

Jo Baer

*The Risen (1960–61/2019)*

*Originals (1975–2020)*

November 6 – December 19, 2020  
540 West 25th Street  
New York, NY

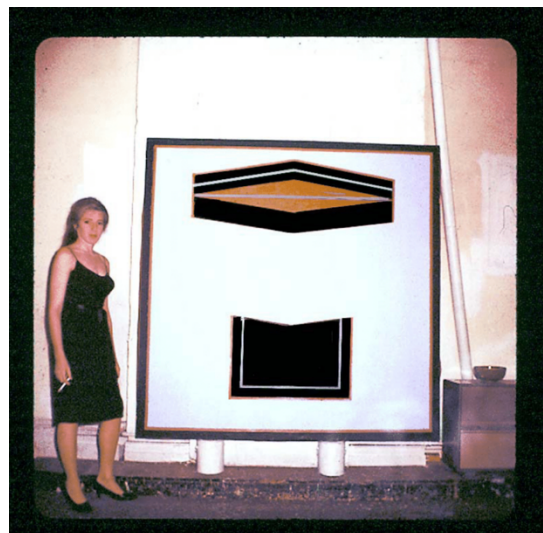


Top to bottom: Jo Baer, *The Risen (Wink)*, 1960–61/2019 © Jo Baer, courtesy Pace Gallery; Jo Baer, *Dusk (Bands and End-Points)*, 2012 © Jo Baer, courtesy Pace Gallery

Pace Gallery is pleased to present two concurrent exhibitions of work by pioneering American painter Jo Baer (b. 1929, Seattle), on view from November 6 – December 19, 2020 at the gallery's location at 540 West 25th Street in New York. *Jo Baer: The Risen* will feature five of Baer's *Risen* works, unprecedented Minimalist paintings originally created in 1960 and 1961 that were subsequently destroyed and then remade by the artist in 2019 from archival images. *Jo Baer: Originals* brings together twelve works from 1975 through the present that reflect the artist's departure from Minimalism towards a new, image-based aesthetic in her practice. Spanning nearly five decades, this presentation is the first time a survey of Baer's image-based work has been exhibited in the U.S. Together, these exhibitions offer an overarching look at Baer's prolific career that continues to defy categorization and has significantly influenced a younger generation of artists.

For over five decades, Baer has relentlessly investigated the problems intrinsic to modern painting, pushing its formal and experiential possibilities in new and radical directions. In the 1960s and 70s, her groundbreaking hard-edge paintings were included in many landmark exhibitions of New York Minimalism, including MoMA's movement defining exhibition *Primary Structures*, alongside works by her largely male

peers, including Sol LeWitt, Frank Stella, and Robert Mangold, among others. Following an exhibition of her work at the Whitney Museum of Art in 1975, Baer distanced herself from the styles and precepts of the movement, feeling it was no longer relevant and critiquing the stance of leading Minimalist artists, such as Donald Judd and Robert Morris, in various published texts. In Baer's words: "In the late 60s and 70s the vocabulary on which abstract art depended was destroyed. We lost our common language; we no longer shared one language that people understood. And once that happened, you had to go look for another language." Shortly after her exhibition at the Whitney Museum, Baer relocated permanently to Europe in 1975 and began to explore new approaches to painting.



Jo Baer with *The Risen (Wink)*, 1960–61

*Jo Baer: The Risen*—on view on the 7th floor of Pace's West 25th Street building—features the artist's reprise of abstract canvases first conceived in the 1960s. These monumental geometric paintings in bold, contrasting colors were some of the first paintings Baer created in her early career and were radically different from the works of Abstract Expressionist and Minimalist painters working in New York in 1960 and 1961. Concerned that the world was not "ready" for these paintings, they were consequently destroyed by the artist. Before doing so, however, Baer posed confidently with each of the paintings in a series of photographs—a performative act that secured their afterlife in another time. Using these images in her archive, Baer began to revisit her earlier ideas of form and color and in 2019 was inspired to reconstruct her first paintings, effectively reawakening this body of work and titling the series *The Risen*. For Baer, while her earlier abstract works appear to be in opposition with her image-based works, they also offer a trajectory from which to map an aesthetic and technical exploration of painting over time, particularly in her approach to light, perception and color. Revisiting her first abstract paintings, while continuing to create new image-based works, embodies the artist's essential and perpetual dedication to her medium, aligning her past and present practices.

*Jo Baer: Originals*—on view in the 3rd floor galleries at West 25th Street—demonstrates the artist's uncompromising exploration of iconography, images, and abstraction in painting. The earliest painting in *Originals*, *The Old Year* (1974–75), marks the artist's earliest experimentation with figuration and image-based painting. The work was started in New York but finished in Ireland, and also coincides with Baer's permanent departure from the United States as well as critical transition from Minimalism. Baer's search for something new brought her to "radical figuration," a term she coined in her now famous letter to *Art in America*, declaring that she was "no longer an abstract artist." The term—which the artist has since moved away from—describes a midway point between abstraction and figuration in which she could utilize partial, edited, or layered images (both found and created) to generate space for a new language within painting.

For Baer, this sense of radicality originated in her approach to creating relationships between images, while not allowing a single image to dominate the space.

After relocating to Europe in 1975, where she first lived in Ireland and London before settling in Amsterdam, where she currently works and lives, Baer developed a new aesthetic grounded in images, text, and prehistoric signs that combined the new, the old, and the mythical, opening painting to the long history of civilization. During the nine years she spent living in Smarmore Castle, County Louth in Ireland, Baer became fascinated by the region's Neolithic history and its connections to the development of human civilization throughout the globe. Viewing painting as a continuously evolving tradition that cannot be easily broken down into neat stylistic and periodic categories, Baer finds as much inspiration in cave paintings and ancient societies as in her own past work and contemporary culture. Highlights from this presentation include a body of work known as The Giants or the Ireland works which draw heavily on Baer's studies of Neolithic mounds and standing stones while incorporating modern art references from Cubism and Constructivism to her own early paintings.

The two most recent works in the exhibition, *Moonstruck Armageddon (Meditation, on Predators and Prey)* (2019–20) and *Snow-Laden Primeval (Meditations, on Log Phase and Decline rampant with Flatulent Cows and Carbon Cars)* (2020), employ a deep and rich color palette. As if tracing the evolution of the human species and our animalistic nature in a spiral composition of Minotaur forms, *Armageddon* asks "Why, at the End of Days, when the Messiah walks Among us and the Moon Turns Red with Blood, Will the Righteous have Animal Heads instead of Human?" In contrast, *Snow-Laden Primeval (Meditations, on Log Phase and Decline rampant with Flatulent Cows and Carbon Cars)* (2020) is dominated by a dark and sumptuous landscape. Great cliffs in blue and green and darker hues of reddish black tower above a diminutive woman on the white plane at the water's edge, arms open and crouching. These works point to themes of environmental, political, and human apocalypse that have emerged in earlier paintings (as in *The Old Lie: Dulce et Decorum Est ... Pro Patria Mori (Wilfred Owen)* (1997–98), also included in this show). However, these works also suggest an existential meditation on our role within the timespan of the Anthropocene, of human life and its relationship to the cosmos and the planet.

Accompanying the exhibition will be the premiere of director and producer Lisa Immordino Vreeland's short film on Jo Baer's career and life, originally commissioned by Art Agency, Partners. Lending nuanced insight into Baer's radical life and practice, the film will be screened alongside *Jo Baer: The Risen* on the 7th floor of the gallery for the duration of the presentation.

On the occasion of Baer's exhibition, Pace will publish *Up Close in the Land of the Giants*, a collection of Baer's writing that brings together a body of scholarly research that has been the foundation of the artist's thinking over the past two decades. Created as a deliberate sibling to Baer's 2013 exhibition book *In the Land of the Giants*, which was published on the occasion of Baer's eponymously titled dual exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam and the Ludwig Museum Cologne, this new volume echoes the 2013 book in layout and

design but offers readers a deeper look into the artist's own thinking on her image-based paintings and the reasons behind the sources she has chosen to reference in her compositions. The book is wide ranging in its subject matter and is organized in sections that move between analysis of specific series of paintings to chapters that delve into bodies of research from fields as diverse as anthropology and archaeology to astronomy and geography—all of which have informed Baer's work.

**Jo Baer** (b. 1929, Seattle) has engaged in an ongoing commitment to painting for over five decades. In the 1960s and 70s, she explored non-objectivity in her black and white hard-edge paintings as part of the New York Minimalist movement. She left New York for Europe in 1975, eventually settling in Amsterdam after years spent in Ireland and London. Through the course of her move to Europe, Baer's work shifted away from pure abstraction, gradually adding figural elements, text, images and symbols.

Baer has been the subject of one-artist exhibitions at institutions worldwide, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1975); Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, Netherlands (1978, 1986); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1986, 1999, 2013); the Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterloo, Netherlands (1993); the Dia Center for the Arts, New York (2002); Secession, Vienna (2008); Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2013); and Camden Arts Centre, London (2015).

Significant recent group exhibitions include Busan Biennale, Busan Museum of Art, Korea (2012); Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil (2014); *Selections from the Permanent Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2014); *Drawing Dialogues: Selections from the Sol LeWitt Collection*, The Drawing Center, New York (2016); Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art (2016); *Calder to Kelly*, Die amerikanische Sammlung, Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2017); *The Absent Museum*, WIELS, Brussels, Belgium (2017); and *Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2017).

Her works are part of numerous public collections, such as the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate Gallery, London; and the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main.

**Pace** is a leading contemporary art gallery representing many of the most significant international artists and estates of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Under the leadership of President and CEO Marc Glimcher, Pace is a vital force within the art world and plays a critical role in shaping the history, creation, and engagement with modern and contemporary art. Since its founding by Arne Glimcher in 1960, Pace has developed a distinguished legacy for vibrant and dedicated relationships with renowned artists. As the gallery enters its seventh decade, Pace's mission continues to be

inspired by a drive to support the world's most influential and innovative artists and to share their visionary work with people around the world.

Pace advances this mission through its dynamic global program, comprising ambitious exhibitions, artist projects, public installations, institutional collaborations, performances and interdisciplinary projects through Pace Live, and curatorial research and writing. Today, Pace has nine locations worldwide: two galleries in New York—including its newly opened headquarters at 540 West 25th Street, and an adjacent 8,000 sq. ft. exhibition space at 510 West 25th Street—as well as galleries in Palo Alto, London, Geneva, Hong Kong, and Seoul. In July 2020 Pace opened a temporary gallery space in East Hampton, New York that will be programmed through October 2021. Additionally, the gallery’s seasonal exhibition space in Palm Beach will be open from early November 2020 through spring 2021.

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