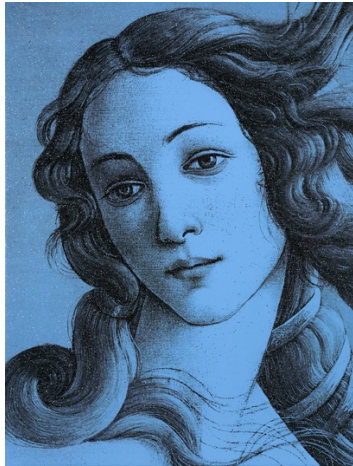


Jacob Skornik

Old Masters Only!



Antoine Helwaser Gallery is thrilled to announce the upcoming solo show of Jacob Skornik, to be presented at Art Miami 2023. Skornik, who was born and raised in France, pursued studies in old masters at Paris X University before relocating to New York. His artistic practice reflects a fusion of classical influences from Parisian institutions and an engagement with post-modernist practices native to New York City. Skornik's work responds to the contemporary global exchange of imagery in our meta society, channeling a second wave 'pictures generation' ethos.

Skornik appropriates old master artworks, subverting their academic execution through the visual language of pop art. His process commences with cropping, resizing, and inverting old master paintings. The reinvented images are then translated into a two-tone silk screen appliqué, enriched with eye-catching diamond dust. Skornik's art weaves a temporal intertwine by presenting a Hollywood-esque immortalization of classical sitters, such as Vermeer's *Lacemaker* and *Girl With A Pearl Earring*.

The exhibition promises to be a must-see event for collectors and art enthusiasts, showcasing Skornik's innovative work. Art Miami 2023 will take place from December 5th to 10th, and Helwaser Gallery cordially invites everyone to experience the beauty and creativity of Jacob Skornik's art at booth 211.

Old Masters Redivivus: Jacob Skornik's Appropriation Art by Donald Kuspit

Appropriation art involves “the intentional borrowing, copying, and alteration of pre-existing images,” or what used to be called plagiarism. Postmodern appropriation art often involved “plagiarizing someone else’s photograph, making a new picture effortlessly,” as Richard Prince said. His appropriation of the photograph of the Marlboro Man, an advertisement for a cigarette, is perhaps the most cynical work of postmodern appropriation art, for it pays blind homage to what Heidegger called everydayness, not to say banality. It is bland and boring quotation, in sharp contrast to modernist appropriation art, which has an axe to grind, does nihilistic violence to what it appropriates: Duchamp’s mocking appropriation of Leonardo’s beautiful and beautifully painted Mona Lisa epitomizes modernist art’s hatred of beauty. Duchamp turns it into a cartoon, a cheap joke, by putting a moustache on a photograph of Leonardo’s masterpiece. A sarcastic gesture of destructive contempt, a sort of graffiti, it ruthlessly de-idealizes Leonardo’s beautiful woman by suggesting she’s a man in disguise, perhaps even a hermaphrodite, at least bisexual. Even more perversely de-idealizing Duchamp ironically implies, by way of the title, the letters L.H.O.O.Q., that “she has a hot ass,” and as such perhaps a whore. Duchamp ruthlessly mocked the Mona Lisa’s beauty, and with that trivialized

Leonardo's genius. In a similar vein, Picasso declared "the beauties of the Parthenon, Venuses, Nymphs, Narcissuses are so many lies. Art is not the application of a canon of beauty but what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon."

From Marinetti's assertion that "a race-automobile which seems to rush over exploding powder is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace" to Barnett Newman's assertion that "the impulse of modern art was this desire to destroy beauty" beautiful works of traditional art were devalued. Beautiful art was an obstacle to what the art historian Ernst Gombrich called "experimental art"—his term for "avant-garde art," emphasizing its use of untraditional materials and techniques as well as such "experimental" ideas as psychoanalysis was early in the 20th century. What was lost by "completely denying that art has any concern with beauty," to again quote Newman? What was lost by regarding museums as "cemeteries" and classic works of traditional art as "funeral urns," to again quote Marinetti? Baudelaire tells us: their "habitual, everyday Idealization of life" brings with it a "sense of beauty" at once "absolute and particular."

Jacob Skornik is taken with the beauty of Old Master art—the kind of beauty that is truth, to allude to the last two lines of Keats' Ode To A Grecian Urn. The return to Old Master art—and the truth of beauty—is overdue. Modern art ended with Pop Art, an eclectic rather than experimental way of making art, more pointedly an art that eschewed abstraction, the seminal art of modernism. It tilted what the critic Lawrence Alloway called the fine art/popular culture continuum away from fine art towards the popular culture. What Braque called "a new sort of beauty, the beauty that appears in terms of volume of line, of mass, of weight" became passe, obsolete, tedious. What Jacques Barzun called "the reflex of negation," feeding "the appetite for change," more broadly for "novelty," had become addictive and with that self-defeating. Modern art ends by destroying the idea of art itself: so-called anti-art announces its bankruptcy and meaninglessness, Barzun argues.

I suggest that Skornik's regression to traditional art has something in common with the art historian and psychoanalyst Ernst Kris' concept of "regression in the service of the ego," with the crucial difference that such regression is "not always a relapse into infantilism," as Jung insisted—Picasso relapsed into infantilism when he said it took him a lifetime "to learn to draw like a child"—but can be "an attempt to get at something necessary, the sense of security, of protection, of reciprocated love, of trust" that the ideal affords. Such a regression to the ideal is what we see in a healthy regression—Skornik's regression to Old Master paintings, their beauty enhanced and emphasized by the colors and diamond dust he adds to them. "Diamond dust is a ground-level cloud composed of tiny ice crystals... Tumbling through the air, they reflect sunlight to the eye. This glittering effect gives the phenomenon its name since it looks like many tiny diamonds are flashing in the air." But there's also "diamond dust, pulverized non-gem grade diamonds, used as a cutting and polishing medium." It is also used in jewelry. "Diamond dust is made from tiny flakes of glass, when these reflect light it achieves a unique diamond-like effect." Applying diamond dust—"the world's most glittery glitter"—to Old Master paintings, Skornik announces that they are precious treasures, and idealizes them, or rather confirms their innate idealism. And it confirms they are immortal, for diamonds last forever.

Skornik is particularly taken with faces, indicative of a person's individuality, uniqueness, consciousness: the faces of Vermeer's Lacemaker and Girl With A Pearl Earring, Botticelli's Aphrodite and Leonardo's Mona Lisa, and Frans Hals Lute Player afford insight into their minds. However distinctive and different, they are all full of wonder, and invite wonder, in a state of heightened awareness, suggesting they are rational and with that ideal human beings. "Let's break away from rationality" Marinetti shouted, which is to dehumanize oneself, bringing to mind Ortega y Gasset's account of the dehumanization of modern art. Perhaps more crucially, the Old Master paintings Skornik admires and celebrates have what Paul Valery calls "a degree of *harmony*" (his emphasis) which modern art, burdened by "the necessity of shocking"—thus Baudelaire's "shock of the new" (now the "schlock of the new")—lacks, having lost the "fine old *objective* criteria" of traditional art. Subjective expression replaces objective perception, experimental art replaces learned art—Old Master art, art based on refined perception and insightful knowledge of external reality rather than the expression of raw feeling, what Valery calls the "laborious study of reality" and "objective criteria of value," an art "in relation to a given thing," and thus a rational, sane art rather than an irrational, peculiarly insane, certainly absurd, experimental art. Old Master art shows that beauty is still possible in an ugly world.