Gladstone Gallery returns to TEFAF New York with Early Drawings by George Condo

Gladstone Gallery is pleased to present an in-depth selection of early drawings by George Condo at TEFAF, offering a rare glimpse into a pivotal period in the artist's career between 1984 and 1986. For Condo, drawing is fundamental. As a young child, following a visit to St. Mary's Church, he produced a startlingly visceral crucifixion scene: the thorns of Christ's crown fractured into abstract slashes of yellow lightning, threatening, yet illuminating the darkened sky. Though unsettled by the work's morbid connotation, his mother preserved this early testament to Condo's talent, and he included it in exhibitions as a mature artist. Drawing essentially underlines all aspects of his rich and evocative oeuvre.

Born in New Hampshire in 1957, Condo initially pursued music and art history in college, performing in the punk band "The Girls," before shifting course at age twenty-three to immerse himself fully in the visual arts. Relocating to New York City, he briefly worked as a printer at Andy Warhol's Factory before emerging as a defining figure within the glistening chaos of the 1980s East Village art scene. The drawings on view, created during a critical juncture in Condo's practice, precede and date to the beginning of his decade-long sojourn in Paris (1985–1995). This crucial period marked a prolific phase for Condo, during which he produced a series of works that emphasized the drawn line, using a fine sable brush to emulate ink-pen strokes. In so doing, he fused painting and drawing in an abstracted matrix—a fine example being *Diaries of Milan* (1984) in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art. Parallels to this bold, assured approach to draftsmanship in the context of painting can be observed in the curated collection of drawings at TEFAF.

Condo has never been shy about acknowledging Picasso's influence on his practice. Through this Spanish master, Condo learned to approach imagery without art-historical constraints or the need for a signature style. However, instead of utilizing Picasso's tendency toward deconstruction, Condo pivoted into the exploration of reconstruction, choosing, for instance, Surrealism over Cubism or, even better, combining these stylistic tendencies to create new and surprising compositions. He once described his creative process as wandering through a forest without direction or destination. In *Untitled* (1984), the viewer is confronted by a Loch Ness Monster-like creature sprouting from an elephant's trunk, crowned like royalty; *Untitled* (1985) showcases a blue being whose head is skewered by a horizontal rod draped with fluttering curtains, all framed by brown lines mimicking fractured architecture; *Untitled* (1986) presents another peculiar fusion of a 2x4 wood plank with a sleek black tail standing "proudly" on a sheaf of floating grass against clouds and blue sky. In Condo's fantastical timberland where industrial rigidity meets organic whimsy, drawings omit logic. Instead, he channels the interior worlds of his subjects, fracturing emotion into a hybrid language of figuration and abstraction he terms "psychological cubism."

Condo defies the traditional hierarchies between drawing and painting, merging paint with pastel to create works of equal stature in form, content, and medium that he terms "drawing-paintings." Moreover, Condo's artistic language provocatively asks: Can we laugh at art? His cartoonish pastiche of styles destabilizes viewers' perceptions as well as the "seriousness" of fine art. For Condo, the divide between "high-" and "lowbrow" art is illusory; all forms meld into a sprawling, constructed reality where absurdity and profundity commingle. Condo's experimentation has proven prescient: pulling from his deep well of art-historical knowledge, he reimagined reality through what he termed "artificial realism," a concept that anticipates today's AI-driven visual culture. These early works on paper exemplify this radical vision, where "artificial realism" interrogates the logic of external reality, while "psychological cubism" maps the labyrinthine terrain of human psychology. Together, this collection of drawings traces Condo's relentless innovation, bridging Old Master traditions and a destabilizing contemporaneity that leads to a realm of fluid artistic expression.

Condo's work is in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Morgan Library & Museum, New York; Buffalo AKG Art Museum ; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Broad Art Foundation, Los Angeles; Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles; Tate Modern, London; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Fonds National d'Art Contemporain, Ministère de la Culture, Paris; Fonds Regional d'Art Contemporain, Ile de France, Paris; Staedel Museum, Frankfurt; Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo; Museu d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona; Museo Jumex, Mexico City; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

About Gladstone Gallery:
Gladstone Gallery is recognized for its embrace of experimentation and visionary practices. The gallery has long been an active partner with artists pursuing catalytic ideas and engaging with pressing issues. Headquartered in New York, Gladstone's impact extends globally with galleries in Brussels and Seoul, enabling it to present new bodies of work and evolve its program to advance the practices and reach of its artists through time. Alongside its work with contemporary artists, the gallery is a steward of the legacies of pivotal historical artists and an advocate for the enduring power of their work. Gladstone is led by a team of partners who spearhead itslong-term vision and program, building on the values of its founder Barbara Gladstone.

Press contact:
press@gladstonegallery.com