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MANHATTAN LOS ANGELES

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Billy Al Bengston Cements His Legacy at Venus Over Manhattan

The West Coast legend is showing in New York.



Following his unusual dual career of artist and flat-track motorcycle racer, Billy Al Bengston's exhibition at Venus Over Manhattan shows the artist's attempt at combining his passions.

The show kicks off with 12 historic paintings from Bengston's 1961 "B.S.A. Motorcycle" series. The works haven't been shown together since they debuted at Los Angeles' legendary Ferus Gallery shortly after their creation. Hanging in an adjacent room, the exhibition also includes new paintings in which the artist revisits his iconic "Chevron" series.

Bengston's importance and impact on the Los Angeles art scene cannot be overstated: he was one of the original Ferus Gallery artists working alongside West

Coast luminaries such as Ed Ruscha, Ken Price, Edward Kienholz, Dennis Hopper, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, and others.

“Billy Al is really the charter member and leader of LA’s ‘Cool School,’ and a founder of the LA art scene in the ’60s,” gallerist Adam Lindemann told artnet News in an email. “Motorcycle racer, surfer, and inspired artist, he is one of the fabled heroic figures of the West Coast art scene... He has refused to play by the art world’s rules, and insisted on creating his own.”

Bengston’s representational early works incorporated deconstructed motorcycle components on matte, monochromatic, or colored backgrounds, and were inspired in part by the motorcycle racing he participated in to help finance the early stages of his art career.

In a recent interview with *Garret Leight*, the artist recalled, “I mean, you’re riding a motorcycle that has nothing in it but motor and tires. No brakes, no nothing. You’d go to the corner, flip the throttle and go sideways. But I did a couple weeks and I got pretty good pretty fast. I got good enough to win everything,” he boasted.

In a separate room hangs the latest iteration of Bengston’s “Chevron” series, which expands on his transition from the slick-finished Masonite and auto lacquered “Dento” works to painting on canvas. The new “Chevron” works are all painted in a variety of brilliant blue hues and with different technical approaches.

The inclusion of early and recent pieces offers viewers a snapshot of the into the radical artist’s work and provides a survey of his style and impact.