



Taschen
JOHNS

Barbara Hess

KA

Brossurato

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JOHNS

Jasper Johns è stato spesso ascritto alla Pop Art, ma per il suo uso dei colori a cera, del collage, degli oggetti di uso comune può anche essere definito come Neo-Dadaista. È ampiamente conosciuto per i suoi quadri che hanno come soggetto la bandiera, sebbene anche altri temi come i numeri, le lettere o la cartina siano altrettanto famosi. Jasper Johns è uno degli artisti americani più importanti del ventesimo secolo.

#arte



“A Vital Neo-Dadaist Spirit”

The “nowhere” out of which Alan Solomon saw Johns suddenly emerge with his first *Flag* painting in 1955, was in fact a carefully staged debut. In 1953 and 1954, he had begun to systematically destroy his earlier works. Later he would even buy early works back for the same purpose. Against the background of this *tabula rasa*, *Flag* (p. 9) could appear all the more programmatic and ambiguous. Many years later, in an interview published in *Newsweek*, Johns explained his iconoclasm as follows: “It was an attempt to destroy some ideas about myself ... It gets to sound very religious, which I don’t like, but it’s true.” In fact Johns would come to be known for his “skill and daring at rebuilding his past,” as the author Michael Crichton put it. Speaking with Paul Clements in 1990, Johns emphasized his conscious effort not to do anything that could be confused with the work of other artists, and his desire to create his own identity. Later, he added, it was no longer so important whether he was himself rather than somebody else. The fact that he succeeded in creating his own personal identity with motifs as anonymous as flags, targets, numerals and letters, is one of the paradoxes that marks Johns’s art.

Thanks to his self-censorship, only a handful of works that were no longer in his possession at the time remain from Johns’s production prior to *Flag*. One of these is *Untitled*, 1954, a small-format, monochrome green painting with a grid structure of collaged paper arcs (p. 16). Johns had found the paper in *Marlboro Books*, an art-book store where he worked at the time. “I used to fold these sheets and then tear them,” he recalled, “so that when they were opened the tears made a symmetrical design. This collage was a collection of torn sheets. The idea was to make something symmetrical that didn’t appear to be symmetrical.” Two still-lives have also survived—highly condensed graphite drawings of dried oranges on oil-soaked paper (p. 20). These likewise show an effect of mirroring and near-symmetry, a factor that Johns would subsequently emphasize in numerous later works (p. 35). In another early work, *Construction with Toy Piano* (p. 18), he incorporated the numbered keys of a toy piano, which actually produce sounds. As Johns explained, he was interested in the idea of a painting “that did more than one thing, that had another aspect. That was the reason for the sound.”

Untitled, 1954, is likewise a hybrid construction, consisting of a wooden box with two different-sized compartments containing reworked visiting cards and a plaster cast of the face of Rachel Rosenthal, a student of the choreographer



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Johns’s work is marked by an origin in repeating his motifs in various media in a dual analysis: “to observe the between the two: the image and the 1

ILLUSTRATION PAGE 14:
Target with Plaster Casts, 1955
Encaustic and collage on canvas with
129.5 x 101.8 x 8.8 cm
Collection David Geffen