

Jenny SAVILLE (1970 -)

Mother and Child Study I

Charcoal, with stumping, on transparent paper superimposed on top of a second sheet of white paper, on which is drawn a similar subject in red chalk.

The two sheets lightly attached to each other with masking tape at each of the four sides, with a narrow strip of card added to the bottom of the second sheet as a support.

Signed and dated Saville / 2009 in pencil at the lower right.

890 x 587 mm. (35 x 23 1/8 in.)

This large charcoal drawing, drawn on two sheets of paper, one superimposed over the other, is part of a group of sizeable drawings, executed by Jenny Saville between 2008 and 2011, that reflect a new interest in exploring themes of pregnancy and motherhood. While a handful of these drawings of pregnant women with infant boys are drawn in pencil and charcoal on fairly sizeable sheets of transparent vellum paper, such as the present drawing and another one of similar dimensions, most are drawn on much larger sheets of paper, sometimes well over two metres in height.

A characteristic of these large graphite and charcoal drawings of mothers and children is Saville's self-assured draughtsmanship. As she has noted, 'in this series, I've embraced drawing in a new way. I'm a bit more confident.' This particular drawing, Mother and Child Study I, is drawn on two sheets of paper, one superimposed over the other to create a layered effect. The upper drawing, executed in charcoal on

transparent, vellum-like paper, has been placed over a second large sheet on which a similar mother and child has been drawn in red chalk. As the artist has stated, 'I wanted the sense of internal/external shifting, the intense physicality of holding an energetic son, less than a year old, while heavily pregnant with another baby. For two years, I was literally making flesh. The sense of weight was very powerful; so was the sense of holding and reproducing – not just holding a child in your arms, but one in your body too. I kept thinking of the formation of flesh and limbs inside my body, of regeneration – while I was in the act of painting flesh, a similar process was taking place inside my body. My multiple drawings – one on top of another – are a way of communicating these feelings. You're literally reproducing yourself while you're pregnant, like the way the lines reproduce themselves. The procedure became obsessive and spawned a whole lot of work…I wanted to see if I could make a convincing and vital image of a mother and child.'

Exhibitions

West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art, Jenny Saville, 2011-2012, unnumbered; Oxford, Modern Art Oxford and Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Jenny Saville, 2012, unnumbered (on loan from a private collection); London, Royal Academy of Arts; RA Now, 2012.

Literature:

Cheryl Brutvan, ed., Jenny Saville, exhibition catalogue, West Palm Beach, 2011-2012, illustrated p.72; New York, Gagosian Gallery, Jenny Saville: Continuum, exhibition catalogue, 2011-2012, p.5, fig.1 (shown in a photograph of the artist's studio in 2011); Oxford, Modern Art Oxford and Ashmolean Museum, Jenny Saville, exhibition catalogue, 2012, unpaginated; Martin Gayford, 'Erotic Emin Doodles, Gormley Robot Raise Cash for Royal Academy', Bloomberg.com, 9 October 2012.

Artist description:

Born in Cambridge, Jenny Saville studied at the Glasgow School of Art, graduating in 1992 with a final show in which every painting was sold. While still at art school, she took part in the British Portrait Competition at the National Portrait Gallery in London in 1990 and in the Van Gogh Self Portrait Competition at the Burrell Collection in Glasgow. Shortly after her graduation, the artist's work came to the attention of the collector Charles Saatchi, who purchased several of her paintings. Between 1992 and 1993, Saatchi commissioned Saville to produce a number of paintings which were later included in the exhibition Young British Artists III at the Saatchi Gallery in London in 1994, where the work of the twenty-three year old artist received a significant amount of critical attention. Working on a very large scale, Saville created paintings characterized both by an abiding interest in the naked female body and the sheer physicality of oil paint. A desire to learn more about anatomy led to an opportunity, during a stay in America in 1994, to make a careful study of cosmetic surgical procedures. In 1995 and 1996 she collaborated with the photographer Glen Luchford on a series of paintings of a female model pressed against a sheet of glass; these works were exhibited at the Pace McGill Gallery in New York in 1996. Saville's paintings were included in the controversial exhibition Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection at the Royal Academy in London in 1997, alongside the work of Damien Hirst, Chris Ofili, Tracey Emin and others, which brought her work to the notice of the public at large. Saville's paintings were also included in the exhibition The Nude in Contemporary Art at the Aldrich Museum of Art in Ridgefield, Connecticut in 1999. In 1998 a solo exhibition, entitled Territories, was mounted at the Gagosian Gallery in New York, followed in 2003 by another exhibition entitled Migrants.

Saville was appointed a lecturer of figure painting at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, where she taught between 2000 and 2006. A solo museum exhibition of her work was mounted at the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea in Rome in 2005, and the following year she completed a commission from the Italian collector Carlo Bilotti for three paintings to decorate the chapel of the Museo Carlo Bilotti in Rome. These were installed in 2006 alongside other site-specific works commissioned for the chapel from Damien Hirst and David Salle. In 2007 she was elected to the Royal Academy, and in 2011 and 2012 a retrospective exhibition of her paintings and drawings, which included the present sheet, was held at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Florida, and at the Ashmolean Museum and the Modern Art Museum in Oxford. Another major solo exhibition took place at the George Economou Collection in Athens in 2018-2019, while another was held in the Museo Novecento and several other locations in Florence in 2021-2022. Most recently, Saville's work was included in the exhibition Women

Painting Women, at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth in 2022. After working for several years between studios in London and Palermo in Sicily, Saville today lives and works in Oxford.