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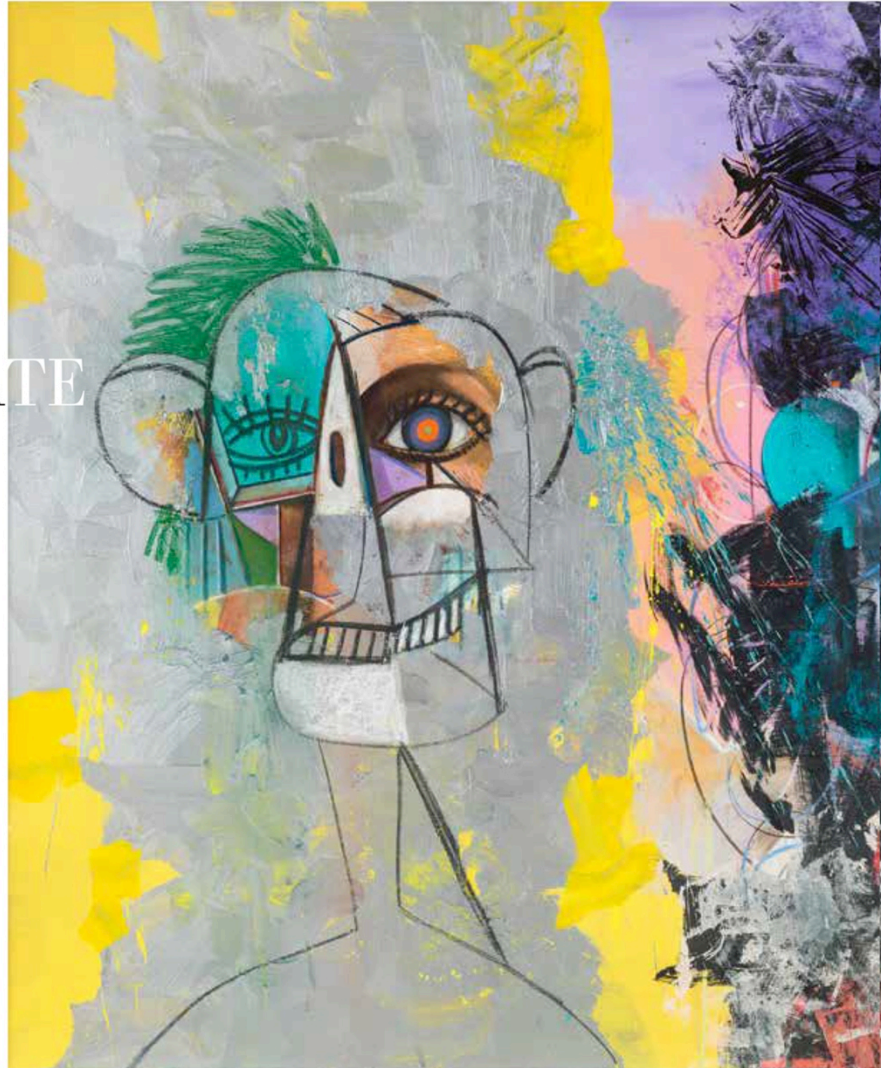
TWIST of FATE

Artist George Condo spent his career subverting the status quo. So how'd he suddenly get so relevant?

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George Condo's career as an artist spans almost 40 years; his paintings sell for nearly half a million dollars. One could safely assume that a guy of his stature would work in an expansive—and expensive—cathedral-like studio bathed in natural light. Yet, on a recent afternoon, Condo could be found tapping into the inspiration of...a tiny one-car garage attached to a rented house in the Hamptons. "A cook cooks in the kitchen, not in the living room," he says of the unlikely space, neatly tapping the ash off his unfiltered cigarette.

Condo's matter-of-fact demeanor is a stark contrast to the tumultuous and chaotic nature of his work. He is the art world's Dr. Moreau, fastidiously cloning and splicing to create strange animals out of the scraps of our culture, borrowing freely from both the canon of art history (a Picasso-esque brush stroke here) and cartoons (Elmer Fudd's nose there). While his incorporation of references aligns him with several other artists who also came out of the postmodern era, what sets Condo apart and explains his staying power is his ability to masterfully execute this vision. He blends the subtle shading of Rembrandt with the heavy-handed caricature of Looney Tunes characters into frenetic compositions that would give the Abstract Expressionists a run for their money—and does so without a drop of irony.



George Condo, *Double Heads on Yellow, Pink, and Silver*, 2014.

Condo grew up in a bucolic New England town and came of age in the New York of Basquiat and Haring, who both became close friends. But while those artists were determined to bring a graffiti-influenced style of mark-making from the streets into the gallery,

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—GEORGE CONDO

Condo, although equally driven by a desire to subvert the mainstream, chose to refine his painting craft, learning to faithfully emulate masters such as Cézanne and Modigliani. Eventually, he would turn that language back on itself. Through gigs that included working on the assembly line at Andy Warhol's factory, he steadily built a reputation as an “artist's artist” whose work was actively collected by other artists, including Warhol. Shortly after Warhol's death, in fact, Condo learned that a small painting of his had sat at Warhol's bedside during his last days. “I took it as a sign that I must be doing something right,” he says.

Still, he never became a household name

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PORTRAIT: PAUL BIEDRZYCKI

like Haring or Basquiat, and during the Schnabel and Kiefer—era, Condo decamped to Europe and drew inward. “I decided to take it back a thousand steps to the idea that painting is just painting,” he says. It was during this time that his idea of “artificial realism,” still a guiding principle of his work, began to gel. As the world became increasingly synthetic, Condo set his sights on, he says, “creating a realistic representation of what was artificial,” to accurately describe where the culture was headed. It wasn’t about depicting an actual, physical place, but instead a psychological state. Rather than revel in the materialism of the day,

As we’ve entered an age that religiously sets its clock to Warhol’s 15 minutes of fame rule, the relevance of Condo’s work has snowballed. The surreal gap between reality and fantasy, otherwise known as Condo’s home turf, is shrinking.

When fellow sample artist Kanye West called to commission Condo to create a cover for his 2010 album, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, Condo admittedly “had absolutely no idea who he was.” And yet, they were kindred spirits who had built their respective oeuvres out of borrowed bits, essentially creating something new out of the remnants of bygone eras (the history of painting

Condo, along with artists such as Jeff Koons and Duane Hanson, continued to pick and prod at the cornerstones of this mounting tower of Babel, tapping into our increasingly strange and absurd existence.

It was only a matter of time until the outside world caught up to Condo’s vision, helped along by things like plastic surgery and genetic engineering

in Condo’s case; soul music in West’s). The collaboration benefitted both: Kanye was further legitimized as a bona fide artiste while Condo was now “trending,” with a whole new generation exposed to his work.

In November, Condo opened a solo show at New York’s Skarstedt Gallery. Created in the Hamptons garage this past summer, the large-scale painting titled *Double Heads on Yellow, Pink, and Silver* that anchors the exhibition represents both the future and past of his work. “I needed something different to happen,” he says. “I thought I would paint two large heads on a single canvas, two figures alienated from one another. I also thought ‘Which color have I never used in my life?’ So, I ordered massive amounts of silver paint and started blasting away.”

Although he shows no signs of slowing down, Condo, now in his late fifties, has come to value what he calls the “longevity” of his work—as have others. “If something that I did in ’84 looked like shit today, I’d probably be a pretty unhappy person,” he says. “What I got from Warhol is that whatever kind of art you want to do, whatever you like, whatever you love, whatever you’re fascinated by—that should be a part of your work. Everyday, I want whatever it is I’m doing now, even if I can’t figure it out at the moment... I want to look back in ten years and think, It wasn’t easy, but I came up with something.” ●