

Q and A: Mel Ramos on His Milestone Galerie Gmurzynska Show

BY NICHOLAS FORREST | OCTOBER 24, 2016



Mel Ramos
(Galerie Gmurzynska)

Galerie Gmurzynska is presenting one of the most important exhibitions of the rebel American figurative painter and Pop art pioneer Mel Ramos in recent years at its Zug gallery in Switzerland until November. The career-spanning retrospective showcases the diversity of Ramos's unique practice and also emphasizes the importance of semiotics in his work.

The now 81 year first gained recognition as a pop artist in the early 60s alongside the likes of [Andy Warhol](#) (/artists/andy-warhol-69) and [Roy Lichtenstein](#) (/artists/roy-lichtenstein-225) with his appropriations of comic book characters such as Batman and Superman. He found fame in the mid 1960s with his "commercial pin-ups," juxtaposing nude pin-up girls from magazines and advertisements with commercial products.

Thorough out his career, Ramos has continued to appropriate images from mass media and popular culture to create satirical parodies of brand advertising clichés. At the same time his works comment

the way the advertising industry and the mass media use images of women as marketing tools, projecting them as products of a consumer society.

Ramos's unique approach to the genre of figurative painting challenges perceptions of sex and materialism, giving new meanings to existing motifs and elevating the status of the female nude to new heights. "I make sure that my pictures are not too erotic and that they always have a trace of humour," Ramos has said. "I make sure they are in good taste. Either you understand it or not."

BLOUIN ARTINFO was granted a rare interview with Mel Ramos who was kind enough to take the time to answer some questions on his work. See what he had to say below.

The exhibition at Galerie Gmurzynska spans your entire career, emphasizing the diversity of your work. What originally motivated and inspired you to become an artist and how did that shape the nature and character of your practice?

My interest in art goes back to my high school days. My high school Art teacher recognized my interest in drawing and she let me do the artwork for the posters illustrating the athletic events. I dabbled in making so called "art," but I realized that I had no talent so I began to paint portraits of my favorite heroes of the comics, which I loved as a kid. Lawrence Alloway called them "Pop Art"

Your work seems to be inextricably linked to the term "Pop Art." What is your connection and relationship with the term and everything it represents and embodies and is it a term that you would use to describe your current work?

"Pop" was something that happened in the early 1960's and was very short lived. Several of these artists felt no connection to the style. I was not one of them. My work was connected to this style because the subject matter was about the figure, an image very prominent in my work.

What is it about mass media and advertising that fascinates you so much and where does this fascination stem from?

"Sex Sells" is the covenant of all my work. Over the years I have strayed from this premise.

Nude female figures are a key, and often controversial motif in your practice. What was the basis and motivation for your engagement with the nude female figure as a key component of your visual language and why do you continue to persist with the depiction of nude female figures?

Morandi painted bottles, Monet painted hay stacks. I paint the nude female figure. It's what I do.

How would you describe the main motivations and inspirations that underpin your career and what is it about these motivations and inspirations that have kept you on the same, or at least a similar artistic trajectory for such a long time?

The figure has been the subject of my work, but the language of my work can be just about anything. For example, the Hollywood sign in Los Angeles or another example is a series of portraits of figures with words such as "Chica," the word for girl in Spanish or "Ragazza," the word for girl in Italian.

What are some of the key experiences and encounters that you would credit with influencing and shaping your career?

Some of the key experiences and encounters that have shaped my life and work are my friendships with [Wayne Thiebaud \(/artists/wayne-thiebaud-1677\)](#) and Roy Lichtenstein.

What do you want to express and convey with your work?

It would be nice to be remembered for making work that has great craftsmanship.