

CHRISTOPHER WOOL

Christopher Wool
works from a private collection

preview

18 – 24 april 2013 10 am – 5 pm

auction

25 april 2013 noon cst

Living Contemporary

lots 150 – 158

Works from the Studio

1987–1993



First and foremost, Christopher Wool is a painter and when it comes to the discourse on the viability of painting, he shows us that the medium is indeed very much still alive. Rooted deeply in contemporary experience and popular culture, Wool relays his relationship to the world through historical modes of production. Even Wool's works in other mediums visually substantiate his paintings. From pattern and word paintings to prints and photographs and artist books, Wool's work blends mechanical process with the physical act of creation. Formal and technical constraints guide Wool as he manipulates, distorts and repeats motifs and themes creating works of art that reminds us that flaws and imperfections are what make the world most interesting.

In 1987 Christopher Wool, upon the referral of Jeff Koons, hired a young college student to be his only studio assistant. Over the next six years, Wool and his "right hand" worked side by side, forging a close working relationship and friendship as they navigated the rise of Wool's artistic career.

By 1987 Christopher Wool was exhibiting works in the hip downtown galleries of New York, with solo shows at Cable Gallery in both 1984 and 1986. Working out of his raw 3,000 square foot fourth floor walkup in Chinatown, Wool was creating large-scale paintings on aluminum panels. Wool, with the help of his assistant, built the aluminum panels from scratch, making them as large as the two of them could physically carry up the stairs to the space. They constructed a spray booth to apply a flat white layer of acrylic paint to the panel then Wool painted using rollers, block prints, linoleum stamps and other items in search of a new visual language.

During this period in Wool's career, there were not many people coming and going from the studio. Funk, hip-hop and acid jazz streamed from the stereo. Wool began exploring text as imagery, appropriating words from popular culture; album covers, books and film noir and people like James Brown and Lenny Bruce provided words for his paintings. Initially Wool would

purchase ready-made stencils from the local hardware store but soon he was exploring various fonts and letter sizes, custom-making stencils for his large panels. Each work would be planned out, the letters mapped for placement. The process took the effort of both Wool and his assistant as the stencils were unwieldy and the alkyd was messy. Only able to paint one letter at a time, they would move between artworks allowing the paint to dry. A development beyond the rolled and printed images, the effect of the stenciled panels, though structured, was immediate. Flaws and blemishes were inherent to the act of creation and Wool embraced these irregularities as part of the painterly process.

When 303 Gallery, in cooperation with Paula Cooper Gallery and Luhring Augustine & Hodes Gallery, featured an exhibition of works by Christopher Wool and Robert Gober in April of 1988, it was clear that Wool had captured the attention of the “big deal” uptown galleries. This seminal exhibition, *A Project: Robert Gober/Christopher Wool*, featured a collaborative work, *Gober's Three Urinals* and Wool's *Apocalypse Now*, one of his earliest word paintings and one of only a few that are titled. There was a demand for Wool's distinct visual vernacular and Luhring Augustine had a waiting list of collectors interested in Wool's word pieces before they were even completed.

In the early 1990s Wool incorporated photography into his artwork; he began documenting the East Village, capturing the grit and grime of the outlying areas that have since vanished. Wool, now showing overseas, also documented the marginal areas of the places he visited. He composed collections of his work on film manipulating them with a Xerox machine that Wool had purchased and his assistant hand-carried from the office supply store. Wool presented the degraded images as collections or in artist made books.

With his success, Wool upgraded his work space, taking over Eric Fischl's studio in the East Village. Wool wanted to work on an even larger scale and his new space, with a freight elevator, allowed him to do so. Wool now had multiple employees. The aluminum

panels he painted were created off-site, layers of Mercedes Benz white replacing the acrylic flat that had previously primed his work surfaces.

By 1992 Wool's assistant had opened his own business in a related art fabrication field, though he would continue, on occasion, to lend Wool a hand for a few more years. The following nine lots were acquired directly from Christopher Wool by his assistant between 1988 and 1993. They have remained in his collection until now.



In 1986 Wool began using rollers and other items found in hardware stores, as well as stamps he created, to make pattern paintings featuring banal decorative motifs. By repeating imagery, with layers or skips in the registration, with splatters, drips and other imperfections, the works reveal the experience of painting through their non-traditional composition.



150 **Christopher Wool** Untitled 1988 alkyd on paper 20 h x 13 w inches | Signed, dated and inscribed to the reverse 'For George X-Mas 1990 Wool 1988'. \$70,000–90,000

In the 1990s Christopher Wool began exploring photography capturing the gritty reality of East Village, New York and other marginalized regions of other cities. As with his paintings, Wool manipulates imagery often using a Xerox machine to make copies of his photographs and copies of the copies, etc., the repetitive process distorting the image, degrading the colors and blurring the lines. Through his process, Wool creates distinct images and collective bodies of work.



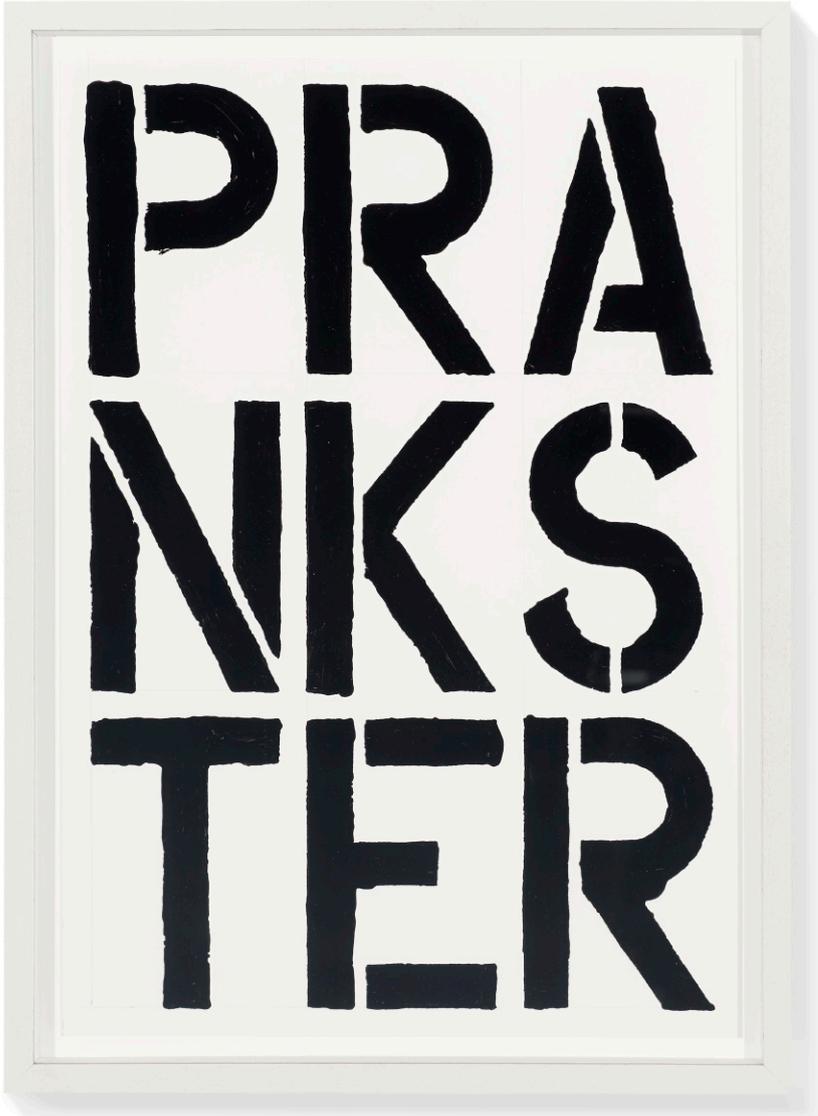
151 **Christopher Wool** Untitled 1992 color Xerox on paper 11 h x 8.5 w inches | Signed and dated to the reverse 'Wool 1992 T.P.' \$1,500–2,000



Between 1988 and 2000 Christopher Wool created approximately seventy-five large-scale word paintings and very few works on paper. The words themselves, appropriated from popular culture such as movies, music and books, were placed within the context of painting; their meanings obscured and their function more closely aligned with imagery than with vocabulary.

Wool started the word paintings using store-bought stencils but soon began to explore fonts and create his own stencils in custom sizes. Focused on the process, the large, proportionately-scaled stencils were meticulously placed on the panel so that everything would be perfectly aligned. The resulting defects and flaws that were inherent to the process of creation became integral parts of each finished work.

In 1989 Wool created a series of paintings featuring mostly nine-letter words describing character types. Evenly spaced, with three letters on three lines, the series includes words such as a celebrity, hypnotist and anarchist along with the word prankster. The meanings of these words, within the context of Wool's artwork, are ambiguous. (Is Wool referring to the painting? To the viewer? Or to himself, the artist?) Despite the uncertainty of the significance of the text, the selection of this particular word drawing as a gift for his friend and studio assistant was very likely deliberate.



152 **Christopher Wool** Untitled 1989 alkyd on paper 17 h x 11.75 w inches | Signed, dated and inscribed to the reverse 'Wool 1989 For George From Christopher 1/93'. \$200,000–300,000

The exploration of repetition is a common theme found throughout Christopher Wool's oeuvre. From his early pattern paintings to his collections of photographs and artist books, Wool's work blends mechanical processes with the physical act of creation or manipulation. This small early dot painting was made with a pattern roller on aluminum panel. Wool made only a handful of works this size.

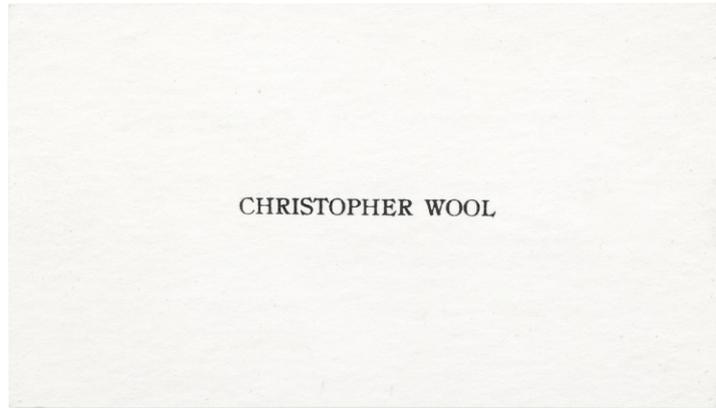


153 **Christopher Wool** Untitled 1988 alkyd and flashe on aluminum 12 h x 12 w inches | Signed, dated and inscribed to the reverse 'Wool 1988 For George My Left Hand Christopher 9/88'. \$100,000 – 150,000

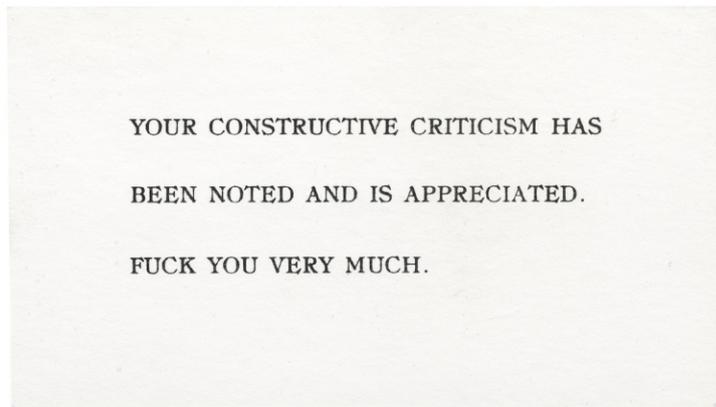
This quick studio drawing was created by dragging a nearly dry paintbrush across a folded sheet of paper. The fold of the paper and the amount of paint on the brush influenced the composition by creating a shadow of the layered paper below. This work illustrates Wool's continual exploration of the creative process and the act of making works of art.



154 **Christopher Wool** Untitled 1990 alkyd and graphite on paper 11 h x 8.5 w inches | Signed and dated to the lower edge 'Wool 1990'. \$10,000–15,000



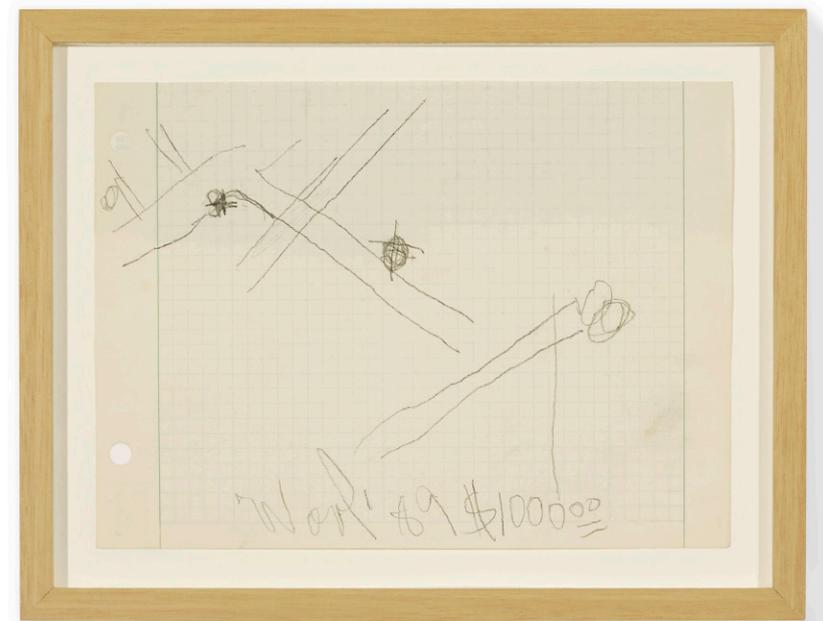
CHRISTOPHER WOOL



YOUR CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM HAS
BEEN NOTED AND IS APPRECIATED.
FUCK YOU VERY MUCH.



Christopher Wool had a sense of humor about his artwork and his growing celebrity in the art world. This piece of paper features a sketch Wool made for his studio assistant illustrating how to get to the hardware store. In fun and jest, Wool signed and dated this work insinuating that it would one day be worth something.





Christopher Wool's Black Book contains seventeen black and white reproductions of works on paper featuring eight- and nine-letter words describing character types. This example is number 30 from the edition of 350 published by Thea Westreich and Gisela Capitain.

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