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GAGOSIAN

JOHN CHAMBERLAIN POETIC FORM

SEPTEMBER 7—NOVEMBER 3, 2016
OPENING RECEPTION: TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 6—8PM

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19 PLACE DE LONGEMALLE 1204 GENEVA
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If I have a room full of parts, they are like a lot of words. I have to take one piece and put it next to another and find out if it really fits. The poet's influence is in there.

—John Chamberlain

Gagosian is pleased to present an exhibition of sculptures and works on paper by John Chamberlain.

During his lifetime, Chamberlain was perhaps best known for his distinctive metal sculptures, constructed from discarded automobile-body parts and other modern industrial detritus, which he began making in the late 1950s. While freely experimenting with other materials—from galvanized steel and paper bags to Plexiglas, foam rubber, and aluminum foil—he consistently returned to metal car components, which he humorously called “art supplies.” Chamberlain's works boldly contrast the everyday, industrial origin of materials with a cumulative formal beauty, often underscored by the given paint finish of the constituents. The process of construction has its roots in industrial fabrication, given that mechanical car-crushers often imparted preliminary form to his raw materials. Chamberlain's emphasis on discovered or spontaneous correlations between materials rather than a prescribed idea of composition have often prompted descriptions of his work as three-dimensional Abstract Expressionist paintings. Crumpling, crushing, bending, twisting, painting, and welding the metals to form individual objects, he combined them into imposing aggregations.

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With works dating from 1975 to 1988, the exhibition focuses on Chamberlain's mid-career return to the use of car metal as a sculptural material, as well as his long-term interest in vibrant, colorful expression in two and three dimensions. Chamberlain broke from his pattern of using discarded autoparts in 1965, only to return to it in 1972. At times, his riotous structures would adhere to certain geometries: the wall relief, *Chamouda* (1975), is from a series of painted and chrome-plated steel sculptures that were each tilted to the left at an angle of 45 degrees. Bright pops of colored metal are variously intertwined with glinting steel, and the visual effects shift with the viewer's movement. Chamberlain also gave structure to otherwise unconstrained abstraction in a series of drawings from 1976, *View from the Cockpit*. Each drawing comprises three cut pieces of paper, collaged vertically and with conflicting patterns of delicate, sprayed pigment. The thin center band that bisects the upper and lower halves of every sheet suggests the sequential frames of a film strip, while alluding to the horizon of an indiscernible landscape.

Chamberlain had a keen appreciation of poetry, fostered during a year spent at Black Mountain College in 1955, while Charles Olson was teaching poetry there, and Robert Creeley edited the *Black Mountain Review*. It was at this time that language began to impact Chamberlain's aesthetic approach. A strict horizontal format was employed in his later *Gondola* floor sculptures (1981–85). Evoking the form of the typical Venetian boat gliding through the canals of the city, each sculpture has as part of its armature an automobile chassis, laden with erratic combinations of painted, bent metal. *Gondola Walt Whitman* (1981–82), like all works in the series, is titled in homage to a writer who Chamberlain admired. In works from the late 1980s, such as the wall relief *Madam Meux* (1987), the same playful approach to wording is evident in his use of alliteration in the title, while the name also suggests that the sculpture's graceful curve refers to the supine feline body.

John Chamberlain was born in Rochester, Indiana in 1927, and died in New York in 2011. Public collections include Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas; Menil Collection, Houston; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; and Tate Modern, London. His first retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1971) was followed by more than one hundred one-person 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 "Chamberlain at the Fairchild," Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, Coral Gables, Florida (2012–13); Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (2013); "John Chamberlain: It Ain't Cheap," Dan Flavin Art Institute, Dia Art Foundation, Bridgehampton, New York (2014); and "John Chamberlain," Inverleith House and Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh (2015).

For further inquiries please contact the gallery at geneva@gagosian.com or at +41.22.319.36.19. All images are subject to copyright. Gallery approval must be granted prior to reproduction.

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Image: *Chamouda*, 1975, painted and chrome-plated steel, 65 × 69 × 23 inches (165.1 × 175.3 × 58.4 cm) © 2016 Fairweather & Fairweather LTD/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo by Rob McKeever.