

MIUCCIA PRADA
ON THE EVE OF HER FIRST
MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE

LINDSAY LOHAN
SMOKING HOT IN LA BENT
OVER A STOVE

AZEALIA BANKS
THE FOUL-MOULDED
FALLEN ANGEL
STORMING 2012

AFTER TASTE

CELEBRATING THE END OF ELEGANCE WITH
LINDA EVANGELISTA

NIR HOD

The first thing you see when you go into Nir Hod's studio is a portrait of the artist as a young woman. A pretty, sad-eyed one singing under a spotlight. 'I don't have anything on in that, that's how I looked,' is what he says about it. 'I maybe had a bit of make-up, like a tiny bit, but really, nothing.' Looking at him, you'd believe it, too. The self-portrait is from 1993, part of a project called *Forever* that he undertook a lifetime before he conceived the body of work that has put him under a different kind of spotlight over the last year; but now, at 40, he still looks like he could pass for a fairly attractive woman without much effort. But the portrait is a painting. How made-up he was in real life has no bearing on it.

'At the time that I painted that, I had this idea that I'd be a huge rock star and die,' he continues, in a confession that would be horribly embarrassing if it was even a tiny bit less sincere. 'I was always fascinated with beauty and extravagance and the personality of rock stars and painters and powerful people. I want to make things that feel untouchable and holy in that way. I like to tell the story the way it is, not the way it is supposed to be, to isolate the beauty.'

To demonstrate, he points to four huge canvases he has leaning against the wall, each one of them bearing a slightly different version of an image of the same young woman, hair fixed up, stylish coat, handbag dangling off arm, against a rich, smoky, Silk Cut purple background. They're part of a nine-piece series called *Mother*. When he says the name in his thick Israeli accent it sounds a lot like 'murder'.

He asks me if I know what the paintings are. I tell him I don't really know what he means.

'What does she look like to you, this woman? I'm just curious.'

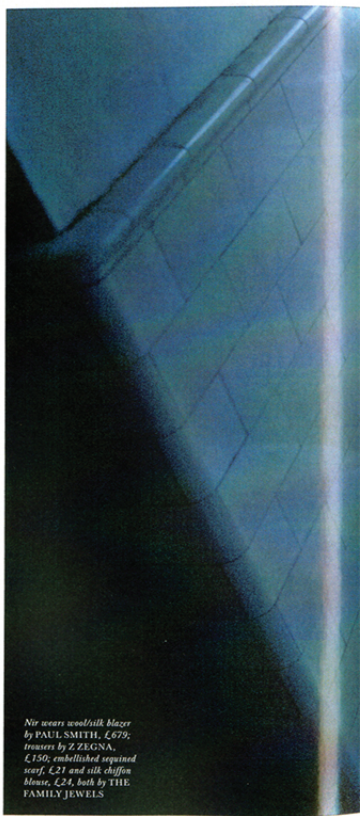
She looks like a model in an advert for handbags. The one dangling from her arm is perfectly lit, its hardware is the lightest point of each painting.

Nir finds the source image on his iPhone. It's a photograph taken in 1943, in the Warsaw ghetto, by Jürgen Stroop for his report to Heinrich Himmler. It's of a woman and a young boy, hands raised, fleeing their home at gunpoint.

'This is considered to be one of the most iconic images from the Holocaust,' he says, 'but all of the discussion there ever is about it is of this child. I grew up on this picture, but never saw the woman. When I looked at it again, as an adult, I saw her standing with her bag and her hair and her bracelets and I just wanted to disconnect her from the setting. I call it *Mother*, but nobody knows who she is.'

He's designed the paintings to trick their viewers. The shame I feel is deliberate, but his aim is not didactic or malicious.

'Eighty per cent of people think that it's some advertising. YSL or Hermès or something. Here's the thing. I'm Jewish, and of course my parents have these terrible stories, but for me, it's not about that. I have a childish view of this woman. I love her



Nir wears wool/silk blazer
by PAUL SMITH, £679;
trousers by Z ZEGNA,
£150; embellished sequined
scarf, £27 and silk chiffon
blouse, £24, both by THE
FAMILY JEWELS

156

NIR HOD

THE SUDDENLY CELEBRATED ISRAELI ARTIST ON GENIUS, ISOLATION
AND THE CREATIVE INSTINCT TOWARDS IMMORTALITY

— TEXT —
JACOB SICK

The first thing you see when you go into Nir Hod's studio is a portrait of the artist as a young woman. A pretty, sad-eyed one singing under a spotlight. 'I don't have anything on in that, that's how I looked,' is what he says about it. 'I maybe had a bit of make-up, like a tiny bit, but really, nothing.' Looking at him, you'd believe it, too. The self-portrait is from 1993, part of a project called *Forever* that he undertook a lifetime before he conceived the body of work that has put him under a different kind of spotlight over the last year; but now, at 40, he still looks like he could pass for a fairly attractive woman without much effort. But the portrait is a painting. How made-up he was in real life has no bearing on it.

'At the time that I painted that, I had this idea that I'd be a huge rock star and die,' he continues, in a confession that would be horribly embarrassing if it was even a tiny bit less sincere. 'I was always fascinated with beauty and extravagance and the personality of rock stars and painters and powerful people. I want to make things that feel untouchable and holy in that way. I like to tell the story the way it is, not the way it is supposed to be, to isolate the beauty.'

To demonstrate, he points to four huge canvases he has leaning against the wall, each one of them bearing a slightly different version of an image of the same young woman, hair fixed up, stylish coat, handbag dangling off arm, against a rich, smoky, Silk Cut purple background. They're part of a nine-piece series called *Mother*. When he says the name in his thick Israeli accent it sounds a lot like 'murder'.

He asks me if I know what the paintings are. I tell him I don't really know what he means.

'What does she look like to you, this woman? I'm just curious.'

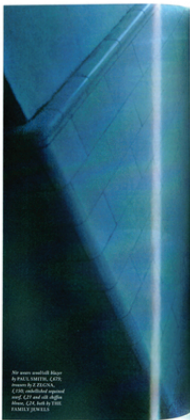
She looks like a model in an advert for handbags. The one dangling from her arm is perfectly lit, its hardware is the lightest point of each painting.

Nir finds the source image on his iPhone. It's a photograph taken in 1943, in the Warsaw ghetto, by Jürgen Stroop for his report to Heinrich Himmler. It's of a woman and a young boy, hands raised, fleeing their home at gunpoint.

'This is considered to be one of the most iconic images from the Holocaust,' he says, 'but all of the discussion there ever is about it is of this child. I grew up on this picture, but never saw the woman. When I looked at it again, as an adult, I saw her standing with her bag and her hair and her bracelets and I just wanted to disconnect her from the setting. I call it *Mother*, but nobody knows who she is.'

He's designed the paintings to trick their viewers. The shame I feel is deliberate, but his aim is not didactic or malicious.

'Eighty per cent of people think that it's some advertising. YSL or Hermès or something. Here's the thing. I'm Jewish, and of course my parents have these terrible stories, but for me, it's not about that. I have a childish view of this woman. I love her



Nir wears wool/silk blazer
by PAUL SMITH, £679;
trousers by Z ZEGNA,
£150; embellished sequined
scarf, £27 and silk chiffon
blouse, £24, both by THE
FAMILY JEWELS



157



'Genius Dorcas', 2011



'Genius Laurence', 2011

'When you see old films of Yves Saint Laurent, he's like a child. If he can't have the fabric he wants, he cries until he gets it. It's awful, but it's beautiful, in a ridiculous way'



standing, being so aristocratic and melancholy in the paintings. It's like life after death. It's about taking something strong and making people look at it in a different way. I mean, she was beautiful! In a way it works in the same way as the Geniuses. It takes something that is maybe completely wrong and shows what's strong and beautiful about it.'

The Geniuses he's talking about are the stars of his 2011 show at the Paul Kasmin gallery: a series of haunting paintings of young children with bad, old-fashioned hair (inspired largely by Margaret Thatcher's) in stuffy adult clothes, often smoking, with an indignant snarl on their faces. 'The look that real geniuses have when they talk to you,' as Hod puts it. 'When you see pictures of Yves Saint Laurent or Freud or Spinoza, they all have the same expression, as if they're bigger than everything else. That look in itself is genius, in the casual, ironic way people say genius today. When you see someone with a fucked-up haircut, you say genius, or old movies of people smoking on planes. You say it about the worst things, but at the same time, when you look at the irony and don't try and play games, there is something beautiful about those things if you take them out of context and look at them with fresh eyes. Geniuses have something of the orphanage about them. You know when you go to a pet shop you instinctively want the saddest-looking puppy? Geniuses learn this and manipulate it, they learn the art of making people feel sorry for them so they get what they want. When you see old films of Yves Saint Laurent, he's like a child. If he can't have the fabric he wants he

literally cries until he gets it, and it's awful, but it's beautiful, in a ridiculous way. I think that's what works about my Geniuses.'

He's right: even if you hate the subjects of the paintings, and what they stand for, you can't help but react to them in a sympathetic way. They make you feel guilty if you try to look away from them. 'I think what it is with these paintings is that I worked out how to combine things in a really spectacular way. I presented things that are wrong but that instinctively feel spectacular when you put them together. That's the world I love. I want to do things that are spectacular, that we don't even have to talk about in an intellectual way. When people overthink things, when they ask too many questions, they gain an analytical understanding of it, but they lose its real meaning, which is to enjoy it. People can read and they can theorise, but at the end of the day, art is something very simple. If you like something, often "I love it" is the most intellectual thing that you need to say. It's when that reaction is not there that you need to come up with all of this theory to justify it. I don't believe in doing that. In the end, when you look at art, you're looking for some kind of magic. It's either there or it's not.'

FASHION EDITOR BEAT BOLLIGER
HAIR ASHLEY JAVIER MAKE-UP OSVALDO SALVATIERRA MANICURE BERNADETTE THOMPSON DIGITAL TECHNICIAN DENIS VLASOV AT 59 STILL + MOTION PRODUCER JEFFREY DELICAT PROD'N PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE WESLEY TORRANCE, LELAND FOSTER AND KAILAS MICHAEL SET DESIGN MEGHAN CZERWINSKI PHOTOGRAPHIC ASSISTANCE MYRO WULF, JOHN RUIZ AND LORENZ SCHMIDL FASHION ASSISTANTS LINDSEY HORNBYAK HAIR ASSISTANCE ESTER ROJAS RETOUCHING DIGITAL LIGHT LTD