

Mitchell-Innes & Nash Announces Representation of the Estate of General Idea (1969-1994)



NEW YORK, June 12, 2017 – Mitchell-Innes & Nash announces the representation of the **Estate of General Idea** (1969-1994). Formed in Toronto in 1969 by AA Bronson, Felix Partz and Jorge Zontal, General Idea is internationally recognized for work that tackled such subjects as the myth of the artist, the role of mass media, the relationship between the body and identity, issues of gender and sexual representation, and famously HIV/AIDS activism at a time when talking about the disease was taboo. The gallery's first exhibition with the Estate of General Idea will be in November 2017 and will feature the group's *Ziggurat Paintings* (1968-86), marking General Idea's first solo exhibition in New York since The Museum of Modern Art presented *One Day of AZT / One Year of AZT* in 1996.

The members of General Idea were key figures in the 1970-80's conceptual art scenes and, with equal parts humor and criticality, created work across a variety of media and platforms. In performances, editions, sculptures, paintings and installations, the group often occupied unconventional forms of presentation such as beauty pageants, picture magazines, television talk shows, pop-up shops, and various advertising formats.

In the mid-1980s, General Idea created a now famous body of work, *Imagevirus*. The work referenced the pop artist Robert Indiana's ubiquitous 1966 *LOVE* painting, boldly replacing the word 'LOVE' with 'AIDS'. *Imagevirus* became central to General Idea's practice in the late 1980's, when AIDS was emerging as a global pandemic, and a general climate of confusion, panic and reactionary homophobic repression spread worldwide. Through the *Imagevirus* works, General Idea addressed the silence and prejudice associated with the disease, which put their career-long preoccupation with issues of copyright, appropriation and consumerism into new and urgent focus. The

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project took on particular significance for the group when two of General Idea's members, Felix and Jorge, were diagnosed with HIV in 1989 and 1990. General Idea ended with the untimely deaths of Jorge and Felix in February and June of 1994 respectively.

General Idea's oeuvre challenges commonly held notions about the artist's role as a producer of tangible 'art objects.' Between 1969 and 1971 the group produced a beauty pageant called the *Miss General Idea Pageant*. The symbolic figure of Miss General Idea presented herself as the group's muse and though there were winners, the pageant was essentially a farce. The pageant format, for General Idea, was a metaphor for the art world in general: there are winners and losers, prizes are given, and all contestants are objectified by the "judges" and "audience" alike. The Miss General Idea Pageants were performative rehearsals for the ultimate 1984 Miss General Idea Pageant, to be housed in the prospective 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion, which inexplicably and abortively burned down in 1977, seven years before its "completion." If *Miss General Idea* was a stand-in for the artists' muse, the Pavillion was their metaphor for the museum or the art gallery.

In 1972, General Idea began to publish *FILE Magazine*, which borrowed the logo and identity of *LIFE* magazine. As Bronson explained, "We knew that if it looked familiar, people would pick it up, and they did. We thought of it as a kind of virus within the communication systems." Inspired by Joseph Beuys' use of multiples to disseminate his ideas widely and inexpensively, General Idea published twenty-six issues of *FILE*, consolidating and perpetuating their career-long interest in publications and low-priced editions.

The exhibition at Mitchell-Innes & Nash will include the group's *Ziggurat Paintings*, made between 1968 and 1986. The ziggurat is a central and repeated symbol in General Idea's vocabulary, appearing in paintings, works on paper, photographs, and dresses for the *Miss General Idea Pageant*. An ancient Mesopotamian architectural structure of steps leading up to a temple, the ziggurat serves as a link between humans and the gods. General Idea appropriates this symbol of power and theism, rendering it in Day-Glo colors. Felix Partz created the first series of Ziggurat paintings before the inception of the General Idea group-identity and they were later absorbed into the General Idea oeuvre. The Ziggurat became a recurrent core motif in General Idea's body of work, appearing in drawings, sculptures, photographs, and performances. In 1986, General Idea returned to the Ziggurat Paintings, many of which will be on view at Mitchell-Innes & Nash from November 30, 2017 to January 13, 2018.

The Estate of General Idea (1969–1994)

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AA Bronson, born Michael Tims, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, 1946.
Felix Partz, born Ronald Gabe, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, 1945-1994.
Jorge Zontal, born Slobodan Saia-Levy, Parma, Italy, 1944-1994.

General Idea is currently the subject of two major 2017 museum exhibitions: *General Idea: Broken Time*, MALBA, Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires (traveled from Museo Jumex, Mexico City) and *General Idea Photographs, 1969-1980*, MAMCO, Geneva.

General Idea has been the subject of several major traveling museum exhibitions: *The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion*, Kunsthalle Basel; Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal (1984-85). *The Armoury of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion*, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; 49th Parallel, New York; University Art Gallery, California State University, Long Beach; Contemporary Arts Museum Houston; Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo (1968-87). *Fin de siècle*, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart; Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, Barcelona; Kunstverein, Hamburg; The Power Plant, Toronto; Wexner Center for the Visual Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA, (1992-1993). *General Idea Editions: 1967-1995*, The Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville; Kunstverein Munich; Kunst-Werke, Berlin; Kunsthalle Zürich; Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, PA, and Blackwood Gallery, University of Toronto, Mississauga (2003-2007). *Haute Culture: General Idea. Une rétrospective, 1969-1994*, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris and Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2011).

Additionally, the group has been the subject of several important solo exhibitions at the Art Gallery of Ontario (1975 and 1993), Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1979), the Vancouver Art Gallery (1984), and Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst (now Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst), Ghent (1984). General Idea has exhibited in the Canadian Pavilion at the 40th Venice Biennale (1980) and at Documenta 7, Kassel (1982).

General Idea's work is included in the collections of important institutions worldwide, including The Museum of Modern Art, NY; the Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; The Art Institute of Chicago; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC; the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and the Tate, London.

The Estate of General Idea is also represented by Esther Schipper (Berlin), Maureen Paley (London), and Mai 36 Galerie (Zurich).

About Mitchell-Innes & Nash

Founded by Lucy Mitchell-Innes and David Nash, who previously directed the worldwide Contemporary and Impressionist & Modern Art divisions of Sotheby's, Mitchell-Innes &

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Nash places exemplary contemporary artists within a historical context, revealing a continuity of ideas and aesthetic virtuosity from the Modern era through the present day.

Mitchell-Innes & Nash's renowned exhibition program, in both their Madison Avenue and Chelsea locations, fosters excellence within artistic practice, while forging an informed dialogue between emerging and established internationally recognized artists. From acclaimed surveys of 20th century masters, such as Jean Arp, Anthony Caro, Jay DeFeo, Willem de Kooning, Leon Kossoff, Kenneth Noland, Roy Lichtenstein, and Nicolas de Stael, to solo exhibitions of Sarah Braman, Keltie Ferris, Daniel Lefcourt, Pope.L, Martha Rosler, and Jessica Stockholder, Mitchell-Innes & Nash has proven expertise in both advancing the careers of emerging artists and maintaining the superior standard set by established artists.

Image Caption: General Idea, *AIDS*, 1987, Serigraph on paper, from General Idea's Imagevirus project, 1987-1994

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