

SETAREH

Although at first glance, the following work takes on stately pop-art characteristics and is strongly reminiscent of works such as Ed Ruscha's *Hurting the Word Radio #2 (1964)* or Roy Lichtenstein's *Whaam!*; the artist does not use commercial techniques and images from popular culture. Instead, the present work unfolds the political and poetic dimensions of the artist's life. *July 5 (Great Day Coming)* was likely inspired by personal and narrative touches rather than by his contemporaries. Despite Copley's commitment to Surrealism, his friendship with its artists and the influences of the flourishing Pop Art scene of New York in the 1970s, his artistic process did not fit neatly within either category. As the esteemed art historian Roland Penrose observes, it is impossible to place Copley in any "school". Participating in World War II had shattered Copley's life and after returning to California in 1945, he divested any convictions about the direction his future should follow. While Copley increasingly distanced himself from his conservative family, with whose point of view he could no longer identify –especially after his wartime experiences–, he became a supporter of left-liberal politics, attended political meetings and distributed pamphlets of the Progressive Party around Henry A. Wallace. His son Bill Copley commented: "It was the bicentennial in honour of America's 200th year. [...] Patriotism to him was a very broad subject and included everything about America, including the kitchen sink. [...] Politics and satire were always a big part of his work. And sex, of course" (B. Copley, quoted in 'Billy Copley & Vincent Fremont 2012', in *The Patriotism of CPLY*, exh.cat., New York: Paul Kasmin Gallery, 2012, n.p.). As the artist himself states: "Surrealism made everything understandable: my genteel family, the war, and why I attended the Yale Prom without my shoes. It looked like something I might succeed at." (William N. Copley, 'Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dealer' 1974, p. 5).

In Copley's early works, like the 1964's *Thinker*, exhibited at MoMA, New York, he depicts two faceless characters, the naked blond and her bandy-legged suitor. His subversive paintings are directed against social values, confronting bourgeois decency and traditional high art. Roberta Smith observes: "But the style he perfected was Surrealist only in its emphasis on uninhibited expressions of the libido. His cartoonish figures had affinities to Pop Art, which they presaged, and drew from American folk art" (Roberta Smith, 'William N. Copley, 77, Painter And Collector of Surrealist Art', *The New York Times*, May 9, 1996). The depictions of figures in various stages of nudity and of sexual intercourse are an attempt to elaborate the artist's assessment of the differences between men and women in romantic and sexual relationships. These scenes do not only evoke casual encounters but also the complicated dynamics of real-world relationships. When Copley ran out of inherited money, he unceremoniously sold his collection of surrealist artworks in 1979 for \$6.7 million, at the time the highest total for the auction of a single owner's collection in the United States. Andy Warhol once remarked: "Copley's work is to die for". He even wanted to write a play about Copley's life, which unfortunately never came to fruition.

The curator Tony Kamps writes: "Copley's art remains exciting and fresh today precisely because of its opposition to decorum, categorization, and any kind of orthodoxy. It stands as a delightfully puckish and honest record of a unique, obsessive vision and life, as well as an emblem of art's essential, exciting freedom and strangeness" (T. Kamps, 'William N. Copley: The World According to CPLY', in *William N. Copley*, exh.cat., Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2016, p. 30).