



Dorothea Tanning, *Chiens de Cythère (Dogs of Cythera)*  
oil on canvas  
77 ½ x 117 in (197 x 297 cm)  
1963

**MEDIA ALERT:**

**Dorothea Tanning: *Unknown but Knowable States*  
January 10 – March 2, 2013**

**Gallery Reception: Thursday, January 10, 2013, 5-8 pm**

**Gallery Wendi Norris**

**161 Jessie Street (at New Montgomery), San Francisco, CA 94105**

- This exhibition features over thirty works, including paintings, sculptures, and unique drawings, made by the American Surrealist artist between 1960 and 1979.
- Works include *Chiens de Cythère (Dogs of Cythera)* (1963), one of Tanning's largest paintings, *Étreinte* (1969), a soft sculpture, and *Still in the Studio* (1979), the last painting she completed in Paris while mourning the death of her beloved husband Max Ernst.
- Rare works from the artist's personal collection will be exhibited for the first time.

- This will be the first exhibition at Gallery Wendi Norris to take place in the entire 5,000 square foot.
- The exhibition will be documented in an 80-page catalog with an essay by Catriona McAra, PhD.
- An academic roundtable will be held on Saturday, January 12, 2013, 2-3:30 pm with special emphasis on the work from the 1960s and 70s in relation to the art world at large.

## SAN FRANCISCO, CA.

“Unknown but Knowable States” comprises over thirty paintings, sculptures and drawings by the late artist Dorothea Tanning (American, 1910-2012), perhaps best known for her early Surrealist paintings. This is a rare opportunity to view the adventurous breadth of Tanning’s prolific art practice through a group of works created between 1960 and 1979 while she was living and exhibiting primarily in France, several of which have never before been exhibited. An eighty-page exhibition catalog will feature an essay by the Scottish scholar, Catriona McAra, who examines Tanning’s unique vision in the context of art history. With pieces ranging from small intimate studies to canvases of monumental scale, this exhibition will span the entire 5,000 square feet of Gallery Wendi Norris, the first time in the gallery’s history.

This exhibition charts Tanning’s transition from her kaleidoscopic and increasingly abstract paintings of the 1960s through her return to a more figurative mode in the 1970s. In these images, the nude female figure, often partially rendered or veiled, appears within evocative scenes of revelry, peril or repose. Each demonstrates her life-long dedication to the revelation of an inner world that balances ecstasy with despair, and to what she described as a desire to capture “unknown but knowable states.”

One of Tanning’s largest paintings, *Chiens de Cythère (Dogs of Cythera)* (1963), will anchor the exhibition and is also the focal point of the catalogue essay. This ambitious, turbulent oil on canvas depicts the mythical birthplace of the Goddess of Love in a composition that is fractured and abstract yet erotically charged. In contrast, the mysterious and surreal *Notes for an Apocalypse* (1978), one of the latest paintings in the show, displays increasingly gestural brushwork and a flash of light and color that together convey bodies once again solidly present and the potent energy of a domestic scene bursting apart.

Tanning’s imaginative investigations of the figure also play out in sculptures of fabric and faux fur from 1969-70. Rarely exhibited, *Étreinte* (1969) and *Traffic Sign* (1970) belong to a series of soft sculptures that culminated in the installation piece *Hôtel du Pavot, Chambre 202* (1970-73), which is now in the collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Works on paper from the small gouache *Phantom* (c. 1965) and the watercolor *Study for À la dérive (Adrift)*, (1967) to the gentle graphite studies for *Hôtel du Pavot* (1970-71) and the energetic pen on board *Birthday 1976* (1976), reveal Tanning’s ongoing experimentation with drawing and painting materials and processes and the inspiration and inner light that animate her paintings.

The pieces in this show bridge the exuberant Surrealist spirit of Tanning’s career with the singular vision she developed over the course of decades. They also demonstrate work ahead of its time, forecasting that of prominent contemporary artists such as painter Cecily Brown, photographer Francesca Woodman, and installation artists Urs Fischer, Sandy Skoglund, and Kim Dingle, among others.

**About the Artist**

Dorothea Tanning's paintings, drawings, prints, and sculptures have been widely exhibited in the US and abroad, and are represented in over fifty museum collections, including The Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Tate Museum of Art, and the Centre Georges Pompidou, among others. She has published two collections of poetry, *Coming to That* (2004) and *A Table of Content* (2011), as well as two memoirs, *Birthday* (1986) and *Between Lives* (2001), and a short novel, *Chasm* (2004).

Born in 1910 in Galesburg, Illinois, Dorothea Tanning supported herself as a commercial artist before meeting art dealer Julien Levy, and the Surrealist painter Max Ernst in New York in the early 1940s. A contributing participant to the Surrealist movement, she went on to marry Ernst. She and Ernst lived and worked in the US and France during their 34 years together. Tanning passed away in Manhattan in 2012 at the age of 101. Gallery Wendi Norris has been working with Tanning and her Foundation for nearly six years, and this is the second solo exhibition of her work with the gallery.

**About the Gallery**

Gallery Wendi Norris presents a compelling contemporary and modern program with a strong emphasis on the global market. Since 2003, we have worked with over one hundred of the top museums around the world, placing works in their collections and collaborating on solo and group exhibitions. Though, by design, the range of works we show is diverse, a common thread runs through them all: a focus on the human ability to create psychological and spiritual meaning through form and content. Both the artworks and the artists themselves are emblematic of this aesthetic ambition and our trans-cultural nature. Through our expertise in the modern art world, with an unparalleled network in Surrealism, and through our considered selection of some of today's most dynamic artists, we support a range of private clients, museums, and not-for-profit art organizations.

For additional information and images please contact the gallery (415) 346-7812 or email [melissa@gallerywendinorris.com](mailto:melissa@gallerywendinorris.com).