

NEWS

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DESDE NEW YORK: LUIS FRANGELLA / DAVID WOJNAROWICZ

5 September - 21 December 2018

EXHIBITION FEATURING WORKS OF FRANGELLA AND WOJNAROWICZ,
GAY ARTISTS AND LEADING FIGURES IN THE 1980s EAST VILLAGE ART SCENE,
TO OPEN WEDNESDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER AT HAL BROMM GALLERY TRIBECA

Luis Frangella and David Wojnarowicz, two artists with long histories at Hal Bromm Gallery, will be the subjects of a joint exhibition, *DESDE NEW YORK: LUIS FRANGELLA / DAVID WOJNAROWICZ*. The exhibition explains how the synergy of these two artists and their circle of friends influenced the 1980s contemporary art world. As artistic collaborators and close friends, Frangella and Wojnarowicz shared a unique relationship as mentor and protégé. Both artists died tragically of AIDS in the early nineties, but left rich bodies of work as a testament to their lives. Today the dialogue between their works transcends geographical, political and cultural boundaries and allows us to revisit the creative forces whose lives were extinguished by the still ongoing AIDS crisis.

DESDE NEW YORK: LUIS FRANGELLA / DAVID WOJNAROWICZ is presented in collaboration with HIV Arts Network, a NYC-based non-profit providing free support services to individuals in the arts community living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. During the exhibition, HIV Arts Network will host a series of panel discussions at the gallery exploring the intersections of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the 1980s contemporary art scene and the gay political landscape through the lives of Frangella and Wojnarowicz.

Sunday, 9 September at 6 PM: Russell Sharon, the partner of Luis Frangella, and Tom Rauffenbart, the partner of David Wojnarowicz, in conversation with Doneley Meris, founder for HIV Arts Network. This discussion will explore the relationship of these two men with artists who both died from HIV/AIDS. Sharon and Rauffenbart will speak informally on how they honor and celebrate the artistic legacies of Frangella and Wojnarowicz.

Monday, September 10 at 6 PM: Judy Glantzman and Russell Sharon in conversation with Gracie Mansion. Glantzman, an artist who was a close friend of both Luis Frangella and David Wojnarowicz, will be joined by Frangella's partner Russell Sharon in reflecting on the artists and their lives.

Monday, September 17 at 6 PM: Marion Scemama, a photographer, filmmaker and close friend of David Wojnarowicz, will introduce "Rushes from Death", a selection of their collaborative videos. Marion Scemama will speak on the context of these rarely screened works and their friendship.

Monday 29 October at 6 PM: John Reed, Hugh Ryan, and Sur Rodney Sur will talk with Doneley Meris, founder of HIV Arts Network, on the impact of HIV/AIDS on Luis Frangella and David Wojnarowicz and how their artistic legacy continues to inspire activism today. The panel is part of "Reimagine End of Life", a weeklong series of events sponsored by Reimagine, a San Francisco-based non-profit organization focused on celebrating life and death through art and discussion.

Monday 19 November at 6 PM: Esther McGowan, Executive Director of VISUAL AIDS, a New York non-profit dedicated to protecting and insuring the art of artists who died of AIDS, will talk with curator Dan Cameron, who curated the 1999 New Museum exhibition "*Fever: The Art of David Wojnarowicz*" and artist Stephen Lack, a close friend of both Frangella and Wojnarowicz whose work often appeared beside theirs.

Monday 10 December at 6 PM: Cindy Carr, author of the acclaimed 2012 David Wojnarowicz biography Fire in the Belly, will talk with artist Jean Foos and Manuela Filiaci on their friendship with the artists. Foos was a close friend of Wojnarowicz until his death, and witnessed the impact of HIV/AIDS on his art and life. Filiaci was one of Luis Frangella's closest friends and confidants who was devoted to his art and life until his death.

Monday 17 December at 6 PM: Critic and curator Carlo McCormick will talk with artists and former gallery owners James Romberger and Marguerite Van Cook on their early East Village gallery experiences and adventures involving Wojnarowicz and Frangella and how the free-spirited scene was decimated by the impact of HIV/AIDS and the loss of so many talented young artists.



*David Wojnarowicz's **The Totem Room** Installation at Hal Bromm Gallery, November 1983
Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W*

Luis Frangella's initial September 1983 exhibition at Hal Bromm featured fourteen-foot tall figures painted directly on the gallery walls, forming a direct connection to Frangella's work at Pier 34 on the Hudson River. Wojnarowicz' solo exhibition at the gallery followed two months later in November.



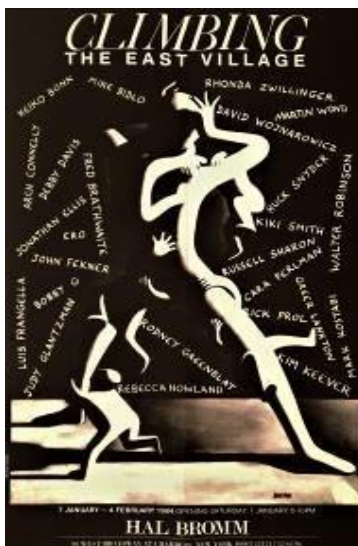
Luis Frangella installation for **Paintings** at Hal Bromm Gallery, 1983
©The Estate of Luis Frangella / Cosmocosa



*Luis Frangella with his gallery installation for **Paintings** at Hal Bromm Gallery, 1983*
 ©The Estate of Luis Frangella / Cosmocosa

A collaborative work painted on a horseshoe crab shell brought Frangella and Wojnarowicz together with Mike Bidlo, a close friend of both. At his invitation, Kiki Smith also collaborated with Wojnarowicz, creating blood paintings on bedsheets that were hung in the gallery.

As gay artists whose works were unapologetically queer, Frangella and Wojnarowicz were seminal figures in the East Village art scene that developed in the early 1980s. Individually and together, they ignored the boundaries of traditional mediums, venturing well beyond the limits of canvas or paper in studio. Clubs, stage sets, construction sites and abandoned piers were their *métier*. With Mike Bidlo they were instrumental in leading other artists (Russell Sharon, Judy Glantzman, Rick Prol and Stephen Lack among many others) to work in the abandoned Hudson River Pier #34. Many of those gifted artists were featured in Hal Bromm's 1984 *Climbing* exhibition, introducing them and the growing East Village art scene to a larger audience.



*Poster for the 1984 exhibition **Climbing The East Village**, Hal Bromm Gallery*



*Andreas Sterzing, 1983, David Wojnarowicz and Mike Bidlo at Pier 34
Background: a Luis Frangella mural*



*Andreas Sterzing, 1983, Luis Frangella at Pier 34
Background: wall drawings by Luis Frangella*

Luis Frangella and David Wojnarowicz transversed hemispheres in the 1980s, collaborating in both New York City and Buenos Aires. Though they were great companions, Wojnarowicz and Frangella came from entirely different backgrounds. Luis Frangella was a highly educated member of Argentina's upper class; David Wojnarowicz, victimized by childhood abuse, dropped out of school at age fourteen and fled to New York City to save himself. A natural artist fascinated by bugs and nature, he was self-taught. Frangella, with the artistic education that Wojnarowicz lacked, easily filled the role of mentor by introducing David to new techniques and materials. Luis was also eleven years older, providing a surrogate for the father figure David never had. Wojnarowicz respected Frangella, learned from him, and collaborated with him both artistically and curatorially. Frangella had great admiration for Wojnarowicz's raw talent and was inspired by his awkward talent and tough independence. Featured in this exhibition is one of several paintings the two artists created together.



Luis Frangella and David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (Genie out of Bottle)*, 1983,
collage and acrylic on paper, 79 ½ x 66 ½”

*Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W and
©The Estate of Luis Frangella / Cosmocosa*

Luis Frangella (1944-1990) was a figurative, postmodern painter and sculptor. He earned a masters in architecture at the University of Buenos Aires in 1972 and then attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1973. In 1976, he moved to New York City where he painted huge “street” murals on construction site wall, abandoned Hudson River piers and in the nightclubs of the East Village and Tribeca. Situated in these nontraditional spaces, he began working with subversive artists like Wojnarowicz. Older than David, Luis was a sort of father figure to many younger artists, becoming an influential member of the East Village art scene. Known as a good cook, he fostered a sense of community and caring, often serving impromptu meals in his loft after the late-night club scene wound down.

Writing in *Art Forum* (1985), John Howell proclaimed, “Luis Frangella is a classic junk artist. That is, he grafts the essence of classic art themes and techniques onto an anthology of urban debris used as support materials, thereby updating the past and historicizing the present.”

David Wojnarowicz (1954 - 1992) was an independent prodigy. As a run-away street hustler at a young age, Wojnarowicz developed an uncanny ability to find beauty in the gritty street life around him. His stencil work was eventually recognized by many New York galleries, elevating avant-garde street art into the Downtown Milieu. Wojnarowicz refused to reduce his creativity into a single medium. Instead, he expanded his techniques, producing collages, films, photographs, poems and sculptures. Today his writing, always incisive, is viewed as an important parallel to his visual art.

Cynthia Carr in *Interview Magazine* (2012) noted that “Wojnarowicz famously raged and recorded at the inception of the early-’80s East Village art-world scene, a hardcore, down-and-out, truly liberating alternative to the money markets of the SoHo and uptown galleries. His works address annihilation, disenfranchisement, depersonalization, and dread, but as much as they invoke the big ideas of a world gone wrong, they also record the artist’s own fears, memories, and demons.”



*David and Luis at the opening of
Desde New York: 37 East Village Painters CAyC, Buenos Aires, 1984
(background: wallpaper by Mike Bidlo)*

*Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W
and ©The Estate of Luis Frangella / Cosmocosa*

In 1984, Frangella invited Wojnarowicz to his home country of Argentina, the same year the country transitioned from a tyrannical dictatorship back to a Democracy. Wojnarowicz found a tangible emotional difference between exhibiting in New York and Buenos Aires. In an interview when speaking of an exhibition in Argentina, Wojnarowicz stated, “I mean, I had people weeping in front of things I made in Argentina. I think the threat of death in daily life, the cycle of death with the ‘disappeared’ people, the threat of death with expression is the same thing I experienced growing up—fearing I would be killed or shocked.” In Buenos Aires, Wojnarowicz created new works from trash, billboards and raw materials. Featured in the exhibition are works on paper, constructions, paintings and sculptures. Pieces specifically created by Luis and David for an exhibition they curated in Buenos Aires, *Desde New York: 37 East Village Painters*, include plastic, ready-made toy dolls. Wojnarowicz re-imagined their surfaces with collaged maps, gauze, paint and coins.

Equally at ease with painting and sculpture, Luis Frangella alternated between refined delicacy and robust muscularity. David Wojnarowicz focused on scavenged and overlooked materials, maps, billboard posters and trash from the streets. The juxtaposition of their work was charged and invigorating, a distillation of what the East Village aesthetic came to mean.



David Wojnarowicz, *Evolution*, 1985
Courtesy of the Estate of David Wojnarowicz and P.P.O.W

At the height of the AIDS epidemic both artists were diagnosed with the disease and played an integral role in the ACT UP movement. Ostracized by their sexuality and state of health, Wojnarowicz and Frangella embraced the marginalization they faced, applying it to their art and activism. Seriously incapacitated by his illness, Frangella was unable to remain involved for long, dying in 1990 at the age of 46. Wojnarowicz, able to carry on, raised hell with his anguished calls for attention to the AIDS crisis. Famously protesting actively until shortly before his death in 1992 at 37, David Wojnarowicz was a champion of all who suffered and died from AIDS, and today remains an inspiration to new generations.

For further information, photographs or details on the exhibition, please visit halbromm.com or contact the gallery via email: gallery@halbromm.com or call 212 732 6196.

For information about the “HIV/AIDS and Arts Collaborative” contact Doneley Meris at HIV ARTS NETWORK: 212-385-4945 or doneleymeris@gmail.com.