

# GAGOSIAN

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## JOHN CURRIN

Opening reception: Tuesday, November 26, 6–8pm  
November 26, 2019–February 29, 2020  
7/F Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Hong Kong

John Currin, *Rosalba*, 2019, oil on canvas, 22 × 18 inches (55.9 × 45.7 cm) © John Currin

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November 14, 2019

*There's a kind of a distortion that happens with adoration.*  
—John Currin

Gagosian is pleased to present new portraits by John Currin. This is his first solo exhibition in Hong Kong and his first exhibition in Asia.

Conflating inspirational sources of high and low culture, from old masters to soft-porn pinups, Currin channels his prodigious painterly skills into idealized yet perverse images that both charm and challenge.

As a graduate student at Yale University in the 1980s, Currin recognized a “forced masculinity” in the Abstract Expressionist mode of painting that he had been practicing; consequently, he began exploring themes of innocence, humor, and eroticism, creating highly mannerist images of horses and girls with feathered hair, large-headed caricatures, and portraits of individuals and couples made in a painterly language entirely his own. Currin’s detailed renderings of human flesh in sensuous, glowing brushwork has frequently prompted comparison to the Dutch masters, including

the celebrated Golden Age painter Cornelis van Haarlem, alongside whose paintings Currin's were exhibited at the Frans Hals Museum in the Netherlands in 2011.

Currin's current exhibition at Dallas Contemporary in the United States focuses on his depictions of men and masculinity throughout the course of his career. Titled *My Life as a Man*, after Philip Roth's sardonic confessional novel about unrequited male angst, this exhibition presents a parade of awkward, self-conscious characters and fantastical artistic emanations that draw beauty and the grotesque in equal measure into the dance of id and ego.

In a series of new portraits, Currin returns to his most beloved subject: women. These latest paintings demonstrate some persistent themes in Currin's oeuvre, as well as a deep exploration of the genre of female portraiture. Characteristically, these women often appear as half-real, half-imagined, as though only part of the artist's subject were held up to a distorting mirror, with the rest left intact.

In one painting, a woman in classical drapery is posed against a blank, gray background, one delicate hand placed protectively over her exposed breast, her attitude at odds with the delirious expression on her face. In another, a woman wearing a silk head wrap is set against a yellow background. Her expression, with its inert smile, is vacant; her matronly bosom, covered in a floral-printed blouse, slopes downward, ending comically and abruptly at the limits of the painting. The resulting affect is one of both nostalgic sweetness and total disengagement.

In another painting, a woman bearing a passing resemblance to Currin's wife—the artist Rachel Feinstein, who is an inexhaustible subject and model for her husband—inclines her head as if in a classical portrait, her hair tumbling romantically around her bare shoulders. Her expression of pure, loving bliss seems to be directed generally outward rather than at the painter himself, conveying an impression of beneficence more than passion. Despite being tinged with irony, Currin's deep affection and affinity for his subjects are evident, his eloquent brushstrokes conveying satire and sincerity in equal measure.

**John Currin** was born in 1962 in Boulder, Colorado, and lives and works in New York. Collections include Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate, London; Art Institute of Chicago; Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Exhibitions include *Works on Paper*, Des Moines Art Center, Iowa (2003, traveled to Aspen Art Museum, Colorado); Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (2003–04, traveled to Serpentine Gallery, London; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York); DHC/ART, Montreal (2011); *John Currin meets Cornelis van Haarlem*, Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, Netherlands (2011–12); and *Paintings*, Museo Stefano Bardini, Florence, Italy (2016).

#JohnCurrin

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