

PRESS RELEASE**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****LUCIA WILCOX: LUCIA OPENS AT BERRY CAMPBELL****LUCIA WILCOX: LUCIA | May 22 – June 28, 2025**

May 7, 2025, New York, NY—Berry Campbell Gallery is thrilled to announce its first exhibition of the work of Lucia Wilcox (1899–1974), whose extraordinary life began with her youth in Beirut and unfolded at the center of the Paris and New York art worlds. Residing in East Hampton from the 1940s onward, Lucia Wilcox served as a vital link between European émigrés, such as Fernand Léger, Max Ernst, and Yves Tanguy, and Abstract Expressionists, such as Lee Krasner, Jackson Pollock and Elaine and Willem de Kooning. With solo exhibitions at Sidney Janis Gallery in the late 1940s and Leo Castelli Gallery in the early 1970s, the *New York Times* described her life in 1973 as “intertwined in the history of twentieth-century art.” This marks the first exhibition of Lucia Wilcox’s work by the gallery after announcing the representation of her Estate. *Lucia Wilcox: LUCIA* will open May 22, 2025 and continue through June 28, 2025 with a reception on Thursday May 29, 2025, 6 to 8 pm.

Lucia Wilcox: LUCIA will focus on her vividly hued and wildly imaginative Surrealist works from 1943 to 1948. Known professionally as “Lucia” (she was married three times), she referenced Fauvism, Primitivism, and Symbolism, creating Surrealist compositions that stood apart for their joyous embrace of life, freedom, and sensual pleasures. She often used the female nude—along with color and line—to construct a realm of uninhibited sensual pleasure, drawing inspiration at times from Henri Matisse. However, in ironic and tongue-in-cheek depictions, she transformed traditional tropes of female angels, reclining nudes, and dancers—often emblems in works by male artists (including Matisse) of women’s ethereality and sexuality—into affirmations of women’s freedom and pleasure. These “fantasyscapes” pose an understated feminist challenge to a Surrealist ethos in which male artists often used women as muses and mediums for visions laced with erotic violence and hallucinations. Like other women associated with Surrealism—including Gertrude Abercrombie, Dorothea Tanning, Leonora Carrington, Leonor Fini, Kay Sage, and Remedios Varo—Lucia found a voice in Surrealism in the 1940s, a time when as Whitney Chadwick notes in *Women, Art, and Society* (1990), women artists replaced such ideologies “with an art of magical fantasy and narrative flow.”

While the dreamlike lyricism of Lucia’s work often evokes that of Marc Chagall, she expressed an exuberant zest for life in the moment—contrasting with Chagall’s frequent retreat into memory and spiritual longing. “Painting is your own reflection,” Lucia stated in 1948. “It is a handwriting, a personal speech. I paint because I have to paint and this is my only way of writing poetry.” The ideology shines forth in works such as *Jungle Path* (1946), in which tiger-like creatures and human faces are growing within a dense tropical landscape. A wide-eyed lion stares toward the viewer, evoking the lion in Henri Rousseau’s *The Dream* (1910, Museum of Modern Art). But here, the creature does not threaten; rather, it invites the viewer to enter a mystical space where boundaries among human, nature, and the environment dissolve—symbolically rejecting hierarchies that undergird patriarchal structures. Lucia likely drew the swirl in the “a” of her signature from the snake in Rousseau’s *Dream*, turning its connotation of Eve’s danger and temptation into a gesture of irreverent delight.

Lucia’s overarching theme was freedom—expressed through immediacy, change, and movement, and a merging of the figurative and decorative. She achieved the latter by blending Eastern and Western traditions in dynamic, flat patterns that reference both Islamic and Byzantine art she experienced in her youth in the Middle East as well as her textile design background. Her works from the war years reflect not only her own 1938 flight from Europe but also a broader meditation on humanity’s resistance to oppression: paths stretch into the unknown (sometimes becoming towering angels), spectral figures move fluidly between terrestrial and celestial realms, and a ship sails beneath a coral reef. In the late 1940s, Lucia often used architecture as a compositional framework. In *Invaded City* (1948), the walls of a European town appear graffitied in floral and geometric designs—as if the interior mosaics of a Byzantine church had turned outward—while spirits fly overhead. The title plays on a double invasion—by war and art. In *Everyone Was a Church Within Himself* (1948), Lucia depicted the facade or chapels of a Moorish-Baroque church, with women occupying every shrine and archway—as

mothers with babies, angels, saints, queens, muses, and dancers. The title suggests a vision of individual spirituality within a universal humanity. Featuring only women, the work imagines a new all-female pantheon.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by independent scholar Lisa N. Peters, PhD. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. or by request.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

In 1921, after ending a brief early marriage and giving birth to a son, Lucia left Beirut for Paris. Although her stay was intended to be short, she remained in the city and joined its vibrant art scene. At Café de Flore, she met Picasso and Léger and many young aspiring artists. Determined to pursue an art career, she studied at a Parisian academy—probably the Académie Ranson—and visited museums with the Fauvist painter André Derain, who became her mentor. After supporting herself first as a seamstress, she became a successful fabric and costume designer, playing a formative role in launching the Paris atelier of Elsa Schiaparelli. In 1938, with war looming, Lucia emigrated to the United States, sponsored by the wealthy American art patrons Gerald and Sara Murphy. Accompanied by Léger—whose passage was also arranged by the Murphys—she traveled on the *S.S. Ile de France*, reaching New York on September 28, 1938.

On arrival, she and Léger stayed at the Wiborg estate of Sara Murphy's family in East Hampton, where Lucia would continue to spend summers in the years ahead. Art historian Phyllis Braff included Lucia among the modern artists who had developed an interest in Eastern Long Island as both a summer and year-round residence long before Surrealism took hold there (*The Surrealists and Their Friends on Eastern Long Island at Mid-Century*, 1996). In 1948, Lucia's paintings were featured in a solo exhibition at the newly established Sidney Janis Gallery. Reviewed in the *New York Times* and other syndicated newspapers, her work was described as "a dramatic compound of Byzantine color, allegro fancy, modern treatment, and near mystic feeling." Five hundred people attended the opening—including "a full galaxy of critics, artists, and friends [who] waltzed around the bright new pictures."

By the time of the show, Lucia had divorced her second husband—the Italian Surrealist painter Francesco Cristofanetti—and married her third, artist and inventor Roger Wilcox. The couple renovated the ramshackle home in Amagansett that Lucia purchased in 1946. Their home became a gathering place for East Hampton artists, drawn by the salon-like atmosphere Lucia created and by her renowned cooking, in which she fused Lebanese and Parisian cuisines. In 1967, *New York Times* restaurant critic Craig Claiborne published an article on Lucia in the *New York Times* titled "An Artist Divides Her Creativity between Palette and Palate," including several of her recipes.

In the 1950s, Lucia turned to abstraction, creating gestural paintings in the Abstract Expressionist idiom, influenced by her friendships with artists including Pollock and de Kooning. With slashing brushwork, calligraphic marks, and stained color, she extended her central themes of spiritual immediacy and expressive freedom. During this period, she was featured in exhibitions at Guild Hall and participated in two of the four historic exhibitions held at Signa Gallery (1957 and 1959), established by Alfonso Ossorio. In 1961, she had a solo exhibition at Lefebvre Gallery on East 77th Street in Manhattan.

After suddenly going almost entirely blind in 1972, Lucia adapted her practice, working in ink instead of oil. Displaying characteristic resilience, she told a *New York Times* reporter, "I see better than anybody. I have eliminated all the details. My mind is free of static. I don't have any distractions." These works were featured in her last lifetime show, held at the Leo Castelli Gallery in Soho in May–June 1974. Although grateful for the recognition, Lucia felt she deserved it earlier in her career. She remarked to *The Washington Post*, "I am now making up for that injustice."

When Lucia's husband organized a 1980 exhibition of her work in East Hampton, art historian Franklin Perrell summarized her legacy: "Her work constitutes the singular achievement of a woman artist working through her own distinct path yet in full contact with the powerful art movements and artist personalities of the twentieth century."

Collectors of Lucia's work include Léger, Sara Murphy, Sidney Janis, Bertha Schaeffer (art dealer), Dorothy Newman (photographer), John Graham (painter), and Harold Rosenberg (art critic).

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Christine Berry and Martha Campbell founded Berry Campbell Gallery in 2013 in a 1,000-square-foot gallery in Chelsea. Now housed in a custom-built, 9,000 square-foot location on one of Chelsea's most prestigious blocks, Berry Campbell Gallery has cemented its position among New York City galleries as a champion of artists historically marginalized due to gender, race, age, and geography.

Central to Berry and Campbell's collective vision is a blend of scholarly dedication and enduring desire to honor their artists' lives and work. Focusing on a selection of postwar and contemporary artists, the gallery addresses a critical gap in art history, revealing a depth within American Modernism that is only now coming to light. Notably, since its inception, Berry Campbell has elevated the profiles of postwar Abstract Expressionist women like Bernice Bing, Lynne Drexler, Perle Fine, Judith Godwin, and Ethel Schwabacher, presented alongside a growing roster of contemporary talents such as Nanette Carter, Beverly McIver, and Susan Vecsey, to name a few.

Berry Campbell's signature ability to construct new narratives for artists lost to art history has caught the attention of the wider art world, with participation in renowned fairs like Art Basel and Frieze and artist placement within prestigious institutions worldwide. Situated at 524 W 26th Street, the gallery's current location boasts 4,500 square feet of exhibition space, including a skylit main gallery, four smaller galleries, private viewing areas, a library, executive offices, and extensive on-site storage.

Press Inquiries

Laurel Megalli, Sutton Communications

laurel@suttoncomms.com

[+1 212 202 3402](tel:+12122023402)