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NEW SIGLIO TITLE FOR FALL

JESS

O! TRICKY CAD & OTHER JESSOTERICA

EDITED BY MICHAEL DUNCAN

HARD-TO-FIND & RARELY SEEN WORKS OF EXTRAORDINARY VISUAL AND VERBAL PLAY BY THE INVENTIVE MASTER OF THE COLLAGE AESTHETIC

The artist Jess has been known for decades to cognoscenti as an inventive and sophisticated master of the collage aesthetic. His works are now receiving fresh attention from a younger generation attuned to Jess's interests in myth, narrative, and appropriation. A unique synthesis of art and literature, Jess's collages intermingle and juxtapose images taken from wildly eclectic sources (*Dick Tracy*, Dürer, 1887 *Scientific American* line engravings, Beatles bubblegum cards, beefcake photos from *Physique Pictorial*, etc.) in order to re-assemble the meanings of our time.

This volume brings to light collages, collage books, word poems, and altered comic strips that have been largely inaccessible or unavailable since their making. Originally published in small editions and hard-to-find journals, or made as singular artist's books, these works demonstrate the full range of Jess's extraordinary verbal and visual play. Legibility has been emphasized in the reproductions, so that the work can be fully engaged and *read*.

Several of Jess's surreal comic strip manipulations—including all of the existing *Tricky Cads*—are reproduced for the first time in their entirety. The book also includes a group of complex wraparound book covers, several unpublished collage poems, and two artist's books never before reproduced in full—*From Force of Habit*, a “fantastic tale” which plays with the pages of a cult 1895 Swedish sci-fi novel, and *When a Young Lad Dreams of Manhood*, a homoerotic paean (and naughty parody of the priapic urge). Jess's twenty-page collage masterpiece *O!* is also included as a separate booklet, and the dust jacket unfolds to a 19 x 25 poster reproduction of a large-scale paste-up.

JESS (1923-2004), born Burgess Collins in Long Beach, California, was trained as a chemist and worked during World War II on the production of plutonium for the Manhattan Project. Experiencing anxiety over the ramifications of his work on atomic energy, Jess abandoned science and his surname in 1949 and enrolled in the California School of Fine Arts. He soon met poet Robert Duncan and the couple embarked on a domestic relationship of shared aesthetic concerns, setting up their home as a haven for books, literature, and the art of their friends. Duncan and Jess were active participants in the burgeoning Bay Area poetry and art scenes, developing close friendships with Helen Adam, Wallace Berman, Robin Blaser, George Herms, Harry Jacobus, Patricia and Lawrence Jordan, Michael McClure, and Jack Spicer.

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Jess's self-reflexive style of image-making was most powerfully conveyed in the *Translations* (1959-76), a group of thirty-two paintings based on found images. They were exhibited in his first solo show in New York in 1971 at the Odyssea Gallery and shown three years later at MOMA. His paste-ups and *Tricky Cad* works were included in early Pop Art and assemblage exhibitions on both coasts. A major retrospective was organized by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo in 1993 and traveled to the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the San Francisco Museum of Art, the Walker Art Center, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Jess's work is the centerpiece of the 2013-14 exhibition, *An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan & Their Circle* organized by the Crocker Art Museum and travelling to Grey Art Gallery, New York University; Katzen Art Gallery, American University; and the Pasadena Museum of California Art. His work resides in numerous private and public collections including those of the Museum of Modern Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Critic and independent curator MICHAEL DUNCAN is a Corresponding Editor for *Art in America*. His writings have focused on individualistic artists of the twentieth century, West Coast modernism, twentieth century figuration, and contemporary California art. His curatorial projects include surveys of works by Pavel Tchelitchew, Kim MacConnel, Lorser Feitelson, Eugene Berman, Richard Pettibone, Alberto Burri, and Wallace Berman. He is co-curator of the forthcoming exhibition *An Opening of the Field: Jess, Robert Duncan & Their Circle*.

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