

David James Gilhooly, “Frog Burger”

It may be hard to believe David James Gilhooly is an artist who played an essential role in changing the course of art history while admiring his series of endearing frog ceramics. Widely associated with the unstructured Funk art movement, Gilhooly helped advance art beyond the pure abstraction of artists such as Jackson Pollack and Mark Rothko, by instead using figurative art to draw out ironies in contemporary society. Michaan’s Auctions is proud to offer David James Gilhooly’s “Frog Burger,” 1977 (\$1,2/1,800) as Lot 8056 in the Winter Fine Sale to be held on Thursday, December 14th.

This palm-sized ceramic from David Gilhooly features a green-stylized frog caught between the two halves of a



poppyseed burger bun. The frog is covered in a white cheese, which is rendered largely intact, although it is beginning to melt around its open eyes and mouth. The frog’s legs are splayed out behind it, preventing the animal from escaping its predicament. The buns are faithfully rendered in trump d’oeil style, while the frog is much more

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abstracted and is delightfully cartoonish in its details, a choice which mirrors both his prior works of frogs, and his future interest in life-like ceramic food sculptures.

Gilhooly is perhaps most famous for his works that substitute frog figures for their human counterparts in historical or religious scenes, a framework that makes his situating the frog as a meal, especially interesting in this piece. This continues his interest in satirical works which emphasize the



bizarre nature of contemporary life. Also interesting is the frog's expression, which while not overtly pained, certainly seems to indicate some discomfort with the situation, undoubtedly a natural reaction to the frog's status as a future meal. It's a sensibility highlighted in other works from his series of frogs in food, which typically depict the frog as alive within the constraints of its accompanying ingredients.

"Frog Burger" continues the artist's longstanding interest in frog figures, a period of nearly 20 years that began early in his career and continued until 1983. Executed in 1977, this piece, therefore, represents a mature period in Gilhooly's career, which is evident not only in his masterful handling of the material but also in his conceptual sophistication. This piece is also notable as a very early example of Gilhooly's eventual turn towards trump d'oeil food

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reproductions, which would eventually supersede frogs as his primary fascination. The combination of the frog and food in “Frog Burger” therefore represents a key turning point in the artist’s career.

Michaan’s Auctions is proud to offer a second piece from Gilhooly in our Winter Fine Sale titled **David Gilhooly, “Five Donuts,” glazed ceramic** (\$1,5/2,500), which will be offered as Lot 8057. Featuring five ceramic donuts about 3 inches in diameter, this work further highlights the artist’s interest in trump d’oeil food reproductions in his work. While this collection of pieces was executed earlier than “Frog Burger,” in subject matter, it represents the direction of the artist’s late career in ceramics.

David James Gilhooly was born in Auburn, CA in 1943. His childhood was marked by frequent uprootings, he left Auburn at only a few years old before spending time in the Virgin Islands, as well as Solvang and Santa Maria California, before graduating from high school in Puerto Rico in 1961. Later that year he returned to California, enrolling in the University of California, Davis as a biology major. In 1962 Gilhooly changed his major to anthropology and later took his first ceramic class. After receiving recognition for his work, he became an art major the following year.

Gilhooly’s career quickly took off, even before his graduation. He quickly earned solo exhibitions at Bay Area galleries and an exceedingly positive

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review in Art Forum magazine. By 1967 had achieved his first of many museum shows, which quickly established his international reputation. In 1969 he and his wife moved to Canada as Gilhooly took up a teaching position at the University of Saskatchewan, but only two years later he was fired for creating works depicting the department head and his wife as animals. He moved to Toronto to teach at York University until 1975 when he finally returned to Davis, California, becoming a full-time teacher at his alma mater. Gilhooly continued making work and exhibiting widely during this time, and in 1983 he made

his last ceramic pieces, before transitioning to Plexiglass sculptures and a printmaking practice.

David James Gilhooly, “Frog Burger,” 1977 (\$1,2/1,800) will be offered as Lot 8056 at Michaan’s Auctions Winter Fine Sale on Thursday, December 14th, which features notable names leading the fine art, decorative, and jewelry departments. BANKSY’s 2004 screenprint “Barcode” headlines a sale featuring Tiffany Studios Bronze Lamp and Wisteria Table Screen, wristwatches by Rolex and Hublot, and a Chalcedony, Yellow Gold Brooch attributed to Suzanne Belperron.

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