

PRESS RELEASE

RICHARD
TAITTINGER
GALLERY

NASSOS DAPHNIS (1914-2010) **CITY WALLS (1969-1975)**

NOVEMBER 10 - DECEMBER 22, 2022

OPENING RECEPTION: THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10TH 6-9PM

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NASSOS DAPHNIS, MADISON AVENUE & 26TH STREET, CITY WALLS, SEPT. 1969

RICHARD TAITTINGER GALLERY is honored to present **CITY WALLS (1969-1975)**, the gallery's fourth solo exhibition of works by Greek-born American artist **NASSOS DAPHNIS** (1914-2010). **CITY WALLS (1969-1975)** will showcase 19 significant works and one print created by Daphnis during his City Walls period, coinciding with a revitalizing period for New York City and the public arts scene.

CITY WALLS (1969-1975) presents an exemplary series that builds on the ethos of what the City Walls program wanted to instill — a revitalization and appreciation for great artists and to challenge them in monumental ways. It is during this period that we see Nassos' work explode (literally), with bold stars and diamonds appearing with accurate precision on his canvases.

In the 1920s, New York surpassed London to become the most populous urbanized area in the world. After World War II, New York City emerged as a leading city of the world, but by the late 1960s, job losses due to industrial restructuring led to rising crime rates and caused economic suffering and decay to befall the city.



20-69, 1969, oil on canvas, 95.25 x 95.25 in (241.94 x 241.94 cm)

According to the well-known art critic and art historian Paul Lester, *"One of the most innovative public arts initiatives of the late 20th century, City Walls Inc., was founded by a group of avant-garde New York artists who wanted to enliven depressed areas of the city through the creation of colorful murals on the sides of large-scale buildings. Many of the founding artists, including Nassos Daphnis, lived and worked in Lower Manhattan at a time when the groundbreaking SoHo art scene was just beginning to emerge. These artists' murals played a vital role in this industrial area's development and eventual economic transformation by making it a more inviting place to visit."*

Established as a not-for-profit organization in 1967 by artists Richard Anuszkiewicz, Jason Crum, Nassos Daphnis, Knox Martin, Mel Pekarsky, Tania, Robert Wiegand, and other notable painters of the period, City Walls sponsored more than 50 murals by 28 different artists over the next decade. In 1977, it was consolidated with the Public Arts Council of the Municipal Arts Society, later becoming the Public Art Fund, and remains one of New York's and America's greatest public arts organizations by working with hundreds of artists over the years.

Nassos Daphnis created three giant projects for City Walls Inc. In talking about the role of wall paintings he stated,

"I think the time has come where art can be a part of daily life. All people should be exposed daily to the art of mural painting. When they walk on a street, or go to work, or sit in a park works of art should surround them. It is this kind of continuous experience that in the long run will raise our aesthetic values to a higher level."

1969 was a turning point for Nassos Daphnis' career, when he had his first retrospective exhibition at the prestigious Albright-Knox Art Gallery (March 9th – April 13th) in Buffalo, NY, which traveled to the Everson Museum of Art (May 1st - June 29th) in Syracuse, NY, and he was an honored participant in the 1969 Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Painting at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York.

Daphnis created his first City Walls mural in September 1969 on the side of a six-story building at Madison Square Park and 26th Street. Four primary-colored concentric circles were joined to create a warped rectangle in the center. Interestingly the image strongly suggested a Romanesque vault, fancifully juxtaposed upon the very ordinary façade of the building. The painting's power to carry across city



S 5-74, 1974, epoxy on masonite, 24 x 24 in (60.96 x 60.96 cm)

blocks provided a strong and fascinating artistic focal point in New York City, which remained visible until the 1980's.

CITY WALLS (1969-1975) exhibition starts at the entrance of Richard Taittinger Gallery with the presentation of three gigantic eight-foot paintings painted in 1969 which were made in dialogue with the forms of his first City Walls mural: *9-69* (1969), *20-69* (1969) and his magistral *11-69* (1969), which was featured in the iconic 1969 Annual Exhibition: Contemporary American Painting (December 16th, 1969 – February 1st, 1970) at the Whitney Museum of American Art curated by Robert Doty and at Leo Castelli Gallery in 1972 for the Nassos Daphnis Retrospective 1958-1972 (March 10th – March 24th 1973) at 420 West Broadway.

These stunning giants appeared during the heart of the Minimalist era, naturally inviting comparison with a movement, which, according to Edward Lucie-Smith, expressed "a



NASSOS DAPHNIS, 620 W. 47TH STREET & WEST SIDE HIGH WAY, CITY WALLS, JULY 1971



15 74-75, 1975, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 in (152.4 x 152.4 cm)

growing concern with the identity of the canvas simply as an object". In describing the work of one of its key practitioners, Frank Stella, Lucie-Smith wrote that the paintings were "not only objects to hang on the wall but things which activated the whole wall surface." Dr. Zona wrote about Daphnis' work,

"Despite outward appearances which include a concentration upon the economy of form, meticulous craftsmanship, flat expanses of color, hard edges, and even shaped work, the paintings of Daphnis are but a distant cousin to the philosophy of Minimalism".

Daphnis' second City Walls mural was commissioned in July 1971 at 620 West 47th Street and the West Side Highway. Daphnis presented a huge red, yellow, and blue star exploding against the sky, formed by the intersection of four equally sized rectangles, which was the start of his famous signature Star Series.

Applying his 1958 Color and Form theory, Nassos Daphnis re-explored the star motif with bold stars and diamonds appearing in exactness on his canvases through 1975 with the creation of his monumental 86 feet long and 10 feet high painting "The Continuous Painting".



NASSOS DAPHNIS, BROADWAY & 43RD STREET, CITY WALLS, 1972

The second room of *CITY WALLS* (1969-1975) will feature six of his stunning six-foot star paintings which were made in dialogue with the forms of his second City Walls mural: Star Series: 17 74-75 (1975), 19 74-75 (1975), 20 74-75 (1975), 23 74-75 (1975), 24 74-75 (1975), and 15 74-75 (1975), which won the 1986 Francis Greenburger Foundation Award. The Star Series was exhibited at Leo Castelli Gallery on 420 West Broadway (February 15th - March 8th 1975) along with "The Continuous Painting".

Dr. Louis A. Zona wrote in the catalog of the retrospective show of Daphnis' at the Boca Raton Museum of Art in 1993, "The success of both public works led in 1972 to an even grander test of Daphnis' abilities to create in monumental proportions. The Arlen Realty and Development Corp. with City Walls, commissioned the artist to create a work sixteen stories high on the structural skeleton of an office tower being constructed on New York's Times Square" ... and 43rd Street. "Maquette completed, the artist undertook the Herculean task of turning the enormous steel cage into a Constructivist's dream – a painted sculpture which literally plays against the greatest skyline in the world. As red, yellow, and white bands appear to ascend the steel grid – the color becomes more than ornamental but rather achieves a unity with the architecture into what Theo Van Doesburg once described as 'inspired totality'."

In The New York Times of January 5th, 1972, "Painting Adorns Buildings Frame", Joseph Lelyveld wrote:

Nassos Daphnis stepped back from his painting, cocked his head to one side ... and said, "You see, here we started with an existing form," ... "It was not fluid at all. It was more concrete." ... Mr. Daphnis noted that he had chosen a sequence of "festive" colors for the building.

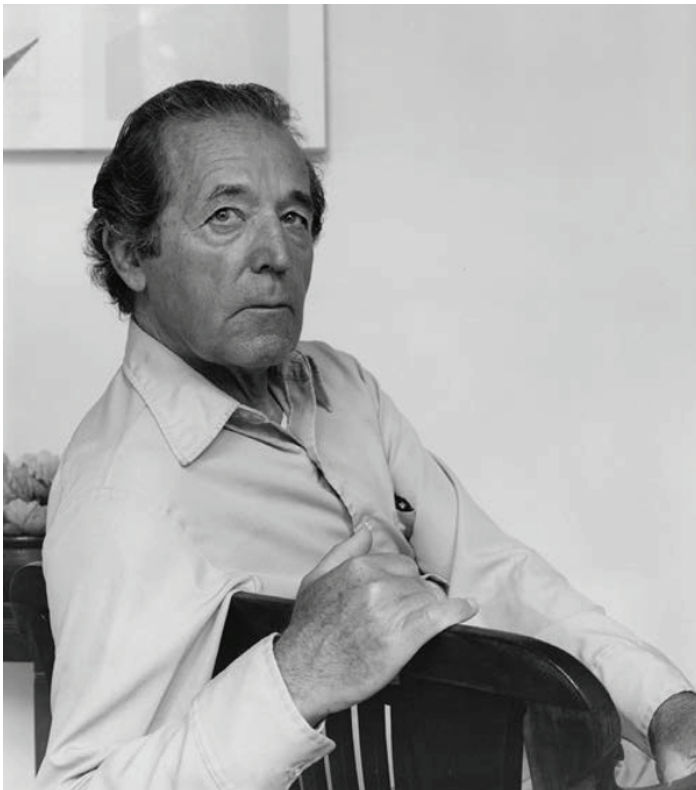
Unfortunately, today, all of the three Nassos Daphnis City Walls' projects have disappeared, however it is with great emotion that the Nassos Daphnis Estate together with the Richard Taittinger Gallery are announcing the installation of a future Nassos Daphnis City Walls-like mural in Athens, Greece in 2023 with the gracious support of the City of Athens.

CITY WALLS (1969-1975) will be on view from November 10th through December 22nd at RICHARD TAITTINGER GALLERY located at 154 Ludlow Street, New York City.

ABOUT NASSOS DAPHNIS

The Greek-born American artist Nassos Daphnis (1914-2010) was a major figure in the 20th Century art world and is recognized for his mastery of geometric abstraction and his evolution into what became known as Hard-Edge Painting.

Daphnis was actively supported by the Leo Castelli Gallery for 39 years, who placed his work in some of the best museum collections around the world (Guggenheim, Whitney, MoMA, to name a few).



NASSOS DAPHNIS (1914-2010)

He also gave him 17 solo shows, making him the 3rd most exhibited artist of Leo Castelli Gallery, right after Jasper Johns (19 solo shows) and Robert Rauschenberg (18 solo shows). In addition to his solo exhibitions at Leo Castelli Gallery, Daphnis was featured in 23 group shows alongside John Chamberlain, Ellsworth Kelly, Edward Ruscha, Richard Serra, Frank Stella, Cy Twombly, among others.

In describing the work of Nassos Daphnis, Leo Castelli has said, *"His paintings were more rigorous than the other geometric painters. From the day I saw his first slides I recognized this, and that he differed also because there was no hint of anything that should suggest sentiment. Sentimentality of any type was ruled out."*

Daphnis was one of the pioneers of the Minimalist school of New York. Well-known New York art critic April Kingsley wrote, *"Some of Daphnis' paintings from the later 50s are so radical you'd assume they'd been painted at least 10 to 15 years later. His devotion to purity predicts 60s minimalism; his systemic approach predates systemic painting."* In the 1950's when Barnett Newman was doing his stripe paintings with traditional brush strokes, Daphnis had already introduced the roller in order to erase the human touch and reached the perfection he always strived for.

In 1958, Daphnis developed his *Color & Plane Theory* to liberate color from the restriction of form. In doing so, he used multiple planes of solid color to create the illusion of depth, space, and movement amid smooth, uninterrupted surface textures. The interplay of Daphnis' carefully chosen palette and dynamic shapes results in a vibrating, tension-ridden energy that allows color to be the primary element of the work, unconstrained by line or form.

Nassos Daphnis remained outside recognized schools and moved fluidly among emerging styles, with one goal – to reach perfection. He remains a pioneer of the Hard-Edge Geometric abstraction and managed through his colossal work to overcome all the most

difficult techniques and challenges by pioneering: magna painting (1958), Plexiglas sculpture (1962), epoxy painting (1966), giant-scale murals (1969), Gestalt Arc Series (1976), and computer-generated works (1985).

In 1967, Nassos Daphnis was one of the co-founders of City Walls Inc. together with Richard Anuszkiewicz, Jason Crum, Knox Martin, Mel Pekarsky, Tania, Robert Wiegand, and other notable painters of the period.

Daphnis has been the recipient of numerous prestigious art awards. He was named a Guggenheim Fellow in 1977 and received the Francis J. Greenburger Foundation Award and the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Award in 1986. Daphnis' works are in the collections of the Guggenheim Museum, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; Museum of Modern Art, NY; Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Tel Aviv Museum, Israel; or Basil Goulandris Museum, Greece, to name a few.

Daphnis had 123 exhibitions during his lifetime, both domestic and international: 90 group shows and 33 solo shows, including four retrospective museum exhibitions: *Nassos Daphnis Work since 1951* at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery (March 9th - April 13th 1969) in Buffalo, NY, which traveled to the Everson Museum of Art (May 1st - June 29th 1969) in Syracuse, NY. *Nassos Daphnis Color and Form: A Retrospective* at the Boca Raton Museum of Art (March 5th - April 18th 1993) which traveled to the Butler Institute of American Art in Youngstown, OH (September 5th - November 21st 1993).

Since 2015, Richard Taittinger Gallery exclusively represents the Nassos Daphnis Estate worldwide and has organized four Nassos Daphnis solo shows: *Pixel Fields* (September 16th - October 25th 2015), *1959 - 1963 American Pioneers of Castelli Gallery, a tribute to Nassos Daphnis* (February 23rd April 15th 2017), *Transmitting Waves* (September 12th - November 10th 2017) and *CITY WALLS (1969-1975)* (November 10th - December 22nd 2022).

Three Nassos Daphnis Retrospective exhibitions are scheduled in China: in Fall 2023 in Shanghai at the Modern Art Museum; in Winter 2024 in Beijing at the Today Art Museum and in Spring 2024 in Shenzhen at the Modern Art Museum.

RICHARD TAITTINGER GALLERY

Founded in 2014 by Richard Frerejean Taittinger, **Richard Taittinger Gallery** is a 3 level, 6,000 sq ft space designed by studioMDA. A pioneer of New York City's Lower East Side art scene, today RTG is surrounded by cultural institutions including the New Museum, the International Center for Photography, and the Brant Foundation.

RTG represents a diverse roster of leading international artists at various stages of their careers covering every medium and photography. Working closely with museum curators, RTG has successfully placed works by our artists in over 25 prestigious museum collections.

RTG advocates for price transparency and democratization of the art world, showing artists who are outside of the traditional art world system. It is a gallery that supports artists attuned to ethical values, human rights, diversity, feminism, and environmental issues. In July 2019, RTG launched a print program, and in June 2021 launched its NFT program offering affordable works to encourage collecting.