

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY



### YZ Kami: Paintings

Gabriel Coxhead



*YZ Kami: 'The Painter's Mother', 2014-15. © Y. Z. Kami. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery. Photography by Robert McKeever*

★★★★★

What does it mean to describe a painting as 'lifelike'? Usually, the term implies a photographic degree of visual accuracy. But in the case of YZ Kami's vast portraits of friends and family members, the figures are lifelike in a much richer and stranger way. As the faces loom over you, they seem to shimmer holographically, to twitch and pulse, even to breathe – as if they're not just lifelike, but quite literally alive.

The eerie effect is due to the Iranian-born painter's technique. Kami blurs and multiplies the boundaries of forms, so that his final figures – mostly with eyes closed, but occasionally staring straight ahead or turned to one side – have a tremulous, hazy appearance, like they're hovering in some weird, halfway distance, perpetually out of focus. As your vision tries to adjust, the shadows and perspectives seem to softly pool and flit, making their faces appear mobile. Of course it isn't the figures shifting at all, but rather the minute movements that you, the viewer, constantly and unconsciously make. Ultimately, there's something mystical, almost religious, in

that way that these inert arrangements of pigment on canvas can become imbued with a sense of agency and presence.

Which is why Kami's actual religious-themed works seem rather superfluous. Some paintings depict hands in a praying position – but unlike faces, which the human brain is designed to resolve, these hands don't carry quite the same vibratory sensation. That goes too for his monochrome, abstract paintings, featuring concentric rings of thousands of brick-like shapes, like mandalas or church cupolas. The patterns concentrate towards the centre, suggesting a kind of breath-like expansion and contraction – but the effect is nothing like as powerful as the haunting animation of his portraits.