



Pau Waelder

# Carlo Zanni, Check Out Paintings, 2022



English Edition

★★★★(243)



## Item details

Material: Acrylic and pencils on canvas

Sizes: 20 x 30, 70 x 100, 100 x 150 cm

Color: White, beige, grey

Style: Abstract, conceptual

Theme: E-commerce

Room Type: Living Room, Office

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Theme: E-commerce  
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## **About this item**

A series of paintings on canvas with pencil markings in white, grey, yellow, and beige colors. Different sizes with custom frames, hand-made by the artist. The canvases seem almost empty at first glance, featuring barely visible shapes in soft tones. Upon closer inspection, they reveal complex, layered compositions of geometric elements and text, meticulously drawn in pencil. In several compositions, dark dots and shapes in solid colors attract the viewer's attention: the artist describes them as "clickbait."

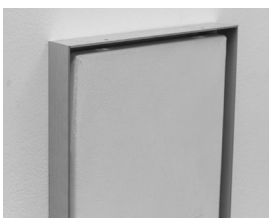
The paintings take inspiration from check out pages in e-commerce sites, elaborating visual compositions with the elements that can be found in them, such as the product image, price, check out button, shipment options, and so forth. Continuing a line of work on the representation of the computer interface that dates back to early projects such as "DTP Icons Paintings" (2000), the artist has developed the compositions further, until these elements can barely be recognized. They no longer follow the logic of the interface, but gradually evolve into a visual language of their own, the buttons, drop-down menus, and disclaimers layered on top of each other, blending and even distorting their shapes. The interaction with the viewer becomes the main focus in these paintings: one must look closer to be able to "read" them, while the gaze is lured by the strategically placed "clickbaits." In this manner, the paintings demand a careful, attentive observation, which is the exact opposite of the images distributed on social media and massively consumed at an increasingly accelerated pace.

Created in response to a period of isolation during the pandemic, in which e-commerce boomed and all social life forcibly took place online, the paintings reflect on consumerism turned into a dull activity, whose meaning is blurred as it becomes part of a routinely cycle of dissatisfaction, aptly depicted in the software performance "Save Me for Later" (2022). While they create a space for meditation, the paintings also constitute a critique of a society that freaks out over shortages of toilet paper, blindly invests in cryptocurrencies, and turns global crises such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the war in Ukraine into business opportunities.

Texts extracted from product and check out pages in e-commerce sites in different languages populate the canvases, linking them to the moment in which they were made (and therefore negating the supposed timelessness of abstract painting) and introducing extraneous subjects such as gender identity or the death of Queen Elizabeth II. These subjects then become part of a logic of e-commerce, as they are embedded in forms and drop-down menus, just another item to select and add to the shopping cart. There is a certain poetic quality to the texts that reminds of previous projects such as "my country is a Living Room" (2011), while the connection with current events provides a subtext similar to that found in "Average Shoveler" (2004) or "The Fifth Day" (2009).

In their apparent simplicity, the paintings actually condense many of the reflections that Carlo Zanni has made over two decades of an intense artistic practice that perfectly merges painting and coding, while giving a new meaning to traditional notions of portrait and landscape.

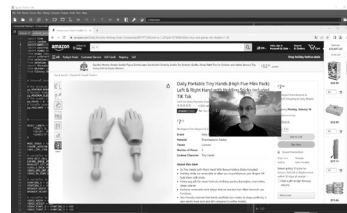
## **Frequently bought together**



### **Check Out Painting #43:**

Acrylic and pencil on canvas.  
Frame by the artist.  
20 x 30 cm.  
Year: 2022

+



### **Save Me for Later:**

Software, Internet. Variable dimensions  
Edition: 2  
Year: 2022

## Top reviews

Elena G.R.

★★★★ **These are landscapes, in fact**

*Reviewed in Italy on April 26, 2018*

Carlo Zanni has always been committed to portraying electronic landscapes as they emerge from computer data and as they relate to humans and their identity, which is also fluid and changing.

Luca P.

★★★★ **Programmed obsolescence**

*Reviewed in Italy on June 8, 2016*

Zanni often alludes to the impossibility of replicating now obsolete past attitudes and lifestyles, and entrusts the new generations with a crucial task against the sterile repetition of acquired knowledge.

Christiane P.

★★★★ **In the tradition of automated writing**

*Reviewed in the United States on March 3, 2011*

The use of text in these paintings reminds me of Zanni's "my country is a Living Room". There he managed to produce a sublime text that may very well be the most poetic content that Google ever produced.

Vivienne G.

★★★★ **Art in a two speed world**

*Reviewed in the United Kingdom on September 9, 2005*

Zanni once said that to paint and make digital worlds is an attempt to witness a two speed world. The position he assumes in his work returns us back to the duality of his worlds, the painter, digital artist, the evangelist for accessibility to digital culture and the net art entrepreneur creating a blueprint for commercial dissemination. In his words: "I feel closer to Donald Judd than to Matrix."

Bennett S.

★★★★ **Upgraded Icons**

*Reviewed in the United States on March 15, 2001*

Zanni's singular, compact images are not meant to be read in the traditional, exegetical way we read icons, by going "into" them and deciphering.

## Related to this item

**DTP Icons Paintings, 2000:** Oil on canvas paintings of desktop icons and logos, including depictions of discontinued software that had a critical role in the creativity of the time.

**The Fifth Day, 2009:** A fictional trailer made from 10 photos taken in Alexandria. The images were edited in real time according to data describing the political and cultural status of Egypt.

**Average Shoveler, 2004:** An online videogame that can also be understood as a painting and a short film, introducing spaces of meditation and the anxiety caused by information overflow.

**my country is a Living Room, 2011:** A generative poem made from automatically completed sentences by the now defunct Google Scribe: a telling description of the political situation in Italy.

Pau Waelder

## **Carlo Zanni, Save Me for Later, 2022**

English Edition

★★★★(184)

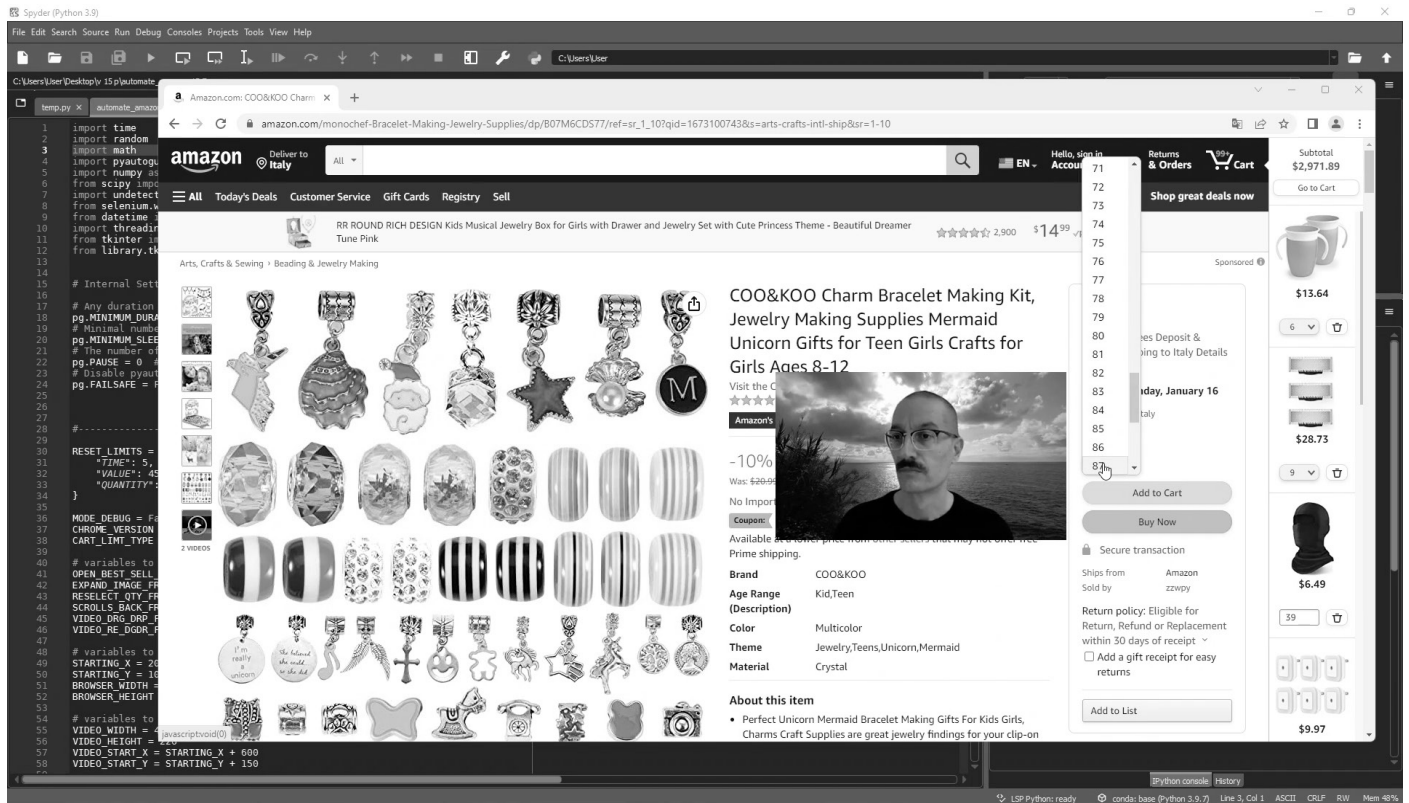
Pau Waelder

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## About this item

A bot browsing amazon.com autonomously selects items and places them in the basket. When the basket reaches its limit, items are automatically moved to the "Saved for later" list. The bot also embeds a floating window showing a webcam stream in which the artist can be seen looking at the screen. This performative act is carried out without end, an absurd dialogue between two autonomous software agents that speaks of the cycles of expectation, fulfillment, and dissatisfaction in our consumerist society.

This work connects, on the one hand, with Zanni's exploration of the individual in a society mediated by digital media, questioning privacy and identity through portraiture, and on the other, with his conception of the computer interface as a landscape we stare at every day. These portraits and landscapes have also been deeply intertwined, from the "Icoportraits" (2000) that lived as desktop icons in the collector's computer to the elaborate server-sculpture "Altarboy-Cyrille" (2003) in which a photographic portrait was populated by pop-up images automatically generated by Internet search queries. Zanni has also depicted himself in the role of an individual subject to surveillance and control, as in "Self-portrait with dog" (2008/2011) or "Iterating My Way

Into Oblivion" (2010), as well as an artist questioning his own productivity and his role in the economy of the art system, for instance in "The Sandman" (2013) or "Life Is A Delicate Negotiation" (2017). "Save Me for Later" seems to peep into a mundane activity carried out by the artist, in an endless game of adding items to the shopping cart. The process is tedious, but in being so it leads to observe the interface of the Amazon e-commerce site as a landscape, a familiar environment in which we may lose ourselves, or maybe feel the urge to open our browser and just buy something.

While it may seem like a performative action patiently carried out by the artist, this is an automated process executed by the Python script that can be seen behind the web browser. As is often the case in Zanni's work, the image is discreetly built with code, in a continuous and often uneasy dialogue with the Internet's most influential companies, from eBay to Google, Apple, and now Amazon. In this exchange between the artist's script and the company's site, the artwork often ends up losing as the Internet giant changes its terms and conditions or directly kills a process that it deems potentially harmful to its interests. This fragility and ephemerality of the piece make it all the more a unique event, bound, as is every artwork, to its present time.

## **About the artist**

Carlo Zanni is an Italian conceptual artist pioneer in the use of third-party Internet data and a painter. Born in La Spezia Italy, in 1975, Zanni works in a wide range of media including video, sound, animation, sculpture, AI, painting, photography, and installation. Since 1999 his practice has explored the public space of the web and the use of Internet data to create time-based ephemeral works that combine a pronounced social consciousness with a primary focus on privacy, identity, and the self. As a painter, he focuses his attention on a new kind of "shared landscape" that emerged with the Internet and that keeps transforming all human activities and relationships. He researches alternative selling models for digital art (ViBo) and he is the author of the book "Art in the Age of the Cloud". Zanni has been the recipient of a Rhizome.org commission and he has shown in galleries and museums worldwide including: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan; Arts Santa Mònica, Barcelona; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Marsèlleria, Milan; Tent, Rotterdam; MAXXI, Rome; P.S.1, New York; Borusan Center, Istanbul; PERFORMA 09, NY and ICA, London. His work appears in more than 50 books and catalogs, as well as in hundreds of articles and interviews online.

## **Top reviews**

Jack A.G.

### **★★★★ Questioning the rules of the industry**

*Reviewed in the United Kingdom on April 12, 2019*

By rethinking the very rules of the industry he operates in, Zanni is unusual in as far as his highly conceptual bent is eminently practical. His questioning of the rules that govern purchasing and selling art can have a massive impact on the physical and pecuniary reality of contemporary artists.

Bill H.

### **★★★★ Letting the world look back**

*Reviewed in the United States on March 2, 2010*

Putting work into the world that lets the world look back is more rare than a consolation: it's a form of solicitude.

Bassam E.B.

### **★★★★ Like a movie director behind an automated online structure**

*Reviewed in Egypt on January 23, 2009*

Zanni's work is really about imagining and then crafting online structures that coordinate pre-calculated links between desperate human activities, existences, and locations.

Domenico Q.

★★★★ **Mirror of the net**

*Reviewed in Italy on April 26, 2007*

"Altarboy" and "4 Untitled Portraits": the former is a mirror image of the self that a person constructs for him or herself, the latter a mirror image of the self that a person presents to the world. Both mirror an image of the network at any given time.

Valentina T.

★★★★ **A research on two parallel and inseparable tracks**

*Reviewed in Italy on December 3, 2002*

Carlo Zanni works with the oldest of artistic media, painting, and with the newest, the Internet. His research takes place on two parallel and inseparable tracks, thus operating a confrontation between tradition and contemporaneity.

## Related to this item

**Altarboy Cyrille, 2003:**

A server sculpture hosting the portrait of Cyrille Polla. In her eyes, an array of pixel-images are constantly generated from queries on Google Images.

**The Sandman, 2013:**

A video of the artist scraping dust from his mouse at his studio and placing it inside containers. A metaphor of the invisible labor in an artist's practice.

**Life Is a Delicate Negotiation, 2017:**

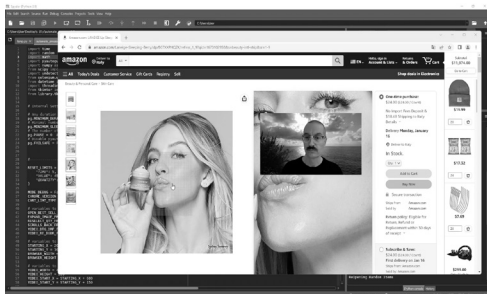
A written monologue and a video in which the artist reflects on the precarity of the artist's work, borrowing techniques used by FBI hostage negotiators.

**Boil The Ocean, Cook**

**The Books, Eat Your Own Dog Food, 2018:**

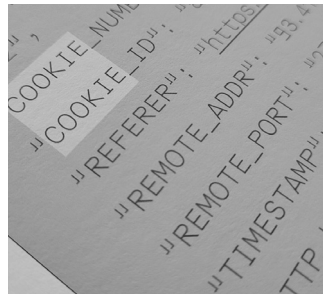
An automatic chat where the owners of the ZANNI (Z) cryptocurrency comment on their shares in a simulated inner circle dialogue.

## Frequently bought together



**Save Me for Later (BALM):**

Fine-art inkjet print on Hahnemuhle Bamboo cotton paper 290 g/m2.  
26,9 x 38,5 cm  
Year: 2023  
Edition: 10



**Cookie Self-Portrait:**

Fine-art inkjet print on Hahnemuhle Bamboo cotton paper 290 g/m2.  
47 x 38,5 cm  
Year: 2022  
Edition: 10

## About the author

Pau Waelder is an art historian and curator based in Spain. He holds a PhD in Information and Knowledge Society. Senior Curator at Niio.art and consulting lecturer at the Open University of Catalunya (UOC), he is also Editor and Advisor at the DAM Digital Art Museum (Berlin). He has curated numerous digital art exhibitions and has given lectures about his research and his work as curator in symposia and conferences at CCCB (Barcelona), KIASMA (Helsinki), Molitor (Montreal), HeK, House of Electronic Arts (Basel), iMAL (Brussels), and Talking Galleries (Barcelona), among others. He is the author of the book "You Can Be A Wealthy/ Cash-Strapped Art Collector In The Digital Age" (Frankfurt: Printer Fault Press, 2020).

## About the fonts

Careof-mono and ABC Laica proportional by Alessio D'Ellena.

