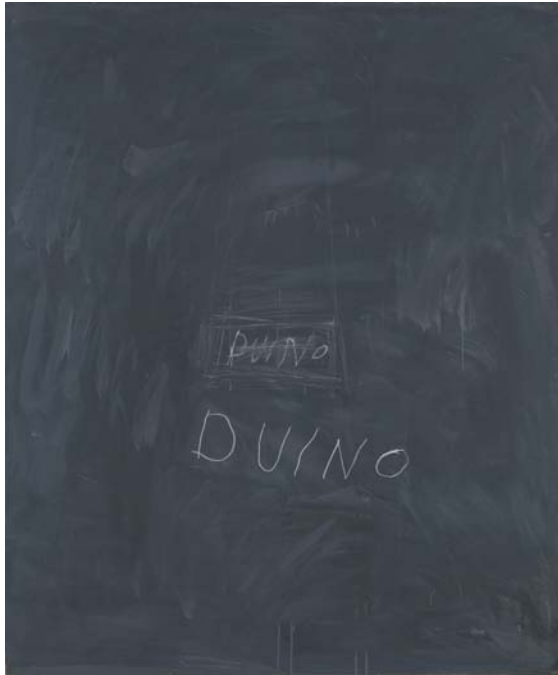


GAGOSIAN



DUINO ELEGIES

Opening reception: Thursday, March 5, 6–8pm
980 Madison Avenue, New York

Cy Twombly, *Duino*, 1967, oil-based house paint and wax crayon on canvas, 70 × 58 inches (177.8 × 147.3 cm) © Cy Twombly Foundation

February 19, 2020

*For beauty is nothing but
the beginning of terror, that we are still able to bear,
and we revere it so, because it calmly disdains
to destroy us.*

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Gagosian is pleased to present *Duino Elegies*, a group exhibition that traces the resonance of Rainer Maria Rilke’s poetry through artworks spanning the past 150 years.

In 1912, Rilke was invited to stay at Duino Castle—a fortress just north of Trieste, Italy—by the Princess Marie von Thurn und Taxis. There, while standing atop a cliff overlooking the Adriatic Sea, he claimed to hear the following line: “Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angelic orders?” Rilke eventually used these words to open the *Duino Elegies*, a 1923 collection of ten intensely religious metaphysical poems. Concerned with the interplay of suffering and beauty in human existence, the *Elegies* also project a hopeful vision of a more peaceful world.

Two decades earlier, Rilke had moved to Paris to write a monograph on Auguste Rodin, initiating a complex but lasting friendship between the two men. Rilke venerated the sculptor’s ability to translate poetic sentiments into figuration, as exemplified by Rodin’s large bronze *La Muse tragique* (1896). Originally conceived seven years prior for the *Monument to Victor Hugo*—in which the muse,

perched above the French literary giant, whispers inspiration to him—*La Muse tragique* is presented here as a single figure, evoking a heightened pathos befitting its subject’s symbolic identity.

In the 1960s, a young Anselm Kiefer picked up a copy of Rilke’s Rodin monograph, his first encounter with both of their work. Rilke’s evocative prose allowed Kiefer to fully appreciate the work of the French sculptor, whose naturalistic touch and tendency toward the monumental would make him one of Kiefer’s most enduring sources of inspiration. In two intimate 1974 artist’s books and a suite of sensuous watercolors, Kiefer presents meditative and spiritual scenes that show his longstanding fascination with both sculptor and poet.

First conceived in 1893, Medardo Rosso’s *Bambino Ebreo (Jewish Boy)* emerged as one of the artist’s most beloved late-career motifs. In a continuing endeavor to represent complex emotion in the young child’s features, Rosso re-created and recast the somber portrait bust several times for numerous exhibitions and personal gifts. On view is a 1920–25 version of *Bambino Ebreo* made in plaster with a wax surface. Rosso employed wax—normally a preparatory medium—as a finish, harnessing its deathly connotations of impermanence and decay as well as its approximation of the warmth and tenderness of human flesh—an impulse akin to Rilke’s own meditations on humankind’s fleeting moments of contact with transient, sublime beauty.

Reminiscing on his formative education, Cy Twombly wrote: “It was impossible to come out of Black Mountain College and not love Rilke.” Forging a direct, powerful connection to the *Elegies*, Twombly’s painting *Duino* (1967) marries the artist’s geometric investigations with his consistent interest in literature. To create this “blackboard painting”—one of a group of works named for their evocation of the schoolroom wall—Twombly scrawled, effaced, and reinscribed the name of Rilke’s titular castle in white wax crayon on a dark gray oil paint ground, positing the act of writing as an artistic gesture in itself.

For this exhibition, Edmund de Waal has produced a new work in dialogue with Twombly’s painting, using the medium of ceramics to improvise on the earlier artist’s trademark handwritten canvases. The diptych *elegie* (2020) is made from kaolin clay brushed over a pair of wood panels; on top of these chalky surfaces, de Waal scribbles literary snippets in graphite and oil stick, partially smearing and overwriting them to simulate the mutability of observation. With its looping, penciled-in script and pale ground, de Waal’s graphic sculpture appears as an aesthetic inverse and creative tribute to Twombly’s *Duino*.

The exhibition will include works by Balthus, Paul Cézanne, Edmund de Waal, Anselm Kiefer, Auguste Rodin, Medardo Rosso, and Cy Twombly, among others.

#DuinoElegies

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