NORMAN BLUHM

Seven from the Seventies

July 10 - October 10, 1984
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are very grateful to John Bernard Myers for writing the introductory essay for this catalogue. Norman Bluhm is mentioned in Mr. Myers' current book "Tracking the Marvelous," and it is clear that he includes Norman Bluhm's paintings in that category.

Most of all, we wish to thank Norman Bluhm for sharing his work with the Stony Brook community.

Rhonda Cooper
Director

Photographs by Noel Rowe

Cover: PYGMALION, 1979
NORMAN BLUHM: Sensibility Making Sense

Three papers had been handed into the professor of architectural history, each concerned with describing the important stylistic features of the Piazza Michaelangelo in Florence. The teacher had found two of the dissertations acceptable, but not the one by the third student, Norman Bluhm. What was wanted by the instructor was a conventional academic description of the buildings around the square, whereas Bluhm's response to it was a rejoicing in its light, its space, its expressive architectural harmonies. The professor proceeded pedantically to outline the correct interpretation, but young Bluhm spoke up and said "You're wrong. That's not the way it is." Needless to say the professor was annoyed. "Further," he continued, "I'd like to ask if you have ever been to Florence, and in the piazza?" "No," replied his mentor, "nor do I think it's of any importance that I wasn't." "Well," came the quick riposte, "I have. I lived around the corner form the piazza and know it well!"

We may deplore the young man's lack of tact but not his sincerity. I like to speculate about Bluhm as a child in Florence living in an old spacious house between the age of four and twelve unconsciously absorbing an ambiance of high aesthetic interest. He is in his high ceilinged bedroom looking up at the decoration which had livened this room for a few centuries: the blue sky, gods and goddesses, putti, all resting and lolling on great cottony clouds that combined Rococo abandon with classical order.

If there is a key to any artist's work, or a clear cut way of "reading" the images of abstract painting, it is first necessary to silently approach the work, letting it "speak" for itself. This is true, of course, for all serious painting, especially where there are seeming ambiguities. Our inner silence is demanded so that what is before us there on the canvas can unfold its non-verbal story. Bluhm is such a story teller. Needless to say he is not recalling the pleasures of Florentine art history, Renaissance splendors, or even the ceiling of his childhood bedroom. He is, however, revealing his way of experiencing the manner, light, space, and color come together or fall apart. His perceptions are lyrical, romantic, intense. Possibly this temperament was molded by hearing so much good music in his childhood. Bluhm's mother was an excellent concert pianist. By the time he was twelve, the family moved permanently back to America, taking up residence in Chicago where Bluhm was educated.

No American city is as interesting architecturally as Chicago, and it is not surprising that the young Bluhm was drawn to the study of architecture at the Bauhaus where Mies van der Rohe was the leading light. But it was not the career that Bluhm was to pursue. During the second World War he became a pilot in the U.S. Air Force; it was only after the war that Bluhm left for Paris to study and paint for several years.

But what must it have been like to be a pilot? Once again the vastness of blue sky, the drama of fields of clouds — white, gray, black and all their intermediary modalities of color sometimes tinted gold, scarlet or violet at sunrise or sunset. Bluhm experienced physically airborne space, the upper reaches of which are infinite. This sensing of space, the movement through it experienced in the eyes, the lungs, the whole body; this was subsumed in Bluhm's deepest self and became integral to his art.

Those of who have been aficionados of the so-called Second Generation of Abstract Expressionists — the brilliant generation that came after such painters as DeKooning, Pollock, Kline, Still, and others of that age group — feel more certain than ever that the successors have sustained as high and ambitious a level of creativity as their elders. If there is a "tradition of the new," Norman Bluhm stands out as one of its finest exponents, certainly one of the most refined, lyrical sensibilities working in the mode of abstraction. The paintings have presence, vigor, and — to use the word precisely — elegance. They are impressive for their abundance, their scale, their swiftness of gesture, their perennial freshness.

John Bernard Myers
Mighty Greek, 1977
(not in exhibition)
Romulus and Remus, 1979
Easter Morning, 1979
NORMAN BLUHM


SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS

1982  Galerie Stadler, Paris, France
1977  The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
1976  Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, Texas
1975  Galerie Stadler, Paris, France
1974  Martha Jackson Gallery, New York City
      Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York
      Circolo Artistico, Palazzo delle Prigioni Vecchie, Venice, Italy
      Galleria II Cerchio, Milan, Italy
      Galleria R. Rotta, Milan, Italy
1973  Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York
1972  Galerie Stadler, Paris, France
      Martha Jackson Gallery, New York City
1971  J.L. Hudson Gallery, Detroit, Michigan
      Martha Jackson Gallery, New York City
1970  Galerie Stadler, Paris, France
      Martha Jackson Gallery, New York City
1969  The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
1968  Galerie Stadler, Paris, France
1965  Galerie Anderson-Mayer, Paris, France
1964  Galerie Smith, Brussels, Belgium
1963  Galerie Semiha Huber, Zurich, Switzerland
      American Gallery, New York City
      Galerie Anderson-Mayer, Paris, France
1962  David Anderson Gallery, New York City
1961  Galleria Notizie, Turin, Italy
      Holland-Goldowsky Gallery, Chicago, Illinois
      (with Larry Rivers)
      Graham Gallery, New York City (with Elaine de Kooning)
1960  Leo Castelli Gallery, New York City
1959  Galleria del Naviglio, Milan, Italy
1957  Leo Castelli Gallery, New York City
SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

The work of Norman Bluhm is in the following museum collections:

Salome, 1977 (detail)
EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Measurements are given in inches, height preceding width. All works are on loan courtesy of the artist.

*Neptune's Orgy*, 1975, oil on canvas, 102 x 144"

*Sand Lady*, 1975, oil on canvas, 102 x 144"

*Salome*, 1977, oil on canvas, 102 x 480"

*Easter Morning*, 1979, oil on canvas, 96 x 282"

*Pygmalion*, 1979, oil on canvas, 108 x 306"

*Romulus and Remus*, 1979, oil on canvas, 102 x 114"

*Yangtse Baby*, 1979, oil on canvas, 102 x 108"
PREVIOUS EXHIBITIONS AT THE ART GALLERY

1975 FACULTY EXHIBITION
1976 MICHELLE STUART
    RECENT DRAWINGS (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
    SALVATORE ROMANO
1977 MEL PEKARSKY
    JUDITH BERNESTEIN
    HERBERT BAYER (AN AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS EXHIBITION)
1978 LEON GOLUB
    WOMEN ARTISTS FROM NEW YORK
    JANET FISH
    ROSEMARY MAYER
    THE SISTER CHAPEL
1979 SHIRLEY GORELICK
    ALAN SONFIST
    HOWARDENA PINDELL
    ROY LICHTENSTEIN
1980 BENNY ANDREWS
    ALEX KATZ
    EIGHT FROM NEW YORK
    ARTISTS FROM QUEENS
    OTTO PIENE
    STONY BROOK 11, THE STUDIO FACULTY
1981 ALICE NEEL
    55 MERCER: 10 SCULPTORS
    JOHN LITTLE
    IRA JOEL HABER
    LEON POLK SMITH
1982 FOUR SCULPTORS
    CECILE ABISH
    JACK YOUNGERMAN
    ALAN SHIELDS
    THE STONY BROOK ALUMNI INVITATIONAL
    ANN MCCOY
1983 THE WAR SHOW
    CERAMIC DIRECTIONS: A CONTEMPORARY OVERVIEW
    CINDY SHERMAN
    THE FACULTY SHOW
1984 BERNARD APTEKAR: ART AND POLITICS
    ERIC STALLER: LIGHT YEARS

Director.............................................. RHONDA COOPER
THE FINE ARTS CENTER ART GALLERY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK