



## Look Back in Anger?

Bethan Huws: *Untitled*  
(*Personally, I like...*)  
2012–16, Aluminum,  
glass, rubber and  
plastic letters, Ed. 1/2

The ongoing pandemic, even though travel restrictions to the USA have been relaxed, has made us humble. **What do we see, what have we seen in 2021? New York presented us with little of the future.** In very important galleries we actually found ourselves looking at the past. At Matthew Marks, the latest works by Robert Gober, the wunderkind of the late 1980s, seemed boring at first. *Gagosian* exhibited Donald Judds from around 1960, works between abstraction and landscape, but they had all been seen in museums. Neo Rauch's new paintings at *Zwirner* looked quite similar to his previous ones, prompting the thought that the artist might be repeating the same picture. The past was also revealed at *Acquavella*, a gallery in which one could admire more than eighty high-quality Picasso drawings from seven decades, including impressive museum loans. Then, surprisingly, at *Skarstedt*, we saw exhibited on three floors the fresh acrylic paintings and stainless-steel sculptures of the designer KAWS, who has been enjoying success on the market for years. He, too, is not an innovator, for his appealing little figures with crosses for eyes resemble Disney characters, and the style of his work mimics Jeff Koons. A trickster, but who would not want to buy one of these beauties, despite the \$600,000 price? The art fairs, too — you could fly to Miami again — did not show much of the future. Seasoned work, on the other hand, was upgraded. Thus, a large painting by Dana Schutz, born in 1974, now costs \$2.4 Million. Basically, the art market in 2021 has adopted a wait- and-see attitude, as if apart from solid tech stocks or Amazon there were no lower values and not much hype around NFTs. **John Osborne's "Look Back in Anger" was about a knight from the lower class who moved up in society, eager to succeed, but misbehaved and ended up being a disappointment despite his reconciliation with his wife.** A Damian Hirst of the 1990s, a Rachel Whiteread or Tracey Emin were not visibly on the horizon in 2021. The street artist Banksy no longer embodied the excuse that expensive "high art" succeeds with regularity, for by now his works, too, sell for particularly high sums. The New York auctions in November also furnished proof that high-quality, market fresh works from the post-war era can repeatedly double the upper estimate. That was true for Philip Guston, Roy Lichtenstein, and Pierre Soulages. Among the established contemporaries, David Hockney, Jonas Wood and, as already mentioned, KAWS were especially well rewarded.

At the same time, the works of older or deceased female artists doubled their market price: Linda Benglis, Lee Bontecou, Agnes Martin, and Alice Neel now also belong to the art investment universe. Likewise, some female artists born after 1980 have been sensationally successful at the most recent auctions: María Berrío, Ewa Juszkiewicz, Danielle Orchard, Hillary Pecis, Lisa Price and Claire Tabouret. Their paintings fetched ten to thirty times the upper estimates in New York. Even though artists like Mark Bradford, Donald Judd, Alex Katz, Brice Marden, Thomas Schütte or Cy Twombly have not experienced price increases for a while, the art market is apparently bursting with money. But is this enough for us? Does it bestow great peace on art and on our souls? **The real sensation in autumn 2021 was Adam Pendleton's installation "Who Is Queen?" in the five-story atrium of New York's MOMA. In the museum's words, the subjects were "Blackness, abstraction, and the avant-garde."**

Two of these three topics were and have been virtual trademarks of this house since the year it was founded in 1929. Suddenly, "blackness" joined in as an unmistakable presence, loud, several floors high, and visually powerful. Suddenly the art history of "old white men" seemed to have been brought to halt and all but turned upside down. Pendleton, a black artist and supremely gifted performer, born in Virginia in 1984, jolted the museum with his black and white written art, words on canvas and paper, sounds and film sequences on a large screen. **In this sense, also at the Munich *Pinakothek der Moderne* with Shirin Neshat's great exhibition "Living in One Land, Dreaming in Another," great art never seems merely expensive or gaudy.** True, it likes to celebrate what we have achieved, and at times offends against the precepts of modesty. Pendleton as well as Neshat, who has in the meantime begun to take photographs of Americans while continuing to cover her photos with script, remind us intensely of who has not profited so far, who has been left behind and forgotten, although he or she may possess the same, if not somewhat greater, dignity. Many artists have suffered setbacks since March 2020 due to the abrupt lack of exhibitions. That is something we cannot change, but we should not forget it in the art market year 2021. **Bethan Huws — she, too, is well established, but her works are still inexpensive — put the following sentence on a bulletin board some years ago: "PERSONALLY, I LIKE THE IDEA THAT JESUS WAS BORN IN A STABLE"**. This work consisting of twelve words hangs at the entrance of *Taras Castle* in Switzerland, owned by the artist Not Vital. Without anger and with the Christian idea that all human beings are entitled to love, Bergos Art Consult wishes all its friends happy holidays.

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