

Red Grooms: *Ninth Street Women meet The Irascibles*

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Press Release

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The Directors of Marlborough Gallery are pleased to present a new series of work by the artist Red Grooms. Inspired by the 2018 book by Mary Gabriel, *Ninth Street Women*, Grooms has recollected and re-constructed history through painting, merging the infamous 1951 photograph from *Life* magazine of the Irascibles with the women of Ninth Street.

“The Sparkling Amazons,” the term coined by Thomas Hess, described five women who revolutionized the modern art world in postwar America, comprised of Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler. The Irascibles, or Irascible 18, were the labels given to a group of American abstract painters who in 1950, penned an open letter to the president of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to express their intense disapproval and commitment to boycott the museum’s exhibition *American Painting Today: 1950*. The subsequent media coverage and iconic photo of the group published in *Life* magazine in 1951 gave the Irascibles notoriety and helped to canonize the term ‘Abstract Expressionism.’

By reconstructing the image with the inclusion of all the notable Abstract Expressionist artists of the period, Red Grooms attempts to recognize the often-overlooked contribution by women artists to the AbEx movement and the significant role they played as bold innovators within the New York School during the 1940s and 1950s. Grooms became an active participant in 1957 joining the cooperative Phoenix Gallery on East 10th Street, then heart of the art world. He left to start City Gallery with Jay Milder in his own loft on West 24th Street in response to Phoenix rejecting the work of Claes Oldenburg who Red would later show, along with Bob Thompson, Lester Johnson, and Alex Katz. Grooms says of this time in New York:

We were reacting to Tenth Street. In '58 and '59, Tenth Street was sort of like SoHo is now, and it was getting all the lively attention of everyone downtown. We were just kids in our twenties and had a flair for attracting people to our openings.

The exhibition will include twenty-six portraits of artists, friends, and personalities encountered during these early formative years in New York along with the centerpiece of the exhibition: *Ninth Street Women meet the Irascibles*. Constructed of eleven panels, the large-scale painting depicts a wide cast of characters, paying homage to the artists who have shaped New York.



Ninth Street Women meet The Irascibles, 2020
acrylic on canvas
96¼ × 144¼ in. / 244.5 × 366.4 cm
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Red Grooms was born in Nashville, Tennessee in 1937 and has lived and worked in New York since 1957. Always vibrant, inventive, and witty, Red has reinforced the pride that New Yorkers have for their city. As somewhat of an outsider—originally from Nashville, with early sojourns to Provincetown and Chicago—Grooms has been able to clearly witness what makes the city so unique.

Following the success of his early performances and underground films, Grooms emerged in the early sixties at the dawn of Pop Art exhibiting widely with Tibor de Nagy. He quickly became noted for his immersive installations such as *The City of Chicago* (1968), *The Discount Store* (1971), *Ruckus Manhattan* (1976), and *Ruckus Rodeo* (1977). Notable exhibitions include *Red Grooms: A Retrospective*, organized by the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (1985), the Whitney Museum of American Art (1987), *Red Grooms at Grand Central* (1993), and a traveling exhibition of his graphic work organized by the Tennessee State Museum (2001-04), which traveled for three years and eight venues, the Yale University Art Gallery (2013) and most recently, *Red Grooms: Traveling Correspondent* (2016) at the Brooks Museum of Art in Memphis. The artist’s works have graced numerous public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth, the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C., the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Museum, New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Moderna Museet, Stockholm and many others.

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