

GLADSTONE GALLERY

David Salle

12 Rue du Grand Cerf, Brussels

June 10 – July 15, 2022

Artist David Salle always finds his way back to the fundamental building blocks of painting: line, shape, color, texture, and most importantly, composition. An imagist at heart, Salle has spent much of his career exploring how images can be constructed from those basic elements. His work demonstrates the essential, even inescapable reciprocity of image and pure painting. In his first exhibition with Gladstone, Salle presents a new series of paintings that each tell their own story through a pictorial language merged with the materiality – the facticity – of paint.

In the current body of work, Salle revisits his past to tell new stories. For this exhibition, the artist has repurposed previous works by enlarging, cropping, re-printing, and then painting over existing images to create brand new ones. This amalgamation of past, present, and future compounds the narrative potential of his figures, producing a complex yet legible mode of storytelling. Male and female figures, some nude and others clothed, a few with heads and many without, bisect the picture plane. Floating in space like flying maquettes, the bodies are tangled and overlaid by various motifs that Salle regularly employs in his work such as trees or ladders, or simple geometric forms. Indeed, the depiction of simplified forms as stand-ins for the human body, as 'bodies-in-the-making' is a leitmotif of these works. These forms take on various identities - sometimes a torso, other times a mattress, or a box, or a dented hourglass; the work seems to say, 'Look at what we are made of.'

As an artist who has made extensive use of photography, Salle's work highlights the importance of perspective and superimposition, as well as strong contrasts of light and shadow to create dynamic relationships between figures that float, fly, and ooze throughout the picture. Built-up in stages, the works combine seemingly unrelated images in diverse and disjunctive representational styles. Salle's images may seem unrelated at first glance, but in fact, exist in carefully calibrated image harmonies. Neither meaningless nor random, the relationships between images are abstract, as in music; the image clusters make precise chords of associations and resonances. As in all art, the how is as important as the what. Some figures seem embedded in passages of swirling paint; others are painted in slashing black outlines, while still others are achieved with delicate brushstrokes of yellow-ochre or Venetian red. In some of the works, Salle's color is naturalistic; in others decidedly not. In one piece, a detached red nose is suspended against an oozing pink background while an outstretched hand is painted in blue, while faces and mannequins weave and twist in and out of the scene. Painted atop magazine covers and ads, the works pile up, each one bolder than the next. One element leads to another, which leads to another, and on and on, ending in a state of expectant animation.

David Salle (b. 1952, Norman, OK) lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. In 1970, at the age of 17, Salle joined the legendary foundational class of the California Institute of the Arts, where his mentor was the Conceptual artist, John Baldessari. At Cal Arts, Salle developed an affinity for the cinematic language of montage, as reflected in his early works of the 1970s. In the early 1980s, Salle came to prominence as a leading figure of the Pictures Generation, artists who questioned the status of the image through appropriation and by confronting mass media on its own terms. Distinct from others in his generation, Salle's work has always been rooted in the complexities and demands of painting.

Since the 1980s, Salle has received international recognition, with solo exhibitions at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam; the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York; Spiral Hall Museum, Tokyo; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. His 1999 retrospective was held at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam and traveled to the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna; Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin, Italy; and Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain. His work has also been shown at institutions including The Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, among many others. In 2016, a solo exhibition was held at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga. His most recent survey exhibition was held at the Brant Foundation in Greenwich. Salle is also a prolific writer and critic whose essays and interviews have been published in Artforum, Art in America, Modern Painters, The Paris Review, and as well as in numerous exhibition catalogues and anthologies. He is a frequent contributor to The New York Review of Books. His collection of critical essays, How To See, was published by W. W. Norton in 2016.

For further information, please contact press@gladstonegallery.com
New York gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–6pm
Brussels gallery hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10am–6pm and Saturday, 12pm–6pm