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PRESS RELEASE

DOROTHEA TANNING: WEB OF DREAMS

11 JULY – 9 AUGUST 2014

PRIVATE VIEW: THURSDAY 10 JULY 6 – 8 pm

I don't see why one shouldn't be absolutely fascinated with the human form, there are so many reasons to be. Besides, we are living in human bodies, we go through life in this world envelope. Why not acknowledge that and try to say something about it? So what I try to say about it is transformation.

Dorothea Tanning, 1993

Working in close collaboration with The Dorothea Tanning Foundation, Alison Jacques Gallery is proud to present our second solo exhibition of works by Dorothea Tanning. *Web of Dreams* brings together a selection of paintings and works on paper spanning fifty years, many of which have never been exhibited before. The exhibition begins with Tanning's 1939 work on paper **Tango** and ends with a work of the same title made in 1989, demonstrating the artist's lifelong study of the passionate interplay of figures.

Some of Tanning's paintings have a mysterious and enigmatic quality to them, digging deep into our unconscious and pulling out fragments from childhood memories, nightmares and fairy tales. In 1942, the gallerist Julien Levy said: "*I had discovered the works of a wonderful young woman, Dorothea Tanning, who created a whole universe from her subconscious, meticulously painted*". **Un Tissu de Songes (Web of Dreams) (1973-93)** provides the title of the show and is a prime example of Tanning's preoccupation with revisiting forms, themes, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and states of being. Originally painted in 1973, then reworked in 1984, and again in 1993, **Un Tissu de Songes (Web of Dreams)** alludes to a convergence of many dream-thoughts or perhaps, more simply, to being caught in an endless dream-like state.

A seminal work included in the exhibition, **Notes for an Apocalypse (1978)**, is described eloquently by Dorothea Tanning in a publication for her exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 2000 "[*Growing up in Galesburg, Illinois*] There was a long dining room table that on Sunday, especially when the pastor came to dinner, got covered with, first, a pad and then the great gleaming white tablecloth. They shook it out and laid it down, smoothing out the folds that made a gentle grid from end to end. The grid surely proved that order prevailed in this house. In *Notes for an Apocalypse* the grid may still be trying to prove something, to reassure, to bring order out of turmoil and to anchor the turbulent images. Once, years ago, a writer, referring to another work of mine (*Some Rose and Their Phantoms, 1952*), used the word eucharist. Wrong again, I thought at the time. But the Sunday tablecloth..."

The latest painting in the show, **To Climb a Ladder (1987)**, depicts a mass of limbs writhing in a struggle to reach the light at the top. The perspective of this painting appears inverted: as the ladder leads upwards the figures seem to fall and remain trapped in a state of purgatory. Tanning wrote in 1989, "*This painting went through several stages before finally taking shape. I just like the imprisoned flesh.*"

Of the works on paper exhibited, two books are shown displaying a frieze format. In **Ouvre-Toi (1971)**, each page unfolds much like a narrative for a film, while a sketchbook from 1965 opens into a concertina, a visual love letter to her husband Max Ernst, with each page bearing a unique image of embracing figures and a single letter spelling out **H-A-P-P-Y B-I-R-T-H-D-A-Y D-E-A-R M-A-X**.

Dorothea Tanning was born in Galesburg, Illinois (1910), and died in New York (2012) aged 101 years. Major solo museum exhibitions included Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (1974); Camden Arts Centre, London (1993); Malmö Konsthall, Malmö, Sweden (1993); and Philadelphia Museum of Art (2000). Notable recent group shows included *The Surreal House*, Barbican Art Gallery, London (2010); *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles (2012), and *Biographical Forms: Construction and Individual Mythology*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (2013). Museum collections include: Tate, London; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and Smithsonian Institute American Art Museum, Washington D.C. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art recently acquired **Self-Portrait (1944)** after being exhibited in 'Il Palazzo Enciclopedico' at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 curated by Massimiliano Gioni.

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