

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT

Sale Interest: 58 Lots



[View Sale](#)



[Conditions of Sale](#)



PHILLIPS

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT

Sale Interest: 58 Lots

Auction & Viewing Location

30 November 2021

JW Marriott Hotel Hong Kong, 88

Queensway, Admiralty, Hong Kong

Highlights Preview

23-24 November 2021 10am-7pm

Viewing

25-30 November 2021 10am-7pm

Sale Designation

When sending in written bids or making enquiries please refer to this sale as HK010321 or 20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction.

Absentee and Telephone Bids

tel +852 2318 2029

bidshongkong@phillips.com

Contemporary Art Department

Charlotte Raybaud

Specialist, Head of Evening Sale

+852 2318 2026

charlotteraybaud@phillips.com

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

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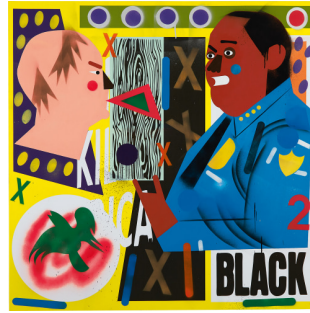
Sale Interest: 58 Lots



1
Cinga Samson
Ivory V
Estimate
HK\$250,000 — 350,000



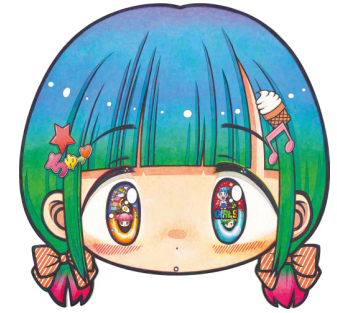
2
Salman Toor
East Village Iqbal Bano
Estimate
HK\$1,800,000 — 2,800,000



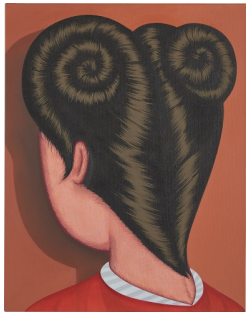
3
Nina Chanel Abney
Untitled (IXI Black)
Estimate
HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000



4
Jamian Juliano-Villani
Clear Cough from Your Schedule
Estimate
HK\$200,000 — 400,000



5
Mr. Yume
Breath of the Earth
Estimate
HK\$1,000,000 — 2,000,000



6
Julie Curtiss
Escargot
Estimate
HK\$400,000 — 600,000



7
Javier Calleja
30 works: Untitled
Estimate
HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000



8
Javier Calleja
You Me
Estimate
HK\$3,000,000 — 4,000,000



9
Aya Takano
In the Lab (the Birth of Jelly)
Estimate
HK\$200,000 — 300,000



10
Hernan Bas
Minimalism (cracking the code)
Estimate
HK\$1,000,000 — 1,500,000

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Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



11
Joel Mesler
Untitled (Night Out)
Estimate
HK\$500,000 — 700,000



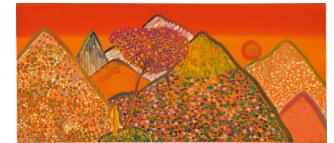
12
Shara Hughes
Magic Island
Estimate
HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000



13
Scott Kahn
Cadman Plaza
Estimate
HK\$1,000,000 — 1,500,000



14
Matthew Wong
Nature's Church
Estimate
HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000



15
Matthew Wong
Far Away Eyes
Estimate
HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000



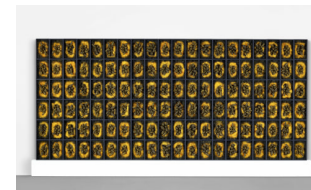
16
Gerhard Richter
Kerzenschein (Candle-light)
Estimate
HK\$55,000,000 — 75,000,000



17
Chu Teh-Chun
Songe de l'aube
Estimate
HK\$9,500,000 — 12,000,000



18
Yayoi Kusama
INFINITY-NETS (OPRT)
Estimate
HK\$15,000,000 — 25,000,000



19
Yayoi Kusama
Repetition
Estimate
HK\$15,000,000 — 20,000,000



20
Nicolas Party
Still Life
Estimate
HK\$6,200,000 — 9,400,000

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21
David Hockney
Bridlington Violets
Estimate
HK\$10,000,000 — 15,000,000



22
Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita
Self-Portrait with a Cat
Estimate
HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000



23
Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita
Reclining Nude
Estimate
HK\$12,000,000 — 18,000,000



24
Sanyu
Paysage Aux Hirondelles
Estimate
HK\$26,000,000 — 46,000,000



25
Zao Wou-Ki
Sans titre ("Notre Dame")
Estimate
HK\$7,500,000 — 10,000,000



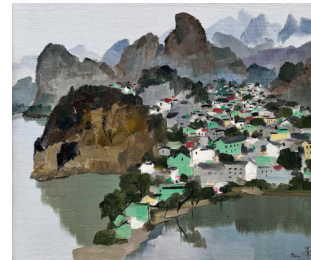
26
Zao Wou-Ki
Brume d'automne
Estimate
HK\$4,500,000 — 7,500,000



27
Auguste Rodin
Le Baiser, 1ère réduction dite au...
Estimate
HK\$10,000,000 — 15,000,000



28
Zao Wou-Ki
20.3.64.
Estimate
HK\$20,000,000 — 30,000,000



29
Wu Guanzhong
Guilin
Estimate
HK\$15,000,000 — 25,000,000



30
Alexander Calder
Two Red Petals in the Air
Estimate
HK\$16,000,000 — 20,000,000

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Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



31
Claude Monet
Pavots dans un vase de Chine
Estimate
HK\$9,500,000 — 15,000,000



32
Georges Mathieu
Saxifrage
Estimate
HK\$2,000,000 — 3,000,000



33
Chu Teh-Chun
Composition
Estimate
HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000



34
Huang Yuxing
Floating Bubbles
Estimate
HK\$1,800,000 — 2,800,000



35
Zhou Chunya
Smell the Flowers
Estimate
HK\$5,000,000 — 7,000,000



36
Zeng Fanzhi
Untitled 09-7-1
Estimate
HK\$8,000,000 — 15,000,000



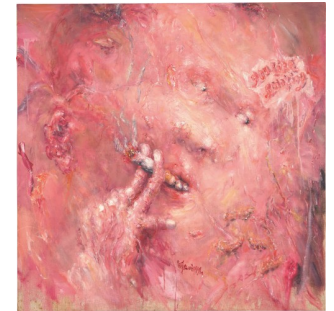
37
Liu Ye
Flagship No. 2
Estimate
HK\$2,000,000 — 3,000,000



38
Wang Xingwei
Untitled (Heart-Shaped Dance)
Estimate
HK\$2,800,000 — 4,800,000



39
Liu Ye
Untitled
Estimate
HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000



40
Liu Wei
You Like Smoking?
Estimate
HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000

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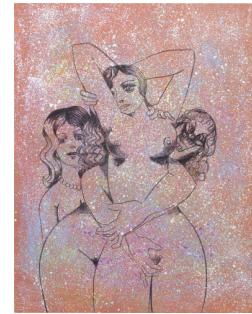
41
Izumi Kato
Untitled
Estimate
HK\$4,500,000 — 7,500,000



42
Yoshitomo Nara
Pandora's Box
Estimate
HK\$7,500,000 — 10,000,000



43
George Condo
The Dreamer
Estimate
HK\$4,600,000 — 6,200,000



44
George Condo
Entangled Figures
Estimate
HK\$6,200,000 — 9,200,000



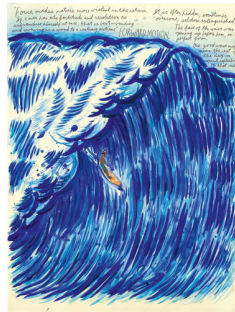
45
Takashi Murakami
Sage
Estimate
HK\$7,500,000 — 9,500,000



46
KAWS
NEW YORK
Estimate
HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000



47
KAWS
FINAL DAYS
Estimate
HK\$6,200,000 — 8,200,000



48
Raymond Pettibon
Untitled (Force makes nature...)
Estimate
HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000



49
Robert Nava
Angel Shark
Estimate
HK\$1,200,000 — 1,800,000



50
Susumu Kamijo
Marching To The Sun
Estimate
HK\$450,000 — 650,000

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51
Jadé Fadojutimi
Fishing For Steps
Estimate
HK\$1,200,000 — 2,200,000



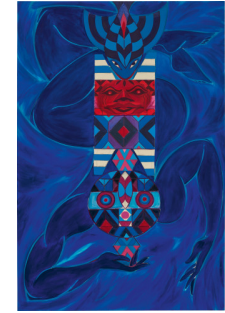
52
Mickalene Thomas
Looking Up from the She Works ...
Estimate
HK\$1,000,000 — 2,000,000



53
Billie Zangewa
Cirque d'hiver
Estimate
HK\$400,000 — 600,000



54
Godwin Champs Namukuru
The Connector
Estimate
HK\$200,000 — 400,000



55
Tunji Adeniyi-Jones
Blue Ancestor
Estimate
HK\$400,000 — 600,000



56
Tomoo Gokita
Final Confrontation
Estimate
HK\$1,200,000 — 2,200,000



57
Ewa Juszkiewicz
Appropriation
Estimate
HK\$400,000 — 600,000



58
Lucas Arruda
Untitled from the series Deserto...
Estimate
HK\$1,000,000 — 1,500,000

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1

Cinga Samson

Ivory V

signed, inscribed and dated 'CINGA SamSON 2018

A.K.A Rhokho/MTHINK' on the reverse

oil on canvas

115 x 90 cm. (45 1/4 x 35 3/8 in.)

Painted in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$250,000 — 350,000

€28,300 — 39,600

\$32,100 — 44,900

[Go to Lot](#)



"In all my art books, African artists are in the last chapter, if at all...I want you to look at my work and think, 'That's exquisite, that's incredible, I am blown away — and I know it is completely African,' without feeling that it is lacking." — Cinga Samson



Cinga Samson, 2020

Photo Stephanie Veldman. © Cinga Samson

There is a haunting beauty in Cinga Samson's *Ivory V*, evoked not only by the ethereal figure at the forefront of the composition whose radiant, pupil-less eyes appear rolled back in reverie, but also in the Samson's ability to confront the viewer's gaze whilst giving very little away of the emotions underpinning his subject's confident, stylised stance. Mysterious but beckoning, and silent yet vibrant, this aesthetic tension is at the core of the South African artist's oeuvre, rooted in his grounding philosophy of: 'The painting is not for you. The painting is for itself.'ⁱ

As the final canvas of his five-part *Ivory* series and the first work by the artist to be offered at auction in Asia, *Ivory V* exquisitely encapsulates the potency of Samson's unique painterly approach, described by *The New York Times* as a 'commitment to excellence' that 'prove[s] [Samson] to be a vital emerging figure in contemporary painting.'ⁱⁱ Emblematic of the artist's up-and-coming presence in the art world, White Cube announced its global representation of the artist in May 2021, with his first solo exhibition with the gallery scheduled to open in London in 2022.

The 5 *Ivory* Canvases



Cinga Samson, *Ivory I*, 2018
© Cinga Samson



Cinga Samson, *Ivory II*, 2018
© Cinga Samson



Cinga Samson, *Ivory III*, 2018
© Cinga Samson



Cinga Samson, *Ivory IV*, 2018
© Cinga Samson



Cinga Samson, *Ivory V*, 2018
© Cinga Samson

Real and Fantasy, Classical and Contemporary

Samson was born in Cape Town in 1986, and grew up between the city and the rural region of Transkei. Originally a photography student, Samson's transition to painting was instigated in 2006 when he stumbled into Isibane Creative Arts, a shared studio on the outskirts of Cape Town home to artists whose work explored Black life in the townships. Under the group's guidance, Samson began experimenting with oil paint, eventually forming his own distinct visual language addressing themes relating to aspiration, youth, spirituality, and masculinity, and the representation of identity in South Africa and beyond.

Despite this shift in medium, photography continues to play an important role in his practice as, much like the work of his peer Kehinde Wiley, Samson first develops concepts in photoshoots before later using the images as reference points for his paintings. Blending reality with imagined details, such as the curving foliage that nods to moments in his youth spent with his mother watching her garden, this technique adds a surreal quality to Samson's portraits as each stylised figure appears almost superimposed onto an artificial backdrop reminiscent of Cape Town and the rural Eastern coast.

Contrasting the still photographs he uses as source material, however, the characters take on a life of their own, as exemplified by the *Ivory V* self-portrait who projects a strong presence and is seemingly unconcerned with the viewer, aware of the fact that 'this is a world that belongs, unequivocally, to him'.ⁱⁱ



Salomon Mesdach, *Portrait of a Man*, 1620, Collection of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

The formal composition of the work draws similarities to the heroically posed figures in Renaissance portraiture, heightened by the delicate lace fan Samson's subject daintily holds. At the same time, the image also recalls the old photo portraits men sent home from mining towns when the Cape Colony imposed the hut tax on Black Africans. Frequently positioned next to a tree or fern, men would pose in new clothes or shoes to reassure their loved ones of their prosperity. This anachronistic aesthetic is interrupted in *Ivory V*, however, by the protagonist's contemporary clothes, a pair of fashionable blue jeans and an open gold and ecru silk jacket adorned with cosmological motifs.



Amedeo Modigliani, *The Boy*, 1919 Collection of Indianapolis Museum of Art at Newfields

Referencing the fashion and popular culture trends he sees around him, Samson honours the youth of African men 'by showing ambitions, perhaps in simple ways, in a brand of clothing'. But as Gabriel Ritter, head of contemporary art at Minneapolis Institute of Art points out, the figures' 'brooding, introspective gaze' ⁱⁱⁱ rejects any superficiality, with the marble white eyes instead channelling a somewhat trance-like stare that only Amedeo Modigliani has previously managed to successfully master. Stemming from a childhood memory of Samson and his cousin wandering alongside a riverside when their eyes were met by subliminal moonlight, these uncanny gazes have since become the artist's most iconic motif, working to both generate a mystical aura and suggest larger ideas about clarity and blindness.

“What I love about the eyes and absence of pupils is that they convey a dreamlike awareness, as opposed to a gaze that connects them beyond the canvas' frame. Is the figure looking outside of the canvas? These eyes emphasise that the figure is aware, rather than just looking passively.” — Cinga Samson

A Celebration of Youth and Heritage

Whilst Samson has cited the significant influence of Western artists on his work, including Andrew Wyeth, Louise Bourgeois, Paul Gauguin, and Francis Bacon, what ultimately drives his creativity is celebrating his heritage and presenting a powerful depiction of his generation in Africa that defies Western expectations. With this in mind, although the title of the present work and wider series provides an obvious link to the subject's luminous, ivory casted eyes, perhaps there is an ironic undertone to this that can be considered as well.

But in the artist's own words, 'I make art for the love of doing it. I am not an activist, I am not involved in any political movement: I am just an African man. I don't want to bring the stigmas of Africa into my work...As soon as we engage those topics, people think it's our identity, and it becomes our identity. Our goal as the young generation is to get ourselves out of the Black stereotype such as sickness or racism. We are part of the new identity of the African continent.'^{iv}

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2DiEQukYo&t=12s>

Cinga Samson in his studio, 2020

Video Courtesy of Galerie Perrotin

Collector's Digest

Proving himself a force to be reckoned with in the art world for his distinctive aesthetic, Samson's auction record was recently achieved by Phillips New York in June 2021, when his painting *Two piece 1* far surpassed its pre-sale estimates of US\$25,000 - 35,000, selling for an impressive US\$378,000.



Cinga Samson, *Two piece 1*, 2018 Sold by Phillips New York in June 2021 for US\$378,000 against pre-auction estimates of US\$25,000 - 35,000

Samson has been honoured with numerous solo exhibitions in key international venues, including blank projects in Cape Town in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2019; and [Perrotin Gallery in New York in 2020](#). Additionally, Samson has an upcoming solo show scheduled in New York at the [FLAG Art Foundation](#), running from 16 October 2021 - 15 January 2022, as well as in 2022 at White Cube in London.

Work by Samson can be found in the public collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Pérez Art Museum Miami; Minneapolis Institute of Art; Center for Curatorial Studies, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; South African National Gallery, Cape Town; and the A4 Arts Foundation, Cape Town.

ⁱ Cinga Samson, quoted in Emma Grayson, 'Cinga Samson Questions Certain Aesthetics at

Perrotin', *Art of Choice*, 26 February 2020, [online](#)

ii Meara Sharma, 'An Artist Who Doesn't Want to Feed Western Fantasies About Africa', *The New York Times*, 21 February 2020, [online](#)

iii Gabriel Ritter, quote in Jareh Das, 'Cinga Samson: a different conversation on representation', *Ocula*, 21 February 2020

iv Cinga Samson, quoted in 'Discussion with Cinga Samson', *Perrotin*, December 2018

Provenance

blank projects, Cape Town

Private Collection, USA

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

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PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT COLLECTION

2

Salman Toor

East Village Iqbal Bano

oil on panel

61 x 61 cm. (24 x 24 in.)

Painted in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$1,800,000 — 2,800,000

€204,000 — 317,000

\$231,000 — 359,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“I try to create moments of intimacy, camaraderie, and consolation. The characters are literary, artsy types and they revel in being fully understood by each other inside the world of painting... In East Village Iqbal Bano, they drunkenly listen to a YouTube video of a ‘60s Pakistani diva, evoking the spirit of classical Indian ghazal in a cramped apartment full of books.” — Salman Toor

Painted in 2018 and unveiled at the artist’s solo exhibition, [Salman Toor | Time After Time](#), hosted by the Aicon Gallery in New York that same year, *East Village Iqbal Bano* is a captivating work by Salman Toor. Formed of rich, tactile brushstrokes rendered in a colourful yet muted palette of dusky blue, yellow and green, two figures sit at a table on mismatched chairs, the closeness of their relationship revealed by the gentle touch of their intertwining legs. Clad in a yellow, sherwani-collared coat and rugged brown slacks, the man on the left perches his head in his hands as he gazes upwards, as if caught in a moment of inner reverie. The other is draped in an embroidered green shawl, his eyes looking downwards into the martini glass from which he gingerly sips. Bathed in a warm twilight cast in from the window behind, a quiet cosiness is evoked by the intimate encounter that leaves us to wonder if we have stumbled in to interrupt a private moment. And yet, the manner-of-fact depiction removes of any concerns of merely peering in as bystanders, as we too, feel invited to join into the protagonists’ world.

A Refreshing of Figurative Painting

Whilst the work is filled with contemporary connotations—the laptop, ceramic ashtray and glowing windows of the apartment blocks outside—Toor’s painterly virtuosity renders the image with an almost Renaissance-era panache of technical perfection, dignity, aspiration and light. His mastery of this juxtaposition, Toor explains, attributes to his studies at Ohio Wesleyan University followed by his MFA at Pratt Institute from 2006 to 2009, as he found inspiration in copying the works of Old Masters, learning ‘to paint like Rubens, Van Dyck, Bernardo Strozzi, Antoine Watteau, among others.’ⁱ

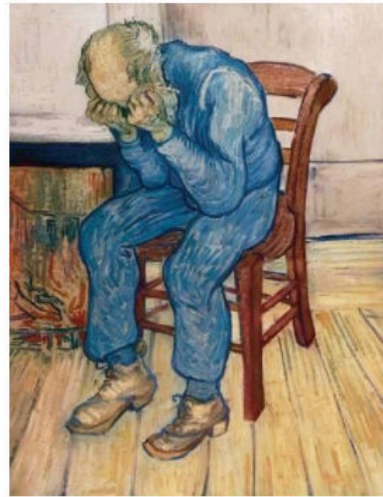


Left: Jacopo Bassano, *The Supper at Emmaus*, circa 1538, Collection of the Kimbell Art Museum, Texas
Right: Anthony van Dyck, *Self-Portrait*, circa 1620-1621, Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Combining this with the influences that helped shape his early practice, namely the works of modern Pakistani and Indian painters such as Amrita Sher-Gil, Colin David, and Bhupen Khakhar, but also source material found in the billboard advertisements peppered around his hometown, Toor succeeds in seamlessly blending both Eastern and Western references, forming original compositions that grapple with art history through the filter of his own subjectivity.

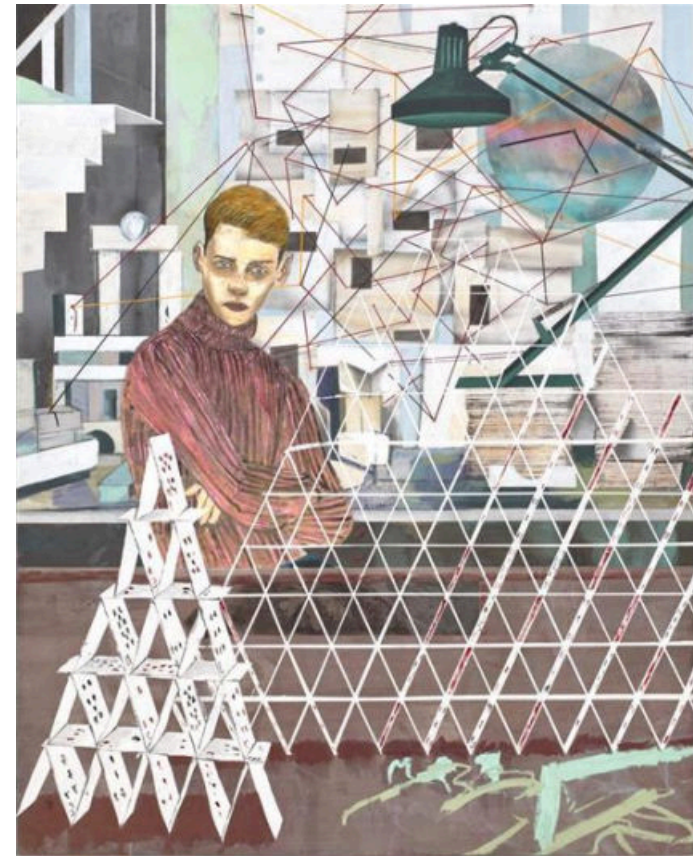
As esteemed critic Roberta Smith for *The New York Times* praises, ‘Toor’s evocative, tenderly executed paintings begin to pluck at your heartstrings as soon as you see them... His delicate, caressing brush strokes and intriguing textures are somewhat too large for the images. So they remain staunchly visible and comforting, conveying crucial details and capturing the telling facial expressions at which the artist excels’.ⁱⁱ This is beautifully conveyed in *East Village Iqbal Bano*, rendered in linear, agitated brushstrokes reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh’s signature use of line. Though this works to articulate foregrounded elements, such as the patterned design of the righthand man’s green and white shawl or his painted fingernails, even the blank, heather-hued wall behind appears imbued with movement, as if dancing in the subtle changes of the dawn or dusk light.



Left: Vincent van Gogh, *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, 1890 Collection of the Musée d'Orsay, Paris Right: Vincent van Gogh, *At Eternity's Gate*, 1890 Collection of the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

East Village Iqbal Bano

Constructed from fantasy and memory, Toor's paintings explore notions of autobiography, art history, and sexuality, earning favourable comparisons to the works of painters such as Jonathan Lyndon Chase and Hernan Bas - an artist whom Toor recently exhibited alongside at Perrotin in New York for their group show *[Them](#)*, presenting works that reclaim traditional scenes of intimacy through exploring the poetry of contemporary quotidian queer life.



Hernan Bas, *Minimalism (cracking the code)*, 2019 [Lot 10 - Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction Evening Sale, 30 November 2021](#) Estimate HK\$ 1,000,000 - 1,500,000 / US\$ 128,000 - 192,000

Unique to Toor, however, is his portrayal of the joy yet unrest of living between two cultures, which he does so through his cast of 'characters [who] are the kind of people who sometimes succeed in merging the seemingly irreconcilable ideas of the culturally Muslim immigrant, and the literary and artistic libertine in the Western tradition.'ⁱⁱⁱⁱ As he explains: 'there is a feeling safety and domesticity in the paintings that I like to work with... they have so many little domestic spaces in them, like the ones that I have and my friends have in [New York's] East Village. They are safe spaces... I grew up in a culture that was relatively conservative, so I am still attached to the safe spaces... spaces in which expression is completely safe to express everything. I like the

combination of flouncy, frilly, feminine domesticity coupled with hairy brown bodies and an idea of the glamour of effeminate men. Together, happy in groups, circles of friendships... that is one of the things that really drives me, as well as the idea of ecstasy in the paintings, is the idea of queer friendships and communities of support that are really valuable because growing up my friendships were the most valuable thing to me.^{iv}



Detail of the present work

Empathetically portraying the nuances of diasporic life, the protagonists of Toor's painting huddle around a laptop enjoying a video of a woman with a microphone which, as suggested by the title, is Pakistani *ghazal* singer Iqbal Bano (1935-2009). In her most famous performance held in 1985 in Toor's home city of Lahore, she brazenly sang to thousands a *ghazal* titled 'Hum Dukhein Gey', or 'We Will Witness', written by the controversial socialist poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984). As an act of defiance during General Zia ul Haq's regime, under which those who were considered anti-national or secular were imprisoned and tortured in the name of shariah law, Bano's powerful performance was met with thunderous applause, with the song becoming an anthem of hope still sung at protests decades after. As such, Bano's feature in Toor's *East Village Iqbal Bano* can be considered a profound homage to Bano, the resistance that enhances the artist's own politics, and of the yearning for progressiveness he still longs for in his native Pakistan.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdvnBuy1PRk>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sdvnBuy1PRk>

Iqbal Bano performing

"I think of the pictures as short stories where the emphasis falls on unexpected places, seemingly mundane situations become illuminating or interesting ones. It's a way of dealing in clichés and daring to do them well." — Salman Toor

Collector's Digest

Ranked among *TIME* magazine's 2021 list of 100 emerging leaders shaping the future, Toor has captured the attention of the artworld as an influential voice in contemporary painting, with work now featured in the permanent collections of institutions such as the Tate Modern in London, and Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago.

Having recently presented his first museum solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, *Salman Toor: How Will I Know* (2020-2021), Toor has an upcoming solo exhibition scheduled to open in early 2022 at M Woods in Beijing, which will mark the artist's first museum solo presentation in Asia.

When Phillips were the first to debut a work by Toor at auction in Asia in December 2020, *Group Dance* (2012) far surpassed its estimates, achieving the artist's top auction record at the time. Demonstrative of the artist's rocketing success, that result has since been broken 7 times in the past year, with the current top place achieved by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 8 June 2021, when *Girl with Driver* (2013) soared over its pre-sale estimates of HK\$1,200,000 – 2,200,000, achieving a remarkable HK\$6,905,000.

ⁱ Maria Vogel, 'Salman Toor Disrupts Old Attitudes of Gender and Race', *Art of Choice*, 10 December 2019, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Roberta Smith, 'Salman Toor, a Painter at Home in Two Worlds', *The New York Times*, 23 December 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Salman Toor, quoted in Osama Shehzad, 'Eyes Lowered', *Popula*, 26 August 2021, [online](#)

^{iv} Salman Toor, quoted in Osama Shehzad, 'Eyes Lowered', *Popula*, 26 August 2021, [online](#)

Provenance

Aicon Gallery, New York

Private Collection, India

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

New York, Aicon Gallery, *Salman Toor | Time After Time*, 26 October - 1 December 2018

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Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



3

Nina Chanel Abney

Untitled (IXI Black)

unique UltraChrome pigmented print, acrylic and spray
paint on canvas

132.1 x 132.1 cm. (52 x 52 in.)

Executed in 2015.

Estimate

HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000

€170,000 — 283,000

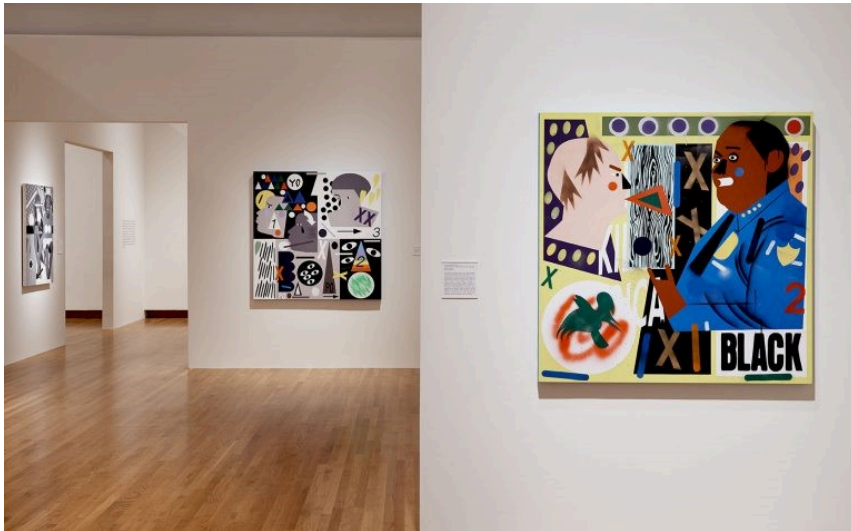
\$192,000 — 321,000

[Go to Lot](#)

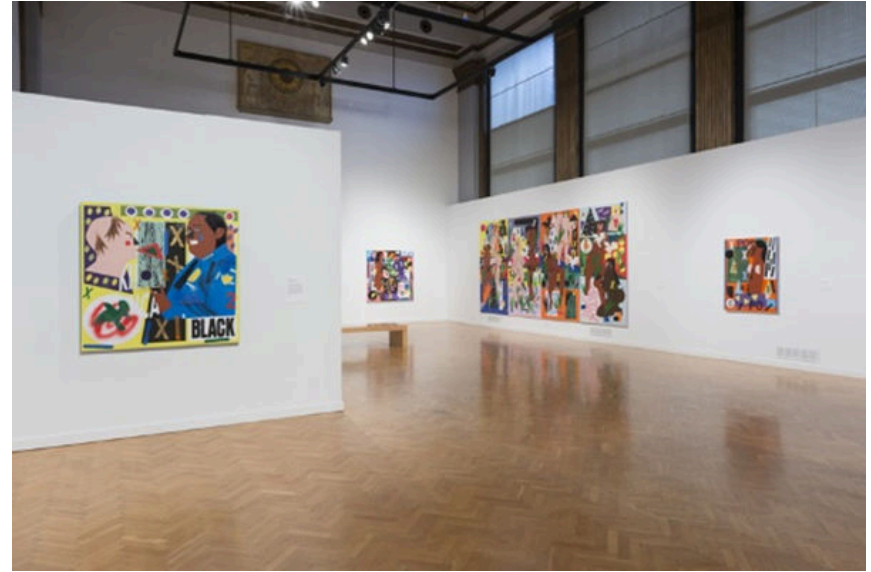


"I like to drop the bomb. Start the conversation, then leave the room." — Nina Chanel Abney

Born in Illinois in 1982, New Jersey-based artist Nina Chanel Abney is celebrated for her striking, distinctive artwork that explores the complex social dynamics of contemporary urban life. As the first painting by Abney to be offered at auction in Asia, *Untitled (IXI Black)* is an incredibly arresting work from her oeuvre that featured as part of her first ever museum solo exhibition, [Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush](#). A major 10-year survey of her practice, it premiered at the Nasher Museum of Art in North Carolina in 2017, before later traveling to the Chicago Cultural Centre and then onto Los Angeles, where it was jointly presented by the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and the California African American Museum in 2018-2019.



Installation view of the present work exhibited at North Carolina, Nasher Museum of Art, Nina Chanel Abney: *Royal Flush*, 16 February – 16 July 2017
© Nina Chanel Abney



Installation view of the present work exhibited at Chicago Cultural Center, *Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush*, 10 February – 6 May 2018
© Nina Chanel Abney



Installation view of the present work exhibited at Los Angeles, California African American Museum, *Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush*, 23 September 2018 – 20 January 2019
© Nina Chanel Abney

Rocketing to Worldwide Acclaim

Although Abney was brought up in a creative environment surrounded by self-taught jazz musicians and watching her mother paint as a hobby, it was not until she was older that she found her passion for art. This changed in 2005, when Abney moved to New York City to attend the Master of Fine Arts programme at the esteemed Parsons School of Design. For her thesis show held two years later, she presented *Class of 2007*, a two-panel artwork measuring 3 metres tall and close to 4.5 metres long. In direct contrast to her experiences as the only Black student in the programme, the monumental painting depicted all of Abney's classmates as Black inmates and herself as a white prison guard, with the concept arising from wanting to evoke uncomfortable yet current conversations with artful tact.

Packed to the brim with a multitude of conflicting themes in a manner Abney has since called 'information overload' ⁱⁱ, whilst the painting marked the beginning of what has since become her signature style, Abney has admitted it did not come into its full realisation until the time the present work was created, explaining: 'By the time I had the Nasher show, I could feel this evolution of my work that felt reflective of my interests—graffiti, abstraction, and figuration. I felt like I was coming to a point of culmination of what's actually me.' ⁱ



Nina Chanel Abney, *Class of 2007*, 2007

The Rubell Family Collection, Miami

And yet, it only took seeing this one work (*Class of 2007*) for gallery owner Marc Wheby and his wife Susan Kravets to sign Abney for a show at their Chelsea gallery and within days of the exhibition opening, everything sold. Along with several other of Abney's paintings, *Class of 2007* was later included in the travelling group exhibition of works from the Rubell Family Collection titled '30 Americans', which premiered in Miami in 2008. Presenting works from 'the most important African American artists of the last three decades', Abney was the youngest to be included along the likes of Kara Walker, Mickalene Thomas, Kehinde Wiley, and Jean-Michel Basquiat - an artist to whom she is frequently compared.



Mickalene Thomas, *Looking Up (She Works Hard For The Money Pin-Up Series)*, 2004

[Lot 52 - Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction Evening Sale, 30 November 2021](#)

Estimate HK\$ 1,000,000 - 2,000,000 / US\$ 128,000 - 256,000

© 2021 Mickalene Thomas / ARS, NY

Untitled (IXI Black)

"I personally find the artwork that I am mostly drawn to is work that keeps you guessing and keeps you coming back for more. I enjoy work that doesn't give me a definite answer, but challenges me answer my own questions." — Nina Chanel Abney

Graphically rendered in vibrant hues of blue, red and green, set against a background of canary yellow, *Untitled (IXI Black)* presents the viewer with two figures surrounded by a frenetic array of text and symbols that beg to be decoded, reflecting the inspiration she finds in the chaotic daily stimuli of our world today. Whilst her stacked, rhythmic abstract shapes allude to the pop-cubist styles of modernist painters Stuart Davis and Henri Matisse, she uses her brilliantly coloured palette and simplified form to tackle tough yet necessary, topical themes that, as the artist states, are 'easy to swallow, hard to digest.'ⁱⁱ



Left: Henri Matisse, *Sorrow of the King*, 1952, Collection of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
© 2021 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Right: Stuart Davis, *American Painting*, 1932, Collection of the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, on extended loan from the University of Nebraska
© 2021 Estate of Stuart Davis / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Belonging to a wider series of works by Abney that directly address the disturbing issues of police brutality and racial bias, the composition draws comparisons to themes explored by Jean-Michel

Basquiat in his painting *Defacement (The Death of Michael Stewart)* from 1983. Showing two pink-faced, vampire-toothed police with batons raised over an all-black silhouette, the highly personal work was created in response to the tragedy that took the life of Michael Stewart, a young Black artist in New York who died following an incident with the city's transit police. Devoid of the signature symbols that populate Basquiat's visual language, the central figure is instead framed by negative space that conveys a powerful sense of isolation, reflecting the raw, brutal tensions evoked by the harrowing scene.



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Defacement (The Death of Michael Stewart)*, 1983

Collection of Nina Clemente

© Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artestar, New York.

In Abney's *Untitled (IXI Black)*, however, like in her piece *Class of 2007*, the assumed races of the composition's subjects have been flipped as the uniformed officer is Black and the man being apprehended is white. Stirring viewers to consider the race-reversal and its implications, Abney extends the challenging conversation explored by Basquiat that is, distressingly, still poignant today.

Although suggestive, Abney prefers not to prescribe meaning to her work and in including references to popular culture, art history, the internet, and current events through the amalgamation of chromatically vibrant, geometric line and form that fill the background, an active engagement is required of the viewer to interpret the symbolism of each contributing component, thereby forming their own response to the piece. As such, through this remixed portrayal of a variety of symbology, political or otherwise, Abney bombards viewers with satirical, disjointed and sometimes contradictory suggestions to capture a visual language reflective of the universal way we consume data today, where loaded news headlines are interrupted by Twitter messages and pop-up notifications, as we constantly and passively flip through the channels.

As the artist expresses, 'I don't attempt to communicate anything specific to the viewer. I simply share my thoughts and hope that the viewer will have an experience, rather pleasant or unpleasant, that will start a conversation, spark an emotion, or help to them to convey their own message to themselves.'ⁱⁱⁱ

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2ap9ouAxVk>

Nina Chanel Abney discusses her work ahead of her *Royal Flush* exhibition of which the present work formed part of, 2017

Video Courtesy of the Nasher Museum of Art, North Carolina

Collector's Digest

Celebrated for being at the forefront of a generation of artists unapologetically revitalising narrative-driven figurative painting, Abney's work is included in collections around the world. This includes the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; The Rubell Family Collection, Miami; the Nasher Museum of Art, North Carolina; and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

Work by Abney is currently on view as part of [Afro-Atlantic Histories](#) at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, which opened on 24 October 2021 and will close on 17 January 2022. The Rubell Museum's [30 Americans](#) is also still ongoing, with the latest showing having opened at the Columbia Museum of Art in South Carolina on 9 October 2021, where it will run until 17 January 2022.

ⁱ Nina Chanel Abney, quoted in Enuma Okroro, 'Nina Chanel Abney Reflects on 15 Years of Honing Her Dynamic Painting Practice', *Artsy*, 14 December 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Nina Chanel Abney, quoted in *Focus: Nina Chanel Abney*, exh. cat., The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, 27 January – 18 March 2018, [online](#)

Nina Chanel Abney

iii Nina Chanel Abney, quoted in 'Easy to Swallow, Hard to Digest': An Interview with Nina Chanel Abney', *Live Unchained*, 28 March 2011, [online](#)

Provenance

Kravets Wehby Gallery, New York
California African American Museum, Los Angeles
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

North Carolina, Nasher Museum of Art (p. 57, illustrated p. 59); Chicago Cultural Centre; Los Angeles, Californian African American Museum, *Nina Chanel Abney: Royal Flush*, 16 February 2017 - 20 January 2019

Literature

Kristin Farr, 'Nina Chanel Abney: Mad Explosive Spontaneity', *Juxtapoz*, vol. 23, no. 186, July 2016, p. 59 (illustrated, p. 58)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



4

Jamian Juliano-Villani

Clear Cough from Your Schedule

signed and dated 'JAMIAN JULIANO-VILLANI 2016' on the overlap

acrylic on canvas

96.5 x 111.8 cm. (38 x 44 in.)

Painted in 2016.

Estimate

HK\$200,000 — 400,000

€22,700 — 45,300

\$25,600 — 51,300

[Go to Lot](#)



“For a painting to be good, in my opinion, it has to have three different levels. Any more than that it becomes a pile of junk, and any less than that, it is just like a one-liner.” — Jamian Juliano-Villani

Known for her acid-bright, hypnotic conglomerations of borrowed images, Italian artist Jamian Juliano-Villani pulls inspiration from her vast digital library of images she has collected since high school, ranging from 70s-era fashion magazines to illustrated human anatomy encyclopaedias; from popular commercial advertisements to obscure European comic art. Working with a projector, Juliano-Villani is able to create disparate layers within her compositions that defy easy interpretation, delicately balancing psychological depth and light humour.

Juliano-Villani carefully considers every image she uses with a profound respect for the source. These various references act as building blocks for Juliano-Villani’s paintings, culminating into visually bizarre and darkly humorous works. The selection process is long yet serendipitous; as the artist explains: ‘When I’m working, I have probably, like, thirty images that, in a month or two months, I’ll keep on coming back to... But, they never look like they’re supposed to be together. That’s when s..t gets good. That’s when the painting can change from “an image-based narrative” into something else.’ⁱ

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Coesu1h2t9Q>

The artist discusses her practice in her Brooklyn Studio, 2015

Video Courtesy of Art21

Clear Cough from Your Schedule

Simultaneously whimsical and nonsensical, irrational and spontaneous, *Clear Cough from Your Schedule* pulls together seemingly unrelated imagery into an eccentric collage that is distinctive of the artist’s practice. An oval-shaped, giant stone table dominates the top of the frame, with its Roman style legs standing underneath, carved with merlion-like creatures with double faces, baring their sharp teeth and entwined together at their tails. Beneath the arch of the table, a mischievous fox accidentally breaks into the picture like a ‘loud cough’, evident from its embarrassed expression.



Jamian Juliano-Villani, *Wavy Fox*, 2013
Courtesy the artist and JTT, New York

Commenting on an earlier painting in 2013 that also depicts a cartoon fox as the protagonist, Juliano-Villani had explained that the fox is actually representative of the artist herself: ‘The one painting I did with the wavy fox in that cage, that’s f...ing me, you know!? That’s how I felt. I didn’t realise it then. I think they’re all extensions of me or self-portraits in some way – or at least an attitude that I have. Those are things you can’t necessarily put into words.’ⁱⁱ In the current example, the fox knocks over a red Lego man and breaks it into many pieces upon impact, sending its zip-lock wrapped, bright yellow head into mid-air. These along with a floating silver spoon are all everyday objects ubiquitous to modern daily life and included possibly as visual references to one’s busy daily ‘schedule’, positioning the fox as a symbol of the artist herself, stumbling along in the messiness that is life, breaking free from boundaries and restraints.

“The reason why I used cartoons a lot of the times is because I like that they’re a kind of populist way of communicating. Because painting is not populist at all, you know? I kind of like that idea.” — Jamian Juliano-Villani

Hyper-realistic Surreal

Jamian Juliano-Villani's paintings are unequivocally absurd. From a lizard shaped human-bacon hybrid crawling on the bathroom floor to [a tomato lying in a hammock amongst voluptuous foliage](#), works by Juliano-Villani inherent the mysterious visual lexicon of Surrealism, whilst juxtaposing realities and activating the unconscious. As one of the most notable figures of the Surrealist movement, Salvador Dalí's dreamlike compositions demonstrate his undying interest in the concept of the unconsciousness devised by Sigmund Freud. In his most famous work, *The Persistence of Memory* (in the collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York), several clocks are depicted melting in a desert setting with the ocean appearing below the horizon. Similar to Dalí, Juliano-Villani's works also capture a magical and peculiar ambience, creating dreamscapes that peer into the unconscious mind with an underlying sense of self-reflection.



Left: Salvador Dalí, *The Persistence of Memory*, 1931

Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York
© 2021 Salvador Dalí, Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Right: Jamian Juliano-Villani, *Boar's Head, a Gateway, my Pinecone*, 2016

Collection of The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Unlike Dalí's paintings that are deeply informed by classical technique, Jamian Juliano-Villani's aforementioned scrapbooking technique along with an airbrush approach is characteristically contemporary, though its overall effect remains undoubtedly surreal. As a technique more commonly used for repairing cars and signs in storefront windows, airbrushing connects Juliano-Villani's work with popular street culture. This association is reinforced by the visual references that populate her works, each 'rub[ing] up against others culled from altogether different times, places, and sensibilities. Within one painting, the references can span generations and decades.'ⁱⁱⁱ



Detail of the present work

In works such as *Clear Cough from Your Schedule*, what starts as absurd ideas evolve into hyper-realistic extensions of our reality. Many of Juliano-Villani's pieces germinate from quickly noted bullet points that explode into an overstuffed, over-saturated image. Altered to suit her unique aesthetic, the artist renders her ideas just as abstractly as they are, yet she is clearly playing with inspirations that are inherent to daily human life. Extracted directly from a myriad of sources, these visual cues are crammed together under a new context, emerging as uniquely modern images that transforms the artist's reverie into a concrete state.

"I make my paintings out of necessity, and like using the things around me to communicate what I need to, because I'm really bad at articulating how I feel, vocally. The paintings do that for me." — Jamian Juliano-Villani

Collector's Digest

Born in 1987 in Newark, New Jersey, Jamian Juliano-Villani graduated from Rutgers University in 2013, forfeiting the chance to further her studies with a Master's Degree and opting instead to learn by working as a studio assistant to artists Erik Parker and Dana Schutz.

Juliano-Villani held her first seminal museum exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art

Jamian Juliano-Villani

Detroit in 2015. Since then, the artist had also exhibited internationally at Kunsthall Stavanger (2021); JTT Gallery, New York (2020); Massimo De Carlo, London (2019); Studio Voltaire, London (2016), Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin (2015), amongst others. Her work has recently been included group shows at the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Jewish Museum, MoMA PS1 and the Brooklyn Museum, the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, Kunsthall Rotterdam and the MAXXI Museum in Rome. The current work was included as part of the [Animality](#) exhibition at Marian Goodman London in 2016.

Earlier in 2021, Juliano-Villani opened her own gallery in New York City called *O'Flaherty's*. The artist's latest solo exhibition, *Steak Wars*, also just closed at the Pond Society in Shanghai (11 September to 30 October 2021), which marked the artist's debut in China.

ⁱ Jamian Juliano-Villani, quoted in 'Jamian Juliano-Villani's Painting Compulsion | Art21 "New York Close Up"', *Art 21*, 1 July 2015, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ *ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ Laura Phipps and Elisabeth Sherman, 'Flatlands: On Unstable Ground', *Whitney Museum of American Art*, [online](#)

Provenance

Massimo de Carlo, London

Private Collection, Europe

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

London, Marian Goodman Gallery, *Animality*, 3 November - 17 December 2016, p. 88 (illustrated)



5

Mr.

Yume—Breath of the Earth

signed and dated 'Mr. 2019' on the underside
acrylic and silkscreen print on canvas
120 x 121.3 cm. (47 1/4 x 47 3/4 in.)
Executed in 2019.

Estimate

HK\$1,000,000 — 2,000,000

€113,000 — 227,000

\$128,000 — 256,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

Spanning across painting, sculpture, installation and video art, Mr.'s signature neo-pop aesthetic portrays the artist's personal fantasies within the realm of *Otaku* subculture in Japan. Celebrated for his cartoonlike representations of children and young adolescents, Mr.'s artwork consistently draws from themes and motifs ranging from manga and anime fandoms, leading many to associate his work with the *Superflat* movement pioneered by art world superstar, Takashi Murakami. Similar to Murakami's approach, as showcased in *Yume—Breath of the Earth*, Mr. depicts his characters in a typical *kawaii* fashion with large, rounded faces, colourful hair and big, sparkling eyes, elevating popular Japanese subculture into the mainstream realm of fine art - which was not the case within Japanese mass culture when he first set out at the start of his career, indicative of Mr.'s influence that has won admiration around the world.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6ejql7bP5w>

Paris, Galerie Perrotin, *Mr's Melancholy Walk Around the Town*, 19 January - 9 March 2019

'Kawaii' to 'Kowai'

"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.

Reaching beyond the superficial appearance of *Kawaii* (cute) culture, Mr.'s compositions express a sense of *Kowai* (scary, dark). Contrasting the bright cheerfulness of Mr.'s characters is an underlying sense of anxiety and loss, specifically as a result of the chaotic environments within which Mr. stages some of his exhibitions, echoing both Japan's traumatic past during World War II and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. Since 2011, when the catastrophic earthquake along with tsunami attacked Tohoku, Japan, Mr. became haunted by this fatal disaster and felt vulnerable about life's unpredictability. He started to broaden the dimension of characters in his otaku world by paring his typical cute, bright and optimistic figures with a more gritty and abstract painting style, exploring themes of loss and destruction.

Just as the artist explains with the title of his 2018 exhibition at Perrotin: 'People misunderstand me and the contents of my paintings. They just think they are nostalgic, cute, and look like Japanese anime. That may be true, but really, I paint daily in order to escape the devil that haunts my soul. The said devil also resides in my blood, and I cannot escape from it no matter how I wish, so I paint in resignation.'¹ Mr.'s works thus act as a form of escapism from contemporary society and a reflection of modern social anxiety, fear and solitude.

This distinctive contrast of the cuteness and idealism in the artist's work versus the cluttered and chaotic of reality has become Mr.'s emblematic style and aesthetic, encapsulating his internal paradox in the quest of searching for happiness and peace.



Installation view of Hong Kong, Lehmann Maupin, *Floating in the Air in the Vicinity of a Convenience Store*, 14 September - 21 October 2017

The Bright-eyed Girl

"I think of them as a kind of a mirror reflecting the world... From one point, I started painting girls' eyes in a way that they seem to have a reflection of something, and since then, I cannot paint eyes without any reflection. There must be something reflecting in the eyes of the girls I paint." — Mr.

The ubiquitous motif of a character with over-sized eyes and a large head, whose inspiration is largely drawn from 1980s manga, has since become integral within the oeuvre of many Japanese and international artists alike, such as Yoshitomo Nara, Ayako Rokkaku and Javier Calleja. Compared to his contemporaries, Mr. approaches this motif with a stylised touch that is closer to its anime inspirations with their black outlines. As opposed to Nara's mischievous protagonists,

Calleja's playfulness or the palpable rhythm of Rokkaku's dancing girls, Mr.'s compositions stand out with their rich colours and glittering details, adorned with various accessories and hairstyles.



Javier Calleja, *You Me*, 2019

[Lot 8 - Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction, 30 November 2021](#)

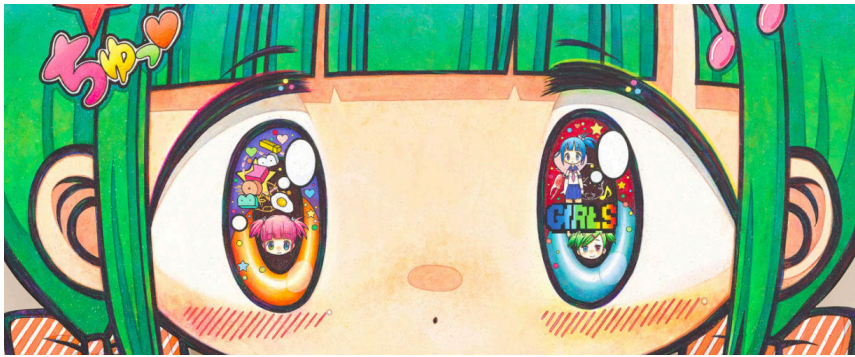
Estimate HK\$3,000,000 - 4,000,000 / US\$ 385,000 - 513,000



Ayako Rokkaku, *Untitled ARP 17-014*, 2017

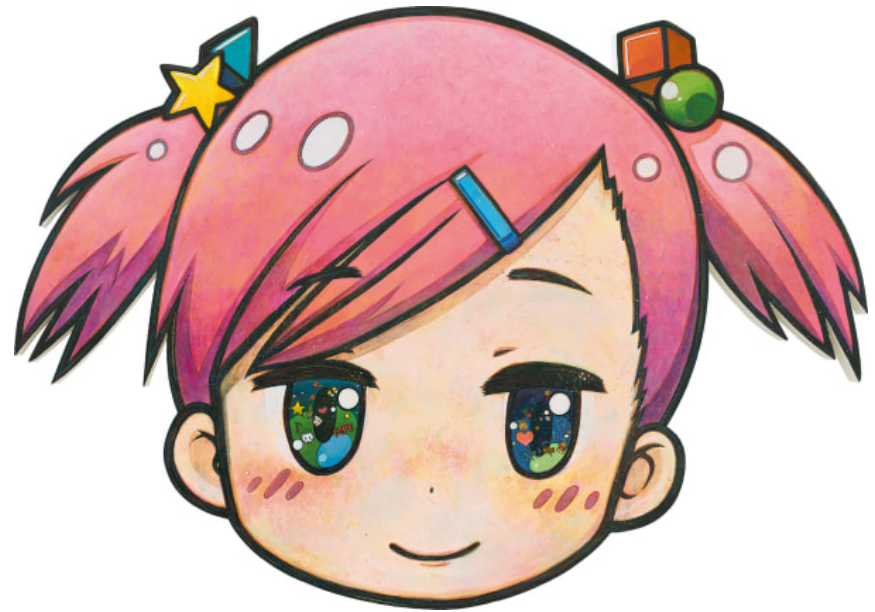
Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 7 June 2021 for HK\$1,890,000

Often appearing with a gentle gaze of naivete and a soft smile, Mr.'s adolescent girls are full of cheerful innocence. As a part of the artist's series of large headshot works, *Yume—Breath of the Earth* is beautifully emblematic of Mr.'s distinctive style. Wearing a surprised expression highlighted by a rosy blush that tints her rounded cheeks, the current protagonist, Yume, emits an irresistible charm and endearing innocence, capturing the audience's heart at first glance. Echoing the work's title, Yume's hair is painted with graduated blue and green hues. With a neat fringe and two pigtails in bows, her hair is also embellished with stars, hearts, musical notes and ice-cream, along with the onomatopoeic Japanese word 'Chuu', as if blowing a kiss.



Detail of the present lot

Within Yume's crystal-clear eyes is the reflection of the colourful world around her, including an explosion of kawaii symbols and Yume's companions, one of which shares striking similarities to [Meg \(2016\)](#), a protagonist appearing in an earlier work of Mr.'s, which was sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 7 June 2021 for HK\$3,276,000.



Mr., *Meg*, 2016

Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 7 June 2021 for HK\$3,276,000

Collector's Digest

Born in Cupa, Japan in 1969, Mr. pursued his art study in Tokyo's Sokei Academy of Fine Art and Design in Tokyo, and was a protégé of Takashi Murakami. Now based in Saitama prefecture, Mr. has been the subject of major international solo exhibitions in Tokyo, Paris, New York, Hong Kong, and beyond with Galerie Perrotin and Lehman Maupin. His works are in the permanent collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Seattle Art Museum.

In 2019, Mr. and Pharrell Williams collaborated in a hugely successful exhibition at the Meese Guimet: *Carte Blanche to Mr. and Pharrell Williams: "A Call to Action"*, in which the artists use manga imagery to ask what kind of world we would want for our future generations, transporting the viewer into another dimension where children control the narrative. Mr.'s recent solo exhibition, *Mr.: Quotidianist*, opened at the HOW Art Museum in Shanghai on 18 June and ran until 21 November 2021.



Installation view of Shanghai, HOW Art Museum, *Mr.: Quotidianist*, 18 June – 21 November 2021

Image Courtesy of HOW Art Museum ©2021 Mr./ Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved

ⁱ Artist's Exhibition Page, Galerie Perrotin, 2018, [online](#)

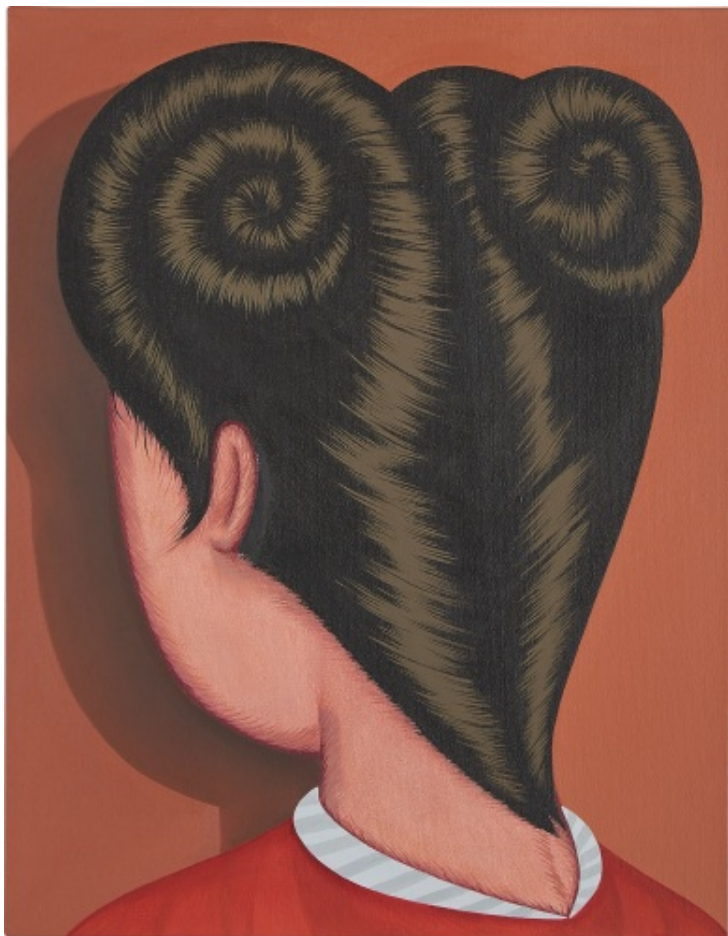
Provenance

Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT COLLECTION

6

Julie Curtiss

Escargot

signed, titled and dated 'Julie CuRTiSS "Escargot", 2018' on the reverse

vinyl paint and oil on canvas

45.7 x 35.6 cm. (18 x 14 in.)

Executed in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$400,000 — 600,000

€45,300 — 68,000

\$51,300 — 76,900

[Go to Lot](#)



"Hair itself is amorphous, but you can shape it; it's inert and alive at once.... What I like about hair in painting is the pattern and repetitiveness, which is hypnotic and attractive." — Julie Curtiss

Painted in 2018, shortly before French-Vietnamese artist Julie Curtiss' launch to the height of critical success following her first solo exhibition at the Anton Kern Gallery in Spring the following year, *Escargot* is a marvellous painting from her distinctive body of work. Playfully alluding to the work's title, the protagonist is spotlighted against a rosy mocha background, her hair tightly twisted into two spiralling buns reminiscent of coiling snail shells. Drawing an instant comparison to Gerhard Richter's famed *Betty* (1988), the subject of the present work turns away from us, evoking an air of mystery through the concealment of her face - a signature feature of Curtiss' compositions explored by the artist to 'point to the elusively of the self'. As she explains, 'I can allude to a character's personality and internal life by dropping clues here and there, and leave to the viewer the task of piecing the puzzle together.'ⁱ

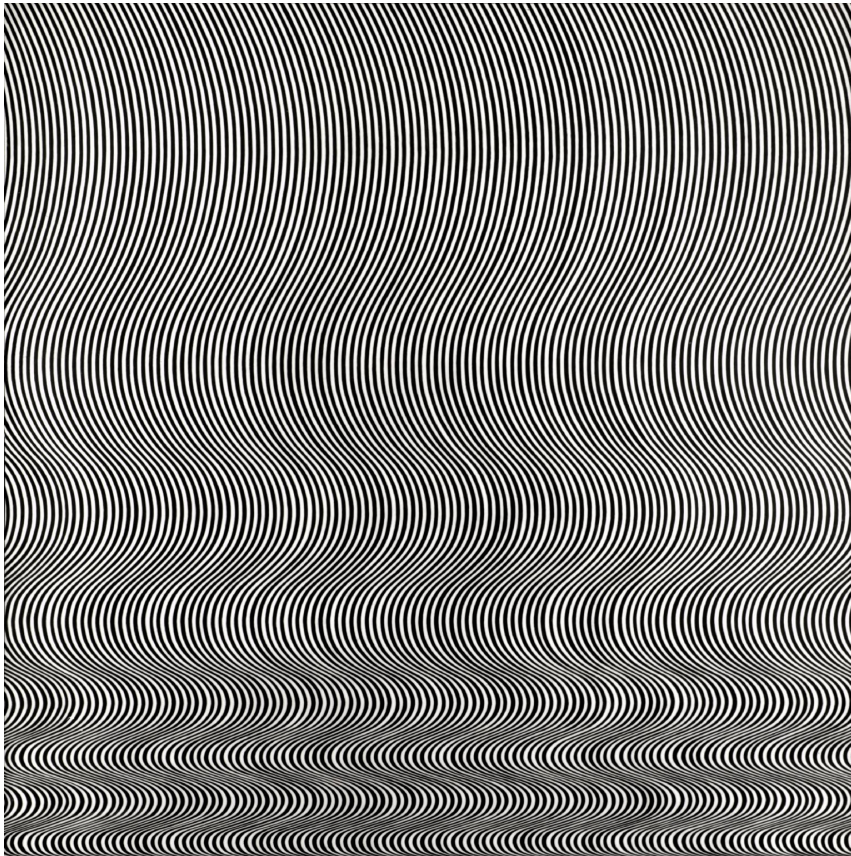


Gerhard Richter, *Betty*, 1988 Collection of the Saint Louis Art Museum, USA

The Subversive Power of Hair

Born in Paris in 1982, Curtiss obtained her Bachelor of Arts and Master of Fine Arts from l'École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Art. It was not until she commenced her formal training at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2005, however, that Curtiss cites a critical turning point in her perception of the world. Immersing herself into the city's thriving art culture and subculture scenes, she simultaneously found inspiration in the works of the Chicago Imagists - alumni of her college including Jim Falconer, Gladys Nilsson, and [Christine Ramberg](#) - the latter of whom Curtiss' work is often compared to for their shared interest in the portrayal of hair to explore perceptions of

identity and femininity.



Bridget Riley, *Fall*, 1963, Collection of the Tate, London © Bridget Riley 2021. All rights reserved.

Indeed, like Ramberg, Curtiss transforms tangible elements into abstract entities on her canvas, rendered with dramatic shadow that helps to add a curious sense of shallow depth also preferred by the likes of KAWS, whom Curtiss worked for between 2014-2018. This nods to her interest in popular culture imagery, comic books and Japanese manga – which perhaps can also be seen in the Princess Leia space-buns the subject of the present work done.

Contributing to this aesthetic is Curtiss' distinctive technique as she uses paints 'that have a matte

finish and that are highly pigmented'ⁱⁱⁱ to achieve a similar effect to gouache. And yet, despite the fact that her works are instantly recognisable for their graphic-like, flattened aesthetic- which immediately caught the eye of artist Loie Hollowell who 'had to see [Curtiss' work] in person because Instagram lies'ⁱⁱⁱⁱ- there is a Bridget Riley-esque hypnotic haze evoked by the repetitive details, such as the vivid, linear contrasts that feather the *Escargot* girl's coiling buns. Conveying twisted presentations of life's familiar visuals, Curtiss masterfully balances the vague with the precise, and the representational with the surreal, to form dreamlike compositions that are at once fantastical and unsettling.



Carrie Fisher as Princess Leia, *Star Wars*, 1977

"As long as I've made art, there's always been hair... I've always been really interested in the artificial vs. the natural and this has been a constant theme in my work." —
Julie Curtiss

Hair as a defining feature of one's identity has been explored throughout art history, from the flowing locks of Sandro Botticelli's goddess of idealised beauty in *The Birth of Venus* (1485-1486), to the stylised coiffeurs of 18th and 19th century portraits, to Edgar Degas' famous little dancer with her sculpted braid tied with a ribbon-bow. For Curtiss, the fascination with the motif began when, as a teenager, she 'discovered old braids of hair belonging to [her] mother and [her] aunt in [her] attic,' as she 'realised there was this part of us that would remain long after we are gone.'^{iv}



Left: Edgar Degas, *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer* (detail), 1922 (cast), Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Right: Domenico Gnoli, *Curly Red Hair*, 1969 © 2021 Domenico Gnoli / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome

And whilst her tightly cropped framing further recalls the strategy of Italian painter Domenico Gnoli, whom too, imbues the banal qualities of hair with character and edge, it is not the depiction of hair itself that drives her concepts. As Curtiss explains: ‘it’s about all the things attached to it: intimacy, identity, culture, the concept of beauty, animality, primordiality. Hair is called an ‘accessory organ’. How weird is that! It’s alive and dead at once. I think a lot of my art is about the inside and outside, and hair grows in that direction. Covering objects with hair is a way for me to remind people that what we perceive from the outer world is suggestive, is tainted by our inner world.’^v

Perfectly exemplifying Curtiss’ reworking of female representations through a surrealist sense of the uncanny, the protagonist of *Escargot*’s curling tendrils mesmerise in their repetitive, abstracted figuration. With no defining characteristics revealed by their turned away face, Curtiss powerfully reappropriates what she terms the ‘tools of communication and seduction’^{vi} to explore the disharmony between the layered female psyche the objectified female form.

Video: <https://player.vimeo.com/video/524236883>

Julie Curtiss in the studio, 2020

Video Courtesy of White Cube

Collector’s Digest

Now based in Brooklyn, New York, Curtiss has mounted numerous exhibitions in recent years. This includes at the White Cube Gallery in London (2021), and Anton Kern Gallery in New York (2020, 2019). She has an upcoming solo show scheduled to open next year in New York at the Anton Kern Gallery.

Curtiss’ work is represented in a number of museum collections around the world, among which are the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Maki Collection, Japan; Bronx Museum, New York; Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and the Yuz Museum in Shanghai.

Her top auction result was recently achieved by Phillips New York in June 2021 when [Three Widows \(2016\)](#) hammered down for US\$466,200 plus Premium, against pre-sale estimates of US\$110,000 – 150,000.



Julie Curtiss, *Three Widows*, 2016 Sold by Phillips New York on 23 June 2021 for US\$466,200

ⁱ Julie Curtiss, quoted in Maria Zemtsova, 'Piecing the Puzzle in Julie Curtiss' Paintings', *Art Maze Mag*, 15 February 2019, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Julie Curtiss, quoted in Emily Burns, 'Q&A with Julie Curtiss', *Maake Magazine*, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Loie Hollowell, quoted in Dodie Kazanjian, 'How Artist Julie Curtiss is Making Waves with Her Quirky, Macabre Neo-Surrealism', *Vogue*, 16 April 2020, [online](#)

^{iv} Julie Curtiss, quoted in Evan Pricco, 'Julie Curtiss: Where the Wild Things Are', *Juxtapoz*, 2019, [online](#)

^v Julie Curtiss, quoted in Marina Pérez, 'Julie Curtiss: Visual Complexity', *Metal Magazine*, [online](#)

^{vi} Julie Curtiss, quoted in 'Julie Curtiss artist profile', *White Cube*, [online](#)

Provenance

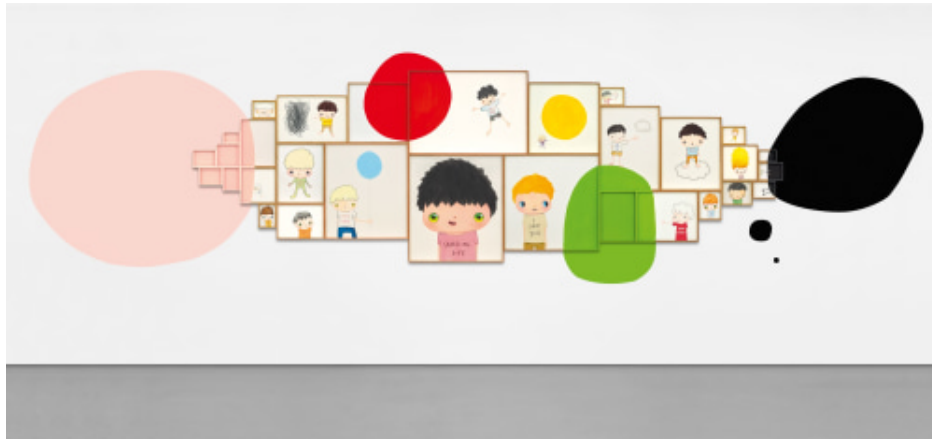
T293, Rome

Private Collection, New York

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A PRIVATE COLLECTION

7

Javier Calleja

30 works: *Untitled*

(i) signed, numbered, inscribed and dated '2017 1/30 SPARKLIN LIF Javier Calleja' on the reverse
(ii); (iv) signed, numbered and dated '2017 [no.]/30 Javier Calleja' on the reverse
(iii) signed, numbered and dated '2017 3/30 Javier' on the reverse
(v - x); (xii - xvii); (xix); (xxiv - xxv); (xxvii); (xxx) numbered and dated '2017 [no.]/30' on the reverse
(xi); (xviii); (xx - xxiii); (xxvi); (xxviii - xxix) numbered and dated '[no.]/30 2017' on the reverse
mixed media on paper and wall painting
dimensions variable, current installation approximately 185 x 730 cm. (72 7/8 x 287 3/8 in.)
For individual dimensions, please refer to Notes.
Executed in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000

€340,000 — 566,000

\$385,000 — 641,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"This is a very important work in my career because it's a connection between my old works with new works. New characters and old characters." — Javier Calleja

With its impressive multi-part installation of 30 unique components, *Untitled* is a particularly special work by Javier Calleja, one of the most prominent artists working today. Created in 2017, an important year in the artist's career where he first debuted his wide-eye boy characters at AISHONANZUKA in Hong Kong—the artist's first solo exhibition in Asia—the present work is a rare, seminal example of what has since become his signature motif. Each meticulously composed drawing shares a story of its own, pulling viewers into Calleja's whimsical world of nostalgic innocence imbued with satirical flair. At the same time, as the largest work by the artist to come to auction, measuring over an epic 7 meters long in its entirety, the work can be endlessly explored for the countless points of dialogue that are evoked between each original part.



The artist in his studio in Málaga
Photo Courtesy of the Calleja Studio

An Innovative Approach

Calleja was born in Málaga in 1971, a picturesque city on the Southern coast of Spain renowned for being the birthplace of fellow Spanish artist Pablo Picasso. He began drawing in his early childhood, citing 'Mazinger Z cartoons and Francisco Ibáñez Talavera's comics'ⁱ as among his biggest influences, but it was not until he was 25 that he decided to pursue his artistic talents more seriously. In 2000, Calleja graduated from the University of Granada with a Bachelor's Degree of Fine Arts, landing his first solo exhibition in Spain just 3 years later.



Comic-strip by Francisco Ibáñez Talavera
© Francisco Ibanez Talavera

Whilst this artistic training would have fed into his development, as evidenced by Calleja's masterful control over a remarkably wide range of techniques and media, his distinctive aesthetic is 'more connected with [Calleja's] real beginnings, [his] childhood, and the drawings [he] was making then.'ⁱⁱ As he explains, 'This is why it always felt that this style actually found me and I didn't find it, and I'm still waiting for it to change.'ⁱⁱ

Comprising of 30 individual drawings on paper that the artist worked on one-by-one over a course of 4 months, *Untitled* brings to mind the work of artists including Barry McGee, David Hockney, and Joan Mitchell, whom too, have experimented with polyptych formats. Unlike his contemporaries, however, whose multi-part works follow a strict compositional order, Calleja's innovative piece is both elastic and modular, adapting to new spaces as it can be installed in endless ways. Harkening back to the formative influence of comic strips on Calleja's art, layers of narrative potential are unlocked with each new combination of the present work's frames, as the work's overall story expands and diverts through the refreshed interactions that start to emerge.



David Hockney, *Tall Dutch Trees After Hobbema (Useful Knowledge)*, 2017
© David Hockney

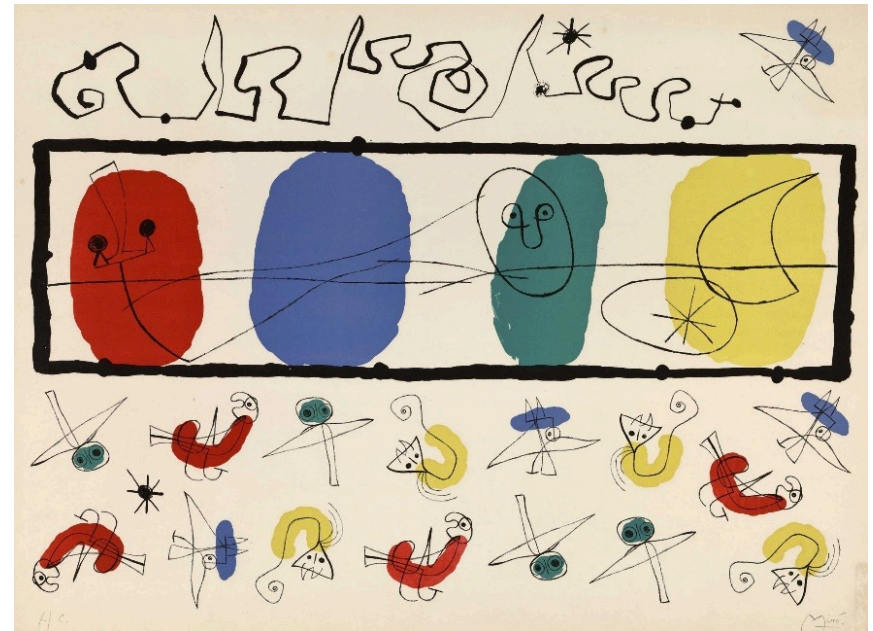


Joan Mitchell, *Bonjour Julie*, 1971
Collection of the Art Fund, Inc. at the Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama
© Joan Mitchell Estate

Calleja's Magical World

*"I love Joan Miró, the artist. He's from Catalunya, and I did specifically draw inspiration from Joan Miró [for this work]... You can see these big colours."
— Javier Calleja*

Untitled immediately grabs the attention of the viewer with its lively palette of red, blue, green, and yellow tones - a purposeful choice by the artist made in tribute to Catalunya-born artist Joan Miró, whose brilliant use of colour combined Fauvist vibrancy with Cubist geometric forms. Like Miró, Calleja's confident treatment of colour helps to guide his spectators' eyes to points of focus, such as to the little boy in *Untitled* who reaches up towards a floating cloud, stood atop a lime green hill.



Joan Miró, *Les Oiseaux (The Birds)*, 1956
© 2021 Successió Miró / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Understood as a reflection of the artist himself, Calleja's characters have become beloved icons

across their world, instantly recognisable for their endearing portrayals that are simultaneously sophisticated in technique and casually candid. Calleja masters this balance through expression, tonality, and texture, most obvious in the contrast between his subjects' watery, marble-like eyes and the more graphically simple elements that frame them. Evoking the delicate moment when a child stops crying and is about to break out into a smile once again, Calleja has revealed: 'That is the moment I paint—when experiencing something bad and you just had a breakthrough. I think when a child is crying and then stops to cry—they're a hero. Because he or she decided to overcome the pain.'ⁱⁱⁱ

Contrasting the cute yet sinister subjects that populate the oeuvre of Japanese-artist Yoshitomo Nara, to whom Calleja is often compared, in the present work Calleja's protagonists surround themselves with phrases of optimism and joy, such as 'Sparkling Life', 'Enjoy Today', 'Best Place', and 'I Like You'. And whilst Calleja has expressed his art is open to interpretation, inviting the observer to 'finish the work'ⁱⁱⁱ, there is an undeniable positivity that radiates from works such as *Untitled*, resonating with audiences on such a universal level only few have so successfully accomplished before.

"I'm looking to communicate emotions. The feeling of love, magic, or pain, I want to show that second when you feel those emotions. [...] I like people to experience the sensation of experiencing the moment of magic. Being lost, confused, heart beating stronger, I love that effect." — Javier Calleja

Collector's Digest

Demonstrative of his position as a major figure within the world of contemporary art, Calleja has presented exhibitions in a wide number of institutions worldwide. Notable solo exhibitions of Calleja include at [Almine Rech in Shanghai](#) (21 May – 26 June 2021); Rafael Pérez Hernando Arte Contemporáneo in Madrid (25 February – 24 April 2021); Bill Brady in Miami (2020); AISHONANZUKA in Hong Kong (2019, 2017); Dio Horia in Athens (2019); and Galerie Zink in the German city of Waldkirchen (2019, 2018).

Works by Calleja now form part of influential public collections including the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Burgos, Marset Collection, and Unicaja Collection, amongst others.

ⁱ Javier Calleja, quoted in Reena Devi, 'Why Spanish artist Javier Calleja is a hit in Asia and beyond', *Cobo Social*, 13 October 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Javier Calleja, quoted in Cristina Samper, 'Tap into your inner child through Javier Calleja's unique work', *Art of Choice*, 21 October 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Javier Calleja, quoted in Sasha Bogojev, 'Javier Calleja: Finding That Magic Moment', *Juxtapoz*, 2019, [online](#)

Provenance

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY OF A PROMINENT COLLECTOR

8

Javier Calleja

You Me

signed and dated '2019 Javier Calleja' on the underside; further titled "'YOU ME'" on the overlap
acrylic on canvas

110 x 116.5 cm. (43 1/4 x 45 7/8 in.)

Painted in 2019.

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 4,000,000

€340,000 — 453,000

\$385,000 — 513,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"Sometimes, you are painting, and your mind, your emotions, are all in the painting. This is the moment when you can find something new. It's an emotional moment." — Javier Calleja

Summoning feelings of warmth and love, the mother and child image has recurrently been explored throughout the history of art as a symbolic motif of empowerment and maternal protection. Instantly recognisable as an exceptional work by Spanish artist Javier Calleja, *You Me* is a compelling interpretation of this universal theme. First unveiled in London at the Dorothy Circus Gallery during their 2019 exhibition titled *Mother & Child*, the endearing canvas depicts two wide-eyed, macrocephalic characters reaching out towards each other's embrace.



The present work exhibited at London, Dorothy Circus Gallery, *Mother & Child*, 13 April – 9 June 2019

Whilst the mother looks onwards, however, the boy's eyes are cast aside, as if wondering of the adventurous possibilities beyond the cocoon of this maternal embrace. Inscribed across the taller figure's top is the word 'You' and the small subject's baby blue shirt the word 'Me', providing a direct link to the work's title and a hint at the child being a self-portrait of Calleja himself.

The Importance of the Mother and Child Motif



Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Madonna and Child*, circa 1300 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Gustav Klimt, *Three Ages of Woman* (Detail), 1905 Collection of Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome



Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita, *Mother and Two Children*, 1917 Collection of Harvard Art Museum, Massachusetts © Foujita Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2021



Amadeo Modigliani, *Seated Woman with Child (Motherhood)*, 1919 Collection of Lille Métropole Museum of Modern, Contemporary and Outsider Art



Pablo Picasso, *Mother and Child*, 1921 Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago © 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Alice Neel, *Mother and Child (Nancy and Olivia)*, 1967 © Alice Neel



Amy Sherald, *Mother and Child*, 2016 © Amy Sherald

Mastering the Balance

Lending to the universal appeal of *kawaii*, both characters don a nose and mouth so minutely sized to be barely functional. Starkly contrasting this, however, are their gleaming emerald green eyes which are so large and detailed in their articulation, they immediately stand out against the sandy wash behind. When questioned on his process behind mastering this balance, Calleja has explained, 'I can paint very realistically, but also, I don't want to see myself doing realistic paintings in the future. Because maybe that is not painting anymore, something like a photograph, a representation. For example, Mark Rothko. His work is also in my paintings. Very flat paintings, not many elements. So I want to keep this moment that one part of the painting is well-rendered or finished, and other is very expressive or casual.'ⁱ



Mark Rothko, *Untitled*, 1954 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Famously coined as 'windows to the soul', eyes are a point of emotive access carrying the weight of genuine human experience. And yet, in *You Me* the eyes bulge from an otherwise cartoonish presentation that only works to add an uncanny sense of playful irony to the overall scene. Communicating on two registers, it is exactly within this tension between the real and fantastical that Calleja creates a moment of magic.

"I think there is something really important in their eyes, and it's with only two drops, white colour, and the shadows. So you get the sensation of real." — Javier

Calleja

Calleja's works appear to situate themselves as a rebuttal against the rise of the anti-cute in popular culture, recognisable in the form of horror movies like *Chucky* where children and dolls become hosts of tormented spirits, or cartoons such as *The Simpsons* which reveal the dysfunction of the nuclear household. Basing his adorably mischievous characters off himself, Calleja instead spreads pleasantry and delight, traits that are especially valuable amidst our time of increasing chaos and uncertainty.

Adamantly rejecting the expectation to over-conceptualise and theorise his work, Calleja explains quite simply, 'every character is like my son. At the end of my life, I might have thousands of children'.ⁱⁱ The viewer is reminded of one of the most basic drives behind the creation of art - posterity. As such, in their simplicity Calleja allows for the viewer to project their own interpretations onto his work, encouraging viewers to seek identification and solace within his protagonists' pooling gazes.

An Optimistic Universe

One of the first galleries to represent Calleja was Galerie Zink, whom were also amongst the first to represent renowned Japanese artist Yoshitomo Nara. In fact, with notable shared similarities in both concept and aesthetic, the work of Calleja often draws comparisons to that of his contemporary. However, whereas both artists explore the motif of childhood, Calleja distinguishes his work with a defiant sense of optimism.

Nara paints his child protagonists as solitary within his visual world. Both tender and violent, and adorable and perverse - in their sneering, half-lidded eyes one encounters a curious depth of cynical emotion that juxtaposes their naive wonder. In contrast, Calleja appears to reverse this archetype of the complex child in his celebrated oeuvre, instead returning the infant to a place of greater comfort and familiarity. Planted in indeterminate spaces that are flat in bright colour, Calleja's children are yet to be totally defiled by adult preoccupations. As exemplified by the present work, they still teeter on the edge of adolescence, evoking a playful humour and sense of optimism that resonates on a universal level.



Javier Calleja in his studio

"I think that my style is more connected with my real beginnings, my childhood, and the drawings I was making then. This is why it always felt that this style actually found me and I didn't find it, and I'm still waiting for it to change." — Javier Calleja

Collector's Digest

Testament to his position as a major figure within the world of contemporary art, Calleja has presented exhibitions in a wide number of institutions worldwide. Notable solo exhibitions of Calleja include at [Almine Rech in Shanghai](#) (21 May - 26 June 2021); Rafael Pérez Hernando Arte Contemporáneo in Madrid (25 February - 24 April 2021); Bill Brady in Miami (2020); AISHONANZUKA in Hong Kong (2019, 2017); Dio Horia in Athens (2019); and Galerie Zink in the German city of Waldkirchen (2019, 2018).

Works by Calleja now form part of influential public collections including the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Burgos, Marset Collection, and Unicaja Collection, amongst others.

ⁱ Javier Calleja, quoted on Sasha Bogojev, *Javier Calleja: Finding That Magic Moment, Juxtapoz*, 2019, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Javier Calleja, quoted on *Avantarte*, [online](#)

Provenance

Dorothy Circus Gallery, Rome

Private Collection, Hong Kong

Private Collection, Asia

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

London, Dorothy Circus Gallery, *Mother & Child*, 13 April – 9 June 2019

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



9

Aya Takano

In the Lab (the Birth of Jelly)

signed and dated '2017 Aya Takano' on the overlap
oil on canvas

97 x 130.3 cm. (38 1/4 x 51 1/4 in.)

Painted in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$200,000 — 300,000

€22,700 — 34,000

\$25,600 — 38,500

[Go to Lot](#)



“When I was a kid, I daydreamed and stayed in my fantasy land by reading books and mangas all the time. I hated most designs of devices and buildings and I still do. I aspired to freedom of spirit and I was very different from others.” — Aya Takano



The present work exhibited during Galerie Perrotin, *Aya Takano - The Jelly Civilization Chronicle*, 17 March – 13 May 2017 ©2021 Aya Takano/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

Aya Takano’s signature pastel colour palette and whimsical dreamscapes draw intimately from her upbringing in Japan. Packed to the brim with references as variegated as *ukiyo-e*, Gustav Klimt, manga, Dutch still life paintings, Takano’s works—close cousins of the *Superflat* movement—exist in a realm entirely of her own creation, in what the artist has coined a sort of Jellyfish paradise. Having been subject of two solo shows this year alone, Takano’s fanciful planets are permanent fixtures within the contemporary art universe.

To Neverland

For as long as she can remember, Aya Takano has wanted to become an artist. An adept painter, illustrator, sci-fi writer and manga artist, Takano immersed herself in science fiction and the world

of manga and anime, creating her own fantastical reality, carving out an illusory realm within the confines of fine art. Her stylistic proximity to *Superflat* can be attributed to her affiliation with Kaikai Kiki, the artistic production studio created in 2001 by Takashi Murakami: as the founder of the *Superflat* art movement and Takano’s mentor, Murakami has inspired the artist to create her own unique painting style.

Video: <https://youtu.be/ZAPGGRCPdCM>

Interview with Aya Takano

Notably, Takano is not that fond of gravity, finding it too realistic, constrained and earth-bound. She aims to create ethereal, dreamy landscapes, places to which she can escape from the discomfort of the dystopic confines of the real world, preferring to create galaxies that go beyond the common good and evil. In most of her artwork, exotic animals and landforms combined with an urban backdrop are common themes. Her works have surrealistic undertones and seem to refuse logical and gravitational conventions: her troupe of characters often float atop buildings, crawl amongst stars, or morph into half-animal humanoids.

“If you shut your eyes and are a lucky one, you may see at times a shapeless pool of lovely pale colours suspended in the darkness; then if you squeeze your eyes tighter, the pool begins to take shape, and the colours become so vivid that with another squeeze they must go on fire.” — Quoted from J.M. Barrie’s Peter Pan

Perhaps most striking in Takano’s works are her iconic wide-eyed girl-women and their androgynous bodies, all of whom, in their refusal to grow up, populate Takano’s paintings in their prepubescent, childlike forms. These figures tither at the turning point between childhood and adulthood, and often evoke erotic undertones hinting at impertinence in the face of maturity, while concurrently challenging the notions of innocence itself. It is evident that the artist is inspired by *Shunga*, a kind of *ukiyo-e* erotic art from Edo period, drawing from this era for her sources in erotica, but perhaps the ever-young characters who exist in her works have more to do with *anime*.

An entire art form which grew out of post-war Japan, *anime* became popular thanks to the likes of cartoonists such as Osamu Tezuka, who popularised the now characteristic art style featuring large emotive eyes and warped bodily proportions. It is a common thread, too, in *anime* for characters to remain infantile, as even adults are often presented in a hyper-kawaii manner, scorning adulthood, and *Astroboy* immediately comes to mind.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/ObDwWhcOu4k?feature=oembed>

TV Series Opening of Osamu Tezuka's beloved creation Astroboy, aired in 1963

When taken within this context, Takano's works join many other artistic creations that investigate the threshold between childhood and adulthood—and perhaps also the reluctance to cross from one side to the other. Though Peter Pan and Astroboy are immediate examples, Takano's art perhaps more closely resembles fellow Japanese contemporary artist Yoshitomo Nara's in this aspect, where her protagonists are eternally housed within the chrysalis of childhood and wonder. Thus, in her deliberate employment of soft pastel colours (to be seen in tandem with the softness of childhood) it is no wonder that the artist names Gustav Klimt amongst her sources of inspiration. One recalls Klimt's famous *Mäda Primavesi*, painted in 1912-13 to immortalise the titular little girl, whose defiant stance conveys a remarkable sense of strength and confidence for a precocious nine year old. The world is undoubtedly her oyster and the future is hers to forge. Much in the same way, Takano aims to seek self-discovery and freedom within her works, and to attain a certain form of transcendence; to exist according to her own terms.



Gustav Klimt, *Mäda Primavesi*, 1912-13 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Seeking Refuge in a Jelly World

Following the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011, Takano began to shift her work towards depictions of nature in a stark reassessment of her life and practice. Instead of indulging herself solely in a sci-fi world, the startling new realities post-disaster jolted Takano to a start, and she began pursuing a new artistic quest in a more humble and spiritual way in reverence of nature and human life.

"...everything is made of a jelly-like soft substance which will eventually dissolve into the soil." — Aya Takano

In *In the Lab (the Birth of Jelly)*, the artist's iconic pig-tailed adolescent girl reappears with her wide eyes, hidden behind a pair of laboratory goggles, donning an emblematic uniform. The scene is a fever dream from within a high-school lab: she holds in her hand a test tube, sitting at a bench strewn with a pipette, Bunsen burner, microscope, glass apparatus, as an anatomical torso-mannequin almost comically looks on in the background, leaning against a chalkboard with mathematical scribbles. The image is ostensibly entirely normal and yet at the centre of the work, within the test tube itself is a blob of animated jelly: presumably the birth referenced in the work's title. The tiny being is amorphous, wide-eyed, gazing at the outside world..

Within this scene, Takano depicts an ordinary picture of a high school girl's school life, and yet a surreal and bizarre atmosphere bubbles underneath. This pseudo-surrealistic scape is not unlike the works of Magritte and Dalí, though somehow still nestles against reality in its evocation of the canon of still life: indeed typical of all of Takano's psychedelic, sci-fi inspired works. In the words of the artist, 'Science-fiction...made me realise there is an existence beyond reality, something that transcends my existence.'¹



Left: René Magritte, *Le Temps Menaçant (Threatening Weather)*, 1929 Collection of the Scottish

National Gallery Of Modern Art, Edinburgh © 2021 C. Herscovici, Brussels / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: David Teniers the Younger, *The Alchemist*, circa 1651-56 Collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Collector's Digest

Born in 1976 in Saitama, Japan, Aya Takano now lives and works in Japan. Represented by Kaikai Kiki, Takano has held several solo exhibitions with the gallery including [beginning. liminal. ego](#) (2021); *Let's make a universe a better place* (2020); *Union Mystica* (2019); and *The Jelly Civilization Chronical* (2017). Her work has been collected and exhibited within notable institutions such as the the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.



Aya Takano, *I like the hollows of the buildings*, 2003 Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles ©2021 Aya Takano/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

ⁱ Aya Takano, quoted in Jennifer Higgie, 'Another Girl, Another Planet' (TBC)

Provenance

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

Exhibited

Paris, Galerie Perrotin, *Aya Takano - The Jelly Civilization Chronicle*, 17 March - 13 May 2017

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



10

Hernan Bas

Minimalism (cracking the code)

signed with the artist's initials and dated 'HB 19' lower left; further signed with the artist's initials, titled and dated "'minimalism (cracking the code)" HB 2019' on the reverse

acrylic on linen

152.6 x 122 cm. (60 1/8 x 48 in.)

Painted in 2019.

Estimate

HK\$1,000,000 — 1,500,000

€113,000 — 170,000

\$128,000 — 192,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"I have always related my paintings as being a stage in and of themselves, the curtains having just parted to reveal a scene where something is about to unfold..."
— Hernan Bas

Minimalism (cracking the code) is an arresting example of Miami-born artist Hernan Bas' narrative-driven portraiture works. Surrounded by an array of richly detailed objects that appear almost ready to tumble out of the frame, a young, hip man crosses his arms from behind a wooden tabletop. Dressed in a thick roll-neck sweater of undulating amber tones, his stylised depiction feels straight out of a high-fashion editorial shoot, accentuated by prominent cheekbones, darkened lips, and a brooding expression that adds an androgynous, waif-like quality to the subject's overall look. With a pensive gaze that focuses directly behind the viewer in a manner reminiscent of the portraits of Egon Schiele, it is as if we have entered the theatrical scene in its moment of intermission, pausing alongside the protagonist in anticipation of what might happen when the clock starts ticking once more.



Egon Schiele, *Self-Portrait with Physalis*, 1912 Collection of the Leopold Museum, Vienna

Hunting for Clues

"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." — Hernan Bas

Showcasing Bas' masterful control over the imaginative potential of his medium, *Minimalism (cracking the code)* is packed to the brim with beautiful details that transform the self-contained space into one of pure fictionalisation. Much like the painting's elaborate title, however, the narrative remains ambiguously out of reach, therefore inviting viewers to seek out clues in and amongst the various layers of colour and texture.

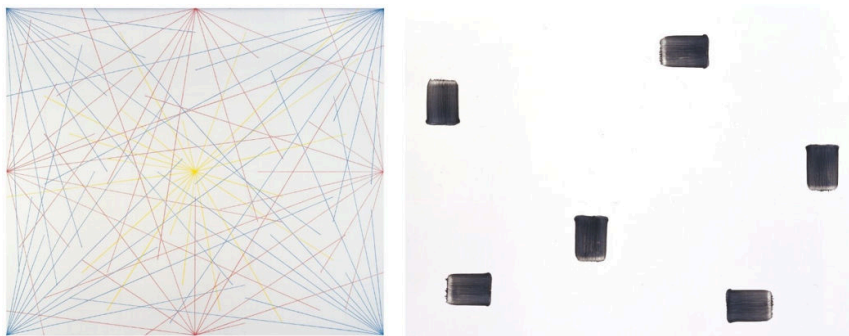
As brackets are punctuation marks used to insert additional clarification into a sentence, the title of the present work can thus be considered a tongue-in-cheek reference to breaking away from the compositional demands of Minimalism, an art movement popularised in the 1960s and 1970s characterised by simplistic forms and hard edges. When viewed from this perspective, the various objects situated within the interior scene of *Minimalism (cracking the code)* reveal an ingenious dual witticism, presented as both figurative portrayals as well as geometric shapes that nod to the influence of artists who helped define the abstract art genre.



Agnes Martin, *Words*, 1981 © 2021 Agnes Martin / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Foregrounding the composition are two towers of stacked playing cards, with the lower-left pyramid placed at an angle that divulges to the viewer the various suits of the front-facing parts.

The theatricality of balance, symmetry, and geometry in its fabrication brings to mind the meticulously handcrafted sculptures of Diane Simpson, of minimal flat forms stacked to create a complex sense of depth. The taller pile behind, however, balanced at a height almost too altitudinous to be possible, eclipses to mere white lines of unrecognisable identification, appearing instead as repeatedly patterned triangles more closely aligned to the geometric vocabulary of abstract artist Agnes Martin.



Left: Sol Lewitt, *Wall Drawing 273*, 1975, Collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art © 2021 Estate of Sol LeWitt/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: Lee Ufan, *Correspondence*, 1993, Collection of the Tate, United Kingdom © 2021 Artists Rights Society (ARS) / ADAGP, Paris

Both adding to the narrative and hinting at the source of patience required to fashion such delicate card towers, the wall behind the protagonist hosts a layered assemblage of papers connected by a matrix of coloured thread, the totality evoking a police evidence board. Nodding to Bas' interest in the paranormal and supernatural, the mysteriously dramatic scene stirs the imagination as we are coaxed to wonder what the puzzle is that, through Minimalist references, Bas' subject is determined to solve. And yet, hunting for clues amongst the wall-pinned paper offers no specific breakthrough as the only marks detectable are the darkened rectangles rendered as if Korean minimalist Lee Ufan left his signature touch on the scene. At the same time, the dizzying overlay of primary-coloured straight line can be considered a homage to minimalist pioneer Sol Lewitt, whose calculated wall drawings of a similar configuration are widely acknowledged as amongst Lewitts' most revered work.

And whilst the collection of geometric shapes behind the young man's back are less distinct in form, perhaps suggestive of the various elements comprising a pet cat's scratching-post tower, they simultaneously recall the structural approach of American artist Donald Judd—founder of The Chinati Foundation in Texas where Bas was an artist-in-residence in 2013.



Donald Judd, *15 Untitled works in concrete*, 1980-1984 Collection of The Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas © 2021 Judd Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

But although the various elements of *Minimalism (cracking the code)* may have originated from simplistic, minimalist shapes, the multilayered composition is magnificently intricate, brimming with a labyrinthine of decorative figurations accentuated by lush painterly effects. As such, whilst there are various visual codes that can be seen in respect to artists Bas admires, he twists and blends these into a language entirely his own.

Weaving References

“I love the written word but I am at a constant battle trying to make images that can stand alone and compete or, better, surpass the written word. I like when the work becomes an image. That moment when everything I read and thought about to get to this finished painting just drops away, and it gets its own life, its own space for interpretation.” — Hernan Bas

An eager consumer of literary and historic references, Bas’s work draws from a rich tapestry of sources ranging from Romantic poetry, texts by Oscar Wilde and Joris-Karl Huysmans, folklore, and the drawings of Van Gogh—to goth culture, ornithology, queer male themes, and ‘deep dives into weirdness on the internet’¹. His atmospheric canvases are a place in which imaginative possibilities collide, leading the viewer on fantastical adventures that push the potential of his medium in both its technical and narrative capacities.



Cinga Samson, *Ivory V*, 2018

Lot 1 - Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction Evening Sale, 30 November 2021 Estimate
HK\$250,000 - 350,000 / US\$32,100 - 44,900

As such, a more contemporary comparison can be made between Bas’ portrait of a young man in a dreamlike environment and the works of Cinga Samson, such as his *Ivory* series which too, depicts a solitary male figure in otherworldly, ambiguous surroundings. But whereas Samson’s youthful character confronts his audience with a self-aware confidence, standing tall at the centre of each *Ivory* canvas, the male protagonist of *Minimalism (cracking the code)* evokes a more introspective intimacy. Appearing almost suspended between the defining stages of adolescence and adulthood, perhaps his unsolved quest is actually a metaphor for the universal angst of coming-of-

age, where only experience in time can supply the answers he obsessively searches for.

Collector's Digest

Demonstrative of his position as a key figure within the world of contemporary art, Bas has mounted numerous successful solo exhibitions in recent years. This includes at the [Rubell Museum in Miami](#), which opened on 18 November 2020 and closes soon on 12 December 2021; [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).

Work by Bas is currently being presented in a retrospective called *Choose Your Adventure* at the Yuz Museum in Shanghai. Running from 28 October 2021 – 9 January 2022, it marks Bas' debut in China.

Works by Bas are represented in numerous prestigious public collections around the world, including at the 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, all in New York.

ⁱ Hernan Bas, quoted in Charlotte Jansen, 'Hernan Bas on the New Paintings He made during Quarantine', *Artsy*, 20 October 2020, [online](#)

Provenance

Frederick Snitzer Gallery, Miami

Acquired from the above by the present owner



11

Joel Mesler

Untitled (Night Out)

signed, inscribed and dated 'The Estate of Joel Mesler
Joel Mesler 2019' on the overlap

pigment on linen

178.1 x 127.3 cm. (70 1/8 x 50 1/8 in.)

Painted in 2019.

Estimate

HK\$500,000 — 700,000

€56,600 — 79,300

\$64,100 — 89,700

[Go to Lot](#)



“The paintings come out of the memories of nights my parents would go out for the evening. They would usually tuck me into my bed and kiss me goodnight... and the animals in my wallpaper would meet with the furs of my mother’s jackets, the colours of their clothes and the smells of their perfume and cologne. I often thought about what my parents were doing as the night went on.” — Joel Mesler

The recent subject of a resoundingly successful solo exhibition hosted by [Lévy Gorvy in Hong Kong](#) (23 June – 14 August 2021), Los Angeles-born artist Joel Mesler is widely acclaimed for his vibrant, instantly recognisable paintings that combine graphically bold print with slogans and words. *Untitled (Night Out)* is a prime example from his oeuvre, presenting the viewer with an assemblage of tightly cropped leaves that intermix across the entirety of the canvas in various shades of green, appearing almost three-dimensional against the raw linen background detailed with a subtle tiger stripes. Commanding the attention at the forefront of the composition are ruby-red bubble letters that spell ‘Night Out’ – the phrase both linking to the present work’s title and evoking memories of evenings of fun.

Mesler achieved his Master of Fine Arts from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1999 and continued to paint through the early 2000s, until, in 2007, he followed a love interest to New York, setting up his own gallery ‘Rental’ in Chinatown shortly after. Putting a pause to his art practice, Mesler became a prominent dealer in the city, establishing a name for himself as he operated several galleries over the past 2 decades. In 2015, however, he picked up his paintbrushes again and in combining his formal training with his wide understanding of contemporary art, he soon developed his distinctive aesthetic that has since been celebrated across multiple solo exhibitions including at the [David Kordansky Gallery](#) in Los Angeles (23 January – 6 March 2021), Harper’s Books in New York (2020), and Simon Lee in London (2018).

Memories of Banana Leaves

Drawing from his childhood memories, though Mesler’s compositions are abstract in construction, they are entirely autobiographical as he brings his private impressions into close contact with cultural touchstones of design and popular iconography. His signature motif is the graphically simplistic banana leaf pattern that populates his oeuvre, its design appropriating the famous Martinique pattern that adorns the wallpapers of the Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles – a place that, for Mesler, evokes powerful childhood flashbacks. As he recalls, ‘at the beginning of my parents’ divorce we had brunch at the Beverly Hills Hotel. My father threw the brunch table over; the eggs Benedict ran down the side of the table onto my mother’s lap and he had a nervous breakdown. My mother chased him in our station wagon while my brother and I ran after him on foot. That was my point of arrested development,’ – half-jokingly adding, ‘That’s when I stopped being a normal person, I think.’ⁱ



The Fountain Room at the Beverly Hills Hotel, Los Angeles

Photo Courtesy of The Beverly Hills Hotel

As *the spot* for A-listers, financiers, and studio-moguls to see and be seen, the Beverly Hills Hotel has been steeped in Hollywood history since its opening in 1912, recognised the world-over as a beacon of glamour and allure. Garnering icon status amongst guests and in the world of design, the familiar green leafy wallpaper pattern has come to be considered synonymous with Southern California style. Touted as one of the most famous prints in the world, it has inspired a multitude of creative outlets, and can be found in collections by mega brands Dolce & Gabbana and Michael Kors, on the covers of multi-platinum albums by artists such as Mariah Carey, and spotted in the background of big-screen hitters such as the cult series *Friends*.

A Visual Medley of Text and Form

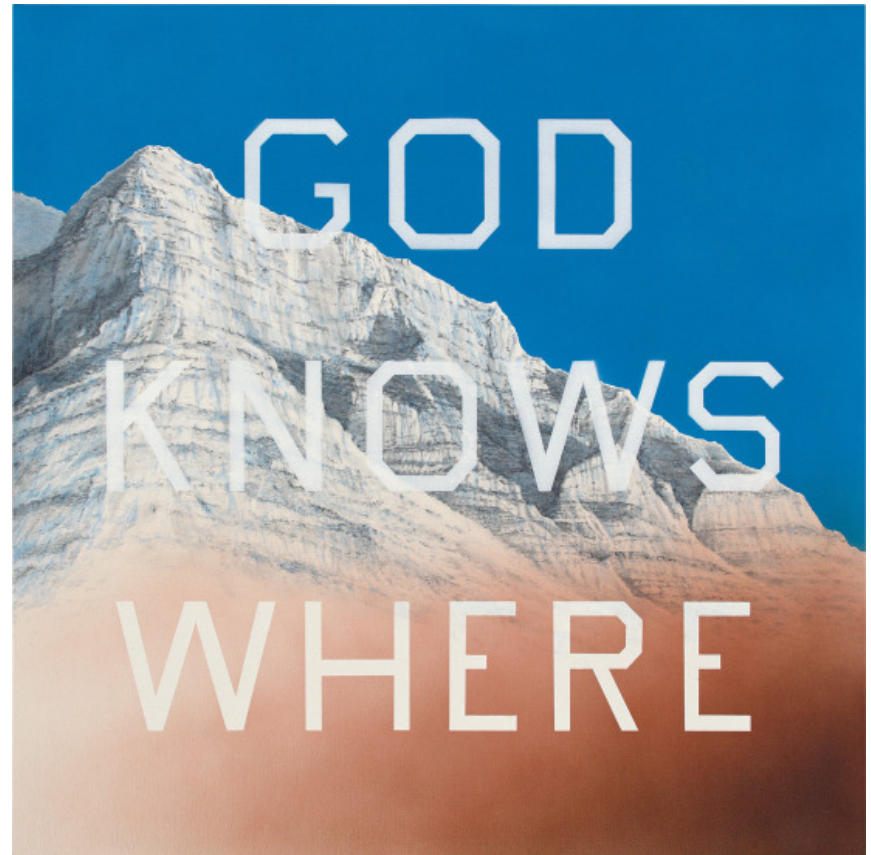
For Mesler, the print stirs the imagination, transporting him back to defining moments from his youth. But through innate optimism, wit and humour, the artist engages with the motif by situating it amongst letters and phrases, engaging in a dialogue with the viewer that attains universal resonance. In the present work, the hand-painted text *Night Out* stands out with its chromatically brilliant red font that exudes the same glow as the neon signs or billboards that pepper urban cities, bringing to mind the gleaming text work by English artist Tracey Emin, whom too, draws from personal experiences to create her art. But whereas Emin's radiant letters can be considered sculptural, rendered of neon moulded to match her handwriting, Mesler achieves luminosity in his writing through the gaps in the letters from which the background shines through, thereby detailing their bubble-rounded shapes through slivers of highlight.



Tracey Emin, *More Passion*, 2010

Collection of the Government Art Collection, London
© Tracey Emin/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Mesler's emphasis on words with wry surrealism further places paintings such as *Untitled (Night Out)* in dialogue with the work of artists including Christopher Wool and Ed Ruscha, who explore the relationship between text and image in their renowned oeuvres. Inspired by the deadpan irreverence of the Pop Art movement, Ruscha became well known in the late 1950s when he began creating small collages using images and words taken from everyday sources, such as advertisements seen in the cityscape of his adopted home Los Angeles. Unlike Ruscha's depiction of language in a strong typographic font juxtaposed against cinematic or seemingly wry imagery from day-to-day life, Mesler's slogans are situated within tightly cropped, abstract formations, as he weaves in themes and motifs from his own personal sources.



Edward Ruscha, *God Knows Where*, 2014

Sold by Phillips London on 23 February 2020 for £3,375,000

© Ed Ruscha

Untitled (Night Out)

As an exceptional work that marks a significant moment in the genesis of Mesler's artistic evolution, *Untitled (Night Out)* showcases a matured development away from the entirely raw linen backgrounds of his earlier works as in the present painting, the canvas has been softly detailed with orange and black stripes reminiscent of those of a tiger. Revealing another link to dreamscapes of his childhood, Mesler alludes to the motif in expressing: 'The paintings come out of the memories of nights my parents would go out for the evening. They would usually tuck me into my bed and kiss me goodnight, my mom leaving red lipstick residue smudged on my cheek. As I would fall asleep, all these elements would swirl through my mind as I hit REM. Their parting words to me, "Honey, you deserve great things" and "The world is yours," and the animals in my wallpaper would meet with the furs of my mother's jackets, the colours of their clothes and the smells of their perfume and cologne. I often thought about what my parents were doing as the night went on. I knew they did things, but I didn't really have the language yet to describe them.'ⁱⁱ



Henri J.F. Rousseau, *Fight between a Tiger and a Buffalo*, 1908

Collection of the Cleveland Art Museum, Ohio

As nocturnal animals who favour to hunt at night, tigers rely on the camouflage their stripes provide to stalk their prey, as explored in works by artists such as French painter Henri J.F. Rousseau's imaginary jungle scenes that convey a sense of the surreal. Mesler captures this characteristic in *Untitled (Night Out)*, stylising his tiger stripes underneath the banana leaves and shining text. Whilst this can be seen as an innocent connotation of the animal-themed wallpaper of the bedroom from his youth, it also can be read as a metaphor for danger, adventure and mystery, and of things that lurk in the dark. Contrasting nostalgic ideas that imprint upon the psyches of many young children, including the artist himself, Mesler imbues his work with sharp wit, conjuring a multitude of possible narratives to emerge.

Collector's Digest

When Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction were the second to offer a work by Mesler at auction in Asia, in June 2021, *Untitled (Tony Chang Goes to Hollywood) (2019)* soared above its pre-sale estimate range of HK\$400,000 – 600,000, achieving a staggering HK\$1,638,000.



Joel Mesler, *Untitled (Tony Chang Goes to Hollywood)*, 2019

Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 8 June 2021 for HK\$1,638,000
© Joel Mesler

ⁱ Joel Mesler, quoted in 'The Alphabet of Creation (For Now) Press Release', *Simon Lee Gallery*, 2018, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Joel Mesler, quoted in 'JOEL MESLER: IN THE BEGINNING press release', *Lévy Gorvy*, June 2021, [online](#)

Provenance

Rental Gallery, East Hampton

Private Collection

Acquired from the above

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A DISTINGUISHED BELGIAN
COLLECTION

12

Shara Hughes

Magic Island

signed, inscribed and dated 'SHARA HUGHES 2012
"Magic Island" FISHERS ISLAND' on the reverse
oil, acrylic and enamel on canvas
182.5 x 179 cm. (71 7/8 x 70 1/2 in.)
Executed in 2012.

Estimate

HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000

€172,000 — 286,000

\$192,000 — 321,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

Delightfully jam-packed with bizarre objects, indeterminate forms and whimsically exuberant colour, Shara Hughes's *Magic Island* packs an instant, electrifying punch. Created in 2012, the painting is situated at a pivotal turning point in Hughes' transition from interior scenes to landscapes. Traversing quite literally between the interior and the exterior, *Magic Island* challenges viewers to navigate not just the quirky chorus of objects that obstinately deny full comprehension but also through foreground, middle ground, and background.

Furniture-esque objects attract attention first: a crippled wooden chair, with a rock and curved pipe for support, cradles a transparent vase with its asymmetrical arms; a translucent coffee table, laden with candle, notebook, and an assortment of apparatus that burgeons into an incandescent lamp, sprouts a curious upside-down U-shaped metal tube. The tube is suspended from a metal wire, while a red, blue, and white pulley system splices through the composition, leading the eye past the see-through music stand at the centre to the flowing seas beyond, and finally to the ocean-liner gliding across the horizon out of the canvas. At once defining and denying certainty of space, the bafflingly complex composition is staunchly cohesive, grounding viewers firmly within the artist's imaginary realm.

"I make art historical playgrounds in my own way. The references are celebrations."
— Shara Hughes

Born in 1981 in Atlanta, Georgia, Hughes earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2004. Shortly after graduation, she earned swift acclaim for her large-scale interiors of imaginary rooms inspired by artists ranging from Matisse to Picasso to Claes Oldenburg to Dana Schutz – as well as her aesthetically warped sense of perspective that aligns with the random assortment of objects populating Surrealistic landscapes and interiors.



Left: René Magritte, *The Difficult Crossing*, 1926 © 2021 C. Herscovici, Brussels / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: René Magritte, *Les valeurs personnelles*, 1952, Collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art © 2021 C. Herscovici, Brussels / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

While crammed chock-full of art historical references, Hughes's language is entirely her own. Her genius lies in her extraordinary inventiveness and her intuitive orchestration of conscious and subconscious motifs and trains of thought. There is an immediacy and freshness that is smart, fast, and fluid, bearing a rapid pulse reminiscent of quick gesture painting; it is this quality of nimble agility that defines her work. Hughes has said: 'I like loose plans because I see everything as alive and changing. The piece struggles then acquires this special kind of pushing and pulling magic that comes with me letting the piece speak, breathe, and change for itself. It's important for me to not become attached to my primary vision.'ⁱ



Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, *From the Entropic Library - Model*, 1989-90 © Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen

“She has a talent for imbuing the most mundane of objects with a definitive human vitality: a coffee cup that might suddenly push itself off the edge of a table, or the arm-like handles of a swimming pool ladder that might wrap themselves around one’s neck.” — Faith McClure

In the present work, there are distinct echoes of Matisse’s *Interior with Phonograph* (1924), as well as to Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen’s *From the Entropic Library - Model* (1989-1990). Hughes expertly steers our vision through flat and dimensional space, to-and-fro representation and abstraction, and between the real and the imagined. She has described her process as organic and surrealistic, beginning with a colour wash, an object, or even a phrase in her mind, and then letting her unconscious take the lead. The push-pull effect applies not just within the narrative of the work but also between narrative and colour and texture; as Stephanie Cash observes: ‘At times,

when Hughes’s content is mystifying, her playful brushwork and sense of colour take centre stage. Yet she can just as easily shift attention – hers and ours – to the figures and their peculiar dramas.’ⁱⁱ



Detail of the present work

Hughes has carried forth her unique vision into the realm of landscapes since around 2015; nevertheless, interior spaces remain the vehicle through which she first solidified her artistic voice. The artist has said: ‘I latched onto the idea of interiors because I was always trying to create some other kind of home, in a way.’ⁱⁱⁱ Interiors also allowed Hughes to celebrate the work of great artists before her; as she stated: ‘So I could paint a really detailed Renaissance painting inside of, on top of, a Bridgette Riley-esque type wallpaper thing. It opened up access for me to flow between everything I wanted to do...’^{iv} Whether interior or exterior, or encompassing both as in the present work, Hughes’s spaces are both literal and psychological, transfixing in its powerful emotional specificity.

“Within an interior, you can make a landscape through a window or you can make another person’s painting within the painting [...] Interiors became the foundation where I could lay all different artists who have come before me into and onto the painting.” — Shara Hughes

Hughes’s depicted spaces reflect her milieu, real or remembered or imagined, just as her actual physical working spaces reflect her personality. The artist declared: ‘Anyone who walks into the loft can tell exactly what kind of person I am. I live in my paintings. I always tell people there is really no

separation between the canvas, the paint, the brush, and myself. This aligns with my ideas about where the lines are between abstraction and reality that I address in the work. Although not one painting is the same as the next, I really see no difference between the spaces I paint, the space I live in and the same space it all comes from.’^{iv}

Collector’s Digest

Well-established through a series of smaller exhibitions with galleries on both sides of the Atlantic, it was her inclusion in the 2017 Whitney Biennial that garnered Hughes major international attention. Since her first solo show in 2007 at Rivington Arms, New York, Hughes has been showing steadily in galleries across the US and Europe for nearly 15 years. In 2020, Hughes opened her first exhibition with Pilar Corrias in London.

Her works are included in the permanent collections of the Dallas Museum of fine Art, the Foundation Louis Vuitton, Paris; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Denver Museum of Art; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Hughes’ first major exhibition in the United States opened in September at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. Titled [Shara Hughes: On Edge](#), it will run until 27 February 2022. Hughes has also recently been honoured with a solo exhibition at the Yuz Museum in Shanghai – [Shara Hughes: The Bridge](#), which runs from 6 November 2021 – 9 January 2022.

ⁱThe artist cited in an interview with Kate Donnelly, “Shara Hughes”, *From Your Desks*, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Stephanie Cash, “Shara Hughes”, in *Artnews*, 22 September 2014, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Rachel Reese, “Shara Hughes”, in *BOMB Magazine*, 9 April 2013, [online](#)

^{iv} *Ibid*

^v The artist cited in an interview with Kate Donnelly, “Shara Hughes”, *From Your Desks*, [online](#)

Provenance

American Contemporary, New York
 Private Collection (acquired from the above in 2012)
 Christie’s, London, 28 June 2018, lot 218
 Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



13

Scott Kahn

Cadman Plaza

signed and dated 'Scott Kahn '02' lower right; further signed, titled, inscribed and dated "'CADMAN PLAZA" KAHN 2002 © 2002 by Scott Kahn all rights reserved' on the overlap

oil on linen

157.5 x 193 cm. (62 x 75 7/8 in.)

Painted in 2002.

Estimate

HK\$1,000,000 — 1,500,000

€114,000 — 171,000

\$128,000 — 192,000

[Go to Lot](#)



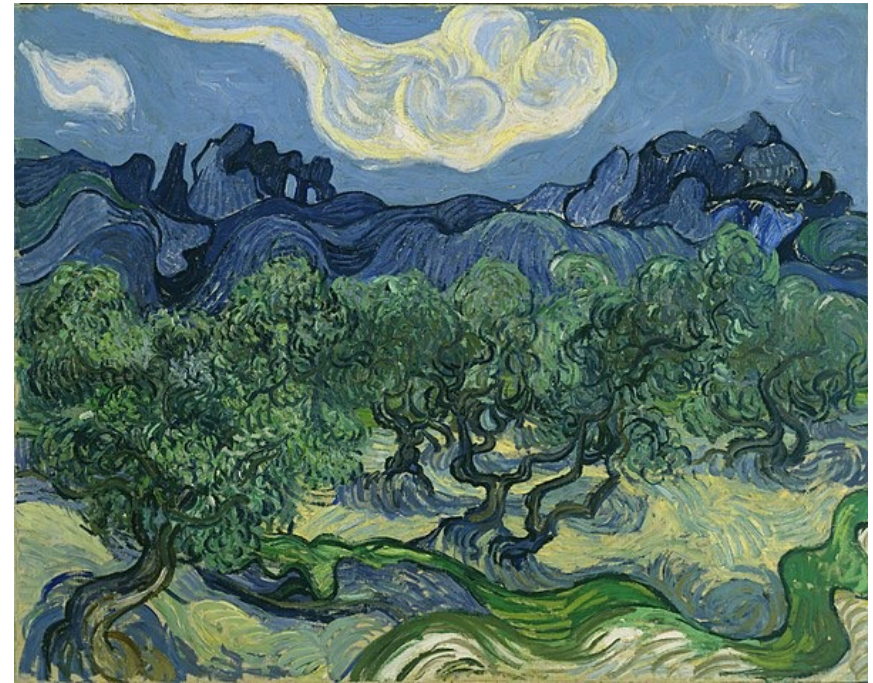
“Creating reaches us and reveals to us who we are. This is why I paint.” — Scott Kahn

Born in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1946, American painter Scott Kahn is celebrated for his strikingly atmospheric landscapes rendered through the prism of memory, experience, and emotion. A master of his craft, he approaches his subject matter with a remarkable dedication to detail, accentuating each cloud in the sky and ripple on the water so meticulously, individual brushstrokes build up into luxurious textures that add a sensuous lucidity to his otherworldly realms. As the first work by the artist to be offered at auction in Asia, shortly following the announcement of his new representation by the esteemed Almine Rech gallery earlier this year, *Cadman Plaza* is a prime example of the artist’s unique, expressive language.

Like Hazy Snapshots from a Dream

Painted in 2002, *Cadman Plaza* transports viewers to Brooklyn, New York, into a tall high-rise building overlooking Cadman Plaza Park. Meandering around the left side of the lush-green, wooded grounds is the exit ramp of the Brooklyn Bridge, whereas peering to the right brings us out to New York Harbour, where the Statue of Liberty proudly stands beneath a horizon line of fluffy white clouds bathed in sunshine. Diluting the moody, dark sky that hangs low over the city, the warm light radiates through the windows of our room, casting afternoon shadows on the checkered linoleum tile floors.

The wispy waves and billowing clouds conjure a sense of eternal movement, further enhanced by the dense, rustling leaves. And yet, the roads are bare and the harbour is empty, leaving us to wonder if we are alone in this dreamlike setting, gazing out over a city entirely our own.



Vincent van Gogh, *The Olive Trees*, 1889 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

Citing influences as varied as Andrew Wyeth, Henri Matisse, Lucien Freud, Pierre Bonnard and John Singer Sargent – whilst Kahn’s paintings can be viewed as an amalgamation of art historical references, he extends the genre of landscape painting through a lens entirely his own. There is a poetic sensibility imbued in his images, however, that specifically recalls Vincent van Gogh’s scenic reveries, which too, are executed with distinctly singular brushstrokes. When speaking of this inspiration, Kahn notes: ‘Every of his painting makes me feel like my soul has been stabbed. It’s so moving and so compelling. When you see one of his paintings, it’s like there is no distance between your soul and the artist’s soul. It’s that straightforward and that direct.’ⁱ

The curving road in *Cadman Plaza* further brings to mind the work of contemporary British artist David Hockney, whom too, depicts vast, empty landscapes separated by winding tarmac. But whereas Hockney introduces a touch of the surreal through his vivid colour palette, indulging in highly saturated and acidic tones, the surrealistic tinge that permeates throughout Kahn’s oeuvre comes from working from memory, as reality and fantasy warp like ‘hazy snapshots extracted from a dream’.ⁱⁱ

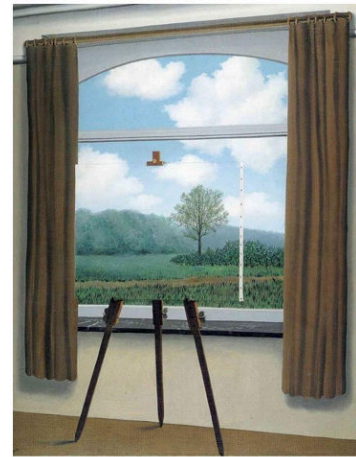


David Hockney, *Nichols Canyon*, 1980 Sold by Phillips New York on 7 December 2020 for US\$ 41,067,500 © David Hockney

Kahn seamlessly blends exterior and interior worlds through the inclusion of a window in the present work. A symbolic motif famously used throughout art history by artists such as Renée Magritte to explore notions of seeing, the transparent panes of glass frame the viewer's vantage point and offer a metaphorical border between the intimate and public, tangible and fantastical, and conscious and unconscious.

A more contemporary connection can be made to Chinese artist Liu Ye, who also employs the motif in his paintings to bridge the realistic world with spiritual or imagined realms. Beyond the aesthetics of architectural framing, both Kahn and Liu Ye use windows to represent the passing of

time through the rhombus-shaped reflections of light cast into their interior scenes. Unlike Liu Ye's inclusion of protagonists, however, Kahn's depictions of familiar yet ambiguous vistas invite introspective contemplation as—like peering through a portal—it is from the viewer's focal point that we take in the view.



Left: Renée Magritte, *The Human Condition*, 1933 Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. © 2021 C. Herscovici, Brussels / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: Liu Ye, *The Second Story*, 1995 Sold at Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 7 June 2021 for HK\$13,076,000 © Liu Ye

Scott Kahn in Conversation

In June 2021, Scott Kahn spoke with RDN Arts about how his magical, painterly universes search for the connections at the base of art and life, always inextricably linked to each other.

RDN Arts: The allegorical and symbolic charge in your works is notable. Can you explain this choice and what is, according to you, the intersection of visual art and poetry?

Scott Kahn: I had a particular interest in dreams, yin-yang symbol symbolism – and I guess I'm still painting in this kind of symbolic dreamlike way. You know, to me, it's an elevated way to present my experience, and most importantly, it's just my nature, and I can't fight my nature. You might say it's a subtext. It's the way it's reported to the viewer that suggests something beyond what is actually being seen. If I'm really successful, the painting achieves some poetic transcendence.

RDN: You said to consider your work to be a visual diary of your life. How do you choose which images to represent? What is the process that leads you to a choice in the representations you carry into your art?

SK: I wait for inspiration to pick up the brush and put it on canvas. It's a little magical and mysterious. I often have to wait for that inspiration, that moment. The impulse that gets me to the canvas generally comes from something very recent in my life. Something I've seen, maybe even frequently. It could be a feeling. I don't consider myself a conceptual artist, but I certainly want to express some symbolic and philosophical meaning through my work.

Read the rest of the interview [here](#).

Collector's Digest

Kahn obtained a Master of Fine Arts from Rutgers University in 1970, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Pennsylvania in 1967. His distinctive oeuvre has received significant international recognition and critical acclaim throughout his career, including being the recipient of the Pollock-Krasner Foundation award in 1986 and 1995, and a fellowship at the Edward F. Albee Foundation.

Kahn's most recent solo exhibitions include [Afternoon of a Faun](#) at Harper's Books in New York (18 February – 26 March 2021), [Diary](#) at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York (19 May – 23 June 2019), and [Scott Kahn: Diary, Continued](#) at Harper's Books in New York (15 June – 11 July 2019).

In July 2021, the Almine Rech announced their exclusive representation of Kahn, following on from their presentation of his works in *One by One: Scott Kahn*, which ran from 25 June – 11 July 2021.

ⁱ Scott Kahn, quoted in 'Interviews we love: Scott Kahn', *RDN Arts*, 2 June 2021, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Harper's Books, 'Scott Kahn: Diary, Continued' Press Release, New York, 15 June – 11 July 2019, [online](#)

Provenance

Harper's, USA

Private Collection

Private Collection

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT COLLECTION

14

Matthew Wong

Nature's Church

signed, titled and dated "'NATURE'S CHURCH" Wong

2017 [in Chinese]' on the reverse

oil on canvas

91.4 x 61 cm. (35 7/8 x 24 in.)

Painted in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000

€453,000 — 680,000

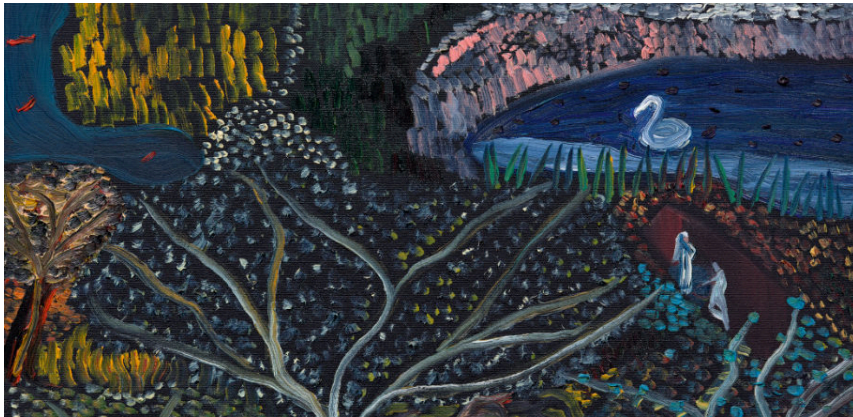
\$513,000 — 769,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“I would like my paintings to have something in them people across the spectrum can find things they identify with. I do believe that there is an inherent loneliness or melancholy to 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

Nature’s Church mesmerises in a symphony of texture and colour, conjuring a dreamlike landscape of curling trees, speckled flora, and cobalt-blue water within which auspicious koi fish swim. In the upper right corner two small figures climb towards the twilight-lit pond, their solitary presence within the clearing sparking the curiosity of a graceful swan who approaches to greet them. Rendered in thick staccato impasto harmonising an explosion of dabs, dots, wiggles, and lines that dance and flicker across the entirety of the surface, the work glows with the rhythm of Wong’s brush, conjuring the viewer into a lullaby of poetic nostalgia, and serene melancholy. Painted within the final years of Matthew Wong’s prolific yet short-lived years, *Nature’s Church* is a superlative example from the artist’s limited oeuvre.



Detail of the present work

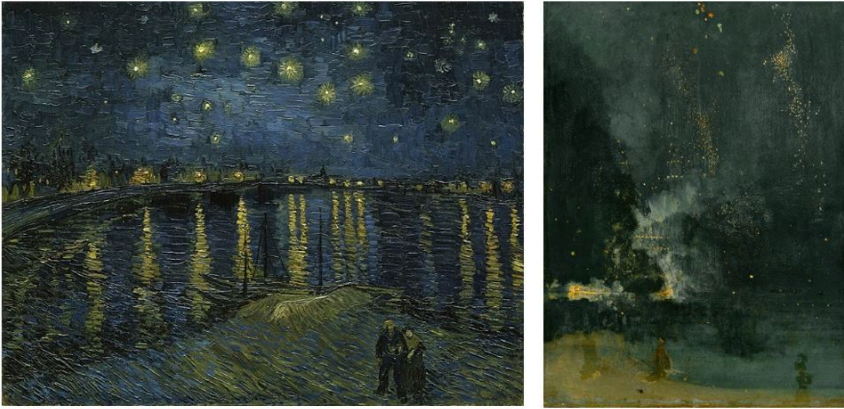
Wong’s Painterly Journey

“Mr. Wong made some of the most irresistible paintings I’ve ever encountered. I fell for the patchworks of colour and stippled patterns of his landscapes.” — Roberta Smith

Wong was born in Toronto in 1984, however with his parents who were involved in the textile business, moved between Canada and Hong Kong every few years before eventually relocating to Hong Kong following his graduation from the University of Michigan in 2007 with a degree in Cultural Anthropology. Three years later Wong earned a Master of Fine Arts in Photography from the City University of Hong Kong, however it was not until 2012 that he pursued his creative interests more seriously. As Wong recalled, ‘at first 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... Pretty soon that was the only activity that sustained me in my daily routine.’ⁱ

Wong’s relationship with art became ‘all-encompassing’ⁱ, as when he was not drawing or painting, he was at the Hong Kong Public Library, ‘writing poetry and pouring over art books’ⁱⁱ, ‘figuring out where [he could] fit into the greater dialogue between artists throughout time.’ⁱ Though never an official student of art history, he developed a remarkable mental database of artists and artworks he admired, added to by his endless scrolling through the digital pages of Instagram, Facebook, and Tumblr, and from immersing himself in online conversations with other creatives. Painting from the soul with none of his compositions planned in advance, Wong began to seamlessly intermix Western and Eastern art historical influences into his practice, forming a singular, instantly identifiable aesthetic that prompted *The New York Times* critic Roberta Smith to dub him as ‘one of the most talented painters of his generation.’ⁱⁱⁱ

A Dialogue with Art History



Left: Vincent van Gogh, *Starry Night over the Rhone*, 1888

Collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Right: James Abbot McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne in Black and Gold, The Falling Rocket*, 1875

Collection of Detroit Institute of Arts, USA

Most often critically associated to the art and life of Vincent van Gogh, Wong's *Nature's Church* indeed brings to mind the starry skies and swirling, tactile brushstrokes of his predecessor - in particular, van Gogh's night paintings created during the final two years of his life which, in a letter to his brother Theo, van Gogh described as being 'much more alive and richly coloured than the day.' A belief also held by James Abott McNeill Whistler, as exemplified by his twilight nocturne paintings, Wong too, evokes the celestial quietude of night in the present work. Night-time, for Wong, was a key time to explore the depths of his mind as 'following the natural path of [his] imagination or watching films in the dark of [his] living room [was] an activity... [he] pursue[d] every night without fail', explaining 'it's inevitable the solitary nature of this pattern seeps into and informs his work.'^{iv}



Gustav Klimt, *Avenue in the Park of Schloss Kammer*, 1912

Collection of Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna

At the same time, whilst the dreamlike vista populated with swaying birch trees in *Nature's Church* further evokes the jewel-toned, luscious scenes of Gustav Klimt—whose kaleidoscopic landscapes dazzle the viewer with reduced spatial depth—Wong's meticulous, repetitive technique can be considered in regard to the masters of Pointillism, including Henri-Edmond Cross, Georges Seurat, or perhaps more recently, Jennifer Guidi and the hallucinatory infinity nets of Yayoi Kusama (see for example, [Lot 25 - Yayoi Kusama, INFINITY-NETS \(OPRT\) \(2004\)](#)). But although countless influences can be observed in *Nature's Church* and Wong's wider oeuvre, he melds them with his own meditative ponderings to form a visual language entirely his own.



Left: Henri-Edmond Cross, *Kap Layet*, 1904

Right: Yayoi Kusama, *INFINITY-NETS (OPRT)*, 2004

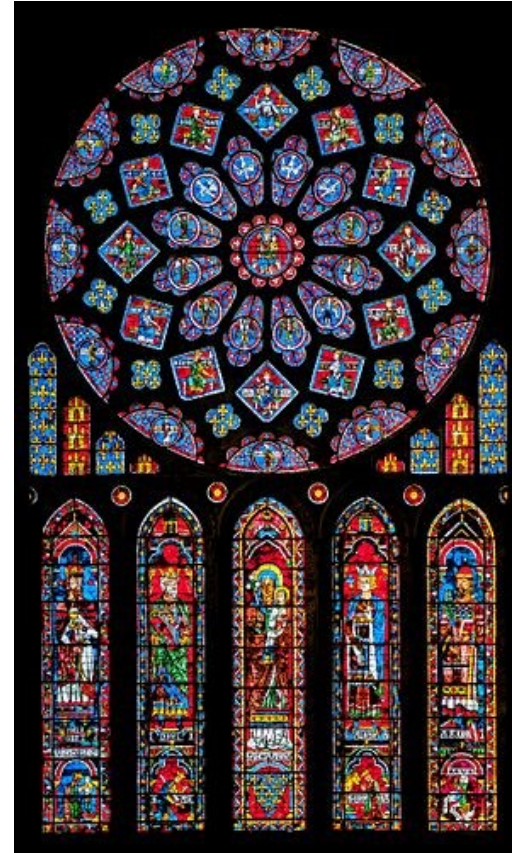
[Lot 25 - Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction Evening Sale](#)

Estimate HK\$ 15,000,000 - 25,000,000 / US\$ 1,920,000 - 3,210,000

© Yayoi Kusama

Nature's Church

The miniature wanderers are a recurring motif in Wong's oeuvre, coming and going through the various serpentine paths and gold-flecked meadows that shape the artist's imaginative dreamscapes, never appearing to quite reach their final destination. Often referred to as 'pilgrims' in the titles of similar paintings by Wong that feature kindred figures, the purity of the radiant white outlines of the pair in *Nature's Church* indeed accentuate a divine, transcendent quality that is further enhanced by the religious connotations evoked by the work's title—and by the shimmering, vibrant details reminiscent of the back-lit stained-glass windows prominently displayed in churches.



The north rose window of the Chartres Cathedral, France

A rarer example of Wong's paintings which more commonly depict a lone figure, or none at all, in *Nature's Church* there are two 'pilgrims' enveloped by the dazzling night-time forest scene. And whilst they are still alone in this portrayal of Wong's expansive, nocturnal universe, they journey on together, following after one another as they travel up the winding path toward the top edge.

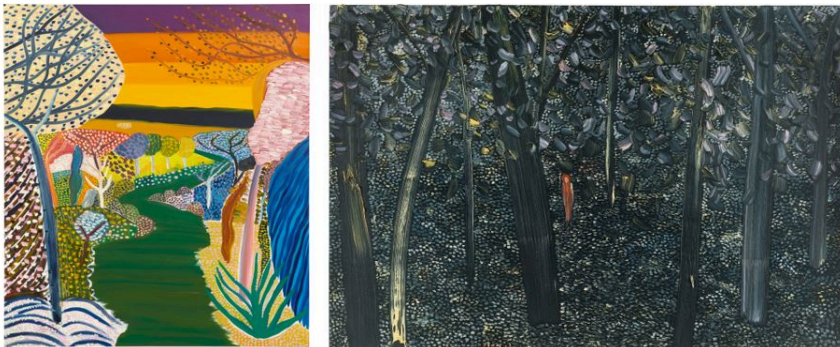
"I already possess the superpower I wanted – the ability to paint." — Matthew Wong

Collector's Digest

With a rise to stardom so rapid, it is widely considered as one of the most remarkable of the past half century, Wong's work has been honoured with inclusion in notable public collections worldwide, 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 Aishti Foundation, Beirut.

Continuing the momentum around the artist's acclaim, the Art Gallery of Ontario is currently hosting the first museum exhibition dedicated to the painter, [Matthew Wong: Blue View](#), which opened on 13 August 2021 and closes on 18 April 2022. This will be followed by the forthcoming retrospective, *Matthew Wong*, at the Dallas Museum of Art in 2022.

In December 2020 when Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly auction sold Wong's painting [River at Dusk](#) (2018), it far exceeded its pre-sale estimate range of HK\$7,000,000 – 10,000,000, hammering down at HK\$37,760,000 plus Premium, establishing the artist's current world record. More recently in June 2021, Wong's work [Figure in a Night Landscape](#) (2017) was sold by Phillips Hong Kong in association with Poly Auction for HK\$36,550,000 against estimates of HK\$6,000,000 – 8,000,000, landing Wong's second top record at auction.



Left: Matthew Wong's 1st top auction result, *River at Dusk*, 2018
Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 3 December 2020 for HK\$37,760,000
© 2021 Matthew Wong Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Right: Matthew Wong's 2nd top auction result, *Figure in a Night Landscape*, 2017
Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 3 December 2020 for HK\$36,550,000

© 2021 Matthew Wong Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

- ⁱ Matthew Wong, quoted in Miss Wong, 'They are artists: Matthew Wong', *Altermodernists*, 29 October 2014, [online](#)
- ⁱⁱ Matthew Wong, 'Matthew Wong: A behind the scenes approach to contemporary painting', *Studio Critical*, 4 November 2013, [online](#)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Roberta Smith, 'A Final Rhapsody in Blue From Matthew Wong', *The New York Times*, 27 December 2019, [online](#)
- ^{iv} Matthew Wong, quote in Maria Vogel, 'Matthew Wong reflects on the melancholy of life', *Art of Choice*, 15 November 2018, [online](#)

Provenance

KARMA, New York
Private Collection, New York
Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT

15 *

Matthew Wong

Far Away Eyes

signed, titled and dated "'FAR AWAY EYES" Wong 2017
[in Chinese]' on the reverse

oil on canvas

66 x 147.5 cm. (25 7/8 x 58 1/8 in.)

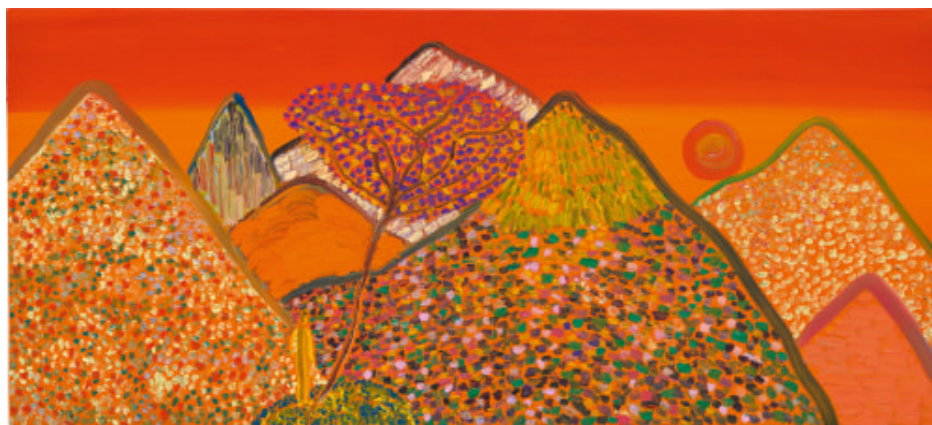
Painted in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000

€906,000 — 1,360,000

\$1,030,000 — 1,540,000



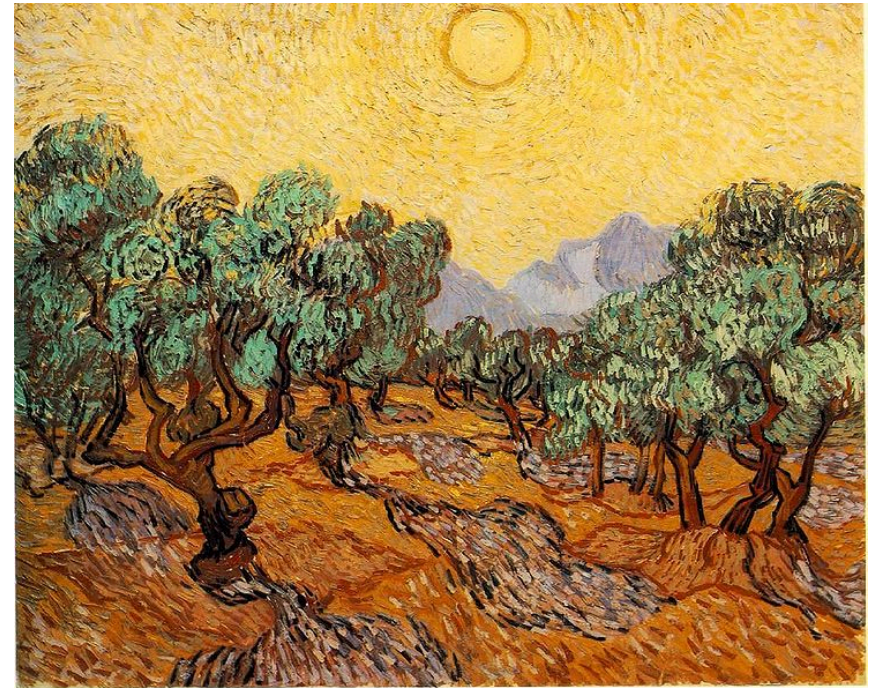
[Go to Lot](#)



*“Mr. Wong made some of the most irresistible paintings I’ve ever encountered...It was a visceral experience, like falling for an unforgettable song on first listen.” —
Roberta Smith*

Hypnotic and riveting, *Far Away Eyes* by Matthew Wong captures the chromatic vibrance, compositional complexity, and emotional depth that characterises the artist’s unique painterly sensitivity. A lone figure, cloaked in gold, stands beneath a single tree, quietly contemplating a sweeping glittering vista of mountain and sky. Slightly off-centre, the solitary tree is imbued with a poignant anthropomorphic quality, its trunk leaning towards a setting sun. The landscape is bathed in incandescent Fauvist hues, while the flattened perspective defies laws of gravity and space, drawing viewers into the depths of memory, imagination, and longing.

Intermixing Western and Eastern art historical influences, Wong developed a singular aesthetic that has redefined the genre of landscape, winning the praise of the esteemed *The New York Times* critic Roberta Smith, who declared him ‘one of the most talented painters of his generation.’ⁱ Evoking the scintillating scenes of Gustav Klimt, the expressionist power of Edvard Munch, the dream-like serenity of Peter Doig, as well as the minimalistic poise of traditional Chinese scrolls, *Far Away Eyes* evokes notions of introspection, meditation, and the search for meaning. It serves as an exquisite example of Wong’s mission and visual language and a moving testament to his uniquely delicate mind.



Vincent van Gogh, *Olive Trees with Yellow Sky and Sun*, 1889 Collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art

The Self-Taught Genius

Wong began painting in 2013 at the age of 29, using his local library and the internet as tools for self-education. A self-proclaimed ‘omnivore for sights, sounds, and ideas,’ⁱⁱ Wong was inspired by everything from his daily visual experiences to the vast canon of the history of art, absorbing information fervently with a highly intellectual mind and an insatiable creative appetite. Over a short period of time, Wong developed his own astonishing visual lexicon – one that conjured a profound *mélange* of modernist influences, from Georges Seurat’s Pointillist dabs to Vincent van Gogh’s tactile strokes, and from the vivid colours of Fauvism to the evocative hues of Symbolism. As Eric Sutphin observed, ‘Wong can be considered a kind of *nouveau Nabi*, a descendant of Post-Impressionist painters like Édouard Vuillard and Paul Sérusier. Like his forebears, he synthesises stylised representations, bright colours, and mystical themes to create rich, evocative scenes. His works, despite their ebullient palette, are frequently tinged with a melancholic yearning.’ⁱⁱⁱ



Paul Cezanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire*, circa 1895 Collection of the Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia

"I'll often have quick flashes of imagery appear in and out of my thoughts, they could be shaped or triggered by something I saw or heard out in the world, an artwork I have seen... Going by intuition and my emotions I will then head to the studio and set out to elaborate in paint these vague glimpses I get.... simply trusting my instinct and the flow from hand to surface." — Matthew Wong



Gustav Klimt, *Birch Forest*, 1903
Collection of the Belvedere, Vienna

The Journey Inwards

In his singular reinvigoration of the genre of landscape, Wong inwardly channels memory, imagination, and intuition. He stated: "One mark responds to another, colours start piling up, getting scraped away, and built up again, and so on and so forth, and somewhere along the line I always reach a certain point where I can intuitively sense the general shape and structure of the

image I need to work towards.^{iv} He further explained: ‘None of the works are planned in advance, but rather worked out through an intuitive engagement with the pigment and surface. Therefore, my work can be seen as an existential meditation on the act of painting, painting as a marker of time.’^v His chosen motifs of atmospheric landscapes and evocative scenes were, in his words, ‘a good starting point for me to establish my visual vocabulary and also have a dialogue with the paintings of the past and present that I admire and learn from looking at.’^{vi}

“The figures, which disturb the landscape, can be read as surrogates for the artist working his way through the landscape of art; he is both embedded in the paint and having a dialog with it.” — John Yau



Georges Seurat, *Morgenspaziergang (Die Seine bei Courbevoie)*, 1885 Collection of the National Gallery, London

The Golden Pilgrim

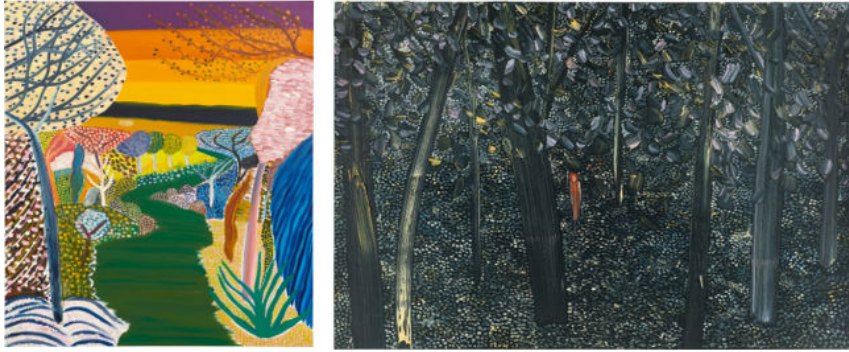
At the core of Wong’s oeuvre is the small figure embedded within his sprawling luminous landscapes. These solitary pilgrims anchor his canvases, serving as a link between exterior landscape and psychological interiority, and a way for viewers to access the endless expanse of the unconscious. The artist has said: ‘I would like my paintings to have something in them people across the spectrum can find things they identify with. I do believe that there is an inherent loneliness or melancholy to 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.’^{vii} Radiant and exquisitely mesmerising, *Far Away Eyes* nevertheless carries within it a silent meditative weight, its bewitching scenery a vehicle to transport viewers into an otherworldly realm cut off from the noise, and often struggles, of reality.

Collector’s Digest

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 © 2021 Matthew Wong Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

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 © 2021 Matthew Wong Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

ⁱ Roberta Smith, 'A Final Rhapsody in Blue From Matthew Wong', *The New York Times*, December 27, 2019, [online](#).

ⁱⁱ Matthew Wong, quoted in Maria Vogel, 'Matthew Wong Reflects on the Melancholy of Life', *Art of Choice*, November 15, 2018, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Eric Sutphin, 'Matthew Wong', *Art in America*, June 1, 2018, [online](#)

^{iv} Matthew Wong, quoted in Valerie Brennan, 'Matthew Wong', *Studio Critical*, November 4, 2013, [online](#)

^v Matthew Wong, quoted in Elaine Wong, 'They Are Artists: Matthew Wong', *Altermodernists*, October 29, 2014, [online](#)

^{vi} Matthew Wong, quoted in Valerie Brennan, 'Matthew Wong', *Studio Critical*, November 4, 2013, [online](#)

^{vii} Matthew Wong, quoted in Maria Vogel, 'Matthew Wong Reflects on the Melancholy of Life', *Art of Choice*, November 15, 2018, [online](#)

Provenance

Private Collection
 Fair Warning, Online, 27 August 2020
 Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT PRIVATE
COLLECTION

16 *

Gerhard Richter

Kerzenschein (Candle-light)

signed, numbered and dated '554-3 Richter 1984' on
the reverse

oil on canvas

200.3 x 179.7 cm. (78 7/8 x 70 3/4 in.)

Painted in 1984.

Estimate

HK\$55,000,000 — 75,000,000

€6,290,000 — 8,570,000

\$7,050,000 — 9,620,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

A resplendent symphony of painterly dynamism and chromatic brilliance, Gerhard Richter's *Kerzenschein (Candle-light)* is an incandescent, electrifying masterpiece hailing from a critical moment of aesthetic and conceptual transition in the German master's inimitable career. Painted in 1984, *Kerzenschein (Candle-light)* is not only an exemplary specimen of Richter's early abstract works, but also a singularly important painting that in title and visual association refer back to the artist's iconic body of *Kerzen (Candles)* paintings from 1982-1983.

Longitudinally bisected down the centre, the present abstract composition presents a crisp duality that echoes the earlier still life works featuring two candles, while its abstract planes of colour vividly communicate the dynamic and poignant evanescence of flame and light. Utterly radical and captivating, Richter's early abstracts scaled new heights of innovation and plumbed formidable depths of conceptual rigour.

A large number of abstract paintings executed between 1984 and 1986 are held in public museums and prominent private collections, while works from this period follow a slew of solo exhibitions at prestigious institutions, including the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (1977); the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1979); and the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (1978, 1980). Created during this important, highly productive and pivotal moment in Richter's career, the present *Kerzenschein (Candle-light)* stridently affirms its creator's visionary genius as one of the most important artists of the 20th and 21st centuries.



Left: Gerhard Richter, *Two Candles*, 1982

Right: Claude Monet, *Haystack, End of Summer, Morning*, 1891

Collection of the Louvre, Paris

“The Abstract Pictures are no less arbitrary than all object-bound representations ... The only difference is that in these the ‘motif’ evolves only during the process of painting. So they imply that I do not know what I want to represent, or how to begin.” — Gerhard Richter

Throughout his career, like no other artist before or after him, Richter tirelessly investigated the phenomena of vision and painterly representation, and the conceptual meaning and experiential reception of painting. After two decades as a skilled photorealist painter operating at the highest levels of technical accomplishment, Richter embarked on a new chapter that represented a stunning departure from the exacting realism of his still lifes, *Photo Paintings*, and landscapes. Deploying colour, texture, and chance, Richter engendered a mode of purely self-referential language of abstraction by applying his tremendous skill as a photorealist painter to the frontiers of abstraction.

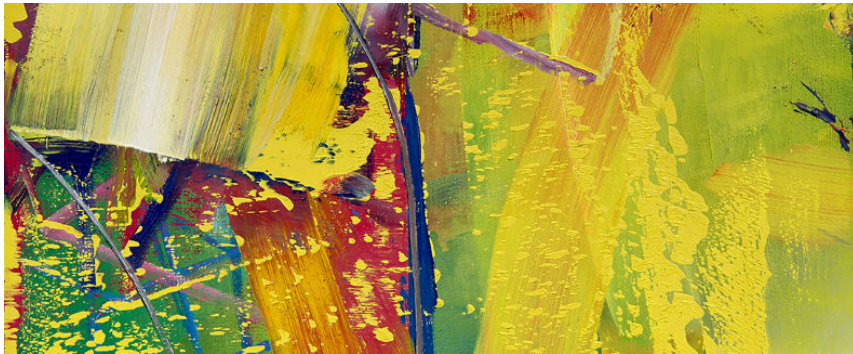


Barnett Newman, *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue IV*, 1969-79
Collection Nationalgalerie, Berlin. © 2021 Barnett Newman Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

A work of supreme grace and tantalising complexity, *Kerzenschein (Candle-light)* is spectacular in its display of riveting interplay of colour. A blue Barnett Newman-esque axis divides the composition into two halves, each of which reveal gestural vistas of texture, depth, and movement. Translucent swathes of yellow and red transmit transcendent white glows at the top left, while narrow claw-like latitudinal branches imbue assertive rhythm at the top right.

Horizontal squeegeed forms traverse the lower half of the canvas, with the stuttering fragmented yellow pigment at the lower left revealing deep green, red, and blue depths of underpainting that

contrast beautifully with the relatively tranquil expanses of yellow tracks on the right. Richter discovered the squeegee in 1979 but only began using it as his sole painting tool in 1986; accordingly, *Kerzenschein (Candle-light)* from 1984 reveals a plethora of painterly techniques, encompassing squeegee, brush, and blade. Richter's repeated process of accretions and excavations result in diaphanous sheens, staccato crests and ridges, mesmerising underlayers and punctuating peaks of impasto, articulating radiant fields of effervescent colour and hypnotic depths.



Detail of the present work

"I partly destroy it, partly add to it; and so it goes on at intervals, till there is nothing more to do and the picture is finished. By then it is a something which I understand in the same way it confronts me, as both incomprehensible and self-sufficient... It is a highly planned kind of spontaneity." — Gerhard Richter

Richter's submission to chance and his open embrace of the arbitrary is key to his monumental corpus of abstract paintings. He explains: 'This method of arbitrary choice, chance, inspiration and destruction may produce a specific type of picture, but it never produces a predetermined picture. Each picture has to evolve out of a painterly or visual logic: It has to emerge as if inevitably. And by not planning the outcome, I hope to achieve the same coherence and objectivity that a random slice of nature (or a readymade) always possesses. Of course, this is also a method of bringing in unconscious processes, as far as possible. I just want to get something more interesting out of it than those things that I can think out for myself.'ⁱ



Mark Rothko, *No. 5/No. 22*, 1950

Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

© 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

While Richter's exuberant strata of colour and corporeal gestures echoes the work of his Abstract Expressionist predecessors, Richter's artistic project is unprecedented. He sought not mere spontaneous expression, but a way to spontaneously yet deliberately generate a previously undetermined yet specific image. In Richter's own words: 'The Abstract Expressionists were amazed at the pictorial quality of their productions, the wonderful world that opens up when you just paint... But the problem is this: not to generate any old thing with all the rightness and spontaneity of Nature, but to produce highly specific pictures with highly specific messages.'ⁱⁱ

Richter sought a means of 'letting a thing come, rather than creating it; no assumptions, constructions, preparation, invention, ideologies – to come closer to the actual, richer, more lifelike, to that which is beyond my comprehension.'ⁱⁱⁱ

“Pollock, Barnett Newman, Franz Kline, their heroism derived from the climate of their time, but we do not have this climate.” — Gerhard Richter

Exquisitely spectacular and sublimely enveloping, Richter’s breath-taking abstract works constitute an elegant rebuttal against the idealism of 1950s abstraction. His physical erasures of his own artistic gestures can be read as a bold negation of the sacred image space. By transforming his pictorial field into a battlefield against his own mark, Richter is interrogating the meaning and position of painting within the contemporary age; specifically, the crisis of painting within the photographic and televisual age. His incessant erasure and blurring of forms are reminiscent of Cibachrome print, while the hazy out-of-focus consistency evokes the mark of televisual opticality. Richter’s project is thus painting’s post-conceptual answer to figuration’s redundancy in the face of photography and the televisual age as well as to the ‘inflated subjectivism, idealism, and existential weightlessness’ of Modernist abstraction.^{iv}

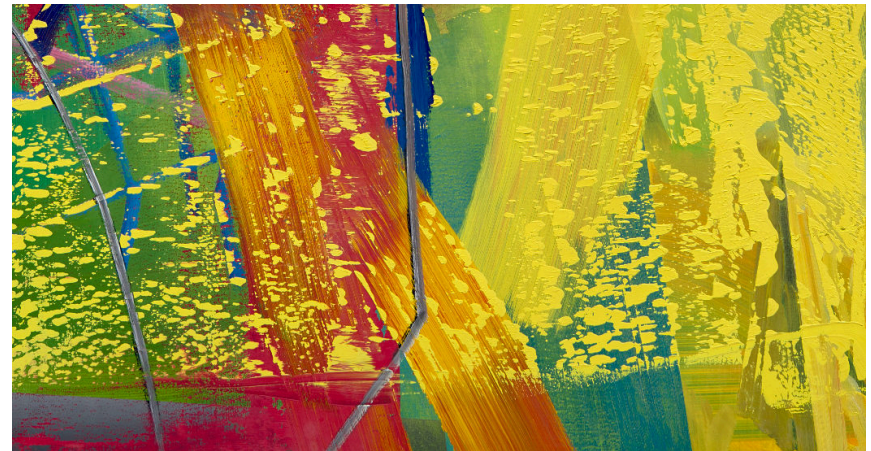


J.M.W. Turner, *Slavers, Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, 1840*

Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Simultaneously majestic and cataclysmic, Richter’s destructive erasures generates a postphotographic re-constitution of the image – one that returns us, paradoxically, to forms associated with nature. As each composition gradually takes shape, the spontaneous sheens and organic variegations of colour and texture evoke visions such as rain streaming against a window, swirling patterns of soil, or, as in the present work, the flickering blaze of candlelight. Whereas Richter’s 1982-1983 *Kerzen (Candles)* meditated on the image of candles and their poignant meanings, the present *Kerzenschein (Candle-light)* encapsulates the very movement, impermanence, and unpredictability of light itself. By consciously succumbing to the mercuriality of paint, Richter’s process-driven methodology inserts him into the production of an unknowable reality, imbuing his works – and his viewers – in a metaphysical dimension.

In its consummate orchestration of colour, movement, light, and texture, *Kerzenschein (Candle-light)* is sensationally spellbinding in its dynamic juxtaposition of luminescent hues, pearlescent layering, as well as decisive gestural mark-making. As an early archetype of Richter’s definitive contribution to the abstract canon, *Kerzenschein (Candle-light)* traces the artist’s revolutionary journey from photorealist exactitude to abstract splendour. Standing before the work, viewers experience a brilliant encapsulation of the artist’s unequalled artistic accomplishments and unyielding intellect, bathed in the glow of his genius.



Detail of the present work

ⁱ Gerhard Richter in conversation with Sabine Schütz, *Gerhard Richter: Text, Writings, Interview and Letters 1961-2007*, London 2009, p. 256

Gerhard Richter

ⁱⁱ Gerhard Richter, 'Notes, 1985', in *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1962-1993*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 122

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter Moritz Pickhaus, 'Gerhard Richter. Abstrakte Bilder 1976-1981', *Kunstforum International*, April/May 1982, p. 250

^{iv} Peter Osborne, 'Painting Negation: Gerhard Richter's Negatives', *October*, vol. 62, Autumn, 1992, p. 104

Provenance

Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York

Private Collection, San Francisco

Private Collection, USA

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

New York, Marian Goodman Gallery and Sperone Westwater Gallery, *Gerhard Richter*, 5 March – 30 March 1985

Literature

Gerhard Richter: Bilder/Paintings 1962-1985, exh. cat., Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1986, no. 554/3, pp. 304, 399 (illustrated)

Gerhard Richter. Werkübersicht / Catalogue Raisonné 1962-1993, exh. cat., Kunst-und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, vol. 111, no. 554-3, n.p. (illustrated)

Dietmar Elger, *Gerhard Richter: Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 3: Nos. 389-651-2 (1976-1987)*, Ostfildern, 2013, no. 554-3, p. 405 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



17 *

Chu Teh-Chun

Songe de l'aube

signed and dated 'CHU TEH-CHUN. [in Chinese and Pinyin] 91.' lower right; further signed, titled, and dated "'SONGE dE L'AUBE" CHU TEH-CHUN [in Pinyin and Chinese] 1991.' on the reverse

oil on canvas

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

Painted in 1991, this work will be accompanied by a certificate of authenticity signed by the artist's wife, Chu Ching-Chao. This work will be included in the artist's forthcoming catalogue raisonné on the work of Chu Teh-Chun, being prepared by Fondation Chu Teh-Chun. (Information provided by Fondation Chu Teh-Chun and Mrs Chu Ching Chao.)

Estimate

HK\$9,500,000 — 12,000,000

€1,090,000 — 1,370,000

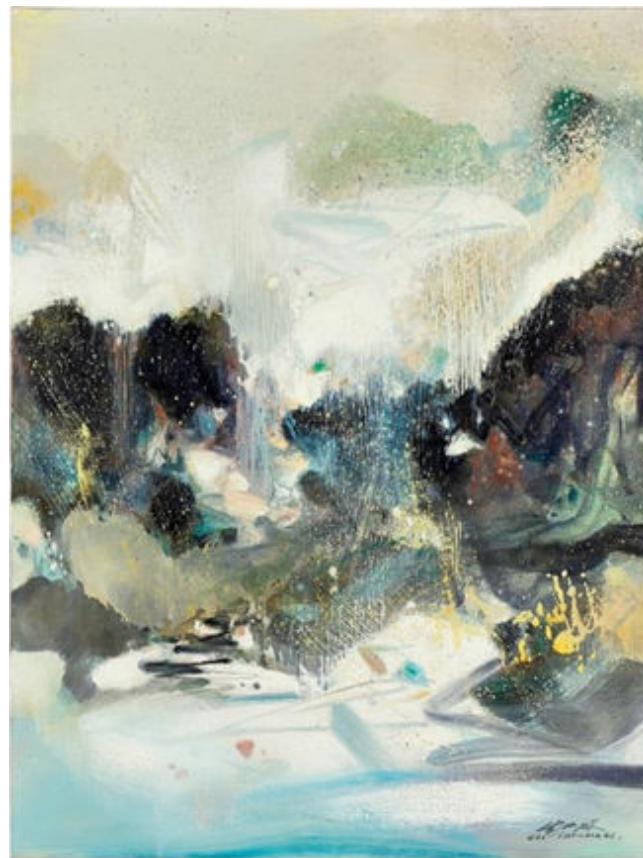
\$1,220,000 — 1,540,000

[Go to Lot](#)



One step closer to *Songe de l'aube* is like another step closer into the world of Chu Teh-Chun. Exemplifying the artist's creativity and imagination, this masterful 2 metre by 2 metre painting seamlessly translates a dreamscape onto canvas.

By the beginning of the 1990s, Chu Teh-Chun had already undergone the exploration of his *Snow Scene* series from the 1980s, and as his creativity developed in conjunction with his experimentations, it fed into the maturation of his work. And as his visual language evolved, it became even more sophisticated. In 1991, Chu moved to a new studio in Vitry-sur-Seine, which was located near the Seine River on the outskirts of Paris. With a spacious and bright new space to paint, Chu was able to challenge himself with increasing the size of his canvases. That same year, Chu took a trip to Venice, Italy, where he thoroughly studied the colours and shadows characteristic of Venetian paintings. With this backdrop, a series of new works was born, including the present work, *Songe de l'aube*.

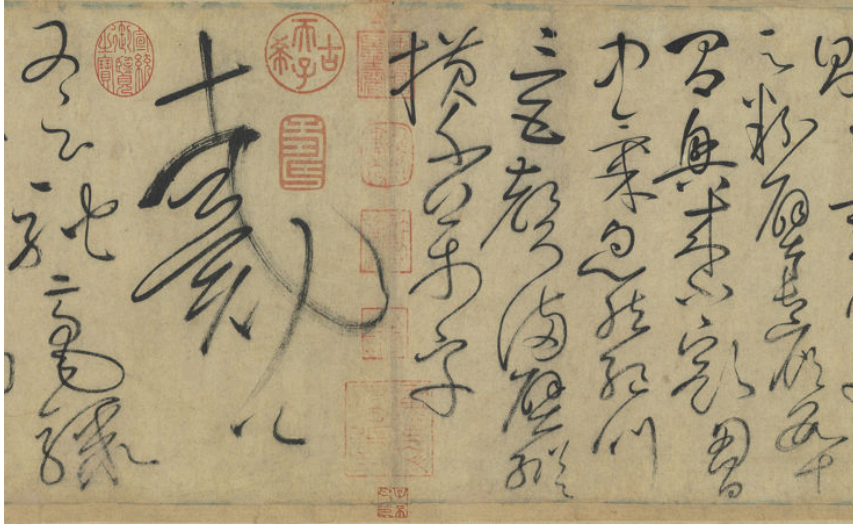


Chu Teh-Chun, *Le 15 Mai 1985*, 1985

Sold by Sotheby's Hong Kong, 9 October 2021 for HK\$ 11,791,000 Premium

At first glance, the present painting inherits the ivory tones of the artist's celebrated *Snow Scene* series created in the 1980s, manifesting a quiet, ethereal, and peaceful atmosphere. Contrastingly, however, Chu took great notice of the 1991 Gulf crisis in the Middle East, which when it came to an end, signified the Persian Gulf War was over. With this influence feeding into his work, Chu hoped to convey the universal value of mankind through his artistic creations, of hope and a vision for peace – and the will and determination to recover from times of disruption. The present work, *Songe de l'aube* is the representation of his *Aurora* series which delved into these themes, hinting at the artist's creative style which he continued to explore for another decade, metaphorically

through the emphasis he placed on the relationship between colour and shadow.



Huai-su, *Autobiography, 777*
Collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei

The white tone across the present work lulls the viewer into a calming tranquility - a main theme evoked by the composition. A closer look reveals the artist's meticulous approach, of bold and rich colours with more than 20 hues, paired with various gradations of brightness and contrast that result in a multitude of magnificent color variations. Chu's precise brush and ink lines - and even his ability to control blocks of colour - are perfectly presented in *Songe de l'aube*. Born into a family of scholars, Chu had always been fascinated by traditional Chinese ink painting since he was a young child. He then trained under the tutelage of Lin Fengmian, the principal of Hangzhou National College of Art, who was a master of calligraphy and painting. Afterwards, Chu travelled to France, wishing to push his practice even more by becoming familiar with Western approaches. Though Chu can be considered in respect to other artist who fused their formal training with their generational background, his unique approach undoubtedly sets him apart.



Cy Twombly, *Leda and the Swan, 1962*
Collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York

The artist employs ink and wash execution methods to apply oil paints to the present work, resulting in a piece that blends Western painting styles with the light charm and agility of Eastern ink painting. This was an important feature of Chu's work from this period. By smoothing out the otherwise intense and heavy brushstrokes, he delicately intermixes different colours together, merging abstract blocks of colour seen in Western art with the characteristics of Chinese landscape brushwork, fusing into a painting language that is unique to Chu. For example, traditional Chinese ink artists seldom used light green, pink, bright yellow, bright purple, colourful blue, or other such hues in such a bold manner, as, if you are not careful, it is easy for the work to look unbalanced and gaudy. Chu was not like that, however, as with his brushwork, colours poetically blend like sounds

of different musical notes, building together to form a 'dawn of dreams' (*Songe de l'aube*). Like a beautiful new world emerging from a 'snow scape', the composition suddenly comes to life before the viewers' eyes.



Chu Teh-Chun, *Vertige Neigeux (Snowy Vertigo)*, 1990-1991
Sold by Christie's Hong Kong, 16 November 2016 for: HK\$91,820,000 Premium

In 1991, when he created *Songe de l'aube*, Chu Teh-Chun had already entered his 70s. The peaceful, far-reaching, calm and tranquil state constructed from light, shadow, colour, and treatment of space in the present work, is a true reflection of the artist's matured approach he had refined over many years, as well as his yearning for idealism. The artist is the painting, and painting is the artist, and the spirit of Chu Teh-Chun is marvelously engraved into the present work.

Provenance

Private Collection, Europe (acquired directly from the artist in 1992)

Private Collection, Asia

Private Collection, Asia

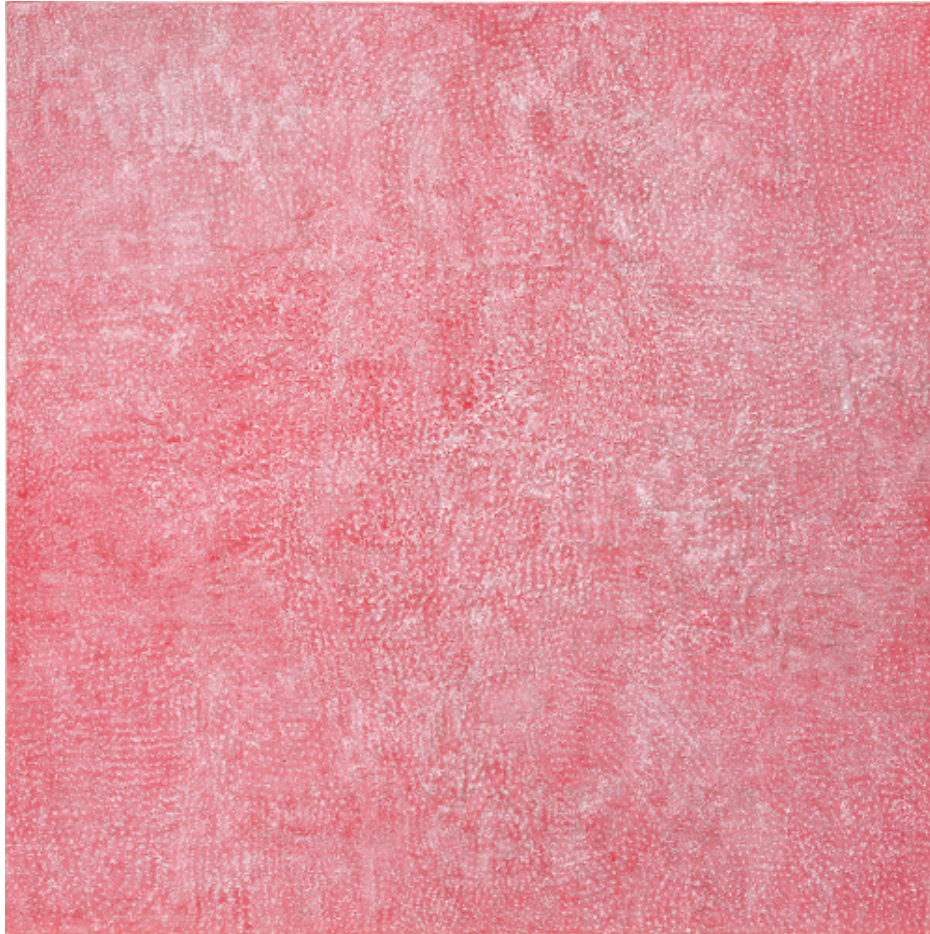
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Literature

Artist Publishing Co., ed., *Chu Teh-Chun*, Taipei, 2007, pl. 72, p. 231 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A DISTINGUISHED PRIVATE
COLLECTION

18 *

Yayoi Kusama

INFINITY-NETS (OPRT)

signed, titled and dated "'OPRT" Yayoi Kusama 2004
"INFINITY NETS" on the reverse

acrylic on canvas

193 x 193 cm. (75 7/8 x 75 7/8 in.)

Painted in 2004, this work will be accompanied by a
registration card issued by the artist's studio.

Estimate

HK\$15,000,000 — 25,000,000

€1,700,000 — 2,830,000

\$1,920,000 — 3,210,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“My nets grew beyond myself and beyond the canvases I was covering with them. They began to cover the walls, the ceiling, and finally the whole universe.” — Yayoi Kusama

Painted in 2004, *INFINITY-NETS (OPRT)* is an exquisite example from Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama’s ground-breaking series of *Infinity Nets*. Veiled in a shimmering lattice of intricately applied loops, dots, and curls, the vibrant rose and pearl coloured canvas mesmerises with ethereal radiance that beckons us closer, enveloping the viewer in poetic splendour. The delicacies of the contours subtly unfold across the painting like billowing cotton-candy clouds, as Kusama melds the observable with the spiritual to obliterate the picture plane into boundlessness, perfectly epitomising the artist’s notion of the infinity.

A Dot in the Universe



Gerhard Richter, *Carmine*, 1994

For her all-over abstraction of colour and texture that teases our sense of spatial depth, as masterfully showcased in the ebbs and flows of the present painting’s netted formation, a comparison can be made to the layered *Abstraktes Bilder* works of Gerhard Richter (see for example, [Lot 16 - Gerhard Richter, *Kerzenschein \(Candle-light\)* \(1984\)](#)). Both artists bring the technique of painting to the forefront of the composition, following their own distinctive method of mark-making. But whereas Richter plays with the notions of intent versus accident, minimising the role of the artist’s hand through his squeegee tool that gives form to chance, Kusama’s repetitive

approach of arching nets and polka-dots is meticulously precise.

Having always insisted that the process of creation is integral to the significance of the works, Kusama employs the minimal gesture of a single touch of the brush to cover her *Infinity Net* canvases in their entirety. Working fixedly for up to 50 or 60 hours at a time, she lays down her loops one-by-one with the canvas placed flat on a table-top or other surface. As such, it is impossible for her to see the whole of the painting while she is working, thereby elevating the importance of her mark-making as she is denied of the ability to respond to or alter the composition as it comes into its complete form.



Lee Krasner, *Another Storm*, 1963 Collection Barbican Centre, London. © 2021 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Contrasting the expansive and passionate gestures of the Abstract Expressionists (see for example, Lee Krasner, *Another Storm* (1963)), the labour-intensive monotony of obsessive, small strokes in Kusama's *Infinity Nets* can be considered almost machine-like in execution. And yet, there is a resoundingly emotive power evoked by the intimacy of her scalloped curves that spread across the canvas in seemingly infinite rippling arcs, arising from Kusama's ultimate desire to subsume individual ego and become one with the universe through what she coins 'self-obliteration.'

Kusama and the Infinite

Born in Matsumoto City, Japan, in 1929, Kusama's crucial years of early adolescence were plagued by hallucinations the artist began experiencing at the age of 10 of fields of dots that would engulf everything around her, including herself. To cope with her fears, the artist sought therapeutic relief in painting her early ink works 'of tiny dots and pen drawings of endless and unbroken chains of graded cellular forms or peculiar structures that resembled magnified sections of plant stalks' ⁱ. These formative meditations on infinity set the groundwork for what would become the core of Kusama's artistry and person – a unique aesthetic framework that is both recognised and celebrated around the world.

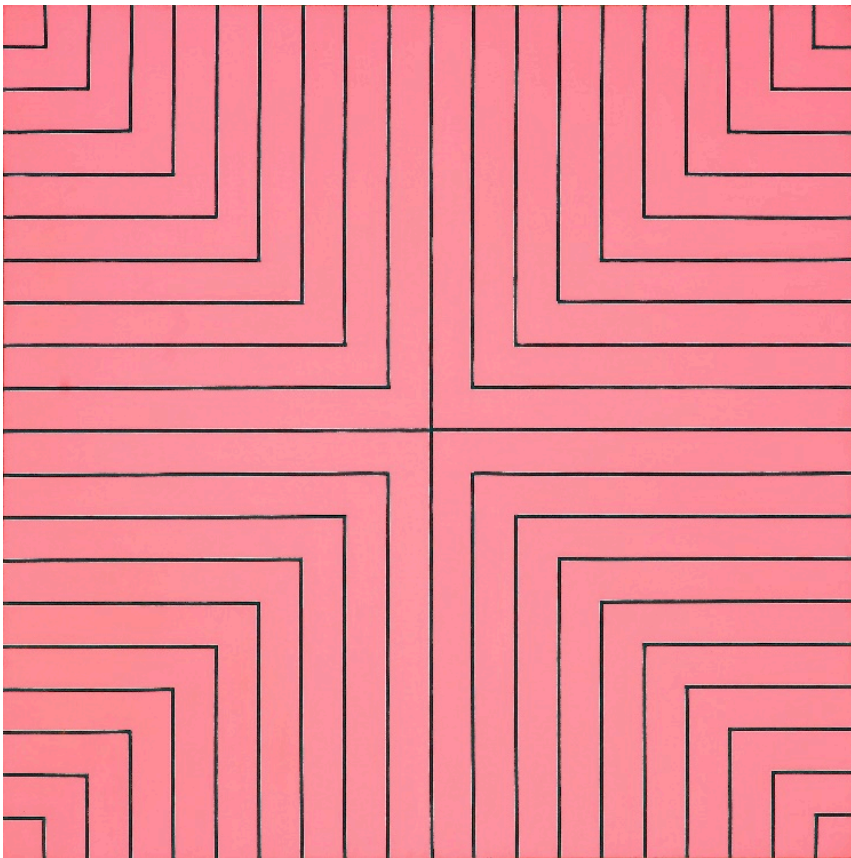
In June 1958, Kusama left for New York, seeking to escape her troubled family life and with the aspiration to 'grab everything that went on in the city and become a star' ⁱⁱ. She debuted her inaugural *Infinity Net* canvases just 18 months later, at the Brata Gallery during her first solo exhibition in the city which was an immediate success, garnering wide critical acclaim including that of Donald Judd who both purchased a work and published a raving review.



The artist in her New York studio, 1958-1959 ©YAYOI KUSAMA

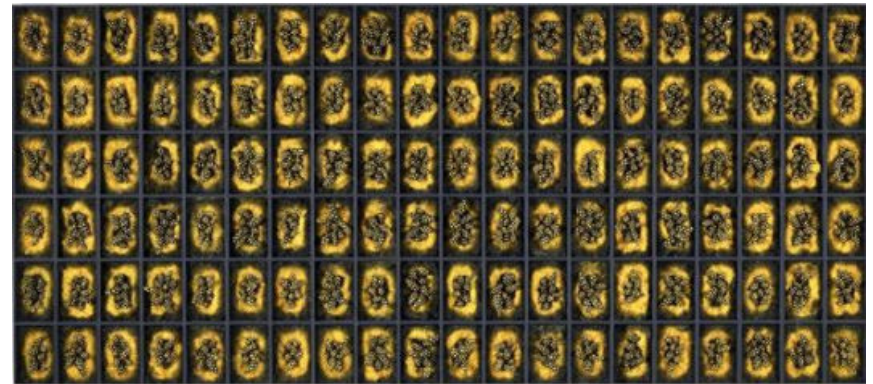
Celebrated for challenging the muscularity of the New School painters who were dominating the city's art scene at the time, Judd later reflected on Kusama's innovative work: 'If you compare it to almost anybody at that point, it's newer and more original. You could strike out with Pollock, Newman, Rothko, etc., Reinhardt. The only person you could kind of find that might be a little bit close was, for a brief time, Frank Stella. But, actually, I think she's somewhat more original than Frank. And clearly she has more durability than Frank' ⁱⁱⁱ.

"I put my whole life on dots and wanted to rebel against history." — Yayoi Kusama



Frank Stella, *Delaware Crossing*, 1967 Collection of the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh © 2021 Frank Stella / ARS, NY

Created almost half a century after she began her renowned *Infinity Nets* body of works, *INFINITY-NETS (OPRT)* exemplifies Kusama's matured approach. Differing to her early oil paint iterations, the present work is rendered in glimmering sapphire-pink and white acrylic paint on canvas – owing to a pivotal shift of medium the artist undertook in the early 1980s. Whilst this transition nods to Kusama's early *nihonga* water-based experimentations, the quicker drying time of acrylic reflects the artist's relentless endurance to make sense of the world and herself, through her art, with remarkable ferocity. As esteemed critic Roberta Smith praises of these later paintings, 'they have an automatic yet meditative quality and the unconscious physical energy of handwriting, attesting not just to the specialness of touch but to its inevitability.' ^{iv}



Yayoi Kusama, *Repetition*, 1999 [Lot 19 – Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction Evening Sale, 30 November 2021](#) Estimate HK\$ 15,000,000 - 20,000,000 / US\$ 1,920,000 - 2,560,000

Though Kusama's compulsive need to self-obliterate through ritualistic replication is not unique to her *Infinity Nets*, instead forming the backbone of her entire multidisciplinary oeuvre ([see for example, Lot 19 – Yayoi Kusama, *Repetition* \(1999\)](#)), her *Net* paintings are singular in that they openly display the process of their making. From detail to detail, our gaze both pauses and whirls around *INFINITY-NETS (OPRT)* endlessly, as foreground and background interweave to an almost dizzying effect. Though constrained by the borders of the canvas, the majestically vibrant net feels to expand beyond its frame, wall, and into the room, immersing the viewer as we too, fall into Kusama's cosmic universe.

"With just one polka dot, nothing can be achieved. In the universe, there is the sun, the moon, the earth, and hundreds of millions of stars. All of us live in the unfathomable mystery and infinitude of the universe." — Yayoi Kusama

Collector's Digest

Universally recognised as one of the most important artists of our time, Kusama's work forms part of extensive museum collections throughout the world. This includes the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Having been honoured with extensive solo exhibitions throughout her career, including the Japanese pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1993 and a large retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 2012, Kusama continues to affirm her position as a leading contemporary artist. She has recently presented a retrospective at the [Gropius Bau in Berlin](#) (23 April – 15 August 2021), and an exhibition at the [New York Botanical Garden](#) (10 April – 31 October 2021).

Kusama currently has a solo exhibition at the [Tate Modern in London](#) (18 May 2021 – 12 June 2022), and the Rubell Museum in Miami (18 November 2020 – 12 December 2021). An upcoming show is also being planned at the [Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden](#), Washington D.C. (postponed from 2020, new dates to be announced).

ⁱ Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, London, 2016, n.p.

ⁱⁱ Yayoi Kusama quoted in Akira Tatehata, *Yayoi Kusama*, London, 2000, p. 11

ⁱⁱⁱ Donald Judd, quoted in Andy Battaglia, 'Kusama's Art, Friendship, and Predilection for Cat Milk', *ARTnews*, 16 November 2017, [online](#)

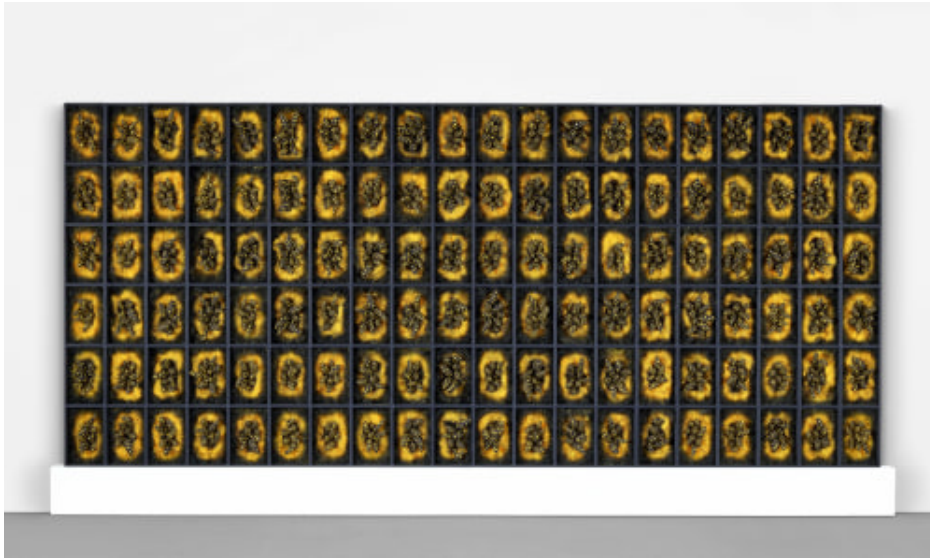
^{iv} Roberta Smith, 'Yayoi Kusama and the Amazing Polka-Dotted, Selfie-Made Journey to Greatness', *The New York Times*, 3 November 2017, [online](#)

Provenance

Robert Miller Gallery, New York
 Collection of Ginny Williams, Denver
 Christie's, New York, 12 May 2010, lot 226
 Private Collection, USA
 Phillips, New York, 8 November 2015, lot 1
 Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT PRIVATE
COLLECTION

19 *

Yayoi Kusama

Repetition

each signed, titled and dated 'YAYOI KUSAMA 1998
"REPETITION"' on the underside

sewn stuffed fabric, wood and paint, in 120 parts
each 38 x 25.6 x 15 cm.

overall 228 x 512 x 15 cm.

Executed in 1998, this work is accompanied by a
registration card issued by the artist's studio.

Estimate

HK\$15,000,000 — 20,000,000

€1,700,000 — 2,270,000

\$1,920,000 — 2,560,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

There are innumerable ways to try and comprehend the creative genius that is Yayoi Kusama, whose remarkable practice has fascinated the world for over six decades. In addition to being the first woman to represent Japan at the Venice Biennale (1993), she has been honoured with copious exhibitions hosted by the most prestigious institutions across the globe, drawing in record visitor numbers who queue for hours for the chance to experience her work. She is the recipient of numerous awards for her art and published books and has even ranked among *TIME Magazine's* list of the 100 most influential people. Her museum presence is immense, with works by the artist now housed in the most prolific public collections worldwide, including at her dedicated museum in Tokyo. As is her established market dominance, with 6 of her top 10 auction results achieved in the past five years. It is without question that she is one of the most important artists working today.



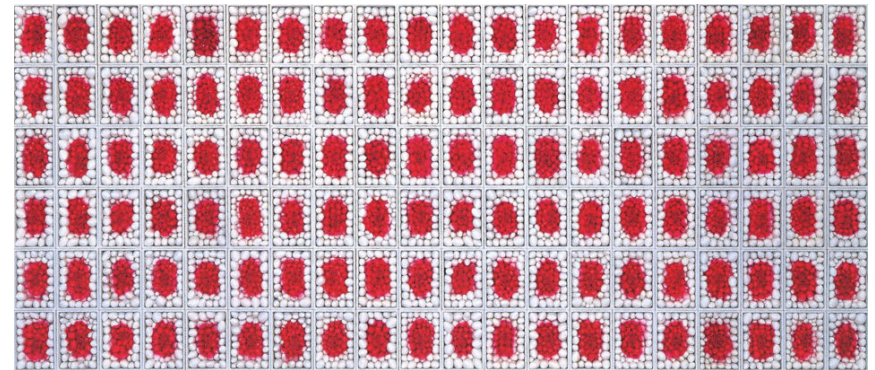
The present work exhibited at New York, Robert Miller Gallery, *Yayoi Kusama: Now*, 11 June - 7 August 1998

Created in 1998, *Repetition* is a rare, significant work from Kusama's oeuvre, boasting a sophisticated combination of key motifs for which she is best known. Stemming from a smaller series whereby Kusama contains her iconic soft sculpture protrusions within wooden boxes, *Repetition* is one of only three exceptional examples that feature 120 individually crafted and signed components. Indicative of the present work's historic importance, another 120-piece work, *Stamens in the Sun*, is now housed in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Toyama, Japan.

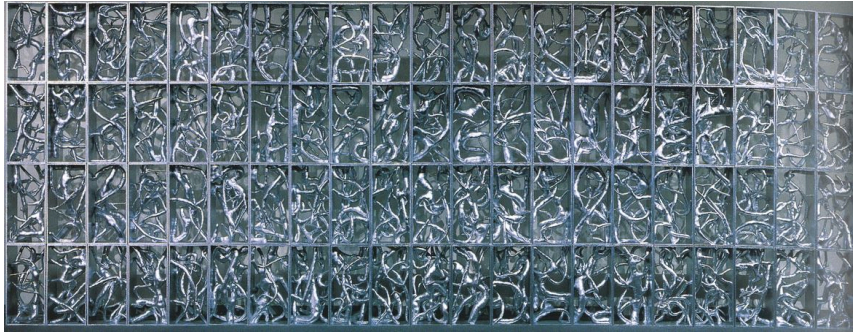
Other smaller works from Kusama's box series can also be found in the collections of museums including the Niigata City Art Museum and the Matsumoto City Museum of Art.

Fresh to the secondary market, *Repetition* was first shown at the at the Robert Miller Gallery in New York the year it was created, before being honoured with presentation at the Bass Museum of Art in Miami in 2003, and the Moore Building in Miami in 2018.

A Museum Quality Piece



Stamens in the Sun, 1989 Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, Toyama



Shooting Star, 1992 Collection of Niigata City Art Museum

Simultaneously monumental and intimate in its execution, *Repetition* comprises of 120 boxes, each of which houses biomorphic polka-dotted protrusions that blossom out from their golden-orange and black, bristly nests. The pillowy phallic forms nod to Kusama's hand-sewn *Accumulations* initiated in 1962, a playful yet menacing body of works created to 'heal [her] feeling and disgust towards sex'ⁱ. Contrasting these earlier compositions of all-over profusions, however, the familiar repetitive pattern of snake-like tubular shapes no longer connotes anger in *Repetition*, but rather abundant growth. Packed together in configurations that appear as flowerpots, incubators or cradles, their nestling organic forms further resemble embryos, stamens, or sprouting buds, thereby alluding to the potential for flourishing life, new beginnings, and unknown potential.

And as our visual perception shifts from a microscopic vision of each cell-like component to a macroscopic view of an expanding universe, this melding of the physical and spiritual engulfs the viewer into a hypnotically meditative experience that stimulates introspection and transcendence.

Kusama's Unparalleled Creativity

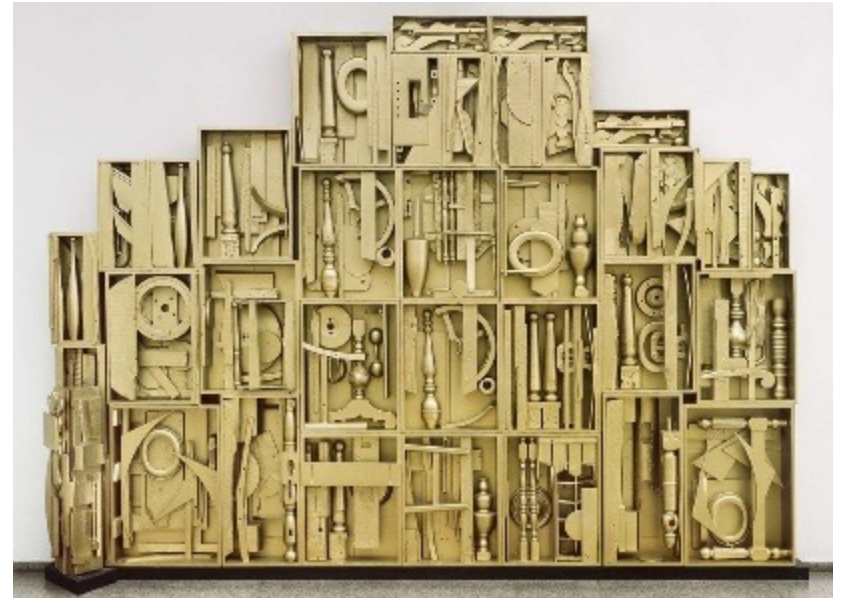
With Kusama's art and her psyche intimately connected, the argument is posed that the metamorphosis of her work occurs in tandem with moments of her life where she experienced great difficulty, such as only employing mechanical processes after the medication prescribed to treat her neurosis began restricting her mobility. The most notable shifts in Kusama's practice occurred in the 1960s after she broke away from her disapproving family and, as encouraged by the American artist Georgia O'Keefe, moved to New York in June 1958. Leaving behind her hometown in Nagano, Japan—where she had first experienced her influential hallucinations of haunting patterns that engulf everything around her, including herself—her move to the States indicated a new start and she aspired to 'grab everything that went on in the city and become a star.'ⁱⁱ

Arriving in America, Kusama found herself in a male-dominated art scene that was not particularly welcoming to a young, female Japanese artist, and yet, the rate at which she made her mark on the New York avant-garde was remarkable. Absorbing and then challenging the most advanced studio practices of the time, her output became as diverse as it was unpredictable, fuelled by her tireless quest to express the infinite of the universe whilst coming to terms with her own individual reality. As such, when regarding her work in relation to many of the artists she befriended during this time, numerous points of interest come to mind.



Yayoi Kusama, *No. 62.A.A.A.*, 1962 Collection of the Blanton Museum of Art, Texas

The gridded, sculptural format of the present work harkens back to Kusama's egg-carton paintings of 1962, an example of which is now housed in the permanent collection of the Blanton Museum of Art in Texas. Formed of recycled material Kusama collected in a manner she likens to eminent American artist Louise Nevelson, who was known to scavenge the streets in search of wood, the series marked one of Kusama's earliest experimentations into three-dimensionality.



Louise Nevelson, *Royal Tide IV*, 1959-1960, Collection of the Museum Ludwig, Cologne © 2021 Estate of Louise Nevelson / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In fact, an interesting dialogue also occurs between *Repetition* and Nevelson's monumental stacked wooden boxes holding abstract shapes. But whereas each box of Nevelson's is characterised by variation, exalting the discarded aspects of bustling city life, Kusama's artwork mirrors the quiet repetition that went into its making as she harnesses the manmade to quantify the abstract concept of infinity.



Jackson Pollock, *Blue Poles*, 1952 Collection of The National Gallery of Australia, Canberra © 2021 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



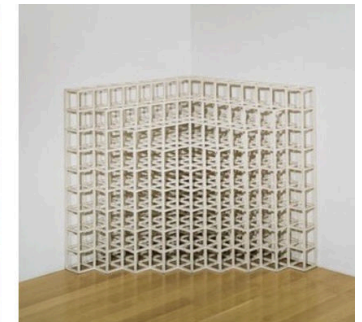
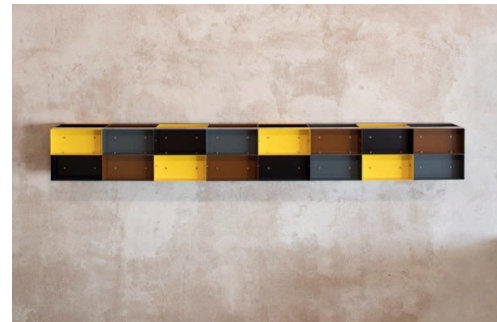
Piero Manzoni, *Line of Infinite Length*, 1960 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York © 2021 Fondation Lucio Fontana / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



On Kawara, *Nov.25, 1989*, 1989 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in association with Poly Auction on 3 December 2020 for HK\$3,276,000

For her all-over patterning of marks and technique, as exemplified in her *Infinity Nets* series and in the abstract, duplicated qualities of the present work, Kusama shares the same heroic scale of Abstract Expressionists Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning. And yet, the 'painstaking sameness of her composition[s] was a deliberate attempt to find an antidote to the emotionalism of [the genre]' ⁱⁱⁱ. At the same time, Kusama's fascination with serialised infinity across multiplied cubes further aligns her approach to that of Piero Manzoni and On Kawara, both of whom too, experimented with boxes in their quest to represent boundlessness. Differing from her counterparts, however, whilst Kusama's practice is based in Conceptual art it does not adhere to the severity of its frameworks, instead evoking a more elastic perusal.

Striking a fine balance between soft and hard, and rigid conformity and loose freedom, the composition of *Repetition* recalls both the dyed rope and metal cube structures of Eva Hesse, an icon of American art whose studio was in the same building as Kusama's for years. Dealing with notions of feminism and sexuality and imbued with sensual and psychological allusions, both Hesse and Kusama present a more organic repetition in their work that departs from the industrial aesthetic of Minimalism championed by artists including Sol LeWitt and Donald Judd - the latter of whom was an early admirer of Kusama's and had acquired pieces by her for his own personal collection.



Left: Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1985 © 2021 Judd Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Right: Sol LeWitt, *Corner Piece No.2*, 1976 © 2021 Sol LeWitt/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Moreover, the stuffed tendrils that jut out from *Repetition* towards the viewer are executed in a medium also preferred by Kusama's contemporary, Claes Oldenburg - with many critics believing his take on soft sculptures was inspired by her innovative eye. But contrasting Oldenburg's concern of depicting the entire form of each enlarged object, Kusama's subject is not the object itself, but the act of multiplying it in her duplicated works.



Claes Oldenburg, *Soft Baked Potato, Open and Thrown--Scale B*, 1970

Burrowed within endless curls that resonate with the intricately crocheted wire sculptures of Ruth Asawa, the elongated protrusions appear almost to come alive from amongst unshorn fur. A more contemporary comparison can be made to the knotted, woven pieces by Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota, who manifests her physical and emotional experiences into netlike environments exploring the infinite, with ‘there appear[ing] to be no end to [her] line of yarn.’^{iv} But unlike the delicacy of Asawa’s loops done in profuse repetition, or the wrapping technique featured across Shiota’s oeuvre, Kusama’s layer of dense tousles conceals the back of each box’s interior, leaving viewers to wonder about the origins of these otherworldly, textural forms.



Left: Ruth Asawa, *Untitled (S. 372)*, 1954, Collection of the Asheville Art Museum, North Carolina © 2021 Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: Chiharu Shiota, *State of Being (Puppet House)*, 2013 Sold at Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 7 June 2021 for HK\$693,000 © Chiharu Shiota / ARS, New York

However, as much as Kusama can be associated with the myriad of post-war artistic movements that sprung up during the years that followed her move to the States, she was never a part of them, skilfully transcending genres to pursue an artistic trajectory of entirely her own.

“New York is the place that made my and other artists’ dreams come true by giving us a chance to realise our ideas and concepts.” — Yayoi Kusama

A Finite Box Holding an Infinite Vision

Following a brief return in 1970, Kusama permanently relocated back to Japan in 1973. Though optimistic for new business opportunities and encouraged by the Japanese economic boom, she was deeply affected by the death of Joseph Cornell, her partner and close friend. Thusly, when considering *Repetition* in respect to the work of Kusama’s peers, the influence of Cornell must be acknowledged.

A pioneer of assemblage art, Cornell’s shadow boxes transformed everyday objects into entrancing treasures. Encased within wooden boxes, instead of conjuring themes of entrapment or captivity, his miniature masterpieces instead invited viewers to escape into them. After meeting in the 1960s, Kusama and Cornell pair entered into a passionate yet platonic relationship. He encouraged her art, and she inspired his, with Cornell creating many works in her honour. Admiring him fondly as he afforded her with ‘such pure kindness... that no one can hope for in the long-gone stream of life’, Kusama has praised his work in explaining ‘this kindness was born from [Cornell’s] lifelong

marvellous artwork of 'Box' pieces and 'collage' pieces.'^v



Joseph Cornell, *Untitled (Pinturicchio Boy)*, 1942-1952 © 2021 The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Equal to Cornell's box constructions of the 1940s being intimately private in their devoted assemblage, it is important to note that none of the 120 components of *Repetition* are the same, despite the repetitive action of their construction. Individually fashioned out of the care of the artist's own hand, each box is defined by unique details like 'in a field of flowers, the stars in the sky, or the stones in a riverbed.'^{vi} Stacked tall to loom over the viewer and filled with her iconic motifs, the mesmerising effect of viewing *Repetition* up close versus from afar intertwines physical materiality with hallucinatory space, as it is revealed that Kusama's expression of infinity is characterised by the uniqueness of each of its parts.

Repetition

Contrasting her earlier box constructions of solitary pieces that can be understood as formed in response to her more contained, smaller studio environment, by the mid-1980s Kusama had re-established her studio practice with explosive creativity. Perhaps inspired by aspects of contemporary art in Japan and its embrace of spectacle, the scale of her multi-part installations grew in parallel to her confidence and restored ambition.

Executed in 1998, the same year as her major landmark retrospective *Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1969* which toured the USA and Japan, *Repetition* exemplifies this area of Kusama's legendary oeuvre at its very best. In its simultaneously epic and personal scale, it is a masterpiece that challenges the possibilities of artistic expression, illustrating in its maturity the remarkable evolution of Kusama's authoritative visual world.



Yayoi Kusama at her solo exhibition at Fuji Television Gallery, Tokyo, 1991 ©YAYOI KUSAMA

"All of my works are steps on my journey, a struggle for truth that I have waged with pen, canvas, and materials. Overhead is a distant, radiant star, and the more I

stretch to reach it, the further it recedes. But by the power of my spirit and my single-hearted pursuit of the path, I have clawed my way through the labyrinthine confusion of the world of people in an unstinting effort to approach even one step closer to the realm of the soul.” — Yayoi Kusama

Collector’s Digest

As a towering figure within the world of contemporary art, works by Kusama form part of extensive museum collections throughout the world. This includes the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Tate Modern, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Kusama has been honoured with vast solo exhibitions throughout her career. Most recently, this has included a retrospective at [Gropius Bau, Berlin](#) (23 April – 15 August 2021), as well as exhibits in [New York at the Botanical Gardens](#) (10 April – 31 October 2021) and at [Victoria Miro in London](#) (4 June – 31 July 2021).

Her current solo exhibits include [Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirror Rooms](#) at the Tate Modern in London (18 May 2021 – 12 June 2022), and *Yayoi Kusama: Narcissus Garden* at the Rubell Museum in Miami (18 November 2020 – 12 December 2021).

ⁱ Yayoi Kusama, quoted in Chris Kraus, ‘Accumulations’, *Kusama*, New York, 2012, p. 108

ⁱⁱ Yayoi Kusama, quoted in Akira Tatehata, *Yayoi Kusama*, London, 2000, p. 11

ⁱⁱⁱ Laura Hopton, ‘Yayoi Kusama: A Reckoning’, *Yayoi Kusama*, New York, 2000, p. 42

^{iv} Chiharu Shiota, quoted in Charlotte Jansen, ‘Tied up: Chiharu Shiota’s “Uncertain Journey” entangles Blain|Southern gallery, Berlin’, *Wallpaper**, 20 September 2016, [online](#)

^v Yayoi Kusama, *Yayoi Kusama: I Like Myself*, Japan, 2007, p. 185

^{vi} Tohru Matsumoto, ‘Requiem and Resurrection: The Art of Yayoi Kusama’, *YAYOI KUSAMA: Eternity – Modernity*, Japan, 2005, p. 278

Exhibited

New York, Robert Miller Gallery, *Yayoi Kusama: Now*, 11 June – 7 August 1998, pl. 10 (illustrated)
Miami, Bass Museum of Art, *Yayoi Kusama*, 4 December 2002 – 11 May 2003, no. 32, p. 39 (illustrated, p. 19)
Miami, Moore Building, *Pop Minimalism | Minimalist Pop*, 4 – 9 December 2018, pp. 109-110 (illustrated)

Literature

Laura Hoptman, Akira Tatehata and Udo Kultermann, eds., *Yayoi Kusama*, New York, 2000, p. 78 (installation view illustrated)
Louise Neri and Takaya Goto, eds., *YAYOI KUSAMA*, New York, 2012, pp. 146-147, 281 (illustrated)
Laura Hoptman, Akira Tatehata, Udo Kultermann and Catherine Taft, eds., *Yayoi Kusama*, New York, 2017, p. 76 (installation view illustrated)

Provenance

Gagosian, New York

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2007

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A EUROPEAN COLLECTION

20

Nicolas Party

Still Life

signed and dated 'Nicolas Party 2017' on the reverse

soft pastel on linen

150 x 130 cm. (59 x 51 1/8 in.)

Executed in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$6,200,000 — 9,400,000

€702,000 — 1,060,000

\$795,000 — 1,210,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“I think the element of timelessness is really fascinating with painting because there’s so much tradition attached to it.” — Nicolas Party

Nicolas Party’s *Still Life* is anything but still. Alive with rhythm and movement, vibrantly saturated fruit twist and sway under a brilliant pervading light that catches onto their contours, casting warm shadows over their rounded curves. Executed in 2017, the technicoloured canvas is a particularly captivating piece from Party’s oeuvre, seducing viewers in with a magnetic quality that is so abundantly rich you can all but taste his fantastical take on reality.

The Identifiable and The Illusional

“I want to grab the audience directly and ‘lock’ them in the work as long as possible. When the viewer is inside the painting, my hope is that its complexity can be revealed. You stay inside it because you feel that there is still something there that you don’t see.” — Nicolas Party

Party was born in 1980 in Lausanne, a Swiss city situated on the banks of Lake Geneva overlooking the imposing Alps. This upbringing in such an idyllic environment clearly figures in Party’s acute fascination with the natural world as whilst the gemstone shapes in *Still Life* are recognisable as pears and gourds, in a layered formation their sloping poses also conjure a landscape of rolling hills foregrounding pointed mountain peaks. With a flair for the uncanny, Party pushes this effect into overdrive through anthropomorphising their organic forms like the dancing flowers of early Disney, intensifying the sense of mystery by ‘see[ing] all [his] motifs as independent characters... approach[ing] them by applying a personality to them.’ⁱ

Video: <https://youtu.be/Sbf7dmbldfs?t=65>

The Dance of the Reed Flutes, from Walt Disney’s *Fantasia*, 1940

Working in the medium of pastel, Party intimately applies the soft chalk directly to the canvas with his fingertips using techniques popularised in the late 17th Century through the beginning of the 18th Century. In employing a material that requires you to work with great precision, the artist observes: ‘oils allow you to endlessly retouch. With pastels it’s kind of the exact opposite. You can layer and layer, but you can’t start over. The nature of the medium is much more direct. Nothing dries or is wet – it stays exactly how it is’.ⁱⁱ Juxtaposing this homage to art-making modes of the past, however, is the fact that Party also spent 10 years working as a 3D animator, and thus the graphic quality to his smoothly rendered subjects is perhaps also informed by his interest in digital art. This individual combination of skills and knowledge allows the artist to amplify the physical presence of his motifs as he presents their forms in unique and revelatory ways.

A Dialogue with Art History

Although Party’s work is un beholden to time or place, it echoes many of the artists who came before him. Under the genre of still life, a dialogue certainly exists between the assemblage of crops in the present work and the compositional strategies of painters such as Paul Cezanne, Euan Uglow and René Magritte. At the same time, having cited early Renaissance painter Fra Angelico’s frescoes at the San Marco in Florence as a source of inspiration, one can also detect similarities between both artist’s treatment of light, shadow and hue, such as in the rippling robes in *The Sermon on the Mount* (1437) and the undulating gourds centring the present work.



Paul Cezanne, *Sugarbowl, Pears and Tablecloth*, 1984 Collection of the Pola Museum of Art, Hakone



René Magritte, *Le Chant d'Amour*, 1967 Collection of the Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Belgium © 2021 C. Herscovici, Brussels / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Fra Angelico, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 1437 Collection of the Convent of San Marco, Florence

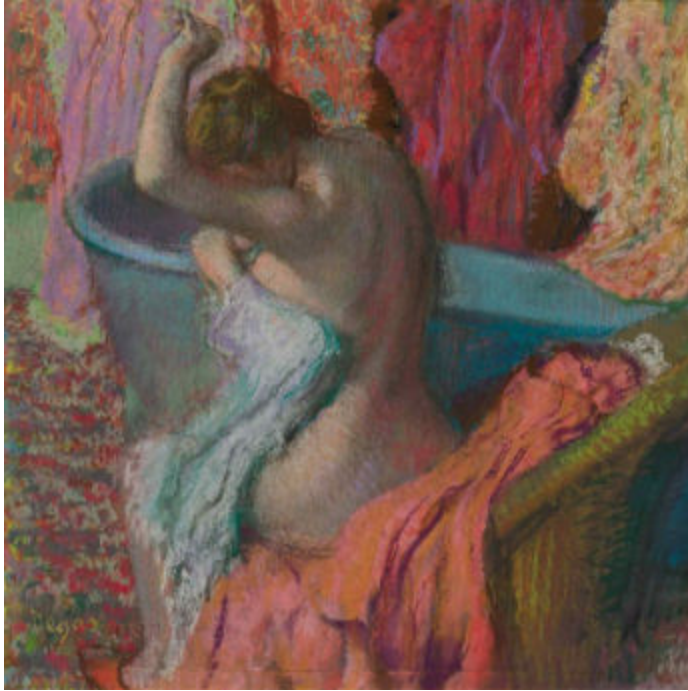
Party's colour palette further connects his canvas to Expressionism and the Fauvists, with the primary-coloured oeuvre of Franz Marc particularly coming to mind. And much as a more contemporary comparison can be made to the curvaceous fruits by Fernando Botero, Party's preference for pastels as a painter aligns to the belief of Impressionist master Edgar Degas who too, favoured the medium for its spontaneity. But despite the fact that this substantial interweaving of art historical influences should amount to somewhat of a 'Frankensteinian plurality', 'instead, these appropriative compositions cohere into something seamlessly Party'.ⁱⁱⁱ



Franz Marc, *The Dream*, 1912. Collection of Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid



Fernando Botero, *Oranges*, 1997 © Fernando Botero



Edgar Degas, *La sortie du bain*, 1985 © Peter Schlesinger

Whilst the composition showcases distinct references to the history of painting, Party reinvigorates traditional artistic subjects with his signature aesthetic that slips between the nostalgic and futuristic and is immediately recognisable. Building on this are his motifs that too, are universal in their visual language, such as the pear that symbolises immortality and prosperity in ancient Chinese culture, grace and nobility in Korea, abundance in Greek and Roman mythology, and Christ's love in Renaissance religious paintings. Bathed in a warm, inviting luminosity that immerses the viewer, there is a timelessness to *Still Life* that encourages a closer look at the evolution of representation, perfectly exemplifying Party's idiosyncratic vision.

"I don't have much interest in what could be labelled as 'reality'. I'm more interested in the signs, symbols and codes we've created for reality." — Nicolas Party

Collector's Digest

Party is considered as one of the most successful and critically acclaimed artists working today. He has been honoured with numerous solo exhibitions in the past decade in key international venues, including that of Hauser & Wirth, Los Angeles (2020); The FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2019); The Modern Institute, Glasgow (2019, 2018, 2016, 2013); M WOODS, Beijing (2018); and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (2017); amongst many others.

Switzerland's MASI Lugano is currently presenting Party's first extensive retrospective. Titled [Nicolas Party – Rovine](#), the major exhibition opened on 27 June 2021, and will run until 9 January 2022. In Dijon, France, the Consortium Museum is also hosting a solo show of Party's work, [Nicolas Party. Bolly](#), which commenced on 7 July 2021 and will close on 9 January 2022. Additionally, a solo exhibition titled [Nicolas Party | Stage Fright](#) opened at the Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover on 12 September 2021 and will run until 9 January 2022.

Party's work is represented in over 30 public collections worldwide, including K11 Art Foundation, Hong Kong; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Long Museum, Shanghai; Fondazione Fiera Milano, Milan; M WOODS, Beijing; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris; and the Rubell Family Collection, Miami.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZozkE6dyBx0>

Nicolas Party

Nicolas Party: In the Studio, June 2019

Video Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth

ⁱ Nicolas Party, quoted in Olivier Zahm, 'Nicolas Party', *Purple Magazine*, 5 October 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ (the artist cited in Ted Loos, "Artist Nicolas Party Revives the Language of Pastel", *Cultured Mag*, 17 March 2019

ⁱⁱⁱ Annie Godfrey Larmon, 'Nicolas Party', *Artforum*, 2 December 2017, [online](#)

Provenance

Kaufmann Repetto, Milan

Private Collection

Acquired from the above by the present owner



21 o♦*

David Hockney

Bridlington Violets

signed, titled and dated "'Bridlington Violets" 1989

David Hockney' on the reverse

oil on canvas

35.6 x 45.7 cm. (14 x 18 in.)

Painted in 1989.

Estimate

HK\$10,000,000 — 15,000,000

€1,130,000 — 1,700,000

\$1,280,000 — 1,920,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"I draw flowers every day and send them to my friends so they get fresh blooms every morning." — David Hockney



Detail of photograph of David Hockney taken by Peter Schlesinger in 1970

Stemming from David Hockney's distinguished series of floral still life paintings, *Bridlington Violets* epitomises the celebration of colour and form that defines his magnificent visual world. Set against a juniper yellow-green background rendered in short, horizontal brushstrokes, a lively bunch of noble purple violets burst out from a dark, rounded vase. Though the enigmatic composition denies specificity of both time and scene, the sweeping, visceral strokes of Hockney's brush imbues the textured plane with movement, capturing the artist's physical joy in the tactile qualities of paint. A piece of British art history, the present work was created in 1989, just after a major retrospective of Hockney's work travelled from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, before closing at the Tate Gallery in London (1988-1989).

Hockney Blooms

"I think every artist who deals with the visible world must come back to it. You begin to see how many choices you can make in even these simple things right in front of you. How exciting they are." —David Hockney on the still life genre



Left: David Hockney, *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy*, 1977, Collection of the Tate, London

© David Hockney

Right: David Hockney, *My Parents*, 1977, Collection of the Tate, London

© David Hockney

Flowers have been a central theme of Hockney's oeuvre since the 1970s; so much so that they have come to be frequently interpreted as a symbol for the artist himself, as if he inserts his presence into the compositions of many of his masterworks. Though his exploration of the motif can be traced back to earlier paintings such as *Henry Geldzahler and Christopher Scott* (1969), *Mr. and Mrs. Clark and Percy* (1970-1971), and *My Parents* (1977) – in the mid-1980s Hockney gradually gave greater importance to the subject as he developed a broader preoccupation painting the still life genre, contributing to a rich history of chronicling the abundances of nature that spans centuries.



- 1) Paul Cézanne, *Vase of Flowers*, 1880-1881, Collection of the Norton Simon Museum, California
© Norton Simon Art Foundation
- 2) Henri Matisse, *Vase D'anémones*, 1946
© 2021 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
- 3) Pablo Picasso, *Vase de fleurs sur une table*, 1969, Collection of the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas
© 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
- 4) Fernando Botero, *Still life with white curtain*, 2013

As Hockney asserts, 'Painting still lifes can be as exciting as anything can be in painting. I remember once saying to Francis Bacon in Paris, that I knew a painting in California of [tulips in a vase](#) that was as profound as any painting he'd made. I think at first he almost thought I was referring to my own, but I was referring to the Cézanne in the Norton Simon Museum. It's the most beautiful painting, and it is as profound as anything he did. Just some tulips in a vase. The profundity is not in the subject, it is the way it's dealt with.'ⁱ



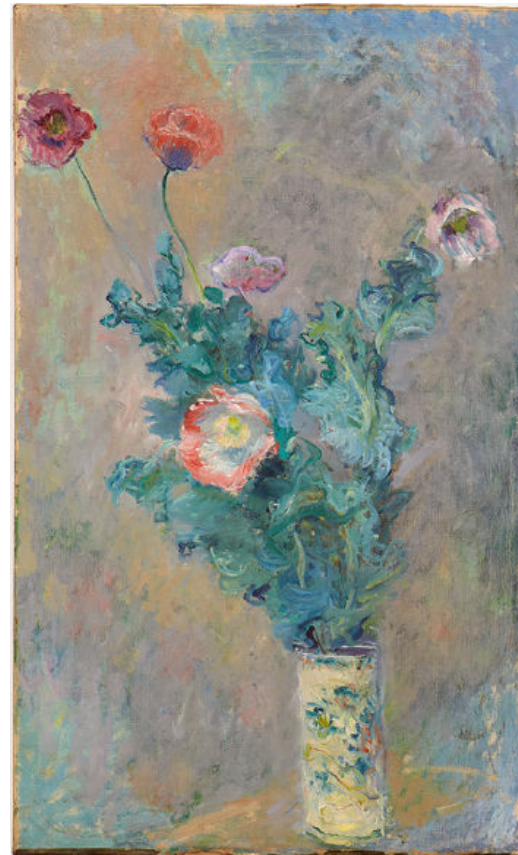
Vincent van Gogh, *Irises*, 1890

Collection of the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

© Photo Art Resource/SCALA, Florence 2021

The present work draws an instant comparison to Vincent van Gogh's *Iris* from 1890, an artist whom Hockney deeply admires. Though Hockney attests that van Gogh's universal appreciation is attributed to the fact that viewers can really 'see how [the paintings] are done: all the brush marks are visible', he continues his praise in expressing '[van Gogh] was really the first great colourist... great, great colourist. He saw more than other people.'ⁱⁱ The same is true for Hockney, as masterfully presented by *Bridlington Violets* which, like *Iris*, is composed of opposing hues on the colour wheel that strengthen each other by their visual juxtaposition: blue and purple against yellow or green.

The consequential effect is tremendously rich, of blossoming buds that pop out against the startling background behind, meticulously painted with tonal contrasts that both compliment and contradict, seemingly changing in the light before us as if in harmonious dialogue with the Impressionists. At the same time, like van Gogh's highly rhythmic application of impasto—which too, was largely influenced by Impressionistic technique (see for example, [Lot 31 - Claude Monet, Pavots dans un vase de Chine \(1883\)](#))—Hockney's command of texture imbues each petal, leaf, and pane of colour with a life of its own, as if painting their individual portraits.



Claude Monet, *Pavots dans un vase de Chine*, 1883

[Lot 31 - Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction Evening Sale, 30 November 2021](#)

Estimate HK\$ 9,500,000 - 15,000,000 / US\$ 1,220,000 - 1,920,000

A Play with Perspective

Painted in 1989, *Bridlington Violets* is a superb example of Hockney's return to painting after his ambitious 'post cubist' experiments with photo-collages that defined his practice at the start of the

decade. Enthused by his desire to form compositions that reflect the sensations of observation as opposed to scientifically render a scene, Hockney's photo-collages 'solve[d] a problem that he had been musing on for several years; how to make representation of the real world without using conventional single-point perspective.'ⁱⁱⁱ This perhaps might have been spurred by a trip he took to Paris in December 1984, where he came across Pablo Picasso's *Femme Couchée* (1932) at the Centre Pompidou. Musing over how you 'could see the back and front at the same time', Hockney remarked 'you would not ask yourself, where am I? You were *inside* the picture; you had to be, because you couldn't be simply outside it and move round it.'^{iv}



Pablo Picasso, *Femme couchée*, 1932, Collection of the Centre Pompidou, Paris
© 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

That same year, Hockney's investigations into the possibilities of perspective were further enhanced by his newly found interest in traditional Chinese scroll paintings, owing to his discovery of George Rowley's 1947 book, *The Principles of Chinese Painting*. In 1984 Hockney was invited to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to see a 72-foot scroll commissioned by the Chinese emperor dating from 1690, and 'spent four hours on his knees unrolling the parchment and

observing each tiny detail.'^v Mesmerised by how the work could not be seen in its entirety, requiring for the viewer to physically navigate the expansive space with constantly changing viewpoints, Hockney highlighted the experience as 'one of the most thrilling afternoons [he'd] ever had',^{vi} later creating a dedicated film centred around the scroll a year prior to *Bridlington Violet's* execution.



Still from film by David Hockney and Philip Haas, *A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China*, Milestone Film & Video, Publisher, Harrington Park, New Jersey, 1988

Image Courtesy of David Hockney and Philip Haas

These influences marvellously fed into Hockney's practice as his experiments later expanded into the realm of painting, culminating in works such as *Bridlington Violet* where although the viewer is presented with the floral vase from front-on, there are constantly changing vantage points that arise when examining the curving leaves and petals in closer detail, leaving the viewer to feel they are experiencing the work from multiple angles concurrently. In constructing coherent space through an arrangement of fragmented views of the same subject, Hockney embraces tradition whilst simultaneously innovates, liberating himself from the constraints of naturalism as he rejects

historical ideas of perspective. As he asserts: ‘perspective takes away the body of the viewer. You have a fixed point, you have no movement; in short, you are not there really. For something to be seen, it has to be looked at by somebody and any true and real depiction should be an account of the experience of looking.’^{vii}

Home in Bridlington

Hockney was born in Bradford, Yorkshire in 1937 and moved to London at the end of the 1950s to study at the Royal College of Art. In the 1960s he relocated to Los Angeles and was struck by the sunny light and colour that is now signature of his work. His family began to migrate Eastward in the 1970s, with his sister moving to Bridlington—a seaside town to the East of York where their mother soon joined. Hockney became a frequent visitor, purchasing a house with an adjoining studio which he returned more permanently in 2004, reengaging with the vast countryside landscape of his home.

Rendered in bright yellow-green and vibrant shades of purple that showcase a unique proficiency for colour-theory Hockney finessed in California, *Bridlington Violets* is a joyful celebration of the still life genre, quintessential of Hockney’s celebrated series of painted blooms. And yet, differing to other similar floral works by the artist in that not all are geographically alluded to by their title, *Bridlington Violets* can be considered a painterly love letter to Bridlington, and to Hockney’s native Yorkshire.



Detail of the present work

“I mean, everything is fresh about blossom, isn’t it?” – David Hockney

Collector’s Digest

Renowned as one of the most prominent creators of our contemporary times, having achieved over 80 international award and honours, work by Hockney now forms part of the world’s most prestigious collections. This includes the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Ludwig Museum, Cologne; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D. C.; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and The British Museum, London.

Having been honoured with extensive solo exhibitions and retrospectives throughout his career, Hockney is currently presenting solo shows at Musée de l’Orangerie in Paris with [David Hockney. A Year in Normandie](#) (13 October 2021 – 14 February 2022); Bozar Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels with [David Hockney. The Arrival of Spring, Normandy, 2020](#) and [David Hockney. Works from the Tate Collection, 1954-2017](#) (8 October 2021 – 23 January 2022); and the Salts Mill in West Yorkshire, UK, with [David Hockney. Woldgate Woods, Winter 2010](#) (extended through September 2022).

In December 2020 in New York, Phillips achieved the world record for a landscape by Hockney with [Nichols Canyon](#) (1980), which soared above US\$40,000,000.



David Hockney, *Nichols Canyon*, 1980

Sold by Phillips New York on 7 December 2020 for US\$41,067,500

© David Hockney

ⁱ David Hockney, quoted in Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'Life of the artist: David Hockney in conversation with Hans Ulrich Obrist', *BBC*, 14 May 2015, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ David Hockney, quoted in 'David Hockney on Vincent van Gogh', *Van Gogh Museum*, 4 March 2019, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ David Hockney, quoted in *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture*, exh. cat., Royal Academy, London,

2012, p. 62

^{iv} David Hockney, quoted in Catherine Cusset, *David Hockney: A Life*, London, 2019, n.p.

^v David Hockney, quoted in lecture presented by Southern California Institute of Architecture, 'David Hockney: Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor Of China (September 14, 1988)', [online](#)

^{vi} David Hockney, quoted in Nikos Stangos, ed., *That's the Way I See It: David Hockney*, London, 1993, p. 102

^{vii} David Hockney, quoted in *David Hockney*, exh. cat., Tate Britain, London, 2017, p. 142

Provenance

André Emmerich Gallery, New York

Nishimura Gallery, Tokyo

Jonathan Novak Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Private Collection, Florida

Private Collection, Los Angeles (acquired from the above in 2001)

Phillips, London, 8 March 2018, lot 23

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

Tokyo, Nishimura Gallery, *David Hockney Paintings - Flower, Chair, Interior*, 23 October - 25 November 1989, no. 12, n. p. (illustrated)

Los Angeles, L.A. Louver Gallery; Honolulu, The Contemporary Museum, *David Hockney: 72 New Pictures*, 6 December 1989 - 19 March 1990, pl. 17 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM THE COLLECTION OF RUEY HSIU LOU

22

Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita

Self-Portrait with a Cat

signed and dated 'Tsuguharu [in Kanji] Foujita 1931'
centre right

mixed media on silk
44.5 x 34.2 cm. (17 1/2 x 13 1/2 in.)

Executed in 1931, this work is accompanied by a
certificate of authenticity issued by Sylvie Buisson.

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000

€456,000 — 684,000

\$513,000 — 769,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Cats never give anything away. They are out for what they can get... They have grace, beauty of movement, intriguing languor. Cats are never in a hurry, never angular. They move softly, gently, insinuatingly.” — Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita

Self-Portrait with a Cat is one of the finest examples of Japanese-French artist Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita’s acclaimed self-portraits. Donning a pudding bowl haircut and Chaplin moustache that echoes the whiskers of the cat nuzzling at his shoulder, Foujita gazes out at the viewer from behind black, circular spectacles that have become iconic signifiers of the artist’s eccentric style. The artist’s delight and pride in his craft is evident, beautifully conveyed by the tilted paintbrush Foujita balances in his hand that marks an instant comparison to museum collection showpieces like the Art Institute of Chicago’s *Self-Portrait with a Cat* (circa 1920s), and *Self-Portrait* (1929) — now housed at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Executed in 1931, at the crescendo of a highly sought-after period in Foujita’s oeuvre where he truly mastered fusing Japanese techniques with the elegance and luminous palette acquired during his first period in Paris, the present work embodies his unique vision that continues to charm almost one century on.



Left: Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita, *Self-Portrait with Cat*, circa 1920s, Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago

© Foujita Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2021

Right: Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita, *Self-Portrait*, 1929, Collection of the National Museum of

Modern Art, Tokyo

© Foujita Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2021

The Image of an Artist

The son of a general in Japan’s imperial army, Foujita was born in Tokyo in 1886 and demonstrated an aptitude for art at an early age. Following his graduation from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts in 1910, he moved to Paris just 3 years later with big aspirations, writing home to his father: ‘consider me dead until I become famous.’ It was not long after that Foujita claimed his quirky, fashion-forward appearance caught the attention of the Chilean painter Manuel Ortiz de Zárate, who introduced himself and quickly became a friend, inviting Foujita to accompany him to visit Pablo Picasso’s studio on rue Schoelcher.



Pablo Picasso, *Self Portrait*, 1906, Collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA
© 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

There, in front of Picasso's paintings and his collection of Henri Matisse, Paul Cezanne, and Henri Rousseau, Foujita felt electrified, deciding he must adapt his vision to either oppose or align with Western art. Over countless trips to the Louvre he perfected replicating masterpieces from art history, simultaneously drawing inspiration from Amedeo Modigliani, Marc Chagall, Georges Braque, and his other contemporaries who were defining the flourishing creative scene at that time. What Foujita offered in comparison, however, was a unique ability to incorporate his mastery of Eastern sensibilities and, in marrying the two by the early 1920s, he followed a 'path that no other Japanese artist had dared to take before'ⁱ, soon coming to be admired as Paris' shining star.

The themes Foujita returned to recurrently throughout his oeuvre were self-portraits, women, cats, still life and portrayals of children, and whilst he did so amid the great wave of major modernist movements, he never broke away from his idiosyncratic approach. This is exquisitely captured in *Self-Portrait with a Cat*, formed of delicate lines that exude an exemplary calligraphic finesse, achieved with touches of sumi ink on silk that depart from the preference for thicker brushstroke more commonly employed by his peers. Though intimate in scale, the details are grand, as evidenced by the clarity of the artist's eyes framed by individual fluttering lashes. In fact, Foujita attributed his flair for painstaking precision to his myopia, believing it was his short-sightedness that allowed for such heightened focus.



Detail of the present work

Subtle washes of pearlescent white, brown, and blush-pink then fills the forms as the cat's furry stripes, contours of the artist's face, and creases in his shirt are refined with milky highlight and

shadow. A feature of Foujita's most highly regarded works, it is this iridescence that adds an almost sculptural quality to the overall composition, seizing the viewers' eyes at even first glance.

Foujita's Feline Muses

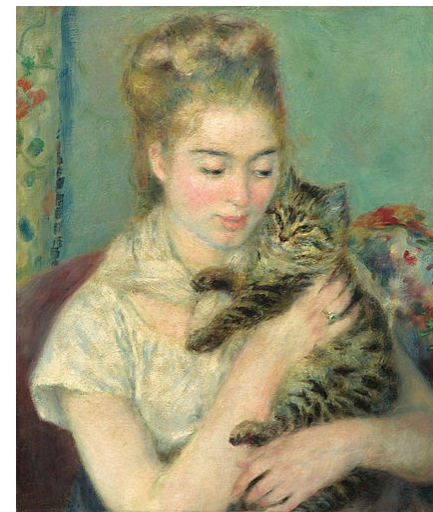
"The reason why I so much enjoy being friends with cats is that they have two different characters: a wild side and a domestic side. This is what makes them interesting." — Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita

Foujita adored cats throughout his lifetime, both as companions and as a signature motif. He began including them in his works with his early reclining nudes, however soon relied on them as subjects when no human model was available, explaining: 'since they were always in my studio, I sometimes put a cat at my side in my self-portraits or placed them by my nudes as a kind of signature'ⁱⁱ.



Left: Edouard Manet, *Woman with a Cat*, circa 1880

Collection of Tate, London



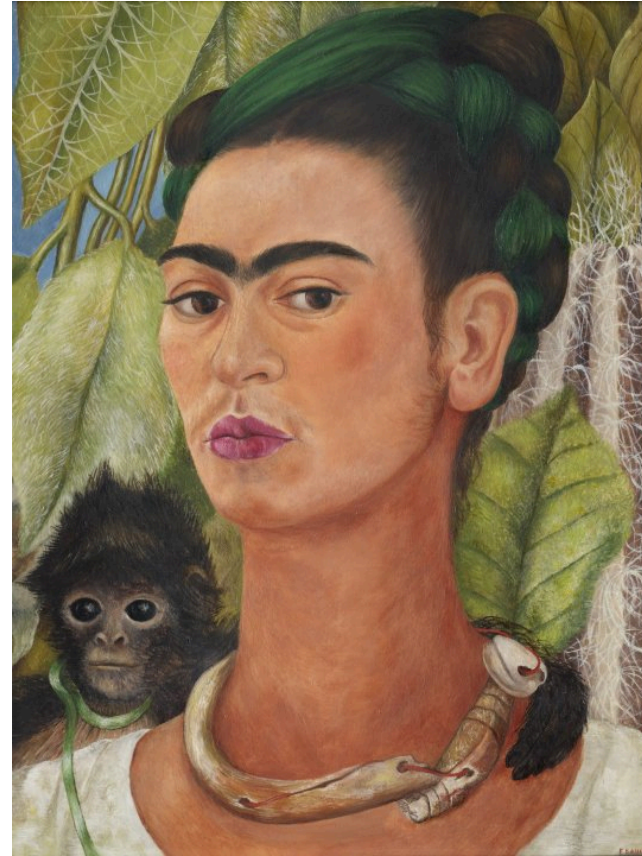
Right: Auguste Renoir, *Woman with Cat*, circa 1875

Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Contrasting how the motif is explored in works such as Edouard Manet's *Woman with a Cat* (circa 1880) and Auguste Renoir's *Woman with Cat* (circa 1875)—where the cat is brought to the centre of each composition—in the present painting, Foujita casts himself as the protagonist with his feline friend in a supporting role, gazing up at his master from behind the artist's shoulder. The self-portraits of Frida Kahlo come to mind as an arguably more apt comparison as she too, includes the image of her pets around the artist's own depiction to contribute to her exploration of the stories of her life, her loves, her joys, and her sorrows.

Though she adored her monkey, Fulang-Chang, for his childlike and playful nature, he also provided Kahlo a source of comfort as she was haunted by her misery of not being able to bear children. Kahlo's *Self-Portrait with Monkey* from 1938 is particularly interesting to consider, as like in Foujita's *Self-Portrait with a Cat*, both artists present themselves with self-assured expressions of slightly pouted lips and eyes that directly meet those of their audiences. However, contrasting Kahlo's self-portrait where her monkey drapes his arm around her neck in a tender and loving display of love, whilst Foujita's cat is immediately endearing with his velvety-fur, the tiny tiger-tooth that peeks out hints at the creature's wilder capabilities.

And yet, as cats are renowned in Japanese folklore as symbols of good luck, believed to bring prosperous fortune to those who own them, Foujita's inclusion of this pointed tooth can perhaps be understood instead as a representation of the animal's protective instincts and devoted loyalty.



Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Monkey*, 1938
Collection Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York
2021 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The present work was created at the end of Foujita's formative first period in Paris, just as he departed the city with his love Madeleine to embark on a journey around Latin America. Showcasing a perfect balance between tradition and modernity, and East and West, *Self-Portrait with a Cat* embodies the style and originality that propelled Foujita to becoming one of the most influential painters of 20th Century art.

Collector's Digest

An eccentric icon of the early 20th Century School of Paris, the Tokyo-born Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita bridges traditions and modernity in his cross-cultural practice, which spans works depicting female nudes and cats with masterful techniques rooted in Japanese art tradition. His recent posthumous retrospectives were held at [Pola Museum of Art](#) in Hakone (17 Apr – 5 Sept 2021), [Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (31 July 31 – 8 October 2018), and Musée Maillol in Paris (7 Mar – 15 July 2018). His work can be found in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., among others.

ⁱ Agnès Poirier, 'Back in favour: Japanese master who outshone Picasso in 1920s Paris', *The Guardian*, 15 April 2018, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita, quoted in Phyllis Brinbaum, *Glory in a Line – A Life of Foujita, The Artist Caught Between East & West*, New York, 2006, p. 113

Provenance

Private Collection, Japan
 Christie's, New York, 20 November 1998, lot 855
 Private Collection, Paris
 Private Collection
 Private Collection, London
 Christie's, Hong Kong, 26 November 2011, lot 1009
 Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

Dinard, Palais des Arts et du Festival, *Foujita, le Maître japonais de Montparnasse*, 27 June - 25 September 2004, pl. 66, pp. 82, 185 (illustrated)
 Paris, Galerie Félix Vercel, *40e anniversaire de la disparition de Léonard Tsuguharu Foujita*, November 2007 - January 2008, pl. 1 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY OF AN IMPORTANT ASIAN COLLECTOR

23 *

Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita

Reclining Nude

signed, inscribed and dated 'Tsuguharu [in Kanji]

Foujita 1931' lower right

oil on canvas

65.5 x 80.7 cm. (25 3/4 x 31 3/4 in.)

Painted in 1931, this work is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by Sylvie Buisson.

Estimate

HK\$12,000,000 — 18,000,000

€1,360,000 — 2,050,000

\$1,540,000 — 2,310,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“There are only very few nudes in Japanese paintings. Even painters like Harunobo or Utamaro let only appear a portion of the knee or the leg, and these were the restricted area where they could represent the skin sensation. This is what encouraged me to paint nudes again after eight years of break with the clear objective of depicting the most beautiful material that can be: human’s skin.” — Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita

Depicting a red-haired beauty posing on tussled bed sheets, Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita’s sensuous *Reclining Nude* delivers charm and romance through delicate use of oil colours, exuding a translucence that gives the image an air of Asian ink painting. An exceptional example of this Japanese-French artist’s female nude paintings, the work portrays the reclining body of one of his most famous lovers, Madeleine Lequeux, whom Foujita fell in love with in Paris in 1930.

An important figure of the School of Paris, Foujita spent most of his life in the French capital, far from his native Tokyo. After arriving in Paris in 1913, Foujita quickly gained fame in the local art scene for his style that hybridises Asian techniques and European genres. In the 1930s, with his new darling, Madeleine, Foujita left Paris to travel around Latin America and revisit Japan. *Reclining Nude* depicts the muse who accompanied Foujita on this global trip, and encapsulates what he values most in his work: beauty and elegance.



Photo of Foujita and Lucie Badoud, model and muse

The Female Form Remastered

Comprising a large portion of his oeuvre, the female nude is a subject Foujita vigorously and actively explored in his East-meets-West practice. Although it is a genre heavily associated with Western iconography, many of Foujita’s nude paintings were styled with calligraphic brushworks and flat perspectives, which suggest a visual language deeply rooted in traditional Asian art, demonstrating the cross-cultural nature of his works.

The present work is immediately reminiscent of the flat visual planes central to early East Asian art, in particular to *ukiyo-e* (literally ‘picture[s] of the floating world’) produced in the artist’s native Japan. Characterised by bold flat lines, *ukiyo-e* woodblock works depicted scenes rendered within a single depth of plane, with forms set against flat spaces. *Shunga* pieces—that is, a form of Japanese erotic art—often produced as a type of *ukiyo-e*, depicted tantalising scenes through the same simple aesthetics. Citing Kitagawa Utamaro (one of the most highly regarded artists in this category) as even being conservative in his depiction of skin, Foujita expanded upon these traditions of *shunga* to create his flirtatious and elegant nudes.

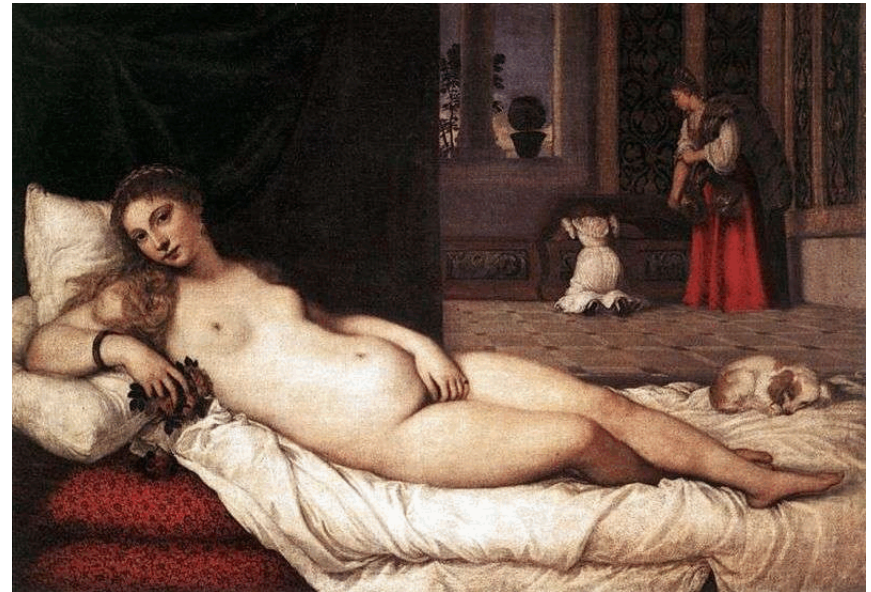


Kitagawa Utamaro, *A Woman and a Cat*, circa 1793-94
Collection of The Metropolitan Museum, New York

In *Reclining Nude*, the lithe body of Madeleine is a combination of both erotica and purity: Her left elbow gently presses against the soft sheets to support her upper body, while her right arm languidly spreads on the pillow, holding a suggestive white handkerchief at her fingertips. She beckons the viewers with an enchanting gaze, yet her body is situated against large areas of milky white, a symbol of purity, to evoke a playful contrast.

With its elaborate arrangement of beddings, reclining body posture and exquisite expressions of beauty, *Reclining Nude* also elicits an interesting comparison to *Venus of Urbino* (1538), a High Renaissance masterpiece by Titian that depicts the naked body of the Roman goddess of love, as

well as *Olympia* (1863), a radical parody of the former by Modernist icon Édouard Manet. Portraying a reclining, naked body against white bed linens, the strikingly similar composition of the two works is deeply rooted in and intertwined with Western iconography. For Foujita, he clearly saw the historical significance of this composition and subject matter, reflected in the appropriated compositional form of *Reclining Nude*. Yet the work also shows a contrasting style associated with Foujita's Japanese cultural heritage, alluding to his possible attempt to delve into Western art traditions and challenge its classical canon.



1) Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, Collection of the Uffizi Gallery, Florence
2) Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863, Collection of the Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Some of Foujita's contemporaries shared his interest in depicting the female form. In particular, Chinese-French painter Sanyu, who was also an active figure in the early 20th Century Paris, produced a number of nude paintings that weaved together European and Asian aesthetics through rendering figures in calligraphic brushworks. Similarly interlacing different cultural elements in their works, Sanyu and Foujita were both propelled by the artistic freedom and unrestricted exploration of the nude genre. While Foujita renders beautiful women in meticulous and descriptive lines and colours, Sanyu experimented with efficient, elliptical, and modulated brushstrokes.



Sanyu, *Four Nudes*, 1950s
Collection of the National Museum of History, Taiwan

Capturing his Muse

The story of Foujita and Madeleine is an adventurous one. After breaking up with his second wife, Lucie “Youki” Badoul in 1931, Foujita took the young beauty as his third muse. A hostess during the day and dancer at night at a local casino, Madeleine charmed the Paris circle of artists with her fiery red hair and clear blue eyes. Foujita’s portraits of Madeleine soon appeared after the artist’s split from Youki, and show a sensuality unprecedented in his previous works.

In 1931, the pair embarked on a two-year journey to Latin America, where they were welcomed with much fanfare. During their sojourn in Brazil in that same year, Foujita held a solo exhibition at the Royal Hotel in Rio de Janeiro. The exhibition was well received by local art critics and collectors alike and went on to be exhibited in São Paulo the following spring. An exceptional example of

Foujita’s oeuvre from this period, *Reclining Nude* is a testament to a particularly fruitful period of his life, with Madeleine as his model.

Rendered to perfection on the canvas, Madeleine’s skin exhibits a sculptural, ivory-like texture achievable only through the employment of various secret techniques, including the signature “Foujita white”: *Grand Fond Blanc* (“Milky White”). The undisclosed ingredients of the pigment have long been speculated, though the brilliance of Foujita’s porcelain figures are unrivalled.

“I decided to bring a life to my works by using paints wildly and apply colours thickly. I didn’t use much colour, mainly black and white. While others used a thick brush, I instead tried to create an oil painting by using a fine writing brush.”
— Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita

The wide range of method and media employed by the artist is key to his inimitable aesthetic. In order to create undulating shadows and halftones within his works, Foujita would use a charcoal powdered cotton ball to pat onto the surface of his paintings. Then, coupled with the seeping of white pigment into the surface of the painting, his subjects would thus be sculpted by softened, hazy outlines. This attention to detail is palpable in the present work: Madeleine’s supple body is lovingly captured, the smoothness of her skin exquisitely replicated. This softness of tone is juxtaposed with Foujita’s razor-sharp brushstrokes steeped in *sumi-e* ink, as a seamless thin line outlines her entire body. Finally, the artist’s *Grand Fond Blanc*: a secret glaze that enshrouds the work and injects a certain air of mystery.

A hint of erotica hovers in the ambiance of the empty background in *Reclining Nude*. Madeleine’s enchanting gaze and pouting lips, complimented by the folds of the bed sheet caused by her languid pose, all suggest lustful longing. The white handkerchief held gently at her fingertips is redolent of the known visual symbol in *shunga* - reflecting Foujita’s intention of referencing past traditions. The over all effect is a stunning work that no doubt captures its viewers’ boundless imaginations.

Collector’s Digest

An eccentric icon of the early 20th century School of Paris, the Tokyo-born Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita bridges traditions and modernity in his cross-cultural practice, which spans works depicting female nudes and cats with masterful techniques rooted in Japanese art tradition. His recent posthumous retrospectives were held at [Pola Museum of Art](#) in Hakone (17 Apr - 5 Sept 2021), [Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (31 July 31 - 8 October 2018), and Musée Maillol in Paris

Léonard-Tsuguharu Foujita

(7 Mar - 15 July 2018). His work can be found in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., among others.

Provenance

Ambassador João Luiz Guimarães Gomes (acquired directly from the artist in 1931)

Collection of Leila Rodrigues Gomes

Private Collection, Latin America (by descent from the above)

Phillips, Hong Kong, 26 November 2017, lot 61

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT PRIVATE ASIAN
COLLECTION

24 *

Sanyu

Paysage Aux Hirondelles

signed 'Yu [in Chinese] SANYU' upper right; further
signed and dated 'SANYU 20.4.1931' on the reverse
oil on canvas

50 x 80.5 cm. (19 5/8 x 31 3/4 in.)

Painted circa 1931.

Estimate

HK\$26,000,000 — 46,000,000

€2,960,000 — 5,240,000

\$3,330,000 — 5,900,000

[Go to Lot](#)

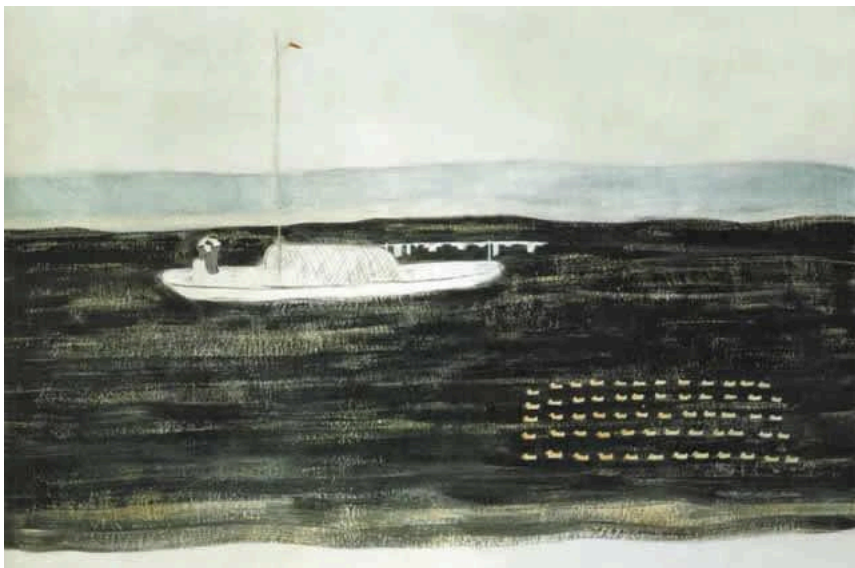


The only 'street scene' of its kind with great significance

Since his arrival to France in 1921, Sanyu spent much of the rest of his life in the area of Montparnasse, Paris. This was an environment which allowed Sanyu to be free and to be part of an open artistic atmosphere. He confronted the modes of Western avant-garde directly, and embraced the spirit of modernist rebellion in the *Atelier de la Grande Chaumière*, rather than become restricted by a rigid academic system of art creation. However, he never departed from his native culture in aesthetics and cultural identity throughout his entire artistic career; rather he steadfastly maintained the independent spirit of Chinese literati. Sanyu absorbed the essence of Western modernist artists, combined with Eastern aesthetics, and thus blended this synergy into his own unique artistic style. We proudly present a rare work by Sanyu, *Paysage Aux Hirondelles*, a representation of Sanyu's combination of a reserved and freehand ink painting expression with a modernist language. Taking the swallow as an oriental image, this is also the only 'street scene' painting in his decades of artistic career. *Paysage Aux Hirondelles* is not only a personal portrayal of Sanyu's oriental sensibilities as he made his debut in Paris in the 1930s, but also a rare art piece since his subsequent works never again depict scenes from actual locations. *Paysage Aux Hirondelles* is thus one of Sanyu's most distinctive landscapes, reflecting the artist's worldview and approach to life, both vast and subtle.



Street scene of Shanghai in the 1920s



Sanyu, *Ducks and Boat*, 1930

Lively spirit and charm shown through the contrast of black and white

Paysage Aux Hirondelles is simple in composition and colour, imbued with a modernist flourish characterised by Western painting modes. The treatment of spatial structure and the representation of virtual and reality draws from the unique sense of Eastern principles of *yin* and *yang*. His spatial division is a slight departure from modern Western forms of composition: in his paintings, whether of nude women or animals, the horizontal lines are far below the normal height of eyesight, dividing the background into two distinct planes, which not only incorporates the compositional principles of Western modern art, but also echoes the “Pingyuan method” (*depicting mountains from near to far*) and “Gaoyuan method” (*depicting mountains from bottom to top*) of Chinese landscapes. In this work, Sanyu uses the traditional Chinese painting concept of ‘five shades of ink’ to create a background of varying shades of ink colours, creating a deep but floating spatial effect. The dreamy pastel colour which was ‘like being emerged in a light pink dream’. The work uses his trademark iconic pink of the Pink Period in the 1920s and 1930s to depict the buildings in the street scene, injecting a touch of sweetness and romance that is uniquely Paris. The thin and long cable lines follow the composition of the building, dispersing in both directions, while the view goes over the top floor of the building, projecting to the black background in the distance, highlighting the correspondence and contrast between the front and back of the scene through the simple composition. In the tranquil and open atmosphere, the

swallows are densely scattered on wires in two directions. Sanyu’s depiction of each swallow is almost purely abstract, using his unique calligraphic lines and mastery ink and brush skills to incorporate the objects in the viewers’ minds without deliberate elaboration, and to express the spirit of painting with simple strokes and pure colours.

Sanyu exquisitely extracted the lively and herd characteristics of the swallows, recalling the Golden Age of the Montparnasse district where he resided at that time, where many masters were born. With sky and sea as the void and the swallow and buildings as the objects, sparse and dense composition is created in the painting. The effect demonstrates the artist’s understanding and practice of traditional Chinese painting, in which reality and emptiness are mutually existent and complement each other. While real objects, scenes and details are outlined, the ‘blank space’ can still form an artistic conception, leaving room for imagination. It also reflects Sanyu’s ability to appreciate his environs, and his outstanding artistic conception to create an ethereal atmosphere. There is a mystical ambiguity to his works, as we are unsure of the extent of verisimilitude, or if they are entirely imagined. Ultimately, it’s for the viewer to interpret.



Sanyu, *Pink Nude on Floral Sheet*, 1930 Poly Auction Hong Kong, 3 October 2016, Sold for HK\$ 59,000,000

Rich in meaning and connected to his native culture

Paysage Aux Hirondelles is not only a reflection of Sanyu’s thoughts on the simplification of Western modernism, but also a subtle echo and a return to his own culture by placing a skillful and

full-bodied oriental sentiment in the painting. This work is a true reflection of the artist's state of mind: the overlapping layers of electric wires do not resemble Paris' city landscape, but rather, the appropriation of the poles probably originated from grafting memories from Sanyu's teenage years as a student in Shanghai. The result is an emotional expression, a 'spiritual return to one's homeland', in which the swallow is the only imagery that carries the artist's profound emotions from his life to a foreign land. Notably, swallows are migratory birds and build their homes under the eaves of someone's home. They leave when autumn arrives and return when spring comes, without forgetting their old nests. This has left abundant room for imagination for the Chinese literati from past to present, evoking the image of yearning for home. As Wang Yan of the Southern Song Dynasty wrote in his *Dian Jiang Chun*: 'On a rainy east wind day, on which swallows are passing through the house. In the evening of a lonely village. Spring is gone and flowers are beginning to wither. Wandering everywhere, the thought of going home lingers in my mind.' As a swallow flies back from the north during the celebration of *Tu Di Shen* (the God of Land) in spring, the swallow is also often used as a symbol of the return of spring in traditional Chinese culture. As stated in the *Yan Shu Po Zhen Zi*: 'The swallows come just in time for the festival to celebrate Tudishen's birth.' Moreover, the swallow is often regarded as a long-lived and auspicious bird. In Chinese, the pronunciation of 'swallow' is the same as in 'banquet', and 'banquet' in ancient Chinese language translated to peace and joy. Therefore, people often associate swallows with joy and peace. In the 1930s, Sanyu frequently participated in autumn salons, independent salons, and the prestigious Salon des Tuileries. This work was created when he was at the pinnacle of his artistic creation and personal prestige. *Paysage Aux Hirondelles* is not only an expression of Sanyu's multiple interpretations of the cultures of his homeland and foreign land, but also relates to the artist's real life, and conveys his deep connection to 'image abstracting from observation' to 'experiencing the image in one's mind'. The work is also a visionary fusion of Eastern and Western aesthetic lexicon, moving freely between the two with ease. Filled with intense meaning and connotations, this painting reaches ultimate eternity.



Mao Yi, *Swallows and Willow Tree*, Southern Song Collection of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington

A bold, pure and highly expansive visual experience

Sanyu's fusion of Eastern and Western art creations has not only enriched Eastern culture but has also nourished Western culture. It is difficult to categorise his paintings into a particular genre since most of his works have an artistic language of its own. Even Matisse--an artist to whom Sanyu is often compared--used spirited lines and flamboyant colours in a manner different in logic to Sanyu's paintings. Sanyu's work is based on the aesthetics of ink and brush painting, combining calligraphic concepts where one treats blank space as black. In his methods, shades of ink used in

traditional painting are fused with the simplicity of the medium of Western oil painting and the stylistic simplicity borrowed from Picasso's paintings. One can conclude after a review of his works throughout his art career that *Paysage Aux Hirondelles* is different from the sweet colours of the floral still lifes of the 1930s, or the bold and spirited lines used in the nude paintings of the 1940s, or the solitary emotions expressed in the late paintings of animals. This work uniquely focuses on Sanyu's echo of traditional paintings' philosophy, displaying the notion that 'the artist is not bound by conventional methods but works in accordance with the rules of art in every way'. This is shown not only in the subtlety of the work's visual composition, but also in the distillation and grafting of the life scenes he used to live in the painting. As advocated in traditional Chinese paintings, where 'the four seasons are blended in one', Sanyu makes a more pioneering and modern expression of the traditional Chinese literati language by breaking the limits of time and space. This masterful spatial arrangement deepens the sensual meaning of the objects and provides the viewer with a wider scope for imagination, allowing them to wander between poetic and pictorial enjoyment, between reality and dream. *Paysage Aux Hirondelles* is not only the unique street scene in Sanyu's art creations, but it also broadens the visual experience of both Eastern and Western painting with its sensual, symbolic style, thus giving this work groundbreaking historical significance.



Dong Yuan, *Summer Mountains* (detail), Five dynasties Collection of the Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, China



Paul Cézanne, *The Gulf of Marseilles Seen from L'Estaque*, circa 1885 Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, USA



Willem de Kooning, *Untitled XVI*, 1976 Phillips New York, 16 May 2019, Sold for US\$ 10,268,000

Provenance

Collection of Mr. Henri-Pierre Roché, Paris
 Collection of Mr. Jean-Claude Riedel, Paris
 Jia Art Gallery, Taipei
 Private Collection, Asia
 Christie's, Hong Kong, 27 May 2017, lot 45
 Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

Taipei, Tamsui Center of Arts and Culture, *Sanyu*, 18 August - 4 September 1994, p. 36 (illustrated)
 Taipei, Jia Art Gallery, *Sanyu*, 12 August - 3 September 1995
 Taipei, National Museum of History, *The Exhibition of Sanyu*, 14 October - 26 November 1995, pl. 26, p. 36 (illustrated)

Literature

Jinxu Publishing Ltd., ed., *Masters of Chinese Painting: Sanyu*, Taipei, 1992, p. 7 (illustrated)
 Jia Gallery, ed., *Home Collection*, Taipei, 1992 (illustrated)
 Artist Publishing Co., ed., *Overseas Chinese Fine Arts Series I - Sanyu*, Taipei, 1995, pl. 62, p. 119 (illustrated)
 Rita Wong, ed., *Sanyu Catalogue Raisonné: Oil Paintings*, Taipei, 2001, pl. 256, p. 383 (illustrated)
 Rita Wong, ed., *Sanyu Catalogue Raisonné Oil Paintings: Volume Two*, Taipei, 2011, pl. 256, p. 145 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY OF AN EMINENT PRIVATE ASIAN COLLECTOR

25

Zao Wou-Ki

Sans titre ("Notre Dame")

signed 'Wou-Ki [in Chinese] ZAO' lower right; further signed and dedicated 'Pour Paul Leaf Très amicalement Wou-Ki [in Chinese] ZAO ZAO WOU-ki' on the reverse

oil on canvas

37 x 43 cm. (14 5/8 x 16 7/8 in.)

Painted circa 1952, this work is registered in the archives of the Fondation Zao Wou-Ki under archive number P-0305, and will be accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by the Fondation Zao Wou-Ki.

Estimate

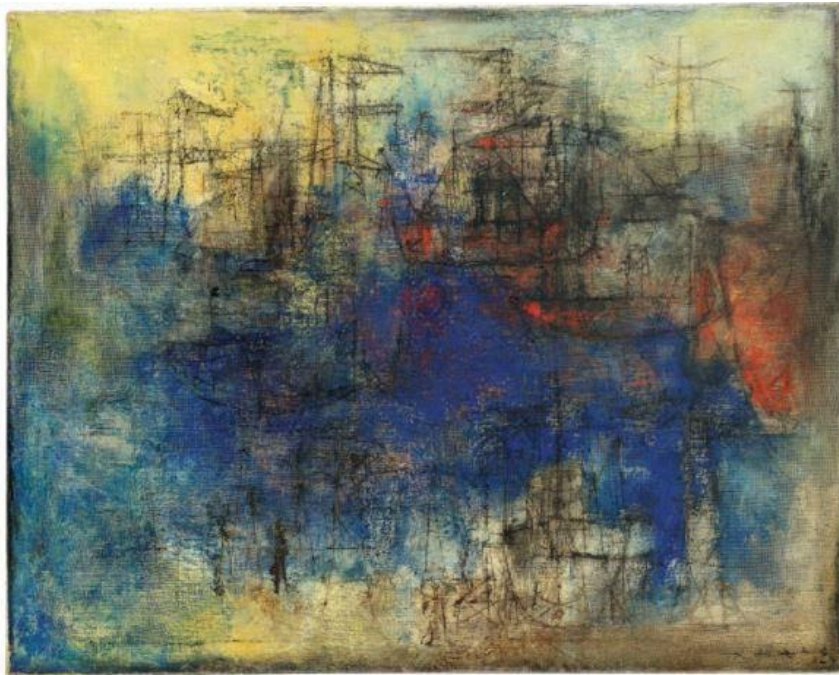
HK\$7,500,000 — 10,000,000

€858,000 — 1,140,000

\$962,000 — 1,280,000

[Go to Lot](#)

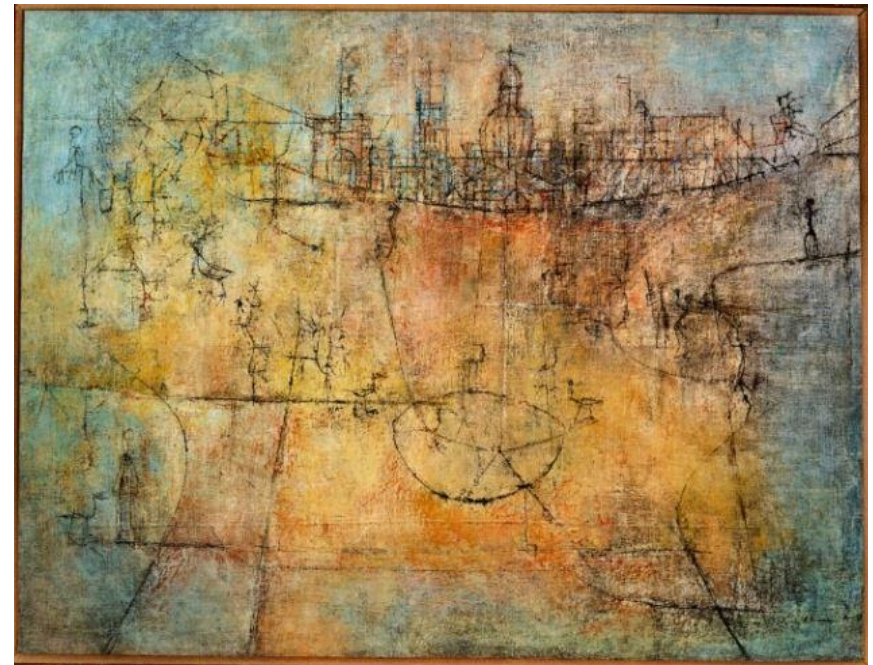




Zao Wou-Ki, *Port* - 29.04.52 Christie's Hong Kong, 24 May 2021 Sold for HK\$30,010,000

A great artist will inevitably undergo multiple stages on their journey. *Sans titre* ("Notre Dame") created by Zao Wou-Ki in the 1950s is an iconic work marking his path towards abstraction.

In 1948, Zao Wou-Ki and his first wife Xie Jinglan (Lalan) moved to Paris together. When Zao Wou-Ki first arrived in Paris, he absorbed elements of Western art like a sponge. Prior to this, he was only able to view Western paintings at the Hangzhou National College of Art. In Paris, these original works unfolded before his eyes, and he immersed himself in exhibits at major art museums. We can see from his works from 1948 to 1950 he attempts to explore a new direction and gradually began to disconnect from figurative paintings. However, some details still bear the shadow of his mentor Lin Fengmian, the principal of Hangzhou National College of Art.



Zao Wou-Ki, *Untitled (Golden City)*, 1951 Sotheby's Hong Kong, 18 April 2021, Sold for HK\$74,453,000

Judging by its style, *Sans titre* ("Notre Dame") was created by Zao Wou-Ki in the early 1950s, with the Fondation Zao Wou-Ki having estimated the year of creation to be circa 1952. When he first arrived in Paris, Zao Wou-Ki enrolled in a sketching course at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, where he became friends with Sam Francis and Hans Hartung, as well as neighbours with Alberto Giacometti. Together, they all went on to become masters of modern art.



Chu The-Chun, *Rouge lourd et vert leger*, 1959 Sotheby's Hong Kong, 31 March 2018, Sold for HK\$61,554,500

In 1951, Zao Wou-Ki went to Switzerland to showcase his first exhibition of lithographs. In Switzerland, he viewed the works of Paul Klee which opened a new window for a breakthrough. Klee's works utilised a geometric structure to present a poetic aesthetic between the concrete and abstract, providing Zao Wou-Ki with answers to a new direction and language for his paintings at that stage. Zao deconstructed the external scene in his own mind, dissecting the forms to explore a unique type of deconstruction that uniquely belonged to him. Thus, the church building and visitors of the Notre Dame de Paris are transformed into simple lines. The slender figures at the bottom right of the canvas look up at the church, derived from the figures of Giacometti. It can be seen that the artist was deconstructing the concrete and moving towards abstraction.



Zao Wou-Ki, *12.04.60*, 1960 Poly Auction Hong Kong, 21 April 2021, Sold for HK\$60,000,000

In Zao Wou-Ki's creative journey, *Sans titre* ("Notre Dame") serves as one of the few works with symbolised figurative architecture. It marks Zao's exploration of abstraction from symbolic imagery painting to expressional abstract painting. As the most representative historical building and Catholic church in Paris, Notre Dame de Paris tends to be filled with tourists. This magnificent and complex Gothic architecture, recreated here with the artist's use of engraving brushwork, is transformed and reproduced in the mind of the artist. Klee's influence is evident in the transformed architectural lines, thus making this a representative work from the artist's Klee period.



Gerhard Richter, *Kerzenschein (Candle-light)*, 1984 Lot 16 - Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction Evening Sale, 30 November 2021 Estimate HK\$55,000,000 - 75,000,000 / US\$7,050,000-9,620,000

The two hues of bright red and violet-blue in the painting shows Zao Wou-Ki's ingenious use of multi-layered colours, creating a sense of space in the Notre Dame de Paris. In 1949, Zao Wou-Ki tried lithographs for the first time. He added a lot of water to present lithographs through the traditional methods of Chinese ink painting. In the painting of *Sans titre ("Notre Dame")*, it is as if the rising sun is reflected within the red colour blocks. The multi-layered colour effect is like the smudging and spreading of ink on rice paper, forming different densities and tints. The thin and light effects of the artist's paintings started from his creation of lithographs. It can be seen from

this work that Zao who is a master of Eastern art strived to absorb Western artistic thought: it is he who eventually blends and integrates into a generation of masters towards the end of his artistic journey.



Mark Rothko, *Red*, 1968 Collection of the Guggenheim Museum, New York



Li Keran, *Wan Sha Hong Bian*, 1963 Collection of the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, China

Literature

Françoise Marquet and Yann Hendgen, ed., *Zao Wou-Ki: Catalogue Raisonné des Peintures, Volume I 1935-1958*, Paris, 2019, no. P-0305, pp. 153, 299 (illustrated)

Provenance

Private Collection, USA

Private Collection, New York

Private Collection, California

Christie's, Hong Kong, 28 November 2010, lot 1070

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT BRITISH
COLLECTION

26

Zao Wou-Ki

Brume d'automne

signed and dated 'Wou-Ki [in Chinese] ZAO 1949/9'
lower right; further signed, titled, inscribed and dated
'No. 7 ZAO WOU-KI 51 Bis, RUE DU MOuLIN vert 14e
""BRUME d'AUTOMNE""' on the reverse
oil on masonite

64.5 x 53.8 cm. (25 3/8 x 21 1/8 in.)

Painted in 1949, this work is registered in the archives
of the Fondation Zao Wou-Ki under archive number
P-0083, and will be accompanied by a certificate of
authenticity issued by the Fondation Zao Wou-Ki.

Estimate

HK\$4,500,000 — 7,500,000

€514,000 — 857,000

\$577,000 — 962,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

Brume d'automne from 1949 provides valuable insight into Zao Wou-Ki's development at the end of the forties, and showcases an emerging style in its earliest iteration, where one detects a melding of Chinese ink traditions and European avant-garde: the former he received in-depth training in since at a tender age; the latter he encountered when he first arrived in Paris one year before the present work was executed.

Though the subject matter portrayed in *Brume d'automne* is not unique (for landscape is a mode long established in both Chinese and European art history), Zao's rendering and method of execution are innovative. In the present piece, we see a pared down landscape reproduced in earthly tones of greens and browns; fractal patterns of trees line the background as a trio of horses in the foreground whiny and gallop next to the outlines of a house or a well, surrounded loosely by white picket fences as a cluster of birds fly overhead. The painting epitomises pastoral bliss, and yet this effect has been realised through gentle allusions to forms, achieved through deft use of lines and colour. Even the idyllic nature of the scene and particularly the titular Autumn mist is hinted at using a formless coloured haze that has descended onto the work.



Paul Klee, *Glance of a Landscape*, 1929 Collection of Philadelphia Museum of Art

One can detect a hint of Paul Klee's landscapes in this work, and in its skeletal evocation of forms, it is clear that Zao was under the influence of the Swiss master's interpretation of the world. The work is also reminiscent of another French-Chinese émigré artist and Zao's contemporary, Sanyu, whose boldly executed scenes of bucolic bliss, sensual nudes, or vivid still-life paintings represented the height of avant-garde at the time. Both artists alluded to Chinese landscapes and painterly methods while undeniably departing from its traditions: Zao famously remarked that it was only upon his arrival in France that he rediscovers his Chinese roots, and with the gift of distance was able to capture important stylistic aesthetics.



Sanyu, *Galloping Horses*, 2017 Collection of the National Museum of History, Taiwan

"Wou-ki rediscovers that reduction, so clear in Chinese painting, of the narrative aspect of landscape which is generally present to act as a springboard into the infinity of the world." — Pierre Daix

Brume d'automne also coincides with a rare and short period of early watercolour painting and subsequent dry-point etching and lithography that the artist creates soon after he arrives in Paris. One of the most significant bodies of works he produces in this style is a collection to accompany his friend and poet Henri Michaux's poetry, *Lecture par Henri Michaux de huit lithographies de Zao*

Wou-Ki (A Reading by Henri Michaux of eight lithographs by Zao Wou-Ki, 1950). One can detect the overlaps of this style and period within *Brume d'Automne*: its subject matter notwithstanding, the almost-hieroglyphic, simplified forms fill the dry-point pieces at this time as Zao sought to capture the scenes described in Michaux's texts.



Lecture II, 1949 Lithography in three colours © 2021, ProLitteris, Zurich

“What milk surrounds the dead star, what whiteness spreads in the sky! At the bottom the meeting took place The arms made to take each other are caught ... Space is silence ... This silence is black In essence There is nothing left..” — Excerpt from Henri Michaux's Lecture

A Limitless Legacy

The formidable oeuvre of Zao Wou-Ki ('Boundless') rings true to his namesake: Zao was an artist whose inexorable fervour for creation was truly limitless, and in his lifetime he produced a body of works that encompassed such media as canvas, works on paper, scrolls, ceramics, amongst others. The artist seamlessly weaved together the divergent cultural strands that made up his being, effortlessly marrying Eastern philosophy with an otherwise Western medium, to create an inimitable legacy of works housed in the most prestigious institutions across the world. Born the son of a successful banker in Beijing, Zao settled in Paris in April 1948 after a 36 day voyage by boat in hopes of honing his artistic capabilities. This supposed short sojourn became a permanent residency in France, where Zao plunged himself into the epicentre of the Parisian art scene. Like many of his artistic peers who identified with multiple cultures, in many ways his works perched on a threshold: inhabiting the liminal space or 'in-betweenness' of both his Chinese heritage as well as the post-war school of painting in Paris.

Provenance

Galerie Charpentier, Paris
Private Collection, United Kingdom
Private Collection, United Kingdom (acquired in 2018)

Exhibited

Paris, Salon des Tuileries, 1949

Literature

Françoise Marquet and Yann Hendgen, ed., *Zao Wou-Ki: Catalogue Raisonné des Peintures, Volume I 1935-1958*, Paris, 2019, no. P-0083, pp. 78, 274 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A DISTINGUISHED PRIVATE
COLLECTION

27 ♦♦

Auguste Rodin

Le Baiser, 1ère réduction dite aussi "réduction n°1"

incised with the artist's signature 'Rodin' centre right
and foundry mark 'F. Barbedienne, Fondateur' on left
lower edge; further incised and numbered 'VL 82' on
the underside

bronze with brown/green patina

71.4 x 43.6 x 45.8 cm. (28 1/8 x 17 1/8 x 18 in.)

Conceived in 1886 in a larger scale, this scale was
conceived in 1898 and the present lifetime example
was cast in bronze by F. Barbedienne Fondateur in May
1914. This work will be included in the forthcoming
Auguste Rodin catalogue critique de l'oeuvre sculpté
currently being prepared by the Comité Auguste Rodin
at Galerie Brame et Lorenceau under the direction of
Jérôme Le Blay under the archive no. 2016-5059B.

Estimate

HK\$10,000,000 — 15,000,000

€1,140,000 — 1,710,000

\$1,280,000 — 1,920,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

Born only two days apart in 1840, Claude Monet and Auguste Rodin were more than close contemporaries, going on to become two of the most significant artists working in their respective disciplines during this important period. As well as showing together at several group exhibitions, including their notable joint retrospective in 1889 during the Exposition Universelle, they also greatly admired and even collected one another's work. Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction is honoured to present two works by these great Modern masters thus reuniting the artists again and for the first time in Asia.

*"For our delight we read of Lancelot, How him love thrall'd. Alone we were, and no
Suspicion near us then he, who ne'er From me shall separate, at once my lips
All trembling kiss'd." — Dante Alighieri, The Inferno, Canto V*

At once tender and erotic, Auguste Rodin's *Le Baiser* remains one of the most iconic and timeless depictions of sensual desire in the history of Western art. What art critic Alastair Sooke has described as a 'universal representation of sexual infatuation' was in fact so intimately observed and immediately recognised that it scandalised the British public on its unveiling there in 1914 to such a degree that it was apparently covered with a tarpaulin and hidden in a stable block.ⁱ

A vivid depiction of forbidden passion, *Le Baiser* and the earlier *L'Eternel Printemps* on which it is closely modelled tells the story of doomed lovers Paolo and Francesca, cast into the second circle of hell in Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* after their adulterous liaison was discovered by Paolo's older brother, Francesca's husband. Flying into a rage at their betrayal, he killed them both. As the 13th century source narrative explained, the two were overcome by passion upon reading Arthurian tales of courtly love, the tragic story of Guinevere and Lancelot igniting their own passion and alluded to here with the subtle inclusion of the forgotten book in Paolo's hand. The only outward sign disclosing their identity, the trysting couple are otherwise elevated to a universal expression of passionate desire, a fact emphasised by early critics who suggested that 'this adorable group of lovers [...] should simply have been called *The Kiss*, or nothing at all.'ⁱⁱ

Rodin, Dante, and *La Porte de L'Enfer*



Auguste Rodin, *La Porte de l'Enfer*, c. 1890, Musée Rodin, Paris

"For a whole year I lived with Dante, with him alone, drawing the eight circles of his inferno." — Auguste Rodin

Standing at over six meters tall and occupying the sculptor for more than thirty years, Rodin's masterpiece *La Porte de l'Enfer* occupies a definitive position in his oeuvre. A hugely important commission from the French government who first approached the sculptor in 1880, the monumental bronze was originally conceived as the entrance to a proposed Decorative Arts Museum and gave rise to some of Rodin's most recognisable, experimental, and historically significant works including *Le Penseur* and *Les Trois Ombres*.

Originally intended to occupy a prominent position on the left-hand side of *La Porte de l'Enfer* Rodin ultimately decided that the *Le Baiser's* elevation of love and desire was too uplifting for the more desperately tragic overtones of the larger composition, replacing the lovers with a couple 'clinging onto one another, like children terrified by their inexorable destiny.'ⁱⁱⁱ In a commercially savvy move, he instead exhibited it at the Galerie Georges Petit and the *Exposition Générale des Beux Arts* in Brussels, where its narrative associations to tragic love and the conventions of courtly romance captured visitor's imaginations, and it swiftly became one of the artist's most widely referenced works.

Well-known to European audiences, the story of Francesca and Paolo's forbidden love embodied the codes courtly love that were going through something of a renaissance in the 19th century, inspiring numerous theatrical and operatic adaptations. The tragic drama of the story of these ill-fated lovers and of Dante's vivid description of the second circle of hell as an eternal whirlwind that reflected the lustful passions of its inhabitants also appealed to artists during the early decades of the 19th century, with Henry Fuseli, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres all creating depictions of the scene.



Left: Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta*, 1819 Musée des Beaux-Arts, Angers Right: *Le Baiser* by Rodin in the Dépôt des marbres studio, c. 1898 Photograph by Eugène Druet

A Matter of Technique

“Any artist worthy of the name should express all the truth of nature, not only the exterior truth, but also, and above all, the inner truth.” — Auguste Rodin

As the recent exhibition *The Making of Rodin* at the Tate Modern in London has emphasised, Rodin's sculptural process continues to be a matter of critical fascination. Focusing on his work in plaster, the exhibition drew out key sculptural principles that operated at the heart of Rodin's practice, including issues of enlargement and repetition which are particularly important to discussions of *Le Baiser*. After the positive reception to *Le Baiser* in Paris and Brussels, Rodin conformed that the composition ultimately worked better in the round, and in 1888 the Ministry of Arts commissioned him to produce two larger-than-life marble versions of the work. Although not exhibited until 1898, it caused an immediate sensation, and went on to be shown at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900.

Alongside the three large marble sculptures, one of which still resides at the Musée Rodin in Paris, the success of *Le Baiser* ensured its reproduction in the form of bronze reductions. Undertaken by

the Leblanc-Barbedienne foundry, the present work is a lifetime 1914 cast of one of only two 1898 reductions. Several of these Barbedienne casts are now in public collections, including the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, the Library of Congress in Washington DC and the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. Retaining its emotive power and evocative sensuality, the supple contortion of the bodies and the electricity created with the touch of Paolo's hand on Francesca's thigh, *Le Baiser* is a supreme expression of Rodin's pursuit of a sculpture that 'embodies a process of thought, implicating the perceiver, creating bodies that seem to live, breathe, and that are capable of touch.'^{iv}



Auguste Rodin in his workshop in Meudon, circa 1910

Collector's Digest

Rodin's sculptures rank amongst Renaissance masters Michelangelo and Donatello as some of the most iconic and instantly recognisable sculptural depictions of the human form in Western art. Of these timeless works, *Le Baiser* in particular remains a universally recognised symbol of love and

desire.

Widely reproduced, it has also appeared prominently in various Rodin retrospectives over the years. With one version appearing at the entrance to the sensational Tate Modern exhibition 'The Making of Rodin', *Le Baiser* also appears side by side with the 1969 Picasso work of the same title on the cover of the catalogue for the *Picasso - Rodin* exhibition, currently on view concurrently at the Musée Rodin and the Musée national Picasso - Paris.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cey7FAxXhWg&feature=emb_imp_woyt

Jane Burton discusses the fascinating history of *Le Baiser* for TateShots

ⁱ Alastair Sooke, 'The Shocking Story of the Kiss', *BBC Culture*, 19 November 2015, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Lucien Solvay, 'Le Salon', in *La Nation*, no. 270, September 1887

ⁱⁱⁱ Antoinette le Normand-Romain, *The Bronzes of Rodin: Catalogue of Works in the Musée Rodin*, vol. I, Paris, 2007, p. 162

^{iv} Lisa Le Feuvre, 'Hands Touching', in *The Making of Rodin* (exh. cat.), Tate Modern, London, 2021, p. 69

Provenance

Collection of the President of the National Libraries of France (gifted by the National Libraries of France on 26 May 1914)

Private Collection (by descent from the above)

Sotheby's, London, 1 March 2017, lot 32

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Literature

- Rainer Maria Rilke, *Auguste Rodin*, London, 1917, pl. 6 (another bronze example illustrated)
- Georges Grappe, *Catalogue du Musée Rodin*, Paris, 1929, no. 114, p. 57 (marble example illustrated)
- Georges Grappe, *Catalogue du Musée Rodin*, Paris, 1944, no. 71 (marble example illustrated)
- Georges Grappe, *Le Musée Rodin*, Paris, 1947, pl. 71 (marble example illustrated)
- Cécile Goldscheider, *Rodin*, Paris, 1962, p. 49 (marble example illustrated)
- Bernard Champigneulle, *Rodin*, London, 1967, nos. 78-79, pp. 162-163 (marble example illustrated)
- Robert Descharnes & Jean-François Chabrun, *Auguste Rodin*, Lausanne, 1967, p. 131 (marble example illustrated)
- Ionel Jianou and Cécile Goldscheider, *Rodin*, Paris, 1967, edition pls. 54-55, p. 100 (marble example illustrated)
- Ludwig Goldscheider, *Rodin Sculptures*, London, 1970, no. 49, p. 121 (marble example illustrated)
- John L. Tancock, *The Sculpture of Auguste Rodin*, Philadelphia, 1976, p.77 (marble example illustrated)
- Albert E. Elsen, *In Rodin's Studio: A Photographic Record of Sculpture in the Making*, Oxford, 1980, pls. 108-109, dust jacket (marble example illustrated)
- Hélène Pinet, *Rodin, sculpteur et les photographes de son temps*, Paris, 1985, no. 34, p. 46 (marble example illustrated)
- Nicole Barbier, *Marbres de Rodin: Collection de Musée Rodin*, Paris, 1987, no. 79, p. 185 (marble example illustrated)
- Pierre Kjellberg, *Les bronzes du XIXe siècle*, Paris, 1987, p. 585 (another bronze example illustrated)
- David Finn & Marie Busco, *Rodin and his Contemporaries: The Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Collection*, New York, 1991, pp. 60-61 (another bronze example illustrated)
- Albert E. Elsen, *Rodin's Art, The Rodin Collection of the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Centre for the Visual Arts at Stanford University*, New York, 2003, no. 49, pp. 214-215 (another bronze example illustrated)
- Antoinette Le Normand-Romain, *The Bronzes of Rodin, Catalogue of Works in the Musée Rodin vol. I*, Paris, 2007, p. 160 (another bronze example illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT BELGIAN
COLLECTION

28 *

Zao Wou-Ki

20.3.64.

signed 'Wou-Ki [in Chinese] ZAO' lower right; further
signed, titled and dated 'ZAO WOU-KI "20.3.64."' on
the reverse

oil on canvas

88.8 x 115.8 cm. (34 7/8 x 45 5/8 in.)

Painted in 1964, this work will be referenced in the
archive of the Fondation Zao Wou-Ki and will be
included in the artist's forthcoming catalogue raisonné
prepared by Françoise Marquet and Yann Hendgen.
(Information provided by Fondation Zao Wou-Ki.)

Estimate

HK\$20,000,000 — 30,000,000

€2,290,000 — 3,430,000

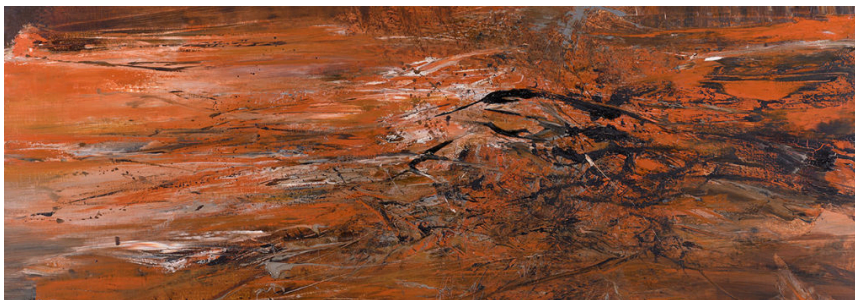
\$2,560,000 — 3,850,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"I want to depict movement, whether lingering in one place or flying fast as lightning. The multiple resonances of contrasting and identical colours make the canvas vibrate, allowing me to find a central, glowing point. My brush moves freely, and sometimes I use a palette knife to press the paint onto the canvas, as if I wanted the paint to penetrate the space." — Zao Wou-Ki

Zao Wou-Ki is one of the most renowned Chinese modern artists in the world—enriched by his artistic encounters in both the East and West, he truly came to be celebrated as the embodiment of his name: 'Wou-Ki'—the artist with 'no limits'. Painted in 1964, the same year as 3 of Zao's top 10 auction results, the present work stems from a highly sought-after decade of Zao's practice known as his 'Hurricane Period' (1959-1972), the name referencing the flowing, central-axis aesthetic that characterised his works of this time. Widely considered as the apex of his career, Zao's style reached a new level of unrestrained, technical maturity as he masterfully harmonised the virtues of Western painting with the essence of traditional Chinese ink landscapes from the Song and Yuan Dynasties. As he would later say of this period, 'I spent ten years at full speed, like driving a fast car.'

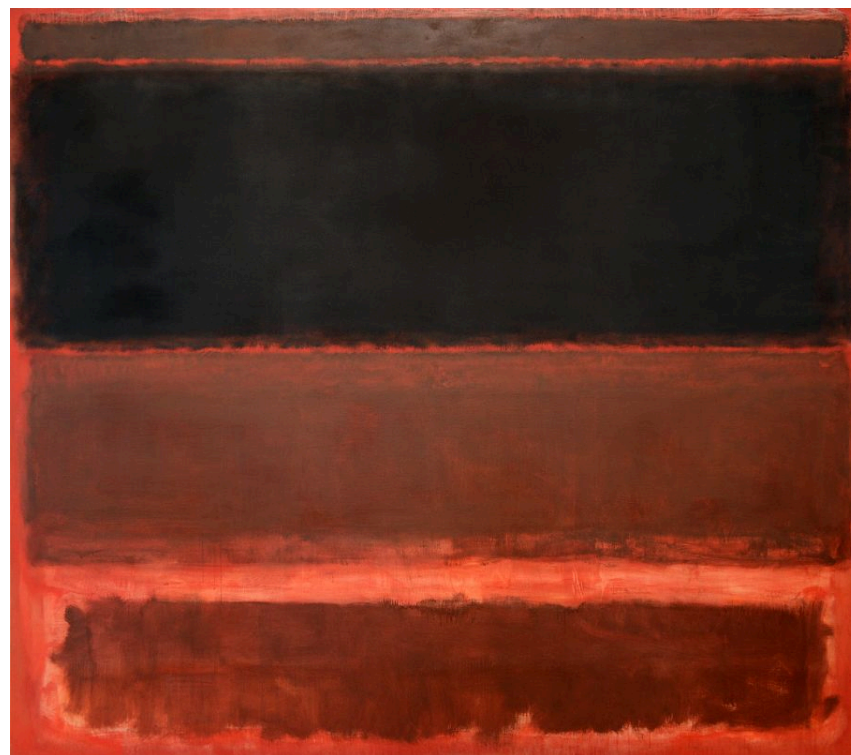


Detail of the present work

Recognised as a landmark year in his legendary oeuvre, it was in 1964 that Zao finally obtained French nationality on the request of the Minister of Culture André Malraux himself. Having made the move from China to Paris almost twenty years prior, this was a sincere conveyance of respect from his adopted country. Over the course of the decade to follow, his French gallerist Myriam Prévot, at Galerie de France, helped to show his work in key venues throughout the world, widely expanding his recognition. Among them was a major retrospective which took place the year following the present work's execution at the Museum Folkwang in Essen—the same year as Zao's final exhibition hosted by the prolific Kootz Gallery in New York before it closed.

An Extraordinary Power of Expression

Epitomising Zao's practice as he came to the full realisation of his artistic vision during the heights of his career, *20.3.64* is a masterpiece of technique, stunningly exemplifying Zao's inimitable draw which has captivated audiences for decades. Distinguished by its abundance of vermilion red which explodes across the canvas surface, intermixing with swathes of calligraphic, inky black from which bursts of radiant white, silvery light diffuses outwards in feathery strokes, the work is at once triumphant and imposing in its execution, evoking the power of elemental vigour and atmospheric charge.



Mark Rothko, *Four Darks in Red*, 1958

Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
© 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

As Zao proclaimed, 'Red is not as easy to master as it seems. If it is not handled well, the painting will come across rather boorish, like someone painting their front door.'¹ Tapping into the colour's rich, historical symbolic significance which resonates across all cultures—luck in China; strength in Japan; purity in India; fury, yet also passion and love in Western countries—Zao communicates a visual authority felt by all. Differing to the works of Clyfford Still or Mark Rothko whose treatment of red focused on its intense emotion across a painted surface, Zao instead conveys a dramatic sense of spatial depth. Bringing to mind constellations of stirring gravity, the spontaneous energy from Zao's hand holding his brush flows to the work in rich layers, as the vibrant amber-red tones dance around those rendered in dark ochre and black, imbuing *20.3.64.* with yin-yang harmony in accordance with the Chinese philosophy of the five elements, portraying the infinities of our cosmos with a sensibility of rhythm and colour.



Clyfford Still, *PH-1034*, 1973

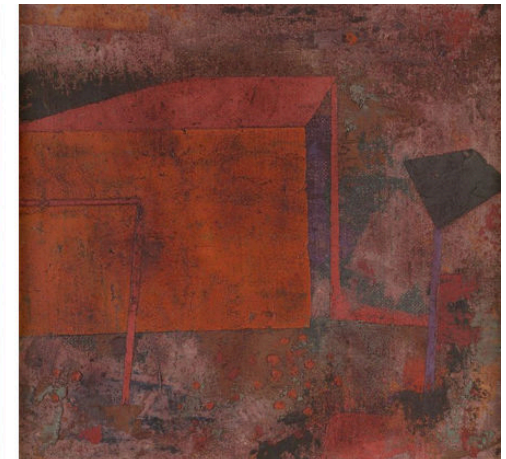
Collection of the Clyfford Still Museum, Denver

© City and County of Denver / ARS, NY

"I want to make the canvas come alive through contrast and the action of multiple layers of similar colours. I want to find a centre for the radiation of light." — Zao Wou-Ki

A Perfect Bridge between East and West

Whilst the present work evokes an outward burst of energy with a gravitational pull that seems almost to draw the viewer into its very core, it simultaneously implodes as much as it explodes, into the intimate, inner world of the artist. Born in Beijing in 1921 and trained at the National School of Arts in Hangzhou under the tutelage of the pioneering modern Chinese painter Lin Fengmian, in the late 1940s Zao decided to move to Paris to further his artistic studies, arriving with his first wife, Lalan, in 1948. Originally planning to stay for only 2 years, the pair took up a quaint studio in the creative, bohemian district of Montparnasse, and soon became friends with artists including Pierre Soulages, Hans Hartung, Joan Mitchell, and Sam Francis.



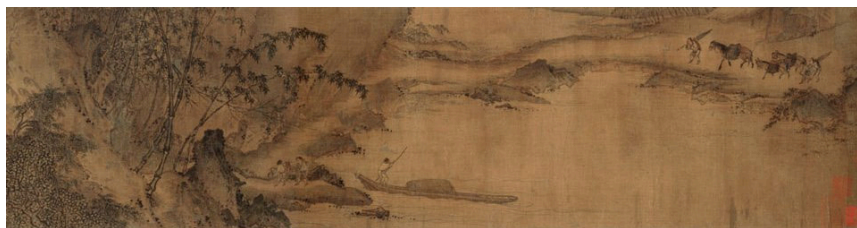
Left: Rembrandt, *Saskia van Uylenburgh in Profile, in Pompous Dress*, circa 1642

Collection of The Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Kassel

Right: Paul Klee, *Gradation, Rotes Haus*, 1929

Collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

Across various trips to galleries and museums, Zao broadened his understanding of Western art, becoming acquainted with works by Paul Cézanne, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Rembrandt and Francisco Goya—to name a few. Wanting to immerse himself more devotedly in this quest of exploration, in the early 1950s Zao even embarked upon a ‘Grand Tour’ of Europe, soaking up both the historical and pioneering contemporary art the countries he visited had to offer, including the work of Paul Klee, whose oeuvre Zao was particularly influenced by, as evidenced by their shared disinterest for traditional perspective. But whilst these experiences fed into Zao’s everchanging approach to abstraction, affording him with an anchoring point from which to forge his own synthesised art, his debt to the roots of his heritage was manifold and by the mid-1950s he began re-incorporating Chinese influences more confidently back into his work. Combining Eastern philosophy with Western mediums, Zao came to realise ‘everybody is bound by tradition, I am bound by two.’ⁱ



Ma Yuan, *Composing Poetry on a Spring Outing*, Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279)

Collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City

Entering the 1960s, Zao’s work became more vibrant and forceful, growing increasingly abstract as he moved away from the detail-heavy style that characterised his earlier work toward a bolder, more energetic mode of painting. To supplement his more intense, spontaneous way of working, Zao purchased a larger warehouse in Paris to convert into his studio, with renovations complete in 1963, a year prior to *20.3.64*’s execution. Designed as an isolated structure whereby light entered through a glass, sky-roof, to Zao, the studio became a sanctuary of sorts – a meditative space to distance himself from the outside world and pour his heart and mind onto his canvases, particularly as his beloved second-wife May was becoming increasingly ill. Working in his atelier which became ‘the only place of peace where [he] held onto hope like in the middle of a storm one grips onto a small boat inundated by water from all sides’,ⁱⁱ his *Hurricane Period* paintings reflect both this profound emotional turmoil, and Zao’s yearning for peace.

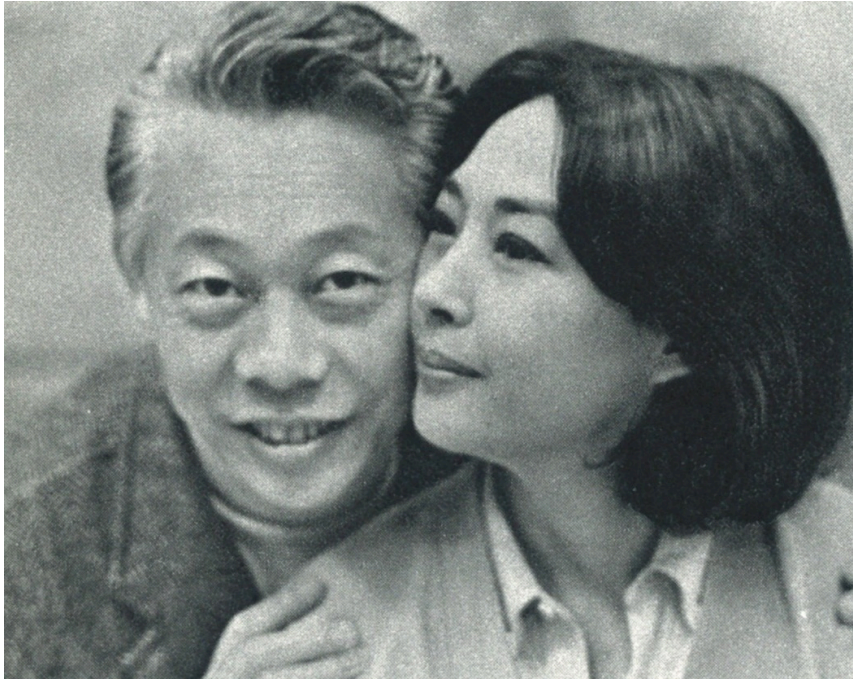


Jackson Pollock, *Free Form*, 1946

Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

© 2021 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Overlapping with perfect harmony in various hues and gradations, large ink-like washes of oil give structure to the edges of *20.3.64* in broad sweeping strokes, only to be ruptured by lighter touches of pigment which collide and echo the pauses, scrapes, and twists of Zao’s brush. Akin to the performative gesture of the Abstract Expressionists, Zao imbues the present work with infinite energy and potential, conjuring a humming vibrancy that emerges from almost seemingly immeasurable depth, as individual strokes blend with the macroscopic grandeur of the universe, immersing viewers into Zao’s powerfully poetic, introspective world.



Zao Wou-Ki and May, 1964

Collector's Digest

Zao's work can be found in more than 150 public collections across more than 20 countries, indicative of his resounding influence that attracts audiences worldwide. Having been honoured with extensive exhibitions throughout his legendary career, Zao's work has most recently been presented in an exhibition at the Hôtel de Caumont Art Centre in Aix-en-Provence. Showcasing 76 works dating from 1935–2009, the solo show ran from 19 May – 10 October 2021. A solo exhibition was also held in Hong Kong last year at the Villepin Gallery between 20 March – 20 September 2020, titled [Zao Wou-Ki: Friendship & Reconciliation](#).

ⁱ Zao Wou-Ki, quoted in *Infinities of Zao Wou-Ki*, exh, cat., Asia University of Modern Art, Taichung, 2017, p. 23

ⁱⁱ Zao Wou-Ki, adapted from *Zao Wou-Ki, Autoportrait*, Paris, 1988, p. 140

Provenance

Private Collection
 Christie's, New York, 20 February 1988, lot 2
 Private Collection
 Galerie Frans Watchers
 Private Collection, Belgium
 Thence by descent to the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A DISTINGUISHED PRIVATE ASIAN
COLLECTION

29 *Ж

Wu Guanzhong

Guilin

signed and dated '91 Tu [in Chinese]' lower right
oil on canvas mounted on board
44 x 53 cm. (17 3/8 x 20 7/8 in.)
Painted in 1991.

Estimate

HK\$15,000,000 — 25,000,000

€1,710,000 — 2,840,000

\$1,920,000 — 3,210,000

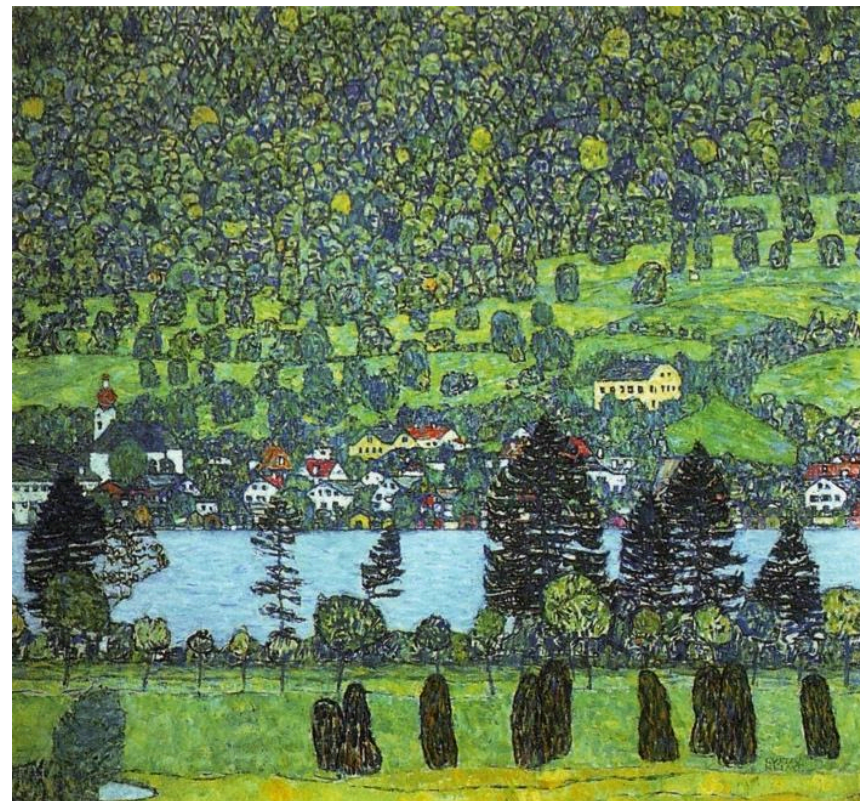
[Go to Lot](#)



Mind Speaks before the Brush--Depicting Image from the Artist's Heart

Looking back at his life as an artist, Wu Guanzhong enrolled in the Hangzhou National College of Art in the 1930s and 1940s to receive a thorough and systematic education of traditional Chinese painting under the supervision of Pan Tianshou. During the same period, he was also profoundly influenced by the Western painting concepts of Lin Fengmian and Wu Dayu, and therefore was inspired to receive training in Western modernist painting in France. After his return to China, he started the initial exploration of blending Chinese and Western art during the 1950s and 1960s. This was a period when Wu Guanzhong made a comprehensive experiment on the 'formal language' of the paintings, and explored a harmonious unity between the 'formal beauty' of the West and the 'contextual beauty' of the East. Having spent time in the countryside and continuously sketching different parts of the country in the 1970s and 80s, the artist's creations covered the most varied and abundant themes at this time. It also became a mature stage for the artist's fusion of East and West in the 'nationalisation of oil painting'. This also led to his exploration of ink paintings in the mid-1980s, which began his artistic path of 'complementing and sharing the use of ink painting and oil painting in order to achieve the purpose of pursuing beauty'. In the 1990s, as his mastery of ink painting became more mature, his artistic language made a new breakthrough and ushered in the pinnacle of his artistic creation.

By this time, Wu Guanzhong had returned to a state where oil painting was the mainstay that was supported and supplemented by ink and wash. The nature being depicted was not nature existing in front of the eyes of the artist, but rather the spiritual nature in his experience and mind. His painterly language at this time became more concise and pure, with a clearer realm. The present work is the epitome of Wu's exploration of 'nationalisation' of oil painting. Relying on the experience and perception of nature for most of his life, Wu Guanzhong uses the image from his heart to paint. More emotional release is achieved through the use of strong colours, reaching the height of 'exploring all the wondrous peaks to make a draft' described by Shi Tao in terms of the ideals of painting. Making this art piece the best expression of the status of 'a wonderful enlightenment brought by a reverie of the mind'.



Gustav Klimt, *Mountain Slope at Unterach*, 1916

Bold and Unstrained Brushwork with Exuberant Colors

Created in 1991, *Guilin* acts on the principle of 'expressing emotions through the painting of landscape' proposed by Wu Guanzhong, integrating both a figurative and abstract visual language. Allowing the brush to be driven by real thoughts, he has abandoned the conventional constraints of concrete objects in his form, but he has not gone completely into abstraction, as if fuelled by distant image filled with emotional memory. The lightness of the lines and the brightness of the colours in *Guilin* are reflected in the diagonal composition of the painting, which uses delicate and flexible geometric blocks to create a rhythmic environment. The work is composed from a wide overhead perspective, allowing the viewer to take in more of the scene. Mixing the magnificent colours of Western oil painting with the flexible aura of traditional ink and wash in an unbridled

manner, the houses are depicted innovatively in magnificent stone green colours and are in sharp contrast to the indigo peaks of Guilin. The colour of the sky and the Lijiang River are painted in a lighter shade of greyish white to leave a blank space in the painting, so that the work is not overwhelmed by the density of the scenery and to create a unique aesthetic beauty of 'realism from a distance and abstraction from a closer view'. The cheerful and light visual tone of *Guilin* comes from Wu's long years of observation and understanding of nature itself, enabling the artist to master the overall modelling functions of point, line and surface through the abstract refinement of objects. This allows the scene to progress from close to far, moving freely between figurative and abstract expressions. Further, the interplay of colour blocks presents the poetic beauty of the world and echoes the traditional Eastern worldview of the reciprocity of reality and emptiness.



Wang Shen, *Landscape Scroll*, Northern Song (detail) Collection of the Shanghai Museum

Brush Moves with the Heart, Forms His Own Unique School of Art

As the founder of modern Chinese painting, Wu Guanzhong created a new contemporary style in the context of traditional Chinese painting in the spirit of his teacher Lin Fengmian's 'Create Art of the Age by Reconciling Eastern and Western Art'. He was aware that the success of Chinese painting was due in part to the refinement of ink and brush techniques, the high degree of colour

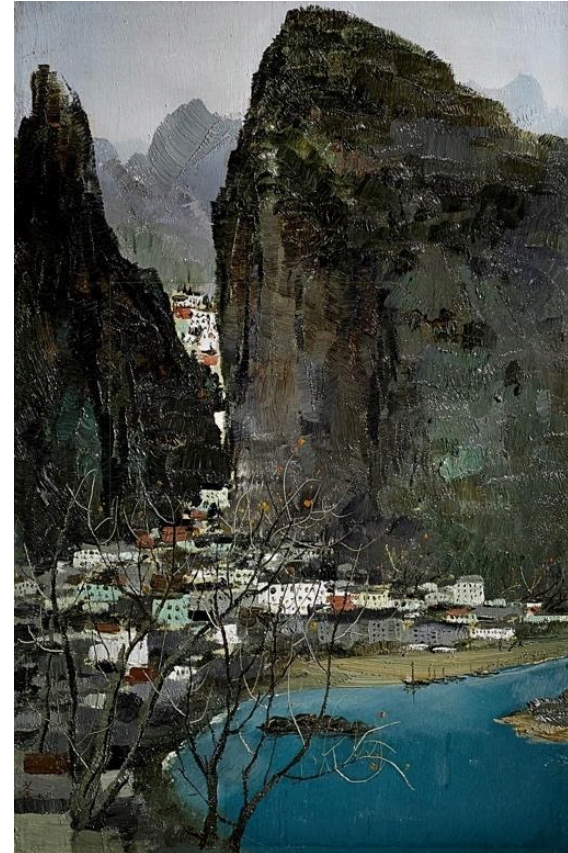
generalisation, and the shaping of the relationship between abstract and reality. The achievement of a symbiosis of 'the brush follows the heart' and 'the penetration of the abstract by leaving blank space' naturally became the basis of Wu Guanzhong's creative principle. After returning from France, he combined the visual language of Maurice Utrillo and Raoul Dufy with the spatial sense of Chinese painting, introducing traditional Chinese ink and brush into the visual concept of Western modern painting, and pursuing the unity of formal and contextual beauty of the picture in the fusion of Chinese and Western art. With his lyrical and light-hearted brushstrokes, he combines the freedom of movement between the two painting styles of Chinese and Western. In the fusion of aesthetic languages, he embodies the Chinese charm and the spirit of Chinese artists. His works not only enrich the depth of the oil painting as a medium in the West, but also maintain the visual tension of the modernist painting language, forming his unique painting style. Additionally, his unique painting style has brought the subject of Chinese landscape painting that enjoys a long history from tradition to modernity in China, reaching an unprecedented height from a new perspective.



Wu Guanzhong, *A Valley of Colours*, 1993, Poly Auction Hong Kong, 3 April 2017, Sold for HK\$28,320,000

Forgetting the Self and the Material, Break Away from the Form and Rationality

The 1990s were a time of great success for Wu Guanzhong, both in terms of his creative work and his personal achievements, as the artist not only held solo exhibitions around the world, but he also won many honours. He was the first artist from the East to hold a solo exhibition at the British Museum, and the first living artist to have an exhibition organised by the Ministry of Culture at the National Art Museum of China. Moreover, the first Chinese artist to be awarded both the title of Corresponding Member of the Academy of Arts and Academe de France and the highest honour of the French Ministry of Culture. At this time, Wu Guanzhong developed a broader vision and a more liberal attitude towards his art creation, conveying through his works a transcendent state of oblivion, just as described in *Zhuangzi: The Great Teacher*, 'Forgetting one's body, abandoning one's intelligence, freeing oneself from the bondage of form and intelligence, and becoming one with the ultimate truth, is called sitting oblivion' and *Guilin* was created in this state of mind. Within the framework of his philosophy of 'learning from the outside and getting to the essence', Wu Guanzhong uses the stacking technique of oil painting to depict the scaled villages, leaving the unique warmth of ink and wash to the unique landscape of *Guilin*. The rich colours and ethereal atmosphere make *Guilin* bright and vibrant, filled with the artist's deep affection for the beautiful river and mountains of this land, conveying a wonderful feeling of life.



Wu Guanzhong, *Scenery of Guilin*, 1973, Sotheby's Hong Kong, 5 October 2020, Sold for HKD 43,430,000

Provenance

Private Collection

Poly Auction, Hong Kong, 2 October 2017, lot 179

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

Beijing, National Agriculture Exhibition Centre, *The Kite String Will Not Be Broken - Wu Guanzhong's Classical Artworks*, 15 - 18 September 2011

Literature

The Oriental Press, ed., *Wu Guanzhong's Personal Selection of Paintings*, Beijing, 1992, p. 82 (illustrated)

Geijutsu Shinbunsha, *An Album of Wu Guanzhong - In Search of New Ways*, Tokyo, 1992, p. 38 (illustrated)

L'Atelier Productions Pte. Ltd., ed., *Wu Guanzhong - A Selection of 128 Fine Works*, Singapore, 1996, p. 49 (illustrated)

Guangxi Fine Arts Publishing House., ed., *About Wu Guanzhong (Selection of Articles about Wu Guanzhong)*, Nanning, 1999, p. 157 (illustrated)

People's Fine Arts Publishing House, ed., *Wu Guanzhong Connoisseurs Choice I*, Beijing, 2003, p. 162 (illustrated)

Hunan Fine Arts Publishing House, ed., *The Complete Works of Wu Guanzhong Vol. III*, Changsha, 2007, p. 317 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



30 *

Alexander Calder

Two Red Petals in the Air

incised with the artist's monogram and date 'CA 58' on the largest black element
sheet metal, wire, and paint
101.6 x 137.2 x 50.8 cm. (40 x 54 x 20 in.)
Executed in 1958, this work is registered in the archives of the Calder Foundation, New York under application number A07334.

Estimate

HK\$16,000,000 — 20,000,000

€1,820,000 — 2,280,000

\$2,050,000 — 2,560,000

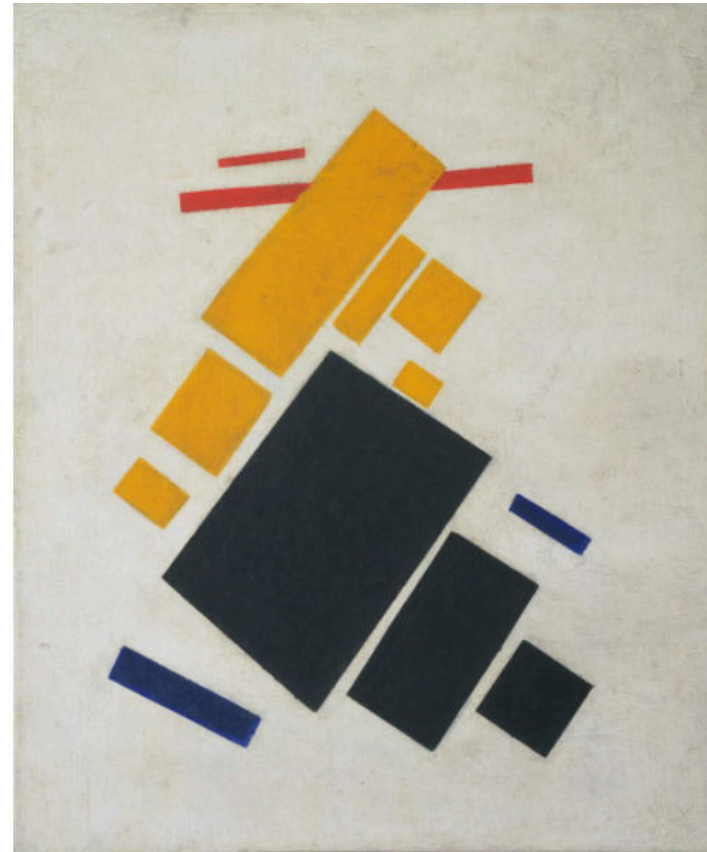
[Go to Lot](#)



“When everything goes right a mobile is a piece of poetry that dances with the joy of life...” — Alexander Calder

Imbued with exquisite poise, balletic dexterity, and elegant movement, Alexander Calder’s *Two Red Petals in the Air* encapsulates the artist’s era-defining style and technical agility as sculptor of colour and metal. The work’s concise simplicity and compact form, perfectly calibrated to convey maximum impact with the greatest degree of effortlessness, exemplifies Calder’s ability to synthesise colour, form, and movement in a wholly unique fashion to transform the course of 20th century sculpture.

Suspended from an intricate wire framework, the coloured elements and discrete shapes in *Two Red Petals in the Air* float in consummate counterbalance to one another, articulating a poetic three-dimensional vision; with the slightest breath of wind, the forms are set in motion, commanding time as the fourth dimension. Created in 1958, *Two Red Petals in the Air* reveals Calder at the height of his technical and conceptual powers within a period of rich artistic and cultural inspiration; between 1953 and 1957, Calder travelled to Europe, the Middle East, India, and South America, representing the United States at the São Paulo Art Biennial and presenting projects for UNESCO, the American Consulate in Frankfurt, and the Spoleto Festival dei Due Mondi. Arising from this ground-breaking period of innovation and accomplishment, *Two Red Petals in the Air* is exemplary of the artist’s inimitably significant oeuvre.



Kazimir Malevich, *Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying*, 1915

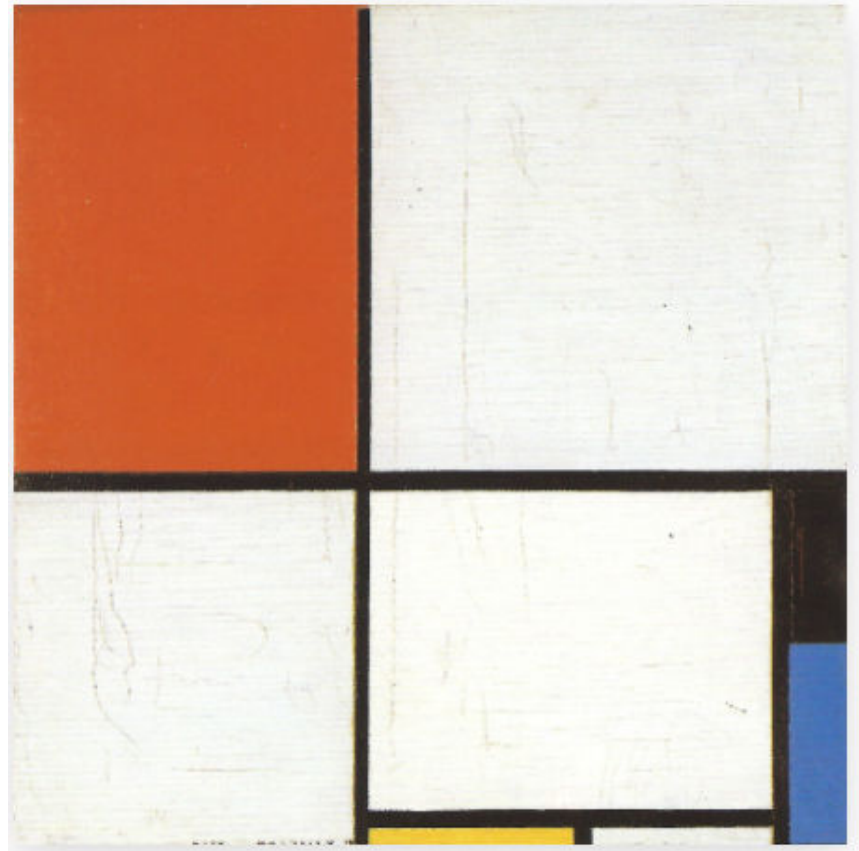
Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York

“Why must art be static? You look at an abstraction, sculptured or painted, an entirely existing arrangement of planes, spheres, nuclei, entirely without meaning. It would be perfect but it is always still. The next step in sculpture is motion.” — Alexander Calder

Showcasing Calder at his most technically adept and conceptually inventive, *Two Red Petals in the Air* comprises the most important essentials of the artist’s aesthetic, demonstrating complex

cadence and sublime balance. The titular red petals perch whimsically atop the mobile, their sprightly disposition balanced by the serenity of the single blue element and the splayed branches of cascading shaped yellow discs, while the two wider horizontal ebony elements anchor the aerial composition.

Presenting a dynamic experience for the viewer, the slightest waft of air sets the lyrical structure in gracefully gliding organic rotation: while each biomorphic element pursues its own path, the whole sculpture remains in choreographed cohesion. As Calder's chosen palette of vibrant primary hues floats within an ethereal ballet of delicate beauty, we are reminded simultaneously of the organic and the architectonic; here, the red petals evoke nature that is at once all-powerful and fragile, demonstrating Calder's profound appreciation for nature in parallel to his extraordinary talents for engineering. Presenting a transcendent interplay between nature and abstraction, stillness and motion, the work culminates in an enchanting synthesis of painterly and sculptural idioms.



Piet Mondrian, *Composition with Red, Yellow and Blue*, 1928

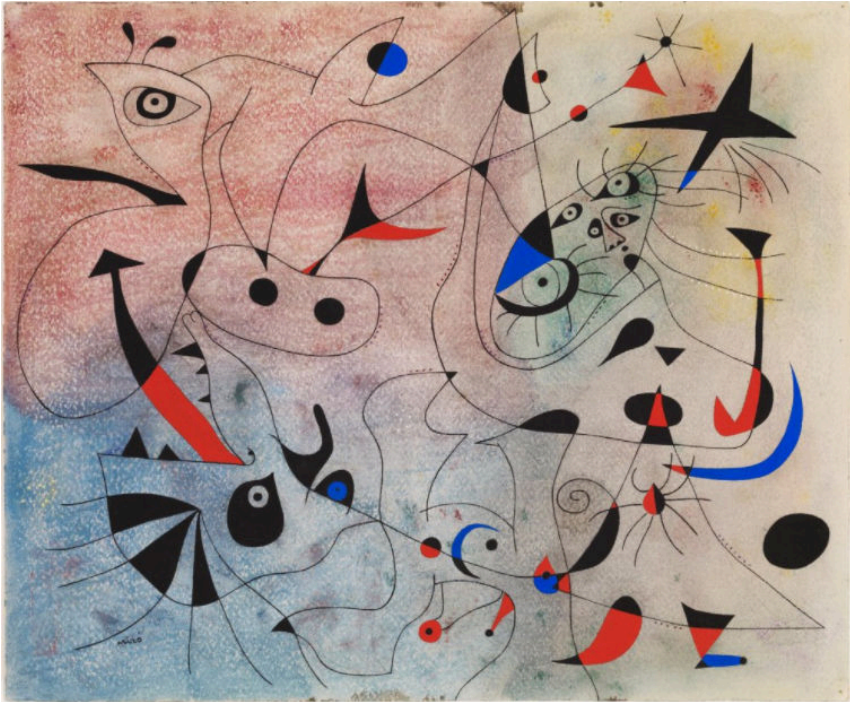
Collection of the Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Germany

Born in Pennsylvania in 1898 to an artistic family of sculptors and painters, Calder first graduated in 1923 with a degree in mechanical engineering from the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken before entering the Art Students League. Determined to pave his own way as an artist, Calder experimented with different methods and mediums and travelled frequently to Paris, developing a lifelong friendship with Joan Miró and an apprenticeship with Marcel Duchamp.

It was in 1930, during his now legendary visit to the studio of Piet Mondrian in Paris, that Calder was first inspired to think about the kinetic possibilities of art. He began to produce abstract

sculptures that freely moved through space as early as 1931; showing these works at the Galerie Vignon in Paris in 1932, Calder called them “mobiles”, using the term coined by Duchamp a year earlier upon his encounter of Calder’s works. From then on, Calder dedicated his career to revolutionising the ability of sculpture to connect with not just viewer but its environment, seeking to ever-expand the possibilities of motion in sculpture.

“Although Calder was not quite the first or the last artist to set sculpture in motion, he sent volumes moving through space with more conviction and imaginative power – with more eloquence and elegance – than any other artist has. These are the works of a poet, but a poet guided by the steady instincts of a scientist.” — Jed Perl



Joan Miró, *L'étoile matinale (Morning Star)*, 1940

Collection of the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona

© 2021 Successió Miró / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Duchamp once remarked that the art of Calder was 'pure joie de vivre. [It] is the sublimation of a tree in the wind.'ⁱ Unparalleled in its poetry and lyricism, Calder’s works utilise principles of balance, aerodynamics, and weight distribution through meticulous calculation and execution, allowing them to interact freely and independently with their environment. Accordingly, the sculptures are uniquely and inimitably anchored in the laws of science, art, and nature; as the poet Jean-Paul Sartre declared: 'What they may do at a given moment will be determined by the time of day, the sun, the temperature or the wind. The object is thus always half way between the servility of a statue and the independence of natural events; each of its evolutions is the inspiration of a moment.'ⁱⁱ Calder’s genius lies in his unique skill in choreographing his sculptures’ movements while at the same time allowing them freedom and independent life; in the words of Penelope Curtis: 'Calder will find a way of making the spell last, embedding the unpredictable, contradictory, (and often syncopated) movements of animals and people into his works.'ⁱⁱⁱ



Calder in his Connecticut studio, 1955

Alexander Calder

Highly sought after for their outstanding craftsmanship and timeless beauty, Calder's mobiles represent the very paradigm of his genius, and works such as *Two Red Petals in the Air* spring forth in graceful motion as an enduring testament to Calder's extraordinary creative vision. The 1950s in particular was a pivotal decade in Calder's practice; working in parallel to the heyday of the New York School and American Abstract Expressionism, Calder's deliberately distanced and unique practice is all the more impressive. Utterly enthralling in its precise craftsmanship, brilliant hues, harmonic beauty, and refined delicacy, the present work exquisitely embodies the technical skill and imaginative genius of Calder, attesting to his success in bringing form, colour, and line into the fourth dimension.ⁱ

ⁱ Marcel Duchamp, 'Alexander Calder', Collection of the Société Anonyme, New Haven 1950, online

ⁱⁱ Jean-Paul Sartre, 'The Mobiles of Calder', *Alexander Calder*, exh. cat., Buchholz Gallery, New York, 1947

ⁱⁱⁱ Penelope Curtis, 'Performance of Post-performance', exh. cat., *Alexander Calder: Performing Sculpture*, London, Tate Modern, 2015, p. 17

Provenance

Perls Galleries, New York

Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Hirsh, Beverly Hills

Newspace Gallery, Los Angeles

Collection of A. Alfred Taubman (acquired from the above in October 1977)

The Collection of A. Alfred Taubman: Masterworks, Sotheby's, New York, November 4, 2015, lot 3

Private Collection, UK

Phillips, New York, 18 May 2017, lot 36

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1977-1979 (on loan)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



31 *

Claude Monet

Pavots dans un vase de Chine

stamped 'Certifie authentique M. Monet' on the reverse

oil on canvas

100 x 61 cm. (39 3/8 x 24 in.)

Painted in 1883, this work will be included in the forthcoming Monet Digital Catalogue Raisonné currently being prepared under the sponsorship of the Wildenstein Plattner Institute, Inc.

Estimate

HK\$9,500,000 — 15,000,000

€1,080,000 — 1,700,000

\$1,220,000 — 1,920,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

Born only two days apart in 1840, Claude Monet and Auguste Rodin were more than close contemporaries, going on to become two of the most significant artists working in their respective disciplines during this important period. As well as showing together at several group exhibitions, including their notable joint retrospective in 1889 during the Exposition Universelle, they also greatly admired and even collected one another's work. Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction is honoured to present two works by these great Modern masters thus reuniting the artists again and for the first time in Asia.

"I am following Nature without being able to grasp her, I perhaps owe having become a painter to flowers." — Claude Monet

Painted in 1883, the year Claude Monet moved to his beloved house and gardens in Giverny, *Pavots dans un vase de Chine* is a strikingly elegant expression of the painterly techniques and dominant themes of nature and the everyday that preoccupied the Impressionist master throughout his long career. Although more renowned as an *en plein air* landscape painter, Monet turned to the subject of still life intermittently throughout his life, to great success. These more closely focussed studio pieces provide fascinating insight into the consolidation and expansion of his ambitious outdoor experiments, evident in the present work where the artist applies the same careful attention to the 'ephemeral changes of atmosphere and light that are the very essence of painting'.ⁱ

Vividly evoked in a brilliant palette and characteristically rapid yet precise brushstrokes, the titular poppies are rendered with a striking freshness and vitality, as if plucked directly by the artist from his idyllic garden sanctuary. In a touching visual echo, the dominant pinks and greens of the composition directly recall the house at Giverny, particularly its iconic shutters and the pink walls, the colours of which were selected by Monet himself.



Claude Monet in his garden at Giverny, 1925, Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris

Like its sister work, *Vase au Pavots*, which now resides in the permanent collection of the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam, *Pavots dans un vase de Chine* features the distinctive Oriental poppies planted by Monet at Giverny. As well as referring back to one of Monet's most iconic and widely reproduced images, the 1873 [Les Coquelicots: environs d'Argenteuil](#) - now held as part of the permanent collection of the Musée d'Orsay, Paris - these poppy paintings are also directly related to a unique commission from the most important and influential dealer of Impressionist art: the critic Paul Durand-Ruel.

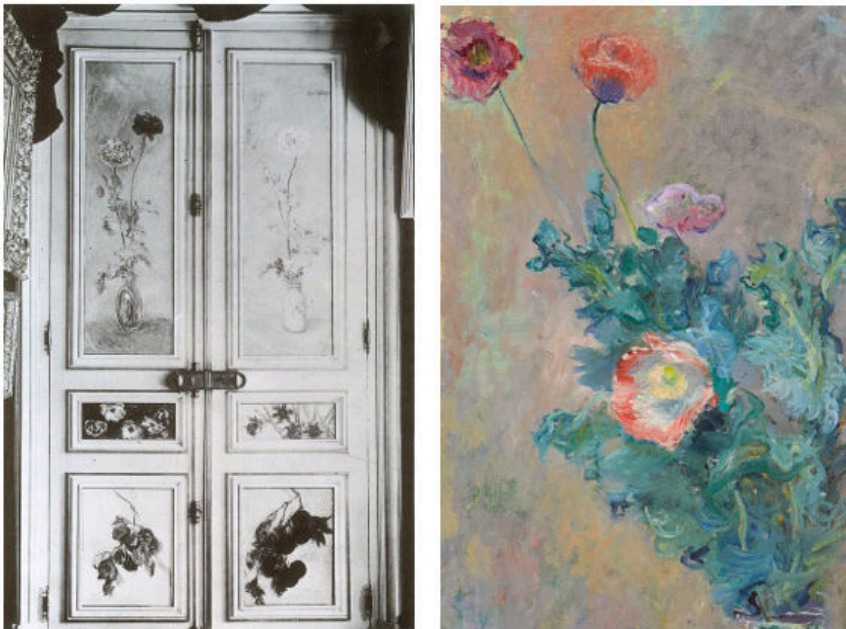
Claude Monet and Paul Durand-Ruel: An Important Commission

"Charming, lusciously painted, and often quite novel in terms of their organisation as decorative groups, these pictures were of a kind that came easily to Monet." — Paul Hayes Tucker

An early advocate of Impressionist art, Durand-Ruel was hugely influential in establishing the

international reputation and commercial success of its key proponents. Having first met Monet in London in the early 1870s, he began to exhibit the then unknown artist, mounting the first self-consciously Impressionist exhibitions in London in 1882 and 1883. As Daniel Wildenstein details it in his catalogue raisonné of Monet's work, it was in these years that Durand-Ruel first approached Monet with a large personal commission that would occupy him for the next few years. Received as early as 1882, the original project soon evolved into a substantial body of work: thirty-six canvases of flowers and fruit specifically designed to decorate the six doors of the large drawing-room of Paul Durand-Ruel's apartment at no. 35, Rue de Rome, Paris.

With progress slower than expected, Monet continued the work after moving to Giverny, with Durand-Ruel encouraging the artist by sending vases, presumably like the one included in the present work. Absorbing the artist during this period, the bulk of the commission, including the striking larger panels, was completed in the summer and autumn of 1883, the same year that *Pavots dans un vase de Chine* was painted.



Left: The Door Panels of Durand-Ruel's drawing room painted by Monet between 1882 and 1885 Right: Detail of the present work

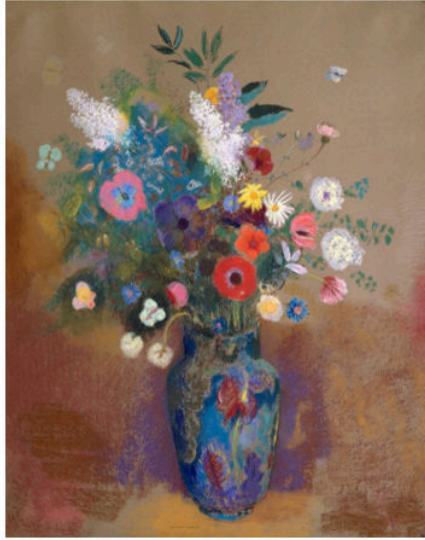
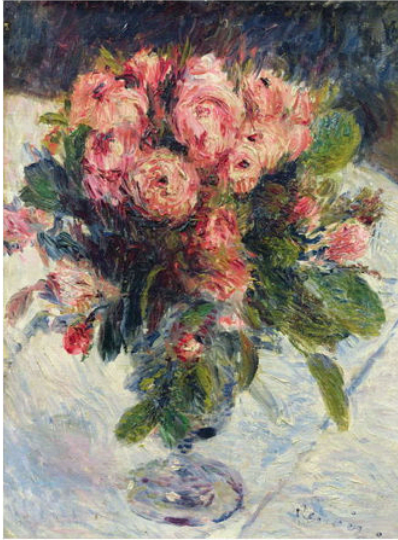
memorable doors, the present work depicts five long-stemmed poppies arranged in a Chinese vase, their naturally elongated form lending itself to the delicate verticality of the composition. When considered in this context, it is certainly possible to read *Pavot dans un vase de Chine* as belonging to a broader series of cut poppies from this period, highlighting the artist's much-famed tendency towards seriality, repetition, and variation in his work.

Monet and the Still Life Tradition

"Monet's exploration of this subject include some of the most lavish still lifes produced by the Impressionist group, and some of the most radical challenges to a long-standing still-life tradition." — John House

Produced during a period of upheaval and change for the artist before settling into the critical and commercial success enjoyed during his later years in Giverny, it is notable that Monet focussed more intensively on still-life composition in the 1870s and 1880s than during any other period of his career. During the famous Impressionist exhibitions of the 1870s, Monet presented several of these floral compositions to the public, which in fact proved to be more commercially reliable than his landscapes during these years. Executed towards the end of this period and on the cusp of the artist's immersion in his *Nymphéas* series, *Pavots dans un vase de Chine* demonstrates Monet's confidence and mastery of Impressionist principles. His successful distillation of these techniques into the still life genre highlights the various challenges that the artist posed to such painterly conventions, and points to the vital role that still life played in the Impressionist movement and beyond. Testifying to the present work's importance to the artist himself, as well as to broader discussions of Impressionist aesthetics, Monet kept the work in his own, private collection for many years, eventually lending it to the prestigious Galerie Bernheim Jeune in Paris in 1907 for an important group exhibition on still-life.

Echoing the distinctive tall and narrow format of the two upper panels of one of the most



Left: Pierre August Renoir, *Moss-Roses*, circa 1890, Musée d'Orsay, Paris Right: Odilon Redon, *Bouquet of Flowers*, circa 1905, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Monet's name is, of course, synonymous with Impressionism itself, and the present work records the masterful diversity of brushwork and sensitivity to the effects of light and atmosphere that his work is most renowned for. With a background of soft, loose marks made up of a dazzling variety of rose pinks, Verdigris greens, blues and flesh tones, Monet creates a dramatic, shifting ground for the slim vase and the delicate extensions of the poppy stems to sit within. While the dominant still life tradition, exemplified by the likes of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, emphasised the solid realism of the objects and the environment that they sat within, Monet's still-lives, like those of his contemporary Pierre Auguste Renoir, instead trained their eye on the recording of fleeting impressions, and of the shifting play of light and movement.

Rendered with remarkable economy and lightness of touch, the present work is particularly innovative, prefiguring the heightened palette and textured brushwork of Odilon Redon's Symbolist canvases, and the tremendously expressive sense of drawing and line captured in Vincent Van Gogh's celebrated still lifes. Reinvigorating the genre for the 20th Century, Monet laid the foundations for contemporary approaches of the subject pioneered by the likes of David Hockney.



Left: Vincent Van Gogh, *Irises*, 1890, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam Right: David Hockney, *Bridlington Violets*, 1989 [Lot 21 - Phillips in association with Poly Auction Evening Sale, 30 November 2021](#)
Estimate HK\$ 10,000,000 - 15,000,000 / US\$ 1,280,000 - 1,920,000 © David Hockney

Collector's Digest

One of the leading artists of the Impressionist movement, Monet's work is widely understood as foundational to the development of 20th Century art, and his still-lives occupied a special place in his practice.

The early 1880s represented an intensification of Monet's engagement with the genre and he painted nearly 80 still-lives during this period, including the 36 works produced for the Durand-Ruel commission.

As well as a sister-work *Vase au Pavots*, which now forms part of the permanent collection of the Boimans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam, the 'vase de Chine' displayed here also appears in *Deux vase de Chrysanthèmes* from 1888.

Notable Still-Lives by Claude Monet



Flowers of the pinambours, 1880, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC



Bouquet de soleils, 1881 The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Vase de Pavots, 1883 Boimans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam



Vase de Fleurs, c. 1880s Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania



Deux vase de Chrysanthèmes, 1888

Literature

Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet, vie et oeuvre vol. II*, Geneva, 1979, p. 112 (illustrated, p. 113)

Daniel Wildenstein, *Monet, Catalogue raisonné vol. II*, Cologne, 1996, no. 849, p. 318 (illustrated p. 316)

ⁱ Claude Monet, quoted in Charles F. Stuckey, *Monet: A Retrospective*, New York, 1985, p. 266

Provenance

Maxime Blum, Paris

Sotheby's, London, 25 November 1959, lot 72

Private Collection, United Kingdom

William Beadleston, Inc., New York

Private Collection, Pennsylvania

Thence by descent to the present owner

Exhibited

Paris, Bernheim-Jeune, *Fleurs et natures mortes*, 14 - 30 November 1907, no. 51 (hitherto unconfirmed, as listed in Wildenstein Plattner Institute, Inc. catalogue raisonné)

London, Gimpel Fils, *Claude Monet*, November 1950, no. 3

Paris, Galerie Framond, *Palettes de Fleur*, 1954 (titled as *Bouquet de Pavots*)

Paris, Galerie Romanet, *La Fleur Coupée*, 1955, no. 72



32

Georges Mathieu

Saxifrage

signed 'Mathieu' lower right; further titled
"'SAXIFRAGE II'" on the stretcher

oil on canvas

97.5 x 195 cm. (38 3/8 x 76 3/4 in.)

Painted in 1980, this work is accompanied by a
certificate of authenticity GM80058 issued by the
Comité Georges Mathieu.

Estimate

HK\$2,000,000 — 3,000,000

€227,000 — 341,000

\$256,000 — 385,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"My painting is the painting of energy, of fever, excitement of life." — Georges Mathieu

Executed in 1980, Georges Mathieu's *Saxifrage* grips viewers with a commanding immediacy, emanating the entrancing energy and lyrical expressivity that define the artist's iconic and pioneering oeuvre. Refined over decades, Mathieu's preference for smaller, more domestic-sized canvases at this point in his career draws attention to the focused, powerfully charged yet enthrallingly graceful compositions, which upon close viewing reveal depths of densely layered pigment. Here Mathieu employs his signature hues of bright crimson and chalk-white on a charcoal ground, with striking accents of canary yellow and turquoise. The artist's gestural applications of paint, which often involved him dripping pigment straight from the tube, exude speed, fluidity, tension, and poise, leading the eye to involuntarily plumb the complex strata of criss-crossing paint projections. At the edges of the central form, supple arcs are executed with a masterful flourish, lifting the rigorous configuration into flight: the wholly abstract and non-signifying composition has become – through gesture, energy, and pigment alone – a sign of its own making.



The artist in front of the present work, *Saxifrage*, at the Théâtre Municipal, Brive, France, 1984, on the occasion of the exhibition *Quelques aspects récents de l'Oeuvre peint de Georges Mathieu. 1976-1984*

Pioneer of Lyrical Abstraction

A self-taught artist, Georges Mathieu (1921-2012) led an extraordinary life and career as one of the foremost founding fathers of post-war European lyrical abstraction. Beginning with figuration, Mathieu swiftly turned to abstraction in the 1940s against the backdrop of war-torn Europe. In 1945, two years before Jackson Pollock created his first drip painting, Mathieu experimented with dripping paint directly from tube to canvas, and by the early 1950s had refined and matured his technique. Seeking more intuitive and organic forms than the prevailing fashion of geometric abstraction, Mathieu published manifestos to define his conception of a lyrical abstraction, postulating four conditions: the primary of speed of execution, to avoid interference of the artist's consciousness; no pre-existing shapes, as the painter must not rely on any references or signs; no pre-meditated moves, as painting must not be a cognitive process; and an ecstatic state of mind, which requires an almost trance-like state of concentration.



Georges Mathieu painting in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 10 October 1954 © Georges Mathieu / ADAGP, Paris & ARS, New York, 2021

Mathieu's aesthetic is characterised by intuitive gestures charged with dynamic tension and calligraphic grace, always executed with speed and an intensely focused energy akin to a trance-

like state. In parallel to – and hand-in-hand with – his four tenets of artistic creation, Mathieu introduced a performative dimension to his practice, creating paintings during highly publicised performances that fused art, dance, and performance. Under the gaze of large audiences, Mathieu started and completed monumental canvases rapidly, moving and painting as if under a trance, such that, in Bernard Marcadé’s words, ‘a genuine confrontation occurs between himself and his canvas, where rituals of martial art, dance and trance all come together’ⁱ. The resulting works are not mere traces of his performances but the end product – the newly created sign, which according to Mathieu preceded meaning.



Georges Mathieu, *Painting*, 1952 Collection of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York © Georges Mathieu / ADAGP, Paris & ARS, New York, 2021

Global Acclaim in Post-war Era

“Georges Mathieu, the transatlantic painter I admire most.” — Clement Greenberg, 1959

Mathieu’s practice received instant recognition locally and abroad. He held his first solo exhibition in Paris in 1950 at the Galerie Rene Drouin and made his New York debut at the Stable Gallery in

1952; in 1953, his works were acquired into the collections of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and the Art Institute of Chicago. In Japan, the *Gutai Manifesto* of 1956 singled out Mathieu and Pollock as key inspirations for the Gutai group’s artistic creation, and in 1957 Mathieu was invited by Jiro Yoshihara to Japan, where he famously created 21 paintings in the space of three days, including 8-metre and 15-metre canvases. In the same year, Mathieu traversed the world, painting live for audiences in Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, and the United States.

Notably, Mathieu’s performances pre-dated Allan Kaprow’s Happenings of the 1960s and Yves Klein’s *Anthropometry* series, just as his painterly methods developed prior to Pollock’s drip technique. So ground-breaking was Mathieu’s practice that Clement Greenberg, one of the most influential American art critics of the post-war period, declared his stamp of approval regarding the work of the French artist. In 1959, after seeing Mathieu’s paintings at the Kootz Gallery in New York, Greenberg proclaimed Mathieu to be ‘the strongest of all new European painters’ⁱⁱ and ‘the transatlantic painter [he] admire[d] most’ⁱⁱⁱ. The American critic’s praise is particularly noteworthy when bearing in mind the transatlantic rivalry felt from artists who were spearheading Abstract Expressionism in the United States.

Saxifrage: Genesis of the Final Years

Following experiments in the 1960s and 1970s involving geometric variations and the applied arts, Mathieu returned in the 1980s to the untethered lyricism of his 1950s period with a newfound freedom and virtuosity. In reintroducing the techniques he had previously put aside, Mathieu’s works from the 1980s, which follow the artist’s major 1978 retrospective at the Grand Palais in Paris, display the confidence and poise of a maestro at the peak of his powers. Working on a smaller scale, Mathieu retains or even amplifies the urgent ferocity of each application of pigment, while channelling heightened precision and focus and a noticeably more grounded energy.



Installation views of Georges Mathieu's 1978 retrospective at the Grand Palais in Paris © Georges Mathieu / ADAGP, Paris & ARS, New York, 2021

Whereas towards the mid-to-late 1980s Mathieu moved towards an all-over aesthetic, eschewing the central form, the present *Saxifrage* was created in 1980, at the genesis of Mathieu's final decade of artistic production on canvas, and still retains a central composition. The compact painting constitutes a sublime echo of the monumental canvases earlier in Mathieu's career: the charcoal ground gives the impression of cavernous depths, while the concise red-on-white-on-black palette employed in the rigorous central matrix simulates the intoxicating and incandescent combustion of potent intrinsic energy.



Detail of the present work

Each flowering of gestural pigment constitutes an exquisite explosion of paint and colour, orchestrated within a sublime balance between centripetal and centrifugal forces within the painting. Radiating pure energy and creation, *Saxifrage* embodies the great French painter's ambition to create 'an abstraction not enclosed by rules, dogmas or canons of beauty – an open abstraction that is free'.^{iv}

Collector's Digest

Critical and market reception towards Mathieu's oeuvre is undergoing a steady revival in recent years. In 2019, Nahmad Contemporary mounted the first US exhibition in almost three decades of Mathieu's work in New York, including four monumental paintings created for his 1978 retrospective at the Grand Palais in Paris. Later that year, Perrotin announced exclusive representation of the Mathieu estate together with Nahmad Contemporary, and the galleries showed previously unseen works by the artist at Art Basel 2019. This was followed by a solo booth at Frieze Masters in London in October 2019 and a major exhibition organised by both galleries at Perrotin Hong Kong in November 2019.

Also in 2019, on the occasion of [Artistic License. Six Takes on the Guggenheim Collection](#) organised

by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Richard Prince included two major Mathieu paintings in his selection, accompanied by a statement reminding the world of the transnational nature of the post-war abstraction movement. Apart from the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Mathieu's works are also held in the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Centre Pompidou, Paris, amongst many others.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OcAxenitQIQ&t=782s>

CoBo Social In Conversation With Édouard Lombard, Director of Comité Georges Mathieu, 25 June 2021

Most recently, the K11 Art Foundation and the Consulate General of France in Hong Kong & Macau co-presented [Calligraphy Rhapsody – Retrospective Exhibition of Georges Mathieu](#) at the K11 Musea in 2021. The exhibition coincided with robust Asian interest in the artist, evidenced by recent auction results. In September 2021, artnet published an article focusing on Perrotin and Nahmad Contemporary's ongoing Mathieu shows in New York and in the resurging market interest in the artist.

ⁱ Bernard Marcadé, 'Pretentious? Moi?', *Tate Etc.*, issue 18, January 2010

ⁱⁱ Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture: Critical Essays*, Boston, 1961

ⁱⁱⁱ Clement Greenberg, quoted in Georges Mathieu, *Le massacre de la sensibilité*, Paris, 1966

^{iv} Georges Mathieu, quoted in Georges Mathieu, *Au-delà du tachisme*, Paris, 1963

Provenance

Private Collection (acquired directly from the artist in 1991)

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Brive, Théâtre Municipal, *Quelques aspects récents de l'oeuvre peint de Georges Mathieu*

1976-1984, 27 June - 16 September 1984

Avignon, Palais des Papes, *Mathieu, Retrospective et Oeuvres récentes*, 7 August - 25 October

1985

Hong Kong, K11 MUSEA, *Calligraphy Rhapsody – Retrospective Exhibition of Georges Mathieu*, 19

May - 4 July 2021, p. 37 (illustrated)

Literature

Georges Mathieu, *Mathieu: 50 ans de création*, Paris, 2003, pp. 412-413 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT

PROPERTY FROM A DISTINGUISHED PRIVATE ASIAN COLLECTION

33 *

Chu Teh-Chun

Composition

each signed 'CHU TEH-CHUN. [in Chinese and Pinyin]' lower right; further signed, titled and dated "'Composition" CHU TEH-CHUN [in Pinyin and Chinese] 1979' on the reverse
oil on canvas, triptych
each 81 x 65 cm. (31 7/8 x 25 5/8 in.)
overall 81 x 195 cm. (31 7/8 x 76 3/4 in.)
Painted in 1979, this work is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity signed by the artist and a certificate of authenticity signed by the artist's wife, Chu Ching-Chao. This work will be included in the artist's forthcoming catalogue raisonné on the work of Chu Teh-Chun, being prepared by Fondation Chu Teh-Chun. (Information provided by Fondation Chu Teh-Chun and Mrs Chu Ching Chao.)

Estimate

HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000

€906,000 — 1,360,000

\$1,030,000 — 1,540,000



[Go to Lot](#)



Created in 1979, *Composition* is a triptych displayed from right to left as though reflecting the continuity of time. Together, these pieces show a magnificent world created by Chu Teh-Chun, while simultaneously expressing the ultimate proposition of art: an exploration of time and space. Each piece of the triptych bears the artist's signature on the lower right corner of the canvas, implying that each piece can also stand alone as an independent work, which is an extremely rare arrangement.

Composition is an abstract painting, in which Chu Teh-Chun presents his conception of Chinese landscape through oil paintings, typical of his works, and the composition of this triptych echoes the distant scenery of a Chinese landscape. The title of the work itself also reveals their deep influence. From *Composition* to *Primordial World*, *Clearing*, *Mid-winter*, *Renewal of the Earth*, and other works reveal the spirit of Chu's Eastern-style landscapes.



Chu Teh-Chun, *Harmonie hivernale*, oil on canvas (triptych), 1986 Sotheby's Hong Kong, 18 April 2021, Sold for HK\$229,568,000

Starting from Hangzhou National College of Art where the artist first began his journey, Chu Teh-Chun's abstract paintings were devoid of figurative forms of mountains, rivers, rocks and trees, yet one can tell from his oeuvre that the artist understands the natural rhythms of the world. Chu's pieces contain the lingering charm of surrounding rocks and mountains, the rising of the sun and the shrouding clouds. As a lover of poetry and an accomplished calligrapher, Chu Teh-Chun creates his paintings with poetic and picturesque images in the same context as Chinese landscapes, the key to the artist's increasing global recognition and allure. Though his journey went from East to West, it was through his creations that the artist realised his core values and eventually returned to the East.



Chu Teh-Chun, *Les éléments confédérés*, oil on canvas (pentptych), 2013 Sotheby's Hong Kong, 8 July 2020, Sold for HK\$98,000,000

Composition catches the viewer's eyes with its fiery red colour as the focus of the work. Coupled with the light source and light-dark contrast, they show the pulse of time. The artist's profound skill in the study of light can also be shown in this work. In 1969, Chu visited the exhibition commemorating the 300th anniversary of Rembrandt's death at the Amsterdam Art Museum and was greatly inspired by the great selection of works by the artist. Chu even once stated that Rembrandt is the artist that influenced him the most. Known for his use and representation of light, Rembrandt often created paintings with a strong light on the subject across a dark background and excelled in using light to create a sense of mystery. Inspired by Rembrandt, Chu began to use light as a visual focus in his paintings. From 1969 to 1979, after a decade of exploration, Chu created his own style of probing light and space. *Composition* is one of those works created as a result of this exploration. The iconic colour originally used in the 60s and 70s are now lighter and more flexible, as the artist began using more turpentine to make the paint easier to spread to create flowing and even blooming effects. By manipulating layers of overlapping colour blocks and natural brushstrokes, Chu mastered his own style, and his paintings became known for their flowing rhythm.



Hsia Kuei, *Remote View of Streams and Hills*, painted in Song dynasty (detail) Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei

In *Composition*, Chu no longer shows light pointed in a single direction, but reflecting and refracting across multiple directions. The colour and saturation of the painting is more refined, creating a dynamic sense of a non-static image; Chu's signature line strokes no longer bear an obvious backbone of ink, but blend imperceptibly into the colourful land.

The year 1979 can also be seen as the beginning of a new era in Chu Teh-Chun's artistic creation. While in Paris, he met with Lin Fengmian and Liu Kaiqu, teachers from the Hangzhou National College of Art after a lapse of more than 30 years. From his works, it can be seen that the artist's mind broadened since the late 1970s, and his abstract works moved onward to a new stage.



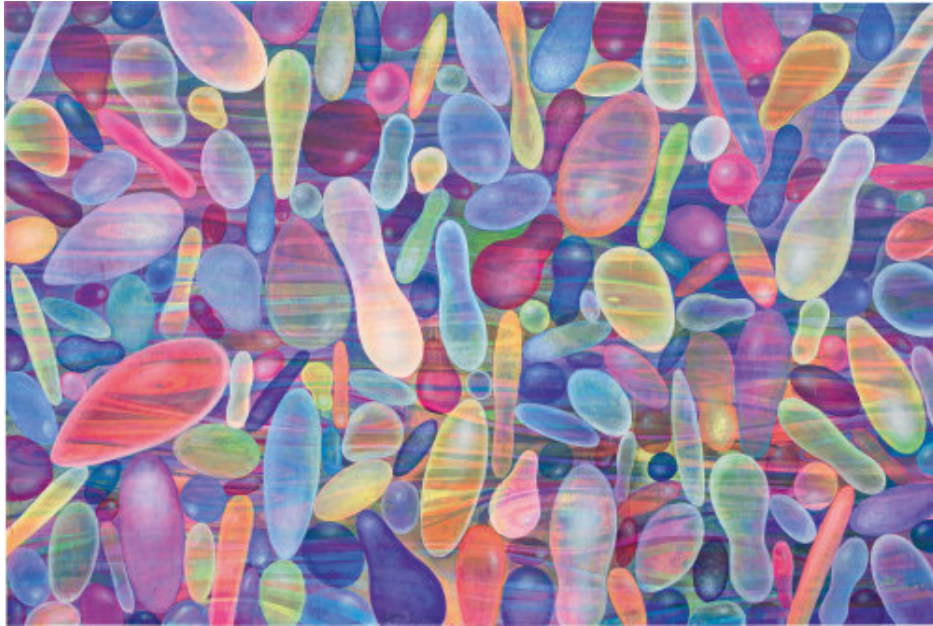
Hsia Kuei, *A Thousand Li of River and Mountains*, painted in Song dynasty (detail) Collection of The Palace Museum, Beijing

Provenance

Private Collection, Europe (acquired directly from the artist)
Acquired from the above by the present owner

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Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



ULTRA/NEO

34 ж

Huang Yuxing

Floating Bubbles

signed and dated 'HUANG. Yuxing 14' along the lower edge

acrylic on linen

200 x 299.5 cm. (78 3/4 x 117 7/8 in.)

Painted in 2014.

Estimate

HK\$1,800,000 — 2,800,000

€204,000 — 317,000

\$231,000 — 359,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"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

Painted in 2006, *Floating Bubbles* is a mesmerising work by Huang Yuxing, one of the most acclaimed Chinese painters working today. Rendered in electrifying shades of neon with each hue competing for the spotlight, a shimmering mirage of balloon-shaped forms appear to float en masse above a hypnotic swirling river behind. As a unique combination of the artist's iconic *River* and *Bubbles* series, *Floating Bubbles* embodies Huang's reflections on time, life, and matter, blurring the boundaries between the real and fantastical to draw viewers into a utopia where a kaleidoscope of ideas and expressions fuse.



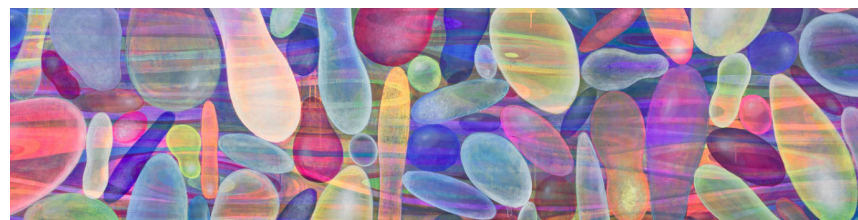
Huang Yuxing in his studio, 2016

A Meditative Experience

Born in Beijing in 1975, Huang quickly made a name for himself in the art scene after graduating from the Central Academy of Fine Arts' Mural Painting Department in 2000. Unlike many of his contemporaries whose art expressed their disillusionment of having grown up within the context of drastic economic reforms and rapid urbanisation, Huang's visual language is instead concerned

with capturing the inner tension between 'the eternal cycles of time' and 'complexity of human nature'ⁱ. Drawing inspiration from the natural environment, his vibrant canvases distort reality through reconstructing the world around him. As the familiar becomes the uncanny, and that which is known becomes foreign, this lack of verisimilitude directs the viewer's attention toward the symbolism and metaphors intermixed amongst the layers of explosive fluorescence.

"It is the physical manifestation that represents the definition of time" — Huang Yuxing



Detail of the present work

To Huang, the whirlpooling eddies of water in his works attach to ideas surrounding of joy and happiness, with their eternal, maze-like flow conceptualising the metamorphosis of time and its vast, eternal qualities. The ballooned bubbles in *Floating Bubbles*, on the other hand, pertain to a temporal existence of expanded shape that is only short-lived in comparison to the longevity of life. Drifting across the painting in its entirety, with some appearing poised to pop, the juxtaposition this presents reflects the artist's ponderings of his own meditative experiences, as he embeds philosophical and existential metaphors into his now instantly recognisable combination of motifs.

Huang's Innovative Eye

Loyal to the process of creation, Huang repeatedly layers colour with meticulous brushstroke in *Floating Bubbles*, applying a method that reveals the traditions of tonality and sharp form in Chinese *gongbi* landscape painting. But with no horizon line to ground the composition, viewers are instead immersed into an ambiguous space open to interpretation as the abstract patterns

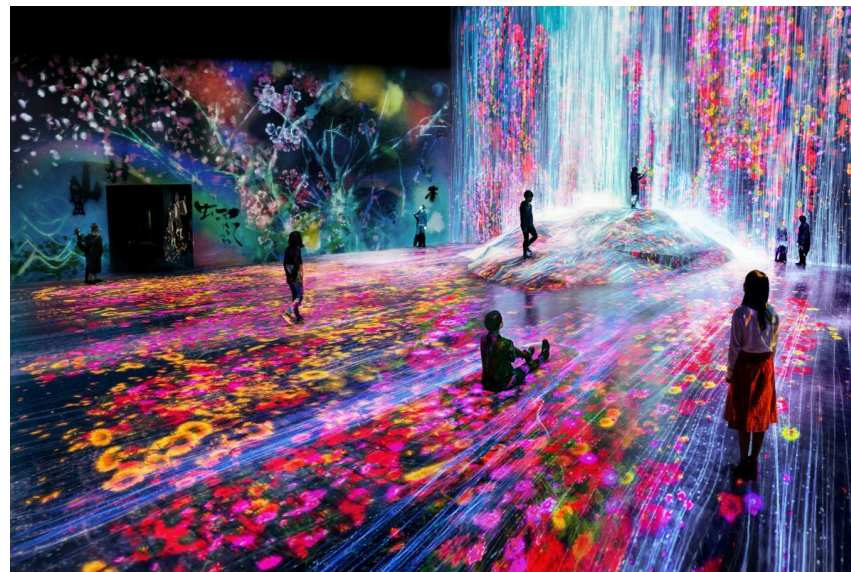
come to be understood as a contemplative exploration of the psyche.



Claude Monet, *Water Lilies*, 1916 Collection of The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo

At the same time, the portrayal of a running water overlaid by ovular contours recalls the water lily paintings by Impressionist master Claude Monet, who famously was fascinated by the shimmering effects of light. Although the vibrant hues of blue, green, red and yellow can be found in both artist's oeuvres, Huang's fluorescent highlights generate a dazzling visual effect reminiscent of the basking multicoloured lights of a modern, urban city. As such, a more contemporary comparison can be made between Huang's work and that of French painter [Bernard Frize](#), as both Huang and Frize use translucent jewel toned pigment to hypnotically blend senses of dimensionality in their

abstract scenes.



TeamLab, *Borderless*
MORI Building Digital Art Museum, Tokyo

Whereas Frize's approach can be considered as complete abstraction, however, Huang's inclusion of an undulating water background engages in the infinite possibilities of an alternate universe, entrancing viewers' senses as if having been transported into a hallucinatory world animated by renowned art collective TeamLab. But whilst TeamLab's display of digital art surrounds visitors with an ever-moving installation, Huang's *Floating Bubbles* sparks the imagination of his audience through its painted surface, appearing to come alive through rippling line and electric colour.

"For me, the shapes attached with colours and feelings in my works, presented deeply, touch hearts. The mystery you feel is from the incomplete perception of the truth, but it would interest you to get into the truth which makes my works more attractive."
— Huang Yuxing

As a stunning example from his celebrated body of works, *Floating Bubbles* is at once harmonious and in calculated disarray. Showcasing Huang's masterful control of his medium, both the rounded bubbles and flowing water glimmer with a vibrancy that transcends time and space, conjuring a

hypnotic sense of depth that reflects the perpetual vitality of our universe.

Collector's Digest

Internationally renowned as one of the most important Chinese painters of our contemporary times, Huang has been honoured with extensive solo exhibitons throughout his career. Most recently, this includes [Heaps of Brocade and Ash](#) at Almine Rech in Brussels (3 June – 31 July 2021), [Essence of Landscape](#) at König London (29 August – 18 September 2019), and [Huang Yuxing – The Lake of Barking Infants](#) at Whitestone Gallery in Tokyo (9 March – 7 April 2019).

Huang was recently 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 – who have all too, introduced their innovative aesthetic visions to the brand.

ⁱ Huang Yuxing quoted in Whitestone Gallery, *HUANG YUXING: Kingdom of Gold*, 14 April 2018, online

Provenance

Private Collection, Asia

Acquired from the above by the present owner

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Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN EMINENT PRIVATE ASIAN
COLLECTION

35 ж

Zhou Chunya

Smell the Flowers

signed and dated '2008 Zhou Chunya [in Chinese and
Pinyin]' lower right

oil on canvas

200 x 250 cm. (78 3/4 x 98 3/8 in.)

Painted in 2008.

Estimate

HK\$5,000,000 — 7,000,000

€569,000 — 796,000

\$641,000 — 897,000

[Go to Lot](#)



For a long time, Zhou Chunya's oeuvre has been focused on subjects which emphasise vitality and life. From the blue skies and the yellow-green grasslands as the background, to the vibrant peach blossom forest in the foreground, to the passionate man and woman in the midground, *Smell the Flowers* presents a picture filled with layered meanings. The piece can even be regarded amongst Zhou's most tension-filled and comprehensive pieces, veiling a pair of lovers hiding within a gorgeous peach blossom forest. The painting depicts the liberation of primal instincts, both in the liveliness of the competing peach blossoms to the energy of the lovers. The strong rhythm of these figures fills the painting with an underlying erotic tension.

Zhou's *Red Man* series began in the late 1990s, originating from the extension of the artist's mid-1990s *Mountain Stone* series featuring stones stacked and twisted into human-like forms. The bright red colour deviates from the previous natural hues, employed to denote passion. The present work's figures rendered in sanguinous red hues is accompanied by a stark nakedness and sexual implicitness. With its strong sense of palette and bodies intertwined with lust, *Smell the Flowers* exhibits the artist's deepest desires. As the artist himself once said, these red people express the beauty of life.



Egon Schiele, *Lovers*, 1914-15 Collection of Leopold Museum, Vienna

In the late 1990s, Zhou started to introduce peach blossoms into his works, but most of them served as mere backgrounds. In the spring of 2005, he went to Longquanyi in the suburbs of Chengdu, where the sight of the mountains covered in peach blossoms left a deep impression on the artist. After this, peach blossoms suddenly were pushed to the fore of his works: the flowers follow a method of extreme fullness to make the picture literally bloom with excitement and fervour. At this time, Zhou explored the interconnectivity between peach blossoms and red figures, and merged the wild and amorous feelings of the peach blossoms with the burning excitement of lovers embracing each other amongst flowers, creating a fantasy-like world of erotic desire. Just like the outspread peach trees in *Smell the Flowers*, the arms of the lovers are mirrored, as if they are in full bloom as they embrace. The overall composition creates a strong and

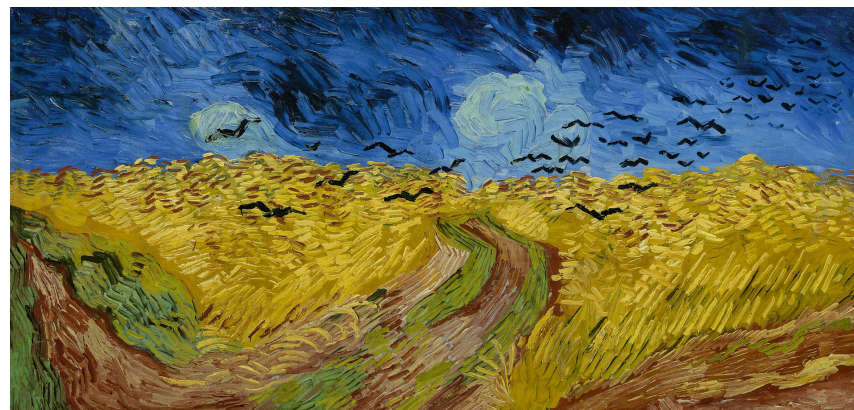
straightforward sensory experience. At the same time, it is also unapologetic in its subject matter, showing love and lust at a glance. On the one hand, the painting is Zhou's projection of the beauty of his own life; on the other hand, it is also the product of his pursuit to release and capture people's desire. The picture exudes passion and vibrance of scenery, forming the charm behind Zhou's works.



Piet Mondrian, *The Grey Tree*, 1911 The Collection of the Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

In *Smell the Flowers*, the twisted peach trunk is like a condensed expression of traditional calligraphic lines, and the brushwork shows the free and organic sprawling of branches and roots, while the scattered momentum contains abundant energy. In addition, Zhou presents the difference of space with varying brushstroke densities. The flat ground below is emerald grass interspersed with countless vertical brushstrokes, while the sky above is made up of rosy clouds with alternating light and dark, purple-tinged blocks. The result of this combination of abstract and concrete is one that evokes landscape patterns in traditional Chinese paintings. Even though the artist uses the expressive skills of Western painting and uses pointed colours to express his emotions, he has always been rooted in the traditional roots of China: and in his arrangement of lines and space, the basic techniques of traditional Chinese painting can be found. His paintings advocate passion and emphasise individuality, by absorbing, blending and transforming Eastern

and Western traditions and combining them to form a unique vocabulary of contemporary Chinese painting.



Vincent van Gogh, *Wheatfield with Crows*, 1890 Collection of the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Provenance

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner

Exhibited

Shanghai Art Museum, *1971-2010 Forty Years Retrospective Review of Zhou Chunya*, 13 - 23 June 2010

Literature

Hong Lei, ed., *Zhou Chunya*, Hong Kong, 2010, pp. 540-541 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT PRIVATE ASIAN
COLLECTION

36 *Ж

Zeng Fanzhi

Untitled 09-7-1

signed and dated 'Zeng Fanzhi [in Chinese] 2009 Zeng
Fanzhi' lower right

oil on canvas

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

Painted in 2009, this work is accompanied by a
certificate of authenticity issued by Gagosian, Hong
Kong.

Estimate

HK\$8,000,000 — 15,000,000

€906,000 — 1,700,000

\$1,030,000 — 1,920,000

[Go to Lot](#)



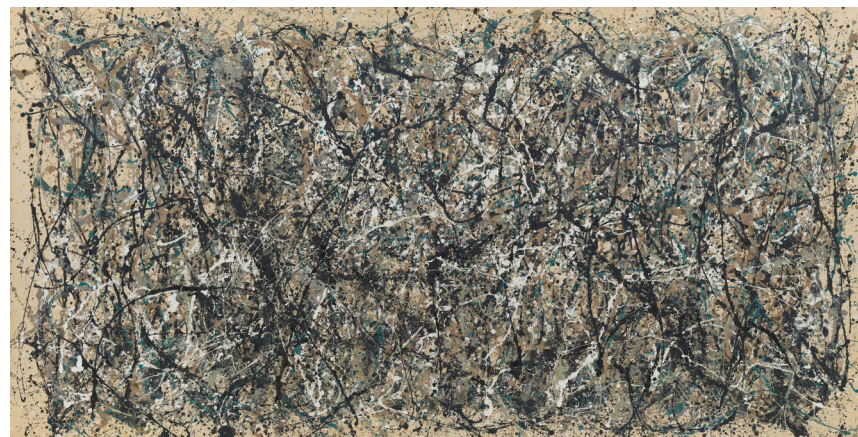
Zeng Fanzhi began to seek enlightenment from traditional Chinese art after the year 2000 and learned the aesthetics of the oriental art spirit. He worked hard to find the connecting point between the East and West and finally came to fruition through his adaptation of *luanbi* (loose-brush technique), which came to be his *Abstract Landscape* series. Breaking free from the shackles of his earlier figurative works, this series may be considered a perfect union of traditional Chinese brushworks and Western abstract art, showcasing a magnificent ambience that draws in its viewers with a strong visual sense upon close inspection. This change in style originated from an injury of the artist's dominant hand as he was forced to paint with his left hand. He frequently lost control of the brush and damaged the overall composition of the pieces he was working on, and this subsequent power of destruction made him aware that such uncertainty contained opportunities for an entirely new creative direction.



Henri Rousseau, *The Dream*, 1910 Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York

The painting *Untitled 09-7-1* illustrates a forest with dense vegetal growth. Zeng Fanzhi freely and continuously twisted and turned his brush, forming tree branches that staggered iteratively on the canvas. The scenery captures the brushstrokes much like the cursive script of Chinese calligraphy yet styled rhythmically like music. The vigorous overlapping brushworks form a gradual buffer, obstructing the light source hidden in the background while providing visual layers. Zeng Fanzhi once said: 'When I am painting, I work with two brushes simultaneously. The brush held between

the index finger and the middle finger serves as the creative leader, while the other brush brings about destruction during the creative process. The method will create seemingly chaotic brushworks that are orderly in the drawing.' This type of special method reminds one of the improvisation techniques of abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock. Performed without bodily consciousness, the method looks random but contains boundless passion. This is indicative of Zeng Fanzhi becoming more open-minded after unveiling his famed masks, and subsequently allowing himself to roam freely on the canvas with his brush. The lines that fill the canvas are like Zeng's psychological defense, putting up a barrier but still allowing people to peek into his inner psyche. The earth hidden behind the branches is a mixture of red, blue and yellow, filled with visceral brushworks expressing the blazing energy of his heart. In the darkness, a yellow light source in the distance is symbolic of the artist's endless pursuit. Looking at the bright light in the dark gives the painting a sense of lyrical mystery.



Jackson Pollock, *One: Number 31, 1950*, 1950 Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA

The 'Abstract Landscape' or *luanbi* series is one of the most crucial artistic breakthroughs of Zeng Fanzhi. No longer reliant on a symbolic single image, he has abandoned rational composition in favor of a comprehensive liberation through intertwining colours and light rays. He sought subject matter and inspirations from nature and daily life which allowed him to establish a brand new visual system via unrestrained brushworks and landscape composition full of Eastern flavors. This allowed him to further convey what was in his heart on canvas. The novel artistic language of *Untitled 09-7-1* created unlimited possibilities, becoming a work of Zeng Fanzhi that is filled with personal emotional characteristics.



Zhang Xu, *Four Poems (detail)*, Tang dynasty Collection of Liaoning Provincial Museum, Shenyang, China

Provenance

Gagosian, Hong Kong

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Literature

Hatje Cantz Verlag, ed., *Zeng Fanzhi: Every Mark Its Mark*, Ostfildern, 2010, p. 194 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



37 ж

Liu Ye

Flagship No. 2

signed and dated '97 Ye [in Chinese]' lower right

acrylic and oil on canvas

29 x 22 cm. (11 3/8 x 8 5/8 in.)

Executed in 1997.

Estimate

HK\$2,000,000 — 3,000,000

€227,000 — 340,000

\$256,000 — 385,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“We 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 recognised at all.” — René Magritte

There was a time when red served as a unique Chinese symbol, and at the same time, it became the iconic context behind Liu’s creations in the late 1990s, and *Flagship No.2* utilises red as its primary hue of choice. A round light focuses on the curtains on the stage as a young admiral opens them, revealing a huge battleship slowly approaching from behind. The black sea separates the foreground and background, and the sky is filled with beautiful, dense clouds. The fantastical colours in Liu Ye’s *Flagship No.2* are reminiscent of René Magritte’s surrealist expressions. As Liu Ye once mentioned, ‘In the 1990s, a lot of works were created with the help of the atmosphere of Surrealism and Metaphysical Paintings.’

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



René Magritte, *La Décalcomanie*, 1966 Collection of the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France

Liu Ye’s father was a children’s playwright, and as a result, Liu Ye’s childhood memories were filled with fairy tales and theatre stages. Around 1995, curtain and stage elements began to appear in his oeuvre, which can be regarded as the subconscious emergence of his childhood life. The big red stage and curtain elements in *Flagship No.2* then continued to appear in Liu’s creative career for nearly a decade.

The huge battleship in the picture also forms part of the typical creative lexicon of Liu Ye’s works from the 1990s. ‘When I was a child, I especially liked painting airplanes, cannons, and battleships. Sometimes I painted the sun and sunflowers.’ In *Flagship No. 2*, the two cannons in front of the battleship adds perspective to the image, making the ship appear extremely tall. From the viewer’s perspective, it is not possible to see how long and how tall the battleship is as a whole. The battleship here has become a representative social symbol. This huge and precise machine seems to represent a ‘complex and complicated world.’ As a viewer, it is impossible to get a glimpse of the whole picture of this ‘huge world’ behind the curtains. But can the small navy sailor, who has the body of a child really see the entirety of this ‘battleship’ as he slowly pull the curtains open? The childlike sailor on the stage also happens to be the protagonist in various works by the artist in the 1990s. The sailor represents the artist himself, advancing through various fairytale-like illusions. The small navy sailor in *Flagship No.2* lifts the curtain to peer into the world beyond, expressing the artist’s childlike desire for exploration as well as his exuberant curiosity about this ‘complex world’ through his works.



Liu Ye, *Hope No.1*, 2000 Christie's Hong Kong, 24 May 2021, Sold for HK\$10,450,000

According to Liu Ye's Catalogue Raisonné, there are only three pieces of the red Flagship. *Flagship No.2* was created in 1997. It was bought by the current collector in 2001 at an auction and has been residing in the collector's home since. After twenty years, the work is once again appearing at auction.



Detail of the present work

Untitled was created during Liu Ye's studies in Germany. There are very few works that are in circulation from these key early years. The various influences of acclaimed Western artists can also be detected in the work, making the piece a rare treasure to appear on the market. The background of *Untitled* shows a more traditional German architecture, and in the distance, there seems to be a modern Bauhaus-style building. The overlap of traditional and modern architecture manifests in a collision of classical and modern thoughts. Liu Ye once said frankly that the German Bauhaus design had a deep influence on his work. The pure geometric forms, and the succinct, evenly distributed lines and space emphasised in the Bauhaus architecture coincides with Mondrian's artistic philosophy, which had a profound influence on Liu. From this, we can also see the future direction of the artist's creative career.



Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

In the foreground of *Untitled*, three vastly different-looking western men sit around the table. The man on the left wears a big, red robe. They each have a different style of clothing, and it's difficult to place which time and space they came from. The old man on the right is looking at the man on his opposite side, holding a piece of paper in his hand. The three men seem to have come from a different era, causing people to wonder about their identities. Are they wise men discussing philosophy? Are they poets of literature? Or are they politicians discussing the future development of society? No matter what kind of philosophical, artistic, or literary problems they are discussing, the little angel in the middle of the table guides them. The angel's fingers are above the sky, bringing an unprecedented level of inspiration to the adults. In that moment, the three men receive the guidance of enlightenment, showing a shocked or surprised expression. This is the most profound and amusing element in this work. It is important to note that angels are also one of the iconic symbols in Liu's works. Naked baby cherubs can be traced back to religious paintings in the Renaissance and even the Middle Ages. The Holy Infant and Virgin Mother are common creative themes, and by integrating the pure infant with an angel, the holy infant is always pointing somewhere, as if to point out the direction for ancient philosophies. In Liu's rendition, the little angel in *Untitled* is derived from traditional Western paintings. With a finger pointing to the sky, he's bringing unprecedented thoughts and philosophical ideas to the world. This winged angel is transformed into a winged child or even an adult in Liu's later works, wandering around in various scenes and throughout the subsequent decades of the artist's creative career. *Untitled* is truly a masterpiece from the era of creations during the artist's studies in Germany, including the

profound Bauhaus doctrine that influenced him, which at the same time inspired him to continue to develop Western constructivist ideas for the next decade.

Lorenzo Lotto, *Madonna col Bambino e santi*, circa 1505 Collection of the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh

Provenance

Ming Jingdi Art Gallery, Beijing
Christie's, Hong Kong, 29 October 2001, lot 1
Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Literature

Liu Ye, exh. cat., Ming Jingdi Gallery, Beijing, 1997, p. 10 (illustrated)
'2007 Art Power 100', *Art Value*, no. 11, Chengdu, 2008, p. 110 (illustrated)
'Art Ought to Be More Simple', *Life Magazine*, no. 40, Guangzhou, 2009, p. 176 (illustrated)
'Liu Ye', *Life Magazine*, Guangzhou, 2011, p. 37 (illustrated)
'Liu Ye', *L'Officiel Art*, no. 79, Paris, 2014, p. 60 (illustrated)
Christoph Noe, ed., *Liu Ye: Catalogue Raisonné 1991-2015*, Berlin, 2015, no. 97-04, p. 272 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN EMINENT PRIVATE ASIAN
COLLECTION

38 ж

Wang Xingwei

Untitled (Heart-Shaped Dance)

signed with the artist's initials, titled and dated
"Untitled (Heart-Shaped Dance)" [in Chinese] WXW,
2006' on the reverse

oil on canvas

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

Painted in 2006.

Estimate

HK\$2,800,000 — 4,800,000

€318,000 — 546,000

\$359,000 — 615,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Wang Xingwei is undoubtedly an artist who excels at using art history symbols in the contemporary art world. From familiar classic artistic images to symbols of ‘bad taste’ that deviate from the mainstream, Wang combines the context of contemporary society with his unique observations and opinions, expressing them in unexpected ways - humorous, ironic, satirical, sad, or even helpless - leaving countless clues for the audience to reflect upon. Wang's paintings refuse to conform to a clear artistic style that can be easily identified by viewers. However, this has been a successful strategy to obtain even greater recognition, raising his popularity and market value. Collectors and art insiders who are not familiar with Wang's paintings usually find them difficult to recognize at first glance. This is the essence of Wang Xingwei's art - a quiet accumulation and development of a unique creative energy while maintaining a distance from mainstream aesthetics.

Untitled (Heart-Shaped Dance) is a part of the Large Rowboat Series - one of the artist's countless attempts and challenges throughout his creative career. The subjects of the series are this man and woman. This work was exhibited as part of Wang Xingwei's first important solo retrospective held at Beijing UCCA Center for Contemporary Art in 2013. It was also the first large-scale solo exhibition featuring only paintings at the UCCA exhibition hall. This exhibition showcased Wang's important pre-2013 creations, including what will later appear on auction markets in Hong Kong and Beijing and become his top 20 auction records. In 2020's Poly Beijing's Autumn Auction, Wang Xingwei's 1995 painting *Post-85s Look* was sold for RMB 31.62 million. Nearly a decade after the 2011 sale of the Ullens Collection at Sotheby's Hong Kong, where the same painting was sold for HKD 4.58 million. This is a testimony as to how Wang Xingwei's top works have greatly appreciated in value.

In 2007, he held a solo exhibition ‘Large Rowboat’ at the Beijing location of Galerie Urs Meile and *Untitled (Heart-Shaped Dance)* is a representative work from this series. From about 2004 to 2008, the artist adopted cartoon images, using a man and a woman in the picture to replace original uniformed subjects such as airline stewardesses, navy officers, and nurses. The subjects in the painting not only lack uniform, but also detailed facial expressions. Wang uses geometric silhouettes found in cartoon and comics to portray the couple as if they were lovers. The images are simple and geometrically flat, but with distortions and exaggerations that can be considered casual. The subject's expressions do not need to be delicately articulated; their identifying features are simple and clear. Throughout the rest of the series, this stylized shadow is present; behind it, there hides Wang Xingwei's attention to gender relations and sexual consciousness. This ambiguous representation allows viewers to engage their imagination when interacting with the piece.

Wang Xingwei once said of this series: ‘I want to gradually break away from art history. In the past, the viewer needed a certain cultural background to understand my paintings. What I am creating now has a more direct relationship with anyone's personal experience. In the latest works, I take shaping the image as the starting point, and I want to simplify the form.’¹ Wang has established a unique artistic style, one that always challenges viewers, leaving them amazed, racking their

brains, or suddenly enlightened. Ultimately, this is the core of Wang Xingwei's work.

¹ Nataline Colonnello, “Large Rowboat Isn't a Group Exhibition”, *Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing*, 13 January, 2007, online (interview between Wang Xingwei and the author Nataline Colonnello at Wang Xingwei's studio in Shanghai, 8 Januar, 2006)

Provenance

Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Beijing, Galerie Urs Meile, *Large Rowboat*, 3 February - 31 March 2007, n.p. (illustrated)

Beijing, UCCA Center for Contemporary Art, *Wang Xingwei*, 19 May - 18 August 2013, p. 123 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY OF AN EMINENT PRIVATE ASIAN
COLLECTOR

39 ж

Liu Ye

Untitled

signed and dated '93. liu ye [in Pinyin and Chinese]
lower right

acrylic and oil on canvas
24 x 24 cm. (9 1/2 x 9 1/2 in.)
Executed in 1993.

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000

€340,000 — 566,000

\$385,000 — 641,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“We 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 recognised at all.” — René Magritte

There was a time when red served as a unique Chinese symbol, and at the same time, it became the iconic context behind Liu’s creations in the late 1990s, and *Flagship No.2* utilises red as its primary hue of choice. A round light focuses on the curtains on the stage as a young admiral opens them, revealing a huge battleship slowly approaching from behind. The black sea separates the foreground and background, and the sky is filled with beautiful, dense clouds. The fantastical colours in Liu Ye’s *Flagship No.2* are reminiscent of René Magritte’s surrealist expressions. As Liu Ye once mentioned, ‘In the 1990s, a lot of works were created with the help of the atmosphere of Surrealism and Metaphysical Paintings.’

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



René Magritte, *La Décalcomanie*, 1966 Collection of the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France

Liu Ye’s father was a children’s playwright, and as a result, Liu Ye’s childhood memories were filled with fairy tales and theatre stages. Around 1995, curtain and stage elements began to appear in his oeuvre, which can be regarded as the subconscious emergence of his childhood life. The big red stage and curtain elements in *Flagship No.2* then continued to appear in Liu’s creative career for nearly a decade.

The huge battleship in the picture also forms part of the typical creative lexicon of Liu Ye’s works from the 1990s. ‘When I was a child, I especially liked painting airplanes, cannons, and battleships. Sometimes I painted the sun and sunflowers.’ In *Flagship No. 2*, the two cannons in front of the battleship adds perspective to the image, making the ship appear extremely tall. From the viewer’s perspective, it is not possible to see how long and how tall the battleship is as a whole. The battleship here has become a representative social symbol. This huge and precise machine seems to represent a ‘complex and complicated world.’ As a viewer, it is impossible to get a glimpse of the whole picture of this ‘huge world’ behind the curtains. But can the small navy sailor, who has the body of a child really see the entirety of this ‘battleship’ as he slowly pull the curtains open? The childlike sailor on the stage also happens to be the protagonist in various works by the artist in the 1990s. The sailor represents the artist himself, advancing through various fairytale-like illusions. The small navy sailor in *Flagship No.2* lifts the curtain to peer into the world beyond, expressing the artist’s childlike desire for exploration as well as his exuberant curiosity about this ‘complex world’ through his works.



Liu Ye, Hope No.1, 2000 Christie's Hong Kong, 24 May 2021, Sold for HK\$10,450,000

According to Liu Ye's Catalogue Raisonné, there are only three pieces of the red Flagship. *Flagship No.2* was created in 1997. It was bought by the current collector in 2001 at an auction and has been residing in the collector's home since. After twenty years, the work is once again appearing at auction.



Detail of the present work

Untitled was created during Liu Ye's studies in Germany. There are very few works that are in circulation from these key early years. The various influences of acclaimed Western artists can also be detected in the work, making the piece a rare treasure to appear on the market. The background of *Untitled* shows a more traditional German architecture, and in the distance, there seems to be a modern Bauhaus-style building. The overlap of traditional and modern architecture manifests in a collision of classical and modern thoughts. Liu Ye once said frankly that the German Bauhaus design had a deep influence on his work. The pure geometric forms, and the succinct, evenly distributed lines and space emphasised in the Bauhaus architecture coincides with Mondrian's artistic philosophy, which had a profound influence on Liu. From this, we can also see the future direction of the artist's creative career.



Bauhaus-Universität Weimar

In the foreground of *Untitled*, three vastly different-looking western men sit around the table. The man on the left wears a big, red robe. They each have a different style of clothing, and it's difficult to place which time and space they came from. The old man on the right is looking at the man on his opposite side, holding a piece of paper in his hand. The three men seem to have come from a different era, causing people to wonder about their identities. Are they wise men discussing philosophy? Are they poets of literature? Or are they politicians discussing the future development of society? No matter what kind of philosophical, artistic, or literary problems they are discussing, the little angel in the middle of the table guides them. The angel's fingers are above the sky, bringing an unprecedented level of inspiration to the adults. In that moment, the three men receive the guidance of enlightenment, showing a shocked or surprised expression. This is the most profound and amusing element in this work. It is important to note that angels are also one of the iconic symbols in Liu's works. Naked baby cherubs can be traced back to religious paintings in the Renaissance and even the Middle Ages. The Holy Infant and Virgin Mother are common creative themes, and by integrating the pure infant with an angel, the holy infant is always pointing somewhere, as if to point out the direction for ancient philosophies. In Liu's rendition, the little angel in *Untitled* is derived from traditional Western paintings. With a finger pointing to the sky, he's bringing unprecedented thoughts and philosophical ideas to the world. This winged angel is transformed into a winged child or even an adult in Liu's later works, wandering around in various scenes and throughout the subsequent decades of the artist's creative career. *Untitled* is truly a masterpiece from the era of creations during the artist's studies in Germany, including the

profound Bauhaus doctrine that influenced him, which at the same time inspired him to continue to develop Western constructivist ideas for the next decade.

Lorenzo Lotto, *Madonna col Bambino e santi*, circa 1505 Collection of the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh

Provenance

Galerie Taube, Berlin
 Galerie Frank Schlag & Cie., Essen
 Sotheby's, New York, 15 November 2007, lot 508
 Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

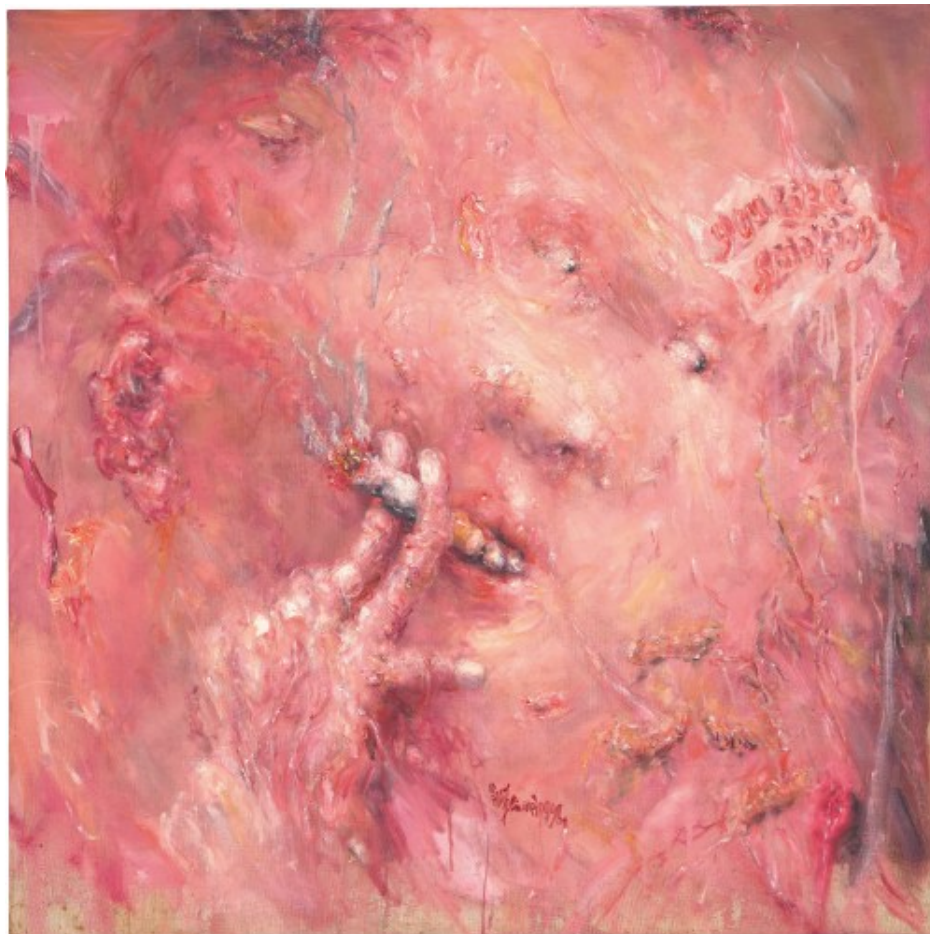
Berlin, Galerie Taube, *WIR - Künstler Unter Sich*, 20 August - 9 October 1993, n.p. (illustrated)
 Berlin, Galerie Taube, *Liu Ye: Bilder 1993-1995*, 7 April - 10 June 1995, n.p. (illustrated)

Literature

Liu Ye, exh. cat., Ming Jingdi Gallery, Beijing, 1997, p. 30 (illustrated)
 Christoph Noe ed., *Liu Ye: Catalogue Raisonné 1991-2015*, Berlin, 2015, no. 93-08, p. 258 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT PRIVATE ASIAN
COLLECTION

40 ж

Liu Wei

You Like Smoking?

signed and dated 'Liu Wei [in Chinese and Pinyin]
1998.' lower centre

oil on canvas

100 x 100 cm. (39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in.)

Painted in 1998.

Estimate

HK\$3,000,000 — 5,000,000

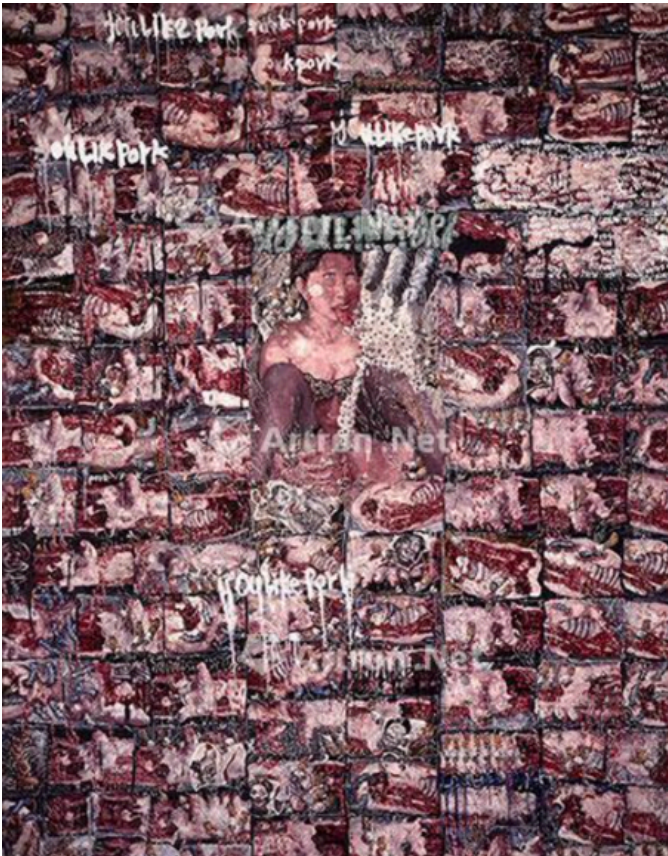
€340,000 — 566,000

\$385,000 — 641,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Born in Beijing in 1965, Liu Wei's upbringing and creative experiences clearly left an imprint on the artist's life, ushered in by the ever-changing conceptual and societal environment resulting from the several drastic social changes in the new China. Liu Wei enrolled in the Printmaking Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 1985, just as Chinese society was awakening from the decade-long torment of the Cultural Revolution, returning to humanity from a state of chaos and confusion, and subsequently welcoming the prosperous cultural revival of the country. Living at the centre of this culture, Liu Wei has therefore developed an open and free way of thinking.



Liu Wei, *You Like Pork?*, 1995 Exhibited in the main gallery of the 46th Venice Biennale, 1995

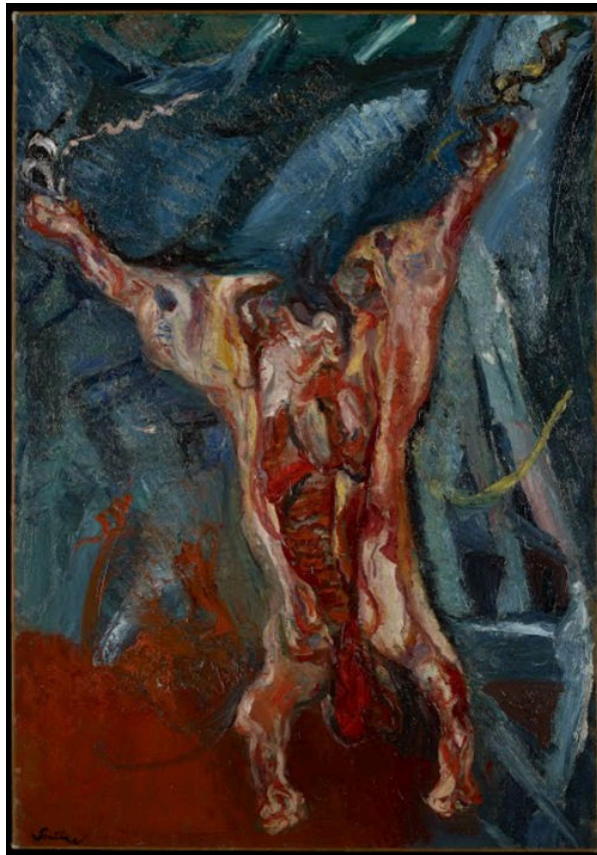
In the early 1990s, the illusion of a utopic system once constructed was hit and collapsed by an onslaught of market-oriented reform, making 'helplessness' the best analogy for people's living conditions. The sense of boredom brought on by this feeling had prompted a generation of artists, inclusive of Liu Wei, to abandon the grand narratives and the sorrowful seriousness of their predecessors, using observation and cynicism instead to depict a reality that is both banal and absurd. The *Revolutionary Family* series, created in the early 1990s, was made within this context. After participating in two consecutive Venice Biennales and São Paulo Art Biennial from 1993 to 1995, Liu Wei lessened the political metaphors in his works in the mid to late 1990s while retaining a playful and cynical undertone. He then turned his attention to the realities of everyday life to immerse himself in human nature and to fully understand the long-suppressed emotional impulses in traditional Chinese culture. In 1995, Liu Wei created the visually striking *You Like Pork?*, which was exhibited in the main gallery of the 46th Venice Biennale, followed by the *Who Am I* and the *No Smoking* series, all of which continue this corrupted and chaotic brushwork.



Liu Wei, *Landscape*, 1998

Created in 1998, *You Like Smoking?* is one of the earliest works in the *No Smoking* series. The *No Smoking* series was Liu Wei's main creation from 1998 to 1999, notable for its pink colour, decaying flesh, skulls and English writing symbols: the artist's characteristic traits during this period of creation. In this period, Liu Wei abandoned the application of criticism and cynicism to deconstruct the political forces that were unique to China, and rather expressed the morbid sense of disorder that characterised the times through a straight forward and intuitive visual language. Continuing the nerve-racking brushwork from his previous series, the use of festering faces and large scales of rotting flesh-like pink colours in the *No Smoking* series added to the visual effect of collapse and paranoia, and the confusion and anxiety brought about by the loss of spiritual support: a

subconscious expression of Liu Wei's own emotions. *You Like Smoking?* is not only the debut piece of the *No Smoking* series, but it also sets the tone for the series' grotesque and inflated characters. To express the spreading trend of the festering, the artist fills the whole picture with pink, melting the boundary between the flesh and the realistic background. Natural drip of paint is used to depict the blistered and swollen faces. With their sly eyes full of disdain for the world and the fingers clutching a cigarette in unrealistic proportions, obstinate and unruly characters portrayed by Liu Wei in this series seemed to have lived an ordinary life that is so twisted and deviant, that it conveys the disillusionment with the rapid development of society and the spiritual degradation brought about by the consumerist society in the specific context of the time.



Chaïm Soutine, *Carcass of Beef*, 1925 Collection of the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota, USA

In *You Like Smoking?*, Liu Wei expresses an instinctive and animalistic aesthetic through an expressionist approach, such as the flesh-and-bloody animal carcasses depicted by the 20th century expressionist artist Chaïm Soutine, which are dismembered, distorted to highly distilled abstract forms to express a frenzied, taboo and pessimistic state of mind. Against the backdrop of a disordered and chaotic society, based on inner subjective emotion, Liu Wei boldly exposed the rottenness, ugliness and tension of chaos to the public by forming a subversive aesthetic that makes the paintings a carrier of introspection, unease and loss of control. The artist philosophically questioned death and life, emptiness and decay in his *Who Am I* series in the mid to late 1990s. The *No Smoking* series inherits this deep contemplation and shows the dramatic tension of defending oneself as wonderful instead of admitting one's fault. As the debut piece of the *No Smoking* series, *You Like Smoking?* on auction this time is a rare piece because of its outstanding expressionism trait and pioneering personal style.



Francis Bacon, *Figure with Meat*, 1954 Collection of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, USA

Exhibited

Paris, Galerie Enrico Navarra, *Made by Chinese #7*, 13 June - 12 July 2002, p. 90 (illustrated)

Literature

Red Bridge Gallery, ed., *Liu Wei*, Shanghai, 2008, pl. 47, pp. 105, 269 (illustrated)

Lin & Lin Gallery, ed., *Liu Wei: A Solo Painter*, Taipei, 2012, p. 93 (illustrated)

Provenance

Private Collection

Christie's, Hong Kong, 25 November 2007, lot 510

Private Collection, Europe

Christie's, Hong Kong, 23 November 2013, lot 56

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT

ULTRA/NEO PROPERTY FROM A PROMINENT
PRIVATE ASIAN COLLECTION

41

Izumi Kato

Untitled

each signed and dated '2008 KATO [in English and
Kanji]' on the reverse
oil on canvas, triptych
red 227.3 x 162.1 cm. (89 1/2 x 63 7/8 in.)
blue 194 x 130.3 cm. (76 3/8 x 51 1/4 in.)
green 227.3 x 162.1 cm. (89 1/2 x 63 7/8 in.)
Painted in 2008.

Estimate

HK\$4,500,000 — 7,500,000

€510,000 — 849,000

\$577,000 — 962,000



[Go to Lot](#)



In the early 1990s, following the collapse of Japan's economic bubble, many commercial galleries faced unprecedented hardships in their daily operations, with the subsequent lack of funding making it nearly impossible to cultivate young artists. Graduating in 1992 from the Department of Oil Painting at Musashino University in Tokyo, Izumi Kato's artistic development was altogether delayed by economic circumstances. For several years, Kato worked as a construction worker to make a living, and it was only when he turned 30 years old that he decided to fully identify himself as an artist, concentrating on his love for creation.



Izumi Kato, *Untitled*, 2012 Christie's Hong Kong, 24 May 2021, Sold for HK\$4,250,000

Initially, Izumi Kato focused on painting abstract landscapes. However, his attention gradually

shifted to various symbolic portraits, featuring creatures of mysterious and grotesque forms. As an art major, he learned about the various influences in art history, such as traditional African art, the Cubist master Pablo Picasso, the Impressionist master Vincent van Gogh, and the figurative master painter Francis Bacon. These artists all had a great impact on Kato's works, which are readily visible in the subjects and compositions in his paintings. In 2007, Kato was invited for the first time to participate in the *52nd Venice Biennale*: the present work was created during the following year. Having had over a decade of experience in the international art community, his painting style became increasingly more mature.

Untitled started as a triptych painting of a family trio in a very large format - quite rare in the artist's oeuvre, also making it the largest painting by the artist to ever appear on the market. Each of the figures on the canvas plays a unique role, distinguished by the three primary colours to strengthen the significance of each representation. The "father" is on the green canvas, the "mother" on the red, and the "son" on a blue-coloured canvas of a slightly smaller size, probably to indicate age difference. Just like the spectrum perceived by the human retina, the three primary colours are also superimposed primary colours - when combined, the more layers the brighter, ultimately creating the colour of white. It is the exact opposite of the three subtractive primary colours of art with red, yellow, and blue, turning darker as more colours blend, eventually resulting in black.

Since the act of painting conforms to the characteristics of mixing colours, artists often apply the three subtractive primary colours metaphorically in their paintings. However, Kato deliberately chose to illustrate this as an optical concept, showing his unique sense of creativity. Given the fact that *Untitled* was once exhibited at the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, the importance of this series for the artist can be felt.



Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962 Collection of the Guggenheim Museum, New York

Growing up, Izumi Kato has always been particularly interested in Japanese folklore and mountain spirits. He always painted with his fingers instead of a paintbrush to stay close to nature, just like the primitive and experimental nature of his subject matters. In his paintings, female figures are usually a hybrid of humans, animals, and plants, creating a unique spiritual being for the artist that is embellished by organic lines or patterns. The dots that create a net on the background are characteristic of his paintings in this period, which sometimes exists on the head of the main figure, or it extends to the void, or add to the thickness of the canvas under the feet of the main figure. Such repetitive patterns were used only for works of this period, similar to Kato's emphasis on the illustration of the original form of plants. After 2010, such attributes gradually disappeared in the works, replaced by geometric shapes as the foundation of his composition. Plant elements have also been illustrated with more abstract formats. In recent years, geometric patterns have gradually and unconsciously disappeared in his works. During his slow exploration process, the artist has begun to focus on the presentation of high purity colours. Kato has consistently named his works *Untitled*, perhaps in an attempt to eliminate the perception of external added values. The result is that the meaning of the works can be anything - tolerant of all perspectives, as close to nature as possible and remaining open to the interpretation of all viewers.

Provenance

ARATANIURANO, Tokyo

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, *Dorodoro, Doron - The Uncanny World in Folk and Contemporary Art in Asia*, 14 March - 10 May 2009, pp. 58-60 (illustrated)

Literature

Kazuko Aono, ed., *Izumi Kato: Paintings and Sculptures*, Kyoto, 2011, pp. 88-89 (illustrated)

Galerie Perrotin, ed., *Izumi Kato*, Paris, 2020, pp. 82-83 (illustrated)



Henri Matisse, *Dance*, 1909-10 Collection of The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY OF AN EMINENT PRIVATE ASIAN COLLECTOR

42

Yoshitomo Nara

Pandora's Box

signed, inscribed and dated '22. Nov '90 Yoshitomo Nara "For The Birdy Num Nums" - MITTEN OVER THE WORLD - NARA MICHU '90' on the reverse

acrylic on canvas

90 x 90 cm. (35 3/8 x 35 3/8 in.)

Painted in 1990.

Estimate

HK\$7,500,000 — 10,000,000

€849,000 — 1,130,000

\$962,000 — 1,280,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Or maybe for me, the reason why I continually create works depicting children is because I desire to forever remain childlike, as opposed to merely wanting to be the ‘selfish child’” — Yoshitomo Nara

Yoshitomo Nara is presently one of the most influential artists in the world. His works showcase the expression of inner emotion, conveying sensitivity, fragility, and other intimate feelings in a distinctly sincere way. In presenting a pure and simple ‘expression’ of art, his works conjure emotional responses that are universal, resonating with all viewers. Nara once said, ‘one cannot understand inner loneliness and sadness when he is young’. As a result, though Nara uses the motif of the child, he paints from an adult perspective with emotional tension. As such, his depictions of children are a contradictory mixture of innocent and rebellious.



Yoshitomo Nara, *Missing in Action*, 2000

Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 8 June 2021 for HK\$ 123,725,000

Pandora's Box was created in 1990, by which time Nara had already commenced his studies at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in Germany, where he stayed between 1988 and 1994. When he first arrived in Germany, Nara became deeply influenced by the German Neo-Expressionism he was becoming acquainted with, gradually coming to explore and incorporate its characteristics into his own practice. He began to combine this his own cultural background, as well as his interest in Japanese comics and children’s drawings – which he understood as containing profound layers of interpretation despite their relatively simple illustrations. In fact, it was the directness of this visual language that inspired the artist’s exploration of the iconic nature of symbols and stylisation, which he continued to evolve in subsequent work. This period of study and exploration marked the beginning of Nara’s signature aesthetic, profoundly impacting his future works.



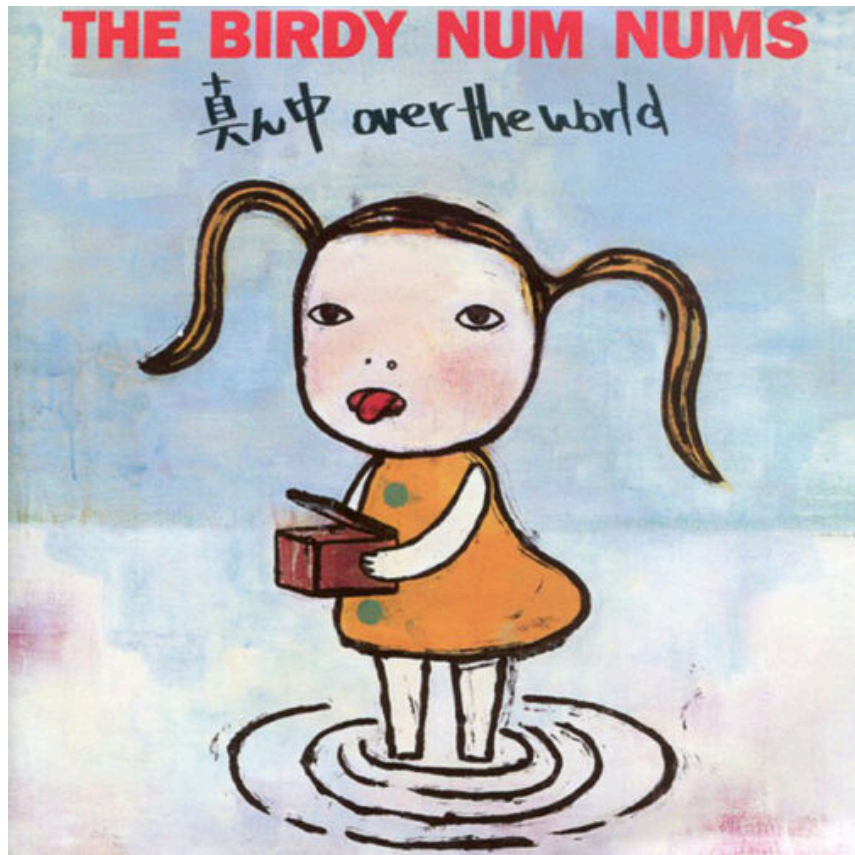
Utagawa Hiroshige, *Fifty-Three Stations of the Tokaidou*, 1948-1952

Collection of the Fujisawa Ukiyo-e Museum, Fujisawa, Japan

Studying alone in Germany, Nara faced difficulty expressing himself verbally and communicating with others as he was not fluent in the language, which consequently left him feeling intensely lonely. As a result, he turned to his paintings as an outlet for his emotions, considering the children or small animals in his compositions as self-portraits. *Pandora's Box*, an iconic early work by Nara, epitomises the mood of the artist at the time. Behind the girl is a highly saturated background, depicting open waters and skies – a space with infinite depth, suggesting infinite possibilities. And yet, the focus is still on the main character.

The little girl's feet are submerged in a rippling puddle, making her tiny body appear like a floating island in the vast ocean. In his successive works, Nara has repeatedly used returned to this motif of the 'puddle', even naming his first major solo exhibition in 1995 '*In the Deepest Puddle*', demonstrating that the artist considers the 'puddle' as one of the most representative symbols in his work. In *Pandora's Box*, the figure is still a young girl with a rich heart and expressive face, grimacing humorously with stubborn eyes that look straight on. There is no audience around her, as if she is not willing to follow the current of the stream, evoking a profound sense of isolation. The slightly opened Pandora's Box in the young girl's hand is not only a symbol of the artist's hope in the face of loneliness, but also a testimony of Nara's courage and belief in never backing down from a difficult situation.

Although his years of study in Germany may have seemed lonely and difficult, Yoshitomo Nara won the recognition of the European art circle with his highly individualistic style. In 1990, he began working with the d'Eendt Gallery in Amsterdam, and signed an official contract with the gallery in 1991, thus allowing him to kickstart his career as a professional artist. With Nara a veteran rock fan, a version of *Pandora's Box* was also used as the cover of indie rock band, The Birdy Num Nums's, for their album *Mannaka over the World* which was released in 1991. The cover of the album was still hung in Nara's home when he was interviewed in May 2000, testament of the significance of the image to him.



The cover of the album *Mannaka over the World*, released by an indie rock band "The Birdy Num Nums" in 1991

In *Pandora's Box*, we can trace the artistic language and emotional symbols that the artist had already started to develop under the influence of German academic system. The whole painting is presented in flat coating, using minimalistic thick lines to outline the figures without any deliberate focus on perspective, showing Nara's inheritance of traditional Japanese painting. However, he was also influenced by Expressionism, which can be seen in the use of bold colours, the artist's use of extremely vivid colours and the natural dripping of paint on the background. Thanks to his exploration of collage, the use of clashing colours in this work divides the painting into contrasting blocks of hue, creating a striking visual effect that introduces a vibrant sense of dimension and expression to the painting. What is revealed, is that Nara was in the process of integrating his own

Eastern cultural experiences with the avant-garde nature of the West, coming to form his own stylised visual language.

As a projection of the artist's self, *Pandora's Box* not only strikes a harmonious balance between Eastern and Western visual languages and poetic subjectivity, it also resonates with the feelings, memories, and imaginations of viewers on a universal level – about the past, present and future. Transcending all geographical, age and cultural divisions, Nara's art evokes vulnerability, courage, and faith – emotions shared by all human beings.



The album cover was hung in Nara's room when he was interviewed in 2000

Yoshitomo Nara

Provenance

Galerie Humanité, Nagoya

The Kurokochi Collection, Japan

Sotheby's, Hong Kong, 5 April 2013, lot 807

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

Nagoya, Galerie Humanité, *Cogitationes Cordium*, 1991

Yokohama Museum of Art (p. 123, illustrated); Ashiya City Museum of Art & History; Hiroshima City

Museum of Contemporary Art; Hokkaido Asahikawa Museum of Art; Hirosaki, Yoshii Brick Brew

House, *I Don't Mind, If You Forget Me*, 11 August 2001 - 29 September 2002

Yokohama Museum of Art, *Works by Nara Yoshitomo in Yokohama Museum of Art Collection*, 21

January - 20 March 2011

Literature

Kadokawa Shoten, ed., *Yoshitomo Nara: In the Deepest Puddle*, Tokyo, 1997, n.p. (illustrated)

Noriko Miyamura and Shinko Suzuki, eds., *Yoshitomo Nara: The Complete Works Volume 1:*

Paintings, Sculptures, Editions, Photographs 1984-2010, Tokyo, 2011, no. P-1990-019, p. 71

(illustrated)

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

81 (illustrated)

Yeewan Koon, ed., *Yoshitomo Nara*, New York, 2020, pl. 54, p. 49 (illustrated)



43

George Condo

The Dreamer

signed, titled and dated 'Condo 08 "The DReamer"' on the reverse

oil on canvas

132.2 x 106.6 cm. (52 x 41 7/8 in.)

Painted in 2008.

Estimate

HK\$4,600,000 — 6,200,000

€521,000 — 702,000

\$590,000 — 795,000

[Go to Lot](#)



*“Attention is what Condo’s figures initially demand, located as they are between the grotesque and the comic, protagonists caught between comedy and tragedy.” —
Margrit Brehm*

A whimsical example of George Condo’s skilful bridging of history and contemporaneity, tradition and irreverence, comedy and tragedy, *The Dreamer* features one of the artist’s most iconic and well-loved characters, the clown. Few artists have dedicated their careers as singularly to one genre as Condo has to portraiture, and his recurring portrayals of the psychologically and socio-politically charged figure of the joker or the clown has long been a powerful vehicle through which he probed the complex depths of the human psyche. In fact, Condo clown-ified his entire cast of wacky characters – be it priest, cardinal, chef, waiter, nude, or debutante – by enlarging body parts, exaggerating, deforming, or rearranging features, and squashing faces into unrecognition. In manipulating the visual appearance of his subjects, Condo reveals the infinitely complex paradoxes and contradictions of human nature, presenting his subjects at their most vulnerable and human.



George Condo, *Untitled (Clown)*, 1984 © 2021 George Condo/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Jokers and Dreamers

Condo has painted clowns as early as the mid-1980s. Drawn to the endless enquiries posed by the aesthetics and formal considerations of the Old Masters, Condo emerged on the New York art scene at the time alongside contemporaries such as Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring and swiftly developed a distinctive visual lexicon that was unmistakably his own. In a lively fusion of Old Master subject matter and Cubist deformity, Condo’s singular portraiture constructed a labyrinthine amalgamation of style that is expressive, replete with rich art historical references,

and which masterfully deconstructs the complex workings of the mind, the psyche, and human perception.



Pablo Picasso, *The Dreamer*, 1932 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York © 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

“I wrote a kind of Artificial Realist manifesto in which I stated: it’s a dismantling of one reality and constructing another from the same parts [...] a new conjunctive hyper-reality or hybrid image showing the simultaneous presences.” — George Condo

Inspired by diverse influences ranging from Francisco Goya to Frans Hals to Willem de Kooning and Picasso, Condo sought to expand the confines of figurative painting and transform the tradition of portraiture in his own unique way. He was fascinated with the emotional expressionism prevalent in Old Master painting as well as the formal and psychological underpinnings of abstraction; in ingeniously fusing the two, Condo created clever and compelling portraits that established his unique artistic language. While on the surface irreverent and brazenly provocative, Condo’s cartoon-like figures push against the boundaries of what figurative painting can visually represent, and the psychological depths that it is able to explore, thus presenting one of our present generation’s most serious investigations into the genre of painting.

“My painting is all about this interchangeability of languages in art. One second you might feel the background has the shading and tonalities you would see in a Rembrandt portrait, but the subject is completely different and painted like some low-culture, transgressive mutation of a comic strip.” — George Condo



Jean Antoine Watteau, *The Dreamer*, 1712-1714 Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago

Psychological Cubism

The present work also alludes to the trope of the dreamer, previously depicted by the likes of Jean-Antoine Watteau, Jean-Baptiste Greuze, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Pablo Picasso, amongst others. In particular, Watteau's full-length portrait features a young woman seated primly upright in a long red gown; in Condo's work, the strategically placed cigarette and bright yellow collar may be playful mockeries of the woman's fur garment and upwards-pointing fan. A sensuous spiral of smoke floats up against Condo's luxurious bubble-gum pink ground rendered in consummate

chiaroscuro depths; as Jennifer Higginson once remarked, Condo has 'lent smoke a sinuous, sculptural quality.'ⁱ Indeed, in all his bizarre eccentricity, the dreamer is not just amusing and endearing but even exudes an incongruous poignancy and classical beauty.

"Funnily enough, the more you look, the more vulnerable and human they become."
— Jennifer Higginson

The comedy in Condo's subjects, however ludicrous or absurd, awakens a heart-wrenching empathy. In the words of curator Ralph Rugoff: 'Unlike in caricature [...] the preposterous features of these figures are in fact rendered with great sympathy. Drawing on the traditional rhetoric of portraiture, Condo imbues his invented subjects with a compelling psychological presence'.ⁱⁱ

"I try to depict a character's train of thoughts simultaneously – hysteria, joy, sadness, desperation. If you could see these things at once that would be like what I'm trying to make you see in my art." — George Condo



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Clown*, 1868

Condo once said: 'I think the paintings have to do with the idea of people's despair today, with the idea that they don't really have a choice. [...] They are questioning their existence. Faced with despair, they decide to live way out there beyond the periphery of consciousness.'ⁱⁱⁱ Articulating a potent emotional charge that resonates powerfully within viewers, *The Dreamer* reminds us of the exquisite highs of hopes and fantasies and the crushing sorrows of dashed dreams, while also reminding us of the bittersweet comedy that ultimately pervades existence.

Collector's Digest

Since his major international travelling mid-career survey *George Condo: Mental States* in 2011, Condo has continued to exhibit widely, representing the United States at the 2013 and 2019 International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia. Now represented by Hauser & Wirth, his paintings are held in important international collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., amongst others. A major exhibition recently opened at the Long Museum in Shanghai in September. In parallel, Hauser & Wirth showed new paintings and drawings across both of their London galleries this October.

ⁱ Jennifer Higgie, 'Time's Fool', *Frieze*, 5 May 2007, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Ralph Rugoff, 'The Mental States of America', *George Condo: Mental States*, exh. cat., Hayward Gallery, London, 2011-12, p. 16

ⁱⁱⁱ Ralph Rugoff, 'George Condo: Existential Portraits, The Enigma of Jean Louis', 2006, p. 7

Provenance

Xavier Hufkens, Brussels

Private Collection, Belgium

Private Collection, Monaco

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Brussels, Xavier Hufkens, *George Condo*, 28 May - 4 July 2009, p. 9 (illustrated)

Literature

Monopol | Magazin für Kunst und Leben, Berlin, February 2009, cover page (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



44

George Condo

Entangled Figures

signed and dated 'Condo 09' on the reverse
acrylic, charcoal and pastel on linen
182.8 x 147.3 cm. (71 7/8 x 57 7/8 in.)
Executed in 2009.

Estimate

HK\$6,200,000 — 9,200,000

€705,000 — 1,050,000

\$795,000 — 1,180,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

One common observation that unites much of the artistic discourse on George Condo is that he is altogether a maverick; a Rimbaud-esque character who, in his unfaltering refusal to adhere to any singular mode of creation or interpretation, has solidified his position as one of the most complex and gifted draftsmen and painters of our generation. Known for the non-hierarchical manner with which he treats his source material (for him, Cubism and cartoons coexist effortlessly), Condo's oeuvre and its re-imaginings of contemporary life have earned him placement within the collections of some of the world's finest institutions. Most recently, the artist has had significant prominence at the 2019 Venice Biennale, as well as a solo exhibition at the [Long Museum, Shanghai](#) in 2021.

"For Condo, things would appear to exist in terms of line, colour and form, life itself is form—form in the throes of ceaseless change, expansion, entanglement—form enamoured of its attendant colour signs and subtly glowing or violently contrasting colour textures..." —Michael Casey



Detail of the present work

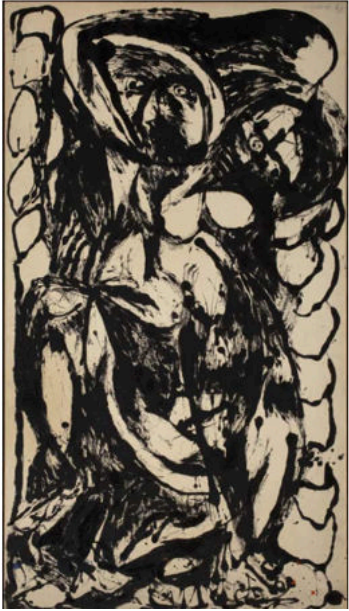
Feast for the Mind

Commanding in scale, colour, subject matter, and composition, *Entangled Figures* is in equal parts visually captivating as it is mentally stimulating. Its Abstract Expressionist background, filled with bursts of pink, purple, blue, speckled with white, immediately recalls Sam Francis' vibrant flecks, a testimony to Condo's skillful evocation of contemporary masters in his works. And yet, contrasting with the energetic background akin to Jackson Pollock's brighter drip paintings is a stark simplicity of line.

*"When I see a network of brushstrokes and a cosmos of imagery in a Jackson Pollock, for example, I see faces and screaming heads, and I want to paint what I see."
—George Condo*

Aside from its obvious Pollockian link, within *Entangled Figures* is also a remarkable similarity to Pollock's lesser known black pouring pieces from the fifties, in which fragments of imagery, made up of distorted faces and human forms, filled predominantly monochrome works. Obscure as his references may be, such is the way with Condo's creations, which draw heavily and unsparingly from the encyclopedic depths of art history.

One constant source of inspiration to Condo—and one comparison oft-cited—is that of Pablo Picasso. In its purity of line, the present work also deftly evokes Picasso's etchings. Such etchings were based on various classical sources, including characters such as Pygmalion, Ariadne and the Minotaur, and, most conspicuously linked to *Entangled Figures*, *The Three Graces*.



Left: Jackson Pollock, *Number 5*, 1952, Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth
© 2021 Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Right: Pablo Picasso, *Les trois grâces, II*, 1922-23, (etching printed in black ink on wove paper),
Collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts
© 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

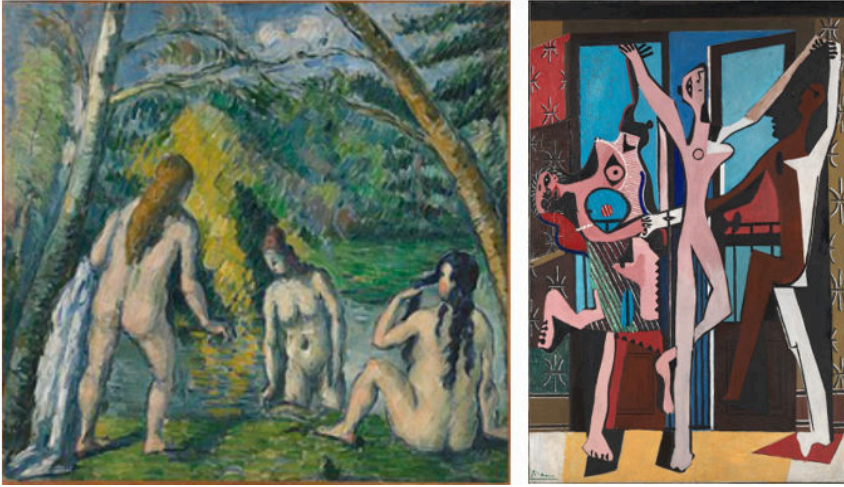
Three's a Crowd

The cultural significance of the magic number three has permeated both art and literature throughout the times. In one of its most notable imaginings is *The Three Graces*, the three goddesses that represent charm, nature, creativity, fertility, and goodwill—amongst many other positive attributes. Often depicted nude, the tripartite symbolises the pinnacle of beauty, a subject no doubt continuously investigated in the annals of history.



- 1) Sandro Botticelli *Three Graces in Primavera*, 1485-87, Collection of the Uffizi Gallery, Florence
- 2) James Pradier *The Tree Graces*, 1831, Collection of the Louvre Museum, Paris
- 3) Raphael *The Three Graces*, circa 1503-05, Collection of the Musée Condé, Chantilly
- 4) Peter Paul Rubens *The Three Graces*, 1630-35, Collection of the Museo del Prado, Madrid

The recreation of a party of three is so adored that the number is heavily referenced by many artists: among Condo's sources, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Paul Cézanne, Picasso, Gustav Klimt, have all produced their own interpretations of *three* bathers, the *three* ages of woman, *three* dancers, among others.

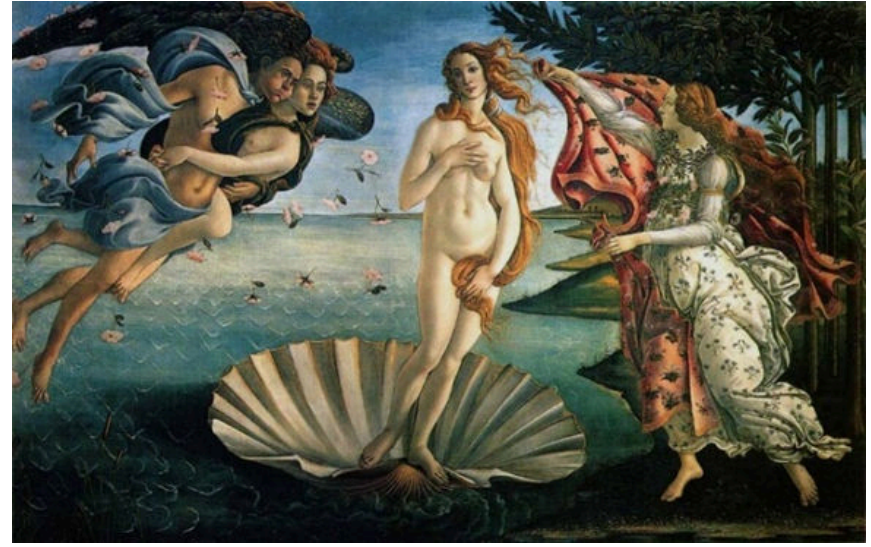


Left: Paul Cézanne *Trois baigneuses* (*Three Bathers*), 1879-82, Collection of the Musée du Petit Palais, Paris

Right: Pablo Picasso *The Three Dancers*, 1925, Collection of the Tate Museum, London
© 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

"There are characters that live within your mind and I want to bring them to light. If you think about how the mind as opposed to the eyes see people, that is the image I want to create." —George Condo

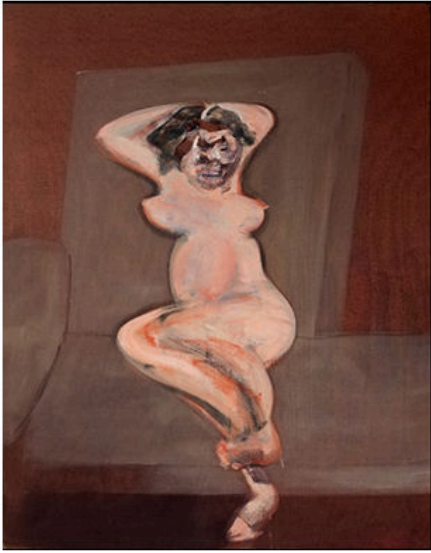
And yet, with George Condo, nothing is without a hint of the grotesque. *Entangled Figures* ostensibly appropriates the three graces: in the central figure's voluptuousness we detect a celebration of fertility; in the left figure's perfectly coiffed hair and adornment of pearls we see a celebration of Venusian beauty and grace—but this image is interrupted by a third, outer right figure, peeking out, wearing a signature Condo grimace, poised between 'a scream and a smile'.



Sandro Botticelli *The Birth of Venus*, circa 1484-86

Collection of the Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Entangled Figures is so typical of the artist. On the one hand the image summons Botticellian memories of Venus emerging from the sea, or indeed Bouguereau's stunning beauty, surrounded by a company of winged cherubs (our Venus, too, raises her arms above her head as her modesty is shielded). On the other hand, the work's sinister twist bears resemblance to the nudes of Francis Bacon: distorted, often haunting, Bacon's influence on Condo is palpable.



Left: Francis Bacon *NUDE*, 1960

© 2021 Estate of Francis Bacon/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London



Right: William-Adolphe Bouguereau *The Birth of Venus*, 1879

Collection of the Musée d'Orsay, Paris

The reverse side of the coin is so often felt in Condo's paintings, as nothing is ever as it seems. Even in its title, *Entangled Figures*, a superficially innocent nod to the intertwined Graces, one also remembers the tale behind Picasso's infamous *The Three Dancers* now housed in The Tate's collection: a '...“dance” of intertwined sinister figures', whose title Picasso 'always felt should be called *The Death of Pichot*'ⁱⁱ, based on a chilling love triangle, a sordid love affair involving lust, jealousy, and ultimately death.

Thus perhaps a closer cousin to the dual allegorical meanings behind Hans Baldung's set of similarly themed paintings: *The Three Graces* and *The Three Ages of Man and Death*, Condo's colourful recreation is an in-depth exploration of such themes as mortality and the fleeting nature of beauty. *Entangled Figures*, is in a type of reconstruction of reality; a perfect example of Condo's famed 'artificial realism'.



Left: Hans Baldung *The Three Ages of Man and Death*, 1541-44

Collection of the Museo del Prado, Madrid



Right: Hans Baldung *The Three Graces*, 1541-44

Collection of the Museo del Prado, Madrid

George Condo in Conversation

Emily Nathan "The only way to feel the difference between every other and me is to use other

artists to become me,” you once said. What did you mean?

George Condo Well, I’m not sure which philosopher it was—Aristotle or Socrates I think—who said that a “thing” is everything that it’s not, and that’s the way to describe definitively what something is. So everything that I love or am interested in or am impressed by in art goes into my work. I can only distinguish myself by understanding that all of those things are in my paintings, and then my works still come out looking like something entirely new and different. It’s really about reconstructive as opposed to deconstructive art: bringing the inter-relationships of languages in art together in a single canvas. My intention when I go into a work is to make people aware of all the great things I think there still are to draw from in painting.

EN Your paintings often contain the recurring trope of a kind of monster, its screaming head contorted and deformed by hysteria. What was the genesis of this image?

GC You know, [Phillip Guston](#) and all those artists who are our heroes, they all got it from Picasso: That screaming head you see in *Guernica* kind of got consumed into their language of abstraction. And for me as a painter, I see all that when I look at abstract paintings. When I see a network of brushstrokes and a cosmos of imagery in a Jackson Pollock, for example, I see faces and screaming heads, and I want to paint what I see. So real life is involved with that. We see reality through our own eyes. Say I see two people talking on a bus, and I don’t know what they’re talking about but their faces are sort of thrown back in some hysterical expression—and I just want to capture that at the moment I see it, even though it might be out of context when it shows up in my work.

EN Are you saying that what we call reality is actually inherently artificial, especially since we can only experience it as filtered through our own perceptions?

GC Our own experiences of the world are really all we can go off of. If you look up the word “artificial” in Webster’s dictionary, the definition is “man made.” And the world we live in is “man made.” If you look up “reality,” though, the definition is something like “that which exists independent of our perception.” So according to this definition, if it’s out there beyond where we can perceive it, then it’s real. But what we generally describe as “concrete reality” is actually the artificial. Now, let’s just say you decide to become a very representational painter and to sit here and paint exactly what you see. So then you’ve created a very realistic representation of that which is artificial—what do you call it? It was Robert Rosenblum, actually, who said, “What do you call this stuff you do? It’s not Surrealism, it’s not Expressionism.” And I thought about it and I said, Robert, you can call it Artificial Realism.

Read the rest of the interview [here](#).

Collector’s Digest

Few artists have dedicated their careers as singularly to one genre as George Condo has to that of portraiture. He is drawn to the endless inquiries posed by the aesthetics and formal considerations of Caravaggio, Rembrandt and the Old Masters. Emerging on the New York art scene in the 1980s alongside contemporaries such as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, Condo developed a distinctive visual lexicon that is unmistakably his own. Student to Warhol, friend to Basquiat and collaborator with William S. Burroughs, Condo tracked a different path. The artist frequently cites Picasso as a predominant influence in his contemporary cubist compositions and joyous use of paint. Condo is known for postmodernist compositions staked in wit and the grotesque, which draw the eye into a highly imaginary world.

ⁱ Annette King, Joyce H. Townsend and Bronwyn Ormsby, ‘*The Three Dancers* 1925 by Pablo Picasso’, The Tate London

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

Provenance

Massimo De Carlo, London
 Repetto Gallery, London
 Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Milan, Massimo De Carlo, *MCMXXXIV*, 8 March – 13 July 2019

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



45

Takashi Murakami

Sage

signed and dated 'Takashi 2014' on the reverse
acrylic, gold leaf and platinum leaf on canvas mounted
on wood panel
diameter 200 cm. (78 3/4 in.)
Executed in 2014.

Estimate

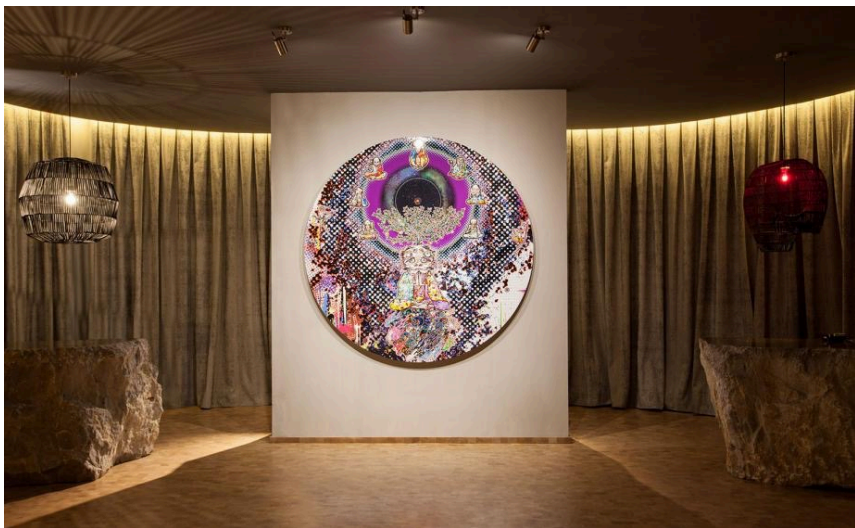
HK\$7,500,000 — 9,500,000
€849,000 — 1,080,000
\$962,000 — 1,220,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Japanese people of my generation grew up reading manga and watching anime and special effect films, so these things are thickly in our flesh and blood. We can’t help expressing them... In any case, the important thing in art is how you express your reality; it’s crucial to accurately depict the influences you have received in life through various methods and grammars of art.” — Takashi Murakami

With works teeming with smiling sunflowers, manga characters, and fashion icons, Japanese superstar artist Takashi Murakami’s ubiquity in our contemporary society is undeniable. Stemming from a wider series of pieces reflecting his own cultural roots, Murakami’s *Sage* is steeped in symbols, and features a glimmering composition of psychedelic hues intermixed with acrylic, gold, and platinum leaf. First shown in a 2015 exhibition presented by Blum & Poe in Ibiza, the work exemplifies Murakami’s drastic change in style and subject in the early 2010s, having shifted from an aesthetically driven, *superflat* practice towards a more esoteric, reflective artistic expression.



The present work exhibited at Ibiza Gran Hotel Presented by Blum & Poe, *Takashi Murakami*, 24 June – 26 September 2015

Interweaving Religious and Manga Imageries

Sage presents a visual feast: sitting cross-legged against a glistening sea of polka dots, the titular magical, six-eyed humanoid hovers between a mystical tree and a globe of skulls, outlined in a

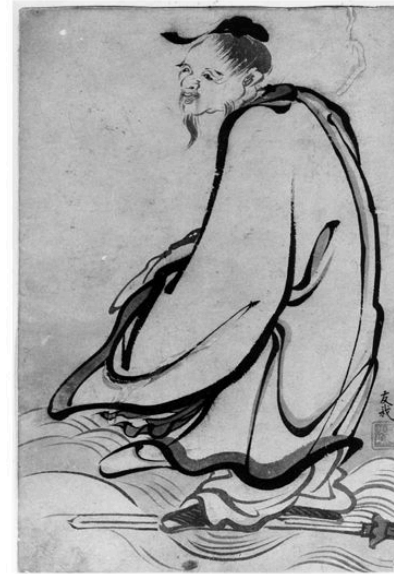
style reminiscent of Japanese manga. Above him floats six equally mystical figures, all rendered in a similarly animated visual language; as the ensemble immediately calls to mind the unnaturally large, supernatural creatures in Japanese animator Hayao Miyazaki’s film *Spirited Away* (2001), alluding to a possible manga-inspired theme.

However, contrary to one’s presumptions, the work’s title suggests that this figure is a sage, a sacred character in Japanese folklore whose wisdom transcends humanity. Drawing inspiration from Eastern religious iconography, the depicted sage is dressed in traditional garb, in a seated posture, with a cosmos-hued circle behind his body suggesting a sacred halo that is common in Buddhist imageries. Lined up around the ring of the halo are nine smaller figures, who may in fact be arhats, the enlightened disciples of Buddha. The composition of *Sage* amalgamates various sources: it could point to the seven stages of the Buddha, another central theme within Buddhist iconology. An alternative reading perhaps points to the enlightenment of the Buddha under the Bodhi Tree just as the Demon King Mara sends forth an army to distract him, oft-depicted in Buddhist symbology. Considering however the figure’s cross-legged nature (the *agura* sitting term considered informal in the company of superiors as opposed to *seiza*, the proper sitting position), a certain superiority may be assumed within the present piece, firmly confirming the seniority of the mysterious sage. Eschewing linier perspectives, the composition speaks for an Asian aesthetic.



Yet upon closer inspection, an apple tree growing out of the sage's head may call into question the work's orientalism, albeit the Eastern aesthetics and subject matter. Closely associated with Western Catholicism, the apple tree appears throughout the history of European religious paintings as a symbol of knowledge, immortality, and temptation. Here, the inclusion of the tree coincides with the symbolic meaning of the sage, both implying divinity and intellectualism, thus forming a multilayered image of various signs.

By embracing overlapping cultural symbols in *Sage*, Murakami is ushering in a globalised view of all the interwoven cultural complexities of our contemporary world.



Left: School of Katsushika Hokusai, *Sage*, 18th-19th century Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Right: Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Adam and Eve*, 1526 Collection of the Courtauld Institute of Art, London

Confronting a Disturbing World

From the year 2011 onwards, Murakami's practice has seen a drastic shift from a brighter style comprising smiling sunflowers and *kawaii* anime characters towards more solemn subject matters of skulls, distorted figures, and religious icons. This introspective change in style and subject marks Murakami's response to the heart-breaking 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami and the ensuing Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.

Executed in 2014, *Sage* is related to Murakami's celebrated *Arhats* series. A motif Murakami relentlessly incorporated in his post-2011 works, an arhat refers to a Buddhist figure who spread Buddha's teachings to save humanity from its dangerous desires. It is used by Murakami to illustrate the wish to recover from the painful aftermath of the 2011 tragedies:

“I used to think of religion as something kind of false and hypocritical, but after the earthquake disaster, I realized in a time like that, religion and fairy tales and things like that are actually a necessity.” — Takashi Murakami

Included in both *Sage* and *Arhats* series are magical human figures, whose uncannily distorted bodies evoke the monstrous mutation of living beings resulting from nuclear exposure. Creating a symbolic space for viewers to confront a disturbing world in which horror and hope are intermingled, Murakami’s works express a deeply humane and honest compassion. Considering that the present work’s original presentation was alongside pieces such as a colossal *Oval Buddha* measuring over eighteen feet tall, it is clear that the artist intended for in-depth meditation and rumination over humanity’s plight.



Installation view of *The 500 Arhats* at *Takashi Murakami: The 500 Arhats*, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2015

Takashi Murakami in Conversation

In 2012 Hans Ulrich Obrist interviewed the artist in tandem with his exhibition *Takashi Murakami: Flowers & Skulls*, which took place at Gagosian Gallery, Hong Kong

Hans Ulrich Obrist Could you tell me about the 100-meter painting that you presented in *Murakami-Ego* as a response to the Tōhoku earthquake?

Takashi Murakami After the disasters in 2011, I experienced an incredible sense of helplessness. I had no idea what I could do as an artist, and felt that the theories I had been building so far didn’t fit with the post-disaster reality. It was the kind of moment that lies at the origin point of most of the world’s religions. In other words, when we are faced with suffering that we can’t make sense of with the help of the human theories or tools at our disposal, we start to look to things like religion for a sense of healing. But there are also examples of art being used as a platform in these times of crisis, such as with Picasso’s *Guernica* [1937], and I realized that in Japanese history the three factors—art, religion, and disaster—have always been intertwined. Around that time, I happened to be working with a Japanese art historian on a collaborative serialized column in a Japanese art magazine. The project entailed that for each issue, he would suggest a historical theme and I would make a work in response. The theme he suggested after the disasters was the motif of “arhat.” Specifically, he wrote an essay on Kano Kazunobu’s *Five Hundred Arhats* [1854–63]. When I saw this, I realized that I had found the platform I was looking for and presented my contemporary version in Doha.

Read the rest of the interview [here](#)

Collector’s Digest

Rising to fame in the 1990s, Takashi Murakami is known for intermingling fine art and pop-culture imageries in his practice spanning paintings, sculptures, installation, and textiles, among many others. His recent large-scale retrospectives were held at [Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong](#) (1 June – 1 September 2019), [Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow](#) (29 September 2017 – 4 February 2018), [Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago](#) (6 June – 24 September 2017), and [Mori Art Museum, Tokyo](#) (31 October 2015 – 6 March 2016). Since 2002, Murakami has collaborated with various brands and celebrities including Louis Vuitton, Kanye West, Pharrell Williams, and G-Dragon. His works are included in major museum collections globally.

Provenance

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Ibiza Gran Hotel presented by Blum & Poe, *Takashi Murakami*, 24 June – 26 September 2015

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A PROMINENT NEW YORK
COLLECTION

46 ♦

KAWS

NEW YORK

signed and dated 'KAWS..18' on the reverse
acrylic on canvas
243.8 x 243.8 cm. (96 x 96 in.)
Painted in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000

€453,000 — 680,000

\$513,000 — 769,000

[Go to Lot](#)



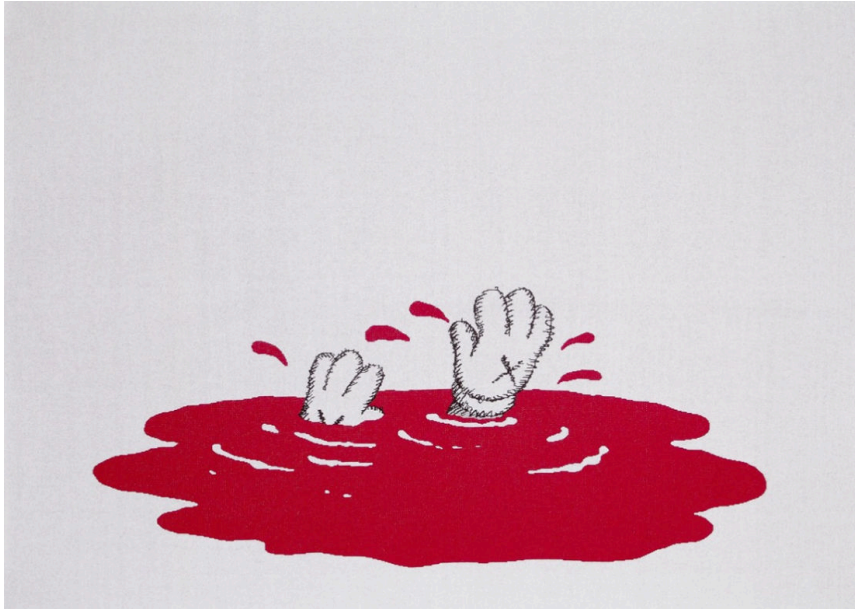
"I use the X the same way that Mercedes uses the grille on their cars... You see them in the rearview mirror and just have a glimpse of it, and you know the style of the car going behind you." — KAWS

Immediately grabbing the attention of the viewer with its commanding scale and refined graphic style, *NEW YORK* is a prime example of American artist KAWS's unique visual language. Fresh to auction, having remained in private hands since the year it was painted, the present work is a rare, original rendering of one of the artist's most iconic images. As the chosen composition to feature as the cover image of KAWS's collaboration with *New York Magazine* for the publication's 50th anniversary year-long public arts programme—with other invited artists including Alex Katz, Emily Mae Smith, George Condo, Kerry James Marshall, Yoko Ono, and Tschabalala Self—the image most recently featured on a KAWS x COMME de GARÇONS 2021 perfume bottle design.

NEW YORK



Another example of the present work featured on the cover of '50 New York Artists: A Public Art Exhibition', *New York Magazine*, 2018



KAWS x House of Voltaire *KAWS NEW YORK (Blanket)*, 2019 cashmere blanket, edition of 85



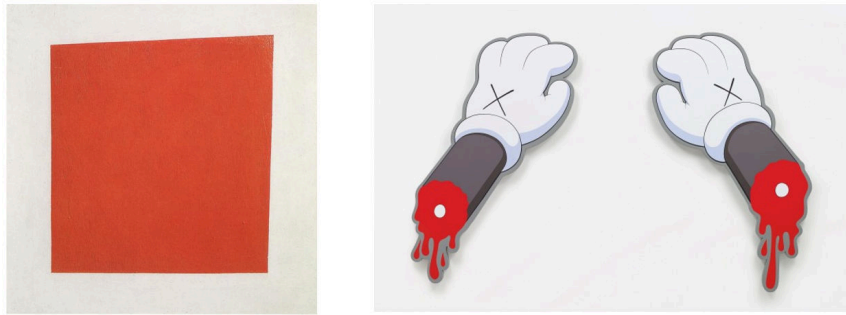
Another example on the present work featured on *MIRROR* by KAWS x COMME des GARCONS Parfums
Photo: Brad Bridgers

Animation to Abstraction

In a reduced colour palette of Kazimir Malevich-esque ruby red contrasting bright white, KAWS paints a pooling puddle of blood in *NEW YORK*. Reaching out from beneath the scarlet ripples are a pair of gloved hands marked with the artist's signature X's, appearing only moments away from being completely submerged.



The fictional character 'Thing' from *The Addams Family*, 1991



Left: Kazimir Malevich, *Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions*, 1951 Collection of the Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg Right: KAWS, *KEEP MOVING*, 2012 Sold by Phillips London on 9 March 2018 for £909,000

Harkening back to KAWS's 2012-piece, *KEEP MOVING*, the disembodied hands recall numerous popular culture references that range from 'Thing' from the famed *The Addams Family* movies to when *Star Wars* Jedi Luke Skywalker loses his hand during an epic duel. At the same time, whilst the gloves are instantly recognisable as belonging to KAWS's internationally beloved *COMPANION* figure, their cartoonish depiction further nods to rubber-hose animation characters whom KAWS presumably takes inspiration from, having previously worked as a freelance animator for Jumbo Pictures.



Luke Skywalker loses his hand, still from *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*, 1997

Following in the footsteps of artists such as Andy Warhol, who famously injected commercial products into spaces of fine art, KAWS taps into the nostalgic warmth of pop-art graphics to imbue the present work with a playful intricacy. Starkly juxtaposing this, however, is the more morbid edge the composition presents which, when considered in relationship to the work's title, can perhaps be understood as a darkly humoured homage to the city the artist calls home.



Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans* (detail), 1962 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York © 2021 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

As such, a more apt comparison can arguably be made to the visually striking works of Roy Lichtenstein, who employed comic-strip iconography to explore highly emotive motifs including that of morality and destruction. However, unlike Lichtenstein's inclusion of text-filled speech bubbles that help convey to the viewer his subject's inner concerns, KAWS's compositions are coolly ambiguous, characterised by unexpected twists of the recognisable that help to define his simultaneously endearing and sinister visual world.

In speaking of the tension that permeates his cartoonish aesthetic, the artist explains '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...I want to understand the world I'm in and, for me, making and seeing art is a way to do that.'ⁱ



Roy Lichtenstein, *Drowning Girl*, 1963 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein

NEW YORK

Nodding to his background as a graffiti-artist provocateur tagging billboards across New York, *NEW YORK* perfectly showcases KAWS's striking yet simple signature approach of bold colour and refined line. With this in a mind, an interesting comparison can be made to the work of anonymous British artist Banksy, whom too, is celebrated for his direct visual language that is whimsical yet with a satirical tone.

But whereas Banksy uses his imagery to convey social or political critique, KAWS's work instead elicits complex emotional responses as his *COMPANION* portrayals address the ubiquitous feelings of isolation, anxiety, and the desire for human connection. Moreover, whilst Banksy has become renowned for his spray paint and stencil technique, *NEW YORK* reveals KAWS's masterful control over his medium as the sharply painted shapes are executed with swift, calligraphic line that leaves no trace of the artist's free-handed approach.

As an exceptional work from one of the most defining and forward-thinking artists of our present age, *NEW YORK* demonstrates the sophisticated humour that has propelled KAWS to becoming a household name. As curator Michael Auping elucidates:

"KAWS is not just referring to pop culture, he is making it." — Michael Auping

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMH8b-lp5uM>

How KAWS Became the Face of Contemporary Art, 2017

Video courtesy of Blueprint

Collector's Digest

Regarded as one of the most important creators of his generation for his ingenuity of reconceptualising some of the world's most cherished icons, work by KAWS can be found in prominent public collections around the world. This includes the Brooklyn Museum, New York; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; CAC Malaga; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; and the Rosenblum Collection, Paris.

In addition to extensive solo exhibitions around the globe, KAWS's practice has most recently been honoured with a solo exhibition, *KAWS: SPOKE TOO SOON*, at Skarstedt in New York (5 November – 11 December 2021). KAWS also recently exhibited a monumental retrospective in his hometown, *KAWS: WHAT PARTY*, which was hosted by the Brooklyn Museum in New York between 26 February – 5 September 2021.

Recent solo exhibitions also include the *Mori Arts Centre in Tokyo* (16 July – 11 October 2021), and a retrospective at the *National Gallery of Victoria, Australia* (2019-2020). An upcoming exhibition will soon open at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta: *KAWS PRINTS*, which will run from 3 December 2021 – 27 March 2022.



KAWS, *SPOKE TOO SOON*, 2021. Featured as part of Skarstedt, New York, *KAWS: SPOKE TOO SOON*, 5 November – 11 December 2021, the work showcases themes that extend upon those explored in *NEW YORK*

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

Provenance

Skarstedt Gallery, New York

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2018

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY OF AN IMPORTANT COLLECTOR

47

KAWS

FINAL DAYS

wood

210 x 195 x 137 cm. (84 x 74 x 53 1/2 in.)

Executed in 2014, this work is number 2 from an edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs and is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity signed by the artist.

Estimate

HK\$6,200,000 — 8,200,000

€707,000 — 935,000

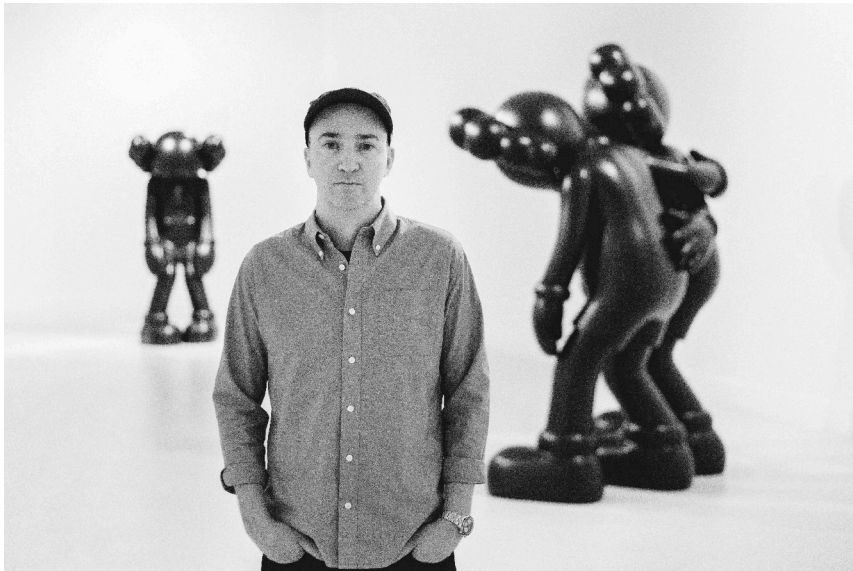
\$795,000 — 1,050,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

Considered as one of the most iconic and forward-thinking artists of his generation, KAWS is celebrated for his multi-disciplinary practice that subverts the traditions of fine art with street art influences, satirising consumer culture. Breaking the ideological hierarchies between the avant-garde and kitsch, KAWS gives his characters life through a variety of mediums including clothing, limited-edition toys, and large-scale sculptures. His works are highly accessible and firmly embedded within contemporary culture, garnering him a devoted international following and establishing his position as a key player in the lexicon of contemporary art.



KAWS by Nils Mueller for Vertical

“When I was younger, I wasn’t going to galleries, I wasn’t going to museums ... There was a lot of ‘this is fine art’ or ‘this is not fine art’; ‘this is commercial’, ‘this is high art’. In my mind I thought, art’s purpose is to communicate and reach people. Whichever outlet that’s being done through is the right one.” — KAWS

Captured mid stride with his arms outstretched and fingers reaching out in an eerie pose, *FINAL DAYS* is reminiscent of the iconic stance of Frankenstein’s monster, mashed with the contrastingly

endearing portrayal of cartoon characters’ gloves, shorts and shoes. Each eye of the figure is marked with the artist’s signature X and his skull is adorned with crossbones, establishing the work as a hallmark within the artist’s oeuvre.



Installation view of a larger edition of *FINAL DAYS* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, 2016

FINAL DAYS

In a sharp divergence to the art historical canon of mythological and biblical depictions rendered in the classical medium of sculpture, *FINAL DAYS* creates a marked contrast between its traditional wooden medium and its empathically contemporary appearance. From ancient stone carvings to the visionary sculptures of Renaissance artist Michelangelo, or more recently, Auguste Rodin, sculpture has been explored by artists for centuries as a medium in which to artistically render physical forms (see for example, Lot 27 - Auguste Rodin, *Le Baiser, 1ère réduction dite aussi "réduction n°1"* (1898)).



Auguste Rodin, *Le Baiser*, 1ère réduction dite aussi "réduction n°1", 1898 [Lot 27 - Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction Evening Sale, 30 November 2021](#) Estimate HK\$ 10,000,000 - 15,000,000 / US\$ 1,280,000 - 1,920,000

Truly contemporary in its formation, *FINAL DAYS* is made from afrormosia hardwood sourced in Africa with the craftsmanship of master craftspeople in Europe. The exposed natural grains of the wood form exquisite swirling striations along the smooth polished surface, with each strip of wood punctiliously fabricated to align with the contours of the figure's body. As a result, the traditional wooden medium juxtaposes the characteristically contemporary appearance; as the artist recalls: 'I was thinking of the relationship I've had to wood toys growing up and the warmth and feeling they have when you hold them in your hand or place them on a shelf or table and stare at them, I wanted to expand on that, to create a wooden sculpture that makes you feel small but at the same

time I want the viewer to feel like they should somehow help or console the work, despite its towering size¹.



Louise Bourgeois, *Maman*, 1999 Installed at the Long Museum in Shanghai, 2018 © The Easton Foundation / VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

As such, a more contemporary comparison can be made to the work of French-American artist Louise Bourgeois, whom too, drew from her childhood memories to form sculptural pieces that are simultaneously haunting and comforting. Like *FINAL DAYS*, Bourgeois' spider sculptures are predominantly large in scale, looming over the viewer in a manner that defies the heaviness of their materiality. Instead of evoking predatory fear, however, Bourgeois allows her viewers to explore the depths of their own psyche as she highlights the beauty of her arachnid subjects in works such as *Maman* (1999) where she includes a sac filled with eggs to symbolise the protective nature of maternal love. Similarly, although the scale, X'd eyes and skull head of KAWS's *FINAL DAYS* may appear at first to be menacing characteristics, there is an overwhelmingly endearing quality to the figure too, as viewers are transported into the artist's toy-like world.

Through KAWS's repeated use of his iconography, *FINAL DAYS* has become a motif in his oeuvre

that epitomises the artist's astute ability to reimagine nostalgic symbols for the contemporary era. As Chris Lee commented for the Los Angeles Times: 'Over the course of a career that has variously infuriated anti-graffiti task force officers and enthralled Japanese street couture collectors-meaning winning props from hip-hop superstars Kanye West and Pharrell Williams - the pop artist KAWS has carved a unique niche for himself... created a business model that bridges the high-low culture divide in ways that would have made steam come out of Andy Warhol's ears'ⁱⁱ.

Collector's Digest

Born in New Jersey in 1974, KAWS's interest in art was shaped by his engagement with skateboarding and graffiti subcultures. Graduating from the New York School of Visual Arts in 1996, KAWS worked as an animator for Jumbo Pictures. It was during this period where he had tagged the advertising posters found at bus stops on the streets of New York with crossed bones and 'X's for eyes. His interest in appropriating existing iconography to confront the viewer with the familiar, made strange, soon prompted him to revisit well-known characters from popular, reconceptualising their forms as he translates them into the realm of fine art.

Now celebrated as one of the most important creators of his generation for his ingenuity, work by KAWS can be found in prominent public collections around the world. This includes the Brooklyn Museum, New York; Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas; CAC Malaga; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; and the Rosenblum Collection, Paris.

In addition to extensive solo exhibitions around the globe, KAWS's practice has most recently been honoured with a solo exhibition, [KAWS: SPOKE TOO SOON](#), at Skarstedt in New York (5 November - 11 December 2021). KAWS also recently exhibited a monumental retrospective in his hometown, [KAWS: WHAT PARTY](#), which was hosted by the Brooklyn Museum in New York between 26 February - 5 September 2021.

Recent solo exhibitions also include the [Mori Arts Centre in Tokyo](#) (16 July - 11 October 2021), and a retrospective at the [National Gallery of Victoria, Australia](#) (2019-2020). An upcoming exhibition will soon open at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta: [KAWS PRINTS](#), which will run from 3 December 2021 - 27 March 2022.

ⁱ KAWS as quoted in 'KAWS: The Story Behind an Artwork, in the Artist's Own Words', *Modern Painters*, February 2016

ⁱⁱ Chris Lee, 'Tag, this artist is definitely it', *Los Angeles Times*, 21 February 2009, [online](#)

Provenance

Private Collection, New York (acquired directly from the artist)
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

New York, Brooklyn Museum, *KAWS: WHAT PARTY*, 26 February - 5 September 2021, p. 243
(another example exhibited)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



SURFING USA: A SELECTION OF WORKS BY
RAYMOND PETTIBON

48

Raymond Pettibon

Untitled (Force makes nature...)

signed and dated 'Raymond Pettibon 6-99' on the reverse

ink and watercolour on paper
59.5 x 45.5 cm. (23 3/8 x 17 7/8 in.)
Executed in 1999.

Estimate

HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000

€171,000 — 284,000

\$192,000 — 321,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“With my kind of work, things mingle and associate, and something comes from it — or not...” — Raymond Pettibon



Pettibon in his studio Image Courtesy of *Contemporary Art Curator Magazine*

Raymond Pettibon is known for his bombastic, often irreverent style which aims to satirise and scrutinise Pop culture. His art is thus borne of his propensity for being anti-establishment, having emerged from the Los Angeles punk scene of the 1980s. His iconoclastic, cartoon-like drawings combine lyrical text with illustrative images and are typically rendered in a sketch-like manner. Pettibon's works touch a wide spectrum of American politics and culture, and are often accompanied by cryptic handwritten text oriented around the themes of literature, religion, sexuality, and sports.

His repertoire of characters includes Hollywood legends, comic book heroes, rock stars, baseball players and murderers—a wide cross-section of America's cultural icons that dissect his society—and yet, unlike the majority of Pettibon's motifs which focus on raging cultural criticism, surfing remains as one consistent subject matter that appears in his oeuvre from 1985 onwards, a remnant of his time growing up on Hermosa Beach before then living on Venice Beach in California as an adult.

Celebrated as the finest examples from his oeuvre, Pettibon's wave works can now be found in the permanent collections of museums worldwide, including the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, both in New York. Earlier this year on 12 May 2021, surf-themed Pettibon worked hammered down for US\$2,682,000 Premium, achieving the artist's top auction record.



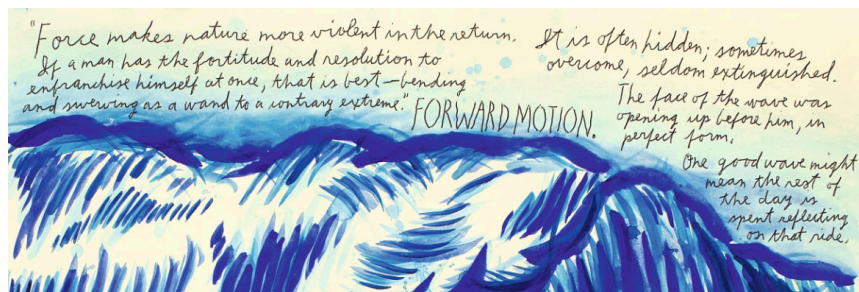
Raymond Pettibon, *No Title (The bright flatness...)*, 2003 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York © Raymond Pettibon. Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner

Surf's Up

Amalgamating various Francis Bacon texts, *Untitled (Force makes nature...)* is both deceptively simple in its visual/textual pairing and yet deliberately so—much like most of Pettibon's art. Set against cheerful cerulean waves are ominous lines from Bacon, scrawled in the artist's own hand. The modernised version of 'Force maketh nature more violent in the return', an excerpt from the 17th Century *Essays of Nature in Men*, carries an underlying meaning of the futility in going against nature. Next to this, yet another rewording appears: 'It is often hidden, sometimes overcome, seldom extinguished,' a sentence reworked from Bacon's original, also referring to human nature.

When set alongside the all-consuming force that are waves, multilayered meanings arise in which the inconsequence of humankind is pitted against the magnanimity of Mother Nature. Thus ironically, the overall sentiment of 'going with the flow' goes hand in hand here with the *laissez-faire* culture of beach life, which the artist no doubt became accustomed to.

As Pettibon once mentioned, 'It was just a subject in the culture that I grew up with, not anything else.'¹ Even though the artist did not pick up the sport himself, through his observation and imagination, he still captured surfing's vitality and movement and transcends this motif by transforming it into an allegory for life's unpredictable ups and downs—and the acceptance of this undeniable reality.



Detail of the present work

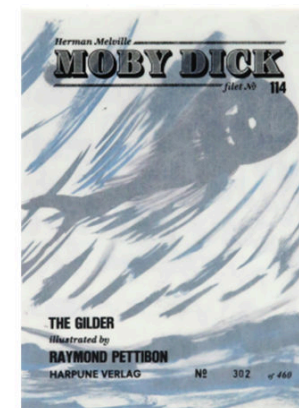
The Perfect Wave

At first glance, the present piece's large body of blue leaps to the eyes, as a foamy crest aggressively dominates the space, plunging from the sky and appearing even eager to sweep across the paper's edges. The artist sophisticatedly employs a rich array of various hues of blue

to capture the movement of the plummeting wave, and a range of darker lines featuring the texture of the vast tide cutting through the waters, as if stirring up from the depths of the ocean bed deep beneath. The whole image is infused with a sense of immersion and urgency. At the centre of the work, Pettibon deliberately inserts a tiny solitary surfer, who miraculously emerges on a surfing board from the dominant swell. He seems calm, confident and relaxed in the face of the sea's greatness.

Looking at Pettibon's great wave, one is reminded of Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, part of a series of *ukiyo-e* prints representing Japan's national culture and spirit. *The Great Wave* features a breaking swell that is about to strike a trio of boats as if it were an enormous sea monster, symbolising the irresistible force of nature and the weakness of humans. The swell consumes the work's surface, dwarfing both the Fuji Mountain and the boats and conveying an overwhelming sense of tension and dominance.

The insignificance of man in the face of nature is heavily explored by a multitude of different cultures across various eras, with sources as diverse as the aforementioned Hokusai, to Song dynasty art exploring human survival against natural elements, to the 'great American novel' *Moby-Dick*, the latter for which Pettibon clearly had a penchant for, having created a limited edition cover for the famous novel.



Left: Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave or Under the Wave, off Kanagawa*, circa 1829-33 Various versions, present image is a print within the Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Right: Herman Melville, *Moby Dick Filet No. 114*, illustrated by Raymond Pettibon © Raymond Pettibon.
Courtesy of the artist and David Zwirner

Pettibon poetically composed this work with two distinctive contrasts: the large-scaled wave versus the negligible surfer, and the turbulent and tempestuous swell versus the calmness carried

by the central figure. Pettibon reveals the full spectrum of human emotions, acknowledging the feelings of fear, loneliness, powerlessness, and insignificance, but also expressing joy, awe, hope and resilience that are mostly absent across his oeuvre.

Balancing at the precipice of danger and exhilaration, in most of Pettibon's surf images, Pettibon's surfers never fall, and always carry a sense of laid-back confidence and optimism - a nod to the artist's Southern California vibe. His surfing series successfully evoke people's resonance while pursuing inner peace in a chaotic reality, striking the art world through their poetic and philosophical representation.

A Snippet inside Raymond Pettibon's Mind

In 'The Underbelly Artist', published in The New York Times in October 2005, Michael Kimmelman writes about his various encounters with the artist:

Michael Kimmelman So the next morning I again found him and his disarrayed tubes of paint and brushes, now roped off, like a zoo specimen of an artist on display for the passing mobs. 'If I could shrink any more into this corner, I would,' he said, slouching against the wall, head down, still absorbed in his folders. One folder contained a page from the art critic Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube*, with a passage highlighted - 'the relation between the picture plane and the underlying wall is very pertinent to the esthetics of surface' - and in the margins, Pettibon's own punning, run-on sentence about surfing: 'When you bring shore life thoughts and theories/ observations into the surf (when you attempt to shore up the line up), that is when (the moment) the nose of your longboard (shortboards, you're not ready for) breaks the surface of the wave, begins to "pearl".'

Pettibon offered to decipher this, but in the process detoured into a conversation about surfboards and Bob Beamon, the Olympic athlete, and long jumping and the flood in New Orleans, without getting to the point, if there had been one. Or perhaps I missed it.

Read the rest [here](#).

Collector's Digest

Well-known for his works that combine text with drawings reminiscent of comic books, Pettibon first rose to prominence in the Southern California punk rock scene of the 1980s, designing album art for his brother Greg's band, Black Flag. Though he holds a degree in economics from UCLA, Pettibon is completely self-taught as an artist. Pettibon's work is often political in nature, critiquing American foreign policy and his experience of American life in general.

The artist was the subject of a major retrospective, entitled 'Raymond Pettibon: A Pen of All Work' at the New Museum in 2017. His work has been collected by the Tate Modern, the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Museum of Modern Art.

ⁱ Raymond Pettibon, as quoted in 'Raymond Pettibon: Are Your Motives Pure?', *Pilgrim*, 11 September 2014, [online](#)

Provenance

Private Collection, Europe

Phillips, London, 17 February 2012, lot 162

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A NEW YORK COLLECTOR

49

Robert Nava

Angel Shark

signed, titled and dated '""Angel Shark"" Nava 20' on the reverse

acrylic on canvas

182.7 x 213.8 cm. (71 7/8 x 84 1/8 in.)

Painted in 2020.

Estimate

HK\$1,200,000 — 1,800,000

€136,000 — 204,000

\$154,000 — 231,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"I know what I'm doing. It's carefully done wrong." — Robert Nava



The artist and his cat, Jumanji, 2020 Photo Courtesy of Michael Kusumadjaja

American artist Robert Nava once referred to his childhood drawings and paintings as bearing the same skill and realism as Diego Velazquez, and yet, despite the premature mastery of his medium, 'it took [Nava] a lifetime to learn how to draw like a kid again'ⁱ. Defying the elitist pretensions of high-brow and low-brow distinctions within art, Nava's fantastical beasts inspire both adoration and criticism, wrenching their way into the hearts of those eager to relive their days of youth while simultaneously causing noses to upturn in disgust at their apparent naïveté. Celebrated for expanding the possibilities of his medium, his vibrant and mischievous approach to figurative painting has garnered impressive international recognition in recent years. This includes the global mega gallery Pace, which announced its representation of Nava in November 2020, and debuted his work in a [sold-out solo show in Palm Beach](#) just two months later.

"I was so much older then; I'm younger than that now." — Bob Dylan

Deceptively Simple



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Dog*, 1982 © Estate of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Licensed by Artstar, New York

Radiating an energy and delight almost infantile in its slick application of paint, Nava's works build on the gesturalism of artists such as Cy Twombly and Jean-Michel Basquiat. Spritzes of neon curl and twiddle across his canvases like flashes of lightning divulging a remarkable speed. In fact, Nava has cited his quickest work to have taken a mere 27 seconds. Nonetheless, despite the slapdash appearance of the finished product that draws comparisons to the deliberately cartoonish aesthetic of Philip Guston, just like his predecessor, Nava's process is one of rigorous discipline.

An accomplished draughtsman, Nava spends hours drawing and redrawing his chimeric creatures to refine their curious forms before placing brush to canvas. Turning to both art history and popular culture, he seeks influence in sources that range from prehistoric cave paintings to contemporary cartoons, however, also notes how his imagination is spurred by the random snippets of conversation overheard in his day-to-day life. Then, when inspiration strikes, he attacks. Art must be rampage, and whilst it may appear as if Nava's paintings are churned out in a flurry so intuitive to be almost thoughtless, the artist has asserted that 'sometimes you need to go slow in the face of speed to make it look like speed,'ⁱⁱ explaining it is music that helps him to set the tempo.

From the Depths of the Deep Sea

The current work, *Angel Shark*, is a prime example of Nava's interpretation of the aquatic creature. Gifted with four legs, gill-like wings and a tail, the lopsided predator looks straight out of Jake and Dinos Chapman's *Exquisite Corpse* series, though not quite as nightmarish with Nava's intentionally childlike touch. Juxtaposing the creature's sharp teeth is a glowing halo that floats above their head, a feature included by the artist to 'make the shark more angelic to rid the notion of the monster'.ⁱⁱⁱ

Indeed, although many of Nava's works describe violence, with crocodiles chomping onto limbs and felines mashing grubbily together, the effect is rarely morbid, instead hinting at only a slight disturbance beneath the more humorous surface. As such, through conflicting elements Nava explores the dualities of good and evil, pointing to the commingling of these moral forces within our own lives. But at the same time, driven by his urge to 'create new myths', there is a reminder at the forefront of every Nava work of the importance of play, and the importance of letting your imagination run free.



Jake and Dinos Chapman, *Exquisite Corpse*, 2000 Collection of the Tate Modern, London

Seriousness in Play

In line with the style of the Brutists of the 1950s and 1960s, Nava disgorges the prim orthodoxy forced onto him in Yale's Master of Fine Arts program with a view that art ought to remain unscathed by culture. In what he refers to as 'seriousness in play'^{iv}, Nava returns us to a childhood world of infinite possibility. Sword-brandishing heroes, fire-breathing beasts, roaring chariots – these are the figures one expects to see only in mythology and story books, yet as Nava engages in his process of resurrection, the creatures reappear as pastiches of hazy memory, vibrating with an

electric magnetism.



Jean Dubuffet, *L'Arbre de fluides*, 1950 Collection of The Tate, United Kingdom © 2021 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Whilst one can undoubtedly trace a romanticisation of the 'primitive' in his paintings, Nava's work is playful and ironic. A comparison can be made to the doodle-like line work used by Jean Dubuffet, such as in his *Corps de dame* series of women portrayed with gnashing teeth and alarmed stares. With their misshapen bodies appearing almost scrubbed to the bone and hammered into submission, as if they have been lain out to dry, each harsh representation is utterly unforgiving. In contrast, Nava's creatures explode from beneath the canvas as if aching to escape, their very essence pushed forward by the bold strokes of the artist's fervent hand.

As exemplified by the striking shark in the present work, the mystique that Nava's subjects communicate is not one of misery and torment, but a crafted clumsiness that becomes almost

virtuous in their shameless honesty. Through his distinct and critically acclaimed style of 'naive' figuration, Nava succeeds in unleashing the child within, teaching us to appreciate the world anew with courage and wonder.

Collector's Digest

A month after his first solo-show with Pace Gallery, Nava made his New York debut with another sell-out show hosted by Vito Schnabel Gallery. Titled *Robert Nava: Angels*, it ran from 25 February - 10 April 2021. Shortly after, Nava's current auction record was achieved in Hong Kong when a work titled *Untitled (Birdie Lovers)* more than quadrupled its pre-sale high estimate, selling for HK\$2,357,000 in May 2021.

In addition to solo exhibitions presented at locations including Night Gallery, Los Angeles; V1 Gallery, Copenhagen; and Sorry We're Closed, Brussels, Nava has recently been honoured with another solo show hosted by [Pace Gallery, which ran from 12 - 29 August 2021](#) in their East Hampton spot. Works by Nava can be found in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the ICA Miami, and Zuzeum Art Centre in Latvia.

ⁱ Keith Estiler, 'Robert Nava's New Mythologies', *Hypebeast*, 19 March 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Robert Nava, quoted in Nate Freeman, 'Painter Robert Nava Is Hated by Art-World Know-It-Alls. So Why Are Collectors Fighting for Anything From His Studio?', *Artnet News*, 19 April 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert Nava, quoted in 'Interview with Robert Nava',

^{iv} Robert Nava, quoted in Lance De Los Reyes, 'Robert Nava's Secret Friends', *Office*, 22 April 2020, [onlin](#)

Provenance

Sorry We're Closed, Brussels

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



ULTRA/NEO

50

Susumu Kamijo

Marching To The Sun

signed and dated 'Susumu Kamijo 2020' on the overlap

Flashe vinyl paint on canvas
152.4 x 122 cm. (60 x 48 in.)
Painted in 2020.

Estimate

HK\$450,000 — 650,000

€51,000 — 73,600

\$57,700 — 83,300

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

Susumu Kamijo's chimerical paintings of poodles are singular in their ability to evoke both light-hearted whimsy and formal gravitas. *Marching to the Sun* is exemplary of Kamijo's uniquely recognisable aesthetic: featuring two of the artist's trademark poodles, the painting confers a majestic, almost imperial stateliness, with the poodles' abstracted forms approaching that of imposing Japanese Samurai soldiers marching side-by-side under the blood-red glow of a setting sun.



The present work installed at New York, Jack Hanley *Susumu Kamijo: Lick Me Till Dawn*, 9 September – 11 October 2020

Kamijo's visual language abstracts reality through a blend of aesthetic styles: his sublimated minimalist shapes and contrasting constellation of colours recall the organic elegance of Henri Matisse's cut-outs, his Pointillist daubs of poodle fur invoke the dexterous, tactile works of artists such as Yayoi Kusama and Jennifer Guidi, while his use of block colour and isolated forms lend his compositions the hard-edged, graphic style of ancient Japanese woodblock printing. Extraordinarily, Kamijo's deceptively simple deconstruction of nonchalant reality articulates powerful emotional impact; in particular, his works communicate slightly unsettling undertones that are reminiscent of the darker angsts of German Expressionism. Overall, his endearing paintings emanate the emotive and alluring glow of works by Colour Field artists, commanding the attention of both vision and psyche.

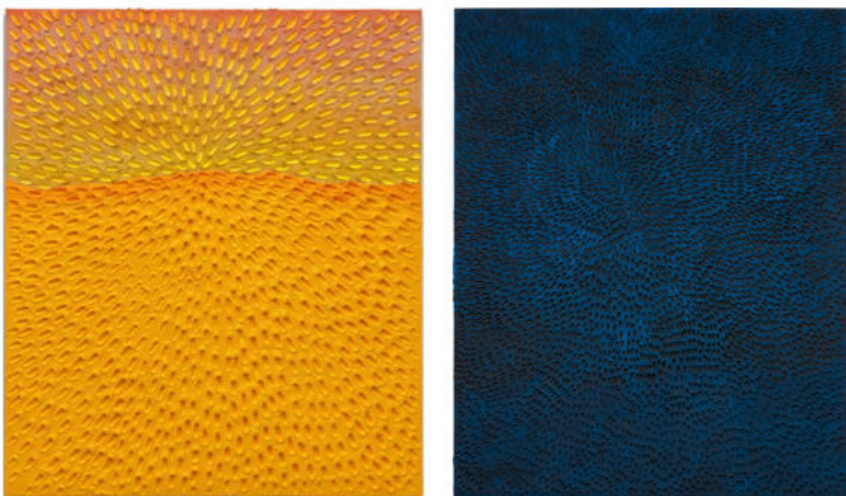


Photograph of a Japanese samurai in armour, 1860s

Born in 1975 in Nagano, Japan, Kamijo moved to the United States at the age of 16 and completed his Bachelor of Fine Art in Painting and Drawing at the University of Oregon in 2000, and his Master of Fine Art in Painting and Drawing at the University of Washington in 2002. Currently living and working in Brooklyn, New York, the artist works across paper and canvas employing a mixture of materials including oil pastel, pencil and pen, as well as acrylic, oil, and Flashe vinyl paint, exploring the abstraction of everyday motifs such as animals and human faces through distortion of shape and colour.

Kamijo's Distinctive Poodles

Kamijo arrived at his signature motif of the poodle in 2014. The artist's motivation for his choice of the poodle was, in particular, their peculiar shapes, especially those with clipped and coiffed fur. Having always been fascinated by the fundamental elements of shape, colour, and pure aesthetic form, Kamijo used photographs from dog shows or magazines as an inspiration for his drawings of poodles, which he reduced to their most essential elements: eyes, ears, noses, and mouths which are deconstructed into undulating shapes, minimalist contours, and sharp lines. Within each expanse of colour, Kamijo creates varied texture through repetitive patterns, cross-hatching, and layering of pigment. While his deconstructions empty his subjects of meaning and reference, the resulting compositions are paradoxically imbued with emotion, character, and personality: through abstraction, Kamijo's poodles come alive, thriving with anthropomorphic charisma.



Left: Jennifer Guidi, *New Horizon (Painted White Sand SF #3C, Light Yellow and Pink Sky)*, 2018

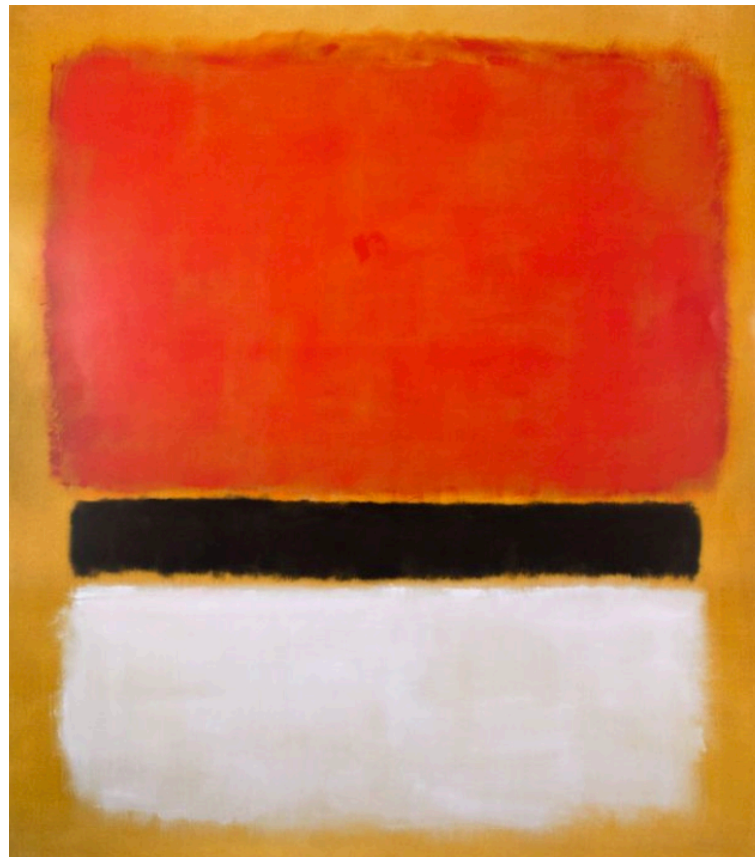
© Jennifer Guidi

Right: Jennifer Guidi, *Orion (Blue Painted Sand SF #1F Mandala)*, 2016

Sold by Phillips New York on 24 June 2021 for US\$441,000

Executed in 2020, the present *Marching to the Sun* hails from the first group of works in which Kamijo expanded his practice from paper to canvas. The large-scale work is set on an abstracted background of white and red, with the circle on the top-centre suggesting the title's setting sun.

Kamijo's minimalist yet powerful scenes ground his frisky subjects within the monumental traditions of landscapes and Abstract Expressionist Colour Field painting; as an undeniably accomplished colourist, the artist's well-honed manoeuvring of tone and layering evokes highly assertive and stirring sense of place, atmosphere, and temperament.



Mark Rothko, *Red, Black, White on Yellow*, 1955

© 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Marching to the Sun's almost symmetrical composition lends the painting a striking grandiosity as well as introspective quality, while the carefully crafted forms of the poodles' body readily invites associations to Japanese Samurai armour. With abstracted facial features peering out of a helmet-like visage, the pair of poodle warriors march defiantly onwards, less to the sun than towards the

viewer. The striking image invites warmth, playful affection, and uplifting encouragement: let us march on, together with man's best friend.

Collector's Digest

Kamijo has held solo exhibitions at Stems Gallery, Brussels; GYNP, Berlin; Harper's Books, New York; Marvin Garden, Queens; and Masahiro Maki Gallery, Tokyo. During his time at the University of Washington, Kamijo met fellow painter Jonas Wood, and the pair collaborated on Kamijo's first catalogue *Poodles* (2017).

Provenance

Jack Hanley Gallery, New York

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Jack Hanley Gallery, New York, *Susumu Kamijo: Lick Me Till Dawn*, 9 September - 11 October 2020

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY OF AN IMPORTANT PRIVATE BRITISH COLLECTOR

51

Jadé Fadojutimi

Fishing For Steps

signed, titled and dated 'Jadé Fadojutimi "'Fishing For Steps"' 2017 JF' on the reverse

oil on canvas

100.4 x 145 cm. (39 1/2 x 57 1/8 in.)

Painted in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$1,200,000 — 2,200,000

€136,000 — 250,000

\$154,000 — 282,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“I bathe in the conversations between colour, texture, line, form, composition, rhythm, marks and disturbances.” — Jadé Fadojutimi

One of the most exciting painters working today, London-born Jadé Fadojutimi has proven herself an indomitable force to be reckoned with in the world of contemporary art. At just twenty-eight years old, she has already been honoured with institutional solo shows around the world, has three galleries representing her, participated in [Biennales](#), ranked alongside the likes of The Duchess of Cambridge and Vivienne Westwood in *Vogue*’s list of the ‘[25 Most Influential Women in 2021](#)’, and has work featured in numerous public collections including the [Tate in London](#), of which she is the youngest artist in their collection.

On the 8th June 2021, when Phillips in Association with Poly Auction debuted Fadojutimi’s work at auction in Asia, [Concealment: An essential generated by the lack of shade \(2019\)](#) far surpassed its pre-auction estimate range of HK\$600,000 – 800,000, achieving a remarkable HK\$5,670,000 and setting a new world record for the artist at the time. Indicative of the enthusiasm surrounding her practice, that record has since been broken three times over, with the current top result achieved on 15 October 2021 by Phillips London for her work [Myths of Pleasure \(2017\)](#), which hammered down for £1,172,000 plus Premium.

Fishing For Steps was created in 2017—the same year as Fadojutimi’s graduation degree show from London’s prestigious Royal College of Art where she was first caught the attention of with the Pippy Houldsworth gallery, launching her meteoric rise to success. Perfectly exemplifying the dynamism and vibrancy for which she has become critically acclaimed, the work was presented at *The Contemporary British Painting Prize 2017* exhibition at London’s Orleans House Gallery. In her accompanying artist statement, Fadojutimi explains: ‘the fascination with paint comes with the interlocking of textures, where the painting converses with itself on the surface - an interaction that lacks control and so liberates the material.’ⁱ

Video: <https://youtu.be/gOjtHikN8UQ>

A studio visit with Jadé Fadojutimi ahead of the Liverpool Biennale, March 2021

Harmony of Colour and Line

Against a lavender blue backdrop highlighted by splashes of lemon yellow, Fadojutimi paints slapdash strokes of vibrant green, black and white that oscillate between foreground and background - with hints of red peeking through to add to the mix. At the heart of her sprawling compositions is an exploration into the fluid nature of identity in relation to the world that shapes it, and as our gaze traverses around *Fishing For Steps*’ gestural line and chromatic intensity, we too, find ourselves immersed into a voyage of the imagination enacted through the language of

paint.

Often working in fortissimo fits of inspiration late into the night with music blasting from her studio—a method of working also preferred by Japanese artist Yoshitomo Nara— Fadojutimi beautifully builds up layers of pigment thinned with Liquin, a quick-drying medium that gives the oil a high sheen. As art critic Jennifer Higgie explains, ‘this results in pictures whose surfaces recall panes of glass or fast-moving water: Shifting, reflective, impatient’.ⁱⁱ Indeed, rhythmically charged by the raw energy of her intricately layered lattice of brushstroke, colour blossoms across *Fishing For Steps* as if in choreographed dance.

Although Fadojutimi’s command of colour recalls the influence of numerous artists, among them David Hockney, Henri Matisse, Makiko Kudo, and Sigmar Polke, the transportive power of her dream-like compositions largely owes to her love for Japanese anime, videogames, poetry, and movie soundtracks. In the artist’s own words, ‘I treasure living in an escapist reality, so it’s only natural that this has had a large impact on my life and practice.’ⁱⁱⁱ



Left: Henri Matisse, *Landscape at Collioure*, 1905 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York © 2021 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: Makiko Kudo, *Invisible*, 2011 © Makiko Kudo

In a Dance with her Canvas

“It’s stimulating exposing the subtleties of organic forms found along the process of painting and I relish manipulating their malleability, carrying them in and out of focus, making their recognition fragile.” — Jadé Fadojutimi



Eddie Martinez, *Christmas in July*, 2016 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 8 June 2021 for HK\$5,922,000 © 2021 Eddie Martinez / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Like Eddie Martinez who likens his physical method of painting to being in a boxing match, stepping in and out of confrontation with the canvas, when Fadojutimi paints she is constantly in motion, guided by the 'strong will of the painting's desire to exist'ⁱⁱ. As Jennifer Higgie notes of the energy Fadojutimi pours into her painting: 'globules of paint erupt like buds from the ground. These pictures seem like a garden in spring or a choppy sea; at times, the mood is so exuberant that it appears to be on the brink of exploding. Colours pulse like a bass line given centre stage. It's clear: paint is an organic substance, as replete with possibility as newly composted earth.'ⁱⁱ

Fadojutimi's triumph of this visceral approach has earned the young artist a cohort of critically favourable comparisons, particularly to Willem de Kooning, Lee Krasner, Joan Mitchell, and the other leading exponents of Abstract Expressionism. Similar to de Kooning, whilst Fadojutimi's canvases are undoubtedly situated within a highly abstracted realm, works like *Fishing For Steps* exquisitely showcase how she flirts with figuration. From the silhouettes of animals, to figures and the outline of a shoe - the composition is peppered with representational allusion that reveal layers of meaning upon extended contemplation, beckoning the viewer to try and seek out recognisable cues.



Willem de Kooning, *Abstraction*, 1949 - 1950 Collection of the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid © 2021 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

As an accomplished writer, torn out pages of jotted down notes and poetry line the walls of Fadojutimi's studio, often feeding into the titles of her works. Although relatively ambiguous, the title *Fishing For Steps* can perhaps be understood from the artist's perspective as she pursues move after move to bring her composition to life. At the same time, *Fishing For Steps* also represents the viewing experience as we delve into the harmonious details of the rhapsodic canvas to explore notions of identity and fluidity from in and amongst the entanglement of mark and recurring form.

Collector's Digest

Fadojutimi graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from London's Slade School of Fine Art in 2015, and a Master of Fine Arts from the Royal College of Art in 2017, where she was awarded the Hine Painting Prize. Since her first solo exhibition at the Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in London in

Jadé Fadojutimi

2017-2018, she has been honoured with solo presentations of her work in key locations around the world. This includes at PEER UK, London, and Galerie Gisela Capitain in Cologne in 2019, and again at the Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in 2020.

The artist's American institutional debut will open on 30 November 2021 at the Miami Institute for Contemporary Art. Titled *Jadé Fadojutimi: Yet, Another Pathetic Fallacy*, the exhibition will run until 17 April 2022. Fadojutimi also has an upcoming solo exhibition arranged with the Taka Ishii Gallery in Tokyo, with shows at [The Hepworth Wakefield](#) and the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin to follow next year.

Her work is in the collections of Tate, London; The Hepworth Wakefield, ICA Miami; Walker Art Center at the Contemporary Art Museum in Minneapolis; The Studio Museum in Harlem; and Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland. The Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris also just announced its acquisition of a 2020 work by the artist for inclusion in their permanent collection.

Fadojutimi is represented by Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London; Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne; and Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo.

ⁱ Jadé Fadojutimi, quoted in *The Contemporary British Painting Prize 2017: Shortlist Selection*, exh. cat., The Stables Gallery at Orleans House Gallery, London, 2017, p. 16

ⁱⁱ Jennifer Higgin, *Jadé Fadojutimi: Gesture*, exh. cat., Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London, 2020, p. 11

ⁱⁱⁱ Jadé Fadojutimi, quoted in David Trigg, 'Jadé Fadojutimi – interview: I bathe in the conversations between colour, texture, line, form, composition, rhythm, marks and disturbances', *Studio International*, 26 April 2021, [online](#)

Provenance

Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London
Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2018

Exhibited

London, Orleans House Gallery, The Stables Gallery, *The Contemporary British Painting Prize 2017: Shortlist Selection*, 25 August - 22 October 2017, p. 17 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A DISTINGUISHED NEW YORK
COLLECTION

52

Mickalene Thomas

*Looking Up from the She Works Hard For the Money
Pin-Up series*

signed, titled and dated "'LOOKING UP (FROM SHE
WORKS HARD FOR THE MONEY PIN-UP SERIES)"
Mickalene Thomas 2004' on the reverse
acrylic, rhinestones and oil enamel on wood panel
121.9 x 91.4 cm. (48 x 36 in.)
Executed in 2004.

Estimate

HK\$1,000,000 — 2,000,000

€113,000 — 227,000

\$128,000 — 256,000

[Go to Lot](#)



"The gaze in my work is unapologetically a Black woman's gaze loving other Black women." — Mickalene Thomas

Mickalene Thomas is deliberately subversive in her art practice: she defies heteronormative discourse, redefines beauty, empowers women of colour, all the while blurring the divide between low and high art. Currently subject of a global solo show, [Beyond the Pleasure Principle](#), Thomas' body of works and their chief concern of celebrating Black women has received extensive institutional attention, having been exhibited at the Guggenheim Museum and Whitney Museum of American Art, and is collected by the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

On Beauty

'One of the things that really is a constant in my life is *Jet Magazine* and *Beauty of the Week*,' says Thomas. ⁱ Referring to *Jet Magazine* and its adjunct publication *The Beauty of Week*, she has consistently drawn from these two publications to delve into her (re)creations of Black beauties. A regular fixture in African American homes, salons, beauty parlours, *Jet Magazine* was unrivalled in its representation of the Black community—one which was not well-represented at all in mainstream, predominantly white media—and to someone like Thomas, growing up, seeing *Beauty of the Week* was significant: '...And they're in these bathing suits, sort of like these pageanties, but, that was like for me, this first notion of beauty.' ⁱⁱ

The artist continually highlights the importance of 'being seen' within a daily cultural context, a privilege which was very often denied to people of colour during her childhood. To fulfil this need to see herself (and figures like her), Thomas began to photograph her mother dressed as Pam Grier (Blaxploitation cinematic icon) or create self-portraits. The artist credits the Black model Naomi Sims with having implanted her need to probe beauty, having been one of the first figures in Thomas' memory who was speaking on the behalf of Black women and their wellness, all the while redefining beauty itself.

"These women were defining another way how we will look at beauty. Because it's not necessarily just the surface; it's also the action. How they define themselves, and how they persevere. And how they withstand circumstance and obstacles. That's always been something that I looked to for women that I'm celebrating in my work." — Mickalene Thomas

Mickalene Thomas has mentioned in the past that she began her artistic career in Abstract Expressionism, though collage was always a permanent fixture in her practice. In graduate school,

she enrolled in a photography class, and started to reconsider the Black body in media and the stereotypes around the notions of beauty. It was a combination of all these aspects that led her to reappropriate icons she found from her childhood: to not only seek collage as a method of creation but also as a mode of thinking to create multi-layered works. One such figures in Thomas' collage works is Pam Grier, the first African American woman to star in an action movie: chief among them *Coffy*, snippets of which we can detect in *Looking Up*.



Movie stills featuring Pam Grier in *Coffy* (1973)

Elevating the Every(wo)man

A filmic superstar of the Blaxploitation movement (a portmanteau of "Black" and "Exploitation"), Pam Grier was one of the first Black women in mainstream American media to be portrayed as a strong lead, and not relegated to mere caricature. In the movie *Coffy*, the actress plays the eponymous heroine, a vigilante who seeks revenge against a drug dealer. *Coffy* goes under various guises in pursuit of her revenge, one of which involves posing as a prostitute to lure a mob boss and drug pusher to their residences before killing them. This particular scene features Grier in a polka-dot, two-piece lingerie set, not unlike the one featured in the present work.

Looking Up also belongs to Thomas' *She Works Hard for the Money Pin-Up Series*, a reference to Donna Summer's 1983 lead single of the same name ([click to listen on Spotify](#)). Inspired by an exhausted, overworked woman resting in a restaurant's bathroom, Summer co-wrote the song with Michael Omartian in the eighties—the song soared the charts and remained #1 for three

weeks in the *Billboard* R&B singles chart when it was released. Thomas' admiration for Donna Summer and her elevation of the working woman culminated in the 2002 work, *Donna Summer*, in which the artist presented the singer in her signature bejewelled style.



Left: Donna Summer, *She Works Hard for the Money* (from the album *She Works Hard for the Money*, 1983)

Right: Mickalene Thomas, *Donna Summer*, 2002
© 2021 Mickalene Thomas / ARS, NY



“I guess my appeal to craft materials is also another historical reference to women making art.” — Mickalene Thomas

When elaborating on the origins of her employment of media such as felt, yarn, rhinestones, glitter, Thomas has in the past commented that she turned to these alternative materials because of the high costs of oils/acrylics during her early artistic career, thus gravitating toward non-traditional materials that were considered ‘low art’ to some. She began accumulating and acquiring these to find meaning within them to use in her oeuvre ‘as a way of identifying myself but also making an image.’ⁱⁱⁱ

Much like other female contemporaries who use ‘craft’ materials, such as Tschabalala Self, Billie Zangewa, Chiharu Shiota, Thomas’ evocation of traditional ‘womanly’ craft practices is a deliberate one to connect with but also elevate its historical reference. Coming hand in hand with her praxis of uplifting the ‘everywoman’, it is unsurprising that this is extended even to the media the artist

selects.

Creating Affinity: The African American Female Body

Mickalene Thomas is adept at creating affinity where there was none before, and her transformation of the art historical cannon into one that includes people of colour is notable for its scope and depth of source.

The artist is deeply inspired by Carrie Mae Weems—the American artist best known for her photography that focuses on the African American experience. Speaking about her 1994 encounter of Weems’ works, Thomas was ‘...inspired...Sort of overwhelmed with familiarity of myself. It was the first time seeing images that called to home...These images were so poignant, and direct, and it felt like they were telling *my* story.’^{iv} Highlighting some of the works from *The Kitchen Table* series, Thomas expounds on the emotional significance of representation and being seen, a powerful undercurrent that permeates her pieces.

Speaking on another important photographic influence, Seydou Keita, the artist explained, ‘I wasn’t trained as a photographer, but it was always a resource for my paintings. I’m always looking at Seydou Keita and thinking, “How did he do that?”...I was really excited about how these different fabrics collided, but they made sense. They created chaos, but then this quiet moment with the figure.’^v It is thus noteworthy that the collision of fabrics, textures, rhinestones in Thomas’ works correspond powerfully to Keita’s oeuvre in this regard.



Left: Carrie Mae Weems, *Untitled (Nude)*, 1990 (from *The Kitchen Table* series)

Right: Seydou Keïta, *Untitled [Seated Woman with Chevron Print Dress]*, 1956, printed 1997

Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art

© Seydou Keïta – SKPEAC – Courtesy The Jean Pigozzi Collection of African Art

Looking Up is a wonderful amalgamation of these photographs and memories, a palimpsest of sorts in which layer upon layer of interpretation seeps through our understanding and viewing experience. The central, sensuous nude reclines in ecstasy, set against a mustard yellow curtain with swirling patterns, recalling the yellows in Donna Summer's album art. She is topless, donning polka dot, *Coffy*-esque underwear, and adorned in rhinestones. The shimmering result is risqué, elegant: reminiscent at once of the sensual scene depicted in Weems' *Untitled (Nude)*, while the viewer is treated to a visual feast of patterns comparable to Keïta's complex photography. The woman is unapologetically sexy, erotic: a powerful affront to modesty and conservatism, reminiscent of odalisques portrayed in artistic discourse, but here transformed into one of William H. Johnson's muses, another artist whose sensibility of line, representation of his journeys and the people in his environment especially struck a chord with Thomas.



Left: Henri Matisse, *Odalisque à la culotte rouge*, 1921

Collection of the Centre Pompidou, Paris

© 2021 Succession H. Matisse / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Right: William H. Johnson, *Nude*, circa 1939

Collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum

Collector's Digest

Mickalene Thomas joins a growing group of artists of colour who are transforming contemporary artistic discourse with their scrutiny of the art historical canon. A contemporary of powerful names such as Kehinde Wiley, Derrick Adams, Kerry James Marshall, Amy Sherald, Nina Chanel Abney, Thomas' signature dazzling collages aim to dismantle the archetypal preconceptions of 'beauty', focusing on African American females. Having earned her BFA from the Pratt Institute and her MFA from Yale University School of Art, Thomas' works are collected by the Museum of Modern Art, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Brooklyn Museum, amongst many others.

ⁱ The artist speaking within her Brooklyn studio, in conversation with Art Basel, December 2019

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ The artist quoted in 'Meeting the Artist: Mickalene Thomas on Her Materials and Artistic Influences', Smithsonian American Art Museum, 30 November 2017

^{iv} The artist quoted in 'In Conversation: Mickalene Thomas and Carrie Mae Weems', 5 January 2013, the Brooklyn Museum

^v The artist quoted in 'Mickalene Thomas on Seydou Keïta', in *Smarthistory*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 15 January 2021

Provenance

Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago

Phillips, New York, 18 May 2007, lot 110

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

Exhibited

Chicago, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, *It's about memory*, 25 March - 23 April 2004

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



53

Billie Zangewa

Cirque d'hiver

embroidered silk

150.9 x 135.9 cm. (59 3/8 x 53 1/2 in.)

Executed in 2007.

Estimate

HK\$400,000 — 600,000

€45,300 — 68,000

\$51,300 — 76,900

[Go to Lot](#)



*“The act of stitching, for me, is incredibly powerful, in a way that’s not obvious” —
Billie Zangewa*

Malawi-born and Johannesburg-based artist Billie Zangewa’s silk tapestries quite literally tug at their viewers’ heart strings, depicting familiar scenes of quotidian life, glimpses into motherhood, and intimate snippets of romance. This autumn alone, the artist will be the subject of various shows, including at the Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco, in which her works will be featured in the aptly named [Thread for a Web Begun](#). With mounting critical attention for her pieces, including being collected by the Centre Pompidou in Paris and having recently been exhibited at the Musée d’art Moderne, Zangewa joins a growing group of artists of colour and young female artists alike who are taking the art world by storm.



An early photograph of the artist in front of *Cirque d’hiver*, next to a detail of the piece

“I use fabrics for different reasons. Firstly, I am obsessed with texture; rich, textured surfaces, and I think silk is the ultimate rich textured surface, because it’s so nuanced, and the way it reflects and absorbs light is very complex” — Billie Zangewa



The present work exhibited in *Alpha Crucis - Contemporary African Art*, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, 30 January – 5 September 2020 Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul.

Zangewa began her career in fashion and advertising, to which her interest in textile can no doubt be attributed. To the artist, employing textile injects a certain sense of utilitarianism into her art form and subject matter: ‘Working with textile also speaks to universality, because we all have an experience with textile...it’s part of the human experience.’ⁱ In particular to her choice of silk—a medium she stumbled upon by chance having accompanied a friend who was sourcing fabricsⁱⁱ—Zangewa has in the past commented on its ‘incredibly seductive, sumptuous and generous’ qualityⁱⁱⁱ. Her affinity for sewing however can be traced to memories of her mother’s sewing group: women who would regularly congregate to sew, all the while commiserating, gossiping, and exchanging daily anecdotes. For the artist, the sewing group was a coterie closed off to men; a meditative and safe space where a sense of quiet feminine strength could take hold. Through her art, she aims to access ‘that empowered space of calm’,^{iv} creating beautiful, intricate works that aim to transform her personal stories into pieces of art.

Weaving Stories

To understand Zangewa's painstakingly created works is to enter a delicate web that is all at once autobiographical, anecdotal, apocryphal—the sources from which she draws when creating her silk tapestries are variegated and complex, and aim to dismantle social paradigms. Primarily, as the artist has noted in the past, her works deal with identity—her own personal one—but she also tackles socio-politics, gender, motherhood, sexuality, individuality, and the notions surrounding being a person of colour.



Left: Billie Zangewa, *Christmas at the Ritz*, 2006 Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul. Right: Billie Zangewa, *City of Light*, 2005 Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul.

Exquisitely rendered on vibrant mauve silk, *Cirque d'hiver* depicts a scene from the titular Winter Circus, a prominent venue in Paris for circus troupes, exhibitions, concerts, and other events since the mid 19th Century (also known as *Cirque d'hiver Bouglione* since its acquisition in the thirties). Perhaps drawn in having followed in the fashion-footsteps of Richard Avedon, who in the fifties photographed the model Dovima posing amongst elephants at the Cirque d'hiver donning a Dior Evening gown; not to mention the fact that there was indeed a Paris Haute Couture Fashion Week event which took place at the very location in 2007 (the same year *Cirque d'hiver* was executed), Zangewa's rendition of the circus shares layered meanings. To the top right corner of the work is a jagged shape resembling a circus dome with lights, not unlike depictions of the sun in the corner of children's drawings. Trapeze acrobats, tightrope-walkers, a balancing act, and an animal ring populate the work as an audience looks on along the bottom edge of the work. Around the animal ring stands several ring masters; a pair of them are in conversation, and above their heads hover speech bubbles: 'Blague, Blah, Blah.', 'Ha, ha, ha!'

Beyond Silk

The artist's early pieces captured cityscapes and city-living, often drawing from fashion photographs, or memories in cities she lived in like London and Paris: some such examples include *City of Light* (2005), showing a cluster of street-goers or perhaps tourists pointing up at a sequined 'PARIS', and *Christmas at the Ritz* (2006), a vibrant yellow piece portraying a dreamscape in which Zangewa reclines in the famed hotel. While similar, *Cirque d'hiver* is much more than the undoubted collage of urban memories and fashion footnotes.

One such clue to the significance of the circus and its theatricality perhaps lies in a work exhibited alongside *Cirque d'hiver* at the Astrup Fearnley Museet in Oslo in 2020. *Rebirth of the Black Venus* (2010), a formidable Botticellian self-portrait showing the artist nude but for a sash written with the words 'Surrender whole-heartedly to your complexity' wrapped around her body, referenced the tragic story of Sarah Baartman, otherwise known as 'The Black Venus'. 'Sarah Baartman', the name given to at least two Khoikhoi women living in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, were women bought as slaves and paraded around Europe, exhibited as freakshow specimens including at Picadilly Circus. Thinly veiled as 'scientific research', their tragic stories of exploitation and racism were only rediscovered in the early 2000s, and Zangewa's powerful reclaiming of this story, both in terms of a person of colour, an African, and above all a woman, is significant. To read *Cirque d'hiver* in such a way is to appreciate the importance of the artist's reclamation of power.



Left: *La Belle Hottentote*, a 19th-century French print of Sarah Baartman Right: Billie Zangewa, *The Rebirth of Black Venus*, 2010 Collection Gervanne and Matthias Leridon Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul.

Zangewa's practice joins a long lineage of female artists who have turned to tapestry, weaving,

sewing, and fabrics as vehicles through which to confront issues such as the liminal separations of art/craft, femininity, gender roles, and power dynamics. Her work is at once a departure from, and a confluence of, 20th Century artists such as Louise Bourgeois (whose sewing equated to emotional restoration of traumas), and Rosemarie Trockel (who confronted the patriarchal hold over the art world with a deliberate choice of material evocative of womanly housework), as well as twenty-first century artists such as Tschabalala Self (whose collaged fabrics are extended metaphors for the accumulation of feelings and ideas), and Chiharu Shiota (whose choice of yarn speaks to the themes of interconnection).

Having combatted the prejudice against being female and told to downplay this aspect of herself, as well as the derogatory way her sewing was initially perceived, the artist seeks to elevate her textile work by way of celebrating women and their plights, to 'disrupt the patriarchal conditioning of the mind'^v.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-2xi-11z2k>

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-2xi-11z2k>

The artist interviewed on occasion of Alpha Crucis, an exhibition in which the present work was shown.

Collector's Digest

Zangewa's practice almost exclusively involves the creation of elaborate collages hand-sewn onto fragments of raw silk. Having begun her career in fashion and advertising, the artist seeks to disrupt the stereotype of the Black female form through her detailed silk tapestries, drawing predominantly from personal memories. Zangewa will be the subject of various solo exhibitions including at the Museum of the African Diaspora and a dual-exhibition presented by Lehmann Maupin London and Seoul. Her works are also in several notable institutional collections including the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Tate Modern, London.



Left: Billie Zangewa, *In My Solitude*, 2018, Collection of the Centre Pompidou, Paris Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul. Right: Billie Zangewa, *Date Night*, 2017, Displayed within the Tate Modern, London Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul.

ⁱ The artist interviewed on the occasion of her participation in *Alpha Crucis – Contemporary African Art*, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, 30 January – 5 September 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ The artist in conversation with Rosalind Duguid, quoted in 'Billie Zangewa on her Sociopolitical Silk Works', *The Elephant*, 18 June 2018, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} The artist interviewed on the occasion of her participation in *Alpha Crucis – Contemporary African Art*, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, 30 January – 5 September 2020, [online](#)

^v The artist interviewed by the Tate for *TateShots*, 'Artist Billie Zangewa – the Ultimate Act of Resistance is Self Love', February 2020, [online](#)

Provenance

MAGNIN-A, Paris
Private Collection, London (acquired from the above)
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Oslo, Astrup Fearnley Museet, *Alpha Crucis – Contemporary African Art*, 31 January – 6 September 2020, p. 221 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A PRIVATE BELGIAN COLLECTION

54

Godwin Champs Namuyimba

The Connector

signed, titled and dated on the reverse
acrylic and mixed media on canvas
200 x 148 cm. (78 3/4 x 58 1/4 in.)
Executed in 2021.

Estimate

HK\$200,000 — 400,000
€22,700 — 45,500
\$25,600 — 51,300

[Go to Lot](#)



"I use human form to explore the construction of identity in relation to race and individuality in a postcolonial African context. I also attempt to critique stereotypical depictions of black people, while I explore the conflicts and tensions between the ideologies of Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism." — Godwin Champs Namuyimba

Introduction

Godwin Champs Namuyimba was born in 1989 in Uganda—‘The Pearl of Africa’, where he continues to live and work. As an emerging Black artist, Namuyimba explores the construction of identity in relation to race and individuality, and through his oeuvre attempts to awaken complex racial and social issues that have been neglected in history.

Having situated himself in Uganda, this young artist draws inspiration from everyday life, friends and family who are often depicted in relaxed settings, surrounded by symbols of domesticity and notable cultural signifiers. Through these figurative representations of reality, Namuyimba enriches and analyses the ways in which race informs the way we perceive each other and ourselves, and forms his narrative around the conflicts between the (post-colonial) ideologies of Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism. He evokes a modern style, whilst injecting within it a unique and contemporary undercurrent by inverting the racialised practice of art history, and instead reinserting Black art into an artistic movement where it was previously obscured and omitted.

The Connector

"I try to approach the subjects from a point of empathy when they enter my consciousness as fleeting characters or as vacant blanks. I am interested in what happens when the subject is transformed into the content." —Godwin Champs Namuyimba

Namuyimba’s figurative oeuvre demonstrates a deft ability to bring intrigue to the quotidian, elevating much of the otherwise mundane scenes he creates. The Ugandan artist renders with tenderness the humanity that his subjects display, usually in their most vulnerable, humiliating, or even farcical moments. The faces of most of his anonymous subjects are ambiguous and even expressionless, only their eyes and lips are featured to express their underlying emotions and stories, leaving viewers intrigued about the lives of the protagonists and what that will mean to us—but alternatively also leaves room for imagination and self-insertion. It is within this alternating feeling of mystery but also affinity that Namuyimba finds the unintentional poetry at the basis for his works.

In *The Connector*, a daily domestic scene is depicted: a woman is ironing a shirt at home. She seems relaxed and calm, depicted with a face without too many details and expressions displayed. This protagonist is placed right at the centre of the canvas, with an eye-catching backdrop decorated with various layers of solid and vibrant colours and vivid patterns. Instead of focusing on her task at hand, the woman looks on beyond the frame, seemingly absent-minded.



Detail of the present work

More symbols are strewn throughout the work: lying on the ground is a worn-out, abandoned plug in white, malfunctioning perhaps, and replaced by the same model but in a different colour, in black. This subtle contrast exemplifies the intent which defines the very heart of Namuyimba’s practice, mirroring the pursuit of abandoning the dominant white art world by including the presence of Black art, allowing it to co-exist and thrive in tandem alongside art and human history.

Just as it is alluded to by the title, Namuyimba attempts to seek a connection between these two divided worlds. An iron in blue, with a colour symbolising freedom and peace, is deliberately used to connect to the black socket, a metaphor of hope and openness embraced. It is perhaps also not a coincidence that blue is evoked, in a veiled reference to the country’s colonial past. The artist demonstrates his humanity and dedicated intellectual pursuit for artists of colour, for his country, for Africa, with a unique aesthetic inserted within the framework of a postcolonial narrative.

Paving His Own Path

Namuyimba attained a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from The Kyambogo University in Kampala, Uganda, and was greatly inspired by the Post-Impressionist French painter Paul Cézanne, who laid the foundations of the transition from the 19th Century conception of artistic endeavour to a new and radically different world of art in the 20th Century. Namuyimba invokes the technique of Post Impressionism by deploying multiple layers in his painting, but alternatively also deliberately leaves unfinished portions, offering his viewers a chance to witness the gradual concretisation of colour forms and a step-by-step change to the intricate layers of his painting. According to the artist, 'My paintings usually begin in the mind and they usually finish in the mind. The process on the canvas involves a lot of layering which makes my art work unique and attractive'.



Paul Cézanne, *The Card Players*, 1890-1895

Collection of Musée d'Orsay, Paris

To the untrained eye, some of his perspectives may be dizzyingly misplaced, but these ad hoc

stages also demonstrate the act of seeing, as if the viewers were there on the inside of his paintings looking around, up and down, from side to side. The artist attempts to remind us that the act of observation is never stationary. Seeing is forever changing and fleeting.

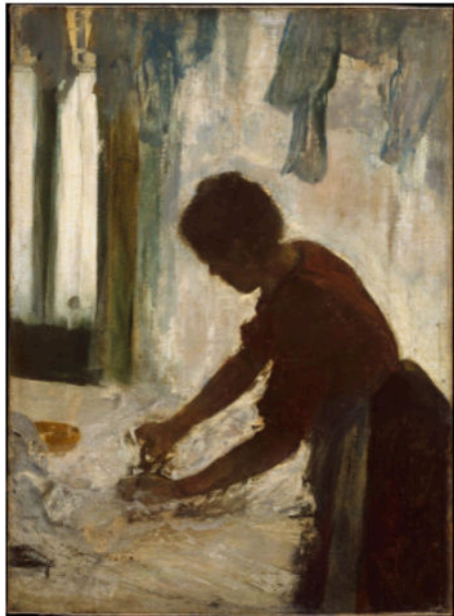
The present work houses clues to the multi-layered sources from which the artist draws. Notably, two distinctive abstract paintings hanging on the wall behind the protagonist draws our attention for their likeness to the abstract styles of Wassily Kandinsky and Pablo Picasso, both eminent pioneers in the revolutionary abstract art movement. Their colour palettes and compositional forms profoundly influenced Namuyimba, a young artist who absorbed the freedom and spirit of the modernists, while deftly translating their language into his own style.



Left: Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition IV*, 1911
Collection Lentos Kunstmuseum, Linz

Right: Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with Fish*, 1923
Collection Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford.
© 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The act of seeing is thus key in Namuyimba's works: a trait that gives visibility and representation to a bevy of characters that he has drawn from daily life, celebrating their comings and goings as notable moments. This act of elevating the everyman is akin to other Modern masters such as Edgar Degas or Pablo Picasso, both of whom coincidentally have produced scenes of women in the midst of their ironing tasks. While Degas was fascinated by the repetitive movements in a laundress' skilled, labour-intensive daily motions (produced with flourish in *A Woman Ironing*), Picasso's work, created during his seminal Blue period, is rendered with startling sensitivity, its melancholic palette bringing sympathy and candour to the plights of the working poor.



Left: Edgar Degas, *A Woman Ironing*, 1873

Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Right: Pablo Picasso, *Woman Ironing (La repasseuse)*, 1904

Collection of the Guggenheim Museum, New York

© 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The artist's shedding light onto the lives of the common man is paramount—after all, art history was for a long period dominated by unrealistic scenes of wealth and splendour. Within the context of an artist of colour, Namuyimba also normalises domesticity without misrepresenting or even exoticising Black bodies as caricatures within his works. In this aspect he joins artists such as William H. Johnson, the great American post-war artist who has also inspired the likes of Mickalene Thomas ([see for example, Lot 52 - Mickalene Thomas, *Looking Up from the She Works Hard For the Money Pin-Up series \(2004\)*](#)) with his artistic representation of his journeys and the people in his environment. From a more contemporary point of view, he also joins figures such as Njideka Akunyili Crosby and Toyin Ojih Odutola, both of whose oeuvres include intimate portraits of daily life.



William H. Johnson, *Woman Ironing*, 1944

Collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington

The Artist in Conversation

In April 2019, Godwin Namuyimba was interviewed by Maria Vogel. Below is an extract from 'Godwin Namuyimba Deconstructs the Elements of Identity'

Maria Vogel: Who are the figures in your paintings?

Godwin Namuyimba: The figures in my paintings are my Black friends and friends of friends.

MV: Your work seems to have an element of social commentary. What are some themes you are exploring?

GN: I use human form to explore the construction of identity in relation to race and individuality in a postcolonial African context. I also attempt to critique stereotypical depictions of Black people, while I explore the conflicts and tensions between the ideologies of Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism.

MV: As a Black contemporary visual artist, have you seen the art landscape change for artists of colour?

GN: It's a process that has endured progress for a time but still a lot has to be done for the better of us and artists that are to come after us.

MV: What is your process like? How do you begin a painting?

GN: My paintings usually begin in the mind and they usually finish in the mind. The process on the canvas involves a lot of layering which makes my art work unique and attractive.

Read the full interview [here](#).

Collector's Digest

As a young artist, Namuyimba's work has been part of numerous public collections worldwide, including The W Art Foundation in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Qingdao; The Contemporary Art Museum of Luxembourg; Örebro City Library in Sweden; and The Bunker Art Space, Beth Rudin de Woody Collection in West Palm Beach, USA. Several of his solo exhibitions have been held including: *'The Dreamer'*, Galleri Steinsland & Berliner Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden (2019); *'Godwin Champs Namuyimba'*, Ars Belga, Brussels, Belgium (2021), and *'Antechamer'*, East-Projects, New York, USA (2021).

Namuyimba's striking authenticity and his unique spin on so-called mundanity has caught the attention of the art world. Recently [Destiny \(2019\)](#) achieved an impressive auction world record of US\$107,100 against pre-auction estimates of US\$8,000-12,000 by Phillips New York in June 2021.



Godwin Champs Namuyimba, *Destiny*, 2019

Sold by Phillips New York on 24 June 2021 for US\$107,100

Provenance

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY OF A DISTINGUISHED PRIVATE COLLECTOR

55

Tunji Adeniyi-Jones

Blue Ancestor

oil on canvas
198.4 x 132.2 cm. (78 1/8 x 52 in.)
Painted in 2019.

Estimate

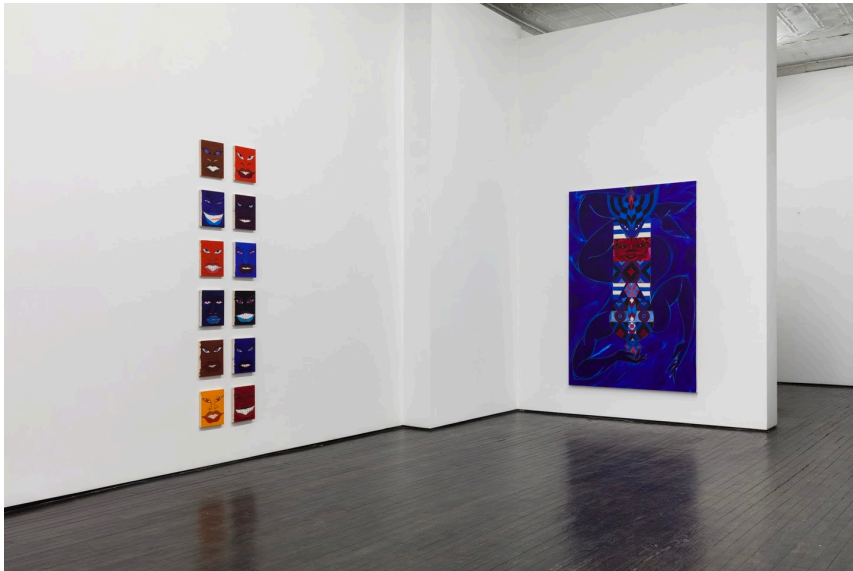
HK\$400,000 — 600,000
€45,500 — 68,200
\$51,300 — 76,900

[Go to Lot](#)



"There are so many compelling cultural crossovers between European art and West African art, and my work is an exploration of this exchange, especially seeing as I can claim ownership over both sides of this transaction." — Tunji Adeniyi-Jones

Born in London in 1992, New York-based artist Tunji Adeniyi-Jones has rapidly gained art world recognition for his use of figurative painting to explore West African history, its associated mythology, and his own Yoruba heritage and diasporic experiences. His paintings dazzle as celebrations of his ancestors' ceremonies and rituals, featuring contorting limbs that are slammed up to the very surface of the canvas with astounding authority, and masks with eyes aglow and gazes magnified.

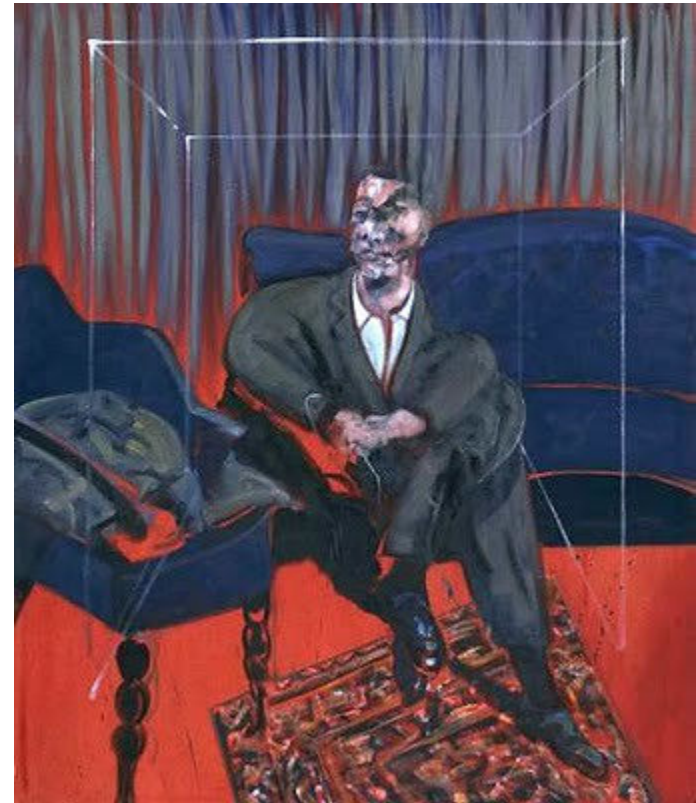


The present work exhibited at New York, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, *Patterns & Rituals*, 19 December – 26 January 2020

Marking the artist's auction debut in Asia, *Blue Ancestor* immediately commands attention with its deep, oceanic shades of blue intercut with ivory and ruby red. Painted in 2019, the work was first unveiled at the artist's solo show [Patterns & Rituals](#) at the Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York (19 December 2019 - 26 January 2020), alongside other large scale oil paintings that assess methods of worship, idolatry, and myth.

Introduction

In 2014, Adeniyi-Jones received his Bachelor's of Fine Arts from the prestigious Ruskin School of Art, Oxford University, and in 2017, his MFA in Painting and Printmaking from Yale School of Art. With beginnings in sculpture and photography, Adeniyi-Jones' transition to painting was spurred by encounters with the works of artists such as Francis Bacon, Eileen Cooper, Peter Doig, and David Hockney, amongst numerous others. Such influences are clearly traceable in the curving silhouettes and ritualistic repetition of motifs and figures throughout Adeniyi-Jones' oeuvre, as well as in his fluid, swirling linework rendered in a bright, bold colour palette.



Francis Bacon, *Seated Figure*, 1961 Collection of the Tate, United Kingdom © 2021 Estate of Francis Bacon/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London

At the same time, caught in between locales, Adeniyi-Jones also uses his art to reclaim his roots, drawing significant inspiration from artefacts of Yoruba rituals such as royal Asante stools, Ife heads and sculptural masks. Expanding on themes elucidated by the likes of Ben Enwonwu, whom Adeniyi-Jones has cited as an important reference point, he firmly centralises himself within modern African diaspora to highlight the rich substance of Nigerian and West African visual, spiritual, and social history.

A Synthesis of Tradition with Modernity

“This language of dance and performance transcends all cultural boundaries, and my intention is to charge the bodies in my paintings with this same vigour.” — Tunji Adeniyi-Jones

The current work, *Blue Ancestor*, is an enthralling example of Adeniyi-Jones’ synthesis of tradition with modernity, and abstraction with figuration. At the centre of the composition is a stack of patterned blocks, within which a face appears below the wide smile of a serpent. The gaze of the face is striking, with upturned eyes that glower with a menacing domination that is at once sneering and seductive. It slices through the surface of the paint into the space of the work’s audience, confronting the viewer amongst the rapture of eddying contours of red and white line.



Nwantantay plank masks, Bwa artist, 1983 Photo Courtesy of Christopher D. Roy

Adeniyi-Jones’ paintings are both documentation and resurrection, speaking to contemporary audiences from a time long past whilst channelling the very essence of his ancestors. The tall shape at the centre of *Blue Ancestor* takes from the image of African ceremonial masks, traditionally worn during performances and celebrations to honour lineage ancestors or embody supernatural forces through reenacting mythic events. In particular, the symmetrical design resembles plank masks from the Bwa, which are believed to possess spiritual powers whose energies are echoed in the rhythms generated by the external geometric markings. But with arms and legs that stretch from the column at the centre of the composition, departing from a point of tradition, the infinite potential for spiritual expansion is revealed in the present work as contours dissolve into the Chris Ofili-esque blue, assimilated and at one with the cosmos.

The curvaceous body of the elegantly posed, monochromatic subject in *Blue Ancestor* recalls the decorative designs of Henri Matisse, notably his *Blue Nudes* series of figures who too, are snugly condensed within the perimeters of each work. In Adeniyi-Jones’ paintings, however, the figure is a fulcrum of contemporary diasporic identity, acting as a tool for both communication and narration. And whilst Adeniyi-Jones’ works visually slot into the historical canon of Western painting, suggestive also of Colour Field paintings, they resist any exoticising, fetishising tendency. Instead, the figure is made sublime through style, ritual, and colour as the dualities of Western and African

influence coalesce and synthesise in a process of ‘cultural addition, combination and collaboration’.

i

*“The bodies and forms depicted in these works can all be derived from the African continent, and more specifically rooted in a mythology emanating from the West African coast [...] The figures in my work are expressions of my identity and there is something very rewarding about using the body as a vehicle for storytelling” —
Tunji Adeniyi-Jones*

Collector’s Digest

In April 2021, a work by Adeniyi-Jones titled [Love Ritual](#) (2019) far exceeded its pre-sale estimates when it was sold by Phillips in London, setting the artist’s current auction record. Testament to his position as a rising star within the world of contemporary art, Adeniyi-Jones has mounted numerous solo exhibitions in recent years, including at 39 Great Jones Street, New York; White Cube, London; The Cabin, Los Angeles; Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York; amongst others. The artist is currently presenting his first solo exhibition in the United Kingdom, hosted by the historic Charleston house. Titled [Tunji Adeniyi-Jones: Astral Reflections](#), the exhibition opened on 18 September 2021 and will run until 13 March 2022.

In 2019, Adeniyi-Jones was selected for Kehinde Wiley’s Black Rock Senegal residency program, and a year later was named in the [Forbes 30 Under 30 Artist Class of 2020](#). Work by Adeniyi-Jones has been acquired by the Dallas Museum of Art, Texas, and the Perez Art Museum in Miami.

ⁱ Tunji Adeniyi-Jones, quoted in White Cube, ‘Tunji Adeniyi-Jones artist page’, *White Cube*, online

Provenance

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York

Private Collection, USA

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

New York, Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, *Patterns & Rituals*, 19 December 2019 – 26 January 2020



56

Tomoo Gokita

Final Confrontation

signed, titled and dated "'FINAL CONFRONTATION"

Tomoo Gokita 2012' on the reverse

acrylic gouache on canvas

181.8 x 227.3 cm. (71 5/8 x 89 1/2 in.)

Painted in 2012.

Estimate

HK\$1,200,000 — 2,200,000

€136,000 — 250,000

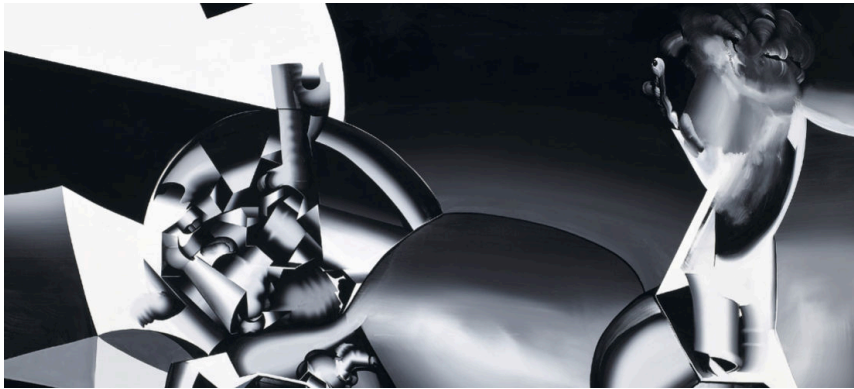
\$154,000 — 282,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

Delivering an arresting visual punch, celebrated Japanese artist Tomoo Gokita's *Final Confrontation* masterfully balances the ornate and the abstract. Rendered in acrylic gouache on canvas, in sharp whites, velvety blacks and a myriad of grey gradations, the artist engenders an ambience of mystery and suspense, as tangible as that of any thriller.



Detail of the present work

A Gokita Masterpiece

Though not inspired by Gokita's signature female muses, *Final Confrontation* is a masterwork that stands out within the artist's oeuvre. First unveiled at the Taka Ishii Gallery in Tokyo during Gokita's 2012 solo exhibition, *Tomoo Gokita: Variety Show*, the work was also included in his first museum solo exhibition, *The Great Circus*, held at the Kawamura Memorial DIC museum in Sakura, Japan, in 2014. With its monumental size and striking composition, *Final Confrontation* transports the viewer before an altar of Gokita's own idiosyncratic, Cubist-inspired dimension, gazing down upon the sublime.

"I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, 'Come and see!' I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest." — Revelation 6:1-2

Unmistakably similar in composition, the current work's title and subject allude to the painting *The Vision of the White Horse* (1798) by early Romantic painter Philip James de Loutherbourg. In this biblical illustration, de Loutherbourg depicts two of the four Horsemen who were summoned by The Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, to set a divine apocalypse upon the mortal world as a Last Judgement. Here, the 'Conqueror' rides out gallantly on a white horse with his bow, with 'War' on a red horse behind him, wielding a sword.



Philip James de Loutherbourg, *The Vision of the White Horse*, 1798 Collection of the Tate, London

In swaths of luxurious black and white, Gokita presents a much more abstract and amorphous version of the same arrangement of the two horses and their riders in *Final Confrontation*. Here, pictorial spaces are flattened and deconstructed, with light, clouds, flesh and fabric layered repeatedly on top of each other, barely separated but still distinguishable in formation. In the foreground of the present work, the velvety-smooth grey gradient is suggestive of the strapping shoulder and barrel of de Louthembourg's white horse, accentuated by the curving strokes of Gokita's brush that further resemble the stallion's rounded neck.

Moreover, Gokita morphs the flowing manes of the horses and riders' scarves into sharp geometric abstractions that float in and amongst his void-like background, hypnotising the eye through the stark tonal contrasts that confuse the senses in their apparent three-dimensionality, bringing to mind the depiction of divine light in other religious works such as Caravaggio's *Conversation on the Way to Damascus* (1601). As visages of the horses and riders in the sky are blurred to mere tonal gradients, Gokita blurs the protagonists' identities through his signature method of effacement, imbuing the work with an overtone that is unnerving and surreal -- yet simultaneously powerful in the allusions it evokes.



Caravaggio, *Conversation on the Way to Damascus*, 1601 Collection of the Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome

“The picture is in motion from the moment the eye turns into an ear.” — Tomoo Gokita

Black-and-White that feels like Living Colour

Influenced by the illustrations of Tandanori Yokoo, Japanese Playboy magazines, jazz record

covers, and old black and white film stills, Gokita's compositions demonstrate a diverse range of style as he blends new modes of illustration and subculture on the same pictorial frame with his distinct touch. The esteemed art critic for *The New York Times*, Roberta Smith, has highly praised this unique approach of Gokita's, stating that his: 'vocabulary barrels across illustration, pornography, abstraction, children's drawing, calligraphy and sign-painting, with a perfect control, velvety surfaces and tonal range that makes black-and-white feel like living color'.ⁱ



Left: Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. K. R. Version O)*, 1911-12 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York © 2021 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: Marcel Duchamp, *The Passage from Virgin to Bride*, 1912 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York © 2021 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Estate of Marcel Duchamp

Offering an alternative view, Takashi Suzuki—the curator for Gokita's seminal *The Great Circus* exhibition of which the present work formed part of—attributes the artist's stylistic influences to the 'various ideological elements fragmented in the pictorial space of...*The Passage from Virgin to Bride*, [and] the transformation of forms and the close entanglement of the figures seen in *Les Femmes d'Alger*'.ⁱⁱ Just as the subjects of these two paintings are fashioned into sharp line and layered shape that confuse the eye as viewers try to seek out elements of figuration, Gokita's stylised *Final Confrontation* masterfully metamorphoses any points of recognition, revealing the artist's affinity for abstraction. As such, a more contemporary comparison can be drawn to American artist Avery Singer, whom too, constructs complex spatial compositions whereby figures are reduced to structural fragmentations. But unlike Singer's reliance on digital technologies, Gokita's compositions are skillfully executed entirely from the artist's own hand.

Gokita's stylistic choice of eliminating colour and adapting grayscale in *Final Confrontation* further blurs the distinction between the abstract and figurative. Without colour, Gokita provides drastically less information in his canvas, pushing the viewer to harness their imaginative powers and proactively tap into the meaning of the painting with greater acuity. As such, his monochromatic composition allows the spectator to tune into the most fundamental experience of painting — the dialogue that occurs between the viewer and the work.

Collector's Digest

Born in 1969 in Tokyo, Gokita's unique and widely acclaimed oeuvre has been celebrated across extensive publications and gallery and museum shows around the world. Following his first solo exhibition in New York in 2006, Gokita has been honoured with numerous solo exhibitions internationally, with notable mentions including his first museum exhibition *The Great Circus* at Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art (2014) and *PEEKABOO* at Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery (2018).

Most recently, the Dallas Contemporary in Texas hosted Gokita's first North American museum solo show, [Tomoo Gokita: Get Down](#), which ran from 12 June – 22 August 2021.

ⁱ Roberta Smith, 'Stranger Town: Invading Genres Breach the Art World's Porous Borders', *The New York Times*, 9 March 2005

ⁱⁱ Takashi Suzuki, quoted in *Tomoo Gokita: The Great Circus*, exh. cat., Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art, 2014, n.p.

Provenance

Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Tokyo, Taka Ishii Gallery, *Tomoo Gokita: Variety Show*, 30 June – 28 July 2012
Sakura, Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art, *Tomoo Gokita: The Great Circus*, 31 August - 24 December 2014, cat. 19, n.p. (illustrated)

Literature

Elaine W. Ng, 'One Thousand Shades of Gray - Tomoo Gokita', *ArtAsiaPacific*, no. 94, July/August 2015, online (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN IMPORTANT POLISH
COLLECTION

57

Ewa Juszkiewicz

Appropriation

signed, titled and dated 'Ewa Juszkiewicz
"Appropriation" 2018' on the reverse

oil on canvas

80 x 60 cm. (31 1/2 x 23 5/8 in.)

Painted in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$400,000 — 600,000

€45,300 — 68,000

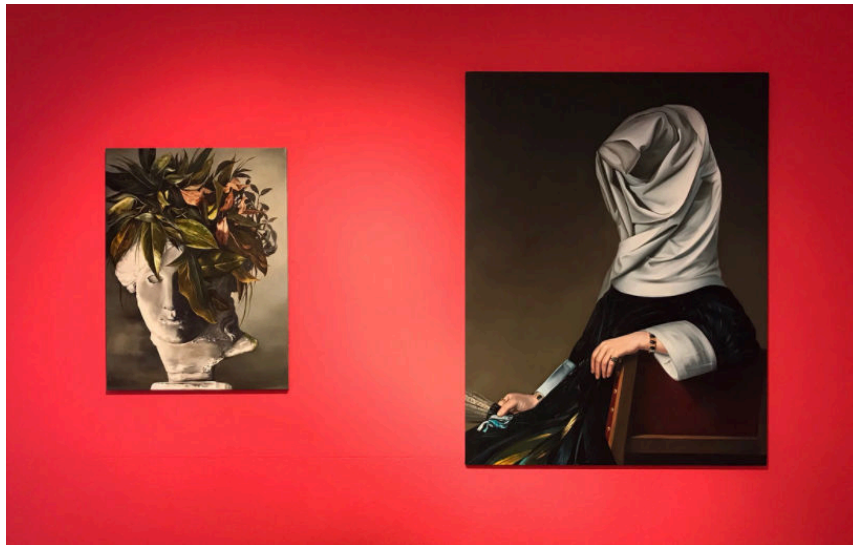
\$51,300 — 76,900

[Go to Lot](#)



“My gestures are the tools to break a cliché and overturn a well-known order. I replace what is classical and connected with the canon into what comes from nature and senses. Paradoxically, by covering these portraits I want to uncover individuality, character, emotions. I want to bring out the vitality.” — Ewa Juszkiewicz

As a rising star in the world of contemporary art, the buzz around Polish-painter Ewa Juszkiewicz continues to grow at a catapulting rate. Following the announcement of her representation by the esteemed Gagosian gallery last year, she has since been honoured with a solo exhibition at Gagosian in New York, and two sell-out solo shows at Almine Rech in London and Paris. As the first work by the artist to be offered at auction in Asia, *Appropriation* is an arresting image that beautifully exemplifies Juszkiewicz’s distinctive style, portraying an oil painted rendering of a marble bust of a woman partially cloaked by invasive green foliage. Encapsulating the artist’s interest in art historical depictions of the female sitter and the ways in which past cultural imperatives continue to reverberate, Juszkiewicz remixes classical portraiture to ‘disturb the harmony and façade and to bring these characters to life’.ⁱ



The present work exhibited at Gdańsk City Gallery, *The Skeletons Must Rise*, 14 July – 26 August 2018

© Ewa Juszkiewicz

Ideals of Beauty

“I wish to tell a new tale and create my own language: ambiguous, dense, natural, and organic.” — Ewa Juszkiewicz

Born in Gdańsk, Poland in 1984, and holding a PhD earned at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, Juszkiewicz has been interested in the genre of portraiture since first starting out on her artistic path. Though impressed by the artistry and technique of portraiture painting from the Western canon, Juszkiewicz was struck by her observation that under the dominant male gaze, women were very often portrayed in a uniformly passive way. As she explains, ‘Their poses, gestures, and facial expressions were very similar and showed no deep emotion or individuality. As a result, I developed a strong need to reference those portraits, and to establish a dialogue with them. I was driven by a desire to revitalise history, or rather, to create my own story on the basis of it.’ⁱⁱ



Left: *The Venus de Milo*

Collection of the Louvre, Paris

Right: *Bust of Aphrodite/Venus*

Collection of The Museum of Liverpool

Alluding to the work's title, *Appropriation* draws an instant comparison to stone carved sculptures from Ancient Greece and Rome, of ideal figures, perfectly proportioned and balanced, who became symbols of both physical and moral excellence. In fact, with curling hair pinned to the sides of the subject's symmetrical face, there is a distinct likeness between the bust in the present work and the portrayals of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of beauty, and her Roman counterpart Venus - such as the famous Hellenistic period *Venus de Milo* which is now housed in the collection of the Louvre in Paris.



Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Head of Medusa*, 1630

Collection of the Palazzo dei Conservatori, Rome

Uprooting Venus and Aphrodite's historically recognised symbolism for love, lust, passion, and pleasure, Juskiewicz delicately conceals part of the subject of *Appropriation's* smooth, marble, expressionless face with a dense covering of leaves, some of which are starting to wither and brown. As such, in substituting the marble art-historical connotations of classisied perfection with something tainted and depraved, Juskiewicz's figure fades into the anonymity of the natural world like a haunting dream - perhaps alluding to the myth of Medusa, who reclaimed her curse as powerful protection against the male gaze. Striking a balance between the glorified and the grotesque, and between theatricality and naturalness, Juskiewicz disrupts stereotypical ideals of beauty to challenge misogynist notions of ownership around female identity, breaking the obsession and illusion of the decorative background role women have so often been expected to play.

Juskiewicz's Surrealist Portraits



Left: Ewa Juskiewicz, *Untitled (after Joseph Karl Stieler)*, 2020

© Ewa Juskiewicz

Right: Joseph Karl Stieler, *Portrait of Auguste Strobl*, 1828

Though the present work undoubtedly nods to works of Classical antiquity, Juskiewicz's acute sensitivity to colour and sophisticated treatment of her oil paint medium further aligns her working methods to that of the Renaissance and Old Masters to the 19th century. And yet, infused with the spirit of Surrealism—an artistic and literary movement stemming from the late 1910s and early 1920s that sought to channel the unconscious to unlock the power of the imagination—Juskiewicz's unconventional portraiture innovates the genre through a contemporary perspective.

Frida Kahlo's thought-provoking self-portraits are interesting to note in respect to the present painting, as both artists' work explores how women and the female body are seen and perceived, wholly debunking Sigmund Freud's ask of 'What do women want?' Incorporating symbolism and metaphor to discuss the most complex aspects of female identity, Kahlo and Juskiewicz's subversive representations convey an inner worldview of such variety that no single question could encompass the nature of the female imagination.



Frida Kahlo, *Self Portrait, Dedicated to Dr Eloesser*, 1940
2021 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

"I am my own muse. The subject I know best. The subject I want to know better" —
Frida Kahlo

But whereas Kahlo explored this through presentations of herself, celebrating her features and drawing from her emotions to curb others' expectations of how a woman should look and behave, Juskiewicz directly transforms the past in dialogue with the modern day to denature and destruct

codes. Like the socially critical *History Portraits* by Cindy Sherman, whom Juszkiewicz has acknowledged for the influence on her work, in appropriating art historical representations of women and imbuing them with contrasts and contradictions, viewers are presented with a tripecta of meaning, prompted to consider the afterlife of such presentations of identity.



Julie Curtiss, *Escargot*, 2018

[Lot 6 - Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction](#)

Estimate HK\$ 400,000 - 600,000 / US\$ 51,300 - 76,900

A more contemporary comparison can be made between Juszkiewicz and the work of French-Vietnamese painter Julie Curtiss, whom too, reworks female archetypes through a sense of the uncanny, playing with notions of concealment versus exposed. Unlike Curtiss, however, whose painterly style is characterised by illustrative line, shadow, and colour, conjuring a dreamlike quality in her balance of the bizarre and the banal, the ethereality of Juszkiewicz's portraits twists to almost satirical. Giving character to her appropriated subjects by manipulating their features to beyond recognition or substituting them with large polypore, the bodies of insects, bouquets of

flowers, tribal masks, or draped fabrics, Juszkiewicz succeeds in creating works that are near-classical in form, but radical in concept.

As she explains, 'In these paintings, by covering or modifying a portrait, I want to disrupt the known order and shatter the uniform and conservative image of female beauty. Through a metamorphosis of classical paintings, I change their interpretation and provoke new, alternative associations... By interweaving elements relating to the canon and tradition with elements derived from nature and the senses, I want to release the expression, emotion, and vitality previously hidden by convention.'ⁱⁱ

Collector's Digest

As one of the most celebrated contemporary Polish painters, Juszkiewicz's work has been featured in extensive exhibitions at galleries worldwide, including at Gagosian in New York ([17 November 2020 - 4 January 2021](#)) and Almine Rech in Paris ([4 September - 9 October 2021](#)) and London ([18 June - 31 July 2020](#)).

She is currently included in an exhibition called [Arcimboldo Face to Face](#) hosted by the Centre Pompidou-Metz in France, running from 29 May - 22 November 2021.

Works by Juszkiewicz' reside in the esteemed museum collections of the National Museum in Gdańsk, the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, BWA Galeria Bielska in Poland, and Zachęta of Contemporary Art in Szczecin, Poland.

ⁱ Ewa Juszkiewicz, quoted in Lucy Rees, 'Ewa Juszkiewicz's Surreal Portraits Challenge the Role of Women in Art', *Galerie*, 9 October 2019, online

ⁱⁱ Ewa Juszkiewicz, quoted in Claire Selvin, 'Painter Ewa Juszkiewicz Wants to Shatter Conservative Ideas About Beauty', *ARTnews*, 25 November 2020, [online](#)

Provenance

lokal_30, Warsaw
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Gdańsk City Gallery, *The Skeletons Must Rise*, 14 July - 26 August 2018

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in Association with Poly Auction

Hong Kong Auction / 30 November 2021 / 7pm HKT



58

Lucas Arruda

Untitled from the series Deserto-Modelo

signed and dated 'LUCAS ARRUDA 2013' on the reverse

oil on canvas

50 x 50 cm. (19 5/8 x 19 5/8 in.)

Painted in 2013.

Estimate

HK\$1,000,000 — 1,500,000

€113,000 — 170,000

\$128,000 — 192,000

[Go to Lot](#)



*“Light is what binds my works together, as if I am balancing light and shadow.”
— Lucas Arruda*

Hailing from São Paulo, Brazil, Lucas Arruda has garnered wide international acclaim for his nuancedly coloured canvases that linger between landscape painting and quasi-abstractness. Conveyed on an intimate scale and with great precision, the present work, *Untitled*, is a marvellous exemplar from Arruda’s celebrated series, *Deserto-Modelo* - a title inspired by the writings of Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto.



Lucas Arruda mixing paint directly on the walls around his canvas in his studio, 2017

Presenting a scene of ochre sea waves that blend into tumbling cloud on horizon line that feels just out of reach, Arruda masterfully balances light with shadow, using an array of cool-toned pigment he mixes directly on the wall around the perimeters of his painting. Although strongly evocative of the landscape paintings from the Romantic period, Arruda does not seek to portray realistic nature in his work. Instead, he draws from the landscapes of his mind to conjure scenes of an uncanny

atmosphere, beckoning the viewer to ‘peer in as if looking through a portal to another world’ⁱ, as they find themselves transported to places from their own memories and imaginative registers.

A Dance of Shadow and Light

“My work is informed at a technical level by certain landscape painting, in the use of colour and brushwork for example, or Constable’s clouds, which are the best in that tradition. But those painters were observing nature.” — Lucas Arruda



J. M. W. Turner, *Seascape*, 1828 Collection of the Tate, United Kingdom



James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Nocturne: Blue and Silver - Cremorne Lights*, 1872. Collection of the Tate Modern, London



Claude Monet, *Marine near Etretat*, 1882. Collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art

Enveloped in a hazy field of cloud, in the present work sky and sea merge to seem infinitely expansive, conveying an awe for the grandeur of nature reminiscent of the oeuvres of J.M.W. Turner and James Abbott McNeill Whistler – artists to whom Arruda is frequently compared. At the same time, the luminous surface of *Untitled* from the series *Deserto-Modelo* also recalls the techniques of Impressionist masters Claude Monet and John Constable, notably for their understanding of how light, shade, and colour can communicate the passing of time over the course of the day. The present work perfectly exemplifies this in the whispers of blue that peek through the dense blanket of ecru tinged mist, indicative of a break in the clouds paving the way for sunbeams to shine through once again.



John Constable, *Cloud Study*, 1822 Collection of the Tate Modern, London

Unlike Monet and Constable's preference for painting *en plein air*, however, Arruda's compositions are not tied to any specific viewpoint. Instead, he favours the power of the imagination, regarding his imposing horizon lines as symbols to elicit emotions and ideas. As the artist asserts: 'In a way, the only reason to call my works landscapes is cultural: it's simply that viewers automatically

register my format as a landscape, although none of the images can be traced to a geographic location. It's the idea of a landscape rather than a real place.'ⁱⁱ

Another artist who sought inner reflection from depicting seascapes was George O'Keeffe, such as in her *York Beach* paintings of 1922 – 1928, which were created during a period of emotional turbulence as she dealt with the challenging aftereffects of heartbreak. Both Arruda and O'Keeffe interrogate the understanding of perception in exploring the balance between man and nature, but whilst O'Keeffe's compositions showcase a clear distinction between sea and sky, Arruda's paintings mesmerise in that ideas of foreground and distance are virtually eliminated.



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Wave, Night*, 1928 Collection of the Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Massachusetts © 2021 Georgia O'Keeffe Museum / ARS, NY

The Atmospheric Effects of Texture

“It’s more powerful to contain something as immense as a seascape in a tighter scale. It increases and concentrates the radiation, and the surrounding frequency.” — Lucas Arruda



Mark Rothko, *Blue and Gray*, 1962 Collection of the Beyeler Foundation, Switzerland © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Despite his format of painting the classical structure of a landscape divided by a horizon line,

Arruda differs from his predecessors as it is the process of painting itself that he brings to the forefront of each composition. Seeking to reveal ‘a sensation, a state of mind suspended within the medium of paint... that can’t be grasped through language because there aren’t sufficient visual elements to describe it’ⁱⁱ, Arruda’s likens his working methods to being almost meditative in nature, akin to the contemplative capacity evoked by the grand canvases of Mark Rothko, which too, radiate an ethereal sense of sublime light caught within the subtleties of tonal hue.



Gerhard Richter, *Seestück*, 1968 © 2021 Gerhard Richter

Perfectly complimenting this attitude are the works of Gerhard Richter, whose practice is also largely guided by his pushing of the boundaries of his chosen medium. However, whereas Richter starts from photographic reference for his own seascape series, works like *Untitled* from the series *Deserto-Modelo* stem from Arruda’s own reverie and the surface of his paintings is all but flat. Working on a small scale that requires intense concentration, he first applies thick layers of paint over a white background, building up hues before peeling and carving them away to draw out light from darkness.

As such, it perhaps may be more appropriate to consider the present work in respect to Richter’s series of *Abstraktes Bilder* (see for example, [Lot 16 - Gerhard Richter, *Kerzenschein \(Candle-light\)* \(1984\)](#)), as both artists build up an almost sculptural definition of texture through layers of paint that tease the eye through the hints of colour that emerge from deep beneath. And yet, in stark contrast to Richter’s technique which is largely left up to chance, Arruda’s approach is meticulously calculated as each aesthetic decision is ‘worked out with great precision, including the scale, the choice of paints, [and] the shape of the canvas.’ⁱⁱⁱ



Gerhard Richter, *Abstraktes Bild (867-1)*, 2000 © 2021 Gerhard Richter



Gerhard Richter, *Abstraktes Bild (940-7)*, 2015 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 8 June 2021 for HK\$95,100,000 © 2021 Gerhard Richter

Collector's Digest

As one of the youngest artists to be represented by David Zwirner, Arruda's London debut at the gallery in 2017 launched him onto an international stage. His practice has since been celebrated across numerous exhibitions, including at David Zwirner, New York in 2019, and the Pond Society in Shanghai - who were the first to present a solo presentation of Arruda's work in China between November 2020 to January 2021.

When Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction were the first to debut Arruda's work in Asia at the end of 2020, his work *Untitled* (2013) far surpassed its pre-auction estimates of HK\$1,500,000 - 2,500,000, achieving an impressive HK\$3,780,000 - the world record for the artist. His second top auction result was accomplished only recently at Phillips London, when it sold for £352,800 in October 2021, slotting in above the artist's previous second-place record which also achieved in Hong Kong by Phillips in association with Poly Auction in June 2021.

Arruda's works are included in major collections globally, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, and the Fondation Beyeler in Basel.



1st top auction result:

Lucas Arruda, *Untitled*, 2013

Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 3 December 2020 for HK\$3,780,000 © Lucas Arruda



2nd top auction result:

Lucas Arruda, *Untitled*, 2013

Sold by Phillips London on 15 October 2021 for GBP 352,800 © Lucas Arruda



3rd top auction result:

Lucas Arruda, *Untitled* from the series *Deserto-Modelo*, 2012

Sold by Phillips Hong Kong in Association with Poly Auction on 8 June 2021 for HK\$3,213,000 © Lucas Arruda

ⁱ Lucy Rees, 'Lucas Arruda's Dreamy Landscapes Go on View at David Zwirner', *Galerie*, 10 October 2019, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Lucas Arruda, quoted in Angeria Rigamonti di Cutò, 'The only reason to call my works landscapes is cultural', *Studio International*, 19 September 2017, [online](#)

Provenance

Herald St, London

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

London, Herald St, *I'll Be Your Mirror*, 7 September - 6 October 2013