

MUSEO TAMAYO

Paseo de la Reforma #51
Bosque de Chapultepec, 11580 México, D.F.

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Nancy Spero: Paper Mirror

- The Museo Tamayo is presenting the first solo exhibition of Nancy Spero in Mexico.
- The exhibition will comprise nearly 100 works, spanning the whole of Spero's career.
- *Nancy Spero: Paper Mirror* will be open to the public from October 6, 2018—February 17, 2019.
- Considered as one of the first feminist and activist artist, her work deals with the representation of women and their inequality in the art world.

A celebrated figure of the feminist art movement in the United States, Nancy Spero (1926–2009) consistently addressed oppression, inequality, and women's social roles through both her art practice and activism. Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Spero graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1949. Before settling with their three sons in New York in 1964, she and her husband, the painter Leon Golub (1922–2004), lived in Paris, where she created her first mature works, the Black Paintings (1959–65).

For Spero, choices of material, form, mode, and subject were always political. After many years of working in oil on canvas, in 1966, she concluded that the language of painting was “too conventional, too establishment,” and decided that from then on she would work exclusively on paper. Her first cycle of work on paper, the War Series (1966–1969), was motivated by her outrage over American atrocities in Vietnam—gouache-and-ink paintings that express “the

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obscenity of war,” including through depictions of sexualized bombs.

The Artaud Paintings followed in 1969–70: handwritten fragments transcribed from the French poet Antonin Artaud’s writings, collaged with painted images of androgynous figures and phallic tongues. In reading Artaud, Spero coined the term “victimage,” making a parallel between Artaud’s language and her feeling of the “loss of tongue” as a female artist in a male-dominated art world.

Wanting to expand further into space beyond conventional formats, Spero’s Codex Artaud series (1971–72) combines typewritten excerpts of Artaud’s writing with collaged and painted images to make extended scroll-like works alluding to Egyptian hieroglyphics and papyrus scrolls.

Spero experienced intense isolation and anger because of her invisibility as a female artist and became active in groups advocating women’s advancement in the arts. In 1972, she cofounded the first independent women’s art venue in the United States, A.I.R. Gallery. Through exhibitions at A.I.R. and elsewhere, Spero developed a vocabulary of female protagonists that run, dance, jump, and crawl across her panels and sheets in scroll-like formations.

In the mid-70s, Spero proclaimed that women would be the “protagonists” of all her future work. She sought to “view women and men by representing women, not just to reverse history, but to see what it means to view the world through the depiction of women.” Around the same time, she began transferring her painted figures to zinc plates that permitted her to reproduce, repeat, and recycle images freely and infinitely, increasingly de-emphasizing text in her work, turning to “the language of gesture and movement.” Spero’s visual

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vocabulary mines diverse cultures, historical periods, and disciplines— mythology, folklore, art history, literature, and media—for representations of women as tragic and triumphant, degraded and powerful, victimized and liberated.

Nancy Spero: Paper Mirror encompasses approximately one hundred works from throughout Spero's career, with elements from the Black Paintings; the War Series; her Artaud series; the Licit Exp and Hours of the Nights series of 1974, and numerous works from the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s populated by her transhistorical and cross-cultural cast of characters. Her last major work before her death in 2009, the installation *Maypole: Take No Prisoners*, that was originally created for the 2007 Venice Biennale, is installed in the Tamayo's central atrium. *Maypole: Take No Prisoners* fuses the "festive and the frightening," and includes over 200 images of heads printed on aluminum and hanging from ribbons and metal chains.

On the occasion of this exhibition, the Museo Tamayo and the Fundación Olga y Rufino Tamayo will publish a catalog edited by the guest curator Julie Ault, which gather a series of original and historical texts written by Jesse Ball (Novelist and poet), Juan A. Gaitán (Director of Museo Tamayo) and Lucy R. Lippard (Art critic and curator), as well as an interview between Ault and Samm Kuncce (Director of the Leon Golub & Nancy Spero Foundation for the Arts), and a partial chronology through the production shifts in Spero's work and the political implications of these changes.

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Nancy Spero (b. 1926, Ohio – 2009, New York) has mounted major monographic exhibitions at venues including the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2010, the Museo d'art Contemporani de Barcelona and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, both 2008. Spero's work is included in over 50 prominent collections worldwide. Numerous publications have been published about her work, notably *Nancy Spero: The Work* (Prestel Books, New York, 2010).

Julie Ault (b. 1957, Boston) is an artist, curator, writer, and editor whose work frequently adopts curatorial and editorial activity as creative practice. Ault has long engaged Spero's work in writing, publications, and exhibitions.