

CECILY BROWN, JEFF KOONS, CHARLES RAY

Exhibition Dates: January 20 – May 14, 2016

Opening Reception: Wednesday, January 20, 6-8PM

NEW YORK, NY – The FLAG Art Foundation presents *Cecily Brown, Jeff Koons, Charles Ray* on view January 20 – May 14, 2016, on FLAG's 9th floor gallery. Ranging from lushly painted canvases to sculptures of extraordinary technical acumen, three artworks by each artist address themes of youth, nostalgia, and intimacy, and highlight the intersection of innocence and subversion.

Jeff Koons and Charles Ray's unprecedented approach to material, scale, and surface have redefined the possibilities of sculpture. Mining the rich psychological territory of childhood and familial relationships, both artists elevate innocent subject matter to monumental status. Cecily Brown explores youth and transience in kaleidoscopic compositions of fleshy, abstracted figures, utilizing the materiality of paint to replicate physical sensation and the illusion of motion.

Select work from the *Celebration*, *Banality*, and *Popeye* Series, each featuring an animal as its subject, trace Jeff Koons's history of reimagining childhood objects through meticulous industrial fabrication. Koons's *Cat on a Clothesline (Red)*, 1994-2001 – a colossal dangling cat figurine seemingly suspended by clothes pins, with a pink and blue daisy on either side – was once described by the artist as a contemporary crucifixion. Constructed from brightly colored molded polyethylene – a common material used in the making of children's toys – the sculpture's cloying sweetness is pushed to its physical limits, transforming a sentimental object into an icon. Similarly, Koons's *Winter Bears*, 1988, carved in the tradition of medieval German church sculpture, could be read as a metaphor of Adam and Eve. A pair of child-sized waving, smiling cartoon bears in matching 'his and hers' outfits "clasp a heart-shaped by in unison," which the artist noted "could be a reference to the Sacred Heart of Jesus or a pop love song by Paul McCartney."¹ In *Sling Hook*, 2007-2009, a lobster and dolphin inflatable pool toy, both painstakingly rendered from aluminum and steel, are suspended from the ceiling by glossy red chains. Simultaneously hard and soft, familiar and uncanny, Koons imbues nostalgic, mass-produced pool toys with surprising energy.

Machine-carved from solid aluminum, Ray's gleaming sculptural wall work *Girl on Pony*, 2015, measures seven feet tall, five feet wide, and four inches deep, weighing over 500 pounds. Alluding to ancient Greek and Roman bas-reliefs as well as the classical motif of a rider on horseback, Ray's subject is far from monumental: a young girl in riding clothes atop a horse whose body, head, and tail have all been cropped from the frame. The physical and historical weight of the work elevate a passing scene of everyday life to a commemorative monument. The fantastical interior world of a child is rendered in ghostly matte white painted steel in Ray's *The New Beetle*, 2006. The *New York Times* critic Roberta Smith wrote that the work's "slouchy pose suggests Narcissus, but the boy is just the opposite, oblivious to himself and his nakedness, completely lost in the make-believe of the car, which is more exactly rendered than his face." The articulation of the figure is less crisp than that of the toy car, which separates the subject of the work from the object of his affection. *Boy*, 1992, transforms a relatable department store mannequin into an awkward figure on the verge of action. Scaled to the artist's height, the sculpture's adult-like presence is juxtaposed with the youthfulness of his pale blue lederhosen, white knee socks, and black patent leather Mary Janes.

¹ Excerpted from Christie's Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Auction catalogue, February 2011.

Cecily Brown explores desire, sexual pleasure, and mortality through swirling, expressionist gesture. Brown's largescale canvas *Figures in a Landscape 1*, 2001 blurs the bodies of lovers with shards of blue sky and greenery creating an abstract work infused with energy and action. Brown notes "In a way, what I really want to happen is all this tension, lewdness and ballsy-ness of a sexual image without necessarily having to describe the image...this idea of figures in motion, figures engaged in something emotional and how figures fuse together."² In *Untitled*, 1996, an innocuous grouping of cartoonish bunnies transitions into a writhing, overtly pornographic heap of phalluses. The painting could be read as twist on the idiom "breeding like rabbits," fusing innocence, eroticism, humor, and death through the artist's frenetic brushstrokes. In *Untitled (Vanity)*, 2005, a seated woman dressed in a black gown and white gloves stares at her reflection in mirror. Brown's brooding palette of black, grays, and flashes of pale skin, depicts a private moment as a memento mori, where a woman and her reflection are joined in the form of a loosely-painted skull.

The FLAG Art Foundation is a non-profit contemporary arts institution, founded by art patron Glenn Fuhrman in 2008. Its objective is to encourage the appreciation of contemporary art among a diverse audience. FLAG organizes four to six exhibitions a year, each with a different curator, as well as producing public programs and catalogues. Past curators include Chuck Close, Lisa Dennison, Eric Fischl, Louis Grachos, Prabal Gurung, Jim Hodges, Shaquille O'Neal, Linda Yablonsky, among others. To date, FLAG has hosted over 35 curated exhibitions, providing a platform for over 400 international established and emerging artists.

FLAG provides a unique educational environment in which visitors can view, contemplate, and engage in active dialogue with the artworks. FLAG is also a resource that facilitates loans of contemporary artworks to museums around the world. An extensive database of available works is maintained and made available to curators.

We are on the 9th and 10th floors of the Chelsea Arts Tower, located in the heart of New York's art district on 25th Street between 10th and 11th Avenues. Its state-of-the-art exhibition space was designed by noted architect Richard Gluckman.

Join the conversation online and follow FLAG's Instagram (@flagartfoundation) and Twitter (@FLAGartNYC), and use the #BrownKoonsRay hashtag when posting.

² "For the Love of Art: Cecily Brown on Sexuality," *Paper Magazine*, October 10, 2008.