

Horacio Torres: Eight Nudes, 1971-1975

Winter 2023



On the 46th anniversary of Horacio Torres' death in February 1976, Cecilia de Torres, Ltd. exhibits eight nudes he painted in New York between 1971 and 1975, when a return to figuration emerged in reaction to the hegemony of Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Color Field, and Pop Art. Today, we again witness an ushering in of representational painting after years of Conceptual Art. The works on view at the gallery demonstrate Torres' contemporary approach to the human body, while at the same time continuing the tradition of great easel painting.

Horacio Torres was born in Italy in 1924; two years later, his father, Joaquín Torres-García, relocated his family to Paris. Horacio was too young to recall the modernists who frequented their home: Jean Arp, Piet Mondrian, Theo van Doesburg, Jean Hélion, and Jacques Lipchitz, among others. He did remember however, accompanying his father to visit Alexander Calder perform his *Circus* and wondering why a grown man was playing like a child. In Montevideo, Torres learned the craft of painting at the Taller Torres-García (TTG), the workshop his father created in the 1940s.

Upon arriving in New York in 1969, and encouraged by Clement Greenberg, Torres began to paint the figure. He abandoned the constructivism and geometric abstraction practiced at the TTG and began painting in the style of the Venetian Renaissance fearful that this tradition, which he held dear, could be lost forever. In 1974, Kenworth Moffett, then Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, organized an exhibition of Torres' new paintings, which brought him to the public's attention. Critics pondered over how he was confronting the dilemma of representing the nude figure at a time when abstraction was dominant.

To achieve a sense of the modern and avoid falling into a renaissance pastiche, Torres divested his paintings of the narrative and the anecdotal. To avoid having the figure become the center of attention he often cropped the body, a device that strengthened the overall abstract effect. Every inch of Torres' lush canvases is a creative act of painting, "it is not a matter of loose painterly handling or empty bravura," wrote Michael Brenson in his review for *The New York Times* of a 1990 exhibition of the artist in New York, "but rather an expressive phrasing that is continually invented."