



art

Nir Hod Shifts Focus

A 'Mother' Revealed, 10 Times

By Lisa Amand

Perched above the velvet ropes, club kids and chain stores of Gansevoort Street, in Manhattan's meatpacking district, Nir Hod's studio, filled with books and light, feels more like a think tank than an artist's lair.

Loquacious and handsome, with wavy, dark hair framing chiseled features, Hod,

40, is consumed with "Mother," his current exhibit at the Paul Kasmin Gallery in Chelsea.

In this series of 10 paintings, he amplifies literally and creatively one woman from Franz Konrad's famous 1943 photograph, "The Boy From Warsaw Ghetto." His goal, he told the *Forward*, was "to bring her to the front, to give her all due respect and to see her in her true colors."

Hod's hyper-focus on this figure began in 2009. He was researching the iconic



From Warsaw to Chelsea: Nir Hod focused on the woman in the iconic photograph from the Warsaw Ghetto (above) and painted her large, alone and repeatedly (main image).

Nazi photo online, when on CNN's homepage he saw an image from *Life* magazine of Hillary Rodham Clinton giving a lecture. He was struck by the photo's beauty, how Clinton's hands held up the way made her look like she was "begging for her life." That stance, of someone scared or surrounded, gripped him then, and now it grabs those viewing his work.

Each of the nine smaller canvases (59 inches by 43 inches), exhibited side by side in the gallery, uses muted shades from "a dreamy, melancholic palette" that Hod describes as colors from old magazines blended with those from the Old Masters. The differences between the paintings are definite but subtle, with the exception of featured colors that vary for each.

The singular, larger painting is twice the size of the others, and the woman's features appear elongated, more exaggerated. "You can really feel her body. There's something so strong about the hands and the expression. Here you can really feel her pain," Hod said, pointing out that her hair piled high "is almost like a skull, like a death mask.... It's almost like a child seeing his mother in this situation."

Hod cites Andy Warhol's *Shadows* paintings as a major source of inspiration. And it's clear that the subject of "Mother" is also in the shadows, having ceded the stage, in Konrad's photograph, to the child.

Hod's work has been displayed worldwide since his first solo show, at age 23, at Jerusalem's Israel Museum. But the 2011 "Genius" exhibition, at the other Paul Kasmin Gallery (half a block away), "was the big break in my career." The sold-out exhibit included controversial paintings of pouty children — some smoldering with cigarettes — and three bronze sculptures, selling for as much as \$45,000. After that success, the nine "Mother" paintings were priced at \$75,000; according to the gallery, they have already sold.

While the identity of the boy in the photograph remains a subject of speculation, little is debated and even less is known about the woman who is the focus of "Mother." That's fine with Hod: "Most of the time, the facts are not important for me. Facts destroy the experience."

Words enhance it. "Titles are really, really important for me," he said. "Once you call it 'Mother,' I think it takes it to a different level." He speaks lovingly of his own mother, who came from Israel for the show's