3/4 x 15 3/4 inches (29.8 x 40 cm)

Frame: 17 1/4 x 21 1/4 inches (43.8 x 54 cm)



Dionysius, Silver & Red, 2021

Oil on canvas and artist's frame

12 x 16 inches (30.5 x 40.6 cm)



Dionysius, Black Moon Gets Bigger, 2021

Oil on canvas and artist's frame

12 x 16 inches (30.5 x 40.6 cm)



Dominion, 2022

Oil on canvas and artist's frame

12 7/8 x 15 3/4 inches (32.7 x 40 cm)



The Sacrificial Bull, 2022
Oil on canvas and artist's frame
33 x 41 1/8 inches (83.8x 104.5 cm)



The Temple of Dionysus at Delos, 2022
Oil on canvas and artist's frame
33 x 41 inches (83.8 x 104.1 cm)



Putrefactio, 2022
Oil on canvas and artist's frame
24 1/8 x 33 1/8 inches (61.3 x 84.1 cm)



The Celestial Body, 2022
Oil on canvas on board and artist's frame
36 1/8 x 41 inches (91.8 x 104.1 cm)



It Between the Two, 2022
Oil on canvas and artist's frame
29 1/4 x 29 3/8 inches (74.3 x 74.6 cm)



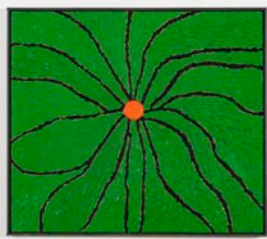
The Coming Together, 2022
Oil on canvas on board and artist's frame
35 1/8 X 41 1/8 inches (89.2 x 104.5 cm)



The Penetration, 2022
Oil on canvas on board and artist's frame
31 1/4 x 41 inches (79.4 x 104.1 cm)



To the Limits of Consciousness, 2022
Oil on canvas and artist's frame
20 7/8 x 20 3/4 inches (53 x 52.7 cm)



Fons Mercurialis, 2022
Oil on canvas on board and artist's frame
36 x 41 inches (91.4 x 104.1 cm)



Passage to Perfection, 2022
Oil on canvas and artist's frame
19 3/4 x 18 3/4 inches (50.2 x 47.6 cm)