

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

20 September 2012



PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY
VIA FRANCESCO CRISPI 16
00187 ROME ITALY
GALLERY HOURS:

T. +39.06.420.86498
F. +39.06.4201.4765
Tue–Sat: 10:30am–7:00pm and by appointment

RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER

Thursday, 27 September–Saturday, 31 October 2012

Opening reception: Thursday, September 27th, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm

The art that I make takes place about one step away from the normal stir of human activity.
—Richard Artschwager

Gagosian Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of new sculptures by Richard Artschwager. This is his first exhibition in Rome.

For five decades, Artschwager has forged a maverick path by confounding the generic limits of art, while making the visual comprehension of space and the everyday objects that occupy it strangely unfamiliar. Touching many genres but cleaving to none, Artschwager's work has been variously described as Pop art, because of its derivation from utilitarian objects and incorporation of commercial and industrial materials; as Minimal art, because of its geometric forms and solid presence; and as conceptual art, because of its cool and cerebral detachment. His approach—evolving out of a formation that brings together counter-intelligence and cabinetmaking—focuses on the structures of perception, conflating the visual world of images (painting), which can be apprehended but not physically grasped, and the tactile world of objects (sculpture), which is the same space that we ourselves occupy.

Discovering the potential of synthetic materials has been critical to his project, whether the readymade frisson of vulgar Formica with its color fields, patterns, and sheen; or the suggestiveness of Celotex, the heavily textured, dimensional paper board on which he paints grisaille renderings of photographs (both obscure and topical), landscapes, and parlor scenes. Adopting most of his motifs from common interior surroundings, he has turned tables, chairs, lecterns, mirrors, and other items of furniture into visual riffs. Then there is punctuation (exclamation marks, question marks, brackets) in materials both hard and soft; fuzzy geometric forms or figural reliefs crafted out of stiff rubberized horsehair; "blps" of varying scale appearing surreptitiously in galleries and parks, and on city streets and skylines; and suggestive wooden crate sculptures that evince the dark humor of Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved Ones*.

(Continue to page 2)

In Rome, Artschwager picks up a conceptual thread that began in one of his earliest furniture surrogates *Piano* (1965), with its cartoonish surface and blocky profile. By way of introduction, this generative musical effigy has been borrowed back for this exhibition from the Castelli Collection and appears alongside other Artschwager "classics," such as a giant, bristling horsehair *Exclamation Mark* and a trompe l'oeil *Formica Mirror*. The centerpiece of the exhibition is a *magnum opus* of four piano sculptures—each a block wrapped with laminate "pictures"; each an indexical variation on the real object; each embodying its maker's musical preference for counterpoint and fugue, resolved sculpturally as balancing act and vanishing point.

Artschwager's fabulous pianos uphold the carefully engineered vagueness between painting and sculpture, and remind us that we are in the realm of art not reality: the white keys of their keyboards differ in size (fa, sol, and la are larger than do, re, mi, and si); some of them have two pedals while others have three; and in each, visual puns and art historical footnotes are cunningly incorporated—from key moments in the history of abstraction, such as Kazimir Malevich's *Red Square*, to the punctuation marks that Artschwager made part of his unique visual syntax. *Piano/Piano* is a grand designed for an animated double act, a keyboard at each end, the lid shut flat as a sinuous, silent graphic element; while in *Piano Grande*, the lid is open, exposing the surprise of its opera-red interior, and as if to let sound escape along with image. *Piano Fort* looks like a bulky Broadwood with its jaunty black-on-yellow exclamation points proclaiming keyboard intervals; while *Piano Malevich* literally embeds a seminal moment in radical politics and radical painting within the body of music and sculpture. Like his famous splattered chair, these are all "platonic" pianos, where just the inherent idea of the object is represented. In Artschwager's startling metaphorical universe, nothing is ever just one thing; an anonymous sheet of patinated Formica is both itself and a depiction of a wooden plane; a piano is furniture, sculpture, and image all at once; and a painting or a sculpture can be at once a "multi-picture" or a "three-dimensional still life."

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition, with essays by Yve-Alain Bois and the renowned pianist Emanuele Arciuli

Richard Artschwager was born in 1923 in Washington D.C. He studied chemistry, biology, and mathematics at Cornell University, and then some informal art studies under Amedée Ozenfant, one of the pioneers of abstraction. In the early 1950s he became involved in cabinetmaking, producing simple pieces of furniture. After a ruinous workshop fire at the end of the decade, he began making sculpture using leftover industrial materials, then followed with paintings, drawings, site-specific installations, and photo-based works. His first exhibition took place at the Art Directions Gallery, New York in 1959. His work has been the subject of many important surveys, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1988); Centre Pompidou, Paris (1989); Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin (2003); and Kunstmuseum Winterthur (2003) and is included in many museum collections worldwide, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Art Institute of Chicago, Museum Ludwig Cologne, and Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris. His second retrospective, "Richard Artschwager!" opens at the Whitney Museum of American Art on October 25 of this year, and will travel to key venues in the U.S. and Europe during 2013.

Press Enquiries

Francesca Martinotti
E.martinotti@lagenziarisorse.it
T. +39.06.8069.0694
www.francescamartinotti.com

For all other information please contact the gallery at +39.06.4208.6498 or at roma@gagosian.com.