

# Jonathan Monk

## An Italian in Paris

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Returning to MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique for his second exhibition with the gallery (*Falling Silver Clouds*, 2022), Berlin-based British artist Jonathan Monk presents *An Italian in Paris*, a subtly orchestrated exploration of originality, visibility and display – even perhaps of the gallery's own purpose.

Operating one layer at the time, this new body of work begins with inkjet prints of Paris's most iconic museum artworks: from Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* to Manet's *Olympia*, Van Gogh's self-portrait and Courbet's *L'Origine du Monde*... the masters are all here.

Yet layered over each one, Monk places smaller, brightly coloured acrylic paintings after Salvo (1947 – 2015), giving *them* center stage, physically disrupting not only the frame, but also – and perhaps most frustratingly – our ability to see the “masterpieces” behind them.

As if it weren't enough, Salvo's paintings *themselves* have been altered: Monk has painted over their backdrops, leaving Salvo's trees floating in abstract colours. “Money doesn't grow on trees” so Monk turns this truth on its head by turning his trees into money: the more tress, the more expensive the artwork.

What are we looking at? Are these works real if they are made with fakes? Is this even a real exhibition if the works displayed are not the originals? What makes an original artwork?

Monk reveals all the ways in which *looking* and *seeing* are indeed structured, learned processes guided by habit, expectations and today's unlimited access to images.

Not only does Monk invite us to look at margins anew, but also to question our assumptions about the subject and constructed value of an artwork.

Ultimately, by creating this visual patchwork, Monk creates a new visual language, a surreal cluster of shapes and colours. Or perhaps *An Italian in Paris* is simply a way to bring Salvo to Paris, as if he were standing in an imaginary crowd in the Louvre, contemplating the work in front of us.

### Jonathan Monk

Jonathan Monk replays, revises and re-examines seminal works of Conceptual and Minimal art by variously witty, ingenious and irreverent means.

Speaking in 2009, he said, *"Appropriation is something I have used or worked with in my art since starting art school in 1987. At this time (and still now) I realised that being original was almost impossible, so I tried using what was already available as source material for my own work."*

Through wall paintings, monochromes, ephemeral sculpture and photography he reflects on the tendency of contemporary art to devour references, simultaneously paying homage to figures such as Sol LeWitt, Ed Ruscha, Bruce Nauman and Lawrence Weiner, while demystifying the creative process. Monk is constantly asking 'what next?' His stainless steel series entitled *Deflated Sculpture* (2009) refigures Jeff Koon's iconic balloon rabbit in various stages of collapse; letting the air out isn't an act of iconoclasm so much as giving the original idea new life. But his conceptual configurations are also grounded in the personal: 'what next?' takes on a poignancy in the slide projection *In Search of Gregory Peck* (1997), where Monk brought together a collection of photographs taken by his late father in the 1950s, preceding him as a tourist in the US.

Jonathan Monk holds a BFA from Leicester Polytechnic (1988) and an MFA from Glasgow School of Art (1991).

Solo exhibitions include CCA Tel Aviv, Israel (2019), The Gallery at De Montford University Leicester, England (2017), Kunsthau Baselland, Basel/Muttenz, Switzerland (2016), CAN Neuchâtel, Switzerland (2015), IMMA Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland (2014), Centro De Arte Contemporaneo (CAC) Malaga, Kunstraum Dornbirn, Austria, (2013), W139, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2011), Artpace, San Antonio, Texas, USA (2009), Palais de Tokyo and Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris (2008), Kunstverein Hannover (2006), Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2005), Museum Kunst

Palast, Dusseldorf and The Swiss Institute, New York, USA (2003).

Jonathan Monk (b. 1969) was born in Leicester and now lives and works in Berlin.