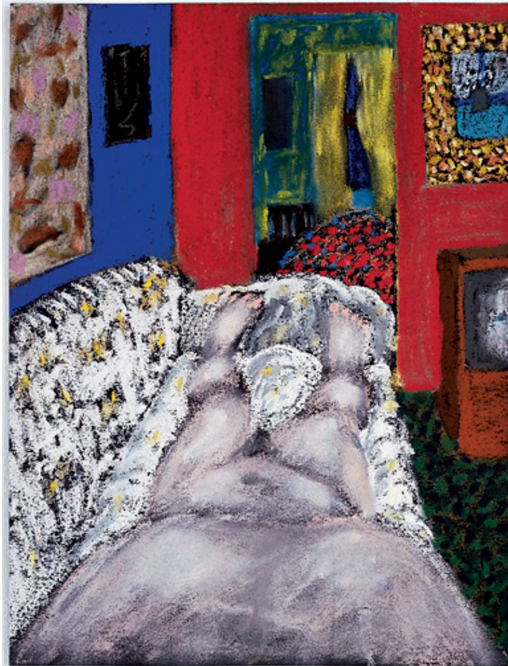




## **Lucas Samaras: Chalk and Bronze**

January 24 – April 12, 2025



Lucas Samaras, *Untitled*, July 17, 1962 © Lucas Samaras, courtesy Pace Gallery.

**New York, NY – January 21, 2025** – 125 Newbury is proud to present *Lucas Samaras: Chalk and Bronze*, an exhibition of two distinct yet related bodies of work by the Greek-born American artist, a pivotal figure in the New York avant-garde. This presentation brings a selection of more than two-dozen vibrant, never-before-seen pastels from the 1960s into dialogue with a suite of figurative bronze sculptures that Samaras created in the early 1980s.

Samaras began employing pastels at a young age, partly as a means of communication. After his family emigrated from Greece to the United States during the 1940s to escape the country's brutal civil war, Samaras, who spoke no English upon his arrival in America, saw pastels as an outlet for his inner world. "Art was the only thing I could do without speaking," the artist explained in an interview, "They just gave me paper and pastels and I drew." He carried this interest through high school and college, studying under the influential artists Allan Kaprow and George and Helen Segal at Rutgers University.

Known for his critical role in the Happenings movement of the late 1950s, his enigmatic sculptural boxes and chairs, and his expansive and protean photographic practice, Samaras's comparatively lesser-known work in pastel was nevertheless integral to his practice. "One might say that the pastels are the foundation of Samaras's work," explains Arne Glimcher, curator of the exhibition and the artist's friend and dealer for over 50 years, "It was in pastel that he invented not only his palette, but himself." Samaras first exhibited his pastels at New York's Green Gallery in the early 1960s. More recently, these works were the subject of a major 2016 exhibition at The Morgan Library.



The selection of pastels included in this exhibition reflects Samaras's deep interest in the lurid, almost vulgarly chromatic possibilities—and the powdery materiality—of the medium. Many of the works consist of self-portraits, where faces or body parts appear fragmented or contorted, rendered in stark contrast against monochromatic backgrounds. Elsewhere, the face merges with its prismatic surroundings, threatening the solidity of the body's border with the world.

Relentless and constantly shapeshifting in his pursuit of formal evolution, Samaras turned towards the medium of bronze on only a few occasions throughout his long career. In this suite of works created during the early 1980s, he explored concerns of flesh and figure through an almost alchemical treatment of metal. Like his early pastels, the bronzes evoke the softness of the body, improbably transmuting the hardness of metal into the tenderness of flesh. The resulting sculptures are among the only figurative images that Samaras created which are *not* self-portraits. Instead, they seem to speak to a more generalized notion of the human condition—what it might look or feel like to inhabit a body from the inside out, externalizing an otherwise inaccessible interiority. If the pastels embody meditations on a vibrant mode of life-turned-art, the bronzes represent their contorted doubles.

Small in scale but capacious in their emotional depth, Samaras's bronze figures offer visions of twisting or perhaps melting bodies. Often plated with silver or gold, they fold over and into themselves as flesh might. Figures recline alone or appear intertwined with one another. Moments of embrace reveal themselves in the murky shimmer of the metal. The boundaries between agony and ecstasy, between self and other, begin to dissolve.

Presented together for the first time since a 1982 exhibition at Pace Gallery, these two bodies of work feed into and inform one another. Together, they reflect the artist's unflinching exploration of what it felt like to inhabit his own body, both in the physical and psychic registers. As a pastel face dissolves into polychrome rays of light, a bronze body takes shape from its primordial ground, producing a sense of struggle that distills Samaras's lifelong investigation of the nature of selfhood and embodiment.

Eluding historical categorization, **Lucas Samaras's** (b. 1936, Kastoria, Macedonia, Greece; d. 2024, New York) oeuvre is united through its consistent focus on the body and psyche, often emphasizing autobiography. The themes of self-depiction, self-investigation, and identity were a driving force behind his practice, which, at its onset in the early 1960s, advanced the Surrealist idiom while proposing a radical departure from the presiding themes of Abstract Expressionism and Pop art. Samaras emigrated with his family from Greece to the United States in 1948 and attended Rutgers University, New Jersey studying under Allan Kaprow and George Segal, and then at Columbia University, New York, where he studied art history under Meyer Schapiro. During this time, he initiated painting self-portraits and gravitated toward the use of pastels, which enabled him to work quickly, exploring figurative and geometrical forms in rich colors and with luxuriant texture, characteristics that would reoccur throughout his practice. He soon shifted toward objects, producing assemblage reliefs and boxes comprised of elements culled from his immediate surroundings and five-and-dime stores—cutlery, nails, mirrors, brightly colored yarn, and feathers—affixed with liquid aluminum or plaster. Gesturing toward a larger investigation of (self) reflection in his work found in his early mirror rooms, self-portraiture, and



more recent use of digital mirror-imaging, Samaras's oeuvre acts as an extension of his body while underscoring the transformative possibilities of the everyday—a true blurring of art and life.

In 1969, Samaras began to expand upon his use of photography, experimenting with a Polaroid 360 camera, which appealed to his sense of immediacy. His innovation further materialized with his use of the Polaroid SX-70 in 1973 in a melding of self-portraiture and abstraction, created by manipulating the wet-dye emulsions with a stylus or fingertip before the chemicals set. This process progressed with digital art in 1996 when he obtained his first computer and began to experiment with printed texts on typewriter paper. By 2002, he had acquired a digital camera and the use of Photoshop became an integral component of his practice. These technologies gave way to Photofictions (2003), a series characterized by distorted self-portraits and psychedelic compositions.

#### **ABOUT 125 NEWBURY**

125 Newbury is a project space in New York City helmed by Arne Glimcher, Founder and Chairman of Pace Gallery. Named for the original location of Pace, which Glimcher opened at 125 Newbury Street in Boston in 1960, the venture is located at 395 Broadway in Manhattan's Tribeca neighborhood, at the corner of Walker Street. Occupying a 3,900-square-foot ground-floor space in a landmark building with 17-foot ceilings, the interior of 125 Newbury has been fully renovated by Enrico Bonetti and Dominic Kozerski of Bonetti/Kozerski Architecture.

Guided by Glimcher's six decades of pioneering exhibition-making and steadfast commitment to close collaboration with artists, 125 Newbury presents up to five exhibitions per year, with a focus on both thematic group shows as well as solo exhibitions by emerging, established, and historical artists. The 125 Newbury team is led by directors Arne Glimcher, Kathleen McDonnell, Talia Rosen, and Oliver Shultz, who work together to develop cutting-edge and thought-provoking exhibitions that reflect a global, cross-generational perspective.

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