

Theodore Roszak: Propulsive Transfiguration A Survey of Drawings from 1928 to 1980

March 25 - May 14, 2016

Preview Event

Thursday, March 24

5:00-6:00 PM: A Conversation with the artist's daughter
Sara Roszak and Robert Slifkin, Associate Professor
at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University
Reception to follow 6:00-8:00 PM

"Every beginning requires of me a new orientation, since at this point little is actually known and less is formally categorized—yet within this amorphous area of emotional experience, one's perceptions and sensibilities stir anew and make unknown alliances, revealing their visual counterpart in varying forms of concealment and disguise."

—Theodore Roszak, 1963

The "self-propulsive" medium of drawing would be the principle means for Roszak's exploration of the transfiguration of the world, a world that he recognized as ceaselessly being in a state of flux as it responds to the changing requirements of an equally mutable human nature.

—Robert Slifkin, 2016

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(New York—March 16, 2016) **Michael Rosenfeld Gallery** is pleased to present ***Theodore Roszak: Propulsive Transfiguration, A Survey of Drawings from 1928 to 1980***, an exhibition of approximately sixty energetic drawings spanning the artist's career and curated in close consultation with the artist's daughter Sara Roszak and his estate. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated color catalogue and an original essay by **Robert Slifkin**, Associate Professor of Fine Arts at NYU's Institute of Fine Arts. This exhibition offers a rare and comprehensive look into the creative process of a celebrated American artist more commonly known for his monumental welded sculptures. Prior to this exhibition, the last and only other survey of Theodore Roszak's drawings was curated in 1992 by Paul Cummings for The Drawing Society in New York City.

Highlighting Roszak's multidimensional talent, the drawings presented in *Theodore Roszak: Propulsive Transfiguration* reveal his capacious intellect and expansive range of interests. The title of the exhibition alludes to Roszak's fascination with the dynamics of metamorphosis—the transformative energies of the natural, organic world as well as the potential of technology and industry



Theodore Roszak (1907-1981), *Untitled*, 1979, graphite on paper, 60" x 47 1/2" / 152.4 x 120.7 cm, signed and dated

to alter the world, for better and for worse. A voracious consumer of ideas, Roszak found inspiration for his prolific body of work in a variety of sources. These included: the design and engineering innovation of streamlining that Norman Bel Geddes addressed in *Horizons*; the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Otto Rank; French purism; atomic energy; aeronautics and space exploration; and the art and culture of India.

This eclecticism strengthened his art and was mirrored in the particular way that Roszak understood the relationship between drawing and sculpture. As Robert Slifkin notes in his essay written for the exhibition catalogue: "while Roszak certainly identified himself first and foremost as a sculptor, coming of age as an artist when such medium-specific monikers were fundamental to aesthetic practices, he consistently produced finished drawings . . . that cannot be considered ancillary to any specific sculpture. . . . A relentlessly productive artist, Roszak invested all of his creative practice with equal vigor and intensity. As a medium traditionally associated with imaginative exploration and translation, drawing occupied a privileged position within Roszak's investigation of creation in both its natural and artificial registers."



100 ELEVENTH AVENUE @ 19TH, NEW YORK, NY 10011
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Theodore Roszak in his studio, 1952

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery has long been a champion of Theodore Roszak's work. In addition to a 2008 solo exhibition, the gallery has featured his work in several major group exhibitions, including: *Aspects of American Abstraction, 1930-1942* (1993), *Defining the Edge: Early American Abstraction, Selections from the Collection of Dr. Peter B. Fischer* (1998), *Organic New York, 1941-1949* (2005), and two major surveys of abstract expressionism and surrealism, in 2009 and 2010, respectively. In cooperation with Jeffrey Hoffeld Fine Art in New York, Michael Rosenfeld Gallery represents the Estate of Theodore Roszak.

Born in 1907 in Posen (now Poznan), Poland, Theodore Roszak was two years old when his family moved to Chicago, settling amid the city's large Polish community. After finishing high school in 1924, Roszak enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago. A 1929 fellowship enabled Roszak to travel to Europe. Based in Prague, he met and befriended Czech artists who introduced him to the principles of Bauhaus design and architecture, and he became familiar with the aesthetics and ideology of constructivism. He returned to America in 1930, settling in New York City. In 1933, the Whitney Museum of American Art included one of his works in their *First Biennial of Contemporary American Painting*. The following year, the Art Institute of Chicago gave him the Eisendrath Award for Painting, and in 1935, Roszak was again represented in the Whitney Biennial with his painting *Fisherman's Bride* (1934), which the museum purchased.

During the second half of the 1930s, Roszak began working on constructions—sleek, free-standing and wall-mounted sculptures of plastic and wood rooted in pure geometric abstraction. However, constructivist ideology was informed by an optimistic faith in technology, and the destruction wreaked by the machinery of war left Roszak deeply critical of this perspective. In the mid-1940s, he abandoned his constructions, picked up an oxyacetylene torch, and began welding steel sculptures. His interest in welding emerged while he was employed at the Brewster Aircraft Corporation in Newark, New Jersey during the Second World War—from 1940 to 1945, Roszak had designed and fabricated aircraft, including an experimental bomber. Although Roszak's welded sculptures

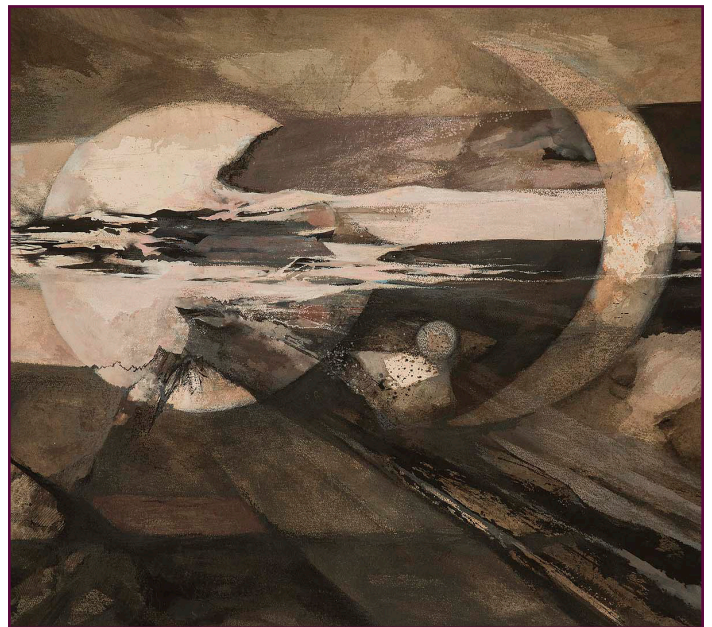
continued to be abstract, they were expressionistic rather than streamlined, inspired by the organic instead of the man-made. This shift was presaged in a series of gouaches he did in the early 1940s, which explored questions of myth and ritual, an interest he shared with Joseph Campbell, who was a colleague of Roszak's at Sarah Lawrence College, where the artist taught from 1941 to 1955. In 1948, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) bought its first Roszak sculpture, *Spectre of Kitty Hawk* (1946-1947).

Rozsak's career thrived in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1956, the Rodin Museum in Paris mounted an exhibition of his work, and *Theodore Roszak*, a traveling mid-career retrospective, was organized by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. In 1959, he received a grant from the Ford Foundation and was included in the *Images of Man* exhibition at MoMA. As his career grew, so did the scale of his sculpture and his interest in flight. But throughout his life, drawing remained a critical means for Roszak to freely explore questions of form, motion, time, and space. In 1969, Roszak began a six-year position as a member of the Fine Arts Commission, and in 1971, he was elected to the Board of Trustees of the American Academy in Rome. Roszak continued to work until his death in 1981.

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Visuals available upon request.

Michael Rosenfeld Gallery is located in Chelsea, at 100 Eleventh Avenue, New York, NY, 10011. Gallery hours are Tuesday – Saturday, 10:00AM – 6:00PM. For visuals and additional information, please contact Marjorie Van Cura at (212) 247-0082 or mv@michaelrosenfeldart.com.



Transfiguration (detail), 1980, ink, gouache and colored pencil on paper, 40" x 59 3/4" / 101.6 x 151.8 cm, signed and dated