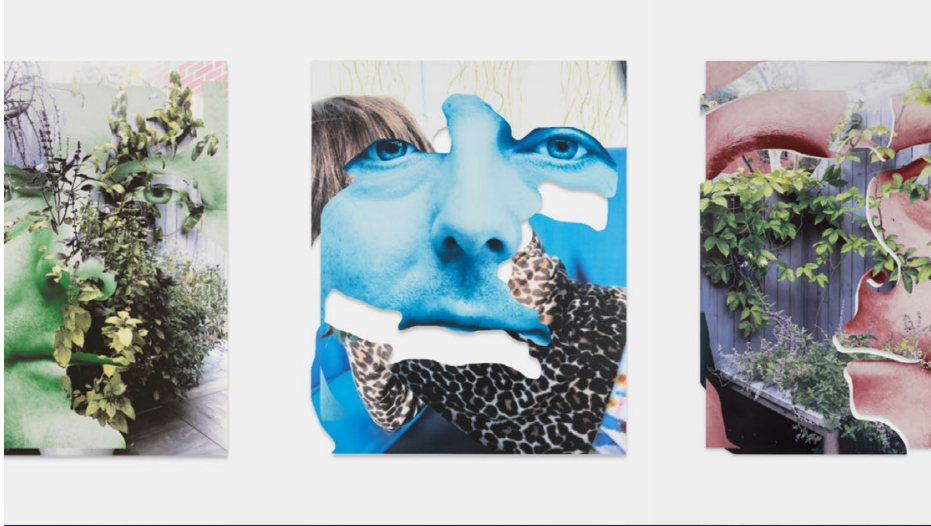


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5 December 2017

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# Urs Fischer on Katy Perry, Art Basel Miami Beach, and Why It's Boring When People Compare Him to Duchamp

"It's like watching people have sex. I'd rather have it myself."

By [PAUL LASTER](#) | Dec 5 2017, 3:59pm

Urs Fischer, *Green Solace*, *16 Handles*, *Red Solace*, 2017. © Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist; Gagosian Gallery; and Jeffrey Deitch, Inc., New York. Photo: Mats Nordman

Urs Fischer makes art looks like child's play; take a look at his giant clay sculpture of Katy Perry, which viewers are invited to physically pull apart through the end of the year in New York, and the new puzzle-like painting he's produced

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prepped for the fair.

**GARAGE: What's your understanding of the concept of *ABSTRACT/NOT ABSTRACT*?**

The lines between abstraction and figuration are very fluid nowadays. My understanding of the idea is that it's about personal abstraction versus a more formal interpretation.

**Have you worked with Jeffrey Deitch in the past?**

Yes, many times. We're old friends. I did a big show with him at LA MoCA when he was the director there. And I've done various projects with him at the Deste Foundation in Greece. I was also part of the first two shows that Deitch and Gagosian did during Art Basel Miami Beach. I like the loose nature of this annual show.

**And are you repped by Gagosian?**

I show with Gagosian and Sadie Coles and lots of other people—but independently. I'm not anyone's artist. I don't have signed contracts, but I'm very loyal. I started working with Gagosian in 2011. My former gallery in New York was Gavin Brown's enterprise, but we still work together at times. I just had a show at his space in Rome.

**In the context of this show are you more abstract or not abstract?**

It's a fusion. The source images are photos. The way that they're cut up, colored, and fused is more abstract. But it's in-between.



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**What are you exhibiting in Miami?**

A triptych, two panels of which are shaped canvases. Each panel fuses two images, one being the same cut-up photo of my face. My face is fused with a personal environment, which in this case is my balcony garden with flowers and plants. The middle one has a photographic ground that's partially my face mixed with an image of my daughter. My face in third panel is a reverse of my features in the first panel. The face in the first panel is tinted green; the second is blue; and the third is red. The green panel merges with the plants and the red panel blends with the bricks in the background. It's a natural environment versus an urban one.

**Have you seen or heard about any of the other works in the show?**

I've heard various things over time, but it's always changing. I'll have to wait and see it when I get there. I always like Jeffrey's broad selection. I think that's one of his best qualities, and he's open to things, which I appreciate.

**You work in a variety of media. What's your approach to making art?**

I'm a servant, that's my approach. My understanding of art is that all of the art ever made is all part of one art—good or bad, communicating with you or not. But I don't think of myself as a creator.

**Was it always like that for you?**

More or less. I don't believe that anything happens when you make an artwork. I believe that when you make an artwork, you just make an artwork; you're not going to get much more out of it.

**Which artists inspired you when starting out and maybe still do?**

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*Francis Bacon* and a book of Pierre Cabanne's interviews with Marcel Duchamp. I really soaked them up, even though they were different in approach. But those issues don't interest me any more.

**When looking at your work I wondered if there were any Duchampian influences.**

It's too sad for me. It's like watching people have sex. I'd rather have it myself.

**What's your take on Art Basel Miami Beach?**

Why not? It's great. I think art fairs work best in insular settings, like in Basel, where there's not much else to do. I remember being in Miami Beach the first year and we were up on a walkway, where you could view the fair from above, and there was an agricultural fair on the other side at the same time. It was at that moment that I understood what it was. On one side there were artworks and on the other side there were tractors. You have a booth and you bring the thing you want to pitch and you meet people and you have a good time and then you go home. If you see it as anything more than that it can get depressing.



Urs Fischer, *Bliss*, 2017. © Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Mats Nordman



Urs Fischer, *Bliss*, 2017. © Urs Fischer. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Mats Nordman

**You also have a larger-than-life sculpture of Katy Perry—titled *Bliss*—that's currently on view in a public setting at 39 Spring Street in New York. How did this project come about?**

I had already been making these Plastiline clay sculptures when I was approached by Katy to do something for the release for her *Witness* album in LA. I came up with the idea to do a layered sculpture and asked her how she wanted to be portrayed, and she said "naked." We started from there, but it was technically too complicated to do the whole body. I reduced it to just a bust—the head and shoulders—because your face is also a naked representation of you. There wasn't enough time to finish it for her album event so I had the piece floating around the studio. I didn't know what to do with it so I asked her if I should just show it someplace and she said sure. I tried to exhibit it in Rome, but that didn't work so I rented this space in New York. There's no gallery presenting it; I did it on my own.

**Is the piece in flux?**

Yeah, it keeps changing. In the beginning it's about purity. It's just her face. Then



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around it. It's almost like "locks on a bridge." The bust is there for people to use. It's a material. It's about making a mark. Some people add to the sculpture, but the majority of people just write their names. It's an experience for the audience.

### How will it end?

I don't know, we'll see. It's on view until the end of the year. People just walk in and start working on it. There are always people there, and it's mainly people that often never engage art. It's getting messy. In the end we'll probably see what we can recycle and the rest will go wherever.



Urs Fischer, Julian, 2014. Courtesy of the artist and Karma, New York. Photo: Christopher Burke Studios

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**You've made other works that confront celebrity, such as your Julian Schnabel candle. Are you saying something about public persona?**

I don't see Julian as a celebrity, I see him as an artist. All the candle sculptures are images of men—different forms of men, different shells of men, different personas. They take on the personas that they have built around themselves. That's what I saw with Julian. With Katy, I think it's a very interesting form of celebrity that she has; she makes things work for her. I see it, ultimately, as a very personal form of entertainment. It's also very communal. I like the way the audience gets involved at her concerts. That's what attracted me to this idea of doing this kind of sculpture. It's open, it's not about control. The whole thing with her was that she texted me directly and she came here and we talked. It was simple, direct—nobody else was involved.

I like the idea that everyone takes something from it. It's amusing to think of Katy as this iconic figure and everyone wanting a piece of her.

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Urs Fischer and various artists, YES, 2011–ongoing. Courtesy of the artists. Photo: Stefan Altenburger

**You've also made these crowd-sourced, participatory public pieces—most notably with your exhibition *YES* at LA MoCA. What is it about these kinds of works that you find appealing?**

First of all it's more fun—plain and simple. At MoCA we had so much fun, for four weeks, every day ten hours with crazy people, nice people, cool people. The energy was always great. There were no inhibiting factors. It was almost like karaoke, where you never dare sing, but after a few drinks and watching other people you do it too, and you enjoy it. With these works, there's also a strong formal aspect to it for me. The clay is like a minimalist artwork. You just have this one material and it's takes on all of these crazy stories and shapes.

**Do you mean you start from minimalism and it ends up representational?**

Yes, you have so much representation that it becomes noise. It's pure material—like Arte Povera.

**That sounds like *ABSTRACT/NOTABSTRACT*.**

There you go!