



David Salle, *Untitled*, 2019, Flashe paint on ink-jet print, 26 × 19 3/8".

David Salle

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The eleven recent large-scale paintings in David Salle's exhibition "Self-Ironing Pants and Other Paintings" featured dapper gentlemen and dolled-up dames. These cavorting protagonists were copied from Peter Arno cartoons originally published in the *New Yorker* and dating from the 1920s through the '60s, but Salle rid the cartoons of their editorial bent, scaling up, cropping, splicing, and rotating Arno's bold-stroked satires of American café society and adding color and consumerism to the mix. He complements Arno's grisaille vignettes with vibrant images appropriated from midcentury advertisements: A giant and dramatically foreshortened deli sandwich, cigarette pack, or classic car might appear to burst forth in shocks of green, orange, yellow, and pink from an uncolored hospital room or cocktail party. As chaotic as they are nostalgic, the paintings capture a troubling mass media-induced malaise—whether caused by flipping through a glossy magazine or clicking around a website—whereby editorial and advertising content overlap, blur, and finally coalesce into nonsense.

The juxtapositions of scale, style, subject, and tone in Salle's mash-ups of cartoons and ads make for some fun absurdist readings. In *Forget School—Remember Camp* (all works 2019), a large, shiny brown oxford shoe on the upper left appears to kick one of Arno's canoodling couples out of the composition. On the bottom right, meanwhile,

several slices of marbled pink ham suggest an extravagant snack for some gray birds whose beaks point longingly toward the supersize cold cuts. In *Self-Ironing Pants*, one of Arno's typical pear-shaped fuddy-duddies, here clad in striped pajamas, glumly contemplates a bathtub over which an explosion of bubble-gum packs extends diagonally across the entire composition. While this geyser of Fler's Dubble Bubble brings to mind the speech or thought bubbles of comic strips, the words on these particular bubbles provide no clarification. Rather, they add to the general confusion. This painting's humorous title is also self-conscious and didactic. Naming his painting (and his show) after an imagined retro-futuristic product, Salle reminds us that art is neither automatic nor perfect. Pants can't iron themselves any more than paintings can decode themselves, but wrinkles and brushstrokes are where things get interesting.

Rounding out the show, eight smaller paintings installed on the gallery's second floor further blurred the distinction between the realms of editorial, advertising, and fine art. To create these more delicate works, Salle sketched female faces and figures on top of digital prints made from scans of vintage magazine ads for products such as boxer shorts, mattresses, and cigarettes. Many of these paintings, all *Untitled*, were originally made for a twelve-page fashion spread in *Vogue Italia*'s January 2020 issue, where they were accompanied by captions crediting the clothes Salle painted to Saint Laurent, Fendi, and Gucci, among others. So for this meta-project, paintings composed from magazine advertisements were published as editorial content in a magazine before being displayed on the gallery walls, framed, as unique works of fine art. With the reproduction of *Untitled*, 2019, as an illustration for this review, the cycle continues.

— Mara Hoberman

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