

# LÉVY GORVY

## LÉVY GORVY TO PRESENT FIRST EXHIBITION WITH DAN COLEN

### *Dan Colen: Mailorder Mother Purgatory*

May 2 – June 12, 2018

Lévy Gorvy  
909 Madison Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

Opening Reception: May 2, 6–8 PM

**New York, NY—** Lévy Gorvy will debut new paintings and sculpture by Dan Colen in the artist's inaugural exhibition at the gallery, opening May 2nd. *Dan Colen: Mailorder Mother Purgatory* will present three recent bodies of works that focus on technical innovation in pursuit of ambience and emotional depth. The exhibition, which will run through June 12th at the gallery's New York location, is both a celebration of Colen's recently announced representation by the gallery and an evolution of his painterly practice.

A leading figure of his generation, Colen pursues an art deeply rooted in the history of painting. Having engaged in long periods of material experimentation, employing substances from chewing gum, flowers, dirt, and grass, to confetti, and tar and feathers, he has gradually deconstructed the essence of painting's brushstroke and the gestural mark of the artist's hand. His bold, spirited, and fertile style of tromp l'oeil techniques and tongue-in-cheek humor deliver a decidedly contemporary interpretation to the recognized canon. However, it is also through this lens that Colen so fervently mines and questions established historical styles: Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Conceptualism. Challenging the heritage of his medium through an innovative approach to materiality, technique, and



Dan Colen, *Electra*, 2018. Oil-based enamel on linen, 120 x 96 inches (304.8 x 243.8 cm). © Dan Colen 2018. Photography by Tim Nighswander.

content, Colen pushes the boundaries of painting while imbuing his work with formal rigor and art historical richness.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue that features a conversation between the artist and Jeff Koons moderated by curator Douglas Fogle as well as an essay by art historian and critic Andrianna Campbell, a noted specialist in American art of the modern and contemporary period.

### **About the Exhibition**

*Dan Colen: Mailorder Mother Purgatory* spans three floors of Lévy Gorvy's gallery in New York.

The exhibition opens on the ground floor with new paintings from Colen's Mailorder series (2015–2018) of lush oil-on-linen silkscreen prints, which depict images of clothing from mailorder catalogues, enlarged to a monumental scale. Here the artist harnesses the power of seduction and subversive marketing to consider relationships between fundamentals of art: commodity, originality, and artistic production. Suggestive of a new direction in Colen's approach to surface, ideas of layering, transference, and accumulation coalesce and converge in the complex process of printing and making these works. Colen creates tension between presence and absence, deriving this dichotomy not only from his choice of disembodied subjects, but also through form. He deliberately interrogates his tools—considering how to use canvas and how to apply paint—and then examines the relationship between the physicality of the canvas's weave and the graphic qualities of the printed dot. By appropriating advertisements that are quite literally clipped from his everyday life, Colen transforms cheap commercial prints into velvety, saturated silkscreens through which blurred forms and tonal subtleties are elevated to technical studies of color, line, shadow, and light. In contrast to the materiality of cut-rate catalogues, the pixelated effect of these paintings was achieved in oil paint—a medium that can only be silkscreened using an intensive, detail-oriented process. Informed by the artist's love of Mark Rothko's color fields and the painterly techniques of predecessors such as Barnett Newman, Brice Marden, Agnes Martin, and Georgia O'Keefe, Colen's Mailorder paintings emerge from a laborious process of application and control. Between the softness of colorful sweaters and the hard edges of corduroy jeans, illusionistic fields of pigments emerge between the creases and the folds to reveal a sublime rendering of our contemporary urban landscape and its alluring, magnetic pull.

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While Colen's Mailorders may bridge a juncture between recent series in his art, his Mother and Purgatory paintings are entrenched in the artist's ever evolving commitment to his painting's fundamental origins. Employing oil on canvas, Colen wrestles with materiality and process in these two bodies of work, propelling his practice ever forward to unveil visceral pictorial experiences that are innovative and fresh.

On the gallery's second and third floors, new Mother and Purgatory paintings further extend Colen's longstanding interest in the sentimental tenderness of mid-20th century hand-drawn animation. Here, three new large-scale oil paintings from the series Mother (2017–2018) are presented in conjunction with a painted steel sculpture of a female nude. Mindful of popular culture's force to express the fleeting and ephemeral moments of human existence, Colen draws upon animated stills from Disney classics to expose the fragility and wrought psychological terrain of our collective imagination. The narrative of the Disney film *Bambi* (1942) arouses the emotions reverberating throughout Colen's present body of work: sentiments of abandonment, emptiness, searching, and loss transcend the artist's cool palette of blues and barren branches that sway hauntingly in the air. Here, the mother figure is personified in landscape: creating tension between the foreground and background of the picture plane, our experience of the looming sky and shivering charcoal bark of autumn's forlorn trees is both startling and harsh. Emblematic of the temporal and transient themes of life and birth, these works elicit the weight of the mournful fawn's experience of life, love, and death.

Paired in dialogue with the Mother paintings, the new sculpture, *Annabelle* (2017–2018), portrays the physical representation of a woman. Arrayed in the center of the gallery floor, her arms reach skyward, similarly evoking the figuration of Colen's dead trees. Lying upon her back, her body twists in the pose *figura serpentinata* (a stance termed in Italian painting and sculpture to elicit dynamism in the figure) — spiraled on its central axis, her lower limbs push in one direction while her torso spins the opposite way. Between her hands she holds a woodland creature: gripping the neck of a rabbit, its feet rest upon her chest. Painted in the technique of chiaroscuro, her intense but tender gaze is inspired by historical depictions, drawing influence from Caravaggio, Gustave Courbet's *Woman with a Parrot* (1866), and the iconography of medieval Madonna and Child.

On the third floor, Colen's investigation of painterly gestures and his ongoing navigation between abstraction and representation culminate in the Purgatory paintings. Four new canvases in vivid magenta hues display the artist's love of surface and pure pleasure in

layering colors. Mining classic styles of American animation and fusing them with the atmospheric effects of J.M.W. Turner and John Constable's studies of clouds, Colen's cloudscapes, rendered with a surreal palette, artificial depth, and cartoonish sense of form, achieve resounding contemporaneity while conjuring historical references that range from 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticism and the Hudson River School to the religiously loaded semiotic legacy of the cloud in Renaissance and Baroque painting. Colen builds up thin, translucent glazes in oil through a process that is slow and searching. Painstakingly crafted and layered, each canvas is sprayed, stained, or hand-painted over a period of months to create a smooth surface that both preserves a satisfying materiality and exhibits a depth of pigment that is at once ethereal, resonant, and full.

In his handling of paint Colen collapses the legibility of his subjects, denying conventions of pictorial space, and conflating the finite and the infinite, the phenomenal and the real. The visual density and aura of color that he creates is suspended on the canvas in a middle ground that is void of three-point-perspective, enigmatically evoking either the surge or dissolution of nature's overwhelming force. Trapped in an irresolute reality outside of conventional space and time, the vaporescent forms of Colen's Purgatory paintings suggest a connection to feelings hidden beneath his amorphous, seemingly abstract surfaces. Built up steadily through surface, the emotional reverence of Colen's compositions is encapsulated in his diffusion of paint. To the greater discourse of painting, Colen offers new interpretations in the genre of landscape and the search for something spiritual and sublime in the mix of contemporary life.

### **About the Artist**

Dan Colen was born in 1979 in Leonia, New Jersey. He received his B.F.A. in 2001 from the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence. His work is held in various public collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and the de la Cruz Collection Contemporary Art Space, Miami. Recent solo exhibitions include Help! at the Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Connecticut (2014); The L...o...n...g Count at the Walter De Maria Building, New York (2014); Psychic Slayer at the Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark (2015); Shake the Elbow at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo (2015); Oil Painting at the Dallas Contemporary (2016); and Sweet Liberty at Newport Street Gallery, London (2017). Colen's work will be the subject of an exhibition at the Astrup Fearnley, Oslo in May 2018 and Asia in 2019.

Dan Colen currently lives and works in New York.

### **About Lévy Gorvy**

Lévy Gorvy cultivates a program devoted to innovation and connoisseurship in the fields of modern, postwar, and contemporary art. Founded by Dominique Lévy and Brett Gorvy, Lévy Gorvy maintains gallery spaces at 909 Madison Avenue in New York and in Mayfair, London. In September 2017, Lévy Gorvy opened an office in Shanghai. The gallery fosters continued dedication to the living artists and artists' estates it represents, and pursues a robust program of exhibitions and multidisciplinary events. Lévy Gorvy also produces ongoing art historical research and original scholarship, publishing exhibition catalogues, monographs, and other key publications.

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