ALMINE RECH

Visages

Feb 12 — Mar 16, 2025 | Gstaad

Almine Rech Gstaad is pleased to present 'Visages', a group exhibition on view from February 12 to March 16, 2025.

Karel Appel, Georg Baselitz, Miriam Cahn, Nina Childress, Genieve Figgis, Günther Förg, Françoise Gilot, Marie Laurencin, Pablo Picasso, Richard Prince, Kenny Scharf, Claire Tabouret, Francesco Vezzoli, and Andy Warhol.

Why faces now? Well, because faces always and forever, as long as each of us has one and animal life manages to persist. But there are other reasons, too. In recent years, the surgeon general diagnosed a national epidemic of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection doing serious damage to individual and societal health. The professionally recommended remedy is, first and foremost, quality time in front of another person, engaging face to face. At the same time, faces and our relationship to them are increasingly undergoing a strange sea change, a transformational trip through the uncanny valley of AI, deep fakes, virtual reality, digital filters, hormone therapies, and the latest in cosmetic procedures. Gender and appearance have never been so fluid, performative, or androgynous. Technology has never been as lifelike nor as thoroughly enmeshed in our lives. And, because our present moment is submerged in an identity politics, verging on tribalism, that too often reduces identity to physiognomy and race, now is also a good time to think more expansively about the convergence of faces and being multifaceted: visages and vision vis-à-vis one's outlook on the world. Perhaps a show about portraiture and the human face today is also asking, can we face the now when it too often appears hostile, brutal, destructive, precarious, and irrational? Is it possible? How did they do it then and how will we face the times in which we find ourselves now? Maybe we can face it by representing some of its many faces?

A face is an arresting encounter, a direct address, an unstable event and catalyst.
A face is a powerful trigger, Proustian or otherwise.
A face is a forgettable or unforgettable arrangement of features that can leave a neurological imprint deeper than language.A face is a plaza, a playground, an open space, an invitation to enter.
A face is a mask, an opacity, a front.
A face is a poem written in time, all those lines with nature's own hand scripted.

In this show of portraits—each work different from its neighbor, in each artist's distinctive style—the group of faces assembled produces a scattershot crowd that suggests a tentative community, a speculative international public that is at turns discombobulated, bawdy, dispassionate, flirtatious, disfigured, fierce, chic, brooding, haunted, energetic, and absurd. One beautiful—or anguished, joyful, sleepy, withdrawn, thoughtful—face can contain the whole world within its bounds. And it *is* beautiful, a face is always beautiful the way animals are all beautiful through the force of their existence: that unique material mass and presence, with all its textural and chromatic detail, is a true representative of breeding and evolutionary lineages—real, in the flesh, alive. There are no ugly animals, not really. Existence, in and of itself, is beautiful.

This show is the second chapter of 'Visages', following a show held at Almine Rech New York, Upper East Side in November 2024. This particular assembly of varied portraits is anchored by works by two canonical titans of twentieth-century art, Picasso and Warhol, who, each in their own way, broke faces down to a flat distillation of component parts in order to depart from a narrow view of the real and play with distortion, disfiguration, becoming-image, perspective, and transfiguration, as in Warhol's two black-and-white photographs *Self-portrait in drag* (1981) or Picasso's *Portrait de Jacqueline* (1956). Direct relations lead from Picasso to Françoise Gilot's portraits of *Iris I, II,* and *III* (1949). Richard Prince's two collages from 2011 genuflect rather directly to the Spaniard. Familiar, if sidelined historical figures like Marie Laurencin are crucial intergenerational bridges contributing continuity to the story 'Visages' tells. Laurencin's *Sonia* (1923) is a dream angel of youthful feminine beauty with bows in her long hair, a bouquet of heavy blooms close to her chest, long, elegant fingers, and that distinctive pale visage marked sparely by huge dark almond eyes and closed dusty-rose lips that tether her timeless vibe to a past century, an ethereal waifish timelessness dreamt a hundred years ago.

The cast of characters in the show's story expands with recent and contemporary legends like Georg Baselitz, Günther Förg, Karel Appel, Miriam Cahn and Kenny Scharf. And then again further with new veteran virtuosos like Genieve Figgis and Francesco Vezzoli. For *Willem de K.* (2018), Baselitz applies all the visceral energy and abstract materiality for which his upside-down figuration is known to a decapitated portrait of the modern Dutch master. Cahn conjures unsettling, ghostly characters with novelistic richness and psychic baggage. Figgis paints figures born at the crossroads of Grey Gardens and Versailles, with lush facial expressions melting eerily into chromatic swirling puddles. Förg's *Untitled (Mask)* (1990) bronze heads have been through the fire, permanently forged out of an elemental weight slumped all around their sunken eye sockets. Vezzoli's *ABSTRACT LEONARDESQUE MADONNA WITH CHILD* (2024) is representative of his ongoing series that affixes tear-shaped pendants and ornaments to reproductions of Old Master works, layering lachrymose expressions of pain, suffering, and joy atop the otherwise distant face of history. Claire Tabouret and Nina Childress paint retro-ish, youthful characters in their own loose, chic manners, perennially handsome and full of cinematic allure, as if stylized along the lines of illustrations in a vintage manual.

As robust, divergent, and gripping as these artists' works surely are, perhaps the precise composition of this show's artist list matters somewhat less than the deeply resonant fact that there continues to be so many compelling, idiosyncratic, and revelatory new artists' practices devoted to the depiction of people and their faces, each a fully realized vision insisting on being met on its own terms.

— Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, writer, curator, and publisher