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## PEOPLE *are* TALKING ABOUT

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT... Thursday September 17, 2009 12:09PM

### Art: Acts of Faith



Calling a painting "operatic" is not generally considered a compliment in the art world, but "**Something About Mary**," a show that opens tonight at the New York Metropolitan Opera's Gallery Met, may change that for good. Under the direction of *Vogue* contributing editor **Dodie Kazanjian**, who founded Gallery Met in 2006, the exhibition space is putting the spotlight on works by more than a dozen top artists—including **Francesco Clemente**, **Elizabeth Peyton**, and **John Currin**—to celebrate the new production of **Puccini's Tosca** (opening night is Monday). Inspired by a key moment in which the brown-eyed Tosca becomes jealous after discovering that her blue-eyed rival has served as the model for a painting of Mary Magdalene by the man she loves, Kazanjian asked them all to take as their subject the art-historical icon. Pop-art icon **James Rosenquist**—whose *Painting Below Zero: Notes on a Life in Art* (Knopf) comes out this month—brought a cinematic style to the assignment, breaking his painting into shards that show a rose, the traditional symbol of Mary; the fiery Tosca and her rival; as well as the instruments of the opera's tragedy: a knife and a gun. "I didn't think about previous versions of Mary by great painters. I just kept my focus on that blue eye," says Rosenquist. So successful was his interpretation that it also adorns the Met's huge outdoor Tosca banner. When the Met asked the painter for advice on the banner's text, he weighed in with complete confidence—after all, he got his start as a billboard painter in Times Square. Says Rosenquist, "They asked me about lettering, and I said, 'Boy, do I know about lettering!'" In the end, a simple sans serif font did the trick.

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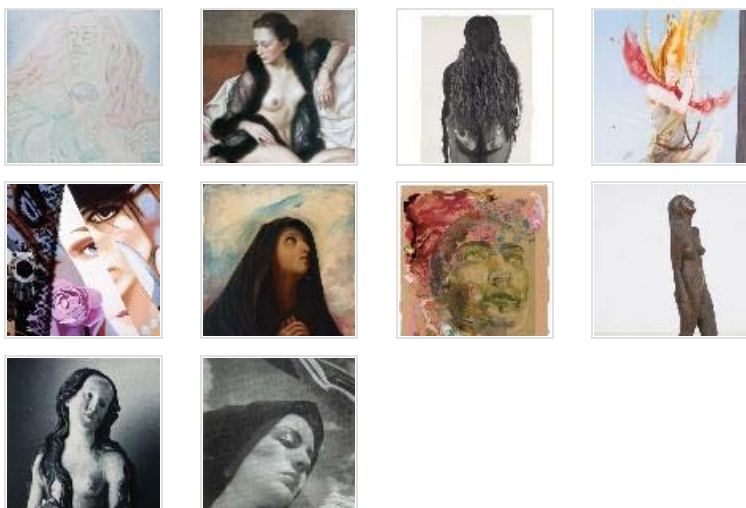
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PHOTO GALLERY



—Ted Loos

Photo: James Rosenquist's *Tosca*. (Courtesy of Acquavella Galleries)  
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