



## Glamour and Madness

Alina Szapocznikow:  
*Multiple Portrait (Double)*  
1967, Granite and  
colored polyester resin  
76.2 × 47.6 × 35.5 cm

“We never get out of style,” sings Taylor Swift or, in another song, “I can still make the whole place shimmer.” In the art world too, wherever sales are taking place, it helps to be glamorous. Indeed, it may have already become necessary. A work of art, to paraphrase the most commercially successful singer, would be well advised to put on the movie looks of James Dean or paint its lips bright red. ***Sotheby’s, in view of the not entirely successful New York auctions, recommends a recount of the “Billion Dollar Week,” as if the gleam in Dagobert Duck’s gaze were shining from our eyes.*** Despite two terrible wars, increased inflation due to Corona, and a significant rise in interest rates, the works of Pablo Picasso (\$139 and \$43 million), Claude Monet (\$74 million), Francis Bacon (\$52 million), Mark Rothko (\$46 million), Jean-Michel Basquiat (\$42 million), Jasper Johns (\$41 million), Ed Ruscha (\$39 million), René Magritte (\$35 million), Gerhard Richter (\$35 million), and now also Joan Mitchell (\$29 million) remain safe values and safe havens. Andy Warhol, with a painting for just under \$26 million, could no longer assert himself, which in the New York auctions was not only due to a lack of major works. The same applies to Cy Twombly, although a work placed on the cover of the *21st Century Evening Sale* attained just under \$20 million, and a painting from the Emily Fisher Landau collection even reached \$26 million. **It is important to note this fall that one cannot expect value increases among any of the particularly successful artists, not even the very stably traded Louise Bourgeois.** Instead, due to declining buyer interest combined with already lowered prices, many works in the areas of Impressionism and Modernism have weakened in value, whether we are speaking of Max Beckmann, Fernand Léger, Camille Pissarro, or Paul Signac. Indeed, a work by Signac estimated at \$15–25 million unfortunately found no bidder. Three paintings by Paul Cézanne from the Swiss *Langmatt Foundation*, acquired by its founders Sidney and Jenny Brown in 1933, achieved over \$52 million in total, including the high premium, at *Christie’s*. Of that sum, the foundation itself received CHF 40.2 million. Restitution claims had been clarified beforehand—another reason why more was hoped for. Declining values were registered in the field of *Post War & Contemporary*, for example the works of Sam Francis, Keith Haring, Donald Judd, Franz Kline, Frank Stella, and Clyfford Still, but also those of Joseph Beuys, whose showcase achieved \$152,000 instead of \$200–300,000. Jeff Koons’s glamour is also measurably less in demand. John Currin’s painting in the style of the old masters is obviously overrated at \$7–10 million.

So, who is succeeding? Primarily women — along with Louise Bourgeois the previously mentioned Joan Mitchell (1925–1992), the always well-exhibited Japanese Ruth Asawa (1926–2012), more recently the voluminous works of Lee Bontecou (1931–2022), for a long time the very young Cecily Brown (\*1969), for the past few years the abstract expressionist Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011), then of course the indestructible and omnipresent Yayoi Kusama (\*1929), the fine minimalist Agnes Martin (1912–2004), the African singleton among US artists, Julie Mehretu (\*1970), and the also still young Elizabeth Peyton (\*1965). Ever since her retrospective at the New York *Metropolitan Museum of Art* in 2022 under the memorable heading “People Come First,” Alice Neel (1900–1984) must be posthumously counted among the highly successful. **Of the above-mentioned women as well as the successful men we have cited, it should be noted that, with the exception of Beuys and Kusama, all of them live or have lived in the USA. Europe and Asia are still on the sidelines in New York.** But among the women, too, there are bought-ins and value corrections. Thus, the paintings and paperworks of Marlene Dumas and Kara Walker are now hardly achieving their high prices anymore. Jenny Holzer and the young sculptor Rebecca Warren, on the other hand, are on the rise. A sculpture by the highly esteemed New Yorker Simone Leigh, the star of the Venice Biennale “Milk of Dreams,” remained unsold. So, what to do? This fall, the greatest good fortune was experienced by the heirs of the Austrian cabaret artist, director, and film star “Fritz” Grünbaum, who was murdered in the Dachau concentration camp in 1941, with works by Egon Schiele from the period of 1910–1912. A small gouache achieved \$10.9 million including premium at *Christie’s* instead of an estimated \$1.5–2 million. **Which brings us to madness, not glamour. It is the doubters, the crazy, the most sensitive artists who may not experience appreciation until the end of their lives or posthumously, if at all.** Exhibitions like the 2022 Biennale, curated with exceptional care by Cecilia Alemani, have ensured that Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) and increasingly Paula Rego (1935–2022) are appearing in major contemporary galleries and are also succeeding at auctions. Lee Lozano (1930–1999) currently has a superb exhibition, adopted from the *Pinacoteca Agnelli* in Turin, at François Pinault’s *La Bourse* in Paris, which shows what a painful path led to her female minimalism. Finally, we must mention Alina Szapocznikow (1926–1973) from Poland, who was interned in concentration camps as a child and later said about herself, “I produce strange objects.” Apprehension of dread, pain, and horror seems almost strange today. “The art world has collapsed and shattered,” wrote Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, a desperate member of the *documenta* selection committee, from Israel after October 7, 2023. The committee has since disbanded in its entirety. Hito Steyerl, the German filmmaker and professor, is even demanding that we finally come to terms with the challenge presented by a “multi-crisis era.” Maybe that is simply the truth of the matter.

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