

Christopher Wool: *See Stop Run*

By Richard Hell

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Installation view: *Christopher Wool: See Stop Run*, 101 Greenwich St., 2024. Courtesy Christopher Wool.

On View

101 Greenwich St.

See Stop Run

March 14–July 31, 2024

New York

You have to see this show.

When Christopher Wool's new exhibit opened in March the *Rail* published three reports on it by three separate writers. It got that coverage not only out of respect for him, but because the venue for this survey of what he's done since his 2013 Guggenheim retrospective is almost as interesting, both as a realization of Wool's sensibility and an idea about how to operate in the current moment, as the works themselves. This development, the impression made by his choice of how to exhibit here and now, may be almost more successful than Wool wished in that it's upstaging the artworks. We viewers exult in the gestalt though :-)) and that's largely why I wanted to write this follow-up.

You have to see this show or you will regret missing it. I'm not aware of anything much like it at any time recently or otherwise. It's not just that it's presented by the artist himself rather than by a dealer—no works are for sale—and that the setting is a huge raw derelict space in a struggling office building down in the southernmost Wall St. area of Manhattan, but how the artist and his cohort and crew have managed to find and delicately caress—largely leave untouched—a space into indistinguishability from the Wool works it displays, like anatomy.



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It seems almost a species of Land art or like the experience of entering a home designed by a wonderfully megalomaniacal architect like Frank Lloyd Wright, designing not only the structure and detail of the premises, but its furnishings as well; or Kurt Schwitters's Merzbau, or even like a cathedral—for the way that the contents of the U shape of the gigantic floor of commercial real estate seem almost to materialize from the environment. A cathedral to decay and chance and the cravings of the human eye. Wool's found a situation nineteen floors up just by Trinity Church that corresponds to his visual mentality, and then has placed a choice of works within it in unconventional positions, so as to create a kind of theme park of aesthetic and philosophical realization, a sort of silent private conceptual Venice, in that everything is marvelous wherever you turn your eye, and there's an inner consistency to the entire field of vision, including more than can be fully assimilated, what with the natural light entering through continuous rows of giant windows (that look out upon New York old and new) ever-changing, the way the mixture of deliberate and random asserts itself in the condition of the expanse, paint there, paint here, wiring there, wiring here, just as it does in the works themselves. It makes you think as well as look.

Wool has always welcomed chance, while at the same time being fanatically controlling and detail-oriented. He's a connoisseur of the foundational, the ubiquitous-unto-invisible ground of daily visual experience in all its dim grunge and constancy, whether it's nighttime slum-industrial districts caught in random flashbulb glare (later carefully adjusted with Photoshop); the cultural detritus of floating phraseology like RUN DOG RUN or SELL THE HOUSE SELL THE CAR SELL THE KIDS; smears and oil stains and spray-paint scribbles; or discarded fencing wire. This combination of qualities—love of splatters and scribbles and the visual Underneath alongside an obsession with and genius for composition—has an apotheosis in this show. You have to understand that the artworks created their setting here. The two are not apart.

Much of Wool's work has long felt, to me, *uncanny*, and this show concentrates that attribute. (It brings to mind that one of his famous early exhibitions—1988—was a two-person show with Robert Gober.) By uncanny I mean the feeling that an unknown dimension has been suddenly exposed in familiar experience, like the world has been turned inside out, or sideways ("tell it slant"), or maybe that it's been pulled into a long strip, given a twist, and attached end to end: step off the elevator and you're there. I don't want to overdo this, but some attendees have been moved to tears.



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To return to spherical earth, it was surprising to learn that Wool's idea for the project originated years ago, prior to the pandemic, and didn't include specifically the plan to use an abandoned office space. Rather, he thought he might like to take charge of an exhibition that he fully administered, including the choice of an unconventional non-white-cube space, and that a vacant office arrangement made sense—he thought he might even use cubicles as enclosures... He was newly occupied with the importance of setting for artworks because of the large sculptures he'd been making. When the pandemic hit and people were talking about commercial spaces vacated, he started organizing a team with his longtime colleague/collaborator Belgian art writer and curator Anne Pontégnie and soon including the two women, Rose Marcus and Marie Angeletti, who now serve as the knowledgeable information officers present during the hours of operation. At first, searching for a venue, the artist was frustrated by the likes of a trashed CVS with lime-green walls and a broken escalator, but, it's true, the moment he entered 101 Greenwich it all fell into place. When there was a kink in the negotiations for it, he considered giving up on the whole plan.

Rose and Marie tell me that this is the first time they've ever known of an art show where many people make return visits and also many stay for hours, hanging out. There are reading copies of ten or twelve of Wool's magnificent artists' books and catalogs on hand and a couple of tables and eight or ten chairs. The artist himself has been present half the days or more, though he might start cutting back. They're averaging 175 visitors a day, a total over 7,000 in the first ten weeks. If you're interested in art, you shouldn't miss it. It's like a dream of the encounter with art, no boundaries.