



IRVING NORMAN (1906-1989)

Bacchanal

oil on canvas

69 1/2 x 39 1/2 in. (72 1/2 x 42 1/4 x 1 3/4 in.)

1954

33467

PROVENANCE:

Moses and Ruth Helen Lasky
Private Collection, California

EXHIBITION:

Dark Metropolis: Irving Norman's Social Surrealism, Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, California, September 23, 2006 - January 7, 2007; Pasadena Museum of California Art, January 26 - May 13, 2007; Nora Eccles Harrison Museum, Logan, Utah, June 5 - October 13, 2007

Irving Norman was born in 1906 in Vilna, then part of the Russian Empire, now Lithuania. Norman's immigration to New York City in 1923 was short-lived, as he would return to Europe to fight as part of the Abraham Lincoln battalion against the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. After the War, Norman would eventually settle in Half Moon Bay, California, where he embarked on a prolific studio practice.

Norman's work portrays the horrors of war and his firsthand knowledge of totalitarian dictatorships. Norman's work has been described as "Social Surrealism," and his grand scenes are immediate and arresting. The large-scale works of Norman truly capture the power of his lived experiences; they are as much a visual record as they are a warning for the future, intended to inspire change.

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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