

GAGOSIAN



JOHN CURRIN

Memorial

September 14–October 30, 2021
541 West 24th Street, New York

John Currin, *Mantis*, 2020 (detail), oil on canvas, 68 × 36 inches (172.7 × 91.4 cm) © John Currin. Photo: Rob McKeever

August 16, 2021

There's the passing moment, and then there's eternity. Two different kinds of time in one painting.

—John Currin

Gagosian is pleased to present *Memorial*, an exhibition of new paintings by John Currin. This is his first solo exhibition at the gallery in New York since 2010.

Sophisticated in technique and perverse in subject matter, Currin's portraits conflate high and low culture in a teasing blend of satire and homage. His figures—predominantly female and often wildly exaggerated—have diverse sources, from pornographic pinups to old master paintings. In their extreme mannerism, they combine the beautiful and the grotesque, the sacred and the profane.

A series of startling new paintings begun in 2020 finds Currin bringing his musings on intimacy, eroticism, and feminine and masculine identities into a fresh context that expands his repertoire of art historical references while returning to the explicitly sexual imagery of his earlier work. In these so-called “memorials,” statuary figures are rendered in alabaster tones; warm flesh is replaced with cold trompe l’oeil stone in a confrontation between the sordid and the stately that diverts the traditional medium of public art to unexpected ends. Currin uses grisaille, a monochrome technique identified with Jan van Eyck and other artists, to evoke the texture of marble. He has spoken of the method as imparting to figures a funerary aspect, suggesting a meditation on death—or the demise of eroticism—and a look back at his own earlier work.

Pinup (2021) depicts a solitary female nude draped in rags and with her arms raised provocatively behind her head. Her gaunt contours, however, undermine the curvaceous archetype suggested by the painting’s title; and rather than being tantalizingly available, she is contained within a boxlike niche. *Sunflower* (2021) also isolates its female subject within the contained space of an alcove, with only the large red flower that she holds beginning to escape its painted confines.

In *Mantis* (2020), one woman perches atop another in an awkward pyramidal pose borrowed from an erotic comic book that also suggests the angular form of the titular insect. The work takes further cues from van Eyck’s *Annunciation Diptych* (ca. 1433–35) by depicting a knee and a foot that project beyond the frame. *Mantis*, like many of these new works, engages with Northern European Mannerism, a movement known for its juxtaposition of dramatic, stylized poses with architectonic solidity.

Reanimating the aesthetic of Lucas Cranach the Elder and Cornelis Engebrechtz, Currin brings dynamic, historicized figures into contact with a distinctly modern view of sexuality and the human body. He further complicates his graphic subject matter by giving many of the central figures the facial features of his wife, the artist Rachel Feinstein, a perpetual muse throughout his career. Through this visual invocation of his most enduring subject and model, Currin’s paintings prompt a complex entanglement of personal, societal, and historical narratives.

In conjunction with *Memorial*, an interview with the artist by Natasha Stagg will appear in the Fall 2021 issue of the *Gagosian Quarterly*.

John Currin was born in Boulder, Colorado, and lives and works in New York. Collections include the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Art Institute of Chicago; Des Moines Art Center, IA; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Tate, London; and Centre Pompidou, Paris. Exhibitions include *Works on Paper*, Des Moines Art Center, IA (2003, traveled to Aspen Art Museum, CO); 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); *Paintings*, Museo Stefano Bardini, Florence, Italy (2016); and *My Life as a Man*, Dallas Contemporary (2019).

#JohnCurrin

Press

Polskin Arts

Meagan Jones | meagan.jones@finnpartners.com | +1 212 593 6485

Julia Esposito | julia.esposito@finnpartners.com | +1 212 715 1643

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pressny@gagosian.com | +1 212 744 2313