



MAG EXHIBITION EXPLORES HEALING POWER OF ART Self-Taught Artist Gregory Van Maanen is Focus of Show Opening January 25



Untitled, 2008. Mixed media on board.

ROCHESTER, NY, January 20, 2009 — Self-taught artist Gregory Van Maanen began painting after his return from a tour of duty in Vietnam, largely as a way of exorcising the demons he brought home from the war. Today, his body of work—which he describes as “self-preservation sometimes shared with others”—includes several thousand paintings and drawings, as well as sculptures and mixed-media works.

An exhibition organized by Rochester’s Memorial Art Gallery brings together more than 50 of the artist’s recent paintings and a selection of mixed media works. *Gregory Van Maanen: The Happy Survivor* opens at the Gallery January 25 and remains on view through March 29.

Powerful and haunting, Van Maanen’s works may at first seem frightening, but the artist sees them as “good magic”—talismans intended to keep evil at bay. Many of the works feature spirits rendered as skeletal heads, and most fall into two broad categories—“portal pictures” (suggesting a world beyond our own) and cruciforms.

Gregory Van Maanen often paints on scraps of paneling or other found materials, and haunts thrift shops for old frames. “He is attracted to things that have been cast off when their initial purpose has been fulfilled,” says Marie Via, Memorial Art Gallery director of exhibitions. “Could there be a more powerful metaphor for the plight of many soldiers in today’s society—used up and then discarded?”

Van Maanen continues to suffer the effects of shrapnel that lodged in his shoulder during the war and is frank about his ongoing struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Yet he remains a firm believer in the healing power of art for veterans and non-veterans alike. “His works,” says Via, “resonate with the artist’s good intentions, respect for humanity and awareness that light can vanquish darkness.”

Lectures



Sunday, February 8 at 3 pm, Jonathan Shay gives an illustrated lecture in the MAG auditorium. A nationally-known psychiatrist who works with veterans in the Boston area and a 2007 MacArthur Fellow, Dr. Shay is known for his studies of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and their clear parallels to the plight of soldiers today. His lecture is sponsored by the Robert Lewis and Florence Foster Berg Fund and is included in Gallery admission.

Sunday, March 1 at 3 pm, New York City art dealer Randall Morris speaks on the work of Gregory Van Maanen. Morris is co-owner of Cavin-Morris Gallery, which represents the artist. Included in Gallery admission.

Sunday, March 22 at 3 pm, Hannah Solky speaks on “Reflections on Images of War in the Gallery’s Collection.” Dr. Solky is clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Rochester. Included in Gallery admission.

About the artist

Gregory Van Maanen was born in Paterson, NJ in 1947. Totally self-taught, he began painting following his return from Vietnam. He has had solo exhibitions at Cavin-Morris Gallery in New York City and at Rutgers University. His work is in such permanent collections as the New Orleans Art Museum, National Vietnam

Veterans Art Museum and New Jersey City Museum. In 2006, Van Maanen moved from New Jersey to upstate New York where he could be close to nature. In 2007, his entire body of work was acquired by the Kohler Foundation, Kohler, WI, where it has been catalogued and conserved; the same year, he joined other presenters for “Taking the Road Less Traveled: Built Environments of Vernacular Artists,” an international conference hosted by the Foundation and the John Michael Kohler Arts Center in Sheboygan, WI.

About the Memorial Art Gallery

The Memorial Art Gallery is considered one of the finest regional art museums in the country. Its permanent collection of 11,000 works spans 50 centuries of world art and includes important works by Monet, Cezanne, Matisse, Homer and Cassatt. The Gallery was founded in 1913 by Emily Sibley Watson as a memorial to her son, architect James Averell. Given in trust to the University of Rochester, it is one of the few university-affiliated art museums in the country that also serves as a public art museum.

The Gallery is supported primarily by its members, the University of Rochester, and public funds from Monroe County and the New York State Council on the Arts.

MAG on the web:

<http://mag.rochester.edu>

Press contact:

Larissa Masny, 585-276-8934 lmasnya@mag.rochester.edu/pr

Patti Giordano, 585-276-8932 pgiordano@mag.rochester.edu

#