



MIKE DARGAS

OPERA GALLERY

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First acclaimed as a tattoo prodigy, Mike Dargas has now gained a well-deserved recognition for his work as an oil painter. The German artist has been taking an increasingly prominent place on the contemporary art scene thanks to fascinating and technically challenging rendering of hyperrealistic portraits.

Opera Gallery is delighted to present Dargas' newest series of work: a challenge to oil painting as we know it and a confirmation of his mastery of the photorealistic techniques. Mike Dargas' love for precision, almost obsessive, brings models to life under his brush stroke and draws us into a dreamlike world where time has suspended. His breath-taking large-scale portraits, all striking with their liveliness and expressionism, will transport the public into a world of intimacy and sensuality; and the lingering images of Mike Dargas' paintings will stay with them well after they have viewed the exhibition.

Opera Gallery has continuously strived to not only offer its international collectors the finest expertise on the art market, but also to facilitate the development of contemporary art by promoting and supporting young talents.

Our collaboration with Mike Dargas follows our path to discovery of new outstanding contemporary artists. He is rigorous in his commitment to produce excellence and demonstrates a level of skills that falls outside our understanding of what is possible.

We take great pride in presenting Mike Dargas' work to all of our collectors through this exciting exhibition, his first London solo exhibition to date.

GILLES DYAN
Founder and Chairman
Opera Gallery Group

JEAN-DAVID MALAT
Director
Opera Gallery London



Photography: © Paul Hampartsoumian 2016

The works of Mike Dargas elude a clear temporal distinction. Even if the representations can stand as indications of a contemporary Western zeitgeist, the images lose their temporal determinability through their static transience and acquire an essence of infinity. 5

Above all, his most recent paintings impress with their oversized and hyper-realistic representation of people. The artist plays with the effect on the observer right from the beginning. Although the works appear to be photographs from a distance, on closer observation the large scale of the portrait establishes the macroscopically precise observation of the artist and his masterly intercourse with colour shading and colour shift rich with nuances that sharpen the view of the picturesque.

Mike Dargas, born in Cologne in 1983, stood out as early as his childhood years with his talent for drawing. Through his mother, the young schoolboy discovered the works of Salvador Dalí, Caravaggio and H.R. Giger, who acted as an influential example for him as he moved towards adolescence. He attracted the keenest interest at only eleven years old, when he painted the cathedral square in Cologne with adaptations of master works in pastel and chalk. Besides painting, the many and varied techniques of which he made his own through independent study and the adult class of a school sponsored by the arts, he also began to develop an interest in three-dimensional art. During his training as a carpenter, he created sculptures from wood and metal. But his passion continued with painting, to which he turned with an intense focus in his mid-twenties, mainly through his work as a tattooist. With his particularly refined portraits in the style of the old Masters, Mike Dargas won numerous awards and distinctions on the tattoo scene and attracted attention worldwide, above all due to the rapid distribution of his works through social media. He has used social media to eagerly share his enthusiasm for perfecting painting techniques and high art in the *trompe-l'œil* style.

Dargas created personal feelings and dreams from the reservoir. The debate regarding the relationship between art and reality was already evident in his early oil paintings. They are thus characterised in

particular by surreal combinatorial analysis of figures and representations of architecture, see *Der Mann und die Zeit*, 2012 (*The Man and Time*), *Die Moderne*, 2013 (*The Modern*). In these works, the backdrop is restricted to implied surreal spaces together with individual portraits. Since architecture and figure are often emphasised in equal measure in a scene, the active figures are the ones which appear to have their gaze turned inwards and are only accompanied by a few accessories, more like on the imaginary stage of a dream than in a real setting.

His images of men, which came shortly after, see *Knastbruder I – III*, *Seek and Destroy (Jailbird I – III, Seek and Destroy)*, all from 2014, demonstrate an affinity to Caravaggio's *chiaroscuro* (ital. "light-and-dark painting") and place the inner conflict as the central motif in the foreground. Mike Dargas always manages to convey an intimate atmosphere into the pictorial space and to deal with his subjects on a real level. Dargas places his motif, e.g. *Die Muse*, 2012 (*The Muse*) in front of a dark background, from which it emerges mysteriously. He adopts Caravaggio's use of light and enhances the drama through the interplay of light and shadow, nuanced by dark, heavy shadows and glaring spotlights, raised sections and highlights. These stark light-dark contrasts create a great vividness, lending the figures a particularly lively appearance. In the dark sections, Dargas indicates yet another landscape (*Die Moderne*, 2013 or *Fallin Angel*, 2014), or he completely foregoes background and spatial depth. In this way, the attention of the observer is not distracted from any additional details. The composition is focussed particularly on the protagonists, even if in the works *Seek and Destroy*, 2014, and *Genesis*, 2014, pictorial elements are already employed as stylistic masking devices, which in his subsequent portraits of women come into play independently.

6 As a result, since 2015, Dargas has increasingly devoted himself to the representation of extremely detailed, oversized portraits in a large format, whose light background becomes a new feature, apart from a few exceptions (*The more I see*, 2015 and *Virgo*, 2016). The back of the painting is now worked through in *sfumato* (ital. "blurred") and causes the motif to emerge softly from the background. The blurriness that is still visible at the edges of the head is lost subtly as we move towards the centre of the face, where it reveals a macroscopically precise representation.

Together with this vivid effect, the hyper-realistic representation of the portrait in combination with liquid is stylistically influential. Either the face emerges from the liquid, as in *Carpe Diem, Baby*, 2015 or liquids such as honey (first seen in *The Ecstasy of Gold*, 2015) and melted chocolate (first seen in *Black Gold*, 2015) flow over the female face. The first impression of the apparent snapshots evokes erotic photography or still images from an erotic film. Dargas uses this to enhance the impact of the painting. The representation of the face as a headpiece is thus shown in various positions such as in the frontal view, semi-profile and three-quarter profile, the lateral lower view and the top view. The young artist, who declares portrait painting the highest discipline in art, appears to have reached a high point in his career. The representation of the beautiful female face can thus on the one hand be dealt with as the muse, and on the other as a metaphorical comparison of how we deal with the world in general. Above all, the two latter works mentioned above allegorise the debate on natural resources and the current struggle for crude oil and gold.

At the start of a new creative phase, Mike Dargas decided to show the eyes of his protagonists either closed or covered. Intimacy thus becomes the actual motif of the painting. Some women appear to be submerged in lust, while others have their view of the world impeded by the liquid. Observers have gone as far as to say that they see something sad in the images. The painter has managed to impressively evoke an element of attraction and sensitive interplay of emotions for those observing the work. However, his pieces are not only visually exciting, but also reflect the emotional and dramatic life of the painter at various points in time. Likewise, he also discusses social conflicts without directly

expressing criticism. An indication of this can be seen in the title of the work partly inspired by Metallica song titles that the artist listens to while he works, for instance: *The more I see*, 2016 or *Wherever I may roam*, 2016, which offers the observer and occasion and opportunity to play their own intellectual game. Within the numerous conflicts of present times, the conscious experience of beauty has become essential for Mike Dargas' genesis, with which the real person takes centre stage with his experiences and feelings.

He asks friends, acquaintances and models for ideas for new paintings, including the German top model Toni Garrn in 2016. On accepting the invitation to his studio, he uses photography to develop the concept for his large-format painting in one session. In an open and trusting atmosphere, he is able to emotionally experience the effect of his compositions himself and investigate individual compositional elements for their effect and intensity. Having looked at the photos, the artist begins the actual work using a pencil on the primed canvas. The representation of eyes is carried out first of all in oil, as these occupy the darkest surfaces and are also increasingly directed at the observer and act as a central design feature. Due to his constant workload, he is continually developing an independent perspective on the present, yet his pictures deal with painting itself. Through the oversized format of representation, the facial expression is especially intensified and the effect of the look reinforced. The most recent works have already been officially scaled down, causing sections of the images to appear unfinished.

We are thus curious as to which reality Mike Dargas will lean towards in future: surely a reality with its imagination, phantasmagoria, dreams, memories and invoked fragments.

NEW WORKS

10 TURN THE PAGE, 2016
Oil on canvas - 180 x 140 cm - 70.9 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back



12 EYE OF THE BEHOLDER, 2016
Oil on canvas - 180 x 140 cm - 70.9 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back



14 INVISIBLE KID, 2016
Oil on canvas - 140 x 100 cm - 55.1 x 39.4 in.
Signed and dated on the back



16 OF WOLF AND MAN, 2016
Oil on canvas - 180 x 130 cm - 70.9 x 51.2 in.
Signed and dated on the back



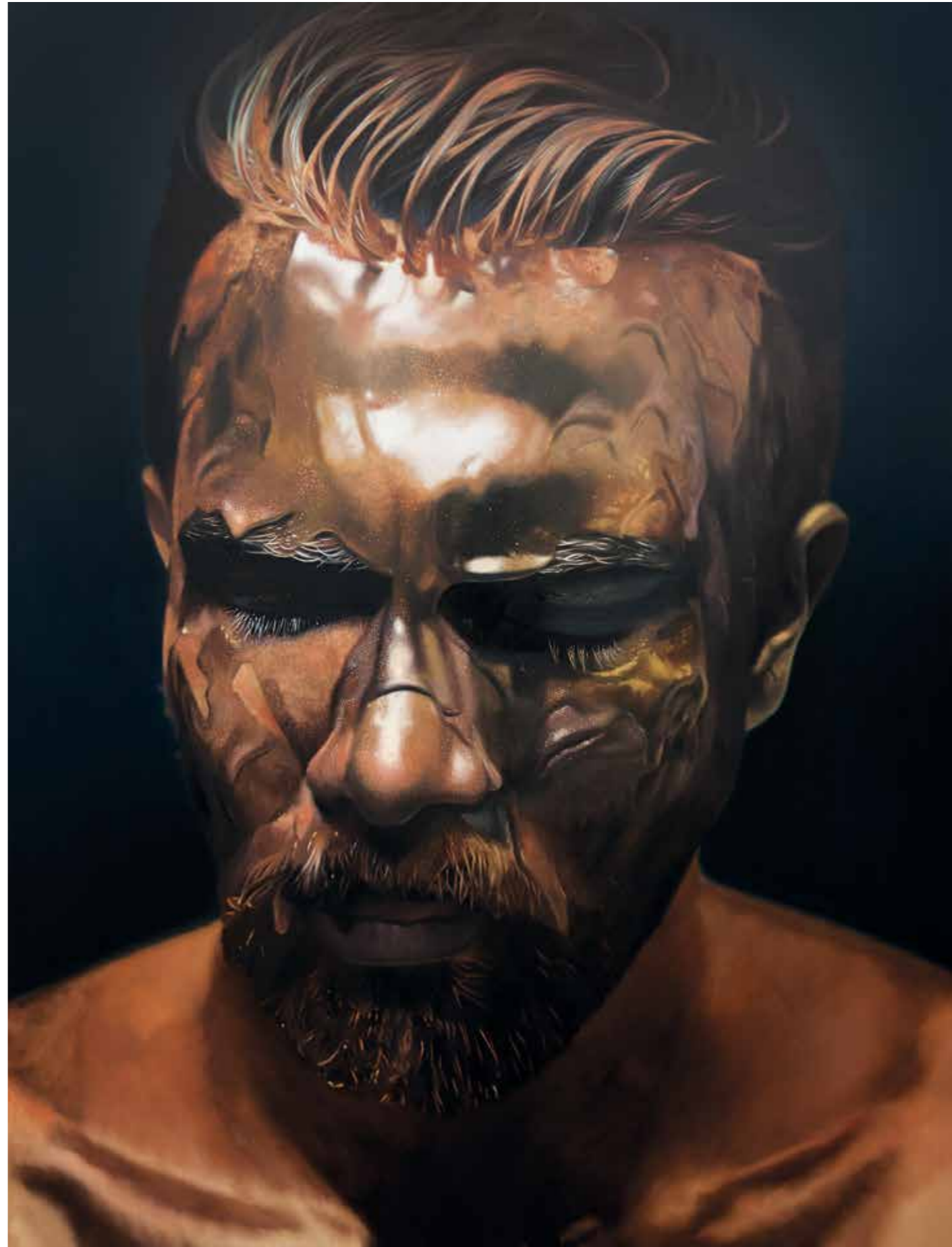
18 LET ME FLY, 2016
Oil on canvas - 180 x 130 cm - 70.9 x 51.2 in.
Signed and dated on the back



20 FADE TO BLACK, 2016
Oil on canvas - 200 x 150 cm - 78.7 x 59.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back



22 RIDE THE LIGHTNING, 2016
Oil on canvas - 180 x 130 cm - 70.9 x 51.2 in.
Signed and dated on the back



24 VIRGO, 2016
Oil on canvas - 195 x 145 cm - 76.8 x 57.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back



26 ALL WITHIN MY HANDS, 2016
Oil on canvas - 180 x 140 cm - 70.9 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back





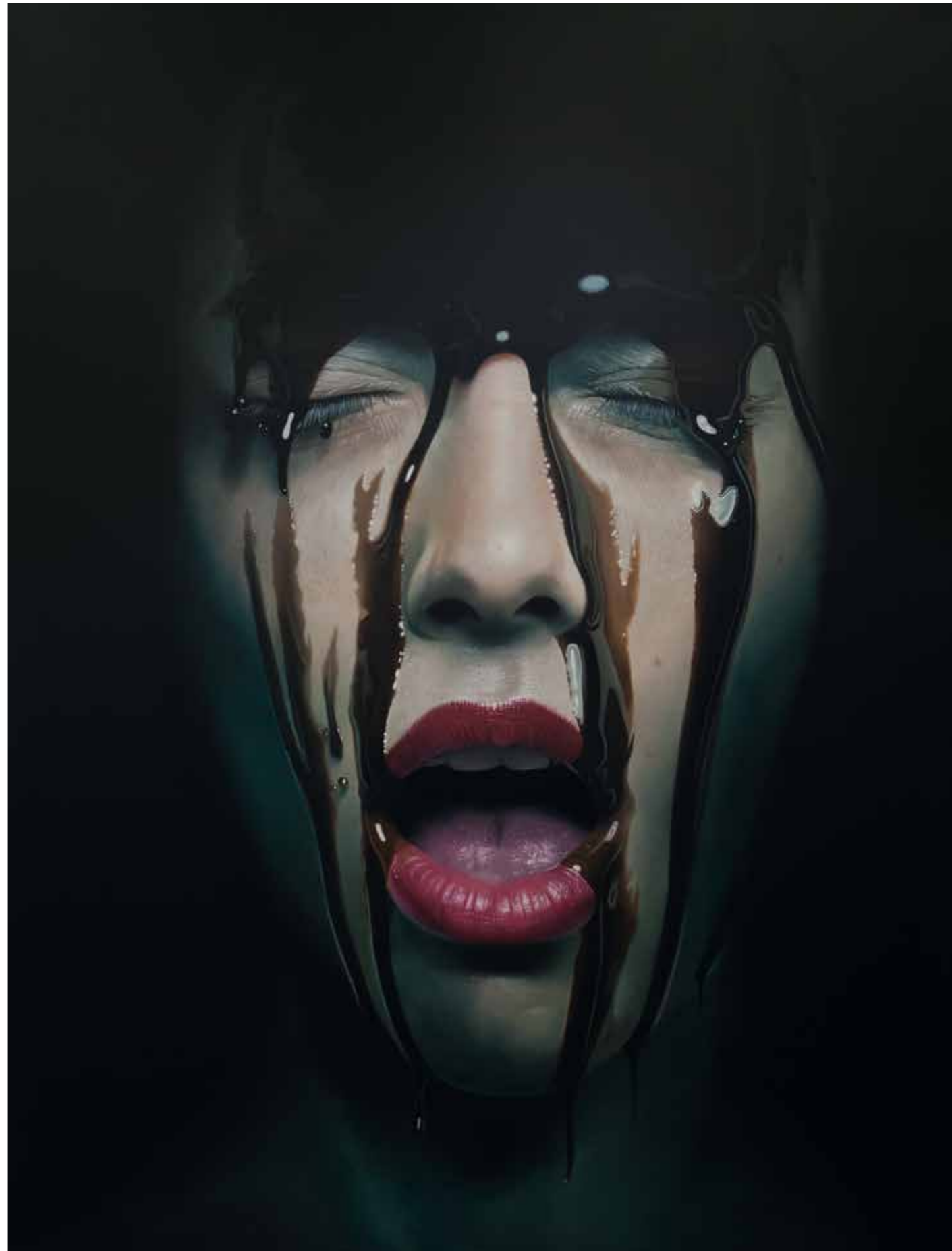
28 WHEREVER I MAY ROAM, 2016
Oil on canvas - 195 x 250 cm - 76.8 x 98.4 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, Germany

RECENT WORKS

32 EVERGLOW, 2015
Oil on canvas - 195 x 145 cm - 76.8 x 57.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back



34 THE MORE I SEE, 2015
Oil on canvas - 195 x 145 cm - 76.8 x 57.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, Los Angeles



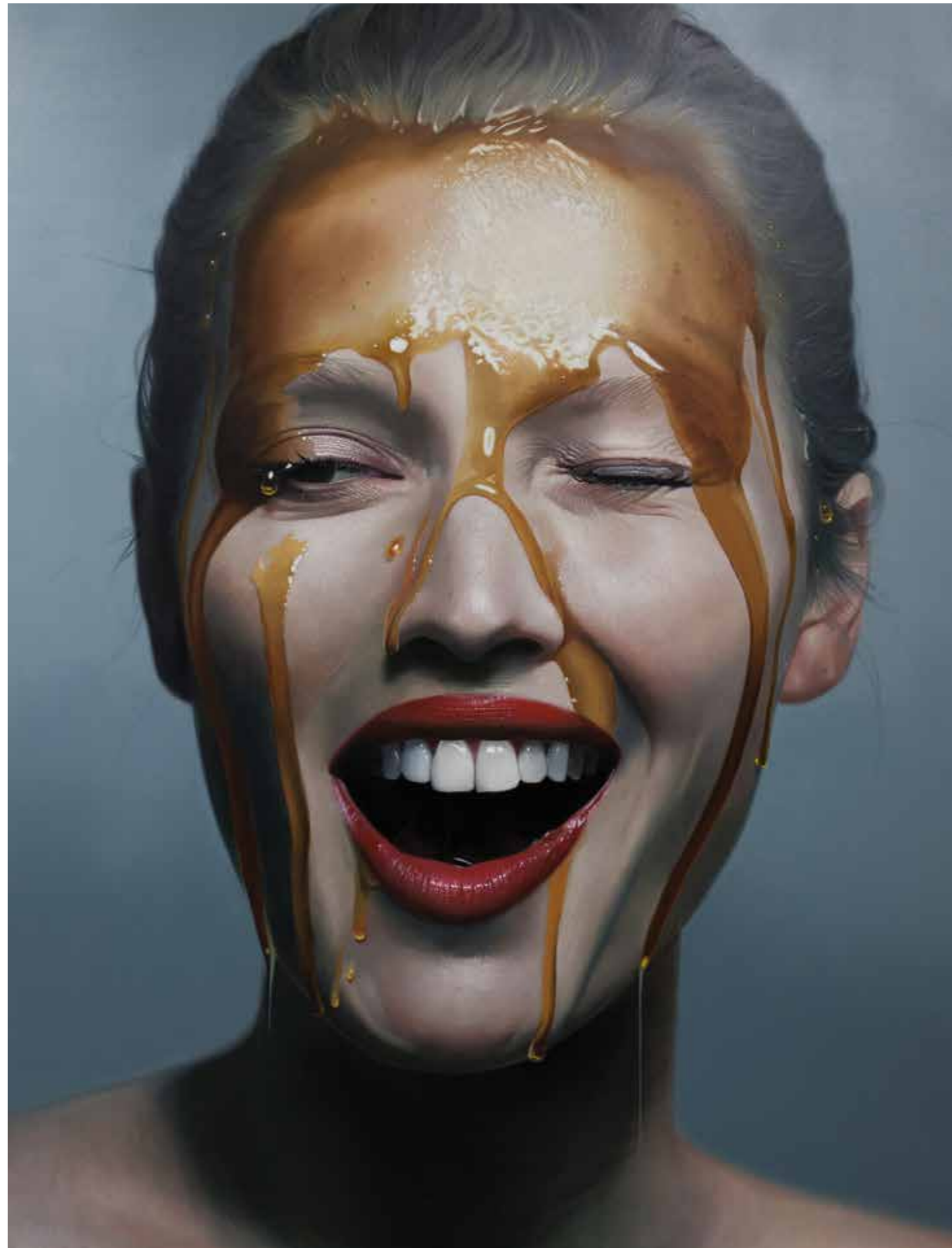
36 TONI I, 2016
Oil on canvas - 195 x 145 cm - 76.8 x 57.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, New York



38 TONI II, 2016
Oil on canvas - 195 x 145 cm - 76.8 x 57.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, London



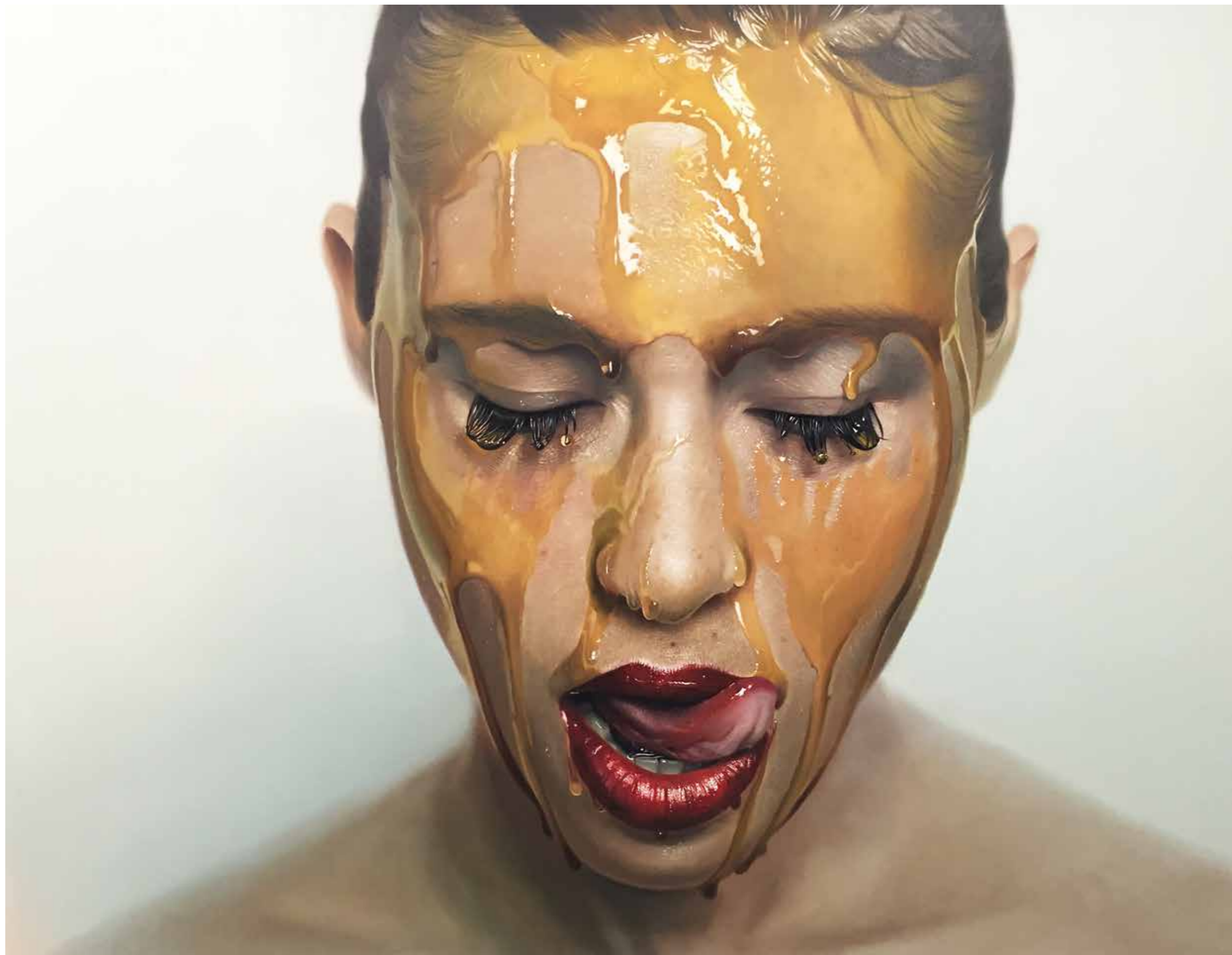
40 TONI III, 2016
Oil on canvas - 195 x 145 cm - 76.8 x 57.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, London





44 FREE FALLING, 2015
Oil on canvas - 200 x 140 cm - 78.7 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back





46 CALIFORNIA DREAMIN, 2015
Oil on canvas - 140 x 200 cm - 55.1 x 78.7 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, Los Angeles



48 NOTHING ELSE MATTERS, 2015
Oil on canvas - 120 x 140 cm - 47.2 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, San Francisco

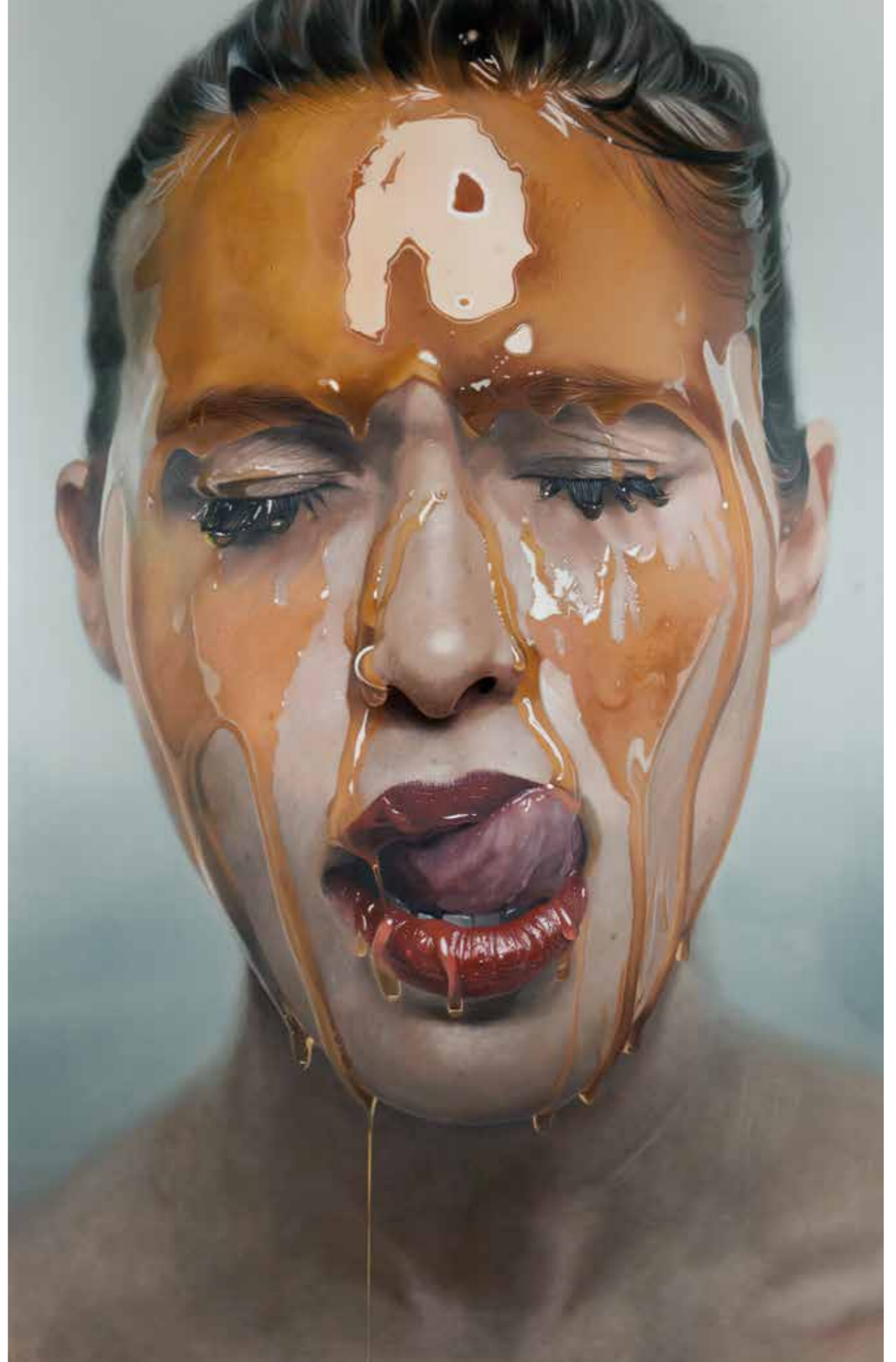
50 GOLDEN GIRL, 2015
Oil on canvas - 180 x 130 cm - 70.9 x 51.2 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, London

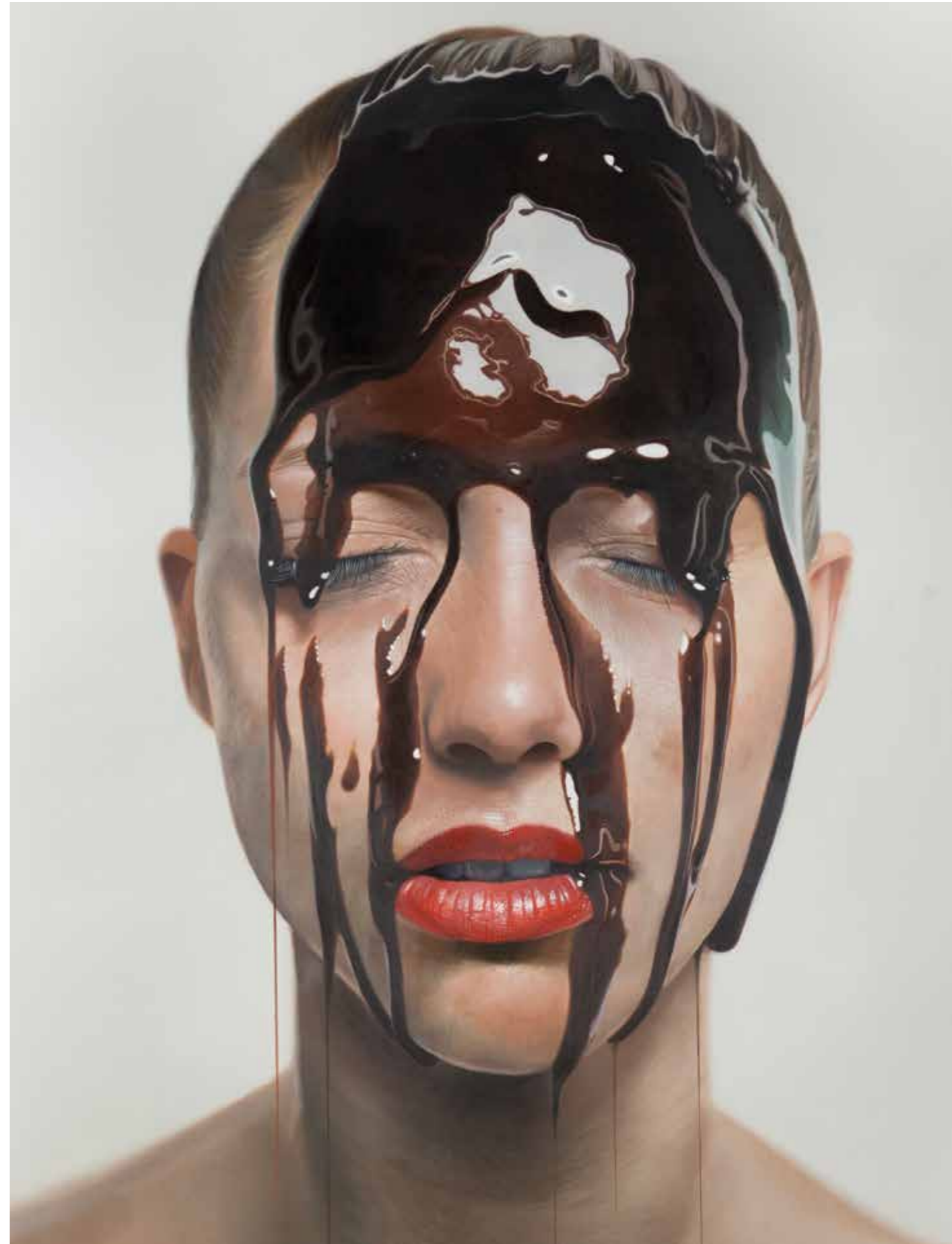


52 CARPE DIEM BABY, 2015
Oil on canvas - 200 x 130 cm - 78.7 x 51.2 in.
Signed and dated on the back



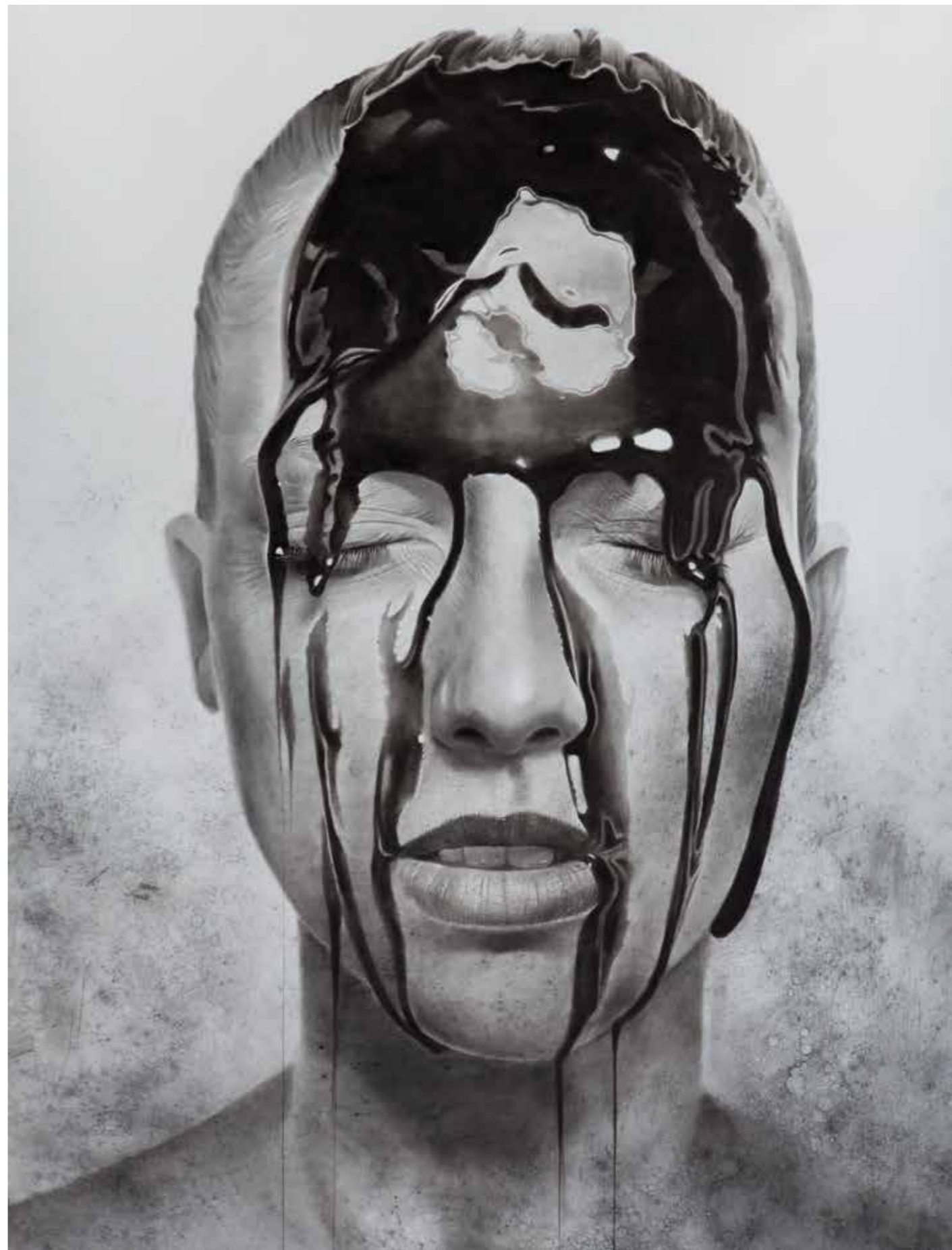
54 LIQUIFIED, 2015
Oil on canvas - 200 x 140 cm - 78.7 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back

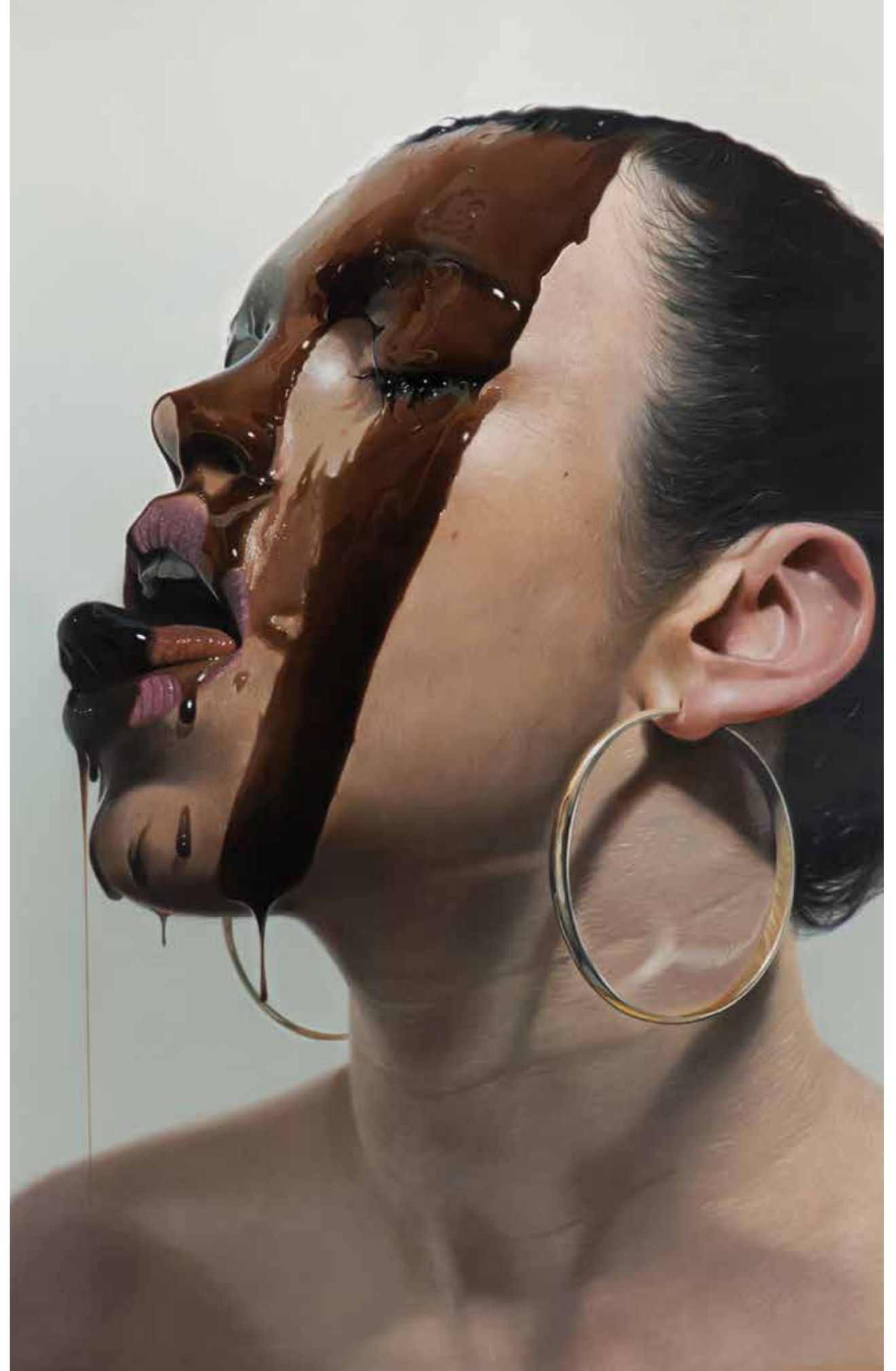




56 TRAIN OF THOUGHT, 2015
Oil on canvas - 180 x 130 cm - 70.9 x 51.2 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, Turkey

58 DARK PRESENTIMENT, 2015
Coal on paper - 150 x 100 cm - 59.1 x 39.4 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, Turkey





60 BLACKENED, 2015
Oil on canvas - 180 x 120 cm - 70.9 x 47.2 in.
Signed and dated on the back

62 MUTUAL TRUST, 2015
Oil on canvas - 200 x 140 cm - 78.7 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back

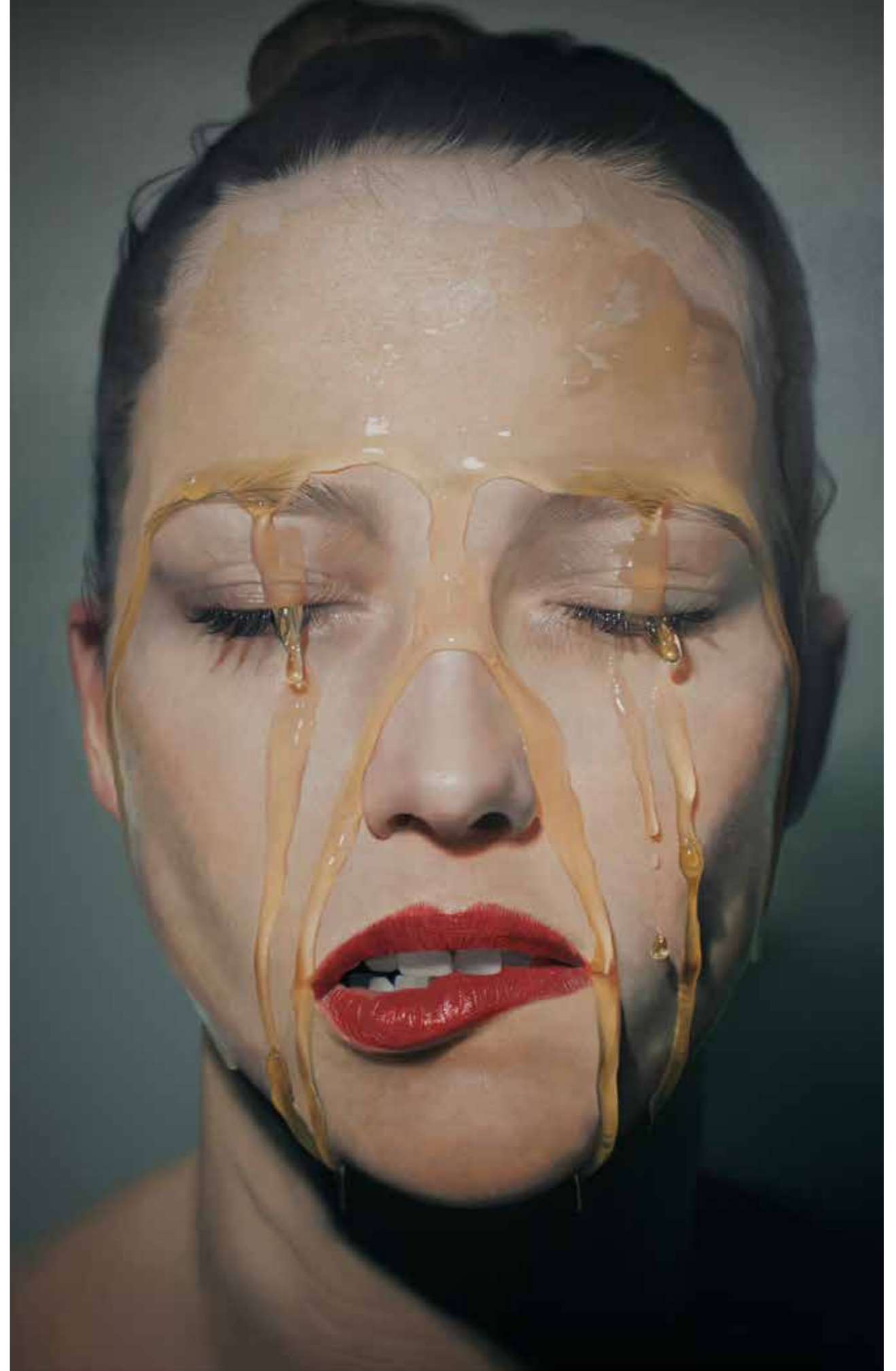


64 JUSTITIA, 2015
Oil on canvas - 140 x 120 cm - 55.1 x 47.2 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, Switzerland





66 INTO THE SUN, 2015
Oil on canvas - 220 x 140 cm - 86.6 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, Norway



68 GOLDEN THOUGHTS, 2015
Oil on canvas - 220 x 140 cm - 86.6 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back



Previous page:

SWEET AMBER, 2015

Oil on canvas - 100 x 150 cm - 39.4 x 59.1 in.

Signed and dated on the back

Private collection, London



72 HIT THE LIGHTS, 2015

Oil on canvas - 220 x 140 cm - 86.6 x 55.1 in.

Signed and dated on the back

Private collection, London

74 HOLIER THAN THOU, 2015
Oil on canvas - 100 x 80 cm - 39.4 x 31.5 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, Italy



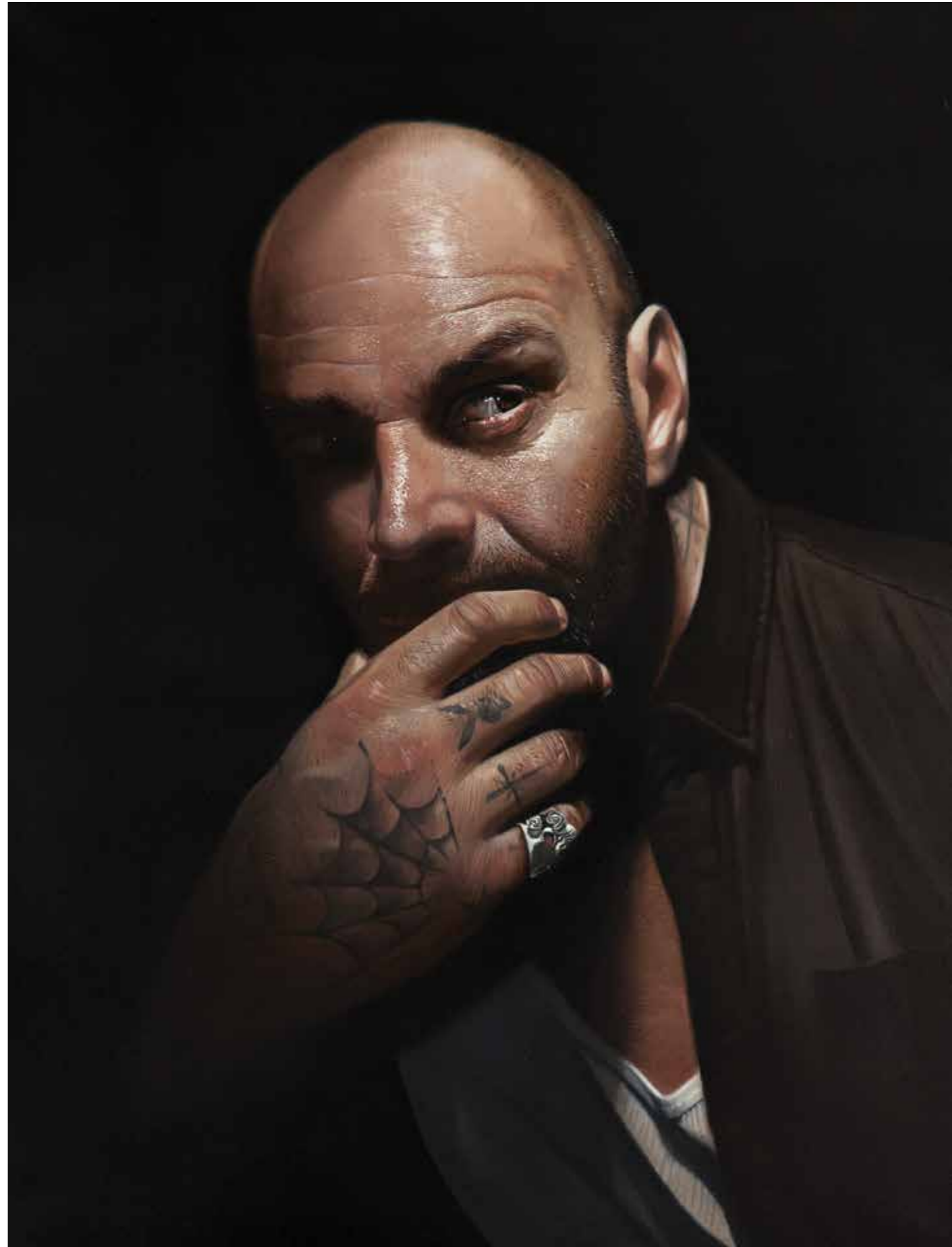
76 BLACK GOLD, 2015
Oil on canvas - 220 x 140 cm - 86.6 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, London



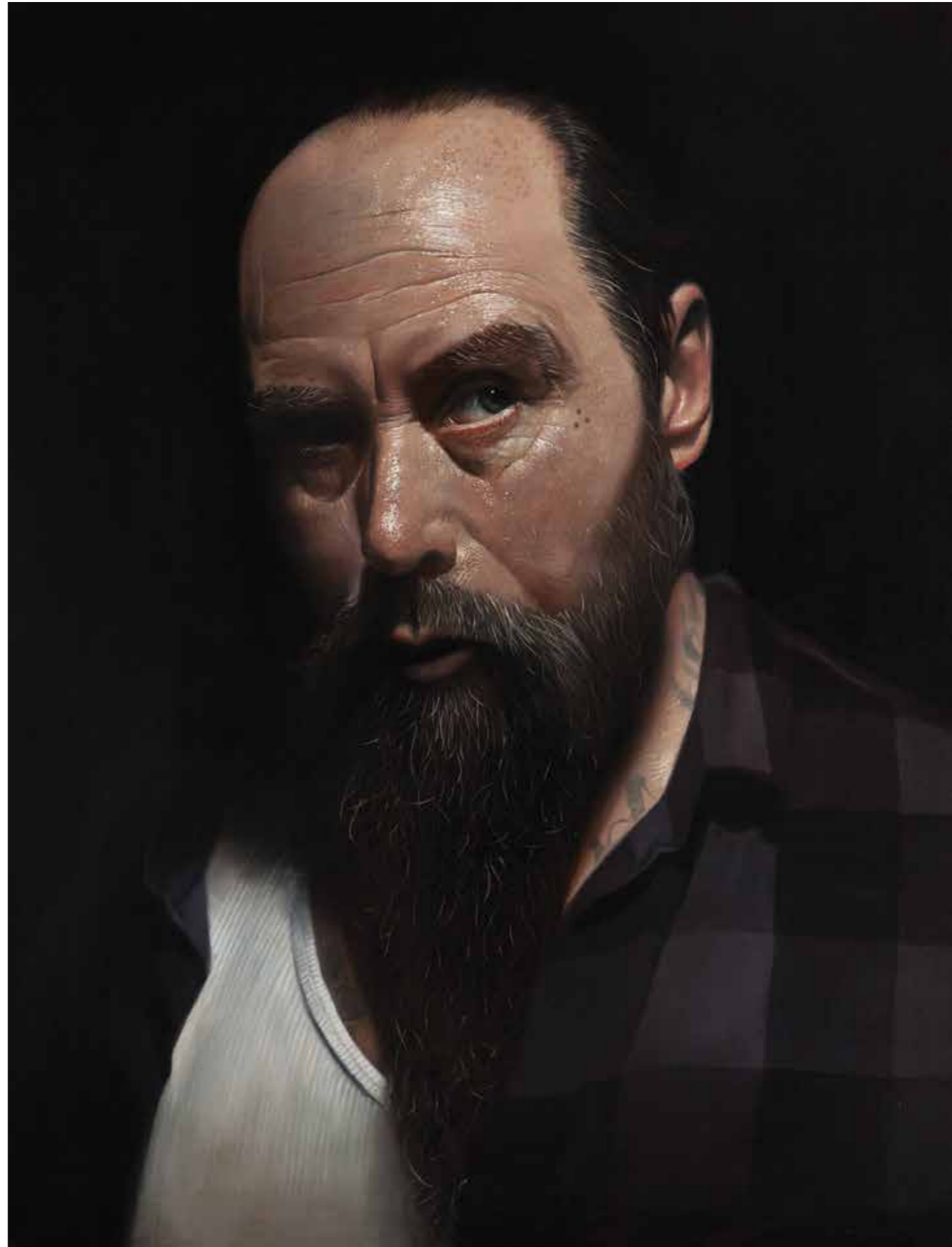
78 THE ECSTASY OF GOLD, 2014
Oil on canvas - 220 x 140 cm - 86.6 x 55.1 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, London



80 SHOOT ME AGAIN, 2014
Oil on canvas - 100 x 80 cm - 39.4 x 31.5 in.
Signed and dated on the back



82 PURIFY, 2014
Oil on canvas - 100 x 80 cm - 39.4 x 31.5 in.
Signed and dated on the back



84 THE UNNAMED FEELING, 2014
Oil on canvas - 100 x 80 cm - 39.4 x 31.5 in.
Signed and dated on the back
Private collection, Germany



86 SEEK AND DESTROY, 2014
Oil on canvas - 100 x 80 cm - 39.4 x 31.5 in.
Signed and dated on the back



88 GENESIS, 2014
Oil on canvas - 100 x 80 cm - 39.4 x 31.5 in.
Signed and dated on the back



ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

90 Mike Dargas was born in 1983 in Cologne, Germany, where he lives and works. Alongside his first drawings, he started making paintings with oil paint from a young age and selling them to friends of his mother. At the age of eleven, Mike Dargas exhibited his talent publicly, drawing old masters paintings with pastel and chalk on the pavement in front of the Cologne cathedral. He then got accepted in an art school, from which he graduated after a year and a half; the only child in a class of adults. There, he learnt different techniques, and received a training that led him to master three dimensional arts, like wooden sculpture. In his early twenties, he built himself a solid reputation in the tattoo scene and won numerous prizes and awards.

Inspired by artists such as Dalí, Caravaggio and H.R. Giger, Mike Dargas studied various techniques and since his youth developed a passion for realism, which he narrowed down to hyperrealism over the years.

The extremely precise oil paint technique gives, like a photography, a snapshot of the moment. The artist studies his subjects with such intensity, that each portrait pictures a profile of increasing intimate closeness. In his portraits, Mike Dargas is not limited to certain types. He paints young and old, beautiful and dark, fragile and strong people. They are lost in their thoughts, show inner conflict or convey a unique or even holy calmness. The perfection of his technique serves his goal to tend towards the perfect image, reaching for the soul within each single one. Through his works, Mike Dargas challenges us to take a closer look, to understand the nature of human being and to question our own emotional perception.

EXHIBITIONS

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- 2017 C24 Gallery, New York, USA (solo)
- 2016 Opera Gallery, London, UK (solo)
- 2015 Enric Miralles meets Mike Dargas, Palau de Casavells, Spain
- 2015 Mike Dargas - Malerei, Ponyhof Gallery, Munich, Germany (solo)
- 2015 Opera Gallery, London, UK
- 2014 Neue Photokunst & Friends, Galerie Display, Cologne, Germany
- 2013 Freud lässt grüßen, Galerie Atelier I.S., Walhorn, Belgium

FAIRS

- 2016 Art Miami, C24 Gallery, Miami, USA
- 2016 Contemporary Art Fair Istanbul, C24 Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2016 Art New York, C24 Gallery, New York, USA
- 2016 Art Karlsruhe, WHITECONCEPTS, Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2015 Contemporary Art Fair Istanbul, C24 Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey
- 2015 Wiener Kunst - und Antiquitätenmesse, CONTEMPO Fine Art, Vienna, Austria
- 2015 STROKE Art Fair, ponyhof artclub, Munich, Germany
- 2013 art;pul Kunstmesse, Cologne, Germany
- 2013 ARTig, Kommandeursburg, Cologne, Germany

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Author: Nicole Loeser

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OPERA GALLERY

operagallery.com

134 New Bond Street, London W1S 2TF • T. + 44 (0)207 491 2999 • london@operagallery.com

