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PRESS RELEASE



LEON GOLUB

Mercenaries II and Napalm Gates

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If anyone supports his state by the arms of mercenaries, he will never stand firm or sure, as they are disunited, ambitious, without discipline, faithless, bold amongst friends, cowardly among enemies, they have no fear of God and keep no faith with men. (Machiavelli)

In 1975/76 Golub made several attempts at the subject of mercenaries, soldiers of fortune, instruments of corrupt power. Of these, one survived whole and one massive painting was cut into segments. While this violent attack on his own work may have been an expression of angry dissatisfaction, it reflected its subject matter with even more power. These four monumental sections can now be seen as crucial expressions of this phase in the artist's work, a phase which saw the completion of the two epic Vietnam paintings, the second of which now hangs in Tate Modern.

Bringing together the four sections of *Mercenaries II* for the first time, this exhibition shows the work of one of the greatest political artists of the last century at its most angry and uncompromising. Not surprising that his works were shunned for so long by an American establishment immersed in Vietnam and its aftermath. The power of the imagery and the violence of its making are shocking and undeniable. It was equally problematic for an art world that was hostile to realist figuration.

And yet, immediately prior to these realist paintings, Golub had grappled with what he saw as the failure of abstract expressionism, and succeeded in investing non-figurative form with the violent narrative of his war commentary. The *Napalm Gates* are extraordinary statements. *"I remember seeing in Knossos on Crete the "Lion's Gate" which was a kind of gate of the city. Ancient and classical cities had gates, arches, and other monumental entrances into urban life, so to speak. I wanted to make some association of the gates of the city or the walls of the city...being disfigured or corrupted with napalm like a stain or a disease."* Three of these 'gates' drenched in the record of indiscriminate cruelty, also feature in the present exhibition. These images of the scarred pillars of a sullied international establishment and the self-interested instruments of its power are as starkly relevant today as then.

Anthony Reynolds Gallery is most grateful to Samm Kunce and the Estate of Leon Golub and particularly to Philip, Steven and Paul Golub for the release of the works for this exhibition.

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