

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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**Evening
Standard**

Jenny Saville: Oxyrynchus, Gagosian - exhibition review
Jenny Saville grows increasingly interesting, and this work, amazingly in her first solo exhibition in London, is her best yet

Ben Luke



The face fits: Dusk, 2014, a portrait that emerges from stains and dribbles

Critic Rating ★★★★★

When Lucian Freud died in 2011, he left a void: who now was Britain's pre-eminent figure painter? Many suggested Jenny Saville, another creator of figures charged with psychological intensity, where the sitter's vitality is matched by the verve in her paint.

Until recently, I've found her work impressive technically yet contrived, overemphasising the body as meat and paint as a metaphor for flesh (Freud, too, laid this on a bit thick).

Yet Saville, 44, grows increasingly interesting, and this work, amazingly in her first solo exhibition in London, is her best yet. Instead of stuffing the canvas full of her figures, a sense of mystery has crept in — multi-figure compositions hover between figuration and abstraction, their mood veers between the objectivity of artist and model (drawn from Saville's photographs, not from life), and the intimacy and sexuality in the intertwined nudes.

Limbs and faces come into sharp focus while others are drawn in sinuous charcoal lines. Saville exploits the serendipities of painting, so that drips and smudges are as crucial as crisp, descriptive passages: in *Dusk* (2014), she almost digs out a portrait from a mess of stains and dribbles.

This archeological metaphor is evoked in the show's title, Oxyrhynchus, the great ancient Egyptian rubbish dump of papyrus texts. What Saville is getting at is the body, and paintings of it, as a repository of human knowledge and expression. Her paintings are full of fragments; of her models' overlapping poses and of great paintings from the past, by Titian, Velázquez, Manet. This is ambitious, stirring stuff.

Until July 26 (020 7841 9960, gagosian.com)