

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Tue–Sat: 10:00am–6:00pm



JENNY SAVILLE: *Oxyrhynchus*

Friday, 13 June–Saturday, 26 July 2014

Opening reception: Thursday, June 12th, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm

Gagosian is pleased to present the first-ever solo exhibition of Jenny Saville's paintings in London.

Captivated by the endless aesthetic and formal possibilities of the materiality of the human body, Saville makes a highly sensuous and tactile impression of surface and mass in her monumental oil paintings. Subjects are imbued with a sculptural yet elusive dimensionality that verges on the abstract. In recent paintings, she renews her enduring figurative investigations by depicting bodies embracing and intertwined.

Several new works are inspired by the ancient Egyptian rubbish dump at Oxyrhynchus, one of the most important archeological sites ever discovered. Heaps of discarded documents and literature, incredibly preserved in the area's dry climate, are now invaluable; fragments of ancient Greek texts such as Euclid's *Elements* and the poems of Sappho are among the excavated papyri. Saville alludes to this history through a deep layering of paired subjects: faces, torsos, and limbs overlap with shadows and reflections, palimpsests of living bodies and ancestral apparitions. Silhouettes drawn in charcoal through the surfaces of oil paint underscore the motion of the central embracing figures, while evoking the timeless human process of sketching. These intermediate "studies" echo the shifting status of the unearthed papers—once discarded, now treasured.

Time is further compressed by Saville's adaptation of various historical approaches to portraiture, from De Kooning's fluid abstractions of the female figure; to the almost combined couples of Picasso's late paintings and Japanese *Shunga* prints; to Titian's placement of subjects within dramatic perspectival landscapes, exemplified by *Nymph and Shepherd* (c. 1570–75). Saville's own figures merge ethereally with settings that have been loosely appropriated from photographs and evoke the backdrops of Renaissance paintings.

Paintings on paper distill this subtle figuration into focused portraits, some taking several years to complete. *Study for Shadow Head* (2007–14) reveals the tension between the subject's features and piercing gaze and the reality of the painting itself as a surface of thick, gestural brushstrokes. In *Generation* (2012–14), multiple impressions of each figure are drawn and painted to create studies in simultaneity; the relationship between mother and child is conveyed in a series of dynamic poses that move beyond formal composition and iconographic order into the realm of metaphysics.

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A fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by John Elderfield is forthcoming.

Jenny Saville was born in Cambridge, England in 1970. She studied at the Glasgow School of Art. Solo museum exhibitions include Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome (2005); Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, Florida (2012); and Modern Art Oxford (2012). Her work was included in "Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection," Royal Academy of Arts, London (1997, traveled to Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; and Brooklyn Museum of Art (1998–99); "The Nude in 20th Century Art," Kunsthalle Emden, Germany (2002, traveled to Arken Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, through 2003); "Painting," Museo Correr, 50th Biennale di Venezia (2003); "Paint Made Flesh," Frist Center for the Arts, Nashville (2009, traveled to Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; and Memorial Art Gallery, University of Rochester, New York, through 2010); and "Eroi," Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Torino, Italy (2011).

"Egon Schiele/Jenny Saville" opens at Kunsthaus Zürich on October 10, 2014.

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