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FERNANDO BOTERO: SANTAS

Opening: June 13, 2015
Exhibition Dates: June 15 – September 30 2015



Fernando Botero, *Santa Barbara*, 2014

Galerie Gmurzynska is thrilled to present *Santas*, a new suite of large-scale portrait paintings by the renowned Colombian artist.

For this body of work created in 2014, Botero has turned his attention to the iconic depictions of female saints from the Christian canon, reinterpreting one of the quintessential genres of Western art history through his unique style by which these revered unearthly heroines reemerge as distinctly worldly society ladies.

This stellar all-female cast altogether comprises ten saints. In approaching these mystical characters, Botero partially incorporates the individual saint's attributes symbolizing their often harrowing hagiographies as well as their respective functions as patrons to distinct social groups. In the hands of Botero however, these meaning-laden attributes such as a bible or candle double as eye-catching accessories,

clutched by the curvaceous saints like a covetable handbag completing the ladies' couture wardrobe.

In "Santa Barbara" – depicted by Peter Paul Rubens and Jan van Eyck as well as in numerous Greek and Eastern Orthodox icons where she is most venerated –
Botero however retains the graphic bodily inflictions frequently endured that are responsible for the women's subsequent sanctification, in this particular case the lacerated left breast of Barbara, this injury and her torturous execution allegedly sanctioned by her own father as a punishment for her unwavering faith.

The deadpan facial expression of the painting's Santa Barbara together with the matter-of-fact halo above her and her revealing and frilly evening attire produce a startling contrast with the historical figure's martyrdom.

These confounding discrepancies run through the entire body of work: the ascetic Franciscan Saint Claire and icon of the Order of the Poor Clares here arrives as a haughty dame dressed in fur-trimmed opera gloves and chiffon; Santa Justa, famously depicted in a Goya painting at the Prado, carries her palm of martyrdom like a tropical plant bought at the florist, her hand raised in a classical gesture that however appears as if she's hailing her chauffeur.

It is through these humorous reformulations of posture, attire, attributes, mimetic style and narrative backdrops that Botero pinpoints history's significant contingency upon the dramatically fictionalizing and powerfully manipulative system of figurative Western iconic art.

A fully illustrated catalogue with archival documents and an essay by Anthony Haden-Guest will accompany this exhibition.

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