

GAGOSIAN

Gagosian to Present *AMERICAN REALISM TODAY*

Paintings by Neil Jenney from His *Modern Africa* and *Good Paintings* Series



Neil Jenney, *Modern Africa #4*, 2020–21, oil on canvas, in painted wood artist's frame, 72 1/4 × 95 1/2 × 3 1/4 inches (183.5 × 242.6 × 8.3 cm) © Neil Jenney. Photo: Rob McKeever

I'm governed by nature. Anything I do, I want it to feel natural.

—Neil Jenney

NEW YORK, November 9, 2021—Gagosian is pleased to present paintings by Neil Jenney from his recent series *Modern Africa* (2015–)—a subseries of the *New Good Paintings* (2015–)—and the preceding series, *Good Paintings* (1971–2015).

Jenney is committed to exploring, and ultimately transcending, realism as both style and philosophy—a project first sparked by the preponderance of Pop-themed Photorealism in late-1960s New York. Having designated his early work “Bad Painting” (a term coined by Marcia Tucker, director of the New Museum, New York, in 1978) and his output after 1970 “Good Painting,” he continues to challenge familiar models of taste and subject matter while pursuing a meticulous and highly idiosyncratic approach to the representation of culture and place.

As with proto-Surrealist writer Raymond Roussel’s fanciful travelogue *Impressions d’Afrique* (*Impressions of Africa*, 1910), Jenney’s approach to his subject in the paintings on view is rooted in personal imagination, and in Western fantasies about the continent. Although these paintings are landscapes, they eschew sweeping panoramas in favor of more intimate, even introspective scenes.

But despite his pictorial restraint, Jenney’s series addresses fundamental conflicts between nature and civilization, and reflects a concern with our deteriorating environment.

Modern Africa shows architectural fragments that Jenney characterizes as “utilitarian”—columns, ramps, and stairways—half-submerged in undulating sand dunes. These monumental structures seem to exist in past and future simultaneously, providing both a critical look at the legacies of colonialism and a speculative view of what may lie in wait for humanity should we fail to address climate change. While the shadows and footprints that intrude here and there reveal a continued human presence, no figures are visible, suggesting that Jenney’s envisioned world is incapable of supporting many survivors.

Jenney refers to his work as “painted sculpture,” and uses handmade black wooden frames, which he first designed in the early 1970s, to present canvases executed in a crisp, high-contrast style. This device was inspired by the classical Greek notion of viewing a painting as a scene through a window, an idea that he encountered in a Fourth Avenue bookstore. Providing in this way an “architectural foreground” as well as—through their stenciled captions—a guide to title and setting, the frames situate the paintings as objects and interpretations and continue to provide Jenney with what he has described as “the most stimulating prospect” with which he has ever worked.

Neil Jenney was born in 1945 in Torrington, Connecticut, and lives and works in New York. Collections include the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk, Denmark; and Tate, London. Solo exhibitions include *Paintings and Sculpture 1967–1980*, University of California Art Museum, Berkeley (1981, traveled to Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk, Denmark; and Kunsthalle Basel); *Collection in Context—Neil Jenney: Natural Rationalism*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1994); and *North America*, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2007). Jenney’s work has been featured in major group exhibitions and biennials, including the Whitney Biennial (1969, 1973, 1981, and 1987); *Representations of America (1977–78)*, organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco for the Pushkin Museum, Moscow; Hermitage, Saint Petersburg; and Palace of Art, Minsk, Belarus); *New Image Painting*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1978); and *Bad Painting*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1978).

#NeilJenney

NEIL JENNEY

AMERICAN REALISM TODAY

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976 Madison Avenue, New York

Press

Gagosian

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