

GAGOSIAN

Wallpaper*

Georg Baselitz pays homage to fellow artists in new exhibition, from Mondrian to Warhol

Charlotte Jansen



Willem (left), 2018, pencil, charcoal and india ink on paper; and N.E., 2018, India ink and watercolour on paper, both by Georg Baselitz. © Georg Baselitz. Photography: Jochen Littkemann. Courtesy of Gagolian

Georg Baselitz believes every work of art is a self-portrait. Whether it's a Mondrian colour puzzle or a Warhol printed tin, what we are looking at – and, Baselitz suggests, the subject we are really interested in – is the artist.

Some time ago, the German neo-expressionist, known for the upside down figures he has painted since the end of the 1960s, was visiting the Kunstmuseum in Basel. It was there he came across Henri Rousseau's painting of the artist Marie Laurencin, muse to the poet Guillaume Apollinaire, both clad in dark clothing and standing in a garden, pink flowers at their feet. Despite the title of the 1909 painting (*The Muse Inspires the Poet*), Baselitz took the portrait to be a self-portrait of Rousseau and his wife.

This interpretation of the painting – Baselitz wasn't entirely wrong in seeing Rousseau's sense of himself projected in the portrait – inspired a whole new direction in Baselitz's work, about to go on show at Gagolian in New York. In this new body of work, Baselitz turns the heads of major artists on their heads (Mondrian and Warhol included) from a long line of famous American abstract expressionists, to artists more directly engaged with self-portraiture, such as Tracey Emin and Paula Modersohn-Becker.



Piet M., 2018, by Georg Baselitz, oil on canvas. © Georg Baselitz. Photography: Jochen Littkemann. Courtesy of Gagosian

The artist titles the exhibition ‘Devotion’, paying homage to the figures he portrays because he says, they are ‘especially meaningful to me’. Each of these portraits becomes, connected by Baselitz’s gaze and hand, a rumination on the artist and their work, both abstract and figurative, outward looking and self-reflexive. Willem de Kooning is drawn in classical, sober pose in charcoal; Philip Guston becomes a pale, pensive pink, not unlike the colour he often applied in his own work; while Rothko is rendered in a nervous, sad blue.

Baselitz was born in 1938 and his career began in the context of a postwar Germany searching for a sense of identity in the aftermath of genocide. Painting figures has sometimes been a difficult, painful exercise for an artist coming to terms with the horrors of egoism. Does this make all art narcissistic? Probably. But as Baselitz shows us through these self-portraits as others, self-enquiry can be a rough road. §

In May 2019, coinciding with the Venice Biennale, a major Georg Baselitz survey curated by Kosme de Barañano will open at the Gallerie dell’Accademia – the first exhibition by a living artist to be staged at the museum.



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Mark Rothko, 2018, by Georg Baselitz, oil on canvas. © Georg Baselitz. Photography: Jochen Littkemann. Courtesy of Gagosian*



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Cecily Brown, 2018, by Georg Baselitz, oil on canvas. © Georg Baselitz. Photography: Jochen Littkemann. Courtesy of
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