

Morgan Levy

Untitled, 2001

Christopher Wool's painting, *Untitled*, created in 2001, offers a complex composition filled with emotion and open to many interpretations. Christopher Wool is an American painter who employs many expressionist techniques in his artwork. He has created an array of artworks, ranging from recreations of signs and symbols to a mixture of silkscreen and spray paint visible in his untitled painting from 2001. In *Untitled, 2001* Wool's use of red hues, violent erasure, spontaneous spray paint, and silkscreening create the layered and complex personality of the painting. Recognizing and analyzing the different techniques that Wool uses to create this work of art unlocks the underlying messages and evokes the deep and almost haunting feelings trapped in Wool's artwork.

The first technique that Wool employs is silkscreening in which he recreates the same image multiple times on the canvas. This is a very controlled form of artistic expression. The spontaneity is limited because of the similarity of the reproduced outcomes of the silkscreen. This is also a form of self-appropriation because he is taking his own work and replicating it. However, Wool adds layers of spray paint that are applied in a spontaneous and almost chaotic matter to the canvas, incorporating another layer of meaning to the composition. In contrast to the controlled technique of silkscreening, with spray paint, the result is different every single time. Katherine Brinson, who curated the 2013 Christopher Wool exhibit at the Guggenheim, notes that Wool's use of spray paint gives "his mutative repetitions an air of vandalism" (Brinson 2013, 46). Her words highlight the spontaneity and vulnerability the layer of spray paint adds.

Finally, Wool utilizes erasure as another key element in his paintings. After there are layers of silkscreen and spray paint on the canvas, Wool “destroys” certain parts of his painting, completely mutilating the patterns that were there before. This is a violent action and it gives the painting another layer of meaning. Each of these techniques works in tandem to create the abstract and visually confusing paintings that are Christopher Wool’s work. *Untitled*, 2001 is a perfect example of the blend of techniques that Wool employs.

Each technique that Wool uses adds a layer of emotion to the painting. The erasure in this painting is one of the most prominent aspects of the composition, as it is a considerably large portion located in the center of the canvas. To achieve this, Wool took a soaked rag and wiped it across the canvas, smudging everything beneath it (Wolin, 2013). The rashness of the erasure and the destruction of his own work portrays a sense of self-hatred and violence to the viewer. More specifically, the self-hatred springs from anger—almost as if the painting did not turn out as he wanted, so, in a fit of anger, Wool destroyed the whole thing. It also creates a contrast with the silkscreening aspect of the painting because the silkscreen portion is very reserved, whereas the erased portion is very intimate to Wool’s psyche. Furthermore, the erasure allows for the presence of Wool’s hand to show through the painting, which is an integral part of abstract expressionist art (Wolin, 2013).

As a whole, the different techniques work together to create the deep complexity of the painting. The juxtaposition between the controlled mode of silkscreening and the spontaneous and chaotic erasure creates layers of emotion within Wool’s painting. First, there is a layer of order and uniformity. Mimicking the post-expressionist artists that came before him such as Andy Warhol, Wool uses silkscreening as the primary technique for his painting. However, Wool

adds his own touch through the use of erasure. Unlike Warhol, the erasure shows Wool's presence to the viewer. He does not create the same distance in his paintings as Warhol does. The destruction of Wool's own work evokes feelings of chaos and disorder. It seems as if Wool was not happy with the original image and wiped it away with angry and abrupt motions (Wolin, 2013). By making the process of erasure visible, Wool allows the viewer to envision his own feelings of anger and self-doubt.

Another important formal quality of the painting is its bright red color. Color completely changes both its visual effect as well as the feelings evoked. Because most of his other paintings are black, white, and grey, Wool's choice to use red is very deliberate. The bright red hues of this artwork call out and draw in the viewer. The red smudges almost resemble those of a murder scene—red being the color of blood. The choice of color fits in because, although potentially morbid, red is the color of blood which evokes feelings of harm and danger in a way that cannot be ignored. Mixed with the spontaneous spray paint and the chaotic smudges that make up the busy composition of the painting, the red adds another layer of emotion: it gives an eeriness that makes the erasure seem more dangerous and violent. The color choice of this painting is an integral part of its narrative and contributes greatly to the feelings of chaos and danger that are evoked when it is viewed.

Overall, *Untitled, 2001* is a powerful painting that portrays many emotions and creates a window into the innermost feelings of Christopher Wool. Wool employs silkscreen and spray paint in many of his other works as well; however, the erasure and red color of *Untitled, 2001* add a dramatic effect to the painting and put a great emphasis on the techniques he uses. The

trifecta of color, erasure, and silkscreen all work together to create a painting that is subject to many different interpretations.

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