

TEMPLON

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JIM DINE

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Celebrated American Artist Jim Dine Creates Works Through Intuition And Improvisation

Feeling the urgency to create even after more than six decades, 88-year-old [Jim Dine](#) doesn't take holidays as there is just too little time, preferring instead to put his hands to work each day to paint, sculpt, draw, make prints or write poems, always with the sole aim of "trying to make art". For him, the creative process is just as important as the finished piece, so he likes to get his hands dirty, working instinctively. Battling with the medium and painting by accumulation of material, his canvases undergo months of transformation that give them extreme depth – he makes a mark, reacts, corrects and starts again – only stopping when he tires of them or when they must leave for an exhibition. I sit down with the artist to discuss his practice and what keeps him going.



Jim Dine, Untitled, 2022, mixed media on canvas PHOTO COURTESY OF TEMPLON, PARIS – BRUSSELS

You were born in 1935 in Cincinnati. What was it like growing up there and what kind of childhood did you have?

It was unusual. I was a gifted child who was always going to be an artist and nobody else in the family ever was, so it was unusual. It was not nice. And then my mother died when I was 12, so that I became a so-called adult. I was on my own.

Do you feel that you were born an artist?

Yeah, I was, and that's all I can do.

You moved to New York in 1958, where you met other artists like Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. What was life like there in the late '50s and '60s, and the art scene?

It was wonderful. The art scene was small, not corrupted. Wonderful artists. It was very exciting. It was great. I met people who were really artists, people you could look up to, who sat with you and gave you encouragement. We're talking 1958, 1959, before commerce.

Together with Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg, you began to stage performances at sites in the city that later became known as "Happenings". What was your aim?

To become famous, no. But that's what happened. It was the same aim I have with painting: I mean I was trying to make art.

Describe to me your artistic language and philosophy.

I don't have any artistic philosophy. That's all I've ever done, and that's really all I can do or want to do. So I've been very fortunate, both genetically, in terms of my age, and also in my life where I've been able to make my work.



Jim Dine, Jim's Head My Plural Head, 2016, bronze, 30 x 40 x 75 in. Photo courtesy of Hauser & Wirtz - 2022.5 - New York

Do you know exactly how an artwork will look like when you start?

No, but when you're as old as I am, you have confidence in your hand and you have confidence in your ideas. Of course, there are failures, but there is less chance of that in the sense that I know enough to know how to act upon those works to hopefully make them succeed.

For example, in your painting-sculptures, is it an intuitive process when you attach the tubes? Do you sometimes go back and change them?

Yeah, I go back and change. It's like painting and drawing, same thing. I know when a work is completed when I get tired of it. I've worked on all these for over a year now and they're taking them away, but probably if they stayed, I might keep working on some of them.

How do you come up with the different subject matter for your artworks?

From my head, my imagination, what I think I can work with, what's relevant at the time that I'm doing it.

You've been drawing and painting yourself for decades, studying yourself and your subconscious. Your work is a relentless exploration and criticism of the self through a number of highly personal motifs which include hearts, bathrobes, tools, antique sculpture, Pinocchio, flora, skulls, birds, figurative self-portraits. Would you say that all of your work is autobiographical?

Yes, I would. That's all part of me. I'd say that the leitmotif that goes through it is the autobiography.

Each time you're trying to learn more about yourself?

I'm always interested when I have an insight into my unconscious.



John Debra, July on the Palouse, 2007, mixed media with hand coloring on Lanes paper, 78 3/8 x 57 1/4
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Do you feel that there's not enough time to do everything you want to do?

No, there isn't. I feel more passion today to create than when I first started because now it's the only thing I care about. I never want to stop because I will eventually.