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George Condo's Fluid Figurations at Skarstedt New York

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Skarstedt New York is currently presenting an exhibition of new sculptures and paintings by influential American artist George Condo. Although best known for his inventive figurative paintings with their casts of distorted and abstracted characters, it's Condo's new sculptures that emerge as the stars of the exhibition. Condo's latest sculptural experiments are created using a method of sculpting that he started using in the late 1980s when he produced used wood, paint, fabric, and found objects, to create bronze sculptures with both figurative and abstract qualities. The exhibition begins with a small wooden sculpture titled "Origins" which later became the subject of the three larger six-foot-high variations in bronze that are exhibited alongside the original.

At the centre of Condo's practice is an emphasis on materiality and process. And it's this focus on the "what" and the "how" that seems to enable Condo to produce wonderfully vibrant and energetic works of art that are imbued with a palpable sense of motion and flux – iconographically poetic objects of performance that reflect and express a visual language that oscillates along a spectrum rather existing on one point. His layered, hybridized, and chimerical mode of production can be interpreted as being a celebration of the path that leads to creation rather than a celebration of the creation itself – a path of transition between genres, traditions, tropes, materials, methods: from figurative to abstract, wood to metal, found object to art object, drawing to painting, classical to contemporary.....



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The deconstructed nature of his “Standing Form with Fragmented Head” bronze and the painterly patina of his bronze “Nude on Wine Crate” with its wine crate wood pedestals continue the theme of transition that is expressed physically in Condo’s sculptures. At the same time as translating the physical transition into a thematic one, the paintings in the exhibition both echo and oppose the three dimensionality of his sculptures. In the “Women and Men” triptych of signature figurative portraits with abstracted faces, the background of bright geometrically arranged squares of colour adds a sense of depth, while the politically-themed figurescapes, with their the evidence of layering, erasing, and reconfiguring, feature titles such as “Political Chaos” and “The White House” that hint at the subject matter.

To find out more about his exhibition at Skarstedt, BLOUIN ARTINFO spoke to Condo and asked him a few question

“George Condo: New Works at Skarstedt” is an exhibition of new sculptures and paintings. What was the inspiration and motivation behind these new works?

I hadn’t done an exhibition of new work for a while and was very inspired to show something different like the sculptures – it was a 3-year project. The paintings were somehow working in tandem to the current events of our time so I thought it would be interesting to put the two together and see what happens.

What methods of sculpting did you use to create the sculptures and what is the significance of the methods in the context of the history of your practice?

I worked from the idea that everything is “hand-made” by the artist. Something that seems to have gone out of fashion these days, but that’s what I do – so I began combining wooden shapes that I cut out and made by screwing them together. I continued applying layers of clay and plaster, found and created objects, until a figure emerged that was in concert with my thought process. This is basically how I’ve always worked. The “Nudes on Wine Crates” were first sculpted in clay. I broke up pre-existing wine crates to create a kind of pedestal on which they could stand.

Why did you choose to work in bronze for the sculptures?

I had worked in bronze since the late eighties and I learned that every mark, every crack or clump of clay will come out in the bronze and I would then have the pleasure to patina the works. It’s a really exciting part of the process to stand there with a blowtorch and a brush applying the colors to metal, I love it.

What was the inspiration for the paintings in the exhibition and how do they relate to (or oppose) the three dimensional works they are shown alongside?

They oppose them in subject and dimension. The 3D aspect of sculpture is obviously not a window or an illusion as it can be in a painting, but more importantly the sculptures represent a truth – that what you see is what’s really there. The subject is concrete and the meaning is ethereal. The paintings represent lies – the lies we are being bombarded with from the new administration and all the negativity and speculative madness going on within their arena, the divisive aspect of today’s government, its attempts to dismantle the



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principles and moral ethics of our society and to embrace dictatorship. The pieces in the show are directly confrontational with the phenomenon of Fake News. So paintings like “The White House,” “The Trial,” “Infiltration,” and “Social Media” all report, from a visual perspective, the fear and loathing that the artistic community (and I hope millions of others) have for this administration. Hopefully there will be some light at the end of the tunnel. But for now, things are very dark.

Could you explain the concept of the “simulated found object” and what form it takes with your work?

That is a concept that updates the “readymade”, a Duchampian invention that lead to a new kind of freedom in art. The Simulated Found Object is an object I personally create in a kind of schizophrenic manner that separates my identity into fragments of what is apparently “found” and that which is created by me to appear found. It is a play between the appearance of the thing and the appearance of its being. It has a contradictive simulacra where the re-definition of an actual thing and the imitation of that thing become one and the same, but with totally different meanings.

