

to Be



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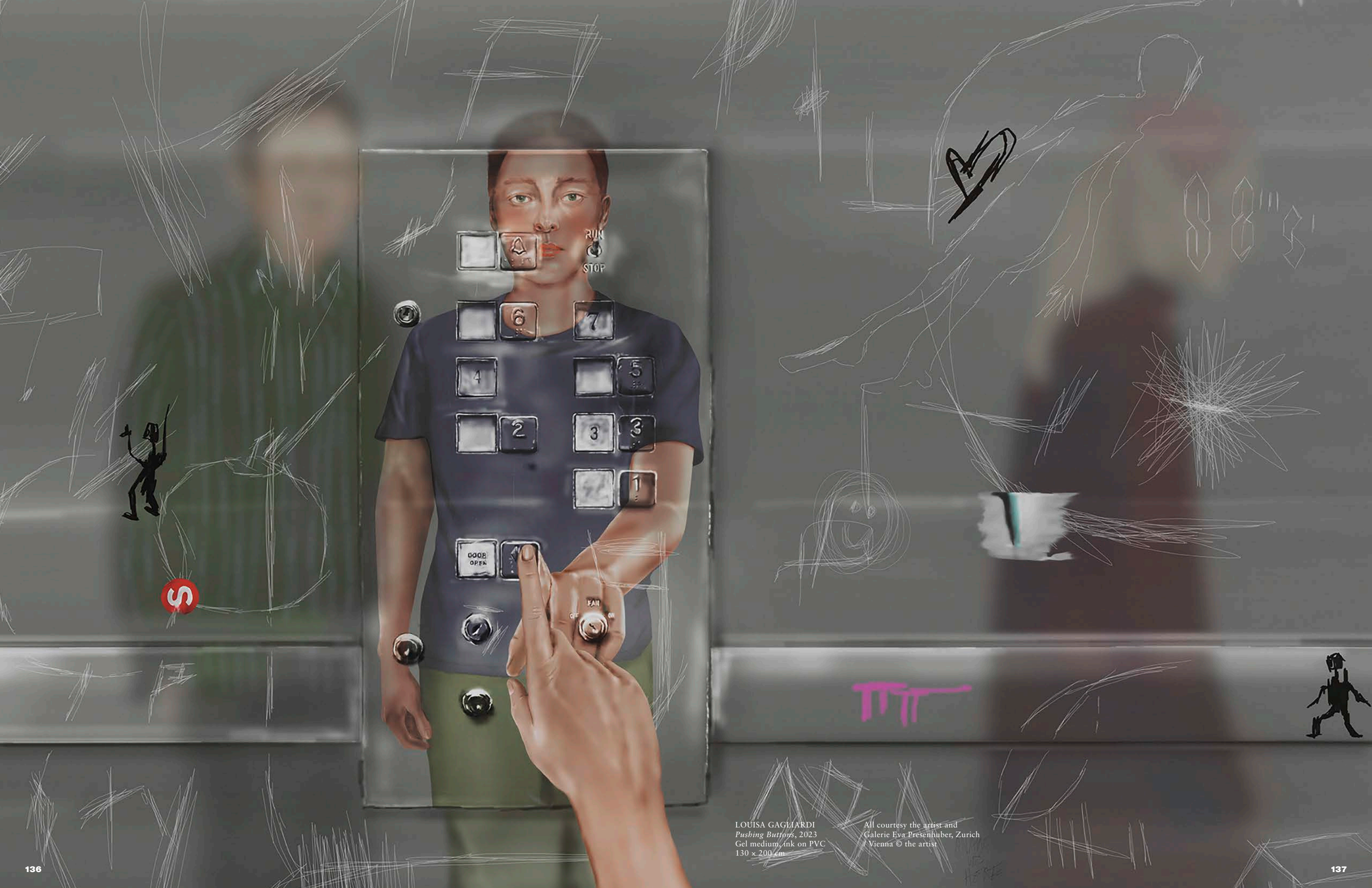


GBP £10.00

Living in Louisa Gagliardi's Antisocial World

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photography Harry Burmeister





LOUISA GAGLIARDI
Pushing Buttons, 2023
Gel medium, ink on PVC
130 x 200 cm

All courtesy the artist and
Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich
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The artist Louisa Gagliardi paints with her hands, one pixel at a time. Usually, she starts with a governing concept (often technology or social media, nowadays nature), opens Photoshop or Illustrator and starts to move her mouse, making distinct marks and applying layers of digital colours until a full composition is formed. It's quite unbelievable. To tell you the truth, Gagliardi, now 35, is even more remarkable than her paintings. She carries herself lightly, letting her wispy blonde hair and gentle smile break through any barriers of shyness. It's no surprise that the past ten years have been kind to her: at 24 she was offered a spot in two group shows after posting a couple of digitally made portraits on Instagram; at 25 she presented her solo show *La Belle Heure* at Tomorrow Gallery, New York; at 33 she participated in Art Basel Unlimited with her three galleries Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Galerie Rodolphe Janssen and Dawid Radziszewski; and in 2023 exhibited her first solo show at Galerie Eva Presenhuber. On the occasion of this conversation, Gagliardi is preparing for her exhibition *Hard Feelings* at Taxa × Galerie Eva Presenhuber in Seoul. From her home in Zurich, she reflects on her referential approach to art, the first ever painting she made and the brave choices that have helped her become a "citizen of the world".



RACHEL WEINBERG A lot of people talk about your medium, but I thought we could start by talking about your message. Specifically, the messaging behind your upcoming exhibition, *Hard Feelings*, which will have finished by the time this is printed.

LOUISA GAGLIARDI Starting with the harder question, I like it. There is a theme that is quite recurrent throughout my work which is the idea of solitude in a very hyper-connected world. We're always on our screen and we're connected to everyone through social media. We're stuck in this filtered bubble where we always see the same people, and the algorithm only shows us what they think we want to see. It's an infinite loop, which also, I think, makes it difficult to be in the real world. It becomes harder to show yourself unfiltered and unedited. I think the pandemic didn't help with that, of course.

I've been working in very large formats, but the space in Seoul is quite small, so I've been able to go back to some more intimate formats. I also wanted to take the opportunity to work on still life. Have you seen them?

No, I haven't seen the new works yet. Can you explain them in your own words?

LG Yes, they feature these figures that seem quite passive and stoic. They are all in this dreamlike environment. They never interact with each other directly. Or if they do, it's always through a glass or a reflection, which links back to the idea of social media. The only aspects that seem to be having fun are the still lives. For example, in one work there is someone sleeping soundly and in front of him on a glass table there are sleeping pills and a keychain. The life happens in the inanimate object. There is another work called *Lovebirds*, where the animals are the only ones having a real interaction, like a loving moment. They are perched on an electric pole, and it almost looks like this scene of an afterparty with glasses and bottles. The idea is that the birds are the only ones having a real party, because we are all anxiously trying to look good behind our screens.

The theme of social media and social anxiety recurs in your work. How do you approach your own Instagram? Have you become more deterred by social media the more that you explore it in your work?

LG I've been thinking about this a lot recently. It's getting easier and easier. As I'm growing up, as I'm maturing, also as I'm working more, I'm understanding social media and what it can do. It brought a lot for my career, and I know I have to get out there. Now I have a healthier relationship with Instagram, and I've learnt to love the online persona. I'm less afraid of the judgement.

I also just find it interesting too. I love the fake beauty and I find it fascinating because I understand that no one is really like this.



It's the story you tell yourself.

LG Exactly. I'm addicted for sure. But I think my relationship is healthy enough that I know when to take a break.

You studied graphic design and were involved in the advertising industry. This idea of external marketing has really been on your mind for a long time. Do you think there will be a time when you change direction? Or has that happened already?

LG Of course. In my recent show that just opened in Belgium, I explored new themes of nature and animals. There are still themes of technology, but I've used nature to express this. For example, there is this beautiful landscape with this round barrel of hay. When you look closely, you realise that the hay, which is like the star of the painting, has an aggression to it because it's been solidly packaged. It also talks about the machine, this really heavy and quite violent machinery. There is another scene of a heard of sheep that have all been spray-painted in neon green, as they do to mark the sheep in real life. I think these paintings show a new direction. I'm still talking about technology, but on a larger scale; it's not only about me anymore. I'm not the main character anymore.

You speak about your work really clearly.

LG Thank you so much for saying that. I always hope I'm being clear. Sometimes I'm not sure what I'm doing. And after the fact, when the work is up, I realise what I was thinking.

Do you remember the first painting you ever made?

LG Yes, very much. At the time, I had finished my studies, and I was working for a creative director who was working in fashion. He was doing excellent work, but he was just not very good at giving me work. He was very often out of the office, and I had a lot of time

LOUISA GAGLIARDI
Counting Sheep, 2024
Gel medium, ink on PVC
155 × 220 cm

opposite
LOUISA GAGLIARDI
Bedtime Daybed, 2023
Ink on Polyester
Total dims. 56.5 × 204 × 93 cm



LOUISA GAGLIARDI
Hardly Working, 2024
 Nail polish, ink on PVC
 160 x 115 cm

opposite
 LOUISA GAGLIARDI
Melting Away, 2024
 Gel medium, nail polish,
 ink on PVC
 160 x 115 cm

behind my desk with very little work to do. It was kind of a blessing in disguise. I had a lot of hours to develop my skills.

I was doing a lot of commission work for clients at the time, and I was getting really bored of the illustration style. I knew I needed to do something different. I didn't want it to be my life.

I just opened Photoshop and started to freehand-ily paint. I selected a few images on my phone of friends smoking or using their hands to hide themselves behind something. The interest in social anxiety was already there. I made two portraits at first. The works didn't exist as objects, they were just jpegs. I put the two jpegs online and straight away had two galleries message me. It was pretty crazy. And from then, it was like a snowball effect.

When the galleries recognised you, did you recognise yourself as an artist? Or has that developed over time?

LG That developed over time. I was extremely confident as a designer, but suddenly felt this imposter syndrome. I've always wanted to be an artist, but I was always too pragmatic in a way. I knew I needed to study something that could pay the bills.

It was definitely a process. Being in the art world is scary in itself, but when you're not even sure what you're doing or how you exist in the world, it's very hard.

You were figuring yourself out while everyone else was figuring you out.

LG Yes! It's also a very different way of talking and approaching. When you're an illustrator, the topic is there and you're just a tool. Now there were no more excuses. There's no one to hide behind. If you want to be front stage, then you better do the work.

Do you find that you're still quite involved in the design and illustration community?

LG In Zurich there is quite a healthy mix of creative people, so you are around all types of industries. And Zurich is quite small, so everyone interacts.

What brought you to Zurich?

LG I studied in Lausanne, which is not very far away. When I did my diploma, my mentor was in Zurich, which is kind of a mecca for graphic design. All the good offices are here, and also my partner was here. For me, it's the most interesting city, especially being such a small town. There is really a

lot going on, I think also because there is a lot of money. We have museums, a lot of institutions too. Now my partner and I get to do a lot of residencies and travel around the world. Zurich is kind of the perfect place to be. But you need to leave often because it's very claustrophobic and kind of feels like Groundhog Day.

As a teenager, did you want to travel a lot? Did you have a wanderlust?

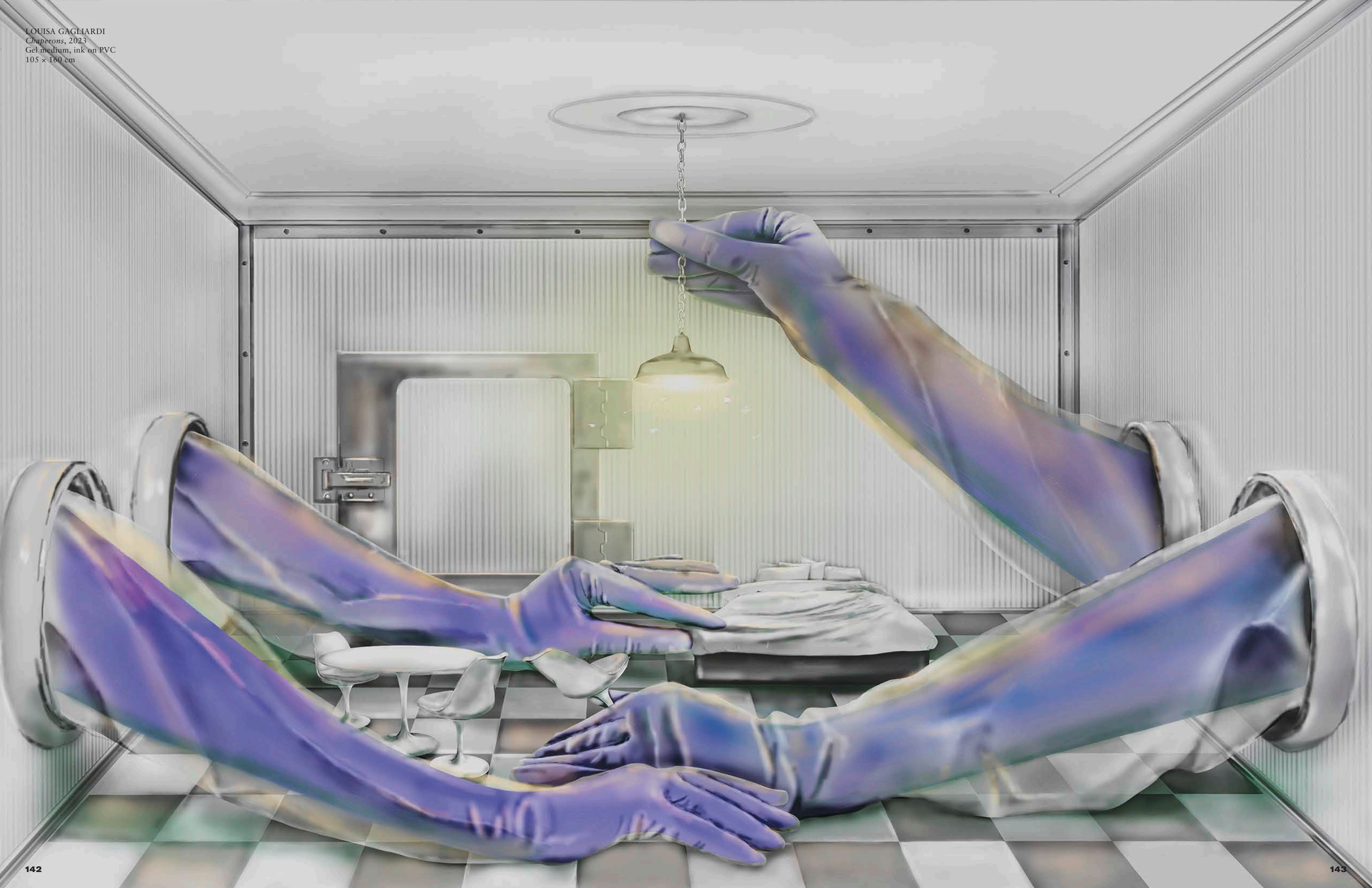
LG That's a great question, I've never thought about that. But no, not as much. I was a very happy kid. I was born in a very small town, and we were very independent, and we had tonnes of friends around. I always knew that as soon as I finished high school, I wanted to leave. I knew there was no future for me, but not in an unhealthy way.

And now Zurich is kind of your base.

LG I know it's a huge privilege to be able to have that. These residencies are such a gift. I've been able to see so much of the world. Also, leaving makes you realise how good it is to have a home base.

Now, I have to ask you what you think about Artificial Intelligence. Do you







opposite
 LOUISA GAGLIARDI
The Sleeper Slept, 2024
 Gel medium, nail polish,
 ink on PVC
 140 × 120 cm

think you will integrate it into your work, or do you feel repulsed by it?

LG I'm neither repulsed nor very attracted to it. I think that there is a stigma around digital and AI, and I think it's a medium as important as any other, as long as you don't think that it's a shortcut to make a good work. I think whoever uses it properly ... it can be excellent. I would be too scared to use AI because, first of all, I love painting and it would take my favourite part away. I love diving into it and finding the solutions and stuff. I'd also be terrified if I saw it could do better than me, which I don't think it can. But I don't want to take the joy away. For now, I want to stay away from it. But I'm fascinated by what it can do.

It can be a tool.

LG Exactly.

Why do you return to art?

LG If I don't do this, I don't know what to do. It's my only way to participate, to be a citizen of the world. It sounds always so corny but it's true. I don't know how to do anything else. I've always been a hard worker and I've been given this opportunity, and I want to honour it as much as I can. I want to do the best with what I've been given. I put a lot of pressure on myself to do good because I realise that my situation is very exceptional. But I don't overwork because I know it's not healthy.

What do you do to relax?

LG I watch shitty TV, I love a good reality show. I love going out to eat. I enjoy seeing friends. I don't have another hobby. I wish I had one. But, of course, going to see museums is my number one. I try to see as many shows as I can everywhere I go. That's still work in a way.

Your godmother used to take you to see the Raphaelite and Renaissance paintings when you were a child. Your compositions are similar in the way that they are vast and all-encompassing. They are almost landscapes of people or objects.

LG I feel reassured because I always feel like I fill the composition up too much. I feel pressure scale it down. My godmother would always take me to the museum to go see these religious paintings that have so many symbols, and I loved the mini stories within the stories. They were like Easter eggs. I like to be playful in that way. I want to justify the time that the viewer is going to spend with my work, so I put in some little treasures here and there.

Do you determine the scale before you start painting? Or is that something that you decide afterwards?

LG It depends. The space I'm going to show in is going to define the scale. For example, I did this mega piece for Galerie Eva Presenhuber on this huge wall. It was the first time I had a real plan, which was pretty tough to work into. I couldn't change it. I had to find

the perfect composition for the wall, which is what a traditional fresco painter would do. This show in Seoul is much smaller.

Do you find that you learn by doing or do you actively upskill, to use the industry word.

LG It's been really DIY. I'm still technically learning. I can really see the progression between the very first portrait that I did and now, even if the first was more painterly. I love where the work is now, there is even more abstraction. By erasing a bit of myself, I open even more doors for people to read the work.

It's nice that you are able to check in with yourself and notice when your work is getting better.

LG And I notice when it's getting too easy. Then I have to make a big shift, which has already happened once in my life when I changed from graphic design to illustration and then to art. Now it's nice because I think from every show, a new door unlocks, a new level like I'm in a video game. I don't want to be doing the same thing my whole life. I never want to be a one-trick pony. I always try to challenge myself. In every show I want there to be something a bit surprising. It's not as radical as some other artists; it's more of a slow and steady progression. I really push myself to try to find the next thing every time. Even if it's not obvious, I know that it's there. [EXEUNT]

