

John Armleder

Ripple: Furniture Sculpture and Painting after 1982

May 7 – June 13, 2026

New York

Press Release

David Kordansky Gallery is pleased to present *Ripple: Furniture Sculpture and Painting after 1982*, an exhibition of historic works by John Armleder from this period. The exhibition is on view in New York at 520 W. 20th St. from May 7 through June 13, 2026. An opening reception will be held on Thursday, May 7, from 6 – 8 PM.

Throughout John Armleder's career, which has thoughtfully and effortlessly traced a myriad of personal and art historical references, a throughline exists in his perpetual interest in collectivity. Armleder attributes this to two major events in his life: a seven-month stint in prison for refusing Switzerland's mandatory conscription, and his time as part of a rowing team, practicing several hours a day. Each of these experiences reaffirmed his belief in the collective, an idea that shapes how he lives his life, but also how he approaches art making. Many of the works on view, predominantly from the 1980s, are part of his historic *Furniture Sculpture* series and exemplify this thinking. It was in an old prison laundry room that he created one of his earliest explorations of this concept, consisting of a table, a window, and some wires.

Like that early example, each of the *Furniture Sculptures* on view incorporates a seemingly functional or decorative object, so that the viewer is given a generous access point through which they can draw their own associations, and so the artworks themselves act as a bridge between artist and onlooker. His interest in furniture and design objects can easily be traced as far back as his childhood, where he spent his earliest years living in his parents' hotel where furniture was constantly moved and rooms redecorated. In *FS 156* (1987), the artist presents a vintage wooden vanity with a large canvas placed where a mirror would traditionally appear. This piece distills the idea that the painting or wall-based work recedes to the background and may be interchangeable with objects that have more decorative or functional associations, like mirrors. Furniture used throughout the exhibition, and in the series at large, is often found or sourced by Armleder and accompanies a painting the artist has made.

The impetus to create the sculptures on view came from an early engagement in experimental compositions like Erik Satie's furniture music, from which Armleder's series takes its name, and a formative interaction with John Cage around the release of his essays, *Silence: Lectures and Writing*, which speak to the importance of chance in creative practices. Paintings like *Untitled, U17* (1986), typify Armleder's *Pour Paintings*, a series that dates back to the 1970s in which the artist pours, drips, and manipulates paint and other media onto an upright canvas so that the material pools and layers to create textured striations, ridges, and grooves along the surface. Paintings in this series can be read as distinctly modernist, foregrounding color, line, material, and process over a planned compositional outcome. Like Cage, Armleder relies on chance in the creation of these paintings.

Satie created his furniture compositions so the sound existed in the background and could be experienced as secondary to a conversation, a drink, or any other exchange. In *Untitled (FS)* (1987) and *Untitled* (1986–2020),

Armleder flanks a wall-based painting with two musical instruments which, while the instruments take center stage, recall the impermanence of compositions like Satie's as there's a sense that the instrument could easily be plucked from the wall, a cymbal could be readjusted, or furniture could otherwise be swapped out.

Armleder's choice to leave many of his paintings and sculptures untitled asserts his belief in the Duchampian idea that it is the viewer who assigns meaning and value to art, not the artist. So, even when direct visual relationships can be made between decoration, interior design, conceptual art, performance, and installation—and even if the references that Armleder pulls from are so intertwined with his own lived experience and life-long engagement with art—citing one source of inspiration would not only limit the viewer, but be an inaccurate representation of what the work is. The *Furniture Sculptures* have to do with decor in a way, but the associations extend far beyond that to movements as far-ranging as Dada, Russian constructivism, Fluxus, and Pop Art. And while his work can be categorized as conceptual, it is also deeply rooted in the social aspects, implications, and impact of art.

The term postwar is often used as a designation for artists of Armleder's generation, however with him it seems that it takes on a different meaning. It's through his own personal and societal awareness of all that unfolded in the postwar period, and the effects that continue to reverberate—or ripple—today, that his work is created. While some artists use conceptual art as a tool to dilute political or radical thought, Armleder foregrounds it. In each of his past exhibitions the installation and, to a certain extent, the onlooker become a part of the work itself, as if to remind the viewer that art relies first on human engagement and that everything is created and understood within the larger context and relational framework of society.

Armleder has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions around the world. Over the last decade alone, he has presented solo exhibitions at Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, Switzerland (2026); Kunsthaus Biel Centre d'art Bienne (KBCB), Biel/Bienne, Switzerland (2026); Musée D'art Moderne et Contemporain (MAMCO), Geneva, Switzerland (2026); Musée Régional d'Art Contemporain (MRAC), Sérignan, France (2023); Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai, China (2021); KANAL – Centre Pompidou, Brussels, Belgium (2021); Aspen Art Museum, CO (2019); Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Germany (2019); MUSEION, Bolzano, Italy (2018); Museo Madre, Naples, Italy (2018); Istituto Svizzero, Rome, Italy (2017); Le Consortium, Dijon, France (2014); Fernand Léger National Museum, Biot, France (2014); Dairy Art Centre, London, England (2013); Swiss Institute, New York, NY (2012); and Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy (2011). Recent group exhibitions include *Drawing, Painting, Sculpture, Photography, Film, Video, Sound: Ringier Collection 1995 – 2025*, Langen Foundation, Neuss, Germany (2025); *Form Matters, Matter Forms – From Readymade to Product Fetish*, Kunst Museum Winterthur, Switzerland (2024); *MONOTYPES: Edition VFO at Kunsthalle Zurich*, Kunsthalle Zurich, Switzerland (2023); *Geometric Opulence*, Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich, Switzerland (2022); *THE ARTIST IS PRESENT*, curated by Maurizio Cattelan, Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China (2018); and *The Trick Brain*, Aishti Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon (2017–2018). His work is in the permanent collections of institutions including the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA; Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, CA; Le Consortium, Dijon, France; and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark. Armleder lives and works in Geneva.