



IRVING NORMAN (1920-1989)

The Palace

oil on canvas

90 x 60 in. (91 3/8 x 61 1/8 x 1 7/8 in.)

1959

2706

PROVENANCE:

Martin Sosin

Heather James Fine Art, Palm Desert, California

EXHIBITION:

Sacramento, Crocker Art Museum, September 23, 2006 – January 7, 2007 Pasadena, Pasadena Museum of California Art, January 21 – April 15, 2007 Logan, Utah, Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Utah State University, June 5 – October 6, 2007 Washington D.C., Katzen Arts Center at American University, November 2007 – January 2008, Laguna Art Museum June 22, 2008 – October 5, 2008

LITERATURE:

Dark Metropolis: Irving Norman's Social Surrealism, pub. Crocker Art Museum and Irving Norman Trust, 2006, pg. 73

Irving Norman was transformed by his experience resisting fascism during the Spanish Civil War, and turned to art as a way to express the atrocities he witnessed. After traveling to Mexico to view the works of artists such as Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco, the muralists' profound influence on him is evident in the grand scale of his works. But Norman was also known for his attention to detail, and to the human condition, which derived from his study and appreciation of the Social Realists and Surrealists of the day.

The Palace (1959) shows a giant structure built upon the mangled bodies of the masses, to house just one corpulent being. From a distance, the palace appears to be a thing of beauty, with its rich colors and tapestries, but Norman's details show the underlying ugliness. Corpses are impaled on the battlements, and hundreds of identical, emaciated figures are crammed into prisons that make up the foundation of this edifice. Such scenes depicting poverty, capitalism, and the many ways in which society traps the many for the benefit of the few are running themes throughout all of Norman's works. The messages in his art were also cornerstones by which he lived, eschewing the "commercially viable" artistic trends and even private patronage. He sought widespread, public viewership in the hope that he might inspire some to reconsider their own roles within society's power structure. This painting has been exhibited at the Crocker Museum, the Pasadena Museum, the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum, the Laguna Museum, and the Katzen Center.

The Lithuanian-American artist Irving Norman was a social surrealist who painted large-scale and highly detailed critiques of contemporary life with hopes that viewers would consider the consequences of their actions and change their behavior. Influenced by the dire conditions of the Great Depression, his massive canvases feature armies of clone-like figures behaving in the clockwork manner in which they have been

programmed. He moved from New York to Los Angeles in 1934 before helping to defend the Spanish Republic from the fascist Franco dictatorship. He survived the Spanish Civil War and in 1939 settling on Catalina Island off the Southern California coast, where he began drawing and painting from the atrocities he had witnessed. In 1940, he moved to San Francisco and had a solo exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Art two years later. He then traveled to Mexico City and saw the murals of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros before moving to New York City to studying at the Art Students League from 1946 to 1947. He returned to San Francisco in the late 1940s. In 1988, fire destroyed his home, studio, artwork, and personal papers.

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