



*Untitled*, 2020  
Leaves, photo collage, acrylic and  
resin on panel  
48 x 48 in  
121.9 x 121.9 cm

48 WALKER ST | OCT 23 - NOV 21, 2020

# Fred Tomaselli

James Cohan is pleased to present an exhibition of new works by Fred Tomaselli, on view from October 23 through November 21 at 48 Walker Street. This is the artist's sixth solo exhibition with James Cohan and his first major presentation of new paintings in New York since 2014. The gallery will host an all-day, limited-capacity opening reception with the artist on Saturday, October 24 that adheres to state COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Since the early 1990's, Fred Tomaselli has created multimedia paintings which explode in mesmerizing and hallucinatory patterns. Their various components—organic matter from his garden, collaged elements from printed sources, and hand-painted fauna and ornament—are all suspended in layers of clear, polished resin. There is always a suggestion of transformation in the materials encapsulated in resin, creating a tension between the dynamism of the image and the stasis of its medium.

The eight new paintings on view in this exhibition represent the first major body of work to marry Tomaselli's resin paintings with his ongoing *New York Times* collages. Tomaselli's interest in newsprint as material has become an extended exploration into the power of news media to shape and reshape our perceptions of reality. Conceptually, these fragments of media are similar to the psychoactive and psychedelic drugs he terms "reality modification devices," which were prevalent in his work throughout the 1990's and noticeably absent from this recent work. Tomaselli has traded one sort of buzz for another, replacing pills with text and headlines pulled directly from *The New York Times*.

In Tomaselli's abstract compositions, text is given formal rather than narrative weight, functioning both as a relentless hum in the background and an existential interruption into the artist's universe. In *Untitled*, 2018, collaged lines of text from the *Times* are incorporated into a kaleidoscopic central composition that suggests a molecular chemical reaction, an interstellar explosion, or a microscopic view into another ecosystem. In other works, the incorporation of headlines from the *Times* are utilized to create moments of absurdist narrative and passages of Burroughs-esque cut-up poetry. Arcing lines of text read "Three decades of economic growth and social change have transformed attitudes of love" and "an impeachment hearing on Jordan sneakers."

While Tomaselli's landscapes capture the idyllic allure of nature, the real world always finds a way into the picture. In the largest work in the exhibition, a lifeless bird rests upon a field of blooming flowers, its body built up entirely of clippings of plastic containers. Swirling upwards from the bird are interlocking spirals of collaged eyes, hands, newsprint, leaves, and hand-painted bullseyes. One collaged headline simply reads "Heart Trouble." In another painting, we see flames lapping at the lower edge of the spiraling composition, a reference to the wildfires that continue to ravage regions across the globe. Several other paintings in this exhibition touch more explicitly upon issues of climate crises and extinction, depicting the beauty of nature under threat.

*Cloud*, 2019, calls to mind the artist's early paintings of utopian landscapes. The low, broiling clouds create a feeling of foreboding, yet this cloud, in contemporary vernacular, calls to mind the digital cloud—a formless repository for personal data and collective knowledge. The banners of newsprint emanating out from the central cloud are a visual gesture, akin to rays of light piercing through the sky, while simultaneously evoking the proliferation of news and media into our lives.

There are fourteen new *New York Times* collages in this exhibition. Since 2005, Tomaselli has engaged in an ongoing body of works on paper that transforms the front page of *The New York Times* with gouache and collage. Like his resin paintings—with which they have become increasingly intertwined—the *Times* collages are the product of a friction between the escapist impulse of artmaking and the crises of the world beyond the studio walls. In March of this year, while in quarantine, Tomaselli once again turned to the covers of *The New York Times* to create a new body of work that attempts to grapple with the enormity of the moment. The surreal compositions are ruminations on the absurdity of news cycles and provide the artist a space to respond to a variety of issues, from regional political squabbles to a global pandemic. As Tomaselli notes, "I think that maybe the *Times* collages are quietly political, in that I can riff on anything I want, while the horrors of the world become the background buzz. Maybe I'm saying that the world may be going to hell, but I still keep painting."

Fred Tomaselli (born 1956, Santa Monica, CA) has been the subject of solo exhibitions at institutions including the Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE (2019); Oceanside Museum of Art, Oceanside, CA (2018); Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH (2016); Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (2014) and the University of Michigan Museum of Art (2014); a survey exhibition at Aspen Art Museum (2009) that toured to Tang Museum in Sarasota, NY and the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn NY (2010); The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (2004) toured to four venues in Europe and the US; Albright-Knox Gallery of Art (2003); Site Santa Fe (2001); Palm Beach ICA (2001), and Whitney Museum of American Art (1999). His works have been included in international biennial exhibitions including Sydney (2010); Prospect 1 (2008); Site Santa Fe (2004); Whitney (2004) and others. Tomaselli's work can be found in the public collections of institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art; Whitney Museum of American Art; Metropolitan Museum of Art; Brooklyn Museum; Albright Knox Art Gallery; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and many others.

Tina Rivers Ryan, Ph.D., Assistant Curator at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, has written an essay, "High Times," to accompany the exhibition.

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