



Feeling the smooth lines and rough textures of his thickly layered canvases, the act of viewing New York-based artist Guy Stanley Philoche's art is an active, participatory and multisensory experience. From his renowned abstract *Untitled* series to his nostalgic *Game* series and his political *No Comment* series, Philoche encourages viewers to physically touch his work, varnishing the surface of his paintings in anticipation of the caress of the viewers' hands.

Exploring his drive to make "work that really connects with people," I visited Philoche's Upper East Side studio where Philoche introduced me to his three distinct series, encouraging me to stroke the works themselves. Not only filled with his own art, Philoche's studio walls are also covered with an assortment of other artists' paintings, showing Philoche's commitment to buying a painting from one of his contemporaries whenever he sells a work. Spending a chilly winter afternoon in his studio, I spoke with Philoche on the tactility of his paintings, the concepts behind his series and the best present he ever received.

ALL HANDS ON THE CANVAS

Guy Stanley Philoche

Born in Haiti and raised in Connecticut, Philoche expressed interest in art since his childhood, a departure from his largely sports-oriented family. Related to his early artistic curiosity, Philoche's creation of tactile paintings originated from a youthful museum visit. "Seeing Pollock, Rothko and the Old Masters for the first time, I wanted to touch them," remembers Philoche. "The guard said, 'You can't touch that.' I thought, 'I'm going to make art you can touch. I'll show you guys!'"

by Emily Colucci

For Philoche, the ability to touch his paintings builds a stronger and more significant connection with the viewer. Philoche observes, "People come to my openings and say, 'We get to touch the work? Wow!' It feels so dangerous like they're breaking the law. I love seeing them laughing."



(previous) **Aubrey W.**
mixed media on canvas
72 x 60in.

(left) **Chinese Checkers with
Checkers Sculpture**
mixed media on canvas
60 x 48in.

(facing page top) **Monopoly, Car
with Car Sculpture**
mixed media on canvas
36 x 36in.

(facing page bottom) **Monopoly,
Scottie Dog with Dog Sculpture**
mixed media on canvas
48 x 48in.

Despite the consistent physicality of his paintings, as well as his recognizable strong black lines, Philoche's three series present remarkably different subjects and styles, exposing his frequent artistic experimentation. Discussing his continuous evolution, Philoche considers, "I realize, as an artist, it's good to evolve and experiment. Sometimes it's a hit-or-miss, but that is ok. I've been lucky and blessed with collectors who allow me to grow."

Perhaps Philoche's most well-known body of work is his extensive *Untitled* series, notable for its juxtaposition of a strict composition with evocative color combinations. Starting the *Untitled* series while a student, Philoche reveals the series developed after a class assignment. "I took an abstract course, which I didn't take that seriously. The professor said, 'We're going to take an object and break it down to its simplest form. Think hard about it.' I didn't think that

hard about it. The next day, I forgot my object so I ran into my car and found rosary beads my parents got me when I graduated high school. I just kept breaking down the cross."

While earlier works feature more obvious references to Jesus on the cross, Philoche continued to further abstract his paintings. Despite their compositional similarities, the *Untitled* series represents a wide range of affects through his deft use of color, which he mixes directly on the canvas. "Even though the composition is the same, each painting still has a different feel, element and emotion to it. I only paint at night and especially these are very emotionally driven," says Philoche.

Taking a hiatus from his *Untitled* series, Philoche began working on his joyful *Game* series, painting segments of classic board games including Monopoly, Risk and Candyland. Inspired by a reminiscing conversation with his brother, Philoche explains,

"Growing up, we had game nights on Sunday nights. Both my parents worked and the weekends were the time when we sat as a family and communicated. We just got around the table and would play board games, making side deals and bonding as a family." After completing the first *Game* painting for his brother, Philoche realized many viewers had a similar nostalgic link to games including a collector who told Philoche that 'Operation' made him become a doctor."

In addition, Philoche also pairs corresponding sculptural game pieces with the paintings. Asked what he sees as the significance of the sculptures, Philoche responds, "I think it ties everything together. As a painter, I wasn't into sculpture. That wasn't my forte. It wasn't until my artist friend got me to appreciate sculpture. A spark ignited and I thought, 'That's what's missing.'"

Philoche's third series *No Comment* – recently shown at the Castle Fitzjohns Gallery – strives to assert a powerful statement against sexism through monumental nude portraits. With an actual piece of duct tape placed on their erased faces, Philoche discloses the subjects are "women I met through the years in New York who had high profile jobs and feel they can't get ahead because they are women." For example, one painting depicts Andrea, who, as Philoche details, "went to Harvard for business, graduated at the top of her class, worked at one of the biggest hedge funds in New York but she never made partner because she's not part of the boys' club."

Not only fighting inequality through art, Philoche is also an active philanthropist with a passion for maintaining school arts programs. Philoche states, "Is dribbling a ball more important than learning color theory? Of course not. Not everyone's going to make it into the NBA, but also not everyone is going to be a doctor or a lawyer. Other people are meant for other great things. I try to



do as much as I can for art programs and for kids."

Crediting art for saving his life, Philoche recalls a present from his high school art teacher that influenced his own drive for artistic success. He reflects, "It's just a simple

paintbrush with a note that said, 'With this brush, if you stay focused, it'll show you the world.' Ever since then, I thought, 'Let's see what my abilities can do.' I've traveled the world and met interesting people because of art. Therefore, I have to give back and be involved."