

ARTFORUM

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John Tweddle

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Recent weeks have seen the art world's temperature spike over the money in art (and politics) problem. Who knows how long such simmering ideological skirmishes will last and whether confrontation can bubble into anything progressively steam-worthy. Nevertheless, taking sides vis-à-vis the raging "free market" has become more explicit.

Now, then, is an ideal and necessary time to encounter the ebullient and searing paintings that John Tweddle made in the late 1960s and early 1970s, before removing himself from the New York art scene. In addition to some drawings, eight large canvases are on view, most of which are shaped by a wavy outline measuring about ten feet wide and over six feet high. In the paintings, Tweddle's furious struggle against the commodity status of art (against capitalism) resonates with extreme clarity and graphic vividness. With titles such as *Art World*, *Time Bomb*, and *Sold*, the works' politic is, up front, the engine of painterly action. Above other recurring motifs, it is the dollar sign that reigns supreme. Dollars erupt in virulent colonies and circulate around Tweddle's characteristically concentric and highly patterned compositions. Evoking tapestries, rugs, quilts, altarpieces, and mandalas, he achieves great optical effects.

Tweddle's anger and energy are a shot in the arm. In *Art (Truck)*, 1970, for example, a central black form in the shape of a flower is pollinated with lots of yellow dollar signs and a truck labeled with "Art" belches exhaust at the painting's core. The bloom could hardly look more toxic and pernicious, hypnotic and nauseating. One sees that its petals appear as gashes and slits in the picture plane—a wound-like rupture in the middle of a greenish-yellow patch of painting that festers like a putrid lesion on the canvas's otherwise tan skin. Heads of cackling dogs, crowing cocks, hissing snakes, and crazed people line up in silhouette around the perimeter of the painting's undulating border to watch. And if all that sounds over the top, I dare you to take a good long look for yourself and try not to feel volatile. (I do not know what it means that this lesser-known artist and repudiator is mostly historicized in relation to his early patron, the collector Robert Scull.)



John Tweddle, *Sold*, 1969, acrylic on canvas, 79 3/4" x 16 1/2"