



Ninu Nina: Artist Wendell Gladstone

Leila Antakly | Ninu Nina, July 23, 2023



Wendell Gladstone, *Spooky Action*, 2023. Acrylic on canvas. 80 x 72 in. Courtesy of the Artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

Gladstone's figurative compositions examine the indescribable psychic impact of human relationships. Drawing from elements of Jungian psychology and taking inspiration from quantum physics, the artist engages a variety of visual styles and painting methods to conjure extraordinary scenes free from the governing principles of reality.

The paintings consider the circuitous flow of influences and effects set in motion by intimate relationships. The exhibition title cites "spooky action at a distance," Einstein's incredulous quip about entanglement the phenomenon where distinctly independent subatomic particles are somehow tethered to each other, equally affected by external forces to share an identical state, even when separated by large distances. Expanding upon Gladstone's interest in figurative painting that is at once human and alien, worldly and otherworldly, structured and fluid. He articulates the curious qualities of entanglement and superposition contained within relationships through both the content of the narratives, as well as a systematic material approach.



Wendell Gladstone, *Superposition*, 2023. Acrylic on Canvas. 80 X 72 In. Courtesy of the Artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

What can we expect to see in *Spooky Action* and how does this latest series of work compare to your previous work at Shulamit?

You will see highly textured figurative paintings that depict intimate relationships in supernatural settings.

When I look back and compare new works to previous shows, I see themes carrying through each phase. Because I usually work on one painting at a time, and not a whole body of work at once, the threads I'm pulling on don't have abrupt beginnings or endings. There isn't a singular concept driving things; I prefer to make incremental evolutions between works. Some ideas and moves get retained, while some fall to the wayside, and a few new elements are added to the mix in each painting. Sometimes there are noticeable shifts within a show, other times an exhibition ends up being more cohesive. "Spooky Action" landed on the cohesive side of the spectrum.

Tell us about your creative process or approach for *Spooky Action* - from ideation, what was going on through your mind, and what that process was like for you.

The process for this show was similar to the way I have worked before. I usually start by making connections between the drawings I collect in my notebook and then form narratives from them. The sketches are quick and of things that I come across that, for some reason or another, I'm drawn to. Initially, I don't interfere and question what the attraction is; I just try to allow for my unconscious to steer the boat. Some ideas eventually start speaking louder than others and dialogues begin to form. At this point, I take a more active role to pull elements together and begin to thread narratives into compositions.

What bubbled up as a main theme in this body of work was a longing for human connection, both physical and emotional. The way the figures touch and intermingle has a specific feel and motivation. The space they inhabit is delineated between inside and outside. Brick and stucco facades separate these two zones with figures either peering from within windows in an interior domestic space or are immersed in a natural setting outside the walls in the foreground, often perched in trees. Subtle connections between the two worlds hint that the barriers are permeable and space is in flux. The physical environment becomes plastic to the touch and bends to the will and desires of the figures on opposing sides.



Wendell Gladstone, *Caress*, 2023. Acrylic on Canvas. 48 X 48 In. Courtesy of the Artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

What does wellbeing mean to you?

I am the most well when I am in the studio and lost in the process of making. I do everything I can to allow for the most time to swim in those waters. You do need to come up for air every now and then, but I don't need much. :)



Wendell Gladstone, *Ambrosia*, 2023. Acrylic on Canvas. 48 X 48 In. Courtesy of the Artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.

By the way, what's up with the spooky- alien-like eyes in all your subjects? why, would love to know the meaning behind that.

The eyes do have a strange quality to them. I like when things hover in an in-between ambiguous space. The other nonhuman elements in my paintings already existed in that type of realm between artifice and nature: trees having a modular plastic appearance, a condensed minimalistic architecture, leaves, flowers, and animals looking like they are made of stained glass. I wanted the figures to exist in a similar liminal state. I was already painting the faces and bodies with varying degrees of abstraction to achieve that uneasy balance, but altering the way the eyes are rendered can have a dramatic effect. It ended up being a simple flip. The inverting of the lights and darks in the eyes gave the figures a mysterious quality while still feeling human. They are now the indigenous inhabitants of their environment.

My favorite question, Tell us your greatest inspirations or influences, please.

That's difficult to pin down. I like to cast a wide net and absorb whatever is pulling me in, so sources of inspiration change frequently. In that respect, an early influence whose process had a big impact on my own approach was Matthew Barney. The way he constructed his narratives by pulling from disparate sources and weaving them together to make something new really opened things up for me.



Wendell Gladstone, *Transmission*, 2023. Acrylic on Canvas. 96 X 84 In. Courtesy of the Artist and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles.