

GAGOSIAN

Forbes

Richard Artschwager, "Primary Sources" At Gagosian, Madison Avenue, New York

Clayton Press



RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER. Tintoretto's "The Rescue of the Body of St. Mark", 1969. Acrylic on Celotex, in metal artist's frame. 46 1/2 x 51 1/4 inches; 118.1 x 130.2 cm. © 2019 RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK. COURTESY GAGOSIAN.

Shut Up and Look is the title of a 2012 documentary film about Richard Artschwager. Six minutes in, the artist opined, “I think the object[ive] of an artist's making a picture is seeing how long you can get somebody to look at something.” In an era of short attention spans, looking—let alone seeing—is a challenge. Various studies—all of them inexact—suggest that the average amount of time a person spends looking at an art work in a museum is between 15 seconds and 30 seconds.

Primary Sources at Gagosian, Madison Avenue embraces Artschwager’s challenge to viewers. Center stage, in two galleries, Gagosian has strategically positioned nine vitrines filled with source images, drawings, maquettes and ephemera. These vitrines are paired with all manner of *Meisterwerke* from Artschwager’s 50-plus year career. It is as worthy and worthwhile an exhibition that you will find in a commercial gallery. Plus, it is inventive, interactive and illuminating in a cerebral way.

The contents of the vitrines—primarily selections from the artist’s archives—link Artschwager’s found images to his final works. The material has breathing room. It is well-considered, -labeled and -ordered. The images he found came from newspapers and magazines that he encountered through serendipity. It is the raw material that fed Artschwager’s microprocesser-like mind. Some sources are presented as single sheets; others are yellowed clippings taped to cardboard or paper. Some are preparatory drawings with instructive grids; others are photocopies.



Tintoretto. Discovery of the Body of Saint Mark, 1562–66. Oil on canvas. 156 x 157 1/2 inches; (396 x 400 cm). PINACOTECA DI BRERA, MILAN

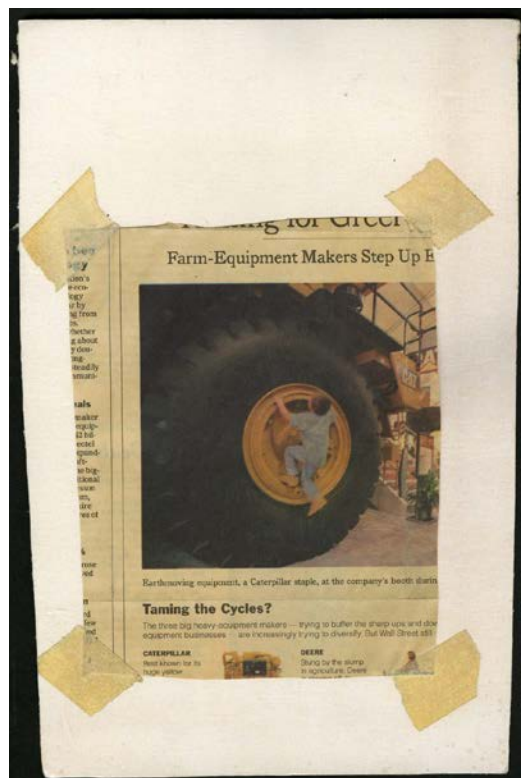
Unlike Andy Warhol who chose his motifs literally and strategically, the very randomness of Artschwager’s motifs was and remains radical. Jean-Christophe Ammann, the Swiss art historian and curator, described Artschwager’s *modus operandi* as, “I flick through the papers, discern, something sticks and possibly serves as a model.” In short, Artschwager selectively sampled images without order or rubric. This is consistent with another of his pronouncements, “Art does not depict.”

Although there is no linear relationship between *Tintoretto's "The Rescue of the Body of St. Mark"* (1969), *Climbing Boy* (1999), and a series of *Running Man* paintings, these works are excellent examples of Artschwager’s process and product, along with his use of unconventional materials and his signature, individualistic aesthetic device—blps (verbally referred to a “blips”). While writing “a script for an object is like taking a water sample of the Hudson River,” an observation Artschwager made in May 1999, a few descriptive examples help one to “shut up and look.”



RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER. *Climbing Boy*, 1999. Acrylic and rubberized-horse-hair on masonite. 59 x 48 x 2 1/2 inches; 149.9 x 121.9 x 6.4 cm. © 2019 RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK. COURTESY GAGOSIAN.

The artist's *Tintoretto's "The Rescue of the Body of St. Mark"* (1969) is consummate Artschwager. It is an abstracted version of the painting, *Discovery of the Body of Saint Mark* (1562–1566) by Tintoretto (Jacopo Robusti). The original oil on canvas, which is in the collection of the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, measures 155.9 x 157.5 inches (or about 13 feet square). Per the Pinacoteca, the painting depicts Venetians who “are busy removing corpses from tombs in their search for Saint Mark’s body, [when] the saint appears to them and imperiously commands them to stop because his body has already been removed from the tomb at the end of the room and is lying at their feet.” (Busted.)



RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER. *EPHEMERA*. Source image for *Climbing Boy*, 1999. *New York Times*, April 14, 1999.

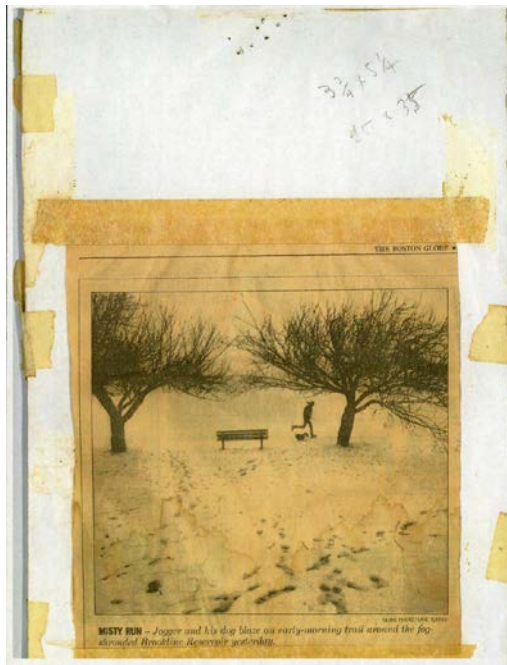
Artschwager's version of the painting is a 46.5 x 51.25 inches acrylic on Celotex, a heavily fibrous paper.¹ Except for St. Mark's outstretched left hand, painted in lithe strokes, the human figures are all depicted as blps, Artschwager's "independent phenomenon" of "lozenge shaped marks," and rectangles. (To better understand the blp, read Ingrid Schaffner's, "A Short History of the blp," (1996), which is an art historical joyride.) Your eyes move between the pages in the vitrine and the Artschwager's on the gallery wall. It is not just interesting. It is a gratifying mental exercise to compare and then see the artist's sources and results.

Climbing Boy (1999) uses another idiosyncratic material that Artschwager favored: rubberized horse-hair. (Texturally, it has a high creep factor, similar to a fibrous, industrial pot-scrubber.) The work—a wall relief—depicts a small boy in coveralls and work boots on the wheel hub of a "heavy equipment" Caterpillar earthmover. Artschwager found the image in an April 4, 1999 article in the *New York Times*, titled "Aiming for Greener Pastures; Farm-Equipment Makers Step Up Efforts to Diversify." The vitrine contains two black and white photocopies and the original clipping from *The Times* taped on cardboard. The colors in the image are pure industrial "ick," which Artschwager seemed to revere. Or, as Agnes Gund, the collector put it, "He is just so much of a weird colorist . . . the colors are really off and yet they work beautifully." When you combine image with color and color with texture you end up with something totally original. This is a classic—perfect—rendering of what Artschwager wanted to make, "Sculpture is for the touch, painting is for the eye. I wanted to make a sculpture for the eye and a painting for the touch."



RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER. *Running Man* (right celadon), 2013. Laminate and Acrylic on Celotex, in artist's frame. 28 x 24 1/2 x 8 inches; 71.1 x 62.2 x 20.3 cm (framed). © 2019 RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER / ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK. COURTESY GAGOSIAN.

A final example of eye-to-vitrine, eye-to-wall enlightenment is a wall of six *Running Man* works, an iconic image that Artschwager used for more than 20 years. He found the image of a man bounding through a winter snow in the December 31, 1989 edition of the *Boston Globe*. He reused this image in paintings, sculptures and drawings. The vitrine has the original *Globe* article, an 80's era low-end photocopy (the kind that ground out of a fax machine), a framed drawing and a copy of the 2013 book, *No More Running Man*. The six Formica-framed acrylic on Celotex works are hung so that the figures are running in every which way as singles and in pairs.



RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER. *EPHEMERA*. Source image for *Running Man*, 2013. *Boston Globe*, December 31, 1989.

Primary Sources is instructive, rather than didactic. Artschwager used what caught his eye, and he expanded directly from these materials. He said, “they took some fine tuning but very little. What I tried in the way of improvement had the direct opposite almost every time.” The vitrine materials reveal how Artschwager always worked with existing images, reproducing pictures and objects to make artworks that seem simultaneously familiar and strange. It is serious work with a high exuberance factor. As the curator Jennifer Gross concluded:

Artschwager had come to the realization that art lay as much in the seeing as in the making—that it lay in one’s perspective on things, not just in craft. While he would continue to be an object-maker whose attention to detail was ‘fanatical,’ he was determined that his future efforts would be applied to things to be looked at, to what he identified as the ‘useless’ realm of art. (RICHARD ARTSCHWAGER! Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, 2014.)

Richard Artschwager, *Primary Sources* At Gagosian, Madison Avenue, New York through February 23, 2019.

¹Artschwager described Celotex thus: “. . . [It] is made of sugarcane fibers, randomly arranged and floated together into a mat, then pressed out and dried, making a solid sheet about one-half inch thick. The process sounds like papermaking, and that’s what Celotex is: paper. One could say it is paper on a grand scale, large in format and with a coarse tooth, looking something like newsprint under magnification.”