

For Immediate Release

**Billy Al Bengston
The 60's**

November 5 – December 15, 2005

Billy Al Bengston first emerged in the Los Angeles art scene from the sphere of his mentor, Peter Voulkos. Voulkos and his students at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles (Bengston among them) were defined by their mantra-like defiance of standardized rules as they applied to art. But unlike Voulkos, who worked in ceramic, Bengston decided early on that he wanted to paint. While Bengston's early work was well received when first exhibited at Ferus Gallery in the mid to late 1950's, it was nevertheless somewhat derivative of his other previous teacher and mentor, Richard Diebenkorn.

While visiting Milan in 1959 Bengston was struck by the work of Tinteretto, and in particular two Madonna portraits in which the models' faces are centered on the canvas. Around the same time, at the Venice Bienale, Bengston encountered the Flag and Target paintings of Jasper Johns and responding in particular to the subtle surface textures of those works. Afterwards, when he returned to Los Angeles, Bengston shifted the direction of his work developing a style involving centralized imagery within a square. Images of hearts, and also irises referred to as "Draculas" (so called because colleague Ken Price described them as looking like Dracula when he turned into a bat) were among the first icons he used in this format. Later Bengston began using images of sergeant stripes, which he referred to as "Chevrons" mainly because of their formal presence when centered within the square. The "Chevrons" are represented in most of Bengston's work throughout the 1960's first within oil on masonite paintings and later in a series of work using purposefully dented and defiled aluminum sheets which he called "Dentos".

The period in which Bengston created the "Dentos" (1965-1969) correlates with his other professional career – motorcycle racing. In the process of detailing his own bikes, Bengston became exceptionally skilled in the use of spray booth materials and equipment. His technical and aesthetic understanding of auto enamels and lacquers quite naturally translated into his art. This vocabulary, articulated by metallic, high-gloss paints on faceted, dented metal became a signature style integrally associated with Bengston throughout his career.

By the end of the decade, in 1969, Bengston re-invoked the "Dracula" flower motif and shifted his attention toward nature, organic shapes, oil on canvas and life after the end of a much-heralded motorcycle-racing career. This exhibition, which focuses primarily on the "Dento" works, is designed to reflect only a sample of the energy and intensity this artist infused in his work throughout this tumultuous decade.

For images, biographies and further information on this exhibition please contact Holly Brown at (212) 246-5360, or log onto the gallery's website at www.franklinparrasch.com.