



2^R Christopher Wool

Chicago 1955 – lives in New York

Untitled, 1998

Alkyd resin on rice paper. 167 × 120 cm (65 3/4 × 47 1/4 in.). On the reverse inscribed with the work number, signed and dated in pencil: D 64 Wool 1998. [3035] Framed.

Provenance

Berliner Sparkasse Collection

EUR 300,000–400,000

USD 349,000–465,000

Literature and illustration

Stiftung Brandenburger Tor (ed.): Die Kunstsammlung der Landesbank Berlin AG, Berlin, Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2007, ill. p. 111

- **The work forms part of the Berliner Sparkasse Collection.**
- **The artist designed the iconic DAAD logo as a painter in residence in Berlin.**
- **Wool's artistic craft is influenced by both Abstract Expressionism and Minimal Art.**

The work on paper from 1998 that will be called up at this auction marks a key turning point in the oeuvre of Christopher Wool: away from his “word paintings,” towards an exclusive focus on pictorial composition. We discern a background formed by various black floral patterns. But parts of it have been painted over with white layers applied as gestures and a second painted surface appears over the neutrally configured substrate. The first and quite essential change in Christopher Wool's approach is that he is now allowing – or even intentionally deploying – a “handwritten” painted gesture to serve as a foil to the “anonymous,” cookie-cutter look of the underlying layer. Today, we know that from the year 2000, every single one of the paintings he created would rely on a drastically pared-down black and white palette, plumbing various shades of gray, while the use of extremely diluted paint evokes large-scale water colours.

The pictorial logic of this oversized drawing allows the viewer to look over Christopher Wool's shoulder, as it were, as he explores new artistic paths during this period. The fact that he executed this work on paper in such a large format testifies to his satisfaction with the results of his experimentation. The size of this piece is larger than a sketch or study and thus also expresses the artist's intention that his artistic development, as also evidenced by other, similar works from the same year, was to be witnessed. Moreover, Christopher Wool made use of extra-fine Japanese tissue paper during this period, which, when used as a base for paint in this way, exudes both refinement and fragility. Both by the painterly gesture of the overlay, which itself intends to be painting, and by the interplay with memories of what once was and now

remains visible through the transparent overpainting, Christopher Wool allows the viewer to participate in his compositional process. Against this backdrop, one could understand this oversized drawing as a private window onto the painter's atelier. And therein lies its distinctiveness and significance.

The works of Christopher Wool from the early 1980s were thematically inspired by a marketing practice he had observed in the New York real estate industry: Brokers would have the lobbies of buildings they were listing temporarily “gussied up” by having house painters apply patterns to the walls. These would be created with a wooden roller engraved with simple floral or abstract decorative designs – a tool found in the painting supply stores along Canal Street. Christopher Wool used these roller-created designs for his own purposes, turning out paintings that resemble oversized woodcuts. The type of paint he favoured is known as “alkyd resin,” which tends to dry quickly and leaves behind a seemingly varnished surface – a colouristic effect that has become a stylistic hallmark of Wool's oeuvre. The use of these patterns creates an all-over effect that harks back to the principles of American Abstract Expressionism, while the serial regularity with which these internal motifs appear also incorporates and reflects concepts from the prior Minimal Art style. While the repeated ornamental figures determining the image's surface suggest reproducibility, they nonetheless remain unique and individual.

Christopher Wool became known in the early 1990s for his paintings of large-scale letters visualizing American English words. Working with the familiar effect of black lettering on a white background, the artist's stenciled-in words exert a striking effect. Individual words and quoted phrases became the signature style of his paintings, which were shown in an impressive retrospective exhibition at the Guggenheim in New York in 2013. It was this same principle that Christopher Wool used to design the DA / AD logo during his artist-in-residence year in Berlin in 1993, which is still in use in today.

Friedrich Meschede

Further works from this collection in our special auction “Sammlung Berliner Sparkasse”, catalogue 339, Thursday, 2 December 2021, 3 p.m.



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