



"WE HAD TO DESTROY IT IN ORDER TO SAVE IT."
PAINTING IN NEW YORK IN THE 1970s

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Ellsworth Kelly
Three Greys
1975
oil on canvas in three panels
108 x 108 in.



Elizabeth Murray
New York Dawn
1977
oil on canvas
88 ½ x 65 in.



Robert Ryman
Surface Veil
1970
oil on fiberglass
20 x 20 in

2-27 October, 2012

New York - Christie's is proud to present an upcoming Private Sale exhibition: **"We had to destroy it in order to save it." Painting in New York in the 1970s.** Co-curated by the esteemed art historian Robert Pincus-Witten and Christie's Chairman of Post-War and Contemporary Development, Amy Cappellazzo, the exhibition will be on view from October 2-27, 2012 in Christie's 20th Floor Private Sales gallery, Rockefeller Center. It will feature approximately 40 works by artists who remained dedicated to painting at a time of crisis in the discipline: **Richard Artschwager, Jo Baer, Jennifer Bartlett, Mary Heilmann, Jasper Johns, Ellsworth Kelly, Willem de Kooning, Robert Mangold, Brice Marden, Robert Moskowitz, Elizabeth Murray, Blinky Palermo, Dorothea Rockburne, Susan Rothenberg, Robert Ryman, and Frank Stella.** Many of the works featured in the exhibition are on loan from select private and institutional collections.

"The 1970s remain one of the most thought-provoking yet least distilled and deciphered periods in art history. This exhibition will hopefully elucidate the artistic impulses of artists who stayed with the Modernist tenants of painting against all odds," declared **Amy Cappellazzo, Chairman of Post-War and Contemporary Art Development, and co-curator of the exhibition.**

"My experiences of the New York art world during the 1970s were charged and privileged. I met and worked with many figures who were addressing the role of painting at a moment when painting itself was under particular siege. These artists, then scarcely known but today household names, were trying to find ways to maintain their sense of painting's contemporary pertinence. My years at Artforum as an editor in the 1970s were, in a sense, allowed for by my primary academic responsibilities since there is scant monetary gain in the critical calling. I was curious about how this seemingly anomalous period could be revisited, how it would strike today's audience. When Amy Cappellazzo of Christie's invited me to join her in such a retrospective glance, I responded with alacrity," commented **Robert Pincus-Witten, co-curator and Professor Emeritus in Art History at the Graduate Center and Queens College of the City University of New York.**

The title of the exhibition derives from a statement by an anonymous military official during the Vietnam War and reiterated by Peter Arnett in *The New York Times*, "We had to destroy it in order to save it," regarding the US bombing of the civilian town Ben Tre.

The 1970s was a tumultuous time in American history and by extension, art history. New York City was on the verge of bankruptcy. Economically, stagnation coupled with inflation created a sense of despair and a need to rethink the future. President Gerald R. Ford angered many New Yorkers by refusing to grant the city a bailout, a decision famously summarized by the *New York Daily News* headline "Ford to City: Drop Dead." During this time of social and political turmoil, artists were responding to this upheaval by incorporating new media and technologies into their artistic practice. While multimedia works were perceived as the most avant-garde, a group of New York painters radically returned to traditional methods of application, with an emphasis on the handmade in their commitment to the authenticity of painting. **"We had to destroy it in order to save it." Painting in New York in the 1970s**, aims to shed light on those who adhered to painting's principle ideas. These artists preserved painterly expression by redefining it for a new generation.

The catalogue will feature essays by Robert Pincus-Witten and Barbara Rose who were among the most influential critics when art criticism enjoyed huge influence. During the 1970s Robert Pincus-Witten was a Senior Editor at *Artforum* and Barbara Rose curated the divisive *"American Painting: The Eighties"* exhibition at the Grey Art Gallery, New York University in 1979.

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October 2-27, 2012
Tuesday - Saturday
11 am - 6 pm and by appointment

Panel Discussion: October 16, 2012 6:30 pm

Christie's 20th Floor Private Sales Galleries - 1230 Avenue of the Americas - New York, NY 10020

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Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in 2011 that totaled £3.6 billion/\$5.7 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 450 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewelry, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War and Contemporary, Impressionist and Modern, Old Masters and Jewelry. Private sales totaled £502 million / \$808.6m in 2011, an increase of 44% on the previous year.

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