

GAGOSIAN

VANITY FAIR

Jennifer Guidi, Her Gagosian Show on Pause, Is Weathering Quarantine with Insta Stories and Baths

While her newest paintings hibernate inside a New York gallery, the Los Angeles artist turns out to be presciently suited for this isolated, introspective time.

Laura Regensdorf



Jennifer Guidi at her studio in Los Angeles. BY CARLOS CHAVARRIA/REDUX.

In the last week of February, Jennifer Guidi posted a video on Instagram Stories that playfully flouted what I imagined to be Gagosian protocol. There she was, roller-skating through the 24th Street location, with a sage bundle in hand and an overlaid soundtrack of Skepta & WizKid’s “Energy (Stay Far Away).” The 47-year-old painter was clearing the air before the opening of “Gemini,” her New York debut with the mega-gallery. “I like the idea of cleansing—not that it’s a negative space, but just starting fresh,” she said of the high-traffic location, home to past shows by Richard Serra, Damien Hirst, and Jeff Koons. Guidi had the urge to skate, as she sometimes does around her Los Angeles studio, and ordered a pair off Amazon. “I didn’t know it would be so slippery!” she told me a few days later.

The title of the exhibition, which is now temporarily closed due to coronavirus and optimistically extended through May 30, is more than a tip-off to Guidi’s astrological sign. (Her 11-year-old twin daughters are also Geminis.) The new paintings—monumental yet intimately hand-tooled,

with nods to chakras and 19th-century color theory—toy with duality, as detailed in the press notes: “light and darkness, abstraction and figuration, science and mysticism.” Now that time itself has bifurcated into “before” and “after,” the show, spanning the divide, has a deeper twin identity. The night of Guidi’s opening, I took an exuberant, crowded dance class with Ryan Heffington before catching a cab to the gallery; a month later, Guidi’s paintings hang in the dark, while Heffington leads the quarantined masses via Instagram Live. Same, same but very different.

What I find strangely comforting with Guidi, having spoken with her “before” and “after,” is how little has changed. The nightly baths. The morning meditation. The solitary, painstaking work. “I think a lot of artists already have what they need to cope in this time—at least I do, as a fairly introverted person,” she said from her house in Silver Lake, her twins in the midst of their virtual school day. (She and her former partner, the artist Mark Grotjahn, are alternating their parenting duties in week-long stretches.)



Guidi's As I Look Into You I Begin to See Myself, 2019. Sand, acrylic, and oil on linen. © JENNIFER GUIDI/PHOTOGRAPH BY BRICA WILCOX/COURTESY OF GAGOSIAN.

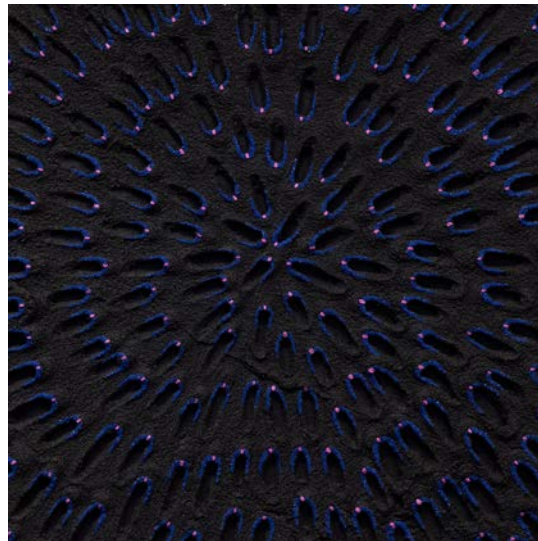
Guidi’s team has vacated her studio in nearby Glassell Park, but she still drives over, starting back up on a few half-finished canvases. Her nearly 70,000 Instagram followers have been keeping up, watching as she makes methodical, almond-size marks using a custom-made dowel. My mind flashed to the memes of shoppers at the grocery store with comically long sticks to keep people at bay. It’s a little over three feet, she told me, stretching out a measuring tape. In other words: the radius of a social-distancing safe zone.

The ability to telegraph your work through a smartphone is more than cultural currency; in quarantine, it’s a creative lifeline, whether it’s comedians dropping Twitter videos or Jane Fonda’s retro-redux workouts on TikTok. Guidi was presciently early to Instagram, back when she faced a different kind of isolation. “I wasn’t showing, and I had very young kids. I was kind of stuck at home with no outlet,” she recalled. Posting videos of her painting techniques—sometimes brushstrokes, other times thumbprint-size impressions into a bed of sand—opened a channel to the outside world. “It’s become this huge tool for collectors,” she explained. “Now, you have this window into people’s lives or practice.” Even within the ecosystem of art consultants and curators, Instagram acts like an intimate studio visit. (There are the haters, she

shrugs—“like, ‘Oh, great, you’re mixing paint.’”) Now, it’s a trip to Chelsea from the confines of your couch.

It’s also, in Guidi’s case, a guide to weathering quarantine in good health. The other week, the artist posted a panorama of her virtuous smoothie ingredients: hemp seeds, collagen peptides, açai powder, bee pollen, cacao nibs, reishi mushrooms—along with almond milk, dragon fruit, banana, and “a lot of greens—basically a full salad,” the artist told me. She demonstrated an upside-down tilt on her inversion board, strapped in at the ankles; the contraption mimics the reverse blood flow of a yoga headstand and helps unwind her upper-body tension from painting (a welcome release, without her usual chiropractor or massage therapist in the immediate future). And she showed off her crystal collection. “I have a lot of rose quartz, smoky quartz, amethyst. A blue one—something with a C,” she said, explaining how trips to the Arizona retreat, Miraval, sparked her interest. “I dip my toe in it. I like a lot of the meanings, the symbolism.”

In “Gemini,” those metaphysical leanings emerge in a series of nearly all-black paintings, correlated to the chakras. Upon close inspection, each bears hints of color, applied to the almondine divots like French-manicure tips. Guidi remembers a time when fellow artists cautioned her against revealing such impulses in her work. “It was like, ‘Don’t talk about spirituality, don’t talk about anything that seems New Age-y,’” she said. “And then the more my meditation practice started blending with the art, I got to a point where I was, like, ‘I don’t care.’”



A detail of My Thoughts Emerge from a Mingling of Light and Darkness (Crown), 2019. Sand, acrylic, and oil on linen. © JENNIFER GUIDI/PHOTOGRAPH BY BRICA WILCOX/COURTESY OF GAGOSIAN.

As we trudge through what people have taken to call “one long day,” can someone else’s baked-in routines be a metronome for the rest of us? Guidi starts her day with a 15-minute meditation, pushing mala beads along a string in sync with her breath. Cardio sessions on the Versaclimber machine in her garage have a similar head-clearing effect, smoothing out waves of anxiety and sharpening the senses: “Once you get the adrenaline going, everything looks better, smells good.” She just signed up for Sky Ting’s online yoga platform (struggling, like the rest of us, to make time for it); her boyfriend is teaching her chess. She’s trying to stick to a daily journal. “There’s so much information that I’m constantly searching for something,” she said. “I’ll pick

up my phone and even if I'm not going to look at Instagram, I'm on Instagram. How did I get there?" The writing practice, even if only for a few pages, calls off the search.

The commonsense cure for seasickness is to train your eyes on the horizon, the one fixed point in the roiling current. In "Gemini," that moment arrives with a colossal painting of a sunset, stretching nearly 20 feet wide. Three social-distance units, I think. The sky is a dappled expanse of Guidi's dash-like strokes, undulating in flamingo pinks and bright tangerines; below it, the water line is straight and true. "As I Look into You I Begin to See Myself," reads the title, and I wonder if I'm becoming a little New Age-y. I just found a crystal—quartz, I think—and put it in the kitchen window above my jar of everlasting scallions. For a few minutes, everything looks better, smells good.