

**Jasper Johns: Flags  
In Memory of Agnes Gund**

APRIL 2 – JUNE 27, 2026



**Jasper Johns** (b. 1930) *Flag*, 1960-1986  
Plaster and painted wood frame, 13 3/8 x 20 inches  
Collection of Jasper Johns, Sharon, CT

NEW YORK – Craig Starr Gallery is pleased to present *Jasper Johns: Flags* on view April 2–June 27, 2026.

Organized in collaboration with the artist and his studio, the exhibition assembles paintings, drawings, and sculptures that expand Johns’s iconic motif into unexpected forms—including double and triple flags, flags rendered in complementary colors, monochromes, and flags set against fields. The show will include loans from the Whitney Museum of American Art, Museum of Modern Art, New York, Jasper Johns, and private collections. This presentation brings together distinctive and unconventional treatments of the flag, revealing the formal and material range Johns achieved through a single, inexhaustible image.

“One night I dreamed that I painted a large American flag, and the next morning I got up and went out and bought the materials to begin it,” recalled the artist. That dream gave rise to *Flag* (1954–55), now in the collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York, a

breakthrough work that initiated Johns's sustained engagement with the motif. The American flag became one of the artist's defining subjects—what he described as among the “things the mind already knows.” Since the image is already a widely recognized symbol, Johns could bypass invention in the conventional sense and instead focus on process, material, and perception. As he later remarked, using the flag meant he “didn't have to design it.” In his hands, the flag becomes less a national symbol than a mechanism for looking.



**Jasper Johns** (b. 1930) *Three Flags*, 2000  
Acrylic and graphite pencil on four sheets of plastic, 11 x 7 1/2 inches  
Collection of Jasper Johns, Sharon, CT

Across the exhibition, Johns tests how far this familiar symbol can be altered while remaining legible. The flags are stripped of their usual conventions—their singularity, their expected color palette, and even their stable symbolic meaning—turning the motif into a flexible structure whose identity is transformed. These nontraditional treatments activate the associations embedded within the symbol itself. A flag is never neutral: it carries meanings that shift with the viewer's nationality, historical moment, and personal relationship to the nation it represents. As an emblem of the United States—its government, ideals, and people—the image is inevitably political. It is also a popular symbol that, much like the Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans*, can be recontextualized through repetition and display. By altering its palette, multiplying its form, or isolating its structural elements, Johns transforms the flag from a stable symbol into a site where cultural attitudes, anxieties, and projections surface. The motif hovers between familiarity and estrangement, inviting viewers to reconsider an image they thought they already knew.

In the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition, Richard Shiff writes that Johns's work emerges through "actions and accumulations of actions," with thought materialized through the senses rather than declared outright. Johns's flag works resist singular interpretation. They do not simply communicate feelings, nor do they submit easily to ideological readings. Instead, as Shiff suggests, they occupy a charged terrain between dream and reality, image and object, abstraction and representation. Johns does not resolve those oppositions so much as hold them in suspension. Regardless of interpretation, any representation of a flag *becomes* a flag. Its likeness is never just an image—it is the thing itself. This collapse of the sign, the signifier, the signified, and the referent—the image, the idea, and the object, is a foundational component of Johns's work.



Jasper Johns and Agnes Gund in Woodville, CT in 2019

This exhibition carries special significance for the gallery as it is organized in memory of our dear friend Agnes Gund. A pioneering patron of the arts and close friend of Johns, Gund played a crucial role in the gallery's history, including curating our 2020 Johns exhibition, *Crosshatch*. Honoring her in this way felt grounding as the exhibition came together—a way of keeping her voice in the room where she spent so much time shaping conversations about art.

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the exhibition and includes a new essay by Richard Shiff, Effie Marie Cain Regents Chair in Art at the University of Texas at Austin. Shiff recently authored *Writing After Art: Essays on Modern and Contemporary Artists*, which includes one of his studies on Jasper Johns.