

TEMPLON



JIM DINE

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Jim Dine: Three Ships: Painting and Sculpture at Templon



Jim Dine, Three Ships (The Magi), 2022, bronze, Left: 284 × 267 × 234 cm — 112 × 105 × 92 in., Center: 269.2 × 259 × 236.2 cm — 106 × 102 × 93 in., Right: 251.5 × 304.8 × 231 cm — 99 × 120 × 91 in., Edition of 3. Courtesy of the artist and Templon Gallery, New York. Photo by Charles Roussel

Jim Dine: Three Ships: Painting and Sculpture

Templon

Through July 28, 2023

By DAVID JAGER, June 2023

Jim Dine marks a triumphant return to New York with this wide-ranging show at Templon gallery in Chelsea. The show, featuring massive, poured bronze sculpture, new abstract paintings and a series of new graphite and oil self-portraits, finds the 87 year boldly old pushing the limits of his practice. Dine may have had a nearly sixty-year career, but he is showing no signs of slowing down. Dine, who lives a nomadic life shared between the Pacific Northwest, New York, Paris and Gottingen Germany, developed much of this work, the self-portrait series especially, during the long night of the pandemic.

The origins of this current show, however, go back to his roots as a pioneer in both the happenings and Pop Art movements of the 60's. In 1959 Jim Dine, newly arrived in New York, could be found wandering the snowy winter streets around his Upper East Side apartment with his buddy Claes Oldenburg, plunging his hands into piles of swept snow to retrieve cast off junk, debris, shards of glass, broken furniture, and other found objects. Dine has always had a deep trust in what the streets have offered him, taking each piece of the cast-off city as a symbolic contribution to his own process, a meeting point between his creative psyche and the collective unconscious of the city expressed through found artefacts.



Installation view, Jim Dine: Three Ships: Painting and Sculpture. Courtesy of the artist and Templon Gallery, New York. Photo by Charles Roussel

This type of deep psychological excavation, of taking found materials and helping them find their place again as part of a new configuration, has always been a central pillar of Dine's work. But the fruition has really come to the fore with his three massive, poured bronze sculptures that dominate the show, a sculptural triptych entitled 'Three Ships'.

Cast over an exhaustive period of five years, Dine's 'Ships' nevertheless have a remarkable freshness and weight. They appear to be sunken wrecks just raised from the soft mud of a bay or lake, metal carcasses dripping with secrets and intrigue. Starting with wire framing, he then then affixed plaster to the frames. Dine, still vigorous in his late eighties, has coaxed something palpable from the plaster through relentless reworking, smearing with a hand here, poking and prodding with a finger there, and imbuing the whole with a recording of his restless movement.

This was then followed by the affixing of objects into the plaster: screws, wire, bits of wood, spades, hammers, saws, drills, shovels and other collected tools. The tools hark back to Dine's childhood in his father's Ohio hardware store, and to his own storied use of salvage and bric a brac. They also speak to his search for a language of things, a visual non-verbal narrative that manages to embody the dreams, anxieties and complicated metaphors that touch directly upon the viewer.

It was in the middle of this construction that Dine hit upon the title of the 'Three Ships'. Dine was thinking specifically of the carol "I saw three ships", as well as the transport of the remains of the three wise men Balthazar, Melchior and Gaspar from Basilica of San "Estorgio in Milan to the Cologne Cathedral in 1162.

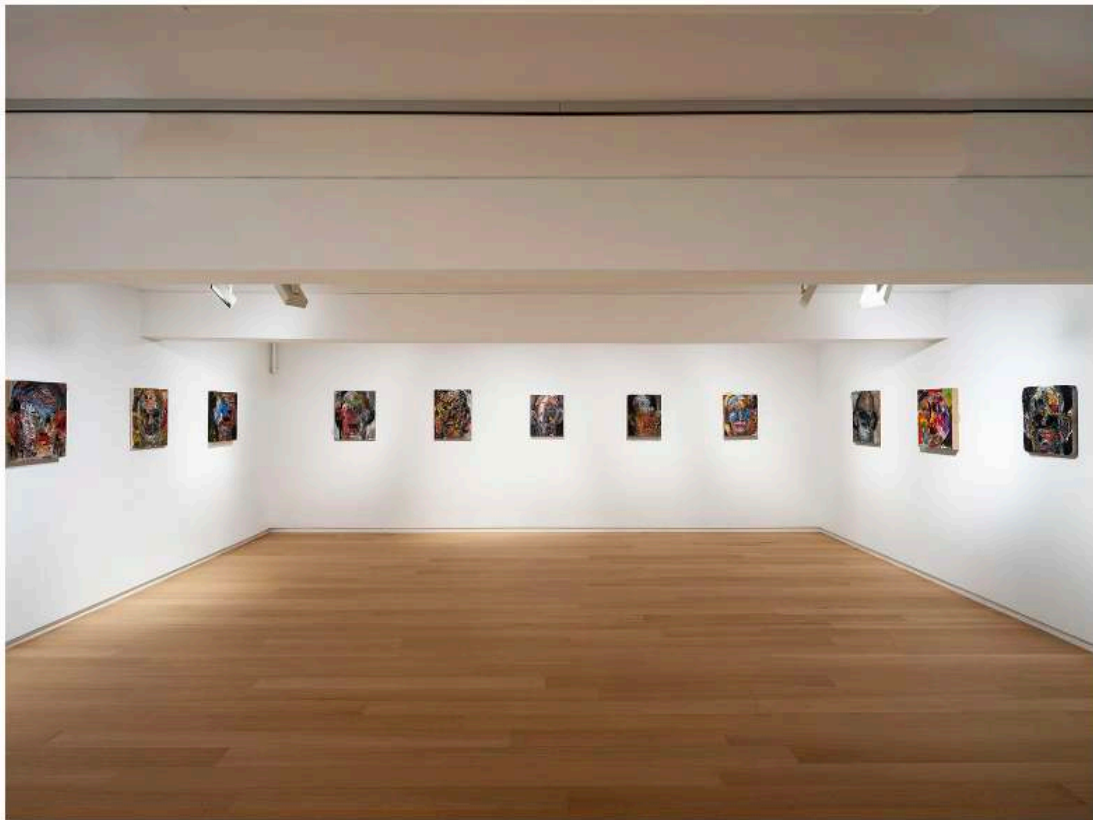


Installation view with The Ruffian (Left), 2023, bronze, 246 × 94 × 81 cm — 97 × 37 × 32 in. Edition of 3. Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Templon, New York. Photo by Charles Roussel.

The next room of the show contains two other recent bronzes that are slightly more subdued but no less powerful. *The Ruffian*, cast in 2023, addresses the figure of Venus De Milo, which Dine has incorporated into his work since the 1970s. *The Ruffian* sits atop a cast wooden tree stump. Like his monumental three ships, Dine appears to have slathered the original Venus with thick layers of mud and dirt, adding a surplus of materiality that only adds to its visceral impact. Dine appears to enjoy wrestling refined forms back into their primal and muddy ambiguity, unleashing something chthonic in the process. Similarly, his bronze duet Venus and Neptune is a visual allegory of a conjunction of the two planets and a revisiting of classical marble forms through Dine's slathering and casting process.

Five large abstract paintings, brightly colored impasto surfaces with added calligraphic twists of copper tubing, inhabit the second room with the two bronzes. Most interesting are *Poets on the Railroad*, a long nearly rectangular wedge of ash tree panel affixed with bright squiggles of copper, which harkens back to Dine's early love of locomotives and the railroad peregrinations of his childhood. With its associations of nomadism, the railroad, and poetry – Dine is also a poet- it places him as a bridging voice between the Beatniks and the subsequent pop generation.

Grace and Beauty, the largest of the abstract canvases, continues in this theme of bright rainbow hues contrasted with the three equidistant squiggles of copper. The result of many laborious surface re-workings, in which the painting either grew too overwhelming or did not appear to be 'breathing' properly, Dine affixed the title 'Grace' to the work, in gratitude for its patient submission to the process.



Installation view, Jim Dine: Three Ships: Painting and Sculpture. Courtesy of the artist and Templon Gallery, New York. Photo by Charles Roussel

Always deeply influenced by his classical and European legacy, Dine has turned to the self-portrait in a manner that recalls the later years of the old masters. Ten graphite drawings, completed during the pandemic, acutely explore the impressions of the passing decades on Dine's face. The draughtsmanship is masterful, one is reminded of either Lucien Freud or Kathe Kollwitz in their level of deep emotion wedded to technical assurance. More so however, they are intrinsically continuations of Dine's wrestling with materiality, as he both gouges at the surface with graphite, erases, and then reaffixes restless lines until his face emerges.

As if this were not enough, Dine, who is self admittedly compulsively productive, also added a room of twenty-nine self-portraits, each entitled 'Me'. These works, rather than being excavational, are the opposite. Dine slathers thick layers of pigment onto each small canvas, with each portrait a study in both exploration and distortion. Some are arrestingly vibrant, some are poignant, others teeter at the edge of legibility. All of them swirl with bright color. A certain self-deprecating humor surfaces in some; Dine appears to be ironically mocking the impermanence and mortality of the human form, if not the intensity of his own relentless self-examining gaze.

Almost too much to take in through one viewing, Dine's new show assures his place as an enduring master of the art world in the last and current century. That he continues to be so restlessly and inventively engaged in production in his eighth decade is simply a gift to the rest of us. **WM**