Press Release

Georg Baselitz

Eroi d'Oro

6 May—27 September 2026
Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice

Georg Baselitz, *Türkische Hose auf dem Treppchen*, 2025
Oil and gold paint on canvas. 460 × 300 cm (181.1 × 118.11 in)
© Georg Baselitz 2026. Photo: Stefan Altenburger

I have a long biography to look back on. What I mean is that I have painted an incredibly large number of pictures over the course of more than 60 years. Now that I'm more or less at the end of my painting activity, I thought I should draw some kind of conclusion. In other words, a summation of the paintings I've done over the years.

—Georg Baselitz

The Fondazione Giorgio Cini presents an exhibition of new works by Georg Baselitz, curated by Luca Massimo Barbero, Director of the Institute of Art History of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini and supported by Thaddaeus Ropac gallery. The exhibition coincides with the 61st Venice Biennale, and features the German artist's most recent series of large-scale paintings, which explore the interplay between luminous gold grounds and delicately

Georg Baselitz, *Die goldene Kittelschürze*, 2025
Oil and gold paint on canvas. 300 × 215 cm (118.11 × 84.65 in)
© Georg Baselitz 2026. Photo: Stefan Altenburger

rendered figures, overlaid in some compositions with bursts of impasto colour. As the artist remarks on his new works: 'Gold absorbs space, absorbs shadows, absorbs spatiality [...]. And on top of that, just a drawing, as if on a piece of paper, a nude drawing [...] as fine as I could manage.'

The golden planes that form the grounds of the works on view, by their reflectivity, offer no illusion of depth, creating a flatness reminiscent of medieval icons or the gilded backgrounds of the works of Northern Renaissance painter Stefan Lochner. Georg Baselitz's painted bodies, executed in sharp lines, lie bare across these grounds as if floating on their surfaces, rendered through an approach that inherits from line drawing. They include larger-than-life self-portraits, as well as numerous depictions of the artist's wife, Elke, his lifelong companion and recurring model. Applied with diluted black paint that resembles ink, the spectral portraits hark back to Hokusai's portraits and Japanese calligraphy. Several of the canvases incorporate thick, viscous brushstrokes that gather on the figures, associating multiple colours to give a marbled, variegated effect: 'small quotations, which I like to call "de Kooning" and "de Kooning-in-the-wrong-place": an arbitrary, sudden action with a brush and a palette knife in de Kooning colours somewhere in or next to the figure,' Baselitz explains. Bringing the delicate bodies forth from the canvases, the vivid strokes seem to gesture to Willem de Kooning's statement that 'flesh is the reason oil paint was invented.'

The gold grounds lend the works on view a luxuriant, gently specular aspect, animated by plays of light, and look back on Baselitz's long history of incorporating the colour in his paintings and wall reliefs. His earliest gold-ground works from the mid-1990s introduced a wallpaper-like planarity, taking on 'pattern and ornamentation as a subject in its own right,' as renowned art historian and former Guggenheim curator Diane Waldman noted. This exploration of surface coincided with the artist's novel practice of painting on canvases so large he would spread them out on the floor, shifting his focus towards the material presence of his paintings. These earlier experiments are at the origin of the innovative treatment of materiality and surface

Georg Baselitz, *Elke drei Flächen*, 2025
Oil and gold paint on canvas. 300 × 215 cm (118.11 × 84.65 in)
© Georg Baselitz 2026. Photo: Stefan Altenburger

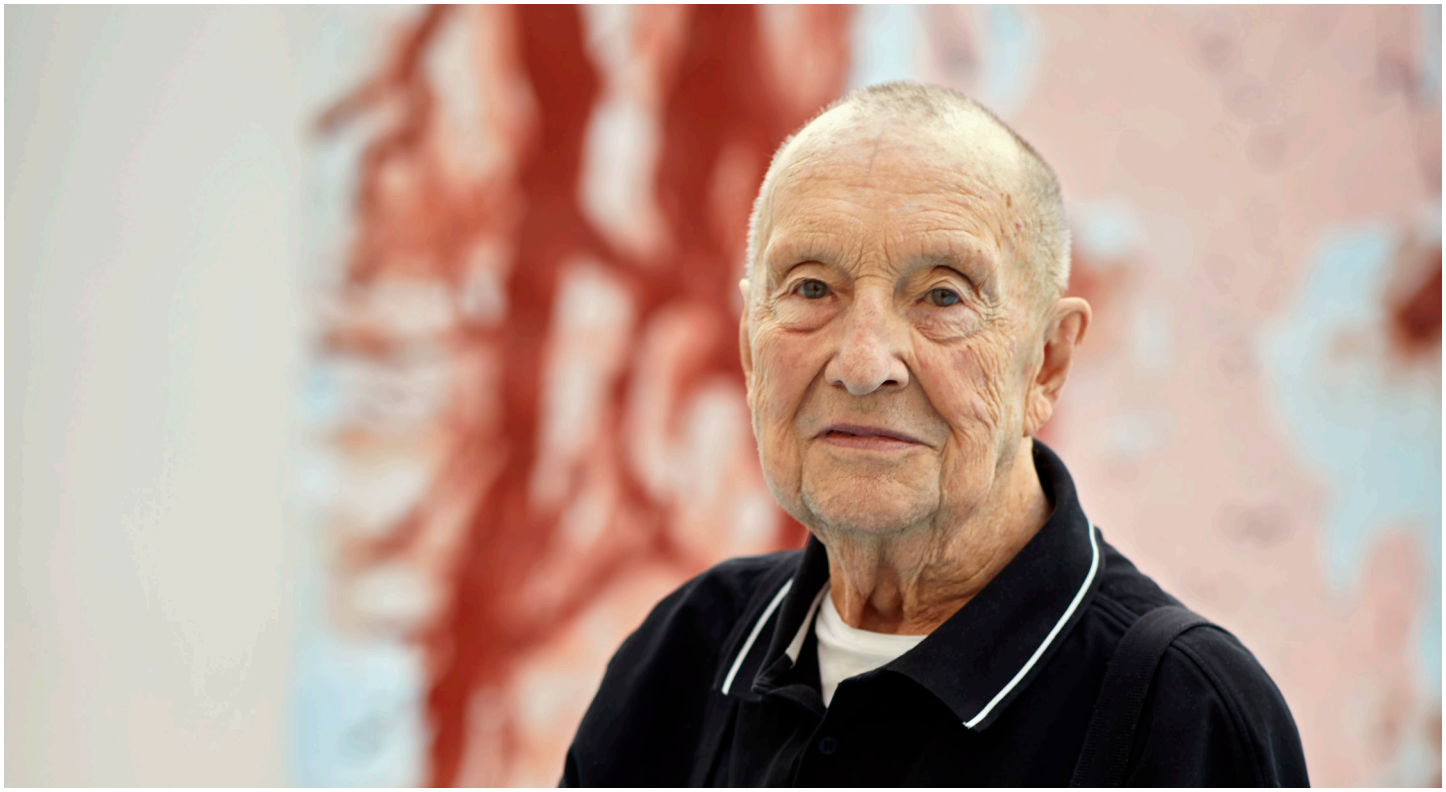
found in Baselitz's most recent series. Testifying to his unrelenting impulse to experiment, and to test and re-test his own history through his characteristic self-referentiality, in the works on view at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, the artist gives new form to the ongoing preoccupations at the centre of his artmaking. In these new works, some of which measure as much as four and a half metres in height, Baselitz extends his longstanding exploration of monumentality to an almost architectural register. At this scale, the gold no longer merely activates the surface but envelops the viewer, transforming the paintings' optical shimmer into a spatial experience. 'The gold was supposed to be neutral,' he explains, 'a colour so dominant, not to disturb but decorate the drawing.'

The title of the exhibition, *Eroi d'Oro*, – 'Heroes of Gold' in Italian – invokes one of the artist's earliest series; 'Back in the 1960s, in 1965, I painted what became known as the *Hero* paintings. Those were fictional characters, not realistic, not based on models, but fantasy figures based on heroic characters from Russian civil war novels, the so-called Greens and Reds and so on. This series dominated my work for a long time and still does today,' he explains. With this exhibition, Georg Baselitz reflects on a lifetime of work, offering a summation as he approaches the culmination of his practice. The artist began exploring the passage of time in 2015 with his series of *Avignon* self-portraits presented at the 56th Venice Biennale, acknowledging with the very title – a reference to Pablo Picasso's late works – the then 77-year-old's awareness of the stage his career was reaching. In 2019, a striking series of golden canvases articulated his continued engagement with mortality, artistic belonging, and legacy, while the use of gold lent these works a cosmic dimension, bathing the figures in a soft light that seemed to radiate from within. In many of them, the use of spray paint allowed the depicted figures to seemingly levitate amid a landscape of clouds in a reflection on the transience of life. These same meditations on time and impermanence are recalled in the gold grounds of Baselitz's new works.

While gold has always held diverse connotations and functions within his practice, never before have Baselitz's paintings borne such a direct resemblance to icon painting. 'None of the golden paintings I have made until now have been true gold-ground paintings. Even with a gold background, even with gold leaf I applied myself, the overpainting is too intense,' he states, 'it is completely different here. There is a certain harshness, there is also a certain loneliness.' The attenuated bodies appear fragile, emptied out and haunting, qualities that stand in stark tension with the gilded grounds, through which the artist confers on his exalted figures an almost reverent dignity and potency. As if in response to the ephemerality of their surroundings, light and shadow dapple their surfaces, creating a luminous, almost devotional presence around the solitary figures. Now debuting, like the *Avignon* works before them, in Venice, where the colour gold holds a particular art historical weight as a result of the strong influence of the Byzantine artistic tradition, this new series forms a continuation of the conversations that came before it. In their spare linearity, these portraits articulate a form of humility, confronting without evasion the relentless reality of physical frailty and the inherent fallibility of human existence.

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, with a text by Luca Massimo Barbero.

Georg Baselitz, *Die Engel sind ausgefallen*, 2025
Oil and gold paint on canvas. 300 × 215 cm (118.11 × 84.65 in)
© Georg Baselitz 2026. Photo: Stefan Altenburger



Portrait of Georg Baselitz, 2018. Photo: Martin Müller, Berlin

About the artist

Georg Baselitz, who has worked with the gallery for over 20 years, lives between three different locations: Lake Ammersee in Bavaria, Salzburg, and Imperia in Liguria, Italy. Early in his career, his work was included in documenta 5 (1972) and 7 (1982). Following the 1980 Venice Biennale, he participated in a series of influential exhibitions: *A New Spirit in Painting* (1981) and *German Art in the Twentieth Century* (1985) at the Royal Academy of Arts, London; and *Zeitgeist* (1982) at the Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, presented his first comprehensive retrospective in the United States in 1995, which toured to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; and Nationalgalerie, Berlin. Further significant retrospectives were organised by the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, in 1996, and the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in 2007. In 2006 and 2007, the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, and the Albertina, Vienna, were the first to present his *Remix* cycle.

A retrospective of Baselitz's sculptures was held at the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris (2011–12) and his *Avignon* series was presented at the Venice Biennale in 2015. His *Heldenbilder* (*Hero Paintings*) and *Neue Typen* (*New Types*) were shown at the Städel Museum, Frankfurt (2016), travelling to the Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome; and Guggenheim Bilbao. To mark the artist's 80th birthday in 2018, comprehensive solo exhibitions were held at the Fondation Beyeler, Basel; Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C.; and Musée Unterlinden, Colmar, France. In 2019, he was elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris and became the first living artist to have an exhibition at the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, followed by his largest retrospective to date at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, in 2021.

In 2022, The Morgan Library, New York, organised a retrospective of his drawings spanning six decades, which travelled to the Albertina Museum, Vienna, in 2023. That same year, the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, realised the major exhibition *Baselitz: Naked Masters*, and an overview of the artist's bronze cast models was exhibited at the Serpentine Galleries in London. In 2024, solo exhibitions followed at the Galleria degli Antichi, Sabbioneta, and the Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul and in 2025 at the Munchmuseet in Oslo, the Kode Museum in Bergen, and the Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao. Coinciding with the exhibition at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice, Baselitz's works are currently featured in solo exhibitions at Rupertinum, Salzburg; Museum der Moderne, Salzburg; and Museo Novecento, Florence.

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