

EXPLORE THE PASTEL-POWERED, FANTASTICAL WORLD OF NICOLAS PARTY IN PHAIDON MONOGRAPH

by Natasha Gural



Nicolas Party 'Two Men With Hats' (2016). (pages 28-29). Soft pastel on linen, 150 x 170 cm. Mural: acrylic on wall. Installation view at The Dallas Museum of Art, 2016. Artwork © Nicolas Party.

Two androgynous figures with crimson lipstick and pastel eyeshadow gaze directly at the viewer. Both figures don wide-brimmed hats, one curled up at the edges. The figure on the left is in the forefront, clad in a simple yellow sweater, as if competing for attention with the brown sweater. Identical white cutaway collars peek out, directing our eyes to bounce between both figures.

Nicolas Party created *Two Men with Hats* (2016), a large-scale pastel on canvas, to accompany a site-specific mural commissioned by the Dallas Museum of Art. It was the Swiss-born artist's first solo museum exhibition in the United States, showcasing a forest landscape on the walls and ceiling of the DMA's Concourse.

The captivating work is among more than 200 images including a photograph of Party's studio, exhibition installation views, and previously unpublished pages from his sketchbooks, featured in the first comprehensive monograph to examine the 41-year-old artist's stunning career so far. The Phaidon book, which goes on sale February 16, is available for pre-order.

The richly illustrated survey includes an interview with Stéphane Aquin, director of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; a survey from the late artist, writer, and curator Stefan Banz, who co-founded the Kunsthalle Marcel Duchamp; insight into Party's depictions of *Purple Peaches* by Ali Subotnick, former curator at the Hammer Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles; and an exploration of Party's renewal of pastel by Melissa Hyde, associate professor of art history at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

Party reinvents traditional genres, marrying historical and contemporary techniques, and borrowing from David Hockney's graphic landscapes and the Fauvist celebration of intense color. His color-saturated landscapes, portraits, and still lifes

simultaneously pay homage to and subvert traditional painting.

The global art world has quickly embraced Party's often-fantastical innovation across genres and mediums. Last November, *Landscape*, a pastel on linen work that Party donated to benefit the New York City AIDS Memorial, fetched \$3.27 million, trouncing the estimate of between \$300,000 and \$500,000 at *Unquestioning Love*, part of Christie's 21st Century Evening Sale. The Phaidon monograph is an invaluable resource for exploring Party's prolific career to date, revealing the scope and depth of his mastery and whimsy.

Another site-specific commission challenges our perception of sunrises and sunsets, compelling us to reconsider our relationship with the environment, time, and space. The spectacular installation view of *Sunrise, Sunset (2017)* spans an inner-circle gallery at the Hirshhorn Museum And Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., augmenting the reinterpreted Surrealist experience of viewing this monumental mural.

Owls appear throughout René Magritte's oeuvre, notably his anthropomorphized portrait of the specialized predator, whose eyes and ears are equipped to locate prey. A dignified owl stands by a window perusing the green fields and smoking a pipe in *Le somnambule (1946)*. In 2018, the Magritte Museum in Brussels, Belgium, presented works by Party to create a dialogue between the two artists. Party's playful *Portrait With An Owl (2018)* builds on Magritte's provocative imagery, depicting a wide-eyed man in a white shirt, dark green suit jacket, and gold tie, eyes wide to mirror those of the owl perched on his head. Both human and bird appear almost hypnotized against the bold red background.

The front cover image, *Portrait with a Seahorse (2018)*, underscores Party's singular approach portraiture, which focuses on representation of people in painting, blurring reality and fiction. The seahorse signals non-binary or fluid gender, as males, rather than females, get pregnant and give birth to young.