

Don Nice: Early Works, 1963-68

May 7 – August 21, 2026



Don Nice (1932-2019), *Cupcakes*, 1963
Oil on canvas, 12 x 18 inches

NEW YORK – Craig Starr Gallery is pleased to present *Don Nice: Early Works, 1963-68* on view May–August 21, 2026.

Organized in collaboration with the artist’s estate, the exhibition brings together a selection of early work in both painting and sculpture. The presentation chiefly unites two distinct bodies of work—Nice’s larger-than-life American motifs based on labels and ads, originally shown as a group at the Feigen + Herbert Gallery in 1963, and his meticulously detailed renderings of everyday objects and iconic consumer products. It will also include Nice’s *Object Boxes*, 1964, first shown in the “The Box Show” at the Byron Gallery in 1965.

Emerging in the decades following Abstract Expressionism of the early 20th century, Nice belongs to a generation shaped by its intensity yet determined to move beyond it. In 1962, at the age of thirty and after a sojourn through Europe where he apprenticed with the Austrian artist Oskar Kokoschka, Don Nice entered the Graduate School of Painting at Yale University where he studied under Alex Katz and Joseph Albers. Among his cohort were other greats including Chuck Close, Sylvia Plimack and Robert Mangold, Nancy Graves, and Richard Serra. During

this period, Nice immersed himself in art history, taking special interest in the Renaissance. Simultaneously, he began to reflect more deliberately on his own American experiences: the orchards of his youth, the spectacle of beauty pageants, and the visual saturation of advertising. These seemingly disparate references began to converge. The enshrined Madonna and the crowned beauty queen, the devotional icon and the cartoon mascot—each functioned as a form of elevation, transforming the ordinary into something revered.



Don Nice at his New York studio on Broome Street, next to *Apples*, 1963

Born in rural California, Don Nice first encountered images not in museums, but on the bold, saturated fruit crate labels that passed through his father's packing plants on his farm. By 1960, Nice turned to these vernacular images experimenting with both their scale and perspective. In paintings such as *Star Crest* (1963), he foregrounded the image as both surface and object. While this shift aligned him with the rise of Pop Art, Nice's approach diverged in tone and intention. Rather than adopting irony or distance, he treated these images as sites of study, augmenting them in his analysis. Introduced in his inaugural exhibition at Feigen + Herbert Gallery, this body of work marked his arrival in New York and established a mode of "personal realism" grounded in the familiarity of everyday forms.



Don Nice (1932-2019), *Star Crest*, 1963
Oil on canvas, 36 x 28 inches

Distinct from the billboard-scale advertisement paintings of the early 60s, Nice's later work marks a decisive shift toward singular, isolated forms. He began placing individual objects—sweets, savory foods, and fruits—against stripped, unarticulated grounds, removing their context and releasing them from narrative constraint. Here, the object exists simultaneously as image and presence. Scale becomes a perceptual condition: ordinary subjects are rendered monumental; their physical immediacy and “thingness” brought into sharp focus. Rather than dissolving into abstraction, these forms achieve a heightened clarity in which the familiar becomes newly arresting, inviting sustained attention and a reconsideration of the everyday. While rooted in the legacy of still lifes, these works extend beyond it, establishing a new sensibility in which the ordinary is rendered immersive, associative, and quietly monumental.

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