

GAGOSIAN



ROBERT THERRIEN

Opening reception: Thursday, March 21, 5–7pm
March 21–May 11, 2019
657 Howard Street, San Francisco

Robert Therrien, *No title (witch hat)*, 2018, plastic, 16 5/8 × 9 1/4 × 9 1/4 inches (42.2 × 23.5 × 23.5 cm) © Robert Therrien/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Josh White

March 15, 2019

There is a diversity in the way people see. Some always see flat. Others always in perspective.
—Robert Therrien

Gagosian is pleased to present new works by Robert Therrien. This is his first solo exhibition in San Francisco in more than twenty years.

Central to Therrien's process is the repetition and refinement of found and invented forms. As he translates seemingly simple subjects from two to three dimensions or from small to large and back again, familiar images become oddly cryptic—like ambiguous linguistic units whose meanings shift depending on their placement and orientation. Entirely new motifs emerge from this process: renderings of a chapel evolve into an oilcan; snowmen become clouds; and a stork beak is echoed in the bent tip of a witch hat.

Attesting to Therrien’s interest in cartoons and animation (especially that of Max Fleischer), new works depict puffy cloud-like forms resembling smoke signals or thought bubbles. Therrien leaves the symbols’ meaning unclear, exploring their formal qualities instead, so that some clouds appear completely flat, like decals, and others more voluminous. For *No title (black cloud mirror)* (2016), he painted his iconic black cloud form on the back of a mirror after sanding away some of the silver to create an antique-looking surface. The mirror thus becomes an almost alchemical environment, as the viewer’s reflection coalesces with both the metallic haze and the black cloud within it. Therrien’s only other mirror work is from the 1980s and depicts a snowman: the cloud simply turned ninety degrees. The progressions in his fine-tuned symbolic vocabulary are epitomized further by a series of four wall reliefs—cutouts of a ranch house, a chapel, a pitcher, and a barn—hanging in silhouette.

Many of Therrien’s works are manifestations of his continued and in-depth explorations of everyday objects or images. His towers of kitchenware are modeled after the pots, pans, and dishes in his studio kitchen, and his beard sculptures began with his interest in representing Constantin Brancusi’s facial hair. Hanging from a cruciform armature, *No title (plaster beard)* (1999) simultaneously recalls classical sculpture, religious iconography, and Surrealist techniques of fragmentation and scale distortion. Adding to this sense of fantasy, *No title (stork beak)* (1999) is a softly lit photographic print that shows a long beak grabbing a white bundle, signaling the Greek myth of the queen Gerana, trying to steal her baby back from the goddess Hera, who had turned her into a stork.

Therrien’s engagement with folklore continues in *No title (hands and tambourines)* (2018), wherein three tambourines are activated by the inclusion of simply drawn hands on a bright blue ground, and *No title (witch hat)* (2018), a mysterious black sculpture that echoes the artist’s “bent cone” form from the 1980s. These works capture Therrien’s unique ability to unite geometric abstraction, perspectival illusion, and realism—oscillating freely between genres and cleverly erasing the lines between them.

Robert Therrien was born in 1947 in Chicago, and lives and works in Los Angeles. Collections include the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Broad, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Glenstone, Potomac, MD; Denver Art Museum; Dallas Museum of Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Tate, London; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Museo Cantonale d’Arte, Lugano, Switzerland; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, Belgium; and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia.

Recent exhibitions include *Drawings*, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh (2010); De Pont Museum, Tilburg, Netherlands (2011); *Selections from the Broad Collection and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2011); Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY (2013); *Artist Rooms: Robert Therrien*, Tate Modern, London (2009, traveled to National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh; Tate Liverpool, England; Metropolitan Arts Centre, Belfast, Northern Ireland; and Paxton House, Berwick-upon-Tweed, England, through 2015); Contemporary Austin, TX (2015); *The Power of the Image*, Denver Art Museum (2016); *Works 1975–1995*, Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London (2016); and *Artist Rooms: Robert Therrien*, Tate Modern, London (2018).

#RobertTherrien

Press

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