

GAGOSIAN

Gagosian to Present New Paintings by Y.Z. Kami in New York



Y.Z. Kami, *Messenger IV*, 2022, oil on linen, 90 × 54 inches (228.6 × 137.2 cm) © Y.Z. Kami. Photo: Rob McKeever

[Download Press Images](#)

NEW YORK, December 19, 2022—Gagosian is pleased to announce *Night and Day*, an exhibition of new paintings by Y.Z. Kami. Opening January 17 at 555 West 24th Street, this will be the artist’s first solo exhibition in New York since 2014.

Night and Day juxtaposes two distinct bodies of work by Kami: the portrait paintings that have been at the center of his practice for more than three decades, and *Night Paintings*, a series that he began in 2017. In conjunction with *Endless Prayers*, *Dome* paintings, and other ongoing projects, the Iranian American artist’s oeuvre represents a deep consideration of representation and abstraction, humanism and spirituality.

Each of Kami’s large-scale painted portraits depicts a single face in muted colors on an opaque ground. Frontally composed and closely cropped, Kami’s self-absorbed subjects are removed from the specificity of context. From *Aïsha* (2021–22) and *Lu* (2022) to *The Monk* (2022) and *Woman in Dark Sweater* (2022), these paintings are titled by first names or descriptions, marking a continuum between individual identity and universality. Using layers of brushstrokes to blur his subjects’ features, Kami concentrates on the ineffability of individual presence. From longtime friends and acquaintances to strangers he has met in passing, his subjects form an ensemble of varied age,

gender, and ethnicity. Kami's introspective faces also recall the Fayum portraits of Roman-era Egypt—naturalistic likenesses of the deceased that were affixed to mummies. The works in *Night and Day* affirm—as do their ancient precedents—the common humanity in our observation of others.

Kami's *Night Paintings* are made using a single shade of indigo—said to be the color of the night—which he blends with gradations of white to summon the sensorial dynamics of presence and absence. Each canvas is filled with apparitions that float just past the limits of materiality and concrete representation. Composed with hazy, tenebrous brushwork, these abstractions evoke a mental inner state. Their shifting outlines and hazy boundaries make manifest soft edges and shimmering biomorphic patterns, enticing the viewer to recognize elements from the human realm while ultimately confounding all attempts to do so. The *Night Paintings* thereby limn the boundaries between the earthly and the sublime.

Messenger IV (2022), a single painting that belongs to neither series, represents a cloaked figure seen from behind, painted in a soft-focus style. The anonymous subject appears in the foreground of a crossroads, a setting of passage and transition. Kami has positioned this figure using the classical compositional device of the *Rückenfigur* (back-figure), with which the viewer is encouraged to identify, thus implicating him or her in the space and narrative suggested.

Contrary to the instantaneity of a photograph, Kami composes his paintings over an extended period, his nuanced brushwork built up in many layers. Consequently, they reward sustained looking, revealing their character over time and bringing awareness both to perception as a process and to contemplation of the nature of being.

Y.Z. Kami: De forma silenciosa/In a Silent Way, a mid-career survey exhibition curated by Steven Henry Madoff, is on view at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla y León, Spain, through January 22, 2023. Opening February 16, 2023, a multi-venue exhibition of Kami's works curated by Sergio Risaliti will be held across four locations in Florence, Italy: Museo Novecento, Abbey of San Miniato, Istituto degli Innocenti, and Palazzo Vecchio.

Y.Z. Kami was born in 1956 in Tehran, and lives and works in New York. Collections include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and British Museum, London. Solo institutional exhibitions include *Portraits by Y.Z. Kami*, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY (2003); *Perspectives*, Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (2008); *Endless Prayers*, Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London (2008); *Beyond Silence*, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (2009–10); and *Endless Prayers*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2016–17). Kami participated in the Biennale di Venezia in 2007 and 2019. In 2022, he received the Asia Arts Game Changer Award from the Asia Society, New York.

#YZKami

Y.Z. KAMI

Night and Day

Opening reception: Tuesday, January 17, 6–8pm

January 17–February 25, 2023

555 West 24th Street, New York

Press

Gagosian | press@gagosian.com

Hallie Freer | hfreer@gagosian.com | +1 212 744 2313

Polskin Arts

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

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