

Anh Duong Is “Prude in Life,” But Nude on Canvas

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Anh Duong's fashion world accolades are common knowledge—the former ballerina was the beloved muse of designers like Yves Saint Laurent and Christian Lacroix, walked in the first runway shows for Dolce & Gabbana and John Galliano, and worked closely with Christian Dior and Karl Lagerfeld. But it wasn't until the summer of 1989, which she spent in repose at Andy Warhol's Montauk estate, that the **fashion icon** rediscovered her love of painting. After serving as the inspiration for other artists for more than a decade, Duong decided it was time to claim that role for herself. “Modeling creates a gap between who you truly are and how you're seen. If that gap it gets too big, can be quite painful,” says Duong. “Becoming an artist was a way of showing who I really am.” Several solo exhibitions and an untold number of self-portraits later, the 61-year-old New York-based artist has become her own muse, focusing her efforts on painting feeling, rather than likeness. This month, Duong is showing a collection of her newest works, titled *Without Obsession I Am Lost*, at Spring Place Beverly Hills curated by Isabelle Bscher, co-owner of **Galerie Gmurzynska**. The series, which includes intimate portraits of larger-than-life figures like Angelica Huston and Susan Sarandon, also documents some of Duong's darkest moments and deepest curiosities. Here, the artist breaks down a few of her favorite works in the exhibition, on view through September 1.

“A lot of unsafe places to be,” 2008



“This painting is about a relationship. How close can you be to someone else? How much distance do you need? I was very close to that dog—it was my ex husband’s—and I was trying to make a portrait of my relationship with him through the dog. It’s about our struggle to connect. I’m kind of a prude in life—I never did any naked shoots during my modeling career—but when I’m naked on the canvas I don’t feel like it’s me, so I’m not self conscious. Because I’m nude in the painting, suddenly it seems like the dog is also nude, although of course dogs always are. The painting creates nudity. “

“The Impossible Gender Frontiers,” 2022



“I wanted to explore the line between feminine and masculine. What is strength, what is vulnerability? What attracts, and what pushes away? So she’s wearing a blonde wig—as a kid I used to always wear a blonde wig. I thought if I was blonde, I’d be more attractive. I was half Asian with dark hair—forget it. She’s holding the bear, showing her vulnerability, but also she’s in all that armor, she’s on guard. But the explanation, it comes after. All I knew was that I wanted to paint that wig, and then I figured out why.”

“Angelica Huston,” 2009



“I’ve always admired Angelica, she’s an incredible actor and so beautiful. People used to say that I looked like her, and years ago I met her at an opening. We looked at each other across the gallery and laughed, I think we realized our similarity. I asked to paint her, and she said yes and was thrilled. I saw why directors love to work with her. Her allure can be so intimidating, but there’s an incredibly vulnerable human quality to her. I love that contrast,

and I wanted to portray it. It was around the time her husband passed away. She became very emotional while she sat for me, she had tears in her eyes when I played music—maybe it reminded her of someone—and she asked if she could have the playlist. That happens a lot—you’re off your guard, so whatever emotion is within you is going to come out, and that’s what I want to paint.”

“Urgency of the Worst,” 2009



“This is my wedding dress, a gorgeous couture piece. I worked a lot with Christian Lacroix when I was modeling—him and Saint Laurent. I was one of his muses, the first time I came to New York was for a fashion show back in the day. When I got married,

Christian did my dress ,of course. But I made this painting in the middle of my divorce. So it’s not a wedding picture, but it is—its about marriage and the failure of marriage. “

“Train Myself to Decency,” 2022



“I love using mirrors, because you never know which figure is the real one. She’s wearing a tie on one side, and lingerie on the other. When I was younger, I was romantically involved with well-known artists, and I was always asked about them in interviews. I always felt like I was pigeonholed into being the woman in the lingerie, inspiring the genius. When I was trying to make it as an artist, I learned that you had to look masculine to be taken seriously. Today, if you’re a female artist, Prada is going to dress you for your opening, and celebrate you. But back then, an artist was expected to come to the opening covered in paint, hungover, looking dragged down—looking like a man. Misogyny is a reality, but breaking into a male-dominated world is so exciting. We are redefining what it means to be men and women now, and I have this fantasy that we’re all going to be the same gender one day. “