



Kitchen Psychic, 2015

DAN COLEN: SHAKE THE ELBOW

June 13–October 18, 2015

This exhibition is organized by Godin-Spaulling Curator & Curator for the Collection Holly E. Hughes. It has been made possible, in part, through the generous support of Gagosian Gallery, New York.

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Dan Colen was born in New Jersey in 1979. Exhibitions include the 2006 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; *USA Today*, Royal Academy, London (2006); *Defamation of Character*, PS1 Contemporary Art Center, Long Island City, New York (2006); *Fantastic Politics*, National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo (2006); *Skin Fruit: Selections from the Dakis Joannou Collection*, New Museum, New York (2010); *Peanuts*, Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2011); *In Living Color*, FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2012); *Meanwhile . . . Suddenly and then*, 12th Biennale de Lyon (2013); *Dan Colen: The Illusion of Life*, Inverleith House, Edinburgh (2013); *Help!* The Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, Connecticut (2014); *The L . . . o . . . n . . . g Count*, The Walter De Maria Building, New York (2014); *Dan Colen: Psychic Slayer*, HEART—Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark (2015). Colen lives and works in New York, splitting his time between his Brooklyn studio and a forty-acre farm in Pine Plains.



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Edited by Emily Mangione, Editorial Assistant
Designed by Ann Casady

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

Scrambled or Fried, 2008

Chewing gum and chewing-gum wrappers on
canvas in artist's frame
30 x 34 inches (76.2 x 86.4 cm)
Collection Joe Bradley, New York

Shake the Elbow, 2014

Gum on canvas
120 x 95½ inches (304.8 x 242.6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery

Barking Irons, 2015

Gum on canvas
110 x 207 inches (279.4 x 525.8 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery

Kitchen Psychic, 2015

Gum on canvas
120 x 95½ inches (304.8 x 242.6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery

Pennies from Heaven, 2015

Gum on canvas
120 x 95½ inches (304.8 x 242.6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery

Shitting through the Teeth, 2015

Gum on canvas
120 x 95½ inches (304.8 x 242.6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery

Tune the Old Cow Died of, 2015

Gum on canvas
120 x 95½ inches (304.8 x 242.6 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery

COVER: *Shake the Elbow*, 2014

Images of works in the exhibition courtesy Gagosian Gallery.
Photographs by Christopher Burke.

Photograph of color palette from the artist's studio
by Holly E. Hughes.



Dan Colen Shake the Elbow

JUNE 13–OCTOBER 18, 2015
ALBRIGHT-KNOX ART GALLERY



Barking Irons, 2015

Dan Colen: A Whole New Kinda Painting

Dan Colen (American, born 1979) finds beauty in the discarded. From abandoned bicycles to dilapidated signs, Colen draws our attention to everyday surroundings in his paintings, sculptures, and installations. “I’m interested in using the ‘real world’ as a material and a force within my process,” he has commented. “These materials come with a history, not one I necessarily know, but a history for sure. There is an infinity in ‘real world objects’ that, no matter how much I try, I couldn’t paint or sculpt into being.”¹ Colen pushes the boundary between high and low art by creating provocative works that utilize visual tropes or illusions. In 2005, he began to replicate wads of gum with a gel medium. He then adhered them onto papier-mâché boulders, which were additionally covered with graffiti and painted bird droppings. These trompe l’oeil objects not only allude to the accumulative process of time, they reveal the idiosyncrasy of artifice—two themes Colen repeatedly addresses in his practice.



“Working” color palette from the artist’s studio, March 11, 2015

In 2006, he moved onto using real gum because “the gel medium proved insufficient and needlessly redundant.”² Colen also began to examine other unconventional materials, such as flowers, grass, dirt, tar, feathers, and confetti. This novel palette allowed him to paint in a radically different manner. In lieu of trying to control his medium, Colen responded to the unpredictable nature of such resources when employed outside their normal function. The works featured in this exhibition harness the gestural energy and carefully controlled chaos of the Gutai group or Abstract Expressionists by translating it into piles, globs, and skins of multicolored chewing gum. These paintings, however, are not just a stylistic riff on great American artists like Jackson Pollock (American, 1912–1956) and Willem de Kooning (American, born the Netherlands, 1904–1997), whose paintings form the cornerstone of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery’s Collection. They are also complex interpretations of Colen’s desire to make an “unpretentious

abstract painting” and explore the possibilities of the unlikeliest of mediums to its fullest potential. “Maybe they are as tied to Britney Spears and Bart Simpson and general teen flippancy as they are to Jackson Pollock,” Colen admits.³ However, in their purest form, these works stand as “pictures of the marks that gum makes.”⁴

When Colen first began working in gum, he and his studio assistants chewed for hours on end. *Scrambled or Fried*, 2008, is an example of these earliest images that remain closely tethered to the ways in which gum is “composed” in urban settings; their waded forms recall the vandalized undersides of benches, tables, and handrails. After producing only three paintings in one year, Colen turned to more modern means to help expedite the process and ensure pliability without mandibular motion. He then began to experiment with heating and throwing or smearing the gum across the canvas. Whereas gum dries similarly to acrylic paint, it also fades, crystalizes, and transforms over time. For Colen, part of the delight in delving into any new material is witnessing change. He has remarked, “I like how these materials take some control away from me, allowing for a more uncertain future and yet a more finished piece.”⁵ Each composition is an explosion of textures and hues that evokes myriad associations. His palette, which is the incidental result of blending various brands and flavors of gum, is inspired by the works of other artists past and present, such as the masterful muted tones of Rococo painter Jean Siméon Chardin (French, 1699–1779), or the bold sculptural canvases of Elizabeth Murray (American, 1940–2007). Colen has said, “I couldn’t invent that combination of colors.”⁶



Shitting through the Teeth, 2015



Scrambled or Fried, 2008

Chance is at the heart of the inception of Colen’s paintings; his methods and means are accompanied by inherent probability. The exhibition’s subtitle—*Shake the Elbow*—is itself taken from an antiquated colloquialism meaning “to gamble at dice,” but it can also reference intoxication. About this, Colen remarks,

So there’s an idea about contemporary context and maybe just the general diffusion of artistic power today that I think is poked fun of by using an outmoded colloquialism for the title. And also “shake the elbow” is helpful as a visual cue to how the paintings get made—the physicality of the process, which is sometimes playful and often weirdly emphatic.⁷

Furthermore, the title of each work is similarly idiomatic. Casual turns of phrase such as *Pennies from Heaven* and *The Tune the Old Cow Died of* resonate with Colen’s partiality for the unorthodox. The most tongue-in-cheek, *Shitting through the Teeth*, is the colorful alternative to “vomiting;” the choice of title here is perhaps a sardonic response on the part of the artist to the stereotypical description of modern painting. These works have a unique presence that permits nostalgia and repulsion to intertwine. A single whiff of their Hubba Bubba scent can transport the viewer out of the museum and into memories of childhood.

Holly E. Hughes

Godin-Spaulling Curator
& Curator for the Collection

1. “Dan Colen: *Trash*” (press release, Gagolian Gallery, September 9, 2011), <https://www.gagolian.com/exhibitions/dan-colen--september-19-2011>.
2. Dan Colen, email message to author, May 2015.
3. Ibid.
4. Dan Colen, in discussion with the author and Cathleen Chaffee, March 2015.
5. “Dan Colen: *Trash*.”
6. Carol Vogel, “A Wild Trip from Bathroom to Gallery,” *New York Times*, September 9, 2010.
7. Dan Colen, email message to author, May 2015.



Pennies from Heaven, 2015



Tune the Old Cow Died of, 2015