
 whitewall

GEORGE CONDO TRANSFORMS HIS STYLE

CHARLOTTE KINBERGER November 13, 2014

<http://whitewallmag.com/art/george-condo-transforms-his-style>



George Condo spent the bulk of the summer isolated, painting, feeling, and transforming his style. He felt stuck in a rut, tired of making what he felt were the same paintings over and over again, and so he retired to his small East Hampton studio to be alone with his work and thoughts. He began by creating the same vein of self-diagnosed homogenous works—De Kooning- and Pollock-esque abstraction, Dali-inspired portraiture—and then, working back into them, attacking and deconstructing what he had just made.

He drew on **Harold Rosenberg's** concept of “action painting.” He often worked on three paintings simultaneously, the scale of one occupying an entire wall of his studio. The emotive results are on view at **Skarstedt** in New York through December 20. “Double Heads / Black Paintings / Abstractions” features 12 of these new, large-scale paintings, which meld abstract and representational practices with a series of single and double portraits.

One work, *Double Portrait in Grisaille on Silver*, began with a black and white Abstract Expressionist style surface—chaotic, curvilinear black lines overlapping in a mass of geometries. But it didn't stay this way. He went back in with silver paint, coating most of the work, so that the black and white base became a frame for two adjacent portraits. Both could be called cubist, but to varying degrees. On the right, Condo reduces the angles of the face to a series of shapes, values and lines until the only discernable features are the eyes. On the left, Condo fuses realistic renderings with cubist placement, skewing the facial features of his female subject so that her eyes are on a diagonal axis and her mouth is below her left eye.

Another double portrait, *Double Heads on Yellow, Pink and Silver*, is of Condo's late colleague and friend, **Jean-Michel Basquiat**, around the date of his death, August 12. “It's a sort of abstracted, wild version of him...within the context of the idea of two heads that are somewhat alienated from one another,” said Condo. The acrylic, charcoal, and pastel work is vibrant and expressive. It is divided almost exactly in half. On one side, the base color is a highlighter yellow beneath a gestural, textured layer of the same silver used in *Double Portrait in Grisaille on Silver*. On top of this is a skull-like face with turquoise hair and sparse black outlines. Its right eye is realistically represented, a remnant of a fully realized naturalistic portrait beneath this gesture and abstraction. On the other side, a face explodes out of a neon pink background in a visual collage of shapes and textures in a milieu of turquoise, red-orange, gray, dark blue, black, and white. The only tonal features are the characteristically Condo-esque rounded right ear, and the left eye.

Other highlights in the show include *Lost at Sea*, a profile portrait with an ear that Condo joked was Van Gogh's; and *Emerging*, which combines the artist's bulbous, facial representations with fields of color like a confused Rothko.

“These were very demanding paintings; they wouldn’t let you off the hook easy. You couldn’t just make them and walk away. You had to get every little silly part and piece and color and make all these decisions constantly, as to what to leave behind and what to do about it,” the artist said. The new series demands the same scrutiny of its viewer. The historical and physical layers require energy to unpack, and the result is moving. As with all of Condo’s work, these paintings meld art historical movements with idiosyncratic decisions, resulting in a style that is entirely his own. This new development of old ideas is well worth a visit.

*“Double Heads / Black Paintings / Abstractions” is on view at **Skarstedt** in New York through December 20.*