



Dodie Kazanjian, "Mira, Mira," *Vogue*, June 2016.

# VOGUE

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Brooklyn  
artist  
Mira Dancy's  
fantastical,  
fluid figures,  
murals, and  
installations have  
made her a  
dynamic name  
to watch.  
Dodie Kazanjian  
reports.  
Photographed  
by Inez  
and Vinoodh.

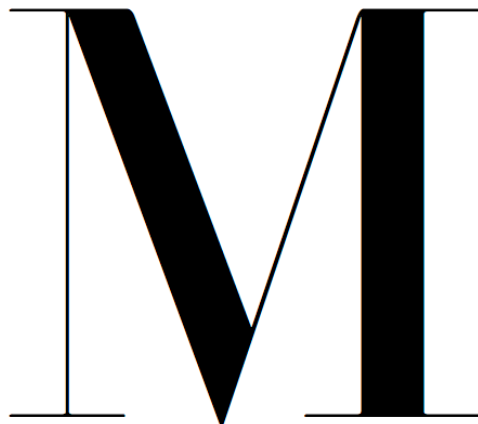




**BRIGHT-EYED**

The artist in her Gowanus studio with her painting *Don't Bury Me*, 2016 (FAR LEFT) and works in progress. Acne Studios dress. Louis Vuitton boots. Hair, Jimmy Paul for Bumble and Bumble; makeup, Yumi Lee. Details, see In This Issue. Sitings Editor: Phyllis Posnick.





Mira Dancy's studio, in the Gowanus section of Brooklyn, is bursting with voluptuous nude bodies—fluorescent-pink, purple, and blue odalisques in fluid motion, painted larger than life on canvas, on shaped Plexiglas sheets hanging from the ceiling, and populating a vast black-and-white mural that fills two walls. It's a post-feminist paradise of women without men, free and independent, changing shape as they float through landscapes and interior spaces of their own imaginings. For Mira, 37, who recently broke through into the top echelon of emerging American artists, everything is happening at once. Since her January 2015 show at Night Gallery in Los Angeles, her work has been in demand from Hong Kong and Paris to MoMA PS1's "Greater New York" show, and her name has appeared on any number of annual top-ten lists of artists to watch. It's mid-April, and her second child is due this week—but you have the feeling it won't slow her down for more than a moment.

"Right now, there's an idea of women painting women, and a return to the figurative—all this language of reclaiming the female body," she says, "but for me, that's a distant idea. I imagine the women in these paintings as characters with the flexibility of characters in an opera or a story. It's not about a portrait of a woman, which is totally Matisse and Picasso, or about the woman as a subject. What I'm trying to do is generate an overall cinematic effect, from painting to painting to painting, where the women are moving from one to the next. It's a continuous structure, not just a static subject."

As you can tell from the above, Mira Dancy is a confident young woman who is in the midst of finding her voice. The *Times*'s Roberta Smith, reviewing Mira's show at Chapter NY gallery last June, described her as "smart and full of possibilities," an artist "revving her engines . . . fiercely and impressively." She's also open, earthy, and fearless. Her waist-length black hair is straight and shiny; her pink leggings and oversize sweater miraculously de-emphasize her pregnancy. "I do have an embarrassing amount of fluorescent pink and turquoise in my closet," she says. "I've been wearing spandex leggings for as long as I can remember. I like the relationship to shape or silhouette, being a body on the street." She's like one of the women in her paintings: There's a changeable quality to her, a refusal of the static, that goes along with her art-making, in which painting, drawing, sculpture, poetry, performance, and video can coexist or combine.

Mira grew up in Merrimack, New Hampshire, near the Massachusetts border and not far from Boston. She's the fourth in a family of ten children, and by chance, she was actually born in London. Her father, Chip Dancy, an electrical engineer who died a year ago, had been invited to set up banking systems in England. His wife, Marie, was six months pregnant, and he would have declined the offer if she had not insisted. "She said, 'Are you crazy?'" Mira tells me. "This is a once in a lifetime opportunity." Marie Dancy was a painter, eager for culture and ready for anything. Mira's earliest memory is of watching her younger brother being born at home when she was two. (All of the Dancy children were home birthed, and Mira is continuing the tradition.) For years, her bedroom was a closet with the doors removed and a stained-glass window her mother had made, and she slept on flat files with a piece of foam on top.

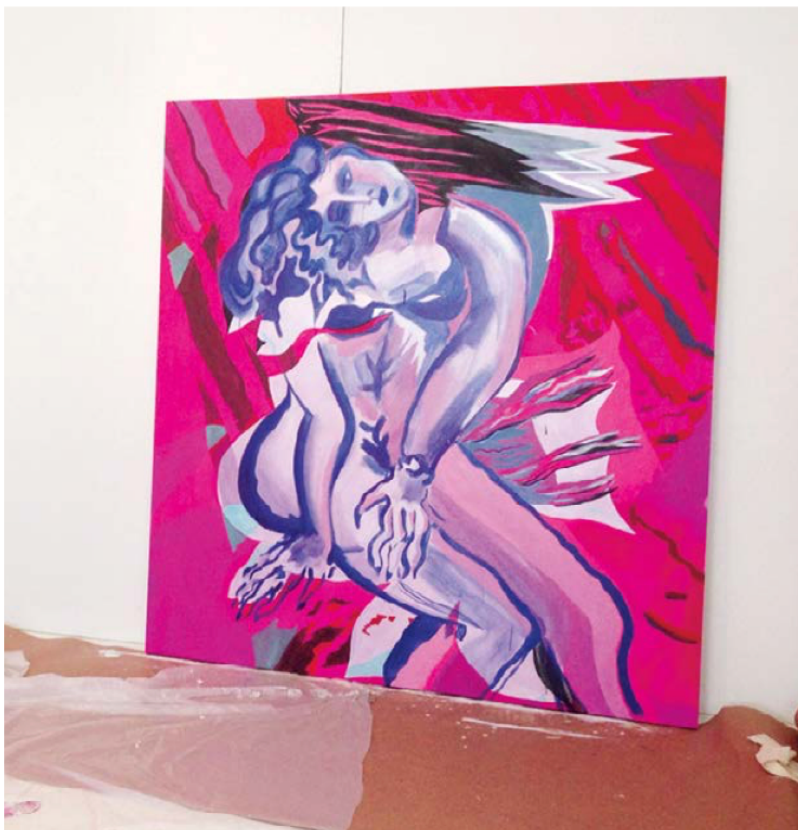
Mira ran away from home at the age of sixteen, when she found out her mother was pregnant with her tenth child. "I thought, What the hell's going on here? Are you ever going to stop having kids?" She stayed away for three days, then came back. Most of her siblings were superachievers, valedictorians in school and headed for M.I.T. But Mira wrote poetry and went to Bard College, where, in her first year, she took a foundation art class with Amy Sillman and suddenly thought, Oh, this makes a lot of sense. After that, there was no turning back.

"Mira was already interested in paintings with invented spaces, the kind of work that flirted with bad taste, bad skills, and bad sources," Sillman remembers. "Her natural bent was toward in-your-face, dumb, awkward, stilted, outlandish, or crude figures. . . . But Mira has always been a lovely person, down-to-earth, unpretentious, funny, and warm."

She graduated from Bard in the spring of 2001 and headed straight for New York City with four close friends. They moved in with a former Bard student who had graduated a year earlier and had an apartment in Greenpoint. Brooklyn was not yet the hip cultural souk it was rapidly becoming. They shared the rent, each paying \$162 a month, and also the bed, which they occupied on a first-come, first-served basis, while looking for jobs. "This lasted for about six months, and it was a pretty magical time," Mira recalls. She went to work as a receptionist for a downtown architectural firm, and a couple of months later, she was on the street when the two planes hit the World Trade Center. Soon afterward, she moved to Bushwick and began spending all her free time in a studio space she shared with six other artists in an industrial building in DUMBO. The others never appeared, and she would sometimes work all night. "The only living thing I'd see was a weird three-legged cat going in and out of the building," she remembers. She was already into painting the body by then—women's forms that channeled classical nudes, Picasso and Matisse, and also the German Expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, one of her principal early influences. (Later, affinities developed with artists Dorothy Iannone, Chantal Akerman, and Sophie von Hellermann.)

By August 2003, a tumultuous affair with her then boyfriend was falling apart, and she'd had her fill of office work. "I needed to take a trip," she tells me. A friend of hers who grew up near Seattle had talked about a cabin that her father had built in the Cascade mountains, with no electricity or running water, and the two of them decided to go there. Mira bought a used white Honda Prelude, and they drove across

PREVIOUS SPREAD: MIRA DANCY, DON'T BURY ME, 2016, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 76" X 96". COURTESY OF CHAPTER NY NIGHT GALLERY, AND GALERIE ERIC HUSSENOT.



**ALL THE YOUNG NUDES** *Blue Angel*, 2015.

MIRA DANCY, *BLUE ANGEL*, 2015. ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 64" X 58". COURTESY OF CHAPTER NY, NIGHT GALLERY, AND GALERIE ÉRIC HUSSENOT.  
FOLLOWING SPREAD: MIRA DANCY, *BLACK DIME // LATE SPRING*, 2015. ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 76" X 96". COURTESY OF CHAPTER NY, NIGHT GALLERY, AND GALERIE ÉRIC HUSSENOT.

the country. "My friend taught me how to chop firewood and pump water," she says. "We were there together for about six weeks, and when she left to go to London, I decided to stay on by myself." She stayed a couple of months, reading Nietzsche and painting, until December, when she "got kicked out by the snow." Back in New York, she became an assistant to the painter Joan Snyder. "I was very resistant to the idea of going to graduate school, and not necessarily dying to have a show," she says. By 2006, however, having seen so many of her friends move away or stop making art, she realized it was time to go to grad school and "refuel my artistic community." She applied to Columbia and Yale, got into both, and chose Columbia.

Almost immediately, she became the spark plug in a network of like-minded women students. "Mira's studio was the place for deliberating and questioning what was going on," says Davida Nemeroff, one of the group. "She drew the figure and set the scene. She believed that she should and would be recognized, and she really delivered on that. Mira has a way of making every situation better, more fun, funny, sensual, serious, political, poetic, and personal." The artist Dana Schutz, one of her Columbia mentors and now her neighbor in Gowanus, says, "What struck me about Mira's paintings was their precise and palpable balance, despite a

complete disregard for what should work in a painting. They were like aliens! I remember a triangular shaped canvas with two blue balls and disembodied eyes—things that are bound to be awful in a painting, but she made it work! The whole piece had such a physical presence, it totally sucked you in."

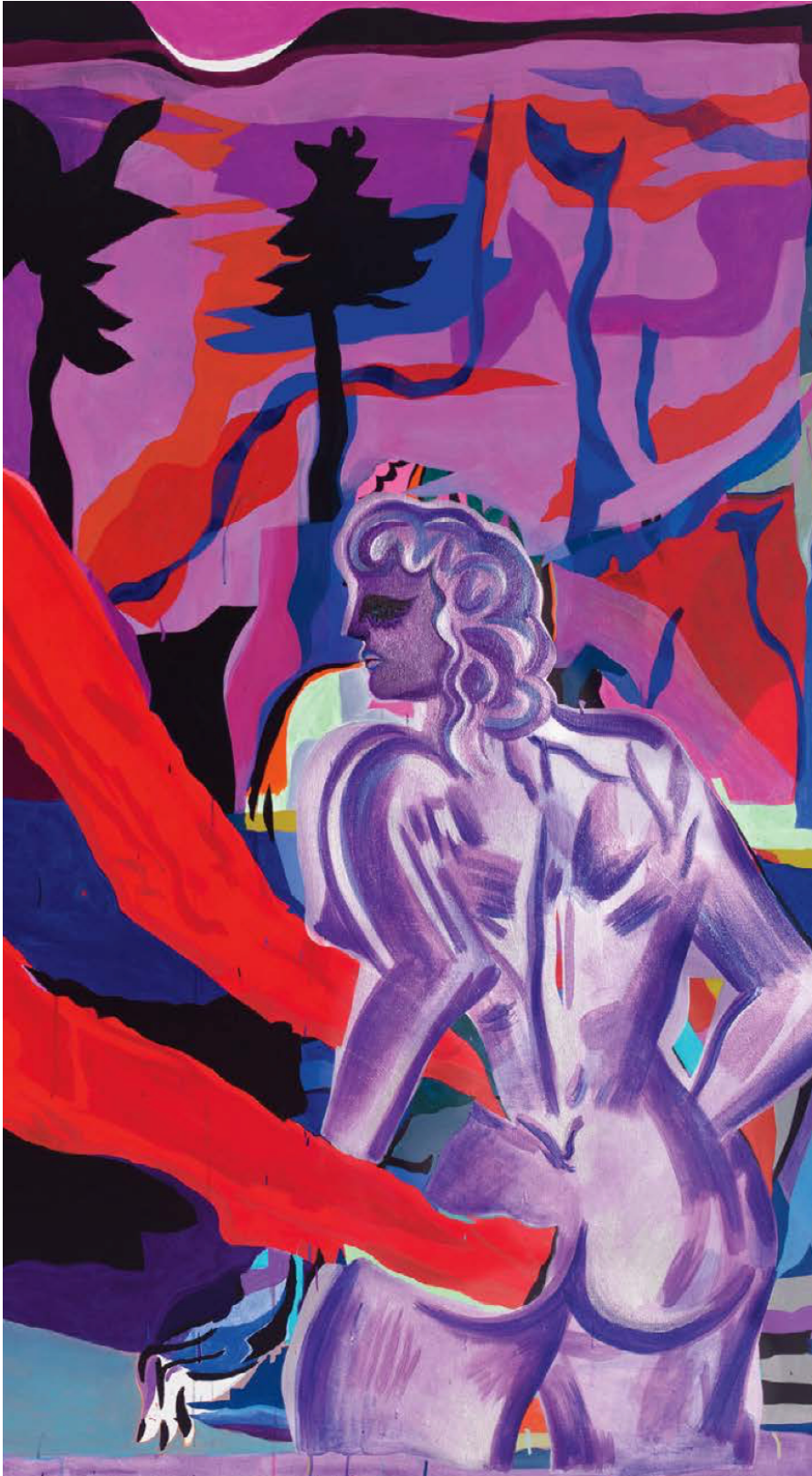
Mira and her friends graduated in 2009, during the recession, and Davida, whose main focus was photography, went to Los Angeles. Her ambition was to start a new kind of gallery there, a gathering place where she and her friends could show their work and continue the conversations they had been having in Mira's studio. The result was Night Gallery (Mira came up with the name), in a very old neighborhood called Lincoln Heights. At the beginning, it was open from 10:00 P.M. until 2:00 A.M.—outside of business hours. The walls were painted black, in defiance of the traditional white cube, and the scent of marijuana was heavy in the air. Almost immediately, Night Gallery caught on as a haven for young artists. The first show, in 2010, featured Mira and two of her fellow students, Anna Rosen and Paul Heyer. Mira showed her "pillow paintings," unstretched canvases with zippers that could be rolled up and carried in her suitcase, and then stuffed with foam when she arrived. Nothing sold, but nobody cared.

Two years later, Mira had her first solo show there—paintings on transparent

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**GO FIGURE**

"The body is not the subject but the medium," says Mira of her work. Pictured here, *Black Dime // Late Spring*, 2015.





her ballot, the stampede of reporters rushes alongside her from one end of the gym to the other, which sounds a bit like a football team running drills. In order to stay clear of the cameramen's shots, Chozick performs the back-and-forth run in a sort of crouched position. "Guys, it's a private ballot," Clinton says, and then scans the crowd for her traveling press secretary. "Nick?" she calls out. "Can we get the press out of here, please?" Later, the reporters watch outside as Clinton's motorcade pulls away and file back onto the bus. "Well, that was fun," says Chozick, with the ambivalence of someone returning from a morning workout. "Sort of." □

## MIRA, MIRA

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shower curtains, and acrylics on raw canvas of idyllic bathing nudes, menaced with a sense of horror lurking in the shadows. Los Angeles artist Laura Owens bought a painting from the show. By this time, Mira, who never moved to L.A., was a mother. Her first child, Isis, born in 2011, was named after a girl she met when she was thirteen, but it also referred to the Egyptian goddess, "a supreme example of female power." (The recent emergence of the word as an acronym for a terrorist movement has been somewhat traumatic.) Isis's father is Max Rubinstein, whom Mira has known since they were both students at Bard. "We were good friends for a long time, but we were also secretly in love with each other," she says. "We've been together since 2005." Max, who worked for a nonprofit environmental agency, is currently studying to be a nurse. "I was unsure about having the first kid," Mira tells me. "But he convinced me. If I fuck up as a mother, at least I know this child has the most awesome father. I don't cook. He does everything. He's been supporting my ability to be a mom and also to have time in the studio. He's taking time off from his nursing studies because he's going to be the primary caregiver of our new baby, at least for the next six months."

They live in the garden apartment of the brownstone house he grew up in, in Cobble Hill—his mother still lives upstairs—and they are happily unmarried. "We're just together," she says. "I

prefer to call him my boyfriend. I don't ever want to be referred to as 'wife.'" Mira's other main source of support is her network of strong women artist friends—Davida, Cara Benedetto, Anna Rosen, Jennifer Castle, Amelia Saddington, and sometimes Paul Heyer, the acceptable male. Mira has been tremendously influenced by the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who used the same actors again and again in his movies; many of her friends, along with Mira herself, appear in her paintings. "The bodies I paint are not realistic by any stretch," she says. "I often think of them as wearing 'nude suits.' Their flesh is silver, blue, green, red, hot pink. The body is not the subject, but the medium."

Everything came together for Mira in her 2015 show at Night Gallery, "Is She Is She Psychic." The title referred to then three-year-old Isis, whom she was thinking about while she made the works—fourteen paintings, two black and white wall drawings, hanging Plexiglas panels, a video, and a figurative neon-tube sculpture. One of the paintings showed Mira breastfeeding Isis. In another, an exotic-looking, nude hermaphrodite (with a penis) is outlined in hot pink against a screaming red and black background. A rave review in *Artforum* described Mira's nudes as "dominant players, staring us down with wry smiles and forceful beauty . . . these neon deities strut with their own lurid force and elegant autonomy." The show sold out, with several pieces going to major collectors, including Donald and Mera Rubell. Her prices tripled, and they've been rising steadily ever since. A solo exhibition opens at Shanghai's Yuz Museum in October, and requests to show her work keep pouring in.

Mira and I have been emailing back and forth about the new baby, who is expected any day. It's a girl, and Mira is "pretty certain" that her name will be Uma, for the Hindu goddess. After Isis was born, she tells me, "my paintings got a million times better. It's really interesting going into the second round of motherhood. I know it's going to be great, and I know I can take a lot from it."

This just in: Uma Jade was born on April 16. Mother, baby, and boyfriend are all doing well. □

## HOP TO IT

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its low and scattered origins—the way it stayed close to the street and feasted on a range of influences.

"By '79, disco can't get bigger. Even Frank Sinatra has a disco record," he says. That summer, "Rapper's Delight" appeared, and by the start of 1980, three hip-hop records had reached the top 50. "At the same time—we touch on this—this thing at CBGB with thrashing guitars, called punk, is happening." Voguing, too. "There was a cross-fertilization that could probably only have taken place in New York," Luhrmann adds. "I don't think it could happen today. There's too much wealth."

The magic, chaos, and eclecticism of that moment show up in *The Get Down's* characters and plot. Though figures of the time appear in his story line—Mayor Ed Koch, Herc, Flash, and others are conjured on-screen—the series centers on what Luhrmann calls "mythological" figures: archetypes wrought from research and, in classic Luhrmannian fashion, made larger than life. "It's from the kids' point of view, slightly romanticized and heightened," he says. "They didn't say, 'My name is Joseph Saddler.' His name is Grandmaster, after kung fu, and Flash, after Flash Gordon. He was a superhero, you know?"

Luhrmann and his writers created the fictional characters in the same mold. There is Shaolin (Shameik Moore), an energetic dancer and a young spark plug. There is Ra-Ra (Skylan Brooks), the strong, silent type, and Jaden Smith's Dizzee. And there's Ezekiel, also called Books (Justice Smith), a young reader who starts the series writing poetry in a disco suit and ends up rhyming at the mic. As a teenager, he's desperately in love with Mylene, and seeks to woo her through his art. For these and other reasons, Luhrmann's series starts out with a bang. The first few episodes include a gun raid, an M.C. battle, and at least one disco showdown.

Keeping this range of action, and variety of characters, in play over more than a dozen episodes is no small task; Luhrmann describes *The Get Down* as "easily" CONTINUED ON PAGE 166