

RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC
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Michael Mazur

Late Work, Rain and Flowers
October 25 – December 22, 2018

RYAN LEE is pleased to announce an exhibition of paintings and drawings by Michael Mazur (1935–2009). Known for his virtuosic facility with painting, drawing and printmaking, Mazur remains celebrated for his relentless drive to create and reinvent. *Late Work, Rain and Flowers* presents a selection of paintings and previously unexhibited drawings that were made in the final years of Mazur's life.

Throughout a career that spanned more than half a century, Mazur explored a range of styles, techniques and subject matter. He often worked in series and in various media at once, experimenting with stencils, airbrushing and printing on silk. Content impelled him, whether he was responding to social injustice or absorbing aesthetic traditions of the Far East. As Mazur explained to Robert Brown in a 1993 interview for the Smithsonian's *Archives of American Art*, "...content drove my engine, but the form always interested me, in terms of its relationship to the content... form-making, the facture of making paintings or drawings or prints, that has interested me and had its influence on me throughout all the work."

This mutually constitutive relationship between form and content in Mazur's oeuvre is particularly evident in the stylistic divergence between these two late bodies of work. While each treats an elemental form of nature, the fragility of the flower drawings presents a stark contrast to the power and dynamism of the pounding rain in the oil paintings. In the Rain paintings the viewer is subsumed, both caught in torrential downpour and somehow under water. The simultaneous horizontality and verticality in *Bay Rain III* (2009) suggests visual access from above as well as head-on while also presenting a Rorschach-like reflection of itself. Combined with rocks and ripples rendered in turquoise, cerulean and lavender, the resulting image evokes creation and disintegration. By contrast, Mazur's floral drawings are delicate and minimal. Despite limited mobility during a period of recovery in the last year of his life, he produced over 100 ink drawings of plants and flowers—many of which had been given to him by his wife or observed in his own garden. Executed in black ink, these intimately scaled images seem to hover, emerging and receding from the negative space.

Taken together these last works by Mazur illustrate the dueling potentialities of nature and art. As Mazur explained when the Rain paintings were first exhibited in 2009, shortly before his death, "all good and great paintings provide a whiff of mortality and, ultimately, are a celebration of the life force; they are both the tunnel and the light at its end... Light and dark, color and its absence, form and anti-form all contribute to this."

Michael Mazur (1935 New York, NY – 2009 Boston, MA) is an internationally recognized artist known for his fluidity between paintings, drawings and prints as well as between abstract and representational imagery. Born and raised in New York City, Mazur moved to Massachusetts in 1953 and received his BA from Amherst College. He received his BFA and MFA from Yale University in 1959 and 1961, respectively, and he was later heralded by *The Boston Globe* as one of the greatest painters and printmakers that New England produced in the second half of the 20th century. Mazur first exhibited in 1960 and quickly earned acclaim, receiving a

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Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation grant, John Simon Guggenheim Foundation award and an American Academy of Arts and Letters fellowship in just two years. Mazur was invited to represent the United States in the 1975 Venice Biennale, but he declined to participate in protest of the Vietnam War. Over the next 50 years, he was the subject of more than 80 solo exhibitions and included in numerous group shows. In 2000, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston held a retrospective which traveled to Stanford University Art Museum, the Jane Vorhees Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University and the Minneapolis Institute of Art. Mazur's work is held in several prominent collections, including the British Museum, London; Cincinnati Art Museum; Cleveland Museum of Art; de Cordova Museum, Lincoln; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Art Institute of Chicago; McNay Art Museum, San Antonio; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven; and Zimmerli Art Museum at Rutgers University, New Brunswick.

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