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Betye Saar's Sketchbooks At Morgan Library And Museum, Jenny Saville Paintings At Gagosian, Highlight New York's Holiday Season

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Jenny Saville, "Prism," 2020. Pastel on linen. 78 3/4 x 63 in 200 x 160 cm. © Jenny Saville Photo: Prudence Cuming. Courtesy Gagosian. © JENNY SAVILLE PHOTO: PRUDENCE CUMING. COURTESY GAGOSIAN

New York's museums and galleries always put their best foot forward during the holiday season. While COVID has muted the museum blockbusters (one exception being the Mexican muralist exhibition on view now at the Whitney Museum of American Art) a number of gallery shows merit close attention. Benny Andrews at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, Thornton Dial at David Lewis gallery and an exhibition of new paintings by Jenny Saville (b. 1950) at Gagosian (980 Madison Avenue) titled "Elpis."

"Elpis" refers to the Greek personification of hope left behind at the bottom of Pandora's box.

Saville has firmly established herself as one of the most important, exciting and critically acclaimed painters working today. Saville's monumental portraits explore the human body, capturing a unique kind of realism specific to the 21st century.

Saville's painting is steeped in a multitude of times and places. Working with expressive and energetic brushstrokes, she creates dramatic juxtapositions of color and shimmering light effects that recall Byzantine icons and mosaics. Saville also illuminates some of the works in "Elpis" with gold oil bar, invoking the precious metal's association with divine embodiment, a tradition dating back to the ancient Egyptians.

The raw, chromatic vitality of Saville's new works was largely inspired by her recent travels to Australia, where she encountered the luminous, fleshy palette of Emily Kame Kngwarreye's virtuoso paintings. For the fiery-toned pastel painting *Prism* (2020), Saville combines her tribute to the Indigenous Australian artist with another: she created this work using a set of crayons purchased from Henri Roché's La Maison du Pastel, a famous art supply store in Paris once frequented by Edgar Degas.