

Christopher Kane on His Sensual New Exhibition of Outsider Art

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Blossom Courtesy of Christopher Kane

As his exhibition opens at Galerie Gugging in Vienna, the Scottish designer talks about the storied history of the museum, turning to art during the pandemic, and why he feels like an outsider in fashion

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TEXT Laura Allsop

"I think it especially resonates for me because the concept of 'outsider' has always been in my shadow," says **Christopher Kane** when asked what outsider art – art made by the self-taught and the marginalised – means to him. "I have had periods in my life where I felt like an outsider, for example growing up in a small steel mining village and being gay," he says. At Central Saint Martins I felt like an outsider because I knew I had a different aesthetic and way of working. In fact, in fashion I often felt like an outsider ... I think the most interesting people in life are the ones that sit on the fringe."

This summer, the Scottish designer (and More Joy disseminator – a lifestyle brand created by Christopher and his sister Tammy) is showing paintings of his own in ***Curated by Christopher Kane***, made while locked down in the feverish early days of the pandemic, alongside those by artists from the Gugging House of Artists outside Vienna. Glitter-speckled, patterned and vividly expressive, Kane’s paintings are aesthetically part of the same family of figures and faces, affectionately dubbed the ‘brats’, which took pride of place in his S/S21 and S/S22 collections. Only instead of decorating clothes, his pieces have been brought into a lively conversation with specially selected artworks by Gugging artists, among them Heinrich Reisenbauer’s run-on sentences of beaming faces, and the entwined, Schiele-esque couples of both Karl Vondal and the late painter Johann Korec.



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Curated by Christopher Kane at Galerie Gugging

Gugging has been a haven of creativity ever since it was transformed from a psychiatric hospital with a dark history into a therapeutic sanctuary for artistically gifted patients in 1986. David Bowie and Brian Eno memorably visited Gugging and its residents during the creation of their 1995 record *Outside* – a fact that didn’t surprise Kane when he first heard about it. “Gugging is like nothing I have ever come across before – the history, the art, the art programmes for young people, the house of artists, the museum,” he says. “There is so much to understand and get to know. I feel so inspired every time I go there.”

“The artworks we chose reflected themes that mean something to us,” Kane explains of his and Tammy’s selection process. “For example, when we found Johann ‘Lejo’ Lechner’s photo collages we were transported to our childhood – you see something new every time you look at them.” Karl Vondal’s works, meanwhile, Kane loved for their “sickly-sweet colour palette and sexual themes. They look so innocent until you take a closer look. It reminded me of the dirty drawings in my garden shed that my elder brothers had done when they were kids.”



Ingrid Courtesy of Christopher Kane

Kane's 'go-to' Gugging artists, though, are Korec and Reisenbauer: "I am like a moth to a flame with them." The artists were folded into the Kane universe five years ago, when motifs from their works were transposed on fabric for the designer's pre-fall 2017 collection: gold and blue flowers on dresses and skirts, nudes on knitwear and a giant smiling face on a jumper. The effect was joyful, yet delicate and refined.

Kane's own artistic methods are intuitive, a form of meditation. "When I get into a flow, I just lose all the noise." Glitter is sprinkled on his chosen canvases in a free yet perfectly precise way, with faces forming as though by magic. Some of his earliest glitter portraits were of his beloved mother, Christine. Finding painting again during the pandemic was a lifeline, a creative release in a strange new reality, and a way to access spontaneity. "What intrigues me about outsider artists is this need to produce work not for profit but just to survive," says Kane. "The output is visceral, organic and devoid of ego. They make the art because they just have to."

Curated by Christopher Kane is on at *Galerie Gugging in Vienna, Austria until 9 October 2022.*