

Bernard Langlais

WORKS IN WOOD: A SURVEY EXHIBITION

May 18 through June 28, 2013

Opening Reception and American Week Open House: Wednesday, May 22, 5 to 7 pm



Bernard Langlais, *Thirteen Cats*, ca. 1967, wood and paint, 48 x 96 x 2 inches

Alexandre Gallery is pleased to present *Bernard Langlais – Works in Wood* on view **May 18 through June 28, 2013**. This exhibition will survey Langlais’s (1921 – 1977) intricate and delicate painted abstract wood assemblages from of the 1950s and 60s through the bold, and often rough, folk inspired animal carvings – including his large-scaled iconic lions – of the 1970s. This marks the first New York showing of Langlais’s work since 1990. In 2002 his work was the subject of an exhibition at the Portland Museum of Art (Maine). The show will be accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with text by Christopher Crosman, founding chief curator, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

In 1956, coinciding with the purchase of a “fixer-upper” summer cottage in Cushing, Maine, Langlais began assembling and carving abstract wood sculptures, primarily as relatively shallow wall reliefs, harking back to cubism, constructivism, and dada and surrealism’s use of found materials. In New York this abstract sculpture was well-received. From the early sixties he was among the most visible and respected artists rising with a generation of

soon-to-be art world stars. His work was included in several ground-breaking exhibitions including *New Forms—New Media (I and II)* at the Martha Jackson Gallery, and *The Art of Assemblage* at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961, at which time he showed with Leo Castelli's eponymous gallery. Langlais's art, like that of many of his peers, explored painting as well as sculpture, and oscillated between representation and abstraction, often in the same object.

Although he continued to paint and draw throughout his life, after moving to Maine full-time in 1966, Langlais decisively committed to figurative sculpture, for which he became best known. These sculptures included his mature, monumental wall reliefs and in-the-round painted and carved constructions – his cacophonous un-“Peaceable Kingdoms” – populated with bears, horses, elephants, birds and other assorted domestic and wild animal sculptures.

For Langlais, his diverse subjects were formal and familiar objects that he could shape, transform, hang paint on, and re-invent as the spirit moved him. That the animals, especially lions, have distinct, individual personalities is also intentional. Even the most doleful lion, sheep or elephant conveys a bit of wonder and perplexed surprise at its very existence, its flawed proportions and stylized features that inexplicably and precisely nail their inherent natures – sometimes literally as when Langlais used a pair of penny nails for a bird's beak or a spindly sandpiper's legs. His best work in this back road, unhurried and unchanging rural landscape, became less like anyone else's, whether in New York or Maine. With his work's genesis in post-War high modernism, Langlais was among those few artists who forged a new approach to figurative sculpture.

Alexandre Gallery is located in the Fuller Building at 41 East 57th Street, 13th Floor. The gallery regularly exhibits the work of contemporary American artists and specializes in first generation American modernists with particular emphasis in the Stieglitz Group. Regular gallery hours are Tuesday through Friday, from 10:00 – 5:30, and Saturdays, from 11:00 to 5:00.

For further information and images, please contact Julia Benjamin at 212-755-2828 or jbenjamin@alexandregallery.com