

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

COLUMBIA  SPECTATOR

'Continuum': Painter Jenny Saville magnifies infancy and motherhood on Gagosian's walls

Saville is known for her use of bold contours, multi-colored flesh, and enlarged body features for her human subjects.



Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery

Blood-red lips, subtle gray eyes, and fleshy pregnant bellies create a powerful union on Jenny Saville's canvases. The world-renowned painter from Cambridge has returned to The Gagosian Gallery's Madison Avenue outpost with her new exhibition "Continuum." Saville's exhibit opened Sept. 15 and will run until Oct. 22.

Saville is known for her use of bold contours, multi-colored flesh, and enlarged body features for her human subjects. Her thick, hot bursts of pinks and reds bring new meaning to the word "flesh."

"The colors aren't different from past bodies of work, but the introduction of children is important," Saville said. "Also, in this series, I've embraced drawing in a new way. I'm a bit more confident."

“Continuum” brings forth this distinctly Saville style while also introducing startling images of pregnancy and infancy in graphite and bursts of gray. There is a sullenness in this body of work—something that hints at a perverseness in motherhood and child-rearing.

The exhibit is on both the fourth and sixth floors of the museum, each with two rooms filled with Saville’s extremely large pieces of art.

Walking through the exhibit’s entrance on the Gagosian’s fourth floor, viewers are met by incredibly embellished toes and bellies. These fantastically proportioned body parts contrast smaller, more subtle faces and limbs. In sixth-floor drawings, charcoal lines are scattered collectively across the canvas, overlapping more pronounced mother-child images.

One wall of the exhibit has two floor-to-ceiling drawings with what looks like the same image in different mediums. But, upon closer look, one of the pieces features a foot tearing through an infant’s stomach. Stare even longer and Saville’s use of fleshy oil paints allows the viewer to see similar images in completely different ways.

“I’ve found new ways to use scale,” Saville said. “I used to just make everything big, and now I’m working with that variation a lot. I’ve also embraced older art with a lot more confidence.”

“Continuum” offers a startling gallery experience that may make women reconsider child-rearing. Even though that may not have been (and probably wasn’t) Saville’s intention, it’s an eye-opener into the colors of motherhood. But since the exhibit isn’t very extensive, viewers don’t leave feeling completely overwhelmed by the boldness of Saville’s perspective.

The 79th Street east-bound bus can take Columbians from the 1 train to the Gagosian Gallery’s entrance (or at least two blocks away from it). Whether they are interested in pregnancy or not, visitors who are fascinated by color, the human experience, and the ways these themes collide will find Saville’s new exhibition a worthwhile experience.