

## Helen Frankenthaler

Knoedler & Company

This show, "East and Beyond," examined pioneering color-field painter Helen Frankenthaler's decades-long interest in Asian art and included a number of rarely exhibited works. It also provided a welcome opportunity to revisit her contributions to postwar American art. Spread out over three floors, the engrossing exhibition centered on 12 paintings and a number of woodcuts, ranging from the expected (Frankenthaler's "Tales of Genji" woodblock-print series, from 1998, titled after the eleventh-century Japanese novel) to the surprising (*Gateway*, 1988, a three-panel bronze folding screen).

There were moments in the show when the Asian inspiration appeared straightforward, most notably in the pairing of an Utagawa Hiroshige woodblock print, owned by Frankenthaler, with a 1981 canvas of her own, titled *For Hiroshige*. More often than not, however, the connection between Frankenthaler's work and Asian art was decidedly more oblique, merely hinted at in a flash of calligraphic brushwork or alluded to in a work's title.

The indirectness of some of these associations only served to strengthen our perception of a work like Frankenthaler's *Silent Wish* (1973), a sublimely beautiful canvas whose hypnotic sparseness could

be seen to evoke the vaporous, mist-shrouded landscape of an antique scroll painting or simply the expanse of creation itself. No matter the source or the inspiration, the haunting simplicity of that painting is a reminder of Frankenthaler's singular vision, and this exhibition offered a fresh perspective on her important innovations.

—Max Weintraub

## Tom Otterness

Marlborough

Titled "Animal Spirits," this exhibition consisted of more than 20 of Tom Otterness's quirky, endearing bronze sculptures of animals and doll-like men sitting or reclining on the floor, along with other works displayed on austere white plinths of varying heights. Each creature—whether pudgy bear, small man, cat, bird, or capybara—told its own story,



Tom Otterness, *Cash Cow*, 2010, bronze, 62" x 50" x 18". Marlborough.

most often a whimsical take on the vagaries of capitalism.

Otterness enjoys a large audience for his work, not simply because he manages to make metal appear cuddly, but also because his mini-fables are so accessible that they reward even those who feel they lack the tools to interpret an artwork. His *Cash Cow* (2010) is a nearly life-size, streamlined version of either an udderless cow or a Brahma bull in high heels. The charmingly beady-eyed beast is eating stylized dollar bills while a pile of coins appear below its hindquarters.

The stock market and our monetary system are the subjects of *Bear Riding Bull* (2011), a depiction of a hairless bear wearing a little nipple-like hat atop a Merrill Lynch-type bull, and *Bad Wolf* (2011), in which two homeless pigs stand helplessly as the proverbial third pig applies mortar to his brick home. But the large wolf encircling the tiny house is hard to miss; the mortgage papers in his pocket quickly clue us in to the ominous foreclosure unfolding.

The bronzes here varied greatly in size, and their finishes simultaneously absorbed and reflected light. Original sketches of the works, presumably those given to the fabricators of the sculptures, accompanied several of the pieces, illuminating the artist's process. Though the story being told might not always have a happy ending, Otterness, like an Aesop in a capitalist world, empathizes in his menagerie and delights in the telling of the tale.

—Doug McClemtont



Helen Frankenthaler, *For Hiroshige*, 1981, acrylic on canvas, 62½" x 92". Knoedler & Company.