In 2019, Saville painted a new self portrait in response to an example from one of her greatest influences, Rembrandt. “The vocabulary of painting is all in this picture,” she remarked in a video interview. “It’s like deconstructing a great piece of Beethoven…Rembrandt that level of humanity, of someone who can turn that screw inside you.”

Gagosian gallery closed 2020 with a suite of new work completed by Saville while in lockdown in Oxford, titled after the Greek personification of Hope, the only remnant saved in Pandora’s Box after its opening, Elpis. Saville commented on her experience of the pandemic and how her new show relates to her practice in an interview with Financial Times, “Because I’m figurative—staunchly figurative, I’d like to say…I’m interested in the space between figurative and abstract. It’s the space for so much intellectual and imaginative interplay. If you let go of the figurative image, you give up that space.”

During a 2016 interview with The Huffington Post, Saville discussed her relationship with art history, representation, identity, and the body in conjunction with her exhibition, Erota, at Gagosian London. “My mediation is through the body.”

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“In the last four or five years, my preoccupation has been how to put all of this idea of having multiple realities that we live now [social media, technology], how do I put that in pictorial form, that’s been the scaffolding of what I’ve been trying to do. Because we don’t live in one reality now,” Saville explained in a 2020 Zoom interview with the National Portrait Gallery. Saville also spoke with The Art Newspaper podcast A Brush With... about her artistic background, and Gagosian Quarterly about books that brought her solace in 2020.
Jenny Saville (British, b. 1970)

Title TBC, 2020
Oil on linen

Peterson Family Collection; L2020:123.1

Born in Cambridge, Jenny Saville rose to prominence while attending the Glasgow School of Art and was associated with a group of upcoming artists in the early 1990s known as the Young British Artists, which included such diverse talents as Cecily Brown (also on view) and Damien Hirst. Like Brown, Saville was driven by a desire to reinvigorate the genre of figurative painting. Her work remains intertwined with art historical precedent, diverging via a raw and almost reverential attention toward imperfection. Saville celebrates real bodies, including her own, fascinated since childhood by natural physical distortion and the appearance of flesh as she observed the world around her. As a student, she also honed her eye through visits to morgues and plastic surgery operating rooms. Title TBC is from a series of new work inspired by the remnants of Hope left behind in Pandora’s Box. It displays the intimacy and textured vitality Saville brings to her portraits, celebrating the totality of what it means to live in a body: the fragility and strength, the animal mass and human interiority, and the infinite spectrum of identity.

On view February 3 – May 9, 2021