

# Petzel

Sarah P. Hanson, “An Uninhibited New Show from an Art-World Provocateur,” *The New York Times Style Magazine*, September 9, 2015.

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## An Uninhibited New Show from an Art-World Provocateur

By SARAH P. HANSON SEPT. 9, 2015



Courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York

Ask Dana Schutz, as a reasonable person might, why she painted a man eating his own face — or a gyrating woman simultaneously cooking and urinating in her kitchen, or the autopsy of Michael Jackson, four years prior to his actual death — and her guileless reply often boils down to some variation on: “I wanted to see if I could.” Though she frames these assays as essentially formal challenges, skirmishes between painter and paint, Schutz’s imagination has given rise to some of the most memorably skewed canvases of the past 15 years. That she so often succeeds reflects the sheer visual appeal

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of her clamorous palette, her bold gestures, and her knack for reflecting all-too-human foibles in absurdist scenarios.

Unafraid to issue a good-natured throwdown to plausibility, to the art-historical canon or to herself, the artist's most recent challenge has been prepping for her first show of new work at Petzel Gallery since 2012 in the wake of giving birth to her first child with her husband, the sculptor Ryan Johnson, last year. It's a time of transition for Schutz, who survived the early-2000s market feeding frenzy for newly minted MFAs (she completed hers at Columbia in 2002) and has settled into established midcareer status. Cresting on a wave of swashbuckling figurative painting, Schutz is one of the relatively few artists under age 40, let alone women, who can claim membership in all four of New York's major museum collections (her ink-on-paper "Building the Boat While Sailing," 2012, recently went on view at the new Whitney, opposite Carroll Dunham and Nicole Eisenman).

A few of the paintings and drawings at Petzel take up her old hypotheticals, but others show Schutz applying her Salvador Dali-meets-Dr. Seuss sensibility to more intimate, quotidian scenes. One thing they have in common is a sense of compression that insists on the fictive space inside the canvas. "I think a lot of the subjects are bumping up against their limitations or defining their limitations within the painting," she says. It's tempting to guess this might derive from experiencing the tether of new motherhood, but that would be like taking the face-eaters at face value: "It's not necessarily first-person that way," Schutz explains. "There's always a call and response with painting. You do something, and then you have to react to it." Discomfort and risk are necessary ingredients, she adds: "That's when it becomes fun."

In fact, Schutz admits, she's sometimes unsure whether an idea for a painting is a good one — which is often a clue she's on the right track. During a visit to her Gowanus studio earlier this summer she announced, with unmistakable glee, "This might be *the* worst thing you could do in a painting." She gestured to a shouting face she had recently drafted. "It's really annoying whenever you see a figure yelling in the direction of the viewer. Too much emotion, with the fourth wall broken. So I wanted to see if it could work." With the finished canvas, the six-way dustup "Fight in an Elevator 2," lending its title to the show, it's safe to say that Schutz has once again succeeded in painting something no one else has ever thought to paint before.

*"Fight in an Elevator" is on view Sept. 10-Oct. 24 at Petzel Gallery, 456 West 18th Street, New York, [petzel.com](http://petzel.com).*

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/09/t-magazine/dana-schutz-art-petzel-gallery.html?module=CloseSlideshow&region=SlideShowTopBar&version=SlideCard-1&action=click&contentCollection=T%20Magazine&pgtype=imageslideshow>