

GREY ART NYU GALLERY

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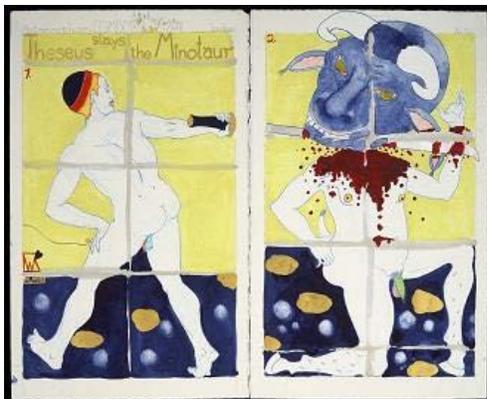
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EXHIBITION PRESENTS NEW YORK'S FIRST SOLO SHOW OF SELF-TAUGHT, OCTOGENARIAN AMERICAN ARTIST

Metamorphoses: Ovid According to Wally Reinhardt

On view at New York University's Grey Art Gallery
January 9–April 6, 2019



Theseus Slays the Minotaur, 2003
Watercolor, gouache, Prismacolor colored pencil, graphite, and tape on prepared Arches paper, 18 x 22 in.
New York University Art Collection. Gift of the artist, 2018.2.30

For centuries, Greek and Roman myths have inspired artists. **New York University's Grey Art Gallery** is pleased to present a solo museum exhibition of the New York-based octogenarian artist Wally Reinhardt, who continues in this time-honored tradition. On view from **January 9 through April 6, 2019** in the Grey's Lower Level Gallery, *Metamorphoses: Ovid According to Wally Reinhardt* features some 50 watercolor, gouache, and colored pencil illustrations from a series that numbers nearly 200. Reinhardt, who began working on this project in 1984, has focused solely on interpreting Ovid's most acclaimed work of Latin poetry, *Metamorphoses*. Spanning 15 books, this oft-cited magnum opus from 8 CE has provided rich source material for Reinhardt's witty and whimsical series, titled *Pages from Ovid's Metamorphoses*. Installed roughly in the same order that Ovid recounted his myths, Reinhardt's graphic interpretations provoke a

reconsideration of art making itself as a form of metamorphosis. *Metamorphoses* will also coincide with the conference *Ovid and Art* on April 4, 2019, organized by NYU's Center for Ancient Studies in collaboration with the Grey Art Gallery and the Department of Art History.

Exhibition

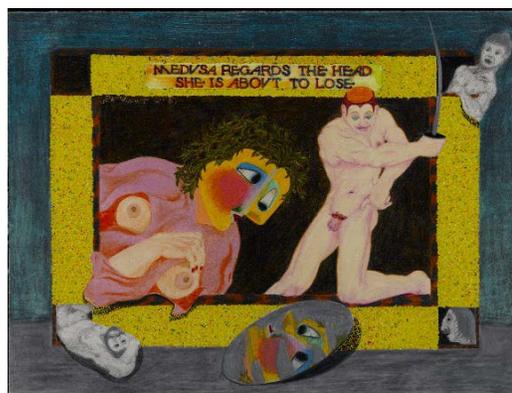
Born in Washington Heights in 1935, Wally Reinhardt only began making art seriously at age 49. His fascination with Ovid's monumental fifteen books of poetry, however, was ignited during the previous decade. While living in Rome in the 1970s with his late partner Robert Keyser, a Philadelphia-based painter who also taught at Temple University Rome, Reinhardt consistently encountered the city's artistic interpretations of Ovid's work. A patron of opera and ballet as well as an admirer of Renaissance and Baroque artists like Antonio del Pollaiuolo, Luca della Robbia, and Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Reinhardt began studying Ovidian-inspired artworks. Having never

had formal art training, the artist acknowledges that the museums and the city of Rome itself were marvelous teachers.

Grey Art Gallery Director Lynn Gumpert states: “As a university art museum, it is very appropriate that the Grey present Reinhardt’s contemporary depictions of this epic poem. And, of course, we are thrilled to collaborate with both NYU’s Department of Art History and Center for Ancient Studies.” In his essay “Ovid and Art” in the show’s catalogue, Matthew S. Santirocco, Professor of Classics and Angelo J. Ranieri Director of Ancient Studies at NYU, notes that “classical myths resonate on many levels,” and that “the representation of a cosmos in perpetual flux and of individual identity as essentially unstable seems strikingly modern.” Dennis Geronimus, associate professor and chair of the Department of Art History, served as co-curator, along with Gumpert for the show. “As a Renaissance art historian, it is exciting and great fun to see a contemporary artist tackle this exceptionally beautiful, evocative poem which has inspired so many interpretations in word and image, theatre, opera and dance, across centuries,” he observes.

Rome features prominently not only in Reinhardt’s biography, but also in that of Ovid himself. At the age of 50, Rome’s most celebrated and prolific poet was mysteriously banished by the Emperor Augustus to a remote stretch of the empire on the Black Sea. *Metamorphoses*, composed in the ten years before his banishment and completed just before his departure in 8 CE, radically altered the direction of Roman—and, ultimately, of Western—literature. At fifteen books, the hexametric poem’s scale redefined the tradition of the epic. Santirocco also notes that *Metamorphoses* deviates from tradition by foregoing “a historical subject, a unified time frame, a continuous plot line, a consistent tone, or even one authorial voice.”

Reinhardt began work on his own ambitious project after returning from Rome in 1984. Titled Pages from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in reference to its literary origins, the series was not created in the order in which the poem unfolds. Originally intending to illustrate all the books in *Metamorphoses*, Reinhardt has instead repeated some of the same stories but as told from different angles. Pages are often captioned with cheeky descriptions of the narrative at hand, using Reinhardt’s language rather than Ovid’s. Nonetheless, Reinhardt has imposed strict formal guidelines. All of the Pages created between 1984 and 1995, for example, are drawings made with Prismacolor pencils and gouache on single sheets of Arches paper, whereas his Pages from the late 1990s through today feature diptychs, triptychs, and polyptychs rendered primarily in watercolor with some details in gold and silver gouache. Early on, Reinhardt depicted elaborate, decorative borders that can be seen as reflections of ancient Roman frescoes and mosaics, or as subtle allusions to New York City’s subway tiles. His later Pages, on the other hand, evolved into gridded, window frame–like compositions that—inspired by comics and akin to Cubism—play with the tension between surface and perspective, “granting the gods,” in Reinhardt’s words, “a modern pictorial space for their endeavors.”



Medusa Regards the Head She Is About to Lose, 1987
Prismacolor colored pencil and gouache on prepared Arches paper, 11 x 15 in.
New York University Art Collection. Gift of the artist, 2018.2.11

Regardless of when they were made, the Pages often recount the most famous legends. Notable examples include a Picasso-esque Gorgon staring at her reflection in *Medusa Regards*

the Head She Is About to Lose (1987); the balletic demise of the ferocious, labyrinth-dwelling beast in *Theseus Slays the Minotaur* (2003); and the tragic tale of the great bard Orpheus and his beloved Eurydice, in *Orpheus & Eurydice* (2000).

The series, *Pages from Ovid's Metamorphoses*, was gifted to the Grey Art Gallery and the New York University Art Collection by the artist in 2017. *Metamorphoses: Ovid According to Wally Reinhardt* is his largest show to date and contributes to present-day discussions about self-taught artists, contemporary interpretations of ancient fable, and late-career practitioners whose works have not been seen by broader publics. Previously, selected *Pages* were featured in a 2010 solo exhibition at the Bates College Museum of Art, as well as in group exhibitions at the Queens Museum, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the ICA Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Arts Alliance, the Carnegie Mellon Art Gallery, the James A. Michener Art Museum, and Dolan/Maxwell Gallery.

This exhibition is timed to overlap with New York University's conference *Ovid and Art*, organized by NYU's Center for Ancient Studies in collaboration with the Grey Art Gallery and the Department of Art History, which will be held on April 4, 2019. Coinciding with the 2000-year anniversary of Ovid's death, the conference will explore Ovid's use of the visual arts in his poem and the ways later artists appropriate Ovid in their work. For more information, please contact ancient.studies@nyu.edu.

Exhibition Catalogue

Metamorphoses: Ovid According to Wally Reinhardt will be accompanied by a 128-page illustrated catalogue with an introduction by Matthew S. Santirocco, Professor of Classics and Angelo J. Ranieri Director of Ancient Studies at New York University, as well as a published conversation between Wally Reinhardt and co-curators Dennis Geronimus, associate professor and chair of the Department of Art History at NYU, and Lynn Gumpert, director of the Grey Art Gallery. Also included will be catalogue entries on Reinhardt's works—many of which have never before been published or seen by the public—by Marlee Miller, a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Fine Arts, NYU, and Hannah Kate Simon, the exhibition's graduate research assistant. The publication will be available as a free download on the Grey Art Gallery website.

Sponsorship

Metamorphoses: Ovid According to Wally Reinhardt was organized by the Grey Art Gallery and co-curated by Dennis Geronimus and Lynn Gumpert. The exhibition is made possible in part by the generous support of the Charina Endowment Fund; Abby Weed Grey Trust; and the Grey's Director's Circle, Inter/National Council, and Friends.

About the Grey Art Gallery

The Grey Art Gallery is New York University's fine arts museum, located on historic Washington Square Park in New York City's Greenwich Village. It offers the NYU community and the general public a dynamic roster of engaging and thought-provoking exhibitions, all of them enriched by public programs. With its emphasis on experimentation and interpretation, and its focus on studying art in its historical, cultural, and social contexts, the Grey serves as a museum-laboratory for the exploration of art's environments.

Exhibitions organized by the Grey have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the Gallery hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York and produces scholarly publications that are distributed worldwide.

General Information

Grey Art Gallery, New York University
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Tel: 212/998-6780, Fax: 212/995-4024
E-mail: greyartgallery@nyu.edu, Website: greyartgallery.nyu.edu

Hours

Grey Art Gallery:
Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11 am–6 pm
OPEN LATE Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm
Saturday: 11 am–5 pm
Closed Sunday, Monday, and major holidays

Admission

Grey Art Gallery:
Suggested donation: \$5; free of charge to NYU students, faculty, and staff