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New Geniuses Born
Artist Nir Hod shares never
before seen portraits
exclusively for *Document*.

INTERVIEW BY AMY PHELAN
ARTWORK BY NIR HOD





Israeli born artist Nir Hod lives and works in New York, and is represented by the Paul Kasmin Gallery in New York. Hod began his career in video, works in sculpture but is known for his high realism paintings. Collector Amy Phelan, a passionate supporter of contemporary art, and Nir's friend discuss his origin, process, and inspiration:

AMY PHELAN—When did you first start painting? What drew you to portraiture? What does this medium offer you that working in other media cannot?

NIR—I started to paint when I was 15 years old. It was some kind of Forest Gump story. By mistake I went to an art school, we studied the Renaissance and I was so fascinated with da Vinci and Michelangelo that after a year I said to myself, I want to be an artist. To this day it's some kind of magic for me to paint or to see paintings. When I studied art at the academy in Jerusalem, the first year I made videos. Once I discovered Gerhard Richter's candle paintings, I started to get more involved with painting.

I like portraits because I like people. I like to understand beauty and expression—why we love some people just by looking at them or why others make us feel different just from the way they look. I am fascinated by what time does to the face, and I like eyes more than anything.

It is so powerful—when I paint portraits I feel like I'm creating someone else, someone who communicates with me. It's a great feeling because as an artist and as a painter you often are lonely or feel lonely.

I like to see old masters portraits and fashion portraits, sometimes it's like a poem and sometimes it's like a sharp knife... it fills me with emotion.

I think that painting is very limited compared to music and movies, but I like it just because of that. I want to compete with the volume and the visual emotional impact on the viewer. I want to get the attention and it is very powerful to do it with a medium like painting. I find paintings to be lonely and deep... they remain much longer than other media; they are timeless. I like the illusion that good paintings create. I like sad paintings because they are so moving, strong, and human.

AMY—Who are the geniuses? Did one person in particular inspire you to create these characters? Are they (the faces/expressions/features) based off of you or anyone you know?

NIR—The geniuses are special children, special people for good or bad. They are children who are asking for their mom's attention or love; they are nasty spoiled children who believe that they deserve everything and they are right; they are orphans who want to be beautiful so someone will take them home; they are powerful people with knowledge and amazing brains that open our minds to new ideas and visions. They are characters I build in my mind because of particular movies, books, and people in history; artists with big egos that painted dandies, kings and warriors with extravagant taste and style. The geniuses are based on some people I know but it's only metaphor; I create them based on a different

time in the history of art and culture. For me it's some kind of correction to society and time.

AMY—In the body of work we see here, some of the faces are “mashed up,” in other words, the features are mismatched. Why, or what inspired, this change?

NIR—It represents a development in my work. I like to be more surreal, I allow myself to be looser or to experience more styles. I like to break the faces and search for a new one. People talk with me a lot about old masters and new realism; this is my way to combine it together.

AMY—Do you believe in Genius?

NIR—Sure, I believe in geniuses and try to push my characters into this area. Warhol said he's interested in what is beautiful and not interested in what is real. I like to take other people with me to the other side of the mirror.

AMY—Describe yourself in a few words.

NIR—Artist. Storyteller. Image-maker. Emotional dealer.

AMY—What artists influence you?

NIR—Leonardo da Vinci, El Greco, Francisco Goya, Auguste Rodin, Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons, James Rosenquist, Alice Neel, Cindy Sherman, Francis Bacon.

AMY—Describe your style.

NIR—Contemporary with a twist, very classic, and historical. I like beauty and destruction, glamour and death, seduction and untouchable emotional.

AMY—What inspires you to keep going, to keep you motivated?

NIR—I guess it's some kind of correction I'm trying to do to my heart, my soul. I feel like I've been heart broken since I was 15 years old. My art allows me to deal, and talk about things that reality and life are too limited, too boring, or not interesting enough for me. I like to mix between dreams and reality, what is fake and what is real. I always look at big artists, people in history who have changed the rules, singers who create lovers, books that change your mind. Artists in different media who can make other people cry. It's so powerful and so dramatic, so touching. It gives me the drive to work hard and be part of it. ★

