

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

4 March 2015

PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Y.Z. KAMI: *Paintings*

Thursday, 9 April–Saturday, 30 May 2015

Opening reception: Wednesday, April 8th, from 6:00 to 8:00pm

When you go through the process of looking at a face and you meditate on it with pigments and brushes in hand, it is like living with the face. In a way, it becomes part of you.

—Y.Z. Kami

Gagosian London is pleased to present recent paintings by Y.Z. Kami.

Kami's portraits of introspective subjects project a broad and inviting presence. Using his own photographs of family, friends, and strangers as source material, he depicts faces as vessels to convey an almost sacred and universal atmosphere of reflection, often with eyes closed as though in meditation. The matte surface of his paintings resembles fresco, while the closely cropped, centered compositions evoke El Fayûm portraits of ancient Egypt. Beginning with a primary paint layer in warm terra cotta, subjects are rendered in a uniform *sfumato* that evokes a light tremor, imparting to the paintings the effect of movement. This sense of vitality may stem from the viewer's own associations with photographed figures in motion, but it transcends even the veracity of photographs. Kami does not aim to create photorealistic portrayals; rather, he seeks to evoke the presence of spirit.

In recent large-scale portraits, Kami emphasizes the process behind the paintings, taking mysterious liberties in his representation of individual features, as in the arresting *Man with Violet Eyes* (2013–14). In *Daya* (2014), a male subject in profile, he recreates a vivid memory of their first encounter. A thin strip of the earthy primary paint layer is visible at the bottom edge of the canvas, a glimpse behind the otherwise even surface of indeterminate skin textures and hair tones.

Depictions of hands joined in supplication, a common action spanning faiths, directly indicate Kami's enduring concerns. *White Dome* paintings similarly convey a sense of universal spirituality in the form of a central white light that spills over countless rows of tiny white rectangles like mosaic, hand-painted or stamped onto the canvas. A single *Black Dome* alludes to the flipside of such enlightenment: Kami cites as examples the *nigredo* phase of metal decomposition during alchemical processes, and the spiritual crisis known in Catholicism as the "dark night of the soul." His paintings possess a distinct sense of fluidity—between the various faiths and texts that constitute his philosophical influences; between representation and abstraction; and, most unexpectedly, between painted portrayals and life energies.

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Y.Z. Kami was born in Tehran, Iran in 1956, and lives and works in New York. His work has been collected and exhibited by Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art, London, and many other institutions worldwide. Solo museum exhibitions include Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York (2003); "Perspectives: Y.Z. Kami," Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (2008); "Y.Z. Kami: Endless Prayers," Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art, London (2008–09); and "Y.Z. Kami: Beyond Silence," National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens (2009–10). His work was included in the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007, curated by Robert Storr).

For further inquiries please contact the gallery at london@gagosian.com or at +44.207.841.9960. All images are subject to copyright. Gallery approval must be granted prior to reproduction.

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