

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



John Currin at Gagosian *Hunter Drohojowska-Philp succumbs to the master seducer.*

Hunter Drohojowska-Philp



*Altar, 2015, Oil on canvas
40 x 28 inches (101.6 x 71.1 cm)*

© John Currin / Photo: Doulas M. Parker Studio

John Currin is so famous, so rich, so talented, it is a challenge to even want to write about his paintings. Shouldn't the effort go to those who are less fortunate? Alas, his latest work on view at Gagosian Gallery overwhelmed any such resistance. They are lush and lovely, weird and provocative.

Long celebrated for his gifts as a figurative painter indebted to the greats of the Baroque and Rococo eras, Currin was catapulted to prominence in the 1990s with his paintings of barely clothed women, eventually using his artist wife Rachel Feinstein as a model. The female nude in painting is a dicey subject for any male artist working today and the controversy over his gorgeous work only escalated in recent years after he started painting pornographic scenes from photographs or the internet. Currin reveled in the controversy. In many ways, it was an extension

of earlier works exploring and exploiting the tropes of sexuality through the history of art and advertising. The porn paintings, however, seemed a cheap use of his undeniable gifts. Currin has decided to move on being uncomfortable with the fact that he was making paintings that he did not want his own daughters to see.

The porn paintings were relegated to the background as he painted over his earlier work, allowing vestiges of the brassy, nastiness emerge behind his more decorous female nudes, often curled up or reclining. In *Fortune Teller* (2015), for instance, a glossy, porn scene with wax dripping from candelabra is flipped upside down as the background of a reclining young woman, her gold robe pulled aside to reveal rounded breasts, a form repeated in the transparent green glass sphere mysteriously held by her to magnify reflections and distortions.

However, the tondos in the exhibition, with no porno-y backgrounds at all, are the triumphs. The distortions of Mannerism, long of interest to Currin, are exaggerated by his use of a convex mirror. The titles provide full disclosure of his technique. In *Nude in a Convex Mirror* (2015), Currin has rounded the bottom to nearly fill the circular format of the picture. With flesh that is pale and pink, it is as inviting as a peach yet executed with full knowledge of the artifice and dry humor that artists have brought to their paintings throughout history. Did I say humor? Absolutely. The faces and expressions of his female figures seem slightly at odds with their situation, as though they are privy to some private joke shared with their creator. Perhaps it is simply that Currin is able to indulge his every whim as a painter, even engaging the predictable continuum of eroticism in ways that are surprisingly unexpected. The show continues through April 11.