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How we got to where we are in the art world: *Re-View: Onnasch Collection* at Hauser and Wirth, London

Playful, anarchic and instructive, Hauser & Wirth's exhibition *Re-View: Onnasch Collection, Directions in Art (1950-1990)* is a whistle-stop, fun romp through major European and American influences on late 20th-century art. A choice destination for the art academic, this is an extensive and entertaining show with a multitude of themes and big-name artists.

Christine Holley 16th October 2013



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Spanning all three Hauser & Wirth Piccadilly and Savile Row galleries, this eclectic and wide-ranging exhibition is scholarly in its approach, and enjoys a breadth and scope rarely seen in a private gallery. If you want an insight on "how we got to where we are today in the art world", you'll find this show illuminating.

Original listing details

Reinhard Onnasch was born in Germany in 1939, knew the Berlin of the 1960s and was one of the first Germans to open a gallery in New York after World War II. Sporting an open-minded and exploratory take on art, he built an individualistic 1,000-piece collection, of which Hauser & Wirth's show features 80 works. It was Onnasch who introduced now-legendary artists such as the Americans Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg and Robert Rauschenberg to German audiences and, conversely, organised German-born artist Gerhard Richter's first solo show in the US.

Here you will find iconic examples of Pop Art, Fluxus (an "anti-art" art movement), Colorfield, Assemblage, Minimalism and Abstract Expressionism from the New York School of Art, many of which are presented for the first time here in the UK.

Chronologically – and because it houses some of the most potentially challenging work – it's probably best to start at the Piccadilly gallery, next-door to St. James's church. This space has the impressive, high-ceilinged grandeur you would expect of the prestigious banking hall it once was. Galleries two and three (Hauser & Wirth South and North Galleries) are a hop, skip and jump away across on Savile Row.

Aside from Kurt Schwitters's 1987 *Hanne Darboven* wall art, the Piccadilly gallery focuses mainly on installation and found objects. Think Peter Blake's assembled art objects and you're in the right area. As you enter the ground floor gallery, the self-taught American Edward Kienholz's *The Future as an Afterthought* (1962) is an arresting and central work. Comprising dismembered baby doll parts in the silhouette of a mushroom cloud, it packs quite a visual punch as his comment on the horrors of nuclear war.

Continue to the upper gallery and more audacity lies in wait. Here, the George Brecht *Chair Event* (1960) in the upper gallery could be said to neatly sum up the tongue-in-cheek and thought-provoking spirit of the entire exhibition. *Chair Event* comprises an orange (always replaced with a fresh one for the duration of the exhibition) and a walking stick placed on a white wooden chair. Brecht was an exponent of the Fluxus "anti-art movement" that challenged established preconceptions of what art could be. Must it reside in the gallery, or can it be all around you in the ordinary landscape of everyday life?

On the same floor, check out Christo's *Wrapped Road Sign* from 1963, and also Dieter Roth's 1970 *Zwerge (Dwarves)*, made from garden gnomes and chocolate – yes, chocolate – with a childlike appeal. Having sussed that the red protuberances in the chocolate are pointy gnome hats, you can ponder the deeper meaning of a pleasurable foodstuff rendered revolting.

Now you are motoring and in the right mindset, so, dear reader, on to Savile Row. Here, Hauser & Wirth's South Gallery explores the emergence and development of Pop Art. Among the most memorable pieces there's *Do it* (1983) by Richard Serra – two giant slabs of hand-rolled steel,

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one precariously perched on the other, making you feel you should move away quite quickly – and Claes Oldenburg's 1976 *Inverted Q 6 ft. Prototype*, a rigid foam and polyurethane enamel sculpture, made of an inviting cuddly form with a foreboding shiny black surface. And do check out Jim Dine's fun painting *Hair* from 1961, just across from John Wesley's more recent 1986 series of large, delightfully graphic and cartoon-like oil paintings.

The North Gallery is next door. Here reside the 'big boys' in all their varied creative approaches; the major Abstract Expressionists who painted in sizes that so shocked post-war Brits. View the large, bold, liberated AND liberating canvases by Robert Motherwell, Cy Twombly, Franz Kline – all dwarfed by Morris Louis's gigantic 1960 *Gamma Tau* and *Gamma Iota*. Stand back and drink them in. This gallery fairly crackles with these juxtaposed canvases of painterly energy.

This is a historical exhibition of the kind more usually seen in public galleries, and a non-selling show that the global gallery players Hauser & Wirth are displaying until the 14th of December – a time of year that might be considered opportune for commercial galleries to make sales. The exhibition is curated by Hauser & Wirth's new partner, Paul Schimmel, formerly of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles.

You may just find that this exhibition is the one that stays with you, making you stop and think as you dash through the flotsam and jetsam of your everyday life.

Date reviewed: Thursday 10th October 2013

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