

SHADOWS OF REALITY

YIGAL OZERI

OPERA GALLERY  
HONG KONG



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**2016**

*Detail: Untitled; Zuzanna, 42x60 inches (106x152 cm), oil on paper, 2015*

## Preface

The exuberance present in Yigal Ozeri's works, perhaps even more than their obvious technical brilliance, overwhelms the viewer. Painted with thousands of tiny brushstrokes, Ozeri's impeccable handiwork and alluring subject matter generate an idyllic milieu that blurs the lines between fantasy and reality. Tinting classical feminine beauty with impossibly realistic solar flares, dreamy backlight and jubilant colour tones, Ozeri's paintings breathe an elated sensuality into fleeting moments of women interacting with their natural habitats.

The tradition of photographic realism dates back several centuries, as does society's obsession with capturing reality in all of its gritty, humanist glory. Since the times of Christ, artists dedicated their practice to producing lifelike renderings of an imagined figure. Bewitched by the promise of fantasy-in-life, painters like da Vinci, Raphael, Titian and Rembrandt represented scenes that answered society's wish to possess and contain beauty. Once artists began painting scenes that did exist in reality, the use of photorealistic techniques were employed in order to accurately portray the scene at hand. Pre-camera, artists such as Van Eyck and, famously, Vermeer, employed tools such as the camera obscura to project and to trace the image before them, allowing the immortalisation of history through faithful representations.

Working from, rather than tracing, his own digital captures, Ozeri's work employs similar optical devices to achieve brilliantly realistic renderings. While the photographs reflect true captures of the women in his paintings the element of fantasy sets his work apart from comparably technical work. In his paintings we gaze into a vision of enthralling beauty – projected not just by the painted figure, but by the airy freedom they seem to be in possession of; the limitless natural landscape framed and enshrined by the gleaming sun. As director, designer and painter, Ozeri's veneration of the power of beauty emphasises, rather than minimises, the poignancy of his works.

It is with great excitement that we honour this seasoned artist with a solo exhibition at Opera Gallery Hong Kong. His gifts have situated him as one of the world's preeminent painters of his genre, and we are proud to collaborate with him on his forthcoming show with us.

Gilles Dyan  
Founder and Chairman  
Opera Gallery Group



Saul Ostrow

We have often been told that the development of photography in the 19th century stood as a challenge to painters. The ability of photography to reproduce appearances accurately, and the photographer's ability to manipulate these in the dark room, threatened painting's supremacy. Photography was perceived as mechanically and scientifically objective, while painting was viewed as subjective because whatever is depicted is always mediated by the artist's abilities, perception and ideas. Some artists adapted themselves to photography, for instance, the painter Thomas Eakins is known to have taken photographs from which in some cases he made detailed transcriptions and tracings in a quest for accuracy and realism in his paintings.

To counter photography and sustain the relevancy of painting, other artists, for instance the Impressionists, set about extricating themselves from (the limitation) imposed upon them by traditional realist and naturalist approaches and goals. These painters, including Édouard Manet and Paul Cézanne, emphasized the literal flatness of the canvas and the materiality of the painting process, highlighted color because it could not be realized by photography. From this, the pure subjectivity of abstraction and then abstract painting emerged.

In the face of the turn to abstract art in the early 20th Century, the artists' desire to transcribe their subjective observation of the appearances of the external world persisted. In the United States, beginning in the 1930s, this orientation was championed by Andrew Wyeth whose works were characterized by a mastery of detail and assiduous craftsmanship. His depiction of early 20th century rural life appeared as if it might have been painted from the types of images found in a farm family's photo album. Many of his compositions, viewpoints, and cropping were informed by photography and cinema. Yet the distortion that characterized Wyeth's work was actually a consequence of his painting of multiple watercolor views of a scene from different angles, put together to create a composition. What is known is that "on occasion he would use photographs to get small details correct – goose feather patterns, goose feet, etc. – he would have used photographs as a reference when he was painting a large tempera and the



Andrew Wyeth, Christina's World, 1948  
Museum of Modern Art, New York City



Andrew Wyeth, Braids, 1979  
portrait of Helga Testorf



Andrew Wyeth, one of the Helga Pictures,  
1978

2. The Helga pictures are a series of more than 240 paintings and drawings created by Andrew Wyeth of German model Helga Testorf between 1971 and 1985. Testorf a neighbor of Wyeth's in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and posed indoors and out of doors, nude and clothed, and expressing varied attitudes for Wyeth over the course of fifteen years.

"models" were prone to move".<sup>1</sup>

The American Precisionist Charles Sheeler, who made paintings based upon photographs is perhaps the most direct precursor of Richard Estes, Ralph Goings, and Robert Bechtle, who in the 1960s – 1970s, created works that would define Photorealism, or Sharp Focus Realism. Responding to Pop Art and faced with the apparent deskilling of art, their works embraced and subverted the course of reproduction by turning the seamless information of photographs into the fractured information of painting. As such, they established a contemporary means to maintain the aura associated with the skills and techniques of realism. Often working from multiple photographs or composites, these painters created a simulacra of the photographic image, rather than a mere transcription. This appropriation of the photographic image was an acknowledgement of the age of mechanical reproduction we were inhearently living in, which all experiences were mediated.

Though of a different ilk and indifferent to the banal and everyday subject matter associated with Photorealism, both Chuck Close and the Swiss painter Franz Gertsch were stylistically identified with it. Influenced by abstract painting, they began making billboard-sized paintings based on photographs in the 1870's. Their works tended to be more painterly and less concerned with creating the seamless illusion of being photographic. Iconically, Close's images are passport-like head shots of friends. Working from a gridded photograph, Close has consistently changed the method by which he rendered his images – he has gone from using airbrush and spray to slowly building up his images by applying one careful stroke after another in multi-colors or gray-scale. Gertsch, on the other hand, has painted on a large scale a wide range of imagery ranging from hippies, rock fans and rock musicians. Like Close, he has also done portraits of fellow artists and bohemians, which developed into his execution of portraits of female models on a monumental scale. Gertsch's works appear to be photographic at a distance, but up close they dissolve into a surface of marks and process.

Unlike the American sharp-focused realists who are pop-oriented, painting subjects such as diners, movie marquees, automobiles, store fronts and street scenes, Richter emerged in the late 1960's making blurry images of black and white photos that referenced the recent Nazi past and WWII. In the 1970's he began to do landscapes, cityscapes and "nudies" in a style that referenced photography and reproduction. By the 1980s, Richter had

1. From an email to the author from Joyce Stoner who was Wyeth's conservator for 12 years. I know some Japanese curators and others have visited Maine and Chadds Ford and tried to take photographs to match up with some of his landscape paintings, and it's difficult because they were adjusted or skewed from the actual landscape perspectives. I tried to take photographs and mimic the angles and views of his paintings connected with the Olson House, and saw how he had skewed the angles from the actual. I have the impression he was consciously NOT a photorealist and was not trying to imitate photographic views. [Unlike the nice match-ups one can do with photographs by Eakins and Mending the Nets, etc.]

achieved renown for producing both photo-realistic and abstract paintings. In doing so he acknowledged that the difference between abstract and mimetic painting had been dissolved; both were now modes that could be used to introspectively address the differing things that painting can narrate.

Stylistically, Richter's reference to photography was particularly indexed to the effects of the focal plane and to photographic blur. He used this effect not only in his figural works but also in his abstract paintings. The irony underlying this practice was that unlike photography, painting could never be out of focus, nor is their subject ever in motion, especially when the painting was an abstract one. For his photo-realistic works, Richter used images that were examples of generic categories: still-life, landscape, portrait, and history, while his abstract paintings reference their own photographic reproduction. By the 2000s, the predominant subjects for his photo-realistic paintings were his wife and children, and the bucolic German landscape.

The practice of the photo-realistic painter was to explore how photography ordered not only our perceptions but also our expectations. Consequently, in the 1990s Photorealism was understood to be an early manifestation of modernism's exhaustion and as a symptom of our culture's Postmodern condition. This was because it self-consciously referenced the fact that we now existed in an image world in which the photographic image had become not only a supplement to memory and experience but also the source of false memories and experiences.

I recount this particular history because it directly bears on Ozeri's approach to Photorealism. As a member of a generation of younger painters concerned with representation — Close, Gertsch, Richter and, less obviously, Wyeth's Helga pictures were influences he drew upon. So while the challenge of realism conceptually informs Ozeri's work, what sets him apart is not his iconography, but his adoption of the minimalist practice of working in series based on repetitions and variations. Ozeri makes groups of works depicting the same model presenting her under varied circumstances, differing ranges of expression, and within different environments. From one image to the next the narratives projected are negligible and ambiguous — no story is developed within the image — even when the images appear to be sequential.

Ozeri's practice of producing multiple works based on a single model in differing sizes and palettes strategically advances the discourse of the relationship between photography, painting and realism by introducing a temporal dimension. This sets him apart from Close, Richter, and Gertsch, for he abandons the fiction that a single image can represent an optimal or quintessentially iconic moment; instead, all images do. Therefore, like Andy Warhol's, Ozeri's work acknowledges that each image (be it a painting or



Franz Gertsch, Johanna I, 1984



Chuck Close, self portrait, 1968



Gerhard Richter, Lesende, 1994

photograph) is one among many — their differences representing the artist's attention and subjectivity.

As the photographer, Ozeri supplies himself with multiple already-made images from which to choose. Those chosen supply the painter with compositions whose focus is fixed and whose contents are significantly prescribed. The photograph whose image is taken from the world is only an interim stage in accomplishing Ozeri's objectives. Iconically the photograph fulfills the painter's intentions, yet leaves intact his desire to make this image an object: something perceived as existing as a separate entity — as a thing in the world. So while the photograph partly curtails the painter's freedom, these restrictions open the way to invention, since the act of formatting and transcribing the image from one medium to another is not a given.

In translating photographic appearance into painted information, Ozeri preserves the handmade as a record of its own means of representation, rather than that of what it depicted. This weds Ozeri's works to those of Wyeth, Close, Richter and Gertsch, by distancing themselves from what they depicted, the artists were able to abstractly see what it was they painted. In this way, they exploit the possibilities of painting as diverse acts of abstraction, transcription, and transformation. This resulted in a painting that was formally and conceptually open to interpretation rather than a mere skillful rendering of appearances.

Furthermore, Ozeri's images often reference the style and figures associated with the aestheticism of the pre-Raphaelites, the eroticism of 19th century Orientalism, and the idyllic sentimentality of Soviet Realism. Most often his women are alone. They always appear to be pensive, looking at nothing in particular, with gazes turned inward. They seem to be in a melancholic state, a condition induced by a feeling that the authentic has been lost. This is reinforced by Ozeri's stylistic references, which are associated with the subgenres of late Romanticism, an expression of late 19th century melancholia associated with the end of the pastoral and the rise of the urban. Sometimes the images have direct art historical references; for instance, the images of Shely in this exhibition reference Ophelia by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

From one series to the next women are always in sharp focus, while depth of field is shallow. Consistent from one series to the next is that women are beautiful — but not in the same way. Beauty is particular to each. His models are sometimes naked, or partially dressed, sometimes they are dressed in flimsy clothing that is often

incongruous to their naturalistic surroundings. In keeping with this, Ozeri's locations are never geographically specific. Wherever they tend toward the generic – the forest, the sea, the fields, etc. – never are there buildings or defining landmarks. On those occasions where two or three models are present in a single image their interaction ranges from indifference to intimacy (as represented by the pairing of Olya and Zuzanna in the series "Bear Mountain"). All of this contributes to the sense that these events, while contemporary, also aspire to being timeless and universal.

All of the qualities and references embedded within Ozeri's works may be initially perceived as antithetical to contemporary concerns and are instead a mere a reprise of past conventions in keeping with such Victorians as Alma, who painted fantasies of ancient Rome. Instead, Ozeri, akin to Close, Gertsch, and Richter, uses Photorealism to achieve formal and conceptual ends that are contingent on the rendering of appearances. Seemingly, Ozeri is using Photorealism to seize upon aspects of the realist tradition, aestheticism, and the historical and literary sources of Romanticism. He transforms these into contemporary concerns by emphasizing how these qualities have been appropriated by cinema, photography, photo-magazines, the graphic novel, etc., and thus have been distanced from their original referents. His re-mediation of these elements now permits them to be viewed in the context of a Postmodern aesthetic.

Given the complex economy Ozeri's work participates in, it is at once both archly Postmodernist in that it brings into question originality, authorship, mediation, formalism and aesthetics, yet radically contemporary. Indeed, he deploys these questions so as to substantiate his own attempt to reclaim for painting the multifaceted and contradictory economy of representation. In this framework, beyond making paintings that appeal to our senses, Ozeri also seeks to resolve the critical conflict that was at the heart of modernity: the disparity between traditional art forms and the emergent popular modes of representation that stemmed from photography, which threaten to usurp painting's position as a principle means to model the representation of the real.



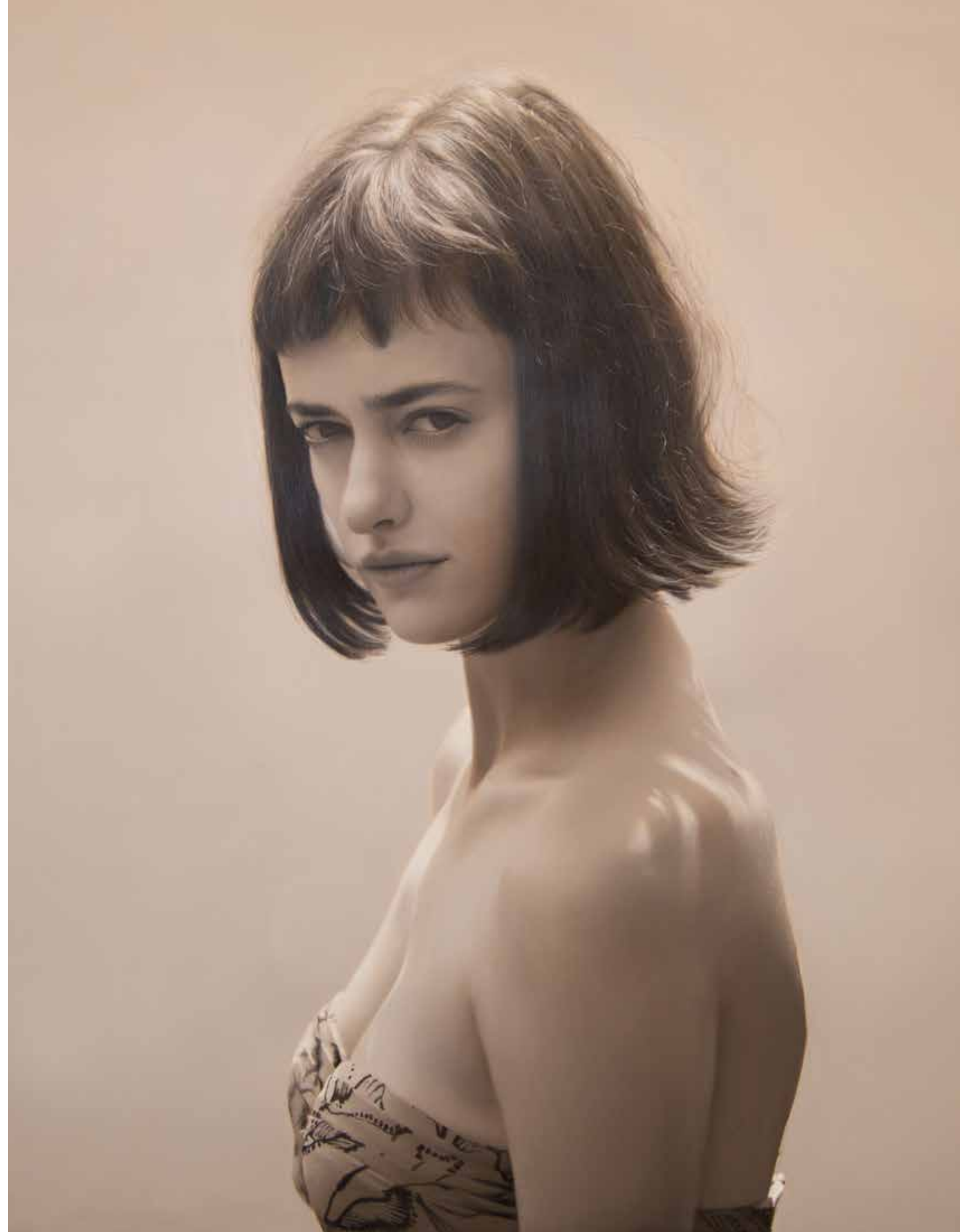
OLYA  
MONOCHROME





*Untitled; Olya Monochrome*, 42x60 inches (106 x152 cm), oil on canvas, 2015



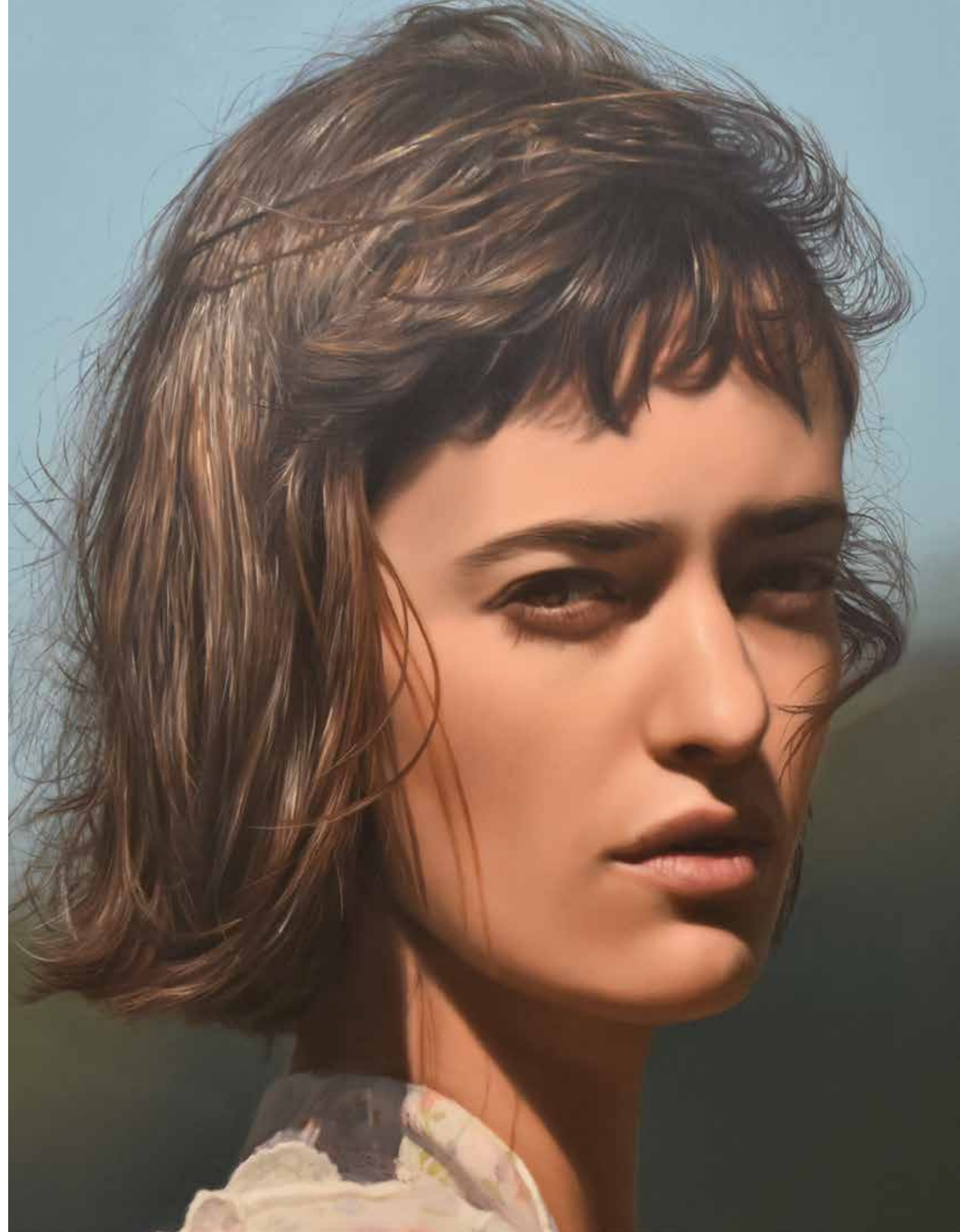






BEAR MOUNTAIN









OLYA IN THE FIELD

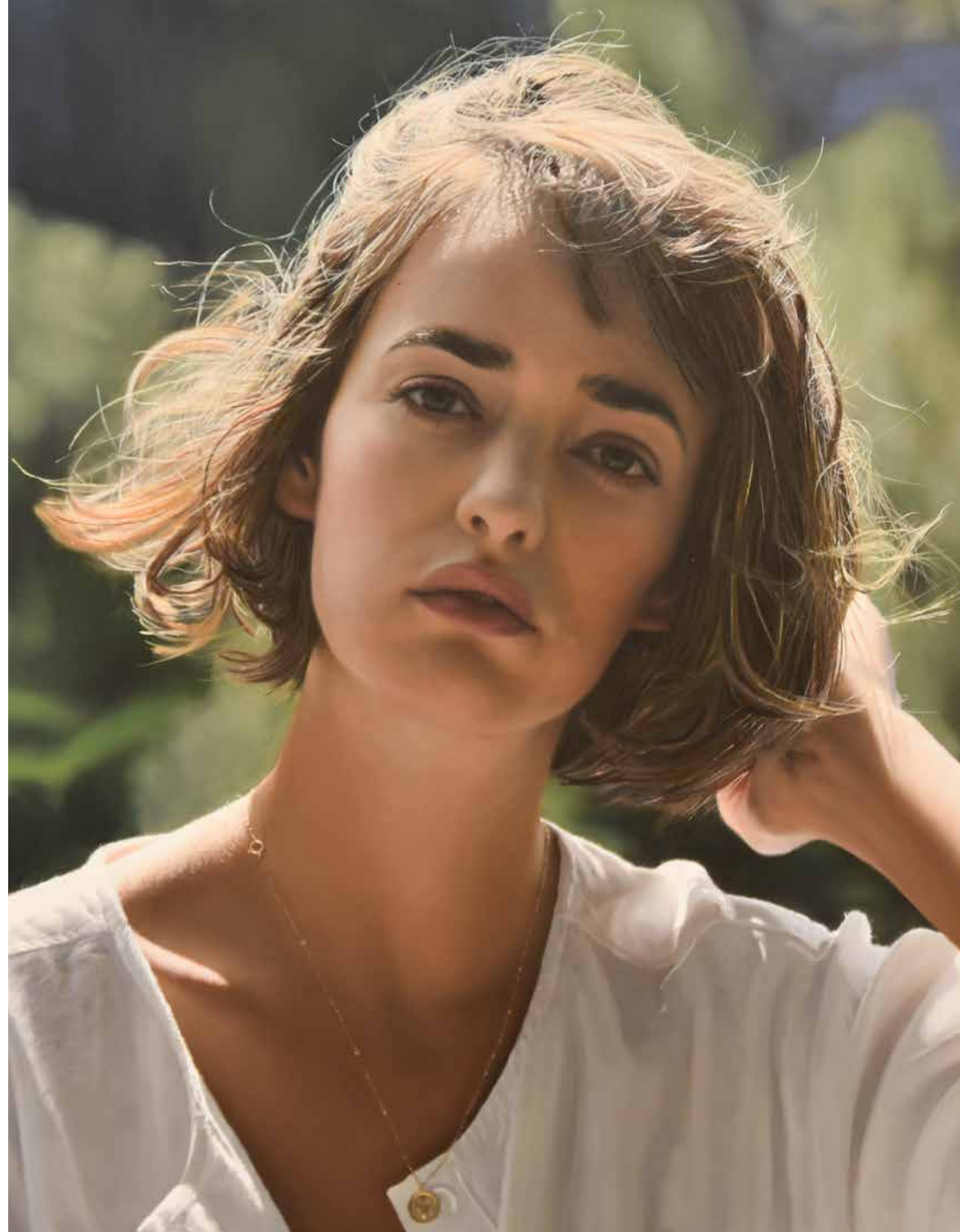






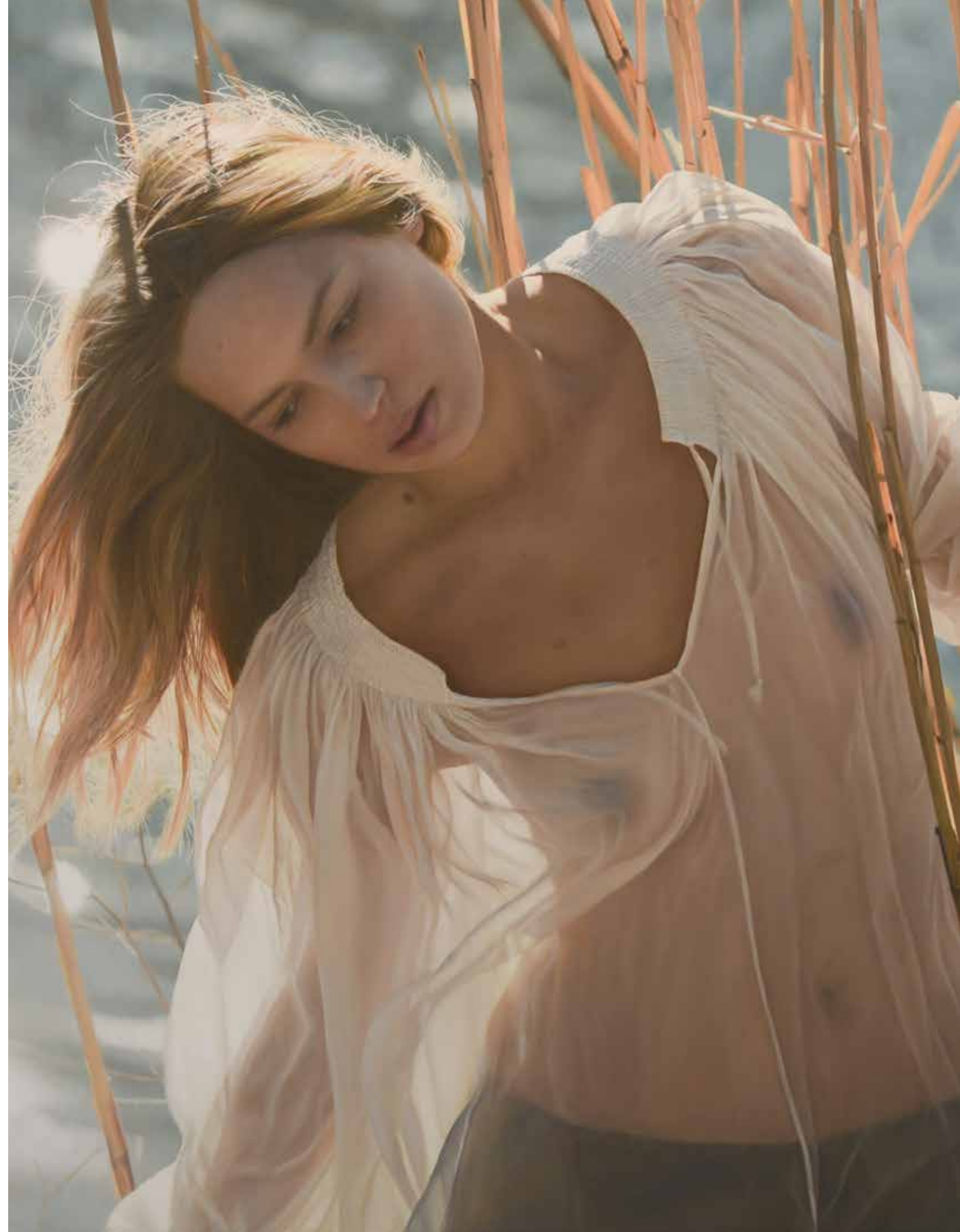


OLYA IN MINNEWASKA





ZUZANNA  
IN CENTRAL PARK







*Detail: Untitled; Zuzanna, 54x81 inches, (137x205 cm), oil on canvas, 2016*









KENDALL





*LIZZIE IN THE SNOW*







CARMELA









STUDIO VISIT



## Yigal Ozeri - Biography

Born 1958, Israel  
Lives and works in New York City

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

2016 Shadows of reality, Opera Gallery, Hong Kong, China  
 2015 Painting Through a Lens, Zemack Contemporary Art, Tel-Aviv, Israel  
 2015 Bear Mountain, Louis K. Meisel Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
 Monochrome, Galerie Andreas Binder, Munich, Germany  
 2014 Revolution at Giverny: A Return of Women in Nature, Galerie Dukan, Paris, France  
 Fiction of Distance, Galería Álvaro Alcázar, Madrid, Spain  
 Photorealism in the Digital Age, Mana Contemporary, Chicago, Illinois, USA  
 2013 Territory, Angell Gallery, Toronto, Canada  
 Triads, Galerie Brandt, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
 2012 Territory, Mike Weiss Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
 Photorealism, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montreal, Canada (Catalogue)  
 The Boathouse, Galerie Andreas Binder, Munich, Germany  
 Territory, Karen Jenkins Johnson, San Francisco, CA, USA  
 Territory, Scott White Contemporary Art, La Jolla, CA, USA  
 2011 Territory, Martin Asbaek Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark (Catalogue)  
 Territory, Zemack Contemporary Art Gallery, Tel-Aviv, Israel (Catalogue)  
 Garden of the Gods, Mike Weiss Gallery, New York, NY, USA (Catalogue)  
 Luce silenziosa (Silent light), Bologna, Italy (Catalogue)  
 2010 Lizzie Smoking, Galería Senda, Barcelona, Spain  
 Lizzie in the Snow, Mark Moore Gallery, Santa Monica, CA, USA (Catalogue)  
 Desire for Anima, Contemporary by Angela Li, Hong Kong, China  
 Olga in the Park, Galerie Brandt, Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
 2009 Desire for Anima, Galerie Andreas Binder, Munich, Germany (Catalogue)  
 Desire for Anima, Mike Weiss Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
 Small Death, Galerie Dukan & Hourdequin, Marseille, France (Catalogue)  
 Priscilla, Wade Wilson Art, Houston, TX, USA (Catalogue)  
 2008 Singer Gallery, Mizel Arts and Culture Center, Denver, CO, USA (Catalogue)  
 The Boathouse, Byron Cohen Gallery, Kansas City, MO, USA  
 Yigal Ozeri, Mike Weiss Gallery, SCOPE Basel 2008, Switzerland  
 Priscilla in Ecstasy, Charim Galerie, Vienna, Austria  
 Genesis, Mike Weiss Gallery, New York, NY, USA (Catalogue)  
 Genesis, Alon Segev Gallery, Tel-Aviv, Israel, (Catalogue)  
 2007 Priscilla in the Cloud Forest, Mike Weiss Gallery, SCOPE Basel 2007, Switzerland  
 2006 The Montfort, New Gallery / Thom Andriola, Houston, TX, USA  
 As Early as New York, Mike Weiss Gallery, New York, NY, USA (Catalogue)  
 Long Island City, Musée de Lodève, Lodève, France (Catalogue)  
 Café Hawelka, Galerie Eric Dupont, Paris, France  
 2005 Long Island City, Alon Segev Gallery, Tel-Aviv, Israel  
 New Paintings, Mike Weiss Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
 Four Seasons, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel-Aviv, Israel (Catalogue)  
 2004 Long Island City, New Gallery / Thom Andriola, Houston, TX, USA  
 Long Island City, Galerie Heike Curtze, Berlin, Germany

2003 The Watcher Paintings, Mike Weiss Gallery, New York, NY, USA (Catalogue)  
 Memories from The Last Supper, New Gallery / Thom Andriola, Houston, TX, USA  
 Tableau Vivant, Galerie Heike Curtze, Berlin, Germany  
 The Last Supper, Galerie Hafemann, Wiesbaden, Germany  
 2002 The Countess De Castiglione, Galerie Heike Curtze, Vienna, Austria  
 Presence of the Absent, Stefan Stux Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
 Présence de L'absence, Galerie Mabel Semmler, Paris, France  
 Yigal Ozeri: Full Moon, Galerie Heike Curtze, Salzburg, Austria  
 2001 Tikkun: The Restoration Series, Stefan Stux Gallery, New York, NY, USA (Catalogue)  
 The Countess De Castiglione, Bineth Gallery, Tel-Aviv, Israel (Catalogue)  
 The Mark of the Bite, Bineth Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel (Catalogue)  
 Still-Life, Galerie Hafemann, Wiesbaden, Germany (Catalogue)  
 Tikkun (Restoration), New Gallery / Thom Andriola, Houston, TX, USA  
 1999 Deep Storage, Galerie Heike Curtze, Vienna, Austria (Catalogue)  
 Overpass: Painting Beyond History, New Gallery / Thom Andriola, Houston, TX, USA  
 1998 Yigal Ozeri: The Grey Series, 1998, Bineth Gallery, Tel-Aviv, Israel (Catalogue)  
 Last Dance with Velázquez, Thom Andriola / New Gallery, Houston, TX, USA  
 The Empty Dress, Caesarea Gallery, Boca Raton, FL, USA  
 1997 Unbuilt America: Tears of Buildings, Z Gallery, New York, NY, USA (Catalogue)  
 Unbuilt America: Fragile Architecture, Galerie ATP, Vienna, Austria  
 Yigal Ozeri, 1994-1997, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel-Aviv, Israel, Curated by  
 Professor Mordechai Omer (Catalogue)  
 Atlas – Yigal Ozeri, Galerie Hafemann, Wiesbaden, Germany  
 Yigal Ozeri, ARCO Art Fair, Madrid, Spain (Bineth Gallery)  
 Unbuilt America, Fragile Architecture, Galerie Heike Curtze, Vienna, Austria  
 Dress Structures, Caesarea Gallery, Boca Raton, FL, USA (Catalogue)  
 1995 The Mad House of Goya, Z Gallery, New York, NY, USA (Catalogue)  
 Yigal Ozeri: New Works, Galerie Hafemann, Wiesbaden, Germany  
 A Lot of White and a Bit of Yellow, Bineth Gallery, Tel-Aviv, Israel  
 Vessels & Shrines, Yigal Ozeri after Frederick Kiesler, The Israel Museum  
 Jerusalem, Israel. Curated by Meira Perry-Lehman (Catalogue)  
 After Velazquez, Caesarea Gallery, Boca Raton, FL, USA  
 1994 Born-Unborn, Yigal Ozeri & Wenda Gu, Berlin-Shafir Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
 The Presence of the Absent: The Empty Chair in the Works of Yigal Ozeri, Haifa  
 Museum of Modern Art, Haifa, Israel. Curated by Professor Mordechai Omer (Catalogue)  
 1993 The Presence of the Absent: The Empty Chair, Bianca Lanza Gallery, Miami, FL, USA  
 My Library (The Organic Series), Sala Gaspar Gallery, Barcelona, Spain (Catalogue)  
 My Library, Galerie Hafemann, Wiesbaden, Germany  
 The Chemical Villa & The Hanging Gardens: Yigal Ozeri & William Katavolos, The  
 Museum of Israeli Art, Ramat Gan, Israel  
 Unbuilt, Bineth Gallery, Tel-Aviv, Israel  
 Yigal Ozeri, Michal Rovner, Betsy Rosenfield Gallery, Chicago, IL, USA  
 1991 Decoy, Yigal Ozeri & Michal Rovner, S. Bitter-Larkin Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
 1990 Interpretation on Fresco Paintings 1989, S. Bitter-Larkin Gallery, New York, NY, USA  
 Matter Becomes Light – Light Becomes Matter, Mishkan Le'Omanut  
 Museum of Art, Ein Harod, Israel; Janco-Dada Museum, Ein Hod, Israel (Catalogue)





