



Michael Kagan, *The Action Is The Justice*, 1980.
Enamel on linen, 72 x 54 in - 182,9 x 137,2 cm

CHRISTIE'S

Studio visit: Michael Kagan

On 2 July, Christie's is offering Michael Kagan's *The Action Is The Juice* to benefit amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research. Ahead of the sale, the artist opens the door to his New York studio and explains the inspiration behind his most recent work

As the American artist [Michael Kagan](#) walks through Brooklyn on the daily one-block commute from his home to his studio, he says he can't imagine doing any other job.

'Once I saw that in New York you could be a painter and make a living from it, I fell in love with the city,' he says in the short film above. 'And here I am 18 years later, still doing the same thing.'

Kagan first moved to the city in 2003 to study at the New York Academy of Art, where his teachers included the painters [Eric Fischl](#) and [Jenny Saville](#). '[Saville] taught me a lot about mark-making, and painting with oomph, and trusting your gut,' he says. 'Whenever I have trouble with painting, I go back to what she taught me.'

Today, Kagan is best known for his richly textured paintings of astronauts, which have impressed collectors ranging from billionaire space-tourist [Yasuku Maezawa](#) to Nike executive chairman Mark Parker and musician Pharrell Williams — who collaborated with the artist on a series of T-shirt designs.

Astronaut paintings were also the focus of recent solo shows at the [Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art](#) and [Almine Rech](#) in Brussels.

Like a NASA training facility, Kagan's minimalist workspace is organised with clinical precision.

Stainless-steel tables contain rows of perfectly lined-up paintbrushes, while the pristine white walls show little trace of his profession — apart from a few fragments of his trademark tool.

'I use a lot of blue masking tape,' he says, as he picks up a roll to plot points on a canvas. 'It keeps me focused. When I'm really cooking on a painting for a show, there is blue tape everywhere.'

The technique helps Kagan to create his signature impasto paint surface. 'I love how you can build up strokes and get lost in this three-inch section of a painting for hours,' he says.

'I feel like it's the best result of years of working on these squeegee paintings. It turned out amazing' — Michael Kagan on The Action Is The Juice

Kagan is fascinated by the limits of human potential and has recently expanded his repertoire to include Formula 1 drivers, such as Ayrton Senna and Michael Schumacher, and professional surfers.

Talking about The Action Is The Juice, he says: 'The base image is a CYMK silk-screen from an image in this book I've had for probably over a decade, that has been bouncing around with me, about maverick big-wave surfers.'

To create the huge canvas for what is his biggest surf piece to date, Kagan began by creating a digital archive of his older paintings on acetate. He then reworked those images into larger silk-screens that could be over-printed, layer upon layer.

According to Kagan, the result is half print, half painting, and a hybrid of the works of Ed Ruscha and Gerhard Richter.

'I feel like it's the best result of years of working on these squeegee paintings,' he adds. 'It turned out amazing.'

The painting is one of nine that have been donated to Christie's by artists including Jenna Gribbon, Katherine Bradford, Cristina BanBan and Jonathan Chapline as part of From the Studio: Part Two, an ongoing partnership between the auction house and amfAR, a non-profit organisation that since 1985 has invested nearly \$600 million in the fight against AIDS.

The proceeds raised from the sale will go towards amfAR's newly expanded efforts to help develop effective treatments for Covid-19.

The Action Is The Juice will be on show at Christie's in London from 24 June to 2 July, ahead of the Post War and Contemporary Art Day Sale on 2 July.