

# Morgan Presents



## Five Years: On Surface

April 29—June 24, 2026

Opening April 29<sup>th</sup>, 5–8pm

537 W 27th Street, New York, NY 10001

Understanding surface as the result of medium and gesture, the intersection of material constraints and artistic intention, this exhibition proposes an axis through which to consider surface: from the byproduct of process, to the central narrative conceit of an artist's work. This anniversary exhibition reflects the gallery's past five years of programming by bringing a select group of German and American 20th Century artists, including Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol and Georg Baselitz, into dialogue with contemporary gallery artists Willie Stewart and Rebecca Ness.

Nowhere is surface as central to both artistic intention and narrative as within the impasto, layered brushstrokes that constitute Georg Baselitz's *Ein Werktätiger* [A Workman]. This 1967 painting is an outstanding example from the artist's acclaimed series of *Frakturbilder* [Fracture Paintings], where the splitting of the composition serves as an unambiguous metaphor for the carving of

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Germany into East and West, a split mirrored in the schizophrenia of a nation divided between capitalism and communism. It is the loaded brushwork that unifies the image, creating cohesion across a fractured image. Baselitz's creation of an almost architectural impasto surface stands in for the German post-war social reconstruction—of the pieces to be stitched back together.

While it is easy for us to understand Frank Auerbach's brushstroke as constructive, the worked surface is rather a remnant of the process of erasure—of taking the painting back down to its studs. *Head of David Landau* is exemplary of Auerbach's idiosyncratic use of gesture, as broad strokes of reds and purples are deposited onto the still-wet fields of yellow that mark Landau's face; pushed and pulled with a rapidity and confidence that captures the sense of intimacy and familiarity of form that Auerbach felt with his sitter.

This stands in contrast to the use of surface to create interior space within an image—as an instrument of narrative—exemplified by Roy Lichtenstein's *Reflections on Brushstrokes* and Rebecca Ness' *Tired Studio*. Lichtenstein's *Reflections* series (1988-90) was first inspired by the artist's attempt to photograph a Robert Rauschenberg print under glass, when the light reflected back as a distortion. Lichtenstein turned again to his Ben-Day dots from the 1960s, layering the stenciled dots with sweeping, gestural brushstrokes. Here, a contrast in surface is employed to create a layering of distance within the image. Ness takes a similar approach in her use of impasto to push back the wall and imbue weight to the figure leaning back against it.

Andy Warhol's embrace of silkscreen technique allowed the artist to abstract the subject, to maintain an impersonalized distance, and for others' hands to be involved in the production the work—this commercial technique also imposed a slick, flat surface as a consequence. Willie Stewart's *Chair* similarly abstracts the subject of the work through an elevation of form. The artist's painterly touch, of trompe l'oeil woodgrain on canvas wrapped to the shape of a chair, in fact suggests that the surface substantiates the image.

Through a sustained consideration of surface—both through the lens of artistic intention and as a byproduct or medium and process—we can establish a new avenue through which to understand these works.

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Image: Roy Lichtenstein, *Reflections on Brushstrokes*, 1990, Acrylic, oil and graphite on canvas, 87 1/4 x 60 inches (221.5 x 152.5 cm) — Detail