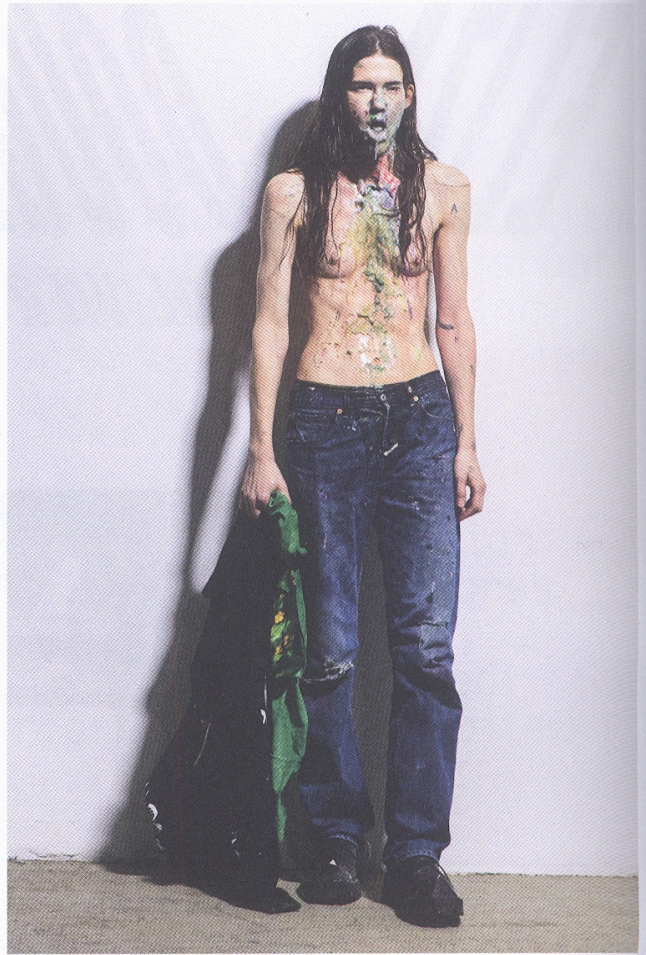
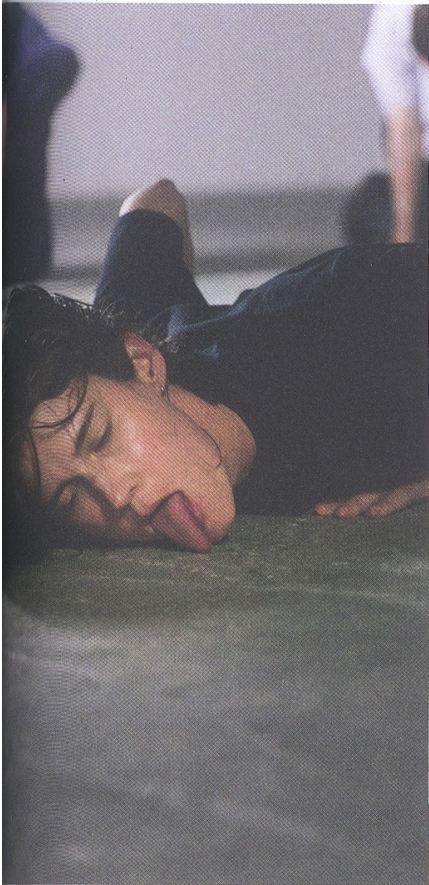


ELIZA DOUGLAS

by OLIVIER ZAHM







ELIZA DOUGLAS PERFORMS IN ANNE IMHOF'S "NATURES MORTES," A MULTI-ARTIST EXHIBITION AT THE PALAIS DE TOKYO IN PARIS, 2021

OLIVIER ZAHM — How do you start a painting? With a picture, an idea, a mood, a sound?

ELIZA DOUGLAS — With all my paintings, there's a photographic element that precedes the painting. I usually work in series, and each series has a process that is consistent within it. With the most recent paintings, I seek out compelling graphics that are printed on fabric. Most of the time, these end up being t-shirts. I then photograph them pretty extensively, often folding and crumpling them, until I get a composition that feels right. That photograph is then painted.

OLIVIER ZAHM — For the t-shirt series, how do you choose the t-shirts? Are they from your personal collection?

ELIZA DOUGLAS — A few have been my personal shirts, but mostly I have sought them out in stores and online, on eBay, etc. I have been collecting shirts and using them in creative ways since I was a teenager. I'm looking for graphics that would be particularly effective for the series. The aesthetic quality is usually what is privileged, but I also take into account what they reference or signify. This painting series — and the fact that I do the styling for Anne Imhof's work — means I end up spending a lot of time researching t-shirts!

OLIVIER ZAHM — Do you paint everything yourself, or do you work with assistants?

ELIZA DOUGLAS — I now often work with two assistants, whom I met when they were studying in NYC. When I sold my first-ever paintings, I made some money that I wanted to reinvest in my practice. Prior to this, I often had ideas for paintings that would have been impossible to implement, given the limits of my abilities. So, my instinct was to open up the possibilities for my paintings in this way. I put an ad in a local art school in search of trained painters. I had just enough money to hire a painter for two weeks, which I did. And that was the beginning of my hands and feet series. I would make a photo mock-up of the hands, which the

assistant would then paint, and then I would finish the rest of the painting in my own more messy and expressive way. The extent to which I use assistants varies, depending on the series I am working on.

OLIVIER ZAHM — How do people react to this aspect of your practice?

ELIZA DOUGLAS — It really varies. To some people, it seems to not make any difference, and others find it shocking and feel it degrades the value or power of my work. I find this ridiculous, given the historical legacy of painting dating back to 1608, when Rubens founded his workshop in Antwerp, where he used to employ several young painters and develop works with them. The search for the master's hand is a long, patriarchal-tinted practice by mostly male art historians and critics. Outsourcing painting is so widely common among my male colleagues, and they don't seem to get the same blowback that I do.

OLIVIER ZAHM — You say you are not a man. Do you consider yourself a woman?

ELIZA DOUGLAS — As a child, I felt more like a boy than a girl. I presented as a boy and often asked people to call me that. But that was also in a world in which I didn't know there could be anything but boys or girls. Although I don't widely proliferate this term, what would most closely describe me would be a nonbinary person. I am both a man and woman, or maybe I am neither a man nor a woman. I am everything, or I am nothing. In terms of pronouns, at this point in my life, I just find it easiest to accept everything. None of them feels particularly right or wrong. And I like the idea that by going by she/he and they, no one can ever get it wrong.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Why do you think painting is relevant today, in a digital age?

ELIZA DOUGLAS — There is no other medium in the history of art that has more often been declared dead and, in the same breath, revived. The constant crisis of painting is also its path to its never-ending relevancy. Like capitalism itself,

painting has the ability to revitalize through its crises.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Some people use the term "meta painting" to describe your relationship to the canvas. Do you agree?

ELIZA DOUGLAS — Isn't all art produced under the condition of postmodernity relating, in one way or the other, on a meta level to already existing art? Again, the word "meta" is often used to establish hierarchies between artists or artworks and measure them by their authenticity levels... Nothing that I am particularly interested in.

OLIVIER ZAHM — How would you describe your music, which seems to defy any genre?

ELIZA DOUGLAS — For now, I'm trying to relate to music with complete openness when it comes to genre. In general, I have challenged myself to make as wide a variety of music as possible — everything from classical music, pop, and black metal. And then I experiment with the ways these various forms can intersect. For the "Natures Mortes" project, I deliberately placed genres side by side that are typically not found together.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Do you compose the music and lyrics of your work?

ELIZA DOUGLAS — Yes. I compose the music and lyrics myself and am proud to be able to do this. While I have been in and out of bands for many years, it was quite recently that I learned how to make music on the computer (via the program Logic), and this greatly broadened the possibilities of what I was capable of. For "Natures Mortes," various people helped with some production aspects.

OLIVIER ZAHM — Your music and performances are intimately linked with the work of Anne Imhof. How do you describe this duality? Is it a collaboration, or is it the inclusion of your work within her work, or vice versa?

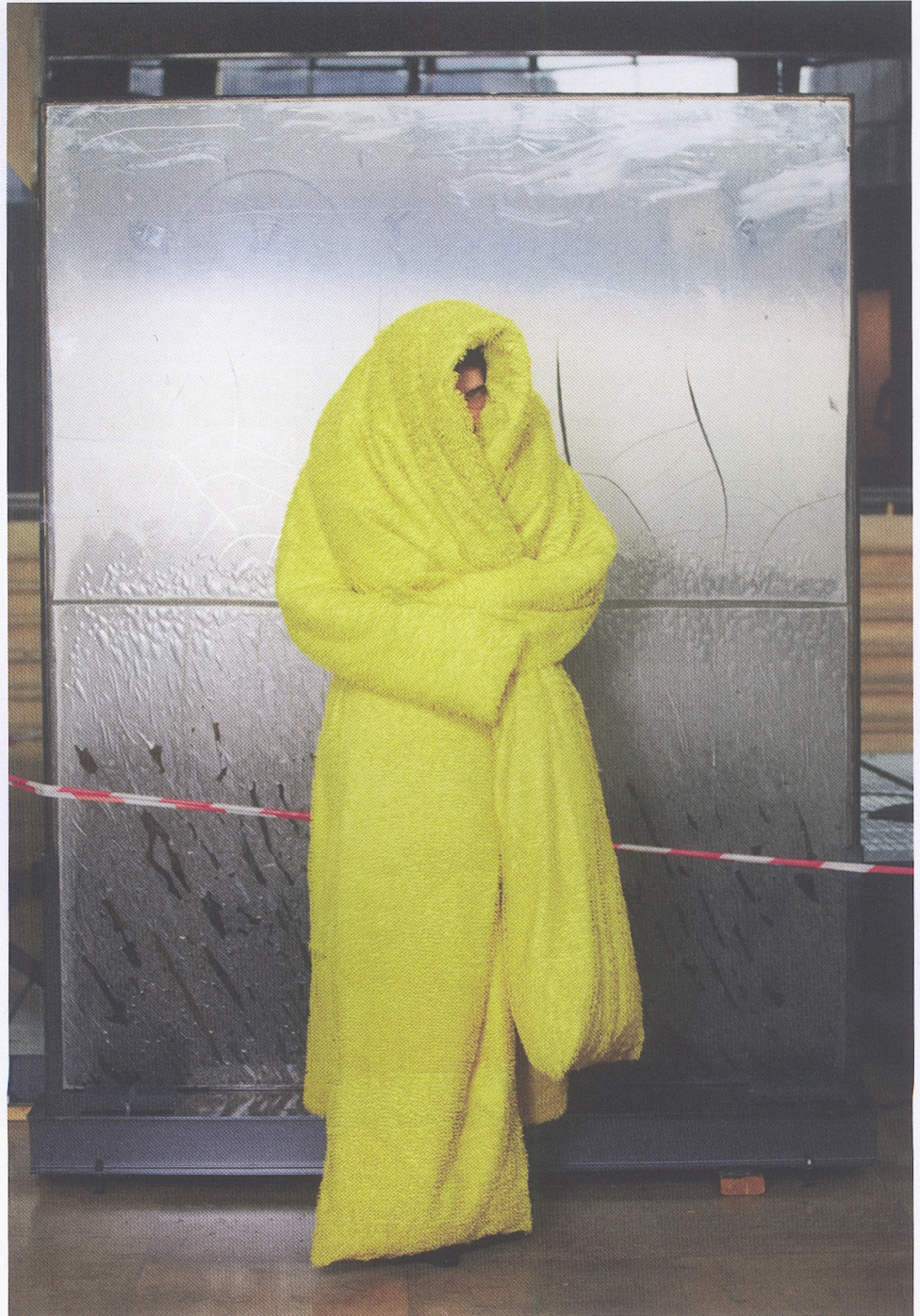
ELIZA DOUGLAS — I am involved in so many ways, so there is no simple answer to that. It depends a bit on



ELIZA DOUGLAS, *UNTITLED*, 2021, INSTALLATION VIEW,
OIL ON CANVAS, 51 3/16 X 39 3/8 INCHES, COURTESY OF
THE ARTIST AND NEUE ALTE BRÜCKE, PHOTO PAUL LEVACK

PURPLE FUTURE

YELLOW BATHROBE COAT IN MICRO-KNIFED LEATHER AND MATCHING STOLE, 50TH COUTURE COLLECTION, BALenciAGA



the context or situation. We have done some projects that have been explicitly coauthored by the two of us. In those cases, it is, of course, a clear-cut collaboration. For "Natures Mortes," I did the music, styling, casting, and creative direction. Anne and I also officially collaborated on the sound installation, which involved moving speakers. When it comes to the music I compose, sometimes I make pieces that are designed to fit into the architecture of the show's themes. Other times, some of the tracks were not necessarily made with that specific show in mind but are then adapted to function inside it. Certainly, the music aspect of this work feels like mine. At times, Anne has been influenced or inspired by things I have done, and some form of them ends up inside her work. In some of those instances, I would say that my work ends up existing within the larger umbrella of her work. Simultaneously, if she hadn't pioneered the work, I would not have developed what I do within her work.

OLIVIER ZAHM - For the music and performances, when you perform for Anne, are you activating her work, or is it your own work?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - This is a complicated question to answer. As a performer, I am, of course, acting within the aesthetic world and style that Anne has developed. But simultaneously, I think I have had a pretty significant effect on this over the past five years and have helped shape this. When I'm performing, I have a lot of freedom. I like to get feedback from Anne whenever possible, but I am making my own decisions and also coming up with a lot of the concepts for the scenes I am in and the movements I make. For example, with the wax pouring, this is something I just did for one show, unplanned. It came from within me. Or the scene with the clown t-shirt on my head. Anne requested I take on the role of a "jester," and that was my way of interpreting that role. I had another performer wear a clown shirt and then slipped my head inside it, turning

it into a mask. And then all the strange things I do... Licking the floor and people's shoes - this was intuitive, not something I was instructed to do. But obviously I'm trying to do whatever I think will be most performatively and visually effective in this world that Anne has created. So, if it weren't for her and her brilliance, I would not have expressed myself in this specific way. When it comes to the styling I do for her work, I bring in graphic interests I have had for a long time, so I feel the clothes are very linked to my identity and have a big impact on the overall aesthetic of the show. And in addition to that, I do the casting.

OLIVIER ZAHM - In terms of fashion, your modeling is mostly devoted to Balenciaga. Can you share the story behind your involvement with the house?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - I modeled in the late '90s, early 2000s, but hadn't done any of that since then and didn't expect I ever would again. That part of my life seemed long over! In 2016, when Demna was planning his first collection with Balenciaga, Lotta Volkova contacted me out of the blue (turns out we had a mutual friend) and asked if I would come to a Balenciaga casting. I thought there was no way they would actually choose me, since I'm older and have a different physique than the average model. But I was happy to get a free trip to Paris out of it, so I went. I met with Lotta and Demna. He asked me to walk, and I warned him that I had always been told I didn't know how to do a runway walk, when I was modeling as a teenager. He said, "Just walk like you walk down the street," and so I did. I've been working with them ever since, and it has been such an unexpected and inspiring part of my recent life.

OLIVIER ZAHM - What do you like about Balenciaga?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - I love the clothes, more than I have ever loved any other clothes. A lot of it feels like it was manifested from my dreams. In general, I feel best when wearing stuff that Demna has made. And

I am constantly surprised by what he and the team come up with. It has been just as inspiring to me as any art I have seen in this time period. I also love the people involved. Now that I have been part of Balenciaga projects pretty consistently for over five years, I have gotten to know a lot of the people who work there, and I really like them. A bunch of them I truly consider friends at this point - Demna, Martina Tiefenthaler, Yuri Escudie, Cédric Charbit, etc. I love them. And Holli Smith, who does the hair, I have known since I was a teenager. And Demna also has such a nice and open approach to his casting. I have met so many people from a variety of walks of life - it's a pleasure.

OLIVIER ZAHM - We cannot listen to your voice without having an echo of Nico. Do you feel connected to her in some ways?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - Funnily enough, in high school, there was a group of guys who had a band. The lead singer once approached me somewhat out of the blue and said, "You will be our Nico," and I played a few gigs with them. Unfortunately, the band was nothing like The Velvet Underground - but that was the first time I was compared to her.

OLIVIER ZAHM - Is there anything you regret not doing?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - I regret that I didn't follow through on certain projects throughout my life because of a lack of confidence.

OLIVIER ZAHM - What was your first job?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - I started babysitting for my neighbors from a very young age. I remember I once made \$100 working quite hard for an entire summer, and that seemed like so much money. Later on, I waited tables, worked in a clothing store, and swept hair in a barber shop.

OLIVIER ZAHM - Why can't it just be magic all the time?
ELIZA DOUGLAS - If we are thinking of magic as a feeling, all feelings only exist in contrast to other feelings, and that is what

defines them. So, you can't have the magic without the mundane.

OLIVIER ZAHM - What are you reading right now?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - Miranda July's *No One Belongs Here More Than You*.

OLIVIER ZAHM - What do you love about New York City?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - In general, I think it's the least judgmental place I have ever been. People can dress as freaky as they want, and no one bats an eye. Also, I grew up there, so I have a feeling of knowing it in a way I couldn't have anywhere else.

OLIVIER ZAHM - What are you most proud of?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - I'm proud and feel very lucky that I was able to stop drinking booze and doing drugs 13 years ago. If I hadn't, I'd probably be dead now!

OLIVIER ZAHM - Who are your favorite writers?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - That's too tough to answer. To take the pressure off, I'm going to list some I am currently enjoying: Dorothea Lasky, *Mary Reilly*, Anne Sexton.

OLIVIER ZAHM - Who are your heroes in real life?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - Also tough! Here are some people I greatly admire: Laurie Anderson, Anne Imhof, Chelsea Manning, Anohni, Rick Rubin.

OLIVIER ZAHM - What's your vision of the future?

ELIZA DOUGLAS - I had a psychoanalyst as a teenager who said, "The future doesn't exist," and that always stuck with me.

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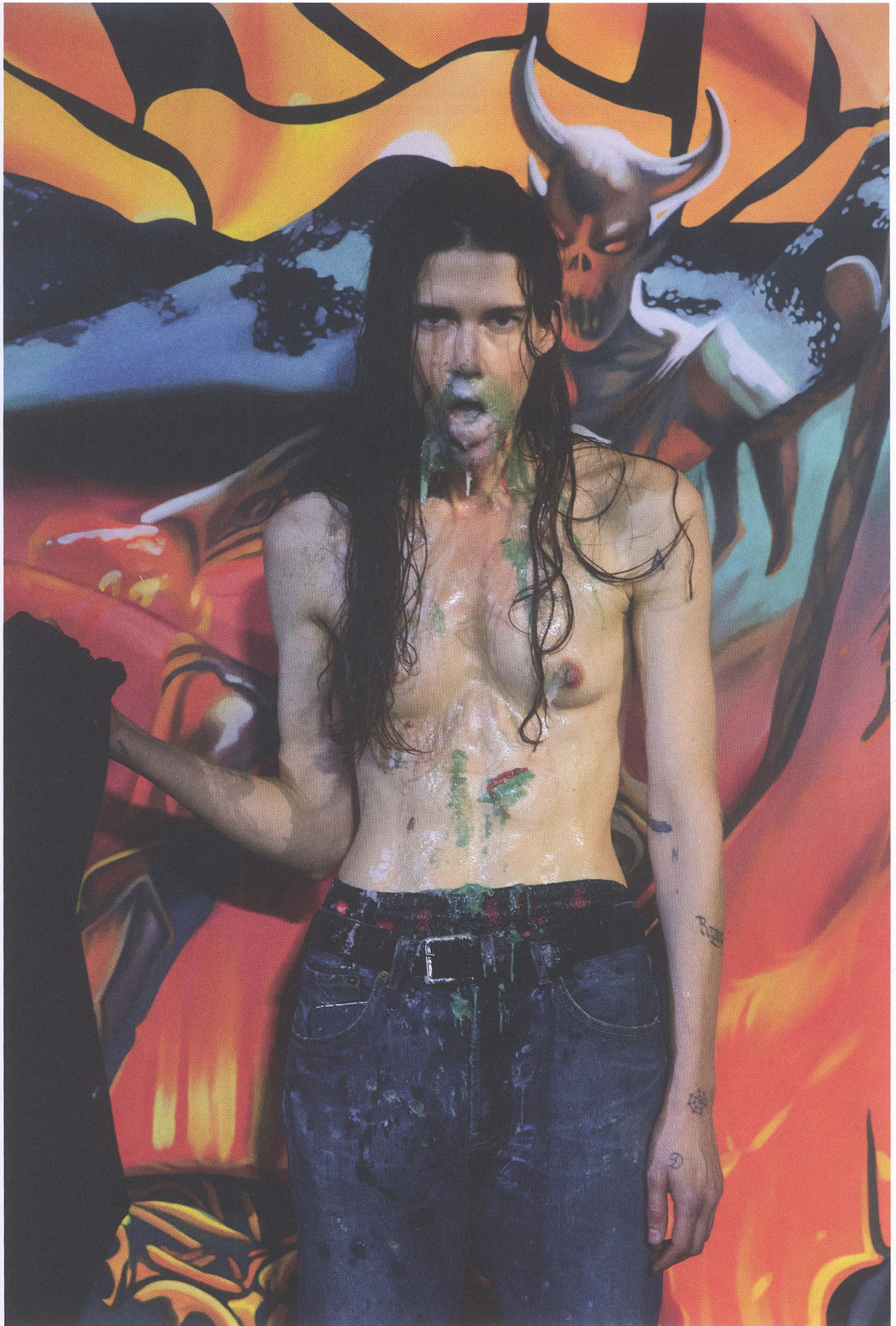


ELIZA DOUGLAS, *UNTITLED* (TOP AND BOTTOM), 2021,
OIL ON CANVAS, 51 3/16 X 39 3/8 INCHES, INSTALLATION
VIEWS AT NEUE ALTE BRÜCKE, COURTESY OF THE ARTIST,
PHOTOS PAUL LEVACK



ELIZA DOUGLAS, *UNTITLED*, 2021, INSTALLATION VIEW,
OIL ON CANVAS, 51 3/16 X 39 3/8 INCHES, COURTESY OF
THE ARTIST AND NEUE ALTE BRÜCKE, PHOTO PAUL LEVACK

OPPOSITE PAGE: ELIZA DOUGLAS IN ANNE IMHOF'S
"NATURES MORTES," PALAIS DE TOKYO, PARIS, 2021



RED AND BLACK TAILORED TRACKSUIT JACKET, BLACK AND
WHITE TRACKSUIT PANTS, AND BLACK GLAZED-CALFSKIN BOOTS,
50TH COUTURE COLLECTION, BALENCIAGA



LOOSE-FIT JACKET AND JEANS IN BLACK DENIM,
50TH COUTURE COLLECTION, BALENCIAGA

