

MNUCHIN GALLERY

OBSERVER

Abstract Expressionism in Three Dimensions: John Chamberlain at Mnuchin Gallery

John Chamberlain: Five Decades +, which runs through June 10, provides a window into the artist's imagination, process and artistic evolution.



John Chamberlain's LAW OF THE BUNGLE (1992). Courtesy Sotheby's

By Margot Malverty

April 11, 2023

While analyzing the twists and turns of welded automotive steel that John Chamberlain shaped into striking works of abstract art, one might assume his signature sculptures were a commentary on consumerism and material waste. However, unlike many artists who used repurposed objects in their works to raise social and environmental concerns, Chamberlain was drawn to automotive steel and other materials for their intrinsic properties.

John Chamberlain: Five Decades +, an upcoming show at Mnuchin Gallery in New York, provides a window into Chamberlain's imagination, process and artistic evolution from 1960 to his death in 2011. While Chamberlain used a variety of materials over the course of his career, including urethane foam, paper bags and foil, one of his career-defining mediums was

automotive steel. After purchasing vintage Chevys, Fords and Cadillacs from auctions, Chamberlain dissected the vehicles, removing everything that stood between the artist and the car's steel soul. In doing so, he transformed the corpses of automotive wonders into the radical form of art that helped solidify his legacy.

Mnuchin Gallery has featured Chamberlain's work several times, most notably in John Chamberlain: Early Years in 2009 and Chamberlain/De Kooning in 2017, and his 1978 sculpture, Funn, was displayed during the Mnuchin Gallery's Highlights of Post-War and Contemporary Art in 2021, as well as in Reds in 2018. John Chamberlain: Five Decades + will showcase a sizable collection of the artist's work drawn from prominent private collections and museums, including early works like Untitled, made in 1963 of chromium-plated automotive steel painted with different shades of blue and green. The artist believed his otherworldly sculptures should reflect color palettes seen in everyday life and used many paint application methods, including spraying, pouring, dripping and layering.

Pieces from various points in Chamberlain's prolific and innovative career will be displayed not chronologically but rather in such a way as to highlight his commitment to experimentation. When discussing his unique approach, Chamberlain was quick to point out that he wasn't the master of his materials but a conduit. "I went at the materials the way the materials evidently told me to," he is quoted as saying in a biography shared by the John Chamberlain Estate. "You squeeze one and you wad another, and you melt another..."

To complement Chamberlain's sculptures, Mnuchin Gallery will offer a fully-illustrated exhibition catalog featuring an essay by New York University art history professor Pepe Karmel and statements by Jim Jacobs and Robert Mnuchin.



John Chamberlain's Untitled (1963) Courtesy Phillips Auctioneers LLC