

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WILL INSLEY:
Architecture of the Mind**

Curated by James Cavello

EXHIBITION DATES:

January 8 to March 14, 2026

OPENING RECEPTION:

Thursday, January 15 from 6:00–8:00PM

WESTWOOD GALLERY NYC presents *Will Insley: Architecture of the Mind*, a solo retrospective exhibition of over twenty paintings, drawings, photomontages, and poetry by visionary American artist Will Insley. Curated by James Cavello who extensively discussed Insley's oeuvre with the artist, the exhibition is part of the gallery's core program highlighting seminal artists and artist estates whose contributions to art history remain underrepresented. Central to the exhibition is the premiere of the concluding chapter of Insley's original typewritten manuscript ONECITY authored in 1972 and never-before published. Original pages from the manuscript are framed and juxtaposed alongside paintings, drawings and photomontages. In addition, the curation includes Insley's drafting table and typewriter, preserved from his 231A Bowery studio. The exhibition is on view from January 8 to March 14, 2026.

Will Insley (1929–2011) dedicated his five-decade career to channeling his visions of a future civilization he called the "Opaque Civilization". At its core was ONECITY, a monumental metropolis he initially envisioned, then developed over years into an expansive conceptual universe expressed through painting, sculpture, drawing, photography, and writing. For Insley, ONECITY became a lifelong investigation shaped by his surroundings, his philosophical interests, art historical movements, and his background in architectural theory.

Born in Indianapolis one week before the 1929 stock market crash, Insley grew up with a fascination for hidden structures and forbidden spaces. He recalled exploring an abandoned house near his childhood home, an early experience sparking his interest in the built environment. In 1944, during a time of worldwide upheaval, a fifteen-year-old Insley decided to entertain friends in the neighborhood by designing and staging a small puppet show production, which was written about in a local paper. The moment represented a hint of the future artist who would create a fully imagined civilization.

Insley studied architecture at Amherst College from 1947–51, writing his thesis on Mies van der Rohe who was known for his important theoretical proposals on the Universal Space Project. During this period, the Mead Art Museum hosted Insley's first exhibition, *Paintings Without Titles*, which showcased figurative works and his early experimentation with unconventional materials such as masonite. While in Amherst, Insley continued to seek hidden spaces, entering a network of underground utility tunnels beneath campus. He continued his architectural studies at Harvard's Graduate School of Design (1951–55), where he wrote a thesis proposing a design for the Guggenheim Museum. In Cambridge, he explored empty Victorian mansions, locked alleyways, and vertical fire-escape mazes, sites that informed his lifelong fascination with fragments of architecture. After army service from 1955–57, Insley moved to New York and from 1959–66 worked as a part-time file clerk at the Metropolitan Museum of Art sorting photographs and record cards of the collection. During this time, he began developing a theory regarding the "fragment" as visual synecdoche — the understanding that shards of a Greek vase could individually symbolize the entire object and even the

civilization that created it. He soon established his first studio on 23rd Street, where he came to the realization that he needed to think as an architect in his approach to painting. He gradually abandoned representation in favor of abstraction rooted in architectural forms, leading him to his first *Wall Fragment* paintings in 1963. In New York, his inspiration deepened during nighttime walks through deserted areas of Manhattan and his intense exploration of the city grid. Monolithic buildings and their concealed spaces also fueled his imagination of future civilizations based on the logic of architectural theory and the freedom granted by existential uncertainty.

As the intricacies of ONECITY's abstract architecture evolved within Insley's mind, he expounded his theorization between 1959 and 1971 in an epic poem. The text became the conceptual engine for each new body of work, marking his shift away from functional architecture and the dominant Minimalist and Conceptual frameworks. In this poem, the imagined collapse of all existing cities precipitates the creation of a singular metropolis designed for "the nation's entire population of some 400 million souls." Insley's paintings, photomontages, drawings, and writings each attempt, in different ways, to answer a central question: What could ONECITY be?

Will Insley: Architecture of the Mind is curated chronologically, presenting works from each of Insley's major series together with more than forty poems from the final chapter of his epic poem interspersed with the artworks. By emphasizing the dialogue between these previously unseen writings and the visual works they inspired, the exhibition offers an unprecedented view into Insley's expansive world-building practice.

Gallery Hours Tue – Sat, 10am – 6pm

Directions F to Second Ave, B, D, F, M to Broadway Lafayette, 6 to Bleeker, N, R at Prince Street