

RENA BRANSTEN

G A L L E R Y

Rupert Garcia: Rolling Thunder

January 6 – February 24

Reception: January 6 / 5-7pm

Artist talk: Feb 3 / 4-5pm

Rena Bransten Gallery is pleased to present *Rupert Garcia: Rolling Thunder*, an exhibition of paintings and prints by renowned Bay Area based American artist Rupert Garcia. Since the late sixties, Garcia has been committed to creating artwork addressing urgent issues of our time, voicing concerns over the desperate consequences of social and political injustice and deceit, as well as raising questions about the pretenses of aesthetic conventions. In strikingly bold graphics, often coopting the mechanics of pop art and culture, his recent work elaborates on his political concerns, and challenges notions of folk and high art.

Rolling Thunder, a survey of five decades of work, exposes his continual use of war imagery and suggests the impact of Mr. Garcia's service in the Vietnam War and direct involvement in a secret US military bombing campaign known as Operation Rolling Thunder. This is the first time Mr. Garcia's work has been assembled to specifically illuminate the impact of his participation in the Vietnam War, and the first time Mr. Garcia has publicly acknowledged his participation in Operation Rolling Thunder.

As he states, these works reveal "a pivotal set of experiences that have never left me and that I would later indirectly reference in my work by referencing various wars the US was involved with over the years until 2017." While Mr. Garcia joined the US Airforce and requested to be sent to Vietnam - certain of the cause and enamored "of the sculptural beauty of the jet fighter bombers, their awesome and frightening roar at takeoff..." - it was when he returned home that he was able to contextualize his service with a fuller understanding of the political forces that drove the war:

- "knowing that these magnificent machines of war fly off to bomb, kill, and destroy"
- The all too familiar and nauseating "race question" at home manifested on the air base in Ubon, Thailand in racial tensions between black and white airmen. A comparison between "the war in Indochina and the war against racism back in the US"
- That "what led up to this mission was the LIE that [sic] an unprovoked second attack by North Vietnamese patrol boats on the US naval vessel Maddox"

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Two new works are a direct response to this experience. The triptych *Rolling Thunder* (2017) includes imagery of the landscape outside his air base in Ubon, F-105 jet fighter bombers, and the North Vietnamese oil tanks which they hit. The self-portrait *Hoodwinked* shows Garcia in military uniform with his "Australian military hat," worn to veil their secret US presence. His Vietnam Service Ribbon blinds his vision, referencing the false pretenses under which the operation was being carried out.

The paradoxical "aesthetics of war" as represented in the phenomenology of the pictorial and sculptural components of the machines of destruction, the fire of consumption, the evidence of death and devastation profoundly fascinate and puzzle me.

I do not believe that war is the way to solve human problems. The cost of human life is too high. The social and political exchange between adversaries is the only humane way to resolve conflict."

-Rupert Garcia, 1996

Rupert Garcia has taught at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) in the Art Department and La Raza Studies; the San Francisco Art Institute; UC Berkeley in the Chicano Studies Program and in the School of Environmental Design, and is Professor Emeritus of Art at San Jose State University. He received a B.A. in Painting and Drawing (1968) and an M.A. in Printmaking (1970) from San Francisco State College. In 1981 he was awarded an M.A. in the History of Art at UC Berkeley and the honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1993. He was honored with the Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement from the College Art Association in 1992. His work is held in major collections including the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; The Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of American Art and National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA. He lives and works in Oakland, CA.

**An illustrated catalogue with essay by Lowery Stokes Sims will accompany the exhibition*

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Hoodwinked, 2017

Pigmented acrylic inkjet on paper
Framed size: 39 3/4 x 33 1/4 in.
Edition 1/10



Hiroshima, 2009

Mixed media on panel
48 x 96 1/2 in.



N.E.W.S. to All, 1993

Oil on linen
72 x 72 in.



Night Cap, 1993

Oil on linen
72 x 72 in.



Rolling Thunder, 2017

Mixed media
Framed size: 65 1/2 x 105 1/2 in.



Goliath Over David, or the US Invasion of Grenada, 1987

Mixed media on linen
50 x 89 1/4 in.



Erupting Iranian Platform, 1988

Mixed media with oil on linen
80 x 65 7/8 in.



Memorias de Honolulu, las Filipinas y Ubon, 1987

Acrylic on paper
Framed size: 40 x 124 5/8 in.

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March 20, 2003, 2009
Mixed media on two panels
47 3/4 x 136 1/2 in.



¡Fuera de Indochina!, 1970
Screen print
Framed size: 31 1/4 x 25 1/4 in.
Edition of 50-75



¡Fuera de Panama!, 1989
Screen print, AP
Framed size: 32 1/4 x 25 1/4 in.
Edition of 80



¡Fuera del Golfo!, 1991
Screen print
Framed size: 32 1/4 x 25 1/4 in.
Edition of 124



The War and Children, 1967/1995
Etching
Framed size: 33 x 25 3/8 in.
Edition 3/10