

SQUARESPACE

CAMDEZ FURNITURE

Control every *design detail* until your website is customer-ready.

START SELLING NOW

ARTS

George Condo Mines the Beautiful and the Strange at Hauser & Wirth’s New West Hollywood Gallery

BY GABÉ HIRSCHOWITZ
February 21, 2023



Installation view: "George Condo: People Are Strange," Hauser & Wirth West Hollywood. On through April 22. © George Condo, Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth, Photo: Keith Lubow

Whatever else can be said about Los Angeles, it is a city in love with paradox. Just consider Hauser & Wirth's recently opened L.A. gallery—housed in a vintage auto showroom on West Hollywood's iconic Santa Monica Boulevard—where the 1930s Spanish Colonial Revival's stucco façade currently frames the colorful and kinetic nude forms of "People Are Strange," a selection of new works by artist George Condo.

"The real beauty of this space is the windows on Santa Monica Boulevard," says Stacen Berg, the gallery's executive director. "There were tens of thousands of people driving by or stuck in traffic who used to look in and see these exotic foreign cars, and now you see these beautiful paintings. So we did orient the show with that in mind."



An exterior view of Hauser & Wirth West Hollywood Photo: Elon Schoenholz Photography. Courtesy of Hauser & Wirth



Entering the space, I seem to hear the tripping drums and piano of the Doors' "People Are Strange" as I see a woman in a ruby flamenco dress power walk past a man in gym clothes, leaning against a graffitied building as his bulldog does its business on a nearby hydrant. The surprise, of course, is that this scene—which teems with L.A.'s particular brand of well-heeled bizarreness—wasn't painted by a native Angeleno, but by an artist most often associated with the city he lives and works in, New York.

Yet George Condo has never been an artist easily pinned down. Born in Concord, New Hampshire, in 1957, he studied art history and music theory at the University of Massachusetts before spending the subsequent decades in cities across Europe and the U.S. Likewise, the artist's overall oeuvre can't be defined by one genre, or—considering his stint as a bassist for the '70s punk band The Girls—even a single art form. Comparing his process to British artist Francis Bacon's, Condo says, "When you throw a number down on a roulette table, the ball spins...and all within a matter of seconds, you're either a winner or you're a loser. And the way I'm throwing paint onto these canvases, it's either a win or a loss, and I love that kind of challenge when it comes to painting."



As for the work in his Hauser & Wirth show, the artist says his inspiration


WATCH



[On the Latest Episode of Good Morning Vogue, A New Allure: How Virginia Viard Is Making Chanel Her Own](#)


...for the work in his earlier years, the artist says the inspiration was as spontaneous as his lifetime of travel and creative experimentation would lead us to believe. He was painting in the countryside last summer when he decided to cue up an old record by the Doors. “The song ‘People Are Strange’ came on, and [Jim Morrison] keeps saying, ‘When you’re strange, when you’re *straaaange...*’ and I just thought to myself—watching the news and looking at the world around us—you know what? People really *are* frickin’ strange,” Condo recalls. “Not the same way that they were probably back in the ’60s, like Jim Morrison was talking about it, but the people like George Santos and Lindsey Graham and Kevin McCarthy and the people who run this government and the people who created this divisive world that we live in today.”

ADVERTISEMENT



This ski trip could lead to your next one.

Expedia members get more than a booking discount, they get points for their next trip too.


Expedia.com
Book Now

Leaning into the idiosyncratic style that he’s described as “psychological Cubism,” with his new paintings, Condo conjured a sense of the strange by simultaneously capturing the beauty and the grotesqueness in the most personal of human aspects, the face. “The idea of Cubism was to be able to see a violin from the front, back, middle, and center,” he says, “and I thought, what about the human being? What about us as people? How do we capture the multiple emotions that we all go through and what’s going on in our heads, and what’s written on our faces? And how do we see it all in one moment at one particular time?”

Moreover, while there is nothing accidental about the display—the night before the opening, Condo insisted that all the paintings in the show be reinstalled two and a half inches to the right—it features work by an artist who likens drawing and painting to “walking into a forest and finding your way out again.” “I don’t want to know what I’m going to do,” Condo reflects. “I don’t want to have a preconceived idea, but often, what happens to me is that an image is locked into my brain. It’s a kind of photographic thing, where I just know what the image is going to look like, but I follow the lines as I see them in my head.”

How can art be both foreseen and unplanned? The answer to that is at the heart of Condo’s genius. A few highlights from the show:

Constellation II (2022)



MOST POPULAR



CELEBRITY STYLE
2023 BAFTAs: All The Best Looks Live From The Red Carpet
 BY HAYLEY MAITLAND



RUNWAY
Phil Oh's Best Street Style Photos From the Fall 2023 Shows in London



CELEBRITY STYLE
The Best Dressed Stars at the 2023 BAFTAs
 BY CHRISTIAN ALLAIRE



George Condo, *Constellation II* (2022), Aluminium, gold leaf. 78.7 x 55.3 x 52.7 cm / 31 x 21 3/4 x 20 3/4 in. © George Condo, Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Thomas Barratt

The bust *Constellation II*—a smaller sequel to Condo’s *Constellation of Voices*, a sculpture unveiled on the terrace of New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 2019—reveals itself as a both literally and figuratively brilliant expression of



Expedia.com

[Book Now](#)

The bust *Constellation II*—a smaller sequel to Condo’s *Constellation of Voices*, a sculpture unveiled on the terrace of New York’s Metropolitan Opera in 2019—reveals itself as a both literally and figuratively brilliant expression of motion and emotion. “My favorite sculptures are the Greek Classicist sculptures because the proportions are so beautiful,” Condo says. “I thought, ‘If I use classical proportions and then incorporate my own concept of figure, there will be a sort of gravitational aspect to the work—as weird as that might be. It’s going to feel like you’ve been there before, that you’ve had this experience but you’ve maybe never seen it.’”

Transitional Portrait in Turquoise and Gold (2022)



MOST POPULAR

MOST POPULAR



CELEBRITY STYLE
[2023 BAFTAs: All The Best Looks Live From The Red Carpet](#)
BY HAYLEY MAITLAND



RUNWAY
[Phil Oh's Best Street Style Photos From the Fall 2023 Shows in London](#)



CELEBRITY STYLE
[The Best Dressed Stars at the 2023 BAFTAs](#)

George Condo, *Transitional Portrait in Turquoise and Gold* (2022), Acrylic, metallic paint and oil stick on linen, 300.7 x 267.3 x 3.8 cm / 118 3/8 x 105 1/4 x 1 1/2 in. © George Condo, Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Thomas Barratt

Condo's *Transitional Portrait in Turquoise and Gold* immediately draws the eye with its tonal contrasts and parallax-like effect of layering different perspectives of the same subject on top of each other. It is one of a group of portraits in the show that examines the ways in which the pandemic confused and fractured people's senses of self.

Condo recalls, "It was a psychiatrist who said to me, 'The irony is we all feel like we've lost two years, but in fact, we've gained two years of age during this time that we lost those two years.' So the idea of the passage of time became a subject matter for the paintings. Large female figures are transforming from youth to age in a strange way—and all differently."

Psycho (2022)



George Condo, *Psycho* (2022), Oil on linen, 228.6 x 215.9 cm / 90 x 85 in. © George Condo, Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth. Photo: Thomas Barratt

ADVERTISEMENT

SQUARESPACE

KLIPSAN

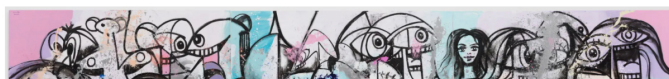
image [edit icons] Move backward [edit icons]

Drag and drop content easily on the website of your dreams.

DESIGN YOUR WEBSITE

Featuring a clear, striking figure with a face full of threatening eyes as it devours its own neck, *Psycho* is one of the most memorable pieces in "People Are Strange," as well as one of the most political. "We have a huge homeless problem on the West Coast, East Coast—all over the world—but who *are* the *strange people*?" Condo muses. "Are they the homeless? Or are they the ones that make them homeless? I ask myself that question all the time."

Transformation (2022)





George Condo, *Transformation* (2022), Acrylic, oil stick, and metallic paint on linen, 228.6 x 647.7 cm / 90 x 255 in. © George Condo, Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth, Photo: Thomas Barratt

The show's largest and most exuberant work, the triptych *Transformation*, was originally its title piece, and it remains a major focus, visible to passersby through the gallery's massive Santa Monica Boulevard-facing windows. "[*Transformation*] is a peaceful protest," Condo explains. "It's a group of people, and it's about the idea of everybody moving together in a single painting: figures front, back, center. I just wanted it to have that feeling of a joyous moment, of a celebration of being together as opposed to the sort of isolated feeling that we have in many of the paintings."

Femme Fatale (2022)



George Condo, *Femme Fatale* (2022), Oil on linen, 215.9 x 228.6 cm / 85 x 90 in. © George Condo, Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth, Photo: Thomas Barratt

ADVERTISEMENT

With its bright colors and cartoonish figures, *Femme Fatale* foregrounds another explosion of levity. And yet, hovering above it all is a small but somewhat terrifying vampyric visage in black and gray, the most clearly legible figure on the canvas. "When we deal with the early 20th-century painters—Picasso, Matisse, all of the great masters of the early 20th century—what they were doing was fighting against Classicism and wanting to deconstruct it and

REVOLVE
FREE SHIPPING AND RETURNS

MOST POPULAR



CELEBRITY STYLE

2023 BAFTAs: All The Best Looks Live From The Red Carpet

BY HAYLEY MAITLAND



RUNWAY

Phil Oh's Best Street Style Photos From the Fall 2023 Shows in London



CELEBRITY STYLE

The Best Dressed Stars at the 2023 BAFTAs

BY CHRISTIAN ALLAIRE



turn it into Abstraction,” Condo says. “But when I was born, it was after Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, De Kooning—the whole world had changed, and so I wanted to take Abstraction and turn it back into Realism.” With *Femme Fatale*, Condo had a bit of fun with that idea, imagining what someone would look like if they were turned into a cartoon and then returned to their original selves.

“George Condo: *People Are Strange*” runs through April 22, 2023.

WATCH

▶ On the Latest Episode of Good Morning Vogue, A New Allure: How Virginie Viard Is Making...

GOOD MORNING VOGUE SEASON 3 1 / 9

On the Latest Episode of Good Morning Vogue... Good Morning Vogue Goes Behind the Scenes o... Good Morning Vogue Takes You Inside the Wor... Good Mo Reveals t

REVOLVE
FREE SHIPPING AND RETURNS

Vogue Daily

All the essentials: top fashion stories, editor's picks, and celebrity style.

SIGN UP NOW

By signing up you agree to our [User Agreement](#) and [Privacy Policy & Cookie Statement](#).

READ MORE

CULTURE

My Abortion Wasn't Easy. That Didn't Make It Any Less Necessary.

BEAUTY

Chanel's Cool-Girl Waves Are Springtime's Easiest Hair Trend.

Necessary.
BY SAMANTHA MANN



TV & MOVIES

What Does the End of Time's Up Mean for the Future of the #MeToo Movement?

BY RADHIKA SETH

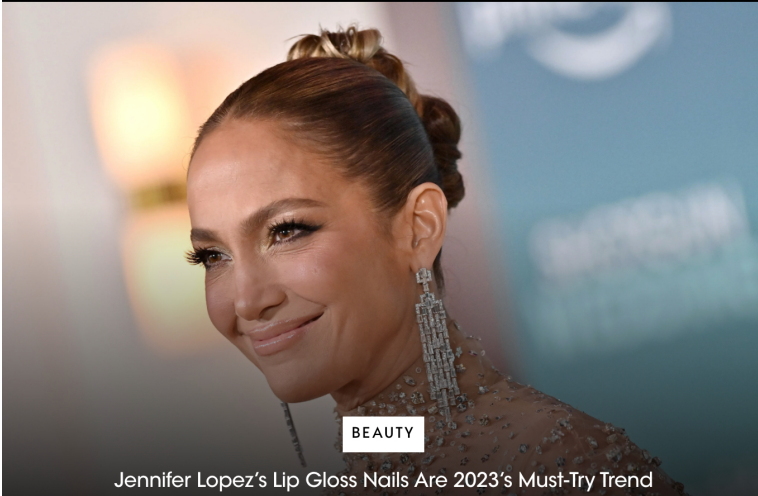
trend
BY HANNAH COATES



CULTURE

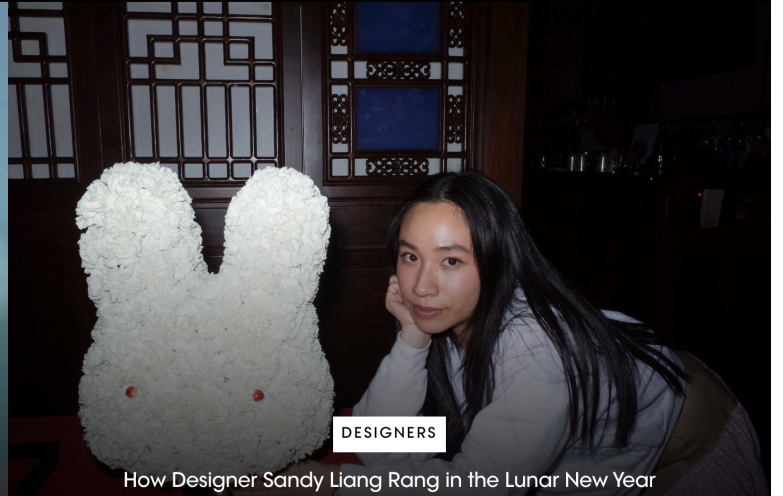
How Having an Open Marriage Made Me Think Differently About Monogamy

BY TOM RASMUSSEN



BEAUTY

Jennifer Lopez's Lip Gloss Nails Are 2023's Must-Try Trend



DESIGNERS

How Designer Sandy Liang Rang in the Lunar New Year