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HAL BROMM GALLERY

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Luis Frangella & Russell Sharon:

A Life in Art

11 February - 29 April 2022



(Left) Luis Frangella 1983 Photo © Andreas Sterzing; (Right) Russell Sharon 1983 Photo © Andreas Sterzing

"Luis & Russell: A Life in Art" celebrates the enduring relationship of Russell Sharon and his late partner Luis Frangella in a joint exhibition of their work.

Through works created by both artists beginning in the 1980s, it explores their influential roles in the East Village art and club scene, their friendships with fellow artists- and occasional collaborators- including Keiko Bonk, Stephen Lack, Judy Glantzman, David Wojnarowicz, Walter Robinson, Bobby G, Martin Wong, Manuela Filiaci, Mike Bidlo, and Rick Prol among many others, and how the energy and enthusiasm of that era faded as AIDS decimated their lives with the death of Frangella in 1990.

The exhibition invites consideration of how Sharon and Frangella - as well as their community - were impacted by the harsh reality of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, as well as how Sharon and his artistic focus have shifted and changed since his loss of Frangella, followed by their close friend David Wojnarowicz's death in 1992.

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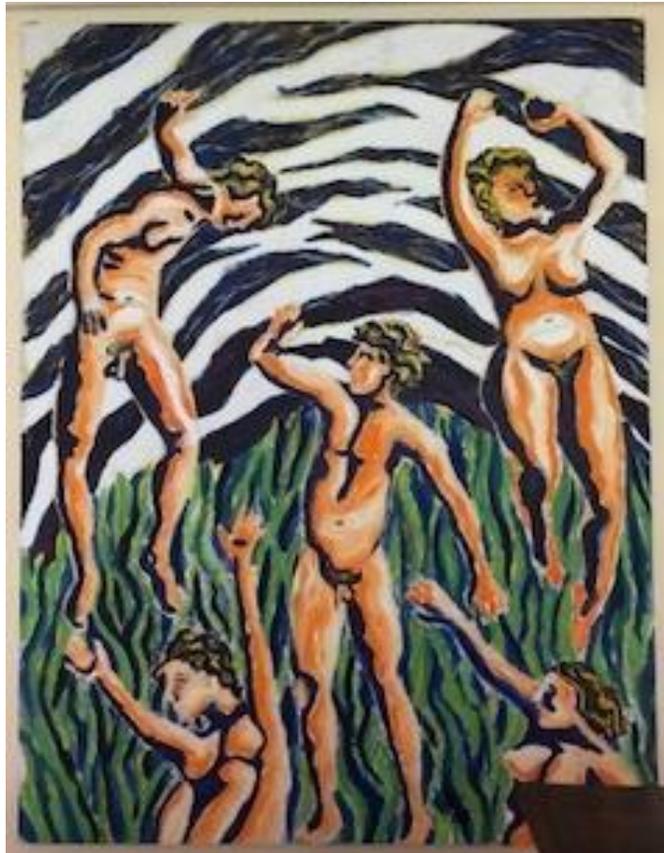
Luis Frangella photographed in front of "Katty" 1983, painted curtain for an East Village night club



All: Luis Frangella, *Untitled (Tuscan Landscape)*, 1982, oil on canvas, 22 x 18"

Moving to New York in 1976, both artists developed their multifaceted practices, which ranged from painting and sculpture, to large-scale installations, stage and set designs and ceramic works.

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Russell Sharon, *Swimmers*, 1984, acrylic on plastic, 111" x 50", Private Collection, New York

Sharon's work, influenced by his childhood spent on his family's farm in central Minnesota, is deeply reverent of nature. Leaving the city, he spent his summers at the farm, transforming dying Dutch Elm trees into sculptures with a chainsaw and creating studies of landscapes. Once back in the city, Sharon developed these into colorful, Neo-Expressionist oil paintings that captured the energy of the East Village at the time. However, Sharon attributes this energy to a disjuncture of experience: "Here in New York, where one can feel so strongly that Nature is being taken for granted and abused on a monstrous scale, I do my oil paintings from the studies I did in the country. So my love and my fears intermingle in the paintings."

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Photo by Glen Straight

RUSSELL SHARON

THE CHAINSAW PEOPLE
A Country Tableau of New Painting and Sculpture

28 MAY-22 JUNE 1985
Opening 28 May 6-8 pm

For this exhibition Russell Sharon has created amazing freestanding figures sculpted with a chainsaw. Working on site in Minnesota with fallen poplar trees, he has produced figures with an exuberance and "life" that belies the destructive, almost menacing tool with which they were created. These new sculptures are shown with vibrant 3-D landscape paintings which have been collaged with painted sticks, and Sharon's "pets" – fanciful animal-like sculptures of colorfully painted wood fragments.

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Notably, Russell Sharon's most recent landscapes have become serene abstractions, focusing on the horizon, which, for the artist, "suggests the past and the future, a point where dreams and memories are born."



Russell Sharon, *Untitled (Landscape)*, 2000, oil on canvas, 24" x 24"

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Luis Frangella, *Candle*, 1987, oil on canvas, 28" x 43"

Frangella received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1982, creating works in an expansive Neo-Expressionist style, influenced by his formal academic training and reaction to it. Critic and curator Elena Oliveras observed:

“In his representation, always fragmented, of human figures, he starts from an academic version in order to give it back in totally anti-academic terms. Although the subject of the classic torso is repeated in his painting, it isn’t the principal subject. It stands as a kind of ‘tray’ on which the artist ‘serves’ shape and color... [an] attentive observer of the objects that surrounded him (a cup, a knife, a bibelot, a sphere of glass), he investigates the lines of the shape and color. He studies the changing incidences of light in its surfaces and the expansion of brightness and reflection.”

The New York Times noted that the artist was “Equally at ease with painting and sculpture” and that Frangella “could also alternate between extreme delicacy and robust muscularity”.

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Dreamer installation in Luis Frangella's 1983 "Paintings" exhibition at Hal Bromm

Frangella's 1983 solo exhibition at Hal Bromm gave the artist free reign to cover the gallery walls with fourteen foot high figurative paintings, echoing the pier works in an exuberant installation with large – scale paintings hung atop the wall images.



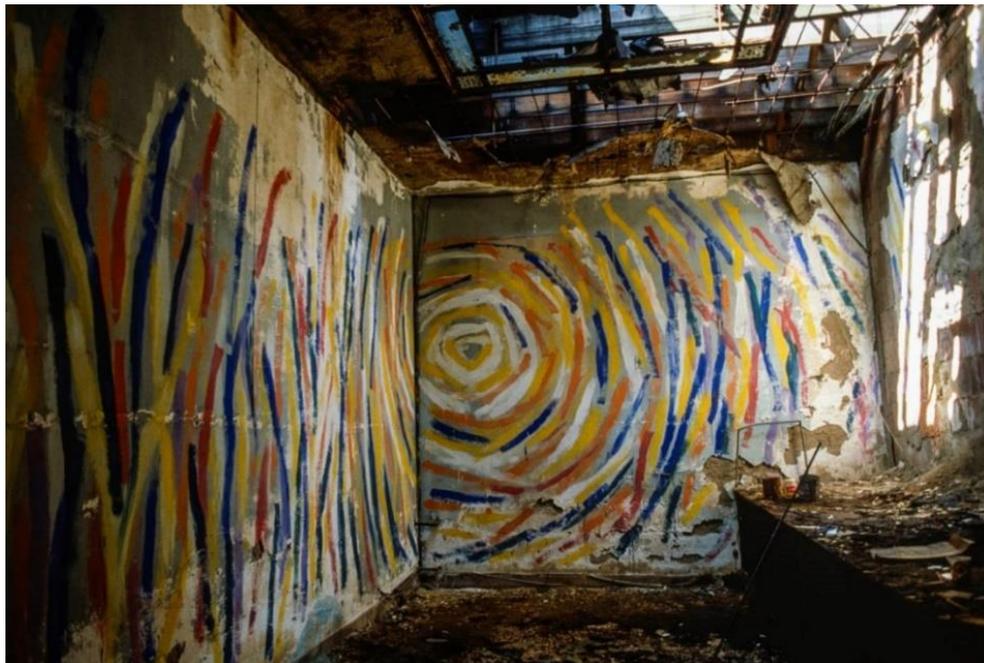
Luis Frangella Poster Design for 1983 "Paintings" Exhibition at Hal Bromm

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Pier 34 Luis Frangella 1983 Photo © Andreas Sterzing

At the same time, Frangella and Sharon had joined David Wojnarowicz and others at Pier 34 where they created vast super-scaled paintings on every surface. The spaces at Pier 34 quickly became an ad hoc ‘artists’ museum’ with a growing cast of participants who used unconventional mediums to transform its floors and walls. In 2016, curator Johnathan Weinberg organized an important exhibition “Pier 34: Something Possible Everywhere” documenting the Pier 34 era. Weinberg observed “beyond the sensation of freedom was the generosity in the act of initiation, the way one artist shared a major source of inspiration with another, short circuiting the hypercompetitive nature of the art market.”



(Left) Pier 34 Russell Sharon Photo © Andreas Sterzing;

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(Right) Russell Sharon Poster Design for 1984 “Paintings” exhibition at Hal Bromm Gallery

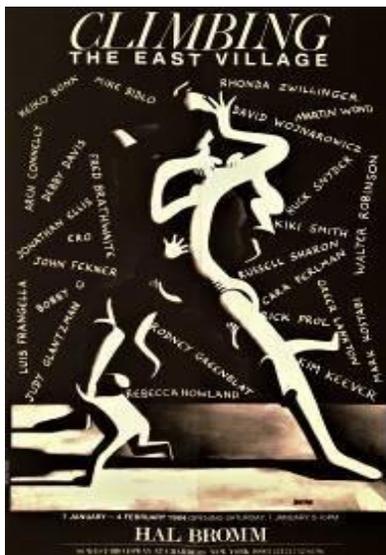
In June of 1983 the infamous ‘opening’ at Pier 34 was advertised to the public and the police showed up, ‘shutting down’ the Pier; although artists continued to work there until its demolition in 1984. Throughout the early 80s Luis Frangella and Russell Sharon helped organized some of the first exhibitions at Limbo Lounge, an artists' after-hours club known for its art shows and film screenings.



Luis Frangella, *Figures (Head and Torso)*, 1984, oil on canvas, 24 x 32”

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Many of the talented artists shown at Limbo Lounge were featured in Hal Bromm's 1984 *Climbing: The East Village* exhibition, introducing them and the growing East Village art scene to a larger audience. Speaking on this experience, Sharon remembers, "It was a very important show for a lot of us to get together and meet in a gallery context" creating a sense of community that grew from their pier experiences together.



Poster for the 1984 exhibition "Climbing The East Village" at Hal Bromm Gallery

At the height of the AIDS epidemic both Sharon and Frangella were diagnosed with HIV and Luis played an integral role in the ACT UP movement. Frangella remained determined to create work until the very end. Shortly before Luis' death at the age of 46, Gracie Mansion staged an exhibition of drawings to raise money for his medical expenses. Work from this final group is included in the exhibition.



Luis Frangella, *Sleep*, 1982, oil on canvas 30 x 40"

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After Luis Frangella's death in 1990, Russell left New York City for a fresh start, establishing a southern studio outpost, dividing his time between his Minnesota Farm and Miami Beach.



Russell Sharon, *Untitled (Blue Landscape)*, 2005, oil on canvas, 12 x 12"

During the exhibition, the gallery will host a number of panel discussions exploring the work and lives of the artists, the 1980s contemporary art scene, and the HIV/ AIDs epidemic.

For information about the "HIV/AIDS and Arts Collaborative" contact Doneley Meris at HIV ARTS NETWORK: 212-385-4945 or doneleymeris@gmail.com.