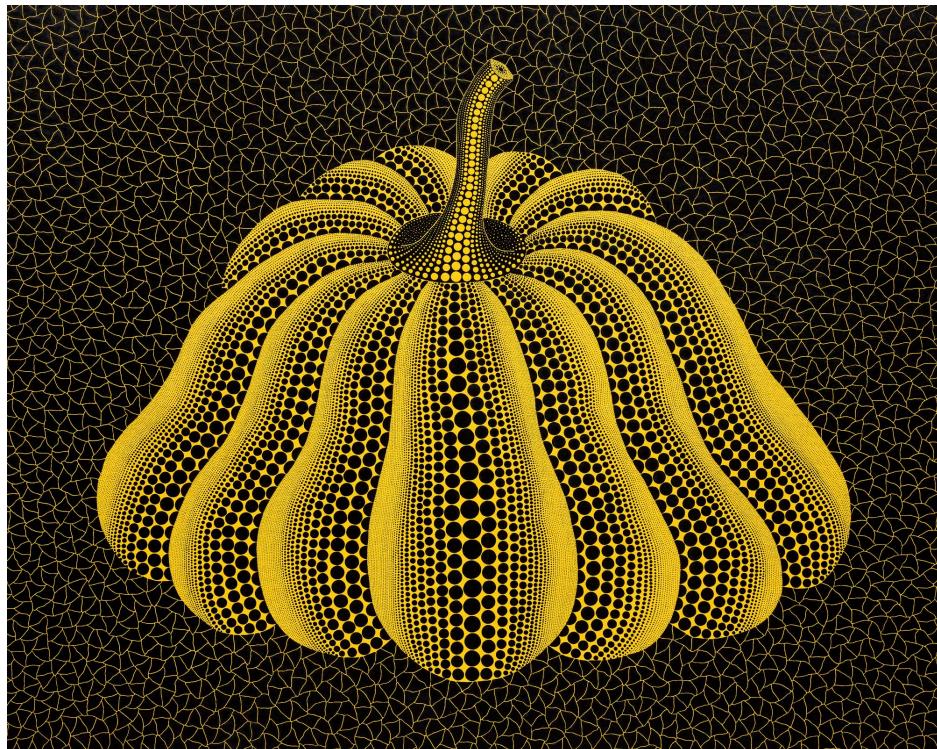


20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT

Sale Interest: 42 Lots



[View Sale](#)



[Conditions of Sale](#)



PHILLIPS

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT

Sale Interest: 42 Lots

Auction & Viewing Location

30 March 2023 7pm HKT
G/F, WKCD Tower, West Kowloon Cultural
District, No. 8 Austin Road West, Kowloon,
Hong Kong.

Contemporary Art Department

Charlotte Raybaud
Specialist, Head of Evening Sale
+852 2318 2026
CharlotteRaybaud@phillips.com

Sale Designation

When sending in written bids or making
enquiries please refer to this sale as
HK010123 or 20th Century & Contemporary
Art Evening Sale.

Absentee and Telephone Bids

tel +852 2318 2029

bidshongkong@phillips.com

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

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Sale Interest: 42 Lots



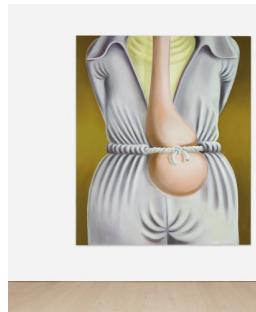
1
Genesis Tramaine
Mother of Suns of Thunder
Estimate
HK\$300,000 — 500,000



2
Christina Quarles
Our Eyes Our Open/Are Eyes Ar...
Estimate
HK\$1,600,000 — 2,600,000



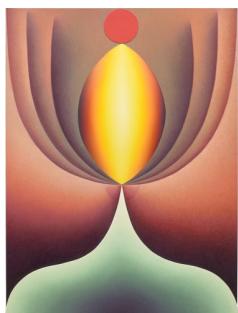
3
George Rouy
Posing in Our Image
Estimate
HK\$500,000 — 700,000



4
Louise Bonnet
The Velour Jumpsuit
Estimate
HK\$800,000 — 1,200,000



5
Lauren Quin
Third Belly
Estimate
HK\$700,000 — 900,000



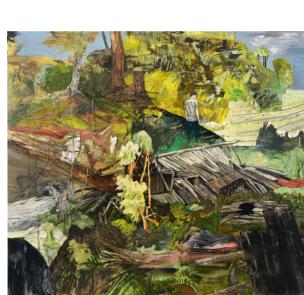
6
Loie Hollowell
A Gentle Meeting of Tips
Estimate
HK\$5,000,000 — 7,000,000



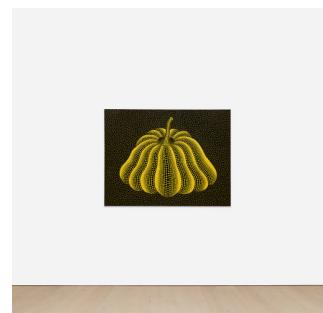
7
Lucy Bull
False Tail
Estimate
HK\$1,000,000 — 2,000,000



8
Matthew Wong
The Road
Estimate
HK\$24,000,000 — 35,000,000



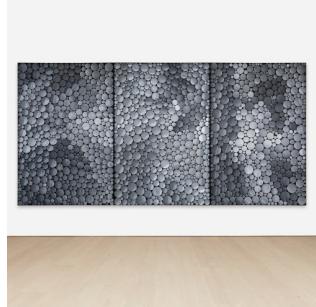
9
Hernan Bas
The hillsides must not know it
Estimate
HK\$6,500,000 — 8,500,000



10
Yayoi Kusama
Pumpkin
Estimate
HK\$40,000,000 — 50,000,000

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11
Yayoi Kusama
Infinity Dots (HTI)
Estimate
HK\$25,000,000 — 30,000,000



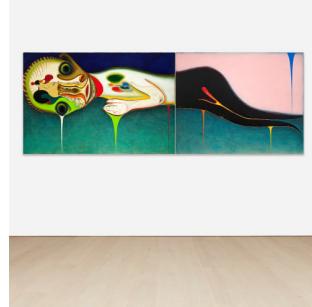
12
Yayoi Kusama
Untitled (Mannequin from The ...)
Estimate
HK\$1,500,000 — 2,300,000



13
Yoshitomo Nara
Lookin' for a Treasure
Estimate
Estimate On Request



14
Takashi Murakami
Flower Parent and Child
Estimate
HK\$15,500,000 — 23,500,000



15
Izumi Kato
Untitled
Estimate
HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000



16
Stanley Whitney
The Last Cowboy Song
Estimate
HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000



17
Gerhard Richter
Strip (923-23)
Estimate
HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000



18
Roy Lichtenstein
Reflections on Brushstrokes
Estimate
HK\$14,000,000 — 19,000,000



19
Claude Monet
Paysage à Villez
Estimate
HK\$5,500,000 — 8,500,000



20
Wu Guanzhong
Autumn onto the Wall
Estimate
HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000

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21

Li Chen

The Pavilion and Angelic Smile

Estimate

HK\$1,200,000 — 2,400,000



22

Angel Otero

Butterflies Drinking Crocodile Te...

Estimate

HK\$1,200,000 — 1,800,000



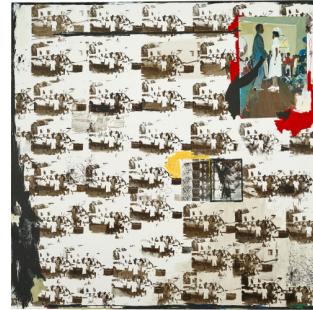
23

Rashid Johnson

Untitled Escape Collage

Estimate

HK\$5,000,000 — 7,000,000



24

Kudzanai-Violet Hwami

Let Us Now Praise the Children (...)

Estimate

HK\$600,000 — 800,000



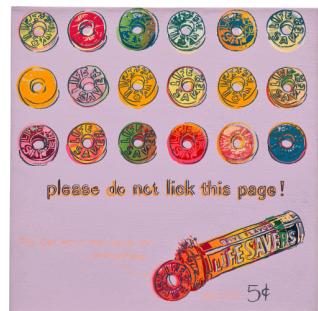
25

Barbara Kruger

Untitled (Time is Money)

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000



26

Andy Warhol

Life Savers from the series Ads

Estimate

HK\$4,500,000 — 6,500,000



27

Andy Warhol

Mobilgas from the series Ads

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000



28

Andy Warhol

Untitled (Volkswagen Lemon) fr...

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000



29

Andy Warhol

Paramount from the series Ads

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000



30

Takashi Murakami

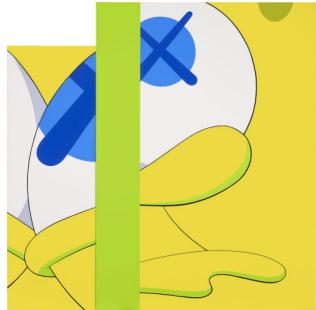
Cherries

Estimate

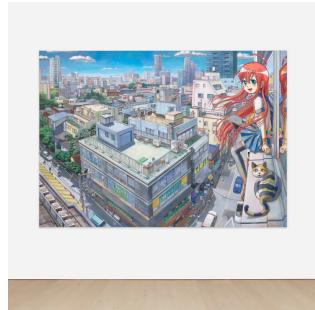
HK\$2,500,000 — 3,500,000

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31
KAWS
Pinch
Estimate
HK\$5,500,000 — 7,500,000



32
Mr.
The Endless Landscape of this R...
Estimate
HK\$1,500,000 — 2,000,000



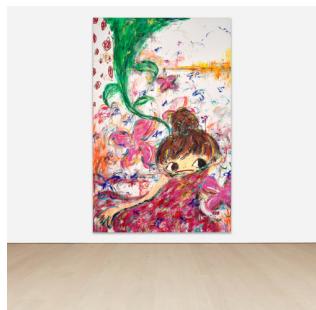
33
Liu Ye
Flagship No. 1
Estimate
HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000



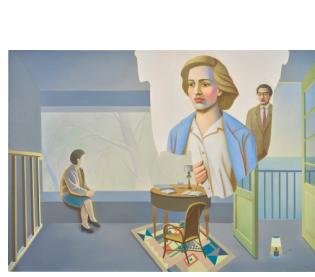
34
Liu Wei
Purple Air 2017 No. 1
Estimate
HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000



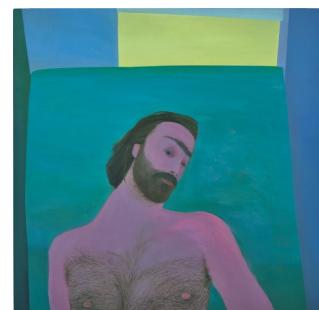
35
Huang Yuxing
Bubbles
Estimate
HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000



36
Ayako Rokkaku
Untitled
Estimate
HK\$4,000,000 — 5,000,000



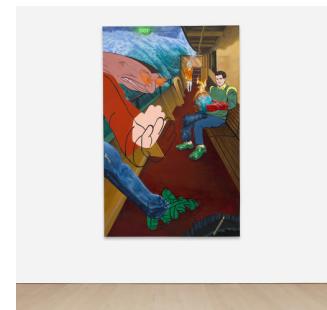
37
Chen Ke
Outside the Window
Estimate
HK\$2,000,000 — 4,000,000



38
Cheng Xinyi
Goodnight, Thomas
Estimate
HK\$600,000 — 900,000



39
Anna Park
Covees
Estimate
HK\$500,000 — 700,000



40
Trey Abdella
Global Warming
Estimate
HK\$1,200,000 — 2,200,000

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41

MADSAKI

Untitled (Masters of the Univers...)

Estimate

HK\$900,000 — 1,200,000



42

Brett Crawford

H3RE HE COMES

Estimate

HK\$600,000 — 800,000

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1

Genesis Tramaine

Mother of Suns of Thunder

signed, dated and inscribed 'In Jesus's Name I Humbly Pray, Amen April 2019 GENESIS TRAMAIN' on the top edge; signed with the artist's signature and dated on the lower right edge; further signed with the artist's signature on the lower left edge

acrylic, oil stick and spray paint on canvas

152.4 x 122 cm. (60 x 48 in.)

Executed in 2019.

Estimate

HK\$300,000 — 500,000

€35,500 — 59,200

\$38,500 — 64,100

[Go to Lot](#)



Genesis Tramaine (b. 1983) is one of the most exciting artists working today. Devoted to expressionism, she specialises in creating abstract portraits that transcend the limitations of gender, race, and social constructs by transforming the ordinary into extraordinary. While creating works that elicit a sense of familiarity and trigger memories of past experiences, she offers glimpses into unexplored possibilities.

A Theist Bursting with Vision and Creativity

A definite lamb of God, the artist first embarked on her deeply spiritual journey as a child at church, where she would draw on whatever she could get her hands on – including Bibles – in order to adhere to clerical solemnity. Fast forward to the present day, not much has changed; the practice of making art has become worship for Tramaine – her canvas her lectern, her pigment her scripture.

"I prayed for peace. I pray to be covered. I pray to be used. I pray for my practice to be elevated so it may help someone else find a deeper connection spiritually. When you praise the Lord with thanksgiving and you close your prayers in the name of Jesus, blessings come down. King David is a Saint, a man born to us as ordinary and used for extraordinary things. His life saw several trials, several tribulations, yet he hung close to the Lord. He consulted with God for each test and shared his testimony in Psalm, which ignited much of the biblical components present in the Gospel and titles of my work." — Genesis Tramaine

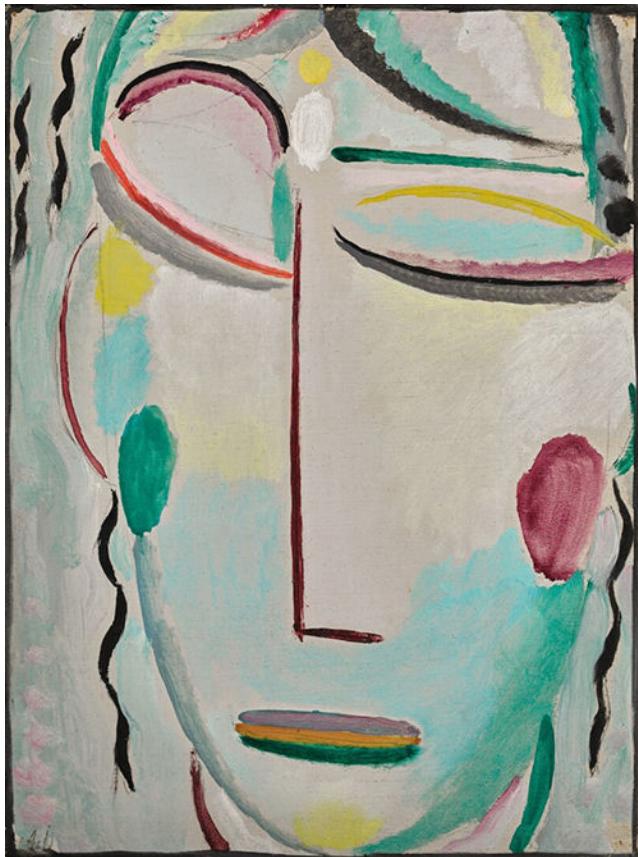
Coined as an ‘Expressionist Devotional’, the artist begins her creative process by channelling her religion through paper and prayer, ‘I think there is a way to trace the energy of God,’ she says i. Tramaine further meditates on the teachings of saints, before actively seeking for guidance from the Holy Spirit: ‘I pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit. I pray to be used...I am not quite sure when spirit is in the room; I am not quite sure of the moment. I am grateful for it. However, the portrait isn’t complete until the Holy Spirit’s presence is clear to me’ ii.

Her creations are powerfully influenced by these spiritual elements which drive her to capture the impassioned emotions of the uncharted, underrepresented spirit of Black individuals, using exaggerated features of her subjects. Her paintings are studies of corporal motion where facial features are contorted into momentous dynamism, and physical markers become distorted – hands become shoulders; eyes become mouths. *Mother of Suns of Thunder* is a striking example of this unique vision. Set against a turquoise background and wearing a red dress, she is the image of

cubic femininity. Rich tones balanced by a thick quality of line provide a study of complex contrast, with the sharp brushwork and abstract shapes create a sense of tension and movement. Though despite the fragmented nature of the image, the woman remains a powerful presence, her essence shining through the shattered pieces of her portrait whose profound depths, thought-provoking colours, and abstract expressionist strokes revealing glimpses of both the forgotten and the undiscovered.

A Metaphysical Exploration

Before the surge in popularity of spiritual and esoteric movements such as new age and mindfulness in the Western, the freethinking Alexej von Jawlensky (1864-1941) combined the most salient features of diverse religious movements in his artistic production. Hailing from Russia by birth, he relocated to Munich where he matured into a preeminent German Expressionist, ascending to the vanguard of a cadre of artists identified as *Der Blaue Reiter*. With portraits such as *Saviour's Face: Resurrection or the New Seeing II*, we see close association with Tramaine’s practice: both artists striving for the simplification of form towards the ultimate goal of spiritual purity.



Alexej von Jawlensky, Saviour's Face: Resurrection or the New Seeing II, 1918, Private Collection

Nonetheless her artistic expression evokes similarity from a variety of cradles, including Art Brut and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Like Tramaine, Basquiat's heavily stylised and symbol-laden portraits represent the fragmentation and struggle for identity and self-expression in a society that often marginalises Black voices, evoking a confrontational quality that speaks to the raw emotion of the Black experience.



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Ancient Scientist*, 1984 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong for HK\$ 58,330,000, 3 December 2020 © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar, New York

Tramaine as a person, as an identity, is almost as multifaceted as her figures. As a Black Queer woman and a Christian, she appears a walking contradiction to most. Regardless, she remains defiant of public opinion and perception: 'The Lord strengthens my stride. God is Trans...that means to me, my steps are ordered, my path is clear and as long as I believe and claim it all in the name of Jesus, God's grace shall overflow. I hope my testimony reminds others of God's Love.' ⁱⁱⁱ.

Yet past any one individual's view of religion or Christianity, Tramaine's work is testament to her exceptionality. So much of art that is created these days is, naturally, self-reflective of an artist's emotions, desires and identities. Therefore, to encounter art that is wholly devotional and

Genesis Tramaine

deferential to something else than ego is nothing short of revolutionary. The artist herself is forthright in her path and future career: ‘I’m a Black woman artist, and I’ve got to do what I got to do to not just keep up, but to build for the next generation. To build and inspire for those who may not know a lot of these tunnels don’t exist, and there’s just no light. I praise and thank God for being the artist who is put in position to create, and to shed that light.’^{iv}



The present lot (left) exhibited at *Chorus*, Almine Rech, Paris, 12 October - 16 November 2019

Collector’s Digest

- Tramaine has enjoyed solo shows at: Almine Rech, New York, Aspen, Brussels, London; Rubell Museum, Miami; Richard Beavers Gallery, New York; and Newark L Center, Newark. Her work resides in prominent museum collections including: Nasher Museum of Art, Durham, North Carolina; National Gallery of Art, Washington; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Arkansas; The Brant Foundation, New York; The Bass Museum of Art, Miami; Rubell Museum, Miami; ICA Miami; Contemporary Art Foundation, Tokyo.

ⁱ Revd. Jonathan Evens, ‘Genesis Tramaine: A Queer Devotional Painter Interview’, *Artlyst*, 7 February 2021, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Genesis Tramaine, quoted in Brienne Walsh, ‘Genesis Tramaine Is Praying For You’, *Forbes*, 11 July 2021, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis Tramaine, quoted in Morgan Becker, ‘Genesis Tramaine’s paintings find God in Black, queer community’, *Document*, 25 March 2022, [online](#)

^{iv} *ibid.*

Provenance

Almine Rech, New York

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2019

Exhibited

Paris, Almine Rech Gallery, *Chorus*, 12 October - 16 November 2019

Italy, Prato, Palazzo Pretorio Museum, *Hi Woman! La notizia del futuro*, 1 December 2021 - 27 March 2022

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PROPERTY FROM AN ESTEEMED COLLECTION

2

Christina Quarles

Our Eyes Our Open/Are Eyes Are Open

acrylic on canvas

127 x 106.7 cm. (50 x 42 in.)

Painted in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$1,600,000 — 2,600,000

€191,000 — 311,000

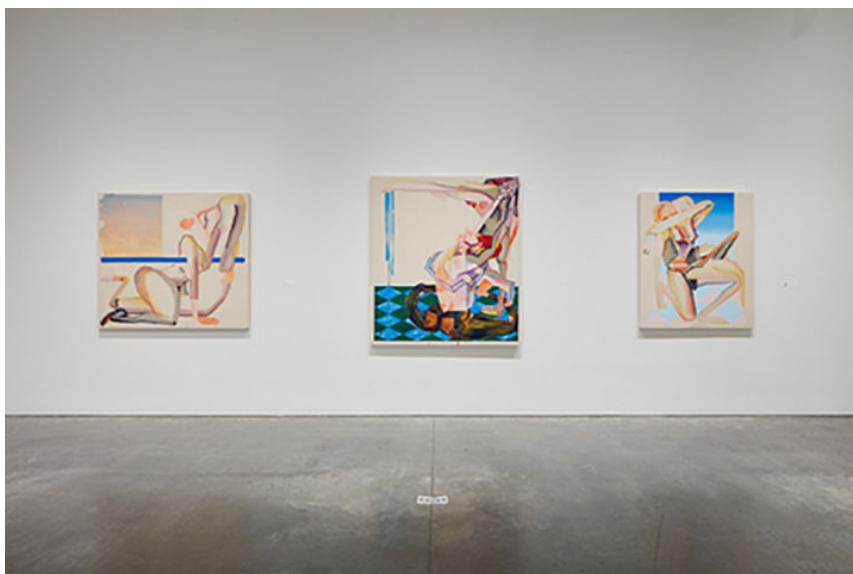
\$205,000 — 333,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Intertwined with fluidity, rhythm and poise, the bodies in Christina Quarles's figures are often enclosed within graphical space, through a windowpane or across patterned tabletops. The torsos, faces and limbs of her entangled protagonists emerge from a patchwork of colour, pattern, and perspectives, giving us charged compositions that create an almost physical tension with the viewer.

Quarles's works feature abstract, line-drawn, and fragmented bodies that aim to visually represent the complexities of how we all inhabit multiple identities, selves, and forms. Informed by her own identity as a mixed-race, queer woman, Quarles investigates the universal experience of being in a body, as well as how race, gender, and sexuality intersect to form complex identities.



Installation view of the current work (right) at Berkley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, *Christina Quarles / MATRIX 271*, 19 September - 18 November 2018

First unveiled at a group exhibition *Abstract/Not Abstract* organised by Gagosian and Jeffrey Deitch in 2017, then subsequently exhibited at the Berkley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive in 2018, *Our Eyes Our Open/Are Eyes Are Open* presents bodies in a state of flux or transformation – forms are ambiguous and fluid, melting and morphing into each other.

In Interview: A Fresh Approach to Figuration

"I'm really interested in exploring what it is to be within your own body looking out. I'll often say that these are portraits, but they aren't portraits of looking at a body — they're portraits of living within your own body. So much of my work is about moments of intimacy when you can actually exist in all your contradictions and complications." — Christina Quarles

In 2021, Quarles was interviewed by ARTnews on her creative process, delving deep into the concept behind her unique style of figuration:

ARTnews: *Is there a gestural element to how you draw the figure?*

Christina Quarles: I approach everything in a gestural drawing way, so it's still this emphasis on a gestural line. In grad school, I learned how to develop the tools for using gestural lines. So, that's what really opened up painting for me: a way to have what had before been these line drawings into something that could be a line made with a really fat brush, or a line made with a brush that's dipped in a gradient. But when I make a painting it's still very much tied to this physical muscle memory of drawing the figure, so I will approach a canvas with a lot of internalised practice but no actual notes when I'm going to the piece.

[...]

As the figures start to get more and more developed, then I photograph the work and bring it into my computer and I play around with Illustrator. That's a way for me to still incorporate drawing and experimentation in this play between intention and actuality. It changes the gesture into being not this grand physical gesture but this more minute, figure gesture of a mouse trackpad. It allows me to create these digital moves that I bring back into the canvas through stencilling, which allows for a gesture that's really not tied to my physical body—so it's a way of mixing up the gesture that gets put into the work. I think the figure, for me, is a helpful tool because I know it so well that I can play with the limits and the stretching of legibility just because I'm so familiar with how it's actually supposed to look.

Read the full interview [here](#).

Intersection of Identity

"The basis of the work is trying to get at what it is to be in a racialised body, to be in a gendered body, to be in a queer body, really to be in any body and the confusing place that actually is with knowing yourself." — Christina Quarles

Tussling with culturally prescribed identities, Quarles probes and challenges the margins between definitions, where meaning is more unfixed and illegible. In Quarles' paintings, limbs, torsos and faces collide and merge with familiar domestic objects made strange through colour and gesture. Her physical representation of figures reflect this idea of exploring multiplicity and ambiguity in identity; as she explains herself, this closely relates to her own lived experience: 'As a queer, cis woman who is black but is often mistaken as white, I engage with the world from a position that is multiply situated.ⁱ

Inherently filled with struggle, Quarles' compositions are provocative, fresh, and demand the viewer's attention. Her fluid execution of form and lines suggest a sense of ambiguity, particularly in relation to race, gender, and human relationships, and is evocative of the works of Francis Bacon, David Hockney, and Pablo Picasso.



Francis Bacon, *Lying Figure*, 1969 Fondation Beyeler, Riehen / Basel Artwork © 2023 Estate of Francis Bacon / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / DACS, London

Also featuring obscured facial features and entwined torsos and limbs in his work, Francis Bacon shares the same contorted and blurred aesthetic with Quarles. Bacon's portraits are wrought with emotion and psychological tension, depicting the inner turmoil and deepest desires of his subjects, as seen in *Lying Figure*. In his portrayal of the human form, Bacon utilises varying densities of paint with intersecting flat planes to anchor his composition – techniques that Quarles had also inherited.

Set against brash, upbeat chequerboard, harlequin, dogtooth and graphic 2D backgrounds – such as the pink and blue squared floor and gradient blue backgrounds in the current work – Quarles's

Christina Quarles

bodies are cut up and interrupted by abruptly shifting planes and perspectives. Hockney also utilises a similar tactic in visually dissecting the composition with flat colourful planes. Quarles often references visual elements such as Hockney's swimming pool swirls and floral patterns from his 1960s works, citing him as a direct influence.

Quarles's voice is unique from her predecessors however, in the way that she utilises a wide variety of techniques: textured brush strokes, thick smooth skins of shiny paint, stencilled patterns and airy spray coexist in a single painting. Such contrasting painterly techniques and references helps the artist to establish her own hybrid art-historical lineage. Her shapeshifting figures are representative of the artist's own lived experience as a queer, mixed-race woman that transcends the boundaries of a simple visual experience. With exceptional dexterity and painterly innovation, Quarles encapsulates the non-binary fluid of reality, challenging the viewer to revel in the multiplicity of the universal human experience.

Collector's Digest

- Born in Chicago in 1985, Los Angeles-based contemporary artist Christina Quarles received her BA from Hampshire College in 2007, where she studied Philosophy and Studio Art, and her MFA at Yale University. The artist will have a brand new museum solo exhibition this year at the [Hamburger Bahnhof](#), Berlin, opening 31 March and closing 17 September.
- Multiple paintings by Quarles were exhibited at the 59th [Venice Biennale](#), 2022. Her most recent solo exhibition at Hauser and Wirth New York, [In 24 Days tha Sun'll Set at 7pm](#), had also closed 29 October, 2022, and was the first show with the gallery since the artist [joined their programme](#) in 2021. The gallery represents Quarles in conjunction with Pilar Corrias, London.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_6EGYOhAfxl&ab_channel=IlluminaFilm

Christina Quarles speaking about her works at the Venice Biennale, 2022

Video Courtesy Illumina Film

- Quarles' other recent solo exhibitions include: [Frye Art Museum](#), Seattle, 2022; [The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago](#), 2021; [South London Gallery](#), 2021; [X Museum, Beijing](#), 2021, which was the artist's debut show in Asia; [Pond Society](#), Shanghai, 2019 among others.
- Christina Quarles' work is also housed in acclaimed public collections, including Centre Pompidou in Paris, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C., Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles

and Tate Modern in London.

ⁱ Christina Quarles, quoted on the artist's website, exhibition page for Berkley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, *Christina Quarles / MATRIX 271*, 19 September - 18 November 2018, [online](#)

Provenance

David Castillo Gallery, Miami

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2018

Exhibited

Miami, Moore Building, *Abstract/Not Abstract*, 6-10 December 2017

Berkley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, *Christina Quarles / MATRIX 271*, 19 September - 18 November 2018

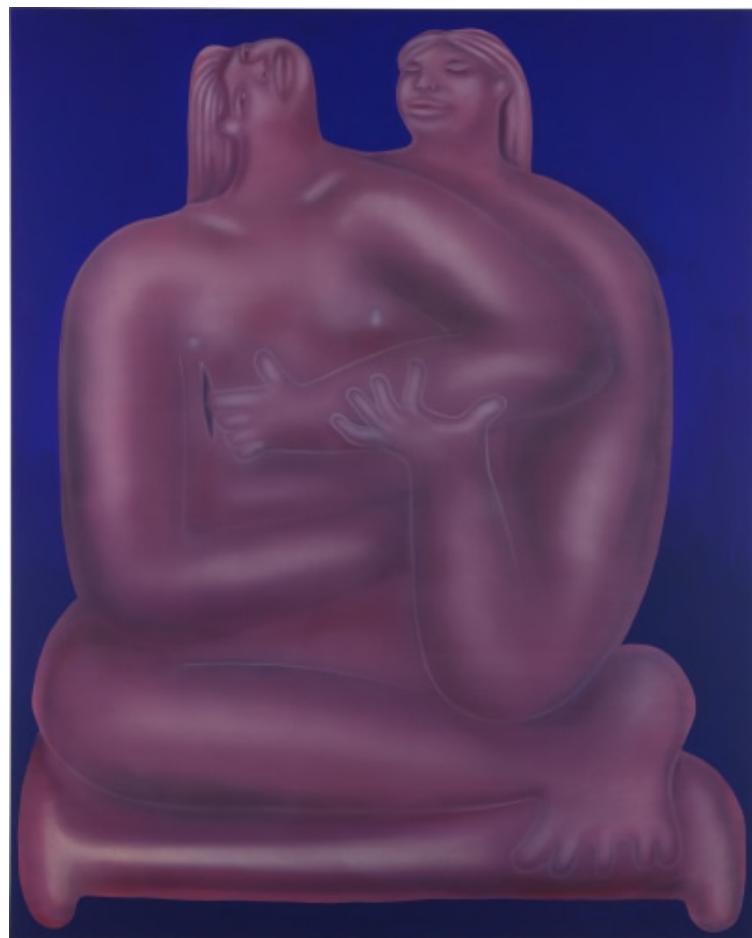
Literature

Christina Quarles and Claudia Mattos, 'Christina Quarles in conversation with Claudia Mattos', *CURA. magazine*, no. 27, April 2018, online (illustrated)

Janelle Zara, "Christina Quarles's Magnetic Paintings Are a Hit at 'Made in L.A.'", *Galerie magazine*, June 2018, online (illustrated)

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3

George Rouy

Posing in Our Image

acrylic on canvas

225 x 180 cm. (88 5/8 x 70 7/8 in.)

Painted in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$500,000 — 700,000

€59,200 — 82,900

\$64,100 — 89,700

[Go to Lot](#)



British painter George Rouy investigates themes of symbolism, sexuality, and the expressiveness of the body in his vast, striking paintings of colossal, formless, entangled figures. Coming to auction for the very first time, *Posing in Our Image* depicts two monumental spectral figures, one cradled in the embrace of the other, neck thrown back as she probes a slit on her chest. Rendered in muted fuchsia with the smooth, glowing style of the Old Masters, Rouy's almost spiritual figures emanate a powerful symbolism as they float in a dreamy, deep purple atmosphere.



Installation photo of the present lot at Los Angeles, Steve Turner Gallery, *Smothered Awake*, 27 October - 8 December 2018

Rouy's figures spring from the depths of his fertile imagination. Through his unique, amorphous yet sculptural style, he seeks to 'capture a feeling that is not subjective to a specific person.' His figures hold each other, knotted together in a primordial, writhing mass, evoking a universality of emotion through their primal, godlike gesture.

The Emotive Body

Rouy simultaneously utilises the human figure as a site for expressing emotion and rejects the conventions of art history through his unique portrayal of the human body. In *Posing in Our Image*,

Rouy's bodies exude a powerful eroticism, the figure in the foreground throwing back her head ecstatically as she pries open her wound, while the figure holding her has eyes closed in either reverent meditation, or blissful rapture.

"I slowly started to see the direction I wanted to take, talking about emotions and provoking feelings and reactions rather than evoking a specific narrative. That's where my work situates itself: it's less about narratives and more about emotions, akin to life. I also like seeing a component of the abstract. Although there's a tangible figure, it's a figure that works within an abstract setting." — George Rouy

By intentionally diverging from the traditional manner of figure painting in *Posing in Our Image*, Rouy creates a world where bodies take on an added layer of meaning, eclipsing preconceived notions of what the human body must represent in art. In Rouy's vast, vivid canvases, his abstracted, otherworldly figures transcend narrative and adopt as subject the fathomless potential of human emotion. Rouy's mammoth, intertwined figures are not unlike those of Brazilian Modernist Tarsila do Amaral, who similarly defied academic conventions of figure painting in works such as her 1929 painting *Anthropophagy*.



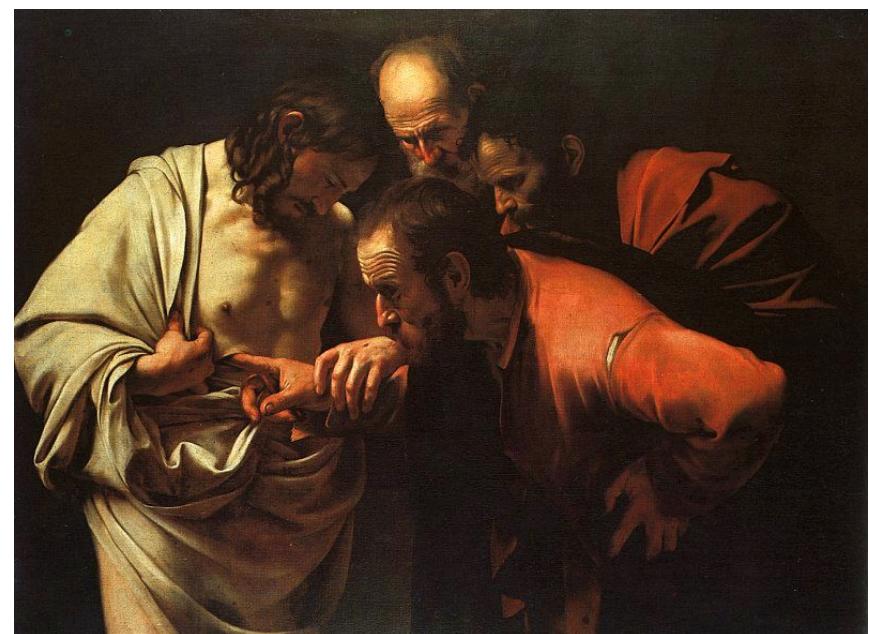
Tarsila do Amaral, *Anthropophagy (Antropofagia)*, 1929 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Artwork: © Tarsila do Amaral

Amaral's massive humanoid figures serve a different mission than Rouy's: to symbolise Brazilian modernists' cannibalism, digestion, and reinvention of European art. However, like Amaral, Rouy combines art historical reference with a novel form of rendering the figure to create powerful work that symbolically examines death, the body, and resurrection.

Choosing the Symbolic over the Narrative

"I think it's important that [the works are] not autobiographical. There needs to be enough space so that the viewer can enter it and not just assess it as these stories, because they're not stories. They're almost like symbols." — George Rouy

One of the most fascinating figure painters working today, Rouy paints the human body in a wide variety of styles: contorted, often nude, ephemeral, ghostly, or solid, exhibiting his extensive technical range and capability as an artist. Painted with a fluid gravitas, Rouy's figures overwhelm the viewer and their heated gazes, interlocked limbs, and closeness to one another are imbued with emotional and symbolic significance. In the present lot, the figures' close embrace reveals an intense intimacy that is questioned by the one figure's almost clinical, seemingly painless probing of her wound. This action itself carries symbolic weight, as a possible reference to the biblical story of the doubtful apostle Thomas, who refused to believe in his own resurrection without firsthand experience.



Caravaggio, *Doubting Thomas*, 1601-02 Sanssouci Picture Gallery, Potsdam, Germany

Posing in Our Image references Caravaggio's painting of the apostle Thomas probing Christ's wound, entitled *Doubting Thomas*. Rouy's painting similarly portrays a person who probes a cut under their right breast, his luminous purple bodies evoking the glowing chiaroscuro of the master Baroque painter. By rendering his behemoth, sacred figures in a primitive, godlike style, Rouy subtly references the story of apostle Thomas while masterfully eluding narrative and evoking an ardent, divine presence.

Collector's Digest

- Born in Britain in 1994, George Rouy graduated from Camberwell College of Arts in London in 2015 and has garnered considerable recognition since for his massive, haunting paintings of nude figures. Rouy has had several major international solo exhibitions, among which are *Belly Ache* (solo), at Almine Rech Gallery in Paris, France (2022), *Real Corporeal*, Gladstone Gallery, New York, USA (2022); *Shit Mirror* (solo), at Peres Projects, Berlin, Germany (2022); *A Thing for the Mind*, Timothy Taylor Gallery, London, UK (2022), and *Clot* (solo), in 2020 at Hannah Barry Gallery in London. Rouy's work has been collected by institutions such as M Woods, 69 Art Campus and X Museum, Beijing, China; Ståhl Collection, Norrköping, Sweden; ICA, Miami, USA; Fondation Cartier and Lafayette Anticipations, Paris; and Sifang Art Museum, Nanjing, China.

Provenance

Steve Turner Gallery, Los Angeles

Private Collection, USA

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Los Angeles, Steve Turner Gallery, *Smothered Awake*, 27 October - 8 December 2018

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



4

Louise Bonnet

The Velour Jumpsuit

oil on canvas

182.9 x 152.4 cm. (72 x 60 in.)

Painted in 2016.

Estimate

HK\$800,000 — 1,200,000

€95,500 — 143,000

\$103,000 — 154,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Los Angeles-based Swiss painter Louise Bonnet dances between the humorous, the beautiful, and the monstrous in her paintings of strangely contorted, misshapen bodies or figures with oddly placed organs and appendages. Rendered with the meticulous attention to light, shadow, and texture of the Renaissance masters, her paintings enact emotions of shame and revulsion through the dramatic surrealism of the absurd. *The Velour Jumpsuit*, created in 2016, is an enchanting and thought-provoking example of Bonnet's distinctive style. An apparently bodiless pale purple velvety jumpsuit set against a glowing greenish-yellow background is the tranquil backdrop for the outlandish occurrence of a digestive organ, placed outside of the body. The organ, which brings to mind a human stomach, is effortlessly volumetric and exquisitely rendered in chiaroscuro, and although located outside of the body it is drawn into the painting's inherent drama via the rope that ties around the waist of the velour suit.

Peculiar Bodies, Uncomfortable Minds

"I'm interested in shame and the body in my paintings, and bodily functions bring extra shame and embarrassment." — Louise Bonnet

Bonnet studied illustration and design in Geneva, and early on in her career created mostly traditionally figurative drawings and paintings. Her decision to one day focus solely on drawing faces for six months proved to be a turning point in her stylistic evolution. This concentrated period led to the discovery of her signature droopy, balloon-like style of painting noses, which later developed into her unique visual language of swollen, contorted, often faceless bodies.

Captivated by the corporeal manifestation of internal emotions such as guilt and shame, Bonnet blurs the distinction between mind and body by synchronizing depth, volume, and form with the absurd and grotesque. As the artist herself says, her work portrays a deep interest in how 'emotions [are] made visible through the body.' Her contorted, uncomfortable bodies evoke psychological anguish, hinting at the innate connection between the physical and inner emotional worlds. She often portrays unguarded moments where her subject is made vulnerable to the viewer's gaze, however, her decision to omit the face in most of her work allows the viewer to participate without shame or self-consciousness in the subject's distress.

"I think the openings in the body are where shame happens, but you always cover it. There are all these rules about all the openings in the body, right? Like, things leaking out—that can't happen. That's really interesting to me, just the body out of control, or things happening to the body and how you would react to it." — Louise Bonnet

The Velour Jumpsuit provides a glimpse into a surreal world where the subject's absurdly exposed organ reveals their susceptibility to embarrassment and shame. The image is cropped so all that is visible is the jumpsuit from neck to groin, and the focus on this seemingly innocuous article of clothing implies the subject's metaphorical nakedness and vulnerability. The digestive organ's unprotected state betrays the subject's lack of containment or control over their own body, a recurring theme in Bonnet's oeuvre.

The Beautiful, the Cartoonish, and the Grotesque

Bonnet began to use oil paint for the first time in 2013 and found that its flexibility and versatility allowed her to manipulate light and shadow to create volume. This transition from the compositional flatness of acrylics led her to produce canvases with greater depth and dimensionality that call to mind the work of Renaissance Masters such as Lucas Cranach the Elder.



Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, c. 1530 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1911, 11.15

Adopting the visual tools of the Renaissance masters, Bonnet uses the magic of beauty as a vehicle to expose the horrible and grotesque in her work. In *The Velour Jumpsuit*, the viewer is caught off guard by the aesthetic charm of the velvety suit and its luminous backdrop. The fluid rendering of the creases in the fabric, which appears luxuriously soft to the touch, is at odds with the arresting appearance of the internal organ outside the body. The symmetry and elegance of the velour suit belie the gut that hangs bizarrely in the middle of the canvas.

"The beauty is a tool to get to the real thing. Or maybe it's an entryway. In a way, it's

a trick. In [Alfred] Hitchcock, for example, everything is really beautiful, right? The hair, and the color, and everyone looks great. And that sort of tricks you into trusting where he's leading you. And then he just collapses that. It's kind of like magic. You can be so much more horrified if you're led into something thinking you can trust it."
— Louise Bonnet

Bonnet approaches the absurd and grotesque through a unique blend of the beauty and stateliness of chiaroscuro and the cartoon-like quality of satirical art. Fascinated with horror films, she masterfully marries beauty and comedy with the frightful. Skillfully mingling beauty, humor, and fear, Bonnet's *Velour Jumpsuit* provides a powerful reminder that our corporeality is part of what it means to be alive.

Collector's Digest

- Born in Geneva in 1970, Bonnet studied at Haute école d'art et de design and began her creative career working in graphic design and illustration. In 2008 she launched her painting career with a solo exhibition at Subliminal Projects in Los Angeles. Her recent exhibitions include *Onslaught* (31 May – 6 August 2022), at Gagosian in Hong Kong in 2022, her first solo show in Asia, *Bathers* at Galerie Max Heltzer in Paris (11 September – 30 October 2021), marking her French debut, and *The Hours* at Gagosian in New York City (29 September – 7 November 2020). Bonnet was also included in *The Milk of Dreams* at the Venice Biennale in 2022.
- Bonnet's work can also be found in the permanent collections of Yuz Foundation, Shanghai; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, and Brandhorst Museum, Munich, among others.

Provenance

Gagosian Gallery, Greece

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



5

Lauren Quin

Third Belly

signed and dated 'L Quin 2021/2022' on the reverse
oil on canvas

152.7 x 213.7 cm. (60 1/8 x 84 1/8 in.)

Painted in 2021-2022.

Estimate

HK\$700,000 — 900,000

€81,900 — 105,000

\$89,700 — 115,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Lauren Quin's abstract paintings are truly a sight to behold. Each of the vivacious young American painter's works is like an explosion of tone and symbols that flood the viewer's senses. The electric colours and pulsating lines that Quin generates are mesmerizing, drawing the eye in and keeping it locked in a trance-like state. The churning waves of form and pigment create networks of interaction between fetish and foul, blood and marrow, purity and perversion.

What makes Quin's work so special is the way in which she merges convictions concerning the individual and the universal in her compositions. Each of her paintings exists at the juncture of the essential components of life, where one begins to bleed into the other, creating a unique and deeply affecting emotional resonance that is difficult to describe – a seismic experience when confronted in person.

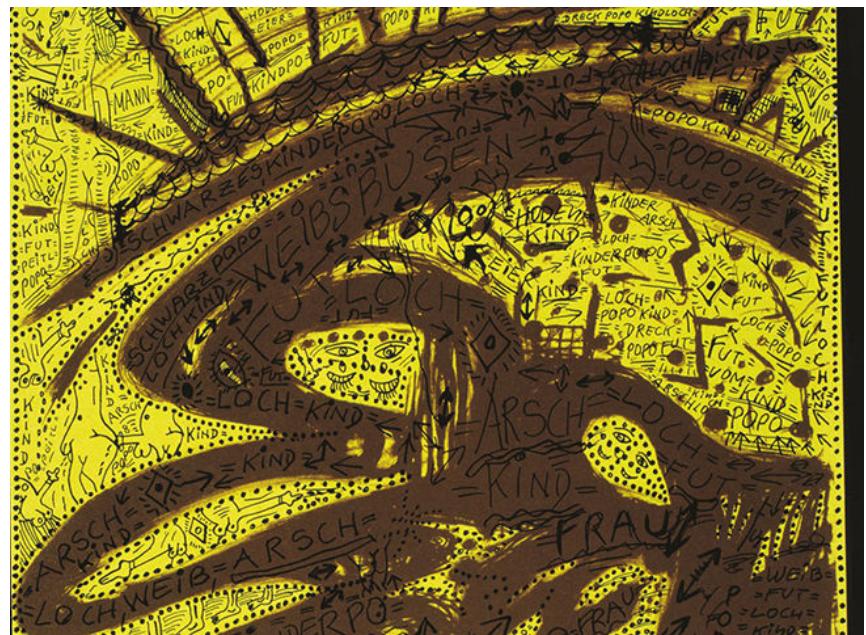
At the heart of Quin's work is a keen awareness of the power of communication. She utilises both internal and external modes of communication to create her imagery and mark-making. The resulting paintings are rich in allusion and symbolism, creating a repertoire of imagery that is both public and private.

Quin's paintings are initially built from a shape that is repeated and overlapped, creating a layering process that forms a multitude of compositional centre points as well as other forms that appear in the residual spaces. Each painting is then topped with motifs derived from Quin's drawing archive, which she transfers onto the canvas using a meticulously honed mono-printing technique. As the artist uses her symbols again and again, they grow from a personally sourced visual language into a collective cultural unconscious – the meaning expands and erodes, taking on a life of its own as each viewer forms their own attachment to these works.

One of the most fascinating aspects of Quin's compositions is the recurring element that she calls the 'tube'. These thick strips of colour and shadow resemble volumetric prisms, and when overlapping, they morph into a shifting crosshatch or moiré pattern. The tubes are both the most persistently recurring and the least stable element of her compositions; they play tricks with the consistency of their weight and value and subvert traditional notions concerning the pictorial space, suffusing the surface of compositions with a surging kinetic energy. Towards the end of Quin's process, she lays down a heavy layer of paint that she acts upon with urgency, carving into it before it can set permanent. This final carving process is athletic, nimble, and dictated by the passage of time. In this way, Quin formulates a new argument for abstraction that is not about hard edges, clean lines, or brute force. Instead, it is about capturing the essence of communication in all its forms and channeling it through a kaleidoscope of colour and form that creates dialogue with the cosmos itself.

The meditative qualities that emerge from these endless permutations are of no surprise given that the artist had originally planned to go into art therapy while at university. Studying the history of art therapy, she was inspired by the rhythmic and repetitive qualities of patients' work and sought to incorporate those into her own practice. The liberating means of self-dialogue bears parallels to the strain of Art Brut that developed at the Maria Gugging Psychiatric Clinic outside

Vienna (commonly known as Gugging). Now an artist's commune and museum, during the 1950s the clinic pioneered using art as a means of diagnosis and therapy for its patients. Since then, it has been a focal point for the production of some of the world's most raw, direct and honest art that speaks to the human condition on a primal level – much like Quin's.



Johann Garber, *Sexi-blatt*, 1994 © Privatstiftung - Künstler aus Gugging

The works of Kazuo Shiraga and Quin share an intense commitment to exploring the possibilities of abstraction, each artist pushing the boundaries of their respective mediums to create works that are both powerful and profoundly expressive. Shiraga's large-scale paintings are characterised by their raw physicality and frenzied gestural marks, while Quin's works often feature subtle variations in texture and colour, imbuing them with a sense of delicacy and refinement.

Despite these apparent differences, there is a deep sense of kinship between the two artists' practices. Both Shiraga and Quin are unafraid to take risks and to experiment with new techniques and are deeply invested in the process of creation itself. Shiraga's physical approach to painting, with his use of his feet and hands to apply paint in sweeping, unrestrained strokes, can be seen as a kind of performative act, while Quin's meticulous attention to detail speaks to her own deep engagement with the materials and techniques of painting. Moreover, both artists are keenly

attuned to the emotional resonances of their work and are part of a broader tradition of artists who have sought to use abstraction as a means of accessing deeper truths about the world around us. Whether through frenzied physical improvisation or careful consideration of form and colour, both artists demonstrate the enduring power of abstraction to evoke complex emotional states and to transcend the limitations of representation. In both cases, the artists strive to capture something essential about the human experience - something that transcends the limits of language or culture.



Kazuo Shiraga, *Zuisouhen*, 1986 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong for HK\$ 9,750,000, 24 November 2019

Collector's Digest

- Quin's work has been featured in numerous solo exhibitions, including *Pulse Train Howl* (2022), Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA, and group exhibitions such as *Fire Figure Fantasy: Selections from ICA Miami's Collection* (2022), Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, FL; and *On Boxing* (2021), Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

- Quin's work is held in numerous public collections including: X Museum, Beijing; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; ICA Miami, Miami; Pérez Art Museum, Miami; Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix; and Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis.
- Her work is also held in the private collections of: Komal Shah Collection; Green Family Art Foundation; Kraus Foundation; and Rachofsky Collection.

Provenance

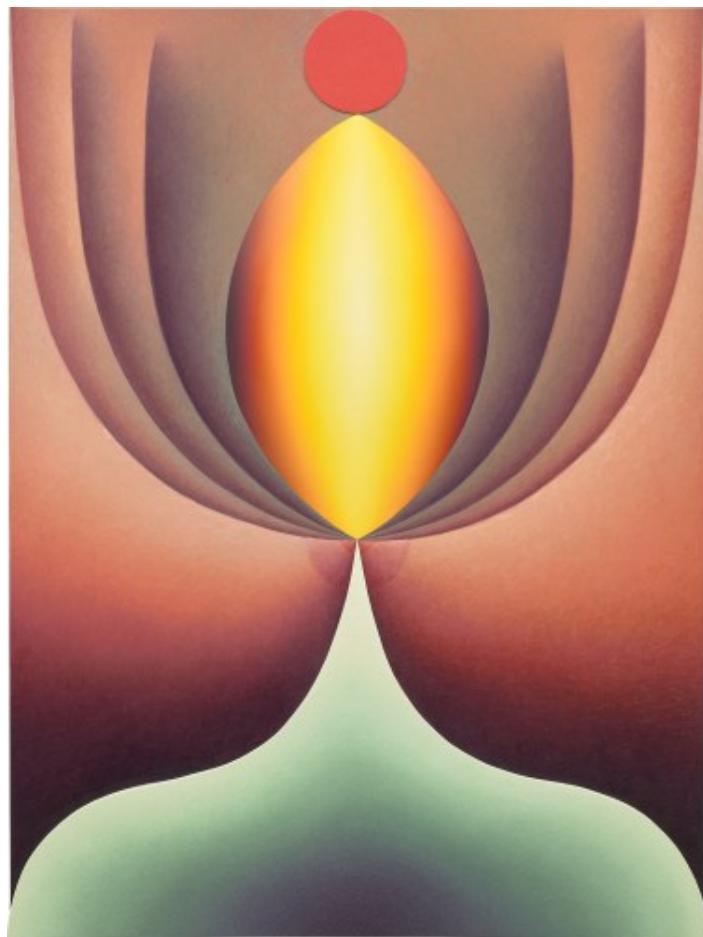
Blum & Poe Gallery, Los Angeles

Private Collection, Los Angeles

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



6

Loie Hollowell

A Gentle Meeting of Tips

signed, titled and dated 'LoieHollowell 2018 "A gentle meeting of tips" "A gentle meeting of tips" Loie Hollowell' on the reverse
oil, acrylic, sawdust and high-density foam on linen
mounted on panel
121.9 x 91.4 cm. (47 7/8 x 35 7/8 in.)
Executed in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$5,000,000 — 7,000,000
€597,000 — 836,000
\$641,000 — 897,000

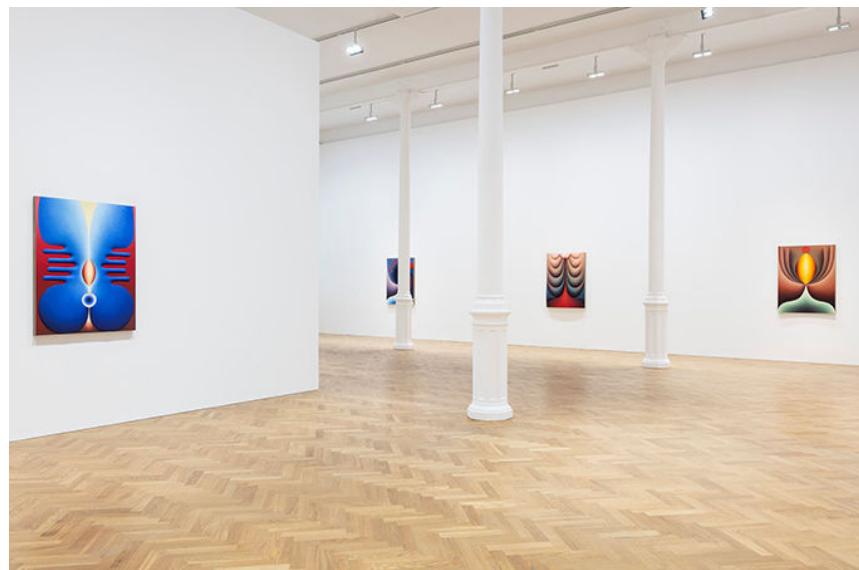
[Go to Lot](#)



"I want my paintings to be experiential. I want them to take the viewer into a phenomenological space of sensual pleasure. I want them to bring the viewer into the present — into their present — and into their own space, within their body. I want the work to be felt on a physical level. I want my work to feel freeing, liberating." — Loie Hollowell

One of the most sensational young artists working today, Loie Hollowell is recognised for her autobiographical paintings that use geometric shapes in a vibrant, electric colour palette. Approaching her work as an architect, Hollowell transforms the female body into abstraction by laying down blueprints of her personal experiences. Evoking bodily landscapes and sacred iconography, these canvases bear resemblance to planets or portals of futuristic monoliths in science fiction, as their three-dimensional elements evolve into an almost sculptural sphere of volume, texture and surface.

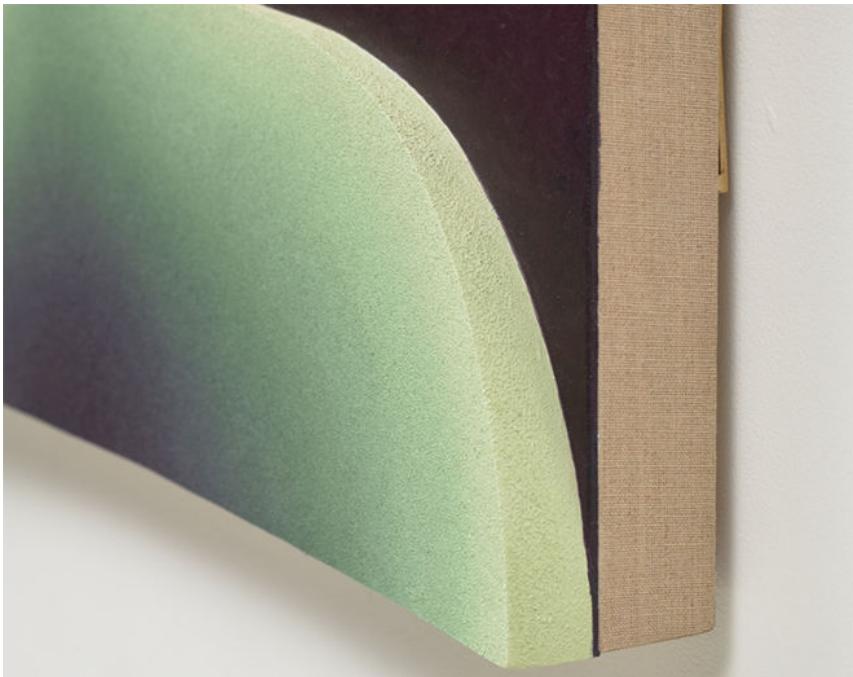
A Gentle Meeting of Tips was executed in 2018, a pivotal year in Hollowell's practice marked by two successful solo exhibitions at PACE that propelled her to international recognition. One of them was *Dominant / Recessive*, presented at PACE London between 28 August – 20 September 2018. It was here, at her first solo exhibition in the United Kingdom, that *A Gentle Meeting of Tips* was unveiled, installed alongside eleven other canvases and twenty-two works on paper that abstract the most intimate and sexually explicit elements of the human anatomy into shapes that reappear frequently throughout art history.



Installation view of the present lot (right) at London, PACE Gallery, *Loie Hollowell: Dominant / Recessive*, 28 August - 20 September 2018 © Loie Hollowell. Courtesy Pace Gallery

Sculpting the Body on the Canvas

Famed for her canvases that abstracts the female body with voluptuous geometric forms, Hollowell's paintings are visceral, honest, and seductive. The artist gradually builds upon the terrain of flat linen panels with high density foam to construct protruding and concaving forms that are sealed with a thin shell of acrylic before being covered by oil paint. The resulting surface is sometimes perfectly smooth like velvet or stippled with texture. These are achieved either with meticulous and delicate soft swirls of the brush, or with the rough side of a cleaning sponge. An extremely arduous process, the end result effectively blurs the distinction between real and constructed depth and the foreground and background, allowing the three-dimensional structures to be almost indiscernible to the eye. The sculpted areas enhance the painted illusory form, enticing the viewer to move closer to the painting in order to figure out which areas are real, and which are not.

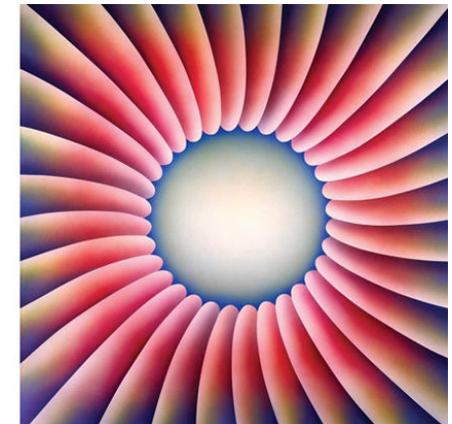


3D Detail of the present lot (profile)

As Hollowell was drawn to abstract, elegant shapes to represent her bodily experiences on the canvas, she looked to artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe, Judy Chicago and Agnes Pelton for inspiration. Like Hollowell, these artists share a fascination in the use of colour and geometry, delving into the realm of pure abstraction with references to the human body, often utilising repetitive, hypnotic patterns with contrasting dark and light colours. Inheriting the same visual lexicon from her predecessors, Hollowell differs from O'Keeffe and Chicago in her use of three-dimensional elements, creating works that move past the constraints of painting and into the sphere of sculpture.



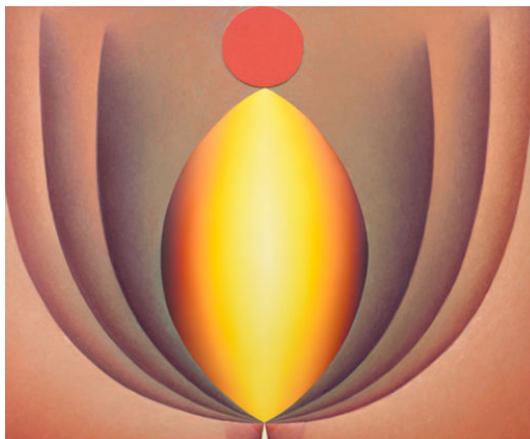
Left: Agnes Pelton, *Winter*, 1933 Collection of the Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento Right: Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower*, 1973 Collection of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, New York Artwork: © 2023 Judy Chicago / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



When the various elements of *A Gentle Meeting of Tips* are considered as a whole under the pretext of the *Dominant / Recessive* exhibition, the composition can be deemed as a powerful visual exploration of both the thought and process of conception. Shapes in the composition of the current work are proportioned in direct correlation with the size of the artist's own body parts. This resonates all the more so when it is revealed that the artist was trying for a baby at the time of the work's inception, with her first child being born in December 2018. As Hollowell explains of her *Dominant / Recessive* works:

"This new body of work considers the act of trying to conceive as well as conception itself. By layering the concerns of painting on top of hand sculpted bodily surfaces, these shapey forms exist in a space between the illusoriness of painting and dimensionality of sculpture. The more time I spend with these paintings, the more I realise how real, physical and complex this liminal space can become. To put the thoughts I have, about trying to conceive and becoming pregnant into my painting / sculpting language is an invitation to embrace the physicality and otherworldliness of that primal sexual act." — Loie Hollowell

Pulsating Light



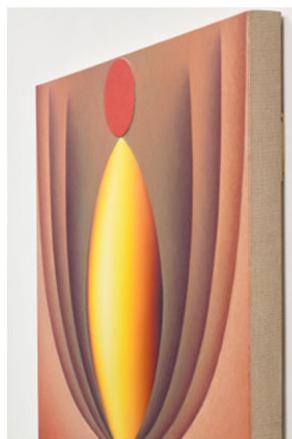
Detail of the present lot, front and profile view

Often referring to light as the central protagonist in her work, Hollowell's canvases often feature key geometric shapes – such as the mandora in the present work – that acts as the emphasis of the composition. In *A Gentle Meeting of Tips*, gentle curves of the female body from both sides of the frame draws the eye into the centre, where a bright, golden mandora is situated. Shining with a searing intensity from within, the golden light penetrates the entire dimension of the canvas, echoing the soft seafoam green glow just below, whilst enhancing the overall contrast of colour and form within.

"I think that what's really a driver for me is the sense of light, and this intense chiaroscuro, light to dark, forms, protruding from the surface, being actually enhanced by illusory depictions of light. There is a permanent sense of pulsating or movement that is embedded in the object, but there's a character always present, and that's light. I almost think of light as the character that's driving the narrative of the work, and a lot of times there's a central light, or the mandorla, which I use as my vagina, which is the source of light that's sort of like spilling out onto everything else."

— Loie Hollowell

In 2017, a year before the current work was executed, Loie Hollowell spoke to Haley Mellin from GARAGE on the central character in her work – light.



Haley Mellin: *Let's talk about light.*

Loie Hollowell: Light has become a central character in my work. Often there will be a light source, a stream of light that penetrates the entire dimension of the canvas. The light moves through the action in the painting, or the action is coming out of the stream of light. Or the light is the action that's happening in the painting.

HM: *How do you choreograph light in your paintings?*

LH: The mandorla and the ogee, or breast shape, are often the source of light. But sometimes the light will take on a character of its own by becoming a symbolic stream of energy, or pee, or cum.

HM: *The light gives a pulse to your paintings.*

LH: Good! Those areas of chiaroscuro and high-intensity light are places of arousal. The pulsing light is like the body's energy—the pulsing of sex or the pulsing of the heart. During sexual climax it feels like there's a bright light pouring out of me, like I'm going to explode. That's the kind of light energy I want to create in my paintings.

HM: *Where do tantric shapes take your work?*

LH: Symbols such as the mandorla and the lingam—the phallus—allow for a more abstract, universal conversation about things that can be very personal. The mandorla [meaning "almond" in Italian] is the perfect symbol for the vagina. In my paintings I use the mandorla as a central focus point and as a source of light. Gothic artists often painted the Virgin Mary surrounded by a glowing mandorla. They're primal shapes—they repeatedly pop up throughout art history. Everyone can relate to them because they originate from the body.

Click [here](#) to read the full interview.

Collector's Digest

- Born 1983 in California, Loie Hollowell lives and works in New York. Known for her oeuvre that transforms the female nude into abstraction, Hollowell quickly rose to global prominence after being discovered by Marc Glimcher, president of PACE Gallery, who praised her as a 'truly rare talent'ⁱⁱ. PACE quickly held several solo exhibitions for Hollowell, including PACE London in 2018; PACE Hong Kong in 2018; PACE New York in 2019; and PACE online in 2020.
- Last year, the artist held a solo exhibition at the Long Museum in Shanghai, titled *Loie Hollowell: Recalibrate*, which ran from 24 April – 11 July 2021. The artist is represented by PACE Gallery and Jessica Silverman Gallery; her first solo show with Jessica

Silverman will be in 2024 in San Francisco.

- Hollowell's works are in the collections of Arts Council England, London (UK); He Art Museum, Shunde (CN); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (US); Long Museum, Shanghai (CN); Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA (US); Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (CH), amongst others.

ⁱ Loie Hollowell, quoted in Katy Hessel, 'Loie Hollowell', *The Great Women Artists Podcast*, August 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Marc Glimcher, quoted in Nate Freeman, 'How Newly Minted Art Market Star Loie Hollowell's Prices Rose More Than 1,200 Percent in Just Three Years', Artnet News, 15 September 2019, [online](#)

Provenance

Pace Gallery, London

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

London, PACE Gallery, *Loie Hollowell: Dominant / Recessive*, 28 August - 20 September 2018, pp. 20, 94 (illustrated. pp. 21, 23)

Literature

Holly Black, 'Loie Hollowell: Fluorescent Light & Full Bellies', *Elephant*, vol. 37, Winter 2018-2019, online (illustrated)

Holly Black, 'That Summer Feeling: Eight Unmissable London Shows', *Elephant*, 28 July 2018, online (illustrated)

Emily Spicer, 'Loie Hollowell: Dominant/Recessive', *studio international*, 11 September 2018, online (illustrated)

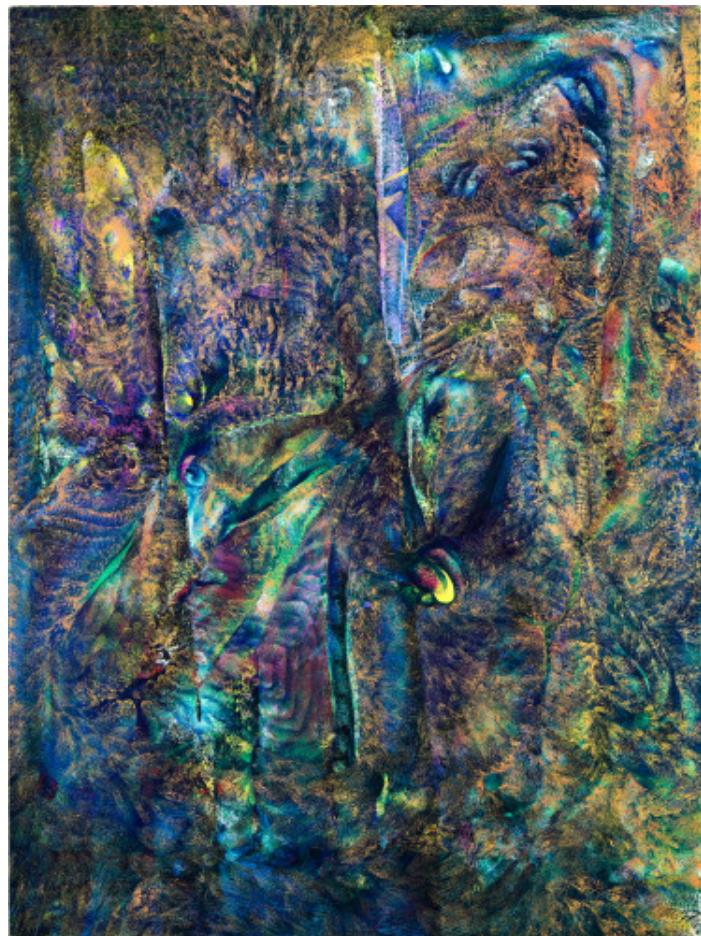
'Raw Sensuality in Loie Hollowell's Orgasmic Abstractions', *Elephant*, 14 September 2018, online

'Loie Hollowell at Pace Gallery', *The Week*, 15 September 2018, p. 34

Pascale Georgiev, Ananda Pellerin, Lucy Kingett and Pac Pobric, eds., *Why I Make Art*, Los Angeles, 2022, p. 136 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



7

Lucy Bull

False Tail

signed and dated 'L Bull 2020' on the reverse

oil on canvas

121.9 x 91.4 cm. (47 7/8 x 35 7/8 in.)

Painted in 2020.

Estimate

HK\$1,000,000 — 2,000,000

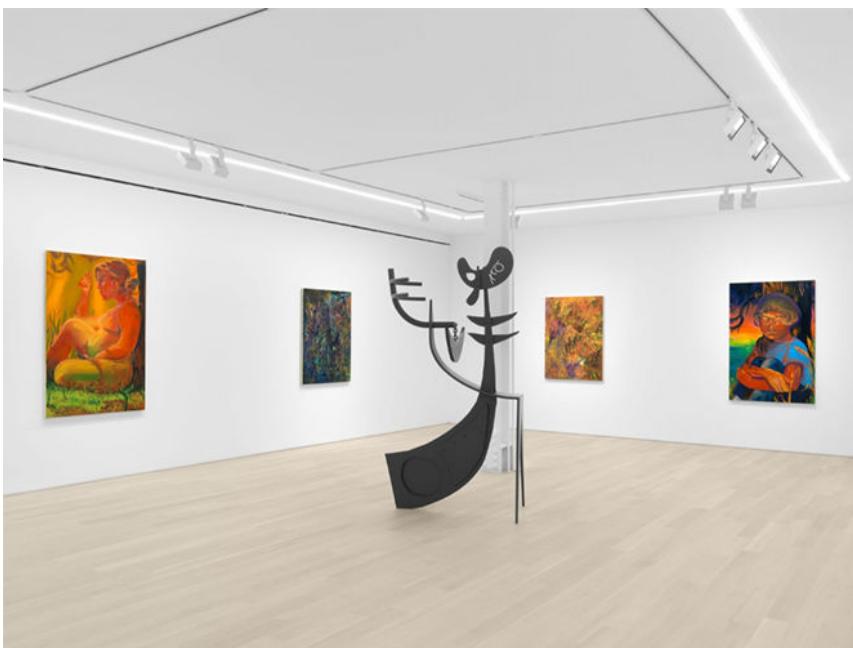
€119,000 — 239,000

\$128,000 — 256,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Vibrant, fantastical and otherworldly, Lucy Bull's *False Tail* is a dazzling field of shape and colour, featuring fiery reds amidst lush green forestry. The title itself suggests a rather ambiguous implication, with the phrase itself being a double entendre: false tail – false tale, evocative of wild animals hidden within the depths of the woods, or a glimpse of a mermaid's tail within pooling waters. Stunning the beholder upon entrance, the visceral impression of *False Tail*'s highly synthetic colour palettes and shapes contradict rationality and order and are often described as dynamic, sonic, pulsing to each individual.



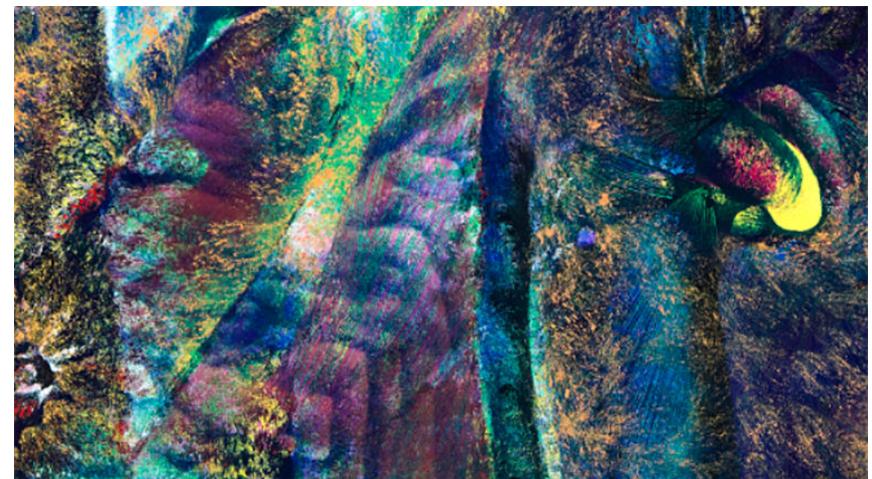
Installation view of the current lot (second from left) at New York, Almine Rech Gallery, Haley Josephs, Lucy Bull, Aaron Curry: *I Want to Eat the Sunset. We're Talking About the Cosmos, Even. And Love, I Guess.*, 10 July - 10 August 2020

First unveiled in a group exhibition with Almine Rech Gallery, New York in 2020, *False Tail* is captivating, enigmatic, and fantastical, and stands as a prime example of her psychedelic works that play with dynamic texture, weight, and space. Bull's canvases overflow with detail, forming an entrancing viewing experience that titillate the senses.

Ripples of Colour

"It's all about the speed and wrist gestures, the amount of paint on the brush. There's this build-up of the layers and then sort of reductive techniques like scratching away or making marks." — Lucy Bull

In the presence of *False Tail*, there is a disrupting overload of visuals that excites and attacks the optical senses. Bull's resistance to defy rationality is clear with the accumulations of disruptive marks, guiding one to draw focus on the primary contours that form art – that is, materiality, colour, pigment, medium, surface, brushwork – rather than a depiction of reality in the making. Ripples of hypnotic waves reveal discernible traces of planning and negotiations with the medium, creating a remarkable visual effect that oscillates between physical imprints of the paintbrush and a psychedelic vision.



Detail of the present lot

Irregularity is instilled in Bull's formula for her paintings, the distortion in the atmospheric composition complements the unexpected colour palette that seemingly abides to its own law and order. The painting opens up a plethora of possibilities and associations unique to the eye of the beholder. Defying definite interpretations, Bull's works morph into an infinite number of new transformations as they shapeshift under every angle. These fantastical landscapes exist outside of time and space in its own universe, where transience and infinitude coexist.

"The paintings kind of function like Rorschachs. If someone were to tell me they see a certain thing in them, it's telling me more about their psychology than about the work itself." — Lucy Bull

In interview: The Art of Transformation

In 2021, Lucy Bull spoke to BOMB Magazine's John Garcia on the magic of colour and her painting process:

John Garcia: I would say that is a fundamental difference between how you work versus the vast majority of painters. You're not trying to make the best painting you can as fast as you can. Instead, you focus on a path of discovery of the new, with no regard to the time it takes to find it.

Lucy Bull: Right. And the question is always how far to take them. I often find myself thinking to myself, 'Well, this is good, but it could be great.' And sometimes that means painting over something that at one point felt finished in hopes of pushing it to another dimension. If I tunnel vision through a single painting for too long, I start to become blind to all that is happening. That's why it's important for me to take breaks between encounters. Sometimes I'll pause on a painting for an entire month. Ultimately what I'm trying to do is get to the point where there is potential for new avenues of discovery. The scratching feels like excavation; older marks in the beginning layers get pulled to the foreground. It's similar to Max Ernst's technique of frottage. I relate to how he talks about being a spectator to the making of his own work. When things finally open up and click, it feels like magic.

[...]

JG: I would say conservatively that tension might be inherent to all things, though I think the amount of tension can be heightened or mitigated through concrete actions. Is colour used to arrive at moments of tension and transformation?

LB: I have a very intuitive relationship to colour by never planning ahead yet always making notes and responding to colours. The notes section of my phone is predominately random colour combinations. In my opinion, the more vivid and acidic, the better. I'm interested in creating a scenario where people can feel their way through a painting. I want the reaction to be more visceral than logical, and colour is the best tool for provoking the viscera.

Read the full interview [here](#).

Collector's Digest

- Phillips debuted the artist's work at auction in Asia in June 2022 with [8:50](#), and holds the world record for Bull's work at auction. The painting achieved nearly eight times the high estimate, [realising nearly 1.5 million USD in June of 2022](#).
- Lucy Bull, born in New York in 1990 and currently residing in Los Angeles, emerges as one of the rising figures in the world of contemporary art. After earning her BFA at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2012, her paintings have been sought after for their ebullient and psychedelic qualities. Her creations recall the likes of Surrealistic landscapes, loose brushwork in opaque, unrealistic combinations, apparently products of a process-based meditation between impulse decision and proposed thinking.
- Recent exhibitions featuring Bull's works include solo exhibitions hosted at David Kordansky Gallery, Human Resources and Smart Objects in Los Angeles, High Art in Arles and Paris, to name a few. Appearances in group exhibitions are frequented as well, including those of *Artists Inspired By Music: Interscope Reimagined* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and *Present Generations: Creating the Scantland Collection* of the Columbus Museum of Art at the Columbus Museum of Art in Ohio. Permanent collections proved her standing importance, currently in the hands of MAMCO Geneva, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Dallas Museum of Art and Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami.

Provenance

Almine Rech, New York

Private Collection

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

New York, Almine Rech, *Haley Josephs, Lucy Bull, Aaron Curry: I Want to Eat the Sunset. We're Talking About the Cosmos, Even. And Love, I Guess.*, 10 July - 10 August 2020

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY OF A DISTINGUISHED PRIVATE
COLLECTOR

8 *

Matthew Wong

The Road

signed, titled and dated "'THE ROAD' Wong 2018 [in Chinese]" on the reverse

oil on canvas

177.8 x 152.4 cm. (70 x 60 in.)

Painted in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$24,000,000 — 35,000,000

€2,870,000 — 4,180,000

\$3,080,000 — 4,490,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Adored with abandon by the art world since his explosive ascent to auction in 2020, Matthew Wong's *The Road* is marked by his virtuosic symphonies of pigment and rejection of tonal modelling in favour of autonomous fields of colour. Sharing in the Modernist conviction that the application of oil onto canvas could elicit intimate yet innovative forms of expression, his short career of only 7 years produced works that are lyrical, whimsical, cerebral but most importantly, sincere.

Wong had a tenacious appetite for not just creative output – but its ceaseless improvement. On the eve of Dallas Art Fair 2017, his first fair in the US, Wong travelled down from his home in Edmonton, Canada. Often caught in the flurry of painting (*not painting is pain*, he once told a friend), he thought upon seeing the work that his New York gallery Karma had selected was, decidedly, imperfect.ⁱ While the fair flowed and ripened around him, Wong propped up a makeshift studio, stood in front of *The West* – every inch a classic representation of his practice – and wove constellations into its orphaned sky.

The anecdote, while often told, holds particular resonance and could be used as a mythology for Wong's career: while the world tugged, pulled, and twisted around him, Wong painted and created at his own pace, his own prerogative – only ever sacrificing himself, for himself.

A Feverish Melody

Wong's works are often punctured by solitary figures that are set adrift in the natural world; cropped against the cosmos' psychodrama, they act not just as staffage but an entry point for the viewer into the artist's chimerical dreams.

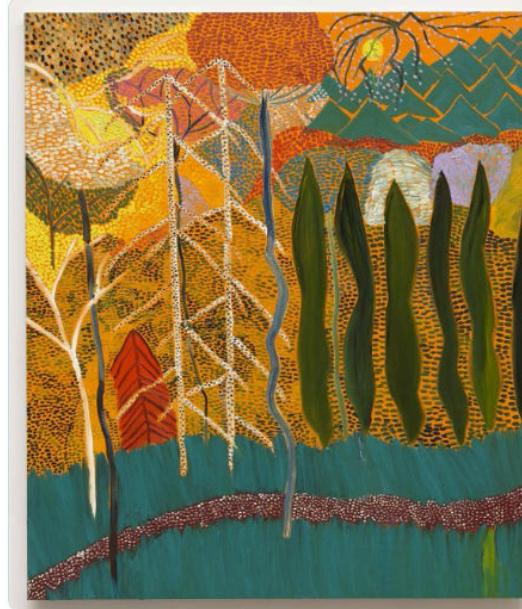
Melancholy can often be the first word that comes to mind when we consider these figures (and therefore own our earthly position). A heavy emotion, doubtless. In the present lot, Wong grants mercy – his imperial thumb pointed firmly up; here we are presented with a shimmering landscape of incendiary autumnal hues that blanket the horizontal panes of canvas. The full force of his painterly ability burns through the composition while Wong's use of pointillism is symphonic: trees are susurrous, canopies chant, mountains croon and the sun drums along. Like a seed each dot is planted with care and precision, growing into a lush forest of hues and tones that bloom with vitality and energy. His pointillism is not just a technique, but a language, a way of speaking to the viewer through the rhythms and melodies of colour and form.



Jerry Saltz
@jerrysaltz

Matthew Wong
The Road
2018
Oil on canvas
70 x 60 inches
@karmakarma9

...



12:46 am · 20 Apr 2018

The current work posted on Jerry Saltz's Twitter page, 2018. Artwork: © 2023 Matthew Wong Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York

It's easy to fall under *The Road's* spell – just ask Jerry Saltz. Announcing his latest horoscope into the contemporary art world, the famed New York critic singled out the work on Twitter. As part of his *Vulture* review of Wong's breakout show at Karma Gallery in 2018, Saltz waxed lyrical: 'Matthew Wong's show at Karma is one of the most impressive solo New York debuts I've seen in a while...Wong brings a focused flickering tightness and absorbing intensity to his paintings, something closer to the talismanic delights of Grandma Moses or, on the hazier side, Vuillard...What really makes Wong his own painter is his preternatural feel for pattern; every painted area becomes a graphic field that allows us to see changing shapes and luminosities, allowing a consciousness of otherness to settle into the work'.ⁱⁱ

Despite the verve that bristles through the work, its autumnal essence deserves some reflection. The passage into winter has always endowed to man a period of inflection; as the world around us shrivels and retreats, our own transience is given a vibrant stage. Shakespeare duly once wrote:

"That time of year thou mayst in me behold When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang Upon those boughs which shake against the cold, Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang. In me thou see'st the twilight of such day As after sunset fadeth in the west; Which by and by black night doth take away, Death's second self, that seals up all in rest. In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire, That on the ashes of his youth doth lie, As the death-bed, whereto it must expire, Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by" — William Shakespeare, Excerpt from Sonnet 73

The Road similarly alludes to these sentiments. At the foot of the composition, the forest's fugitive forms relinquish their dynamism and bleed into the dominating sash of turquoise. A red path meanders through the oblivion's deforestation, but this too seems at risk of being swallowed up, menacing the painting's resolution.

Artist Interrupted

Wong knew what it meant to be unrooted from the world; he would flit between his birthplace and Toronto for much of his childhood before settling in Hong Kong after studying in the States. Professional life would prove difficult as he bounced around white-collar jobs, unable to settle down and carve out a career in 'Asia's global city'. Neither local (his Cantonese was only passable) nor expat and without friends, he turned to poetry as a release and a calling before taking up photography and then painting.

"I do believe that there is an inherent loneliness or melancholy in much of contemporary life, and on a broader level I feel my work speaks to this quality in addition to being a reflection of my thoughts, fascinations and impulses." — Matthew Wong

The wild exuberance that would come to lie at the core of his work was tempered by the artist's inner turmoil. Diagnosed with depression, Tourette's Syndrome and autism, Wong struggled with his mental health throughout his life, a conflict that his mother has spoken of candidly: 'He would just tell me, "you know, Mom, my mind, I'm fighting with the Devil every single day, every waking moment of my life"',ⁱⁱⁱ.

In early October 2019, Wong would lose this fight, and take his life. He was 35 and on the cusp of

immortality.

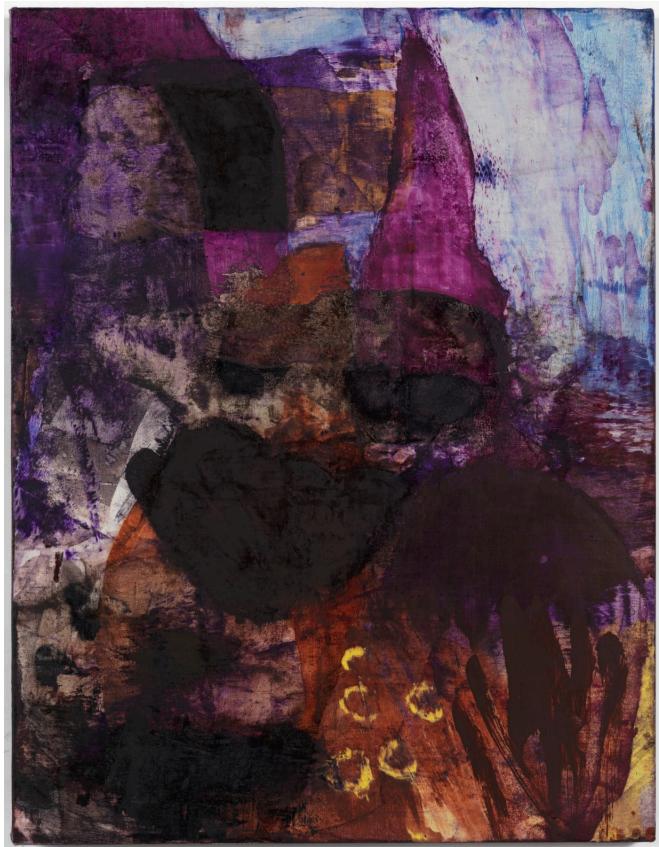
Reverential Reflections

In the art world, we're quick to lavish, aggrandise, and sensationalise. As such, the life of an aesthete is one of indulgence; providing ample alimentation, the trials of a troubled artist are perversely (somewhat inevitably) fashioned into heroic poses, à la Basquiat or Van Gogh.

To understand the work of Matthew Wong is naturally to understand the artist – the person – he was when he created these. However, to celebrate the work of Matthew Wong, we would do well to divert our attention away from an infatuation with yet another tortured creative and instead focus on the qualities of his oeuvre that do warrant our infatuation: its vivacity; singular vision; and honest dialogues between pigment, canvas, and the innumerable generations of artists that came before him.

A child of the modern age, he was completely self-taught, taking to Facebook to further his education and engaging in lengthy debates with figures like gallery owner John Cheim and artist Paul Behnke. This fascinating journey to becoming an artist makes his works all the more absorbing, while underlining the exceptional intuition of a practice that was unbound by traditional teachings and institutional formation.

For Wong, painting was nothing if not cathartic – a primordial mediation between material and self. Ignited by the work of Abstract Expressionist Bill Jensen, he would almost let the paint apply itself, guided by its own hand and letting pictorial order incubate within chromatic disorder, Listening to John Coltrane's seminal 1966 album, *Meditations*, on repeat, Wong allow the abstracted notes of free-jazz to whip him into a frenzy: 'I may just pick a few colours at hand and squeeze them onto the surface, blindly making marks, but at a certain point I will inexplicably get a very fleeting glimpse of what the image I may finally arrive at will be, sort of like a hallucination.'ⁱ His paintings became his reality as pareidolia kicked in, his life conjuring a mirage of pigment.

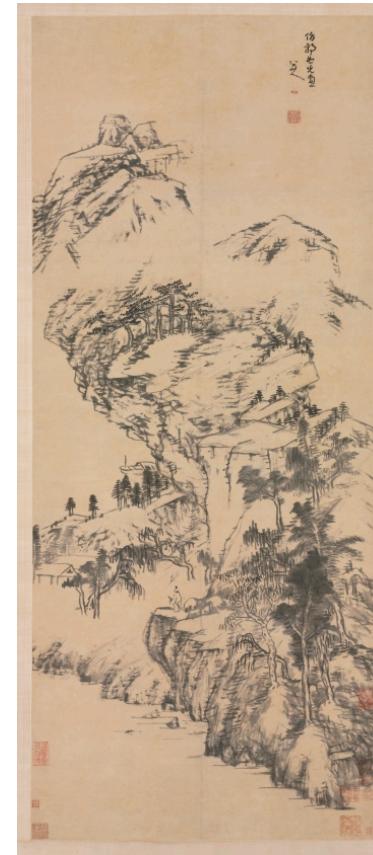


Spannocchia Luohan I, 2017 Artwork: © Bill Jensen 2023. Courtesy of Cheim & Read

"I'd like to think of my art practice as an open-ended dialogue between myself and other painters, both living and dead." — Matthew Wong

While favouring oil, Wong used ink throughout his career, often as a kind of subtle meditation. Some of his first forays into art involved the use of ink having been inspired by traditional Chinese works and Christopher Wool's Rorschach paintings: 'I just bought a cheap sketch pad, along with a bottle of ink, and made a mess every day in my bathroom randomly pouring ink onto pages—smashing them together—hoping something interesting was going to come out of it' ^{iv}.

A 2021 posthumous exhibition at Cheim & Read explored the influence of the legacy of Chinese landscape painting on Wong's work; critic Dawn Chan induced in the show's catalogue: 'We know that Wong specifically fixed his attention on the art of Shitao, as well as those of his [Shitao's] contemporary, Bada Shanren. Both artists were famous for pushing the envelope in their work — for moving ink painting towards surprising moments of expressive abstraction. Their influence is deeply integrated in Wong's own works. Wong maintained a committed ink-art practice, making an ink painting every morning. Painting immediately after waking, before food or coffee, he experimented boldly with the medium, pouring paint and letting it pool on the page' ^v.



Bada Shanren, *Landscape after Guo Zhongshu*, c.1650 – 1705 Cleveland Museum of Art Image: Cleveland Museum of Art, John L. Severance Fund

Much of what has been written about Wong thus far has been focused on the perceived affinity with Western artists, almost as a kind of deference (as per Jerry Saltz and Roberta Smith). Though what might seem more accurate is a highly sensitive attempt to recognise Western artistic tendencies through an East Asian lens. Chinese landscape would have indeed provided an accessible template with which Wong could explore the human condition within the psychology of nature. Moreover, the flatness of Chinese landscape would have afforded a striking conjunction of pictorial dimensions with Wong's impasto and tactile use of paint.

A conversation study of *The West* at last year's Dallas Museum of Art retrospective revealed that, as with many other paintings, Wong reused and repainted canvasses several times over. This attention – dedication – to mark making further places himself alongside Chinese rather than Western artists. An essential aspect of Classical Chinese art, mark making is an expression of the artist's individuality and creativity within the confines of the traditional techniques and subject matter. Each brushstroke is deliberate and purposeful, creating a sense of harmony and balance in the composition. The technique of using ink and brush to create subtle variations of light and shadow, known as "qi yun sheng dong" or "spirit resonance, rhythm, and movement" is considered fundamental. Wong was not alone in breathing new life into the tradition of mark making, with the esteemed Cai Guo-Qiang similarly placing focus on the beauty of the final product through instinctive emotional output.



Cai Guo-Qiang, Mountain Range, 2006 Courtesy of Cai Studio

By incorporating these irrevocable forms and shapes, Wong not only spoke to his cultural and artistic heritage, but to a confidence that at times caveated his fragile practice. With a swagger he once called his paintings 'sheer, genuine acts of will'ⁱ before his first solo show. For a man so deeply in touch with and affected by the world around him, the bravado could not last.

In Paris' Pere Lachaise Cemetery, the tombstone of the great Amedeo Modigliani reads, 'Struck down by death in the moment of glory'; on Wong's, a line from one of his poems is inscribed: 'I am that which is idle on a summer day. I am the mouth that does not move'.

Collector's Digest

- Wong's works reside in notable public collections, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Dallas Museum of Art; Estée Lauder Collection, New York; and the Aïshti Foundation, Beirut.
- Continuing the momentum around the artist's acclaim, the Dallas Museum of Art hosted Wong's first museum retrospective in the United States, *Matthew Wong: The Realm of Appearances*, late 2022, and the exhibition had just closed 19 February, 2023. This was also on the heels of the painter's institutional debut, *Matthew Wong: Blue View*, which took place at the Art Gallery of Ontario from August 2021 to April 2022.

ⁱ Raffi Khatchadourian, Matthew Wong's Life in Light and Shadow, *The New Yorker*, 9 May 2022, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Jerry Saltz, 'Losing Myself in the Paintings of Facebook-Educated Matthew Wong', *Vulture*, 19 April 2018, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Monita Wong, quoted by Neil Genzlinger in 'Matthew Wong, Painter on Cusp of Fame, Dies at 35', *New York Times*, October 2019

^{iv} Matthew Wong, quoted in Elaine Wong, "They Are Artists: Matthew Wong," Altermodernists, October 29, 2014, [online](#).

^v Dawn Chan, 'Matthew Wong: Footprints in the Wind', *Cheim & Read*, 2021

Provenance

Karma Gallery, New York
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

New York, Karma Gallery, *Matthew Wong*, 22 March - 29 April 2018, p. 90 (illustrated, p. 91)

Literature

John Martin Tilley, 'Scenery from the Subconscious', *Office Magazine*, 26 March 2018, online

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



9 o**

Hernan Bas

The hillsides must not know it

signed with the artist's initials, titled and dated "The hillsides must not know it" HB 2011' on the reverse
acrylic airbrush and block print on linen
183.2 x 213.5 cm. (72 1/8 x 84 in.)
Executed in 2011.

Estimate

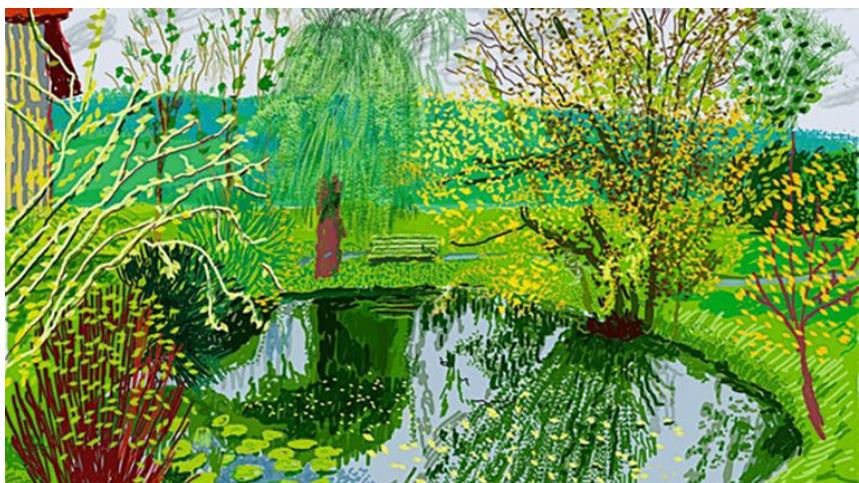
HK\$6,500,000 — 8,500,000
€770,000 — 1,010,000
\$833,000 — 1,090,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Hernan Bas (born 1978) is a contemporary American painter living and working in Miami. His paintings feature complex compositions that are rich in detail and texture, frequently layering images and patterns that create a sense of depth and movement within the canvas. This is augmented by a fluid, gestural brushwork with which his characters are rendered - often in a loose, expressive style that emphasises their emotional states.

The present lot, painted in 2011, is a resonant example of this singular practice. Orphaned in a desolate and barren landscape, a lone figure has his back turned, his face obscured in forbidden knowledge. The world around him has seemed to have been left to rot, with fauna fanning itself out and trees fumbling new roots over dilapidated settlements. An annihilating sky lies heavy over this chaos, where Bas' brushwork goes from loose to abstracted. The observation of nature (despite being harrowing) is one of precision, an almost preternatural intuition that borders into the supernatural, recalling the attuned forms of David Hockney.



David Hockney, No. 599, 2020 iPad Drawing Artwork: © David Hockney

Sensual Danger

Growing up in a small backwater town in upstate Florida, a place that the artist described as living in an episode of the *X-Files*, Bas enjoyed a unique childhood that was littered with paranormal sightings and other bizarre encounters with the unearthly. These formative years fomented a penchant for morbidity, desolation, isolation and eccentric humour.

The psychotropic worlds that Bas conjures are ones where darkness and pleasure are intimately intertwined. In his work, sexuality is often depicted in a highly charged, ambiguous manner where men and boys of various ages engage in acts and rituals of courtship, love and death - the mannered ballads of heightened emotion. This androgynous dandy aesthetic, tempered with a macabre sensibility, is rarely explicit; rather, it is suggested through small details, such as a hint of a lace collar or a languid, sensual pose.

These visions are both alluring and ominous, often featuring dark, lush landscapes filled with tangled vegetation and shadowy corners. His waif figures are depicted in soft, almost dreamlike tones, and occupy the liminal boundaries of the human condition, what Bas calls the 'fag limbo'.ⁱ

The Hillsides Must Not Know It takes its title from the poem by enigmatic 19th Century poet Emily Dickinson, *I Haven't Told My Garden Yet*. Both works teem with essential harmony; both explore themes of secrecy and the hidden nature of the self.

"I haven't told my garden yet— Lest that should conquer me. I haven't quite the strength now To break it to the Bee— I will not name it in the street For shops would stare at me— That one so shy—so ignorant Should have the face to die. The hillsides must not know it— Where I have rambled so— Nor tell the loving forests The day that I shall go— Nor lisp it at the table— Nor heedless by the way Hint that within the Riddle One will walk today" — Emily Dickinson, I Haven't Told My Garden Yet, 1898

By enveloping his figure in a world of oppressive incongruity, Bas speaks to the confines of his own sexuality. This subversive symbolism of his queerness is enshrined in his work, as he describes: 'The very terms: suspicion, mystery, clues, secrets, etc., are closely tied to any gay youth's experience. It describes the need to cover it up (one's sexuality). To keep it cloaked to solve these mysteries, to express the charm of ambiguous sexuality'.ⁱⁱ This intimate secrecy is paralleled in Dickinson's powerful lines of apprehension, which suggest that the true nature of the self is something that cannot be easily expressed or understood, and that there is a sense of danger and vulnerability in revealing one's true desires and passions.

The Southern Gothic

Bas' work is often informed by literature, though in particular, that of the great Romantic, Edgar Allan Poe. Forging a dialogue through generations of America's creative output, both artists find kinship in their preoccupation with penetrating and uncovering the hidden facets of the human psyche. In Poe's stories, characters often struggle with their inner demons or encounter supernatural beings that represent their deepest fears and desires. Similarly, Bas' paintings often

feature human figures in various states of emotional turmoil, hinting at the complex, multifaceted nature of human psychology. As such, Bas lifts from Allen Poe's fiefdom of the Southern Gothic – a genre known for its exploration of the macabre, grotesque, and taboo – to infuses it with a distinctly queer sensibility in the production of hauntingly erotic works.

This dialogue is brilliantly played out in the present lot. Like in *The Hillsides Must Not Know It*, Allen Poe's famed short story *The Fall of the House of Usher* is haunting, thought-provoking, and demonstrates the power of art to evoke senses of unease and disquietude. Decay and isolation are similarly focal, where the deterioration of a familial house reflects the psychological corrosion of its inhabitants.

"I looked upon the scene before me - upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain - upon the bleak walls - upon the vacant eye-like windows - upon a few rank sedges - and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees - with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium - the bitter lapse into everyday life - the hideous dropping off of the veil." — Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, 1839

Though perhaps with the medium of painting, Bas unleashes the full potential of Southern Gothic psychodrama. Po's tale is a narrative that unfolds over time, with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Bas' painting, on the other hand, is a static image that invites the viewer to linger and explore. The lack of a clear narrative allows for multiple interpretations, and the viewer is left to draw their own conclusions about the meaning behind the image. The artist explains as much: 'I do like the idea that everything is contained—the entire narrative, within the frame of the canvas; but paintings that I consider to be successful are always on the verge of falling apart. To me, that's the fun of it—the eminent collapse, and also the challenge.'ⁱⁱⁱ. Permanence is perilous however, as with every second spent investigating the work's panoplies, we run the risk of forever being swallowed into its endless intricacies.

"There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart - an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it - I paused to think - what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher?" — Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, 1839

Collector's Digest

- Bas has held numerous successful solo exhibitions in recent years. This includes at the

Rubell Museum in Miami; *Creature Comforts* at Perrotin in Paris (17 October 2020 – 30 January 2021); *Venetian Blind* at Victoria Miro in Venice (8 February – 14 March 2020); and *TIME LIFE* at Lehmann Maupin in New York (7 November 2019 – 4 January 2020).

- 2021 marked Bas' debut in China when his retrospective, *Choose Your Adventure*, was held at the Yuz Museum in Shanghai
- His works are held in numerous prestigious public collections around the world, including: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Saatchi Collection, London; Samuso: Space for Contemporary Art, Seoul; Rubell Family Collection, Miami; and the Brooklyn Museum, Museum of Modern Art, and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

ⁱ Hernan Bas, quoted in artist biography on the Galerie Perrotin website, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Hernan Bas, quoted in: Exh. Cat., Miami, Museum of Contemporary Art, *Hernan Bas: It's Supernatural*, 2002

ⁱⁱⁱ Hernan Bas, quoted in Sarah Margolis-Pineo, 'Against Nature: An Interview with Hernan Bas', *Art21*, 27 December 2011, [online](#)

Provenance

Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich

Acquired from the above by the current owner in 2015

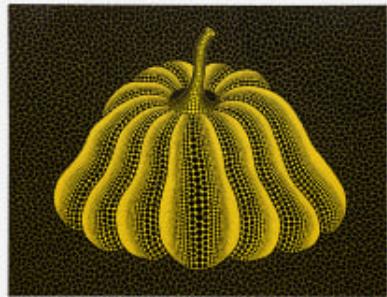
Exhibited

Zurich, Galerie Peter Kilchmann, *Hernan Bas, Perennial Affairs*, 11 June - 30 July 2011

Kunstverein Hannover, *Hernan Bas: The Other Side*, 18 February - 29 April 2012

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY SOLD TO BENEFIT THE CLARINDA
CARNEGIE ART MUSEUM, IOWA, UNITED STATES

10 *

Yayoi Kusama

Pumpkin

signed, titled and dated 'Yayoi Kusama 1995
"Pumpkin" [in Japanese]' on the reverse
acrylic on canvas

112.3 x 145.8 cm. (44 1/4 x 57 3/8 in.)
Painted in 1995, this work is accompanied by a
registration card issued by the artist's studio.

Estimate

HK\$40,000,000 — 50,000,000
€4,750,000 — 5,940,000
\$5,130,000 — 6,410,000

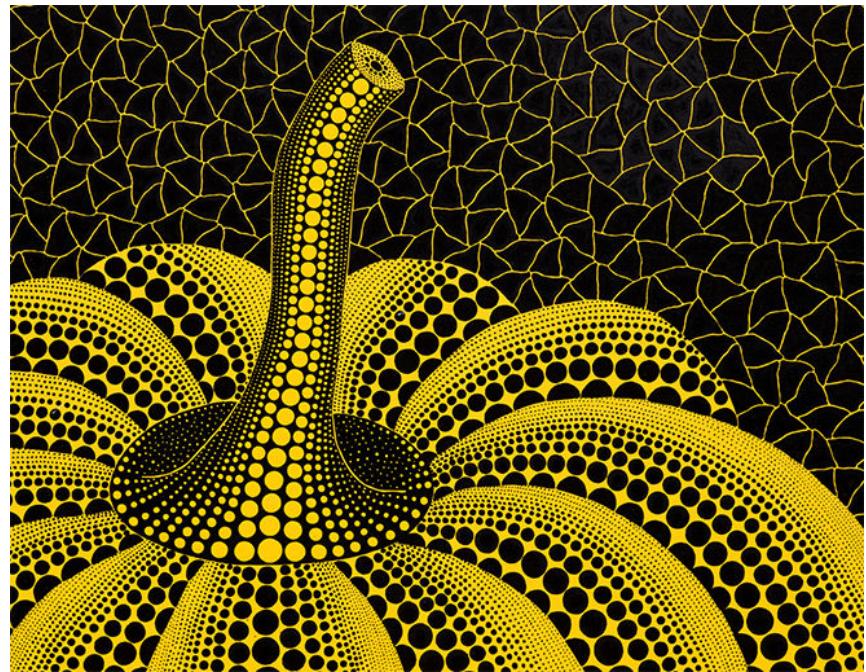
[Go to Lot](#)



"Pumpkins talk to me. Pumpkins, pumpkins, pumpkins. Giving off an aura of my sacred mental state. They embody a base for the joy of living, a living shared by all humankind on the earth. It is for the pumpkins that I keep going." — Yayoi Kusama

With its charming, jolly and peaceful presence, the pumpkin is unequivocally the most iconic motif of Kusama's career. Full, symmetrical and voluptuous, the current work is an exquisite example of the artist's highly coveted pumpkin paintings. Vibrantly rendered in golden yellow juxtaposed against ebony black, *Pumpkin* is undeniably and distinctly Kusama in its sharp contrast. An early example that is archetypal of Kusama's pumpkin motif, the current work masterfully encapsulates the artist's obsessional focus on accumulation, repetition, and the infinite through the combination of the three pillars that define her artistic practice – dots, nets, and the pumpkin.

Intricate in its execution and instantly arresting, *Pumpkin* is the epitome of the artist's unique artistic expression through which she achieves self-obliteration through repetition. The multi-sized striated black dots in *Pumpkin* slither over the golden surface of the gourd's bulbous form, creating an optical illusion of depth through varied sizes that showcases Kusama's unparalleled skill and dexterity in her command of the medium. These all-encompassing dots coalesce into waves of pattern set against a latticed background, together forming a fluctuating visual field that moves beyond the picture plane, drawing the viewer into a delicate web of colour and shape.



Detail of the present lot

A Passionate Cause

One of the highest valued works by the artist to ever be offered at auction, *Pumpkin* is fresh to the market, coming from the esteemed collection of the Clarinda Carnegie Art Museum in Clarinda, Iowa, United States. The sale proceeds will further the Museum's critical mission of promoting the Arts to a global community of enthusiasts, while also supporting local Arts and Youth programs.

"Pumpkins are lovable and their wonderfully wild and humorous atmosphere never ceases to capture the hearts of people. I [have] adored pumpkins as my spiritual home since childhood and with their infinite spirituality they contribute to the peace of mankind across the world and to the celebration of humanity and by doing so, they make me feel at peace." — Yayoi Kusama

A playful and endearing rumination of the artist's most beloved vegetable, *Pumpkin* is a cheerful

image that is representative of a piece of happiness and comfort during the artist's childhood. The symbolic meaning of this charming gourd serendipitously aligns with the charitable cause behind the sale of *Pumpkin*. An imagery that is known and loved by children worldwide, pumpkins possess a positive, warm nature that perfectly complements the museum's continued desire to provide a safe haven for art and culture within their community.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRmOqoCFGvQ>

The Clarinda Carnegie Art Museum, Iowa, United States

The Perfect Pumpkin

Brilliantly luminous and flawlessly executed, *Pumpkin* is a star example from Yayoi Kusama's oeuvre that marries her eminent pumpkin iconography with her iconic polka dots – both signature motifs that explores the artist's obsession with infinite repetition. Each circle is scrupulously painted and perfectly round; each meticulously crafted row of multi-striated dots vibrates with rhythm and dances fluidly across the body of the gourd. The overall form is curvaceous and almost perfectly symmetrical, radiating with joyous energy that is highly anthropomorphic and affectious.



Detail of the present lot

Upon close inspection, the tightly and dexterously woven lattice behind hums with the rhythmic intensity of the pattern. An iconic iteration of the artist's most distinctive infinity net motif, these labyrinthine yet organic lines pulsate with palpable energy, establishing a spellbinding sense of pictorial space. This intricate and labour-intensive technique envelops both the viewer and the artist in the concept of the infinite, and stands as a testament to Kusama's astonishing dedication to creation and technique.

"Just as Bodhidharma spent ten years facing a stone wall, I spent as much as a month facing a single pumpkin. I regretted even having to take time to sleep." — Yayoi Kusama

An Affinity to Nature

One of the most beloved and universally ubiquitous images of contemporary art today, Kusama's bright and brilliantly patterned pumpkins are central to the artist's widely celebrated oeuvre. The pumpkin is almost synonymous with Yayoi Kusama – much like the Campbell's soup can is to Andy Warhol – a motif that serves as both a mode of self representation and a universal signature of the artist. According to Kusama, she prefers to paint pumpkins not only because they are attractive in both colour and form, but also tender to the touch.



Yayoi Kusama at the age of ten, 1939 Image: © YAYOI KUSAMA

Kusama's profound connection with the pumpkin motif can be traced back to her upbringing on her family's large plant nursery in Matsumoto, surrounded by fields of flowers, rolling mountains and forests. Describing a vivid hallucinogenic episode that she had around the age of 10, the artist recalled: 'The first time I ever saw a pumpkin was when I was in elementary school and went with my grandfather to visit a big seed-harvesting ground... and there it was: a pumpkin the size of a man's head... It immediately began speaking to me in a most animated manner.'ⁱ Since then, Kusama has always held positive and fond memories for pumpkins.

Closely tied to her childhood, plants and the natural world provide an important biographical foundation for Kusama's artistic interest in accumulation and repetition; much of her work

demonstrates her affinity to nature, as the artist incorporates organic patterns and an elemental palette. This naturalistic source of inspiration and aesthetic pursuit is shared by artists such as Paul Cézanne and Georgia O'Keeffe, who were both artists renowned for their particular focus on one subject – apples and flowers respectively.



Georgia O'Keeffe *Jimson Weed/White Flower No. 1*, 1932 Collection of the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Arkansas Image: Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas / Edward C. Robinson III, Artwork: © 2023 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Possessing a dreamlike quality, O'Keeffe's works such as *Jimson Weed/White Flower No. 1* abstracts the surface of the flower's bracts, their smoothly executed surfaces stand in bold

contrast with her choice of bold, luminous colour. Similar to Kusama, O'Keeffe also drew from her memory and imagination to conceive paintings that capture 'the wideness and wonder of the world as I live in it.'ⁱⁱ Coincidentally, it was also O'Keeffe who encouraged and helped Kusama on her move to New York in pursuit of an art career. Recalling this inspiration, Kusama had said: 'When I was young, a stroke of luck led me to a book with paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe. I dreamed of going to America and escaping my family, even though I knew no one there. After seeing her paintings in this book, I wrote to her. She responded with great kindness and generosity. Her letter gave me the courage I needed to leave for New York.'ⁱⁱⁱ



Paul Cézanne, *Apples*, 1878-79 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Mr. and Mrs. Henry Ittleson Jr. Purchase Fund, 1961, 61.103

Just like Kusama's pumpkins, Cézanne's apples are also artistic icons in their own right. Cézanne once declared that 'With an apple I want to astonish Paris'^{iv}. Cézanne's mission was to rethink how three-dimensional objects could be captured in paint and to include multiple viewpoints rather than just one. By depicting an apple in this manner, the artist not only brilliantly captures the likeliness of an apple, but also the truth of how we might perceive one in a physical setting, resulting in a new direction for representation in art that challenges form and perspective. Over the years, Kusama has recreated the image of the pumpkin across a plethora of mediums – from

pumpkin sculptures, paintings, infinity rooms, to pumpkin charm bracelets and pumpkin polka-dot printed shoes, elevating an everyday gourd into a contemporary art icon. Both Cézanne and Kusama reinvented artistic representation of their time through their own unique vision, resulting in works that are inextricably tied with their own name and oeuvre.

Artistic Genealogy of the Pumpkin

The initial manifestation of the pumpkin motif emerged during Kusama's Nihonga practice at the Kyoto Municipal School of Arts and Crafts in the late 1940s; recalling this period, Kusama wrote: 'During my time in Kyoto I diligently painted pumpkins, which in later years would become an important theme in my art.'^v

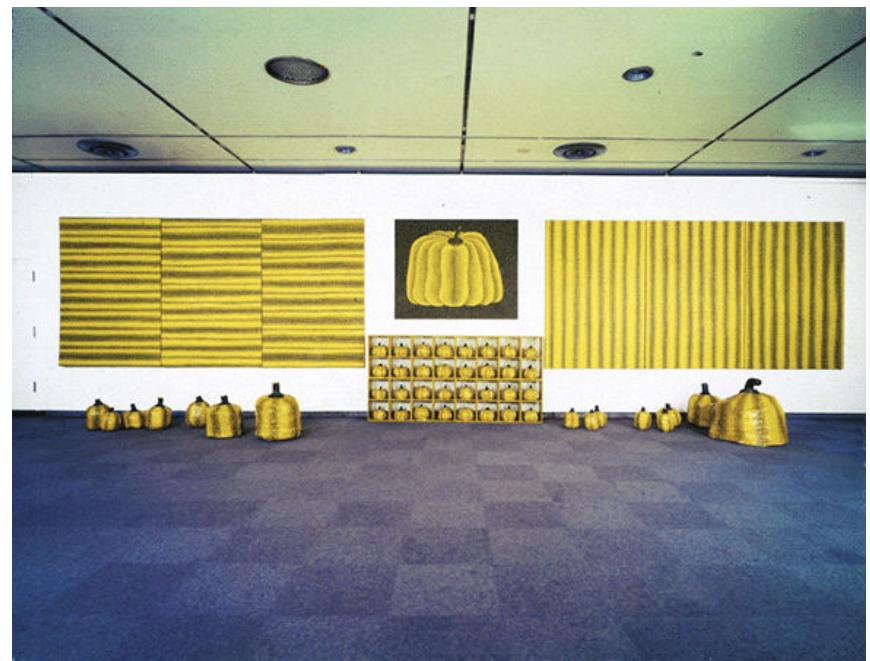


Left: *Onions*, 1948 Collection of the Artist Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA Right: The present lot

As seen in her works such as *Onions* that was executed during the same period, elements such as a hypnotic chequered background and bulbous forms were always a part of Kusama's artistic genealogy, but went through tremendous development to evolve into the mature form that is *Pumpkin* today. In the 1970s, the pumpkin appears in the artist's works such as *The Memory of the Pumpkin and the Lizard*, 1975. During this time, the shape of the pumpkin was not yet formalised into its balanced round form as seen today. However, elements such as its net pattern and collaged elements on the surface of the pumpkin will soon evolve into the polka dot motif that takes over the entire surface of the gourd in Kusama's later works. These early drawings demonstrate Kusama's obsession with a net/dot pattern that was in place since the very beginning of her career as a professional artist, and illustrate the initial conception and formation of her iconic imagery that stemmed from her childhood hallucinations.



1975 *The Memory of the Pumpkin and the Lizard*, 1975 Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA



1984 Installation view of Kusama's second solo exhibition at Fuji Television Gallery, Tokyo, 20 April - 16 May 1984 Image: © Estate of Shigeo Anzaï, courtesy of Zeit-Foto, Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA



1991 *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)*, 1991 Inner view of the work installed at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan Collection of the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art ARC, Japan Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

Making its formal entrance in a more matured form, Kusama's pumpkins reappeared a few decades later in the 1980s, as seen in the second solo exhibition for the artist held at Fuji Television Gallery, Tokyo in 1984. During this time, Kusama began to incorporate pumpkins with her polka-dot motif, which appeared in her drawings, paintings, and as well as the famed installation *Mirror Room (Pumpkin)*, exhibited at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in 1991. This immersive installation was then subsequently brought to the Japanese Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1993 – a momentous milestone that was marked by Kusama's signature pumpkins, which truly cemented the artist's status as an international icon. At this installation, Kusama dressed in a matching polka-dot ensemble and gave away tiny yellow and black polka-dotted pumpkins to anyone who entered her exhibition – which in turn further popularised and promoted her work to a wider audience.



Pumpkin, 1994 Installation view at Benesse Art Site, Naoshima, Japan Image: © Anthony Shaw | Dreamstime.com, Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

The most recognizable pumpkin sculpture of today would have to be the massive sculpture on Naoshima Island, sitting at the end of a pier at the Benesse Art Site. First installed in 1994, the Naoshima pumpkin is highly photogenic, attracting art lovers and everyday tourists alike as it sits gracefully against the backdrop of a beautiful blue sky and glistening waterfront, harmoniously situated within the natural landscape. The current *Pumpkin* was executed in 1995, right at the pinnacle of success for the artist.



Pumpkin, 2008 Harbour Arts Sculpture Park, Hong Kong, 2018 Image: Bob Henry / Alamy Stock Photo,
Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

The Naoshima pumpkin was only the first of many outdoor sculptures that Kusama continued to display across various international locations. By the 2000s, Kusama's pumpkins had become a central theme and emblem of the artist's epochal and multifaceted oeuvre, appearing again and again often in larger than life sculptural forms and installed in iconic sites around the world, including the Place Vendôme, Paris; and even Hong Kong's own Harbour Arts Sculpture Park, in 2018.

"I love pumpkins because of their humorous form, warm feeling, and human-like

quality and form. My desire to create works of pumpkins still continues. I have enthusiasm, as if I were still a child." — Yayoi Kusama

Functioning as both an allegory and a form of self-portraiture, Kusama's pumpkins are an embodiment of optimism, serenity, and joy, and are celebrated as one of the most loved and instantly recognizable icons in contemporary art today. Each of these pumpkins stand as a symbol of triumph for Kusama's status as an international sensation, whilst also sending out a message of hope, peace and love to all corners of the world.



Installation view of pumpkin sculptures at the M+ Museum, Hong Kong, 2022-2023 Image: © Vycchan | Dreamstime.com, Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

Collector's Digest

- One of the most prominent and prolific artists working today, Yayoi Kusama's practice blends painting, installation, sculpture, and performance to powerful effect. Arguably her most iconic motif, the pumpkin has appeared in various different formats in Kusama's career, including paintings, colossal outdoor sculptures and domestic-scaled ceramics, and her celebrated mirrored environments.
- Invited to be the first woman artist to represent the Japanese Pavilion in the 1993 La Biennale di Venezia, Kusama chose to centralise the pumpkin, constructing a mirrored room in an immersive installation of black and yellow polka dots. An exhibition of a similar installation, *The Spirits of the Pumpkins Descended into the Heavens*, had just closed at the Art Gallery of South Australia on 13 March, 2023.
- Her ongoing exhibitions include *One with Eternity* at the Hirshhorn Museum, Washington D.C., which showcases the museum's permanent collection of the artist, including two of her infinity mirror rooms and their own *pumpkin sculpture* from 2016. Tate Modern in London had also extended *their exhibition of Kusama's infinity mirror room* until 2 April, 2023.
- Kusama's largest retrospective in Asia, *Yayoi Kusama: 1945 to Now*, is currently on view at the M+ Museum in Hong Kong until 14 May 2023. The exhibition features 3 new works, and over 200 works across various international collections, the M+ collection as well as the artist's own collection. Phillips is delighted to offer this fresh-to-market work by Kusama alongside Kusama's exciting retrospective at the M+ Museum, having also achieved the world auction record for the artist most recently in May 2022 in New York with *Untitled (Nets)* at US\$10,496,000.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OA_5_wrm-c&t=43s&ab_channel=SouthChinaMorningPost

Yayoi Kusama: 1945 to Now, is currently on view at the M+ Museum in Hong Kong

ⁱ Yayoi Kusama, quoted in Yayoi Kusama and Ralph McCarthy, *Infinity Net*, London, 2011, p. 75

ⁱⁱ Georgia O'Keeffe, quoted in Elizabeth H. Turner, *Georgia O'Keeffe: The Poetry of Things*, Washington, D.C., 1999, p. vi.

ⁱⁱⁱ Yayoi Kusama, quoted in Rosanna Greenstreet, 'Yayoi Kusama: "A letter from Georgia O'Keeffe gave me the courage to leave home"', *The Guardian*, 21 May 2016, [online](#)

^{iv} Paul Cézanne, quoted in artist's page, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, [online](#)

^v Yayoi Kusama, quoted in Yayoi Kusama and Ralph McCarthy, *Infinity Net*, London, 2011, p. 75

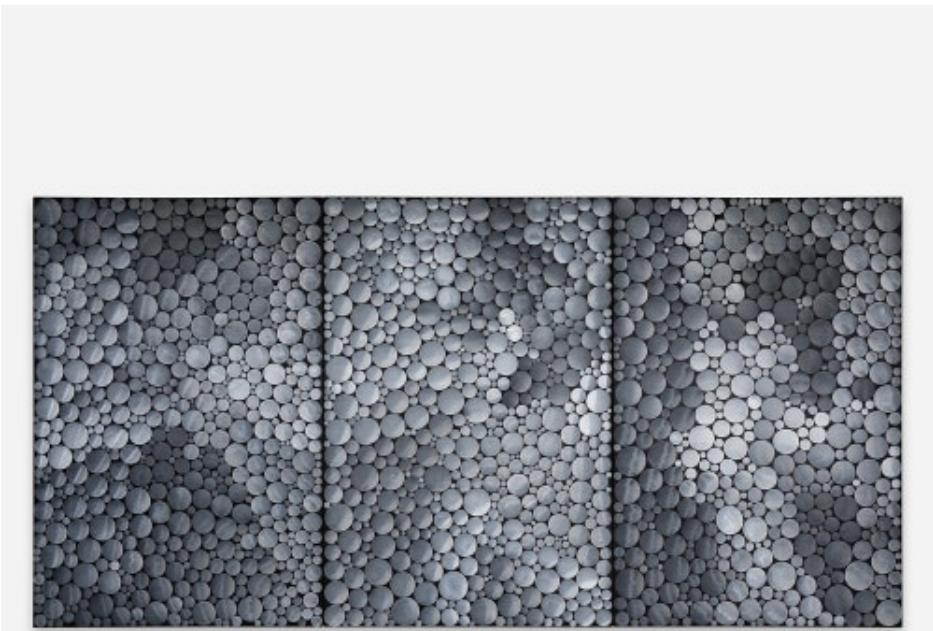
Provenance

Gallery Kasahara, Osaka

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2000

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN ESTEEMED PRIVATE
COLLECTION

11 *

Yayoi Kusama

Infinity Dots (HTI)

signed, titled and dated 'yayoi Kusama "Infinity Dots 2001 (HTI)"' on the reverse of each panel

acrylic on canvas, triptych

overall 194 x 390 cm. (76 3/8 x 153 1/2 in.)

Painted in 2001, this work is accompanied by a registration card issued by the artist's studio.

Estimate

HK\$25,000,000 — 30,000,000

€2,930,000 — 3,510,000

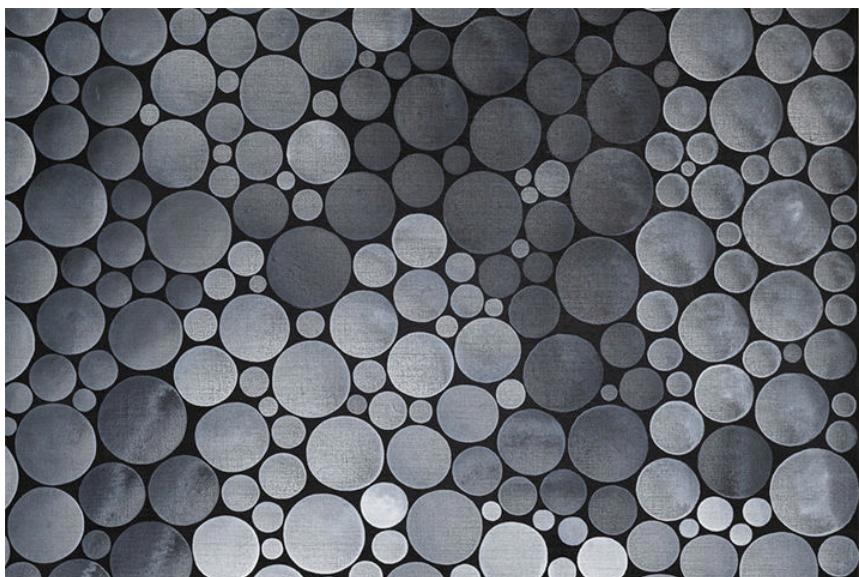
\$3,210,000 — 3,850,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“... They [The dots] began to cover the walls, the ceiling, and finally the whole universe. I was always standing at the centre of the obsession, over the passionate accretion and repetition inside of me.” — Yayoi Kusama

In monumental effervescence, Yayoi Kusama’s *Infinity Dots (HTI)* triumphs as one the largest of the artist’s canvases to ever appear in public auction. Spanning almost four metres wide and two metres in height, this larger-than-life triptych engulfs the audience in an infinite landscape: shimmering silver dots of various sizes and shades transcend their formalist nature to blanket the canvas in a rhythmic undulation. Pulsating and ever expanding, the poetic lattice confronts the viewer’s perception of space and time, capturing the stillness of a transient moment but simultaneously weaving the audience into a boundless mindscape. The translucent silver impasto resonates a weightless quality in sheer contrast with the obsessive pattern and overwhelming magnitude of the triptych, brilliantly offsetting reality. To behold this masterpiece is to be transported into the artist’s hypnotic universe, forever billowing, swelling, and receding.



Detail of the present lot

Synonymous to Kusama’s distinguished artistic career, her dotted patterns have been exhaustively canonised in sculptures, prints, and canvases of various sizes. Completed almost five decades after her initial venture into the subject, the present work materialises the artist’s most determined

vision and exhaustive practice in museum-grade exquisiteness. As a jewel of extreme scarcity, *Infinity Dots (HTI)* has never been auctioned but nevertheless enjoyed international acclaim when exhibited in *Yayoi Kusama: Dots Obsession* at the Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery in Sydney.

The Art of Artmaking

Born in Matsumoto City, Japan, in 1929, Yayoi Kusama spent her formative years battling an obsessive-compulsive disorder which resulted in hallucinations. These very illusions would continue to debilitate her throughout her life but at the same time, inspire her prolific artistic career.

“When I was a child, one day I was walking in the field, then all of a sudden, the sky became bright over the mountains, and I saw clearly the very image I was about to paint appear in the sky... I immediately transferred the idea onto a canvas. It was a hallucination only the mentally ill can experience.” — Yayoi Kusama on the origin of her Infinity series



Yayoi Kusama in her Studio, 1958–1959 Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

In realising her delirium through art, Kusama's craft has become synonymous to the act of salvation, where she would forego sleep to compulsively paint for forty or fifty hours per session, which is illustriously exemplified by *Infinity Dots (HTI)*. Extreme dedication is demanded as the completion of each dot dictates its surrounding compositions. No further alterations are permitted in order to uphold a uniform effect. Through painstakingly layering circles of impasto atop of one another, the labyrinthine of overlapping dots launches an alternate universe, where cognition has been displaced. In such manner, *Infinity Dots (HTI)* captures the obsessive mind and psychological power of the artist as a self-portrait does. The repetitive motion and extreme concentration have become an integral part of the infinity dots, as Kusama pours her spirit and craft onto the canvas.

"This was my epic, summing up all I was...And the spell of the dots and the mesh enfolded me in a magical curtain of mysterious, invisible power." — Yayoi Kusama

To Infinity and Beyond

Relentlessly devoted to honing her craft, a 28 year old Kusama emigrated from her native Japan to Seattle, then to New York city at 29, where she first realised her grand vision of the celestial tessellation in her first solo exhibition at the Brata Gallery in 1960. Since then, the artist would ceaselessly perfect her infinity nets and dots, always returning to her most eminent motif.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRZR3nsileA>

A Short Film on Yayoi Kusama's New York Trip and Obsessive Art Practices

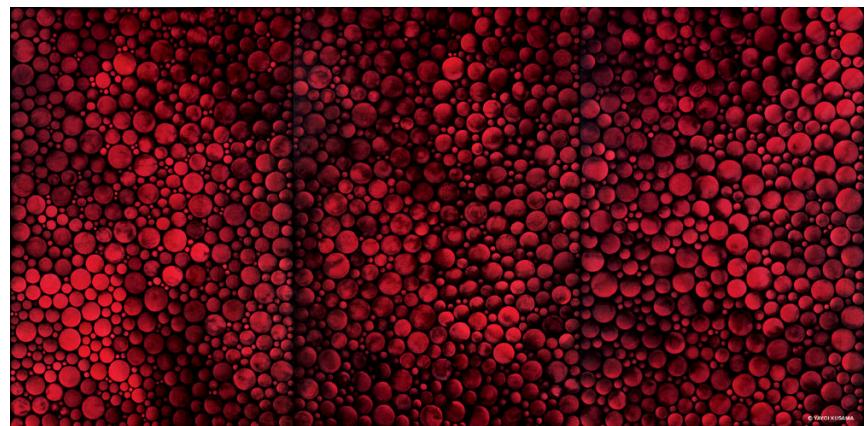
During Kusama's meteoric rise to prominence in the city, she found aesthetic and spiritual affinities in the grand gestures of the abstract expressionists and the sublime of the minimalists—two of the most influential art movements of the century. The most mature example of such craft, *Infinity Dots (HTI)* impressively collects the palpating energy of action paintings and singular gravitas of minimalism to envelope the audience into a microcosm of pure perception, through billowing shades of impasto and repetitive patterns of variegated sizes. At the same time, Kusama emphasises repetition in lieu of the monochrome and obsession over abstraction in bold confrontation of her Western contemporaries. At once majestic and weightless, disconcerting yet quiet, the present work transcends the boundaries of a work on canvas, in manifesting beyond the pictorial plane to create an unprecedentedly immersive and disquieting mystery. In Kusama's cosmic fantasy, humans—viewers and artists alike—dissolve into singular cells, extending into their surroundings to constitute a uniform humanity.

"Up till Kusama, there were many artists from the Renaissance on, who were involved with perceptive and infinity. But it was all fake, because you know you were the viewer. You were always aware that you were the master. That it was a painting

encompassed by a frame and the artist was playing with space, but it wasn't enveloping you." — Richard Castellane, prior owner of Castellane Gallery

Collector's Digest

- With its large size, which makes it of institutional quality and unparalleled rarity, the present work remains one of her most coveted masterpieces by collectors. Indeed, in the past year, Phillips New York has achieved the artist's highest auction record—a ground-breaking USD \$10.5 million—with the sale of an *Infinity Net*; shifting the artist's market to unprecedented heights. Appearing in auction for the first time, *Infinity Dots (HTI)* will most certainly be crowned as one of the artist's most distinguished offering.
- Institutional recognitions for the artist ushered such momentum—In 2022, Hong Kong's newly established M+ museum debuted its first special exhibition *Yayoi Kusama: 1945 to Now*, the artist's largest retrospective in Asia. On view until 14 May 2023, the exhibition notably features a highly comparable red infinity dots within the same series.



Yayoi Kusama, *Accumulation of Stardust*, 2001 Collection of the Matsumoto City Museum of Art, currently on view at the M+ Museum, Hong Kong Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

- No artist has witnessed a more glorious year than the artist Yayoi Kusama. Her collaboration with Louis Vuitton has generated international fanfare as her larger-than-life sculptures and classic polka dotted pattern—a signature of this particular lot—adorns the Louis Vuitton storefronts of metropolitan cities.

Yayoi Kusama

-
- Celebrations of the artist transpired beyond Asia: the artist has held solo exhibitions around the most prestigious institutions around the globe, including one of her largest installation exhibitions to date entitled *Infinity Mirrored Room – Filled with the Brilliance of Life* at Tate Modern in London which concluded in 2022 and *One with Eternity: Yayoi Kusama in the Hirshhorn Collection* presently on view in the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington D.C.
-

Provenance

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Sydney, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, *Dots Obsession*, 3 – 26 February 2005

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



12

Yayoi Kusama

Untitled (Mannequin from The Driving Image Show)

signed and dated 'KUSAMA 1966' on the top
acrylic on polyester mannequin, synthetic wig and
base

173 x 64 x 40 cm. (68 1/8 x 25 1/4 x 15 3/4 in.)

Executed in 1966, this work will be accompanied by a
registration card issued by the artist's studio.

Estimate

HK\$1,500,000 — 2,300,000

€178,000 — 272,000

\$192,000 — 295,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"If I were not Kusama, I would say she is a good artist. I'd think she is outstanding." — Yayoi Kusama

Part of a series of artworks on display at Yayoi Kusama's *The Driving Image Show*, which was first presented at Castellane Gallery in New York in 1964, *Untitled* consists of a female mannequin that seems to have been caught in the act of shying away from an invisible object or subject, with the head turned to her left and the rest of the body curved to her right. The sculpture is painted in blue, and the entire surface of her naked figure is covered in Kusama's signature infinity nets pattern – a shade of deep cobalt blue over an underlying layer of yellow. On top of her head is a black wig, which mimics the beauty trends of the 1960s.

Among the objects that composed the installation, Kusama included several kitchen furniture pieces and utensils, a ladder, shoes, vases, books and flowers, some of which were dispersed throughout the years. The exhibition was so successful that it became itinerant, and it was later shown – with variations – at Galleria d'arte del Naviglio, Milan, between January and February 1966, and at Galerie M.E. Thelen in Essen, Germany, in April of the same year.



Driving Image Show poster for the 1966 Milan exhibition. © YAYOI KUSAMA

The fact that some of the sculptures which were exhibited at *The Driving Image Show* are now lost makes this 174 cm tall *Untitled* an incredibly rare, exceptional and historically relevant artwork. This blue, yellow-dotted mannequin survived several decades to testify to Kusama's outstanding artistic achievements during her American period. 'The first thing I did in New York', declared Kusama in a recent interview, discussing her arrival in New York in 1958, 'was to climb up the Empire State Building and survey the city. I aspire to grab everything that went on in the city and become a star'.ⁱ The New York years were certainly essential to her career, and played a fundamental role in helping Kusama establish her name among the most globally acclaimed artists.

The Driving Image Show was revolutionary for its time, and had a radical impact on current and future generations of artists, art amateurs and gallery goers. Unlike nowadays, where they are a common and established practice in the art world, in the 1960s installations were still a very unusual form of exhibition. One of the most original aspects of *The Driving Image Show* (1964) was the fact that the entire gallery space was integrated within the installation: Kusama's dotted pattern was painted not only on the mannequins, but also on household objects and furniture. The floor was covered in a bed of dry macaroni, so that anyone who would step on it would hear crackling sounds, and – instead of remaining a passive observer – would interactively participate in an immersive art experience.

"I am an obsessional artist. People may call me otherwise, but I simply let them do as they please. I consider myself a heretic of the art world. I think only of myself when I make my artwork. Affected by the obsession that has been lodged in my body, I created pieces in quick succession for my new 'isms'." — Yayoi Kusama

In the course of her New York years, Kusama became famous for provoking the puritan American society with her irreverent *Body Festivals* or *Happenings*, during which she painted the bodies of naked men and women with her signature polka dots, while the participants were singing, dancing and taking part in orgies. These public celebrations of art and freedom were often interrupted by police interventions. *Untitled* is an evolution of these staged demonstrations; at first, she started to incorporate mannequins as sculptural works within her installations, then she gradually migrated this artistic expression onto living human bodies and animals. In these instances, the naked body is not alive and sexually active, but becomes an anonymous and robotic symbol of the modern industrial society.

Kusama's *Untitled* can be fruitfully compared to the mannequin figures of the Italian Metaphysical Painting Movement led by Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà, whose school and principles were established in 1917. In Metaphysical paintings, the human figure is often absent, or, when present,

it is depicted on a small scale or as a shadow. Mostly replaced by statues or mannequins which evoke the shape of a female or male body, humans do not seem to be crucial to the Metaphysical masters, who, through their work, intended to transmit the sense of isolation and alienation in which World War I left the European society.

In particular, *Untitled* can remind viewers of Carrà's painting *The Enchanted Chamber* (1917), in which a headless female mannequin is depicted near a tower of geometric objects, on top of which is a black wig. Representing a sort of mysterious and modern idol, Kusama's and Carrà's mannequins hint at the risks of dehumanisation that are hidden behind mass-production and globalisation.



Carlo Carrà, *The Enchanted Chamber*, 1917, Brera Pinoteca. Artwork: © 2023 Carlo Carrà / Artists Rights

Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome

Collector's Digest

- Yayoi Kusama was born in 1929 in Matsumoto, Japan, to a family of merchants who owned a plant nursery. She was trained in *Nihonga* painting at the Kyoto City University of Arts. Since the age of ten, she started to experience hallucinations, to which she soon responded by making art as a form of self-therapy.
- After moving to the United States in 1958, she became a leading member of the New York avant-garde art scene. She returned to Japan in the 1970s, choosing to reside in a mental health facility and work in a studio during the daytime.
- An extremely eclectic artist, her cultural production has explored several forms of expression, from sculpture, painting, and installation, to fashion, poetry, and performance.
- A retrospective of the artist's work was on view at Gropius Bau, Berlin, in 2021, and at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in 2022. The M+ Museum in Hong Kong is currently hosting *Yayoi Kusama: From 1945 to Now*, an exhibition that explores the evolution of the artist's work over the past seven decades.

ⁱ Yayoi Kusama, interviewed by Akira Tatehata, quoted in "It Feels Good to Be an Outsider": Yayoi Kusama on Avoiding Labels, Organising Orgies, and Battling Hardships', *The Phaidon Folio - Artspace*, 8 May 2017, [online](#).

Provenance

Galleria d'Arte del Naviglio, Milan
Internationale Galerij Orez, The Hague
Private Collection, Milan
Private Collection (acquired from the above)
Christie's, New York, 9 November 2005, lot 330
Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

Milan, Galerie M.E. Thelen, *Driving Image Show*, 29 January - 27 May 1966
London, Serpentine Gallery, *Yayoi Kusama*, 26 January - 19 March 2000
Kunstverein Braunschweig, *Yayoi Kusama*, 29 November 2003 - 8 February 2004
Warsaw, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, *Yayoi Kusama*, 6 April - 16 May 2004

Literature

Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective. A Bouquet of Love I Saw in the Universe, exh. cat., Gropius Bau, Berlin; Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2021 - 2022, p. 19 (illustrated)

Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968, exh. cat., Los Angeles County Museum of Art; New York, Museum of Modern Art; Minneapolis, The Walker Art Center and Tokyo, The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998 - 1999, index page (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A DISTINGUISHED ASIAN
COLLECTION

13 o♦*

Yoshitomo Nara

Lookin' for a Treasure

signed, titled and dated 'Nara [in Japanese] 95 "Lookin'
for a Treasure"' on the reverse

acrylic on canvas

120 x 110 cm. (47 1/4 x 43 1/4 in.)

Painted in 1995.

Estimate

Estimate On Request

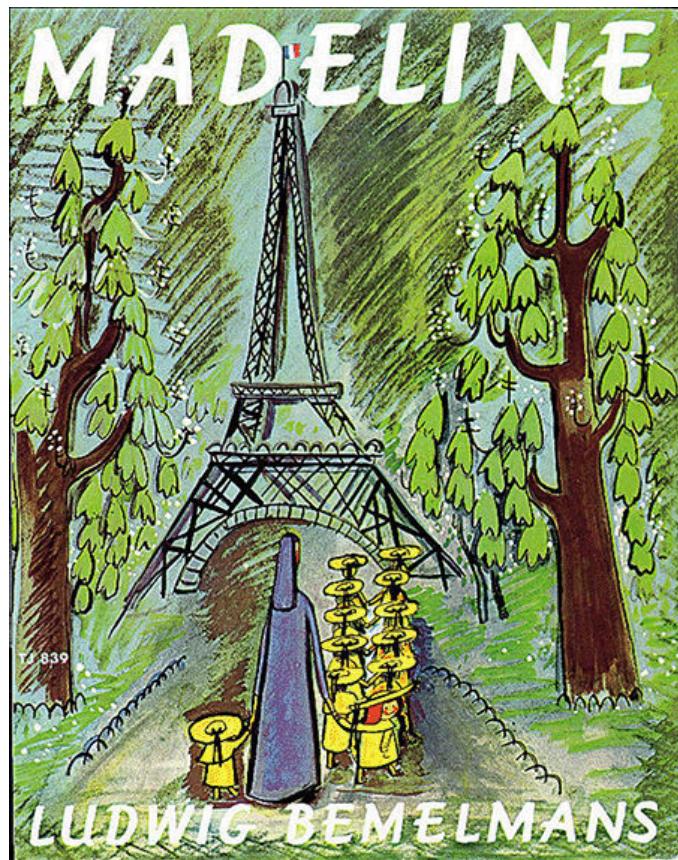
[Go to Lot](#)



Exceptionally rare in composition and arresting in its visual power, *Lookin' for a Treasure* is a singularly special painting by art world phenomenon, Yoshitomo Nara, whose 'Nara girls' have captivated audiences around the world. The protagonist embodies a unique combination of traits that are most highly sought after in the Japanese painter's oeuvre and are characteristic of his work from this period, as she is depicted full-length with a large, chickpea shaped head and pudgy cheeks, fixatedly piercing jellybean eyes, and with small, cherry-red lips which here, form the expression of a mischievous, confident smirk that quietly confronts the viewer.

In stark contrast to the pastel blue, pristine background of seemingly infinite depth built through thin layers of repainting, the protagonist in *Lookin' for a Treasure* wears a golden dress that is as vibrant as her sapphire-toned eyes. The subject's canary dress, along with their bob haircut, brings to mind the iconic appearance of *Madelaine*, the Parisian orphan schoolgirl who is the titular character of a media franchise that originated from children's books by Ludwig Bemelmans in 1939. Madeline is renowned for her courageous and outgoing nature, which was brought to life through animated adaptations starting in 1993. Interestingly, *Lookin' for a Treasure*, which similarly portrays a child whose mature confidence contradicts their youthful innocence, was created just two years after the animated series premiered.

Significantly, Nara's yellow-dressed muses are much more exclusive than their red and blue counterparts, as corroborated by the artist's printed catalogue raisonné. As few as 20 paintings of yellow-dressed girls feature in paintings before 2000, compared to more than 50 for blue and 80 for red. And yet, 3 out of 5 of Nara's highest results at auction are for works featuring yellow or yellow-red heroines, confirming that this is a particularly coveted trait within the artist's oeuvre.



Ludwig Bemelmans, Cover of *Madeline*, 1939

Perhaps this is due to the auspicious and sacred symbolism conjured by the colour golden-yellow, which is considered imperial in Chinese culture and reserved for the emperor, representing power, royalty, and prosperity. In Japan, yellow is considered the colour of nature and sunshine, whereas it symbolises joy and optimism in Western culture. Further, the meaning of the colour gold is multifaceted, often denoting generosity and compassion, as well as being synonymous with divinity and status in many religious settings including Renaissance art.

Indeed, these yellow-dressed Nara girls have also garnered notable institutional attention of museums around the world, with a number of canvases now held in the permanent collections of Aomori Museum of Art with *Lampflowers* (1993); The Tokushima Modern Art Museum with

Untitled (Broken Treasure) (1995); the Rubell Museum, Miami, with *Too Young to Die* (2001); the Yuz Museum, Shanghai, with *Jolie the Little Thinker* (2011); and the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, with *Miss Moonlight* (2020), to name a few.

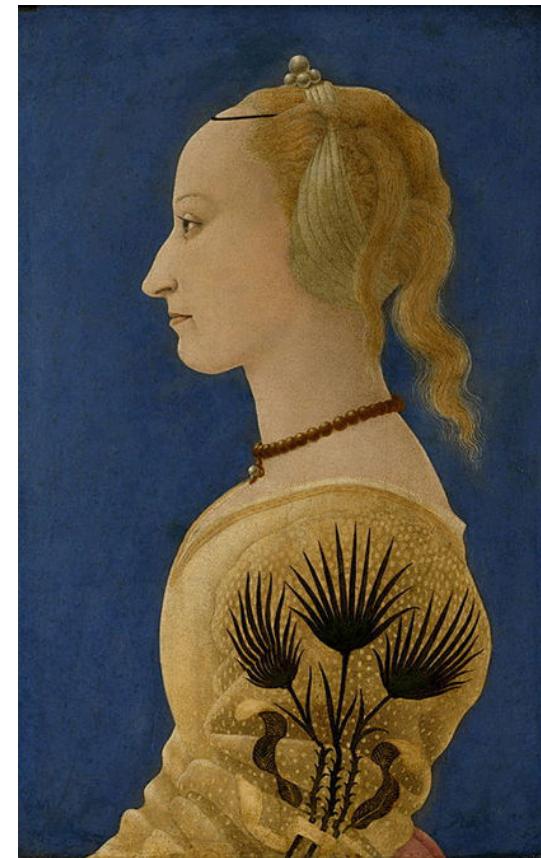
The Crucial Years in Germany

Lookin' for a Treasure was painted in 1995 – a particularly important, breakthrough year for Nara as his first monograph was published; Blum & Poe became his dealer and honoured him with a solo show in Los Angeles; and Nara presented his first major gallery exhibition in Tokyo with ‘In the Deepest Puddle’ at SCAI the Bathhouse which asserted his signature painting style. He was living in Cologne at the time, in a studio acquired for him by Jörg Johnen one year prior, who was the co-owner of Galerie Johnen + Schöttle where Nara had exhibited his work before graduating from the prestigious Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in 1993 with an advanced degree in painting.

This studio became the ‘center of [Nara’s] world’ⁱ where he worked in the tranquil darkness of nighttime to a soundtrack of punk, rock and folk melodies blasting from his speakers. Within these walls, Nara captured his unique blend of introspective emotions, perfectly translating his sense of contemplative loneliness and longing onto canvas, during a prolific period in which he created some of his most prized works.

“A rock musician can share mental impulses with his audience in real time depending on the beat or the warped guitar sound he play. Likewise, Nara realizes something with his inner self as he uses his materials and simple images. His materials are his guitar, while images are his melody, his beat.” — Takashi Azumaya

Lookin' for a Treasure is among the first of Nara’s canvases that showcase the softer, more refined painterly style he transitioned into during the mid-to-late-1990s, which has come to represent his most recognisable aesthetic. Inspired by a range of artists from early Renaissance painter Giotto to Balthus, this shift moved away from the rougher, more aggressive brushstroke, thick black outlines and bold colours reminiscent of Neo-Expressionism that were present in his earlier pieces executed in Germany during his six-year apprenticeship under A.R. Penck from 1988, as Nara’s figures began to attain ‘the illusion of three-dimensionality, coming out of the pastel background buoyed up by luminous shadows’ⁱⁱ.



Alessio Baldovinetti, *Portrait of a Lady in Yellow*, 1465, Collection of The National Gallery, London. Image: © The National Gallery, London/Scala, Florence

Whilst the painting is generously composed on a large format, the sheer craftsmanship of its artistry is striking when examined up close. What appears to be a pastel wash background is actually the result of multiple coats of semi-translucent acrylic that are painstakingly applied in successive layers, similar to the technique employed by renowned painter Peter Doig, who later became an influential instructor at the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf.

This process produces an infinite amount of tonal subtleties that bring attention to the interplay of fine surface textures while emitting a mellow glow that radiates deep from the work’s core. Whereas many Nara girls are painted against an off-white setting, in *Lookin' for a Treasure*, our

subject is situated amongst a vast expanse of sea or sky blue, which further evokes notions of exploration and adventure. However, with no indication of time or place, the result is both neutral and timeless, instead conveying an ambiguous sense of boundless possibility, especially when contrasted against the solid permanence of the figure who stands before us - their isolation representing the universally resonant sensation of feeling alone in our alienating world. As Nara has explained, 'these blank backgrounds reflected liberation from the places that I had become familiar with. These works were born not from confronting the other, but from confronting myself'.ⁱⁱⁱ



Kitagawa Utamaro, *The Oiran Hanaogi of Ogiya*, circa 1795-1796 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Howard Mansfield Collection, Purchase, Rogers Fund, 1936

Meticulously composed, *Lookin' for a Treasure* exudes an air of simplicity through its austere yet organic line which recalls the free-handed drawings found in classic Japanese cartoons from the 1950s, the works of renowned ukiyo-e woodblock artist Kitagawa Utamaro, or the bold colours often seen in vintage picture books or movies, such as the *Wizard of Oz*'s richly saturated yellow brick road. Moreover, this distinct aesthetic shares 'the same inherent subversiveness against 'classical style' like the faux-naïve paintings of Magic Realism, the German figurative paintings in the 1920s, and the early Lucien Freud (1922-2011).^{iv}

The Golden Girls

Having not appeared on the market for more than a decade, the present work forms part of a very small series of only 4 canvases painted in 1995 of Nara's doll-like protagonist wearing an umbrella-shaped, golden dress, set against a pale blue background. The other work referencing 'treasure' in its title has been [acquired by the Tokushima Modern Art Museum](#) for its permanent collection.

When the 'golden girls' are examined collectively, it can be hypothesised that Nara was interested in the fundamental elements that define our world at the time of their execution - earth, air, water and spirit. *Untitled (Broken Treasure)* depicts a figure clutching a plant, which could represent the earth, while *I'm Swaying in the Air* references our atmosphere. *Walking with Little Steps* portrays an androgynous, small child carrying a fishing rod, suggesting water. Finally, according to this perspective, *Lookin' for a Treasure* would thus refer to mysticism, magic, and the otherworldly, due to its protagonist engaging with the act of dowsing.



YNF1240 / P-1995-007 *Untitled (Broken Treasure)* acrylic on canvas 150 x 150 cm. 1995 Collection of The Tokushima Modern Art Museum Artwork: © Yoshitomo Nara



YNF1243 / P-1995-010 *Lookin' for a Treasure* acrylic on canvas 120 x 110 cm. 1995 The present lot

Looking for Treasure

"Some Sorcerers do boast they have a Rod, Gather'd with Vowes and Sacrifice, And (borne about) will strangely nod To hidden Treasure where it lies; Mankind is (sure) that Rod divine, For to the Wealthiest (ever) they incline." — Virgula Divina, Written by Samuel Sheppard, from Epigrams theological, philosophical, and romantick (1651)

The title of the present work alludes to the pair of L-shaped dowsing prongs the child points forward in *Lookin' for a Treasure*, which captures her adventurous spirit as she searches intently. Dowsing has a long and diverse history in Germany as a type of divination, with many distinct practitioners and schools of thought arising over the years, and it is probable Nara first became acquainted with it during his time in Europe. The theory behind the practice suggests that divining tools such as a forked stick or prongs react to subtle vibrations or energy fields emanating from water, minerals, or other hidden treasures, guiding the dowser to their hidden locations. In many cultures, dowsing is considered a supernatural practice, with practitioners claiming to possess mystical abilities.

For Nara—an artist who at the time was on the brink of international success—the ideas *Lookin' for a Treasure* conveys of discovery and exploration serve as a powerful metaphor for the artist's own journey. This can be traced from his largely isolated childhood in postwar Hirosaki (a small castle town over 400 miles from Tokyo), where Nara had two working parents and was thus largely left up to his own devices, to his paths traversed at Musashino Art University in Tokyo, Aichi Prefectural University of Fine Arts and Music near Nagoya, and later in Germany. Additionally, Nara's deep love for music, his fascination with different subcultures, and his community involvement have all played important roles in shaping his identity. In this light, the image of the Nara girl in *Lookin' for a Treasure* can be viewed as a reflection of Nara himself, illuminating his own pursuit for development in both his art, and sense of self, during these formative years.

Collector's Digest

- *Lookin' for a Treasure* is a masterpiece that encapsulates the very best of Nara's practice at a time where institutional and critical acknowledgement of the artist is at an all-time high and his market is stronger than ever, as evidenced by Nara's top 10 auction prices being set in the past 4 years. This includes *Missing in Action* (2000), the current second-highest result which was set by Phillips Hong Kong in 2021, as well as *Hothouse Doll* (1995) which achieved a second-highest record at the time, when Phillips Hong Kong sold it in 2020.

- Having been the subject of extensive exhibitions at key galleries and institutions around the world, Nara has most recently been honoured with important solo shows at museums that include the Art Gallery of Western Australia in Perth, which is currently ongoing until 25 June 2023; Yuz Museum in Shanghai in 2022-2023; Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2021-2022; Dallas Contemporary in 2021; Kuandu Museum of Arts in Taipei in 2021; and the Rubell Family Collection in Miami in 2020-2021, to highlight a few.
- Further, Nara's work has been on the covers of records by bands such as Shonen Knife, REM, The Star Club, The Birdy Num Nums and many more, as well as the covers of books by writers such as Banana Yoshimoto, Hijo Tanaka, and Riichi Nakaba. In December 2022, Nara released his second collaboration with fashion designer Stella McCartney.
- Work by Nara is held in the most important institutions around the globe, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; the British Museum, London; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Australia, among others.

ⁱYoshitomo Nara, quoted in Bijutsu Shuppan-Sha, ed., *Yoshitomo Nara: The Complete BT Archives 1991-2013*, Tokyo, 2013, p. 44

ⁱⁱMidori Matsui, 'A Gaze from Outside: Merits of the Minor in Yoshitomo Nara's Painting', in exh. cat., Yokohama Museum of Art, *Nara Yoshitomo: I Don't Mind, If You Forget Me*, 2001, p. 168

ⁱⁱⁱYoshitomo Nara, *The Little Start Dweller*, Taipei, 2004, p. 60

^{iv}Midori Matsui, *New Japanese Painting in 1990s*, Tokyo, 1999, p. 12

Provenance

Galerie d'Eendt, Amsterdam

Private Collection (acquired from the above in 1995)

Private Collection (acquired from the above in 2008)

Christie's, Hong Kong, 26 November 2011, lot 1053

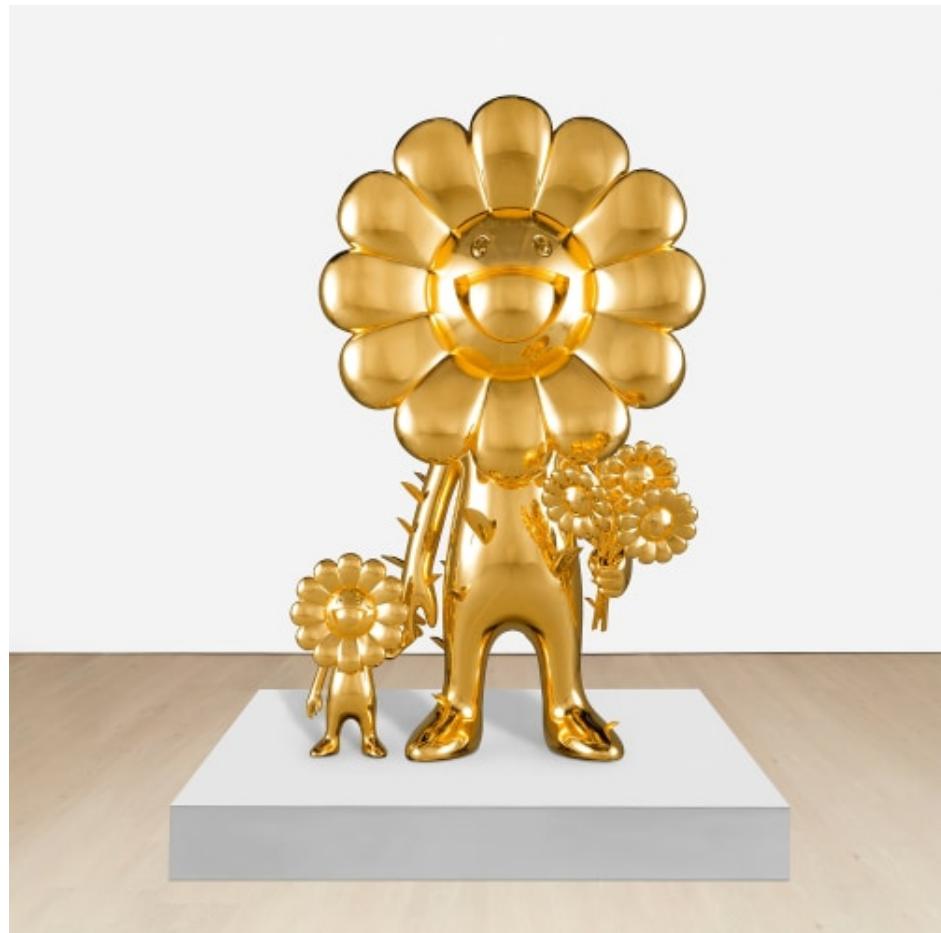
Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Literature

Noriko Miyamura and Shinko Suzuki, eds., *Yoshitomo Nara: The Complete Works Volume 1: Paintings, Sculptures, Editions, Photographs 1984-2010*, Tokyo, 2011, no. P-1995-010, p. 382 (illustrated, p. 114)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



14 *

Takashi Murakami

Flower Parent and Child

signed and dated 'TAKASHI 2020'

gold leaf on bronze

248.5 x 152.3 x 115.3 cm. (97 7/8 x 59 7/8 x 45 3/8 in.)

Executed 2018-2020, this work is unique, and is
accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by
Perrotin Gallery.

Estimate

HK\$15,500,000 — 23,500,000

€1,840,000 — 2,790,000

\$1,990,000 — 3,010,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Dazzling in its incandescent splendour, Takashi Murakami's *Flower Parent and Child* is masterfully produced in gilded gold leaf. Demonstrating a profound understanding of a globalised contemporary culture, Murakami is widely recognised as an innovator and cultural synthesiser of our time. Exemplifying the artist's wholly unique visual lexicon, *Flower Parent and Child* presents an original response to the conditions and sensibilities of a contemporary era.

Golden Splendour

Flower Parent and Child features a smooth and seductive surface that is resplendently reflective. Murakami's most iconic motif – the flower, takes on the role of a parent and child, holding hands and standing in synchronicity. Later recreated as a 10 metre tall public sculpture in Roppongi, Tokyo, Murakami had envisioned that families would move around to take in the full scope of *Flower Parent and Child*.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eTau6IXFTM&ab_channel=RoppongiHills

The Story of *Flower Parent and Child*, Roppongi Hills

Full of intricacy in its gold leaf texture and decorated on all sides, the sculpture is designed to be viewed from all angles, providing compositional complexity that is impossible to absorb in one glance. Demanding movement from its viewer, the current sculpture is a conversational piece that allows families to find resonance through an interactive experience, as they mirror the family bond shown in the work.

"...it's a sculpture decorated with 'flower' motifs where a family could communicate with one another to find out how these motifs relate to each other. In short, when I created this sculpture, I had to write a scenario to imagine if those 'communication' between a parent and a child would work out or not when going 360 degrees around this sculpture." — Takashi Murakami

Visually striking, *Flower Parent and Child* is a paradigm of Murakami's multidisciplinary oeuvre that masterfully combines contemporary Pop aesthetic with traditional *Nihonga* techniques. With a background in Japanese painting, Murakami frequently makes references to works by Japanese masters such as Ogata Kōrin's famous folding screens through the use of metallic gold, whilst simultaneously evoking statues found in ancient temples and shrines through the use of gold leaf in his sculptures.



Ogata Kōrin, *Red and White Plum Blossoms*, 18th century Collection of the MOA Museum, Atami, Japan
Image: akg-images / Album

Best known for his paintings on folding screens that profoundly impacted many Western painters, such as Gustav Klimt, Ogata Kōrin often depicted scenery that masterfully combines abstraction and naturalism. *Red and White Plum Blossoms* portrays a dreamlike landscape that is both abstract yet opulent – two flowering trees with writhing branches on both sides of a flowing river are set against subtle grids of gold leaf, lending the painting its ethereal glow. Devoid of a sense of depth within the composition, the scene appears to be flat, denying a specific sense of place or time.

"People react to shiny things but it's not so much about how beautiful they are, but rather about the materials that have been used. Historically speaking, the colour, gold, more precisely gold leaf has been used in many temples and shrines and other historical objects. Especially since my background is in Japanese painting, I have been training to use such gold leaf. Drawing from such traditional Japanese paintings, I naturally chose gold for the colour to use for my new sculpture." — Takashi Murakami

A Symbol of Hope, Happiness, and Family



Pablo Picasso, *Mother and Child*, 1921 Art Institute of Chicago Image: The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY/ Scala, Florence, © 2023 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Flower Parent and Child's uniqueness also lies in its defiance of gender norms: going against an historically established pictorial tradition which represents parenthood only in its female declination, Murakami sculpture allows viewers of any gender to identify with the adult floral figure. Throughout centuries, in Western and non-Western art, endless are the examples of paintings that revolve around the theme of maternity, and the bond between mother and child, as in the artworks shown below. These depictions contribute to promoting a stereotype according to which women's lives and identities within a society are entirely fulfilled only through procreation and motherhood. The generic term 'parent', which Murakami chooses to title his work, gives recognition to any form of parenting, including fatherhood.

Murakami's Iconic Flower

Murakami is generally acknowledged to be the father of the highly popular two-dimensional style and artistic theory known as *Superflat*. At the origin of this movement are the flat aesthetics of Japanese traditional art and the more recent trend of 2D graphics, which includes anime and manga. The mixture of these two visual expressions has converted into the contemporary hybrid *Superflat* style, which pays homage to the past and the present of Japanese art and culture.

The flower, Murakami's signature motif and an almost omnipresent element of his work, embodies a painful historical contradiction: behind the artist's iconic cartoonish floral figures, their bright smiles and enthusiastic expressions lies in fact a hidden, profound collective trauma. The spiral of violence and upheaval which haunted Japan for decades since World War II, the psychological and physical consequences of the Japanese defeat and the devastating atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki left in the country's post-war generations a repressed yet drastic sense of fear and disheartenment. The spread of Pop culture and colourful child-like aesthetics in the second half of the 20th century are the country's radical response to the suffering, an attempt to transmit a sense of light-heartedness and airiness in a climate of communal grief.

In 'Earth in My Window', a 2012 essay, Murakami reflects on post-war consumeristic Japanese society and the infantilising Japanese Pop aesthetics, delving into the source of contemporary *kawaii* culture'. He argues: 'from social mores to art and culture, everything is super two-dimensional. *Kawaii* (cute) culture has become a living entity that pervades everything. With a population heedless of the cost of embracing immaturity, the nation is in the throes of a dilemma: a preoccupation with anti-aging may conquer not only the human heart, but also the body.' For the artist, Japan has become a fascinating paradox: 'a utopian society as fully regulated as the science-fiction world George Orwell envisioned in 1984: comfortable, happy, fashionable—a world nearly devoid of discriminatory impulses.'ⁱ

Collector's Digest

- Born in Tokyo in 1962, Takashi Murakami studied Japanese painting at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, where he received a Bachelor in Fine Arts in 1986, and a Ph.D. in 1993.
- Trained in Japanese traditional painting, the artist has later become the main exponent of the *Superflat* movement, a contemporary hybrid form of artistic representation which draws inspiration from the *Nihonga* traditional style and from Japanese Pop cultural elements. In 2001, he founded Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd., an art production company with offices in Tokyo and New York.

-
- Interested in the relations between fine arts and the commercial world, Murakami regularly collaborates with fashion and design brands: his most notable artistic partnerships include those with Supreme, Uniqlo, Crocs, Louis Vuitton and Casio.
 - Among his latest exhibitions are *Takashi Murakami: Stepping on the Tail of a Rainbow* at The Broad, Los Angeles ([21 May - 25 September 2022](#)) and *Takashi Murakami: An Arrow Through History* at Gagosian New York ([11 May - 25 June 2022](#)).

ⁱ Takashi Murakami, translated by Linda Hoaglund, ‘Earth in My Window’, *Gwern*, 3 April 2012,
[online](#)

Provenance

Perrotin Gallery, Hong Kong

Acquired from the above by the present owner

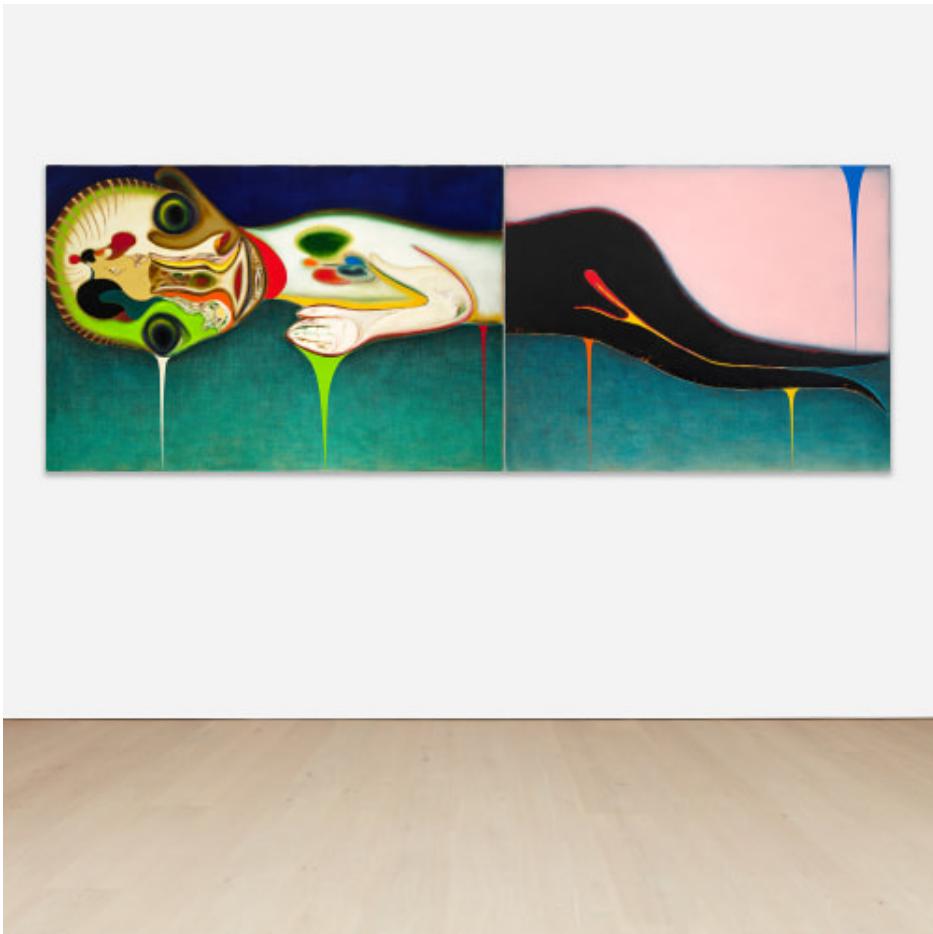
Exhibited

Hong Kong, Tai Kwun, *Murakami vs. Murakami*, 1 June - 1 September 2019 (similar example exhibited)

Tokyo, Roppongi Hill, *Flower Family*, 26 November 2020 - 26 September 2021 (similar example exhibited)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



15

Izumi Kato

Untitled

signed and dated '2017 KATO [in English and Kanji]' on the reverse of the left panel

oil on canvas, diptych

overall 130.5 x 356 cm. (51 3/8 x 140 1/8 in.)

Painted in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000

€478,000 — 717,000

\$513,000 — 769,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Monumental, iridescent, serene and fantastical, Japanese artist Izumi Kato's *Untitled* marks the artist's most illustrious offering to ever debut in auction. Spanning over three meters in length, Kato's iconic humanoid form with bulbous head and eyes suspends mid-air in child's pose, its slim and graceful body abruptly interrupted by the waist yet fading enigmatically into the surroundings through painterly beams. Arrestingly primitive yet executed with anatomical precision, exquisitely contrasting colours highlight the minimalist contour and the body's heart and face, amplifying Kato's vision of human transcendence. Indeed, the artist's profound connection with his native Japanese spiritual folklores and decade-long refinement of his archetypes culminate in the superbly dramatic symbol that dominates *Untitled*. Despite tremendous market interest in the artist, a canvas of this scale remains impressively unprecedented in public auction.



Detail of the present work

No One and Nowhere

Izumi Kato's investigation of his emblematic silhouettes—featuring globular eyes as echoed by rounded visages and faded limbs—commenced at the very initial stage of his artistic career in the 1990s. Born and raised in Shimane, by the Sea of Japan, the artist has grown up acquainted with religious folklore. The figurines can be interpreted as reincarnations of *kami*—spirits who are present in the environment, mortal beings, and souls of the dead who have parted from their mortal envelopes—to occupy a parallel universe, not to be encountered by humans.

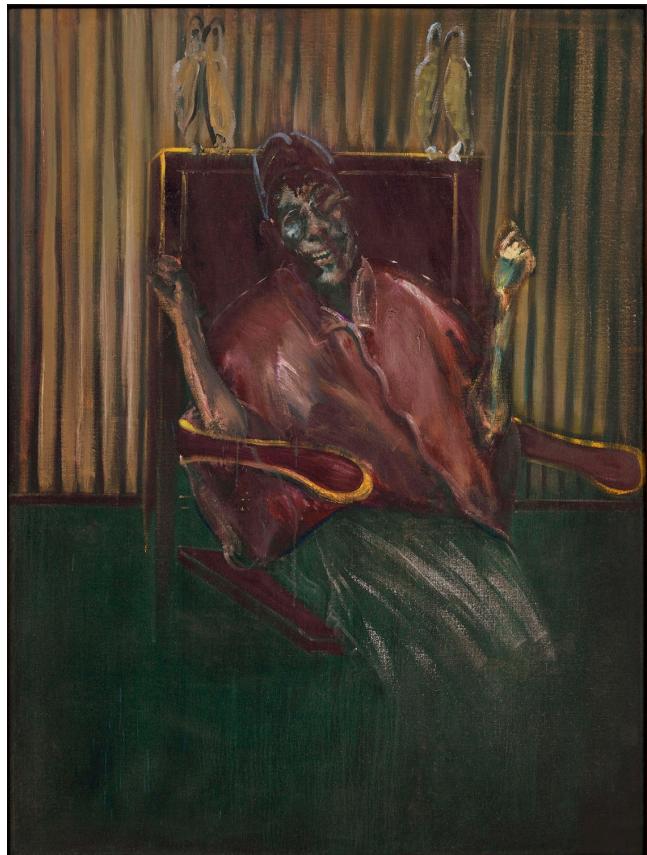
"They are no one and nowhere." — Izumi Kato

Sharply truncated at the waist to deny any individuality, the contour in the present work is notably absent of gender, identity, or any worldly possessions. The wonderfully bold colours of the background absorb the figure into a vacuum, curating an alternative universe devoid of time and space. In Kato's *Untitled*, the fetal position of the figure, reminiscent of a child in a mother's womb, undresses all mankind to their most unadorned state as a powerful expression of universality.

"I am interested in the meaning of people's lives. I believe this is where art is rooted and I realized afresh that continuing my work could not be meaningless." — Izumi Kato

The hollowed oval eyes, minimalistic facial features, and exuberant colours of Izumi Kato's otherworldly creature in *Untitled* also cite inspiration from African masks worn in religious ceremonies as medium to bridge the mortals with the invisible powers and departed ancestors. While Kato traces the profound art historical legacy of quoting African tribal art alongside masters such as Pablo Picasso, he nevertheless seamlessly dawns his enigmatic creature as an agent of a communal spirituality transcending history, religion, and geography. Simultaneously, the concept of utilizing masks to embody the other addresses the transience of identity, confronting the quintessentially modern question of one's individuality in an increasingly globalized society. Indeed, *Untitled* towers as the finest demonstration of how Kato—a 'master of portraiture' regarded by renowned collector Dr. Ryutaro Takahashi—"doesn't simply depict an individual, or capture the subconscious... [but] exposes the psychological depths of the era in which it was painted."ⁱ

Despite depicting a singular feature of immense size, the artwork transforms into an instrument which strips down the simulacrum of modern human existence in bold confrontation with its audience. In over three decades of ceaseless efforts, Kato has perfected this existential concept, raising the open-ended question of whether to interpret the present work as brutal erasure of individuality or commiserate reminder of collective spirituality. Such exploration of complex and fluid existence recalls the artist's greatest muses, Francis Bacon and Vincent Van Gogh.



Francis Bacon, *Pope with Owls*, oil on canvas, circa 1958 Sold by Phillips New York for US\$33,000,000, 17 November 2021 Artwork: © 2023 Estate of Francis Bacon/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London

The Human Touch

Izumi Kato's artistic career was interrupted after graduating with an oil painting degree from Musashino University in Japan in 1992. Instead of becoming a professional artist, Kato pursued various labour-intensive roles in light of Japan's economic downfall at the time. However, once he returns to painting at the age of thirty, his intimate encounters with the human physicality would inform Kato's unwavering pursuit in the body as a vessel for its forms, practices, and interaction

with the surroundings.

"I'd say the first big turning point in my work was the transition to oils and working with my hands." — Izumi Kato

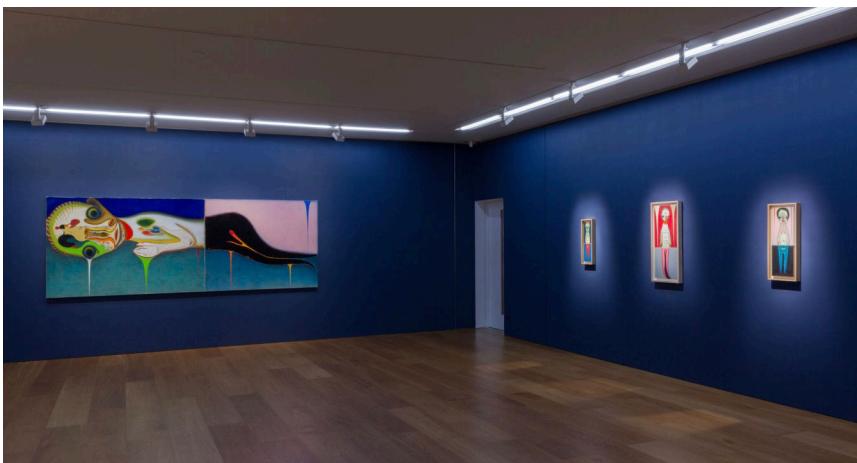
Executing his paintings with a latex-gloved hand, Kato rids the intermediary between the artist and his canvas. In *Untitled*, to create the rich textures of the face, the artist first applies paint to his hands to directly colour the canvas. Afterwards, a spatula is employed to add multiple layers of paint as the background. Kato's artistic practice transports vivacity, as he caresses the canvas with his hands to breathe life into the silhouette's pupils, nose, mouth, and mind—all vessels of humanity. Illustrating a uniquely intimate human-to-human connection, Kato's creation of an anthropomorphic subject in *Untitled* impressively integrates his utmost craftsmanship into his oeuvre. Evoking the artist's personal previous endeavours, *Untitled* simultaneously addresses the universal spirituality that Kato so splendidly crafted.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yNM5oo6Zm4&ab_channel=GaleriePerrotin

Izumi Kato - Galerie Perrotin, New York 2016

Collector's Digest

- Ever since the artist's participation in the Venice Biennale on behalf of Japan in 2007, regarded as one of the most venerable prestige for a living artist, Izumi Kato's profound practices have garnered well-deserved fanfare. International institutions have honoured the artist with exhibitions at CHAT Hong Kong (2020), the Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing (2020), the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum (2020), and an ongoing exhibition at the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art in Japan. The present work, in particular, was crowned the centrepiece of the artist's solo exhibition in Perrotin Hong Kong in 2018.



Installation view of the current work at Perrotin, Hong Kong, 19 January - 6 March 2018 Image: Ringo Cheung, Artwork: Courtesy the artist and Perrotin. © 2018 Izumi Kato

- Cementing his auction record in 2021 at Phillips Hong Kong, Izumi Kato has recently become one of the most sought-after artists of our time. Ten of the artist's highest auction records—all achieved within the past year or so—attest to his popularity among collectors. On an unprecedented scale, the Japanese sensation's *Untitled* marks Kato's most prestigious auction offering with only more momentum for the artist to witness.



Izumi Kato, *Untitled*, 2008 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong for HK\$11,745,000, 30 November 2021
Artwork: © 2008 Izumi Kato

ⁱ Dr. Ryutaro Takahashi, quoted in 'The Future That Should Come', *Izumi Kato*, Italy, 2020, p. 23

Provenance

Perrotin Gallery, Hong Kong
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Hong Kong, Perrotin Gallery, *Izumi Kato*, 19 January - 6 March 2018

Literature

Izumi Kato, 'Interview: Izumi Kato', *Post-ism*, 18 June 2018, online (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT SOUTHEAST ASIAN COLLECTION

16

Stanley Whitney

The Last Cowboy Song

signed, titled and dated "The Last Cowboy Song" 2019
Stanley Whitney' on the reverse

oil on linen

183 x 183 cm. (72 x 72 in.)

Painted in 2019.

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000

€475,000 — 713,000

\$513,000 — 769,000

[Go to Lot](#)

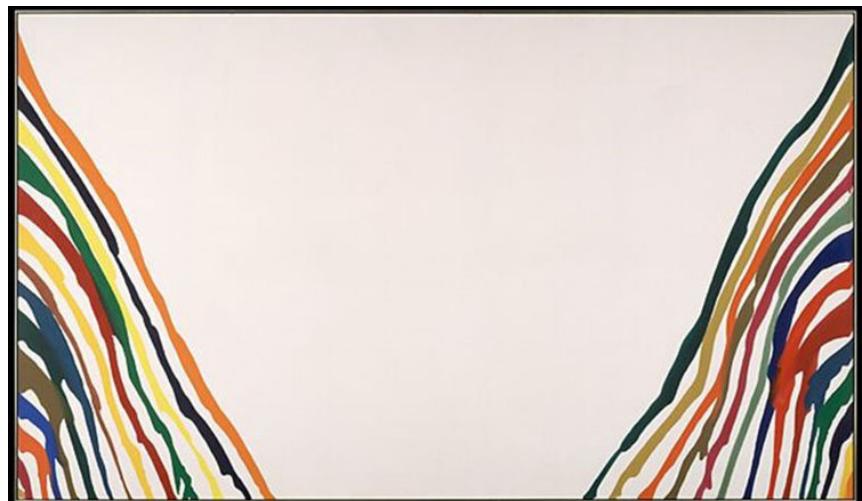


"I knew I wasn't a storyteller. I felt that art should be something that encompassed more. I read a lot of poetry. I didn't know any poets, but I knew that I wanted my work to be more than one single story." — Stanley Whitney

All-encompassing is an unusual way to describe a painting, given the limitation of dimension and subject matter, yet it precisely defines the canvas of Stanley Whitney. Drawing influences from Renaissance painting to jazz music, Whitney's colour grid paintings are integral to the current discourse of abstract painting in contemporary art. He developed his signature style in the 1970s when he discovered the paintings of Morris Louis, which enlightened his intuitive sense of pure colour exploration. Since then, he has been an active proponent of colour field painting and highly regarded for his spontaneous approach.

Integral to Whitney's approach to painting is the process by which he is able to 'lay two colours so close to each other and not trap them, but rather allow air for the canvas to breath'.ⁱ The present lot, *The Last Cowboy Song* painted in 2019 exemplifies Whitney's distinctive approach to painting that gives complete autonomy to colours. A sense of composure is formed between the loosely structured grids and the rhythmic hues stacked against one another. To create his signature style, Whitney stacks irregular-shaped rectangles of colour within a square format canvas and works in a sequential manner, moving methodically from one square to the next, row after row, from left to right, top to bottom. In doing so, Whitney is able to let the colour form the structure rather than having a structure to fill in the colour.

Deeply inspired by the improvisational nature of jazz music, the present painting is composed similarly to musical scores, with each colour denoting a note in sequence combined to form a unique visual melody. The spontaneous and intuitive composition of colour in Whitney's paintings lends each of his canvas its own distinctive character and substance.



Morris Louis, *Alpha-Pi*, 1960 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource/Scala, Florence,

Artwork: © 2023 Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), Rights Administered by Artist Rights Society (ARS), New York, All Rights Reserved

"I want everything in the paintings—the complexity of the world." — Stanley Whitney

Reinventing the Modernist Grid

From the representation of reality to the abstract colour field canvas born at the beginning of the twentieth century, artists throughout history have attempted to represent certain aspects of the world through art, while pioneers like Kazimir Malevich and Marcel Duchamp introduced the non-representational and conceptual into the narrative of art history and proclaimed the end of painting. The subsequent rise of monochrome painting was a timely response to look beyond the confines of dimension, materiality, context and psychological associations. Reducing painting to its bare essentials as paint on canvas, whereby the colour is the subject matter itself, Whitney composes his canvas through spontaneous interactions between forms, colours and lines, giving a

structured autonomy to his paintings.

Whitney managed to break away from the modernist concept of the grid as both a formal and ideological device representative of the urban cityscape that confines one's physical space and system of thought. For Whitney, the structure of the grid provides the colours with a space to perform and allows him to reconcile two previously opposing poles in his practice or, as he described in one interview 'something as open as Pollock but as structured as Mondrian'.ⁱⁱ With colour itself emerging as the organising principle in his works, Whitney unlocked the structural confines of the grid by focusing on the interaction between colours, and the visual dialogues formed in his compositions. Free from the constraints of colour theory and psychological associations, Whitney relies on what he terms the 'magic' of colour: 'I lay a colour down and that colour calls another colour, and then it's a balancing act. You don't want to have something dominate something else, and you want to have good transitions'.ⁱⁱⁱ

Collector's Digest

- Born in Philadelphia in 1956, and drawing on a wealth of art historical references, Stanley Whitney has played a central role in the evolution of contemporary abstract painting. Examples of his works can be found in the prestigious public collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Madazzino d'Arte Moderna, Rome; and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.
- Following recent solo exhibitions at the Modern Art Museum, Fort Worth and the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, Whitney is currently receiving widespread critical attention. Most recently, his work was on display at Palazzo Tiepolo Passi, Venice, his solo exhibition *The Italian Paintings* running alongside the 59th International Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.

ⁱ Stanley Whitney and Andrianna Campbell, 'Stanley Whitney discusses painting and his show at the Studio Museum in Harlem', *Artforum*, 14 July 2015, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Stanley Whitney quoted in Alteronce Gumby, 'Oral History Project: Stanley Whitney by Alteronce Gumby', *BOMB Magazine*, 21 April 2015, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid.*

Provenance

Lisson Gallery, London

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT

17 o◆

Gerhard Richter

Strip (923-23)

signed, numbered and dated '923-23 Richter 2012' on
the reverse

digital print mounted on Aludibond, in artist's frame
sheet 51 x 142.9 cm. (20 1/8 x 56 1/4 in.)
artist's frame 69 x 158 cm. (27 1/8 x 62 1/4 in.)
Executed in 2012.

Estimate

HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000
€176,000 — 293,000
\$192,000 — 321,000



[Go to Lot](#)



Gerhard Richter's monumental *Strip* paintings demonstrate a vigorous and ingenious interrogation into the possibilities of painting. Richter methodically applied the technology of photography and digital editing to construct multiple distinct abstract paintings from one, and *Strip* (923-23) is a unique example of this meticulous system of splitting, mirroring, and recombining the divided parts of an original painting. Richter's approach in creating his *Strip* paintings was exacting, beginning by dissecting a digital photograph of his 1990 work *Abstract Painting* 724-4 first into two vertical sections and then joining each half with its mirror image.



Left: The present lot Right: Gerhard Richter, *Abstract Painting* 724-4, 1990 Artwork: © Gerhard Richter 2023 (0073)

He repeated this process, splitting the two into four, then four into eight, and so on, until 8,190 colorful strips remained, each 8.8 mm wide. Richter then mirrored each of these vertical bands of color, stretching the varying pigmentation of each strip horizontally over a chosen length. He further dissected these resulting paintings into details that he then collaged in unique combinations to create his final works.

An Experimental Perspective on the Future of Painting

Richter's *Strip* paintings are a testament to the artist's profoundly intelligent understanding and interrogation of the medium of painting. Taking up the mantle of countless painters who came before him, Richter has created a new view of what is possible within the medium. This effort was not his first foray into the realm of rigorous and systematic experimentation. In fact, his *Strip* paintings are a continuation of the conversation he initiated in the 1960s with his color charts, which began as an unsystematic reference to the found images of Pop art but grew into a methodical investigation of the mathematical possibilities of color. In his 1974 painting *4096 Colours*, which marked the culmination of his color chart research, Richter created a system that enabled him to represent all possible color shades in one artwork.

Though his procedure for creating the color chart paintings differs from his more recent endeavor to technologize his paintings in his *Strip* series, in both instances the artist has created a scrupulous logic by which his creative process abides, opening the work, through his detailed and analytical approach, to questions about the endless untapped potential for two-dimensional pictorial art.



Gerhard Richter, *4096 Colours*, 1974 Artwork: © Gerhard Richter 2023 (0073)

Richter's project in *Strip* (923-23) questions the direction in which painting is headed as a medium and at the same time provides a glimpse of what possibilities exist beyond traditional hand-painted art. Richter does not believe that traditional painting is a dying art form, saying that

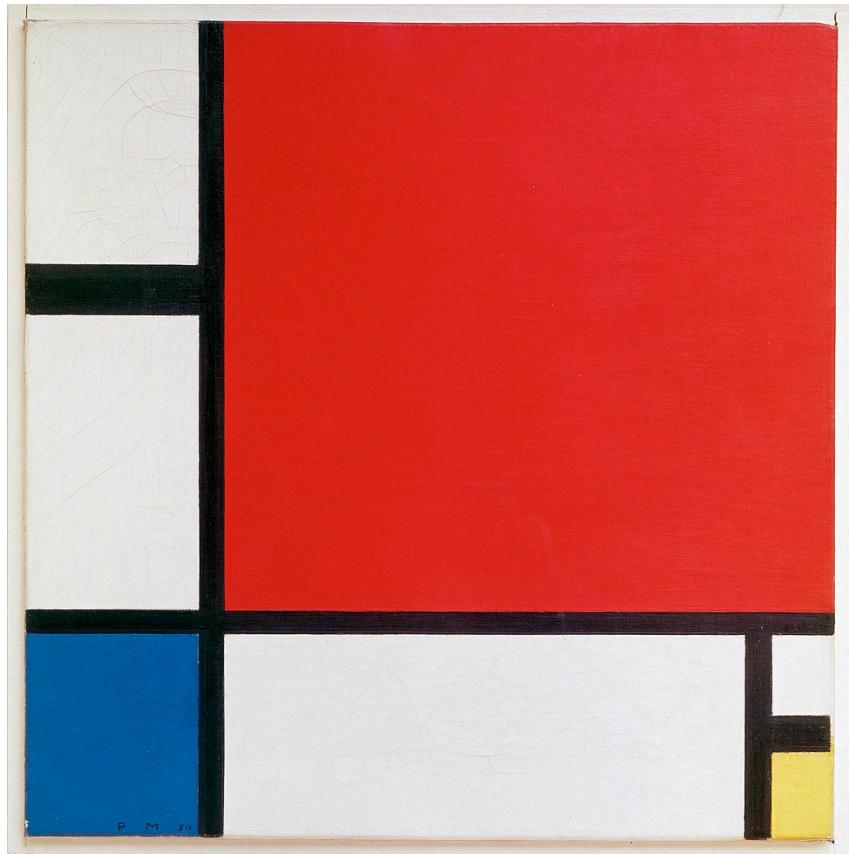
'people won't stop painting, just as they won't stop making music or dancing.' However, he is acutely aware of the potential avenues of exploration that photography and technology open up for the practice of painting, and works such as *Strip* (923-23) are a testament to his intuitive grasp of the new directions that painting can take as a medium.

Richter has incorporated photography into his paintings since the 1960s, when he first painted from photographs projected on his canvases, blurring his subjects through the process of reproduction. His engagement in the dialogue between photography and painting continued decades later when he began painting directly on photographs. *Strip* (923-23) marks a continuation of his interrogation of the relationship between painting and photography. Interestingly, the photographs that were the basis for his *Strip* paintings were taken and processed by the same company that Dusseldorf photographers Thomas Struth and Andreas Gursky employed, using the same techniques to produce immensely different results.

Chance as Theme and Method

"Chance is a given, unpredictable, chaotic, the basis. And we try to control that by intervening, giving form to chance, putting it to use." – Gerhard Richter

Like his predecessor, Piet Mondrian, Richter plays with the balance between chance and intention, random potentiality, and direct choice. In his abstract, sparse grid canvases that speak to what he deemed the purest form of abstraction, Mondrian enacts a careful dance between random and self-determined artistic decisions. Similarly, in his *Strip* paintings, Richter plays with the give and take of chance and intentionality. However, Richter's game of chance has different rules; he introduces the added variable of technology, using all of the colors available to him within his original *Abstract Painting* 724-4, whereas Mondrian hand paints solely with the primaries, black, and white.



Piet Mondrian, *Composition II in Red, Blue, and Yellow*, 1930, Kunsthaus, Zurich

Richter has famously studied how happenstance influences production with his invention of the squeegee technique, using the broad-shaped tool to scrape away impasto from his canvases and create spontaneous, abstract symphonies of form and color. Richter also experimented with random probability in his later color chart paintings, in which he arranged the color squares according to chance. Richter's method of generating his *Strip* paintings was initially entirely at the mercy of probability, as each digital print represented the expansive mirroring of a random vertical strip of his original oil painting. However, in the last step of his process of breaking down and rebuilding his painting into many other iterations, Richter intervened. Rather than leave the appearance of the final work up to providence alone, he augmented his result by again bisecting

Gerhard Richter

the strip pieces and combining specifically chosen elements from them in collage in order to create a more visually appealing composition.

Collector's Digest

- A tremendously influential powerhouse of contemporary art, Gerhard Richter was born in Dresden in 1932 and came of age during a period of intense political and cultural change. Richter studied art first at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts in 1951 and then at the Dusseldorf Academy in 1961, before embarking on a flourishing career that has spanned several decades. Continuing to explore the tensions between color, chance, abstraction, and representation, his oeuvre has made a considerable mark on art history. At age 91, Richter is known as arguably the most famous and influential living contemporary artist of his time.
- The period in which he made *Strip* (923-23) marked considerable successes for Richter, with solo shows at Tate Modern, London in 2011; Centre Pompidou, Paris, France, in 2012 and Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany in 2012 as well. More recently, in 2022 his work was shown in three exhibitions in Germany, as well as The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, and this March works from the past seven years will be shown at the Zvirner gallery in New York City.

Provenance

Marian Goodman Gallery, New York

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2012

Exhibited

New York, Marian Goodman Gallery, *Gerhard Richter: Painting 2012*, 12 September - 13 October 2012, n. p. (illustrated)

Literature

Dietmar Elger, *Gerhard Richter: Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 6: Nos. 900-957 (2007-2019)*, Berlin, 2022, no. 923-23, p. 287 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT

18 *

Roy Lichtenstein

Reflections on Brushstrokes

signed and dated 'R. Lichtenstein 90' on the reverse
oil and magna on canvas

148.3 x 222.4 cm. (58 3/8 x 87 1/2 in.)

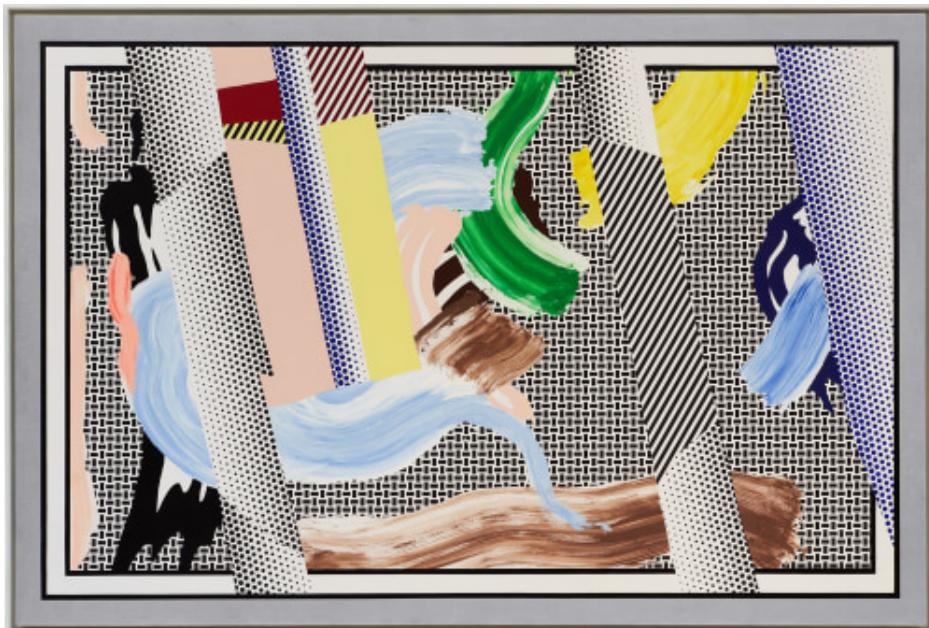
Executed in 1990.

Estimate

HK\$14,000,000 — 19,000,000

€1,650,000 — 2,240,000

\$1,790,000 — 2,440,000



[Go to Lot](#)



“Everything is a brushstroke... That’s the idea. It gives me a certain freedom.”

— Roy Lichtenstein in BOMB Magazine, 1986

‘All that is Art’ in One Painting

In rare combination of Roy Lichtenstein’s two most practiced subjects, *Reflections on Brushstrokes* encapsulates the American pop icon’s most refined craft and revolutionary concepts. Joining the canonical art historical discussion on image-making, this magnum opus firmly grounds itself within the twentieth century American zeitgeist. In balancing an inherently academic investigation with the artist’s distinctively light-hearted charm, the masterpiece mimics a grand drama. Intrigue sizzles as a reflective silver frame stages the pictorial plane. Resting on controlled industrial patterns, sinuous and colourful paint strokes serve as crescendos that demand the viewer’s attention to the artist’s lingering presence. Building suspense to the narrative, oblique stripes featuring Lichtenstein’s signature Ben-day dots interrupt the performance. Evoking the experience of observing an image under glass, the reflective nature of these bands generate an intentional trompe l’oeil, leaving the audience bedazzled.

*“I like the idea of the brushstroke on (printed canvas), and then with reflections it is even better. That’s why I like *Reflections on Brushstrokes*. It shows all of the paint and it has the glass in front, and the canvas and brushstrokes, so it encompasses all that is art – more or less.” — Roy Lichtenstein*

Indeed, multiple decades of tireless repetitions on brushstrokes and reflections have led to this exquisite moment. *Reflections on Brushstrokes* marks a monumental breakthrough in Lichtenstein’s oeuvre: no longer are advertising imageries of women or bold letters needed to recall post-war American sentiments. The artist has now masterfully channelled the spirit of pop art to painting’s purest languages, through primary colours and industrial patterns that resonate with mass culture. Simultaneously, in dissecting artistic components with surgical precision, Lichtenstein positions himself within the art historical canon, fine tuning Georges Seurat’s pointillism and drawing inspirations from Claude Monet’s reflective surfaces.

Brushstrokes as Grand Gestures

Brushstrokes as Grand Gestures

A vanguard of American pop art, Roy Lichtenstein harnesses the quotidian imageries of cartoon and commercial printing patterns as homage to the heightened consumerism that defined twentieth-century United States. This commitment to social sentiments has been engrained in the

artist’s oeuvre, through his signature Ben Day dots technique that the present work illustriously exemplifies. Named after its late nineteenth century illustrator Benjamin Day Jr., this printing technique aggregates evenly spaced dots—typically coloured blue, yellow, magenta, and black—to create patterns and shapes. Most commonly realised in comic books and newspapers, such pattern of humble associations evokes mass production and commerciality. Throughout his entire career, Lichtenstein has astutely incorporated this allegedly unsophisticated style to his artmaking, thoroughly embodying a twentieth century artist in subject and craft.



Detail of the present lot

Yet the artist’s true brilliance lies in his ability to integrate the most mundane methods into high art, through recreating Monet’s waterlilies and Picasso’s cubist muses. This particular study testifies to the artist’s illustrious contribution to the historical investigation on brushstrokes as a motif, one that has begun centuries prior and reached its peak in the 1950s with the most acclaimed art movement of post-war America, abstract expressionism.

“Brushstrokes are almost a symbol of art. The Brushstrokes paintings also resembles Abstract Expressionism. Of course visible brushstrokes in a painting convey a sense of grand gesture; but in my hands, the brushstrokes become a depiction of a grand gesture.” — Roy Lichtenstein in A Review of My Work Since 1961, 1995

Roy Lichtenstein

While abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock elevate brushstrokes as subjects dominating the image, in *Reflections on Brushstrokes*, Lichtenstein revolutionises this concept: Suggestive of the artist's intentionality, the monumental and staid brushstrokes challenge the spontaneity and gestural legacy of Pollock's expressive marks. Though also protagonists of the canvas, the brushstrokes are voided of action and stripped to their purest forms—further questioning the visual syntax that grounded art since its genesis. To understand *Reflections on Brushstrokes* is to witness conceptual ingenuity transform into power imagery under the finest execution. In fact, so significant is the subject of brushstrokes to Lichtenstein that the artist repeatedly canonised it in every medium and scale for almost thirty years of his distinguished career.



Hans Namuth, photograph of Jackson Pollock painting *Autumn Rhythm*; Number 30, 1950
Image: © 1991 Hans Namuth Estate, Courtesy Center for Creative Photography

Symphony of Perception

It started when I tried to photograph a print by Robert Rauschenberg that was under glass. But the light from a window reflected on the surface of the glass and prevented me from taking a good picture. But it gave me the idea of photographing... works

under glass, where the reflections would hide most of the work... It portrays a painting under glass. It is framed and the glass is preventing you from seeing the painting.” — Roy Lichtenstein on the origins of his reflection series

In 1988, under fortuitous circumstances, Lichtenstein commences his inquiry into the constructs of seeing through reflections. His seminal contribution to art history is brilliantly indicative of his time: While Jan van Eyck played with illusions from mirrors as early as the fifteenth century and the expressionists observed reflections in water, Lichtenstein conceptualises seeing through modern photography. The culmination of this investigation, *Reflections on Brushstrokes*, is an embodiment of the artist's present moment and an ode to artmaking from past to present.



The present lot

The reflective frame, in conjunction with the bands punctuating the canvas, disconnects the viewer from the image. Nevertheless, the brilliant brushwork laden underneath inspires curiosity. In stimulating the natural phenomenon of reflection under glass, Lichtenstein achieves such complex emotions all through a series of coloured dots once disregarded by critics as kitsch.

Reflection on Brushstrokes marks a brilliant graduation of Lichtenstein's pop art vernacular into formalist concepts, all without forsaking his characteristically playful aesthetic – marking this

Roy Lichtenstein

canvas the acme of Lichtenstein's exquisite craft. Homonymous Lichtenstein prints have found homes in major international museums from the Tate Gallery in London to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvZBoLj4xil&t=25s>

An insight into the production of 'Reflections on brushstroke' (1992), by artist Roy Lichtenstein.

A print published by Tyler Graphics Limited. Edited and collated from Kenneth Tyler Collection archival footage by David Greenhalgh, Curatorial Assistant, National Gallery of Australia

Provenance

Leo Castelli Gallery, New York
 Herland Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm
 Cindric Meyer Gallery, Florida
 Private Collection, United States (acquired from the above in 1998)
 Private Collection (acquired from the above in 2014)
 Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York
 Private Collection, Europe

Collector's Digest

- Undoubtedly among the defining artists of post-war American art, Roy Lichtenstein remains one of the most highly coveted names for collectors and museums worldwide. His paintings have fetched unprecedented prices of US\$165,000,000 (almost HK\$1,300,000) and his artworks deemed essential collection pieces for every prestigious institution—from the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Tate Modern in London, Centre Pompidou in Paris, and National Art Museum of China in Beijing.
- By 1990, the artist has already achieved considerable commercial and institutional success, with a retrospective in the Museum of Modern Art three years prior, in addition to countless global exhibitions and the completion of his world-renowned Times Square mural in New York City. Lichtenstein's exploration on the brushstrokes has also matured from his initial venture twenty-five years ago. The twenty-six *Reflection* images—the artist's most repeated motif in 1990—are regarded as some of his most sought after works. Other canvases in the series have generated ground-breaking prices of \$21 million USD (\$165 million HKD) and can be located in the San Francisco Modern Art, The Broad Museum in Los Angeles, and the Israel Museum, etc.
- Amongst them, the present work uniquely addresses brushstrokes as its subject and is the first Lichtenstein brushstroke and reflection canvas to appear in auction in the past twenty years, dawning it a true collector's gem in Lichtenstein's masterful ascension as one of the trailblazers of twentieth century art.

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT ASIAN
COLLECTION

19

Claude Monet

Paysage à Villez

oil on canvas

60.3 x 78.8 cm. (23 3/4 x 31 in.)

Painted circa 1883, This work will be included in the forthcoming supplement to the *Catalogue Raisonné of Claude Monet's Paintings and Drawings*, currently being prepared under the sponsorship of the Wildenstein Plattner Institute, Inc.

Estimate

HK\$5,500,000 — 8,500,000

€653,000 — 1,010,000

\$705,000 — 1,090,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"For me, a landscape does not exist in its own right, since its appearance changes at every moment; but the surrounding atmosphere brings it to life - the air and the light, which vary continuously. For me, it is only the surrounding atmosphere which gives subjects their true value." — Claude Monet

Confidently rendered in a flurry of rapid and yet precise brushstrokes, *Paysage à Villez* is a work of remarkable energy and vitality by Impressionist master Claude Monet. Depicting a line of poplar trees set on the grassy banks of the river Epte in the environs of Villez, it captures one of Monet's most enduring themes - that of the play of light on water and the fleeting patterns meteorological and atmospheric effects that he was able to observe in nature. Evoking a quiet moment of calm on a bright, spring-like day, the light palette and loose, open brushwork are highly characteristic of the artist's *en plein air* approach to painting, allowing him to record the sensations of an instant with remarkable skill.

Against the slender, vertical line of the tree trunks, Monet juxtaposes deeper shades of emerald and mossy greens with touches of chartreuse and Indian yellow, the richly variegated foliage appearing animated by an invisible breeze. This same effect seems to stir the surface of the river, whipping its surface into little eddies as it flows past. In keeping with this radically economical approach to composition, the far bank of the river is evoked by a single, subtle line edged in violet, introducing a striking spatial tension as it appears to move towards us against the receding cooler blue tones. Demonstrating the profound effect of the natural world on the artist, *Paysage à Villez* at once recalls some of the artist's earliest *en plein air* compositions while prefiguring his iconic series of *Poplars* and the *Nymphéas* which would occupy him completely in the final years of his life.



Claude Monet, *Nymphéas*, 1916-19, Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris Image: akg-images / Erich Lessing

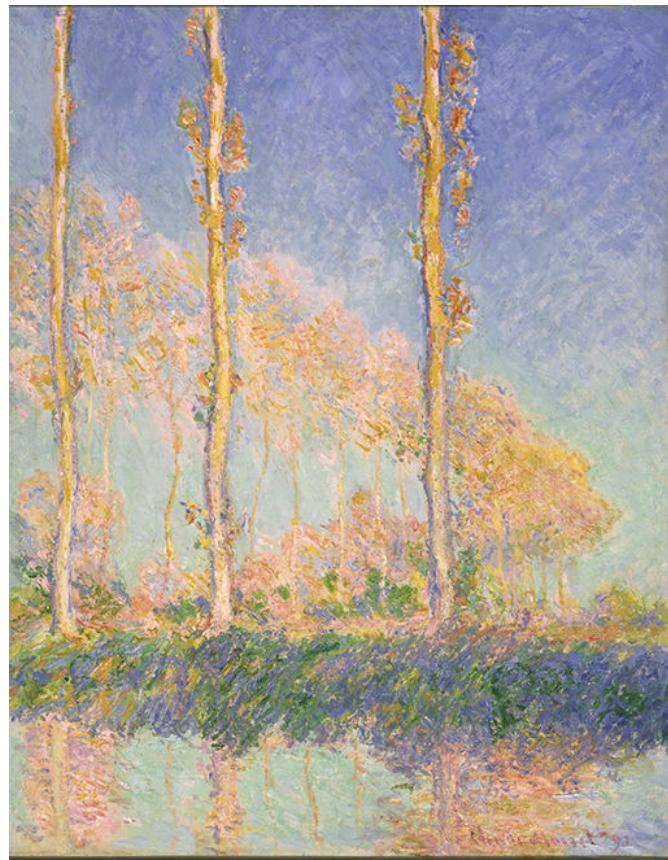
So Much for the City

Even though Monet spent significant time in Paris, he was something of a reluctant city-dweller, finding instead a limitless source of inspiration in the countryside spread out to the northwest of the capital where he would eventually make his home. Moving first to Argenteuil in 1871, Monet 'bought himself a boat and built a cabin on it for use as a floating studio as Daubigny had done before him', allowing him to reach even more unspoiled and difficult to reach spots with his easel and paints.ⁱ As is typical of the artist, he rarely painted his immediate surroundings, preferring to explore a little further afield for his subject. Moving first to Vétheuil in 1878, Monet deepened his appreciation for the natural abundance of the region, the house he rented there with his young children and the bankrupt Hoschedé family including a garden that ran down to the Seine where he could moor his boat in between excursions out on the river as he honed his increasingly fresh and delicately hued compositions.

"All haste as he fills the canvas with the dominant tones, he then studies their

graduations and contrast and harmonises them. From this comes the painting's unity [...] all these different states of nature [...] and you will see the mornings rise before you, afternoons grow radiant, and the darkness of evening descend.” — Gustave Geffroy

Clarifying his unique and profoundly important contribution to emerging definitions of Impressionism in these years, by the time Monet moved to his beloved Giverny in 1883 he had successfully separated notions of so-called ‘modern’ painting from scenes of urban modernity, turning instead to the genre of landscape painting to extend his radical vision with remarkable assurance. Closely related to a series of similar compositions executed by the artist from a variety of locations around Villez - just a kilometre south of Giverny - the present work finds its closest compositional relation in *Paysage à Villez près de Vernon*, executed in 1883. In its combination of slender poplar trees and their fractured, shifting reflection in the surface of the river, *Paysage à Villez* also anticipates one of Monet’s most stunning and significant series, *Les Peupliers*.

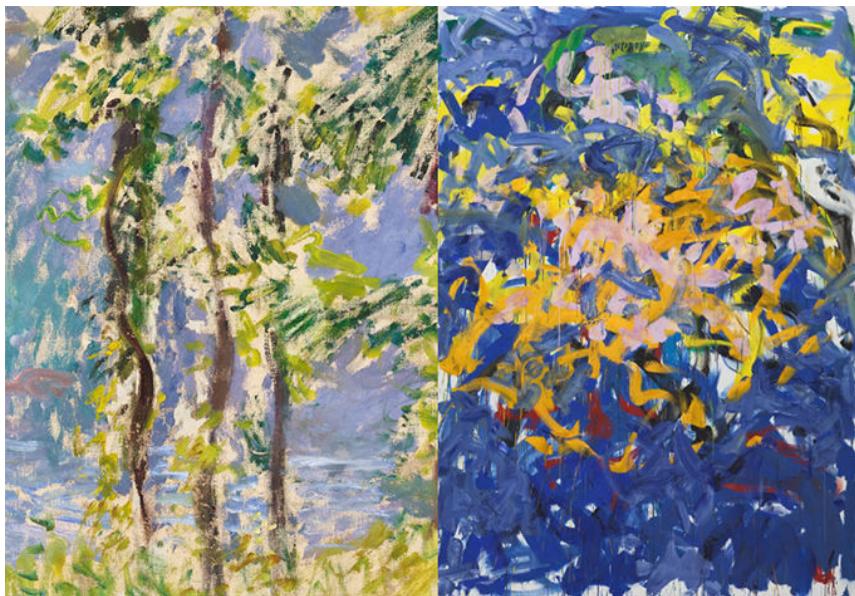


Claude Monet, *Les Peupliers*, 1891, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia Image: The Philadelphia Museum of Art/ Art Resource/ Scala, Florence

As Daniel Wildenstein describes, by the summer of 1891, Monet would make the serpentine line of poplars on the south bank of the Epte upstream from his home and legendary gardens at Giverny the sole focus of his attention. Hearing that the trees were due to be felled, the artist successfully lobbied to hold the plans just long enough to allow him to render the scene in paint. Traversing the river in his boat, Monet produced 23 paintings of the scene, 11 especially exemplifying the artist’s serial approach in these years, showing the same view at varying times of the day and a range of weather conditions. Deeply representative of the northern French countryside itself, in adopting the poplars as a central motif in the 1880s and 90s, Monet signposts both his mastery of Impressionist technique and the ways in which he embraced and extended a European tradition of

landscape painting. As is evident in this earlier rendering of the poplars, for Monet ‘working outdoors and *in situ* was the key to capturing the sensation of the fleeting moment and to render not so much the object itself as a slice of nature cloaked by evanescent atmospheric effects.’ⁱⁱ

Marking a transition in Monet’s painting and personal life, the move to Giverny also marked some long-awaited financial security, and the official beginning of his relationship with Alice Hoschedé, the wife of his former patron who had lived with him in Vétheuil a few years before. Setting the scene for his final, triumphant approach to depicting the shifting surface of water in the *Nymphéas*. Monet’s radical vision and experimental approach have been widely accepted as establishing the foundations for modern art and 20th century abstraction. This enduring legacy has most recently been addressed in the Fondation Louis Vuitton’s recent exhibition *Monet – Mitchell*. Focusing primarily on Monet’s late production and these last, great works, the show brought out compelling conversations between the two artists in relation to colour, compositional structure, and energetic brushwork, and the painterly tools with which both artists distilled phenomena from the natural world. Following in the footsteps of Monet, Mitchell would also relocate to Vétheuil in 1968, finding the same creative inspiration in the abundance and vitality of the region’s natural surroundings as Monet had done nearly a century before.



Left: Detail of the present work Right: Joan Mitchell, *Before, Again II*, 1985, Detroit Institute of Arts
Image: © Detroit Institute of Arts/ Bridgeman Images, Artwork: © Estate of Joan Mitchell

ⁱ Stephan Koja, *Monet*, exh. cat., Österreichische Galerie, Belvedere, Vienna, 1996, p. 60

ⁱⁱ Daniel Zamani, ‘Sur le motif: Monet, Impressionism, and the Practice of Painting in Nature’, in *Claude Monet: The Truth of Nature*, exh. cat., Denver Art Museum, 2019, p. 23

Provenance

Wildenstein & Cie., Paris

Private Collection (acquired from the above)

Private Collection, England (gifted from the above)

Private Collection (acquired from the above)

Christie's, New York, 13 November 2015, lot 1265

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

Yokohama Museum of Art, *100 Years After Monet*, 14 July - 24 September 2018

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT ASIAN
COLLECTION

20 *k

Wu Guanzhong

Autumn onto the Wall

signed and dated '91 Tu [in Chinese]' lower right

oil on board

30 x 54.5 cm. (11 3/4 x 21 1/2 in.)

Painted in 1991.

Estimate

HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000

€950,000 — 1,430,000

\$1,030,000 — 1,540,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"A plain white wall is an enticing creative subject for the painter, but this one has been taken over by vines of ivy. Its living network spreads slowly, from youth to maturity to old age, as it weaves traces of all its springs and autumns into its brocade. The new shoots of spring, the remnants of autumn's red, and the speckling here and there all play their notes on this harp of ivy, making the willows flutter and the swallows take flight — are they accompanists, or audience?" — Wu Guanzhong

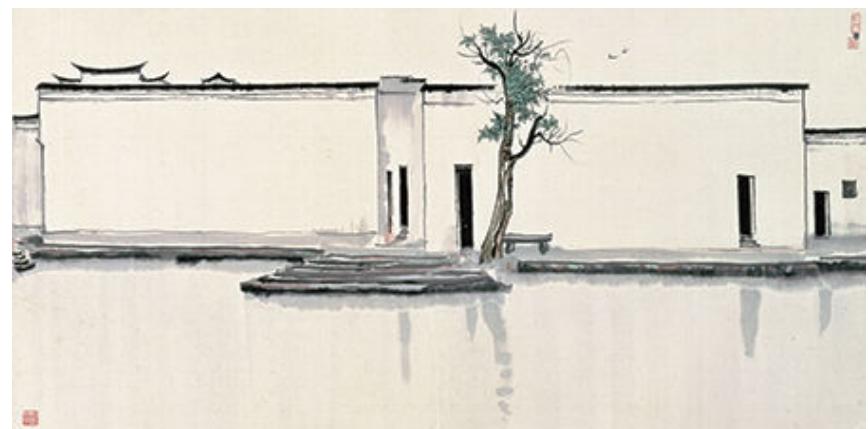
In 1936, Wu Guanzhong entered the Hangzhou National Academy of Arts, founded by Lin Fengmian, and along with such others as Zao Wou-ki and Chu Teh-Chun, became one of the outstanding students to study under Lin. Each of the three traveled abroad to study Western painting in Paris, for which they became known as 'the Three Musketeers' of modern Chinese art. Having absorbed the essentials of Western painting during his stay in France, Wu returned to China in 1950 and devoted himself to creating a fusion of Eastern and Western painting. As he explored this path, he made innovative conceptual breakthroughs in areas such as brushwork, colour, and modeling of form, depicting his inner dialogues with an artistic vocabulary based on the beauty of form and abstraction. His work with landscapes, primarily in the oil medium, reached maturity during the 1970s; in the 1980s, he turned more toward inkwash painting but still produced works in oil, thus beginning his 'amphibian' period of working in both the 'watery' medium of inks and the 'drier' medium of oils. New breakthroughs followed in the 1990s when he incorporated even more expressionistic elements into his realistic style, painting with tremendous freedom and verve in both oils and the ink medium.

In the years just before and after 1990, Wu Guanzhong enjoyed a period of substantial achievement in which he held frequent exhibitions. This involved numerous trips abroad for large-scale solo exhibitions in important institutions, and during these periods abroad he enjoyed sketching and painting from life, an experience that broadened his vision and led to a more open mindset. His brushwork began to exhibit even greater freedom, ease, and character, and he became more attentive to the expressive use of colour. Created in 1991, *Autumn onto the Wall* explores through the oil medium the unique sense of abstraction in Chinese painting, is a perfect demonstration of how the artist put his artistic theories into practice.

Autumn Colours

"I have made many paintings, in oils and in ink, of the gorgeous autumn colours on these walls.... but the toughest problem was always the limitation of the wall. That in turn restricted the extension of the vines, and the sky above always occupied too much space where vines ought to be instead. I compressed the sky to a minimum, but even so still had trouble expressing the essence of that wall, its grand presence." — Wu Guanzhong

Autumn colours on a wall was a favorite theme for Wu Guanzhong, one he revisited often in both the ink and the oil mediums. He felt special affection for the scenery of the Jiangnan region, of which he was a native, and was attracted by the weathered, time-worn walls there that had witnessed so much change. Wu's first use of this autumnal colours theme derived from the experience of painting from life in Suzhou in the early 1980s, when a wall in the 'Lingering Garden' in Suzhou captured his attention with its spreading, interwoven vines, sparking his creative urge. During this period, he was less concerned with detail than when painting landscapes in the 1970s, and no longer insisted on completing his paintings on site; instead, he simply recorded his responses to these scenes in sketches, which he would complete later in the studio. Wu once said that the most vexing problem in creating these 'autumn colours' paintings, whether in oil or in ink, was how to balance the boundaries of the wall, the spreading of the vines, and the proportions of the sky. What remains, after the dissatisfactions and the occasional failed attempts of his explorations, are the wonderful classic works that we now enjoy.



Wu Guanzhong, *Shuang yan (Two Swallows)*, 1981 Hong Kong Museum of Art Collection Image: Hong Kong Museum of Art

Autumn onto the Wall, is painted in oil and features a horizontal composition, which makes the wall that extends across the entire painting its principal subject. The two birch trees that stand in front, however, divide the pictorial space into two parts even as they seem to break the ancient silence of the old wall. The composition is reminiscent of a Wu Guanzhong masterpiece from the 1980s — *Shuang Yan (Two Swallows)* — which the artist himself considered the most representative among his many Jiangnan-inspired works. Autumn endeavors to break the pictorial plane up into geometric arrangements, as the large trees in front divide the featured structure into two parts, while long horizontal lines and white blocks of colour form a strong contrast with shorter, vertical blocks of black. *Autumn onto the Wall* is presented in a compositional style similar

to *Two Swallows*, though perhaps divided even more clearly into a tripartite horizontal composition through the interaction between sky, the vines and the wall, and the wall and the ground beneath. The viewer's gaze is led beyond the boundaries of the painting, powerfully suggesting to the imagination a space that encompasses both the painting and the spaces beyond.



Left: Lot 8, Matthew Wong, *The Road*, 2018 Artwork: © 2023 Matthew Wong Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS) New York Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 30 March 2023 Estimate: HK\$24,000,000 - 35,000,000 Right: Vincent van Gogh, *Landscape with House and Ploughman*, 1889 Image: Fine Art Images/Heritage Images/Scala, Florence

Throughout his career, in China and abroad, Wu Guanzhong remained in love with the theme of autumn colours. In many places, this Autumn shows influences of Western masters of the oil medium such as Van Gogh; later successors to Wu Guanzhong, such as Mathew Wong, have similarly painted works on the theme of autumn colours. In contrast to Wu's other works on this theme, the number of black lines that represent vines is reduced in favor of the abstract blocks of rich, thick autumn tones that he scatters across the canvas. Occupying the center, among the weaving lines of ivy, we see orange, golden brown, and reddish brown, their rich hues blurring the wall's upper boundary; these are further embellished with touches of dark green, light brown, reddish orange, and chrome yellow. The white wall is built up from blocks in varied shades of grey, which complement the lyrical, freehand lines near the bottom of the canvas and add a sense of graceful movement; two white clouds floating in the autumn sky above add the final harmonies to this symphony of the season.

"I personally will never be satisfied with the visual comfort of nothing more than pure forms; I love artistic conceptions in paintings, yet those conceptions are always found in union with the beauty of form, and can only be manifested through it."

Always at the heart of my career as an artist has been using my painter's eye to discover the conception associated with an image." — Wu Guanzhong

Wu Guanzhong once said that the nearly abstract geometric structuring of his works, and their complex jumbles of intertwined lines, actually grew from the interplay of concrete images. Beyond the deep nostalgia in this painting for the old wall and its vines, the language of form receives consideration in the relationship between the images of the white birches and the sky, wall, and vines — which is precisely the 'beauty of form' that Wu Guanzhong explored throughout his career. He believed the point of artistic creation was not to produce faithful imitations of scenes; instead, he felt a modern artist should search for certain elements hidden within an objective scene, the constituent elements of its beauty, and discover the principles that govern them. He also emphasized the importance of artistic conception, expecting artists to bring an emotional focus to the scenes they portrayed, so that 'feeling will be present within the forms.' No matter how abstract, or how lofty the object of the painting, he felt this connection with feeling must not be broken. With this in mind, *Autumn onto the Wall* stands as an outstanding illustration of Wu's theory of art. On the one hand, gazing at this wall with its old vines, everyone feels the enchantment of their beautiful forms, and by transforming them into lines, geometric shapes, and blocks of colour, the artist reveals the structural beauty so essential to the gardens of the Jiangnan region. At the same time, the vines, which people of yore planted to protect their walls, become a lyrical expression of autumn's abundance, imbued with a meaning beyond themselves. They give voice to the artist's Eastern outlook and feelings and his memories of his native land, in a perfect realization of his idea that 'the kite string (connected to the viewer's feelings) must not be broken.'

Collector's Digest

- In 1991, Wu Guanzhong was awarded the French Ministry of Culture's highest award for literature and art and the Golden Medal from the Municipal Government of Paris. In the spring of 1992, when Wu was 72, the British Museum in London held the solo exhibition Wu Guanzhong: A 20th Century Chinese Painter, the first time since its founding that it had held a solo exhibition for a living Chinese artist. The curator for the exhibition was the famous art historian Michael Sullivan, and the ribbon cutting at the opening ceremony was performed by then British Crown Prince Charles. Wu Guanzhong's old friend Chu Teh-Chun and his wife also came from Paris to attend.
- When Wu passed away in 2010, an obituary by Walter Sullivan was published in The Guardian, in which he praised Wu's work, saying, 'His landscapes in oils are marked by a delicacy of touch and colour, a purity and fluidity of line, that are very seductive.'
- Beginning in the 1990s, Wu Guanzhong held solo exhibitions in museums in the United

States, Britain, France, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Those included the 2002 *Wu Guanzhong Retrospective Exhibition* at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, the 2005 *Wu Guanzhong Retrospective Exhibition* at the Shanghai Art Museum, the 2006 *Wu Guanzhong Solo Exhibition* at the National Art Museum of China, and the 2018 *Wu Guan Zhong: Expressions of Pen & Palette* at the National Gallery of Singapore. In addition to the esteem in which he is held for his creative work, Wu Guanzhong also engaged in research into the theory and development of art, and published dozens of painting albums and anthologies of his writings. The Hunan Arts Publishing House in 2006 issued a ten-volume collection of his work, *The Complete Works of Wu Guanzhong*.

Provenance

Private Collection, Asia (acquired directly from the artist)

Christie's, Hong Kong, 26 May 2018, lot 19

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

Hong Kong, Exchange Square, Yi Hua Lang, *The Art of Wu Guanzhong 60's-90's*, October 1996

Literature

China Three Gorges Publishing House, *Art of Wu Guanzhong 60's-90's*, Beijing, 1996, pl. 84, p. 105
(illustrated)

People's Fine Arts Publishing House, *Wu Guan Zhong - Connoisseur's Choice I*, China, 2003, pl. 72,
pp. 166-167 (illustrated)

Shui Zhongtian and Wang Hua, eds., *The Complete Works of Wu Guanzhong Vol. III*, Changsha,
2007, pp. 320-321 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY OF AN IMPORTANT ASIAN COLLECTOR

21

Li Chen

The Pavilion and Angelic Smile

incised with the artist's seal and signature 'LiChen' on the reverse of the left figure; incised with the date '2010' on the reverse of the base; further incised with the artist's seal and number '3/8' on the reverse of the right figure
bronze

68.4 x 61.5 x 36.4 cm. (26 7/8 x 24 1/4 x 14 3/8 in.)
Executed in 2010, this work is number 3 from an edition of 8, and is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by Asia Art International Group Corporation.

Estimate

HK\$1,200,000 — 2,400,000
€142,000 — 284,000
\$154,000 — 308,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“We live in a highly complex and volatile age. There is a deep spiritual poverty within humanity – they are spiritually lost and confused souls. Art is not merely a record of life and its activities, but is also a valuable form of spiritual healing.” — Li Chen

Li Chen (b. 1963 in Taiwan) is a prominent sculptor whose works are an amalgamation of Eastern philosophical thought and contemporary art aesthetics. His characteristic bronze sculptures, whether miniature or monumental in size, draw profound influences from his studies in Chan (Zen) Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Currently exhibiting a solo show at Asia Art Center in Taiwan (*Li Chen: Paradox in Elegance—Spiritual Journey through the Mundane World*, 11 March – 20 April 2023), Li's body of works are deeply spiritual and seek to instill in the viewer a sense of joy and enlightenment.

The physical appearance of Li's sculptures is decidedly modern through the minimalistic rendering of the figures and their elongated stature. However, one immediately recognizes elements characteristic of traditional East Asian art and Buddhist sculptures. The benevolent and tranquil expression of the Buddha is reflected in both figures of the present lot, *The Pavilion and Angelic Smile*, executed in 2010 as part of the artist's renowned *The Beacon* series.

The figures harmoniously resonate with one another, as the female figure faces upward with a modest and honest expression that embraces a state of bliss and nirvana. In her hands is a golden lotus flower, a Buddhist symbol of spiritual awakening and purity that stems from the plant's ability to rise from murky waters, clean and untainted. The use of gold is both symbolic of divinity and enlightenment. Behind her head floats a cloud shaped like a pillow or a surreal face, lending a touch of whimsicalness and humor to the otherwise thought-provoking work. Furthermore, Li deliberately emphasized the roundness of the figures which is characteristic of East Asian features.

By contrast, the male figure faces downward, embracing in his arms a golden pavilion, an important cultural heritage of the literati tradition. The literati of ancient China enjoyed their idle time reading the Classics, appreciating the natural landscape, conducting tea ceremonies, and engaging in discussions of art under a pavilion, usually situated in a classical Chinese garden. Li admires the lifestyle of the literati and yearns to find a balance in the fast-paced modern society where we no longer take the time to slow down and introspect.

The present sculpture is an embodiment of contrasting elements, conveying at once a strong physical presence and spiritual weightlessness. The viewer rejoices in the familiarity of traditional culture and the serene energy in Li's work while reflecting on the excess and anxieties of modernity. Through its meditative and transcendent quality, *The Pavilion and Angelic Smile* restores a sense of inner peace and joy in the viewer, reminding us of the importance of spiritual cultivation and the timeless wisdom of ancient philosophy.



Li Chen, *Angellic Smile*, 2010 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong for HK\$4,284,000, 22 June 2022

Collector's Digest

- Internationally and critically acclaimed, Li has received prominent recognition from both critics and collectors alike. In 2007, Li was invited to exhibit his works in a solo show at the 52nd Venice Biennale, an outstanding achievement as he was the first artist from Taiwan to accomplish this, cementing his status in the contemporary art scene as one of the most sought-after sculptors.
- Li Chen's work has been presented in prestigious galleries and museums, with recent

solo shows including; *Being: In/Voluntary Drift Li Chen Solo Exhibition* (2017) at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei; *Through the Ages – Li Chen Solo Exhibition* (2018-2019) at the Aurora Museum, Shanghai; *Ethereal Cloud – Li Chen New Works* (2019) at the Asia Art Center, Beijing, among numerous others. The present lot, *Angelic Smile*, was part of the *Greatness of Spirit – Li Chen Premiere Sculpture Exhibition in Taiwan* (2011), Taipei, and *Monumental Levity: Li Chen 2013 Place Vendôme Premiere Solo Sculpture Exhibition in Paris* (2013) — a large-scale outdoor display at the historic Place Vendôme in Paris.

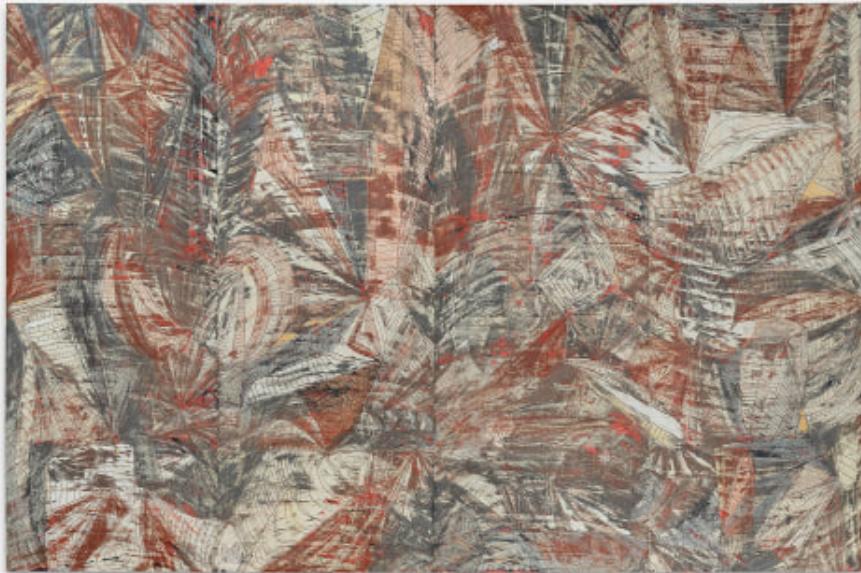
Provenance

Asia Art Center, Taipei

Acquired from the above by the present owner

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22

Angel Otero

Butterflies Drinking Crocodile Tears

signed, titled and dated "'Butterflies Drinking Crocodile Tears' Angel Otero 2016' on the reverse
oil and fabric collaged on canvas, diptych
overall 243.8 x 368.3 cm. (95 7/8 x 145 in.)
Painted in 2016.

Estimate

HK\$1,200,000 — 1,800,000
€140,000 — 211,000
\$154,000 — 231,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Phillips is pleased to present a work by the enigmatic Angel Otero, *Butterflies Drinking Crocodile Tears*. Through his bewitching compositions that traverse the boundaries between abstraction and figuration, memory and identity, the Puerto Rican-American painter has blazed his own trail in the art world – becoming one of its most revered, and consequential, creatives.

A Unique Approach



Otero in his Brooklyn studio, 2019. Pots of his 'oil skins' are on the table in front of him. Image: © Taylor Dafoe

Otero's technique is singular: he begins each painting by meticulously reproducing reference images in dense oil paint on large planes of plexiglass. Once the paint has nearly dried, the artist delicately removes what he terms the 'oil skin' from the glass surface and adorns and combines it onto large-scale canvasesⁱ. This technique effectively obfuscates the original painted imagery and culminates in an entirely new and distinctive composition. Through years of scrupulously observing interactions between pigment and surface, the artist has established his own style while simultaneously broadening the traditional genre of abstract painting.

"I was tired of the canvas and the frame, and I knew I wanted to embrace something

more sculptural without departing from the conversations about painting I usually have with the work in the studio. So, I brought all these scraps and leftovers to the studio floor, spread them all around, and literally started cutting shapes and making compositions with them. That was my first impulse. That's the way I tend to work in the studio: act first and then think, rather than the other way around" — Angel Otero

This novel approach to artistic production symbolizes an extension of Otero's focus. The artist incorporates mediums beyond painting, notably woodcutting and etching, and employs some of these printmaking techniques in his practice. Starting with a layer of paint on glass, Otero introduces his line work by wiping away the paint with a cloth – the negative space ultimately unveiling the images. The painting undergoes a metamorphosis during the transfer to the canvas – certain images are distinctly visible while others are wholly distorted. Otero's artistic references, primarily abstract and Expressionist artists of the 20th century, amalgamate into cohesive gestural abstraction. The artist asserts himself more prominently into these collaged works, and the convergence of art history they signify, by scraping into or drawing onto the tableau.



Installation view of the current work at: Hong Kong, Lehmann Maupin, *Angel Otero: Born in the Echoes*, 26 May - 2 July 2016

An Artist Who Lays Himself Bare

The measured chaos that finds genesis in Otero's works speaks to a greater dislocation – that of his own identity. Born in Puerto Rico, Otero moved to the East Coast to study at the prestigious Art Institute of Chicago where he would have to navigate the two worlds of diasporic experience. In charting smooth passage, he would come to rely on the duality of memory and origin: 'I'm constantly thinking about the concept of home, but also about the different departures that I can take from it, converting into an interesting formal excuse to make these paintings that are very meaningful to me. 'I feel that I have always been on this constant rediscovery or re-questioning of myself: where I've come from, where I am, where I grew up. Where I'm at the present moment, and how I relate that to my past.'ⁱⁱ. This dyad emerges in the chimerical qualities of the present lot. Spread across four panels, we see the concrete scales of crocodiles (native to Costa Rica) battle for pictorial space with the ephemeral wings of butterflies. Here, forms coalesce as ciphered memories, plunging the viewer into Otero's whirlpool of nostalgia. The palette is emotional, seductive: tracts of red circulate with bands of grey to create concentric demi-moons. Elements of beige and white serve to anchor the work and provide entry points for our own introspection.

The relation between butterflies and crocodiles hold fascinating relevance, as they are known to drink the latter's salty tears. This phenomenon – more akin to fairy tale rather than the real world – is one of a delicate, oxymoronic beauty, much like the present lot. Just as the butterfly and crocodile engage in mutual benefit, Otero takes what he needs from oil to create his art. He repurposes the material, transforming it into something of real beauty. The layers of paint, like the layers of a butterfly's wings, are diaphanous yet resilient – composing a work that is both intricate and durable.



An Amazonian crocodile with a crown of indulging butterflies. Image: Rolf Nussbaumer Photography / Alamy Stock Photo

Dialogue with Art History

A melting pot of form and colour like *Butterflies Drinking Crocodile Tears* can be difficult to navigate, not only for us, the viewer, but also for Otero, as its architect. 'I feel that culturally, I grew up in a very confusing environment', he explains. 'Am I American or am I Puerto Rican? Am I Black, or am I Spanish, or am I Taino, or am I this, or am I that? I don't think that art necessarily needs to give us an answer to these questions, but we all have the right to turn to art as an exit. To transform those questions into formal aspects.'ⁱⁱⁱ The heightened drama of Otero's self-identification and determination finds itself aligned with that of the Spanish Baroque. While artists like Goya and Velázquez incorporated intricate allegories and symbolic references to convey religious or philosophical ideas, Otero focuses on the essential symbolism of form – fragmented and distorted shapes – to conjure a facsimile of his identity's complex directions.



Diego Velázquez, *Christ Contemplated by the Christian Soul*, c. 1660 National Gallery, London Image: © The National Gallery, London/Scala, Florence

Collector's Digest

- Otero is a rising star in the art market, and recently moved to Hauser & Wirth. His work is in numerous public and private collections including: Berezdivin Collection, Puerto Rico; Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx; DePaul Art Museum, Chicago; Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, Turkey; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City; Margulies Collection, Miami; Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh; Guggenheim Museum, New York; UBS Art Collection, Chicago; and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.

ⁱ. Alex Greenberger, 'Angel Otero Heads to Hauser & Wirth as His Market Rapidly Ascends', *ARTnews*, 4 February 2022, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Otero quoted in Valentina Di Liscia, 'Painter Angel Otero on Solitude and What It Means When

You Can't Go Home', *Hyperallergic*, 14 August 2020, [online](#)

Provenance

Lehmann Maupin, Hong Kong

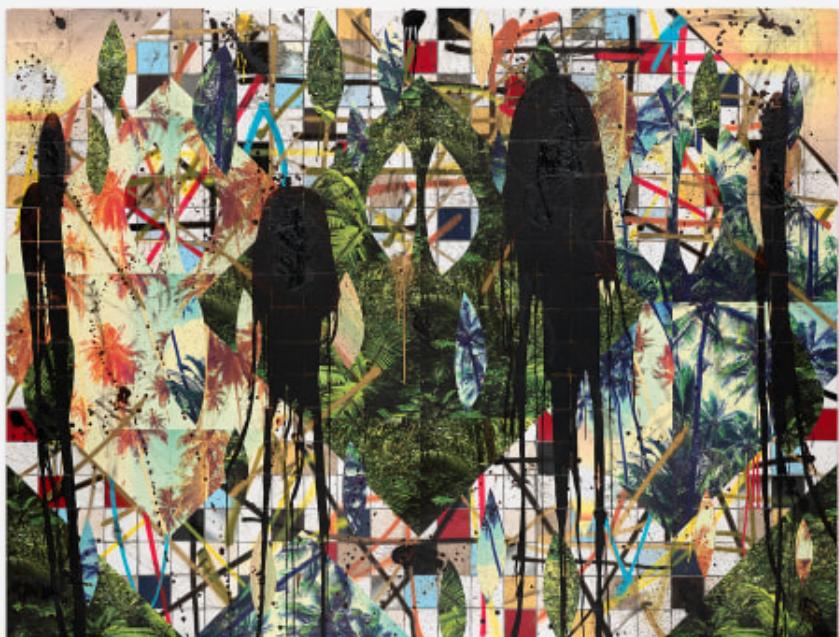
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Hong Kong, Lehmann Maupin, *Angel Otero: Born in the Echoes*, 26 May - 2 July 2016

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



23 o•

Rashid Johnson

Untitled Escape Collage

ceramic tile, mirror tile, black soap, wax, vinyl, spray
enamel

181.5 x 238 cm. (71 1/2 x 93 3/4 in.)

Executed in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$5,000,000 — 7,000,000

€594,000 — 831,000

\$641,000 — 897,000

[Go to Lot](#)



To ruminate on themes as heavy and diverse as race, gender, sexuality and identity, one could do well to turn to the oeuvre of Rashid Johnson. His artistic practice is multifaceted, encompassing various forms such as painting, sculpture, large-scale installation, film, and mosaic, and producing works that reflect visual cosmologies which reference his upbringing in Chicago and African diasporic culture.

Art Unbound by Race

"My work has always had concerns around race, struggle, grief and grievance, but also joy and excitement around the tradition and opportunities of Blackness." — Rashid Johnson

For Johnson, the act of creation is an act of bearing his soul to the world; as such, the indication of post-blackness is crucial to Johnson's work. The term was coined by the director of the Studio Museum in Harlem, Thelma Golden, who included Johnson in an important show, *Freestyle*, in 2001. It describes a new generation of African American artists who were moving beyond the constraints of identity politics and making art that addressed broader cultural concerns. One of the defining characteristics of Johnson's work is his use of materials. He often incorporates everyday objects, such as shea butter, ceramic tiles, and books, into his works. These materials are imbued with cultural significance, and their inclusion in Johnson's work speaks to his interest in the ways in which objects can function as markers of identity and history. However, Johnson speaks with a certain degree of deference about an emphasis on artistic convergence: 'At this point, I think we have become so invested in this idea of integration within the arts—this ambition to see art practices leave their singular intention and be joined in some ceremonious and harmonic engagement. My work doesn't ask for that, and it doesn't attempt to bring that to fruition. One of my goals is to create contradictory opportunities for exploration and the explosive agency born from those conjured collisions' ⁱ.

Anxiety, both as a symptom and a response to post-blackness, negotiates the tensions between celebrating blackness and rejecting its limitations. It permeates through much of Johnson's works, and the present lot is no different. Walking through *Untitled Escape Collage* is traversing a welter of interests and collective apprehensions; these emotions are superimposed over a mosaic of ceramic tiles that are adorned with splashes of spray paint and contesting geometric patterns. Gliding through this visual kaleidoscope are obsidian titans, ominous figures that are not so much painted but dagged into existence with a thickness of line reminiscent of Dubuffet or Guston. Yet Johnson is not party to their childishness, nor seeks to allude to a kind of sardonic vision or lost history. These figures are abandoned, trapped in these ephemeral worlds - less humanoid as they are spectres, an absence of being rather than presence. As such we are reminded of mid-century texts like Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*, Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*, and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* - tomes of alienation that speak to a profound anomie that is essential to

man; or in this case 'man', creatures analogous with wretchedness and castrated by their similitude. Eerie and ominous, the artist calls them 'a stand-in for the human condition' ⁱⁱ. They weep and wail through the composition, one that holds potent tension. Despite its immediate anarchy, Johnson compiles the image within lucid measures through this balance of (un)natural forms and mechanical patterns.

"I am invisible. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me." — Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

The subsequent production of a classical symphony is informed by Johnson's literary inclinations, and in particular, that of poetry. The son and brother of poets, he details its importance as: 'For critical engagement, and for discussion of the human condition, poetry is really the ultimate bridge for explanation.' ⁱⁱⁱ.

The Brooklyn Brothers

For its radical use of multimedia and its exploration of the diaspora experience in the USA, *Untitled Escape Collage* finds great kinship with *Butterflies Drinking Crocodile Tears*, by Angel Otero, also to be offered this season. Indeed the two artists are great friends, having both attended the School of Art Institute of Chicago, and have studios around the corner from each other in Brooklyn, New York City.



Lot 22, Angel Otero, *Butterflies Drinking Crocodile Tears*, 2016 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 30 March 2023 Estimate: HK\$1,200,000 - 1,800,000

Apart from sharing a long-standing friendship, both Johnson and Otero hold a passion for using art as a means of exploring personal and cultural identity, and their work is marked by a deep emotional intensity that speaks to the power of the creative process. Together, they represent a dynamic and compelling vision of contemporary art, one that challenges us to look beyond the surface of things and to explore the depths of our shared humanity.

Video: <https://art21.org/watch/new-york-close-up/rashid-johnson-trades-art-with-angel-otero/>

Collector's Digest

- Rashid Johnson will be having a [solo exhibition at Hauser and Wirth](#), Hong Kong, during Art Basel this year.
- His first Asian solo museum show will open at the Long Museum, Shanghai, next year, from April to July 2024.
- Johnson has become a leading voice of his generation, taking on board positions at the Guggenheim Museum, Performa and Ballroom Marfa

- His first feature-length film, an adaptation of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was released on HBO in 2019
- Johnson has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions including Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2019); Aspen Art Museum, Colorado (2019); Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (2017); Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (2016); and Drawing Center, New York (2015).
- Notable group exhibitions include *Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America*, New Museum, New York (2021); *The Stomach and the Port*, Liverpool Biennial, England (2021); *Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2014); and *ILLUMInations*, International Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale, Italy (2011).
- His work is in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago

ⁱ Rashid Johnson, quoted in Michael Rooks, 'Rashid Johnson: Creating Agency Through Collision', *Ocula Magazine*, 18 May 2022, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Rashid Johnson, quoted in Jackson Arn, 'Rashid Johnson and the Age of Broken Men', *Art in America*, 12 February 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Rashid Johnson, quoted in Jan Dalley, 'Artist Rashid Johnson: "I still had more I wanted to know, I wasn't ready"', *Financial Times*, 11 June 2022, [online](#)

Provenance

David Kordansky Gallery

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2017

Exhibited

Miami, De la Cruz Collection, *A Possible Horizon*, 2 September 2020 - November 2021

Miami, De la Cruz Collection, *There is Always One Direction*, 30 November 2021 - 1 November 2022

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24

Kudzanai-Violet Hwami

Let Us Now Praise the Children (Zwizwai Family)

silkscreen, acrylic and oil on canvas

150 x 150 cm. (59 x 59 in.)

Executed in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$600,000 — 800,000

€71,700 — 95,500

\$76,900 — 103,000

[Go to Lot](#)



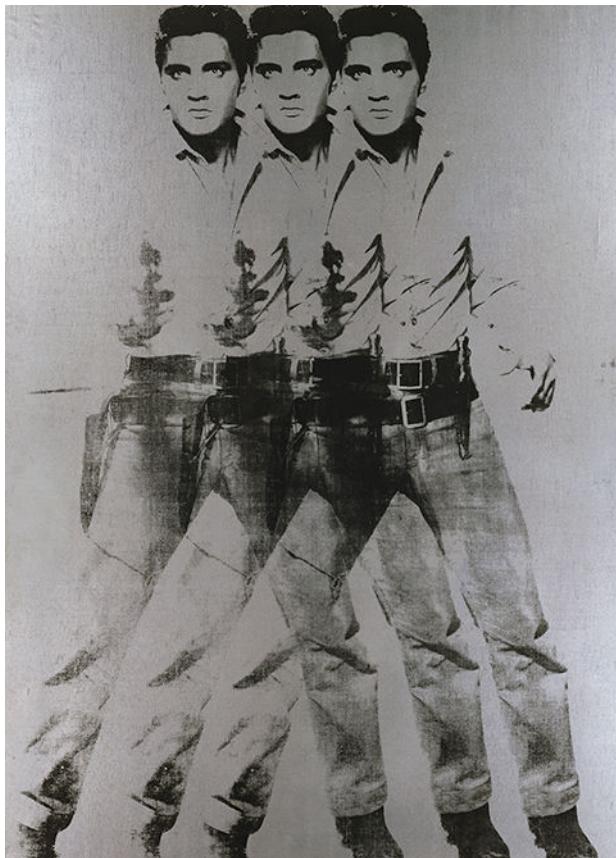
Kudzanai-Violet Hwami

Kudzanai-Violet Hwami's oil paintings display a personal and courageous vision of life in Southern Africa, conveying both tenderness and strength. Within her practice, one finds self-portraits and depictions of her family, as well as powerful nudes that challenge societal notions of the black body, sexuality, gender, and spirituality.

Through her vibrant and striking art, Hwami explores themes related to diaspora, displacement, and identity. She employs a unique process, which involves experimenting with photography and digitally collaged images to create large oil paintings on paper or canvas. Hwami frequently incorporates other mediums, such as silkscreen, pastel, and charcoal, to create truly multidimensional pieces.

Portraits of Movement

Let Us Now Praise the Children (Zwizwai Family) confronts us with the icon of family. Hwami weaves a tapestry of nostalgia through repeated monochrome silkscreen prints of familial portrait that echo Andy Warhol's hallowed use of identical overlapping images. These warm grey tones provide a contemplative ocean for a bouquet of memories intertwined with abstract patterns and shapes. Throughout the composition, we see flickers of pigment that emerge almost autonomously as if Hwami's very synapses were beginning to protrude through the canvas. The work is crowned by the artist's own hand: a wedding scene in which the bride and groom face each other, the crowd watching on. The expressive quadrant is rendered in pastel colours and thick brushstroke that join in unison to complement their own materiality.



Andy Warhol, *Elvis Presley (silk-screening)*, 1963. Image: © NPL - DeA Picture Library / Bridgeman Images, Artwork: © 2023 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

This balance between a declarative presence and caveats of concealment and indeterminacy is a dialectic that lies at the core of both her work and her life. While Hwami's works explore the ebbs and flows of memory, they are also concerned with the nuances of identity, and the complex narratives of diaspora. Born in Zimbabwe, she came to study in Manchester, Wimbledon and later at the prestigious Ruskin School of Art in Oxford. Navigating these varying landscapes of life as a Queer woman presents a challenge internally and externally.

Hwami challenges the conventional approach to identity-driven painting by intentionally disrupting its associated expectations. She achieves this by fracturing her picture planes and incorporating visual cues of censorship in her works. Through this approach, Hwami aims to subvert the notion that identity is an inescapable and dominant aspect of art, particularly within the realm of figurative painting and especially when one belongs to a minority group. As such, her fragmented pictorial planes develop as a kind of collage: ‘To me, painting is a practice that allows me to remain curious and the act of using collage is helpful as a reminder of the fragility of the human condition’ⁱ.

The intimacy that oozes from Hwami’s compositions are not just limited to the frames of their canvases but is imbued directly into the very act of painting; as she explains ‘I paint because of the pleasure of painting and having a direct connection between the mind and the hand; the idea of being a master in painting or being skilful and proving to myself that I’m worth something—that I’m good at something. That’s why I paint.’ⁱⁱ This desire for self-realisation through her craft – giving herself an essential presence in the context of a global world – bears close association with the work of Michael Armitage and his intellectual mastication. Through their paintings, they seek to connect with their cultural heritage and explore their own personal histories, while also engaging with larger social and political issues facing Africa today.



Michael Armitage, *The Paradise Edict*, 2019 Joyner/Giuffrida Collection. Photo: Theo Christelis. © the artist

Collector’s Digest

- Hwami’s work is set to be included in the Tate Britain’s major rehang, to be revealed in May 2023
- At 26 years old, Hwami became the youngest artist to ever show at the Venice Biennale in 2019
- She has had solo exhibitions at: Kunsthaus Pasquart, Biel, Switzerland; Victoria Miro, London; Gasworks, London, and Tyburn Gallery, London.
- Hwami has also enjoyed group exhibitions at: 2018, 2019 & 2022 Venice Biennale; Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; and Musée d’Art Moderne, Paris.
- Her work is included in notable public collections such as: Fondation Blachère, Apt, France; Government Art Collection, London; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Kadist Foundation, Paris; Norval Foundation, Cape Town; Perez Art Museum, Miami; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford; and Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town.

ⁱ Camila McHugh, ‘Kudzanai-Violet Hwami Wants the Choice to Reveal Herself—or Not’, *Cultured Magazine*, 9 August 2022, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Michael Armitage, ‘Michael Armitage and Kudzanai-Violet Hwami on Painting’, *Ocula Magazine*, 15 November 2019, [online](#)

Provenance

Tyburn Gallery, London

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



25 o◆

Barbara Kruger

Untitled (Time is Money)

digital print on vinyl
152.4 x 213.4 cm. (60 x 84 in.)
Executed in 2011.

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000
€354,000 — 591,000
\$385,000 — 641,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Coming to auction for the first time, Barbara Kruger's *Untitled (Time is Money)* is a brilliantly arresting artwork both visually and conceptually. Colossal grey letters: 'TIME IS MONEY' in boldface sans serif font fill a vivid red canvas. The contrasting colors and imposing size of the letters demand to be looked at, while their meaning compels the viewer to confront their own role in a modern capitalist society where even time is monetized. Since the 70s, Kruger has developed an ingenious mode of commentary on complex topics such as value, power, and gender, although she declines to call her art political.

"I never say I do political art. Nor do I do feminist art. I'm a woman who's a feminist, who makes art. My work has always been about power and control and bodies and money." — Barbara Kruger

Influential Words: A Conceptual Pioneer

Kruger's early career as an editorial designer for the popular magazine Condé Nast in the 70s influenced her quintessential visual style, often including bill-board-like vinyl canvases of monumental text or photographic images strategically overlaid with text in her distinctive color palette of black, white and red. Kruger rapidly rose to critical acclaim in the 80s with her large-scale black and white photo-based images, usually outlined in red and superimposed with quotations that directly address the viewer. Since then, she has applied her signature visual language to a variety of media from screen-prints, lithographs, and digital printing to wall and floor installations of printed words that employ video, sound and LED elements to create a dynamic multisensory experience. In *Untitled (Time is Money)*, Kruger employs an iconic tool in her repertoire: the use of big block-lettered words to elucidate a critical issue in modern culture, namely, how time is valued. In this profoundly culturally significant artwork, Kruger illuminates the capacity of art and language to define human values and society.

"I work with pictures and words because they have the ability to determine who we are and who we aren't." — Barbara Kruger

The artist repeatedly uses potent words and images in her work to identify what is valued in our society and comment on it. *Untitled (Time is Money)* speaks to the power of the written word as a visual tool to instigate the viewer's reflection. Kruger's bold use of text puts her in conversation with artists such as Wool, Holzer, and Ruscha who use language subversively to discuss society's current state. *Apocalypse Now* by postmodernist Christopher Wool, for example, similarly uses large, arresting canvases of block text to startle and inspire the viewer's contemplation.

Like postmodern conceptual artist Jasper Johns, Kruger draws upon the visual language of

consumer culture within her oeuvre. However, she stands out as the first artist to examine how the mass media represents, objectifies, and distorts power, identity, and the portrayal of women. In conversation with Roy Lichtenstein's artwork *Sweet Dreams Baby!* which parodies popular culture through its use of comic strip-inspired images and words, Kruger's art similarly imposes text over images in the style of mass media. However, Kruger's unique use of modern slogans to pinpoint what our society values through a critical lens sets her apart.

Time is Money Then and Now

The famous aphorism 'Time is Money' has often been attributed to Benjamin Franklin, appearing in his essay 'Advice to a Young Tradesman,' published in George Fisher's 1748 book, *The American Instructor: or Young Man's Best Companion*. While Franklin's quote, 'Remember time is money,' popularized the saying, the idea behind it can be traced back to the earliest versions of the phrase: 'Time is the measure of business as money is of wares' and 'The most costly outlay is time', which can be found across various sources such as Wilson's *A discourse upon usury* (1572) or Bacon's *Essays* (1607), and may refer to an ancient Greek proverb from Antiphon (430 B.C.).¹ Use of the idiom skyrocketed between the 1980s and early 2000s, and 'time is money' had become a widely used maxim in American popular culture by the time Kruger employed it in her 2011 artwork *Untitled (Time is Money)* to subversively comment on American work culture.

Throughout her work Kruger has effectively synthesized images and words to create clever, pithy messages that tie together the aesthetic of mass media and the fast-paced nature of 21st century hustle culture. *Untitled (Time is Money)* is one of a series of works of similar scale produced in 2011-2012 that investigate the relationship between art, power and money, all created during the aftermath of a worldwide economic recession.

Like *Untitled (Money money money)*, *Untitled (Time is Money)* explores the meaning of value production in society, but the latter work uniquely equates time with money and power, two central themes in Kruger's work. As the artist herself says, 'Power is the most free-flowing element in society, maybe next to money, but in fact they both motor each other.' The only work of the series to employ red as the backdrop for block text, *Untitled (Time is Money)* is a rare artwork that not only boldly identifies how society values time, but also singularly alludes to the role of the artwork itself as a valuable product of the artist's time.

Kruger's piece *Untitled (Time is Money)* captures the mindset of hustle culture, an aspect of modern life that took on added significance during the late 2000s but continues to be relevant today. The catchphrase 'Time is Money' encapsulates a widespread attitude during the time period following the recession of 2008. Kruger sees her art as a monumental commentary on what it means to exist at a specific moment in time, and this work captures the essence of the lived

experience of many during the time it was created.

"I really view art in a much more expansive sense: an aerosol of commentary, an enormous visual, filmic, sonic, and textual creation of what it means to be alive at a specific time. An ability to visualize, textualize, and musicalize the experience of the world." — Barbara Kruger

Collector's Digest

- A trailblazer of conceptual art, Kruger has exhibited in a considerable number of solo shows internationally, such as her recent exhibition of *Thinking of You, I Mean Me, I Mean You* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Art Institute of Chicago, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2021-2023. Other solo shows include *Forever* in 2019 at the Amorepacific Museum of Art in Seoul, *Questions* in 2012 at Arbeiterkammer Wien, Vienna, and *The Globe Shrinks* in 2011 at Sprüth Magers in London, among many more. Kruger also represented the United States at the Venice Biennale in 1982, and participated in 2005 and 2022.
- By the early 2010s, Kruger had reached considerable commercial success, with an immense installation exhibited at the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow in 2011. While she continued to show large-scale installations throughout the 2010s, block letters on monochrome vinyl backdrop were a repeated motif in Kruger's early 2010s prints. Other works in her 2010s series have generated soaring prices of up to 189,000 USD (1,483,000 HKD) at auction. A rare collector's item, *Untitled (Time is Money)* is exemplary of Kruger's remarkable influence in the contemporary art world.

ⁱ Damien Villers, Wolfgang Mieder. 'Time is money: Benjamin Franklin and the vexing problem of proverb origins.' *Proverbium (Columbus, Ohio)*, 2017, 34, pp. 391-404.

Provenance

L&M Arts, New York

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2011

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



26

Andy Warhol

Life Savers from the series Ads

acrylic and silkscreen enamel on canvas
signed and dated 'Andy Warhol 85' on the overlap
55.9 x 55.9 cm. (22 x 22 in.)
Executed in 1985.

Estimate

HK\$4,500,000 — 6,500,000
€533,000 — 770,000
\$577,000 — 833,000

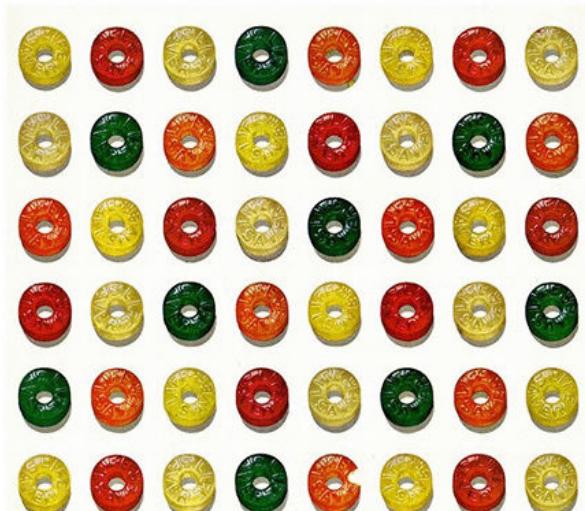
[Go to Lot](#)



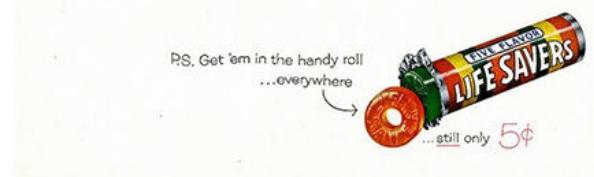
Andy Warhol

In his 1985 *Ad* series, Andy Warhol appropriates advertisements to create a bold homage to consumerism and the powerful influence of ads on American society. Each work in the series uniquely and colorfully captures a cultural moment. Warhol references the dominant corporate leaders of his time by representing a product accompanied by its brand logo in each of these works. *Life Savers*, which depicts the iconic brand of ring-shaped hard candy, is a nostalgic nod to advertisements from the 50s and 60s, while *Mobilgas* and *Paramount* directly refer to some of the most influential American corporations of the time. *Untitled, (Volkswagen Lemon)* uniquely draws upon and amplifies one of the most ingenious advertising campaigns of the postwar period. The German car company, seeking to market their vehicles to countless American veterans returning from the war, labeled the image of a perfect Volkswagen model as a 'Lemon' or a flawed, cheaply made foreign car. This advertisement proved successful in rebranding their company and showing off the exceptional make of their car through self-deprecating humor. Warhol cleverly uses these defining moments and figures in the history of American consumerism to question what art can be and elevate advertisement to the status of fine art.

Warhol achieved the colorful and loose style of his *Ad Series* by employing varying methods from acrylics to multiple silkscreens and layers of paint. This aesthetic departure from his more mechanical and serialized earlier work such as the *Campbell Soup* series allowed him to produce a stunning portfolio of unique, vivid artworks that not only are culturally significant but also provide a strikingly vibrant visual experience.



please do not lick this page!



Vintage Life Saver magazine advertisement, 1950s

"I really do live for the future, because when I'm eating a box of candy, I can't wait to taste the last piece." — Andy Warhol

Blurring the Lines between Commercial and Fine Art

Warhol began his artistic career as a commercial artist, drawing shoes for *Glamour* magazine in the late 40s and working as a designer for shoe manufacturer Israel Miller in the early 50s. He exhibited his work at several galleries, garnering recognition in the late 50s and early 60s for his strikingly unconventional silkscreen prints and paintings of everyday objects. He made a name for himself in the fine art world by heightening the stature of commercial objects to that of fine art, simultaneously taking fine art off its pedestal and elevating the banal, everyday, and repetitive. Warhol was fascinated with the mundane, and spoke of wanting to paint 'nothing' in his *Campbell Soup* series: 'I was looking for something that was the essence of nothing, and the soup can was it.' Warhol took the commonplace, humdrum objects and images of everyday life, the soup cans, the ketchup bottles and the advertisements - and made something both visually and conceptually enthralling from them.

Warhol made a lasting impact on the world of fine art by challenging art critics to question what truly makes art and find the differentiating line between commercial and fine art. Repeatedly depicting common household objects in the style of advertisements, Warhol's art provides a unique commentary on the rapid rise of American consumerism after World War II. Warhol's art documented the aftermath of the remarkable transition from a pre-war Depression era economy to a financial system that based itself around the needs and wants of its consumers. Warhol recognized the significance of advertising, television and the movies and the influence of these key industries on popular culture and the American psyche.

Like Marcel Duchamp, who turned then current ideas about art upside down with his radical piece *Fountain*, Andy Warhol revolutionized the art world of his time, creating countless new possibilities for what art could be and mean, and redefining the dialogue between the worlds of fine art and commerce. In his *Ad* series, Warhol recognized and commemorated the most iconic moments and figures of 20th century popular culture in works that embody his dramatic transformation of the criteria for what constitutes art. Through these artworks Warhol opened the doorway between the commercial and the beaux arts and captured the zeitgeist of late 20th century visual culture.



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1964 Artwork: © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Estate of Marcel Duchamp

Defining a Movement: The *Ad* Series as an Emblem of Pop Art

Warhol's 1965 *Ad* series epitomizes and celebrates the movement that defined his stamp on art history: Pop art. Warhol's embrace of consumerism and the commercial aesthetic ran directly counter to the prevailing ideas about art at the time, which deemed Abstract Expressionism's reaction to modern pre-war art the avant-garde of contemporary visual arts. Abstract Expressionist work such as Rothko's No 14, 1960 was seen as an exploration of individual expression through new, ever-changing visual images that conveyed a spiritual connection with the sublime.



Left: Current lot Right: Mark Rothko, No. 14, 1960, 1960 © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Pop art rejected this notion entirely, effacing any trace of the artist's personal identity and transforming art into something that can be mass-produced over and over again, detached copies of preconceived ideas rather than novel forays into personal expression. In a direct rejection of Abstract Expressionism's high-brow aim to transcend the commonplace, Warhol's Ad Series celebrates the everyday, seeking to magnify the ways in which popular culture unites regular Americans with celebrities and politicians. As Warhol said himself, ;you can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too.; As Warhol sees it, consumer culture connects disparate groups of people, surmounting barriers of class and status.

“Once you ‘got’ Pop, you could never see a sign again the same way again. And once you thought Pop, you could never see America the same way again.” — Andy Warhol

Warhol understood the tremendous impact that popular culture had and would have on American society, and he made this apparent through his works in the *Ad* series. His brilliantly chromatic homages to commodity culture highlight the very advertisements that people habitually skim over in their everyday lives. Like Jasper Johns in his iconic painting *Three Flags*, Warhol sought to draw attention to the images that inundate people's daily lives but that they rarely examine closely. While Johns chose the American flag for this endeavor, Warhol alternatively employed images that reference titanic corporations, celebrities, fashion, and witty advertising techniques, all in his distinctive brightly colorful, and glamorous style.



Jasper Johns, Three Flags, 1958, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Artwork: © 2023 Jasper Johns / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Equally influential in shaping the Pop Art movement, Warhol's use of neon and contrasting colors in addition to his adaptation of advertisements to the level of fine art marked his departure from Johns. While Johns laid the groundwork for Pop Art's espousal of commodity culture, Warhol built the backbone of the movement through his unique adaptation of advertisements, serial imagery production, and his technicolor mechanization of art. While Warhol helped to create and foster the Pop Art movement, he freely embraced experimentation and didn't want to be pigeonholed into one particular style.

“You ought to be able to be an Abstract Expressionist next week, or a Pop artist, or a realist, without feeling you've given up something... I think that would be so great, to be able to change style. And I think that's what's going to happen, that's going to be the whole new scene.” — Andy Warhol

Throughout his career Warhol has exhibited great versatility, working with the varying methods of acrylic painting, screen printing, printmaking, photography, and even filmmaking. The present lots are a testament to his ability to execute artwork not only in a wide range of media, from acrylics to polymer and silkscreen inks on canvas, but also in a variety of styles linked by the common theme

of advertisement.

Collector's Digest

- Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S. in 1928, Warhol came to maturity during a rapidly changing cultural and artistic scene. He earned a degree in pictorial design from the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh and worked for about a decade in New York City as a commercial artist. Warhol began painting in the late 50s, and swiftly rose to fame and critical acclaim in the early 60s after he produced his Campbell Soup can paintings.
- Warhol created his *Ad Series* only two years before his untimely death in 1987. The 80s marked a re-emergence of publicity and financial success for the artist, and he partnered with several younger artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat on new projects during this period. His commission business expanded and proliferated as he produced countless iconic images, including his portrait of Prince created in 1984. He also pursued an interest in television during this decade, hosting two programs for MTV, *Andy Warhol's T.V.* and *Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes*.
- Within a year of Warhol's death, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts was established, and in 1989 MoMA showed a retrospective of his works. The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh holds the largest collection of his artworks, which are also part of the permanent collections of institutions such as MoMA in New York City; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The High Museum of Art in Atlanta, GA; Museo Jumex in Mexico City; The Broad in LA; Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany; Detroit Institute of Arts, and Leeum Samsung Museum of Art in Seoul.

Provenance

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York
 Private Collection, New York
 Private Collection
 Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

New York, David Benrimon Fine Art, *Andy Warhol. Idolized*, 3 November - 15 December 2016, p. 11
 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



27

Andy Warhol

Mobilgas from the series Ads

signed and dated 'Andy Warhol 85' on the overlap
synthetic polymer and silkscreen inks on canvas
55.9 x 55.9 cm. (22 x 22 in.)
Executed in 1985.

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000
€355,000 — 592,000
\$385,000 — 641,000

[Go to Lot](#)



In his 1985 *Ad* series, Andy Warhol appropriates advertisements to create a bold homage to consumerism and the powerful influence of ads on American society. Each work in the series uniquely and colorfully captures a cultural moment. Warhol references the dominant corporate leaders of his time by representing a product accompanied by its brand logo in each of these works. *Life Savers*, which depicts the iconic brand of ring-shaped hard candy, is a nostalgic nod to advertisements from the 50s and 60s, while *Mobilgas* and *Paramount* directly refer to some of the most influential American corporations of the time. *Untitled, (Volkswagen Lemon)* uniquely draws upon and amplifies one of the most ingenious advertising campaigns of the postwar period. The German car company, seeking to market their vehicles to countless American veterans returning from the war, labelled the image of a perfect Volkswagen model as a 'Lemon' or a flawed, cheaply made foreign car. This advertisement proved successful in rebranding their company and showing off the exceptional make of their car through self-deprecating humor. Warhol cleverly uses these defining moments and figures in the history of American consumerism to question what art can be and elevate advertisement to the status of fine art.

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Mobilgas Vintage Logo, 1932-1939

"I just paint things I always thought were beautiful, things you use every day and never think about." — Andy Warhol

Blurring the Lines between Commercial and Fine Art

Warhol began his artistic career as a commercial artist, drawing shoes for *Glamour* magazine in the late 40s and working as a designer for shoe manufacturer Israel Miller in the early 50s. He exhibited his work at several galleries, garnering recognition in the late 50s and early 60s for his strikingly unconventional silkscreen prints and paintings of everyday objects. He made a name for himself in the fine art world by heightening the stature of commercial objects to that of fine art, simultaneously taking fine art off its pedestal and elevating the banal, everyday, and repetitive.

Andy Warhol

Warhol was fascinated with the mundane, and spoke of wanting to paint 'nothing' in his *Campbell Soup* series: 'I was looking for something that was the essence of nothing, and the soup can was it.' Warhol took the commonplace, humdrum objects and images of everyday life, the soup cans, the ketchup bottles and the advertisements – and made something both visually and conceptually enthralling from them.

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Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1964. Artwork: © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Estate of Marcel Duchamp

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Left: Lot 26, Andy Warhol, *Life Savers from the series Ads*, 1962 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 30 March 2023 Estimate: HK\$ 4,500,000 - 6,500,000 Right: Mark Rothko, *No. 14*, 1960, 1960

Pop art rejected this notion entirely, effacing any trace of the artist's personal identity and transforming art into something that can be mass produced over and over again, detached copies of preconceived ideas rather than novel forays into personal expression. In a direct rejection of Abstract Expressionism's high-brow aim to transcend the commonplace, Warhol's *Ad Series* celebrates the everyday, seeking to magnify the ways in which popular culture unites regular Americans with celebrities and politicians. As Warhol said himself, 'you can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too.' As Warhol sees it, consumer culture connects disparate groups of people, surmounting barriers of class and status.

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Collector's Digest

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Provenance

David Capo Collection, Los Angeles (acquired directly from the artist in 1985)

Private Collection

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



28

Andy Warhol

Untitled (Volkswagen Lemon) from the series Ads

signed and dated 'Andy Warhol 85' on the overlap
synthetic polymer and silkscreen inks on canvas
55.9 x 55.9 cm. (22 x 22 in.)

Executed in 1985.

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000

€474,000 — 710,000

\$513,000 — 769,000

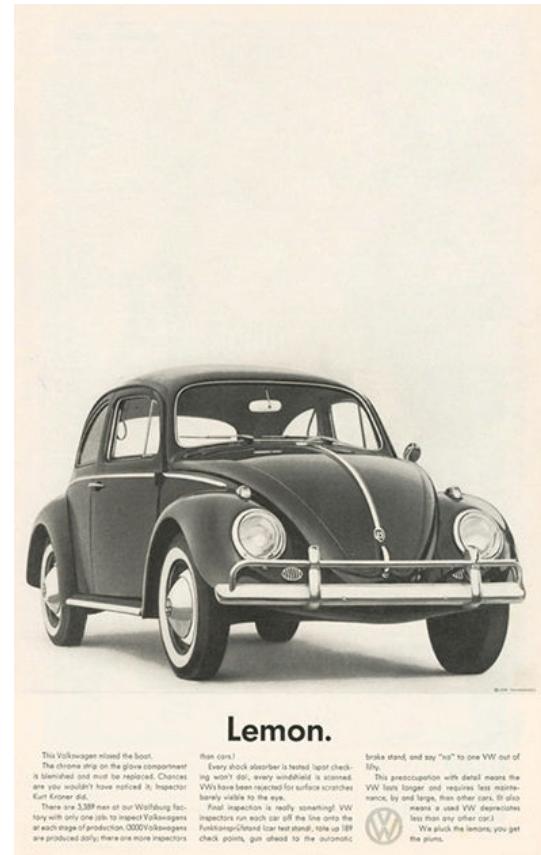
[Go to Lot](#)



Andy Warhol

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Vintage Volkswagen ad, 1960-68

"I see art in everything. Your shoes. That car. This coffee cup. It's art if you see it as art." — Andy Warhol

Blurring the Lines between Commercial and Fine Art

Warhol began his artistic career as a commercial artist, drawing shoes for *Glamour* magazine in the late 40s and working as a designer for shoe manufacturer Israel Miller in the early 50s. He exhibited his work at several galleries, garnering recognition in the late 50s and early 60s for his

Andy Warhol

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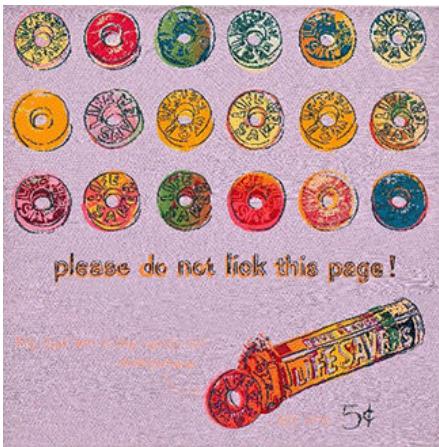
Like Marcel Duchamp, who turned then current ideas about art upside down with his radical piece *Fountain*, Andy Warhol revolutionized the art world of his time, creating countless new possibilities for what art could be and mean, and redefining the dialogue between the worlds of fine art and commerce. In his *Ad* series, Warhol recognized and commemorated the most iconic moments and figures of 20th century popular culture in works that embody his dramatic transformation of the criteria for what constitutes art. Through these artworks Warhol opened the doorway between the commercial and the beaux arts and captured the zeitgeist of late 20th century visual culture.



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917, replica 1964. Artwork: © 2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Estate of Marcel Duchamp

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Left: Lot

26, Andy Warhol, *Life Savers from the series Ads*, 1985

Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 30 March 2023

Estimate: HK\$ 4,500,000 - 6,500,000

Right: Mark Rothko, *No. 14*, 1960

Pop art rejected this notion entirely, effacing any trace of the artist's personal identity and transforming art into something that can be mass-produced over and over again, detached copies of preconceived ideas rather than novel forays into personal expression. In a direct rejection of Abstract Expressionism's high-brow aim to transcend the commonplace, Warhol's *Ad Series* celebrates the everyday, seeking to magnify the ways in which popular culture unites regular Americans with celebrities and politicians. As Warhol said himself, 'you can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too.' As Warhol sees it, consumer culture connects disparate groups of people, surmounting barriers of class and status.

"Once you 'got' Pop, you could never see a sign again the same way again. And once you thought Pop, you could never see America the same way again." — Andy Warhol

Warhol understood the tremendous impact that popular culture had and would have on American society, and he made this apparent through his works in the *Ad* series. His brilliantly chromatic homages to commodity culture highlight the very advertisements that people habitually skim over in their everyday lives. Like Jasper Johns in his iconic painting *Three Flags*, Warhol sought to draw attention to the images that inundate people's daily lives but that they rarely examine closely. While Johns chose the American flag for this endeavor, Warhol alternatively employed images that

reference titanic corporations, celebrities, fashion, and witty advertising techniques, all in his distinctive brightly colorful, and glamorous style.



Jasper Johns, *Three Flags*, 1958, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Artwork: © 2023 Jasper Johns / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Equally influential in shaping the Pop Art movement, Warhol's use of neon and contrasting colors in addition to his adaptation of advertisements to the level of fine art marked his departure from Johns. While Johns laid the groundwork for Pop Art's espousal of commodity culture, Warhol built the backbone of the movement through his unique adaptation of advertisements, serial imagery production, and his technicolor mechanization of art. While Warhol helped to create and foster the Pop Art movement, he freely embraced experimentation and didn't want to be pigeonholed into one particular style.

"You ought to be able to be an Abstract Expressionist next week, or a Pop artist, or a realist, without feeling you've given up something... I think that would be so great, to be able to change style. And I think that's what's going to happen, that's going to be the whole new scene." — Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol

Throughout his career Warhol has exhibited great versatility, working with the varying methods of acrylic painting, screen printing, printmaking, photography, and even filmmaking. The present lots are a testament to his ability to execute artwork not only in a wide range of media, from acrylics to polymer and silkscreen inks on canvas, but also in a variety of styles linked by the common theme of advertisement.

Collector's Digest

- Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S. in 1928, Warhol came to maturity during a rapidly changing cultural and artistic scene. He earned a degree in pictorial design from the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh and worked for about a decade in New York City as a commercial artist. Warhol began painting in the late 50s, and swiftly rose to fame and critical acclaim in the early 60s after he produced his Campbell Soup can paintings.
 - Warhol created his *Ad Series* only two years before his untimely death in 1987. The 80s marked a re-emergence of publicity and financial success for the artist, and he partnered with several younger artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat on new projects during this period. His commission business expanded and proliferated as he produced countless iconic images, including his portrait of Prince created in 1984. He also pursued an interest in television during this decade, hosting two programs for MTV, *Andy Warhol's T.V.* and *Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes*.
 - Within a year of Warhol's death, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts was established, and in 1989 MoMA showed a retrospective of his works. The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh holds the largest collection of his artworks, which are also part of the permanent collections of institutions such as MoMA in New York City; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The High Museum of Art in Atlanta, GA; Museo Jumex in Mexico City; The Broad in LA; Museum für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt, Germany; Detroit Institute of Arts, and Leeum Samsung Museum of Art in Seoul.
-

Provenance

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York
 American Fine Art Editions, Inc., Scottsdale
 Private Collection (acquired from the above in 2005)
 Christie's, New York, 09 May 2012, lot 117
 Ackerman's Fine Art & Advisory, New York
 Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



29

Andy Warhol

Paramount from the series Ads

signed and dated 'Andy Warhol 85' on the overlap

acrylic on canvas

55.9 x 55.9 cm. (22 x 22 in.)

Executed in 1985.

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000

€355,000 — 592,000

\$385,000 — 641,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Andy Warhol

In his 1985 *Ad* series, Andy Warhol appropriates advertisements to create a bold homage to consumerism and the powerful influence of ads on American society. Each work in the series uniquely and colorfully captures a cultural moment. Warhol references the dominant corporate leaders of his time by representing a product accompanied by its brand logo in each of these works. *Life Savers*, which depicts the iconic brand of ring-shaped hard candy, is a nostalgic nod to advertisements from the 50s and 60s, while *Mobilgas* and *Paramount* directly refer to some of the most influential American corporations of the time. *Untitled, (Volkswagen Lemon)* uniquely draws upon and amplifies one of the most ingenious advertising campaigns of the postwar period. The German car company, seeking to market their vehicles to countless American veterans returning from the war, labelled the image of a perfect Volkswagen model as a 'Lemon' or a flawed, cheaply made foreign car. This advertisement proved successful in rebranding their company and showing off the exceptional make of their car through self-deprecating humor. Warhol cleverly uses these defining moments and figures in the history of American consumerism to question what art can be and elevate advertisement to the status of fine art.

Warhol achieved the colorful and loose style of his *Ad Series* by employing varying methods from acrylics to multiple silkscreens and layers of paint. This aesthetic departure from his more mechanical and serialized earlier work such as the *Campbell Soup* series allowed him to produce a stunning portfolio of unique, vivid artworks that not only are culturally significant but also provide a strikingly vibrant visual experience.



Paramount Pictures Logo 1967-current

"It's the movies that have really been running things in America ever since they were invented. They show you what to do, how to do it, when to do it, how to feel about it, and how to look how you feel about it." — Andy Warhol

Blurring the Lines between Commercial and Fine Art

Warhol began his artistic career as a commercial artist, drawing shoes for *Glamour* magazine in the late 40s and working as a designer for shoe manufacturer Israel Miller in the early 50s. He exhibited his work at several galleries, garnering recognition in the late 50s and early 60s for his strikingly unconventional silkscreen prints and paintings of everyday objects. He made a name for himself in the fine art world by heightening the stature of commercial objects to that of fine art, simultaneously taking fine art off its pedestal and elevating the banal, everyday, and repetitive. Warhol was fascinated with the mundane, and spoke of wanting to paint 'nothing' in his *Campbell Soup* series: 'I was looking for something that was the essence of nothing, and the soup can was it.' Warhol took the commonplace, humdrum objects and images of everyday life, the soup cans, the ketchup bottles and the advertisements – and made something both visually and conceptually

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Left: Lot 26, Andy Warhol, *Life Savers from the series Ads*, 1985 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 30 March 2023 Estimate: HK\$ 4,500,000 - 6,500,000 Right: Mark Rothko, No. 14, 1960, 1960

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Provenance

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Private Collection, New York

Private Collection

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



30 o◆

Takashi Murakami

Cherries

FRP, steel, acrylic and urethane paint

200 x 100 x 71 cm. (78 3/4 x 39 3/8 x 27 7/8 in.)

Executed in 2005, this work is from an edition of 5 plus
2 artist's proofs.

Estimate

HK\$2,500,000 — 3,500,000

€296,000 — 414,000

\$321,000 — 449,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Rather than a big figure, I guess you could say I’m more of an influential minority symbol.” — Takashi Murakami

A master cultural synthesiser of our time, Takashi Murakami was named by *Time* magazine as one of the world's most influential icons. Celebrated as multi-hyphenate icons and leaders of contemporary consumer culture, Murakami uses pop culture as a springboard to transform contemporary art, attracting new audiences and building a stronger bridge between art and the general public, fashion, and subculture.

Known for blurring the lines between high art and popular visual culture, and for challenging the divide between artistic practice and commercial enterprise, Murakami's colourful sculptures and paintings, such as *Cherries*, belie the sharp, subversive intelligence of their creator.



Installation view of another edition of the current work at Hong Kong Museum of Art, *Louis Vuitton: A Passion for Creation*, 22 May - 9 August 2009 Artwork: © 2005 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd.
All Rights Reserved

Playful Encounter

With its irresistible charm and a sly provocativeness, *Cherries* shows Murakami to be an artist

skilled at navigating the realm of the surreal. The traditionally sexual connotations of cherry fruit are undermined by the disarming, candy-coloured smiles of Murakami's *Cherries*, offering a joyfully surreal encounter for viewers.

In the midst of his deep dive into otaku culture during the mid-1990s, Murakami realised the greater relatable appeal and potential of *kawaii* (cuteness), and thus re-oriented his art from confrontation to cuteness. He created a strange, imaginary world of iconic characters including Mr. DOB, Kaikai, Kiki and enchanted mushrooms, eyes, and flowers. He explained in an interview with the New York Times: 'I found a system for what is a cute character,' and on a whiteboard at Kaikai Kiki he drew a circle with the top half blank and the bottom half containing two dots for eyes and a smiling mouth. 'In the *kawaii* system, this scale is very important.'ⁱ



Claes Oldenburg, *Spoonbridge and Cherry*, 1988 Walker Art Center, Minneapolis Image: © Whirlitzer | Dreamstime.com

Cherries also pays tribute to the influence of Pop Art on the *Superflat* movement that Murakami had pioneered, referencing American sculptor Claes Oldenburg's celebrated *Spoonbridge and Cherry* (1988) for the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Oldenburg created monumental works based on everyday consumer objects which elevated the banal to the extraordinary, and *Cherries* in its bold, voluptuous form provides a humorous, even Americanised, counterpoint to the mystique and rituals of Japanese cherry blossom culture. But whilst Pop Art took a somewhat quizzical, even

critical look at capitalism and the burgeoning culture of consumerism, Murakami transcended those boundaries altogether.

Breaking Boundaries

"When future audiences look at our work, I'd like them to think of the end of an era when art was still sheltered in a sanctuary, and when we were working ceaselessly to bring it outside." — Takashi Murakami

Cherries was created in 2005, the same year that Murakami's flourishing collaboration with Louis Vuitton saw Murakami's kawaii smiling red cherries featured alongside the historic LV monogram on the label's cult luxury handbags and accessories. Murakami's instantly-recognisable smiling cherry icon is now immortalised in art and fashion history, his collaboration with the French fashion house propelling Murakami to celebrity status in Japan and around the world, and cementing his reputation as an artist unafraid of blurring the boundaries between 'high' art and commercial enterprise.



Cherries being cooperated into a Louis Vuitton pattern Facade of a Louis Vuitton store on Champs-Élysées, Paris, April 2005

Murakami continues to work deliberately to reject the air of exclusivity surrounding art, synthesising elements of high and low culture across all areas of his work. Showing a fiercely entrepreneurial streak in his work, he is a game-changer in terms of his desire to cut across conventional boundaries for an artist in the art world (most notably through the establishment of his art production and artist management company KaiKai KiKi), as well as through his collaborations across altogether different industries (for example with cult fashion designer and music producer Virgil Abloh), effortlessly switching between contemporary cultural and subcultural trends. Since his first solo exhibition outside Japan in 1995 at Galerie Perrotin, Murakami's status as one of the most important artists of our time has been confirmed by numerous exhibitions at prominent museums and art institutions around the world, including the Palais de Tokyo in Paris and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

Collector's Digest

- Best known for his celebrated oeuvre that fuses fine art with pop culture, Takashi Murakami founded the *Superflat* movement in the 1990s and Kaikai Kiki Studio in 2001, opening doors for many rising and established Japanese artists such as Mr., Akayo Rokkaku, Chiho Aoshima and MADSAKI.
- Collaborating with numerous bands and celebrities including Kanye West, Louis Vuitton, Pharrell Williams and Billie Eilish, Murakami's astoundingly rich and varied oeuvre has received unparalleled popularity, cementing his position as one of the most renowned artists in the contemporary art scene.
- Murakami's works are in the most prestigious public collections of notable institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles; The Broad, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Foundation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo; Guggenheim, Abu Dhabi; Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; Long Museum, Shanghai; M+, Hong Kong; and Tai Kwun, Hong Kong, amongst others.

¹ Takashi Murakami, quoted in Arthur Lubow, 'The Murakami Method', *The New York Times*, 3 April 2005, [online](#)

Provenance

Perrotin Gallery

Private Collection, London (acquired from the above in 2006)

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2020

Exhibited

Hong Kong Museum of Art, Louis Vuitton: A Passion for Creation, 22 May - 9 August 2009, p. 23

(another example exhibited and illustrated)

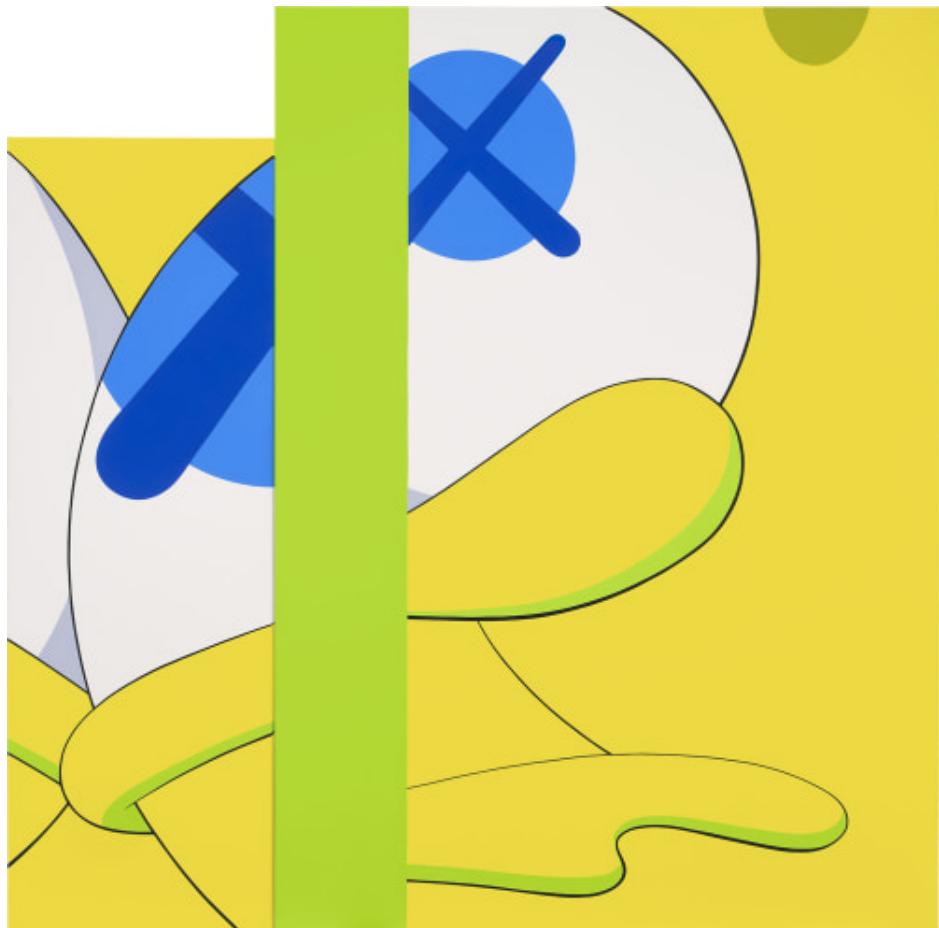
Literature

Marc Jacobs and Louis Vuitton, *Louis Vuitton: Art, Fashion and Architecture*, New York, 2009, p.

302 (another example illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

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31

KAWS

Pinch

signed and dated 'KAWS..10' on the reverse of each panel

acrylic on canvas, diptych

left 182.9 x 60.96 cm. (72 x 24 in.)

right 213.4 x 152.4 cm. (84 x 60 in.)

Painted in 2010.

Estimate

HK\$5,500,000 — 7,500,000

€653,000 — 891,000

\$705,000 — 962,000

[Go to Lot](#)



It's difficult to overstate KAWS' importance to contemporary art. The American multidisciplinary creative has in many ways come to define the gold standard of an artist in the 21st century: scything down the traditions of art while retaining a successful and singular vision.

Early Beginnings

KAWS has always understood the fundamental requisite of giving his art a stage to flourish. As a street artist in New York City in the 1990s, he honed his skills by developing a signature skull-and-crossbones motif, which he would later evolve into his iconic 'Companion' character. This character, a hybrid of popular culture icons, served as a reflection of KAWS' deep understanding of the power of public art and the ways in which it can shape the cultural landscape. KAWS' experiences as a street artist also instilled in him a keen sense of the importance of accessibility and audience engagement; by creating art in public spaces, the artist was able to reach a wider reception and make his work a part of the fabric of everyday life. 'It's definitely a great training ground [graffiti]. I mean, that's everything. Basically, speaking for myself, you build an image and a presence', the artist explainsⁱ.



KAWS posing with some of his original graffiti work Image and Artwork: KAWS

A Diptych of Popular Chaos

Adept at subverting and refashioning the familiar in pop culture, KAWS has always tended to cartoons as a means of highlighting the inherent malleability of cultural symbols. As curator Mónica Ramírez-Montagut explains, '...we recognise the cartoon characters yet, with KAWS's intervention, the meaning becomes somewhat subverted...Since we are familiar with these characters...we in fact feel empowered to ponder the meaning and have an opinion. Thus it is up to us to decide whether these are homages or criticisms'ⁱⁱ. The present lot plays well into this satirical

reinterpretation. *Pinch*, painted in 2010, is an extravagant contortion of Cubist measures where the culturally ubiquitous character SpongeBob SquarePants is reconditioned into KAWS' unique visual vocabulary. Facial features are unanchored and clash together to produce seismic levels of pictorial chaos that is supercharged with raw emotion. By dissecting the figure and isolating certain constituents to magnify the significance of the eyes and mouth, we are compelled to confront these abstracted forms directly. This in turn adds a complex layer to our interpretive process and necessitates our active engagement with the artwork, provoking us to imbue it with our own perspicacious conjectures.

Despite being rooted in their source imagery, KAWS's paintings are not appropriations of specific animated cartoon narratives but rather form broader dialogues of universal human emotions. Of his practice, KAWS has commented, 'even though I use a comic language, my figures are not always reflecting the idealistic cartoon view that I grew up on, where everything has a happy ending'ⁱⁱⁱ.

"...And as I investigated it more I realised all these similarities between SpongeBob and tonnes of other earlier cartoons from the thirties and forties, up to the present. I like the way common eyes and noses can exist through different formats and how just a dominant colour change or some other sort of shift will completely identify existing forms with a new cartoon. So I think that's why you see SpongeBob and it instantly feels familiar. It's sort of a combination of many things you grew up on." — KAWS
in conversation with Pharrell Williams

It is interesting to note that the current lot was exhibited as part of *KAWS: PAY THE DEBT TO NATURE*. This exhibition title may be a subtle reference to a line in Thomas Pynchon's famous novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*. In the novel, a character reads a tombstone with the words, 'Death is a debt to nature due, which I have paid, and so must you,' which is a powerful reference to the novel's opening epitaph: 'Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation.' Remarkable that almost four decades after the publication of *Gravity's Rainbow*, KAWS' artistic practice is similarly adept at blending diverse cultural elements in his works, much like Pynchon's penchant for combining high and low culture.



KAWS: *PAY THE DEBT TO NATURE*, 6 November - 23 December 2010, Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris Artwork: © KAWS

Critique of Power

This recurring theme of merging high and low culture has become a hallmark of KAWS' diverse and multifaceted body of work, and functions as a crucial postmodern mediation of today's world. By breaking down and reconfiguring familiar forms, he challenges our assumptions about the coherence and stability of identity and meaning. In *Pinch*, the figure is deconstructed and reassembled in various permutations, highlighting the fluidity and multiplicity of identity. This fragmentation also speaks to the commodification of art and the commercialization of culture, as its stratification of form attempts to peel back to layers of financial interest that now permeates the art world.

Despite his association with pop art and his use of cartoon characters, KAWS' work is anything but superficial. His works are deeply introspective, exploring themes of loneliness, isolation, and mortality in a way that is both poignant and thought-provoking. Through his use of form, the artist speaks to the ways in which our identities are often fractured and incomplete, highlighting the sense of disconnection that many of us feel in an increasingly polarized world. Therefore in doing

so, he creates a body of work that is at once relatable and yet deeply personal.

From the streets of New York to the global stage, KAWS continues to blaze a trail through the ever-interconnected worlds of toys, graffiti, fine art and fashion. Despite this, he remains resolute about his *raison d'être* as an artist: 'It's just always been about communication, and I've found other means. Now I get to have that dialogue with the world.'^{iv}

Collector's Digest



KAWS, HOT SEAT JUNCTION, 2010 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong for HK\$8,599,000, 1 December 2022
Artwork: © KAWS

- KAWS's multidisciplinary practice has caught the attention of collectors worldwide. The artist has shown commitment to remaining accessible by collaborating with global

fashion brands including Dior, Nike, and Uniqlo

- KAWS has exhibited extensively in renowned institutions including solo exhibitions at—The National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Qatar Museums, Doha; Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Michigan; Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China; Yorkshire Sculpture Brooklyn Museum, New York (2015); Centro de Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga; Norman Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia; and the High Art Museum, Atlanta.
- The artist received a retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia (2019-2020) and most recently, the highly acclaimed major survey at the Brooklyn Museum, New York in 2021.
- His works are cemented within the permanent collections of international institutions, including the Brooklyn Museum, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in Texas, the CAC Malaga in Spain, and the Rosenblum Collection in Paris.

ⁱ Evan Pricco, 'Art Louder Than Words', *Juxtapoz*, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Mónica Ramírez-Montagut, KAWS, exh. brochure, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ KAWS, quoted in KAWS: *WHERE THE END STARTS*, exh. cat., Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth, 2016, p. 5

^{iv} Evan Pricco, 'Art Louder Than Words', *Juxtapoz*, [online](#)

Provenance

Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Paris, Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, KAWS: *PAY THE DEBT TO NATURE*, 6 November - 23 December 2010

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN ESTEEMED COLLECTION

32

Mr.

The Endless Landscape of this Reality

signed and dated 'Mr. 2008' on the stretcher
acrylic on canvas
170.2 x 238.8 cm. (67 x 94 in.)
Painted in 2009.

Estimate

HK\$1,500,000 — 2,000,000
€177,000 — 236,000
\$192,000 — 256,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Everything I create is about my surroundings and the environment around me: from my daily activities, to all the logos and signs in the city, and all sorts of symbols—anything and everything.” — Mr.

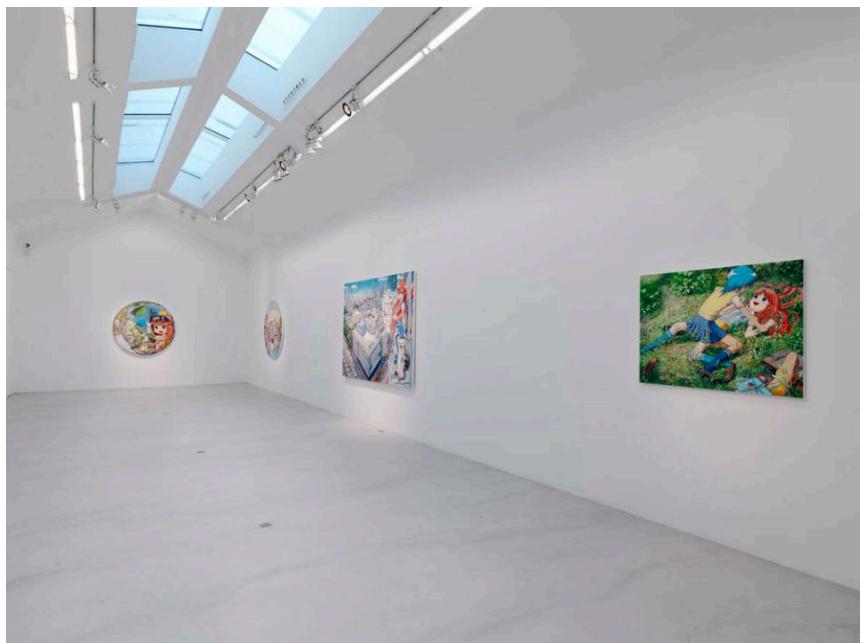
Featuring a sprawling cityscape and anime-inspired characters, *The Endless Landscape of this Reality* is characteristic of Japanese artist Mr.’s iconic oeuvre. Internationally recognised for his vibrant and nostalgic aesthetic, the artist examines *otaku* subculture— the Japanese fan community for anime, manga, and video games. By incorporating such motifs into his works, Mr. blurs the lines between high and low culture.

Taking visual cues from the Japanese culture of cuteness, Mr. first gained popularity in the early 2000s for drawing young female characters, who remain synonymous with the artist to this day. These characters are rendered in typical *kawaii* style— sparkling wide eyes, colourful hair, and round, blush-tinted faces— and are meant to evoke *moe*, the Japanese pop-culture notion of feeling affection and protectiveness for fictional characters due to their cuteness and innocence.

As a self-proclaimed *otaku*, Mr. continuously depicts these *kawaii* girls as a reflection of his own interests, but self-indulgence and eliciting adoration are not the only intentions behind his works—he hopes to portray these girls as bold, powerful individuals. Regarding the emphasis on young female characters in his oeuvre, he states: ‘I was inspired by the heroic female anime characters, which appeared in the ‘90s. From the 1970s to 1980s, I noticed that there were mainly male heroic characters in anime. However, from the 1990s, *Sailor Moon* became one of the popular heroine anime characters. And 10 years later, another popular anime series called *Pretty Cure* dominated the anime industry in Japan. Hence, my artworks only feature female characters because I want to provide them with power in our society.’ⁱ

Courage and Cuteness

“I don’t believe in things being only ‘cute’, I feel I always have to represent both the cute and the scary dimensions with my paintings... I want to express roughness, not just cuteness and light-hearted characters.” — Mr.



Installation view of the current lot (centre) at Paris, Perrotin, *Mr.: Nobody Dies*, 21 October 2008 - 10 January 2009

Part of *Nobody Dies*, Mr.’s 2008 solo show with Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris, the current work exemplifies the artist’s neo-pop aesthetic, combining his *otaku* fantasies with his desire to present girls as heroic, self-contained figures. Our orange-haired protagonist sits precariously on a narrow windowsill, overlooking a neighbourhood street corner on a clear day. She seems oblivious or indifferent to her perilous position, sending a bright smile our way as her hair blows casually in the breeze. The painting is a perfect balance of cheerfulness and ominousness, a running theme throughout the artist’s repertoire. Beyond the innocent heroine’s exuberance and the comfortable ambience of the urban landscape, undercurrents of isolation and danger pervade the scene. This is a commonality in Mr.’s works, which often juxtapose fun, jovial imagery with subtle themes of emptiness and pain. The artist uses art to withdraw from reality, as well as to self-reflect on solitude, fear, and social anxiety. He explains: ‘I don’t really interact with the brighter side of life. But precisely because of this, imagined scenes of comfort and reassurance evolve inside of me, becoming my artistic vision. There is a darkness that exists. But in order to break out from it, I create these bright, playful works. Perhaps the viewer can find some comfort also, in the awareness of my battle and process.ⁱⁱ Indeed, the current work embodies the idea of escapism—the subject is quite literally detached from the real world, observing society from an unreachable

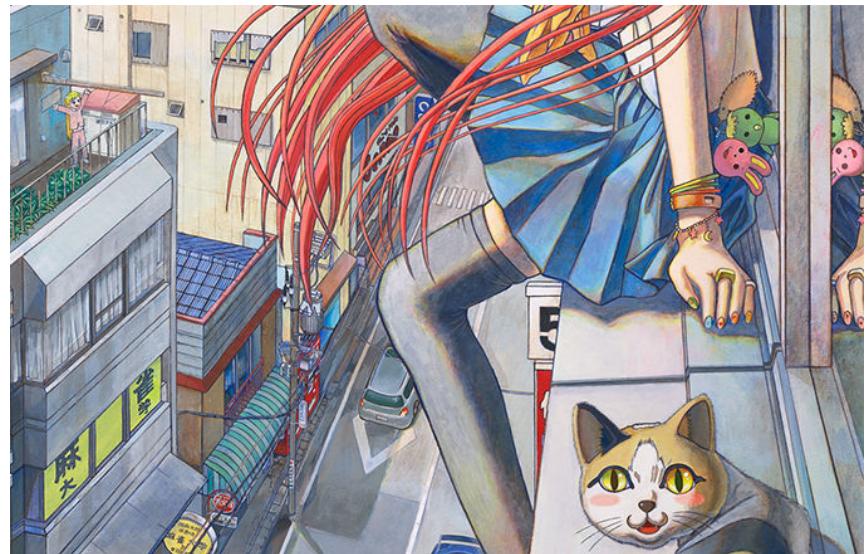
height.

Placing the subject towards the right, Mr. draws our attention to the city scenery that takes up most of the canvas. His paintings frequently document urban environments, often based on photographs of Tokyo's streets that were taken by the artist himself. In the current work, a peaceful suburban setting dominates the foreground, featuring three-storey homes with sloped roofs and balconies lined with plants. Skyscrapers tower in the near distance, close enough to be visible, yet too far away to disrupt the serene suburban atmosphere. Here, the neighbourhood scene lies on the outskirts of the metropolis, serving as a pocket of peace and quiet amidst the hustle and bustle of cosmopolitan life.

Despite the foreboding undertones, *The Endless Landscape of this Reality* still carries an undeniable air of positivity. Coupled with the subject's sunny disposition, the recklessness of her position is a testament to her fearlessness. Here, the artist succeeds in his intentions to recreate the anime heroine archetype – as in many of his works, the young protagonist, despite her sweet and juvenile appearance, is depicted as a courageous, independent risk-taker.

Superflat and Kawaii Culture

A protégé of art world superstar Takashi Murakami, Mr. is often associated with the Superflat movement pioneered by his mentor. 'Superflat' is a conflation of high and low culture, usually comprising a flat painting style reminiscent of anime and manga. Alongside a roster of artists such as Yoshitomo Nara and Aya Takano, Mr. has played an important part in the elevation of Japanese pop culture to high art. Though his work is often compared with that of his mentor and his contemporaries, Mr.'s style is unique in its explicit referencing of anime aesthetics. His oeuvre pays homage to both *otaku* media and Japan's youth culture, as epitomised by the current work.



Detail of the present lot

The subject dons a blue and white sailor *fuku*, the traditional military-inspired girls' uniform that is widely used across Japan and even in other parts of Asia. Notably, it is closely linked to cosplay (a subculture of fans that dress up as fictional characters) and is a symbol of *otaku* subculture. Synonymous with cute schoolgirl characters in anime and manga, Mr.'s subjects are often dressed in variations of this classic outfit. Upon closer inspection, the subject's nails are painted neon pink, and she has accessorised with an array of candy-coloured rings and bracelets. A bundle of small plush toys, seemingly cell phone charms, peek out from her skirt pocket. Her trinkets and jewellery are characteristically *kawaii* and are a likely tribute to Harajuku fashion – named after a district in Shibuya, Tokyo, it celebrates vibrant, expressive street style and was particularly popular among the Japanese youth in the 2000s.

Collector's Digest

- Born in 1969, Mr. grew up with anime and *Otaku* culture at the forefront of his daily experience – the characteristic anime style we recognise today originated in the '60s, and the fandom culture that Mr. documents in his works began to enter the mainstream in the '80s. He honed his artistic practice at the Sokei Art School in Tokyo, graduating from the Department of Fine Arts in 1996. Just the previous year, he was

discovered by Takashi Murakami and has been involved with his mentor's Kaikai Kiki Gallery ever since.

- Mr.'s work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at renowned institutions, including *Mr.: You Can Hear the Song of This Town*, Phoenix Art Museum, Phoenix (2022), *Quotidianist*, How Art Museum, Shanghai (2021), and *CARTE BLANCHE TO MR. AND PHARRELL WILLIAMS: 'A CALL TO ACTION'*, Musée Guimet, Paris (2019), among many others. Represented by Perrotin, Mr. has worked with the gallery on numerous shows, with the most recent ones including the solo show *Mr.'s Melancholy Walk Around the Town*, Perrotin Paris (2019), and the group shows *Healing*, Perrotin Shanghai (2021) and Perrotin Seoul (2020), and *Kaleidoscopes: Contemporary Portraiture*, Perrotin Hong Kong (2020). A consistent participant in gallery shows, museum exhibits, and art fairs since the launch of his career over two decades ago, Mr. continues to inspire an international audience, and is one of the biggest names in Japanese contemporary art today.

ⁱ Mr., quoted in Suzz, 'An exclusive interview with MR. The Otaku artist', *Artitute*, 3 September 2019, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Mr., quoted in Oliver Giles, 'The Dark Truth Behind Japanese Artist Mr.'s Art Pieces', *Tatler Asia*, 13 October 2018, [online](#)

Provenance

Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2009

Exhibited

Paris, Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, *Mr.: Nobody Dies*, 21 October 2008 - 10 January 2009

Seattle Asian Art Museum, *Live On: Mr.'s Japanese Neo-Pop*, 22 November 2014 - 5 April 2015

Literature

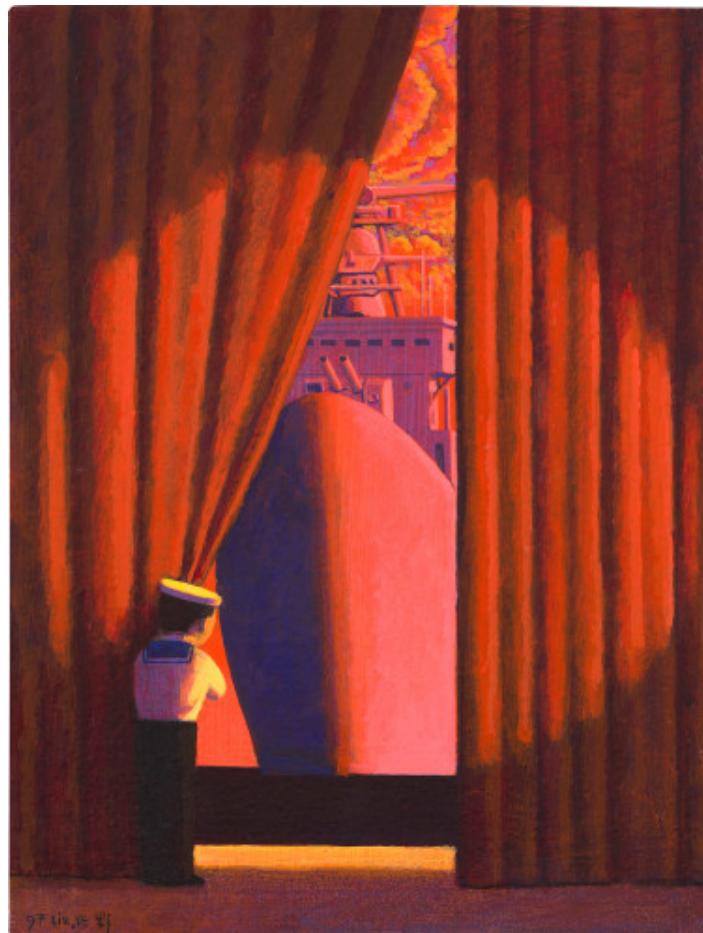
Brian Miller, 'Reverie and Rubble: Poised between shining kitsch and forbidding ruins, meet Mr.', *Seattle Weekly*, 7-13 January 2015, vol. 40, no. 1, p. 17

Susan Kunimatsu, 'Fantasy meets tragedy in Mr.'s Japanese Neo-Pop Art', *International Examiner*, vol. 42, no. 4, 18 February - 3 March 2015, p. 12

Galerie Perrotin and Kaikai Kiki, *Mr.*, Paris and Tokyo, 2011, pp. 82-83 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT EUROPEAN
COLLECTION

33 o♦x

Liu Ye

Flagship No. 1

signed and dated '97 Liu Ye Ye [in Chinese]' lower left

acrylic and oil on canvas

29.2 x 22.2 cm. (11 1/2 x 8 3/4 in.)

Painted in 1997.

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000

€473,000 — 709,000

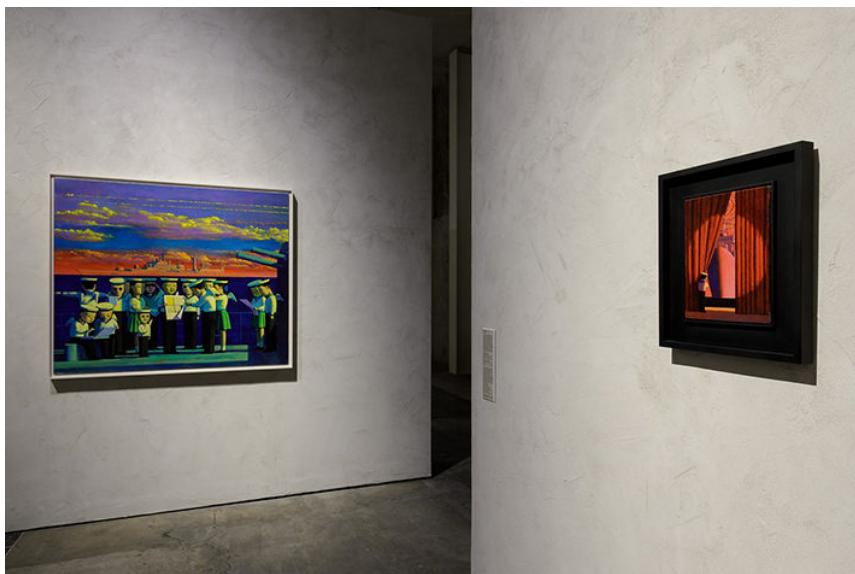
\$513,000 — 769,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"I have equal passion for fairy tales and philosophy. Fairytales are full of imagination and sensitivity whereas philosophy requires strict and rational thinking. Fairytales and philosophy represent two extreme poles of thinking. My paintings roam between these two poles, at times more towards one pole and at other times towards the opposite pole." — Liu Ye

Whimsical and theatrical are words that come to mind when approaching Liu Ye's bewildering yet charming oeuvre. As one of the most important living contemporary Chinese artists, Liu Ye's most recent solo exhibition—fittingly entitled *Storytelling*—took place at the Fondazione Prada in Milan in 2020-2021, the second leg of an exhibition that began in Shanghai in 2018. The present work, *Flagship No.1*, the first piece from a series exploring astounding scenes in which tiny sailors peel back hefty velvet stage curtains to reveal hulking warships, was part of this thought-provoking show in Italy. Having remained in private hands for nearly a decade, *Flagship No. 1* rejoins the auction stage this season as a signature work by the artist.



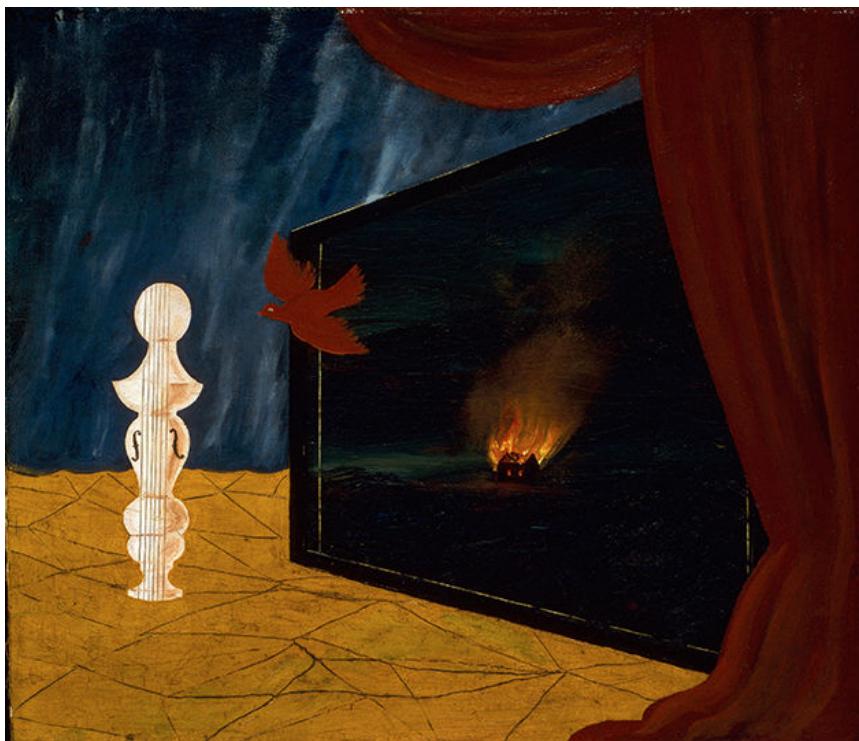
The present work on view in the exhibition in Milan, Fondazione Prada, *Liu Ye: Storytelling*, 10 January 2020 - 10 January 2021

Behind the Crimson Curtain

Often heavily imbued with references to legendary painters throughout art history, Liu's works draw on a vast multitude of influences, all the while creating a distinctive painterly style that is unique to him. He cites his greatest inspiration to be Piet Mondrian, most known for pioneering the De Stijl movement with his abstract geometric paintings, composed of quadrilaterals rendered in primary colours and bold outlines. For those familiar with Liu's oeuvre, this comes as no surprise, as the artist has explicitly referenced Mondrian in numerous works, and yet the artist also pays tribute to his role model in subtler ways, such as in the present work. The artist's captivation with Mondrian translates seamlessly onto the current canvas through a well-balanced composition and a bold use of the primary colour red, such as can be seen in the strict linear preoccupation in the crimson curtain's folds, and the deliberately placed, central circular stage light, as well as the rectilinear balance one detects in the execution of the warship.

For all its angled perfection however, *Flagship No. 1* powerfully evokes the dreamy influences of Surrealism, at deliberately great odds with the rigidity and compositional equipoise the painting demands. Liu's use of the curtain in the present work invokes a device employed by the great Surrealist René Magritte, but also artists from a longer art-historical lineage, such as the Old Masters: as can be seen in Rembrandt's *The Holy Family with a Curtain*, the curtain serves as a powerful trompe-l'oeil, drawing the viewer into the depths of its composition, signaling the artifice of the scene we are witnessing, and yet also showcasing great skill in rendering drapery. The overall effect is one that recalls a stage and make-believe, juxtaposing with the verisimilitude of the Virgin Mother and Child.

Having famously stated, '[w]e are surrounded by curtains. We can only perceive the world behind a curtain of semblance. At the same time, an object needs to be covered in order to be recognized at all,' René Magritte is an illusionist posing as a painter, whose presence can be felt in Liu's pieces. In works such as *The Nocturne*, 1925, the viewer plunges into an unlikely scene: burgundy theatre curtains rise to reveal a nightmarish scene of a lone totem resembling a cello, rising out of a cracked earth. Beside this is a framed canvas depicting a house ablaze, and a monotonous red bird flutters inexplicably across the painting. A vast aqueous wall of blue rises behind this scene; a tsunami threatening to engulf the scene. A precursor to a longer series of later works in which Magritte paired landscape with theatre curtains, the thematic concern at hand is inextricably tied to the historical backdrop of the years of uncertainty between the two world wars, lending a somber tone to the painting, and undeniably hinting at the theatricality and perhaps absurdity of the epoch.



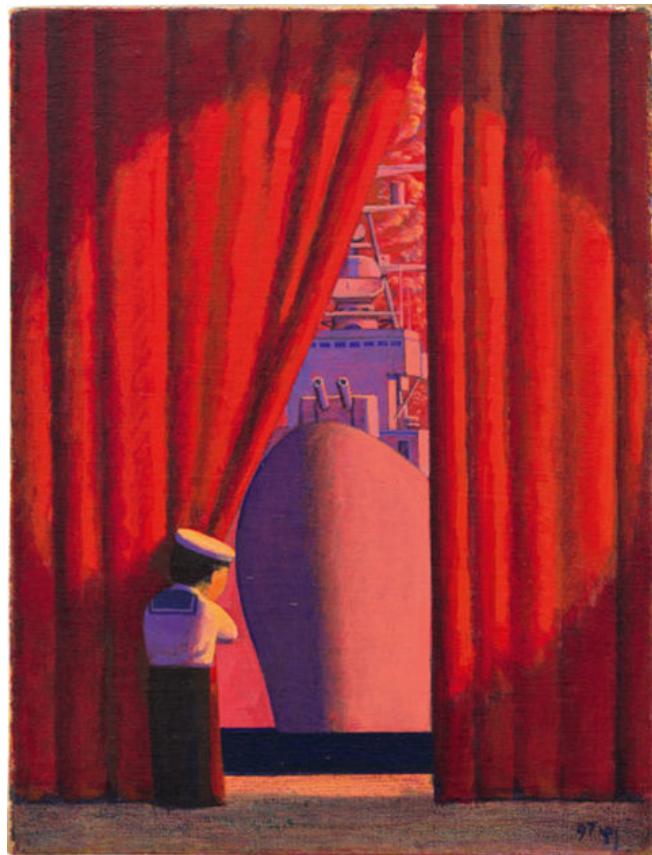
René Magritte, *Nocturne*, 1925 The Menil Collection, Houston Image : Photothèque R. Magritte / Adagp Images, Paris, / SCALA, Florence, Artwork : © 2023 C. Herscovici / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Liu's own works are a culmination of a lifetime tinged by close brushes with fairytales. The son of a children's book writer and playwright, Liu's childhood was literally both fantastical and theatrical. In the mid-nineties, this nostalgia would emerge in the form of curtain and stage motifs in the artist's work, and one can identify such key elements in *Flagship No. 1*. Depicted in this work is a world steeped in red, a colour that has layers of meanings to Liu: a hue associated with his childhood, a unique Chinese symbol referencing Communist China in a modern time gone-by.

One of the artist's most endearing and iconic subjects, the pairing of the minuscule sailor and the looming warship such as in *Flagship No. 1* is a visual lexicon that combines the influences of Chinese propagandist posters a young Liu would no doubt have encountered in his childhood, mixed with Western imagery the artist would have experienced in his adult life, having travelled to Germany for his studies. Drawing together such divergent poles of inspiration is akin to the

contraries held in tension in the artist's conflation of 'philosophy and fairytale'—an unlikely union that effortlessly coalesces at Liu's gentle touch.

"I grew up in a world that was covered up in red—the red sun, the red flag and red scarves." — Liu Ye



Phillips sold the second work from the same series, *Flagship No. 2*, 1997 in November 2021. Sold by Phillips Hong Kong for HK\$ 5,922,000, 30 November 2021

Collector's Digest

- Liu's paintings are held in numerous prominent collections, including but not limited to that of the Long Museum in Shanghai, the M+ Sigg Collection in Hong Kong, and the Today Art Museum in Beijing. The artist, who is currently represented by David Zwirner, was recently the subject of an international solo exhibition, titled *Liu Ye: Storytelling*. It was first presented at Prada Rong Zhai in Shanghai (2018-2019), then travelled to the Fondazione Prada in Milan (2020-2021). Undeniably at the forefront of Asian contemporary art, Liu's powerfully eloquent works are widely praised by critics and highly sought after by collectors.

Provenance

Mingjingdi Gallery, Beijing
Christie's, Hong Kong, 29 October 2001, lot 1
Private Collection
Borobudur Auction, Singapore, 18 May 2008, lot 1108
Private Collection
Sotheby's, Hong Kong, 6 April 2014, lot 895
Private Collection, Hong Kong
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Milan, Fondazione Prada, *Liu Ye: Storytelling*, 10 January 2020 - 10 January 2021, p. 30
(illustrated)

Literature

'I've Earned a One-Hundred-And-Sixtieth', *Hi Art*, July-August 2009, p. 65
Christoph Noe, ed., *Liu Ye Catalogue Raisonne 1991-2015*, Berlin, 2015, no. 97-03, p. 272
(illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A DISTINGUISHED PRIVATE
COLLECTION

34 ✕

Liu Wei

Purple Air 2017 No. 1

signed and dated 'Liu Wei [in Chinese] Liu Wei
2016-2017' on the reverse
oil on canvas
300 x 300 cm. (118 1/8 x 118 1/8 in.)
Painted 2016-2017.

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000
€351,000 — 585,000
\$385,000 — 641,000

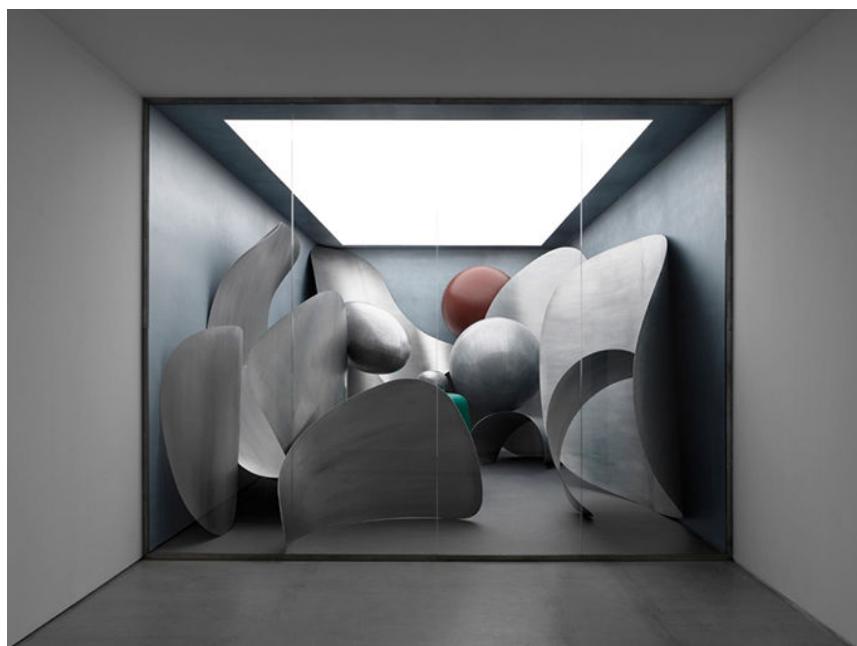
[Go to Lot](#)



"My work is a reflection on reality, taking topics from real life or inserting them into reality. We don't just look to the past, but also think about and develop a future vision." — Liu Wei

Born in 1972, Liu Wei graduated from the China Academy of Art in 1996 and was part of a generation in China that experienced rapid urbanisation and a quickly changing socio-political landscape. First rising to international prominence alongside Chinese artists Qiu Zhijie, Yang Fudong, and others for their 1999 exhibition *Post-Sense Sensibility: Alien Bodies and Delusion*, Liu's earlier works were more political in approach, commenting on the overtly ideological nature of art during that time.

Since gaining recognition for his own practice, Liu has most recently exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 2019, *May You Live in Interesting Times*. Working across various mediums from video, installation, sculpture, painting to drawing, Liu's current practice touches upon a broader exploration of the human experience in the context of urban life.



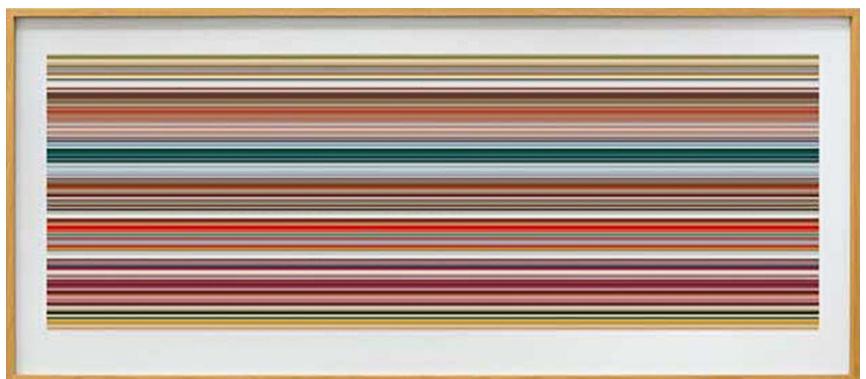
Liu Wei, *Microworld*, 2018. Aluminium plates. Dimensions variable
Courtesy Liu Wei Studio & Faurschou Foundation Beijing Photo: © Jonathan Leijonhufvud

Part of Liu Wei's seminal cityscape series, *Purple Air 2017 No.1* presents the viewers with monolithic neon-green structures, set against a vivid, pink sky - a modern interpretation of and homage to the tradition of Chinese landscape paintings. Though the abstracted landscape is a recurring motif throughout the history of art, Liu's interest seems to lie beyond the visual deconstruction of the Beijing skyline.

Purple Air 2017 No.1 presents a duality of scenes: one in which a sweet, sticky blanket of pollution weighs down on the city. And the other being: one in which a rising pink sunrise, illuminates the city below - as if Liu has captured the serenity of a bustling city at dawn, a static vibration of energy, ready to exhaust itself anew. These scenes are not lyrical in any sense, but rather an observation of the brutalist architecture that has scattered the city skyline in the context of rapid urbanisation.

"Those who are truly contemporary are those who neither perfectly coincide with their time nor adapt to its demands... Contemporariness, then, is that relationship with time that adheres to it through a disconnection." — Giorgio Agamben

The linear deconstructions of Liu's cityscapes find comparison in another work to be offered in this season's sale: Gerhard Richter's *Strip* (lot). Beyond the visual similarities of both works, there is a further connection found within the way in which these images are informed.



Lot 17, Gerhard Richter, *Strip* (923-23), 2012
Phillips Hong Kong, 20th Century and Contemporary Art Evening Sale, 30 March 2023
Both Liu and Richter were born into a generation dealing with the aftermaths of certain

unprecedented events that caused psychological trauma to the collective psyche: Europe in its post-war era and China in its post-Cultural Revolution era. For both artists, the reference point is clear—Richter's *Strips* begin with his *Squeegee* paintings (and his photorealist paintings before that) and Liu's cityscapes begin with the city of Beijing (and the tradition of Chinese landscape paintings before that). *What* you are seeing is never the question, but rather the *why*. In making sense of the present, there is a return to the past to understand the scope and scale of these consequences.

"I am with the viewers, in the quest for meaning. I hope the viewers could use my works as starting points or points of reference in their discussions, contributing to their own thinking. In this sense, art means freedom. Not only am I free as a creator, the viewers are free as spectators as well." — Liu Wei

Liu's *Purple Air* 2017 No.1 depicts two distinct temporalities in the Beijing skyline: one in which the past still dwells heavy in its atmosphere and one in which the present is trapped amid pollution and rising skyscrapers with nowhere to go. In a city where the past and present are so tangibly interconnected, Liu imagines the potential and freedom for the future – simultaneously asking his viewers to consider the same.



Liu Wei at work in his studio. Image courtesy of Liu Wei Studio.

Collector's Digest

- Since his first European solo show, *Purple Air*, where this work made its debut at Grace Li Gallery, Zurich in 2006; his multi-faceted works continue to show in solo exhibitions internationally, including the White Cube, London in 2014; Long March Space, Beijing in 2018; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland in 2019. Liu has participated in multiple Biennales including two installations at the central show of the Venice Biennale *May You Live in Interesting Times* in 2019.
- Many more of his works can be found in major collections worldwide, including the DSL Collection in Paris; the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and the M+ Sigg Collection in Hong Kong, which holds another work from the *Purple Air* series.

Provenance

White Cube Gallery, London

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

London, White Cube Bermondsey, *Memory Palace*, 11 July – 2 September 2018

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



35 *

Huang Yuxing

Bubbles

signed and dated 'HUANG. Yuxing 18' on the reverse
acrylic on canvas

150 x 200 cm. (59 x 78 3/4 in.)

Painted in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000

€179,000 — 299,000

\$192,000 — 321,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Fantastical and hypnotically mesmerising, *Bubbles* is an unapologetic celebration of Huang Yuxing's deep reflection on the human experience in time and space, expressed in visual metaphors of organic life forms. Light, colour, movement, and depth are central to his visual expression. Presenting a dense flux of translucent bubbles in shades of saturated neons, this dreamy and almost psychedelic work is a prime example from Huang's renowned *Bubble* series, revealing the artist's focus on investigation the individual experience of life in parallel to the natural world.

Neon Bursts of Life

Huang's artistic practice entails a long-running investigation into the individual's life experience in parallel to the natural world. Stemming from reoccurring motifs of rivers and swirls in the artist's oeuvre, the *Bubble* series discusses the topic of dissolution, demonstrating a sense of eternity that underlies the ephemeral existence of bubbles themselves. The human experience is visually represented as bubbles caught in various states of motion, as fleeting and volatile as the temporary existence of an individual's life.

"Neon represents the colour of our generation. Its vibrancy is something that no other colour spectra could ever rival: it carries with it a unique sense of import, like an outburst of living energy after a long period of repression." — Huang Yuxing

Huang's signature approach during this period was to superimpose geometric forms delineated in thinly veiled neon colours to create delicate depth and texture, which is well-demonstrated in *Bubbles*. Multiple dualities are juxtaposed in the picture, manifested effortlessly through the artist's masterful command of colour, shape, and paint application. The bubbles' varying degrees of translucency unveils the drapes for a magnificent play between light and dark, heaviness and lightness, density and space, stillness and movement.

Brilliantly dynamic and effortless, the captivating *Bubbles* exemplifies highly individualized style that Huang Yuxing is recognized and celebrated for. It encompasses not only pungent visual stimuli, demonstration of masterful command of paint application, delineations of forms and depth, and rendering of light, but also an overflowing vitality that is omnipresent in Huang's oeuvre, and the world that we live in.



Detail of the present lot

From Past to Future

From Dutch Baroque painter Karel Dujardin, Pre-Raphaelite artist John Everett Millais, to Impressionist forefather Édouard Manet, the bubble trope has been a subject dear to artists through the ages, shining light on the simple joy and the transitoriness of life. A plain form such as a bubble can kindle the observation and reflection of a much greater presence that is beyond our sensory perceptions.



Karel Dujardin, *Boy Blowing Soap Bubbles*. Allegory on the Transitoriness and the Brevity of Life, 1663
Collection of Statens Museum for Kunst (National Gallery of Denmark) Image: Statens Museum for
Kunst, open.smk.dk, public domain

Trained in the Mural Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, Huang's painting techniques owe much to that of traditional Chinese paintings. His ability of morphing the latter into a modern appeal that comprise his unique abstract visual repertoire, testifying to the deep integration of his trainings and the discovery of his creative voice within.

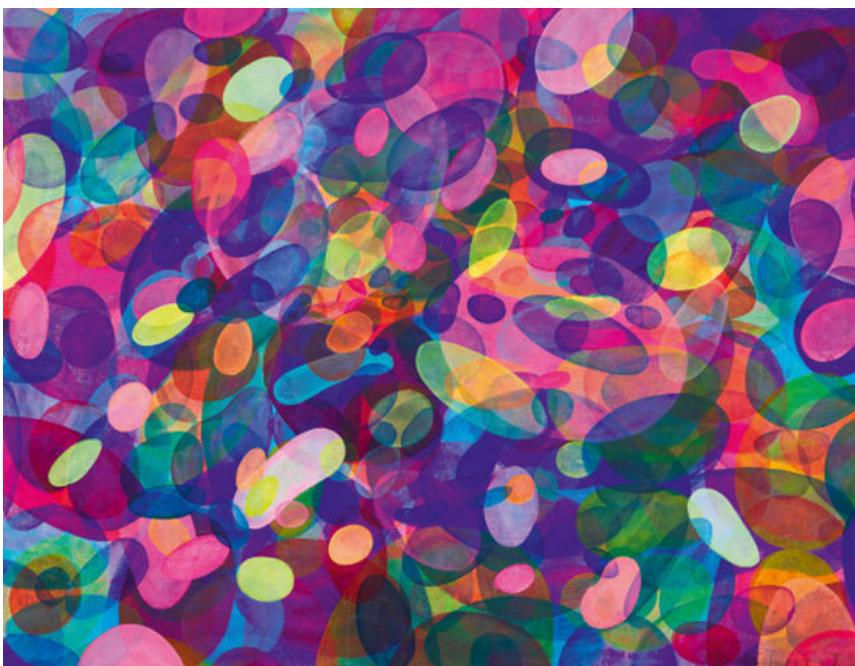


Xia Gui, *Mountain Market, Clearing Mist*, early 13th century Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, John Stewart Kennedy Fund, 1913

The layers of bright acrylic paints are treated as layers of chiffon on Huang's paintbrush, paying homage to the traditional Chinese painting concept of 'five shades of ink' (墨分五色), which refers to the technique of mixing varying amount of water into ink to yield nuanced tones and textures with only the colour of ink. Peeking through layers of translucent colour frenzy, the luminating background in *Bubbles* pulses with energy, presenting in a visual symphony of the impermanent vitality of life. Light-weight and delicate in appearance, bubbles are capable of gathering tremendous energy that can be unleashed into an exceptionally dynamic movement in an instant. The present work captures bubbles in a temporary moment of stillness, resting to build up tremendous energy until the cycle of ebb and flow starts again.

Huang's approach of zooming in on bubbles as a glimpse into the much larger movement that they are parts of, animating a simple component of the microcosm to metaphorize the force and momentum within the macrocosm that involve every living being on this planet. By presenting a visual language that straddles the line of being the traditional and the contemporary, Huang anchors a ground for his abstract narration to bloom and continuously evolve.

Collector's Digest



Huang Yuxing, *Bubbles*, 2017 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong for HK\$5,796,000, 7 June 2021 © Huang Yuxing

- Born in 1975 in Beijing, Huang Yuxing graduated from the Mural Painting Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2000, and currently lives and works in his hometown. He was the first guest artist at the Yuz Museum Project Room in 2015 and has been extensively holding solo exhibitions since.
- In 2020, Almine Rech has announced the representation of the artist in the United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom. Huang's current exhibitions includes *Heaps of*

Brocade and Ash at Almine Rech in Brussels (3 June – 31 July 2021), and *Huang Yuxing*, with Almine Rech Shanghai, 4 November - 3 December 2022 (works on paper). Scheduled for 3 November – 17 December 2022, his solo show titled *An Absolute Power We Cannot Find* at Almine Rech, New York marks Huang's debut in the city.

- Huang was invited to collaborate with Louis Vuitton for their 2021 'Artycapucines' collection, joining the likes of Urs Fischer, Tschabalala Self, Liu Wei, Henry Taylor, Jonas Wood, and Alex Israel, to introduce their innovative aesthetic visions to the brand.
- Huang's first NFT project, *Meta-morphic*, was released online on 7 September 2022 and sold out within one minute of the launch.

ⁱ Shu Wen, 'Huang Yuxing: Painting is an intuition', *Artnow*, May 2022, [online](#)

Provenance

Private Collection, Asia

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



36

Ayako Rokkaku

Untitled

signed and dated '2007 Rokkaku Ayako [in Japanese]'
lower right

acrylic on canvas

303 x 190 cm. (119 1/4 x 74 3/4 in.)

Painted in 2007.

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 5,000,000

€478,000 — 597,000

\$513,000 — 641,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"I love painting on something that is much bigger than I am. Moving to and fro between the corners of such a huge canvas makes me feel as if the colours are flowing through my body." — Ayako Rokkaku

Created in 2007 on site at her exhibition, *Walkin' Around Clouds* with Galerie Delaive, Ayako Rokkaku's *Untitled* is one of the artist's earliest and largest works that has come to auction. Featuring the artist's signature young female protagonist with bright curious eyes, *Untitled*'s little girl is brought to life with just acrylic and the hands of the artist, as she dances within a whirlwind of dazzling colours and soft flower petals.

Entirely self-taught, Rokkaku's artistic practice is anchored through the artist's touch – she developed her finger-painting technique when she was only 20 years old. Dancing across large canvases, Rokkaku smears dazzling swirls of colour directly with her bare hands and fingertips, capturing the speed and verve in which she creates.



The artist creating the current lot at Galerie Delaive, 2007

Painted live during the artist's first collaboration with Gallery Delaive in Amsterdam in 2007, the present work is the largest canvases to be created as a performance during Rokkaku's solo exhibition titled *Walkin' Around Clouds*. In manipulating acrylic paint with her fingers, Rokkaku displays a visceral approach in painting and a willingness to let the audience participate in her world and witness her creative process. Through this performance and this exhibition, she firmly established herself as the most exciting artist to watch in the contemporary art world.

Smeering and spreading paints on a gigantic canvas with her fingers and hands, the petite artist

enjoys creating large pieces of work, which creates a sharp visual contrast when she is painting on a canvas in-situ. According to Rokkaku, her choice to work on such scale of canvases also allows her to feel more connected to life itself, as the excitement of the process pumps tides of energy through the veins in her body, which in turn translates onto the canvas into whimsical landscapes of living colour.



Ayako Rokkaku creating the current work in-situ at the *Walkin' Around Clouds* exhibition, 2007 © Gallery Delaive, Amsterdam



Painting through Intuition

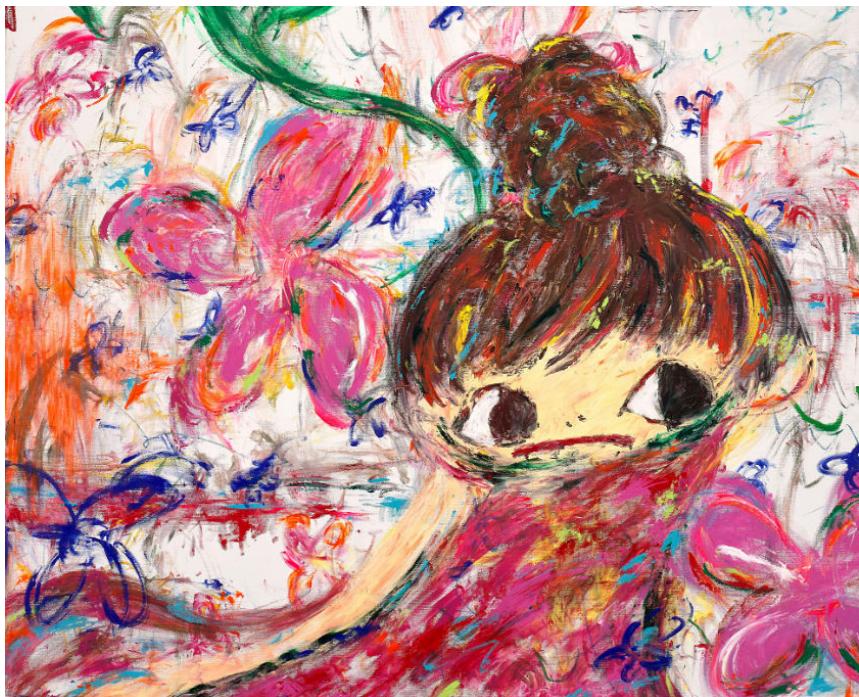


Jackson Pollock, *Number 16*, 1950 Artwork: © 2023 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Inspired by fellow Abstract and Expressionist artists, Jackson Pollock, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Cy Twombly, Rokkaku felt the creative energy from their expressive paintings. Pioneering the Abstract Expressionist movement, Jackson Pollock conveys emotions and ideas through non-representational forms, as seen in *Number 16* (1950) where the artist covers the canvas with unrecognized acrylic subjects in assorted colours. Pollock recognized that the major force in creating art is having an unconscious mind, where the process leads by spontaneity and

improvisations – a process Rokkaku whole heartedly agrees with. Highly intuitive, Rokkaku refrains from being confined by rules of conventional painting, immersing herself fully during her painting process without an underlying plan. This allows her motifs to develop during the process, the act of painting becomes performative:

"I don't feel I'm really painting unless my hands are in direct contact with the paint. It's more fun that way." — Ayako Rokkaku



Detail of the present lot

During her live performance, Rokkaku used part of her own fingertips as an agency to bring the little girl to life, creating a floral landscape that brims with energy and movement yet is simultaneously soft and loose in its execution. Wearing a pink dress that complements the flora and fauna surrounding her, the current protagonist draws parallel to the leading character Chihiro Ogino in the Japanese animation movie *Spirited Away* (2001), in the scene where she was also passing through fields of blooming flowers.



Film still of Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*, 2001 Image: AJ Pics / Alamy Stock Photo

Rokkaku utilises an aesthetic that directly references the Japanese anime style, which also features adorable characters with enormous, shining eyes. Her work blends divergent styles from varying corners of the art world, while remaining childlike, youthful, and innocent – a headspace in which the artist tries to return to: 'When I'm painting, I try to get in touch with the way I felt as a child – to get back to my starting point, if you like. Everyone goes through a stage of being totally into drawing and painting when they are small. Children can get completely absorbed in their pictures. I think maybe my pictures help to remind people of how they felt back then.'ⁱ

Collector's Digest



Ayako Rokkaku, *Untitled*, 2019 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong for HK\$8,115,000, 22 June 2022

- Born 1982 in Chiba, Japan, Ayako Rokkaku began her artistic career in 2002, during her early twenties. Rokkaku quickly established herself on the international art scene after exhibiting at the 9th edition of the Geisai art fair in 2006 and was awarded the prestigious Akio Goto Prize, founded by Kaikai Kiki Studio which is led by art world giant, Takashi Murakami.
- In 2018, Phillips Hong Kong was the first to bring Rokkaku to the eyes of the market with a selling exhibition, *Sam Francis, Walasse Ting & Ayako Rokkaku: Perpetual Colours*, selling out before the first day of the opening. Since then, demand for the artist has exploded internationally. Rokkaku's works are included in the permanent collections of the Powerlong Art Museum, China; Sehwa Museum of Art, South Korea; the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan; and the Voorlinden Museum, Netherlands, amongst others.
- Rokkaku's recent exhibitions include solo presentation, *Born in the Fluffy Journey* with Konig Galerie, Berlin (2021) and her institutional show with the Chiba Prefectural Museum of Art, *Magic Hand* (2021). Rokkaku currently lives and works in multiple cities, travelling between Porto, Berlin, Tokyo, and Amsterdam. She is represented by Gallery Delaive, Amsterdam.

ⁱ Somese Naoto, 'Rokkaku Ayako: An Artist with the World at Her Fingertips', *nippon.com*, 3, October 2011, [online](#)

Provenance

Gallery Delaive, Amsterdam

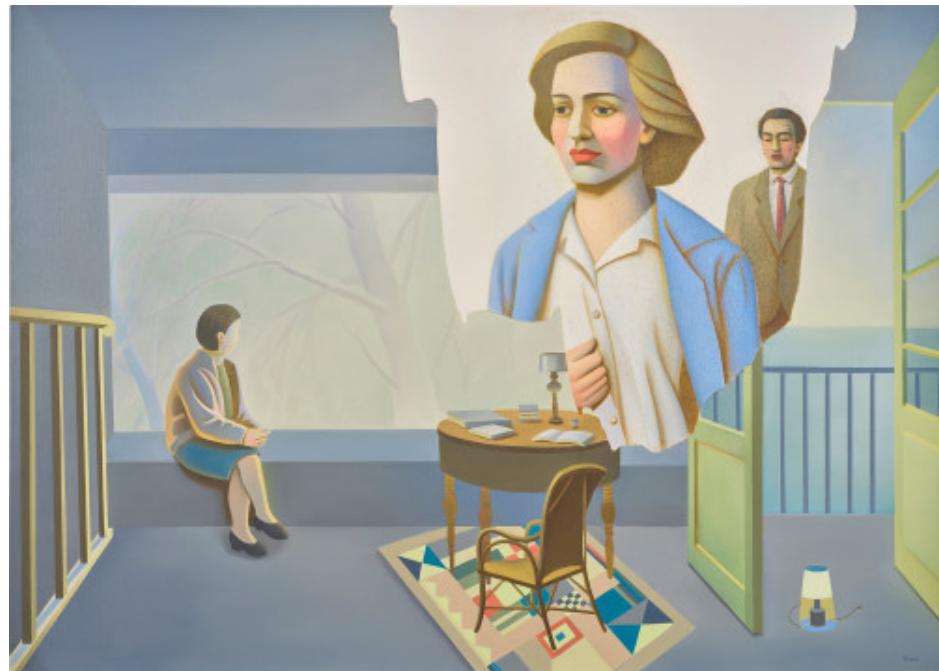
Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2007

Exhibited

Amsterdam, Gallery Delaive, *Walkin' Around Clouds*, 3-27 February 2007

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT PRIVATE
COLLECTION

37 ✝

Chen Ke

Outside the Window

signed and dated 'Chen Ke 2022' lower right; further signed, titled and dated "'Outside the Window" Chen Ke [in Chinese] Chen Ke 2022' on the reverse

oil and acrylic gesso on canvas

180 x 250 cm. (70 7/8 x 98 3/8 in.)

Painted in 2020, signed in 2022.

Estimate

HK\$2,000,000 — 4,000,000

€239,000 — 478,000

\$256,000 — 513,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Arresting in scale, brimming with thought-provoking motifs, and otherworldly in its pastel hues, *Outside the Window* is a defining example from Chen Ke's repertoire. A glimpse into Chen's *Bauhaus Gal* series and a first from this body of works to come to auction, the present piece depicts the artist's mastery of portraiture and unique spatial delineation, one which captures converging snapshots: the series' titular Bauhaus references, the artist's own memories, and cinematic and photographic cues, all whimsically interwoven with surrealist undertones.

"The type of Bauhaus girl, The star among actresses. She knows what she wants, and will make it happen too" — Taken from 'Mädchen wollen etwas lernen', Die Woche, 4 January 1930

Bauhaus State of Mind

In 2021, Galerie Perrotin presented *Bauhaus Gal / Room*, a solo exhibition which showcased Chen's new series. It aimed to unite two seemingly divergent creative strands: one half presented figurative portraiture on canvases featuring characters thematically similar to *Outside the Window*; the other half was made up of abstract-shaped aluminium plates painted over with impasto, some with fissures or craquelures, others reminiscent of Bauhaus-inspired shapes. The artist explained that the bifurcated show and her double medium choice aimed, among other things, to explore the alternating softness and toughness she believes exists in all women, the latter of which Chen believes comes to the fore in times of adversity.



A page showcasing the article entitled 'Mädchen wollen etwas lernen' (Girls want to learn something) in *Bauhaus Mädels* (2019 - unpaginated). Article originally published in *Die Woche*, vol. 32, no.1, 4 January 1930, pp. 30-32.

Though the present work was not exhibited in the aforementioned show, its thematic concerns predate the exhibition, and it can be seen as a powerful precursor to the *Bauhaus Gal* series, having been conceived in 2019, and latterly completed between 2020 to 2022. The series takes its roots from a photo-book the artist owns entitled *Bauhaus Mädels* ('Bauhaus Girls'), a volume which recorded the files, oeuvres, memoirs, and portraits of lesser-known female Bauhaus students. Accompanied with the subtitle, 'A Tribute to Pioneering Women Artists,' *Bauhaus Mädels* also includes a spread that focuses on the phrase "Girls Want to Learn Something", taken from a 1930 article published in *Die Woche*, which showcased the zeal of the undervalued female pupils. Admitting that she hadn't previously known so many women were involved in Bauhaus, the artist commented, '[t]he first time I saw the faces of these girls, [they were] like sprouting buds, with a sense of aspiration, as if they [were] running towards the future, a kind of vitality...We may be able to abstract a spirit of the time from them, or a kind of temperament.ⁱ In its chronicles of the almost era-defying work and lives of the undervalued women operating under the Bauhaus aesthetic at the time, *Bauhaus Mädels* encapsulates their powerful avant-garde spirits, all of which were boldly forward-looking and rebelled against its epoch. In these women, Chen Ke found affinity, recognised in them her own past, and sought to transform their photographs and archival

material into painting form, allowing her to layer their key memories with her own.

“These girls found their spiritual utopias in the negotiation with the outside world, and so did I. We were all lucky.” — Chen Ke

A Refuge for the Spirit

In the dual-titled show *Bauhaus Gal / Room*, the artist hints at the relationship between an inner and outer psyche: ‘The title ‘Bauhaus Gal’ is composed of two parts: with a subtitle of ‘Room’. In fact many of my works deal with the relationship between the individual and the external world, so I think the room here becomes a dwelling point for your spirit, the idea of a shelter [of sorts].’

ⁱⁱ Fittingly, *Outside the Window* shows exactly this: a snapshot of an interior overlooking an outside world. A faceless woman sits cross-legged on a ledge peering out of a window framed by hazy outlines of tree branches (Alex Katz’s feathery, wispy shoots come to mind); the room she is in is curiously furnished, a banister juts out to the left of the frame, an armchair and table littered with books rest atop a Bauhaus motif rug beside her. To the right of this, a lamp on the ground glows inexplicably in front of open French windows that seem to overlook a tranquil seascape. Finally, an oddly shaped tear featuring a scene depicting a man and woman—not unlike a Robert Rauschenberg collage with its jagged ripped edge—sits to the right of the painting, reminiscent of torn underlayers of old wallpaper emerging from the past. The over all effect is dreamlike and mysterious, as if a fading palimpsest of memories revealing itself to the viewer.

“There is a gap between reality and dream. Our impression is so different from the real person. It’s about tackling the gap. It’s about finding our own dream. We live for nothing in the end, but still we must have some hope.” — Chen Ke

Outside the Window is undeniably rich in its sources. Drawing from both *Bauhaus Mädels* but also film, photography, and of course art history, the work is a combination of divergent layers of the artist’s variegated interests.



Film still from Hiroshima mon amour (*Hiroshima, My Love*), 1959

Donning an eggshell blue cardigan and determinedly striding away from a suited male protagonist behind her, the female that commands so much of our attention in *Outside the Window* is based on the character ‘Elle’ (‘Her’) in the 1959 French New Wave film, *Hiroshima mon amour*. Psychedelic, nonlinear in its narration, and flitting between memory and reality, *Hiroshima mon amour* was directed by Alain Resnais and written by Marguerite Duras, and follows the tale of a Japanese architect and French actress who are involved in a brief tryst while in the Japanese city. The film begins with incongruous imagery: bodies in the throes of passion melt into shocking and heart wrenching footage of maimed bodies in the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The weight of this tragedy bleeds into the tale of the two nameless characters, as the film expands to follow their love affair. As they grapple with a post-war reality—both weighed down by painful, ineffaceable memories of their own individual pasts—the impossibility of their relationship mounts as the story unfolds, crescendoing to a painful parting that leaves both parties irreparably changed. Taking this into consideration, perhaps *Outside the Window* offers us a fleeting glimpse into Chen’s own spirit and thoughts.



Film still from *The Lorry*, 1977, directed by Marguerite Duras Showing the setting of her living room, which is also seen in the present lot

Technicoloured Reimaginings

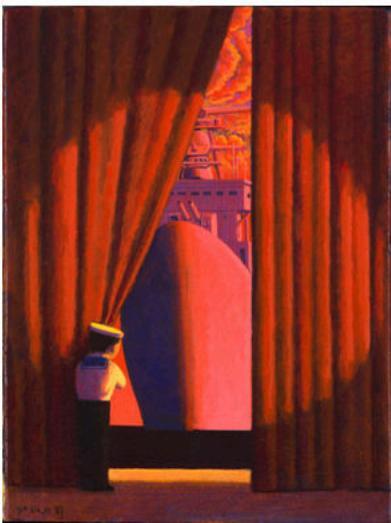
Outside the Window's recoloured imagining of the movie scene brings to the fore Chen's ability to use colour to create her signature pseudo-sculptural style when it comes to portraiture. Layering warm tones that build to create three-dimensionality, Chen's figures are at once reminiscent of Renaissance frescoes in their physicality and forms, and yet also startlingly contemporary, calling to mind the Art Deco boldness of Tamara de Lempicka's oeuvre. The chiselled angularity of her figures juxtapose with the sensual tenderness of her paintings, and yet, they somehow come together to present a coherent narrative. When asked how she transitioned into this style when it came to her Bauhaus Gals and their sharp features, the artist noted the importance of empowerment: 'This time I want[ed] to highlight the sense of power, a bit like a sculpture. I want to draw the ideal woman in my mind, [one] who is tough and not weak.'ⁱⁱⁱ Once again recalling Chen's comment on female strength and meekness in flux, one might infer deeper meanings in the contemplative *Outside the Window*.



Tamara de Lempicka, *Woman with Arms Crossed*, 1939 Collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Artwork: © Tamara de Lempicka / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In the clashing of reverie and rigidity, Chen also dips her brush into the realms of Surrealism. A sense of surrealist influence permeates her works, as traces of artists such as René Magritte and Liu Ye are detectable. Gazing into a metaphysical anomaly in which a window onlooking tree branches can mysteriously extend itself into a calm ocean, Chen's sedentary solitary figure is not dissimilar to the individuals that gingerly peel back hefty velvet curtains in Liu Ye's works, revealing foreboding fleets of warships; or, indeed, the mystifyingly illogical creatures and scenes that inhabit Magritte's canvases. Contrasting with the modular Bauhaus shapes of the rug—characterised by a lack of ornament and a focus on function and clean lines—the over all

scene shown in *Outside the Window* is altogether paradoxical.



Left: Lot 33, Liu Ye, *Flagship No. 1*, 1997, Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 30 March 2023 Estimate: HKD 4,000,000 – 6,000,000 Right: René Magritte, *The Human Condition (La condition humaine)*, 1933, Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. Artwork: © 2023 C. Herscovici / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The artist has been quoted as saying, ‘There is a gap between reality and dream. Our impression is so different from the real person. It’s about tackling the gap. It’s about finding our own dream. We live for nothing in the end, but still we must have some hope.’ Chen’s works epitomise the maxim ‘Life is but a dream’, and tiptoe in precisely the ‘gap between reality and dream’^{iv} she mentions; in the twilight zone between being asleep and awake. In her evocation of the phantastic undertones of Surrealism but also the rigidity of Bauhaus, Chen forges a visual language that is distinctly her own.

Collector’s Digest

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tf63_ECDcpQ&ab_channel=GaleriePerrotin

Born 1978 in Tongjiang, Sichuan, Chen Ke currently lives and works in Beijing. She recently held a solo show at Galerie Perrotin in Shanghai ([15 June – 14 August 2021](#)). Chen obtained a BA from the

Oil Painting Department of Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in 2002 and an MFA in 2005. Recent exhibitions include: *For the Children*, Long Museum, Shanghai, (2020); *The Unknown Woman Artist*, CNCNM, Beijing (2020), and *The Real Deal Is Talking with Dad*, YUZ Museum, Shanghai (2018–2019). Her works are in the collections of enterprises and museums alike, including the Franks-Suss Collection (London), BSI art collection (Lugano), M+ Sigg Collection (Hong Kong), the Shenzhen Art Museum, and the Minsheng Art Museum (Shanghai), amongst others.

ⁱ The artist quoted speaking about ‘Bauhaus Gal / Room’, 2021. [online](#).

ⁱⁱ The artist quoted speaking about ‘Bauhaus Gal / Room’, 2021. [online](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ Translated from the Chinese article ‘Chen Ke: Turning Point’, *Hi Art*, 16 July 2021, [online](#)

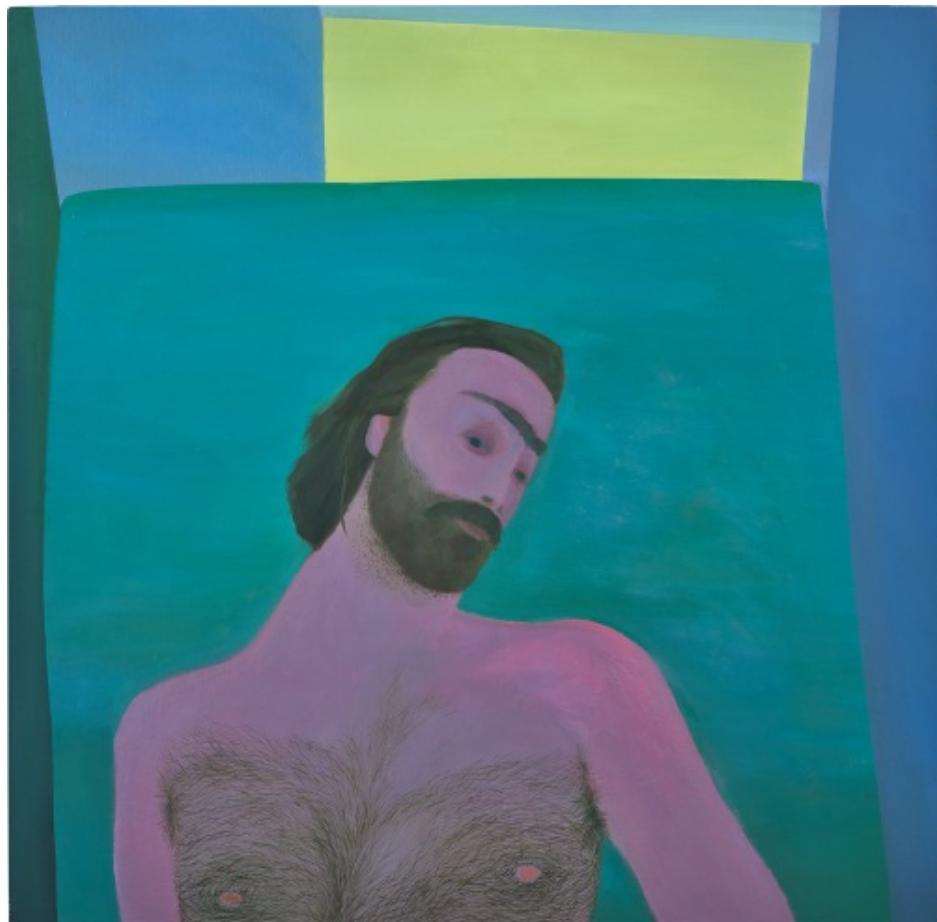
^{iv} Chen Ke, quoted in ‘Contemporary Artist Chen Ke Sees Herself in Marilyn Monroe’, #legend, 1 June 2016, [online](#)

Provenance

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT SOUTHEAST ASIAN COLLECTION

38 ✝

Cheng Xinyi

Goodnight, Thomas

oil on linen

94 x 94 cm. (37 x 37 in.)

Painted in 2013.

Estimate

HK\$600,000 — 900,000

€71,300 — 107,000

\$76,900 — 115,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Where colour is concerned, I want it to be pleasing and slightly disturbing at the same time – so that it triggers a specific moment with feelings.” — Cheng Xinyi

Cheng Xinyi’s murky, melancholic and sensual paintings are intimate snapshots of her life, experiences and encounters. Human subjects – with a predilection for young men – are often portrayed by the Wuhan-born artist as fully naked or only partially covered by clothes, looking pensive and slightly low-spirited, with at times an almost resigned expression.

Goodnight, Thomas, painted in 2013, elegantly encapsulates this mélange of feelings: it depicts a clothless male figure from head to chest, whose blue mood seems strengthened by the cold tones of the green, greyish-azure and yellow background. Thomas’ head is tilted to one side, his drooping eyelids appear reddish and darker than the rest of the skin. A prominent, subtly sultry detail that instantly catches the attention of the viewer is the abundant body hair: the man’s eyes are surmounted by an arched unibrow, his face is framed by a short, thick beard and a full moustache, his brown and straight mane of hair is styled in a mid-length haircut, and a coat of hair copiously grows all over his chest, bringing out his bright pink nipples.

Intimate Portraits

“I do like to paint eyes – but painting the mouth determines if someone is happy and sad; it tells too much directly. I don’t like that. I like people being absorbed in what they are doing. I look to make the emotions and the mood with the colours and brushstrokes instead of with an expression on their face.” — Cheng Xinyi

In Cheng’s paintings, the subjects that are portrayed on canvas are mostly her friends. The prevalence of young men reveals the artist’s fascination with the theme of masculinity as a social construct: ‘I’m interested in how men deal with their masculinity and how they respond to other people’s feelings’ⁱ, she stated in a 2021 interview. Thomas, a recurring character in her paintings, also appears in the homonymous piece *Thomas*, made in 2013, and has become a sort of male alter-ego for the artist along the years.

The hypnotic, chromatically balanced background, made of sombre nuances and irregular rectangular shapes, testifies to Cheng’s admiration for the work of the German-born painter Josef Albers, which has significantly influenced the way she uses colours and light in her paintings. Cheng explains that it was the discovery of Albers’ book *Interaction of Colour* (1963), with its different combinations and tonality, ‘which made me want to play around with getting the colour

palette to fit certain moods and emotions. But I also think adopting these colours was a way of saying goodbye to my past, which was a very traditional training at a Chinese college’.ⁱⁱ

In particular, for its chromatic choices and its geometric composition, *Goodnight, Thomas* resembles Albers’ painting *Hommage to the Square: Apparition*, made in 1959. The piece is part of a series that the German artist began in 1950, which occupied him for 25 years. By playing around with the shape of the square, the Bauhaus professor experimented with the contrasts and the optical effects created by the juxtaposition of multi-coloured quadrangles.



Left: Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square: Apparition*, 1959 Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York
Image: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation/Art Resource, NY/ Scala, Florence, Artwork: © The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: The present lot

Cheng’s way of playing around with colour on canvas is purposefully unnatural, as her intention is not that of faithfully representing and imitating reality. Instead, her choice of colours intends to convey very specific emotions to viewers. And, since Albers’ approach to painting taught her that all the colours are in relation to each other, she covers her canvases with many stratified layers of paint, to finally achieve a moment in which all tones seem to have found a balance that makes them work together.

“I like to imagine that my characters exist in a three-dimensional space, I really want them to have a sense of volume. When I paint, I still think about sculpture, Bernini’s sculptures, for example. I want the surface to be very smooth.” — Cheng Xinyi

Moving to Baltimore, and from there to Amsterdam and Paris, played an important role in Cheng's coming of age as a painter. A student at Beijing's Tsinghua University, where she studied sculpture, the Chinese artist attended the Maryland Institute of Art for her MFA, and then spent two years in a residency at the prestigious Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, to eventually land in Paris. In the French capital, Cheng found her maturity as an artist, and – she explained – refined her iconic pictorial style: 'the light is really special in Paris. I love the sunsets, and the fact that the light looks different in every season. I believe that the light is a really important part of my painting too. Living in Paris has undoubtedly influenced my practice'.ⁱⁱⁱ

Collector's Digest

- Born in Wuhan in 1989, Cheng Xinyi is one of the most promising Chinese contemporary artists. She describes herself as a 'painter who's fascinated by emotions, desires and power dynamics' ^{iv}. She studied sculpture at the Academy of Arts & Design at Tsinghua University and obtained an MFA at the Maryland Institute College of Art. From 2016 to 2017 she took part in a two-year residency programme at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, to then move to Paris in 2017, where she currently lives and works.
- In 2019, Cheng was awarded the illustrious Baloise Art Prize 2019 of Art Basel. In 2021, some of her paintings were exhibited at the Parisian Bourse de Commerce, as part of a series of works coming from the private collection of the French billionaire businessman François Pinault.
- Among her most recent solo exhibitions are *Xinyi Cheng* at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, ([4 November 2022 – 28 January 2023](#)); *Seen Through Others* at Lafayette Anticipations, Paris ([23 March – 28 May 2022](#)); *The Horse with Eye Binders* at Hamburger Bahnhof—Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin ([10 December 2020 – 6 June 2021](#)).

ⁱ Cheng Xinyi, quoted in Duncan Ballantyne-Way, 'Xinyi Cheng: "I'm interested in how men deal with their masculinity"', *Exberliner*, 3 June 2021, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Cheng Xinyi, quoted in Duncan Ballantyne-Way, 'Xinyi Cheng: "I'm interested in how men deal with their masculinity"', *Exberliner*, 3 June 2021, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Cheng Xinyi, quoted in Maxime Tétard, 'Xinyi Cheng / Interview', *Pinault Collection*, 7 July 2021, [online](#)

^{iv} Cheng Xinyi, quoted in Fiona He, 'Xinyi Cheng, ANTENNA SPACE 天线空间', *Artforum*, [online](#)

Provenance

Private Collection, New York

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

New York, Thomas Erben Gallery, *Soft Haze*, 7 July - 5 August 2016

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39

Anna Park

Covees

signed 'ANNA PARK' lower right

charcoal on paper

sheet 183.6 x 131.6 cm. (72 1/4 x 51 3/4 in.)

Executed in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$500,000 — 700,000

€59,700 — 83,600

\$64,100 — 89,700

[Go to Lot](#)



A symphony of line, form, and shading, Anna Park's 2018 charcoal drawing *Covees* dexterously captures the chaotic moment before a performance when cast members prepare before a mirror, donning costumes, makeup, or dressing their hair. Her seemingly effortless use of composition transports the viewer's eye along the fluid lines of the figures' arms, faces and torsos. Light illuminates the raised arm of a man fixing his hair in the foreground, and plays upon the face and upper body of a woman leaning on her hand, contrasting with the shadowy background behind her and creating a sense of space and atmosphere. Park's clear, confident marks draw the viewer into the drama of the scene while simultaneously creating the sense that something momentous is about to occur.

Coming to auction for the very first time, *Covees* is an impeccable example of Park's recurring interest in depicting moments of tense expectation. The title of this work may be a reference to the technical term cove, which in U.S. theatre vernacular refers to lighting positions at the front of the stage. Perhaps the figures in Park's piece are about to step out into the brilliant stagelight, becoming what she calls 'covees'. *Covees* also could refer to the urban slang term 'coving', which means to stop in a subtle location and drink, smoke, or do drugs and generally have a good time. Park often depicts debaucherous revelers, and here she may be alluding to the camaraderie that actors share; perhaps her characters will step out into the spotlight to perform and then celebrate afterwards by coving.

Familiar Mayhem

Park's distinctive visual style establishes a fresh lexicon of Americana art. Motorcycles, cowboy hats, wedding cakes, and fractured figures whirling in stars and stripes explode in an array of splintered shards in her work, providing a fragmented glimpse into the American Dream. The Americana motif prevalent in her work can be traced to the artist's experience growing up in suburban Utah, while she attributes the turbulent mania of her canvases to the overstimulating environment of her current place of work in New York City. On her life-size and sometimes larger-than-life canvases she depicts scenes that flit between memory and abstraction, a frantic flurry of activity that both transcends the ordinary and reminds the viewer of moments from their everyday lives.

"I hope to elicit some sense of familiarity with the viewer, whether this reminds them of a party they've been to, or just being able to recognise any of the characters as their own self or someone they know." — Anna Park

Working primarily with charcoal and graphite, Park's monumental creations are tumultuous, virtuosic depictions of what she dubs 'humanity at its finest'. She draws inspiration from found images and memories of commonplace scenes such as parties, barbecues, or musical

performances, working intuitively to render her subjects in varying degrees of figuration. From nearly photorealistic detail to her signature kaleidoscope abstraction, Park's dance between the figurative and the nonpictorial draws the viewer into her chaotic, yet eerily familiar visual world.

"It's almost like our inner demons; we all have that. I think when we're most vulnerable, we can allow ourselves to be kind of [messed] up or allow the things that you would think in private or talk about with your closest friends to come out in public. In these worlds that I create, people are allowed to be that way. And I like that." — Anna Park

Park seeks to 'present instances of uncertain chaos' and portray 'the unpredictable nature of life', illustrating the precarious turmoil rampant around us, both internally and in the world at large. Her fractured compositions not only reflect the chaotic nature of everyday life in the 21st century, an era of short attention spans and incessant exposure to information but also highlight the vulnerability and psychological agitation that simmers beneath the surface of everyday life.

Capturing a Moment through Frenzied Figuration

Born in South Korea in 1996, Park's family moved to Salt Lake City, Utah when she was eleven. Park took figure drawing classes with a local art teacher, immersing herself in drawing with charcoal from an early age, and her meticulous yet frenzied manner of depicting the figure is a testament to her rigorous early training. Her more recent work straddles the line between abstraction and representation. She points out that 'the stylistic choice of both abstraction and figuration came as a natural evolution within my practice of drawing. Having come from an education of traditional figure drawing, my way to explore different avenues of drawing was to abstract forms.' Creating the illusion of volume and depth through her angular and sculptural mark-making, Park alludes to the geometric tessellation of Cubism, which consciously seeks to both overcome and imply the inherent flatness of the canvas.



Left: The present lot Right: Pablo Picasso, *Girl with a Mandolin (Fanny Tellier)*, 1910 Image: © The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence, Artwork: © 2023 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Park's organised semi-abstraction of figures, mirrors, and objects in Covees furthermore calls to mind the variegated cacophony of Cecily Brown's vast canvases. Like Brown, Park's figures are part of a visually charged yet fragmented world, surrounded by and taking part in feverish activity. Park's work, however, uniquely comments on American life in a humorous and satirical manner, using abstraction, figuration, and repetition to illustrate the insanity of even the most mundane parts of everyday life, such as a parent-teacher conference, the subject of a 2019 drawing of hers. In Covees, Park seeks to draw the viewer's attention to the present moment, the tense few minutes of suspense before a performance. She asks the viewer to set aside all distractions of social media, work, and everyday life and let a moment of 'genuine interaction' blossom between viewer and artist.

Collector's Digest

- Anna Park studied animation and illustration at the Pratt Institute before she shifted her focus to developing her work in fine art at the New York Academy of Art. Though

still in her twenties, she has become widely acclaimed in the short period since her graduation from art school, and her oeuvre has become part of the permanent collection of several prominent institutions, including the High Museum of Art in Atlanta; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; and Pérez Art Museum, Miami. Park's work is also part of the collection of Brian Donnelly (KAWS), who found her striking artwork displayed at the New York Academy of Art.

- Park's solo exhibitions to date include *Mirror Shy* at Blum and Poe, Los Angeles, CA in 2022; *Hello, Stranger* at Blum and Poe, Tokyo, Japan in 2021, marking her Asian debut, and *Pluck Me Tender* at Half Gallery, New York, NY in 2021, amongst others. She has also exhibited at Pond Society, Shanghai, and at SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah, GA, both in 2022.

Provenance

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner in 2019

Literature

Natasha Arselan, Morgan Everhart, and Matthew Calendar, eds., *Friend of the Artist*, New York, 2018, vol. 7, n. p. (illustrated)

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Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT



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Trey Abdella

Global Warming

acrylic on canvas

200.2 x 130.4 cm. (78 7/8 x 51 3/8 in.)

Painted in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$1,200,000 — 2,200,000

€140,000 — 257,000

\$154,000 — 282,000

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Trey Abdella's work is marked by its exploration of themes such as identity, memory, and perception. The artist's primary concern has been to locate the balance between hyperrealism and glitchy cartoon in the creation of a twisted catalogue of digital ciphers and wider cultural references. Abdella is tireless in his examination of contemporary culture – a zealous fascination afforded by the doom-scrolling of Instagram feeds: he takes an almost inconceivable 4000 screenshots per day, weaving them together to create an amalgamous tapestry of the kitsch.

By incorporating images from cartoons, advertisements, and social media into his paintings, he breaks down the boundaries between high and low culture, and challenges the traditional notion of the 'original' artwork.

Reinventing the Brush

Taking the conventional hardware of painting, Abdella plugs his brush into the software of the modern age by using Photoshop as a petri dish: taking ciphered ideas and nascent sketches, the artist allows them to gestate both on the screen and in his own mind before transferring them onto canvas. The surfaces of his paintings are lush yet fissured, where sharp acrylics meet tellurian highlights – rock, glass, sand – in unison. Material meets mentality here, as these combinations allow for rapid expression: 'I think of acrylic as a kind of kindred spirit, what with our shared lack of patience. I'll be damned if I have to wait more than 15 minutes for something to dry!' says the artist. This collage engenders a mechanical intertextuality that teems with drama and emotion, one that grants an open agora between artwork, artist, and viewer. 'I want the viewer to experience my work in a different way digitally and in real life,' Abdella explains. 'I add these textures and materials almost as Easter eggs for the viewer to find when seeing the works in person.'ⁱ

His paintings – manifests of a voyeuristic mind palace – are tempered by Abdella's own shards of memory. His works are the autobiographical frames of Millennial Americana, scenes of haphazard ecstasy that speak to a greater odium: 'I'm interested in exploring the misery of the American Dream...My work is about America but a very dark America. I'm looking at what is broken'ⁱⁱ. Pathos becomes logos in Abdella's creative industry, speaking to a wider disaffection in America, one pincerred by contemporary challenges of self-image and a divisive political and economic landscape.



Installation view of the current work at Berlin, Future Gallery, *Clusterfuck: Trey Abdella, Botond Keresztesi, Olga Mikh Fedorova*, 23 March - 20 April 2019. Image: © Andrea Rossetti

This spurious offspring of modern malaise and social anomie develops in the present lot to form an accomplished post-modern critique of burning relevance. *Global Warming*, painted in 2018, is typical of Abdella's acerbic imagination. Three figures occupy the lush veranda of a cruise ship, complete with red velvet carpeting and dark wood panelling. Exploding from the left is a man suspended in martial motion; with palm open and foot extended he renders violence in abstracted distortion – one that seems to lag behind the black outlines his body. A cartoon man is sat holding a flame-licked globe, lost in the rapture of its blaze. Despite his All-American looks, the rest of his figure finds itself incongruous between a pixelated leg and photorealistic green brogues. Between them, level and centre with our eye, hovers a ghostly figure. Garbed in a dress of flames, she is the most unsettling of the three. The corporeal fragmentation with which Abdella depicts his figures not only defines them within the pictorial space, but appears to inform their own human condition.

Wholly occupied in their own liminal existence, these characters do not interact nor engage in the environment around them – instead becoming actors of bemusing theatricality. Despite the surreal humour that we are presented with, a sense of anxiety pervades through the composition: what are we looking at? What are these figures meant to mean? The towering wave that threatens to bridge and topple the vessel does little calm our fears, though alludes to the central narrative that Abdella stitches into the work. Tsunamis have held essential cultural symbolism since time immemorial, from Noah and the Ark, Hokusai's *Great Wave off Kanagawa*, the quinquennial flood

in *100 Years of Solitude*, and fitting for Abdella's artistic typology, the blockbuster apocalyptic film 2012.



Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, 1831 Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929

As indicated by the immolated glob and the title of the work itself, man has overreached in its own greed and become a Promethean nightmare, levying untold destruction on the world. In this context, the wave holds a duality of being: both the consequence and feebleness of human subjugation over nature. Sadly, for our trio (and perhaps ourselves as well...) the glowering 'EXIT' sign embellished into the tempestuous sky acts as a tantalus of our own inability to overcome, resigning fate to the depths of this newfound drowned world.

This is no nightmare, but reality. In *Global Warming*, Abdella allows us a peek through the quantum hiccups of his crystal ball, bestowing images that burn, and rage.

Collector's Digest

- Trey Abdella lives and works in New York; graduate of the prestigious New York Academy of Art MFA program in 2019 and is represented by T293 and König Galerie. Abdella marked his debut in Asia last year with *Almost Heaven*, a solo show at X Museum in Beijing. His upcoming shows this year at Vito Schnabel Gallery and David Lewis Gallery.
- Abdella has held solo exhibitions internationally at KÖNIG GALERIE, Seoul (2021); KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin (2020); T293 Gallery, Rome (2021, 2019), amongst others. His work has been included in recent group shows at Vito Schnabel Gallery, Los Angeles (2022) and Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles (2021). His art is also included in important collections such as the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; Perez Museum, Miami; Albertina Museum and X Museum, Beijing.

ⁱ Rebecca Fulleylove, 'Trey Abdella's cartoonish paintings are a textural joy', *Creative Review*, 2 May 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Trey Abdella, quoted in 'Next Big Things: Trey Abdella', *Galerie Magazine*, 3 December 2021, [online](#)

Provenance

Berlin, Future Gallery

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Berlin, Future Gallery, *Clusterfuck: Trey Abdella, Botond Keresztesi, Olga Mikh Fedorova*, 23 March - 20 April 2019

Literature

Sasha Bogojev and Trey Abdella, "Trey Abdella's Painted World of Imaginative Mashups", *Juxtapoz Magazine*, 29 January 2019, [online](#) (illustrated)

Sigrid Hermann, 'Trey Abdella, Botond Keresztesi, Olga Mikh Fedorova "Clusterfuck" at FUTURE GALLERY, Berlin', *moussemagazine*, 18 April 2019, [online](#) (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

Hong Kong Auction / 30 March 2023 / 7pm HKT

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MADSAKI

Untitled (Masters of the Universe)

signed and dated 'madsaki 2019' on the reverse
acrylic paint aerosol on canvas

140.2 x 200 cm. (55 1/4 x 78 3/4 in.)

Executed in 2019.

Estimate

HK\$900,000 — 1,200,000

€106,000 — 142,000

\$115,000 — 154,000



[Go to Lot](#)



"He-Man and the Masters of the Universe have held a special place in my heart for a long time... These characters played a pivotal part in teaching me how to express myself to the world around me." — MADSAKI

"The Most Powerful Man in the Universe"

MADSAKI, a Japan-born visual artist known only by a pseudonym, is a fixture in the contemporary art world. Known for his signature use of spray paint and comical characters with hollowed eyes and pasted-on smiles, his works revisit mass culture and art historical tropes – in a bold reexamination of the societal value systems inherent to making art.

In 1980, MADSAKI and his family relocated from Osaka, Japan, to New Jersey, USA. Six year old and possessing no knowledge of English, the young MADSAKI learned to adapt, and instead of playing after school, he often ended up watching cartoons at home alone. The young boy subsequently became particularly obsessed with *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*, and it would be these early encounters with American pop culture (cartoons such as *Masters of the Universe* included) that would hold particular nostalgic fondness for him in his adult years, serving as the basis for his grasp of the English language.



A cartoon still from *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*, 1984

He-Man and the Masters of the Universe is a science fiction and medieval fantasy-themed media franchise created by Mattel, in which the muscular, blonde-hair protagonist He-Man fights to protect his planet from his arch-nemesis Skeletor. The series made its first appearance as a line of action figures in 1982, later spawning its iterations in a wide range of genres, including animated television series, comic books, video games, and later a live-action feature film. Larger-than-life and hyper-masculine, anyone who grew up in 1980s America would have been familiar with He-Man, and by 1984, the apex of the show's popularity, MADSAKI was fully aware of this ubiquitous comic universe. Perhaps the young artist found solace in the hero's tagline "I am He-Man, the Most Powerful Man in the Universe", using it as motivation to empower himself in a foreign land.



The artist in his studio in front of the present work MADSAKI's Instagram page, 2019

Say It / Spray It

A graduate from the prestigious Parsons School of Design, MADSAKI's trademark technique of utilising spray paint – a medium more commonly associated with street art and graffiti – to create 'fine art' is unconventional and deliberately subversive. Using stencil caps attached to the spray can to produce a refined stream of paint, he explained:

"I prefer dripping or grimy lines to clean lines. I really do not try and paint finely at all. There are way too many people who are good at painting beautifully. I'm happy to leave that up to them. [...] I am painting with spray, not with a brush." — MADSAKI

Wielding aerosol paint in a rapid and spontaneous manner, the artist encourages viewers to form their own interpretations when interacting with his paintings; for them to personally connect with his art and to discover meaning and subtext within his oeuvre. Technical and humorous, this unconventional method of painting is a reflection of MADSAKI's own journey as an artist. Fittingly, this work, highly significant and autobiographical, relates to the artist's own transformation from an immigrant to being assimilated into American culture. Through the saturated vibrant colours and exhilarant energy of *Untitled (Masters of the Universe)*, MADSAKI reimagines one of the cartoon series' most famous posters and images, and presents the superheroes in a stereotypical display of strength posed against the background of the fictional planet Eternia, all looking out confidently and smiling to the viewer. Through this radical recreation, he ignites an ongoing dialogue concerning the value of art and the role of the artist within mass culture. Like Warhol preceding him, and the more contemporaneous KAWS, MADSAKI is unafraid to experiment with unconventional means, rebelling against tradition and embracing pop culture by using images with wide appeal in society as the core subject matter of his works.



Andy Warhol, too, reimagined key images from pop culture, as can be seen in the quartet of advertisement posters in the present sale. (Lots 39-42)

After releasing this work and its sister series, similarly depicting Skeletor and his acolytes, in 2019 at Galerie Perrotin Hong Kong, MADSAKI came back to the theme for an exhibition at Kaikai Kiki, Takashi Murakami's gallery in Tokyo, in September 2020. The exhibition featured paintings portraying the *Masters of the Universe* world, as well as sculptures created by enlarging the action figures from the era by roughly fifteen times, and paintings depicting MADSAKI at ten years old.

In Murakami's own words when discussing the exhibition, this *Masters of the Universe* series provides invaluable insight into the artist's psyche: 'While MADSAKI's clumsy yet purposeful use of spray paint to re-create existing images may seem like simple mimicry, and the lines and colours of

his crude paintings—by no means skillfully executed—wobble with uncertainty, this is in fact the artist's prescription for disentangling the loose ends of his utterly unsuccessful efforts at communication, generating a genuine voice that resonates with many.'ⁱ

Collector's Digest

- MADSAKI's uncompromising approach to art has won him many fans, including fellow Japanese icon Takashi Murakami, who hails the younger artist's 'bottomless talent' and who has bought dozens of pieces for his personal *Superflat* collection. Today MADSAKI is represented by several prominent international art galleries, including Galerie Perrotin and Kaikai Kiki Gallery in Tokyo.
- In January 2021, MADSAKI released a collaboration with [Mattel Creations](#) and in conjunction with Kaikai Kiki: a He-Man and Battle Cat deluxe art toy set. The set features the hero and his fierce steed in bold neon colors, and both pieces feature MADSAKI's signature spray paint-style black eyes with drip trails. In addition to the toy, the artist launched a clothing capsule collection and released two prints: one featuring the heroes of the show and the other one the villains, underscoring the importance of the cartoon to the artist.

ⁱ Takashi Murakami, quoted in the press release of the MADSAKI exhibition 1984, Kaikai Kiki Gallery, Tokyo, 2020, [online](#)

Provenance

Kaikai Kiki Gallery, Japan

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale

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Brett Crawford

H3RE HE COMES

signed, titled and dated "'H3RE HE COMES' Brett Crawford 2023' on the reverse; further signed with the artist's initials and inscribed "'I ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A RACECAR DRIV3R' BC' on the stretcher

acrylic on linen

81.3 x 121.9 cm. (32 x 47 7/8 in.)

Painted in 2023.

Estimate

HK\$600,000 — 800,000

€70,200 — 93,600

\$76,900 — 103,000



[Go to Lot](#)



Based in Southern California, Brett Crawford is a multidisciplinary artist whose works span across painting, sculpture, design, and street murals; each of his works is a cultural exchange between art, fashion, and street culture. Driven by his love for vintage cars and F1 formula car racing, the current work, *H3RE HE COMES* references the Brett Crawford's favourite childhood memories and the cartoon *Speed Racer*. As always, Crawford's works always include easter eggs for those who are 'in the know', prompting them to seek for hidden stories within. In the current work, the artist sprinkled a few clues for the viewer per his usual style: the Monkey, Chim Chim, on the front of the vehicle; the subtle Gucci styling of the protagonist's jacket and car interior, and the rabbit and number 23 that refer to when this work was painted - 2023, the year of the rabbit.

Following the success of the artist's auction debut with *3MO SUPPORT* in 2022 and subsequent pop-up exhibition, *UNTAPP3D FUTURE* in collaboration with Phillips and alongside ART SG, the current lot *H3RE HE COMES* is coming to auction following great success and traction. This time, Brett Crawford sat down with Charlotte Raybaud, Head of Evening Sale, Hong Kong once again to give us more insight into the inspirations behind this particular work. Below is an excerpt of their conversation.

Charlotte Raybaud: *How did you choose the subject matter of this work?*

Brett Crawford: I've been working on some designs for a series of sculptures based on vintage Formula 1 cars driven by my protagonist - my Pinocchio character. This 1954 Mercedes W196 F1 car is particularly beautiful to me. I love the shape of it. In this case I wanted to use this car to reference a favourite childhood memory. There's a cartoon called *Speed Racer*. I don't know if you're familiar with it. It's a really old cartoon. There's a guy who races. Are you familiar with *Speed Racer*?

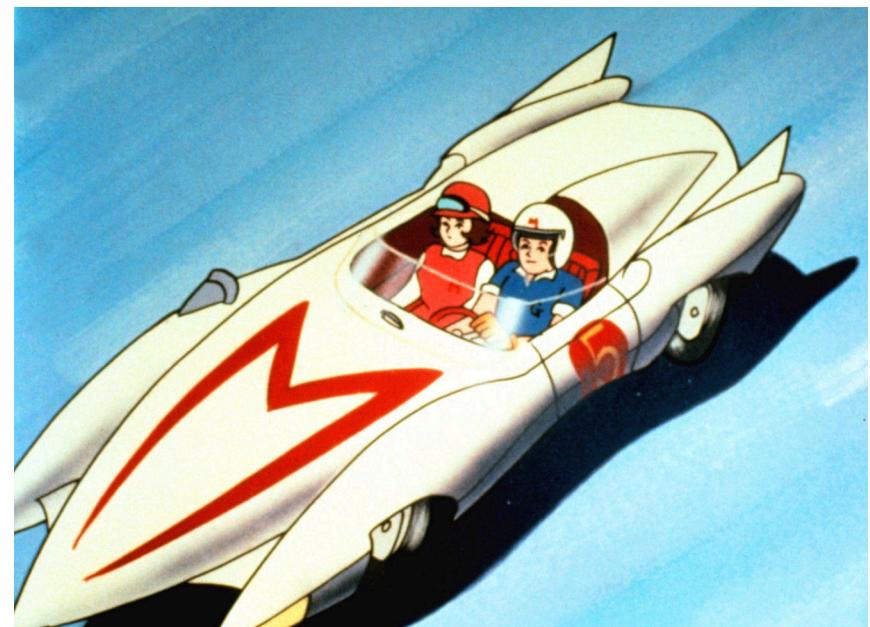
CR: Yeah, I am.

BC: Okay, cool. Before I just keep talking, I just want to make sure everybody is. It is a really old cartoon. But I think it's still in circulation, so hopefully lots of people know who he is. That's the gist of it. It's me painting a car, I think it's beautiful. With my character and paying homage to *Speed Racer*.

CR: I love it. And did you pick these colours yourself? Like, adding on the extra details? Details like the monkey sticker at the front and I mean, the thing at the end is obviously a dating thing. But how did you choose the colours of the car itself? Does it correspond to a favourite character or a favourite episode from *Speed Racer*?

BC: Yeah, all of those things. It's actually the colouring. It ties into the question where you asked me the meaning behind Number Five. All of that is styling from *Speed Racer*. His car was number five. His car was white with this orange and red lettering on the side. So it's all styled mostly like his car. Just cause I love fashion so much I added some Gucci styling for the fashionista. Not boldly. There's no cheese and things like that. But there's the icon on his jacket and on the seats, and on

the seat back you can see some of the Gucci styling. Just the colours. So it's *Speed Racer* with Gucci styling. Styled by Brett.



The car in *Speed Racer* Image: Everett Collection Inc / Alamy Stock Photo

CR: Any meanings behind the wording Go Go Go?

BC: I love expressing movement through my art. I think Lichtenstein would've agreed that bold descriptive text can definitely help with that. They are also plucked from the theme song for *Speed Racer* in which they say 'Go Speed Racer' repeatedly throughout the song. It's also my way of encouraging both myself and anyone who needs to hear it, to keep going. Go Go Go!

CR: Any meanings behind the #5?

BC: Yeah, to be honest, the number five was really just dedicated to *Speed Racer*. It was his number on the car. The font is the same. The colours are the same. It's funny. I've shown some friends, or some people [...] that stands out in my mind. Showed a really young guy at the art supply store that I go to. I showed him a picture of it, and he knew immediately what it was, because this is very *Speed Racer*. So I wanted to for the people who know *Speed Racer*, or I wanted

them to be able to spot that immediately, because, to be honest, the car doesn't match his car.



Detail of the present lot

CR: Do you have any particular interest in cars/ race cars etc.?

BC: I always wanted to be a race car driver. It has always fascinated me. It seems so daring and glamorous. The beautiful cars the roar of the motors, the fanfare and pageantry. I love it all. I don't know if that started before or after I watched *Speed Racer* as a child. In fact, the main reason I loved that cartoon so much wasn't the racing or cars. It was the protective sibling element that left the biggest impact on my psyche. *Speed Racer* had an older brother named *Racer X* who also raced but he didn't play by the rules. He was a bit of an anti-hero. Whenever *Speed Racer* was in danger *Racer X* was there to protect him. As a child with a lot of violence in our home I wished for someone to protect me like a *Racer X*. Separate from all that I have a very competitive spirit. I think in a healthy environment competition can be great whether it's in racing or in the field of art. I know it is taboo to admit enjoying being competitive at art, but I love it. I've made some of my closest friends and art peers by competing in art battles like *Secret Walls*. I think when artistic peers really push each other it's a win for art.

CR: Could you share a bit of HOW the work was created, technique/layering/ etc.?

BC: I'm really enjoying the beginning parts of my paintings. I always start with a drawing that holds my idea in place. But the way I start my painting process is very loose these days. I take care to use the very best linen stretched over aluminium stretchers hand made by the best canvas makers in the world Lucius Hudson here in Los Angeles because I start all my new paintings with very wet acrylic washes. Not having to worry about the stretchers warping gives me a lot of freedom. There are so many moments in that wet process I wish I could freeze. Moments of lost beauty as the colour moves and changes shape with the water. The goal is to capture bits, a piece of that beauty by stopping to let it dry in phases before adding more water and thinned acrylics. Once I get the background to a place that makes me happy, I switch gears. I return to my plan and go very precise. For me the final joy is in the details. The form, lighting, shadows, highlights and of course Easter Eggs.

Phillips would like to thank Brett Crawford for his time in taking this interview.

Provenance

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner