

ARTS

# Beyond Sex and Anger: ‘SEEING RED’ at Phillips London Invites Reflection

The auction house's soon-to-close selling exhibition with more than seventy works by forty artists is an exploration of our preoccupation with this meaning-laden hue.

By [Christa Terry](#) · 03/15/24 2:46pm



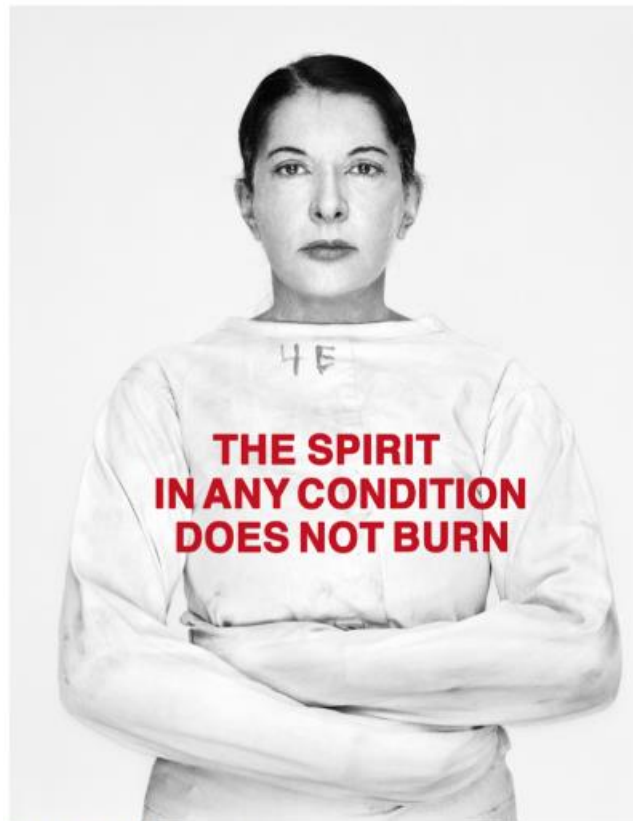
Laura Bohinc, 'Big Girl Chair' and 'Peaches Pouffe-Red.' Courtesy PhillipsX

Red has always stood out, even if its power is just now being discovered by creators pushing the Unexpected Red Theory on TikTok. It's dichotomous: the color of both life and danger...of love and aggression. It's also the color of us—heart and vein and viscera—and imbued with meaning. “The pure red of which certain abstractionists speak does not exist, no matter how one shifts its physical contexts,” wrote American abstract expressionist [Robert Motherwell](#) in a 1946 essay. “Any red is rooted in blood, glass, wine, hunters' caps and a thousand other concrete phenomena. Otherwise, we would have no feeling toward red or its relations, and it would be useless as an artistic element.”



Dale Chihuly, 'Ruby Red Chandelier.' Courtesy PhillipsX

Historian Michel Pastoureau, author of *Red: The History of a Color*, writes that the late Middle Ages and the modern period “left us works by great painters that are particularly remarkable for their range of reds. Let us mention Van Eyck, Uccello, Carpaccio, Raphael, and later, Rubens and Georges De La Tour,” before adding that “all artists seemed to love this color and tried to draw various tonalities from it.”



Marina Abramovich, 'The spirit.' Courtesy PhillipsX

Building an exhibition or auction around the color is a little like plucking low-hanging fruit on a heavily laden tree in that one is spoilt for choice, but it's not necessarily easy to do well—ironically for the same reason. There's also the absolute riot of reds in art: cinnabar, vermilion, carmine, cadmium and so on. It is, as they say *a lot*.

Jane Neal and Fru Tholstrup had a big job curating "SEEING RED" on view in Phillips London Galleries for one more week. This selling exhibition, which presents more than seventy works by forty artists, dives into how we 'see red.' There's the sex you'd expect and nods to the realities of having a physical body (overt, as in [Martin Eder's](#) *Venus as a Boy I*, and less so, as in the vaguely unsettling mixed-media sculptures of [Kate MccGwire](#)). And then there's more, and that more is the most interesting part because it's not the 'concrete phenomena' one might expect to see.



David Brian Smith, 'A bit more somewhere.' Courtesy PhillipsX

Neal and Tholstrup did a solid job of creating an inclusive experience of red in a selection of works by artists including Marina Abramović, [Alma Berrow](#), [Lara Bohinc](#), [Dale Chihuly](#), Martin Eder, [Alexis Soul-Gray](#), [Fredrikson Stallard](#), and [David Brian Smith](#) that acknowledges the many, many different ways in which contemporary artists use this color. “In weaving together this narrative, it was important to us to uphold inclusivity and artistic freedom while challenging art world norms, igniting dialogue, and offering a fresh lens on our perception of how we feel when we ‘see red,’ the curators told Observer.

“SEEING RED” encourages personal reflection. “We hope that visitors to the exhibition will feel a shift in perception, and remember it as a transformative moment, evoking a sense of delight and wonder.”



Fredrikson Stallard, "Figure 4 - Vermillion." Cristina Tafuri, Courtesy PhillipsX

**"SEEING RED," on view in Phillips London Galleries, closes on March 24.**