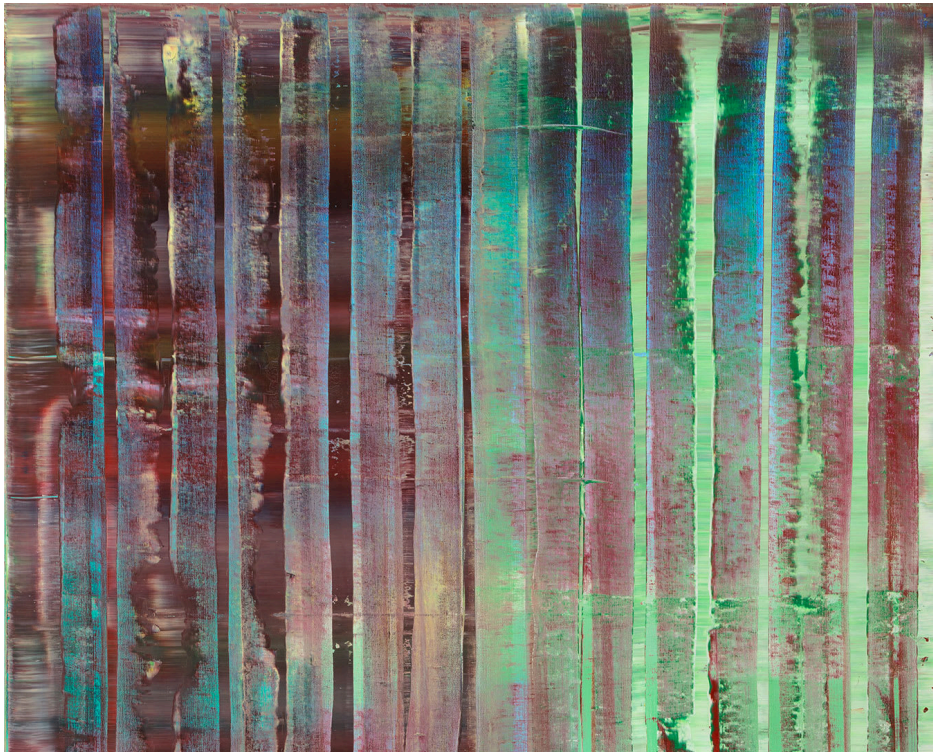


20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT

Sale Interest: 35 Lots



[View Sale](#)



[Conditions of Sale](#)



PHILLIPS

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT

Sale Interest: 35 Lots

Auction & Viewing Location

1 December 2022 4:30pm HKT
JW Marriott Hotel Hong Kong, 88
Queensway, Admiralty, Hong Kong

Sale Designation

When sending in written bids or making
enquiries please refer to this sale as
HK010322 or 20th Century & Contemporary
Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle.

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

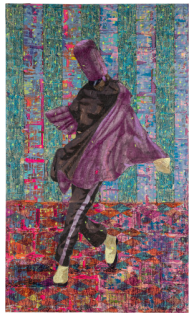
20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

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Sale Interest: 35 Lots



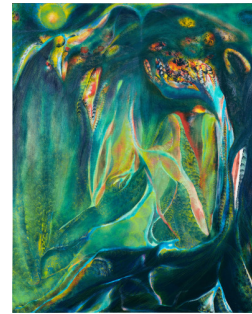
1
Michaela Yearwood-Dan
What's the Use in Yearning
Estimate
HK\$250,000 — 350,000



2
Derek Fordjour
Single Pivot Turn
Estimate
HK\$2,000,000 — 3,000,000



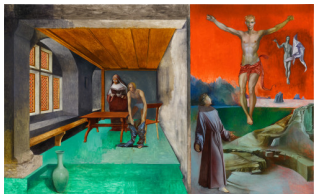
3
María Berrío
The Lovers 2
Estimate
HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000



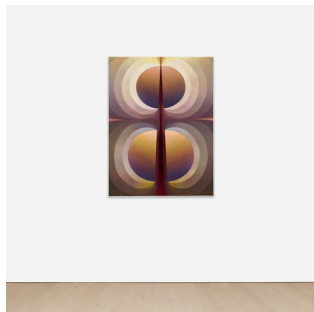
4
Lucy Bull
Giving Tree
Estimate
HK\$1,000,000 — 1,500,000



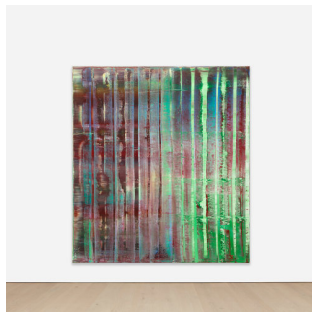
5
Christina Quarles
I Can Only Feel Whut Touches Me
Estimate
HK\$900,000 — 1,200,000



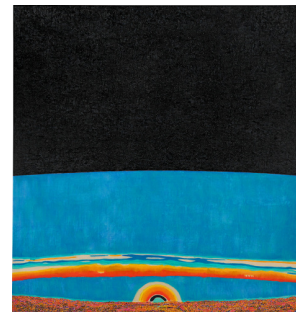
6
Julien Nguyen
Faust II
Estimate
HK\$900,000 — 1,200,000



7
Loie Hollowell
Split Orbs in gray-brown, yellow...
Estimate
HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000



8
Gerhard Richter
Abstraktes Bild (774-1)
Estimate
HK\$80,000,000 — 120,000,000



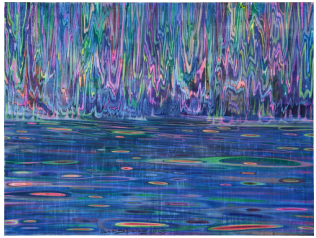
9
William Monk
Far-Out III
Estimate
HK\$800,000 — 1,200,000



10
Damien Hirst
Forgiven
Estimate
HK\$6,000,000 — 9,000,000

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

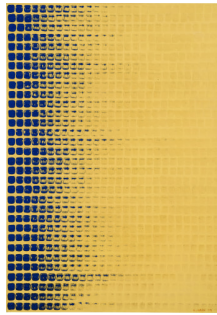
Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



11
Huang Yuxing
River
Estimate
HK\$1,200,000 — 1,800,000



12
Yayoi Kusama
INFINITY-NETS (GMBKA)
Estimate
HK\$12,000,000 — 18,000,000



13
Lee Ufan
From Point No. 77103
Estimate
HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000



14
Zao Wou-Ki
14.10.69.
Estimate
HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000



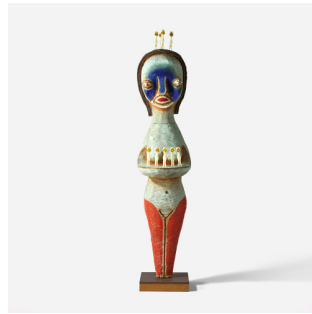
15
Yayoi Kusama
Gold Accumulation (1)
Estimate
HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000



16
Chiharu Shiota
State of Being (Boy's Kimono)
Estimate
HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000



17
Javier Calleja
Once in Life
Estimate
HK\$2,700,000 — 3,800,000



18
Izumi Kato
Untitled
Estimate
HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000



19
Michaël Borremans
The Butter Sculptor
Estimate
HK\$2,800,000 — 3,500,000



20
Michaël Borremans
The Assistant
Estimate
HK\$3,200,000 — 4,200,000

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21
Yoshitomo Nara
Nachtwandern
Estimate
HK\$16,000,000 — 25,000,000



22
Yoshitomo Nara
Flying Nun
Estimate
HK\$3,800,000 — 5,800,000



23
KAWS
HOT SEAT JUNCTION
Estimate
HK\$7,000,000 — 10,000,000



24
KAWS
COMPANION
Estimate
HK\$6,000,000 — 10,000,000



25
Banksy
Girl with Balloon & Morons Sepia
Estimate
HK\$4,500,000 — 6,500,000



26
Banksy
Kids on Guns
Estimate
HK\$8,500,000 — 12,000,000



27
Caroline Walker
The Masquerade
Estimate
HK\$1,000,000 — 1,500,000



28
Trey Abdella
Sunny Days
Estimate
HK\$700,000 — 900,000



29
André Butzer
Untitled
Estimate
HK\$600,000 — 800,000



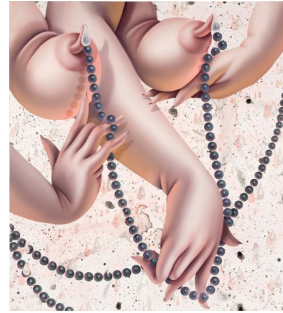
30
Rafa Macarrón
Atmosfera II
Estimate
HK\$800,000 — 1,200,000

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31
Louise Bonnet
The Swimmer
Estimate
HK\$400,000 — 600,000



32
Sarah Slappey
Black Pearls II
Estimate
HK\$300,000 — 500,000



33
Ayako Rokkaku
Untitled
Estimate
HK\$1,200,000 — 1,800,000



34
Brett Crawford
3MO SUPPORT
Estimate
HK\$600,000 — 800,000



35
Raghav Babbar
Off Duty
Estimate
HK\$150,000 — 250,000



1

Michaela Yearwood-Dan

What's the Use in Yearning

signed, titled and dated "'What the use in yearning"
2021 M Yearwood-Dan' on the reverse of the right
panel

acrylic, oil and Swarovski crystals on canvas, diptych
each canvas 200 x 150 cm. (78 3/4 x 59 in.)
overall 200 x 300 cm. (78 3/4 x 118 1/8 in.)
Executed in 2021.

Estimate

HK\$250,000 — 350,000

€30,900 — 43,300

\$32,100 — 44,900

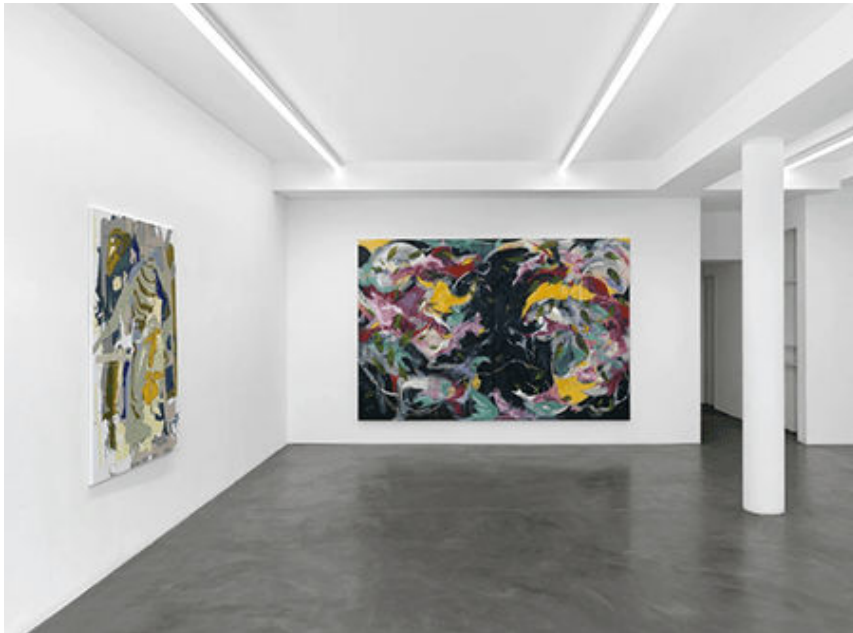
[Go to Lot](#)



In a world where figurative art dominates, Michaela Yearwood-Dan's colossal megacosms of chromatic abstraction have an unmistakable ambience, exuding a kind of chaotic meditation, and places her at the head of the emerging group of Black abstractionists that include Rachel Jones and Torkwase Dyson, positioning her as one of the world's most exciting young painters. Her work is deeply personal, operating as an open-book journal for her layered identities. Yet these individualities do not conform to expectations of race or sexuality, instead transcending them to redefine the notions of collective identity and history. Incorporating an array of cultural signifiers, she borrows freely from blackness - flora, healing techniques, clothes and carnival culture in the production of her majestic compositions.

“My practice is routed in self historicisation, primarily executed through large scale abstract painting and, more recently, ceramics. The work I make explores a plethora of themes ranging from political dissection to personal narrative accounts with consistent references to botany and poetry.” — Michaela Yearwood-Dan

Painting Poetry with Pigment



Installation view of the present lot at Zurich, Galerie Maria Berheim, *Ghost Painterly Abstraction*, 9

September - 23 October 2021

Floral images emerge and coalesce within *What's the Use in Yearning*, where forms reimagine themselves infinite before falling away to be replaced by alternate constructions. Pigment unravels across two canvasses, a Gaian undulation that recalls the abstracted arcadia of Claude Monet's later works. An endless alchemist, the painting marks a change of direction in the artist's practice as figuration falls away almost completely to be replaced with a mastery over paint. 'I find versatility the most exciting thing', she declares, 'I'm forever finding new ways to use paints and finding love for new colours and mediums and ways to experiment with using them. In recent years I've become more confident in my use of colour and bold marks.'ⁱ



Claude Monet, *Water Lilies*, 1919 Collection of the Albertina Museum, Vienna

These works are produced meticulously with Yearwood-Dan starting at the centre of the canvas, buttering layers of oil paint using a palette knife, then working outwards to create spatial ambiguity that invites us to step into the canvas - a process of transportation allowing for ecstatic elevation.

Opulence and Awareness

The present lot is bestowed with a level of affluence with its embellishment of Swarovski crystals, a process that the artist calls 'accessorisation'ⁱⁱ. This impulse to adorn is rooted in her South London upbringing and her exposure to gold-laden religious iconography whilst being educated at a

Catholic school. However, the practice of accessorising with jewels or gold is not inherent to Christianity alone, but also seen in other regions of the world within Buddhism or Muslim cultures, as means to elevate the work to a higher dimension that reaches closer to their deities. As such, Yearwood-Dan's intentional choice of embellishing her works anchors her oeuvre within a greater context of art history that began with religious iconography.



Detail of the present lot

Indeed, Yearwood-Dan's paintings are almost Renaissance-like in their opulence, while her swathes of nuanced lines and sumptuous colour evoke shades of Botticelli. Yet it would be an encounter with another Black painter hailing from London, Chris Ofili, that would spark her genesis as an artist. 'Everyone talks about representation, but there are some moments of representation that do shake you to the core, and for me, it was discovering Chris Ofili at age 16 or 17', she explains.ⁱ Yearwood-Dan's productions find undoubtable kinship with Ofili, with both using their distinct practices as a means of self-determination.

Collector's Digest

In October 2022, the artist's auction record was set when *Coping Mechanisms* (2021) sold for £239,400 at Phillips London.

Yearwood-Dan has been celebrated with several solo exhibitions between New York and London. This year, Tiwani Contemporary celebrated the artist with a solo exhibition, *The Sweetest Taboo*, following their 2019 show, *After Euphoria*.

In 2021, she was the subject of a solo exhibition at Marianne Boesky Gallery and in 2019 at The Lee Alexander McQueen Foundation. Most recently, Yearwood-Dan created a site-specific installation, *Let Me Hold You* for Queercircle, a dedicated safe space for LGBTQ+ communities to gather; earlier this year Yearwood-Dan was featured in the third annual Great Women Artists Residency at Palazzo Monti.

Recent exhibitions include *Laced*, New Art Exchange, Nottingham, UK (group - 2021); *Summer exhibition*, Royal Academy, London, UK (group- 2021); *Be Gentle With Me*, Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York (solo - 2021); *Ancient Deities*, Arusha Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK (group - 2020); *Clay TM*, TJ Boulting, London, UK (group - 2020); *The Green Fuse*, Frestonian Gallery, London, UK (group -2020); *No Time Like the Present*, Public Gallery, London, UK, (group - 2020); *Begin Again*, Guts Gallery, London, UK, (group - 2020); *After Euphoria*, Tiwani Contemporary, London, UK (solo - 2019) and *One English Pound*, Sarabande, The Lee Alexander McQueen Foundation (solo - 2019).

Yearwood-Dan's works are held in the permanent collections of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., Institute of Contemporary Art Miami, and Columbus Museum of Art.

ⁱ Michaela Yearwood-Dan, quoted in 'Our Featured Artist: Michaela Yearwood-Dan', *Windsor & Newton*, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Michaela Yearwood-Dan, quoted in [Tess Thackara](#), 'Beyond Their Lavish Aesthetic, Michaela Yearwood-Dan's Paintings Make You Feel', *Cultured*, 8 December 2021, [online](#)

Provenance

Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zürich

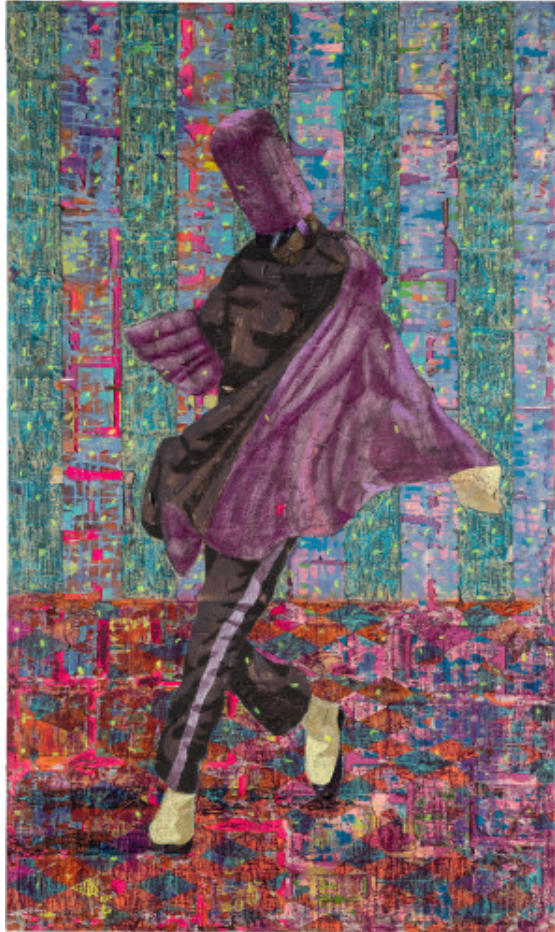
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Zürich, Galerie Maria Berheim, *Images: Ghost Painterly Abstraction*, 9 September - 23 October
2021

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



2

Derek Fordjour

Single Pivot Turn

signed and dated 'FORDJOUR '18' on the reverse
acrylic, charcoal and oil pastel on newspaper mounted
on canvas

255 x 150.1 cm. (100 3/8 x 59 1/8 in.)

Executed in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$2,000,000 — 3,000,000

€249,000 — 373,000

\$256,000 — 385,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“The most instrumental, insurgent painting for this moment must be of figures, and those figures must be black, unapologetically so.” — Kerry James Marshall

Derek Fordjour is an American multidisciplinary artist who works across video, collage, sculpture and painting to project his unique creative vision. His works largely depict Black figures engaging in cultural rituals and rites of passage, who strive to manoeuvre through the ambiguity of success while being scrutinised through the prism of race.



The present lot shown at Josh Lilley Gallery booth, Art Basel Miami Beach 2018

Fordjour’s rise as an artist mimics the industry of his work, having only had his first exhibition in 2014, *The Big Game*, whilst completing his MFA at Hunter College. Figures like Nari Ward and Kerry James Marshall would point him in the right direction, but it would be a residency at the Sugar Hill Museum in New York that garnered critical acclaim. Fordjour then detonated the public eye with the sale of *Agency and Regulation (study)* at Phillips New York in September 2019, before his booth at Frieze was bought up by influential collectors Jay-Z and Beyoncé.



Derek Fordjour, *Agency and Regulation (study)*, 2016 Sold for USD137,500 (Premium) at Phillips New York, 24 September 2019

His artistic process is that of singularity and pain-staking intricacy. After preliminary layers of paint, he then glues cardboard tiles before wrapping the canvas in layers of newspaper (usually seven or eight). What follows next is a procedure of addition and subtraction: scraping away areas of newspaper, adding further polygons of cardboard, and finally drawing with charcoal and painting in acrylics. The country that this labyrinth of medium and material creates is nothing short of breathtaking; a complex topography that glides over the pictorial space, running crags and crevasses through the canvas as we become helpless in their mysteries.

“During tough times I worked with newspaper, which is a fragile material, but the joy of drawing on such a surface with vine charcoal freed me from the oppression of easel painting. I enjoyed how liberating it was. It allowed me to start cutting, but then I had this hollow object that needed more support. Experimenting with ways to create more support ended up creating a new kind of surface. Now I react to something in every painting.” — Derek Fordjour

The subversion of the mundane nature by using periodicals as layers within the work holds deeper meaning. He always uses the fabled, salmon pink pages of the *Financial Times*, a paper whose illustrious reputation holds personal resonance for him as an artist: ‘The Financial Times is making an effort to differentiate itself from the pool of other newsprint with its distinctive colour. The idea of individuation—the desire to distinguish oneself in the face of being stereotyped or grouped—has a tension that I identify with.’ⁱ

Now 48 and reaching a mature stage in his career, Fordjour has found his voice and carved his seat in the cacophonous, sensory-overloaded modern world. *Single Pivot Turn* stands as the epitome of this assured development; a single figure dominates the composition, caught in the wild abandon of dance – a corporal traversal that oozes with dynamism. The passion of the act is attuned by the concealed features of the dancer who is garbed in Tyrian magenta, a balance between anonymity and prestige. Imperial associations aside, the figure closely matches the Zaouli dancers of the Ivory Coast, who focus on foot gyrations and similarly don face masks and purple costumes.



Left: Turkish Dancers in Traditional Costume Right: A Zouli dancer Image by Inger Vandyke

The dance, commonly performed during funerals, lends *Single Pivot Turn* the mantle of precursor to his celebrated 2020 show, *SELF MUST DIE*, held at Petzel Gallery which focused on funerary tradition operated by Black figures.



Derek Fordjour, *Pall Bearers*, 2020

Further African signifiers are found in the patchwork of the work’s setting, which resemble the woven plastic floor mats found all over West Africa; the rhythmic mosaic of diamonds blinding the

boundaries between foreground and background as the two planes oscillate between each other.



Plastic woven mats

Yet the mystical symbolism that suffuses the present lot is tempered by the social landscape in which it is produced. The idea of performance is intrinsic both to this work, and his practice as a whole; 'I love learning other ways to have a conversation. Painting has its utility, but performance is another register.'ⁱⁱ Indeed, within the context of Black success in a White America, showmanship has often provided a route to both achievement and degradation, a phenomenon placed under a bright spotlight in recent years as subcultures like hip-hop have become avenues for widespread accessible entertainment despite its anti-establishment and racial expression origins. As such, with *Single Pivot Turn*, Fordjour toys with the ornate, blurring the line between luxury and obligation while constructing an arena of allegorical nuance that forces the boundaries of discourse to be redrawn and hitting refresh on the conversation.

Yet the artist shakes off the crown of a spokesman for Black artistic production, asserting that 'I cannot speak for other black artists. My primary artistic goal is freedom'ⁱⁱⁱ. Nonetheless Fordjour sees himself in the fabric of his works, admitting their shades of self-portraiture. These liminal

spaces, both physically and essentially, is where the magic of his practice lies – at the crossroads between the the personal and the social.

Collector's Digest

Derek Fordjour was recently appointed the Alex Katz Chair at Cooper Union, serves as a Core Critic at the Yale School of Art, and was named the 2016 Sugarhill Museum Artist-in-Residence and the 2018 Deutsche Bank NYFA Fellow.

Recently, the artist had solo shows held at the Pond Society, Shanghai; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; and Petzel Gallery, New York. Recent group exhibitions include *The Slipstream: Reflection, Resilience, and Resistance in the Art of Our Time*, Brooklyn Museum, New York (2021); *Present Generations: Creating the Scantland Collection* of the Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio (2021); and *100 Drawings from Now*, The Drawing Center, New York (2020).

Fordjour's work is included in the collections of the Brooklyn Museum; Dallas Museum of Art; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Pérez Art Museum Miami; The Studio Museum of Harlem, New York; and Whitney Museum, New York among others.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority of New York commissioned Fordjour to create a series of mosaics for Manhattan's 145th Street subway station which were unveiled in 2018.

ⁱ Derek Fordjour, quoted in Paul Laster, 'Derek Fordjour's Vibrant Interactions', *Ocula Magazine*, 23 June 2021, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Derek Fourdjour, quoted in Siddhartha Mitter, 'Derek Fordjour, From Anguish to Transcendence', *The New York Times*, 19 November 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Derek Fourdjour, quoted in Jackie Wullschläger, 'Derek Fordjour on painting the African-American experience', *The Financial Times*, 20 October 2020, [online](#)

Provenance

Josh Lilley Gallery, London

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2018



3

María Berrío

The Lovers 2

signed, titled and dated “The lovers 2” María Berrío
2015’ on the reverse
watercolour, Swarovski rhinestones and Japanese rice
paper collage on canvas
182.5 x 183 cm. (71 7/8 x 72 in.)
Executed in 2015.

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000

€498,000 — 747,000

\$513,000 — 769,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“To truly ennoble womanhood, we must discover and appreciate the beauty in every action, big or small.” — María Berrío

María Berrío is a Colombian-born artist hailing from Bogotá though now living and working in New York, who produces highly intricate, decorative works where women take centre-stage within imagined landscapes that are often populated by fantastical creatures. She follows in the tradition of her Colombian forbearers by weaving magical realism into her kaleidoscopic tapestries where folklore and figuration come together in sumptuous harmony; an exuberance that recalls the paintings of the great Austrian secessionist, Gustav Klimt.



Gustav Klimt, *The Friends*, 1917

Her artistic process is one of painstaking yet beautiful dedication to the craft of collage: taking rare decorative papers from Thailand, Japan and Nepal, she then creates a delicate veneer on which she then applies watercolours. ‘Working with collage there is such a marvellous diversity of textures,’ she enthuses, ‘different sounds made as they are torn... I love the spreading of glue with sticky fingers, the stretching, the cutting. These collages are built layer by layer forming the topographical features upon the canvas.’ⁱ

Glimpses of the Surreal

Berrío’s paintings act almost like Rorschach tests or cogent unravellings of the artist’s expansive imagination that bristle with both self-expression and self-determination, a double-edged sword that cuts through the fossilised legacy of the male gaze that permits her feminine totems to flourish. *The Lovers 2*, painted in 2015, is an accomplished product of this desire to define female autonomy, and demonstrates a turn to the introspective. Here we are introduced to a veiled beauty against a seductive backdrop of crimson flowers, which when paired with her pale – almost translucent – complexion, grants the painting a certain sensuality, one made disarming by her inscrutable stare.



Frida Kahlo, *Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and Hummingbird*, 1940 Harry Ransom Center, Austin, Texas, Austin Image: Bridgeman Images, Artwork: © 2022 Banco de México Diego Rivera Frida Kahlo Museums Trust, Mexico, D.F. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In the current work, the protagonist's tattooed hands are raised up in a dainty pose, affirming her fragility, while stroking the head of the flamingo that drapes down from her headpiece – undoubtedly the centrepiece of Berrío's mastery of pigment. Similar to Mexican icon Frida Kahlo, whom also adorns her portraits with animals such as hummingbirds, monkeys and black cats surrounding her central self-portrait, animals often form part of Berrío's compositions, acting as visceral attachments to her homeland that provide the *id* for her creative drive. Yet she eschews the traditional artistic uses of animals (that of allegory or religion) and instead incorporates their spirituality into her compositions to then lend them magical quality. As such she follows in the philosophy of the French symbolist Paul Gauguin, who sought to uncover Tahiti – and thus its nature and true being – before its colonisation and dragging into the modern age.



Paul Gauguin, *Mahana no atua (Day of the God)*, 1894 Collection of the Art Institute, Chicago Image: Art Institute of Chicago, Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection, 1926.198

Divine Feminine

The femininity that one bears witness to are not necessarily reflections of Berrío as a woman, nor those that surround her, but rather projections of what she thinks a woman should be: 'They are embodied ideals of femininity. The ghostly pallor of their skin suggests an otherworldliness; they appear to be more spirit than flesh. These are the women I want to be: strong, vulnerable, compassionate, courageous, and in harmony with themselves and nature. They combine the elements of women who are typically thought of as powerful – the captains of industry, resolute politicians, fiery activists – with the traits of those who are not usually thought of as such, thereby underlining the common force found in all women. The female soldier fighting on the front lines is of interest, but so too is the mother who finds a way to feed her children and sing them to sleep amid bombing campaigns and in the ruins of cities'ⁱⁱ.

While the default option for when we think of Latin female artists is undoubtedly Frida Kahlo, Berrío represents a new wave of artists who are carving out their own pedestals within the art

world, and accordingly deserve our respect and attention. Berrío describes this not only as marking a stage for herself and future generations, but as a way of remedying the larger social injustices that women face: 'I feel like it's my responsibility to shine the light on other Latina women who haven't had this possibility'ⁱⁱⁱ. This marriage of the personal and the political places her at the head of a long line of Latin women who have sought to express themselves artistically through the prism of political strife that sadly dominates the continent.

However, her practice should not be solely defined by the oft-used Latin tropes of political trauma, but rather be considered a dialogue with humanity, one that bridges cultural sensitivity and social identity, ancient and contemporary sensibilities, while endowing the physical with the majestic.



Installation view of the current work (left) at New York, Rachel Uffner Gallery, *All That Glitters*, 29 June - 2 August 2017

Collector's Digest

Testament to the artist's meteoric rise to critical acclaim, Berrío received a solo presentation with Victoria Miro Gallery at Frieze Los Angeles this year, on the heels of her major survey debut at the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach in 2021.

A solo exhibition of new and existing works will take place at Institute of Contemporary Art in 2023.

Recent group shows include: *Born in Flames: Feminist Futures*, Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York (2021); *Labor: Motherhood & Art in 2020*, University Art Museum at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces (2020); *Present Tense: Recent Gifts of Contemporary Art*, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia (2019); Prospect.4 Triennial, New Orleans (2017).

Other important exhibitions of the artist include *María Berrío: A Day's Cadence*, Victoria Miro, London (2020); *María Berrío, Caroline Walker, Flora Yukhnovich*, Victoria Miro, London, UK (2019); *A Cloud's Roots*, Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles (2019); *In a Time of Drought*, Praxis International Gallery, New York (2017); *The Harmony of the Spheres*, Praxis International Gallery, New York (2015).

Berrío's work is held in the permanent collections of: Dallas Museum of Art; LACMA, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice, New York; Pérez Art Museum, Miami; Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and Yuz Museum, Shanghai.

ⁱ María Berrío, quoted in María Berrío and C.J. Bartunek, "As Complicated and Elusive as Reality": María Berrío's Many-Layered Collages (with an interview by C.J. Bartunek)', *The Georgia Review*, 2019, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ María Berrío, quoted in Laura Isabella, 'Latin American artist María Berrío's collages explore the innate power of women', *itsnicethat*, 10 April 2018, [online](#)

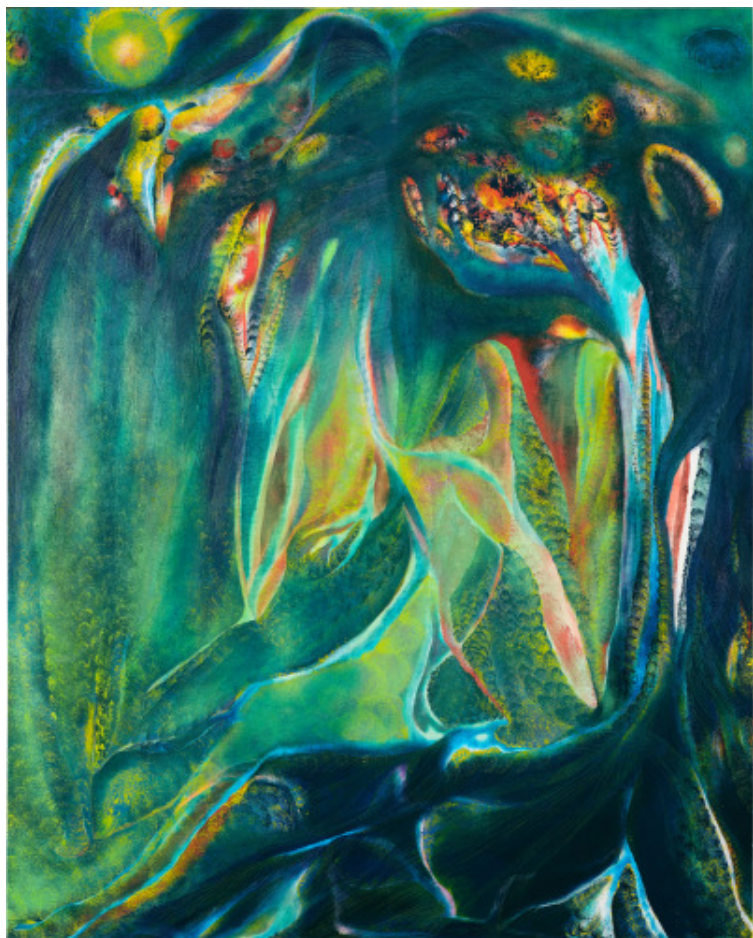
ⁱⁱⁱ María Berrío, quoted in Adrian Hornton, "Like magical realism": María Berrío on her surreal collages', *The Guardian*, 20 June 2020, [online](#)

Provenance

Praxis Gallery, New York
Private Collection, Chicago
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

New York, Praxis Gallery, *María Berrío: The Harmony of the Spheres*, 10 September - 7 November 2015, n.p. (illustrated)
New York, Rachel Uffner Gallery, *All That Glitters*, 29 June - 2 August 2017



4

Lucy Bull

Giving Tree

signed with the artist's initials and dated 'LB 19' on the reverse

oil on linen

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

Painted in 2019.

Estimate

HK\$1,000,000 — 1,500,000

€124,000 — 187,000

\$128,000 — 192,000

[Go to Lot](#)

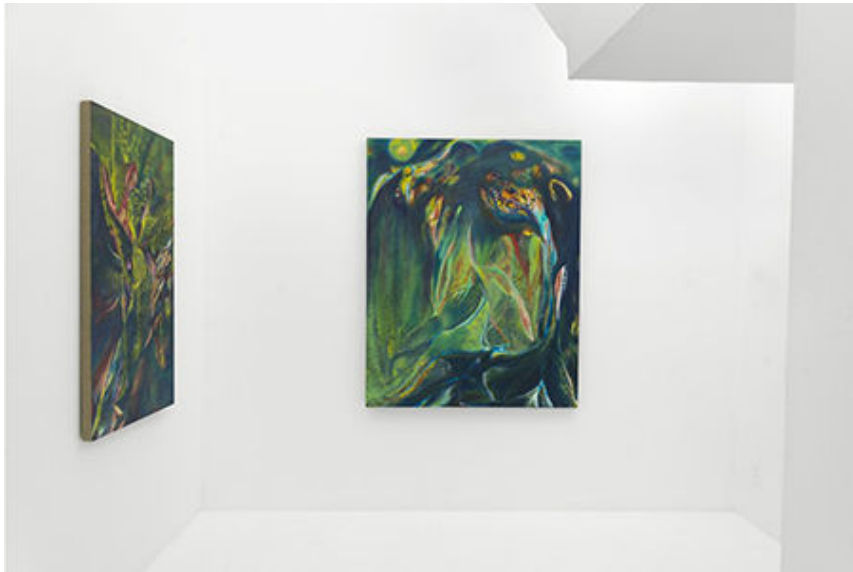


“I think that the most interesting paintings are the ones that are disruptive, confusing, and show something of the psyche that you’re not aware of.” — Lucy Bull

Otherworldly and fantastical, Bull's visionary paintings are dazzling fields of shape and colour that form vivid tessellations of synaesthesia. Her abstract works play with dynamic texture, weight, and space, creating canvases that overflow with detail, forming an entrancing viewing experience that titillate the senses.

Highly evocative, Bull's kaleidoscopic visions constantly change before your eyes. Alluding to a poignant children's tale of the same title, *Giving Tree* emits an ethereal glow from within, its neon colours resplendent in contrast with deeper shades of pine greens and Prussian blues. As one grapples with various associations in their minds for the work – whether it be gentle branches hanging from a mossy tree trunk, or a phoenix about to spread its glowing wings – each image seems to concretize; yet like fleeting mirages, its true identity is impossible to decipher.

Defying definite interpretations, Bull's works morph into an infinite number of new transformations as they shapeshift under every angle. These fantastical landscapes exist outside of time and space in its own universe, where transience and infinitude coexist.



Installation view of the current work at Los Angeles, Smart Objects, *Lucy Bull: Squall*, 10 May - 16 June 2019 © Lucy Bull

Interplaying Layers

Bull's paintings are a dance between impulse and constraint. Ripples of hypnotic waves reveal discernible traces of planning and negotiations with the medium itself, leaving remarkable layers of colour that oscillate between physical imprints of the paintbrush and a psychedelic vision.

“Every impulsive layer of mark-making is countered with a more calculated response. It goes in waves.” — Lucy Bull

Meticulously applied, each of Bull's paintings comprises somewhere between four to twenty layers of paint. Painting with great speed and wispy wrist gestures, Bull gradually creates a build-up of colours, yet returns to remove and scratch away at the surface. This additive and reductive creative method showcases the artist's unmatched prowess in manipulating her medium. With each twisting and dabbing movement of the brush, gestural marks and scratches intermix, coalescing into an overload of visual sensation.



Details of the present work

Starting with a base, such as a shade of rich green in *Giving Tree*, Bull begins a process of ‘breaking it down’ with a variety of tools, thereby ‘activating the older layers’¹, yet one is unable to discern

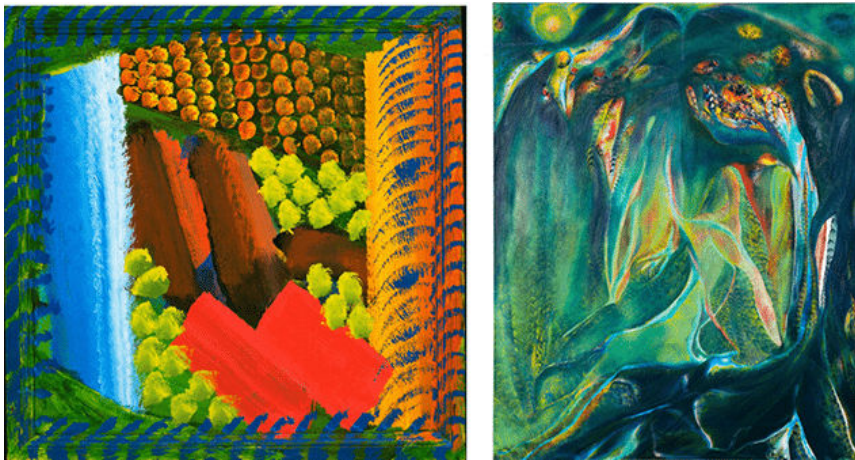
which layer came first and last. Swaths of colour engage in a psychedelic interplay of tones where vibrant hues combine and separate, congeal and thin out, each swirl vying separately for the spotlight all at once.

Buzzing with Colour

Bull's distinct, layered construction of impasto forms illusionistic shapes that seem to swiftly slip away between one's fingers at a moment's notice, giving way to new layers of phantasmagorical colour underneath. This visual depth is constructed through a tension between clashing colours and form, layered and selected carefully:

"I'm choosing a lot of complementary colours that create a static buzz on the surface. There's a fair amount of optics at play. I'm trying to draw people in." — Lucy Bull

However, hesitant to characterise her work as purely abstract, Lucy Bull prefers to reference the late Howard Hodgkin's famous quote: 'I am a representational painter, but not a painter of appearances. I paint representational pictures of emotional situations.'ⁱⁱ



Left: Howard Hodgkin, *Red Bermudas*, 1978-80 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York Image: © The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence, Artwork: © Howard Hodgkin Right: The present lot

Indeed, Hodgkin and Bull share their interest in the interplay of gesture, colour, and ground. Famed for his abstract canvases that often continue onto the frame, Hodgkin's works break from the traditional confines of painting, reaching beyond the picture plane in an effort to immerse the viewer within his reverie of intangible thoughts and feelings, an objective that Bull wholeheartedly shares:

"I'm interested in creating a scenario where people can feel their way through a painting. I want the reaction to be more visceral than logical, and colour is the best tool for provoking the viscera." — Lucy Bull

Enigmatically Rorschachian

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

The original children's story by Shel Silverstein, *Giving Tree*, follows the lifelong relationship between an apple tree and a boy. Initially having a close friendship with the tree during his childhood, the boy enjoyed playing around the tree and swinging off its branches. As he grew up, the boy gradually spent less time with the tree, only returning when he needed material items from the tree. The tree happily gave him apples, branches, and even her trunk to the boy for money, a house, and a boat, until only her stump remained. In his old age, the boy was now too weak to swing from the tree and his teeth too weak for apples; he only wanted a quiet place to sit and rest. The tree – who by now was just a stump, and could provide him with a comfortable resting place. With this final stage of giving, the tree was happy.

Despite the connotations of the original tale, Lucy Bull's enigmatic compositions are open ended puzzles with seemingly limitless interpretations available; decoding her work is like roaming through a magical dreamscape of brushstrokes as one cycles through a myriad of possible associations. The essence of Bull's works lies in the experience of the viewer's interaction with the canvas itself – a Rorschach-like encounter between artwork and spectator. As such, this theological focus on one's stream of consciousness draws comparisons to Surrealist works such as those by Max Ernst.



Max Ernst, *The Nymph Echo (La Nympe Écho)*, 1936 Collection of The Museum of Modern Art, New York © Museum of Modern Art/ Licensed by SCALA/ Art Resource, NY, Artwork: © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris

Similar to Bull's current example, Ernst often features flora and fauna in his enigmatic works, as seen in *The Nymph Echo*, 1936. Ernst famously employed his 'frottage' technique, where he rubs the surfaces of works against floorboards, twine, wire mesh or crumpled paper as a way to probe the subconscious mind. Bull herself had drawn comparisons between her own technique and that of Ernst's, emphasising on how this process allows the artist to explore new avenues within the subliminal mind: 'The scratching feels like excavation; older marks in the beginning layers get pulled to the foreground. It's similar to Max Ernst's technique of frottage. I relate to how he talks about being a spectator to the making of his own work. When things finally open up and click, it feels like magic.'ⁱⁱⁱ

"I hope to transport people. That's all I want to do is be transported and I hope people can get lost in them and take pleasure in looking at them. [...] I hope that they are as enigmatic to others as they are to me." — Lucy Bull

Collector's Digest

Born 1990 in New York, Lucy Bull received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2012, and has gained major traction since her auction debut in May 2022. Phillips Hong Kong debuted the artist's work, *8:50*, at auction in Asia in June 2022. The artist's recent solo exhibition, *Lucy Bull: Piper*, had just closed in October in New York with David Kordansky Gallery.



Lucy Bull, *8:50*, 2020 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong for HKD11,382,000, 22 June 2022 Artwork: © Lucy Bull

Lucy Bull lives and works in Los Angeles, and is represented by David Kordansky, Los Angeles & New York. Her work is in the permanent collections of MAMCO Geneva; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego; Dallas Museum of Art; and Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami.

ⁱ Lucy Bull, quoted in Stephanie Eckardt, 'In the Studio With Lucy Bull, the Painter Bringing Back Abstraction', *W Magazine*, 2 April 2021, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ *ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ John Garcia, 'Getting Lost in the Brushstrokes: Lucy Bull Interviewed by John Garcia', *BOMB Magazine*, 26 April 2021, [online](#)

Provenance

Smart Objects, Los Angeles

Private Collection

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Los Angeles, Smart Objects, *Lucy Bull: Squall*, 10 May - 16 June 2019

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



5

Christina Quarles

I Can Only Feel Whut Touches Me

signed and dated 'Christina Quarles 2016' on the overlap

acrylic on canvas

195.6 x 243.8 cm. (77 x 95 7/8 in.)

Painted in 2016.

Estimate

HK\$900,000 — 1,200,000

€111,000 — 148,000

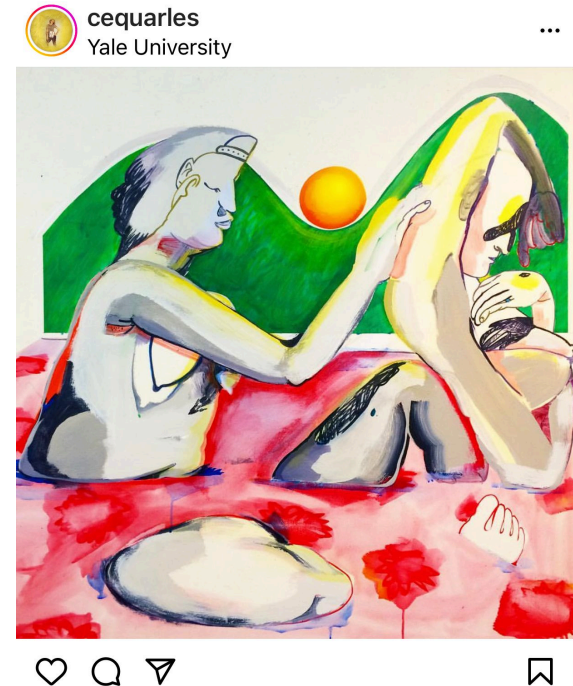
\$115,000 — 154,000

[Go to Lot](#)



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

Characterised by psychedelic hues, shapeshifting figures and dissected visual planes, Christina Quarles’ works explore the abstraction of human form and the physical experience of living in a body. Situated within the traditional genre of painting, her distinct style of ambiguous figuration is unapologetically unconventional. Through fragmenting the viewer’s perception, Quarles questions the ways race, gender and sexuality intersect to form complex identities. *I Can Only Feel Whut Touches Me*, 2016 is an early exemplar of the artist’s oeuvre, painted during her final MFA year at the Yale School of Art.



cequarles 🍊🍊🍊🍊🍊

25 March 2016

The present lot (detail) on the artist’s Instagram Photographed at Yale University, 2016

Often inspired by or directly quoting poetry and song lyrics, the titles of Quarles’ works are integral to her practice. Almost always featuring an alternate phonetic spelling of words – such as in the current work where ‘whut’ stands in for ‘what’ – Quarles’ titles invite the viewer to multiple readings of the word or phrase, underpinned with the context of socio-political connotations of spelling. As the artist explains: ‘The language I use with the work turns into something that is completed by the imagination or a recollection. I feel that this opens the work up to the viewer’s interpretation or memory of that word, which is very specific to whomever reads it, which is what I love about incorporating language into the paintings.’ⁱ

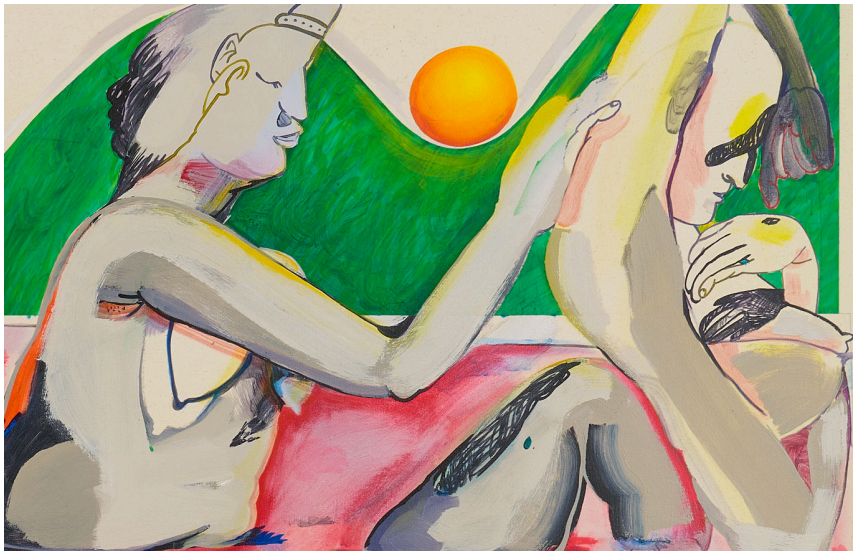
Tentative Touch

*“I only feel what touches me And feel in touching I can see A better state to be in
Who has the right To question what I might do? In feeling I should touch the real
And only things I feel” — Lyrics from Son by Jethro Tull*

Video: <https://open.spotify.com/track/7DsUYWfE39nWYTQCIztfH?si=7566910546144fba>

Soundtrack of *Son* by Jethro Tull

A sense of touch permeates the composition of *I Can Only Feel What Touches Me*, as the foreground yellow figure reaches beyond the frame of the canvas by holding out a single finger, evocative of a tentative touch. Caught in a moment of intimacy, the bathing figures on the right intertwine as they nestle within a bubbling pool of fuchsia waters, whilst a warm orange sun settles between the mountains in the background.



Detail of the present lot

Playing with fixed notions of the body, Quarles' characters are fractured, ambiguous, yet intertwined. A range of techniques are employed by the artist to illustrate each plane and area,

reflecting multiple storylines. In the current work, the yellow figure's head and feet lie beyond the frame, whilst the background figures are partially hidden under water, their limbs fragmented by the intersecting pink plane. As these figures twirl and tangle into impossible positions, Quarles brings attention to the body in relation to space, and the range of possibilities in terms of physical touch. The blurring boundaries between body, space and frame creates what the artists described as a 'sense of multiple intimate experiences and touches'ⁱⁱ.

Describing The Body Through Paint

*“I will use elements of fragmentation and containment to express the feeling I have of
being within a gendered or racialised body. And trying to express that range of
emotional resonance throughout any one experience or circumstance.” — Christina
Quarles*

Exploring the dichotomies of the self, Quarles' paintings are derived from her personal experience living as a queer, biracial woman. Through a distinct style of ambiguous figuration, Quarles rejects singular descriptors and instead embraces multiplicity, recontextualising the traditional genre of painting with a multifaceted perspective. Comparing the edge of the canvas to the edge of a body, Quarles challenges traditional limitations and definitions: 'The composition of the figures is largely determined by the edge of the frame which, much like the edge of the body, is a limitation that is simultaneously completely arbitrary and extremely real.'ⁱⁱⁱ



Francis Bacon, *Studies from the Human Body*, 1975 Image: © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd, Artwork: © 2022 Estate of Francis Bacon/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

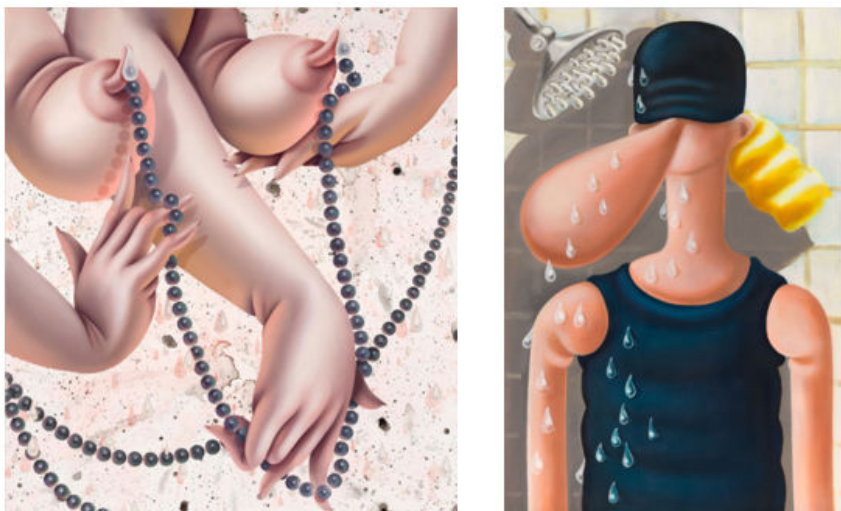
Quarles' evocative portraits feature obscured facial features and entwined torsos and limbs, recalling the contorted and blurred aesthetic of Francis Bacon. Demonstrating painterly virtuosity, Bacon's portraits are wrought with emotion and psychological tension, depicting the inner turmoil and deepest desires of his subjects, as seen in *Studies from the Human Body*. In his portrayal of the human form, Bacon utilises varying densities of paint with intersecting flat planes to anchor his composition – techniques that Quarles had also inherited.



Left: Dorothea Tanning, *On Time Off Time*, 1948 Image: © The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence, Artwork: © 2022 The Destina Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: The present lot

Juxtaposing elements of flatness and three dimensionality in her work, Quarles' fluid portraits also recall stylistic and compositional elements of Surrealist works such as *On Time Off Time* by Dorothea Tanning. Painted during her time living in the desert environment of Arizona, Tanning depicts a wooden foundation of a house set against a barren landscape, with billowing smoke and flames ascending from both sides. Similar to Tanning's example, Quarles divides her fore and background with a diagonal line from the lower left to upper right. Rectangular planes of the floor and sky are also used by both artists to reinforce this perspective.

Looking to more contemporary female artists, both Louise Bonnet and Sarah Slapney share a focus on figuration, and utilise distorted and intertwined limbs in their portraits. Bonnet and Slapney are unapologetically bold in their arrangement of human features, yet both their works possess a vein of humour in their visual presentations, exemplified by *Black Pearls II* by Slapney and Bonnet's *The Swimmer*.



Left: Lot 32, Sarah Slaphey, *Black Pearls II*, 2020 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD300,000 - 500,000 Right: Lot 31, Louise Bonnet, *The Swimmer*, 2016 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD400,000 - 600,000

Sharing a graphic design background with Quarles, Bonnet's aesthetic is more playful as she toys with exaggeration, walking a thin line between the beautiful and the grotesque. Slaphey, on the other hand, creates works that are more surreal in its execution. Slaphey's works confront the male gaze with works that are simultaneously seductive and repulsive, rejecting the limits of femininity and sharing Quarles' endeavour on exploring what it feels like to live within a female body.

Collector's Digest

Born in Chicago in 1985, Los Angeles-based contemporary artist Christina Quarles received her BA from Hampshire College in 2007, where she studied Philosophy and Studio Art, and her MFA at Yale University.

Multiple paintings by Quarles were exhibited at the 59th [Venice Biennale](#), 2022. Her concurrent solo exhibition at Hauser and Wirth New York, [In 24 Days the Sun'll Set at 7pm](#), had also just closed 29 October, 2022, and was the first show with the gallery since the artist [joined their programme](#) in 2021. The galleries represents Quarles in conjunction with Pilar Corrias, London.

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

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

Video Courtesy Illumina Film

Quarles' other recent solo exhibitions include: [Frye Art Museum](#), Seattle, 2022; [The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago](#), 2021; [South London Gallery](#), 2021; [X Museum, Beijing](#), 2021, which was the artist's debut show in Asia; [Pond Society](#), Shanghai, 2019 among others.

Christina Quarles' work is also housed in acclaimed public collections, including Centre Pompidou in Paris, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C., Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and Tate Modern in London.

ⁱ Christina Quarles, quoted in Jareh Das, 'Sitting with Discomfort: Christina Quarles Interviewed by Jareh Das', *BOMB Magazine*, 21 July 2021, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Claire Voon, 'Christina Quarles Paints The Complicated, Intimate Moments When We Feel Like Ourselves', *Artsy*, 15 April 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Christina Quarles, quoted in Diane Solway, 'The 6 Rising Artists You Must Know In 2018', *W Magazine*, 12 May 2017, [online](#)

Provenance

David Castillo Gallery, Miami

Private Collection, Miami

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



6

Julien Nguyen

Faust II

signed and dated 'Julien Nguyen 2017' on the reverse
oil on panel

113.3 x 182.8 cm. (44 5/8 x 71 7/8 in.)

Painted in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$900,000 — 1,200,000

€112,000 — 149,000

\$115,000 — 154,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“I’m drawn to certain artists and certain ways of making, certain techniques of depiction, that tend to come from the early Renaissance. But it’s a question of method, not style. During this period, painting became a form of philosophical play. The way in which these artists began to think about and collect art is actually very similar to where contemporary art ended up in the twentieth century. Renaissance painters did not simply try to reproduce what was in front of them or arrange pleasing shapes in a field but sought to bring something into life through an analogous process of physically constructing or building or growing it in their pictures. Take the landscapes in the backgrounds of many Renaissance paintings, where painters took elements from their own region and projected them onto Palestine or Egypt or wherever the tale is set. They’re constructed like stages, like dioramas, or like maps in a video game. The conjuring aspect is really powerful. I’ll say this in the language of the time: They’re bringing to life their own genius.” — Julien Nguyen

A Vision Unbound

Phillips is pleased to present a work by the ever-enigmatic Vietnamese-American artist, Julien Nguyen, for the first time at auction in Asia. As a teenager growing up in Washington D.C. and during the dawn of the Internet Age, Nguyen formed the basis of his aesthetic by playing video games like Civilization III, Age of Empires and StarCraft, each with their own highly stylised depictions of their respective worlds. This would then inform his later studies of Illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design; of this he remarks ‘You’re building your empire and conquering different parts of the world or space. I wanted to become a concept artist who designs all the characters and spaceships and buildings.’ⁱ



Installation view of the current work (left) at Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, *Julien Nguyen: Returns*, 8 February - 16 June 2019

This interest in technology and digital media forms one half of the glimmering coin that is Nguyen’s practice, the other side being a profound preoccupation with the art that has come before him, drawing in particular from the bottomless pool of visual source of the Renaissance. He describes this marriage as such: ‘science fiction mirrors the Renaissance way of thinking about history, using the rubble of the present or the past. These were the things that led me into art.’ⁱⁱ He unlocks the power of the Old Masters by connecting the dots between antiquity and the present day, combining Byzantine decorative flourishes with Renaissance rationality, through to French Mannerism and the biomorphism of Japanese Manga.



Raphael, *The Miraculous Draft of Fishes*, c. 1515 Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Image: Eraza Collection / Alamy Stock Photo

An inversion of cultural capital, Nguyen turns propaganda into a guidebook for understanding the canon of art history through the combinatory lens of an artist that holds more affinity with Dr. Who than the average man. 'It is my strong belief', he posits, 'that from the 17th century onwards much of western art slowly transforms into (bad) apologetics for imperialism— but not before! It is from before where we might still learn, if we could only remember.'¹ *Faust II* is a startling vision of this maxim as we are presented with his foundational methodology. Peculiarity permeates through the work, which is split into two sides, almost as a diptych. The left side of the composition reveals an intimate scene that straddles piety and intimacy: a member of the cloth burrowed into scripture while a pubescent boy pulls his trousers on – acts of indulging in and cleansing of sin operating in tandem.



Detail of the present lot

The right side of the work is more macabre. Mimicking the traditional representation of the Crucifixion, a man is suspended in thin air with his arms outstretched, his legs crossed and draped in a red loincloth. While these visual signifiers point towards the graphic Biblical scene, the man's face in this picture quickly dispels any associations with Jesus. Instead of the pained expression of sacrifice, we are greeted with a garish grin and demented emeralds for eyes reminiscent of characteristic portrayals of the demon.

A fallen angel rather than humanity's saviour, a man stands below this (anti)Christ, arms likewise outstretched in the presence of divinity. Despite lacking facial features, the black coiffed hair and glasses are a give-away of the artist's own inclusion into the composition, an exploit of self-

portraiture that lends *Faust II* a personal touch. The dark fantastical tones of the work are compounded by another figure receding into the sanguine sky, indicating towards the central character while bosomed by an anthropomorphic shape. Though Raphael is often cited as the inspiration for Nguyen's figuration, when we consider the contorted angularity of these bodies we realise that they lie closer to the corporality of El Greco, and that of Mannerism.

The allegorical ambiguity of the painting can be resolved by considering its title. Faust is the protagonist of the classic German legend, immortalised by Christopher Marlowe and Goethe's epics. A scholar dissatisfied with the limitations of his own knowledge, he makes a pact with the Devil who promises essential satisfaction. Things quickly take a turn for the worse as he is dragged through vice, deceit and deception. We can see this tale played out on the right-hand side of the composition, with the crucified man representing Mephistopheles - the Devil's delegate - and the man dressed in blue robes being Faust. If we take the latter figure to be Nguyen himself, then the work takes on an extraordinary depth of meaning, shrouding it in nefarious cloak as we begin to question the artist's own immoral ambitions, and fear for his fate.



El Greco, *The Opening of the Fifth Seal (The Vision of Saint John)*, 1608-14 The Metropolitan Museum of Art Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1956

Nguyen's accomplished mastery over the human form comes to the forefront here and lends *Faust II* a quality as intoxicating as it is unsettling. The detached localities of the painting ground the figures in a kind of fever dream, and aligns the work with that of Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical period. Moreover, like the Italian before him, Nguyen seeks a return to order by turning to the past for inspiration. Yet this work should not be treated as a pastiche of Renaissance sensibilities but rather an endeavour of dragging them into the 21st Century, ultimately creating artistic conciliations of effortless fluency.



Giorgio de Chirico, *Il Trovatore*, 1955 Museum of Modern Art, Dublin Artwork: © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / SIAE, Rome

Collector's Digest

Nguyen's popularity has crossed the border of art and fashion, with the fashion brand Ottolinger basing their Fall 2020 collection, which was then worn by the likes of Dua Lipa and Bella Hadid, while the rapper SZA wore a shift from the collection in her music video for '[Hit Different](#)'. Of the collaboration, the artist said 'I've always gotten a lot of satisfaction from the representation of fabric, the beauty of certain materials, the way things are cut and made. But making clothes is a completely different operation than figuring out what pair of shorts this boy is going to wear in a

painting. The fact that certain pop-cultural figures began to wear those clothes did elicit both excitement and a bit of a chuckle. The paintings become much more symbolic, like how Athena has the head of a Gorgon on her shield.ⁱⁱ

Nguyen's work was included in the 2017 Whitney Biennial and has been the subject of one-person exhibitions at the Swiss Institute in New York, Kunstverein München in Munich, and the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati.

ⁱ Julien Nguyen, quoted in Kate Dwyer, 'An Artist Who Blurs Video Games and Italian Renaissance', *The New York Times*, 20 August 2021, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Julien Nguyen, quoted in Travis Diehl, 'Julien Nguyen on the Renaissance, conjury, and painting himself', *Artforum*, 20 July 2021, [online](#)

Provenance

Stuart Shave Modern Art, London

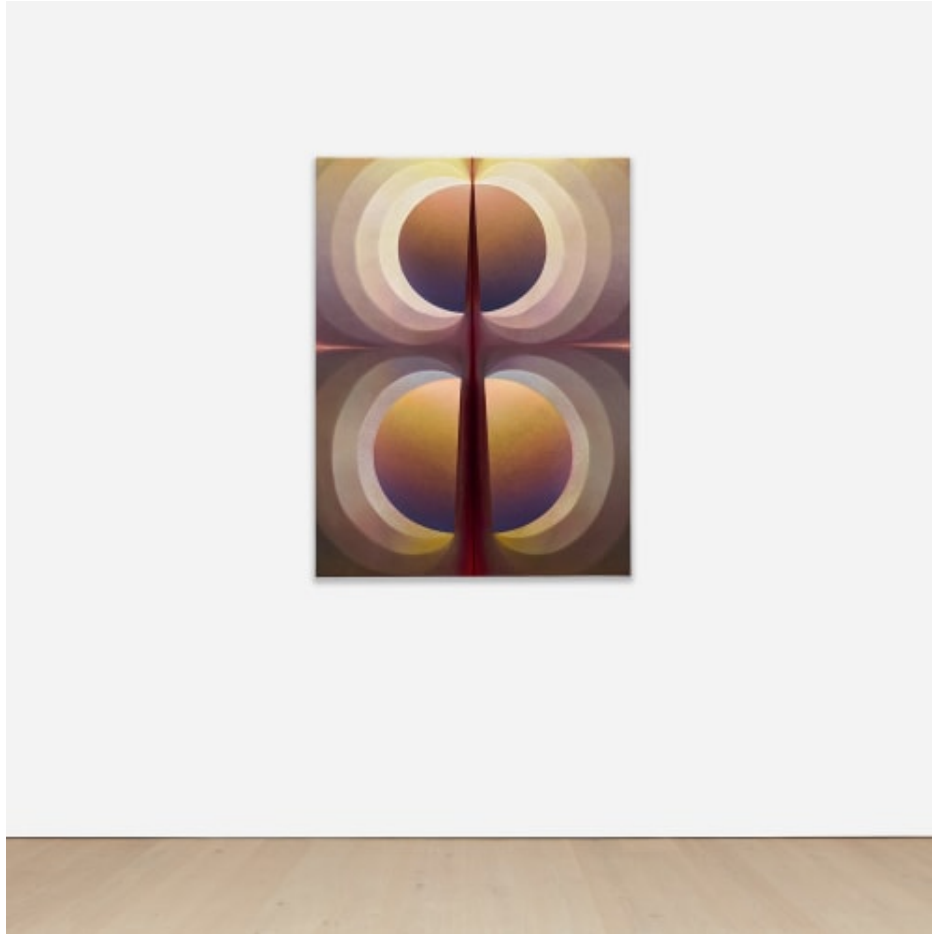
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Cincinnati, Contemporary Arts Center, *Julien Nguyen: Returns*, 8 February - 16 June 2019

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



7

Loie Hollowell

Split Orbs in gray-brown, yellow, purple and carmine

signed, titled and dated 'Loie Hollowell 2021 "Spilt orbs in gray-brown, yellow, purple and carmine" Loie Hollowell 2021' on the reverse

oil, acrylic and high-density foam on linen mounted on panel

122.5 x 91.8 cm. (48 1/4 x 36 1/8 in.)

Executed in 2021.

Estimate

HK\$4,000,000 — 6,000,000

€498,000 — 747,000

\$513,000 — 769,000

[Go to Lot](#)



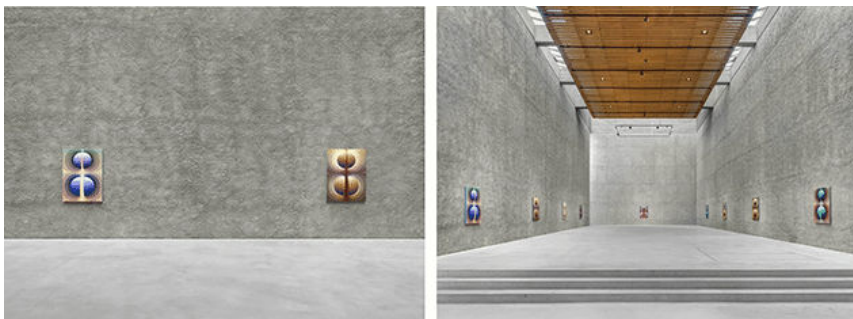
Oscillating between abstraction and figuration, Loie Hollowell's unique portraits of the bodily landscapes are characterised by her use of brightly contrasting colours and voluptuous geometric forms. A recurring theme for the artist, Hollowell's sculptural paintings are autobiographical. Elevating flat geometric expression with autobiographical analogies of the physical and psychological, Hollowell's creations are visceral, honest, and seductive.

"I'm a body that is pregnant, but isn't necessarily the woman or the pregnant body that society may put onto me. I'm experiencing pleasure and pain that anyone can experience, and that's what I'm putting into the work." — Loie Hollowell

Created after the artist's second pregnancy, *Split Orbs in gray-brown, yellow, purple and carmine* visually abstracts the physical pain of labour. The orbs seem to pulsate with palpable rhythm as they expand and quiver under the blunt force of a sharp cut down the midline, presenting to us an almost psychedelic and transcendental viewing experience.

Meditations on Childbirth

Utilising colour, line and form, Hollowell mediates on the carnal process of childbirth, creating canvases that share resemblances with the pregnant female body. A part of a nine-canvas series that directly references the birth of her second child, Hollowell's *Split Orbs* canvases are a journey into the epicentre of pain. This series, including the current work, was exhibited at König Galerie, Berlin in *Loie Hollowell: Sacred Contract* in 2021.



Left: Installation view of the current work (right) at Berlin, König Galerie, *Loie Hollowell: Sacred Contract*, 28 April - 13 June 2021 Right: Full view of the exhibition © Loie Hollowell - Photo: Roman März
Courtesy of the artist and KÖNIG GALERIE

Hung in order, the centre spilt of the orb increases from one inch to ten inches across nine canvases, representing the dilation process during labour. As these forms crack apart along their centre lines, the colours radiating from the orbs fluctuates between light and dark, saturated and muted, mimicking the shifts in consciousness during this painful process:

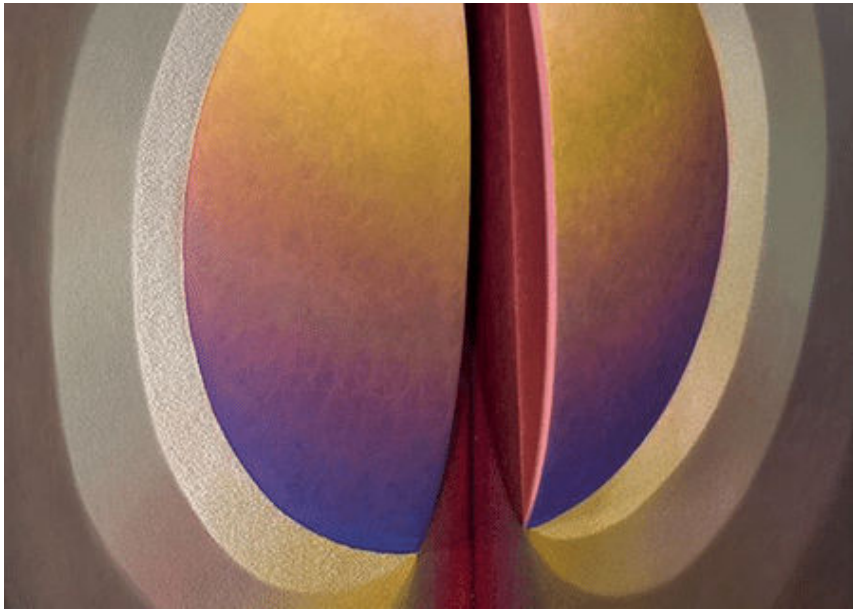
'Giving birth feels like an explosion. To me, it felt like the earth was shattering and I imagined that my screams could be heard from ten houses away. When I looked at the footage my husband had taken, however, I was surprised to see how still I was. As my cervix opened the contractions became more intense; my conscious mind was unable to process the pain. I turned completely inward and the outside world vanished. Thus in the paintings that depict these moments I used muted tones like mauves and beiges for the orb's radiations.' — Loie Hollowell

The artist labours arduously over the surface with delicate brushstrokes, carefully creating both smooth velvety textures and stippled rough spots in the core of the painting. Representing Hollowell's own shifting consciousness during labour, these dualities of light and dark, rough and smooth correspond to periods of relaxation and contraction: 'I took deep breaths and zoned out; the white lines in my paintings refer to those moments of relief. [...] These moments of climactic pain are hard to put into words or depict visually, but it feels like leaving one version of yourself behind and moving toward another.'¹

Optical Illusions

'I'm interested in the blurring of painting and sculpture, enhancing the actual light and shadow created by the orbs with painted light and shadow. The nave space, with its skylight, is a perfect setup to experience this mixing of reality and illusion.' — Loie Hollowell

At first glance, works such as *Split Orbs in gray-brown, yellow, purple and carmine* appear to be flat, yet it incorporates subtle three-dimensional structures that escapes the detection of the human eye. As explained by Hollowell above, the nave space of Berlin König Galerie is crucial to the *Split Orbs* series as she plays with the differences between natural and constructed light, real and fake shadow. Enhancing the contrasts on her canvases, protruding and concaving forms are constructed by building upon flat linen covered panels with high-density foam. This is then sealed with a thin shell of acrylic before being covered by oil paint, achieving a perfectly smooth surface. The end result is an almost optical illusionary effect, with the foreground and background being indiscernible to the eye.



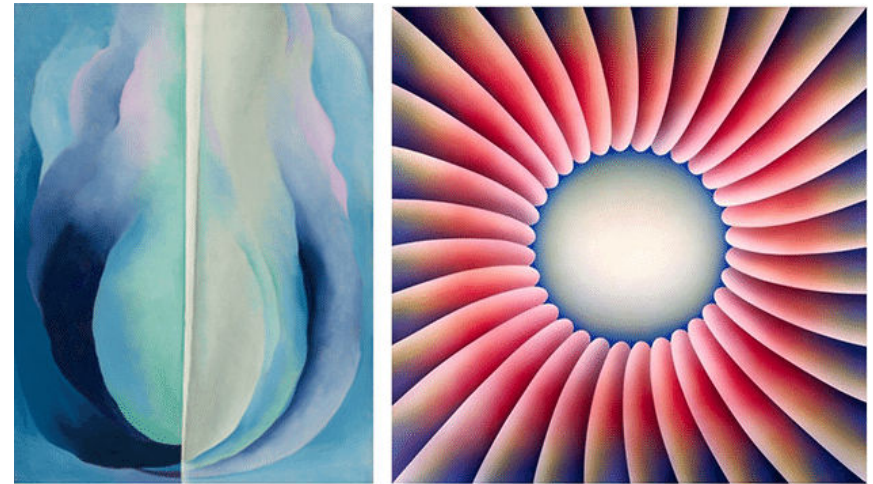
Three-dimensional detail of the present lot

Bearing resemblance to planets, portals of futuristic monoliths in science fiction, these illusionistic contours breathe off the canvas, seemingly advancing and receding in front of the viewer. Colours shift gradually from light to dark, so that the eye spends time trying to understand what it sees – what is nearer and what is farther, what is flat and what isn't.

Biomorphic Abstraction

“I realised the abstraction can hold within it that sensation or that emotion by its colour, its composition, its texture.” — Loie Hollowell

In dialogue with diverse art historical traditions in abstraction, Hollowell gestures towards artists such as Hilma af Klimt, Georgia O’Keeffe and Judy Chicago. Celebrated for their role as foremothers of the feminist art movement, O’Keeffe and Chicago challenged the male dominated art world. Like Hollowell, both these artists share a fascination in the use of colour and geometry, delving into the realm of pure abstraction with references to the human body.



Left: Georgia O’Keeffe, *Abstraction Blue*, 1927 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York Image: © The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence Artwork: © Georgia O’Keeffe Museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower*, 1973 Collection of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, New York Artwork: © 2022 Judy Chicago / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

O’Keeffe’s *Abstraction Blue* (1927) features a growing gap down the centre of the canvas – unmistakable in its compositional similarities with Hollowell’s *Spilt Orbs* works. Notably, *Spilt Orbs in gray-brown, yellow, purple and carmine* also share the same hypnotic visual quality with Chicago’s iconic *Through the Flower* (1973). Presenting the viewer with a radiating female sexual organ, lines of light and shadow emit from the centre like the beaming sun. Meticulously rendered, *Through the Flower* showcases a use of colour and shape that is similar to that of Hollowell’s, where gradients and patterns are repeated, framing the central circular forms. Inheriting the same visual lexicon from her predecessors, Hollowell differs from O’Keeffe and Chicago in her use of three-dimensional elements that plays tricks with the eye, creating radiant, showstopping works that are uniquely her own.

Collector’s Digest

Born 1983 in California, Loie Hollowell lives and works in New York. Known for her oeuvre that transforms the female nude into abstraction, Hollowell quickly rose to global prominence after being discovered by Marc Glimcher, president of PACE Gallery, who praised her as a “truly rare talent”ⁱⁱ. PACE quickly held several solo exhibitions for Hollowell, including PACE London in 2018;

Loie Hollowell

PACE Hong Kong in 2018; PACE New York in 2019; and PACE online in 2020.

Last year, the artist held a solo exhibition at the Long Museum in Shanghai, titled *Loie Hollowell: Recalibrate*, which ran from 24 April – 11 July 2021. The artist is represented by PACE Gallery and Jessica Silverman Gallery; her first solo show with Jessica Silverman will be in 2024 in San Francisco.

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

ⁱ Loie Hollowell, quoted in Osman Can Yerebakan, 'Loie Hollowell on painting, pain, and her second birth', *Artforum*, 26 May 2021, [online](#)

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

Provenance

PACE Gallery, New York

König Galerie, Berlin

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Berlin, König Galerie, *Loie Hollowell: Sacred Contract*, 28 April - 13 June 2021

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



PROPERTY OF A DISTINGUISHED PRIVATE
COLLECTOR

8 ♦♦*

Gerhard Richter

Abstraktes Bild (774-1)

signed, numbered and dated '774-1 RICHTER 1992' on
the reverse

oil on canvas

200 x 180.3 cm. (78 3/4 x 70 7/8 in.)

Painted in 1992.

Estimate

HK\$80,000,000 — 120,000,000

€9,850,000 — 14,770,000

\$10,260,000 — 15,380,000

[Go to Lot](#)



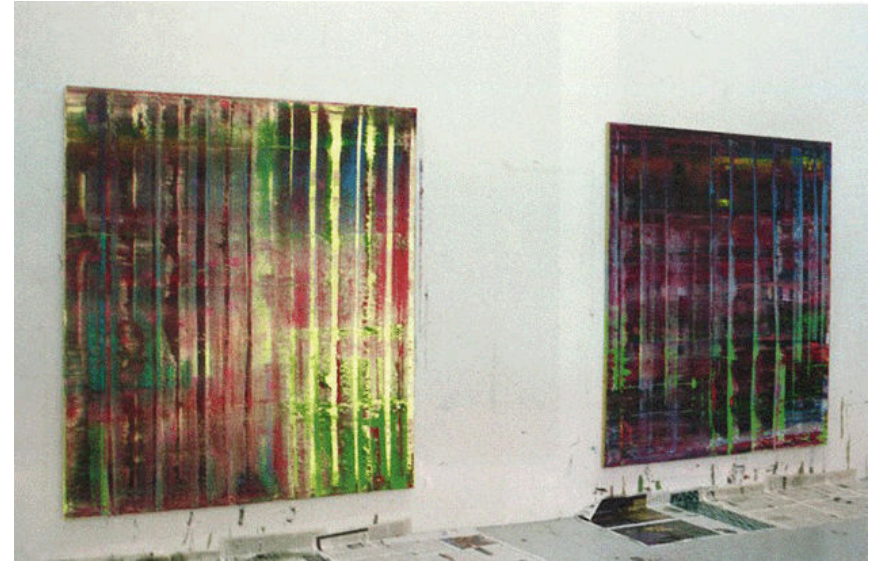
Coming to the auction market for the very first time, Gerhard Richter's *Abstraktes Bild (774-1)* is a visually arresting masterpiece that exquisitely exemplifies the artist's technical and conceptual approach into abstraction. Spatial ambiguity, visual complexity, and tactile materiality all come into play in *Abstraktes Bild (774-1)*, embodying the beauty of marrying spontaneity with orchestration.

"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 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 painted his first abstract piece in 1976, and in the 1980s, started to use a squeegee in these paintings to introduce the element of chance. *Abstraktes Bild* was created in 1992, more than a decade since the artist first experimented in similar compositions, and right when he started implementing colour columns and monochrome tones into his oeuvre. With this particular piece, contrasting vertical lines are swept across the surface. The dynamic movement of strokes create a heightened sense of restlessness, highly gestural and energetic, forming a mesmerising depth of field through the overlapping pigments.

Height of Abstraction

The early 1990s is widely regarded as the height of Richter's aesthetic inquiry into the nature of abstraction. During this time, Richter repeatedly returned to striped and gridded compositions, suggesting his extended exploration into unifying bright colours with a more muted palette. This is masterfully encapsulated in the present work via the visual interplay between layers of deep red and brighter hues of blues and greens.



Installation view of the current work (left) with *Abstraktes Bild (774-2)* (right), which is on permanent loan to the Sprengel Museum, Hannover from the Hannover Rück Stiftung (Hannover Re Foundation)
The artist's studio, Cologne © 2022 Gerhard Richter (0229)

Recalling rolling greenery and undulating mountain peaks, the current work debuted at his 1992 exhibition, *Montagne* with Associazione per l'Arte Contemporanea Zerynthia in Rome. One of only seven paintings made specifically for the 1992 exhibition, the present work exemplifies the purest articulation of Richter's finest period of abstraction. *Abstraktes Bild (774-1)* is the only painting that is fresh to the market from the original exhibition. Its sister painting (see above) is on permanent loan to the Sprengel Museum, Hannover; other paintings in the show are either [destroyed](#) (774-3) or have been sold at auction.

"Richter's interest in this natural occurrence (distance, majestic, and in a certain sense already a 'painting in itself') has become a regular feature of his work since his 1981 series of Swiss mountain landscapes." — Massimo Carboni, Review of Montagne in [Artforum](#), 1992

Created right after Richter's breakthrough retrospective at London's Tate Modern in the previous year, *Abstraktes Bild (774-1)* is representative of a climactic moment within the artist's career

where he garnered unprecedented critical acclaim. There is a domination of primary colours in *Abstraktes Bild (774-1)* that is reminiscent of bright skies, luscious meadows, and majestic mountainscapes – strokes of bright greens and soft blues melt into a background of deep garnet reds. These colours recall waves of trees and grass as they ripple to the current of the wind. The disconnected strokes of paint, the naturalistic colour scheme, and the reminiscence of sky and land are evocative of Paul Cézanne’s famous paintings of the Saint-Victoire mountains. The mountains of the exhibition’s title are also evoked by ‘the vertical stripes that punctuate the paintings’ surfaces, giving a sense of majesty, of severity, of indifference to what surrounds themⁱ.



Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire and the Viaduct of the Arc River Valley*, 1882-85 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.64

However, as the nature of abstract paintings suggests, one can only interpret the theme of Richter’s work according to their own perception. As the artist himself outlines: ‘We only find paintings interesting because we search for something that looks familiar to us. [...] Basically, we always try to identify the relationship of the picture to some sort of appearance. It’s not about the

recognition of a particular subject matter.’ⁱⁱ

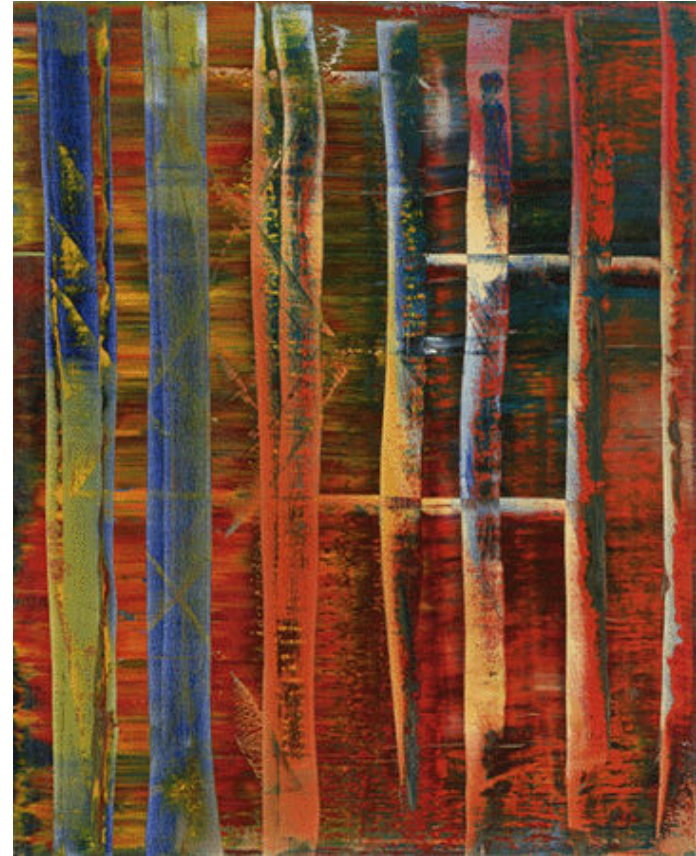
“Abstract pictures do indeed show something, they just show things that don’t exist. But they still follow the same requirements as figurative works: they need a setup, structure. You need to be able to look at it and say, ‘It’s almost something.’ But it’s actually representing nothing. It pulls feelings out of you, even as it’s showing you a scene that technically isn’t there.” — Gerhard Richter

Richter focused almost solely on abstract paintings since the year 1990, and as a result, his work during this period skewed increasingly towards minimalist abstraction. They became more structural, with vertical and horizontal striations dominating the composition that counteracted the depth and flatness of the picture plane, as seen in *Abstraktes Bild (774-1)*. Richter repeatedly returned to striped and gridded compositions, suggesting his exploration into unifying bright colours with the more muted, melancholy palette to which he was periodically drawn towards. In the current work, the foundational layer is executed in a deep red pigment, highly characteristic of Richter’s work from this period.

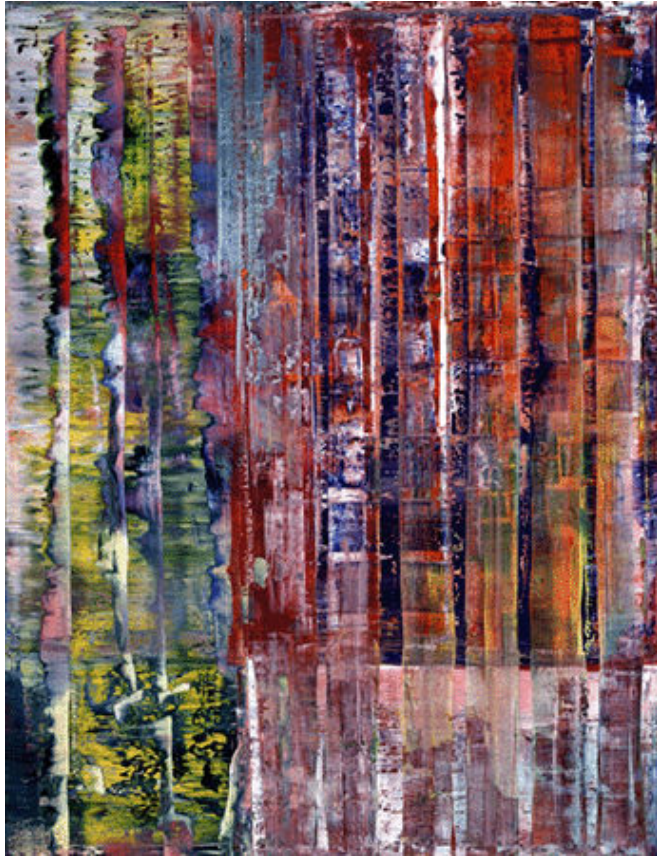
Abstraktes Bild from 1992 in Museums



774-2, 1992 (sister painting of the current work) Permanent loan to the Sprengel Museum Hannover © 2022 Gerhard Richter (0229)



768-1, 1992 Collection of the Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden © 2022 Gerhard Richter (0229)



780-2, 1992 Long term loan to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) © 2022 Gerhard Richter (0229)



780-3, 1992 Daros Collection, Zurich, Switzerland © 2022 Gerhard Richter (0229)



780-1, 1992 Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. © 2022 Gerhard Richter (0229)

Spontaneous Orchestration

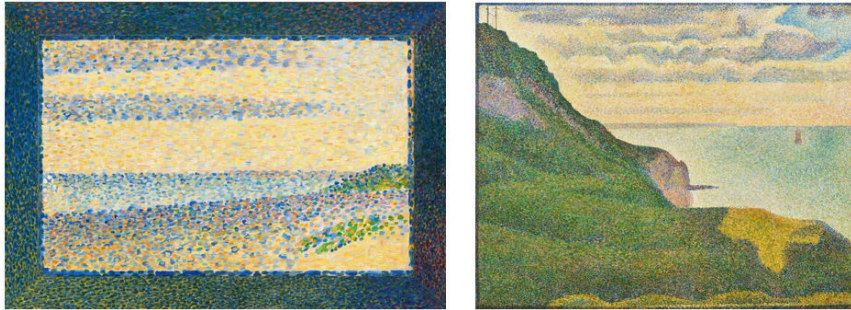
“I’ve never found anything to be lacking in a blurry canvas. Quite the contrary: you can see many more things in it than in a sharply focused image.” — Gerhard Richter

The *Abstraktes Bild* series celebrates Richter’s mastery of the squeegee technique, a creative method that is crucial in bringing Richter’s abstract paintings to life. Using a large, broad squeegee to scrape away layers of impasto, Richter blurs and mixes pigment in the process, partially concealing and partially revealing what was originally laid beneath. Colours, textures, and layers intermingle, coalescing into organic and beautiful ‘accidents’ that emerge from the canvas.



Detail of the present lot

Thick impasto is dragged across the canvas with a large squeegee, creating a depth of organised chaos. These lattices of vibrant primary colours crisscross and intermingle across each layer, creating a hypnotic, immersive viewing experience. By blurring the colours in *Abstraktes Bild (774-1)*, Richter tantalises the viewer by creating an indecipherable mystery. He encourages the viewer to search for familiar forms, but at the same time denies a decisive answer, as he believes that this opens the painting up for interpretation.



Left: Georges Seurat, *Seascape (Gravelines)*, 1890 Image: © National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Collection of Mr and Mrs Paul Mellon, 2012.89.8 Right: Georges Seurat, *Seascape at Port-en-Bessin, Normandy*, 1888 Image: © National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Gift of the W. Averell Harriman Foundation in memory of Marie N. Harriman, 1972.9.21

Here, Richter creates ambiguous representations of nature without ever solidifying them into actual silhouettes. This motivates the viewer to appreciate the piece for its materiality, as if one was gazing upon a piece of lavish textile. Sweeping and grazing across the canvas, these painstakingly administered layers of intense chromatic pigment incite an optical engagement akin to works by pointillist painter Georges Seurat and the idea of atmospheric espousal in colour theory. Rather than a subjective documentation of nature, Richter's ostensibly objective and purely abstract works allow one to hone in on their visual senses and focus on the experience of seeing itself.

"It is as if the very phenomena that occur in reality are not simply arranged 'in front of' us, but pass right through us, in a continuous, transforming flow of concrete presences and of mental projections. With these paintings, Richter is also referring to a type of philosophical or at least conceptual reflection which deals with the meaning of vision, of the very act of seeing, with the optical relationship that we establish with the outer world." — Massimo Carboni, *Review of Montagne in Artforum*, 1992

The multiple layers, directions of movement, and differences in thickness of paint, are all decided by Richter himself; yet he allowed these elements to interact freely, which perfectly encapsulates the essence of organic chance in nature. As a result, *Abstraktes Bild (774-1)* is the perfect balance between both subjectivity and objectivity, accidental and planned. Although dependent on chance and spontaneity, this process of painting was carefully developed: '...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.'ⁱⁱⁱ

Video: <https://youtu.be/DW380joCvdM>

Collector's Digest

Born in Dresden in 1932, Gerhard Richter came of age in a rapidly shifting political and cultural landscape, first joining the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts in 1951 and later enrolling at the Dusseldorf Academy in 1961 alongside Sigmar Polke. Spanning almost six decades, Richter's oeuvre continues to explore the relationships between colour and form, abstraction and representation, and remains a paragon of the genre in art history.

The 1990s – when the current work was painted – marked many professional milestones for the artist. He received the Wolf Prize in Arts, Jerusalem in 1995; the Golden Lion at the 47th Venice Biennale and the Praemium Imperiale, Tokyo in 1997, and exhibited *Atlas* at documenta X, Kassel in the same year. In 1998, Richter was awarded a number of prizes including the Wexner Prize, a Foreign Honorary Membership of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Staatspreis des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen.

Having just celebrated his 90th birthday on 9 February 2022, the artist's work will be celebrated across three exhibitions in his native Germany, including a show in Richter's hometown of Dresden. Curated by the artist himself, this intimate and personal show includes his last oil painting, and will coincide with the publication of the artist's final catalogue raisonné.

ⁱ Massimo Carboni, 'Gerhard Richter: Zerynthia, Associazione per l'Arte Contemporanea', *Artforum*, vol. 31, no. 7, March 1993, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Gerhard Richter, quoted in Robert Storr, 'Interview with Gerhard Richter', *Forty Years of Painting*, New York, 2003, p. 304

ⁱⁱⁱ Gerhard Richter, quoted in Gerhard Richter, Elgar Dietmar, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Gerhard Richter - Text: Writings, Interviews and Letters 1961-2007*, London, 2009, p.256

Provenance

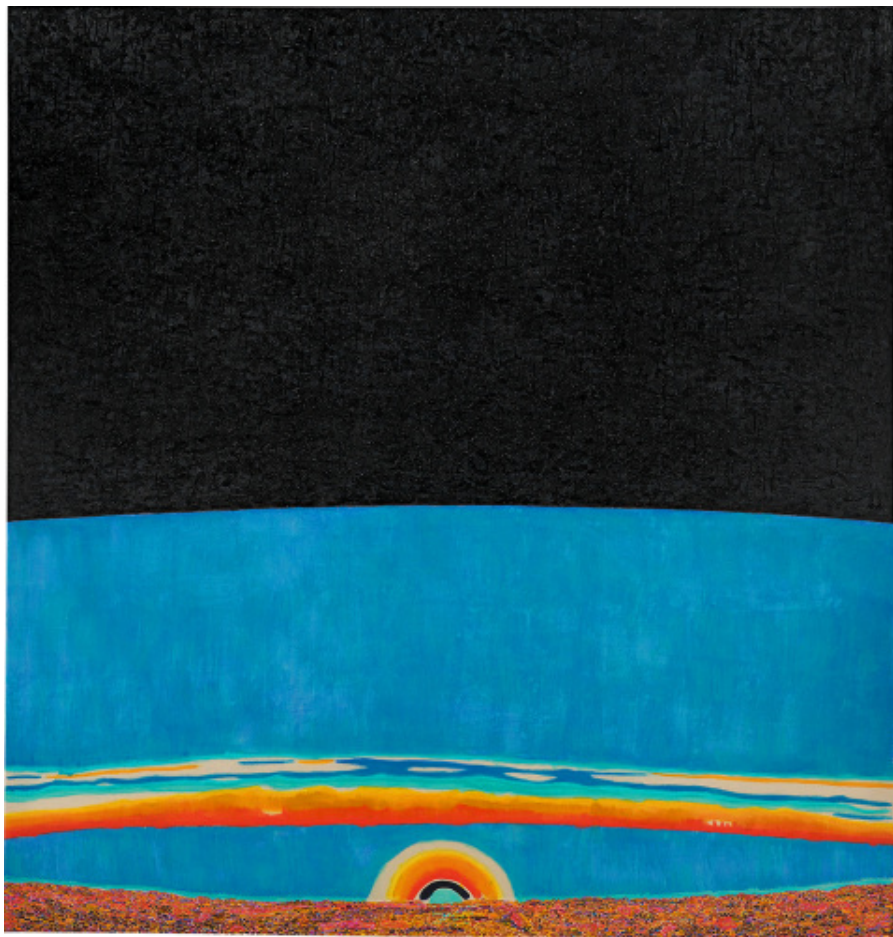
Mario Pieroni Gallery, Rome (acquired directly from the artist)
Private Collection, Germany
Schönewald Fine Arts, Xanten
Anthony Meier Fine Arts, San Francisco
Private Collection, Brussels
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Rome, Associazione per l'Arte Contemporanea Zerynthia, *Gerhard Richter: Montagne*, 3 October - 6 December 1992, p. 25 (illustrated)

Literature

Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, ed., *Gerhard Richter: Werkübersicht/Catalogue Raisonné 1962-1993*, vol. III, Ostfildern-Ruit, 1993, no. 774-1 (illustrated)
Emanuele Garbin, *Il bordo del mondo: la forma della sguardo nella pittura di Gerhard Richter*, Venice, 2011, p. 154
Dietmar Elger, *Gerhard Richter: Catalogue Raisonné, Volume 4: Nos. 652-1-805-6 (1988-1994)*, Ostfildern, 2015, no. 774-1, p. 483 (illustrated in the artist's studio, p. 482)



9

William Monk

Far-Out III

signed, titled and dated 'William Monk "Far-Out III"

2013' on the reverse

oil on canvas

230.5 x 220.3 cm. (90 3/4 x 86 3/4 in.)

Painted in 2013.

Estimate

HK\$800,000 — 1,200,000

€98,900 — 148,000

\$103,000 — 154,000

[Go to Lot](#)



*“The idea of painting as mantra interests me: paintings as objects, figurations as images and models used as vibrations to reach somewhere else, beyond ourselves.”—
William Monk*

Recognised for his poetically atmospheric and enigmatic landscape paintings, British’s artist William Monk’s oeuvre is his meditation on the sublime and the personal. Centring his creative explorations on subject-matters concerning cycles of life, death, and transcendence, he paints with the aim to activate the space between the object and the spectator. Created in 2013, the energetic and minimalist *Far-Out III* finds itself amongst a three-work series, exploring the artistic possibilities of themes such as the Earth, the universe, and the repeating shapes and fractals throughout the world we know and beyond.



Detail of the present lot

An engrossing quality of Monk’s works are that they are figuratively familiar yet elusive in meaning, inviting the viewer to actively contribute to his own understanding of the former’s visual codes. Showing in the present work is a glimpse into Monk’s apocalyptic take on his vision of the universe that we all share. The curvature of a vast cerulean blue globe clearly divides the pictorial plane with the boundless dark void in the backdrop. At the lower centre of the picture, a cyan planet radiates vibrant rainbow-coloured auras as it partially emerges out of the blue ocean, surrounded by a liquid orbit. A close-up of this pebbly-textured orbit is delineated in a thin strip at

the bottom of the canvas, substantiating the picture with a denser material quality, whilst bringing the macrocosm and the microcosm into juxtaposition. Come near the canvas, one will discover drizzles and strokes of greens, blues and purples on the seemingly matte black background, which at once becomes mesmerizingly reflective in light, with rainbow-coloured specks shining through the darkness. The depth of this infinite void immediately reminds the all-encompassing and magnificent starry universe that we lift our heads to gaze upon from time to time, transcending the act of looking into an experience of plunging into the sublime. Monk’s visual representations aren’t for any amount of rational decoding, for its elusive quality serves as a kind of tractor-beam, tugging between the known and the unknown.

Alchemising the Digital and the Traditional

Monk’s oeuvre stems from a personal ode to painting, the commitment of which is manifested in the present work through both the artist’s signature visual cues and his exploration of repetition. The central motif consisting of a red or orange circle inside larger yellow circles, originates from the sun that Monk painted as a child, and recurs in paintings such as the 2014 *Untitled (Atomic Flower Power)*ⁱ. For him, revisiting the same motif time and time again takes on a philosophical connotation as the practice is comparable to ‘the unfolding of a mantra or a word losing its perceived meaning through repetition.’ For him, this simple practice can also be playfully psychological, ‘the point where the brain expects something to end is the part I find the most interesting, and this can only be achieved through repetition.’ⁱⁱ



Left: Detail of the present lot Right: Peter Doig, *Tunnel Painting (Country-rock)*, 40.5 x 30.5 cm., 2000
Sold by Phillips, London, 29 June 2017 for GBP1,157,000 (Premium) Artwork: © 2022 Peter Doig / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The constant return to imagery, shape, line or colour-schema shows the artist's simple commitment to the language and medium of paint, flavoured by the investment of his personal experience. This creates a parallel between Monk's practice with that of one of the most renowned living figurative painters Peter Doig. Known for his renditions of pastoral landscapes, Doig balances the tension between generic representations of a subject and reflections of his personal experience in his works. Yet for Monk, this central duality is the known and the unknown, for painting is just the beginning of the unknown: 'I don't know exactly what the work is about. The paintings are starting points for other kinds of illumination, a receiving and reimagining that has nothing to do with paintings being finished expressions.'ⁱⁱⁱ



Harold Ancart, *Untitled*, 2015 Artwork: © 2022 Harold Ancart / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

A major inspiration of Monk's process is integrating the digital reality that we are accustomed to into traditional painting, through the visual vocabulary of organic forms that places emphasises on paint quality. Weaving figuration and abstraction in and out of one another as a harmonious whole and a juxtaposed duality, Monk's practice draws a parallel with that of his Belgian contemporary, Harold Ancart. Also creating serial works that straddle between representation and figuration, Ancart emphasises the process of painting by experimenting with colour and composition, simultaneously embracing chance as the co-creator of his work. For Monk, the way a painting is experienced fascinates him, as he, as an artist, explores the ways in which he can guide those experiences, re-establishing the meaning of a painting within the context of the digital world.

"There's a similar level of thought about how these paintings are created, composed and arranged, to pull you into the space." — William Monk

Activating the Space In-Between

This present lot is included as a part of Monk's 2013 exhibition *Furthur Planetarium!* at Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam, featuring a selection of large oil paintings together with woodcuts, watercolours, and distempers from the two years prior. The intentional misspelling of 'Furthur' is taken from the bus that American author and 1960s' trailblazer Ken Kesey took across the U.S. during the early 60s. Regardless of the figurative source of Monk's paintings, he zooms in on bringing about an objectual physical presence of his pieces, which serves as the conduit for the viewer to explore the experience within the space between them and the paintings.

A multi-faceted connotation of space is another important concept for Monk's oeuvre. For him, a work's sphere of influence is always inclusive of the space within and outside the pictorial plane. The *Far-Out Series* is meant to create an immersive stereo experience in installation, with large areas of blue and dark voids reaching out of the surface of the canvases, creating an intangible continuity that envelops the viewer, thus bringing awareness to the physical space in between the two. The title *Far-Out* also indicates the painter's intention of inviting the viewer to take on a perspective that is larger than life, as they simultaneously experience the physical space and the psychological space beyond. As such, the human element within the context of a painting is established, on which the artist explains, 'Rather than have a human presence in the work in a traditional narrative sense, I want the viewer to be aware of their own presence in front of the object. I feel to include the human form would act as a barrier to that.'^{iv}



Installation view of the current work at Amsterdam, Grimm Gallery, *Furthur Planetarium!*, 28 June - 3 August 2013 Image: Courtesy of the Artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam | New York.

It could be said that Monk's works are more states of mind than locales, as he transforms abstract experiences into a tangible existence. Monk exercises an economy of means that lends itself to visual revelation, where nature's enduring forms are paired down to reveal their inner brilliance in full glory. Present in equal measure are mundane and sublime forces, feeding the human imagination with a sense of anticipation to the unknown.

Collector's Digest

Born in 1977 in the UK, William Monk now lives and works in New York. After receiving his BA in Fine Art at Kingston University, London in 2000 and completed a two-year residency at De Ateliers in Amsterdam in 2006. He was awarded the Dutch Royal Award for Painting in 2005, which resulted in widespread, ongoing institutional recognition in Northern Europe and the Jerwood Painting Prize in the UK in 2009, followed by a yearlong national touring exhibition. Monk has been exhibiting work globally, and his works are amongst the collections of institutions such as the Kunstmuseum in the Hague, HE Art Museum in Foshan, China, AkzoNobel Art Foundation in Amsterdam and Roberts Institute of Art, London.

William Monk

Pace Gallery announced the representation of the artist in 2018. His latest exhibitions include the three-venue exhibition *The Ferryman* held at [Pace Gallery](#) New York and East Hampton, and [Grimm Gallery](#) New York (27 May 27 - 5 June 2022), and *Point Datum* at Pace Hong Kong Gallery (2 December 2020 - 30 January 2021), *Mount Atom* with Grimm Gallery Amsterdam (2 October - 21 November 2020).

ⁱ Jay Merrick, 'William Monk's Luminous remains', *Grimm Gallery*, 2017, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Osman Can Yerebakan, 'William Monk's Enigmatic Paintings Take Over Three Galleries in New York', *Galerie Magazine*, 26 April 2022, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Jay Merrick, 'A Fool Through the Cloud', *Ocula*, February 2019, [online](#)

^{iv} Milja Ficpatrik, 'William Monk', *Widewalls*, 21 May 2015, [online](#)

Provenance

Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Amsterdam, Grimm Gallery, *Furthur Planetarium!*, 28 June - 3 August 2013



10

Damien Hirst

Forgiven

signed, titled and dated "'Forgiven" Damien Hirst 2008' on the reverse; further signed 'D Hirst' on the stretcher

butterflies and household gloss on canvas

diameter 213.4 cm. (84 in.)

Executed in 2008.

Estimate

HK\$6,000,000 — 9,000,000

€742,000 — 1,110,000

\$769,000 — 1,150,000

[Go to Lot](#)



To encapsulate a maverick artist as manifold as Damien Hirst in a single object is a Herculean task, one that most critics and academics would shun for the fear of failure. Yet here with *Forgiven*, we are given a cheat sheet into one of the world's greatest creative minds. His fascination with colour, the aesthetics of display and the methodology of collecting, and crucially, mortality and the transience of beauty are placed on a pedestal for us to contemplate, muse, wonder and venerate; a pleasure rare to the world.

Ars longa, vita brevis -- Whilst Life is Short, Art is Eternal

“Art’s about life and it can’t really be about anything else ... there isn’t anything else.”
— Damien Hirst

Butterflies have always been a hallmark of Hirst's storied practice, indeed a creative crucible, ever since his first forays as an artist navigating a post-modern art field. In 1991 he presented *In and Out of Love (Butterfly Paintings and Ashtrays)*, his first exhibition following the legendary YBA-led *Freeze* exhibition that he curated while a student at Goldsmith's, and his first solo show in London. Spread over two floors of the nascent (and ultimately short-lived) Woodstock Street Gallery, Hirst placed an audacious installation: on the ground floor, an artificial habitat with the humidity cranked up; larvae were attached onto five monochrome canvasses, upon hatching they would fly around the gallery with sugar bowls and plants encouraging residence in the Mayfair gallery. If this was life, the basement below was death - where paintings rendered in bright pastel colours with adorned with dead butterflies pressed into their surfaces hung on the walls as reminders of our fleeting existence. As Hirst explained in 1991: 'It's about love and realism, dreams, ideals, symbols, life and death. I worked out many possible trajectories for these things, like the way the real butterfly can destroy the ideal (birthday-card) kind of love; the symbol exists apart from the real thing. Or the butterflies still being beautiful even when dead. All these things are completely thrown off balance by a comparison I tried to make between art and life, in the upstairs and downstairs installations, a crazy thing to do when in the end it's all art.'ⁱ

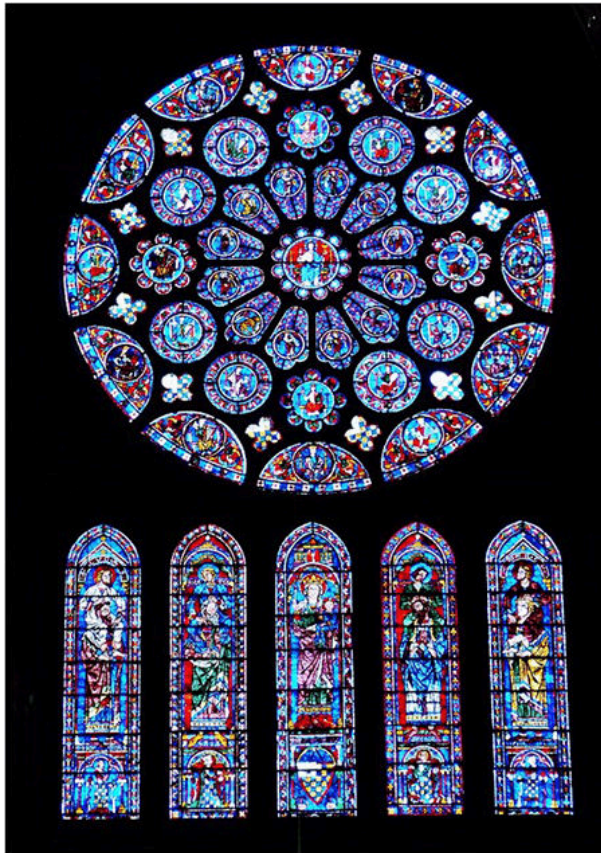
This exhibition would form the foundation for the *memento mori* totems that make up Hirst's most accomplished works, and would be recreated for his landmark retrospective at the Tate Modern in 2012. It also placed the artist shoulder to shoulder with the greatest proponents of vanitas that art history has seen: the *Pronkstilleven* artists of the Dutch Golden Age. Like Hirst, figures such as Willem Kalf and Jacob van Es utilised butterflies and other creatures to underline the transience of life and the sensationalised triviality of the quotidian, as we can see in the latter's 1640 painting, *Roses with Butterflies and Insects*.



Jacob van Es, *Roses with Butterflies and Insects*, 1640 Collection of the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Strasbourg

His *Butterfly Monochrome* paintings would follow and interrogate the real vs. imagined symbolism of these chrysalises, and form a kind of personal iconography, before embarking on his ambitious *Kaleidoscope* series in 2001, to which the present lot belongs. Employing thousands of butterfly wings (Hirst became the UK's leading importer of butterflies in 2003) that form concentric circles which undulate through the spherical canvas, *Forgiven* is a grand feat of mesmerisation; attendance begs adulation as we lose ourselves in their prismatic ring roads. The luminescent beauty of the work and the language of its radial arrangement recall the forms of Gothic stained windows that populate the great cathedrals of Europe, in particular those present at Chartres Cathedral in France. There, colossal panes of variegated glass affirm John's decree that 'The news

that we have learned from him and are announcing to you is that God is light and that in him there is nothing of darknessⁱⁱ, and as such, they confirm the presence of God.



Southern Window at [Chartres Cathedral](#), France

An Immaterial Connection

“You have to find universal triggers, everyone’s frightened of glass, everyone’s frightened of sharks, everyone loves butterflies.” — Damien Hirst

The spirituality that emanates from *Forgiven* is not limited to the ecclesiastical and finds kinship with both Western and Eastern doctrines. Butterflies are used in the bible as a praxis to understand the transfiguration of Christ – the moment in which he transcends flesh to become radiant in his full glory – as well imagery for the Resurrection. The title of the current work also holds direct reference to scripture as it is taken from the Book of Psalms, as does all the works from the limited 2008 subseries to which it belongs.

Forgiven also holds spiritual heritage in Buddhist art due to the fact that they bear close association with mandalas, devotional images that function as a representation of the ideal universe. Hirst would go onto to create a series of paintings inspired by mandalas in 2019, entrenching the symbolic gravitas of the butterfly in Eastern philosophical tradition.



Four Mandala Vajravali Thangka, c.1430

Collector's Digest

One of the most recognizable, defining artists of his generation, Damien Hirst will go down in the annals of art history as a genre-bending, revolutionary conceptual artist. Coming to prominence in the late 1980s as part of the group identified by collector and gallerist Charles Saatchi as a generation of 'Young British Artists', Damien Hirst is best known for his boundary-pushing sculptures of animals submerged in formaldehyde, and his sustained investigation of seriality, repetition, death and belief.



Damien Hirst, *Omnipotence*, 2008 Sold for GBP796,900 at Phillips London, 14 October 2022 Artwork: © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2022

Also executed in 2008, one of the largest *Kaleidoscope* paintings, *Enlightenment*, measures over 7 x 17 feet and includes over 2,700 butterflies. Works from the *Kaleidoscope* series were first exhibited as part of Hirst's 2003 White Cube show *Romance in the Age of Uncertainty*. In 2007, Hirst presented a major series of the paintings in his solo exhibition *Superstition with Gagosian* Gallery in London and Beverly Hills.

ⁱ Damien Hirst, quoted in Sophie Calle, *Internal Affair*, exh. cat., Jay Jopling/ICA, 1991, unpaginated

ⁱⁱ 1 John 1:5, *The Bible*, [online](#)

Damien Hirst

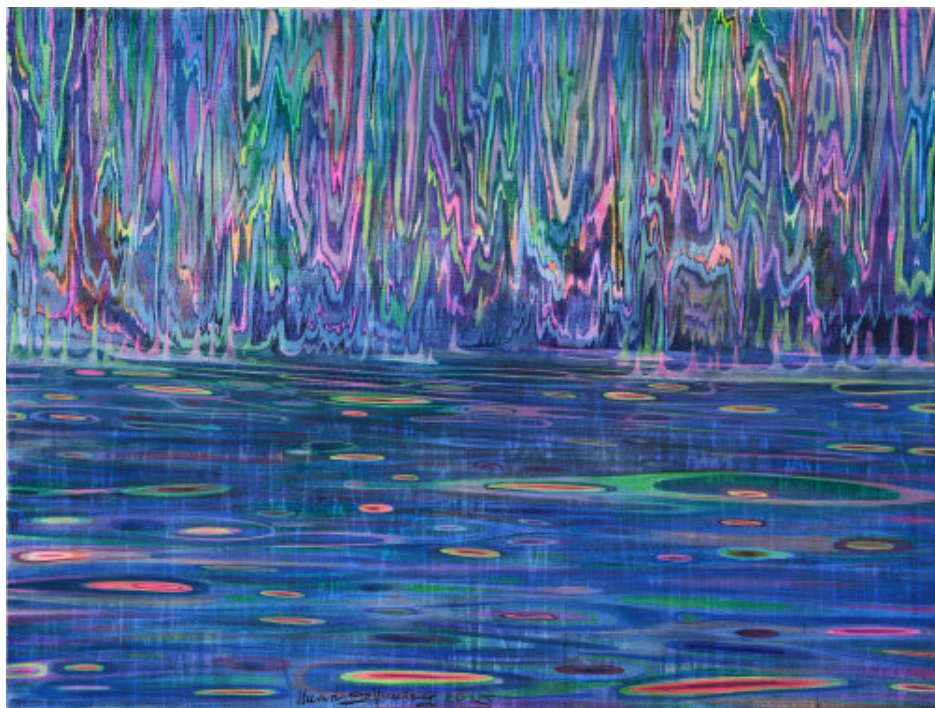
Provenance

Gagosian, London

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



11 ж

Huang Yuxing

River

signed and dated 'Huang Yuxing 2015' lower centre
acrylic on canvas

150.9 x 199.3 cm. (59 3/8 x 78 1/2 in.)

Painted in 2015.

Estimate

HK\$1,200,000 — 1,800,000

€149,000 — 224,000

\$154,000 — 231,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“The river has great wisdom and whispers its secrets to the hearts of men.” — Mark Twain

Enigmatically dynamic and hypnotically mesmerising, *River* is an irresistible symphony of colour, form, light, and movement, composed by Chinese contemporary artist Huang Yuxing’s to express his deep reflection on the human experience within time and space. Presented here is a whimsical landscape of a river stream where washes of opalescent purple-blue tides pool at the depth of the middle ground. Rendered in his highly individualised visual vocabulary of organic life forms, this alluring and dreamy scene is a prime example from Huang’s renowned *River* series, revealing his focus on the manifold and transient movements of life that is central to the artist’s explorations into universal themes concerning humanity.

“My works focus on the now, but they will become a thing of the past. They are presented to the audiences honestly, with no sense of mystery. For me, shapes are associated with colours and feelings; and when they are presented in a profound way, they can touch the hearts of many. The mysterious feeling you sense stems from the incomplete perception of the truth, but it would draw you to be more interested in the truth, which makes my works more appealing.” — Huang Yuxing

Movements of Life

Huang’s artistic practice entails a long-running investigation into the individual’s life experience in parallel to the natural world. The formative *River* series has its far-reaching impact on Huang’s academically and commercially acclaimed oeuvre, as it became one of the pillar stones where the artist’s later inspirations spring from. Evoking masterpieces by Dutch Post-Impressionist Vincent van Gogh’s *The Starry Night* with a comparable colour palette and vigorous energy, the painting features Huang’s reoccurring motifs of rivers and whirlpools, centring the discussion on the endless and all-encompassing movements in the river of life. Life’s journey is represented as colours and shapes captured in various states of motion, as fleeting and volatile as the temporary existence of an individual’s life.



Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York Image: © The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence

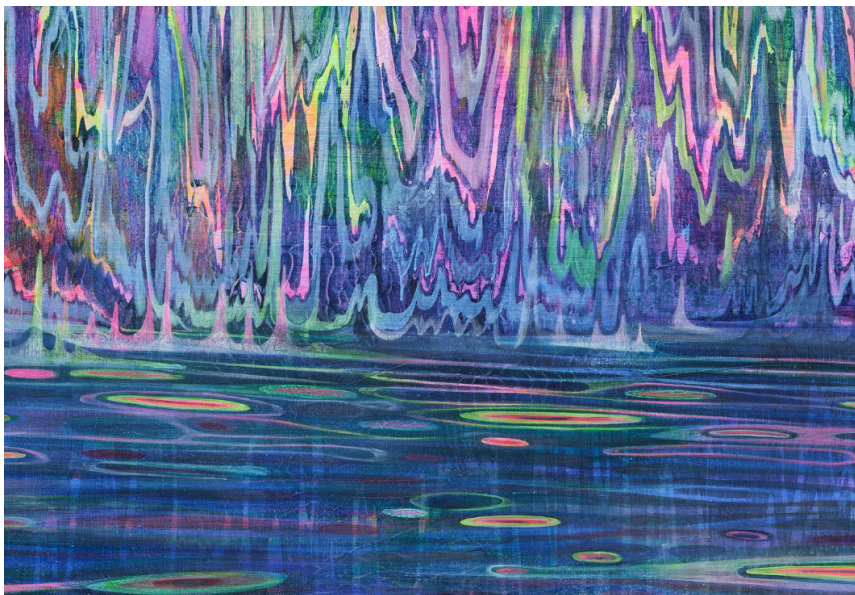
Employing the horizontal-vertical composition that is typical of the series, *River* features a particularly enchanting colour-scheme that recalls magical fairy tales, luring the audience to immerse themselves into the pictorial space. Varying sizes of spirited swirls surface the otherwise tranquil indigo river, as if a secret underneath the water is eager to bubble up. Undulations of water is vividly rendered through the use of fantastical lines of colour to indicate both subtle and vigorous movements. In the background, streams of malachite green stand out amongst splashes of fierce currents surging up from the river, conveying much energy and power. Although uniquely subdued in colour scheme, Huang’s virtuosity in balancing colours of varying depths imparts to the work a warming glow that is unmistakably his.

Be Kind Like Water

“The highest form of goodness is like water. Water nourishes all things without

contending with them. It stays in lowly places loathed by all men. Thus, it comes close to the Tao (the Eternal).” — Laozi, excerpt from Tao Te Ching

Huang’s artistic investigations venture deep inside his introspective journey within. The choice of water as a subject-matter is profound and thought-provoking: water seems so ordinary, yet is vital to all lives, without ever being selective of who and what it benefits. The all-encompassing and nourishing qualities of water speak for the artist’s humanitarian concern on topics relating to experiences we all share as human beings, which transcends time and culture.



Detail of the present lot

Despite being recognised and sought-after for his signature works that feature a frenetic, stimulating colour palette, Huang did not venture into the world of colour until he went through a challenging period in his life in 2008. In Huang’s own words, ‘that grey period gave me a more practical understanding of the concepts of light, life and hope, and this resolution became more real and deeper from abstraction, which made me begin to re-examine myself and slowly release the repressed desire for colour into the picture. Once this repressed desire and understanding of colour is unleashed, it was even more intense and gorgeous than before.’ⁱ

“As an artist and as an individual, I discuss problems shared by all human beings. From my own individual perspective, the problems I discuss are those that our ancestors and future generations will encounter as well... people will continue to discuss these issues a hundred years from now. Because this is a proposition that will trouble the individual human life and the flesh.” — Huang Yuxing

Alchemize The Traditional and The Personal

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



Left: Detail of Xu Wei, Peony, Bamboo and Rocks, hanging scroll, Ming (1368-1644) Collection of the Shanghai Museum Right: Detail of a Jun Ware Flower Vase in the Form of an Archaic Bronze Zun Vessel, Ming Dynasty (15th Century) Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei

Meticulously delineated colourful lines are immediately reminiscent of the traditional Chinese realist style *gongbi zhongcai* (工筆重彩). Intensely bright acrylic paints are treated like layers of chiffon on Huang's paintbrush, paying homage to the traditional Chinese painting concept of 'five shades of ink' (墨分五色), which refers to the technique of mixing varying amount of water into ink to yield nuanced tones and textures with only the colour of ink. This dilution technique not only gives the gradient tie-dye quality to the paint, but also locks in on a particular movement of water in time as the dripping glaze of Chinese ceramics that vitrifies during the firing process. By presenting a multifaceted visual language that straddles the line of being the traditional and the contemporary, Huang anchors a ground for his abstract narration to bloom and continuously evolve.

Brilliantly captivating and fluid, the poetic *River* exemplifies the highly individualised style that Huang Yuxing is recognised and celebrated for. Shining through veils of enchanting indigo, violet and malachite green, an overflowing vitality of Huang's ever-evolving oeuvre narrates his poetic vision of the omnipresent universal energy that we all share.

Collector's Digest



Huang Yuxing, *River*, 2013 Sold by Phillips, Hong Kong, 9 July 2020 for HKD1,375,000 (Premium)

Born in 1975 in Beijing, Huang Yuxing graduated from the Mural Painting Department of the

Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2000, and currently lives and works in his hometown. He was the first guest artist at the Yuz Museum Project Room in 2015 and has been extensively holding solo exhibitions since.

In 2020, Almine Rech has announced the representation of the artist in the United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom. Huang's current exhibitions includes *Heaps of Brocade and Ash* at Almine Rech in Brussels (3 June - 31 July 2021), and *Huang Yuxing*, with Almine Rech Shanghai, 4 November - 3 December 2022 (works on paper). Scheduled for 3 November - 17 December 2022, his solo show titled *An Absolute Power We Cannot Find* at Almine Rech, New York marks Huang's debut in the city.

Huang was invited to collaborate with Louis Vuitton for their 2021 'Artycapucines' collection, joining the likes of Urs Fischer, Tschabalala Self, Liu Wei, Henry Taylor, Jonas Wood, and Alex Israel, to introduce their innovative aesthetic visions to the brand.

Huang's first NFT project, *Meta-morphic*, was released online on 7 September 2022 and sold out within one minute of the launch.

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

Provenance
Private Collection, Asia



PROPERTY OF AN IMPORTANT ASIAN COLLECTOR

12 *

Yayoi Kusama

INFINITY-NETS (GMBKA)

signed, titled and dated "'GMBKA INFINITY-NETS"

YAYOI KUSAMA 2013' on the reverse

acrylic on canvas

162 x 131 cm. (63 3/4 x 51 5/8 in.)

Painted in 2013, this work is accompanied by a registration card issued by the artist's studio.

Estimate

HK\$12,000,000 — 18,000,000

€1,480,000 — 2,220,000

\$1,540,000 — 2,310,000

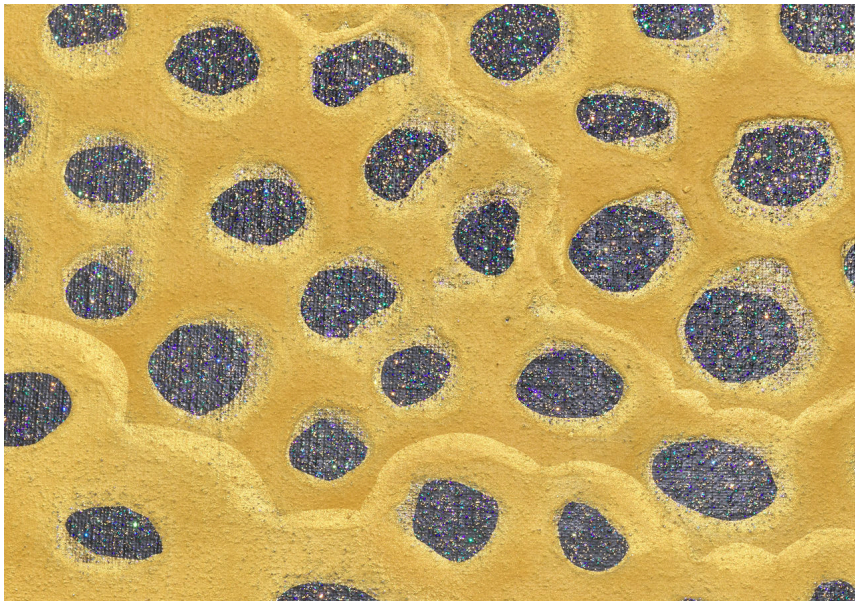
[Go to Lot](#)



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

Resplendent with endlessly repeating strokes of golden-orange atop a glistening black canvas, *INFINITY-NETS (GMBKA)* is a remarkable example from the artist’s iconic *Infinity Nets* series. The series serves as a cornerstone to her artistic practice, acting as the foundation in which Kusama develops many of her sculptures and installations.

Meticulously rendered in delicate lattices of loops and swirls, Kusama’s webs appear to be expanding outward, mesmerising as they draw the viewer towards the shimmering spaces contained within the tightly woven blanket of paint. A closer examination of the work reveals a scintillating layer of black impasto behind waves of brilliant golden loops, inviting the viewer to immerse themselves within the depths of the painting amongst the brilliance of an endless expanse of shimmering stars.



Detail of the present lot

Generating an entrancing optical sensation, the labyrinthine web of *INFINITY-NETS (GMBKA)* seems to expand and contract, coming alive as they radiate and pulsate with palpable rhythm.

These intricate lines are painted in varying degrees of density, revealing the artist’s hand and painting process, dipping her brush in fresh paint ever so often. From afar, the repeated iterations of a single touch of the brush establish a spellbinding sense of pictorial space. Upon closer examination, the incessant quality of this calculated gesture reveals a dizzying, labour-intensive technique that envelops both the viewer and the artist in the concept of the infinite.

The Beginning of Infinity

Born 1929 in Matsumoto City, Kusama grew up in wartime Japan. It was during this period in her childhood where she began to experience vivid hallucinations of rhythmic patterns that engulfed her field of vision. Tracing back to a specific incident when she was ten years old, the artist described: ‘One day, looking at a red flower-patterned tablecloth on the table, I turned my eyes to the ceiling and saw the same red flower pattern everywhere, even on the window glass and posts. The room, my body, the entire universe was filled with it, my self was eliminated, and I had returned and been reduced to the infinity of eternal time and the absolute of space. This was not an illusion but reality. I was astounded. If I did not get away from there, I would be wrapped up in the spell of the red flowers and lose my life. I ran for the stairs without thinking of anything else. Looking down, I saw the steps fall away one by one, pulling my leg and making me trip and fall from the top of the stairs. I sprained my leg. Dissolving and accumulating, proliferating and separating. A feeling of particles disintegrating and reverberations from an invisible universe...’¹



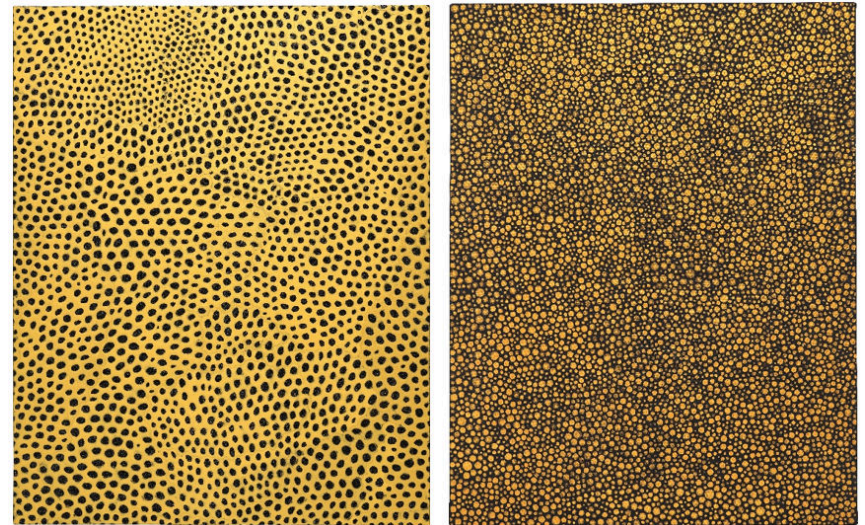
The artist next to her *Infinity Nets* paintings in her studio, New York, 1961 Image/Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

Kusama arrived in New York in the 1950s, in pursuit of a better artistic career and seeking creative freedom from the constraints of conventional Japan. Finding inspiration from New York's avant-garde art scene, the *Infinity Nets* were born from being surrounded by abstract and minimalistic influences of Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Donald Judd and Frank Stella (who both acquired her paintings during this time). However, differentiating herself from the minimalist aesthetic that was prevalent in the New York art scene at the time, Kusama had declared that:

“My Infinity Net paintings and Accumulation work share different origins from the

European monochrome works. They were about an obsession: infinite repetition.” — Yayoi Kusama

Kusama's works, such as *INFINITY-NETS (GMBKA)* and *Gold Accumulation (1)*, arose from Kusama's kaleidoscopic neurosis and was further extrapolated and reconfigured into ceaseless art marking. Like both sides of one coin, these two works showcase different artist interpretations of the infinite.



Left: The present lot Right: Lot 15, Yayoi Kusama, *Gold Accumulation (1)*, 1999 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD8,000,000 - 12,000,000

Executed in the mature period of Kusama's career, instead of oil, *INFINITY-NETS (GMBKA)* (2013) is painted with acrylic. Kusama made this pivotal transition to a water-based medium in the late 1970s, which built on her foundational training in traditional Japanese painting, and having employed *Nihonga* watercolour to compose the series' earlier works. The present work continues the legacy of Kusama's iconic series of *Infinity Nets*, employing the same repetitive and hypnotic mark-making technique that forms a captivating visual interplay within the painting's pictorial depths.

Obsessive and Meditative, All at Once

“I came under the spell of repetition and aggregation. 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. I was always standing at the centre of the obsession, over the passionate accretion and repetition inside of me.” — Yayoi Kusama

Although it is hard to separate Kusama’s mental state from her work, her illness is not the subject of her work, but rather the engine that drives it. Often painting continuously for 40 to 50 hour sessions at a time, Kusama described the process as if she was ‘[...] driving on the highways or carried on a conveyor belt without ending until my death. This is like continuing to drink thousands of cups of coffee or eating thousands of feet of macaroni... I am deeply terrified by the obsessions crawling over my body, whether they come from within me or from outside. I fluctuate between feelings of reality and unreality.’ⁱⁱ



The artist with an Infinity Net painting, double exposure photograph, early 1960s Image: Ken van Sickle, Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

Kusama saw the process of making the *Infinity Nets* as integral to the works themselves, and the physical and emotional energy that she poured into them as an imprint of her physical beingⁱⁱⁱ. Using precise, minute flicks of the wrist, Kusama would move her brush across the canvas in an endless repetition, carefully weaving a labyrinthine of overlapping nets that are at once obsessive and meditative, intricate and explosive. This infinitely oscillating pattern simulates the visual effect of a mesmerising glimpse into infinity, demonstrating the artist’s desire to subsume individual ego, bury and obliterate herself through endless intuitive repetition.

Collector's Digest

Kusama's largest retrospective in Asia, *Yayoi Kusama: 1945 to Now*, is currently on view at the M+ Museum in Hong Kong until 14 May 2023. The exhibition features 3 new works, and over 200 works across various international collections, the M+ collection as well as the artist's own collection.

The present work, *Infinity Net*, stands as a prime example of one of her most emblematic, longest-running series. In May of this year, Phillips New York sold an early work from the same series, *Untitled (Nets)*, for USD \$10,496,000 — a record-breaking sum for Kusama's work at auction. One of the most important contemporary artists today, Kusama continues to amaze with her boundless artistic interpretation of 'infinity'.

The artist's exhibition, *Every Day I Pray for Love*, is also currently ongoing at the Yayoi Kusama Museum, Tokyo from 7 October 2022 - 26 February 2023. Recent notable solo exhibitions include: Tel Aviv Museum of Art; *Berlin, Gropius Bau*, 15 November 2021 - 23 April 2022; *Victoria Miro*, London, 4 June - 31 July 2021; *Tate Modern*, London, 11 May 2020 - 30 September 2022; amongst others.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10A_5_wrm-c&ab_channel=SouthChinaMorningPost

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

ⁱ Laura Hoptman, Akira Tatehata and Udo Kultermann, *Yayoi Kusama*, London, 2000, p. 35-36

ⁱⁱ *ibid*, p. 18

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*, p. 46

Provenance

David Zwirner, New York

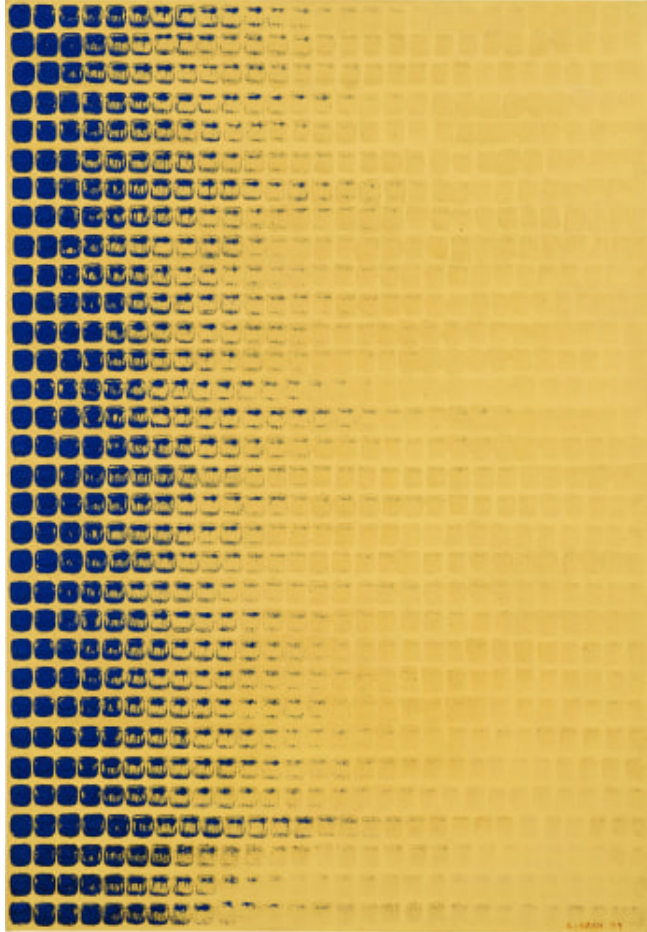
Private Collection, USA (acquired from the above in 2013)

Phillips, Hong Kong, 24 November 2019, lot 28

Acquired at the above sale by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A DISTINGUISHED ASIAN COLLECTOR

13 *

Lee Ufan

From Point No. 77103

signed and dated 'L. UFAN 77' lower right; further signed and titled "'From point No. 77103" Leeufan' on the reverse

oil and mineral pigment on canvas
162.2 x 112 cm. (63 7/8 x 44 1/8 in.)

Executed in 1977, this work is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by LVS Gallery.

Estimate

HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000

€989,000 — 1,480,000

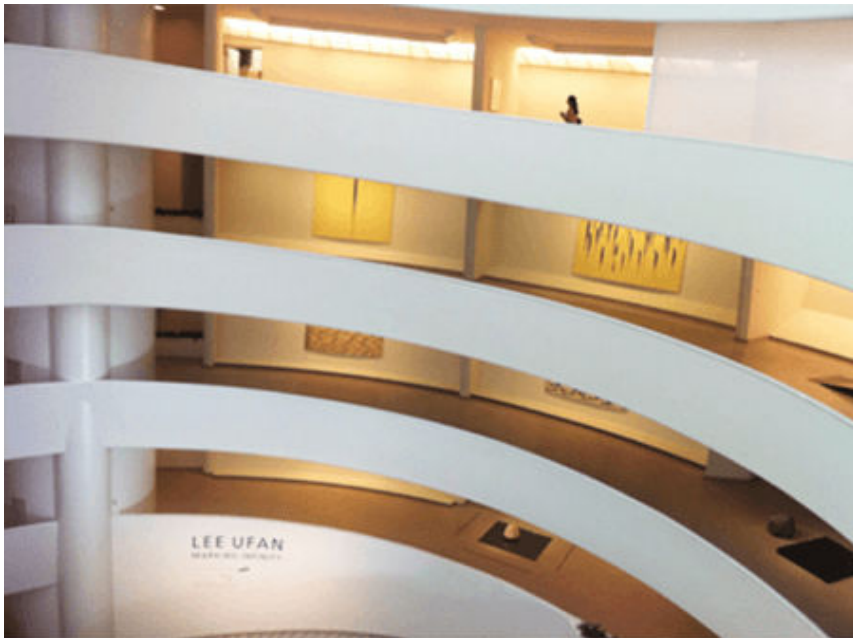
\$1,030,000 — 1,540,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“The object before the eyes and the image in the mind are all constructed of points and lines, expressed in rhythm with the rising and falling of the breath. Because of this, the viewer [...] can observe the dynamic relationship between the painting and the canvas, the condition of the painter’s body, the movement of his heart, his character, and the atmosphere of the age.” — Lee Ufan

A gracefully meditative example from Lee Ufan’s iconic *From Point* series, *From Point No. 77103* is a poetic visual metaphor encapsulating the idea of infinity within time and space, appearance and disappearance, and the continuous cycle of birth and death. Thirty-two rows of repeated dotting of glistening cobalt gradually dissolve into the void from left to right, bringing awareness to the empty space that we seem to forget. Created during the early period of what would become a decade-long preoccupation with the *From Point* paintings, this exquisite work from 1977, testifies to the philosophy that underpins Lee’s internationally acclaimed oeuvre. This formative series has been exhibited internationally, including at the Guggenheim Museum, New York and the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto.



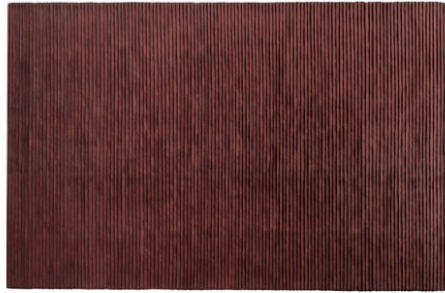
Installation shot of Lee Ufan’s retrospective, *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, 24 June - 28 September, 2011, Guggenheim Museum, New York

Artistic Trajectory

An artist, philosopher and poet, Lee was a pivotal figure in the Japanese avant-garde movement *Mono-ha* (School of Things) in the late 1960s. As Japan’s first contemporary art movement to gain international recognition, *Mono-ha* rejected traditional ideas and Western notions of representation that focused on expression or intervention, in favour of depicting the world ‘as is’ with an emphasis on the relationship between material and perception. By the early 1970s, Lee had received significant acclaim at Tokyo’s leading galleries and museums and began exhibiting in West Germany and France -- including the 1971 Paris Youth Biennale that introduced *Mono-ha* to European audience.

“Before working, I calm my breathing, correct my posture, and hold my brush quietly. I put plenty of paint on the brush and paint spots on a canvas laid on the floor. I paint them one after the other, beginning at the upper left of the canvas and proceeding to the right. The spots are dense at first but gradually become thinner. As I continue, they fade to nothing. Then I put more paint on the brush and keep doing the same thing over and over.” — Lee Ufan

After years of developing his *Relatum* series of sculptural installations, Lee returned to painting in 1972. Between 1972-1984, in the wake of *Abstract Expressionism* in the United States and *Art Informel* in Europe, Lee developed the quintessential *From Point* and *From Line* series, which documented on canvas a minimal, gestural act that induces in the viewer a lived experience of time’s perpetual passage, exploring the notion of infinity. This body of work received critical acclaim and was especially influential in his home country South Korea, where he became a seminal figure in the *Dansaekhwa* (monochrome painting) movement in the mid-1970s alongside the renowned artists such as Park Seo-bo and Kim Whanki. Dubbed as the ‘Godfather of *Dansaekhwa*’, Kim is known for works feature dense repetitive patterns that evoke the vastness of the universe. Lee’s work, on the other hand, while retaining the repetitive minimalist gestures, contains much empty space that bringing to the fore time’s perpetual passage that would otherwise have gone unnoticed otherwise.



Left: Lot 216, *Park Seo-bo, Ecriture No. 160408*, 2016 Phillips Hong Kong Day Sale, 30 November 2022
Estimate HKD 2,500,000 - 3,500,000 Right: Kim Whanki, *26-I-70*, 1970 Collection of San Francisco
Museum of Modern Art

The Simple and The Eternal

“When I was young, I followed my father to a beach, I slept at the beach and woke up in the morning, and the sun was rising. The sight of the sunrise touched my heart, such that when I grew up and thought about what art is, the rising sun was always lingering before my eyes, and that was an immense starting point for creativity.” —
Lee Ufan

In the *From Point* and *From Line* series, the artist makes minimal interventions, using both single colour and simple artistic gestures so that the works could be a direct manifestation of the invisible that remains organic, pure, and immediate. The intense blue colour in *From Point No. 77103* is brought about by mixing ground cobalt blue pigment with traditional Japanese *Nikawa* glue, a technique stemmed from *Nihonga* (Japanese-style) painting on silk. Saturating the paint brush with powdery, crystalline emulsion and laying the canvas flat on the floor, Lee works from the upper left of the canvas and gradually proceeds to the right, until the marks dissipate and turn to emptiness. He then repeats this act until rows of gradually fading marks fill the entire canvas, capturing the boundless splendour of the universe, concurrently recalling the infinite fading tones of the sky.

The repetitive brush marks are Lee’s markings in space that elicit momentary, open-ended situations that engage the viewer viscerally. Each point is applied slowly and finished in one go without modification or correction. This process is in accordance with *ikkaisei* (oneness) – which is derived from a Japanese ink-painting tradition where the innumerable elements that constitute a single brushstroke can never be repeated. In doing so, each point becomes the physical manifestation of a specific ‘lived moment’ in time, with its echoes permeating into the ambient surrounding space of the work.

Simple in its planning and execution, there is more to Lee’s work than meets the eye. Lee’s encounter with point and line began at a very early age, foreseeing his revisit to these simple elements in his artistic career. While attending a local village school at the age of five, he learned the basics of Chinese classical arts; *si* (poetry), *seo* (calligraphy), and *hwa* (painting) were built upon, which manifest into points and lines. By practicing drawing points and lines, Lee began to understand the interdependency between art forms, and tapped in the realisation of ‘the entirety of the universe begins and returns to one point’¹. A point in this context represents the basic element that comprises and evolves into unlimited variations in the universe. Through this lens, the process of dense spots that gradually thin down and eventually fade into just fractals of pigment on the canvas, draws a parallel to the cycle of life, from birthing to dying -- from the vibrantly vital infancy to returning to dust. By introducing the juxtaposition and duality of emptiness and substance on the canvas, *From Point No. 77103* demonstrates a profound quality of the series where the void becomes visible and perceivable, and thus shining light on this omnipresent, yet oft-overlooked part of our existence.



Barnett Newman, *The Voice*, 1950 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York Image: © The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence, Artwork: © 2022 Barnett Newman Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Eclectic in drawing inspirations, Lee gradually developed his signature style that is distinctly simple and highly recognisable. The artist was profoundly influenced by the retrospective of American Abstract Expressionist artist Barnett Newman, which he visited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Showcased in *The Voice*, Newman's vertical, white abstractions demonstrate a materiality and a strong sense of space which transcends the painting's two-dimensionality and inspired Lee to focus on the medium in his overall expression of marking time and space. Adding to this exploration ideas and techniques from his trainings in traditional *nihonga*, the artist also started experimenting with repetitive marking, piercing, and chiselling to investigate the textual qualities of materials. Spending approximately one month on each of his paintings, Lee's slow and introspective painting process reflects his experience and consciousness of time: 'My paintings are not a direct representation of an image, nor are they concerned with a particular meaning, rather

they are the phenomenological result of a temporal gesture created by neutral actions.'ⁱⁱ

"Usually, when I let go of my brush, especially with paintings, when I get a feeling that the artwork itself feels like a living thing, that's when I let it go." — Lee Ufan

Lee's canvas is painted in a way that perfectly reflects his thinking and philosophy. 'The creation starts when the inside and the outside coincide.' As he explains the idea behind his process, 'so rather than myself controlling it, when the external and the internal meet, that is where the interaction of the external and internal becomes a control, and that is when the artwork transcends beyond me to a new dimension.'ⁱⁱⁱ In this way, Lee becomes the conduit of the indescribable operating law of nature; the work and the painter come together composing a harmonious symphony of balancing the known and the unknown.

Collector's Digest

Lee was born in Southern Korea in 1936 and studied painting at the College of Fine Arts at Seoul National University and moved to Japan in 1956, where he earned a degree in philosophy. Over the last 40 years, he has lived and worked in Korea, Japan, and France, becoming a transnational artist in a postmodern world before those terms were current.

Throughout his career Lee has been honoured with numerous solo exhibitions and major retrospectives at distinguished public institutions around the world, including the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul (1994), the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007) and the Guggenheim Museum in New York (2011). He was awarded the Praemium Imperiale for painting in 2001 and the UNESCO Prize in 2000. The author of 17 books, he has written seminal essays on contemporary art, Asian culture and democracy. In 2010 the Lee Ufan Museum designed by Tadao Ando opened in Naoshima, Japan. In 2010, the Lee Ufan Museum, dedicated to the artist's oeuvre, opened on the Japanese island of Naoshima.

His exhibition centre at the Hôtel Vernon in Arles, a seventeenth-century building located near the city's Roman arena, remodelled by his friend the architect Tadao Ando, opened on 5 April 2022.

ⁱ Lee Ufan, quoted in Mika Yoshitake, 'Chronology', *Lee Ufan: Marking Infinity*, New York, 2011, p. 186

ⁱⁱ Lee Ufan, quoted in *Lee Ufan: From Point, From Line, From Wind*, London Pace Gallery, 2015, p. 27

ⁱⁱⁱ Lee Ufan, quoted in 'Meet the Artists | Lee Ufan', *Art Basel*, 30 April 2021

Lee Ufan

Provenance

Collection of Kim Noe-seong, Korea

Stephen and Yana Peel Collection

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM THE COLLECTION OF SIN-MAY ROY
ZAO

14 *

Zao Wou-Ki

14.10.69.

signed 'Wou-Ki [in Chinese] ZAO' lower centre; further signed and titled 'ZAO WOU-Ki "14.10.69."' on the reverse

oil on canvas

65 x 100 cm. (25 5/8 x 39 3/8 in.)

Painted in 1969, this work is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by the Fondation Zao Wou-Ki. 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\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000

€989,000 — 1,480,000

\$1,030,000 — 1,540,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“I want to paint invisible things: the breath of life, wind, movement, the vitality of forms, the unfolding and intermingling of colours.” — Zao Wou-Ki

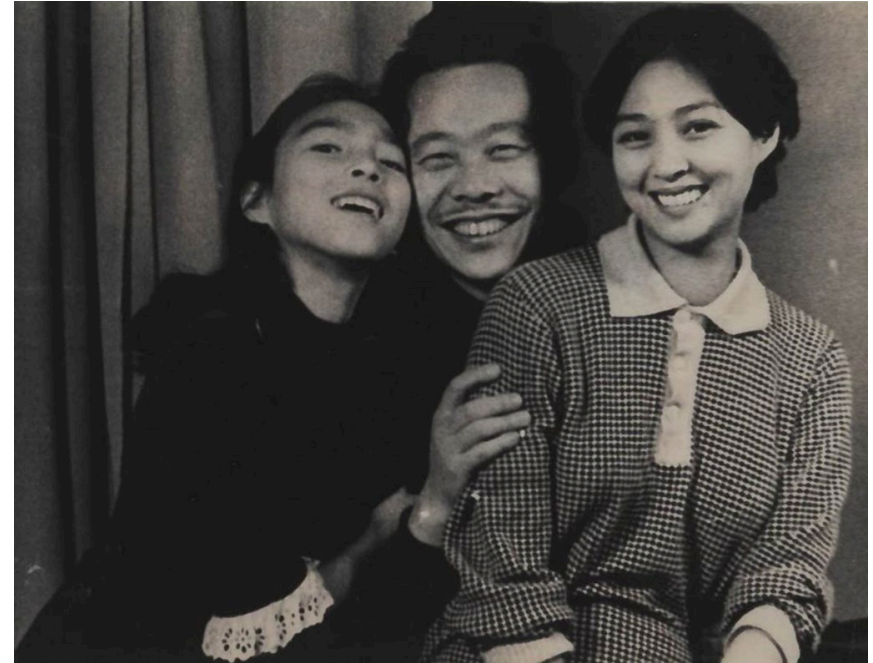
Beautifully emblematic of Zao Wou-Ki's astoundingly rich and varied oeuvre, *14.10.69.* is a compelling example from the apex of the artist's extraordinary career – the Hurricane Period – which lies between the late 1950s to the early 1970s. During this time, Zao's work became more vibrant and forceful, growing increasingly abstract as he moved away from the figurative style that characterised his earlier works toward a bolder mode of painting fuelled with an indomitable force, palpable with energy.

The unique features of Zao's works made him stand out against the tide of post-war abstract paintings in Europe and earned him global fame. Directly inspired by traditional Chinese landscape painting, *14.10.69.* perfectly expresses the tension between yin and yang, oscillating between abstraction and tangibility, being and nothingness in a composition that showcases Zao's creative reverie. Colours ripple in a liquid, misty universe, becoming less and less present until it is nothing but light; gesture grows heavier, until it is nothing but form.

Family Ties

“Hong Kong is where my mother and I came from and where my parents met, so the city always holds a special place in my heart.” — Sin-May Roy Zao

In 1958, Zao met his beloved wife Chan May-Kan in Hong Kong, whom he fell in love with during their first meeting. Suffering from delicate health her entire life, May had passed away at the age of 41 in 1972. Describing this emotionally turbulent period that is simultaneously blissful yet strenuous, Zao compared it to ‘driving a fast car’ at full speed for ten yearsⁱ. As such, painting became his refuge, and his atelier was ‘the only place of peace where I held onto hope like in the middle of a storm one grips onto a small boat inundated by water from all sides.’ⁱⁱ



Sin-May Roy Zao with father, Zao Wou-Ki and mother, May Zao

14.10.69., along with *Sans titre* (2007) in the current Phillips Day Sale, both come from the personal collection of Chan May-Kan's daughter, Sin-May Roy Zao. Returning to the same soil of where the artist's deepest origins lie, and where Sin-May's parents first met – Hong Kong, *14.10.69.* is a deeply personal work, cherished by the artist's family.



Lot 218, Zao Wou-Ki, *Sans titre*, 2007 Phillips Hong Kong Day Sale, 30 November 2022 Estimate: HKD 4,000,000 - 6,000,000

Bound by Two Traditions

“Everybody is bound by a tradition; I am bound by two.” — Zao Wou-Ki

Culminating techniques acquired through his formative training in Chinese painting as well as the post-war style in Paris, Zao’s artistic approach is fully recognised as a mature symbiotic synthesis of the east and west, establishing the artist’s unquestionable status as a paragon of modern art.

14.10.69. is compositionally reminiscent of J.M.W. Turner’s turbulent seascapes, yet the skeleton of a Chinese ink landscape peers through a misty veil, evoking rivers and mountains without literal depiction. Various hues of sepia rise and fall in swelling arcs within the picture plane, creating a thriving energy that is full of latent intensity, forming a unique layered effect that allows the viewer to peer into a deeper plane.

Commenting on his own paintings in 1961, Zao mentioned that his paintings had become increasingly more abstract in style as a result of moving to Paris: ‘...the influence of Paris is undeniable in my complete artistic development, I also must say that I have gradually rediscovered China, to the extent that my deepest personality asserted itself. In my recent canvases, [my Chinese identity] is expressed innately. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is to Paris that I owe this return to my deepest roots.’ⁱⁱⁱ

By the time it was 1975, he could confidently say that ‘There is no longer any boundary between oriental art and occidental art. The essential thing is to find a universal and international language’,^{iv} demonstrating a gradual shift into a mature style that is deeply rooted in a holistic approach towards combining both the east and west, rather than a conveniently dichotomous vision of them.

Labyrinth of Light

Touching the theme of the Sublime, English Romantic painter J.M.W. Turner’s is an important source of inspiration for many Chinese artists, such as Zao Wou-Ki himself and his contemporaries such as Chu Teh-Chun. Focusing atmospheric portrayal, Turner’s stylistic treatment of the sky, sea, and wind paves the way for artists such as Zao, influencing his unique depiction of nature and form, particularly in his works from the late 1960s and the early 1970s.



J.M.W. Turner, *Stormy Sea Breaking on a Shore*, 1840-1845 Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

As seen in both the current work by Zao and in Turner's *Stormy Sea Breaking on a Shore*, both artists establish a focal point at the centre of the canvas, from which rays of diagonal and horizontal arcs emerge outwards, blurring the distinction between cloud and wind, sea and sky. Both Zao and Turner capture an atmospheric or an impression of nature; yet in contrast to Turner, Zao is able to incorporate the Chinese *Xieyi* (寫意) approach with the boldness of Western modernism, creating a dialogue between two traditions and furthering discourse in art history.

Dominique de Villepin, former French Prime Minister and Zao's long-time friend, also echoed this relationship between the works of Zao and Turner: 'His progression is the same as J.M.W. Turner's [...] Subjects become themes, the laboratories in which pure light is distilled, an epiphany of colours following the thread of the world back to creation. [...] What is offered to view is the apotheosis of light. I find a deep affinity between these two artistic pursuits, Turner's and Zao Wou-ki's, which took place more than a century apart.'^v

Misty Mountainscape

"The clouds rush in Propelling the rain The calm water begins to shiver As smoke

ascends" — Li Bai (Tang Dynasty), excerpt from Tianmu Mountain Ascended in a Dream

Despite an obvious turn to abstraction in the 1960s, the structure of Chinese landscape painting continued to inform Zao's works. The artist himself had noted in 1964: 'I tell myself I am not a landscapist. I refuse to let the landscape into my studio. But truthfully, perhaps that is because it enters more easily than anything else.'^{vi} In *14.10.69*, a strip of what seems to be land juts into the foreground as it curves around a river bend towards the right, where a breath of luminosity seeps through over the distant mountains in an enveloping, swirling mist, bearing visual similarities to Muqi's *Evening Light in Fishing Village* (from *Eight Views of Xiao-Xiang*).



Muqi (South Song Dynasty), *Evening Light in Fishing Village* (from *Eight Views of Xiao-Xiang*), Nezu Museum Tokyo, c. 1250

Calling upon his artistic experiences with brush and ink as a child, as well as his training at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, Zao began to adapt the visual lexicon of Chinese ink landscapes innovatively in a uniquely modern approach. Traditional methods such as *Feibai* (飛白), where a brush smudges across the surface, creating a sense of flight; *Liubai* (留白), where areas are intentionally left blank; and *Cunfa* (皴法), the technique of depicting the surface character of rocks and mountains of textured strokes, can all be observed in Zao's present work.

Zao achieves this effect by diluting oils with turpentine, successfully imitating the ethereal, flowing qualities of ink as it sinks into paper, simultaneously imbuing the oil medium with dazzling fluidity and ephemeral light. As the materiality of the medium transforms, so does one's perception of the work - the abstraction dissolves into a landscape, yet disintegrates again into abstraction.

"Planes rise up, masses as well: sea, mountain, sky. Even forms, those craquelure trees. You have the sense of a reconciled landscape [...] that brings to the surface both an Italian-style perspective and the drifting mists of Song Landscapes quivering on tissue paper." — Dominique de Villepin

Collector's Digest

With his charm and unquestionable talent, Zao cultivated an extensive circle of friendships with fellow artists and influential cultural figures during his lifetime, becoming one of the best-known painters of his generation. He developed close relationships with Jean-Paul Riopelle, Alberto Giacometti, Joan Miró, Hans Hartung, Pierre Soulages, Joan Mitchell, Sam Francis and I.M. Pei, among many others.



Chez Margot, Golfe-Juan, 1962 From left to right: The painter Joan Mitchell, Patricia Matisse, May Zao, the painter Jean-Paul Riopelle, the art dealer Pierre Matisse and Zao Wou-Ki

In early 2022, Sin-May Roy Zao [made a generous donation](#) of twelve works by Zao Wou-Ki to M+ Museum, Hong Kong, which now holds one of the largest collections of the artist's work outside of Europe. The donation includes nine prints, two oil paintings, and one watercolour painting ranging in dates from 1945 to 2005, spanning almost Zao's entire professional career.

As a truly global artist and cultural synthesiser, Zao's works can be found in over 150 public collections across 200 countries, which include the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim, and Tate Modern, amongst others. His legendary legacy continues to inspire generations of creators that come after, proving him to be of paramount importance in art history with unprecedented levels of contribution towards shaping and defining the face of contemporary art today.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAGx4chzDLw&ab_channel=Villepin

Video of Zao's most recent exhibition in Hong Kong at Villepin:

Zao Wou-Ki: The Eternal Return to China, 2021-2022

Video courtesy Villepin

ⁱ Zao Wou-Ki, quoted in Zao Wou-Ki, *Autoportrait*, Paris, 1988, pp. 139, 142

ⁱⁱ *ibid.*, p. 140

ⁱⁱⁱ Zao Wou-Ki, quoted in Melissa Walt, Michelle Yun and Ankeney Weitz, *No Limits: Zao Wou-Ki*, New Haven and London, 2016, p. 29

^{iv} *ibid.*

^v Dominique de Villepin, quoted in Yann Hendgen and Francoise Marquet, eds., *Zao Wou-Ki*, New York, 2018, p. 22

^{vi} Zao Wou-Ki, quoted in Melissa Walt, Michelle Yun and Ankeney Weitz, *No Limits: Zao Wou-Ki*, New Haven and London, 2016, p. 11

Provenance

Collection of Zao Wou-Ki

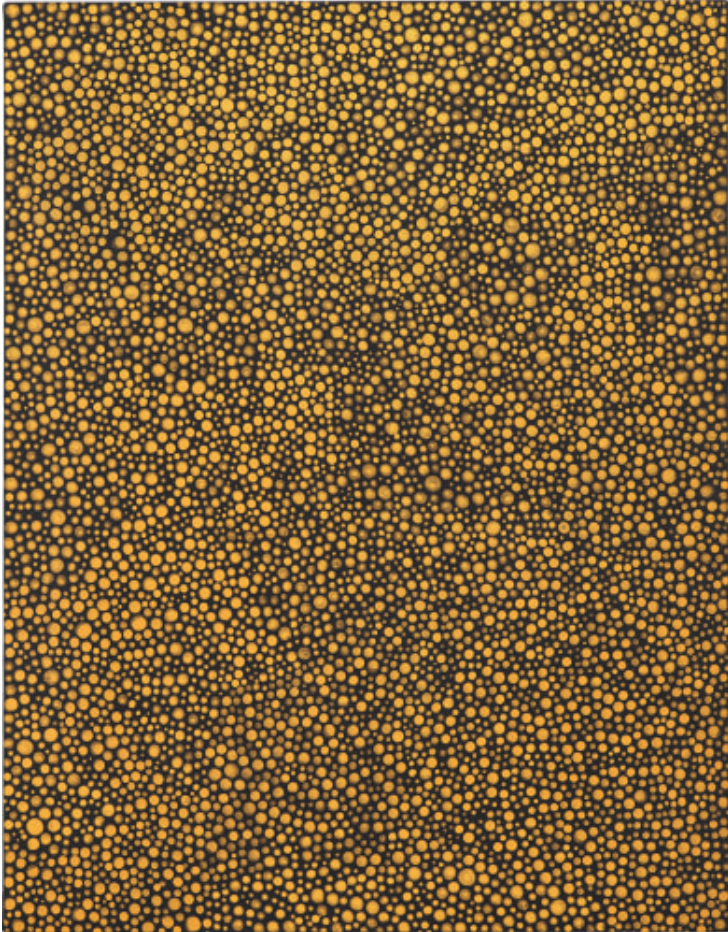
Thence by descent to the present owner

Literature

Pierre Daix, *Zao Wou-Ki, L'Oeuvre 1935-1993*, Neuchâtel, 1994, pp. 116, 223 (illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



PROPERTY OF A PRIVATE ASIAN COLLECTOR

15 *

Yayoi Kusama

Gold Accumulation (1)

signed, titled and dated 'yayoi Kusama 1999 "Gold Accumulation (1)" [in Japanese]' on the reverse
acrylic on canvas

117 x 91 cm. (46 1/8 x 35 7/8 in.)

Painted in 1999, this work is accompanied by a registration card issued by the artist's studio and a certificate of authenticity issued by Galerie Pierre, Taichung.

Estimate

HK\$8,000,000 — 12,000,000

€992,000 — 1,490,000

\$1,030,000 — 1,540,000

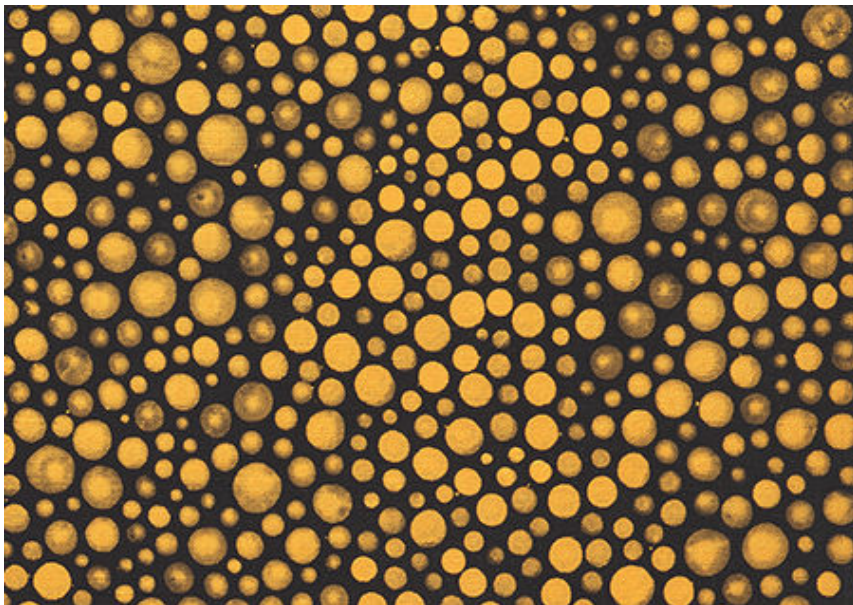
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Introduction

“Bring on Picasso, bring on Matisse, bring on anybody! I would stand up to them all with a single polka dot [...] I was betting everything on this and raising my revolutionary banner against all of history.” — Yayoi Kusama

Intricate in its execution and instantly arresting, *Gold Accumulation (1)* is an exquisite example of Kusama’s iconic motif – the polka dot. Accumulated over time, circles of impasto lay atop of one another, varying in degrees of opacity. With some more translucent than others, these dots coalesce into a wave of pattern, coming alive as they breathe and shimmer as if stars under the night sky. These all-encompassing dots form a fluctuating visual field that moves beyond the picture plane, immersing the viewer within a delicate web of pure gold.



Detail of the present lot

Painted in 1999, *Gold Accumulation (1)* marks the apex of a period when a major retrospective of Kusama’s works were shown in New York, Los Angeles and Tokyo, solidifying the artist’s international stardom and significance in the contemporary art world. The work was included as

one of only two acrylic paintings in Galerie Pierre’s exhibition, *Love Explosion: Yayoi Kusama After Ten Thousand Tribulations* in Taichung. The exhibition also presented multimedia works by Kusama, including soft sculptures, paintings, and collages. Named after the luxurious colour of gold, the current work bears auspicious meaning, and was the main focal point in Galerie Pierre’s exhibition as a new work at the time.



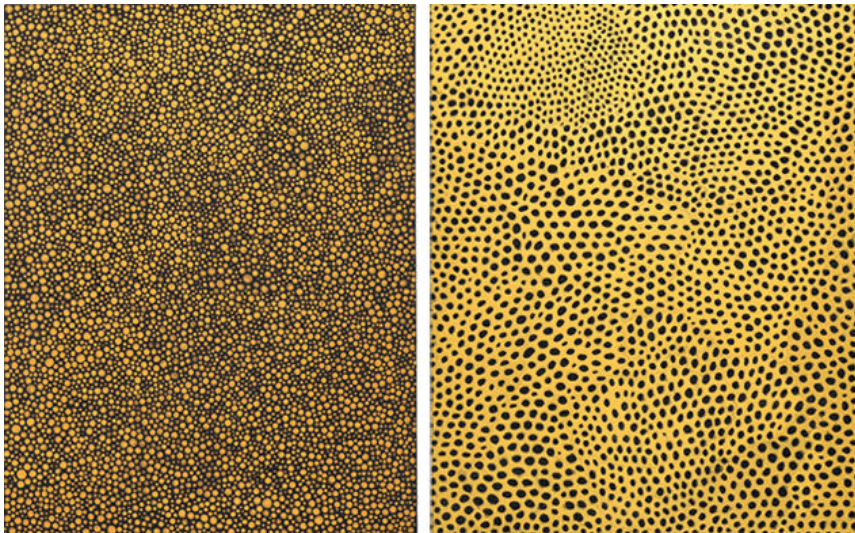
Installation shot of the current work (left) with the artist Taichung, Galerie Pierre, *Love Explosion: Yayoi Kusama After Ten Thousand Tribulations*, 29 May - 27 June 1999 Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

Presented in tandem with the largest retrospective of Kusama in Asia (outside Japan) at Hong Kong’s M+ Museum this year, the present work comes to auction for the first time after being cherished by an important Asian collection for more than two decades.

Accumulation and Repetition

“My desire was to predict and measure the infinity of the unbounded universe, from my own position in it, with dots — an accumulation of particles forming the negative spaces in the net.” — Yayoi Kusama

As an inverse variation of Kusama's celebrated *Infinity Net* paintings, dots and nets are two interchangeable motifs adopted by the artist to negate her neurosis. The artist once said: 'dots and accumulation of particles forming the negative spaces in the net... I wanted to examine the single dot that was my own life'¹. Kusama's works, such as *INFINITY-NETS (GMBKA)* and *Gold Accumulation (1)*, both arose from Kusama's kaleidoscopic neurosis and was further extrapolated and reconfigured into ceaseless art marking. Like both sides of one coin, these two works showcase Kusama's different artistic interpretations of the infinite.



Left: The present lot Right: Lot 12, Yayoi Kusama, *INFINITY-NETS (GMBKA)*, 2013 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD12,000,000 - 18,000,000

The Polka-Dot Queen

"Our earth is only one polka-dot among a million stars in the cosmos. Polka-dots are a way to infinity. [...] When we obliterate nature and our bodies with polka-dots, we become part of the unity of our environment. I become part of the eternal and we obliterate ourselves in love." — Yayoi Kusama

As a visual motif, the polka dot evolved from its first appearances in the backgrounds of Kusama's early drawings, to mirrored spheres in *Narcissus Garden* (1966) that was installed for the 33rd Venice Biennale, to an infinite pattern that sprawls across [pumpkins](#), [clothing](#), [mirror rooms](#) and

beyond. As such, *Gold Accumulation (1)* is an exceptional example that demonstrates part of Kusama's visual development of the dot motif, created during an early and celebrated period of the artist's career. *Gold Accumulation (1)* captures the artist's obsessional focus on accumulation, repetition, and the infinite – the three pillars that define Kusama's artistic practice.



Lot 211, Yayoi Kusama, *Red Shoe*, 1979 Phillips Hong Kong Day Sale, 30 November 2022 Estimate: HKD3,000,000 - 5,000,000

Kusama's devotion to polka dots can be traced back to a hallucinatory experience when she was ten years old: 'One day, looking at a red flower-patterned tablecloth on the table, I turned my eyes to the ceiling and saw the same red flower pattern everywhere, even on the window glass and posts. The room, my body, the entire universe was filled with it, my self was eliminated, and I had returned and been reduced to the infinity of eternal time and the absolute of space. This was not an illusion but reality. I was astounded. If I did not get away from there, I would be wrapped up in the spell of the red flowers and lose my life. I ran for the stairs without thinking of anything else. Looking down, I saw the steps fall away one by one, pulling my leg and making me trip and fall from the top of the stairs. I sprained my leg. Dissolving and accumulating, proliferating and

separating. A feeling of particles disintegrating and reverberations from an invisible universe...ⁱⁱⁱ



Yayoi Kusama in her *Phalli's Field* infinity room in 1965 Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

Kusama first arrived in the United States in Seattle, 1957. She then moved to New York in 1958, held her first solo exhibition in 1959. By the mid-60s, the polka dot had already become a trademark of her iconic oeuvre. It was seen across the artist's various *Happenings* performances, Infinity Mirror rooms, and on clothing she had designed. By covering her clothes, skin and the surrounding environment entirely, Kusama is able to find self-obliteration, allowing her to return to the natural universe: '[...] by covering my entire body with polka dots, then covering the background with polka dots as well, I find self-obliteration. The form disappears and assimilates into the dots, and when that happens, I too am obliterated. The ground -- or the mesh of the net -- is negative, and the polka dots placed upon the ground are positive. The positive and negative become one and consolidate my expression. And that is when I achieve obliteration.'ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

Over the years, Kusama had set up interactive *Obliteration Rooms* across numerous institutions, where visitors are invited to cover a completely white room with stickers. Over the course of a few weeks, the room is transformed from a white canvas into an explosion of dots, covering every visible surface. These rooms concretise Kusama's initial hallucinations in their true form, as she further extrapolates the idea of self-obliteration from the canvas and into a third dimension and

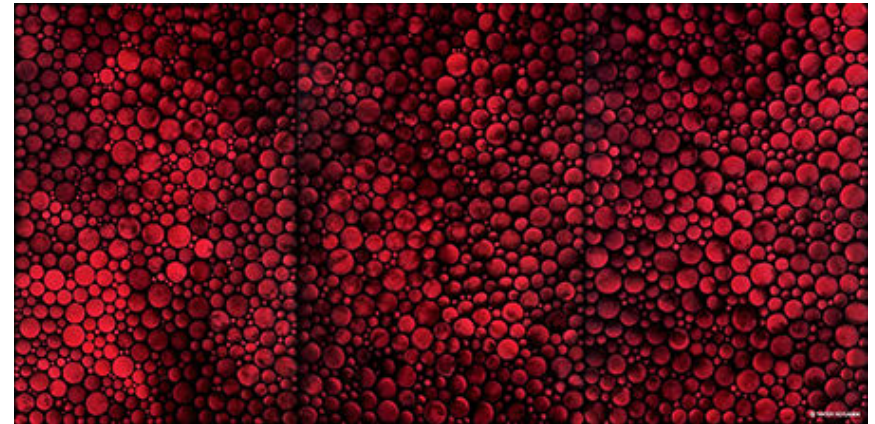
even fourth dimension, allowing the audience to participate and become a part of her dotty universe.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xNzr-fJHQw&ab_channel=Tate

Yayoi Kusama's interactive *Obliteration Room* at Tate Modern, 2012

Collector's Digest

Kusama's largest retrospective in Asia, *Yayoi Kusama: 1945 to Now*, 〈草間彌生：1945年至今〉 is currently on view at the M+ Museum in Hong Kong until 14 May 2023. The exhibition features 3 new works, and over 200 works across various international collections, the M+ collection as well as the artist's own collection.



Yayoi Kusama, *Accumulation of Stardust*, 2001 Collection of the Matsumoto Museum of Art Artwork: © YAYOI KUSAMA

The artist's exhibition, *Every Day I Pray for Love*, is also currently ongoing at the Yayoi Kusama Museum, Tokyo from 7 October 2022 - 26 February 2023. Recent notable solo exhibitions include: Tel Aviv Museum of Art; Berlin, Gropius Bau, 15 November 2021 - 23 April 2022; Victoria Miro, London, 4 June - 31 July 2021; Tate Modern, London, 11 May 2020 - 30 September 2022; amongst others.

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=10A_5_wrm-c&ab_channel=SouthChinaMorningPost

Yayoi Kusama: 1945 to Now, 〈草間彌生：1945年至今〉 is currently on view at the M+ Museum in Hong Kong

ⁱ Yayoi Kusama, quoted in Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, London, 2011, p. 23

ⁱⁱ Laura Hoptman, Akira Tatehata and Udo Kultermann, *Yayoi Kusama*, London, 2000, p. 35-36

ⁱⁱⁱ Yayoi Kusama, quoted in Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, London, 2011, p. 47

Provenance

Taichung, Galerie Pierre

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Taichung, Galerie Pierre, *Love Explosion: Yayoi Kusama After Ten Thousand Tribulations*, 29 May - 27 June 1999

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



16

Chiharu Shiota

State of Being (Boy's Kimono)

signed with the artist's initials 'CS' reverse lower right

metal, black thread and Kimono

151 x 100 x 80 cm. (59 1/2 x 39 3/8 x 31 1/2 in.)

Executed in 2013.

Estimate

HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000

€184,000 — 307,000

\$192,000 — 321,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Threads allow me to explore space, piling up layer after layer creates a surface like the night sky which gradually expands into the universe.” — Chiharu Shiota

Weaving entralling, otherworldly dimensions out of thread, Japanese artist Chiharu Shiota creates immersive installations and sculptures where the past and present collides, and the intangible is given form. Masterfully encapsulating abstract notions of personal memories and human existence, Shiota’s hauntingly beautiful works are fraught with the emotional power of absence.

Shiota predominantly uses red, black, or white colour schemes in her work; these colours each represent the interconnectedness between human relationships, the universe and unknown cosmos, and a timeless sense of purity and new beginnings respectively. With these monochromatic vacuums of space, Shiota focuses the viewer’s attention on the central object intertwined within, enabling them to tune into their emotional responses to the work without any distractions. Her large scale, site-specific installations encourage interaction, often creating passages for viewers to walk through and around in order to take in the full scope of the work, demanding both a physical and emotional engagement from the viewer.

The Presence of Absence

Grounded by everyday objects that belong to unknown strangers, Shiota’s woven sculptures suspend each item in time, reifying transient memories, making them tangible. These found objects – such as the kimono in the present work – hold symbolic personal connotations, or cultural significance. Each object captured within these intricate webs represent poignant personal narratives for the artist: ‘Many years ago, I bought some old suitcases at a flea market in Berlin. When I opened them at home, I could feel the existence of the previous owner. Even though I never met them, I could feel their presence. I believe the objects that surround us accumulate our existence. When I leave my bed in the morning, you can see traces of my body in the sheets.’ⁱ

“No one is there now but someone was there previously. This is the theme of my work. Someone is here and nobody is here. And traces of the person who previously owned and used these objects are present.” — Chiharu Shiota

In *State of Being (Boy’s Kimono)*, the presence of its previous owner is emphasised through the absence of a body. In her attempts in making the body’s absence tangible, Shiota’s works transcend the gap between the material and the abstract. Like labyrinths, countless lines of thread bind, circle and trace around these objects, alluding to a complex web of human connections, emotions and memories, which in turn carves out a deeply personal and poetic space that

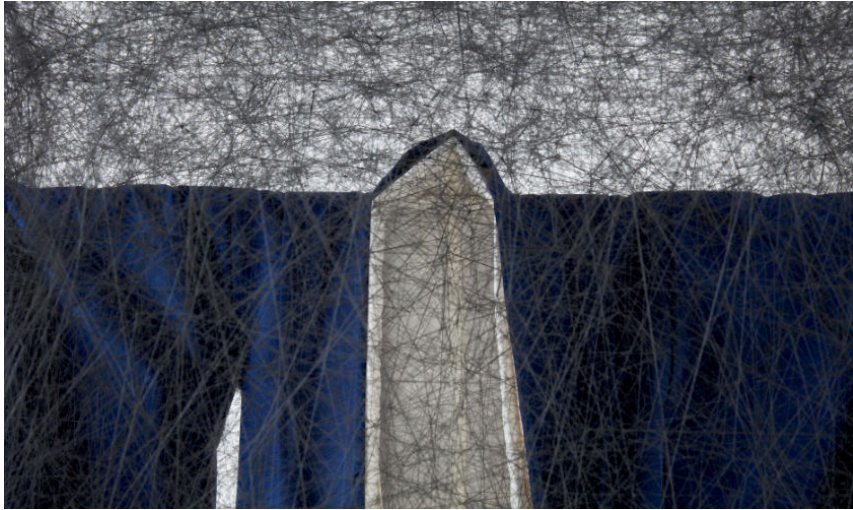
previously existed only in abstraction.

Vessels of Memory

Though mundane in its nature, clothes are extraordinary vessels of memory. Garments outlive their owners – their presence allude to an irrevocable absence. Bodies come and go, but the clothing that carried those bodies survive. Suspended, they take on a spectral guise.

“Clothing is... an exercise of memory... It makes me explore the past... How did I feel when I wore that...” — Louise Bourgeois

Shiota’s contemporaries such as Louise Bourgeois and Yayoi Kusama have all utilised fabric and clothing as conduits in communicating complex personal emotions of loss and memory. Often adapting garments that belonged to her mother who passes when she was only 22, Louise Bourgeois employed a variety of textiles that were cut up and contorted with exposed seams, others kept as they were. Items from her youth, such as the pink silk coats as seen in *Pink Days and Blue Days*, became mementos of her younger self, hanging freely or sewn closed to suggest the presence of human form. Similarly, Yayoi Kusama has also created [garments](#) which possess a unique tactile presence that gives them a decidedly sculptural dimension. However, in contrast to both Shiota and Bourgeois, Kusama’s garments stems from her infinite hallucinations and a desire to cover the universe – including bodies – with her signature motifs of polka dots, webs, and biomorphic patterns. These costumes were also used for her ‘happenings’, as the participants in her performances were dressed in clothing designed by the artist.



Detail of the present lot

Both Shiota and Bourgeois treats the clothing in their works with sentimentality. In *State of Being (Boy's Kimono)*, Shiota's time consuming, labour intensive process possess a meditative quality. The act of weaving around a central object suggests a protective tenderness towards it, as each item is surrounded by layers of coloured thread within a metal frame. These vitrines of quiet contemplation envelopes the object and its histories within a deliberate stillness, frozen in time, memorialising and preserving the stories associated within.

Weaving Connections

“All my work is inspired by my life or by a personal emotion. I try to expand this emotion into something universal to connect with others. I have tried to express emotions in my art that I would never be able to explain.” — Chiharu Shiota

Central to the artist's practice, strings were an escape from the canvas for Shiota. Feeling more connected to the string as a material than paint, Shiota started doing performance and installation art with thread: ‘When you weave string, it's a communication with the space. It's like painting a picture in the air.’ⁱⁱ First incorporating threads as a medium in 1999, Shiota started her exploration with the medium with her large-scale installation *Dreaming Time*, where she connected 450 shoes with red strings, pulling the ends up towards a centre point suspended under an outline of a house

made from black thread.



Installation of *Dreaming Time* (1999), at Asian Fine Arts Berlin / Prüss & Ochs Gallery, Berlin, Germany
Artwork: © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Despite originating from the personal, Shiota's sculptures and installations explore emotions that are universally resonated with. Representing Japan in the 2015 Venice Biennale, Shiota stretched a myriad of red lines around worn-out gondolas, wrapping and suspending rusty keys in the space above. Speaking to contemporary experiences of migration and diaspora, each vessel contains their distinct histories and unique traces of human life. The presence of each traveller can be felt, despite their physical absence. Shiota believes that ‘by creating webs, I tend to wrap individual memories and shine a light on human relationships.’ⁱⁱⁱ Similar to *The Key in the Hand* (2015), the *State of Being* series can be seen as a commentary and exploration into human existence and the interconnectedness of life and death.



Installation view of *The Key in the Hand* (2015) at the Japanese Pavilion, 56th Venice Biennale, 2015
Artwork: © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Collector's Digest

Born in 1972 in Osaka, Shiota studied painting at Kyoto Seika University before continuing her artistic education at the University of Fine Arts of Hamburg, the Berlin University of the Arts, and the Braunschweig University of Art, where she was a student of performance artist Marina Abramovic. Currently based in Berlin, Chiharu Shiota won international acclaim after her representation of Japan at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015.

Her largest travelling retrospective to date, *The Soul Trembles*, just closed in October at the Queensland Art Gallery of Modern Art (QAGoMA), Brisbane. It was touring at the [Long Museum](#) in Shanghai in 2021, and at the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; the Busan Museum of Art; the Gallery of Modern Art in Australia; and the Museum MACAN, Indonesia previously. The artist is represented by Gallery Templon, König Gallery, and Mimmo Scognamiglio Artecontemporanea.

This spring, Musée Guimet presented Chiharu Shiota's work in [Carte blanche to Chiharu Shiota](#), which ran from 16 March - 6 June 2022. [Chiharu Shiota: Multiple Realities](#), is still ongoing at the Cisternerne Museum in Copenhagen until 30 November 2022.

Video: <https://youtu.be/cyDc7hU29gM>

Chiharu Shiota interviewed in March 2022 for her exhibition *Multiple Realities* at Cisternerne in Copenhagen, Denmark

ⁱ Chiharu Shiota, as quoted in TF Chan, 'At home with artist Chiharu Shiota', *Wallpaper*, 1 June 2020, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Chiharu Shiota, as quoted in 'Artist Chiharu Shiota Uses String to Draw in Space', *Louisiana Channel* (*Louisiana Museum of Modern Art*), Youtube, 22 April 2022, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Chiharu Shiota, as quoted in 'Interview:Chiharu Sota' *Dreamideamachine ART VIEW*, 11 April 2017, [online](#)

Provenance

Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Paris, Galerie Daniel Templon, *Small Room*, 7 June - 23 July, 2014



17 o

Javier Calleja

Once in Life

signed, titled and dated '2018 Javier Calleja "ONCE IN LiFE"' on the overlap

acrylic on canvas

195.5 x 162.8 cm. (76 7/8 x 64 1/8 in.)

Painted in 2018.

Estimate

HK\$2,700,000 — 3,800,000

€334,000 — 470,000

\$346,000 — 487,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“I think that my style is more connected with my real beginnings, my childhood, and me and I didn’t find it, and I’m still waiting for it to change. 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

Summoning feelings of childhood innocence and curiosity, *Once in Life* is a compelling rendition of Spanish artist Javier Calleja’s instantly relatable and light-hearted imagery. First unveiled in Tokyo at NANZUKA Gallery during their 2018 exhibition titled *Do Not Touch*, the endearing canvas depicts a wide-eyed, macrocephalic child reaching out to the viewer with his genuine sense of sincerity and hope.



The present work exhibited at Tokyo, NANZUKA, *Do Not Touch*, 24 November – 22 December 2018
Image: Courtesy of Nanzuka Underground, Artwork: © Javier Calleja

Born and based in the Spanish port city of Málaga, the birthplace of fellow Spanish artist Pablo Picasso, Calleja’s earliest influences of his art were childhood comics, cartoons, and toys. Ranging from tiny drawings to large-scale installations, his impressive body of works is the result of his long-term experimentation across a wide range of techniques and mediums. Recognised for his paintings of children that are visually endearing, and straightforward in its messaging, Calleja has

garnered strong international following over the past few years for his signature sculptures, paintings and drawings combining whimsy with satirical and philosophical flair.

Keep It Simple

Having difficulty relating to the famous artists in the 1990s who were highly conceptual about the process and meaning behind each work, Calleja had elaborated: ‘there is something behind my work, but I don’t like to explain it. I prefer that the viewers are the ones to finish that.’ⁱ Going along with his style of selective explanation, Calleja also favours simple subjects, as he explains, ‘I like simple things. Simple, but not easy. I always say that I like to find a magic moment.’ One aspect to this magic moment refers to the brief period between when a viewer first sees a Calleja’s work and goes ‘Wow.’, and before their brain starts to look for a logical explanation for the meaning of the work.ⁱⁱ



Javier Calleja, *No Step Back*, 2019 Sold by Phillips, Hong Kong, 7 June 2021 for HKD6,542,000 (Premium) Artwork: © Javier Calleja

For Calleja, the emphasis of the figure is on those big, colourful eyes. Everything else such as the background and the character's T-shirt is pared down to the bare minimum with pure colours, in juxtaposition with the sometimes mischievous, sometimes innocent looks in those glassy, three-dimensional 'windows of the soul'. Calleja paints from his own experience and understanding as a viewer, 'when your eyes notice the eyes in the painting, the brain feels like the whole image is real. They are very important to people. So your brain is looking at something real but your eyes are looking at something not real, and I think there is some kind of magic in such a moment.'ⁱⁱⁱ

Not That Simple

"They have, you know, the eyes, puppy eyes. But it's with red. And the nose is also red. And the eyes are really shiny, watery. So these guys are happy because they just stopped crying. Do you know this moment when you are crying or a child is crying, but then start to smile again?" — Javier Calleja

Calleja's simple subject matter lends itself to being the element of surprise for delivering profound messages contained in clichés that have been overlooked. The subject of endearment in the present work, is the little blond-haired character making direct eye contact with the viewer with his immensely bright and gradient green eyes, set off by an earth-toned backdrop. With a tender smile on his face, the boy's rosy lips and orange-tinted nose indicates a cry that may have taken place a moment ago. With hands slightly put back, he emanates a sense of excited anticipation, allowing more attention to land on the slogan that sits his periwinkle t-shirt: 'Once in Life'.

'Once in Life' coincides with the idea of 'Ichi-go ichi-e' 「一期一會」 in Japanese culture, referring to once-in-a-lifetime moments and treasuring the unrepeatable nature of each encounter, cueing the famous saying by the Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus: 'change is the only constant in life.' Everything changes in the ephemeral phenomenon we call human life, and this sense of instability and unknown inspires us to 'carpe diem' -- seize the day. Full of childlike sincerity and hope, our endearing protagonist's adorable face belies the profound meaning of the slogan.

All About That Connection

Depictions of upbeat, mischievous children lie at the core of Calleja's practice. As a recurring subject-matter throughout art history, children portraiture is an imagery that never gets old, for it is a symbolic motif for going back to the basics with the carefree joy and the unbound curiosity that we all share as little ones. Historically, children's portraits are done for the royals, and the children of the rich and the powerful, seen in works by Spanish court painter Diego Velázquez. As time went on, artists such as Renoir and Picasso brought their own styles into the exploration of this subject. As a result of their artistic investigation and the social climates of the time they lived in, the subject of depiction has become more and more relatable to the common viewer, with conspicuously less telling of the protagonist imbued in the attributes and surroundings, and much more focused on the behaviour and emotions of the actual person. This is well demonstrated through Calleja's individualised style in *Once in Life*.



Diego Velázquez, María Teresa (1638-1683), Infanta of Spain, 1651-54 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Lucie Berard (Child in White)*, 1883 Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago
Image: Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection, 1933.1173



Pablo Picasso, *Child with A Dove*, 1901 Private Collection Image: Bridgeman Images, Artwork: © 2022 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

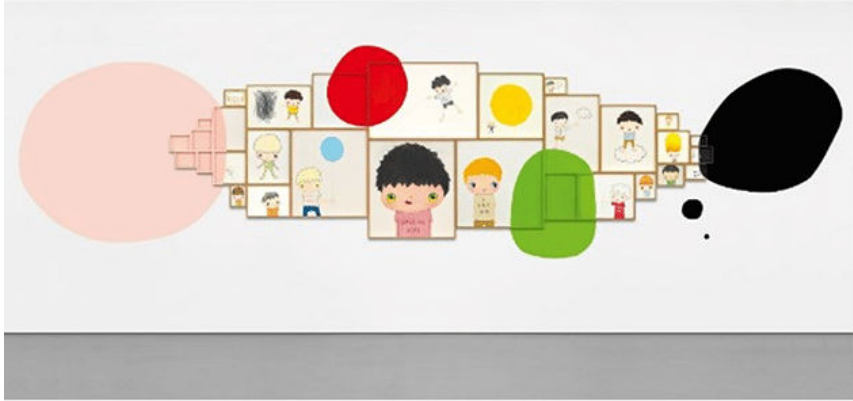
Art speaks for the zeitgeist of its time, and Calleja's oeuvre is part of the movement that has been pushing for the democracy of art connoisseurship — making the enjoyment of art more laid-back and accessible to all. Having the capacity of being universally understood and admired, Calleja's work empowers the viewer as it requires no prerequisite art historical background, and thus allows for expanded possibilities for interpretations. The simple imagery serves as the vehicle to interact and communicate, complemented by humorous and thought-provoking slogans, which express a global sentiment of desiring childhood innocence and simplicity in a rather intricate and fast-paced society.

Collector's Digest

One of the biggest names in contemporary art today, Calleja's works have been widely exhibited at numerous prestigious galleries and institutions worldwide, including solo exhibitions at Almine Rech in Shanghai (2021), Bill Brady in Miami (2020), and AISHONANZUKA in Hong Kong (2019, 2017), among many others. 2022 sees an incredible line-up for the artist, most notable being the solo shows with [Almine Rech in Paris](#) (2 June - 25 June 2022), PARCO Museum in Tokyo (30 June - 18 July 2022), and with [Almine Rech in Shanghai](#) (8 July - 6 August 2022).

The artist's most recent solo show, [Javier Calleja: MR. GÜNTER, THE CAT SHOW](#), had just ended at the Centre of International Contemporary Art, Vancouver, lasting from 6 October to 6 November, 2022.

Calleja set his personal auction record with Phillips Hong Kong in 2021 when his multi-part installation, *30 Works: Untitled* sold for HK\$12,108,000. It is an early example of the artist's signature aesthetic, having been created in 2017— the year he first debuted his beloved big-eyed children at AISHONANZUKA in Hong Kong. Collectors have been clamouring for Calleja's work ever since, and demand, particularly in Asia, is at an all-time high as his popularity continues to skyrocket.



Javier Calleja, *30 Works: Untitled*, 2017 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong, 30 November 2021, for HKD12,108,000 (Premium)

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

ⁱⁱ *ibid.*

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid.*

Provenance

NANZUKA, Tokyo

Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2018

Exhibited

NANZUKA, Tokyo, "*Do Not Touch*", 24 November - 22 December 2018

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



18

Izumi Kato

Untitled

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

wood, soft vinyl and acrylic

211.5 x 45 x 54 cm. (83 1/4 x 17 3/4 x 21 1/4 in.)

Executed in 2017.

Estimate

HK\$1,500,000 — 2,500,000

€187,000 — 311,000

\$192,000 — 321,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“When I see cave paintings, I feel something very powerful. On another level, when I see Van Gogh’s work, I also have a very strong response, and I believe there is a bond with these pieces. It is the same with the work of Francis Bacon. These are paintings one can truly say are interesting works and I feel close affinities with these artists. Without sounding pretentious, perhaps I am the continuity of these artists? Perhaps, I am in the continuity of a broader tradition, at the other end of the cave paintings?”
— Izumi Kato

Enigmatically primitive in its presentation, the captivating forms of Izumi Kato call to mind cave drawings and majestic statues from the past. At once serene and grandiose, *Untitled* incorporates aspects of the classical, yet is endearingly modern as Kato’s inventive forms relate to certain aesthetic and iconographic codes that are universal and can still be resonated with today.

Since 2005, Kato has added sculpture into his repertoire as a natural extension of his paintings, and they now remain critical to his practice. Incorporating a variety of mediums in these works, Kato’s sculptures are hand-chiselled, with marks and cracks still visible on the surface of his roughly hewn figures. Based on instinctive premonition rather than intention, the elementary representation of bodily features in Kato’s sculptures are rendered with simple outlines, presenting to the viewer a pure and simplistic meditation on sculpture itself.



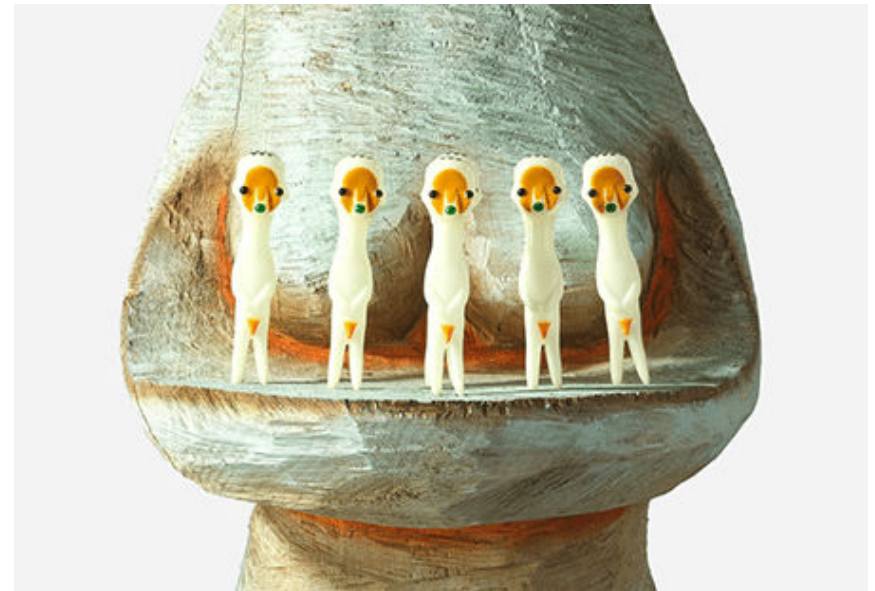
Installation view of the current work (right) at Beijing, Red Brick Art Museum, Izumi Kato, 25 August -

14 October 2018 Photo: Yu Xing & Li Yang, Yusuke Sato Image and Artwork: © 2018 Izumi Kato. Courtesy Red Brick Art Museum, the Artist and Perrotin

Exhibited at the artist’s seminal retrospective at the Red Brick Art Museum in Beijing, *Untitled* features a central totem figure, protected by translucent vinyl spirits as they rest peacefully in the protagonist’s arms and on its head. Without feet, these anthropomorphic figures possess a mysterious and tranquil aura. The protagonist in *Untitled* gazes directly at the viewer with a pair of sparkling eyes, leaving a lingering presence, impactful with a powerful visual language that draws upon the relationship between nature and humanity.

Spiritual Presence

On first impression, Kato’s strange creatures with their curious expressions and missing feet seem extra-terrestrial, yet neither hostile nor benevolent. With their humanoid shape and luminous texture, the tiny vinyl figures rest atop the main protagonist in *Untitled*, emerging from its body.



Detail of the present lot

Growing up in the seaside mountains of Shimane prefecture in Japan, Kato was surrounded by archaic religions that are still prevalent and practised in these coastal lands. Legends and folklore strongly shape the area, as one of Japan's oldest Shinto shrines – Izumo Tisha – is still worshipped here.

In Shintoism, spirits are believed to be present in every part of nature, be it animals, natural phenomena, or in the environment. These white creatures present in the current work share a striking resemblance with the *Kodama*, or tree spirits, from Studio Ghibli's *Princess Mononoke*. Their faces are vaguely circular, as if pebbles sculptured from chance, pierced in irregular fashion by eyes and a mouth. Upon inspection in the dark, these figures also emit an ethereal glow. This parallel is clear as in the original anime: the *Kodama* are silent, translucent creatures who also float about, appearing and disappearing at will, accompanying trees in life and death as protectors.



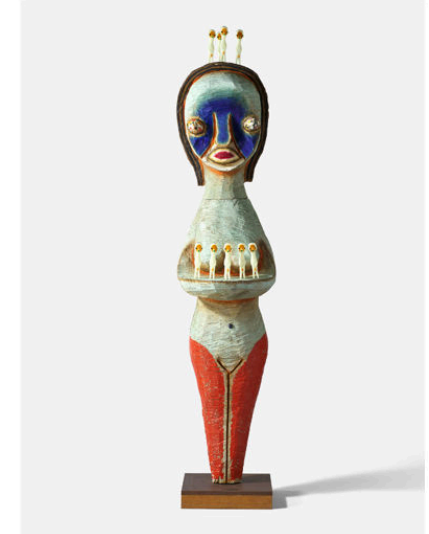
Kodama (tree spirits) in Studio Ghibli's *Princess Mononoke*, 1997 Image: Photo 12 / Alamy Stock Photo

Modern Totem

As myths from his childhood home trickle down and shape Kato's work, many of his sculptures strongly evoke the ancient figuration of primitive totems, each characterised with large heads, and mysterious, glowing yet expressionless eyes.



Left: *Totem Pole for Beaver House*, mid-19th century Made in Q'aayang (Kayang) Village, Queen Charlotte Islands, British Columbia, Canada Collection of the Brooklyn Museum, New York Image: Brooklyn Museum, Museum Expedition 1911, Purchased with funds given by Robert B. Woodward, 11.703a-b Right: The present lot



Most notably, Kato's *Untitled* is aesthetically comparable to Japanese *Dogū* from the Jomon period– clay figures produced about 13,000 years ago with unique characteristics which distinguish them from ancient European or West Asian ritual figures. Similar distinct features could also be found in Kato's sculptures, such as the round mouth, wide set eyes and prominent nose in *Untitled*. These *Dogū* act as symbols of prehistoric Japan, their influence reaching beyond that of Kato's work and into contemporary culture, prevalent in comics and computer games.



Dogū (Clay Figurine), Japan, Final Jōmon period, ca. 1000–300 B.C. [Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art](#), New York Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Harry G. C. Packard Collection of Asian Art, Gift of Harry G. C. Packard, and Purchase, Fletcher, Rogers, Harris Brisbane Dick, and Louis V. Bell Funds, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, and The Annenberg Fund Inc. Gift, 1975, 1975.268.193

Paradoxically, these references are not always deliberate for Kato, even if they draw on ancient cultural traditions: ‘I have recently realised that growing up in Shimane, where the history of Jomon is very present, [it] had a much bigger influence on me than I had thought. It was felt in my daily life when I was a child until I became a teenager, and it kind of formed my aesthetics.’ⁱ

*“All the movements and compositions are arrived at instinctively, naturally, from my inner side, with all the life experience that I have gone through and digested.” —
Izumi Kato*

Kato’s inventive totemic sculptures bestows upon us an aura that lies outside of time and space. With their posture and expression, these sculptures facilitate a connection and exchange between the viewer and the artwork, astonishing in their inexorable beauty.

In Interview: Sculptural Dimension



Installation view of the current work at Hong Kong, Perrotin, [Izumi Kato](#), 19 January - 6 March 2018
Image and Artwork: © 2018 Izumi Kato. Courtesy the Artist and Perrotin

In 2018, Izumi Kato spoke to Post-ism in an interview surrounding his 2018 exhibition with Perrotin, Hong Kong, elaborating into the creative process of his sculptural works:

Post-ism: *How does your approach to sculpture differ from that to painting? What does one allow you to do that the other doesn’t? And how do they inform each other?*

Izumi Kato: For the art, I use different materials for sculpture and the paintings. I purely want to improve my work, that’s why I get inspiration from the material and use it for my art work. It’s not intentional, the choice to make sculpture or painting. I don’t want the art work to have any [definitive] meaning. What I mean is, it’s not something I want to explain.

[...]

Post-ism: *I’m interested in this idea of dissection in your work. Your sculptures are composed of several pieces, sometimes using different materials and different forms for the head and body. And your canvases, particularly the recent series, are divided into halves or thirds and look like they have almost been collaged together. What is the thinking behind this?*

IK: As an artist I feel like I have moved on and developed from my last exhibition. I wanted to use different materials to create works as I imagine them. Even the canvas itself, last time it was one piece now two. I have gotten much more confident in using different materials, but it's still of course the one piece of art. I think that's where my art has become most different. I want to challenge myself. It's like the rock music, it's about challenging myself, and exploring new things, new materials.

Post-ism: *For some of the sculptural works in the Perrotin Hong Kong exhibition you incorporate granite found on the shore near your studio as a found object. What was it like to work with this new material? What does working with this new material bring to your work?*

IK: Painting on the stone requires more time to settle on the stone than canvas. The techniques are different, and it takes much longer. Wood and stone require a brush because the tool is much more suitable for the material.

Upcoming work is with Hong Kong stone from the shore outside my studio. The stones have their own characteristics of the geological area. The Japanese stones in the exhibition are round, the Hong Kong ones are much pointier and sharper. Usually when I create on stones it's different to canvas. I don't paint the whole stone – I leave part of it unpainted. I want the audience to see the original pure stone with the work, to see the character of the stone.

Read the full interview [here](#)

Collector's Digest

Kato's inclusion in the 2007 Venice Biennale exhibition *Think with the Senses – Feel with the Mind* propelled his career onto the international stage, and he continues to garner critical attention around the world. The artist has recently been honoured with multiple institutional solo shows at CHAT Hong Kong (2020), the Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing (2020), the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum (2020). And the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2019).

The artist [joined Stephen Friedman](#) in 2021, and will have an upcoming solo exhibition with the gallery in November 2022, and another exhibition with WATARI-UM in Tokyo, [IZUMI KATO - Parasitic Plastic Plamodels](#), lasting from 6 November 2022 to 12 March 2023.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9ZCyHiWfIA>

Interview with the artist on the occasion of his exhibition at Red Brick Art Museum, Beijing, 2018

ⁱ Izumi Kato, quoted in Raphaël Gatel and Manon Lutanie, eds., *Izumi Kato*, Paris, 2020, p. 7

Provenance

Perrotin, Hong Kong

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

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

Beijing, Red Brick Art Museum, *Izumi Kato*, 25 August - 14 October 2018

Literature

Stephanie Bailey, 'Izumi Kato', *Artforum*, April 2018, vol. 56, no. 8, p. 203 (illustrated)

Grace Ignacia See, 'Izumi Kato: "Inspiration comes from all aspects of life, simply from being alive."', *the Artling*, 11 September 2018, online (installation view illustrated)

Raphaël Gatel and Manon Lutanie, eds., *Izumi Kato*, Paris, 2020, p. 196 (installation view illustrated)



19

Michaël Borremans

The Butter Sculptor

signed, titled, dated and inscribed 'M.M.C.G.
Borremans O.O.C. M.M. "The Butter Sculptor" 2000.'
on the reverse
oil on canvas
70 x 60 cm. (27 1/2 x 23 5/8 in.)
Painted in 2000.

Estimate

HK\$2,800,000 — 3,500,000

€346,000 — 433,000

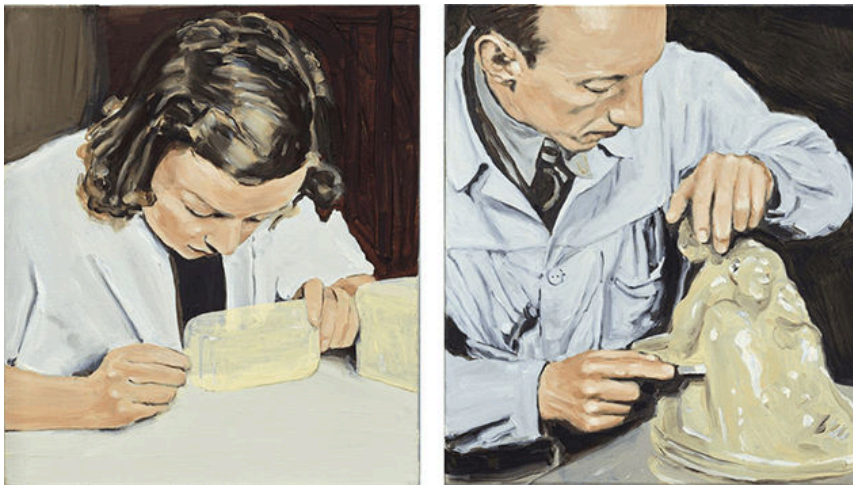
\$359,000 — 449,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Everything is defined; in painting, it is not.” — Michaël Borremans

Disquieting yet compelling, Belgian painter Michaël Borremans’ works are characterised by his unique style of figuration that features staged scenes based on photographic source images, exploring the potent and complicated relationship between reality and painting – the real and imaginary, the source and interpretation.



Left: Lot 20, *The Assistant*, 2000 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD3,200,000 - 4,200,000 Right: Lot 19, *The Butter Sculptor*, 2000 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD2,800,000 - 3,500,000

Both executed in 2000, *The Assistant* and *The Butter Sculptor* were painted during a decisive year for the artist when clarity was within Borremans’ oeuvre¹. This year marked the beginning of his distinctive photorealist style and the gradual increase of film influences in his work. Borremans started producing his own films in 2002 – only two years after the creation of these works – which he started screening in 2007.

Lost Images

Rendered in an intimate scale that draws the viewer to the story within, Borremans’ images are like stills from a non-existent film that free-floats in an enigmatic space, rejecting any definitive

narrative or interpretation.



Detail of *The Butter Sculptor*, 2000

In *The Assistant* and *The Butter Sculptor*, Borremans utilises elegiac washes of pale yellows, creamy whites, and shades of dark brown, creating a subtle hazy effect that mimics old photographs kept away in old family albums. Possibly referencing his own grandfather who was a baker turned photographer himself, *The Butter Sculptor* depicts an older gentleman reshaping a large mountain of melting butter, whilst *The Assistant* shows a younger girl playing with a fresh cube of the same substance, with its title alluding to the collaborative relationship between this pair of protagonists.

“Images aren’t supposed to be seen this way, you are obliged [to see them filtered through the process that reproduced them for the eye]. I am looking for ‘lost images’ [for instance] images on TV; some scenes are important in the story, [but others are not, they] are ‘in-between’; I try to make use of them.” — Michaël Borremans

Borremans uses source photographs for references, including pictures downloaded from the internet, film stills, and images taken from television. These appropriated pictures introduce a deeper layer of mystery and subjectivity to the end result, implying that no matter the reality of the scene at the instant the image is taken, it both documents and transforms that moment into fiction. Displacing the aura of the original by re-photographing it, Borremans felt this strategy allowed him to ‘get closer by getting further away’ further eroding the significance of the original.ⁱⁱ



Detail of *The Assistant*, 2000

By reworking his source images, Borremans implies that his paintings are subconscious expressions. Though without any logical explanations, he does not imply that they are imaginary: ‘Sure, there is nothing there. On the other hand, all is there.’ⁱⁱⁱ

In the Eye of the Beholder

“The paintings always include several elements that refer to other matters outside the painting. I create my paintings in such a way that these references never converge, it remains a puzzle because nothing can ever be defined.” — Michaël Borremans

At first glance, the subject matter of butter draws associations to the fat sculptures of Joseph Beuys. Recontextualising overlooked and mundane objects such as furniture – and in this case, fat – Beuys’ *Fat Chair* is an homage to the substance; as he explained, it had saved his life during World War II.



Joseph Beuys, *Fat Chair*, 1964–1985 Artwork: © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Aesthetically, Borremans’ work is more comparable with works by Old Master painters such as Edouard Manet, Antoine Villon, or Diego Velazquez. Imbuing his portraits with his iconic sepia tones, Borremans embraces the painting medium and genre for its deterministic illusory quality.



Édouard Manet, *Jean-Baptiste Faure*, 1882-83 Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William B. Jaffe, 1950, 50.71.1

However, different from portraits by Manet or Velazquez, the eyes of Borremans' characters are always downcast or averted, such as in *The Assistant* and *The Butter Sculptor*. Intentionally depicted as so, the artist explains that a direct gaze is not suitable for his works, since it will characterise the work as a portrait, offering the protagonist authenticity, originality and power. Deliberately ambiguous with mysterious signifiers, Borremans' methodology fulfils his intentions of creating works that are situated 'outside [of] time, a space where time has been cancelled'^{iv}, and where his characters become objects instead, defying clear interpretation.



Left: Antoine Vollon, *Mound of Butter*, 1875-1885 Collection of the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Image: National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Chester Dale Fund, 1992.95.1 Right: Detail of *The Butter Sculptor*, 2000

Borremans explains that painting cannot be seen as purely conceptual: 'There is always in [some] way an emotional and personal quality involved.'^v The psychology that constructs his paintings offer insight into the artist's articulation that in his painting there is no reality, which in turns places emphasis on what the viewer brings to the experience of looking at the painting itself. To delve into Borremans' narratives is very comparable to looking at one's internal reflection in the mirror, as the narratives act as prompts, and any meaning or significance ascribed to them is likely to be a projection stemming from the viewer's own psyche. The beauty of the artist's artistic exploration lies in the direct contact with the multifaceted human nature that is much more easily perceived than articulated or analysed.

"There is no story. Everything is implicit. I try to initiate a dialogue because if you become explicit, you always get it wrong — as if you believe that a kind of truth actually exists." — Michaël Borremans

Collector's Digest

Born 1963 in Geraardsbergen, Belgium, Michaël Borremans received his M.F.A. from Hogeschool voor Wetenschap en Kunst, Ghent. Borremans's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at a number of prominent institutions, including [Michaël Borremans: The Advantage](#), the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2014); [Michaël Borremans: Fixture](#), Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga (2015-2016); the artist's major museum survey, [Michaël Borremans:](#)

[As sweet as it gets](#), which included one hundred works from the past two decades, at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (2014), which travelled to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Dallas Museum of Art (2015).

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The artist's most recent exhibition, [The Acrobat](#), had just closed at David Zwirner New York, which lasted from 28 April - 4 June 2022.

ⁱ Jeffrey Grove, 'Ventilating a Nihilist Vision', *Michaël Borremans: Paintings*, Ostfildern, 2009, p. 5

ⁱⁱ *ibid*, p. 10

ⁱⁱⁱ Luk Lambrecht, 'Michael Borremans, I am an Avant-Garde Artist', *Flash Art*, October 2006, p. 75

^{iv} Jeffrey Grove, 'Ventilating a Nihilist Vision', *Michaël Borremans: Paintings*, Ostfildern, 2009, p. 6

^v *ibid*, p. 8

Provenance

Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Literature

Jeffrey Grove, *Michaël Borremans: Paintings*, Ostfildern, 2009, p. 6 (illustrated, p. 19)



20

Michaël Borremans

The Assistant

signed, titled, dated and inscribed 'M.M.C.G.
Borremans "The Assistant" O.O.C. 2000' on the
reverse

oil on canvas

70 x 60 cm. (27 1/2 x 23 5/8 in.)

Painted in 2000.

Estimate

HK\$3,200,000 — 4,200,000

€395,000 — 519,000

\$410,000 — 538,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Everything is defined; in painting, it is not.” — Michaël Borremans

Disquieting yet compelling, Belgian painter Michaël Borremans’ works are characterised by his unique style of figuration that features staged scenes based on photographic source images, exploring the potent and complicated relationship between reality and painting – the real and imaginary, the source and interpretation.



Left: Lot 20, *The Assistant*, 2000 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD3,200,000 - 4,200,000 Right: Lot 19, *The Butter Sculptor*, 2000 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD2,800,000 - 3,500,000

Both executed in 2000, *The Assistant* and *The Butter Sculptor* were painted during a decisive year for the artist when clarity was within Borremans’ oeuvre¹. This year marked the beginning of his distinctive photorealist style and the gradual increase of film influences in his work. Borremans started producing his own films in 2002 – only two years after the creation of these works – which he started screening in 2007.

Lost Images

Rendered in an intimate scale that draws the viewer to the story within, Borremans’ images are like stills from a non-existent film that free-floats in an enigmatic space, rejecting any definitive

narrative or interpretation.



Detail of *The Butter Sculptor*, 2000

In *The Assistant* and *The Butter Sculptor*, Borremans utilises elegiac washes of pale yellows, creamy whites, and shades of dark brown, creating a subtle hazy effect that mimics old photographs kept away in old family albums. Possibly referencing his own grandfather who was a baker turned photographer himself, *The Butter Sculptor* depicts an older gentleman reshaping a large mountain of melting butter, whilst *The Assistant* shows a younger girl playing with a fresh cube of the same substance, with its title alluding to the collaborative relationship between this pair of protagonists.

“Images aren’t supposed to be seen this way, you are obliged [to see them filtered through the process that reproduced them for the eye]. I am looking for ‘lost images’ [for instance] images on TV; some scenes are important in the story, [but others are not, they] are ‘in-between’; I try to make use of them.” — Michaël Borremans

Borremans uses source photographs for references, including pictures downloaded from the internet, film stills, and images taken from television. These appropriated pictures introduce a deeper layer of mystery and subjectivity to the end result, implying that no matter the reality of the scene at the instant the image is taken, it both documents and transforms that moment into fiction. Displacing the aura of the original by re-photographing it, Borremans felt this strategy allowed him to ‘get closer by getting further away’ further eroding the significance of the original.ⁱⁱ



Detail of *The Assistant*, 2000

By reworking his source images, Borremans implies that his paintings are subconscious expressions. Though without any logical explanations, he does not imply that they are imaginary: ‘Sure, there is nothing there. On the other hand, all is there.’ⁱⁱⁱ

In the Eye of the Beholder

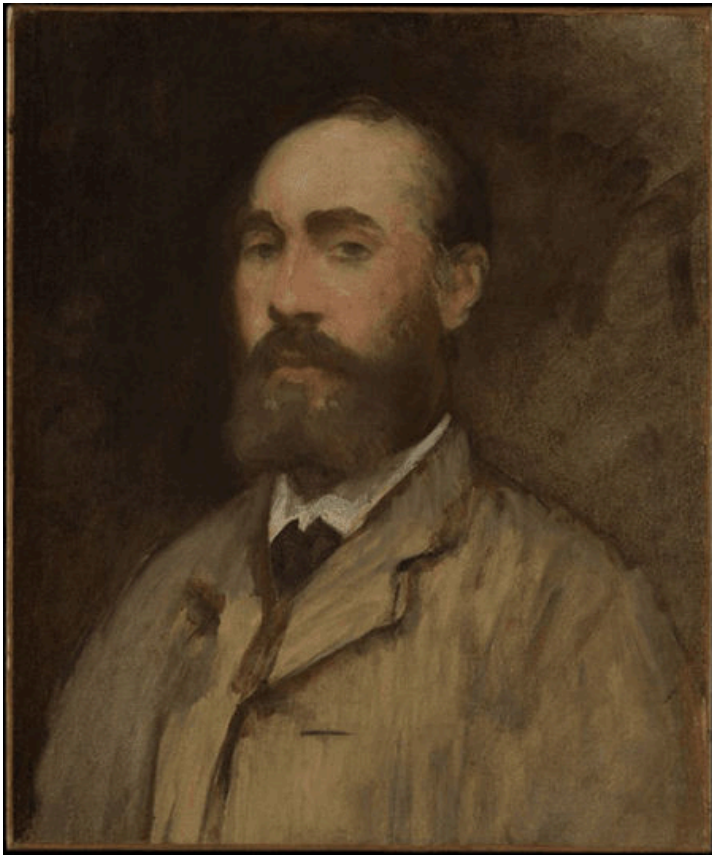
“The paintings always include several elements that refer to other matters outside the painting. I create my paintings in such a way that these references never converge, it remains a puzzle because nothing can ever be defined.” — Michaël Borremans

At first glance, the subject matter of butter draws associations to the fat sculptures of Joseph Beuys. Recontextualising overlooked and mundane objects such as furniture – and in this case, fat – Beuys’ Fat Chair is an homage to the substance; as he explained, it had saved his life during World War II.



[Joseph Beuys, Fat Chair](#), 1964–1985 Artwork: © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Aesthetically, Borremans’ work is more comparable with works by Old Master painters such as Edouard Manet, Antoine Villon, or Diego Velazquez. Imbuing his portraits with his iconic sepia tones, Borremans embraces the painting medium and genre for its deterministic illusory quality.



Édouard Manet, [Jean-Baptiste Faure](#), 1882-83 Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William B. Jaffe, 1950, 50.71.1

However, different from portraits by Manet or Velazquez, the eyes of Borremans' characters are always downcast or averted, such as in *The Assistant* and *The Butter Sculptor*. Intentionally depicted as so, the artist explains that a direct gaze is not suitable for his works, since it will characterise the work as a portrait, offering the protagonist authenticity, originality and power. Deliberately ambiguous with mysterious signifiers, Borremans' methodology fulfils his intentions of creating works that are situated 'outside [of] time, a space where time has been cancelled'^{iv}, and where his characters become objects instead, defying clear interpretation.



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ⁱ Jeffrey Grove, 'Ventilating a Nihilist Vision', *Michaël Borremans: Paintings*, Ostfildern, 2009, p. 5

ⁱⁱ *ibid*, p. 10

ⁱⁱⁱ Luk Lambrecht, 'Michael Borremans, I am an Avant-Garde Artist', *Flash Art*, October 2006, p. 75

^{iv} Jeffrey Grove, 'Ventilating a Nihilist Vision', *Michaël Borremans: Paintings*, Ostfildern, 2009, p. 6

^v *ibid*, p. 8

Provenance

Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Literature

Jeffrey Grove, *Michaël Borremans: Paintings*, Ostfildern, 2009, pp. 6, 21 (illustrated, p. 20)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM AN ESTEEMED PRIVATE
COLLECTION

21 ♦♦

Yoshitomo Nara

Nachtwandern

signed, titled, dated and inscribed "'Nachtwandern" -2
Nara [in Japanese] 94' on the reverse

acrylic on canvas

100 x 100 cm. (39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in.)

Painted in 1994, this work is registered in the
Yoshitomo Nara Online Catalogue Raisonné under
registration number YNF1161.

Estimate

HK\$16,000,000 — 25,000,000

€1,980,000 — 3,090,000

\$2,050,000 — 3,210,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“...[A] pure white image that covers everything in winter. At the time, I didn't think about beauty or anything like that, but it left an impression on me.” — Yoshitomo Nara

The novelist Banana Yoshimoto once surmised, ‘Like every cell in his body, each line that Yoshitomo Nara draws contains all the data of his life.’ⁱ An apt description of the present work, the serene and sentimental *Nachtwandern* (‘Night Walking’) makes its debut at auction this autumn and is an exemplary work from the artist’s early years of production. Painted in 1994, just one year before Nara’s seminal solo exhibitions at SCAI the Bathhouse and Blum & Poe, *Nachtwandern* is a piece filled with latent talent, the product of a young artist on the cusp of enormous international renown.

A Lonely World in White

A defining example capturing Nara’s signature powdery white backgrounds filled with multilayered clouds of soft pastels, *Nachtwandern*’s titular somnambulant infant floats with a curious backwards glance at a solitary lightbulb, suspended aglow to the right of the frame. Donning a soft white nightgown, the child—their nightie trailing behind them like that of a cartoonish ghost’s tail, or perhaps resembling the emergence from a puddle of water—has a disproportionately large forehead betraying their youth. Cheeks flushed as if braced against the snow, our protagonist’s bean-like eyes focus on the glowing light, and the hint of a peevish grin forms on their face. The immediate effect of the work is an overwhelming calmness amidst plunging solitude; a combination of lightness and darkness that has become synonymous with Nara’s creations, one which draws deeply from a lonely childhood.

“His work evokes in me the smells of a cold night spent in a foreign country, the scent of rain seen through a window in childhood, a stifled breath while studying a bug in the grass, the sadness of a white-walled room with a wooden floor... Having plunged into the ambience of this kind of world makes me feel born again, as from a soak in a hot-spring bath.” — The novelist Banana Yoshimoto on Yoshitomo Nara’s work

Speaking in an interview in 1995, Nara remarked on a largely isolated upbringing. The youngest of three brothers, the artist grew up in a remote neighbourhood with not many small children within close proximity. Mostly left to his own devices while his parents worked full time jobs, Nara looked back on an empty home and only animals for company. Particularly, he spoke about a profound memory that resurfaced to him in his later years in Germany, “...[A] pure white image that covers everything in winter. At the time, I didn’t think about beauty or anything like that, but it left an impression on me. I’ve been living in Germany for eight years, but when I first started living there, I

felt the atmosphere of my hometown when I was young. It was as if I had slipped back in time, and I was also rediscovering lost values in an unexpected place.”ⁱⁱ



Utagawa Hiroshige, *Evening Snow at Kanbara*, from the series "Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō", circa 1833–34 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Howard Mansfield Collection, Purchase, Rogers Fund, 1936, JP2492

That Nara painted *Nachtwandern* during these years of deep reflection is significant. When exploring Nara’s nineties-era paintings, and indeed the present work, we are immediately struck with their affinity to 20th century children’s books. As the artist has recently stated, ‘My works’ roots are my childhood, not pop culture...Around me there were orchards, sheep and horses; I read fairytales rather than comics.’ⁱⁱⁱ *Nachtwandern*’s lonesome child for instance recalls scenes from Hans Christian Andersen’s *The Little Match Girl*, or perhaps even J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. Additionally, a particular whimsy permeates our work, recalling maybe even the poetic lightness of Wilhelm Müller’s ‘To Wander is the Miller’s Delight’, later set to music by Franz Schubert, no doubt well known in Nara’s adopted home country Germany during the nineties.

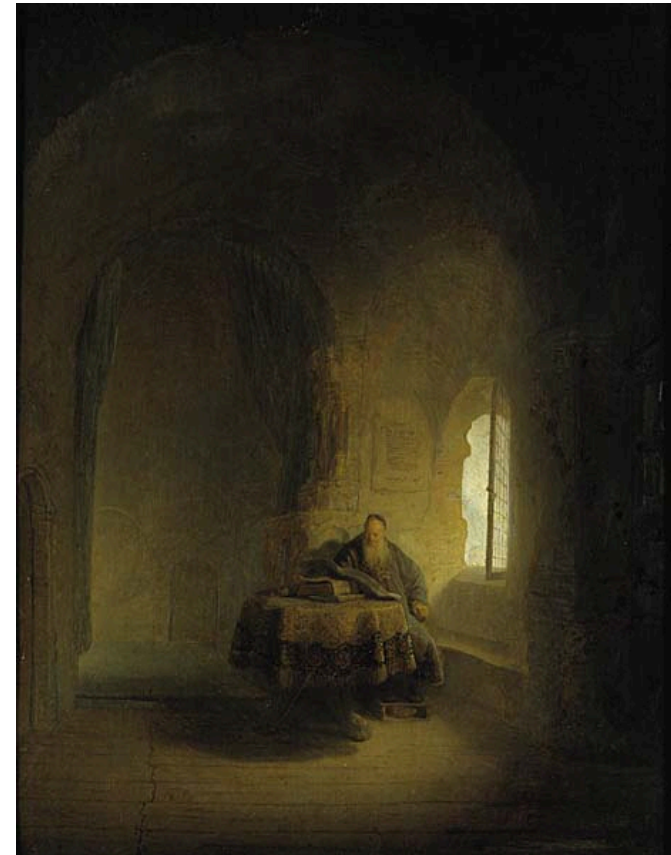
Fittingly, the artist’s works from this time exuded a certain graphic nature, achieved through Nara’s original commitment to bold linear renderings akin to Japanese woodcut pieces. Moreover, it is fit that one should consider the influence of Japanese woodcut: full-bodied figures depicted against neutral backgrounds and the use of empty space can be traced in Nara’s oeuvre, recreated

some two centuries later in a powerful capturing of nostalgic remembrance.

“O wandering, my delight, O wandering! Master and mistress, let me go my way in peace, and wander.” — Stanza taken from Wilhelm Müller’s “Das Wandern ist des Müller’s Lust” (“To Wander is the Miller’s Delight”)

Frolicking in the Dark

Nara’s work has frequently been described as *kima-kawaii*: cuteness with an edge, often with a hint of underlying darkness. It is thus unsurprising perhaps that Nara sought inspiration from Renaissance artists^{iv}, whose canonical employment of *chiaroscuro* links symbolically with the tensions between light(ness) and dark(ness), explored both literally and metaphorically in the artist’s works. Taken in this light, *Nachtwandern* is an ironic twist on its title: though it suggests a nighttime meander, the child portrayed walks in a white room basking in light, a clear departure from other similarly titled “Night Walking” works in Nara’s repertoire. The painting also has a tongue-in-cheek quality not unlike that of Raymond Pettibon’s works, whose cover art for bands such as Sonic Youth and Black Flag would not have been unknown to the rock-obsessed Nara.



Rembrandt, *An Old Scholar Near a Window in a Vaulted Room*, 1631 Image: Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

Coming from a whole host of other similarly enigmatic figures—some portrayed seated in the dark, others yet sleepwalking—the artist’s famous somnambulating children are paradigmatic of Nara’s engagement with the themes of sleep, consciousness, and boundless childlike imagination. Each wanderer’s liminal existence between states of interior dreams and external exploration perhaps embody an infantile sense of curiosity that guides our consciousness from the cradle into adulthood. Whether taken individually or collectively, these dreaming, sleepwalking, roaming figures betray an underlining sense of self-discovery and self-imaging teetering between childhood and adulthood, good and evil, innocence and maturity: intimate snapshots of an artist whose own journey of reflection was (and remains) very much crucial in his artistic process.



Yoshitomo Nara, *The Longest Night*, 1995 Collection of The National Museum of Art, Osaka Artwork: © Yoshitomo Nara

“In some of Nara’s earliest works made in Düsseldorf, allegories of good and evil collapse, and innocence becomes one with destruction itself.” — The art critic Noi Sawaragi on Yoshitomo Nara’s work

Beans for Eyes, Flowers for Lamps

Grasping Nara’s propensity for repeating certain motifs in his earlier works is crucial in

understanding his artistic creations. Key stylistic features including a particular type of line, compositional considerations, colour palettes, are just some of the distinct identifiers for the artist’s nineties works. However, the symbols that truly set apart his works from this era are rather the visual aids sprinkled through his pieces like proverbial breadcrumbs—whimsical, fairytale-like—all that enhance what can be seen as universal markers of childlike sensibilities.

As the oft-repeated truism goes, ‘windows are the eyes to the soul’. Trite though it may be, Nara’s work constantly explores this phrase through steadfast attention paid to the execution of his characters’ eyes. Whether open or closed, eyes are often the first indicators as to which period a Nara painting is from. In *Nachtwandern*, our little hero’s narrowed jelly-bean eyes verge on suspicion and capture a heightened sense of *kima-kawaii*. Deeply emblematic of the artist’s earlier pieces when he preferred pared down and tightly lined eyes, it is almost as if Nara deliberately presented such impenetrable slivers—onyx, jet-black with but a hint of emerald—as a pointed effort to remain obscure and hidden.



John Singer Sargent, *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, 1885 Collection of Tate Britain, London Image: akg-images

One only needs to look as far as the titles of some of Nara's 1994 solo exhibitions to comprehend the artist's personal sentiments when he painted *Nachtwandern*. Titles such as *lonesome babies* (Hakutosha, Nagoya), *Hula Hula Garden* (Galerie d'Eendt, Amsterdam), and *Christmas for sleeping children* (Itoki Crystal Hall, Osaka) fill his exhibition biography at the time, and a clear focus on childhood and children—sleepy, lonesome ones—can be detected. In the work *Hula Hula Garden* (also created in 1994), lifelike dolls donning flowing dresses lie face-down in a garden of flowers, calling to mind Lewis Carroll's Alice's frolicking in amongst enchanted flowers, or even John Singer Sargent's *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, bearing a striking resemblance at least thematically to our little night walker.

In his initial creations, flowers constantly appear at the end of sprawling green vines and sprout throughout Nara's early works. The floral vines were often metaphorical, such as the intertwining ones in *Lampflowers* (currently in the collection of the Aomori Museum of Art), which housed lightbulbs, held aloft by twins in matching golden dresses. As summarised by Yeewan Koon, '...the lily flower, recalling a specific type found in northern Japan, references Nara's upbringing, [and] plays an important compositional role as well, its fragile coiling pulling the viewer back toward the centre of the canvas.'^v



Yoshitomo Nara, *Hula Hula Garden*, 1994 Collection of the Aomori Museum of Art Artwork: © Yoshitomo Nara

Similarly, the lightbulb commands our attention in *Nachtwandern* and references the same vines: suspended by a distinctly green vine-like rope, its effervescence is indicated by a few straight lines next to the bulb itself, an allusion to the glow it emits. An allegory unto itself—light being an indication of life, much like the presence of plants—the lightbulb/lamp flower is a trope that Nara's little heroes constantly engage with during the nineties: they can be seen watering, serenading, cutting, pulling, hiding under such glowing lamps and/or flowers. The repetition and persistence of this motif is much like the employment of emblems in fairytales, and it acts as a powerful anchor for an audience to ruminate over.

With their saucer eyes and pursed lips, *Nachtwandern*'s little sleepwalker radiates skepticism, ambivalence, and perhaps a little apprehension. According to the curator Mika Yoshitake, 'People refer to them as portraits of girls or children, [b]ut they're really all, I think, self-portraits.'^{vi} It is not hard to make this connection when one thinks particularly about Yoshitomo Nara's own recreated studios: tight, small white spaces lit by single lightbulbs. Painted during a time of intense self-reflection, *Nachtwandern* is a unique work that provides profound insight into the longings of a young artist, and is a perfect embodiment of Nara's inimitable bottling of nostalgia itself.

Collector's Digest

Born 1959 in Hirosaki, Japan, Yoshitomo Nara stands as one of the defining icons in contemporary art today. After completing his master's degree at Aichi Prefectural University of Fine Arts and Music in 1987, Nara lived in Germany from 1988 to 2000, returning to Japan in 2000, where he lived and worked in Tokyo and moved to Tochigi in 2005.

Nara's most recent major touring museum exhibition, *Yoshitomo Nara*, is the artist's largest retrospective to date, featuring more than 100 major paintings, ceramics, sculptures and installations, and 700 works of paper that span over 36 years of the artist's career. The exhibition started from the [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#) (2021-2022) and was exhibited at the [Yuz Museum](#) in Shanghai until 4 September, 2022. The exhibition will then travel to the Guggenheim Bilbao in Spain and the Kunsthal Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

ⁱ Banana Yoshimoto, 'The Lines He Draws', translated from the Japanese by Charles Worthen, and published in *Yoshitomo Nara: Lullaby Supermarket*, exh. cat., Institut für Kunst Nürnberg, 2002, p. 47

ⁱⁱ The artist quoted in 'Yoshitomo Nara: Living a Quiet Life Ordinarily', first published in *Bijutsu Techo Monthly Art Magazine*, vol. 47, no. 7, July 1995, p. 34 [translated from Japanese, original: 「(そう。)冬なんかだとすべてを覆い尽くす真っ白なイメージ。当時はきれいとかそういう童識はないんだけど、とにかく印象に残ってる。」]

ⁱⁱⁱ Yoshitomo Nara quoted in Skye Sherwin, 'Yoshitomo Nara: "My works" roots are in fairytales, not comics', *The Guardian*, 7 January 2022, [online](#)

^{iv} Stephen Trescher, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog', published in *Yoshitomo Nara: Lullaby Supermarket*, exh. cat., Institut für Kunst Nürnberg, 2002, p. 11

^v Yeewan Koon, 'Those Big-Headed Girls', in Yeewan Koon, ed., *Yoshitomo Nara*, New York, 2020, p.53

^{vi} Mika Yoshitake quoted in Nick Marino, 'Yoshitomo Nara Paints What He Hears', 24 July 2020, [online](#)

Provenance

Galerie d'Eendt, Amsterdam
Private Collection, Amsterdam
Pace Gallery at Chesa Büsin, Zuoz, Switzerland
Private Collection, Asia
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Zuoz, PACE Gallery, *Carte Blanche*, 20 February - 30 March 2014



22

Yoshitomo Nara

Flying Nun

signed, titled and dated "'The Flying Nun" Nara [in Japanese] 2002' on the reverse
acrylic on cotton mounted on fibre-reinforced plastic
diameter 54.6 cm. (21 1/2 in.)
Executed in 2002, this work is registered in the
Yoshitomo Nara Online Catalogue Raisonné under
registration number YNF3061.

Estimate

HK\$3,800,000 — 5,800,000

€471,000 — 720,000

\$487,000 — 744,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Saucer Tales

Painted by one of the leading contemporary Japanese artists of his generation, Yoshitomo Nara's *The Flying Nun* is a compelling example from his internationally acclaimed oeuvre. This work was first exhibited at the artist's *Saucer Tales* solo exhibition hosted at the Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York in 2002, and subsequently also participated in the touring exhibition *Nothing Ever Happens* in 2003-2005 shown at museums in Cleveland, St. Louis and Honolulu.



Installation view of the current work (right) at New York, Marianne Boesky Gallery, *Saucer Tales*, 19 October - 16 November 2002 Image: Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen

Saucer Tales included twelve paintings that were wall mounted fiberglass saucer shaped structures, overlaid with a patchwork of small pieces of canvas. A giant advertisement of a coffee company at Nara's commercial fabricator inspired the artist to make paintings in saucer shapes, paving the way for a new direction in Nara's artistic practice. Drawn to the freedom of pictorial representation within this circular, roundel form, the artist has noted that 'if the things I have been drawing in a square were placed in it, it becomes less of a picture - it might look as if there's a hole

in the wall. Because the depth perception becomes ambiguous, I thought perhaps I could achieve the effect that looks as if there actually is an opening, and inside there is a child.'¹

A Glowing Roundel

Thanks to its shape, title, and imagery, the present work carries strong religious connotations, immediately reminiscent perhaps of the circular dome of the Sixteenth Century St Peter's Basilica housed in the Vatican. Depicting St Peter floating atop a celestial cloud, this central figure gestures benevolently toward his right, surrounded by a cloister of cherubs. The use of the circular form is also similarly used in many other instances of religious paintings to draw attention to the divine, or other central ecclesiastical motifs as can be seen in pieces like Botticelli's *Madonna with Lillies and Eight Angels*.



Left: Dome (detail of centerpiece), St Peter's Basilica, Vatican, Rome, 1590 Right: Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna with Lillies and Eight Angels*, 1477 Collection of the Staatliche Museum, Berlin Image: Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur fuer Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin

Unlike most of the other dishes in the *Saucer Tales* exhibition that featured Nara's *kima-kawaii* devilish children, *The Flying Nun* stands out thanks to its subject matter. Situated at the centre of a three-dimensional, concave plate that blurs the boundaries between painting and sculpture, the *Flying Nun*, donning a white headress, sits in the centre of the saucer in profile with a downturned line of a ruby-red smirk, floating and gliding towards the left of the composition on an aeroplane labelled as *Flying Nun* in red. Focused on her destination, the nun's large bulging eyes concentrate on her direction ahead, and does not engage with the viewer.

The title *Flying Nun* also inevitably draws associations to the novel by American author Marie Teresa Ríos (known as Tere Ríos), titled *The Fifteenth Pelican - The Original Adventures of Sister Bertrille*, which was later adapted into TV sitcom *The Flying Nun*. The story recounts the tale of an American nun—Sister Bertrille, a novice at the convent San Tanco in San Juan, Puerto Rico, who at only 75 pounds discovers by accident that she can fly, when her headdress is caught by the wind. Coupled with religious iconography, and perhaps lending itself to an ironic reading of its source material, our diminutive nun is the artist's unique reimagining of an established motif and topic.

Mastering Layers

In the present work, Nara lays a patchwork of small pieces of canvases on top of the saucer shaped structure, these pale-light green painted pieces further extending into the background's sky. This technique recalls the stitched, torn, and burned burlap sacks used by Alberto Burri who repurposed such objections found during his captivity during World War II. When taken in tandem alongside the present lot, another work by Nara created in the same year, *Flying Nuns* (which depicts angry nuns unleashing missiles from within planes), one cannot ignore Nara's strong pacifist stance against the act of war, a notable theme that has remained throughout his body of works.



Alberto Burri, *Sacco e Rosso*, 1956 Artwork: © Fondazione Palazzo Albizzini Collezione Burri, Città di

Castello/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome

Born in 1959 in the city of Hirosaki near the military base of the 8th Division of the Imperial Japanese Army, which was partially turned into the Misawa Air Base by the U.S. ally during World War II, Nara spent his childhood surrounded by reminders of war. Listening to the base's Far East Network (FEN) radio's broadcasting on the Vietnam War in Japanese, and American rock and folk, Nara viscerally experienced the aftermath of war, eerily recalled by the artist as an 'entire area was filled with debris and ghosts'.ⁱⁱ The impression was deeply burned into his mind that even when watching mere footage of war, he felt as if he was experiencing it in real time. Because of this, Nara developed a strong conviction of always creating what innately rings true to him personallyⁱⁱⁱ, recalling similar determination in Nara's favourite war-protest song from the time —'Universal Soldier' (1964) that calls on individuals to take responsibility for war.

*"He's the Universal Soldier and he really is to blame / His orders come from far away
no more! They come from here and there and you and me / And brothers, can't you
see / This is not the way we put an end to war." — Lyrics of "Universal Soldier"
(1964), Nara's favourite war-protest song from his youth*

Collector's Digest

Born 1959 in Hirosaki, Japan, Yoshitomo Nara stands as one of the defining icons in contemporary art today. He completed his master's degree at Aichi Prefectural University of Fine Arts and Music in 1987. Testament to the universal appeal of Nara's oeuvre, works by the artist are now housed in over sixty public collections worldwide. Notably, this includes the Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art; Aomori Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; National Museum of Art, Osaka; National Museum of Art, Tokyo; 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa; and Yokohama Museum of Art.

Nara's most recent major touring museum exhibition, *Yoshitomo Nara*, is the artist's largest retrospective to date, featuring more than 100 major paintings, ceramics, sculptures and installations, and 700 works of paper that span over 36 years of the artist's career. The exhibition started from the [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#) (2021-2022) and was exhibited at the [Yuz Museum](#) in Shanghai until 4 September, 2022. The exhibition will then travel to the Guggenheim Bilbao in Spain and the Kunsthal Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

The current work was included as part of Nara's second solo exhibition in New York, *Saucer Tales* at the Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York in 2002. It also toured with the *Nothing Ever Happens* exhibition to Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland; University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; San Jose Museum of Art; Contemporary Art Museum, St. Louis; Contemporary Museum Honolulu

in 2003-2005.

ⁱ Yoshitomo Nara, quoted from *H magazine*

ⁱⁱ Yoshitomo Nara, quoted in Mika Kuraya, “Where the Wild Children Are,” *Once in a Life: Encounters with Nara*, Hong Kong, 2016, p. 124

ⁱⁱⁱ Yoshitomo Nara, *Nara Yoshitomo: The Little Star Dweller*, Tokyo, 2004, p. 16

Provenance

Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York

Private Collection, New York

S|2 Gallery, Hong Kong

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

New York, Marianne Boesky Gallery, *Saucer Tales*, 19 October – 16 November 2002

Cleveland, Museum of Contemporary Art; Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania; San Jose

Museum of Art; St. Louis, Contemporary Art Museum; Honolulu, Contemporary Museum, *Nothing Ever Happens*, 12 September 2003 - 22 May 2005, pp. 76, 94 (illustrated, pp. 70, 71, 77)

Hong Kong, S|2 Gallery, *The World According to Nara*, September 2014

Literature

Noriko Miyamura and Shinko Suzuki, eds., *Yoshitomo Nara: The Complete Works Volume 1: Paintings, Sculptures, Editions, Photographs 1984-2010*, Tokyo, 2011, no. P-2002-003, p. 388 (illustrated, p. 183)



23

KAWS

HOT SEAT JUNCTION

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

acrylic on canvas, triptych
overall 213.4 x 274.4 cm. (84 x 108 in.)

Painted in 2010.

Estimate

HK\$7,000,000 — 10,000,000

€865,000 — 1,240,000

\$897,000 — 1,280,000

[Go to Lot](#)



If there is one artist who can effortlessly combine such varied influences as Dutch polyptychs, cartoon characters, and stylistic references taken from American literature, it is KAWS: an ardent chronicler of our times whose unique visual language has created an instantly recognisable oeuvre. Inspired by the Pop sensibility of artists like Claes Oldenburg and Tom Wesselmann, KAWS topples traditional ideas of fine art, masterfully blurring the line between art and commerce.

A master in transforming the familiar, KAWS draws from nostalgic imagery in order to capture complex ranges in human emotion. Painted in 2010 and exhibited in the solo show, *KAWS: PAY THE DEBT TO NATURE* in Galerie Perrotin, *HOT SEAT JUNCTION* is a key example of this very ability. Cropping in on and chopping up the culturally ubiquitous character SpongeBob SquarePants, KAWS brings this well-loved icon into his unique vernacular with his signature crossed out eyes. Presented with a gasping mouth and surprised face, spliced together with dissected zoom-ins of his pupils and clenched jaw, our SpongeBob is charged with raw emotion. Standing at more than two by two metres high and wide, the figure's iconic yellow visage is expanded and abstracted to larger-than-life proportions, amplifying its emotional impact on the viewer.

Immediately recalling the introduction and theme song to the cartoon, where SpongeBob balloons into a swelling sponge mass in a bathtub, his body then quartered, each section bouncing arbitrarily to form an ill-fitting whole, *HOT SEAT JUNCTION* is an early work that re-contextualises the humble cartoon character within an art historical canon. Paralleling religious polyptychs most commonly created by early Renaissance painters, the present work borrows from this tradition, whose central panels would serve as the crux of a scene, with minor side panels serving to further bolster the over all narrative depicted.

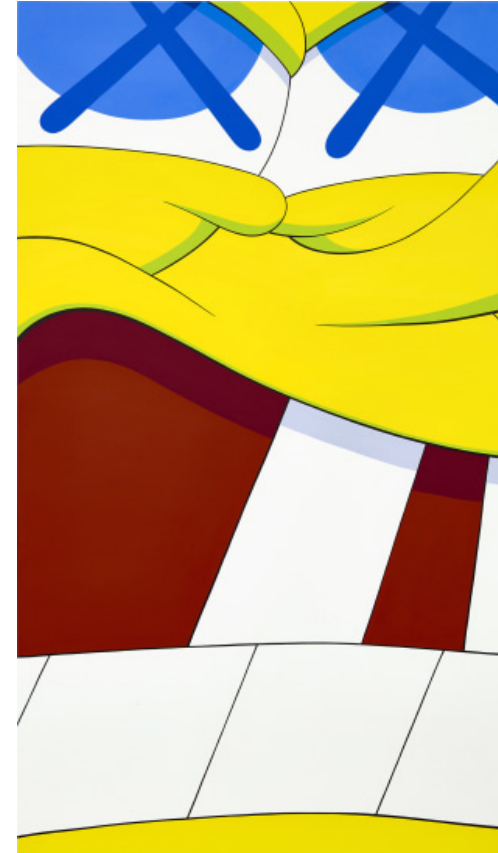


Agnolo Gaddi, *Madonna and Child with Saints Andrew, Benedict, Bernard, and Catherine of Alexandria with Angels*, triptych, c. 1387 Image: © National Gallery of Washington, D.C., Andrew W. Mellon Collection, 1937.1.4.a-c

In *HOT SEAT JUNCTION*, KAWS succeeds in emphasising the magnitude of emotion captured through the repetitive nature of the panels. By starting with the character's face as his reference point (the largest reproduction of which serves as his central panel), KAWS deconstructs the figure and isolates parts of the whole to place emphasis on the eyes and mouth within the exterior panels, forcing us to behold these vignettes essentially as abstractions of an already abstracted form, thus complicating our narrative reading of the scene, and compelling us to imbue the work with our own suppositions. As curator Mónica Ramírez-Montagut explains, '...we recognise the cartoon characters yet, with KAWS's intervention, the meaning becomes somewhat subverted...Since we are familiar with these characters...we in fact feel empowered to ponder the meaning and have an opinion. Thus it is up to us to decide whether these are homages or criticisms.'¹

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

Despite being rooted in their source imagery, KAWS’s paintings are not appropriations of specific animated cartoon narratives but rather broader interrogations of universal human emotions. Of his practice, KAWS has commented, ‘even though I use a comic language, my figures are not always reflecting the idealistic cartoon view that I grew up on, where everything has a happy ending’.ⁱⁱ Indeed, the overtly emotional reaction KAWS conveys in *HOT SEAT JUNCTION*—further reinforced by the strained emotions captured in the repeated focus on the character’s mouth, perhaps the nervousness one feels when sitting in the proverbial ‘hot seat’—seems to hold more convincing links to Pablo Picasso’s renderings of *The Weeping Woman* or indeed the frozen shriek of Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, than any scene from the children’s cartoon show. Bearing this in mind, *HOT SEAT JUNCTION* serves primarily as a study in pure human emotion, one that is universally understood and transcends nationality, culture, and time.



KAWS, *THE WAY HE KNOWS*, 2010 Private Collection, Artwork: © KAWS Sold by Phillips, New York, 17 November 2021 for USD1,542,500 (Premium)

It is curious to note that the present painting was exhibited in *KAWS: PAY THE DEBT TO NATURE*, a veiled nod perhaps to a line included in the great American novel *Gravity’s Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon. Within the novel, a character reads the words ‘Death is a debt to nature due, / Which I have paid, and so must you.’ inscribed upon a tombstone, a potent nod to the epitaph at the beginning of the novel: ‘Nature does not know extinction; all it knows is transformation.’ In a strange twist of fate nearly four decades after the publication of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, KAWS’s tireless aptitude for interweaving divergent strands of culture into his works can perhaps be likened to Pynchon’s own penchant for conflating high and low culture. In KAWS’s own varied and diverse practice, the transformative appropriation, recreation, and conflation of the high and low

has served as a common thread for more than thirty years, serving as a theme that has underpinned his repertoire spanning painting, sculpture, printmaking, street art and clothing design.

Following his limited edition toys of the late 1990s, of which the subjects were KAWS's own creations, the artist turned to familiar television and cartoon icons such as The Simpsons, Mickey Mouse, the Smurfs, and SpongeBob in the early 2000s. Created by marine science educator Stephen Hillenburg in the late 1990s, SpongeBob SquarePants is the highest rated series to ever air on the children's cartoon network, Nickelodeon. Speaking about his use of SpongeBob's character in his practice, KAWS said '...I started doing SpongeBob paintings for Pharrell. Then I started doing smaller paintings, which got much more abstract. And SpongeBob was something I wanted to do because graphically I love the shapes.'ⁱⁱⁱ

KAWS's multidisciplinary practice has caught the attention of collectors worldwide. The artist has shown commitment to remaining accessible by collaborating with global fashion brands including Dior, Nike, and Uniqlo. His practice has been honoured with numerous solo shows around the globe, including a 2011 solo exhibition at The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Ridgefield, CT, where the present work was on view. The artist also received a retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia (2019-2020) and most recently, the highly acclaimed major survey at the Brooklyn Museum, New York in 2021. His works are cemented within the permanent collections of international institutions, including the Brooklyn Museum, the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in Texas, the CAC Malaga in Spain, and the Rosenblum Collection in Paris.

ⁱ Mónica Ramírez-Montagut, KAWS, exh. brochure, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, 2010, [online](#)

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

ⁱⁱⁱ KAWS, quoted in Tobey Maguire, "KAWS", *Interview Magazine*, April 27, 2010, [online](#)

Provenance

Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris
Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

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

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



24

KAWS

COMPANION

paint on fibreglass

243.8 x 121.9 x 91.4 cm. (96 x 48 x 36 in.)

Executed in 2010, this work is number 2 from an edition of 3 plus 1 artist's proof, and is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by the artist's studio.

Estimate

HK\$6,000,000 — 10,000,000

€737,000 — 1,230,000

\$769,000 — 1,280,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“When I was doing graffiti, my whole thought was, ‘I just want to exist.’ I want to exist with this visual language in the world [...] It meant nothing to me to make paintings if I wasn’t reaching people.” — KAWS

Magnificently grand in its execution, the current work *COMPANION* is undoubtedly one of the most prized symbols that defines the multidisciplinary oeuvre of art world icon, KAWS. Instantly recognisable with its ‘X’ shaped eyes, the *COMPANION* works showcases the artist’s distinct approach. By introducing cartoon inspired characteristics to his protagonists, KAWS creates new tensions between the form and context of sculpture whilst taking a sharp divergence away from traditional notions of the medium. Engaging with a myriad of references from popular culture in a uniquely witty way, KAWS’ works are synonymous with contemporary street art culture, as he positions his works as both a celebration and critique of consumerism.



KAWS, *KAWS: HOLIDAY (Changbai Mountain)* Jilin Province, China, 7-16 January, 2022 Artwork: © KAWS

The Origin of the ‘X’

“I use the X the same way that Mercedes uses the grille on their cars... You see them in the rear-view mirror and just have a glimpse of it, and you know the style of the

car going behind you.” — KAWS

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 (the same school that Keith Haring attended), KAWS first worked as an animator for Jumbo Pictures. After graduation, KAWS began to use artistic intervention as both a social and creative strategy; he saw an opportunity to introduce a new level of dialogue with the consumer through a series of street level interventions, where he reworked advertising posters taken from bus shelters and telephone booths. He would take them out of their cabinets in broad daylight, collecting a variety of posters, returning only when he had amassed a certain volume of completed works. After prying a lock out of one of the advertising hoardings, KAWS had master keys cut by a locksmith, thus giving him the ability to access virtually all the advertising cabinets in New York City and freeing him from the fear of being caught. Such a methodology stirred a far more widespread intervention; people would get up the next day and the whole street would be KAWS, from one end to the other.



KAWS, *UNTITLED (US)*, 2002 acrylic on existing advertising poster Sold with Phillips Hong Kong on 29 November 2021 for HKD11,745,000 Artwork: © KAWS

It was during this exact period that KAWS began to tag the advertising posters found at bus stops on the streets of New York with crossed bones and 'X's for eyes. This motif marked the beginnings of KAWS' trademark style, as exemplified by the current work. *COMPANION*'s large 'X' eyes and skulled head might appear to be intimidating at first, yet its rounded silhouette, smooth surface, along with shorts and shoes all evoke the likings of beloved cartoon characters, giving the work an overwhelmingly endearing quality. This is in turn enhanced by its larger than life scale, transporting the viewer into a toy-like wonderland.

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMH8b-lp5uM>

KAWS discusses the development of his artmaking practises and the incorporation of the skull as a recurring symbol in his work.

Collector's Digest

"KAWS is not just referring to Pop culture, he is making it." — Michael Auping

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 can be found in prominent public collections around the world, including 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.

KAWS has exhibited extensively around the globe, most recently with solo exhibitions at the Serpentine, London: *KAWS: NEW FICTION* (digital exhibition) from 18 January - 27 February, 2022; the High Museum of Art in Atlanta: *KAWS PRINTS*, from 3 December 2021 - 27 March 2022; and Skarstedt Gallery in New York (5 November - 11 December 2021), *KAWS: SPOKE TOO SOON*. 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. Other 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).

Provenance

Galerie Perrotin
Private Collection
Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong
Acquired from the above by the present owner in 2016

Exhibited

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, *KAWS*, 12 October 2013 - 5 January 2014 (another example exhibited)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



25 ♦

Banksy

Girl with Balloon & Morons Sepia

signed, numbered and dated 'BANKSY 07 3/8' lower right

double-sided work on paper

Girl with Balloon: spray paint on paper

Morons Sepia: screenprint on paper

56.5 x 76 cm. (22 1/4 x 29 7/8 in.)

Executed in 2007, this work is number 3 from an edition of 8, and is accompanied by a certificate of authenticity issued by Pest Control.

Estimate

HK\$4,500,000 — 6,500,000

€553,000 — 799,000

\$577,000 — 833,000

[Go to Lot](#)



A biting example of Banksy's satirical oeuvre, *Girl with Balloon & Morons Sepia* is a double-sided composition boasting two of the artist's most famous images: *Girl with Balloon* and *Morons*. On the recto, *Girl with Balloon* depicts a young girl extending her hand toward a red heart-shaped balloon, carried away by the wind. To the reverse, a crowd of art collectors is shown gathered around an auctioneer who, mid-performance, gestures toward a large, gilt-framed canvas. When held up to light, *Girl with Balloon* and *Morons Sepia* magically fuse into a single composition, transporting the young girl into the sale room, and creating a mirror effect between her extended arm and that of the auctioneer. Forming part of an edition of 8 works, the present work is nonetheless rendered unique by the artist's spray painting of the young girl's figure to the front of the work – a feat that distinguishes it from Banksy's other editions of *Girl with Balloon* and *Morons*.

Girl with Balloon

First developed in 2002 and 2006 respectively, *Girl with Balloon* and *Morons* have, as independent images, become laden with meaning. The former, initially devised as a stencil mural, was exhibited in such public and political spaces as Waterloo Bridge and the West Bank barrier. Its portrayal of a young girl reaching for – or releasing – a drifting balloon spurred a number of interpretations relating to one's inevitable loss of childhood and innocence.



Detail of the present lot

Recognised as one of the artist's foremost symbols for more than a decade, and voted [the nation's favourite artwork in 2017](#), the image once again came to the forefront of the public's attention in 2018, when a 2006 framed copy of the artwork came to auction and sold for a record price. Adding further momentum to the event, the work began self-destructing just a few moments after the closing bid, by means of a concealed mechanical paper shredder Banksy had built into the frame bottom. Marking auction history with an unprecedented performative quality, *Girl with Balloon* became an icon for the unpredictable developments of contemporary markets, whilst simultaneously entering the realm of popular culture.

Video: <https://youtu.be/fyQMJ-RmYcQ>

Morons Sepia

“All graffiti is low-level dissent, but stencils have an extra history. They’ve been used to start revolutions and to stop wars.” — Banksy

Similarly quoting the environment and corporate fabric of the auction world, *Morons* was published as a set of six prints on the occasion of Banksy’s important and characteristically controversial warehouse exhibition *Barely Legal*, which took place in Los Angeles in 2006. In the now iconic image, an auctioneer commands a sale room packed with bidders, immortalising the historical 1987 sale that saw Vincent van Gogh’s *Sunflowers* yield a price of £22,500,000 – a record for any work at auction at the time. Among the works on display, a large canvas to the right of the composition stands out, reading the words ‘I CAN’T BELIEVE YOU MORONS ACTUALLY BUY THIS SHIT’. Devising a facetious critique of the art world – one that Banksy has become known and revered for – the artist paradoxically turns his own creative gesture into a reproducible image, one that, in *Girl with Balloon & Morons Sepia*, constitutes half of the work’s iconographic value.



Detail of the present lot

Punchy Critique

“Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.” — Banksy

Controversial yet packed with punchy humour, Banksy’s works have always poked fun at the art establishment, undercutting the elite within the industry. In the earlier days of Banksy’s creative career, the artist organised street interventions and [museum incursions](#). Between March and May 2005, Banksy had snuck his way into four of New York’s elite cultural institutions: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, and the Brooklyn Museum in New York, and also London’s British Museum. Hijacking these world-renowned public spaces, Banksy displayed his own parodic, ‘vandalised’ versions of old master paintings on the walls: [Mona Lisa wearing a smiley face mask](#); [an admiral clutching a spray can in front of anti-war graffiti](#), to name a few.

Together, *Morons Sepia* and *Girl with Balloon* form a joint critique of the art world, specifically on the auction market, irreverently contributing to the artist’s overarching political stance. As such, the work epitomises Banksy’s ability to propel his infamous urban vernacular to the realm of high art. ‘This is the first time the essentially bourgeois world of art has belonged to the people’, he mused. ‘We need to make it count’.ⁱ

Collector’s Digest

With his popularity, Banksy has established himself as a widespread cultural phenomenon with an air of mystique as he continues to keep a stealth status. Despite remaining anonymous, Banksy was named one of [Time magazine’s 100 most influential people](#) in 2010, alongside Barack Obama and Steve Jobs.

Revolutionising the way street art is perceived and redefining ‘art’ itself, works by Banksy can be found in prestigious public collections including the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. With a massive following of over 10 million on Instagram, Banksy is the world’s most renowned mystery man, and a trailblazer that continues to catapult the art historical cannon in new directions.

ⁱ Banksy, quoted in Will Ellsworth-Jones, ‘The Story Behind Banksy’, *Smithsonian Mag*, February 2013, [online](#)

Banksy

Provenance

Hang Up Gallery, London

Acquired from the above by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



PROPERTY FROM A SOUTHEAST ASIAN COLLECTION

26 *

Banksy

Kids on Guns

numbered and dated '3/25 2003' on the reverse,
stencilled with the artist's name 'BANKSY' lower right
overlap

spray paint on canvas

50 x 50 cm. (19 5/8 x 19 5/8 in.)

Executed in 2003, this work is number 3 from an
edition of 25, and is accompanied by a certificate of
authenticity issued by Pest Control.

Estimate

HK\$8,500,000 — 12,000,000

€1,050,000 — 1,480,000

\$1,090,000 — 1,540,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Doing what you’re told is generally overrated. More crimes are committed in the name of obedience than disobedience. It’s those who follow any authority blindly who are the real danger.” — Banksy

Undoubtedly one of the most controversial street artists in the contemporary art scene, Bristolian street artist Banksy has achieved global attention whilst still maintaining his anonymity. Known for his iconic anti-war imagery such as *Kids on Guns* (2003), Banksy’s works provide poignant and potent social commentaries on contemporary issues such as terrorism, political authority and capitalism. Utilising simple visual cues and a strong contrast in colour, his works deliver powerful messages that are universally understood, marked by dark humour, satire, and strong political undertones.

Kids on Guns

“All graffiti is low-level dissent, but stencils have an extra history. They’ve been used to start revolutions and to stop wars.” — Banksy

Emerging as a graffiti artist as early as 1993, Banksy’s stencils appeared throughout the streets of Bristol, London, Paris, and New York. Choosing to work with stencils since 2000, Banksy is thus able to achieve meticulous details more quickly, keeping him beyond the reach of local law enforcements.

With its striking simplicity and raw immediacy, *Kids on Guns* is a prime example demonstrating the artist’s famed stencil and spray paint approach that originated from his time as a graffiti artist on the streets of Bristol. This technique allowed him to work quickly and make hasty escapes, maintaining a consistent level of quality in his work whilst protecting his anonymity as his popularity grew.



Detail of the present lot

In *Kids on Guns*, the artist places the image of an innocent little girl and boy – accentuated with a heart shaped balloon and teddy bear – against the silhouettes of a mountain of weapons below their feet in a satirical juxtaposition. Surrounded by violence and threats, the two young children look to each other for consolation, as the boy rests his hand on the girl’s shoulder as a sign of reassurance.

Standing atop the mountain of brutality with a shining red balloon – an iconic motif that is almost synonymous to Banksy himself – the children are advocating for hope amongst fear in sombre

solidarity, offering an alternative view against the chaotic state of affairs that is war, oppression, hatred and violence.

In 2013, during Banksy's time at his residency with Better Out Than In in New York, the artist [set up a temporary stall in Central Park](#) with an unassuming hawker to sell his stencilled works to onlooking tourists and passerbys, priced at \$60 each. Several of Banksy's most iconic black and white motifs were available, amongst which is an edition of *Kids on Guns*.

This act democratised Banksy's works and made it more accessible to the public; works by the artist were bought as if they were any trinket on a street market. The stark contrast between the initial purchase price of \$60 and the current auction records positions the work as a witty and potent commentary on art circulation, the art market and authenticity as a whole.

Invasion of the Institution

“Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.” — Banksy

Controversial yet packed with punchy humour, Banksy's works have always poked fun at the art establishment, undercutting the elite within the industry. In the earlier days of Banksy's creative career, the artist organised street interventions and [museum incursions](#). Between March and May 2005, Banksy had snuck his way into four of New York's elite cultural institutions: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, and the Brooklyn Museum in New York, and also London's British Museum. Hijacking these world-renowned public spaces, Banksy displayed his own parodic, 'vandalised' versions of old master paintings on the walls: [Mona Lisa wearing a smiley face mask](#); [an admiral clutching a spray can in front of anti-war graffiti](#), to name a few.

[Peckham Rock](#) (2005) (later on renamed to *Wall Art*) featured a hunter pushing a supermarket cart that had appeared in the British Museum, masquerading as a legitimate part of the museum's collection and was displayed undetected for three days. Ironically yet fittingly, this work was later acquired into the permanent collection of the British Museum.

Acting as institutional critique, these works questioned and subverted the very environment in which art lives in – the museum, making a statement that art does not have to be produced and consumed by a certain coterie of artists and critics, breaking art free from its preconceived definitions and constraints. These underlying satirical and political tones of Banksy's creations evoke the same dissident principles that inspired conceptual art, marking him as one of the pioneering artists of his time.

Embodying both sides of a multi-layered paradox, Banksy's works comment on potentially marginalising political issues with contrasting punchy, light humour; he is immensely popular, yet remains an anonymous persona; his works originated from the streets, yet has found their ways into international prestigious institutions. Continuously pushing the boundaries of art and taste, it is this unique duality that captivates the audience with such powerful resonance.

Collector's Digest

With his popularity, Banksy has established himself as a widespread cultural phenomenon with an air of mystique as he continues to keep a stealth status. Despite remaining anonymous, Banksy was named one of [Time magazine's 100 most influential people](#) in 2010, alongside Barack Obama and Steve Jobs.

Revolutionising the way street art is perceived and redefining 'art' itself, works by Banksy can be found in prestigious public collections including the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. With a massive following of over 10 million on Instagram, Banksy is the world's most renowned mystery man, and a trailblazer that continues to catapult the art historical cannon in new directions.

Provenance

Private Collection, UK

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Literature

Gianni Mercurio, ed., exh. cat., MUDEC- Museo delle Culture, Milan, 2018, p. 128 (another example illustrated)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



ULTRA/NEO

27

Caroline Walker

The Masquerade

oil on linen

180 x 240 cm. (70 7/8 x 94 1/2 in.)

Painted in 2012.

Estimate

HK\$1,000,000 — 1,500,000

€124,000 — 187,000

\$128,000 — 192,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Serene yet seductive, *The Masquerade* unfolds before its audience with a sultry cinematic flare that underpins Caroline Walker's unique visual language. Painted in 2012 and exhibited in the artist's first public solo exhibition in London *In Every Dream Home*, the present work is a potent example from a series that explored the intersections between role-playing, gender conformity, domesticity, and class.

The Soul of an Interior

There is a solemn dreamlike quality to the *In Every Dream Home* paintings, each depicting various female protagonists within luxurious domestic settings. However, each also begs closer inspection as surface perfection seems to cloak the truth, as if each scene is rehearsed and directed. Fittingly, Caroline Walker's deliberate working method was purely directorial: seeking out real, unique locations, and along with a cast of models with costumes and props, the artist staged photoshoots from which she drew inspiration when she painted the final pieces. According to the artist, 'since representational painting is already such a space of construction and illusion, the process itself just seems to compound the fiction.'ⁱ

"I'm interested in the relationship between the real and the imaginary particularly with the performative aspect of the work. At the beginning of a photoshoot the women are always very aware of themselves being looked at; they watch each other and are keen to control how I look at them... The real interaction, which is what I hope to catch, only really starts when they stop being aware of my presence." —
Caroline Walker

Drawing from the 1973 Roxy Music song, *In Every Dream Home a Heartache*—which inspired the title of Caroline Walker's 2013 exhibition—*The Masquerade* is a perfect summary of its lyrics. The song's narrator describes his hyper materialistic world with 'penthouse perfection' in tow, in which he installs his 'disposable darling', a mail-order inflatable sex doll: the tale of a crude and distorted doll house of sorts thus comes to life. The artist explains: 'Like a dream-home lifestyle, the doll itself embodies fantasy and artifice. This struck a chord with me in the way I populate my paintings with alienated, nameless women, often in states of undress, available for our projected fantasies, sexual or otherwise.'ⁱⁱ

Video: <https://open.spotify.com/track/3Wkho6tesTh4aF80T6evqH?si=30d0d8dbed1c40f7>

Roxy Music's *In Every Dream Home a Heartache*, 1973

Indeed, *The Masquerade* aptly captures the confluence of such topics. We peek into a scene set behind bright red framed windows: a woman in a flowing emerald gown looks down at a white

masquerade mask laid out on a table, and what appear to be a crown and a fan are discarded around her. We are unsure whether she is undressing from, or about to attend, some sort of masked ball; or which prop she will finally choose. The overall effect is voyeuristic, and a certain eroticism pervades the painting—the metaphor of our doll encased behind glass is therefore apt and charged with meaning.

Through a Domestic Lens

The succinctness of the symbology used in Walker's work can be attributed to the artist's wide range of filmic influences, including that of David Lynch and Alfred Hitchcock: 'I think it's that space that both Hitchcock and Lynch achieve between the banal or familiar and the threatening. They both use visual signifiers very effectively as well – recurring colour motifs in the character's clothing or environment for example which re-enforce an overarching atmosphere seem very painterly, and is definitely a strategy I use when working in series.'ⁱⁱⁱ

Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66XPYk9bdhc&ab_channel=DAVIDLYNCHTHEATER

David Lynch's *Rabbits*, 2002

Because Walker champions the two filmmakers' use of strong motifs and symbols, it is unsurprising she turned to other cultural iconography such as the neopagan archetype of the Triple Goddess when creating the present series: 'My female subjects inhabit different archetypes both in the home, such as the housewife, cleaner, house sitter or intruder and wider female archetypes such as the witch, femme fatale, mother, and many others. With a number of the paintings in this exhibition [*In Every Dream Home*] I was exploring the pagan idea of the triple goddess: Maiden, Mother, Crone which are these 3 stages of woman.'^{iv} Thus the mask, the crown, and the fan depicted within *The Masquerade* may also similarly evoke deeper connotations of a woman's purpose and life-cycle, especially when set against the ordinary backdrop of the home. The tripartite of symbols is rich with meaning: the performative aspect of assuming different gender roles (the mask), female empowerment (the crown), or even vanity and beauty (the fan)—just one allegorical interpretation amongst many for *The Masquerade*.



Eric Fischl, *Krefeld Project: Bathroom Scene 2*, 2003 © 2022 Eric Fischl / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Caroline Walker's intimate portrayals of the prosaic underbelly of suburban life are not dissimilar to the art of Eric Fischl, whom the artist also names as another influence. Of significance perhaps is Fischl's 2002 project entitled *The Krefeld Project*, during which photo sessions spanning three days took place in a temporarily furnished home in Germany, 'inhabited' by two actors. Various scenes were captured within the artificial domestic setting, culminating in a series of paintings rendering this convergence of performance and real life. This investigation of mundanity is a fascination that both artists share, and as Walker explains, '[t]here's something about the banality and boredom of domesticity mixed with the voyeurism and eroticism in all of these works which intrigues me.'

The Female Gaze

"My work definitely engages with that history of painting women, which has largely cast the male artist as the portrayer of the female realm. I suppose I'm revisiting that, but through a female gaze. And I'm interested in whether the knowledge that something has been painted by a woman might change the way you feel about what you are looking at, or challenge your assumptions about a relationship between artist and model." — Caroline Walker

The utter dissection and scrutiny of the everyday are key to Caroline Walker. One detects links to sources as diverse as Edward Hopper and David Hockney (both of whom turned to quotidian life for artistic stimulus), to the pioneering 19th Century *Intimisme* artists Édouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard, whose devoted depictions of banal but personal domestic scenes paved the way to a new artistic movement. Of particular note however is Walker's commitment to capturing such scenes as seen through a female lens—the same for which cannot be said about her male predecessors. In her unyielding preference for depicting women, Walker challenges our societal perceptions for the female figures she renders, forcing us to fill in the gaps within the narratives she constructs. Her paintings are thus mirrors that reveal more about ourselves than perhaps the images into which we peer.



Left: Édouard Vuillard, *Mme Vuillard Sewing by the Window, rue Truffaut*, circa 1889 Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 Right: Edward Hopper, *New York Office*, 1962 Collection of the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Image: Bridgeman Images, Artwork: © 2022 Heirs of Josephine Hopper / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Collector's Digest

The below is an excerpt from Emily Spicer's interview with the artist for *studio international* in 2017.

Emily Spicer: *Tell me about your process? I've read that you have a particular way of working.*

Caroline Walker: It's quite an elaborate process that starts with finding a location for a photoshoot. When I have a location, I look for models, props and clothing. I start to build a story in my head and then I spend a day on location, photographing the models. I almost try to storyboard that, like

doing a primitive version of a film shoot, I suppose, although I usually go off track quite quickly and start ad-libbing. I might get hundreds of photographs. Then I'll work with them back at the studio and start making lots of drawings and oil sketches. So I start putting together potential big paintings, thinking about how they might join up narratively.

ES: *Why do you so often set your paintings in modernist interiors?*

CW: I think that started with my desire to bring my subject matter into a more contemporary context because, up until about 2010, it seemed that I was always painting interiors of traditionally decorated Victorian houses. At some point around 2010, I began to think about how the environment would affect how you feel about the figures in the paintings and what their situation is. I had the opportunity to use a contemporary home as a setting for a photoshoot and the resulting paintings immediately seemed to engage more with how we live now, instead of looking as though they could have been painted any time in the last 150 years.

[...]

ES: *The way you paint your figures in these spaces makes it feel as though we are spying on them; it's quite voyeuristic. We are viewing them through windows, often from a height or through bannisters as though we're sneaking around the house, and this creates a bit of a tension. Is that something that you are striving for, or is it a byproduct of a different aim?*

CW: There is definitely a strong sense of voyeurism in my work. I'm interested in challenging the position of the viewer, particularly in relation to my female subjects. And the paintings are very large, so there's a sense that you could almost step into the scene. I don't want the paintings to feel like pictures of something that's happening somewhere else. I want you to feel like you're involved or implicated in what's going on.

Read the full interview [here](#).

^{i-v} Caroline Walker, quoted in Daisy Woodward, 'Caroline Walker: In Every Dream Home', *AnOther*, 2013, [online](#)

Provenance

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner in 2012

Exhibited

Debrecen, MODEM Centre for Modern and Contemporary Arts; Prague, Galerie Rudolfinum; *Nightfall: New Tendencies in Figurative Painting*, 7 October 2012 - 24 May 2013, p. 66 (illustrated, p. 67)
London, Pitzhanger Manor Gallery and House, *Caroline Walker: In Every Dream Home*, 18 July - 8 September 2013, p. 67 (illustrated, p. 66)

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



ULTRA/NEO

28

Trey Abdella

Sunny Days

signed and dated 'TREY ABDELLA 2020' on the reverse

acrylic on canvas

198 x 218.5 cm. (77 7/8 x 86 in.)

Painted in 2020.

Estimate

HK\$700,000 — 900,000

€86,000 — 111,000

\$89,700 — 115,000

[Go to Lot](#)



The American Icon

Following on from great American portraitists such as Grant Wood, Edward Hopper, and John Currin, whose art portrays the ideals of the American Dream, Trey Abdella's own renditions of Americana equally distilled the essence of quotidian life. The father and daughter duo depicted in Wood's famed *American Gothic* provided a snapshot into rural America during the turning tides of modernisation during the Great Depression; Hopper's serene scenes of bars and gas stations encapsulated the everyman's frequented locales; Currin's intimate portraits of party scenes and domestic life provided valuable insight into the American psyche. Similarly set against the 'picket fence' notion of a plain white house, New York based Virginia-born American artist Trey Abdella skilfully creates a complex web of contrasting symbology in *Sunny Days*, while knitting in the ideals of the American Dream. He crafts the story of the painting through his exquisite painting techniques, layered use of space and a whimsical play in style that exists between Realism and Surrealism laced with the verisimilitudinous effects of photography.



Grant Wood, *American Gothic*, 1930 School of the Art Institute of Chicago Image: Art Institute of Chicago, Friends of the American Art Collection, 1930.934

Real or Surreal - A Love Story in Virginia?

Abdella stages the social gathering in front of a white house in *Sunny Days*, where the group gathers outdoors to have a good time around a table of refreshments. In the blurred background, the excited crowd sides on the left with man-made objects, which juxtaposes with the tranquillity of nature that is left untouched by men on the right. Estranged from this public gathering, a blurred embracing couple centres the midground in a balanced pyramidal structure. Also set in nature, the intimacy of the veiled *Lovers I* painted by Surrealist master René Magritte comes to

mind as a close reference in their positioning. Like the couple in *Sunny Days*, they have a similar type of indifference to their surroundings, only with awareness towards one other. By veiling the couple, Magritte's pair become a symbol for mysterious love. Similarly, Abdella also symbolically draws parallels between the couple and the tulips in the present work.



René Magritte, *The Lovers I*, 1928 National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Image: © National Gallery of Australia, Canberra / Purchased 1990 / Bridgeman Images © 2022 C. Herscovici / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

In the middle foreground of *Sunny Days*, two black vases display two red tulips each on a hyper realistic wood-grained table. Red tulips carry the artistic connotations of the declaration of love and symbolises passionate love and romance. The side-by-side arrangement of the detailed two vases and contrasting states of the flowers encourage comparison between them. The vase on the left features two wilting, unhealthy tulips, and the form echoes the sloping shoulders of the male figure. Comparatively, the vase on the right features two upright, healthy tulips that pierce through the male's side profile. The way they are both positioned is suggestive, and this surreal organisation of the vases brings to mind the two opposing outcomes for the couple right behind them - a love that will either last or wither. Fittingly, the artist grew up in Virginia, which is famous for their tulip fields, perhaps even suggesting a love story set in Virginia.

The Impact of Photography

At the moment of passionate embrace, time stops for love. Similarly, photography captures frozen moments in time. Renowned Contemporary German master painter Gerhard Richter explores the fading effects of photography in paintings, as illustrated in *Lillies*. Richter uses a blurring effect to undermine binaries and fade the boundaries between abstract and figurative. With a similar exploration, Abdella sets *Sunny Days* in a rectangular frame like a photograph. The artist brings the foreground into focus in high resolution while blurring out the hazy background, and the mid-ground grass remains texturally painted in between. This layering resembles the effect of photos taken by a professional camera and demonstrates the skilful painting techniques of the artist and his mastering of pictorial space. To stimulate the viewer's eye, the current work is an exquisite demonstration of Abdella's mastery in conveying multiple messages and narratives simultaneously within one glance.



Gerhard Richter, *Lilies*, 2000 National Gallery of Canada, Canada Image and Artwork: © 2022 Gerhard Richter (0226)

Estranged American Dream

“I think my work is autobiographical, so most of the paintings are about me in some way. Kind of like a weird diary entry from different days in my life.” — Trey Abdella

Living in a complex cosmopolitan city in New York, Abdella gains inspiration from contemporary American culture and utilises simple universal iconography referenced from internet memes, movies and cartoons. Similar to American female artist Jamian Juliano-Villani, Abdella also uses the projector as a tool for layering different symbols into his compositions. His art strives to resonate with human experiences and feelings, as he blends different scenarios encountered in daily life, taken from his personal experiences or stories that he hears from his friends into his art. The current work was exhibited in Berlin, König Galerie’s Abdella solo show *Growing Pains* in 2020 alongside other comical works that featured the small daily grievances encountered in everyday American life. The estranged couple alludes to the alienated and hidden emotional life that one experiences in America, and the contrast between the fading and thriving tulips symbolise success and failure of the great American Dream. Taken in this context, the present work is a frozen image of the state of Contemporary America that is both a departure but also continuation of *American Gothic*.



Installation view of the current work (left) at Berlin, König Galerie *Trey Abdella: Growing Pains*, 25 September - 18 October 2020 Courtesy the artists and König Galerie

Collector’s Digest

Born in 1994 in Manassas, West Virginia, Trey Abdella graduated from School of Visual Arts, New York for his BFA in 2016 and furthered his studies with a master’s degree at New York Academy of Art.

During summer this year, the artist debuted a solo exhibition in China, *Almost Heaven* in X Museum, Beijing (July, 2022). Additionally, Trey Abdella held solo exhibitions internationally at KÖNIG GALERIE, Seoul (2021); KÖNIG GALERIE, Berlin (2020); T293 Gallery, Rome (2021, 2019), amongst others. Next year, the artist will be having solo shows at Vito Schnabel Gallery, New York (2023) and David Lewis Gallery, New York (2023). His work has been included in recent group shows at Vito Schnabel Gallery, Los Angeles (2022) and Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles (2021). He also joined the Chubb artist fellowships at the New York Academy of Art (2019-2020). His art is

Trey Abdella

included in important collections such as the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami; Perez Museum, Miami; Albertina Museum and X Museum, Beijing. The current work was included as part of the Trey Abdella: Growing Pains exhibition at König Galerie Berlin in 2020.

Provenance

König Galerie, Berlin

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Berlin, König Galerie, *Trey Abdella: Growing Pains*, 25 September - 18 October 2020

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



ULTRA/NEO

29

André Butzer

Untitled

signed and dated 'A. Butzer '19' on the reverse
oil on canvas
190 x 285 cm. (74 3/4 x 112 1/4 in.)
Painted in 2019.

Estimate

HK\$600,000 — 800,000
€74,200 — 98,900
\$76,900 — 103,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Every image is an abstraction. No matter what’s on it.” — André Butzer

In a world of compromise, André Butzer refuses to do so. For the last three decades, he’s carved his way through the ever-changing sands of art discourse with a wholly unique practice, one that blends the tradition of European expressionism with American popular culture. Deriving from a varied and storied clout of influences, Henri Matisse to Walt Disney, Friedrich Hölderlin to Henry Ford, Butzer creates tapestries of a singular devotion to that which exists around him, and that which lies in his ideation.

A Castle in the Sky

“I just follow the roads of pictorial power.” — André Butzer

This complex visual register is what the artist has labelled ‘Science-Fiction Expressionism’ⁱ, with which he constructs the fictional world of NASAHEIM, a space colony populated by the Piece-Siemens. In his own words: ‘NASAHEIM is a word creation. The term brings together what constitutes the pictorial in itself. Namely, proximity and distance. These two terms are then pulled together into a non-place which is NASAHEIM. This is not a private mythology, but an impossibility of a very universal kind, a dimensionless locality without a place, whose essence is the threshold or the frequency. Thus, a very vibrating manner – but still almost imperceptibly vibrating, like a sound’ⁱ. By founding this imaginary universe, Butzer lends social allegory to his figures who in turn transcend past existing as staffage in his pools of pigment, becoming icons of the future that occupy the liminal spaces between meta-narratives like utopianism and mass consumerism. Rendered in child-like abstraction, the artist calls his creatures to be ‘an embodiment of the generally prevailing deformation, which relates to the idea of a future image of man, body, flesh and of potato chips. It is an image of man that one often encounters in everyday culture’ⁱⁱ. What becomes manifest through these images is a breed of expressionism as pictorial space protrudes outwards into our presence, granting entry to Butzer’s creative genius.

Free Association

“Titian said painting is about flesh and water, and I say it is about flesh and lemonade.” — André Butzer

The present lot reflects his recent move to California in 2019, a vibrant palette replacing the Soulages-esque, dark monochromatic tones of his *N-Paintings*. Entropy lingers in these sober

works, as does Butzer’s commitment to utopianism. Indeed, this period in his oeuvre functions as a kind of endgame for his painterly ambitions (if such a label is even possible for an artist of such ceaseless industry): ‘The black paintings are decisive: they are the utmost limit from which I had to return. Never can any image undo the borderline experience I had and still have with the black paintings. One does not simply jump back from the boundary; instead, everything returns, but differently. They, the black paintings, are the foundation of all images before and after. They are the place my paintings come from. Place of birth and place of death, beginning and end, but set into one’ⁱⁱⁱ. The East Coast’s temperate climate allowed for Butzer to paint *en plein air* year-round, suffusing his canvasses with dynamic vigour and opening the door for figuration to mesh seamlessly with his dedication to abstraction.

Untitled presents four figures set against a teal backdrop – chromatic totalism that is a hallmark of his practice. These figures are not suspended in mutual perpetuity, but instead engaging with one another jovially. These characters are otherworldly yet familiar, bearing distinct resemblance to the flattened caricatures of Jean Dubuffet. Naturally, Butzer’s abstraction disseminates from form to interaction as their childlike expressions and simplified features turn conversation into dialogue more fitting for a Kurt Vonnegut novel.



Jean Dubuffet, *Vont et Viennent*, 1980 Artwork: © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris / Estate of Marcel Duchamp

While three of these figures can be allotted into a similar genus, the figure on the right provokes a different association: cloaked in burnt drabs of brown and gilded with an unsettling visage embellished with vacant eyes, his presence redefines the painting's ambience as our eye travels left to right across the composition. Either the sinister underbelly of utopianism or rather, final-stage capitalism is made manifest in his works. The basis of his inception produces a plurality of theories, but one thing is for certain – his inclusion in the otherwise gentile scene makes the work teem with a certain otherness. For symbolic guidance, we can turn to an interview with the artist conducted with *Vice* in 2017, predating his relocation to California, in which he declared 'LA is like death in the sunshine'^{iv}. Such broodings indicate that the exuberance of his practice is indeed tempered by a darker side, which places his *N-Paintings* in a different context. In any case, *Untitled's* unsettling ambiguity does not repel but attract as we cannot help to ponder the origins, desires, and ambitions of these figures; plunging into Butzer's Pandora's box of futuristic fantasy is a pleasure second to none – dive headfirst.

Collectors Digest

Testament to his growing eminence in both the commercial and institutional spheres of the art world, Taschen released a comprehensive study into Butzer's work this summer.

Butzer has been the subject of solo shows at major institutions including the Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover; Kunsthalle Nuremberg; and the Yuz Museum, Shanghai. His work forms part of the collections of Carré d'art, Nîmes; the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; MONA, Tasmania; the Rubell Family, Miami; MOCA, Los Angeles; and the Marciano Collection, Los Angeles, amongst others.

Butzer's work is held in various leading, internationally recognised collections, including: Scharpff Collection; Taschen Collection; Goetz Collection; Rubell Collection; Fondazione Prada; and Colección Lázaro.

ⁱ André Butzer, quoted in [Shawn Ghassemitari](#), 'TASCHEN Published a Massive Book on André Butzer', *Hypeart*, June 2022, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ André Butzer, quoted in Hans Werner Holzwarth, 'André Butzer: Paints from 1999 to 2021', *Taschen Magazine*, Summer 2022, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid.*

^{iv} André Butzer, quoted in Michael Slenske, 'Expressionism, Now with Added Black', *Vice*, 11 September 2017, [online](#)

Provenance

Galerie Max Hetzler, London

Private Collection, Sydney

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Literature

Georg Von Bernstorff, ed., 'André Butzer. Von Berlin nach Kalifornien – Matisse und der Science-Fiction-Expressionismus', *SALON*, Summer 2020, vol. 77, p. 83 (illustrated)

Hans Werner Halzwarth, *André Butzer*, Cologne, 2021, pp. 356-357 (illustrated)

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ULTRA/NEO

30

Rafa Macarrón

Atmosfera II

signed with the artist's initials and inscribed 'Rm
BACH' lower right
mixed media on aluminium and PVC
228 x 146 cm. (89 3/4 x 57 1/2 in.)
Executed in 2015.

Estimate

HK\$800,000 — 1,200,000

€97,800 — 147,000

\$103,000 — 154,000

[Go to Lot](#)



“Everything depends on the power of wonder at life, from there I build my work. I am interested in each of my characters being unique, alive, and having their own soul.” — Rafa Macarrón

Carrying a sense of tranquillity, tenderness, and wonder, Spanish artist Rafa Macarrón’s fluid, dazzling dreamscapes are characterised by his layered use of mixed-media techniques that culminates into a rich tapestry of texture and detail, brimming with life. Playing host to an assortment of uncanny humanoid characters, Macarrón’s paintings celebrate the excitement of ordinary life, depicting figures in quotidian moments as they drink beer, smoke cigarettes, or go to work.

Atmosfera II

In *Atmosfera II*, Macarrón’s surreal, alien-like protagonists are sprinkled across the canvas in various groups, surrounded by patchworks of impasto, colour, lines and text. Under close observation, the artist had incorporated three-dimensional bulbous eyes that protrude from the surface for the largest creatures, animating these characters with an air of playfulness and humour that stands in contrast with the intentionally flat background.



Detail of the present lot

Incorporating a diverse range of mediums in his work, Macarrón builds up a tapestry of layers and perspectives as seen in the current work. Each group of figures is situated on disparate planes whilst linked by colourful strands of acrylic, creating nuanced complexity within the pictorial surface.

Distorted Figuration

A physiotherapist by training, Macarrón plays with anatomic distortions and deformations based on his personal experience working with the human body. Demonstrating the artist’s acute sense of observation and familiarity in this area, Macarrón depicts limbs and faces with all their imperfections, celebrating each person’s unique soul and personality.

“My characters [...] are born from a fantastic, surreal, and expressionist figuration. I consider them hybrid characters that are closely related to my admiration for Dubuffet, Bonifacio, and Alfonso Fraile.” — Rafa Macarrón

Deeply rooted in the history of European figurative painting, Macarrón’s paintings draw comparison with the works of Jean Dubuffet, in particular in their shared sense of unstructured space, their application of layered, swift brushstrokes and a playful use of line, evident in examples such as Dubuffet’s *Random Site with 5 Personages* from the *Sites Aléatoires* series.



Left: Jean Dubuffet, *Random Site with 5 Personages* from the *Sites Aléatoires* series, 1982 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York Image: © The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence, Artwork: © 2022 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris Right: Detail of the present lot

Acknowledging the influence of a fellow Spaniard, Macarrón recalls a childhood visit to Musée Picasso in Paris as particularly inspirational: ‘When I entered one of the rooms I asked for a notebook and coloured pencils. I spent the whole morning trying to understand what was in front of me. At the age of seven I used to make drawings full of colour, animals or people taken out from some unknown world.’¹ Similar to Picasso, Macarrón plays with fragmentation and reconfiguration in character construction. Yet departing from this Cubist starting point, Macarrón places an emphasis on the exaggeration of their facial features through his use of elongated limbs in juxtaposition.



Left: Pablo Picasso, *Seated Woman*, 1927 Collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York Image: © The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence, Artwork: © 2022 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Right: Detail of the present lot

In Interview

In 2021, Rafa Macarrón spoke to Rom Levy from Street Art News on the aesthetic and inspiration behind his idiosyncratic characters:

Street Art News: Who and what inspires your work?

Rafa Macarrón: A small sunrise, the time I spend with my children, a walk with the dogs... To look at the small, ordinary, and daily details. It is very important to me and for my practice, to feel, perceive and keep painting to learn how to create new work. Those are the little things that inspire me.

SAN: Who are the characters in your paintings?

RM: The characters come out of my everyday life and I take them out of context. They could be individuals living with us. When I create them, I always like to imagine where they come from, what they do, where they go, what life they have...

It is clear to me that I want to speak about life on the street, the everyday life, and my own existence. And I want to speak about these things with humour, more white than dark humour, more compassionate than cruel.

I also like that the characters relate to the viewer, and I play with the formats and scales. I go from a large portrait, where the contact with the figure is direct, to panoramas in which dozens of characters seem to be starring in multiple scenes simultaneously.

SAN: Although your subject engages in daily human activities and has human resemblance, they have a more cartoonish quality. What do you aim to deliver through that, and do your subjects stand as separate entities from ordinary people?

RM: My characters don't go towards the caricature. I flee away from all kinds of cartoonish ornamentation. They are born from a fantastic, surreal, and expressionist figuration. I consider them hybrid characters that are closely related to my admiration for Dubuffet, Bonifacio, and Alfonso Fraile. My characters live in a transcended daily life, clean days, sunsets, and fresh air.

Read the full interview [here](#).

Collector's Digest

Born in Madrid in 1981, self-taught artist Rafa Macarrón first came to prominence after winning the BMW Painting Award in 2010. The artist's debut solo exhibition in Asia, *Afternoon Delight*, had just closed at the CVG Foundation in Beijing, which lasted from 22 April - 19 May, 2022.

Alongside solo exhibitions with Allouche Gallery in New York and Nino Mier Gallery in Los Angeles, Macarrón held his first institutional solo show at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga in 2021 with scenes of bathers and beaches providing the central thematic focus.

Macarrón's works are in the public collections of the Hudson Valley Centre for Contemporary Art, New York; Foundation BMW, Spain; Caja Campo, Valladolid, Spain; and Collection Mercadona, Spain, among others.

ⁱ Rafa Macarrón, quoted in 'Artist Interview: Rafa Macarrón', *Street Art News*, 26 October 2021, [online](#)

Provenance

Lío Malca, New York

Aurora Vigil-Escalera Galería de Arte, Gijón

Acquired from the above by the present owner



ULTRA/NEO

31

Louise Bonnet

The Swimmer

oil on canvas

76.5 x 51 cm. (30 1/8 x 20 1/8 in.)

Painted in 2016.

Estimate

HK\$400,000 — 600,000

€49,200 — 73,700

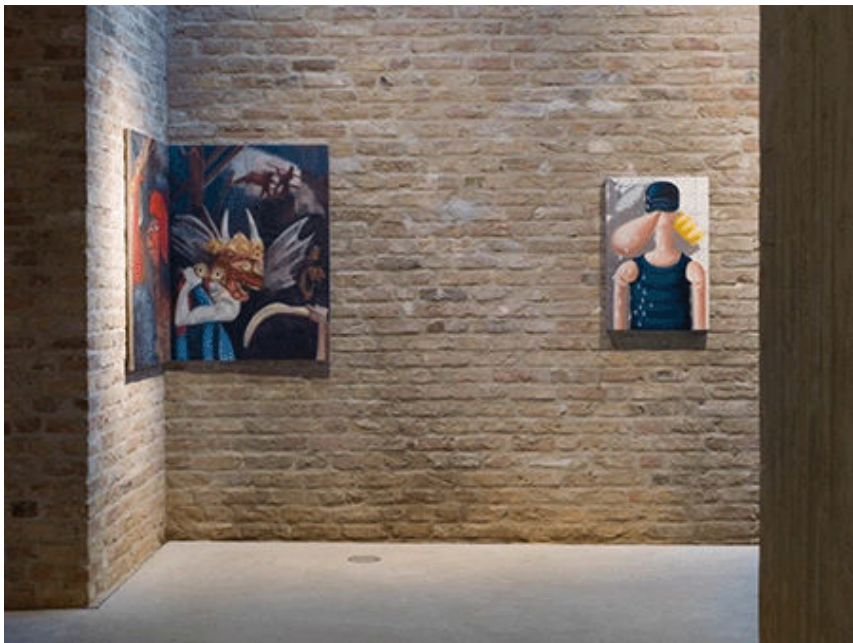
\$51,300 — 76,900

[Go to Lot](#)



"I'm interested in the body being out of control, that you think you are in control, but you are actually not, your body is betraying you, or things are happening that you can't control... So the noses are, to me, represent that sort of weight, like an external vision of weight and being out of control, but still trying to be dignified about it." — Louise Bonnet

Fascinated by externalising her inner vision for emotions such as guilt and shame, Los Angeles-based Swiss artist Louise Bonnet's constant explorations into the matter arrive at a highly recognisable style that straddles the line between beauty and ugliness, whilst focusing on expressing her own feelings as much as evoking them from the viewer. Created in 2016, *The Swimmer* is a humorous and bizarrely charming exemplar, revealing a light-hearted side of Bonnet's oeuvre. Widely recognised for her beautiful yet grotesque depictions of human bodies that twist, fold and intertwine into an emotionally powerful presence, she has garnered international following in recent years.



Installation view of the present lot (right) at Berlin, König Galerie, *Surreal*, 12 March - 24 April 2016
Courtesy the artists and König Galerie Artwork: © Louise Bonnet

Let The Body Talk

"To me it's really about you seeing something that you might not be allowed to see. That the person wouldn't want you to see. That's also why I think I don't put eyes, usually, and I hide their faces, so that you are really allowed to look as much as you want without being challenged." — Louise Bonnet

Following less on a narrative that ties a painting together, Bonnet instead focuses on articulating the expressive tension of forms through the rendering of weight, volume, and depth, allowing elements to weave into a nonsensical appearance that exudes unexpected strength and enchantment. Captured on canvas is a figure in a navy swimsuit and swim cap, with wavy blond hair untucked, standing under a drizzling showerhead against a white-tiled bathroom wall. With eyes covered-up and their gender inconclusive, the character's body is depicted in solidified and weighty forms, with a tiered torso being reminiscent of the Michelin Man. With the disproportionately large mallet-shaped nose taking centre stage for attention, the absurdity of the 'swimming under a showerhead' scene immediately brings a smile to the viewer's face.



The artist in her studio Image: David Broach, Artwork: © Louise Bonnet

Portraying her characters without the distractions of the eyes or face, Bonnet aims to present a vulnerable moment of her figures, when their bodies betray their conscious management and is out of control. In the case of *The Swimmer*, this idea is articulated by the overly exaggerated weighty nose, visually pulling the character down, as if speaking for the entertainingly dampened mood. This characterisation recalls the well-known protagonist of children's novel *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, whose nose grows whenever he lies. Bonnet zooms in on the psychological and physiological tension that is a result from the unwilling revelation of what one intends to conceal.



Left: The present lot Right: Caravaggio, *The Musicians*, 1597 Image: © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Rogers Fund, 1952, 5281

A long-desired creative freedom came to Bonnet after she unleashed her creative voice by switching from acrylic paint to the oil medium in 2014, with market popularity positively affirming this transition in her style. Contrasted to the flat quality of acrylic painting, oil allows for a rendering of stronger compositional depth, introducing to her new canvases a vivid chiaroscuro that imparts sculptural quality and dramatic impact. This new element allows for much dramatic tension to come through, inevitably reminding the viewer of the distinct style of Baroque Mannerism artists such as Caravaggio.

The Expressive Potentials of The Human Form

As female contemporaries of Bonnet, both Christina Quarles and Sarah Slapppy share a focus on figuration, exploring the expressive potentials of human bodies in out-of-the-ordinary ways.

Quarles and Slapppy are unapologetically bold in expressing their unique sentiments by redlining normalcy of human representations, and as a result, evoke unexpected emotions, exemplified by *I Can Only Feel Whut Touches Me* by Quarles and *Black Pearls II* by Slapppy.



Left: Lot 5, Christina Quarles, *I Can Only Feel Whut Touches Me*, 2016 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD900,000 - 1,200,000 Right: Lot 32, Sarah Slapppy, *Black Pearls II*, 2020 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD300,000 - 500,000

Sharing a graphic design background with Bonnet, Quarles centres her works around subverting ingrained assumptions and beliefs concerning identity and the human figure with her fluid and dynamic human forms, employing technologies such as Adobe Illustrator into her creative process. Slapppy, contrastingly brings to focus the unconscious violence inherent to the homogenous and almost rigid definition of femineity, articulated by her meticulously delineated and bizarrely interactive human limbs.

Immersing into Bonnet's work can be a complicated experience: while being puzzled and even repulsed by the grotesque appeal, one is irresistibly attracted to her work in ways beyond logical explanations. The simultaneous emotional pleasure and critical judgement create unconscious inner conflict within the viewer's mind, making the viewing experience of Bonnet's work an unexpected expedition of inward discoveries.

Bonnet was born in 1970 in Geneva, Switzerland, where she attended the Haute École d'art et de design. She now resides and works in Los Angeles with artist husband Adam Silverman. She began her creative career working in illustration and graphic design, before foray into the realm of painting in 2008. Her recent exhibition includes *Onslaught* at Gagosian in Hong Kong (31 May - 6 August 2022), marking her Asian debut, and her first solos show in France - *Bathers* at Galerie Max Heltzer in Paris (11 September - 30 October 2021).

Louise Bonnet

In addition to being represented by Gagosian, Bonnet's work is amongst the permanent collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Yuz Foundation, Shanghai; Brandhorst Museum, Munich; and Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; amongst others.

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

The artist speaking on her creative process, 2022

Provenance

Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Berlin, König Galerie, *Surreal*, 12 March - 24 April 2016

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



ULTRA/NEO

32

Sarah Slaphey

Black Pearls II

signed and dated 'S.Slaphey 2020' on the reverse
oil on canvas
140 x 124.5 cm. (55 1/8 x 49 in.)
Painted in 2020.

Estimate

HK\$300,000 — 500,000
€36,900 — 61,500
\$38,500 — 64,100

[Go to Lot](#)



“I think being in a human body is to be in a constant state of vulnerability. The action in my paintings underscores this. I like to play with different kinds of touching that straddle the line between comfort and discomfort. Squeezing, grabbing, poking, prodding. They are actions that could feel menacing or delightful, depending on the context. And in my paintings you never really know what this context is, so they flip-flop between dangerous and silly – and to me, that’s vulnerability.” — Sarah Slappey

South Carolina-born but Brooklyn-based, Sarah Slappey’s work is defined by her surrealist interpretations of femininity in the 21st Century. Luscious and unnerving, her compositions are filled with nameless bodies whose contorted limbs interlink with controlled abandon, and bejeweled with tropes of girlhood (bows, jewels) as well as more lewd objects like drugs and piercings. Slappey’s unforgiving and singular practice has firmly placed her at the forefront of the next crop of rising female figurative artists, straddling the line between comfort and discomfort, the seductive and the grotesque.

Sinister Objects of Restraint

Here, twisting ribbons of black beads lactate from the impossible physiology of the anonymous Venus. Carnal topography is rendered in portly blushes of pink, rose and coral that serve both to heighten femininity and flirt with a menacing sexuality, one that pervades through the composition despite its innocent palette and that the artist categorises as ‘a kind of quiet violence’¹. The salacious sexuality that lies at the heart of the work shifts interest from the conceptual to the physical, making us question our own bodies and their relationship with our subconscious. The searching hands are poised in a Renaissance delicacy bearing religion connotations to Virgin Mary’s chironomia, while their corpulence reminds us of Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, albeit with a more sinister kind of Mannerism. Nonetheless, the soft contours of flesh that Slappey achieves is a product of both her own industry (she often devotes 60-hour weeks to her studio) and her use of a weathered palette knife that permits large quantities of pigment to melt under her consummate direction.



Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus*, 1485-86 Uffizi Gallery, Florence Image: Scala, Florence - courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali e del Turismo

In another work to be offered in this season’s sales, *The Swimmer* by Louis Bonnet (Lot 31), we see a further continuation of this toying with the signifiers of sexuality and gender, forming a natural diptych of conference. Bonnet presents an absurdist depiction of a young man showering with his clothes on, his exaggerated features holding patent phallic imagery – an uneasy balance between physiological and psychological tension that makes canvas and pigment burst at the seams.



Left: The Present Lot Right: Lot 31, Louise Bonnet, *The Swimmer*, 2016 Phillips Hong Kong Evening Sale, 1 December 2022 Estimate: HKD400,000-600,00

Interpretations are not definitive or final as Slappey leaves the door open for personal subjectivity; 'I know that I can't control other people's read of my work. I would be chasing that forever', she explains, 'but it made me think that, as an artist who makes representational images, my work is sort of like a stew, where I'm always adding in ingredients to make the final product'ⁱⁱ. However, there is a target in sight for her works: the male gaze. For all the subjugation of the female body that hangs onto art history (and art to this day) like a cancer, Slappey's presentation of the female figure with all its contours, imperfections and perfections forces the debate to the opposite sex, and demands an answer; 'I want men to feel the humaneness of being in a body and the constraints of being in a body. Also the body and culture and pinching and pulling and piercing because that's all universal. We all have skin, muscle, and tissue, and fat'ⁱⁱⁱ.

In Interview

In 2019, Sarah Slappey spoke to Julia Mont from *twocoatsofpaint* on her newer series of smaller works that began to place an emphasis on the tangling of limbs and dripping breasts:

Julia Monte: This approach is new for you.

Sarah Slappey: Definitely since within the past year, it sort of grew from small paintings on paper of hands, because I wanted to apply for a flat file program and I needed paintings on paper. Then I started making these paintings; I wanted to make some small, quick works. Instead of trying to fit the whole figure into a small space, I thought, well what if I keep the figure essentially lifesize, but just use the hands as a substitute for the entire body? I kept going with because I realized that to say what I want to say, I didn't need the whole body. It might actually be a distraction.

JM: *I think that's a smart move. This is something I think about as well, the scale within a drawing or sculpture and how you can manipulate that. So prior to this work you were painting full figures.*

SS: Yes, some full figures, some pieces of bodies, but they were all nearly life size. In hindsight I realize I was paying more attention to the environments than what the figures were doing in them. Now it's much more important to have the figure in the environment, both acting and reacting with each other.

[...]

JM: *Limbs was definitely stuck in my head, describing both plant and body. The ones that referenced that of a human were very slippery or glossy and shiny -*

SS: slimey, yes.

JM: *There is a dichotomy between the two. Not that the plants don't always read the same way, but they seem to have more evident brush strokes, while the marks in the hands or breasts and nipples are subdued, They are more realized and stick out in a different way.*

SS: Well, the foliage backgrounds, to me, feel much more abstract because they are quick. It is like I am finding the spaces as I go along, usually. Whereas the limbs and the breasts are really, like you said, highly rendered and kind of shiny and slimy. I like the paradox between the two as this kind of puffy body that lives in a world that is fast and sketchy, at times. And then, at other times, maybe it is just a series of abstracted shapes that feel Matisse-y. If it were all done in one style or the other that space between the two types of representation would be lost.

[...]

JM: *Some worlds within the paintings are almost desolate feeling. They do feel full of life, and I think there is an idea of nurturing, as well. Of course, nature is evident, but the other side of that is nurture; especially with the dripping breasts that present as if they were watering their environment. There is a directness. Perhaps the misshapen figures don't represent something dead, but something not living.*

SS: There is definitely something sinister. Any time an artist takes apart a body in a painting, there is going to be a sense of disturbance. Which I like because they are all so lush and sexual, but each of these figures, in not connecting to a torso or a head, feel threatening to a viewer. But, again, I

am all about the paradox, so I like to undermine that threat. Maybe it was a living person and it is not any more. That sort of dead feeling, like you said, presents something gentle and caressing, but is it also pulling something apart. Or holding it together? The painting with the hand reaching for a butterfly, which seems -- I am even surprised that I put a butterfly in a painting because it is so twee and yet, I put it in there because it seems sweet. Also I always want to touch butterflies and you're not supposed to because you will damage their wings. So, essentially, by touching their wings you are murdering them. Impulse control, or lack thereof, and the feeling that things are teetering on not being ok is something that I am interested in. But I love what you just said about the dripping breasts nourishing the environment. I feel like the moment you said that I got four paintings in my brain.

Read the full interview [here](#).

Collector's Digest

Sarah Slappey lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Her paintings examine the paradoxes of aesthetic pleasure and discomfort through the human form. She received her MFA from Hunter College in 2016 and BA from Wake Forest University in 2006. She is represented by Sargent's Daughters, New York.

Slappey has had solo exhibitions at Maria Bernheim Gallery (Zurich) and Sargent's Daughters (New York). Her work has been included in group exhibitions at the Schlossmuseum, Linz; Carl Kostyal Gallery, London; Deanna Evans Projects, New York; König Galerie, Berlin; Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York; and the Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain (MAMCO), Geneva.

In 2015, Slappey was awarded at Kossak Painting Grant and a Hunter MFA award for Outstanding Achievement. Her work as appeared in such publications as *The New Yorker*, *Flash Art*, *Two Coats of Paint*, *ArtSpace*, *ArtMaze Magazine*, *Social Life*, *Long Island Pulse*, and *Hamptons Art Hub*.

Slappey's work is held in the permanent collections of Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; Institute of Contemporary Art Miami, Miami; Musée D'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Geneva; Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus; Orange County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Vanhaerents Art Collection, Brussels; Zabudowicz Collection, London.

ⁱ Katie White, 'How Does Rising Artist Sarah Slappey Stay Mellow While Painting Scenes of 'Quiet Violence'? A Soothing Studio Soundtrack', *Artnet News*, 21 September 2021, [online](#)

ⁱⁱ Sarah Slappey, quoted in Sasha Bogojev, 'Sarah Slappey: The Well of Fucked-Upness', *Juxtapoz*, [online](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid.*

Provenance

Galerie Maria Bernheim, Zürich

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Berlin, König Galerie, *The Artist is Online: Painting and Sculpture in the Postdigital Age*, 18 March - 18 April 2021

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



ULTRA/NEO

33

Ayako Rokkaku

Untitled

signed and dated '2012 Rokkaku Ayako [in Japanese]'

lower right

acrylic on canvas

142.2 x 225.3 cm. (55 7/8 x 88 3/4 in.)

Painted in 2012.

Estimate

HK\$1,200,000 — 1,800,000

€148,000 — 222,000

\$154,000 — 231,000

[Go to Lot](#)



Introduction

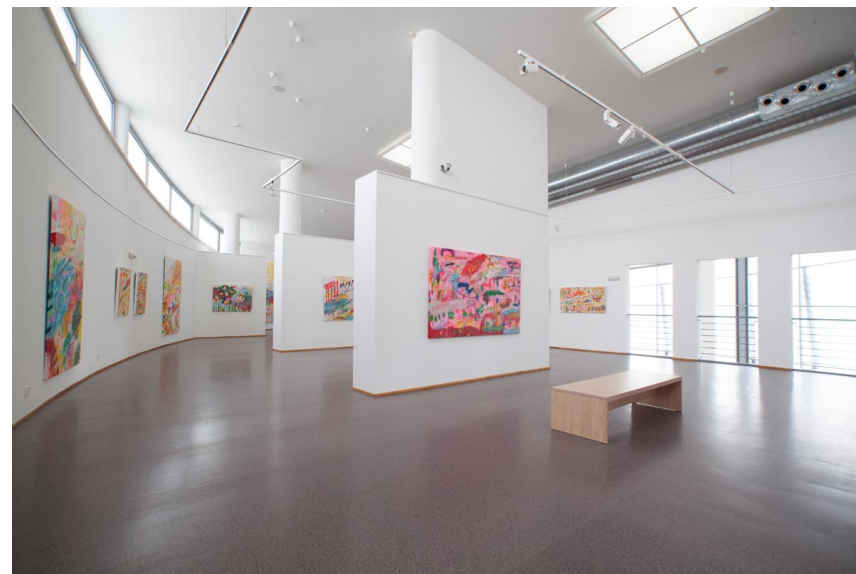
Featuring dazzling colours and a myriad of whimsical creatures, Ayako Rokkaku's *Untitled* (2012) is an early exemplar of the artist's kaleidoscopic, enchanting paintings from the artist's prolific oeuvre. The artist populates her vivid wonderlands with spirited characters, flourishing nature and her signature *Kawaii* (cute) adolescent girls.

Evoking carefree mark-making often seen in children's drawings, Rokkaku's painterly surfaces recall elements of impressionism in its thick layers of impasto. Spontaneous, staccato brushstrokes commingle and combine into vast dreamlike fantasies, as if lush meadows rippling under a gentle spring breeze. Shifting between abstraction and figuration, Rokkaku introduces intriguing plays of form and streams of bright colour into her fantastical world, her characters continually assuming new shapes within a dynamic landscape.



Detail of the present lot

Dancing through the woods, our main protagonist in *Untitled* is accompanied by a whole cast of animal friends. She cheekily tucks away one of them in her dress pocket, bringing it along on her paradisiacal journey through the swaying cotton candy trees and rich mushroom forests. The current work was also exhibited at the artist's solo museum exhibition at the Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, Bratislava in 2012.



Installation view of the current work at Bratislava, Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, Ayako Rokkaku: *Where the smell comes from*, 23 September - 9 December 2012 Image: Archive Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum.

In Interview: The World at her Fingertips

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

Entirely self taught, Rokkaku's artistic practice is anchored through the artist's touch. Dancing across large canvases, Rokkaku smears dazzling swirls of colour directly with her bare hands and fingertips, capturing the speed and verve in which she creates. Highly intuitive, Rokkaku refrains from being confined by rules of conventional painting, immersing herself fully during her painting process without an underlying plan. Allowing her motifs to develop during the process, the act of painting becomes performative: 'I love painting something that is much bigger than I am. Moving to and fro between the corners of such a huge canvas makes me feel as if the colours are flowing through my body.'ⁱ

In 2022, Rokkaku spoke with *Autre Magazine* on this hands-on creative process:

Autre Magazine: *As a self-taught artist, when did you realise that working with your fingers and hands helped you produce your painterly, impressionistic visions on canvas?*

Ayako Rokkaku: When I was 20 years old and when I hadn't got my style yet, I participated in an event in Tokyo for amateur artists for the first time. I did live painting there. I prepared some materials (brush, pen, crayon, paper, etc) and tried some methods of painting. I was painting on the used cardboard on the floor with acrylic paint on my hand and it came to me. I felt that I was able to leave a trace of something like an improvisational and primitive impulse on the cardboard and it fit me well.

Autre: *Your paintings are fully realised and mature, but there is a very childlike freedom to them. Did you paint when you were a child and what did you paint or draw?*

AR: I liked drawing when I was a child, and I remember I liked putting colours more.

It feels fun when the paper gets vivid and lively as I put more colours on it. But it was after I grew up when I started to look carefully and think more about children's drawing. I'm trying to keep the impression of pureness and freedom like children's drawing in my works.

Autre: *Who are some Japanese or international artists that inspired you growing up?*

AR: I'm impressed by Cy Twombly, Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning. I also like Monet, Klee, Matisse, etc...

Autre: *There has been a tradition of artists painting as performance. For instance, Yves Klein — is there a particular difference between painting in front of a crowd versus the solitary environment of a studio?*

AR: I'm happy to be able to share the time and process when a painting is born, not only a finished work with the people there. It makes me feel like I'm drawing with the energy of the people there. And it is fun for me, by continuing to paint without thinking too much and without fear of failure in a limited time, sometimes unexpected techniques and motifs are born. On the other hand, when painting alone in the studio, it feels like playing — catching the energy ball between the canvas and myself.

Read the full interview [here](#).

Collector's Digest

Born 1982 in Chiba, Japan, Ayako Rokkaku began her artistic career in 2002, during her early twenties. Rokkaku quickly established herself on the international art scene after exhibiting at the 9th edition of the Geisai art fair in 2006 and was awarded the prestigious Akio Goto Prize, founded

by Kaikai KiKi Studio which is led by art world giant, Takashi Murakami.

In 2018, Phillips Hong Kong was the first to bring Rokkaku to the eyes of the market with a selling exhibition, *Sam Francis, Walasse Ting & Ayako Rokkaku: Perpetual Colours*, selling out before the first day of the opening. Since then, demand for the artist has exploded internationally. Rokkaku's works are included in the permanent collections of the Powerlong Art Museum, China; Sehwa Museum of Art, South Korea; the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, Japan; and the Voorlinden Museum, Netherlands, amongst others.

Rokkaku's recent exhibitions include solo presentation, *Born in the Fluffy Journey* with Konig Galerie, Berlin (2021) and her institutional show with the Chiba Prefectural Museum of Art, *Magic Hand* (2021). Rokkaku currently lives and works in multiple cities, travelling between Porto, Berlin, Tokyo, and Amsterdam. She is represented by Gallery Delaive, Amsterdam.



Ayako Rokkaku, *Untitled*, 2019 Sold by Phillips Hong Kong for HKD8,115,000, 22 June 2022

ⁱ Ayako Rokkaku, as quoted in: 'Ayako Rokkaku: "Fumble in Colors, Tiny Discoveries"', *Markets Insider*, 15 August 2019, [online](#)

Provenance

Gallery Delaive, Amsterdam

Acquired from the above by the present owner

Exhibited

Bratislava, Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, *Ayako Rokkaku: Where the smell comes from*,

23 September - 9 December 2012

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



ULTRA/NEO

34

Brett Crawford

3MO SUPPORT

signed with the artist's initials 'BC' in the centre;
further signed, titled and dated "'3MO SUPPORT"
2022 Brett Crawford' on the reverse
acrylic on canvas
100 x 100 cm. (39 3/8 x 39 3/8 in.)
Painted in 2022.

Estimate

HK\$600,000 — 800,000

€74,200 — 98,900

\$76,900 — 103,000

[Go to Lot](#)



An Auction debut for the artist, Brett Crawford's *3MO SUPPORT* is an homage to a plethora of pop culture and contemporary icons from Pinocchio to Virgil Abloh's Louis Vuitton x Off White Nike sneakers. Based in Southern California, Crawford is a multidisciplinary artist whose works span across painting, sculpture, design, and street murals; each of his works is a cultural exchange between art, fashion, and street culture. Playing with fairy tale imagery and surreal settings, Crawford's canvases are populated with pop references and contemporary icons that prompt the viewer to seek for hidden stories within, as if going on an Easter egg hunt.

In October 2022, Charlotte Raybaud, Head of Evening Sale, Hong Kong spoke to Brett Crawford in depth about his background, and on living through a tough childhood and adulthood yet completing turning his life around towards his now skyrocketing artistic career. The artist also takes a deep dive into his inspiration behind the current work, *3MO SUPPORT*. Below is an excerpt of their conversation.

The Beginning

Charlotte Raybaud: Well, why don't we start with the first question. How did you get started on your career as an artist?

Brett Crawford: I think that the interesting question is when do you define the career: when you first start making art or when you become a professional artist? I started doing art young, like two or three years old. I don't ever remember a time where I couldn't draw whatever I wanted to draw. [...] And at around probably three or four years old, is when I started using my art to kind of deal with a lot – really kind of a rough childhood.

I was raised by criminal[s], thieves and drug addicts. And then I became that for a long time, and I ended up spending about 18 years of my life in jail and in prison. Because once I got it into my head, that's all I could ever be. I just never saw a way out of it. [...]

The last time I got caught, I was facing 12 years [...] and I asked the judge if I could go to this programme. And the judge said, I'll never forget his name: Judge Parsons, he said: 'I'm gonna give you a chance to go fix your life. I'm not worried about whether you do or don't, because you're a horrible criminal. If you don't fix your life, we'll catch you.' He [Judge Parsons] gave me a choice: you can go to prison for 12 years, or you can go to [Delancey Street Foundation] for 2 years. And I'm not great with math, but I can do *that* math. And so I said, I'll take two years.

“That is the hardest thing in the world to do, just to learn how to just be a basic, decent, kind, honest, hardworking human being. And it took me five years to get it down. And now I think I'm pretty good at it, I practise being kind, I go back into jails and prisons and I go and talk to kids and different people who are in trouble,

and tell them, ‘Hey, just because you've been doing something for a really long time, doesn't mean you always have to be that way.’ — Brett Crawford

I had a great mentor at Delancey Street Foundation named Dugald Stermer. He is the greatest illustrator you've never heard of, probably. He works for the Smithsonian and National Geographic and things like that. He gave me some advice. [...] And by 2019, I was having nice shows in San Francisco and Los Angeles, had a gallery representing me LA, a couple of small places in San Diego. And I was showing my work and it was really fulfilling; I was happy with the work that I was making. But I didn't know if I was gonna be able to make it as a career.

“And it's really, you know, exploded – beyond my most crazy imagination. My entire life - I never thought my life could be what it is right now.” — Brett Crawford

Redemption for Pinocchio

BC: I have somehow grown really attached to the idea of Pinocchio. Mostly in that I've used lots of different themes throughout my career - using animals to tell human stories, about human emotions or human feelings. There's a lot of therapy that I've learned on fixing my life.

I think if you ask 10 People who Pinocchio is, 9 of them will say he's a liar - his little nose growing and him telling you a lie. Then in the original story by Carlo Collodi, and the Disney version, and all the different versions they've made over the years, he's this amazing, brave, courageous, adventurous [boy]. He faces down a monster whale to save his father and his friends. And I kind of want that for me: it's not that I fix my life, I don't want my life to be based on all that knucklehead stuff I did in my life, I want it to be based on the hard work I do now and how kind I am to people.

“The work that I do, the art that I make, and the people's lives that I attach to - that's what I want. So I'm very connected to this idea of Pinocchio. And so what I've done is made it kind of like a new coming of age story where Pinocchio, when it happened to that little brave boy, and so I've made him into like a young adult, in his 20s or 30s.” — Brett Crawford

CR: Well, there's another important part of his narrative: at the end of the story, he becomes a real boy, [though]the lying thing is such a big theme in that story. But as you said, he's there for his father, he's a wonderful little boy and at the end, he breaks away from being the puppet. So there's always this redemption at the end of it, which I think a lot of people forget. So I think it's powerful

that you've chosen him as a character in your story.

BC: [...] The way life goes: I went to see the Guillermo del Toro collection [through a friend's introduction], which is basically all his collection of things that he keeps in his house from all the movies he's made. And he has a wonderful collection of Pinocchio drawings.



Left: Film Still from Guillermo del Toro's *Pinocchio*, 2022 Image: Collection Christophel / Alamy Stock Photo Right: Detail of the present lot

BC: I drew him as a puppet master. And then I drew this one version of Pinocchio. I started using sneakers to date the paintings. I drew just the bottom half of Pinocchio, wearing these Travis Scotts, which was the hottest [shoe] that year, and they kind of date my paintings. [...] The one that I'm using now, for Pinocchio, and then *S3lf Made* is, what makes us self-made? Is it just your own hard work, or the people you surround yourself [with] and their magic? And drawing that makes more people connect to that image in their own way than any other piece of art.



Brett Crawford, *S3lf Made*, 2022 Vinyl Toy Artwork: © Brett Crawford

BC: For me it was [also] about [how] I didn't know who my father was. I only had these kind of awful stepfather type people in my life. And so "self-made" for me was about how I tried to become my own man and I didn't do a great job at it for a really long time. And then it became [about] me fixing my life and becoming self-made. In a way I became cut loose of my puppet strings. And I did that with the help of my version of Jiminy Cricket: all my mentors and buyers and all the different people who are my life; people who really help mentor me and teach me things that I've missed out on.

3MO SUPPORT

"It's a juxtaposition of I'm very cool, but I'm also very insecure." — Brett Crawford

BC: [...] For me it's really fun to document: I think artists have been documenting current fashion for as long as people could draw the things that they see. I thought that the most simple and best way that made me connect was the art of 'now'. That's why I try to include pieces of fashion that are very distinctive [like certain Nikes or Louis Vuitton camouflage print], [...and] these like Easter eggs date the paintings.

CR: They are timestamps in a way.

BC: Yes, they put a big '2020' or '2022'. I can mark the painting because if you just use Pinocchio, the first version of that was done in the 1800s. Or if you just use Nike that has been around for 70 years. They say a lot about pop culture.

CR: I love the word that you used, 'easter eggs', there are a few little symbols that we have in the painting that I think would be wonderful to have you elaborate a little bit on it. The first thing that we've noted is the title of the work. You use '3' as your 'E' that you've used in *Self Made* as well. Would you be able to elaborate on that?

BC: Sure. I think titling my work used to be almost torturous, where I would be too wordy, or I would give too much away about the painting in the title. And then I started using words that have an E and then I would use the replacement. [...] Occasionally, I do use the number '1' as an 'I' or whatever. But using these numbers make the titles fun. So, if I have an idea for a painting, even if the word for the idea doesn't have an 'E' in it, I'll just Google synonyms for whatever the word.

And so in this case, 'Emo' is short for emotional: so 'emo support' equals 'emotional support'. And Artemis is the name of this character. She's the eldest child of Pinocchio and his wife. When I think of how any teenager is: full of emotions, trying to figure out who [or] what their identity is, going through the stuff you go through and high school, relationships, and having all these exaggerated emotions and hormones. I put the headphones on the character because of my kid, even at the dinner table will have headphones on and doesn't want to hear anything. [...]



Detail of the present lot

BC: It's a juxtaposition of: *I'm very cool, but I'm also very insecure*. And the stuffed animal as a friend that has these kinds of buttons for eyes, that you can put whatever emotion you want. Are you happy? Are you sad? Are you silly? His ears were our Easter egg. The pattern on his ears is the pattern for Louis Vuitton Off White. It's all for that beautiful kind of brown and I put that same shoe in another painting called 'Together'. I really love that pattern. So, I put that pattern as an easter egg for people who have a keen eye for fashion.



Left: Detail of Virgil Abloh's Louis Vuitton x Nike Air Force 1 Low Right: Detail of the present lot

BC: Then you asked about the patch that's on her Beanie. That's from a guy in Los Angeles who has this great shop that has all these amazing patches that are sometimes funny, sometimes positive. I think a teenager having that patch saying 'optimist 100% positive' is a little sarcastic.

"For the optimist 100% positive patch, those are just like little easter eggs for people who are in the know about fashion and fun for them to discover. So it's really been really fun to figure out ways, lots of different sides of the story, but also find lots of different ways to help people connect to the work." — Brett Crawford

CR: Would you be able to speak to the colours and the background of the work that we have in 3MO SUPPORT?

What immediately struck me about the colour of the background is that the left side is predominantly orange, you have some yellows in there and then there's the figure with her cuddly toy. Then on the right side there's this redness, it's sort of transitions, almost like a sunset from left to right. It's two different colours. So I was wondering whether that had anything to do with the story that you're trying to evoke?



Detail of the present lot

BC: Sometimes, yes, there is teenage angst, the flesh on the cheek, the red can be embarrassment or excitement and things like that. And then the going towards the orange and yellow is less about the emotion and more how I play with light and light sources, the shadow[s] are like implying what the past is. I repeated [the] theme in my work too, [this] use of shadows in the background.

"Those shadows, for me, are like past memories or past thoughts or past mistakes. They can be past accomplishments. But the reason I put those shadows in there is not just to push the character forward in the painting, and give a kind of a 3D effect, but it's also me continuing to talk about [not getting] stuck in your past that's behind us. The shadows are behind you." — Brett Crawford

CR: It reminds me a little bit of Peter Pan actually, as well. You know, if we want to talk about fairy tales and stories that have been around for a long time, how he sews his shadow back on.

Brett Crawford

BC: Yeah, it is like an alter ego.

CR: You were speaking at the beginning of this interview about being proud of yourself, I think you have more than enough reason to be just listening to all of this. Something that's really striking to me is that every single little thing that has happened to you is fuelling every single thing that you're doing right now. You're not isolating any part of your experience. You are taking it in your stride and it's feeding back into your work, and it's feeding back into what you're doing to give back to the community. I think it's wonderful.

Phillips would like to thank Brett Crawford for his time in taking this interview.

Provenance

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner

20th Century & Contemporary Art Evening Sale in association with Yongle

Hong Kong Auction / 1 December 2022 / 4:30pm HKT



ULTRA/NEO

35

Raghav Babbar

Off Duty

signed 'BABBAR BABBAR RAGHAV BABBAR' on the reverse

oil on canvas

152.5 x 101.7 cm. (60 x 40 in.)

Painted in 2020.

Estimate

HK\$150,000 — 250,000

€18,600 — 31,000

\$19,200 — 32,100

[Go to Lot](#)



“The attachments I have to my daily sights gives life to my work.” — Raghav Babbar

A true citizen of the world, Raghav Babbar is a young artist born in India, raised in Singapore and now living and working in London, completing his MFA at the prestigious Royal College of Art. Channelling emotion through figuration, Babbar exploded onto the ultra-contemporary scene this year with the spectacular sale of his 2020 work, *Surinder*.



Raghav Babbar, *Surinder*, 2020 Sold for GBP403,200 at Phillips London, 13 October 2022

The present lot is a product of the artist’s wanderings through his native India as an art student.

Travelling through the country’s Northern regions of Uttarakhand and Sikkim, Babbar would have come to an intuitive interaction between his heritage and the area’s profound spirituality (they are both sites of Hindu pilgrimages, the former being the home of yoga); one which he suffuses into the characters that he came across along this journey.

We are introduced to a man stood against a whitewashed wall, his figure intersected by shadow and the afternoon sun. Isolated in the composition, his guard is raised – despite what the work’s title might suggest. With brows furrowed and eyes hawking to the right, raising the question: what exactly is he looking at? The scene is not quite of a quotidian numbness, but rather a bewitching snapshot into an otherly ambiguity. Babbar explains this as such, ‘Amongst my paintings, I realised people truly liked those that I had done the creative process spontaneously instead of subjects I sought out. This led me to pick figurative studies to better express my emotions on the canvas, allowing me to better observe moods and personalities. Their momentary actions usually give me the purest display of emotion possible, especially when they are alone. Capturing them in these moments and relaying it to the canvas later establishes a connection between the individual and myself. I feel figures are an area where it is easy for me to express myself.’ⁱ

Babbar’s brushwork is impressive, and accomplished for such a young artist. Thick impasto renders the creaminess of the edifice on which the man rests/guards, while the deft parallels on his shirt break up these descending foundations. ‘[The] strokes I make change the narrative of the moment’ⁱ, he explains, and rings true in this painting, as this layered vocabulary ultimately succeeds in augmenting its intrigue.

This balance between figuration and cognitive fantasy bears remarkable correspondence to the work of Johannes Vermeer, whose delicate portraits hold boundless reserves of intimacy. Such intimacy is reflected in *Off-Duty*, despite the frosty atmosphere that we could derive from the work, and is achieved by Babbar leaving half of the composition empty for the viewer to engage and introduce their presence, becoming unitary with the work. Standing alone with the painting we feel we stand alone with the man, sun stroking our faces as we bear witness on the nameless pavement; though not in anonymity, but amity.



Johannes Vermeer, *The Wine Glass*, c. 1660 Collection of the Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Image: Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur fuer Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin

While Vermeer became the pioneer of the genre interior, where his leisurely figures occupied sumptuous interiors, Babbar has begun to carve out his own style, that of genre exterior. The majority of his subjects are indeed caught en-plein-air, waxing and waning between states of industry, relaxation, and introspection. Similarly, while the Dutch master is best known for his opulence, command of light and elegance of structure, what cannot be ignored are the simmering undercurrents of corruption that lie within his works. We can take *The Wine Glass* (c. 1660), as a matte example of this: here we seem to have stumbled upon a simple scene of domestic interaction; a couple enjoying a glass of wine, nothing more. Yet upon closer inspection we begin to doubt the man's intentions. More cavalier than gentleman, he seems impatient to pour another glass. In contrast, the woman's body language is hermetic, her arm folded in defence of wanton advances. The scene is compounded by the stained-glass window which holds a female figure of *Temperance* - providing a suggestion towards moderation, and a warning against indulgence.

Likewise, in *Off-Duty*, there is a palpable sense of trepidation – a feeling that something is not quite right here – as we are unsure of what is to come; searching a realm of possibilities we ultimately beg the artist for answers, a sequel to this flash of vitality. Unfulfilled, we are left to the devices of our imagination, both hopeful and cynical.

ⁱ Raghav Babbar, quoted on the artist's website, [online](#)

Provenance

Acquired directly from the artist by the present owner