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Gribbon wears a Commission top and jeans; Edgar Mosa necklace; G.H. Bass shoes. Photo by Jeff Henrikson

STUDIO VISIT

Jenna Gribbon Explores the Dynamics of Motherhood

The artist's upcoming show in Los Angeles centers her relationship with her child at a pivotal moment in his life.

by **Maxine Wally**
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“Hang on a second.” The painter Jenna Gribbon fiddles with her phone over FaceTime, then switches her camera to front-facing, revealing her Brooklyn studio, filled with the typical detritus of a visual artist’s workspace: jars of brushes, half-squeezed bottles of paint, stacks of canvases. Gribbon, a Tennessee native now based in New York City, wanted to show me one work in particular—a large-scale canvas that will be included in her next solo show, *Like Looking in a Mirror*, which opens at David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles on September 13 (through October 19). In the painting, two people who look like Gribbon—long brown hair, sleepy eyes, dignified bone structure—stand beside each other. One is hanging up lights, while the other is taking a picture. They look like identical twins. In fact,



Jenna Gribbon, *A reflection held*, 2024
Photo by Jeff Henrikson

“it’s my son holding the light, and me taking the photo,” the artist says. “He’s kind of my little doppelganger.”

Gribbon’s 13-year-old child, their dynamic, and her experience with what she describes as the “psychedelic” and “trippy” experience of motherhood are all central themes in *Like Looking in a Mirror*. “I’m seizing on this little window in time where he looks more like me than he ever will,” she adds, noting that they have the same hairstyle. “He’s in this androgynous state, where he doesn’t quite look like a child anymore, but he’s not exactly looking like a man yet.”

During this pivotal moment in his life, Gribbon is integrating her son into her paintings for the first time—and also portraying herself in the works. The idea of mirroring the subject and artist, reflecting the self against and toward other people, has been a key part of Gribbon’s artistic practice since 2006, when she first gained notoriety for being commissioned to create three portraits for the set of Sofia Coppola’s *Marie Antoinette*. Group exhibitions at the Frick Madison and Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville have included portraits of her wife, Mackenzie Scott, the main subject in many of Gribbon’s most well-known works. *Mirror* is a stark departure from that series.

“It’s even more challenging because not only is the parent-child relationship arguably the most intimate relationship there is, it’s



Maison Margiela shirt; Commission jeans; Edgar Mosa necklace; Comme Si socks; JW Anderson shoes.
Photo by Jeff Henrikson

extra tough to really see kids for themselves and not get your own self-concept entwined in how you view them," she says. Gribbon explores this concept in pieces where the lines between herself and her son are blurred, quite literally. In one example, Gribbon had her son take a photo of her, which she then projected onto him; she then painted what she saw. "The experience of seeing yourself, outside of yourself, in another totally separate human being, with their own world, makes you evaluate what's important to you and what's meaningful to share," she says. "What do you want to pass down? What do you want to replicate and what do you want to not replicate? It becomes a process of assessing your own values, too."



Photo by Jeff Henrikson

Along with the large-format paintings, there will be another group of smaller works that zero in on all the things she’s passed down to him: a family recipe, or books she’s read and loved. “I gave him a CD player and a stack of my old CDs,” she says with pride. “It’s a shared sensory experience. Not only does this person share your genetics, they also share an experience of what food tastes like, or how to make something.”



Photo by Jeff Henrikson

Gribbon has been working on the paintings for *Mirror* over the course of one year. During that time, she’s learned to give her inner child a little more grace. “You have so much empathy for your kid that it turns into empathy for yourself,” she says. “You look back at

yourself and certain things that you maybe disliked, but then you see them in your child, too. And you have so much love for them that you’re able to have empathy for yourself for those things.”



Commission trench coat; Maison Margiela shirt; Commission jeans; Edgar Mosa necklace; Comme Si socks; JW Anderson shoes.

Photo by Jeff Henrikson

Still, the artist is not just in these works metaphorically. “I’m present in the paintings as his guardian,” she says. “You can absorb the image of my child, but I will be watching you. I’m also here. He’s not in this alone.”



Commission blazer, top, and jeans; Edgar Mosa necklace; G.H. Bass shoes.
Photo by Jeff Henrikson

Styling assistants: Celeste Roh and Maia Wilson.