



George Condo, Birdbrain (2018)
Courtesy Sprüth Magers

George Condo Gets to the Point at His New Los Angeles Exhibition

Artist George Condo counts numerous celebrities among his collectors, including Jay-Z and Beyoncé as well as Kanye West, for whom he designed the controversial 2010 album cover *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*. Back in 2016, Lady Gaga and Jessica Chastain turned out for Condo's *Entrance to the Void* show at Sprüth Magers, and last weekend filmmaker Gus Van Sant Jr. and Sylvester Stallone were spotted at the same gallery for the opening of his latest show, "What's the Point?," which is on view through June 1.

“Rocky was in the house,” Condo tells L.A. Weekly in a voice still raspy from his bout with vocal cord cancer three years ago. “We all know him from Rambo and Rocky. L.A.’s pretty amazing. Sometimes you feel like you’re watching a movie when you’re here. All the people you see in them are in the room.”

Well, in his room, anyway. But even the celebrity mega-wattage could not upstage his 11 new large-scale works, including pieces like the monochromatic triptych of abstracted tough guys, *Shorty and His Gang*, an acrylic-on-linen painting measuring 100 x 234 inches, sprawling even by Condo’s standards.



George Condo, “What’s the Point?” installation view
Courtesy Sprüth Magers

“I like the freedom of space in large-scale pieces. Some of them you fill every single centimeter of canvas with some sort of line or color, but there are some pretty open ones,” he says. “There’s big scale in L.A., looking out the window to see how far you can see. The landscape out here being wide open, big paintings would be a good thing to show.”

From Boston originally, Condo was convinced by his best friend, Jean-Michel Basquiat, to move to New York City in the early 1980s. He worked a menial position at MoMA until he got fired and went to work for Andy Warhol. On a trip to L.A. with Basquiat in 1981, Condo exhibited at a club called the Rhythm Lounge.

“It was my first time showing in a public place and the Chili Peppers played their first gig. I went with Jean-Michel and Rammellzee and all these guys,” Condo recalls. “The best part is Basquiat had this big gangster car and we drove all around Los Angeles with this guy who was stretching canvases. We ended up at Will Rogers [State] Park at 10 o’clock at night. And we drove up onto this family’s yard and he went up to the front door and knocked on the door and asked them very politely, ‘How do you get to Rodeo Drive?’”



George Condo, "What's the Point?" installation view

Courtesy Sprüth Magers

The new works, some of which will travel to the Venice Biennale next month, bear unmistakable Condo trademarks — cubist facial features recalling Picasso in one frame, hinting at Francis Bacon in another, expressionist undertones throughout. *Insanity*, painted this year, is of an expressionist clown against a vibrant yellow backdrop. *The Outcast*, also this year, employs a pastel blue and gray, conjuring a calm introspective tone, while *Double Nude Composition* from 2018 evokes the primitivist masks of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*.

The show's title piece, *What's the Point?*, also from 2018, is a massive monochromatic, 114-by-114-inch, oil-on-linen composition featuring a jumble of figures. Some consume media, newspaper, TV screens, and all are crushed to near abstraction, suggesting an indistinguishable cacophony of sound.

If his 2016 show, "*Entrance to the Void*," was a rumination on death reflecting his struggle with cancer, then is "*What's the Point?*" a fatalistic reassessment of priorities? "It's another good reason to ask yourself what's the point when something like that happens. You have to recalibrate your life in a way that's a little bit healthier. What can I say?" he shrugs, joking, "I've gone from cigarettes to vegan coffee, drinking vegan wine, vegan cigarettes, dropping vegan acid."

For Condo, priorities in the wake of the crisis shook out the way they do for most — fitness and care of loved ones — but he found something else, too. He found the only thing he could trust, in a world of fake news and fake leadership, was the act of mark-making.

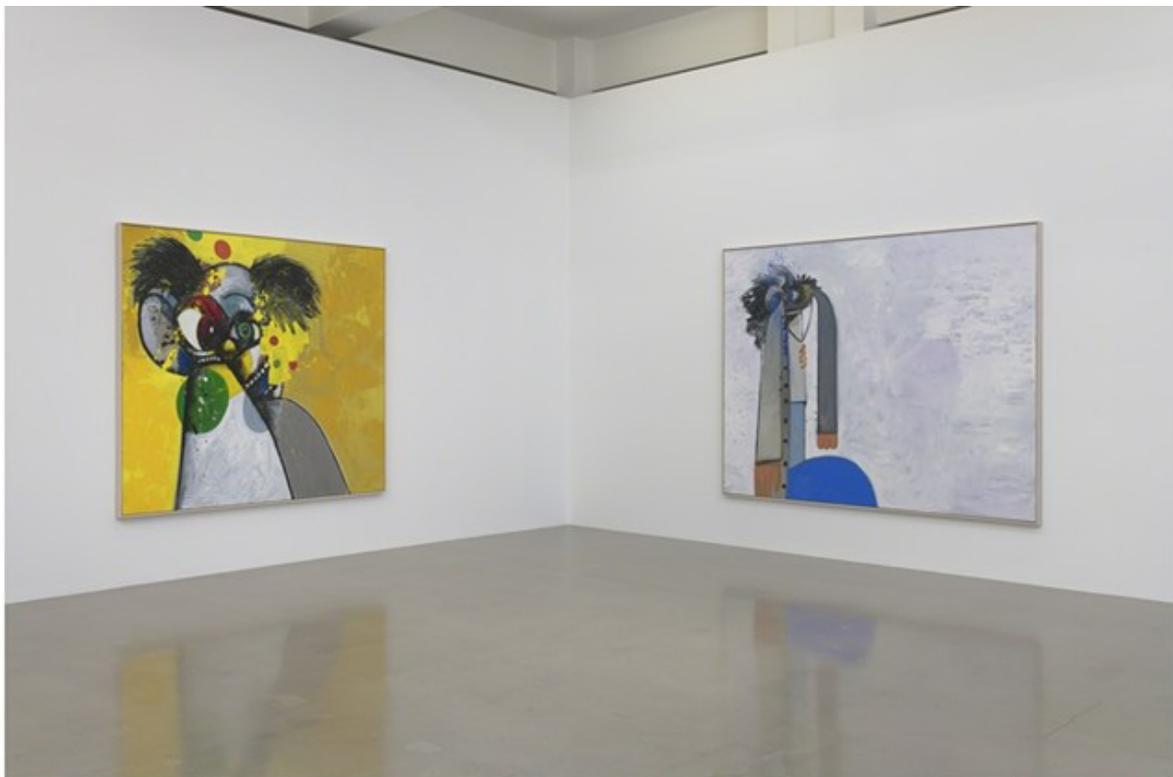


George Condo, Self-Portraits Facing Cancer 1 (2015)

Courtesy Sprüth Magers

“I came to the conclusion that the only thing worth talking about is the decision-making process in a painting,” he reasons. “That should be the question that artists should really ask themselves, whether they’re musicians or whether they’re painters or writers: What’s the point?”

Through June 1 at Sprüth Magers, 5900 Wilshire Blvd., Miracle Mile.



George Condo, “What’s the Point?” installation view
Courtesy Sprüth Magers