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## “INAPPROPRIATE APPROPRIATIONS” BY GEOFFREY MOSS INSPIRED BY SHUNGA PRINTS

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No other influence upon the fine arts of Europe and America has been as profound as that exerted by the great Ukiyo-e artists of Japan. Ever since the 1860s artists of the Western world have drawn great inspiration from the color woodblock prints of the Ukiyo-e artists, such as Hiroshige, Hokusai, and Utamaro. Japonisme had a pervasive influence upon the French Impressionist masters, including Monet, Degas, Renoir, Pissarro, Gauguin, and Van Gogh. The movement spread even quicker from Paris owing to the posters of Toulouse-Lautrec and Alphonse Mucha. The three most influential American masters were James McNeil Whistler, Arthur Wesley Dow, and Mary Cassatt. In architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright led the avant-garde with many structures that are indebted to the Japanese.

Whether in landscape or portraiture, artists have been inspired by Japanese composition, perspective, and color for the past 150 years. But one theme within the Ukiyo-e movement that has been explored by very few is *shunga*, or erotica.

Studio Vendome in SoHo has unveiled “Inappropriate Appropriations” by Geoffrey Moss, which runs through Oct 12<sup>th</sup>. This visually compelling body of work represents the artist’s most private and unseen paintings. The series’ reference point is the classic erotica imagery of Japanese *shunga*, a subject with which he first became familiar while working at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. “I wanted to give this Japanese subject an American character...It’s a process of distillation in many steps” until the erotic image becomes abstracted yet still bearing a subliminal seduction.

Geoffrey Moss has led double lives for fifty years. The public knows him for his instantly recognizable style of searing political cartoons that appeared in the op-ed pages of the *Washington Post* for decades. He was nominated two times for the Pulitzer Prize and became one of the most sought-after illustrators in the country. No one knows that successful career was paralleled by his secret life as

a brilliant abstract painter. In 1964, when he and his fellow students (who included Rackstraw Downes, Janet Fish, Brice Marden, and Richard Serra) graduated from Yale's MFA program, Moss remained stubbornly independent and avoided exhibiting his paintings. When he met Peter Hastings Falk, the curator of this exhibition and founder of Rediscovered Masters, he was convinced otherwise. Falk points out that while Moss may have been pigeon-holed as an illustrator he stands firmly on equal footing with the best of the abstract painters of any generation.

The galleries of Studio Vendome are unique in that their exhibitions will showcase late career artists and artist estate collections deserving greater critical recognition. The shows are part of the unprecedented "Rediscovered Masters" series, whose artists are elected by an Art Advisory Board composed of distinguished museum directors, curators, historians, and critics. Falk, also a noted art historian and art reference publisher, has planned the next ten art exhibitions for Studio Vendome, some of which first showed at art museums and non-profit art centers from across the country.

Antonio "Nino" Vendome, chairman of the Vendome Group, recently opened two new art galleries under his name located in West SoHo's burgeoning Hudson Square district. The first gallery, Studio Vendome, is located in architect Philip Johnson's Urban Glass House at 330 Spring Street. It is featuring 12 oils on canvas plus 12 works on paper. The second gallery, Studio Vendome Projects, is located at 30 Grand Street across from The James hotel, and it is featuring 12 smaller format works on paper that are studies for the oils.

Mr. Vendome's vision for approaching the art world in a different way came during the 1980s and 1990s owing to his close professional relationship with Philip Johnson, the great modernist American architect. The Manhattan real estate developer explained, "Philip Johnson designed the critically acclaimed 'Habitable Sculpture' which I intend to build one day to continue his legacy and establish the true value of architecture as art, which will highlight Johnson's lasting impact on the American landscape." Vendome's overarching initiative is therefore to present visually compelling exhibitions for both galleries.

Vendome is also affectionately known for his "Nino's Restaurant 9/11 Relief Fund" where he transformed his family restaurant in to a relief center for first responders and others at the World Trade Center site where he served tens of thousands of free meals to Ground Zero workers for seven months following 9/11.

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