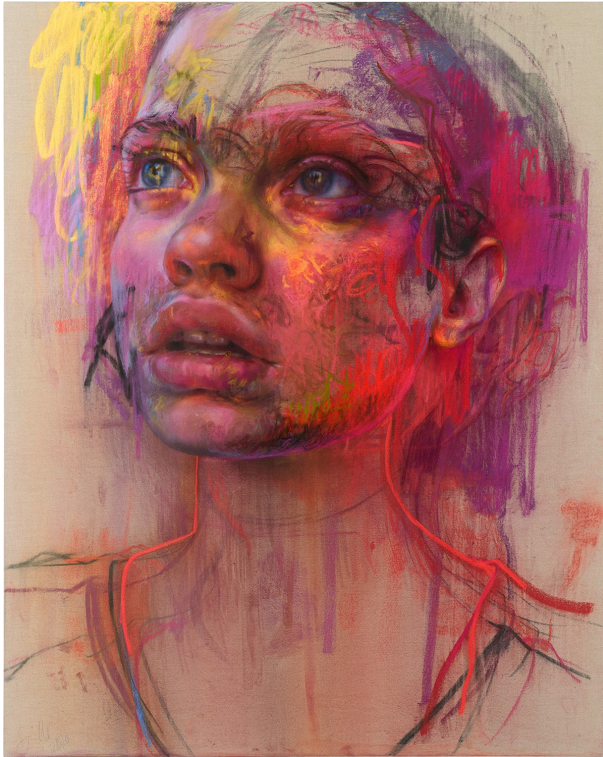


GAGOSIAN



JENNY SAVILLE

Elpis

November 12–December 22, 2020
980 Madison Avenue, New York

Jenny Saville, *Prism*, 2020, pastel and charcoal on canvas, 78 3/4 × 63 inches (200 × 160 cm) © Jenny Saville. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates

October 28, 2020

*Only Elpis [Hope] was left within her unbreakable house,
she remained under the lip of the jar, and did not
fly away. Before [she could], Pandora replaced the
lid of the jar. This was the will of aegis-bearing
Zeus the Cloudgatherer.
—Hesiod, Works and Days*

Gagosian is pleased to present *Elpis*, an exhibition of new paintings by Jenny Saville. This exhibition marks the reopening of the gallery at 980 Madison Avenue following the pandemic-related shutdown in March.

Saville's monumental portraits explore the human body and its fascinating aesthetic potential. Her bold and sensuous impressions of surface, line, and mass oscillate between rational and irrational forms, capturing a unique kind of realism specific to the twenty-first century. Titled after the ancient Greek personification of hope left behind at the bottom of Pandora's box—a spirit traditionally associated with the burdens of human suffering, rather than positivity—the paintings in *Elpis* are grounded in tangible realities while reaching toward their mythological dimensions.

Though resolutely of its time, Saville's art speaks to a profound reckoning with the primordial lineage of humanity. The ancient world comprises one of her most enduring sources of inspiration. In the past, she has presented the human figure as classical sculpture, melding marble and flesh through a complex layering of body parts and transhistorical artistic tributes. In the massive canvases presented at her 2014 solo exhibition *Oxyrhynchus* at Gagosian, Britannia Street, London, Saville intertwined palimpsestic silhouettes and fleshly forms, alluding to the trove of documents and literature that lay dormant in the famed titular Egyptian archeological site for millennia.

Saville's painting is steeped in a multitude of times and places. Working with expressive and energetic brushstrokes, she creates dramatic juxtapositions of color and shimmering light effects that recall Byzantine icons and mosaics, which were designed to take on a spellbinding and spiritually transcendent glow when lit by flickering candlelight. Saville also illuminates some of the works in *Elpis* with gold oil bar, invoking the precious metal's association with divine embodiment, a tradition dating back to the ancient Egyptians, who imagined gold to be the "flesh of the gods," and the Greek myth of Danaë, who was impregnated by Zeus in a shower of golden rain.

Saville's references and techniques span Western art history—combining the striking chiaroscuro of Baroque portraiture with the dappled light of Impressionist plein air painting—and also encompass snapshots and visual effects from everyday life. The raw chromatic vitality of Saville's new works was largely inspired by her recent travels to Australia, where she encountered the luminous, fleshy palette of Emily Kame Ngwarreye's virtuoso paintings. For the fiery-toned pastel painting *Prism* (2020), Saville combines her tribute to the Indigenous Australian artist with another: she created this work using a set of crayons purchased from Henri Roché's La Maison du Pastel, a famous art supply store in Paris once frequented by Edgar Degas.

Saville paints from photographs of models, often singling out and magnifying individual body parts that capture her attention: the vulnerable intensity of a wide-eyed stare, or the provocative glimmer of lips and pale teeth. In the self-portrait *Virtual* (2020), featured earlier this year in the first season of Gagosian's Artist Spotlight series, Saville compartmentalizes her facial features into disorienting boxes that recall windows jostling for space on a computer screen, or the stream of talking heads that populate news broadcasts and online webinars. At the brink between realism and abstraction, *Virtual* recalls fragmented portrait heads by Pablo Picasso and Francis Bacon as much as it points to the increasing slippage between the physical and the virtual in today's image-saturated world.

Jenny Saville was born in 1970 in Cambridge, England, and currently lives and works in Oxford, England. Collections include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Broad, Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; and Saatchi Collection, London. Recent exhibitions include the 50th Biennale di Venezia (2003); Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Roma, Rome (2005); Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL (2011, traveled to Modern Art Oxford, England, through 2012); *Egon Schiele–Jenny Saville*, Kunsthaus Zürich (2014–15); *Jenny Saville Drawing*, Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, England (2015–16); *Now*, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh (2018); and George Economou Collection, Athens (2018–19).

#JennySaville

Press

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