

LE  
CIRQUE  
DES  
RÊVES

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FINDLAY GALLERIES

THREE CENTURIES IN ART

LE  
CIRQUE  
DES  
RÊVES

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## INTRODUCTION

Findlay Galleries is delighted to present *Le Cirque des Rêves*, an exhibition that pays vibrant homage to the spectacle, mystery, and enduring romance of the circus as seen through the eyes of six masterful artists: Marc Chagall, Nicola Simbari, Jean Dufy, Gen Paul, Henri Matisse, and Henri Maïk. Together, their works capture the visual poetry of the early 20th-century circus—an era when the arrival of the big top transformed towns into theatres of wonder and imagination.

In the early decades of the last century, the circus occupied a unique place in European and American culture. It was a cherished ritual, one steeped in its own elegant etiquette. Audiences arrived dressed for the occasion, often in evening wear, their excitement swelling with each sound of the orchestra tuning. Under the vaulted canopy of striped tents, an unspoken decorum ruled: silence during the tightrope walker's ascent, thunderous applause for the tumblers, and collective awe at the soaring feats of the trapeze artists. The circus was both social event and enchanted dreamscape—a pageant of daring, color, and carefully orchestrated illusion.

Marc Chagall, whose imagination was forever tethered to the floating figures and fantastical creatures of circus life, evokes its spiritual and dreamlike dimensions. His works pulse with emotion and whimsy, blending memory and myth. Jean Dufy and Gen Paul interpret the circus through the lens of modernist energy and movement, capturing its rhythm, spectacle, and city-life allure. Nicola Simbari dazzles with dynamic color and sunlit drama, while Henri Maïk conjures the childlike joy and narrative charm of the parade. Matisse, ever the master of form and theatrical composition, contributes a sense of elegance and design that elevates the performers to icons of grace.

*Le Cirque des Rêves* brings these visions together in a lyrical celebration of a world that still haunts the cultural imagination. The circus, in these paintings, is not merely a subject—it is a symbol of performance, vulnerability, and sublime beauty. The artists reveal its many layers: the glitter and grit, the harmony and chaos, the fleeting brilliance of a moment before it disappears behind the curtain.

As you move through the exhibition, you are invited to surrender to the wonder that once captivated generations. Like the rustle of velvet curtains before a show, or the hush of a crowd just before the drumroll, *Le Cirque des Rêves* offers a timeless invitation to dream—to step into a world where gravity is defied, reality is suspended, and the heart beats just a little faster beneath the spell of the ring.



“For me, a circus is a magic show that appears and disappears like a world,” Marc Chagall wrote in 1966. “These clowns, bareback riders and acrobats have made themselves at home in my visions. Why? Why am I so touched by their make-up and their grimaces? With them I can move towards new horizons.”

In his work, Chagall consistently sought to create fantasy worlds in which anything was possible. For him, the circus stage was the ideal setting for dreamlike, extraordinary acts: trapeze artists, lovers, cockerels and violinists floating in their own metaphysical spaces, defying, like the circus itself, the formal laws of composition.

‘A circus is disturbing. It is profound,’ Chagall wrote in 1966. ‘A timeless dancing game where tears and smiles, the play of arms and legs take the form of a great art.’



(cover image) Marc Chagall (1887-1985) | *Le Cirque*, 1941  
watercolor, gouache and pastel on paper | 15 1/4 x 19 1/2 in. | FG© 129010



"The circus is joy. An explosion of color, a knot of movement, a shimmer of light, the dynamism of forms. It is also a force of life, a constant feat dominated by rigor, assurance, and the infallible precision of a gesture that cannot fail.

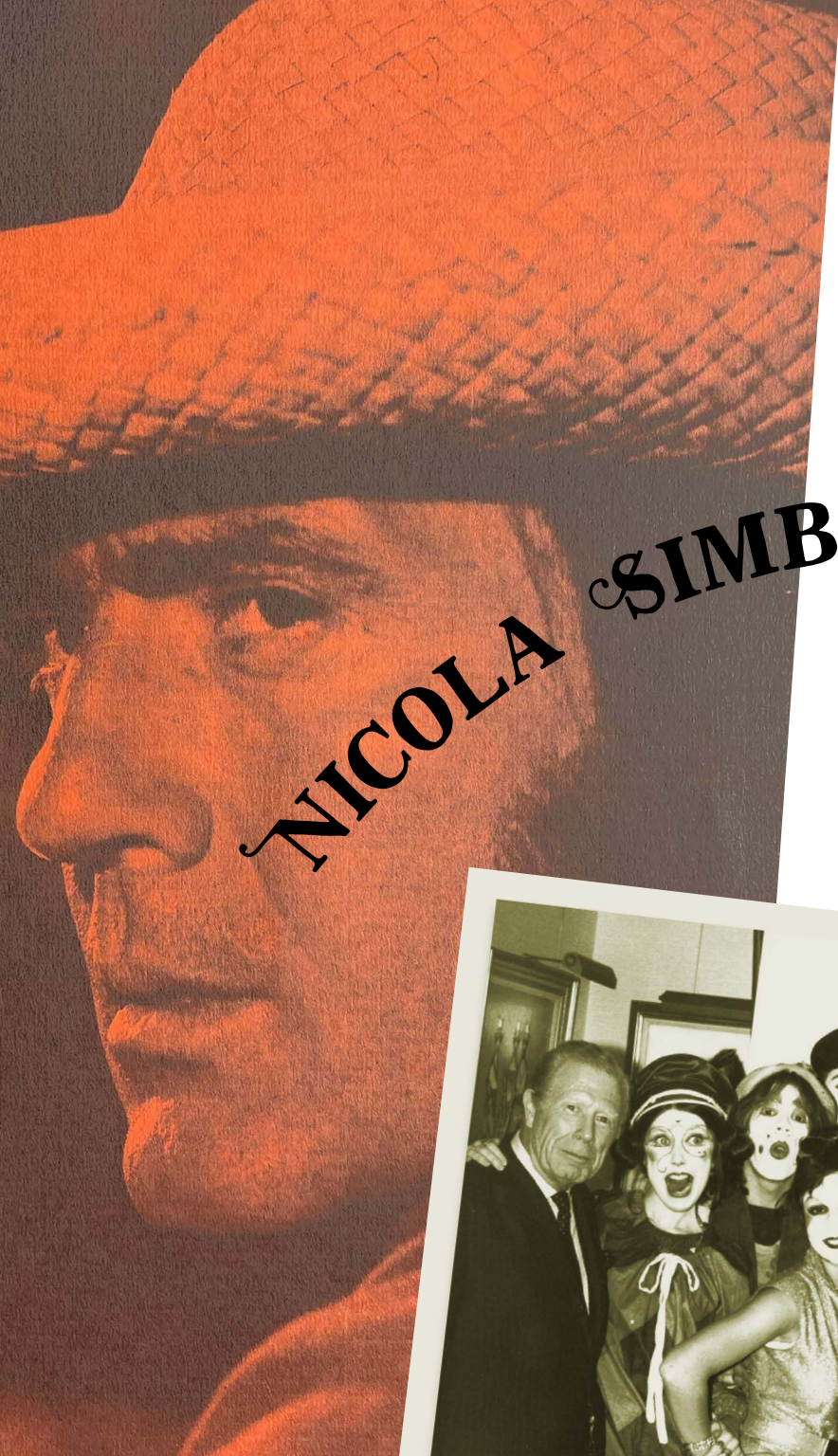
The spirit of the circus is also innocence, through laughter, the almost physical participation of the spectator who, with all their muscles, follows the "feats of strength," the openness of minds ready to welcome all the clowns' pranks. It is childhood rediscovered, prolonged joy.

All of this—yes, all of this—I find again in the paintings of Nicola Simbari, master of his palette, whose magical eye has distinguished the essential from the detail, like pinning a butterfly with shimmering wings to prolong its splendor and stop time.

With his paintings, the circus becomes timeless and the ephemeral takes on the dimension of the eternal.

The smells, the sounds, the glitter, the beings, the animals—this orgy of sounds, movement, of vibrant life that characterizes the circus—transform into shapes and colors with an enchanted vision as if from a crystal ball."

— Jean Richard, Paris, 1978



# NICOLA SIMBARI



## Art Gallery Throws a Circus



By ENID NEMY

A lot of parties end up as circuses, so it's kind of a relief to walk into one that's a circus right from the start. By design.

This circus wasn't exactly Barnum & Bailey, but for midtown Manhattan, it wasn't bad at all. And for an art gallery, well, as some of the guests said, it was pretty far out. One guest described it as "groovy," but that was after he described himself, quite accurately, as a gray panther.

Anyway, it was quite a mob scene last night at the Wally Findlay Galleries, where the windows were full of bars that looked like animal cages, and the second-floor walls were covered with enormous, colorful circus paintings by Nicola Simbari. You did know that there was a reason for all this, didn't you?

And there, dotted among the social, the shakers, the collectors, the friends of friends and the just plain rich, were clowns, jugglers, a mime and a magician, and that famous snake charmer who also operates a few nightclubs, Regine.

Regine said she was once scared stiff of snakes but that Federico Fellini, the Italian movie director, had, for a charity party some years ago, coaxed her into wrapping a snake around her neck. Most of the audience last night, never having listened to Mr. Fellini's pep talk, were scared stiff.

"Hey, take it easy," said Mr. Simbari, who was standing next to Regine as scores of photographers' flashbulbs clicked. "You'll make him nervous."

"Oooh, my gawd," cried Janet Scaduto of Wayne, N. J., who was at the exhibition with her friends, Lorraine and Hy Rabin, who own 10 Simbari paintings.

Candy McMillan of Washington, who with her husband, Robert, came in especially for the party, said she hated snakes so much, she didn't even want to look at one. Her husband said he could take or leave snakes but, occasionally he had other problems.

"I'm independently wealthy," he said "Sometimes that's a prob-



Rosalind Esakof and the artist, Nicola Simbari, watch Abner Dixon's magic tricks

lem... sometimes I'm conned."

His wife giggled, but then she remembered the snake was due to be unveiled and she disappeared.

Regine said the 12-foot boa constrictor, rented for \$50 (with a rebate if it was returned intact), was harmless.

"If there's anything I wouldn't trust, it's a rented snake," said Jack Osborn, who is in the talent developing business but doesn't much care about reptile talent.

The party delighted a lot of people, especially those who survived the crush and didn't get a strange elbow or knee somewhere on their anatomy. For Mr. Simbari, who might be called a "circus freak," it was like living a dream.

"I've been an acrobat, a clown, a magician—in my head," he said. As Mr. Simbari's current paintings sell for \$5,000 to \$25,000, his remark could stimulate a good deal of mental activity.

Last night, he was a clown, with one eye ringed in black and colored sequins dotting a cheek bone.

**A Siberian Wolf Coat**

Phyllis Diller took one look at him and laughed like a drain.

"Your makeup is worse than mine," she said.

Still, bad makeup or not, she wore a chinchilla coat, Jacques Morali, a French composer, was the only one who topped her—he wandered into the packed room in a coat of Siberian wolf.

And what's a circus without smells? They were all there—well almost. There were hamburgers, hot dogs, cotton candy, popcorn and peanuts—the classiest possible kind because at a gathering like this, you get Marina de Brantes, the sister-in-law of the President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing of France, to do the catering.

The guest list included such as Marylou Whitney, Marilyn and Serge Obolensky, Rosalind and Dr. Ernest Esakof, Drew Dudley, Bert Whitley, Doris Stein, Yanie Kosciusko-Morizet, Nancy and Howard Ross, John Young of Bermuda, Lillian de Cabrera and a lot of others for whom hamburgers and hot dogs are a real treat.

1977  
NEW YORK



Nicola Simbari (1927-2012) | *Allez-hoop*, 1977 | oil on canvas | 27 3/4 x 31 1/2 in. | FG© 139809



Henri MATISSE (after) | *Le cheval, l'écuyere et le clown*, 2013  
offset lithograph printed on Ital-yon Polyedra Rives paper | 15 x 22 1/2 in. | FG© 140856



Jean Dufy (1888-1964) | *Scene de cirque*, 1926  
watercolor on paper | 19 x 24 7/8 in. | FG© 140122



Nicola Simbari (1927-2012) | *Le cheval blanc*, 1978 | acrylic on canvas | 24 x 28 in. | FG© 139743



Henri Maïk (1922-1993) | *Le 5 compains*, 1980  
oil on canvas | 13 x 9 7/16 in. | FG© 141162

# Jean Dufy



“If I paint the circus, it’s because I love circuses. I have many friends, such as the Fratellinis, The Porto clowns, Rhum, Achille Zavatto, and Trunck, animal trainer.” The painter loved the circus as a spectator, but he also experienced it from the inside thanks to his friendships, especially with Francois Fratellini. “These artists are saints, true artists who give themselves completely to their public. Their purpose in life is to be in the ring where they always try to be better than the day before”, – Jean Dufy

And above all, there are the musical instruments, the accordion, the guitar, the trombone, the saxophone, the muted trumpet. Most strikingly are the similarities between these objects and Dufy’s beings. I had never before noticed the resemblances between a horse and a double bass, a clown and a concertina, an acrobat and a tambourine. Nevertheless, they are all part of the same universe; you cannot have one without the other. This, I believe ins Jen Dufy’s secret. With his resonant imagery, he is a painter of sound. – Jacques Bailey



Jean Dufy (1888-1964) | *Cirque*, 1948  
oil on paper laid down on 8-ply ragboard | 18 1/8 x 24 7/16 in. | FG© 140906



**Gen Paul (1895-1975)**  
*Clowns musiciens*, 1958  
pastel on paper  
16 1/8 x 12 9/16 in.  
FG© 137076





Gen Paul (1895-1975) | *Clowns Musiciens*  
crayon on paper | 21 1/4 x 16 1/8 in. | FG© 140957



Gen Paul (1895-1975) | *Le Clown Violiniste*  
pastel on paper | 14 15/16 x 9 13/16 in. | FG© 136382

Gen Paul was born and raised in Montmartre, Paris, the bohemian artistic community many artists would flock. He left Paris to fight in World War I, where he was seriously injured and lost his right leg in 1915. Gen Paul returned home, and his artistic career began. During these early years of his career, which spanned 60 years, he saw “everyone come and go”, referring to all the great names who spent time in Montmartre before moving on again. He was also highly regarded by writers, artists, actors, and Parisian natives; Jean-Paul Crespelle said that “Gen Paul was the last of the great painters of Montmartre”. He was a socialite and a city dweller; he needed the city and loved living amidst the noise and movement, surrounded by people. He would often have famous writers, actors, artists, and even clowns from the circus in his salon while he would paint late into the night. It’s apparent to see why so much life, color, and vibrance is present on his canvas.





**Henri Maïk (1922-1993)**  
*Pret pour le cirque, 1973*  
tapestry  
25 9/16 x 21 1/4 in.  
FG© 140212





Henri Maïk (1922-1993) | *The Lion*, 1965  
oil on canvas | 36 1/4 x 28 3/4 in. | FG© 141650



# FINDLAY GALLERIES

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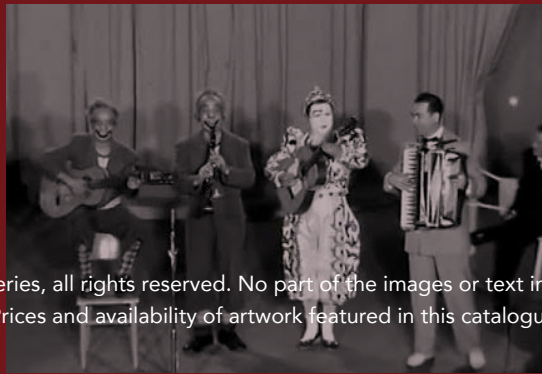
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