

# SPRÜTH MAGERS

## ***Entrance to the Void***

**George Condo**

**Sprüth Magers Los Angeles april 20 - june 11 2016**

**Public reception: Tuesday, April 19, 6-8pm**

In *Entrance to the Void*, George Condo condenses the disparate styles of his previous artistic periods into individual paintings that broach the void between figuration and abstraction. Moreover, his new body of work becomes a philosophical exercise in counteracting ideas of 'nothingness' through the visual consolidation of a personal, and in this case, artistic history. Condo's exhibition at Sprüth Magers in Los Angeles marks over three decades with the gallery since his very first solo show at Monika Sprüth Gallery in Cologne, 1984.

George Condo is considered a pioneer of the international revival of figurative painting. From 1985, he spent over a decade living in Paris, where he began an intensive investigation of Old Master paintings. Since then, he has developed a unique pictorial language – often termed 'artificial realism' – that sweeps the gamut of Western art history. Multifaceted figures assembled from fragments of faces and geometrical forms exude the painterly lexica of Rembrandt, Velazquez, Fragonard and Picasso, whilst also flaunting references to Cubism, Surrealism, Pop art and comic books. With his play between abstraction and figuration, and his combination of elements from high and everyday culture, Condo repudiates genre-defined hierarchies within painting.

A continuing focus for the artist has been an unconventional handling of the portrait genre. Six 'psychological cubist' portraits featured within the show testify to his endeavors to corrupt classical representations of the face as the point at which subjectivity and narrative meaning converge. Mostly listening to late John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy, Condo involves their violent and harmonic approach to music in his works. All prospect of physiognomic comprehension is fractured into startling facial details: rows of teeth, spider-like sets of eyelashes, 'bugged-out' eyes and dense tangles of hair. The abstracted contours of the face form a tessellation of brightly colored planes marked out in thick black lines that bring to mind portraits by Picasso or Klee.

In the late 1970s Condo moved from Boston to New York, working for Andy Warhol in the Factory as a screen-printer. His two diptychs directly reference Warhol's infamous Myths series that featured subjects as diverse as Marilyn Monroe and Mickey Mouse. Replicating Warhol's favored quadrant formation, the artist superimposes facial features to distort his portraits into chaotic compositions: a mouth becomes a nose; an oversized ear becomes a cartoonish snout. Not limited to his portraits, Condo creates mayhem out of dislocated limbs and facial features elsewhere in the exhibition. The upward motion of dense abstracted forms in *Zombie Modernism* (2015) reads like a comic book that begs to be deciphered. The flat colors of its background evoke Mondrian, whilst the title is a playful nod to Condo's gusto for resurrecting Modernist characteristics and disfiguring them to address the zeitgeist of his own era

A series of three paintings, *Impressions of Goya 1-3* (2016), pay homage to the Spanish painter Francisco de Goya. Whilst living in Paris, Condo worked alongside a certified copyist at the Louvre to hone his imitation of Old Master techniques. Here, he had the chance to study Goya's *The Countess of Carpio, Marquesa de la Solana* (1794-95). Condo's versions on show feature the same background as the original, using flat swathes of unmodulated color. However, he brings the full weight of abstraction to bear on the Countess' face so that she appears to be almost entirely without features or expression.

Through a hybrid of references to his own practice and the art historical traditions that precede him, Entrance to the Void offers a considered précis on George Condo's progressive stance toward painting. Moreover, this new body of work showcases his ability to evoke pathos for his subjects through abstracted bodily details that reveal human existence as tragic, comic, and at times, bewildering.

George Condo (\*1957, Concord, USA) lives and works in New York. Currently, the Phillips Collection, Washington D.C. is planning a retrospective of his work on paper to open in 2017. In November 2016 his work will be the feature of *George Condo. Confrontation* at the Museum Berggruen, Berlin. In recent years, his extensive retrospective *Mental States* took place at the New Museum, New York (2010-2011), which subsequently travelled to the Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, the Hayward Gallery, London and the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2011-2012). Further solo exhibitions include *La Civilisation perdue*, Musée Maillol, Paris (2009); *One Hundred Women*, Museum der Moderne, Salzburg (2005); *New York Expression*, Bergen Art Museum, Bergen (2002). Moreover, he has had solo shows at the Palais des Congrès, Paris (1995) and at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (1994-1995). Recently the artist has presented his work in major group shows including *Picasso. Mania, Grand Palais, Paris*; *La vie moderne*, 13e Biennale de Lyon, Lyon; *Picasso in Contemporary Art*, Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Hamburg (all 2015) and *William S. Burroughs: Creative Observer*, Lawrence Arts Center, Lawrence (2014). In 2013 he was part of The Encyclopedic Palace, 55. La Biennale di Venezia, Venice; *Looking back for the Future*, Kunsthalle Zurich, Zurich (2012); the *Whitney Biennial*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2010); the Kunstmuseum Luzern, Luzern (2008); the Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern (2006/2007); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1994, 1992); the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (1994) and *Le visage dans l'art contemporain*, Musée du Luxembourg, Paris, which travelled to the Musée des Jacobins, Toulouse (1990).

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Opening hours: Tue – Sat, 10am – 6pm