

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

A R T O B S E R V E D

Paris: John Currin at the Gagosian Gallery through December 21, 2013

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Lynette & Janette (2013). All images courtesy the Gagosian Gallery.

John Currin's work is currently on view at the Gagosian Gallery in Paris through December 21st. Currin is known for his seductive and, to some, lewd appropriations of sixteenth and seventeenth century European painting. His paintings pair explicit sexual representations with the extremely polished and delicate details of this classical style. The result is a fascinating, touching and often hilarious interpretation of the politics of visual representation and sexual provocation.

Disorienting, delicious and challenging, Currin treats painterly cliché with the kitsch and gaudy visions of the Baroque-style female form, adorned in a peasant blouse and tight ripped jeans. The fleshy figures and elaborate backgrounds inspire a sense of historical disorientation in the experience of viewing Currin's work. *Tapestry* (2013) reveals the extent of Currin's mastery, of the practice of painting and manipulating the minor but unmistakably surreal application of historically inappropriate detail of dress. A young porcelain-skinned girl gazes out of the frame, while indeterminate flesh and expressions of ecstasy encircle her figure from the background. Similarly, *The Old Fur* (2010) suggests a subtle manipulation of the proportions of the female form. Questions of concealment and the gaze constituted in different periods of art history are a clear concern of Currin's, and his work revels in the disorientation it seeks to provoke in the viewer.

Currin's work is not easy viewing, but the mastery and skill of this artist is clear. By raising questions of form, historical context and the fragmentation of art history, Currin expands a realm

of visual understanding by exposing the latent possibilities for the crude within the world of classical and mannerist painting. Currin's experimental power comes from his ability to challenge the limits of the viewer's visual frame of reference while maintaining the coherence of the form he is questioning.