



Edward Melcarth
American, 1914 – 1973

Manhole, 1959

oil on canvas, 70 x 70 in.

Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art,
Bentonville, Arkansas, Gift of Kip and Astrid
Forbes, in honor of Alice Walton, L2022.21.5.
Photography by Edward C. Robison III.

About the Art

- This painting, with its suggestive title, celebrates the young male working class body, a recurring theme for Edward Melcarth who was a communist and openly gay.
- The unusual composition with the dramatic view from above seems to rotate around the empty center.
- Various objects throughout the painting evoke Christian symbolism: the dove of the Holy Spirit at upper left, the tools of the Crucifixion at lower right, and the ladder of the Descent from the Cross at the center.
- Melcarth once described his art as Social Romanticism, which “attempts to describe man’s idealized view of himself using the techniques closer to the Renaissance,” taking ordinary subjects and rendering them “extraordinary.”

About the Artist

1914: Born Edward Epstein in Louisville, Kentucky. Later changed his surname to Melcarth, an ancient Phoenician god.

1930s: Studied at Harvard University, with artist Karl Zerbe in Boston, Massachusetts, and with printmaker Stanley Hayter in Paris, France

1942: The Museum of Fine Arts Boston acquired his self portrait

1950: Named one of the best American artists by *Life Magazine*

1959: Painted *Manhole*

1967: Painted commissioned murals at the Pierre Hotel in New York City, New York

Late 1960s: Left New York for Venice, Italy, where he focused on sculpture

1973: Died in Venice