

TEMLON



JIM DINE

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Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man

Time passing has never been a subject Jim Dine has avoided; he has long made art about getting old.



John Yau 18 hours ago



Installation view of *Jim Dine: Three Ships* at Templon, New York. Pictured: *Tampa Tool Reliefs* series (1974), cast aluminum; suite of five panels, 26.5 x 28.5 x 2 inches each, edition of nine (all images courtesy the artist and TEMPLON, Paris — Brussels — New York, photos Charles Roussel)

The art of Jim Dine, who recently turned 87, is impossible to characterize. He was an instrumental figure in Happenings, a famous Pop Artist, a poet, printmaker, and sculptor. Throughout his career, he has worked in different mediums and painted in different styles, both tightly and loosely, all of which conveys his direct engagement with his art. It is Dine's lifelong commitment to using his hands, to drawing and shaping, that separates him from his contemporaries, particularly since he never felt compelled to suppress his love for classical art — for exploring contour, volume, and shading.

Starting with his drawings, what I sense in Dine's mastery of different materials and processes is a restlessness that has little to do with production and a lot to do with his fierce desire to push beyond his enormous talent. A masterful draughtsman, he is capable of a fluid, easy line to which few of his contemporaries come close. Rather than being content with this skill, Dine has spent his career trying to get out of himself without taking any of the familiar roads. He wants to find the outer limits of exploring the relationship between maintaining control (as in classical art) and surrendering it (as in expressionism). This yearning is one of his motivations. It is why his self-portraits, whatever the medium, constitute one of the great bodies of work in postwar art.

Though I expected to be surprised by something in the exhibition *Jim Dine: Three Ships* at Templon I was not prepared for the show's range of works, mediums, and processes, from intimately scaled drawings to monumental sculptures, all of which felt connected by the artist's hand.

While many of Dine's subject are associated with memories going back to his childhood, he is open to random occurrences. In 2015, when he was about to turn 80, he said this about his use of black forms in his works (exhibited in 2018 at [Richard Gray Gallery](#)):

I had found a 3-inch square piece of paper that my printers had been testing black litho ink on. The small forms that were laid down evoked a figurative image that was (and is) human, yet visually concrete so that the black forms can be interpreted unconsciously as many things "non-verbal."

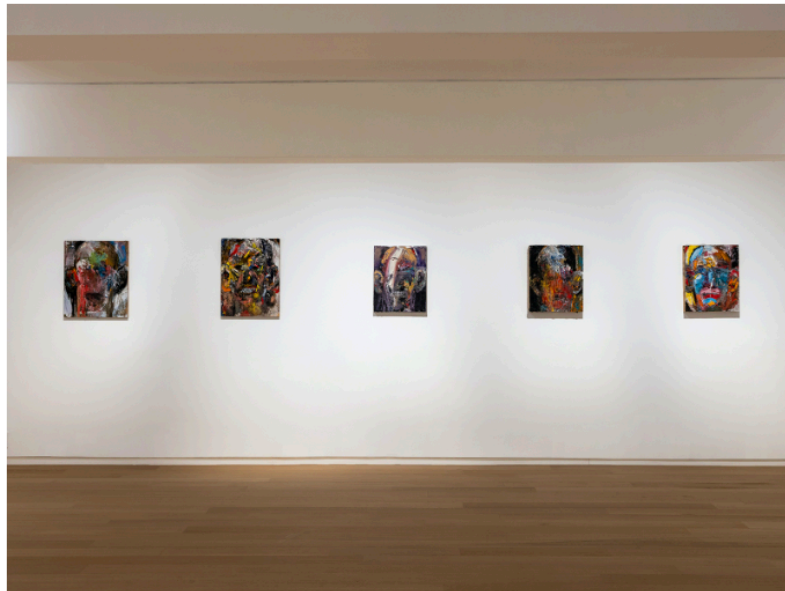


Installation view of *Jim Dine: Three Ships* at Templon, New York. Pictured: "Three Ships (The Magi)" (2022), bronze; left to right: 112 x 105 x 92 inches, 106 x 102 x 93 inches, 99 x 120 x 91 inches, edition of three

The current exhibition includes "Three Ships (The Magi)" (2022), three monumental, heavily encrusted bronze sculptures. According to the show's catalogue, the sculpture's armature was "derived from a litho ink stain made by Dine's printer's granddaughter at his Walla Walla studio." By beginning with this found mark and building an armature to which he applied what looks like "loose packed dirt and gravel studded with branches, ropes, planks of wood, and dozens of tools including pliers, hammers, saws, drills, shovels, and spades," as Sam Sackeroff writes in the catalogue, Dine makes an evocative work that resists any reductive reading, and finds a way to undo his own mastery. This desire to countermand as many traces of his artistic preeminence as he can aligns with the concept of mortality, and the realization that one cannot control one's fate.

The title “Three Ships (The Magi)” comes from a 17th-century carol about a ship purported to have carried the relics of the three magi to Cologne. The patina of the encrusted objects imbues the work with the sense that it was recently excavated — it is something that was found and whose purpose is not apparent. While Dine was once considered an important figure in the reaction to Abstract Expressionism, he has long since gone his own way. That is no small achievement, particularly when we consider how many artists do not change in substantial ways. More importantly, time passing has never been a subject he has avoided; he has long made art about getting old.

If “Three Ships (The Magi)” was the only work in the show, I would have been more than satisfied, but it also includes two figural bronzes, three abstract paintings, a suite of 11 self-portraits dated 2020 to 2023 and begun while quarantined in Paris, where Dine currently lives, and 19 numbered paintings from *ME* (2020–23), a series of self-portraits on panels measuring around 20 by 16 inches.



Installation view of *Jim Dine: Three Ships* at Templon, New York. Pictured: works from the series *ME* (2020–23)

Rather than aligning himself with the art world’s privileging of reason and the mind over the body, Dine embraces his aging, libidinal body, and what it can construct, paint, and draw out of Eros and decay in the face of death. The motif of a bald head with both ears sticking out recurs in the paintings. These self-portraits, begun during the height of the pandemic, are touching, tender, funny, anguished, grim, and stoic. Dine seems determined to unearth and expose every feeling he has about his vulnerability and persistence. A white smear obliterates the left side of his face in “ME#29” (2023), while the two rows of teeth call to mind images of a skull. The instance of erasure was jolting to encounter. In “ME#25” (2023), the face has become encrusted in a mask of paint, with just the teeth and eyes trying to peer through. Do we read the drips, rain, or body as a run-down and leaking organism? These paintings are about the desire to stay conscious and see right up to the end, while recording the effects of time.

Also started during the pandemic, the 11 pencil works from suite *Drawing the Minutes A–K* (2023) are composed of drawn and erased lines, Dine incising the paper as he pressed the lead point against the soft surface. He is both making a mark and feeling his way across the paper. Sometimes he is wearing glasses; on some he wrote the date he finished the drawing; and in several he added another sheet of paper. At times he seems resigned. He is sad and isolated, thoughtful and anxious, recording time with each line and erasure. They are — to use a word I have never used before — soulful. So much can be read into these drawings, their creases, erasures, and abrasions.

With these and other pieces made during the last two decades, it seems to me a museum should survey the changes Dine's work has undergone, and the openness to time he has expressed.



Installation view of *Jim Dine: Three Ships* at Templon, New York. Left to right: "The Ruffian" (2023), bronze, 97 x 37 x 32 inches, edition of three; "Three Ships (The Magi)" (2022), bronze; "Poets on the Railroad" (2023), mixed media on ashtree panel with copper tubing, 53 1/8 x 200 4/5 x 25 5/8 inches, unique

Jim Dine: Three Ships continues at Templon (293 Tenth Avenue, Chelsea, Manhattan) through July 28. The exhibition was organized by the gallery.