

# Press Release

PJAMA Galerie  
presents



*From Protest to Spirituality - Highway to Peace*

Marc Morrel

January 7<sup>th</sup> – February 21<sup>st</sup> 2016

## Marc Morrel (1937, Philadelphia (USA) – Lives in Amsterdam)

Marc Morrel moved to New York in the early 60's, where he associated with some of the greatest artists of the time. He explored different techniques, being amongst the first artists to experiment with acrylic paints, which had recently arrived on the art scene and also stuffing canvas to create soft sculptures. He was invited to participate a group show in the John Daniels gallery, created by Dan Graham, with artists such as Dan Flavin and Sol Lewitt.



His work made an impression and he was soon invited to show these stuffed sculptures and paintings in several galleries and institutions in Manhattan. But with the assassination of J.F. Kennedy and the atrocity of the war in Vietnam, Marc felt that he could not remain silent and was determined to express his disapproval and protest through his art. He didn't feel that traditional materials generally used for artistic expression were strong enough to provoke the



reaction he hoped for in the patriotic American mentality, so he decided to use the American flag as his artistic medium. Marc Morrel used the highly symbolic *Star-Spangled banner*, made by himself, which he stuffed to make sculptures in numerous evocative forms: the self-explanatory *Hand grenade resting on a US flag cushion*, *Hanging* (cf photo) or *The United States flag crucified as a phallus* depicting a stuffed phallus emerging from a Vatican flag.

In 1966, Marc Morrel had a solo show in Stephen Radich's prestigious Madison Avenue gallery, where he exhibited more than a dozen of these flag works. The exhibition created an almost immediate reaction when police visited and took photographs and subsequently Stephen Radich was convicted of casting contempt on the American flag. As stated in the New York Times: the case became a cause célèbre in the New York art world with Radich declaring that losing the case "could affect the future of art galleries, a very important industry in New York whose right to show new work without interference from police could be severely threatened." The court battle lasted eight years and concluded with a Supreme Court ruling that the freedom of speech and expression, a part of the constitution of the USA, was more important than the respect for a national symbol. Even though the use of the Flag might seem trivial in today's world and he wasn't personally charged in the case, Marc did receive several death threats and decided to leave the United States for Europe; first Paris and then London, where he continued working. But after seeing a couple of his exhibitions in public institutions obstructed for political reasons, and following his artist friend Mark Boyle's advice, he settled in Amsterdam in 1971.

After several years of living on a string, whilst working on a series of photo-collages and other artwork inspired by the Tarot and other mystical practices, Marc met a Tibetan teacher, through whom he discovered a new spirituality. Of course he felt yet again a need to incorporate this into his art; he started working on a beautiful series of Mandalas and Tonkas inspired by Tibetan Buddhism after a journey to India, his first step towards Shamanism. Some time later, during a trip to South Western USA, his first trip back the United States after twenty-five years of exile, he was struck with wonder by the cave drawings of the Native American Indians in Cochiti (New Mexico), expressing a meditative symbol of peace and communion between human beings and the spirits in nature. At the end of nineties, he created an eponymous work inspired by these same paintings and made a film of all of the stages in its creative process. In fact, since the sixties in New York, Marc had always been fascinated by film, in parallel to his main artistic work; creating films ranging in styles from the psychedelic to his interpretation of the assassination of Che Guevara. Always an Avant-gardist in heart, he is in some ways the inventor of the 'Autobiopic': *Dreams: an Autobiography* is an experimental, somewhat psychedelic, autobiographical work, which he filmed and edited between the early-sixties in New York, up until the mid-seventies in Amsterdam.

Since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, light has been the main centre of interest for the artist, not only by its formal representation but also by the use of phosphorescent paints creating luminescence in the dark or in black light. In a new quest for ultimate spirituality, Marc paints

the universe and in the sharing of this artistic research, he guides the observer on a journey of light through space-time to the very origins of existence.

Almost forty years after his presence in the exhibition *Artists as Adversary* at the MoMA (New-York), in 2010, Marc Morrel was asked to participate in a group exhibition: *Freedom of Speech* – by the curators Marius Babias and Florian Waldvogel of the *Neuer Berliner Kunstverein* (Berlin) and the *Kunstverein Hamburg* (Hamburg) who brought together pieces by artists such as Norman Rockwell, Barbara Kruger, Dan Perjovschi, Bruce Nauman and sister Corita Kent in an exhibition that had liberty of artistic expression as its central theme.

Even though his work has travelled across continents, this is the first time that Paris will be welcoming an exhibition of Marc Morrel's work with this Introductory mini-retrospective at the Pijama Gallery, who is honoured to be able to present a representational voyage of the artists work *From Protest to the Spiritual – Highway to Peace*, just a few steps away from the artists studio that he occupied in 1968 on the Rue de Crussol (11<sup>th</sup> Arrdt.)

### ***From Protest to Spirituality – Highway to Peace***

One year after the self-claimed 'punitive' attack carried out against the Newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* and amidst a geopolitical climate that is extremely sensitive, it seemed important to emphasise the evolution of contestation through expression, illustrating it with the work of an iconic artist who's ideological path has been an example to be followed.

Protest is, in its very essence, an intellectual war and often expresses itself by acts that might appear revolutionary, such as the defilement of a flag. It's clear that in Marc Morrel's work, this struggle has evolved in a very natural way towards peace and spirituality. This transition is what the Pijama Gallery hopes to highlight with Marc's première show in France.



It is a pretty much impossible task to have a retrospective show that could represent fifty years of work in a gallery which is only 170 sq. Ft. It would mean dedicating 35 sq. ft. per decade! The decision was made to present the work in a unique way by:

- Creating an opaque street window with openings to reveal a few of the artist's works but without revealing the whole show.
- Having discrete window openings will be designed to create curiosity and encourage the observer to want to see more.
- Creating an interior where the light can be controlled to create an intimate atmosphere with spots, black light or a completely dark room as desired.

In this way, rather than aggressing the viewer as would normally be expected in the impetuous protest of disenchanting youth, the exhibition offers an unusually militant stand: it invites the subject into the artist's universe, accompanying him towards a more introspective idea of contestation and ultimately concludes with a vision of eternal harmony and peace. The scenography thus counters the commonplace definition of contestation, by inviting each one of us to reflect on our own day-to-day struggles.

Marc Morrel is an accomplished artist who has evolved wisely whilst retaining a remarkably youthful intellect. The Pijama Gallery, transformed into a sort of protective art case/come light box will be presenting a selection of drawings, collages and small sculptures from his protest era, but also paintings from two major periods of his career: *Shaman* series and *Space and Universe* in order to highlight the full potency of his journey from protest to spirituality.

## Solo shows

6 exhibitions at the Spirit Gallery, Amsterdam, since 1995  
*Solo show*, 25th Edinburgh Festival, 1971, Edinburgh  
*Camden Art Festival*, Camden Art Center, 1971, London  
*Solo show*, Stephen Radich Gallery, 1966, New-York City

## Group shows

*Freedom of Speech*, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, 2011, Berlin  
*Freedom of Speech*, Kunstverein Hamburg, 2010, Hamburg  
*AAVRA Project Patagonia*, End of the World Biennial, 2006-2007, Ushuaïa  
*Plastic*, Daniels Gallery, 1965, New-York City  
*UMO*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1975, Amsterdam  
*Patriotic Images in American Art*, American federation of the Arts, 1968-1970, Unites States  
*Collage of Indignation*, New York University, 1967, New-York City  
*Stuffed expressionism*, Graham Gallery, 1966, New-York City  
*Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, World House Gallery, 1965, New-York City  
*Shaped Canvas*, Van Bovenkamp Gallery, 1965, New-York City  
*Sculpture from all directions*, World House Gallery, 1965, New-York

## Bibliography

Matthew Israel, *Kill for Peace - American Artists Against the Vietnam War*, 2013  
Rhiannon Corby, *From the Gallery to the Streets - Dissenting Art and the Vietnam War*, 2011  
Daniel McClean, *The Trials of Art*, 2007  
Michael Kammen, *Visual Shock - History of Art Controversies in American Culture*, 2006  
S. Brent Plate, *Blasphemy - Art That Offends*, 2006  
Francis Frascina, *Art, Politics and dissent*, 1999  
Jeanne Siegel, *Artwords - Discourse on the 60's and 70's*, 1985  
Gregory Battcock, *Minimal Art - A Critical Anthology*, 1968

## Collections

Museum of Modern Art - New York City  
University of California Museum - Berkley (US)  
Camden council - London (UK)  
Brummelkamp collectie AMC - Amsterdam

Many other private and public collections

**Informations**

ΠJAMA Galerie (Pijama Galerie)  
10, rue du Pont aux Choux – 75003 Paris  
M° Saint-Sébastien Froissart  
From Tuesday to Saturday or on appointment  
Contact: Pascal Gauzes – 06 64 24 39 88

Vernissage on January 7<sup>th</sup> 2016 from 7pm  
End of the show on February 21<sup>st</sup> (noon to 3pm)

**Iconography:**

Page 1:

Jean-Paul Morrel-Armstrong, *Portrait*, Digital photography, 2013

Marc Morrel, *Memories of Hamburg*, Collage, 40x50cm, 2011

Page 2:

Marc Morrel, *Hanging*, Photography taken during *Freedom of Speech*, Kunstverein Hamburg, 2010, Hamburg

Page 3:

Marc Morrel, *Planet*, Acrylic on canvas, 75x75cm, 2015

**Texts:**

Pascal Gauzes – Gallery owner

Marie Guinet – Graduate from École du Louvre

**Translation:**

Jean-Paul Morrel-Armstrong

## Reproductions



Marc Morrel, *When will it ever end*, Perspex tube and stuffed canvas, 1965



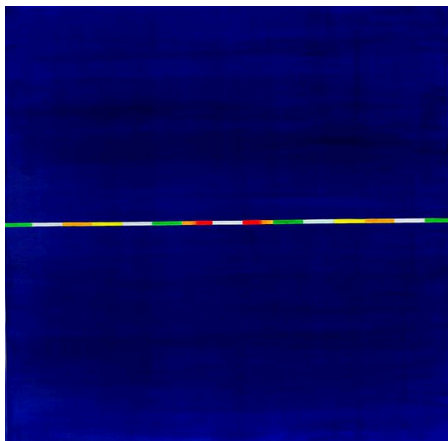
Marc Morrel, *Song of the South*, Church box and stuffed canvas, 1966



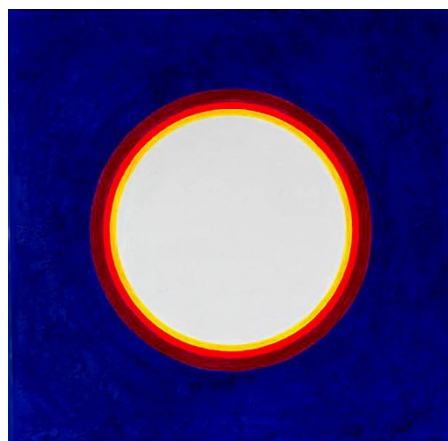
Marc Morrel, *Escalante*, Acrylic on canvas, 88cm x 99cm, 1998



Marc Morrel, *Neosete Urosete*, Acrylic on canvas, 136cm x 102cm, 1996



Marc Morrel, *Ibiza by Night*, Acrylic on canvas, 75cmx75cm, 2015



Marc Morrel, *Magic Circle*, Acrylic on canvas, 75cmx75cm, 2015

## Artist contact

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