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JOHN CHAMBERLAIN MASKS

Opening reception:
Wednesday, September 27, 6–8PM
September 19–October 28, 2017

980 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10075

Let the insanity play itself out through the materials. Then you don't have to worry about style. You'll just be working to describe your own insanity.
—John Chamberlain

Gagosian is pleased to present rarely seen sculptures by John Chamberlain. Following the New York showings of “New Sculpture” at Gagosian in 2011, as well as “Choices,” his 2012 retrospective at the Guggenheim, the current exhibition highlights a series of steel masks, the majority of which are on view for the first time since their creation in the 1990s, as well as abstract wall sculptures made between the 1970s and 2000s.

Best known during his lifetime for his distinctive metal sculptures, often made of crushed and torqued automobile steel, Chamberlain used the detritus of American industry to create works that contain the bold energy of Abstract Expressionism, the pre-manufactured elements of Pop and Minimalism, and even the provocative curves and swells of the High Baroque. His multidimensional collages of foam, steel, or aluminum—from large floor sculptures to more intimate, interlocking arrangements—express an unwavering elegance, exuding both the strength and the fragility of everyday materials.

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From the beginning of his career, Chamberlain emphasized the primary role of abstraction in his work. In 1991, he turned to a more recognizable form: the mask. Assembling intricately cut, painted metal parts, he made his first mask, *A Good Head and a Half* (1991), for a benefit auction for Victim Services, providing aid to victims of sexual assault. He continued to produce masks throughout the 1990s in his studio on Shelter Island, titling many of them with opus numbers—as in *Opus 16* (1998) and *Opus 90* (1998)—thus aligning their visual dynamism with the various synchronized elements of a musical composition. Similar to the *Tonk* sculptures that precede them, which were made of disassembled toy trucks gathered from an abandoned Tonka Toy factory in 1981, the masks possess a vibrant, lyrical innocence, with their overlapping strips and shards of metal, as well as nails, used to evoke hair, beards, eyebrows, teeth, and crowns.

Complex relationships between color, texture, and form are found in both the masks and the wall sculptures. *Cum Two Me* (1977) is a multicolored mass of curved and conjoined steel scraps, combining raw, rusty edges with straight lines, and spray-paint drips with polished chrome. These juxtapositions are echoed in *THE MASK OF PERSISTENCE* (1996), with its protruding tongue and spirals of hair, which emerge from behind leaf-like planes of white and red. In *Rebel Ruckus* (1975), the twists and folds of the metal resemble crumpled paper in hues of pink, green, yellow, and blue. With its various ridges and cast shadows, the abstract sculpture tempts a search for the contours of a face, yet remains undefinable, exemplifying the subtle anthropomorphism of Chamberlain's abstraction. This ambiguity can be found in the masks as well; though they are representational in nature, they too are comprised of interconnected abstract units.

John Chamberlain was born in Rochester, Indiana in 1927, and died in New York in 2011. Collections include Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Dia: Beacon, NY; Chinati Foundation, Marfa, TX; Menil Collection, Houston; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA); Museo Jumex, Mexico City; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK), Frankfurt; Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig (mumok), Vienna; Berardo Museum, Lisbon; and Tate, London. His first retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1971) was followed by more than one hundred solo exhibitions, including “John Chamberlain: Sculpture, An Extended Exhibition,” Dia Art Foundation (1982–85); “John Chamberlain: Sculpture, 1954–1985,” Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (1986); “John Chamberlain,” Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (1991); “John Chamberlain: Sculpture,” Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1996); “John Chamberlain: Foam sculptures (1966–79); Photographs (1989–2004),” Chinati Foundation, Marfa (2005–06); and “John Chamberlain: American Tableau,” Menil Collection, Houston (2009). A second retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, “Choices,” took place in 2012. Other recent exhibitions include “John Chamberlain: It Ain't Cheap,” Dan Flavin Art Institute, Dia Art Foundation, Bridgehampton, NY (2014); and “John Chamberlain,” Inverleith House and Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (2015).

“John Chamberlain: Foils,” an outdoor installation of two monumental aluminum foil sculptures, is on view at LongHouse Reserve, East Hampton, NY, through October 2018.

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Image: *Opus 16*, 1998, painted and chrome-plated steel, 13 × 8 3/4 × 7 1/2 inches (33 × 22.2 × 19.1 cm) © 2017 Fairweather & Fairweather LTD/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.
Photo by Rob McKeever.

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