

SOTHEBY'S TO OFFER

MAURIZIO CATTELAN

COMEDIAN

THE INFAMOUS SENSATION THAT TOOK THE WORLD BY STORM
UNVEILED AT ART BASEL MIAMI BEACH IN 2019

Highlighting The Now and Contemporary Evening Auction this November
With Estimate of \$1–1.5 Million in Auction Debut



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Returning to New York for Public Exhibition from 8-20 November

“ The most influential and radical artworks of the last century have had the power to fundamentally shift perceptions around the nature of art itself. In this spirit, *Comedian* is a defiant work of pure genius. Balancing profound critical thought and subversive wit, this is a defining work for the artist and for our generation. With a single brilliant gesture, Cattelan rocked the foundations of the art world, and brought art to the center of mainstream popular culture. If at its core, *Comedian* questions the very notion of the value of art, then putting the work at auction this November will be the ultimate realization of its essential conceptual idea - the public will finally have a say in deciding its true value.

Whatever your take on it, you won't want to miss the sensation of the season.

DAVID GALPERIN, SOTHEBY'S HEAD OF CONTEMPORARY ART, AMERICAS

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NEW YORK, 25 OCTOBER 2024 - In December 2019, Maurizio Cattelan's *Comedian* captivated the world in its debut at Art Basel Miami Beach. Comprised of a banana fastened with duct tape to a wall, the artwork quickly erupted into a viral global sensation that left a lasting impact on the contemporary cultural consciousness. Its initial appearance drew record crowds, divided viewers and critics alike, and caused such pandemonium that it had to be removed from the premises before the end of the fair. Widely venerated, and hotly contested – and eaten not only once, but twice – the work headlined news stories shared around the world. Skyrocketing to art historical infamy and universal recognition in an instant, no other artwork from the twenty-first century has provoked controversy, sparked imagination, and upended the very definition of contemporary art like Cattelan's *Comedian*.

Estimated at \$1-1.5 million, Sotheby's will offer *Comedian* at auction for the first time as a highlight of The Now and Contemporary Evening Auction this November in New York. The work will take to the global stage, kicking off with a one-day exhibition this Monday, 28 October in New York, followed by a world tour including London, Paris, Milan, Hong Kong, Dubai, Taipei, Tokyo, and Los Angeles, before returning to New York for exhibition ahead of the auction on 20 November.

Comedian sits within an art historical legacy of conceptually audacious masterworks that redefined what art could be: from Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, a readymade porcelain urinal turned over, mounted

on a pedestal, and signed with a pseudonym in 1917; to Robert Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing* of 1953, when one legendary artist defaced the work of another to destabilize notions of artistic originality; to Damien Hirst's formaldehyde-pickled shark in 1991; through to Banksy's *Love is in the Bin*, which famously shredded after being sold in Sotheby's salesroom in 2018, and thus created a new artwork in real time. These revolutionary works shared in a spirit of iconoclastic pranksterism that provoked audiences to question the meaning of art, from within the very systems that enable their creation and reception. Reflecting on the conceptual underpinnings of *Comedian*, in an interview with *The Art Newspaper*, Cattelan said: "To me, *Comedian* was not a joke; it was a sincere commentary and a reflection on what we value. At art fairs, speed and business reign, so I saw it like this: if I had to be at a fair, I could sell a banana like others sell their paintings. I could play within the system, but with my rules."¹ Cattelan exploits the ideal of the heroic artist, interrogating viewer's beliefs about art with deadpan honesty.

Following its unveiling in 2019, *Comedian* landed firmly at the center of the cultural zeitgeist – the ubiquitous tape-strapped banana featured on the cover of *The New York Post* and became an inescapable media phenomenon. Conceived in an edition of three plus two artist proofs, one example is held in the collection of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

¹ Maurizio Cattelan: 'Life is often tragic and comedic at the same time', *The Art Newspaper*, 30 November 2021

COMEDIAN



In his greatest coup to date, Cattelan's *Comedian* single handedly prompted the world to reconsider how we define art. We may be in on Cattelan's joke, but *Comedian* is anything but.

Literally and metaphorically holding the mirror to the face of contemporary art, *Comedian's* origins can be traced back to the Duchampian readymade, which decentered craft, rarity, and technical mastery in favor of the conceptual value assigned by the artist. Just as Duchamp turned a urinal into a landmark work of modern art through boldly signing the readymade with a pseudonym 'R. Mutt', Cattelan brings the banal into the extraordinary by leveraging the systems of art's display and reception. Through its presentation and context, Cattelan elevates the everyday object to the realm of art, following in the footsteps of Dada and Warhol, for whom the idea, or concept, was of paramount importance – more important than the process of creation.

In many ways, *Comedian's* title is a self-portrait of this notorious *enfant terrible*: a masterpiece achieved only by means of provocation, humor, and desecration. Cattelan utilizes humor to probe the distinction between art and life through a distinctly Pop sensibility. The artist remarked to The Art Newspaper: "When art makes us feel something and puts us in a position of discomfort, that's when it has an impact."² He lays bare what has always been in front of us, an idea presented in his retrospective *Maurizio Cattelan: All at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York*, which the artist promoted with the unrealized promise of his retirement upon the exhibition's opening. His works hung suspended from the rotunda, in a testament to the strategy of suspension which has remained paramount in his *oeuvre*. When Cattelan unveiled *Comedian* – his first work for a fair in fifteen years – he made his re-entrée with something so decisively unextraordinary that it allowed him to distill the 30-year-old aims of his artistic output: a banana taped to a wall using duct tape, a medium he first deployed in *A Perfect Day* from 1999, which strapped his dealer Massimo De Carlo to a wall. For the ways that his work both pleases and discomforts us, he is as much a tragedian as he is the eponymous comedian.

² Maurizio Cattelan: 'Life is often tragic and comedic at the same time', The Art Newspaper, 30 November 2021

MAURIZIO CATTELAN

Maurizio Cattelan is among Contemporary Art's most brilliant provocateurs. He has persistently disrupted the art world's status quo in meaningful, irreverent, and often controversial ways. Cattelan's post-Duchampian penchant for the absurd is apparent in his critiques of social and cultural norms, executed through a wide variety of media from sculpture and taxidermy to performance and curatorial endeavors. Describing his work, curator Nancy Spector has written: "It is aspirational yet ironic; comical yet critical; and elusive yet instantly accessible, given its pop sensibility. Like a seasoned outlaw, Cattelan navigates a fine line between what is socially and culturally acceptable and what is not."³

Cattelan has exhibited widely throughout his career, including solo shows at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1998), Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (2000), Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles (2003), Musée du Louvre in Paris (2004) and the Menil Collection in Houston (2010). In 2011, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York mounted a major retrospective of his work, titled *All*. Cattelan has also participated in numerous contemporary art fairs including the Venice Biennale (1993, 1997, 1999, 2002 and 2011) and Whitney Biennial (2004).

The artist's auction record was set in 2016 when *Him* sold for \$17.2 million.

TRAVELING EXHIBITION DATES

New York	28 October	Dubai	4 November
London	29 October	Taipei	5 November
Paris	30 October	Tokyo	6 November
Milan	31 October	Los Angeles	7 November
Hong Kong	1 November	New York	8 — 20 November

#ComedianWorldTour

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*Estimates do not include buyer's premium or overhead premium. Prices achieved include the hammer price plus buyer's premium and overhead premium and are net of any fees paid to the purchaser where the purchaser provided an irrevocable bid.

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