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20 Postwar Artists Who Deserve Greater Recognition

Some Are Obscure, Others Are Known—but All Should Be More Celebrated



Gino de Dominicis, *Calamita Cosmica* (1990). Photo credit: Alberto Pellaschi/Associated Press

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The art market is both well-ordered and strange, having become so efficient over the past decade as to have reduced its attention and its concentration of value to a sparsely populated Olympus of market-proven masters. Through this editorial project, we will periodically draw attention to artists whom we believe are of greater importance than their current recognition and/or pricing would suggest. This list could easily have included many more artists, but I chose to focus it on a wide range from different parts of the world whom I hold in particularly high regard.

Many artists on this list came of age artistically in the 1950s and 1960s, which isn't surprising given that the market's bias toward American art in the post-war decades created an artificial barrier whose inaccuracy collectors, historians, and museums are just beginning to comprehend. The artists are arranged roughly in chronological order of the work that makes them significant.

Alfredo Volpi



Alfredo Volpi, *Fachada* (c. 1950's), courtesy of Bergamin & Gomide

To Brazilian collectors, [Alfredo Volpi](#) is the wellspring from which the great post-war Neo-Concrete artists drank. His work occupies the most prominent position in the nation's significant modern art collections, yet the international market has failed to see what most Brazilians know. Given his exalted position in great collections of post-war Latin masterworks, Volpi's paintings are not cheap, but they deserve more international recognition.

This self-taught artist began by making folkloric, representational paintings. His work eventually evolved into a geometric language that was nonetheless rooted in allusions to architecture and the vitality of the street. His works have exquisite fresco-like tempera surfaces, resonant palettes and a personal, poetic presence. While the later works have an air of the naïf about them, one can also trace in his work an ode to a history of abstraction from [Constantin Brancusi](#) through [Josef Albers](#). His work was a great influence on the generation of Neo-Concrete modernists who would coalesce in Brazil in the 1950s.



Mimmo Rotella, *Marilyn 2* (2005). Photo courtesy of De Buck Gallery

Mimmo Rotella

As the international art market has become increasingly focused on the works of post-war Italian masters such as [Lucio Fontana](#), [Alberto Burri](#) and [Piero Manzoni](#), Rotella's spirited, muscular works composed of torn and layered movie posters lifted straight off the streets of Rome form an essential juncture between the expressionistic, urban grit of the 1950s and the glamorous Pop imagery of the 1960s—much in the way that [Robert Rauschenberg](#) did in the United States.

Yet the market for [Rotella](#) remains surprisingly suspended at price levels a fraction of those of his historical peers. Perhaps that is partly due to controversy about the dating (and possible backdating) of many of his works. But none of this undermines his [achievements](#) and significance, or the fact that he should be better appreciated.

Atsuko Tanaka

Another first-generation Gutai giant, Tanaka is hardly unknown—her [electric dress](#) has been a staple of many exhibitions about performance and post-war Japanese art. However, her signature drawings and paintings of circles and the circuitry lines that connect them, which she obsessively explored over 40 years, have yet to be fully acknowledged by the market.



A visitor looks at Tanaka Atsuko's painting 93C in Hong Kong (2015). Photo credit: Lucas Schifres/Getty Images

In every decade, from her drawings of this subject in the late 1950s through to the final paintings of her life in the early 2000s, Tanaka re-examined this motif with the same compulsive sense of discovery as [Agnes Martin](#) or Tanaka's her more celebrated Japanese peer, [Yayoi Kusama](#). While the market has justifiably become increasingly invested in Kusama's work, one could argue that Tanaka remained more consistent over the decades, and to many, improved with age.

Saburo Murakami



Murakami Saburō, *Passing Through* (1956) © Murakami Makiko and the former members of the Gutai Art Association c/o Museum of Osaka University

One of the less understood masters of the first generation of Gutai artists, [Murakami](#) is best known for performative work in which he comes crashing through a stack of paper-covered stretchers. But in the years between the mid-1950s and 1970, in

his own pensive and exploratory way, Murakami cycled through an entire history of painting and its possibilities, from mid-century easel painting to works crafted to self-destruct to, ultimately, his own version of the last paintings. Murakami, whose great works are rare and hard to find, would ultimately honor the end of painting by turning a network of canvasses to the wall, leaving their painted stretchers as an epitaph to the medium's concluded life.

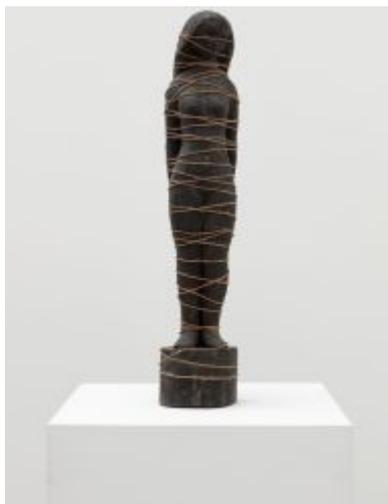
Willys de Castro



Willys de Castro, *Objeto ativo* (1961). Courtesy of Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros.
Photo credit: Mark Moroose

Willys de Castro's rare and sought-after small, geometric paintings suggest a universe on the scale of a stick. He might not be as internationally acknowledged as his Brazilian peers [Lygia Clarke](#) and [Lygia Pape](#), but his works are the most guarded gems in any collection of post-war Brazilian painting. They are so well regarded, in fact, that it is becoming increasingly difficult for non-Brazilian collectors to have the opportunity to acquire one of his works. If you can find a great one, grab it.

Seung-Taek Lee



Seung-Taek Lee, *Untitled* (c. 1950s), The Rachofsky Collection

We tend to think that Conceptual art was born in New York in the mid-1960s, after years of Minimalist reduction deemed the object to be obsolete. However, there were significant artists in other parts of the world who, years before this, were exploring the conceptual nature of art (and I don't mean Duchamp). One of the most compelling, idiosyncratic and still to many undiscovered, is the Korean artist [Seung-Taek Lee](#). In the 1950s he made works in which the painting has gone, with the stretcher bars all that remains, as well as sculptures which have been bound and silenced, as though their magic has left the object.

Giulio Paolini

Hardly overlooked, [Paolini](#) nonetheless remains somewhat invisible outside Europe. He developed a Conceptual line in his work from the early 1960s, but with a style and theatricality that could only come from the hand and heart of a poetic Italian.



Giulio Paolini, *Senza titolo (Untitled)* (1964), courtesy of The Rose Collection and The Rachofsky Collection

Paolini has spent a lifetime making paintings, sculptures, photographs and installations that express the melancholy of the artist who has nothing left to make, the magician with nothing up his sleeve—but yet so stylishly executed.

Anne Truitt



Anne Truitt, *Morning Choice* (1968). Courtesy of Saint Louis Art Museum/Bridgeman Images

Like Agnes Martin in painting, [Anne Truitt](#) was a poetic proto-Minimalist in sculpture. Her simple, monolithic works, which are rendered with elegant precision, brought painting into three dimensions pretty much before anyone else. Like the work of other American women in and around Minimalism, her art has received less airtime than her male counterparts.

Her roots can be found in the work of [Barnett Newman](#), and in the American geometric abstraction that influenced his generation. But her art offers a gentle presence in large scale in what was an otherwise a movement built on the solidity of construction—which may be why we were blinded to an artist of such singular vision until recently.

Domenico Gnoli

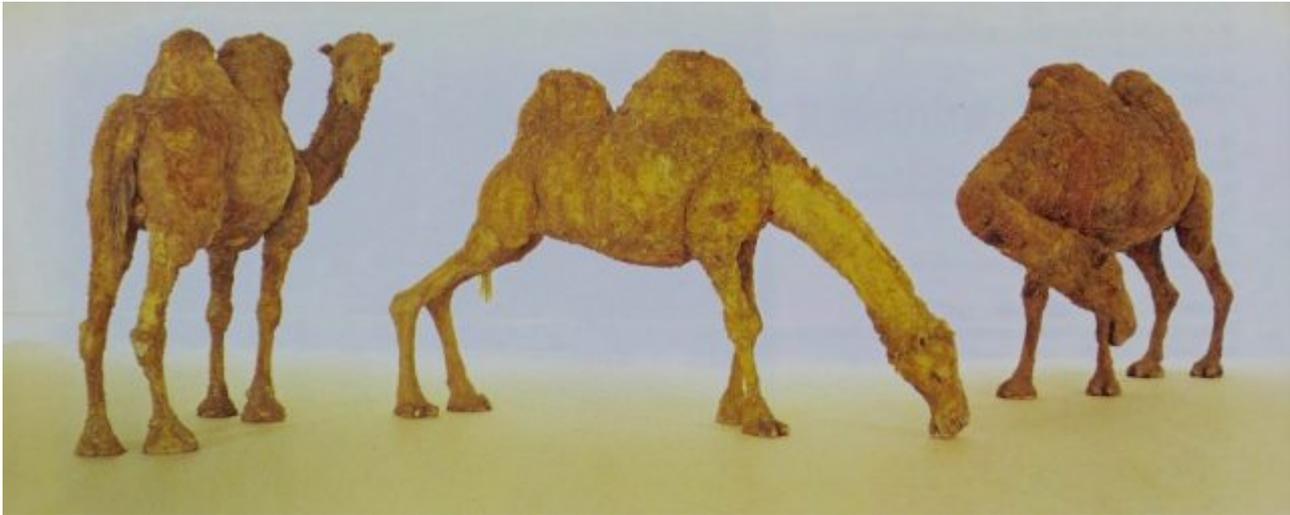


Installation view, Domenico Gnoli: Paintings from 1964-1969, April -June 2012/Courtesy of Luxembourg & Dayan

To many viewers, [Gnoli](#) may seem like a painter from another era. His meticulously detailed representations could be read as a dandy's version of gentle hyper-realism. Which, in part, they are.

And yet, Gnoli is an artist with one foot intentionally in the past and the other firmly embedded in his time—perhaps the only representational painter other than [Chuck Close](#) who could also be considered in some way a Minimalist. His fetishistic renderings of women, furniture, suitcases, suits and shirts are simply exquisite, a post-Surrealist world where the ordinary becomes extraordinary, where the braid of a woman's head can feel like a mountain of desire the artist could never climb. He only produced about 100 paintings and so one day, when the market fully wakes up, the opportunities will have disappeared.

Nancy Graves



Nancy Graves, *Camel VI, VII, VIII* (1968-69), collection of National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa Art. Photo credit: Carl Brunn © Nancy Graves Foundation, Inc./Licensed by VAGA, New York, N.Y.

In 1969, [Nancy Graves](#) made some of the most radical sculptures in a period when nearly all sculpture was radical. The works were fully in sync with the deconstructivist impulse at the time to challenge what sculpture is, while also looking like nothing else. Graves' sculptures of life-size camels are about disassembling the language of both anatomy and sculpture, and rebuilding from the ground up. The bone-like sculptures and topographic map paintings that followed have been somewhat obscured by the more decorative and traditional metal sculptures of her later years. She was an uncompromisingly rigorous sculptor, a staunch feminist and an under-appreciated talent.

Richard Artschwager



Richard Artschwager, *Description of Table* (1964) Photo credit: Jerry L. Thompson © Whitney Museum of American Art, New York © 2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

I still can't understand why this 1960s master of both Pop and Minimalism remains so undervalued. Or maybe his ability to reconcile is precisely why: [Artschwager](#) unites the apple and the orange of the two mainstreams of art made in the 1960s and, for this crime of inventive brilliance, he seems to have evaded the market recognition he is due.

Cildo Meireles



Cildo Meireles, *Babel* (2001) Photograph © Tate, London 2017/Cildo Meireles, Studio

It is still something of a mystery to me that a major [Tate](#) retrospective of the great Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles in 2008-9 never made it to the United States. Meireles' "corner sculptures" of 1969 are as important as Richard Serra's Prop pieces or the earthworks of that same moment made by artists such as Walter De Maria.

Meireles has gone on to make sculptures and installations that are complex and beautiful, magical and mystical, mythical and ordinary at the same time. He may well be the most revered artist working in Latin America today. He is certainly one of the world's greatest artists of the past 50 years. The international art market has yet to find a way to intersect with this copious creative force.

Nancy Spero

So many significant artists came into their own through the social, sexual and gender revolutions of the 1960s. Of them, [Nancy Spero](#) (like her husband, the painter [Leon Golub](#)), remains one of the most revered and yet most under-collected. Spero's artistic decisions ran counter to the scale, muscularity and personal gesture that defined greatness during the male dominated movements like Abstract Expressionism that reigned when she came of age artistically.



Nancy Spero, *Male Bomb* (1966). Courtesy of Galerie Lelong. Art © The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts/Licensed by VAGA, New York, N.Y.

She intentionally chose paper as her principle medium, women as her imagery and print-making as her “hand”—all artistic decisions typically identified with “the minor arts” that were all made stronger for her embrace.

Joan Brown



Joan Brown, *The Bicentennial Champion* (1976), courtesy of the Estate of Joan Brown and George Adams Gallery © The Estate of Joan Brown

There is a special place in my heart for the work of [Joan Brown](#), but that's a story for another day. The San Franciscan artist came out of the painterly, figurative lineage of [Elmer Bischoff](#), but it is the highly autobiographical, boldly colored paintings of herself and her daily life where she really came into her own. Prior to these pensively extroverted, Matisse-like works and the time in which they were made, great art couldn't be personal. Since then, most contemporary art has been.

Joe Goode



Joe Goode, *Photo Cloud painting Triptych* (1969-70), courtesy of Kohn Gallery, Los Angeles

There are so many artists who emerged in the 1960s in California who remain under-acknowledged. Close to the top of my list is [Joe Goode](#), borne of Pop but as much a philosopher of the metaphysical. His paintings somehow fuse the wit of [Ed Ruscha](#) with the ineffable sense of light and air of [Robert Irwin](#).

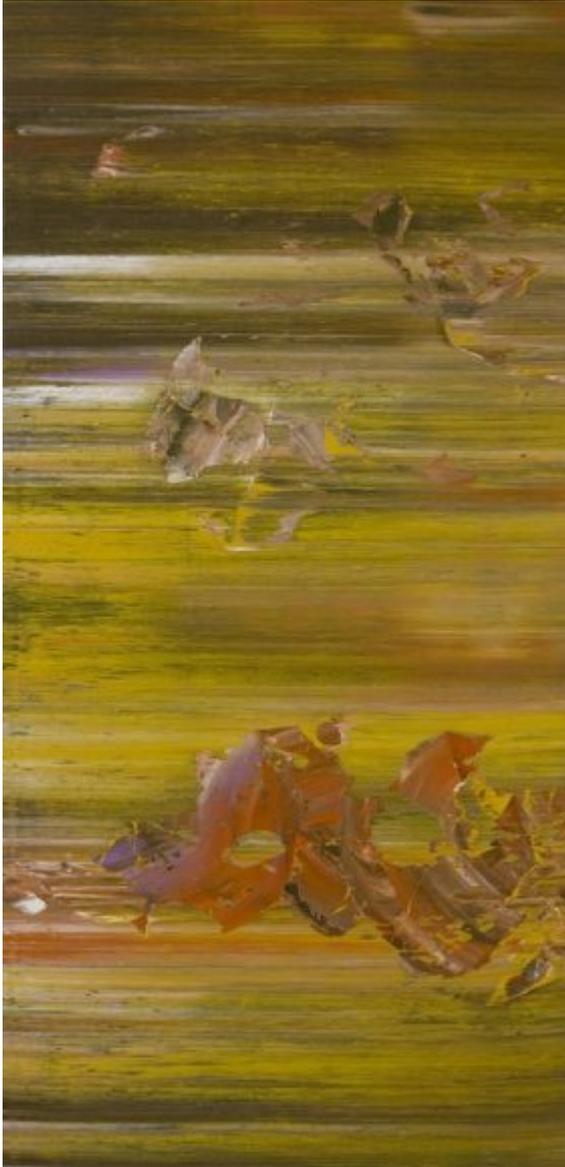
Jim Nutt



Jim Nutt, *It's a Long Way Down* (1971) © Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC/Art Resource, N.Y. © Jim Nutt, courtesy of David Nolan Gallery

In the 1960s and 1970s, when art focused on formal issues ruled the day, the work of figurative and often deliberately folkish art of American regionalists was respected but pushed to the margins of collecting. It is so easy to confuse the work of Nutt, one of the famous Chicago “[Hairy Who](#)” with cartoonery. But his paintings have the luminous magnetism of religious icons and of the work made by Medieval and Early Renaissance manuscript illuminators who were the architects of Western painting.

Jack Whitten



Jack Whitten, *Chinese Doorway* (1974), courtesy of Private Collection, Chicago

The abstract painting of the 1970s by African-American artist [Jack Whitten](#) do not suggest that part of his artistic roots in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. In the 1970s, his work may have got somewhat lost in the sea of what was then the very popular territory of post-Minimalist painting. But today these works can be seen to have addressed complex issues of painting that [Gerhard Richter](#) would later be credited with having pioneered.

Gino de Dominicis



Gino de Dominicis, *Calamita Cosmica* (1990). Photo credit: Alberto Pellaschi/Associated Press

[Gino de Dominicis](#) was the one younger artist whom the giants of what became known as Italian Arte Povera revered. He refused to be pinned down as an artist, exhibiting infrequently and somewhat eccentrically, never permitting images of his work to be reproduced or books to be published. His embrace of non-conformist attitudes reached such notoriety that even his early death in 1998 was met with [suspicion](#) and uncertainty. Most of his work resides in a few collections in Italy and it is only in the past few years that we have even been able to view exhibitions and publications of his art.

Troy Brauntuch



Troy Brauntuch, *Untitled (Officers)* (1982). Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York

With the emergence of a new art market in the 1980s, much of which grew around the artists of the so-called “[Pictures Generation](#)”, no artist was more revered by his peers than [Troy Brauntuch](#). And yet, as his contemporaries went on to gain in popularity and success, Brauntuch retreated. His potent paintings of images that are often intentionally difficult to see — sometimes light chalk on dark paper, or faint or dark paint on black canvas — both embody the spirit of that moment and its embrace of controversial images taken from popular culture, and have a timeless mastery that may send you as far back as Vélazquez for affinity of touch.

Carroll Dunham



Carroll Dunham, *Late Trees #6* (2012) © Carroll Dunham. Image courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

Though hardly unknown or disrespected (he has influenced entire generations of younger artists), I think of [Dunham](#) as the [Cy Twombly](#) and later [Philip Guston](#) of our times. Yet his market has so much room to grow. Few artists of recent decades have permitted themselves both the gestural freedom and restraint of Dunham, or get to the psychological truthfulness of what it means to be living through this moment in history, whether it is with concerns about the planet, the self, ageing or desire.

Maureen Gallace

At first, I didn't care much for the work of [Maureen Gallace](#), finding it too traditional in subject matter for my taste. I became impatient with its repetition of image, scale and palette. Then, one day, I had time to kill and found myself looking at an exhibition of her work with less haste than I otherwise might. It started to speak to me in a different way: in its repetitiveness, I found a [Morandi](#) or an [Agnes Martin](#)—an artist making what looked like the same work, but rediscovering with each new canvas a relationship of forms, perception and experience, paint and space. The repetition became a comforting means of endless engagement and reinvention.

Now, I see Gallace as the [Robert Ryman](#) of her time: a magnificent master of the brush who paints in a narrow language while engaging in an infinite re-examination of what painting is. I own three works of hers and often find myself wanting more.

Gallace doesn't make a lot of work. While much of it looks like casually gestural "plein-air" painting, each canvas is the result of extensive examination, planning and decision-making. She is one of those artists whose fans recognize as profound and undervalued, and whose market is set, at some point, for a rise. In a period where painting abounds, I nevertheless find myself getting freshly lost in her works again and again.



Maureen Gallace, *Ice Storm, Easton (with Robert)* (2015). Photo credit: 303 Gallery