

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
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CONTENT

JASPER JOHNS: A RETROSPECTIVE

DATES

October 20, 1996 - January 21, 1997

ORGANIZATION

Organized by Kirk Varnedoe, Chief Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art.

SPONSORSHIP

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THE EXHIBITION

JASPER JOHNS: A RETROSPECTIVE presents the most comprehensive survey ever held of the most influential artist of the postwar era, including recent work never before shown to the public. Johns' last full retrospective was nearly 20 years ago.

Johns (b. 1930, United States) emerged on the art scene in the late 1950s with his bracingly direct depictions of targets, flags, and numbers, works that represented a fresh and original approach in an era when the legacy of the New York School seemed to be sinking into slack, unconvincing gestural abstraction. Johns anticipated and informed such diverse strains of contemporary creativity as Pop, Minimalism, and Conceptual art, creating a profound impact on his contemporaries as well as countless younger artists. Looking backward with evident homage to such varied models as Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp, Johns also opened a door through which many of the neglected strategies of Dada and Surrealism were given a new entry into postwar art. Despite his deep engagement with early modern art, Johns is constantly cited as a founding father of postmodernism. He continues today to surprise and challenge viewers by constantly reinventing his singular fusion of austere, cerebral authority and sophisticated visual seduction, in imagery that looks nothing like -- but seamlessly subsumes -- his signature styles of earlier years.

One of the essential methods on which Johns' development has always been built is the apparent repetition of an established motif in another medium, an altered format, or different colors. As his work evolved, this constant recycling and reconsideration of a private repertory of icons -- ale cans, flags, handprints, rulers, cross-hatch patterns, details from other art -- has gained a symphonic complexity that can only be appreciated when work in every medium and from widely different periods is seen together.

TRAVEL

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For further information, contact Mary Lee, Department of Communications, The Museum of Modern Art, 212/708-9755.

CONTENT

Surveying works in all media from 1954 to the present, the exhibition comprises approximately 110 paintings, some 85 drawings, 20 prints, and 10 to 15 pieces of sculpture. It is organized for the most part chronologically, with certain rooms devoted to exploring thematic issues that recur throughout the artist's work.

PUBLICATIONS

Jasper Johns: A Retrospective, by Kirk Varnedoe with an essay by Roberta Bernstein. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. 408 pages. 483 illustrations, including 261 in color and four foldouts. In his introductory essay, Mr. Varnedoe examines recurring themes in Johns' work, highlighting the tension between literal and abstract aspects, and stressing the elusive ways in which the meaning of the art is intertwined with its materials and processes. In her essay, Ms. Bernstein discusses the significant artistic and literary sources -- including Picasso, Duchamp, Paul Cézanne, Leonardo da Vinci, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Frank O'Hara -- that surface throughout Johns' work. Mr. Varnedoe's second essay then examines Johns' wide-ranging impact on the art of his time, through interviews with a variety of contemporary painters and sculptors who have been affected by different aspects of Johns' innovations. Clothbound, \$65.00, distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, and paperbound, \$32.50; both available in The MoMA Book Store.

Jasper Johns in His Own Words: Writings, Sketchbook Notes, and Interviews, compiled by Christel Hollevoet. Edited by Kirk Varnedoe and Christel Hollevoet. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. 288 pages. 30 illustrations. In material from the late 1950s to the present, Johns discusses his work, describes his relationships with other artists, and analyzes the problematic aspects of artistic representation and interpretation. Included are transcripts of filmed and taped interviews that have never been published, as well as writings and interviews that have appeared in a wide variety of books, magazines, and catalogues. Among the illustrations are selected pages from the artist's previously unpublished sketchbooks. Paperbound, \$24.95, distributed in the United States and Canada by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York; available in The MoMA Book Store.

TRAVEL

JASPER JOHNS: A RETROSPECTIVE will travel to the Ludwig Museum, Cologne (March 7 - June 1, 1997) and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (June 28 - August 17, 1997).

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