



# ARTIFICIAL REALISM

## GEORGE CONDO

15 May–14 August 2008

George Condo is widely recognized as one of the most influential American artists of his generation. Renowned for his singular brand of figuration, Condo developed a style that fuses the elegance of classical painting with the fractured intensity of the modern psyche. His works are populated by grotesque, exaggerated, and often comically disfigured characters — figures that reflect the absurdities, contradictions, and inner anxieties of contemporary life.

Condo studied art history and music theory at the University of Massachusetts in Lowell. In the early 1980s, he worked briefly at Andy Warhol's Factory, an experience that shaped his understanding of both American iconography and the mechanisms of the art world. In 1985, he moved to Paris, where he spent a decade immersed in the legacy of European painting before returning to New York in the mid-1990s.

**"I felt I had to come back to New York with a statement that would stand up against Andy Warhol's soup cans. And the irony was that it turned out to be Old Master painting." – George Condo**

His engagement with the legacy of the Old Masters became the foundation of his own artistic language: it combines influences from Velázquez, Goya, and Rembrandt, refracted through the lens of American visual culture. Condo coined the term *Artificial Realism* to describe this approach – "the realistic representation of that which is artificial."

These paintings form a bold fusion of the sensual painting of the European school with the aesthetics of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Francis Bacon's *Studies of the Human Body*, and the female figures of Willem de Kooning, enriched by references to kitsch and American visual culture – from *Playboy* magazine to comics and animation. His paintings offer not simply portraits, but imagined personalities, fractured and reassembled into visual manifestations of psychological states.

The artist describes his style as *psychological Cubism*, aiming not so much to break down traditional forms as to convey a multiplicity of emotional and mental experiences coexisting within a single image. His characters evoke both empathy and unease; they appear familiar and yet distorted. Their dual nature – at once alluring and unsettling – reflects the inner contradictions of a person living under ongoing psychological tension.

Condo's painting is a subtle balance between refinement and destruction. Acting as a mediator between cultural memory and the visual aggression of the present, he reimagines the genre of portraiture, turning the human figure into a graphic reflection of inner conflict and fragmented consciousness. What emerges in his images is neither unity nor narrative, but the reverse side of reality – a heightened perception that exposes illusion and the complex spectrum of emotional and inner expression.

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