



# 1001 PAINTINGS

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WITH A PREFACE BY  
GEOFF DYER

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## Prada—Great Criticism | Wang Guangyi

2005 | oil on canvas | 63 x 63 in / 160 x 160 cm | Chinese Contemporary Gallery, London, UK

Following the events surrounding Tiananmen Square in 1989, and the controversial closure of the China/Avant-Garde exhibition at the National Art Gallery in Beijing, a new artistic movement arose in China—Political Pop—of which Wang Guangyi (b.1956) was a leading proponent. Wang and his contemporaries take visual propaganda from the Cultural Revolution and rework them in the flat, colorful style of American Pop art. The Maoist regime dominated visual culture and artistic production in China from 1949 to 1976, but since the mid-1990s, China's economic system has opened up to the global marketplace. In response, Wang sets Maoist imagery against the new visual regime of commercial advertising and branding, a juxtaposition that he terms "anatomic structuralism."

The original context of the images is, of course, lost in the process, and as a result they become somewhat absurd. In *Prada*, three men represent the industrial laborer, a soldier in the People's Liberation Army, and a farmer—examples of the defiant proletariat uttering a resounding "No!" The Italian fashion brand Prada dominates the image, placed off-center; the scattered numbers recall confetti at political parades, or perhaps sales figures. Some critics find fault with Wang for manipulating propaganda imagery without also adequately subverting its meaning. But pop culture has never claimed to be more than superficial and commercial. Lending a unique cultural perspective to contemporary art, Wang translates cultural globalism by reading its most dominant signs. **SWW**



## The End of Madame Gardenia | Jacques Monory

1964 | oil on canvas, wood, plexiglass | 110 x 126 in / 280 x 320 cm | Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau, France

Jacques Monory (b.1944) worked for ten years as an art director in Paris, which helped to form his highly charged, graphic style of painting. He experimented with color photography collages, lithographs, and 16mm films before creating a series of paintings in the early 1960s that defined his cold, figurative narratives. Despite his cruel, modern themes—often featuring guns and other symbols of power—his images, rendered with a disturbingly commercial cleanliness, are pleasing overall. His figures are juxtaposed against a playful color scheme that verges on technicolor, recalling the vivid scale of early polaroids or film chemicals. *The End of Madame Gardenia* is dominated by the eponymous flower, known for its sweet, heady perfume. Its errant, pink petals resemble drops of

blood or falling tears. A woman's black-and-white image, charged with perfection as if taken from a contemporary fashion magazine, is cracked in pieces like shrapnel, suggesting a breach of sanity. With the city architecture behind her, she symbolizes the European lady—refined, beautiful, but often fractured by loneliness. A gun on the table suggests suicide and the black dots scattered across the painting look like bullet holes. The well-kept, ideal French wife, as presented in Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, has her neurosis deconstructed into a basic, bold palette of white, pink, and black. With the visual vocabulary of his American Pop art contemporaries, Monory creates a mythology of the everyday, evoking characters that are both everyone and no one. **SWW**



## Gears | James Rosenquist

1977 | oil on canvas | Private collection

Created between the sexual revolution of the early 1970s and the conspicuous consumption of the 1980s, *Gears* confirms James Rosenquist's (b.1933) ability to represent the modern consumer mind in its vividly stimulated fragments. Since his early comparison to Lichtenstein and Warhol, Rosenquist appropriates the visual language of advertising and pop culture in his collage-based paintings. A commercial billboard artist by training, Rosenquist is intrigued by large-scale fragments of everyday objects, using them to comment on material plentitude, cultural narcissism, and sexually charged commercial media. Rosenquist's use of size and color conveys, above all, intelligence and humor. If there were ever an atomic war, Rosenquist once said, he

would really have a great view being blasted off a signboard in Times Square, New York. *Gears* is sexually charged, with stereotypically masculine machinery on the left, feminine pearls on the right, with the central, governing gear controlled by one of the penetrating red lipsticks. These lipsticks, open and ready for application, come out of an icy background—a color scheme of commercial product lighting in industrial blues, cool metals, and severe reds. Rosenquist is a dynamic conversationalist using color, shape, and popular culture. He abstracts common consumer culture to uncommonly large sizes, articulating the modern visual reality of disparate images in constant flux, and the modern creative impulse to consume in order to understand. **SWW**