

# BEAUTIFUL/ DECAY

## ARTIST INTERVIEW: YIGAL OZERI

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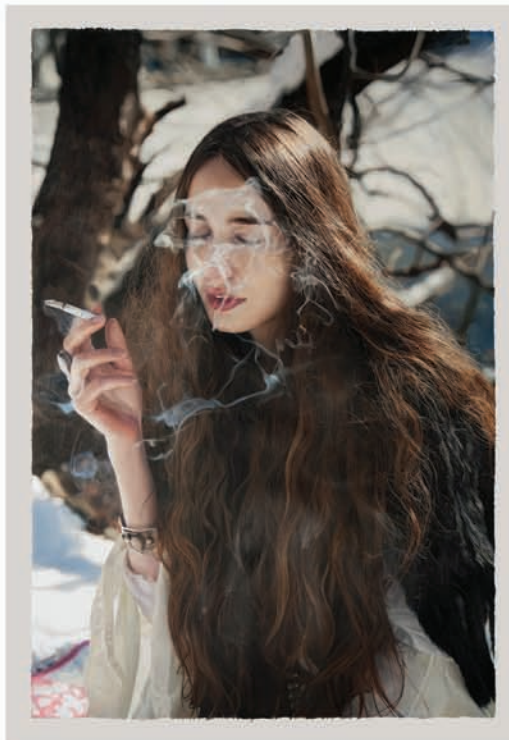
New York based artist Yigal Ozeri will debut a stunning solo show at Mark Moore Gallery this Saturday, October 30. In his latest body of work, he captures rock royalty model/actress Lizzie Jagger, daughter of Mick Jagger & Jerry Hall. Posing in luscious velvets amidst a hauntingly ethereal frozen landscape, Ozeri's dramatic, rock 'n' roll, sumptuously gorgeous portraits call to mind the unparalleled beauty of Pre-Raphaelite painters. Injecting a much needed dose of beauty, depth and complexity to Photorealism, Yigal Ozeri's works dance between liminal realms of reality and fantasy, imagination and truth, nature and transcendence.

**The subject of your latest solo exhibition at Mark Moore Gallery features the rock royalty model & actress Lizzie Jagger, the oldest daughter of Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall. Can you talk a little bit about how you came to work with her, why you chose her as a subject?**

Lizzie is a special individual. I was introduced to Lizzie by a mutual friend. We cannot forget that she is the daughter of Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall. Like the famous quote says, "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree." Both of her parents were such monumental, iconic figures that she is the ultimate model. To me she represents freedom, joy, and love.

**Can you talk about collaborating with Lizzie for the images and what you envisioned at the outset? Why did you choose the snow as the setting?**

She came to the photo shoot on one of the coldest winter days we had last year. The entire park was covered with white snow, everything was frozen.



**I absolutely love the portrait of Lizzie smoking with her eyes closed...at first, I almost thought the smoke was some kind of magical trope, and when I realized it was from a cigarette it immediately became sort of rock 'n' roll, of this era. The portraits, for me, are timeless; you can't quite place the temporality of many of them. But a woman smoking a cigarette also makes them contemporary at the same time. And its an odd juxtaposition in nature. How did the poses with the cigarettes come about?**

From the moment she arrived, Lizzie started to chain-smoke. Smoking in nature? The staff on the set was a little confused as to why I wasn't upset at her taking all these "smoking breaks." They asked, "Are you paying her to smoke?" Nobody understood why I kept filming. I thought it was brilliant.

This was her connection to nature. That was her passion for nature, that was her joy, her relaxation. That was a new challenge for me. She smoked and she smiled with great joy. That was enough for me. "I got what I need," I told everyone. The white smoke that materialized from the wet white snow was visually stimulating for me.

**I love the wardrobe in the paintings, there's sort of a Victorian/Edwardian influence, with the flowing bell sleeves, the beautiful black magic velvet hooded gown, there's almost an element of the supernatural or a mysterious witchy woman were these pieces Lizzie's clothing? How did you decide what she would wear, or how did that come about?**

Yes- she came wearing a black/green velvet cape, she had pale skin and long hair and she looked like a vampire.

**The mimetic qualities and approach of your works is absolutely gorgeous, calling to mind the elegant compositions and sumptuous detail of Pre-Raphaelite painters. In particular I am reminded of such works as Jon Everett Millais' "Ophelia," where the subject just seems to melt and become one with the natural environment, or the stunning ladies of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The details in the hair, the fabric, the textural qualities of the snow and her expressions are all incredibly sensuous. Can you talk about your relation to this movement & style?**

Yes, there is definitely a connection to "Pre-Raphaelite." I paint women in nature. Of course I look at the works of John Everett Millais, "Ophelia in the Nature" from the 1850's. I was fascinated with the works and with the group of artists Millais, Rossetti, they worked like a communion. They work together in England with complete freedom without all the feeling of academic work that was before them. They took the model to the nature and just painted.

**The works also call to mind tromp l'oeil of sorts, or more recently, photorealism. But for me, the works sort of live in the uncanny valley, at once hyper real and imaginative, encapsulating both truth and fiction at once. For me, the heightened reality of the pieces don't lend the works the dry, factual tone of Photorealism, but instead a kind of haunting, ethereal beauty that is incredibly arresting and seductive. They sort of dance between myriad realms. Can you talk about how mimesis plays out in your works, the relation between your paintings and photographs?**

Photographing is an important part of my work. I use all the elements of video, and digital photography, and I archive and store them on my computer. After I organize them and choose the images that I want to use, I start the painting process. First, I make a grid on the canvas or paper, then I project the drawing and then I paint with the actual photograph as a reference. I think that when you create a movie there is no way back. What the camera captures is the closest to life, to real life, to one's reality, to one's breathing. The camera doesn't lie. That is why it isn't photorealism, it isn't hyperrealism, it is reality.



**How did you come to work in this fashion?**

In 2000 after my mother died, I created a series called Tikkun (like tikkun olam- meaning "to mend the world") like a "Trompe L'oeil." I dealt with materials that decay when the body decomposes, and with fear of death. That series marked a turning point in my career. I did a series called the Last Supper inspired by Leonardo De Vinci. I dealt again with decay and all the transformations that Leonardo De Vinci's The Last Supper fresco endured. The actual de Vinci piece was restored for over 400 years and that really fascinated me. My The Last Supper series was the first time I used small brushes and the first time I used photography and reproduction as a major source to my work.

Shortly after that series, I started painting windows with pigeons, which in actuality was the view from my Long Island City studio. That was when the big change began. I wasn't focused on reacting to the art world anymore, but rather I focused on my immediate surrounding.

In the first phase I painted by looking at the object, observing it and painting it without a secondary reference. I completed one painting, on the topic of seasons "The Four Seasons" in 13 months. It was the only painting that I painted simply by observing. After that I started to photograph the window and the pigeons surrounding it every day for a year. I started painting from the photographs I took, like you mentioned in the question, it was the idea of photorealism for the first time in my work. Initially I painted much more freely and then I started to pay more attention to details and I started using small brushes. It was the first time I was able to paint portraits. I added paintings of my son and daughter as representations of myself as a child playing with pigeons in my grandfather's house in Israel. It was a very gradual process of shifting styles over a decade, it didn't happen all at once.

I got here from Israel as a successful artist with a unique artistic vocabulary and then little by little I have changed. I started to breathe differently. I became more of an American artist, with a different perspective after all I have been a New Yorker for the past 22 years.

**What inspires you as an artist, whether visually, conceptually, musically...?**

It is always the first moment with the model in the natural atmosphere. How the model connects with the natural aspects. Her first interaction with her settings. Her initial timidness, slight reluctant behavior, insecurity, embarrassment, the model's direct gaze, her openness. Sometimes the model experiences joy from her settings, that is the most important element in my eyes. If it doesn't happen then the work will never happen. All of those aspects affect my work.