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CALARTS DOWNTOWN CENTER FOR INNOVATIVE VISUAL, PERFORMING AND MEDIA ARTS

NEWS RELEASE

Emerson Woelffer: A Solo Flight

Curated by Ed Ruscha

November 20 - December 28, 2003

Press preview: November 18, 10 am - 12 pm

Opening Reception: November 20, 6 - 9 pm



For its inaugural exhibition, the Gallery at REDCAT (Roy and Edna Disney/CalArts Theater) is pleased to announce *Emerson Woelffer: A Solo Flight*, a survey of the work

of the late Los Angeles-based Abstract Expressionist. Conceived and curated by artist Ed Ruscha, the exhibition features over 50 works representing six decades of Woelffer's career. As a committed art instructor, Woelffer was a major influence and inspiration to generations of artists in Southern California where he taught at the Chouinard Art Institute (1959-1961), California Institute of the Arts (1969-1973) and Otis College of Art and Design (1974-1992).

The exhibition begins with works from the late 1940s characterized by totemic, pictographic elements rooted in Surrealism and its admiration of African sculptural forms. In the early 1950s Woelffer turned to a simplified visual language, paring down his forms to generic symbols, letters and numerals. At this point in his career, Woelffer's engagement with jazz music entered into his visual repertoire by way of repeated markings and a free compositional style. By the 1960s, Woelffer reduced his imagery even further to a series of single paint strokes against backdrops of monotone colors that would eventually lead to his double oval paintings, a homage to Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror*. Woelffer's experiments in the 1970s with methods of line making by way of oil slicks, torn paper edges and roughly cut strips of paper transitioned to acrylic canvases and a unique body of collages. Woelffer's later works were primarily white paint on black prepared paper. His last completed canvas is dated 1999.

Born in Chicago in 1914, Emerson Woelffer attended the Art Institute of Chicago. After working as a draftsman for the U.S. military, he joined the faculty of Chicago's Institute of Design in 1939, where he formed a close relationship with the great modernist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Woelffer's subsequent travels to the Yucatán, Italy, France, Spain and Turkey, as well as teaching experiences at Black Mountain College (1949) and Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center (1950-1956) kept him in dialogue with his contemporaries including Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko.

Throughout his career, Woelffer explored the formal possibilities of Abstract Expressionism. Unlike his New York School contemporaries, Woelffer experimented with different abstract styles, introducing elements of chance and spontaneity. Subject to Surrealist and Dada impulses as well as the influence of improvisational jazz music, Woelffer's paintings, drawings and collages adhere to an intimate and direct interpretation of abstraction. Unlike the formal implications of Rothko's spirituality or Motherwell's grand elegies, Woelffer's distinctly personal and improvisational approach to Abstract Expressionism favored experience and affection over universal themes. As a result Woelffer was known as a West Coast pioneer of free-form abstraction.

A 64-page color catalogue accompanies *Emerson Woelffer: A Solo Flight*. It includes an extensive essay by Gerald Nordland and remarks by former students and colleagues including Mary Corse, Joe Goode, George Herms, Dennis Hopper, Allen Ruppersberg and Ed Ruscha.

Emerson Woelffer: A Solo Flight is dedicated in memory of Ira Yellin, CalArts Trustee from 1994 to 2002. The exhibition catalogue is made possible by the generous support of the Dedalus Foundation, Joan and Fred Nicholas, Otis College of Art and Design, Manny Silverman Gallery, and Laura and Casey Wasserman. Gallery exhibitions are

also made possible in part by the Booth Heritage Foundation and the JL Foundation.

Gallery hours: noon to 6pm or curtain, closed Mondays

Admission to the gallery is always free

Visit www.redcat.org or call +1.213.237.2800 for more information

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