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Rosenberg & Co. Opens Exhibition

## DINA VIERNY—A LIFE OF ART AND RESISTANCE

September 27 – December 18, 2021

**Rosenberg & Co.** is pleased to present *Dina Vierny: A Life of Art and Resistance*, a long-overdue exhibition celebrating the influential role of Dina Vierny (1919–2009) as an art dealer, museum founder, political activist, and artist’s model. Tracing the very veins of midcentury conflict, Dina Vierny’s life and politics—from her participation in the Front Populaire, to her work with Varian Fry and the French Resistance, to her open subversion of the USSR—are rivaled only by her role within the history of art.

And yet, Vierny is primarily known as the model and “muse” of the famed sculptor Aristide Maillol. Feminist art historians have done inestimable work to address the gendered disparity in the attention accorded to female artists, but for those women in the arts who were not artists—such as dealers and executors—few descriptors exist to ensure accurate representation. Focusing on the life of Vierny acknowledges the *social* nature of art history. Through a relational lens and historical research, Rosenberg & Co. seeks to reveal Vierny’s extensive impact upon midcentury art, and to resituate her work with Maillol as simply the beginning of her career.

As a teenager, Vierny was a member of socialist youth organizations, sang in cabarets, and posed for photographer and singer Pierre Jamet, whom she met in the choir of the Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires. They became lovers, camping and hitchhiking between youth hostels during the Front Populaire, one of the world’s largest youth movements. Jamet’s photographs of Vierny were used in leftist publications, and Vierny became a face for the movement. For Vierny, who came from an artistic bourgeois family of Russian émigrés, modeling was considered an impropriety. It was due to Vierny’s politics and embodiment of the “modern woman” that she began posing nude for Maillol: he was “very nineteenth century,” according to Vierny, and would never have asked, while she “was in youth organizations where nudity was nothing exceptional.” She later modeled for Henri Matisse, Pierre Bonnard, and Raoul Dufy, whom she called her “old friends.”

During the Nazi Occupation of France, Vierny left Paris to work with Maillol in Banyuls-sur-Mer, near the Spanish border. A chance encounter incited her to begin guiding refugees over the Pyrenees and out of France. Initially acting alone, Vierny connected with both the French Resistance and the famed networks of Varian Fry, which led to friendships with many Surrealists in exile, including Victor Serge, André Breton, and Victor Brauner. Over several months, Vierny helped hundreds of refugees cross the border, but in 1940 she was denounced and interrogated. She was freed only due to Maillol’s efforts, and he insisted she leave Banyuls. She left to model for Matisse in Nice, and then Bonnard in Le Cannet. Vierny did not sever her ties with the Resistance, however, and while in Paris in 1943 to visit Pablo Picasso, Vierny was caught in a raid. Due to her prior arrest, she was imprisoned by the Gestapo and incarcerated for six months. Less than a year after her release, she fought on the barricades during the Liberation of Paris.

In 1947, at the age of 28, Vierny opened a gallery in Paris with the guidance of Matisse and Jeanne Bucher. As a dealer, her influence was far-reaching: Galerie Dina Vierny both established the reputations of emerging artists such as Serge Poliakoff and Fahrelnissa Zeid, and maintained the legacies of School of Paris and Naïf artists, including Séraphine Louis, Camille Bombois, André Bauchant, and Jean Éve. The gallery’s program was driven by idealism: Vierny often earned income by directing Maillol exhibitions for other institutions, so was able to take risks with her gallery. “I never did any commercial exhibitions,” she said, “I showed painters whose artistic expression interested me...it was always about a search for artistic expression, for new approaches.” Vierny also tried to rectify injustices in



Dina Vierny in front of Maillol’s painting *Dina à la robe rouge* (1940) during the Galerie Dina Vierny’s inaugural exhibition, 1947.  
Photograph by Gaston Karquel.

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the art world: in the 1950s, in response to the reluctance of postwar French institutions to support abstract or foreign art, Vierny negotiated the first placements of Wassily Kandinsky's work into the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris and other national collections.

Vierny began traveling to the USSR in the 1960s with the intent of finding and exhibiting the work of dissident Soviet artists. She smuggled artwork across the border, and in 1973 held the first exhibition of Soviet Nonconformists in France: *Avant-Garde Russe—Moscow 73*, which included Ilya Kabakov, Erik Bulatov, Vladimir Yankilevsky, and Oskar Rabin. During her travels in the USSR, Vierny also memorized the songs of Gulag prisoners, and she published them in 1975. The Soviet Union responded by banning Vierny from entering the country.

Throughout her career as a dealer, Vierny was committed to preserving Maillol's legacy. In 1958, she collaborated with Paul Rosenberg to organize a circulating exhibition of Maillol's sculptures in the US, which began at Paul Rosenberg & Co. in New York, and continued to the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. She was intent on creating permanent public access, however, and in 1963, the French Minister of Culture accepted her donation of eighteen Maillol sculptures to form an open-air museum in the Tuileries, a public garden near the Louvre. And in 1995, after decades of effort, Vierny inaugurated the Musée Maillol—Fondation Dina Vierny to preserve and exhibit the work of her first mentor.

From the sculptures, paintings, and works on paper of Maillol and her "old friends," to the work of artists she championed with her gallery, Dina Vierny left an indelible mark on the history of art. Shown among archival documents and photographs, the artists represented in *Dina Vierny: A Life of Art and Resistance* illuminate the reaches of Vierny's artistic passion, innovation, and influence.

**Rosenberg & Co.** is grateful for the opportunity to unite with the **Fondation Dina Vierny—Musée Maillol** and the **Galerie Dina Vierny**, led by Vierny's grandsons, Alexandre and Pierre Lorquin.

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Organization of the Exhibition:

Gallery I / *Artists' Model*: Works by Raoul Dufy, Aristide Maillol, and Henri Matisse

Gallery II / *Art Dealer & Collector*: Works by André Bauchant, Camille Bombois, Erik Boulatov, Émile Gilioli, Robert Couturier, Dominique Peyronnet, Jacques Doucet, Marcel Duchamp, Jean Éve, Wassily Kandinsky, Séraphine Louis, Serge Poliakoff, Jean Pougny, Oskar Rabin, Rastislav Racoff, René Rimbart, Louis Vivin, Vladimir Yankilevsky, and Fahrelnissa Zeid

Gallery III / *Political Activist*: Works by Victor Brauner and Pierre Jamet, and archival documents and photographs

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