

COLNAGHI



CATHERINE MURPHY

(b. 1946, Cambridge, MA)

HARRY'S NIPPLE, 2003

Oil on canvas

117 x 117 cm; 46 x 46 in.

Signed and dated verso, lower right:

'C. Murphy © '03'

Provenance

The Artist.

Literature

C. Murphy, 'Catherine Murphy in Conversation with John Yau,' *The Brooklyn Rail*, February 2005, p. 24.

K. Johnson, 'Art in Review: Catherine Murphy,' *The New York Times*, 4 March 2005, p. E37.

F. Hirsch, 'Catherine Murphy at Lennon, Weinberg,' *Art in America*, June-July 2005.

M. Falkenberg ed. *All The More Real*, New York, The Parrish Art Museum, 2007, p. 16.

J. Yau and S. Alpers, *Catherine Murphy*, New York, 2016, p. 191, p. 151 ill. (colour).

Exhibited

New York, Lennon Weinberg, *Catherine Murphy: Paintings and Drawings 2001–2004*, February 9 – March 26, 2005.

New York, The Parrish Art Museum, *All the More Real: Portraits of Intimacy and Empathy*, August 12 – October 14, 2007.

New York, The Kleinert/James Center for the Arts, *Give and Take*, June 28 – August 11, 2013.

New York, Cheim & Read, *The Female Gaze, Part II: Women Look at Men*, June 23 – September 2, 2016.

New York, Peter Freeman, *Eye to Eye*, curated by Katie Rashid, 19 June – July 30, 2021.

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This painting by American artist Catherine Murphy presents us with a much larger than life male breast, the composition cropped tightly to reveal a fleshy nipple covered in precisely depicted hairs and emerging from the folds of a torn dark-green t-shirt. Over one meter square, the painting offers an image which strikes the viewer both because of its hyperrealist rendering of the human anatomy and its unusual subject.

The composition distorts the traditional 'male gaze', or how women's bodies are represented and fetishised in art, by transforming the nipple – a recurring erotic feature in traditional painting – into a male rather than female attribute. Traditionally in Old Master paintings, a vestment or piece of cloths falls off the shoulder of a beautiful woman, thus revealing the bare and forbidden breast. Here, Murphy has replaced the elegant tumbling fabric with a ripped t-shirt in a way that calls into question the violence of a sexualized gaze. Furthermore, this highly detailed male nipple challenges our perception of beauty: the fact that its owner is named – the title's Harry – implies that the sitter's body is familiar to the artist, and perhaps loved and desired. Something as precisely and perhaps, to some, crudely represented is not simply disembodied and anonymous, but belongs to a person who feels – physically and emotionally.

Catherine Murphy is known for her hyperrealist paintings which take familiar subjects and objects and transform them to arrest and unsettle the viewer, allowing us to reflect on a subject and question our preconceptions. Subjects are transformed them into uncanny, disturbing compositions. John Yau, who authored a monograph about the artist in 2018, says of her work: "In Murphy's paintings and drawings, the commonplace things of everyday life become analogical: the mind is set loose upon a circumscribed view... It [becomes] about lucid dreaming, about the continuum between the boundless imagination and physical limitation, and about the border along which one's consciousness of the visible world becomes disturbed by what is being apprehended, no matter how ordinary it appears. Murphy's work suggests that nothing is seen neutrally that the idea of something being neutral and without content is an ideology, at best."¹ Her work is very particular for transcending its mere representation of a thing or object, making it feel as if embodied.

Born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1946, Catherine Murphy graduated from the Pratt Institute of New York in 1967 and started exhibiting in New York in the early 1970s. Her paintings are featured in a major public collection such as the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum and the Phillips Collection.

¹ John Yau, 'Catherine Murphy Sets the Bar Higher and Higher', *Hyperallergic*, 21 January 2018, <https://hyperallergic.com/421843/catherine-murphy-recent-work-peter-freeman-gallery-2018>