



Dick Morrill

Paintings



Archeologist, 2009, 42 x 36 inches, Oil and acrylic on canvas



Handy Man
48 x 36 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



Girl Of the Golden West
48 x 40 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



The Blue Girl
42 x 36 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



The White Clown
42 x 36 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



Optimist
40 x 28 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



Martini With Olive
42 x 30 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



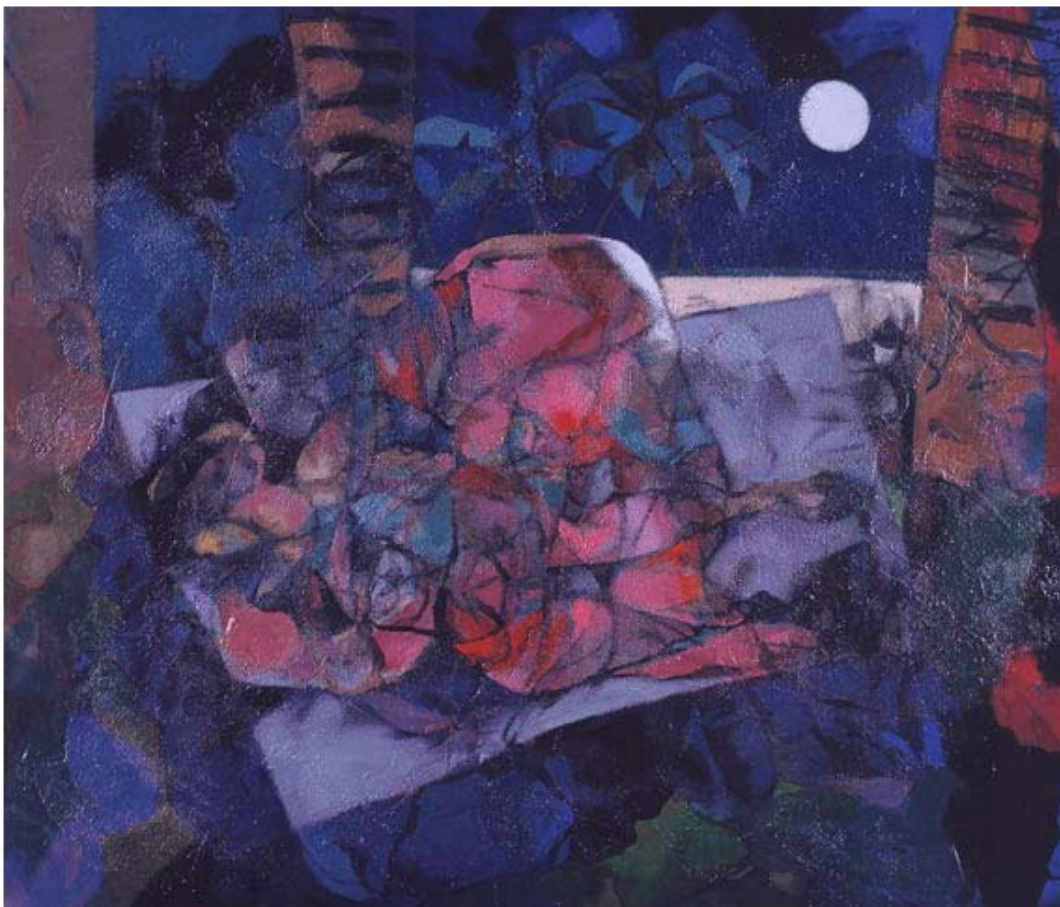
Woman with Fan
50 x 60 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



Communion
50 x 60 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



Leadership Council
50 x 60 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



Tropical Moon
36 x 42 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



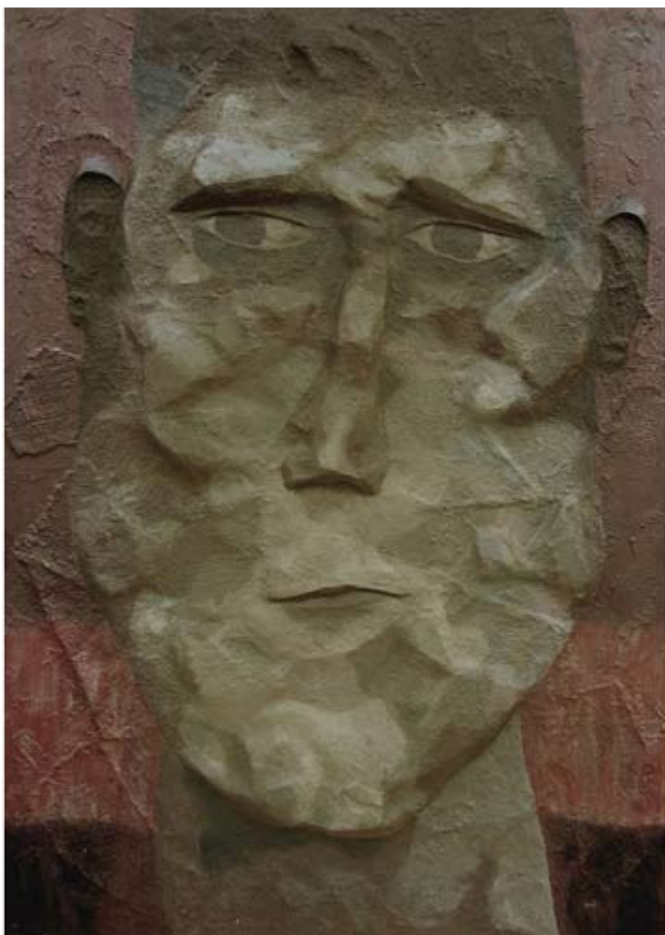
Birth of Bocce
48 x 54 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



History Lesson
50 x 60 inches
Oil and acrylic on canvas



Mr. Merryweather
52 x 36 inches
polychrome bas-relief, mixed media



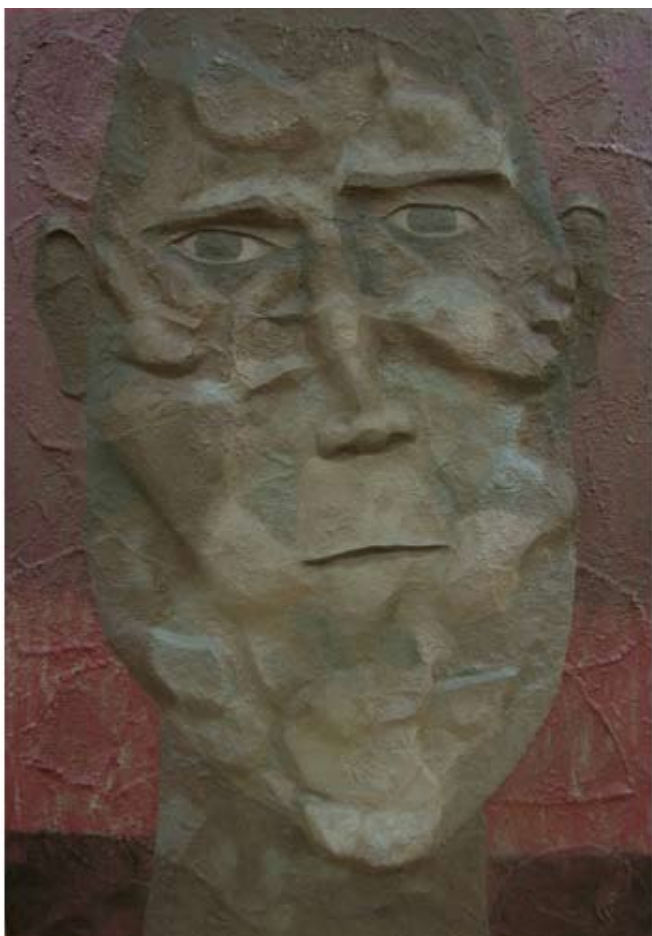
Jack
52 x 36 inches
polychrome bas-relief, mixed media



Sully
52 x 36 inches
polychrome bas-relief, mixed media



Dr. Hurley
52 x 36 inches
polychrome bas-relief, mixed media



The Coach
52 x 36 inches
polychrome bas-relief, mixed media



Clarence
52 x 36 inches
polychrome bas-relief, mixed media

Dick Morrill

Commentary

Through their work, artists reveal a vision of the world. Beyond an interpretation or a response, art can be a way of seeing life that seems to break open the ordinary surface of things to show us an alternate realm already formed and waiting to be exposed.

Dick Morrill reveals visions of individual and social reality, through an art that is both personal and political, visually acute while speaking truth to power. His art is uneasy and psychically charged, but it looks at humanity and its follies with a kind of avid amazement. There is in this work a critique of the plutocrat, the military dictator, and the elected abuser of democracy. At the same time there is a willingness to look at the toll that our personal transgressions take upon each one of us.

This artist is a humanist with an edge, employing allegory, satire and abstraction to make us see what he feels. In this sense he is an expressionist, with a connection to German painters like Max Beckmann and Otto Dix, who saw their own societies decaying from within. And Morrill shares with American social realist painters like Jack Levine and Hyman Bloom a sense of responsibility to embed dissent in aesthetic experience.

Morrill's art takes diverse forms: narrative paintings, portraits and bas reliefs. In all of them there is a constant energy that insists on manic simultaneity, while distorting figures and fracturing form. In *Lady with a Fan*, America as a battered, fallen Statue of Liberty is tempted by a forked-tongue angel, while an equally dissolute clown blows smoke in her other ear, as he holds a portrait of a corrupt politician who hovers above a snaking red oil pipeline. In the midst of this national spectacle looms a black monstrous head neither human nor animal, the embodiment of a foreign war gone disastrously wrong. All is painted with an anxious, angled, sooty, hallucinatory vigor.

In Morrill's portraits, whether in paint or bas relief paper mache, the space is filled by a single head, the contours of the face broken into colored shards or a raddled topography. Painted on textured grounds, these riven faces seemed mapped with their own inner turmoil. The portraits are social and psychological, each distinctively personal, yet all sharing both a bold presentation of the self and inadvertent exposure, as well. The optimistic priest is shadowed by self-doubt, the natty gent is shown as the imperialist trespasser he is, the archeologist is herself a hidden excavation exotically-hued like the sky behind her. Upon these vain-glorious, melancholy, brave, and introspective faces, the artist lavishes a raw attention, a kind of ambivalent, fevered love.

John Mendelsohn

Dick Morrill

Biography

Dick Morrill makes narrative paintings, portraits and bas reliefs, capturing in highly charged images the spectacle of social folly and vagaries of the personality. His work both critiques power relations, and examines the inner lives of individuals. Using bold colors and fractured forms, Morrill in his art is both an expressionist and a humanist.

Morrill was born in 1927 and grew up in the Boston area. His family nurtured his strong, early interest in making art. His father was, for a period, a commercial artist, and as a youth Dick attended Saturday morning art classes at the Museum of Fine Arts. From childhood, he had the good fortune of having a role model in his cousin, the Boston painter Philip Hicken. After serving in the Navy during the war, he went on to study illustration and painting at the Cambridge School of Design.

During his school years Morrill was exposed to art that would be a foundation for the development of his art. There was in the late 1940s the presence of Boston Expressionism, a style exemplified by the work of the social realist Jack Levine, Hyman Bloom, and Karl Zerbe. Morrill absorbed from their examples the melding of social content, vigorous paint handling, and figurative abstraction. Levine was a particular role model with his post-war critique of militarism and satires of political corruption. And like Levine, Morrill was influenced by the color-infused paintings of Georges Rouault and Oscar Kokoshka. The idea of creating advanced art with a social spirit was also fired by the Mexican muralists, Rivera, Siquieros and Orozco.

While in art school, Morrill discovered the work of Max Beckmann in a museum exhibition of his work at Harvard University. In Morrill's work we see a reflection of Beckmann's interest in cryptic allegorical narrative. Morrill's portraits reflect the work of two other artists central to his development. Evident is the influence of Paul Klee in the use of line to create whimsical and psychologically revealing images. From Rembrandt's faces, particularly his late self-portraits, Morrill learned the possibility of creating searching, penetrating paintings of the inner self.

After moving to New York in the early 1950s, Morrill worked for an advertising design firm before founding his own agency representing illustrators and photographers. For most of his working career, he managed to work in his studio whenever possible. He also taught at Pratt Institute and Parsons School of Design, and established several overseas art programs through the State University of New York. During the 1950s and 1960s Morrill created a series of sculptures of abstracted figures in carved wood, cold cast metal and paper mache. In the mid-'60s, influenced by the Vietnam War, Morrill began working on politically-charged images. With these painting, the artist saw his mission to "question authority", and started the complex, narrative paintings that are the focus of his ongoing practice. In the 1990s Morrill entered a new phase with his painted portraits and the parallel sculpted bas reliefs. These works combine the social self with an examination of the private self, as revealed in faces with a complex, faceted topography.

Dick Morrill

Artist Statement

The current body of work falls into three categories: narratives paintings, portraits, and bas reliefs. Each group has its own subject matter, and all have a spirited directness of execution.

Most of the narratives are political, dealing with the current state of this country and the world, particularly the relationships of power, money and democracy. These paintings usually have a cast of many characters who interact with each other, often in theatrical ways. And while there are some recognizable personages, most of the figures are symbolic or fictional. The narratives are anything but straightforward—they are complex, allegorical, and sometimes cryptic. The viewer is rarely supplied with a specific message, but rather the opportunity to create their own interpretations.

The portraits and bas reliefs all share the same subject, the human face that fills the pictorial space. The portraits are painted in a combination of acrylic and oil, often with a textural ground of fabric, such as cheesecloth, sand, and gesso. The bas reliefs are made with paper mache, fabric and other assorted materials. Both of these modes of working afford the possibility of both depicting the outward appearance and suggesting the inner person. The fragmented or topographic quality of the faces, along with the vivid color in the paintings, further emphasize the character of the individual. The titles often suggest a social identity that a person maintains, while at the same time making it impossible to conceal their real selves.

The artist's approach to this work is direct, with never any preliminaries. The process is an intuitive one, working from memory and imagination, with some works developing over a number of months or even years. The style of these paintings can be described as figurative expressionism, with roots in the challenging modern art created in pre-Hitler Germany.



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