

Gilles Aillaud: Paintings 1964–1976

March 7 – May 11, 2019

Ortuzar Projects is pleased to present **“Paintings 1964–1976,”** an exhibition of paintings by **Gilles Aillaud** (1928–2005). This exhibition, the first presentation of Aillaud’s work in New York since 1982, will survey portraits of animals in zoos that he produced in the 1960s and 1970s. In collaboration with Galerie Loevenbruck, Paris, Ortuzar Projects will also present a single-artist booth devoted to Aillaud’s paintings and drawings at Independent Art Fair, New York (March 8-10).

Gilles Aillaud’s multifaceted career encompasses painting, writing, political organization and set design. Born in Paris in 1928, Aillaud studied philosophy before focusing on art making as his primary endeavor. Influenced by Marxist thought (and its reception in France via the writings of Louis Althusser), Aillaud became radicalized in the early 1960s. His work as a painter is thus inseparable from his parallel activities in the political realm.

Aillaud’s portraits of animals in zoo environments – his almost singular theme throughout much of the 1960s and 1970s – can be seen as a fusion of his political, philosophical and aesthetic beliefs. In these works, the twinned notions of spectacle and alienation find perfect form. Although grounded in the specific realities of the observable world, they also stand as a reminder of the conditions imposed by advanced capitalist culture. Against the emancipatory promises of his peers, Aillaud’s animals are articulable only within the often menacing mechanisms of power and control. Often depicted behind barriers (glass and metal bars) that simultaneously create and obscure their visibility, Aillaud’s subjects are prescient renderings of life quantified and objectified.

In 1965, Aillaud became the director of the Salon de Jeune Peinture, a position that he held until 1969. In this capacity Aillaud wrote several texts that would help to articulate the emergent concerns of his contemporaries. Aillaud criticized the formalist belief in aesthetic autonomy, arguing instead for an art that was embedded in the lived realities of history. This notion was positioned against what Aillaud believed to be the deceptive promises of both historical and neo-avant-garde experimentation (i.e., art that aspired to the “false images of freedom that art represented in capitalist society”), and instead espoused a militant political consciousness and an art that reflected the social structures of its times.

Aillaud was further galvanized around the events in Paris in May-June ’68, and was a central participant in the Atelier Populaire (the student-worker occupation of the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts). This organization produced, disseminated and theoretically supported the many revolutionary posters that accompanied the Paris uprisings. Aillaud was the main author of Atelier Populaire texts that described the aspirations of collective aesthetic action in the service of political and social ideals.

Gilles Aillaud (b. 1928, Paris; d. 2005, Paris) has been the subject of major monographic exhibitions and publications, including the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rennes, France (2015); Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (2010); Villa Médicis, Rome (2007); Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid (1991); Institute of Contemporary Art, London (1982); and Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris (1969). A retrospective of his works on paper is currently on view at the Villa Tamaris, La Seyne-sur-mer, France, until March 19, 2019. His work is represented in numerous institutional collections, including the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid; and Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Netherlands.