

Petzel

ROGER-EDGAR GILLET

Dinner Party

January 16 – February 22, 2025

520 W 25th Street

Petzel is pleased to present *Dinner Party*, an exhibition of paintings by Roger-Edgar Gillet (1924–2004), the French artist's second solo presentation with the gallery. Organized in partnership with the artist's estate, this group of works traces Gillet's oeuvre following his breakthrough experimentations with figuration in the early 1960s.

In conversation with Alexis Pelletier in 1998, Gillet recalls, as a six-year-old, being struck by the sight of bakers kneading dough, and workers pouring tar on the streets. As he stated to Pelletier, "For me, painting is foremost matter."¹ Fifteen years later, this early affinity toward material became a constant among his paintings, taking shape in various forms over the next 40 years with gestural virtuosity.

Emerging from the *Seconde École de Paris*, an influential post-war generation of French painters defined by a movement toward abstraction, Gillet turned to expressionist figuration after a transformative visit to the United States in 1955. Resigning from *Art Informel*, his works of the '60s, still engaging his earthy palette of the '50s, strived toward gnarled faces and limbs, cast in bravura strokes. His lifetime dedication to the production of portraits, which he playfully called his "best"² medium, is evidenced by *Untitled*, 1996, a visage without eyes, wrought with slashes of umbers and browns. In 1962, Gillet began a series of portraits titled "Apostles" ("Apôtres"), in which faces are faintly suggested. Rather than religious allusion, Gillet's 'apostles' nod to a lineage of classical thinkers and fellow painters. Forty-five years later, he took this theme up again with around forty portraits, each whose contours were more defined, but whose features, and sometimes their gaze, were obliterated by the material.

Gillet found inspiration in both classical and contemporary motifs, drawing on the intellectual and literary generation of his epoch, in addition to antecedents such as Francisco Goya, Honoré Daumier, and James Ensor. However, he sought an alternative beyond the preeminent art movement of mid-century Paris, prioritizing raw feeling, and reveling in the carnivalesque and grotesque. Gillet's tormented visions, often infused with a tragicomic drama, are both perennial and prophetic to the present-day viewer, imbued with lasting truths regarding the human condition.

¹ Roger-Edgar Gillet, "*La Matière et le geste: interview d'Alexis Pelletier en 1998*" ("Matter and Gesture: Interview with Alexis Pelletier in 1998)," galerie Guigon, 2006.

² *ibid.*

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About Roger-Edgar Gillet

Roger-Edgar Gillet (b. 1924-2004, Paris) lived between Paris, Sens and the Saint-Malo region, where he died in 2004. A graduate of the École Boulle and the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Roger-Edgar Gillet first worked as a decorator before devoting himself to painting. Very early on he was defended by Michel Tapié and Charles Estienne, and was part of a post-war generation of French painters, that of the Seconde École de Paris, and distinguished himself by a practice ranging from lyrical abstraction to expressionist figuration in the vein of Jean Fautrier, Paul Rebeyrolle and Jean Dubuffet.

Roger-Edgar Gillet has also been the subject of major institutional exhibitions in France and abroad: Gillet-Dodeigne at the Musée Galliera (1971, Paris); Retrospective at the CNAP (1987, Paris); La Marche des oubliés at the Centre d'art contemporain de Saint-Priest (1989); Roger-Edgar Gillet, Cinquante ans de peinture at the Musée du Palais Synodal (1999, Sens); Je Garderai un Excellent Souvenir de vous ! at the Musée Estrine (2005, Saint-Rémy de Provence); Un Regard at the Centre d'art contemporain du Parc Caillebotte (2009, Yerres); Exercices de survie, œuvres graphiques at the Musée du Mont de Piété (2017, Bergues); and in the United States, March of the forgotten at the University of Oklahoma Museum and Stéphane Janssen Collection at the Scottsdale Arts Centre (1990).

More recently, Roger-Edgar Gillet's work has been presented in the exhibitions Construire une collection at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes and De Tiépolo à Richter at the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire de Bruxelles in 2018; as well as Recent Acquisitions of the Cabinet d'art graphique in 2018 and Galeries du XXe siècle in 2019 at the Centre Pompidou. Roger-Edgar Gillet was also awarded the Prix Fénéon in 1954 and the Catherwood Prize in 1955. In 2023, Gillet had a solo exhibition at the Espace Rebeyrolle in Eymoutiers. He will also have a travelling exhibition in 2026 at the Musée Estrine in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, and then at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes.

Gillet's work is included in collections such as Abbaye d'Auberive, Auberive; Centre National des Arts Plastiques (CNAP), Paris; Fondation du roi Baudouin, Neiryneck Collection, Mons; LAAC – Lieu d'Art et Action Contemporaine, Musées de Dunkerque, Dunkirk; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen; Musée Estrine, Saint Rémy de Provence; Musée National d'Art Moderne - Centre Pompidou, Paris; Musée Paul Valéry, Sète; Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels; Musée de Sens, Sens; Museu de Arte de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Lille; Oslo Museum, Oslo; SACEM, Le Grand Orchestre, Mural realized in 1978, Paris; and SMAK – Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent.

Petzel Gallery is located at 520 West 25th Street New York, NY 10001. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM–6:00 PM. For press inquiries, please contact Karolina Chojnowska at karolina@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.