

Every era produces its iconic artists. A simple list of names—Michelangelo, El Greco, Goya, Rembrandt, Velázquez, Watteau, Manet, Monet, van Gogh, Picasso, Matisse, Pollock, Rothko, Johns, Warhol, Judd, Basquiat—can serve as shorthand for the history of Western art from the Renaissance to the late twentieth century. These (and many of their contemporaries) are blue-chip artists—each emblematic of his day and style, each having produced work of excellence and innovation. A hallmark of blue-chip artists, says Christie’s senior vice president Amy Cappellazzo, “is that you will not be able to discuss the art of their time without mentioning their names.”

We spoke with art critics, advisers, dealers, curators, and auction house specialists, and what follows is a list of contemporary artists who they feel will live on in the annals of art history and the collections of museums. The list, we hasten to note, is tightly condensed—it cites only artists mentioned by a majority of our sources—and hardly definitive, whether you define blue chip in terms of artistic merit or as an investment.

In the first instance, tastes change. Most of the artists listed are painters; most of them make figurative (as opposed to abstract) work.

Today, a loose consensus is emerging on who among living and working artists merits (or soon will) designation as a blue chip. The majority of new blue-chippers are no spring chickens. Most were born in the 1960s or just before. “It takes fifteen to twenty years for an artist to prove himself creatively,” says Alexander Rotter, a specialist for Sotheby’s, “and to show that he has staying power in the secondary market.”

That’s the other side of the blue chip. Gallery owners set prices more or less arbitrarily; many jealously guard their artists’ work, selling only to the “right” people—those whose collections lend gravitas to anyone whose works are included. Auctions, though, are a free market, and art experts agree that a blue chip must stand the test of open waters.

Unlike Gilded Age tycoons, many of today’s collectors are truly interested in art. They are often the scions of Park Avenue families or hedge funders and entrepreneurs who appreciate the daring (*Cont. on page 116*)

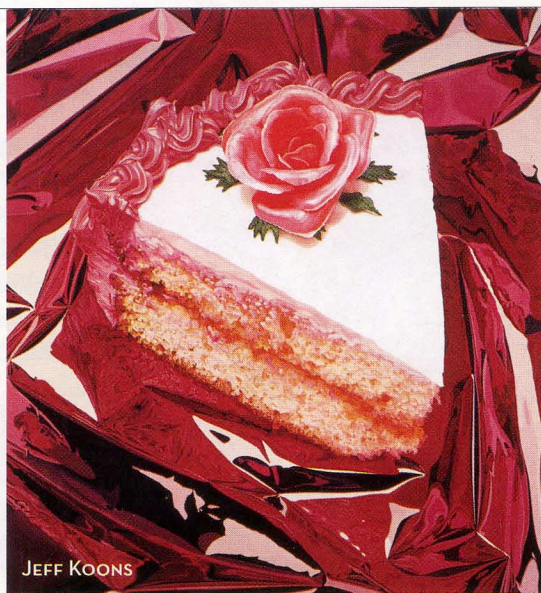
THE SHOW-STOPPERS

The work of these brand-name artists is brilliant and instantly recognized. They bring the “Wow!” factor to a collection. **JEFF KOONS** Audacity has never been his short suit, whether he is exploring pop, porn, balloons as art, or (his favorite subject) himself. Always provocative. (Top auction price: \$5,600,000.)

DAMIEN HIRST Since his breakout pieces with animals preserved in formaldehyde, the Briton has never stopped examining new ideas, media, and techniques, and his best may be ahead. (Top price: \$2,250,182.)

MATTHEW BARNEY Limited-edition copies of his epic, extravagant *Cremaster* films are the true gems, but the photos and sculptures he made in concert with the videos make stirring display pieces. (Top price: \$400,000.)

CINDY SHERMAN Many of her sly, subversive, costumed self-portrait photos are printed in large numbers, diluting her cachet. But a small-edition Sherman work can be the star of a collection. (Top price: \$336,000.)



CONTEMPORARY ART:



THE CAMERA ARTISTS

Whether they document or alter a moment in time, these photographers make work that is both instantly exciting and enduring:

ANDREAS GURSKY This Leipzig native embraces digital technology, manipulating images to create huge panoramic wonders. (Top price: \$632,000.)

THOMAS STRUTH His mammoth, richly colored, grandly composed photos study the relation of human beings to environments. (Top price: \$317,500.)

THOMAS RUFF This prolific German’s subjects have ranged from people and architecture to nudes, the stars, and machinery. (Top price: \$150,000.)

THOMAS DEMAND Trained as a sculptor. For works such as *Podium*, he creates a cardboard model of a site (above left, a dais where Serb dictator Slobodan Milošević spoke) and photographs it. (Top price: \$180,000.)

ELIZABETH PEYTON



THE NEWLY ANOINTED

These artists have recently been acknowledged as first-rank talents:

JOHN CURRIN Influenced by northern European Renaissance art.

His attenuated portraits, mainly of women, are credited with reviving interest in figurative art. (Top price: \$847,500.)

LISA YUSKAVAGE Bright, gauzy colors and the superficial cuteness of the girls she paints belie their inner rage and confusion. (Top price: \$180,000.)

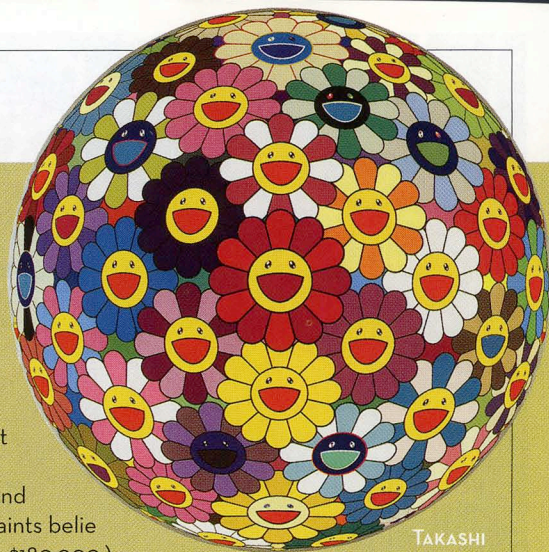
RICHARD PRINCE Long on the art scene. The energy and diversity of his work in photos, painting, and sculpture have now lent him blue-chip status. (Top price: \$1,024,000.)

ELIZABETH PEYTON A romantic at heart, she paints loving portraits of friends and pop culture icons such as John Lennon, left, and Kurt Cobain that attempt to elicit the core of the allure of her subjects. (Top price: \$800,000.)

MARLENE DUMAS This veteran South African artist's haunting portraits reveal a different—and more disturbing—meaning with each viewing. (Top price: \$3,342,600.)

TAKASHI MURAKAMI His bright, bouncy, anime-inspired acrylic works can range from pure fun to kind of scary. Prints are widely available. (Top price: \$624,000.)

LUC TUYMANS This Belgian painter finds horror in the everyday. In one example, a close-up of a birdcage suggests despair and isolation. (Top price: \$1,472,000.)



TAKASHI MURAKAMI

THE NEW BLUE CHIPS

BY GREGORY CERIO

ON THE CUSP OF GREATNESS?

Not quite a sure bet for membership in the elite creative club, these artists have many people talking—and thinking:

KAI ALTHOFF There's a big buzz in the art world about this Cologne-based 39-year-old whose paintings, channeling the styles of Egon Schiele and George Grosz, explore the meaning of maleness. (Top price: \$78,000.)

FRANCIS ALÿS For his video and painting projects, this Belgian often works with assistants such as the Mexican sign painters

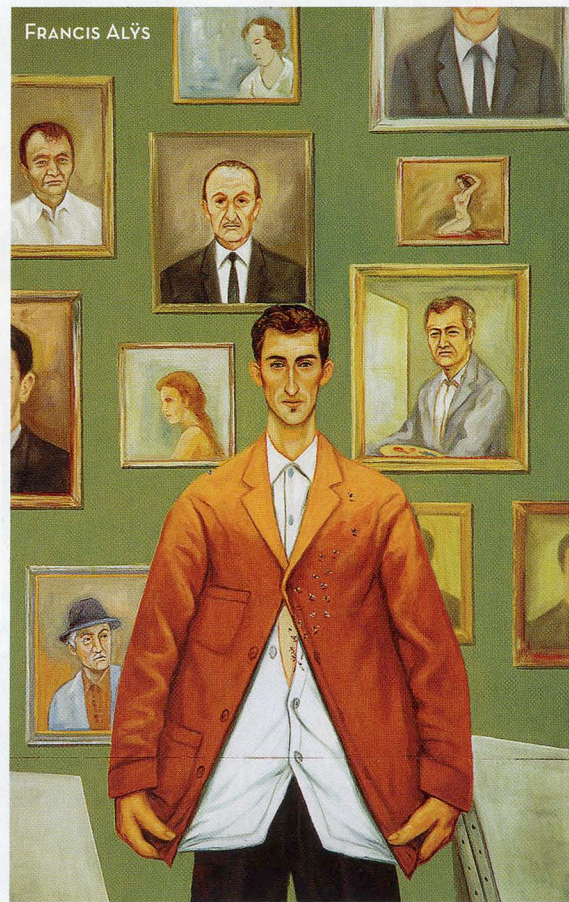
he had copy his self-portrait for his piece *El Soplón*, a detail of which is shown at right. (Top price: \$164,800.)

ELLEN GALLAGHER A veteran multimedia artist now coming into her own. Her recent work includes *DeLuxe*, a limited-edition, 60-piece portfolio of framed magazine ads altered with materials such as plasticine. (New York's Museum of Modern Art bought one set.) (Top price: \$320,000.)

KARA WALKER Born in California in 1969, she is best known for using a quaint, parlor-pastime medium—black paper silhouettes—to create murals that make scathing commentaries on race and gender issues. A detail of her piece *The Battle of Atlanta* ... is shown above. (Top price: \$329,600.)



KARA WALKER



FRANCIS ALÿS

ARCHITECTURE

(Cont. from page 52) east facade, which has vertical banks of windows and horizontal limestone bands recalling the playful spirit of Sir Edwin Lutyens.

The main facade of the Dumbarton Oaks library demonstrates Venturi and Scott Brown's willingness to defer to good existing structures. How many architectural prima donnas would place another designer's work front and center, as Venturi has done here by recycling an orangery as the library's new reading room? His recent essay "Architecture—Ma Non Troppo—as Background Rather than Distraction" invokes the Italian musical term "but not too much" to make a case for unassertive design "in an era when architecture as total fanfare has become egotecture."

The foundation of this firm's recent practice has been campus planning, science buildings, student centers, and libraries. Those projects share several characteristics, mainly the "decorated shed" format, defined by Venturi and Scott Brown as a simple generic structure with flat surfaces enlivened by two-dimensional decoration. Appropriately for American campuses, the team's main material of choice is brick, deployed in contrasting colors and vivid patterns, from diagonal "diapering" based on Tudor and Victorian prototypes to sideways stripes of stylized waves and weavings adapted from pre-Columbian and Byzantine motifs at Dumbarton Oaks.

The curving driveway sloping downward from the street toward the library's main door is flanked by two refurbished McKim, Mead & White outbuildings: the gardener's cottage, for offices, and the refectory, for communal dining. The refectory's ground floor reception room opens onto a rectangular court also bounded by a lovely old greenhouse—a gateway to Farrand's majestic garden—and Venturi's new structure, with an enormous beech tree anchoring the quadrangle's center.

The reception room's pale green walls bloom with a smaller version of the superscale pink, yellow, and white pop flowers that Venturi and Scott Brown devised for their Best Products Catalog Showroom of 1977 near Philadelphia. Good-taste-niks will demand that this Dorothy Draper-meets-Andy Warhol

pattern be painted over, and I pray they will be rebuffed.

Because the library, which cost a relatively modest \$18 million, is a study facility rather than a public showcase, its interiors are straightforwardly flat-footed—"almost all right," as Venturi famously described the classic American Main Street. Gray steel shelving, natural cork flooring, and sturdy oak details impart a pleasingly old-fashioned air. The few hints of drama come from views of the lush grounds framed by towering square-paned windows and daylight raking down from the clerestory.

Dumbarton Oaks' previous claim to architectural fame was the art gallery that Philip Johnson added to the mansion in 1963, which he rightly judged "my most elegant building." Defined by a series of shallow domes ringed with columns, that reliquarylike space (now under renovation) is ideal for the collection's small-scale objects. For once Johnson's preciousness seems appropriate, reminding me of the rococo Hall of Mirrors at the Amalienburg pavilion near Munich and a later musical analogue, the lilting waltzes from Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*.

Great artists are rare, and those who change the way we see the world rarest of all. Just as Stravinsky revolutionized music early in the twentieth century, so Venturi and Scott Brown recast modern architecture with their iconoclastic designs and writings of the 1960s and 1970s. All broke free of the past but continued to learn from the masters. In his Dumbarton Oaks Concerto, Stravinsky channeled the synopated structure of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos to create something akin but vibrantly new. Venturi and Scott Brown have done the same at Dumbarton Oaks with their sophisticated riffs on Elizabethan, Georgian, and modernist architecture in an unmistakably contemporary idiom.

Dumbarton Oaks' brave director, Edward L. Keenan, would have had a far easier time had he commissioned a routine in-fill scheme from some historical revivalist. But in going with a maverick couple whose quirky work still arouses controversy, Keenan has given Dumbarton Oaks the latest installment in its open-ended dialogue with genius. □

THE NEW BLUE CHIPS

(Cont. from page 93) and even shocking aspects of much new art. Even those who rely on expert guidance are "very knowledgeable," says Alicia Bona, a principal in the New York art advisory firm the Heller Group. "They get out to galleries, museums, studios. They want to make informed decisions. We merely further their education." Craig Robins, the Miami real estate developer behind the city's Design District, is a model young collector. He studied art history at college, has cultivated relationships with galleries and artists, and often exhibits pieces. "Art for art's sake" is his motto, yet he's mindful of the bottom line. "I don't like to look at art as an investment," he says, "but you have to choose the best places to put your resources."

Even the most genteel of connoisseurs sound like racetrack touts when discussing the investment prospects of artists. But art is always about questioning and debate. □

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VOLUME 175, NO. 1. HOUSE AND GARDEN (ISSN 1087-9528) is published monthly by The Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Advance Magazine Publishers Inc.: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., Chairman; Charles H. Townsend, President & C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, Executive Vice President and C.O.O.; Jill Bright, Executive Vice President-Human Resources; John Buese, Executive Vice President-Chief Information Officer; David Orlin, Senior Vice President-Strategic Sourcing; Robert Bennis, Senior Vice President-Real Estate; Maurie Perl, Senior Vice President-Chief Communications Officer. Shared Services provided by Advance Magazine Group: Steven T. Florio, Advance Magazine Group Vice Chairman; David B. Chemidlin, Senior Vice President-General Manager, Shared Services Center. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. R123242885. Canada Post return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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