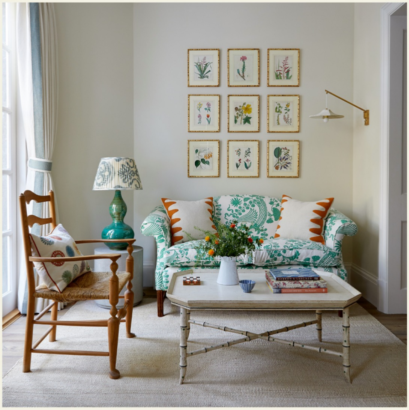
[REQUIRED READING]

London’s Todhunter Earle Puts a Refreshing Twist on Traditional English Design

With an emphasis on eclecticism, British duo Emily Todhunter and Kate Earle effortlessly inject wit, comfort and joy into homes both historic and contemporary.

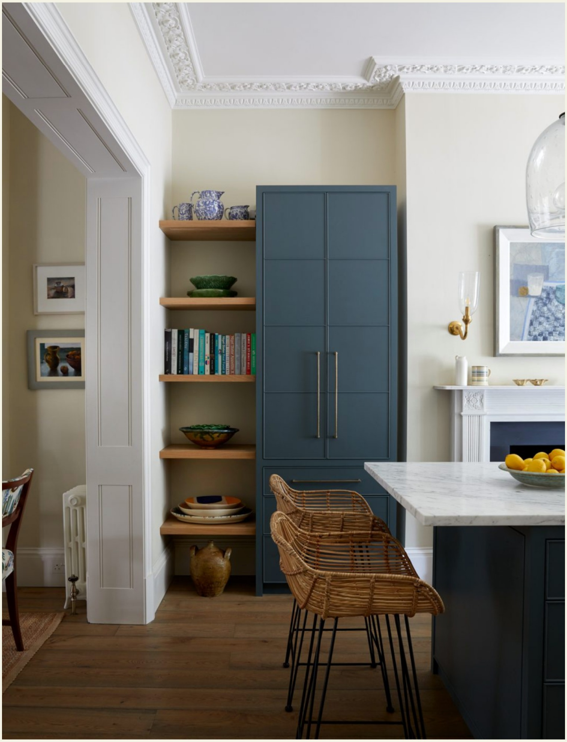
BY HELEN CHISLETT



[JANUARY 9, 2022] Anyone seeking to bottle the essence of 21st-century English decoration and design will find it in the portfolio of Emily Todhunter and Kate Earle. Since launching their firm, TODHUNTER EARLE, 20 years ago, the pair have built a sterling reputation based largely on their innate understanding of British country houses. But they bring an equally sympathetic touch to city apartments and landmarked townhouses, contemporary new-builds, iconic hotels, yachts, villas and ski chalets.

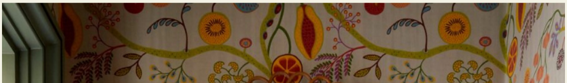
British interior designers Kate Earle (left) and Emily Todhunter — who formed their London firm, TODHUNTER EARLE, in 1998 — recently released a monograph, *MODERN ENGLISH*, from VENDOME PRESS (portrait by Richard Braine). Top: The book includes a Notting Hill home whose garden-level sitting room features a painted mid-century BAMBOO COFFEE TABLE, EDWIN LUTYENS–style ladderback chairs and a reproduction CHIPPENDALE two-seater sofa. The table lamp is by Penny Morrison and the wall light by NAOMI PAUL. All photos by Paul Massey unless otherwise noted

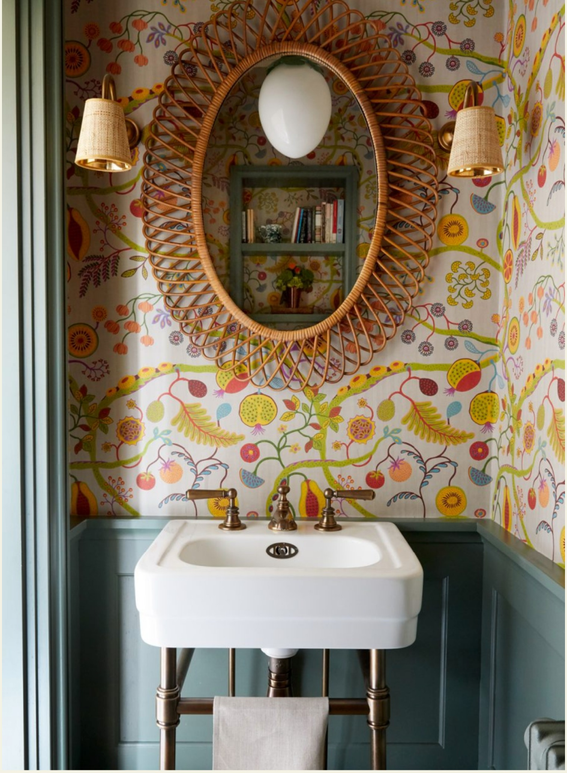
At the heart of what they do is a mastery of scale and flow that allows them to create interiors that not only look wonderful but feel comfortable and inviting. Their rooms, characterized by confident patterns and painterly colors, are designed to be lived in and loved — a joyful antidote to the over-perfect showhouse look.



In the Notting Hill house kitchen, CARRARA MARBLE counters sit atop painted custom wood cabinetry. The RATTAN STOOLS are by Cox & Cox.

Their style, which is playful and engaging, has earned Earle and Todhunter many loyal clients who return to their firm again and again. By no means are all these clients British — but what attracts people to the studio is an aesthetic best described as English with a twist. It is characterized, as Todhunter puts it, by “a relaxed informality, an element of wit, and the eclectic combination of old with new.”

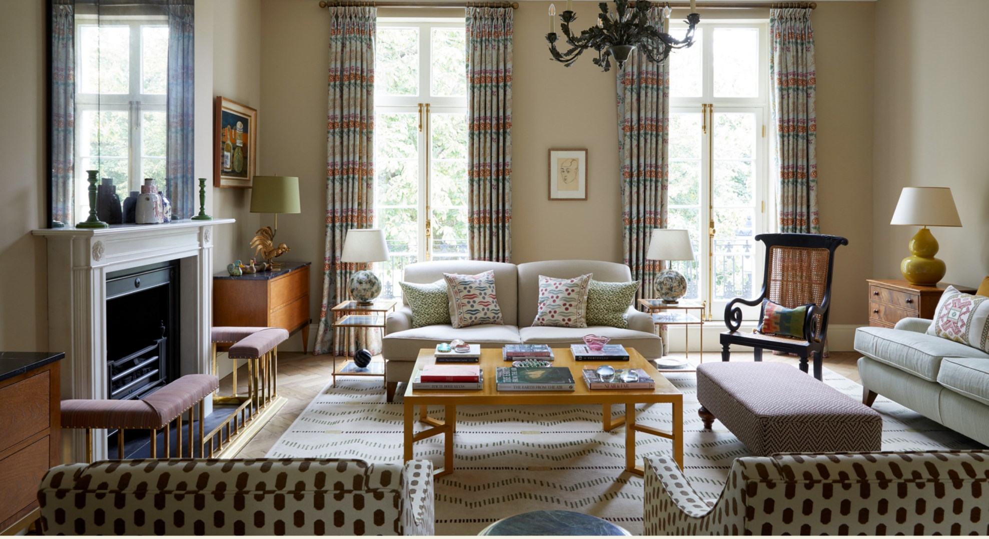




The home's powder room in clad in PIERRE FREY's Mojito wallpaper. The mid-century Italian wicker mirror, in the style of FRANCO ALBINI, is from VALERIE WADE. The Dodo Egg pendant light (seen reflected in the mirror) is by BEATA HEUMAN, and the sconces are from Pooky.

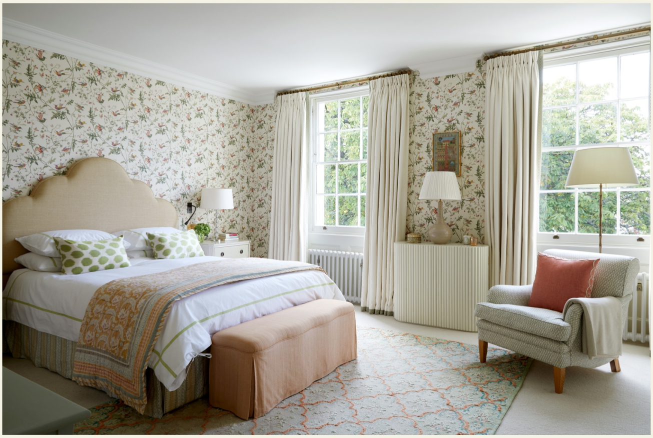
The pair met through a cousin of Earle's in 1990 and joined forces professionally in 1998, after already establishing their own solo careers in London. Since the beginning, each of them heads up her own interior design team, but every project the firm undertakes has the full approval of both.

Devotees of their effortless style will be delighted that Earle and Todhunter have now published their first book, for which I wrote the text. Those not so familiar with their work will have the treat of discovering it for the first time.



An oak-branch chandelier from Richard Taylor hangs from the ceiling in the Notting Hill living room. Antique SUZANI cushions adorn the sofa, the coffee table is from SIBYL COLEFAX & JOHN FOWLER, and the cabinets flanking the fireplace are by Julian Chichester. The antiqued ART DECO–STYLE MIRROR over the mantel is by Rupert Bevan.

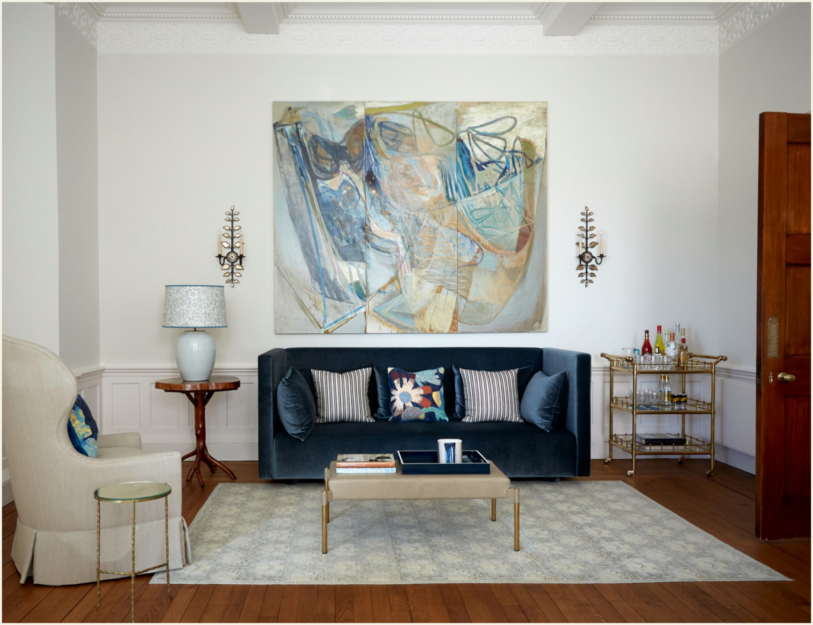
Featuring colorful perspective illustrations by Marianne Topham and photographs by Paul Massey and Ray Main, ***MODERN ENGLISH*** (VENDOME) highlights 18 of Todhunter Earle's projects, both British and international. The backstory of each is detailed, from the initial challenges it presented to the inspirations underlying the design decisions.



In the Notting Hill house's main bedroom, a Howe side cabinet stands between the windows, while an upholstered bench provides a comfortable place to sit at the foot of the bed. The scalloped raffia headboard is custom.

The book is pleasingly diverse in its subjects, reflecting the breadth of the studio's portfolio — as well as the range, and the caliber, of the clients they each attract.

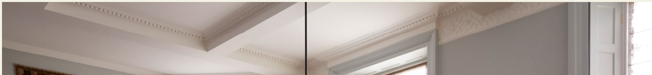
One chapter focuses on a large ARTS AND CRAFTS house in the Surrey Hills, about 30 miles west of London, owned by a Scandinavian couple. Rather than refurbishing the home to reflect its aesthetic roots, Earle decided to respect its heritage while introducing a spare quality more in keeping with the clients' identity.



For the drawing room of a heritage-listed ARTS AND CRAFTS property in the Surrey Hills, about 30 miles west of London, she selected a GEORGE SMITH sofa and Soane ottoman and bar cart. The wooden side table is a 19th-century piece from TARQUIN BILGEN ANTIQUES; the painting is by PETER JOYCE.

To this end, the studio curated a selection of key 20th-century Scandinavian and French works — including pieces by JOSEF FRANK, Danièle Raimbault Saerens, MÄRTA MÅÅS-FJETTERSTRÖM and RAOUL UBAC — along with RÖLLAKAN rugs. She chose a cool, neutral palette for the walls, using a mix of linens, wools and velvet for the curtains and upholstery.

The house has protected heritage status, so lighting — including an antique Swedish chandelier in the drawing room and a glass-and-bronze pendant by LINDSEY ADELMAN mounted over the dining table — had to be suspended from the same positions as the original fixtures.



SVENSKT TENN chairs surround a Fiona McDonald table in the Surrey Hills dining room. The chandelier is by LINDSEY ADELMAN, and the wall hanging is Swedish.

It is a testament to the success of the design that the clients chose to spend the pandemic's lockdowns there rather than in their primary residence, in central London. Says Earle, "We like to think that the feeling of relaxation, comfort and harmony we brought into the house stood them in good stead during that challenging period."

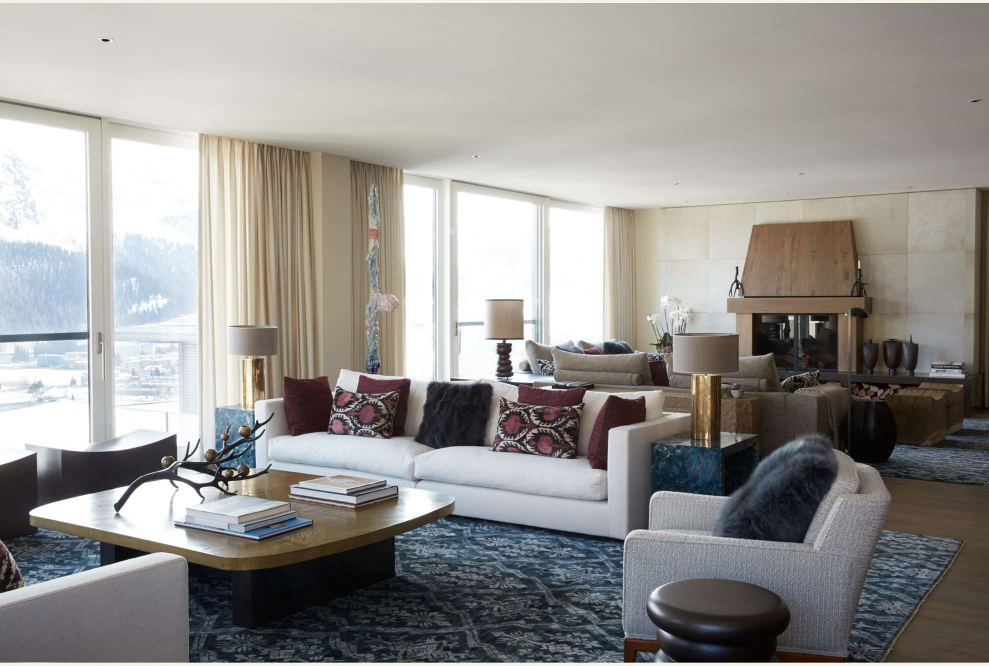
The book also spotlights the firm's talent for reinvigorating and reconfiguring London townhouses, which tend to have tall and narrow proportions. Earle crafted five floors of a traditional Victorian house in Notting Hill into a comfortable home that reflects the practical needs of a young family.

Elsewhere in the Surrey Hills home, FLEMMING LASSEN Tired Man armchairs and footstool, JOSEF FRANK for SVENSKT TENN floor lamps and a cocktail table from Hilary Batstone sit on an Aarambha carpet from THE RUG COMPANY.

This project is a prime example of Todhunter Earle's careful marrying of old with new. The first-floor drawing room, for example, features antique SUZANI cushions, an antiqued ART DECO–STYLE MIRROR over the mantel, an oak-branch chandelier and a Lyall coffee table from SIBYL COLEFAX & JOHN FOWLER. Earle offset these more traditional pieces with the clients' exuberant CONTEMPORARY ART.

Downstairs, a sitting room opening to the garden features a painted mid-century BAMBOO COFFEE TABLE, EDWIN LUTYENS–style ladderback chairs and a reproduction CHIPPENDALE two-seater sofa. Bold prints and crisp colors imbue it with a relaxed and informal air, well suited to this family area.

The main bedroom, on the second floor, combines a classic hummingbird wallpaper with cream-colored linen curtains and an end-of-bed upholstered bench. The result is youthful and airy, invigorated with bolts of color.

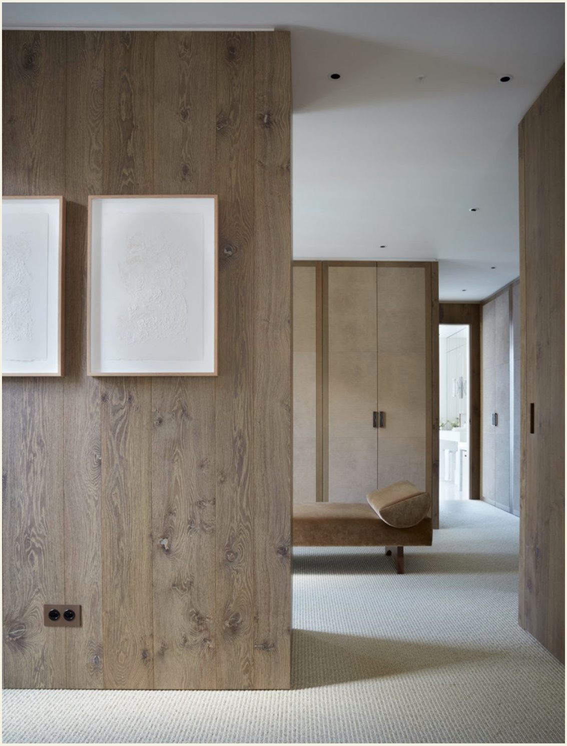


For the large living area of a penthouse in a NORMAN FOSTER–designed building in St. Moritz, Earle chose a PAUL MCCOBB armchair from the 1950s and FLEXFORM sofas. The wood of the bespoke fireplace mantel matches the floors. The surrounding wall is covered in hair-on-hide panels.

As you might expect from a duo with many international clients, the Todhunter Earle aesthetic travels well. For a commission in St. Moritz, Earle was asked to transform two über-contemporary penthouses designed by SIR NORMAN FOSTER into one huge lake-view apartment.

The clients had requested interiors that felt warmer than Foster's relatively cool contemporary architecture, desiring something more in line with traditional Alpine style.

So, Earle clad one wall in each room with wood and designed a scheme rich in cashmere, cowhide, horsehair, velvet and linen, using a rare vintage FORTUNY fabric for the guest-room curtains. For the living room, she commissioned a bespoke indigo carpet based on a 17th-century Italian document.



The dressing area in St. Moritz features a KEVIN WALZ for RALPH PUCCI daybed.

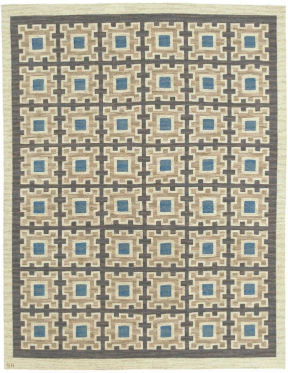
Populating the rooms are thoughtfully selected furniture pieces, including 1950s PAUL MCCOBB armchairs in the drawing room, leather-wrapped bedside tables by Gosling and a MATTIA BONETTI armchair in the main bedroom and a KEVIN WALZ for RALPH PUCCI daybed in the dressing area. The effect is of understated sophistication — effortless chic for clients who wanted an interior that would be comfortable and inviting but also complement their museum-class art collection.

MODERN
ENGLISH
TODHUNTER EARLE
INTERIORS

VENDOME released *MODERN ENGLISH* this past fall. On the cover is a "party barn" the firm designed in Berkshire, about 50 miles west of London.

Ultimately, the book shows that Todhunter and Earle's work has a definite English quality, but one that has nothing to do with CHINTZ, fussy florals and whimsical WALLPAPERS. Instead, their designs betoken an instinctive way of doing things that is relaxed, unpretentious, discreet and elegant — the very definition of true English style. And underpinning it all? The elusive idea of ideal proportion, of something quite simply being "right." ■

KATE EARLE AND EMILY TODHUNTER'S QUICK PICKS



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EDNA MARTIN FLAT-WEAVE RUG, 1950, OFFERED BY FJ HAKIMIAN

"I love Scandinavian mid-twentieth-century pieces, and Edna Martin is someone I admire enormously," says Earle. "*Läggspel* is an infrequently used word which means means 'puzzle,' or the kind of game where pieces have to be assembled to make a whole. It was a word that she apparently used to describe many of her intricately woven rugs."

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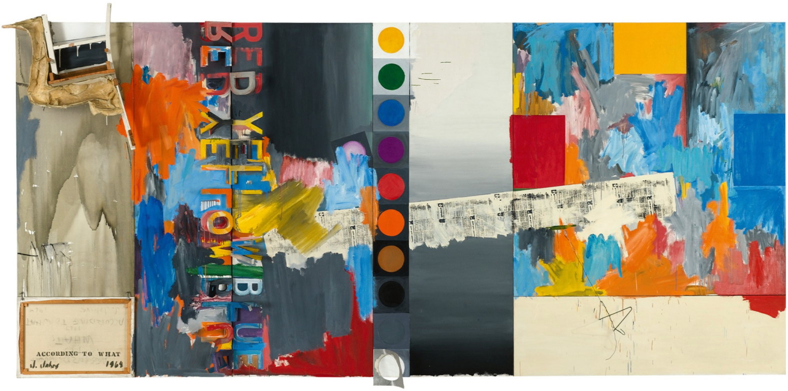
[ARTISTIC PRACTICE]

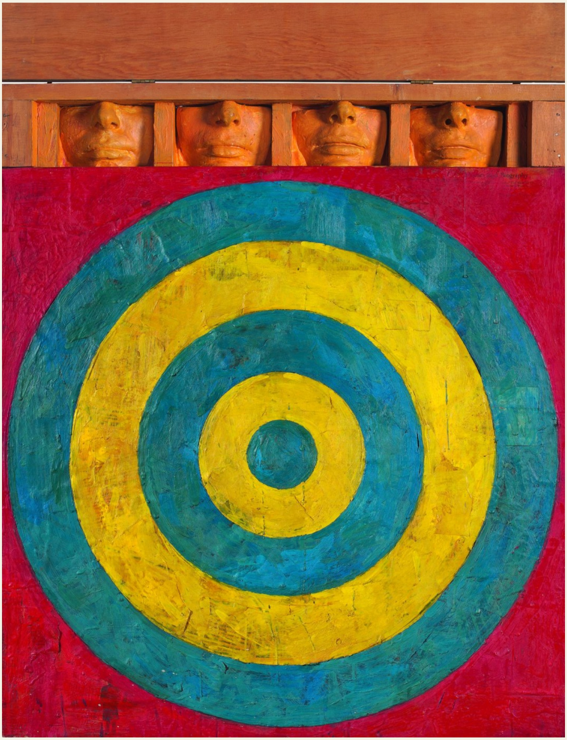
Why Jasper Johns Is *So Much More* Than a Maker of Aloof Pop Art



A retrospective spanning two major East Coast museums demonstrates Johns's massive role in contemporary art history. © 2021 Jasper Johns / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Philadelphia Museum of Art Photo Studio; Joseph Hu

BY MARLENA DONOHUE

[JANUARY 9, 2022] "Jasper Johns: Mind/Mirror" is a stunning two-museum retrospective featuring the artist's most epoch-defining works, like *Flag* (1954–55), and *TARGET* (1958), plus recent pieces seen publicly here for the first time. The result of a five-year collaboration between Carlos Basualdo, senior curator of contemporary art at the PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART, and Scott Rothkopf, chief curator at New York's WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, it was conceived from the get-go as dual exhibitions, mounted simultaneously at the two institutions, that coalesce into one conceptual whole.



"Jasper Johns: Mind/Mirror" comprises more than 400 paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints, spread across the galleries of the Whitney Museum of American Art, in New York, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Works on view include classics like *Target*, 1958 (above), and *According to Wha*t, 1964 (top), as well as newer creations. Photo © 2021 Jasper Johns / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY. Photograph by Jamie Stukenberg, Professional Graphics, Rockford, Illinois

In the two venues, viewers are treated to more than 400 paintings, sculptures, drawings and prints, as well as fascinating mixed-media works dating from 1954 to the present. Many of the shows' earliest pieces anticipate conceptualism or Pop art and carried forward DUCHAMP's legacy at a time when few outside Johns's circle grasped the dadaist's impact on the art world.

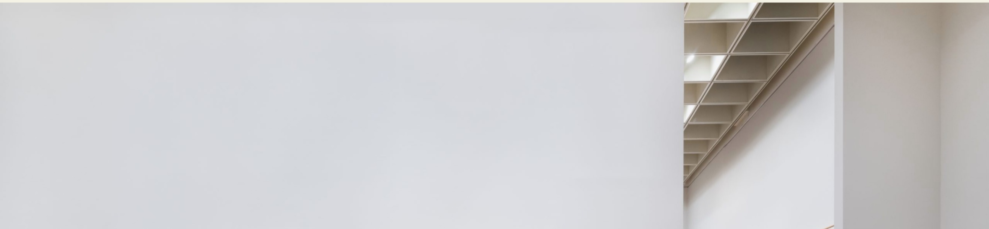
There's a conscious symmetry in the selection of the exhibition sites. The galleries in each museum have been designed in a kind of call and response. "We use the idea of doubles, of mirroring and repetition as a generative process in our design, and repetition for Johns was a means of creative exploration and inquiry, not used for its own sake," Basualdo explains.

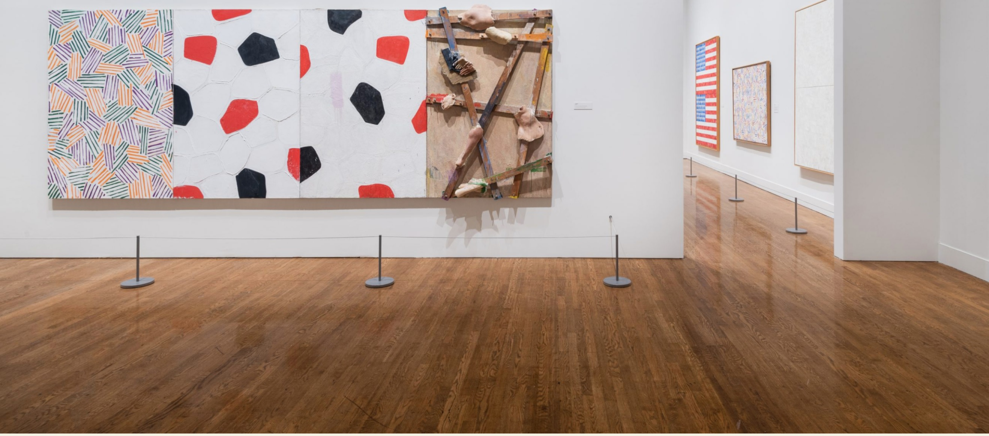
ARTIST Jasper Johns - 1977
©JACK MITCHELL

Johns in his New York studio in a 1977 portrait by JACK MITCHELL

“Carlos and I always understood that our unique contexts would inflect the sense of Jasper’s oeuvre,” says Rothkopf. “In Philadelphia, his art would be seen near some of his greatest inspirations and references, including Duchamp, CÉZANNE and PICASSO. And the Whitney is known as a place for contemporary art, like our biennials, so it was important to really show Jasper as a living artist still pushing his work forward after so many years.”

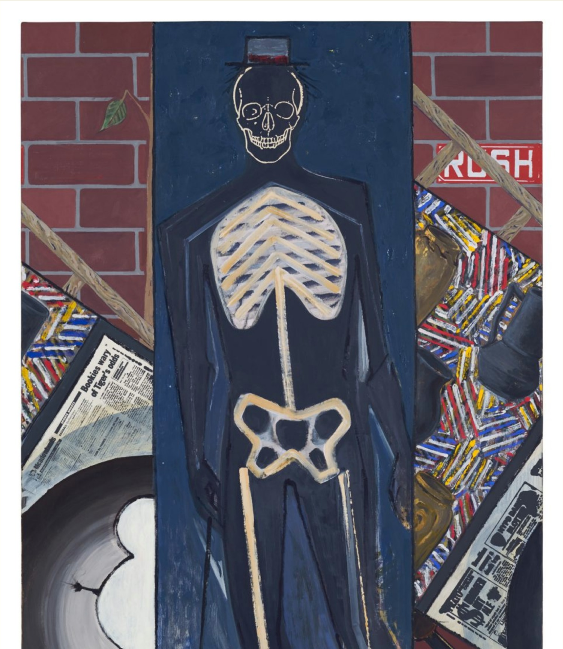
Both exhibitions consider the impact of place. The Philadelphia Museum has an in-depth look at the influence of Japan on Johns’s work during and after his 1964 visit to the country features the artist’s signature cross-hatch pieces, collectively titled “USUYUKI,” a Japanese word meaning “light snow,” which for Johns evokes the transitory nature of beauty. The Whitney’s presentation of Johns’s “NUMBERS” series, created at Edisto Island in North Carolina, provokes a deeper understanding of the artist’s use of numerals as both painterly gestures and symbols.

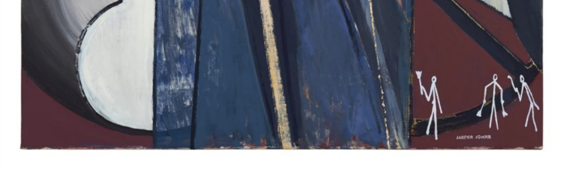




The mixed-media behemoth *Untitled*, 1972, installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art Photograph of the installation, *Jasper Johns: Mind/Mirror* at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Photo courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Photo by Joseph Hu, 2021.

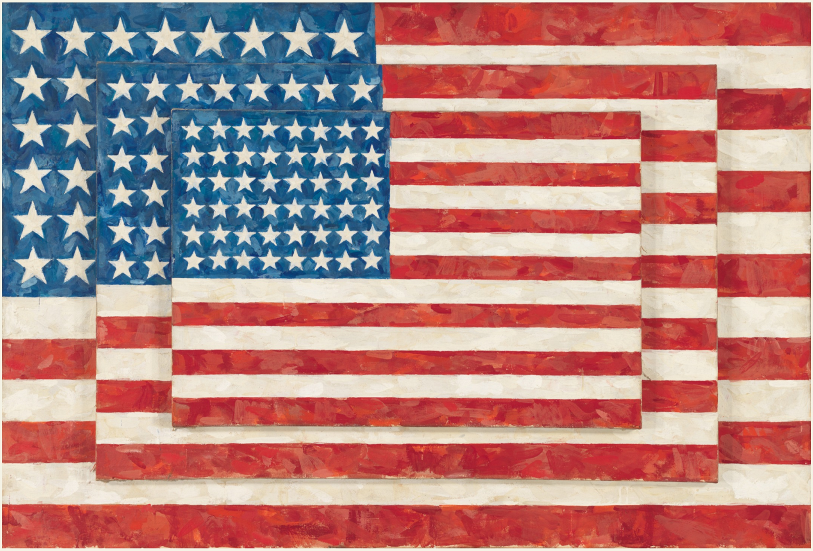
If you did not know it was a Johns show, you might not recognize some of the pieces on display as his — rare, fascinating works that contain spindly, shadowy figures, apparently ruminations on the body and mortality. “The body figures prominently, but not as content. It is there to remind us that making the work is a strenuously physical process,” Basualdo says. “Even in the ‘Numbers,’ which seem intellectual, there is the over-and-over-marking quality that suggests a repeating gesture, a kind of choreography.”


RUSH
Bookies wary of Tiger's odds



In newer figurative pieces, such as *Untitled*, 2018, the body "is there to remind us that making the work is a strenuously physical process," Philadelphia Museum curator Carlos Basualdo says. Photo © 2021 Jasper Johns / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photograph courtesy MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY, New York

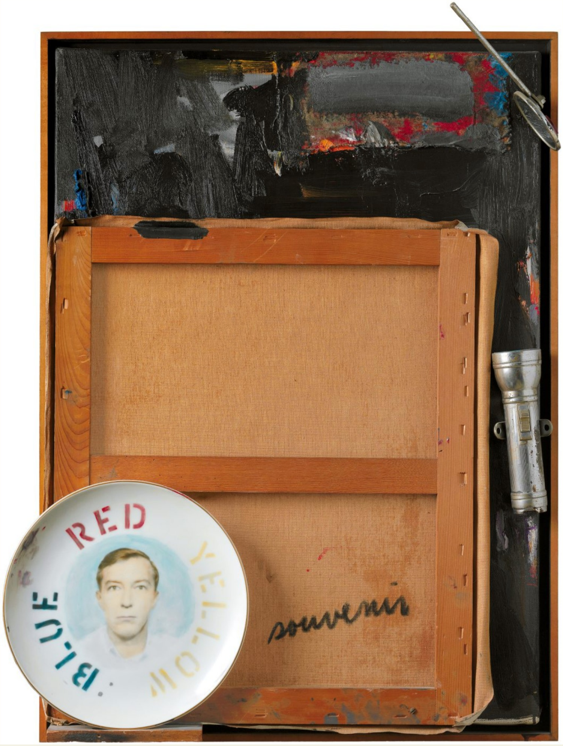
The revelation here is the inventive energy and courage of this artist, who, through nearly 70 years of art making, moves past what we expect and what was demanded in his day. In the early 1960s, when race tensions at home and war in East Asia tested the American white-cis dream, Johns was a gay man who dared make REPLICAS OF OLD GLORY.



Three Flags, 1958. Photo © 2021 Jasper Johns / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY

Created at the height of ABEX's monopoly on "real" feelings and in the face of conceptualism's demand for cool remove, Johns's targets and maps demonstrate the expressive force of flatness and show how abstract forms and banal symbols and objects — letters of the alphabet, beer cans — as well as spaces filled with nothing can join together to create intensely private communication. The Philadelphia Museum's display of the book on which Johns collaborated with playwright Samuel Beckett — two fellow probers into the nature of language — is an epiphany.

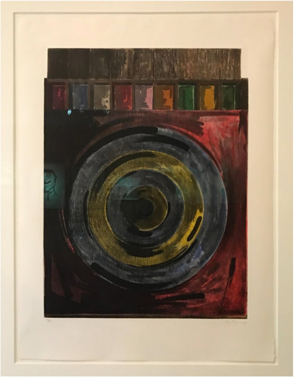
"Johns's art of nineteen fifties and sixties was radical and disruptive, but he also remained true to certain traditional formats and values, such as easel painting and even the handmade," says Rothkopf. "His work paved the way for artists like RICHARD SERRA or Eva Hesse to explode conventions further, while he continued to innovate from within."



The assemblage *Souvenir 2*, 1964, contains a cheeky self-portrait on a plate. Photo © 2021 Jasper Johns/VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

It is amusing to recall that as late as the 1980s, college textbooks on art quaintly referred to Johns and like-minded innovator ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG as "close friends." The two artists were lovers for half a decade and lifelong collaborators who, along with couple MERCE CUNNINGHAM and JOHN CAGE, formed a nexus of discreetly queer artists pioneering what we've come to term POSTMODERNISM, in which painting mirrored sculpture, image echoed text, ideas became actions, people loved whom they loved, and art could be anything: a danced shape, a flashlight affixed near an old photo or a painting of a common flag.

These currents and arcs are beautifully delineated in both shows. ■



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TARGET WITH PLASTER CASTS, 1979–80, OFFERED BY GREG SHIENBAUM FINE ART

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