

Emerson Woelffer

Forty Years (Paintings 1956 – 1996)

14 July – 1 September 2018

Ibid Gallery is pleased to present a survey of paintings by the 20th century American artist Emerson Woelffer. A prominent figure linking Abstract Expressionism to Los Angeles, Woelffer was a highly influential artist, educator, and mentor to a generation of Los Angeles artists including Ed Ruscha, Mary Corse, Joe Goode, Larry Bell, Lynn Foulkes, and Allan Ruppersberg. Woelffer stands out as one of the most historically significant artists in Los Angeles by bringing an international discourse to what was a growing art community.

Emerson Woelffer (1914 – 2003) was born in Chicago to a middle class family. After studying at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago he joined the WPA Arts Program in 1938 followed by a job in the U.S. Army Air Corps topographical survey program. In 1942 Woelffer was hired by László Moholy-Nagy to teach painting, photography, design, and sculpture at the recently founded New Bauhaus in Chicago. During this time Woelffer developed his interest in Surrealist automatism through drawing and playing the drums in jazz groups, two activities that sustained Woelffer's painting practice the rest of his life.

As Woelffer gained more national attention, he was invited by Buckminster Fuller to teach in 1949 at Black Mountain College, which was followed by a solo exhibition at the Artist's Gallery in New York City and inclusion in the Whitney Museum Annual. It was on this trip to New York that Woelffer met key Abstract Expressionism artists including Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, Willem DeKooning, and Robert Motherwell, with whom Woelffer developed a lifelong friendship and dialogue. Despite Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner's urges for Woelffer to stay in New York for a second show at the Artist's Gallery and seek out gallery representation, Woelffer spent the following decade traveling and painting in Yucatán, Mexico; Colorado Springs, where Motherwell joined him to teach at the Fine Arts Center; and Forio d'Ischia Naples, Italy.

After two years in Naples, Woelffer moved to Los Angeles in 1959 accepting a teach position at Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts). Despite New York being the center of the art world, Los Angeles proved fruitful with a rapid succession of gallery shows in New York and Los Angeles, retrospective exhibitions at La Jolla Art Center, Pasadena Museum of Art, and the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, and inclusion in Clement Greenberg's *Post-Painterly Abstraction* at LACMA in 1964. Woelffer continued traveling and received prestigious grants, including the Guggenheim Foundation (1967), National Endowment for the Arts (1974), Pollock-Krasner (1984), and the Francis Greenburger Award from the Guggenheim Museum (1988).

Ibid Gallery

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Tuesday – Saturday, 11am – 6pm

In 1974 Woelffer was offered to chair the painting department at Otis Art Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design) where he was credited with relentlessly supporting his students in their making of work that they felt necessary to make, regardless of convention or acceptability. Woelffer's belief in the practice of making art encouraged a generation of Los Angeles artists ranging from Light and Space to Conceptual to pursue a mode of making entirely new, and radically different from his own. Following his retirement from Otis in 1989, Woelffer continued to paint and draw despite suffering from macular degeneration in his later years by utilizing white oil stick on a black ground. The highly contrasted imagery allowed him to continue working in his Mount Washington home studio despite deteriorating eyesight, where he worked nearly up to his passing in 2003. Later that year Ed Ruscha curated the retrospective exhibition *A Solo Flight* as the inaugural exhibition for REDCAT, and the last major solo exhibition of Emerson Woelffer.

Ibid Gallery is proud to partner with Otis College of Art and Design, the Estate of Emerson Woelffer, and Los Angeles Modern Auctions to present a survey by "the grandfather of LA Modernism." As directed by Woelffer following his retirement from Otis, proceeds from the Estate benefit the Scholarship Fund of Otis College of Art and Design, continuing Woelffer's legacy not only as one of LA's most significant artists, but also a lifelong educator and supporter of young artists. It is with *Forty Years (Paintings 1956 – 1996)* that Emerson Woelffer's profound work and impact on the Los Angeles art community can be revisited by those already familiar with the artist and introduced for the first time to a new generation of Los Angeles artists.

Work by Emerson Woelffer is held in public collections internationally including the Baltimore Art Museum, Baltimore, MD; Bauhaus Archives, Berlin, Germany; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France; Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel; Kansas City Art Museum, Kansas City, MI; the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, CA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI; Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase, NY; New Orleans Museum of Art, New Orleans, LA; and the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, CA.

Ibid Gallery thanks the Estate of Emerson Woelffer, Doug Roberts, Los Angeles Modern Auctions, and Otis College of Art and Design for their support of *Forty Years (Paintings 1956 – 1996)*.

For additional information or images please contact Magnus Edensvard at magnus@ibidgallery.com or John Emison at john@ibidgallery.com, or call +1 (323) 395-8914.

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