

PATRON

ART / CULTURE / DESIGN

ON TARGET *DALLAS ART FAIR'S 8TH TURN*



Plus:
Frank Stella
at The Modern

Diana Al-Hadid
Oliver Clegg
Melvin Edwards
Margaret Lee
Marc Quinn
Michelle Rawlings
Eva Rothschild
Blair Thurman
Rebecca Warren



INTERNATIONAL SOLITUDE

Though conceptual painter Blair Thurman's work is found in collections across the globe, the artist enjoys the intimacy of the woods in Upstate New York where he resides and works.

This page: Blair Thurman, *Widows' Walk (A Coat of Arms and/or Tails for a Whale)*, 2015, neon, acrylic, glass, wood, metal fittings, transformers, 129.92 x 118.11 x 11.81 in. Opposite (from left): Blair Thurman, *Sea Robin*, 2015, acrylic on canvas mounted on wood, 85 x 47 x 2 in.; Blair Thurman, *Everlasting Sandcast*, 2015, acrylic on canvas on wood, 85 x 47 x 2 in.; Blair Thurman, *Dressed To Kill*, 2015, acrylic on canvas on wood, 85 x 47 x 2 in. All images courtesy of the artist and Galerie Frank Elbaz.

Personal history goes a long way with artist Blair Thurman. It's the lifeblood of his art, which draws upon his childhood nostalgia for Pop and Minimalism as well as his early obsession with sports cars. The son of a contemporary museum director, Thurman spent his formative years looking at the work of art legends like Andy Warhol, Nam June Paik, and Robert Rauschenberg, but these days the 55-year-old artist tends to surround himself with a different kind of stimulus—namely the woods of Upstate New York, where he lives with his wife. Purposefully secluded, his studio offers ample space to experiment and produce his large sculptural paintings without interruption. An Edenic alternative to the hustle of New York, Thurman's rural home base allows him the flexibility to commute for work when needed, but for the most part he sticks to his daily routine. "Constant coffee and television," says Thurman, describing the typical series of events. "I try to get to the studio by 9 a.m. We eat a nice lunch everyday because we're lucky to have a hippie commune nearby with a fabulous kitchen. Sometimes I work quite late, into the next morning, but generally until 10 or 11 p.m. I seem to be very slow at making things. My wife and I have a beautiful dog, and my assistants, Dana and Holly, also have dogs, so it's very cozy. We know we're very lucky. I like living in a place where I'm not likely to meet another artist. I like privacy and solitude."

While Thurman tends to keep to himself and a small group of friends, his work travels around the world. Over the past two years, Thurman's work has crisscrossed from Los Angeles to Berlin to please an increasingly international collector base. This month, Thurman's paintings touch down in Texas thanks to the artist's long-time friend and dealer, Frank Elbaz, who plans to show Thurman's newest work at his Dallas Art Fair booth. "[I] met Frank in Nice through Vincent Pecoil. He's very gregarious, very outgoing. We met at the casino one night, late, at an after party," recounts Thurman of the duo's first meeting. "Frank was playing Blackjack or maybe Baccarat with a bunch of other art dealers. He told me he was winning the money to do a show with me. I have to say I like that style."

Equally a showman, Thurman knows how to energize a room. His neon sculptures and oversized paintings add a sense of drama to any space they inhabit. Inspired by the tropes of Minimalism and Pop

as well as advertising, the artist looks at the construction of visual language through an abstracted lens. In his *Supermodels* series, one of his best known bodies of works, Thurman distilled racecars down to their individual components and laid them out on the wall in the same precise way a doctor might line up his scalpels. The resulting neon-lit works call to mind animal hides. It's these slippages between references that require one to look twice at everything the artist touches.

Removed from the figurative or illustrative realm, Thurman's paintings inhabit a conceptual space where meaning is open to individual interpretation. Titles become an important tool for Thurman to shape these evolving discussions around his work. Whimsical names like *Endless Summer*, *Underton*, and *Goth Rocket* set a certain tone when looking at Thurman's geometrically striking compositions. "I always think about titles—titles make the connection to the viewer. At the other end, I always try to connect what I'm doing to my life," explains Thurman. "There has to be something nominally personal, autobiographical, or whatever. I try to put a little soul into my work, which is, I guess, a very old-fashioned idea, like preferring a used car to this year's model."

While nostalgic in one sense, Thurman's work rarely feels sentimental. Instead, it feels almost scientific in its analysis of Pop and consumer culture as an aesthetic. Permanent and paradoxically ephemeral, Thurman's sculptures strike the same precarious equilibrium as their subject matter. Like something drafted from memory rather than copied from paper, Thurman's wall-clinging creations meld together past and present in a way that feels authentic to both. Perhaps this organic touch comes from Thurman's own experience finding a place within the art history canon alongside the Modern iconoclasts that his work continues to revisit.

A former assistant to video art pioneer Nam June Paik, Thurman intimately understands the cycles of influence and how one generation's innovations lead into the next. "I'm at that age where you can really look at your life, and there's still time left, but you can really see the arc, and you have some grasp of where you're going," notes Thurman. If his recent rash of exhibitions is any indication, it seems Thurman's trajectory is undoubtedly up. **P**

