



A Marriage, 2017, oil and acrylic on Caltex PVC panel, 30 1/2 x 34 1/2 (77.5 x 87.6 cm)

Don Suggs Face-Off

11 March – 2 May 2020

Opening reception:
Wednesday, 11 March, 6-8pm

Venice, CA -- L.A. Louver is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Don Suggs (1945-2019), 11 March – 2 May 2020. Titled *Face-Off*, the exhibition includes never-before-seen paintings created by Suggs 2017-2019.

In this series, Suggs superimposed delineated figurative forms over colorful geometric abstractions. The underlying shapes appear to influence the characteristics and positioning of the graphic characters, which are staged in various stages of confrontation and emotion. While appearing lighthearted upon initial encounter, their subjects, at times, touch on the political but moreover, speak to the human condition. In several works, faces are fractured with line renderings of anthropomorphized trees and animal forms, while others include disembodied human hands and masks; all are marked with the same sharp-witted irreverent intellect and intense interrogation that is a hallmark of Suggs' long career as an artist.

Featuring more than a dozen paintings, the comical portrayals are belied by Suggs' intrinsic eye for color and his deft mark-making skills, from subtle tonal arrangements and painterly streaks, to bold vibrant contrasts and agile calligraphic lines. A master of the flowing mark, every action is precise, confident and deliberate. However varied in composition, scale and technique, these works are rooted in drawing. Suggs had habitually maintained a routine of drawing on notecards he kept in his shirt pocket. Executed with ink or pencil, he referred to these sketches as "autoglyphs" -- an automatic response made with immediacy. He would later return to these drawings to generate ideas. For these works, the characters were lifted directly from the notecards and transferred onto larger panels with blocks of color either loosely rendered, or organized into "studiously geometric" hard-edged configurations.

Some characters are solitary, as in "Red Hand" and "His Galatea" -- both employ distinct artist's frames in which graphic elements embellish their underlying supports. Other isolated figures include what the artist termed "Paintlings." These curious compositions are formed through a painterly, almost marbled, spiral of pigments in varying palettes, within which recognizable elements were inscribed. In such works like "Fledgeling," the artist articulated a bird's beak and eyes, emerging from the swirling paint. "They might be described as 'scrambles,' with rapid automatist gestures inspiring a spare decoding into caricatured faces of humanoids or animals," wrote Suggs. "These are all about 'flux.'"

More often, the characters are paired with a counterpart in varying degrees of interaction. In "Talk to the Hand," a couple is situated *tete-a-tete*, the character on the right emanates from the open palm of a hand to meet the gaze of the figure on the left.

Both are confined to a rectangular field comprised of grey and soft blue equidistant stripes whose clean edges fray towards the top – signaling the specific painterly action required to achieve this quality. The whole composition rests on a pink background, stippled with a delicately textured application that reveals a darker blue-grey tone at its base. Another pairing, “A Marriage,” is bolder in coloration with bright red, yellow and orange over a mustard background. Two figures, one embracing the other, take shape from rounded mounds where hands become eyes, eyes become breasts, an extended arm morphs into a winged serpent. The figures themselves can be read as human or animal depending on where one’s eyes rest, and multiple faces can seemingly be distinguished in unexpected places. Perhaps the title might be understood as the relationship forged with the medium itself, in which something new can continually be discovered. “My impression was that he was really enjoying the spontaneity, free-association and near-automatism of the drawing process which allowed him to follow any path from slapstick Saul Steinberg-type penmanship to angry political caricature,” said writer and curator Doug Harvey. “But he was also enjoying the selection and filtering of the original small images, and the translation into their final, more deliberate incarnations. Typical balancing act between the rational and intuitive.”



Fledgeling (From the series “Paintlings”), 2018
oil and acrylic on canvas board
10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm)

Don Suggs (1945-2019) was born in Fort Worth, Texas, and grew up in San Diego, California. Suggs studied art, film and psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, where he earned both an MA in 1971 and MFA in 1972. Suggs was awarded two National Endowment for the Art Grants, in 1973 and 1991. A thirty-eight year survey of Suggs’ paintings, drawings, photography and sculptures was presented at the Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles in 2007. Titled *One Man Group Show*, the exhibition was co-curated by gallery director Meg Linton, and writer and curator Doug Harvey.

In addition to making art, Suggs had a distinguished career as a teacher. He held positions at Florida State University, Tallahassee; Franconia College, New Hampshire; the University of Southern California; Otis College of Art and Design, Los Angeles, and UCLA, where he taught painting and drawing from 1983 to 2014.

Concurrently on view at L.A. Louver

Tom Wudl: The Flowerbank World – An exhibition of new and recent works by the Los Angeles-based artist, inspired by the revered Buddhist teaching the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (*Flower Ornament Scripture*). Among the nearly two dozen works from 2015-20 on display, the exhibition includes one of Wudl’s early paper-punch abstractions from 1973, as well as an in-progress large-scale work that he commenced in 2018.

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