

Petzel

NICOLA TYSON

90s Paintings

April 4 – May 11, 2024

35 East 67th Street

I wanted to use the figure—my figure, a female figure—as my playground, to reclaim it, inhabit and investigate it, and rearticulate it from a position of active, creative sovereignty as opposed to that of the passive muse and ‘nude’ of art history and popular culture, where it had been routinely described and prescribed by male desire. I wanted to be—and create—a female protagonist.

—Nicola Tyson

Petzel is pleased to present *90s Paintings*, an exhibition of works from the 1990s by British-born artist Nicola Tyson, opening Thursday, April 4, 2024. The show marks Tyson’s eleventh solo exhibition with Petzel and will be on view through May 11, 2024, at Petzel’s Upper East Side location at 35 East 67th Street, Parlor Floor. Through *90s Paintings*, Tyson brings the viewer into the milieu of this formative period, considering these works in the context of her practice today.

Two of the early paintings featured in the exhibition were first shown in Tyson’s 1993 solo show at Trial BALLOON, the experimental project space the artist co-founded and ran out of her Soho loft from 1991–1993, centering women and lesbian artists. Trial BALLOON represented a DIY ethos, responding to a critical need for alternative venues outside the stagnant, post-80s commercial gallery scene. A new approach to female subjectivity was beginning to manifest; an interest in representing “difficult subject matter,” spearheaded by key players such as Nicole Eisenman in the emerging, yet sophisticated, lesbian subculture.

Tyson spoke of her work then:

I’m interested in ‘possibles’ and ‘becomings’... for me, making a painting feels like wrestling with an inherent, libidinal presence that’s in the painting already but has to be conjured up (wrestled with) and controlled for the painting to work. And as a woman painting, this relationship is harder won, for my ‘painting body’ is evasive... the canvas is so trained to the demands of male desire. So when I capture an image and ‘pin it’, it is already distorting into something else again, unwilling, almost unable to stay. (1993)

Tyson’s palette across these 90s works is more muted, employing delicate tints and hues befitting “the tentative, phantom-catching nature of this exploration—to discover and represent the uncharted, invisible female subjectivity in painting.” Her figures are most often faceless or turned away, an act of refusal to engage with the viewer. Tyson protects this interior space while revealing it just slightly, through the torque of the figure, the slope of a declined gaze. In contrast, her self-portraits from this period are laden with intense, time-specific autobiographical detail, inviting the viewer into her subjective environment.

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Galvanized by groundbreaking women artists of the 1980s such as Louise Bourgeois, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, and Karen Finley, and writers Laura Mulvey, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray during her time in art school, Tyson's sense of and relationship to feminism transformed. Tyson abandoned 'easel' painting upon graduation and—moving to New York—worked conceptually for a few years, before realizing for her, this was to deny instinct. Tyson sought to carve out space within an environment where painting, particularly figurative painting, was not at the forefront of the male-dominated, contemporary argument. When Tyson returned to painting in her 1993 exhibition at Trial BALLOON, what surfaced surprised her: "I had found my own voice."

Where the female form "had been routinely described and prescribed by male desire," Tyson created a painterly language outside of the male argument, and with it "a female protagonist." Over the past three decades, Tyson's paintings and their enhanced chromatic intensity have examined new strategies of refusal and tension; more spontaneous preparatory techniques have shifted gesture and form on the canvas. Yet, as *90s Paintings* illuminates, Tyson's desire and ability to conjure presence, in and by the paint, continues to persist and unfurl.

The opening of this exhibition coincides with the launch of *Nicola Tyson: Selected Paintings 1993–2022*, the most comprehensive overview of the artist's paintings to date. Spanning three decades of Tyson's oeuvre, this monograph provides a panoramic view of the artist's evolving lexicon.

A conversation between Nicola Tyson and Ksenia M. Soboleva celebrating *Selected Paintings: 1993–2022* and discussing the evolution of Tyson's practice will take place on May 11th, from 4–6 pm, at Petzel's Upper East Side location, 35 East 67th Street.

90s Paintings also anticipates an exhibition of new paintings from the artist, opening January 2025 at Petzel's Chelsea space, located at 520 W 25th Street.

About Nicola Tyson

Nicola Tyson was born in 1960 in London, England. She attended Chelsea School of Art, St. Martins School of Art, and Central/St. Martins School of Art in London and currently lives and works in New York, NY. Recent solo exhibitions include *Nicola Tyson (a survey of drawings)*, Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2024), *Nicola Tyson: A Bit Touched*, Nino Mier Gallery, Belgium, Brussels (2022), *Holding Pattern*, Sadie Coles HQ, London, UK (2021), and *Sense of Self*, Petzel Gallery, New York, NY (2020). In 2017, she was the subject of solo exhibitions at The Drawing Room, London, and the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, St. Louis, Missouri. In 2011 Tyson released the limited-edition book, *Dead Letter Men*, a collection of satirical letters addressing famous male artists. The book was designed by Peter Miles and published by Petzel Gallery, New York, and Sadie Coles HQ, London. Her unique archive of color photos documenting the London club scene of the late 1970s—*Bowie Nights at Billy's Club*—was the subject of shows, both in New York and London, in 2012 and 2013.

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Tyson's work is included in major collections such as Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C.; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and Tate Modern, London.

Petzel Gallery is located on the parlor floor and third floors of 35 East 67th Street New York, NY 10065. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 10:00 AM–6:00 PM. For press inquires, please contact Hanna Andrews at hanna@petzel.com, or call (212) 680-9467.