

ELLE
December 2014

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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MEET THE EXPLORERS CLUB:
12 MAKERS AND SELLERS, MUSEUM
MASTERS, AND COLLECTION BUILDERS
WHO ARE MAJOR PLAYERS IN ART'S
BIG, BUZZY MOMENTS (RECORD SALES!
SHOCKING SHOWS!) AND IN ITS EVEN
BIGGER IDEAS: WHAT ART IS NOW, WHERE
IT'S HEADED, AND WHAT THAT SAYS
ABOUT US ALL. BY MOLLY LANGMUIR

PHOTOGRAPHED BY FREDRIKE HELWIG
STYLED BY SAMIRA NASR CURATED BY CARY LEITZES

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THE NEW OLD MASTER

CECILY BROWN

In one early Cecily Brown work, bunnies engage in an orgy. In another—a mass of limbs and genitalia—humans do the same. “I was so aware that people were very dismissive of painting,” says Brown of the late ’90s, when she burst onto the scene with lushly rendered paintings that blended Old Master-style brushwork with the imagery of hard-core porn. “I needed something ballsy to make people stop and look.” It worked: Hers was an early, rapid rise—by age 29 she had been picked up by premier blue-chip gallery Gagosian—but she has long since proven her staying power. Says Whitney Museum of American Art curator Chrissie Iles, who put Brown in the 2004 Whitney Biennial: “She’s rewritten the language of the erotic in painting from a female perspective.”

On an early-fall afternoon, Brown’s Union Square studio was filled with paintings in various stages of readiness for two European shows opening two days apart in October. (An easel also displayed a drawing of an iguana amid some suspiciously Brown-esque greenery—a collaboration with five-year-old Celeste, her daughter with husband Nicolai Ouroussoff, an architecture critic.) Like any artist who’s been working steadily for almost two decades, her subject matter has evolved, becoming more complex and ambitious. “Now I try to throw everything into one painting,” she says. “Life, death, and the kitchen sink.” She still incorporates eroticism, but it’s less overt. “It’s more about letting the painting itself conjure those qualities rather than describing penetration,” she says. “Now I look at the early work and think, Ah, youth.”

Brown, photographed with untitled works in progress at her Union Square, NYC, studio

Hair by Briton Buenaventura at Management+Art; Art by Cecily Brown; Production by Mary Clancy Pace for Henstooth Productions; Styling by Rog & Bone; Storey, wallpaper, glass and glass, lighting, Celine; Make-up on the set; for details, see Shopping Guide