

JOHN CURRIN

02 April 2008 – 10 May 2008
69 South Audley Street London W1

Private view 02 April 2008 6 – 8pm

Sadie Coles HQ is presenting a major new series of paintings by American painter John Currin whose subjects range from the domestic to the overtly erotic. These exceptionally refined and gloriously engaging paintings continue the intense debate within Currin's work that combines art historical technique with contemporary reference. While some of Currin's new paintings are of flowers and exquisite china, most are depictions of hardcore eroticism taken from European pornography.

Pornography is functional and almost by definition an unembellished celluloid or digital idiom. Indeed, one of the primary uses of photography is porn, and a painting would struggle to claim to be as immediate or undeniably in the moment as a photograph. Currin's use of pornographic subject matter is both a challenge to these conventions and an acknowledgement of the spectral presence of photography for the contemporary painter.



Currin renders the pornographic in luscious oil paint, evoking the technique of historical painters as various as the magisterial Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Gustave Courbet, Christian Schad or Otto Dix. Currin's appropriation of daring images and their transformation through the medium of paint knowingly mimics the four-hundred-year-old practice of erotic paintings commissioned for private viewing by wealthy patrons. His imagery does away with the elevation of the subject through mythical role play and these girls and boys are what they are, 20th century porn stars, but they are promoted purely through their rendering in oil paint. And when the pictures are not explicit they are laced with innuendo. One picture in the exhibition, *Pushkin Girl*, depicts a plump young woman looking up from her book in order to gaze at the viewer, the expression on her face suggesting that something indecent may be going on outside the crop of the image. Another painting, a still life of delft china, is seen in this context as fetishistic and as dogged in its mastery as Currin's rendering of the sex act.

From early on in his career Currin was known for his distinctive depictions of women of various ages and sizes – dour menopausal women, pretty young girls, buxom maidens – and men of dubious sexual ability, and he has been alternately spoken of in terms of mannerism, caricature, and conservatism. But throughout Currin's compositions is a morphology of academic realism entwined with lively contemporary caricature, with the work allowed to triumph by the pure splendour and the staggering ability of his painting.

John Currin was born in Boulder, Colorado, in 1962 and obtained a B.F.A. from Carnegie Mellon University (1984) followed by a M.F.A. from Yale University (1986). He lives and works in New York. In 2003, a travelling exhibition of drawings was organised by the Des Moines Art Center and in the same year MoCA Chicago initiated a mid-career survey of his painting which travelled to the Serpentine Gallery, London and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. His work has also been included as part of *What is Painting? - Contemporary Art from the Collection*, MoMA- Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2007; *Painting Now! - Back to Figuration*, Kunsthal Rotterdam, 2007; *In the Darkest Hour there may be light: works from Damien Hirst's Murderme Collection*, Serpentine Gallery, London, 2006. A major monograph on John Currin was published by Rizzoli in 2006.

For further information or images please contact Rebecca Heald on +44 [0] 20 7434 2227 or press@sadiecoles.com

Opening hours Tuesday – Saturday 11am – 6pm