

James Rosenquist: Warhol's favourite artist celebrated in London show

Pop art pioneer was a friend and contemporary of Warhol, Lichtenstein and Rauschenberg



▲ **Untitled (Blue Sky), 1962**, one of the works featured in James Rosenquist: Visualising the Sixties at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock

Surreal, innovative and political paintings by an American artist worshipped by Andy Warhol have gone on display in London.

James Rosenquist was a pop art pioneer whose name is well known in America and parts of Europe, but far less so in the UK.

The London show, at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, which occupies a stupendously grand 18th-century townhouse in Mayfair, may go a small way towards changing that. It focuses on his work in the 1960s, when he was part of a New York gang that included artists such as Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Rauschenberg, and shows how he was frequently ahead of his time.



▲ James Rosenquist pictured in 2005 with his work Brazil. Photograph: Wolfgang Weihs/EPA



He was often interested in the experiential side of visual art. On loan from the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, and shown for the first time in the UK, is *Forest Ranger* (1967), a 4-metre-high painting of a tank which hangs from the ceiling like a stripped plastic curtain and which visitors are invited to walk through.

Rosenquist died in 2017, aged 83. In the 1960s he was a key pop art player although it was a label none of the artists were keen on. “No one of them liked that term,” said Rosenquist’s widow, Mimi Thompson Rosenquist. “They all said ‘what does that mean’ because they were all so different. They all used commercial imagery in some way but they all used it so differently.”

He was part of a remarkable community of artists which also included Agnes Martin and Jasper Johns.

“It was a smaller art world then and they all really knew each other and they all looked at each other’s work,” said Thompson Rosenquist. “They always knew what was happening.

“It was very open and supportive ... they were competitive but there was no money involved at that time so people weren’t as competitive as they are now.”

Warhol wrote in his diaries how Rosenquist was his favourite artist. And he told him. “When he and Jim would see each other Andy would say: ‘Jim, you know you’re my favourite artist,’ and Jim would say: ‘No Andy, you’re my favourite artist.’ This would go back and forth for a while until they got tired of it.”



▲ Forest Ranger will be on display for the first time in the UK. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock



▲ The Light That Won't Fail 1, 1961 by James Rosenquist. Photograph: Guy Bell/Rex/Shutterstock



The London exhibition explores how surrealism influenced Rosenquist and how politics, overtly or subtly, was always bound up in the meaning of his works.

- Mark Brown, Arts correspondent. September 10th 2019

● *James Rosenquist: Visualising the Sixties is at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London, 10 September to 9 November.*