



George Condo Creates Portraits in Action

BY ANN BINLOT

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Condo's "Double Heads on Yellow, Pink, and Silver" (2014) references Andy Warhol's "Double Elvis." Copyright George Condo, courtesy Skarstedt, New York

Last June, the Metropolitan Museum of Art asked the artist George Condo to participate in a discussion on Willem de Kooning. In the course of his research on de Kooning, Condo read several texts by the art critic Harold Rosenberg and became inspired by the concept of “action painting” — the term Rosenberg coined to describe the intense, almost performative energy the Abstract Expressionists used to paint their canvases. Condo experimented with that idea while creating his newest body of work earlier this year in his East Hampton studio. “They coalesced into the form of a portrait, rather than just a sort of abstract painting,” Condo says. That series, which he calls “action portraits,” is on view from Nov. 8 to Dec. 20,

in a 12-piece exhibition titled **Double Heads / Black Paintings / “Abstractions”** at Skarstedt’s Chelsea location.

Though Condo explored the idea of portraiture in the series, he wasn’t focused on the subjects, as he has been in the past (among his best-known works are a Cubist-style portrait of Kanye West, one of the **five covers** he designed for West’s album, “My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy,” as well as several **warped portraits** of Queen Elizabeth). The figurative element in this series, Condo explains, is less specific. “They’re really not so much subjects in themselves as they are observations of the emotional content of human nature, so they’re variables in that sense,” he says. “They’re sort of interchangeable.” In the paintings, the subjects are rendered unrecognizable, thanks to a complicated layering process. In one piece, “Beginnings,” Condo blacks out an entire face, except for one eye, with charcoal. In another, “Double Heads in Silver,” the artist references Andy Warhol’s “Double Elvis,” turning two heads into abstract forms. One subject Condo did reveal was himself, depicted in “Self Portrait Right Now,” a study of, he says, “the changing atmosphere of my feelings that I have about life.” In the complex piece, strokes of charcoal and blocks of silver paint cover a colorful drawing of his face — his representation, Condo says, “of a mix of desperation, sort of darkness, alienation, loneliness and freedom.”

“Double Heads / Black Paintings / Abstractions” is on view Nov. 8 through Dec. 20 at Skarstedt, Chelsea, skarstedt.com.